

New UK analysis reveals 18 million people have hearing loss

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A more holistic definition of hearing loss by The University of

Manchester and University of Nottingham researchers has revealed that 18 million people are affected, 6 million higher than previously reported using a definition from the 1980s.

The new analysis, [published](#) in the *International Journal of Audiology*, re-evaluated existing [prevalence data](#) to include people with hearing loss who were previously not taken into account by official statistics.

The study was based on new population estimates from the most recent censuses: the 2021 Scottish census and the 2022 England and Wales Census. Because of an increase in the UK population, this resulted in an increase to 4.6 million.

However, the new data shows if people with a milder degree of hearing loss in both ears are included, the estimate is 12.3 million, or 1 in 4 of the population aged 18–80.

The number is greater still—18 million or 1 in 3— if those with a hearing loss in only one ear are also included.

Co-author Professor Kevin Munro, National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) senior investigator at the University of Manchester said, "These data more accurately reflect the number of adults in the UK who have impaired hearing that will cause listening difficulty, especially in background noise.

"Maintaining the hearing health of adults is a strong social responsibility. So it is important to acknowledge that millions of people's experiences have effectively been dismissed by existing data which means they are effectively left out of the national conversation."

Co-author NIHR Senior Investigator Professor Michael Akeroyd from the University of Nottingham said, "The way we define hearing loss puts

us at odds with most other countries.

"By modernizing these numbers, we align with the latest international practice. We hope it will encourage more people to realize how common hearing loss is."

Hearing loss ranks third for Years Lived with Disability, first for sensory disorders, and first for those over age 70. That is why addressing hearing loss is an important component of healthy aging, argue the researchers.

Despite the revised estimate, the researchers stress a new study is required because there have been significant changes in factors that could affect the estimates.

These include potentially lower occupational hearing loss from reductions in heavy industry and greater population diversity since the 1980s on which these data are estimated. Some ethnic minorities are at higher risk of hearing loss.

New studies could also determine if there is now greater hearing loss from recreational noise exposure.

The Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for England Professor Chis Whitty, in a 2023 report on healthy aging reflected the call by the researchers for better data.

His report argued that available estimates of hearing impairment rely on outdated statistics from several decades ago and that sensory impairment is a major contributor to disability in older age.

It also argued that many components of the aging process are significantly under-researched including hearing impairment.

Victoria Boelman, Director of Insight and Policy at RNID, said, "RNID welcomes this new insight as a step forward in our understanding of the UK's community of people with hearing loss. The updated statistics now reflect and include the real-life experience of the 18 million people in the UK who have different and diverse experiences of deafness and hearing loss.

"By previously excluding people with milder hearing loss or hearing loss in a single ear, society had effectively dismissed millions of people's experiences and not factored them into national conversations.

"We're here for the 18 million people in the UK who are deaf, have [hearing loss](#) or tinnitus. With our communities, we'll change society to make it more inclusive for everyone, help people hear better now and fund world-class research. If you need support or information, visit rnid.org.uk."

More information: Michael A. Akeroyd et al, Population estimates of the number of adults in the UK with a hearing loss updated using 2021 and 2022 census data, *International Journal of Audiology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1080/14992027.2024.2341956](https://doi.org/10.1080/14992027.2024.2341956)

Provided by University of Manchester

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