



Is society becoming noisier: is this affecting our health and wellbeing?

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Context

'Environmental noise and light remain neglected pollutants, poorly understood and poorly regulated, a House of Lords report has warned.

Research studies suggest that noise impacts our health and wellbeing. As exemplified by affecting our hearing, can cause or exacerbate cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, affect our sleep, increase stress and anxiety, and affect our mental health.

Yet the impact is very individual, for example, one person can be affected by a ticking clock when another will not be.

We know that our environments have increased decibel levels, there are more people living closer together, and more traffic. People shared that repeated train announcements, mobile phone ring tones and loud conversations have become the norm since the COVID pandemic. So, something there to support our communication and navigation is just another noise in the background.

Have you ever gone to a café with a friend, only to find that you cannot talk to each other as the background music is too loud to hear each other?

I am hearing impaired. Despite my hearing aids, the background noise, and acoustics of many public venues, including restaurants, cafes, and meeting places, is such that I cannot easily hold a conversation or understand what staff are saying to me.

Eating out is not enjoyable - too much jabbering and music.

I have noticed the increase in noise for a longtime now creeping up.

Introduction

Our Blog Is society becoming noisier: is this affecting our health and wellbeing was published on the 12 December 2023 and widely promoted across West Sussex on social media and in e-bulletins. The Poll closed on the 31 January 2024 with 50 responses received.

Thank you

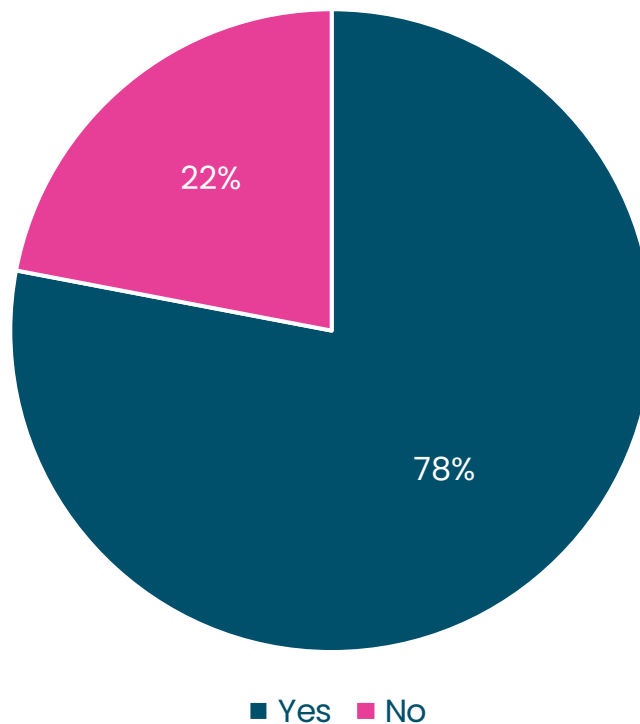
We would like to **thank** all who completed the Poll and shared their stories to support this important topic.

Poll Findings

This update is based on these 50 responses.

Three quarters of responders (n39) stated that **the levels of noise are affecting their health and wellbeing.**

Is noise affecting people's Health and Wellbeing



Too many announcements and alerts feel like information overload and intrusive.

Many are unnecessary. I do not for example need to be reminded to "tap on or off" a local bus!

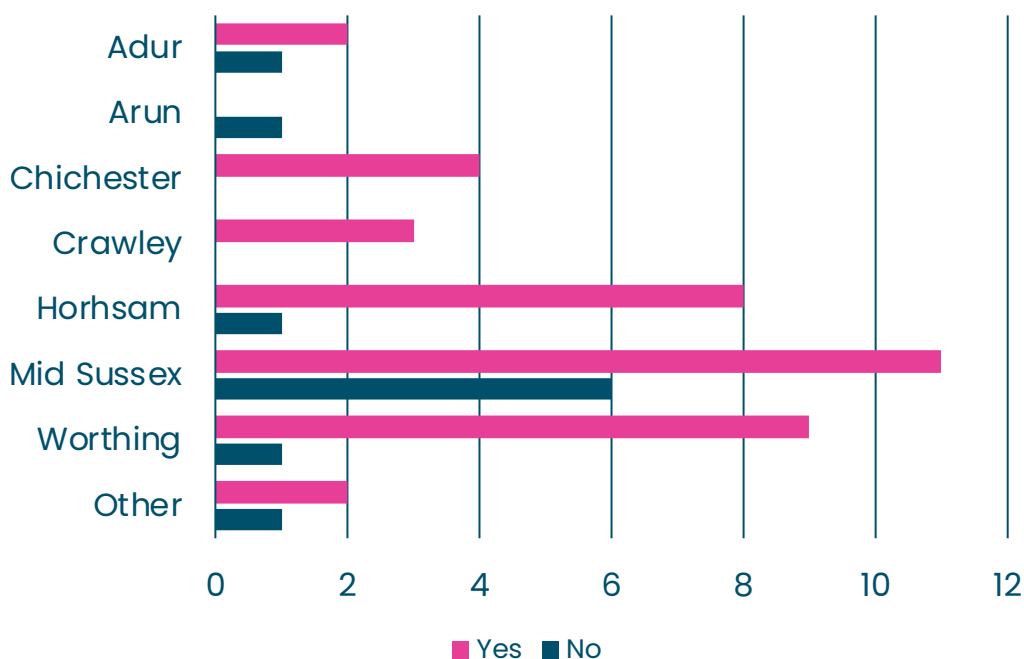
There is excessive noise everywhere you go to eat in cafes or restaurants as they are usually playing loud music.

You also encounter loud music everywhere including leisure centres, supermarkets and even NHS facilities.

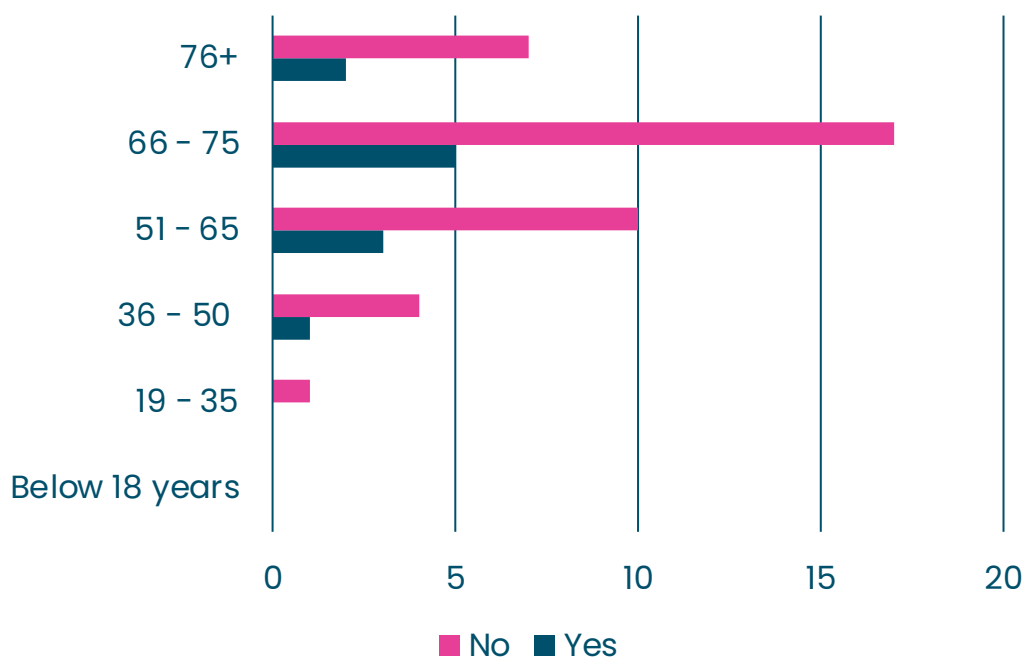
Those who stated **'No'**, live mainly in the Mid Sussex area. Mid Sussex (n6), Worthing (n1), Arun, (n1), Adur, (n1) Horsham, (n1) and other (n1).

Those who stated **'Yes'** mainly live in the Mid Sussex, Worthing, and Horsham areas of West Sussex. Adur (n2), Chichester (n4), Crawley (n3), Horsham (n8), Mid Sussex (n11), Worthing (n9) and other (n2).

Comparison West Sussex Area and those stated Yes or No



Comparison of age range of those stating Yes or No



38 responders stated how noise was affecting their health and wellbeing.

This fell into the categories of environmental noise, travel, home environment, social and every day out and about.

Environmental Noise

Air traffic.
Cars and lorries.

There's the noise, day, and night, of aircraft. Not only the small planes used for 'fun' but the commercial aircraft flying to and from Europe and the noise of the air brakes as they begin their descent. Also, the noise made by commercial aircraft as they leave airports and climb. They climb more slowly, than in times gone by, because they are tasked by owners and others to save fuel.

Travel

On trains, people using mobile phones without headphones.
Anxiety when travelling by public transport or out in public.

Small motor bikes/mopeds screech around dispersing noise and pollution in their wake.

Home environment

Neighbour's washing machine.
Children loud in streets.
Music in gardens or home.
Dogs barking.
At home, appliances that beep excessively drive me nuts!
Noisy events.

Bin men come really early and wake me from sleep (often between 7-7.30).

Living on a residential road that's increasingly being used as a cut through by traffic. It causes stress and sometimes affects my mood negatively. It feels impossible to escape the rumble of a car going past every 30 seconds or so. Sometimes at night my sleep gets disturbed by particularly noisy vehicles driving otherwise quiet roads.

Social

Inside noisy cafes.

Cafe's coffee making machines work at a really high decibel level.

Conversation in pubs and restaurants is generally difficult or impossible because of people shouting to one another.

Noise in restaurants has really increased in the last few years. Not just louder voices but shrieking and laughing.

Cinema noise - excessively and uncomfortably loud.

Every day out and about

Loud conversations in cafes, background music in places such as supermarkets, music being played on phones when you are on hold to a company.

Sometimes, people talking loudly on their phones or to each other without realising. Cinemas and TV differing sound levels. I would say that noise seems to affect me more since coming out of lockdown.

It's worse when people speed in the road, as live on one where this is common. This increases noise, but also feels like an invasion of privacy and a lack of consideration.

Trains can also be heard from the house - but this is never annoying, it's motor vehicles in particular that affect my health and wellbeing.

How the increase noise is affecting people's health, wellbeing and physically.

Such as; impact on health conditions, forgetfulness, difficult to hear others, irritation, stress, depressed, being disturbed, lack of concentration, exhausting, and frustrating.

Affect of noise on Health

I have Vestibular migraine. Nearby construction has severely impacted my condition. The use of generators has created an almost constant vibration.

Its intrusive on my thoughts, particularly shops blasting out loud music -makes me forget what I am shopping for and get irritated and desperate to get out of that environment.

Christmas was particularly hard with the loud seasonal music -much too loud - it made me severely depressed.

Background noise is everywhere. Supermarkets, cafés, even the doctor's surgery waiting room.

Difficult to carry on a conversation. It's distracting and intensely irritating.

It affects my ability to concentrate on what I'm doing.

Affect of noise on Wellbeing

I was in a building society recently and, as well as background music, the person next to me at the counter and another cashier was talking excessively loudly. It made it extremely difficult to hear the cashier's instructions to me.

Sitting in the garden and being disturbed by other people speaking loudly or playing their radio - the worse is people shouting out at 'Alexa' to play something from the garden.

Leaf blowers, do not see their purpose when raking up leaves would give some exercise.

Effect on wellbeing

Distracting and limits meaningful conversation and give me a sore throat trying to talk above the noise. It is also exhausting.

I become irritable in places where there is a lot of noise.

Can't relax.

Noise of constant messages being received by email or social media notification - constant pings in WhatsApp groups.

Concentration and serenity.

Neighbouring family with 8 children caused noise from morning 'til night, which resulted in the last 5 years of my mother's life being full of stress and worry and may have speeded up her demise.

House building next door, 18 months now but nearly finished.

Emotional effect

Loud levels of noise make me feel irritable and unable to think properly which makes me anxious. It is not always the volume sometimes prolonged noise at a lower level can have the same effect.

It makes me stressed when I'm trying to make a decision about what I'm going to buy.

Putting up with the noise level causes frustration.

Physical effect

Slamming doors make me jump.

It makes conversation difficult when you are in a café or restaurant, and everybody has to talk louder which can be exhausting to listen to and to make yourself heard.

²Sound Sensitive, Person. Loud noise (in particular) exacerbates, sound sensitivity.

Since the COVID pandemic more people have remained working from home.

They are finding the environment much noisier, affecting the person and work.

Working from home

Next door and neighbours both have RING doorbells. The 'ring' is very loud - neither of them have hearing issues.

When someone rings it interrupts me as I work from home, and it is hard to blank it out as white noise!

Some respondents shared their observations of how society has become noisier.

Such as people shouting at each other, competing to be heard over multiple noises which is stopping some people wanting to go out.

Observations

More people seem to shout rather than actually stand close enough to a person to speak at a normal sound level.

Noisy restaurants, cafes, pubs. Not just the hubbub of people chatting but the constant noise of loud music. I've almost stopped going to places as a consequence. No better in supermarkets.

Next steps

To **share** this update with **partners**.

1 Light and noise pollution remain neglected pollutants despite significant health impacts

2 Hyperacusis



Talk to us

If you have questions about the content of this report, please either call 0300 012 0122 or email cheryl.berry@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk

How this insight will be used?

We recognise that all health and care services are under pressure at this time and have had to adapt their ways of working. We will share this report with the local NHS, Local Government, and other providers to help them understand where things are working well and services are adapting to meet peoples' needs, and to help them identify any gaps. We see this as a continuation of discussions taking place and will continue to use this fresh insight and the solutions presented to challenge for a better future.

For help, advice, and information or to share your experience

We also help people find the information they need about health, care and community and voluntary health and care support services in West Sussex.

Here to help you on the next step of your health and social care journey



You can review how we performed and how we report on what we have done by visiting our website www.healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk

Healthwatch West Sussex works with **Help & Care** to provide its statutory activities.



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