

# Hearing loss: National and global statistics of hearing loss.

NID Training Disability Diary

- Compiled by Dr Jean Mitchell



## Introduction

Hearing loss can affect anyone from birth upwards. While it has always increased among people above 55, in recent years there has been an increase of hearing damage among younger groups in recent times possibly as a result of factors such as loud music, traffic noise, builders' machinery and aircraft. Engelbrecht (2017) refers to the increase in incidence of hearing loss as an epidemic, while Bell (2013) calls it a 'global pandemic'.

## Discussion

Accurate statistics of the global incidence of hearing loss are not available because different countries have different methods of recording the prevalence of disability. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that about 278 million people worldwide suffer from moderate to profound hearing loss and the majority of those affected live in the low- and middle-income communities of the developing world (South Asia, Asia-Pacific and sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)). The WHO also estimates that by 2050 nearly 2.5 billion people will have hearing loss and at least 700 million will require hearing rehabilitation. In addition, over than one billion young adults could have permanent hearing loss due to unsafe listening practices (WHO, 2021).

There are no conclusive statistics of the prevalence of hearing impairment in South Africa. Data that are available are unreliable mainly because sources of information provide conflicting facts, or else data is misinterpreted. For example, Berke (2018) quotes an Internet source that claims there were at least four million deaf and hard of hearing people in South Africa in 1998. On the other hand, Mabula (2016) claims that 20% of South Africans have significant and permanent hearing loss. This was a misinterpretation of the 2001 census where it was reported that 5% of the population had some type of disability, and that 20% of this 5% (about 453,104 people) had degrees of hearing loss.

The 2011 census separated various types of disability and found that 3.6% of the national population had hearing loss, indicating a slight increase in number from 2001. The possible answers provided to questions in the

2011 census were more specific than in 2001, and, thus the data might be more reliable (Africa Check, 2020).

## Conclusion

It is evident that more research is necessary to obtain accurate information. Whether details of available information are accurate or not, increased awareness of the hearing impairment and advocacy are necessary so that appropriate interventions, education and support can be timeously.

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