

“Too many people take their hearing for granted”

Exploring young people’s attitudes and behaviours towards loud music



Don't Lose the Music research – full report
Claire Bennett

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<u>Contents</u>	<u>Page No</u>
List of tables	2
Executive summary	4
1) Introduction	6
1.1 Don’t Lose The Music campaign	
1.2 Research report	
2) Methodology	8
3) Research findings – themed analysis:	
3.1 Young people’s behaviour, attitudes and awareness towards loud music	12
3.2 Young people’s experience and awareness of ringing in their ears	26
3.3 Young people’s use and awareness of earplugs	34
3.4 Young people’s use of MP3 players	46
4) Conclusions and recommendations	51
References	54
<u>Appendices</u>	
Annex I: Demographic of questionnaire sample and focus group discussion sample	56
Annex II: Questionnaire	58
Annex III: Focus group discussion themes	64

Annex IV: Participatory research tools - a) Discussion line statements	65
b) Vignettes	66
c) Picture	67
Annex V: Additional statistical tables	68

List of tables

Chapter 3.1 **Page No.**

Table 1: How often respondents go to a pub or bar where they need to shout to be heard. 13

Table 2: How many hours respondents spend in a typical evening in a pub or bar where they need to shout to be heard. 13

Table 3: How often respondents go clubbing. 13

Table 4: How often respondents go to a gig or concert. 14

Table 5:How many hours respondents spend in a typical evening in club. 14

Table 6: How often respondents go clubbing and how many hours on average respondents spend in club. 68

Table 7: How many respondents go to more than one activity in the same evening. 14

Table 8: How many respondents go clubbing and go to a pub or bar where they have to shout to be heard (see Annex V). 68

Table 9: How many respondents go clubbing and listen to an MP3 player/personal stereo (see Annex V). 69

Table 10: Do you think music is played too loudly at gigs/concerts? 16

Table 11: Do you think music is played too loudly in nightclubs? 16

Table 12: Do you think music is played too loudly in some pubs/bars? 16

Table 13: I sometimes worry about losing my hearing. 22

Table 14: I think that any loss in hearing would have a dramatic effect on my life. 22

Chapter 3.2

Table 15: How many respondents had had ringing in their ears or dull hearing on the way home or in the following morning after a night out at a gig/concert. 27

Table 16: How many respondents had ringing in their ears or dull hearing on the way home or the following morning after a night 27

out at a club.

Table 17: Number of respondents who go clubbing and have experienced ringing in ears or dull hearing after the club. **69**

Table 18: How many respondents had ringing in their ears or dull hearing on the way home or the following morning after a night out at a pub/bar. **28**

Table 19: Statement: Do you think that ringing in your ears can be a warning sign for more permanent damage to your hearing? **28**

Chapter 3.3

Table 20: I wear earplugs in clubs/at gigs. **35**

Table 21: I have never worn earplugs in clubs/at gigs but would consider doing so in the future. **35**

Table 22: I think earplugs look silly and will not wear them in clubs/at gigs. **35**

Table 23: I have seen people wearing earplugs in clubs/at gigs. **36**

Table 24: I like loud music so won't wear earplugs. **39**

Table 25: If I wanted to buy a pair of good-quality earplugs I would know where to buy them. **40**

Table 26: I know there are different types of earplugs that can be used in different situations. **41**

Chapter 3.4

Table 27: How many hours on average respondents listen to a personal stereo/CD player/MP3 player per week. **46**

Table 28: Age of respondents and how many hours average respondents listen to a personal stereo/CD player/MP3 player in a week (See Annex V). **70**

Table 29: I sometimes think I listen to music too loudly on my personal stereo/CD player/MP3 player. **47**

Table 30: How many hours on average respondents listen to a personal stereo/CD player/MP3 player in a week. And how many respondents sometimes think they listen to music too loudly on personal stereo/CD player/MP3 player (see Annex V) **70**

Executive Summary

RNID's Don't Lose The Music campaign aims to raise awareness and prevent incidents of hearing damage caused through over exposure to loud music. The Don't Lose The Music campaign works directly with young people (aged 16-30) to ensure messages are relevant and informative, whilst promoting suitable and practical solution.

This research was commissioned to enhance current organisational knowledge and understanding of the issues surrounding young people's awareness, attitudes and behaviours towards loud music and their hearing. This research engaged directly with young people, through both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to ensure young people's voices are at the forefront of all analysis and future planning.

Music is integral to young people's personal and social lives, routines and identity. The role and availability of music is rapidly changing in contemporary society primarily due to the introduction of digital technology. Young people are increasingly accustomed to 'round the clock' music, both through music at public venues and personal entertainment systems. Much of this music is being accessed at high volume levels that could affect young people's hearing immediately (with conditions such as tinnitus) or in the long term (through the development of noise-induced hearing loss).

ringing ears is a sign of potential damage to hearing and experiencing this on a frequent basis can lead to permanent hearing damage. The majority of young people have experienced ringing in their ears at some point in their lives and a large proportion of young people experience this on a regular basis. Alongside this, some young people are reporting more severe symptoms associated with accessing loud music including physical pain and breathing difficulties. This physical reaction indicates that some young people are exposed to extremely damaging volume levels in public venues that almost certainly will affect their hearing.

Noise is the biggest cause of preventable hearing loss in the UK. Evidence suggests that exposure to sounds above 85 decibels over time can damage hearing¹. Since 1989 UK employees exposed to dangerous noise levels have been protected by legislation. This is not the case for young people exposed to dangerous noise levels in their leisure time. Many young people are regularly exposed to music at volume levels above 85 decibels as part of their normal social routines. This lengthy and regular exposure to high volume levels is unquestioned by many young people, who disregard potential implications and hearing protection products. For the majority of young people, noise damage is not considered a risk and it is not regarded as a public health issue.

Furthermore, alongside music in venues, many young people listen to MP3 players and personal stereos for personal enjoyment. For some young people listening to their MP3 players and personal stereos at high volumes for many hours is typical with volume levels often being increased to block out background noise. Combined this regular, unquestioned accessibility of music at high volumes through both public and personal domains, increases the cumulative risks associated with hearing loss or permanent damage.

¹ Health and Safety Executive, 2005

There are currently no medical cures for either tinnitus or hearing loss. Young people's physical experiences associated with loud music, length and exposure to high volume levels presents a worrying social trend. Young people's current dismissive attitudes towards issues, hearing protection and behaviours place them at increased risk of permanent hearing difficulties. This could result in many young people experiencing premature hearing loss or damage earlier than normally expected with huge individual and potential social and economic implications.

This research reveals that many young people are unaware of basic facts about their hearing and how damage occurs from over exposure to loud music. Many young people are not accessing relevant, sustained, educational information from avenues and at ages they expect. This raises major questions over the level of informed choice and knowledge young people have on important issues relating to their hearing. Consequently, amid the perceived lack of substantial public health debates and education, young people are applying and generating their own assumptions and myths. This misinformation is heavily ingrained in young people's attitudes, behaviours and reinforced through cultural norms, social status and peer pressures.

This schism between young people's current awareness and reality is concerning and needs to be urgently addressed. A substantial shift is needed to raise the profile of hearing health issues to young people in a relevant, constructive and consistent way. This includes ensuring young people have adequate information on hearing issues associated with loud music. This also places responsibility onto public health providers including the government and voluntary sector, educators (across different age groups) and the music industry. A collective effort is needed to ensure all young people are making informed choices about their hearing and are aware of hearing protection issues and accessing relevant products.

This report presents a comprehensive situational analysis on young people's current behaviours, awareness and trends relating to loud music. Understanding the complexity of issues, construction of ideas and cultural influences as they exist is crucial to address and achieve long-term attitudinal and behavioural changes. Moreover, the active inclusion of young people themselves is integral for individual, social and educational shifts. Young people need to be at the forefront of and drivers to specific strategic processes and recommendations. Young people need to access relevant information on issues that affect them without prohibiting personal enjoyment and unnecessarily heightening anxieties. This report and research process reflects this commitment and places young people at the heart of its analysis. This report encourages a consistent approach and collective responsibility across agencies and with young people. This report is an essential read for young people, professionals associated with music, the music industry, manufacturers of earplugs, health campaigners, academics and teachers.

1.1 Introduction to Don't Lose The Music campaign

RNID's Don't Lose The Music campaign was launched in May 2003. The campaign aims to prevent people needing premature audiology treatment due to noise-induced hearing damage caused by over-exposure to loud music. RNID is committed to the Don't Lose The Music campaign to raise awareness among a new generation and to ensure young people know how to protect their hearing while enjoying music.

The Don't Lose The Music campaign specifically targets 16-30 year olds who are more likely to be exposed to loud music in a variety of leisure settings. The campaign considers all forms of loud music including nightclubs, bars, gigs, festivals, MP3 players and personal stereos.

The objectives of the campaign are to:

- increase the level of awareness among young people about the potential risks and hearing difficulties associated with loud music
- increase the uptake of hearing protection strategies, mechanisms and products by young people.

Information on public health is pivotal for individuals to make informed decisions on issues that are relevant to them. Public health information on subjects such as healthy diet, promotion of safer sex, risks associated with sunbathing and the effects of smoking, alcohol and drugs are widely available to the public. However, information relating to noise-induced hearing loss and hearing protection receives little public attention. Consequently, young people are unaware of when they are putting their hearing at risk and what they can do to protect themselves.

The human ear is an extremely sensitive organ. The ear can detect the tiniest of sounds however, it cannot withstand loud noises especially for long periods of time. Sustained loud noise affects the hearing by damaging the hair cells in the inner ear that convey sound to the brain through the auditory nerve. Once damaged, these hair cells are not replaced. Therefore, prevention is paramount in order to reduce the incidence of noise-induced hearing loss.

The messages behind the Don't Lose The Music campaign are communicated in a variety of ways to the target audience including: media stories, celebrity endorsements, stalls at festivals and music events, a dedicated campaign website, corporate partnerships, awareness weeks and campaign materials to promote the campaign.

1.2 Introduction to the research report

The purpose of this report is to present, analyse and discuss the findings of the 2005 *Don't Lose The Music* research. As part of the research investigation, this report will use the data to suggest and shape the internal and external direction of the campaign through analysis and recommendations. The research report will specifically draw from the direct comments, experiences and personal recommendations of young people themselves and base this within a statistical overview. In line with the objectives of the research, this report will ensure the strategic direction of the *Don't Lose the Music* campaign is clearly influenced by, and grounded in the experiences and perspectives of young people themselves. The term 'young people' within the context of this report refers specifically to people who participated in the research only (both in questionnaire and focus group discussions). This research does not attempt

to assume the findings represent all young people (aged 16-30) in the UK and acknowledges there may be different opinions among the heterogeneous target audience.

The methodology chapter will outline how the research was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies and specific methods to generate analysis for the *Don't Lose The Music* campaign. This chapter will explore the objectives, developments, decisions and logistical issues relating to the research design and implementation phase. This chapter will also incorporate a 'lessons learnt' section drawn from the focus groups conducted by RNID's Social Research and Policy Team. As all fieldwork for this aspect of the research was conducted 'in-house,' the inclusion of this section is integral for continuous organisational learning, reflection and the promotion of research transparency.

This report will explore and outline the key research findings drawing from both the quantitative and qualitative research. The report is divided into specific themed sections and will include both statistical data and direct individual quotes. The themed analysis includes discussions around: young people's experiences relating to loud music; ringing in their ears; use of earplugs; MP3 players and personal stereos. Finally, the report will summarise key findings and make specific, strategic recommendations for the campaign.

2. Methodology

Social research consists of either quantitative or qualitative research methodologies. Quantitative research provides numerical data that is useful when exploring general statistical patterns. Quantitative research methodology is often used to explore 'what' large groups of people do. Qualitative research however, provides in-depth personal information and is useful to explore individual decision-making processes, choices and experiences. Therefore, qualitative research methodology provides information on 'why' people do certain things and their individual rationale. Each research methodology involves different processes, methods and produces different data and analysis.

The specific aims of this research was to engage directly with young people to:

- Chart young people's attitudes and behaviours towards loud music
- Understand personal experiences and rationales around loud music, ringing in ears and MP3 usage
- Elicit views on hearing protection products

In order to conduct an in-depth exploration into current behaviours, experiences, attitudes and awareness of young people, the research for the *Don't Lose The Music* campaign involved both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. The combined complementary approach aimed to provide both a statistical overview (quantitative) alongside in-depth personal perspectives on the awareness and effects of loud music on young people's hearing (qualitative).

RNID's Social Research and Policy Team designed a questionnaire largely based on previous research commissioned by RNID in 2002². The similarity of questionnaires was deliberate to allow for some comparative analysis since 2002. A specific change in relation to the research sample was the inclusion of 16 and 17 year olds who were not included in the 2002 research (which was conducted with 18-30 year olds). The incorporation of younger participants is in line with current strategic objectives of the campaign. Widening the age of the sample³ in 2005 provided invaluable information about this younger age group, to enhance RNID's knowledge and influence key objectives and interventions.

In November 2005 Synovate Research, under the direction of Social Research and Policy Team surveyed (face to face) 1381 young people (16-30 year olds) across England, Scotland and Wales⁴. The questionnaire encompassed issues around the length and type of exposure to loud music, experiences of ringing in ears and attitudes to loud music⁵. RNID Social Research and Policy Team analysed the data⁶ and generated initial statistical findings.

To expand upon the statistical data, six qualitative focus groups were conducted in April/May 2006. The aim of the focus groups was to provide additional in-depth

² 2002 research conducted by Synovate Research

³ 2005 research sample: 16-30 year olds

⁴ See Annex I: demographic of questionnaire sample – including age/gender/location breakdown of sample

⁵ See Annex II: questionnaire

⁶ Data processed on SPSS computer package. All data relating to this research is owned by RNID. RNID's Social Research and Policy Team completed all the analysis and findings presented in this report.

information and personal explanations relating to choices, experiences and individual understandings of issues relating to loud music and hearing. The qualitative data provided a fuller, robust, situational analysis of young people's current views and outlooks revealing individual rationale and reasonings. Moreover, this research method permitted greater levels of participation from young people, directly engaging them into the campaign and thus raising the profile and relevance of key issues to the target group.

The focus groups were devised⁷, planned and conducted by RNID Social Research and Policy Team. During the design phase, regional locations were decided near universities, with good transport links and locations where RNID could easily and economically hire room space. Wales (Cardiff) was originally included in the research design phase to mirror the geographical spread of the questionnaire. Unfortunately, due to low participant uptake, the Wales focus group had to be cancelled. As regionally there was a large participant response in London and to use and encourage participant interest, an additional focus group was arranged in London to replace the cancelled Wales group. Prior to the 'roll-out' of focus groups across England and Scotland, pilots were held at RNID headquarters (London) to rehearse and practice format and learn from participant (volunteer) feedback.

Participants were recruited in various ways including: through the Don't Lose The Music website, a campaign newsletter, expressions of interest after questionnaires (November 2005) and regional advertisements at local universities and colleges. The various methods used to identify the sample meant there was a range of views and awareness of the campaign messages and objectives. As the qualitative sample aimed to be socially representative (i.e. represent a range of social views and experiences), having participants with various understandings of the campaign was considered a positive. To ensure full and easy participation and relaxed dynamics across varied age range, participants of similar age groups were selected in different regions.

The Don't Lose The Music focus groups went 'live' during March/April 2006.⁸ The focus group, facilitated by the Social Research and Policy Team, aimed to create an informal setting for participants to openly and honestly discuss their views. 44 young people participated (22 male/22 female), discussing issues around current awareness, knowledge, opinions and individual experiences of the affects of loud music on people's hearing. Each group consisted of six to eight people (with the exception of Birmingham which included 10 people and London (1) which included 5⁹) and were conducted in the evenings. All participants were paid £20 for attending and were provided with some Don't Lose The Music material after the session. The group discussions lasted approximately 90 minutes each and various participatory tools¹⁰ were adapted and developed to generate ideas, elicit opinions and foster a relaxed ambience. Focus groups were held in a variety of locations including RNID offices (London/Manchester), a library (Birmingham), a university (Southampton) and a

⁷ See Annex I for statistical breakdown of attendees including age/gender/location breakdown for focus groups

⁸ Focus group regional breakdown: 2 groups in London April/May 2006; Southampton April 2006; Manchester April 2006; Birmingham April 2006 and Glasgow April 2006.

⁹ The focus groups aimed to attract 6-8 attendees. Taking into account natural attrition 10 people were invited to each focus group.

¹⁰ Participatory tools used included vignettes, a 'discussion line' and pictures. Tools were not used prescriptively rather selectively in context of discussions. See Annex III.

conference centre (Glasgow). As the physical setting and environment can influence group dynamics and attendance, the range of locations was considered a suitable option to attract a range of people. All group discussions were recorded as agreed by participants and confidentiality of data procedures were explained prior to the focus group.

Lessons learnt from focus group

Conducting focus groups across England and Scotland was a crucial opportunity to engage young people directly in the campaign. The group discussions provided invaluable information on the current experiences, thoughts and views of young people themselves, which was both interesting and integral to the strategic direction of the campaign. Alongside the findings, the process of conducting the focus groups provided distinct learning opportunities for RNID. Reflecting upon this and acknowledging lessons learnt ensures continuous organisational learning to help strengthen similar research conducted in the future.

- Participant recruitment

Various mechanisms were employed to attract focus group participants within a specified age range. Different response rates occurred in different regions; London and Manchester attracted a large response; Southampton and Glasgow a lower response; and Cardiff only one potential participant. There may be a number of contributing factors to explain regional variations in participant interest including regional awareness of campaign messages and exposure to issues (the research findings would support this). However, on reflection if similar work was planned in the future a more specific regional approach and targeting should be adopted. In addition, the timings of the focus groups (near university holidays and assessment times) could have influenced the response rate especially in Cardiff. Future work with this specific target audience should take this into account.

- Numbers of participants per group

It was envisaged all focus groups would consist of six to eight people. Additional people were invited to attend to take into account last minute cancellations or non-attendance. This approach was considered necessary after the first London focus groups where 10 people were invited and only five arrived. Facilitating a smaller group did place additional pressures on the group (both for participants and facilitator) however it did provide a useful opportunity for a more in-depth exploration of personal accounts. All 10 invitees arrived in Birmingham and it was decided they should all participate. Facilitating a larger group was more difficult; especially ensuring all participants had opportunity and time to discuss their views and minimising simultaneous conversations. Although the exact number of attendees can not be predicted prior to focus groups, on reflection if similar work was conducted in the future and more than eight attendees arrive, some participants should be thanked but sent home (always leaving a maximum of eight).

- Timing of groups

One focus group discussion was conducted per week and involved a facilitator (Social Research and Policy Team) and an assistant facilitator (from RNID's Campaign or Media Teams).¹¹ The organising of groups, preparation of discussions, travel to venues (and overnight accommodation where necessary), preparing rooms (including

¹¹ Except Manchester – conducted by facilitator only.

refreshments) and arranging participant payments all placed additional time constraints and pressures on both facilitators and assistant facilitators. During this time, completing the focus groups dominated workloads and did impact on any additional work commitments and responsibilities. In addition, the close timing of groups did not permit an initial analysis of key findings or practical reflections that could have positively influenced other groups. Therefore, if similar work across the country were conducted in the future, more space between groups would be recommended.

- Time to transcribe data

All recorded data was transcribed manually by the Social Research and Policy Team¹². Transcribing six focus group discussions was an extremely time consuming process with both positive and negative implications. Completing the transcriptions provided greater ownership over the entire research process and resulted in a thorough, intricate data analysis process and opportunity to reflect upon strengths and constraints. However, the time taken to transcribe and analyse material placed pressures and strains on additional workloads and responsibilities to other projects. On reflection, if similar focus groups are conducted in the future a computer package could be used (i.e. Nvivo) or, additional personnel would be beneficial. In addition, adequate time needs to be devoted to both the transcription and data analysis process, consequently the rescheduling and reprioritising workloads may also need to be considered.

¹² Each of the two facilitators were responsible for their own focus group translations (three each).

3) Research findings: themed analysis

3.1 Young people's behaviour, attitudes and awareness towards loud music

“If you went to a club and it's loud then you love it don't you”¹³

The research findings in this report exemplify how music is an integral part of young people's lives, social make-up and personal identity. The research reveals how young people's social time is largely based around music-related activities where music is deemed loud. The definition of 'loud' in this chapter is based on young people's personal interpretations and individual meanings. Deliberately, no technological definitions were provided and young people were specifically asked for their own perceptions and self-analysis of loud music.

Both the questionnaire and the focus groups explored the specific behaviours and attitudes towards loud music expressed by young people themselves. This chapter will firstly outline statistical information outlining the length and frequency of time young people spend in venues with loud music to provide context and analysis. Exposure to prolonged high noise levels increases the risk of permanent hearing damage. Many music venues have volume levels in excess of 100 decibels. If we compare this to someone working in a noisy environment, there are regulations that specify that their average noise exposure at work must not exceed 87 decibels¹⁴. This is based on evidence of risk over a working lifetime. When considering effects of 'social noise' it is important to know about both noise levels and total exposure time in order to get any precise estimate of risk.¹⁵ Things such as tinnitus (a permanent noise in the head or ears, which does not come from another source) or hyperacusis (sensitivity to certain sounds) may be signs that the ear could be damaged, even before someone notices that they have a hearing loss. Consequently, the regularity and the amount of time young people spend listening to music at high volumes are significant. Charting young people's behaviour helps to analyse their exposure levels and assess potential risks of noise induced hearing loss or other hearing difficulties. This chapter will also explore young people's attitudes and thoughts around loud music in venues drawing on individual choices and activities and assessing how loud music has been 'normalised' into young people's social routines.

Behaviours

The questionnaire reveals that young people frequent music venues regularly with the most popular venue being pubs or bars. The questionnaire specifically focused on pubs or bars where 'you need to shout to be heard' to explore high volume levels in these venues. **55%** of respondents attended a pub or bar where you have to shout to be heard at least once a week (see table 1).

¹³ Birmingham/Female age 28

¹⁴ In the new 'Control of Noise at Work Regulations', the levels at which employers and employees are obliged to take certain actions are 80dB(A) and 85dB(A) averaged over each working day/week. The absolute exposure limit is an average of 87 dB(A).

¹⁵ The term 'social noise' is often used to describe noise from leisure pursuits such as music, DIY tools, noisy sports etc.

Table 1: How often respondents go to a pub or bar where they need to shout to be heard. (Total = 1381)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Three or more times a week	162	11.7
Twice a week	227	16.4
Once a week	373	27.0
Once or twice a month	251	18.2
Less often	202	14.6
Never	166	12.0

Significantly, of these respondents **76%** stayed between 2 and 6 hours (see table 2) in a typical evening. Combined, these statistics reveal how many young people are regularly exposed to volume levels so loud you have to shout to be heard for many hours per week. The length of time young people spend in pubs or bars that are so loud you need to shout to be heard is important because exposure to high volume levels for many hours could impact on people's hearing.

Table 2: How many hours respondents spend in a typical evening in a pub or bar where they need to shout to be heard. (Total = 1215)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 2 hours	234	19.3
More than 2 hours and up to 4 hours	673	55.4
More than 4 hours and up to 6 hours	257	21.2
More than 6 hours	51	4.2

Similarly, clubbing and gigging are part of young people's social routines. **56%** of respondents go clubbing at least once or twice a month (see table 3) and **23%** go gigging at least once or twice a month (see table 4). These statistics are important as they illustrate the high frequency and regularity with which young people attend these public music venues as part of their personal social routines.

Table 3: How often respondents go clubbing. (Total = 1381)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Three or more times a week	37	2.7
Twice a week	112	8.1
Once a week	264	19.1
Once or twice a month	361	26.1
Less often	323	23.4
Never	284	20.6

Table 4: How often respondents go to a gig or concert. (Total = 1381)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Three or more times a week	4	0.3
Twice a week	25	1.8
Once a week	46	3.3
Once or twice a month	241	17.5
Less often	636	46.1
Never	429	31.1

Significantly, alongside attendance the statistics reveal that **30%** of respondents attend clubs for more than 4 hours in a typical evening (see table 5). When comparing attendance against length of time, the findings illustrate **41%** of respondents who go clubbing three or more times a week spend over 4 hours in a club (see table 6, Annex V, page 68). These statistics raise questions about the length and regularity young people are exposed to high volumes.

Table 5: How many hours respondents spend in a typical evening in club. (Total =1097)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 2 hours	82	7.5
More than 2 hours and up to 4 hours	682	62.2
More than 4 hours and up to 6 hours	271	24.7
More than 6 hours	62	5.7

Importantly, it should be noted that alongside time spent in specific venues, **73%** of respondents stated they attended other music venues in the same night either regularly or occasionally (see table 7). This indicates the total length of time young people are consecutively exposed to loud music is compounded by a combination of different activities. Consequently, the statistics reveal young people are regularly exposed to high volumes of music for long periods of time.

Table 7: How many respondents go to more than one activity in the same evening. (Total = 1177)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes regularly	344	29.2
Yes, occasionally	520	44.2
Yes, at least once before	106	9.0
No, never	207	17.6

In addition, alongside the regularity of attending certain music venues, the statistics suggest a correlation between young people combining different personal and social music activities. For example, **75%** of respondents who go to a club three or more times a week also go to a pub or bar (where you need to shout to be heard) three or more times a week (see Table 8, Annex V, page 68). Furthermore, the data reveals a higher than expected statistical correlation between the number of young people who listen to their MP3 player/personal stereo for 6 hours or more and go clubbing every week or more (see Table 9, Annex V, page 69). This could indicate that young people who regularly expose themselves to one form of music activity are more likely to have regular exposure to others. Significantly, if young people are listening to personal music and attending a range of social venues with high volumes for long periods of time, they are at an increased risk of hearing damage.

Attitudes

Using qualitative analysis alongside the quantitative data provides a fuller depiction of young people's attitudes to loud music in public venues. The qualitative research explored young people's individual choices, distinctions, thoughts and views in more detail. The focus groups revealed that loud music in venues is an important factor for many participants. Discussions highlighted how many people associated loud music with fun and interpreted the physical affects and vibrations of loud music as an enjoyable positive experience:

"I think sometimes it's quite fun being right next to the speakers, especially if you're if you're at a club or something and it's erm... if it's really bass heavy music and you're kind of dancing or something then it's quite fun to be near the speaker 'cause you've got that whole... it's quite a fun sensation as well I think 'cause it's quite... it's unusual isn't it... it's not something you have everyday standing next to a massive... bass woofer thingy that makes your you know makes your insides shake."
(London/Male age 29)

"I like loud music 'cause er, I dunno, 'cause it like makes, vibrations in my body, just feels good basically, erm, I like erm, I dunno, I like feeling like bass and just like loud frequencies like coming through the floor from my feet and my gut as well." (Manchester/Male age 24)

This attraction and enjoyment of loud music in certain venues is supported by the statistics. When respondents were asked if they thought the music was played too loud at gigs/concerts, nightclubs and pub/bars the majority disagreed. **88%** disagreed that music was played too loud at gigs/concert, **74%** disagreed that music was played too loud in nightclubs, and **70%** disagreed that music was played too loud in pubs/bars (see tables 10, 11,12). These figures suggest that the volume levels at certain venues are acceptable for the majority of young people surveyed.

Table 10

Statement: Do you think music is played too loudly at gigs/concerts?

(Total =1321)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
No	1213	87.8
Yes	168	12.2

Table 11

Statement: Do you think music is played too loudly in nightclubs?

(Total = 1381)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
No	1027	74.4
Yes	354	25.6

Table 12

Statement: Do you think music is played too loudly in some pubs/bars?

(Total = 1381)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
No	962	69.7
Yes	419	30.3

However, the group discussions indicate that issues of ‘volume acceptability’ are more complex than statistics first suggest. The focus groups indicated how participants differentiated between music in certain venues based on the personal intentions, motivations and expectations:

“I think if you’re in a pub or a bar you don’t expect it to be, you know if its, normal sort of sit down bar, you don’t expect it to be pounding music, and a lot of people get annoyed... obviously, if its got a dance floor then, you expect it to be a bit louder. ” (London/Female age 22)

Furthermore, the focus group revealed how if young people expect it to be loud and its not, they are disappointed. This expectation and disappointment could reinforce a demand for louder music.

“We’ve been out a few times, and we’ve said ‘it’s not loud enough’. It needs to be louder.” (Glasgow/ Female age 29)

Initially, statistics and conversations support how young people do enjoy loud music, sometimes demand loud music and expect loud music. However, issues around the shaping of personal perspectives and the ‘normalisation’ of loud music need to be considered and analysed. It could be argued that as increasing numbers of venues play loud music for long periods of time then these volumes have become the ‘norm,’ forming part of young people’s unquestioned social expectations. For many young people, loud music is associated with a good time and therefore, if volume levels do not meet young people’s expectations they notice a difference and become disappointed.

“I think it is a feel good factor... you just wanna go out, and ‘ave a good time and erm, generally the places that you go to there’ll be loud music on so I think that’s what you associate with going out and having a good time” (Manchester/Female age 26)

Moreover, the focus groups revealed that alongside personal expectations and associations, a person’s appreciation of loud music enhances their social status. Likewise, a sound system that plays loud music generates respect amongst young people. This arguably embeds loud music further into young people’s popular mainstream culture and establishes a social hierarchy.

“It’s quite a macho thing I s’pose...bands – they all try and kind of out do each other, they just turn it up and up and up and up, and I know that in terms of sound systems it may be, especially when you’re going to like the reggae nights and drum and bass nights, the bigger the sound system the like more respect you’ve got basically” (London/Male age 20)

However, some participants questioned this social status, acceptance and reasoning. For them, loud volumes are not always positive – both in terms of the quality of sound and experiences. Worryingly, many participants reported negative physical affects or symptoms caused directly by loud music.

“I once went to a gig and we paid £10 to get in and my friends left after half an hour because they couldn’t handle it, because it was actually making them feel ill because it was that loud.” (London/Male age 20)

“Has anyone here ever heard of... [name of specific sound system] ooh, it’s the loudest sound system in this country as far as drum and bass is concerned, I’m, more worried about my physical like, breathing rather than just ears, its like ah, ah (pretends to gasp for breathe), you have to just get out of there, it’s really dangerous.” (Southampton/Male age 25)

“I was in the [name of venue] a couple of weeks ago and they clearly have a digital sound system in there so they can increase the sound to whatever they want without distorting and you can really tell the difference because they were cranking it up...and it hurt when I went in the main room, it really did and I thought what the bollocks...so we went to a side room and spent most of our time avoiding.” (Birmingham/Male age 24)

Interestingly, the last two quotes refer to specific sound systems or new digital technology with the capacity to further enhance the volume levels. This perhaps raises questions of whether the music volumes in public venues are increasing through new technology? How equipment is being used? What affect this may have on young people’s hearing? The awareness young people have of the issues?

If the volume levels in certain venues are so loud that they can cause physical pain, this is an extremely worrying development and is likely to have potential hearing implications. Therefore, the length of time young people spend in venues with loud music and availability of quieter rooms/areas are important. Providing quiet areas is integral for protecting the hearing of customers and creating an alternative space and option for young people. In some venues this clearly does not exist, leaving many young people with no alternative and thus increasing potential hearing damage.

“I went to erm, [name of club] the other night which is a new nightclub, and there was nowhere really to go where it’s a bit quieter, but in one of the rooms there’s a dance floor, and there’s loads of benches, and the speakers are all facing the benches, and so everyone’s just sitting there but you can’t talk properly, the speakers are right next to your ear.” (Southampton/Male age 17)

The above quote illustrates how issues around volume levels, availability of quiet areas, planning of new venues and the appropriate positioning of speakers, need to be considered for the protection of customers and staff. The majority of participants believed quiet areas should be available however, as the conversation below illustrates for one participant that loud music is so important any alternative defeats the object and personal enjoyment.

Participant 1: ***“I think clubs should have a quiet area as well.”***

Participant 2: ***“You can always run to the toilet ‘cause it’s really quiet in there.”***

Participant 3: ***“But usually like you said...it’s the toilets isn’t it, and you’re like ‘oh lets go into the toilet and have a quick chat or something,’ but it would be better if it wasn’t just the toilet, they’re not great places to be hanging around chatting.”***

Participant 2: *“But there are clubs and stuff that have sofa and stuff like round the edges, and it is relatively quiet considering, where you are, and I think, that’s enough.”*

Participant 4: *“Well, it’s just that some clubs don’t have that at all, you can be at the back but you still can’t hear anything, you’re struggling to hear.”*

(Southampton:- Participant 1: male age 26; Participant 2: female age 21; Participant 3: female age 25; Participant 4: male age 25)

In addition, the group discussions revealed how many participants had limited knowledge of how loud music can contribute to hearing damage and questioned potential strategies to protect their hearing.

“But, so I’m not actually sure like, you know, standing ten paces further back is going to really make that much difference at all.” (London/Male age 25)

“Does it make a difference, is it like cumulative, does it make a difference if you have a break from the noise...if I go out every weekend, which I do, mostly, or listen to some sort of loud music once a week at least and, rather than like listening to it for 3 hours, if I had like breaks in the middle would that make a difference?” (Manchester/Female age 21)

The group discussions revealed how hearing protection appeared to have little impact on young people’s lives and rationale. Issues regarding hearing were predominately not seen as important to young people, were not an area of concern or relevant to daily lives and realities. However, the group discussions revealed how many participants dismissed their hearing as unimportant because they were not aware of any alternative views. The majority of participants expressed extremely limited knowledge and understanding about hearing and often based individual awareness on misassumptions and myths. For example, many participants believed it was the ‘type of ear’ such as *“superior,” “inferior,” “harder,” “softer,” “weaker,” “sensitive”* and *“tough”* ears as well as the *“shape of your ears”* that caused hearing damage, not loud music. These discussions highlighted both participants’ level of awareness and their individual reasoning. For some participants the onus of hearing damage and potential problems is clearly placed onto medical science and away from personal actions and choices. Scientifically, there may be some people who are genetically more likely to develop noise-induced hearing loss than other people however, personal exposure to loud volumes is also a key contributory factor to hearing damage. Participants’ lack of knowledge about their own hearing and unwillingness to recognise their own choices and behaviors as a contributory factor in causing hearing damage suggests a disconcerting development. As the conversation below demonstrates, for some participants any hearing problems that occur are the result of the ‘type’ of ear as opposed to volume levels. By shifting the responsibility onto

genetics arguably allows some young people to differentiate and dismiss potential issues, affects and risks.

Participant 1: *“It happened to my ex-boyfriend’s dad, he got tinnitus in one, can you get it in one ear?”*

Participant 2: *“Yeah.”*

Participant 1: *“I think he only had it in one ear, because he went to a really loud [name of band] concert once (laughs)... ”*

Participant 3: *“Well maybe some people have, erm, like pre, maybe somebody could be, like predisposed to it or could have some kind of weakness.”*

Participant 4: *“A bit more sensitive.”*

Participant 2: *“A weak ear.”*

Participant 3: *“A weak ear, yeah.”*

(Manchester-: Participant 1: Female age 25; Participant 2: Female age 22; Participant 3: Male age 24; Participant 4: Female age 26)

Similarly, for other participants, issues around hearing loss were considered almost inevitable, associated with old age as opposed to personal activities, choices and volume levels. Again, this highlights current levels of awareness and the distinctions people make to divorce their personal choices from any potential effects.

“So it’s like almost everything you know in your body eventually gets fucked up... it’s almost inevitable. Yeah I think that that’s you know I don’t want it to happen while I’m still in my prime, erm... see I kind of know that it’s gonna probably happen and that’s the thing – you don’t know how long you will live and the longer you do live the more chance that things are gonna go wrong...so I could live to a 110 and be completely deaf or I might die when I’m sixty-four and still have my hearing perfectly so, it doesn’t worry me too I much, I just know it’s kind of inevitable.”
(London/Male age 29)

Within these assumptions and generalisations some participants also believed medical science and future technologies would cure hearing damage in the future. This further reiterated views that hearing damage was not something to worry about or try and prevent.

“I’m perfectly willing to believe, you know, that at some point in time, you know, someone can find...cures for...hearing loss or what causes [it] and

therefore prevent it but again... it's probably going to go with old age anyway." (London/Male age 25)

In addition, some young people placed certain assumptions on new technology inferring that some stereos or music systems may be 'safer' than others. This could indicate that some participants believe their hearing is not at risk of damage if music is listened on a new, expensive stereo.

"I mean if you listen to music on an expensive hi-fi that's, you know, that sounds really great then it doesn't actually, tire your ears as much as listening to something on an car radio for example." (Manchester/Male age 21)

This statement could mirror how certain manufactures are marketing specific new stereo systems as providing 'high quality' sound that is safer. These stereo's PA systems reproduce low frequencies more efficiently and provide a brighter sound that should prevent people increasing the volume. Cheaper stereos do not have the capacity to reproduce loud brighter sounds and distort at higher volumes and so tend not to be played loud. A major disadvantage with new 'high-quality' systems is that they reproduce transients that are capable of producing peaks of 20 decibels to 30 decibels (and more) above the average level. This volume at regular intervals can cause permanent hearing damage. The lack of accurate information could lead some people to continually listen to their stereo at high volumes, for long periods of time believing their hearing is protected by technology. This also suggests that many young people have limited knowledge of how listening to music can affect their hearing and what can potentially can cause hearing damage. The focus groups revealed that some participants thought it was the 'way people listened to music' and the 'type of sound, frequencies and notes' that potentially could damage their hearing.

"But it depends on where you are, and how you're listening to it and what kind of music it is and erm, what's making up the music, the sounds of the music, and the way it affects your brain like, the alpha waves in your brain." (Manchester/Male age 24)

"What is the bit which is doing the damage, is it the high notes or the low notes?" (Glasgow/Male age 26)

The above quotes indicate the participants' limited knowledge and assumptions they place on what potentially could damage their hearing. For many participants, individual reasoning over ear 'types', inevitability of hearing loss through age, reliance on medical cures and misassumptions over new technology and certain sounds are the most common perceptions around hearing damage. In addition, alongside the lack of information and awareness, only **16%** of respondents said they 'sometimes worried about losing their hearing' (see table 13). This statistic is significant as it indicates that many young people do not consider losing their hearing to be an area of concern. Similarly, only **34%** of respondents thought hearing loss would have a dramatic effect

on their lives (see table 14). This implies that many young people are not worried or are not aware about the consequences of losing or damaging their hearing. This could indicate that young people simply do not associate their choices around loud music with risks and long-term effects or are not aware and exposed to the issues.

“Some people might put it down to me being too young, but I mean, I just don’t think about it at all.” (Glasgow/Male age 16)

Table 13

Statement: I sometimes worry about losing my hearing.

(Total = 1382)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
No	1166	84.4
Yes: I sometimes worry about losing my hearing	215	15.6

Table 14

Statement: I think that any loss in hearing would have a dramatic effect on my life.

(Total = 1381)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
No	912	66.0
Yes: I think that any loss in hearing would have a dramatic effect on my life	469	34.0

Conversely, within the discussions there were differences of opinions. Some participants expressed concerns about hearing loss. However, generally these people had already experienced a problem with their hearing and arguably this resulted in their personal anxieties.

“Cause like my hearing’s got worse recently, like, so, now I’ve started to worry about it.” (London/Female age 18)

“I was actually thinking about having a hearing test...’cause when I’m at work and the phone’s ringing I never know where it’s coming from, and it worries me.” (Birmingham/Female age 28)

As participants discussed their current levels of knowledge and experiences, many reflected on where they were accessing information and what was available to them. For many participants the low prevalence of educational messages and awareness contributed to their limited understanding.

“Well there’s never any information that I’ve seen about it anywhere, there’s never anything on TV. I mean thousands of people in the UK club, go clubbing and listen to loud music every week, erm, or worldwide, and you never see any sort of information on it.” (Manchester/Male age 24)

“There’s very little public awareness really, there’s not really much resources really, readily available but not many people, even myself, know too much about hearing loss or hearing damage, how widespread it is, how prevalent it is, like how often you have to go, or whatever, the conditions...” (Glasgow/Male age 21)

In addition, participants discussed their awareness of other public health ‘warning’ or educational messages however, had not seen any relating to their hearing. This apparent lack of targeted public health messages about hearing damage for young people clearly contributes to the limited knowledge and relevance young people place upon their hearing.

“It is ridiculous though how you get signs saying ‘beware of the lasers’, ‘beware of the strobes’ and stuff like that, and everything else but, obviously the main thing that people are in these places to do is to listen to music, and... yeah, I mean some, most people wont know what the equipment’s about, how loud it actually is or, anything.” (Manchester/Female age 22)

The group discussions revealed how many young people are accustomed to accessing public health messages relevant to their lifestyles. For the participants, issues around potential hearing damage from loud music are not presented as a public health message and young people are not educated on the complexity of issues.

“What about public health warnings, in the same respect of cigarettes or, erm, like, putting a positive poster on clubs on doors, you know like OK like have fun but, be aware of the dangers. I don’t think having like smoking can kill your baby or smoking can make you infertile has actually stopped that many people from actually smoking, but it has educated everybody. You do have to read it, its there, in your face, and, it might make clubbing less cool or whatever. The same way if you go in a pub and it says next to you don’t drink and drive, its, it’s a way to educate people.” (Southampton/Male age 22)

Consequently, in this context where health messages relating to hearing are not available, young people can easily dismiss the importance of issues. This dismissal could also be heightened by the lack of government involvement. Clearly, for some participant's government endorsement was important to sanction and add credit to public health messages and changes.

“I think that... it would only happen if the government did something about it like, you get warnings on cigarette packets, but that's only 'cause the government says, they have to be there.”(Manchester/Female age 21)

“I think it depends where the information coming from doesn't it, if it's advertising you're less likely to go with it but if it's officially I don't know, if the government are telling you maybe, I'm not sure, maybe that carries more weight.” (London/Female age 29)

The apparent lack of specific, targeted messages for young people does appear to affect young people's knowledge and attitudes. The research revealed how many participants believed that protecting their hearing was not an important and relevant issue in their lives. At the same time, participants discussed how they had received very little information about their hearing and the potential risk of permanent damage from loud music. The focus groups illustrated how participants had specific expectations about where and who they should be receiving public health messages from. Therefore, given that young people's attitudes are shaped and framed by available information, it is perhaps unsurprising that many participants had formed dismissive and blasé views about their hearing. This apparent lack of information on the potential affects of loud music on hearing also raises serious questions around individual informed choice. For example, to what extent are young people's personal choices based on full knowledge and awareness on the complexity of issues and choices available to them?

“I think there's nothing very specific that I know about how, you know, about how it all works, so yeah I think the sort of the general, you know, advice 'don't listen to incredibly loud music' but I think I don't know enough about, or don't have enough information about, how much is too much...and how much is safe and how much is, is going to be damaging...I couldn't gauge it [in] full I don't think.” (London/Female age 29)

“We would need facts that's very true, I agree, I don't think people know the facts.” (Southampton/Male age 25)

“I don't think I know that much about how, to protect them [ears], I know like loudness is bad but, I don't know like, what all the ways of protecting your hearing long term.” (London/Male age 16)

In conclusion, this chapter asserts how loud music is an important factor in young people's social lives, identity and activities. Many young people expressed how they enjoyed loud music in certain venues and, statistically, the majority of participants did not believe volume levels were too loud. Discussions highlighted how loud music has penetrated the cultural ideologies of young people's social norms and reinforces its own social codes, behaviors and hierarchies. This overarching view of loud music has perhaps contributed to a general acceptance of a range of misinformation and assumptions relating to hearing loss, risks and protection. This limited knowledge is even more worrying when participants expressed how their exposure to loud music has often caused physical pain and discomfort. However, the focus groups revealed young people's attitude to loud music and knowledge of potential effects on their hearing was shaped by the lack of information, especially from a range of expected sources. Clearly, for some participants the lack of messages, posters, adverts and government campaigns and endorsements had been personally interpreted as a sign that loud music poses minimal risks. Consequently, the absence of substantial and sustained messages from a range of sources has meant hearing protection has become sidelined and is not important to young people. However, when exploring young people's attitude to loud music, the lack of knowledge and information available to them raises serious questions about how much young people are exercising informed choice in their behavior and personal decisions.

3.2 Young people's experience and awareness of ringing in their ears

“You just come out and say ‘god my ears are well ringing (laugh)’”¹⁶

The quantitative and qualitative research findings reveal that ringing in the ears after exposure to loud music is a common and regular experience for many participants. The findings suggest that the routine occurrence of ringing in people's ears has become an expected part of many young people's social activities. During the research, 'ringing in ears' was a self-defined classification to elicit individual meaning and interpretations. This was deliberate in order for young people to internalise their own experiences and to avoid the use of scientific jargon. Alongside ringing other symptoms may also include sounds such as 'dullness' in hearing, 'buzzing', 'quietness' and 'muffled sounds.' Participants were asked about their experiences of ringing or any other of the above symptoms specifically after exposure to loud music.

This chapter will firstly outline the statistical frequency of ringing or dull hearing in the respondents' ears after exposure to loud music. The statistics will convey incidents of ringing in ears after attending different types of venues where music is played. This chapter will then analyse the qualitative findings from the focus group drawing from participant's experiences and descriptions of ringing in their ears, exploring their awareness and understanding of what ringing in the ears is and its potential affects.

The survey asked participants if they had ever 'had ringing in their ears or dull hearing on the way home or the following morning after a night in a gig or concert, a club or a pub or bar.' Temporary ringing in the ears or dull hearing after exposure to loud music indicates that the ear has been placed under stress. If this occurs regularly it can result in irreversible hearing damage, permanent hearing loss or tinnitus. The main purpose of these questions was to chart the prevalence and occurrence of ringing in the ears or dullness of hearing of young people after certain social activities. These findings help to extrapolate potential risks on young people's hearing.

The findings revealed that **68%** of respondents who go to a gig or concert had experienced ringing in their ears, of which **55%** experienced ringing on a regular or occasional basis (see table 15). This indicates that a high proportion of young people regularly expose their hearing to noise levels that have the potential to permanently damage their hearing. This raises questions about the volume levels, protection options available to customers and awareness of what ringing in the ears and dullness of hearing means to people.

¹⁶ Southampton/Female age 21

Table 15: How many respondents had had ringing in their ears or dull hearing on the way home or in the following morning after a night out at a gig/concert?
(Total = 952)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes, regularly	192	20.2
Yes, occasionally	331	34.8
Yes, at least once before	124	13.0
No, never	305	32.0

Similarly, a high incidence of ringing in ears were noted amongst respondents who go to clubs with **70%** having experiencing ringing in their ears or dullness in hearing (see table 16). These statistics are slightly higher than gigs or concerts maybe indicating the volume levels and/or the amount of time people spend in clubs are higher than at live gigs. The findings also reveal that of respondents who go clubbing three or more times a week, **65%** had experienced ringing in their ears or dullness in hearing on a regular or occasional basis (see table 17, Annex V, page 69).

Current legislation should also be considered alongside these statistics. The Licensing Act 2003 permits 24-hour, opening of pubs, which could suggest an increased likelihood of young people going to pubs, bars and clubs for longer and therefore increasing their length of exposure to loud music. Together with this, the popularity of these social activities presents a worrying social trend indicating that the majority of respondents are placing their hearing under extreme stress.

Table 16: How many respondents had ringing in your ears or dull hearing on the way home or the following morning after a night out at a club? (Total = 1097)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes, regularly	221	20.1
Yes, occasionally	416	37.9
Yes, at least once before	125	11.4
No, never	335	30.5

Of the respondents who go to pubs or bars, **44%** had experienced ringing in their ears before with **34%** on a regular or occasional basis (see table 18). Incidentally, this question was not exclusive to bars that are 'so loud you need to shout to be heard' but included all bars. The level of incidence of ringing after attending pubs or bars is an issue of concern especially when combined with the frequency and length of time people visit pubs and bars and the social norm of combining several music venues in one evening.

Table 18: How many respondents had ringing in their ears or dull hearing on the way home or the following morning after a night out at a pub/bar? (Total = 1215)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes, regularly	103	8.5
Yes, occasionally	307	25.3
Yes, at least once before	126	10.4
No, never	679	55.9

Alongside frequency of ringing in ears, the survey showed that many respondents did not consider ringing in their ears to be an area of concern. **58%** of young people who completed the survey did not believe that ringing in their ears was a warning sign for more permanent damage to their hearing (see table 19). This infers that the majority of respondents do not associate ringing with any potential long or short-term hearing problems.

Table 19: Question: Do you think that ringing in your ears can be a warning sign for more permanent damage to your hearing? (Total 1381)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
No	806	58.4
Yes: Ringing in your ears can be a warning sign for more permanent damage	575	41.6

Alongside the statistics, all of the focus groups participants had previously experienced ringing in their ears after exposure to loud music. The group discussions revealed that many participants placed clear distinctions on different types of ringing from perceived **“normal”** to more extreme and **“painful”** instances.

“Just physically felt like I was gonna be sick 'cause it was just... pounding in my head and my ears...like, I'm gonna be sick, (laugh).”
(London/Female age 22)

Significantly, for some participants the more extreme instances, that appeared to combine both physical pain and longer than expected ringing, also made people consider the impact of ringing and dullness.

“I go to a lot of sort of music gigs as well and I had ringing in the ears as normal but it got, slightly worse at one stage, and it was more like, like a

constant pulse in my ears and it actually drove me mad for like ages and I was really worried it was gonna be a permanent thing but, luckily it hasn't been but, I'm always like worried that its gonna come back so... it was like a pulse, you know you feel it like a tambourine, you know you feel like someone's banging a tambourine inside your head." (Southampton/Male age 22)

"I do remember the first time when I thought the noise was ridiculous and erm, I went to see [name of band] and its, apparently they bought their own sound system as well as the one in the venue so they just put them both up and er, that was painful for days after, that was the point that I started to, think about it." (Manchester/Male age 21)

ringing in the ears is a recognisable sign that ears have been stressed and possibly damaged by noise. Ringing in the ears and dullness in hearing can be experienced before any permanent effects on hearing are noticed. For some people, ringing in ears is considered temporary, however continued exposure to this level of noise could result in more permanent conditions. The focus groups revealed that many participants had experienced ringing ***"the next day"*** for ***"24 hours"***, ***"two days"*** and ***"three days"***. For some participants, this prolonged ringing impacted upon their lives and activities:

"...When I go to a friend's studio I find it hard to er, listen to what he's listening to because, I over exposed myself to music at the weekend and so, the beginning of the week it's still, the Monday, I find it hard to listen to things properly." (Manchester/Male age 24)

Within this context, the discussions revealed how different people internalised, reflected and placed different interpretations on acceptable length of time to have ringing and perceived ***"normal"*** experiences. For example, the participant quoted below clearly distinguishes between and judges supposed ***"normal"*** and ***"extreme"*** experiences by how long the ringing lasts. For this participant, ringing for a day is acceptable, a ***"normal"*** experience and clearly not an area of concern.

"It depends how long it goes on for, I wouldn't worry about it if it was just for a day" (Manchester/Female age 25)

Interestingly, many participants viewed ringing in their ears as an acceptable side effect of going to venues with loud music. Several participants made correlations between drinking alcohol and having hangovers, thus reinforcing socially acceptable expectations and norms.

"Yeah, yeah mine ring all the time after I've been somewhere that loud, like you, you just expect it...it goes with the hangover."(Birmingham/Male age 30)

Furthermore, for many participants ringing in ears after exposure to loud music is not only socially acceptable but also has an element of status and satisfaction. Participants referred to ringing as a physical endorsement of having **“done something really special”**¹⁷ or a **“badge of pride”**¹⁸ reinforcing its acceptability and standing.

Participant 1: **“It’s quite socially acceptable isn’t it?”**

Participant 2: **“And I get like a bit of perverse buzz out of it and say ‘oh must have had a good night’ I’ve got ringing in my ears...I think that is very sort of a short-term way of looking at it, it’s kind of like that’s a sign of a good night out, terrible hangover, ringing in my ears, must have been good.”**

Participant 1: **“And my wallet’s empty.”**

(London:- Participant 1: male age 29, Participant 2: female age 29)

Participant 1: **“I agree with you, it’s just one of those things.”**

Participant 2: **“It just happens, people don’t really think about it too much but.”**

Participant 3: **“I think you say it to all the people to reassure yourself that you’re not the only one, (laugh), you just wanna make sure that if your friends are doing it then it’s OK, the ringing...”**

Participant 4: **“Well I’ve never really minded it...when my ears have rung ‘cause that’s the sign of a good night, it’s a bit like an endorsement or whatever...”**

Participant 1: **“Its an endorsement...I’m like well, that was definitely good then, you know kind of like that (laugh), well I don’t know about the performance but I would say its more about, as far as the sound system goes it must have been good, a good night.”**

(Southampton:- Participant 1: male age 25; Participant 2: male age 17; Participant 3: female age 21; Participant 4: male age 26)

¹⁷ London/Female age 29

¹⁸ Glasgow/Male age 21

Interestingly, one of the participants in the quote above (Southampton) infers how ringing is acceptable if other people are also experiencing it at the same time. This demonstrates how some individuals place certain meanings on their experiences after comparing themselves to others. Therefore, the evident social endorsement provides a positive sanctioning and continuous approval of ringing that reinforces a social acceptability and 'normalised' experience. This element of expectation and social approval could also be compounded by the experience of ringing in ears from a relatively early age. The focus groups reveal that many participants first experienced ringing from "15", "16" and "17" years old and recognised that "**it just goes away, you get up the next morning and it's not there.**"¹⁹ As ringing is not permanent for many participants any lasting and long-term implications are considered minimal if non-existent. This belief that ringing is only temporary does appear to influence some participants' knowledge, concerns and views about ringing. For one participant, the experience of ringing in her ears was considered so temporary that it was far less of a concern in comparison to aching feet.

"Well the thing is with party feet, my feet will like, if I don't wear them [party feet], my feet will like hurt in the evening and hurt the day after, when I have ringing ears, they only ring in the evening, by the morning when I wake up it's fine, so really, so, I'd be more concerned about my feet 'cause they hurt for longer, it last longer." (Southampton/Female age 21)

This quote and earlier analysis demonstrates how there are clear misunderstandings and assumptions relating to what ringing in your ears is and potential implications on people's hearing. The discussions with participants suggest how many people have limited awareness and at times, participants appear to be guessing and clearly questioning their own knowledge.

"But that's it like you're ears made up... kind of like a bell kind of thing on a, on a pulley or something so when you get the ringing in your ear it is like a, bell or something like that, I think, I might just be making that up." (Manchester/Male age 24)

Significantly, this extremely low awareness could indicate a lack of general, informative and sustained education about hearing and ringing in ears. This raises questions about what information is available to young people, what is being accessed and at what age young people are targeted.

"I get ringing... in my ear like, I think I've experienced it like my whole life... so its not always like a big deal, but, I think, like this, its not always, that bad, I don't think, I don't know, I don't know that much, much about ringing in the ears, I don't know what its, from, but I, I have had it, like, sort of, my whole life." (London/Male age 16)

¹⁹ London/Male age 29

In the absence of information and arguably to compensate for this gap, the findings reveal how many participants are accumulating and generating their own assumptions and misinformation. Worryingly, many participants perceived ringing in their ears to be a positive sign, a symbol that ears are getting stronger and/or becoming more resistant to potential hearing damage.

Participant 1: *“I thought like when it was sort of throbbing it was kind of like, you know you work your muscles they’re kind of building on erm, the strength that you can have ... ’cause I don’t think I’ve had my ears ringing for quite a while and its not because I haven’t been to, venues with loud sound systems, I feel its because I haven’t oh, I’ve sort of built.”*

Participant 2: *“Immunity.”*

Participant 1: *“Yeah, well not immunity but, they’ve gotten a bit more used to it, ’cause I think its er, an average weekend for me you know.”*

Participant 3: *“I get the same thing, but...maybe my hearing’s getting more insensitive. you build up more of a toleration to it and, well it doesn’t affect you after a while.”*

(Southampton: Participant 1: male age 25; Participant 2: female age 21; Participant 3: male age 17)

The lack of information and young people’s construction of myths reinforce views that ringing in your ears is inevitable, a **“natural reaction”** and clearly nothing to worry about.

“Well I don’t’ think it’s damaged my hearing, not as far as I can tell I mean I, it doesn’t seem to be more than a temporary er, sort of issue to be concerned... I’ve been involved in music for several years and my ears ring, that’s natural, that’s a natural reaction, your ears ring, its natural”
(Southampton/Male age 25)

To conclude, this chapter explored how a majority of young people in the survey had experienced ringing in their ears after leaving venues with loud music. Many respondents had experienced ringing on a regular and occasional basis, which combined with frequency, length and visiting different venues in one night, depict a disquieting social trend. The group discussions also highlighted how many young people had experienced quite severe ringing for a considerable length of time and instances of pain and nausea were reported. Given that ringing in your ears is a warning sign of potential hearing damage, these examples give reason for serious concern about the risks of prolonged noise exposure levels to young people. These risks are compounded by the apparent limited awareness and understanding

expressed by participants about what ringing in their ears may indicate and the potential impact of noise exposure on their hearing. Discussions with young people reveal that, with limited information, many participants are generating their own myths and assumptions relating to ringing in their ears. Worryingly, the consequences of this are that many young people are assuming ringing in their ears is 'natural' and is sometimes interpreted as a positive step to 'build up tolerance'. Young people's attitudes and expectations are being shaped by personal and peer experiences that include an implied social status and acceptance of ringing in ears and dullness of hearing. Disturbingly, the research findings presents a view from young people that ringing is common and that certain positive meanings and endorsements have been placed upon it. In addition, a perceived lack of information being provided and accessed exacerbates a view by some young people that protecting your hearing is not important.

3.3 Young people's use and awareness of earplugs

"I don't wear earplugs because if I'm paying to get in somewhere, or paying I don't know, £25 for a ticket I want to absorb every ounce of that music."²⁰

The Don't Lose The Music research wanted to explore young people's attitudes and behavior relating to loud music and the use of hearing protection products. Exploring young people's use and awareness of earplugs was an important part of the research as encouraging young people to wear specifically designed earplugs at music venues is a strategic objective of campaign. The research used quantitative research to analyse the use of earplugs by young people within music venues. The findings from the survey revealed that the usage of earplugs is extremely low. Therefore, qualitative research was conducted to draw out young people's views and awareness about earplugs and importantly why young people do not wear them. During the focus groups young people were shown and discussed their thoughts on a range of earplugs from a variety of different companies. These findings help to analyse and draw concise conclusions relating to why young people do not wear earplugs and gauge how to make hearing protection a more important issue for young people.

This chapter uses the term earplugs to refer to a range of earplugs specifically designed to reduce the sound of loud music in your ear for music professionals and people in loud music environments. This category also includes earplugs that are used in industries to eliminate sound (usually luminous) as these earplugs are frequently associated with music venues and are often given to staff and occasionally available to customers. Discussions specifically related to earplugs available for MP3 or personal stereo headphones will be discussed in the next chapter '*Young people's use of MP3 players.*'

This chapter will firstly outline the statistical data charting the use and exposure of young people to earplugs. Then, using the qualitative findings, this chapter will explore young people's awareness of different types of earplugs and their experiences of using earplugs. In addition, the chapter will explore the opinions and reasons for either wearing or not wearing earplugs and the assumptions and meanings young people place on earplugs. Finally, this chapter will outline the participant's views about the marketing and packaging of earplugs and outline their recommendations and suggestions.

The findings reveal that only **3%** of respondents in the questionnaire state they wear earplugs at clubs or at gigs (see table 20). This low figure is concerning when compared against the high number of respondents who visit venues where loud music is played and have experienced warning signs of hearing damage. Of the **97%** of respondents who do not wear earplugs only **18%** stated they would consider doing so in the future. This leaves **83%** of respondents currently dismissing the possibility of wearing earplugs in the future (see table 21).

²⁰ Southampton/Female age 22

Table 20: Statement: I wear earplugs in clubs/at gigs.

(Total = 1381)

	Number or Respondents	Percentage
No	1345	97.4
Yes: I wear earplugs in clubs/at gigs (regular/occasional)	36	2.6

Table 21: Statement: I have never worn earplugs in clubs/at gigs but would consider doing so in the future? (Total = 1381)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
No	1139	82.5
Yes: I have never worn earplugs in clubs/at gigs but would consider doing so in the future	242	17.5

The survey asked whether the refusal of an overwhelming majority of respondents to not wear, or consider wearing earplugs was based on their physical appearance. **39%** of respondents agreed that they would not wear earplugs because ‘they look silly’ (see table 22). This raises issues around the barriers young people place upon the physical look of wearing earplugs and how these views restrict behaviors and social acceptability.

Table 22: Statement: I think earplugs look silly and will not wear them in clubs/at gigs. (Total = 1382)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
No	914	66.2
Yes: I think earplugs look silly and will not wear them in clubs/at gigs	467	33.8

The focus groups also supported these statistics however illustrated further issues, reasons, connotations and choices young people internalise surrounding earplugs. Young people discussed the physical appearance of earplugs and how the look and image influences people's choices.

“They’re not really appealing for... well, for younger people who go out, they’re not very, well I wouldn’t say any of them are very appealing.”
(Glasgow/Female age 21)

In addition, alongside the physical look of earplugs, the discussions highlighted how earplugs had negative connotations and were regarded as **“sad”, “uncool,” “daft”** and **“looking stupid.”** This choice of terminology is interesting especially in comparison to some of the positive perspectives associated with loud music and ringing in ears. From the discussions it is apparent that there are distinct views and perceptions from some participants relating to wearing earplugs, which influence and shape people's opinions.

“I’d feel embarrassed to wear earplugs I would, I worked in a nightclub and I didn’t even wear them, so” *(Birmingham/Male age 21)*

This quote raises issues about acceptance, availability and exposure of earplugs in music venues. The survey revealed that only **13%** of respondents had ‘seen people wearing earplugs at clubs and gigs’ (see table 23). In addition, the focus group revealed that for many of the participants, the only people seen wearing earplugs were in an official capacity.

Table 23: Statement: I have seen people wearing earplugs in clubs/at gigs.
 (Total – 1381)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
No	1200	86.9
Yes: I have seen people wearing earplugs in clubs/at gigs	181	13.1

Participant 1: ***“I saw someone with earplugs I’m sure I saw someone with earplugs working at the bar...oh I don’t know where it was but that was the first time I think I’d seen anything like that.”***

Participant 2: ***“I’ve seen bouncers at Brixton Academy wearing them but they are standing, right next to the speakers”***

(London:- Participant 1: Female age 29, Participant 2: male age 25)

This apparent 'officialdom' of earplugs could contribute to a belief that earplugs are only for people who have to wear them and professionals who frequently perform near speakers. The conversation below illustrates how participants rationalise earplugs as not relevant to them and only an area of concern for officials in extreme situations:

Participant 1: *"It's similar to when you see, bands wearing them and stuff, I understand that that's what they do every night so, they have to..."*

Participant 2: *"Well that's what I would probably think as well, I'd think they were a musician or, or, a sound engineer..."*

Participant 3: *"Yeah... they must be, they must be official, they've got earplugs' (laugh)... I've never seen anyone in a club."*

Participant 4: *"St Johns Ambulance people or seem to wear them at festivals and stuff."*

Participant 5: *"I think I've only ever seen them, you know when you go to a gig and in the pit at the bottom, right at the front, the security men have them."*

Participant 6: *"Well I think in some of the televised events, what was it called, Live8, I think some of the celebrities did actually have them in."*

Participant 5: *" Yeah if they're standing next to the stage."*

(Southampton:- Participant 1: male age 17; Participant 2: female age 25; Participant 3: female age 23; Participant 4: male age 22; Participant 5: female age 21; Participant 6: female age 17)

Some participants also strengthened this view by only wearing and discussing earplugs in a 'staff' or 'regular band member' capacity. This attitude towards earplugs appeared to create a perception that earplugs and 'protecting your hearing' is not regarded as an area of concern or risk for customers. The discussions revealed that many participants have consciously excluded themselves as people who could and should be wearing earplugs in music venues. Even more worrying, discussions around earplug usage highlighted further negative connotations placed upon them. For many participants the perception of people who use earplugs was that they are 'different' and consequently 'being different' was synonymous with negative.

"There would be people starting trouble in clubs I think here, it's not offensive to me, and I think each to their own, but there is people here that would start going 'what you got in your ear?' and then it would, drink and fight." (Birmingham/Female age 27)

Equating wearing music earplugs with potential violence is a rather extreme reaction and inferred by only one respondent. However, the fact that one participant viewed this as a potential direct effect of wearing earplugs is significant and demonstrates some of the strong feelings people have towards earplugs. Other participants discussed the perceived 'difference' as an issue that would actively discourage themselves and others wearing earplugs:

"I think if you decide to wear earplugs then you know that's your choice, everyone looking at you and saying 'oh look he's wearing earplugs.'"
(London/Male age 25)

"I will notice what other people are wearing and, I will notice if they are wearing something different, I won't necessarily make a point and say, 'hey look at her she's got earplugs in,' but, I dunno, I would be like, I'd notice the difference, I guess most people would." (Southampton/Female age 21)

"I think... for kids, kids coming up, they don't want to be wearing something that's gonna look, in their eyes daft, 'cause they're gonna be a minority probably wearing them. Until its majority and everybody's wearing them then, you're always gonna be an odd one out when you're, wearing them aren't ya?." (Manchester/Female age 26)

"No-one else was going to and I'd think everyone would mock me if I was going to wear them I wouldn't because I'm too shallow, if everyone else was doing it then probably." (London/Male age 29)

The views being generated from the focus groups clearly illustrated the importance for many participants of being easily identifiable as part of a 'majority.' The above quotes demonstrate how being physically seen as 'not different' can shape and influence individual attitudes and behavior. In addition to these perceptions and internalisations, the research revealed further negative assumptions and connotations associated with earplugs. The survey reported that **28%** of respondents specified that they 'like loud music so they would not wear earplugs' (see Table 24). Alongside this, the focus group revealed that many participants viewed music earplugs as a physical barrier that would "**definitely lessen the experience**"²¹ of enjoying music and socialising.

"Isn't the point that I mean, if you're going somewhere to listen to music you don't want to have something that's going to stop you listening to music, like some earphone, like some earplugs." (London/Male age 29)

²¹ Glasgow/Male age 21

“The thing that pisses me off is talking to people, in clubs, I can barely hear what people say to me anyway, so I’d be reluctant to wear earplugs, unless they can cut out the music and not the speech or something.”
(Southampton/Male age 26)

Table 24: Statements: I like loud music so won't wear earplugs.

(Total = 1381)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
No	989	71.6
Yes: I like loud music so won't wear earplugs	392	28.4

The focus group’s discussions highlight the limited knowledge and general awareness about earplugs among participants. This lack of information arguably contributes to the potential barriers and negative views young people generate and associate with earplugs.

“I don’t use them, it’s just the way, I didn’t think they’ll be that good at protecting your ears.” *(London/Female age 18)*

In addition, many participants expressed a reluctance to wear earplugs because they were unaware of why they should and any potential benefits. This indicates how many young people are not accessing specific information about the benefits of earplugs and the range of suitable earplugs available. This is consequently restricting their knowledge and affecting their informed choice.

“I mean at the moment they don’t know about it so, people don’t wear it ‘cause they think why should they.” *(Southampton/Male age 17)*

“Yeah... they’re a functional thing, if you knew you had to wear them then you would, or you knew the real affects of ringing in your ears, I don’t know what the real affects are, so I don’t consider wearing them [earplugs], those that do, well they would I suppose.”
(Southampton/Female age 25)

In addition, the survey identified that only **11%** of respondents knew ‘where to buy a pair of good quality earplugs’ (see Table 25). This extremely low statistic was reiterated during the focus groups, with many participants openly asking, ***“where do you sell them?”*** This lack of easy access to earplugs clearly contributes to the limited knowledge and social endorsement that is important to young people. Consequently

young people are internalising the limited exposure, information and accessibility of earplugs as a “**fear of the unknown.**”²²

Table 25: Statement: If I wanted to buy a pair of good quality earplugs I would know where to buy them. (Total = 1381)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
No	1226	88.8
Yes: If I wanted to buy a pair of good quality earplugs I would know where to buy them	155	11.2

Participant 1: *“if it was in, in the record shops, and stuff like that, then people would, be aware of it.”*

Participant 2: *“But, yeah, I don’t think any, I don’t see why any people our age would, would be going out and buying stuff like that, ’cause it’s not marketed.”*

Participant 3: *“Notice how none of us, have seen them like, in a travel shop kind of thing, to block out of a plane, but I’ve never seen it in a music shop or anything like that.”*

(London:- Participant 1: Female age 22; Participant 2: male age 20; Participant 3: male age 20)

Similarly, **78%** of respondents indicated that they do not know there are different types of earplugs to be used in different situations (see Table 26). This statistic implies that there is an overwhelming confusion by the majority of young people who took part in the research about different types of earplugs that are available for activities such as work, for sleep and for using at clubs and gigs. This was also reiterated in the focus groups as many participants stated they “**never knew there were so many different ones,**”²³ clearly indicating a gap in young people’s knowledge and awareness.

²² Southampton/Male age 22

²³ Birmingham/Female age 28

Table: 26: Statement: I know there are different types of earplugs that can be used in different situations. (Total = 1381)

	Number or Respondents	Percentage
No	1081	78.3
Yes: I know there are different types of earplugs that can be used in different situations	300	21.7

In addition, group discussions suggested many participants believed the packaging of earplugs was **“quite strange”**, **“not very eye catching”** and **“not clear”** thus alienating and not appealing to young people.

Participant 1: *“Well that one in the middle, I wouldn’t know what that is.”*

Participant 2: *“I think you need to make it more attractive to young people...”*

Participant 3: *“I think they could be made smaller that’s all, you know like a key ring then you’re not gonna forget them ...”*

Participant 4: *“And they’ve got a cool lady on it (laugh), you see that would probably put off 16 and 17 year olds, looking at that, woman, I dunno.”*

Participant 2: *“It’s a bit like your mad auntie init.”*

Participant 4: *“Yeah, exactly.”*

Participant 5: *“A karaoke queen.”*

Participant 1: *“Somebody, mum or dad might buy for the kids, because they’ve read, because they’ve read in the paper that it’s, about this, people losing their hearing and, they buy these for them and try and get them to wear them and then they probably wouldn’t.”*

(Manchester: Participant 1: female age 22; Participant 2: female age 26; Participant 3 male age 21; Participant 4: female age 21; Participant 5: male age 24)

The above conversation also draws out key issues regarding age and the myth that hearing problems are only relevant to older people and not an area of concern for younger people. For some participants the marketing of music earplugs by manufacturers also reinforced this stereotype and did not directly target young people. Moreover, participants also commented that the packaging and marketing material did not provide any additional information or enhance young people's awareness of why they should or how to wear earplugs."

"Mmm but when you buy a pair of sunglasses it pretty much tells you what they're doing and how they work there'll be like a little graphic about the sunray and all that sort of stuff...but they don't, even on those that you showed that were in their packaging, and I know having bought them there's nothing inside that really tells you, on the ones that I got, there's no, no kind of literature, no kind of bump or whatever, just to make it make some sort of make sense of what you should really be doing or how you should be thinking about it." (London/Male age 29)

This lack of information appeared to generate further practical barriers associated with wearing earplugs.

"Well I always think that you've got to bung them in as far as you can 'cause otherwise they'll just pop out, I don't' know if that's right, I've never seen instructions. I know that sounds silly as you put them in your ears but how far." (Southampton/Female age 23)

In addition, many participants expressed concerns over the cost of earplugs and also saw this as a potential barrier to discourage young people.

"Ahhh, I think with these things, you know, they're too pricey."
(Glasgow/Male age 26)

However, many of the negative comments can be seen in relation to the priorities of some young people and the relevance hearing currently has on people's lives.

Participant 1: ***"Even with the £10 ones, if I lost them I'd be really annoyed, 'cause I don't spend more than £5 on earrings, I know it's the same region, maybe not the same purpose but, I'd be really annoyed if I'd spent £70 and lost them at a rave and they were on the floor with people stepping on them my £70 earplugs, I'd be absolutely fuming, it not just as if you could go and take it back and wash it...£70 on the floor, that's all I'd be thinking of, you wouldn't take it out, I don't think I've spent £70 on one item of anything."***

Participant 2: *“But isn’t that the same as anything though, like a mobile phone...”*

Participant 1: *“But, I think we’re more dependant on phones, well obviously we’re dependant on our ears, but not these plugs, we don’t need the plugs..... if you had £70 you’d spend it on booze or... I think £10 is a lot...”*

Participant 2: *“But I, I, I, I’m not thinking about losing them, do you know what I mean, I’m thinking a tenner for a pair of earplugs, potentially for life, they can protect my hearing, I won’t get ringing, you know, its not that much money.”*

(Southampton: Participant 1: Female age 21, Participant 2: Female age 23)

Some participants did base their views on specific experiences of being given and wearing earplugs at music venues before. However, for some participants, this experience was largely negative and affected their future decisions about earplugs.

“My friend works round the sound desk and they give out earphones/plugs if you want them, but they’re just crap really they don’t do anything and er, the problem is when, I’m playing on stage, if you have just these really cheap earphones, they cut out certain frequencies but not others so you get a really distorted, muddy sound, and you won’t hear certain frequencies.”

(London /Male age 20)

“They don’t all work. ...and the sponge, the foamy ones, they just expand and pop out after a little while, if one’s dancing around and you you’re kind of rocking to a decent band they’ll be gone in a matter of minutes.”

(Glasgow/ Male age 26)

This raises several questions about what types of earplugs are promoted and available to young people at certain venues. For some participants, the specific earplugs discussed above (likely to be disposable foam or wax earplugs) are the only earplugs they associate with music. The distribution of these earplugs at music venues leaves many young people with a negative experience and thus reinforcing a view that earplugs do not work. Consequently this is cementing a dismissive attitude towards wearing earplugs in the future.

Conversely, a few participants in the group discussions had found wearing earplugs in music venues a positive experience and saw it as an investment or believed it enhanced their experience.

“I need my ears too much to be, risking it, so a couple of quid, to go clubbing...well it’s my life, it’s my livelihood in a way, so...well I mean

there's no reason to... is there, there's no reason to, to put yourself at risk in a way. (Manchester/Male age 21)

Participant 1: ***“Actually I used to, I was in a band when I was at school and I used to wear, I used to wear earplugs in that because it was just too loud and it hurt your ears, and you could hear stuff better with the earplugs in as well.”***

Participant 2: ***“Yeah definitely, it helps you concentrate.”***

(London:- Participant 1: male age 29, Participant 2: male age 29)

For many participants the focus groups was the first opportunity to see, discuss and learn about earplugs and hear some positive and practical discussions. This underpins the importance of promoting the use of correct earplugs and positive experiences and benefits. Some participants expressed how, in light of the discussions they would consider wearing earplugs in music venues. Although it is uncertain whether they acted upon this after the focus group, the process of learning and reflecting about earplugs is a significant step, especially when compared with earlier views and negative reactions.

“After today if I saw someone I'd be like, 'hey, they're looking after their hearing.’”(Southampton/Female age 23)

“Well I think I would [wear earplugs], its been on my mind before, I have thought oh what am I doing to my ears, you know I might have to take that step, but now I know the different options and in a way, the like confirmation that you can do something.” (Southampton/Male age 22)

“I might go and buy some this Saturday.” (Manchester/Female age 21)

“I would now, [wear earplugs] now I know about it.” (London /Male age 20)

During the initial negative discussions around earplugs, many participants appeared to alter their views and expressed a desire to try and think of mechanisms to encourage other young people to use earplugs. One participant suggested 'earplug trials' to encourage young people to try earplugs, address some of their potential barriers and base their views on their own positive experiences. This apparent positive reaction from some participants suggests how, if young people were more directly engaged, had relevant information and knew the benefits of wearing earplugs; attitudes towards earplugs could potentially change.

“It could be like a huge thing as well like, a huge thing where you just send everybody a voucher to get a pair of like the £10 ones maybe, and, and everybody you know, will go out and get them and try them, the, if you lose them you’ve got to buy, new ones, but, but, at least you’ve been able to try them and you might not begrudge buying new ones because if they’re good.” (Southampton/Female age 25)

To conclude, this chapter examines how an overwhelming majority of young people who participated in the research did not wear earplugs in music venues and would not consider doing so in the future. The statistics outlined a variety of reasons why respondents do not and would not consider wearing earplugs that projected a discouraging social trend of minimal earplug usage. The focus groups permitted further in-depth investigations into young people’s reasons and outlined a range of assumptions, barriers, meanings and interpretations that combined, resulted in earplugs being dismissed and sidelined by many young people. The group discussions highlighted how limited exposure to seeing people wearing earplugs in a non-work capacity was shaping people’s views, beliefs and assumptions. In addition, young people were not making the connection between why, as customers they should and would benefit from wearing earplugs. For some participants, earplugs were clearly regarded as ‘different’ and as the discussions illustrated, ‘different’ provoked anxieties of social disapproval and ridicule. However, the discussions with young people revealed that many participants lacked basic information about different types of earplugs that are available, where to buy earplugs and why people should wear earplugs. From the discussions it was apparent that many young people felt they were not specifically engaged or targeted in the promotion of earplugs, including in their packaging, marketing and availability in appropriate shops. Experiences of using earplugs in music venues also uncovered mixed reactions, highlighting the importance of young people being given and knowing about the most appropriate earplugs for music venues. However, despite the initial negative reactions, upon reflection, some participants started to question their knowledge and opinions and (after a relatively short discussion) expressed more positive considerations about wearing earplugs in the future.

3.4 Young people's use of MP3 players

“Yeah, and I just listen to my MP3 player everyday, and quite loud.”²⁴

The currently popularity of MP3 players, together with advances in technology that allow people to listen to audio equipment for long periods of time and at louder volumes than before is of concern to RNID. The *Don't Lose The Music* research wanted to investigate how often young people use MP3 players at high volumes and their understanding of the potential affects to their hearing. The quantitative and qualitative findings present an overview of the use of and attitudes towards MP3 players.

This chapter uses the term 'MP3 player' to refer to all MP3 players and personal stereos. All efforts were made to minimise discussions on any particular brand or make of MP3 players and this report will not refer to any specific brand. During the focus groups young people did discuss specific 'earplugs' available for headphones. These earplugs are designed to block out background noise (such as city streets, a train or a tube), which enables users to listen at a lower volume thus protecting hearing. Throughout this chapter these will be referred to as 'additions to in-ear headphones'. Similar to other chapters, reference to 'loud' music is self-determined based on young people individual reflections and views.

The statistics reveal that **77%** of respondents listen to MP3 players. In total **38%** of respondents who listen to their MP3 players listen for more than 10 hours a week of which, **19%** listen for more than 21 hours a week (see table 27). These figures suggest how MP3 players are not only popular with young people but are being listened to for considerable amounts of time regularly.

Table 27: How many hours on average respondents listen to a personal stereo, personal CD player or MP3 player per week. (Total = 1068)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 2 hours	158	14.8
More than 2 hours up to 4 hours	170	15.9
More than 4 hours up to 6 hours	156	14.6
More than 6 hours up to 10 hours	181	16.9
More than 10 hours up to 21 hours	203	19.0
More than 21 hours	200	18.7

²⁴ London/Female age 18

The statistics also reveal that the majority of respondents who listen to their MP3 players for more than 21 hours a week are between the ages 16 and 20 years of age (see table 28, Annex V, page 70). This raises concerns about the length of time per week young people are directly exposed to music. Although it is not clear at what volume levels young people listen to their MP3 players, the survey illustrates **34%** of respondents who listen to MP3 players believe they sometimes listen too loudly (see Table 29). Worryingly, **50%** of all respondents who listened to their MP3 players for over 21 hours a week believed they sometimes listened too loudly (see Table 30 – See Annex V, page 70). This suggests that many respondents are listening to their MP3 players at high volumes, regularly and for long periods of time, which potentially places many young people at risk of hearing damage.

Table 29: Statement: I sometimes think I listen to music too loudly on my personal stereo/CD player/MP3 player. (Total = 1068)

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
No	710	66.5
Yes: I sometimes think I listen to music too loudly on my personal stereo/CD player/MP3 player	358	33.5

The regional focus groups enhanced this analysis and suggested variations within and across the regions with regard to usage and views. In the focus groups bigger commuter cities such as London and Manchester reported high frequency of use among participants, other regional locations (Birmingham, Southampton and Glasgow) suggested more infrequent use. Interestingly, the discussions revealed that for many young people, the use and enjoyment of MP3's were often inextricably linked to volume levels. This further supports earlier analysis on the social acceptability and status of loud music amongst young people.

“I think the issue with [MP3 player] is like I said and most people agreed with this when you have a favourite song you turn it up, well an [MP3 player’s] got all your favourite songs on... so I think the thing with that is you just constantly have it on loud ‘cause it’s all your favourite songs.”
(Birmingham/Male age 21)

“I’ve got friends even now, if I put their headphones in my ear...it’s just crazily loud (laugh).” *(London/Male age 20)*

However, for other participants increasing the volume level is not necessarily through choice but rather a consequence of loud background noise.

“Well I don’t listen to it, erm I mean I think generally I’m quite good but again the problem is when you get on the tube or, somewhere particularly

noisy or you're just sitting next to a very annoying person on the bus or something and then I'll just turn it up, and I just know that's not particularly great because that's a loud noise and the only way I'll get rid of the loud noise is to create a new but louder noise so I can't hear it...and I know I think there's kind of a stubbornness there though also you kind of want to listen to music that's why I'm listening to it and I'll be damned if I'm letting this tube or whatever, drown it out. (London/Male age 25)

"Yeah 'cause I just get I've been listening, if I listen to my like [MP3 player] or something on the on the tube you can't hear it unless you whack it up to super duper...you come out and you realise your ears are bleeding 'cause you've been playing it too loud." (London/Male age 27)

The above quote also indicates some of the negative physical effects young people had experienced directly as a result of listening to MP3 players at high volumes. Although this quote may be somewhat exaggerated, many participants reported that they believed listening to their MP3 players had made their ears "***hurt,***" "***ring,***" had caused "***actual pain***" and "***affected the quality of hearing***"²⁵. One participant believed the physical affects caused by his MP3 player were so disruptive that he stopped using his MP3 player altogether.

"I've stopped listening to my [MP3 player] recently 'cause I've got in-ear headphones and they're just too bright and, like whenever I listen to, like good downloads or whatever and er, they're good quality I can hear like, drums crackling in my ear, I take 'em out and I can still feel my ears throbbing a bit, for about an hour afterwards, more on Monday mornings I've got ringing in my ears, you know." (Manchester/Male age 24)

From the above quote it is unclear how much the participants' discomforts are attributed solely to listening to an MP3 player. However, the quotes and general discussions do suggest that many young people are experiencing or MP3 players are exacerbating hearing problems and associated personal anxieties.

"Because I'm worried that it is going to damage my ears... that listening to my [MP3 player] too loud is going to, or you know just in general, yeah basically listening to my [MP3 player] too loud is going to hurt damage my hearing, and then I won't then be able to listen to music anyway, and so that would be crap." (London/Male age 27)

Discussions around personal volume also encompassed deliberations around both individual and manufacturers responsibility over volume control.

²⁵ London/Male age 16

“I do, I do sometime wonder why they, make it possible to go so loud... it’s totally, a persons fault I mean, but I do yeah, I do sometimes wonder, how, why they make it so loud that like some of them you can place on a chair over there and you can just listen to it... I’ve just seen my friend with ones which like, is about three times over what you could ever possibly want, volume wise, but it’s still, you know... they’re stupid enough to listen to it.” (London/Male age 20)

Many participants believed individuals exercised their own control over volume levels and therefore were responsible for any potential hearing problems. However many young people questioned why MP3 devices were designed for such high volumes and why more information or technology was not available to warn people of potential risks. This could imply for some participants, the lack of information outlining potential risks indicates that MP3’s are safe and will not affect hearing.

“If it was going to harm your hearing then surely there would be some sort of devices to tell you that you’re going over.” (Birmingham/Male age28)

Besides issues around specific volumes, the need for finding positive solutions to reduce background noise or overcome discomfort was important for many participants. The discussions revealed how the majority of MP3 users had ***“never heard”*** of ‘additions to in-ear headphones’ and were unaware of their purpose and availability. Many young people could not understand ***“why, if these things exists, why, why on earth do we not know about them?”***²⁶ This raises questions about young people’s access to information and the marketing of certain products that may be beneficial for them. Young people themselves identified how the lack of availability in certain shops, advertising and packaging excluded young people and reinforced a view that either the products were not available or that they were not important for young people.

“they kind of need to be targeted, er, more at the, the younger, younger audience really, I mean that packaging, it doesn’t kind of, jump out of you from the shelves, erm, I just think it needs to be targeted better, and stuff for the [MP3 player], like, none of us even knew that it existed, so, kind of, they need to get their advertising, right, and get it stocked in, in, in, places that young people go to...if it was in, in the record shops, and stuff like that, then people would, be aware of it.” (London/Female age 22)

In addition, some young people believed that ‘additions to in-ear headphones’ should be sold with MP3 players or at leased endorsed by manufacturers and as easily available as other MP3 accessories.

²⁶ London Male age 20

Participant 1: *“ I think it’ll be a good idea if, er, if manufactures were convinced, er, to, provide, like, similar things to er, what you’re selling there like erm, what you’re talking about there, with the products, like, compulsory, so its there if you like want to use it and like and think people want.”*

Participant 2: *“Would be good if, [MP3’s] were sold.”*

Participant 3: *“Yeah, if it were sold if [MP3’s] were sold with.”*

Participant 2: *“And they’re not expensive.”*

Participant 4: *“It should be like sold with, where you can’t actually take it of... so if you buy an [MP3 player]and it comes with those headphones you have to use that, and then our ears won’t be as bad.”*

Participant 2: *“Yeah I think they’ve got enough, they’ve got loads of accessories, so why not.”*

(London:- Participant 1: Male age 16; Participant 2: Male age 20; Participant 3: Female age 22; Participant 4: Male age 18)

The MP3 users in the focus groups were extremely positive about the ‘additions to in ear headphones’ and suggested that they are a product that they would purchase and wear. Although it is not clear how these discussions reflect actual changes in behaviours of MP3 users and the purchasing of products, the initial reaction from young people is extremely encouraging. The group discussions suggest that with more information, specific marketing and easy availability, young people may consider wearing ‘additions to in-ear headphones’.

To conclude, this chapter reveals a high usage of MP3 players amongst the respondents especially 16-20 year olds. Worryingly, many within this age group are listening to their MP3 players for over 21 hours a week and sometimes at volume levels they believe to be ‘too loud.’ Within discussions around personal volume both notions of personal enjoyment and background noise contributed to higher volume levels. Interestingly the focus group revealed some participants had experience negative affects that they believed were a consequence of their MP3 usage. This raises questions about the role and responsibilities of both manufacturers and individuals regarding high volumes levels and controls. Alongside issues of volume, the focus groups reveled that there is extremely limited awareness about the existence of headphone earplugs to restrict background noise. Young people identified that current strategies to raise awareness, exposure, availability and the profile of ‘headphone earplugs’ were not accessible to young people. ‘Headphone earplugs’ were extremely well received by young MP3 users and this should be explored and enhanced further by manufacturers and other relevant organisation.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Don't Lose The Music research provided an in-depth analysis into the attitudes, behaviors, thoughts and experiences of young people (aged 16-30). The research specifically explored issues around loud music, ringing in ears, views about earplugs and of MP3 player usage. The findings presented both a statistical overview of current behavior and personal insights and perspectives. This report and recommendations are grounded in the views and comments of young people to ensure they influence discussions and decisions around the future long-term strategic direction and planning of the campaign.

The research findings revealed that many young people enjoy and associate loud music in public venues with personal satisfaction and enjoyment. Loud music has a positive social status amongst young people, which is endorsed and promoted by bands, venues and new technology. Consequently, many young people expect venues to have loud music and are disappointed if this demand is not met. However, the focus groups revealed an overwhelming lack of information from participants about the volume levels and potential effects on hearing. For many participants, loud music was socially acceptable and positive. Nevertheless, young people in the focus groups did express an interest in learning more about volume levels and any potential effects on their hearing. This initial interest and desire for more information needs to be explored and enhanced further.

The research revealed that the majority of participants had experienced ringing in their ears after attending music venues. Many respondents believed that ringing in their ears had no relationship to potential hearing damage and posed no area of risk or concern. For many participants ringing in their ears was regarded as an acceptable reaction to loud music and sometimes interpreted as a positive sign that ears are becoming stronger. However, the focus groups revealed a substantially low level of awareness and understanding about what ringing in their ears is and potential issues arising from it. This low level of awareness needs to be addressed in a relevant and appropriate way so young people can frame their experiences and understandings on facts and a balance of views.

The research illustrated that an overwhelming majority of young people do not and would not consider wearing earplugs in music venues. Many young people expressed extreme negative reactions and barriers towards wearing earplugs based on their look, packaging, cost and a range of negative assumptions and experiences. The opinions of young people towards earplugs reveal the importance and influence of peer endorsement and status. However, the focus groups revealed an extremely low understanding and appreciation of the benefits of wearing earplugs and the different types available. The focus groups appeared to heighten an initial interest in trying earplugs and incorporating earplugs into a relevant, educational public health message.

The research illustrated how MP3 players and personal stereos have become an integral part of many young people's lives. The research indicates that many young people listen to their MP3 players for significant amounts of time and at volume levels they consider to be 'too loud'. Younger people (16-20) are more likely to demonstrate this behavior, thus presenting a worrying trend and raising serious questions over regular exposure to loud music from an early age. The focus groups highlighted young

people were not aware of hearing protection products that could potentially benefit MP3 player users. Young people need to be made more aware of facts regarding listening to music on MP3 players and possible solutions available to them.

Don't Lose The Music is a long-term campaign aiming to change the attitudes, opinions, awareness and behavior of young people towards their hearing. Drawing from the research with young people, this report recommends the following be accomplished in order to achieve that:

- Greater awareness among young people on volume levels, ringing in ears, potential effects on hearing and hearing protection. Awareness campaign need to specifically target young people with a key education aspect. The campaign needs to be promoted as a public 'hearing health' message, making hearing relevant to young people and empowering young people to make informed choices about their hearing. The campaign needs to address, challenge and stop the misinformation and assumptions being generated about hearing, ringing in ears and earplugs.
- Ensure young people are accessing information from a range of sources. Develop key partnership with the government, schools, youth agencies, media and music industry to disseminate the public 'hearing health' message. Messages need to be specifically targeted and relevant to young people with significant emphasis on raising awareness of hearing as a public health issue.
- Ensure education is in place, accessible and available to young people so they are aware of what ringing in ears is and how to prevent it when they first start to experience it.
- Engage directly with young people to increase their level of understanding and endorsement of the campaign at a national and local level. This should include elements of peer campaigning, whereby young people are lobbying on hearing protection issues that are important to them.
- Provide and promote positive experiences of wearing correct music earplugs in music venues linked to a clear 'hearing health' promotion message. Young people should have the opportunity to be directly involved in discussions, demonstrations and trials around the range of relevant earplugs to demystify current myths and barriers. Use of earplugs should always be linked to wider 'hearing health' issues.
- Conduct further medical and social research on the impact loud music has on people's hearing. This should include an analysis of medical risks associated with early and regular exposure to loud music. Further social research should explore young people's experiences of hearing loss and damage caused through exposure to loud music. This could include longitudinal work.
- Work directly with venues to promote quiet areas for young people. These spaces should also provide information on how to protect people's hearing and encourage practical solutions so young people can enjoy music without damaging their hearing.

- Work directly with local councils to encourage the promotion of the above and 'hearing health' public messages in a range of forums they influence
- Distribute key materials to MP3 manufacturers to engage them further into the campaign and generate a greater level of involvement and interest.
- Influence earplug manufacturers to market earplugs specifically at young people and to be more easily recognisable and available. This also includes marketing earplugs for MP3 headphones as MP3 accessories

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Annex I

Questionnaire sample statistical breakdown

Gender:

(total = 1381)

	Frequency	Percent
Male	700	50.7
Female	681	49.3
Total	1381	100.0

Age:

(total = 1381)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid 16	99	7.2	7.2
17	120	8.7	8.7
18	121	8.8	8.8
19	99	7.2	7.2
20	97	7.0	7.0
21	75	5.4	5.4
22	80	5.8	5.8
23	71	5.1	5.1
24	115	8.3	8.3
25	102	7.4	7.4
26	84	6.1	6.1
27	86	6.2	6.2
28	84	6.1	6.1
29	60	4.3	4.3
30	88	6.4	6.4

Hearing:

(total=1381)

	Frequency	Percent
I am hard of hearing	0	0
I am deaf	0	0
I am a hearing aid user	0	0
I have tinnitus (a constant and permanent ringing in the ear)	12	.9
None of these apply to me	1369	99.1

Region:
(total = 1381)

	Frequency	Percent
North East	142	10.3
North West	127	9.2
Yorks & Humber	131	9.5
South West	76	5.5
Midlands	195	14.2
East Anglia	195	14.1
Surrey	25	1.8
Kent	148	10.7
Scotland	100	7.2
Wales	140	10.1
London	102	7.4

Focus group sample breakdown

Gender: 22 Female
22 Male

Regions London
Manchester
Birmingham
Southampton
Glasgow

Annex II

SYNOVATE, MOUNT OFFHAM, OFFHAM, WEST MALLING, KENT, ME19 5PG

JOB NO: 25211901

Don't Lose the Music

October 2005

Good morning/afternoon. I am from Synovate, an independent market research company (**SHOW IDENTITY CARD**). We are carrying out research on behalf of a national charity. Please can you take about 8 minutes to answer some questions? This is genuine market research; your answers will remain anonymous and none of your personal details will be passed on.

(1-5)

QA. Interviewer record sex:

Male	1	CHECK QUOTA	(6)
Female	2	CHECK QUOTA	

QB. Can I check your age please:

<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> <div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; width: 20px; height: 20px;"></div>	(7-8)
--	-------

QC. Interviewer record age:

16 - 20	1	(9)
21 - 25	2	
26 - 30	3	

CHECK QUOTAS

QD. Do any of the following statements apply to you?

I am hard of hearing	1	(10)
I am deaf	2	
I am a hearing aid user	3	
I have tinnitus (a constant and permanent ringing in the ears)	4	
None of these apply to me	5	

ONLY CODES 4 OR 5 PROCEED

PLEASE THANK THOSE ANSWERING CODES 1 – 3, FOR PARTICIPATING BUT EXPLAIN QUESTIONNAIRE ONLY FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT AFFECTED BY HEARING LOSS IN WAY

Q1. I am going to ask some questions about how often you take part in different activities

	Three or e times a week	Twice a week	Once a week	Once or a a month often	Less often	Never	
a) Go clubbing	1	2	3	4	5	6	(11)
b) Go to a gig or concert	1	2	3	4	5	6	(12)
c) Go to a pub or bar where you need to shout to be heard	1	2	3	4	5	6	(13)

ASK ALL THOSE WHO EVER GO TO CLUBS (CODE 1-5 AT Q1A)
SHOWCARD B

Q2. And how many hours would you spend in a typical evening in a club?

Less than 2 hours	1	(14)
More than 2 hours and up to 4 hours	2	
More than 4 hours and up to 6 hours	3	
More than 6 hours	4	

ASK ALL THOSE WHO EVER GO TO GIGS OR CONCERTS (CODE 1-5 AT Q1B)
SHOWCARD B

Q2B. And how many hours would you spend in a typical evening in a gig or concert?

Less than 2 hours	1	(15)
More than 2 hours and up to 4 hours	2	
More than 4 hours and up to 6 hours	3	
More than 6 hours	4	

ASK ALL THOSE WHO EVER GO TO PUBS OR BARS WHERE YOU NEED TO SHOUT TO BE
HEARD (CODE 1-5 AT Q1C)
SHOWCARD B

Q2C. And how many hours would you spend in a typical evening in a pub or bar where you need to shout to be heard?

Less than 2 hours	1	(16)
More than 2 hours and up to 4 hours	2	
More than 4 hours and up to 6 hours	3	
More than 6 hours	4	

ASK ALL THOSE WHO ANSWERED MORE THAN ONE CATEGORY AT Q1A/1B AND/OR Q1C
SHOWCARD C

Q2D. Do you ever go to more than one activity: - club - gig - and/or pub/bar - in the same evening?

Yes regularly	1	(17)
Yes, occasionally	2	
Yes, at least once before	3	
No, never	4	

ASK ALL THOSE WHO EVER GO TO CLUBS
SHOWCARD C

Q3. Have you had ringing in your ears or dull hearing on the way home or in the following morning after a night out at a club?

Yes, regularly	1	(18)
Yes, occasionally	2	
Yes, at least once before	3	
No, never	4	

ASK ALL THOSE WHO EVER GO TO GIGS OR CONCERTS
SHOWCARD C

Q4A. Have you had ringing in your ears or dull hearing on the way home or in the following morning after a night out at a gig/concert?

Yes, regularly	1	(19)
Yes, occasionally	2	
Yes, at least once before	3	
No, never	4	

ASK ALL THOSE WHO EVER GO TO PUBS OR BARS WHERE YOU NEED TO SHOUT TO BE
RD
SHOWCARD C

Q4B. Have you had ringing in your ears or dull hearing on the way home or in the following morning after a night out at a pub/bar?

Yes, regularly	1	(20)
Yes, occasionally	2	
Yes, at least once before	3	
No, never	4	

SHOWCARD D

ASK ALL

Q5. How many hours on average do you listen to a personal stereo, personal CD player or MP3 player in a week?

Never	1	(21)
Less than 2 hours	2	
More than 2 hours up to 4 hours	3	
More than 4 hours up to 6 hours	4	
More than 6 hours up to 10 hours	5	
More than 10 hours up to 21 hours	6	
More than 21 hours	7	

SHOWCARD E

Q6. I'm going to give you a list of statements that may or may not apply to you. Can you please tell which apply to you - just read out the number on the card (MULTI CODING ALLOWED):

I do not think my ears are affected by or put at risk from loud music	1	(22-32)
When I get ringing in the ears or dullness of hearing it gets better after a while	2	
I have never been told about potential risks to my hearing from loud music	3	
I sometimes think I listen to music too loudly on my personal stereo/CD player/MP3 player	4	
I think music is played too loudly in nightclubs	5	
I think music is played too loudly at gigs/concerts	6	
I think music is played too loudly in some pubs/bars	7	
I do not think looking after my hearing is important	8	
I think that any loss in hearing would have a dramatic effect on my life	9	

I like to listen to loud music	10
I sometimes worry about losing my hearing	11

SHOWCARD F

Q7. Which, if any of the following pieces of information do you think is true? Just read out the number (MULTI CODING ALLOWED)

Hearing deteriorates with age	1	(33-40)
Listening to loud music can damage your hearing	2	
I don't think listening to loud music affects my hearing	3	
You cannot prevent hearing loss	4	
Ringing in your ears can be a warning sign for more permanent damage to your hearing	5	
Some DJs and bands protect their hearing during gigs	6	
Any damage that may be caused to hearing through loud music is not serious and can be repaired	7	
I know how to protect my hearing when I listen to loud music	8	

SHOWCARD G

Q8A. Which of the following statements apply to you? MULTI CODING ALLOWED

I wear earplugs in clubs/at gigs (regular/occasional)	1	(41-48)
I have seen people wearing earplugs in clubs/at gigs	2	
I have never worn earplugs in clubs/at gigs but would consider doing so	3	
I think earplugs look silly and will not wear them in clubs/at gigs	4	
I know there are different types of earplugs that can be used in different situations	5	
If I wanted to buy a pair of good quality earplugs I would know where to buy them	6	
I like loud music so won't wear earplugs	7	
I rarely go clubbing so don't think wearing earplugs is worthwhile	8	

SHOWCARD H

Q8B. Which, if any, of the following do you already do?

I take regular breaks from the dance floor when clubbing because of potential damage to my hearing	1	(49-54)
I wear earplugs in clubs/at gigs	2	
I try to stand away from loud speakers	3	
I try not to play my personal stereo/ CD player/ mp3 player at high volumes	4	
I take regular breaks from my personal stereo/ CD player/ mp3 player	5	
None of these	6	

Q9A. If you developed a hearing loss at some point in your life, would you know who to contact for help?

Yes	1	go to Q9B	(55)
-----	---	-----------	------

No 2 go to Q10

Q9B. If yes, who?

..... (56-85)
.....

Q10. This research has been carried out on behalf of the RNID (Royal National Institute for Deaf People) as part of their Don't Lose The Music campaign. The information collected from you and others will be used to support the campaign, which aims to encourage people to look after their hearing, whilst still enjoying the music they love.

RNID may need people to take part in focus groups or give an opinion on the campaign or talk about their experiences in newspapers, magazines or on the radio/TV. If this is the case, would you be happy to be contacted by RNID again?

Yes 1 (86-87)
No 2

Q11A. If yes, record telephone number

..... (88-99)

Q11B. Record email address:

..... (100-139)

REGION. Interviewer record region:

North East	1	Surrey	8	(140-141)
North West	2	Essex	9	
Yorks & Humber	3	Kent	10	
South West	4	Scotland	11	
West Midlands	5	Wales	12	
East Midlands	6	London	13	
East Anglia	7			

NAME AND ADDRESS OF RESPONDENT FOR BACKCHECKING PURPOSES ONLY.

Name:

Address:

.....
Post Code:

Telephone number: (INCL. STD CODE)

Email address:

THANK RESPONDENT AND CLOSE

INTERVIEWED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE MRS CODE OF CONDUCT

.....

(142-146)

..... **Signed**

Interviewer:

0 5

Date of interview:

: :

(147-152)

Time of interview:

:

(153-156)

PLEASE NOTE ACCORDING TO 24 HOUR CLOCK E.G. 1.00PM WILL BE

: 13 00

..... FOR OFFICE USE ONLY:

CODER 1 (157-158)
PUNCHER 2 (163-164)

CODER 2 (159-160)

PUNCHER 1 (161-162)

Appendix III

DLTM Focus Group Discussion Themes

Facilitator use the following themes as guidelines.

Themes to be covered during focus group non-prescriptively alongside use of participatory tools where necessary.

Loud music

- What do people define as 'loud' and how often people go to venues with loud music (this could be opening introductory question)
- What people think about loud music – discuss their experiences thoughts. Do people specifically go to places with loud music? Do they enjoy the music?
- Discuss levels of acceptability of loud music – including at venues/ individual expectations/ responsibility of individuals/venues/manufacturers etc
- For the people who think music is loud – what do they do in terms of behaviour i.e leave/stand away from speakers etc. and why?
- Discuss people's attitudes towards personal stereos – including usage and for how long? Do people think they listen 'loud'? If they think it's loud? Why do they listen at that volume? Draw out individual behaviour/attitudes.
- Discuss whether people make any link between loud music and 'problems' with hearing – elicit individual opinions.

Ringling in ears

- Have people experienced this? Describe individual experiences - how often – since what age?
- Do people remember when first experienced ringing – what were their thoughts?
- What do people think about ringing in their ears?
- Have people discussed ringing in their ears with friends?
Opinions.
- Do people link ringing in ears with potential hearing damage – is ringing a cause for concern?
- Do people worry about losing hearing?

Ear plugs (take examples)

- Have people ever worn earplugs? What are their individual thoughts on this – explore reasonings?
- What do people know about earplugs, including different types, where to buy and availability?
- Have people seen people wearing earplugs – what do they think of this?
- Thoughts about different types of earplugs (use examples), colours, packaging, marketing. Any examples people prefer?
- Would people wear them (those that don't already)?
- Do people feel they need to protect their hearing – and why?

Annex IV

Participatory tools used to generate and enhance discussions. All tools should be used non-prescriptively, in line with general discussions.

Discussion line statements

Read the following statements and ask participants to place care on 'discussion line' stating whether they agree or disagree with statement. Discussions **do not** focus on where participants place card rather provide a platform for discussions around **why** participants placed card there.

- I wear earplugs when clubbing/gigging.

- I like loud music.

- Ringing in my ears is nothing to worry about.

- I think I listen to music too loudly on my personal stereo/MP3 player.

- I have experienced ringing in my ears after listening to personal stereo/MP3.

- I worry about losing my hearing.

- Ringing in my ears is nothing to worry about.

- I know how to protect my hearing.

Vignette
DLTM

Story One:
(noise)

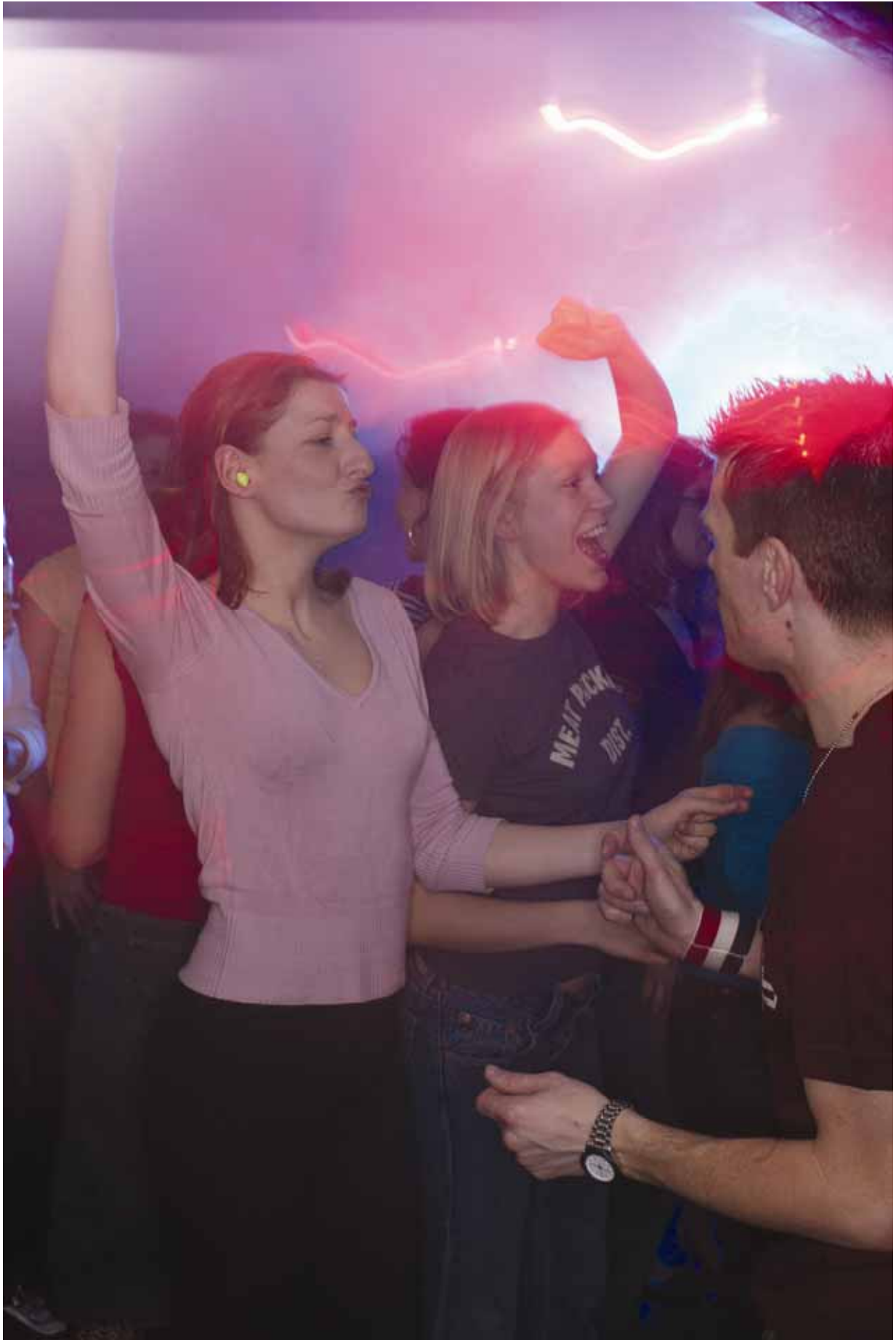
It was a Friday night and a group of friends were drinking in a bar. After a couple of drinks the music volume was turned up considerably and the friends now couldn't hear their conversation with each other. Some friends wanted to leave for a quieter bar and other's wanted to stay and enjoy the music.

- What would you do?
- Has this ever happened to you? If so what did you do in this situation?

Story Two:
(earplugs)

You're out clubbing and see the following people wearing earplugs show picture (page

- What do you think?
- Have you seen people wearing earplugs before?



Additional Statistical Tables**Table 6**

Cross tabulation: number of respondents who go clubbing – how often go clubbing and how many hours spent in average evening in club.

(Total = 1097)

		How many hours do you spend in a typical evening in a club?			
		Less than 2 hours	More than 2 hours and up to 4 hours	More than 4 hours and up to 6 hours	More than 6 hours
How often go clubbing	Three or more times a week	1	21	13	2
	Twice a week	0	65	36	11
	Once a week	13	157	81	13
	Less often	48	213	48	14

Table 8

Cross tabulation: number of respondents who go clubbing and go to a pub or bar where you have to shout to be heard.

(Total = 1042)

		Go to a pub or bar where you need to shout to be heard				
		Three or more times a week	Twice a week	Once a week	Once or twice a month	Less often
Go clubbing	Three or more times a week	27	2	4	1	2
	Twice a week	42	50	9	2	7
	Once a week	38	79	115	13	7
	Once or twice a month	29	56	127	104	25
	Less often	13	28	83	92	87

Table 9

Cross tabulation: number of respondents who go clubbing and number of respondents who listen to MP3 player/personal stereo.

(Total = 1381)

			Listen to MP3 player/personal stereo		
			less than 6 hours	6 hours or more	Total
Go clubbing frequency	every week or more	Count	206	207	413
		Expected Count	238.3	174.7	413.0
		% within recoded clubbing frequency	49.9%	50.1%	100.0%
	less than once a week	Count	591	377	968
		Expected Count	558.7	409.3	968.0
		% within recoded clubbing frequency	61.1%	38.9%	100.0%

Table 17

Cross tabulation: number of respondents who go clubbing and have experienced ringing in ears or dull hearing on the way home or the following morning after the club.

(Total = 1097)

		Have you had ringing in your ears or dull hearing on the way home or the following morning after a night out at a club?			
		Yes, regularly	Yes, occasionally	Yes, at least once before	No, never
How often you take part in different activities: Clubbing	Three or more times a week	9	15	3	10
	Twice a week	34	41	10	27
	Once a week	63	98	31	72
	Once or twice a month	81	140	41	99
	Less often	34	122	40	127

Table 28

Cross tabulation: Age of respondents and how many hours on average respondents listen to a personal stereo, personal CD player or MP3 player in a week? (Total =1068)

		How many hours on average do you listen to a personal stereo, personal CD player or MP3 player in a week?					
		Less than 2 hours	More than 2 hours up to 4 hours	More than 4 hours up to 6 hours	More than 6 hours up to 10 hours	More than 10 hours up to 21 hours	More than 21 hours
Age:	16	4	10	11	19	22	28
	17	8	10	17	18	27	32
	18	12	14	14	13	27	30
	19	12	13	10	15	18	22
	20	8	10	15	16	11	19
	21	9	11	8	13	12	8
	22	12	10	9	7	14	12
	23	7	9	7	11	8	9
	24	9	14	17	12	15	13
	25	19	14	13	16	8	4
	26	12	12	9	8	8	4
	27	10	7	8	11	12	9
	28	18	12	7	14	5	4
	29	5	11	5	7	5	4
	30	13	13	6	1	11	2

Table 30:

Cross tabulation – How many hours on average respondents listen to a personal stereo, personal CD player or MP3 player in a week?

Statement: I sometimes think I listen to music too loudly on my personal stereo/CD player/MP3 player. (Total = 1068)

		Statement : I sometimes think I listen to music too loudly on my personal stereo/CD player/MP3 player.	
		No	Yes: I sometimes think I listen to music too loudly on my personal stereo
How many hours on average do you listen to a personal stereo, personal CD player or MP3 player in a week?	Less than 2 hours	134	24
	More than 2 hours up to 4 hours	113	57
	More than 4 hours up to 6 hours	119	37
	More than 6 hours up to 10 hours	131	50
	More than 10 hours up to 21 hours	112	91
	More than 21 hours	101	99

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