

Hearing loss tied with mental, physical, and social ailments in older people

July 19 2019



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Hearing loss is the world's fourth-leading cause of years lived with disability. The condition may worsen an array of mental, physical, and social complications. As over 90 percent of hearing loss is age-related, its burden is notably growing amid aging populations.

Hearing ability is integrally tied with communication, and [hearing loss](#) leads to communication barriers. This in turn increases stress and restricts the ability to venture outdoors. It may also be tied with cognitive decline and dementia.

A team of Japanese researchers centered at the University of Tsukuba sought to shed further light on the relation of [hearing](#) loss and other illnesses among older people. They examined three key areas and found hearing loss had a clear link with all three, especially memory loss. The researchers reported their findings in the journal, *Geriatrics & Gerontology International*.

The team took advantage of the large-scale 2016 Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions of Japan, a nationwide, population-based cross-sectional questionnaire of more than 220,000 households. From this, they targeted 137,723 survey respondents aged 65 or older and without dementia. The survey's self-reported responses on conditions including hearing loss allowed valuable comparisons to be made.

"Japan is the world's most rapidly aging country, and this is a large and compelling data set of its citizens," lead author Masao Iwagami says. "It was a solid foundation for examining correlations between hearing loss and three key problems: outdoor activity limitations, [psychological distress](#), and memory loss."

About 9 percent of the 137,723 [survey respondents](#) examined had reported hearing loss. Their responses also showed the condition increased with age. The researchers further adjusted and refined their analysis to account for factors such as smoking, alcohol intake, and income. The differences between those with and without hearing loss were quite telling.

Of those reporting limitations in [outdoor activities](#) such as shopping or

travel, 28.9 percent of those with hearing loss were affected vs. just 9.5 percent of those without. For psychological distress it was 39.7 percent vs 19.3 percent. For [memory loss](#), the gap was the most profound: 37.7 percent vs 5.2 percent. These patterns were similar irrespective of age or sex.

"Hearing loss takes an enormous toll on [older people](#) in so many ways, physically and mentally, while limiting activities of daily living," study co-author Yoko Kobayashi says. "Greater awareness of the burden of hearing loss will help improve their quality of life. Measures such as hearing aids and social support by volunteers in the community can also provide them with assistance."

More information: Masao Iwagami et al. Associations between self-reported hearing loss and outdoor activity limitations, psychological distress and self-reported memory loss among older people: Analysis of the 2016 Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions in Japan, *Geriatrics & Gerontology International* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/ggi.13708](https://doi.org/10.1111/ggi.13708)

Provided by University of Tsukuba

Citation: Hearing loss tied with mental, physical, and social ailments in older people (2019, July 19) retrieved 7 May 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-07-loss-tied-mental-physical-social.html>

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