

# Untreated youth hearing loss can create problems with social skills, grades and more

By Orland Purcell, Au. D.

We generally think of hearing loss as a problem only for older adults, and that is the age where most hearing loss occurs. But a recent study released by the Better Hearing Institute (BHI) showed that there may be 1.4 million or more young people with hearing loss, only 12 percent of whom wear hearing devices.

Untreated hearing loss among youth was shown to lead to social, emotional, behavioral and learning difficulties. Three-fourths of parents said their child experienced minor to serious problems due to their hearing loss.

Just over half of youth hearing loss was detected in physicians' offices, followed distantly by schools and audiologists' offices. Seven percent were identified in hospitals through newborn screening.

While it is certainly a concern that so few young people with hearing loss are being allowed to address the issue, the study reported a number of reasons why parents decided not to check into hearing aids.

The most common reason was that parents minimized or denied their child's hearing loss.

Second was conflicting information provided by health care professionals such as physicians, audiologists and otolaryngologists. Some misinformation included the idea that hearing aids are not needed for hearing loss in one ear (false) or that high frequency hearing loss is not treatable with hearing aids (also false).

Thirty-two percent of parents were worried about how others might perceive their child if he or she were wearing a hearing aid.

Fourth, 20 percent of parents said they could not afford hearing devices.

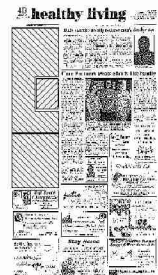
Hearing loss reduces a child's language competence, cognitive development and emotional well being, in addition to school performance. Hearing is how we learn language for the most part.

Many studies have shown that untreated hearing loss affects just about every aspect of life. Pediatric studies have demonstrated that even children with hearing loss that is referred to as minimal tend to perform below the level of their peers with normal hearing.

Authors of the study included BHI's executive director, Sergei Kochkin, Ph. D. and otolaryngologist Dr. William Luxford of the House Ear Clinic, also a BHI board member, among others. Dr.



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Luxford said, "Based on our findings, I am concerned that a sizeable population of young people in America is being left behind because they do not fit existing paradigms of hearing disability. We need a fundamental re-examination of the current hearing health policies and protocols influencing America's children with hearing loss.

Here are some of the study's author's conclusions, which are in the form of questions:

1. Do educators, medical doctors and hearing health care professionals systematically overlook the needs of young people with minor or moderate degrees of hearing loss?
2. Is the prevalence of treatable hearing loss among children under-represented in the US when subjective methodology (e.g. parental awareness) is used to assess hearing loss? Objective research indicates that more than 10 percent of children may have early evidence of noise-induced hearing loss.
3. Are pediatricians sufficiently trained on audiological diagnostic techniques and hearing device solutions to accurately measure hearing loss in children and to advise parents on appropriate treatment options?
4. Do parents have viable options for paying for hearing aids for their children if they cannot personally afford one?

Please don't let concerns about peer pressure or misinformation keep you from getting help if your child has even mild hearing loss. I can make a difference for the rest of their lives.

*Audio Acoustics, a full-service hearing center owned by Orland Purcell, Au. D., has been in business since 1975. Kathleen Heitpas, M.S., CCC-A, is his associate. They offer industrial hearing conservation, diagnostic audiology and a wide variety of hearing aids. They are located at 2101 North Midland Drive, Suite Four. The phone number is 689-4327.*

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