

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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Letter to the Editor—A call to raise awareness on “Make Listening Safe” initiative by WHO

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To the Editor,

Background

Over 5% of the world’s population (432 million adults and 34 million children) have disabling hearing loss; this may rise to 900 million people by 2050. It is estimated that the annual cost of unaddressed hearing loss globally is around US\$ 750 billion. Noise induced hearing loss is one of the major healthcare challenges facing the global community today. Personal listening devices like mobile phones and iPods contribute a major constituent in this regard. The major worry is that these devices start causing hearing loss as early as in childhood. As estimated by the world health organization (WHO), more than 1.1 billion teenagers and young adults all over the world are at risk of developing hearing loss due to the precarious use of personal audio devices and exposure to high levels of sound in noisy leisure venues [1].

Main text

The WHO has recognized the extent of this problem and launched the “Make Listening Safe” initiative as early as in 2015 [1]. The initiative aims to improve listening practices particularly among youngsters, both when they are exposed to loud sounds at noisy entertainment settings and as they tune in to music through their audio gadgets. However, 5 years since this initiative much is still desired in this regard. As a continuation of

this initiative, some important steps have been taken. The first step entails the development of the hearWHO app for mobile devices which allows people to check their hearing consistently and intercede early in case of hearing loss [2]. The app is useful for people who are at risk of hearing loss or already have some symptoms related to hearing loss. The second step is the development of recommendations in conjunction with International Telecommunications union (ITU) on the manufacture and use of personal audio devices, which include smartphones and audio players [3]. These recommendations include (a) using a software that tracks the level and duration of the user’s exposure to sound, (b) option of making a customized listening profile based on the user’s listening practices and educates them regarding how safely they have been listening, (c) volume-limiting options: this includes automatic volume reduction and parental volume control, and (d) further education to users on safe listening practices [3].

Conclusion

Noise-induced hearing loss can be prevented, especially due to the use of personal audio devices. Strict enforcement of the WHO-ITU recommendations and conduction of health awareness campaigns, especially in adolescents and young adults will go a long way in reducing this burden. We would like to emphasize that active participation of healthcare professionals from the primary to tertiary level, in educating and screening individuals at risk is required for making this initiative a grand success.

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Abbreviations

WHO: World Health Organization; ITU: International Telecommunication Union

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