This presentation on Children and Noise is part of a comprehensive set of training materials for health care providers on children, the environment and health.

<<NOTE TO USER: This is a large set of slides from which the presenter should select the most relevant ones to use in a specific presentation. These slides cover many facets of the problem. Present only those slides that apply most directly to the local situation in the region. It is also very useful if you present regional/local examples of noise prevention programs, if available, and choose local relevant pictures.>>
1. Introduction
2. Vulnerability of children
3. Adverse health effects
4. Effects by age-group
5. Taking action
6. Discussion
These are the learning objectives for this module. After the presentation, the audience should understand, recognize and know

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Children and noise

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1. **Introduction**

2. Vulnerability of children

3. Adverse health effects

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6. Discussion
What is sound? Sound is a mechanic vibration propagated by elastic media (as air and water) which alters the pressure displacing the particles, and can be recognized by a person or an instrument. Vibration and noise can never be separated but vibration can exist without audible noise. Sound is characterized by its intrinsic characteristics:

- **Vibration**: Sound is a mechanic vibration, expressed as a combination of pressure (Pascals, Pa) and frequency (Hertz, Hz)
  - **Frequency** or pitch is the number of cycles per second (Hertz, Hz or kilo Hertz, KHz).
  - **Intensity** or loudness is the “level of sonorous pressure” and is measured in Pascals (Pa) or decibels (dB). The audible spectrum of the human ear is between 0.00002 Pa (corresponds to 0 dB) and 20 Pa (corresponds to 120 dB). The intensity of human speech is approximately 50 dB. Decibels are used for convenience to express sound on a compressed, logarithmic scale in the human audible spectrum.
- **Periodicity**: describes the pattern of repetition of a sound within a period of time: short sounds that are repeated.
- **Duration**: is the acoustic sense developed by the continuity of a sound in a period of time, for example music, voice or machinery.

What is noise? Noise is an unwanted or objectionable sound. Generally, the acoustic signals that produce a pleasant sense (music, bells) are recognized as “sound” and the unpleasant sounds as “noise” (for example: produced by a machine or airplane). It can be a pollutant and environmental stressor, and the meaning of sound is important in determining reaction of different individuals to the same sound. One person’s music is another’s noise.

The human ear is an instrument that detects vibration within a set range of frequencies. Air, liquid or solid propagates vibration; without them, sound does not exist. Sound does not exist in the vacuum. The higher the level of pressure of the sonorous wave, the shorter the period of time needed to be perceived by the ear.

Why are not all vibrations audible?

The ear is a frequency analyzer. The eardrum separates tone and conduction in two different ways: by the nervous system and by the bones. The nervous system connects the cochlea to the temporal region of both hemispheres of the brain. The cochlea perceives vibration transmitted directly from the bones of the head.

**Picture:**

- NASA
**Why is noise sometimes inaudible?**

Threshold of hearing is defined as the minimum efficient sonorous pressure (Pa or dB) that can be heard without background noise of a pure tone at a specific frequency (Hz or KHz, cycles per second).

The human audible frequency range is from 20 to 20,000 Hertz (Hz). Frequencies out of this range are not detected by the human ear. The ear is not equally sensitive to all the frequencies.* The most audible frequencies are between 2000 and 3000 Hz (range within which the least pressure is needed to provoke the conscious recognition of a sound). This range can be easily identified where the curve is at its minimum and corresponds to human speaking frequencies.

For this reason, sound meters are usually fitted with a filter whose response to frequency is a bit like that of the human ear. The most widely used sound level filter is the A scale, which roughly corresponds to the inverse of the 40 dB (at 1 kHz) equal-loudness curve. Using this filter, the sound level meter is thus less sensitive to very high and very low frequencies. Measurements made on this scale are expressed as dBA.

The "normal threshold" of hearing is defined in "young people with a healthy auditory system".

The "pain threshold" is the high level (high dB) audible sound where the level of pressure of the sound produces discomfort or pain. The pressures of the sounds are over the curve: "ultrasounds". Very powerful levels of sound can be perceived by the human ear but cause discomfort and pain.

*Pressures below the audible level are called "infra-sounds": the pressure is detected but our hearing mechanism is not adapted to making the sound evident to the human ear (under the curve in the graphic). These frequencies (less than 20 Hz, not audible for the human ear) can be produced by machines or "ultrasonic" motors of planes. Out of the limits of the human threshold of hearing exists sound that can be perceived by special equipment or animals such as dolphins and bats that are equipped to perceive sound that humans can not perceive. The human being hears a very short portion of the existing sounds, the very weak and the ones above and below of the thresholds are not perceived or they are accompanied by pain, and can produce damage to a system that is not prepared to perceive them as the person may not be able to protect herself from this deleterious exposure. There is individual variation within these general parameters.

**Reference:**


**Picture:**

- EPA (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)
This abbreviated table correlates common sounds with effects on hearing.

Additional examples for discussion are listed below:

- Quiet suburb or quiet conversation 50 dB A  
  No significant effect
- Conversation in a busy place, 
  background music or traffic 60 dB A  Intrusive
- Freeway traffic at 15 metres 70 dB A  Annoying
- Average factory, train at 15 metres 80 dB A  Possible hearing damage
- Busy urban street, diesel truck 90 dB A  Chronic hearing damage if exposure over 8 hours
- Subway noise 90 dB A  Chronic hearing damage, speech interfering
- Jet take-off 300 metres 100 dB A  More severe than above
- Stereo held close ear 110 dB A  More severe than above
- Live rock music, jet take off 160 mts 120 dB A  As above, human pain threshold
- Earphones at loud level 130 dB A  More severe than above
- Toy cap pistol, firecracker close ear 150 dB A  Acute damage (eardrum rupture)

**dBA** weighting curve: response of a filter that is applied to sound level meters to mimic (roughly) the response of human hearing. So a typical human equal loudness curve is somewhat similar to the dBA curve, but inverted.

**Reference:**
Common sources of outdoor noise arise from transportation (aircraft, car and truck traffic, and trains), occupations (construction machinery, assembly lines), and even from neighbours (yard equipment, loud music). Indoor noise is affected by outdoor noise, and indoor sources such as TV, radio, music and children at play. The level is modified by building design and location as well as room acoustics.
The concept of a “noise-scape” can be useful in thinking about noise exposures. That is, obvious loud noises are imposed upon a background of noises that will vary according to general location (urban vs. rural), time of day (day vs. night) and activity (school vs. play). This image is a schematic representation which illustrates these different aspects of the “noise-scape”.

Reference:

Picture:
•EPA (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)
Leq: average sound level over the period of the measurement, usually measured A-weighted
Lmax: maximum A-weighted noise level
dBA weighting curve: response of a filter that is applied to sound level meters to mimic
(roughly) the response of human hearing. So a typical human equal loudness curve is
somewhat similar to the dBA curve, but inverted.

Reference:
Noise contamination or noise pollution is a concept which implies harmful levels of excess noise. Noise intense enough to cause harm is widely spread.

Children and noise

NOISE CONTAMINATION

❖ Noise exceeding safety threshold is widespread:
  • In neighbourhoods
  • Schools, hospitals and care centres
  • Urban and suburban areas
  • Activities inside the buildings (elevators, water tubs, music in discotheque)
  • From children themselves (toys, equipment, children playing or practicing sports in a close yard)
  • Traffic: heavy road, railways, highways, subways, airports
  • Industrial activities
  • Building and road construction, renovation

❖ Increased environmental noise levels - more noise sources

❖ Also linked to population growth

Noise contamination or noise pollution is a concept which implies harmful levels of excess noise. Noise intense enough to cause harm is widely spread.

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It is logical to consider certain subgroups of children (since conception) to be particularly at risk for harm from excess noise exposure. These include the fetus, babies and very young infants born preterm, with low birth weight or small for gestational age. Also, children who have learning disabilities or attention difficulties may be more likely to develop early problems with mild hearing loss compared to children without these challenges, and children on ototoxic medications may have higher likelihood of developing problems from exposure to excess noise.

Reference:

OBJECTIVES: The purpose of this study was to verify the noise level at a PICU. METHODS: This prospective observational study was performed in a 10 bed PICU at a teaching hospital located in a densely populated district within the city of São Paulo, Brazil. Sound pressure levels (dBA) were measured 24 hours during a 6-day period. Noise recording equipment was placed in the PICU access corridor, nursing station, two open wards with three and five beds, and in isolation rooms. The resulting curves were analyzed. RESULTS: A basal noise level variation between 60 and 70 dBA was identified, with a maximum level of 120 dBA. The most significant noise levels were recorded during the day and were produced by the staff. CONCLUSION: The basal noise level identified exceeds International Noise Council recommendations. Education regarding the effects of noise on human hearing and its relation to stress is the essential basis for the development of a noise reduction program.
Special vulnerability of children to noise. The known increased risk is due to

"Children may be more prone to the adverse effects of noise because they may be more frequently exposed….and they are more susceptible to the impact of noise". (Tamburlini, 2002)

Reference:

Exposure to excessive noise and vibration during pregnancy may result in high frequency hearing loss in the newborn, may be associated with prematurity and growth retardation, although the scientific evidence remains inconclusive.

The role of the amniotic fluid is not yet defined, nor when and which noises or vibrations can damage the fetal development of the auditory system (e.g. cochlea). Concern about synergism between exposure to noise and ototoxic drugs remains incompletely defined. There are studies on fetal audition dating from 1932 that explore the reaction of the fetus to external noises but even today this remains incompletely characterized.

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Adverse effects can be divided into direct damage, indirect adverse effects and impaired cognition. Many effects of noise exposure are more thoroughly studied in adults than in children.

The degree of adverse effect is modified by the sound characteristics.

- **Vibration**: can be acute or chronic, audible or inaudible. Vibration can be transmitted to all the body directly through the skin or bones.

- **Frequencies**: lower and higher (ultra and infra sounds) can also damage the human hearing system, despite being imperceptible, and have important consequences for life (loss of hearing). These consequences can also be present after chronic exposure to low frequency non audible sounds (chronic back noise exposure). Incubators are an example of this exposure.

- **Intensity**: Direct blows to the ears, very loud noise (pneumatic hammer or drill, fire arms, rocket), and sudden but intense sounds can destroy the eardrum and damage the hair cells of the cochlea by bypassing the protective reflexes. Acute trauma can cause a lifelong lesion.

- **Periodicity and Duration**: Impulse noise is more harmful than continuous because it bypass the natural protective reaction, the damping-out of the ossicles mediated by the facial nerve. Loud noise may result in temporary decrease in the sensitivity of hearing and tinnitus, but repeated exposure may cause these temporary conditions to become permanent.
Normal healthy “hair cells” transform vibration into nerve impulses sending messages to the brain. Trauma to the hair cells of the cochlea results in hearing loss. Prolonged exposure to sounds louder than 85 dBA is potentially injurious (85 dBA is tolerable for an occupational exposure). Continuous exposure to hazardous levels of noise tend to affect high frequencies regions of the cochlea first. Noise induces hearing loss gradually, imperceptibly, and often painlessly. Often, the problem is not recognized early enough to provide protection. Further, it may not be recognized as a problem, but merely considered a normal consequence of ordinary exposure, and part of the environment and daily life.

References:
• Moeller, Environmental health, Harvard University Press, 1992
• VIMM (Veterinarian Institute of Molecular Medicine, Italy): www.vimm.it/cochlea/cochleapages/theory/hcells/hcells.htm

Pictures:
• VIMM (Veterinarian Institute of Molecular Medicine, Italy): www.vimm.it/cochlea/cochleapages/theory/hcells/hcells.htm - used with copyright permission.
Noise-induced hearing loss is insidious, but increases with time, usually beginning in adolescent years. As shown here, it affects the high frequencies first. The speech window is between 500 and 4000 Hz, so it is not surprising that high frequency loss of large magnitude could go undetected for long periods of time without formal testing.

Picture:
• OSHA (U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety & Health Administration)
These ranges represent excessive everyday exposures of children to sound.

References:

Exposure to loud noise may result in a temporary decrease in the sensitivity of hearing and tinnitus. This condition, called temporary noise-induced threshold shift (NITS), lasts for several hours depending on the degree of exposure, and may become permanent depending on the severity and duration of noise exposure. Noise induced threshold shifts may be reversible; however, continued excessive noise exposure could lead to progression of NITS to include other frequencies and lead to increase severity and permanent hearing loss. The consequences of these measured NITS may be enormous if they progress to a persistent minimal sensorineural hearing loss. In school-aged children, minimal sensorineural hearing loss has been associated with poor school performance and social and emotional dysfunction.
This is evidence that children are experiencing changes in hearing which are consistent with excess noise exposure. These data show the prevalence of Noise Induced Threshold Shift (NITS) in children which increases with age. The prevalence of NITS in one or both ears among children 6-19 year of age in the USA was recently found to be 12.5% (or 5.2 million) children affected. Most children with NITS have an early phase of NITS in only one ear and involving only a single frequency, however among children with NITS, 4.9% had moderate to profound NITS. This table demonstrates several points. First, older children have a higher prevalence of NITS compared to younger children suggesting that ongoing exposure to excess noise in the environment may be causing cumulative hearing damage. Boys in this survey were more likely to have evidence of excess noise exposure measured as NITS compared to girls, but there was little difference between urban and non-urban status.

Reference:


This analysis estimates the first nationally representative prevalence of noise-induced hearing threshold shifts (NITS) among US children. Historically, NITS has not been considered a common cause of childhood hearing problems. Among children, NITS can be a progressive problem with continued exposure to excessive noise, which can lead to high-frequency sound discrimination difficulties (eg, speech consonants and whistles). The Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES III) was conducted from 1988 to 1994. NHANES III is a national population-based cross-sectional survey with a household interview, audiometric testing at 0.5 to 8 kHz, and compliance testing. A total of 5249 children aged 6 to 19 years completed audiometry and compliance testing for both ears in NHANES III. The criteria used to assess NITS included audiometry indicating a noise notch in at least 1 ear. RESULTS: Of US children 6 to 19 years old, 12.5% (approximately 5.2 million) are estimated to have NITS in 1 or both ears. In the majority of the children meeting NITS criteria, only 1 ear and only 1 frequency are affected. In this analysis, all children identified with NITS passed compliance testing, which essentially rules out middle ear disorders such as conductive hearing loss. The prevalence estimate of NITS differed by sociodemographics, including age and sex. CONCLUSIONS: These findings suggest that children are being exposed to excessive amounts of hazardous levels of noise, and children's hearing is vulnerable to these exposures. These data support the need for research on appropriate hearing conservation methods and for NITS screening programs among school-aged children. Public health interventions such as education, training, audiometric testing, exposure assessment, hearing protection, and noise control when feasible are all components of occupational hearing conservation that could be adapted to children’s needs with children-specific research.
The next section will review the indirect adverse effects of noise listed here.

**INDIRECT ADVERSE EFFECTS**

- **Stress-related somatic effects**
  - Stress hormone
  - Blood pressure
  - Muscle spasm

- **Psychological effects**
  - Annoyance / Isolation
  - Sleep disturbance
  - Mental health

- **Cognitive effects**
  - Reading, concentration, memory, attention
There are a variety of physiological effects that have been documented or postulated as a result of excess noise exposure.

References:

Stress response:
- Increased excretion of adrenaline and noradrenaline demonstrated in humans exposed to noise at 90 dBA for 30 minutes.
  Hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis is sensitive to noise as low as 65 dBA (53% increase in plasma 17 HO corticosteroid levels).
  Biochemical evidence of the stress response was found in elevated urinary cortisol and hypertension accompanied a 30 minute exposure to 100dBA in 60 children aged 11 to 16 years.

Sleep derivation:
- Noise levels at 40-50 dBA result in 10-20% increase in awakening or EEG changes

Cardiovascular effects:
  *Exposure to noise levels greater than 70 dBA causes increases in vasoconstriction, heart rate and blood pressure*

Picture:
- EPA (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)
In experimental studies with humans carried out in the laboratory, unequivocal findings of noise exposure on the endocrine system have been sometimes observed. However, exposure conditions vary considerably between experiments. Furthermore, secretory patterns of hormone excretion vary between individuals. It is not clear as to what extent findings from experimental studies on endocrine responses of noise reflect a potential health hazard. To more completely characterize these indirect adverse effects of excess noise, there is a need to 1) develop a consensus on measurement techniques, 2) replicate results of adult studies in children, and 3) link hormone levels to health impairment. When it is done, stress hormone responses may identify risk groups.

Leq: average sound level over the period of the measurement, usually measured A-weighted

N*: number of subjects

Reference:

In recent years, the measurement of stress hormones including adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol has been widely used to study the possible increase in cardiovascular risk of noise exposed subjects. Since endocrine changes manifesting in physiological disorders come first in the chain of cause-effect for perceived noise stress, noise effects in stress hormones may therefore be detected in populations after relatively short periods of noise exposure. This makes stress hormones a useful stress indicator, but regarding a risk assessment, the interpretation of endocrine noise effects is often a qualitative one rather than a quantitative one. Stress hormones can be used in noise studies to study mechanisms of physiological reactions to noise and to identify vulnerable groups. A review is given about findings in stress hormones from laboratory, occupational and environmental studies.
Studies on elevated blood pressure and noise exposure (from aircraft) are also inconsistent. Only the cross-sectional study of Cohen shows that aircraft noise exposure (specifically at school) is statistically significantly associated with increases in systolic and diastolic blood pressure.

Leq: average sound level over the period of the measurement, usually measured A-weighted
Psys: systolic pressure
Pdia: diastolic pressure
dBA weighting curve: response of a filter that is applied to sound level meters to mimic (roughly) the response of human hearing. So a typical human equal loudness curve is somewhat similar to the dBA curve, but inverted.
ANEI: Australian Noise Exposure Index.

References:

Aircraft Noise:

BACKGROUND: Conclusions that can be drawn from earlier studies on noise and children's blood pressure are limited due to inconsistent results, methodological problems, and the focus on school noise exposure. OBJECTIVES: To investigate the effects of aircraft and road traffic noise exposure on children's blood pressure and heart rate. METHODS: Participants were 1283 children
(age 9-11 years) attending 62 primary schools around two European airports. Data were pooled and analysed using multilevel modelling. Adjustments were made for a range of socioeconomic and lifestyle factors. RESULTS: After pooling the data, aircraft noise exposure at school was related to a statistically non-significant increase in blood pressure and heart rate. Aircraft noise exposure at home was related to a statistically significant increase in blood pressure. Aircraft noise exposure during the night at home was positively and significantly associated with blood pressure. The findings differed between the Dutch and British samples. Negative associations were found between road traffic noise exposure and blood pressure, which cannot be explained. CONCLUSION: On the basis of this study and previous scientific literature, no unequivocal conclusions can be drawn about the relationship between community noise and children's blood pressure.

Traffic Noise:

An increasing number of people live near airports with considerable noise and air pollution. The Hypertension and Exposure to Noise near Airports (HYENA) project aims to assess the impact of airport-related noise exposure on blood pressure (BP) and cardiovascular disease using a cross-sectional study design.

Although the study has been made in adults (men and women between 45-70 years old), it might be a good cardiovascular disease predictor in children.

Reference:
Psychological effects correlate with intensity (or loudness) of the noise.

Exposure to **moderate level of noise** can cause:
- Psychological stress
- Annoyance, interference with activity, isolation
- Headache, tiredness and irritability; may impair intellectual function and performance of complex tasks

Exposure to **intense level of noise** can:
- Cause personality changes and aggressive/violent reactions
- Reduce ability to cope
- Alter work performance and intellectual function
- May cause muscle spasm and also break a bone (when combined with strong vibration)
- Sleep disturbance
- Changes in mental health

Exposure to **sudden, unexpected noise** can cause:
- Startle reaction with stress responses
- Cause non intentional injuries

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**References:**

The most robust area of study on noise and effects in children comes from studies which evaluate the effect of noise on learning and cognitive function; there are possible mechanisms, including noise-related changes in attention or distraction and impaired auditory discrimination. 

<<READ SLIDE>>
Effects of noise on cognitive development have been documented in preschool ages as well. Higher levels of noise at home are associated with decrements in cognitive development for age.

References:


This study shows that street traffic noise measured on different floors of a multilevel apartment correlates inversely with auditory discrimination and reading ability. The higher floors were quieter and children scored better on reading ability and auditory discrimination. Correlations varied with duration of residence, and when reading level scores were adjusted for auditory discrimination measures, the floor level effect disappeared. Reading is also powerfully associated with mother’s education.

Reference:
This study compared reading scores between classrooms in the same school that were exposed and not exposed to railway noise. Poorer performance was noted on the noisy side with a 3-4 month delay compared to the quieter side. There was no selection of the children in each class. This is supportive evidence that noise impaired reading learning.

Reference:
Many studies have reported that noise can adversely affect children’s academic performance. Transport noise is well-studied. Some of the most important studies are the Los Angeles airport study, the New York airport study, the Munich and Heathrow studies.

**References:**

**AIM:** To assess noise exposure in school children in urban center in different residential areas and to examine psychosocial effects of chronic noise exposure in school children, taking into account their socioeconomic status.

**METHODS:** We measured community noise on specific measurement points in residential-administrative-market area and suburban residential area. We determined the average energy-equivalent sound level for 8 hours (L\text{Aeq}, 8 h) or 16 hours (L\text{Aeq}, 16 h) and compared measured noise levels with World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines. Psychological effects were examined in two groups of children: children exposed to noise level L\text{Aeq}, 8 h >55 dBA (n=266) and children exposed to noise level L\text{Aeq}, 8 h <55 dBA (n=263). The examinees were schoolchildren of 10-11 years of age. We used a self-reported questionnaire for each child - Anxiety test (General Anxiety Scale) and Attention Deficit Disorder.
Questionnaire intended for teachers to rate children’s behavior. We used Mann Whitney U test and multiple regression for identifying the significance of differences between the two study groups. RESULTS: School children who lived and studied in the residential-administrative-market area were exposed to noise levels above WHO guidelines (55 dBA), and school children who lived and studied in the suburban residential area were exposed to noise levels below WHO guidelines. Children exposed to L_{Aeq, 8 h} >55 dBA had significantly decreased attention (Z=-2.16; p=0.031), decreased social adaptability (Z = -2.16; p=0.029), and increased opposing behavior in their relations to other people (Z=-3; p=0.001). We did not find any correlation between socioeconomic characteristics and development of psychosocial effects. CONCLUSION: School children exposed to elevated noise level had significantly decreased attention, and social adaptability, and increased opposing behavior in comparison with school children who were not exposed to elevated noise levels. Chronic noise exposure is associated with psychosocial effects in school children and should be taken as an important factor in assessing the psychological welfare of the children.


When an old airport was closed down in Munich, deficits in long term memory and reading in children exposed to the old airport improved within 2 years of the airport's closure and the associated decreased noise exposure. Interestingly, the children exposed to noise from the new airport replacing the old began to have the same deficits in long term memory and reading that were seen in the children exposed to the old airport—also within 2 years.

Reference:

Before the opening of the new Munich International Airport and the termination of the old airport, children near both sites were recruited into aircraft-noise groups (aircraft noise at present or pending) and control groups with no aircraft noise (closely matched for socioeconomic status). A total of 326 children (mean age = 10.4 years) took part in three data-collection waves, one before and two after the switch-over of the airports. After the switch, long-term memory and reading were impaired in the noise group at the new airport, and improved in the formerly noise-exposed group at the old airport. Short-term memory also improved in the latter group after the old airport was closed. At the new airport, speech perception was impaired in the newly noise-exposed group. Mediational analyses suggest that poorer reading was not mediated by speech perception, and that impaired recall was in part mediated by reading.

Picture:
• US Transportation Security Administration
Here is a brief summary slide examining the weight of the evidence for health outcomes in children from aircraft noise. We are indebted to Dr. Stephen Stansfeld (Queen Mary, University of London) for kindly lending us this and many of the previous slides for this project. This slide highlights the clear associations in children between annoyance, hearing loss and impaired cognitive performance and excess noise. The lower categories are still in need of investigation.

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EFFECTS OF NOISE BY AGE-GROUP

- Fetus
- Infant
- Pre-school, school-aged children
- Teenager
- Youth
There are several paediatric populations which may be at increased risk of harm from noise. The fetus is one in which there is some evidence that occupational exposure to a pregnant woman may result in growth retardation and/or hearing impairment. Little is known about the effects of non-occupational noise on fetal development, and further studies are needed.

Reference:
Babies who are born pre-term or require intensive care in hospital are exposed to large amounts of noise from incubators and busy hospital settings. Furthermore, this noise may be continuous, 24 hours/day.

They are exposed to "Neonatal Intensive Care Unit" (NICU) noise (60 - 90 dBA max. 120 dBA) and noise inside the incubators (60 – 75 dBA max. 100 dBA). Pre-term babies must cope with their environment with immature organ systems (auditory, visual and central nervous system). These last stages of maturation occur, in part, during the time the pre-term child is in an incubator or neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).

References:
• Brandon DH. Effect of Environmental Changes on Noise in the NICU. Advances in Neonatal Care, 2008, 8(5):S5-S10
• Milette IH, Carnevale FA. I'm trying to heal...noise levels in a pediatric intensive care unit. Dynamics, 2003, 14:14-21.

The literature demonstrates clearly that most intensive care units exceed the standard recommendations for noise levels in hospitals, and that high noise levels have negative impacts on patients and staff. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the level of noise in a PICU and compare it to the recommendations of international bodies. We outline recommendations to promote the awareness of this problem and suggest strategies to decrease the level of noise in a PICU. The orientations of these strategies are threefold: 1) architectural-acoustic design, 2) equipment design and, most importantly, 3) staff education.
Children raise their voices and risk developing hoarseness and vocal nodules because of noise and relative overcrowding. The number of children screaming so much and so loudly that their voices are damaged and require treatment increased in Denmark during the 1990s. Noise in schools and day care institutions results in boys' voices getting hoarse and girls' voices squeaky. Children with vocal nodules can be difficult to understand and risk losing their voices altogether. Other children become so tired of screaming or of trying to make themselves heard that they give up saying anything at all and, for example, do not raise their hands in class. If children give up speaking, their voices do not develop properly and language learning is not reinforced.

References:


Transport noise is an increasingly prominent feature of the urban environment, making noise pollution an important environmental public health issue. This paper reports on the 2001-2003 RANCH project, the first cross-national epidemiologic study known to examine exposure-effect relations between aircraft and road traffic noise exposure and reading comprehension. Participants were 2,010 children aged 9-10 years from 89 schools around Amsterdam Schiphol, Madrid Barajas, and London Heathrow airports. Data from The Netherlands, Spain, and the United Kingdom were pooled and analyzed using multilevel modeling. Aircraft noise exposure at school was linearly associated with impaired reading comprehension; the association was maintained after adjustment for socioeconomic variables (beta = -0.008, p = 0.012), aircraft noise annoyance, and other cognitive abilities (episodic memory, working memory, and sustained attention). Aircraft noise exposure at home was highly correlated with aircraft noise exposure at school and demonstrated a similar linear association with impaired reading comprehension. Road traffic noise exposure at school was not associated with reading comprehension in either the absence or the presence of aircraft noise (beta = 0.003, p = 0.509; beta = 0.002, p = 0.540, respectively). Findings were consistent across the three countries, which varied with respect to a range of socioeconomic and environmental variables, thus offering robust evidence of a direct exposure-effect relation between aircraft noise and reading comprehension.

Noise is associated with youth. Often, teenagers’ exposure is constant. Prolonged exposure can lead to a transitory loss of 10-30 dB for several minutes after the noise ceases. Frequency of exposure, personal variability, and age of exposure determine the pattern of the damage.

Music occurs outside of the major frequencies of the human voice and over exposure to loud music causes loss of discrimination at low frequencies which may not be detected without formal testing for years. “Walkman” equipment is designed for emissions not higher than 80 dB, but the combination of an immature hearing system and a prolonged use may cause cumulative damage. Technology can be modified to bypass factory-imposed limitations and result in very loud music/noise exposure. Loss of concentration because of the focus on the music, in the presence of a potentially dangerous situation, makes a young person more vulnerable to accidents.

Teenagers should be instructed to use personal hearing protection as soon as they start being exposed to high noise levels, not only at work, but also at technical and polytechnic schools. If noise-abatement measures are not taken, good hearing will not be preserved and noise-induced tinnitus will not be prevented. The extent of hearing impairment in teenagers, caused by occupational noise exposure, and exposure at technical and polytechnic schools is unknown.

There are insufficient numbers of studies on somatic, psycho-social and behavioural effects of noise in teenagers.

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Future research:
- Effects of noise on cognitive functions.
- Effects of noise on children’s sleep.
- Magnitude/significance of noise annoyance.
- Children’s perception and risk perception.
- Settings: home, schools, hospital, day care centres.
- Teenagers’ attention when driving and listening to loud music.
- Effect of non-audible noise.
- Identification of more vulnerable groups!
- Intervention programs/best practices for preventing harmful effects.

Preventive actions
Noise has to be controlled at the source by:
- Reducing.
- Enclosing the vibrating surfaces.
- Placing sound absorbers and other protections.

Hearing protection devices are a last resort!

Child hearing conservation program
- Noise monitoring where children live, study and play.
- Hearing protection programs diffusion for teachers and parents.
- Vibration detection and protection.
- Protection of the pregnant woman.

Education and dissemination

References:
Identified potential settings for intervention

1. NICU
2. Child care settings: more and more children stay in various child care settings. These play an important role in the initial stages of children beginning to establish their basic education.
3. Primary schools: primary school children often spend long periods of time in one classroom, and a noisy room can adversely affect the occupants of that room.
4. Discotheques and rock festivals: the noise level can be very high in discotheques, often resulting in tinnitus or a temporary threshold shift among patrons. Many major cities have festivals, and many of the noisier attractions inevitably appeal to younger people.

References:


PURPOSES: To provide descriptive information about the sound levels to which high-risk infants are exposed in various actual environmental conditions in the NICU, including the impact of physical renovation on sound levels, and to assess the contributions of various types of equipment, alarms, and activities to sound levels in simulated conditions in the NICU. DESIGN: Descriptive and comparative design. SAMPLE: Convenience sample of 134 infants at a southeastern quaternary children's hospital. MAIN OUTCOME VARIABLE: A-weighted decibel (dBA) sound levels under various actual and simulated environmental conditions. RESULTS: The renovated NICU was, on average, 4-6 dBA quieter across all environmental conditions than a comparable nonrenovated room, representing a significant sound level reduction. Sound levels remained above consensus recommendations despite physical redesign and staff training. Respiratory therapy equipment, alarms, staff talking, and infant fussiness contributed to higher sound levels. CONCLUSION: Evidence-based sound-reducing strategies are proposed. Findings were used to plan environment management as part of a developmental, family-centered care, performance improvement
program and in new NICU planning.
Children and noise

HOW TO INTERVENE?

Technically

- Planning and designing outdoors and indoors “soundscapes”
- Improving road surfaces and developing green spaces and green barriers
- Developing noise barriers, building sound insulation
- Planning internal spaces according to activities (e.g. schools, sports-centres, others that involve noise), strategically using the space & location
- Reducing internal noise (e.g. fans, ventilators)
- Using sound-absorbent materials
- Setting sound limits for concerts
- Increasing public and professional education to recognize noise pollution and reduction!
Children and noise

HOW TO INTERVENE?

Organizationally and Educationally

❖ Educating children, adults, professionals
❖ Teaching methods/interventions
❖ Disseminating information
❖ Informing the media and decision-makers and health professionals!
❖ Creating silent areas (“silence islands”) for resting
❖ Distributing earplugs at work and setting limits for the earphones
❖ Identifying and turning off noise at the source!
Children and noise

HOW TO INTERVENE?

Planning

❖ Identifying noise sources and recognizing noise as a problem
❖ Recognizing health effects in children caused by noise
❖ Recognizing and diagnosing adults’ health problems originated in childhood exposure
❖ Raising awareness
❖ Setting-up noise control campaigns in hospitals and schools
❖ Applying the “Precautionary Principle”
❖ Thinking about noise exposure when planning the settings where children dwell
❖ Promoting sound landscape design
❖ Developing noise mapping, action plans, community involvement
❖ Standardizing noise measurements
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POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

<<NOTE TO USER: Add points for discussion according to the needs of your audience.>>
We are indebted to Dr. Stephen Stansfeld (Queen Mary, University of London) for kindly lending us slides for this project.
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