

## **ONE QUARTER OF AUSSIE WORKERS SUFFER FROM TINNITUS**

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ABOUT one-quarter of Australian workers experience tinnitus, including half a million workers for whom it is always present, according to research published today by the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

Tinnitus – the perception of sound in the absence of an external stimulus – is common, and can disturb sleep, cause anxiety and depression, and substantially impair quality of life, according to the research authors, led by Kate Lewkowski, an audiologist and Research Associate at Curtin University in Perth.

National information on tinnitus in Australian workers has not been published before.

Lewkowski and colleagues conducted a national telephone survey of self-reported frequency and duration of tinnitus among currently employed Australians aged 18 to 64 years, between 7 June 2016 and 20 March 2017.

"Of 4970 respondents, 1317 reported experiencing tinnitus (26.5%): 713 people had occasional tinnitus (14.3%), 259 intermittent tinnitus (5.2%), and 345 constant tinnitus (6.9%)," they reported.

"The sample prevalence of constant tinnitus was greater among men (7.5%) than women (3.3%), and was higher in older age groups."

After statistical analysis, Lewkowski and colleagues estimated that 2.4 million workers (24.8%) of Australian workers experience tinnitus, including 529 343 with constant tinnitus (5.5%).

"The estimated prevalence of constant tinnitus was highest for automotive workers (16.7%), drivers (13.0%), farmers (12.1%), and workers in other trades (10.4%).

"The prevalence of tinnitus was highest in occupations most exposed to hazardous noise levels (farming, construction work, automotive industries, machine operators)," Lewkowski and colleagues wrote.

"One exception was the drivers group, for which the likelihood of any tinnitus was second only to that automotive industry workers, despite a much lower risk of hazardous workplace noise exposure.

"Drivers are, however, exposed to ototoxic chemicals, including carbon monoxide (84.1% with medium to high exposure levels). The association of tinnitus with workplace noise is recognised, but associations with workplace ototoxic chemicals still require detailed examination."

The authors concluded that the higher prevalence of tinnitus in certain occupational groups suggested that “much of the burden of tinnitus is preventable”.

“A clinically validated instrument for categorising tinnitus is required, and modifiable risk factors should be explored,” they concluded.

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