

Noise and Music

- A Matter of Risk Perception?

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Avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i psykologi, som med vederbörligt tillstånd av samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid Göteborgs universitet kommer att offentligens försvaras fredagen den 15 september 2006, kl. 10.00 i sal F1, Psykologiska institutionen, Haraldsgatan 1 Göteborg.

Fakultetsopponent: Professor Berth Danermark, Hälsovetenskapliga institutionen Örebro universitet, Sweden.



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2006

Abstract

The prevalence of tinnitus and hearing impairments among adolescents seems to increase as a consequence of exposure to loud noise. Several studies have highlighted the negative auditory effects of exposure to loud music at concerts and discotheques, environments in which young people today spend considerable periods of time. The appreciation of loud music clearly involves health-risks. Previous research suggests that patterns of health risk behaviours differ in relation to socio-economic status. The purpose of this thesis is to gain a better insight into adolescents' and young adults' attitudes and health-risk behaviours regarding exposure to loud music.

Four empirical studies were conducted. Permanent tinnitus and noise sensitivity were not found to be significantly related to socio-economic status, although significant age-related differences in the prevalence of experienced tinnitus and noise sensitivity were found, which might indicate that the problem increases with age. Of 1285 subjects a larger number (30%) reported the use of hearing protection when attending concerts. Our finding that adolescents' attitudes and behaviours regarding the use of hearing protection differed between levels of socio-economic status and age is of considerable interest. Adolescents from low socio-economic backgrounds express more positive attitudes towards noise and report less use of hearing protection, in comparison to those with high SES. These differences in attitudes and behaviour may indicate future socio-economic differences in ear health.

Comparisons between Swedish and American young adults revealed that attitudes towards noise differed significantly due to gender and country. Men had more positive attitudes towards noise than women, and men from the USA had the most positive attitudes. Least positive were the women from Sweden. In Sweden the use of hearing protection at concerts was substantially higher than in the USA, a result that can be explained by cultural and attitudinal differences between the countries. Young people's experiences, attitudes and beliefs concerning risk-taking in musical settings have been investigated in a qualitative study. In a theoretical model, we suggest that background variables, such as gender, culture and social status may have an impact on the individual's self-image, risk consideration, social norms and ideals. These variables, together with attitudes and experience of risk-behaviour, are considered as important factors in the understanding of health-risk behaviour.

Key words: Adolescents, Tinnitus, Noise sensitivity, Socio-economic status, Attitudes, Use of hearing protection, Risk behaviour, Risk-consideration, Self-image, Norms and Ideals.