



Support • Research • Prevent

Revealing the struggle for silence: highlighting the mental health crisis in people living with tinnitus

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Introduction & objectives

Tinnitus - the perception of sound when there is no corresponding external sound - affects around one in seven adults in the UK.

There is currently no cure for tinnitus, and the impact of the condition on quality of life and mental health can be severe.

Tinnitus UK wished to examine the experiences of people living with tinnitus, and of accessing healthcare support for the condition.

Method

In December 2023, we invited people to answer questions about their tinnitus, its impact including feelings they have had more frequently since experiencing tinnitus, and the support received in primary and secondary care.

We invited responses from Tinnitus UK members, mailing list subscribers and social media followers.

478 people completed an online survey.

Patient experiences

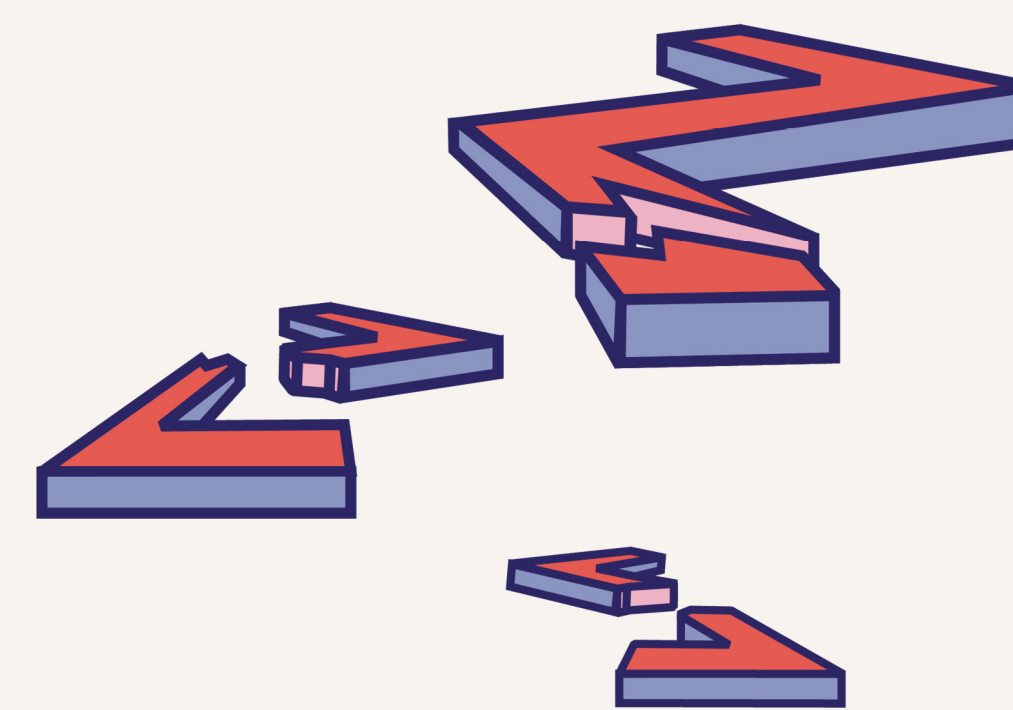
Symptoms varied across the respondents, but the impact of tinnitus on quality of life and mental health could be severe.



Over 1 in 5 of the people living with tinnitus surveyed had had thoughts of suicide or harming themselves in the last year.



More than 8 out of 10 respondents experienced low mood or anxiety in the last year, with 7 out of 10 feeling hopeless or helpless.



Sleep disturbances affect 85.7% of respondents.

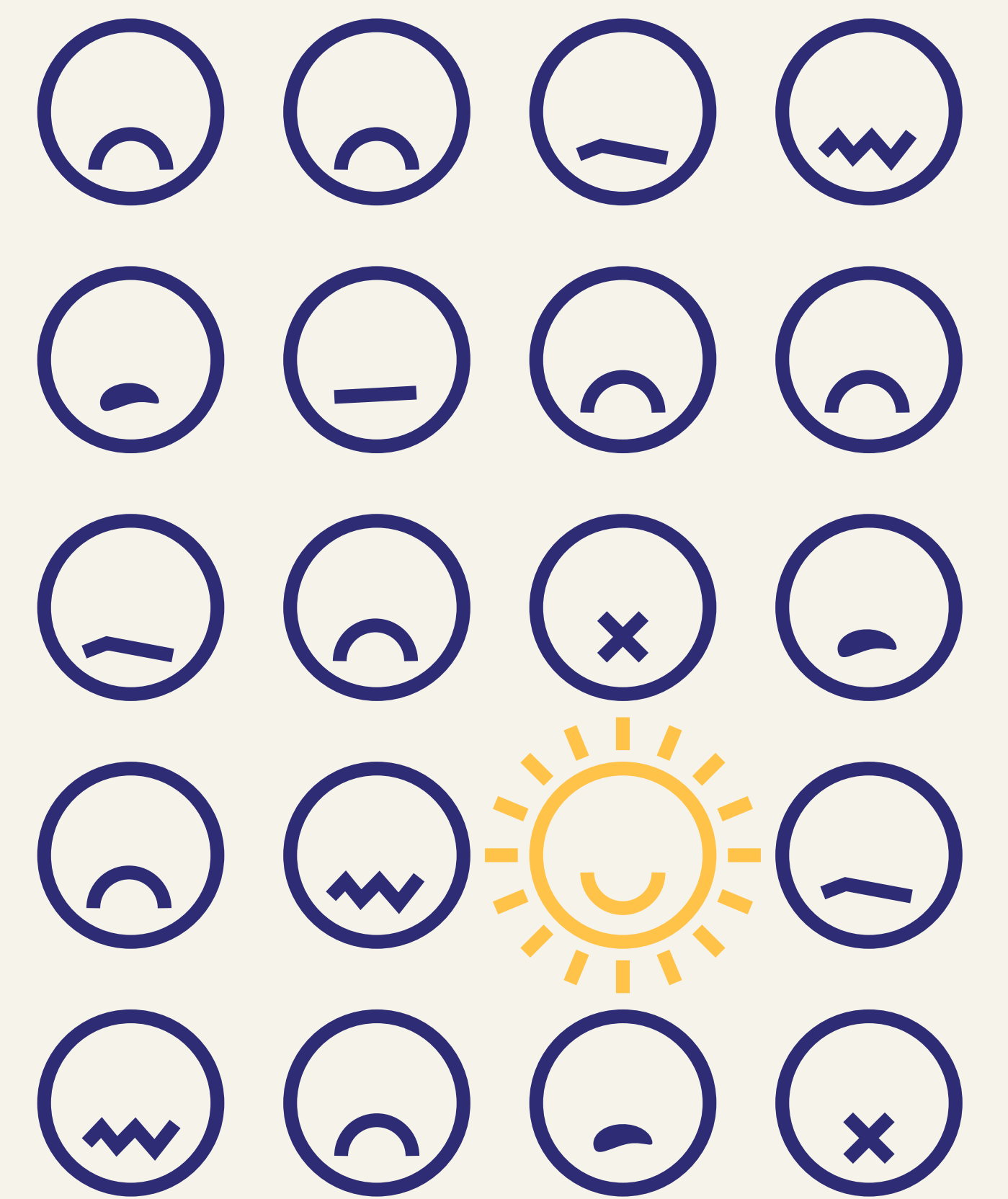


The emotional impact of tinnitus is significant, with 68.4% reporting low self-esteem and 54.9% struggling to think rationally.

Healthcare support

There is no cure for tinnitus. In March 2020, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) published their first guidelines for the assessment and management of tinnitus in primary, secondary and community care.

- Half of respondents obtained GP appointments within a week, but 16% waited over a month.
- Referrals to secondary care decreased to 57.9% (2020: 64%) with 11.7% not offered a referral.
- The number of people reporting that they waited more than 12 months for an appointment in secondary care has tripled from 2019 to 2023, with 1 in 6 facing waits of more than a year.
- The increase in waiting times for audiology appointments impacted quality of life for two thirds of respondents.
- There is limited mental health support from GPs.
- Only 5% of respondents were offered Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) as recommended in the NICE guidelines.



Discussion

Our survey starkly revealed the substantial toll tinnitus can take on mental health, emphasising the urgent need for comprehensive support and intervention measures to address the psychological challenges associated with this condition.

These findings underscore the imperative for enhancements in the initial stages of tinnitus care, including timely access to appointments, improved reassurance, increased dissemination of information by healthcare professionals and increased access to psychological support.

To read the full report scan here:



Calls to action

Tinnitus UK are calling for:

1. A review and evaluation of the status of secondary care services.
2. A standardised nationwide management model for tinnitus.
3. Investment by commissioners in proven secondary tinnitus services.
4. Increased tinnitus education for medical professionals.