

# Reasons for non-adoption

**The UK now has the highest recorded hearing aid adoption rate of any country at 41.1% but this still leaves 59% of people with a hearing loss who are not using hearing instruments. Many questions in the 2012 EuroTrak report looked into why these people remain un-aided, despite the significant benefits that can be gained for individual and society.**



Many people choose not to wear a hearing aid despite recommendations from audiologists, ENT doctors and G.P.s.

As with the original survey, EuroTrak UK 2012 was designed and executed by the Anovum market research agency in Zurich, Switzerland, on behalf of the European Hearing Instrument Manufacturers Association (EHIMA). Step one in the process was approaching the general population, with a view to getting approximately 15,000 responses to assess the prevalence of hearing loss and hearing aid ownership. The next stage involved detailed questions of the target groups of the hearing impaired with hearing aids and the non-adopters; with the view to looking at topics such as satisfaction, or reasons for non-adoption. In the previous EuroTrak article in Audio Infos UK (issue 72) we looked at satisfaction rates which are still relatively high at 72%, (77% in 2009) with overall satisfaction with hearing aids highest among users who wear them for more than 8 hours per day, bought them in 2010 or after and have BTEs. Pleasingly, the binaural percentage has increased from 47% in 2009 to 54% this year; although we still lag behind our European neighbours - 74% of hearing aid wearers in France have binaural instruments. (Fig.1)

One of the main issues highlighted in the 2009 research was the extremely high drop off of people after visiting their G.P. In 2009, of those who thought they had a problem with their hearing, only 41% received positive medical advice from their G.P. or ENT. (94% of these people went on to obtain hearing instruments). The 2012 research shows improvement, with 56% receiving positive encouragement from their G.P. or ENT; although only 73% then went on to obtain hearing aids. (Fig. 2) Concerned about the lack of positive involvement from the family doctor in the 2009 survey and the drop-out rates after visiting professionals, the EuroTrak survey questions were extended to look at the reasons for non-adoption of hearing instruments. What becomes clear from the further questions is the number one reason people do not currently have an instrument is because they are waiting for appointments (80% of people in the UK are fitted through the NHS). Where G.P.s had recommended further action, 23% are in the process of getting hearing aids or are waiting for appointments, and 34% are waiting following appointments with ENT doctors. (Fig. 3 and 4). Degree of hearing loss is a big influencer with 19% of those who had visited their GP

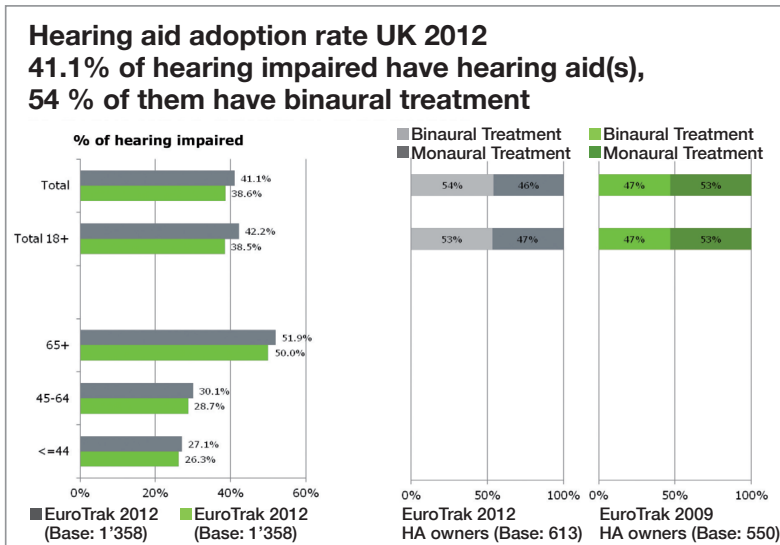


Fig 1. UK adoption and binaural rates.

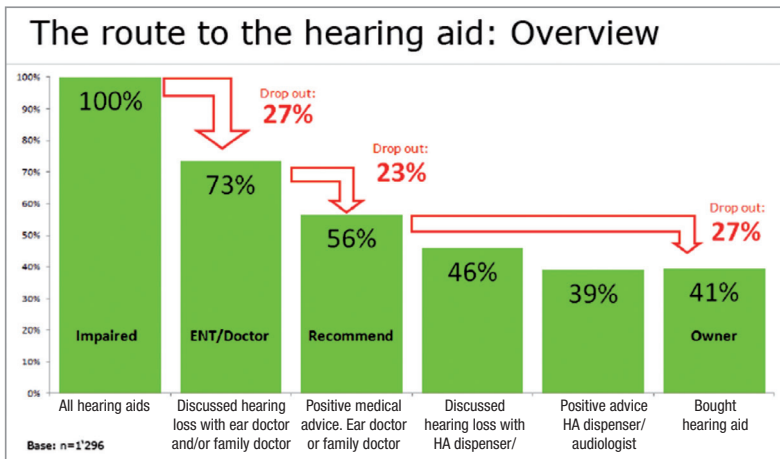


Fig. 2 Of those people who think they have a hearing loss, 41% have ended up owning a hearing aid.

believing their hearing loss is not severe enough to warrant a hearing aid, this figure is 13% for those who have been to see an ENT doctor. A typical comment from this group of people was, “Doctor said that I could have a hearing aid, but that it was not essential, so the choice was mine.” EuroTrak mirrors other studies that show low adoption rates within mild and moderate hearing loss. Of those surveyed, 29% had a mild loss - 13% of this group have hearing instruments. 47% of people have a moderate hearing loss, of which, 46% have hearing aids, compared to 66% of people with a severe to profound hearing loss (24% of the population).

#### Don't need, don't want!

15% in each group stated they didn't need or want a hearing aid; they were used to their hearing loss. Once again, a typical comment was, “Think I cope to a standard that I'm happy with.” Only 4% admit that vanity plays a part in their non-use of hearing instruments (this drops to 2% in the ENT group). Of the non-owners who have been to see an audiologist or hearing aid dispenser, almost half are waiting to get hearing instruments (Fig. 5); they are waiting for appointments or waiting for the right time! A typical comment was, “I am awaiting an appointment to have a second opinion on my options available to me.” 29% stated cost was an issue

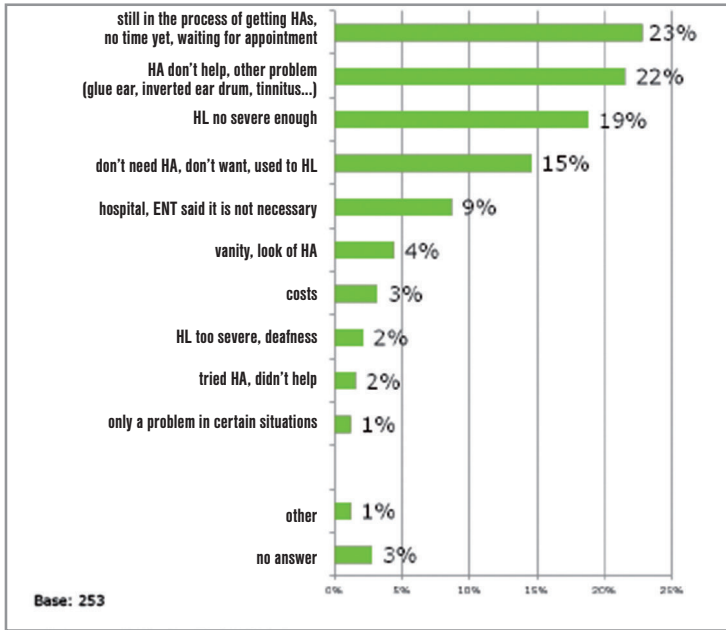


Fig. 3 Reasons why people do not yet have hearing aids despite positive recommendations from their GP.

(obviously this group have visited private hearing aid dispensers as there would be no cost to them through an NHS clinic), indeed several commented, “Cost is the main reason - waiting to see if I can get one on the National Health.”

In a more detailed analysis of hearing impaired people who do not own hearing instruments, there are no surprises in the reasons given for non-ownership. We can, perhaps, be somewhat dismayed that still the right messages are not being communicated clearly enough (Fig. 6)

When asked why they did not have a hearing aid, 74% state ‘uncomfortable’ as the reason – it is not clear whether this group has tried a hearing aid or whether this is just a perception. 72% believe their hearing loss is not severe enough to warrant wearing hearing instruments. As seen in previous questions, this is sometimes down to advice from a professional, and other times decided by the hearing impaired. Mild hearing loss and its impact on the person, their work and family life is the focus

Fig. 5. Non-owners who have been recommended a hearing aid by their audiologist/hearing aid dispenser.

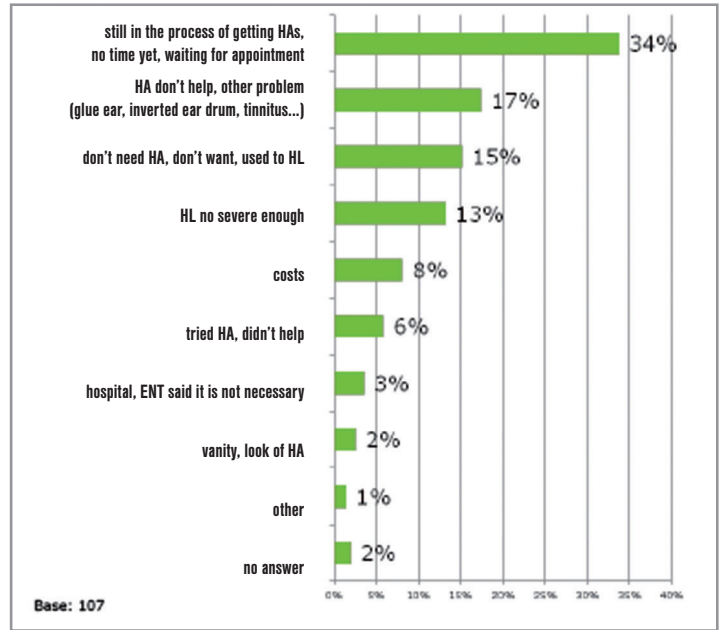
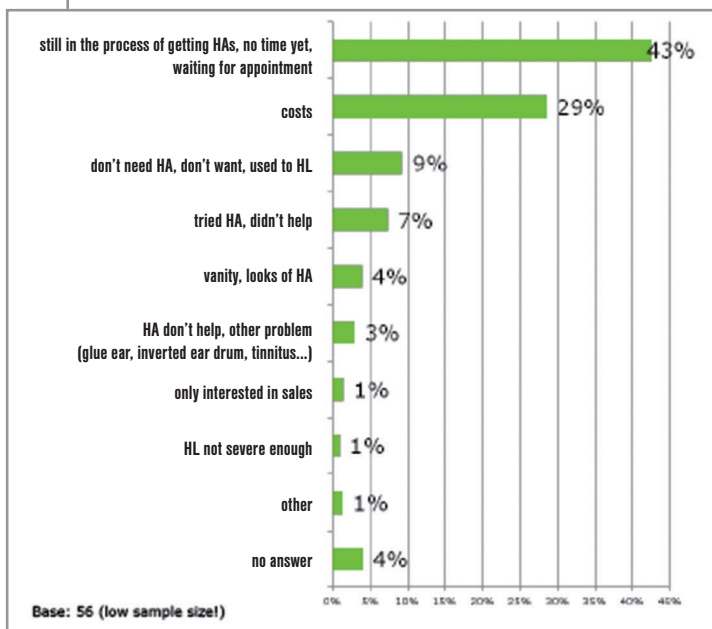


Fig. 4. Reasons for not owning a hearing aid, when the ENT has recommended further action.

of many studies at the moment, which may eventually result in a greater uptake of hearing instruments if the benefits of hearing aid use can be proven for this group. Similarly, 54% claim they ‘hear well in most situations’. The fourth and fifth most common reasons given for non-use should be handled by hearing care professionals and manufacturers. 59% of people state that hearing aids ‘do not restore your hearing to normal’. Perhaps advertising has played a part in this idea of ‘restoration’ and has raised expectations beyond what can be expected? Thanks to the Advertising Standards Agency, companies are a lot more careful in the claims they make about hearing aids, but still more attention can be paid to the language used in the marketing and the counselling process (both in the public and the private sector).

Fig.6. also shows a more realistic picture of the stigma



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**Want to read more?**

The full EHIMA EuroTrak report can be obtained from the British Hearing Aid Manufacturers' Associations – [www.bhama.org.uk](http://www.bhama.org.uk)

that still surrounds hearing instruments. 52% of non-owners admit to being embarrassed to wear a hearing instrument and 40% do not want to admit to having hearing loss in public. Could IIC products be the silver bullet to finally penetrate this age old issue? Perhaps this will be a new sector added to the 2014 survey?

**Accentuate the positive**

Whilst there are negative messages in the research, these results should not be a surprise for people. There are, however, some extremely positive results that somehow need to be captured and articulated to professionals, politicians and the general public.

There are significant social cost savings due to the use of hearing aids. From a work competitiveness angle, 83% of hearing aid owners who are still working state their hearing aids are useful in their job. People with hearing instruments are more likely to be promoted than hearing impaired non-owners and also have a higher personal

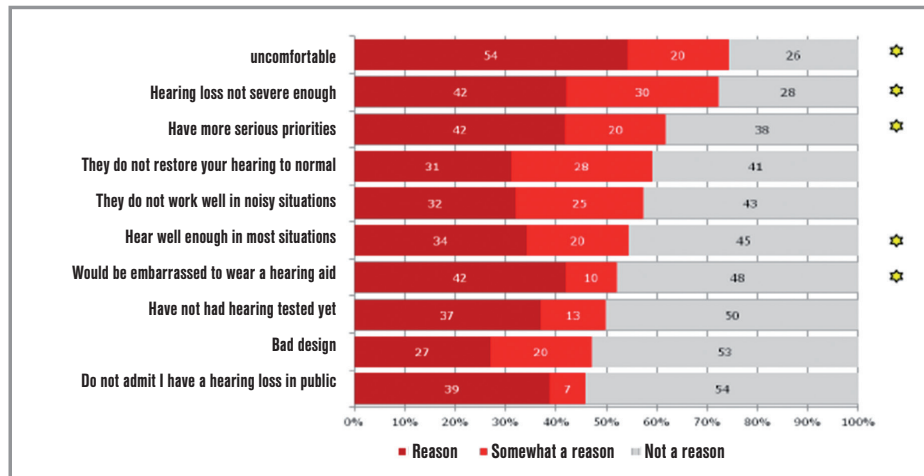


Fig. 6. The Top Ten reasons for not owning a hearing instrument.

income. Hearing aid owners have a much lower risk of being depressed and a lower risk of dementia compared to impaired non-owners. And finally, hearing aids have a significant positive impact on many different aspects of life – especially communication effectiveness, social life, group activities and confidence.

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*Article written from the data of the EuroTrak UK survey 2012, completed by Anovum for EHIMA (European Hearing Instrument Manufacturers' Association)*