

Noise takes its toll on traffic cops, several fail hearing test

Blame It On Poor Awareness About Sound Pollution: Activist

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Mumbai: In a city where everyday life is a struggle, noise pollution is dismissed as a first world problem. But a peep inside the ears of Mumbai's traffic policemen provides cause for alarm. Eleven of 17 traffic policemen tested for hearing loss at Mahim traffic junction in October showed signs of hearing impairment in either one or both ears. The tests were conducted by Awaaz Foundation that works on combating noise pollution and AURED, which works with hearing impaired children.

The tests were conducted in a sound-proof van on October 19 and 29 by Vibha Shah of AURED, who used an Oto Acoustic Emissions machine to test policemen's hearing. Probes were placed in their ears and the machine sent sound signals of different frequencies to the brain to gauge whether or not they could hear all frequencies.

This is a preliminary test. Those who did not pass it would have to go to an ENT to further probe the extent of damage. "Temporary damage may have been caused by excess wax or middle ear infection. This, too, is caused by the outside environment and

SOUND CHECK RINGS ALARM



A traffic cop undergoes the hearing test

► Hearing test conducted at Mahim traffic chowky in afternoon of Oct 19 and 29, 2015

► Of 17 cops tested, only 6 passed the hearing test

► 11 of the policemen tested were referred for further tests

► 3 of the cops tested had hearing impairment ranging from 3K to 5K

THE PROCEDURE

Testing was done in a sound-proof van specially modified for conducting hearing tests. The van contained a machine called Oto Acoustic Emissions. Probes were

placed in policemen's ears and the machine ran tests that involved sending sound signals of different frequencies to the brain, in order to gauge whether they could hear all frequencies

A year ago, TOI joined activist Sumaira Abdulali in measuring horns of cars, autos and bikes on Bandra's Carter Road. Of the 17 cars measured, all except two, had horn decibels over 85. A handful were over 90dB, two crossed 100dB. All bike horns measured were over 100dB

Ambient Air Quality Standards In Respect Of Noise

Category of Area / Zone (Limits in dB)	DAY NIGHT	
	DAY	NIGHT
Industrial area	75	70
Commercial area	65	55
Residential area	55	45
Silence Zone	50	40

would be aggravated by the traffic noise policemen are exposed to," says Shah.

She points to the absolute lack of awareness on sound pollution, seen in the extent to

which drivers press the horn even in peak traffic when there is clearly no space to move. While she acknowledges the difficulty involved in educating lakhs of drivers on the

need to stop pressing the horn, she feels the need for strict laws ensuring car horns above a certain decibel level are not manufactured.

A year ago, TOI had accompanied Sumaira Abdulali, founder of Awaaz Foundation, while she measured decibel levels of vehicle horns at Bandra's Carter Road on a weekday between 6.35pm and 7.35pm. All bike horns measured and a couple of car horns were over 100 dB. For autos, the figures were between 90dB and 96.4dB. Not only is this well above the standards prescribed by the Central Pollution Control Board for residential and for commercial areas, but this is even higher than the standards for industrial areas, which are 75 db in the daytime and 70 dB at night. The ambient noise level opposite the office of the additional commissioner of police (W) on Carter Road was 111.8dB.

While noise pollution usually hits headlines around the festival season, Abdulali points to the fact that traffic noise plagues the city round the year. "We keep complaining of traffic noise, but we need to realize that those most affected by it are cops who face it all day in their line of duty. "We can leave the spot or shut our windows. They can't," she adds. While Maharashtra's economic survey called Mumbai the noisiest city in the world last year, Abdulali stresses the need to protect oneself. "We take eye camps and eye tests seriously, but we never take our hearing seriously."

Speech frequencies first to be hit among those suffering hearing loss: WHO

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: According to a World Health Organization report, noise-induced hearing loss typically begins in the frequency range of human voices, interfering with spoken communication.

"Damage usually begins in the range of high frequencies. Everything is not damaged in one go. In speech, high frequencies are the

ones that are attacked first. People who have been speaking correctly all their lives begin to speak incorrectly because they cannot hear certain frequencies and their speech adapts to what they can hear. They begin to drop sounds such as 's', 'sh', 'th' and 'f' which makes their speech garbled," says Aziza Tyabji, founder of AURED, which works with hearing impaired children.

"In the workplace, impaired communication sometimes leads to accidents," shows the WHO report, which goes on to say that exposure levels above 85 dB are considered hazardous for workers and are found especially among mining, manufacturing and construction workers, particularly in developing countries. Ironically, the ambient sound levels measured by Su-

maira Abdulali of Awaaz Foundation opposite the office of the additional commissioner of police (W) on Carter Road last year were over 110 dB.

Not surprisingly, WHO data shows that South Asia is among the regions with the highest prevalence of hearing loss in children and in adults over the age of 65, alongside Asia Pacific and sub-Saharan Africa.