

1 out of 6 baby boomers and 1 out of 14 "Generation Xers" have hearing problems

More than 31.5 million Americans find it difficult to hear without a hearing aid, an increase of 9.9 percent since 2000, according to a survey by the Better Hearing Institute (BHI) published in July 2005. BHI researchers also documented that untreated hearing loss has a tremendously negative effect on individual incomes.

The BHI "MarkeTrak VII" survey found that:

- 1 in 6 baby boomers (ages 41-59), or 14.6 percent, have a hearing problem, and most people with hearing loss are still in the workforce (younger than 65).
- 1 in 14 Generation Xers (ages 29-40), or 7.4 percent, already have hearing loss.
- At least 1.4 million children (18 or younger) have hearing problems.

Yet, despite the rising incidence of hearing loss, only about 1 out of 4 (23.5 percent) people with this problem use hearing instruments. And more than 1 million children with hearing problems are not being treated.

At Least \$100 Billion in Lost Income

BHI researchers found that for the 24 million Americans with untreated hearing loss, the impact of doing nothing about this problem equates to at least \$100 billion in lost income per year in the United States. Whether your hearing problem is treated or not, you are likely to lose some income in the course of your working life. But the research revealed that, on average, the income decline is cut in half for hearing aid owners.

The average amount of income lost by working people who do not get hearing aids ranges from \$1,000 a year (for those with mild hearing loss) to \$12,000 a year (for those with profound hearing loss). Of course, individual gains or losses vary widely, depending on income levels, age and the severity of hearing loss.

"People are still embarrassed to admit they have a hearing loss and get hearing aids. But the price of their vanity is lost earnings for the rest of their lives, a diminished ability to communicate effectively, family problems and a host of other troubles," said Sergei Kochkin, Ph.D, Executive Director of the not-for-profit BHI and the principal MarkeTrak researcher. "When you seem out of touch because you can't hear, other people may incorrectly believe you are stupid; in effect your untreated hearing loss ends up being much more noticeable than modern hearing devices in your ears."

Greater Acceptance of Devices for the Ear

Once people try hearing aids, the vast majority feel their lives have improved, according to survey findings. Overall consumer satisfaction with new digital hearing instruments is 77.5 percent, an increase of more than 14 percentage points since 2000. "With the increase of 'blue tooth' for cell phones and the growth of MP3 players with earphones, there is greater acceptance of devices for the ear," said Dr. Kochkin. "We hope this trend helps people overcome their anxieties about using instruments to aid hearing."

The BHI, founded in 1973, is an American not-for-profit organization that educates the public about the neglected problem of hearing loss and what can be done about it. With research and educational initiatives, it is working to erase the stigma and end the embarrassment that prevents millions of people from seeking help for hearing loss.

The BHI's MarkeTrak VII survey utilized 53,000 members of the National Family Opinion (NFO panel) to track the incidence of identified hearing loss in the United States. It is the seventh MarkeTrak survey to be released since 1990.

The research on income loss is not included in MarketTrak but was compiled by analyzing data from the same households.

To download a copy of the survey, visit the BHI website at www.betterhearing.org.

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