

Why Patrons Don't Use Hearing Protection: A Qualitative Study in a Live Music District



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Background: Exposure to high-intensity recreational noise is a well-established risk factor for noise-induced hearing loss, yet hearing protection use remains uncommon in live music settings. Understanding hearing protection behaviors among patrons is critical, yet prior studies have relied on survey-based approaches conducted outside of the live music environment.

Aims: This study aims to identify factors influencing hearing protection behaviors by examining patrons' perceptions of (1) personal use of hearing protection, (2) others' use of hearing protection, and (3) drivers of hearing protection behaviors in situ in a high-noise entertainment district.

Methods

Study Design & Participants

- 1 Cross-sectional convenience sample of adults (≥18 years) recruited in Nashville's Lower Broadway District (June–July 2025) (IRB exempt.)
- 2 Participants answered 3 open-ended questions exploring personal hearing protection use, perceptions of others' non-use, and factors encouraging use.

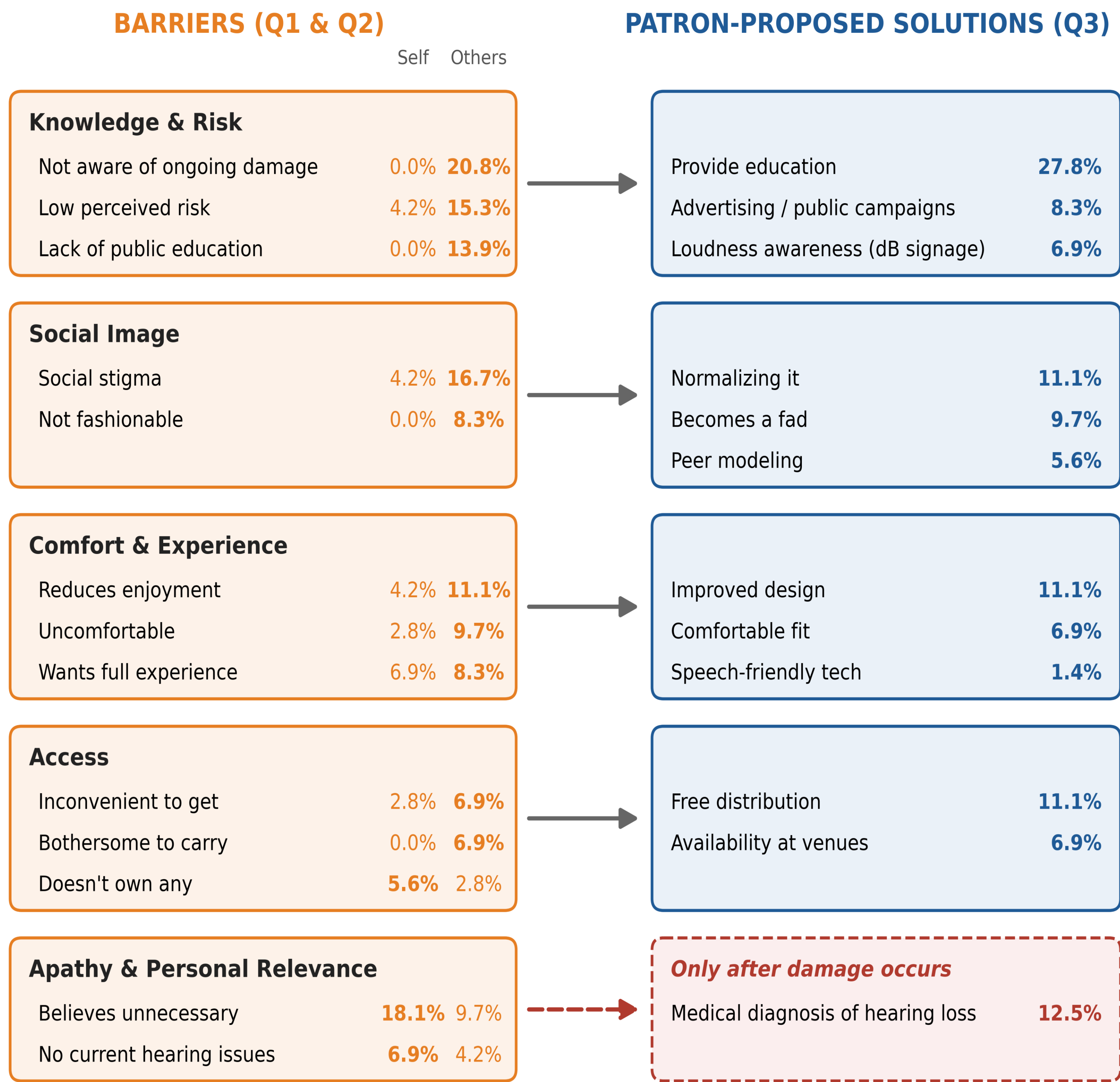
Thematic Analysis

- 2 Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) was performed by two independent investigators using inductive coding.
- 2 A shared codebook was iteratively developed through consensus, followed by independent coding and organization of codes into higher-order themes.
- 2 Methodologic rigor was supported by monitoring data saturation, consensus review to address coder bias, and transparent documentation.
- 2 Scan to access the complete codebook used for thematic analysis.



Results

Figure 1. Patron-Identified Barriers and Proposed Solutions for Hearing Protection Use



Participants

- 72 patrons: median age 28 years (IQR 23–50); 53.5% male; 64.0% reported alcohol consumption that day.
- Median 6.5 music-venue visits/year (IQR 3.0–14.3), with 135 min/visit (IQR 120–300).

Thematic Findings

- 47 codes generated 7 overarching themes across participant responses.
- Personal use: Apathy or Dismissiveness was most common (27.8)
- Perceptions of others: Perceived Risk & Knowledge Gaps was most common (43.1%)
- Encouraging use: Motivational & Behavioral Drivers predominated (79.2%)

Conclusion:

- Hearing protection use in recreational music settings is shaped by interacting educational, motivational, social, and practical barriers.
- Although patrons frequently identified education as a potential solution, knowledge alone may be insufficient to overcome apathy, perceived risk, comfort, and accessibility barriers.
- Effective interventions should move beyond education alone, combining awareness with strategies that increase motivation, improve accessibility, and make hearing protection easier to adopt.

References

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