

# Research Carried Out by NOP into Attitudes to Piped Music

NOP carried out extensive research in 1998 into what people think about background music that is played in public places such as shops, restaurants, pubs and hotels. For many people background music, or “muzak” as it is commonly known, is both irritating and frustrating. For the UK’s 8.7 million deaf and hard of hearing people background muzak often causes pain, discomfort, and unnecessary distress.

This survey asked the general public and members of The Royal National Institute for Deaf People to tell the researchers what they thought about muzak. These research findings provide an interesting and illuminating insight into the growing phenomenon of piped music that is intruding into everyone’s daily lives.

## What is Muzak?

Muzak, or piped music, is background (or all too commonly, foreground) music played in public places: shops, supermarkets, pubs, restaurants/cafes, hotels, on travel bulletins, TV programmes and piped down the telephone.

Research has found that 86% of hard of hearing people find muzak annoying whilst a third of the general public also expressed their dislike of it (Royal National Institute for the Deaf Survey and NOP Omnibus). When this is put alongside the 36% of the general public who say that they never notice background music, this makes a strong case for commercial organisations questioning the value of playing muzak in public places.

Clearly, many people dislike muzak. This probably includes many of the staff who work in environments in which piped music is played.

Age plays a significant part in how an individual feels about piped music. Nearly half of the general public between 45-54 years find muzak annoying compared to 21% of 15-24 year olds. One interpretation of this statistic is that the monoculture that is presented in the mass media has produced a general coarsening and degradation of taste in the general population under the age of 35.

## Findings:

- 86% of hard of hearing people find muzak annoying
- 34% of the general public find muzak annoying
- 36% of the general public never notice muzak
- 45% of 45-54 year olds find muzak annoying
- 21% of 15-25 year olds find muzak annoying

For hard of hearing people, background noise of any kind can be a major annoyance because it drowns out the most important sounds such as speech and announcements. Even a small amount of hearing loss means that background noise makes it very difficult to follow what other people are saying. Most hearing aids amplify all sounds equally which means that speech and background music become very hard to distinguish; something our ears do automatically. For deaf people, muzak can be just as problematic as they find it more difficult for hearing people to be able to understand and hear their speech when background, or foreground, muzak obscures their speech patterns. In this situation, the non-hearing impaired person has no recourse, usually, to sign language and the ability to communicate is therefore significantly impaired.

It also appears that the wealthier you are and the area in which you live is a significant determinant of your attitude to muzak. 51% of people in social group AB dislike muzak compared to 26% in social group DE in the NOP survey. As businesses struggle to retain customers during the recession, they would be wise to stop playing muzak. Those with more spending power dislike muzak the most.

Interestingly people living in London and the Home Counties are nearly twice as likely to find muzak annoying compared to people living in the Tyne Tees area, suggesting again that economic status has a bearing on people's views. Generally, people living in the south dislike muzak more (42% compared to 30% in the north).

### **Findings:**

- 51% of people in social group AB find muzak annoying
- 26% of people in social group DE find muzak annoying
- Those in the South East/London area find muzak more of an annoyance than people in the North. However, there is still a significant proportion of people in the North who dislike muzak.

The vast majority of people who found muzak annoying felt that shops, supermarkets, restaurants and cafes were most often the worst places for background music. Generally restaurants were worse for hard of hearing people who felt excluded from conversations or were unable even to hear the restaurant staff.

There were differences between men and women surveyed by NOP, suggesting that men spend more time in restaurants and women spend more time in supermarkets. 31% of women compared to 18% of men said that muzak was most often a problem in supermarkets. The results were reversed with restaurants and cafes with 17% of women and 29% of men. However, amongst members of the Royal National Institute for deaf People (RNID), the views of men and women were very similar. For hard of hearing people muzak is a problem in any situation.

Muzak is not just a problem in public places. For hard of hearing people the frustrations are increasingly extending into their homes. One area that caused a significant annoyance to people with a hearing loss was background music on television and radio. It spoils their enjoyment of programmes and/or the ability to follow the programme.

## **Findings:**

- Women say worst in supermarkets (31%) equal to men's view of restaurants/cafes (29%).
- 15-24 year olds voted supermarkets as most often the problem.
- 65+ said almost equally shops and restaurants/cafes were most often the problem
- 68% of people in the RNID survey felt muzak was annoying on TV and radio

The general public are most annoyed by shops (60%), supermarkets (57%), and restaurants (55%). RNID members are most annoyed by restaurants (78%) followed by shops (70%) and radio/TV/cinema (68%).

## **Christmas**

Just over a quarter of the general public and two thirds of RNID members found Christmas music annoying. However, on the whole, Christmas music was looked at more favourable than Muzak, apparently because it consisted of more traditional material free from the influence of pop music. The older people get, the less likely they are to find Christmas music annoying in comparison with Muzak. Nevertheless, almost one in ten 55-64 year olds hated Christmas music.

Social class also makes a difference as more than double of those in the professional classes (36%) compared to those on lower incomes (16%) found Christmas music annoying. It is interesting that whilst the national picture shows that deaf and hard of hearing people, in the RNID survey, are a quarter more likely to find Christmas music annoying than the general public, this figure rises to double or triple the general public's views when broken down into TV regions.

More than two thirds of hearing and hard of hearing people who found Christmas music annoying felt it was worse in shops, supermarkets and eateries.

## **Findings:**

- One in ten of 35-44 year olds hated Christmas music
- Almost one in ten of 55-64 year olds hated Christmas music
- Professionals were almost twice as likely as those on lower incomes to find Christmas music annoying

## **Regional Breakdowns**

There are strong regional variations and a clear North/South divide for some questions.

**% of people who find muzak annoying? (national averages: NOP 34% RNID Members 80%)**

<b>TV REGION</b>	<b>NOP FIGURES</b>	<b>RNID MEMBERS</b>
<i>Carlton/LWT</i>	46%	81%
<i>Meridian</i>	36%	81%
<i>Anglia</i>	33%	77%
<i>West Country</i>	40%	85%
<i>HTV/Harlech (Wales)</i>	29%	82%
<i>Central</i>	31%	79%
<i>Granada</i>	28%	70%
<i>Yorkshire</i>	32%	74%
<i>Tyne Tees</i>	24%	90%
<i>Scotland</i>	32%	84%
<i>Ulster</i>		69%
<i>UK Total</i>	34%	80%

There is a North/South split but not as pronounced for RNID members who re-affirm that hard of hearing members have a problem with muzak regardless of where they are. RNID members were more solidly against muzak regardless of region and were two or three times more likely to hate muzak.

Carlton and the West Country scored highly in both surveys, suggesting that people living in the South dislike muzak more than those living in the North. However, those with hearing loss in the Tyne Tees area gave the highest score against muzak.

**% of people who find Christmas musak annoying (national averages: NOP 27% RNID Members 64%)**

<b>TV REGION</b>	<b>NOP FIGURES</b>	<b>RNID</b>
<i>Carlton/LWT</i>	31%	68%
<i>Meridian</i>	23%	60%
<i>Anglia</i>	28%	61%
<i>West Country</i>	37%	76%
<i>HTV/Harlech (Wales)</i>	21%	68%
<i>Central</i>	24%	67%
<i>Granada</i>	28%	55%
<i>Yorkshire</i>	32%	59%
<i>Tyne Tees</i>	18%	62%
<i>Scotland</i>	21%	72%
<i>Ulster</i>		63%
<i>UK Total</i>	27%	64%

On the whole, most people had less of a problem with Christmas musak than general muzak. Even so, two thirds of people who found it annoying said that Christmas musak was worst in shops or supermarkets. People in Ulster found Christmas musak most annoying in supermarkets with a massive vote of 92%.

In the North, people were equally annoyed by general muzak as by Christmas muzak, whereas Southerners were more annoyed by general muzak. RNID members were more likely to be annoyed by general muzak than by Christmas muzak regardless of where they lived.

### Where is Muzak an Annoyance?

<i>TV REGION</i>	<i>SHOPS</i>		<i>SUPERMARKETS</i>		<i>RESTAURANTS</i>	
	NOP	RNID	NOP	RNID	NOP	RNID
<i>Carlton/LWT</i>	53%	71%	56%	53%	54%	85%
<i>Meridian</i>	65%	68%	55%	58%	55%	78%
<i>Anglia</i>	57%	72%	54%	54%	59%	78%
<i>West Country</i>	75%	70%	65%	63%	82%	72%
<i>HTV/Harlech (Wales)</i>	55%	72%	47%	73%	48%	83%
<i>Central</i>	73%	71%	62%	60%	54%	77%
<i>Granada</i>	50%	73%	55%	67%	54%	68%
<i>Yorkshire</i>	54%	67%	61%	68%	53%	64%
<i>Tyne Tees</i>	67%	66%	72%	63%	29%	76%
<i>Scotland</i>	70%	75%	49%	61%	61%	86%
<i>Ulster</i>		46%		77%		85%

The vast majority of people in both surveys who found muzak annoying found shops, supermarkets, restaurants, and cafes to be the worse culprits. People in Ulster and London equally voted restaurants and cafes as the most annoying place, reinforced by the views of AB professionals who found muzak more of an annoyance than those with less spending power.

### Methodology

Two quantitative research surveys were carried out. The experiences and views of the general population were gathered via a telephone omnibus survey conducted between 30th October and 1st November 1998. In total, 1,002 people in England, Wales and Scotland were interviewed by NOP OMNIBUS.

The other element of the quantitative work was a postal survey sent to 3,200 members of RNID. Before the closing date a total of 1260 completed questionnaires were received of which 300 expressed a wish to support a Campaign further by speaking to national and regional media. Such an impressive response rate (two fifths) has ensured that the results, analysed by NSM Research, are an accurate and authoritative portrayal of the views of deaf, hard of hearing and hearing people throughout the UK who are RNID members.

The final element of the research was qualitative. RNID members surveyed were able to add comments and their own personal stories if they wished to do so. The vast majority of them did so.