

Asia lacks capacity to prevent and care hearing loss: WHO survey

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Singapore: Over 5 percent of the world's population, 360 million people, has disabling hearing loss and the highest prevalence is found in Asia Pacific, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa where there is lack of capacity to prevent and care for hearing loss, according to a WHO survey.

A leading cause for hearing loss in younger ages, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, is untreated ear infections, which often presents with discharge from the ear. Vaccine-preventable infectious diseases such as rubella, meningitis, measles, or mumps can also lead to hearing loss.

According to the survey, just 32 of the 76 countries who responded have developed plans and programmes to prevent and control ear diseases and hearing loss. According to the report, many lack trained health personnel, educational facilities, data and national plans to address the needs of those living with ear and hearing problems. The information received also indicates that the gap between need and services is greatest in sub-Saharan Africa.

"The results of this survey are a clear call to action for governments and partners to invest in hearing care especially at community and primary level," says Dr Etienne Krug, Director of the WHO Department of Violence and Injury Prevention and Disability. "The programmes must aim to benefit all, including disadvantaged parts of the population who are least able to access hearing services."

The national plans that already exist in some countries can serve as a model for countries that still lack strategies to better address disabling hearing loss. However, each country needs to develop a unique plan based on its specific situation, the prevalent causes of hearing loss as well as the available health infrastructure.