

# Noise Discrimination Against People with Hearing Loss, Tinnitus and Hyperacusis

Chains of restaurants and retail stores are now offering Quiet Hour. The media says [Quiet Hour](#) is for people with autism spectrum disorder. An hour a week with canned or piped-in music turned off. Popping up from country to country. My first thought on hearing about it was why only an hour a week? It doesn't seem like enough time for people.

Also what about everybody else with quiet communication needs? All the people stressed by noise. All the people who can't hear or make out what people are saying in places with background noise or music. Or who can't comfortably tolerate noise from muzak. This large group of people, from babies to seniors, has quiet communication needs. It includes people with conditions and disabilities like:

- autism
- hearing loss
- tinnitus
- hyperacusis
- history of brain injury (concussion or head injury)
- cognitive delays or slow cognitive processing (children to elders)

Wheelchair ramps don't get rolled in for an hour a day. They're there even when nobody in a wheelchair or scooter needs access. Otherwise, it's discrimination against people with disabilities. Pedestrian crosswalks have audible signals even when blind people aren't there. For access all the time, otherwise it's discrimination against people with disabilities. Autism, hearing loss and cognition problems are classified as functional disabilities. Outside of Quiet Hour, stores, shops, cafés, restaurants and other public spaces playing piped-in music are discriminating against people with these disabilities by blocking quiet access.

## **Access Provided:**

- 13% of people have mobility disabilities.
- 5% of people have a vision disability.

## **Quiet Hour Access Provided:**

- 1% of people have autism
- Note Quiet Hour is low sensory: music turned off, lights are also dimmed 50%, register and scanner volumes are turned down, PA announcements and collecting shopping carts/trolleys are avoided, etc.

## **Access Not Provided:**

- 16% of people have hearing loss.
- 33% of adults over age 65 have hearing loss.
- 10% of people aged 20 and older have tinnitus.
- 7% of people aged 18 and older have hyperacusis.
- 5% of people over age 12 have had a brain injury.
- 12% of people have cognitive functional disability.

I was watching a Frank Sinatra movie from the 1950s. In one scene, he was in a restaurant talking to another character. Something felt wrong about it. Eventually I figured it out. I could understand what they were saying. It was quiet. There was no background music playing inside the restaurant. Just conversation.

Piped-in music hasn't been around forever. When it arrived, consumers and customers didn't ask for it. It is purely based on perceived or expected sales.

The idea that background music makes consumers buy more. Even though many customers, especially people with quiet communication needs, need a distraction and noise free environment. Financial experts say many retail stores and malls are closing because there aren't enough customers; they blame millennials who do more shopping on-line. Maybe there aren't enough customers because the quiet majority of people won't shop in retail environments with loud muzak.

[Pipedown](#), an international campaign to stop piped-in music that started in the UK, reports that 34% of people don't like piped background music, 30% like it and the 36% remaining don't care. They state "there is no *genuine evidence* to show that such music increases sales by one penny." In the UK, several retail chains never wasted money on built-in canned music. For the rest, piped-in music is getting turned off. By national bookstores and big retail chains like Marks and Spencer since 2015, Gatwick airport, and financial institutions like building societies aka credit unions.

Pipedown is now letter campaigning to get canned music turned off in hospitals and doctor's surgeries/offices where patient calm and accurate communication are essential.

Companies usually have excuses why noise can't be stopped. It's too expensive. It's too difficult. Those excuses don't work when it comes to providing quiet access for people with functional hearing and cognitive disabilities. Turn off the piped-in background music. Easy. Free.

People with quiet communication needs, from disabilities like hearing loss, tinnitus and hyperacusis, should always have access to public spaces the same as people with mobility or vision disabilities. Discrimination by stores, restaurants, and other public places playing constant background music should end. Not just for an hour at a time.

**Statistics Sources:**

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html>

<http://www.cnib.ca/en/about/media/vision-loss/pages/default.aspx>

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