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TINNITUS SEVERITY AND THE RELATION TO DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS: A CRITICAL STUDY

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Introduction: Research indicates that subjective tinnitus severity varies among tinnitus patients. One of the variables held responsible for these differences is depression. However the relationship between depression and tinnitus severity was never investigated more in depth.

Objectives: If depression is responsible for differences in subjective tinnitus severity two conditions need to be fulfilled. First, there should be evidence for the presence of moderate to severe depressive symptomatology in a substantial group, and second, there should be evidence for a substantial relationship between depressive symptoms and tinnitus severity which can not be explained due to method and content overlap.

Aims: In this study we investigated whether tinnitus severity is a depression related problem.

Methods: 136 consecutive help-seeking tinnitus patients were seen by a psychologist and an audiologist. All patients filled in the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II), the Tinnitus Handicap Inventory (THI), and underwent psychoacoustic measurement (pitch and loudness).

Results: Mean scores indicate the presence of no or minimal depressive symptoms. There was only a positive correlation ($p < .01$) between the BDI-II and the THI. No correlations were found between psychoacoustic measures and the self-report questionnaires. Linear regression analysis revealed that only the somatic depression subscale significantly predicted tinnitus severity.

Conclusions: Tinnitus does not seem to be a depression-like problem. There is no substantial group of tinnitus patients with moderate to severe depressive symptoms. The relation between depressive symptoms and tinnitus severity seems to be an artefact due to content overlap between the THI and the somatic subscale of the BDI-II.