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Tuned in may mean young ears tune out

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THEIR white earphones have become a symbol of a generation but the ubiquity of the iPod and other MP3 players is raising concerns of hearing loss in young people.

Now French researchers have found one in five adolescents suffers hearing problems from exposure to loud music through such players or at clubs and concerts.

Professor Christian Huggonet has told France's *Le Figaro* that between 10 and 20 per cent of adolescents surveyed had poor hearing. He also said the use of "compressed" sound in media - in which weak signals are boosted to the level of stronger ones - is changing the way people speak.

"Once the ear has got accustomed to this kind of sound, it finds it very hard to return to sounds of weak intensity," Professor Huggonet said. "Young children used to watching cartoons with compressed sound can end up speaking in the same loud, monotone way."

Rebecca Verhoef, an audiologist, from the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital, said more research into compressed sound was needed before drawing such a conclusion. But she said the hospital had seen an anecdotal increase in young people presenting with hearing problems such as tinnitus.

"That's associated with noise damage and kids are reporting that, which you never have heard before in under 60-year-olds," she said.

with Telegraph, London

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