



Support • Research • Prevent

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Introduction

Tinnitus affects around one in seven adults in the UK.

There is currently no cure for tinnitus, and the impact of the condition on quality of life and mental health can be severe.

Noise exposure is the most common preventable cause of tinnitus and hearing loss.

Noise starts to become a risk to hearing at 80dB. Although there is legislation in place to protect hearing in the workplace, there is no such legal status for noise outside of the working environment.

Aim

Studies have shown that the use of hearing protection in certain groups, such as musicians and young people, is quite low.

We wanted to see whether this behaviour differed in a wider population, and across a range of job roles and leisure activities.

Method

In December 2022, we invited people to answer questions about their tinnitus and noise exposure, inviting responses from Tinnitus UK members, mailing list subscribers and social media followers.

Over 750 people completed an online survey.

Results

All the respondents who completed the survey had tinnitus.

The survey findings emphasized the chronic nature of tinnitus, and overwhelmingly, respondents (90%) described their tinnitus as “continuous”.

The most frequently mentioned tinnitus trigger was noise exposure. More than one in three (35%) people attributed their tinnitus to loud noise. Twice as many men (48%) as women (24%) claimed noise exposure as a cause.

Almost four out of ten people (37%) said that they “regularly”, “usually” or “sometimes” been exposed to noise at work. In comparison, 65% of respondents “regularly” or “sometimes” went to the cinema, 58% listen to loud music. Visiting live music venues, clubs and festivals “regularly” or “sometimes” was done by almost half (48%) of respondents.

Chart 1: Noise exposure from leisure activities

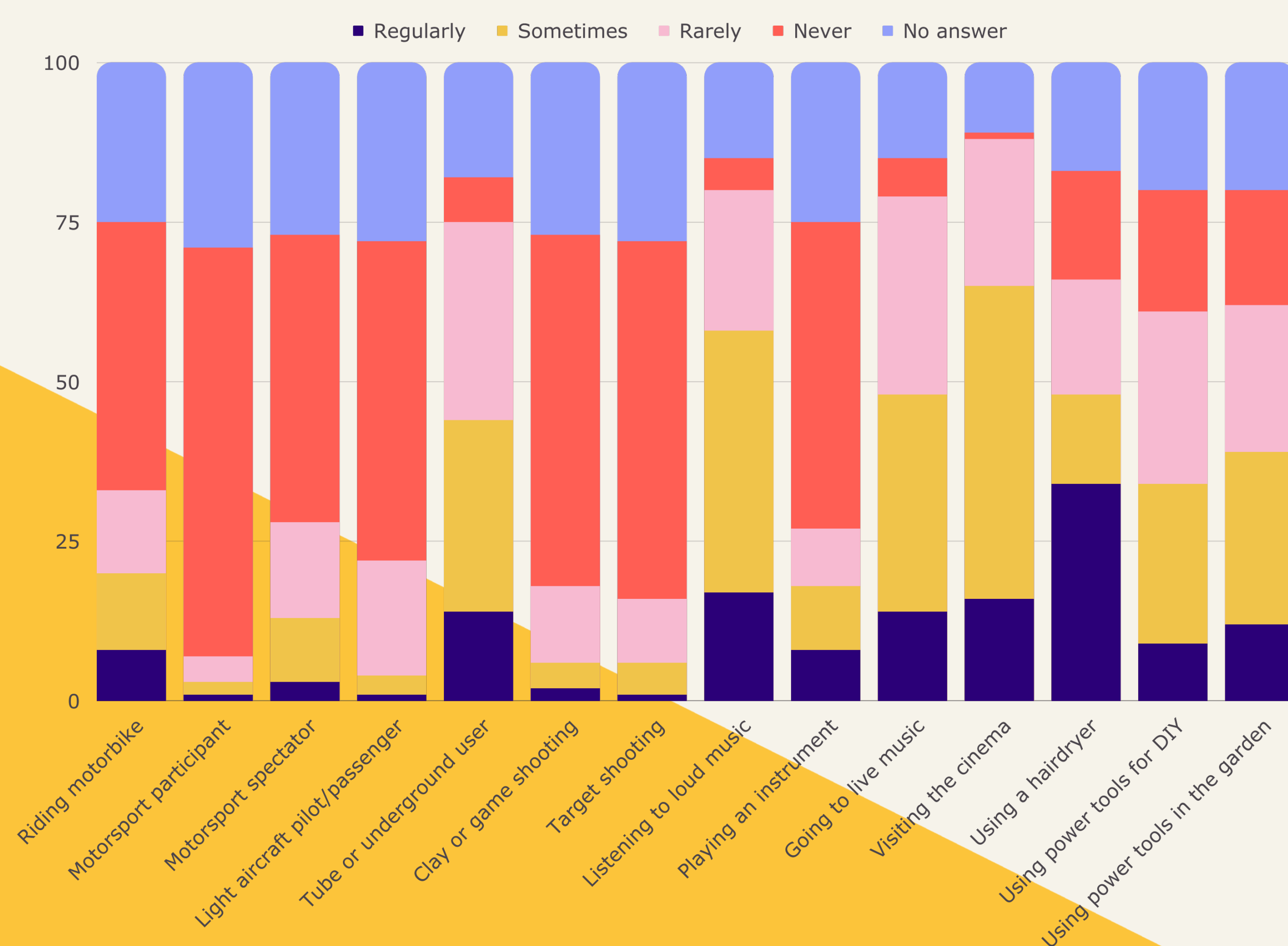
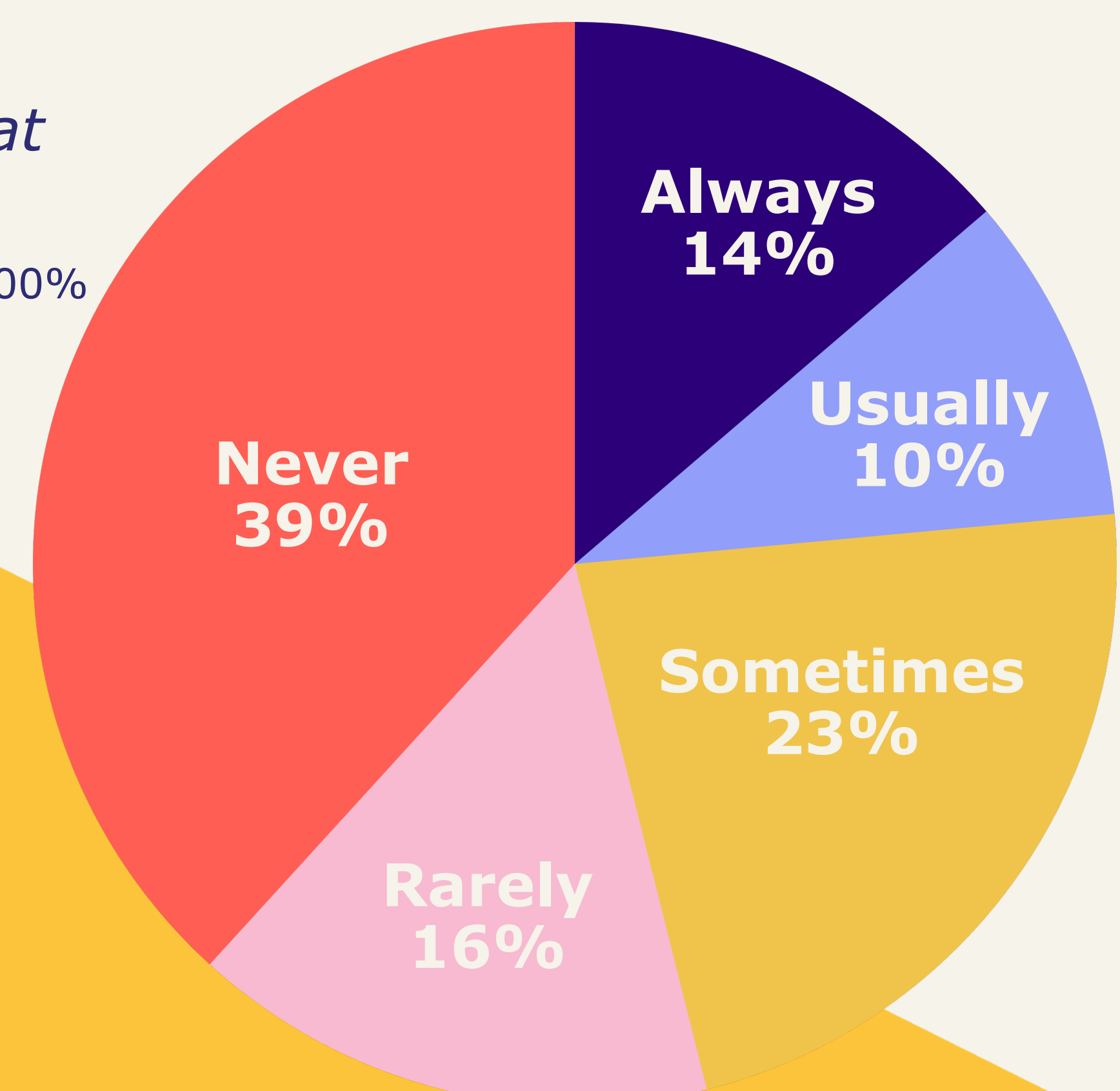


Chart 2: Use of hearing protection at work

Numbers total more than 100% due to rounding

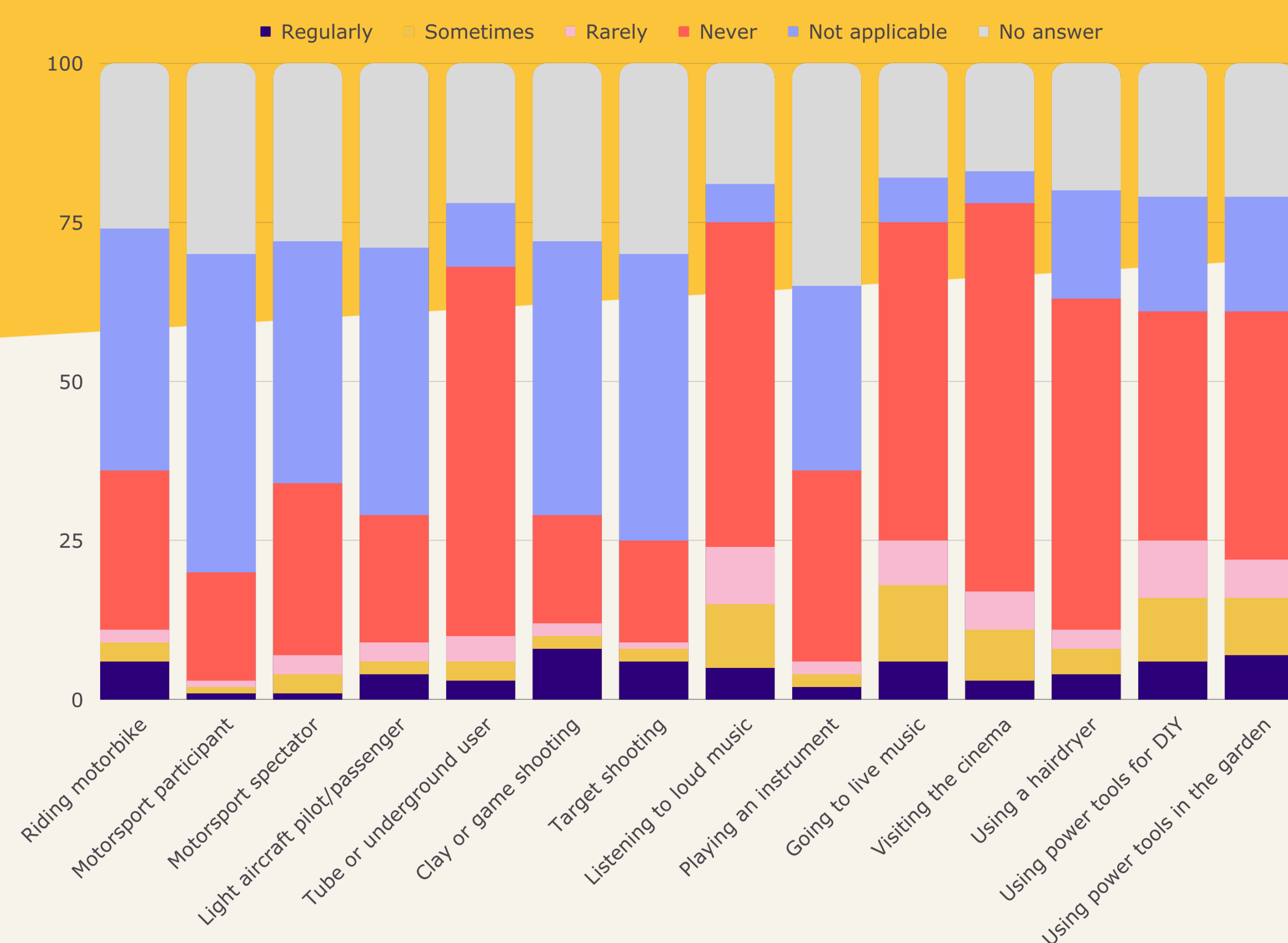


Four out of ten (39%) respondents who were exposed to noise at work “never” used hearing protection and only a quarter (24%) “always” or “sometimes” used hearing protection. Hearing protection usage was also low for leisure activities:

- only a quarter (26%) of DIYers and gardeners “regularly” or “sometimes” use hearing protection
- 23% of attendees use hearing protection at live music events
- only 17% of music performers “regularly” or “sometimes” wear hearing protection
- one in five music listeners use hearing protection
- less than a third (29%) of motorbike riders “regularly” or “sometimes” use hearing protection

There was also similarly low hearing protection usage by motor sports participants and spectators, Tube travellers, hair dryer users and cinema goers.

Chart 3: Use of hearing protection for leisure activities



Recommendations

Tinnitus UK are calling for people to:

- Always wear appropriate hearing protection when in a loud place, and working with loud equipment
- Avoid being exposed to excessive noise for long periods
- Replace hearing protection if it is worn or damaged
- Have their hearing checked regularly.