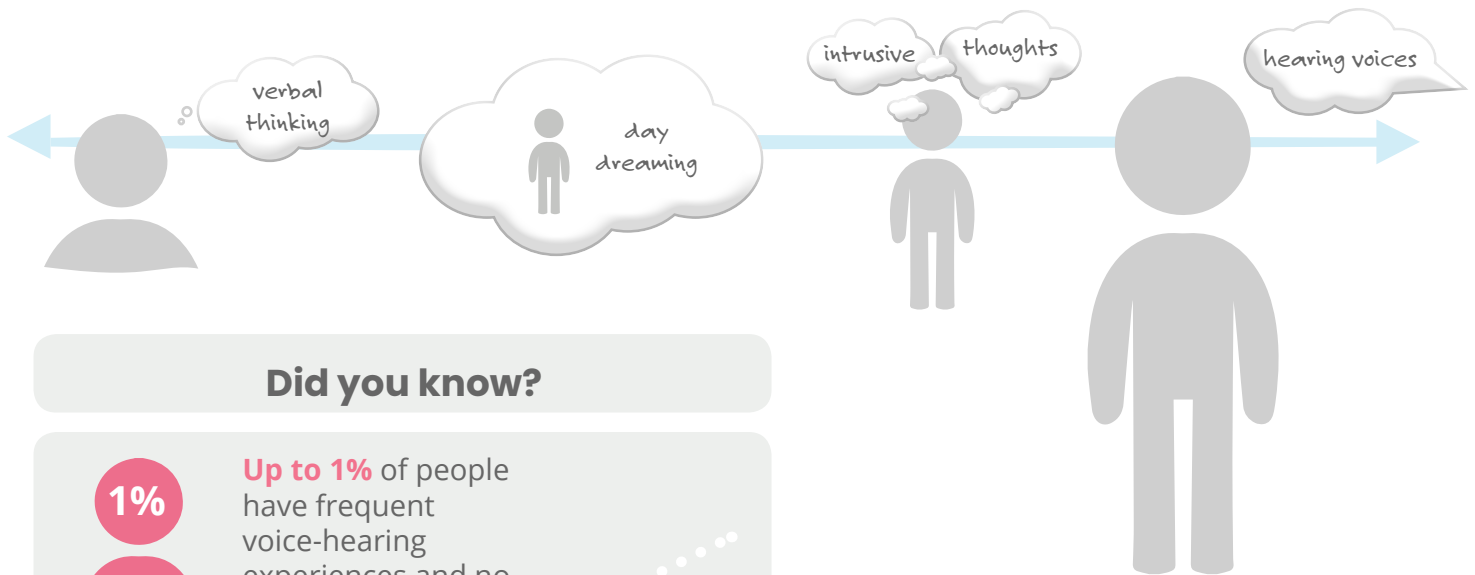


It is increasingly recognised that voice-hearing exists on the end of a 'continuum' or 'spectrum' that includes ordinary verbal thinking, day-dreaming and intrusive thoughts. We all have the capacity for hearing voices, it's just that some of us are more likely than others to hear more intense voices, or to hear them more often.



Did you know?

1%



Up to 1% of people have frequent voice-hearing experiences and no need for psychiatric care...

1%



...A separate 1% have a diagnosis of schizophrenia. Around 75% of this group will hear voices

What is the difference between voice-hearing and my own inner voice?

Unlike instances of our own inner voice which clearly belong to us, most people report that hearing a voice in the absence of any speaker doesn't feel like it comes from the self.

The loudness and location of the voice - whether or not it is experienced as coming from 'inside' or 'outside' the head - seems to be irrelevant. Some people experience voices that sound as if they are coming from the external environment, but many voices are experienced as internal in the same way as our own inner voice is.

Voices in people with a diagnosis of schizophrenia or psychosis	Voices in people with no diagnosis
Can be outside or inside the head	Can be outside or inside the head
Can vary in volume	Can vary in volume
Will comment on things or take part in conversation	Will comment on things or take part in conversation
Often difficult to control	Often easier to control
First experienced aged 16-25 (on average)	First experienced aged 5-15 (on average)
Tend to occur many times a day	Tend to occur a few times a day at most

Voices in people with no need for psychiatric care are also more likely to be positive and helpful than those experienced by people with psychosis. They tend to provide support and guidance and often have an important spiritual aspect.

If voice-hearing is fairly common, why is it only distressing for some people and not for others?

1 Control and content

One thing people often struggle with is not being able to control **when the voices speak** – it's often a surprise and it can go on for a long time. For others, it is not so much when the voices speak or how much, but **what they say**. That is, they find the content of the voices distressing – perhaps because it is derogatory, offensive, or expresses views, thoughts or intentions that are very different from the person's own.



2 Trauma

Research indicates that, for some people, voice-hearing is a response to traumatic life events, particularly during childhood. Examples include **bullying, neglect and physical, sexual and emotional abuse**. Major life changes such as the end of a relationship, losing your job, becoming homeless, or starting a new school or college have also been linked to the onset of hearing voices.



Individuals with a history of childhood adversity are approximately **3 times more likely to develop psychosis**.



3 Other triggers

Other things that can make distressing voices more likely to occur include:

- Lack of sleep
- Extreme hunger
- Drugs and alcohol
- Danger and feeling under threat
- Stress and pressure



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