

One third of dyslexic adults report being physically abused during childhood

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Adults who have dyslexia are much more likely to report they were physically abused before they turned 18 than their peers without dyslexia, according to a new study from researchers at the University of Toronto and the University of North Carolina School of Medicine in Chapel Hill.

Thirty-five per cent of adults with [dyslexia](#) report they were physically abused before they turned 18. In contrast, seven per cent of those without dyslexia reported that they had experienced [childhood physical abuse](#).

"Even after accounting for age, race, sex and other early adversities such as parental addictions, childhood physical abuse was still associated with a six-fold increase in the odds of dyslexia" says co-author Esme Fuller-Thomson, professor and Sandra Rotman Endowed Chair at University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work.

Investigators examined a representative sample of 13,054 adults aged 18 and over in the 2005 Canadian Community Health Survey including 1,020 respondents who reported that they had been physically abused during their childhood and 77 who reported that they had been diagnosed by a health professional with dyslexia.

The results were in a study published online this week in *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

"Our data do not allow us to know the direction of the association. It is possible that for some children, the presence of dyslexia and related [learning problems](#) may place them at relatively higher risk for physical abuse, perhaps due to adult frustrations with chronic learning failure" said study co-author, Stephen Hooper, professor of Psychiatry and Pediatrics, and Associate Dean and Chair of Allied Health Sciences at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine. "Alternatively, given the known association between brain dysfunction and maltreatment, it could be that the experience of physical abuse may also contribute to and/or exacerbate such learning problems, secondary to increased neurologic burden."

Fuller-Thomson asserts "Although we do not know if the abuse-dyslexia association is causative, with one-third of adults with dyslexia reporting [childhood abuse](#), it is important that [primary health care](#) providers and school-based practitioners working with children with dyslexia screen them for physical abuse."

Provided by University of Toronto

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