

Majority of adults in Canada report adverse childhood experiences

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New research from McMaster University has found that roughly three in every five Canadian adults aged 45 to 85 have been exposed to childhood abuse, neglect, intimate partner violence or other household adversity.

The research, which estimates the prevalence of a broad range of adverse childhood experiences, was published in *CMAJ Open*.

"Our research showed that adverse childhood experiences are highly prevalent in the Canadian population, with 62% of Canadian adults aged 45 to 85 reporting at least one exposure," said Divya Joshi, the study's lead author and a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence, and Impact at McMaster.

The study used data collected from 44,817 participants enrolled in the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA), a large, national population-based study of health and aging. The participants completed questionnaires about adverse childhood experiences through telephone and face-to-face interviews between 2015 and

2018.

Childhood exposure to physical abuse, intimate partner violence and emotional abuse were the most prevalent types of adverse childhood experiences reported across all participants.

More than one in four adults reported exposure to [physical abuse](#), and one in five reported exposure to [intimate partner violence](#) and [emotional abuse](#) in childhood.

The researchers also found that reporting of adverse childhood events varied by demographic factors, such as age, sex, socioeconomic status, education and sexual orientation.

People younger than 65 years, women, those with less education, lower annual household income, and those of non-heterosexual orientation reported greater exposure. "We found that adverse childhood experiences were highly prevalent across all demographic groups, although some groups experienced an unequal or greater burden," Joshi said.

The research also showed that exposure to adverse childhood events varied across Canadian provinces. "This research shows that strategies are needed to increase awareness of adverse [childhood](#) experiences and their long-lasting consequences," said Andrea Gonzalez, a member of the research team and an associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences at McMaster.

"We need to take measures to improve the quality of household environments, support positive parenting and promote healthy child development, as well as integrate trauma-informed care to prevent the negative consequences of [adverse childhood experiences](#)," added Gonzalez, who is a member of the Offord Centre for Child Studies and the McMaster Institute for Research on Aging.

More information: Divya Joshi et al. Prevalence of adverse childhood experiences among individuals aged 45 to 85 years: a cross-sectional analysis of the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging, *CMAJ Open* (2021). DOI: [10.9778/cmajo.20200064](https://doi.org/10.9778/cmajo.20200064)

Provided by McMaster University

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