

Researchers find link between childhood physical abuse, chronic fatigue syndrome

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Childhood physical abuse is associated with significantly elevated rates of functional somatic syndromes such as chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia and multiple chemical sensitivities among women, according to new findings by University of Toronto researchers. The research will be published in this month's issue of the *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*.

"Women who reported they had been physically abused as children have twice the odds of [chronic fatigue syndrome](#) and multiple chemical sensitivities, and 65 per cent higher odds of [fibromyalgia](#)" says lead investigator Professor Esme Fuller-Thomson, who holds the Sandra Rotman Chair at U of T's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work and Department of Family and Community Medicine. "These findings persisted even after controlling for potentially confounding factors such as other adverse childhood experiences, age, race, mental health and adult socioeconomic status."

The study examined statistics from a regional subsample of the 2005 Canadian Community Health Survey involving 7,342 women, 10 per cent of whom reported being physically abused as children. A minority of women reported they had been diagnosed by a health professional with chronic fatigue syndrome (1.3%), fibromyalgia (2.5%), or multiple chemical sensitivities (2.7%).

Co-author Joanne Sulman, from the Department of Social Work at Mount Sinai, says the research not only points to an association between

childhood physical abuse and these disorders, but also explores the contribution of confounding psychosocial factors such as other childhood adversities, adult health behaviours and mental health.

"But perhaps the most interesting aspects of the research," says Sulman, "are the questions it raises, such as the mechanisms that link [physical abuse](#) to chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia and multiple chemical sensitivities."

Provided by University of Toronto

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