

Study finds large proportion of intellectual disability is not genetically inherited

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New research published Online First in The *Lancet* suggests that a high proportion of severe intellectual disability results from genetic causes that are not inherited. These findings are good news for parents, indicating a low risk of passing on the disorder to further children.

[Intellectual disability](#) affects between 1% and 2% of children worldwide. Although a handful of genes that appear to cause some cases of intellectual disability have been identified, the [genetic causes](#) of the disorder in most people remains unclear, especially those with non-syndromic types which have no obvious physical signs and cause up to 50% of intellectual disability worldwide.

Some evidence suggests that de novo (new) [mutations](#), that show up for the first time in affected children but are not found in their parents, might be a common cause of the disorder.

As a joint effort by the German [Mental Retardation](#) Network led by André Reis from the Institute of Human Genetics, University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany, the current study used a new technique known as exome sequencing to look for mutations that are not inherited but newly formed in 51 children with unexplained severe non-syndromic intellectual disability (an IQ

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