

# Researchers study rate of stuttering in adult struggling readers

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Adults who struggle to read often read at a slower pace and with lower accuracy compared to their peers. They can also have difficulties with spoken language skills, such as difficulties with understanding and using

words, and recognizing and working with sounds associated with spoken language.

Reading and spoken [language skills](#) are closely connected, and adults who struggle in these areas may be at a higher risk for speech difficulties, such as stuttering, a [neurodevelopmental disorder](#) that disrupts the flow of a person's speech.

College of Education & Human Development faculty members Ai Leen Choo, Daphne Greenberg and Hongli Li and CEHD alum Amani Talwar (Ph.D. '19) conducted a study to learn more about stuttering rates for adults who struggle to read and to better understand the relationship between their speech and reading skills. The paper is [published](#) in the *Journal of Learning Disabilities*.

The study, which is the first publication to examine stuttering in adults who struggle with reading, included 120 participants. These individuals completed a series of standardized reading-related assessments; answered questions about whether they'd been tested for a [learning disability](#), whether they attended special education classes and other similar questions; and were asked to speak about a positive reading experience and a negative one.

The research team transcribed participants' oral responses and analyzed their responses for speech disfluencies. Their results noted that about 18% of participants met the criteria for stuttering—noticeably higher than the estimated 1% of the general population who stutters.

"The higher rate of stuttering in adults who struggle with reading concurs with neuroimaging and genetics studies that have found overlaps between stuttering and reading impairment," Choo said. "Stuttering may mask any improvements in reading gains, particularly if the assessments require oral speech. Thus, it is important to screen for stuttering in adult

literacy programs."

Based on the study's standardized reading assessments, adult struggling readers who [stutter](#) did not show weaker reading skills compared with their peers who do not stutter.

However, the researchers found that adult struggling readers who stutter showed a lack of synchronization between their reading and reading-related skills compared to their peers who do not stutter. For example, the reading comprehension ability of adult struggling readers who stutter was not consistent with their phonological awareness skills.

"These results suggest that adult struggling readers who stutter have challenges coordinating various reading skills and may use different reading strategies compared to their peers who do not stutter," Choo said. "Educators need to be aware that instruction for adult struggling readers who stutter may need to address both stuttering and reading strategies."

**More information:** Ai Leen Choo et al, Rate of Stuttering and Factors Associated With Speech Fluency Characteristics in Adult Struggling Readers, *Journal of Learning Disabilities* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/00222194221095265](#)

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