

The International Institute of Colorimetry (IloC) has commented on this article by the BBC.

They agree that the BBC article was misleading, and have been in touch with the BBC since it was first published online, pushing them to revise it. The BBC have now added a “very strong” (but abridged) quote from Professor Bruce Evans. Professor Evans’s full quote is below:

"At one level, the Paediatrics paper reconfirms what has been known for many years: that visual factors are not a major cause of reading disability (RD). Indeed, research funded by the College of Optometrists and published over 20 years ago made just this point (Evans et al., 1994). This research, and many subsequent studies, have nonetheless identified subtle visual problems that co-occur with reading disability and which can cause symptoms such as blurring, eyestrain, or headaches when reading. Such problems may not cause the reading disability, but will nonetheless add to the burden that the child experiences in the classroom. Treatment of such problems should not be expected to cure reading disability, but may make the child willing to read for longer and hence help indirectly. These problems are only present in a minority of children with RD.

Unfortunately, the Paediatrics paper did not use tests that are most appropriate to detect these problems. Further, the authors analysed their results inappropriately, reducing their test results to pass/fail based on arbitrary or unstated criteria. The researchers also did not investigate the visual condition that has the highest prevalence in people with reading disability (affecting about one third), which is Visual Stress (alleviated by coloured filters).

Despite these limitations, it is noteworthy that the authors of the Paediatrics paper found that 1 in 5 children with a severe reading impairment had a visual problem. It is a great shame that in interpreting their results the authors seem to only consider two options: that visual problems either cause reading disability or are irrelevant to reading disability. Such extreme views were popular in the 1970s, but nowadays most practitioners recognise that children who struggle at school need to have sensory factors ruled out as possible contributory factors (e.g., tests of eyesight and hearing) and also to receive expert educational support which is the mainstay of managing reading disability. Reading skills are multi-factorial and therefore a multi-disciplinary approach to managing reading disability is advocated."

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