

Genetic variations impacting empathy tied to psych issues

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(HealthDay)—Genetic variations associated with empathy play a role in

psychiatric conditions and traits, including schizophrenia, anorexia nervosa, and extraversion, according to a study published online March 11 in *Translational Psychiatry*.

Varun Warriar, from the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom, and colleagues conducted the largest genome-wide association study (GWAS) of [empathy](#) to date using the well-validated self-reported Empathy Quotient (EQ). Data were included for 46,861 research participants from 23andMe, Inc.

The researchers identified 11 suggestive loci (P^{-6}), although after correction for multiple testing, none were significant at P^{-8} . The most significant small nucleotide polymorphism (SNP), an intronic SNP in *TMEM132C* (rs4882760), was identified in the non-stratified analysis. A modest but significant narrow-sense heritability was found for the EQ. A significant female advantage on the EQ, predicted in earlier work, was confirmed. Between the sexes there was similar SNP heritability and high genetic correlation. There was also a significant negative genetic correlation between autism and EQ, as predicted. A significant positive genetic [correlation](#) was identified between the EQ and risk for schizophrenia, risk for anorexia nervosa, and extraversion.

"This is the first GWAS of self-reported empathy. The results suggest that the genetic variations associated with empathy also play a role in [psychiatric conditions](#) and psychological traits," the authors write.

One author is an employee of 23andMe, Inc.

More information: [Abstract/Full Text](#)

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