



How do your genes feel? Subjective experiences of anorexia nervosa patients with high vs low polygenic risk for anorexia nervosa.

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Abstract

Objective: Research suggests that genetic risk for anorexia nervosa (AN) may be related to both psychiatric and metabolic traits. Specifically, those with high polygenic risk for AN may react favorably to negative energy balance (NEB). We aimed to examine the relationship between the genetic underpinnings of AN and its phenotypic expression.

Method: Using data from a large genetic study of AN, polygenic risk scores (PRS) were used to randomly select participants with the highest ($n=10$) vs lowest ($n=10$) polygenic risk for AN. Qualitative interviews explored perception of symptoms, stress/trauma, and course of illness, with specific focus on metabolism-related experiences, such as hunger and satiety. Data were analyzed thematically in stages to identify experiential themes and sub-themes in each group, and interviewers were blind to PRS group.

Results: The low-PRS group had fewer lifetime psychiatric and somatic problems, a more environmentally determined onset of illness, less extreme symptoms, and were more often recovered at time of interview. For them, AN constituted a transient interruption of their life trajectory. In contrast, the high-PRS group had more lifetime psychiatric and somatic problems, the progression into hunger/starvation was a more purposive continuation of pre-existing preoccupations and was experienced as more intensely positive and energizing, while they more often had remaining ED symptoms at interview.

For them, AN represented the apex of a life trajectory centered on ED traits and symptoms.

Discussion: Results illustrate how qualitative research can capture the phenotypic expression of genetic risk; with important implications for interdisciplinary research and treatment development.

Topics: Other

For workshops only

No Answer Given

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