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ARTICLE

Genome-wide gene-environment analyses of major depressive disorder and reported lifetime traumatic experiences in UK Biobank

Jonathan R. I. Coleman[1,2] · Wouter J. Peyrot[3] · Kirstin L. Purves[1] · Katrina A. S. Davis[2,4] · Christopher Rayner[1] · Shing Wan Choi[1] · Christopher Hübel[1,2] · Héléna A. Gaspar[1,2] · Carol Kan[4] · Sandra Van der Auwera[5] · Mark James Adams[6] · Donald M. Lyall[7] · Karmel W. Choi[8,9,10,11] · on the behalf of Major Depressive Disorder Working Group of the Psychiatric Genomics Consortium[34] · Erin C. Dunn[10,11,12] · Evangelos Vassos[1,2] · Andrea Danese[1,13,14] · Barbara Maughan[1] · Hans J. Grabe[5] · Cathryn M. Lewis[1,2] · Paul F. O'Reilly[1] · Andrew M. McIntosh[6] · Daniel J. Smith[7] · Naomi R. Wray[15,16] · Matthew Hotopf[2,4] · Thalia C. Eley[1,2] · Gerome Breen[1,2]

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Abstract

Depression is more frequent among individuals exposed to traumatic events. Both trauma exposure and depression are heritable. However, the relationship between these traits, including the role of genetic risk factors, is complex and poorly understood. When modelling trauma exposure as an environmental influence on depression, both gene-environment correlations and gene-environment interactions have been observed. The UK Biobank concurrently assessed Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) and self-reported lifetime exposure to traumatic events in 126,522 genotyped individuals of European ancestry. We contrasted genetic influences on MDD stratified by reported trauma exposure (final sample size range: 24,094–92,957). The SNP-based heritability of MDD with reported trauma exposure (24%) was greater than MDD without reported trauma exposure (12%). Simulations showed that this is not confounded by the strong, positive genetic correlation observed between MDD and reported trauma exposure. We also observed that the genetic correlation between MDD and waist circumference was only significant in individuals reporting trauma exposure ($r_g = 0.24$, $p = 1.8 \times 10^{-7}$ versus $r_g = -0.05$, $p = 0.39$ in individuals not reporting trauma exposure, difference $p = 2.3 \times 10^{-4}$). Our results suggest that the genetic contribution to MDD is greater when reported trauma is present, and that a complex relationship exists between reported trauma exposure, body composition, and MDD.

Introduction

Depression is among the most common mental illnesses worldwide and accounts for 5.5% of all years lost through disability globally [1]. In England ~28% of individuals self-report depression during their lifetime [2]. The most common clinically recognised form of depression is called Major Depressive Disorder (MDD). Both environmental and genetic factors influence MDD. In particular, MDD is more commonly observed among individuals reporting exposure to stressful life events and early-life traumas [3–6]. In turn, reported trauma exposure has been robustly correlated with a range of adverse life outcomes including MDD [6–9]. The relationship between MDD and reported trauma exposure is complex. Reported trauma exposure is associated with both subsequent MDD and prior MDD [10, 11]. However, the majority of people reporting exposure to traumatic experiences do not report MDD [6–9].

Twin studies show that MDD is moderately heritable, with 30–40% of the variance in MDD attributable to genetic factors [12]. The proportion of heritability captured by common genetic variants, also known as single nucleotide

Consortium members are listed at the end of the paper.

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✉ Thalia C. Eley
thalia.eley@kcl.ac.uk

✉ Gerome Breen
gerome.breen@kcl.ac.uk

Extended author information available on the last page of the article.

polymorphism or SNP-based heritability, can be estimated from genome-wide association study (GWAS) data. Such estimates tend to be lower than those obtained from twin approaches, due to the incomplete capture of genetic information in GWAS data among other reasons [13]. The most recent major depression GWAS from the Psychiatric Genomics Consortium was anchored in 35 cohorts (including the 23andMe discovery cohort [14]) recruited with a variety of methods [15]. This meta-analysis identified 44 loci significantly associated with major depression, and estimated a SNP-based heritability of 9–10% [15]. These results strongly suggest both the mild and more severe forms of depression are polygenic, with potentially thousands of variants with very small individual effects contributing to risk.

There are far fewer genetic studies of reported trauma exposure than of MDD. However, the available studies have demonstrated that reported trauma exposure is heritable, with twin heritability estimates of 20–50% [16–18] and SNP-based heritability estimates of 30% [19]. Combining measures of trauma exposure and depression at scale is difficult, given the need for careful phenotyping [20]. Potential confounds include the (often unavoidable) use of retrospective self-reported measures of trauma exposure, which can be weakly correlated with objective measures of traumatic experiences [9]. Furthermore, current (i.e. state) low mood can increase self-reporting of previous trauma exposure [9, 21]. Previous individual study cohorts have generally been too small for effective GWAS, while meta-analyses have contained considerable heterogeneity due to the use of different phenotyping instruments in the included studies.

However, some notable genome-wide analyses of MDD and trauma exposure have been performed. A genome-wide by environment interaction study of depressive symptoms and stressful life events in 7179 African American women identified a genome-wide association near the *CEP350* gene (although this did not replicate in a smaller cohort) [22]. An investigation in 9599 Han Chinese women with severe MDD identified three variants associated with MDD in individuals who did not report trauma exposure prior to MDD onset [23].

Several attempts have been made to estimate the interaction of overall genetic risk and trauma by using polygenic risk scores for MDD to perform polygenic risk score-by-trauma interaction analyses. Such studies test whether there are departures from additivity (where the combined effect of risk score and trauma differs from the sum of the individual effects) or from multiplicativity (where the combined effect differs from the product of the individual effects). Reported results have been highly variable, with findings of both significant additive and multiplicative interactions [24]; significant multiplicative interactions only [25]; and, in the largest previous study published (a meta-analysis of 5765 individuals), no interactions [26].

Studies of gene–environment interaction usually assume the genetic and environmental influences are independent and uncorrelated [27]. However, genetic correlations between reported trauma exposure and MDD have been reported, both from twin studies [28–30] and from the genomic literature [22, 26]. Reports of the magnitude of this genetic correlation have varied widely, which reflects differences in defining trauma exposure, and in the populations studied. While some studies have identified a very high genetic correlation (95%) [22], others have found no such correlation [23]. The genetic relationship between reported trauma exposure and MDD is therefore unresolved.

The release of mental health questionnaire data from the UK Biobank resource provides an opportunity to assess the relationship between genetic variation, risk for MDD, and reported trauma exposure in a single large cohort. We performed GWAS of MDD (as defined from the mental health questionnaire [31]) with and without reported lifetime trauma exposure in UK Biobank European ancestry individuals. These results enabled us to estimate the genetic contribution (via SNP-based heritability estimation) to MDD in individuals with and without reported lifetime trauma exposure. To examine differences in the genetic contribution, we calculated the genetic correlation between MDD in individuals reporting and not reporting trauma exposure. To assess whether the genetic relationship of MDD to other traits varies in the context of reported trauma exposure, we assessed genetic correlations with a wide range of physical and psychiatric traits. Finally, we performed polygenic risk scoring, using external traits commonly comorbid with MDD, and sought to extend previous analyses of polygenic risk score-by-trauma interactions in MDD.

Methods

Phenotype definitions

The UK Biobank assessed a range of health-related phenotypes and biological measures including genome-wide genotype data in ~500,000 British individuals aged between 40 and 70 [32]. This includes 157,366 participants who completed an online follow-up questionnaire assessing common mental health disorders, including MDD symptoms, and 16 items assessing traumatic events (Resource 22 on http://biobank.ctsu.ox.ac.uk) [31]. Phenotypes were derived from this questionnaire, using definitions from a recent publication describing its phenotypic structure [31].

Individuals with probable MDD met lifetime criteria based on their responses to questions derived from the

Table 1 Participants available for analysis

		Participants with genomic data			
		Reported trauma exposure	No reported trauma exposure	Excluded	Total
MDD	Cases	**13,393**[b]	**9487**[c]	6595	**29,475**[a]
	Controls	**10,701**[b]	**39,677**[c]	13,104	**63,482**[a]

Groups of individuals used in each of the three analyses are in bold

[a]MDD in all participants (29,475 cases, 63,482 controls, $N = 92,957$)

[b]MDD in participants reporting trauma exposure (13,393 cases, 10,701 controls, $N = 24,094$)

[c]MDD in participants not reporting trauma exposure (9487 cases, 39,677 controls, $N = 49,164$)

Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI; Supplementary Table 1). We excluded cases if they self-reported diagnoses of schizophrenia, other psychoses, or bipolar disorder. Controls were excluded if they self-reported any mental illness, taking any drug with an antidepressant indication, or had been hospitalised with a mood disorder or met previously-defined criteria for a mood disorder (Supplementary Table 1) [33].

Participants were asked questions relating to traumatic experiences in childhood using the Childhood Trauma Screener (a shortened version of the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire [34–36]) and an equivalent screener for adulthood developed by the UK Biobank Mental Health steering group to mirror the childhood items [31]. In addition, participants were asked questions related to events that commonly trigger post-traumatic stress-disorder (PTSD). Responses to individual questions (items) in these three categories (child trauma, adult trauma, PTSD-relevant trauma) were dichotomised and compared between MDD cases and controls (Supplementary Table 2a).

We selected reported items with an odds ratio >2.5 with MDD, to obtain a single binary variable for stratification that captured exposure to the traumatic events most associated with MDD. Items from all three trauma categories were reported more in MDD cases compared with controls. Of the selected items, three referred to events in childhood (did not feel loved, felt hated by a family member, sexually abused). Another three items referred to events in adulthood (physical violence, belittlement, sexual interference), and one item assessed a PTSD-relevant event (ever a victim of sexual assault). In order to capture increased severity of exposure, only individuals reporting two or more of these items were included as reporting trauma exposure. Individuals reporting none of the items were included as not reporting trauma exposure. Individuals reporting a single trauma item, or who did not provide an answer were excluded from the analyses (Supplementary Table 1). A breakdown of reported traumatic experiences by sex and MDD status is provided in Supplementary Table 2b. Further discussion of the definition of trauma exposure is included in the Supplementary Note.

Phenotype preparation for analyses

Three sets of analyses comparing MDD cases and controls were performed (i) overall, (ii) limited to individuals reporting trauma exposure, and (iii) limited to individuals not reporting trauma exposure (Table 1). In addition, sensitivity analyses were performed on reported trauma exposure (overall and stratified by MDD diagnosis; see Supplementary Methods and Results, and Supplementary Table 3). For each analysis, phenotypes were first residualised on 6 ancestry principal components from the genetic data of the European samples as well as factors capturing initial assessment centre and genotyping batch. More details on phenotype preparation can be found in the Supplementary Methods.

Phenotype distribution

Previous analyses have shown that, compared with the participants in the UK Biobank as a whole, those who completed the mental health questionnaire were more likely to have a university degree, came from a higher socioeconomic background, and reported fewer long-standing illnesses or disabilities [31]. Accordingly, participants were compared across a number of standard demographic variables and common correlates of MDD: sex, age (at questionnaire), education (university degree vs. not), neighbourhood socioeconomic status (SES, as Townsend deprivation index [37]) and BMI (recorded from measurements taken at the initial recruitment of the participants into the biobank). For further details on these analyses, see Supplementary Methods.

Genetic data

Genetic data for GWAS analyses came from the full release of the UK Biobank data ($N = 487,410$; [38]). Autosomal genotype data from two highly-overlapping custom genotyping arrays (covering ~800,000 markers) underwent centralised quality control before being imputed in a two-stage imputation to the Haplotype Reference Consortium (HRC) and UK10K (for rarer variants not present in the

HRC) reference panels [38–40]. In addition to this central quality control, variants for analysis were limited to common variants (minor allele frequency > 0.01) that were either directly genotyped or imputed from the HRC with high confidence (IMPUTE INFO metric > 0.4) [39].

Individuals were excluded where recommended by the UK Biobank core analysis team for unusual levels of missingness or heterozygosity, or if they had withdrawn consent for analysis. Using the genotyped SNPs, individuals with call rate <98%, who were related to another individual in the dataset (KING $r < 0.044$, equivalent to removing third-degree relatives and closer [41]) or whose phenotypic and genotypic gender information was discordant (X-chromosome homozygosity (F_X) < 0.9 for phenotypic males, $F_X > 0.5$ for phenotypic females) were also excluded. Removal of relatives was performed using a "greedy" algorithm, which minimises exclusions (for example, by excluding the child in a mother–father–child trio). All analyses were limited to individuals of European ancestry, as defined by 4-means clustering on the first two genetic principal components provided by the UK Biobank [42]. This ancestry group included 95% of the respondents to the mental health questionnaire—as such, the non-European ancestry groups were considered too small to analyse informatively. Principal components analysis was also performed on the European-only subset of the data using the software flashpca2 [43]. After quality control, individuals with high-quality genotype data and who had completed the online mental health questionnaire were retained for analysis ($N = 126{,}522$).

GWAS analyses used the imputed data as described above. Genetic correlation analyses used the results of the GWAS analyses. Polygenic risk score analyses and SNP-based heritability analyses in BOLT-LMM used the genotyped variants [38]. These latter analyses were limited to common variants (minor allele frequency > 0.01) with call rate > 98% that were in approximate Hardy–Weinberg equilibrium (HWE test $p > 10^{-8}$). The same individuals were used for analyses using the imputed and the genotyped data.

Analyses

Genome wide association studies (GWAS)

GWAS were performed to assess the association of individual genetic variants with MDD. These analyses were first undertaken for the entire sample regardless of reported trauma exposure, then stratified by reported trauma exposure. GWAS were performed using linear regressions on imputed genotype dosages in BGenie v1.2 [38], with residualised phenotypes as described above. Phenotypes and genotypes were mean-centred and standardised. Genome-wide significance was defined at the conventional level $p < 5 \times 10^{-8}$ [44]. Results from each GWAS were clumped to define genetic loci in PLINK2 [45]. Loci were defined following established protocols (Supplementary Methods) [15].

Betas from the GWAS were converted to odds ratios (OR) using LMOR (http://cnsgenomics.com/shiny/LMOR/) and observed sample prevalences [46]. Standard errors were calculated from the p-value and estimated OR [47]. Performing GWAS on residuals, rather than including covariates in the analysis, is a restriction imposed by the BGenie software (which was used because it is specifically designed for analysing the UK Biobank genetic data). Sensitivity analyses were performed to test for biases resulting from this method. Specifically, for each GWAS, each variant with nominal significance ($p < 0.0001$) was also tested using logistic regression including covariates in R 3.4.1, in order to confirm the results from BGenie [48].

SNP-based heritability

Results from GWAS were combined to assess the proportion of variance due to the additive effect of common genetic variants (SNP-based heritability). SNP-based heritability was calculated on the observed scale using BOLT-LMM v2.3 [49]. The estimate for MDD in the cohort was converted to the liability scale in R 3.4.1, assuming a population prevalence of 28% [2, 50]. Converting estimates of SNP-based heritability for a case-control trait from the observed scale to the liability scale requires accurate estimates of the lifetime prevalence of the trait in the (sub) population. When comparing a trait stratified by a correlated variable (as is the case when we compare the SNP-based heritability of MDD stratified by reported trauma exposure), the population prevalence in each stratum is unknown. To address this, we approximated the expected prevalence of MDD in individuals either reporting or not reporting trauma exposure (Supplementary Methods). This allowed us to convert the observed scale SNP-based heritability of MDD to the liability scale in both strata (i.e. those reporting and those not reporting trauma exposure). A second challenge is that trauma exposure is itself a heritable trait that is genetically correlated with MDD in this study. The potential impact of this on SNP-based heritability estimation is not intuitive. To benchmark our findings, we performed simulations of SNP-level data to explore the expected SNP-based heritability of MDD in individuals reporting and not reporting trauma exposure, assuming differences in SNP-based heritability resulted only from the genetic correlation between MDD and reported trauma exposure. Further details of these analyses are provided in the Supplementary Methods.

Genetic correlations

Genetic correlations (r_g) were calculated to assess shared genetic influences between MDD and other phenotypes, using GWAS summary statistics and LD Score regression v1.0.0 [51] using the default HapMap LD reference. Two sets of genetic correlations were calculated. First, we calculated genetic correlations between the phenotypes examined within this paper (internal phenotypes). We calculated the genetic correlation between MDD and reported trauma exposure in the full dataset, and then the genetic correlation between MDD in individuals reporting trauma exposure and MDD in individuals not reporting trauma exposure. Secondly, we also calculated genetic correlations between each GWAS from this analysis and a curated list of 308 publicly-available phenotypes (external phenotypes) [51, 52].

Genetic correlations were tested for difference from 0 (default in LD Score), and for difference from 1 (in Microsoft Excel, converting r_g to a chi-square as $[(r_g - 1)/se]^2$) [51, 52]. Genetic correlations were considered significant if they passed the Bonferroni-adjusted threshold for the effective number of traits studied in each analysis (internal: $p < 0.01$; external: $p < 2.5 \times 10^{-4}$). The effective number of traits was calculated as the number of principal components explaining 99.5% of the variance in the pairwise genetic correlation matrix (internal: 5; external: 202). External phenotype GWAS all had heritability estimates such that $h^2/SE > 2$, and produced valid (i.e. non-NA) r_g with all other phenotypes tested.

The genetic correlation of MDD with each external phenotype was compared between individuals reporting trauma exposure and individuals not reporting trauma exposure using a two-stage method. First, differences were assessed using two sample z-tests [53]. Nominally-significant differences ($p < 0.05$) by this method were then compared using the block-jackknife (Supplementary Methods) [52, 54, 55]. Results using the jackknife were considered significant if they passed the Bonferroni-adjusted threshold ($p < 2.5 \times 10^{-4}$).

Polygenic risk scoring

Polygenic risk scores were calculated to further assess shared genetic influences between MDD and traits known to be correlated to MDD. Specifically, risk scores from analyses of major depression (MDD) [15], schizophrenia (SCZ) [56], bipolar disorder (BIP) [57], body mass index (BMI) [58] and glycated haemoglobin (HbA1c; used as a negative control) [59] were calculated and compared in all participants and stratifying by reported trauma exposure. The PGC major depression GWAS contained participants from UK Biobank, so to derive the MDD risk score we used a restricted set of summary statistics without these individuals (but including individuals from 23andMe, whose diagnoses were self-reported [14]). For further discussion of this overlap, see Supplementary Note [15]. Risk scores were calculated using PRSice v2 at seven thresholds (external GWAS $p < 0.001$, 0.05, 0.1, 0.2, 0.3, 0.4 and 0.5) to allow assessment of the spread of association between risk score and MDD [45, 60, 61]. Analyses used logistic regression, including all covariates used in creating the residuals for GWAS. In total, five external phenotypes were used to produce risk scores for the three target phenotypes (MDD overall, and stratified by reported trauma exposure/non-exposure), resulting in 15 analyses. A conservative Bonferroni adjustment for multiple testing was used, correcting for 105 tests (given seven thresholds and 15 analyses), giving a final threshold for significance of $p < 0.0004$.

We also performed formal risk score-by-environment analyses to estimate the effect on MDD of the interaction between genetic variants across the whole genome (modelled as a polygenic risk score) and reported trauma exposure. These analyses included the same covariates used in the GWAS, and all risk score-by-covariate and reported trauma exposure-by-covariate interactions [62, 63]. Both multiplicative and additive interactions were tested. A significant multiplicative interaction means that the combined effect of the risk score and reported trauma exposure differs from the product of their individual effects. Multiplicative interactions were tested using logistic regression [25, 26]. A significant additive interaction means that the combined effect of the risk score and reported trauma exposure differs from the sum of their individual effects. Additive interactions were tested using linear regression (Supplementary Methods).

Sensitivity analyses

Differences in phenotypic variables were observed between cases and controls. To assess the impact of including these variables as covariates, all analyses were rerun retaining all previous covariates and including as further covariates: age (at questionnaire), neighbourhood socioeconomic status (SES, as Townsend deprivation index [37]), BMI (at baseline assessment), and a binary variable of education (university degree vs. not). The same covariates were also included in polygenic risk score and SNP-based heritability analyses. Sensitivity analyses focussing on reported trauma exposure as an outcome were similarly rerun (Supplementary Methods).

The majority of the sample with data on both MDD symptoms and reported trauma status were controls who did not report trauma (Table 1). To assess whether this disbalance in sample status affected our results, genetic correlation analyses with external phenotypes were rerun on ten downsampled cohorts, with 9,487 participants in each group (the number of cases not reporting trauma exposure; see Supplementary Methods).

In order to test whether our definition of trauma exposure affected the main finding of our paper, we performed three further sensitivity analyses, redefining reported trauma exposure. First, we assessed if our main finding was robust to changing the threshold for including MDD-relevant trauma, by redefining reported trauma exposure as a report of (i) one or more and (ii) three or more of the seven MDD-relevant trauma items. Second, we assessed whether the timing of trauma exposure affected this finding by redefining reported trauma exposure as a report of (iii) one or more of the five childhood trauma items. We then re-analysed the heritability of MDD in individuals reporting and not reporting trauma exposure using these three alternative definitions.

Results

Phenotype distribution

Phenotypic and genetic data were available on 24,094–92,957 individuals (Table 1). Overall, 36% of individuals met our definition of MDD-relevant trauma exposure, and were more frequently cases (45%) than controls (17%; OR = 5.23; $p < 10^{-50}$, chi-square test). We assessed a number of phenotypic correlates of depression to confirm that these correlates differed between MDD cases and controls, and to assess whether these differences were affected by trauma exposure. Cases differed significantly from controls overall. Individuals with MDD were mostly females, significantly younger, less likely to have a university degree, came from more deprived neighbourhoods, and had higher BMI at recruitment. These differences persisted when the cohort was limited just to individuals reporting trauma exposure, and when the cohort was limited just to individuals not reporting trauma exposure. Furthermore, cases reporting trauma exposure differed from cases not reporting trauma exposure, in that they were mostly females, younger, more likely to have a degree (note difference from case-control comparisons), came from more deprived neighbourhoods, and had higher BMI at recruitment. The same differences (in the same direction) were observed between controls reporting and not reporting trauma exposure (all $p < 0.05$; Supplementary Table 4).

Genome-wide association studies

We performed GWAS for MDD overall and stratified by reported trauma exposure to obtain results for heritability and genetic correlation analyses (Supplementary Table 5; Supplementary Figs. 1–3). No analysis showed evidence of genome-wide inflation attributable to confounding (the 95% confidence intervals of all regression intercepts from LD Score included 1; Supplementary Table 6). One genome-wide significant locus (rs11515172, Chr 9:11 Mb, $p = 3.82 \times 10^{-8}$) was identified in the analysis of MDD overall, and remained significant when using logistic regression ($p = 4.69 \times 10^{-8}$, OR = 0.96, SE = 0.007; Supplementary Table 5). This locus has been repeatedly associated with depression [15, 64, 65], and with neuroticism [66–69]. However, it should be noted that all of these studies included UK Biobank. The locus is intergenic, and is not annotated to any currently known biological feature of interest (Supplementary Table 7).

SNP-based heritability

First we estimated the observed scale SNP-based heritability of MDD overall and stratified by reported trauma exposure. Second, in order to assess whether the relative influence of genetic variants on MDD differed by reported trauma status, we converted SNP-heritabilities to the liability scale. We assumed a prevalence of 28% for self-reported MDD in the full population [2]. Based on this, and on the ratio of MDD cases:controls in the sample, we estimated the prevalence of MDD in the trauma-exposed population as 52%, and in the unexposed population as 17%. Using these estimates of population prevalence, the liability scale estimate of MDD SNP-based heritability was 20% (95% confidence interval: [18–22%]) overall. In those reporting trauma exposure, the liability scale SNP-based heritability of MDD was 24% [18–31%], and in those not reporting trauma exposure it was 12% [7–16%]. The SNP-based heritability of MDD was significantly greater in individuals who reported trauma exposure compared to those who did not ($p = 0.0021$, Z-test).

These estimated SNP-heritabilities could be confounded by genetic correlation between MDD and reported trauma exposure. We designed and conducted simulations of SNP-level data to quantify the expected difference in SNP-based heritability from genetic correlation alone (Supplementary Methods). Our simulations yielded expected estimates for the liability scale SNP-based heritability of MDD of 14–15% in those reporting trauma exposure, and 15–16% in those not reporting trauma exposure (Supplementary Methods). This small difference in expected SNP-based heritability for those reporting and not reporting trauma is in the opposite direction to our findings. This suggests that our findings cannot be explained by genetic correlation between MDD and reported trauma exposure, nor by the transformation from the observed scale to the liability scale.

Genetic correlations

Genetic correlations were calculated between MDD and reported trauma to explore the genetic relationship between these traits. Further genetic correlations were calculated

between MDD in the two strata to assess whether genetics influences on MDD differ in the context of reported trauma exposure (Supplementary Table 8).

We observed a significant r_g between MDD and reported trauma exposure in the full cohort (0.62 [95% CI: 0.76–0.94], $p < 10^{-50}$). Given that trauma items were selected for association with MDD, we also calculated the genetic correlation between MDD in the full cohort and reported trauma exposure in just the controls, which was also significant (0.31 [0.18–0.45], $p = 4 \times 10^{-6}$; Supplementary Table 8). This correlation persisted when using independent major depression GWAS summary statistics, as reported trauma exposure was significantly correlated with the MDD polygenic risk score (Spearman's rho = 0.0675, $p < 10^{-50}$) [15]. The genetic correlation between MDD in individuals reporting trauma exposure and MDD in individuals not reporting trauma exposure was high and did not differ significantly from 1 ($r_g = 0.77$ [0.48–1.05]; difference from 0: $p = 1.8 \times 10^{-7}$; difference from 1: $p = 0.11$).

Genetic correlations were calculated between MDD and all available external traits to systematically assess whether genetic relationships with MDD differed in the context of reported trauma exposure. All psychiatric traits included were significantly associated ($p < 2.5 \times 10^{-4}$) with MDD, but this association did not differ substantially in magnitude between the groups reporting and not reporting trauma exposure (z-test for comparisons of $r_g - \Delta r_g$—ranged from $p = 0.10$–0.99; Fig. 1). In contrast, waist circumference was significantly associated with MDD only in individuals reporting trauma exposure ($r_g = 0.24$), and the correlation was significantly larger than that in individuals not reporting trauma exposure ($r_g = -0.05$, jackknife $p_{\Delta rg} = 2.3 \times 10^{-4}$). Other correlations between MDD and body composition, reproductive, and socioeconomic phenotypes were larger in the group reporting trauma exposure compared to individuals not reporting trauma exposure, but these differences did not remain significant following multiple testing correction (all jackknife $p > 2.5 \times 10^{-4}$; Fig. 1, Supplementary Table 9).

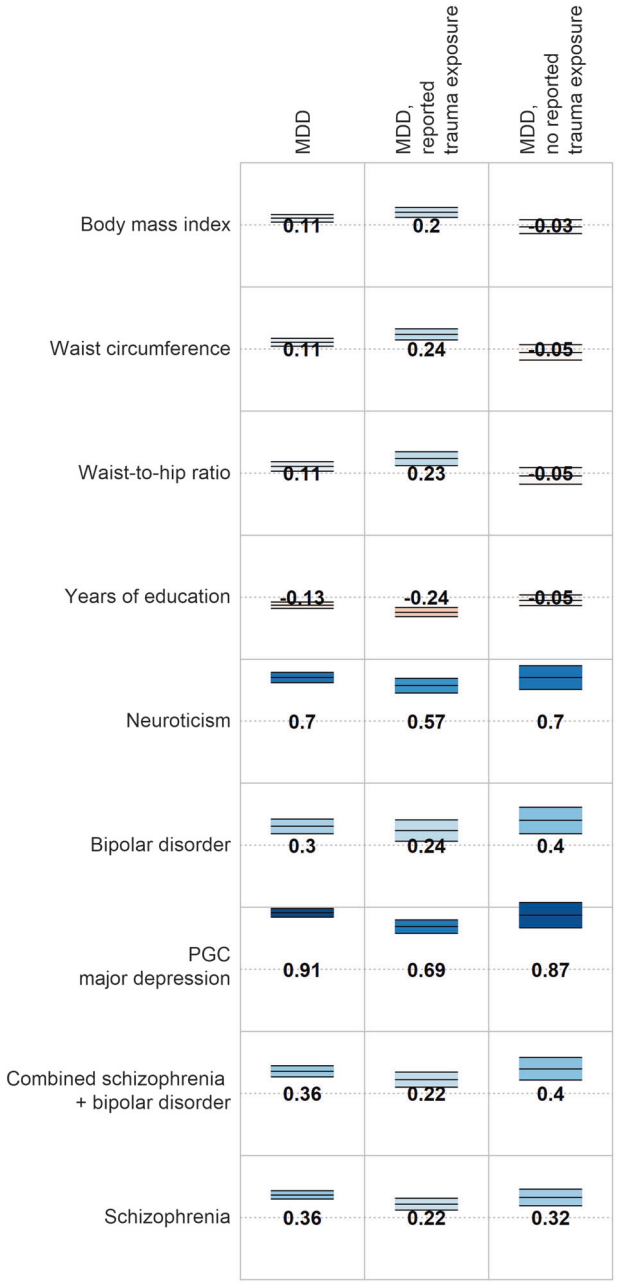

Fig. 1 Genetic correlations between MDD (overall and stratified by reported trauma exposure) and selected traits and disorders. Full genetic correlation results are available in Supplementary Table 9. Numbers = genetic correlations. Colour = direction of effect (blue = positive, red = negative). Colour intensity = size of correlation. Upper and lower bars are 95% confidence interval of genetic correlation

Polygenic risk scores across strata

We performed polygenic risk score analyses to further explore how stratification by trauma status affects the genetic relationship between MDD and specific correlates of MDD, and to mirror previous analyses in the literature (Fig. 2, Table 2; see Supplementary Table 10 for full details of all risk score analyses, including the number of SNPs in each score) [26]. Individuals with high genetic risk scores for MDD were more likely to be cases than controls, and a significant additive interaction term was observed from linear regression. Specifically, the combined effect of the MDD risk score and reported trauma exposure on MDD was greater than the sum of the individual effects (beta > 0, Table 2 central panel). However, the multiplicative interaction term was not significant ($p > 0.01$). The presence of an interaction on the additive scale reflects the greater SNP-based heritability of MDD in individuals reporting trauma exposure (SNP – $h^2 = 24\%$) compared with those not

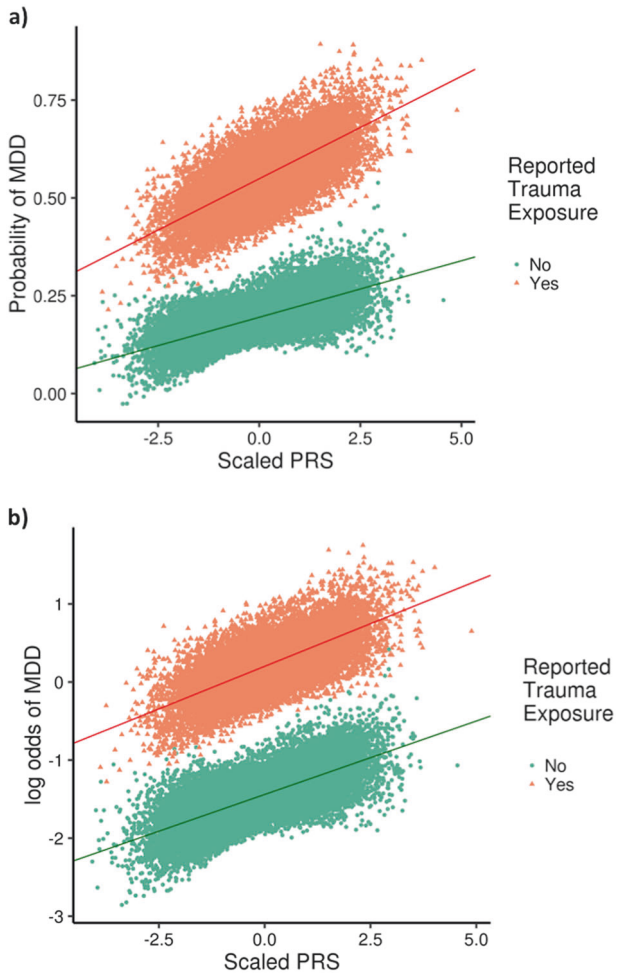

Fig. 2 Association between MDD polygenic risk score (PRS) and MDD. Individuals reporting trauma exposure are shown as orange triangles, and those not reporting trauma exposure as green dots. **a** shows the relationship on the linear additive scale, and **b** shows the relationship on the multiplicative scale. A significant interaction is observed on the additive scale only, as shown by differing slopes of the two regression lines in panel a

reporting trauma exposure (SNP $-h^2 = 12\%$), as described above.

In contrast, although those with higher BMI risk scores were more likely to be cases than controls, this only passed correction for multiple testing in individuals reporting trauma exposure. Both the additive (beta > 0) and the multiplicative (OR > 1) interaction terms were significant, suggesting the combined effect on MDD from BMI risk score and reported trauma exposure together was greater than expected from both the sum of the individual risks and from their product, respectively (OR > 1).

Individuals with high genetic risk scores for SCZ were more likely to be cases than controls, but this did not differ between strata (both interaction terms $p > 0.01$). Individuals with higher BIP risk scores were also more likely to be cases than controls—although this association was not

Table 2 Main effect and interaction effects for polygenic risk scores (PRS) associated with MDD overall and in stratified analyses

Base	Base *N*	Best threshold	Analysis	PRS			PRS × Reported trauma						
							Additive			Multiplicative			
				OR	95% CI	*p*	Beta	95% CI	*p*	OR	95% CI	*p*
MDD	116,404//314,990	**0.5**	*MDD*	**1.26**	**1.24–1.28**	**$<10^{-50}$**	**0.011**	**0.008–0.014**	**2.69×10^{-11}**	1.01	1.00–1.03	0.132
SCZ	36,989//113,075	**0.3**		**1.11**	**1.09–1.12**	**1.11×10^{-41}**	0.008	−0.003–0.004	0.659	0.99	0.97–1.00	0.158
BIP	7,481//9,250	**0.2**		**1.07**	**1.05–1.08**	**4.57×10^{-19}**	−0.000	−0.003–0.003	0.961	0.99	0.97–1.00	0.165
BMI	339,224	**0.3**		**1.04**	**1.03–1.06**	**2.60×10^{-8}**	**0.006**	**0.003–0.009**	**1.13×10^{-4}**	**1.02**	**1.01–1.04**	**0.0074**
HB1Ac	46,368	0.001		1.01	1.00–1.02	0.163	0.002	−0.001–0.005	0.186	1.01	0.99–1.02	0.391
MDD	116,404//314,990	**0.4**	*MDD, reported trauma exposure*	**1.24**	**1.21–1.27**	**$<10^{-50}$**						
SCZ	36,989//113,075	**0.5**		**1.06**	**1.03–1.09**	**2.96×10^{-5}**						
BIP	7481//9250	0.5		1.04	1.01–1.07	0.00329						
BMI	339,224	**0.5**		**1.07**	**1.04–1.10**	**1.85×10^{-7}**						
HB1Ac	46,368	0.001		1.02	1.00–1.05	0.0863						
MDD	116,404//314,990	**0.4**	*MDD, no reported trauma exposure*	**1.21**	**1.18–1.23**	**$<10^{-50}$**						
SCZ	36,989//113,075	**0.5**		**1.09**	**1.06–1.11**	**4.34×10^{-12}**						
BIP	7481//9250	**0.2**		**1.07**	**1.04–1.09**	**4.05×10^{-8}**						
BMI	339,224	0.3		1.02	1.00–1.04	0.0980						
HB1Ac	46,368	0.001		1.01	0.99–1.03	0.492						

Interaction effects are on the additive scale (Beta) and the multiplicative scale (OR). Bold = significant associations (main analyses: $p < 0.000143$; interactions: $p < 0.01$). Base N = Cases // Controls. OR/Beta = Increase with 1 SD increase in risk score or trauma exposure. Results are reported at the "best" threshold (that with the lowest *p*-value in main effect analyses)—results across all thresholds are reported in Supplementary Table 10

significant in the subset of individuals reporting trauma exposure, no significant interaction term was observed, suggesting the observed difference in results within-strata may be due to differences in power. No significant differences were observed in the negative control analysis with HbA1c.

Sensitivity analyses

Four sets of sensitivity analyses were performed. In the first set, all analyses were repeated using reported trauma exposure as the phenotype, assessed overall and stratified by MDD (as opposed to the primary analysis, where MDD was the phenotype and analyses were stratified by reported trauma exposure). Results from these analyses were broadly similar to the results from the primary analysis (Supplementary Tables 3–11, Supplementary Figs. 4–7).

The second set of sensitivity analyses repeated the primary analyses with additional covariates to assess the impact of controlling for age, neighbourhood socioeconomic status, BMI, and education. This did not alter the conclusions drawn from the GWAS and SNP-based heritability analyses, nor from the genetic correlations observed between the internal phenotypes (those assessed in this study; Supplementary Tables 12–17). Genetic correlations between MDD and external phenotypes did not differ significantly from the main analysis (all z-test $p < 0.05$), but were sufficiently attenuated that the genetic correlations of MDD with waist circumference was no longer significantly different between individuals reporting and not reporting trauma exposure. Differences in the polygenic risk score analyses were limited to analyses involving the BMI risk score. In analyses adjusted for phenotypic BMI, the BMI polygenic risk score was no longer associated with MDD in any analysis, and no interactions including the BMI risk score remained significant.

The third set of sensitivity analyses repeated the genetic correlation analyses, but downsampled the analysed cohort such that each of the four groups (MDD cases/controls reporting/not reporting trauma exposure) had 9487 participants (the size of the smallest group from the main analysis, cases not reporting trauma exposure). In these analyses, genetic correlations between MDD and external phenotypes were attenuated across most phenotypes, but not significantly (two-sample z-tests, all $p > 0.05$; Supplementary Table 18). As such, the general pattern of genetic correlations observed in the main analysis was retained, although the genetic correlations of MDD with waist circumference was no longer significantly different between individuals reporting and not reporting trauma exposure.

The final set of sensitivity analyses repeated the SNP-based heritability analyses of MDD in individuals reporting and not reporting trauma exposure, altering the definition of reported trauma exposure in three ways (increasing and decreasing the number of items required to be defined as reporting trauma exposure, and limiting the items considered to only childhood experiences). The purpose of these analyses was to test the robustness of our key finding (greater MDD SNP-based heritability in trauma-exposed individuals compared with those not reporting trauma exposure). Neither increasing nor decreasing the number of MDD-relevant items selected, nor focussing on childhood items, altered our conclusions (Supplementary Table 19).

Full results for all four sensitivity analyses, and for variant-level gene-by-environment interaction analyses (Supplementary Table 20), are included in the Supplementary Material.

Discussion

We investigated the relationship between MDD and self-reported trauma exposure in the largest single cohort available to date ($N = 73{,}258$ with MDD and reported trauma data). The SNP-based heritability of MDD was higher in individuals reporting trauma exposure than in individuals not reporting trauma exposure. This was not explained by gene–environment correlation, or the transformation of SNP-based heritability from the observed to the liability scale. Despite the significant difference in SNP-based heritability across the two strata, the genetic correlation between MDD in individuals reporting and not reporting trauma exposure was not statistically different from 1. Polygenic risk score-by-reported trauma exposure interaction analyses identified significant interactions for both MDD and BMI risk scores. However, the interactions involving the BMI risk score appear to be explained by differences in measured BMI between MDD cases and controls. Finally, a significant genetic correlation between MDD and waist circumference was observed only in individuals reporting trauma exposure, and was absent from those not reporting trauma exposure.

A number of limitations should be considered when assessing our results. Our simulations suggest that our SNP-based heritability differences did not result from gene–environment correlation between MDD and reported trauma exposure, nor the conversion of observed scale SNP-based heritabilities to the liability scale. However, we could not address further sources of potential bias. These could arise from non-additive genetic architectures, ascertainment bias and the effects of covariates not included in the model [70, 71], or from potential collider bias resulting from selection bias [72]. We also assumed that the population prevalence of reported trauma exposure can be extrapolated from that observed in this sample (see Supplementary Methods). Although the UK Biobank allows us to integrate

genetic and environmental data at scale, and is a reasonably homogeneous cohort, it also has a "healthy volunteer bias", whereby the participants tend to have better overall health and higher socioeconomic status compared with the equivalent overall population of this age [73]. It is possible that the depressive and traumatic experiences reported by these participants may not generalise to the whole population, or to clinically-ascertained cases. Furthermore, we focussed on European ancestry; further studies in non-European populations are required [74].

To obtain further insight into the association of genome-wide genetic variation and reported trauma exposure with MDD (and to enable comparison with previous studies [24–26]), we carried out polygenic risk score-by-environment interaction analyses. There are a number of limitations to consider when interpreting such analyses. Polygenic risk score-by-environment interaction analyses test a specific hypothesis, namely that the overall association of common variants with the outcome (modelled as a risk score) varies dependent on the environmental exposure being tested. We did not test the existence of specific variant-by-environment interactions, including those featuring variants contributing to the risk score. Furthermore, we cannot exclude the possibility that the correlation between the MDD and BMI risk scores with reported trauma exposure may alter the observed interactions. This prevents the drawing of strong conclusions, especially given the limited predictive power of the risk scores used in this study (Supplementary Table 10).

Throughout this paper, we have referred to our depression phenotype as "MDD" rather than "major depression". We do this because our definition is based on the CIDI-SF, which has previously been shown to have good concordance with direct clinical assessments of MDD [75, 76]. However, it should be noted that direct assessment was not performed, and our MDD cases may not have met criteria within a clinical setting. Nonetheless, genetic correlations between studies of clinical MDD and our definition are very high, suggesting there is strong genetic continuity across different methods of assessing depression [15, 65].

Trauma exposure was defined in this study using retrospective self-report. This is not the ideal measure for this phenotype, and precludes robust measurement of the severity and timing of the reported trauma exposure. However, retrospective report is the only feasible option for cohorts large enough to enable detailed genetic analyses of the interaction between trauma and MDD. Retrospectively reported trauma and MDD are also not robust to reverse causation, and our results cannot strongly inform any temporal or causal hypotheses about their relationship. Such hypotheses could be tested using (extensive) longitudinal studies or through more powerful genomic studies of trauma exposure including data from similar or larger cohorts. This could enable the identification of sufficient robustly associated genetic variants to inform approaches such as Mendelian randomisation (which we were underpowered to examine in this study). In addition, future work may benefit from assessing the heritability of broader depression phenotypes that lie beyond our binary criteria, including reward sensitivity and negative valence traits [77].

Our findings suggest that the genetic variants associated with MDD are the same in individuals reporting and not reporting trauma exposure, because the genetic correlation between MDD measured in these two groups was not significantly different from 1. However, the SNP-based heritability of MDD was *greater* in individuals reporting compared to not reporting trauma exposure. This suggests that the combined effect of the variants associated with MDD is greater in people reporting trauma exposure than in those who do not. The mechanism underlying this finding is uncertain. One possibility is that exposure to traumatic events might amplify genetic influences on MDD beyond the magnitude of the effects seen in the absence of trauma (consistent with the stress-diathesis hypothesis [78–80]). The concept that genetic variance varies with exposure to different environments is well-recognised in studies of animal populations in the wild [81]. However, the opposite may also be true; genetic influences on MDD could increase an individual's likelihood of experiencing and/or reporting trauma, and through doing so increase the apparent heritability of MDD by partly incorporating genetic influences related to trauma reporting itself [11]. A third possibility relates to the components of variance involved in calculating SNP-based heritability. Phenotypic variance can be attributed either to the SNPs measured in the GWAS, or to environmental sources of variance reflecting all phenotypic variance not explained by common variants. It is possible that the genetic variance is constant across the strata, but that the environmental variance is decreased when only considering individuals reporting trauma exposure, due to the shared (and thus more similar/less variable) exposure of these individuals to MDD-relevant traumatic experiences. This would result in greater heritability in individuals reporting trauma exposure. These explanations are potential interpretations of these findings but are not the only possibilities. It is also likely that multiple such mechanisms are involved.

A final, separate, possibility is that self-report is impaired in the group reporting trauma exposure. Reported trauma exposure is associated with an increased prevalence of multiple psychiatric disorders including personality disorders. The rapidly fluctuating symptoms of personality disorders can reduce the reliability of self-report in affected individuals [82]. If self-report is less reliable in those reporting trauma exposure, this would affect the accuracy of our MDD definition in this group, such that the cases in this

group may also include unreported cases of excluded disorders with higher heritability, such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. Although the reported prevalence of personality disorder diagnosis in this cohort is too low to explain the observed differences in SNP-based heritability (142/22,880 MDD cases, <1% of MDD cases), the participants in the study have not undergone more extensive assessment, and further diagnoses of personality disorders may have been missed.

In polygenic risk score-by-reported trauma exposure interaction analyses, we identified a significant interaction on the additive scale for the combined effect of the MDD risk score and reported trauma exposure on risk of MDD. These results are also reflected in the larger SNP-based heritability of MDD in exposed compared to unexposed individuals. The simplest explanation for this result is that the effects of the MDD risk score and reported trauma exposure on MDD combine multiplicatively, such that their combined effects are greater than the sum of their individual effects. For the BMI risk score however, the interaction with reported trauma exposure appears to be more complex, combining neither additively nor multiplicatively. In sensitivity analyses controlling for BMI (obtained at recruitment, approximately five years before the mental health questionnaire), the BMI risk score-by-reported trauma exposure interaction was no longer significant, suggesting that the observed interaction can be explained by differences in measured BMI. Further research, with concurrent measurements of BMI, trauma exposure and MDD in a longitudinally-sampled cohort would offer further insight into the relationship between these three variables.

The high genetic correlation between MDD in individuals reporting and not reporting trauma exposure was supported by significant genetic correlations between MDD and other psychiatric disorders regardless of reported trauma exposure. In individuals reporting trauma exposure, a further significant genetic correlation was observed between MDD and waist circumference, which was significantly greater than the equivalent correlation in those not reporting trauma exposure. Although not significant, there was also a general pattern of higher genetic correlations between MDD and several weight-related measures and educational attainment, in individuals reporting trauma exposure. This is consistent with previous literature on traumatic experiences and related phenomena such as Adverse Childhood Experiences, which has found that they are associated not only with psychiatric risk but also with wide-ranging impairments in social and health outcomes including obesity and (less) education [83–86]. However, we stress that causal conclusions cannot be drawn from these (or our) data, or that the reported trauma exposure is responsible for the observed differences.

Our estimate of the SNP-based heritability of MDD (20%) is higher than that reported in previous studies of major depression (~9%) [15]. This may be explained by the relative homogeneity of the UK Biobank compared to previous meta-analyses. The UK Biobank is a single-country cohort ascertained using a consistent protocol. The same questionnaire was used to gather symptom data, and the samples were stored, extracted, and genotyped using a single method. In contrast, meta-analyses have needed to combine diverse ascertainment, sampling, and genotyping; SNP-based heritability has been reported to decrease with increasing numbers of meta-analysed samples [87].

Previous analyses have assessed alternative depression phenotypes in the UK Biobank [65]. Our MDD phenotype (based on DSM criteria for MDD) is most similar to the probable MDD phenotype from Howard et al, rather than the less strictly-defined "broad depression" phenotype, which includes those who seek treatment for depression, anxiety and related phenotypes. Our summary statistics LDSC-based estimate is higher than the equivalent from Howard et al (4–5%). However, our estimate using genotype data (20%) is within the bounds of equivalent estimates by geographic region reported for the probable MDD (0–27.5%) phenotype. We note that our MDD phenotype definition may have more specificity than the probable MDD phenotype used in Howard et al.

Our results also differ in several respects from those of a study of MDD and adversity in Han Chinese women [23]. No difference in the SNP-based heritability of MDD between individuals reporting and not reporting trauma exposure was observed in the previous study, and we did not replicate individual variant results. However, this is unsurprising, as there are a number of differences between the studies of which the primary one is sample size (this study: 73,258; CONVERGE: 9599). Other differences included culture and ethnicity, and the deeper phenotyping methodology applied in CONVERGE, resulting in a severe inpatient MDD phenotype. Notably, the previous study did not report a genetic correlation between MDD and trauma exposure [23].

Sensitivity analyses focussed on trauma found that self-reported traumatic experience was significantly heritable, as has been previously observed [19]. We strongly emphasise that this does not necessarily imply that traumatic experiences themselves have a biological component—such experiences may be associated with other significantly heritable traits, and their biology would then be reflected in the observed heritability of trauma exposure. One potential set of heritable traits that may be associated with reporting traumatic experiences are personality traits such as risk-taking, and this might explain the observed genetic correlations with psychiatric traits. A similar phenomenon has been proposed to underlie observed genetic correlations

with socioeconomic status [88]. Our trauma exposure measure relies on retrospective self-report, which is itself correlated with personality traits and mood at time of report [9]. This may also explain the genetic correlations we observe with reported trauma exposure (including in controls, who do not report previous psychiatric illness).

In summary, we find that genetic associations with MDD in UK Biobank vary by context. Specifically, the SNP-based heritability of MDD is larger in individuals reporting trauma exposure compared to those not doing so. Furthermore, the genetic correlation of MDD with waist circumference was significant only in individuals reporting exposure to trauma. Nonetheless, a strong genetic correlation was observed between MDD measured in the two strata. Together, these findings suggest the relative contribution of genetic variants to variance in MDD is greater when additional risk factors are present.

Code availability

Analytical code underlying this project will be made available at https://github.com/tnggroup.

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Major Depressive Disorder Working Group of the Psychiatric Genomics Consortium Naomi R. Wray[17,18], Stephan Ripke[19,20,21], Manuel Mattheisen[22,23,24], Maciej Trzaskowski[17], Enda M. Byrne[17], Abdel Abdellaoui[25], Mark J. Adams[26], Esben Agerbo[27,28,29], Tracy M. Air[30], Till F. M. Andlauer[31,32], Silviu-Alin Bacanu[33], Marie Bækvad-Hansen[29,34], Aartjan T. F. Beekman[35], Tim B. Bigdeli[33,36], Elisabeth B. Binder[31,37], Julien Bryois[38], Henriette N. Buttenschøn[29,39,40], Jonas Bybjerg-Grauholm[29,34], Na Cai[41,42], Enrique Castelao[43], Jane Hvarregaard Christensen[24,29,40], Toni-Kim Clarke[26], Jonathan R. I. Coleman[44], Lucía Colodro-Conde[45], Baptiste Couvy-Duchesne[18,46], Nick Craddock[47], Gregory E. Crawford[48,49], Gail Davies[50], Ian J. Deary[50], Franziska Degenhardt[51], Eske M. Derks[45], Nese Direk[52,53], Conor V. Dolan[25], Erin C. Dunn[54,55,56], Thalia C. Eley[44], Valentina Escott-Price[57], Farnush Farhadi Hassan Kiadeh[58], Hilary K. Finucane[59,60], Jerome C. Foo[61], Andreas J. Forstner[51,62,63,64], Josef Frank[61], Héléna A. Gaspar[44], Michael Gill[65], Fernando S. Goes[66], Scott D. Gordon[45], Jakob Grove[24,29,40,67], Lynsey S. Hall[26,68], Christine Søholm Hansen[29,34], Thomas F. Hansen[69,70,71], Stefan Herms[51,63], Ian B. Hickie[72], Per Hoffmann[51,63], Georg Homuth[73], Carsten Horn[74], Jouke-Jan Hottenga[25], David M. Hougaard[29], David M. Howard[26,44], Marcus Ising[75], Rick Jansen[35], Ian Jones[76], Lisa A. Jones[77], Eric Jorgenson[78], James A. Knowles[79], Isaac S. Kohane[80,81,82], Julia Kraft[20], Warren W. Kretzschmar[83], Zoltán Kutalik[84,85], Yihan Li[83], Penelope A. Lind[45], Donald J. MacIntyre[86,87], Dean F. MacKinnon[66], Robert M. Maier[18], Wolfgang Maier[88], Jonathan Marchini[89], Hamdi Mbarek[25] Patrick McGrath[90], Peter McGuffin[44], Sarah E. Medland[45], Divya Mehta[18,91], Christel M. Middeldorp[25,92,93], Evelin Mihailov[94], Yuri Milaneschi[35], Lili Milani[94], Francis M. Mondimore[66], Grant W. Montgomery[17], Sara Mostafavi[95,96], Niamh Mullins[44], Matthias Nauck[97,98], Bernard Ng[96], Michel G. Nivard[25], Dale R. Nyholt[99], Paul F. O'Reilly[44], Hogni Oskarsson[100], Michael J. Owen[76], Jodie N. Painter[45], Carsten Bøcker Pedersen[27,28,29], Marianne Giørtz Pedersen[27,28,29], Roseann E. Peterson[33,101], Erik Pettersson[38], Wouter J. Peyrot[35], Giorgio Pistis[43], Danielle Posthuma[102,103], Jorge A. Quiroz[104], Per Qvist[24,29,40], John P. Rice[105], Brien P. Riley[33], Margarita Rivera[44,106], Saira Saeed Mirza[52], Robert Schoevers[107], Eva C. Schulte[108,109], Ling Shen[78], Jianxin Shi[110], Stanley I. Shyn[111], Engilbert Sigurdsson[112], Grant C. B. Sinnamon[113], Johannes H. Smit[35], Daniel J. Smith[114], Hreinn Stefansson[115], Stacy Steinberg[115], Fabian Streit[61], Jana Strohmaier[61], Katherine E. Tansey[116], Henning Teismann[117], Alexander Teumer[118], Wesley Thompson[29,70,119,120], Pippa A. Thomson[121], Thorgeir E. Thorgeirsson[115], Matthew Traylor[122], Jens Treutlein[61], Vassily Trubetskoy[20], Andrés G. Uitterlinden[123], Daniel Umbricht[124], Sandra Van der Auwera[125], Albert M. van Hemert1[26], Alexander Viktorin[38], Peter M. Visscher[17,18], Yunpeng Wang[29,70,120], Bradley T. Webb[127], Shantel Marie Weinsheimer[29,70], Jürgen Wellmann[117], Gonneke Willemsen[25], Stephanie H. Witt[61], Yang Wu[17], Hualin S. Xi[128], Jian Yang[18,129], Futao Zhang[17], Volker Arolt[130], Bernhard T. Baune[131,132,133], Klaus Berger[117], Dorret I. Boomsma[25], Sven Cichon[51,63,134,135], Udo Dannlowski[130], E. J. C. de Geus[25,136], J. Raymond DePaulo[66], Enrico Domenici[137], Katharina Domschke[138,139], Tõnu Esko[21,94], Hans J. Grabe[125], Steven P. Hamilton[140], Caroline Hayward[141], Andrew C. Heath[105], Kenneth S. Kendler[33], Stefan Kloiber[75,142,143], Glyn Lewis[144], Qingqin S. Li[145], Susanne Lucae[75], Pamela A. F. Madden[105], Patrik K. Magnusson[38], Nicholas G. Martin[45], Andrew M. McIntosh[26,50], Andres Metspalu[94,146], Ole Mors[29,147], Preben Bo Mortensen[27,28,29,40], Bertram Müller-Myhsok[31,148,149], Merete Nordentoft[29,150], Markus M. Nöthen[51], Michael C. O'Donovan[76], Sara A. Paciga[151], Nancy L. Pedersen[38], Brenda W. J. H. Penninx[35], Roy H. Perlis[54,152], David J. Porteous[121], James B. Potash[153], Martin Preisig[43], Marcella Rietschel[61], Catherine Schaefer[78], Thomas G. Schulze[61,109,154,155,156], Jordan W. Smoller[54,55,56], Kari Stefansson[115,157], Henning Tiemeier[52,158,159], Rudolf Uher[160], Henry Völzke1[18], Myrna M. Weissman[90,161], Thomas Werge[29,70,162], Cathryn M. Lewis[44,163], Douglas F. Levinson[164], Gerome Breen[44,165], Anders D. Børglum[24,29,40], Patrick F. Sullivan[38,166,167]

[17]Institute for Molecular Bioscience, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, QLD, Australia; [18]Queensland Brain Institute, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, QLD, Australia; [19]Analytic and Translational Genetics Unit, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA, USA; [20]Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, Universitätsmedizin Berlin Campus Charité Mitte, Berlin, Germany; [21]Medical and Population Genetics, Broad Institute, Cambridge, MA, USA; [22]Department of Psychiatry, Psychosomatics and Psychotherapy, University of Wurzburg, Wurzburg, Germany; [23]Centre for Psychiatry Research, Department of Clinical Neuroscience, Karolinska

Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden; [24]Department of Biomedicine, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark; [25]Dept of Biological Psychology & EMGO+ Institute for Health and Care Research, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Amsterdam, the Netherlands; [26]Division of Psychiatry, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland; [27]Centre for Integrated Register-based Research, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark; [28]National Centre for Register-Based Research, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark; [29]iPSYCH, The Foundation Initiative for Integrative Psychiatric Research, Aarhus, Denmark; [30]Discipline of Psychiatry, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, SA, Australia; [31]Department of Translational Research in Psychiatry, Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry, Munich, Germany; [32]Department of Neurology, Klinikum rechts der Isar, Technical University of Munich, Munich, Germany; [33]Department of Psychiatry, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA, USA; [34]Center for Neonatal Screening, Department for Congenital Disorders, Statens Serum Institut, Copenhagen, Denmark; [35]Department of Psychiatry, Vrije Universiteit Medical Center and GGZ inGeest, Amsterdam, the Netherlands; [36]Virginia Institute for Psychiatric and Behavior Genetics, Richmond, VA, USA; [37]Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Emory University School of Medicine, Atlanta, GA, USA; [38]Department of Medical Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden; [39]Department of Clinical Medicine, Translational Neuropsychiatry Unit, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark; [40]iSEQ, Centre for Integrative Sequencing, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark; [41]Human Genetics, Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, Cambridge, England; [42]Statistical Genomics and Systems Genetics, European Bioinformatics Institute (EMBL-EBI), Cambridge, England; [43]Department of Psychiatry, University Hospital of Lausanne, Prilly, VD, Switzerland; [44]Social Genetic and Developmental Psychiatry Centre, King's College London, London, England; [45]Genetics and Computational Biology, QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, Brisbane, QLD, Australia; [46]Centre for Advanced Imaging, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, QLD, Australia; [47]Psychological Medicine, Cardiff University, Cardiff, Wales; [48]Center for Genomic and Computational Biology, Duke University, Durham, NC, USA; [49]Department of Pediatrics, Division of Medical Genetics, Duke University, Durham, NC, USA; [50]Centre for Cognitive Ageing and Cognitive Epidemiology, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland; [51]Institute of Human Genetics, University of Bonn, School of Medicine & University Hospital Bonn, Bonn, Germany; [52]Department of Epidemiology, Erasmus MC, Rotterdam, Zuid-Holland, the Netherlands; [53]Department of Psychiatry, School Of Medicine, Dokuz Eylul University, Izmir, Turkey; [54]Department of Psychiatry, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA, USA; [55]Psychiatric and Neurodevelopmental Genetics Unit (PNGU), Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA, USA; [56]Stanley Center for Psychiatric Research, Broad Institute, Cambridge, MA, USA; [57]Neuroscience and Mental Health, Cardiff University, Cardiff, Wales; [58]Department of Bioinformatics, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada; [59]Department of Epidemiology, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Boston, MA, USA; [60]Department of Mathematics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, USA; [61]Department of Genetic Epidemiology in Psychiatry, Central Institute of Mental Health, Medical Faculty Mannheim, Heidelberg University, Mannheim, Baden-Württemberg, Germany; [62]Department of Psychiatry (UPK), University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland; [63]Department of Biomedicine, University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland; [64]Centre for Human Genetics, University of Marburg, Marburg, Germany; [65]Department of Psychiatry, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland; [66]Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, USA; [67]Bioinformatics Research Centre, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark; [68]Institute of Genetic Medicine, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, England; [69]Department of Neurology, Danish Headache Centre, Rigshospitalet, Glostrup, Denmark; [70]Institute of Biological Psychiatry, Mental Health Center Sct. Hans, Mental Health Services Capital Region of Denmark, Copenhagen, Denmark; [71]iPSYCH, The Lundbeck Foundation Initiative for Psychiatric Research, Copenhagen, Denmark; [72]Brain and Mind Centre, University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW, Australia; [73]Interfaculty Institute for Genetics and Functional Genomics, Department of Functional Genomics, University Medicine and Ernst Moritz Arndt University Greifswald, Greifswald, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany; [74]Roche Pharmaceutical Research and Early Development, Pharmaceutical Sciences, Roche Innovation Center Basel, F. Hoffmann-La Roche Ltd, Basel, Switzerland; [75]Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry, Munich, Germany; [76]MRC Centre for Neuropsychiatric Genetics and Genomics, Cardiff University, Cardiff, Wales; [77]Department of Psychological Medicine, University of Worcester, Worcester, England; [78]Division of Research, Kaiser Permanente Northern California, Oakland, CA, USA; [79]Psychiatry & The Behavioral Sciences, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, USA; [80]Department of Biomedical Informatics, Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA, USA; [81]Department of Medicine, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston, MA, USA; [82]Informatics Program, Boston Children's Hospital, Boston, MA, USA; [83]Wellcome Trust Centre for Human Genetics, University of Oxford, Oxford, England; [84]Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine (IUMSP), University Hospital of Lausanne, Lausanne, VD, Switzerland; [85]Swiss Institute of Bioinformatics, Lausanne, VD, Switzerland; [86]Division of Psychiatry, Centre for Clinical Brain Sciences, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, England; [87]Mental Health, NHS 24, Glasgow, Scotland; [88]Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany; [89]Department of Statistics, University of Oxford, Oxford, England; [90]Department of Psychiatry, College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University, New York, NY, USA; [91]School of Psychology and Counseling, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, QLD, Australia; [92]Child and Youth Mental Health Service, Children's Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service, South Brisbane, QLD, Australia; [93]Child Health Research Centre, University of Queensland, Brisbane, QLD, Australia; [94]Estonian Genome Center, University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia; [95]Medical Genetics, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada; [96]Department of Statistics, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada; [97]DZHK (German Centre for Cardiovascular Research), Partner Site Greifswald, University Medicine, University Medicine Greifswald, Greifswald, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany; [98]Institute of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine, University Medicine Greifswald, Greifswald, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany; [99]Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, QLD, Australia; [100]Humus, Reykjavik, Iceland; [101]Virginia Institute for Psychiatric & Behavioral Genetics, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA, USA; [102]Clinical Genetics, Vrije Universiteit Medical Center, Amsterdam, the Netherlands; [103]Complex Trait Genetics, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Amsterdam, the Netherlands; [104]Solid Biosciences, Boston, MA, USA; [105]Department of Psychiatry, Washington University in Saint Louis School of Medicine, Saint Louis, MO, USA; [106]Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology II, Institute of Neurosciences, Center for Biomedical Research, University of Granada, Granada, Spain; [107]Department of Psychiatry, University of Groningen, University Medical Center Groningen, Groningen, the Netherlands; [108]Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, University Hospital, Ludwig Maximilian University Munich, Munich, Germany; [109]Institute of Psychiatric Phenomics and Genomics (IPPG), University Hospital, Ludwig Maximilian University Munich, Munich, Germany; [110]Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics, National Cancer Institute, Bethesda, MD, USA; [111]Behavioral Health Services, Kaiser Permanente Washington, Seattle, WA, USA; [112]Faculty of Medicine,

Department of Psychiatry, University of Iceland, Reykjavik, Iceland; [113]School of Medicine and Dentistry, James Cook University, Townsville, QLD, Australia; [114]Institute of Health and Wellbeing, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, Scotland; [115]deCODE Genetics/Amgen, Reykjavik, Iceland; [116]College of Biomedical and Life Sciences, Cardiff University, Cardiff, Wales; [117]Institute of Epidemiology and Social Medicine, University of Münster, Münster, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany; [118]Institute for Community Medicine, University Medicine Greifswald, Greifswald, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany; [119]Department of Psychiatry, University of California, San Diego, San Diego, CA, USA; [120]KG Jebsen Centre for Psychosis Research, Norway Division of Mental Health and Addiction, Oslo University Hospital, Oslo, Norway; [121]Medical Genetics Section, CGEM, IGMM, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland; [122]Clinical Neurosciences, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England; [123]Internal Medicine, Erasmus MC, Rotterdam, Zuid-Holland, the Netherlands; [124]Roche Pharmaceutical Research and Early Development, Neuroscience, Ophthalmology and Rare Diseases Discovery & Translational Medicine Area, Roche Innovation Center Basel, F. Hoffmann-La Roche Ltd, Basel, Switzerland; [125]Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, University Medicine Greifswald, Greifswald, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany; [126]Department of Psychiatry, Leiden University Medical Center, Leiden, the Netherlands; [127]Virginia Institute for Psychiatric & Behavioral Genetics, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA, USA; [128]Computational Sciences Center of Emphasis, Pfizer Global Research and Development, Cambridge, MA, USA; [129]Institute for Molecular Bioscience; Queensland Brain Institute, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, QLD, Australia; [130]Department of Psychiatry, University of Münster, Münster, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany; [131]Department of Psychiatry, University of Münster, Münster, Germany; [132]Department of Psychiatry, Melbourne Medical School, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia; [133]Florey Institute for Neuroscience and Mental Health, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia; [134]Institute of Medical Genetics and Pathology, University Hospital Basel, University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland; [135]Institute of Neuroscience and Medicine (INM-1), Research Center Juelich, Juelich, Germany; [136]Amsterdam Public Health Institute, Vrije Universiteit Medical Center, Amsterdam, the Netherlands; [137]Centre for Integrative Biology, Università degli Studi di Trento, Trento, Trentino-Alto Adige, Italy; [138]Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, Medical Center—University of Freiburg, Faculty of Medicine, University of Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany; [139]Center for NeuroModulation, Faculty of Medicine, University of Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany; [140]Psychiatry, Kaiser Permanente Northern California, San Francisco, CA, USA; [141]Medical Research Council Human Genetics Unit, Institute of Genetics and Molecular Medicine, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland; [142]Department of Psychiatry, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada; [143]Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto, ON, Canada; [144]Division of Psychiatry, University College London, London, England; [145]Neuroscience Therapeutic Area, Janssen Research and Development, LLC, Titusville, NJ, USA; [146]Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology, University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia; [147]Psychosis Research Unit, Aarhus University Hospital, Risskov, Aarhus, Germany; [148]Munich Cluster for Systems Neurology (SyNergy), Munich, Germany; [149]University of Liverpool, Liverpool, England; [150]Mental Health Center Copenhagen, Copenhagen Universtity Hospital, Copenhagen, Denmark; [151]Human Genetics and Computational Biomedicine, Pfizer Global Research and Development, Groton, CT, USA; [152]Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA, USA; [153]Psychiatry, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, USA; [154]Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, USA; [155]Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, University Medical Center Göttingen, Goettingen, Niedersachsen, Germany; [156]Human Genetics Branch, NIMH Division of Intramural Research Programs, Bethesda, MD, USA; [157]Faculty of Medicine, University of Iceland, Reykjavik, Iceland; [158]Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Erasmus MC, Rotterdam, Zuid-Holland, the Netherlands; [159]Department of Psychiatry, Erasmus MC, Rotterdam, Zuid-Holland, the Netherlands; [160]Department of Psychiatry, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS, Canada; [161]Division of Epidemiology, New York State Psychiatric Institute, New York, NY, USA; [162]Department of Clinical Medicine, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, DK, Denmark; [163]Department of Medical & Molecular Genetics, King's College London, London, England; [164]Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, USA; [165]NIHR Maudsley Biomedical Research Centre, King's College London, London, England; [166]Department of Genetics, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA; [167]Department of Psychiatry, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Affiliations

Jonathan R. I. Coleman[1,2] · Wouter J. Peyrot[3] · Kirstin L. Purves[1] · Katrina A. S. Davis[2,4] · Christopher Rayner[1] · Shing Wan Choi[1] · Christopher Hübel[1,2] · Héléna A. Gaspar[1,2] · Carol Kan[4] · Sandra Van der Auwera[5] · Mark James Adams[6] · Donald M. Lyall[7] · Karmel W. Choi[8,9,10,11] · on the behalf of Major Depressive Disorder Working Group of the Psychiatric Genomics Consortium[34] · Erin C. Dunn[10,11,12] · Evangelos Vassos[1,2] · Andrea Danese[1,13,14] · Barbara Maughan[1] · Hans J. Grabe[5] · Cathryn M. Lewis[1,2] · Paul F. O'Reilly[1] · Andrew M. McIntosh[6] · Daniel J. Smith[7] · Naomi R. Wray[15,16] · Matthew Hotopf[2,4] · Thalia C. Eley[1,2] · Gerome Breen[1,2]

[1] Social, Genetic and Developmental Psychiatry Centre, Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience, King's College London, London, UK

[2] NIHR Maudsley Biomedical Research Centre, South London and Maudsley NHS Trust, London, UK

[3] Department of Psychiatry, Amsterdam UMC, Vrije Universiteit Medical Center, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

[4] Department of Psychological Medicine, Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience, King's College London, London, UK

[5] Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, University Medicine Greifswald, Greifswald, Germany

[6] Division of Psychiatry, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK

[7] Institute of Health and Wellbeing, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK

[8] Department of Psychiatry, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA, USA

[9] Department of Epidemiology, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Boston, MA, USA

[10] Stanley Center for Psychiatric Research, The Broad Institute of Harvard and MIT, Cambridge, MA, USA

[11] Psychiatric and Neurodevelopmental Genetics Unit, Center for Genomic Medicine, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA, USA

[12] Department of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA, USA

[13] Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience, King's College London, London, UK

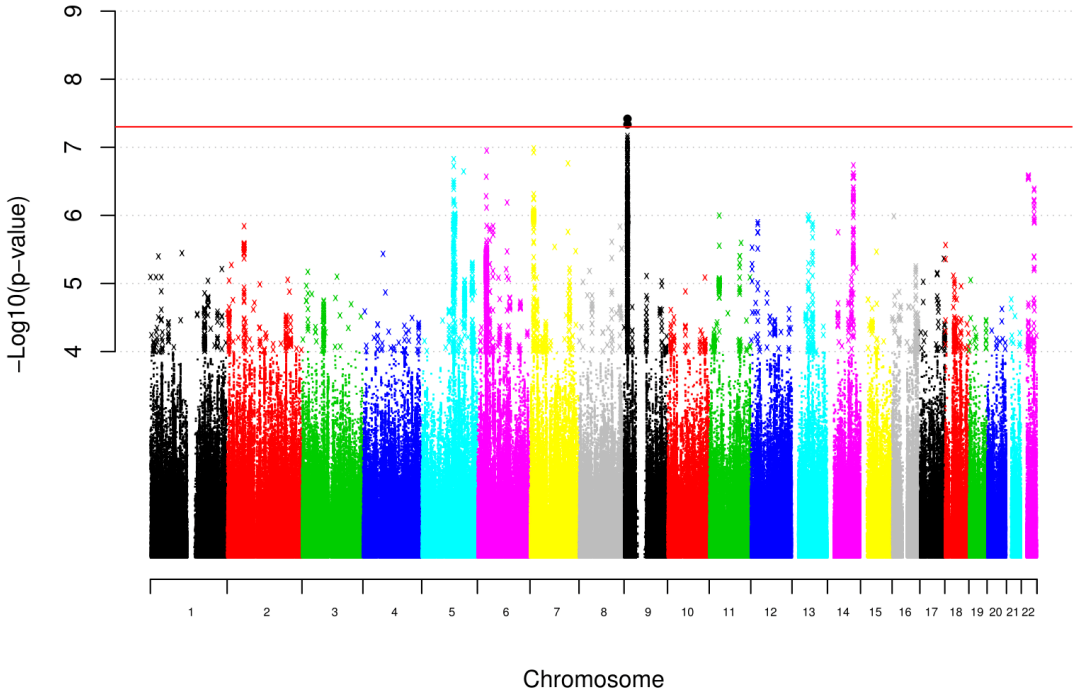
[14] National and Specialist CAMHS Trauma and Anxiety Clinic, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK

[15] Institute for Molecular Bioscience, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

[16] Queensland Brain Institute, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

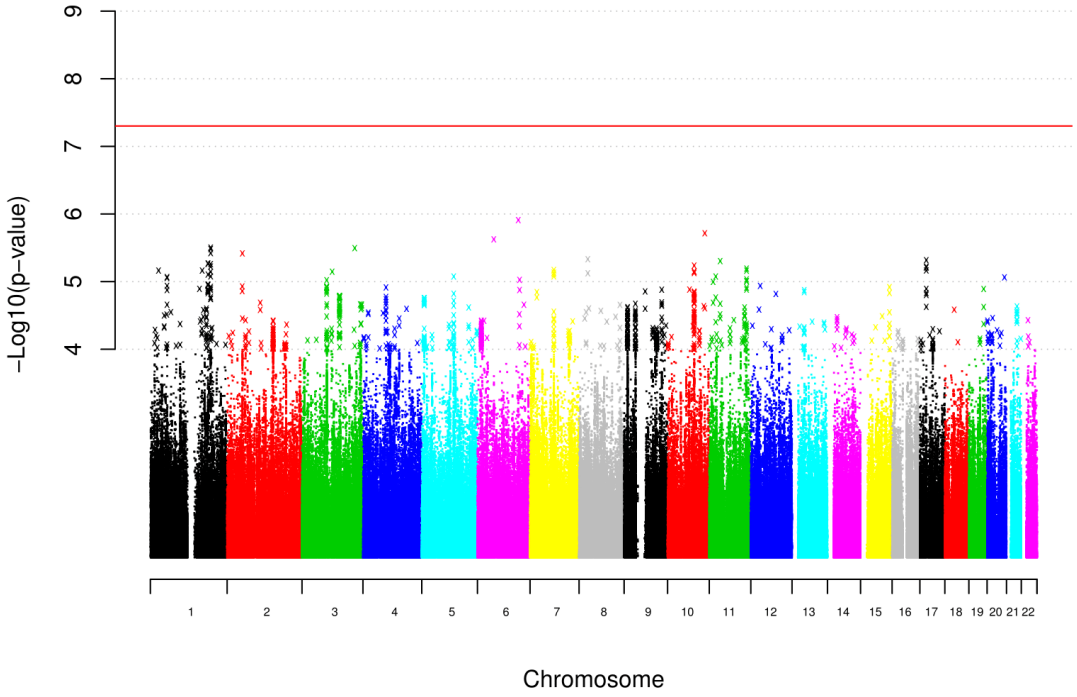
Supplementary Figures for "Genome-wide gene-environment analyses of major depressive disorder and reported lifetime traumatic experiences in UK Biobank"

Supplementary Figure 1



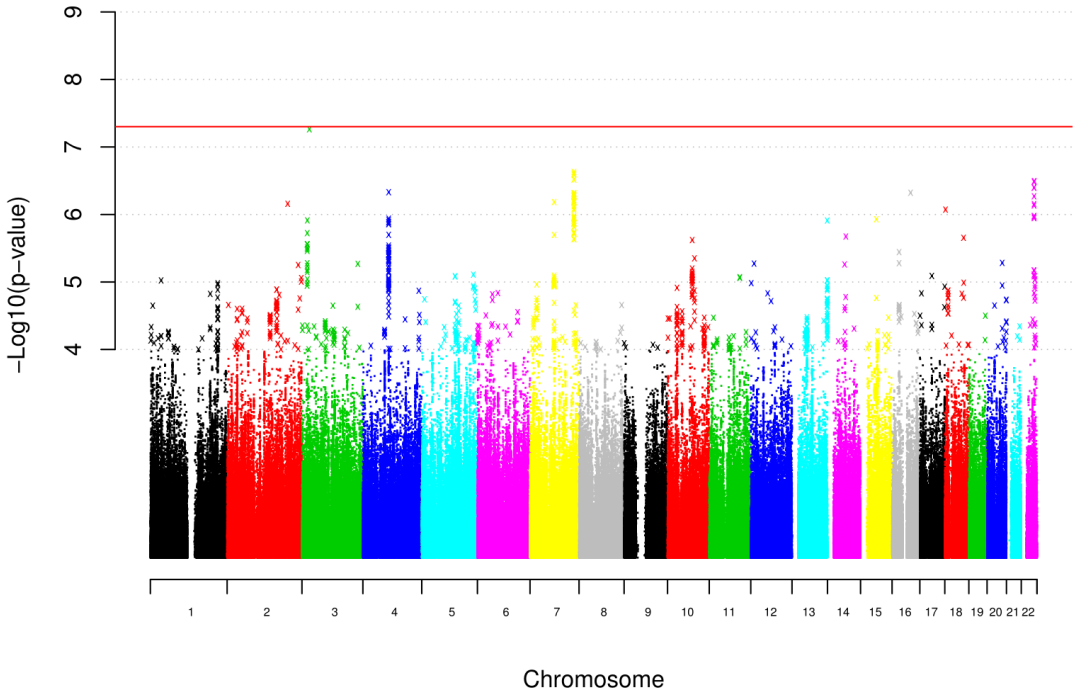
Supplementary Figure 1: Manhattan plot of individual variant GWAS results for MDD

Supplementary Figure 2



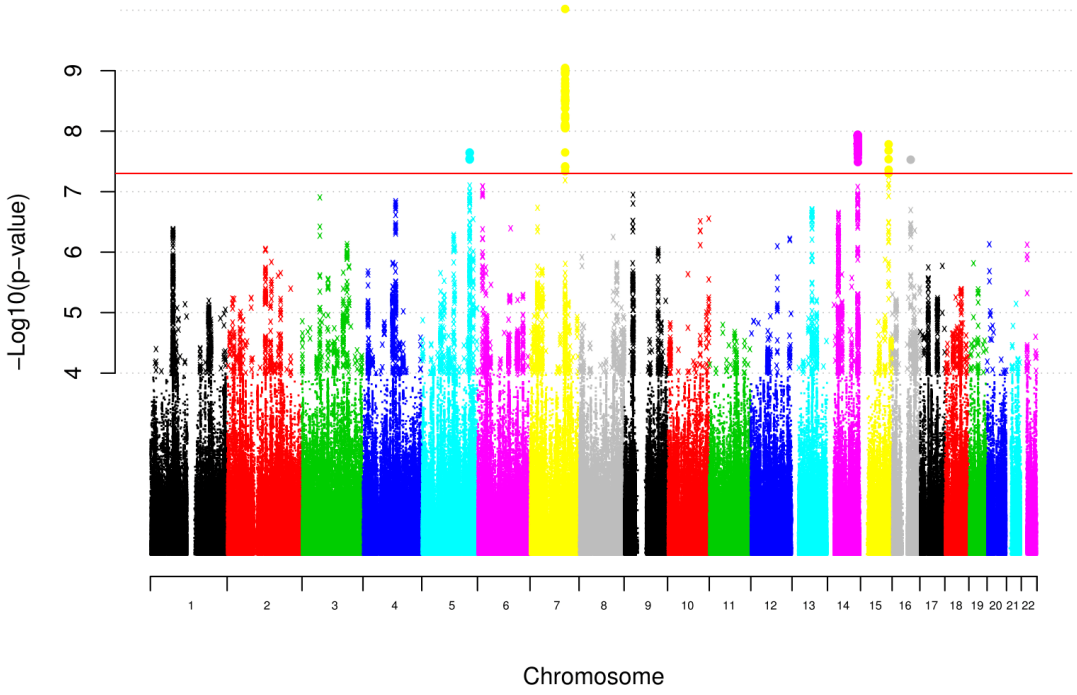
Supplementary Figure 2: Manhattan plot of individual variant GWAS results for MDD in individuals reporting trauma exposure

Supplementary Figure 3



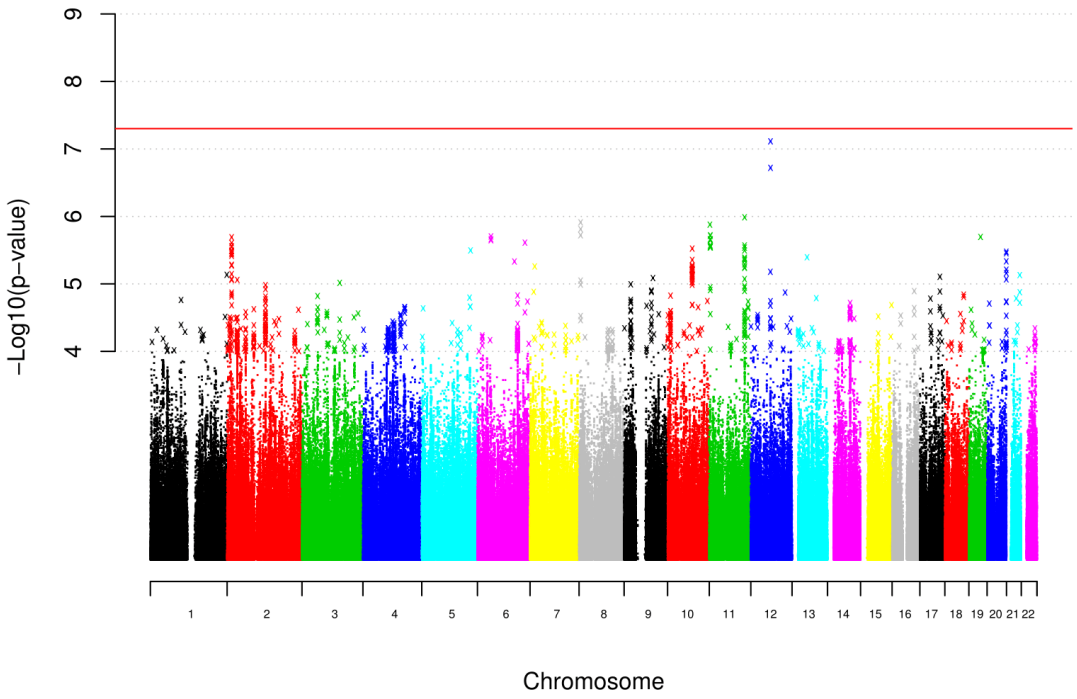
Supplementary Figure 3: Manhattan plot of individual variant GWAS results for MDD in individuals not reporting trauma exposure

Supplementary Figure 4



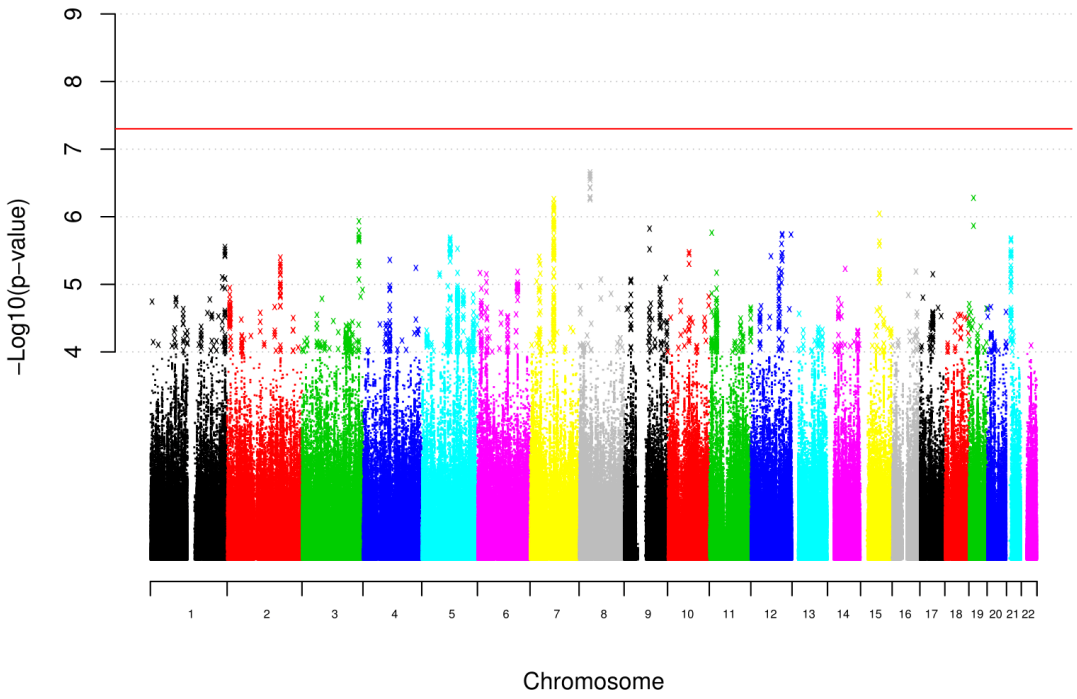
Supplementary Figure 4: Manhattan plot of individual variant GWAS results for reported trauma exposure

Supplementary Figure 5



Supplementary Figure 5: Manhattan plot of individual variant GWAS results for reported trauma exposure in MDD cases

Supplementary Figure 6



Supplementary Figure 6: Manhattan plot of individual variant GWAS results for reported trauma exposure in controls

Supplementary information for "Genome-wide gene-environment analyses of major depressive disorder and reported lifetime traumatic experiences in UK Biobank"

Supplementary Note

Defining reported trauma exposure

In this study, we sought to define reported trauma exposure with the aim of obtaining a single binary variable for stratification that reflected an overall exposure to a severe and potentially depressogenic environment. In doing so, we consulted a number of experts in the field of early-life trauma and stressful life events (including authors AD, BM, and MH among others). The complexity of defining reported trauma exposure is apparent from the multiple approaches that have been used in the field, and we do not suggest that the definition used here represents a gold-standard. However, we believe this is a reasonable definition of reported exposure given the necessary limitations of obtaining such data in a biobank-scale dataset.

Our definition included only items that were enriched in cases in this cohort, which we defined as having an OR > 2.5. This threshold results in only considering types of trauma more common in major depressive disorder (MDD) cases than in controls (Supplementary Table 2b). A side-effect of this is that the items on which we focus are more enriched in females than in males. As such, our enrichment for reported trauma exposure also reflects an enrichment for female sex, and for types of trauma that are more commonly reported by women.

We then defined individuals reporting two types of traumatic experience as reporters and those reporting no traumatic experiences as non-reporters. Individuals reporting only a single type of trauma were excluded. We did this because we wished to capture severe trauma, and felt that a single type of exposure may not represent such. This is imperfect, for a number of reasons. A single type of trauma may be depressogenic for a given individual, regardless of its wider effect in the population; however, the false positive rate of this more relaxed definition will be higher than a multi-item measure, given that 50% of the sample reported at least one traumatic experience. Reporting a type of trauma does not capture the severity of the trauma; however, the data available in the UK Biobank does not allow for a robust examination of trauma severity, and so multiple trauma reports are the best proxy available.

We included three measures of sexual trauma in our trauma definition. These are correlated, and so some participants may be defined as reporting trauma exposure from a single incident. However, the different sexual traumas are not nested; for example, within the analysed sample, only 3,758/7,179 (52%) individuals endorsing "interference by a partner" also endorsed "victim of sexual assault". This may result from semantic and contextual differences in how the questions were asked. The full sexual assault question is "*In your life, have you been a victim of a sexual assault, whether by a stranger or someone you knew"*, and the sexual interference question is "*Since I was sixteen, a partner or ex-partner sexually interfered with me, or forced me to have sex against my wishes"*. It is possible that participants felt that the first question encompassed more behaviours than the second. As such, we considered including all three items was justified, as excluding (for example) "interference by a partner" because it was correlated with "victim of

sexual assault" could result in misclassification of individuals reporting the former but not the latter.

Overlap with PGC major depression GWAS

The PGC major depression GWAS contained participants from UK Biobank [1]. Overlap of this kind upwardly biases results from polygenic risk scoring. Accordingly, we used a restricted set of summary statistics without these individuals (but including individuals from 23andMe [2]). This addressed the major source of overlap between these cohorts. Further overlap may exist, but is difficult to quantify, as individual-level data is not available for all individuals in the PGC major depression GWAS. However, the deviation of the LD Score genetic covariance intercept from 0 represents a crude measure of sample overlap, assuming there is no shared confounding (such as population stratification) between the cohorts tested [3,4]. The genetic covariance intercept in this case was -0.0061 (SE: 0.0063), indicating any remaining sample overlap is negligible.

Additive interactions - linear regression or RERI?

Linear regression was used in this analysis to test interaction as deviation from additivity, as has been used previously [5]. However, an alternative method would be to calculate relative excess risk from interactions (RERI; [6]), as has also been used previously [7]. The use of linear regression in this context is less well-described than RERI, and may give an inaccurate estimate of interaction when there are sizable differences between the proportion of cases in the sample and in the population. However, there is only a minor difference between the proportion of cases in the sample (31.7%) and the population incidence of self-reported depression in England (28% [8]), so this limitation is unlikely to affect our additive interaction analysis. As such, both methods were used.

Supplementary Methods

Further information on main analyses

Phenotype distribution

Participants were compared across a number of standard demographic variables and common correlates of MDD: sex, age (at questionnaire), education (university degree vs. not), neighbourhood socioeconomic status (SES, as Townsend deprivation index [9]) and BMI (recorded from measurements taken at the initial recruitment of the participants into the biobank). For dichotomous variables (sex and education), comparisons were made using chi-square tests. For approximately continuous variables (age, SES and BMI), the skewness and kurtosis of the distribution was checked, and roughly normal variables (absolute values of skewness (as b_1) and kurtosis (as b_2) <= 2; [10]) were compared using Welch's t-tests. Non-normal continuous variables were compared using Mann-Whitney U tests. All comparisons were performed in R.3.4.1, using skewness and kurtosis calculations from the e1071 package [10–12]. An additional breakdown of individual trauma items by sex was performed.

Genome Wide Association Studies (GWAS)

GWAS were performed using linear regressions on imputed genotype dosages in BGenie v1.2 [13], with residualised phenotypes. Deviance residuals were obtained from logistic regressions in R.3.4.1 [11]. Six principal components were used because investigations suggested this was necessary to control for geographical

variation in the dataset, and that increasing this number had negligible additional benefits (data not shown).

Results from each GWAS were clumped to define genetic loci in PLINK2 [14]. Loci were defined following established protocols [1]. Each locus comprised all variants with $p < 0.0001$ in linkage disequilibrium ($r_2 > 0.1$ in European subjects from the 1000 Genomes Phase 3 release [15]) with a nearby (< 3Mb) variant with a lower p-value. Neighbouring (< 50kb) or overlapping clumps were merged using bedtools [16]. Loci were annotated using RegionAnnotator v1.63 (https://github.com/ivankosmos/RegionAnnotator) to identify proximal (< 100kb from loci boundaries) features of interest using data from the NHGRI-EBI GWAS Catalog; OMIM; GENCODE genes; genes previously implicated in autism and/or intellectual disability; copy-number variants previously implicated in psychiatric disorders; and mouse knockout phenotypes.

Sensitivity analyses

Sensitivity analyses were performed as described below. For all analyses, phenotypes were residualised using the same process and covariates as described in the main text.

Reported trauma exposure

Three sets of analyses were performed comparing (i) all individuals reporting trauma exposure with those not reporting exposure, (ii) limiting just to MDD cases, and (iii) limiting just to controls. Participants included in the overall reported trauma exposure analysis, and the analyses stratified by MDD, were compared across the same phenotypic variables used in the main analysis. All analyses performed in the

main paper were repeated focussed on reported trauma exposure, with the exception of stratified heritability analyses, as we felt the results of such analyses would be difficult to interpret.

Covarying for age, education, neighbourhood SES and BMI

Analyses of MDD (overall, in individuals reporting trauma exposure, in individuals not reporting trauma exposure) and reported trauma exposure (overall, in cases, in controls) were repeated, retaining all previous covariates and including as further covariates age (at questionnaire), neighbourhood socioeconomic status (SES, as Townsend deprivation index [9]), BMI (at baseline assessment), and a binary variable of education (university degree vs. not). All analyses performed in the main paper (and as described above, focussed on reported trauma exposure) were repeated.

Downsampled cohorts

Most of the sample with data both on MDD symptoms and on reported trauma status were controls who did not report trauma (Table 1). To assess whether this disbalance in sample status affected our results, analyses of genetic correlations between external phenotypes and MDD (i) overall, (ii) in individuals reporting trauma exposure, and (iii) in individuals not reporting trauma exposure were repeated using ten downsampled cohorts. Downsampled cohorts were produced by downsampling both MDD case groups (reporting and not reporting trauma exposure) and the control group not reporting trauma exposure to 9,487 (the smallest group, controls reporting trauma exposure). Downsampling was performed in R 3.4.1, using random selections of individuals from each group, and was repeated ten times to reduce

selection biases [11]. Genetic correlations with all external phenotypes were performed in LD Score for each of the six analyses (MDD overall and stratified, and reported trauma exposure overall and stratified) as detailed in the main paper. The mean average SNP-heritability estimates and mean average standard errors from each of the ten cohorts were calculated. From each analysis, the average genetic correlation with each external phenotype was compared to the relevant correlation from the main analyses [17]. The difference between correlations with MDD in individuals reporting and not reporting trauma exposure were also compared, and then these differences were compared to those from the main analysis. All comparisons used two-sample z-tests. Use of the block jackknife was not possible as the results were averaged across downsampled cohorts. Equivalent comparisons were made for analyses of reported trauma exposure in cases and in controls.

Alternative definitions of reported trauma exposure

In order to test the robustness of our main finding (that the SNP-heritability of MDD is greater in individuals reporting trauma exposure compared to those who do not), we repeated this analysis with three alternative definitions of reported trauma exposure. Our first two alternatives altered the threshold for including MDD-relevant traumas, firstly decreasing the threshold from reporting two such traumas to reporting one, and secondly increasing it to reporting three MDD-relevant traumas. Our third alternative altered the definition itself to focus only on childhood traumas. We considered all five childhood traumas, and defined reported trauma exposure as a report of any of these five (Supplementary Table 2a). Traumas in adulthood and PTSD-relevant traumas were not considered for the purpose of this final alternative

(so individuals defined as not reporting trauma on this measure may still report traumatic experiences later in life).

Heritability analyses stratified by reported trauma exposure

We aimed to compare the SNP-heritability of MDD in individuals reporting trauma exposure with those not doing so. Typically, such a comparison could be achieved by converting the SNP-heritability estimates from the observed scale (which is dependent on the proportion of cases in the cohort) to the liability scale (independent of the proportion of cases in the study and of the population prevalence). We calculated the proportion of individuals with MDD in each group (i.e. we converted Table 1 from counts to proportions). We then assumed that the population prevalence of self-reported MDD = 28% [8] and that individuals with trauma exposure were sampled representatively from the population in cases and in controls. This allows the calculation of population prevalences for MDD in individuals reporting (52%) and not reporting trauma exposure (17%). With these estimates, and observed scale SNP-heritability estimates from BOLT-LMM, we estimated of liability scale SNP-heritability estimates for MDD in individuals reporting and not reporting trauma exposure, and compared them using a two-sample z-test (Supplementary Table 6).

However, the conversion from the observed to the liability scale assumes the genetic and environmental influences on the trait are independent - the correlation between MDD and reported trauma exposure violates this underlying assumption [18–20]. Furthermore, the sample is not divided by an purely environmental trait, because

trauma exposure is itself heritable. The impact of these concerns on estimates of the SNP heritability in each group is not intuitive.

Therefore, we performed a simulation study of SNP-level data in line with previous work [21]. In this simulation, we assumed the phenotypic link between MDD and reported trauma exposure was attributable to sharing of genetic and environmental effects without interaction (that is, gene-environment correlation alone). The prevalence of MDD was set at $K_{MDD} = 0.28$. The remaining simulation parameters were aligned with the empirical observations from the study: the prevalence of reported trauma exposure was set at $K_T = 0.32$ (assuming accurate sampling of reported trauma exposure from the population of cases and of controls), while the liability-scale heritabilities were set at $h^2_{l,MDD} = 0.20$ and $h^2_{l,T} = 0.24$. BOLT-LMM was used to empirically estimate the genetic correlation between MDD and reported trauma exposure at $r_g = 0.76$ and the environmental correlation at $r_e = 0.31$. These values were used as the first parameterization (parametrization #1) and fixed the phenotypic OR between MDD and reported trauma exposure at 3.1. The empirical OR, however, was estimated at 5.2. Therefore, a second parameterization was simulated by increasing $r_e = 0.5$ and thereby fixing the phenotypic OR at 5.2 (parametrization #2). For these parameterizations, 1,000 SNPs were simulated with random minor allele frequencies (MAF) uniformly distributed between 0.05 and 0.5. The SNP-effects for MDD (β_{MDD}) and reported trauma exposure (β_T) were drawn from a bivariate normal distribution with variances $h^2_{l,MDD} = 0.20$ and $h^2_{l,T} = 0.24$ and covariance $r_g\sqrt{h^2_{l,MDD}h^2_{l,T}}$. An individual was simulated by randomly assigning genotypes with probabilities in line with the MAFs. The genetic value for MDD was estimated as $g_{MDD} = \sum_i \beta_{MDD,i}(genotype_i - 2MAF_i)/(2MAF_i(1 - MAF_i))$ with i

iterating over the 1,000 SNPs, and the genetic values for reported trauma exposure were estimated analogously. The environmental values for MDD (e_{MDD}) and reported trauma exposure (e_T) were drawn from a bivariate normal distribution with variances $1 - h^2_{l,MDD}$ and $1 - h^2_{l,T}$ and covariance $r_e\sqrt{(1 - h^2_{l,MDD})(1 - h^2_{l,T})}$. The values on the liability scale were subsequently estimated as $l_{MDD} = g_{MDD} + e_{MDD}$ and $l_T = g_T + e_T$. MDD was set at 1 when $l_{MDD} \geq \phi^{-1}(1 - K_{MDD})$ and 0 otherwise, while reported trauma exposure was set 1 when $l_T \geq \phi^{-1}(1 - K_T)$ and 0 otherwise (ϕ^{-1} is the standard normal cumulative distribution function). For both parametrizations, individuals were simulated one-by-one until we had collected 4,000 of each of: cases reporting trauma exposure (MDD_1T_1), controls reporting trauma exposure (MDD_0T_1), cases not reporting trauma exposure (MDD_1T_0), and controls not reporting trauma exposure (MDD_0T_0). The data were merged for MDD_1T_1-MDD_0T_1 and MDD_1T_0-MDD_0T_0. Subsequently, cross-product Haseman Elston regression was applied to estimate the heritability of MDD in individuals reporting trauma exposure and in individuals not reporting trauma exposure respectively. The observed scale heritabilities were converted to the liability scale based on a prevalence of MDD in individuals reporting trauma exposure of $K_{MDD|T=1} = 0.45$ and in individuals not reporting trauma exposure of $K_{MDD|T=0} = 0.20$, as follows from $K_{MDD} = 0.28$ and $K_T = 0.32$ with $OR = 3.1$ (i.e. parametrization #1) [22]. For parametrization #2, these respective prevalences were $K_{MDD|T=1} = 0.52$ and $K_{MDD|T=0} = 0.17$ (as follows from $K_{MDD} = 0.28$ and $K_T = 0.32$ with $OR = 5.2$). For both parameterizations, simulations were repeated 100 times.

With these simulations an average liability scale heritability of MDD $\hat{h}^2_{l,MDD|T=1} = 0.148$ (SE over 100 iterations of 0.002) was found in individuals

reporting trauma exposure, and $\hat{h}^2_{l,MDD|T=0} = 0.157$ in individuals not reporting trauma exposure for parameterization #1. For parameterization #2, heritabilities were estimated as $\hat{h}^2_{l,MDD|T=1} = 0.145\ (0.002)$ and $\hat{h}^2_{l,MDD|T=0} = 0.154\ (0.001)$ respectively. Thus, the heritability estimates were slightly larger in individuals not reporting trauma exposure compared to individuals reporting trauma exposure. This contrasts our empirical findings where the heritability was larger in individuals reporting trauma exposure compared to individuals not reporting trauma exposure. Thus, these simulations suggest that our empirical findings were not directly attributable to bias from the heritable component of reported trauma exposure, nor by the transformation of the observed scale heritability to the liability scale. At the same time, however, we would like to emphasize that we did not address different sources of potential bias from other genetic architectures than those simulated, from intrinsic challenges of heritability estimation from case-control data [21,23], or from potential collider bias resulting from selection bias [24].

Comparing two genetic correlations using block jackknife and LD Score

Define four phenotypes: A, B, C, and D. We wished to compare the genetic correlation of A and B to the genetic correlation of C and D. Global estimates of these correlations, denoted $r(A,B)$ and $r(C,D)$, can be computed using LD Score. The same software can output jackknife delete values for genetic covariance: $G(A,B)$, $G(C,D)$, as well as for heritability: $H(A,B)$ and $H(C,D)$. These jackknife delete values are estimated by excluding blocks of values (here, number of blocks n = 200). The n-dimensional vectors $G(A,B)$, $G(C,D)$, $H(A,B)$ and $H(C,D)$ can be used to generate genetic correlation delete values $R(A,B)$ and $R(C,D)$. The difference between the global estimates $r(A,B)$ and $r(C,D)$ is $d(AB,CD)$ and the difference

between the vectors $R(A,B)$ and $R(C,D)$ is $D(AB,CD)$. The global genetic correlation difference $d(AB,CD)$ and the delete values $D(AB,CD)$ are used to compute jackknife pseudovalues. The ith pseudovalue is:

$$P_i(AB,CD) = n \times d(AB,CD) - (n-1) * D_i(AB,CD)$$

The mean and variance of the jackknife pseudovalues are:

$$m(AB,CD) = \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} P_i(AB,CD)$$

$$v(AB,CD) = \frac{1}{n-1}\sum_{i=1}^{n} (P_i(AB,CD) - m(AB,CD))^2$$

The jackknife estimate of the difference between the two correlations m(AB,CD) can then be compared to test H0 : $\theta = \theta_0$ (where $\theta_0 = 0$ for no difference between genetic correlations), and a p-value can be derived from the z statistic:

$$z(AB,CD) = \frac{m(AB,CD) - \theta_0}{\sqrt{(1/n) \times v(AB,CD)}}$$

Gene environment interaction analyses (variant level)

In addition to the analyses described in the main text, we performed exploratory analyses to determine if the variants with the strongest main effects in the analyses of MDD and reported trauma exposure (overall and stratified) showed interaction effects. Specifically, index SNPs with a nominally significant main effect ($p<0.0001$) in one or more of the six analyses were tested for SNP-by-reported

trauma exposure interactions associated with MDD. (Similar analyses were performed assessing SNP-by-MDD interactions and reported trauma exposure, but results were effectively identical to those for SNP-by-reported trauma interactions and are not shown.) Interaction models were calculated in R.3.4.1 [11]. SNP dosages were extracted from imputed data using PLINK2.0 [14]. SNP, reported trauma and genetic principal components were mean-centred and scaled to have a standard deviation of 1 (i.e. converted to Z scores). To assess interactions as departure from multiplicativity, logistic regressions were performed regressing MDD on the main effect of reported trauma exposure, SNP, covariates (as used in the GWAS), SNP-by-reported trauma exposure interaction terms, SNP-by-covariate interaction terms and reported trauma exposure-by-covariate interaction terms [25,26]. Further analyses were performed to assess interactions as departure from additivity as above using linear regressions. SNP-trauma interaction terms were considered experiment-wide significant if they passed Bonferroni correction for the 1,652 SNPs assessed ($p \approx 3 \times 10^{-5}$), and genome-wide significant if $p \leq 5 \times 10^{-8}$.

Supplementary Results

Sensitivity analyses

Analyses focussed on reported trauma exposure

Individuals reporting trauma exposure differed significantly from those who did not: they were mostly females, significantly younger, more likely to have a degree, came from more deprived neighbourhoods, and had higher BMI at recruitment (all p

< 0.05; Supplementary Table 4). Genome-wide association analyses identified six significant loci when comparing individuals reporting trauma exposure to those who did not, which remained significant when assessed with logistic regression (Supplementary Figures 4-6). These loci have previously been implicated in genetic studies of a variety of phenotypes, including attention deficit disorder, schizophrenia and educational attainment, but did not overlap with the locus identified in the MDD analyses (Supplementary Table 7). No analysis showed evidence of genome-wide inflation that was attributable to confounding (95% confidence intervals of all regression intercepts from LD Score heritability estimation overlapped 1; Supplementary Table 6). The liability-scale SNP-heritability estimate for reported trauma exposure (24% [22-26%], assuming a population prevalence of 32%, equivalent to representative sampling from the population in cases and in controls) was in excess of that for MDD (20%, Z-test p = 0.006).

Genetic correlations were calculated between all internal phenotypes (Supplementary Table 8). The genetic correlation between reported trauma exposure in cases and in controls was high (r_g = 0.737 [95% CI: 0.493-0.981]; difference from 0: p = 3.33 x 10^{-9}; difference from 1: p = 0.0349). Genetic correlations of reported trauma exposure with body composition phenotypes and with educational attainment were significantly larger in cases than the equivalent correlations in controls (Supplementary Figure 7; Supplementary Table 9).

Individuals with higher MDD PRS were more likely to report a trauma exposure, and a significant additive interaction term was observed from linear regression - the combined effect of PRS and reported trauma exposure was greater than the sum of the individual effects (beta > 0, Supplementary Table 10). However, the multiplicative interaction term was not significant (p > 0.01). Individuals with

higher BMI risk scores were more likely to be report a trauma exposure, although this only passed correction for multiple testing in cases. Both the additive (beta > 0) and the multiplicative (OR > 0) interaction terms were significant, suggesting the combined risk of MDD from BMI PRS and reported trauma exposure together was greater than expected from both the sum of the individual risks and from their product, respectively (OR > 1).

Covarying for BMI, age, SES and education

Approximately 1% of the cohort did not provide information on one or more of these variables, resulting in a minor difference in sample size across all analyses (Supplementary Table 12).

No additional loci passed genome-wide significance in any analysis. The locus passing genome-wide significance in the overall MDD analysis, and four of the six loci from the overall reported trauma exposure analyses, remained significant when controlling for the additional covariates (Supplementary Table 13). There was no evidence of confounding introduced by controlling for these additional covariates (all LD Score intercepts contained 1; Supplementary Table 14).

Estimates of the SNP-heritability of MDD overall (19% [17-21%]) and in individuals reporting trauma exposure (22% [16-29%]) were attenuated compared to the overall analysis, but remained constant in those not reporting trauma exposure (12% [7-16%]; Supplementary Table 14). Despite this, the SNP-heritability of MDD remained significantly greater in individuals reporting trauma exposure than in those not reporting trauma exposure ($p = 0.01$). Similarly, estimates of the SNP-heritability of reported trauma exposure were attenuated (23% [21-25%]).

Genetic correlations with external phenotypes did not differ substantially with and without the additional covariates in any analysis (all z-test $p < 0.05$), with the exception of the correlations with BMI, body fat percentage and fat mass, all of which were significantly diminished in the overall MDD analysis when the additional covariates were included (z-test $p = 0.01$-0.03). The genetic correlation of waist circumference with MDD no longer differed significantly between individuals reporting and not reporting trauma exposure. In the analyses of reported trauma exposure, genetic correlations with BMI, fat mass, hip circumference and waist-hip ratio no longer differed significantly between cases and controls. However, the correlation between reported trauma exposure and total body (less head) bone mineral density became significantly larger in cases compared to controls (Supplementary Table 16).

PRS analyses differed only in analyses involving the BMI PRS. BMI PRS was no longer associated with MDD or reported trauma exposure in any analysis, and no interactions including the BMI PRS remained significant after correcting for multiple testing (Supplementary Table 17).

Genetic correlations using downsampled cohorts

Genetic correlation analyses with external phenotypes were rerun using ten cohorts downsampled such that each group had 9,487 participants (Supplementary Table 18). Mean average genetic correlations with MDD were attenuated across most phenotypes when compared to the original results, but these reductions were not significant in any instance (two-sample z-tests, all $p > 0.05$). Similarly, differences in correlations with MDD between individuals reporting trauma exposure and individuals not reporting trauma exposure were reduced compared to the original

results, but not significantly so (two-sample z-tests, all $p > 0.05$). However, due to this reduction, no differences in genetic correlations with MDD between individuals reporting and not reporting trauma exposure remained significant after multiple testing correction in this downsampled cohort. As such, we conclude that the differences observed in the genetic correlations with MDD between individuals reporting and not reporting trauma exposure are robust, but their magnitude is likely to be increased by the differences in size between the different groups.

SNP-heritability of MDD using alternative definitions of reported trauma exposure

We repeated our analyses of SNP-heritability in MDD using alternative definitions of reported trauma exposure in order to test the robustness of this principal finding from the main paper. Results did not qualitatively differ from those in the main paper: for all definitions of reported trauma exposure, the SNP-heritability of MDD was significantly greater in individuals reporting trauma exposure than in those not doing so (Supplementary Table 19).

Altering the threshold for including MDD-relevant traumas resulted in a dosage-like effect, whereby increasing the number of reported traumas required increased the SNP-heritability of MDD in individuals reporting trauma exposure (21% to 24% to 28%). However, increasing the threshold reduced the number of individuals defined as reporting trauma exposure. Consequently, the power decreased with higher thresholds, as did the significance of the difference in MDD SNP-heritability between those reporting and not reporting trauma exposure.

Limiting the trauma items considered just to the childhood items altered the composition of both the group reporting and the group not reporting trauma exposure (Compare the two previous alternative definitions, in which the composition of the

group not reporting trauma remained constant.) Although the difference in MDD SNP-heritability between the trauma-reporting and non-reporting groups was smaller using this final alternative definition, the greater power of this definition meant that the difference remained significant.

SNP environment interaction analyses

Analyses were performed for the 1,652 index SNPs ($p < 0.0001$ in at least one of the six analyses) to assess the association of SNP-trauma interactions with MDD. Multiplicative interaction effects at experiment-wide significance ($p < 3x10^{-5}$) were observed at 78 variants, with the most significant interaction (with rs143276464) reaching genome-wide significance ($p = 2.42x10^{-9}$; Supplementary Table 20). In the case of rs143276464, the probability of MDD increases with each additional minor allele in individuals reporting trauma exposure, but decreases with each additional minor allele in those who do not report exposure.

Additive interaction effects at experiment-wide significance ($p < 3x10^{-5}$) were observed at 85 variants, although none reached genome-wide significance (Supplementary Table 20). 31/85 of the interactions with significant additive interaction effects also showed significant multiplicative interaction effects.

Replication of the observed interactions was sought in a previous analysis of genetic variant-by-trauma interactions with MDD (N = 3944, [27]) and in similar data from Generation Scotland (N = 629, unpublished). No interaction was significantly associated in both replication datasets.

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