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# The genetic and environmental origins of emotional and cognitive empathy: Review and meta-analyses of twin studies

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## Abstract

Empathy is considered a cornerstone of human social experience, and as such has been widely investigated from psychological and neuroscientific approaches. To better understand the factors influencing individual differences in empathy, we reviewed and meta-analyzed the behavioral genetic literature of emotional empathy- sharing others' emotions (k=13), and cognitive empathy- understanding others' emotions (k = 15), as manifested in twin studies. Results showed that emotional empathy is more heritable, 48.3 % [41.3 %-50.6 %], than cognitive empathy, 26.9 % [18.1 %-35.8 %]. Moreover, cognitive empathy as examined by performance tests was affected by the environment shared by family members, 11.9 % [2.6 %-21.0 %], suggesting that emotional understanding is influenced, to some degree, by environmental factors that have similar effects on family members beyond their genetic relatedness. The effects of participants' age and the method

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