Common variants in the *JAZF1* gene associated with height identified by linkage and genome-wide association analysis

Åsa Johansson¹, Fabio Marroni², Caroline Hayward³, Christopher S. Franklin⁴, Anatoly V. Kirichenko⁵, Inger Jonasson¹, Andrew A. Hicks², Veronique Vitart³, Aaron Isaacs⁶, Tatiana Axenovich⁵, Susan Campbell³, Malcolm G. Dunlop⁶, Jamie Floyd⁶, Nick Hastie³, Albert Hofman⁶, Sara Knott¹⁰, Ivana Kolcic¹¹, Irene Pichler², Ozren Polasek¹¹, Fernando Rivadeneira⁷, Albert Tenesa⁸, André G. Uitterlinden⁷, Sarah H. Wild⁴, Irina V. Zorkoltseva⁵, Thomas Meitinger¹², James F. Wilson⁴, Igor Rudan⁴,¹³,¹⁴ Harry Campbell⁴, Cristian Pattaro², Peter Pamstaller²,¹⁵ Ben A. Oostra⁶, Alan F. Wright³, Cornelia M. van Duijn⁶, Yuri S. Aulchenko⁶ and Ulf Gyllensten¹, on behalf of the EUROSPAN Consortium

¹Rudbeck Laboratory, Department of Genetics and Pathology, Uppsala University, SE-751 85 Uppsala, Sweden, ²Institute of Genetic Medicine, European Academy, Viale Druso 1, I-39100 Bolzano, Italy, ³MRC Human Genetics Unit, Institute of Genetics and Molecular Medicine, Western General Hospital, Edinburgh EH4 2XU, UK, ⁴Public Health Sciences, University of Edinburgh, Teviot Place, Edinburgh EH8 9AG, UK, ⁵Siberian Division of Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Cytology and Genetics, 630090 Novosibirsk, Russia, ⁶Genetic Epidemiology Unit, Department of Epidemiology and Clinical Genetics and, ⁷Genetic Laboratory, Department of Internal Medicine, Erasmus University Medical Center, PO Box 2040, 3000 CA, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, ⁸Colon Cancer Genetics Group, Institute of Genetics and Molecular Medicine, MRC Human Genetics Unit, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh EH4 2XU, UK, ⁹The Roslin Institute, Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, Roslin BioCentre, University of Edinburgh, Midlothian EH25 9PS, UK, ¹⁰Institute of Evolutionary Biology, University of Edinburgh, West Mains Road, Edinburgh EH9 3JT, UK, ¹¹Andrija Stampar School of Public Health, University of Zagreb Medical School, Rockefellerova 4, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia, ¹²Institute of Human Genetics, Helmholtz Zentrum München, German Research Center for Environmental Health (GmbH), Ingolstaedter Landstr. 1, D-85764 Neuherberg, Germany, ¹³Croatian Centre for Global Health, University of Split Medical School, Soltsanska 2, 21000 Split, Croatia, ¹⁴Institute for Clinical Medical Research, University Hospital ‘Sestre Milosrdnice’, Zagreb, Croatia and ¹⁵Department of Neurology, Central Hospital, Bolzano, Italy

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Genes for height have gained interest for decades, but only recently have candidate genes started to be identified. We have performed linkage analysis and genome-wide association for height in approximately 4000 individuals from five European populations. A total of five chromosomal regions showed suggestive linkage and in one of these regions, two SNPs (rs849140 and rs1635852) were associated with height (nominal $P = 7.0 \times 10^{-8}$ and $P = 9.6 \times 10^{-7}$, respectively). In total, five SNPs across the genome showed an association with height that reached the threshold of genome-wide significance (nominal $P < 1.6 \times 10^{-8}$). The association with height was replicated for two SNPs (rs1635852 and rs849140) using three independent studies ($n = 31\,077, n = 1268$ and $n = 5746$) with overall meta $P$-values of $9.4 \times 10^{-10}$ and $5.3 \times 10^{-8}$. These SNPs are located in the *JAZF1* gene, which has recently been associated with type II diabetes, prostate and endometrial cancer. *JAZF1* is a transcriptional repressor of *NR2C2*, which results in low IGF1 serum concentrations, perinatal and...

*To whom correspondence should be addressed. Tel: +46 184714909; Fax: +46 184714931; Email: ulf.gyllensten@genpat.uu.se

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early postnatal hypoglycemia and growth retardation when knocked out in mice. Both the linkage and association analyses independently identified the JAZF1 region affecting human height. We have demonstrated, through replication in additional independent populations, the consistency of the effect of the JAZF1 SNPs on height. Since this gene also has a key function in the metabolism of growth, JAZF1 represents one of the strongest candidates influencing human height identified so far.

INTRODUCTION

The genetic architecture of anthropometric measures is largely unknown. Height displays a very high heritability, indicating a strong contribution of genetic factors to its normal variation, but progress in identifying these factors has been relatively slow. During the last year, a number of genes or chromosomal regions have been identified that are associated with height (1–5). The large sample sizes needed and the low overlap between studies in terms of the regions identified indicate a complex inheritance pattern with many contributing gene variants of small effect, which explain a relatively low fraction of the variance in body height.

One approach to increase the power of linkage and association analyses is to focus on populations with an increased level of linkage disequilibrium (LD) and reduced diversity. LD mapping has been suggested to be more efficient in populations with increased LD, and a smaller sample size will be required using this approach to achieve the same power as in general population studies (6). Recent findings have demonstrated that studies of isolated populations also benefit from a reduction in environmental heterogeneity (7), which, in combination with lower genetic variability, may further increase the power to detect genomic regions affecting a complex trait compared with that of similar studies undertaken in general populations.

We have performed linkage and genome-wide association (GWA) analyses for height in four (linkage) or five (association) geographically and environmentally distinct European populations (Fig. 1). Data for linkage studies were available from populations of northern Swedish villages (Sweden), Alpine settlements in South Tyrol (Italy), the Vis island in the Adriatic Sea (Croatia) and a Dutch village (Netherlands), from now on referred to as the Swedish, South Tyrolean, Croatian and Dutch populations. GWA data were available for these four populations and a fifth additional population from the Orkney Islands (Scotland), subsequently referred to as the Scottish population.

RESULTS

Trait distribution and heritability

The distribution of height was similar in the different populations (Table 1). The highest average height (176 and 161.4 cm for males and females, respectively) was seen in the Croatian population and the lowest average height (173.1 and 160.6 cm for males and females, respectively) in the South Tyrolean population. The heritability was high and highly significant in all populations analyzed separately or jointly, and when stratified by gender (Table 2). The heritability, estimated in the linkage analysis, varied from 0.79 for the South Tyrolean population to 1 for the Swedish population and was higher when estimated for males and females separately. In contrast, the heritability based on the joint analysis of the five populations was similar to the average heritability estimated for the populations separately.

Linkage analysis

Linkage data were available from four of the populations. A total of five chromosomal regions reached the threshold of suggestive linkage (Table 3). For three of these regions, the highest LOD score was obtained in the joint analysis either for males and females together or separately, even though one population was the major contributor to the LOD score (Fig. 2). In the remaining two linkage regions (Table 3), the overall LOD score was mainly due to strong effects in one of the populations.

Association mapping in linkage regions

We next investigated the association between SNPs and the trait in the linkage regions. The five linkage regions were large and included between 887 and 3176 SNPs each, with a total of 9852 examined. Only in the region on chromosome 7 did any of the SNPs show evidence of association with height in the meta-analysis (Table 3). In this region, two neighboring SNPs (rs849140 and rs1635852) were associated with height ($P < 0.05$ after Bonferroni correction for 9852 SNPs tested). Both these SNPs are located within the JAZF1 gene.

Genome-wide association

The meta-analysis of the GWA data from the five populations identified five SNPs that reached the threshold of genome-wide significance ($P < 0.05$) after Bonferroni correction for the number of SNPs tested: rs12106790 (nominal $P = 3.8 \times 10^{-8}$), rs11205415 (nominal $P = 6.7 \times 10^{-8}$), rs849140 (nominal $P = 7.0 \times 10^{-8}$), rs1772810 (nominal $P = 1.0 \times 10^{-7}$) and rs17051743 (nominal $P = 1.6 \times 10^{-7}$). None of these SNPs was associated (nominal $P < 0.05$) in all five populations, and the strongest signal was in four of the cases obtained for males separately and in one case for females (Supplementary Material, Table S2). One SNP was associated in four of the populations, two SNPs were associated in three populations and two SNPs were associated in two populations. All five SNPs associated with height were located within or in proximity (<40 kb upstream) to a known gene, and one of the SNPs (rs849140) was located within the JAZF1, and...
corresponds to one of the SNPs under the linkage peak described earlier.

**Replication of our top SNP association findings**

We used three different studies to attempt to replicate our findings on height. The recently published data from Gudbjartsson et al. (1) include information on all SNPs associated with height (P < 10^{-4}) within a large data set of 25,174 Icelanders, 2,876 Dutch, 1,770 European Americans, 3,025 individuals of European descent from the Diabetes Genetics Initiative (DGI) and 1,148 African Americans. Only one of the SNPs (rs1635852) associated with height in our data set was present among the top SNPs (P < 10^{-4}) identified in the data set by Gudbjartsson et al., where it had a P-value of 7.7 × 10^{-5} in the European populations alone (n = 31,077) or 8.2 × 10^{-7} when the African American populations were also included (n = 32,225). This SNP is located 5,709 bp downstream of the SNP showing the strongest association with height in our data set (rs849140) and was detected as a candidate SNP within one of our linkage regions (Fig. 3). Both rs1635852 and rs849140 are located in the last intron of the JAZ1F gene and are in strong LD (r^2 = 0.61, 0.60, 0.75, 0.59 and 0.47 in the Croatian, Dutch, Scottish, South Tyrolean and Swedish populations, respectively).

We further investigated our six top-ranked SNP–height associations in 1268 individuals (494 cases with colorectal cancer and 774 healthy controls) of Scottish descent and recruited from the general Scottish population for the COGS (COlorectal Cancer Genetics Susceptibility) Study (8,9). One (rs849140) of the SNPs within JAZ1F was associated (nominal P = 0.03) with height in this study. Finally, we used data from the Rotterdam Study (n = 5746), a population-based follow-up Dutch cohort (10). In this cohort, both rs1635852 and rs849140 were associated with height (P = 0.003 and P = 0.001, respectively). In all the 11 populations of European descent [five from European Special Population Network (EUROSPAN), four from Gudbjartsson et al., one from the Rotterdam Study and one from the COGS], for which the information on effect sizes was available, the effect was in the same direction (Table 4), and the overall meta P-values including all available populations were estimated to be 9.4 × 10^{-10} and 5.3 × 10^{-8} for rs1635852 and rs849140, respectively.

**Replication of recent findings in our data set**

We also tested the findings of three recently published meta-analyses (1,2,4) in our data set. A total of 61 SNPs were significantly associated with height in the three studies, 33 of which could be evaluated in our study (Supplementary Material, Table S3). Eighteen of these 33 SNPs (located in 27 different regions) showed an association (P < 0.05) with height in our sample. Two of these SNPs were strongly associated (P < 0.05 after correcting for 33 SNPs tested) with height in our sample; rs6854783 (P = 4.26 × 10^{-5}) located in the HHIP region and rs8756 (P = 4.4 × 10^{-4}) located in the HMGA2 gene.

**DISCUSSION**

We have performed joint linkage and association under the linkage peaks, along with GWA analyses in a set of diverse European populations. These populations were selected because prior genealogical information and/or previous

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Table 1. Average (standard deviation) for age (years) and height (cm) in the five populations by sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age at study average (standard deviation)</th>
<th>Height average (standard deviation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Croatian</td>
<td>Males (n = 305)</td>
<td>54.9 (15.9)</td>
<td>176 (7.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females (n = 415)</td>
<td>56.5 (16.5)</td>
<td>161.4 (6.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Males (n = 354)</td>
<td>50.1 (14.5)</td>
<td>173.5 (7.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females (n = 564)</td>
<td>48.8 (14.6)</td>
<td>161.3 (6.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>Males (n = 334)</td>
<td>54.2 (15.7)</td>
<td>174.8 (6.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females (n = 385)</td>
<td>53.0 (15.7)</td>
<td>161.0 (6.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>Males (n = 309)</td>
<td>43.2 (10.9)</td>
<td>174.7 (8.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females (n = 347)</td>
<td>45.2 (10.8)</td>
<td>160.8 (6.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Tyrolean</td>
<td>Males (n = 475)</td>
<td>45.6 (15.8)</td>
<td>173.1 (7.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females (n = 622)</td>
<td>46.1 (16.5)</td>
<td>160.6 (6.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Heritability of height

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Height Heritability (standard error)</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joint both sexes</td>
<td>0.89 (0.027)</td>
<td>3.3 × 10^{-15}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint males</td>
<td>1.00 (NA)</td>
<td>1.8 × 10^{-4}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint females</td>
<td>0.95 (0.051)</td>
<td>1.6 × 10^{-7}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatian</td>
<td>0.93 (0.076)</td>
<td>7.7 × 10^{-21}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>0.89 (0.038)</td>
<td>4.6 × 10^{-76}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>1.00 (NA)</td>
<td>1.2 × 10^{-27}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Tyrolean</td>
<td>0.79 (0.063)</td>
<td>5.7 × 10^{-33}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only the populations from the linkage analysis are included—Croatian, Dutch, Swedish and South Tyrolean.
molecular studies indicated that they have increased LD and decreased genetic diversity compared with general populations. The linkage analysis results showed little overlap between the four populations. Most of the regions with suggestive linkage were identified in the joint analysis, but in the majority of cases, the dominant contribution to the LOD score came from a single population. This is expected, since linkage is most powerful to detect rare alleles which have large effects on the trait and which are more likely to vary across populations. Of the five linkage regions, only the one on chromosome 7 also showed evidence for association. This low overlap might reflect the different power of linkage and association methods in detecting rare alleles with large effect versus common variants with small effects and implies that the specific variants underlying the linkage signal might not be those responsible for the association findings. However, we cannot exclude the possibility that some of the regions identified in the linkage analysis represent false positives.

In conclusion, we have identified novel common variants associated with normal variation in height in a study of 3925 individuals from five diverse European populations. This is one of the first studies of common variants for human height performed on family-based population samples across Europe. In total, we identified two SNPs associated to variation in height, which also replicate in up to six different populations. The SNP (rs849140) showing the strongest association with height replicated in 1268 unrelated individuals of Scottish ancestry and \((n = 5746)\) of Dutch descent. A nearby SNP

### Table 3. Chromosomal regions with evidence of linkage to height and the best association for each region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Chromosome</th>
<th>deCODE (cM)</th>
<th>Position(^a) (Mb)</th>
<th>No SNPs</th>
<th>LOD(^b)</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Best association</th>
<th>(P)-value</th>
<th>(P)\textsuperscript{c}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>77–94</td>
<td>51–72</td>
<td>2582</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Joint</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>(4.9 \times 10^{-5})</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22–40</td>
<td>8–29</td>
<td>3176</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Sum(^d)</td>
<td>Males(^e)</td>
<td>(7.0 \times 10^{-8})</td>
<td>(6.9 \times 10^{-4})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>109–123</td>
<td>108–120</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>(1.5 \times 10^{-5})</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>93–104</td>
<td>72–80</td>
<td>1193</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>(7.3 \times 10^{-6})</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>91–95</td>
<td>52–63</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Joint</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>(6.7 \times 10^{-5})</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)Build 36.2.
\(^b\)Suggestive LOD of 2.69 is based on seven subpopulations: Swedish, South Tyrolean, Croatian, Dutch, Females, Males and All populations jointly. Suggestive LOD of \(>3.47\) based on combining LOD scores for the four subpopulations (Swedish, Croatian, South Tyrolean, Dutch).
\(^c\)\(P\)-value corrected for the number of SNPs in the region and the total number of regions evaluated for the trait. NS, not significant \((P > 0.05)\).
\(^d\)Sum of the LOD scores for the four subpopulations (Swedish, Croatian, South Tyrolean, Dutch).
\(^e\)The best association is to rs849140, which is located in the \textit{JAZF1} gene.

![Figure 2. QTL on chromosome 7 for height. The signal in the summarized LOD score is mainly based on the signal from the Swedish population, with contribution also from the Croatian populations.](image)

![Figure 3. Manhattan plot of the \textit{JAZF1} region on chromosome 7. Associations \((-\log_{10}\) nominal \(P\)-value) for males are showed for all SNPs in the \textit{JAZF1} region. The top SNPs (rs1635852 from the linkage region) and rs849140 (from the linkage region and the genome-wide analysis) are all located within the first intron of the \textit{JAZF1} gene.](image)
(rs1635852) was also associated with height in a recently published data set (four populations of European descent) by Gudbjartsson et al. (1) from approximately 31,000 individuals. This SNP also showed an association was also present in the 5,746 individuals of Dutch descent. Interestingly, the effect sizes were quite similar across populations ranging from 0.18 cm for rs1635852 in the South Tyrolean population to 0.57 cm for rs849140 in the Scottish population from the COGS study. The two SNPs, rs1635852 and rs849140, are both located in the chromosome 7 linkage region (Fig. 3) and are in LD with each other. Both SNPs are located in the first intron of the JAZF1 gene. JAZF1 has recently been associated with type 2 diabetes (11), prostate cancer (12) and endometrial cancer (13). JAZF1, also known as TIP27, encodes a transcriptional repressor of NR2C2, also known as TAK1 or TR4 (14). Mice deficient in NR2C2 show low IGF1 serum concentrations and perinatal and early postnatal hypoglycemia, as well as growth retardation (15). As a transcriptional repressor of a gene that causes growth retardation in mice, JAZF1 is a good candidate also to affect variation in human height. JAZF1 has a key function in the metabolism of growth, and our results show that it has a consistent pattern of association to variation in height across 11 populations. This makes JAZF1 one of the best candidate genes, identified so far, influencing the variation in human height.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Subjects**

The five populations used for the initial analysis are all part of the EUROSPAN (European Special Population Network) project, the aims of which are to study the genetic and environmental determinants of quantitative phenotypes of clinical importance. The Swedish samples are part of the Northern Swedish Population Health Study (NSPHS). Samples for the linkage analysis were collected from the southern part of the Swedish mountain region (County of Västerbotten) and samples for the association analysis from the northern part of the Swedish mountain region (County of Norrbotten, Parish of Karesuando) (Fig. 1). There is no overlap between the individuals in the Swedish linkage and association cohorts. Samples from South Tyrol were collected as part of an extended genetic study (MICROS) from settlements in Venosta Valley. The Dutch samples were collected within the ERF study, which is a family-based study that includes 3000 inhabitants of a genetically isolated community in the south-western area of the Netherlands (16). The Croatian samples were from the villages of Vis and Komiza on the Dalmatian island of Vis. The Orkney Complex Disease Study (ORCADES) is an ongoing family-based genetic epidemiology collection in the isolated Scottish archipelago of Orkney. More information about each EUROSPAN study population can be found in Supplementary Material. Two additional populations were used to replicate the initial findings. The COGS study in Scotland is a national population-based case–control study of colorectal cancer occurring in individuals aged 55 years and under presenting to Scottish hospitals (8,9). From the COGS study, 1268 individuals were genotyped for the SNPs of interest. The Rotterdam
Study (10) is a prospective cohort study that started in 1990 in Ommoord, a suburb of Rotterdam, among 10,994 men and women aged 55 years and over. Height measurements used in this study were obtained at baseline between 1990 and 1993. For this study, we used data on 5746 participants for whom genotypic and height data were available (10,17).

**Genotyping**

**Linkage analysis.** A total of 3448 individuals (1890 females and 1518 males) from four populations were genotyped (591 Croatian, 1455 Dutch, 926 South Tyrolean and 436 Swedish). The Swedish, South Tyrolean and Croatian samples were typed for 390, 1113, 747 microsatellite markers, respectively, whereas the Dutch individuals were genotyped for 6008 SNPs. For complete genotyping information, see references (18–20). The individuals from the four populations represented 138, 156, 121 and 119 families, with a total pedigree size of 2806, 1346, 1940 and 850 individuals for the Croatian, Dutch, South Tyrolean and Swedish population, respectively.

**Genome-wide association.** DNA samples (n = 4200) were genotyped according to the manufacturer’s instructions on using Illumina’s HumanHap300 Genotyping BeadChip. Analysis of the raw data was done using the BeadStudio software with the recommended parameters for the Infinium assay and using the genotype cluster files provided by Illumina. Samples with a call rate <97%, identical twins and genetic outliers (identified by classical multidimensional scaling) were excluded from the analysis, resulting in a total of n = 3925 (790 Dutch, 656 Swedish, 1079 South Tyrolean, 709 Croatian and 695 Scottish) samples for the downstream analysis. Multidimensional scaling was also used to test for population stratification. The Dutch, South Tyrolean and Croatian individuals in the association cohorts overlap partly with those in the linkage cohorts. In the initial QC, most SNPs were included in the primary analysis, independent of allele frequencies and with a call rate >90%, with the exception or SNPs deviating strongly from Hardy–Weinberg equilibrium (P < 1.0 × 10^-10), resulting in 317465, 318049, 318235, 318236, 318237 in the Croatian, Dutch, Scottish, Swedish and South Tyrolean populations, respectively. QC summary for all SNPs discussed throughout this manuscript is included in Supplementary Material, Table S1. SNPs tested for replication in the Rotterdam Study were genotyped using Infinium II HumanHap550 V.3 BeadChips according to the manufacturer’s protocol (Illumina Inc., San Diego, CA, USA).

**Statistical analyses**

The trait (height) was rank-transformed to be normally distributed with average (=0) and standard deviation (=1) for each population and gender separately. Heritabilities and evidence for linkage were estimated using SOLAR (21).

**Linkage analysis.** Multipoint-identical-by-descent (MIBD) matrices were calculated for each population separately using LOKI or Merlin software (22,23), using the deCODE genetic map as a reference. MIBD matrixes of different populations were merged and imported into SOLAR (21), which was used to perform the linkage analysis. Analyses were performed independently for each population and on the combined data, for males and females separately and both sexes together. The threshold for suggestive linkage was set to 2.69 when analyzing the populations/subgroups (Swedish, South Tyrolean, Croatian, Dutch, Females and Males) separately. This is based on correcting the P-value for six independent tests. LOD variates are additive, so we adjusted the threshold for suggestive linkage to 3.47 by compensating for four degrees of freedom when combining the LOD scores from the four populations.

**GWA analysis and meta-analysis**

GWA analyses were performed using the GenABEL R library (24–26) for each population, both combining the genders and analyzing them separately. Genomic control (27) was used to correct standard errors of the effect estimates. The inflation factor lambdas for females/males/all were 1.11/1.07/1.24, 1.41/1.50/1.81, 1.23/1.19/1.45, 1.34/1.30/1.62 and 2.63/2.63/4.19 for the Croatian, Dutch, Scottish, South Tyrolean and Swedish populations, respectively. The meta-analysis was performed by adding the effects (β) and the standard error of the effects (SE β) for each population and gender as:

\[
\text{SE } \beta_{\text{meta}} = \frac{1}{\sqrt{\sum (1/\text{SE } \beta_i^2)}}
\]

\[
\beta_{\text{meta}} = \frac{\text{SE } \beta_{\text{meta}}}{\text{SE } \beta_i^2} \sum \beta_i.
\]

For each population, standard errors of the estimates were corrected using genomic control procedure to account for relatedness. The P-value for the meta-analysis was assessed using χ² statistics. Only populations that contributed to the association were included. The genome-wide threshold for significance (P = 0.05) after using the Bonferroni approach to correct for multiple testing (318237 SNPs) was calculated to be P = 1.6 × 10^-7. To get an unbiased estimate of the effect sizes for the most significant SNPs, we used a score test for association in family-based samples (28), implemented in GenABEL (24–26).

**SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL**

Supplementary Material is available at HMG Online.

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Conflict of Interest statement. None declared.

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