

# 1 Rank concordance of polygenic indices: Implications for personalised 2 intervention and gene-environment interplay

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## 15 **Abstract**

16 Polygenic indices (PGIs) are increasingly used to identify individuals at high risk of developing diseases  
17 and disorders and are advocated as a screening tool for personalised intervention in medicine and  
18 education. The performance of PGIs is typically assessed in terms of the amount of phenotypic variance  
19 they explain in independent prediction samples. However, the correct *ranking* of individuals in the PGI  
20 distribution is a more important performance metric when identifying individuals at high genetic risk.  
21 We empirically assess the rank concordance between PGIs that are created with different construction  
22 methods and discovery samples, focusing on cardiovascular disease (CVD) and educational attainment  
23 (EA). We find that the rank correlations between the constructed PGIs vary strongly (Spearman  
24 correlations between 0.17 and 0.94 for CVD, and between 0.40 and 0.85 for EA), indicating highly  
25 unstable rankings across different PGIs for the same trait. Simulations show that measurement error in  
26 PGIs is responsible for a substantial part of PGI rank discordance. Potential consequences for  
27 personalised medicine in CVD and research on gene-environment (G×E) interplay are illustrated using  
28 data from the UK Biobank.

29 Keywords: polygenic indices/scores, rank discordance, personalised medicine, gene-environment  
30 interactions

## 31 Introduction

32 Since the publication of the first genome-wide association study (GWAS) in 2005, it has become clear  
33 that most common human behavioural and disease traits are polygenic: they are influenced by  
34 thousands of single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs), each with a tiny effect<sup>1,2</sup>. GWAS estimates can be  
35 used to calculate an individual's genetic risk or predisposition using a polygenic index (PGI; also known  
36 as a "polygenic (risk) score"): a weighted sum of SNPs, with the weights proportional to the effect size  
37 estimates obtained from a GWAS in an independent sample<sup>3,4</sup>. The recent increase in the predictive  
38 power of PGIs has opened the door to their usage in clinical settings<sup>5-7</sup>. For example, one study found  
39 that individuals ranking in the top quintile of the PGI distribution for cardiovascular disease are most  
40 likely to benefit from statin treatment, lowering the 10-year relative risk of coronary heart disease by  
41 45%, and no risk reduction for individuals in the lowest PGI quintile<sup>6</sup>. More controversially, PGIs are also  
42 starting to be used for embryo selection<sup>8-10</sup>, and it has been suggested that in the future PGIs might be  
43 used to select against embryos predisposed to learning disorders<sup>11,12</sup>.

44 While the performance of a PGI is typically assessed by its explained phenotypic variance in an  
45 independent prediction sample<sup>11</sup>, a PGI's precision in correctly *ranking* individuals in the PGI distribution  
46 is arguably more important when using PGIs for personalised interventions. In personalised  
47 interventions, individuals at elevated genetic risk are typically identified by their rank in the PGI  
48 distribution (e.g., top quintile). Moreover, ranking precision is also likely to be important for the  
49 estimation of gene-by-environment (G×E) interplay. G×E studies analyse heterogeneity in treatment  
50 effects as a function of individuals' PGI: this is possible using the full (continuous) PGI distribution or on  
51 the basis of quantile-stratified samples of the PGI distribution (e.g., above/below the median)<sup>13-16</sup>.  
52 Imprecise PGI rankings may therefore lead to noisy decision-making in the clinic and bias our  
53 understanding of G×E interplay.

54 While recent studies have started to stress the importance of transparency about the construction of  
55 PGIs<sup>17-20</sup>, empirical studies often implicitly assume that PGIs for a specific trait are interchangeable. PGIs  
56 can be constructed in various ways. The most important features that have been highlighted are (i) the  
57 choice of GWAS discovery sample, (ii) the number of SNPs included, and (iii) the weights used to  
58 construct the aggregated polygenic index – e.g., corrected for linkage disequilibrium or not<sup>21</sup>. In this  
59 study, we empirically analyse individuals' rank concordance across PGIs with different construction  
60 methods and discovery samples and explore the mechanisms underlying the discordance. Rank  
61 discordance between PGIs could arise from differences between construction methods, differences in

62 the environmental context of the discovery samples, or random measurement error stemming from the  
63 finite discovery samples. In the empirical analyses, we focus on the first two of these: the discovery  
64 sample and the construction method. We use simulations to explore the extent to which measurement  
65 error in the PGIs is responsible for PGI rank discordance.

66 We start by investigating individuals' rank concordance for two different polygenic traits that have been  
67 highlighted as promising targets for personalised screening: cardiovascular disease (CVD)<sup>5,6,22,23</sup> and  
68 educational attainment (EA)<sup>11,12</sup>. We compare the PGIs constructed using different discovery samples  
69 (i.e., UK Biobank (UKB)<sup>24</sup>, CARDIoGRAM<sup>25</sup>, and 23andMe, Inc.<sup>26</sup>) as well as the two most commonly used  
70 construction methods: the “clumping and thresholding” algorithm as implemented in Plink (henceforth  
71 C+T)<sup>27,28</sup> and the Bayesian LDpred method<sup>29</sup>. C+T is widely used given its relative simplicity and low  
72 computational cost<sup>21</sup>, although Bayesian methods such as LDpred are gaining popularity due to the  
73 increased predictive power compared to C+T. The central difference between Plink C+T and LDpred lies  
74 in the fact LDpred corrects the SNP weights for linkage disequilibrium (LD) and uses a large set of SNPs  
75 (i.e., >1 million) in the PGI, whereas Plink deals with LD by only keeping one SNP from each LD block —  
76 typically the SNP with the lowest  $p$  value. Because the differences between different Bayesian PGI  
77 construction methods like LDpred, PRS-CS, or S-Bayes-R are relatively less pronounced<sup>30</sup>, they are not  
78 explicitly considered in this paper.

79 We find limited concordance in individuals' ranking across PGIs that are created with different  
80 construction methods or discovery samples. For example, for EA, 17% of the individuals who are in the  
81 top quintile of the UKB-based PGI (C+T) are in the bottom quintile of the 23andMe-based PGI (C+T). For  
82 LDpred-based PGIs constructed on the basis of the same discovery samples, the switch from top to  
83 bottom quintile is around 9%. We present two applications to illustrate the impact of such rank  
84 discordance. First, we show how PGI rank discordance can affect treatment decisions. Following an  
85 earlier study<sup>22</sup>, we assess which individuals should be given statin treatment by combining classical CVD  
86 risk factors and CVD PGIs in a prediction model. Here, we find that treatment decisions can vary highly  
87 depending on the PGI used in the model. Second, inspired by a study<sup>31</sup> analysing how genetic effects on  
88 EA (among other traits) differ across birth cohorts, we investigate G×E interactions using different EA  
89 PGIs and birth year. We show that choices in the PGI construction stage can affect G×E estimations and  
90 with that, our understanding of the interplay between nature and nurture.

91 To understand the source of PGI rank discordance, we conduct simulations that show how accurately  
92 one can identify an individual's true PGI rank and phenotype rank under various degrees of

93 measurement error in the PGI. Our simulations indicate that for a trait with a SNP-heritability of 25%  
94 and a PGI that explains 12% of the total phenotypic variation (i.e., the ‘explained SNP-heritability’ is  
95 about 50%; this is roughly the state-of-the-literature for EA<sup>26</sup>), we only classify half of the individuals  
96 correctly in the top PGI quintile. Importantly, we show that the rank misclassification depends on the  
97 *explained* SNP-based heritability and is largely independent of the *absolute* SNP-based heritability.  
98 Overall, the simulations show that measurement error in the PGI is an important driver of the lack of  
99 concordance across PGIs, and that rigidly ranking individuals into quantiles based on current-day PGIs  
100 will inevitably lead to major misclassifications of true genetic risk.

## 101 Results

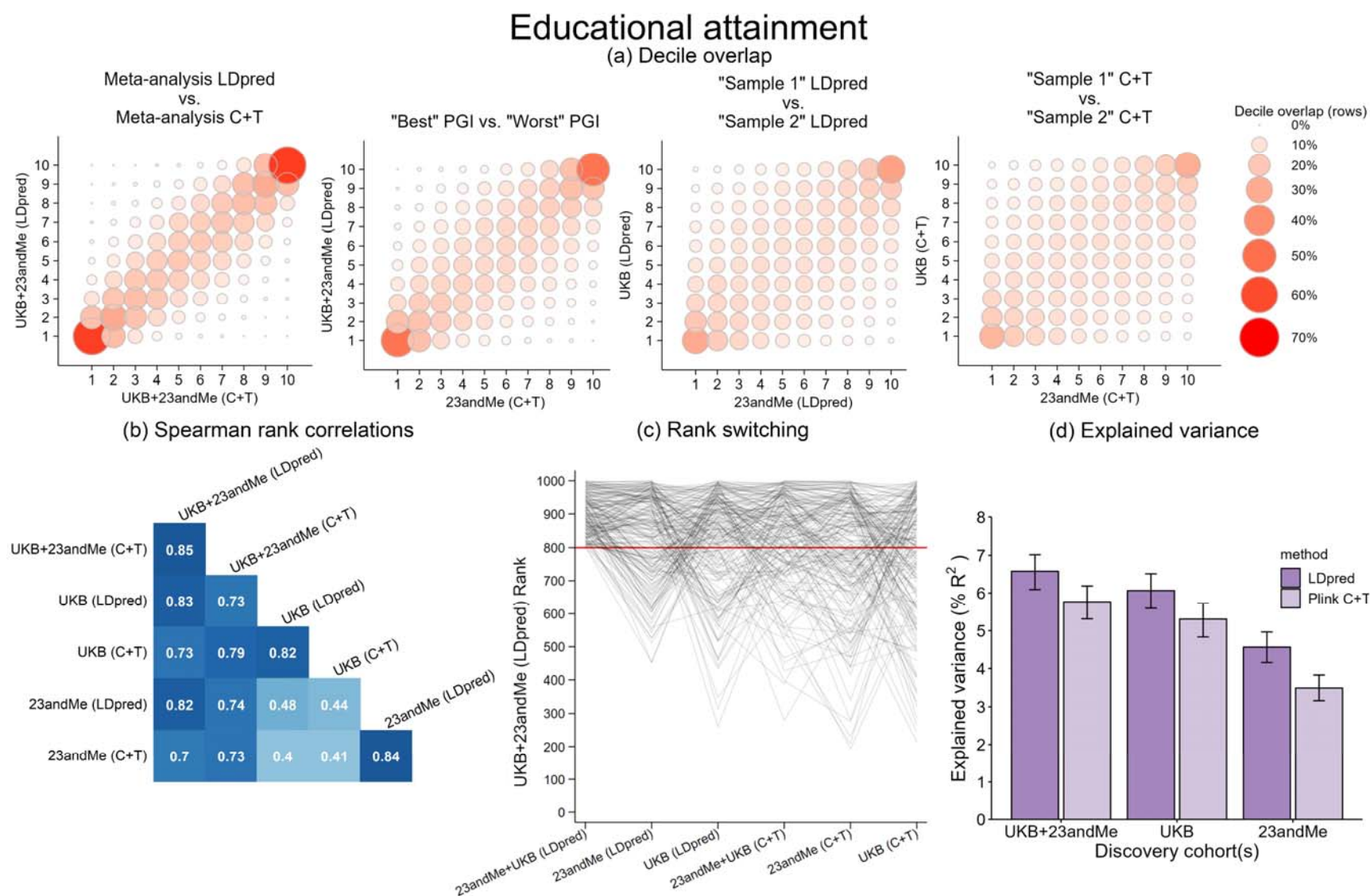
### 102 *Rank concordance across PGIs*

103 We present the results on the rank concordance of PGIs constructed with (i) different construction  
104 methods (i.e., C+T with  $p$  value threshold = 1, and LDpred with a prior fraction of causal SNPs = 1), but  
105 the same GWAS discovery sample; and (ii) the same construction method, but two different GWAS  
106 discovery samples (i.e., UKB and CARDIoGRAM/23andMe for CVD/EA respectively). The UKB GWAS  
107 discovery sample includes those of European ancestry and excludes the sibling holdout sample and their  
108 relatives. The subset of UKB siblings serves as our holdout sample here (Supplementary Information  
109 1.1). Using bivariate LD Score regression<sup>32</sup>, we find that the genetic correlations between the GWAS  
110 summary statistics from different discovery samples are high. We estimate the genetic correlation  $r_g$   
111 between the discovery samples to be 0.96 (SE = 0.03) for CVD and 0.88 (SE = 0.01) for EA. Hence, SNP  
112 effect sizes are generally concordant between the GWAS discovery samples. This suggests that  
113 differences in the environmental context of the discovery sample cannot be the main driver for  
114 discordance between PGIs, especially for CVD.

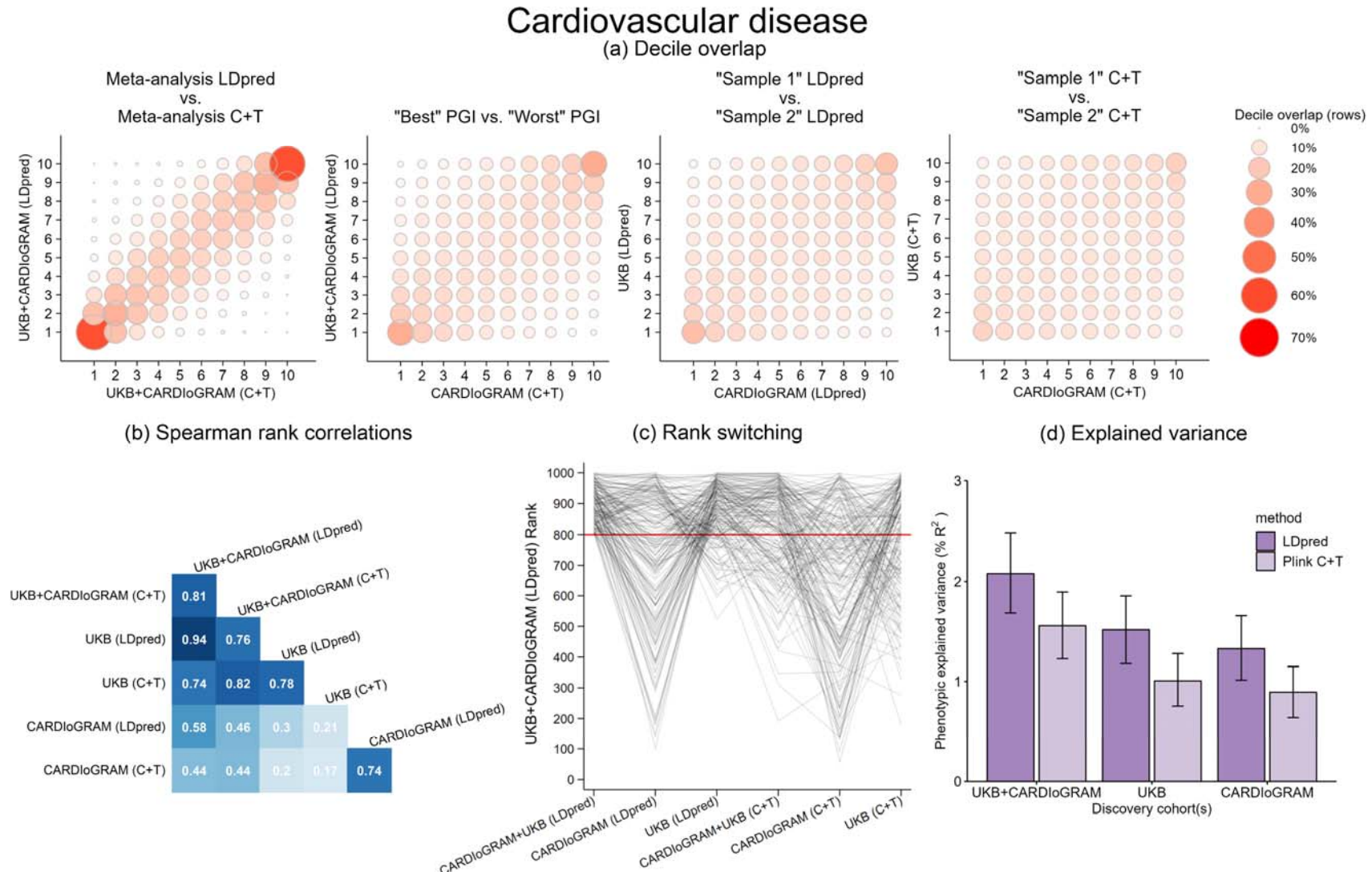
115 The LDpred PGI based on the meta-analysis of two samples (UKB and 23andMe for EA; UKB and  
116 CARDIoGRAM for CVD) results in the PGI with the highest explained variance for each trait (Fig. 1d and  
117 Fig. 2d). We refer to these PGIs as the “benchmark PGIs”. Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 visualise the rank concordance  
118 between the different PGIs for EA and CVD, respectively. Fig. 1a and Fig. 2a show the rank concordance  
119 in deciles of the PGI, with the size and shading of the bubble visualizing the extent of overlap. With full  
120 concordance of PGI deciles, all circles would fall on the diagonal line and be of the same size. However,  
121 we find especially low rank concordance between PGIs that use different GWAS discovery samples, and  
122 there is more discordance for PGIs constructed using C+T compared to those using LDpred. Fig. 1b and

123 Fig. 2b show the Spearman correlation matrix for the differently constructed PGIs. We find rank  
124 correlations ranging between  $r = 0.40-0.85$  for EA PGIs, and between  $r = 0.17-0.94$  for CVD PGIs.

125 In Fig. 1c and Fig. 2c, the rank switching is visualised for a random subset of  $N = 1,000$  individuals from  
126 our analysis sample. The vertical axis shows the exact PGI rank for these 1,000 individuals on the  
127 benchmark PGI, highlighting those in the top quintile (i.e., those above the red threshold line). The  
128 horizontal axis displays the different PGI construction methods. The lines show the extent to which  
129 individuals who are in the top quintile of the benchmark PGI switch ranks when using different  
130 construction methods. With full rank concordance, all “top”-ranked individuals would remain above the  
131 red line. However, we observe strikingly large rank switching: of all those in the top quintile of the  
132 “benchmark PGI” for CVD (CARDIoGRAM+UKB, LDpred), we find that between 21% (for our second-best  
133 performing PGI – CVD (UKB, LDpred)) and 63% (for our worst-performing PGI - CVD (CARDIoGRAM, C+T))  
134 of individuals fall outside of the top quintile, i.e., move below the red line in panel (c). Only 10% of the  
135 individuals are in the top quintile for each of the six CVD PGIs. For EA, only 22% of individuals who are in  
136 the top quintile of the benchmark PGI are also in the top quintile of rest of the PGIs.



**Figure 1. Concordance across six PGIs for educational attainment.** **a.** Rank concordance in deciles of the PGI distribution. **b.** Spearman rank correlations across PGIs. **c.** rank switching across the PGIs for a random  $N = 1,000$  individuals from the UKB holdout sample, with the red line denoting the top quintile. **d.** explained phenotypic variance of the PGIs with error bars showing 95% confidence intervals. PGI = polygenic index, C+T = clumping and thresholding.

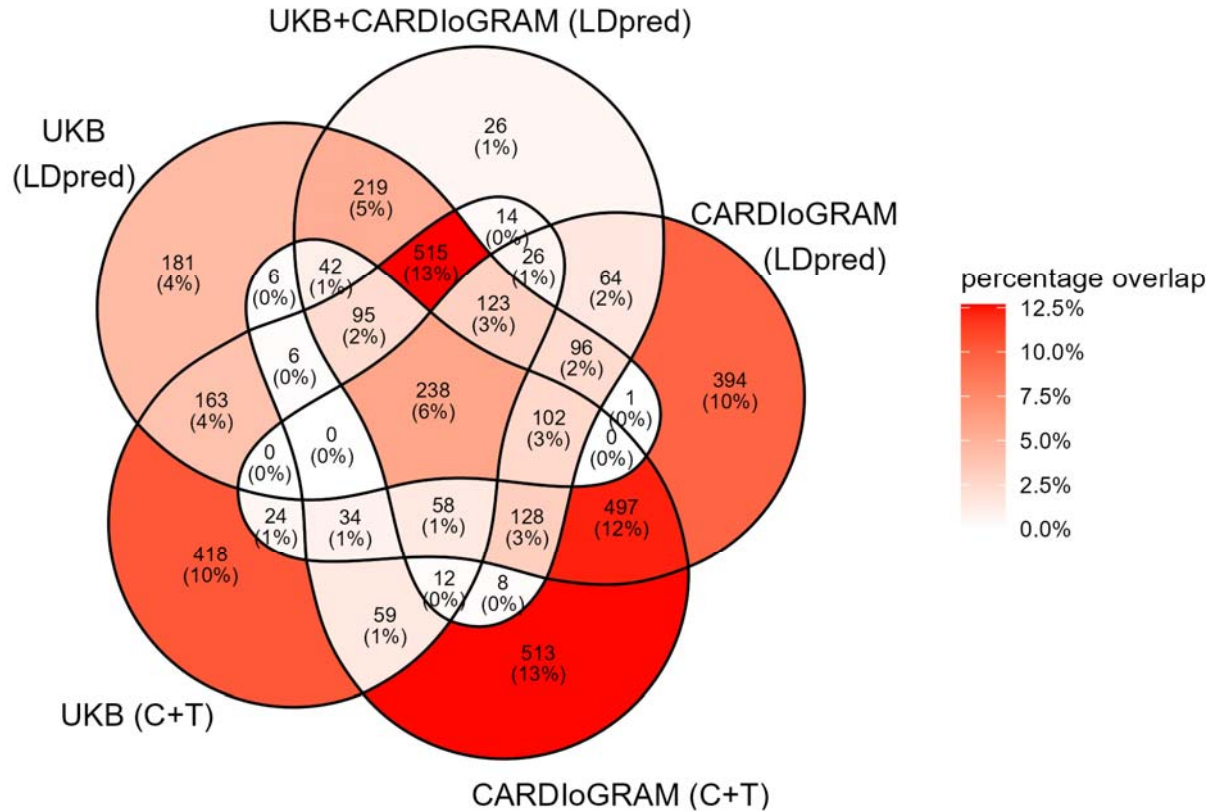


**Figure 2. Concordance across six PGIs for cardiovascular disease.** **a.** Rank concordance in deciles of the PGI distribution. **b.** Spearman rank correlations across PGIs. **c.** Rank switching across the PGIs for a random  $N = 1,000$  individuals from the UKB holdout sample, with the red line denoting the top quintile. **d.** Explained phenotypic variance of the PGIs in terms of pseudo- $R^2$  from a logit regression with error bars showing 95% confidence intervals. PGI = polygenic index, C+T = clumping and thresholding.

163 *Personalised interventions*

164 We examine the extent to which rank switching between PGIs may influence individualised drug  
165 prescription for CVD. We illustrate the overlap in individuals to be prescribed statins (a type of  
166 cholesterol-lowering medication) according to recently proposed clinical guidelines to involve PGI data<sup>22</sup>.  
167 While statins reduce the risk of cardiovascular events in individuals with high cholesterol levels<sup>33</sup>, their  
168 benefits need to be assessed against their potential adverse effects, which includes a higher risk of  
169 developing diabetes<sup>34</sup>. Current guidelines from the American College of Cardiologists/American Heart  
170 Association (ACC/AHA) recommend statins for three groups of patients: those with high LDL cholesterol  
171 ( $\geq 190$  mg/dL); 2) those with a combination of elevated LDL cholesterol ( $\geq 70$  mg/dL) and diabetes; and 3)  
172 those with a combination of elevated LDL cholesterol ( $\geq 70$  mg/dL) and a  $\geq 7.5\%$  (“high”) risk to develop  
173 atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (ASCVD) within ten years<sup>35</sup>. These ten-year ASCVD risks can be  
174 calculated with prediction models from the ACC/AHA<sup>36</sup>. The ACC/AHA welcomes the inclusion of  
175 alternative risk factors to identify additional individuals who might benefit from statin therapy because  
176 they are at “borderline” (i.e.,  $\geq 5\%$ ) ten-year ASCVD risk<sup>22</sup>. Accordingly, an earlier study<sup>22</sup> uses the top  
177 quintile of an LDpred PGI (based on CARDIoGRAM 2015 GWAS results<sup>25</sup>) as a risk factor to identify  
178 additional candidates for statin therapy for CVD-free individuals at borderline ASCVD risk. We follow  
179 their strategy and examine the variation in individuals to be recommended statins based on  
180 differentially constructed PGIs. For this analysis, we create a CVD-free holdout subsample in the UKB  
181 siblings sample ( $N = 4,061$ ) consisting of individuals i) who report to not use statins and without a history  
182 of CVD; ii) who are not recommended statins according to current ACC/AHA guidelines; iii) who do have  
183 a have  $\geq 5\%$  ten-year ASCVD risk; and iv) who score in the top quintile of at least one of five CVD PGIs  
184 (we here drop the meta-analysed score from UKB + CARDIoGRAM (C+T) for visualisation purposes). The  
185 threshold determining the top PGI quintile is calculated in the full UKB holdout sample (i.e., including  
186 individuals who do have a history of CVD or use statins).





187

188 **Figure 3. Venn diagram depicting the overlap in individuals ranked in the top quintiles of five CVD PGIs**  
 189 **(N = 4,061).** Individuals included in this figure are potential candidates for statin therapy<sup>22</sup>; they have an  
 190 intermediate ten-year ASCVD risk ( $\geq 5\%$ ); have no (self-reported) history of CVD; are not statin users; and  
 191 are not yet candidates according to current ACC/AHA guidelines. C+T = clumping and thresholding.

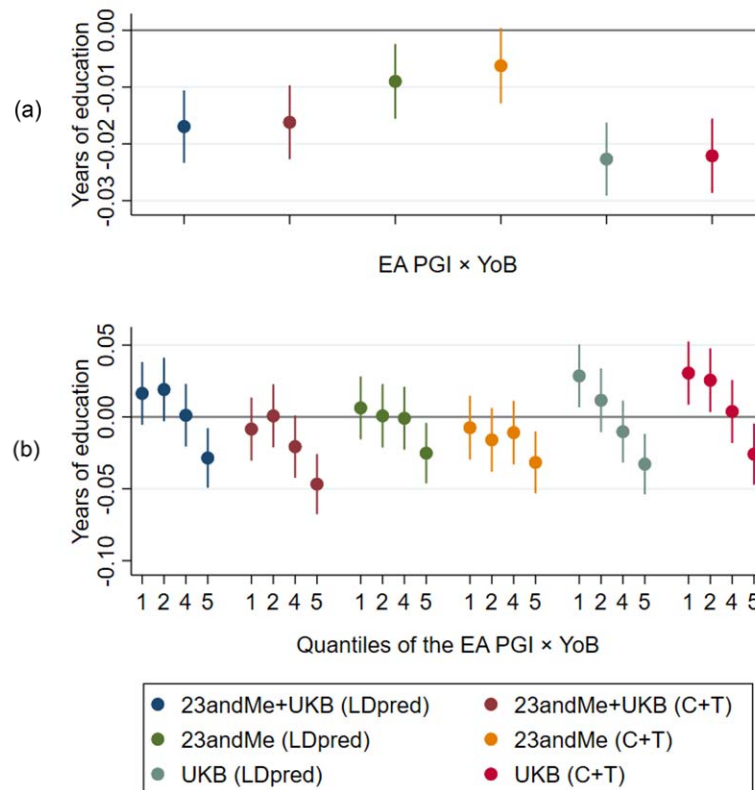
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193 Fig. 3 shows a Venn diagram depicting the overlap in individuals' ranking in the top quintile across the  
 194 five CVD PGIs. Only 6% of the individuals are in the top quintile for all five CVD PGIs (inner cell), while  
 195 38% of the individuals are in the top quintile for only one PGI (outer layer). Discordance is especially high  
 196 for PGIs created based on CARDIoGRAM GWAS summary statistics only (as in the study we follow  
 197 here<sup>22</sup>), with 35% (i.e., 10% + 12% + 13%) of the individuals scoring in the top quintile of the  
 198 CARDIoGRAM C+T or LDpred PGI distributions but not in the other PGI distributions. Out of the N =  
 199 2,007 individuals eligible for statins according to the meta-analysis (UKB + CARDIoGRAM) LDpred PGI,  
 200 only 38.6% would have received statins if this decision was based on the CARDIoGRAM (C+T) PGI  
 201 instead. These results show that different sets of individuals may be selected for personalised  
 202 intervention based on decisions made at the PGI construction stage.

203 *GxE interplay*

204 We then explore whether the estimation of G×E interaction effects may vary by PGI construction  
205 method. G×E research explores how environments can moderate genetic susceptibilities, or vice versa,  
206 how genetic susceptibility can moderate environmental effects. For instance, assessing if the  
207 effectiveness of drug treatment varies by quantiles of genetic risk is a form of G×E research. If, however,  
208 the extent of genetic susceptibility in empirical studies is dependent on how the PGI is constructed, so  
209 may its estimated interaction with the environment. Here, we explore whether PGI rank discordance can  
210 affect G×E estimates. We follow a previous study design which found that association between the EA  
211 PGI and EA has decreased over time in the United States<sup>31</sup>, and explore how different methods of PGI  
212 construction influence the association between six different EA PGIs and EA across birth cohorts in the  
213 UKB.<sup>31</sup>

214 We assess whether modelling the PGI as a continuous or stratified measure of genetic predisposition  
215 alters the estimation of G×E. We run two regressions: in the first regression we use the EA PGI as a  
216 continuous variable, in the second regression we employ four binary indicators for the EA PGI quintiles.  
217 We do this separately for the six different PGIs. Fig. 4a shows the coefficients of the interaction term  
218 between the continuous PGI and year of birth, while Fig. 4b shows the coefficients of the interaction  
219 term between year of birth and PGI quintiles 1, 2, 4 and 5 (with quintile 3 serving as the baseline). In line  
220 with earlier evidence<sup>31</sup>, we find that the size of the association between the EA PGI and EA decreases for  
221 later-born cohorts as evidenced by the negative interaction terms in Fig. 4a and the negative slope of  
222 the interaction terms over the PGI quintiles in Fig. 4b. The most negative interaction terms in Fig. 4a are  
223 estimated using the two UKB-based PGIs, which is mirrored by the clearest negative gradient in Fig. 4b  
224 for the quintile-stratified PGIs. The interaction term that is closest to zero in Fig. 4a is estimated using  
225 the two 23andMe-based PGIs, which is mirrored by a less clear negative gradient in Fig. 4b. Although the  
226 estimates do not vary greatly across the different PGIs in that they are all negative and mostly  
227 statistically significant, a joint *F*-test rejects the hypothesis that the interaction coefficients are equal to  
228 each other. A pairwise *F*-test suggests that the divergence is driven by PGIs constructed using C+T  
229 (Supplementary Information 1.6). Overall, these results again illustrate that choices made at the PGI  
230 construction stage can affect the results in G×E analyses.



231  
232

233 **Figure 4. Results of OLS regressions explaining years of education by the EA polygenic index (PGI), year of birth**  
 234 **(YoB), and the interaction between the EA PGI and YoB in the subsample of siblings of the UK Biobank ( $N =$**   
 235 **38,049).** **a.** The PGI analysed as a continuous variable. **b.** The PGI split into binary indicators for each quintile (with  
 236 **quintile 3 serving as the baseline). The figure visualises the estimated interaction terms with their 95% confidence**  
 237 **intervals. C+T = clumping and thresholding.**  
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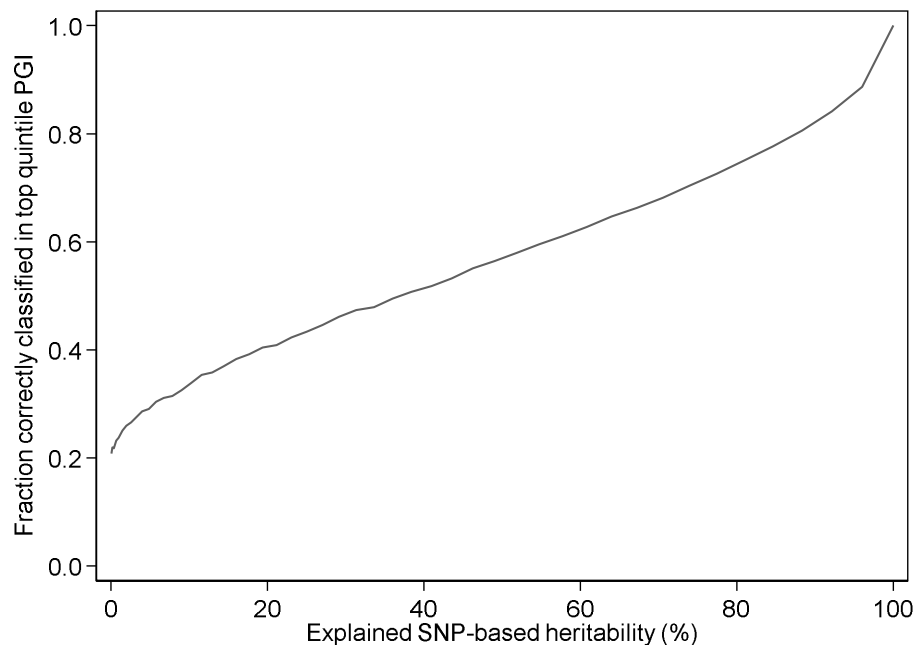
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239 *Simulations*

240 The empirical analyses show that choices during the PGI construction phase may lead to the ranking of  
 241 individuals in different quantiles of the resulting PGI distribution, but the underlying reason for such  
 242 discordance across PGIs is not clear. Here, we use simulations to assess to what extent a discordance  
 243 across different PGIs could be the result of measurement error in the PGI. Measurement error in the PGI  
 244 stems from the fact that any underlying GWAS is conducted on a finite sample, with the coefficients that  
 245 are used to construct the PGI exhibiting a degree of statistical noise that decreases with the size of the  
 246 GWAS discovery sample<sup>37</sup>. As a result of measurement error in the coefficients, the predictive power of  
 247 the PGI will fall short of the SNP-based heritability, which constitutes the upper bound of the predictive  
 248 power of a PGI in terms of variance explained<sup>38</sup>. We define the “*explained SNP-based heritability*” as the  
 249 ratio of the explained variance of a PGI and the SNP-based heritability of the trait of interest. In our

250 simulations, we model measurement error to be classical, and we use EA as our benchmark trait, which  
251 has a SNP-heritability of around 25%, a PGI that explains 12% of its variation, and with that, an *explained*  
252 SNP-heritability of around 50%<sup>39,40</sup>.

253 Fig. 5 shows that “rank precision” of a PGI (i.e., the fraction of individuals correctly classified into the  
254 top quintile of the “true” PGI) strongly depends on the *explained* SNP-based heritability. Naturally, an  
255 explained SNP-based heritability of 100% is necessary to accurately place individuals in the top quintile  
256 of the PGI distribution. For 80% accuracy, an explained SNP-based heritability of 88% is needed. With a  
257 current explained SNP-based heritability of 50% for EA, we can expect a 57% correct placement in the  
258 top quintile of the PGI distribution.



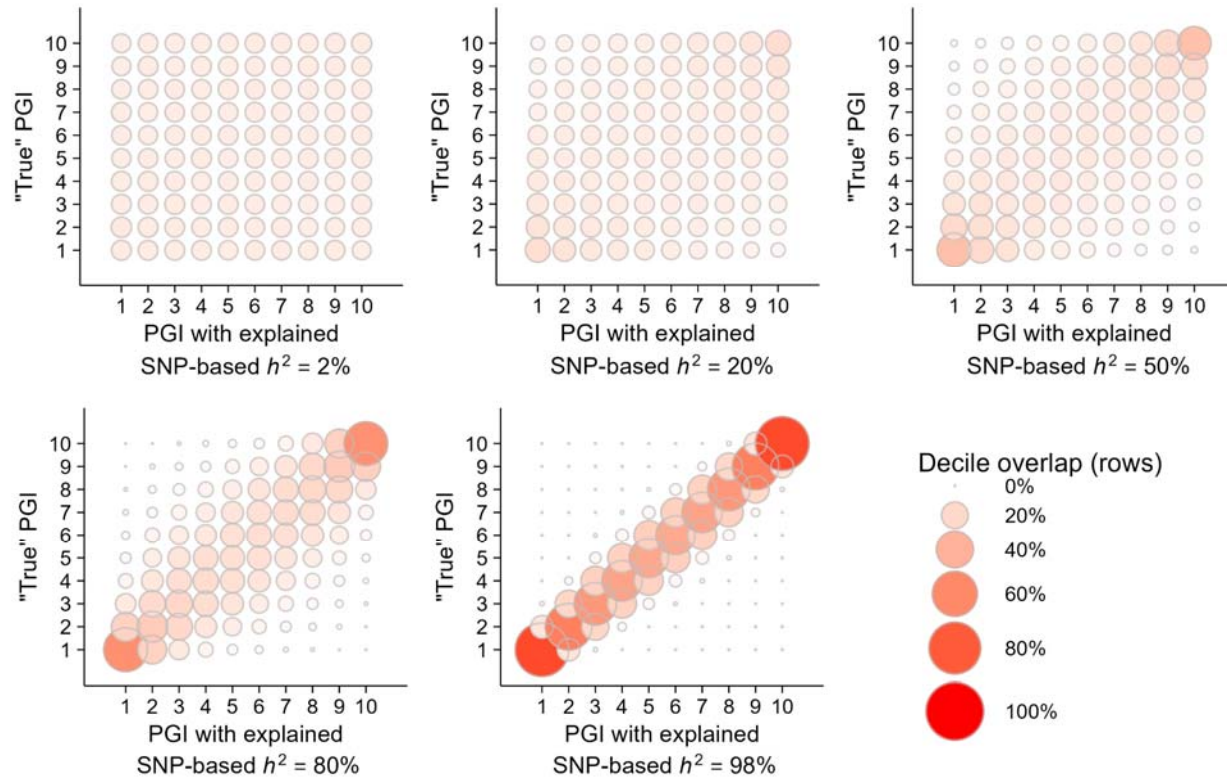
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260 **Figure 5. The relationship between the predictive power of the PGI and the correct classification of individuals in**  
261 **the top quintile of the PGI distribution.** This figure visualises the relationship between the explained SNP-based  
262 heritability (%) and the fraction of correctly classified individuals in the top quintile of the PGI distribution.

263

264 Fig. 6 shows decile overlap between the simulated “true” PGI and PGIs with varying degrees of explained  
265 SNP-based heritability, quantifying to which extent individuals are placed into the correct decile of the  
266 true PGI given a noisy PGI. While concordance increases with increasing explained SNP-based  
267 heritability, even for a PGI with an explained SNP-based heritability of 80% the fraction of off-diagonal  
268 elements is only 72.7 percent.

269



270

271 **Figure 6. Results of the simulations analysing the relationship between the predictive power of a PGI and the**  
272 **ranking of individuals in the PGI distribution.** This figure shows the rank concordance in terms of deciles between  
273 the “true” PGI and PGIs with varying degrees of explained SNP-based heritability ( $h^2$ ).

274

275 In Supplementary Information 1.7, we show that these simulation results are independent of the  
276 absolute level of the SNP-based heritability of a trait. In other words, correct classification into quintiles  
277 of genetic risk depends on the *explained* SNP-based heritability, regardless of the absolute level of  
278 heritability. Correct classification into the quintiles of the *trait* distribution, however, does depend on  
279 the absolute level of the SNP-based heritability. For example, the 25% SNP-based heritability for EA  
280 implies that, even with a perfect PGI, the prediction accuracy of the correct quintile in the *trait*  
281 distribution is only around 40% (Supplementary Information 1.7). Thus, the increasing predictive power  
282 of PGIs implies better rank concordance across PGIs due to increases in the explained SNP-based  
283 heritability. Nonetheless, prediction accuracy of the PGI on the trait level is constrained by the SNP-  
284 based heritability of the trait. Hence, there are two layers of uncertainty when using PGIs for trait  
285 prediction: first, any estimated PGI is a noisy proxy for the “true” PGI, and second, any risk prediction of  
286 even the “true” PGI is limited by the SNP-based heritability.

## 287 **Discussion**

288 Despite high genetic correlations between GWAS discovery samples, the ranking of individuals across  
289 differently constructed PGIs can vary substantially. This rank discordance between PGIs can have  
290 implications for personalised interventions and gene-environment interaction research. We focus on  
291 two traits that have recently garnered attention as candidates for individualised intervention:  
292 cardiovascular disease (CVD) for individualised drug prescription, and educational attainment (EA) for  
293 individualised learning trajectories. PGIs for both traits are also currently being put to use for pre-  
294 implantation genetic testing for embryos<sup>9</sup>.

295 We show that using differentially constructed CVD PGIs for individualised statin prescription identifies  
296 different groups of individuals eligible for statins, with only 6% of individuals in our sample ranking  
297 consistently in the top quintile for each of the five PGIs (Fig. 3). Importantly, misclassifications may lead  
298 to adverse treatment effects<sup>34</sup>. With regards to educational attainment, our simulations show that we  
299 classify just over 50% of individuals correctly in the top quintile of the “true” PGI with current-day PGIs.  
300 Hence, using PGIs for “precision education”<sup>11</sup> is likely to lead to educational customisations that are  
301 channelled to the wrong individuals in a substantial number of cases. Classifying individuals into  
302 quantiles of a PGI distribution can also have repercussions for empirical research, as we find that the PGI  
303 construction method can affect the estimates of the importance of the nature-nurture interplay in  
304 shaping life outcomes.

305 Our study joins earlier studies in their call for making the use and reporting of PGIs and their  
306 construction more transparent and standardised<sup>17–19,41</sup> and contributes to the set of recent studies  
307 highlighting the divergent predictive power of PGIs<sup>20,42–44</sup>. Pain et al. compare a very extensive set of  
308 traits and test the predictive power of a wide variety of PGI construction methods<sup>43</sup>. Ware et al.  
309 compare a more limited set of PGI construction methods and analyse the intra-individual correlation of  
310 PGIs<sup>42</sup>. Finally, two studies that were independently developed around the same time<sup>20,44</sup> are similar in  
311 spirit as the present study in comparing the rank concordance of individuals in the PGI distribution  
312 depending on the GWAS discovery sample. Our study complement these studies by i) explicitly focusing  
313 on rank discordance and its source, ii) comparing across PGI construction methods (e.g., C+T and  
314 LDpred), and iii) analysing the implications for empirical applications such as personalised medicine or  
315 GxE analysis.

316 Our findings are of crucial importance now that PGIs are becoming increasingly accessible to physicians,  
317 consumers, and applied researchers<sup>19</sup>. We complement recent work that showed that an individual’s

318 PGI can span several deciles when the uncertainty of GWAS estimates are taken into account during PGI  
319 construction<sup>45,46</sup>. While the source of uncertainty emphasised in these papers does not derive from the  
320 construction method or GWAS discovery sample per se, we draw a similar conclusion: ranking  
321 individuals on basis of their position in a PGI distribution is prone to large uncertainty. Therefore,  
322 transparent reporting<sup>17</sup> and robustness checks against different PGIs should become routine in analyses  
323 that use PGI ranks. We conclude that while PGIs can be a useful tool for identifying individuals at risk,  
324 rigidly relying on a PGI rank from a single (noisy) PGI may lead to misinformed decision and  
325 policymaking.

## 326 **Methods**

327 **Sample and data.** Participants of this study were sourced from UK Biobank, a prospective cohort study  
328 in the UK that collects physical, health and cognitive measures, and biological samples (including  
329 genotype data) in about 500,000 individuals<sup>24</sup>. UK Biobank has received ethical approval from the  
330 National Health Service North West Centre for Research Ethics Committee (11/NW/0382) and has  
331 obtained informed consent from its research participants. In our analyses, we include only European  
332 ancestry respondents (81% of the UKB). The UK Biobank's sibling subsample serves as the holdout  
333 sample. Siblings and their relatives are identified using the UKB's kinship matrix based on genetic  
334 relatedness and containing relatives of third degree and closer. The sibling subsample consists of  $N =$   
335 39,296 individuals (16,556 males and 22,740 females). The age of these individuals ranges from 40 to 71  
336 years with the average age of 57. years at recruitment. More information about the analysis sample and  
337 the construction of variables can be found in Supplementary Information 1.1 and 1.2.

338 **Statistical analyses.** The PGIs used in this study are based on four sets of GWAS summary statistics:  
339 GWAS summary statistics for EA ( $N = 389,419$ ) and CVD ( $N = 392,789$ ) resulting from our GWAS  
340 conducted in the UKB sample (excluding the siblings subsample and their relatives, Supplementary  
341 Information 1.3), GWAS summary statistics for EA from 23andMe ( $N = 365,536$ ), and GWAS summary  
342 statistics for CVD from the CARDIoGRAM<sup>25</sup> consortium ( $N = 184,305$ ). Mixed linear model GWAS were  
343 conducted with fastgwa<sup>47</sup>, using the sparse genotype matrix provided by the UKB to account for  
344 relatedness between participants. The CVD phenotype is based on hospital and death records (ICD9 410-  
345 414 or ICD10 I20-I25). The PGIs were constructed using LDpred<sup>29</sup> (prior fraction of causal SNPs = 1) and  
346 Plink clumping and thresholding<sup>28</sup> ( $p$  value threshold is = 1, more details in Supplementary Information  
347 1.4). The personalised intervention analysis (Supplementary Information 1.5) and G×E analyses

348 (Supplementary Information 1.6) as well as the simulations (Supplementary Information 1.7) were  
349 performed in STATA.

## 350 **Data availability statement**

351 Individual-level genotype and phenotype data are available by application via the UKB Biobank website  
352 (<https://www.ukbiobank.ac.uk/>). The genome-wide summary statistics from 23andMe can be obtained  
353 by completing the 23andMe publication dataset access request form at  
354 <https://research.23andme.com/dataset-access/>. The genome wide summary statistics from  
355 CARDIoGRAM are available at <http://www.cardiogramplusc4d.org/>. The authors declare that the results  
356 supporting the findings of this study are available within the paper and its supplementary information  
357 files.

## 358 **Code availability statement**

359 Analysis code will be made available on Github.

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458 **Acknowledgments**

459 UK Biobank has obtained ethical approval from the National Research Ethics Committee (11/NW/0382).  
460 This research has been conducted using the UK Biobank Resource under application number 41382. The  
461 authors gratefully acknowledge funding from NORFACE through the Dynamic of Inequality across the  
462 Life Course (DIAL) programme (GEIGHEI 462-16-100). Research reported in this publication was also  
463 supported by the National Institute on Aging of the National Institutes of Health under Award  
464 R56AG058726. S.F.W.M. gratefully acknowledges funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020  
465 research and innovation program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement (GENIO  
466 101019584). C.A.R. and S.v.H. gratefully acknowledge funding from the European Research Council  
467 (GEPSI 946647; DONNI 851725). We are grateful for Aysu Okbay and employees and research  
468 participants of the 23andMe, Inc. cohort for sharing GWAS summary statistics for educational  
469 attainment, and we thank Pietro Biroli, Titus Galama, and Eric Slob for insightful comments. This work  
470 made use of the Dutch national e-infrastructure with the support of the SURF Cooperative using grant  
471 EINF-1107.

472 **Author contributions**

473 S.F.W.M. and D.M. designed and oversaw the study. S.F.W.M. and D.M. conducted the GWAS in UKB  
474 and the meta-analyses with other GWAS summary statistics, constructed the PGIs, and prepared the  
475 illustrative applications. R.D.P. performed the G×E analyses. H.v.K. conducted the simulations. C.A.R. and  
476 S.v.H. assisted with the analyses. All authors contributed to preparing and critically reviewing the  
477 manuscript and the supplementary file.

478 **Competing interests**

479 The authors declare no competing interests.