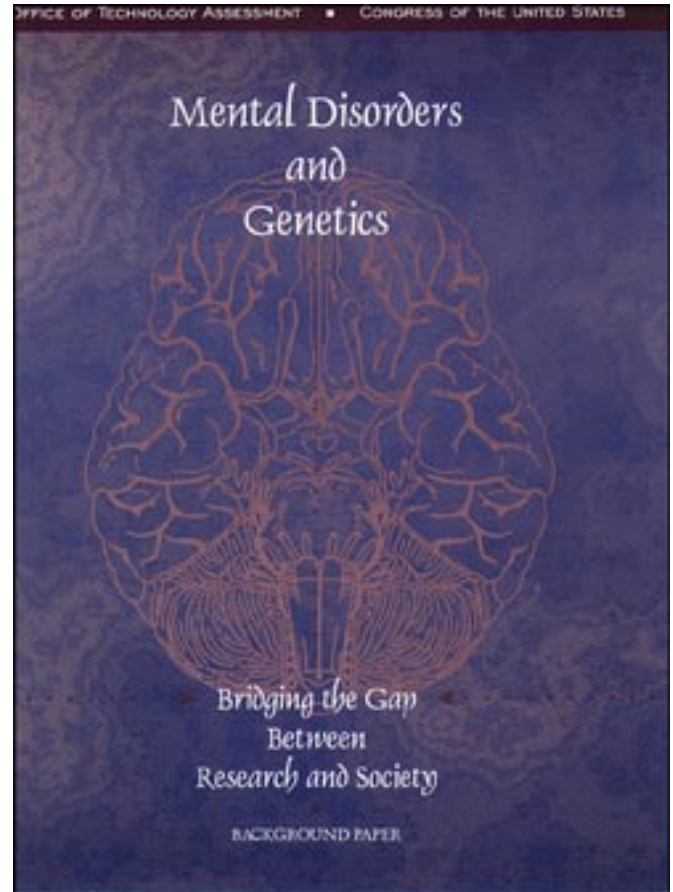


*Mental Disorders and Genetics: Bridging
the Gap Between Research and Society*

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Foreword

Technological advances in genetics drive the search for mental disorder genes. Although the research results have been complicated and, at times, confusing, some important discoveries have emerged. Researchers have located and identified genes associated with Alzheimer's disease. A sound and extensive bank of data provides evidence for the role of genetic factors in schizophrenia and major mood disorders. Other, albeit fewer data lend support to the hypothesis that genetic factors contribute to panic and obsessive-compulsive disorders.

What we know about the genetics of mental disorders, and what we may learn, has implications for research, clinical practice, and society-at-large. A workshop cosponsored by the Office of Technology Assessment and the National Institute of Mental Health focused on these implications. It was prompted by the 1992 report *The Biology of Mental Disorders*, which was requested by House Committees on Appropriations; Energy and Commerce; Science, Space, and Technology; Veterans Affairs; and the Senate Subcommittee on Science, Technology, and Space of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, also endorsed the 1992 report request. This background paper relays the workshop participants' discussion, augmenting it with other information sources. OTA gratefully acknowledges the assistance of workshop participants as well as other experts who assisted with this work. But as with all OTA products, responsibility for the content is OTA'S alone.

A key focus of the workshop was the impact of genetic research on people with mental disorders and their family members. Workshop testimony made clear that they want to know the latest research discoveries. They are encouraged by research progress and the possibility of improved treatment. They worry about the genetic risk for a serious mental disorder that their family members face. They want to be more equal partners in research. They welcome the de-stigmatizing influence of biomedical research. Yet they fear its potential abuse. However, as the background paper title suggests, a gap separates research-derived information on genetics and mental illness from the people who desire it. This background paper offers one resource in closing this gap.



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