# Ancient viral DNA in human genome linked to psychiatric disorders, study finds



Researchers at King’s College London have identified a link between ancient viral DNA present in the human genome and psychiatric disorders. The study, published in *Nature Communications*, found that DNA sequences derived from ancient infections—known as Human Endogenous Retroviruses (HERVs)—make up about 8% of the human genome. These sequences, initially considered junk DNA, potentially contribute to the risk of conditions like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and depression.

The research team examined data from extensive population studies and brain autopsies from 800 individuals. They identified five specific HERV sequences linked to psychiatric disorders, including two associated with schizophrenia, one with both bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, and one with depression. Dr. Timothy Powell, a senior lecturer at King’s College, emphasized that these viral sequences likely play a more significant role in brain function than previously recognized.

Co-senior author Dr. Douglas Nixon from the Feinstein Institutes for Medical Research in the USA stated that further research is needed to elucidate the function of HERVs and their role in mental health. The study was partly funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) and the US National Institutes of Health (NIH).