

Professor Sarah Cohen-Woods *BSc (Hons), MSc, PhD*

Professor of Psychology, Flinders University Institute for Mental Health and Wellbeing & Head, Behavioural Genetic & Environmental Mechanisms Lab, Flinders University, **ADELAIDE**

Professor Sarah Cohen-Woods is a Professor of Psychology at the Flinders University Institute for Mental Health and Wellbeing, and Head of the Behavioural Genetic and Environmental Mechanisms (GEMs) Lab, Flinders University, Adelaide.

Employing a comprehensive biopsychosocial approach, Prof Cohen-Woods' research focuses on integrating environmental factors, including social determinants of health, such as socioeconomic status and stress, with genetic predictors, in a range of phenotypes: disordered eating, depression, psychosis (bipolar disorder and schizophrenia) and cognition.



Prof Cohen-Woods graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from the University of Leeds in 2003, and completed her Medical Research Council (MRC)-funded Master's of Science in 2004. She then went on to complete her PhD in 2008 in Social Genetic and Developmental Psychiatry at the Institute of Psychiatry and Neuroscience at King's College London and held an NIHR postdoctoral fellowship there 2009 - 2011.

In 2012, she moved to the University of Adelaide as a Senior Lecturer, and in 2016 to Flinders University as a Matthew Flinders Fellow.

Prof Cohen-Woods explores the role of epigenetics in how environmental factors influence genetic risk.

Her research in eating disorders demonstrates that the psychological and physical impact of disordered eating can be substantial, even if not reaching threshold for diagnosis, and that polygenic risk for anorexia nervosa can predict disordered eating in the general population at a non-clinical level. Her work focuses on how variation in behaviour and psychological disorders may be influenced by genetic risk and environmental exposures.

Her special interests include eating disorders, major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, genome-wide association studies (GWAS), genetics and genetic divergence. Her work also extends to understanding whether phenotypes and factors such as stress, also contribute to physical health outcomes, such as obesity and infertility. Prof Cohen-Woods has published more than 90 pieces of work including articles, review articles, book chapters, letters and more.

Through her work, she aims to understand how the environment interacts with genetics and people at the biological level, and how risk can be passed from generation to generation.

As a spokesperson for the Eating Disorders Genetics Initiative 2 (EDGI2) study, Prof Cohen-Woods is supporting Australian researchers in the quest to find the genes behind eating disorders, which will flag the way to new cures.

"EDGI2 is a groundbreaking, international initiative that will improve our understanding of the genetic and environmental risk factors underlying eating disorders.

"By identifying genetic risk factors, and understanding how genetic predispositions interact with our environments, we can pave the way to intervene earlier, and develop more new, more effective, targeted treatments," said Prof Cohen-Woods.

"To uncover these relationships and better understand the drivers of eating disorders, EDGI2 needs the Australian public to rally together to collect data from a diverse and large group of individuals affected by eating disorders. By working together, Australian science can deepen our understanding of eating disorders and drive meaningful change in how we identify those at risk early, and how we approach treatment and intervention."

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To coordinate an interview with Professor Sarah Cohen-Woods, please contact:

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