

METHODS IN MOLECULAR BIOLOGY

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Genetic Epidemiology

Methods and Protocols

Edited by

Evangelos Evangelou

*Department of Hygiene and Epidemiology, University of Ioannina Medical School, Ioannina, Greece
Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Imperial College London, London, UK*

Editor

Evangelos Evangelou
Department of Hygiene and Epidemiology
University of Ioannina Medical School
Ioannina, Greece

Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics
Imperial College London
London, UK

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Preface

Genetic epidemiology is a relatively new field of epidemiology that studies the role of genetic factors in health and diseases and has witnessed some exciting findings in our quest to understand the nature of genetic inheritance. It is an amalgam of methods and approaches applied in traditional epidemiology, statistics, genetics, and bioinformatics and it brings together several scientific disciplines. In the last few years, scientists have been able to map thousands of genetic variants contributing to complex diseases helping to unravel the genetic causes of diseases on a population scale.

This book is a broad overview written at a level that should be accessible to a wide range of interested scientists including epidemiologists, genetic statisticians, human geneticists, clinicians, and bioinformaticians. I hope that this book will be also helpful for graduate students pursuing research in related fields. Some chapters of the book assume a basic level of competence with regard to statistic and probabilistic reasoning; however it was written and edited having in mind that a noncompetent reader will be able to follow, if not all, most of the text. For many scientists, genetic epidemiology is too convoluted to understand; however I hope to persuade the reader that this view is not correct. My goal was to provide a unifying overview of a fast-moving research while providing a description in some depth of the techniques and data that are helping us to understand our genome and how it is related to mainly complex diseases.

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to basic terms of epidemiology whereas Chapter 2 introduces the reader to the key principles of genetic epidemiology including genetic models of inheritance and associations. The next three chapters describe the process of quality control (Chapter 3), the analysis and the detection of common (Chapter 4) and rare variation (Chapter 5) whereas Chapter 6 outlines state-of-the-art meta-analyses approaches for the synthesis of such data. Chapter 7 outlines methods for detecting both gene-gene and gene-environment interactions as well as approaches for increasing statistical power.

The next seven chapters cover novel, state-of-the-art methods that go beyond the conventional approaches for the detection of common variation including analysis in the HLA region (Chapter 8), novel family-based approaches (Chapter 9), approaches for polygenic traits (Chapter 10), multivariate methods for meta-analysis of genetic associations and meta-analysis of gene expression data (Chapters 11 and 12). Chapter 13 covers the rapidly evolving method of Mendelian Randomization that is used for the estimation of causal effects of an exposure on an outcome, whereas computational methods for the analysis of Copy Number Variation are presented in Chapter 14. We conclude in the last two chapters by assessing the functional role of the identified variants (Chapter 15) and the challenges we are facing to use human genetics to identify and validate novel drug targets (Chapter 16).

I thank sincerely all those who have helped to bring this book together and I am grateful to the coauthors who accepted my invitation and contributed to this book, devoting valuable time and effort.

Ioannina, Greece

Evangelos Evangelou

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Contributors

- EMIL VINCENT ROSENBAUM APPEL • *Section for Metabolic Genetics, Faculty of Health Sciences, Novo Nordisk Foundation Center for Basic Metabolic Research, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark*
- PANTELIS G. BAGOS • *Department of Computer Science and Biomedical Informatics, University of Thessaly, Lamia, Greece*
- LAZAROS BELBASIS • *Department of Hygiene and Epidemiology, University of Ioannina Medical School, Ioannina, Greece*
- VANESA BELLOU • *Department of Hygiene and Epidemiology, University of Ioannina Medical School, Ioannina, Greece*
- ANTONIO J. BERLANGA-TAYLOR • *Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Faculty of Medicine, School of Public Health, MRC-PHE Centre for Environment and Health, Imperial College London, London, UK*
- GEORGIA G. BRALIOU • *Department of Computer Science and Biomedical Informatics, University of Thessaly, Lamia, Greece*
- ABBAS DEHGHAN • *Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Imperial College London, London, UK*
- ANDREW T. DEWAN • *Department of Chronic Disease Epidemiology, Yale School of Public Health, New Haven, CT, USA*
- NIKI L. DIMOU • *Department of Computer Science and Biomedical Informatics, University of Thessaly, Lamia, Greece; Department of Hygiene and Epidemiology, University of Ioannina School of Medicine, Ioannina, Greece*
- KAROL ESTRADA • *Translational Genome Sciences, Biogen, Cambridge, MA, USA*
- JAVIER GUTIERREZ-ACHURY • *The Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, Cambridgeshire, UK*
- PANAGIOTA I. KONTOU • *Department of Computer Science and Biomedical Informatics, University of Thessaly, Lamia, Greece*
- KAROLINE KUCHENBAECKER • *Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, Cambridge, UK; University College London, London, UK*
- ZOLTÁN KUTALIK • *Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine, University Hospital of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland; Swiss Institute of Bioinformatics, Lausanne, Switzerland*
- AURÉLIEN MACÉ • *Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine, University Hospital of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland; Department of Computational Biology, University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland; Swiss Institute of Bioinformatics, Lausanne, Switzerland*
- KYRIAKI MICHAILIDOU • *Department of Electron Microscopy/Molecular Pathology, The Cyprus Institute of Neurology and Genetics, Nicosia, Cyprus*
- LOUKAS MOUTSIANAS • *The Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, Cambridgeshire, UK*
- KALLIOPE PANOUTSOPOULOU • *Wellcome Sanger Institute, Wellcome Genome Campus, Cambridgeshire, UK*
- KATERINA G. PANTAVOU • *Department of Computer Science and Biomedical Informatics, University of Thessaly, Lamia, Greece*

- ATHANASIA PAVLOPOULOU • *Department of Computer Science and Biomedical Informatics, University of Thessaly, Lamia, Greece; International Biomedicine and Genome Institute (iBG-Izmir), Dokuz Eylul University, Konak, Turkey*
- RAHA PAZOKI • *Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics (inc MRC-HPA Centre), School of Public Health, Imperial College London, London, UK*
- KONSTANTINOS K. TSILIDIS • *Department of Hygiene and Epidemiology, University of Ioannina School of Medicine, Ioannina, Greece; Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, School of Public Health, Imperial College London, London, UK*
- ARMAND VALSESIA • *Nestlé Institute of Health Sciences, Lausanne, Switzerland*
- KLAUDIA WALTER • *Wellcome Sanger Institute, Wellcome Genome Campus, Cambridgeshire, UK*
- ELEANOR WHEELER • *Wellcome Sanger Institute, Wellcome Genome Campus, Cambridgeshire, UK*
- QI YAN • *Division of Pulmonary Medicine, Allergy and Immunology, Department of Pediatrics, Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA, USA*