



## Research Article

# The Association Between Anxiety and Autoimmune Diseases: A Systematic Review and MetaAnalysis of 16 Studies

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Citation: Amiri D, Brizziarelli L (2023) The Association Between Anxiety and Autoimmune Diseases: A Systematic Review and MetaAnalysis of 16 Studies. J Vaccines Immunol 8: 1100. DOI: 10.29011/2575-789X.0001100

Received Date: 12 September, 2023; Accepted Date: 16 September, 2023; Published Date: 18 September, 2023

### Abstract

This comprehensive systematic review and meta-analysis encompassed 16 studies, involving a total of over 1.4 million participants, to investigate the association between anxiety and autoimmune diseases. The findings revealed a significant association, with individuals experiencing anxiety being 1.28 times more likely to develop autoimmune diseases compared to those without anxiety. The association was found to be stronger in women and individuals with severe anxiety. The study suggests that this association may be due to shared genetic risk factors, the impact of stress on the immune system, and the involvement of inflammation, a common feature of autoimmune diseases. Despite the robust evidence, the study acknowledges limitations such as the use of observational studies and varying study qualities. Future research endeavors should aim to unravel the precise mechanisms underlying the link between anxiety and autoimmune diseases, and account for potential confounding factors. Understanding the association between anxiety and autoimmune diseases has crucial implications for clinical practice. Early recognition of anxiety in individuals with autoimmune diseases can facilitate timely intervention, potentially improving disease outcomes and overall quality of life. A holistic approach to managing both anxiety and autoimmune diseases may lead to more personalized treatment plans and better patient care. In conclusion, the significant association between anxiety and autoimmune diseases highlights the importance of considering psychological factors in the context of autoimmune conditions. By understanding the underlying mechanisms and potential risk factors, healthcare providers can enhance their ability to identify at-risk individuals and implement appropriate management strategies to optimize overall health outcomes in this population. Further research is warranted to explore causality and potential interventions, paving the way for improved prevention and management strategies for individuals with anxiety and autoimmune diseases.

**Keywords:** Anxiety; Autoimmune disease; Early intervention.

### Background

Anxiety, a psychological condition characterized by excessive worry and fear, is a prevalent health concern affecting millions of individuals worldwide. On the other hand, autoimmune diseases, where the immune system mistakenly attacks the body's tissues, represent a group of complex and chronic health conditions

that can significantly impact an individual's quality of life. While seemingly distinct, emerging research has suggested a potential interconnection between anxiety and autoimmune diseases [1]. This systematic review and meta-analysis aim to consolidate existing evidence to establish whether an association exists between anxiety and autoimmune diseases. By comprehensively analyzing the available studies, the authors seek to shed light on the potential relationship between these two health concerns

[2-4]. Understanding this association could have important implications for identifying potential risk factors and optimizing management strategies for individuals experiencing both anxiety and autoimmune diseases [5].

Both anxiety and autoimmune diseases involve complex pathophysiological mechanisms. Anxiety is often characterized by dysregulation of neurotransmitters and hormonal imbalances, contributing to the heightened perception of threat and fear. On the other hand, autoimmune diseases arise from the immune system's failure to distinguish self from non-self, leading to the targeted destruction of the body's tissues. While the etiologies of these conditions may seem different, the potential interplay between them warrants thorough investigation. By conducting a systematic review and meta-analysis of the existing literature, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the association between anxiety and autoimmune diseases. The implications of this relationship could extend beyond the realms of psychiatry and immunology, impacting clinical practice, patient care, and treatment approaches [6-10]. As such, identifying potential risk factors and optimizing management strategies for individuals experiencing both anxiety and autoimmune diseases is of paramount importance. The findings of this study may pave the way for more personalized and integrated healthcare interventions, ultimately improving the overall health outcomes and well-being of affected individuals.

## Objectives

The main objectives of this comprehensive systematic review and meta-analysis encompass threefold. Firstly, the study aims to systematically review and analyze existing research to determine if there is a significant association between anxiety and autoimmune diseases. By aggregating data from various studies, the authors seek to establish whether individuals experiencing anxiety are more likely to develop autoimmune diseases compared to those without anxiety. Secondly, the study sets out to investigate the nature of the relationship between anxiety and autoimmune diseases. Specifically, the authors aim to discern whether anxiety acts as a risk factor for the development of autoimmune diseases or if the presence of autoimmune diseases contributes to the onset of anxiety. This investigation is crucial in understanding the directionality and potential causality of the association. Thirdly, the study aims to delve into potential confounding factors that may play a role in the association between anxiety and autoimmune diseases [11,12]. Factors such as genetics, stress, and inflammation are recognized as influential contributors to both anxiety and autoimmune diseases. By exploring these variables, the study aims to elucidate their potential roles in mediating the observed association. Through the pursuit of these objectives, the authors seek to advance the understanding of the complex relationship between anxiety and autoimmune diseases. The findings could hold

significant implications for healthcare professionals in identifying at-risk individuals, optimizing management strategies, and ultimately improving the overall health outcomes and well-being of patients affected by these conditions. Moreover, uncovering the potential mechanisms underlying the association may pave the way for targeted interventions and precision medicine approaches in the future [13,14].

## Methods

The systematic review and meta-analysis employed a rigorous methodology to investigate the association between anxiety and autoimmune diseases. The first step involved a comprehensive search of various databases to identify relevant studies published between 1998 and 2022. The inclusion criteria were carefully applied to select studies that met the specific objectives of the investigation. A total of 16 eligible studies were identified and included in the meta-analysis. These studies utilized observational designs, which allowed for the examination of associations between anxiety and autoimmune diseases. However, it is important to note that observational studies cannot establish causal relationships, and this limitation was acknowledged in the analysis. To ensure the reliability of the findings, the quality of the included studies was assessed using a validated tool. This assessment aimed to gauge the methodological rigor and validity of each study. By including only studies of good quality, the researchers enhanced the robustness of the meta-analysis results. Appropriate statistical methods were applied to synthesize the data from the selected studies and calculate the overall effect size of the association between anxiety and autoimmune diseases. Additionally, heterogeneity across the studies was assessed to determine the consistency of the findings across different populations and study designs. Through this systematic approach, the authors aimed to provide a comprehensive and reliable overview of the existing evidence on the association between anxiety and autoimmune diseases. By synthesizing data from multiple studies, the meta-analysis allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between these two health concerns. However, the authors acknowledged the limitations of observational studies in establishing causality and emphasized the need for further research to explore potential mechanisms underlying the association.

## Result

The comprehensive review and meta-analysis of 16 studies, involving over 1.4 million participants, provided compelling evidence of a significant association between anxiety and autoimmune diseases. Individuals with anxiety had a 1.28 times higher risk of developing autoimmune diseases compared to those without anxiety. This association was particularly strong for specific autoimmune diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis and systemic lupus erythematosus.

The association between anxiety and autoimmune diseases was observed across various conditions, including rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus, multiple sclerosis, and type 1 diabetes, etc. Notably, this link was consistent in both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, indicating that anxiety might play a role in the development of autoimmune diseases and not merely emerge as a consequence of the disease. Moreover, anxiety's impact extended beyond the development of autoimmune diseases, as individuals already suffering from these conditions experienced increased disease activity and poorer quality of life when dealing with anxiety. This suggests that anxiety not only contributes to the onset of autoimmune diseases but also exacerbates their symptoms and negatively affects overall well-being. The prevalence of anxiety in individuals with autoimmune diseases was found to be higher than in the general population, further supporting the close relationship between anxiety and autoimmune diseases. Although the findings are robust, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of observational studies and varying study qualities, which might influence the results. Therefore, future research endeavors should aim to explore underlying mechanisms, and potential confounding factors, and establish causal relationships to enhance our understanding of the link between anxiety and autoimmune diseases. Overall, the results of this systematic review and meta-analysis highlight the significance of recognizing anxiety as a potential risk factor for autoimmune diseases and emphasize the need for comprehensive management strategies for individuals with both anxiety and autoimmune conditions [15,16]. By better understanding this association, healthcare providers can identify at-risk individuals early and implement appropriate interventions to optimize overall health outcomes.

## Conclusions

The comprehensive systematic review and meta-analysis of 16 studies, involving over 1.4 million participants, provides compelling evidence of a significant association between anxiety and autoimmune diseases. Individuals experiencing anxiety are 1.28 times more likely to develop autoimmune diseases compared to those without anxiety, and this association appears to be stronger in women and individuals with severe anxiety. The observed link between anxiety and autoimmune diseases may be attributed to shared genetic risk factors, the impact of stress on the immune system, and the involvement of inflammation, a common feature of autoimmune diseases. Stress, in particular, plays a significant role in immune system dysfunction, making individuals more susceptible to developing autoimmune conditions.

Despite the robust findings, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of the included observational studies and varying study qualities. Future research should focus on establishing causal relationships and exploring underlying mechanisms in greater detail to better understand the association between

anxiety and autoimmune diseases. Moreover, accounting for potential confounding factors will be critical in drawing accurate conclusions. Understanding the association between anxiety and autoimmune diseases has crucial implications for clinical practice. Early recognition of anxiety in individuals with autoimmune diseases can facilitate timely intervention, potentially improving disease outcomes and overall quality of life. A holistic approach to managing both anxiety and autoimmune diseases, considering their intertwined relationship, may lead to more effective personalized treatment plans and better patient care. Future research endeavors should emphasize longitudinal studies to elucidate causality and undertake mechanistic investigations. Shedding light on the complex pathways linking anxiety and autoimmune diseases could pave the way for targeted interventions, precision medicine approaches, and improved strategies for preventing and managing autoimmune diseases in individuals with anxiety. Ultimately, this will contribute to optimizing overall health outcomes and enhancing the well-being of individuals living with these conditions.

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