

# Patient-Reported Outcomes in Systemic Lupus Erythematosus: A Meta-Analysis

Yun Liu\*

Department of Rheumatology, Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Shanghai, China

\*Corresponding author: Yun Liu, Department of Rheumatology, Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Shanghai, China; E-mail: Yun897.in@gmail.com

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## Introduction

Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE) is a complex autoimmune disease that can affect multiple organs and systems in the body, leading to significant morbidity. The heterogeneity of SLE symptoms and the impact of the disease on patients' daily lives necessitate a thorough understanding of Patient-Reported Outcomes (PROs). PROs provide insights into patients' perspectives on their health status, treatment effects, and overall well-being. This article presents a meta-analysis of the current literature on PROs in SLE, highlighting key findings, implications for clinical practice, and areas for future research.

## Understanding patient-reported outcomes

Patient-reported outcomes are direct reports from patients regarding their health status, functional abilities, and quality of life, without interpretation by healthcare professionals. In the context of SLE, PROs encompass various dimensions, including physical functioning, fatigue, emotional well-being, pain, and disease activity. By capturing the patient's voice, PROs can inform treatment decisions, improve disease management, and enhance the overall patient experience.

## Description

### Importance of PROs in SLE

**Holistic assessment:** SLE affects not only physical health but also mental and emotional well-being. PROs help capture this multifaceted impact, providing a more holistic view of the patient's health.

**Treatment evaluation:** PROs can serve as valuable indicators of treatment effectiveness. By monitoring changes in patient-reported outcomes, clinicians can gauge how well a treatment is working from the patient's perspective.

**Patient engagement:** Incorporating PROs into clinical practice fosters patient engagement, allowing individuals to play an active role in their care. This can enhance adherence to treatment and improve overall satisfaction.

### Methodology of the meta-analysis

**Study selection:** The meta-analysis included studies that utilized validated PRO measures in patients diagnosed with SLE.

Databases such as PubMed, Embase, and Cochrane Library were searched for relevant articles published up to 2023. Inclusion criteria were based on the use of standardized questionnaires measuring PROs related to SLE, including Quality of Life (QoL), fatigue, and pain.

**Data extraction:** Data were extracted regarding study characteristics, patient demographics, and specific PRO measures utilized. The analysis focused on common PRO tools, such as the Lupus Quality of Life (LupusQoL), Short Form Health Survey (SF-36), and the Fatigue Severity Scale (FSS).

**Statistical analysis:** A random-effects model was employed to analyze the pooled results of the studies. Effect sizes were calculated to quantify the differences in PROs among various populations, treatment groups, and disease activity levels. Heterogeneity was assessed using the  $I^2$  statistic.

### Key findings

**Quality of life:** The meta-analysis revealed that patients with SLE experience significantly impaired quality of life compared to healthy controls. The LupusQoL scores consistently indicated lower QoL across various domains, including physical health, emotional well-being, and social functioning. Notably, the physical health domain was often more affected than emotional well-being, suggesting that physical limitations might dominate the patient experience.

**Fatigue:** Fatigue emerged as a prominent issue in SLE, with the meta-analysis indicating that patients reported significantly higher levels of fatigue compared to normative populations. The FSS scores highlighted that fatigue in SLE patients is not only prevalent but also debilitating, impacting daily activities and overall quality of life. Furthermore, fatigue levels were found to correlate with disease activity, indicating that periods of flare often coincide with increased fatigue.

**Pain and disability:** Pain was another significant concern, with the meta-analysis showing that SLE patients experience higher pain levels compared to the general population. The presence of pain often correlates with functional disability, affecting the ability to perform daily tasks and maintain employment. The analysis also revealed a significant association between disease activity and self-reported pain levels, underscoring the need for effective pain management strategies in SLE treatment.

**Emotional well-being:** Emotional well-being was consistently lower in SLE patients, with high rates of anxiety and depression

reported in several studies. The meta-analysis indicated that psychological distress is common, affecting both quality of life and treatment adherence. Addressing mental health is crucial, as emotional well-being can significantly influence the overall disease trajectory and patient satisfaction.

**Implications for clinical practice:** The findings of this meta-analysis highlight the importance of incorporating patient-reported outcomes into the clinical management of SLE. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of the disease can lead to more comprehensive treatment plans that address both physical and emotional aspects of health.

**Personalized care:** Incorporating PROs allows for more personalized care. Understanding individual patient concerns can help clinicians tailor treatments, adjust medications, and implement supportive therapies aimed at improving both physical and emotional well-being.

#### **Monitoring treatment effectiveness**

Regularly assessing PROs can provide valuable feedback on treatment effectiveness, enabling timely adjustments when patients experience inadequate relief. This patient-centered approach can enhance treatment outcomes and improve patient satisfaction.

#### **Collaborative care**

Integrating mental health support into routine care for SLE patients is essential. Collaborative care models that involve rheumatologists, psychologists, and other healthcare professionals can address the psychosocial aspects of living with a chronic illness.

### **Future research directions**

While this meta-analysis sheds light on the significance of patient-reported outcomes in SLE, several areas warrant further investigation:

**Longitudinal studies:** More longitudinal studies are needed to understand how PROs evolve over time, especially in relation to treatment changes and disease progression.

**Diverse populations:** Future research should aim to include more diverse populations to understand the impact of cultural and socioeconomic factors on PROs.

**Intervention studies:** Investigating the effects of specific interventions aimed at improving PROs such as psychological therapies, lifestyle changes, or novel pharmacological treatments will be essential in developing comprehensive care strategies.

### **Conclusion**

Patient-reported outcomes are invaluable in understanding the impact of systemic lupus erythematosus on patients' lives. The findings from this meta-analysis highlight the significant impairments in quality of life, fatigue, pain, and emotional well-being experienced by individuals with SLE. Incorporating PROs into clinical practice not only enhances patient engagement but also fosters personalized care, ultimately leading to better health outcomes. Continued research into PROs will be essential in refining treatment approaches and improving the overall quality of life for those living with this challenging autoimmune disease.