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Gender and age differences in systemic lupus erythematosus. A study of 489 Greek patients with a review of the literature

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We investigated whether gender and age influence the clinical course and outcome in systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) patients. Thus, we analyzed the clinical and laboratory data of 489 SLE patients at presentation and during follow-up. In addition, disease activity score (using the European Consensus Lupus Activity Measure, ECLAM) and organ damage index (using the Systemic Lupus International Collaboration Clinics/American College of Rheumatology Damage Index, DI) were measured. Furthermore, data from both sexes were analyzed according to the following age groups: < 55 years (younger group) and ≥ 55 years (older group). There were 68 men and 421 women, giving a ratio of 1:7. We found no differences in the mean age, mean age at diagnosis, disease duration as well as duration of follow-up between men and women. Young men presented more frequently with serositis and discoid lesions, while women presented with Raynaud’s phenomenon (RP) and malar rash. Regarding the laboratory findings, young women presented more often with anti-Ro(SSA) and anti-La(SSB) antibodies, while increased levels of erythrocyte sedimentation rate (ESR) were found in old women. During follow-up, men had serositis and renal disease more frequently, while the women’s group were found to complain of RP, photosensitivity and mucosal ulcers more frequently, especially in young women. Anemia, leukopenia, thrombocytopenia and elevated levels of ESR were also found more frequently in young women during follow-up. However, there were no significant differences concerning ECLAM and DI scores between the two gender groups. Using multiple logistic regression analysis, a statistically significant association of malar rash, discoid lesions, serositis, RP, anti-Ro(SSA)/La(SSB) and increased ESR with sex was found independently of age, while only malar rash showed a statistically significant association with age independently of sex. Thus, we conclude that gender influences the clinical expression of the disease independently of age, while both gender and age do not affect the overall damage score. Lupus (2002) 11, 722–729.

Key words: lupus; men; age groups; gender; men vs women with lupus

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