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Elena GRECO, MD, PhD, Maria CALANDUCCI, MD, Kypros H. NICOLAIDES, Professor, Eleanor VH. BARRY, Mohammed SB. HUDA, Stamatina ILIODROMITI, MD, PhD

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TITLE PAGE

Gestational diabetes mellitus and adverse maternal and perinatal outcomes in twin and singleton pregnancies: a systematic review and meta-analysis.

Authors

Elena GRECO, MD, PhD* ¹

Maria CALANDUCCI, MD*^{2,3}

Kypros H NICOLAIDES, Professor ³

Eleanor VH BARRY¹

Mohammed SB HUDA ²

Stamatina ILIODROMITI, MD, PhD¹

1. Women's Health Research Unit, Wolfson Institute of Population Health, Queen Mary University of London, UK

2. The Royal London Hospital, Barts Health NHS Trust

3. The Harris Birthright Research Centre, King's College, London UK

*Joint first authors.

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21 **Corresponding author:** Dr Elena Greco. Women's Health Research Unit, Wolfson
22 Institute of Population Health, Queen Mary University of London, Mile End Road, London
23 E1 4NS, United Kingdom. Tel (cell). +44 07854712987 e.greco@qmul.ac.uk

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CONDENSATION PAGE

Tweetable statement: Gestational diabetes #GDM is associated with adverse maternal and perinatal outcomes in both #singleton and #twin pregnancies. Gestational diabetes is associated with lower risk of neonatal death in twins. @m_iliodromiti @CphpQmul @QMUL_WIPH

Short title: Adverse outcomes in twin and singleton pregnancies with Gestational diabetes

AJOG at a Glance:**A. Why was this study conducted?**

- The impact of gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM) on pregnancy outcomes in twin pregnancies is not well studied.
- Screening and management of GDM in twins have been extrapolated from singletons where the beneficial impact of tight control on maternal and neonatal outcome is better studied.
- The aim of this study was to investigate whether twin and singleton pregnancies affected by GDM are at higher risk of adverse maternal and perinatal complications compared to the respective group without GDM.

B. What are the key findings?

- In both singleton and twin pregnancies, GDM is associated with increased risk of adverse maternal and perinatal outcomes.
- Unlike singletons, GDM in twin pregnancies may be associated with less adverse outcomes than twins without GDM, including a lower risk of neonatal death.

C. What does this study add to what is already known?

- In twin pregnancies the impact of GDM is milder than in singleton pregnancies. Different glycaemic targets might be considered in twin pregnancies.

ABSTRACT PAGE

Objective: To assess the risk of adverse maternal and perinatal complications in twin and singleton pregnancies affected by gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM), compared to the respective group without GDM.

Data sources: Medline, Embase and Cochrane (January 1980 to May 2023).

Study eligibility criteria: Observational studies reporting maternal and perinatal outcomes in singletons and/or twin pregnancies with GDM versus controls.

Study appraisal and synthesis methods: Systematic review and meta-analysis. Pooled estimate risk ratios (RR) with 95% confidence intervals (CI) were generated to determine the likelihood of adverse pregnancy outcomes between GDM and non-GDM in twin and singleton pregnancies. Heterogeneity between studies was evaluated in the model and expressed using the I² statistic. A P-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant. The meta-analyses were performed using Review Manager (Version 5.4). Meta-regression was used to compare RRs between singletons and twins. The addition of multiple covariates into the models was used to address lack of adjustments.

Results: Eighty-five studies in singletons and 27 in twins were included. In singletons with GDM, compared to controls, there was increased risk of hypertensive disorders of pregnancy (RR 1.85; 95%CI 1.69, 2.01), induction of labour (RR 1.36; 95%CI 1.05,1.77), caesarean delivery (RR 1.31; 95%CI 1.24,1.38), large for gestational age neonate (RR 1.61; 95%CI 1.46,1.77), preterm birth (RR 1.36; 95%CI 1.27,1.46), admission to neonatal unit (RR 1.43; 95%CI 1.38,1.49). In twins with GDM, compared to controls, there was increased risk of hypertensive disorders of pregnancy (RR 1.69; 95%CI 1.51,1.90),

caesarean delivery (RR 1.10; 95%CI 1.06,1.13) large for gestational age neonate (RR 1.29; 95%CI 1.03,1.60), preterm birth (RR 1.19; 95%CI 1.07,1.32), admission to neonatal unit (RR 1.20; 95%CI 1.09,1.32) and reduced risk of small for gestational age neonate (RR 0.89; 95% CI 0.81-0.97) and risk of neonatal death (RR 0.50; 95%CI 0.39,0.65). When comparing RRs in singleton versus twin pregnancies, there was sufficient evidence to suggest that twins have a lower RR of caesarean delivery than singletons (P=0.003) and with sufficient adjustment for confounders, also lower RR for admission to neonatal care unit (P= 0.005), stillbirths (P= 0.002) and neonatal death (P= 0.001).

Conclusions: In both singletons and twin pregnancies, GDM is associated with increased risk of adverse maternal and perinatal outcomes. In twins, GDM may have a milder impact on some adverse perinatal outcomes and may be associated with lower risk of neonatal death.

Keywords: *gestational diabetes, hypertension, maternal outcomes, perinatal outcomes, pregnancy, preterm, singletons, twins.*

MAIN TEXT

Introduction

Gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM) is defined as impaired glucose tolerance resulting in hyperglycaemia of variable severity, diagnosed for the first time during pregnancy¹. Over the last decades the incidence of GDM has increased, mainly due to increasing prevalence of obesity and advanced maternal age^{2, 3}. Twin pregnancies account for approximately 3% of all births with increasing incidence over the last decades mostly due to advanced maternal age and widespread use of *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF)^{4 5}.

The increasing prevalence of both GDM and twin pregnancies as well as the shared risk factors have led to the hypothesis that twinning may further increase the risk of GDM complications^{6 7}. However, a meta-analysis by McGrath found the risks of adverse neonatal outcomes to be similar in twins born to mothers with GDM compared to controls⁸. In addition, there is some evidence that GDM in twins but not in singletons may actually be protective on some important perinatal outcomes such as lower Apgar score and perinatal death⁹. Conversely, a recent meta-analysis by Tu and Fei¹⁰ aggregating data from eight studies comparing maternal and perinatal outcomes in singleton versus twin pregnancies with GDM found lower risk in singletons for several perinatal outcomes.

Screening and management for twin pregnancies with GDM are extrapolated from studies in singletons, although good quality evidence that treatment improves adverse outcomes is available only for singletons with GDM^{11 12}, and despite reports showing glucose tolerance to be different in mothers of twins^{13 14 15}. At present, it remains unclear whether

GDM has different associations with maternal and perinatal outcomes in twin and singleton pregnancies.

Objectives

The aim of this systematic review and meta-analysis was to assess the risk of adverse maternal and perinatal complications in twin and singleton pregnancies affected by GDM, compared to the respective group without GDM.

Methods

Eligibility criteria, data sources and search strategy

This systematic review was performed in accordance with PRISMA statement for systematic reviews and meta-analysis¹⁶ and registered with PROSPERO International prospective register of systematic review (CRD42020222733).

A literature search was carried out using Medline, Embase and Cochrane databases. The following search terms were used: 'GDM; or gestational diabetes; or diabetes in pregnancy; or glucose intolerance; or hyperglycaemia; AND twins; or multiple; or singleton; AND pregnancy; NOT type 1; or type 2; or t2DM'. Filters applied included 'humans, female'. A manual search of relevant study reference lists was completed to identify additional studies of interest. Search results were exported to EndNote X6 (Clarivate; <http://www.endnote.com>) to organise and remove duplicate publications. Searches were carried out from January 1980 until May 2023. Start date of the search was set based on the time where GDM screening using thresholds adjusted for plasma became widespread¹⁷. Two authors (MC, EG) independently screened the titles and/or

abstracts of studies to determine eligibility for subsequent full paper appraisal. Disagreements were solved by consensus or by a third reviewer (SI).

Study selection

Papers were considered eligible for full manuscript review and data extraction if the study was a full paper observational study (either retrospective or prospective) comparing maternal and perinatal outcomes in pregnancies with GDM with pregnancies without GDM stratified to singleton or twins, published between January 1980 and May 2023. No language restriction was imposed.

Studies with insufficient data for interpretation, those without an adequate comparison group and those with inadequate distinction between pre-existing diabetes and GDM were excluded. If studies did not report data in sufficient detail, the corresponding author was contacted to request further information.

Data extraction

For data collection, an extraction sheet was developed on Microsoft Excel (Microsoft Corporation, 2018) including main data categories: study characteristics (study authors, year of publication, study design); details of GDM screening (method, approach, diagnostic criteria) and management (lifestyle modifications, diet, medical treatment with metformin and/or insulin); GDM prevalence (as reported in the study, or calculated as number of GDM cases over total number of cases screened); maternal demographics (non-GDM and GDM sample sizes, maternal age, main ethnicity, parity, body mass index

[BMI], smoking habit, mode of conception, chronic hypertension). In addition, for studies in twins we extracted data on chorionicity.

Data were extracted from publications by one author (MC) and cross-checked by another author (EG). For studies that separated groups (i.e., two control groups or two GDM groups based on differences in blood glucose levels), the means and standard deviations were combined using the formula provided by the Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions Version 5.1.0 (Cochrane 2011) and the lower glucose threshold used for diagnosis was selected.

Outcomes

Adverse maternal outcomes included any caesarean delivery (CD); induction of labour (IOL); post-partum haemorrhage; hypertensive disorders of pregnancy (HDP) defined as the sum of all adverse maternal outcomes related to high blood pressure including pregnancy-induced hypertension, pre-eclampsia, eclampsia and HELLP syndrome; premature, prelabour rupture of membranes; placental abruption.

Adverse perinatal outcomes included small-for-gestational-age (SGA) and large-for-gestational-age (LGA), including definition and reference chart used; preterm birth, including definition; low Apgar score, including definition ; admission to Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU); stillbirth, defined as any death between 24 weeks and birth; neonatal death (NND), referred to as the death of a live born infant, regardless of gestational age at birth, within the first 28 completed days of life; perinatal mortality, defined as the sum of stillbirths and neonatal deaths.

Assessment of risk of bias

To assess the quality of the studies selected and the risk of bias, two authors (MC, EG) classified them independently, according to the Newcastle - Ottawa scale (NOS) grading and considering scores ≥ 7 -9, 4-6, <4 low, medium, and high risk of bias, respectively.

Data synthesis

The primary end points of this study were to investigate the association of GDM in twin and singleton pregnancies with paired adverse maternal and perinatal outcomes.

Unadjusted pooled estimate risk ratios (RRs) with 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were generated to determine the likelihood of adverse pregnancy outcomes between GDM and non-GDM. Heterogeneity between studies was evaluated in the model and expressed using the I² statistic. A P-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant. The meta-analyses were performed using Review Manager (Version 5.4). Meta-regression was used to compare RRs between singletons and twins (RStudio version 3.4.1).

Secondary analysis: Meta-regression

To address the lack of adjustments of the studies included, multiple covariates were added into a meta-regression model to investigate whether this altered our conclusions regarding the difference in RRs between singletons and twins. The covariates included number of fetuses (singleton or twin), diagnostic criteria for GDM (five most common criteria and an additional 'other' category), and four demographic maternal characteristics including ethnicity, age, BMI, and nulliparity. Ethnicity was considered as a categorical variable depending on the most prevalent ethnicity; age and BMI were considered as

continuous variables and the means for each category were used; parity was defined by the percentage of nulliparous mothers out of the total number of mothers with and without GDM.

For this analysis, we have assumed that all women diagnosed with GDM (including those where data on screening methods and management were unavailable) received standard monitoring and treatment as appropriate. Therefore, outcomes presented herein, refer to singleton and twin pregnancies diagnosed with GDM and treated as per local policies.

RESULTS

Study selection

A total of 6190 studies were identified with the search. After removal of duplicate studies, 5898 studies were screened by title and/or abstract and 388 were deemed suitable for full paper appraisal. Following assessment of eligibility, 280 studies were excluded due to the following reasons: insufficient reported study data for interpretation (n = 42), inadequate comparison group (n = 66), inadequate distinction between pre-existing diabetes and GDM (n = 51), outcomes not of interest (n=121). Screening the study reference lists did not lead to additional studies being incorporated.

A total of 108 studies were included in the final meta-analysis, of which 81 in singleton pregnancies^{18 19 20-22 23 24-26 27, 28 29 30 31-33 34, 35 36 37, 38 39-43 44-46 47 48-52 53-57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66-68 69 70 71 72, 73 74 75-77 78-82 83 84, 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95, 23 in twins^{96 97 98 99 100 101 102 103 104, 105 106 107 108 109 110 111 112 113 114 115 62 116 117, and 4^{51 37 6 118} reporting outcomes for both singletons and twins, thus included in both analyses (**Figure 1**).}}

Characteristics of studies in singletons

A total of 14,033.990 pregnancies were examined, including 722,020 GDM singleton pregnancies and 13,308.855 singleton controls. All studies included were observational in design. Out of these 70 were cohort studies, of which 58 retrospective and 12 prospective, and 15 were case control, of which 9 retrospective and 6 prospective. Qualitative assessment using NOS identified a low risk of bias for 56 studies, a medium risk of bias for 21 studies and a high risk of bias for the remaining 7 studies (Supplementary Table 1).

Most studies were carried out in Asian women [34%], followed by White [31%], Hispanic [7%], Middle Eastern [6%], Black [3%], and in the remaining 19% ethnicity was other non-White or unspecified. The average age for GDM patients was 31.6 ± 4.7 years and 29.4 ± 4.8 years for controls. Mean BMI was 26.2 ± 4.6 Kg/m² for GDM patients and 24.4 ± 4.3 Kg/m² for controls. Paired parity data were available for 63% of the studies which showed a lower percentage of nulliparous amongst GDM patients compared to controls [47% vs 51%].

Screening strategy was universal in 59 studies, based on risk-factors in 12 studies, variable in 2 studies (universal or risk-factors) and unspecified in 12 studies. Out of the studies reporting a universal screening strategy, in 32 the screening approach was two-step (glucose challenge test [GCT] in all women, followed by glucose tolerance test [GTT] in those with positive results), in 25 one-step (GTT in all women), and in two the approach was variable (one-step or two-step). Out of the studies adopting a screening strategy

based on risk-factors, six used a one-step approach, four a two-step approach and two a variable or unspecified approach.

Methods of screening and criteria for diagnosis varied widely across studies with International Association of Diabetes and Pregnancy Study Group (IADPSG) (33% of the studies), Carpenter and Coustan (CC) (19%), National Diabetes Data Group (NDDG) (8%) and American Diabetes Association (ADA) (5%) being the most used. Half of the studies included details of management of GDM, with a combination of diet, self-monitoring, oral antihyperglycemic agents and insulin being the most common measures reported.

Study design, geographical setting, ethnic characteristics of the populations, screening strategy and GDM prevalence in studies on singletons are outlined in Supplementary Table 2.

Characteristics of studies in twins

A total of 167,991 twin pregnancies were examined, including 11,812 GDM pregnancies and 156,179 controls. All studies included were observational in design, of which 20 were cohort (all retrospective but one ¹¹⁵) and 7 case-control (5 retrospective and 2 prospective). Qualitative assessment using NOS identified a low risk of bias for 21 studies, a medium risk of bias for two studies, and high risk of bias for four studies (Supplementary Table 3).

The most represented ethnicity in studies on twins was White [34%], followed by Asians [22%], however in 44% of cases ethnicity was unspecified. The average age for GDM

patients was 32.7 ± 5.0 years and 31.2 ± 5.0 years for controls. The mean BMI was 25 ± 5.0 kg/m² for GDM and 23.6 ± 4.5 kg/m² for controls. Paired parity data were available for 15 studies (56%) which showed the percentage of nulliparous women to be higher in the GDM group compared to controls (56% vs 55%). Twenty-one studies (78%) included all type of twins, five (18%) excluded complications in monochorionic diamniotic twins and all monochorionic monoamniotic pregnancies, and one (4%) included dichorionic twins only.

Screening strategy was universal in 20 studies, unspecified in six and based on risk factors in one. Out of studies adopting universal screening, 12 described a two-step approach, 7 one-step and one a variable approach (one-step or two-step). Criteria for diagnosis were the same as for singletons and varied widely across studies with CC (15%), NDDG (11%), CDA (15%) and Australasian Diabetes in Pregnancy Society (ADIPS) (26%) being the most used ones. Details of management of GDM in twins were available in 16 studies, of which self-monitoring, life-style measures and insulin treatment were common to 11 studies whereas oral antihyperglycemic were used in 5 studies only.

Study design, geographical setting, ethnic characteristics of the populations, screening strategy and GDM prevalence in studies in twins are outlined in Supplementary Table 4.

GDM and maternal outcomes

Hypertensive disorders of pregnancy

Fifty-two studies in singletons (including 194,224 GDM mothers and 4,909,973 controls) and 21 in twins (including 11,646 GDM mothers and 155,030 controls) reported outcome data for HDP, with mean prevalence of 9.6% (0.5 to 65) and 18.3% (6.4 to 48) in GDM

mothers of singletons and twins, respectively. In singletons with GDM, compared to those without GDM, the risk of hypertensive disorders of pregnancy was increased (RR 1.85; 95%CI 1.69, 2.01; I² 94%; P<0.00001), and this was also true in twins (RR 1.69; 95%CI 1.51,1.90; I² 50%; P<0.00001) (**Figure 2: A, B**). The difference between the RRs for singletons and twins was not statistically significant (P=0.477) and the addition of covariates in meta-regression models did not change this.

Induction of labour

Eighteen studies in singletons (including 43,817 mothers with GDM and 704,228 controls) and seven in twins (including 1268 GDM mothers of twins versus 12,399 controls) reported data on IOL with a prevalence of 25.2% (3 to 60) in singletons and 18.5% (5.3 to 56.3) in twins. In singletons with GDM, compared to those without GDM, the risk of induction of labour was increased (RR 1.36; 95%CI 1.05,1.77; I² 99%; P=0.02); this was not the case in twins (RR 1.20; 95%CI 0.72,2.00; I² 94%; P=0.48). (**Figure 2: C, D**). The difference between the RRs for singleton and twins was not statistically significant (P=0.484) and the addition of covariates in meta-regression models did not change this.

Caesarean delivery

Sixty-seven studies in singletons (including 657,545 GDM mothers and 10,302,849 controls) and 23 in twins (including 11,503 GDM mothers and 153,455 controls) reported outcome data for CD, with mean prevalence of 36.4% (2.6-74) and 76% (44-100) in GDM mothers of singletons and twins, respectively. The risk of caesarean delivery was

increased both in singletons with GDM (RR 1.31; 95%CI 1.24,1.38; I² 99%, P<0.00001) and in twins with GDM (RR 1.10; 95%CI 1.06,1.13; I² 88%; P<0.00001) compared to their respective controls without GDM. (**Figure 2: E, F**).

The difference between the RRs for singleton and twins was statistically significant (P=0.003) and the addition of covariates in meta-regression models did not change this.

GDM and perinatal outcomes

Small for Gestational Age

Thirty-nine studies in singletons (including 124,873 babies from GDM mothers and 2,064,602 controls) and 16 studies in twins (including 4986 twins from GDM mothers and 35,591 twins controls) provided outcome data for small for gestational age neonates, with a mean prevalence of 7.3% (range 1.8 to 20) in singletons and 20% (range 7-63.2) in twins born to GDM mothers. SGA was mostly defined as birth weight below the 10th centile (70% of the studies in singletons and all but one study in twins¹⁰⁵) or birth weight less than 2500g^{18 57 68 70 74 80 119 105 23 46}. Most studies in singletons used reference charts adjusted for gender and gestational age; 53% of studies in twins used charts for multiples^{101 112 103 113 100 115 51 114 104}, with the remaining using charts for singletons (41%) or unspecified (6%). In singletons with GDM, compared to those without GDM, the risk of small for gestational age was not reduced (RR 0.99; 95%CI 0.90,1.08; I² 92%; P=0.78). Conversely, in twins with GDM, compared to those without GDM, the risk of small for gestational age was reduced (RR 0.89; 95%CI 0.81,0.97; I² 27%; P=0.009) (**Figure 3: A, B**).

The difference between the RRs for singleton and twins was not statistically significant (P=0.250) and the addition of covariates in meta-regression models did not change this.

Large for Gestational Age

Forty-six studies in singletons (including 508,648 babies from GDM mothers and 9,834,975 controls) and fourteen studies in twin pregnancies (including 4841 twins from GDM mothers and 34,205 twin controls) looked at large for gestational age, with a mean prevalence of 16.3% (range 3.5 to 37.7) in singletons and 14.1% (range 3.8 to 34.5) in twins born to GDM mothers. LGA was mostly defined as birth weight above the 90th centile (88% of studies in singletons and 100% studies in twins), or birth weight greater than two standard deviations [SD] above the mean⁴⁶ or birth weight greater than 4000g⁶⁴. In singletons with GDM, compared to those without GDM, the risk of large for gestational age was increased (RR 1.61; 95%CI 1.46,1.77, I2 99%, P<0.00001). This was true also for twins born to mother with GDM (RR 1.29; 95%CI 1.03,1.60; I2 58%; P=0.02) compared to controls (**Figure 3: C, D**).

The difference between the RRs for singleton and twins was not statistically significant (P= 0.103) and the addition of covariates in meta-regression models did not change this.

Preterm birth

Fifty-three studies in singletons (including 508,766 GDM mothers and 10,151,968 controls) and 16 in twins (including 2804 GDM mothers of twins and 21,250 controls) reported outcome data for preterm birth (< 37 weeks), with a mean prevalence of 12.1%

(2.5 to 100) in singletons and 40.2% (13.6 to 73.8) in twins born to GDM mothers. Nine studies in twins reported also outcome data for preterm birth <34 weeks^{105 113 100 96 118 37 102 98 114}; several studies both in singletons^{18 21 33 37 38 42 53 61 83 94 89} and twins^{96 37 98, 102 111 114 62 117 100 113} reported outcome data also for other categories of preterm birth which were insufficient for meta-analysis due to heterogeneity in outcomes. In singletons with GDM, compared to those without GDM, the risk of preterm birth was increased (RR 1.36 95%CI 1.27,1.46, I² 99%; P<0.00001) and this was also true for twins (RR 1.19; 95%CI 1.07,1.32; I² 90%; P=0.001) (**Figure 4: A, B**).

The difference between the RRs for singleton and twins was not statistically significant (P= 0.161) and the addition of covariates in meta-regression models did not change this.

In addition, we considered that in twins preterm birth < 34 weeks is clinically more relevant than <37 weeks, thus we produced RRs also for 9 studies in twins including the preterm birth category of < 33- or <34- weeks. However, these showed minimal change in the RR for twins (RR 1.24; 95%CI 1.04,1.48, I² 61%; P=0.02), and meta-regression analysis did not show a significant difference between singletons and twins (P=0.440).

Low Apgar score

Thirty studies in singletons (including 114,034 babies from GDM mothers and 4,243.611 controls) were examined and 11 studies in twins (including 3326 twins from GDM mothers and 25,277 twins controls) reported outcome data for low Apgar score, with a mean prevalence of 2.5% (range 0 to 11.7) in singletons and 2.5% (range 0 to 10.5) in twins born to GDM mothers. Low Apgar score was defined as below 7 at 5 minutes of life in all

but one study¹¹³; In singletons with GDM, compared to those without GDM, the risk of low Apgar score was not increased (RR 1.12; 95%CI 0.97,1.31; I2 76%, P= 0.13); this was also true for twin pregnancies (RR 0.90; 95%CI 0.68,1.19; I2 16%; P= 0.44) (**Figure 4: C, D**), but the direction of associations was opposite in the two groups. The difference between the RRs for singleton and twins was not statistically significant (P=0.129) and the addition of covariates in meta-regression models did not change this.

Admission to Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

Thirty-five studies in singletons (including 495,192 singletons from GDM mothers and 6,495,739 controls) and 15 in twins (including 4294 twins born from GDM mothers and 31,001 twins controls) reported outcome data on admission to NICU, with a mean prevalence of 14% (0.4 to 76) in singletons and 45.8% (22.8 to 100) in twins born to GDM mothers. In singletons with GDM, compared to those without GDM, the rate of NICU admission was increased (RR 1.43; 95% CI 1.38,1.49; I2 82%; P<0.0001); this was also true for twin pregnancies (RR 1.20; 95% CI 1.09,1.32; I2 80%; P=0.0002) (**Figure 4: E, F**). The difference between the RRs for singleton and twins was not statistically significant (P= 0.097) when additional covariates were not included. However, when BMI or parity were included in the model, the effect estimates for singletons versus twins became significant (P= 0.033 and P= 0.005, respectively).

Stillbirth

Twenty-two studies in singletons and 8 in twins reported outcome data for stillbirths, with a mean prevalence of 1.2% (0 to 8.3) in singleton and 2.4% (0.0 to 8.8) in twin pregnancies complicated with GDM. A total of 360,647 GDM singletons and 8,489.858 singleton controls were examined, versus 1531 twins from diabetic mother and 15362 twins controls. In singletons with GDM, compared to those without GDM, the risk of stillbirth was not significantly different (RR 1.00; 95%CI 0.80,1.25; I2 73%; P=0.99). Similarly, in twins with GDM, compared to those without GDM, the risk of stillbirth was not significantly different (RR 1.72; 95%CI 0.57,5.19; I2 68%, P=0.34) (**Figure 5: A, B**). The difference between the RRs for singletons and twins was not statistically significant (P=0.3743). However, when age or diagnostic criteria were added in the meta-regression, the estimate effect of being a singleton versus twin was significant, implying that twins have a greater risk ratio compared to singletons (P= 0.002 and P=0.042, respectively).

Neonatal death

Sixteen studies in singletons (including 147107 babies from GDM mothers and 4434173 controls) and 10 studies in twins (including 19,299 twins from GDM mothers and 280,387 twins controls) reported data on neonatal deaths, with a mean prevalence of 0.9% (0 to 3) in singleton and 0.88% (0 to 2.3) in twin pregnancies complicated with GDM. In singletons with GDM, compared to those without GDM, the risk of neonatal death was not significantly different (RR 0.87, 95%CI 0.65,1.17, I2 78%; P=0.36). In twins with GDM, compared to those without GDM, the risk of neonatal death was markedly reduced (RR 0.50; 95% CI 0.39,0.65, I2 6%; P<0.00001) (**Figure 5: C, D**). The RRs for singletons and

twins did not differ substantially ($P=0.082$), which remained unchanged after the inclusion of most covariates in the meta-regression models. However, after including diagnostic criteria for GDM in the meta-regression, the RRs for NND differed between singletons and twins, with twins having a lower risk of NND compared to singletons ($P=0.0012$).

Perinatal mortality

Fifteen studies in singletons (including 153099 babies from GDM mothers and 4214762 controls) and 5 studies in twins (including 1763 twins from GDM mothers and 13416 twins controls) reported outcome data for perinatal mortality, with a mean prevalence of 1.0% (0 to 6.8) in singletons and 3.8 (1.5 to 10.5) in twins born to GDM mothers. In singletons with GDM, compared to those without GDM, the risk of perinatal mortality was not significantly different (RR 0.89; 95%CI, 0.67, 1.18; I² 88%; $P=0.41$) and this was also true for twin pregnancies (RR 1.04; 95%CI 0.47, 2.32; I² 75%; $P=0.92$) (**Figure 5: E, F**). The difference between the RRs for singleton and twins was not statistically significant ($P=0.893$) and the addition of covariates in meta-regression models did not change this.

COMMENT*Principal findings*

This systematic review and meta-analysis have demonstrated that in singleton pregnancies with GDM, compared to those without GDM, there was increased risk of hypertensive disorders of pregnancy, induction of labour, caesarean delivery, birth of large for gestational age neonate, preterm birth, neonatal intensive care unit admission; there was no significant difference in risk of birth of small for gestational age neonate, low-Apgar score, stillbirth, neonatal death, and perinatal mortality.

In twin pregnancies with GDM, compared to those without GDM, there was increased risk of hypertensive disorders of pregnancy, caesarean delivery, birth of large for gestational age neonate, preterm birth, and admission to neonatal intensive care unit; there were reduction in the risk of small for gestational age neonate and a 50% reduction in the risk of neonatal death. There were no significant differences in risk of induction of labour, low-Apgar score, stillbirth, or perinatal mortality.

When comparing RRs in singleton versus twin pregnancies, there was sufficient evidence to suggest that twins have a lower RR of caesarean delivery than singletons. There was insufficient evidence to suggest a difference in hypertensive disorders of pregnancy, induction of labour, birth of large for gestational neonate, preterm birth, low-Apgar score, stillbirth, and perinatal mortality. With sufficient adjustment for confounders, there was evidence that twins have lower RR than singletons for admission to neonatal intensive care unit, stillbirth, and neonatal death.

Comparison with existing literature

The increased risk of adverse outcomes in singleton pregnancies with GDM is well established¹²⁰ and likely to be mediated by the substantial increase in the risk of LGA which, in turn, leads to increased risk of induction of labour and caesarean delivery and predisposes to other adverse outcomes, such as birth trauma and shoulder dystocia, which have been omitted in this review as were not reported for twins. In addition, GDM in singletons is known to be associated with placental dysfunction¹²¹, chronic hypoxia, neonatal hypoglycaemia, all of which may contribute to increased perinatal risks. Conversely, in twins, the impact of hyperglycaemia is thought to provide a benefit in terms of fetal growth, by counterbalancing the inherent growth restricting effect of the inadequate uterine milieu in multiples³⁷.

In our study, GDM was associated with a 50% reduction in the risk of neonatal death in twins but not in singletons. Our results were mostly driven by two good quality studies, which showed a positive impact of GDM on the risk of neonatal death^{110 51} in twins compared to controls without GDM. In the large US birth cohort study by Foeller, the trend towards reduced neonatal deaths in twins GDM versus controls (aOR 0.84, 95% CI 0.68–1.02) was justified by reduced risk of low Apgar score (aOR 0.8 95%CI 0.68, 0.94), reduced prematurity before 32 weeks (aOR 0.72, 95% CI 0.68–0.76), and reduced risk of SGA neonate (aOR 0.84, 95% CI 0.81–0.89)¹¹⁰. Lai et al also observed a reduced risk of neonatal death (OR 0.45 95%CI 0.21, 0.97 p<0.05) and low Apgar score (OR 0.54 95%CI 0.34, 0.87 p<0.05) in twins with GDM versus controls but not in singletons⁵¹. Of note both these studies reported data adjusted for multiple maternal and pregnancy confounders, except pre-pregnancy BMI, which is known to be an independent predictor of adverse

perinatal outcomes¹²². In addition, neither study presented chorionicity data. Interestingly, in our study, the risk of low Apgar score was not significantly reduced; both the risk of NICU admissions and preterm birth were increased in twin neonates with GDM compared to controls, thus they could not mediate the risk of neonatal death. It can be hypothesised that the positive effect of GDM on growth in twins is what confers them a real metabolic advantage, whereas low birth weight is one of the most frequent causes of morbidity in twins. Other contributing factors may include closer antenatal surveillance with multidisciplinary input in twin pregnancies with GDM compared to twins without GDM, lower threshold for delivery, higher rates of steroid administration for lung maturation and increased compliance to follow-up in this group.

Strengths and limitations

Strengths of our analysis include the large sample size and inclusion of studies from a wide number of geographical settings, ethnicities, and cultures without language restriction, which increase the applicability of our findings to different populations. The comprehensive outcome dataset, including paired perinatal and maternal adverse outcomes for singletons and twins helps comparability of findings between these two populations.

There are several limitations to this meta-analysis. Estimating risks of adverse outcomes for both twins and singletons affected by GDM based on aggregated data is subject to the heterogeneity of the primary studies with regards to the study design, demographics of the populations studied, methods of screening, and criteria for diagnosing GDM across the studies. The high between studies heterogeneity reflects great methodological

variation, thus suggesting that the findings should be interpreted cautiously. However, adopting a mixed methods approach accounts partially for the within studies heterogeneity. In addition, the inclusion of meta-regression models mitigates the risk of bias due to lack of adjustment for confounders by assessing whether the variation in confounders accounts for the within group difference in risk.

Finally, data from birth registry studies incorporated in this analysis included different approaches and/or methods of screening and provided no information on local policies for management of GDM; however, the inclusion of registry data minimises the risk of selection bias. Data reported in this meta-analysis pertain to women diagnosed and treated with GDM as per local policy, therefore the effect of treatment on the outcomes could not be measured. However, this was beyond the scope of this review.

Conclusions and Implications

We performed a meta-analysis of the association between GDM and adverse pregnancy outcomes in more than fourteen million women with singleton and nearly 170,000 with twin pregnancies. In singletons GDM is associated with increased risk of adverse maternal and perinatal outcomes, but the impact of GDM on twins was milder, with a remarkable reduced risk of neonatal death.

Our findings contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of adverse outcomes of pregnancy related to GDM in singletons and twins compared to their counterparts without GDM which will facilitate evidence-based counselling to the respective group of women. The impact of GDM treatment in mediating adverse outcomes in each group and the optimal thresholds for diagnosing GDM in twin pregnancies warrant further research.

CRedit author statement:

Elena Greco: *Investigation, Formal Analysis, Writing-Original Draft, Writing- Review & Editing, Visualization.* **Maria Calanducci:** *Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Writing-Original Draft, Visualization.* **Kypros H Nicolaides:** *Methodology, Visualization, Writing- Review & Editing.* **Mohammed BS Huda:** *Visualization, Writing- Review & Editing.* **Eleanor VH Barry:** *Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing- Review & Editing.* **Stamatina Iliodromiti:** *Conceptualization, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Writing- Review & Editing.*

Data availability: The protocol and datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Figure Legends:

Figure 1. PRISMA study selection flowchart

Figure 2. Risk of adverse maternal outcomes in singleton pregnancies with GDM versus control and in twin pregnancies with GDM versus controls.

Risk of hypertensive disorders of pregnancy in singleton pregnancies with GDM versus controls (A) and in twin pregnancies with GDM versus controls (B); Risk of induction of labour in singleton pregnancies with GDM versus controls (C) and in twin pregnancies with GDM versus controls (D); Risk of caesarean delivery in singleton pregnancies with GDM versus controls (E) and in twin pregnancies with GDM versus controls (F)

Figure 3. Risk of adverse growth outcomes in singleton pregnancies with GDM with GDM versus controls and twin pregnancies with GDM versus controls. Risk of SGA in singleton pregnancies with GDM versus controls (A) and in twin pregnancies with GDM versus controls (B); Risk of LGA in singleton pregnancies with GDM versus controls (C) and in twin pregnancies with GDM versus controls (D).

Figure 4. Risk of preterm birth, low Apgar score and NICU admission in singleton pregnancies with GDM versus controls and twin pregnancies with GDM versus controls. Risk of preterm birth in singleton pregnancies with GDM versus controls (A) and in twin pregnancies with GDM versus controls (B); Risk of low-Apgar score in singleton pregnancies with GDM versus controls (C) and in twin pregnancies with GDM versus controls (D); Risk of NICU admission in singleton pregnancies with GDM versus controls (E) and in twin pregnancies with GDM versus controls (F).

Figure 5. Risk of stillbirth, neonatal death, and perinatal mortality in singleton pregnancies with GDM with GDM versus controls and twin pregnancies with GDM versus controls. Risk of stillbirth in singleton pregnancies with GDM versus controls (A) and in twin pregnancies with GDM versus controls (B); Risk of NND in singleton pregnancies with GDM versus controls (C) and in twin pregnancies with GDM versus controls (D); Risk of perinatal mortality in singleton pregnancies with GDM versus controls (E) and in twin pregnancies with GDM versus controls (F).

Supplementary material:

Table 1. Quality assessment for studies in singletons using Newcastle-Ottawa scale

567 **Table 2.** Characteristics of studies in singletons

568 **Table 3.** Quality assessment for studies in twins using Newcastle-Ottawa scale

569 **Table 4.** Characteristics of studies in twins

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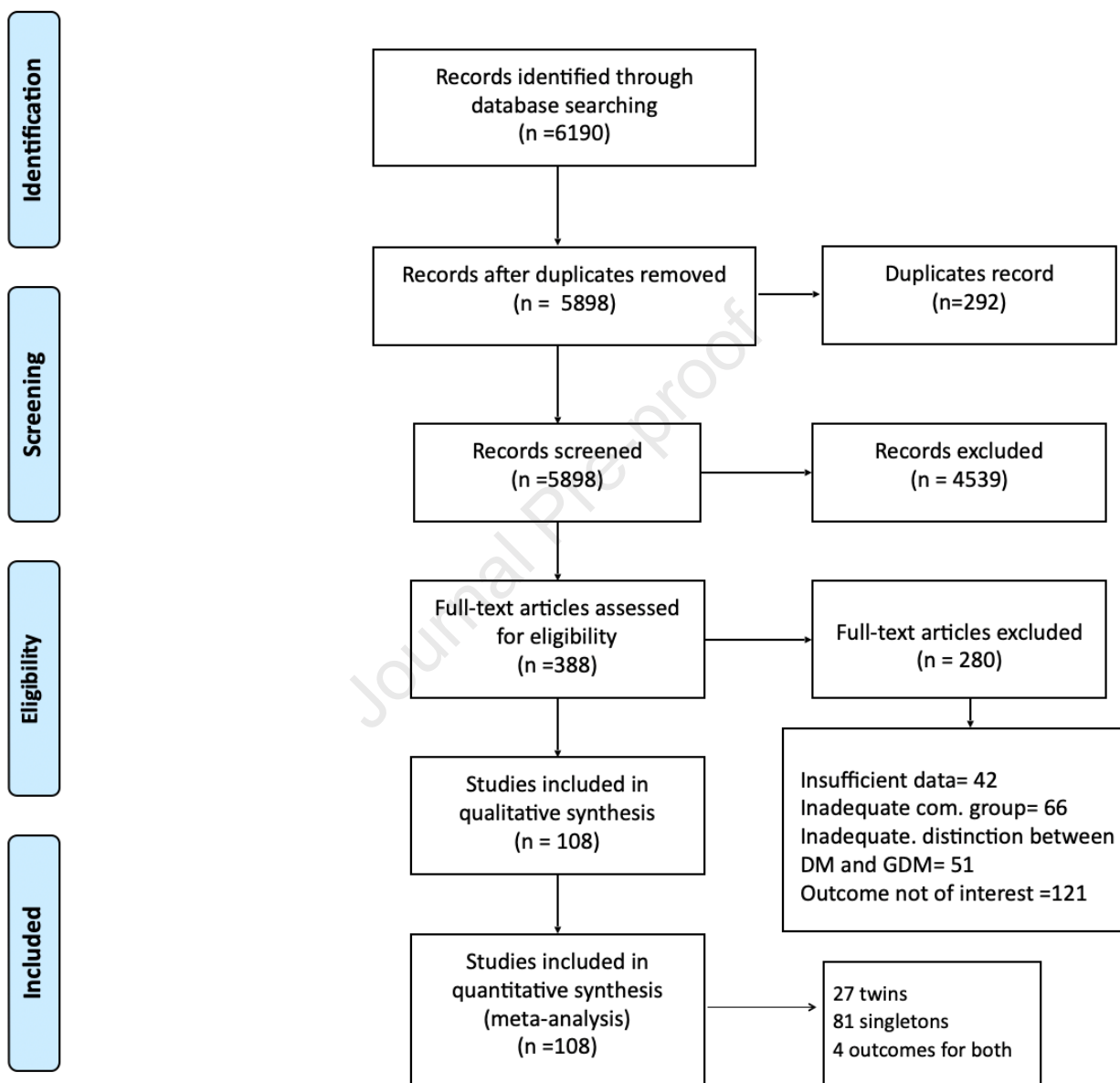
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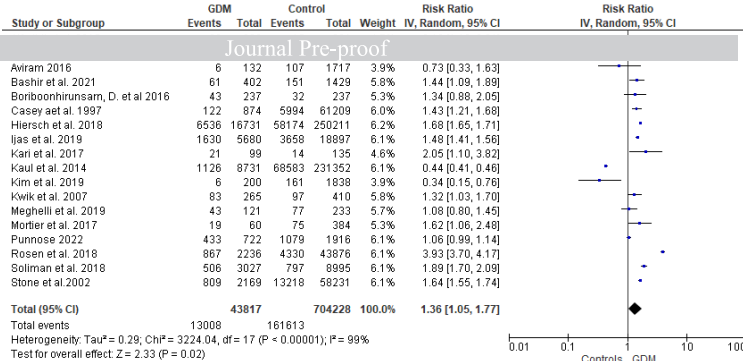
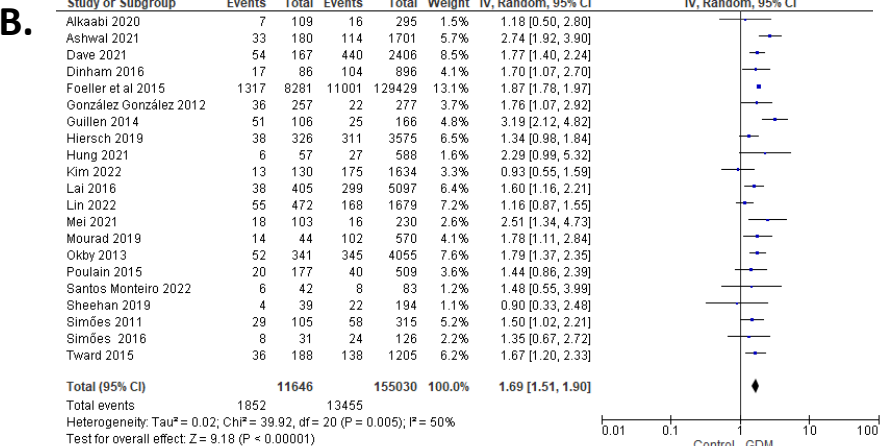
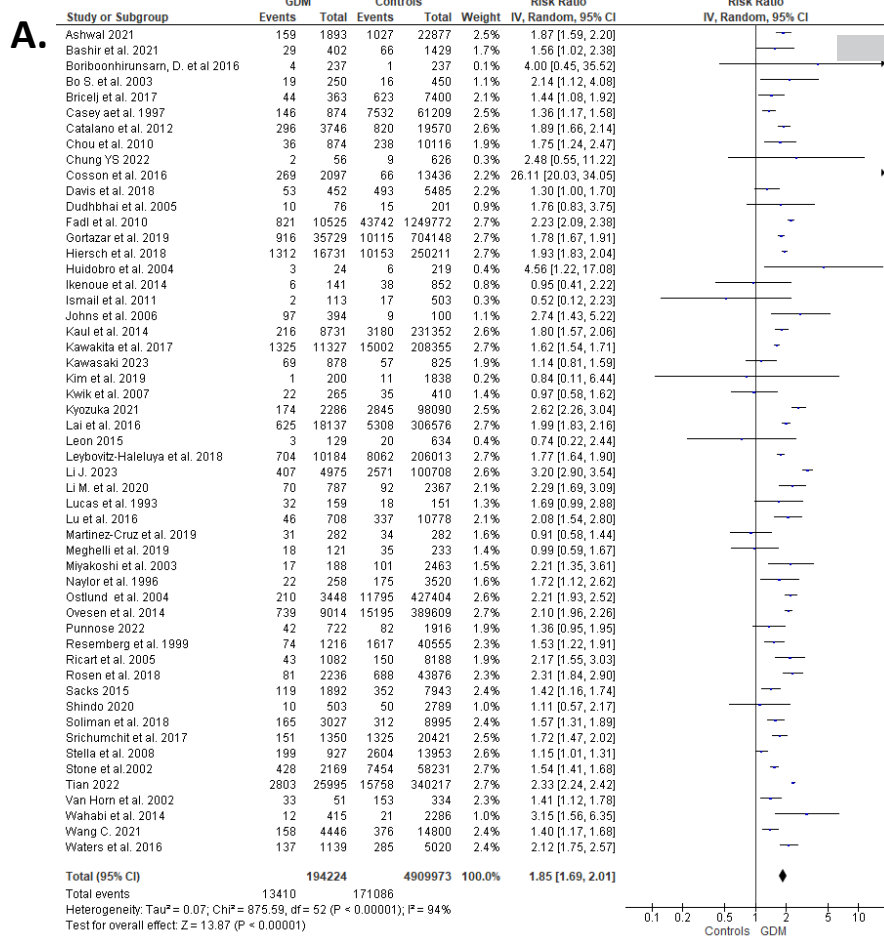
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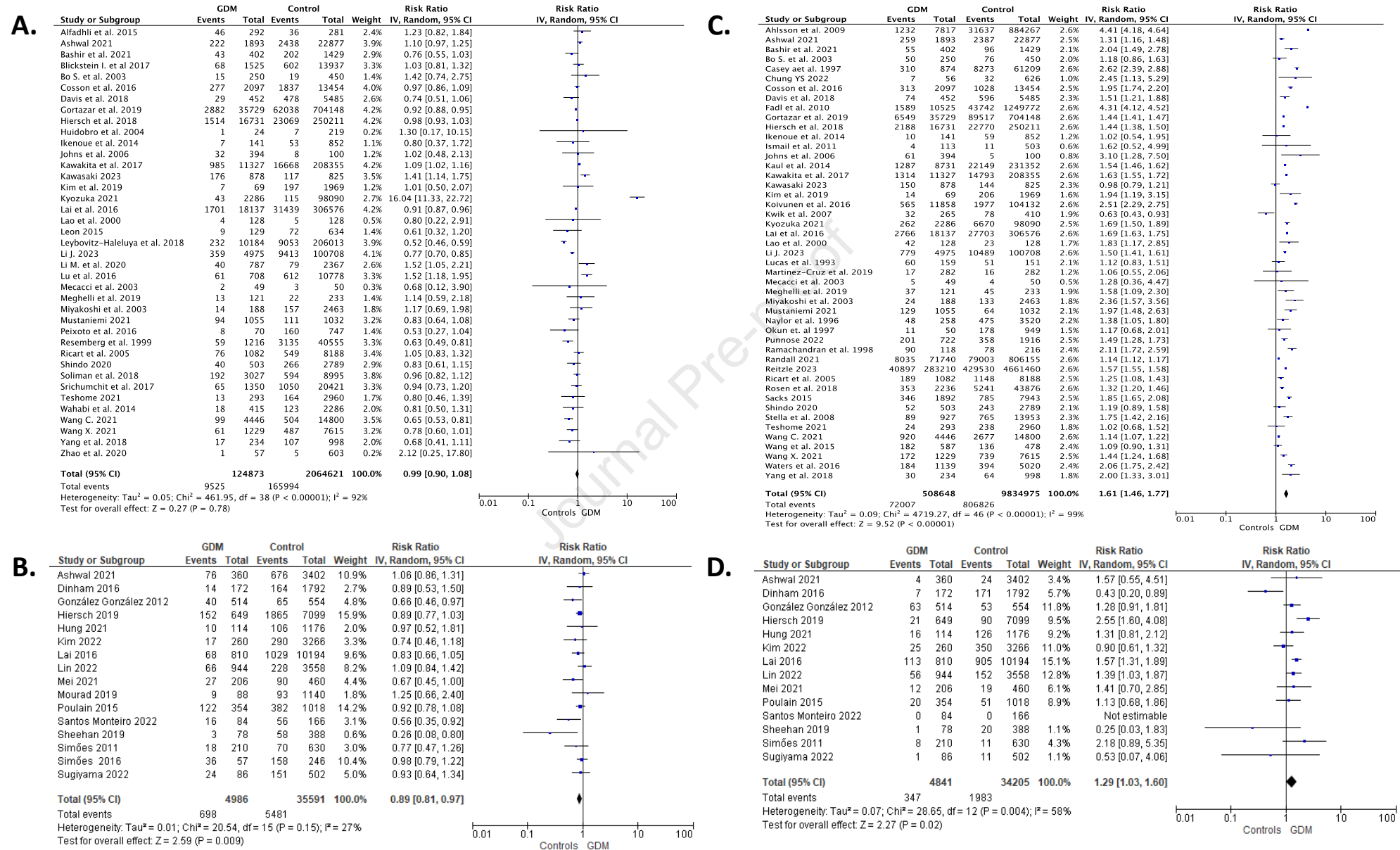
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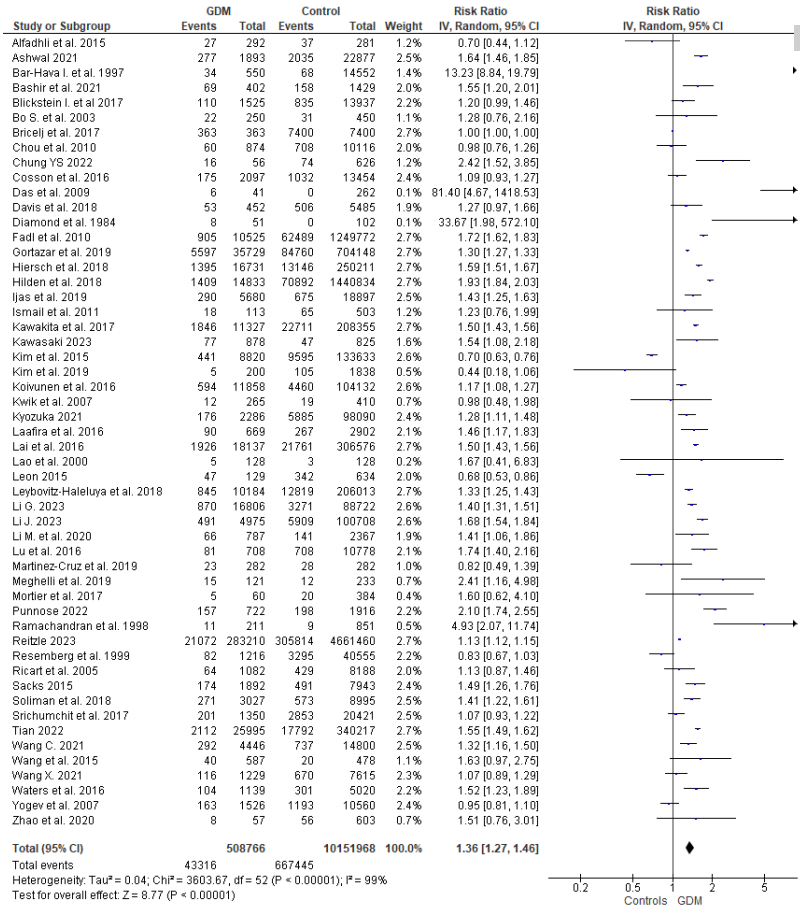
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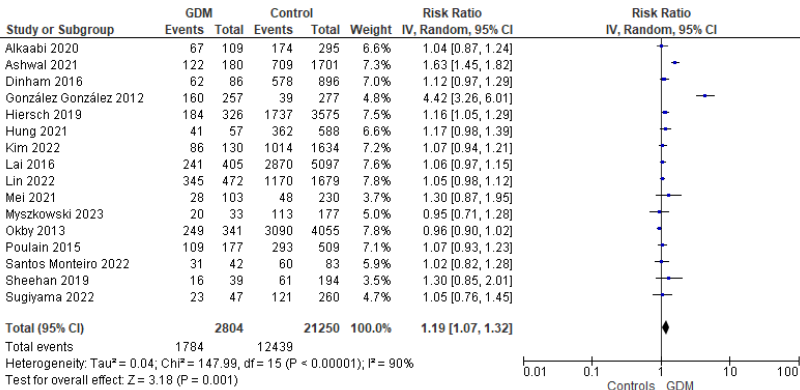




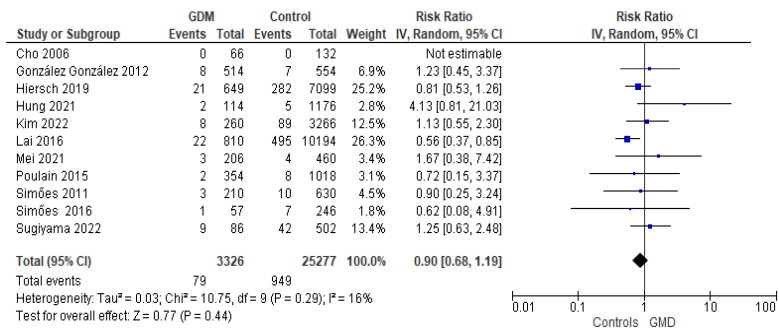
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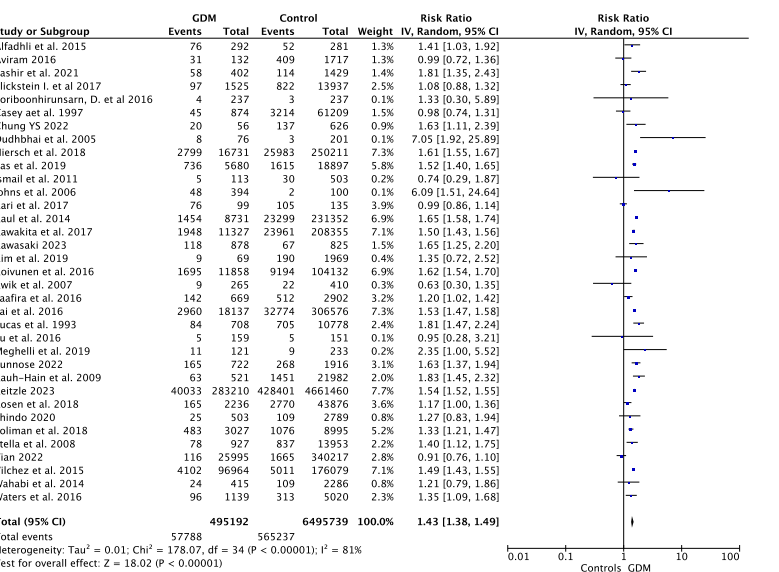
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