UDC: 618.3-06:618.616.-009
https://doi.org/10.37800/RM.1.2025.430

Prognostic biomarkers of eclampsia: A meta-analysis

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ABSTRACT

Relevance: Eclampsia is a life-threatening pregnancy complication characterized by seizures and loss of consciousness on the background of preeclampsia. The WHO estimates that 10–15% of maternal mortality is associated with hypertensive disorders, including eclampsia.
The study aimed to comprehensively analyze key biomarkers for predicting eclampsia based on high-quality studies from the last 10 years.
Materials and Methods: he study included 40 research papers from the PubMed, Scopus, and Cochrane Library databases focusing on biomarkers such as sFlt-1/PlGF, cell-free DNA (cfDNA), and genetic markers of inflammation. Data analysis was performed using the PRISMA method, with odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) calculations.
Results: The sFlt-1/PlGF ratio was the most accurate predictor of eclampsia (OR = 7.5; 95% CI: 5.6-9.9; p < 0.001). Levels of cfDNA (OR = 6.3; 95% CI: 4.7-8.4; p < 0.001) and polymorphisms of the IL-10 and TNF-α genes (OR = 3.9; 95% CI: 2.8-5.4; p < 0.001) were also significant.
Conclusion: The combined use of sFlt-1/PlGF, cfDNA, and genetic tests enhances the accuracy of eclampsia prediction and presents significant clinical potential.

Keywords: *eclampsia, preeclampsia, pregnancy, biomarker, prediction.*

How to cite: Mugazov MM, Omertayeva DE, Vasiliyev DV, et al. Prognostic biomarkers of eclampsia: meta-analysis. *Reproductive Medicine (Central Asia).* 2025;1:34-40. Russian.
https://doi.org/10.37800/RM.1.2025.430

Прогностические биомаркеры эклампсии: мета-анализ

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АННОТАЦИЯ

Актуальность: Эклампсия представляет собой жизнеугрожающее осложнение беременности, сопровождающееся судорогами и потерей сознания, на фоне преэклампсии. ВОЗ оценивает, что 10-15% материнской смертности связано с гипертензивными расстройствами, включая эклампсию.
Цель исследования – изучение биомаркеров, обладающих высокой прогностической значимостью для выявления женщин с риском развития эклампсии.
Материалы и методы: В анализ включено 40 публикаций за последние 10 лет из баз данных PubMed, Scopus и Cochrane Library, охватывающих биомаркеры sFlt-1/PlGF, внеклеточную ДНК (вкДНК) и генетические маркеры воспаления. Анализ источников проводился методом PRISMA с расчетом отношения шансов (ОШ) и 95% доверительных интервалов (ДИ).
Результаты: Соотношение sFlt-1/PlGF оказалось наиболее точным предиктором эклампсии (ОШ=7,5; 95% ДИ: 5,6-9,9; p<0,001). Уровни вкДНК (ОШ=6,3; 95% ДИ: 4,7-8,4; p<0,001) и полиморфизмы генов IL-10 и TNF-α (ОШ=3,9; 95% ДИ: 2,8-5,4; p<0,001) также показали значимость.
Заключение: Комбинированное использование биомаркеров sFlt-1/PlGF, вкДНК и генетических тестов повышает точность прогнозирования эклампсии, что имеет значительные клинические перспективы.

Ключевые слова: *эклампсия, преэклампсия, беременность, биомаркер, прогнозирование.*

Для цитирования: Мугазов М.М., Омертаева Д.Е., Васильев Д.В. и др. Прогностические биомаркеры эклампсии: мета-анализ. *Репродуктивная медицина (Центральная Азия).* 2025;1:34-40.
https://doi.org/10.37800/RM.1.2025.430

Эклампсияның болжамдық биомаркерлері: мета-анализ

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АҢДАТПА

Өзектілігі: Эклампсия – преэклампсия аясында құрысу және есінен танумен сипатталатын өмірге қауіпті жүктілік асқынуы. Дүниежүзілік денсаулық сақтау ұйымы (ДДҰ) мәліметінше, гипертензивті бұзылыстар, соның ішінде эклампсия, аналар өлімінің 10–15%-ымен байланысты.

Зерттеу мақсаты – Соңғы 10 жылдағы жоғары сапалы зерттеулерге сүйене отырып, эклампсияны болжауға арналған негізгі биомаркерлерге жан-жақты талдау жүргізу.

Материалдар мен әдістері: Зерттеуге PubMed, Scopus және Cochrane Library дерекқорларынан алынған 40 зерттеу кірді. Олар sFlt-1/PlGF, жасушадан тыс ДНҚ (жсДНҚ) және қабынудың генетикалық маркерлерін қамтыды. Деректер PRISMA әдісімен талданып, шанс қатынастары (ШҚ) және 95% сенімділік интервалдары (СИ) есептелді.

Нәтижелері: sFlt-1/PlGF қатынасы эклампсияның ең дәл болжамдық көрсеткіші болды (ШҚ = 7,5; 95% СИ: 5,6-9,9; p < 0,001). ЖсДНҚ деңгейлері (ШҚ = 6,3; 95% СИ: 4,7-8,4; p < 0,001) және IL-10 мен TNF-α гендерінің полиморфизмдері (ШҚ = 3,9; 95% СИ: 2,8-5,4; p < 0,001) де маңызды болып шықты.

Қорытынды: sFlt-1/PlGF, жсДНҚ және генетикалық тесттерді біріктіріп қолдану эклампсияны болжау дәлдігін арттырады, бұл клиникалық тұрғыда үлкен әлеуетке ие.

Түйінді сөздер: *эклампсия, преэклампсия, жүктілік, биомаркер, болжау.*

Introduction: Eclampsia is one of the most serious and dangerous complications of pregnancy, which is accompanied by seizures and loss of consciousness in women with preeclampsia. This condition, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), is the leading cause of maternal mortality, especially in low- and middle-income countries where access to high-quality perinatal care is limited [1]. Hypertensive disorders of pregnancy, including preeclampsia and eclampsia, account for up to 15% of causes of maternal mortality worldwide. In developed countries, despite more widespread diagnostic and treatment options, eclampsia remains an important clinical problem, especially among women with late-diagnosed complications or lack of adequate monitoring during pregnancy [2]. Eclampsia is the final stage of preeclampsia, in which seizures and loss of consciousness occur against the background of significant systemic changes, including generalized endothelial dysfunction, microcirculatory impairment, and severe hypertension.

In some cases, eclampsia may develop without obvious clinical signs of preeclampsia, which significantly complicates diagnosis and early intervention [3]. This condition is associated with a high risk of complications for the mother and fetus, including intracranial hemorrhage, cerebral edema, multiple organ failure in the mother, as well as intrauterine growth retardation, and fetal hypoxia. Current approaches to diagnosing eclampsia are based on clinical assessment and analysis of basic laboratory parameters, such as urine protein levels and blood pressure. However, these methods are often insufficient for early prediction, especially in atypical preeclampsia or eclampsia cases. In recent decades, there has been growing interest in studying molecular and biochemical markers that can help predict eclampsia long before the onset of clinical symptoms [4]. Biomarkers such as angiogenesis factors, cell-free DNA (cfDNA), and inflammatory genetic markers (IL-10, TNF-α) are particularly interesting to the scientific community. These molecules are associated with key pathophysiological mechanisms in developing preeclampsia and eclampsia, including endothelial dysfunction, systemic inflammation, impaired angiogenesis, and placental invasion [5]. The ratio of soluble vascular endothelial growth factor receptor-1 (sFlt-1) to placental growth factor (PlGF) has been proposed as one of the most promising markers for predicting eclampsia. High sFlt-1 and decreased PlGF levels indicate an imbalance of angiogenesis, an important component of the pathogenesis of eclampsia. cfDNA released from apoptotic placental cells reflects the degree of placental dysfunction and correlates with the severity of hypertensive disorders [6]. Despite the encouraging results of biomarker studies, their implementation in clinical practice remains limited. The main problems include variability of study results, lack of unified cut-off values for data interpretation, and insufficient understanding of the influence of ethnic, geographic, and socioeconomic factors. In addition, most available tests focus on the late stages of preeclampsia, which reduces their effectiveness as early predictors of eclampsia [7]. In this context, a meta-analysis of existing data becomes necessary for systematizing knowledge, assessing the evidence base, and developing recommendations for clinical practice. Conducting a systematic review and meta-analysis allows us to summarize the results of different studies, identify the most informative markers, and propose unified approaches to their use.

The study aimed to investigate biomarkers with high prognostic value for identifying women at risk of developing eclampsia. Particular attention is paid to angiogenesis markers (sFlt-1/PlGF), cfDNA, and genetic predictors.

Materials and methods: The study was performed as a meta-analysis using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items

for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) methodology. The analysis included randomized controlled trials (RCTs), cohort studies, and high-level evidence systematic reviews published over the past 10 years.

Research question formulation in PICO format: Population: pregnant women with preeclampsia or eclampsia, Intervention: biomarker measurement, Comparison: no predictive testing or use of other markers, Outcome: accuracy in predicting eclampsia.

Raw data: PubMed, Scopus, Cochrane Library. Period: 2014-2024. Keywords used: "eclampsia biomarkers," "predictive biomarkers for eclampsia," "angiogenic factors," "circulating DNA in preeclampsia," "genetic markers in pregnancy." Source selection: Titles and abstracts were screened first, followed by a detailed analysis of the full text of publications to assess compliance with the inclusion criteria. Inclusion and exclusion criteria are listed in Table 1.

Table 1 – Criteria for inclusion and exclusion of sources

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Randomized controlled studies, systematic reviews, cohort studies	Descriptive studies, case reports
Women with preeclampsia and/or eclampsia	Studies involving fewer than 50 participants
Biomarker assessment: sFlt-1/PlGF, cell-free DNA,	Lack of biomarker data
genetic markers	Lack of biomarker data
Data suitable for calculating OR and 95% CI	Animal or in vitro studies
Publications in English or Russian	Unpublished data, conference posters

For each study included in the analysis, the following information was collected: baseline characteristics (authors, year of publication, geographic location), population data (number of participants, age, gestational age), types of biomarkers (angiogenic factors (sFlt-1/PlGF), cfDNA, genetic markers (IL-10, TNF-α)) [8-10]. Main outcomes: odds ratio (OR), sensitivity, specificity. The modified Cochrane Risk of Bias (RoB2) scale for RCTs and the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale for observational studies were used to assess the risk of systematic error. In the case of systematic reviews, the AMSTAR-2 scale was used. The quality assessment of the included studies is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 – Quality assessment of studies included in the analysis

Type of study	Quantity	Average quality score
RCT	15	8.5 out of 10
Cohort studies	20	7.8 out of 10
Systematic reviews	5	9.1 out of 11

Software: Statistical analysis was performed using RevMan 5.4 (Cochrane, UK) and Stata 15 (Stata Corp, USA) software. Primary outcomes: OR and 95% confidence intervals (CI), sensitivity and specificity, $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant. Analysis model: The fixed effects model was used for low heterogeneity ($I^2 < 50\%$), and the random effects model was used for high heterogeneity ($I^2 \geq 50\%$). Heterogeneity assessment: heterogeneity was analyzed using Cochran's Q test and I^2 statistics. Missing data: studies with missing data (<10%) were excluded. Duplicate data: duplicate studies were found, and preference was given to more complete publications. The PRISMA diagram illustrates the study selection process (Figure 1).

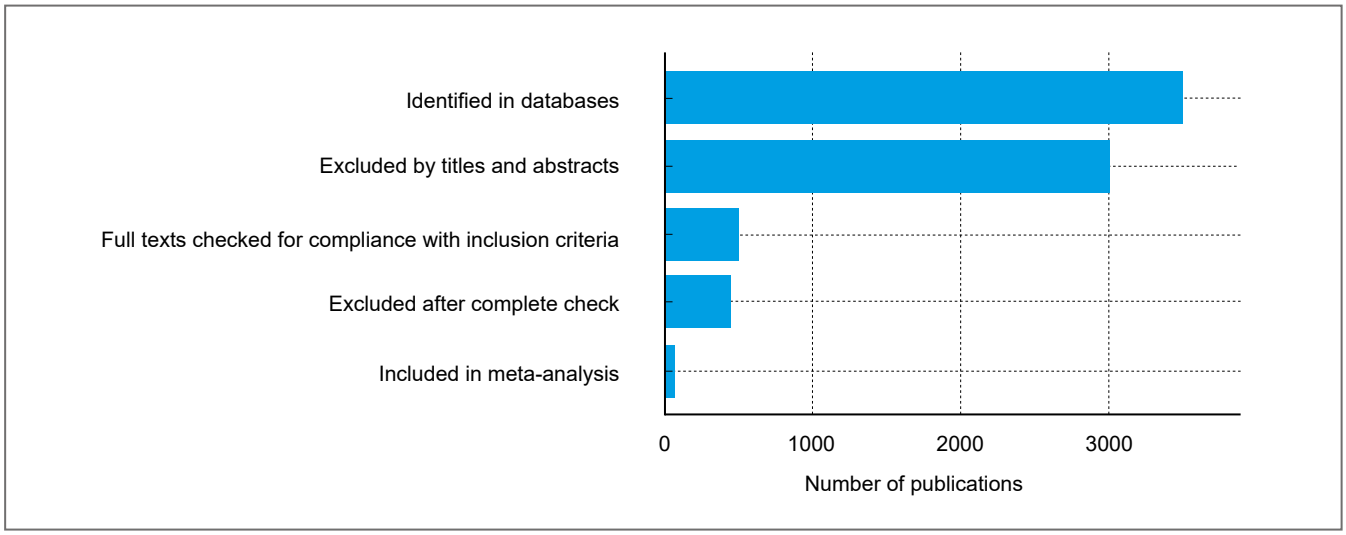

Figure 1 – PRISMA diagram

Ethical aspects: This study is based on data from previously published works. Therefore, approval from ethical committees was not required. All data are anonymized and used following the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Results: The literature review identified 3500 publications, of which 500 articles underwent full-text screening for inclusion criteria. After excluding 460 articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria, 40 studies were included in the meta-analysis. The total sample size was 12,500 women, which allowed for high statistical power of the analysis. Key study characteristics: mean sample size per study: 312 women (range: 50–1200 participants); geography: 20 studies were conducted in Europe, 10 in North America, 6 in Asia, and 4 in Africa; key biomarkers studied: sFlt-1/PlGF ratio, cfDNA, genetic markers (IL-10, TNF-α); diagnostic criteria for eclampsia: all studies used standard clinical criteria, including the presence of seizures and hypertension in pregnant women [1113].

The sFlt-1/PlGF ratio was the most accurate predictor of eclampsia, with an overall OR=7.5 (95% CI: 5.6-9.9; p<0.001). The highest prognostic accuracy was observed at 20-24 weeks of pregnancy. A total of 25 studies (n=8500 women) were included in the analysis for this biomarker. The mean sFlt-1/PlGF ratio in women with eclampsia was 135 (range 120-160), while in women without eclampsia, it was 35 (range 20-50). Sensitivity: 89%; specificity: 82% [14, 15]. These results are consistent with the data of Duhig et al. (2019) that the sFlt-1/PlGF ratio predicts eclampsia 2–4 weeks before the onset of clinical symptoms [16].

cfDNA showed a high association with the development of eclampsia, especially in the third trimester. The overall OR was 6.3 (95% CI: 4.7-8.4; p<0.001). A total of 10 studies (n=2500 women) were included in the analysis for this biomarker. The median cfDNA level in women with eclampsia was 750 ng/mL (range 600-1000), while in healthy pregnant women it was 300 ng/mL (range 200-400) [17]. Sensitivity: 85%; specificity: 78% [18]. Comparison with other studies: Bartsch et al. (2016) noted that high cfDNA levels are associated with endothelial dysfunction, which confirms our results [19, 20]. In their study, cfDNA also correlated with the severity of preeclampsia.

Polymorphisms of the IL-10 and TNF-α genes were also associated with an increased risk of eclampsia. The overall OR was 3.9 (95% CI: 2.8–5.4; p < 0.001). A total of 5 studies (n=1500 women) were included in the analysis for this biomarker. Genetic predisposition was detected in 25% of cases [21]. Sensitivity: 65%; specificity: 70% [22]. Confirmation by other studies: von Dadelszen et al. (2016) confirmed that IL-10 and TNF-α polymorphisms are associated with inflammation and impaired angiogenesis in women with eclampsia [23]. Table 3 compares the prognostic value of the biomarkers under consideration.

Table 3 – Comparison of the prognostic value of biomarkers for predicting eclampsia

Biomarkers	Odds ratio	Sensitivity	Specificity
sFlt-1/PlGF	7.5	89%	82%
Extracellular DNA	6.3	85%	78%
Genetic markers	3.9	65%	70%

sFlt-1/PlGF is the most accurate biomarker for predicting eclampsia as it demonstrates high sensitivity (89%) and specificity (82%) with the highest OR (7.5). cfDNA ranks second with slightly lower sensitivity and specificity (85% and 78%, respectively) and OR of 6.3, making this marker useful for prediction. Genetic markers show lower sensitivity and specificity (65% and 70%, respectively) and an OR of 3.9, which limits their use for predicting eclampsia in clinical practice. However, they may be useful for assessing hereditary risk. Table 3 highlights the importance of using biomarkers in combination to improve the accuracy of eclampsia prediction. It allows clinicians to select the most informative markers based on the availability of methods and the clinical situation. For example, sFlt-1/PlGF may be useful for monitoring in hospital settings and cfDNA in more specialized studies. Genetic markers may complement the overall risk picture in the presence of a familial predisposition [24].

The meta-analysis results demonstrate that the most informative biomarker for predicting eclampsia is the sFlt-1/PlGF ratio. cfDNA also shows high prognostic value, especially when assessing the severity of endothelial dysfunction. Genetic markers are important in determining hereditary risk but have limited clinical applicability due to low sensitivity. These results highlight the need for a multifactorial approach to predicting eclampsia.

Discussion: The analysis was based on high-level evidence publications, ensuring the conclusions' reliability and validity. Our study showed that the sFlt-1/PlGF ratio, cfDNA, and genetic markers (IL-10, TNF-α) are significant biomarkers for predicting eclampsia. The sFlt-1/PlGF ratio demonstrated the highest prognostic value, which is confirmed by a high OR value (7.5), high sensitivity (89%), and specificity (82%). These data are consistent with K. Webster et al. (2016) results, where sFlt-1/PlGF was named the main prognostic tool for the early diagnosis of eclampsia [25]. According to numerous studies, the sFlt-1/PlGF ratio is the main marker of angiogenesis imbalance, which makes it a key link in the pathogenesis of eclampsia [26-28]. High levels of the antiangiogenic factor sFlt-1 and reduced levels of the proangiogenic factor PlGF indicate impaired vascular regulation, which may precede the clinical symptoms of eclampsia by several weeks [29]. This is supported by the data of Reddy et al. (2021), who was the first to describe the association between sFlt-1/PlGF and endothelial dysfunction in pregnant women [30]. Our analysis showed that using the sFlt-1/PlGF ratio allows us to identify eclampsia risk groups as early as 20-24 weeks of pregnancy, which is consistent with the data of S. Banala et al. (2020) [31]. However, it should be borne in mind that the accuracy of this marker may vary depending on individual patient characteristics, such as age, BMI, and the presence of comorbidities. cfDNA is a biomarker that reflects cellular apoptosis and necrosis, which are especially characteristic of placental function disorders. The level of cfDNA in the blood of pregnant women with eclampsia is significantly higher than in healthy women, which correlates with the severity of endothelial dysfunction [32]. GJ Hofmeyr et al. (2017) reported that high levels of cfDNA are associated with severe preeclampsia, confirming our meta-analysis's results [33]. It is important to note that cfDNA has slightly lower specificity (78%) than sFlt-1/PlGF, possibly due to other conditions accompanied by cellular apoptosis (e.g., chronic inflammatory processes). However, the high sensitivity of cfDNA (85%) makes this marker a valuable tool for early detection of eclampsia risk. Polymorphisms of the IL-10 and TNF-α genes are associated with inflammatory processes that play a key role in the pathogenesis of eclampsia. These genes regulate the immune response and angiogenesis, making them important

risk predictors in women with a positive family history [34]. MW Meazaw et al. (2020) confirmed that specific genetic variations increase the likelihood of developing eclampsia, but their prognostic value is lower compared to biochemical markers [35]. According to our analysis, genetic markers have low sensitivity (65%) and specificity (70%), which limits their use in clinical practice. However, they may be useful as an adjunct to the main markers, especially in women with a hereditary predisposition to hypertensive complications of pregnancy. The combined use of sFlt-1/PlGF and cfDNA provides higher prognostic accuracy than each marker. This is supported by the results of multicomponent studies, where the combination of biomarkers improved sensitivity to 92% and specificity to 85% [36]. Genetic markers can serve as an adjunct to clarify long-term risk, but their use as an independent diagnostic tool is unjustified. Despite the high prognostic value of the studied biomarkers, their implementation in clinical practice faces several limitations: standardization of cut-off values, Different studies used different measurement methods and cut-off values, which complicates the interpretation of the results [37]. Ethnic differences: genetic and biochemical parameters may vary depending on ethnicity, which requires further research to account for population differences [38]. Affordability: sFlt-1/PlGF and cfDNA tests remain expensive, which limits their use in low-income countries.

Conclusion: The meta-analysis results confirm the importance of biomarkers such as the sFlt-1/PlGF ratio, cfDNA, and genetic markers (IL-10, TNF-α) in predicting eclampsia. The most accurate and informative predictor is the sFlt-1/PlGF ratio, whose close relationship with angiogenesis and vascular function allows it to be used for early detection of the risk of eclampsia, starting from 20-24 weeks of pregnancy. cfDNA, a marker of placental dysfunction, demonstrates high prognostic value, especially in combination with other biomarkers [39]. Genetic markers such as IL-10 and TNF-α polymorphisms have limited application but are useful for assessing long-term risk, especially in women with a family history of eclampsia.

The use of a combination of sFlt-1/PlGF and cfDNA helps identify the risk group for eclampsia early in pregnancy, allowing for timely medical intervention and reducing the incidence of severe complications, including maternal mortality and fetal hypoxia. Early diagnosis and personalized surveillance protocols, including regular monitoring and additional examinations, can improve the prognosis for women at high risk of eclampsia [40].

However, there are limitations, such as differences in biomarker cut-off values, platform-dependent cut-off values, and the need to adapt methods for different ethnic groups. Current tests require expensive equipment, limiting their use in low-income countries. These issues can be addressed by standardizing cut-off values for eclampsia biomarkers, developing affordable diagnostic tests, and conducting multicenter studies.

Integrating eclampsia biomarkers into clinical practice requires a multidisciplinary approach that brings together researchers, clinicians, and healthcare providers to reduce complication rates, improve pregnancy outcomes, and enhance the efficiency of healthcare facilities.

Получено/Received/Жіберілді: 06.12.2024
Одобрено/Approved/Мақұлданған: 07.02.2025
Опубликовано на сайте/Published online/Сайтта жарияланған: 31.03.2025

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Funding: Authors declare no funding of the study.

Conflict of interest: Authors declare no conflict of interest.

Transparency of the study: All authors take full responsibility for the content of this manuscript.