Association Between Exposure to Pesticides and ADHD or Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Systematic Review of the Literature

Luca Tessari 1, Marco Angriman 2, Amparo Díaz-Román 3, Junhua Zhang 4, Andreas Conca 5, Samuele Cortese 6 7 8 9

Affiliations collapse

Affiliations
1 Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Unit, Bolzano, Italy.
2 Hospital of Bolzano, Bolzano, Italy.
3 University of Granada, Granada, Spain.
4 Yancheng Teachers University, Yancheng, China.
5 San Maurizio Hospital, Bolzano, Italy.
6 University of Southampton, UK.
7 Solent NHS Trust, Southampton, UK.
8 New York University Child Study Center, New York, NY, USA.
9 University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK.

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Abstract: Objective: To conduct a systematic review of studies assessing the relationship between exposure to pesticides and ADHD or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Methods: Based on a pre-registered protocol in PROPSERO (CRD42018107847), we searched PubMed, Ovid databases, and ISI Web of Knowledge with no date/language/document type restrictions, up to May 2019. The Newcastle Ottawa Scale was used to assess study quality.

Results: Among the 29 retained studies, 13 focused on ADHD, 14 on ASD, and two on both disorders. Ten studies reported a significant association between exposure to pesticides and ADHD/ADHD symptoms and 12 studies found a significant association with ASD/ASD traits. The strengths of the association and the possible confounders controlled for varied substantially across studies.

Conclusion: Whilst there is some evidence suggesting a possible link between pesticides and ADHD/ASD, heterogeneity across studies prevents firm conclusions. We provide methodological indications for future studies.

Keywords: ADHD; pesticides; systematic review