Cancer and Migration:
Epidemiological studies on relationship between
country of birth, socio-economic position and cancer

Omid Beiki

Stockholm 2010
In the name of God, the beneficent, the merciful

To my family
Najmeh, Yasaman, Ida
Abstract

Background: Migrant studies offer a unique opportunity to analyze variation in disease occurrence due to background factors. The role of environmental and lifestyle exposures are of particular interest in cancer research, and migrant studies can be considered as “natural experiments” in epidemiological research. Large numbers of immigrants from different regions of the world and the availability of comprehensive demographic and health-related registers in Sweden have prompted us to conduct migrant studies on the epidemiology of cancer. Breast cancer and genital tract cancers were selected for study since the role of environmental and lifestyle risk factors are debated for these disorders.

Objectives: To compare the risk and survival of the female breast, cervical, ovarian and endometrial cancers and male prostate and testicular cancers among immigrants to those among Swedish-born individuals to elucidate the importance and the potential timing of environmental and genetic factors in cancer etiology.

Methods: We established different cohorts by linkages between Swedish national registers, including Cancer and Cause of Death registers, through personal identity number. The main exposure variable was country of birth with Swedish-born persons with both parents born in Sweden as reference group. Each cohort was followed from start date of follow-up period, date of birth or first immigration date, whichever occurred last, until exit date from the cohort, which was diagnosis of primary outcomes of interest, first emigration, or end of follow-up, whichever came first. We calculated incidence rate ratios and hazard ratios with 95% confidence intervals adjusted for age and calendar period of follow-up using Poisson and Cox proportional hazards regression models.

Results: First-generation immigrants in Sweden had an overall lower risk of cancers studied compared with Swedish-born people. However, we found remarkable variations in cancer risks and survival by country of birth. Age at immigration and duration of residence of first-generation immigrants were important factors affecting risk of cervical, breast, prostate, and testis seminomas. An increasing trend in incidence of prostate cancer among first-generation immigrants similar to either Sweden or country of birth was observed. Second-generation immigrants showed a risk converging toward the risk in Sweden for testicular and breast cancers. Education, as an indicator of socio-economic position, differentially affected the risk of cervical cancer among first-generation immigrants and Swedish-born women. Among both immigrants and Swedish-born women, breast cancer risk increased, while its mortality decreased with increasing level of education.

Conclusions: Country of birth was a major determinant for cancer risk. Variation of risk by age at immigration or duration of residence highlights the effect of environmental and lifestyle factors on cancer risk. The observed patterns of prostate cancer risk imply the importance of both genetic and environmental factors in the etiology of this cancer. Patterns of testicular cancer risk indicate the importance of early environmental risk factors acting even after the intrauterine period.

Keywords: country of birth, immigrants, breast neoplasm, uterine cervical neoplasm, endometrial neoplasm, ovarian neoplasm, prostatic neoplasm, testicular neoplasm, socio-economic position, incidence, survival, Sweden
List of Publications

This thesis is based on the following papers, which in the text will be referred to by their roman numerals (I-IV):

I. **Beiki O., Allebeck P., Nordqvist T., Moradi T.**
   Cervical, endometrial and ovarian cancers among immigrants in Sweden: importance of age at immigration and duration of residence.

II. **Beiki O., Ekbom A., Allebeck P., Moradi T.**

III. **Beiki O., Granath F., Allebeck P., Akre O., Moradi T.**

IV. **Beiki O., Moradi T.**
    *Manuscript.*

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# Contents

1 Introduction .................................................................................................. 1

2 Background .............................................................................................. 2

2.1 Immigrants in Sweden ........................................................................ 2

2.2 Studies of cancer in immigrant populations ...................................... 3

2.2.1 Migrant studies ....................................................................... 3

2.2.2 A glance at literature .............................................................. 5

2.2.3 Limitations of previous migrants studies in Sweden .......... 10

3 Aims of this thesis ...................................................................................... 11

3.1 General aim....................................................................................... 11

3.2 Specific aims..................................................................................... 11

4 Materials and methods ............................................................................... 12

4.1 Materials ........................................................................................... 12

4.1.1 Total Population Register (TPR) ......................................... 12

4.1.2 Swedish Cancer Register ..................................................... 13

4.1.3 Cause of Death Register....................................................... 14

4.1.4 Multi-generation Register .................................................... 15

4.1.5 The National Population and Housing Censuses ............... 15

4.1.6 LISA ..................................................................................... 15

4.1.7 GLOBOCAN 2002 .............................................................. 15

4.1.8 Cancer Incidence in Five Continents (CI5)......................... 16

4.2 Methods ............................................................................................ 16

4.2.1 Outcome variable ................................................................. 16

4.2.2 Exposure variable................................................................. 18

4.2.3 Explanatory variables........................................................... 19

4.2.4 Statistical methods ............................................................... 21

4.3 Ethical consideration ........................................................................ 22

5 Results (Table 3) ........................................................................................ 23

5.1 Cervical cancer (Study I).................................................................. 23

5.2 Endometrial cancer (Study I) ........................................................... 23

5.3 Ovarian cancer (Study I) .................................................................. 23

5.4 Breast cancer (Study IV) .................................................................. 24

5.4.1 Incidence............................................................................... 24

5.4.2 Survival................................................................................. 24

5.5 Prostate cancer (Study II)................................................................. 25

5.6 Testicular cancer (Study III) ............................................................ 25

6 Methodological considerations .................................................................. 28

6.1 Selection bias .................................................................................... 28

6.2 Confounding ..................................................................................... 29

6.3 Data quality ....................................................................................... 30

7 Interpretation of findings............................................................................ 32

7.1 Cervical cancer (Study I) ................................................................. 32

7.2 Endometrial cancer (Study I) ........................................................... 33

7.3 Ovarian cancer (Study I) ................................................................. 34

7.4 Breast cancer (Study IV) .................................................................. 34

7.4.1 Incidence............................................................................... 34
7.4.2 Survival.........................................................................................35
7.5 Prostate cancer (Study II).................................................................36
7.6 Testicular cancer (Study III).............................................................37
8 Concluding remarks ..............................................................................39
9 Future perspective.................................................................................40
10 Acknowledgements ..............................................................................41
11 References...........................................................................................45
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AACR</td>
<td>International Association of Cancer Registries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>Annual Percent Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASR</td>
<td>Age Standardized Incidence Rate (per 100,000 World Population)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDR</td>
<td>Cause of Death Register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td>Confidence Interval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI5</td>
<td>Cancer Incidence in Five Continents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRE</td>
<td>Digital Rectal Examination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HPV</td>
<td>Human Papillomavirus</td>
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<tr>
<td>HR</td>
<td>Hazard Rate Ratio</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRT</td>
<td>Hormone Replacement Therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IARC</td>
<td>International Agency for Research on Cancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICD</td>
<td>International Classification of Disease</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRR</td>
<td>Incidence Rate Ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LISA</td>
<td>Longitudinal Integration Database for Health Insurance and Labour Market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSAID</td>
<td>Non-steroidal Anti-inflammatory Drug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Cooperation &amp; Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PID</td>
<td>Personal Identity Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSA</td>
<td>Prostate Specific Antigen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEI</td>
<td>Socio-economic Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEP</td>
<td>Socio-economic Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIR</td>
<td>Standardized Incidence Ratios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPR</td>
<td>Total Population Register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TURP</td>
<td>Transurethral Resection of the Prostate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>The United States</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 Introduction

Cancer is a major public health problem in many parts of the world and its incidence and mortality is projected to double by 2020 (1). A profound variation in the geographical pattern of cancer is present in terms of its risk and mortality (2). The reasons for these differences are largely unknown. In Sweden, cancer is currently one of the three dominating groups of diseases which account for more than 60% of the total burden of disease in Sweden (3).

Today, international migration is occurring in greater numbers, in a faster rate than before and over greater distances (4). Immigration has increased in Sweden. In 2008, 13.8% of the population or over 1.2 million persons were born outside Sweden (5), with 200 different nationalities represented within this group of immigrants. Adding persons born in Sweden with two parents born outside Sweden, referred to as second-generation, immigrants accounted for about 18% of total population of Sweden.

During the last decades, analytical epidemiological studies focusing on the comparison of cancer risk and mortality among different populations have been an approach to shedding further light on the unknown aspects of cancer etiology. In addition, epidemiologic approaches studying cancer care and health services for immigrants help to identify health inequalities and can thus contribute to improve health care. In Sweden, the high proportion of foreign-born residents, the vast majority coming from other Nordic countries, as well as a well-established system of population-based registers provide a unique opportunity to conduct migrant studies on cancer.

This thesis aimed to compare the risk and survival of the most common male and female genital cancers among immigrants and their descendants to those among Swedish-born persons in order to elucidate the importance of genetic and environmental factors in cancer etiology and the potential timing of exposures.
2 Background

2.1 Immigrants in Sweden

In the 19th and the early 20th century, Sweden was an emigration country. Many migrated to other countries, primarily the United States but also to Canada, Australia and Argentina. At the same time, there was also a labor migration to Germany, to Denmark especially from the southern part of Sweden and to Norway from other parts of Sweden.

Sweden has now been an immigration country for many decades. As Sweden was the only Nordic country that was not involved in the war, with the war an increasing number of refugees came to Sweden. The large flow of refugee immigrants during the Second World War changed Sweden from being an emigration country to an immigration country. The majority of the refugees returned but many also stayed in Sweden. The number of foreign citizens staying in Sweden was much higher after the war than before the war. In the years after 1945 the net immigration was around 10,000 and increased steadily throughout the 1950s and 1960s (6-8).

Refugees from the neighboring countries dominated immigration from 1940 to 1948. In 1946, more than 70,000 foreign citizens lived in Sweden, four times more than in 1940. This was also associated with an increase in the number of people from other Nordic countries (6-8).

Between 1949 and 1971, migrants from southern Europe dominated the influx of foreign nationals. From 1954, the first common Nordic labor market was established, and citizens from Sweden’s neighbors were free to work and live in Sweden. This resulted in a considerable increase in number of immigrants especially from Finland but also from Denmark and to some extent Norway. Employers recruited from abroad and many workers arrived spontaneously to Sweden looking for a job (6-8).

During the period between 1972 and 1989, immigration was characterized by refugee immigration. The migration of family members of refugees that arrived earlier and labor migrants also grew. Predominantly during the 1970s, refugees fleeing Chile after the military coup of 1973 constituted the largest part of immigrants. Asylum seekers from the Middle East then superseded this flow of Latin American refugees at the beginning of the 1980s. The Iran-Iraq war was the main reason for this new inflow of refugees. By the end of the 1980s, migration of non-Nordic citizens accounted for 70% and that of non-European citizens for half of the total immigration to Sweden.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, political events in the Balkans led to increased numbers of asylum seekers from the former Yugoslavia. There was also an influx of immigrants from Africa, and the Middle East in the 2000s (6-8).

In Sweden, 13.8% of the population or over 1.2 million persons were foreign-born in 2008 (5). Among this group of immigrants, 200 different nationalities were represented (Figure 1). There were 379,422 persons, accounting for 4.1% of the registered population born in Sweden but with both parents born outside of Sweden. Most foreign-born immigrants, nearly 60%, have an origin in Europe. In 2008, one-seventh of Sweden's foreign-born population originally comes from Finland followed
The gender distribution was uneven for each of the ten largest countries of birth except Bosnia-Herzegovina and former Yugoslavia, while there were far more women than men are. Nearly 60% of immigrants originating from Finland and Poland were women. In contrast, there was much larger proportion of men, 55% against 45% women among those who were born in Iraq (9). In Table 1, we presented summary statistics including the number of immigrants, age at immigration, duration of residence, and age at diagnosis for any cancer among immigrants who were registered in Sweden at any time between 1960 and 2007.

2.2 Studies of cancer in immigrant populations

2.2.1 Migrant studies

Migration of a population from one to another environment has been considered as a “natural experiment” (10). Most migrant studies address cancer incidence or mortality. This allows for a comparison of the risk of cancer either in populations of similar genetic background living in different environments or in populations of different genetic background living in similar environment. Cancer studies among immigrants are based on the assumption that immigrants carry a risk of cancer that to some extent reflects that of their country of origin rather than the host country.
Table 1: Age at immigration, duration of residence and age at diagnosis of any cancer among immigrants registered in Sweden between 1960 and 2007.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth Region</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>No. 1</th>
<th>No. 2</th>
<th>No. 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>463,162</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>6,863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Europe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-Eastern Asia</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Central/Eastern Asia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
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<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1Median age at migration; 2Median duration of residence; 3Median age at diagnosis of first malignant cancer.
Migrant studies can be used for generating hypotheses or confirming hypotheses derived from etiologic studies of environmental risk factors associated with cancer occurrence. They can also be used to study the health status of minorities in host country. Migrant studies can be grouped into different categories as follows (11):

2.2.1.1 Single-comparison studies:
In this category, the researcher compares the risk in immigrants versus that in the host country. These are the least informative, showing differences in cancer risk between immigrants and the locally-born, but providing no information on the populations from which the immigrants came from. However, lack of data from the country of origin may result from the non-existence of appropriate sources.

2.2.1.2 Two-comparison studies:
These are the most common types of migrant studies reported. Cancer risks among immigrants are compared with the risk in the host country and with the country of origin. The results can be interpreted as the degree to which the risk for cancer changes among immigrants away from that in the country of origin and towards that in host country.

2.2.1.3 Studies with a time dimension:
In this kind of migrant study; in addition to single or two comparisons studies, the effect of duration of residence of immigrants in the host country, age at immigration on the risk, or the risk among subsequent generations of immigrants is evaluated.

2.2.1.4 Studies with information on exposures in immigrants and host countries:
In this type of study, data on the prevalence of exposure to possible etiological factors are available for the immigrants and the population of the host country, and sometimes for country or origin. Studies of Japanese immigrants to Hawaii and studies of European immigrants to Australia are examples of studies of this kind, which showed that changes in cancer risk could be linked to the changes in the dietary habits (12-14).

2.2.2 A glance at literature
Migrant studies have been of most interest for those cancers for which a large fraction of unknown environmental or genetic risk factors is attributable. For cancers such as oral cancer that is clearly linked to chewing habits (15, 16) or lung cancer that is linked to tobacco smoking (17), the risk in immigrants will be almost entirely determined by past chewing and smoking habits. Thus, evaluation of the contributions of other environmental factors will be quite impossible in the absence of detailed knowledge of exposure to these known risk factors. However, the changes of risk for cancers, such as breast and prostate cancers in which the known risk factors explain only a small proportion of the incidence, migrant studies have been useful in delineating the relative importance of environmental risk factors in the etiology of cancer.
In this thesis, our focus is on female breast cancer, the most common female (cervical, ovarian and endometrial) and male (prostate and testicular) genital cancers. For these cancers, we will present a summary of previous studies that were carried out among immigrants.

2.2.2.1 Cervical Cancer

Worldwide, cervical cancer is the second most common malignant disease among women, with more than 500,000 new cases diagnosed each year (18, 19). Although cervical cancer is associated with a broad age range, the peak is at a mean age of 54 years (20). Cervical cancer is one of the cancers with higher rates in many low- and middle-income countries than in high-income countries, with nearly 80% of new cases occurring in low- and middle-income countries (19). Being the most common gynecological cancer in the low- and middle-income world, it accounts for two-thirds of cases and continues to be a serious health problem. Of cervical cancers worldwide, 90% are squamous cell carcinomas. Human papillomavirus (HPV) acts as the necessary cause in the development of cervical cancer and more than 90% of squamous cervical cancers contain HPV DNA. This virus is acquired mainly through sexual activity. Other factors associated with development of cervical cancer, such as smoking, early sexual debut, a high total number of sexual partners, multi-parity, and oral contraceptive use probably act as risk modifiers of HPV-associated cervical cancer (21, 22).

There is an 8-fold variation in the incidence of cervical cancer worldwide. The highest rates are observed in sub-Saharan Africa, Melanesia, Latin America and the Caribbean, South-Central Asia, and South-East Asia (23). The incidence is generally low in high-income countries, with age-standardized rates less than 14 per 100,000 women. The low risk in such countries is due to effective screening programs. Before the introduction of screening programs, the incidence rates in most high-income countries were similar to those found in low- and middle-income countries today (24).

Several studies have been performed on the risk of cervical cancer among different immigrant groups in different countries including Sweden (25), Australia (26), the Netherlands (27), United States (28), France (29), and United Kingdom (30). Unfortunately, in many studies, carcinomas of the cervix and corpus uteri were combined and little information on rates in second-generation immigrants is available. Overall, previous studies showed that cervical cancer incidence or mortality is lower among immigrants than among those in countries of origin.

2.2.2.2 Endometrial cancer

Worldwide, endometrial cancer is the seventh most common malignant disorder, but incidence varies among regions. Endometrial cancer ranks as the most common gynecologic cancer in high-income countries while it has low incidence in low- and middle-income countries (18, 31). The highest incidences are observed in North America, and in Europe. Incidence rates in South America are intermediate, whereas rates are low in Southern and Eastern Asia and most of Africa. In Sweden, the incidence of endometrial cancer is one of the highest in Europe (19). The incidence of endometrial cancer has been increasing in Europe, United States and other regions of the world in the past several decades.
Endometrial cancer is a post-menopausal cancer with 90% of cases occurring in women over 50 years of age (32). Known risk factors associated with endometrial cancer are nulliparity, hormone replacement therapy (HRT), diabetes, age at menarche and menopause, obesity and physical activity (33-35).

Endometrial cancers have been poorly studied in immigrant populations. In some studies, it has not been possible to distinguish endometrial cancers from cervix uteri cancers. The results of studies mostly performed in US showed considerably lower incidence of malignant tumors of the uterine corpus among blacks compared with whites; however, blacks had less favorable survival and mortality rates (36). Another study on Asian immigrants in the US showed that the annual incidence of primary endometrial cancer was lower among Chinese-American and Japanese-American women born in Asia than among their counterparts who were born in the United States (37). The distribution of known risk factors of endometrial cancer could not explain the observed reduced risk among different ethnic populations in the US (38). Overall, a lower risk of endometrial cancer has been observed among immigrants in Sweden compared with Swedish-born women (25).

2.2.2.3 Ovarian cancer

Epithelial ovarian cancer is the deadliest gynecologic cancer, with the 5-year survival less than 50% (23). Ovarian cancer is the second most common gynecological cancer. It accounts for 19% of all gynecological cancers in low- and middle-income countries and 29% in high-income countries (23). Incidence rates are highest in high-income countries, with rates in these areas exceeding 10 per 100,000 women, except for Japan. The incidence in South America is relatively high compared with many regions in Asia and Africa. The incidence rate has been slowly increasing in many high-income countries over the last two decades. In Sweden, the incidence of ovarian cancer is one of the highest in Europe (19).

A number of epidemiological studies have evaluated a variety of risk factors for ovarian cancer. However, contrary to cervical and endometrial cancers, little is known about the etiology of ovarian cancer. To date, these risk factors include age (39), non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) use (40), diet (41), ethnicity, HRT (42), hysterectomy, infertility drug use, obesity, smoking, and talc use (43).

Several studies have reported the risk of ovarian cancer among immigrants in UK and US (30, 44-47). Haenszel was not able to show significant difference in ovarian cancer mortality among immigrants in the US in 1960 except for the higher mortality for women from Italy (46). Later, he observed that mortality from ovarian tumors had risen among Japanese migrants and their descendants (47). Japanese, Chinese, Hispanic, and Black women had lower rates of epithelial ovarian tumors than those of White women in the US (45). A lower incidence of ovarian cancer has been reported among first-generation migrants from Africa and Caribbean compared with White native women in Britain, even after correction for reproductive factors and menstrual history (30, 44). In Sweden, a lower risk has been observed among all immigrants as a whole and immigrants from Asia and Yugoslavia compared with Swedish-born women (25).
2.2.2.4 Breast cancer

With one million new cases each year, breast cancer is the most common malignancy in women in the world. It comprises 18% of all female cancers (48). Breast cancer is also the most common cause of cancer-related mortality among women, which is approximately 15% of all cancer-related deaths, representing 1.7% of all female deaths (48, 49). In terms of absolute numbers of death, the figure is now higher in low- and middle-income countries compared with high-income countries.

Both incidence of, and mortality from breast cancer vary about five-fold across countries around the world (50). The difference between Far Eastern and Western countries is diminishing but is still about five-fold. Countries with high risk of breast cancer i.e. world age-standardized rates (ASR) greater than 80 new cases per 100,000 women years, include the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, and Uruguay in South America (18).

Estrogens are connected to many of the established risk factors of breast cancer (50). Early menarche (51, 52), late menopause (51-53), obesity in postmenopausal women (54), alcohol (55), oral contraceptives (56), hormonal therapy for menopause (57) and mutations in certain genes (58-60) are associated with an increase in risk. Childbearing (61), early first birth (62, 63), a larger number of births; breastfeeding (51, 62-64), low socio-economic position (65) and physical activity (66) reduce the risk.

Potential explanations for the large geographical differences in breast cancer incidence may either be genetics, lifestyle and environment or most likely the interaction between gene and environment. Results from studies on migrants from low-risk to high-risk countries have shown that the rates increase and eventually become similar to those among the rest of the population in the new country. The study of Chinese migrating to Hong-Kong and then to the United States showed that it took more than one generation for the risk to converge towards the high risk of breast cancer of Caucasian American women (53). Studies of migrants from Japan to Hawaii showed that the rates of breast cancer in migrants reached the rate in the host country within one or two generations, indicating that environmental factors are of greater importance than genetic factors (47, 67).

2.2.2.5 Prostate cancer

Prostate cancer is the second most common cancer diagnosed among men worldwide (68). Reported prostate cancer incidence rates vary considerably worldwide (19). It was the most common type of cancer diagnosed among men in many high-income countries; however, in low- and middle-income countries, prostate cancer was the sixth most common cancer among men (69). In 2002, there was about a six-fold difference between the prostate cancer incidences in high-income countries compared with low- and middle-income countries. Rates among African-Americans are the highest in the world, followed by Caucasian-Americans. Rates in the Caribbean and in Brazil, where there are large populations of African descent, are comparable to the rates among Caucasian-Americans. In contrast, in Central America and other parts of South America, rates are much lower. Rates within Europe vary almost 7-fold, and are highest in Western Europe in particular Austria, and lowest in Eastern Europe. Although rates in Canada, Oceania, Western Europe, and Scandinavia are generally lower than the rates reported in the US, they are 2-3 times higher than those reported in Eastern
Europe. Asia, the continent having the lowest incidence of prostate cancer, also has considerable variation in reported incidence, with more westernized countries such as Japan, and the Philippines showing markedly higher rates than Thailand, India, Pakistan, Shanghai, and China. Prostate cancer incidence data from Africa are sparse.

Despite its high morbidity, the etiology of prostate cancer remains largely unknown. Age, race, and a family history of prostate cancer are the only established risk factors (69, 70). Other risk factors, including androgens (71-73), diet (74, 75), physical activity (76-78), sexual activity and numbers of sexual partners (79), inflammation (80), and obesity (81), have been suspected, but their roles in prostate cancer etiology remain unclear. It is estimated that a large proportion of the prostate cancer risk may be accounted for by genetic influences (69).

Ethnicity has consistently been observed as a risk factor for prostate cancer. African-Americans have the highest incidence rates in the world. Prevalence of latent disease at autopsy and proportion of localized tumors among all prostate cancers indicate that differences in detection cannot explain all of the observed variability in prostate cancer risk between populations (82, 83). This supports the results of migrant studies suggesting that ethnic factors, including genetic, lifestyle, or environmental factors, may affect prostate cancer risk and explain much of the differences in risk between high and low-risk populations (26, 27, 84-89).

In a study on immigrants in Sweden, researchers found that prostate cancer rate was statistically significantly lower among immigrants that among Swedish-born men. The lowest rate was found for Turkish, Yugoslavs, Italian, and Greek men (25).

2.2.2.6 Testicular cancer

Although testicular cancer remains an uncommon malignancy in men, it is the most common malignancy in young men (90, 91). There is marked geographical variation in the incidence of testicular cancer, with the highest incidence among men in the Nordic countries and the lowest incidence among men in the Middle East and Asia. Even in the Nordic region, there is a 4-fold difference in the incidence of testicular cancer. Denmark and Norway have the highest incidences and have about twice the risk of Swedish men, while the Finnish incidence is half of the incidence in Sweden. In many high-income countries, the incidence of testicular cancer has increased over the past 50 years (91-93). Reasons for this increase in incidence are less understood.

The only risk factors consistently reported to be associated with testicular cancer are cryptorchidism, past individual history and family history of testicular cancer (94, 95). A birth cohort pattern has been found for the testicular cancer (96-98) plus carcinoma in situ found in embryonic testes (99) indicating that exposures very early in life can play a role in the development of testicular cancer. Results of testicular cancer studies are often inconsistent mostly because of small sample size. A recently published systematic review and meta-analysis has found associations of maternal bleeding, birth order, sibship size and possibly caesarean section with the risk of testicular cancer (100).

A decreased risk of testicular cancer has been reported among immigrants in Sweden compared with the natives, with a tendency for this risk to disappear in next generation (25, 101). The risk among second-generation immigrants from Finland in Sweden has been shown to be double compared with that of their fathers (102, 103).
None of these studies explored the effect of age at immigration and duration of residence on the risk of subtype-specific testicular cancer.

2.2.3 Limitations of previous migrants studies in Sweden

Though there is a unique opportunity to perform migrant studies in Sweden, there were a limited number of studies on cancer morbidity and mortality among immigrant in Sweden at the start of our study. A couple of limitations are recognized in these studies:

- Most of these studies (25, 101, 104) used “Family-Cancer Database” created by linkages between Swedish National Registers. However, the focus of this register was to study familial cancer risk in Sweden. Thus, this database included only individuals who were parents of children born in Sweden. Later, researchers used this database to perform migrant studies. Since the probability of having a child might not be the same for native Swedes and immigrants (105) and because it has been shown that the risk of some cancers are affected by reproductive factors, this kind of selection might be a source of bias in migrant studies based on this register.
- They utilized the indirect method for standardization of cancer incidence rates (SIR, Standardized Incidence Ratios) to compare rates between immigrants and Swedes. These summary statistics are of value when there are small numbers of cases in the migrant groups. However, the major disadvantage of these ratios is that they are assumed to be constant across all ages, and if they are not, the values for the various groups are not comparable.
- Social class and occupation are also known to be strong determinants of cancer risk, and it is often clear from census data that migrants are over-represented in specific occupational categories, and are atypical of the general population in their socio-economic profile. Even though it is well known that certain cancers have shown clustering in groups with different socioeconomic position (SEP), previous studies have not taken SEP into consideration in their analysis.
- Previous studies did not take age at immigration and duration of residence into consideration as proxies for the acculturation in the new environment.
- In studies on testicular cancer, lack of power hampered analysis on the effect of age at immigration and duration of residence and did not allow researchers to perform histology-specific analysis.
3 Aims of this thesis

3.1 General aim

The general objective of this thesis was to delineate the effect of country of birth and socio-economic position on incidence and survival for female breast cancer and the most common female (cervical, ovarian, and endometrial) and male (prostate and testicular) genital cancers in Sweden.

3.2 Specific aims

The specific aims of the studies described in this thesis were:

**Incidence (Study I-IV):**
- To compare incidence of the selected cancers among first-generation immigrants to those among Swedish-born men and women (Study I-IV);
- To study the effect of age at immigration and duration of residence on the risk of the selected cancers among first-generation immigrants in Sweden (Study I-IV);
- To study the effect of socio-economic position (SEP) on the risk of the selected cancers among first-generation immigrants in Sweden (Study I, II and IV);
- To compare trends in incidence of prostate cancer among first-generation immigrants to that in country of origin (Study II);
- To compare incidence of testicular and breast cancers among second-generation immigrants to that among first-generation immigrants and Swedish-born people (Study III-IV).

**Survival (Study IV):**
- To compare survival of female breast cancer among first- and second-generation immigrants to that among Swedish-born women;
- To study the effect of age at immigration and duration of residence on the survival of female breast cancer among first-generation immigrants in Sweden;
- To study the effect of socio-economic position (SEP) on the survival of female breast cancer among first-generation immigrants in Sweden;
- To compare incidence of female breast cancer among second-generation immigrants to that among first-generation immigrants and Swedish-born people.
4 Materials and methods

From 1947 and onwards, every individual that has resided in Sweden on a permanent basis i.e. been recorded in the Total Population Register (TPR) has been assigned a 10-digit personal identity number (PIN). In health care, the PIN is used for vital statistics but it is also the key variable for linkages between different demographic and health registers including the Total population register, Cancer Register, and Cause of Death Register (106). Several authorities handle register linkages for health research purposes, but the two major operators are Statistics Sweden and the National Board of Health and Welfare. At present, PIN consists of date of birth, a three-digit birth number which is sex-specific, and a check digit (107).

Every new born in Sweden will receive a unique PIN that must be reported to the Tax Board. Immigrants without a PIN will also receive a PIN if they intend to stay in Sweden for at least one year.

4.1 Materials

We used Health and Migration Cohort, designed specifically to address health status among immigrants and their descendants in Sweden. This database was created by linkages between more than fifteen Swedish national registers through the PIN to study cancer, cardiovascular and psychiatric diseases among these groups. Part of the H&M Co data that was used in this thesis is listed below.

4.1.1 Total Population Register (TPR)

Statistics Sweden's Total Population Register was established in 1968 when a large amount of data from the registers at the country administrative boards was copied and sent to Statistics Sweden. Simultaneously, the control digit was officially introduced into personal identity numbers in 1968 when the population registration system was computerized and county-based population registers were introduced.

The TPR contain information on the population as well as population changes and should reflect the content of the population registration. The National Tax Board is the central authority with the overall responsibility for population registration. Notifications on changes in the population register are reported on a continuous basis from the National Tax Board to Statistics Sweden and the TPR. The notifications contain data on births, deaths, migrations, changes of address, changes in civil status, immigrations and emigrations.

TPR is primarily used as a basic register to produce statistics on population size and composition by variables such as sex, age, marital status in counties and municipalities. Reports on changes in the population register are used for statistics on migration, births, deaths, marriages and divorces.

The information that is registered in the population register includes:

- Name
- Address
- Personal identity number
- Country of birth
- Citizenship
TPR should cover the whole population registration in Sweden; however, both undercoverage (persons who should be registered but who are not) and overcoverage (persons who should not be registered but who are) occur. Currently, no exact measurements of the size of these deficiencies are available (108).

Deficiencies in the reporting of births and immigration introduce undercoverage, while gaps in the reporting of deaths and emigrations results in overcoverage. Due to fast reporting of routines, births and deaths will introduce only very small errors. However, long intervals between the time of arrival to Sweden and the time of being entered into the population register make immigration a potential factor for undercoverage. In 1996, the median time from the registration of application for persons with citizenship of a non-Nordic country to the time they were entered into the population register was 21 weeks. This lag is shorter for immigrants since Nordic citizens stay in Sweden without a residence permit. Emigration also causes overcoverage because it is not always reported.

Probably the most serious quality deficiency in TPR is that it contains a considerable number of persons who no longer live in Sweden. Studies showed that overcoverage among foreign-born persons can be as large as 10%; however, a recently published study indicated that overcoverage among non-Nordic immigrants lies within the interval of 25,000-50,000 persons, equivalent to 4-8 % of non-Nordic immigrants (108).

4.1.2 Swedish Cancer Register

The Swedish Cancer Register was founded in 1958 and covers total population in Sweden. It is compulsory for every health care provider to report newly detected cancer cases diagnosed at clinical, pathological, or other laboratory examinations as well as cases diagnosed at autopsy to the registry.

Regional cancer registries were established in the country in the mid-1970s. Since the early 1980s, there have been six regional registries associated with oncologic centers in each medical region of Sweden, where the registration, coding, and major check-up and correction work is performed. After verification of the material, it is then sent annually to the National Board for inclusion in the Swedish Cancer Registry. There are different types of information:

- Data on the patient, including personal identity number, sex, age, and place of residence;
- Medical data, including site of tumor (the codes are available as ICD-7 codes for the whole period from 1958), histological type, stage (has been collected since 2004), basis of diagnosis, date of diagnosis, reporting hospital and department, reporting pathology/cytology department, and identification number for the tissue specimen;
Follow-up data, including date and cause of death, as well as date of migration.

Collected information passes through the different steps. First, personal identity number is checked against the total population register of Sweden. Second, duplicate cases and information by, for example sex and site are checked in order to preserve the validity and logical contents of the codes. A couple of studies aiming to evaluate quality of the cancer register were published (109-111). In the most recent article, the coverage rate was evaluated in comparison to the inpatient registry. The underreporting was then estimated to approximately 4%. Researchers concluded that the overall completeness of the registry is high and available underreporting will be without major impact for most uses in epidemiological or public health surveillance.

Since the Swedish Cancer Register does not accept notifications from death certificates, an estimation of the underreporting of cancers was also done by comparing the Cancer Register data with the Cause of Death Register. They found that underreporting is highly dependent on the cancer site; for example, breast cancer, female genital cancer, and urologic cancers have very low underreporting while there are a larger number of pancreatic and lung cancer that are not reported to the cancer registry (109).

4.1.3 Cause of Death Register

The Cause of Death Register (CDR) is administered by The Swedish Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) and contains data from 1952 onward. A medical doctor issues death certificates and cause of death certificates when a person dies in Sweden. The death certificate is sent to the local tax authority and the cause of death certificate is sent to the Swedish Board of Health and Welfare. Information in the CDR is mainly retrieved from the cause of death certificates.

The register includes all deaths, including deaths of persons registered in Sweden but occurring outside Sweden. Stillborn babies, persons who died during temporary stay in Sweden or persons without a residence permit are not included in the register. The register is updated yearly and contains personal identity number, place of death (county and municipality), underlying cause of death, nature of the injury, contributing causes of death, date of death, sex, marital status, and age. The international classification code for diseases (ICD) is used for classification of the causes of death.

Quality of Cause of Death Register is influenced by a variety of factors. The loss is small, and information about the cause of death is missing in a maximum of 0.5% of all deaths. There have been no losses since 1997, because the data collected from population statistics also include that for the deceased persons but without indicating the cause of death. A major source of uncertainty is the doctors’ determination and reporting of cause of death. New legislation to give families greater ability to refuse an autopsy, and the changing rules for forensic death investigation have gradually reduced the number of autopsies for more than 50% of the deceased autopsies since the mid-1970s, compared with 14% in 2003s (5, 112).

The quality of cause of death in the register also varies mainly with age and diagnosis of the deceased. Cause of death data is more precise for young people than for older people. Old people often suffer from many diseases and it can be difficult for the physician to determine which condition was critical to the death. Similarly, data on
violent deaths and diseases with an acute nature are more reliable than data on chronic conditions. When reporting ambiguous or poorly specified causes of death, the Swedish authority requests additional information. Each year, additional information is requested in more than 4,500 cases of death.

4.1.4 Multi-generation Register

A Multi-Generation Register has been created focusing on the child-parent (biological and adoptive) relationship. The register, which contains all persons born since 1932, makes it possible to study biological relationships, which for example is of great interest for medical research (113). When data on country of birth is missing in the TPR, this information is taken from the Multi-Generation Register.

4.1.5 The National Population and Housing Censuses

The National Population and Housing Censuses cover demographic, occupational, and socioeconomic factors, such as income, occupation, and education for each household member. Variables related to SEP i.e. education, is obtained from this register. The register contains data on the total population of Sweden between 1960 and 1990. Since 1960, census information has been obtained in Sweden approximately every five years using questionnaires mailed to every Swedish household. This practice ended in 1990.

4.1.6 LISA

The Longitudinal Integration Database for Health Insurance and Labor Market (LISA) presently holds annual registers since 1990 and includes all individuals 16 years of age and older that are registered in Sweden as of December 31 each year. The database integrates existing data from the labor market, educational and social sectors and is updated each year with a new annual register. LISA includes several demographic, occupational, and socioeconomic factors, such as individual income, family income, capital income, education, and marital status.

4.1.7 GLOBOCAN 2002

The GLOBOCAN 2002 database was built up using data available in the Descriptive Epidemiology Group of International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). It presents estimates of the incidence, prevalence, and mortality of 27 cancers for all countries in the world in 2002 (114). It used five different methods to estimate the sex and age-specific incidence rates of cancer based on the optimal information available from each country; National Incidence data, Mortality Data, Local (regional) incidence data, Frequency data, No data. This means that estimated ASRs are not always based on data from the entire population or high quality cancer registers and indicates that the ASRs for most low and medium resource countries might be underestimated (18). In Study III, stratified analysis based on testicular cancer risk in parental country of birth was performed using age-standardized rates in countries of origin, derived from GLOBOCAN2002.
4.1.8 Cancer Incidence in Five Continents (CI5)

The Cancer Incidence in Five Continents series, published every five years, has become the reference source of data on the international incidence of cancer. This project is the result of collaboration between the International Agency for Research on Cancer and the International Association of Cancer Registries (AACR). The aim of the Cancer Incidence in Five Continents series was understanding disease etiology from the study of disease frequency in different communities, in different areas, and over time. The Cancer Incidence in Five Continents presents incidence data from populations all over the world for which good quality data are available (high-quality registers).

We obtained standardized rates, age-adjusted to the world population, for prostate cancer between 1963 and 2002 in the countries of origin from volumes II-IX of Cancer Incidence in Five Continents (115, 116). The criteria used to select countries were the availability of population-based data from five consecutive volumes of IARC publications.

4.2 Methods

As shown in Table 2, we established different cohorts consisted of men or women with known individual country of birth (and known parental country of birth for Study III and IV). All cohorts consisted of at least two groups: persons born outside of Sweden, called foreign-born (first-generation), and persons born in Sweden with both parents born in Sweden, called Swedish-born as reference group. In study III and IV we also had another group of people who were born in Sweden with at least one parent born outside of Sweden called the second-generation immigrants.

Each cohort was followed either from start date of follow-up period, date of birth or first immigration date for immigrants, whichever occurred last, until they exited from the cohorts, which were the date of diagnosis of cancer, first emigration date, death, or end of follow-up, whichever came first.

In survival analysis (Study IV), the primary outcomes of interest were death due to any cause and death due to breast cancer as main cause. The final cohort was followed from date of cancer diagnosis, until they exited from the cohort which was the date of death, first emigration date, or end of follow-up, whichever came first. In cause-specific survival analysis, patient’s follow-up was considered censored if either death for other reasons or emigration took place.

4.2.1 Outcome variable

In the analysis of incidence (Study I-IV), the primary outcome of interest was diagnosis of the first malignant cancer of interest for each person. We used International Classification of Diseases (ICD-7) to identify cancer cases during the follow-up from the Swedish Cancer Registry (Table 2).

In survival analysis (Study IV), the primary outcomes of interest were death due to any cause and death due to breast cancer as main cause obtained from the Cause of Death Register.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Follow-up Period</th>
<th>Outcome variable</th>
<th>Risk Measures</th>
<th>Exposure variable</th>
<th>Study Design</th>
<th>Follow-up Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Follow-up Study</td>
<td>Health and Migration Cohort</td>
<td>1960-2004</td>
<td>Breast Cancer Incidence (ICD-7 Code 170)</td>
<td>Hazard Ratio (HR)</td>
<td>Age, Calendar period of follow-up</td>
<td>Cohort Study</td>
<td>Follow-up Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Follow-up Study</td>
<td>Health and Migration Cohort</td>
<td>1960-2004</td>
<td>Prostate Cancer Incidence (ICD-7 Code 177)</td>
<td>Hazard Ratio (HR)</td>
<td>Age, Education, Age at immigration, Duration of residence, Residence place at diagnosis</td>
<td>Cohort Study</td>
<td>Follow-up Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Follow-up Study</td>
<td>Health and Migration Cohort</td>
<td>1960-2004</td>
<td>Testicular Cancer Incidence (ICD-7 Code 178)</td>
<td>Hazard Ratio (HR)</td>
<td>Age, Calendar period of follow-up</td>
<td>Cohort Study</td>
<td>Follow-up Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Follow-up Study</td>
<td>Health and Migration Cohort</td>
<td>1960-2004</td>
<td>Ovarian Cancer Incidence (ICD-7 Code 175)</td>
<td>Hazard Ratio (HR)</td>
<td>Age, Calendar period of follow-up</td>
<td>Cohort Study</td>
<td>Follow-up Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Follow-up Study</td>
<td>Health and Migration Cohort</td>
<td>1960-2004</td>
<td>Endometrial Cancer Incidence (ICD-7 Code 172)</td>
<td>Hazard Ratio (HR)</td>
<td>Age, Calendar period of follow-up</td>
<td>Cohort Study</td>
<td>Follow-up Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>Follow-up Study</td>
<td>Health and Migration Cohort</td>
<td>1960-2004</td>
<td>Cervical Cancer Incidence (ICD-7 Code 171)</td>
<td>Hazard Ratio (HR)</td>
<td>Age, Calendar period of follow-up</td>
<td>Cohort Study</td>
<td>Follow-up Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>Follow-up Study</td>
<td>Health and Migration Cohort</td>
<td>1960-2004</td>
<td>Breast Cancer Mortality</td>
<td>Hazard Ratio (HR)</td>
<td>Age, Calendar period of follow-up</td>
<td>Cohort Study</td>
<td>Follow-up Study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Characteristics of studies included in this thesis.


4.2.2 Exposure variable

In this thesis, the main exposure variable was country of birth; being an immigrant or Swedish-born person living in Sweden, obtained from the Swedish Total Population Register. Many studies on immigrants’ health use ethnicity as exposure but since this term refers to a complex phenomenon including both objective and subjective criteria that is difficult to measure, country of birth is used as the more straightforward variable. Since one country may include several ethnic groups and one ethnic group may be presented in several countries, it was not possible to infer a person’s ethnicity from their country of birth.

Despite the recurrence of the term immigrant in the official statistics of Sweden, there is no generally accepted definition of the word in use. The broadest definition includes all persons born in another country, as well as their children. The term ‘First-generation’ immigrant usually refers to persons born outside of the country, regardless of whether they are foreign citizens or have acquired Swedish citizenship. Persons born in Sweden, but with one or both parents born abroad comprise second-generations immigrants.

In study I, we used classification as follows:

- OECD countries (Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development) not specified in other groups (US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Western Europe except for Finland);
- Finland;
- South Europe (Portugal, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Greece and the former Yugoslavia);
- Eastern Europe (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Moldavia, Slovenia, Russia, the Soviet Union, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Tadzhikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan);
- Poland;
- Bosnia;
- South America (Chile and other Latin American countries);
- Asia (except Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Arabic-speaking countries);
- Turkey;
- Iraq and other Arabic countries;
- Iran;
- Africa (except Arabic-speaking countries of North Africa).

For studies II-IV, we classified foreign-born individuals into six continents according to their country of birth. We further subdivided continents into 19 world regions (Figure 2), as defined by the United Nations Population Division (114, 117). We reported the results in a pooled format at the level of regions or countries whenever we encountered statistical lack of power.

To evaluate the change in risk of cancer in the new environment, we performed analyses among first-generation immigrants stratified by age at immigration and duration of residence in Sweden. Tests for homogeneity and for trend were performed as likelihood ratio tests. To assess the homogeneity, we calculated $p$-values for the interaction between country of birth, duration of stay and age at immigration. Tests for trend were performed with the median in each category used as the continuous variable.
### 4.2.3 Explanatory variables

#### 4.2.3.1 Socio-economic Position

We selected educational level as an indicator for socio-economic position (SEP), which has been shown to be a preferable surrogate factor for SEP (118). Furthermore, among other available variables for use as possible indicators of SEP, such as the Swedish socio-economic index (SEI), employment status, and income, education was the variable with the most complete coverage and that was largely unaffected by retirement. We obtained individual information on highest attained level of education from censuses and LISA. We classified educational level into low (<9 years), middle (10-12 years), high (college and university, 13+ years), and unknown education.

#### 4.2.3.2 Area of residence at diagnosis

Since the early 1980s, there have been six regional registries associated with the oncologic centers in each medical region of Sweden, where the registration, coding, as well as major check-up and correction work are performed. After verification of the material, it is sent to the National Board of Health and Welfare annually for inclusion in the National Cancer Registry. We studied the effect of place of residence at diagnosis on breast cancer risk and survival (Study IV) by stratifying our analysis by geographical place at diagnosis into six regions (Gothenburg, Linkoping, Lund-Malmo, Stockholm, Umea, and Uppsala).

#### 4.2.3.3 Attained age

We adjusted for attained age in 5-year (Study I, III, and IV) and 2-year (Study II) intervals in all models we fitted. We also stratified our analysis based on the attained age as below:

- **Study I**: 15-34, 35-49, 50-59, and 60+;
- **Study II**: 45-54, 55-64, 65-74, 75-84, and 85+;
- **Study IV**: 0-34, 35-49, 50-64, and 65+.

#### 4.2.3.4 Calendar period of follow-up

We adjusted for calendar period of follow-up in all fitted statistical models as follows:

- **Study III**: 2-year intervals;
Figure 2: World regions classification recommended by United Nations Population Division (Source: Wikipedia)
4.2.4 Statistical methods

4.2.4.1 Poisson regression

We calculated incidence rate ratios (IRRs) with 95% confidence intervals (CIs) using Poisson regression models. All analyses were adjusted for attained age (age at follow-up) and calendar period of follow-up (Study I-IV).

In Poisson regression models, the outcome variable is assumed to come from a Poisson distribution, a distribution of the number of events in a fixed time interval, if the events occur randomly at a constant rate. The multiplicative Poisson regression models were fitted as a log-linear regression with an offset equal to the natural logarithm of person-time. With this multiplicative model, the exponents of coefficients are equal to the incidence rate ratio (relative risk). These baseline relative risks give values relative to covariates for the whole population.

A characteristic of the Poisson distribution is that its mean is equal to its variance. In certain circumstances, the observed variance is greater than the mean; this is known as overdispersion and indicates that the model is not appropriate. A common reason for this is the omission of relevant explanatory variables.

4.2.4.2 Cox proportional hazard regression

Hazard ratios (HR) with 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for breast cancer patients (Study IV) were calculated using stratified Cox proportional hazards regression model. Point estimates and 95% confidence intervals were produced using the maximum partial likelihood for the effect estimates. The validity of the proportional hazards assumption was evaluated using a martingale residual-based graphical and numerical approach.

The proportional hazard model is not based on any assumptions concerning the nature or shape of the underlying survival distribution. The model assumes that the underlying hazard rate is a function of the independent variables; no assumptions are made about the nature or shape of the hazard function. However, the model requires fulfillment of two assumptions. The first is the proportionality assumption that specifies a multiplicative relationship between the underlying hazard function and the log-linear function of the covariates. The second assumption of course, is that there is a log-linear relationship between the independent variables and the underlying hazard function.

4.2.4.3 Joinpoint regression

The Joinpoint regression models were used (Study III) to find the best-fit line for trends of prostate cancer incidence rates (119, 120). The software takes trend data (e.g. cancer rates) and fits the simplest joinpoint model that the data allow. This analysis involves fitting a series of joined straight lines on a log scale to the trends in the age-adjusted rates. Line segments were joined at points called joinpoints. Each joinpoint denotes a statistically significant change in trend. The program starts with the minimum number of joinpoint and tests whether more joinpoints are statistically significant and must be added to the model (up to the maximum number defined by user). Once the line segments are established, the estimated annual percent change (APC) was used to describe and test the statistical significance of the trends. The null hypothesis in this analysis is that the trend in incidence rates is neither increasing nor decreasing. The
software also allows viewing one graph for each joinpoint model with the minimum number of joinpoints to the model with maximum number of joinpoints.

4.3 Ethical consideration

Epidemiological research using registers constitutes a special case regarding selection of appropriate information and consent procedures. Several national registers have been established in Sweden and elsewhere without individual consent through decisions by the national parliament on behalf of its citizens (e.g. patient registers, cancer and death cause registers). An individual has the legal right to know what kind of information the register contains but has no legal right to withdraw information from the register. Linkage of different registers is intrinsic to epidemiological research. However, protection of privacy through strict coding measures and restricted access to data is of paramount ethical interest.

To avoid violation of personal integrity; researchers need to make sure that it is not possible to link sensitive personal information to individuals. In our studies, Statistics Sweden and Centre for Epidemiology at the National Board of Health and Welfare have completed the linkages. To ensure confidentiality, the personal identity numbers are replaced with serial numbers and the codes kept by Statistics Sweden in order to preserve the possibility to perform future linkage requests by researchers. No contacts with the individuals are allowed.

This study was approved by the Regional Board of The Ethical Committee, Stockholm (Dnr: 2005/726-31 and amendment 2009/587-32).
5 Results (Table 3)

5.1 Cervical cancer (Study I)

In general, we observed a significantly lower risk for cervical cancer among foreign-born women compared with Swedish-born women after adjusting for attained age, and calendar period of follow-up. At country level, analyses revealed statistically significantly higher risk of cervical cancer among women born in Poland and Bosnia. Observed excess risk of cervical cancer among women born in Bosnia and Poland was confined to women aged 35-49 that had a doubled risk compared with Swedish-born women. We also found an increased risk among women older than 50 who were born in South America.

Overall, the risk of cervical cancer increased with increasing age at migration; however, no variation in cervical cancer risk was observed by duration of residence among all immigrant groups combined. The risk was reduced by 30% among women who immigrated at younger ages and increased by 60% among women who immigrated at older ages. Women born in Iraq and Africa who immigrated before 35 years of age had the lowest risk for cervical cancer while women born in South America, Asia, and Poland who immigrated in their fifties or later showed the highest risk for cervical cancer. A significant excess risk was apparent among women born in Bosnia and Eastern Europe within the first 5 years since immigration compared with the Swedish-born women, which converged toward the risk of the host country thereafter.

We found a slight attenuation in the risk of cervical cancer after adjustment for education, while the adjustment did not affect the risk for endometrial or ovarian cancer.

5.2 Endometrial cancer (Study I)

We observed an overall lower risk, age and calendar-adjusted, for endometrial cancer that was similar in all age strata among foreign-born women compared with Swedish-born women. Additional adjustment for education did not affect the risk for endometrial cancer.

Contrary to the risk for cervical cancer, we observed a slight decrease in the risk for endometrial cancer with increasing age at migration that was significant in women born in Asia and Turkey. Incidence rate ratios for endometrial cancer in foreign-born women were not affected by duration of residence and were lower than or similar to that for Swedish-born women, regardless of the time since immigration.

5.3 Ovarian cancer (Study I)

We observed an overall lower IRR for ovarian cancer among foreign-born women compared with Swedish-born women after adjusting for attained age, and calendar period of follow-up. Additional adjustment for education did not affect the risk.
In all age strata, the risk of ovarian cancer was the same or lower among foreign-born women compared with Swedish-born women.

The risk of ovarian cancer was 10% to 80% lower in all immigrant groups than in women born in Sweden. The lowest risk was observed among women born in Asia, South America and Turkey. Overall, ovarian cancer risk did not vary by age at migration and duration of residence.

5.4 Breast cancer (Study IV)

5.4.1 Incidence

First-generation immigrants had an overall lower risk of breast cancer. However, the overall risk among second-generation immigrants was similar to that of Swedish-born women. When stratifying the results by age at exit, calendar period of year, education, and place of residence at diagnosis, we found no variation in breast cancer risk among first- and second-generation immigrants compared with Swedish-born women. However, the risk statistically significantly decreased with increasing age at immigration among first-generation immigrants. This variation in risk by age at immigration was prominent among immigrants from low-risk countries in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe.

There was a 20-50% statistically significantly lower risk of breast cancer observed among first-generation immigrants born in different regions in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. At the country level, IRR of breast cancer was 5% to 55% significantly lower among immigrants born in Finland, Ex-Yugoslavia, Norway, Bosnia, Poland, Ex-Czechoslovakia, China, Chile, Thailand, Turkey, and Viet Nam compared with Swedish-born women.

Women with lowest educational level had statistically significantly decreased risk of breast cancer. The decreased risk varied between 15% among women born in Sweden and second generation immigrants to 20% among first generation immigrants in the lowest compared with the highest educational level.

5.4.2 Survival

5.4.2.1 All-cause mortality

Overall, first-generation and second-generation immigrants had similar all-cause mortality compared with Swedish-born women. However, first-generation immigrants who were born in Ethiopia, Poland, and Portugal as well as second-generation immigrants whose parents, either one or both, were born in Latvia, France, and the Netherlands had statistically significantly higher risk of all-cause mortality, while women born in Asia had significantly lower risk of all-cause mortality compared with Swedish-born women.

5.4.2.2 Cause-specific mortality

We did not find statistically significant differences in cause-specific mortality either among first- or among second-generation migrants compared with Swedish-born women. However, cause-specific mortality increased significantly with increasing age at immigration. Post-menopausal breast cancer mortality was statistically significantly
higher among first-generation immigrants than among Swedish-born women, while breast cancer mortality was significantly lower if cancer was diagnosed pre-menopausal.

We observed a clear socioeconomic gradient in the breast cancer mortality. Regardless of country of birth, women with lowest educational level had statistically significantly around 50% higher risk of dying of breast cancer compared with women with highest level of education.

5.5 Prostate cancer (Study II)

In general, foreign-born men had a 40% lower risk of prostate cancer compared with Swedish-born men after adjusting for attained age and calendar period of year. Additional adjustment for education did not change the risk of prostate cancer.

At the level of World regions, men born in the Caribbean had a non-significant elevated risk and men born in Middle Africa had a borderline increased risk. The risk among immigrants from Democratic Republic of the Congo, who constituted the majority of immigrants from Middle Africa, was about 3 times higher than the risk for men born in Sweden.

Overall, the risk adjusted for attained age, calendar period of year and education was lower in both strata of age at immigration and duration of residence compared with the Swedish-born men. After additional adjustment for birth country, we observed a significantly higher risk among immigrants who immigrated at ages younger than 40 years compared with those who immigrated at ages older than 40 years, and among foreign-born men who stayed longer than 35 years compared with those who stayed for shorter periods.

In analyzing the incidence trend by joinpoint regression, prostate cancer incidence among Swedish-born men increased significantly by 2.0% per year for the period 1964-1995 and by 8.0% per year for the period of 1996-2004. Rates among immigrants from Estonia also increased by 1.6% and 9.0% per year for the periods of 1961-1993 and 1994-2004, respectively. Incidence rates were relatively stable for 1961 through 1995 among immigrants from Denmark, Germany and Finland, whereas their more recent rates (1996-2004) increased by around 9% per year.

5.6 Testicular cancer (Study III)

First-generation immigrants showed remarkably different IRRs by country of birth. In general, IRRs among first-generation immigrants reflected to some extent, the risk in the countries of birth. Compared with Swedish-born men, first-generation immigrants from low-risk countries had a lower risk of testicular cancer, while those from high-risk countries had a higher risk. At the country level, IRR of testicular cancer was 40% to 85% significantly lower among immigrants born in Ex-Yugoslavia, Lebanon, Finland, Iran, Turkey, and Iraq compared with Swedish-born men. The risk was 40% to 240% significantly higher among men born in Germany, Norway, Denmark, Chile, and Switzerland compared with Swedish-born men.

Overall risk of testicular cancer among second-generation immigrants was similar to that of Swedish-born men, but varied by parental country of birth. An apparent
convergence toward the risk of Swedish-born men was observed among most second-
generation groups.

Among first-generation immigrants with both parents born outside Sweden, those
from high-risk areas had 60% higher risk, while those from low-risk areas showed
about 60% lower risk compared with the Swedish-born men.

Among second-generation immigrants, there was no significant difference across
parental categories of origin (mother foreign-born, father foreign-born or both foreign-
born). However, second-generation immigrants with both parents born outside Sweden
had higher risk compared with Swedish-born men if parents were from high-risk areas
and lower risk if parents were from low-risk areas.

Compared with the first-generation immigrants, testicular cancer risk was lower
among second-generation immigrants with parents from high-risk areas, while the risk
was two times higher among second-generation immigrants with parents from low-risk
areas. When the data was stratified by histopathological subtypes, the overall results
were basically the same but more prominent for seminomas than non-seminomas. At
the country level, the risk was significantly higher among second-generation
immigrants with at least one parent born in former Soviet Union, Turkey, and Finland
compared with the corresponding first-generation immigrants.

In general, the risk decreased by increasing age at immigration and increased by
increasing duration of residence regardless of the risk in country of birth. When
stratifying the results by histopathological subtypes, the risk of testicular seminomas
was statistically significantly modified by age at immigration and duration of residence
among immigrants from high-risk areas, but not among those from low-risk areas. The
risk patterns in the analysis of the risk of non-seminomas were less regular and without
statistically significant trend or heterogeneity.
### Table 3 - Summary of results of studies included in this thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cancer Type</th>
<th>Swedish-born</th>
<th>First-generation</th>
<th>Second-generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female Cancers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cervical</td>
<td>17,070</td>
<td>1,177</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endometrial</td>
<td>33,658</td>
<td>1,632</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ovarian</td>
<td>31,070</td>
<td>1,157</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breast</td>
<td>60,249</td>
<td>8,315</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male Cancers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prostate</td>
<td>187,675</td>
<td>8,244</td>
<td>530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testicular</td>
<td>4,733</td>
<td>538</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Risk:** immigrants vs. Swedish-born; IRR (95% CI)

- **First-generation**
  - Cervical: 0.88 (0.83-0.94)
  - Endometrial: 0.78 (0.74-0.82)
  - Ovarian: 0.59 (0.55-0.62)
  - Breast: 0.90 (0.88-0.92)
  - Prostate: 0.57 (0.56-0.58)

  **Low-risk area:** 0.43 (0.38-0.49)
  **High-risk area:** 1.61 (1.42-1.83)

- **Second-generation**
  - Cervical: -
  - Endometrial: -
  - Ovarian: 1.04 (0.99-1.09)
  - Breast: -
  - Prostate: 1.02 (0.93-1.12)
  - Testicular: 1.02 (0.93-1.12)

**Effect modification by:** Age at Immigration, Duration of Residence, Socio-economic Position

- **First-generation**
  - Low-risk area: 0.84 (0.82-0.86)
  - High-risk area: 0.78 (0.74-0.83)

- **Second-generation**
  - Low-risk area: 0.85 (0.76-0.95)

**Survival:** Immigrants vs. Swedish-born; HR (95% CI)

- **First-generation**
  - Cervical: 1.00 (0.93-1.06)
  - Endometrial: 1.42 (1.22-1.66)
  - Ovarian: 1.55 (1.47-1.63)
  - Breast: 1.43 (1.06-1.95)

- **Second-generation**
  - Cervical: -
  - Endometrial: -
  - Ovarian: -
  - Breast: -

**Survival:** lowest vs. highest level of education; HR (95% CI)

- **First-generation**
  - Cervical: -
  - Endometrial: -
  - Ovarian: -
  - Breast: -

- **Second-generation**
  - Cervical: -
  - Endometrial: -
  - Ovarian: -
  - Breast: -
6 Methodological considerations

The major strengths of our studies are the unprecedented statistical precision and the nation-wide design with a long follow-up of all Swedish-born and foreign-born men during the study period. We had almost complete records about our main exposure, country of birth. Misclassification with regard to exposure, if any, is most likely independent of cancers and thus non-differential since information on exposure was collected before the diagnosis of any cancer. It is obviously essential that migrant status should be defined in an identical manner in the censuses as sources of exposure variable and population at risk data, as well as cancer and death registers as sources of outcome variables. We used Total Population Register as the source for country of birth in our studies and linked that to the National Cancer and Cause of Death Registers. Thus, there is virtually no concern about consistency in definition of migrant status in our studies.

Power to stratify the risk among immigrants by age at immigration and duration of residence, by histopathological subtypes and by risk in parental country of birth (Study III) and among second-generation immigrants (Study III and IV) together with the completeness and reliability of registers in Sweden are other strengths. These factors allowed us to evaluate further the importance of exposure timing on epidemiology of selected cancers among immigrants.

6.1 Selection bias

Interpretation of migrant studies is not straightforward as migrant populations are most likely a self-selected and non-random sample from the population of their countries of origin. Immigrants may often come from very limited sub-areas within the country of origin or from special religions, socio-economic positions, occupations, or ethnic groups. When comparing disease risk among immigrants to that in country of origin, one should take into account that immigrants may differ from non-migrants according to different factors. This selection may influence health and disease risk, although this effect is likely to disappear with time and in the second generation.

It often assumes that migrants are healthier than the average population in the country of origin, the “healthy migrant effect” (121). For example, this kind of effect has been reported in studies on mortality among Turkish immigrants in Germany but not in Sweden (122, 123). One reason might be that migration needs energy and enough resources. Another reason, not applicable to Sweden, might be the exclusions for ill or disabled persons introduced by authorities of host countries. Researchers have also reported an “unhealthy migrant effect”.

To reduce the effect of selection bias in migrant studies, researchers can make comparisons between similar groups, immigrants vs. source population in country of origin. This comparison is usually impossible for the country of origin except for immigrants from distinct geographical regions within the country of origin when health data, and in our case cancer data is available. In some situations, where there is considerable variation in rates of cancer within various parts of the country of birth, such as testicular cancer in Denmark (124), more defined measures for place of birth within country of origin is needed. We had no such information in Swedish national
Cancer and Migration in Sweden

registers. However, it is possible to check for these effects, healthy or unhealthy, if risk according to duration of residence in the country of origin can be estimated. A significant change in rates from those in the host country in recent migrants suggests this form of bias (11). In our study on testicular cancer (Study III), we used cancer rates in countries of origin extracted from GLOBOCAN to categorize immigrants into high-risk and low-risk. When analyzing the effect of duration of residence on cancer risk (Study I-IV), we excluded cancer cases diagnosed within two years of arrival. Similar to some of other studies, we found no sign of any such effect among immigrants in Sweden regarding selected cancer risks (125).

6.2 Confounding

Exploring the effect of birthplace on cancer risk, several variables related to both cancer risk and exposure can be considered as confounders. Two most important demographic factors with such possible effect are age and calendar year of diagnosis. Different age distribution between immigrants and population of host country might be a strong confounder in the comparison of cancer risk. Controlling for age, either by age-standardization or by adjustment, has commonly been used to control for the effect of this potential confounder. In our studies, we adjusted for attained age in all our analyses. However, residual confounding may still be of concern due to older age among Swedish-born residents compared with immigrant population and especially for cancers with peak incidence at older ages. Temporal trends in cancer incidence may also be different in both migrant and host populations, especially if, like in our studies, historical data is used. This should be considered, especially when studying the effect of duration of residence. In this case, an adjustment for period is necessary because data from more recent periods will contain more migrants with long periods of residence than those from earlier years. All statistical models in our studies included calendar period of year as a probable confounder.

Geographical variation in cancer risk within host country is also considered as a possible source for confounding, given that immigrants are rarely distributed homogeneously in the host country. In Sweden, researchers reported variation in breast and prostate cancer risk by geographical regions within the country (126, 127). We performed the stratified analysis by area of residence at diagnosis of breast cancer (Study IV). We did not find any effect modification of place of residence on the incidence rate ratio of breast cancer among immigrants compared with Swedish-born women.

Socio-economic position (SEP) is known to be a strong determinant of cancer risk. It is often clear from census data that migrants are over-represented in specific occupational categories, and are atypical of the general population in their socio-economic profile. To have meaningful comparisons, one should therefore take SEP into account. Besides the adjustment of risk for SEP, we tried to study the effect of SEP on the risk of cancers by stratification in this thesis.

Several risk factors have been suggested for the cancers that were studied in this thesis. We could not adjust for these potential confounders because such information was not available in the Swedish registers. However, because most of these factors can only account for a small fraction of the total incidence of malignant tumors such as
testicular cancer, differences found in risks among immigrants might not be explained by these factors.

6.3 Data quality

Variation in the quality of data from different sources is a source of problem when cancer rates in one country are compared with those from another country i.e. country of origin for immigrants vs. host country. Comparisons within a country are less likely to suffer from systematic biases in data quality. However, biases might result from inequalities in access to healthcare facilities for immigrants compared with the native population of the host country.

Some cancer sites are prone to misclassification at registration. A well-known example is cancer of the uterus, for which cause-specific death records varies considerably between countries, leading to large international variation in the death rates of cervical and endometrial cancer. However, to our knowledge, there is no evidence indicating differences of cancer registration between immigrants and native Swedes in Sweden.

Calculation of incidence rates requires an estimate of person-years at risk. This calculation is normally made from census data. However, censuses are usually infrequent, and interpolations are needed to derive person-years at risk. This might introduce some practical difficulties in using population-at-risk data, especially when active migration is still occurring during the study period. In our analyses for age at immigration and duration of residence, we found an overall 12% missing data for first immigration date. The degree in which immigration date was missing varied considerably by country of birth; ranging from less than 5% among immigrants from Asia and Latin America to 67% among immigrants from Estonia. Immigrants from Nordic and European countries had between 10 and 30% missing data in first immigration date. To overcome the problem, some researchers used first date of appearance in censuses in Sweden as a proxy for immigration date. To preserve accuracy, we analyzed age at immigration and duration of residence only among immigrants with known immigration date. On the other hand, when calculating person-years at risk we used first date of appearance in censuses as entry date to cohort for immigrants with unknown immigration date.

A source of bias that is more difficult to detect is the failure to report re-migration. The problem arises if immigrants return to their country of origin due to critical status of their health and the probability of passing away there. This overcoverage in the population statistics leads to overestimation of person-years at risk and, subsequently to underestimation of the incidence of the health outcome under study. One study on mortality among immigrants in Sweden found significantly lower death rates among residents born in Turkey, Southern Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa compared with native Swedes. However, when the income criterion was introduced as an indicator for residence in Sweden, the reduced relative death risks was no longer significant for males born in Southern Europe, former Yugoslavia, and Turkey as well as women born in Asia and Africa (123). However, in a study in Germany researchers found comparatively low mortality among Turkish immigrants that was not explained by over-registration alone (122). Overcoverage in Sweden is estimated to range from 4 to 8% for non-Nordic immigrants (128). No overcoverage
has been observed for immigrants from Nordic countries because since 1969 Nordic countries have coordinated their population changes with each other. Further studies are required to rule out probable biases due to selective re-migration of critically ill individuals to their home countries.
7 Interpretation of findings

7.1 Cervical cancer (Study I)

We found that foreign-born women had an overall lower risk of cervical cancer than Swedish-born women (129). Our findings are in line with the results from studies on first-generation immigrants in New South Wales and the Netherlands (26, 27), and in contrast to the results of a Swedish study (25). Lack of power due to restriction of cohort to women who gave birth after immigration to Sweden in the latter Swedish study may explain the contrasting results with our study (25). We did not compare the risk of cervical cancer among immigrants to that in the countries of origin. However, other studies on immigrants in the United States, France, Netherlands, and Australia as well as a recently published study in Sweden consistently showed that cervical cancer risk is lower among immigrants than that in their countries of origin (27, 29, 30, 130-133).

The risk of cervical cancer was higher among older immigrants especially those from high-risk regions, such as Asia, Bosnia, Eastern Europe, Poland and South America. This risk modification by age at immigration may be due to the fact that older immigrants have had undetected persistent human papillomavirus (HPV) infection or pre-cancerous lesions before immigration (134). The finding of increased risk among these older immigrants is in accordance with available data on cancer rates in the respective countries of origin in GLOBOCAN (135). The observed risk after the age of 50 years at immigration reflects a rate corresponding reasonably to the rate of the birth country of these immigrants.

Another explanation might be lower probability of access to screening because in Sweden women are not invited for screening after the age of 60 years. In addition, from the decreasing trend in the risk of cervical cancer by duration of residence among immigrants from Bosnia and Eastern Europe, it can also be hypothesized that the immigrants live longer because they benefit from the cervical cancer screening program in Sweden. Similarities in HPV prevalence between Eastern Europe and Sweden (136, 137), and differences in attitudes toward pre-marital and extramarital sex, sex before the age of 16, and homosexuality between Poland and Sweden (138) cannot explain the observed increased risk among women immigrating at the age of 50 years and older. Further studies on attendance to cervical cancer screening and occurrence of carcinoma in situ would help to clarify this hypothesis.

The decreased risk of cervical cancer among immigrant women born in Africa, Iran, Iraq/Arab countries and Turkey might be explained by exposure related to different sexual behaviors, which is reflected by the dominant religion among these women, Islam (139). Prohibited extramarital sexual activities might lead to later age at first intercourse and fewer sexual partners (140).

The incidence rates of cervical cancer vary considerably in the world. They are much higher in low- and middle-income countries than in high-income countries and highest in sub-Saharan Africa and Melanesia (135). The estimated RR among immigrants from Africa in our study was unexpectedly low and might be explained by
the “healthy migrant effect” (11), or by misclassification due to the pooling of African countries due to lack of power.

Socioeconomic position (SEP) has an important implication on cervical cancer risk and screening practices (141, 142). We adjusted for years of education, which has been shown to be a preferable surrogate factor for SEP (118). We found a slight attenuation of the risk of cervical cancer after adjustment for education. This is in line with the known confounding effect of SEP on the risk of cervical cancer, which might be explained by different sexual behaviors and higher prevalence of HPV prevalence in women with low SEP (143).

7.2 Endometrial cancer (Study I)

All foreign-born women had a lower risk of endometrial cancer compared with the Swedish-born women, with no effect modification by age at migration, duration of residence or socioeconomic position (129).

According to the available information, endometrial cancer incidences are low in southern and eastern Asia, and the highest incidences are observed in North America and Europe (18). Sweden has one of the highest rates in the world (144). Our results indicate that the immigrant women retained their lower risk without convergence to the risk in the host country. Poorer medical surveillance of immigrants than that among native residents might also partially explain this finding.

Epidemiologic data are consistent with a model system for hormonal effects in women, which indicate that estrogens induce endometrial proliferation and carcinomatous change, whereas progestins counteract these effects. We had no information on individual risk factors, such as parity, use of oral contraceptives and menopausal estrogen therapy, age at menarche and menopause, or obesity (33). However, a study on different ethnic groups in the USA showed that the distribution of known risk factors of endometrial cancer could not explain the observed reduced risk among different ethnic populations (38). Furthermore, findings from a recently performed health survey in Stockholm County (145) and results from other studies (146, 147) showed that the prevalence of obesity is higher among women born in Turkey, Iraq, Chile and South America, Bosnia, South Europe, Finland and Iran than among Swedish-born women. On the other hand, obesity has been associated with increased risk of endometrial cancer by increasing peripheral production of estrogen (33), which is in contrast to the observed decreased risk of endometrial cancer found among immigrant women in our study.

Increased risk of endometrial cancer caused by exposure to unopposed estrogen among Swedish women could explain the increased risk of endometrial cancer among Swedish-born women (148). The use of unopposed estrogen was common in Sweden in the 1970s among postmenopausal women (148).

One study on childless women aged 20-41 years showed a higher first birth rate in most foreign-born women compared with native Swedish women (105). The highest rates were found among women from Iraq and other Arabic-speaking countries, Bosnia, Turkey and Somalia. If first birth rate is an indicator of multi-parity, then decreased risk of endometrial cancer among migrants might be explained by higher first birth rates.
7.3 Ovarian cancer (Study I)

We found an overall lower risk of ovarian cancer among immigrants in Sweden compared with the Swedish-born women (129). We did not find any effect modification by age at migration, duration of residence or socioeconomic position. Overall, observed lower risk of ovarian cancer among foreign-born women is in agreement with available data on ovarian cancer rates in countries of origin. Incidence of ovarian cancer is lower in Africa and Asia compared with Western countries and it is highest in Northern Europe (18). Our findings are also in line with studies on black women, Japanese and Chinese immigrants in the United States and on immigrants from Africa and Caribbean in Britain, which showed consistently lower risk among immigrants compared with the host country (30, 44, 45).

Findings of no affect of age at migration or duration of residence on ovarian cancer risk in our study indicate that protective factors for ovarian cancer, if any, seem to be retained upon migration.

Contrary to cervical and endometrial cancers, little is known about the etiology of ovarian cancer. Older age, nulliparity, talc use, early menarche, late menopause, obesity, endometriosis, being Caucasian, and family history of ovarian cancer have been shown to be positively associated with ovarian cancer, while the inverse association has been observed for oral contraceptive use and parity (149, 150). Foreign-born women in our study were younger than Swedish-born women. The observed lower risk of ovarian cancer among immigrants cannot be explained by age, as decreased risk was consistently observed in all strata of attained age. Prevalence of obesity was higher among many immigrant groups compared with Swedish-born women in previous studies, which is in contrast with observed lower risk among immigrants in our study (146, 147, 151). On the other hand, higher first birth rate, as a probable indicator of multi-parity, could explain part of the observed decreased risk of ovarian cancer among foreign-born women (105). None of these studies were population-based; thus, one should be careful to draw any conclusions based on these results.

7.4 Breast cancer (Study IV)

7.4.1 Incidence

We observed an overall lower risk of breast cancer among first-generation immigrants, but a risk among second-generation immigrants similar to that of Swedish-born women. Age at immigration significantly modified the risk among first-generation immigrants. Previous studies on cancer among immigrants in Sweden neither focused on breast cancer per se nor considered age at immigration and duration of residence (25, 152-154).

Previous migrants studies on breast cancer incidence have shown that adult immigrant women from low-risk areas retain their low risk, while younger migrants had an increased risk (155). This highlights the importance of early exposures such as diet. In our study we examined changes in risk with respect to three indicators of acculturation i.e. age at immigration, duration of stay and generation in Sweden. Our findings of risk modification by age at immigration, but not by duration of residence, in
line with studies on Italian migrants and US Hispanics (156-158), suggest that the
timing of migration might be a stronger predictor of breast cancer risk than duration of
residence and highlights the importance of early-life exposures.

The low incidence in women born in Finland, Ex-Yugoslavia, Norway, Bosnia,
Poland, Ex-Czechoslovakia, China, Chile, Thailand, Turkey, and Viet Nam found in
our study might be due to different distribution of risk factors in comparison to native
Swedes. We had no information on individual risk factors in this study.

In agreement with the results of studies among immigrants from Asia and Latin
America in the US and immigrants from Ireland in the UK (53, 159-161), we observed
convergence of risk toward the risk in Sweden among second-generation immigrants
particularly among those whose parents were from low-risk areas such as Asia and
Latin America.

The finding of our study of protective effect of low social position on breast
cancer risk was expected and was consistent with the results from numerous previous
studies (162-168).

7.4.2 Survival

Overall, cause-specific and all-cause mortality were similar between first- and
second-generation immigrants compared with Swedish-born women. However, at
country level some groups of immigrants, either among first- or among second-
generation immigrants, showed statistically significantly higher all-cause mortality
compared with Swedish-born women. Cause-specific mortality was statistically
significantly higher among older first-generation immigrants, or if cancer was
diagnosed post-menopausal or in most recent years.

Evidence from different epidemiological studies including our study and other
studies from Sweden with believed equal access to a uniform health care system,
indicate that breast cancer survival is poorer among socio-economically disadvantaged
women (169-173). Despite the observed socioeconomic gradient, we did not find a
significant variation in survival by education among immigrants compared with
Swedish-born women, indicating similar poorer breast cancer prognosis among
immigrants and Swedes in less advantaged social group.

It is known that breast cancer survival is better in Sweden than in Denmark
(174). We found a similar survival rate among immigrants from Denmark and among
Swedish-born women. Our finding is in agreement with the results of a previous study
that concluded that the early detection in Sweden has a significant impact of breast
cancer survival (175).

Swedish researchers have earlier shown that young women affected by breast
cancer have a high risk of mortality even if diagnosed early and receiving intensive
treatment. In older women, however, less diagnostic activity, less aggressive treatment,
and later diagnoses were associated with poorer survival (176, 177). In our study, we
found a disparity in survival for postmenopausal breast cancer among immigrants and
Swedish-born women but not for premenopausal cancer. It might be explained by
differences in management and diagnosis of breast cancer in older immigrant women
(178-180).
7.5 Prostate cancer (Study II)

We found that foreign-born men had an overall lower risk of prostate cancer compared with Swedish-born men that was not affected by education, and was similar in all strata of attained age (181). Duration of residence was an effect modifier for prostate cancer risk among the immigrants. The observed differences in risk of prostate cancer among foreign-born compared with Swedish-born men may be related to a number of factors. These factors include diagnosis by prostate specific antigen (182, 183), access to health care and different diagnostic procedures including digital rectal examination (DRE) and transurethral resection of the prostate (TURP)(184), genetic susceptibility, and exposure to environmental and lifestyle risk factors.

Although, the risk of prostate cancer among first-generation immigrants was modified by duration of residence, it remained statistically lower than that among Swedish-born men in both strata of duration of residence. This might suggest that either genetic factors are more influential than environmental factors in the susceptibility to prostate cancer, or more likely that it takes more than one generation for environmental factors to act.

In general, the observed high risk of prostate cancer among immigrants from Middle Africa and the Caribbean that have common ancestors in Africa, may suggest a strong influence of genetics or, less likely, shared lifestyle risk factors in the etiology of prostate cancer. Our findings are in agreement with the consistently observed high risk of prostate cancer among African immigrants in the USA and the UK and among immigrants from the Caribbean in the UK (185-187). The data is also suggestive of higher rates of prostate cancer in Africa and the Caribbean than that presented in international data, indicating the possibility of unreported cases in these countries (18).

The observed lower risk of prostate cancer among immigrants from Asia compared with Swedish-born men is similar to other studies on Asian migrants in the USA, the UK and Australia (26, 187, 188). We found a tendency of convergence of the risk among Asian immigrants who immigrated at younger ages or among those who stayed longer toward the risk among Swedish-born men. Unknown risk factors associated with western lifestyle in this group, especially diet could partly explain this convergence (70, 189).

The incidence of prostate cancer is more affected by screening than any other cancer. In addition, the prevalence of microscopic latent tumors has been shown to be quite high and similar among the elderly in most populations (190). A more rapid increase in incidence of prostate cancer, which started around 1995 among immigrants from Denmark, Estonia, Germany, and Finland, and for the same period among Swedish-born men, can be attributed to the introduction of diagnostic PSA test in Sweden around 1990 (191).

Migrants from Denmark had similar trends of incidence to their counterparts in Denmark. We also found that the risk of prostate cancer among immigrants from Denmark remained lower compared with Swedish-born men in all strata of attained age, age at immigration and duration of residence. This might be explained by genetic factors or persistent lifestyle risk factors in the etiology and progression of prostate cancer within this population; however, the effect of diagnostic density should also be taken into account.
Migrants from Estonia, known as the most integrated immigrants into the Swedish society (153), had a trend in incidence of prostate cancer more similar to the Swedish-born men than to their counterparts in Estonia. We found a higher risk among Estonians who immigrated at younger ages and among those who stayed longer. These observations indicate the importance of modifiable environmental factors in the etiology of prostate cancer.

High SEP has been shown to be associated with increased incidence of prostate cancer (192, 193). These differences in SEP have often been explained by differences in diagnostic activity, and are at least partly due to greater use of diagnostic PSA test among higher educated men. In our study, however, adjustment for education did not affect the risk. Although, education is one of the best indicators of SEP, there might be a residual confounding regarding social position. Diagnostic activity may also vary by occupation due to available occupational health services.

7.6 Testicular cancer (Study III)

The incidence of testicular cancer has doubled in the past decades in the USA, Canada, Europe and Australia (92, 93, 194, 195). Such a rapid increase indicates environmental and lifestyle factors are crucial in the development of testicular cancer. Our findings of a clear maintenance of the risk of the country of origin by first-generation immigrants and convergence of risk towards that among native Swedes in second-generation immigrants (196) are in line with results of previous studies (102, 152, 197), and provide further evidence of the effect of environmental and life style factors on the risk of testicular cancer.

There is a reasonably large amount of epidemiological and experimental data supporting the hypothesis that factors acting in utero, namely excess estrogens play a role in the development of testicular cancer (198, 199). Our findings of risk modification of seminomas by age at immigration and duration of residence among first-generation immigrants from high-risk areas, in contrast to the results of previous studies (102, 152, 197), indicate however, that the risk of testicular cancer is affected by environmental and life style factors acting postnatal. Unfortunately, previous studies supporting the importance of postnatal factors in developing testicular cancer (200, 201) have not reported risk of testicular cancer separately for seminomas and non-seminomas.

Several risk factors, such as birth weight, maternal age and parity, have been suggested for testicular cancer (202-204). These data were not available in our study. However, since these factors only account for a small fraction of the total incidence, and because of very similar population in the Nordic countries of such factors, differences found among immigrants from Nordic countries might not be explained by these factors (205).

Second-generation immigrants with both parents born in low-risk areas had a doubled risk as compared with first-generation immigrants, while those with at least one parent born in high-risk areas showed similar risk to that among their fathers. Differences in genetic susceptibility cannot explain doubling of the risk and might indicate existence of a gene-environment interaction in testicular cancer etiology. There have been some indications of a link between genetic factors and ethnic differences in
testicular cancer (206, 207). Further investigation is needed to combine exposure data with genetic predisposition of testicular cancer.

We found no or modest change in the risk for non-seminomas compared with seminomas. It is possible that the two types do not entirely share risk factors, and as suggested by previous studies, non-seminomas may be worth further investigation for genetic susceptibility (98, 208-215).

Our results for first-generation immigrants from the countries with better cancer registration showed similar or even lower risk compared with the risk in country of birth. However, the risk among immigrants from countries with no or poor quality registers showed a higher risk compared with country of birth, indicating that testicular cancer risk in these countries is likely to be underestimated by GLOBOCAN 2002 (19, 114).
8 Concluding remarks

- First-generation immigrants in Sweden have an overall lower risk of all cancers studied compared with Swedish-born people. However, there are considerable variations in cervical, prostate, and testicular cancer risks among first-generation immigrants by country of birth. Thus, country of birth is a major determinant for cancer risk. More importantly, immigrants should not be considered as a homogeneous group and thus, should not be treated as one group in research and preventive programs.

- Age at immigration and duration of residence are important factors affecting risk of cervical, breast, prostate, and testicular (seminomas) cancers among first-generation immigrants, which illustrate the effect of environmental and lifestyle factors on cancer risk. Risk of ovarian and endometrial cancer remains low even after long stay in the host country, indicating that protective factors for these cancers are retained upon migration.

- Education, as an indicator of socio-economic position, differentially affected the risk of cervical cancer among first-generation immigrants and Swedish-born women. Education either had no effect or non-differentially affected the risk of other cancers among immigrants and Swedes.

- The observed increasing trend in prostate cancer incidence among first-generation immigrants similar to the trend in either Sweden or country of birth implies the importance of both genetic and environmental factors in the etiology of prostate cancer.

- Similar patterns of testicular cancer risk among second-generation immigrants and Swedish-born men indicate the importance of early environmental risk factors that probably act after the intrauterine period. These factors appear to influence the risk of seminomas more than other cancer types.

- Individual country of birth, parental country of birth and age at diagnosis are important effect modifiers in the analysis of breast cancer survival among first- and second-generation immigrants compared with Swedish-born women.

- Among both immigrants and Swedish-born women, breast cancer risk increased, while, its survival decreased with increasing level of education.
9 Future perspective

- Sweden is an excellent country to perform migrant studies on cancer because of its uniform health care system, high-quality cancer registration and the large and increasing number of immigrants from many parts of the world. Many immigrant groups in Sweden originate from countries with no cancer registration. Swedish cancer data among immigrants may provide reasonable estimates of the cancer rates for countries with no registration.

- Our established Health & Migration Cohort is an ideal resource to carry out migrant studies on cancer incidence and survival in almost all types of cancers. It will help to estimate an unbiased data on cancer risks, to stimulate the formulation of new etiological hypotheses, and to find appropriate ways to reduce mortality from cancer.

- Individual-based data on risk factors, diagnoses, treatments, and outcomes of cancers are valuable for drawing conclusions from migrant studies. A system of national quality registries has been established in the last decade in Sweden and contains individual data on diagnoses, treatments, and outcomes. Linkage to these resources may shed further light on etiology of cancer and in the interpretation of the survival studies; it also can help to find inequalities, if any, in access to health care for cancers among immigrants.

- Data on disparity in diagnostic activities and screening behavior by country of birth in Sweden is scarce. Such differences may help to explain part of the differences in cancer risk among immigrant groups compared with Swedish-born individuals. Also for public health reasons it is important to increase uptake of screening also in immigrants group.

- The results of our studies provide useful information for authorities involved in the management of health care and cancer prevention programs relating to immigrant population. Culturally- and linguistically-adapted educational and research materials may enhance access of immigrants to health care and screening programs and increase participation rates in studies. All of which are of importance to policy makers, health care professionals and obviously to the public.

- Further studies on pitfalls of migrant studies, such as selection bias, effect of return migration and over-coverage in population registration are needed.

- Socio-economic position (SEP) is an important factor associated with risk and survival of many cancer types. Unfortunately, there is a lack of a reliable indicator of SEP, especially among immigrants. Further studies focusing on selection of the most precise indicators of SEP are necessary.
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