Risk of Kaposi Sarcoma Among Immigrants to Sweden

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Kaposi sarcoma (KS) is a locally aggressive endothelial tumour that is classified into 4 clinico-epidemiological forms: classic KS affecting lower limbs in elderly Mediterranean or East European men; endemic KS occurring in extremities among Equatorial African middle-aged men and children; iatrogenic KS involving lower limbs in immunosuppressive patients; and AIDS-associated (epidemic) KS observed among homo- and bisexual HIV-1-infected young men (1, 2). The world-wide epidemiology of KS has changed by spreading of HIV infection (1). For example, KS represented 7% of all cancers in Sub-Saharan African men in the 1960s, whereas in the 1980s the rate increased to 50%. Furthermore, the age distribution of KS has changed from elderly (in classic form) to the late thirties (in epidemic form). KS is a rare tumour in Nordic countries; the incidence is 0.1–0.2/100,000 according to the Cancer Incidence in Five Continents (CIS) report (3). According to this source, the rate in many Asian countries is < 0.5/100,000, whereas African American men have a rate of 6.2/100,000. The highest rate is in men from Zimbabwe (52.2/100,000) (3).

Human herpesvirus 8 (HHV-8) is the recognised cause of all forms of KS (2). There is discrepancy between the prevalence of HHV-8 and KS incidence in some populations suggesting underreporting of KS or the existence of some unknown protective factors for KS (1). Migrant studies provide data on international differences in cancer rates (4). Furthermore, studies on immigrants may provide supplementary and confirmatory data on the incidence of cancer in countries without local cancer registries. A few available studies on immigrants have focused only on classic KS (5, 6). In the present study, we report mean age at diagnosis and KS rates by site in first-generation immigrants to Sweden.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

We used the Swedish Family-Cancer Database which includes population-based data from the national censuses, the Swedish Cancer Registry, and death notifications (7, 8). Native Swedes were defined as those who, along with their parents, were born in Sweden. First-generation immigrants were defined as those born outside Sweden without identified parents in the Database. We classified the immigrants according to birth country, number of cases, and geographical setting into 8 groups. Whenever feasible, large immigrant populations, for example immigrants from Finland were kept as separate groups: Finland, Norway and Denmark, Eastern Europe, other Europe, Africa, Middle East, Latin America, and other immigrants.

Risk of Kaposi Sarcoma Among Immigrants to Sweden

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Swedish Family-Cancer Database included 552 cases of KS in Swedes and 119 cases in immigrants (Table I). Immigrants were diagnosed at an earlier age (47.5 years) than Swedes (65.6); Eastern Europeans showed a high diagnostic age (60.1). All immigrant groups had increased KS rates compared to Swedes. Africans (SIr = 9.64) had a high KS risk in upper limbs among Africans diagnosed at a mean age of 32 years. Furthermore, we observed a mean age of 50–54 years at diagnosis among Finns and other immigrants.
Mean age at diagnosis and standardised incidence ratios (SIRs) for Kaposi sarcoma among immigrants to Sweden by site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth region</th>
<th>All sites</th>
<th>Face and genitalia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>SIR (95% CI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean age (SD)</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>73.7 (15.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>47.0 (15.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway and Denmark</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>48.2 (15.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>46.1 (9.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Europe</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34.7 (6.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>34.7 (6.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>46.1 (13.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other immigrants</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>47.5 (15.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All immigrants</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>47.5 (15.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ratios were adjusted for age (5-year bands), sex, period (10-year bands from 1958 to 2008), and region (large cities, northern, southern, and other Swedish regions). Bold type: 95% confidence interval (CI) of the SIR for each region.

Low confidence in estimates due to few cases.

Our novel findings originated from a nationwide data having information on the birth country, the date of immigration, and the site of KS for all subjects. We found that immigrants had a higher risk than Swedes. An increased KS risk in lower limbs among Eastern Europeans, Africans, and Middle Easterners, in upper limbs among Africans, and in face and genitalia among Finns and Middle Easterners was observed. The overall observed difference in KS risk is in line with that cited in the CI5 report (3). We found that Finns, Norwegians, and Danes had an higher KS risk than Swedes, while a study on KS in the Nordic countries before the AIDS epidemic (1980) reported a higher KS rate among Swedes than among other Nordics (10). Whether the risk difference in the Nordic countries were due to the geographical distribution of HHV-8 remains unanswered because most immigrants entered Sweden decades ago (11). Recent serological analyses from Finland showed that the HHV-8 infection is rare in Finland and it may be lower than the infection rate in Sweden (12). A contributing factor to the high KS rates in Nordic immigrants may be their mobile lifestyle which includes frequent visits to the country of origin. Our study most likely shows that the incidence in KS in immigrants may differ from the rate in the country of origin.

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