Risk of disability pension in first and second generation immigrants

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Background
In several countries, immigrants have higher disability pension (DP) rates than natives. Reasons for this are poorly understood.
The aim of this study was to investigate if the risk of diagnosis-specific disability pension differed in first, second, and second/intermediate generation immigrants compared to natives, in general and stratified by age and regions of birth.

Methods
A population-based prospective cohort study on Swedish nationwide registers of all 3,507,055 individuals 19-50 years old and living in Sweden in 2004 with a follow-up period of 6-years. Hazard ratios (HR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) for mental and somatic DP were estimated by Cox regression for first, second, and second/intermediate generation immigrants compared to natives, stratified by age and region of birth.

Results
After multivariate adjustment, HRs for both mental and somatic DP were higher at follow-up in the first generation compared to natives: mental HR 1.17 (CI 1.02-1.22) and somatic 1.15 (1.09-1.22) for individuals <35 years; 1.74 (1.69-1.79) and 1.70 (1.66-1.74) ≥35 years (median), respectively. Immigrants born in Europe outside EU25, and countries outside Europe had particularly elevated HRs. Also in the second generation, HRs were higher in mental 1.29 (1.21-1.37) and somatic DP: 1.30 (1.19-1.42) in those <35 years; and 1.18 (1.10-1.27); and 1.10 (1.03-1.17) for those ≥35 years, respectively. Among second generation immigrants there were no strong differences in HRs between regions of birth.

Conclusions
In comparison to native Swedes, the risk of disability pension was higher both in first and second generation immigrants in both age groups. Immigrants from “Europe outside EU 25” showed highest estimates in the first generation. Public health actions are warranted to reduce inequalities in early exit from the labour market in immigrants.

Key messages:
- The risks of mental and somatic DP were higher among first and second generation immigrants compared to native Swedes.
- Highest estimates were among first generation immigrants from “Europe outside EU 25”. In second generation immigrants there were no strong differences between regions of birth.