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## **Pooled analysis indicates that the *GSTT1* deletion, *GSTM1* deletion, and *GSTP1* Ile105Val polymorphisms do not modify breast cancer risk in *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* mutation carriers**

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## Abstract

The *GSTP1*, *GSTM1*, and *GSTT1* detoxification genes all have functional polymorphisms that are common in the general population. A single study of 320 *BRCA1/2* carriers previously assessed their effect in *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* mutation carriers. This study showed no evidence for altered risk of breast cancer for individuals with the *GSTT1* and *GSTM1* deletion variants, but did report that the *GSTP1* Ile105Val (rs1695) variant was associated with increased breast cancer risk in carriers. We investigated the association between these three *GST* polymorphisms and breast cancer risk using existing data from 718 women *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* mutation carriers from Australia, the UK, Canada, and the USA. Data were analyzed within a proportional hazards framework using Cox regression. There was no evidence to show that any of the polymorphisms modified disease risk for *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* carriers, and there was no evidence for heterogeneity between sites. These results support the need for replication studies to confirm or refute hypothesis-generating studies.

## Keywords

GST polymorphisms; BRCA1; BRCA2; Modifier gene

## Introduction

Breast cancer risk is greatly increased in female carriers of germline mutations in the *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* genes compared with the general population. However, the estimated penetrance of deleterious mutations does vary according to study ascertainment, being somewhat lower in carriers recruited via population-based studies compared to those identified in studies of multiple case families, and risks have been found to vary depending on the cancer site of the first individual that led to the family ascertainment [1–3]. It is generally accepted that genetic modifiers explain some of this difference in penetrance and, indeed, recent studies by the Consortium of Investigators of Modifiers of *BRCA1/2* (CIMBA) have provided evidence showing that genetic variation outside of the *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* genes can modify risk of breast cancer in carriers of pathogenic *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* mutations [4–6].

Candidate breast cancer modifier genes include those that are involved in the metabolism of carcinogens. The phase II glutathione S-transferase genes catalyze the glutathione-mediated reduction of exogenous and endogenous electrophiles with broad and overlapping substrate specificity [7,8], generally producing readily excreted water-soluble compounds. Thus, allelic variants associated with altered detoxification rates of potential carcinogens have long been postulated to confer an increased susceptibility to cancer [9]. The *GSTP1*, *GSTM1*, and *GSTT1* genes have functional polymorphisms that are frequently present in the general

population. Inherited homozygous deletions of the *GSTT1* and *GSTM1* gene lead to the complete absence of enzyme activity [10–12], whereas the *GSTP1* A313G substitution results in an isoleucine to valine amino acid substitution at position 104, which has altered specific activity and decreased heat stability [13–15].

There is conflicting evidence for a role for *GST* functional polymorphisms with risk of breast and bladder cancer, and other smoking-related cancers [16–19]. However, their effects on breast cancer risk in carriers of *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* mutations have been reported in only a single study [20]. Their analysis of 320 *BRCA1/2* carriers showed no evidence for altered risk of breast cancer for individuals with the *GSTT1* and *GSTM1* deletion variants, but did report that the *GSTP1* Ile105Val variant was associated with increased breast cancer risk (HR 1.36 ( $p = 0.04$ ) for heterozygotes, and HR 2.00 ( $P = 0.01$ ) for homozygotes). After stratification by gene, the effect of the *GSTP1* variant remained significant among *BRCA2* carriers only (Hazard Ratio = 3.20 (95% CI 1.26–8.09,  $P = 0.01$ )).

We undertook a study to collate existing data for these polymorphisms from CIMBA consortium members to assess the association of *GST* polymorphisms with risk of breast cancer in a larger sample set.

## Subjects

The characteristics of the study samples are shown in Table 1. A total of 473 *BRCA1* and 245 *BRCA2* carriers, from four sites within CIMBA, had been genotyped for the *GSTT1* and *GSTM1* deletion polymorphisms, and the *GSTP1* Ile105Val polymorphism. All sites provided information for the *GSTT1* and *GSTM1* polymorphisms, and all except the MAGIC site provided data for the *GSTP1* missense polymorphism. The ascertainment of carriers to these four sites is described in detail elsewhere [4]. Only carriers of pathogenic mutations were included. Ethical approvals for recruitment and genotyping were obtained from the institutional review boards or ethics committees at all the sites. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant.

## Molecular methods

Genotyping for the MAGIC [21], and kConFab, EMBRACE and INHERIT samples [22], was as described previously. In brief, PCR-agarose methodology was used to detect the homozygous wildtype and *GSTT1* and *GSTM1* deletion variants; ABI Prism 7700 Sequence Detection System (SDS) methodology was used for genotyping the *GSTP1* A to G Ile105Val variant (rs1695).

## Statistical methods

Individuals with a first primary invasive breast cancer diagnosis were considered to be affected, while individuals with no reported breast or ovarian cancer were censored at the age of interview, or at the age of prior bilateral prophylactic mastectomy. Individuals with a first primary ovarian cancer diagnosis were censored as unaffected at the age at onset of ovarian cancer. Analyses of association between genotype and breast cancer risk were performed using Cox regression with time to breast cancer onset as the end point. Hazard ratios (HRs) and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were estimated separately for *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* carriers, and in each, study group and year of birth (categorized into subgroups 1910–1939, 1940–1949, 1950–1959, and 1960+) were included as covariates in the analysis. Secondary analyses also adjusted for ethnicity (Caucasian, other). Adjustment for other potential confounders was not considered due to the relatively small sample size of this study, which included only a limited number of CIMBA subjects with existing genotyping data. Confidence limits for the rate ratio were calculated using a robust variance approach to allow for the dependence among individuals in the same family [23]. In order to address the

problem of non-random sampling of mutation carriers with respect to the disease phenotype, we analyzed using the weighted Cox regression approach [24], where individuals were weighted such that observed breast cancer incidence rates in the study sample are consistent with established breast cancer risk estimates for *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* mutation carriers [1]. R version 2.7.0 was used for statistical analyses.

## Results and Discussion

The estimated hazard ratios associated with the *GST* polymorphisms are shown in Table 2. There was no evidence for an association between any of the *GST* polymorphisms and risk in *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* mutation carriers. This included the *GSTP1* Ile105Val variant: the HR (95% CI) for this ValVal homozygote genotype was 0.89 (0.44–1.49) for *BRCA1* carriers, and 0.81 (0.40–1.65) for *BRCA2* carriers. There was no evidence for heterogeneity in the hazard ratios between studies for any of the three polymorphisms analyzed ( $P \geq 0.3$ ). The overall findings were little different when analyses were adjusted additionally for ethnicity. For example, the HR (95% CI) for the *GSTP1* ValVal genotype was 0.92 (0.46–1.84) for *BRCA1* carriers, and 0.80 (0.39–1.65) for *BRCA2* carriers.

Although our genotyping method for *GSTM1* and *GSTT1* does not distinguish heterozygotes from wild-type homozygotes [25], our data provide no evidence for association between breast cancer risk for carriers and three *GST* common polymorphisms. Notably, the *GSTP1* 105Val variant, which was previously reported to be associated with *increased* risk of breast cancer in a small study of 90 *BRCA2* carriers [20], was associated with non-significant *reduced* risk for *BRCA2* carriers in our larger sample of 245 women with *BRCA2* mutations. Although the sample size of this study is still relatively small, there is a statistically significant difference ( $P = 0.02$ ) between the HR for *BRCA2* in this study and that reported by Kadouri et al [20]. These results support the need for replication studies to confirm or refute hypothesis-generating studies, including analyses that use existing unpublished data collated by consortia.

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## Appendix

### **kConFab—The Kathleen Cuninghame Consortium for Research into Familial Breast Cancer**

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### **Epidemiological study of BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutation carriers (EMBRACE)**

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Table 1

## Characteristics of Study Subjects

	<u>BRCAl</u>		<u>BRCa2</u>		<u>Group TOTAL</u>	
	<i>n</i>	(% of total)	<i>n</i>	(% of total)	<i>n</i>	(% of total)
EMBRACE	236	(49.9)	90	(36.7)	326	
KconFab	93	(19.7)	73	(29.8)	166	
Inherit	73	(15.4)	82	(33.5)	155	
Magic*	71	(15.0)	0	(0.0)	71	
<i>Total</i>	<i>473</i>		<i>245</i>		<i>718</i>	
Affected with breast cancer <sup>a</sup>	251	(53.1)	136	(55.5)		
Affected with ovarian cancer <sup>a</sup>	42	(8.9)	13	(5.3)		
Unaffected <sup>b</sup>	180	(38.1)	96	(39.2)		

\* *GSTPI* genotypes were not available for this sample set

<sup>a</sup>Refers to first cancer for individuals reporting both breast and ovarian cancer. Individuals with ovarian cancer were censored as unaffected at the age of diagnosis for analysis

<sup>b</sup>Includes unaffected individuals censored at the age of prior bilateral mastectomy



Table 2

Association of *GSTT1*, *GSTM1*, and *GSTP1* genotypes with breast cancer risk in *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* carriers

Gene	Genotype	<i>BRCA1</i>			<i>BRCA2</i>		
		Genotype frequency	Adjusted group and year of birth P	HR (95% CI)	Genotype frequency	Adjusted group and year of birth P	HR (95% CI)
<i>GSTT1</i>	Null	0.20	0.60	0.90 (0.59–1.36)	0.14	0.71	1.13 (0.59–2.19)
<i>GSTM1</i>	Null	0.52	0.3	1.19 (0.84–1.67)	0.48	0.5	0.84 (0.53–1.33)
<i>GSTP1</i>	AG	0.47	0.82	1.05 (0.70–1.57)	0.42	0.86	1.05 (0.62–1.77)
	GG	0.10	0.74	0.89 (0.44–1.79)	0.16	0.56	0.81 (0.40–1.65)