

Dysfunctional Societies: why inequality matters

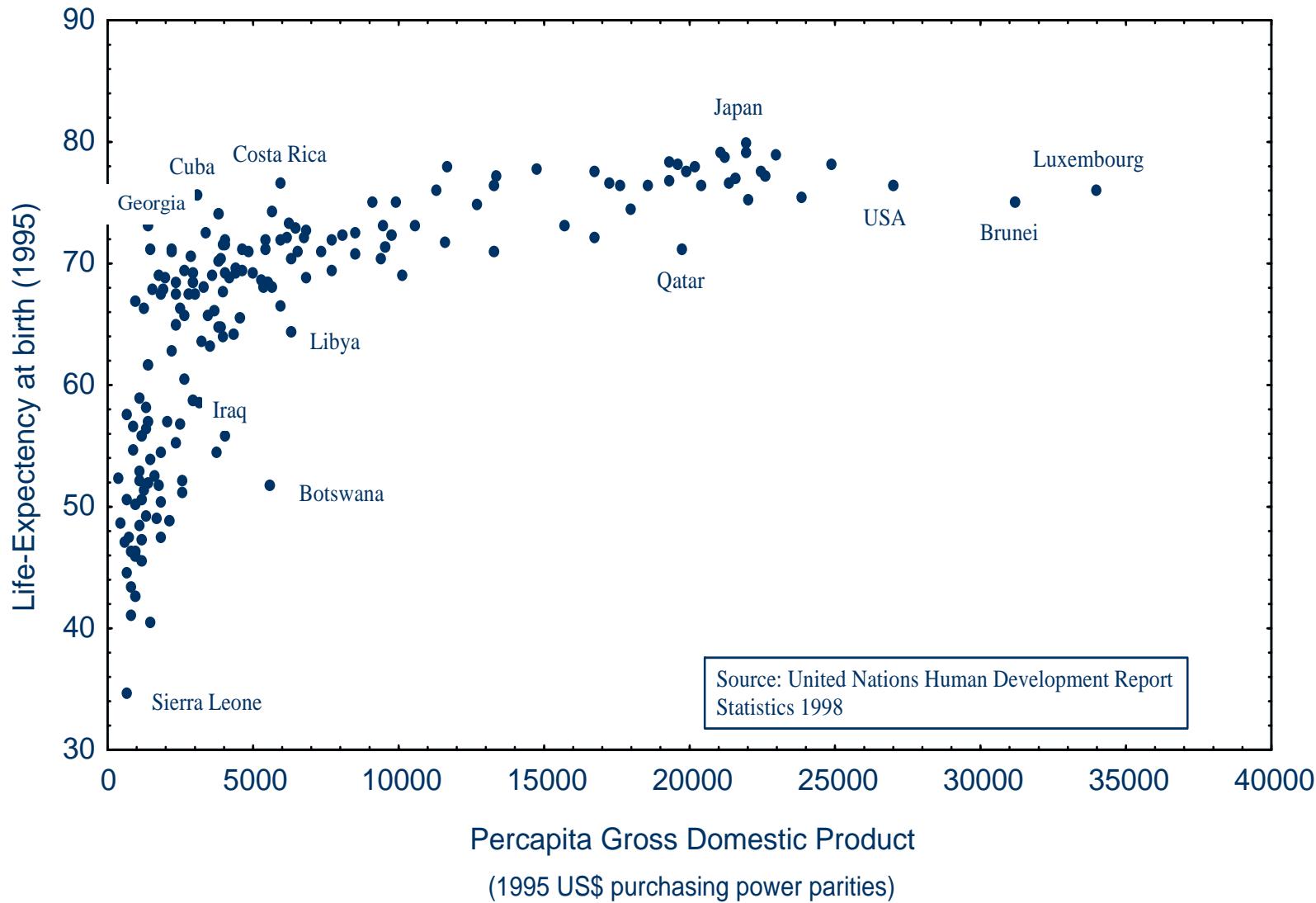
Richard Wilkinson

Professor of Social Epidemiology,
University of Nottingham Medical School
and

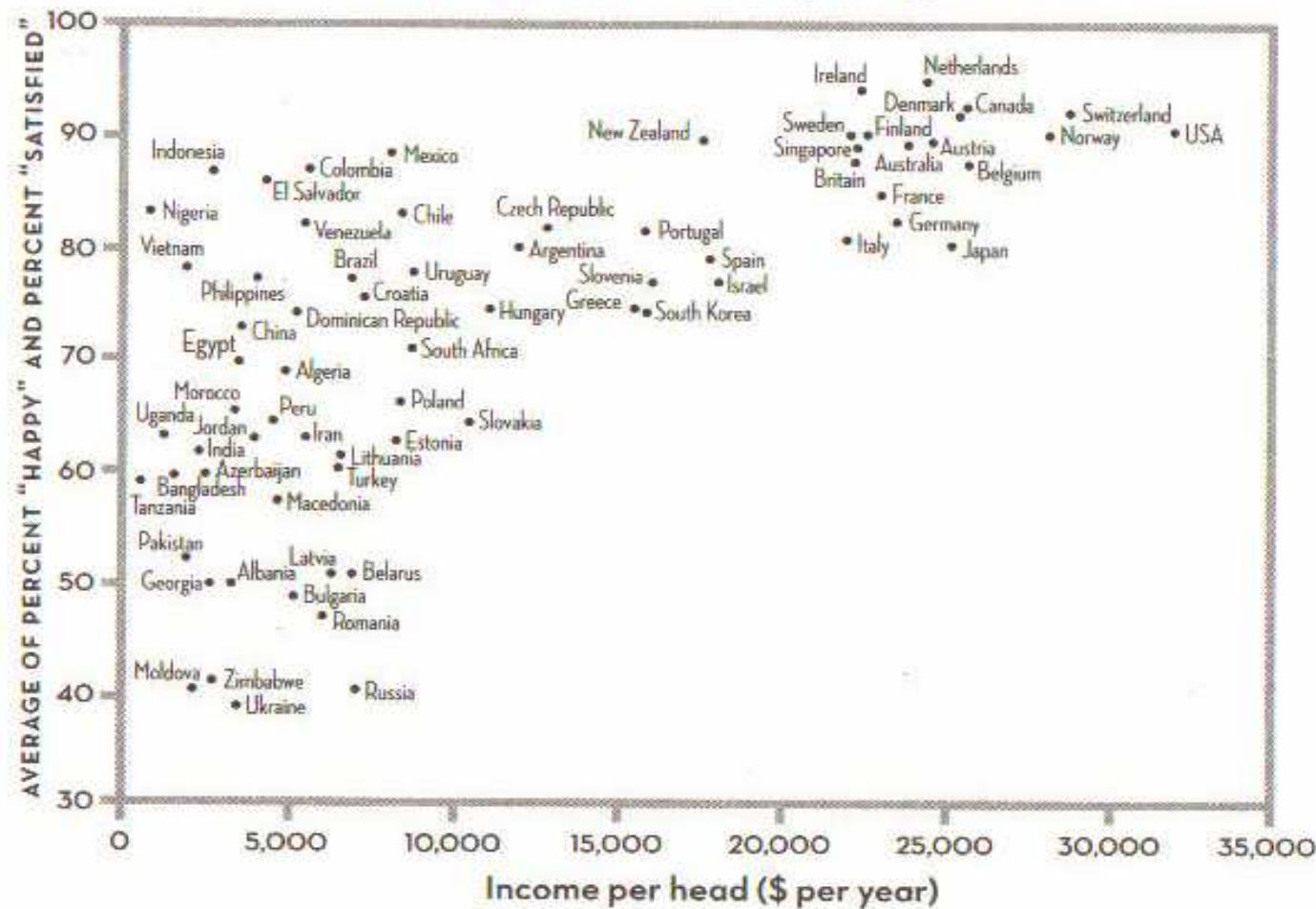
Dr Kate Pickett

Department of Health Sciences,
University of York.

GDP per head and life-expectancy: rich and poor countries



Income and happiness: Comparing countries

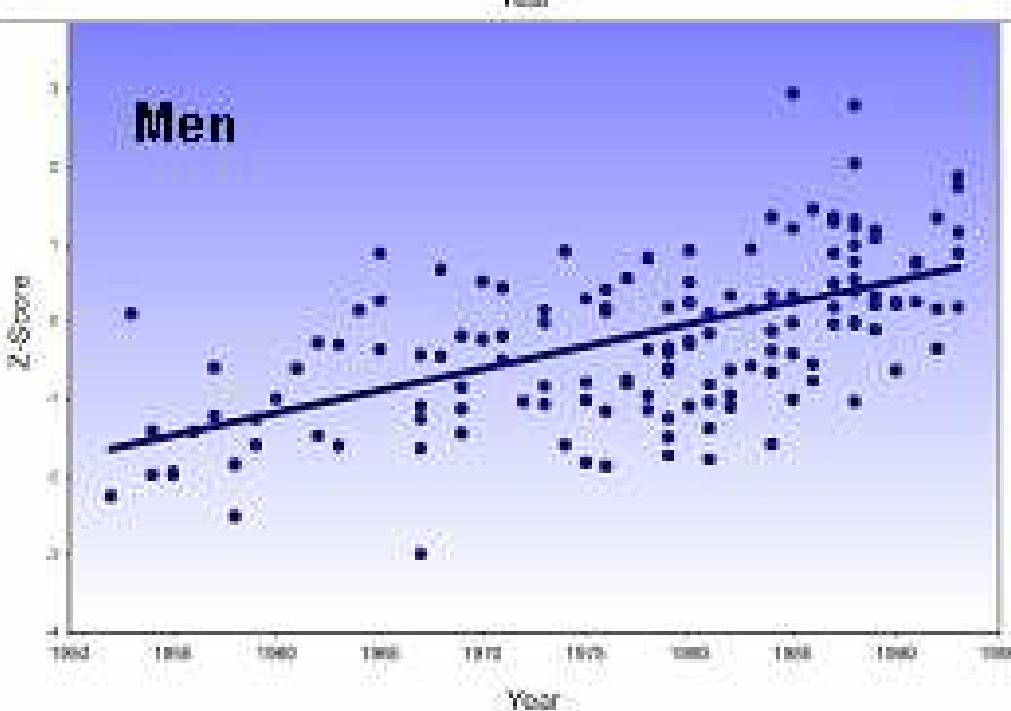
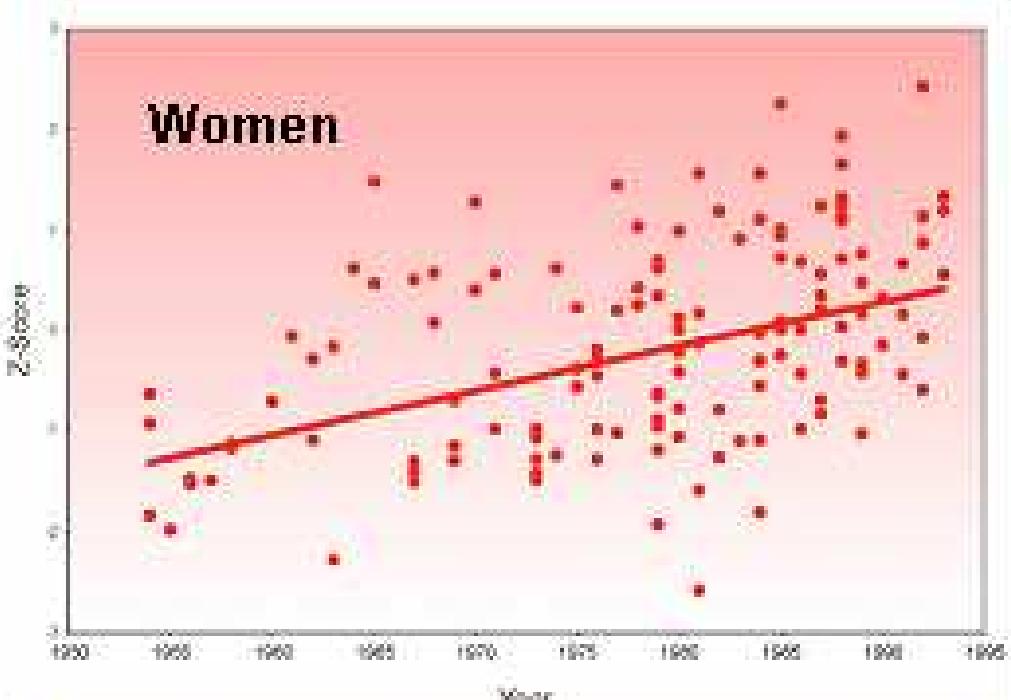


Layard R. *Happiness: lessons from a new science*.
Allen Lane, London 2005

Rise in anxiety levels among US college students 1952-93.

269 samples covering 52,000 individuals.

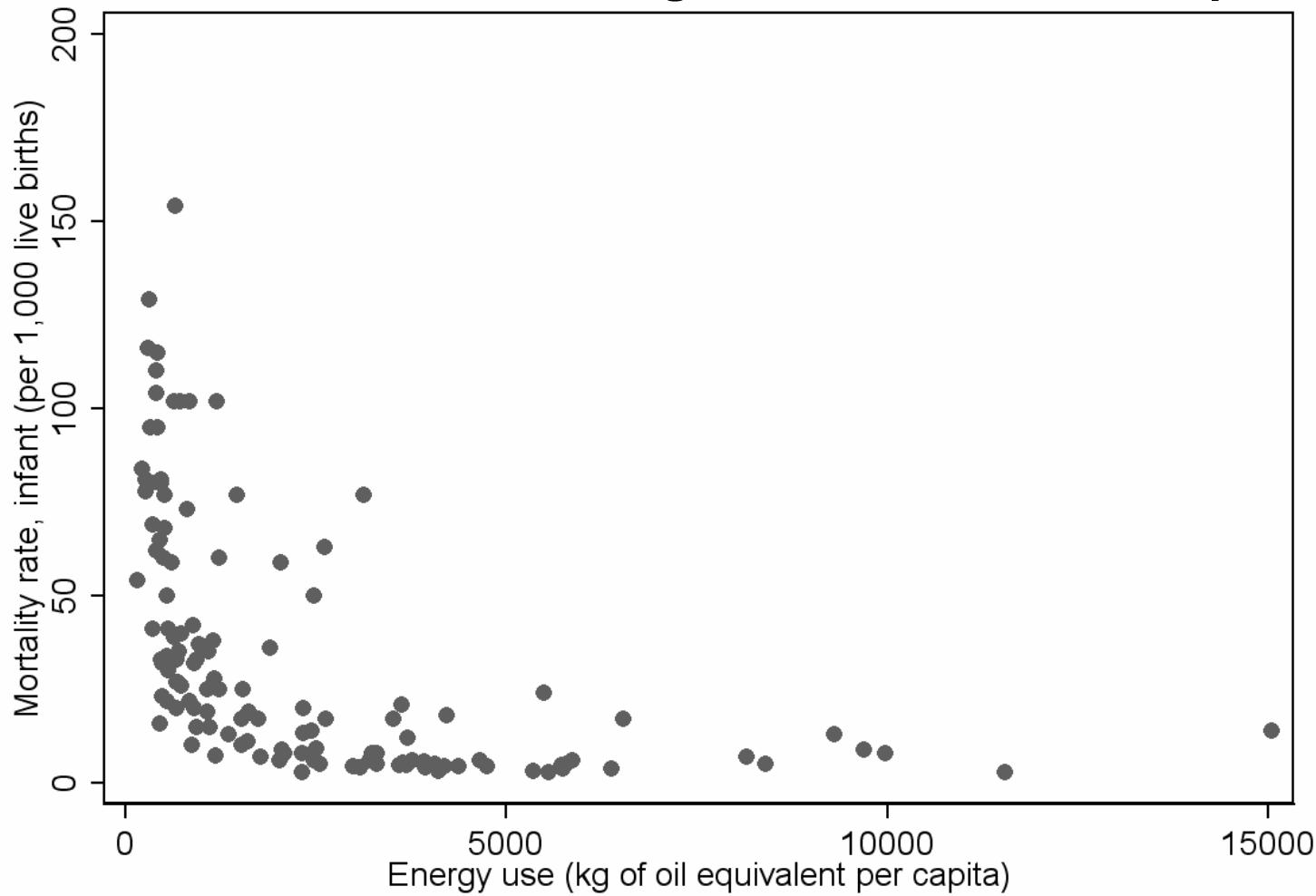
Source: Twenge JM. The age of anxiety? Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 2000; 79(6): 1007-21.



<http://www.centreforconfidence.co.uk/pp/audio.php?p=c2lkPTY=>

Infant mortality in relation to energy use per person

Countries at various stages of economic development

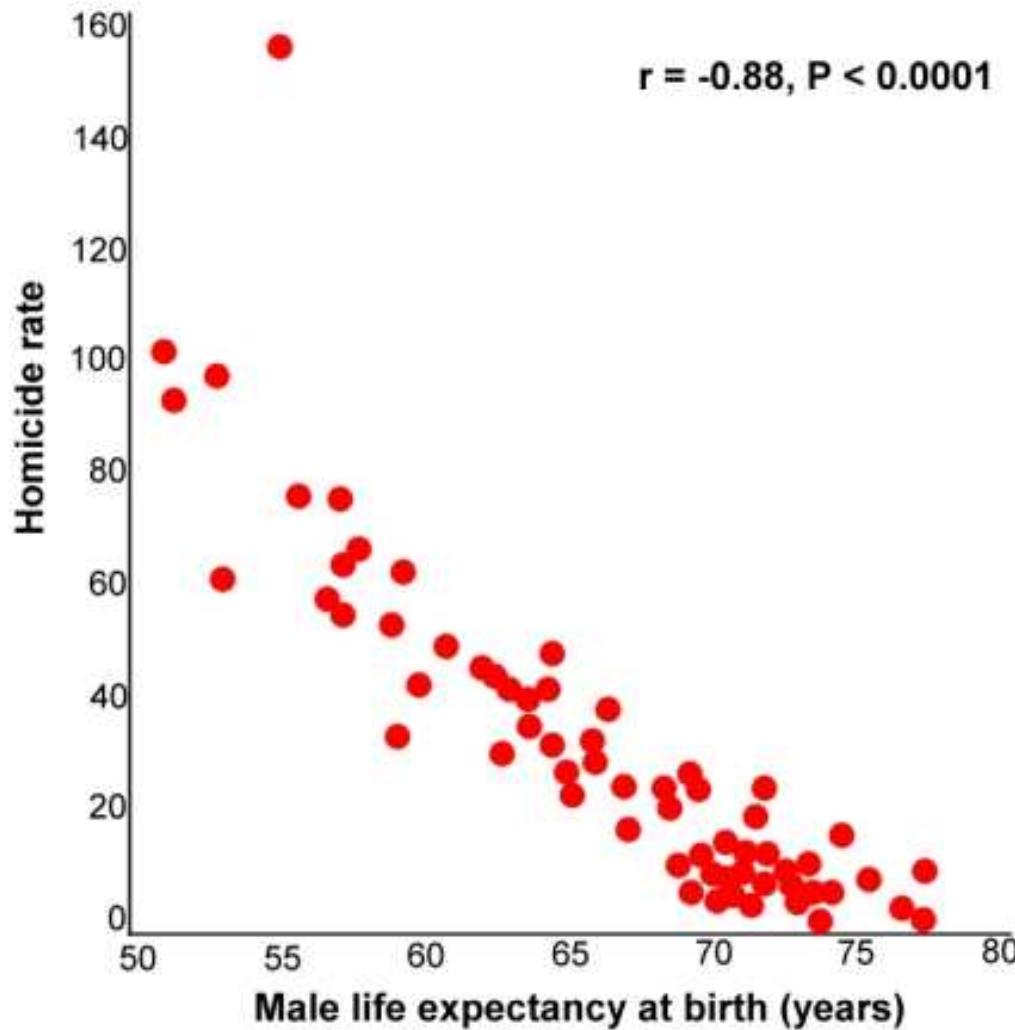


Source: Wilkinson & Pickett (2009 forthcoming)

Dysfunctional Societies – the symptoms

- **Violence**
- **Antisocial behaviour**
- **Imprisonment**
- **School failure**
- **Bullying**
- **Mental illness**
- **Physical health**
- **Obesity**
- **Drug abuse**
- **Teen pregnancy**

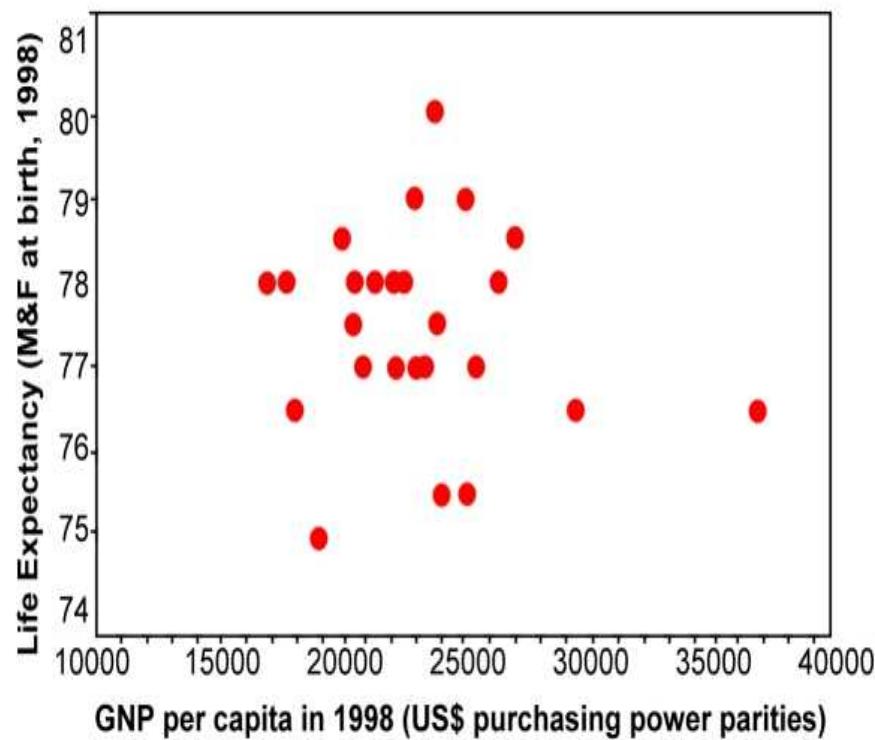
Homicide rates in relation to male life expectancy (excluding homicides) in 77 Chicago neighbourhoods.



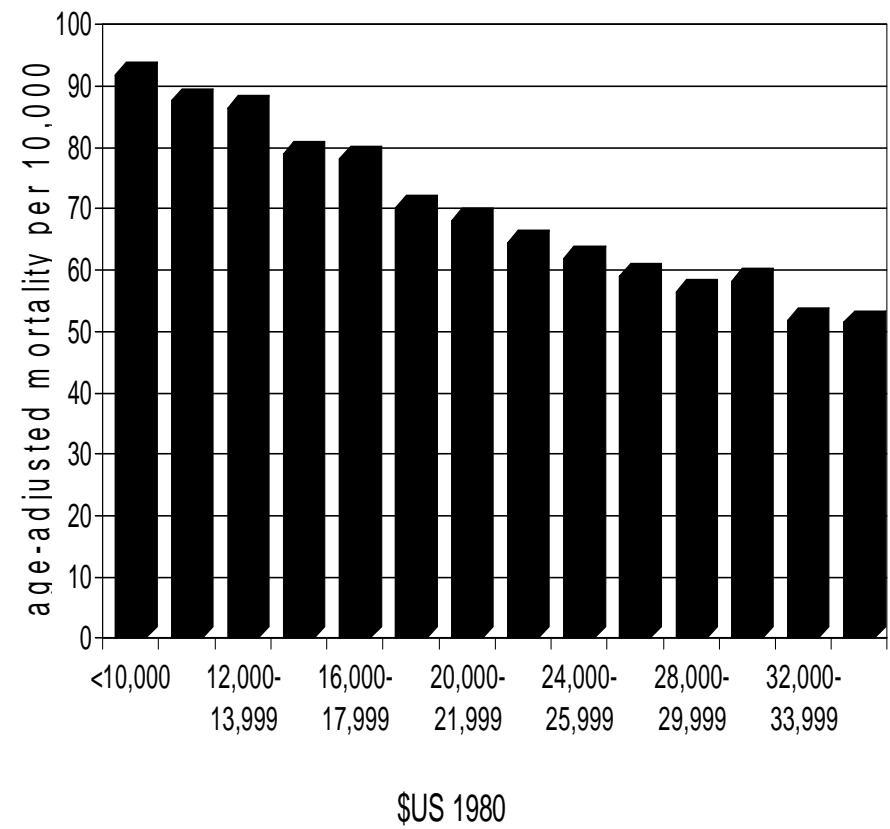
Source: Wilson M. and Daly M.. *British Medical Journal*, 1997; 314:1271-4

Income is related to health within rich societies but not between them

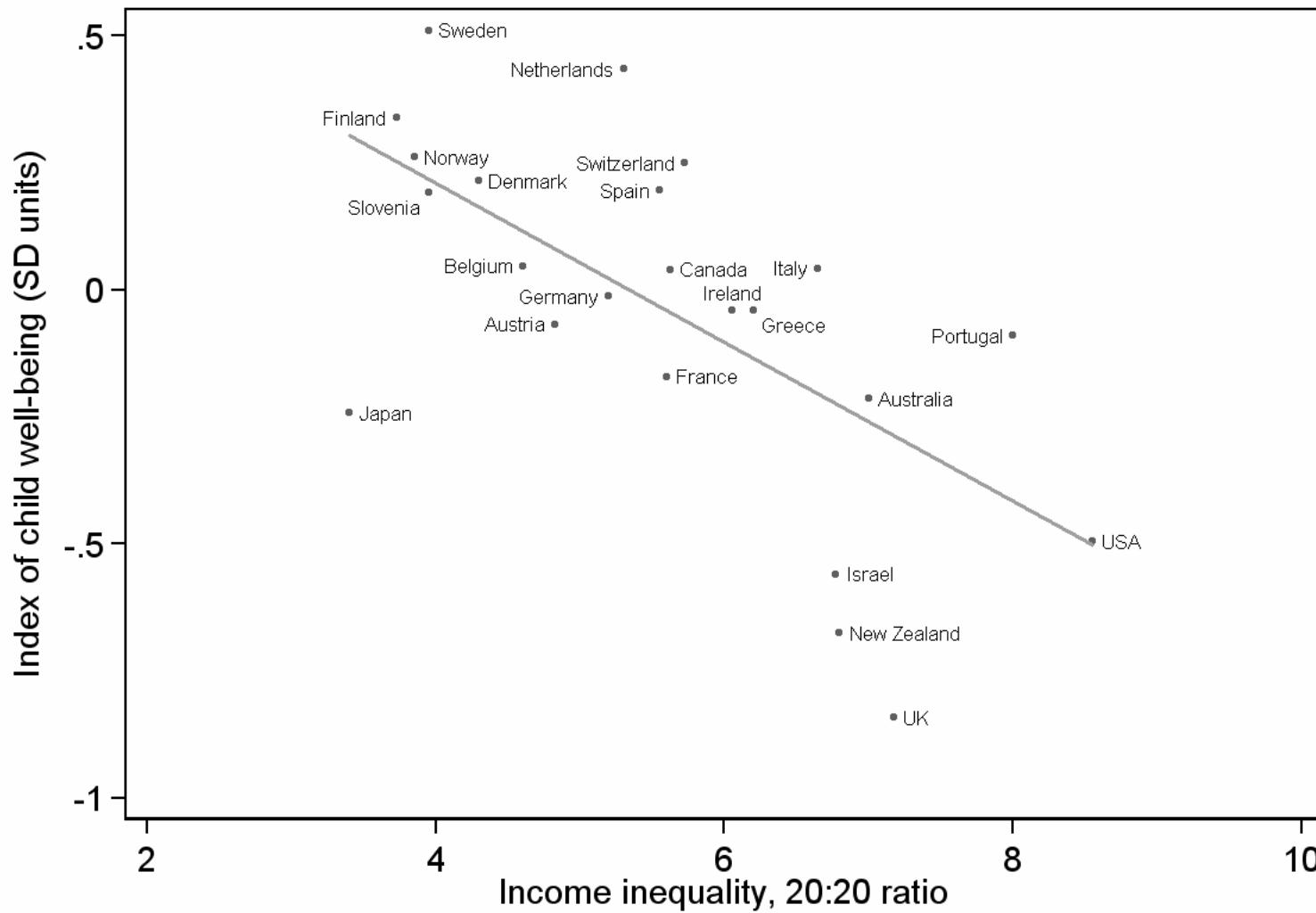
Between (rich) societies



Within societies

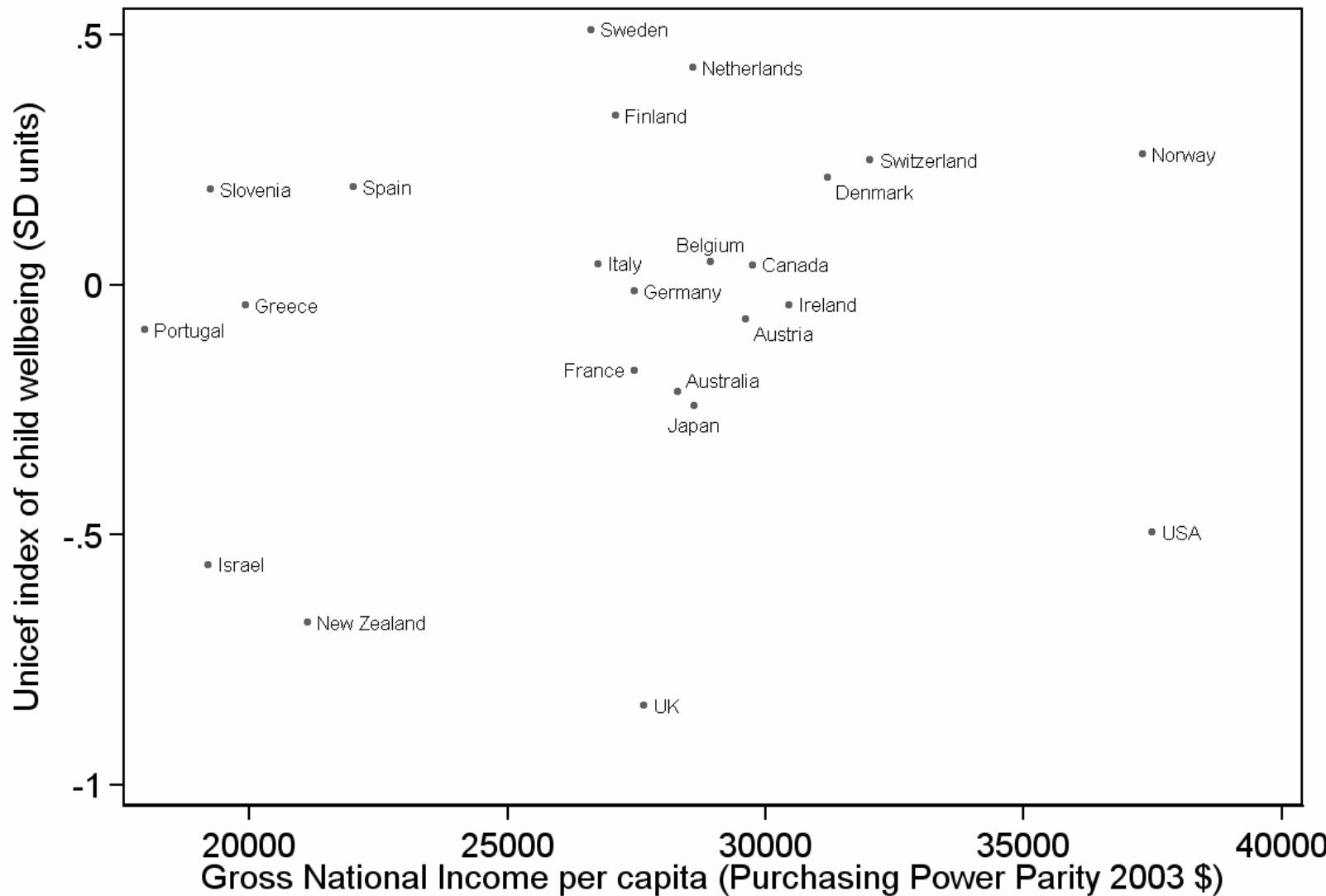


Income Inequality & UNICEF Index of Child Well-Being in rich countries



Pickett KE, Wilkinson RG, Child Well-Being *BMJ*, 2007 (in press)

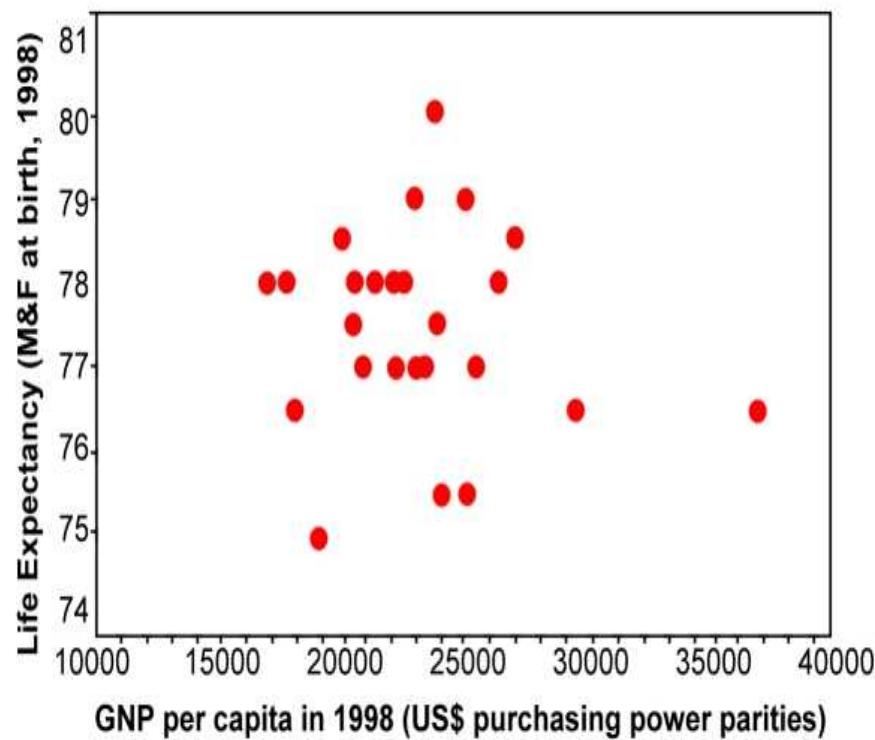
UNICEF Index of Child-Wellbeing is not related to average income in rich countries



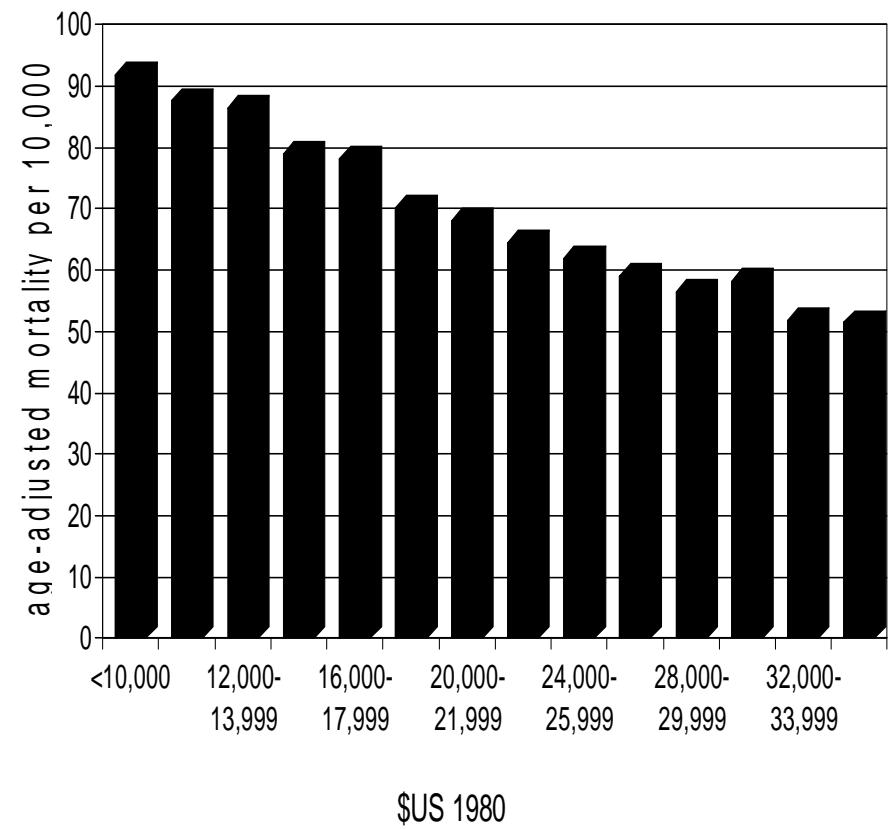
Pickett KE, Wilkinson RG. *Bmj* 2007 (in press)

Income is related to health within rich societies but not between them

Between (rich) societies



Within societies



Social Gradients

three explanations:

- Social Mobility – the resilient move up
the vulnerable move down?
- Material conditions – damp housing, air
pollution, malnutrition etc.?
- Social position – low social status,
disadvantage?

Mental Health in Relation to Income Inequality



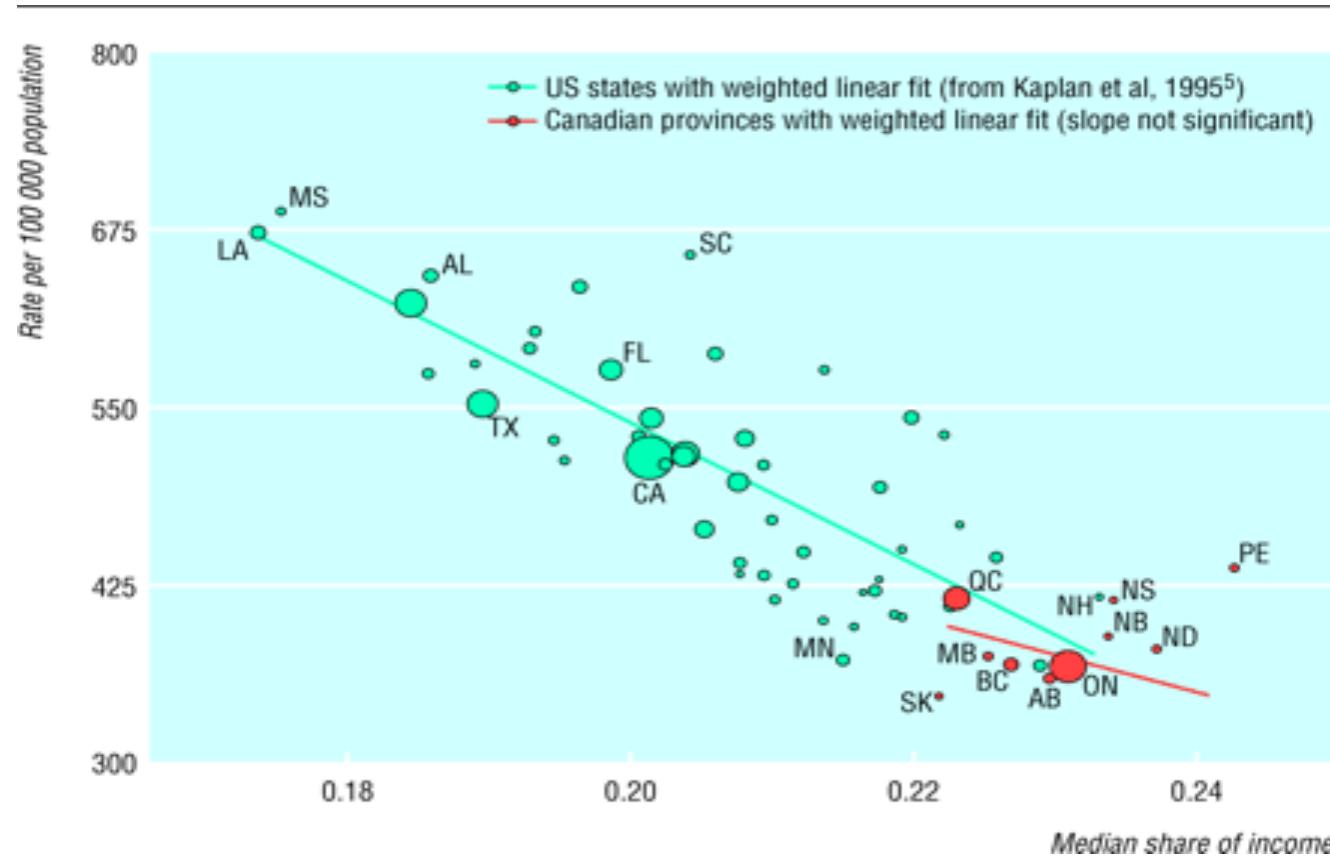
Developed from: Pickett KE, James O, Wilkinson RG. Income inequality and the prevalence of mental illness: a preliminary international analysis. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 2006; 60: 646-7.

Maths & Literacy scores and Income Inequality



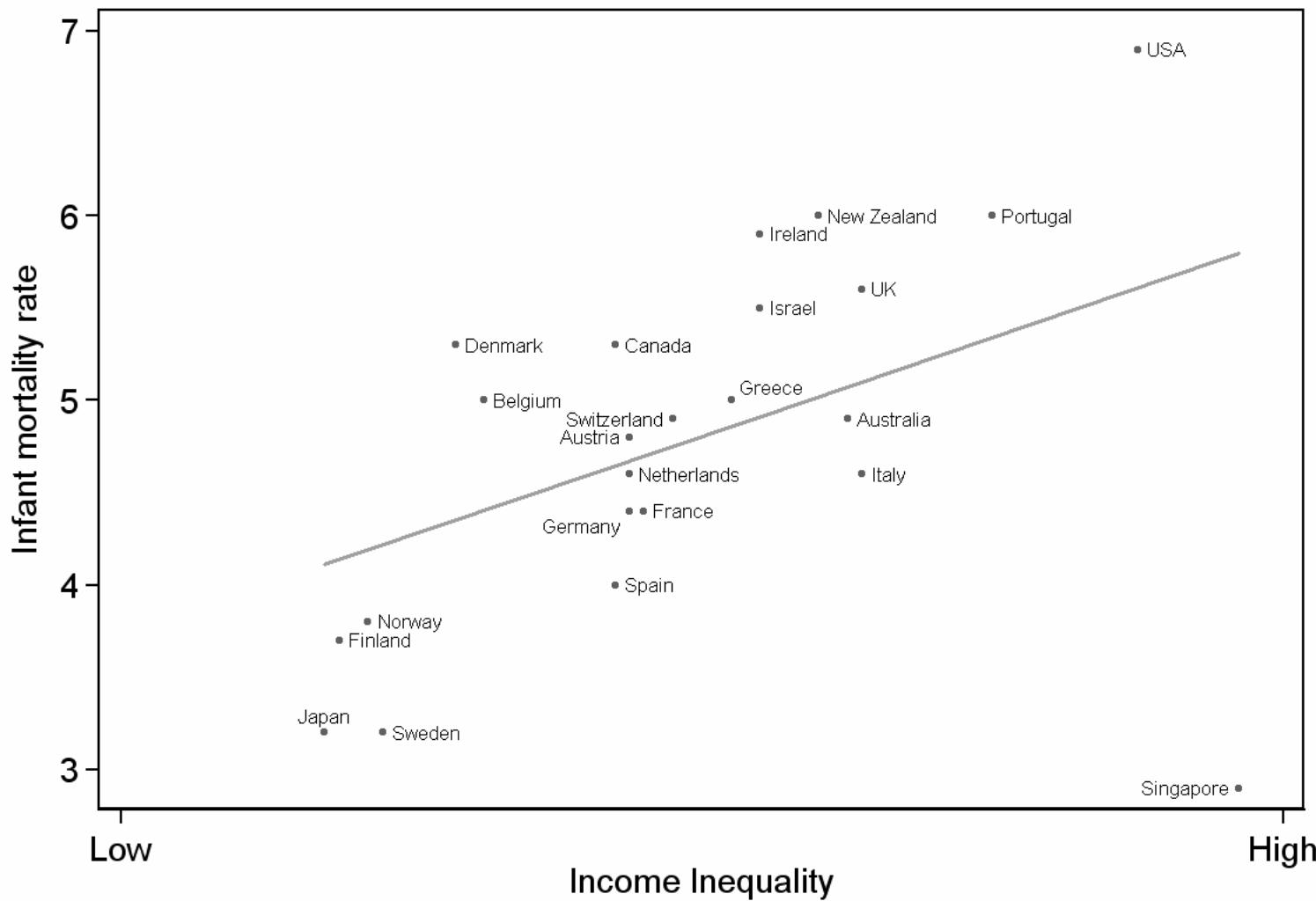
Source: Wilkinson and Pickett. *Lancet* 2006; 367:1126-8. Data from: OECD (2004), *Learning for Tomorrow's World: first results for PISA 2003*.

Male mortality (25-64 yrs) and income inequality in US states and Canadian provinces.



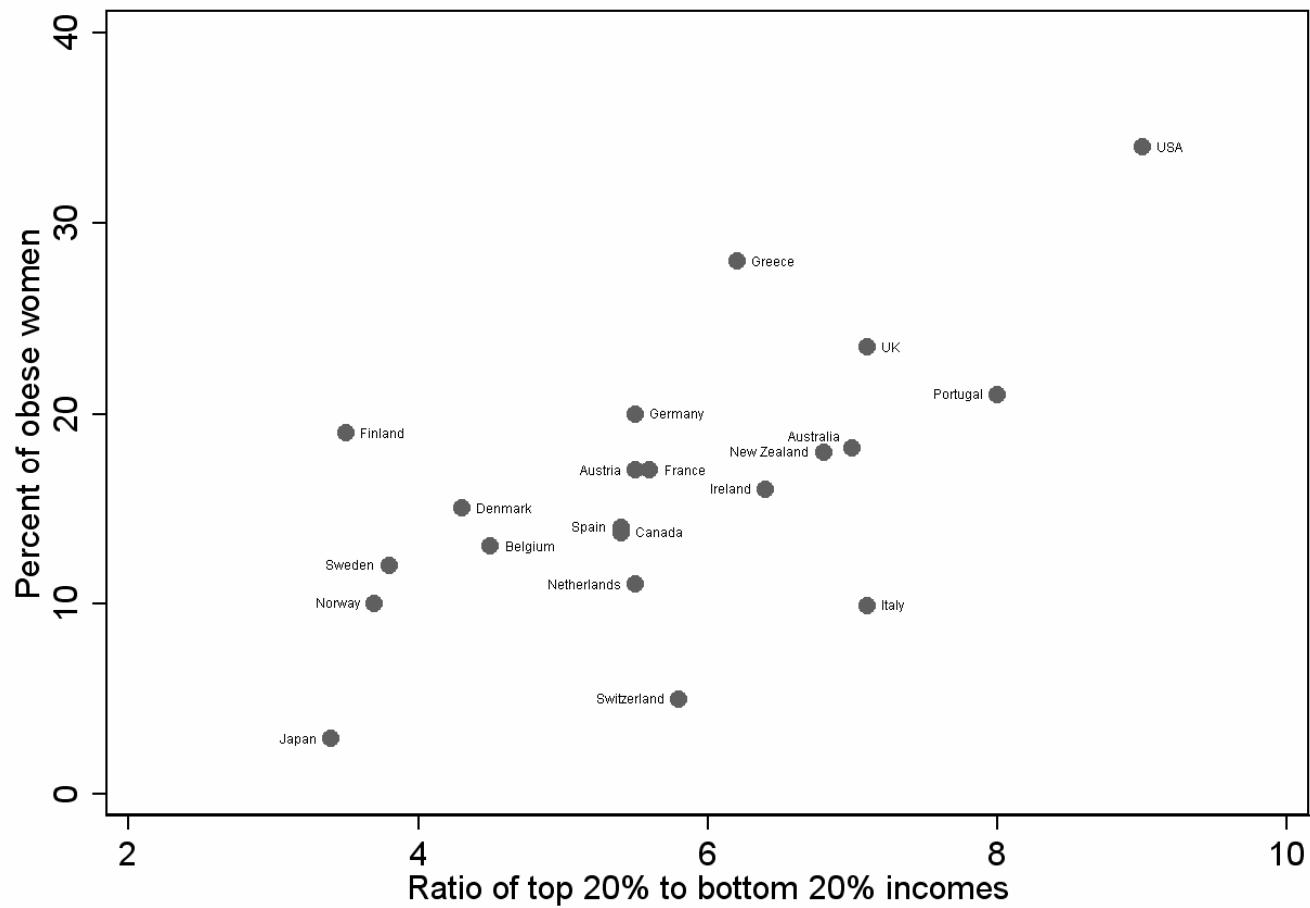
Source: Ross NA, Wolfson MC, Dunn JR, Berthelot JM, Kaplan GA, Lynch JW. *British Medical Journal* 2000;320:898-902

Infant mortality & Inequality: rich countries



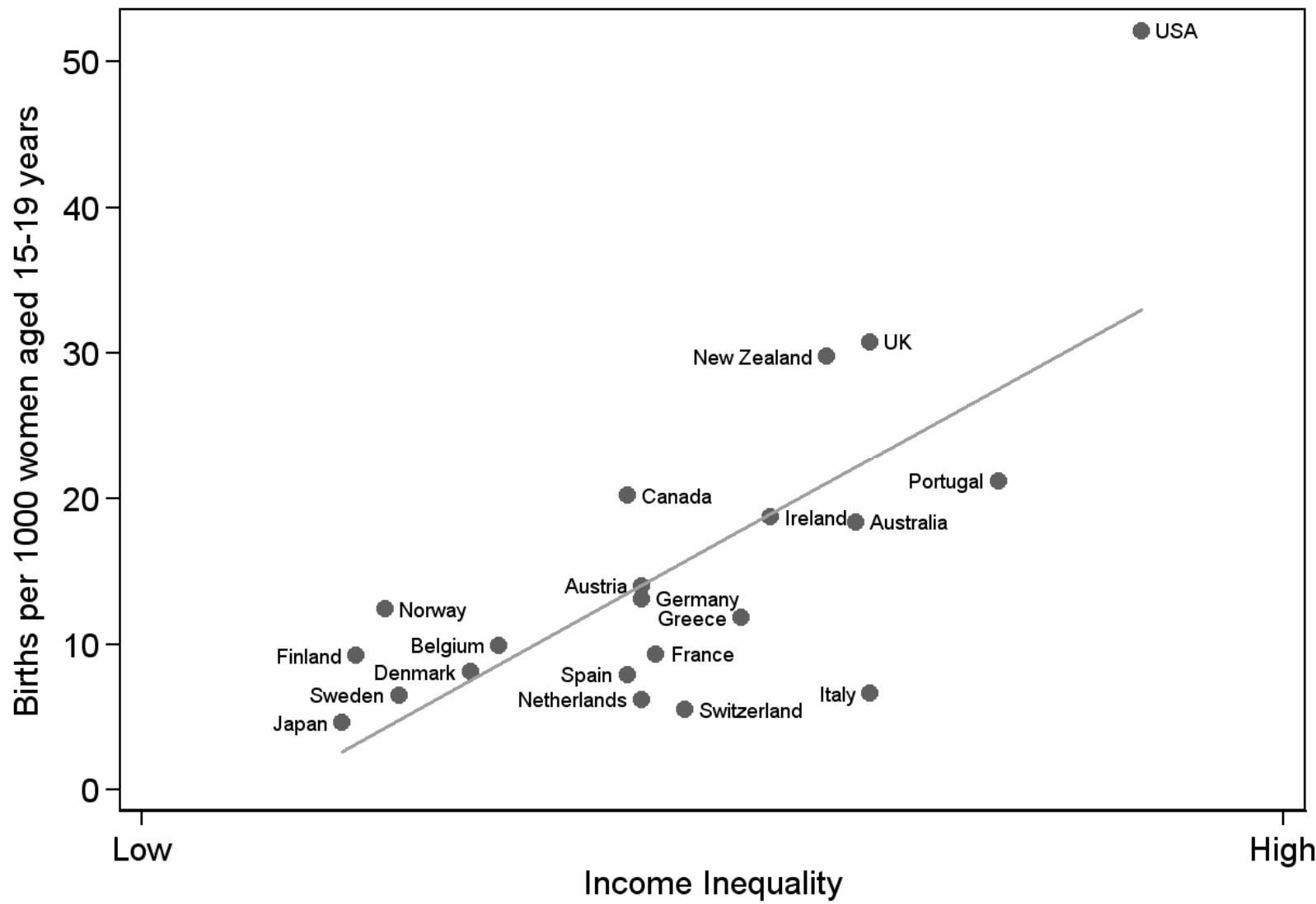
Wilkinson RG, Pickett KE, 2009 forthcoming

Obesity (BMI>30) among women and income inequality



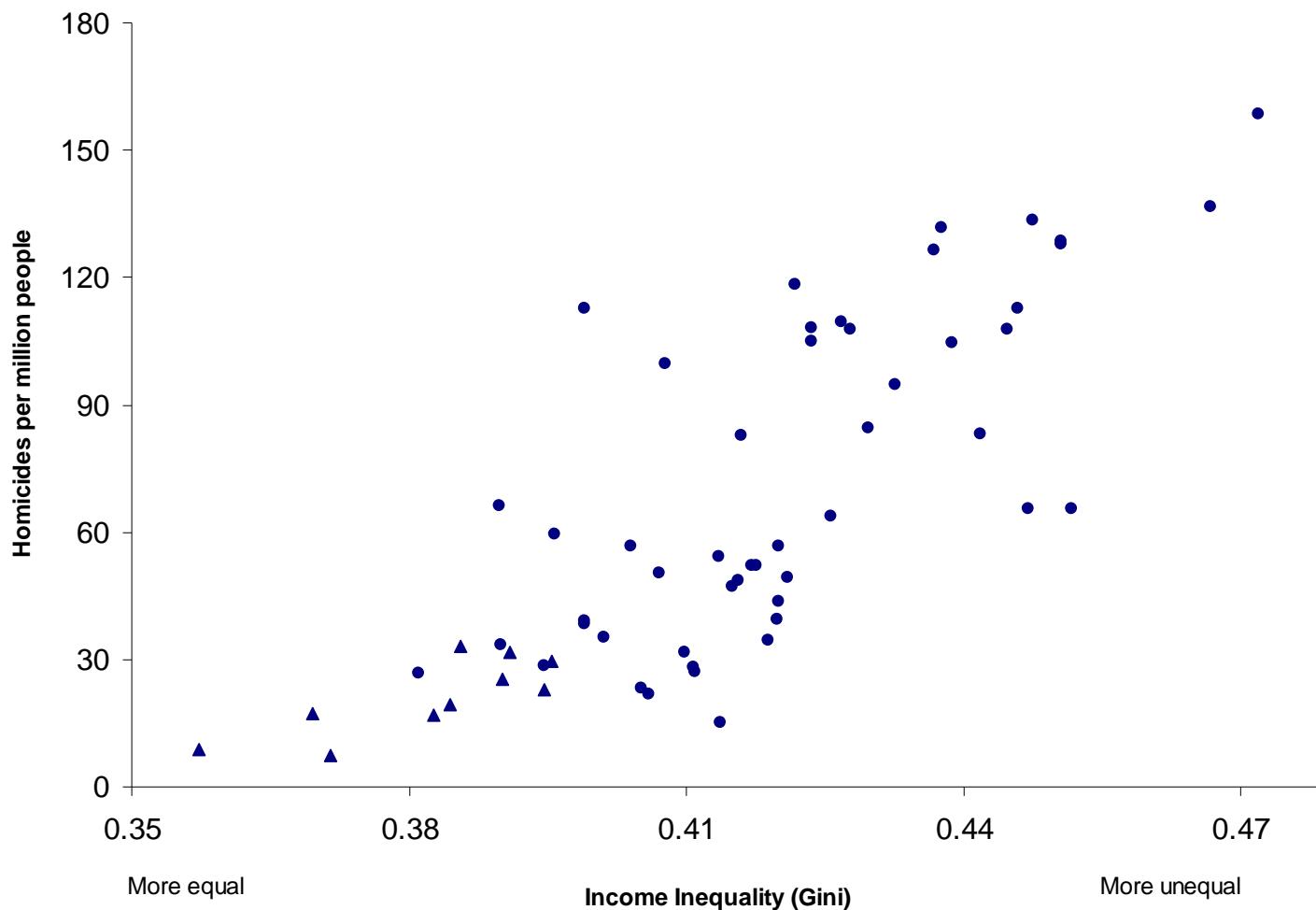
Source: Pickett, Wilkinson, *J Epidemiol Community Health* 2005; 59:670-674

Teenage births & Inequality: rich countries



Pickett KE, Mookherjee J, Wilkinson RG.
American Journal of Public Health 2005; 95: 1181-3.

Homicide and income inequality: US States and Canadian Provinces



Source: Daly M, Wilson M, Vasdev S. Income inequality and homicide rates in Canada and the United States. *Canadian Journal of Criminology* 2001; 43: 219-36.

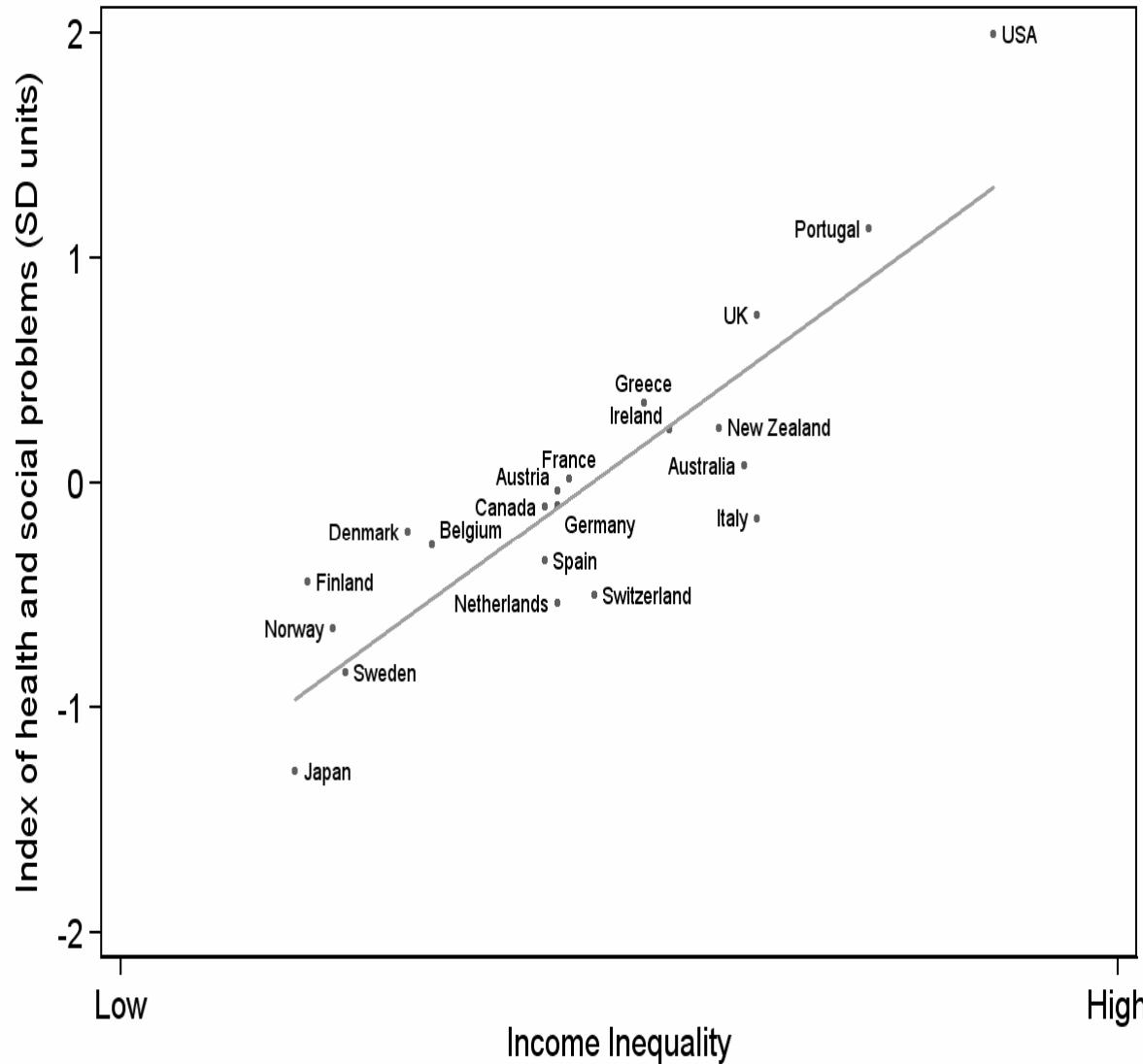
Is there less social mobility where income inequality is greater?



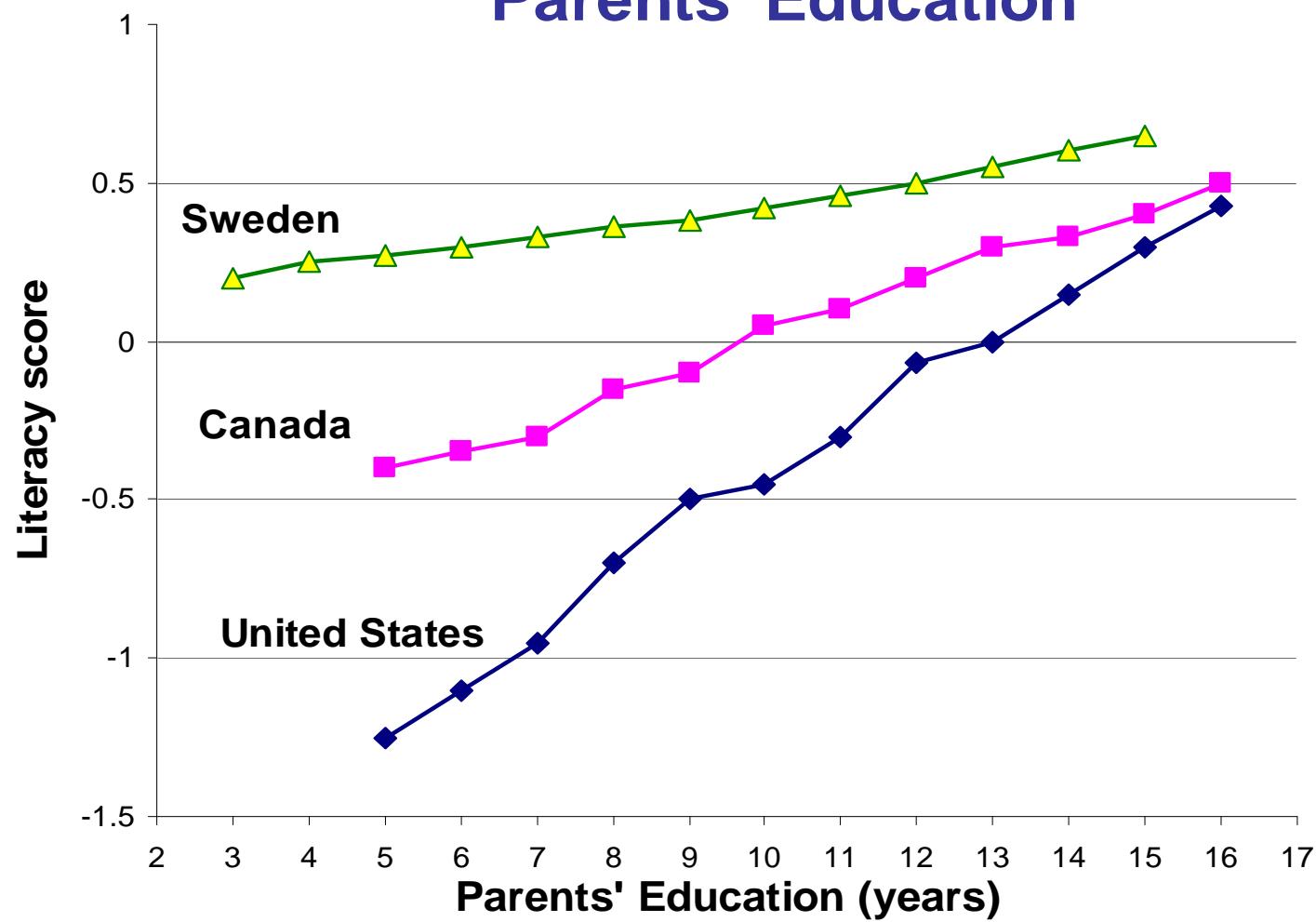
Social mobility data from: Blanden J, Gregg P, Machin S.
Intergenerational mobility. CEP, LSE 2005.

Health and Social Problems in Relation to Inequality

Index of:
Life expectancy,
Math & Literacy,
Infant mortality,
Homicides,
Imprisonment rate,
Teenage births,
Trust,
Obesity,
Mental illness,
Social mobility.

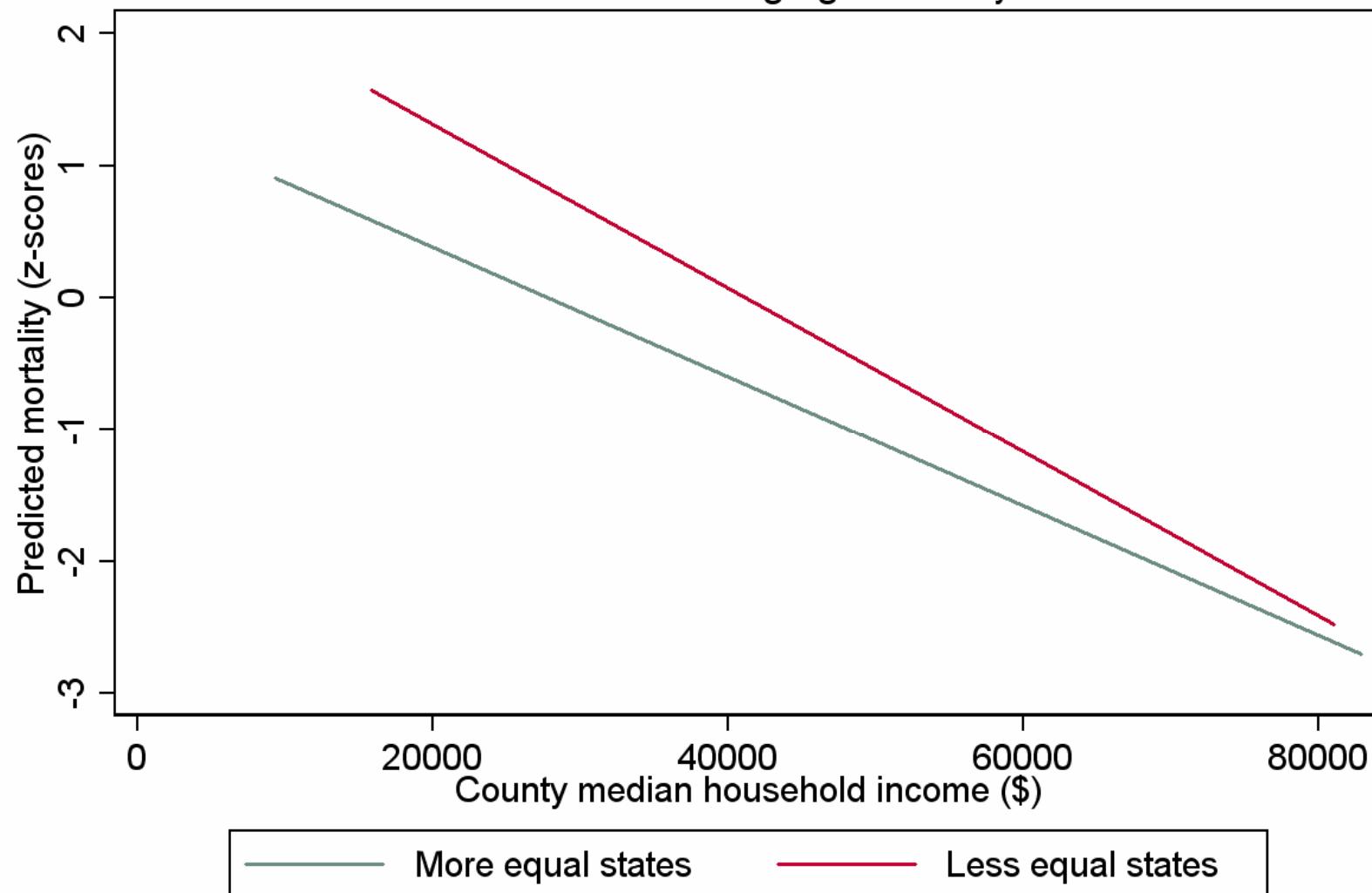


Literacy Scores of 16-25 year olds by Parents' Education



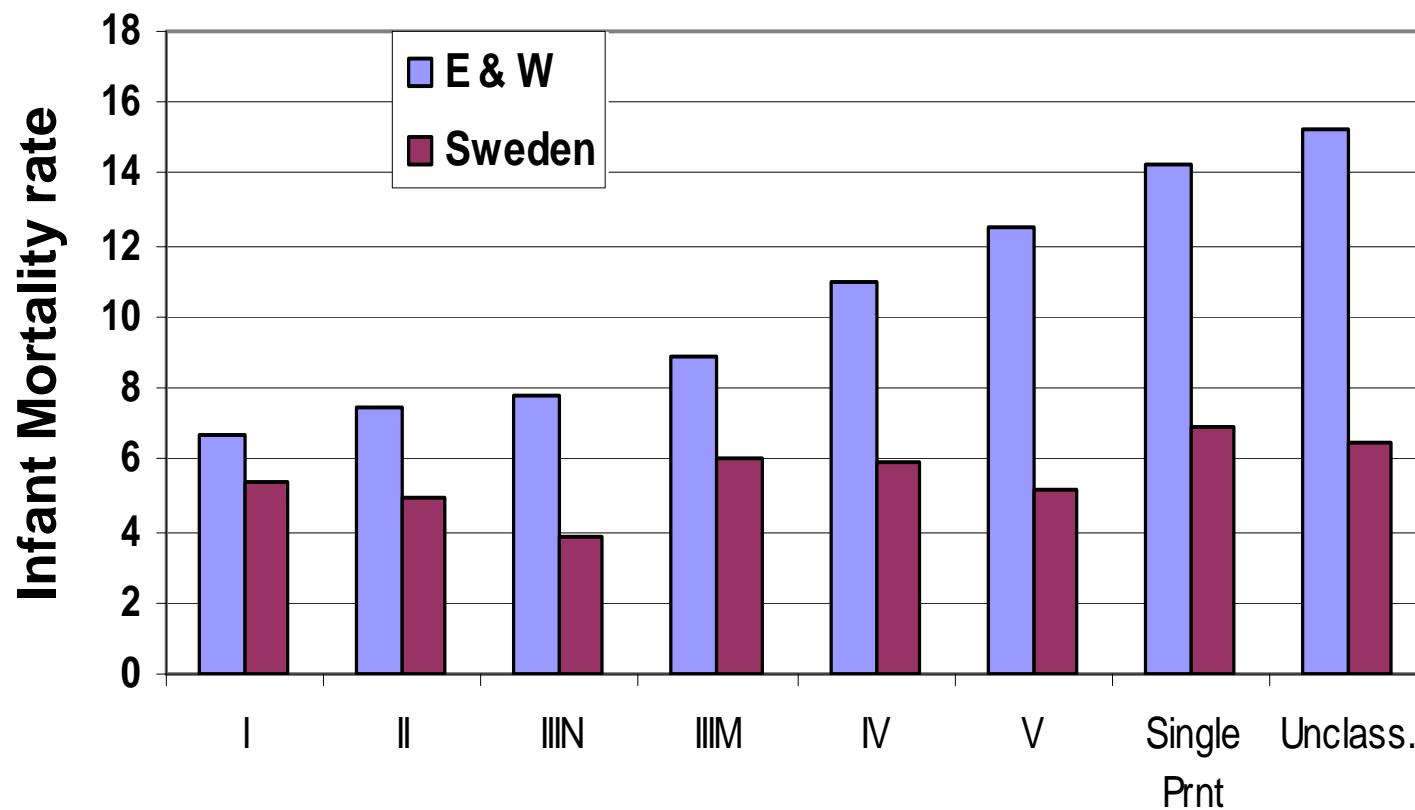
Source: Willms JD. 1997. Data from OECD Programme for International Student

All-cause working-age mortality



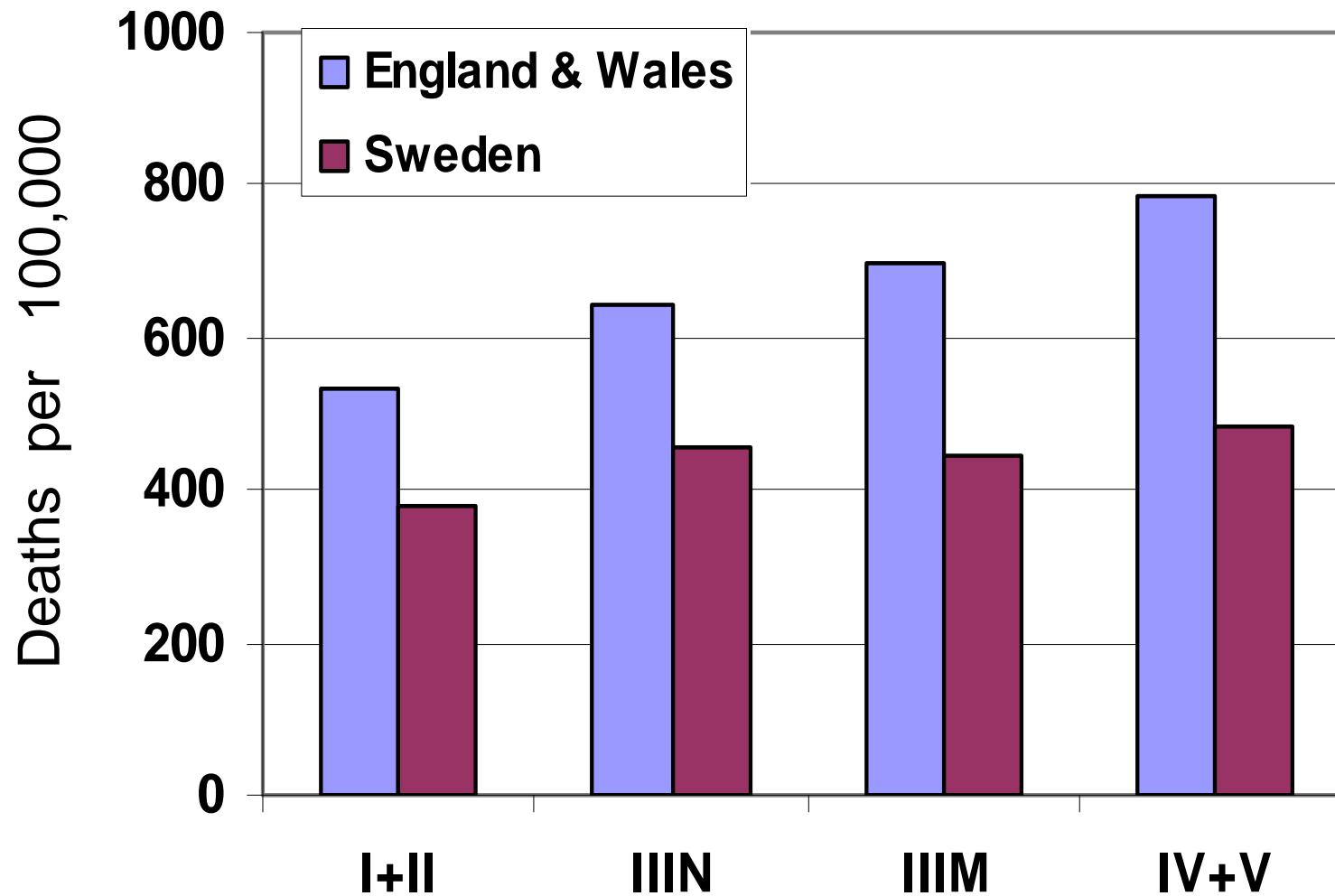
Source: Wilkinson and Pickett, AJPH (2007 - in press)

Infant Mortality by Social Class: Sweden and England & Wales



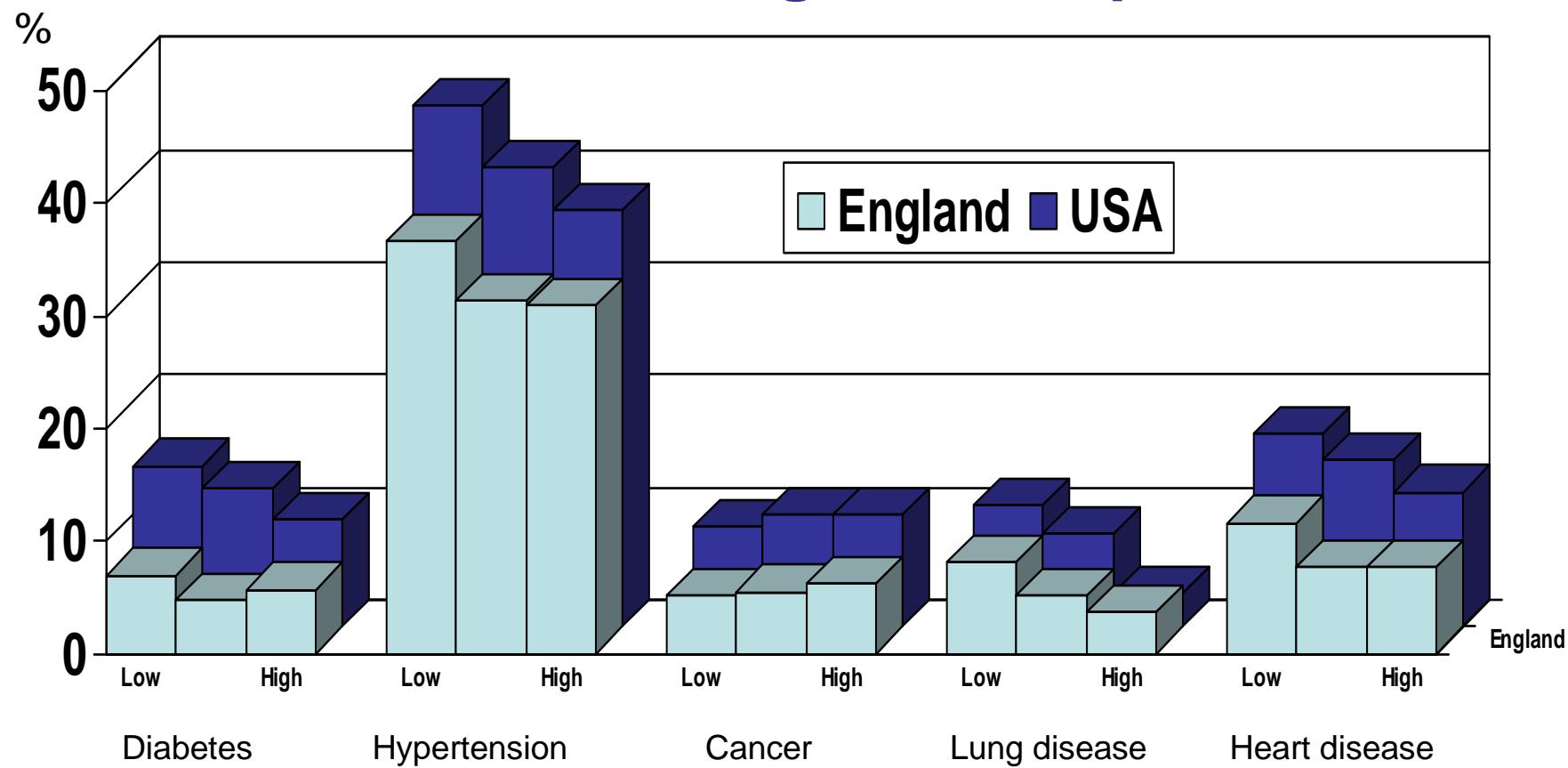
Leon DA, Vagero D, Olausson PO. *BMJ* 1992; 305; 687-91

Death Rates by Social Class in Sweden and England & Wales. Men 20-64 yrs.



Source: Vagero D, Lundberg O, *Lancet* 1989; 2: 35-6

Self-reported prevalence of illness by tertiles of education: USA and England compared.



Source: Banks et al. JAMA 2006; 295: 2037-2045

Psychosocial risk factors for ill health

- **Low social status**
- **Weak social affiliations**
- **Stress in early life**
 - (pre- and postnatally)

Dickerson SS, Kemeny ME. Acute stressors and cortisol responses: a theoretical integration and synthesis of laboratory research. *Psychological Bulletin* 2004; 130(3): 355-91

A meta-analysis of 208 laboratory studies of cortisol responses to acute stressors found that “Tasks that included social-evaluative threat (such as threats to self-esteem or social status), in which others could negatively judge performance, particularly when the outcome of the performance was uncontrollable, provoked larger and more reliable cortisol changes than stressors without these particular threats.” (p.377)

“Humans are driven to preserve the social self and are vigilant to threats that may jeopardize their social esteem or status.” (p.357)

Gilligan J. *Violence: Our Deadly Epidemic and its Causes.*
(G .P. Putnam 1996)

" ...the prison inmates I work with have told me repeatedly, when I asked them why they had assaulted someone, that it was because 'he disrespected me', or 'he disrespected my visit' (meaning 'visitor'). The word 'disrespect' is central in the vocabulary, moral value system, and psychodynamics of these chronically violent men that they have abbreviated it into the slang term, 'he dis'ed me." p.106

A few pages further on Gilligan continues:-

"I have yet to see a serious act of violence that was not provoked by the experience of feeling shamed and humiliated, disrespected and ridiculed, and that did not represent the attempt to prevent or undo this "loss of face" - no matter how severe the punishment, even if it includes death." p.110

Alan Bennett, *Untold Stories*, (Faber/Profile, 2005).

They (his parents) put...down...most of their imagined shortcomings to their not having been educated, education (was) to them a passport to everything they lacked: self-confidence, social ease and above all the ability to be like other people.

Put simply and as they themselves would have put it, both my parents were shy, a shortcoming they thought of as an affliction while at the same time enshrining it as a virtue.

I assured them, falsely, that everybody felt much as they did but that social ease was something that could and should be faked.

"Well, you can do that," Dad would say, "you've been educated," adding how often he felt he had nothing to contribute. "I'm boring, I think. I can't understand why anybody likes us. I wonder sometimes whether they do, really."

Social Status and Friendship

Two sides of the same coin:

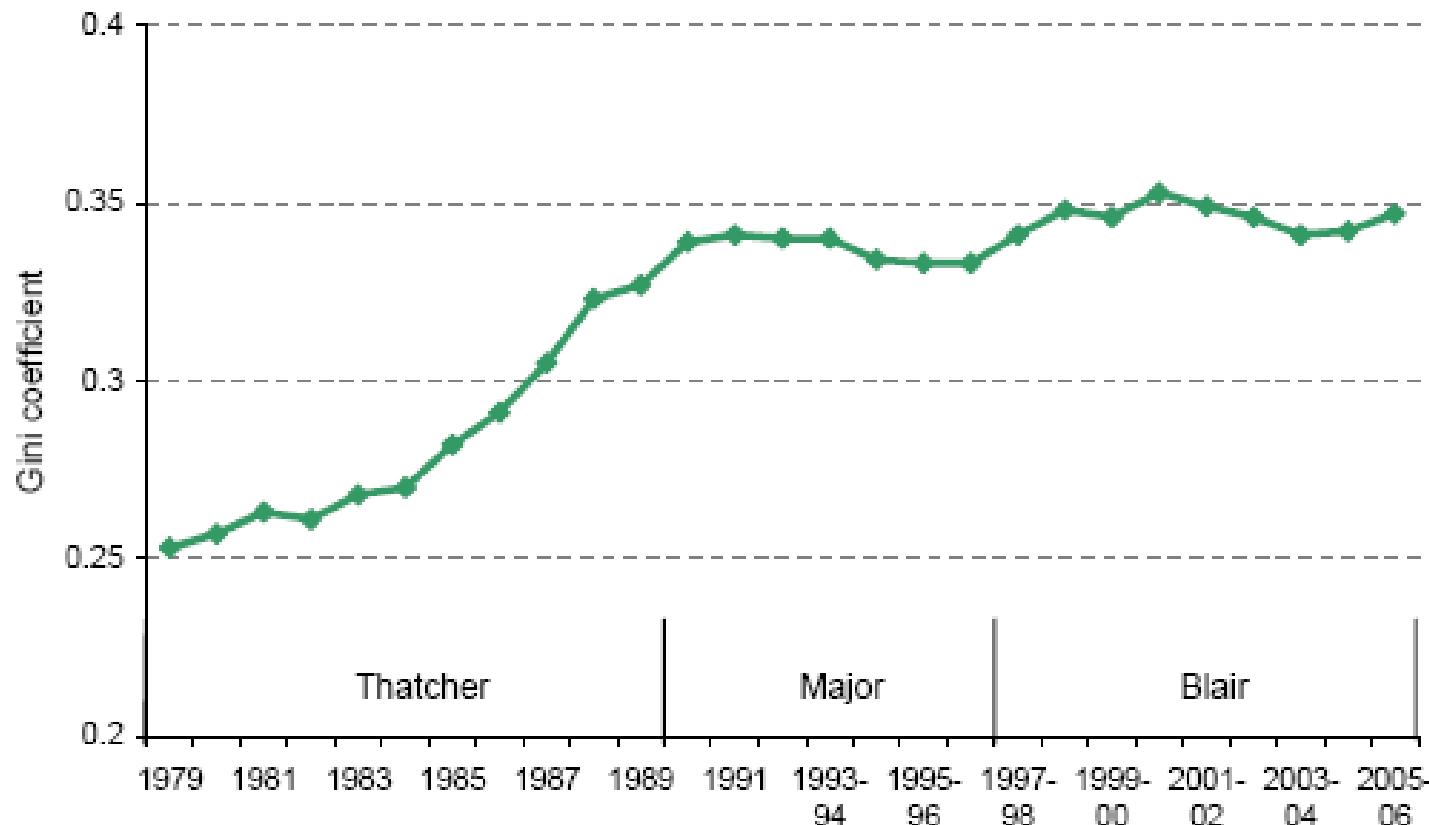
Social status (dominance hierarchies, pecking orders) are orderings based on power, coercion and privileged access to resources – regardless of the needs of others.

Friendship, in contrast, is based on reciprocity, mutuality, social obligations, sharing and a recognition of each other's needs.

How does inequality affect us?

- Bigger status differences: status becomes more important
- Status competition increases
- Increased insecurities about appearances, how we are seen, “social evaluation anxieties”
- More downward social prejudice, stigmatisation of the poor
- More discrimination against vulnerable minorities and women
- Lower levels of trust and community life
- More violence

Trends in income inequality 1979-2005/6 (Gini coefficient, Great Britain.)



Brewer M, Goodman A, Muriel A, Sibieta L. *Poverty and Inequality in the UK: 2007*. Institute of Fiscal Studies, London.