

# **Dysfunctional Societies: why inequality matters**

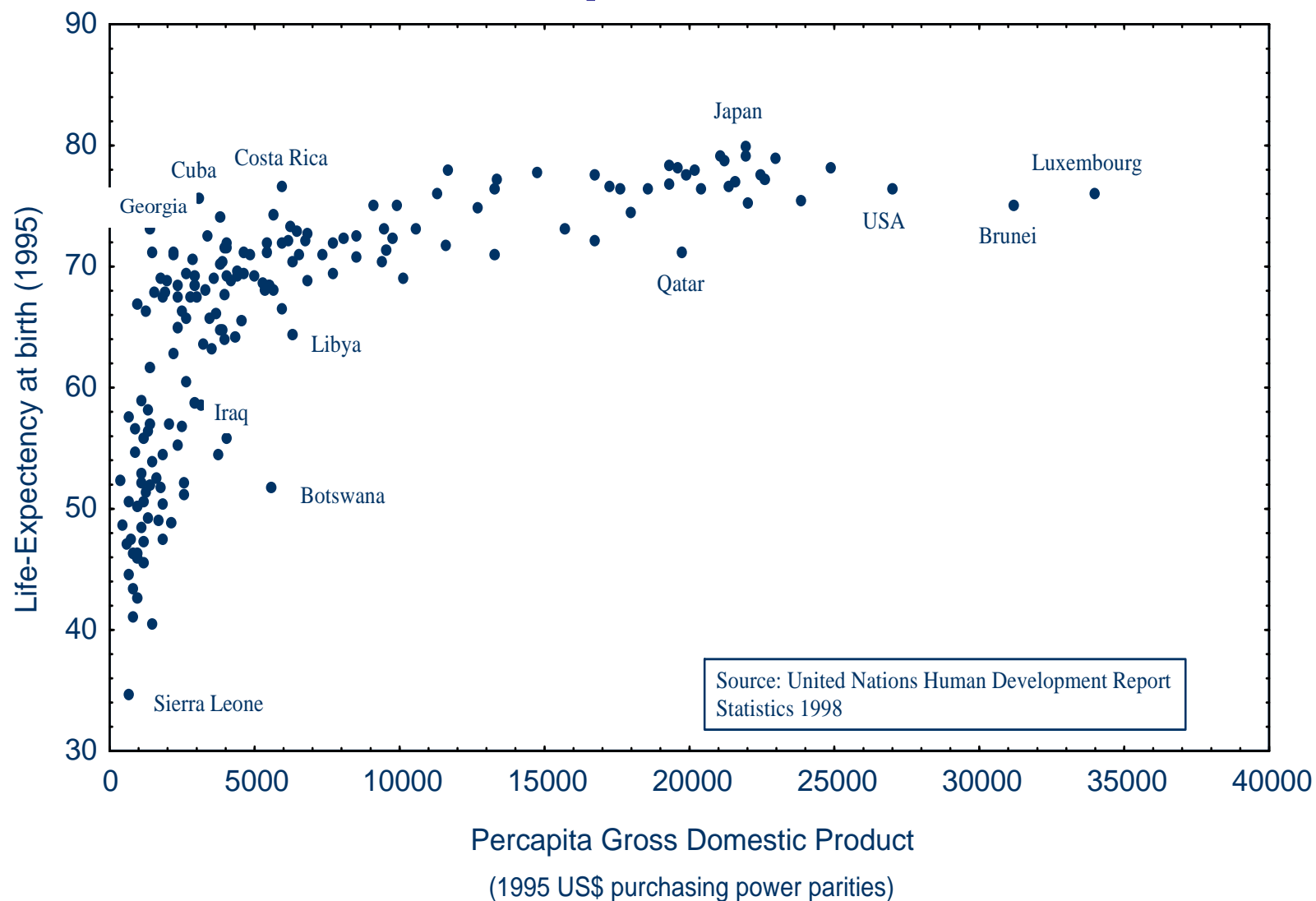
**Richard Wilkinson**

Professor of Social Epidemiology,  
University of Nottingham Medical School  
and

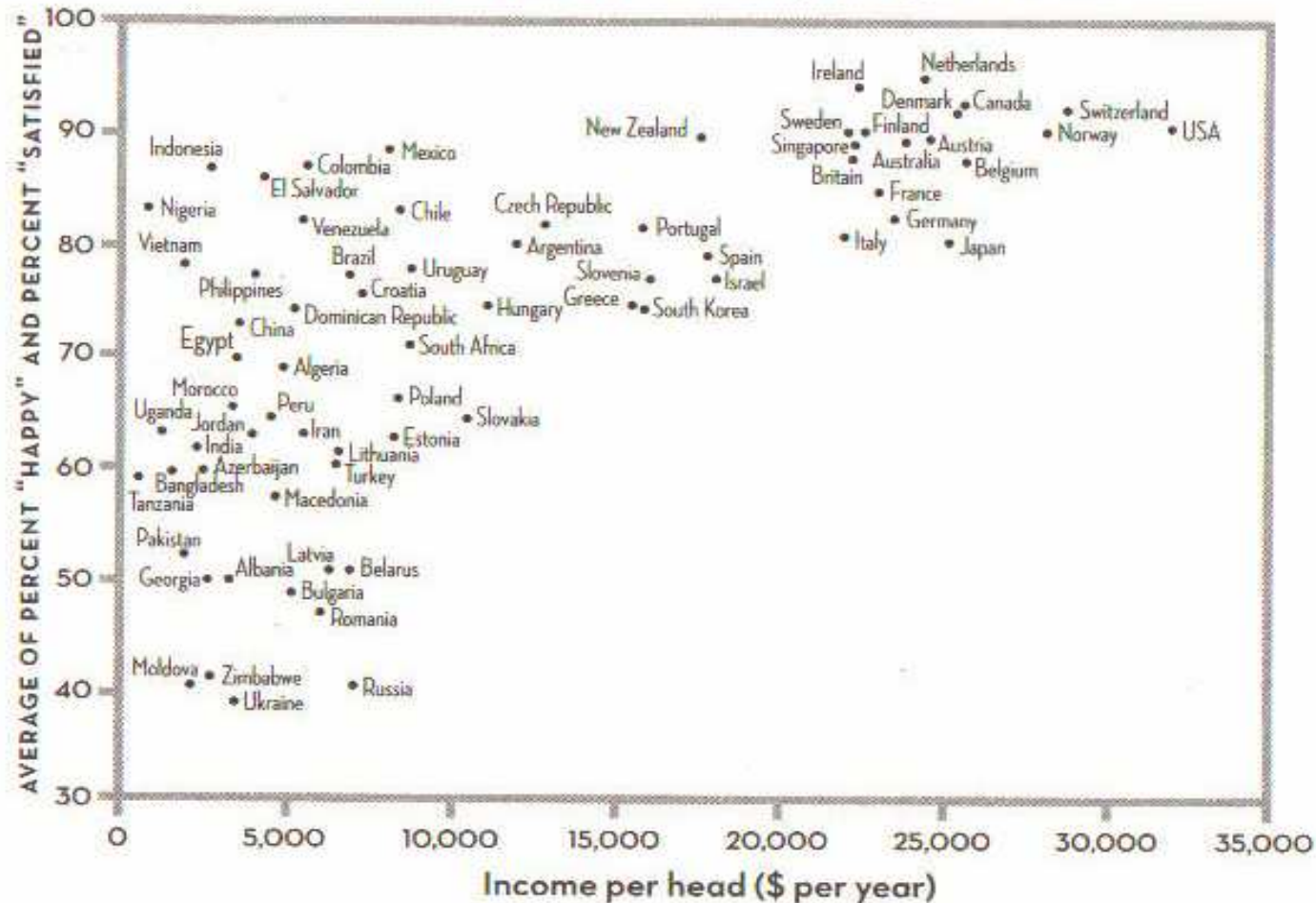
**Dr Kate Pickett**

Department of Health Sciences,  
University of York.

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



## Income and happiness: Comparing countries



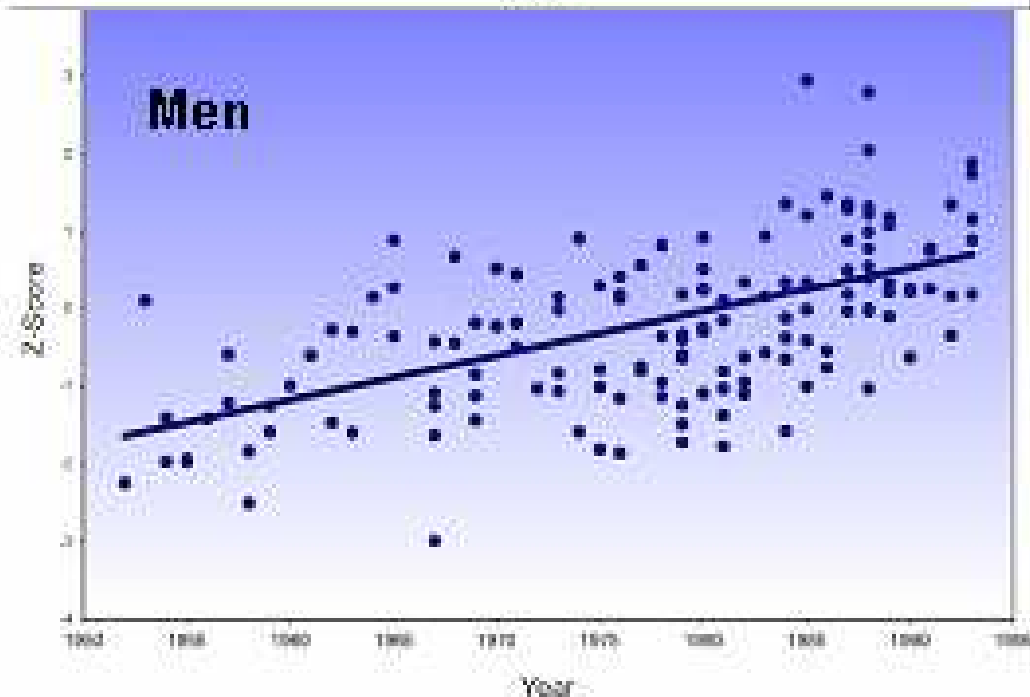
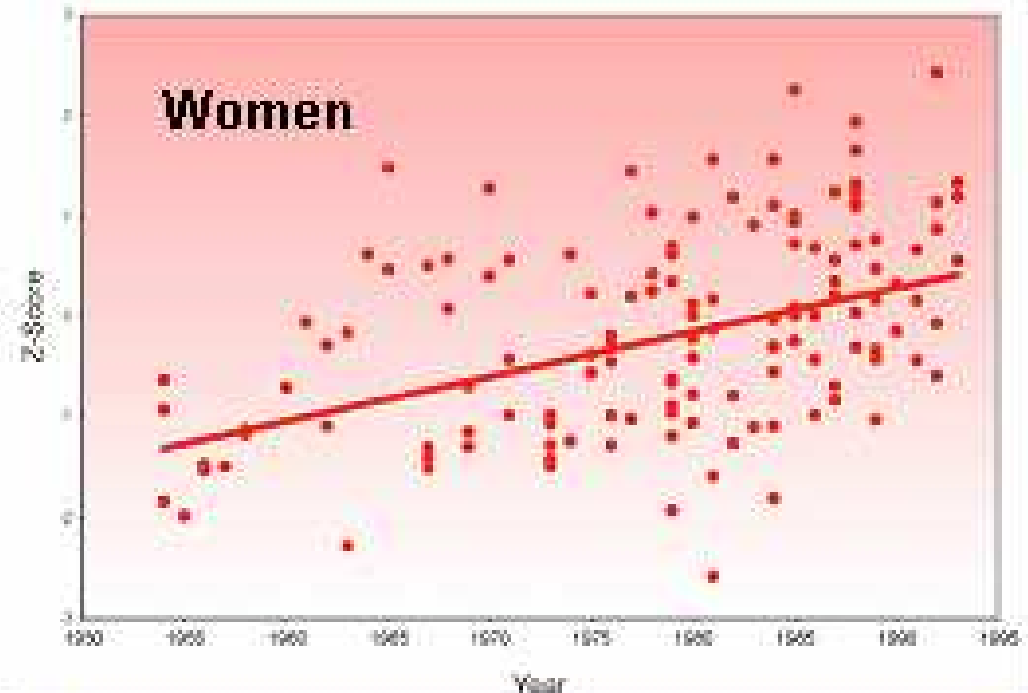
Layard R. *Happiness: lessons from a new science.*  
Allen Lane, London 2005

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

**269 samples covering  
52,000 individuals.**

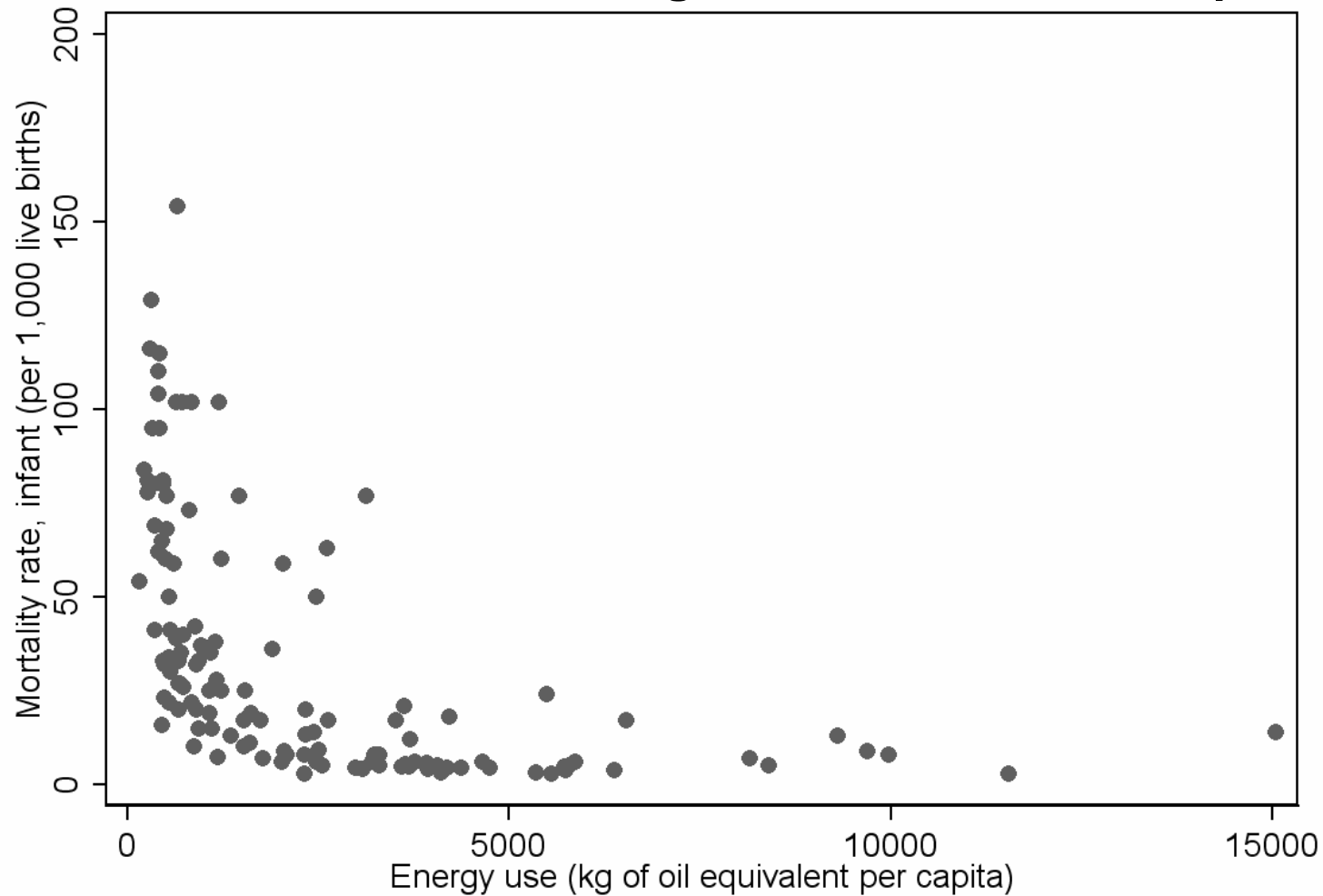
Source: Twenge JM. The  
age of anxiety? Journal of  
Personality and Social  
Psychology 2000; 79(6):  
1007-21.

<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

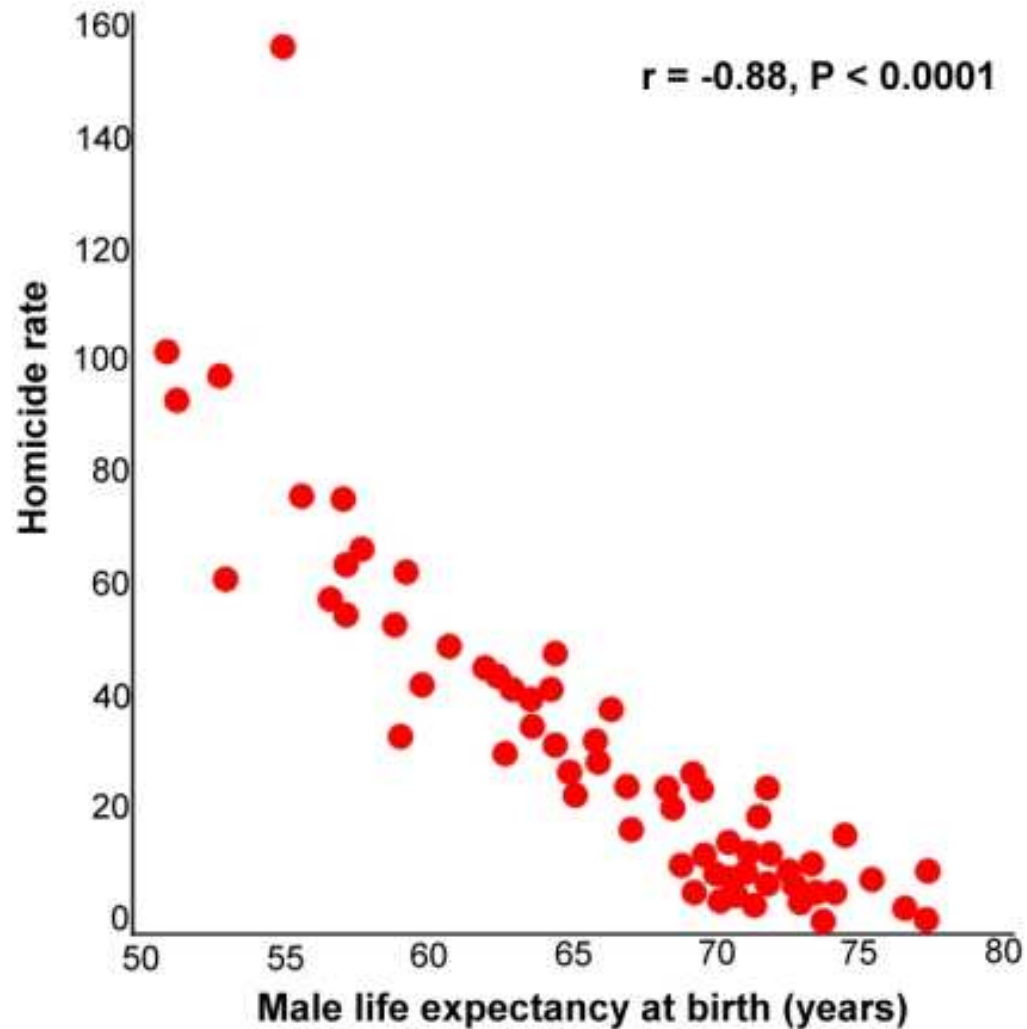


Source: Wilkinson & Pickett (2009 forthcoming)

# Dysfunctional Societies – the symptoms

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

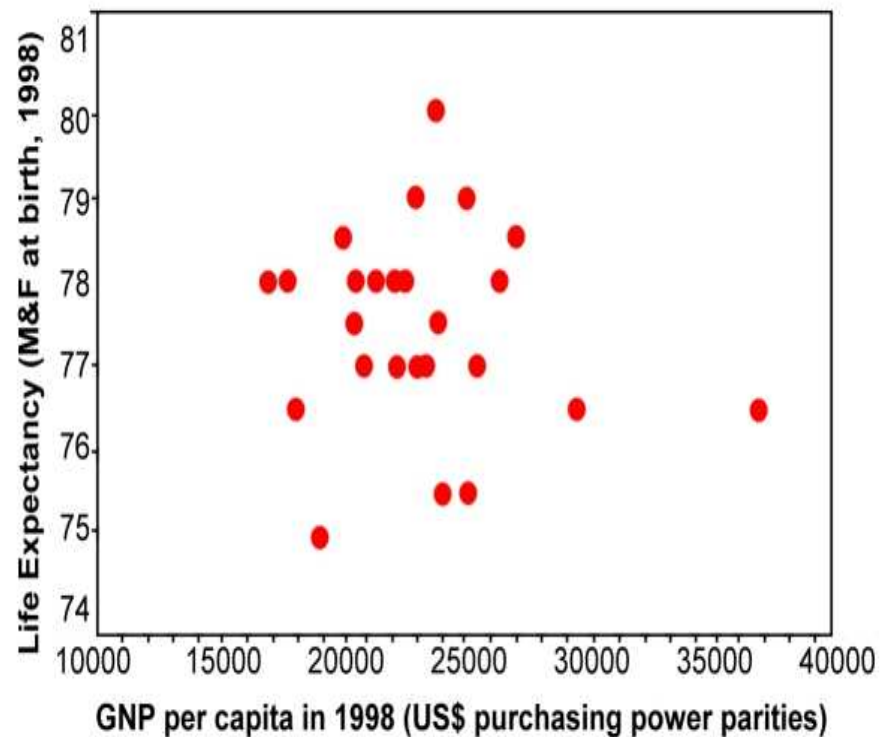
Homicide rates in relation to male life expectancy (excluding homicides) in 77 Chicago neighbourhoods.



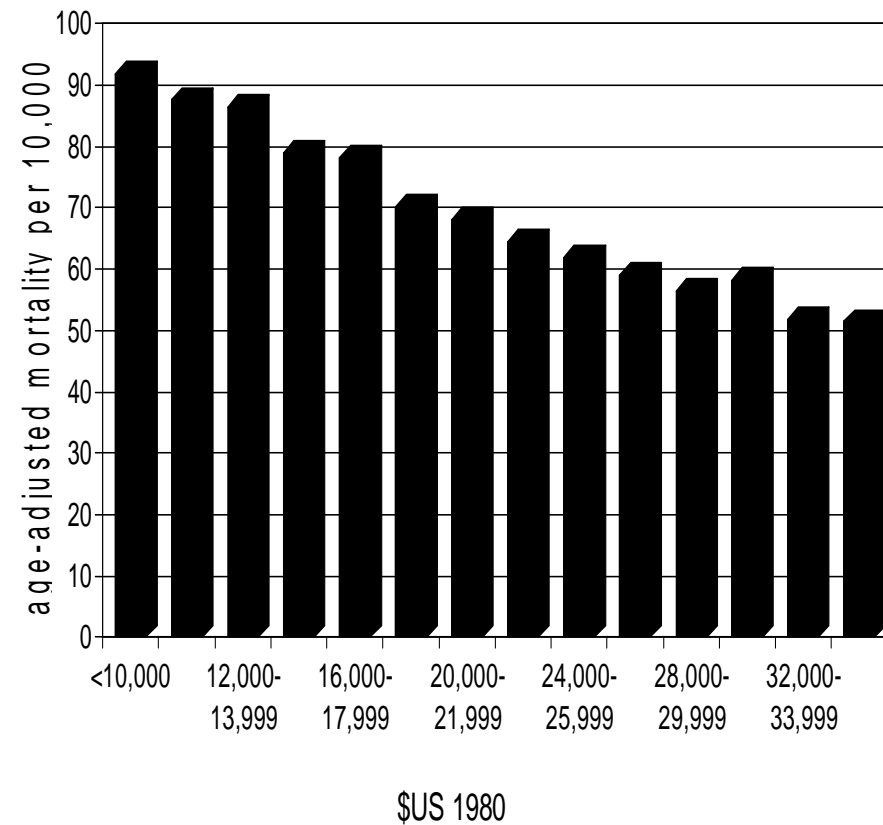
Source: Wilson M. and Daly M.. *British Medical Journal*, 1997; 314:1271-4

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

**Between (rich) societies**

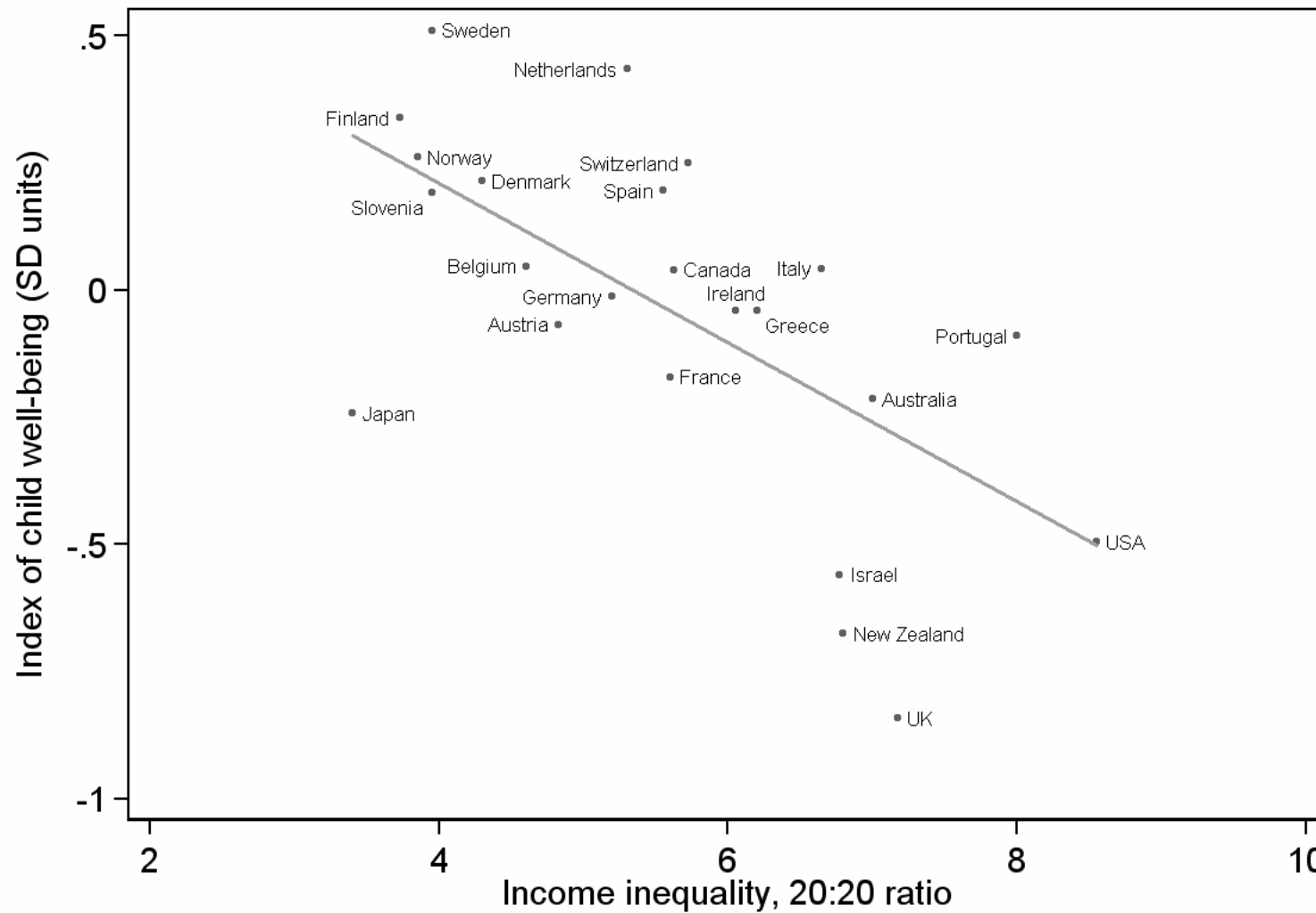


**Within societies**



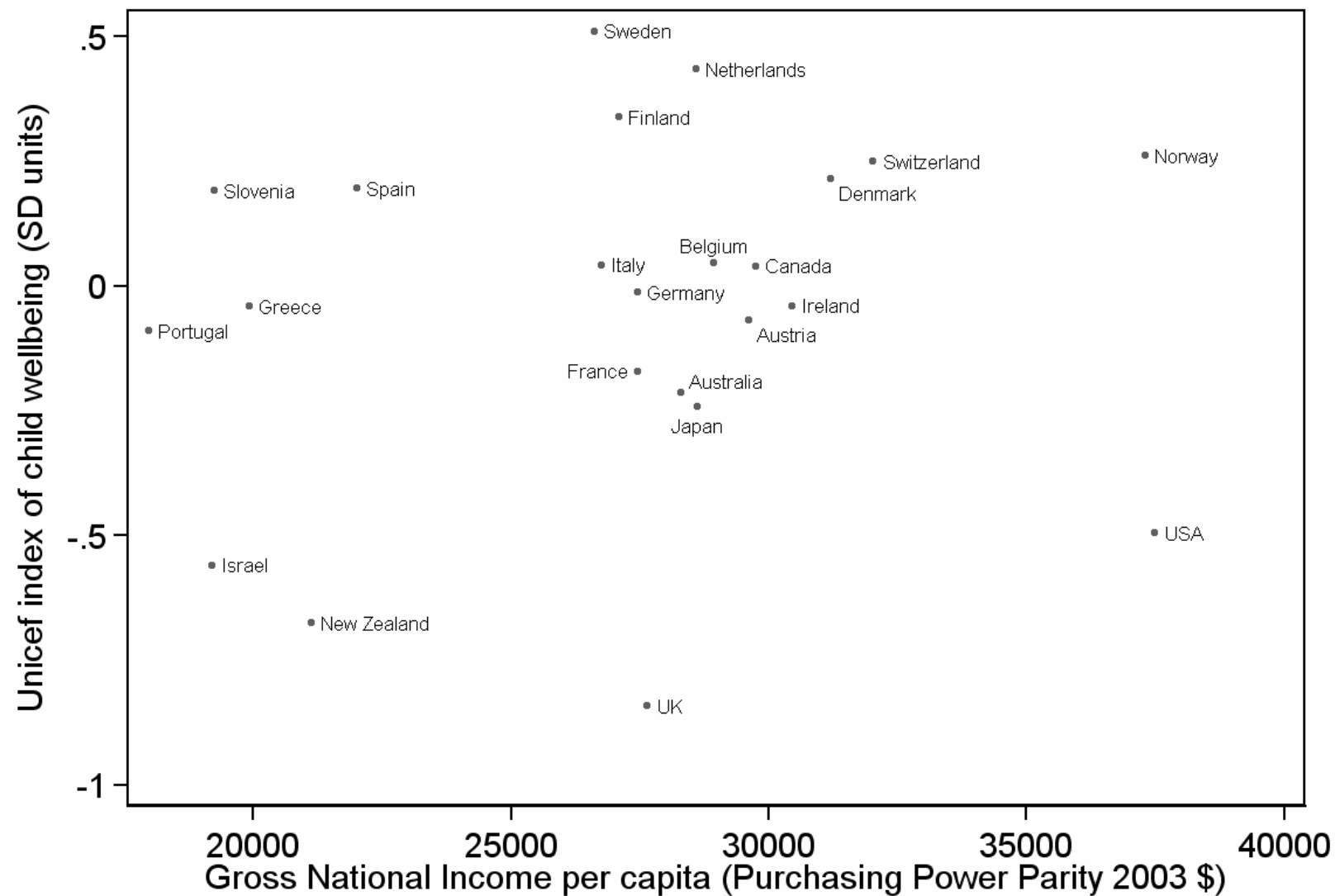


## Income Inequality & UNICEF Index of Child Well-Being in rich countries



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

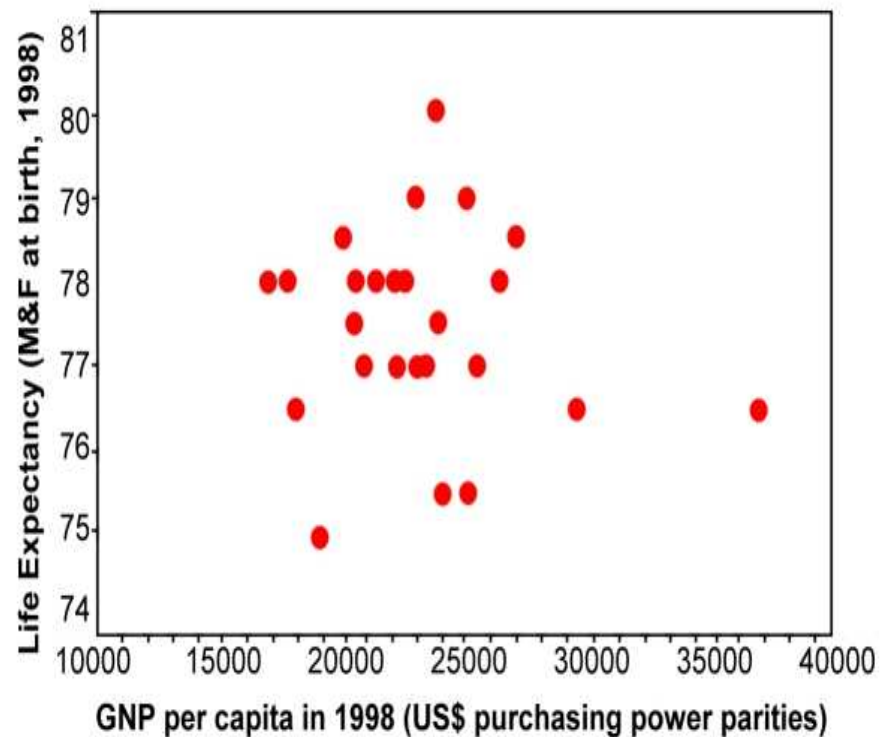
## UNICEF Index of Child-Wellbeing is not related to average income in rich countries



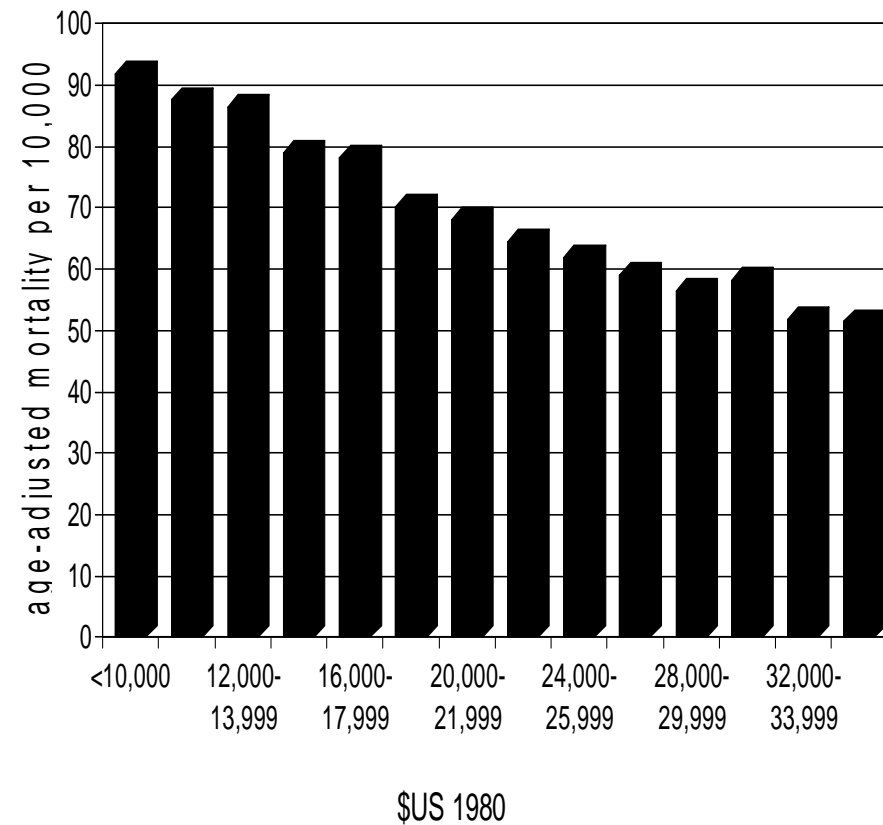
Pickett KE, Wilkinson RG. Bmj 2007 (in press)

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

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**Within societies**

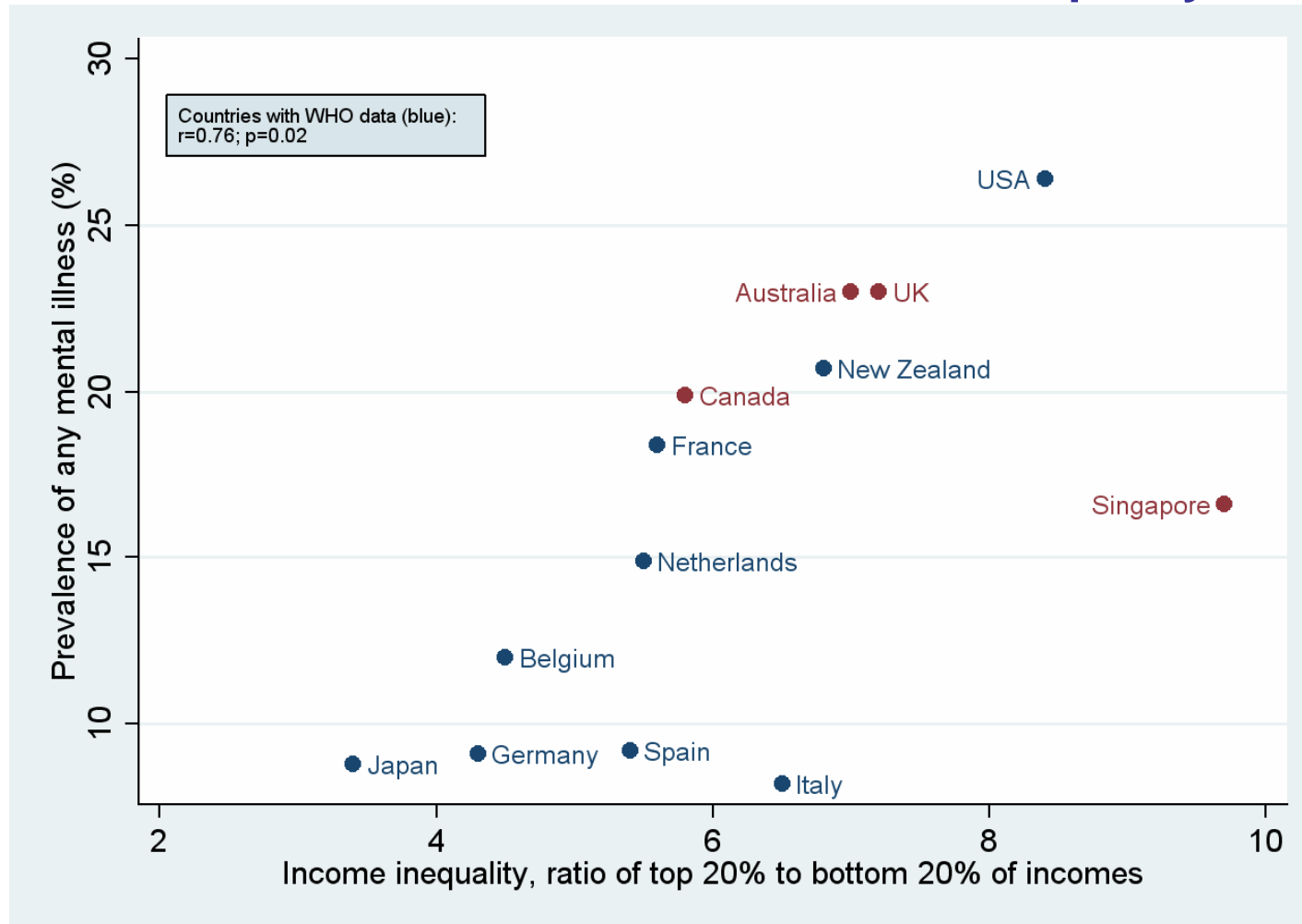


# Social Gradients

## **three explanations:**

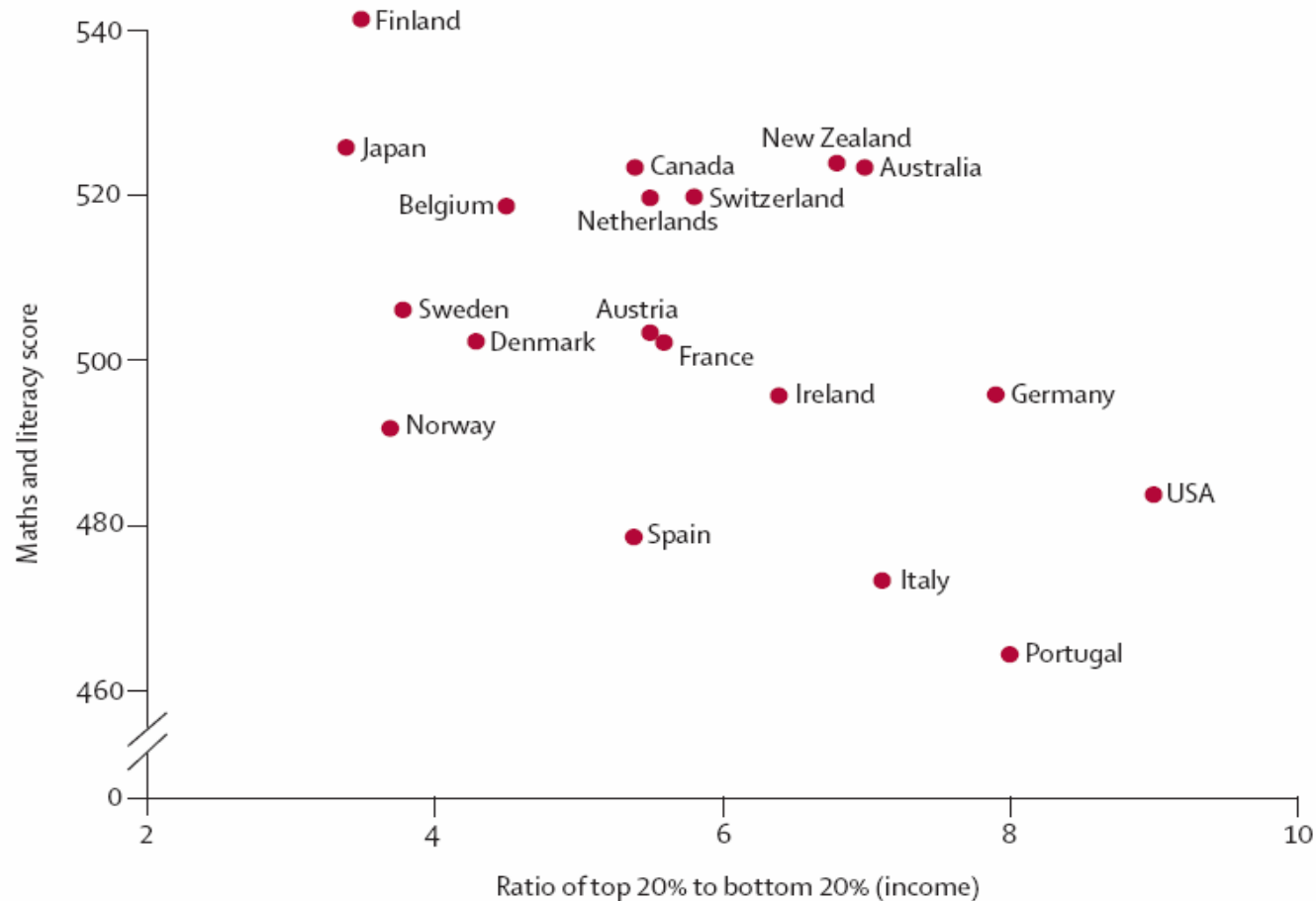
- Social Mobility – the resilient move up  
the vulnerable move down?
- Material conditions – damp housing, air pollution, malnutrition etc.?
- Social position – low social status, disadvantage?

## Mental Health in Relation to Income Inequality



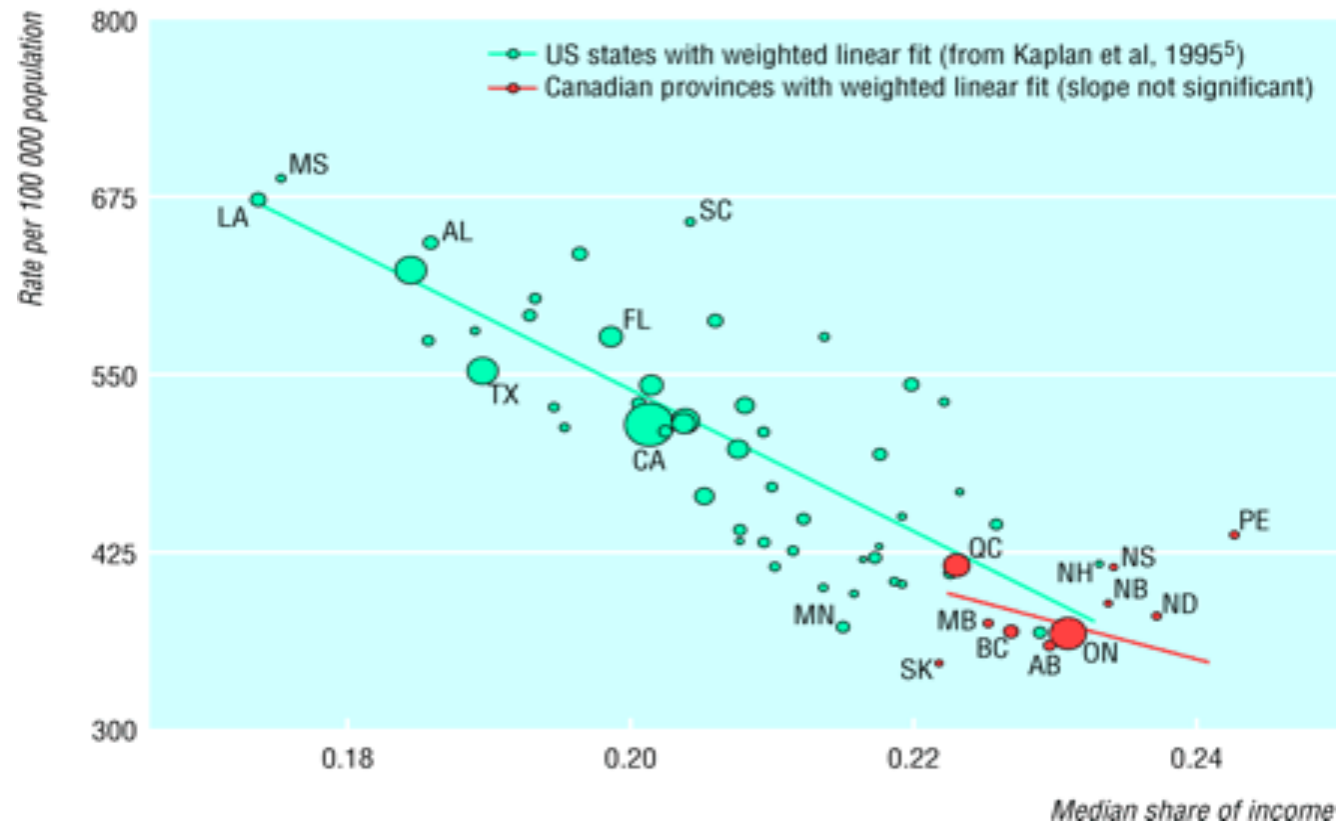
Developed from: Pickett KE, James O, Wilkinson RG. Income inequality and the prevalence of mental illness: a preliminary international analysis. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 2006; 60: 646-7.

# Maths & Literacy scores and Income Inequality



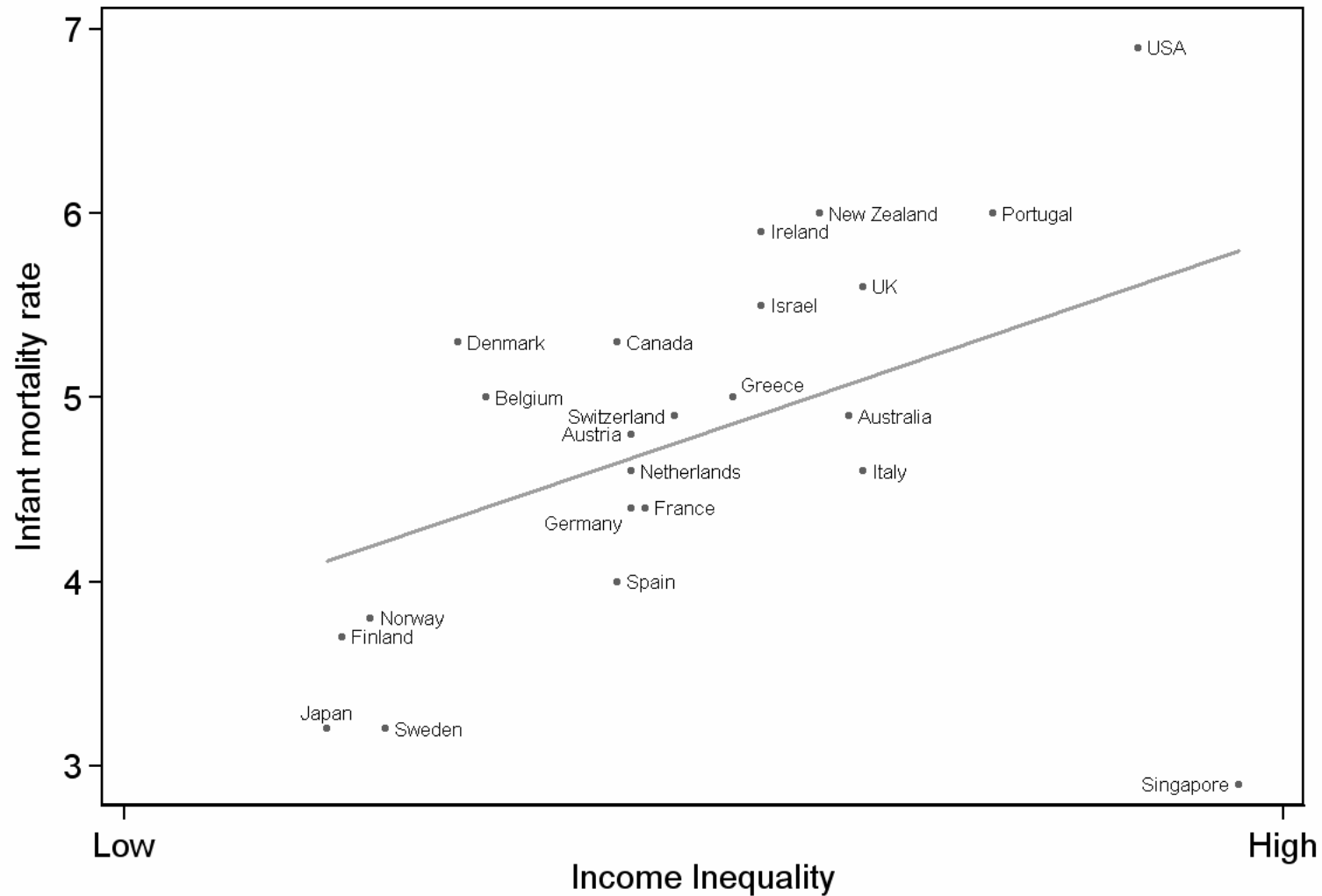
**Source: Wilkinson and Pickett. *Lancet* 2006; 367:1126-8.** Data from: OECD (2004), *Learning for Tomorrow's World: first results for PISA 2003*.

## 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

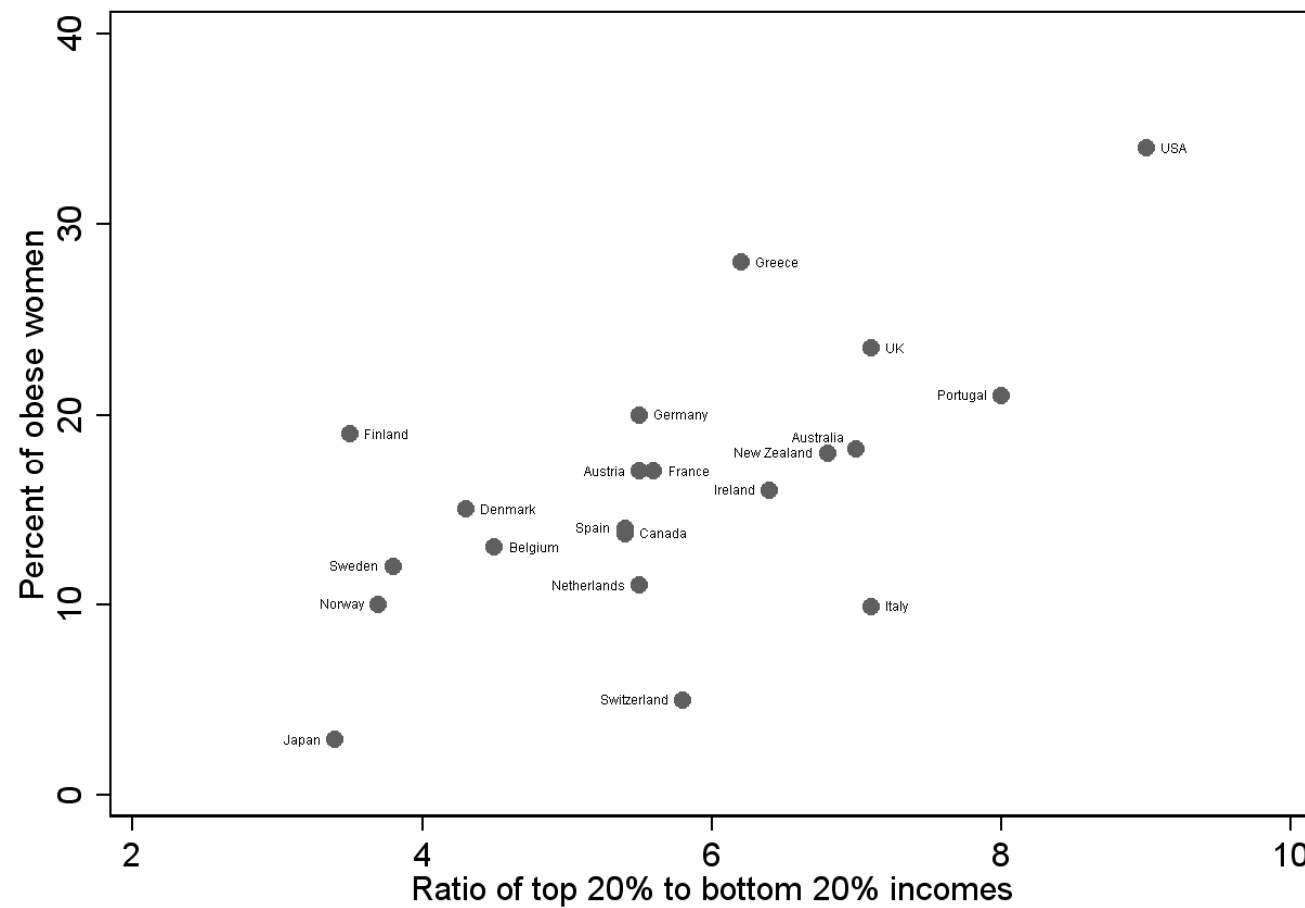
# Infant mortality & Inequality: rich countries



Wilkinson RG, Pickett KE, 2009 forthcoming

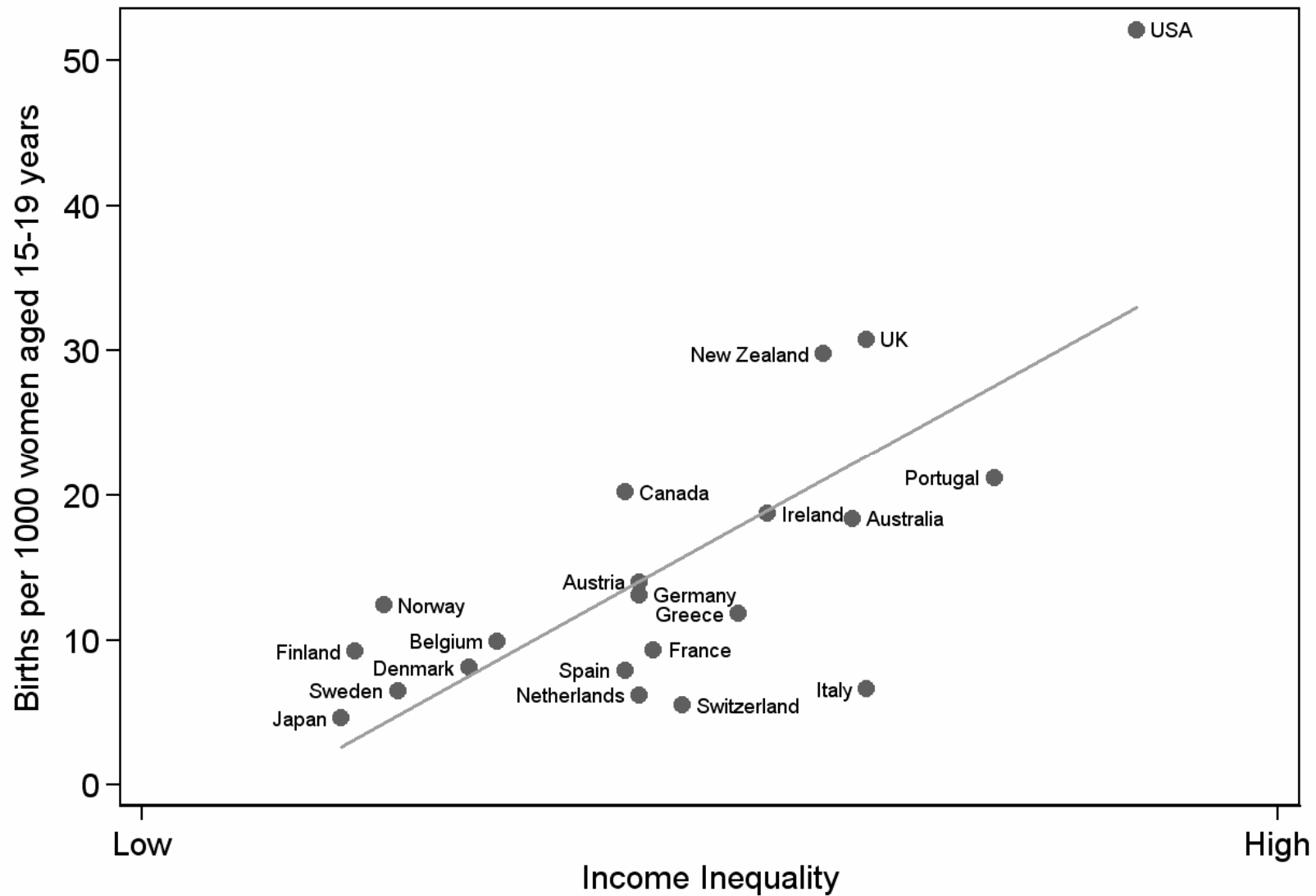


## Obesity (BMI>30) among women and income inequality



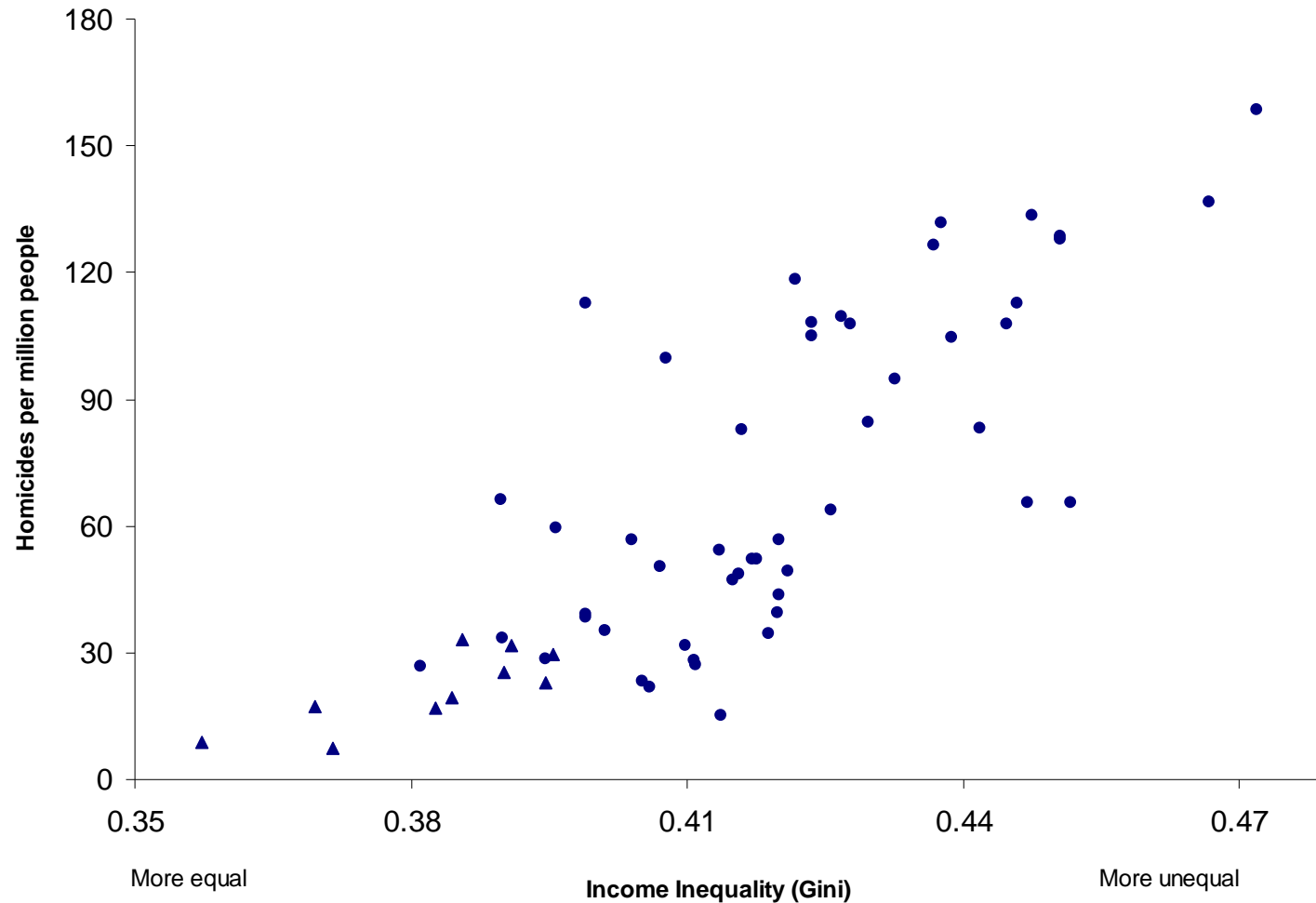
Source: Pickett, Wilkinson, *J Epidemiol Community Health* 2005; 59:670-674

## Teenage births & Inequality: rich countries



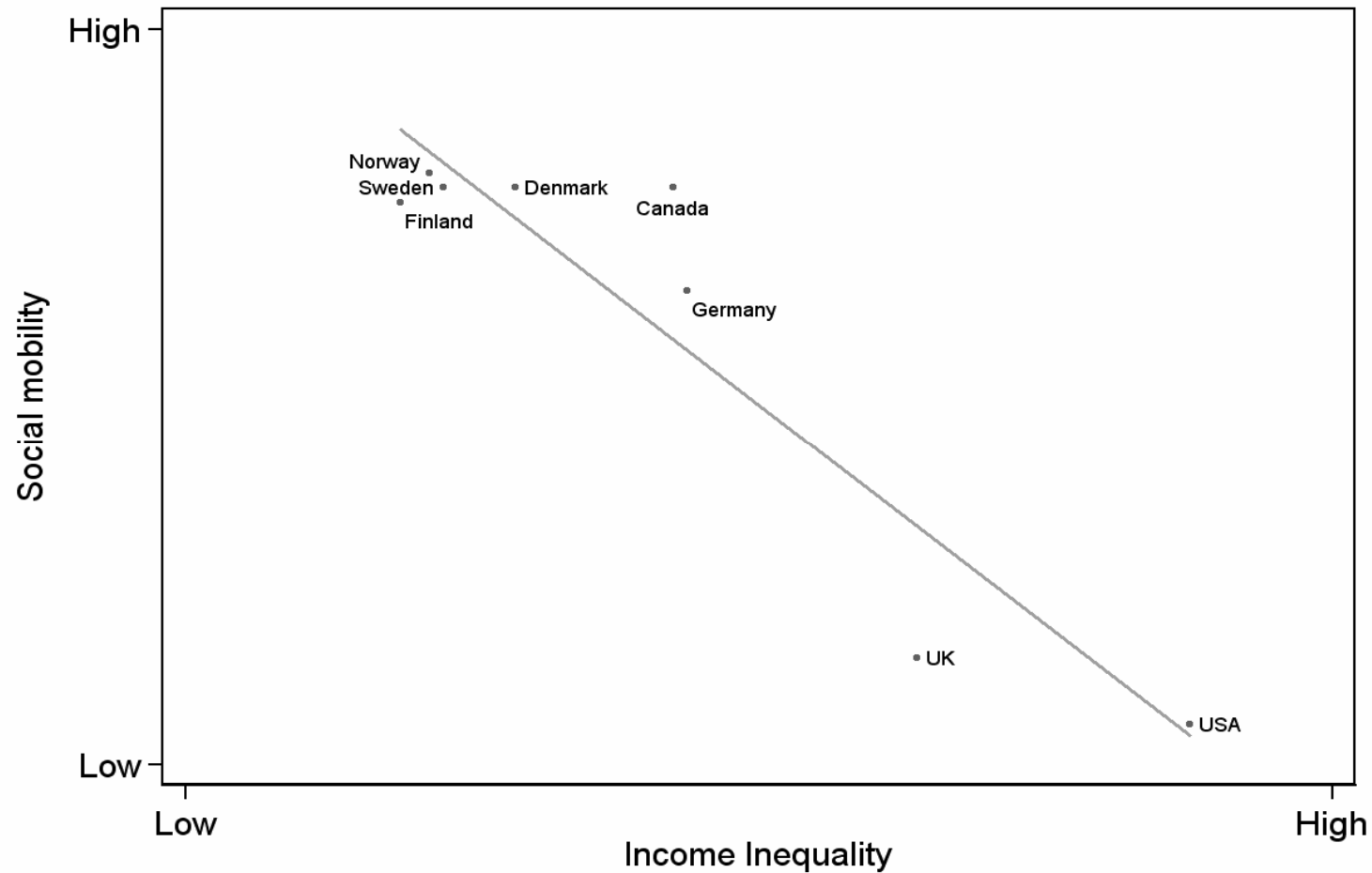
**Pickett KE, Mookherjee J, Wilkinson RG.  
American Journal of Public Health 2005; 95: 1181-3.**

# 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.

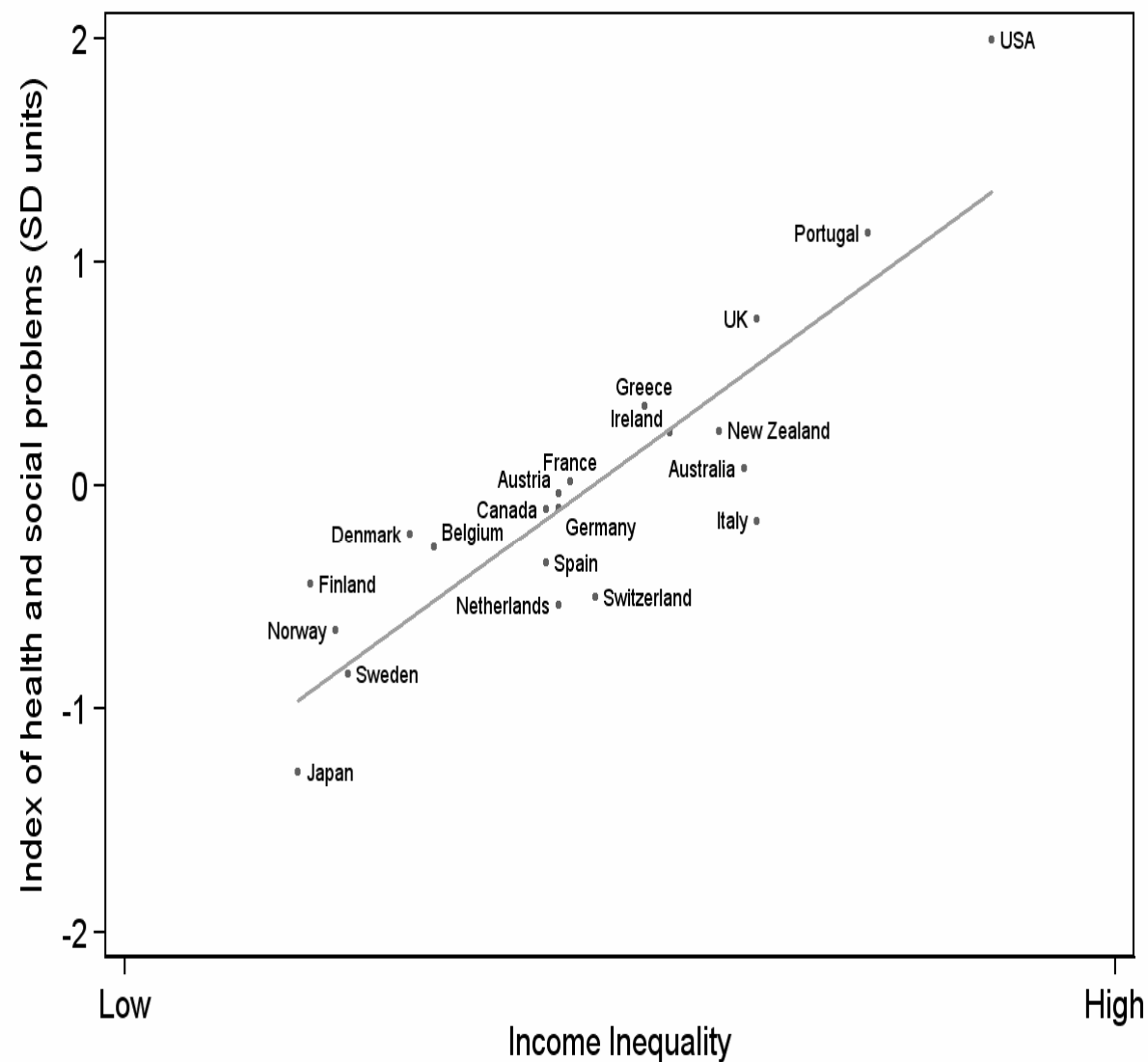
## Is there less social mobility where income inequality is greater?



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

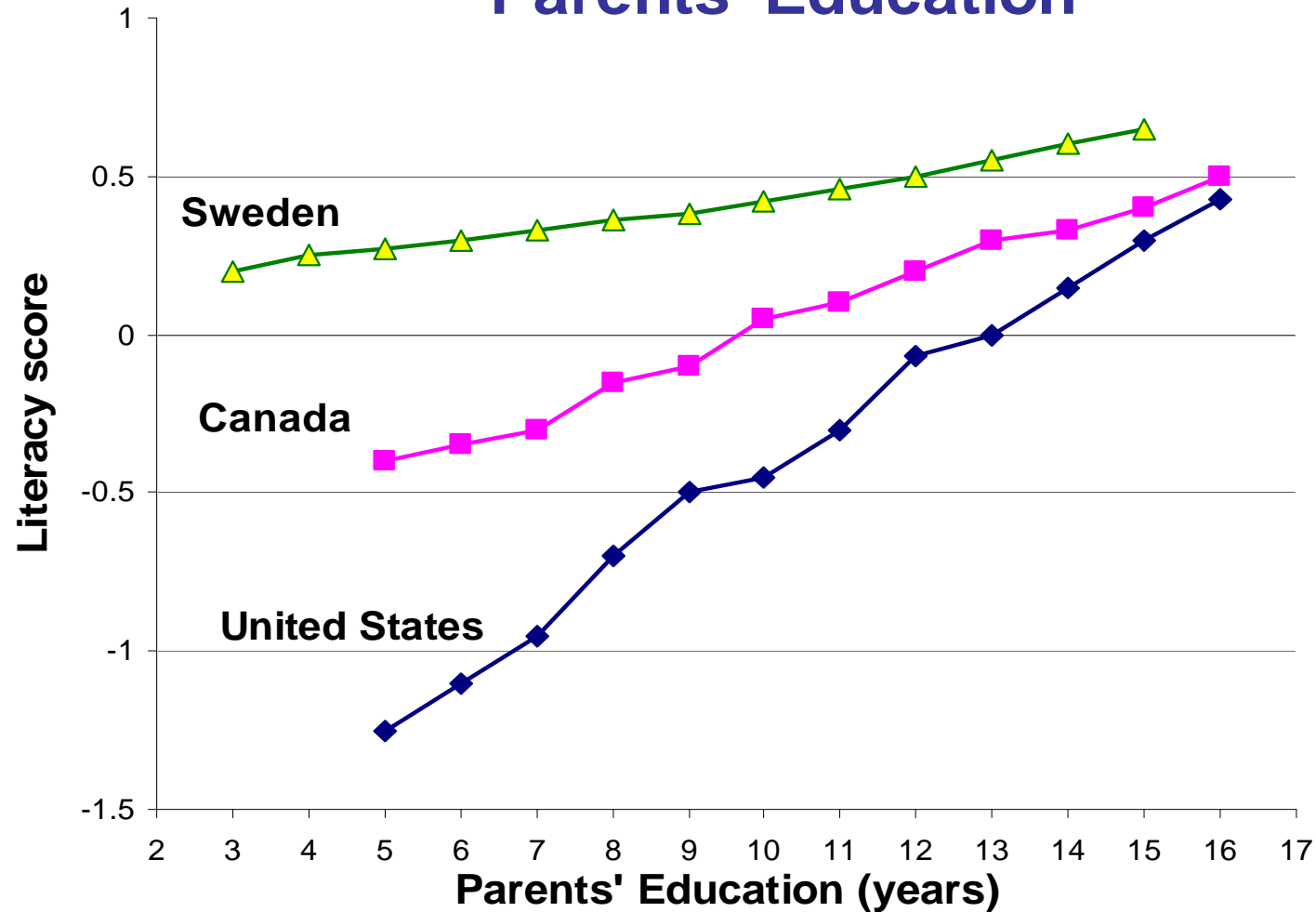
## Health and Social Problems in Relation to Inequality

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

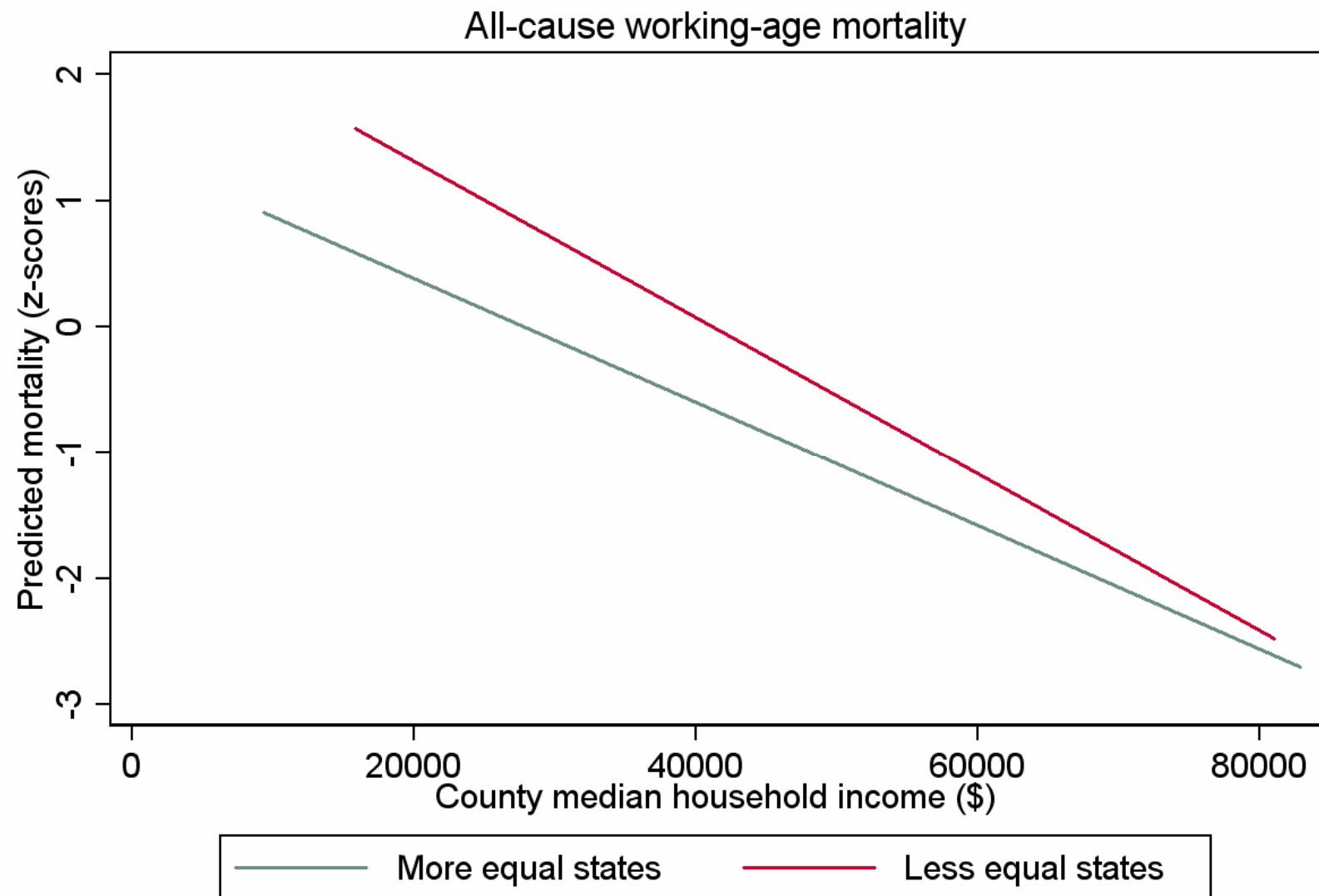


Wilkinson RG, Pickett KE. 2009 forthcoming

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

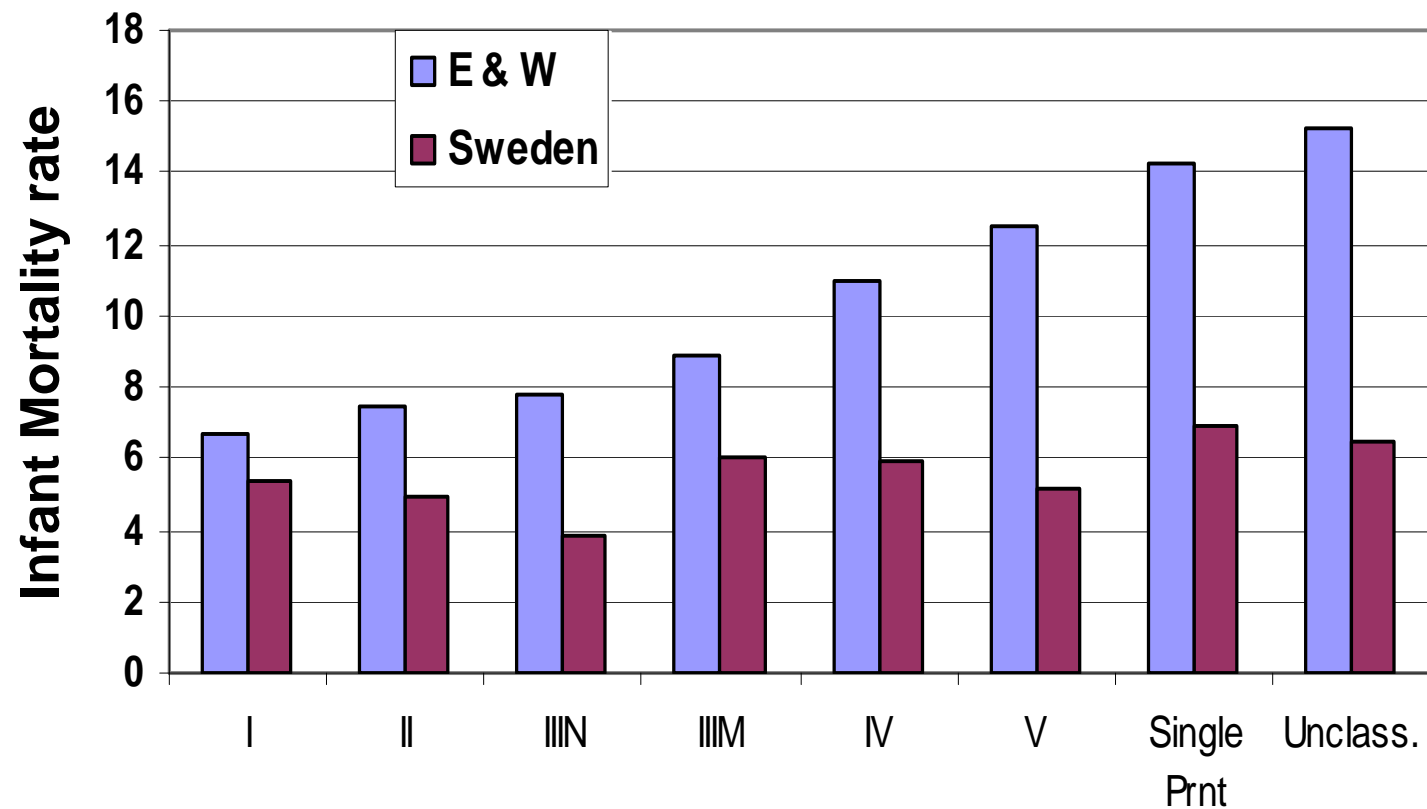


Source: Willms JD. 1997. Data from OECD Programme for International Student



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

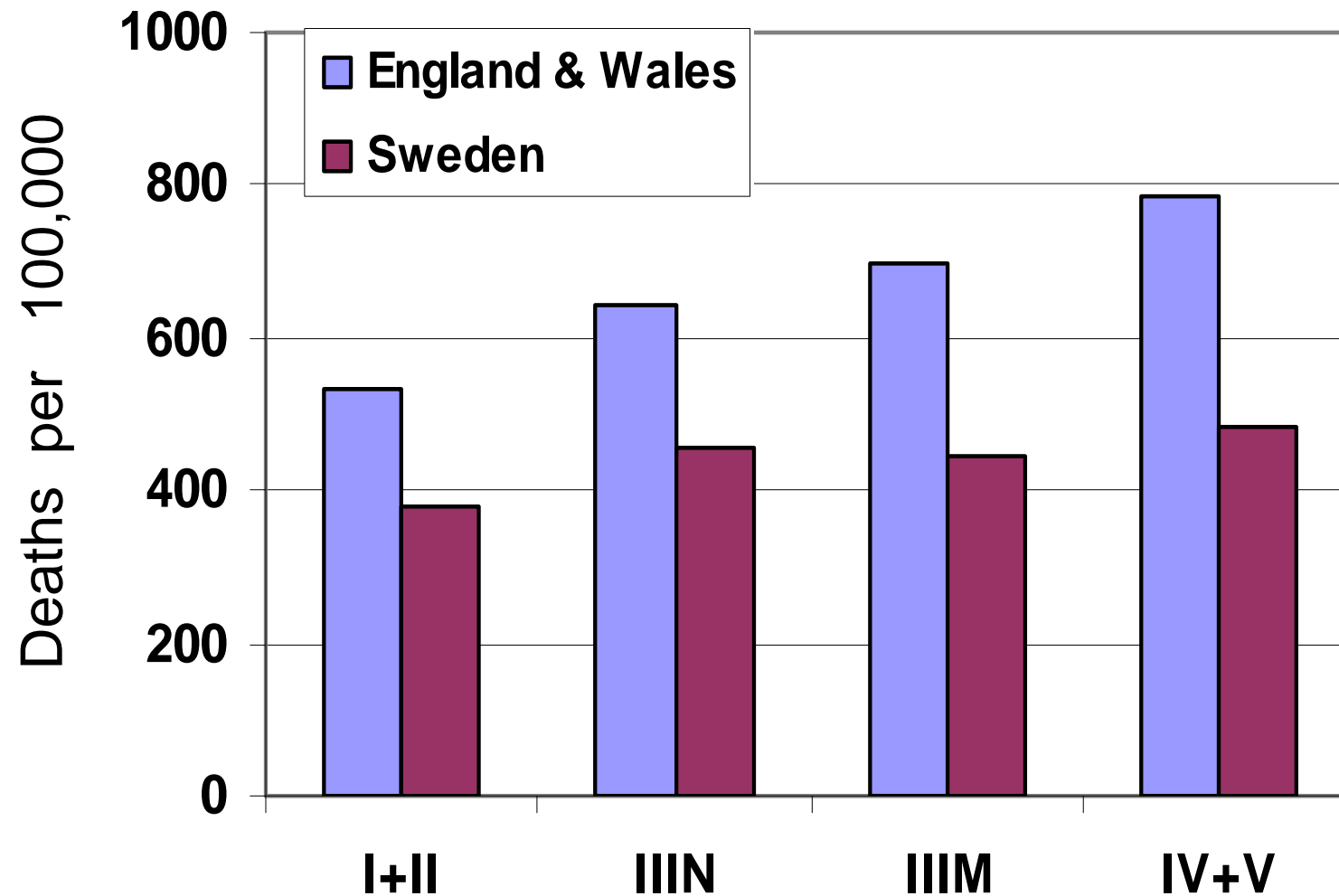
## Infant Mortality by Social Class: Sweden and England & Wales



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

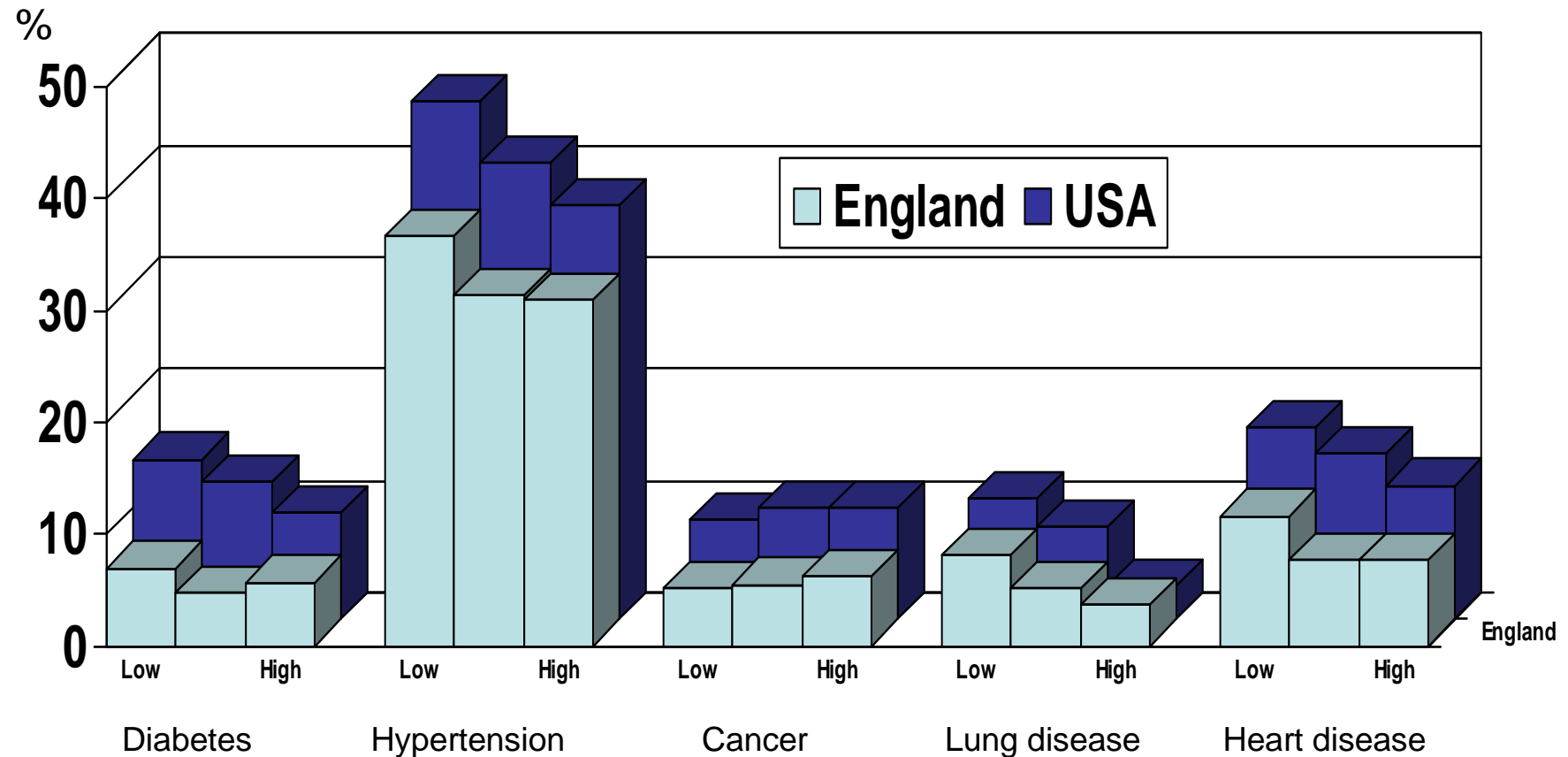


## Death Rates by Social Class in Sweden and England & Wales. Men 20-64 yrs.



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.**

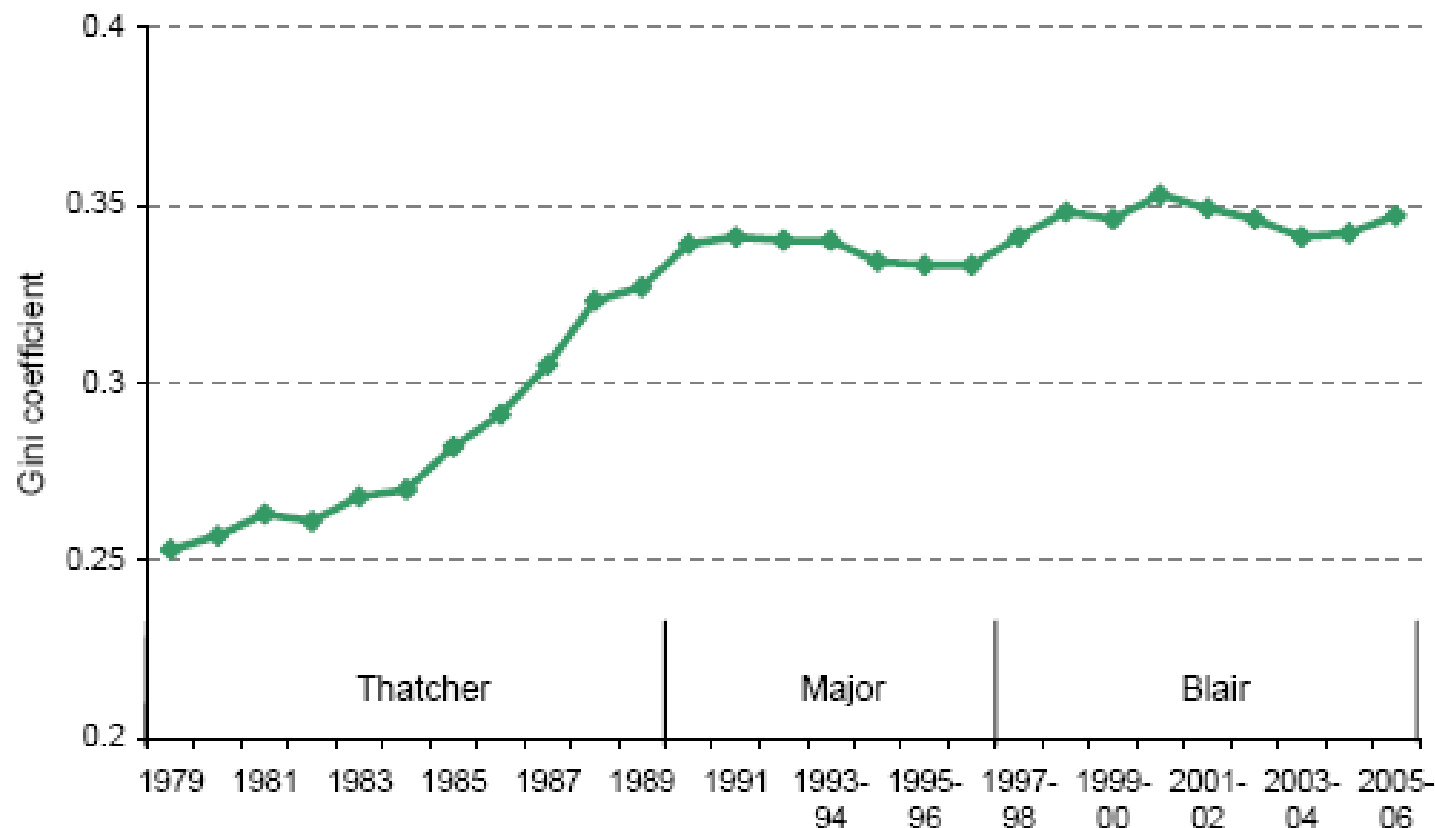
## **How does inequality affect us?**

- **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.**