The Spirit Level

Why Equality is Better for Everyone

Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett

'A big idea, big enough to change political thinking’
Sunday Times

'A sweeping theory of everything’ Guardian

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http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk
Income per head and life-expectancy: rich & poor countries

Among the rich countries life expectancy is not related to national differences in average income.

…but life expectancy is related to income within rich societies

How much richer are the richest 20% than the poorest 20%?

**Income gaps**
How many times richer are the richest fifth than the poorest fifth

- **Japan**: 3.4
- **Finland**: 3.7
- **Norway**: 3.9
- **Sweden**: 4.0
- **Denmark**: 4.3
- **Belgium**: 4.6
- **Austria**: 4.8
- **Germany**: 5.2
- **Netherlands**: 5.3
- **Spain**: 5.6
- **France**: 5.6
- **Canada**: 5.6
- **Switzerland**: 5.7
- **Ireland**: 6.1
- **Greece**: 6.2
- **Italy**: 6.7
- **Israel**: 6.8
- **New Zealand**: 6.8
- **Australia**: 7.0
- **UK**: 7.2
- **Portugal**: 8.0
- **US**: 8.5

Health and Social Problems are Worse in More Unequal Countries

Index of:
- Life expectancy
- Math & Literacy
- Infant mortality
- Homicides
- Imprisonment
- Teenage births
- Trust
- Obesity
- Mental illness – incl. drug & alcohol addiction
- Social mobility

Health and Social Problems are not Related to Average Income in Rich Countries

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Child Well-being is Better in More Equal Rich Countries

Child-Wellbeing is Unrelated to Average Incomes in Rich Countries

Levels of Trust are Higher in More Equal Rich Countries

Levels of Trust are Higher in More Equal US States

The Prevalence of Mental Illness is Higher in More Unequal Rich Countries

Infant Mortality Rates are Higher in More Unequal Countries

Drug Use is More Common in More Unequal Countries

Index of use of: opiates, cocaine, cannabis, ecstasy, amphetamines

Teenage Birth Rates are Higher in More Unequal Rich Countries


www.equalitytrust.org.uk
Homicide and income inequality: US States and Canadian Provinces

Rates of Imprisonment are Higher in More Unequal Countries


www.equalitytrust.org.uk
Social mobility is higher in more equal countries

## Correlations & p-values: Index of Health & Social Problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>International data</th>
<th>US data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$r$</td>
<td>$p$-value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>-0.66</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy</td>
<td>-0.44</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant mortality</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obesity</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental illness</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education score</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
<td>0.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teen birth rate</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homicides</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Imprisonment</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social mobility</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Almost everyone benefits from greater equality.

Usually the benefits are greatest among the poor but extend to the majority of the population.
Infant Mortality by Social Class: Sweden and England & Wales

Source: Leon DA, Vagero D, Olausson PO. BMJ 1992; 305; 687-91
Literacy Scores of 16-25 year olds by Parents' Education

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Psychosocial risk factors for ill health

- Low social status
- Weak social affiliations
- Stress in early life (pre- and postnatally)
What kind of stress most reliably raises cortisol levels?

Source: Dickerson SS & Kemeny ME. Psychological Bulletin 2004; 130(3): 355-91
Effect of stereotype threat: Verbal GRE: high & low SES

**Number of items correct**

- **High SES**
- **Low SES**

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“Not a test of ability”

“Test of ability”

Effect of stereotype threat
Advanced Progressive Matrices Test: high & low SES

Number of items correct

“Not a test of ability”  "Test of ability"

Stereotype Threat

The effect of caste identity on children's performance

"...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
Working hours are longer in more unequal countries

Inequality and household debt (as % of financial assets)
The effects of inequality - a two stage process

1. adult experience of inequality
2. passed on to children – epigenetics?
Inequality (Gini) Great Britain 1961 - 2008

Source: Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) Commentary C116 Data Appendix.
The public and policy response?

more:-

Police
Doctors
Social Workers
Drug rehabilitation units
Educational Psychologists

But...services are expensive and only partially effective.
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For more information:
... a book
and a website...

The Equality Trust
http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk
Table 2 | Correlations of measures of child wellbeing with income inequality, and average income across the 50 US states (including District of Columbia)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure of child wellbeing</th>
<th>Income inequality</th>
<th>Average income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( r )</td>
<td>( r )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenage births(^{12})</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>-0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile homicides(^{12})</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant mortality*</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low birth weight*</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational performance (combined maths and reading scores for 15 year olds)(^{4})</td>
<td>-0.69</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropping out of high school(^{4})</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overweight</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health problems</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Similar findings have been reported elsewhere.\(^{11, 40}\)
†Similar findings have been reported elsewhere.\(^{11}\)
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.
The Social Brain: the neocortex is a larger proportion of the brain in primate species with larger social groups.

CO$_2$ emissions and life expectancy

[Graph showing the relationship between CO$_2$ emissions and life expectancy for various countries, with a circle highlighting Costa Rica.]

www.equalitytrust.org.uk
More equal countries are more generous foreign aid donors.
Business leaders in more equal countries give a higher priority to complying with international environmental agreements.

With permission from R De Vogli & D Gimeno
More equal countries recycle more waste

Why are we so sensitive to inequality?
Trends in income inequality 1979-2005/6 (Gini coefficient, Great Britain.)

P. Krugman Inequality and Crisis: coincidence or causation?
Data from: Picketty-Saez, Historical Statistics, Federal Reserve.
More equal societies are more innovative
More Adults are Obese in More Unequal Rich Countries

Life Expectancy is Longer in More Equal Rich Countries

Children Experience More Conflict in More Unequal Societies

11, 13 & 15 yr olds fighting, bullying, and finding peers not kind & helpful

More Children Drop Out of High School in More Unequal US States

www.equalitytrust.org.uk
Cognitive Score: Socioeconomic status more important than starting point

(From The Marmot Review 2010)
Educational Scores are Higher in More Equal Rich Countries

The changing relation between life expectancy and income.

Reproduced from World Bank, *World Development Report 1993*
Review of 168 analyses of the relation between income inequality and health.
