The Inner Level: how more equal societies reduce stress, restore sanity and improve wellbeing

#LSEinnerlevel

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**Chair: Beverley Skeggs**
A feminist sociologist and the Academic Director of the Atlantic Fellows for Social and Economic Equity based in the LSE International Inequalities Institute.

*Hosted by LSE International Inequalities Institute*
How More Equal Societies Reduce Stress, Restore Sanity and Improve Wellbeing

The Spirit Level
Why Equality is Better for Everyone
Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett

The Inner Level
Richard Wilkinson & Kate Pickett
How More Equal Societies Reduce Stress, Restore Sanity and Improve Everybody’s Wellbeing
74% of adults (83% of 18-24 year-olds) felt so stressed they were overwhelmed or unable to cope sometime in the past year.

32% of adults (39% of 18-24 year-olds) had suicidal feelings as a result of stress.

16% of adults (29% of 18-24 year old) had self-harmed as a result of stress.
Income Inequality

The naïve view: Inequality only matters if it creates poverty or if income differences seem unfair.

A more accurate view: Inequality brings out features of our evolved psychology to do with dominance and subordination, superiority and inferiority. That affects how we treat each other and feel about ourselves. Inequality increases status competition and status insecurity. It increases anxieties about self-worth, and intensifies worries about how we are seen and judged – whether as attractive or unattractive, interesting or boring etc…
Inequality...
How much richer are the richest 20% in each country 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
- USA: 8.5
- Singapore: 9.7

Wilkinson & Pickett, The Spirit Level

www.equalitytrust.org.uk
Bigger income gaps lead to deteriorations in:

**Social Relations**
- School bullying
- Homicide
- Imprisonment
- Community life
- Trust

**Health**
- Drug abuse
- Infant mortality
- Life expectancy
- Mental illness
- Obesity

**Human Capital**
- Child wellbeing
- High school drop outs
- Math & literacy scores
- Social mobility
- Teenage births
Robert Walker et al.
Poverty in global perspective
Journal of Social Policy
2013; 42, 215-233
Bigger material differences create bigger social distances and increase social status differentiation.
Participation in local groups and voluntary organisations is lower in more unequal societies.

People in more unequal countries trust each other less
Homicide rates are higher in more unequal US states and Canadian provinces

Cuernavaca, Mexico
‘Armed Response’ - Pretoria, South Africa.
More unequal societies need more “guard labor”

The proportion of ‘guard’ labor grew with inequality.
USA 1979-2000

Bowles & Jayadev, NYT 2014
The Jekyll & Hyde of Public Health?

- **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.
Companion
Spanish: Compañero;
French: Copain

from the Latin “Con” (with)
and “Pan” (bread)
- someone with whom you eat bread
“Gifts make friends and friends make gifts”

Health and social problems are worse in more unequal countries.

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

Index of income inequality
- Low
- High

Wilkinson & Pickett, The Spirit Level

www.equalitytrust.org.uk
Child Wellbeing is lower in more unequal countries

UNICEF Index of Child Wellbeing vs. Income Inequality (Gini)

Better

Worse

Low

Income Inequality (Gini)

High

Where income inequalities are larger, there is less social mobility

Data from Corak (2013), World Bank (2013)
There is more mental illness in unequal societies.
Inequality increases anxieties about status, making people doubt their self-worth

Depression is more common in more unequal states

More people exaggerate their self-importance…

and become more narcissistic

College students' Narcissistic Personality Inventory scores over time reflect the rise in US income inequality.
...there is more schizophrenia

Addictive behaviour increases: e.g., gambling

![Graph showing the relationship between income inequality and problem gambling prevalence in various countries.](image-url)
WE BUY THINGS WE DON'T NEED WITH MONEY WE DON'T HAVE TO IMPRESS PEOPLE WE DON'T LIKE.
There is more advertising in more unequal countries
The Effects of Income inequality

EVIDENCE OF CAUSALITY

THEORY & PSYCHOSOCIAL PROCESSES
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