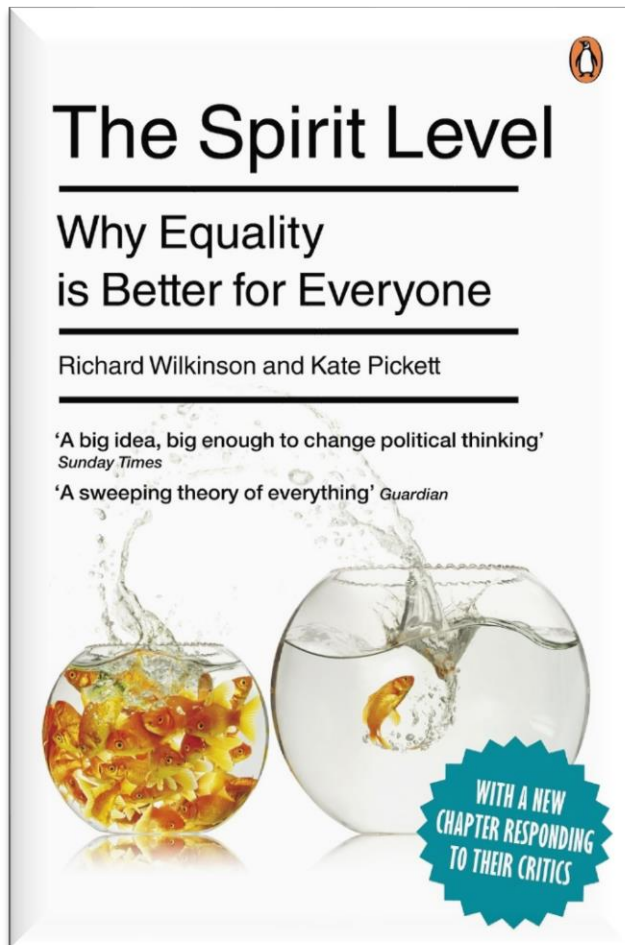


# Inequality and Child Wellbeing

Richard Wilkinson

Emeritus Professor of Social Epidemiology

Children in Scotland, November 2018

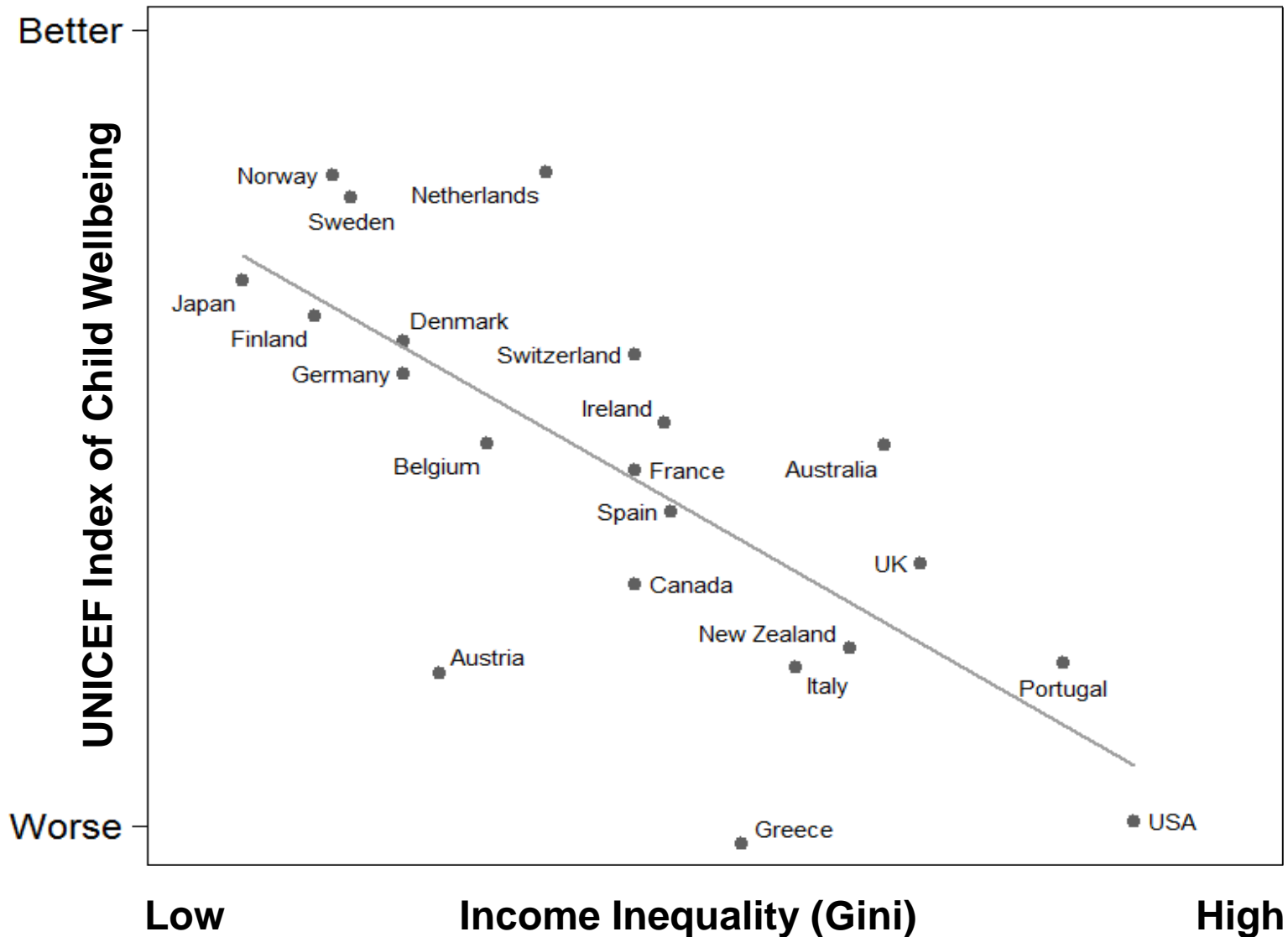


# Income inequality

**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...

# Child Wellbeing is lower in more unequal countries



# Child outcomes found to be worse in more unequal societies

- **In rich countries**

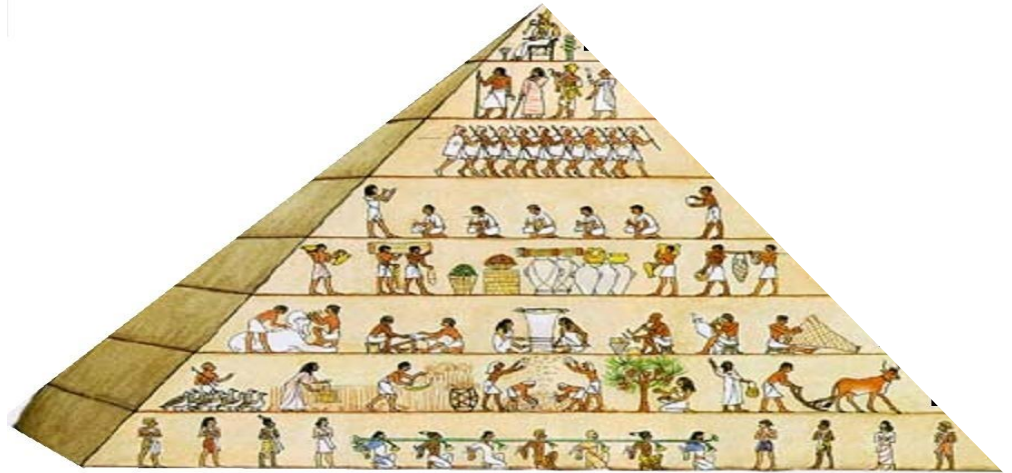
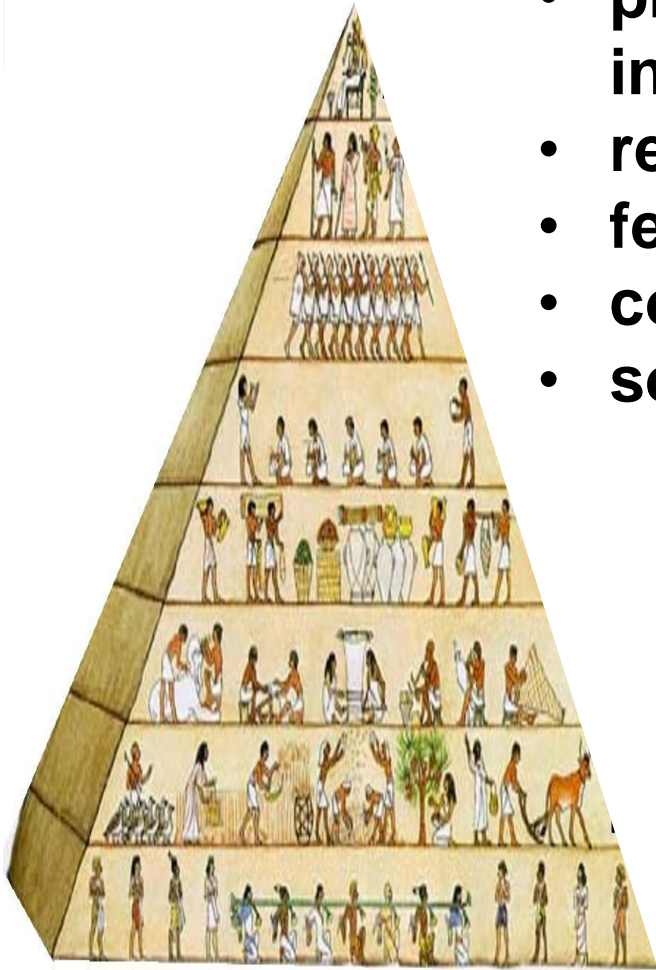
- Infant mortality
- Low birth weight
- Overweight
- Maths & literacy scores
- Teenage births
- Child Conflict & Bullying
- Social mobility
- UNICEF Index of Child Wellbeing

- **In US states**

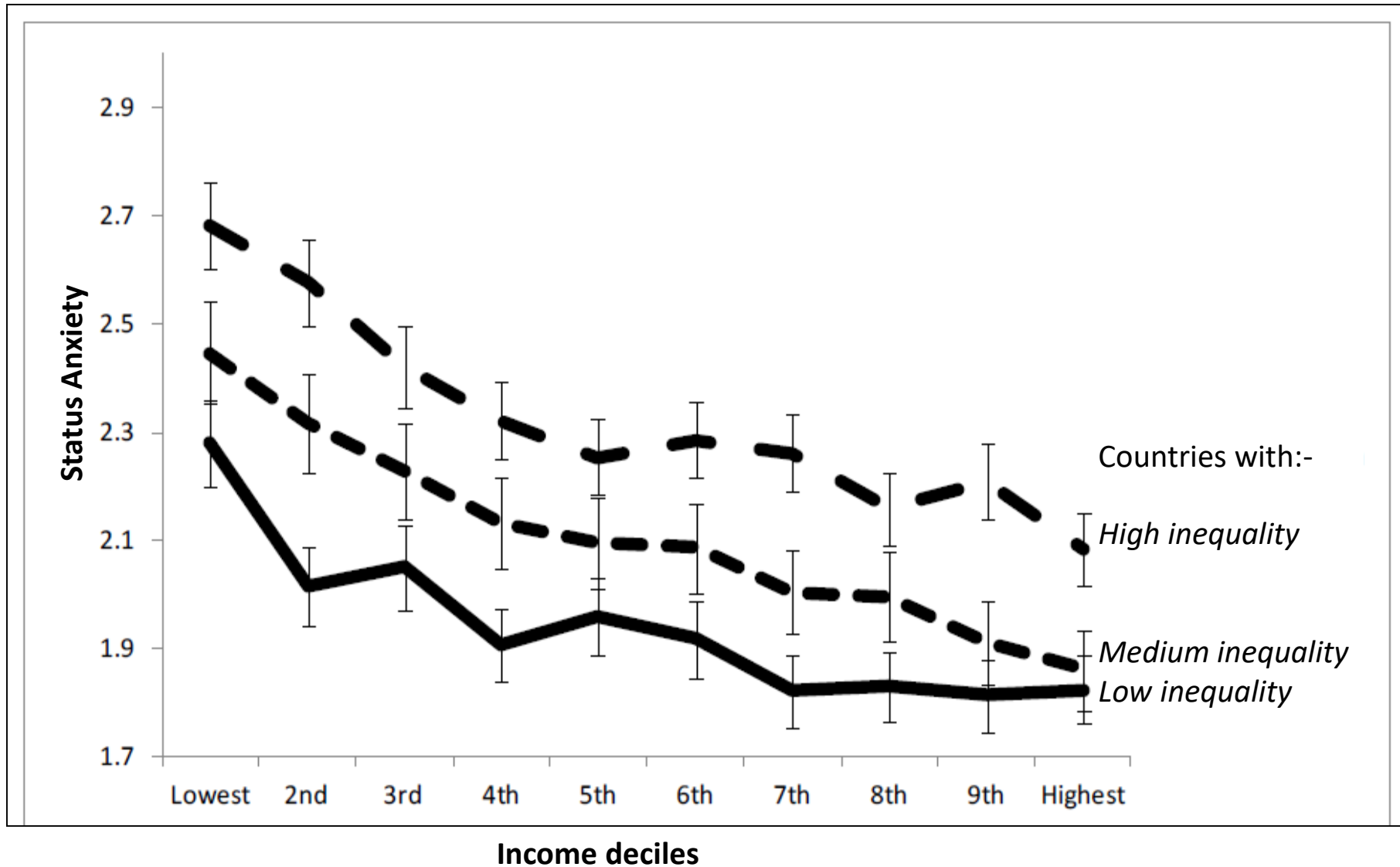
- Infant mortality
- Low birth weight
- Overweight
- Maths & literacy scores
- Teenage pregnancy
- Mental health problems
- Juvenile homicides
- High School drop outs

# Bigger material differences create bigger social distances and increase social class differentiation:

- problems related to social status increase,
- residential segregation increases,
- fewer interclass marriages,
- community life weakens,
- social mobility declines.



# Status Anxiety across income deciles for high, medium and low inequality countries



# The Dominance Behavioural System

Johnson SL, Leedom LJ, Muhtadie L.

The Dominance Behavioral System and Psychopathology.

*Psychological Bulletin*, 2012; 138(4): 692-743.

## **Findings:-**

- **Anxiety and depression are related to subordination, to submissiveness and to the desire to avoid subordination.**
- **Disruptive behavior disorders, mania and narcissistic traits are related to inflated self-perceptions of power or a heightened focus on achieving social dominance and recognition**



Photo by kind permission of Matt Stuart



# Mental Health Foundation Survey, UK 2018

**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 olds) had self-harmed as a result of stress.**

## Social anxiety postings on the Experience Project web site

- *“In social situations I shut down and I tend to be awkward because I'm scared of people judging me and not liking me so much that I just distance myself. I hear people laughing and I immediately think they're laughing at me (which is stupid) but I can't help it. Over the years I have learned to embrace the loner life style...”*
- *“Sometimes I avoid anyone and everyone because I can't stand the thought of them judging me.”*
- *“I'll have panic attacks over something as simple as going to the checkout at Walmart. I do self-checkouts so I don't have to talk to anyone.”*
- *“I am extremely shy around both people I know and don't know. It hinders my everyday life so much that people think I am making it up. I have no friends. It is hard for me to go anywhere. I always make sure I go shopping in the day – that way I can wear sunglasses or a hat. It is my security blanket from Social Anxiety Disorder. I get tongue-tied and sweaty, then I feel like they're looking at me like I am some sort of freak! It is a living hell I struggle with on a daily basis.”*

NOT PRETTY  
ENOUGH

NOT SMART  
ENOUGH

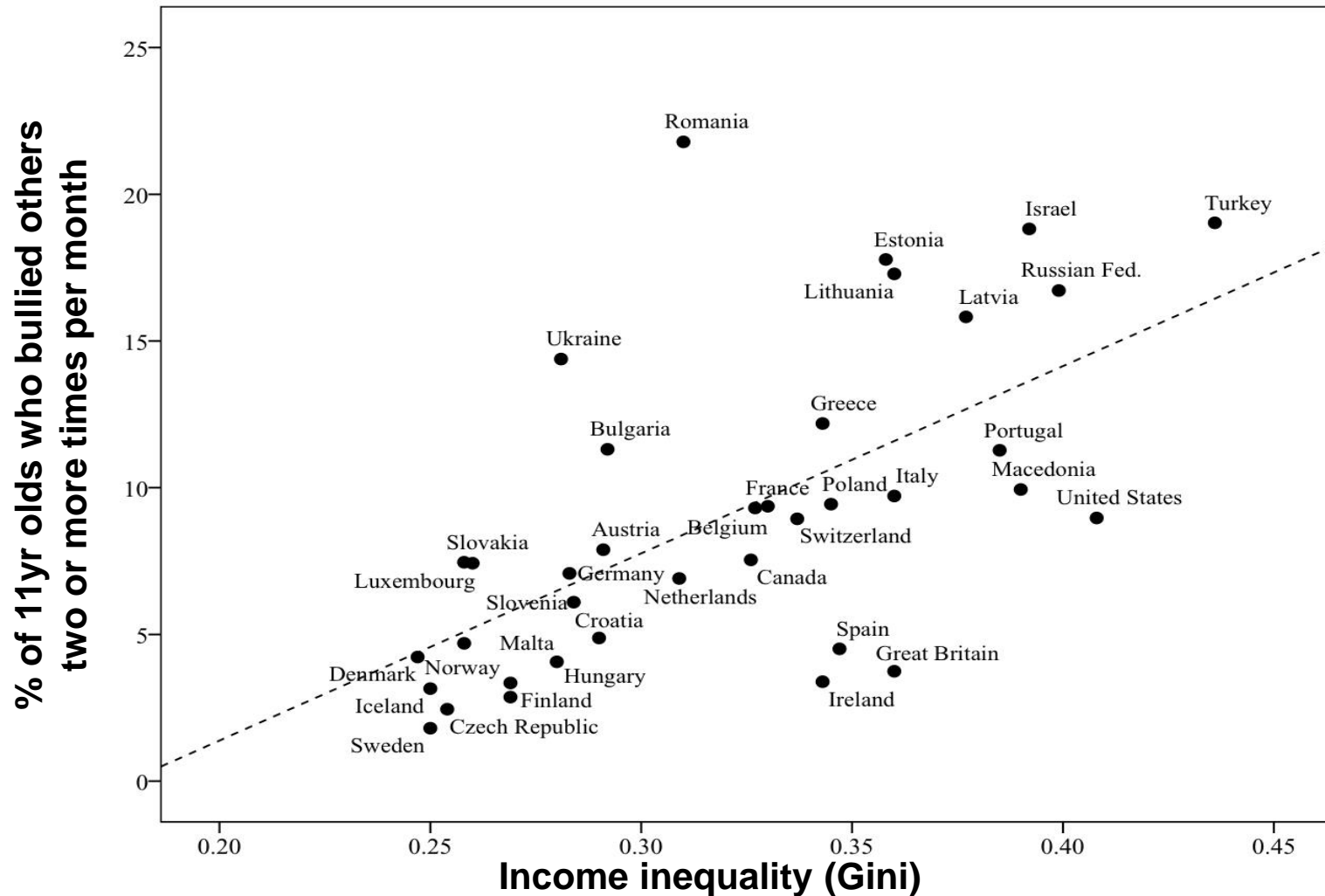


NOT GOOD  
ENOUGH

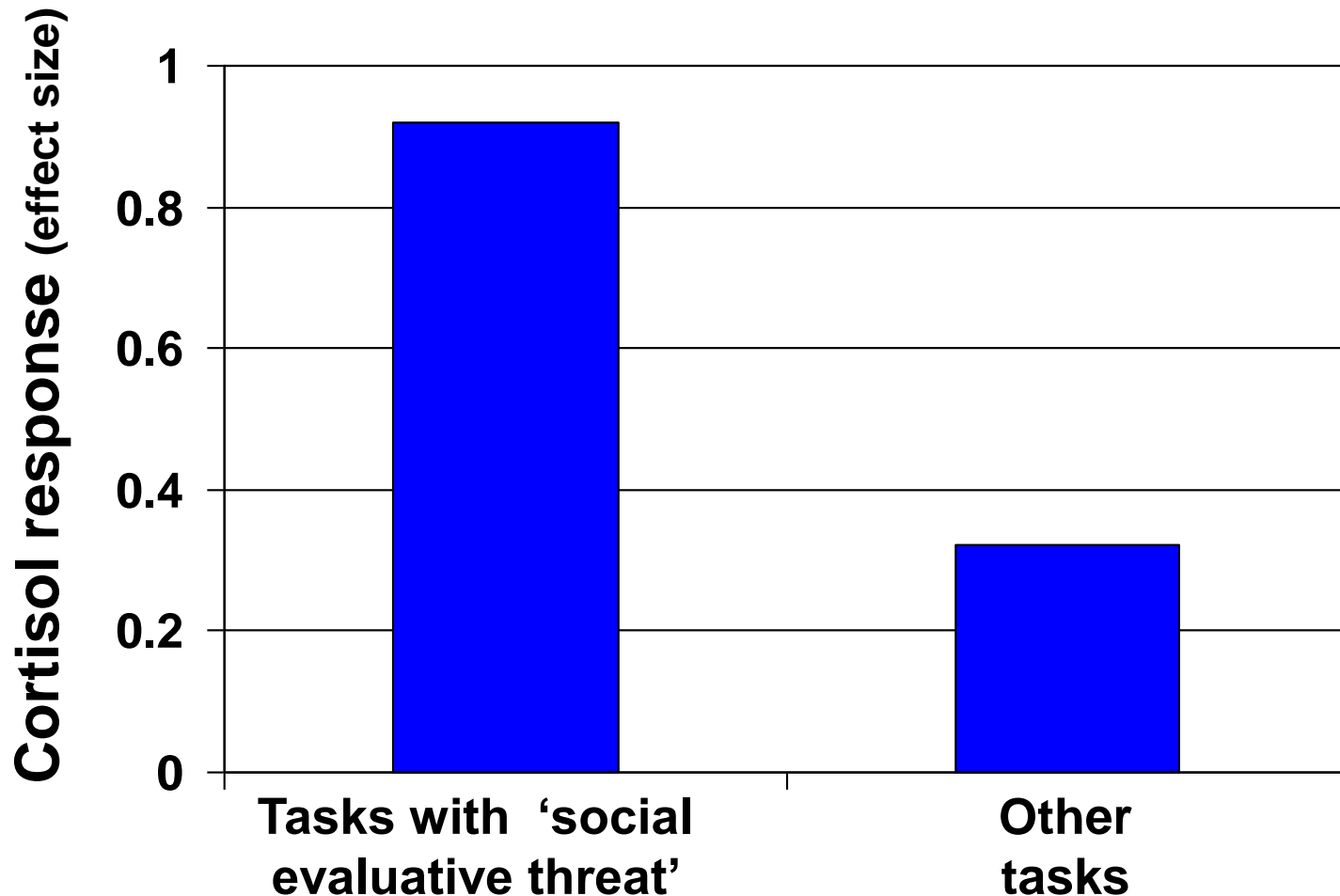
NOT FUNNY  
ENOUGH

# School bullying is much more common in countries with bigger income differences.

## 11-year-olds in 37 countries ( $r = .62$ )



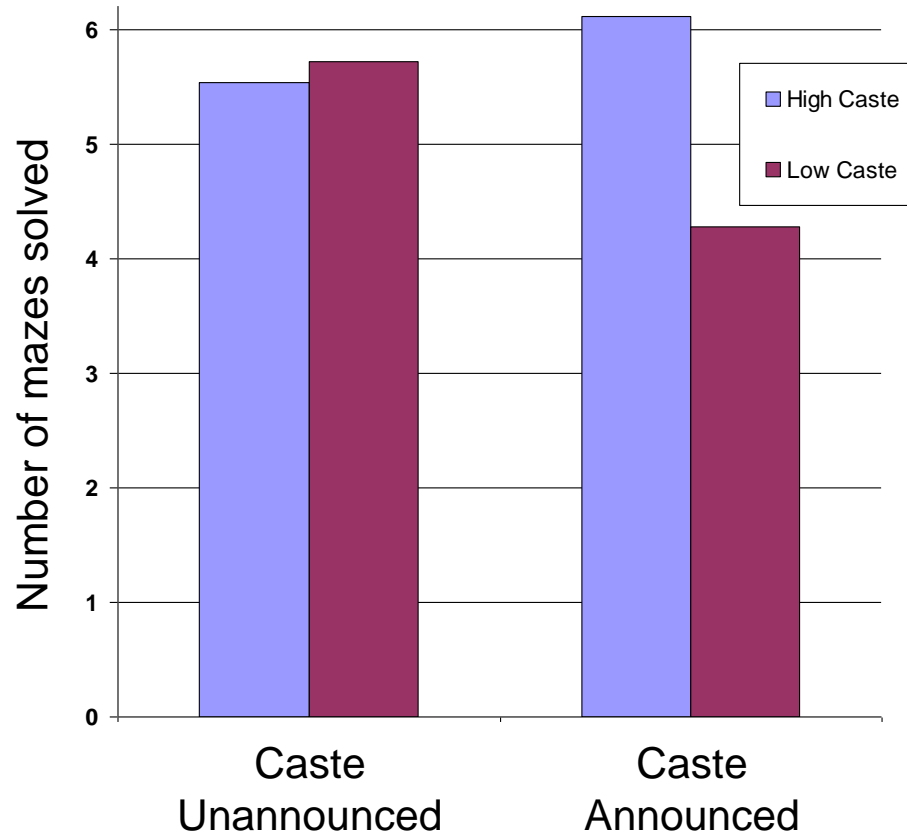
# What kinds of stress cause the biggest rise in stress hormones?



Dickerson SS, Kemeny ME. Acute stressors and cortisol responses. *Psychological Bulletin* 2004; 130(3): 355-91.

# Stereotype Threat

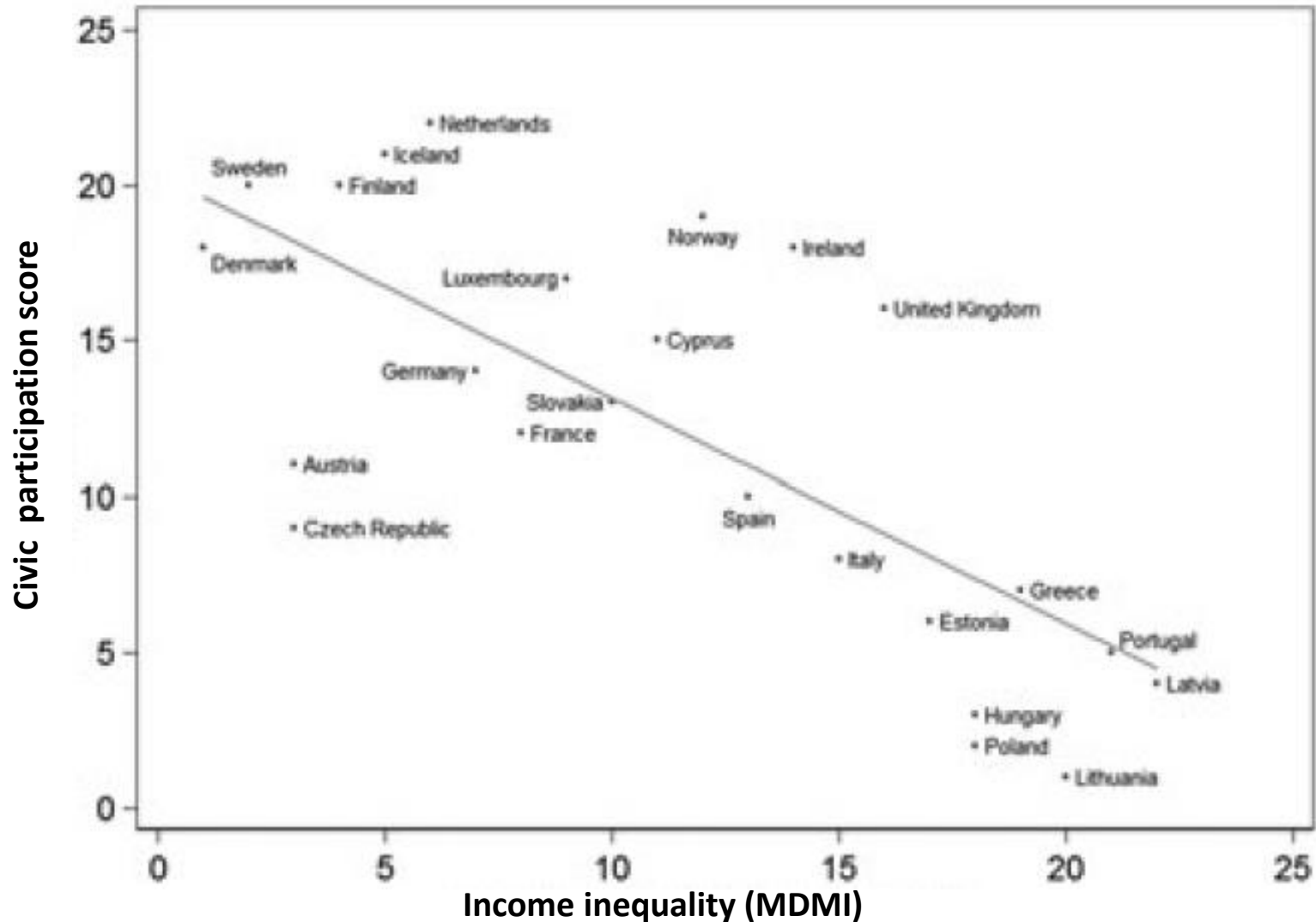
The effect of caste identity on children's performance



# Mental illness is more common in more unequal societies



# Participation in local groups and voluntary organisations is lower in more unequal societies



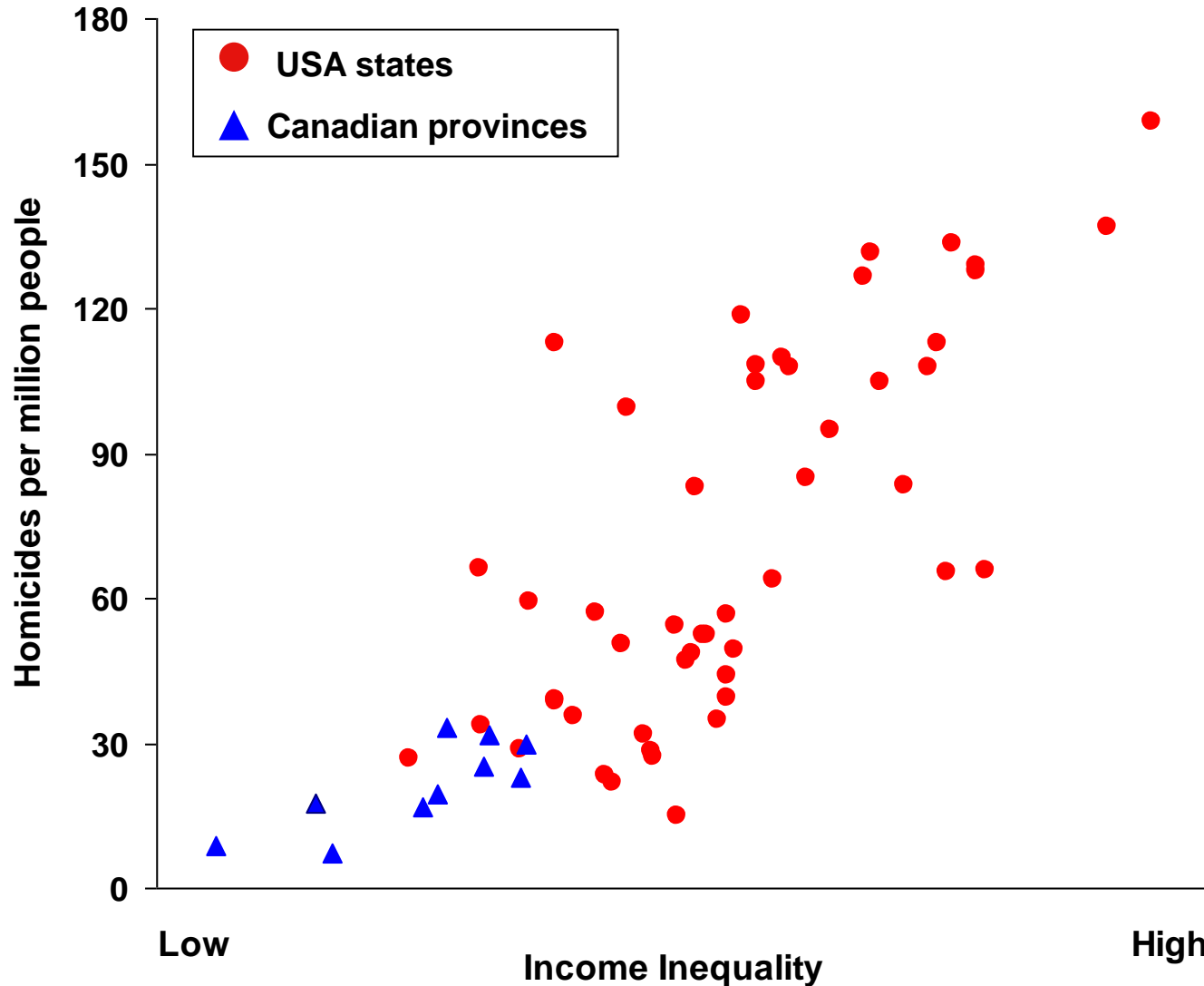
Lancee B, Van de Werfhorst HG. Income inequality and participation: A comparison of 24 European countries. *Social Science Research*. 2012; 41(5):1166-78.



# 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.



# Societies with wider Income differences need more “guard labor”

