



Why Equality is Better for Everyone

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**Public Health Network Cymru
Video Conference**

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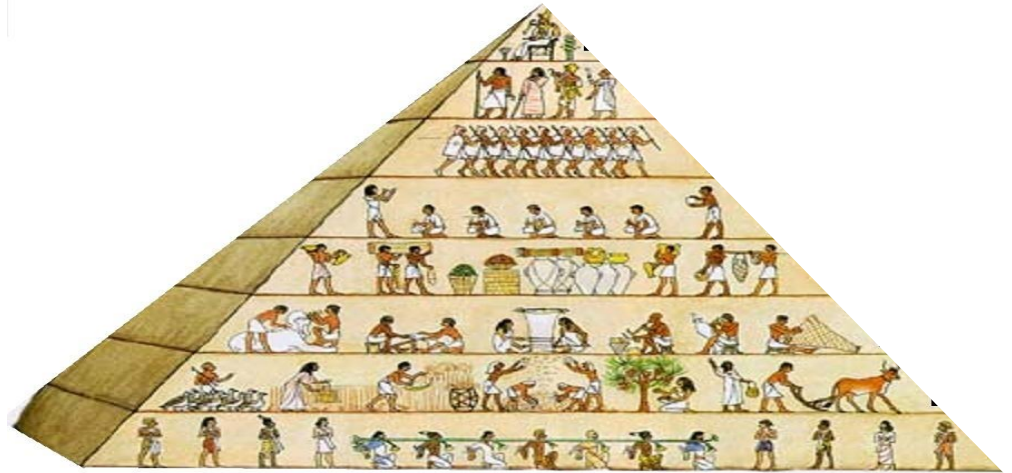
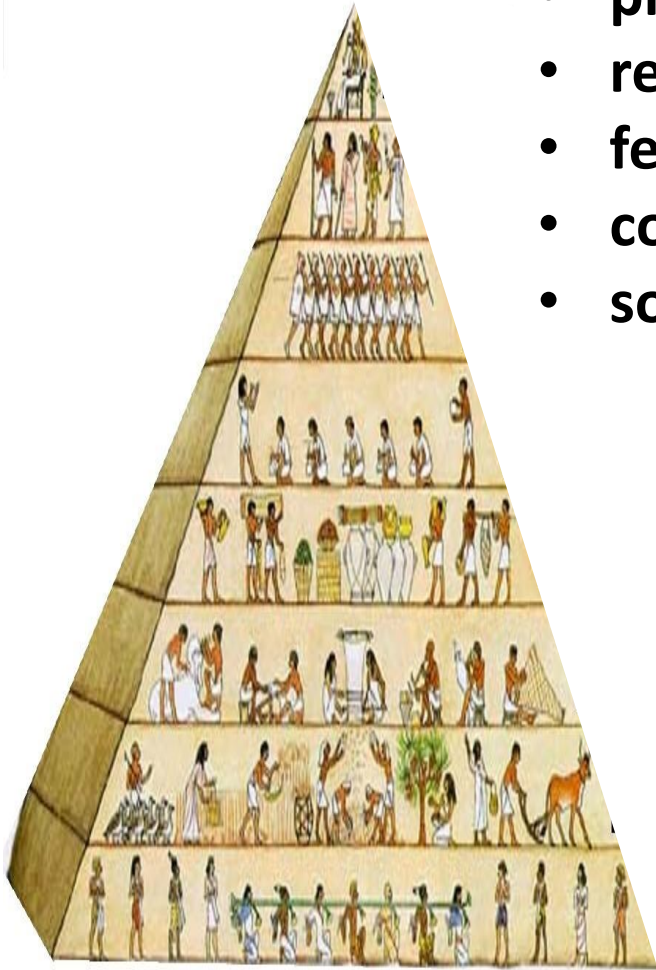
Income inequality

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. It 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...

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.



Class and Status

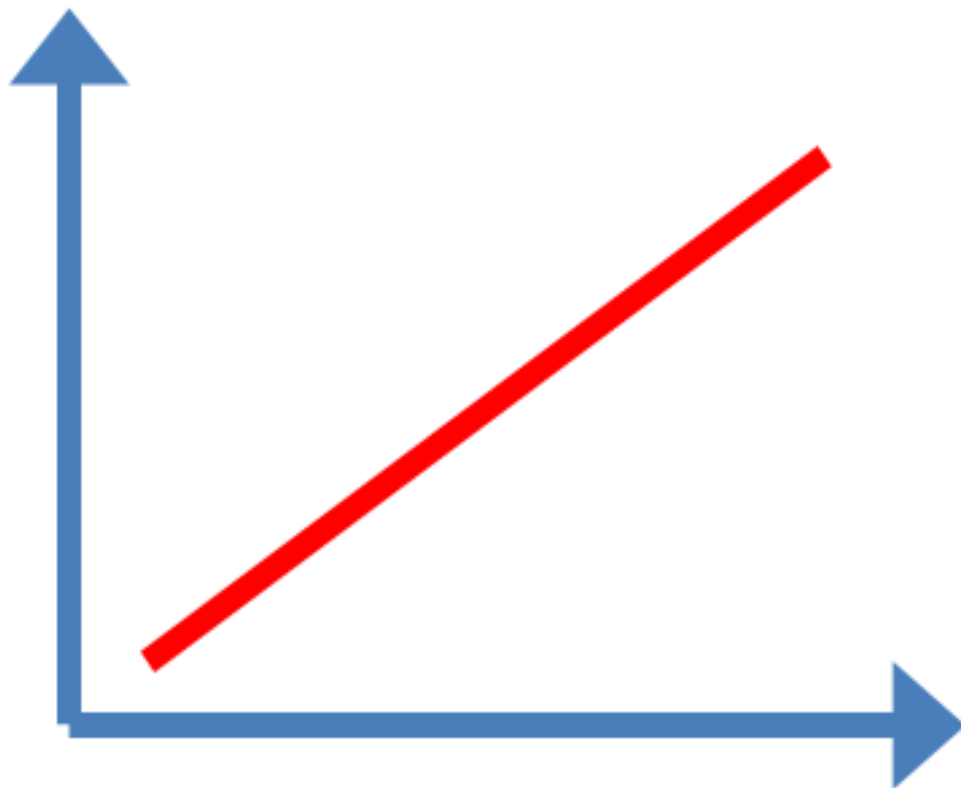
Sociologists have argued about the ‘correct’ way to categorize people into classes.

But perhaps what matters most (and maybe what income differences are telling us) is how far apart those social classes are and/or how strongly people are cast as superior and inferior.

Robert Walker *et al.*
Poverty in global perspective
Journal of Social Policy
2013; 42, 215-233

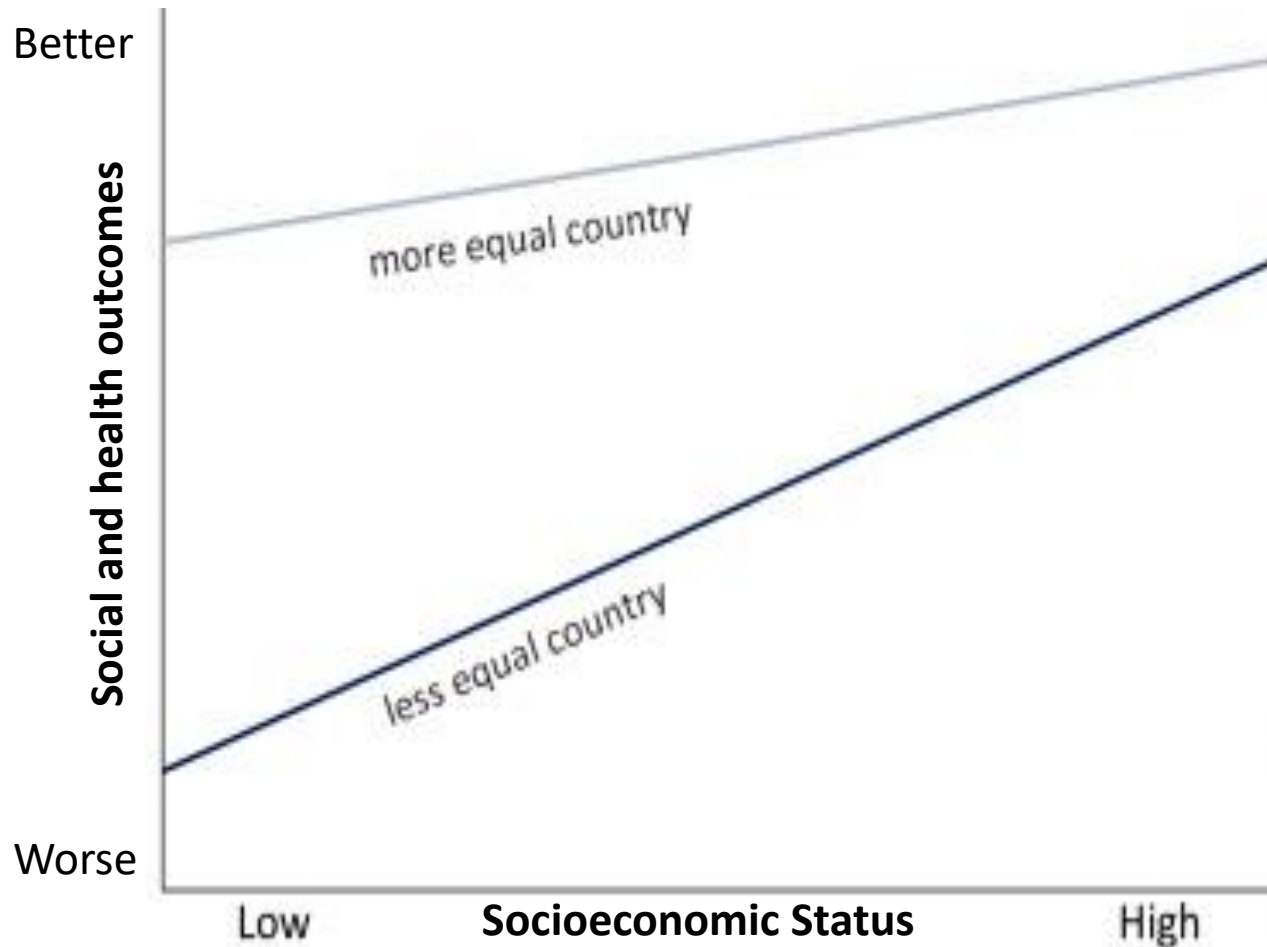


Problems

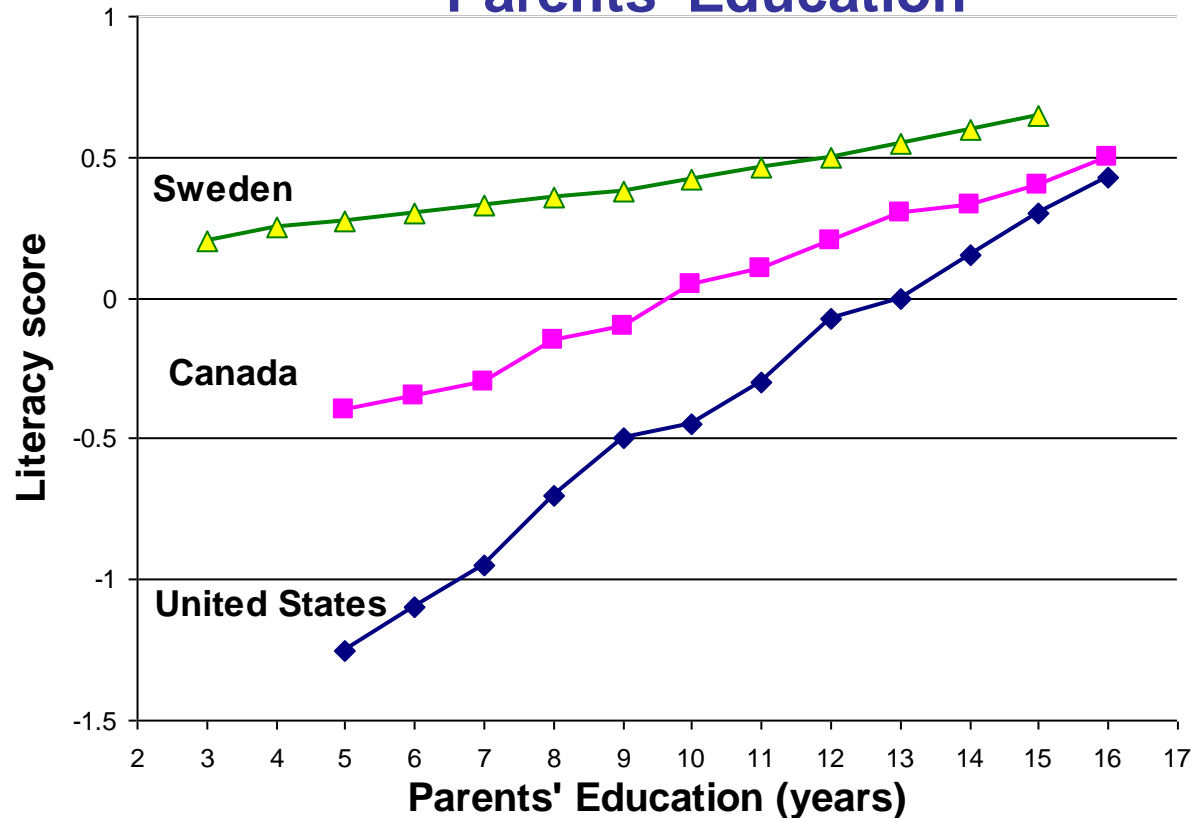


**Income
inequality**

Social gradients tend to be steeper and average performance poorer in more unequal societies

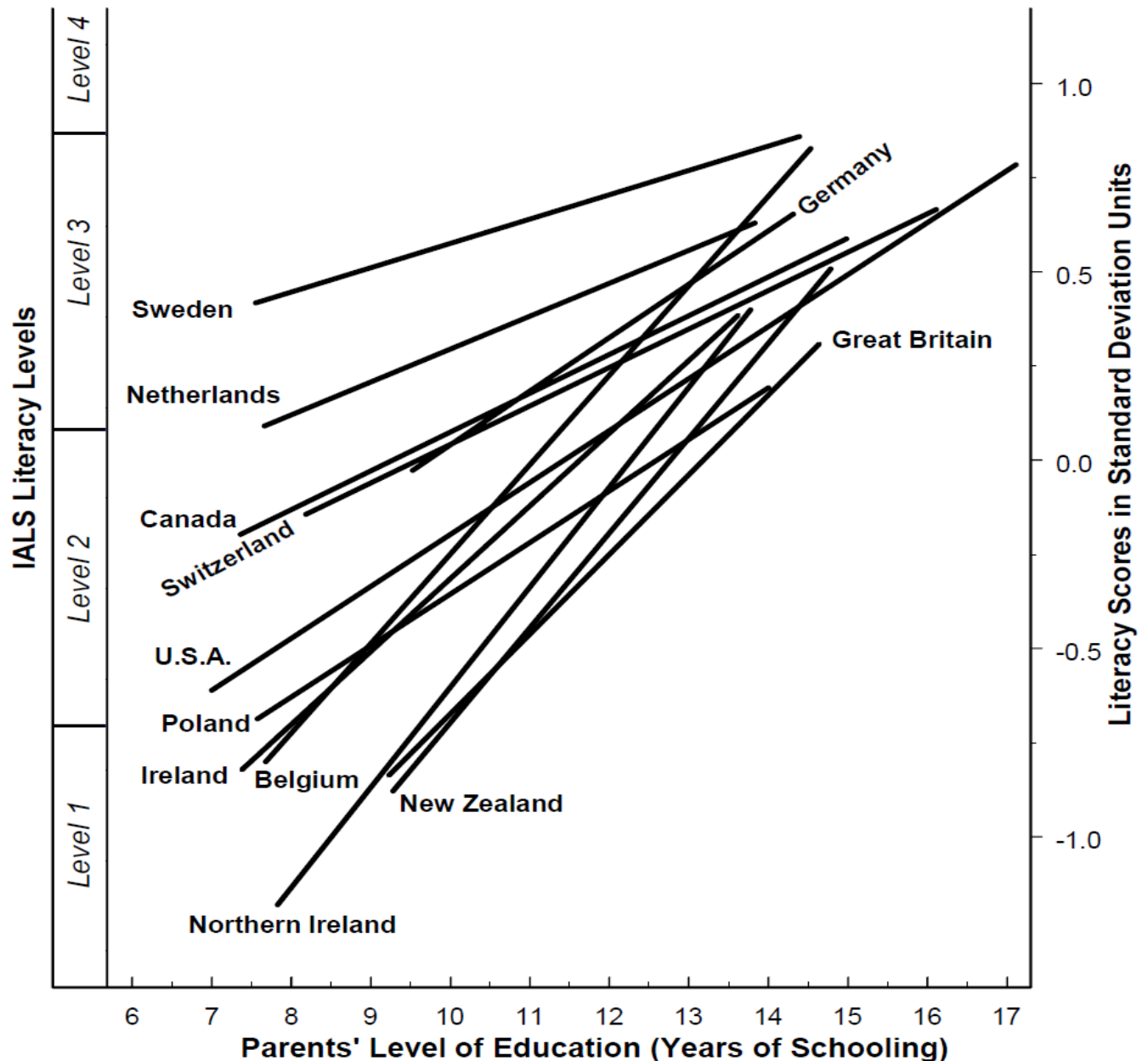


Literacy Scores of 16-25 year olds by Parents' Education



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

Average literacy levels are lower where social gradients are steeper

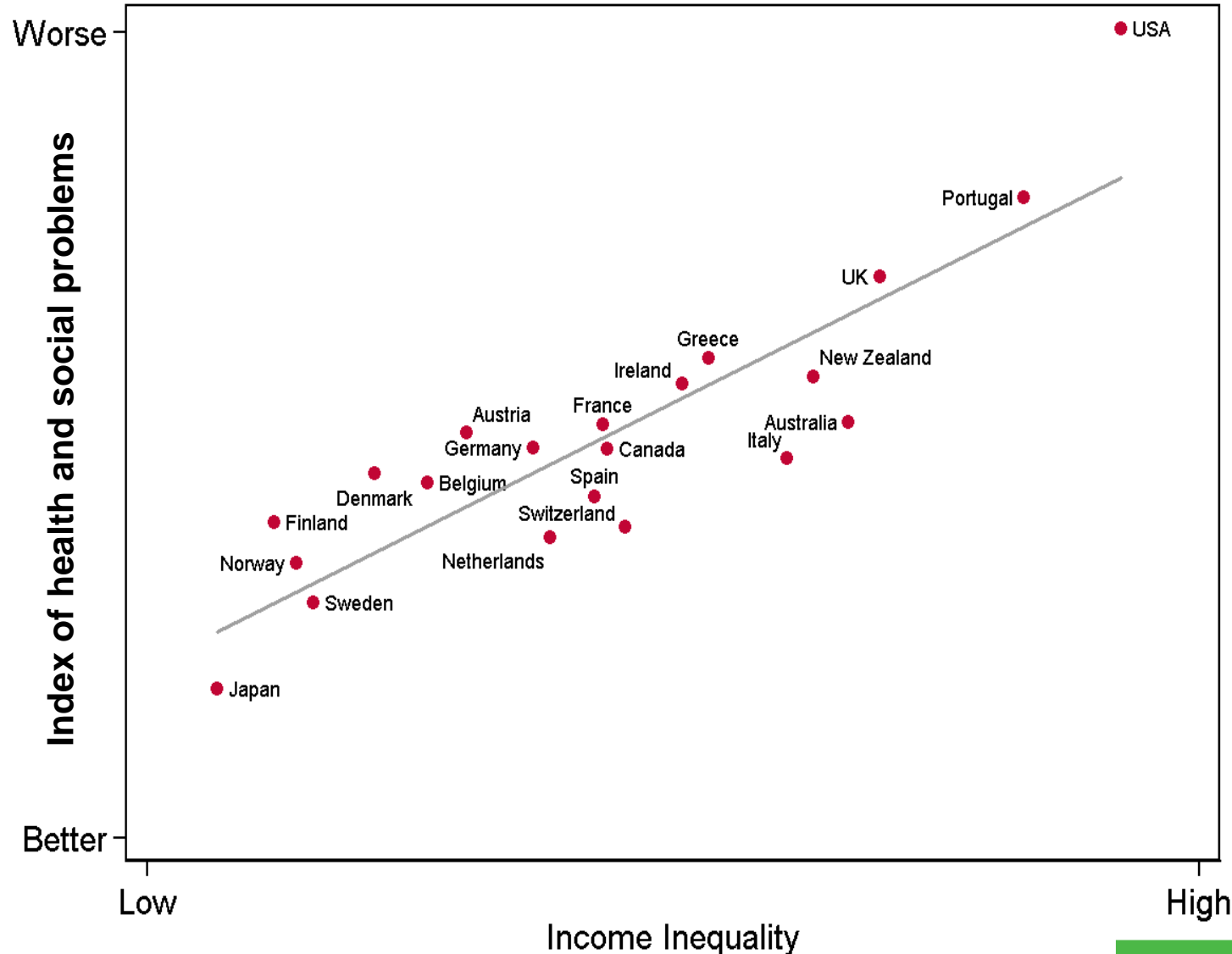


Sloat E, Willms JD.
The international
adult literacy survey.
Canadian J Educ.
2000 Jan 1:218-33.

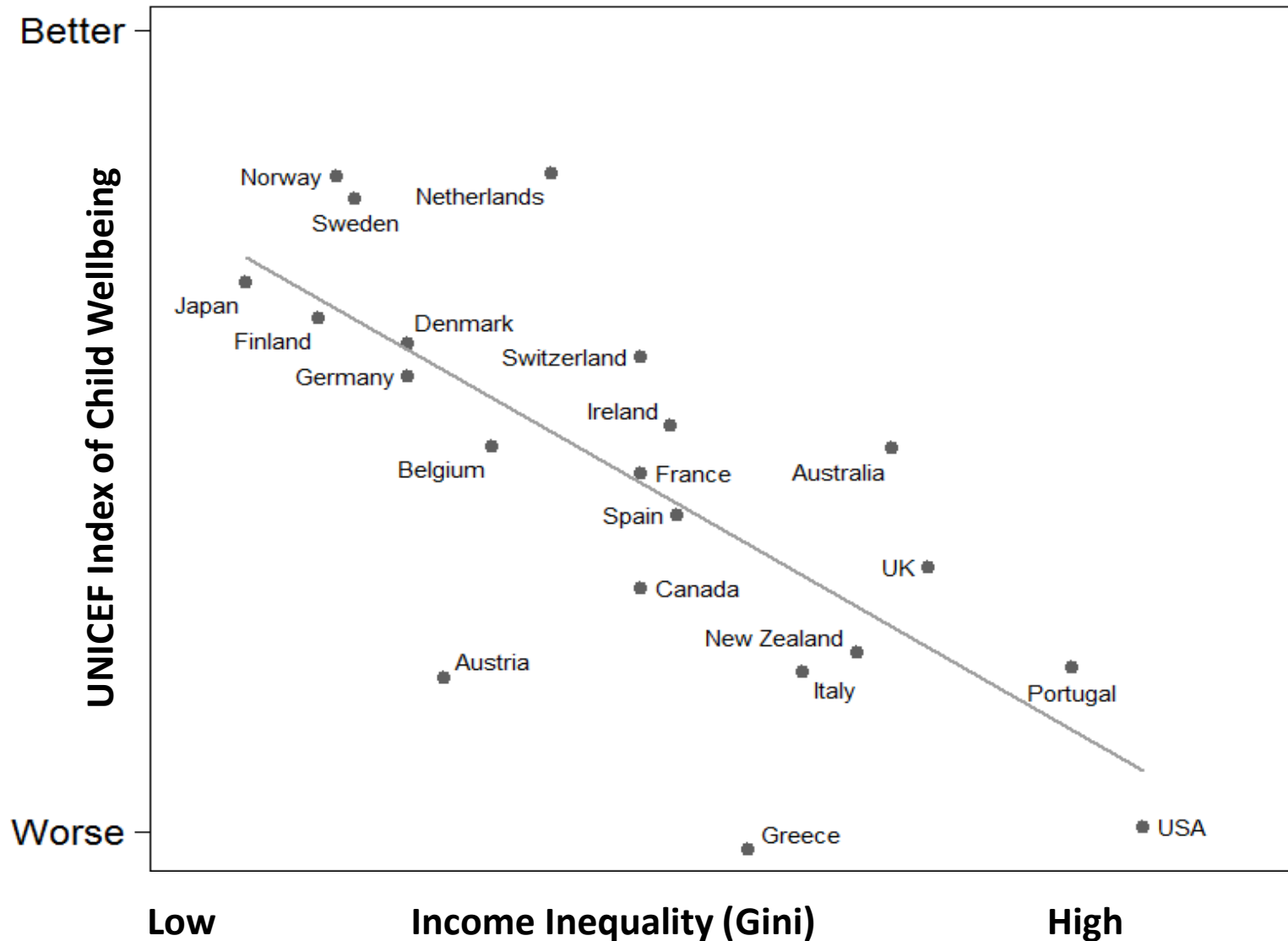
Health and social problems are worse in more unequal countries

Index of:

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



Child Wellbeing is lower in more unequal countries



Covid-19 incidence and mortality are higher in more unequal countries

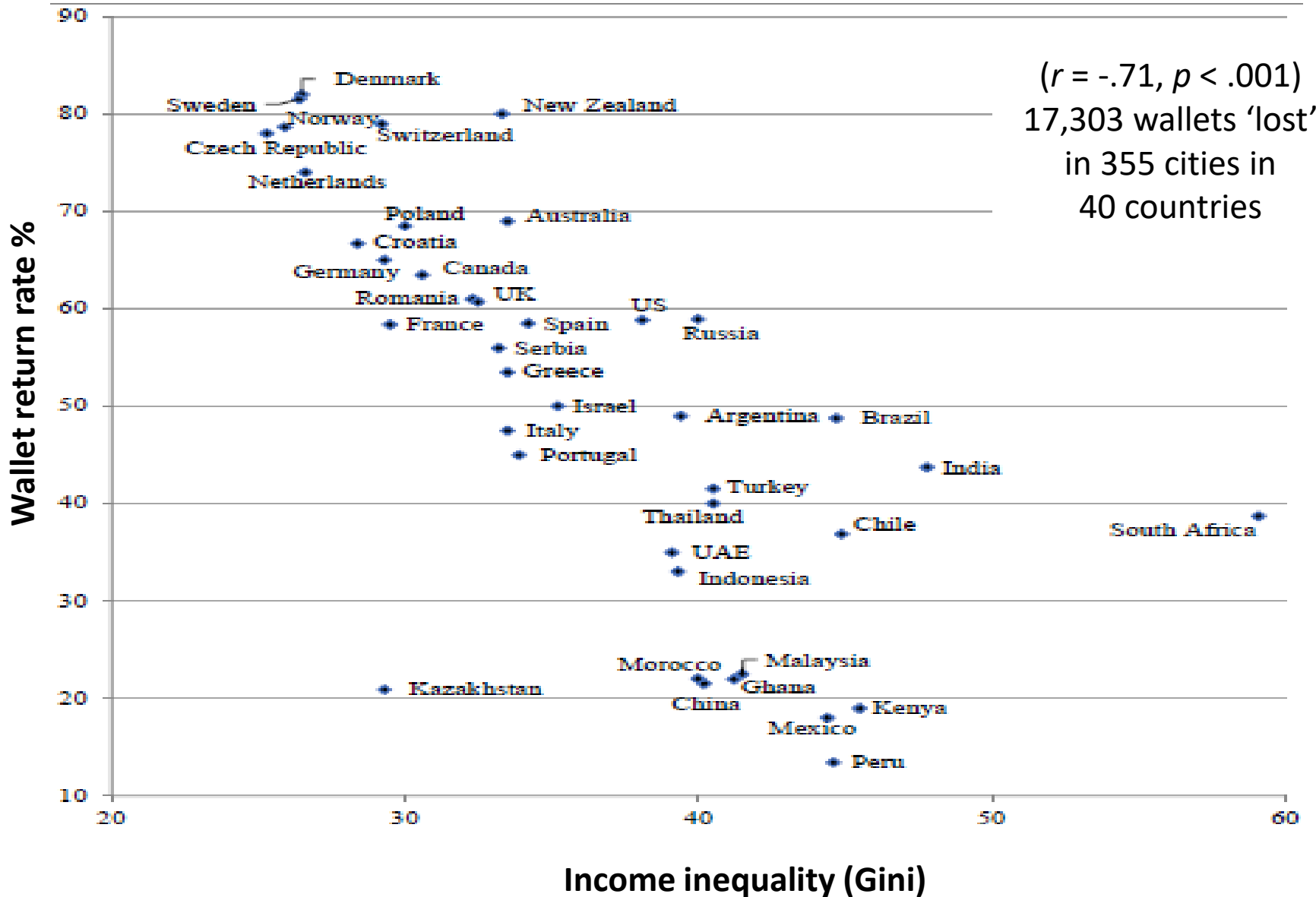
Elgar, F. J., et al. (2020). "Research paper The trouble with trust: Time-series analysis of social capital, income inequality, and COVID-19 deaths in 84 countries." *Social Science & Medicine*: 113365

Oronce, C. I. A., et al. (2020). "Association Between State-Level Income Inequality and COVID-19 Cases and Mortality in the USA." *Journal of General Internal Medicine*: 1-3

Mollalo, A., et al. (2020). "GIS-based spatial modeling of COVID-19 incidence rate in the continental United States" *Science of The Total Environment*: 138884

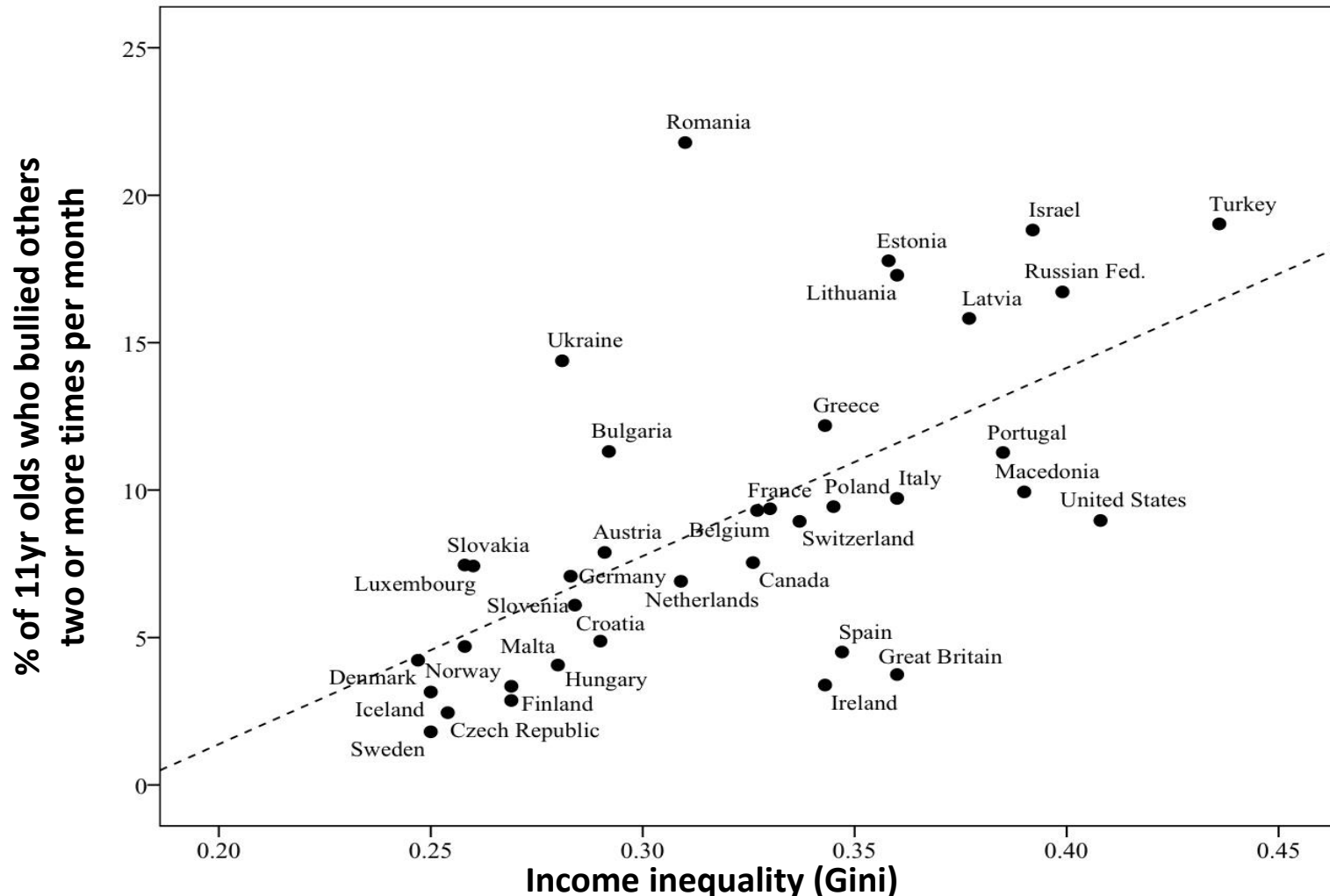
Davies JB. Economic Inequality and COVID-19 Deaths and Cases in the First Wave: A Cross-Country Analysis. Canadian Public Policy. 2021 Dec 1;47(4):537-53.

Fewer lost wallets are returned in countries with greater inequality

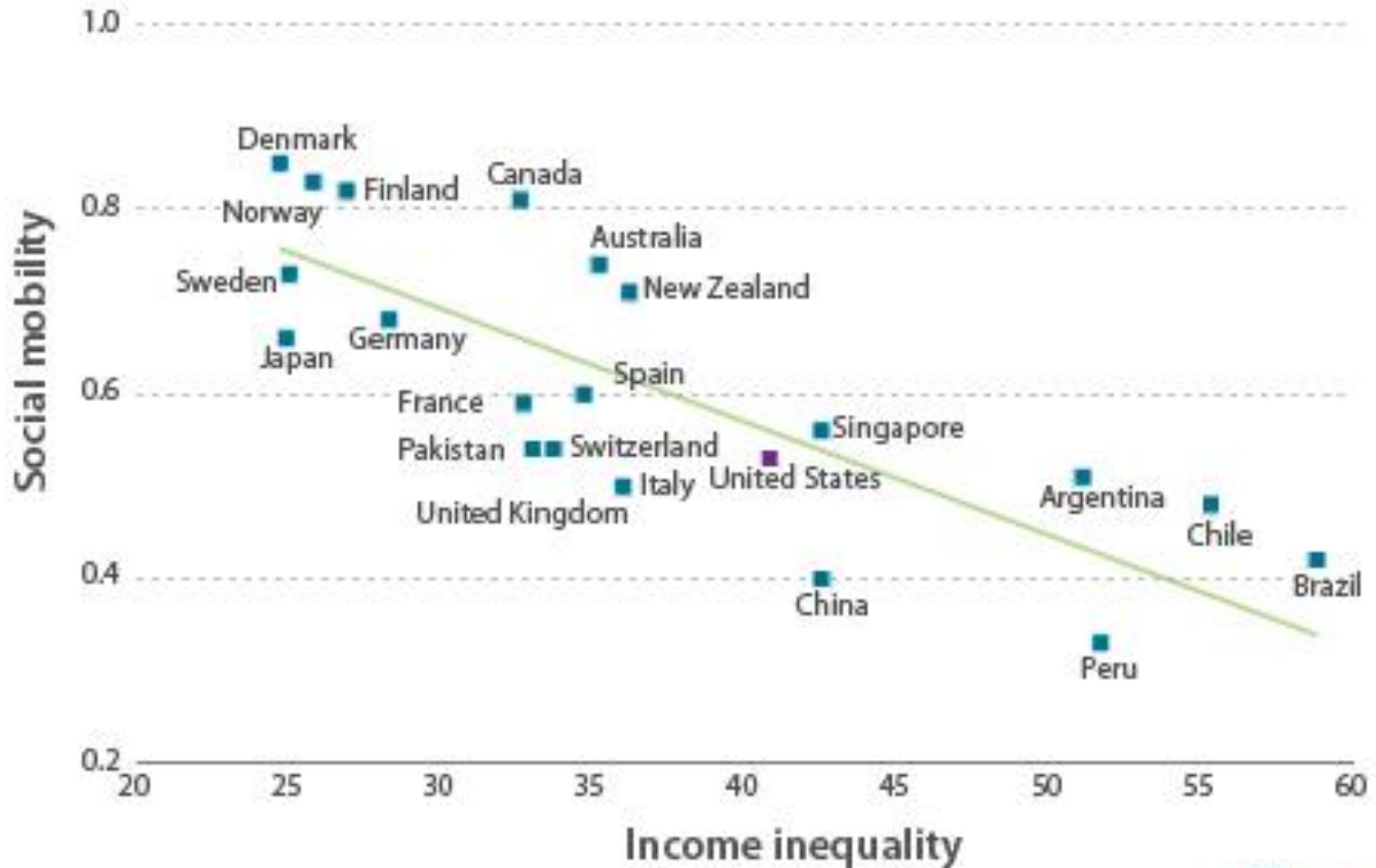


School bullying is much more common in countries with bigger income differences.

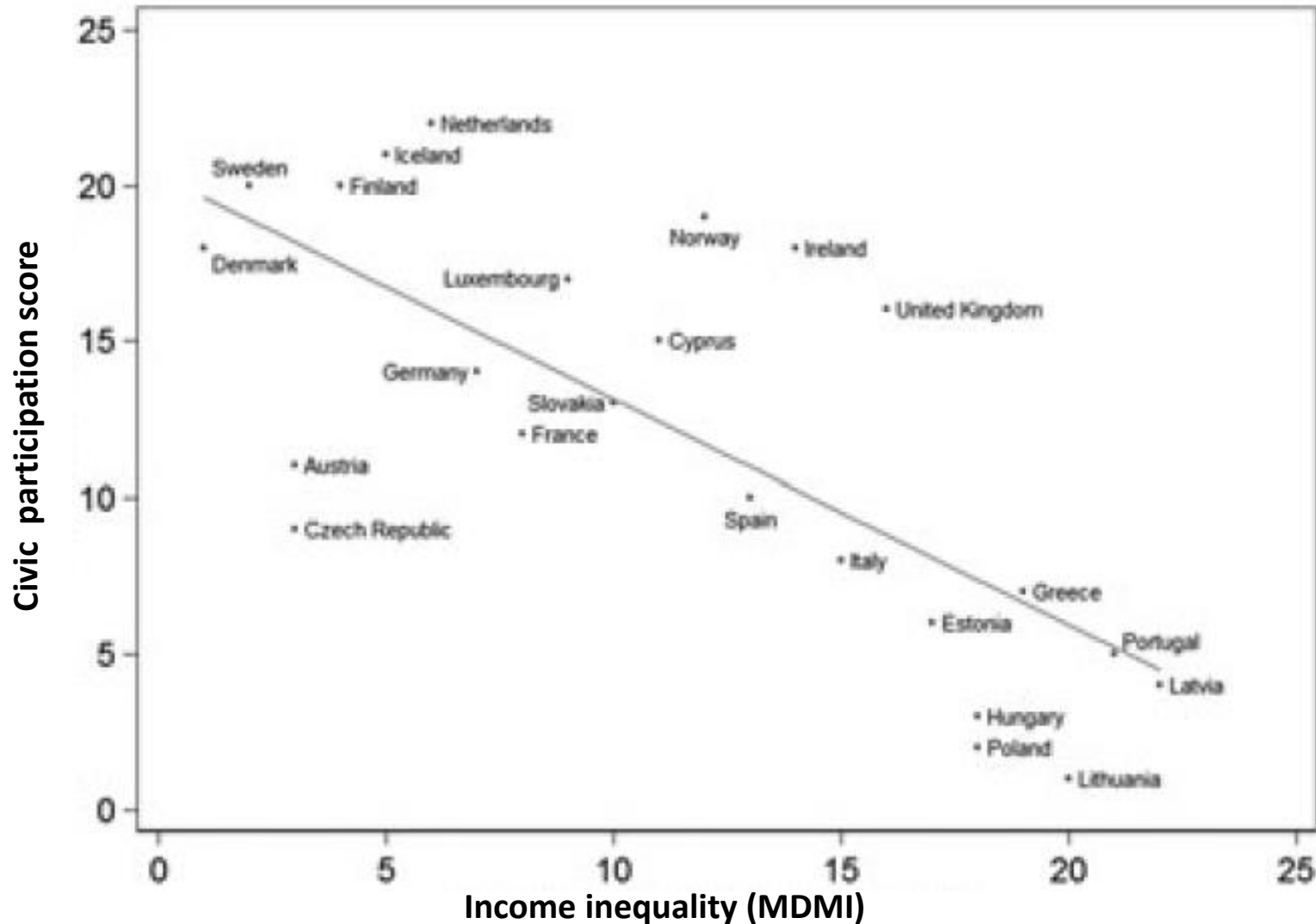
11-year-olds in 37 countries ($r = .62$)



Where income inequalities are larger, there is less social mobility



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

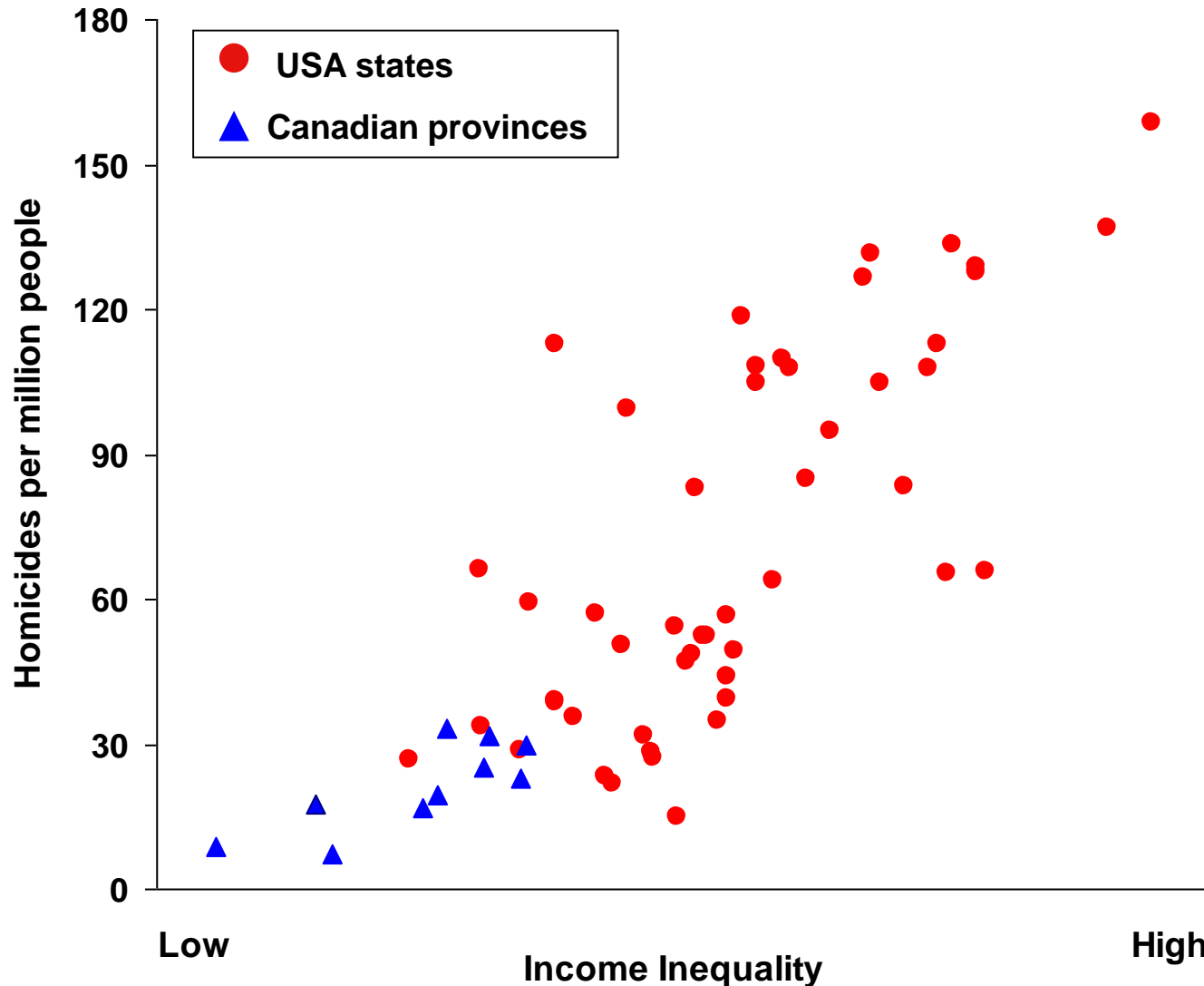


Lancee B, Van de Werfhorst HG. Income inequality and participation: A comparison of 24 European countries. *Social Science Research*. 2012; 41(5):1166-78.

People in more unequal countries trust each other less



Homicide rates are higher in more unequal US states and Canadian provinces



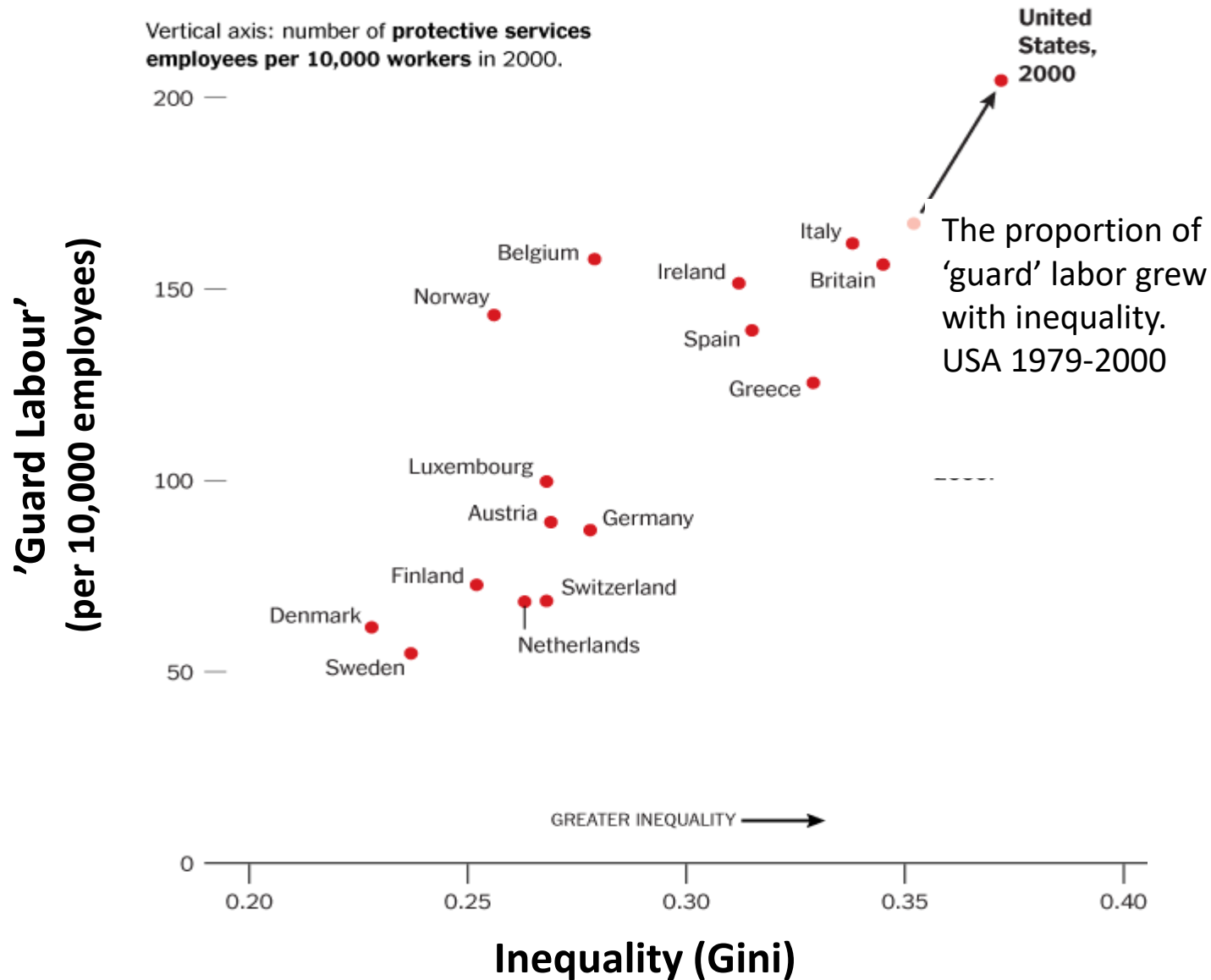
Cuernavaca, Mexico



'Armed Response' - Pretoria, South Africa.

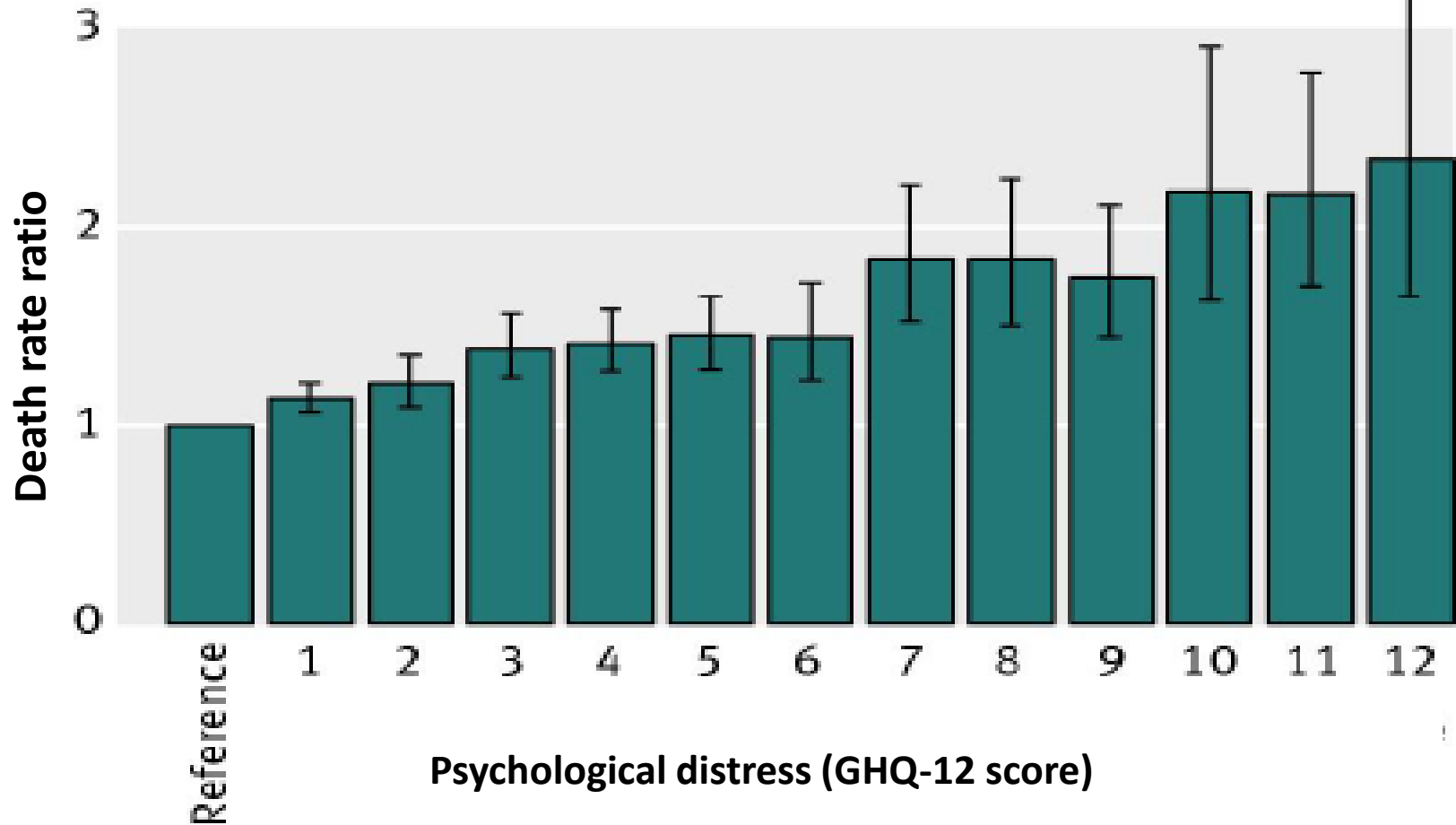


More unequal societies need more “guard labor”



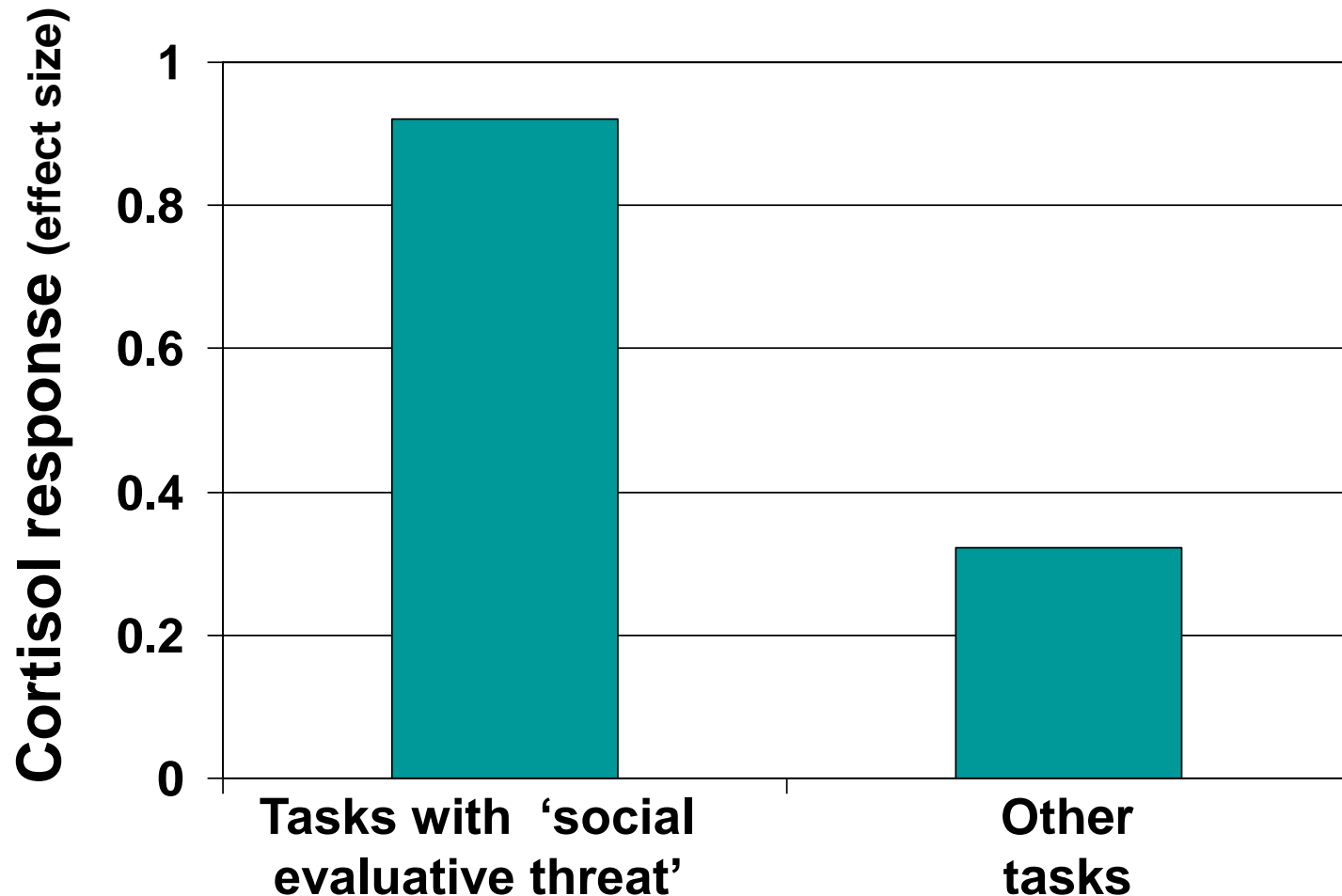
Even low levels of stress raise death rates

(pooled analysis from 10 prospective cohort studies)



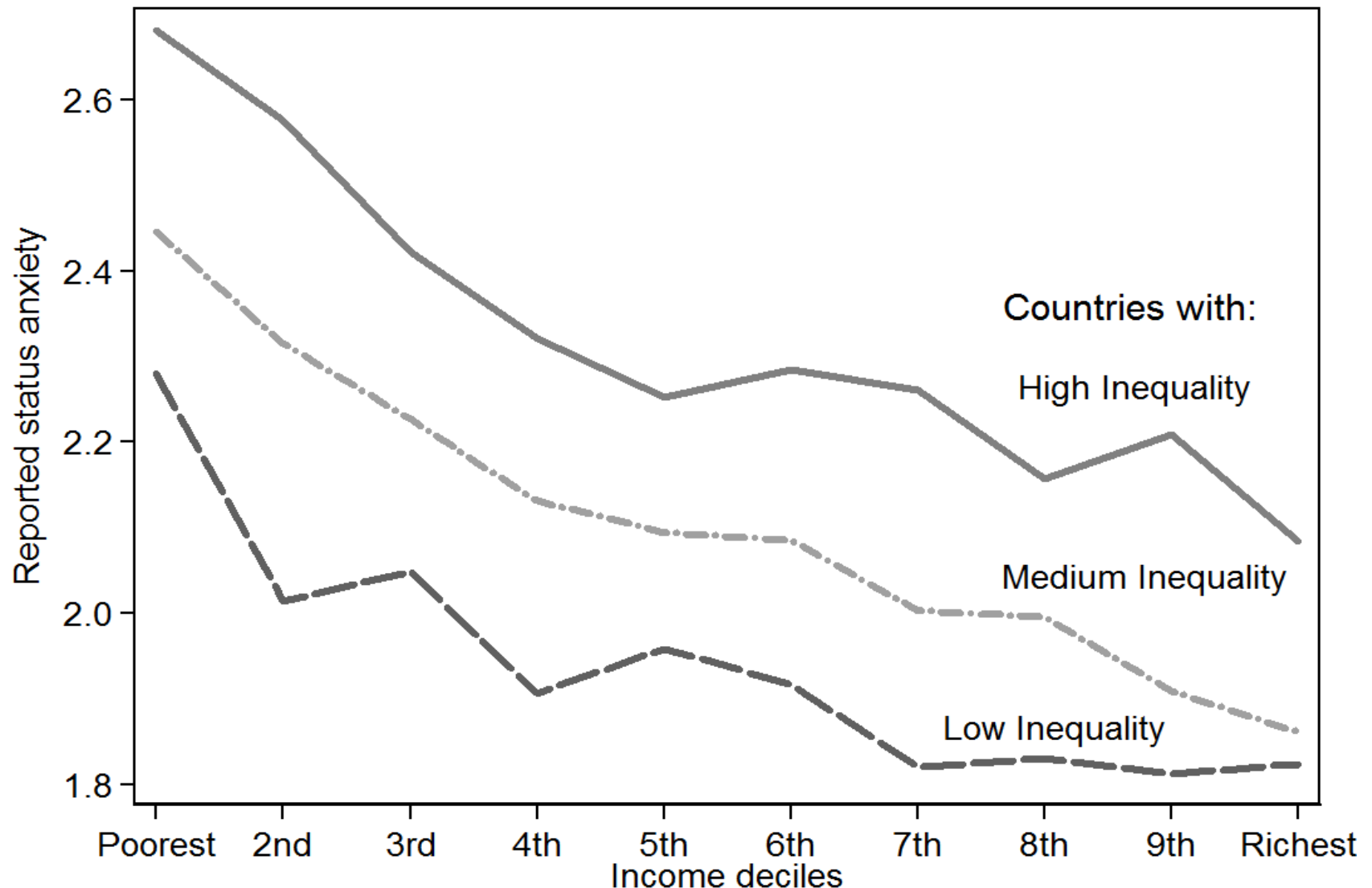
Russ TC, Stamatakis E, Hamer M, Starr JM, Kivimäki M, Batty GD.
Association between psychological distress and mortality. *BMJ* 2012; 345: e4933.

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.

Status anxiety is higher at all income levels in more unequal countries



Redrawn from Layte and Whelan (2014), data kindly provided by Richard Layte

Inequality increases conspicuous consumption and consumerism

- **People in more unequal areas of the USA are more likely to buy high status cars**

Bricker J., et al. Signaling Status: The Impact of Relative Income on Household Consumption. Finance and Economics Discussion Series, Divisions of Research & Statistics and Monetary Affairs, Federal Reserve Board, Washington, D.C. 2014

- **People in more unequal US states and more unequal countries are more likely to buy status goods**

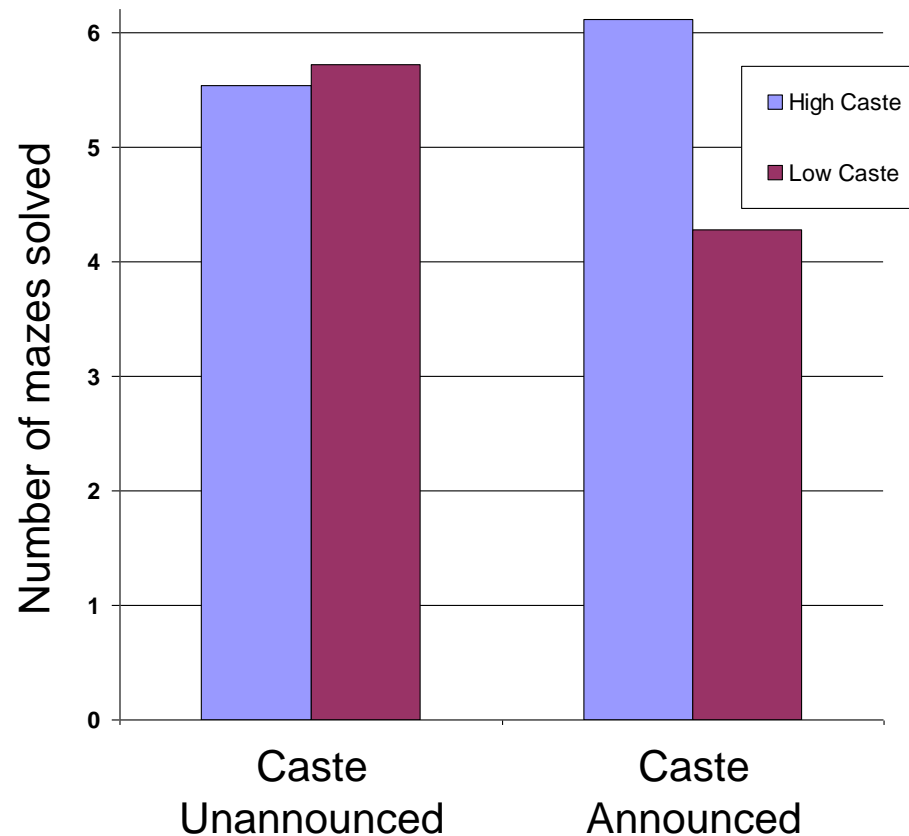
Walasek L, Brown GDA. "Income Inequality, Income, and Internet Searches for Status Goods. Social Indicators Research: 1-14. 2015. Walasek L, Brown GD. "Inequality and status seeking. Psychol Sci. 2015; 26(4):527-33



Because you're worth it
L'ORÉAL
PARIS

Stereotype Threat

The effect of caste identity on children's performance

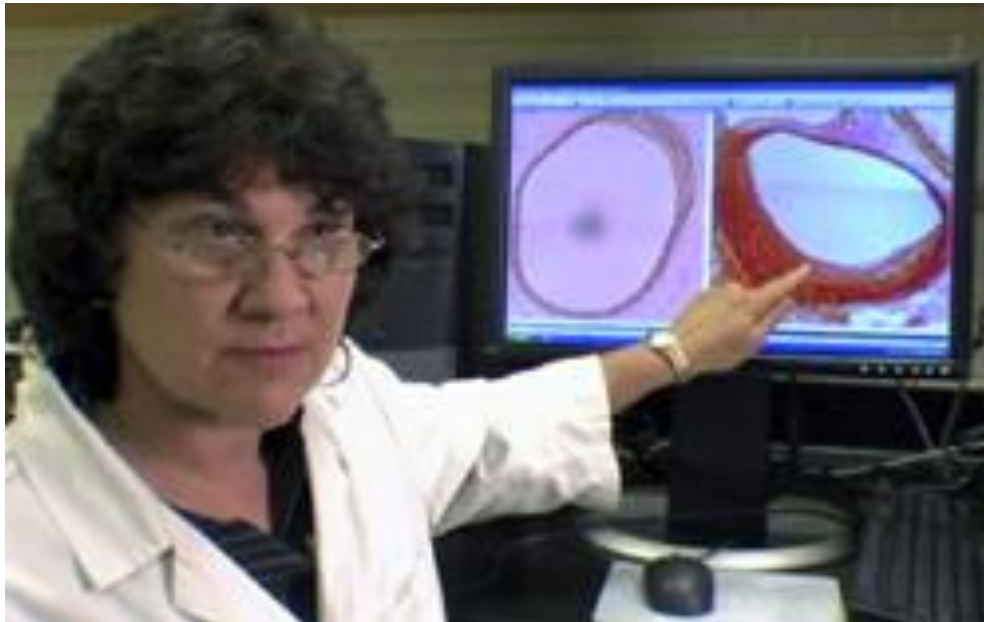


Social hierarchy in non-human primates

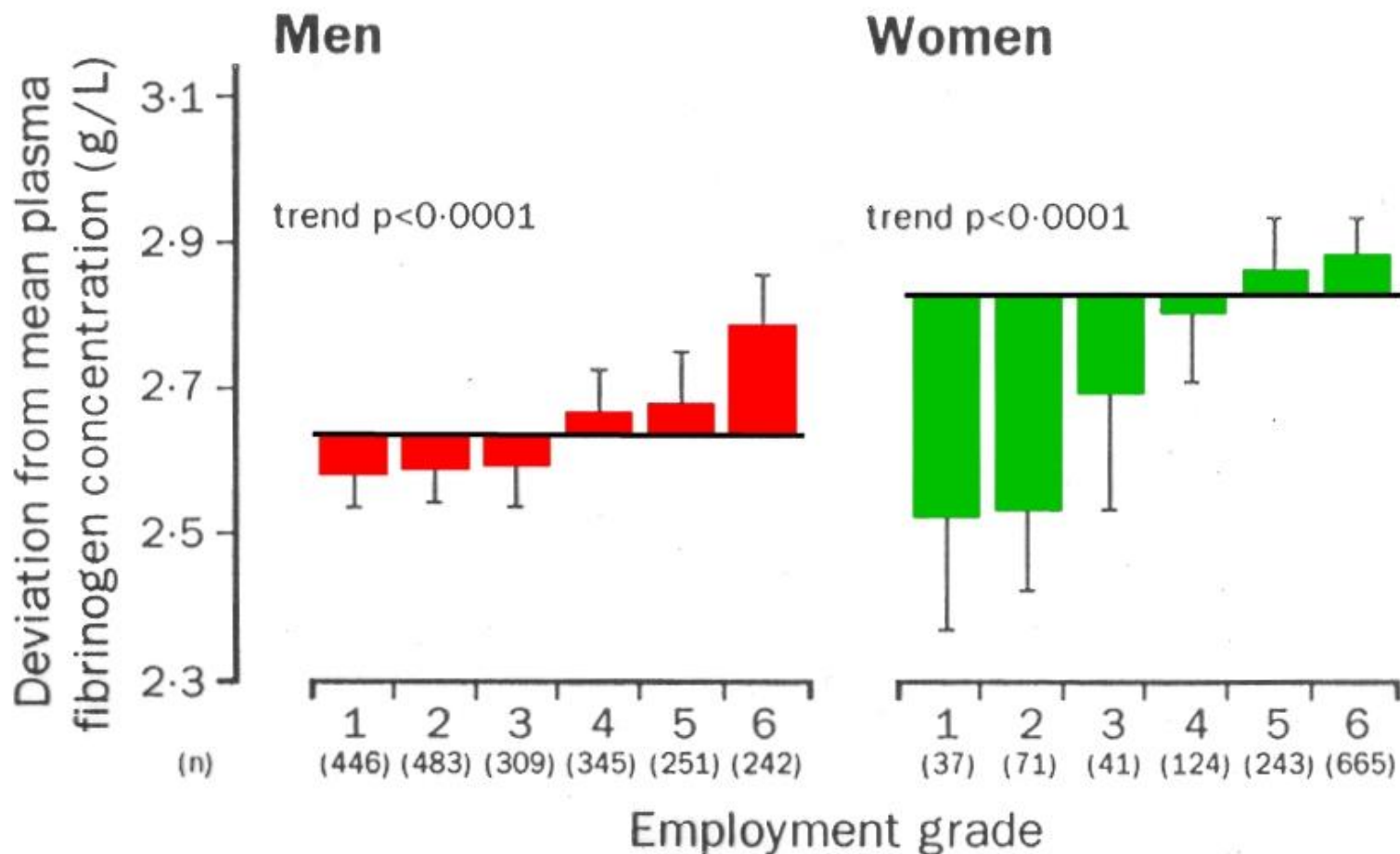
**Robert Sapolsky studies
baboons in the wild**



**Carol Shively studies
macaques in captivity**



Plasma fibrinogen by employment grade among Civil Servants, Whitehall II.



(Adjusted for age, ethnic origin and women's menopausal status)

The Dominance Behavioural System

Johnson SL, Leedom LJ, Muhtadie L.

The Dominance Behavioral System and Psychopathology.
Psychological Bulletin, 2012; 138(4): 692-743.

Findings:-

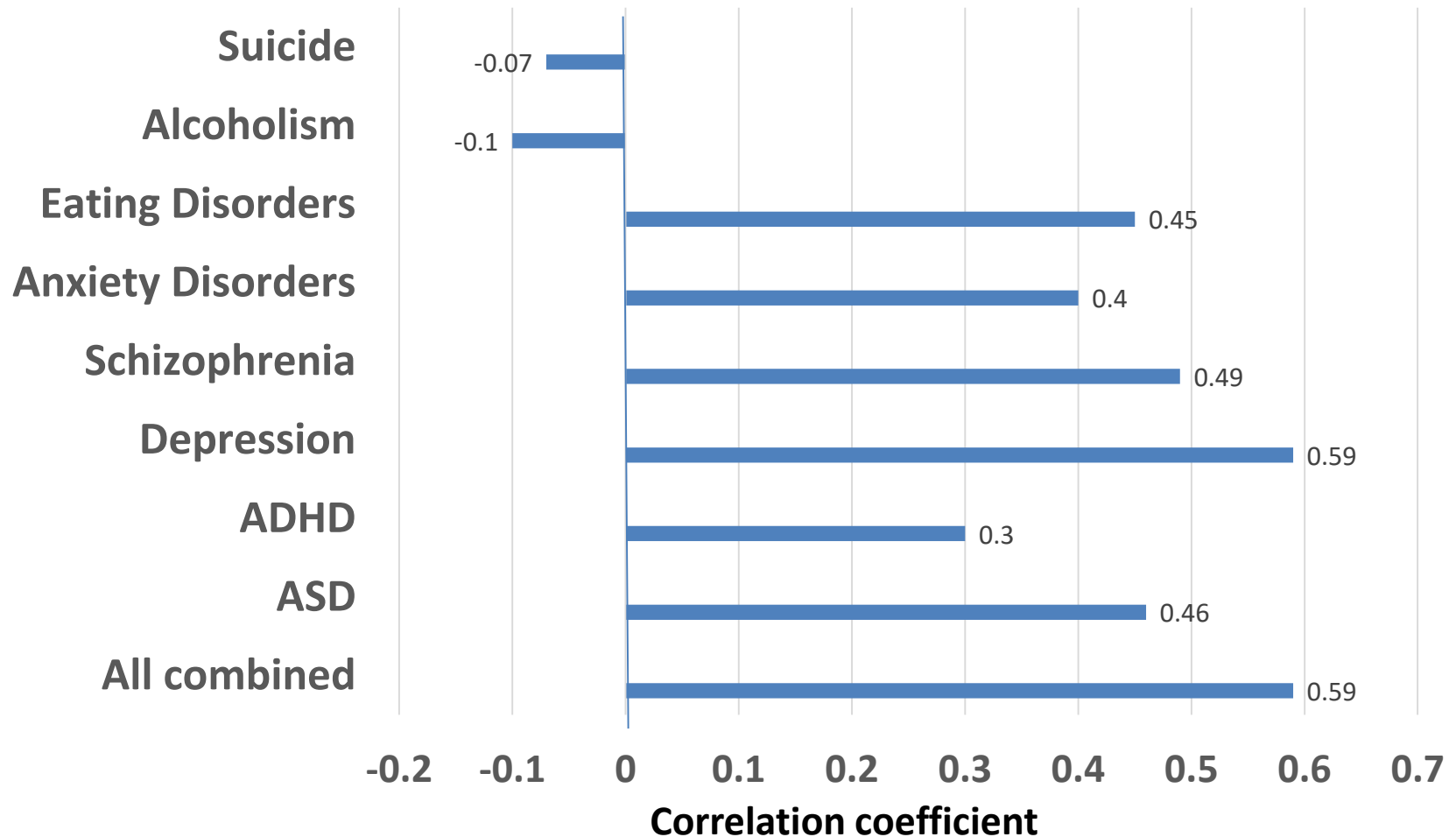
- **Anxiety and depression are related to subordination, to submissiveness and to the desire to avoid subordination.**
- **Disruptive behavior disorders, mania and narcissistic traits are related to inflated self-perceptions of power or a heightened focus on achieving social dominance and recognition**

Mental illness is more common in more unequal societies



Psychological problems and income inequality

36 OECD countries



Barbalat G, Franck N. Ecological study of the association between mental illness with human development, income inequalities and unemployment across OECD countries. *BMJ open*. 2020 Apr 1;10(4):e035055

NOT PRETTY
ENOUGH

NOT SMART
ENOUGH



NOT GOOD
ENOUGH

NOT FUNNY
ENOUGH

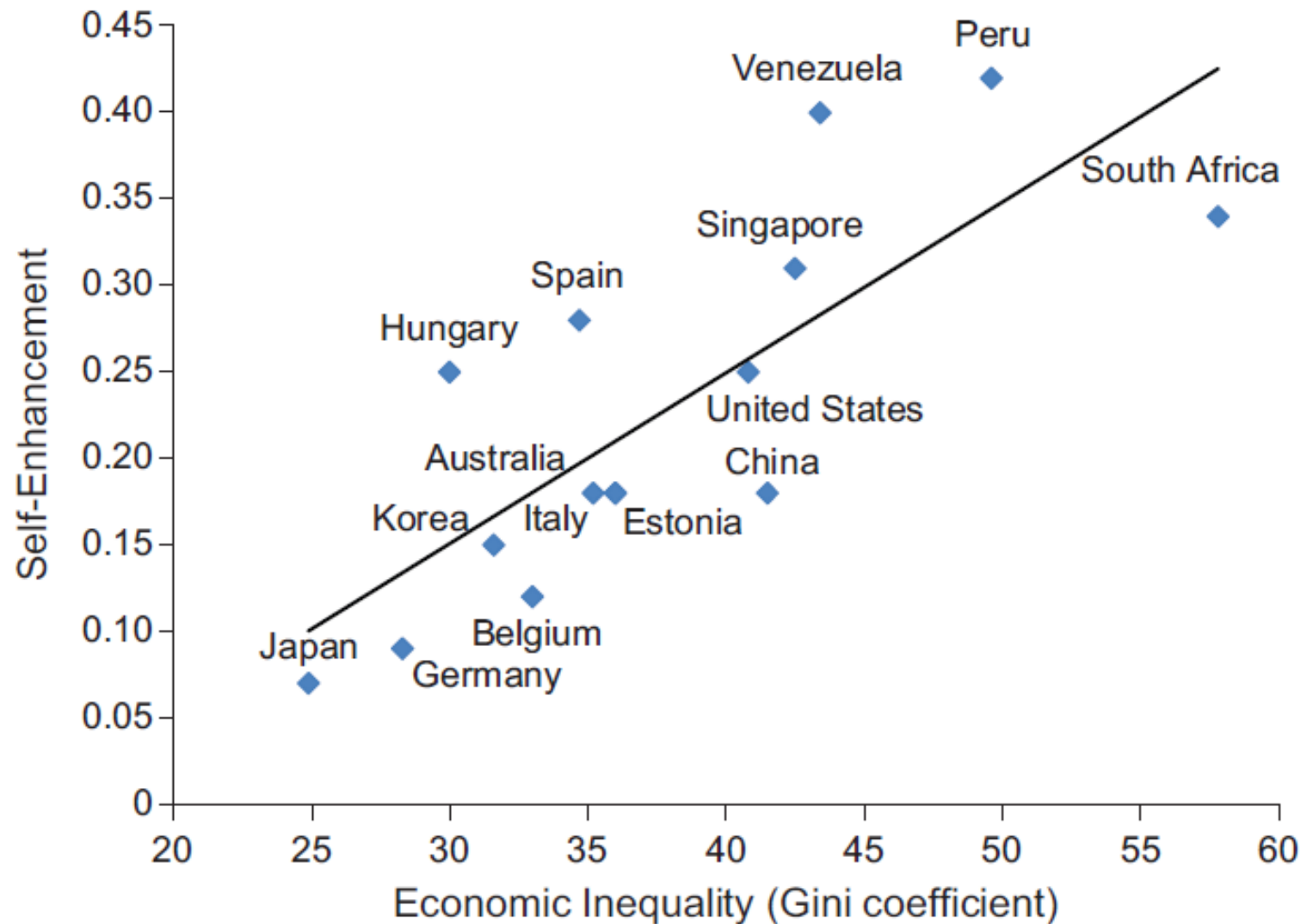
Depression is more common in more unequal states



Messias E, Eaton WW, et al. . Economic grand rounds: Income inequality and depression across the United States: an ecological study." Psychiatric Services, 2011; 62(7): 710-2.

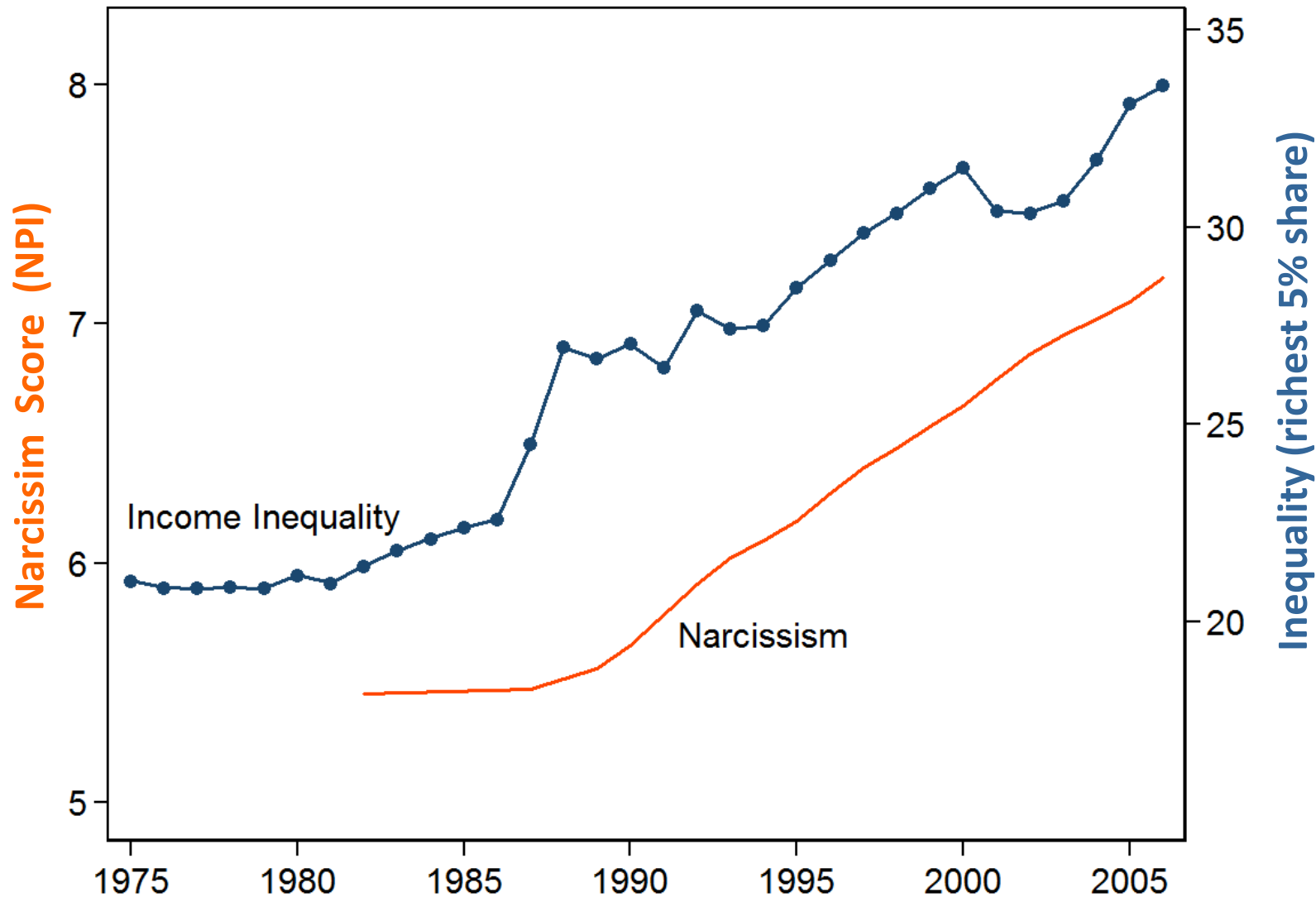


Self-enhancement increases in more unequal societies



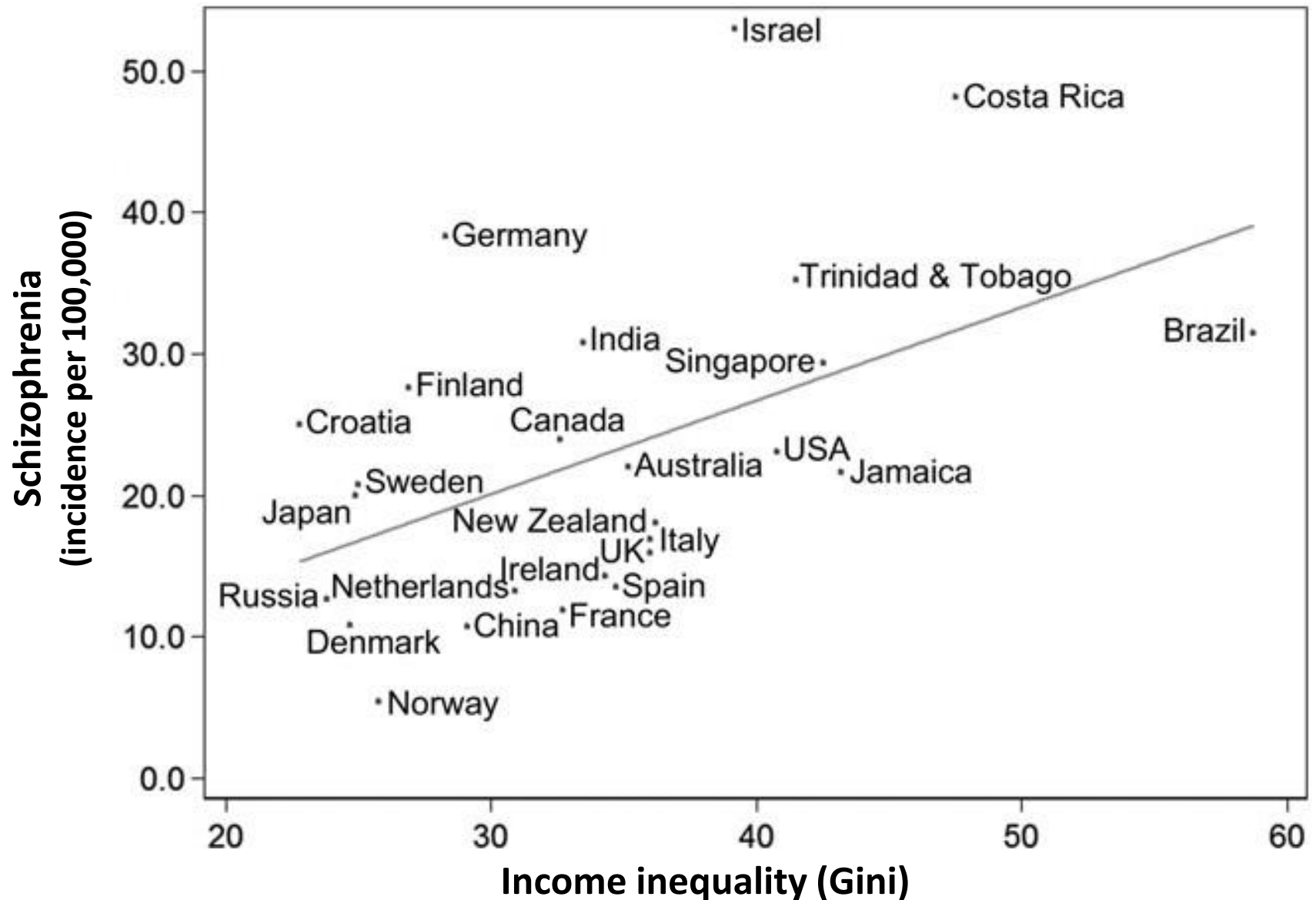
Loughnan S, et al. Economic Inequality is linked to biased self-perception.
Psychological Science, 2011; 22: 1254

US college students became more narcissistic as income inequality increased

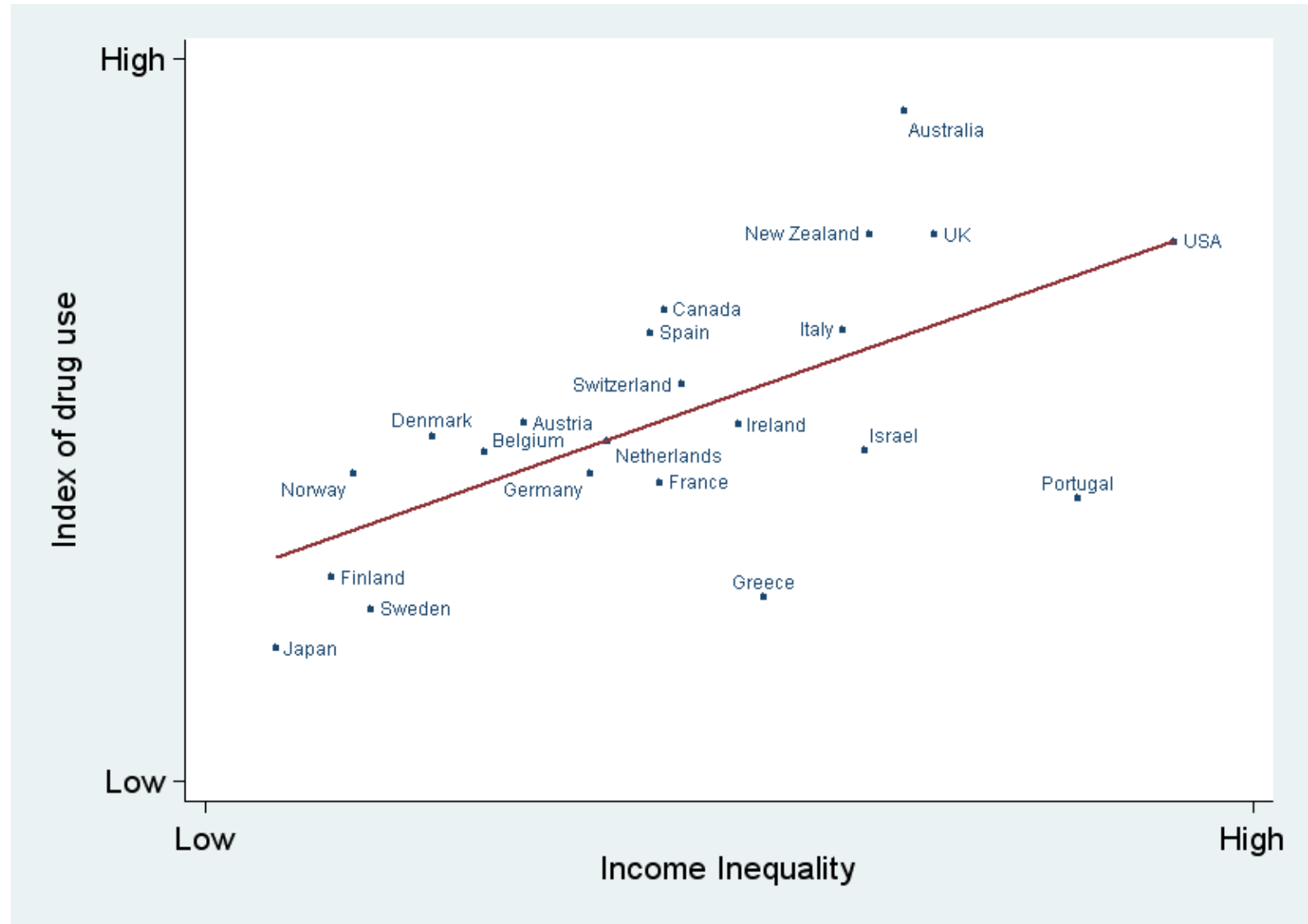


Inequality data from World Top Incomes Database
Narcissism data from Twenge JM, et al., Journal of Personality 2008; 76(4): 875-901.

Schizophrenia is more common in more unequal countries



Drug Use is More Common in More Unequal Countries



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

Source: Wilkinson & Pickett, *The Spirit Level* (2009)



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”



Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (1974)

For at least 90% of human existence, we lived in highly egalitarian societies

**The San, South Africa.
Paintings up to 26,000
years old**



**Lascaux, France.
Paintings around 20,000
years old**



What can be done?

Income differences before tax

- Stronger Trade Unions
- Increase company democracy - employee ownership etc
- Promote more directors from within companies

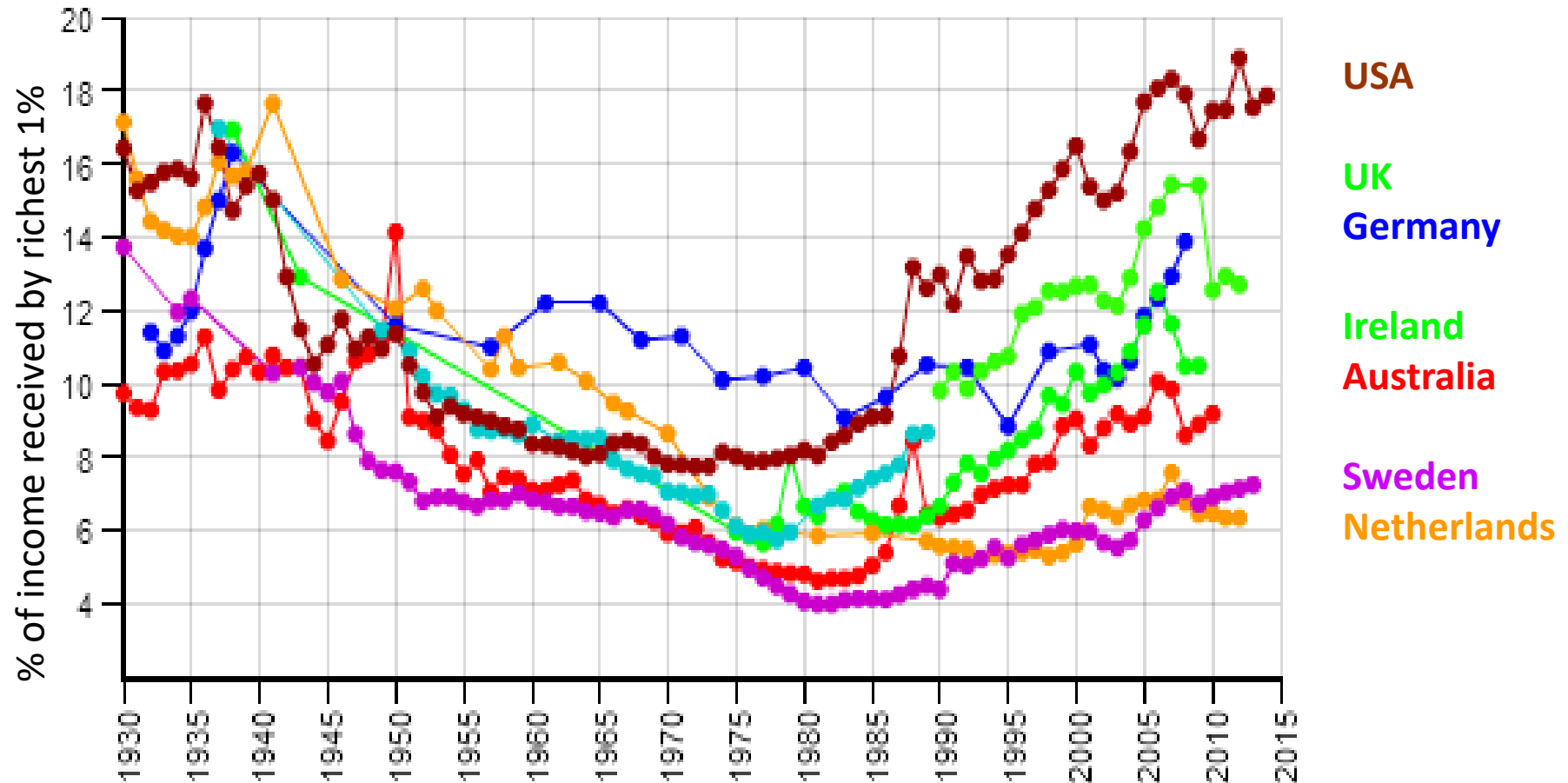


Taxes & benefits

- Stop tax avoidance
- End tax havens
- Make taxation progressive again

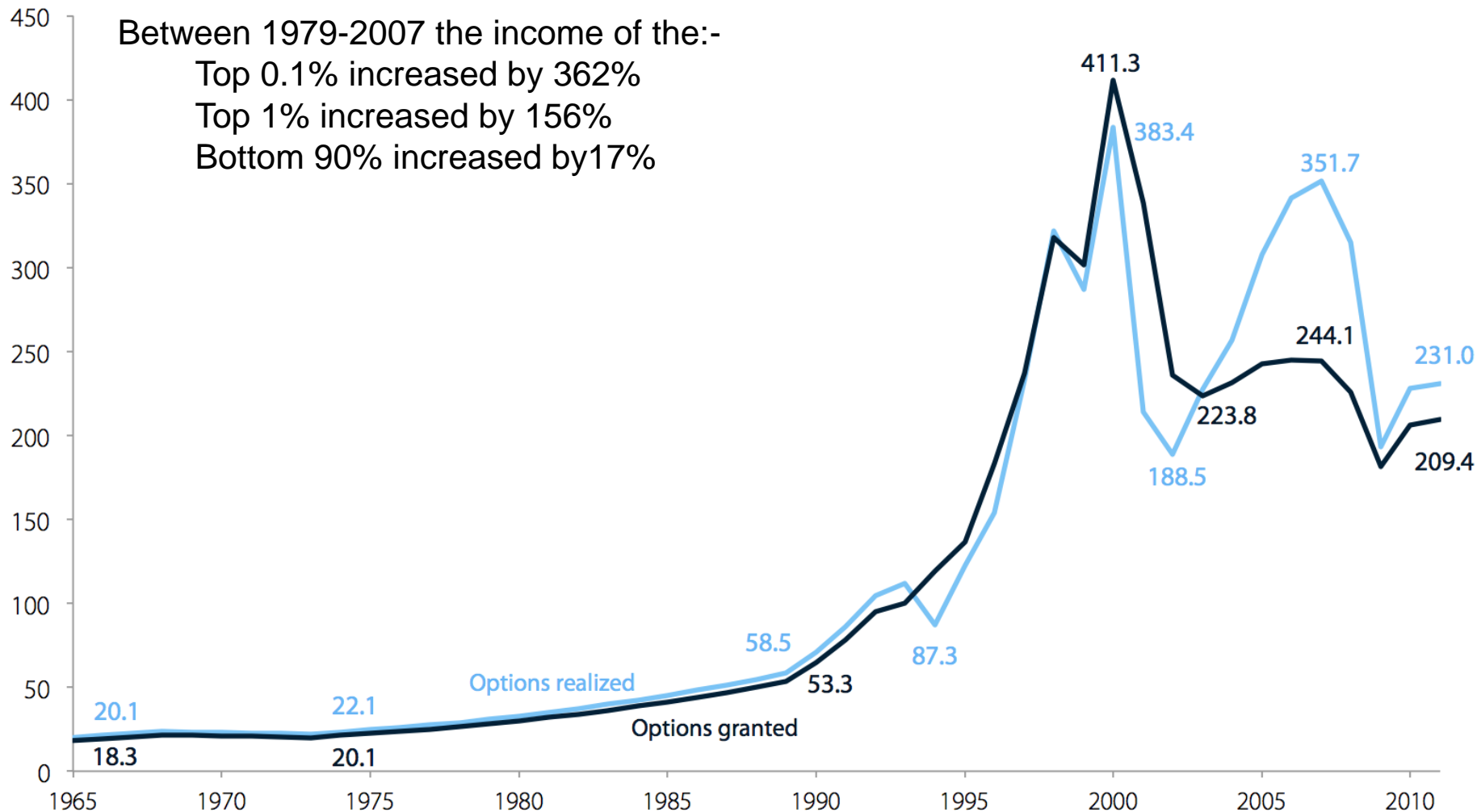
**Sustainability needs
greater equality**

Percent of all income going to top 1% 1930-2014

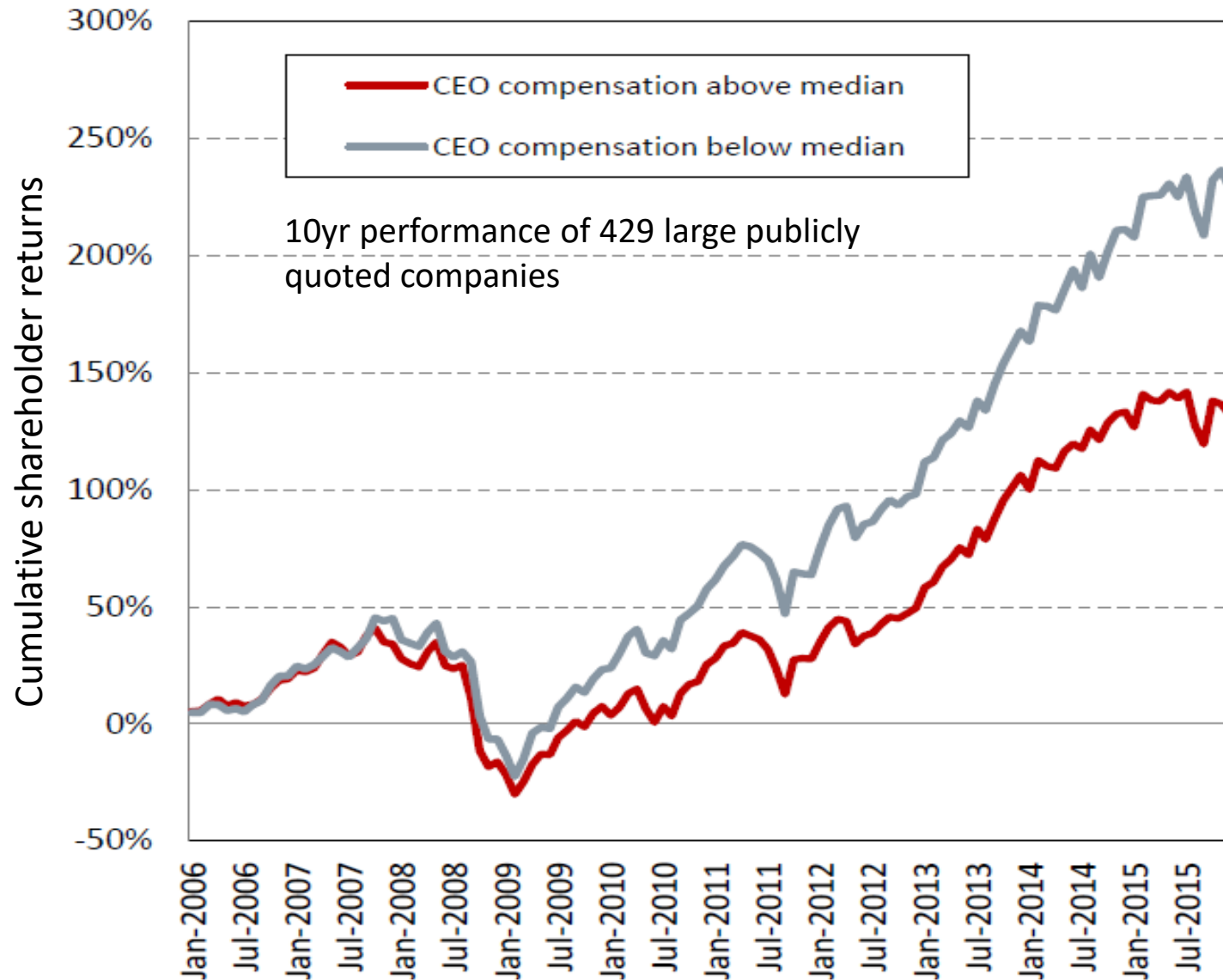


Source: World Top Incomes Database

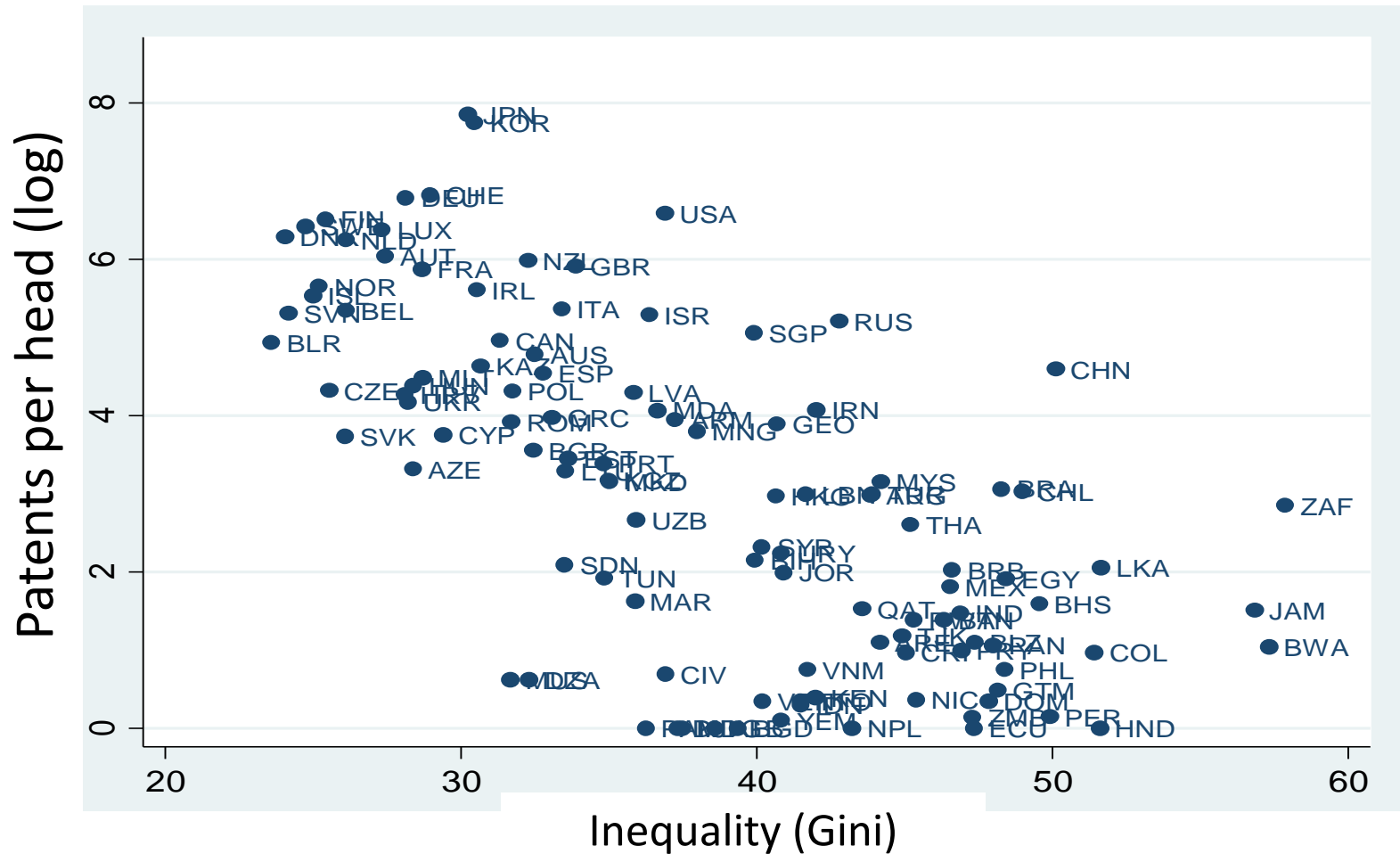
Changing ratio of CEO pay to average pay of production & non-supervisory workers in top 350 US companies



Companies paying CEOs above the median performed less well than those paying below the median



More unequal countries have fewer patents per head



Trade Unions membership (% workforce) and Share of Income going to top 10% (USA, 1918-2008)



Colin Gordon's analysis of Historical Statistics for the US, unionstats.com, Piketty and Saez 2003, and World Top Incomes Database. Economic Policy Institute, Washington DC.

Economic democracy:-

- **“turns companies from being pieces of property into communities”**
- **reduces pay ratios within companies**
- **transforms the experience of work**
- **redistributes wealth & reduces unearned income**
- **improves productivity**
- **makes companies more environmentally & socially responsible**

Boards can include employee, community and consumer representatives

Thank You

Individual differences may explain who falls, but the height of the hurdles explains how many fall

