

## Equality -- Good For All

I recently attended a talk by someone who had written a remarkable book. It was the result of many years of research by an epidemiologist -- (someone trained to use statistics to trace the source of an epidemic.)

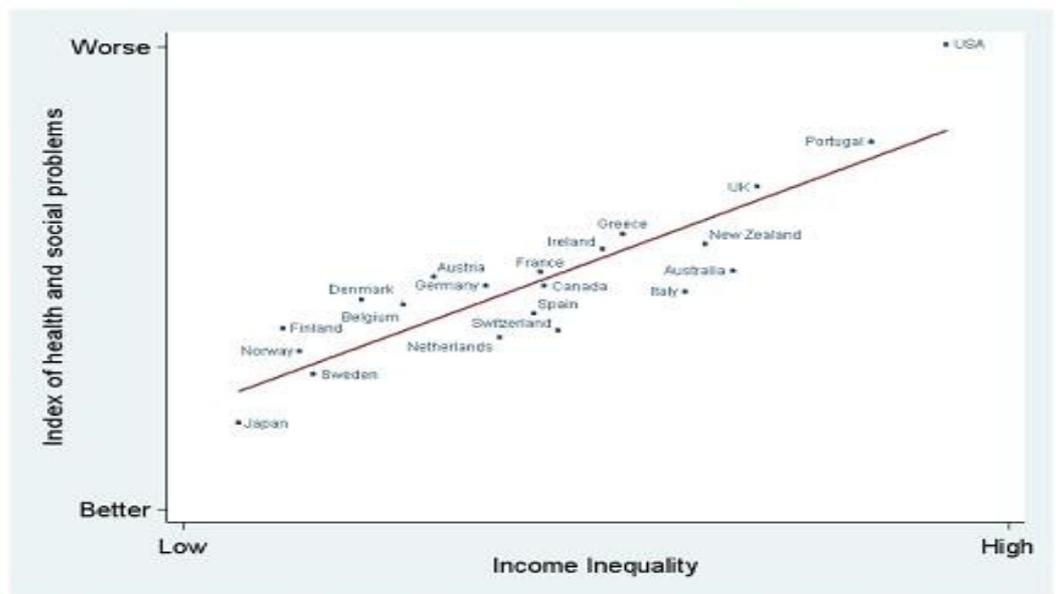
The book was called "Spirit Level" and was a study of levels of wage inequality across the world's 25 richest countries. The author had used his statistical expertise to plot graphs of inequality against various social ills in society. To plot inequality, he didn't compare the very poorest to the very richest. Rather he compared the average wage -- what most of us get, against the very highest wages that only a few get -- bankers, chief executives, etc. The results were truly remarkable.

The countries with the greatest inequality -- regardless of how wealthy they were overall, had worse problems than the other countries. They were worse in life expectancy, murder, education, infant mortality, imprisonment, teenage births, trust, obesity, mental illness, and social mobility.

So it seems that in rich countries, a smaller gap between rich and poor means a healthier, happier and more successful population. Just look at the US, the UK, Portugal, and New Zealand in the top right of the graph, doing much worse than Japan, Sweden, Finland, or Norway in the bottom left.

### 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



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

[www.equalitytrust.org.uk](http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk)

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So more economic growth in itself does not lead to a happier population. In fact there is no relation between income per head and social well-being in rich countries.

If the UK were more equal, we'd be better off as a population. For example the evidence suggests that if we halved inequality here -- murder rates could halve; mental illness could reduce by two thirds; obesity could half; imprisonment could reduce by 80%; teenage

births could reduce by 80%; levels of trust could increase by 85%. And it's not just the poor people who would do better. The evidence suggests people all the way up would benefit. (I believe this book has been studied by the Prime Minister !)

Of course we are often told that "we need to pay these high wages to attract the best people". Yet study after study has shown that this is simply not true. There is no correlation between six-figure wages and the success of your company, department or council. It's just that we have got into a culture of greed. Food for thought. God Bless, *Revd Peter.*