



Prof. em. Richard Wilkinson

„Poverty, Inequality and Child Wellbeing“

Child health and wellbeing is powerfully affected by the quality of family life. But family life serves partly to pass on parents' experience of adversity to children, not only through direct psychological effects, but also through epigenetic processes.

Key to understanding the effects of poverty is to understand our sensitivity to low social status. Poverty is, as Marshall Sahlins pointed out, not simply a relationship between people and poor material conditions. It has instead to be understood as a social relation, as an inferior social status. Money and living standards matter primarily because they are markers of social status which affect the way we feel in relation to others and the way others see us.

Bigger income differences between rich and poor make class and status – issues to do with superiority and inferiority – more important. They become more powerful determinants of a wide range of outcomes including health and wellbeing, the strength of community life, the frequency of bullying, the educational performance of school children, social mobility, teenage birthrates and obesity.

In short, all the problems which are related to lower social status get worse when social status differences are increased. The only surprise is that bigger income differences increases the prevalence of these problems throughout societies – not just among the poor.

Zur Person:

Richard Wilkinson studied economic history and the philosophy of science at the London School of Economics before training in epidemiology. From the 1970s onwards, his research focused on increasing public awareness of the injustice of widening social class differences in death rates. He has played a formative role in international research on the social determinants of health and on the societal effects of income inequality. His books and papers have drawn attention to the tendency for societies with bigger income differences between rich and poor to have a higher prevalence of a wide range of health and social problems.

Two of his books have been the subject of documentary films – one called *The Great Leveller* for the Channel 4 Equinox series broadcast in prime time in 1996 (to coincide with the publication of his *Unhealthy Societies*) and another, called *The Divide* (based on *The Spirit Level*) released in April 2016 and now available on Netflix. Richard is now Professor Emeritus of Social Epidemiology at the University of Nottingham Medical School, Honorary Professor at University College London and Visiting Professor at the University of York. He wrote *The Spirit Level* with Kate Pickett, a best seller now available in 24 languages. It won the 2011 Political Studies Association *Publication of the Year Award* and the 2010 Bristol Festival of Ideas Prize. He co-founded The Equality Trust (with support from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust). In 2013 Richard received Solidar's Silver Rose Award and received Community Access Unlimited's 'Humanitarian of the Year' Award. In 2014 the Irish Cancer Society awarded him the Charles Cully Memorial medal. In the last few years he has given many hundreds of conference addresses and media interviews round the world, including at WHO, the EU, OECD and the World Bank.



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