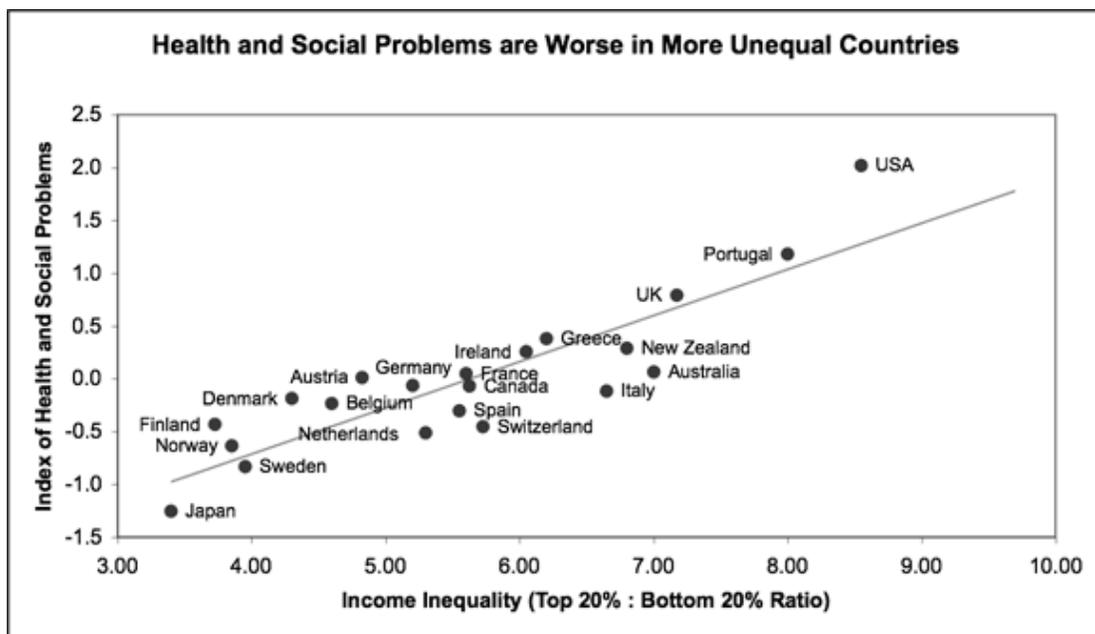


Large Economic Disparities Harm Everyone

Our large and growing economic disparities are causing pervasive harm, extending into our society and our personal lives in ways not widely known. Large economic disparities also significantly harm the wealthy. Health and social problems are strongly correlated with income inequality. The graph shows this strong correlation. It is from the book *The Spirit Level* by research epidemiologists Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson. The indicators that make up the Index of Health and Social Problems are: life expectancy, math proficiency and literacy, infant mortality, homicides, imprisonment, teenage births, trust, obesity, mental illness, drug and alcohol addiction, and social mobility.

Studies have shown more than a correlation: Inequality has a causal relation to health and social problems. [One study suggested that the loss of life from income inequality in the U.S. in 1995, before the larger disparities we experience today, was the equivalent of the combined loss of life due to lung cancer, diabetes, motor-vehicle accidents, HIV-related causes, suicide and homicide.](#)



One explanation for income inequality's apparent effect on health and social problems is "status anxiety." Wide economic disparities exacerbate status competition and cause stress, which can lead to poor health and other negative outcomes. Some research has compared different groups in different countries and found that those in lower socio-economic groups in more equal countries sometimes do better than those in higher socio-economic groups in more unequal countries.

The U.S. is 30th in life expectancy. The population of Cuba, which has a per capita GDP of \$6,790 compared to our \$52,980 (about one-eighth of ours), has a higher life expectancy and a lower infant mortality rate than we do. Social determinants of health and poor access to health care for tens of millions of Americans are responsible. As Pickett and Wilkinson's research details, the social determinants of health are associated with economic inequality.