

cross-sectional in design, the inferences that can be drawn from the findings in support or opposition to Wilkinson's hypothesis are contradictory. The finding that those on high incomes were more likely to report common mental disorders in areas of the greatest income inequality, fits comfortably within Wilkinson's model depicting declining social cohesion, combined with increasing crime and fear. However the second finding, that those on low incomes reported a lower prevalence of common mental disorders in areas of high, rather than low income inequality may appear contrary to this model. However, this finding may help redirect research along an emerging avenue exploring the importance of the appropriate size/scale of comparisons. Recent research has explored this hypothesis at a much smaller scale, examining effects at the level of localities in England and Wales (Boyle *et al.*, 1999). Wilkinson's work contains an inherent contradiction on this issue. He argues that the societal level is the most

appropriate scale of comparison to explore inequality and health, while basing much of his support for his thesis on studies at a much lower scale.

Weich *et al.*'s second finding may reflect income differences in the scale of comparisons. Research exploring the mental maps of individuals, which may influence such comparisons, show dramatic differences by age, gender and particularly by income (Lynch, 1960). Although it is dated and overplayed, Stacey's (1960) comment that "The basis of the upper class social circle is national, with the West End of London as its town centre, *The Times* as its local paper, and certain national events, e.g. Ascott, as its focal points", helps demonstrate this point.

Britain is no exception to the international trend of increasing socially homogenous housing estates. Therefore, it is likely that those on the lowest incomes are living in poor, socially segregated areas. They may also be using more local scales of comparison, and in their eyes may in fact

be living in areas of low income inequality. Further work is urgently needed to explore the importance of scale in the inequality and health model, paying particular attention to the effects of income, gender and age on such comparisons.

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One hundred years ago

The private class of insane

The London County Council has recently announced to medical practitioners that it has provided accommodation for about sixty female patients having a legal settlement in the county of London at the Manor House, Horton, Epsom, at a weekly charge, as at present fixed, of 15s., exclusive of clothing and special luxuries. Full particulars

can be obtained from Mr. R. W. Partridge, clerk of the Asylums Committee. At the Claybury Asylum provision is also made for private patients who can claim a settlement in the county of London at a charge of 30s. a week, and for others at a charge of £2. This action of the London County Council has our hearty approval. Similar arrangements have been made in other counties, and the results have proved satisfactory

in affording most needful accommodation to the poorer class of the private insane.

REFERENCE

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