

<b>Institution:</b> University of York		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 21 – Sociology		
<b>Title of case study:</b> The Impact of Social Inequality on Mental Health and Psychosocial Wellbeing		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2010-2018		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Kate Pickett	Professor	2003 - present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Research undertaken by Kate Pickett at the University of York with Richard Wilkinson, has been pivotal in arguing that status hierarchies and relative income inequality strongly impact wider human health and wellbeing, not only at the bottom but at every rung of the social ladder. It has profoundly shaped policy debate and implementation at a range of national and supra-national levels. <u>Firstly</u>, it has influenced the scientific review of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. <u>Secondly</u>, it has directly shaped the European Commission's work on the European Child Guarantee. <u>Thirdly</u>, it has informed the OECD's work on inclusive growth, which led to the creation of the Wellbeing, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity (WISE) Centre. <u>Fourthly</u>, through work with The Equality Trust, 26 Fairness Commissions have been formed, leading to the successful Living Wage Campaign, implemented across 26 UK Councils (16 of these reported within the current REF period).</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The research, jointly conducted by Professor Kate Pickett and Honorary Visiting Professor Richard Wilkinson, includes 21 research articles and seven commentaries/editorials/invited pieces in peer-reviewed journals, and has informed two particularly influential monographs – 'The Spirit Level' published in 2009 (TSL), and the 'The Inner Level' [F] published in 2018 (TIL) – introducing the work to a wider audience via an innovative and accessible interdisciplinary account of how income inequality heightens the saliency of social class and status for health. Building upon the popular success of TSL, TIL offered a more scholarly focus, including extensive original research using a range of indicators of (in)equality, social cohesion, life chances, and health. This progressed TSL's analysis of how social inequality 'gets into our minds' through status anxiety with consequences for levels of mental illness, emotional disorders and other social problems (such as bullying, gambling, and substance abuse) [F].</p> <p>Now published in ten non-English editions, TIL has been extensively reviewed, discussed, and used by commentators, politicians and others in the international print media. It appeared in both The Observer and The Tablet 'Books of the Year' lists in 2018. The work has a distinct relevance at the current time, as Jeffrey Sachs notes in his Project Syndicate column: <i>"As Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson convincingly reported in two important books, 'The Spirit Level' and 'The Inner Level', higher inequality leads to worse overall health conditions, which significantly increases vulnerability to COVID-19 deaths. Moreover, higher inequality leads to lower social cohesion, less social trust and more political polarization, all of which negatively affect governments' ability and readiness to adopt strong control measures."</i> Sachs consequently appointed Pickett to the Vatican Commission on the Science and Ethics of Happiness and Wellbeing (2019-2021). This body of research is thus widely considered as a significant and pioneering contribution to current and future debates regarding the interrelatedness of health, economics and social inequality.</p> <p>In synthesising their own and others' empirical research, Wilkinson and Pickett have generated an innovative theoretical psychosocial framework for understanding the pathways through which income inequality adversely affects individuals and society. In doing this, they have established a number of significant features that differentiate affluent societies:</p>		

- People in affluent societies with lower income inequality gaps between rich and poor (such as Japan) are far less likely to suffer widespread health and related social problems than people in less equal societies with larger income inequality gaps (such as the UK). [C]
- More unequal societies have both a higher prevalence and a higher range of health and social problems, such as obesity, drug use, and imprisonment. [A][C][F]
- The population of a society as a whole is negatively affected by inequality, not just the poor. [E][F]
- Material income matters less than how people feel they stand in relation to others in the social hierarchy. Relative inequality thus generates status anxiety, producing stress and problems of self-esteem which are detrimental to physical and mental health. [B][E]

Building on these findings, Pickett and Wilkinson collaborated on research to develop a Sustainable Wellbeing Index as an alternative measure to assess the progress of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. A co-authored commentary, 'Time to leave GDP behind' (*Nature* 505, 16<sup>th</sup> January 2014), argued that the successor to GDP should involve novel metrics that allow for wider, more inclusive, measures of economic and social sustainability. This body of research thus provides an overall measure of sustainable wellbeing that can motivate and guide the process of global societal change. [D]

### 3. References to research (indicative maximum of six references)

The research has been published in peer reviewed journals, and funded via a variety of sources, including NIHR (Award CSA/03/07/014, 2007-2012) and ESRC (ES/J010731/1, 2012-2013).

[A] (2007) Wilkinson RG, Pickett KE "The problems of relative deprivation: why some societies do better than others" *Social Science & Medicine* 65:1965–1978 (570 citations) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2007.05.041> (submitted to REF2014)

[B] (2009) Wilkinson RG, Pickett KE "Income inequality and social dysfunction" *Annual Review of Sociology* 35:493–511 (691 citations) <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-070308-115926> (submitted to REF2014)

[C] (2015) Pickett KE, Wilkinson RG "Income inequality and health: A causal review" *Social Science & Medicine*; 128:316-326 (1038 citations) <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.12.031>

[D] (2016) Costanza R, Daly L, Fioramonti L, Giovannini E, Kubiszewski I, Mortensen LF, Pickett KE, Ragnarsdottir KV, De Vogli R, Wilkinson R "Modelling and measuring sustainable wellbeing in connection with the UN Sustainable Development Goals" *Ecological Economics* 130:350-55 (244 citations) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2016.07.009>

[E] (2017) Wilkinson RG, Pickett KE. "The enemy between us: The psychological and social costs of inequality" *European Journal of Social Psychology*; 47:11-24 (123 citations) <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2275>

[F] (2018) Wilkinson RG, Pickett, KE *The Inner Level* Random House. ISBN:978-1-846-14741-8

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Pickett and Wilkinson have directly contributed to public understanding and debate through hundreds of conferences, keynotes and seminars, aimed at predominantly non-academic audiences. As a result, the research has influenced policy and legislation nationally and internationally.

#### (1) **Influencing UN policy and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals:**

In 2013, Pickett and Wilkinson were appointed as co-leads for inequality on the International Expert Working Group (WG) for the UN-sponsored New Development Paradigm [1a]. Pickett subsequently led a successful campaign with Save the Children, alongside 90 influential experts, for the inclusion of 'Income Inequality' in the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [1b]. The need for a measure of inequality gained significant traction, and was agreed by the UN in 2015, with the 2015 UN Report 'Review of Targets for The Sustainable

Development Goals: The Science Perspective'. The Report specifically cites the WG's proposal to replace GDP with a new set of metrics that "integrates current knowledge of how ecology, economics, psychology and sociology collectively contribute to establishing and measuring sustainable wellbeing" ([1c], p.9). Subsequently, Wilkinson was chosen as one of two UN-appointed expert reviewers for SDG 10 targets (Reduce inequality within and among countries) and TSL was cited in the UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) Flagship 2016 report, 'Policy Innovations for Transformative Change' [1d]. Thus Wilkinson and Pickett's research has achieved international recognition for demonstrating the inseparable interdependence of socioeconomic inequality and health and wellbeing outcomes, and was a catalyst for the inclusion of income inequality (and related targets and measures) within the SDGs. This influence continues:

- In noting that TSL was "an important citation in UNEP's Background Briefing on Pollution", the former UN Environment (UNEP) Chief Scientist confirms the ongoing value of TIL, noting that: "TIL [was used] as inspiration to shift our thinking in UNEP and WHO towards a better way of approaching the health impacts of social and environmental inequalities from looking at health and environment in separate silos, showing that this was quite the wrong course of action from a policy and implementation perspective... Professor Pickett's research in this regard has been important in revising views on the need to include inequality in the delivery of the sustainable development goals." [1e]
- The UNDP's 2019 Human Development Report on inequality references TSL and TIL extensively [1f].
- A 2019 report to the UN's General Assembly of the Human Rights Council cites TIL in acknowledging that 'the psychosocial environment is increasingly recognized as just as important for health as the physical environment' [1g].
- Wilkinson and Pickett were exclusively commissioned to write a report for the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). The report (published 2020) was used in preparing a Secretary-General's report on the priority theme of the 59<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission of Social Development (CSocD) (taking place Feb 2021) [1h]. Since CSocD is the key UN body responsible for the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Program of Action for social development, Session outcomes are expected to be significant, and writing the report for the session typically anticipates a significant influence over procedural decisions.

## **(2) Influencing EU policy**

Pickett was appointed as a Commissioner on the EU-based Independent Commission for Sustainable Equality (ICSE). The ICSE co-chair recounts that Pickett "was one of the most active and influential members of the Commission... [she] provided research-based evidence that growing inequalities have had deleterious effects on physical and mental health and well-being... [her findings] were subsequently cited in our Report... [from which 60] policy recommendations have been incorporated into the European Commission's policy agenda."

Crucially, it is noted that Pickett and Wilkinson's work both:

- (1) "informed the European Commission's agenda/work programme report – "Communication and Annex on a Strong Social Europe for Just Transitions". The Commission is expected to propose a Social Economy Action Plan containing related measures in 2021 based on this earlier foundational work.
- (2) "provided strong evidence of the importance of equality for child wellbeing and the need for greater equality of outcome to drive equality of opportunity for children and young people. ICSE called for the EU to issue a European Child Guarantee to mitigate the damaging effects of poverty and inequality on children" [2a]

It has been confirmed that "The new European Commission has announced a legislative proposal for 2021 to establish the European Child Guarantee" [2a], and in July 2020 the Commission published the Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (awaiting consultation results) [2b].

In 2017, Pickett and Wilkinson's research also informed the EU Committee on Employment and Social Affairs 'Report on Combating Inequalities as a Lever to Boost Job Creation and Growth'

recommending reviews of EU inequality by all member states and identification of shortcomings as a matter of urgency. Commission members voted in favour [2c].

### **(3) Influencing the OECD's analysis and narratives on inclusive growth, and international campaigns to end child poverty**

Pickett and Wilkinson's work significantly influenced the 2011 OECD campaign for income distribution and poverty as social indicators [3a]. This continued to have impact within the current REF period, such as its extensive referencing within Oxfam's corresponding 'Even it Up' campaign, which highlights the 'toxic' nature of inequality [3b]. Commenting on the ongoing value of the research, the acting Director of the OECD Centre for Wellbeing, Inclusion and Equal Opportunity states that:

*"Kate's work has richly informed the OECD's analysis and narratives on inclusive growth... By drawing together the bigger picture of inequality, [Pickett and Wilkinson] have shown... inequality weakens our societies, destroys public trust and has a toll on everybody's well-being. These facts have been fundamental in helping the OECD build the case for governments to take serious action. Similarly, Kate and Richard's contributions to the Beyond GDP movement have been instrumental in promoting and articulating a new vision of societal progress, one that is in line with sustainability and long-term investment in well-being... Last November for World Children's Day, Kate spoke at the OECD about the challenges for youth mental health, highlighting the need to refocus towards an economy of well-being with children at the centre."* [3c]

It is also verified that Pickett's "research and concrete policy insights continue to inform the research activities of the newly established Wellbeing, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity (WISE) Centre" [3c]. Officially launched in November 2020, the mission of this OECD Centre is to better understand the impact of policies and business actions on people's lives. It has prepared resources such as [www.compareyourincome.org](http://www.compareyourincome.org) to collect 'new data and information on people's perceptions of income inequality, to help align public spending to the priorities of all'.

### **(4) UK policy impact via the Equality Trust, Fairness Commissions and the New Economics Foundation, and the concept of a Wellbeing Economy used internationally**

Wilkinson and Pickett established The Equality Trust (TET) in 2009 to 'raise awareness around issues of equality raised in [TSL]' [4a]. By 2014, the TET had facilitated the set-up of 26 UK Fairness Commissions (FCs) (16 reporting during the current REF period). The 2014 Report, 'Approaches to Reducing Poverty and Inequality in the UK: A Study of Civil Society Initiatives and Fairness Commissions', commissioned by the Webb Memorial Trust for the All Parliamentary Group on Poverty explains that: *'If we consider three of the main initiatives highlighted in this report ... they have all to a greater or lesser degree been driven or inspired by organisations independent of government... in the case of Fairness Commissions, the work of the Equality Trust and inspiration of the book, 'The Spirit Level' [4a].* As testament to this influence, in 2020 Pickett was appointed by Andy Burnham, elected Mayor of Greater Manchester, to chair the Greater Manchester Independent Inequalities Commission.

Wilkinson and Pickett's central role was confirmed by The New Economics Foundation (NEF) who reported in 2015 that: *"Inspired by the evidence in [TSL] ... local authorities and their partners have set up Fairness Commissions and similar participative bodies to reduce inequality and poverty" [4b].* All 26 FCs have supported the implementation of a Living Wage and pay ratios, including Oldham Fairness Commission, who, in 2019, successfully lobbied for Living Wage implementation by Oldham Council and directly cited TIL as an influence for their campaign [4c][4d]. This campaign complemented the impact of the wider UK Living Wage campaign (led by NEF and strongly influenced by Pickett's work, which is referred to in [4b]), whose impacts include:

- *"In the last year (since Living Wage Week 2014) 29,011 workers across the UK have had a pay rise as a result of employers becoming accredited. This includes both directly employed and subcontracted staff members."* [4e]

- “York Council introduced the Living Wage (becoming accredited in November 2013), benefiting 573 employees, 75% of whom were women. It extended this to casual workers in 2014 thereby covering a further 120 staff.” [4f]
- Since 2016, TET has been UK and European convener of the global Fight Inequality Alliance and co-secretariat for the All Parliamentary Group on Poverty.
- Both TSL and TIL have been cited extensively within UK parliamentary debate during the current REF period. [4g]

The former director of the New Economics Foundation (NEF) confirms that they “saw first-hand the influence ‘The Spirit Level’ had on government policy making... I was able to use the evidence from their research to show that while the Irish transfer system was beneficial in mitigating the harms caused by inequality, how much better both societal and economic outcomes would be if these inequalities were prevented from occurring in the first place.” Now Chair of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance, he acknowledges that “both books had a major influence on our foundational work on defining and promoting the concept of a Wellbeing Economy and this has influenced the policies of the countries we have been working with. Both New Zealand Wellbeing Budgets... have put a major emphasis on the prevention of inequality and tackling mental health issues” [4h]. Prime Minister Arden endorsed this when introducing the first New Zealand Wellbeing Budget in May 2019, “we have broadened our definition of success for our country to one that incorporates not just the health of our finances, but also of our natural resources, people and communities” [4i]. This included NZD1.9 billion (GBP980 million) for mental health support, NZD320 million for measures to combat family violence, and more than NZD1 billion for child wellbeing. These measures were taken forward in the subsequent 2020 budget, delivered within the context of COVID-19.

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[1] **SDG Evidence:** (a) NDP Steering Committee, 2013. Happiness: Towards a New Development Paradigm (contains working group list); (b) Campaign letter; (c) ICSU, ISSC (2015): Review of Targets for the Sustainable Development Goals. Paris: International Council for Science (p.10); (d) UNRISD (2016) Policy Innovations for Transformative Change’ (e) **Testimonial**, Former UN Environment (UNEP) Chief Scientist, 25 November 2020 & 2019 Background paper: ‘Towards a Pollution-Free Planet’; (f) UNDP (2019) Human Development Report; (g) UN Human Rights Council (2019) ‘Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health’ (p.5); (h) UN Economic and Social Council (2020) ‘Socially just transition towards sustainable development’.

[2] **EU Evidence:** (a) **Testimonial**, Former co-chair Independent Commission for Sustainable Equality (ICSE), 23 November 2020 & European Commission (2020) ‘A strong Social Europe for Just Transitions; (b) Frazer, H., Guio, A-C. and Marlier, E. (eds) (2020) Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee: Final Report(FSCG); (c) European Parliament (2017) Report on combating inequalities, Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (p.9)

[3] **OECD Evidence:** (a) OECD (2011) Society at a Glance 2011: OECD Social Indicators. (b) Oxfam, 2014. Even It Up (c) **Testimonial**, Acting Director of the OECD Centre for Wellbeing, Inclusion and Equal Opportunity, 4 December 2020.

[4] **Equality Trust Evidence:** (a) Approaches to Reducing Poverty and Inequality in the UK. A Report commissioned by the Webb Memorial Trust for the APPG on Poverty by Bunyan and Diamond, Edge Hill University, May 2014 (pp.8, 20); (b) New Economics Foundation, (2015) Fairness Commissions: Understanding how local authorities can have an impact on inequality and poverty; (c) Oldham Council (2019) Pursuit of accreditation by the Living Wage Foundation to be a Living Wage Employer; (d) Oldham Fairness Commission (2015) Building a Fairer Oldham (e) Impact of the Living Wage Foundation, Queen Mary University (f) Making York a Living Wage City Information Leaflet; (g) Selection of quotes from Hansard; (h) **Testimonial**, Chair, Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll) and former Executive Director of the New Economics Foundation, 26 November 2020; (i) **New Zealand Treasury Evidence, The Wellbeing Budget 30 May 2019.**