

The significance of inequalities in later life Lessons from twenty years of ELSA

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NIHR

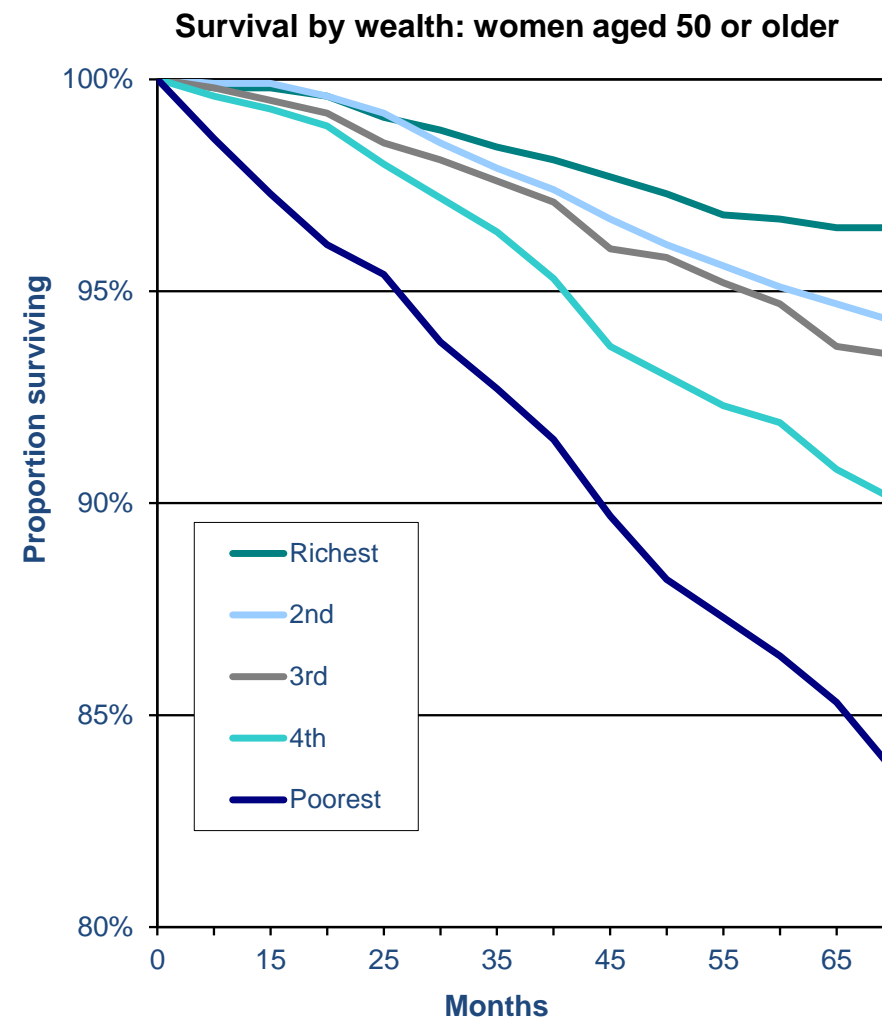


NIH National Institute on Aging



INEQUALITIES IN LATER LIFE: WHAT DO WE KNOW?

- Inequalities in later life are present in relation to any domain we focus on: health and wellbeing; employment, retirement and pensions; social engagement; citizenship and digital exclusion; engagement in caring roles, etc. There is nowhere where we do not see the outcomes of inequality.

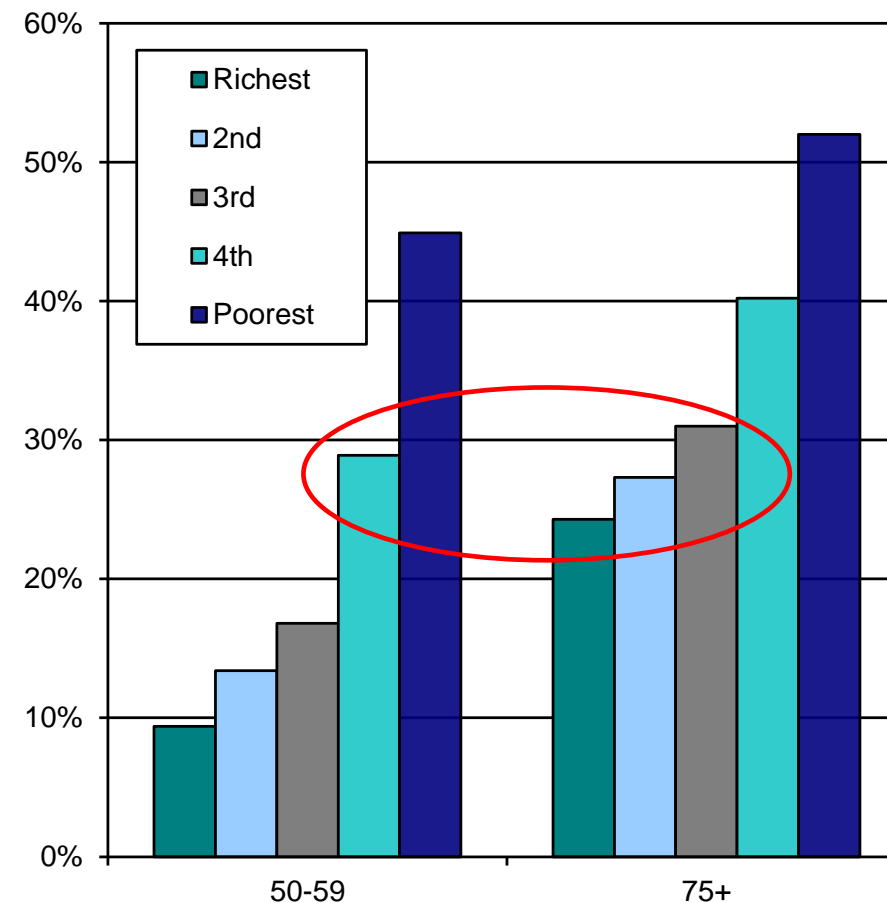




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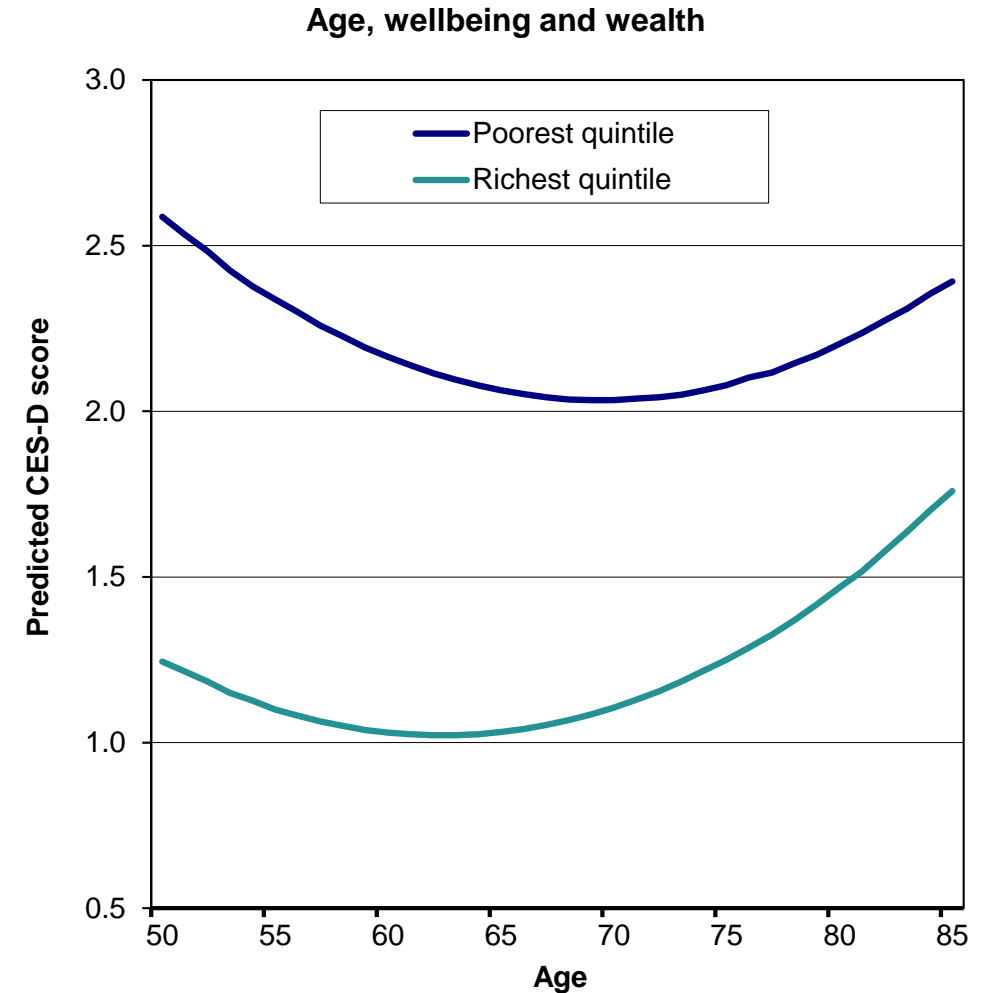
Fair/poor health by wealth and age: men





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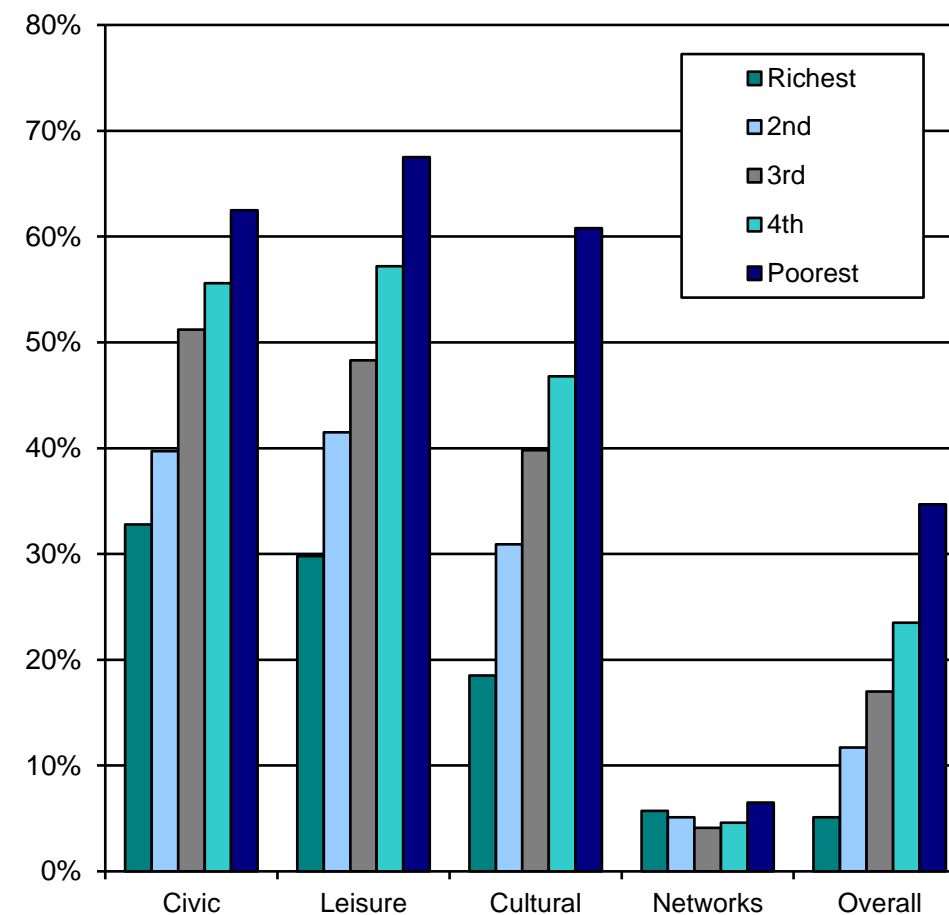




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Social detachment and wealth

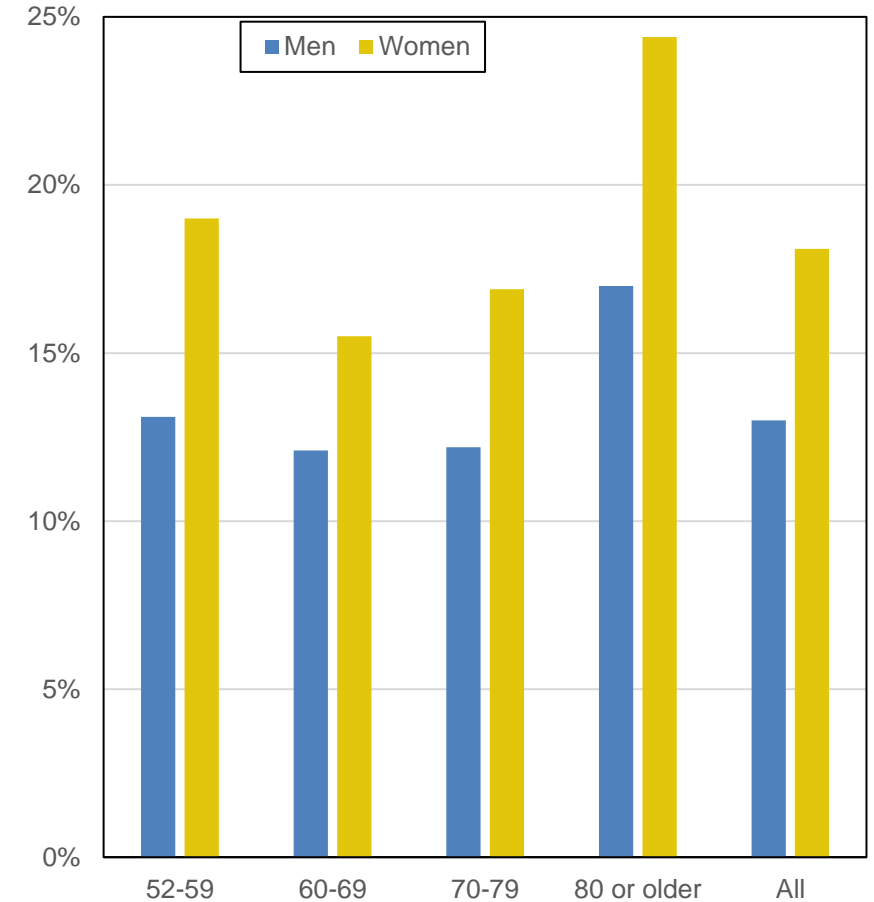




INEQUALITIES IN LATER LIFE: EXPANDING THE FOCUS

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Probable depression by gender and age

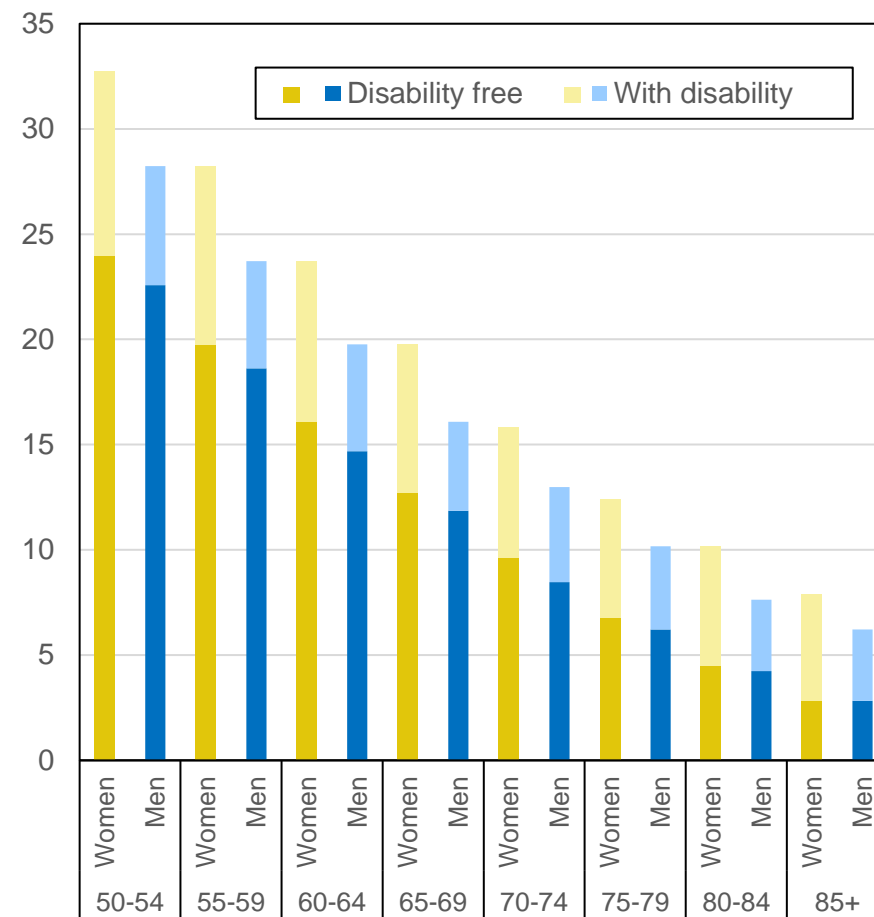




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Gender and life expectancy

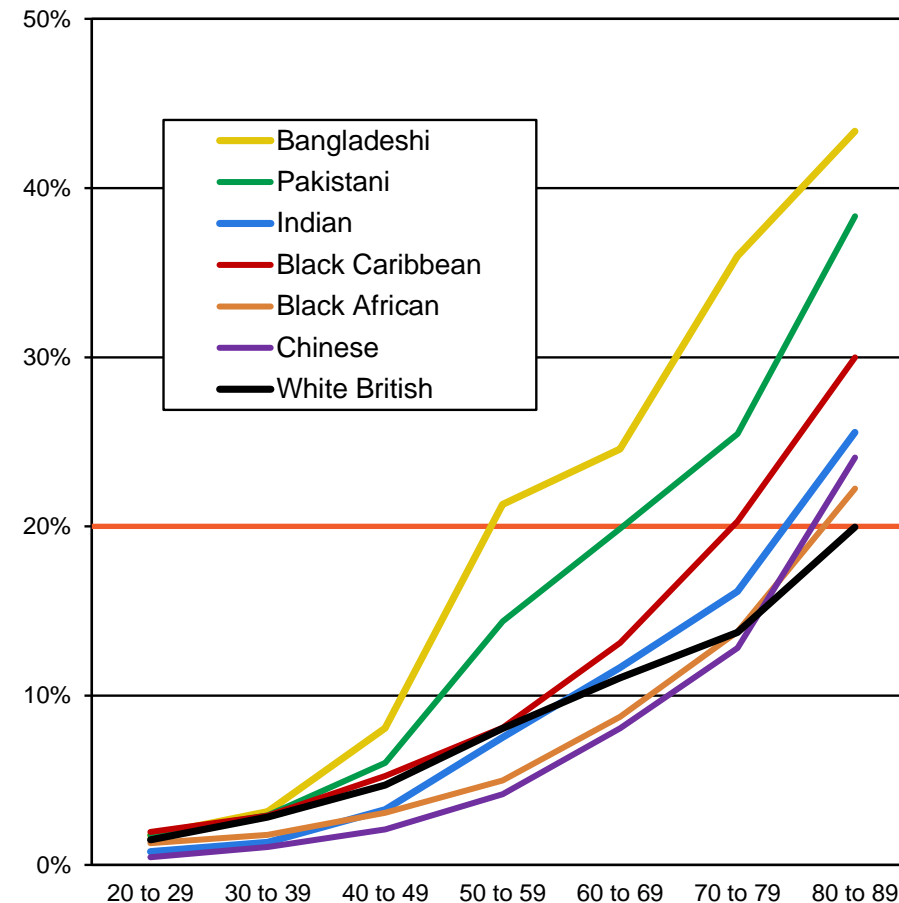




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Bad or very bad health by ethnicity and age

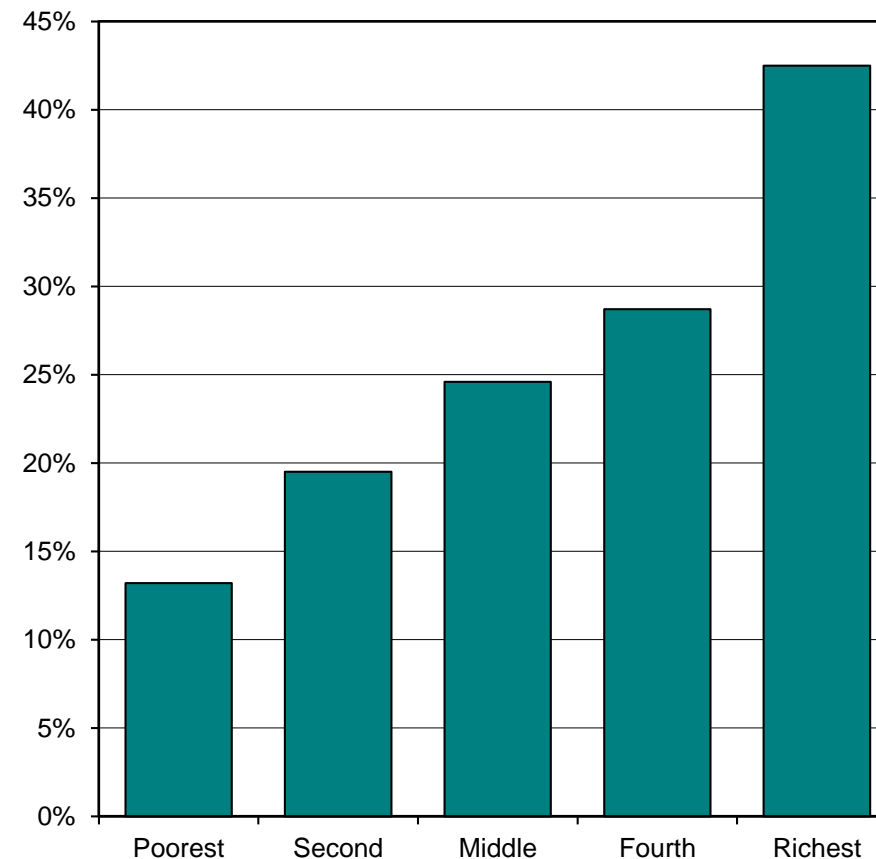




INEQUALITIES IN LATER LIFE: EXAMINING THE LIFE COURSE AND LATER LIFE EVENTS

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- Processes that operate across the life course are crucially relevant to these inequalities: critical periods, transition points, trajectories and accumulation. But what happens in later life is also relevant – retirement, partnership change, caring roles, new opportunities for volunteering and for leisure pursuits, etc.

Proportion who volunteer by wealth

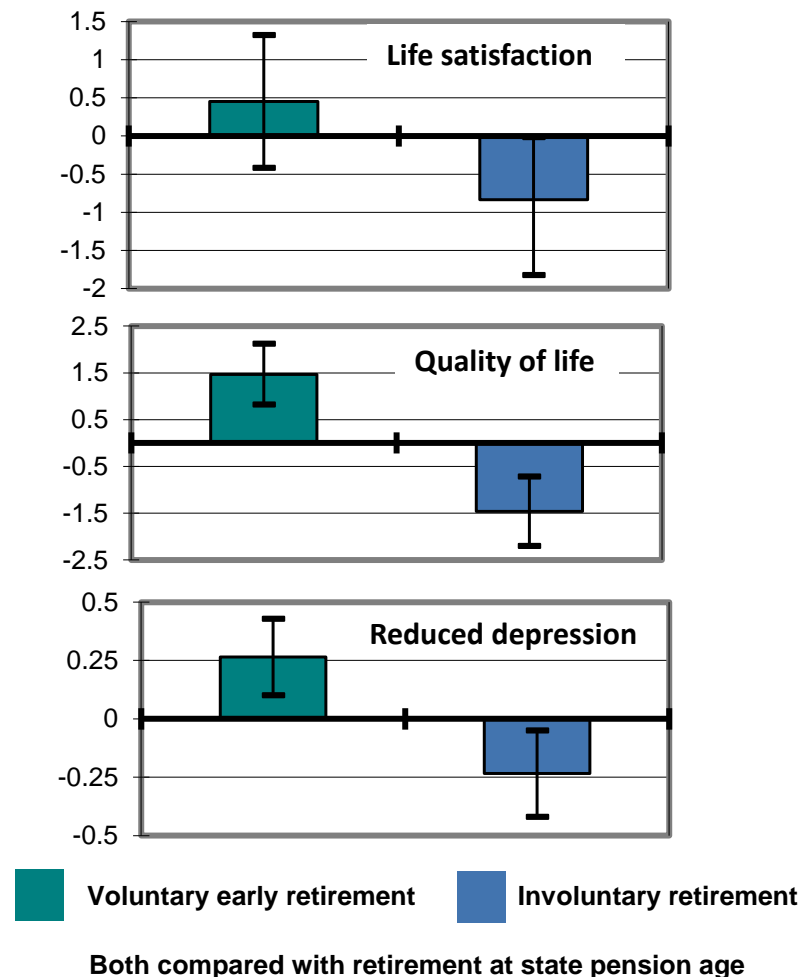




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- Such inequalities are increasingly the focus of centrally driven research and policy agendas.
- What do we need to pursue these agendas?

Retirement route and wellbeing

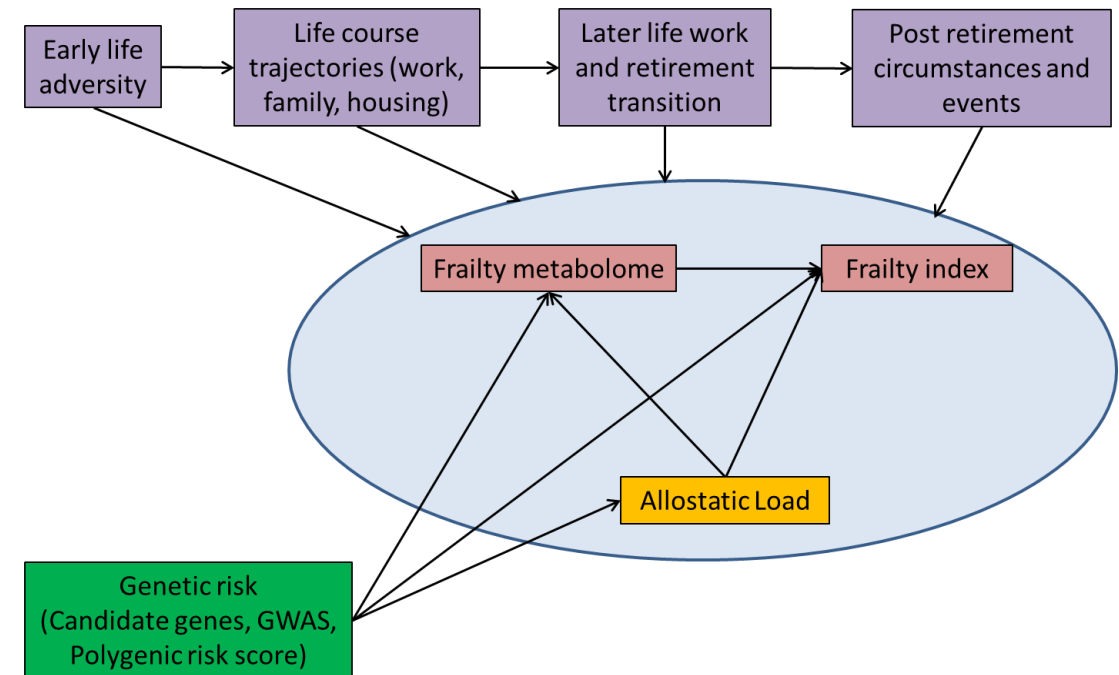




INVESTIGATING MECHANISMS SHAPING INEQUALITIES IN LATER LIFE

- Panel data to examine later life dynamics.
- Multi-disciplinary focus is crucial, cutting edge design providing detailed coverage of relevant mechanisms:
 - Evolving social and economic circumstances;
 - Psychological traits and outcomes;
 - Biological processes;
 - Access to and impact of health and social care;
 - Health, illness, disease and disability.

An interdisciplinary investigation of inequalities in risk of frailty

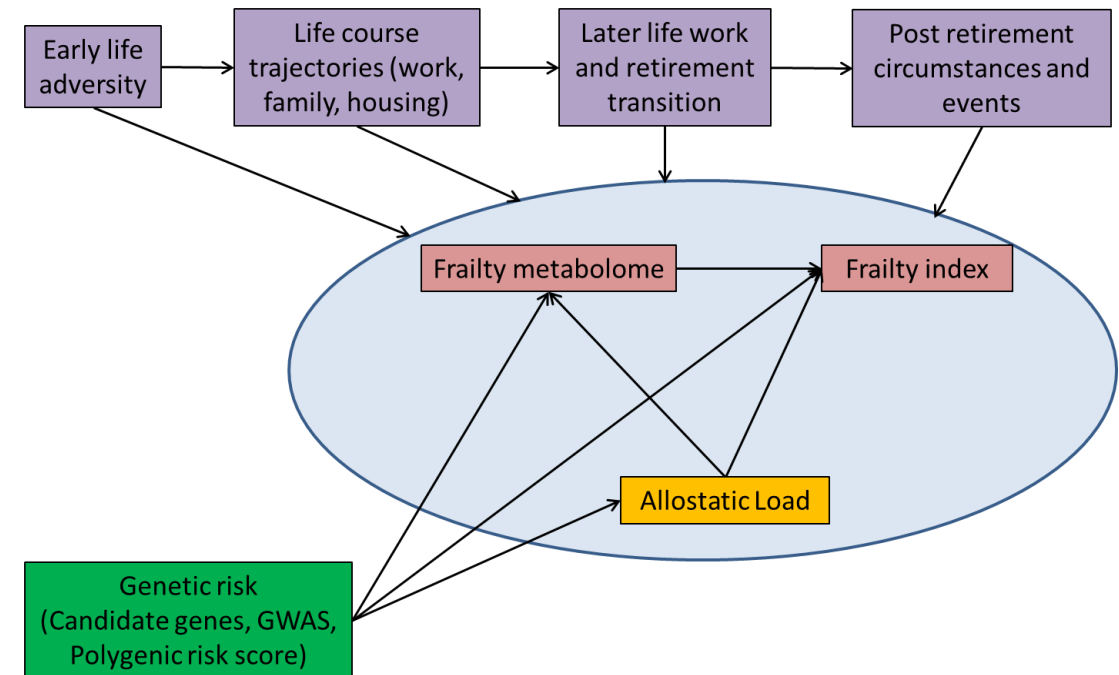




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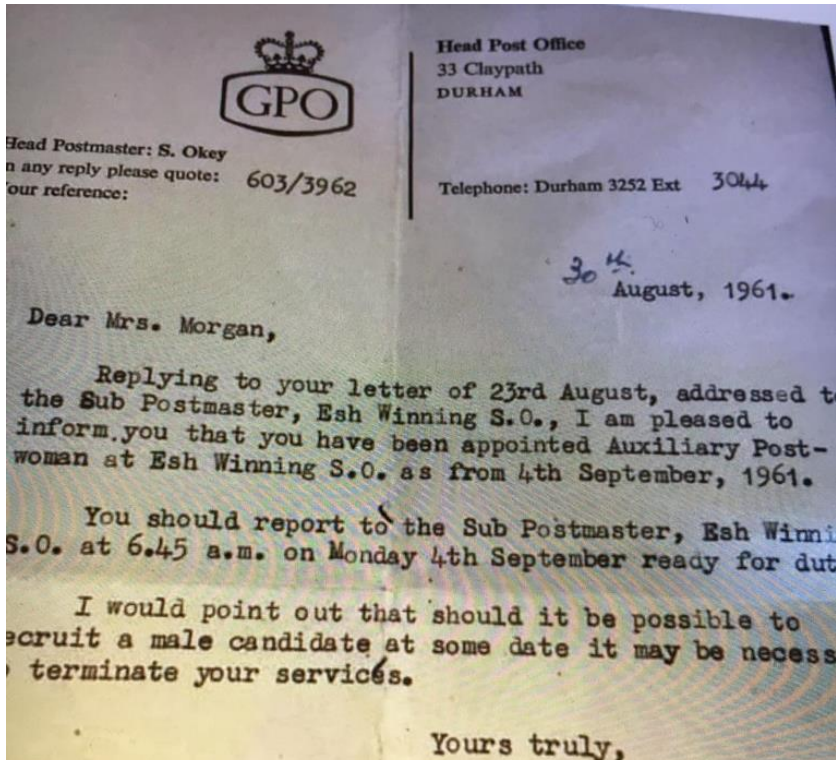
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- Data covering a range of cohorts to examine changes in systems and processes over time and across generations.
- Detailed life history data, to examine trajectories into later life and the accumulation of advantage/disadvantage.

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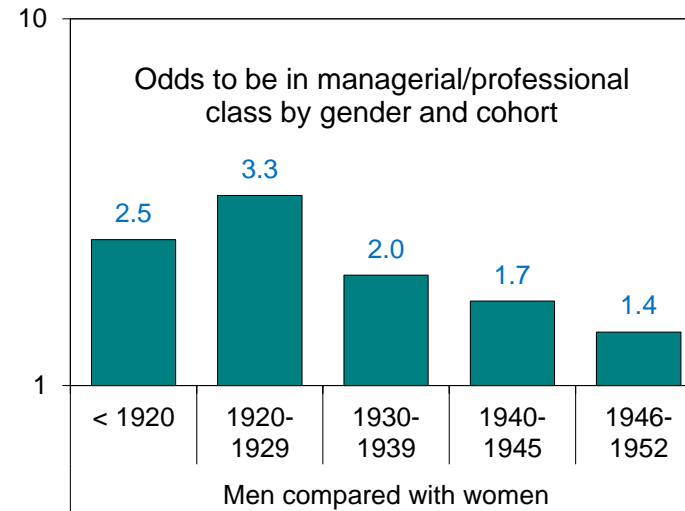


CHANGING (GENDER) INEQUALITIES?



I would point out that should it be possible to recruit a male candidate at some date it may be necessary to terminate your services.

(G. R. THOMPSON)
Asst. Head Postmaster



"The Coronavirus pandemic is exceptionally difficult ... Now schools and nurseries have closed their doors it will be women who take on most of the unpaid care work, reducing their hours or giving up paid work, turning the clock back on gender equality ... Many women will be trapped in their homes, self-isolating with an abusive partner. It's women who are also more likely to care for older or disabled relatives and neighbours. "

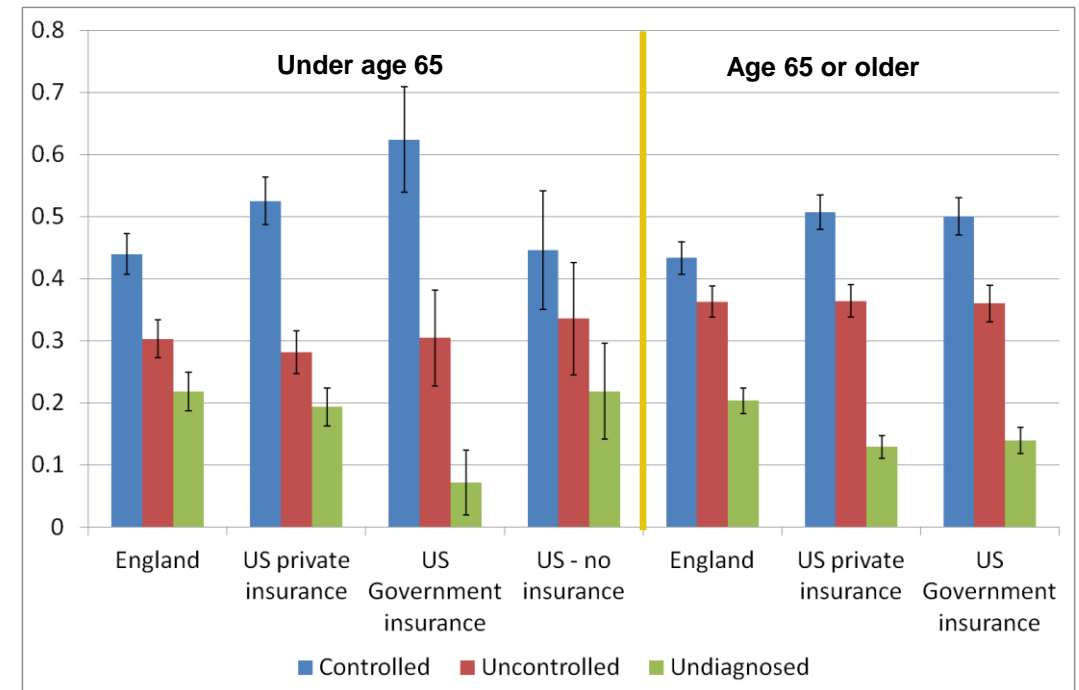
The Fawcett Society



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- International data to explore system effects and varying economic and cultural contexts.

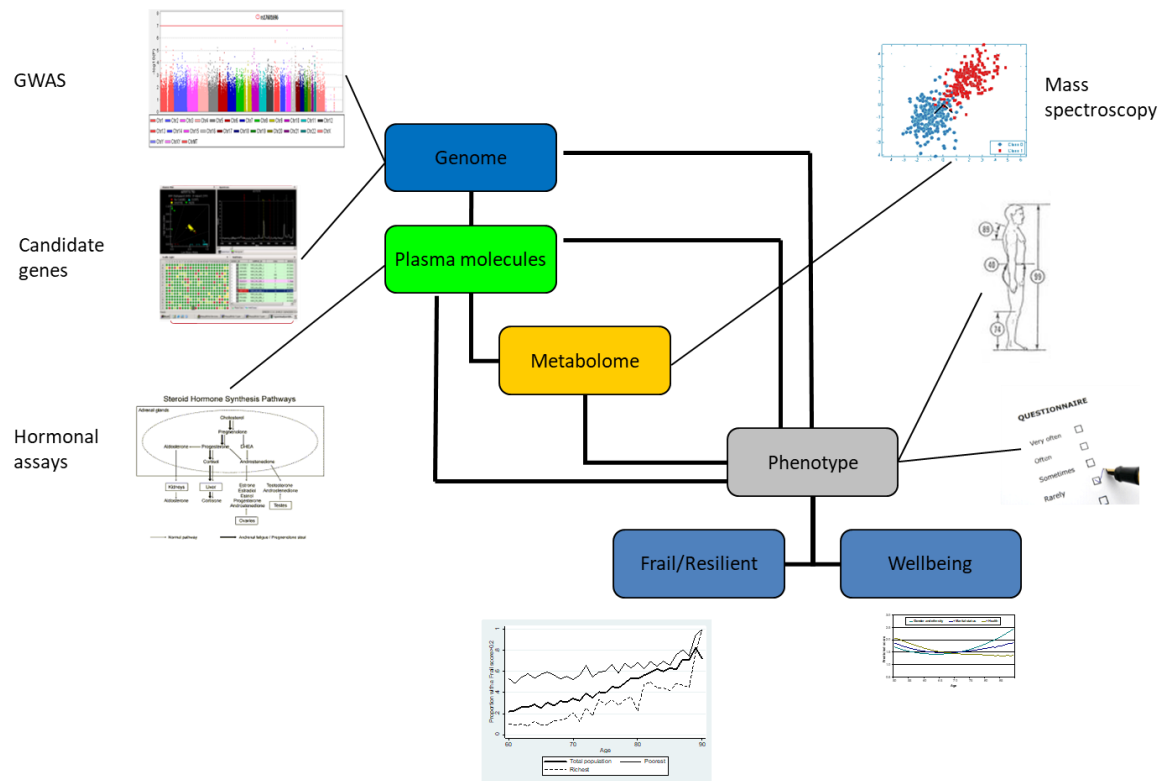
Outcomes of care for hypertension in the UK and the US



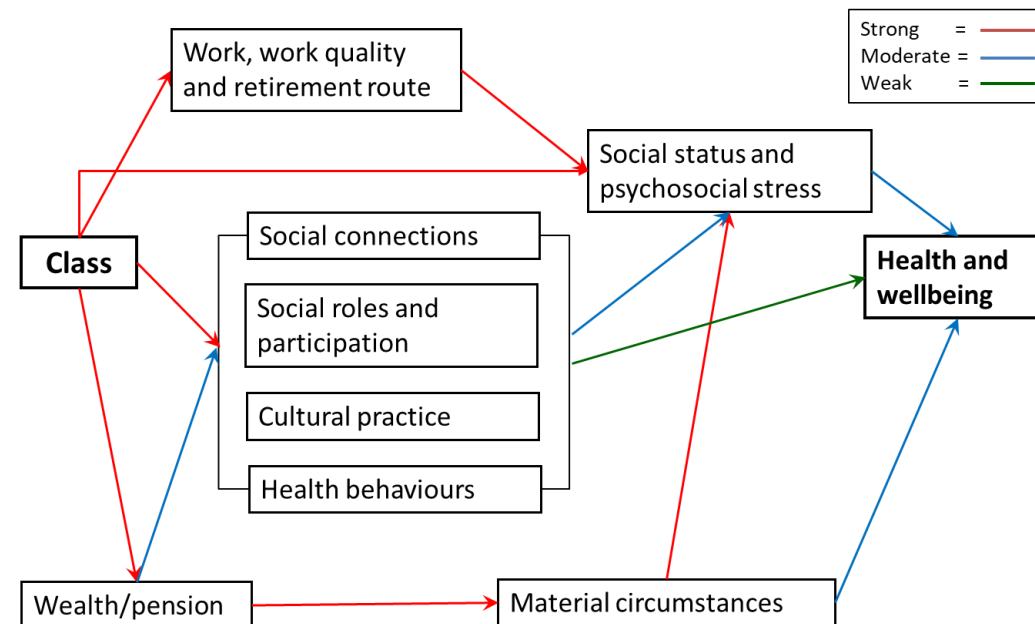


HOWEVER, A FOCUS ON INFORMING POLICY REQUIRES US TO PLACE BOTH THE DESCRIPTION OF INEQUALITY AND THE INVESTIGATION OF MECHANISMS IN CONTEXT

Investigating biological pathways



An empirical investigation of hypothesised processes shaped by class





CONCLUDING POINTS – LOOKING FORWARD

- Inequalities in later life are stark and they matter.
- An evolving research agenda, moving from description to an interdisciplinary investigation of pathways and on to an investigation of fundamental mechanisms.
- A focus on informing policy responses requires investigating how fundamental mechanisms shape trajectories, accumulation of advantage and proximal pathways.
- A starting point is to hypothesise, and test, how experiences related to class, racism and patriarchy, operating across the life course and into later life, determine the processes driving these inequalities.
- These fundamental causes shape social and economic structures and access to the resources they provide, shape interpersonal interactions, and shape the functions and processes of institutions.
- So, it is important to examine the ways in which class, racism and patriarchy operate across structural, interpersonal and institutional arenas to impact on the possession of social and economic resources.
- Structural conditions of socioeconomic disadvantage and interpersonal experiences of discrimination and violence create an increased risk of inequality across all domains.
- They also shape encounters with institutions that have policies and practices that lead to unequal outcomes – education, employment, housing, legal, politics, health and social care, etc.
- Institutional settings, then, are the sites where we see the concentration and mediation of structural forms of disadvantage and interpersonal encounters – and the potential for disruption.

