

Socioeconomic health inequalities:

the shady sides of social mobility and class-related stigmatisation

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Background I

Socioeconomic health inequalities

- Health inequalities between the rich and poor exist all over the world
- Unexpected finding:
Egalitarian countries, such as the Scandinavian countries, do not have the smallest socioeconomic health inequalities
- Between-country differences in socioeconomic health inequalities are hard to explain

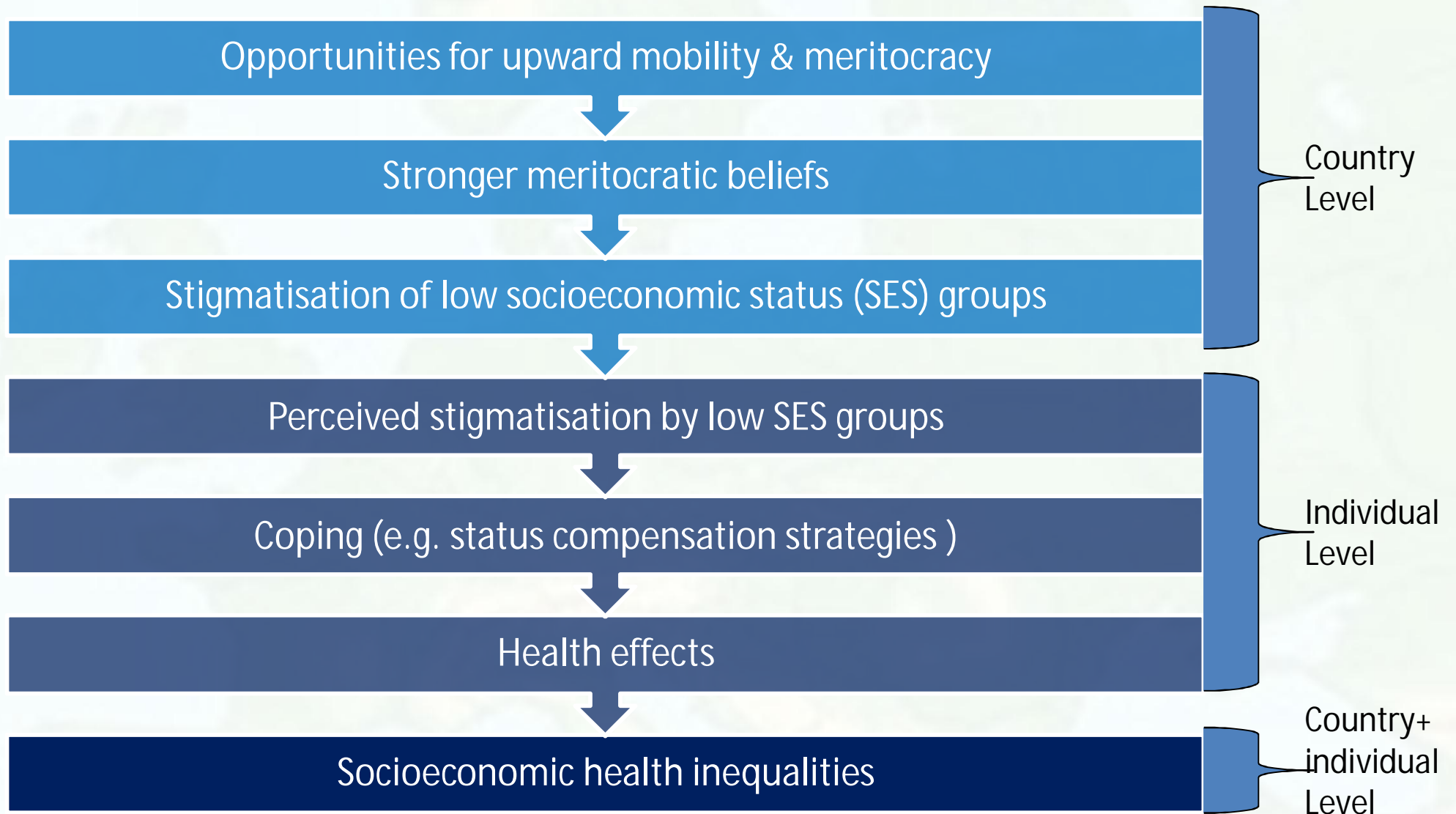
Background II

- Social mobility →
People climbing up and falling down on the social ladder might result in homogeneous group of less healthy and talented people at the bottom rungs
- Class-related stigmatisation →
Beliefs in opportunities for upward mobility and meritocracy* can result in blaming people at the bottom for not getting ahead due to low efforts and abilities

*the belief that status is based on merits and efforts



Background III



Objectives

To examine:

1. Whether between-country differences in socioeconomic health inequalities can be better explained by differences in social mobility than by income inequality
2. Whether social mobility is related to perceived class-related stigmatisation
3. Whether class-related stigmatisation contributes to the social mobility – socioeconomic health inequality relation

Methods I

Ecological study

- 14 European countries
- Country-level data from secondary data:
 - Socioeconomic health inequality (outcome measure):
relative index of inequality (RII) regarding
 - all-cause mortality (90s) and
 - self-assessed health (80s) (Mackenbach 1997 & 2008)
 - Income inequality: Gini coefficient (OECD)

Methods II

- Intergenerational social mobility:
 - 1 – correlation of father's and participant's occupational status (ISSP dataset 2009)
 - Perceived class-related stigmatisation:
 - 'some people look down on me because of my income or job situation' and
 - 'I feel left out of society' (Eurobarometer dataset 2001)
- Pearson's correlations and linear regression analyses

Results

1A Income inequality - Socioeconomic health inequality (self assessed health)

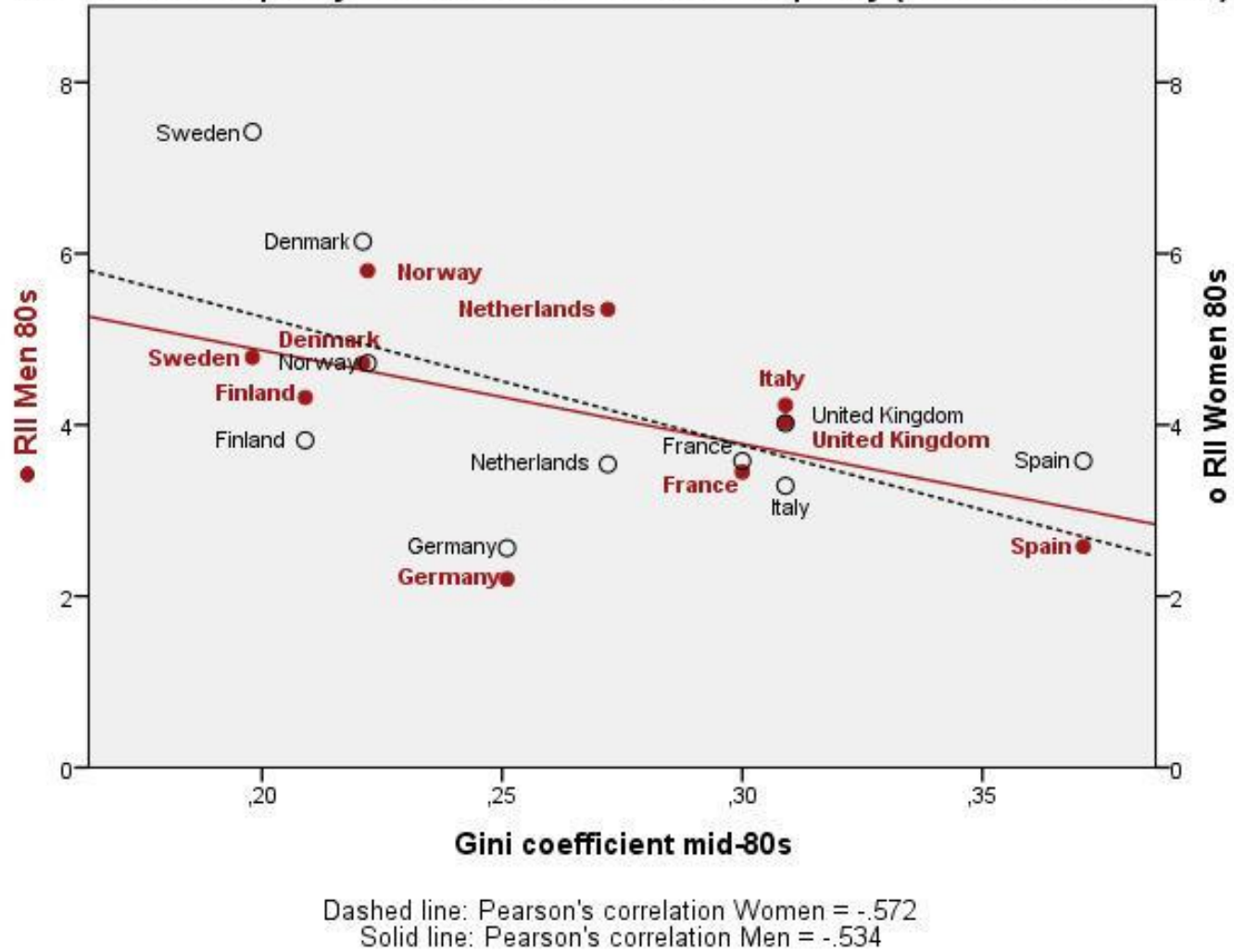


Figure 1a. Association between income inequality and socioeconomic health inequality.

Results cont.

1B Income inequality - Socioeconomic health inequality (all-cause mortality)

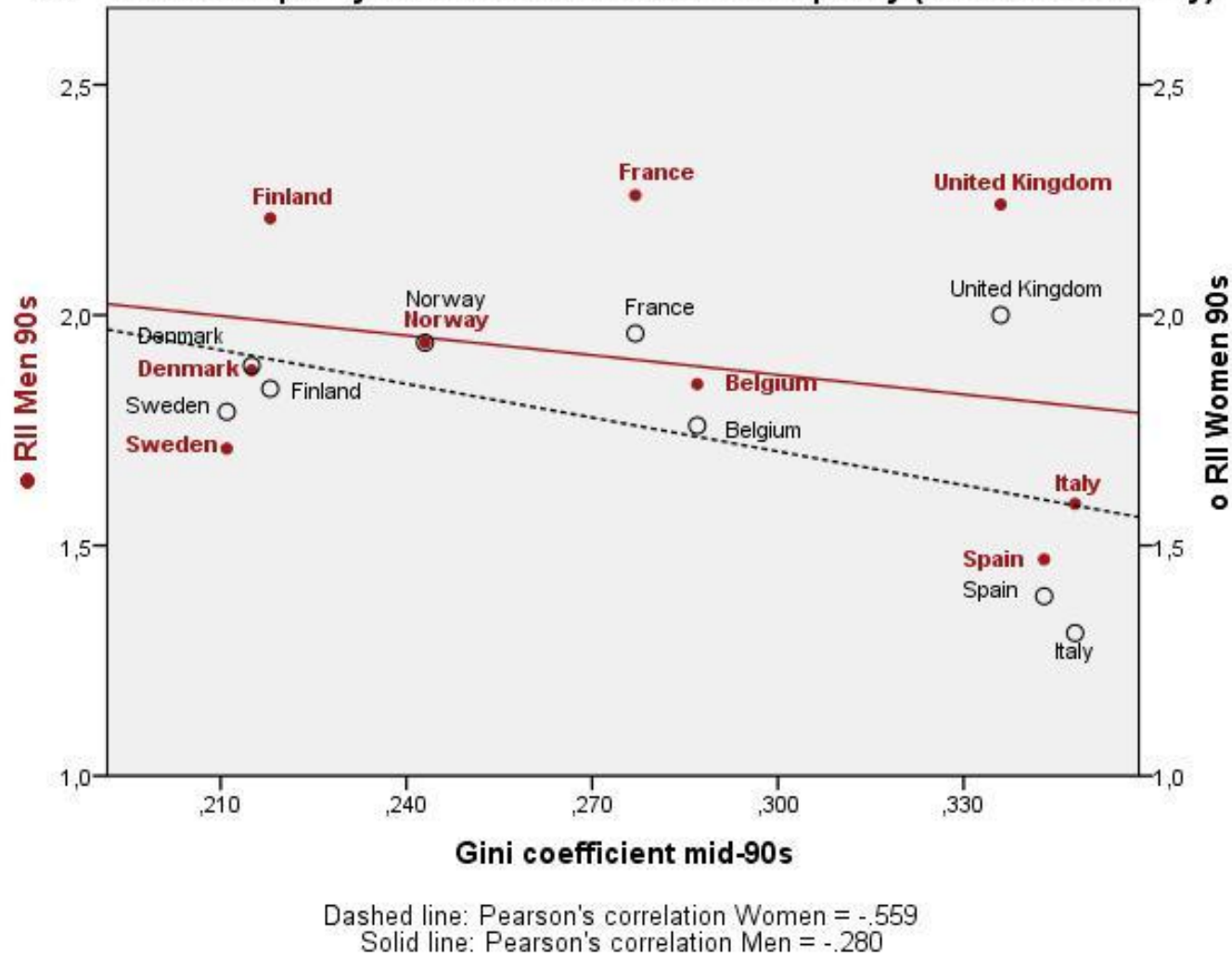
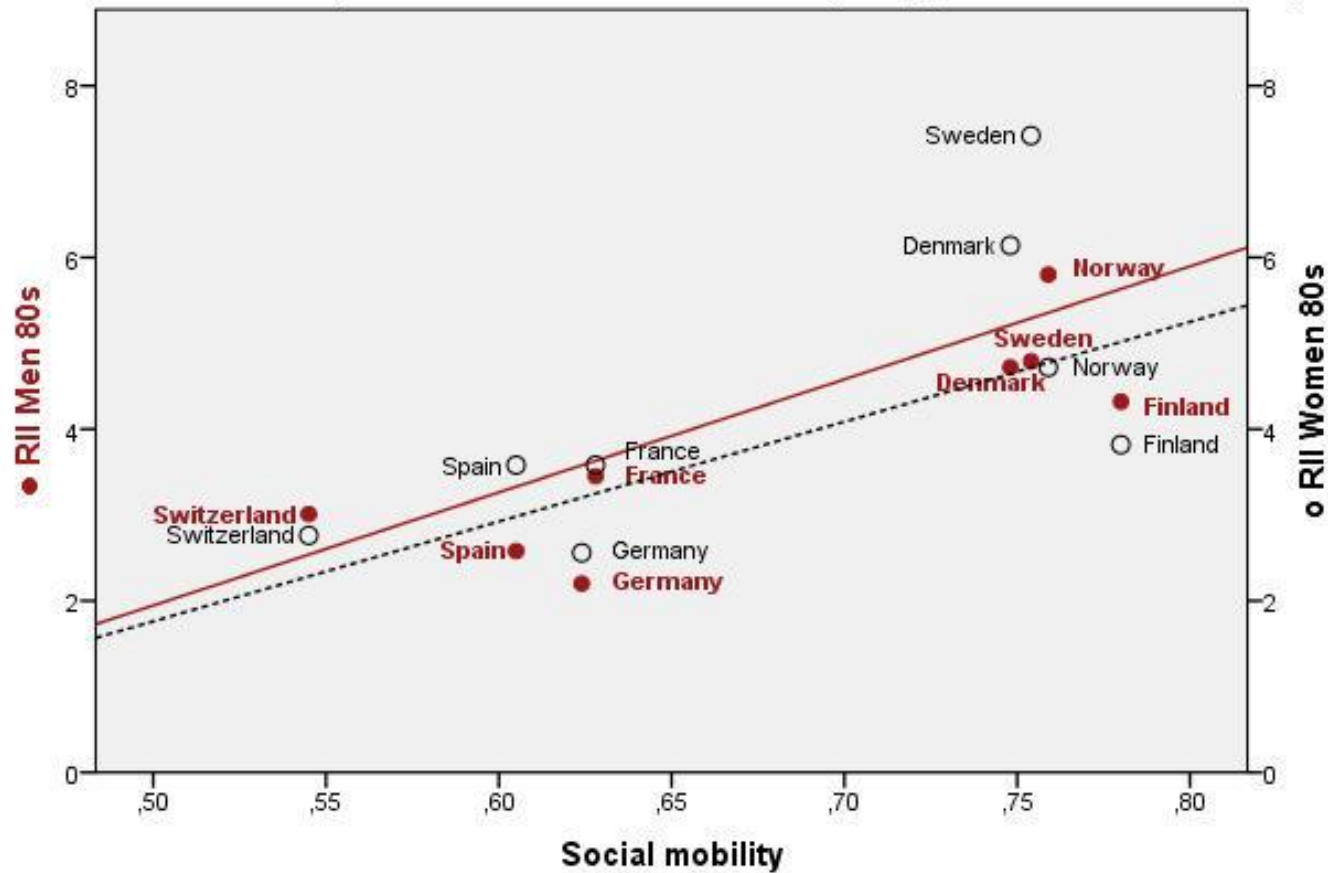


Figure 1b. Association between income inequality and socioeconomic health inequality.

Results cont.

2A Social mobility - Socioeconomic health inequality (self assessed health)



Dashed line: Pearson's correlation Women = .698
Solid line: Pearson's correlation Men = .835**

Figure 2a. Association between social mobility and socioeconomic health inequality.

** P value < 0.001

Results cont.

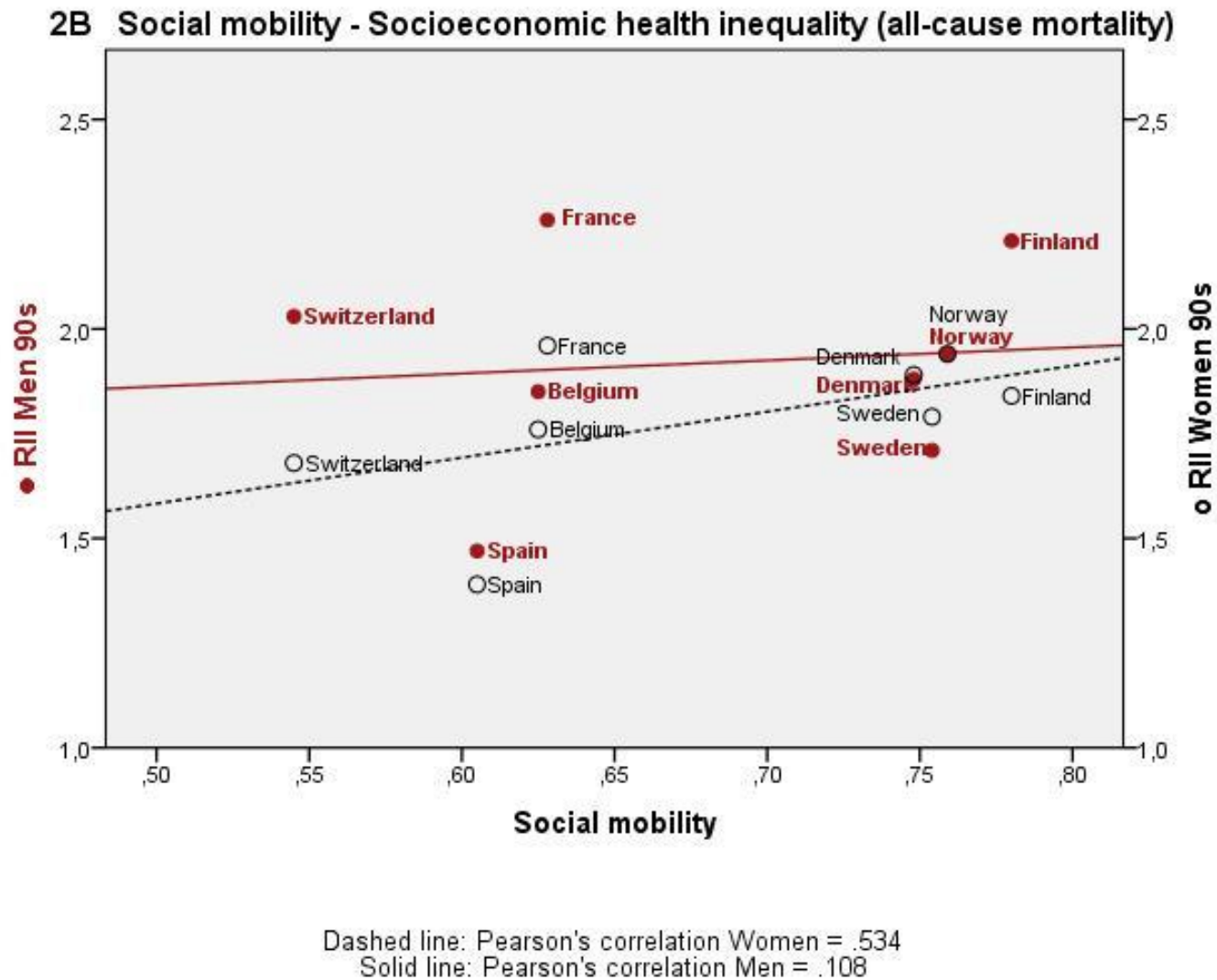


Figure 2b. Association between social mobility and socioeconomic health inequality.

Results cont.

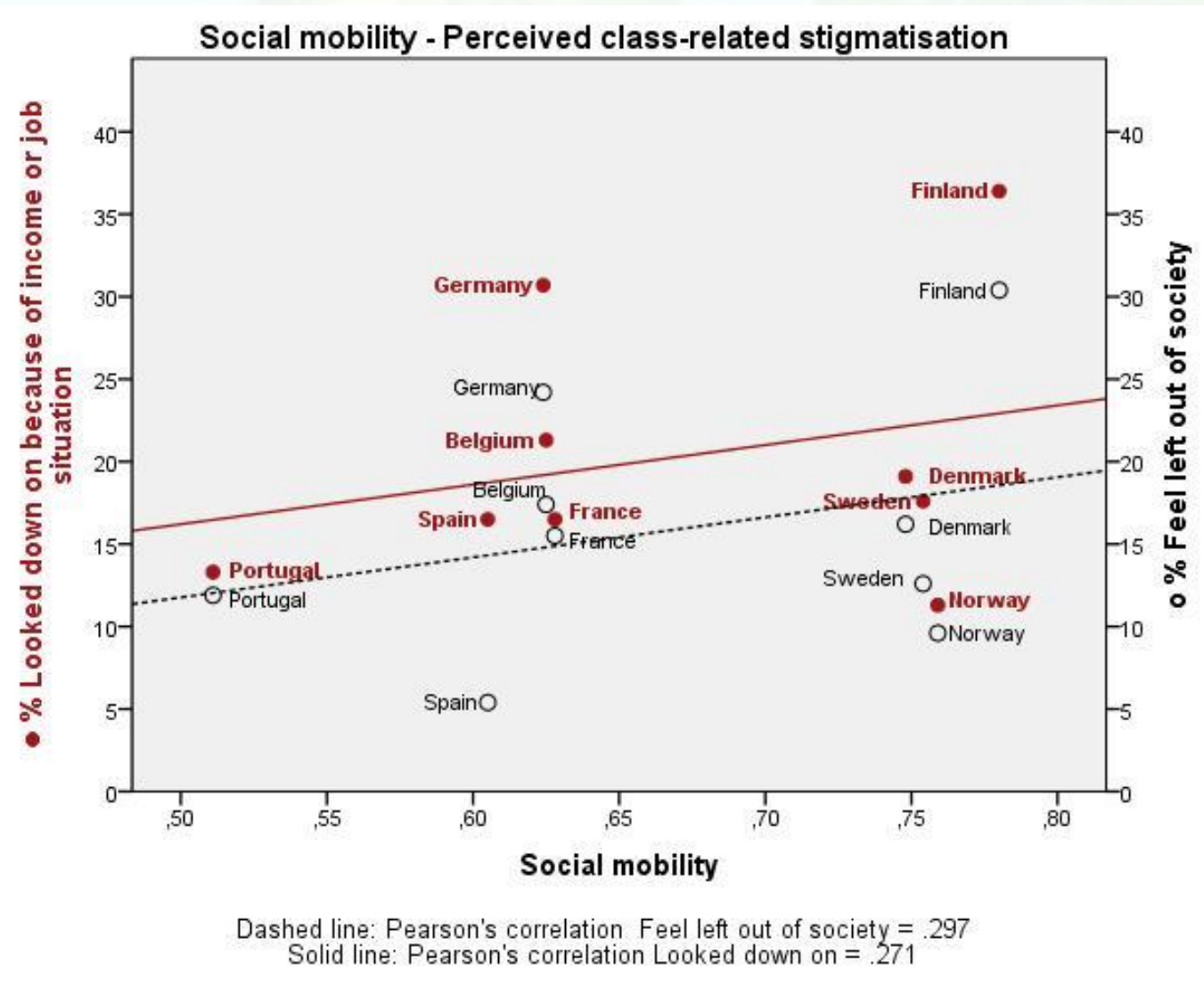


Figure 3. Association between social mobility and perceived class-related stigmatisation

Results cont.

- Effect of income inequality on socioeconomic health inequality disappeared after correcting for social mobility.
- Effect of social mobility on socioeconomic differences in all-cause mortality decreased after correcting for perceived class-related stigmatisation.

Main results & discussion I

- More equal income distribution = larger socioeconomic health inequalities
→ confirmation Mackenbach
- Greater social mobility = larger socioeconomic health inequalities
- Greater social mobility \approx more perceived class-related stigmatisation

Main results & discussion II

- Role social selection (= 'unhealthy homogenisation')
- Main limitations:
 - Small sample
 - No corrections for possible important confounders, such as
 - lifestyle (e.g. Mediterranean),
 - phase in epidemiological transition (e.g. prevalence of smoking or CVD)
 - gross domestic product (country's standard of living)
 - Causes not measured prior to outcomes

Conclusion

- Social mobility might intensify stigmatisation of persons who stay behind in the mobility rat race. This might underlie that egalitarian countries also face substantial socioeconomic health inequalities.
- Country-level social mobility, meritocratic beliefs, and stigmatisation should be taken into account when interpreting between-country differences in socioeconomic health inequalities.

Thank you for your attention

