

Rising inequalities to blame for many of world's ills, say experts

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Our collective failure to reverse inequality is at the heart of a global malaise, from populism to climate change, argue experts in *The BMJ* today.

Professors Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson at the University of York, say societies with bigger income differences tend to have poorer physical and mental [health](#), more illicit drug use and more obesity. More unequal societies are also marked by more violence, weaker community life and less trust.

Other global risks stemming from inequality range from 'fiscal crises' to 'profound social instability', 'increasing polarisation of societies' and 'increasing national sentiment' and even 'changing climate' and a 'degrading environment' because of the ways in which inequality drives consumerism and over-consumption, they add.

Yet, despite decades of research showing that we need to tackle the structural determinants of health if we want to reduce health inequalities, this has not happened and [health inequalities](#) have not diminished, they write.

"In many cities in the UK and USA, for example, we continue to see life expectancy gaps of 5 to 10 years and occasionally of 15 to 20 years between the richest and poorest areas."

They believe that the long term failure, even of ostensibly progressive

governments, to tackle these glaring injustices is perhaps one of the reasons why public opinion has swung so strongly away from the established political parties.

And they warn that the public's sense of being left behind "will only be exacerbated by the [negative health effects](#) of austerity, which are starting to emerge in our health statistics."

They point out that during the last generation, economic growth ceased to improve health, happiness and the quality of life in rich countries. "Now, more than ever, we need an inspiring vision of a future capable of creating more equal societies that increase sustainable wellbeing for all of us and for the planet," they conclude.

More information: The immorality of inaction on inequality, www.bmj.com/content/356/bmj.j556

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