

The Social Gradient in Health

Sociology

Why health tracks social position at every step, not just at the bottom.

The finding that health outcomes improve stepwise with social position across the whole hierarchy, rather than separating a deprived group from everyone else.

KEY STUDIES

Whitehall I and II

PATTERN

stepwise, not threshold

- Whitehall studies: a gradient within one civil service.
- Each grade healthier than the one below it.
- Not explained by smoking and diet alone.
- Control at work is a proposed mechanism.
- Materialist and psychosocial accounts compete.
- Selection into ill health runs the other way too.

LOOK FOR IT

Life expectancy differing by years between neighbouring districts of the same city.

Educational reference, not medical advice. The relative weight of material and psychosocial pathways remains contested.