

Social Capital: Meaning, Measurement and Mechanisms

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Social Capital Symposium
Flemish Policy Research Centre on Welfare, Health and Family
5 June 2009, Ghent, Belgium

- Last decade has seen increase of interest in the influence of the social environment on people's health and well-being
- Research efforts have mainly focussed on the construct of social capital
- There now is general agreement that social capital is (in some way) important for community health
- However, still no clarity or agreement about:
 - (1) the *nature (meaning) of social capital*;
 - (2) the *measurement* of social capital; and
 - (3) the *mechanism and pathways* to health

- **Social capital is a very broad social concept, with a wide range of meanings**
- According to some, **social capital has lost meaning**: it has become a '**catch all**' for various social phenomena (Macinko & Starfield, 2001).
 - **Social capital often used interchangeably with other social constructs** (such as 'social networks', 'social embeddedness' 'social support', 'social cohesion', or 'collective efficacy')
 - **Social capital can take different forms** (e.g., bonding, bridging, and linking)

- In order to correctly **measure** and examine the **mechanisms** contributing to health, it is essential to know what we **mean** by social capital:
 1. **Social capital or social support?** Can social capital be measured separately from social support; Is social capital a collective or individual resource for health?
 2. **What form of social capital?** (bonding, bridging, linking); how can they be measured; and how do they contribute to health?

Social Capital or Social Support?

- **Social Capital is usually defined as a *collective resource*:**
 - *“the norms and social relations embedded in the social structures of societies that enable people to co-ordinate action to achieve desired goals”* (World Bank, 1998)
 - *“networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within or among groups”* (OECD 2001)
 - *“the degree to which a community or society collaborates and cooperates -through such mechanisms as networks, shared trust, norms and values- to achieve mutual benefits”* (Putnam 2000)

Social Capital or Social Support?

- **But others define it as an *individual* resource:**
 - “*the sum of the resources (...) that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition*” (Bourdieu, 1985)
 - “(...) is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structure and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure (Coleman, 1990).
 - “*the capacity of individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their memberships in networks or broader social structures*” (Portes, 1998)

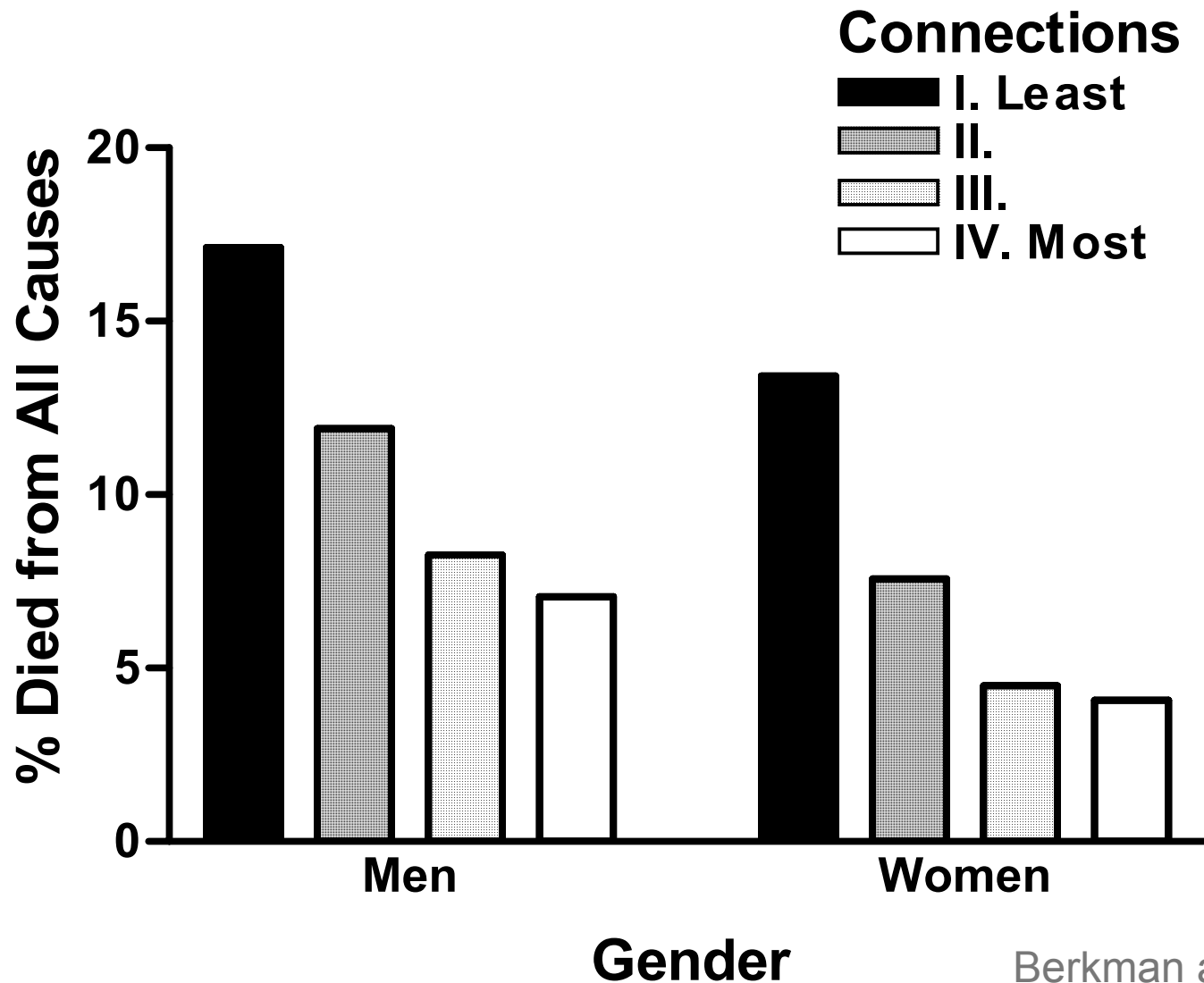
Social Capital or Social Support?

- General agreement where **social capital** resides: **produced in/through social networks**
- Networks with high levels of social capital: **trust, reciprocity**, and high **social/civic participation** (based on definitions of Putnam and Coleman)
- However, there still is a **debate over how the benefits are produced** (via collective or individual action) **and to whom they accrue** (to the collective or to the individual)

Social Capital or Social Support?

- **Lochner et al (1999) make a useful distinction between social capital** (social structure; benefits communities) **and social networks and support** (social embeddedness; benefits individuals)
- **Distinction is important for two reasons:**
 - Equating social capital to social support would be *“pouring old wine into new bottles”*
 - Implications for health policy: should interventions *target ‘people’ or ‘places’?*
- **Question is partly methodological/empirical**

Social Capital or Social Support?



Berkman and Syme 1979
Alameda County Study

Social Capital or Social Support?

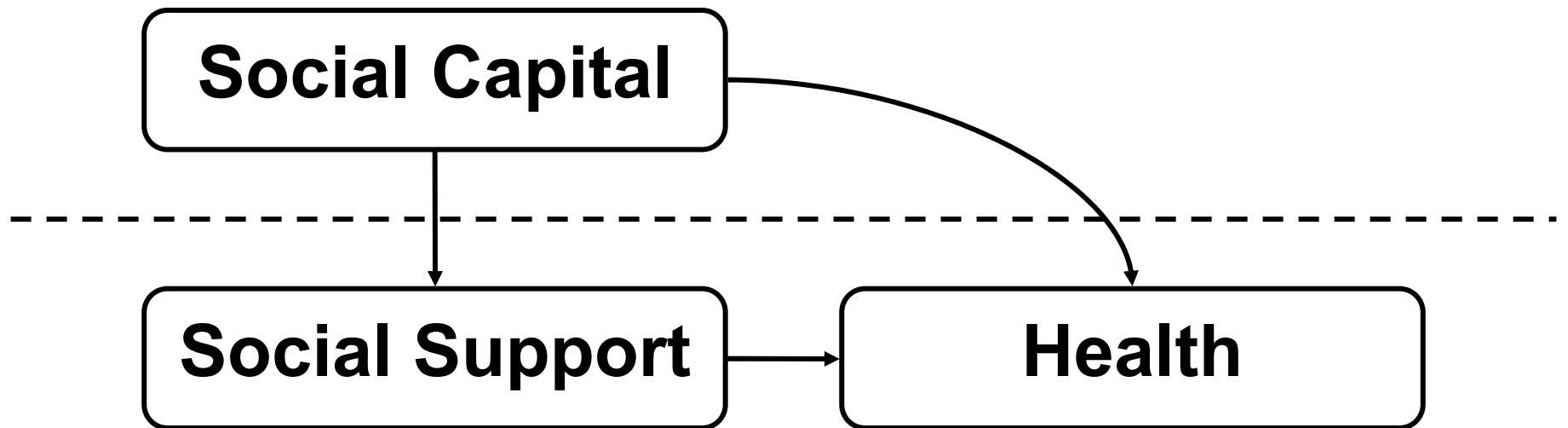
- **Communities with high levels of social capital:** trust, reciprocity, and high social/civic participation:
- **Social Trust**
 - *“would you say that most people can be trusted, or you cannot be too careful in dealing with people”*
- **Reciprocity**
 - *“would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful or just look out for themselves?”*
- **Civic Participation**
 - *Participation in voluntary groups or organisations (sports, cultural, political, environmental, religious, etc...)*

Social Capital or Social Support?

- a) **How can social capital be measured at the collective level?**
 - Individuals answer social capital questions...
- b) **How can we examine whether the benefits of social capital accrue to the individual or the collective?**
 - Both questions can be answered utilising **multilevel modelling**

Social Capital or Social Support?

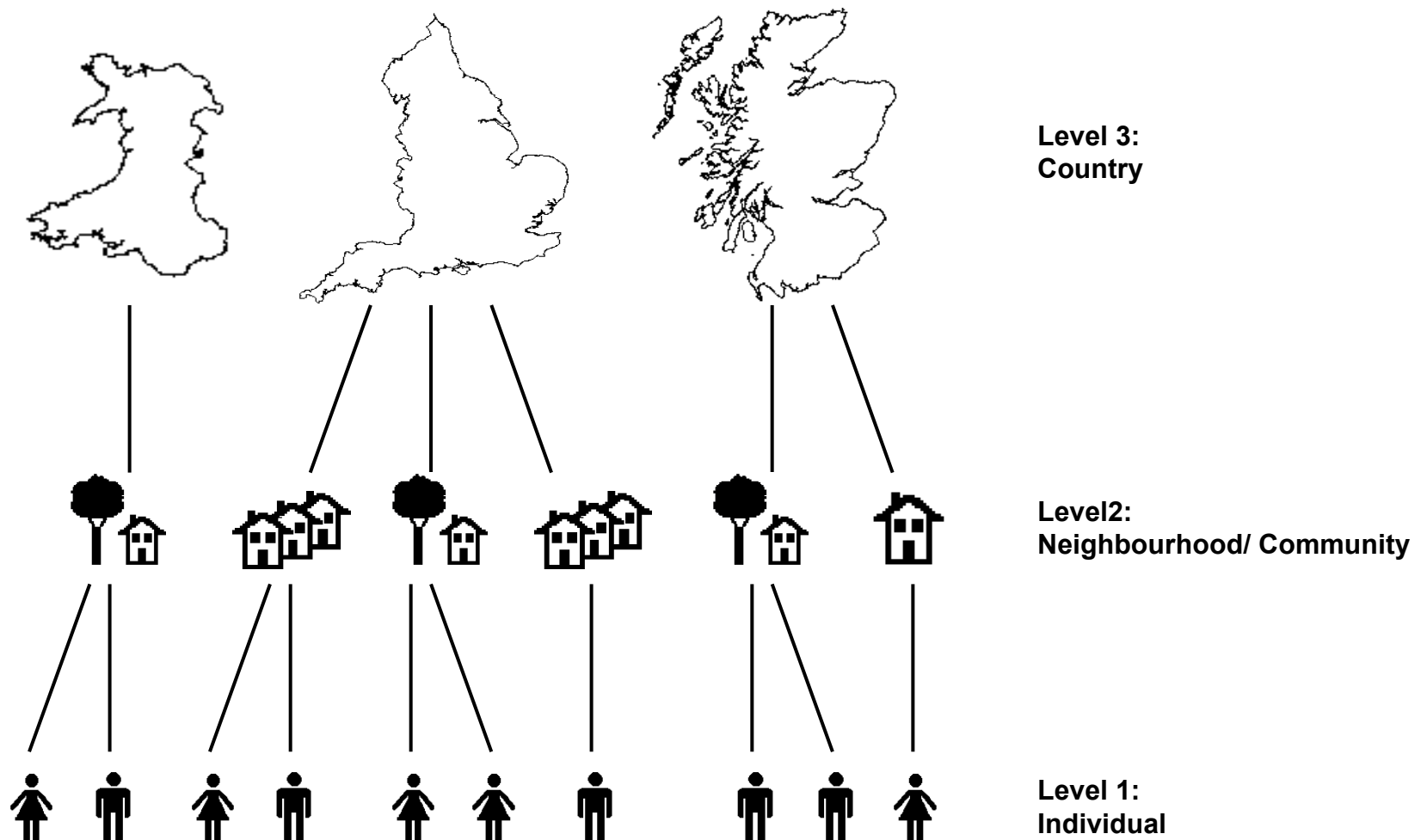
Community



Individual

Social Capital or Social Support?

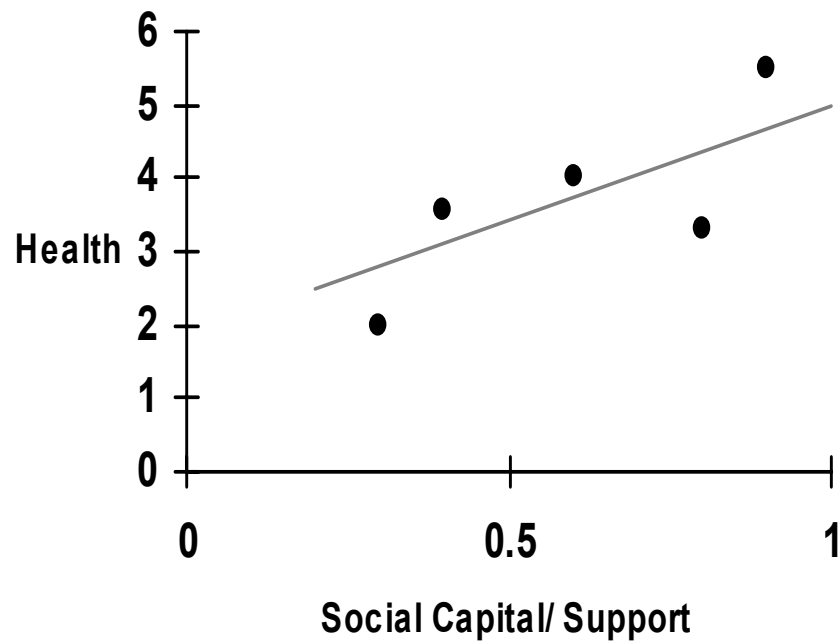
- **Multilevel Modelling**



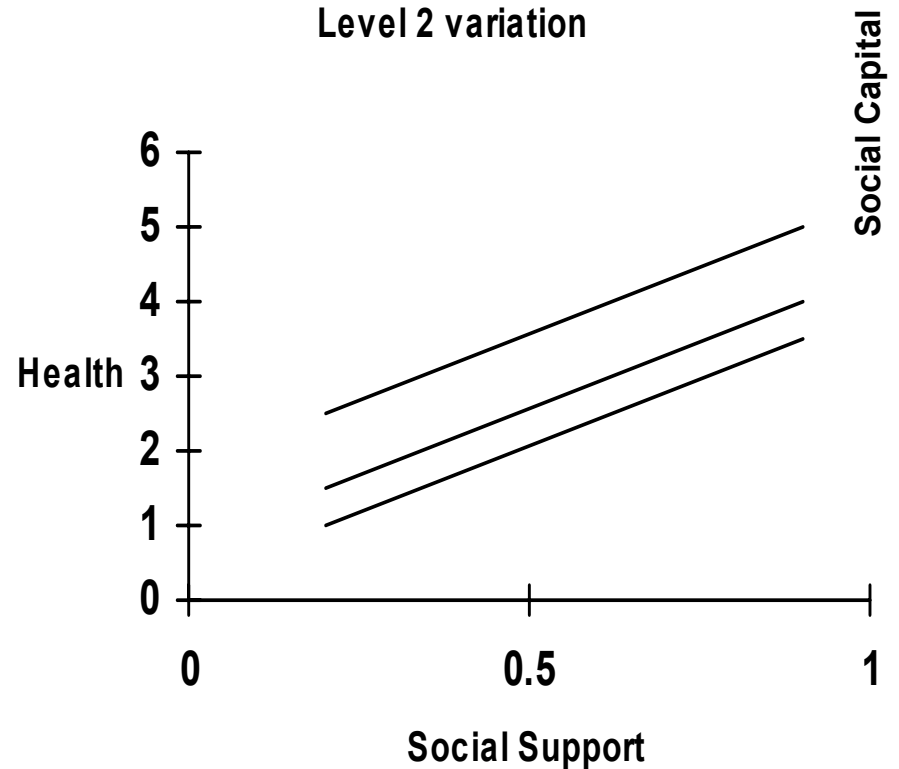
Social Capital or Social Support?

- **Multilevel Modelling**

Level 1 variation



Level 2 variation



Social Capital or Social Support?

- **Subramanian et al (2003):** multilevel analyses to separate individual and collective variation in ‘trust’ (Chicago Community Survey 1994-1995)
 - How much of the variation in social capital can be attributed to the neighbourhood level?
 - “*people in this neighbourhood can be trusted*” (agree-disagree)

- About 19% of variation in trust at neighbourhood level

	Model 1	Model 2		Model 3
		A	B	
Level-2: Between- neighborhood variation σ_{u0}^2	0.751 (9.38)	0.494 (8.23)	0.387 (6.67)	0.378 (6.63)

Note: Estimate divided by standard errors given in brackets.

Social Capital or Social Support?

- **Do the health benefits of social capital accrue to the individual or the collective?**
- **Evidence from ecological studies that social capital is a collective resource for health** (e.g., Kawachi et al 1997;1999; Putnam 2000)
 - Social capital and health indicators aggregated
 - Results are open to contextual and individual interpretation
- **Social capital indicators are related to health outcomes at the individual level** (e.g., Barefoot et al 1998; Rose 2000; Hyyppä & Mäki 2001)
 - Individual analyses can't identify genuine contextual effects

Social Capital or Social Support?

- **Health Survey for England (2002)**
 - Total 7,394 interviews within 4,332 households selected from 720 postcode sectors
 - Analysed using **Multilevel Modelling** (MLwiN)
 - **Self-Rated Health** as dependent variable
 - **Neighbourhood level:**
 - Aggregate social trust
 - Aggregate civic participation
 - **Individual level:**
 - Social trust
 - Civic participation
 - Social support

Social Capital or Social Support?

Community

	<u>Unadjusted</u>	<u>Adjusted</u>
Aggregate Social Trust	0.25 (0.14-0.45)	0.33 (0.16-0.67)
Aggregate Participation	0.38 (0.22-0.65)	0.63 (0.33-1.18)

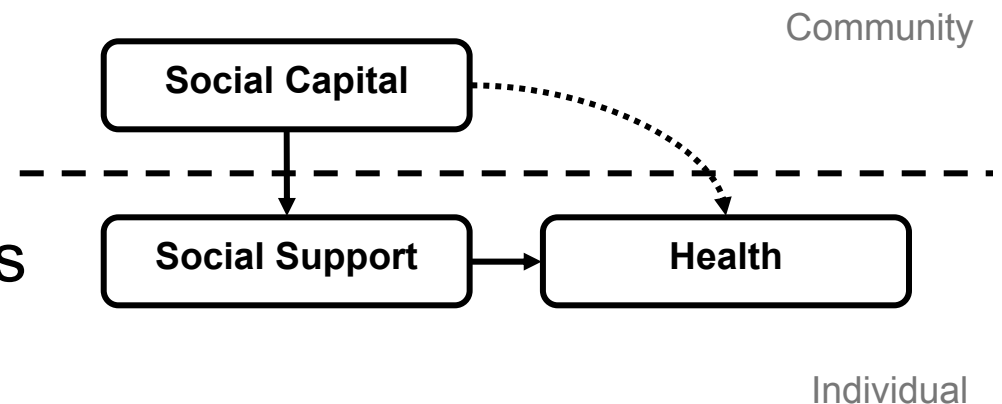
Individual

Social Trust	---	0.78 (0.64-0.95)
Participation Medium	---	0.66 (0.53-0.81)
High	---	0.55 (0.44-0.69)
Social Support Some Lack	---	1.44 (1.18-1.76)
Severe Lack	---	2.77 (2.16-3.55)

Social Capital or Social Support?

- **Conclusions:**

- Social capital indicators remain associated with self-rated health, even after controlling for individual social capital and support
- Results suggest that health benefits accrue to the individual as well as the collective (community)
- However, the individual effects are stronger
- Results suggest a pathway via social support
- ... results linked to **bonding social capital**.
- What about other forms of social capital?



- **Different types of social capital (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004):**
 - **Bonding Social Capital:** refers to ‘horizontal’ ties between members of a network/ people who share a social identity (cf., *strong ties*, Granovetter 1973)
 - **Bridging Social Capital:** refers to links across different groups in society –solidarity and respects in society as a whole (cf., *weak ties*, Granovetter 1973)
 - **Linking Social Capital:** refers to ‘vertical’ ties across formal/institutionalised power or authority structures (political engagement and influence)

Forms of Social Capital

- Most research focuses on **Bonding Social Capital**
- Refers to ‘**strong ties in the community**’
- Probably most important for health, as it provides social support (**social support pathway**)
- **Measures include:**
 - **Trust** (“...people in this neighbourhood can be trusted”)
 - **Reciprocity** (“...people in this neighbourhood try to be helpful or just look out for themselves”)
 - **Civic Participation** (‘participation in voluntary groups’):
Weak Ties?
- Associated with other social phenomena, like “**social cohesion**” (cf., Buckner, 1988)

Forms of Social Capital

- Is **Bridging Social Capital** beneficial for health?
- ‘**Weak ties**’ are unlikely to provide social support: but **broader radius of trust** likely to be beneficial
- ‘Weak’ (cooperative) connections across the social spectrum: **mutual respect** and **social inclusion**
- Bridging social capital is related to an **inequality thesis**: growing gaps in developed societies erode mutual respect and trust
- **Other possible mechanisms:**
 - *Buffer against socio-economic inequality* (lack of respect detrimental to self esteem and health)
 - *Weak ties may help to find a job* (individual SES)

Forms of Social Capital

- **Buffering effects of social capital**

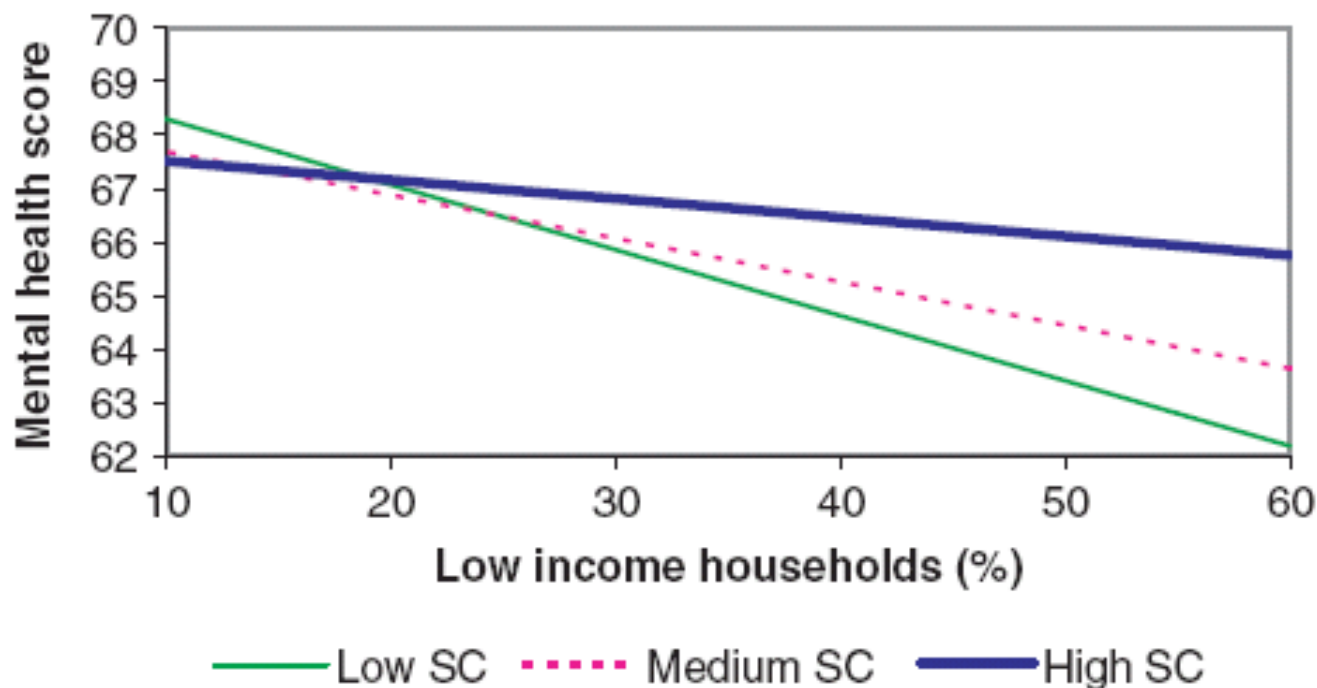


Figure 1 Relation between model predicted mental health scores, social cohesion (SC) and area income deprivation

Forms of Social Capital

- **Measurement of Bridging Social Capital**
 - **Civic participation** (‘participation in voluntary groups’)
-weak ties
 - **Generalised trust and reciprocity** (“*most people can be trusted*”)
 - **Mutual respect** (“*this neighbourhood is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together*”)
 - **Outside social links** (“*regular interaction with people outside the neighbourhood*”) → open versus closed networks
- **Note: some measures are very difficult to distinguish from Bonding Social Capital**

Forms of Social Capital

BRIDGING

- **Social Trust**
 - “*would you say that most people can be trusted, or you cannot be too careful in dealing with people*”
- **Reciprocity**
 - “*would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful or just look out for themselves?*”
- **Civic Participation** (participation in voluntary groups)
 - **Bonding or Bridging:** Depends on the strength of interaction (both bonding and bridging aspects?)

BONDING

- **Social Trust**
 - “*would you say that most people in your neighbourhood can be trusted (...)*”
- **Reciprocity**
 - “*would you say that people in your neighbourhood are helpful?*” (“I borrow things and exchange favours with my neighbours”)

Forms of Social Capital

- What about **Linking Social Capital**?
 - links across vertical power or authority gradients in society (Szreter & Woolcock 2004)
- **Political engagement and influence**
- Linking social capital is related to the **political economy approach**: Health inequalities caused by differences in access to material resources
- **Possible pathway**: fight successfully against budget cuts and/or lobby for improvements?
- Associated with social phenomena, such as “**collective efficacy**” (Sampson et al 1997) and “**vertical trust**” (i.e., trust in political and societal institution, Rothstein 2000)

- **Measurement of Linking Social Capital**
 - **Political Engagement:** *Have you taken any of the following actions? (contacted an MP, attended a public meeting, signed a petition, etcetera....)*
 - **Political Participation:** voting in national elections
 - **Political Trust:** *(how much do you trust ... the government, parliament, your local council, the police, etcetera...)*
 - **Collective Efficacy:** *“by working together people in my area can influence decisions that affect the local area”*

Forms of Social Capital

- **Sundquist & Yang (2007):** Linking social capital and self-rated health
- 11,175 participants in Sweden (2000-2002)

Linking Social Capital (proportion nbh voting)		<u>Unadjusted</u>	<u>Adjusted</u>
Low	1.41	(1.27-1.59)	1.22 (1.10-1.34)
Medium	1.20	(1.10-1.30)	1.14 (1.05-1.24)
High	1		1

- **What do these results mean?**
- **What are the possible pathways?**

Forms of Social Capital

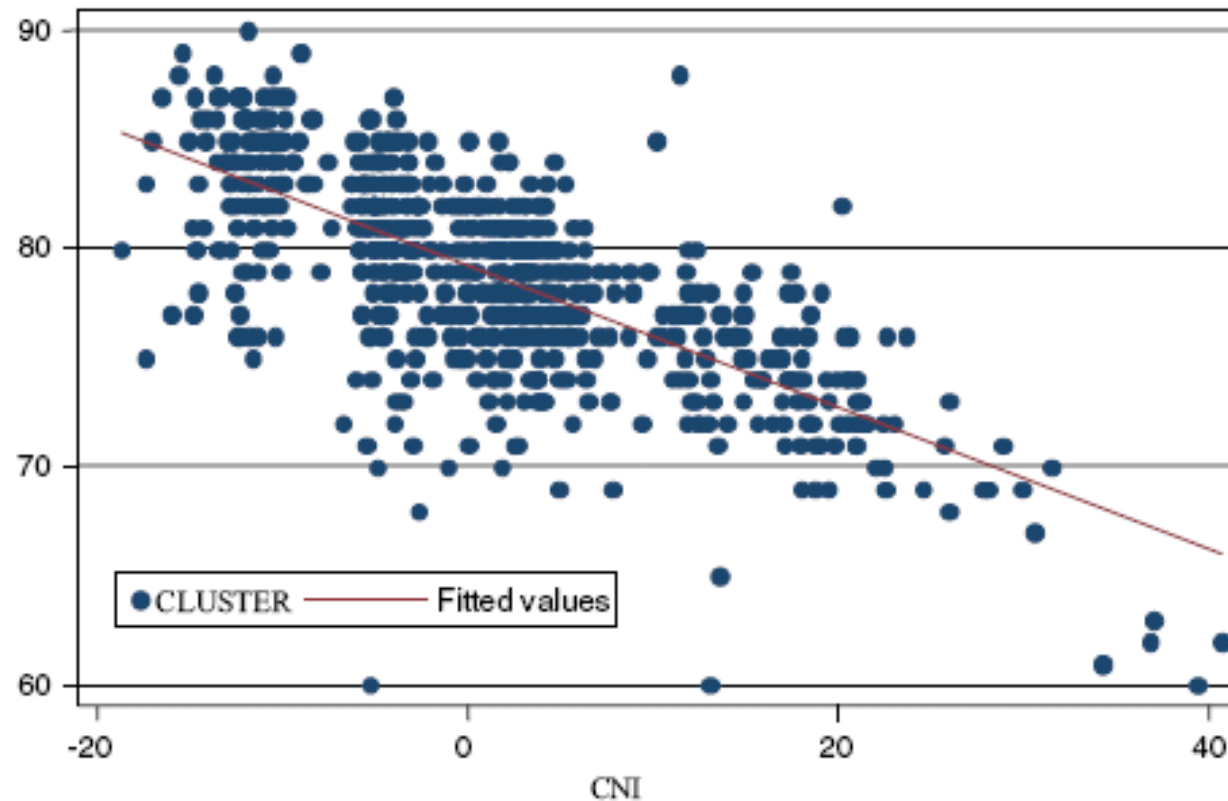


Fig. 1. All clusters ($n = 740$). The x -axis shows level of deprivation, i.e. the higher the value, the higher the deprivation. The y -axis shows voting in percentages. The correlation coefficient between level of deprivation and voting is 0.87.

- **Social Capital:** social aspects of neighbourhood environment are important for health
- However, **social capital is a broad social construct** that it is difficult to grasp
- Social Capital **can take various forms, is easily mixed up with other social phenomena, and often possible mechanisms are not clear** (lack of theoretical framework)
- Clearer **definition, measurement, and** (spelling out of) **mechanisms** are needed to be useful
(*meaning* \leftrightarrow *measurement* \leftrightarrow *mechanism*)

- **Measurement of social capital** depends on
 - the **form of social capital** (bonding, bridging, linking)
 - **Aspect of social capital and associated social phenomena** (social cohesion, social inclusiveness, collective efficacy, political trust)
- **Indicators may also measure aspects of other forms of social capital**
 - cf., civic participation: bonding or bridging? Strong or weak ties?
- **Definition and measurement central to the possible pathways to health**
 - Different aspects of social environment impact on health in different ways
 - Mechanism implies form or aspect of social capital

Many Thanks

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