

Ageing, Frailty and Wellbeing: Trends, Inequality, and Implications for Policy

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An ageing world

[Nothing] is more likely to shape economic, social, and political developments in the early twenty-first century than the simultaneous aging of Japan, Europe, and the United States ... The human life cycle is undergoing unprecedented change. To preserve economic security, we must adapt the social institutions built around it to these new realities.

The Commission on Global Aging (1999)

Politicians urged to face up to the Demographic timebomb (Guardian 2006)

Population ageing - Are we heading for a future of protest, destruction and the threat of financial meltdown? (BBC 2004)

“If you aren’t scared about the enormous generational storm we’re facing, you must be on a particularly high dose of Prozac” (Kotlikoff, 2004)

The perceived impact of an ageing world

- Reduced labour supply and decreased consumption, reducing tax income;
- Increased costs of pension, health and social care programs;
- Enormous pressure to reduce benefits, raise taxes, and reduce spending on other public services;
- Reduced levels of publicly provided benefits and pensions;
- Increased family involvement in care provision.

The Commission on Global Aging (1999)

- In response, the major policy strategy is extended working lives.
- More broadly, there is an 'active ageing' policy agenda, said to carry both social and personal benefits.
- Ultimately an aspiration to promote productive ageing – if you are not working you should be engaged in social activities, including grandparenting, or civic activities, including volunteering...

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Demographic aging brings with it a systematic transformation of all spheres of social life ... beneath even the daunting fiscal projections, lies a longer-term economic, social and cultural dynamic ... What will it be like to live in societies that are much older than any we have ever known or imagined?

The Commission on Global Aging (1999)

Images of ageing

The title means 'my mother, poor thing'

Contemporary critics found this image **shocking** at a time when it was thought that the elderly should be represented with respect or with sentiment.

Sickert instead treads a fine line between complete honesty and brutality applying the paint in small dabs and touches so that the face has the crumbling texture of great age.



Mamma Mia Poveretta (1901-04)
Walter Richard Sickert



Images of ageing

ERWIN OLAF (born in 1959 in Hilversum (the Netherlands))

Erwin Olaf's art implicitly visualises the unspoken, the overlooked, that which typically resists easy documentation.

Olaf's trademark is to address social issues, taboos and bourgeois conventions.

Olaf conceals his themes so that the viewer unconsciously and initially accepts the concealment found in his photo series. Yet in the end, his unconventional style delivers dramatic visual and emotional impact ... **he vividly captures the essence of contemporary life.**

The Third Age

Healthy, wealthy and engaged in society

- Post-retirement, post-parenting, but pre-dependency.
- Contributing to society:
 - Voluntary/community activities;
 - Political/civic engagement.
- Consuming and enjoying life, leisure and pleasure – cultural mainstream.
- Self-fulfilment:
 - Having a role;
 - Having status;
 - Having fun.
- A generation liberated from the standardised lives of previous cohorts.
- Or greedy, self-interested baby-boomers, who benefited from social welfare and are living individualised lives orientated to self satisfaction, and giving rise to inter-generational conflict.
- And what about class?

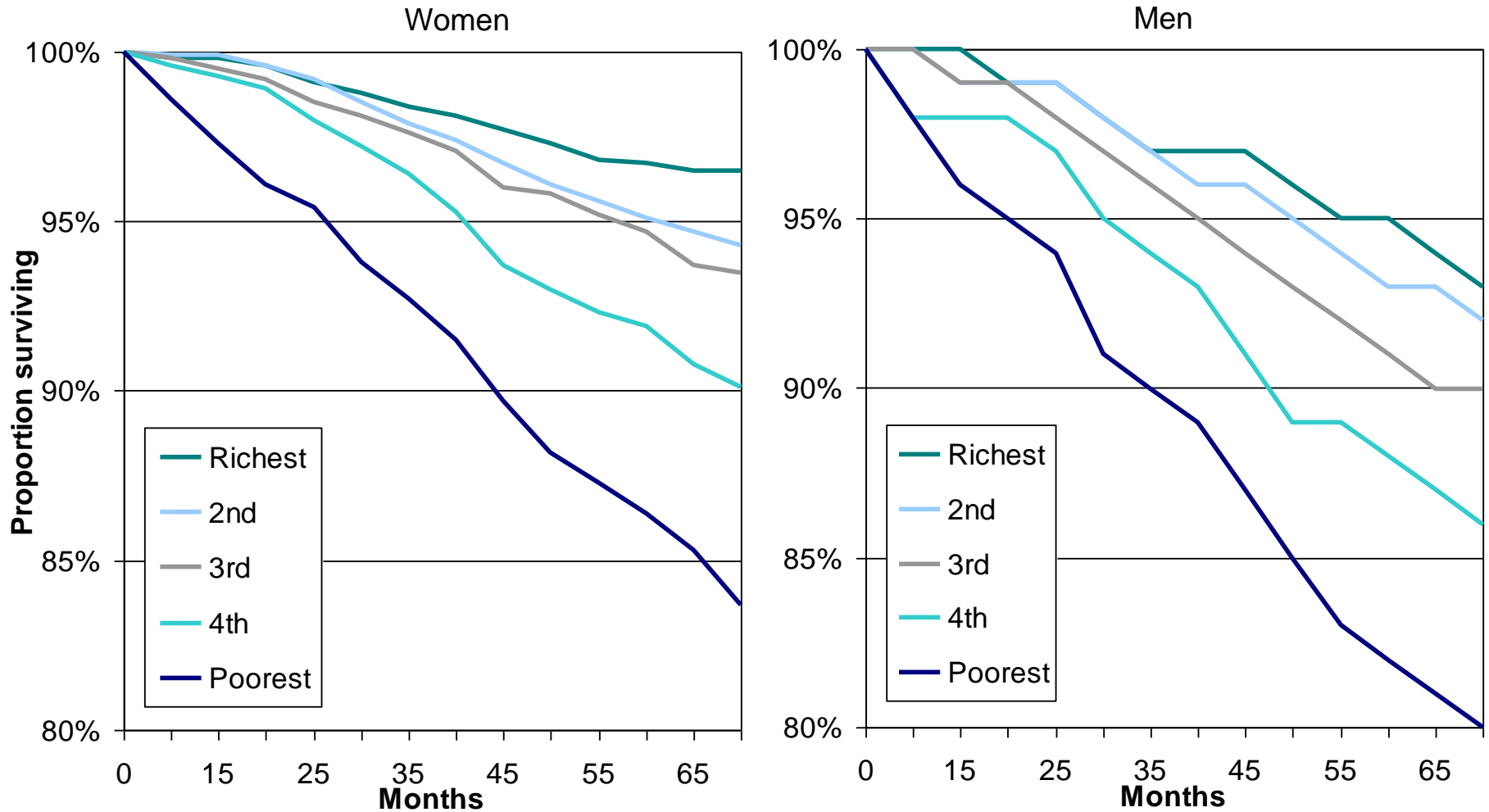
Questions and methods

- How important are health inequalities in later life?
- In what ways is the health of the older population changing in the context of dramatic increases in life expectancy?
- How is age related to wellbeing and what drives this relationship?
- What are the implications of changing patterns of retirement and the extended working lives agenda?
- What are the underlying mechanisms behind socioeconomic inequalities?

- To answer these and related questions we make use of the increasing range and depth of longitudinal, multidisciplinary, survey data on older people in a wide range of countries – in particular the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing.

The significance of health inequalities in later life

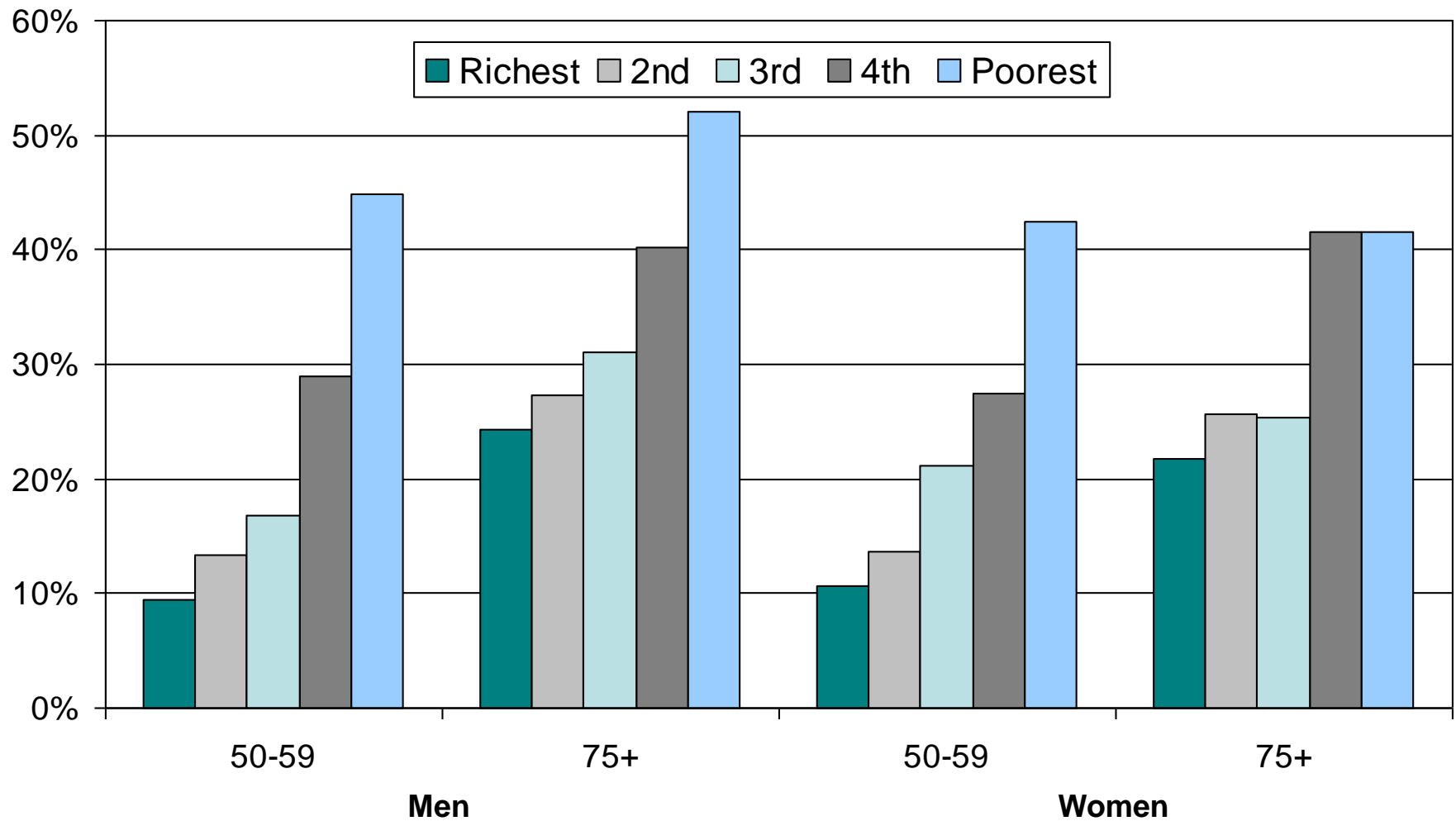
Survival rates by wealth, age 50+



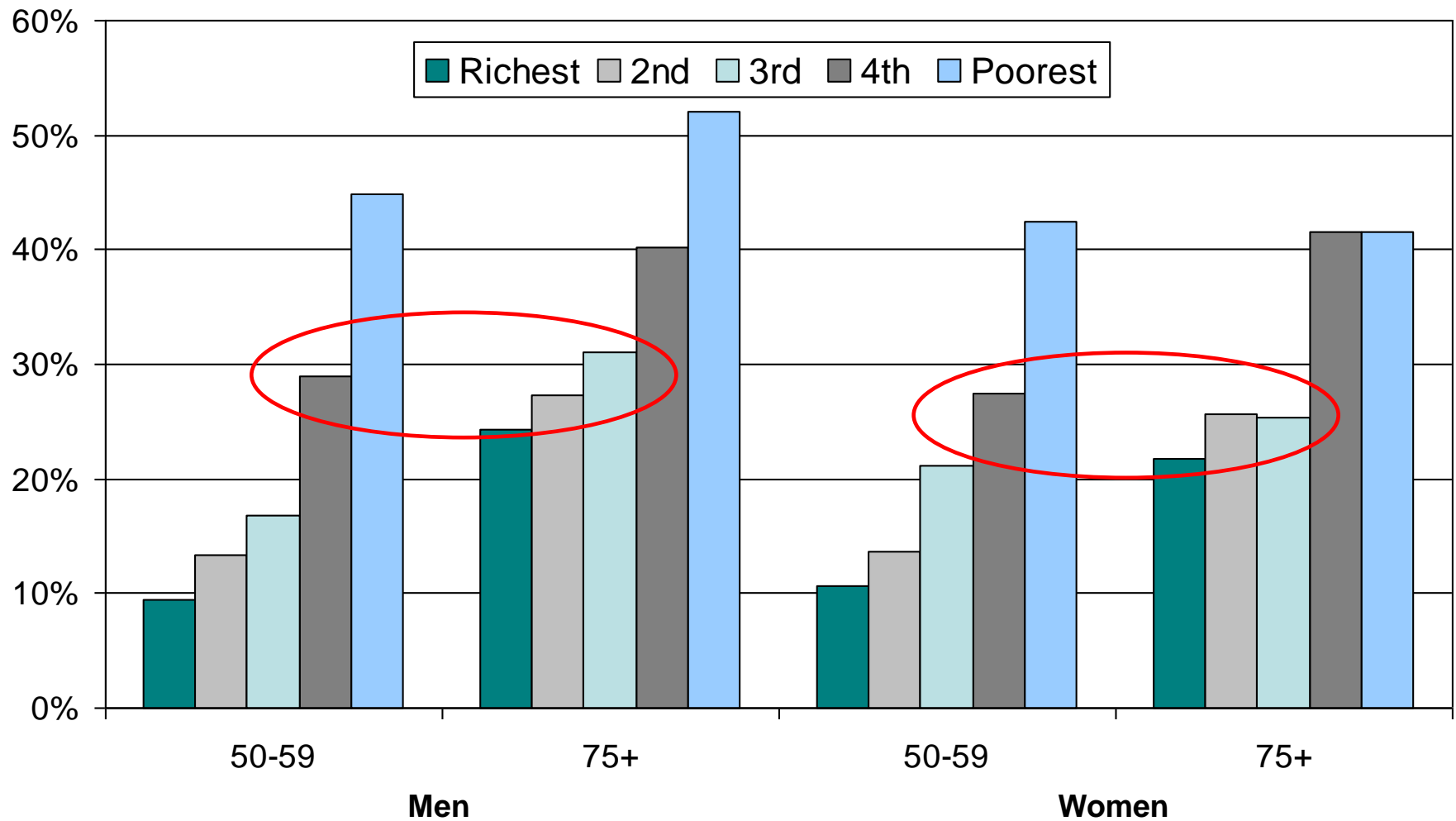
Fully adjusted hazard ratio poorest compared with richest = 1.7

(Nazroo et al. 2008)

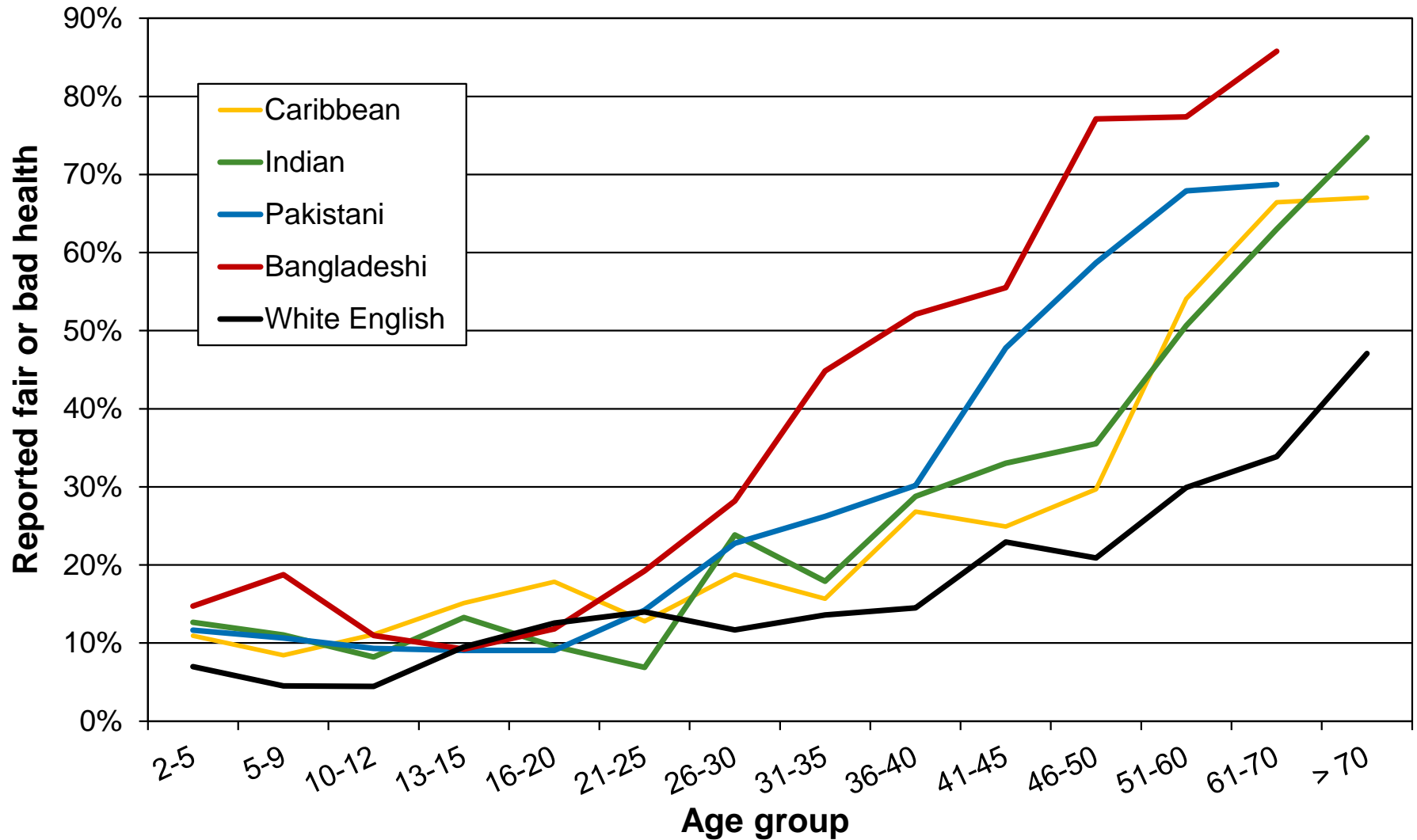
Fair/poor self reported health and wealth



Fair/poor self reported health and wealth

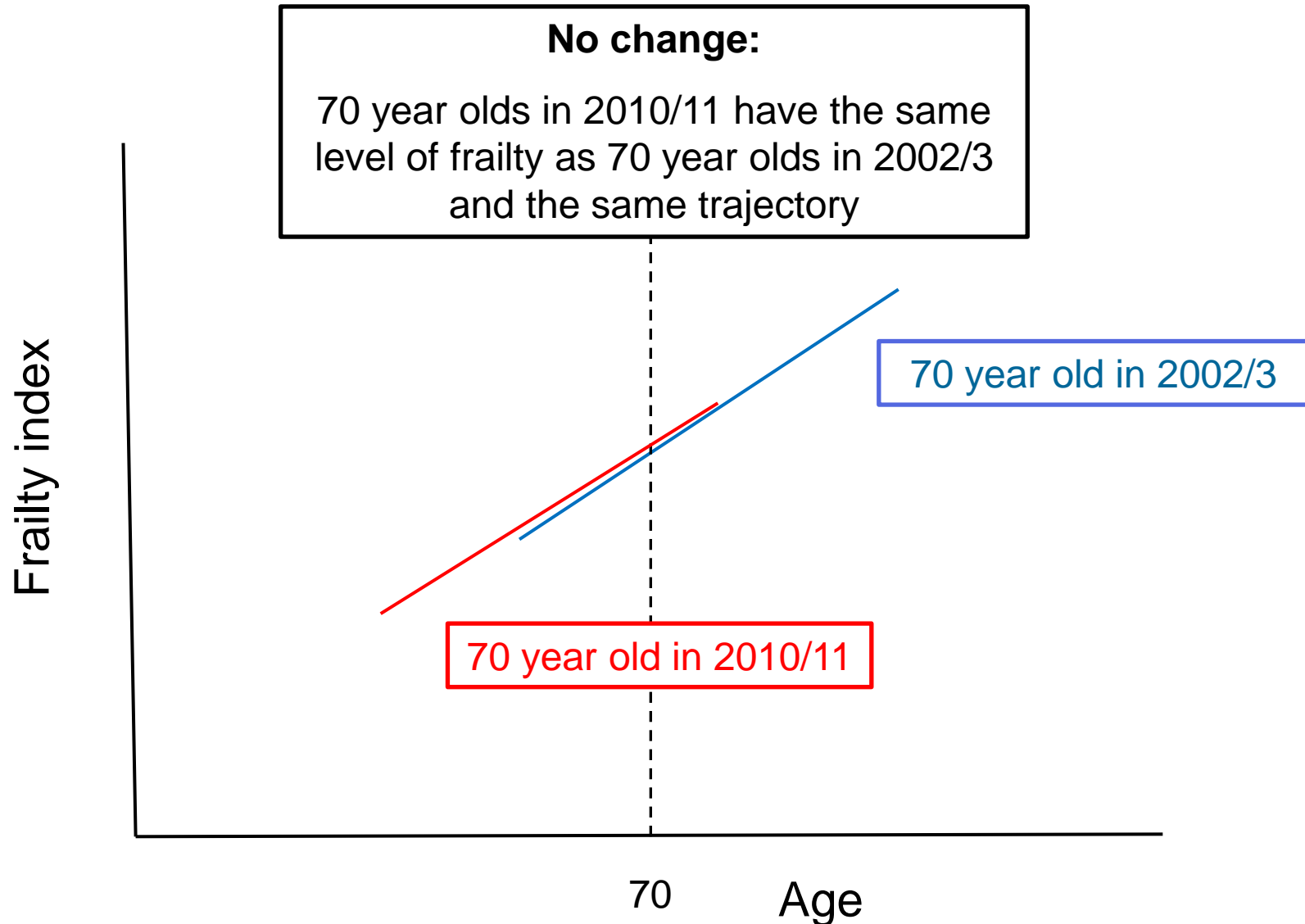


And it is not just socioeconomic position that matters: Ethnic inequalities

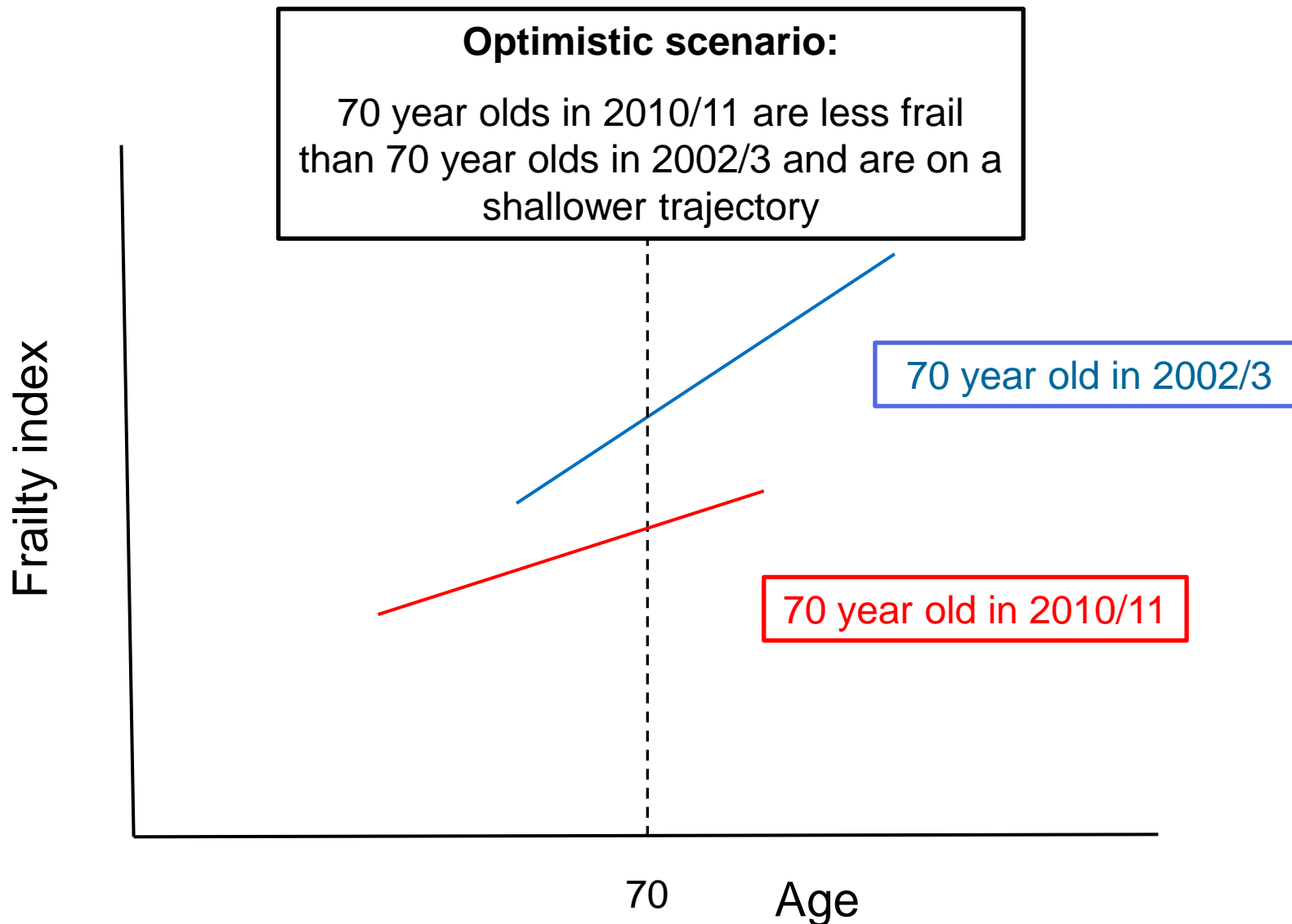


Compression of morbidity and inequalities

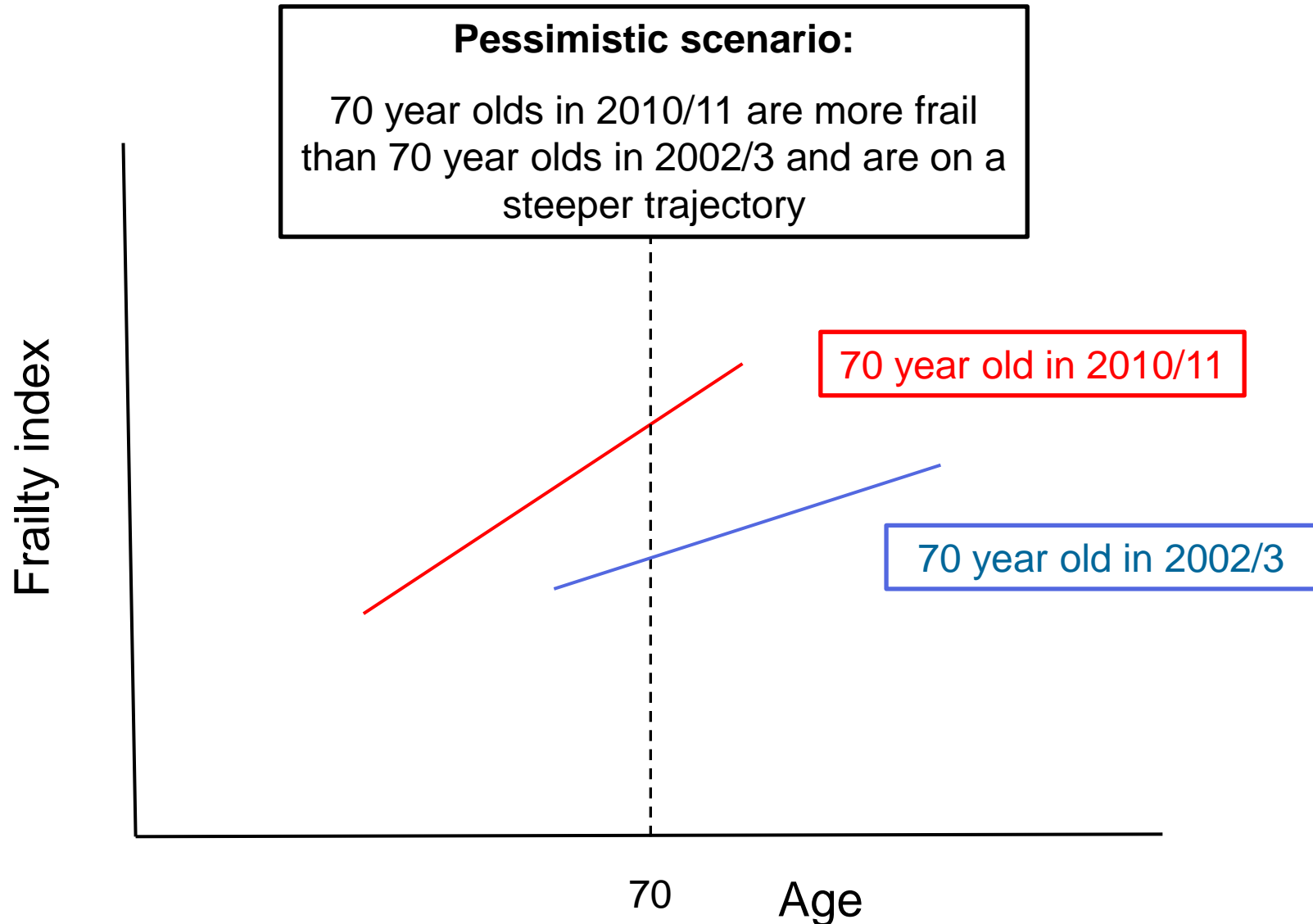
Modelling frailty trajectories by age cohort



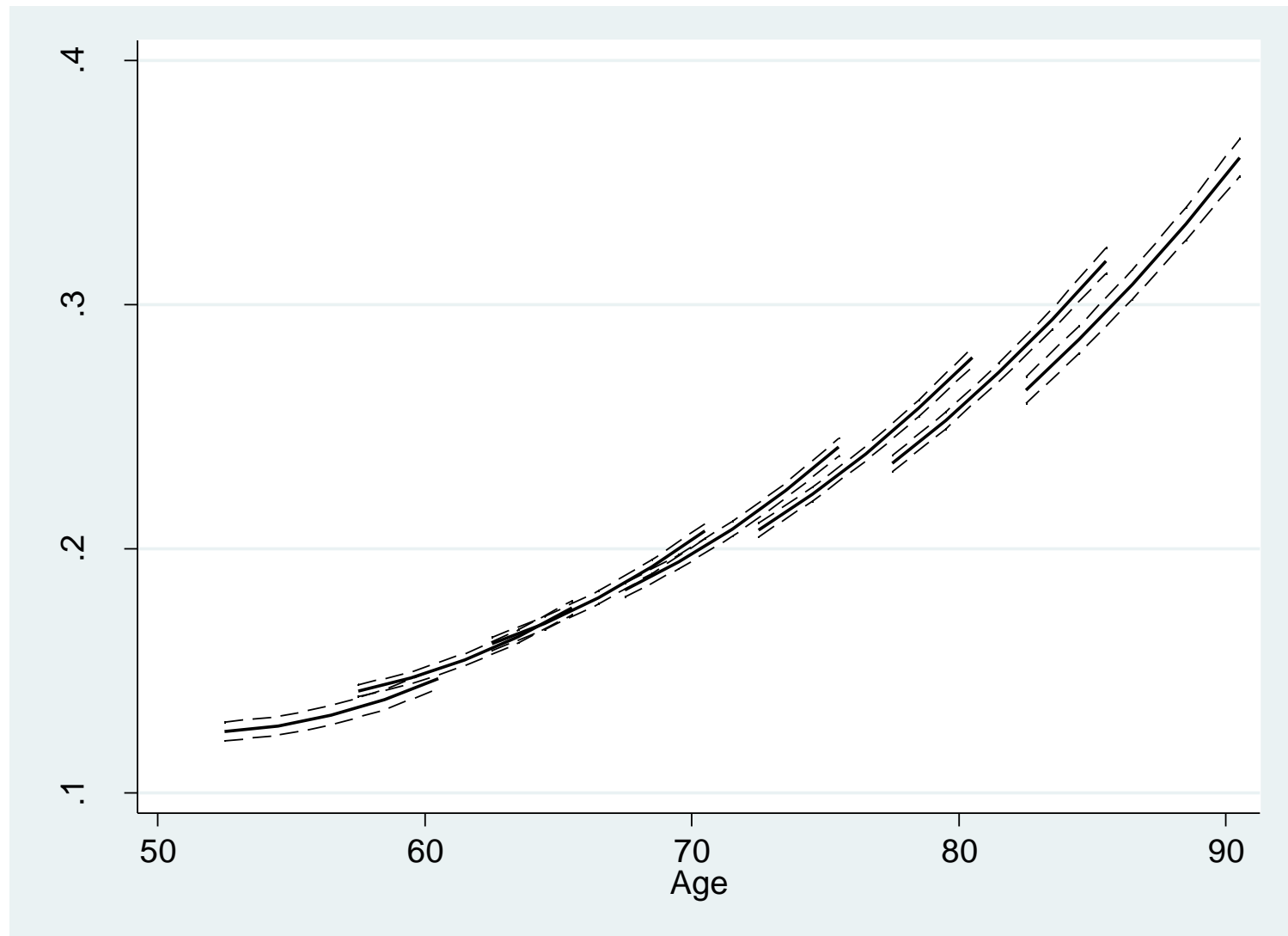
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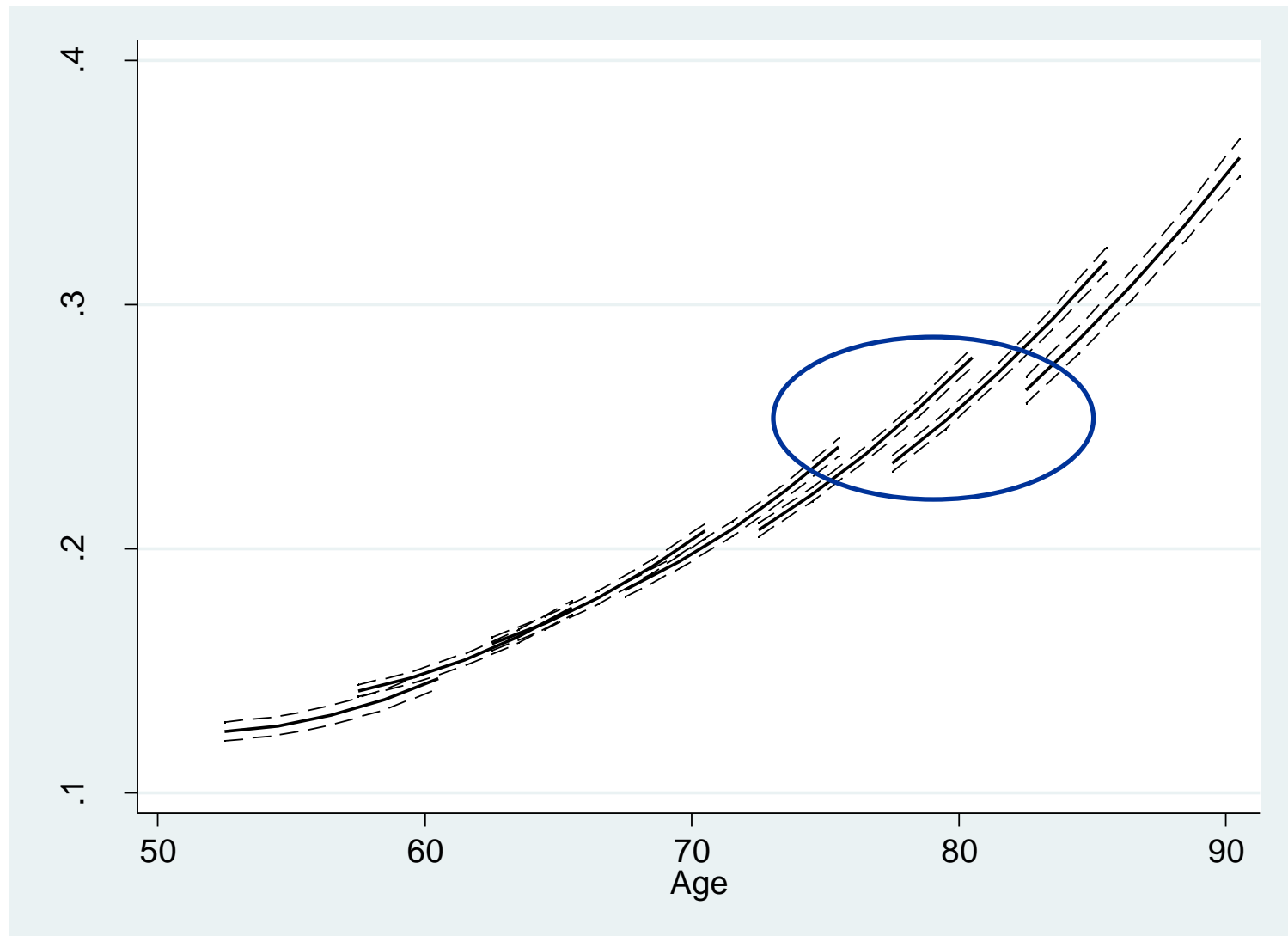


Frailty trajectories by cohort



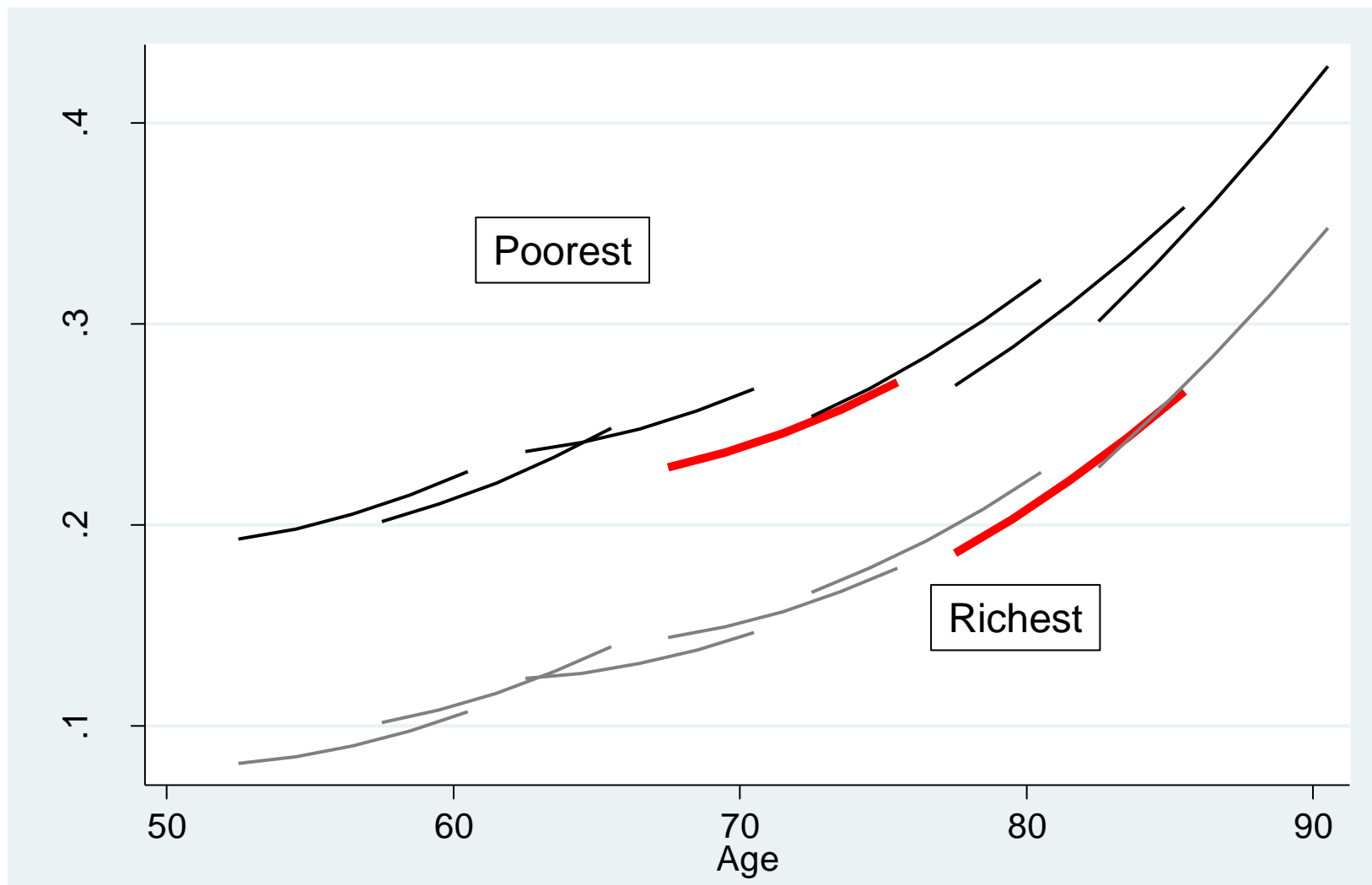
(Marshall *et al.* 2015)

Frailty trajectories by cohort



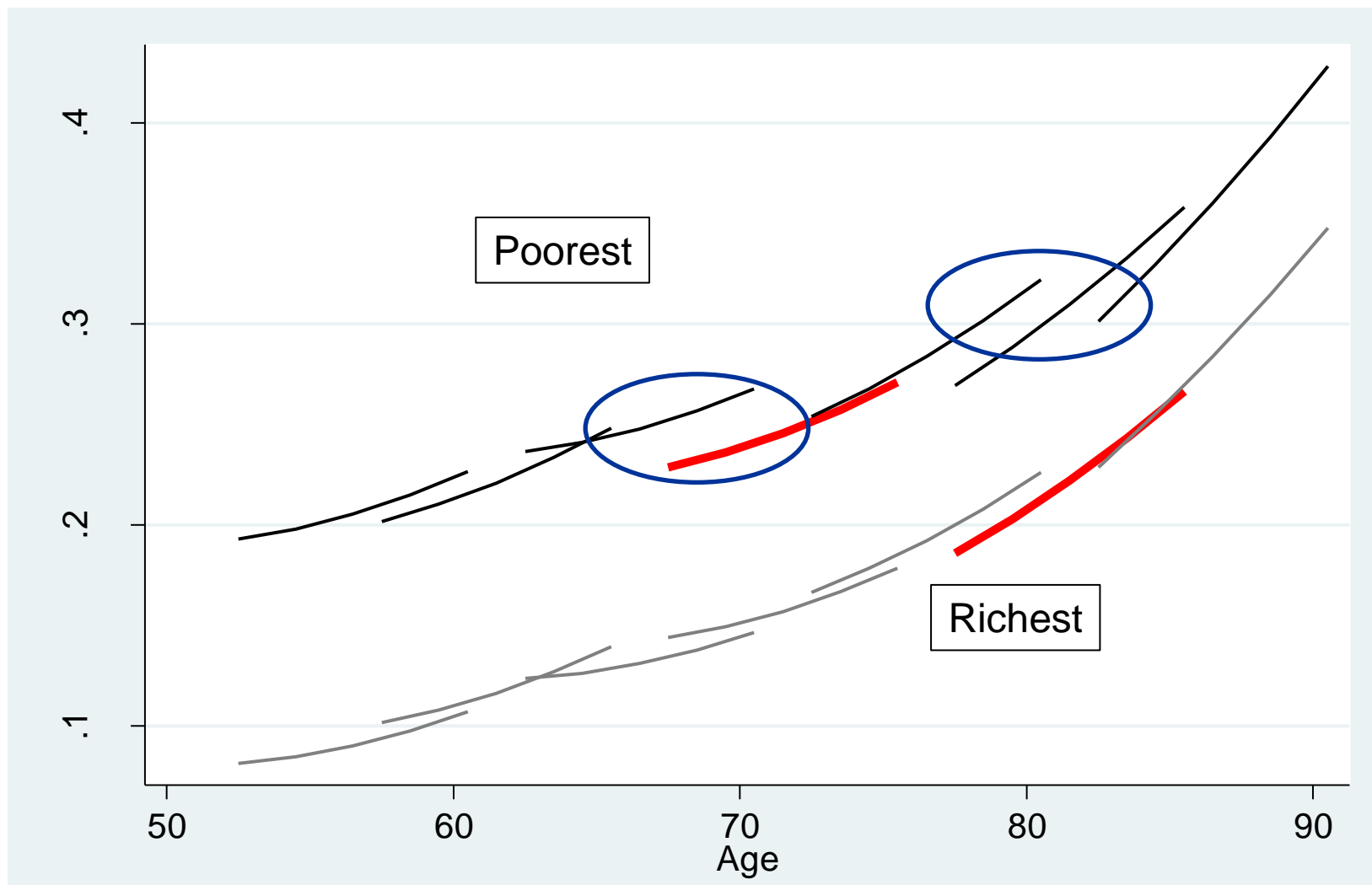
(Marshall *et al.* 2015)

Frailty trajectories by cohort and wealth



(Marshall *et al.* 2015)

Frailty trajectories by cohort and wealth

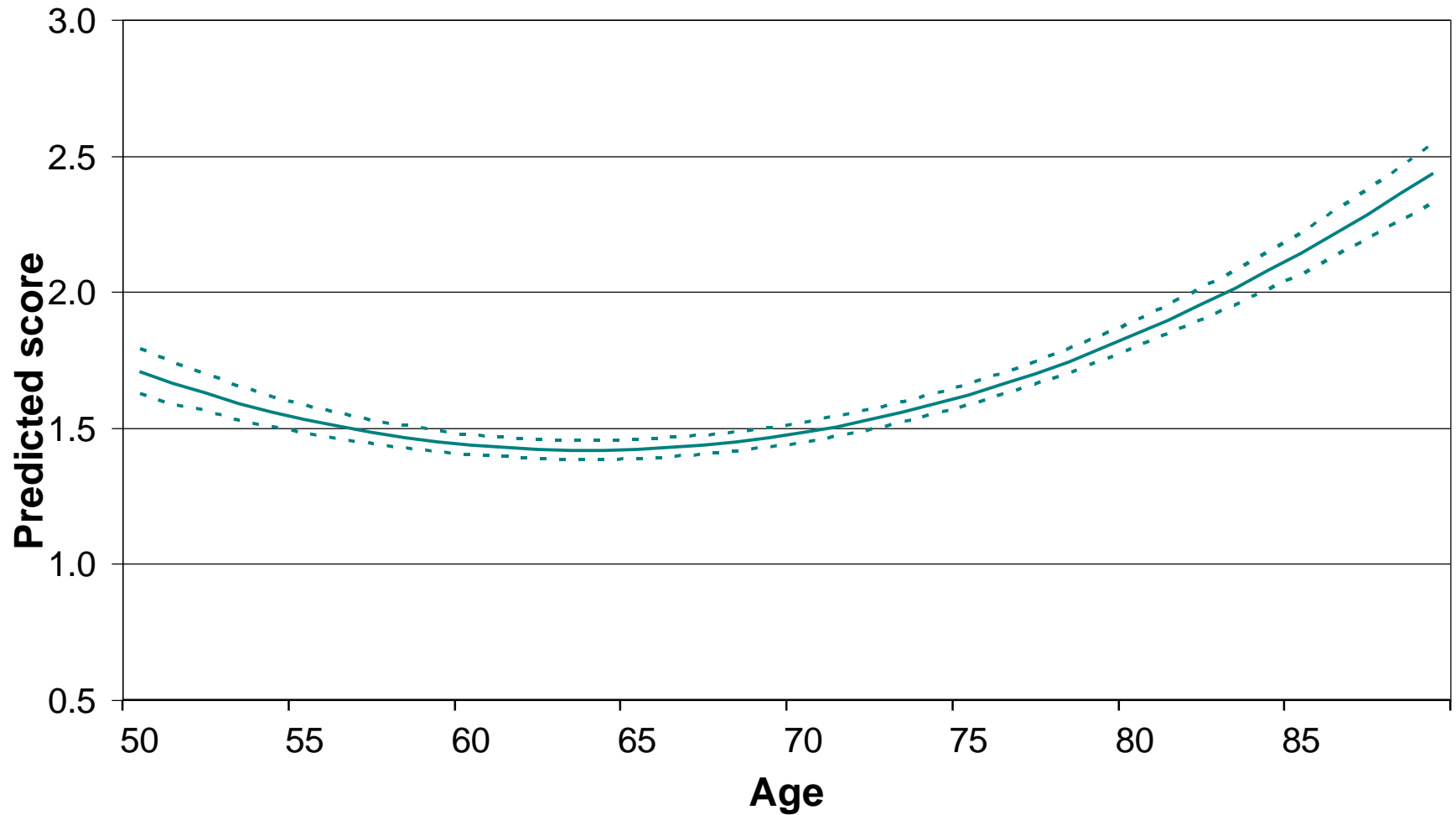


(Marshall *et al.* 2015)

Ageing, age related transitions, wellbeing and inequality

Age and depressed mood

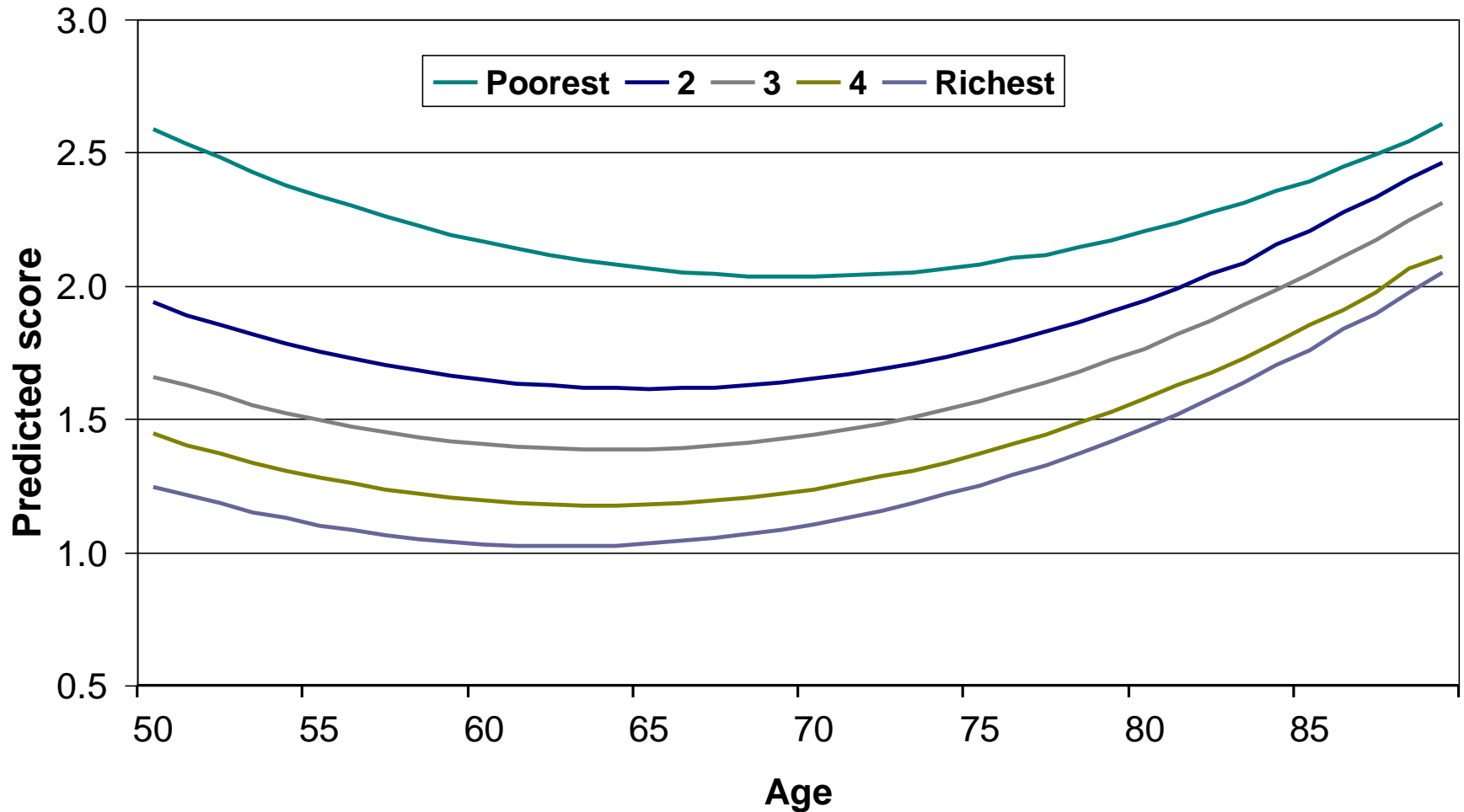
(CES-D score adjusted for gender and ethnicity)



(Jivraj *et al.* 2014)

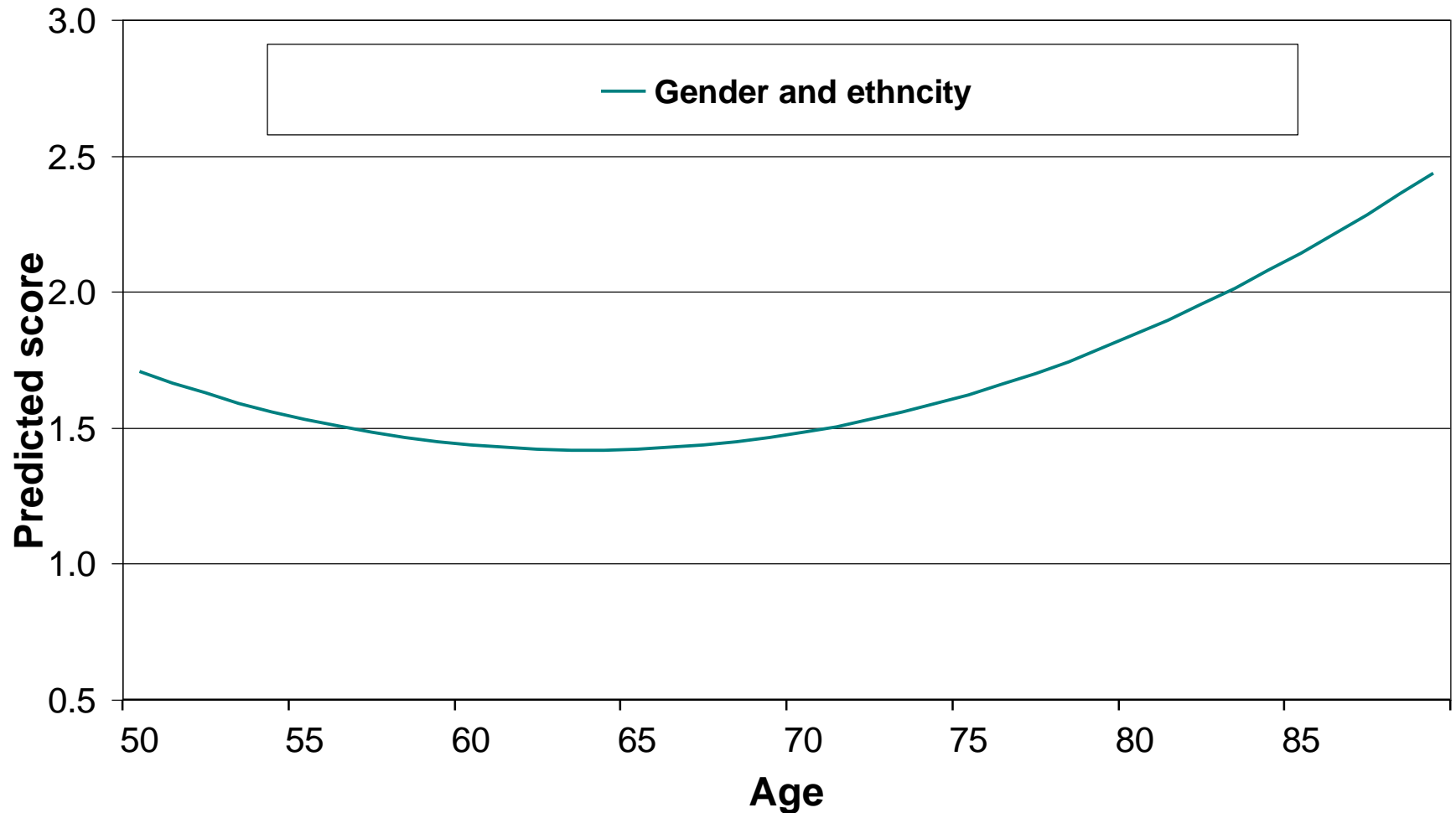
Age, depressed mood and wealth

(CES-D score adjusted for gender and ethnicity)



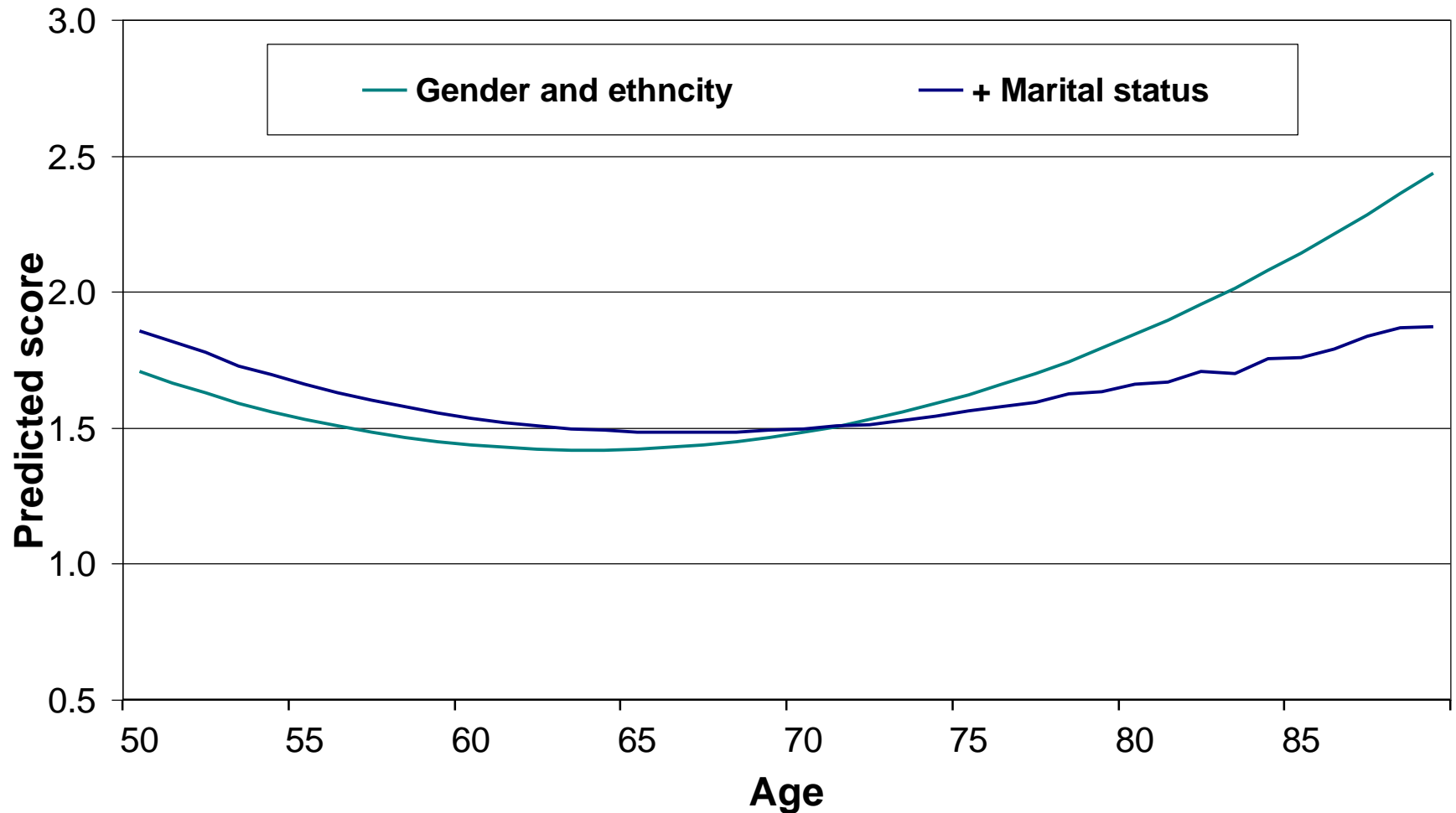
(Jivraj *et al.* 2014)

Age and depression: explaining the relationship

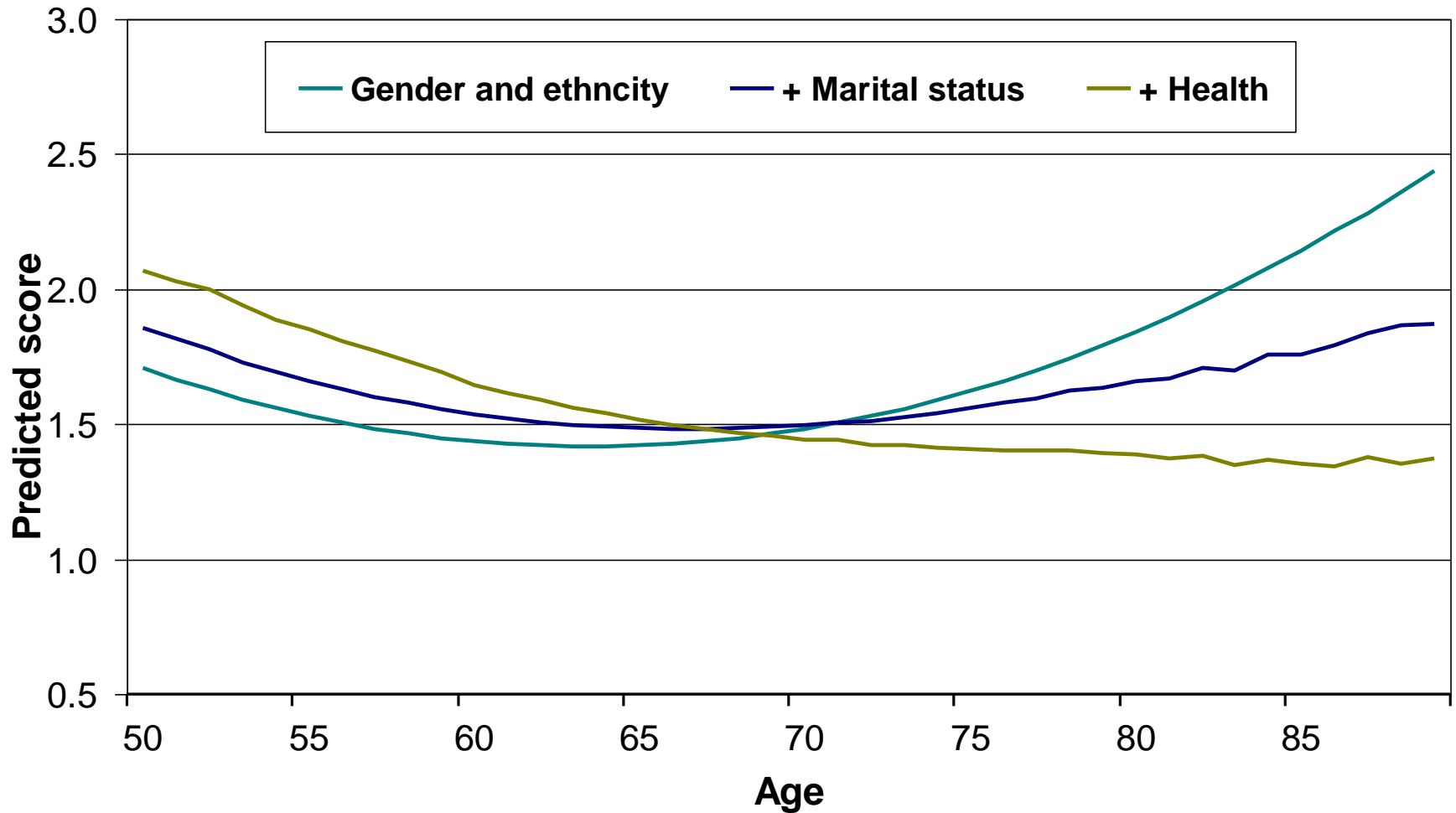


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Age and depression: explaining the relationship



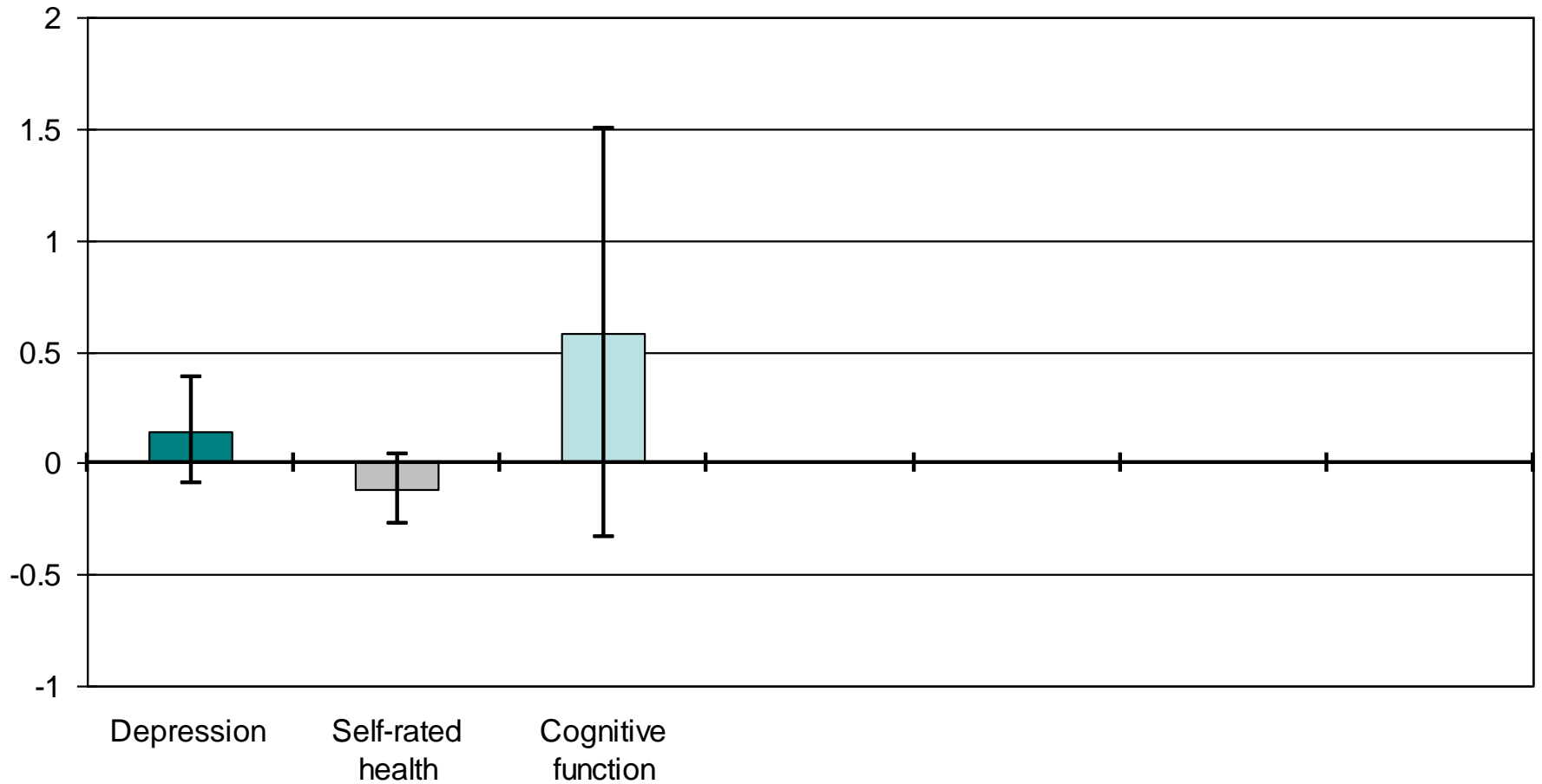
Age and depression: explaining the relationship



(Jivraj *et al.* 2014)

What is the role of paid work and retirement?

Impact of working post-retirement age on health

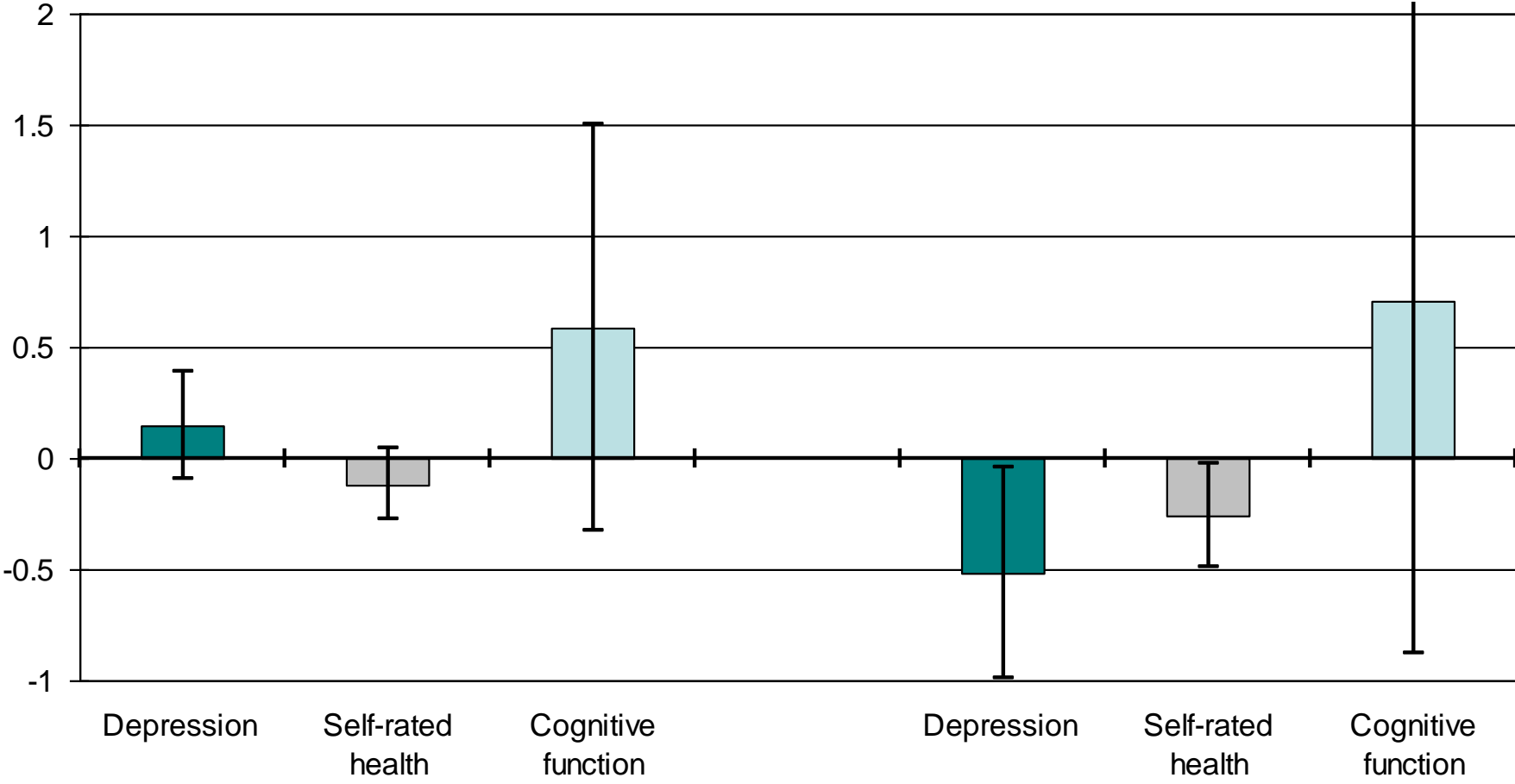


Change relative to those who retire

Propensity Score Matching

(Matthews and Nazroo 2015)

Impact of working post-retirement age on health



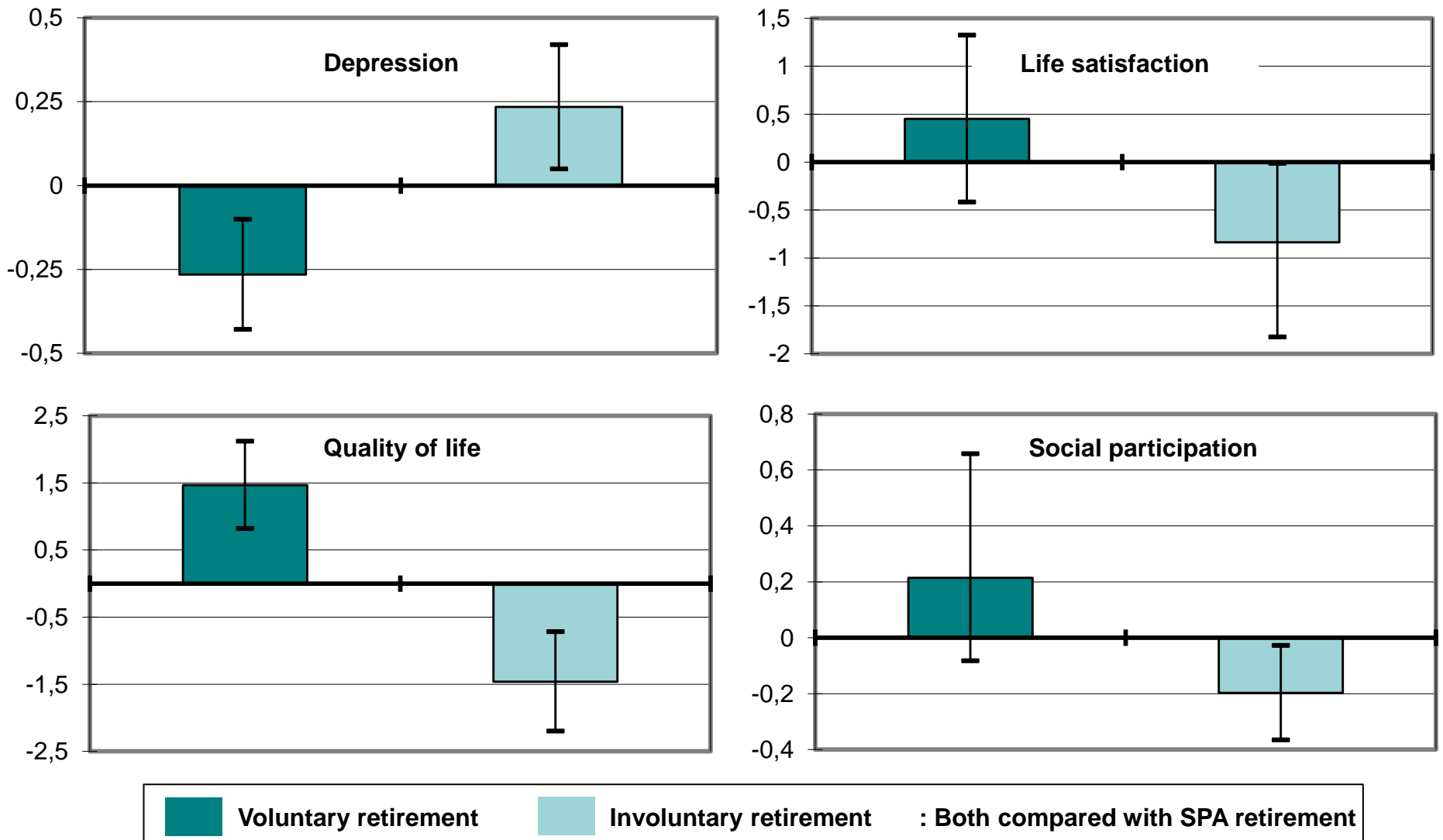
Change relative to those who retire

Change relative to those in low quality work

Propensity Score Matching

(Matthews and Nazroo 2015)

Wellbeing and type of retirement transition



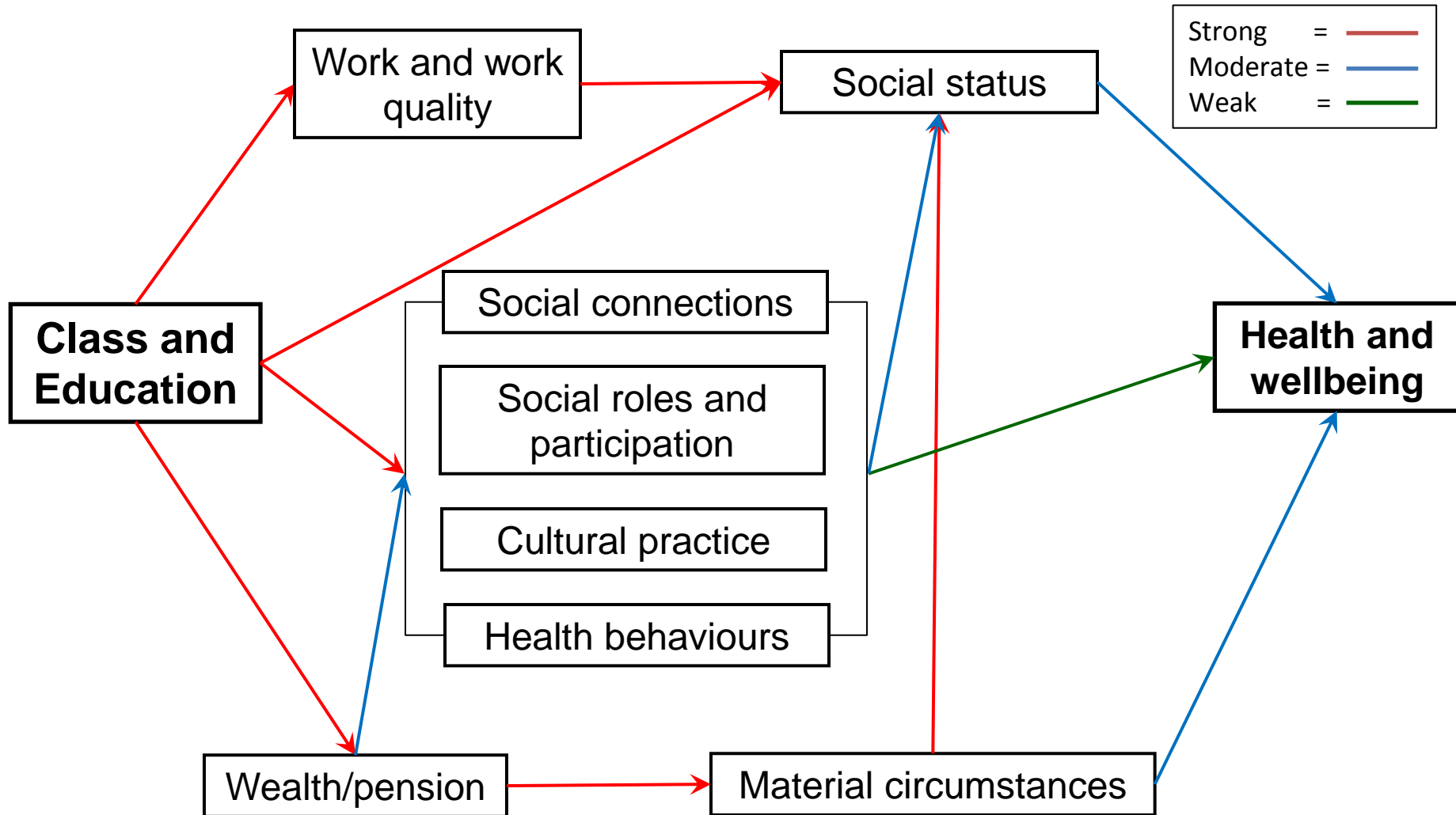
(Matthews and Nazroo 2016)

The importance of class in later life

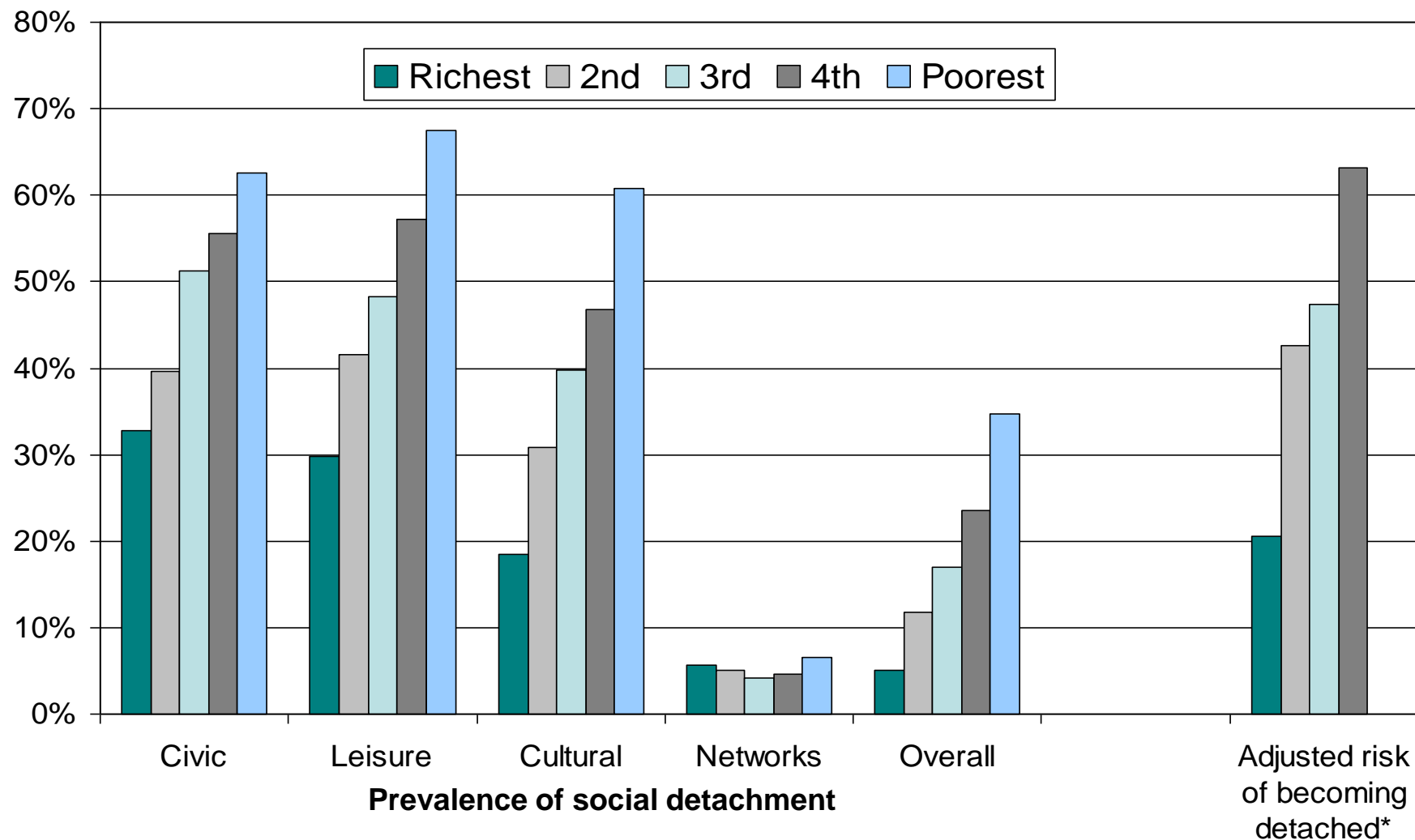
How can we understand class in later life?

- Inequalities research typically operationalises class with a measure of occupation (sometimes education), so those of working age have been the main focus.
- Class is largely theorised in terms of the impact of labour position on material and psychosocial factors, which in turn impact on relevant outcomes.
- Psychosocial explanations emphasise work conditions (control/autonomy and effort/reward) and perceived relative social position.
- But, occupational class (and education) may no longer adequately capture (processes of) stratification in societies where consumption and practice – reflecting social and cultural capital – have become significant markers of status.
- This may be particularly pertinent to those post-retirement, for whom (former) occupation may have less direct salience, highlighting the need to consider processes of stratification beyond labour relations.

Class-related pathways in later life



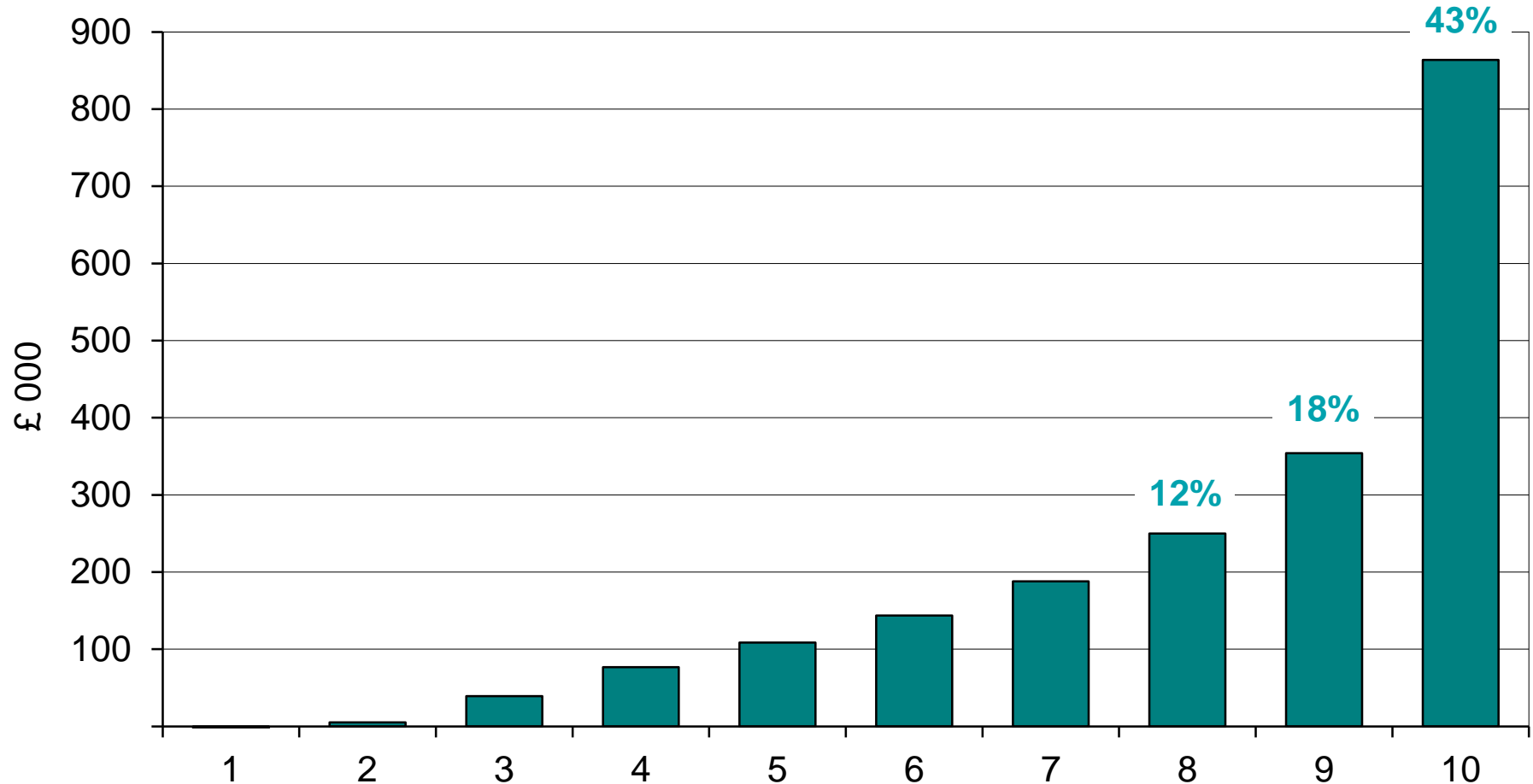
Social detachment and wealth



* Percentage of risk of poorest, over a two year period, adjusted for education, health, car ownership, age, gender, etc.

(Jivraj *et al.* 2012)

The distribution of non-pension wealth in later life



Mean level of wealth within population deciles, and percent of total non-pension wealth – Findings from ELSA (England)

Concluding comments (1)

- There are significant class (and ethnic, gender, area, etc.) inequalities that continue into later life.
- These inequalities are present for almost all relevant outcomes, proximal, intermediate and distal.
- There are important variations by cohort, with a strong indication of increases in levels, or, at best, stability in levels, of morbidity, and a widening of inequalities for more recent cohorts.
- The occurrence and nature of later life transitions and circumstances are related to outcomes – later life is important:
 - Marital status (divorce and widowhood);
 - Health/disability;
 - Retirement status/route (voluntary) and employment conditions;
 - Wealth.
- And these are all related to class position.

Concluding comments (2)

- The mechanisms through which these inequalities operate are complex, inter-related processes, operating over time:
 - Material/economic wellbeing;
 - Social and cultural capital;
 - Employment quality and retirement processes;
 - Social status and valued identities.
- There are important cohort and period changes that are reshaping later life and that have implications for these inequalities:
 - Occupational structures;
 - Pension arrangements, retirement choices/opportunities;
 - Marriage choices;
 - Health.
- All of this has implications for policies to address ageing, which currently neglect class inequalities; and it also points to the need to address proximal effects and inequalities within the post-retirement population.

Policy interventions

- Socioeconomic inequalities in later life are an absent topic in policy discussion and development.
- Almost no consideration of inequalities in discussions around later life employment, active ageing, pensions, social care and welfare reform.
- Almost no interventions to address inequalities in health in later life.
- And for interventions that are focussed on later life there is no direct evaluation of their impact on inequalities.
- Policy discourse and focus is on empowerment, productivity, individualisation of risk and responsibility, in the context of welfare retrenchment. All are likely to increase inequalities.
- In fact, there is a policy space for interventions targeted at reducing inequality and increasing social justice: pensions; job quality; housing; and social roles that provide valued identities, contribute to personal development and enhance social status.

Acknowledgements

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