



Eignungsprüfung für Berufstätige Musterprüfung Prüfungsteil Englisch

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Text

1 **Social Problems in Today's Societies**

2 Another day, another headline: today obesity*, tomorrow teenage pregnancy, the next day
3 crime figures. As soon as one social problem goes away, another turns up. For the most
4 part, these problems are regarded as entirely separate from each other. Obesity is a health
5 issue, crime a policing issue and so on. So the government launches new initiatives, builds
6 new hospitals, puts more money into the police and prisons. And all with little hope of real
7 improvement.

8 Until now, maybe. Two British academics have come up with a theory that every social
9 problem, from crime to obesity, stems from one root cause: inequality. John Crace meets the
10 authors of the book "Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better".

11 Wilkinson, a retired professor from Nottingham medical school and his partner, Kate Pickett,
12 a lecturer at the University of York, argue that almost every social problem common in
13 developed societies - reduced life expectancy, child mortality, drugs, crime, homicide rates,
14 mental illness and obesity - has a single root cause: inequality. And, they say, it's not just
15 the deprived underclass that loses out in an unequal society - everyone does, even the
16 people who are better off. Because social problems are not created by the absolute levels of
17 poverty, but the differences in income between rich and poor.

18 Take these random headline statistics for example: The USA are wealthier and spend more
19 on health care than any other country, yet a baby born in Greece, where average income
20 levels are about half that of the US, has a lower risk of infant mortality and longer life
21 expectancy than an American baby. Obesity is twice as common in the UK as in the more
22 equal societies of Sweden and Norway, and six times more common in the US than in Japan.
23 Teenage pregnancy is six times higher in the UK than in more equal societies; mental illness
24 is three times as common in the US as in Japan; murder rates are three times higher in more
25 unequal countries. The examples are almost endless.

26 "It became clear," Wilkinson says, "that countries such as the US, the UK and Portugal,
27 where the top 20% earn seven, eight or nine times more than the lowest 20%, scored
28 noticeably higher on all social problems at every level of society than in countries such as
29 Sweden and Japan, where the difference is only two or three times higher at the top."

30 The statistics came from the World Bank's list of 50 richest countries, but Wilkinson suggests
31 their conclusions apply more broadly. To ensure their findings weren't explainable by cultural
32 differences, they analysed the data from all 50 US states and found the same pattern. In

33 states where income differences were greatest, so were the social problems and lack of
34 cohesion.

35 Two things immediately became clear to Wilkinson. "While I'd always assumed that an equal
36 society must score better on social cohesion*," he says, "I never expected to find such clear
37 differences between existing market economies."

38 There are two anomalies*. Suicide and smoking levels are both higher in more equal
39 societies. "Violence tends to be directed towards other people or yourself," Wilkinson says,
40 "and it is our guess that in societies with a higher sense of community responsibility, people
41 tend to blame themselves rather than other people when things go wrong. Smoking is a little
42 different: It starts among upper-class men, then moves to upper-class women and then
43 down the social ladder; quitting smoking seems to follow a similar pattern in all countries."

44 Even so, the correlation* between inequality and social problems remains startling. And it is
45 the difference in income rather than the level of poverty that's critical. In the USA some 13%
46 of the population fall below the poverty line: yet of those who come into this category, 80%
47 have air-conditioning, 33% have a dishwasher and 50% have two or more cars. Which is not
48 quite what some other countries might call poverty.

49 What is it about unequal societies that causes the damage? Wilkinson believes the answer
50 lies in the psycho-social areas of hierarchy and status. The greater the difference between
51 the haves and have-nots, the greater importance everyone places on the material aspects of
52 consumption. What brand of car you drive carries far more meaning in a more hierarchical
53 society than in a flatter one. Status anxiety finds expression in crime, ill-health and mistrust,
54 thereby corroding society.

55 Adapted from John Crace, The Guardian, Thursday 12 March 2009

Words

anomaly - Ausnahme

cohesion - Zusammenhalt

correlation - Zusammenhang

homicide - Mord

obesity - Fettleibigkeit

1 Comprehension

Do the following tasks

1. Name three problems which characterize modern societies. How do governments usually try to solve such problems?
2. What do Wilkinson and Pickett think about these government initiatives?
3. What should be done in their opinion?
4. How can obesity be used as an example for Wilkinson's and Pickett's theory.
5. In which way do people lose out in unequal societies?
 - a) the poor
 - b) the wealthier people
6. What is special about smoking and suicide rates?
7. What according to Wilkinson causes the damage in unequal societies?

2 Translation

Translate into German: lines 11-25 (beginning with "Wilkinson, a retired professor from Nottingham...")

3 Writing

Describe life in a more equal society compared to a less equal one.

What needs to happen so we can live in a more equal society? Make some suggestions and consider the limitations of your suggestions.