

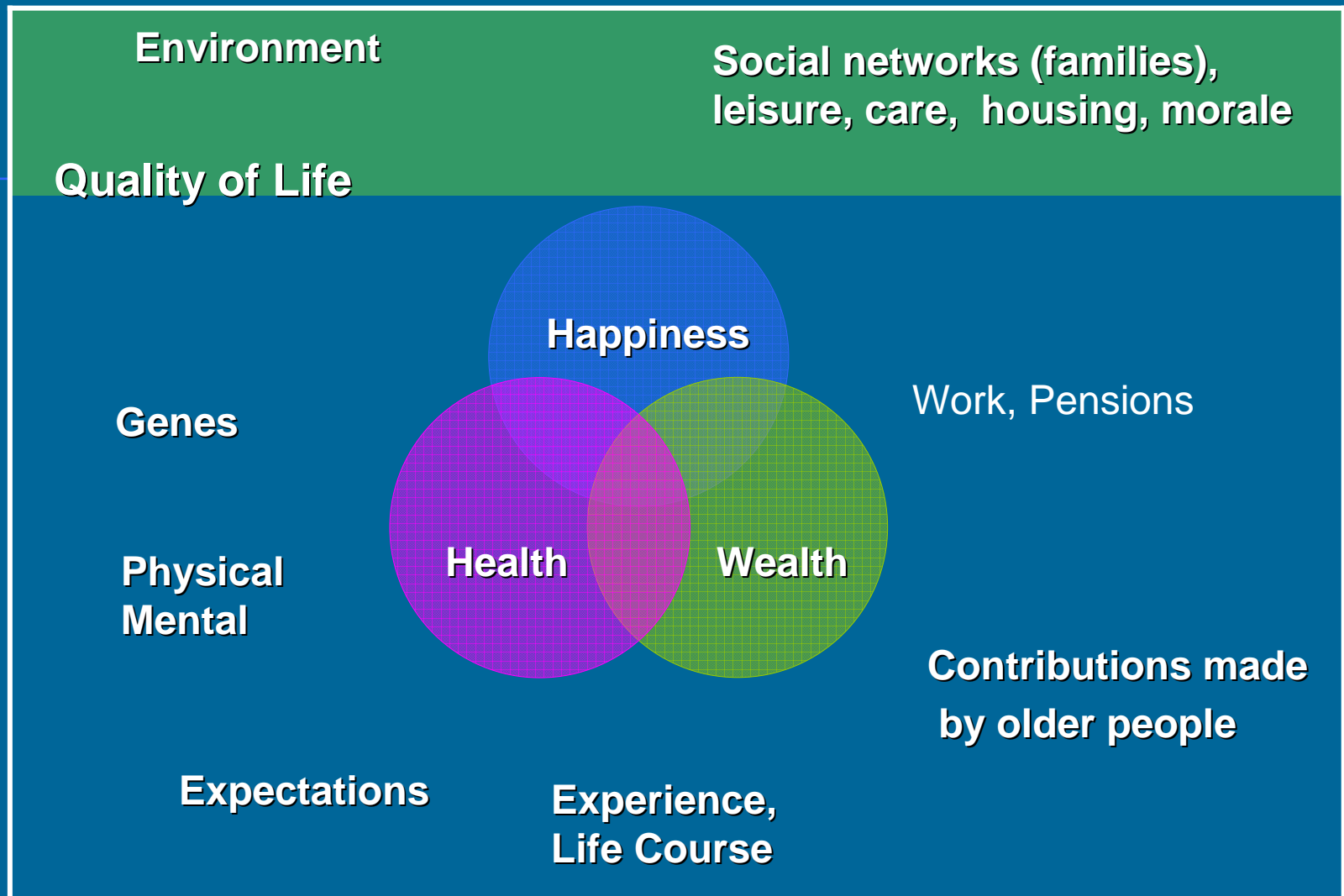
Health, Economic and Social Aspects of Ageing

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Key characteristics of 'ageing' as a research / study topic

- It is complex!
- Multi- / inter-disciplinary
- Relatively new area of research, hence much description, defining, conceptualising
- Tendency to problematise (aspects of) ageing, hence search for 'solutions' – and somewhat less for theories



Key challenges

- (1) How can one understand something as complex as 'ageing'?
- (2) Understanding 'structure' and 'agency': role of 'actors' vs. 'the stage'
- (3) Understanding 'micro' and 'macro' levels: how do individuals change & how do societies / policies change

Understanding ageing-related phenomena

The importance of the temporal aspect:

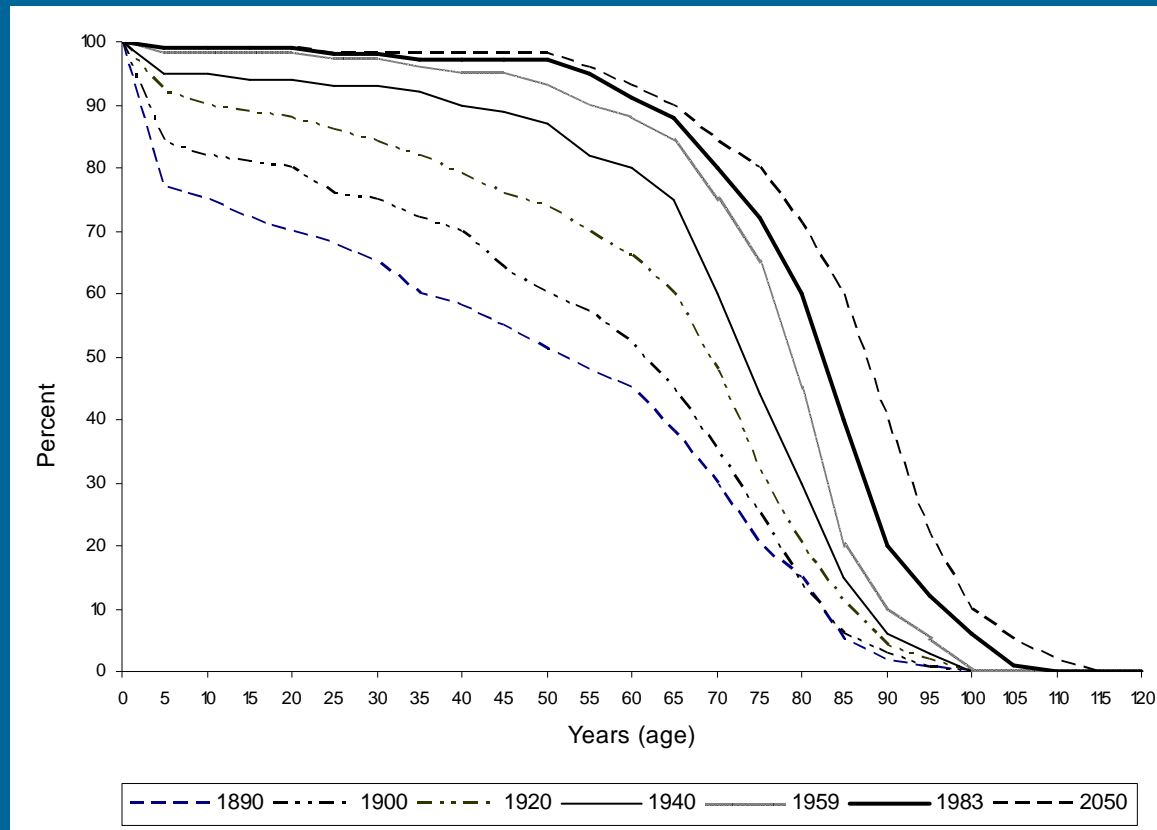
- Antecedents: Who? Why?
- Processes: What? How?
- Consequences: What? Why? How?

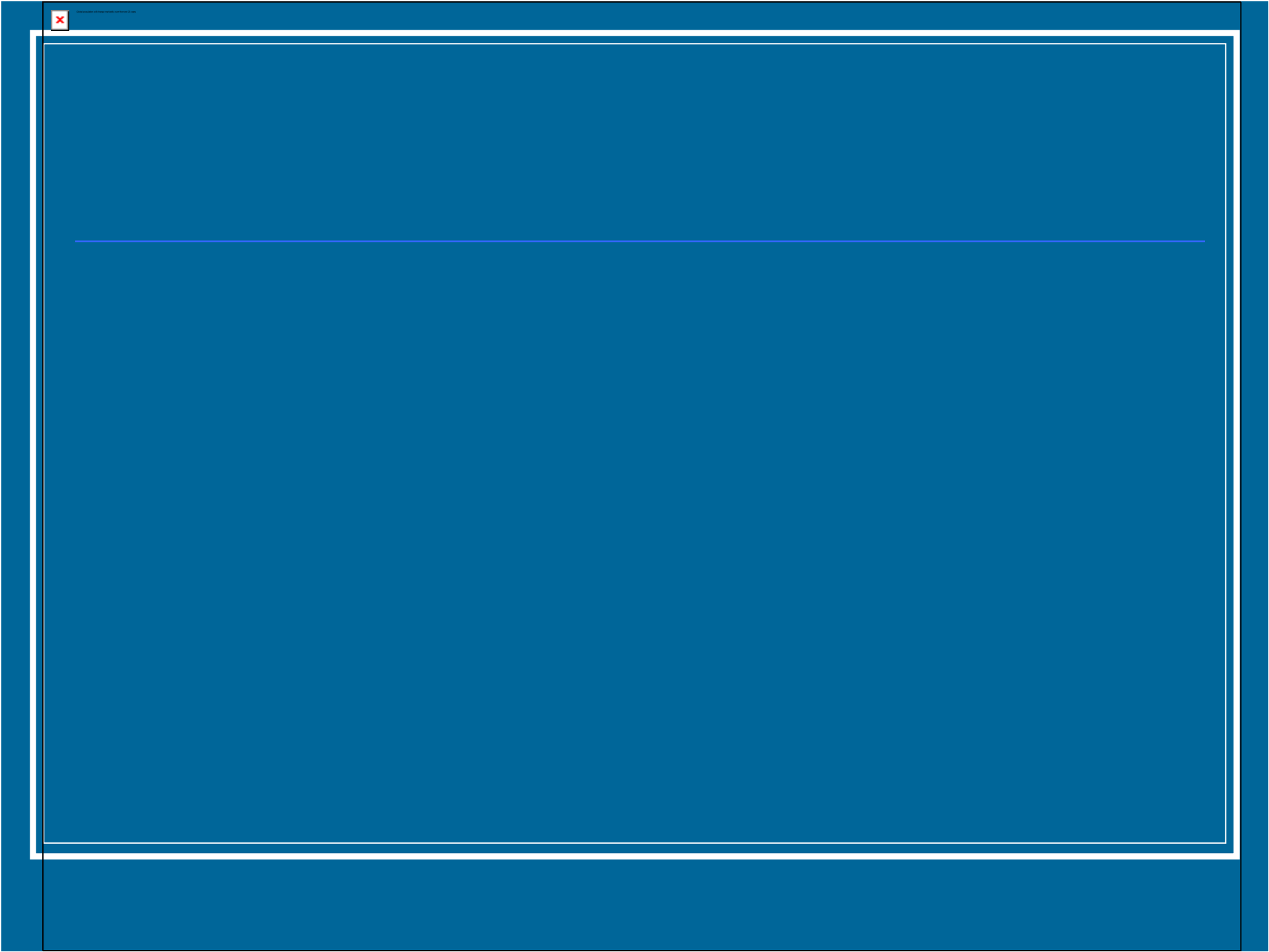
But: expense and demands of longitudinal studies

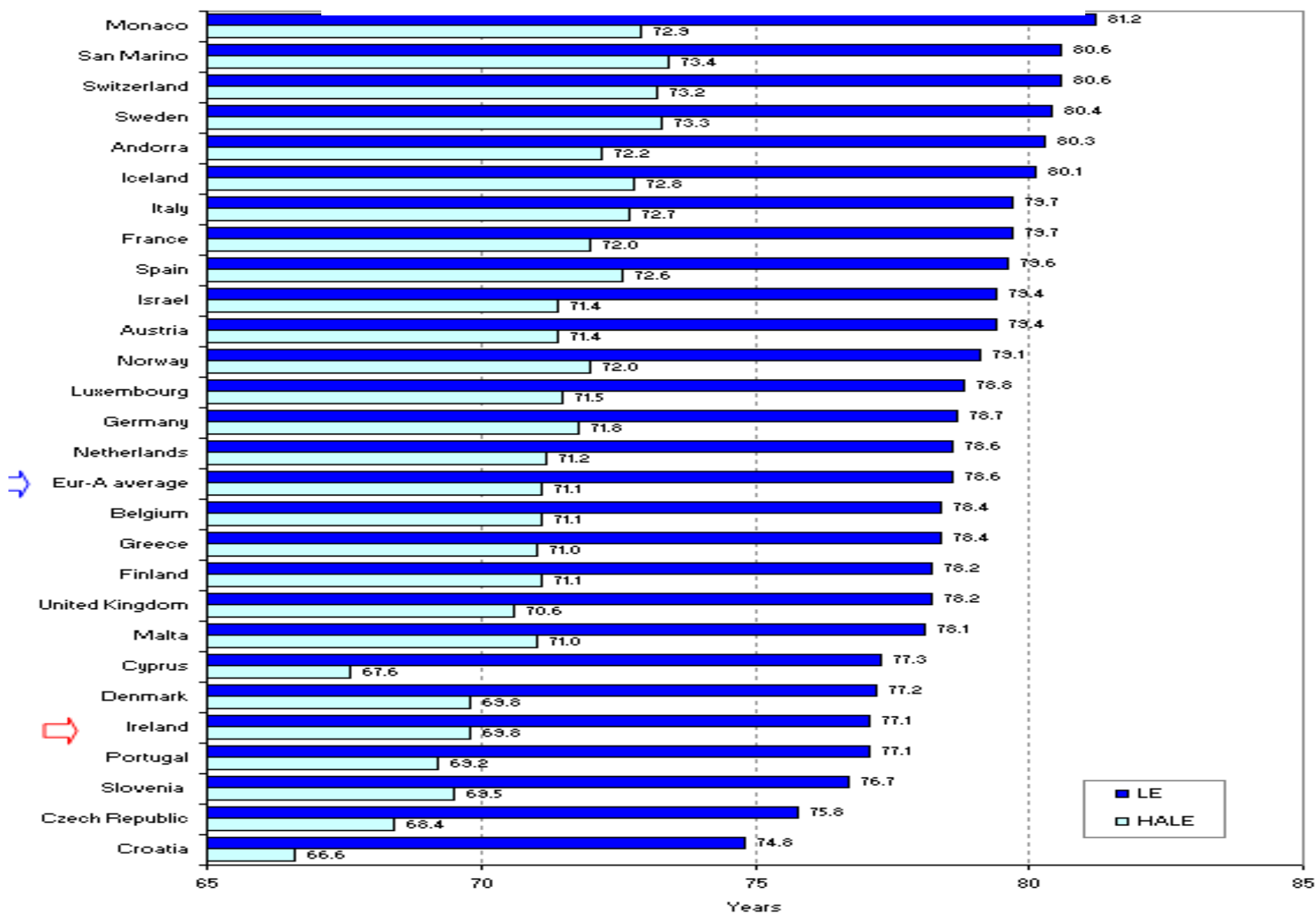
‘Tenets of gerontological imagination’ (Ferraro 2006)

- Ageing is not a cause of all age-related phenomena
- Ageing involves biological, psychological and social changes in individuals at varying rates
- The imprint of genetics on development and ageing is substantial
- Age is positively associated with heterogeneity in a population
- Ageing is a life-long process and using a life-course perspective helps advance the scientific study of ageing
- Disadvantage accumulates over the life course
- There is a propensity toward ageism in modern societies

The increasingly rectangular survival curve

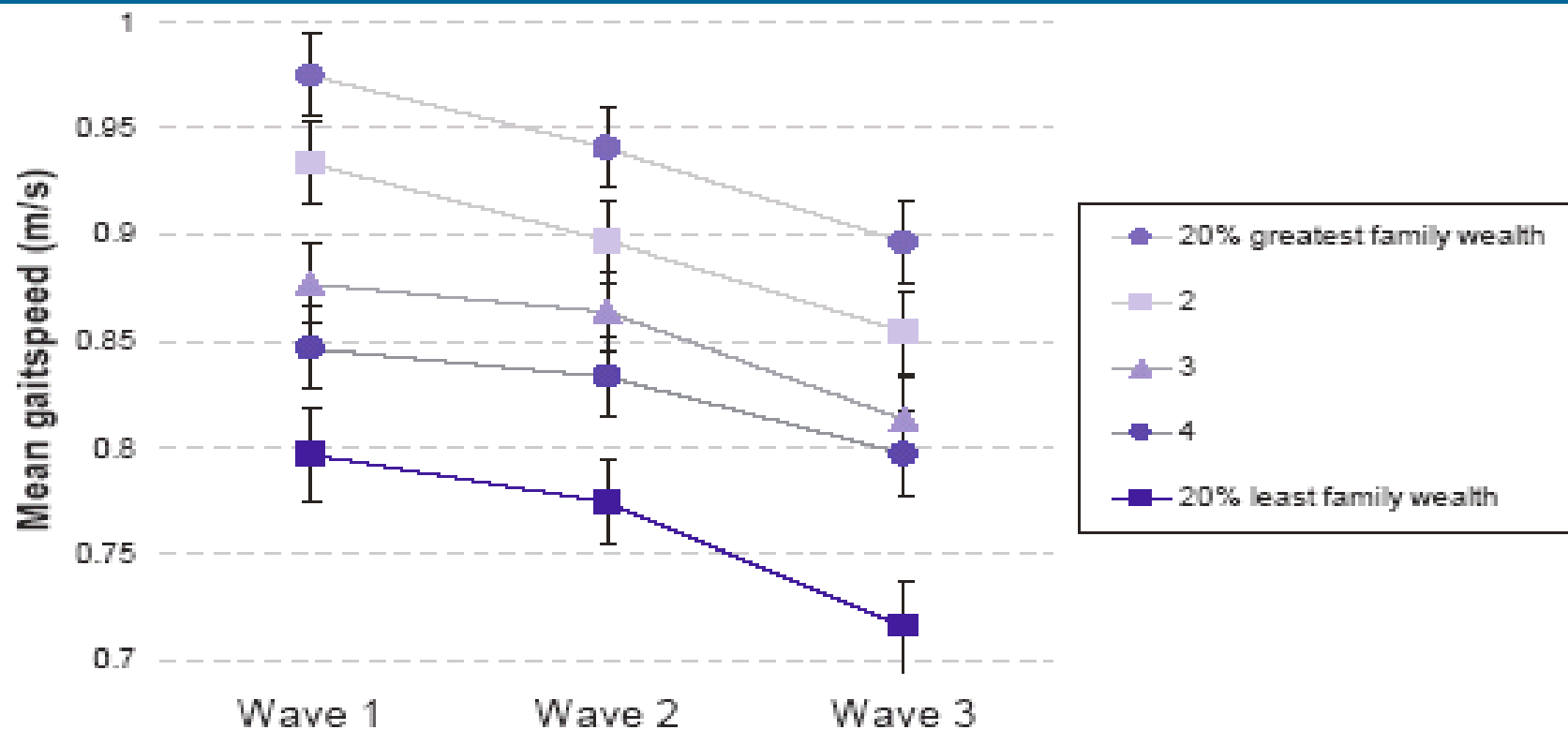






* Including Andorra and Monaco.
Source : WHO (2003e).

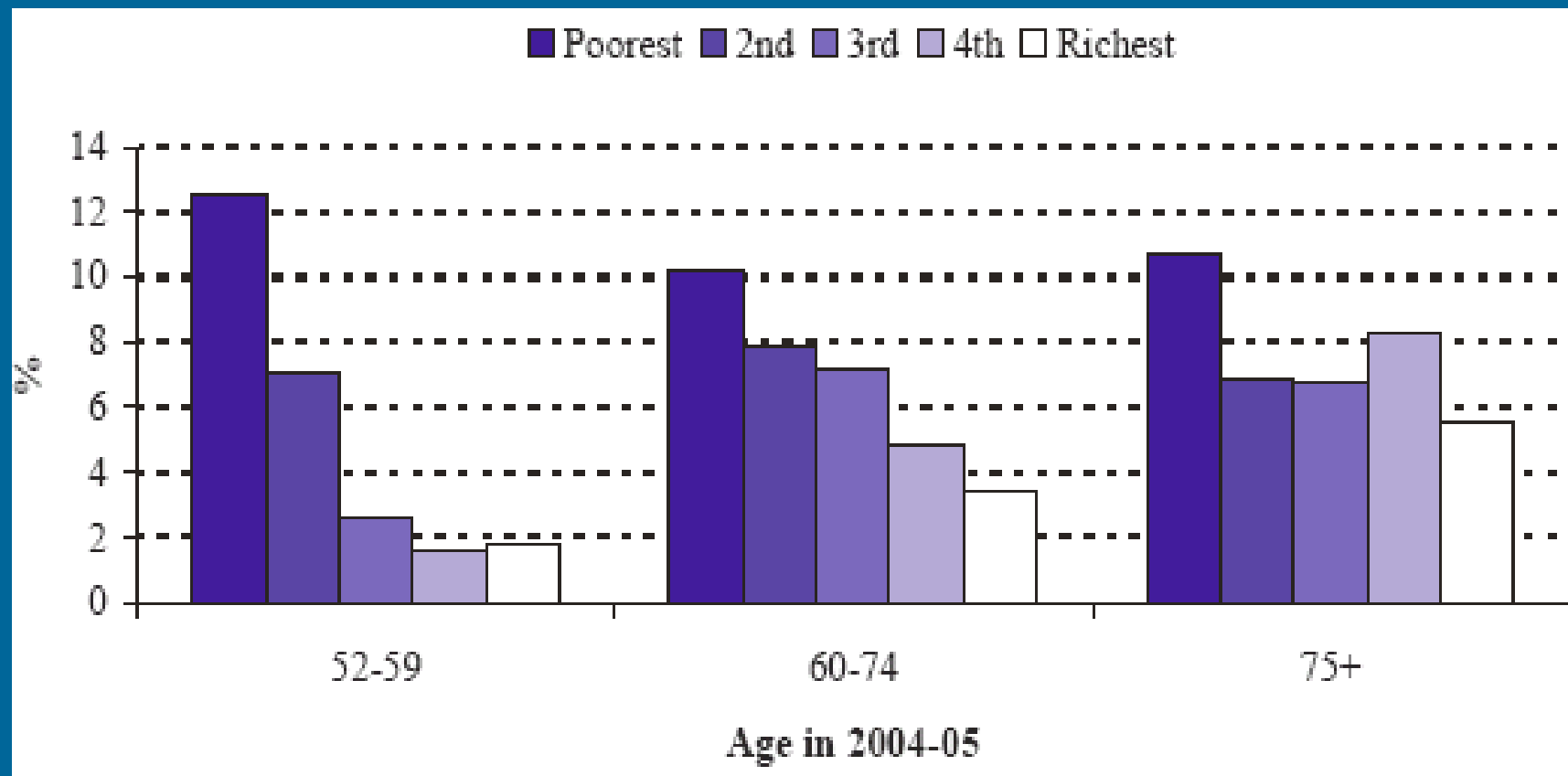
Gait speed by wealth (ELSA)



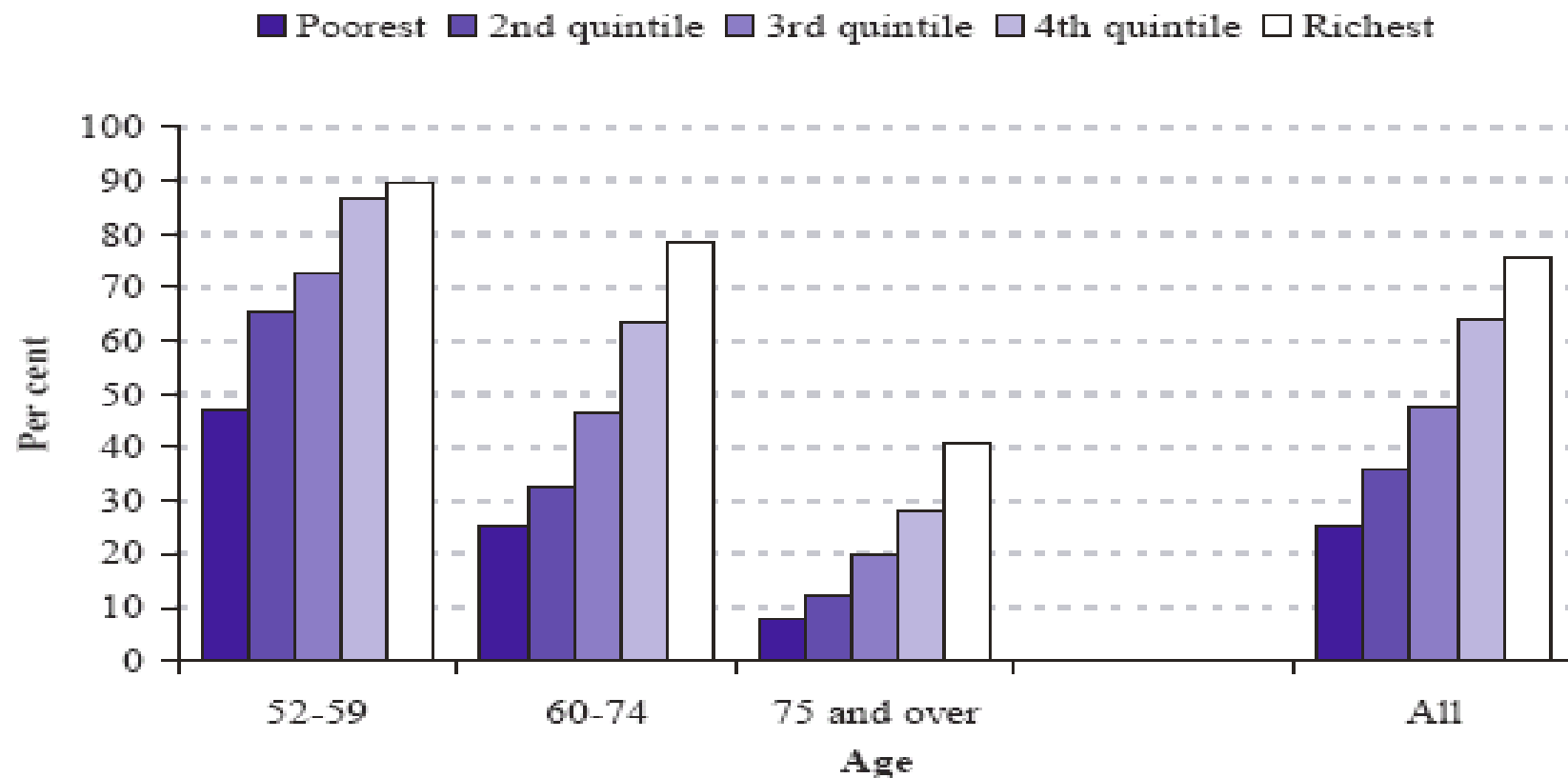
% with severe pain in two or more of back, hip, knee or foot, by sex, age & wealth (ELSA)



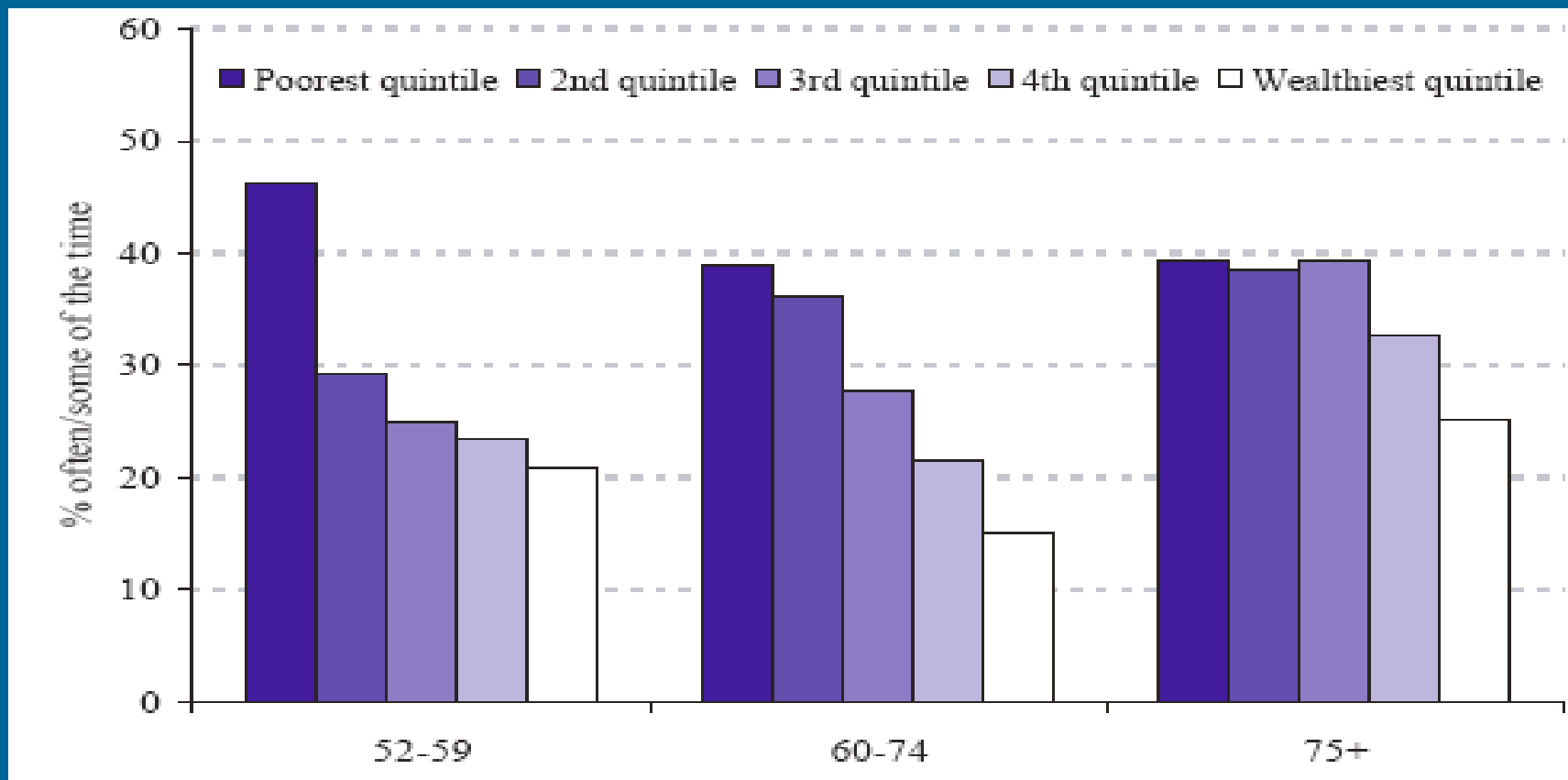
Angina symptoms by age & wealth, men (ELSA)



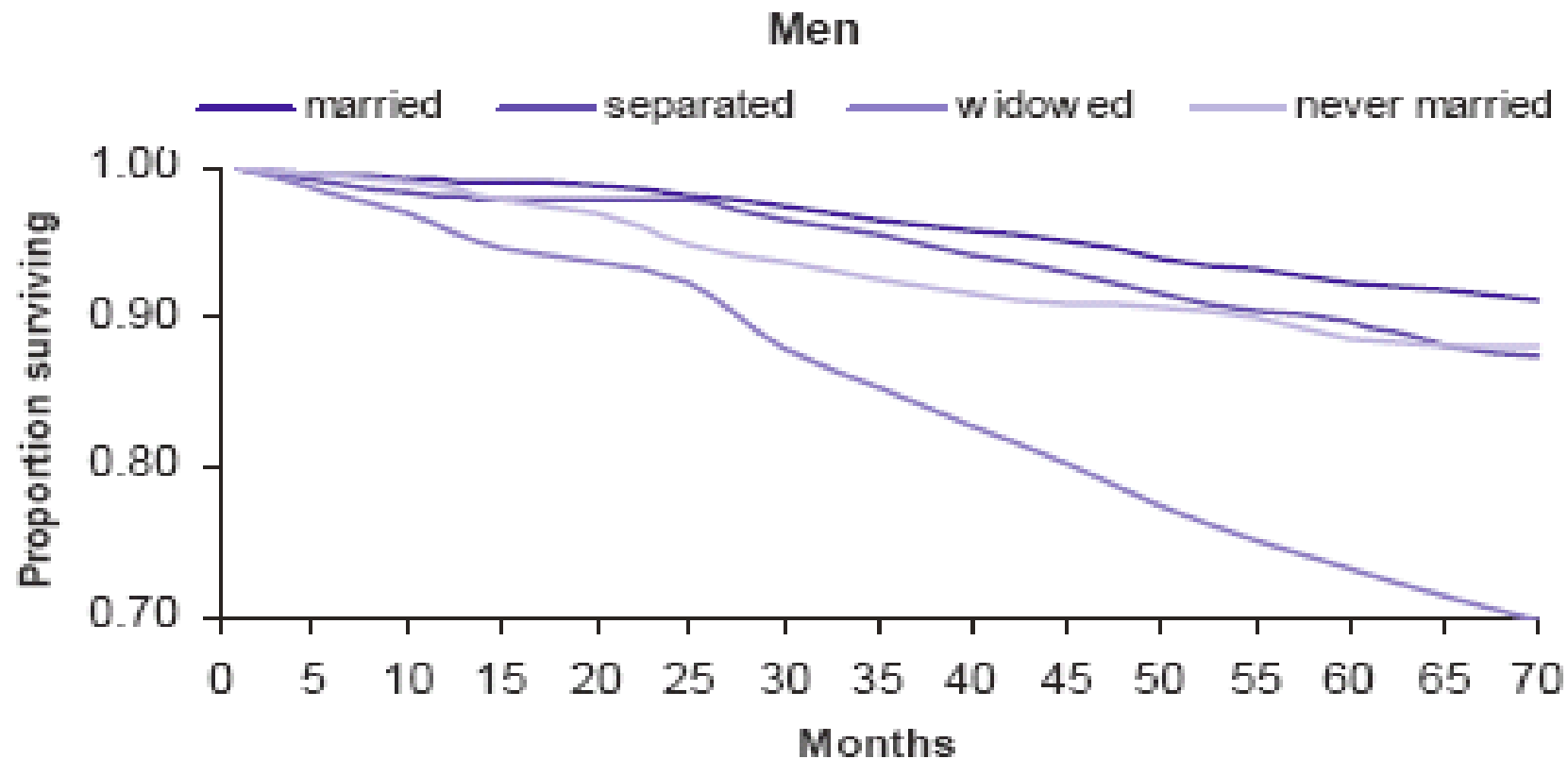
% with personal computer, by age and wealth (ELSA)



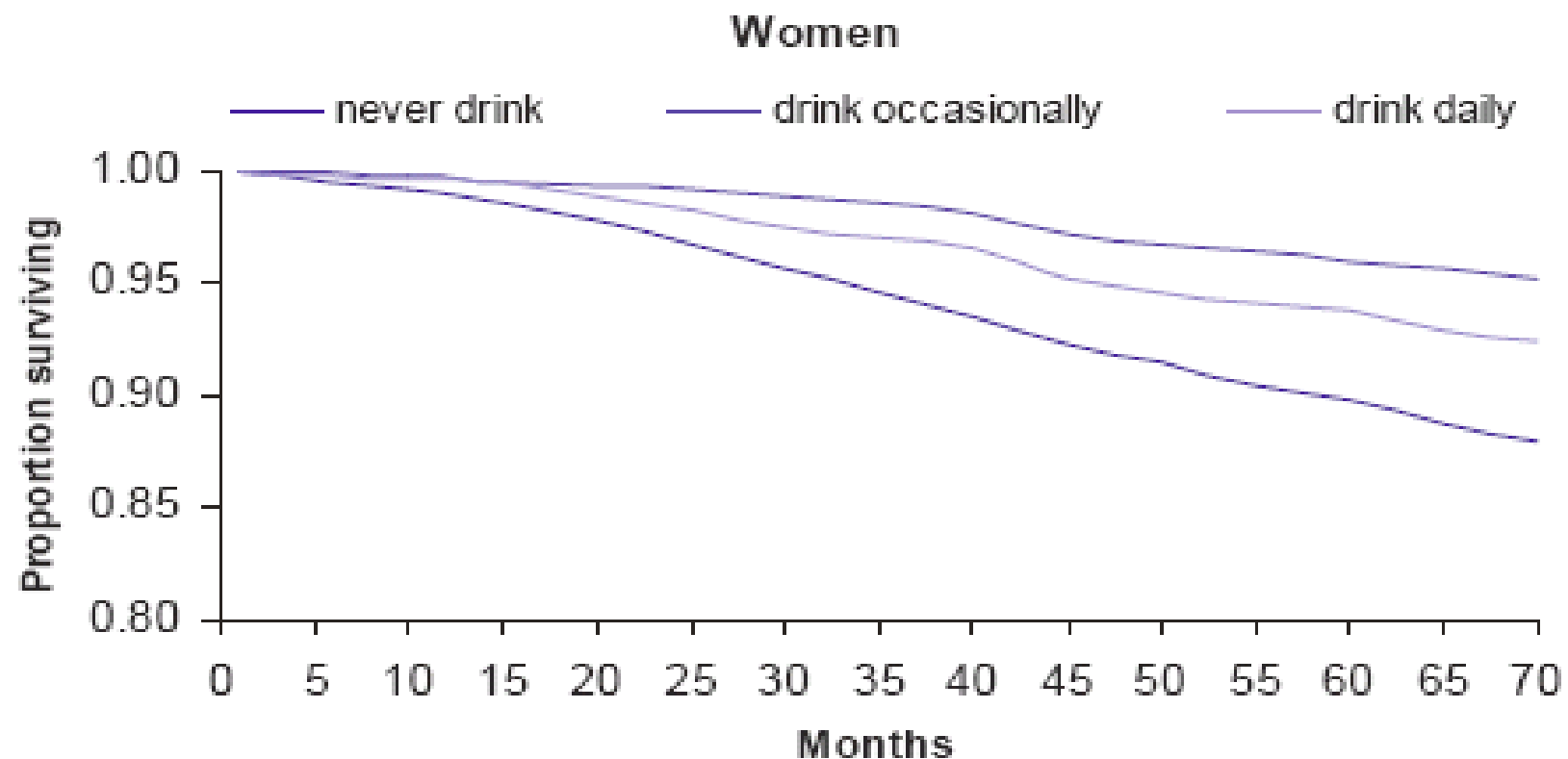
Feel isolated from other people by age & wealth (ELSA)



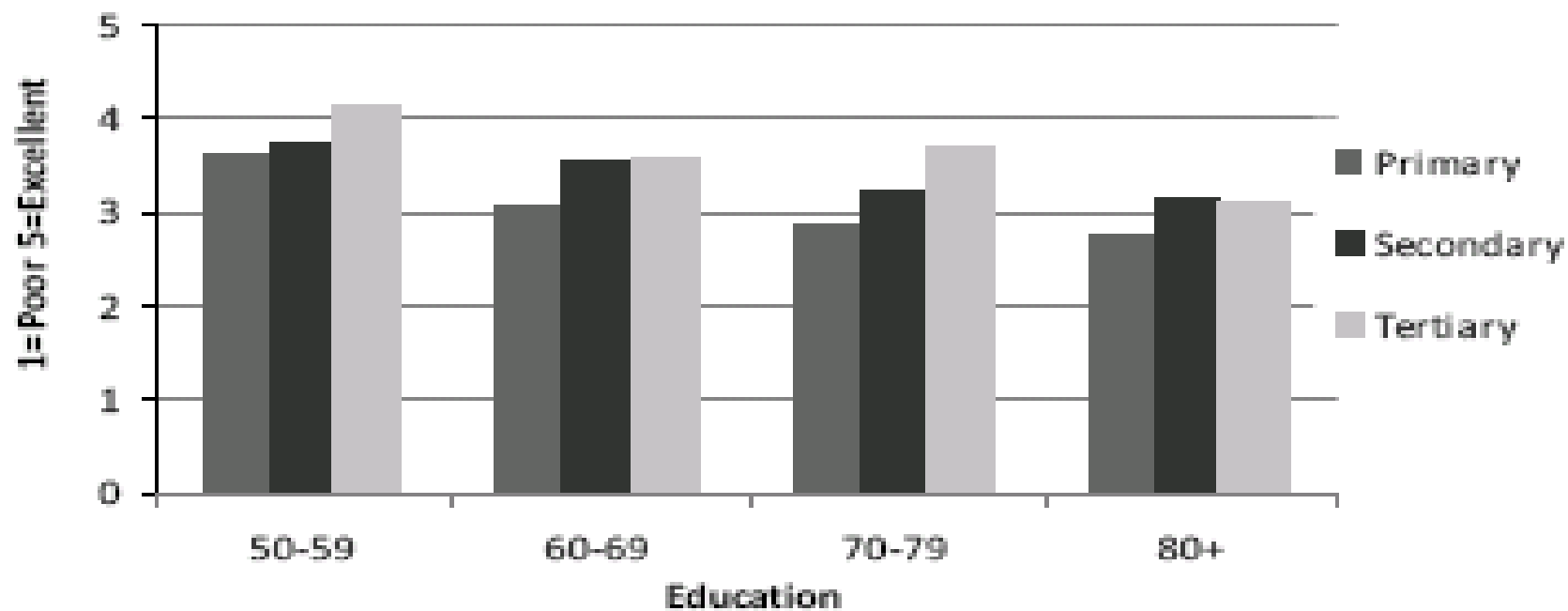
Survival by marital status, males (ELSA)



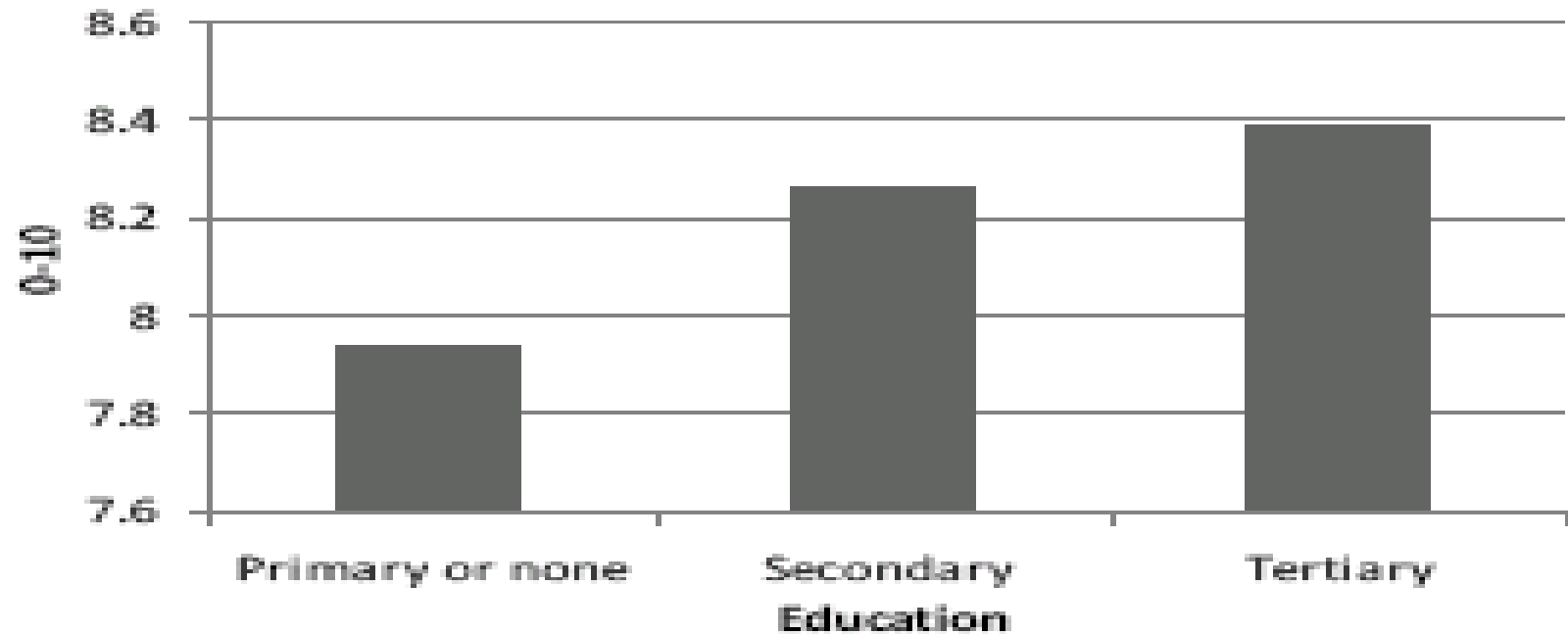
Survival by alcohol consumption, females (ELSA)



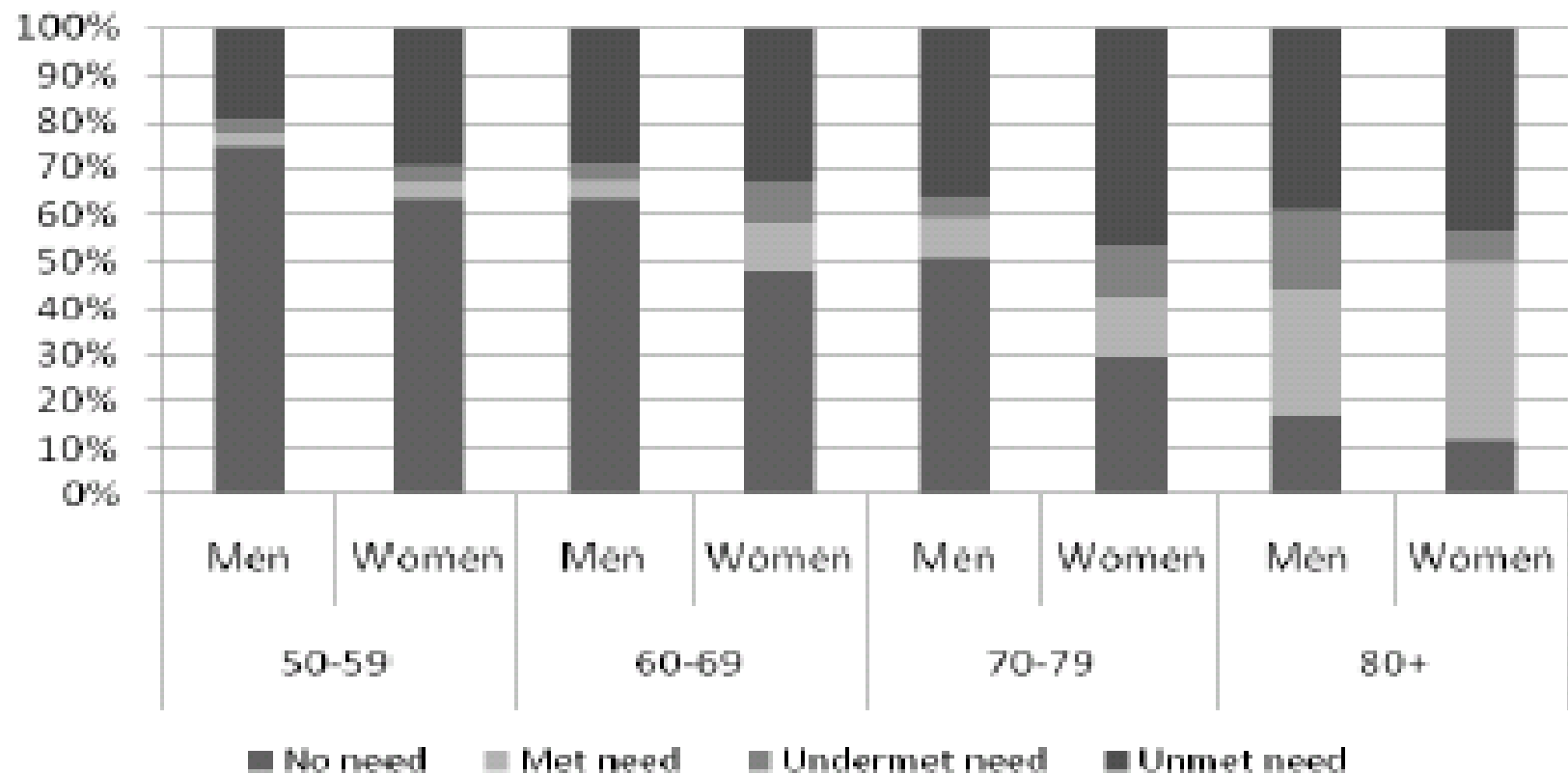
Health by education, SHARE - Irl



Life satisfaction by education (SHARE- Irl)

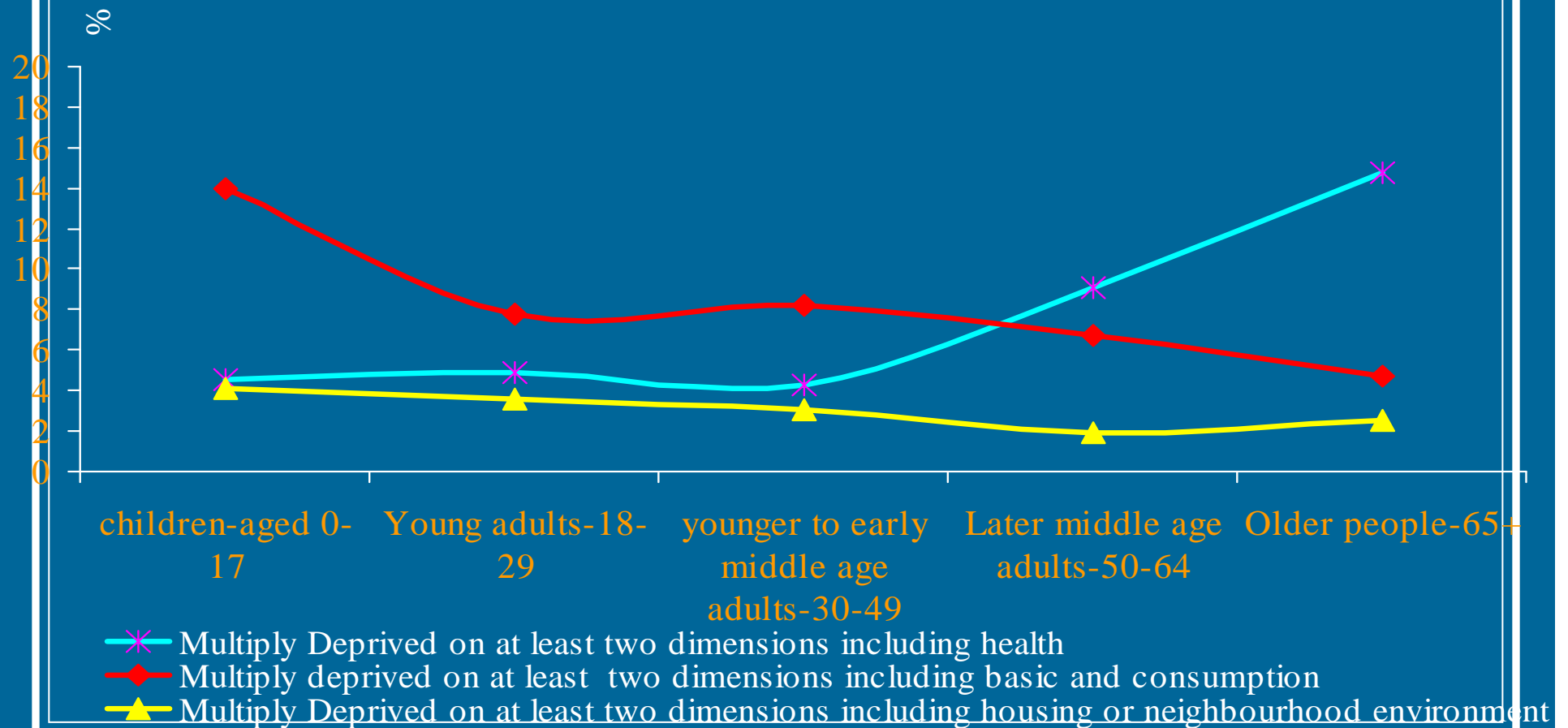


Need for care by age and sex (SHARE – Irl)



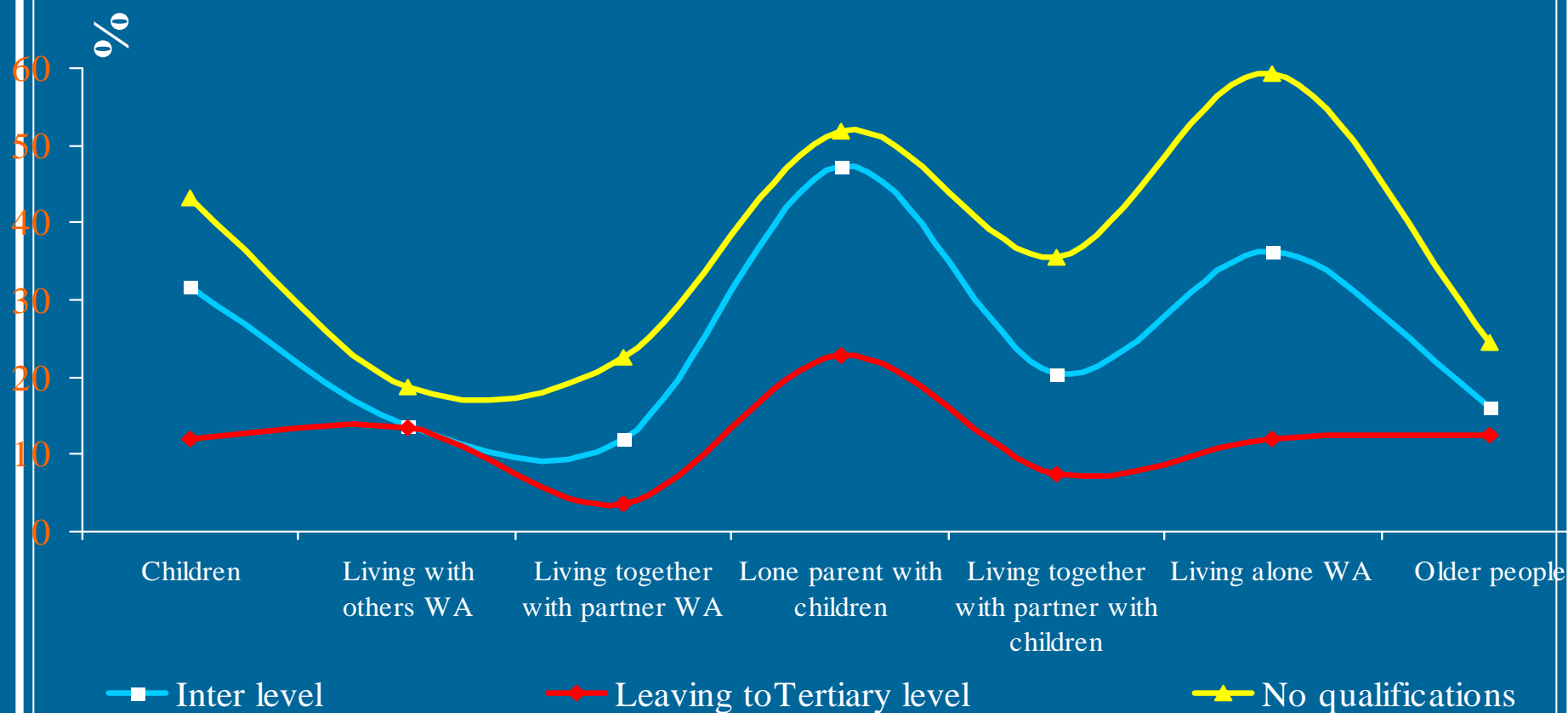
Pattern of Multiple Deprivation by Age Group

Source: Whelan, C. and Maître, B. (2008) ESRI Life Cycle & Social Exclusion Seminar

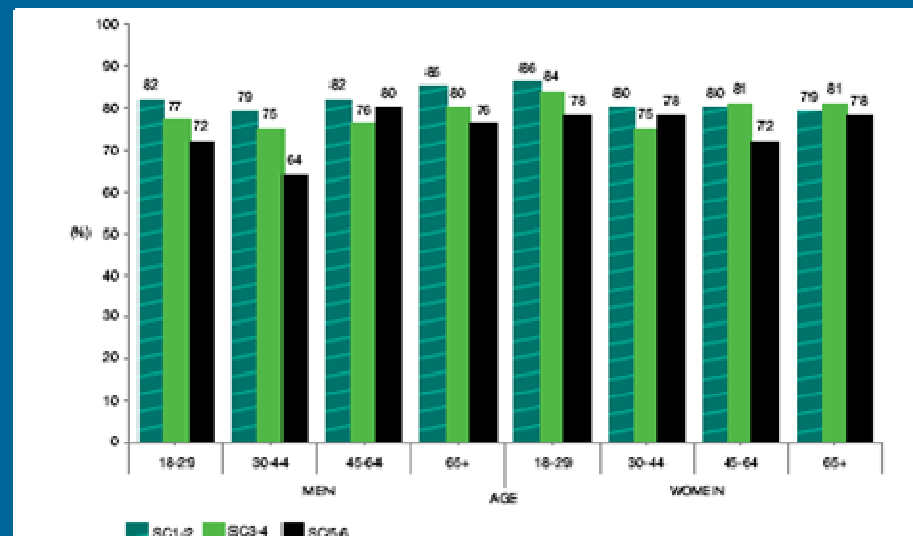


At Risk of Poverty by Life Cycle Stage & HRP Educational Qualifications

Source: Whelan, C. and Maître, B. (2008) ESRI Life Cycle & Social Exclusion Seminar



Percentage of respondents who reported having 3 or more close people they could count on if they had serious personal problems, by age, gender and social class, SLAN III



Understanding the Pathways from 'Social' to Health (and vice versa)

Social – health

Social Engagement

- Social network
- Social integration
- Social support
- Relationship quality

Socio-demographic Characteristics



Pathways

Behavioral processes:

- Smoking
- Alcohol
- Exercise
- Sleep
- Nutrition

Psychological processes:

- Loneliness
- Anxiety
- Hostility
- Perceived stress
- Depression
- Positive affect

Biomarkers

Stress hormones:
Cortisol,, Adrenaline

Inflammatory markers: IL-6, CRP, Fibrinogen

Cardiovascular:
General: BMI, WHR
Blood pressure
Heart rate variability
Pulse wave velocity
Biomarkers: HbA1c, LipoA, Fasting lipids, Homocysteine

Health Outcomes

Mortality

Physical Disease:

- Disability
- Osteoarthritis
- CVD
- Respiratory Disease

Survival after adverse health events

Psychiatric Disease:

- Cognitive decline: Dementia, Alzheimer's Disease
- Depression

What is 'successful ageing'?

'Minimization of losses that occur as a result of a reduction in physical, cognitive and social reserves and a maximization of gains that result through adaptation, mastery and the use of wisdom.'

Baltes & Baltes, 1990

Ageing as Adaptation (1)

- Process of adaptation at both individual and societal levels
- But some face greater challenges than others! Those same individuals less well equipped to deal with these challenges
- In most countries, adaptation expected to happen primarily at the level of individuals / families

Ageing as Adaptation (2)

- Locus of adaptation in all systems has been gradually shifting towards older people themselves
- The 'problem' becomes the 'solution' (at a high cost to some groups)
- Increasing focus on 'opportunities' & 'freedoms' → apparent / real decline in ageism; age resistance / denial

To conclude...Points for discussion...

- Plentiful evidence of links between health, economic & social aspects of life in older age
- But 'pathways' (the why & the how) poorly understood!
- 'Good old age' in fact guaranteed for some, denied to others, at a much younger age?
- What, if anything, should be done?