

Historical roots of social epidemiology:
socioeconomic gradients in health and
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Historical roots of social epidemiology: socioeconomic gradients in health and contextual analysis FREE

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Sir—In recent years, social epidemiologists have brought to the fore two seemingly new observations:

Together, these observations offer important challenges to aetiologic explanations and policy interventions.

But are these observations in fact new? Or is it that contemporary scientists—and perhaps policy makers—are once again willing to engage with questions initially raised during the formative days of epidemiology as a discipline, in the early 19th century?⁵

...

Consider, for example, research conducted by one of the earliest and foremost investigators linking population health to political economy: Louis René Villermé (1782–1863).⁶⁻⁷ A French physician and liberal supporter of the free market, in the mid-1820s Villermé creatively employed newly amassed and unprecedented Parisian census data to produce a novel finding. His classic 1826 study demonstrated empirically, for the first time for any city anywhere, that variations in annual mortality rates across neighbourhoods—even in non-epidemic years—were...

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