

'Model minority' stereotype punishes less-educated Asian-American men, says study

May 29 2014, by George Diepenbrock

Past research and popular media have often portrayed Asian-Americans as a "model minority" based on their high level of educational attainment and earnings, allowing them to reach approximate parity in labor market performances with white Americans.

However, a University of Kansas researcher has found the stereotype has negative effects on Asian-American men who drop out of [high school](#) or fail to earn a college degree. This group of men earns noticeably less than comparable whites who have the same level of education, said ChangHwan Kim, an associate professor of sociology and co-author of the study published recently in the sociology journal *Social Problems*.

"A positive racial stereotype is not always positive," Kim said. "Native-born, less-educated Asian-Americans earn substantially less than equally qualified white Americans."

The study found the lower [earnings](#) of less-educated Asian-Americans when compared to white Americans was likely to be associated with unexpected deleterious effects of the model minority image instead of particularly low qualification of the less-educated Asian-Americans.

Kim and Arthur Sakamoto, a professor of sociology at Texas A&M University, analyzed data in the 2010 Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, which includes both U.S. Census and American Community Survey data, to estimate net racial effects at both the lower and higher ends of the scale of distribution of earnings.

Kim said at the 10th percentile—the low end of distributed earnings in the data set—a native-born Asian-American man who did not graduate high school earned 24 percent less than an equally educated, native-born white man. The two men in the comparison are the same age, work the same hours a week and live in the same region, he said.

The study seems to support that Asian-Americans on the whole have a higher [educational attainment](#) than white Americans, because the average annual earnings for Asian-American men are \$59,258, or \$6,745 higher than the average earnings for white men. However, average annual earnings for an Asian-American men who dropped out of high school is \$29,017 and \$35,183, which are both lower—\$1,872 and \$1,188 respectively—than the corresponding average for white men.

Kim said the poverty rate for Asian-American men with no high school degree is 11.3 percent, significantly higher than the rate of 7.2 percent for white [men](#) who dropped out of high school.

Previous research that has highlighted the educational and economic success of Asian-Americans had neglected those among the group who are less educated, said Kim, who researches issues of income inequality among social groups. So the study sheds new light on racial stereotypes and their effects on economic outcomes as well provides insight into the future economic prospects for Asian-Americans. This is crucial, he said, because recent trends have shown a decline in the educational attainment among third-generation Asian-Americans.

"The penalty of being Asian-American in terms of earnings becomes larger as their actual situation is further away from the model minority image," Kim said. "Therefore, the model minority image of Asian-Americans is not necessarily positive but destructive for those who do not fit to this image."

While the "model minority" idea was meant to be a positive stereotype, he said, past research neglected to measure its effect on less-educated Asian Americans.

"As for racial stereotypes, there is no such thing as a good stereotype," Kim said. "The best stereotype is no stereotype."

The Social Problems article, "The Earnings of Less Educated Asian American Men: Educational Selectivity and the Model Minority Image," by Kim and Sakamoto, appears in the May issue of *Social Problems*.

More information: "The Earnings of Less Educated Asian American Men: Educational Selectivity and the Model Minority Image."

ChangHwan Kim and Arthur Sakamoto. *Social Problems*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (May 2014), pp. 283-304. Published by: University of California Press.

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