

Do you really get paid less if you're 'ugly'?

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Do beautiful people earn more while those who are not so gorgeous are paid less? It's not as simple as that, according to Satoshi Kanazawa of the London School of Economics and Political Science in the UK and Mary Still of the University of Massachusetts in Boston. People's salaries are influenced by more than just physical attractiveness (or lack thereof), and individual differences count too. Their research found that healthier and more intelligent people, and those with more Conscientious, more Extraverted, and less Neurotic personality traits were the ones taking fatter pay checks home. The study is published in Springer's *Journal of Business and Psychology*.

Economists have widely documented the "beauty premium"—or, conversely, the "ugliness penalty"—on wages. Population-based surveys in the US and Canada for instance showed that people who are physically attractive earn more than the average Joe or Jane, while those who are aesthetically compromised earn less. More attractive lawyers and MBA graduates are also said to earn more.

Kanazawa and Still analyzed a nationally representative sample from a US data set that had very precise and repeated measures of physical attractiveness—the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (Add Health). It measured physical attractiveness of all respondents on a five-point scale at four different points in life over 13 years.

Their analysis showed that people are not necessarily discriminated against because of their looks. The beauty premium theory was dispelled when the researchers took into account factors such as health,

intelligence, and major personality factors together with other correlates of [physical attractiveness](#). Healthier and more intelligent respondents, and those with more Conscientious, more Extraverted, and less Neurotic [personality traits](#) earned significantly more than others.

"Physically more attractive workers may earn more, not necessarily because they are more beautiful, but because they are healthier, more intelligent, and have better personality traits conducive to higher earnings, such as being more Conscientious, more Extraverted, and less Neurotic," explains Kanazawa.

Some evidence was found for a so-called ugliness premium in which it pays to not be aesthetically pleasing. Respondents who fell in the "very unattractive" category always earned more than those rated as merely unattractive. This was sometimes even the case when the income of the very unattractive was measured against their average-looking or even attractive co-workers.

According to Still, the methods used in other studies might explain why the findings in the current research are contrary to many current thoughts about the economics of beauty. On the one hand, few other studies have taken into account aspects of health, intelligence (as opposed to education), and personality factors. On the other, in most studies the so-called "very unattractive" and "unattractive" categories are grouped together to form a "below-average" category.

"Thereby they fail to document the ugliness premium enjoyed by the very unattractive workers," explains Still.

More information: Satoshi Kanazawa et al, Is There Really a Beauty Premium or an Ugliness Penalty on Earnings?, *Journal of Business and Psychology* (2017). [DOI: 10.1007/s10869-017-9489-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-017-9489-6)

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