

How much people earn is associated with how they experience happiness

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People who earn more money tend to experience more positive emotions focused on themselves, while people who earn less take greater pleasure in their relationships and ability to connect with others, according to research published by the American Psychological Association.

"Higher income has many benefits, including improved health and life satisfaction, but is it associated with greater happiness?" asked lead author Paul Piff, PhD, of the University of California, Irvine. "After all, most people think of money as some kind of unmitigated good. But some recent research suggests that this may not actually be the case. In many ways, money does not necessarily buy you happiness."

The research was published in the journal *Emotion*.

The researchers used a survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,519 people. Participants were asked about their household income and answered a series of questions designed to measure their tendency to experience

seven distinct emotions that are considered to make up the core of happiness: amusement, awe, compassion, contentment, enthusiasm, love and pride. For example, to measure compassion, participants rated their agreement with various statements, including, "Nurturing others gives me a warm feeling inside."

Participants at the higher end of the socioeconomic spectrum reported a greater tendency to experience emotions that focused on themselves, specifically, contentment and pride (as well as amusement). Individuals at the lower end of the income scale were more likely to experience emotions that focus on other people, namely compassion and love. Poorer individuals also reported experiencing more awe and beauty in the world around them. There was no apparent difference for enthusiasm, according to the researchers.

"These findings indicate that wealth is not unequivocally associated with happiness," said Piff. "What seems to be the case is that your wealth predisposes you to different kinds of happiness. While wealthier individuals may find greater positivity in their accomplishments, status and individual achievements, less wealthy individuals seem to find more positivity and happiness in their relationships, their ability to care for and connect with others."

Piff believes these differences may stem from higher-income individuals' desire for independence and self-sufficiency, while the other-oriented emotions help lower-income individuals to form more interdependent bonds with others to help cope with their more threatening environments.

Much psychological research over the last few decades has focused on the negative effects of poverty, according to Piff. "Poverty heightens people's risks for a slew of negative life outcomes, including worsened health," he said. "Wealth

doesn't guarantee you happiness, but it may predispose you to experiencing different forms of it—for example, whether you delight in yourself versus in your friends and relationships. These findings suggest that lower-income individuals have devised ways to cope, to find meaning, joy and [happiness](#) in their lives despite their relatively less favorable circumstances."

More information: "Wealth, Poverty, and Happiness: Social Class Is Differentially Associated With Positive Emotions," by Paul Piff, PhD, and Jake Moskowitz, BA, University of California, Irvine. *Emotion*, published online Dec. 18, 2017.

Provided by American Psychological Association

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