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## Children Born During Pandemic Score Lower on Cognitive Tests, Study Finds

*A study of 672 children from Rhode Island that has run since 2011, showed children born after the start of the pandemic had an average IQ score of 78 — a drop of 22 points from the average of previous cohorts.*

By **Owen Dyer**

18



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Children born during the pandemic score markedly lower on standard measures of verbal, motor and overall cognitive ability, U.S. researchers have found.

In a longitudinal study of 672 children from Rhode Island that has run since 2011, those born after the **pandemic** began showed results on the Mullen scales of early learning that corresponded to an average IQ score of 78, a drop of 22 points from the average of previous cohorts.

The study, which was funded by the U.S. National Institutes of Health, is awaiting peer review before publication in JAMA Pediatrics. But a [preprint copy](#) is available online.

The researchers have largely ruled out a direct effect of the virus, as mothers or children with a history of testing positive for COVID-19 were excluded from the analysis. Instead, the authors say, reduced interaction with parents and less outdoor exercise are likely culprits, along with effects that occurred during pregnancy.

Other research has hinted at behavioral effects in children born during the pandemic, including a [study](#) from Italy.

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Children born in 2019 did not experience a decline in development scores during the pandemic. "Their trajectories of maturation were unaltered," said lead author of the longitudinal study and pediatrician Sean Deoni of Brown University. "They seemed to be doing alright. It's really affecting those born during the pandemic, whether through transference from their mother, what she's experiencing during late term pregnancy, or during those crucial earliest months after birth."

Scores among children born during the pandemic began to decline in 2020 in an early learning composite that measured fine and gross motor control, visual reception and expressive and receptive language. But it was in 2021 that the developmental deficit became significant ( $P < 0.001$ ). The effect was larger in boys than in girls.

The strongest protective factor was higher maternal education, and mothers in the study population had more schooling than the U.S. average, suggesting that results in less educated parts of the country could be "even more depressing," said Deoni.

In terms of effect size, he said, "the closest thing we've seen in other research — and this is horrible, not a good comparison to be making — is the studies that were done of orphans in Romania. The effects of institutionalization and lack of interaction on them were profound, but what we're seeing here is on par with that."

A push by Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu to increase birth rates led to hundreds of thousands of [children being abandoned to state orphanages](#), where many spent most of the day in cots, staring at the ceiling.

While the Rhode Island study did not directly measure time spent interacting between family members, said Deoni, "we do have some preliminary data that we're working on in a separate study using miniature recorders which the infants wear on their chest which measure the interaction between the caregiver and the child, and what we are seeing, anecdotally, is a significant depression in the number of words spoken to kids and, as you can imagine, a massive increase in TV exposure, and a decline in meaningful conversations. Time spent engaged with a caregiver is way down."

*Originally published by [The BMJ](#) August 16, 2021, written by Owen Dyer, reproduced here under the terms of the CC BY NC license.*

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**Owen Dyer**

Owen Dyer is a journalist at British Medical Journal.

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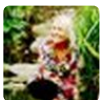
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**Kathryn Knight** • 6 days ago

Talk about bias: this researcher believes that "educated" mothers' babies will have a higher IQ than "uneducated" mothers' babies:) how absurd. it could well be exactly the opposite. that's the problem w/ studies, inherent bias of the researcher is inevitable and the results are equally skewed:)

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**disqus\_KYzELRS7E6** → Kathryn Knight • 5 days ago

Wrong.

"Although we found no significant changes in the degree of maternal perceived stress, and we did, however, find that maternal education, often used as a marker of surrogate of socioeconomic status, was generally associated with improved cognitive function and..."

Children Born During Pandemic Score Lower on Cognitive Tests, Study Finds • Children's Health Defense associated with improved cognitive function and, as an interactive term, had a buffering effect against the impact of the pandemic. This is particularly salient given the disproportionate effect the pandemic has had on lower income families [54], who have not only dealt with job loss and financial insecurity, but are also over-represented in front line and essential service employment with increased risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection and COVID-19 illness [55]."

Again: maternal education is used as a \*marker for socioeconomic status\*. They found a correlation using a standard indicator. Nothing to do with the bias of the researcher.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Martha Rowen** → disqus\_KYzELRS7E6

• 5 days ago

I agree that masking surely played a huge part. Decreased oxygen for the mother while pregnant, in labor (as mothers have in some hospitals been forced to wear masks during labor), and one sees people putting masks on infants and if hospitals are doing it to newborns, that's horrendous! But at least as important is the fact that so many people around them wear masks. I remember a beautiful, sunny day last spring in the park, a mother, masked up to the eyeballs, leaning over her baby who couldn't have been more than two weeks old. I'm sure this mother wore a mask whenever they were around other people, perhaps whenever she was around her baby, as I'm sure other family members did too. No wonder these children suffered deficits in expressive and receptive language! With the insanity in our schools, and what I'm seeing among shockingly stupid and ignorant parents who have their kids masked up on the street, in stores, in the playground, here in NYC from two years old, and who go around with the the most bizarre muzzles on their own faces, the upcoming generations will attain barely functional intelligence. All the better to brainwash and control them.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Leslea Witter** • 6 days ago

How many of the mothers wore masks? Most learning at an early age is from facial recognition and reading facial expressions. That's why masks are so detrimental to learning.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Penny Michalko** • 6 days ago

Probably afraid they're going to give the child Covid-19 so they're not bonding and interacting with them as much.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Sarah** • 6 days ago

Nothing about women wearing masks and reduced oxygen that could contribute to any ill effects to the baby.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Gerald Greene** • 6 days ago

This is kinda dumb b/c the kids would hardly be 1.5 yrs. old at best.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Polly Green** → Gerald Greene • 6 days ago • edited

My kids were part of an NIH study beginning at six months. (We lived nearby, it paid \$250/yr each for 21 years. We participated for the entire study.) Amazingly, there are ways to estimate IQ at 6 months. One thing I recall was what the child reached for when urged. Can't recall what the incentive was... this was 1987. But their IQs remained consistent until they suffered seizures and GI problems from vaccination for measles (at that time the MMR could be split into separate components, which we did—it didn't help, and the pediatrician insisted that on "not being bothered twice" so they got them on the same day.)

I would think it must be related to masking. A lot of hospitals have insisted on masking newborns. After all, even a slight decrease in oxygen will decrease IQ. It's well known enough that it's a plot point in "Brave New World." Life imitates art maybe.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**chris charles** • 7 days ago

IQ tests on infants? how do they answer standardized testing questions?

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Lindsey** → chris charles • 6 days ago

Um, "The study, which was funded by the U.S. National Institutes of Health" . The NIH knows which tests/scales are actual measures of infant intelligence, same with toddlers and young children. They have tests similar to the Bayley Scales you can read about here <https://www.verywellfamily...> You don't give an infant a computer test!

2 ^ | v 1 • Reply • Share ›



**Polly Green** → chris charles • 6 days ago • edited

They certainly test the parents. I know firsthand. For babies they track their eye movements and reactions to various noises/music, visual cues, duration of smiles and so on.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Petrus** → chris charles • 6 days ago • edited

But this is the Guardian after all — standard liberal progressive claptrap, and 100% propaganda.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Angela Kay** • 6 days ago

Pretty sure that is a known statistical quantity: IQ scores of educated parents' babies is higher on average than IQ scores of less educated parents. In fact, achievement scores go up linearly according to parental income, which is highly related to parental IQ, all the way up the income scale. Of course, not all of it is genetic, but learned parenting practices are also handed down generation to generation so it is clearly a mixture of nature and nurture. Note: this does NOT mean that a baby born to less educated parents could never have a high IQ, just that it occurs

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