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Gap in intelligence between healthy rich, poor kids is not wide

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When equally healthy children are compared, the gap between rich and poor kids results in smaller intelligence differences than previously thought, a study found.

In research by the National Institutes of Health, healthy children from families earning less than \$35,000 a year scored only 10 points lower on average on IQ tests than similar children from families earning more than twice that amount. Intelligence is rated on a scale of 1-200.

The screening to ensure only healthy children were compared probably explains the contrast between these findings and earlier research, lead author Deborah P. Waber said. Having a group of healthy children who represent a cross-section of the population will help with future research into diseases, Waber said.

"We wanted a very healthy sample," said Waber, an associate professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School and Children's Hospital Boston. "This paper is an initial look at what healthy children look like behaviorally and cognitively."

Children who had been exposed in the womb to drugs known to alter development were excluded from the study, published online Friday by the Journal of the International Neuropsychological Society. So were children who had a psychiatric disorder, such as depression or attention deficit disorder.

The population was selected using census data and is representative of the U.S., Waber said. The study enrolled 385 healthy girls and boys between the ages of 6 and 18.

Researchers were especially pleased that the results of the study will help them establish what normal brain and behavioral development look like in children, Waber said. In many cases, research on adults is extrapolated to children.

"The important advance is choosing normal subjects," said Michael Goldstein, vice president of the American Academy of Neurology and a practicing child neurologist in Salt Lake City.

"They tried very hard to make sure the subjects were normal so that the results can be compared with an individual child," he said.

The current results provide a benchmark for normal development that other studies can use as a control when studying diseases such as autism, making the data "great as a control group," said Katrina Gwinn-Hardy, a program officer at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke in Bethesda, Md.

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