

# Cognitive skills of kids born to teen mums don't lag behind those of other kids

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Contrary to popular belief, the intellectual development of children born to teen mums does not lag behind that of children born to mums in their 20s and 30s, finds research published online in the *Archives of Disease in Childhood*.

While there is some difference in the speed of [language development](#), the spatial and non-verbal skills of [children](#) born to teen [mums](#) don't differ from those of children born to older mums, after influential factors are taken into account, say the authors.

They base their findings on data from the Millennium Cohort Study, a long term nationally representative study of almost 19,000 children born between 2000 and 2001 across the UK.

The non-verbal, spatial, and verbal skills of 12,000 of these children were assessed when they were 5 years old, using validated tests (British Abilities Scale II).

One in 20 (617; 5%) of the children's mothers were aged 18 or younger, and one in five (20%; 2410) were aged between 19 and 24. Of the remainder, 28% (3327) of the mums were aged between 25 and 29, while 35% (4198) were between 30 and 35. Just 12% (1469) of the mothers were aged 35 and above.

When only the child's birthweight, gestational age, and sex were taken account of, children born to teen mums had lower scores for all the skills

assessed than children born to [older mothers](#).

But after taking account of perinatal and social factors, the differences between children born to teen mums and those born to older mums almost completely disappeared for non-verbal and spatial skills.

Social factors included household income, absence of a father in the home, mother's educational attainment, job, mental health, childcare, and parenting behaviours. Both poverty and low educational attainment were more common among the teen mums.

Perinatal factors included poor antenatal care, smoking during the pregnancy, the absence of breastfeeding, and being a second or subsequent child.

The teen mums were more likely to have their pregnancy confirmed only after 30 weeks (1.9% compared with 0.9% of mothers aged 30-34), and not to receive any antenatal care (6.7% compared with 1.1% of mothers aged 30-34).

And only 7% of them breastfed their babies for 4 or more months compared with 41% of the mothers aged 30-34 —factors that have previously been linked to greater disadvantage for children.

Although a difference in [verbal skills](#) scores remained among children born to teen mums compared with children born to mothers aged 25-34, the apparent developmental delay fell from 11 months to 5 months after taking social and perinatal factors into account.

While this deserves further investigation, socioeconomic factors which had not been fully accounted for might explain this difference too, the authors suggest.

"Being a teenage mother significantly limits one's ability to gain further education and higher level employment, which may in turn affect child development," they say.

**More information:** Effect of teenage motherhood on cognitive outcomes in children: a population-based cohort study, [DOI: 10.1136/rchdischild-2012-302525](https://doi.org/10.1136/rchdischild-2012-302525)

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