

All babies are born equal, no matter their race or class

By Margarett Driscoll

BABIES born in similar circumstances will thrive regardless of race or geography, Oxford-led research has found, quashing the idea that race or class determines intelligence.

In a scientific first, the team of researchers tracked the physical and intellectual development of babies around the world from the earliest days after conception to age two.

"At every single stage we've shown that healthy mothers have healthy babies and that healthy babies all grow at exactly the same rate," said Prof Stephen Kennedy, the co-director of the Oxford Maternal and Perinatal Health Institute.

"It doesn't matter where you are living, it doesn't matter what the colour of your skin is, it doesn't matter what your race and ethnicity is, receiving decent medical care and nutrition is the key."

The INTERGROWTH-21st Project, led jointly by Prof Kennedy and Prof José Villar at Oxford, involved nearly

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60,000 mothers and babies, tracking growth in the womb, then followed more than 1,300 of the children, measuring growth and development.

The mothers - in locations as diverse as Brazil, India and Italy - were chosen because they were in good health and lived in similar, clean, urban environments. Their babies scored similarly on both physical and intellectual development.

The study should help settle the debate over the role of genetics in determining intelligence, which has been rumbling since the publication of Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve* in the Nineties. The book argued that a "cognitive elite" was becoming separated from the general population.

"There's still a substantial body of opinion out there in both the scientific and lay communities who genuinely believe that intelligence is predominantly determined by genes and the environment that you're living in and that your parents and grandparents were living in and their nutritional and health status are not relevant," said Prof Kennedy. "Well, that's clearly not the case."

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