IQ a better predictor of adult economic success than maths

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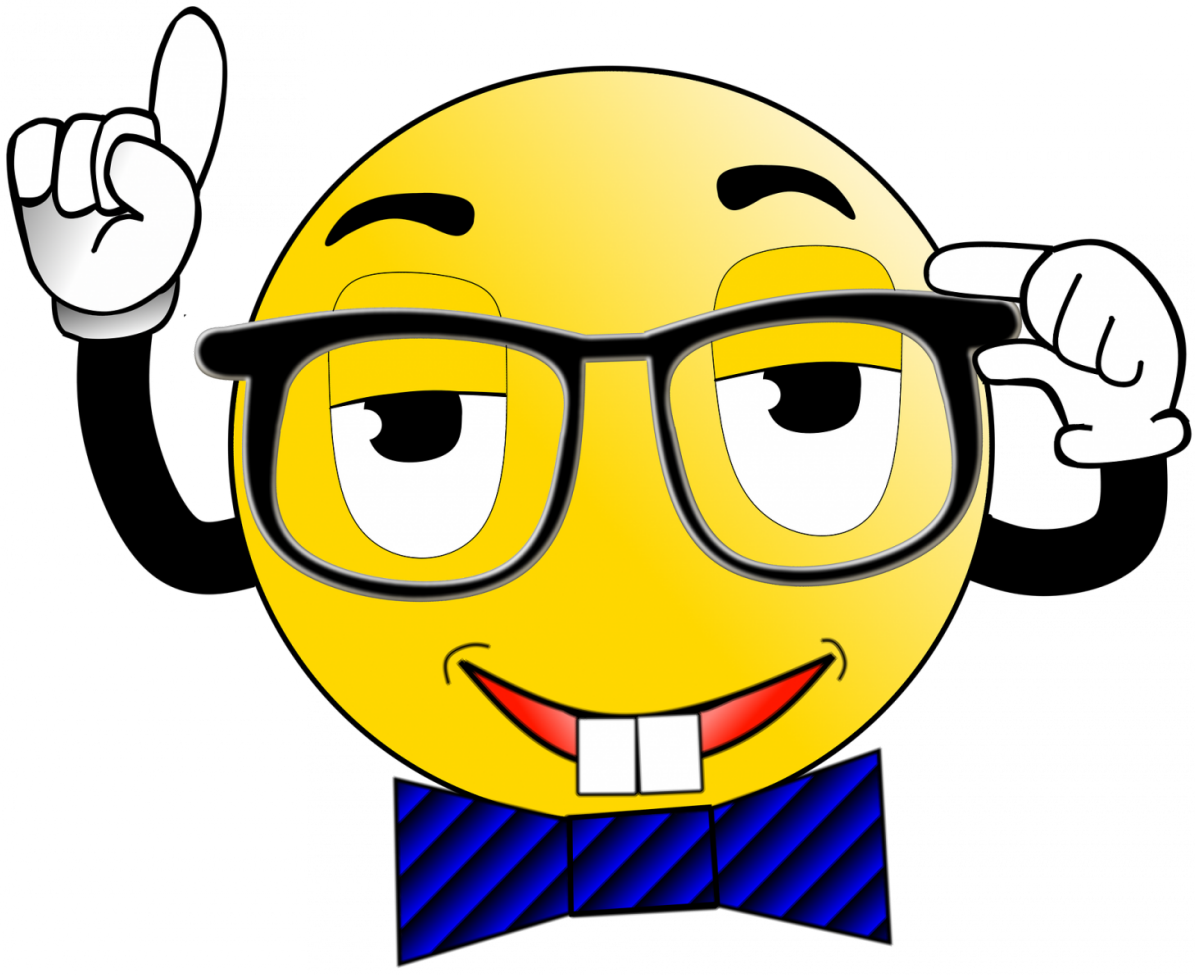

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IQ in childhood is a better indicator of adult wealth than maths for very preterm and very low-weight babies, according to a new study in *PLOS One* by researchers at the University of Warwick and the University of Tennessee. This could change the education system for those with cognitive impairments.

These findings contrast with previous evidence suggesting the specific importance of math skills for economic achievement.

The study, 'General Cognitive but Not Mathematic Abilities Predict Very Preterm and Healthy Term Born Adults' Wealth,' followed more than 400 children born in Bavaria, Germany, from birth through adulthood. Of the children in the study, 193 were born very preterm (under 32 weeks gestation) or with very low birth weight (less than 3.3 pounds) and 217 were healthy term babies.

Using standardized tests, psychologists assessed general intelligence and specific maths skills of the children at eight years old. When the subjects reached age 26, information on their income, social benefits, educational qualifications, and career success was summarized into a comprehensive wealth index.

The researchers tested whether math abilities or IQ explained the negative consequences of very premature birth on adult wealth. They concluded that IQ was a better predictor of life course economic success.

This new research adds to the understanding of long-term outcomes in the lives of children who are born very preterm. As many children demonstrating cognitive impairments attend mainstream schools, it also

provides an opportunity to develop strategies for ensuring that they receive best support for their learning progress.

Prof. Dieter Wolke, from the Department of Psychology at the University of Warwick comments:

"No matter whether their difficulties are global or specific, many very preterm and very low birthweight individuals require continued educational support in order to succeed in school and life.

Our findings can inform the design of follow-up and intervention services to reduce the burden of prematurity for those individuals who were born at highest neonatal risk."

"Considering preterm and low-birthweight individuals' multiple neurocognitive difficulties, our results suggest that IQ is a more significant predictor of adult wealth than the ability to solve specific math problems," said Julia Jaekel, associate professor of child and family studies, who coauthored the study with Nicole Baumann and Dieter Wolke from the University of Warwick and Peter Bartmann from the University of Bonn.

More information: Julia Jaekel et al. General cognitive but not mathematic abilities predict very preterm and healthy term born adults' wealth, *PLOS ONE* (2019). DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0212789

Provided by University of Warwick

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