

Boosting the next generation's IQ

COMMENTARY

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In 2002-2006, British professor of psychology Richard Lynn and Finnish professor of political science Tatu Vanhanen conducted IQ studies in more than 80 countries.

Some results of their work: Hong Kong and Singapore topped the list with an average IQ of 108, followed by South Korea, 106; Japan and China, 105; Taiwan, 104; Italy, 102; Iceland, Mongolia and Switzerland, 101; and the United States, 98.

The Philippines, Kuwait, and Seychelles scored 86. Other Southeast Asian countries with higher average IQ were: Vietnam, 94; Malaysia, 92; Brunei, Cambodia and Thailand, 91; Laos, 89; and Indonesia, 87.

A few countries with 85 and below were: Cuba, Peru, Colombia, Iran, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela, Oman, India and Egypt.

The traditional way of raising children's IQ is through the educational system, whether public or private. Generally, the higher a student's educational attainment, the higher the IQ. This is so because most IQ tests are based on written language.

But there's a method not commonly recognized: educating the parents, starting from the mother's pregnancy, on the factors that can advance fetal brain development and boost the language and math skills of young children.

This can be done on a national level by educating the physicians, nurses, and midwives of the town health center. Information on advanced cognitive development

should be added to their present health and nutrition curriculum.

This is what I am doing in our town of Lezo in Aklan, as well as its capital, Kalibo, to help boost children's IQ. Lezo (pop.: 12,000) has 12 barangays; most of its residents do not hold a full-time job.

Since we moved to Lezo in 2010, I have delivered talks on advancing cognitive and language development to the rural health physician, nurses, midwives, teachers, couples planning marriage, high school students, parents, and some government officials. Now I am working with our town mayor on systematically spreading cognitive tips to parents to increase the IQ of the children, my goal being to make them happier and smarter.

All couples who are getting married are educated by the rural health staff on the factors that can reduce injury to the fetal brain and increase a child's chance at advanced language development.

These are the most critical points that parents should remember during pregnancy:

- Avoid or reduce eating too much cassava, cabbage, cauliflower, sweet potato, bamboo shoots, and other foods that can lower the thyroid hormone in the

mother's blood. This hormone is needed by the fetal brain for normal language and cognitive development.

- Reduce or avoid anxiety or emotional stress. This can increase the stress hormone cortisol that can damage parts of the fetus' memory center, the hippocampus.

• Starting from the sixth month of pregnancy, the mother should read aloud to the baby and the father should talk to the baby at about 3 inches from the mother's abdomen. At this time, the baby can hear.

• Starting from the child's birth until he or she is 4 years old, the parents should talk at about 35 words a minute. Talking at this rate is a critical step in boosting the child's IQ. They should read baby books to the child as often as possible.

Parents or caregivers should never shout, fight, or argue within the baby's seeing and hearing distance. Hitting or spanking a child should not be done.

If all parents follow these steps, we will have happier and smarter Filipino children in the next generation and possibly boost their average IQ to above 86.

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* PREGNANCY