

Autism-vaccine study was 'fraud' says journal (Update)

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A 1998 study that linked childhood autism to a vaccine was branded an "elaborate fraud" by the [British Medical Journal](#) (BMJ) Thursday, but its lead author said he was the victim of a smear campaign by drug manufacturers.

In an interview late Wednesday with CNN, Andrew Wakefield denied inventing data and blasted a reporter who apparently uncovered the falsifications as a "hit man" doing the bidding of a powerful pharmaceutical industry.

"It's a ruthless pragmatic attempt to crush any investigation into valid vaccine safety concerns," Wakefield said.

He insisted the "truth" was in his book about the scandal: "The book is not a lie, the study is not a lie...I did not make up the diagnoses of autism."

Follow up: [Autism study doctor says victim of smears](#)

Blamed for a disastrous boycott of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine in Britain, the study was retracted by The Lancet last year and Wakefield was disgraced on the grounds of conflict of financial interest and unethical treatment of some children involved in the research.

Wakefield, then a consultant in experimental gastro-enterology at

London's Royal Free Hospital, and his team suggested they had found a "new syndrome" of autism and bowel disease among 12 children.

They linked it to the MMR vaccine, which they said had been administered to eight of the youngsters shortly before the symptoms emerged.

But other scientists swiftly cautioned the study was only among a tiny group, without a comparative "control" sample, and the dating of when symptoms surfaced was based on parental recall, which is notoriously unreliable.

Experts said the study's results have never been replicated.

When asked why 10 of his co-authors retracted the interpretations of the study, Wakefield said: "I'm afraid the pressure has been put on them to do so."

"People get very, very frightened. You're dealing with some very powerful interests here."

The BMJ charged that hundreds of thousands of children in Britain are now unshielded against these three diseases. In 2008, measles was declared endemic, or present in the wider population much like chicken pox, in England and Wales.

None of the 12 cases, as reported in the study, tallied fully with the children's official medical records, the journal said.

Some diagnoses had been misrepresented and dates faked in order to draw a convenient link with the MMR jab, it said.

Of nine children described by Wakefield as having "regressive autism,"

only one clearly had this condition and three were not even diagnosed with autism at all, it said.

The findings had been skewed in advance, as the patients had been recruited via campaigners opposed to the MMR vaccine, the journal added.

And, said the BMJ, Wakefield had been confidentially paid hundreds of thousands of pounds (dollars, euros) through a law firm under plans to launch "class action" litigation against the vaccine.

Wakefield, who still retains a vocal band of supporters, reportedly left Britain to work in the United States.

Wakefield has previously accused Britain's General Medical Council (GMC) of seeking to "discredit and silence" him and shield the British government from responsibility in what he calls a "scandal."

The Lancet told AFP it would not comment on the BMJ accusations.

Autism is the term for an array of conditions ranging from poor social interaction to repetitive behaviours and entrenched silence. The condition is rare, predominantly affecting boys, although its causes are fiercely debated.

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