Landmark study describes the link between pesticide levels in expectant mothers and autism risk in their infants

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Science has provided yet more clues as to why autism rates in children continue to skyrocket throughout the Western world.

A groundbreaking new study recently published in „The American Journal of Psychiatry" found that pesticide exposure in pregnant women is directly correlated to increased autism risk in children, pointing to industrial agriculture as a major cause of brain damage in exposed children.

A teams of researchers from Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health in New York City joined up with researchers from the University of Turku and the National Institute of Health and Welfare, both in Finland, to take a closer look at whether or not pesticides, and specifically DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane), play any role at all in causing autism.

Using data collected from the Finnish Prenatal Study of Autism, this investigatory cohort study analyzed serum samples from more than 750 children with autism. They looked specifically for DDE (p,p'-dichlorodiphenyl dichloroethylene), a breakdown byproduct of DDT, in these serum samples, and compared what they found to serum samples from matched control children without autism.

What they discovered is that a child's risk of developing autism is roughly 33 percent higher when their mothers have elevated levels of DDE in their blood. And that risk jumps to about double, the team found, when DDE levels are detected in

the top 75th percentile, suggesting a corollary relationship between increased pesticide exposure and increased risk of autism.

These groundbreaking findings, the team wrote in their paper, "provide the first biomarker-based evidence that maternal exposure to insecticides is associated with autism among offspring."

"We think of these chemicals in the past tense, relegated to a long-gone era of dangerous 20th century toxins," stated Dr. Alan. S. Brown, the study's lead author. "Unfortunately, they are still present in the environment and are in our blood and tissues."

Though the researchers were quick to denounce a definitive causal connection between crop chemical exposure and autism, insisting that these findings are merely correlative for the time being, they did also admit in apparently duplicity that pesticides, herbicides, and insecticides are, in fact, "passed along to the developing fetus" from the mother.

Even after controlling for other outside factors that may have influenced these findings to arrive at this potentially erroneous conclusion, the researchers were unable to peg anything other than DDT and its metabolites, in this particular case, as being the cause of increased autism prevalence in children.

Several years back, researchers from the Neuroscience Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) found that crop chemicals are neurodegenerative, meaning they damage

brain cells.

Their paper, which was published in the journal „Nature Communications", found that several commonly used pesticides and fungicides triggered changes in the expression of brain genes in test mammals, which in turn led to symptoms associated with not only autism but Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.

In a press release accompanying this study's publishing, Mark Zylka, Ph.D., one of its authors, explained how crop chemicals reduce the expression of genes involved in synaptic transmission, which is how brain neurons communicate. When these genes don't express themselves as they should, brain function declines and inflammation ensues.

"This so-called neuroinflammation is commonly seen in autism and neurodegenerative conditions," the press release stated.

"The researchers also found that these chemicals stimulated the production of free radicals – particles that can damage the basic building blocks of cells and that have been implicated in a number of brain diseases."

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