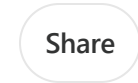
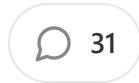
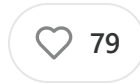


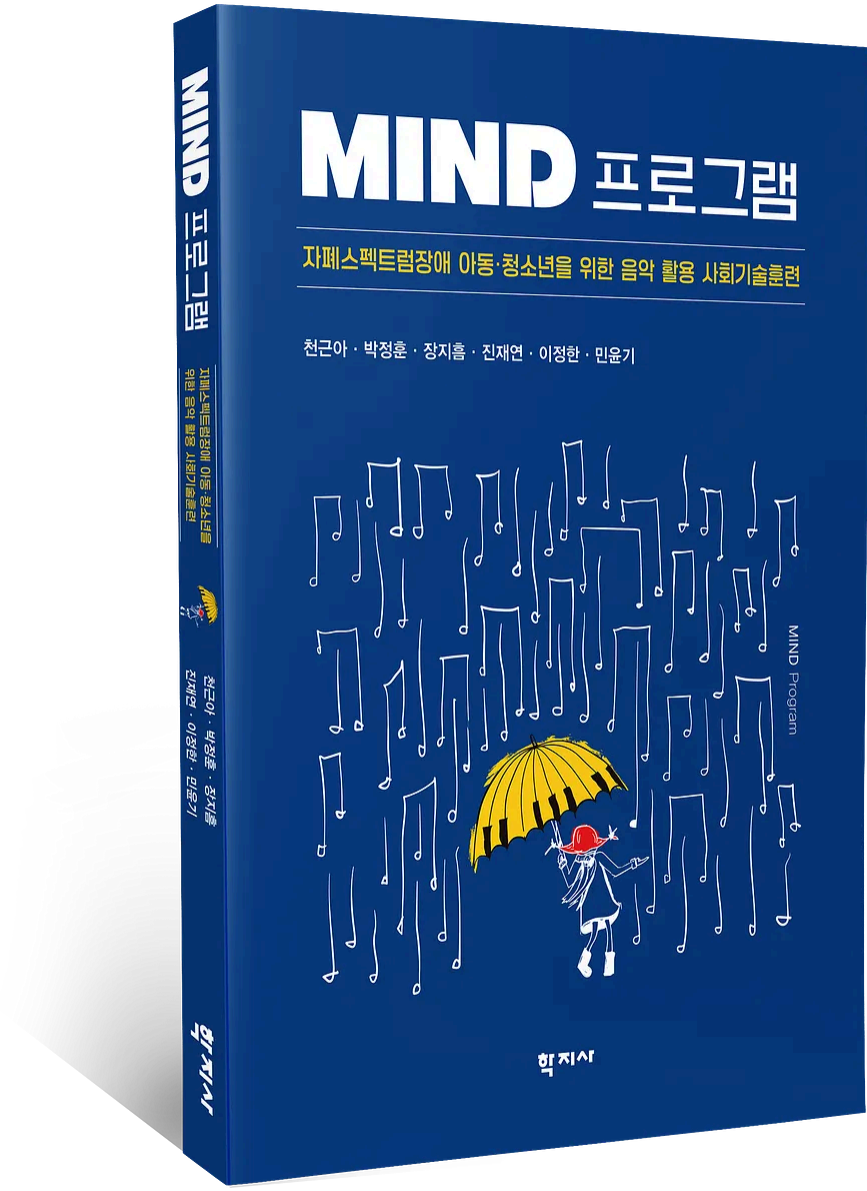
# BTS' Suga Co-Wrote a Music-Based Book About Autism Therapy

Why this Korean-language book excites me more than the pop group's worldwide tour

JAE-HA KIM

APR 17, 2026





BTS rapper Suga co-wrote *The MIND Program* with medical experts.

Every day, there seems to be news about the Korean supergroup **BTS**. They released their much awaited post-military album *Arirang*. The septet starred in their own Netflix **documentary**, *BTS: The Return*. And they've already kicked off their world tour, which is slated to end on March 14, 2027 in the Philippines.

But something that didn't get enough attention (in my opinion) is Suga co-authoring the book, *MIND Program* <sup>1</sup>, with experts from the Yonsei Severance Hospital <sup>2</sup>. The *MIND* in question stands for Music, Interaction, Network, and Diversity, and the book offers a music-based approach to developing social skills for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). (Suga's fans may recall that the music star donated \$3.5 million to that same hospital in 2025 to establish the Min Yoongi Treatment Center <sup>3</sup>.)

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## HOW DID THIS BOOK COME ABOUT?

Due to a pre-existing injury, Suga was assigned alternative military service (from 2023 to 2025) rather than active combat duty like his bandmates. While employed as a public service worker, he began planning ideas for *MIND* with Cheon Keun-ah, who specializes in child and adolescent psychiatry. Around the same time, Suga quietly volunteered to work with children with ASD.

While some naysayers have said he only did this to get back in the public's good graces after his much publicized **scooter incident**, I'd argue that celebrities don't usually put in this much time, effort, or money when making public mea culpas. They issue apologies, disappear for a while, and then pretend it never happened.

But this book wasn't written to make a lot of money or top the world's bestseller lists. It's an academic book aimed at a specific market.

## WHAT IS AUTISM?











According to the World Population Review, "autism is a neurological and developmental condition related to brain development. Autism impacts the way individuals perceive and socialize with others and interact with their surroundings. Signs of autism can usually be observed in the early childhood years. Autism is defined by a specific set of behaviors that affect a person's ability to interact and communicate with others. There are different degrees of autism, but some common behaviors associated with this disability include poor motor skills, repetitive behaviors, delayed

speech, difficulties with reasoning, very narrow interests, and impairments in social interactions and communications (such as a diminished ability to detect social cues).”

## **ANDREW WAKEFIELD SPEARHEADED THE ANTI-VAX MOVEMENT**

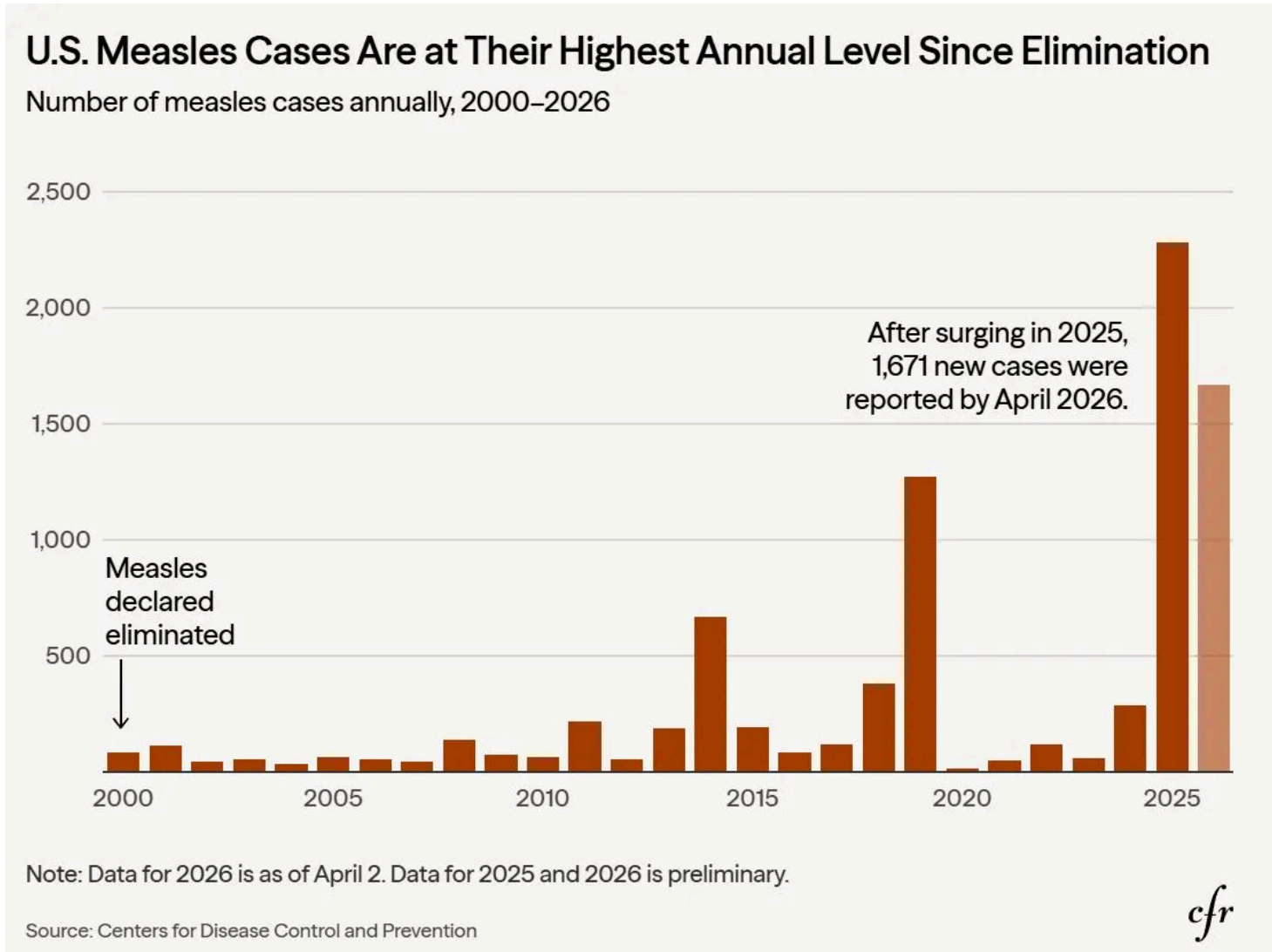
Andrew Wakefield was a British gastroenterologist and surgeon who, as of 2010, was stripped of his medical license. Why? For professional misconduct. In 1998, he presented a research paper based on a small sample group of 12 children, and claimed that the MMR vaccine — for measles, mumps, and rubella — led to increased rates of autism. Though scientists conducted epidemiological studies and disavowed his research as flawed, and though his publisher retracted Wakefield’s paper, his initial claim became the kindling that sparked the anti-vax movement.

“There were lots of problems later found with what [Wakefield] published,” Dr. Josh Sharfstein said on the *Public Health On Call* podcast. “They were cherry-picked cases. And we know that, given that the age when children receive the MMR is also the age when some children regress into autism, there will be a temporal relationship; by chance alone, some children would develop autism after vaccination. So, from a scientific perspective, the paper didn’t show much. But you had a very well-credentialed, very charismatic person coming from an outstanding institution publishing this paper in a very prestigious journal, and he really ran with it.”

	COUNTRY	AUTISM RATE 2023 (PER 100K) ↓
	Brunei	1,651
	Singapore	1,382
	Japan	1,340
	South Korea	1,279
	Uganda	1,040
	Iceland	1,031
	Canada	1,024
	Sweden	1,008
	Ethiopia	972
	United States	969

Source: [World Population Review](#)

As of today, no peer-reviewed research confirmed any links between vaccines and autism. Sharfstein, who's also a professor at Johns Hopkins University professor, concluded, “[As of 2025], we have 16 well-conducted, large population-based studies, carefully designed, done by different investigators in different countries, using different but strong methods. And all have found no relationship between the MMR vaccine, thimerosal in vaccines, or the number of vaccines given and autism. The evidence is compelling.”



Courtesy: Council on Foreign Relations

## HAVE THE MEASLES BEEN ELIMINATED?

Yes, but then no. In 2000, the measles had been eliminated in the United States. But by 2025, the U.S. cited more than 2,200 measles cases that year alone. We're not even halfway through 2026, but at least 1,600 cases of measles have been confirmed so far.

The U.S. has become one of those *shithole countries*<sup>4</sup> that our president shook his finger at. And now the U.S. is at risk of losing its measles-elimination status from the Pan American Health Organization.

I bring all of this up because it *is* true that South Korea culturally does not view those with disabilities favorably — and it's an important issue that is being addressed by South Koreans who are nowhere near as famous as Suga.

But let's not pretend that this isn't also the case where most of us (*all of us?*) live. This isn't whataboutism<sup>5</sup>. It's fact. Yet there is a certain contingent of westerners<sup>6</sup> who have had a field day using this as an indictment against South Korea. As if the U.S. isn't experiencing a major measles epidemic *right now* because some parents believe the possibility of autism is a *worse fate than death* itself.

I have nothing but kudos for Suga, who could have let the academics<sup>7</sup> and scientists handle this project. But he chose to use his celebrity to bring attention to an important cause that he *knows* will get more coverage because of who he is.

This is how change happens. Not the only way, for certain, but a definitive way for sure.



Suga alongside Severance Hospital president, Keum Ki-chang (Courtesy: Severance Hospital)

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## K-DRAMA INDEX

JAE-HA KIM • APR 1



These are some of my reviews and essays about K-Dramas (and also Korean films and other Korean-centric projects). You may also read more about my take on Korean pop culture in outlets such as Rolling Stone, Mashable, Victoria & Al...

[Read full story →](#)

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- 1 *The MIND Program* is only available in Korean. As of now, they are not planning on adapting the book into English or any other languages.
  - 2 Yonsei Severance Hospital is a teaching hospital affiliated with Yonsei University — the Y in the prestigious SKY schools in South Korea. (S stands for Seoul National University and K stands for Korea University).

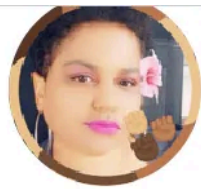
- 3 Min Yoon-gi is Suga's legal name.
- 4 In a closed-door meeting in January 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump referred to African countries, El Salvador, and Haiti as “shithole countries.”
- 5 Just a reminder that while I appreciate all of my subscribers, I am not a gumball machine that will spit out what you want me to say if you put a quarter in the coin slot. Unfortunately, people like Jennifer below didn't read my work or — if they did — chose to be deliberately obtuse about what was actually written.

**User feedback:** Disappointed in the author not taking a stand against the bullying of Suga in Korea by stating that many people in Korea don't support sending funeral wreaths. Yet, won't even say if they are against it and instead plays a game of "whataboutism". Guess what. I live in the US. We have a hellish problem with gun violence. Many people are against guns and

promote gun safety policy. I ALSO AM ANTI-GUN and SUPPORT ALL GUN SAFETY POLICIES." Not hard, is it?

The *whataboutism* she referred to was when I started asking commenters, “What country do you live in?” after they insisted that strange/illegal things don’t happen where they’re from. 🙄 Excuse me, sirs and ma’ams, but you live in India, the Philippines, Indonesia, England, Nigeria, the United States etcetera, etcetera, etcetera! I don’t even have to look up all the atrocities that happened there, but I do know that the people who committed those crimes are *NOT* representative of the average citizen in any of those nations. Yet these same entitled whingers insist that the actions of some truly unhinged K-pop fans *are* indicative of all 51.7 million people living in South Korea. Just say you’re xenophobic and call it a day, OK?

- 6 Speaking of people who hate non-idol Koreans... This woman is one of many K-pop “fans” who love their *oppars*, but hate Koreans and South Korea in general. Want to know why most Korean celebrities don’t want to move away from their homeland? Because they love it there. And most of them realize that in just about any other country, they will be treated as less than simply for existing. Which. Is. Why. They. Choose. To. Live. In. South Korea.



♥ **Cosmic Black Swan** ♥ 🖊️ 🖊️ BL... ▼

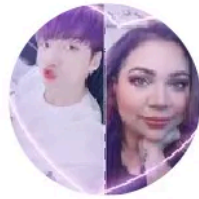
@mikrokosmos\_nia

Replying to [@GoAwayWithJae](#)

I agree with everything except that last line. Are you implying that all "Westerners" are a bunch of stupid inbred hicks? Not all of us are uneducated so you can take that last line and shove it up your non-existent ass!

9:41 PM · 22 Jun 20 · [Twitter for Android](#)





CHRISTINA7/아미 🐦 방탄소년단 ... · 6h ▾

Replying to @mikrokosmos\_nia and @GoAwayWithJae

You're right. Not all of us are uneducated or inbred... op didn't say we were. It's 🙌 to have an opinion but don't come at someone like that for having their own. Op is a very intelligent Korean journalist who is giving us all a different perspective on her tl

Her account no longer exists, so there's no need to block out her name.

- Z ETA: I didn't think this needed to be spelled out, but **some readers** on social media are annoyed that Suga isn't referred to as an academic and are **spreading strange lies**. Suga is brilliant, but he isn't an academic. The book's lead author, Cheon Keun-ah — who's is a professor at Yonsei University College of Medicine, Severance Hospital — *is*. This distinction doesn't make one person better than the other. But there is a distinction about academics in academia. An academic is “a member (such as a professor) of an institution of learning (such as a university),” according to Merriam-Webster.

◦ Having graduated from college doesn't qualify you as an academic in the scientific world. I have a post-graduate degree. I am not an academic.

◦ My husband is a scientist who has co-written multiple research papers. Even he doesn't consider himself an academic, because he is not teaching or doing research at a university.

◦ My teenage son's conservation research data will be published in the upcoming months, with him being credited as *one* of the co-authors. Clearly, he is not an academic. He hasn't even graduated from high school yet.

To be clear, you could have a PhD. And while that may qualify you for an academic job, the degree itself doesn't mean you're an academic. There is nothing wrong with *not* being an academic. Most of us aren't.



79 Likes · 12 Restacks

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## Discussion about this post

Comments Restacks



Write a comment...



**Kelly Hudson** Kelly Hudson Apr 17



♥ Liked by Jae-Ha Kim

As someone from a family with a lot of neurodivergent kids, include autistic, this was just one of the things that confirmed for me what a deep, kind and profoundly committed person Suga is. He has a rare combination of both emotional passion and introspection along with a deep intellect and the will to apply both to what he loves.

♥ LIKED (13) REPLY

SHARE

2 replies by Jae-Ha Kim and others



**TiU** TiU Apr 17



♥ Liked by Jae-Ha Kim

Thanks for this, Jae. Suga seems to be so intentional about his actions.

♥ LIKED (10) REPLY

SHARE

1 reply by Jae-Ha Kim

29 more comments...

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