

Prevention Research Center

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Rap listeners prone to alcohol, drugs, violence *Study raises questions about alcohol industry marketing through hip hop*

BERKELEY, CA – Young people who listen to rap and hip hop music are more likely to have problems with alcohol, drugs and violence than listeners of other types of music, a new study shows. The link to these problems raises serious questions about the alcohol industry's use of rap and hip hop to market products, the study author said.

A survey of more than 1,000 community college students found that rap music was consistently associated with alcohol use, potential alcohol use disorder, illicit drug use and aggressive behavior. Alcohol and illicit drug use were also associated with listening to techno and reggae. The results were not affected by the respondents' gender or ethnicity.

"People should be concerned about rap and hip hop being used to market alcoholic beverages, given the alcohol, drug and aggression problems among listeners," said lead author Meng-Jinn Chen, Ph.D., a research scientist at PIRE Prevention Research Center. "That's particularly true considering the popularity of rap and hip hop among young people."

Rap and hip hop music and artists have been used in commercials and advertisements for malt liquor and other alcohol products, while the urban contemporary music radio format, which features rap and hip hop, is regularly used for alcohol advertising.

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The study, published today in the May issue of the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, surveyed over 1,000 students aged 15 to 25. Students were asked about their music listening habits, alcohol use, illicit drug use and aggressive behaviors – such as getting into fights and attacking or threatening others. Researchers emphasize that the survey results cannot determine whether listening to certain music genres leads to alcohol or illicit drug use or aggressive behavior. Young people with tendencies to use alcohol or illicit drugs or to be aggressive may be drawn to particular music styles.

“While we don’t fully understand the relationship between music preferences and behavioral outcomes, our study shows that young people may be influenced by frequent exposure to music lyrics that make positive references to substance use and violence,” Meng-Jinn said

Recent studies of popular music by other researchers reveal that nearly half of rap/hip and hop songs mentioned alcohol as compared to around 10 percent or less of other popular music genres. Nearly two-thirds of rap songs mentioned illicit drugs as compared with one-tenth of songs from other genres. Rap and rock music videos depict violence twice as often as other music genres.

The PIRE study, entitled “Music, Substance Use and Aggression,” also found that young people who listen to reggae and techno used more alcohol and illicit drugs than listeners of other music, with the exception of rap. Rap topped all other genres in association to alcohol and drug use and aggression.

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To obtain a copy of the study or to arrange an interview with study authors, contact Jim Gogek at (301) 755-2445.

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