

Study Raps Hip-Hop Videos

Says they lead to increased violence, promiscuity among teen girls

By Randy Dotinga

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THURSDAY, March 6 (HealthScoutNews) -- Rap music videos often portray a world teeming with sex and violence.

But can they make teenaged **girls** do bad things?

While the authors of a new **study** say the answer to that question remains elusive, they add their research has uncovered a potential connection.

The **study** found that black teen **girls** who view more rap videos are more likely to get in trouble with the law, take drugs and become infected with sexually transmitted diseases.

"We can see there is some link, some association," says **study** co-author Gina Wingood, an associate professor of behavioral sciences and health education at **Emory** University in Atlanta. "Maybe they see what's on the rap music videos and think that's how teenagers act, and that's how I should act."

While sociologists have devoted plenty of time studying how music affects teenagers, rap videos haven't gotten much specific attention. "We said, 'Let's look at adolescent females and ask them questions about rap music and other media venues, like gospel, hip-hop and music videos in general,'" Wingood says.

The **study** findings appear in the March issue of the *American Journal of Public Health* .

Phone calls seeking comment about the **study** were not returned by spokespersons for Island Def Jam, a record company that releases rap records, or the Recording Industry Association of America, the main trade group for the recording industry.

Wingood and her colleagues went to health clinics in Birmingham, Ala., and studied 522 black **girls** from 1996 to 1999. All were sexually active and between the ages of 14 and 18.

Girls who watched the most rap videos (more than the average of 14 hours a week), were three times as likely as the other **girls** to have hit a teacher (7.1 percent versus 2.4 percent). They were also 2.5 times more likely to have been arrested (17.3 percent versus 7.2 percent), and nearly two times more likely to have had sex with multiple partners (19.3 percent versus 11 percent).

The researchers then followed the **girls** for a year. Forty-one percent of those who watched the most rap music videos developed a sexually transmitted disease, compared to 33 percent who didn't watch as many videos.

Wingood and her researchers looked at several factors that could affect behavior, such as age, income level and extracurricular activities, including church attendance. However, only two factors other than rap music viewing boosted the rates of promiscuity,

drug and alcohol use, and violence among the teens. Those factors were lack of employment and lack of parents who monitor teen activities.

Wingood acknowledges she doesn't know whether the watching of rap videos directly affected the **girls'** behavior or merely reflected interests they already have. "Maybe they want to be independent and autonomous adolescents, and this is how they express it," she says.

Michael D. Resnick, director of the National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Research Center at the University of Minnesota, says sociologists have found plenty of evidence that the media -- including music and television -- affect the health, attitudes and behaviors of teens.

"Young people are listening and observing," says Resnick, who is also a professor of pediatrics. "Adults may think they are not, but they, like adults, are social beings and we respond to the environment around us."

"When that environment is one that desensitizes us to violence and to treating each other with caring and respect, we see predictable results in young people and in ourselves."

More information

Information for parents on teenage sexuality can be found at **The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy** and the **Campaign for Our Children** .

Get an alternative view of rap music from **Urban Think Tank.org** , which examines rap and hip hop culture.

SOURCES: Gina Wingood, Sc.D., associate professor, behavioral sciences and health education, Rawlins School of Public Health, **Emory** University, Atlanta; Michael D. Resnick, Ph.D., professor, pediatrics, and director, National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Research Center, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis; March 2003 *American Journal of Public Health*