The effects of dancehall genre on adolescent sexual and violent behavior in Jamaica: A public health concern

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Citation: Crawford AD. The effects of dancehall genre on adolescent sexual and violent behavior in Jamaica: A public health concern. North Am J Med Sci 2010; 2: 143-145.
Doi: 10.4297/najms.2010.3143
Availability: www.najms.org
ISSN: 1947 – 2714

Abstract

Background: Research has shown that there is a direct correlation between the loud ‘hard-core’ music played on public transportation and the proliferation of sexual activities on these said transportations. Aim: To determine the extent to which dancehall music/genre impacts adolescent behavior. Materials and Method: The study is informed by quantitative and qualitative data, which were collected during the period February–May 2008. Convenience and judgmental sampling were used to target 100 subjects. Results: Of the 100 adolescent cases (50 male, 50 female), females (40%) were more likely to gravitate to sexually explicit lyrical content than their male counterparts (26%). Females (74%) were also more likely to act upon lyrical contents than males (46%). There was no significant difference where males (100%) and females (98%) subconsciously sings the dancehall lyrics even without hearing it; as well as inspire their dreams 64% and 62% respectively. However, more females (74%) than males (46%) acted on lyrical contents of the dancehall genre. Conclusion: There is a correlation between hard-core dancehall genre and the sexual and violent behavior of adolescents.

Keywords: dancehall genre, lyrics, adolescent, behavior, sexual, violent.

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Introduction

Adolescents’ psycho-social response to dancehall genre has become a national and public health concern, and has raised policy debate in terms of adolescent’s sexual and violent behavior (with respect to pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STI) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)).

Issues relating to sex and violence among adolescents have, in recent times, raised much public health and policy concerns, especially in an era where first sexual debut is at the mean age of 11.4 years for boys and 12.8 years for girls in Jamaica [1].

Studies have shown that graphical lyrical contents in some music can impact adolescent sexual and violent behavior. This research has explored the literature and noted that there is a correlation between dancehall genre and adolescent sexual and violent behavior. Unlike the literature which shows that such genre is likely to impact the behavior of male than female (because of its delivery from a masculine perspective), the findings of this research show that females are more likely to be impacted psycho-socially, hence would act upon the lyrical contents that they hear.

This research has posited the various policy and health implications governing adolescent behavior and the playing of dancehall music on public buses and taxis. Recommendations are also made regarding policy and legislative directions that may be taken by the health sector of Jamaica.

Materials and Methods

This study is informed by quantitative and qualitative data. The former was captured through field research, which was collected in Jamaica, during the period February-May, 2008. The subjects were 100 adolescents (50 males and 50
females).

Information was obtained using both convenience and purposive sampling methods. The instrument used in the collection of data was a 20-item close-ended questionnaire. The respondents were instructed to opt-out, should they become uncomfortable with any aspect of the questionnaire. They were also informed that the process of questionnaire administration was of high confidentiality.

Qualitative information was obtained via secondary research. The analysis of the data was done via Microsoft Excel.

Results

The findings reveal (Table 1) that unlike females (40%) who gravitated to sexually explicit lyrical content than their male counterpart (26%), males were more inclined to lyrical contents that were conscious (34%) and violent (20%) rather than their female counterpart (24% and 16% respectively). Both males (20%) and females (20%) responded similarly to lyrical content of expletive language.

| Table 1 | Adolescent’s response to dancehall genre |
|---------|----------------------------------------|
| Lyrical Contents | M (n = 50) | F (n = 50) |
|              | N | % | N | % |
| Sexually explicit | 13 | 26 | 20 | 40 |
| Violently explicit | 10 | 20 | 8 | 16 |
| Expletive language | 10 | 20 | 10 | 20 |
| Conscious lyrics | 17 | 34 | 12 | 24 |
| Total | 50 | 100 | 50 | 100 |

N: number, M: male, F: female

From a psychological perspective, Table 2 shows that there is no significant difference between the respondents who claimed that dancehall genre inspired their dreams (males 64%, females 62%). To be more specific, these respondents postulated that they dream of the sexual and violent graphics of the genre and that this resulted in waking up with an orgasm and/or a feeling of rage or fright. Males (62%) were, however, less likely to be emotionally stimulated by the dancehall genre than their female counterpart (82%). Males were also less likely to act on lyrical content (46%) or feel controlled by the lyrics (42%) than the females (74% and 64% respectively). More males (54%) than females (26%) claimed that the dancehall lyrics did not influence them. During the questionnaire administration, there were respondents who claimed that the graphical overtone of sex and violence in the dancehall music, helped to stimulate and empower them to behave according to the impression conveyed, whether or not they had prior exposure to sex and/or violence.

Of the 100 respondents, 52% males and 58% females claimed to be sexually active, while 19% male and 13% females demonstrated violence in schools, in their communities, and/or in their homes - 7% females and 9% males were taken to the Principal’s office; 3% females and 5% males suspended; and 5% females and 8% male were warned by police (without arrest); 3% male and 6% female contracted STI (including HIV).

There was no significant difference between those who would sing the lyrics of the dancehall genre without hearing it (100% male, 98% female). However, 30% male and 58% female said that they sometimes heard the music in their heads while focusing on other things.

| Table 2 | Psychological impact |
|---------|----------------------|
| Psychological Response | M (N=50) | F (N=50) |
|              | N | % | N | % |
| Hear lyrics in one’s head sometimes | 15 | 30 | 29 | 58 |
| Feel lyrics in one’s emotions | 31 | 62 | 41 | 82 |
| Sing lyrics without hearing it | 50 | 100 | 49 | 98 |
| Lyrics inspire dreams | 32 | 64 | 31 | 62 |
| Act on lyrical content | 23 | 46 | 37 | 74 |
| Feel controlled by lyrics | 21 | 42 | 32 | 64 |
| Lyrics is not influential | 27 | 54 | 13 | 26 |

N: number, M: male, F: female

Discussion

In support of the findings of this study, the literature reveals that music (especially in the dancehall genre) has influence on adolescent sexual behavior. In a 2007 study in Jamaica (Table 3), out of 238 cases of 9-17 year olds, 10.1% male and 3.4% female were sexually influenced by dancehall genre. 42% respondents (18.5% male, 23.5% female) contracted STIs/HIV [2]. Unlike the findings of this study, males were more likely influenced (than their female counterpart) by dancehall genre [2].

| Table 3 | Influences of sexual activities [2] |
|---------|------------------------------------|
| Influential Factors | Male | Female |
|                | (N = 50) | (N = 50) |
| Peer pressure | 46 | 38.7 | 46 | 38.7 |
| Everyone is doing it | 24 | 20.2 | 19 | 16.0 |
| Inability to communicate sexual feelings to parents | 13 | 10.9 | 14 | 11.8 |
| Money | 8 | 6.7 | 12 | 10.1 |
| Music (dancehall genre) | 12 | 10.1 | 4 | 3.4 |
| Cellular phone | 5 | 4.0 | 9 | 7.6 |
| Environment | 7 | 5.9 | 4 | 3.4 |
| Don’t know/uncertain | 4 | 3.4 | 7 | 5.9 |
| Others | 0 | 0.0 | 4 | 3.4 |

N: number

The literature also shows that music is highly influential and can create negative impact on youths, who imitate these negative acts [3]. Music also plays an important role in the development of youths [3].

Schubert contends that music tend to evoke intense pleasure [4]; while McFarlane holds the view that a link does exist between exposure to sexual content via the media and the sexual behavior of our children [5].

Unlike the findings of this study, the literature also points out that males were more likely to be impacted by the sexual messages from the dancehall genre, because such message is usually delivered from a masculine perspective [6].
One author noted that the lyrical contents of dancehall genre have the potential to impact the brain, and affect emotional behavior in humans, especially for the young people [6]. This is probably because there is a direct correlation between the playing of “hard-core” music on public transportation and the proliferation of sexual display on these said transportations [6].

In a 2009 Jamaican study, school children were more drawn to heavily-tint public buses with ‘lewd’ dancehall music. This study explains that female students would often sit in the laps of the male students and engage in sexual activities while gyrating their bodies to the sound of the music. This kind of behavior is usually facilitated by both the bus driver and conductor [7]. The said study further pointed out that such kind of sexual behavior, demonstrated by adolescents, was also prevalent in taxis. The gyrating of the body brings to mind one’s scholar’s perspective that owing to the rhythmic pattern, timbre and amplitudes of the music, in general, this can affect emotional behavior [6].

It is noted that the lyrical contents in the majority of the dancehall genre are messages which relate to male-female sexual relationships, and are not messages of respect, care, consideration and values. In these musicals, the artists sing about what men should do and how they should treat women (in a derogatory manner) [8].

One deejay artist charged that parents become more responsible and censor what their children see or hear [8]. As a result, it is encouraged that “effective controls over crime in Jamaica need to start with the music industries, the artists and the music lyrics which explicitly describe and depict murder so callously to a level where it is difficult to fathom. Dancehall music with these violent lyrics helps to build the thought process of our youths” [9].

The encouragement of sexual activities of minors by bus and taxi operators (adults) is a breach of (1) Article 34 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the child (1989), which addresses sexual exploitation, abuse, unlawful sexual activity/practices, pornographic performance or materials [10]; and (2) the Child Care and Protection Act, which refers to exposing the child to moral danger [11].

In addition, such practice suggests conflict with the Jamaican Government’s efforts (under its National Development 2030 Plan) to achieve (i) “a healthy and stable population” [12]; (ii) a society which is “safe, cohesive and just” [12]; (iii) the goal of being able to “combat HIV/AIDS” [12].

It is therefore recommended that the state should make it a responsibility to educate public bus and taxi operators on the psycho-social, legal and health implications (abuse, pregnancy, STI/HIV) of playing loud inappropriate music while transporting passengers. At the same time it is imperative that there be political support for this cause. Policies should be enforced (if already implemented) regarding the matter of public bus and taxi operators facilitating sexual activities by adolescents while on their public transportations. Sanction should be applied where there is breach of such policy.

Close attention should be paid to the legislation (Child Care and Protection Act, 2004), which protects the interest and rights of the child.

Loud and inappropriate music on public buses and taxis should be forbidden (especially while located in public domain) whether or not such transportations contain passengers.

**Conclusion**

There is a correlation between ‘hard-core’ dancehall genre and the sexual and violent behavior of adolescents. Based on the responses obtained from the respondents, the findings reveal that females more than males are more likely to respond psychologically to the lyrical contents of dancehall genre.

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