

Health campaigns that tap teen culture curtail risky adolescent behavior

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Health campaigns that target teens based their social groups and subcultures, such as hip hop, preppy or alternative, can be an effective tool in dissuading adolescents from engaging in risky behaviors such as smoking and drinking, suggests a survey of the literature and a case study.

The findings will be presented at the APHA meeting in Chicago on Tuesday, Nov. 3.

"In [public health](#), we typically segment more in terms of sociodemographics like race, gender and income," says Meghan Moran, an associate professor in the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health's Department of Health, Behavior and Society and lead author of the study. "But, we know that young people identify strongly with groups along subcultures and these groups vary on their health behavior, too. For instance, the teens we categorize as alternative, be they goth or skateboarders, are at a higher risk for alcohol use. If we develop campaigns that incorporate the style of the group, it can increase their effectiveness."

For their study, researchers surveyed journal articles highlighting evidence related to the use of peer crowds to develop targeted health campaigns aimed at adolescents. Such campaigns can work on several levels. One, the teens identify with the individuals and the culture represented in a targeted campaign. Secondly, teen groups have different risk profiles. For instance, skaters are at an increased risk for smoking

and preppy teens exhibit an increased likelihood of alcohol use. Campaigns can tap these vulnerable points. Finally, the campaigns can factor in cues the group likely receives in its cultural consumption - music, TV, movies - some of which may promote the very risky behavior the campaigns seek to curtail.

The researchers also describe a case study of an ongoing anti-smoking campaign developed by the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth. The campaign targets alternative youth who identify with crowds such as rockers or hardcore (punk) and strives to prevent smoking from being seen as socially acceptable in these music scenes.

The review was conducted with colleagues from the Rescue Social Change Group, a marketing firm based in San Diego, California.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recently launched "Fresh Empire," a peer crowd anti-smoking campaign aimed at hip-hop youth. The \$128 million campaign will run in 36 markets over the next 24 months and aired nationally for the first time during the 2015 BET Hip-Hop Awards earlier this month.

The FDA's campaign is too new to gauge its effectiveness, notes Moran.

"Why adolescent peer crowds matter: Incorporating youth subcultures and values in [health behavior](#) campaigns" was written by Meghan Moran, PhD; Jeffrey W. Jordan, MA and Mayo Djakaria, MPH.

Provided by Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health

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