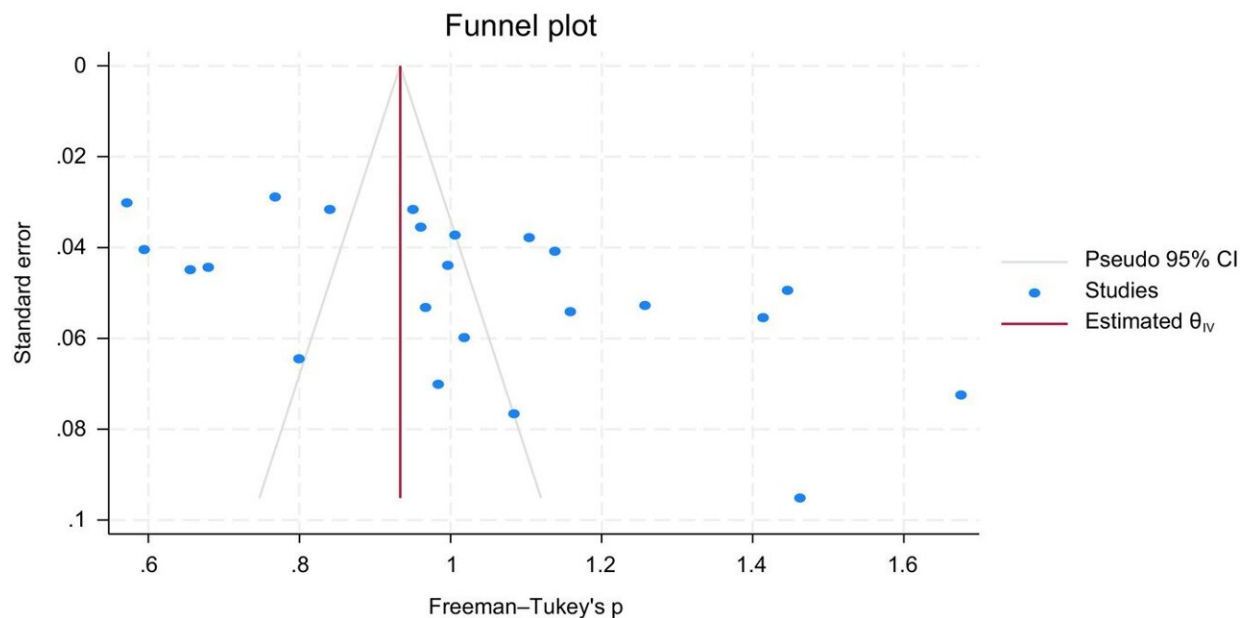


Music exposes listeners to alcohol references, potentially influencing drinking

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Funnel plot. *Note:* Freeman–Tukey's p , x -axis, represents the transformed proportions using Freeman–Tukey's transformation technique. The Y -axis represents the standard error of transformed proportions. Credit: *Alcohol, Clinical and Experimental Research* (2024). DOI: 10.1111/acer.15262

At least one in four contemporary songs references alcohol, according to an analysis of multiple studies that hint at the effects of music exposure on listeners' drinking. Music is nearly ubiquitous in modern life, thanks partly to smartphones and streaming services.

A 2022 study found that we listen to (on average) 961 hours of music per year, or two hours and 38 minutes per day. Music is a powerful social and emotional influence and can shape attitudes and behaviors. This may be particularly so among [young people](#) whose engagement with music is relatively high.

Research has found that [alcohol](#) references are common in lyrics and videos and have increased in recent decades. Although drinking behaviors have been linked to alcohol-related content in various media, little attention has been paid to music in this regard.

Understanding the connection could inform policies and interventions that reduce alcohol-related harms. For the analysis in [Alcohol: Clinical & Experimental Research](#), investigators in Australia reviewed studies estimating the prevalence of alcohol references in music and exploring possible links with drinking behaviors.

Researchers conducted a search in literature databases for studies measuring the prevalence of alcohol-related content in song lyrics and music videos: beverages, brands, behaviors (e.g., chugging), contexts (e.g., bars), and altered states (e.g., tipsy). Of 23 papers included in the new analysis, eight focused on [music videos](#), of which five measured lyrical content too.

Three articles tackled the association between alcohol references in music and drinking-related behaviors. The investigators used [statistical analysis](#) to explore the prevalence of alcohol references in music, several contributing factors, and any association between music exposure and drinking behaviors.

The 23 studies involved 12,224 songs, of which 24% contained at least one alcohol reference in the lyric or video. The five studies that analyzed both lyrics and visuals reported that 29% of songs contained alcohol

references. The prevalence remained high when considering lyrics only (in 17 studies involving 10,511 songs, 22%) and visuals only (in five studies representing 1,965 videos, 25%). Prevalence varied significantly between studies.

The analysis implicated several moderating factors, including the source of the music, genre, study period, and sample size. For example, music sampled from popular rap charts contained more alcohol references than songs sampled from Billboard, music TV channels, and YouTube. Rap music had a higher prevalence of alcohol references than rock music; pop and country music were in between.

The prevalence of alcohol references seemed stable from the 1990s to the 2010s and subsequently increased. The three articles on the association between alcohol references and consumption each reported that music exposure influenced drinking—for example, a 2011 study in bars showed that playlists with alcohol references were associated with higher customer spending on alcoholic beverages than playlists featuring the same artists but no drinking references.

The review findings underscore music as a prominent medium for alcohol-related exposure, potentially affecting the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of listeners and raising their risk of alcohol-related harm. The analysis was limited by inconsistent study methodology. More research using standardized measurements of music content is needed to clarify the existence and scale of behavioral effects and identify relevant mechanisms.

More information: Gedefaw Diress Alen et al, The prevalence of alcohol references in music and their effect on people's drinking behavior: A systematic review and meta-analysis, *Alcohol, Clinical and Experimental Research* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/acer.15262](https://doi.org/10.1111/acer.15262)

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