



# **WORK MATTERS**

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**COLUMN**

# The Influence of Dancehall on our youth

What may be oblivious to the majority, may be seen by a few. This is a statement that has been made in relation to music, where it is argued that certain genres are glorified and played in the public, and help shape the minds of the listeners. An article written by CNN, recently explored how 'drill music' - a genre of rap characterized by threatening and violent lyrics, might be linked to attention-seeking criminal behavior, and suggested that such behavior is intensified by the need to post it on social media.

Another article written by Louisa Starling in January titled 'Health and Wellbeing' listed factors and research acquired from Stanford University that claim music seems to be able to affect the moods and brain functions of individuals. It is also argued that certain moods are triggered by the release of chemicals in the brain, which in turn can affect behavior. For example, when happy, we release a hormone called dopamine; when sad monoamine oxidase levels are higher, which can cause a reduction in the levels of dopamine (mentioned above) in the body.

I am suggesting that as it relates to music, certain styles and genres of music have the effect of enhancing and modifying our moods. For example, when we need to exercise or complete a task, we usually prefer energetic music, but when attending a funeral, more somber music is played.

In Trinidad, where we have a wide variety of music available, on certain radio stations and in parties, one genre is more dominant than the others. Here I refer to 'dancehall' or as we locally call it, 'gunman music', that is quite popular and can be heard on the radio, in cars or being played throughout most parts of the country.

Does this type of music glorify a life of violence through its use of vividly describing misogyny, drug use and gang life? Through the description of different methods of violence such as drive-bys, random shootings, gang warfare, that are promoted in these

songs; young listeners are exposed to these images on a daily basis. This bombardment may result in the desensitization in the youth, where they do not feel the sense of remorse or surprise or disgust that these types of behavior usually evoke; and some even argue that it contributes to them getting in the frame of mind to condone committing acts of violence. Instead of love and positivity being spread through the nation's airwaves, music purporting violence is being played on the popular radio stations, as the crime rate escalates.

Not too long ago, there was reggae and dancehall music being performed and played by our elders, but as time went by, the lyrics became increasingly violent and degrading to females. Some Caribbean countries have already begun to take a drastic approach towards the change and shift in the culture by banning certain artistes that engage in singing about glorifying crime and violence, from entering their country; and some have also put things in place to restrict their music from being played on the airwaves.

Recently, a popular artiste who is very well known among the youths as one that promotes the lifestyle of violence through the use of guns, vulgarity and lawless behavior, was banned from Guyana after an incident at one of his concerts within the country, where guns were fired, causing mass panic. Now, some might argue that the action of one does not justify such a drastic decision, but we have to look at the bigger picture, and determine how the influences affect our youth and our national communities.

I argue that the evolution of the genre of dancehall is something that we need to evaluate properly, look at what it purports and see what behaviors it is encouraging among the youth in society. Is it a medium for community discussion, for social commentary, or simply something else altogether? While we have heard that 'music soothes the soul' and 'music soothes the savage beast', we have to decide to what extent that is true with all types of music that we expose to our youth.

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