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### Study looks at musicians, use of energy drinks

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#### Researchers suggest link to misuse of other legal substances

By Kelly Hogan of the *Journal Sentinel*

July 11, 2011 | (0) COMMENTS

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Monster, Daredevil and Havoc, terms synonymous with fear, risk-taking and hell-raising, may be associated with other forms of chaos among musicians who imbibe in energy drinks: binge drinking, alcohol-related social problems and misuse of prescription drugs, researchers at the University of Buffalo said in a recent study published in the *Journal of Caffeine Research*.

Kathleen E. Miller and Brian M. Quigley, social scientists at the university's [Research Institute on Addictions](#), studied substance use among 226 professional and amateur musicians ranging in age from 18 to 45. Nearly all survey respondents reported use of caffeine and more than half reported use of energy drinks.

Among the musicians who imbibed in energy drinks, researchers discovered significantly more misuse of prescription drugs and alcohol compared with their non-energy-drink-consuming counterparts.

Miller and her colleague showed that energy drink-consuming musicians - a major target of energy drink marketing - may be especially prone to misuse of other legal substances.

#### Musicians' habits

In their findings, nearly a third of musicians who consume energy drinks misused prescription medications. Among musicians who did not consume energy drinks, 13% reported prescription drug misuse.

Seventy-six percent of musicians who indulge in energy drinks admitted binge drinking, compared with 59% of musicians who confessed to binge drinking but reported no use of energy drinks. Previous studies show a similar trend among college students and athletes.

What these studies suggest, Miller said, is an association between energy drink consumption and legal substance misuse among a cohort known for sensation seeking. This finding may be linked to higher-than-usual caffeine levels in these beverages. Miller said energy drinks are sometimes supplemented with several sources of caffeine, including guarana, kola nut and green tea extract.

Whether ingredients in energy drinks prime some consumers for other substance use is not known. High levels of caffeine produce anxiety, irritability, insomnia, high blood pressure, cardiac arrhythmias and death in rare cases. Miller said that more research is needed to elucidate the role of caffeine in substance use behavior.

#### Caution suggested

Carlyle H. Chan, a professor of psychiatry at the Medical College of Wisconsin, said that while concerns about energy drinks may be justified, the study's conclusions shouldn't be overstated.

"Association and correlation does not mean causation or prediction," said Chan, who noted that survey studies that fail to randomize - or control for variables that can influence the outcome of the data - are prone to bias.

Bryan L. Williams, an epidemiologist at Georgia State University, echoed concerns about the study's design.

"The findings of this study should be interpreted very cautiously, and more rigorous design should be used to test the stated hypothesis," he said. "I suspect the relationship between the caffeine use and alcohol abuse is confounded by numerous variables including, but not limited to, tobacco use and family history."

Miller acknowledged that research on energy drink use is in its infancy.

Labeling concerns

This, she said, may have implications for consumer safety.

Miller noted that the burden of labeling and evaluating the safety of products containing nutritional supplements rests on the manufacturer rather than the FDA. Miller said that while the FDA limits the amount of caffeine in soft drinks and over-the-counter stimulants, energy drinks containing other supplements fly under the FDA radar.

Only if adverse effects occur after a product reaches market does the FDA intervene. Miller cited as an example last year's rash of hospitalizations due to alcoholic energy drinks. The manufacturers have since removed caffeine from the drinks.

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Product labeling is also part of the problem, Miller said. She said labels containing terms such as "energy blend" rarely list the quantity of individual ingredients.

American Beverage Association spokeswoman Tracey Halliday said the organization recognizes the need to play a positive role in accurate labeling. "We encourage all members to incorporate labeling guidelines," she said.

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