

# Rap music is being used as evidence to convict children of serious crimes: Report

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New research from the University of Manchester has found that children are being swept up in murder and attempted murder cases—and being tried in adult courts—partly due to rap music culture being used as evidence against them.

Rap lyrics and videos are regularly used as prosecution evidence in youth violence criminal cases in England and Wales. The material selected by the state typically has violent themes, often from the popular "drill" rap [music](#) genre, and is composed by one or more of the defendants or by one of their friends. This use is deeply controversial because of concerns that rap is an unreliable form of evidence, and that its use is unfairly prejudicial.

Despite mounting criticism, there is very little regulation or monitoring of how rap is being used as criminal evidence, and it continues to be used to build "gang-related" prosecutions under highly contentious Secondary Liability laws. In turn, "gang" labels—which have even been discredited as imprecise and racist by some law enforcers—are "evidenced" by rap music, often to build large "Joint Enterprise" trials in which more than one person is prosecuted for a single crime.

Eithne Quinn, Erica Kane and Will Pritchard say that their [report](#) has uncovered very concerning processes of "compounding injustice" which risk innocent people being convicted of the most serious crimes.

In exploratory research, the researchers found 68 cases involving 252 defendants between 2020 and 2023 in which rap music was used as evidence for serious charges of violence—including murders. The overwhelming majority of the defendants were Black or mixed race.

Joint Enterprise cases involving rap music evidence have a notably higher average number of defendants per case than those without a rap music soundtrack, which they say supports the suggestion that rap is encouraging overcharging and mischarging by prosecutors.

Those charged in cases involving rap evidence—including those charged with murder under secondary liability laws, which carries a life sentence—tend to be young and Black, suggesting that these groups are being targeted disproportionately. This lends weight to those who see the rising use of rap in cases as systematically racist, and who are raising the alarm about the overcriminalization of young people—including children.

"Our findings are deeply troubling, and support the view that the marshaling of rap evidence in criminal cases encourages police and prosecutors to further increase the number of people charged as secondaries under already-egregious secondary liability laws," said Eithne Quinn, professor of cultural and socio-legal studies, the University of Manchester.

"Once again, three of the best researchers on the subject are doing what the state refuses to do," said Liz Fekete, director of the Institute of Race Relations. "They have scrutinized the data on rap prosecutions, exposed the racism that lies within the law—particularly the joint enterprise doctrine—and suggested targeted reforms to end the wide-ranging criminalization of Black expressive culture."

"Rap music is one of the most popular genres of music in the U.K.—it's time to end the marginalization and punishment of its creators through its use as prosecution evidence. JUSTICE welcomes this important and timely report and its recommendations, which will undoubtedly help tackle the corrosive practice of portraying a genre of music as innately illegal and dangerous," said Tyrone Steele, deputy legal director,

JUSTICE.

**More information:** Compound Injustice: A review of cases involving rap music evidence in England and Wales.

[documents.manchester.ac.uk/dis...lay.aspx?DocID=72455](https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/dis...lay.aspx?DocID=72455)

Provided by University of Manchester

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