

# African American Youth Mental Health: Individual, Environmental and Clinical Factors in Context

Alfiee M. Breland-Noble

Published online: 27 November 2012  
© Springer Science+Business Media New York 2012

**Abstract** This article serves as an introduction to this special issue focused on the mental health of African American youth within a familial and environmental context. I present background on the African American adolescent population in the area of mental and behavioral health, describe the impetus for this special issue and provide a brief overview of the professional training and backgrounds of the contributing authors. Finally, I present brief descriptions of the manuscripts selected for inclusion in this special volume of the Journal of Child and Family Studies.

**Keywords** African American youth · Adolescents · Treatment · Child and adolescent mental health

## Introduction

This special issue is an outgrowth of my own research in positive approaches to addressing treatment engagement with mood disordered African American youth and families. Utilizing Health Disparities, Behavioral Clinical Trials and Community Based Participatory methodological approaches, I have spent the past 18 years of my career engaged in research focused on the mental health and wellbeing of this population. There is a scarcity of research on this population and so much of the literature regarding African American youth focuses on under-resourced youth and youth facing very challenging environmental

circumstances. While youth and families who are under-resourced and living in challenging environmental circumstances are absolutely an important community on which to focus our efforts, there is a great deal to be learned from expanding our focus to include African Americans across the socioeconomic spectrum, by region of the country and by country of origin. Therefore, one of my primary goals with this special issue is to support the presentation of mental and behavioral health research on African American youth within a broad contextual framework, including within-group variability in socioeconomic position and varied mental health concerns.

The team of authors assembled to contribute to this special issue reflects a variety of training stages, disciplines and professional interests. Included in this group are graduate students, postdoctoral trainees, university faculty of varied ranks, clinicians and policy makers. In addition, the authors include psychologists, social workers, physicians, educators and counselors. Overall, these authors share a common interest in research, clinical care, education and policy related to African American youth's mental and behavioral health.

The significance of African American youth mental health is made apparent by the scarcity of literature on a broad swath of this population (accounting for within-group difference in socioeconomic position, country of origin and pattern of migration to the US). Specifically, while African Americans comprise approximately 13 % of the US population, most health related literature focuses primarily on the largest subset of this group; persons descended from Africans forcibly transported to the US via the 200 years of the transatlantic slave trade (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2001). Fortunately, newer research on African Americans (including youth) has expanded to include persons who might best be described

---

A. M. Breland-Noble (✉)  
Department of Psychiatry, Georgetown University Medical  
Center, 2115 Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 120, Washington,  
DC 20007, USA  
e-mail: ab2892@georgetown.edu