

# AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUTH AND SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES: WHAT ARE WE COMMUNICATING?

## BACKGROUND

Many health care professionals and researchers cite the worrisome utilization of narrow epidemiological methodologies and prejudicial researcher bias noted in studies that address STD disparities. Given the ever-increasing proportion of African Americans aged 15-25 with STDs, an examination of what and not how messages about STDs have been communicated to African American youth deserves serious consideration by health professionals and researchers.

## OBJECTIVES

Studies addressing STD disparities with regard to negative sexual health outcomes and poor quality-of-life indicators may negatively impact African American youth and should be examined cautiously.

## METHODS

Articles addressing STD disparities, social determinants of health, sexual risk behaviors, and prevention approaches to address STD disparities published since 2001, were reviewed. Source material was identified from a compendium of relevant citations in Medline, PubMed and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

## RESULTS

Publications addressing sexual behaviors and poor quality-of-life indicators that impact African American youth risks for adverse sexual health outcomes may be a by-product of biased research promulgated, albeit inadvertently, by the larger research society on the African American community, particularly among youth.

## CONCLUSIONS

Albeit, the literature review did not show whether researcher bias can negatively influence sexual attitudes of African American youth, history has taught us that positive or negative expectations about circumstances or people may affect a person's behavior in a manner that causes those expectations to be fulfilled.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS, POLICY, AND RESEARCH

African American youth may view research conclusions as a self fulfilling predictor of sexual behavior and poor quality of life, thereby, counteracting culture-specific protective factors that buffer African American youth from the deleterious health consequences related to their perceived high risk status. Discussions of whether there exists a new collective experience shared by these youth should be explored.