Kirbi Yelorda, MD Serena Bidwell, MPH Sue Fu, MD, Sylvia Bereknyei Merrell, DrPH, Sonia Koshy, PhD Arden M. Morris, MD, MPH

SELF-EFFICACY TOWARD A HEALTHCARE CAREER AMONG MINORITY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN A SURGICAL PIPELINE PROGRAM: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

Objective: While many barriers to healthcare careers exist for URM (underrepresented minority) students, a strong sense of self-efficacy may help mitigate these obstacles. This study explores how URM high school students describe their academic challenges and to compare their descriptions across self-efficacy scores.

Community partner: SMASH Academy https://www.smash.org/programs/smash-academy/

Design: We conducted a convergent mixed methods study of URM high school students in a surgical exposure pipeline program sponsored by Stanford University Department of Surgery. Students completed a validated self-efficacy questionnaire and participated in semi-structured focus group interviews to discuss their approach to academic challenges, goal setting, and achievement. The primary outcome was academic, social, and emotional self-efficacy, measured using the Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for Children. We separated participants into high and low self-efficacy groups based on scores in each domain. Using thematic analysis, we identified and compared common themes associated with academic challenges and goal setting.

Results: Thirty-one high school students completed the focus groups and self-efficacy questionnaire. Most students scored in the high self-efficacy group for at least one domain: 65% for academic self-efficacy, 56% for social self-efficacy, and 19% for emotional self-efficacy. Four emergent themes highlighted participants' perspectives toward educational success: fulfillment in academic challenges, focus on future goals, failing forward, and asking for help. Compared to students with low self-efficacy scores, students in the high-scoring self-efficacy groups more often discussed strategies and concrete behaviors such as the importance of seeking support from teachers and peers and learning from failure.

Conclusions: Students in high self-efficacy groups were more comfortable utilizing approaches that helped them succeed academically. Additional efforts are needed to bolster student self-efficacy, particularly in students from URM backgrounds, to increase diversity in medical schools.

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