Self-Efficacy Toward a Healthcare Career Among Low-Income Minority High School Students: A Mixed Methods Study

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Introduction

The disproportionate underrepresentation of minority physicians is partially attributed to attrition from the high school-to-medical school pipeline. While many barriers to healthcare careers exist for URM students, a strong sense of self-efficacy may help mitigate some of these obstacles.

Objectives/Aims

Determine how high-achieving underrepresented minority (URM) high school students describe their self-efficacy toward a healthcare career, and to what extent these students' experiences, beliefs, and self-identified attributes correspond with their self-efficacy ratings.

Methods

- We recruited students from a STEM/healthcare summer program for focus groups to discuss careers in healthcare and aspects of academic self-efficacy (n=31 students; 6 focus groups).
- Participants completed a pre-validated survey of *academic*, *social*, and *emotional* self-efficacy. We dichotomized participants to "high" or "low" groups for each self-efficacy domain.
- We developed codes inductively and revised through discussion. Two coders reached 100% inter-rater agreement in final code application. Coded data were thematically analyzed.
- We integrated qualitative and quantitative data through a joint display of themes across high or low self-efficacy survey domains.

Results

Individual Students' **Mean** Academic Self-Efficacy Rating

Low Self-Efficacy n=14 | **High Self-Efficacy** n=17

Ask a teacher

"I'm scared to ask questions because I feel like then teachers think I'm either dumb. They don't want to...waste their time on me."

"Go talk to a teacher because in my experience when you go one on one with teachers, they teach different."

Ask a peer

"It's kind of hard to ask questions around my peers, because I feel like they're going to think I'm stupid... or I'm not qualified enough."

"Ask somebody who's taking the class. If your school offers tutoring, that's always a great resource. If you still need help, I would say online is a good way to go... There's a lot of resources out there."

Ask for help

"Asking for help is hard... I'm always scared of what people think of me. And if I ask for help, I'll be judged."

"I learned that I can't do everything on my own... it's okay to ask for help."

Results

- Students with low *academic* self-efficacy discussed being too nervous to ask for help, for fear of being judged, and feeling "less smart" compared to their peers.
- Students with high *academic* self-efficacy described strategies for developing relationships with teachers and seeking help from multiple sources, as well as the belief that not asking for help was self-limiting.
- Students with low *social* self-efficacy noted feeling inferior to peers when discussing academic and career aspirations and recognized their difficulty with time and stress management

Conclusions

Students' ratings of academic self-efficacy aligned with their descriptions of strategies such as asking for help and time management. All students expressed similar academic and career aspirations, regardless of survey-based ratings.

Future Directions

- Among URM high school students in a STEM/healthcare pipeline program, self-efficacy may facilitate the ability to address academic and other career-related obstacles.
- Efforts to recruit and improve diversity in the physician workforce should focus on students' career aspirations and strategies to support self-efficacy toward their academic success.

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