

Experiencing Agency in the Context of ADHD: The Role of Agential Capacities and Sociodemographic Factors

Agency and related constructs, such as action control, self-efficacy, and autonomy, are widely studied topics in psychological and philosophical research (see Bandura, 2018; Gallagher, 2012; Haggard, 2017). Existing literature points to the importance of experienced agency in health and wellbeing, economic development, and political participation (e.g., Martikainen, 2025; Moore, 2016; Wuepper & Lybbert, 2017). However, the exact definitions of agency have varied across studies and subfields. Different theoretical and methodological approaches highlight different factors underlying agency – from neurocognitive mechanisms to societal structures.

We propose an integrative perspective, according to which the subjective experience of agency is shaped by one's agential capacities, such as self-control, decision-making, and motivation, as well as by one's position in the society. That is, people's experience of agency, or lack thereof, builds on their individual capacities and their subjective perceptions of those capacities, but this happens in dynamic interaction with their immediate environment and broader structural conditions.

In the present study, we will follow this theoretical framework and collect empirical data on people's subjective experiences of agency. We will focus on two complementary aspects of agency: people's *sense of agency* and their *general self-efficacy*. Sense of agency refers to people's perceived ownership of their actions, "the registration that I am the initiator of my actions" (Synofzik et al., 2013; see also Tapal et al., 2017). General self-efficacy reflects a more goal-oriented facet of agency, people's beliefs about their ability to sort out challenges and reach their aims (see Bandura, 1997; Luszczynska et al., 2005).

We will combine questionnaire measures and executive functioning (EF) tasks (i.e., cued task switching, n-back, and Stroop) to examine agential capacities and the subjective experience of agency in the context of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). ADHD is characterised by impairments in EF, leading to attention difficulties, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. These traits create additional challenges for agential capacities. For example, intrapsychic self-control strategies that rely on effortful attention control may be less effective for people with strong ADHD traits (Koi, 2021). Moreover, if ADHD traits lead to recurring challenges in daily life, these negative experiences may shape people's agency beliefs beyond the direct effect of their objective EF impairments. Indeed, previous studies offer preliminary evidence for a negative association between ADHD and general self-efficacy (Newark et al., 2016; Waite et al., 2022). That said, to our

knowledge, no studies so far have examined ADHD-related differences in people's sense of agency rather than their self-efficacy.

In addition to these cognitive and behavioural phenomena, we expect that people's experiences of agency are also shaped by their social position in terms of both socioeconomic status (SES) and gender. Many studies report positive associations between SES and domain-specific aspects of agency, such as self-efficacy in science (Tan et al., 2023), career goal setting and exploration (Wang et al., 2025), and sexual life (Cha, 2022). Furthermore, some research suggests potential gender differences in sense of agency (Hurault et al., 2020) and self-efficacy (Bonsaksen et al., 2018; Löve et al., 2012), such that men report higher agency than women.

Finally, it is important to note the association between depressive symptoms and experiences of agency. Research literature on self-efficacy (see Li et al., 2024) and sense of agency (Borrelli et al., 2026; Di Plinio et al., 2024; but see also Bart et al., 2023; Tapal et al., 2017) suggests that depressive symptoms may undermine both aspects of agency – or vice versa. However, inconsistent findings regarding the association between depression and sense of agency highlight the need for further research.

In this study, we will examine the extent to which people's sense of agency and general self-efficacy are associated with their EF capacity, self-reported ADHD traits, depressive symptoms, SES, and gender. We expect that EF capacity, weaker ADHD traits, less depressive symptoms, higher SES, and male gender will each independently predict stronger sense of agency and higher general self-efficacy – even after controlling for the effects of the other predictors. We will test this hypothesis with multiple linear regression models. Additionally, we will carry out network analyses to explore the links between sense of agency, self-efficacy, specific EF tasks, ADHD traits, depressive symptoms, and demographic variables. The study plan will be preregistered in February, all data will be collected between March and April, and we will carry out our main analyses in May.

The results of our study will offer new insights into how different psychological and sociodemographic factors shape the subjective experience of agency. In addition to more nuanced theoretical understanding, this work may provide valuable information for interventions aimed at supporting people's agency in disadvantaged circumstances.

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