

Wrapped in Time: Investigating Hyperfocus in Everyday Life

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Introduction

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is marked by inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity (DSM-V).
- People with ADHD often have difficulties with attention-related tasks, such as sustaining focus, shifting attention, and selective attention (Tucha et al., 2008; Mehta et al., 2004; Park & Lee, 2021).
- Despite these challenges, individuals with ADHD often report intense periods of focus, known as "hyperfocus" (Groen et al., 2020; Brown, 2006; Ozel Kiziel et al., 2016).
- Hyperfocus is a state of total concentration on a task to the point where shifting focus becomes challenging, impairing one's sense of time and attention to oneself and one's surroundings (Hupfeld et al., 2019).
- This suggests that individuals with ADHD have a dysregulation in attention rather than an attention deficit. Studying hyperfocus may offer insights into the mechanisms of the ADHD brain.
- Most studies on hyperfocus rely on questionnaires, which depend on participants' memory. This approach may not be completely reliable on its own, as individuals with ADHD often report gaps in their memories (Kofler et al., 2020). To address this limitation, we studied hyperfocus in everyday life using experience sampling methodology (ESM), a more direct and reliable approach.

Method

Secondary analysis: N=101, ages 18-34 (M=21, SD=3.60); 74 Females, 25 Males, 2 did not identify with either.

Questioners:

Two questionnaires were used in the study out of the original four: the Adult ADHD Self-Report Scale (ASRS v1.1; Adler et al., 2006) and the Adult Hyperfocus Questionnaire (AHQ; Hupfeld et al., 2019).

Day 0:

Training via Zoom:

Participants met the researcher and were explained the experience sampling procedure and logged into the Sema3 app on their smartphones.

Day 1-5:

Experience Sampling:

Between 9 am and 11 pm, participants were prompted 10 times on their smartphones to report on several dimensions of their ongoing thoughts, absorption and activity

Absorption question: I was immersed / absorbed in the contents of my thoughts
Slider: 1=Not at all to 5=Completely.

Results

Individuals with higher ADHD scores tend to experience hyperfocus more frequently.

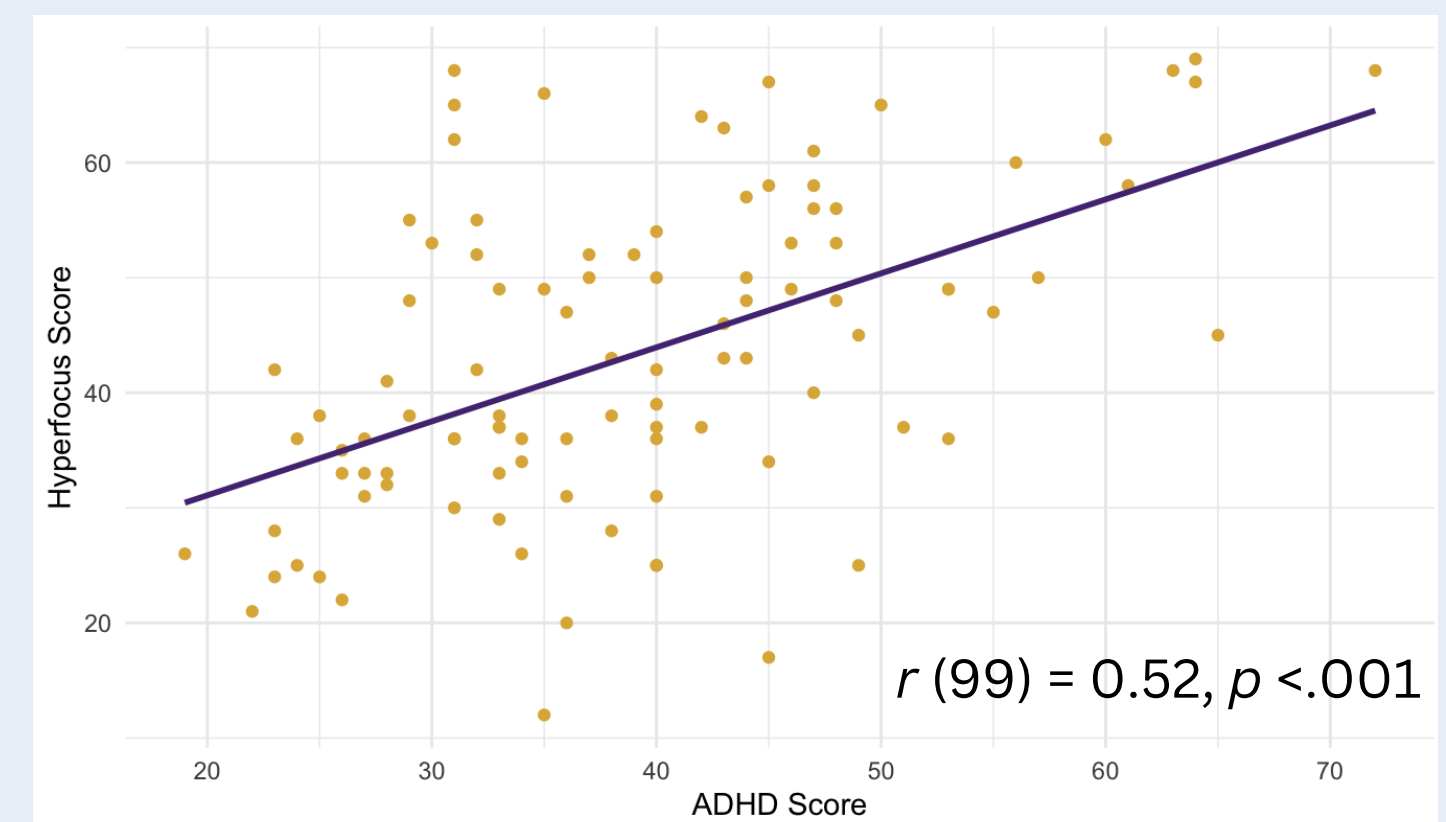


Fig. 1 Scatterplot of ADHD Score vs. Hyperfocus Score

Individuals with higher ADHD scores reported being more absorbed in their daily tasks.

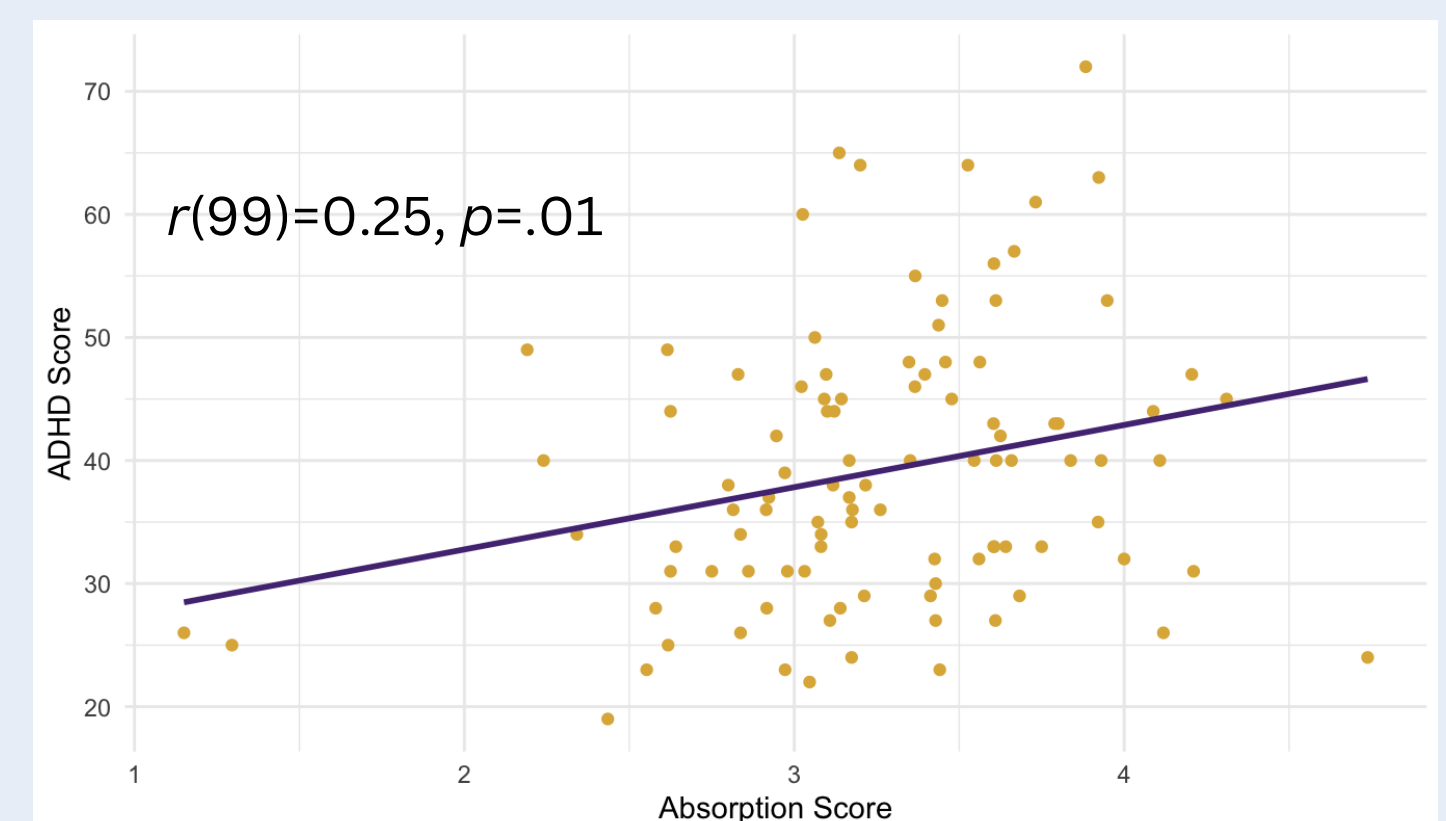


Fig. 2 Scatterplot of Absorption Score vs. ADHD Score

Individuals with higher hyperfocus scores did not report being significantly more absorbed in their daily tasks.

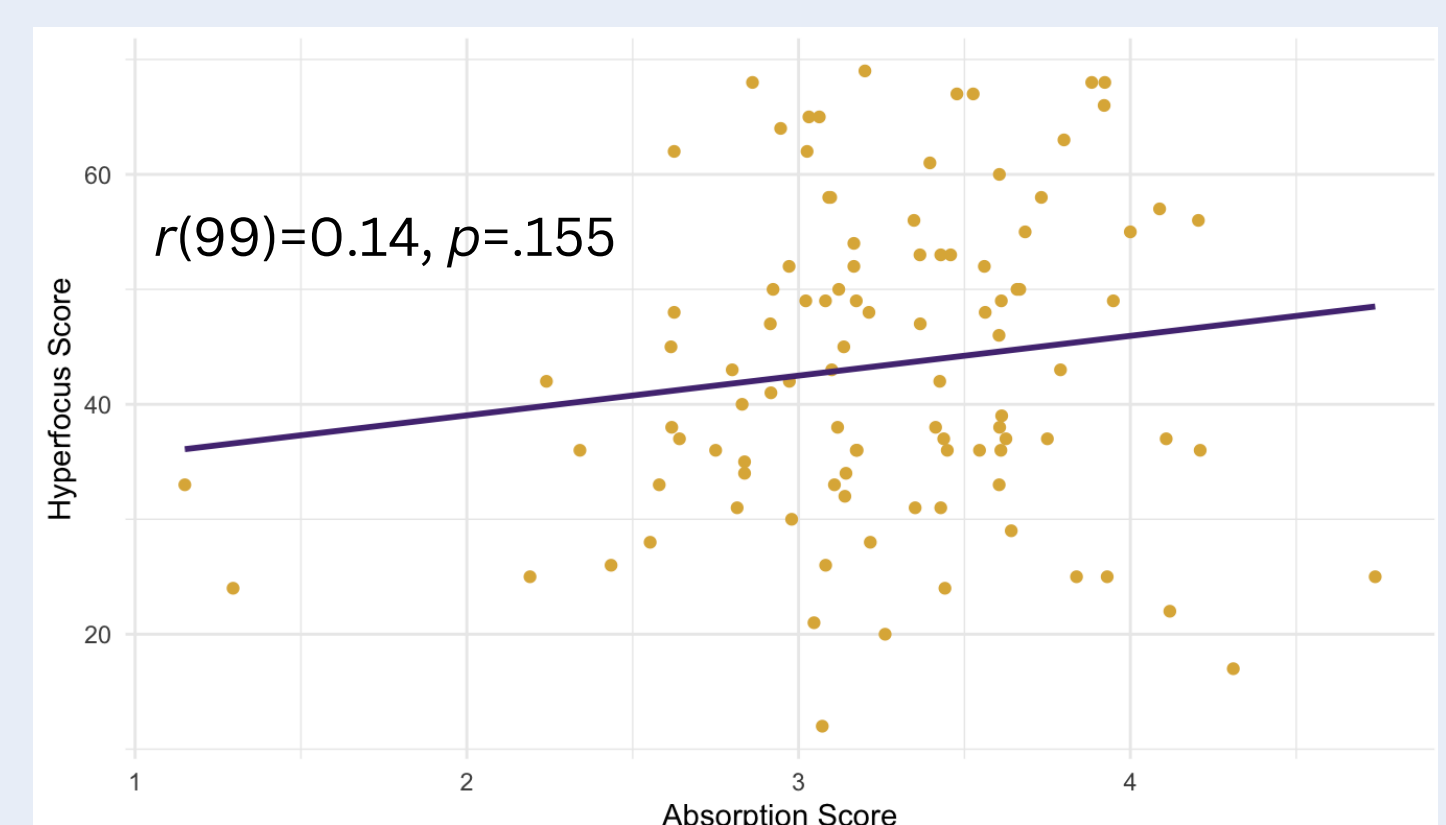


Fig. 3 Scatterplot of Absorption Score vs. Hyperfocus Score

Discussion

- First, to explore hyperfocus in individuals with ADHD traits using experience sampling methodology. Our results align with prior studies (Grotewiel et al., 2023; Groen et al., 2020; Hupfeld et al., 2019; Ozel-Kizil et al., 2016), indicating a positive correlation between hyperfocus and ADHD traits. Additionally, we observed increased task absorption in these individuals and found a non-significant link between hyperfocus and task absorption.
- Insight into hyperfocus enhances understanding of ADHD, aiding diagnosis and medication development.
- Future research should examine the impact of stimulant medication and account for autistic individuals and individuals with schizophrenia as they also experience hyperfocus.



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