

What Research Says about Entrepreneurship and ADHD

Esbri, August 2026

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A QUICK GROUNDING

What is ADHD?

A common neurodevelopmental condition present from childhood and, for most, lasting into adult life

HYPERACTIVITY / IMPULSIVITY

- Restlessness, high energy, a drive to act
- Acting quickly under uncertainty; low tolerance for delay
- Risk tolerance and novelty seeking

INATTENTION

- Difficulty sustaining focus and following through
- Trouble with detail, planning, and organization
- Easily distracted from the task at hand

Symptoms sit on a continuum — not simply present or absent. Hold these two clusters apart: they pull in opposite directions across the venture life cycle.

Focused, Balanced Days With ADHD

Your Business Is Running But Why Does It Feel Like It's About to Fall Over?

The research on ADHD founders and operational stress, and what it actually means for your business

SKYE WATERSON
JUN 05, 2026



ADHD Entrepreneur

June 3 at 3:44 PM · 🌐



ADHD Entrepreneurs

This is my story: I joined a business community because I wanted to scale my online business. I was ...



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Women with ADHD are often BUILT for entrepreneurship and here's the evidence 🧠

Busy brain = 1 million ideas
Hyperfocus = big output
High risk tolerance = take action, move the needle
Noticing what doesn't work = pivot without hesitation
The audacity to prove people wrong 🧠

I often hear about the ADHD traits that have to be overcome in order to succeed.

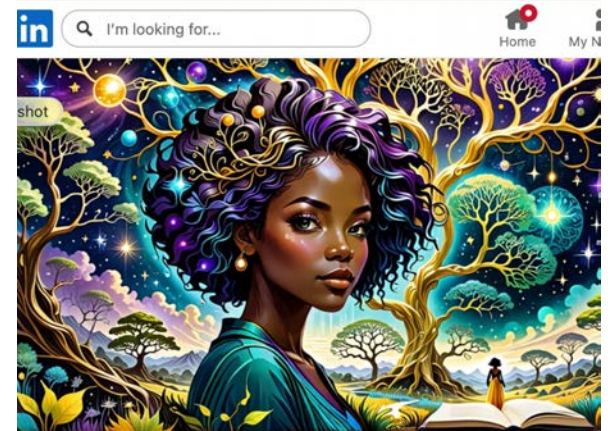
What if those same traits are the reason for success, with the right context?

If you're a business owner with ADHD who's been told your brain is a liability, I want you to take this in.

46 ❤️ 14 💬

4 days ago

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Sea Art AI Creation by Shayne

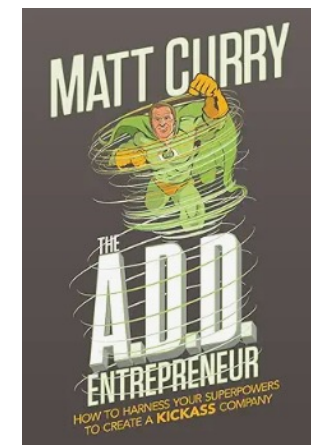
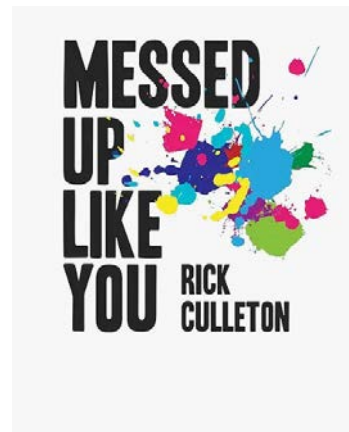
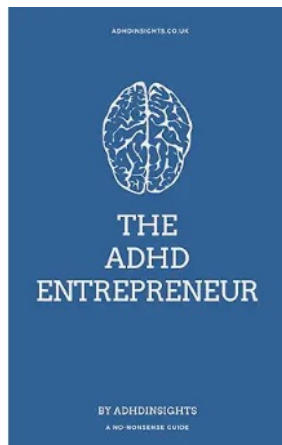
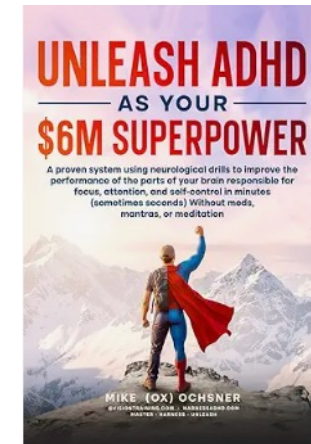
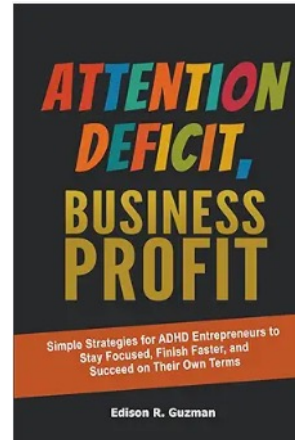
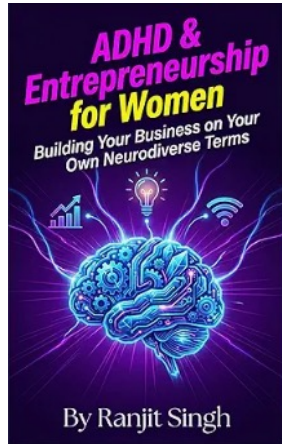
ADHD entrepreneurs do not always build businesses. Many of us build ecosystems.



Shayne Swift, MS, ACC, EXA, CACP [in](#)

I help overwhelmed ADHD leaders & managers improve productivity, efficiency, and well-being | SwiftLyfe™

June 4, 2026



Themes in popular press



1. The "Superpower" Framing



2. The "Chaos Management" Workbooks



3. Demographic-Specific Guides



4. "In the Trenches" Founder Stories



5. Niche Industry & Specific Business Model Playbooks

What does evidence say about ADHD and entrepreneurship?

Loud

in the popular press

Books, podcasts, founder reels —
mostly the “superpower” story

Thin

in management research

Findings are fragmented and, at
times, point in opposite directions

≈ Silent

in the clinical literature

Almost nothing published where
ADHD expertise actually lives

Entrepreneurship and ADHD: A Meta-Analytical Assessment of the State-of-the-Art and Suggestions for the Future

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Kevin Antshel³, Nandini Jhavar⁴, and
Catherine Montgomery⁴

Entrepreneurship Theory and
Practice
1–41

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A close-up of Donkey from the animated movie Shrek. He is a grey donkey with large, upright ears, looking upwards and to the right with a wide, toothy grin. The background is a lush green field with some rocks and a small stream in the distance.

SHREK
.COM

Why a meta-analysis on ADHD and entrepreneurship?

Because we can!

A sufficient number of studies have been conducted

How is ADHD and entrepreneurship linked?

4 potential mechanisms. Not mutually exclusive

1

Inherent fit with self-employment

Conventional jobs poorly designed for ADHD. Self-employed can adapt jobs to leverage strengths and overcome weaknesses.

2

Lateral thinking & creativity

Neurodivergent cognition generates more unconventional, divergent ideas

"There are basically two ways to know you have a future," Karp said during a recent interview on TBP. "One, you have some vocational training. Or two, you're neurodivergent."

Alex Karp, CEO Palantir



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3

Distinctive attention style

A scanning, stimulus-driven attention style surfaces opportunities that more focused people overlook.

4

Impulsivity → action

A bias for action under uncertainty: acting while others hesitate

No consistent evidence for any of these mechanisms
Meta-analysis of all prior research to establish evidence

METHODS IN BRIEF

How We Built the Evidence Base



PRISMA systematic search

488 records screened down to 43 articles / 47 studies



Four databases + outreach

Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, EBSCO; plus reference checks and requests for unpublished work



ADHD coded four ways

Inattention, hyperactivity/impulsivity, total symptoms, and formal diagnosis



Entrepreneurship by process stage

Attitudes → behaviors → post-launch outcomes



Corrected, weighted estimates

Measurement-error correction; sample-weighted mean correlations

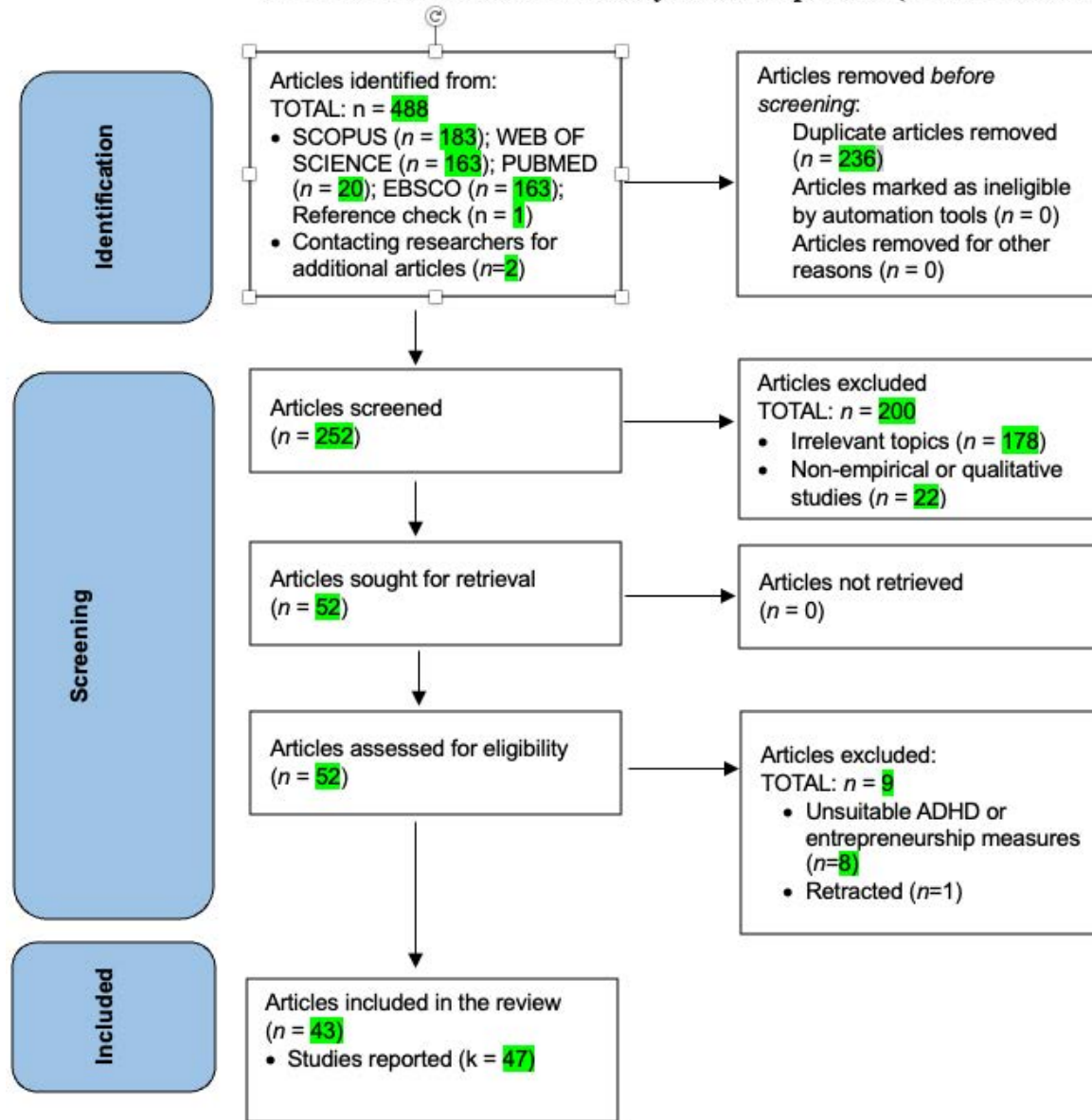


Publication bias checked 3 ways

Egger's test, trim-and-fill, Fail-Safe N — minimal evidence of bias

Caveat: the data are correlational — they identify patterns, not mechanisms.

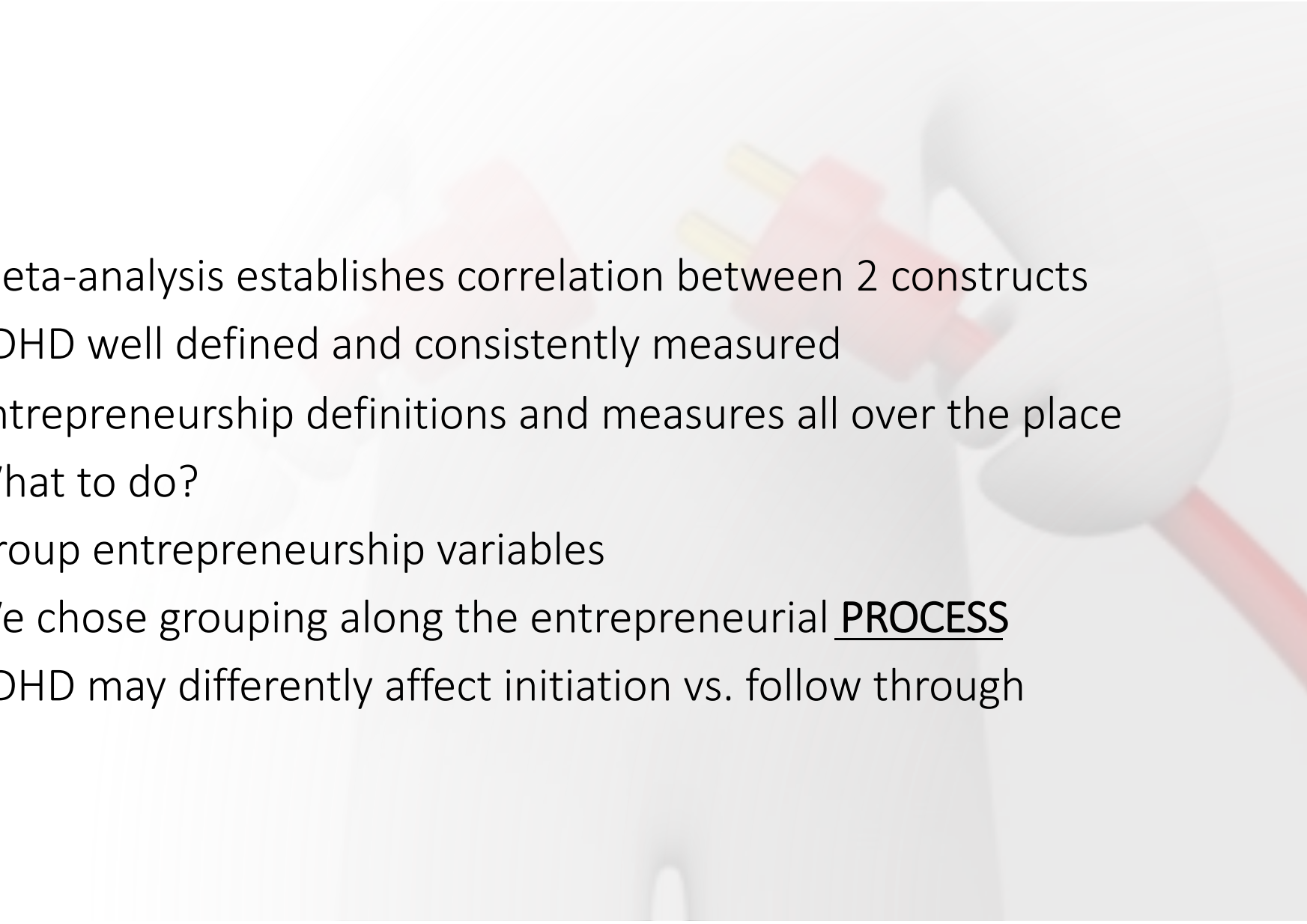
FIGURE 1. Flow chart of study selection process (PRISMA framework)



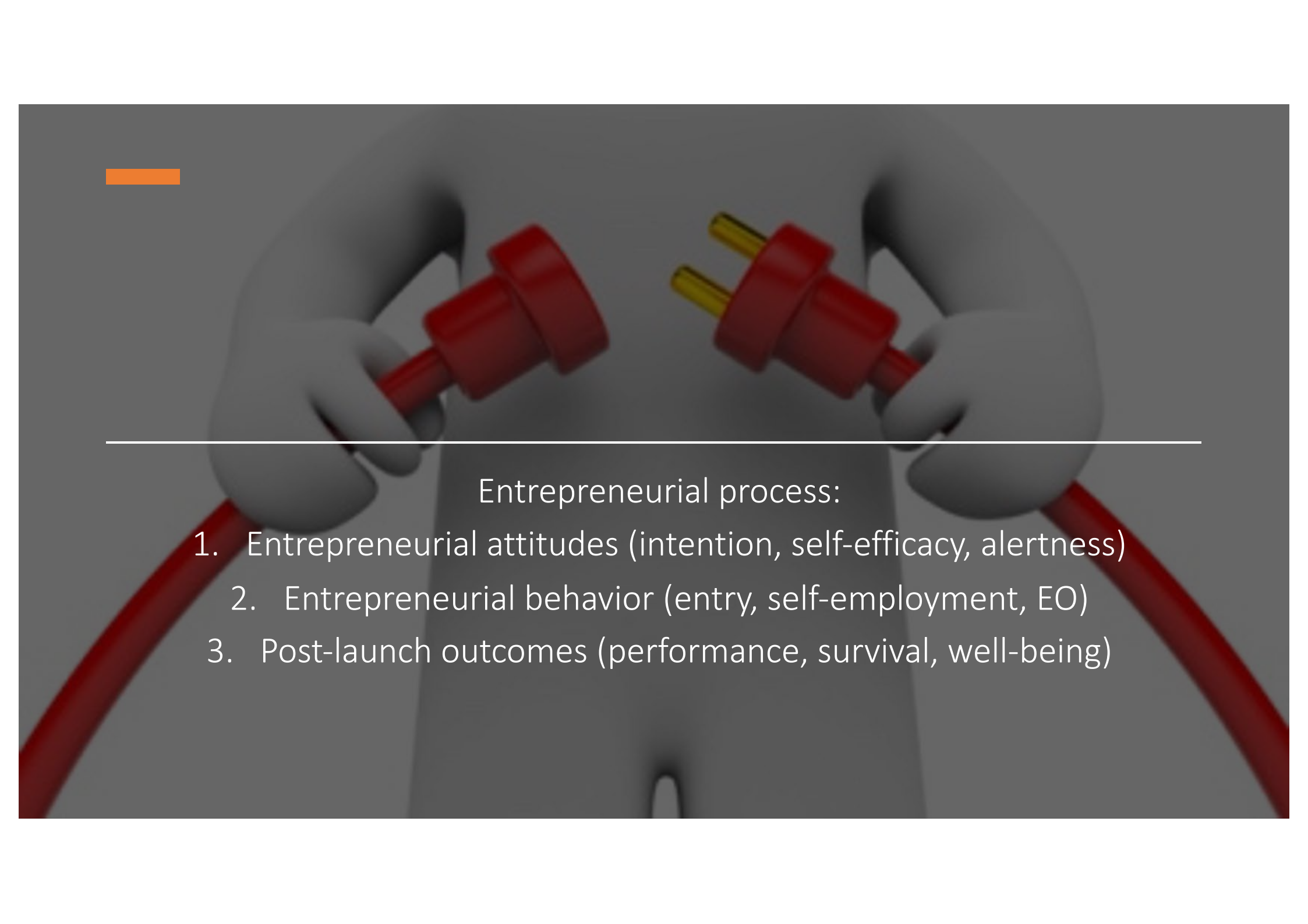
ADHD search terms: ADHD, hyperactiv*, impulsiv*, inattention, “attention deficit”, hyperkinetic, hyperfocus, “Deficits in Attention Motor and Perceptual Abilities”.

ENT search terms: entrepren*, self-employ*, “business owner”, venture, startup, proprietor

Study	Entrepreneurial construct	ADHD construct	ADHD measure	Sample size	Student sample	Sample average age	Sample gender (% female)	Sample origin	Cross-sectional data	Published
(masked title) (a)	EB	IA, HI, ADHD	ASRS-18	724	No	43.94	31.77	E	Yes	No
Baciu et al., 2020	PO	HI	Other (BIS-11)	123	No	34.39	54	E	Yes	Yes
Boada-Grau et al., 2021	EB	HI	Other (Impulsivity Inventory Scale)	883	No	38.88	38.88	E	Yes	Yes
Canits et al., 2019	EA, EB	IA, HI	ASRS-18	534	No	40	-	E	Yes	Yes
Dimic & Orlov, 2014	EB	ADHD	Diagnosis	270	No	33.85	62	E	Yes	Yes
Duong & Le, 2021; Doan et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2023 (b)	EA	IA, HI, ADHD	ASRS-6	2,218 to 2,556	Yes	-	52.20 to 58.90	NW	Yes	Yes
Fisch et al., 2021 (Study 1)	EA, EB	HI, ADHD	ASRS-6	133	Yes	22.2	22.2	E	Yes	Yes
Fisch et al., 2021 (Study 2)	EA, EB	HI, ADHD	ASRS-6	142	Yes	20.6	20.6	E	Yes	Yes
Freeman et al., 2019	EB	ADHD	Diagnosis	315	No	25.22	29.5	NA	Yes	Yes
Games & Sari, 2022	PO	HI	Other (UPPS)	101	No	-	69.6	NW	Yes	Yes
Greidanus & Liao, 2021	EB, PO	ADHD	Diagnosis	7,795	No	40.2	40.2	NA	No	Yes
Gunia et al., 2021 (Study 1)	EA	IA, HI, ADHD	ASRS-18	281	No	33.9	33.9	NA	Yes	Yes
Gunia et al., 2021 (Study2)	EA	IA, HI, ADHD	ASRS-6	100	No	40.1	40.1	NA	Yes	Yes
Gunia et al., 2021 (Study 3)	EA	IA, HI, ADHD	ASRS-6	184	No	43	43	NA	Yes	Yes
Hatak et al., 2021	EA, PO	IA, HI, ADHD	ASRS-6	164	No	40	40	E	Yes	Yes
Hunt et al., 2022	PO	IA, HI	ASRS-18	557	No	53.9	35.2	NA	No	Yes
Isfahani et al., 2022	EA, EB	IA, HI, ADHD	ASRS-18	388	No	37.02	37.02	NW	Yes	Yes
Lanivich et al., 2024	EA, EB	ADHD	ASRS-6	581	No	-	38.9	NA	Yes	Yes
Lerner et al., 2019	EA, EB	ADHD	Diagnosis	9,749	Yes	22.4	22.4	E	Yes	Yes
Leung et al., 2020	EA	IA, HI	ASRS-6	182	Yes	20.63	20.63	E	Yes	Yes
Mannuzza et al., 1993	EB	ADHD	Diagnosis	103	No	25.5	0	NA	Yes	Yes
Moore et al., 2021	EA, EB	ADHD	ASRS-18	581	No	-	0	NA	Yes	Yes

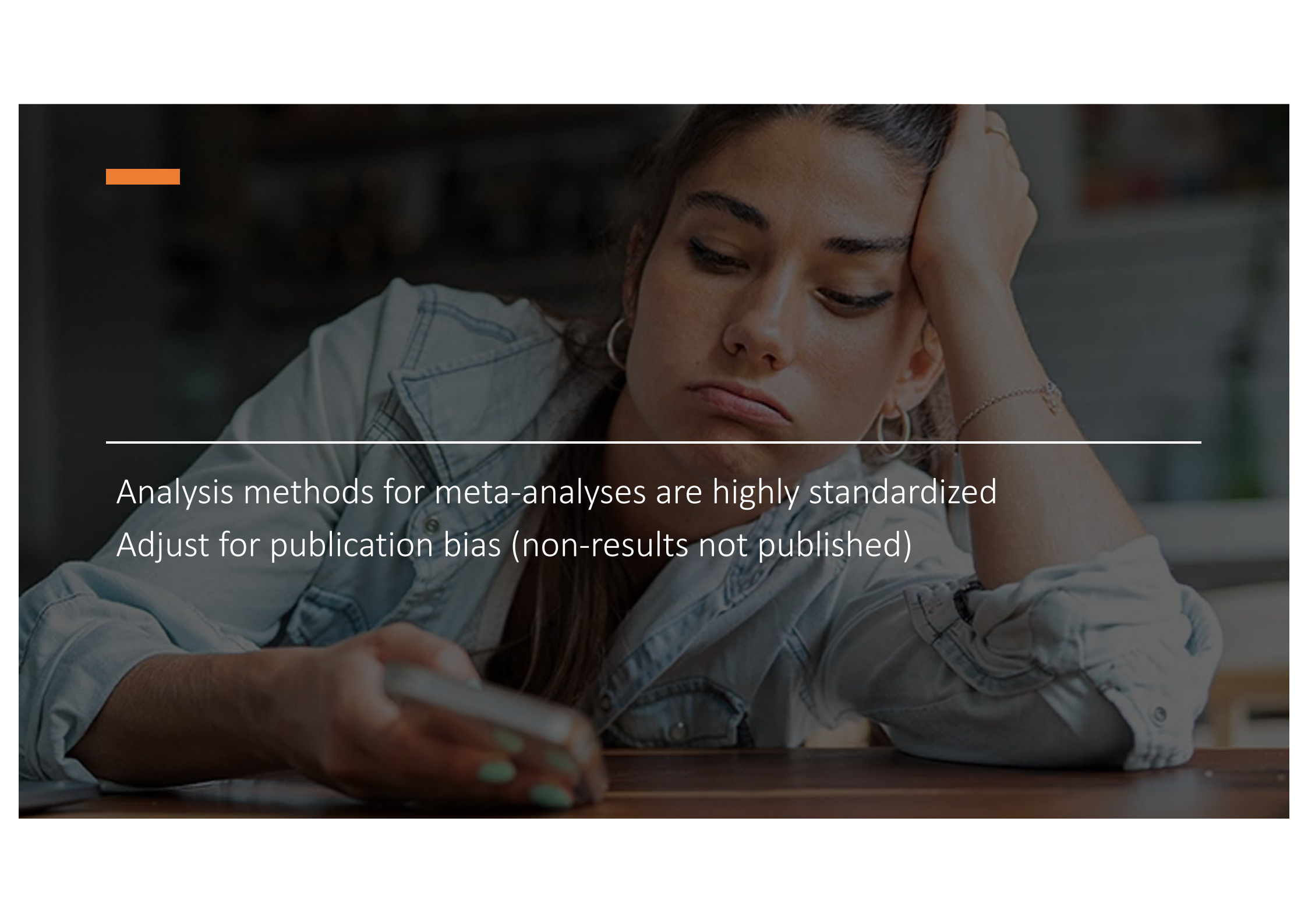


Meta-analysis establishes correlation between 2 constructs
ADHD well defined and consistently measured
Entrepreneurship definitions and measures all over the place
What to do?
Group entrepreneurship variables
We chose grouping along the entrepreneurial PROCESS
ADHD may differently affect initiation vs. follow through



Entrepreneurial process:

1. Entrepreneurial attitudes (intention, self-efficacy, alertness)
2. Entrepreneurial behavior (entry, self-employment, EO)
3. Post-launch outcomes (performance, survival, well-being)



Analysis methods for meta-analyses are highly standardized
Adjust for publication bias (non-results not published)

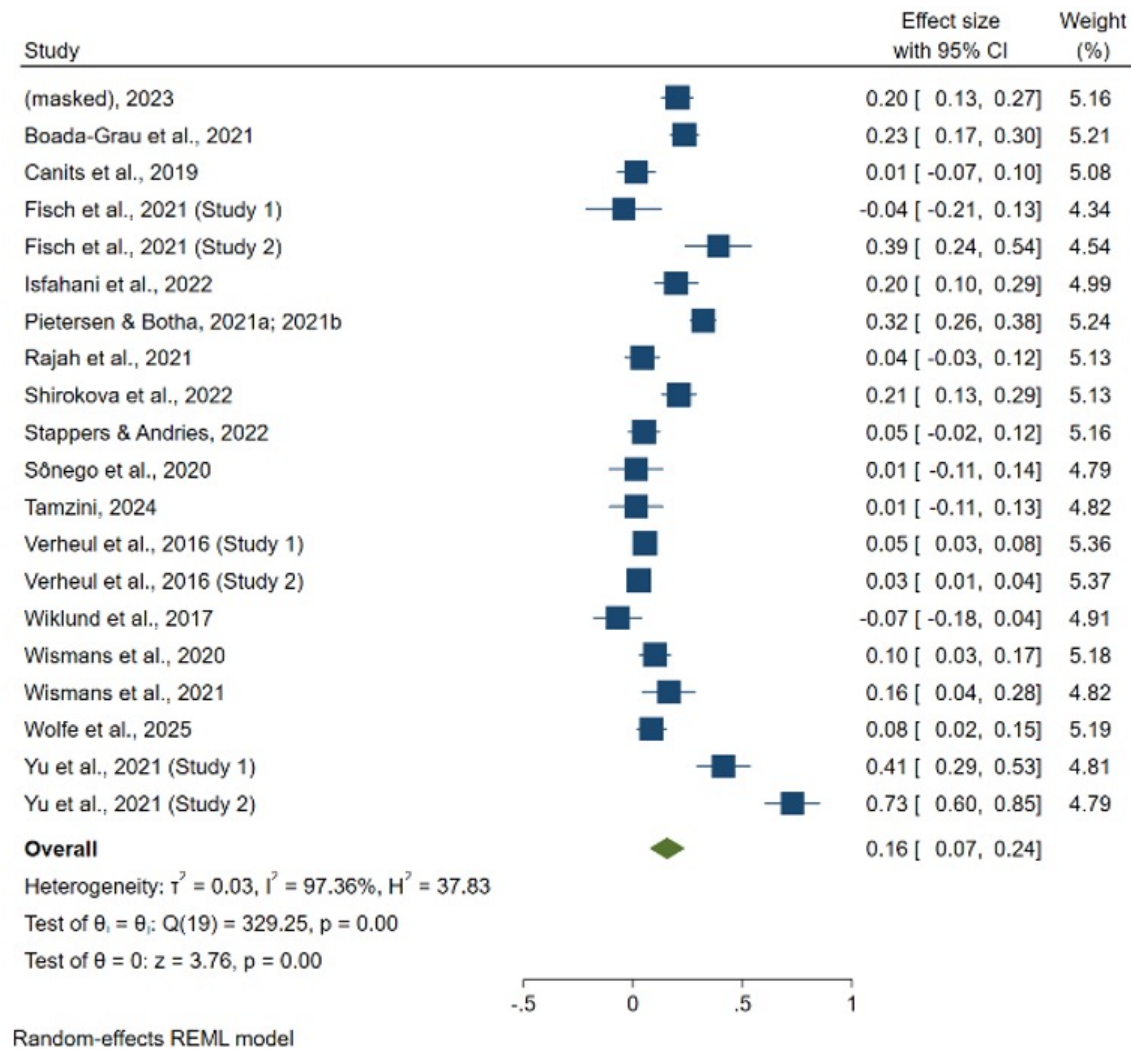


Figure 3b. Forest plot for correlations between hyperactivity/impulsivity and entrepreneurial behavior

TABLE 5. Matrix of ADHD - Entrepreneurship Relationships: Summary of Findings

	Inattention	Hyperactivity/ Impulsivity	Total ADHD Symptoms	ADHD Diagnosis
Entrepreneurial Attitude	N.S.	Positive	N.S.	Positive
Entrepreneurial Behavior	N.S.	Positive	Positive	Positive
Overall Post-launch Outcome	Negative	N.S.	Negative	Negative
Well-being Outcome	Negative	Negative	Negative	-
Performance Outcome	Negative	N.S.	Negative	Negative

Notes: N.S. = Not statistically significant relationship; Positive = Positive statistically significant relationship; Negative = Negative statistically significant relationship.

For "Entrepreneurial Attitude," "Entrepreneurial Behavior," and "Overall Post-launch Outcome," results are derived from the main analyses (Tables 1, 2, and 3). Within "Overall Post-launch Outcome," "Well-being Outcome" and "Performance Outcome" represent subcategories based specifically on the robustness checks (Table A2).

HEADLINE FINDING

ADHD Helps Starting — and Hurts Sustaining



Hyperactivity/impulsivity drives the front end

Positive for entrepreneurial attitudes and for behavior — the push into starting up.



Inattention drags on the back end

Negative for post-launch outcomes; little to no effect on attitudes or behavior.



No single dimension helps across all three phases

Every aspect of ADHD is stage-specific — the effect flips sign depending on where you are.

BEYOND THE SINGLE RED BLOCK

Inside Post-Launch: Well-Being and Performance Diverge

	Inattention	Hyperactivity / Impulsivity
Performance	Negative	Not significant
Well-being	Negative	Negative

Performance:
driven down by inattention only. The “bias for action” doesn’t damage the firm.

Well-being:
negative for both symptom clusters

The honest message is not “ADHD hurts after launch.” It is: the firm can survive the impulsive style — the founder’s well-being is what suffers most.

Robustness analyses, Table A2 (well-being and performance separated)

READ THIS CAREFULLY

The Gender Question: A Male-Built Evidence Base



Samples skew heavily male



The positive ADHD findings rest disproportionately on male-majority samples



Several relationships reach significance only in male-majority samples



But gender NOT a significant moderator in our meta-analysis — samples too male-heavy for strong test



Women entrepreneurs with ADHD were few. Other studies suggest ADHD liability for women entrepreneurs

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

APPLIED
PSYCHOLOGY



Who benefits from ADHD in entrepreneurship? Intelligence and gender as critical boundary conditions

Mi Hoang Tran¹  | **Wei Yu**²  | **Johan Wiklund**³ |
Ute Stephan⁴ 

On IQ and gender



The findings of this paper align with my hunch



Positive effects among men and negative effect among women cancel each other in mixed sample



Pretty strong positive effects for men with high IQ



Meta-cognitive ability?



ADHD symptoms run counter to female gender stereotypes

WHY THE FIELD IS STUCK

Findings Don't Agree With Each Other

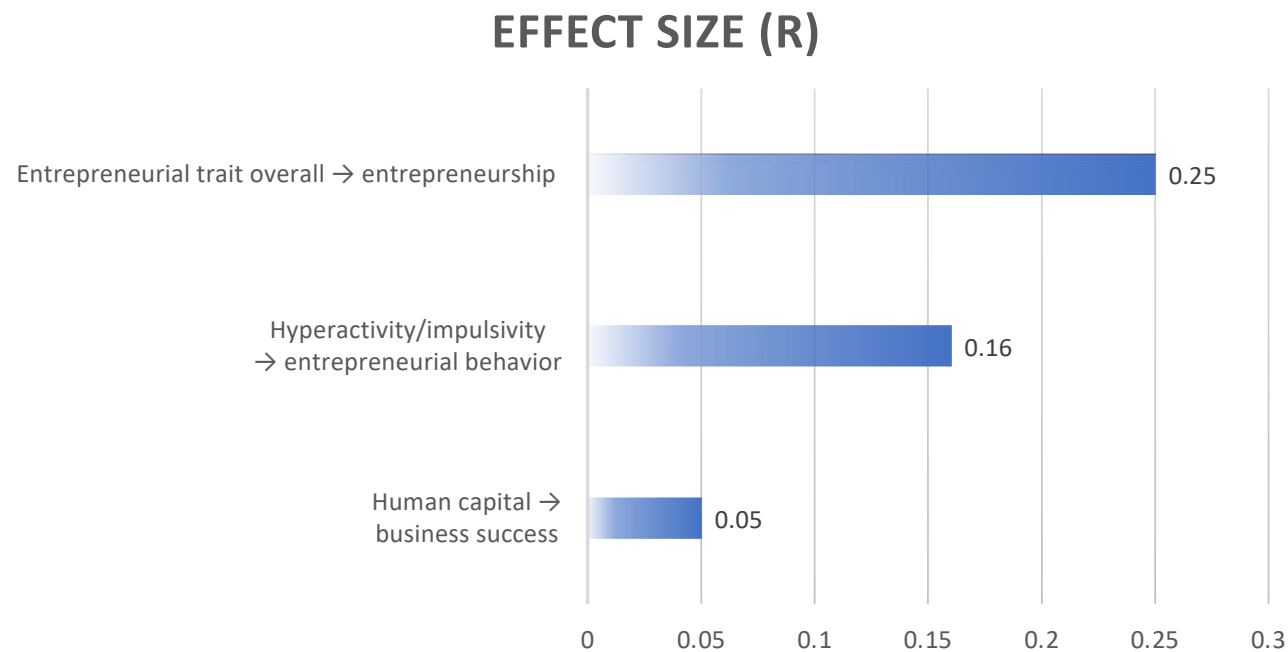
93–97%

of study differences are
systematic, not chance

- Studies genuinely point in opposite directions — this is real, not noise
- Context drives divergence: gender, study design, region, sample type
- North America: stronger positive hyperactivity/impulsivity effects
- Non-Western: stronger negative inattention → outcome effects
- Why a single label — “superpower” or “disorder” — keeps failing

PUTTING 0.16 IN CONTEXT

Modest Numbers, Real Signal



0.16 looks small — until you compare.

Small effects accumulate into meaningful outcomes over time.

REFINING THE FIT

It's Not "ADHD" — It's Which Symptom, Which Stage

HYPERACTIVITY / IMPULSIVITY

The entry engine

- Positive for entrepreneurial attitudes
- Positive for entrepreneurial behavior / entry
- Not significant for firm performance — it doesn't wreck the venture later

INATTENTION

The liability

- Negative for post-launch performance
- Negative for well-being
- Never an asset — no stage where it helps

Blanket "ADHD–entrepreneurship fit" is oversimplification. Symptom-specific and stage-specific.

Reading the mechanisms against the evidence

Our data are correlational — they cannot test mechanisms directly. But the pattern of findings fits some stories better than others.

1	Inherent fit with self-employment	ADHD increases intentions and entry	✓ Consistent with the data
4	Impulsivity → action	Hyperactivity/impulsivity positive for entry	✓ Consistent with the data
2	Lateral thinking & creativity	ADHD boosts opportunity-related cognition	— Not borne out here
3	Distinctive attention style	Inattention helps spot opportunities	— Not borne out here

“Not borne out” = the constructs we measured show no significant link — not proof the pathway is absent.

Future research



Stating that ADHD is a strength (or weakness) is not useful. It is multifaceted



Methods sufficient for establish relevance of the research → Moving forward we must do better



Panel data. Diagnosis AND symptoms. Entrepreneurs – NOT students. Behavior AND outcomes – NOT attitudes.



Gender MUST be considered



Relevant comparisons...

Occupation = entrepreneur

Yes

No

Yes



No



ADHD

Some takeaways



For founders: ADHD isn't a strategy — build deliberate scaffolding.



For programs: The advantage story doesn't fit everyone; support women with ADHD.



For investors: Use structured criteria – ADHD interpreted differently for men and women.



For counselors: Entrepreneurship isn't every ADHD student's home.



For the narrative: The "advantage" is a shaky and mostly male story.

Those helping entrepreneurs



Drop single label. “Superpower” and “disorder” both too blunt. The same traits help at one stage and hurt at another



Mind the stage. Energy and a bias for action are assets at the start. Liability post-launch



Watch post-launch dip. Well-being particularly negative. Support matters a lot



Build scaffolding, not fixes. Partners, structure, and routines



Gender matters. Patterns differ for women; don’t assume male story generalizes

ADHD is not a verdict — it's a profile.

It opens the door to starting up and raises the bar for keeping going