

# Conceptualizing and Measuring Agency for SBC Programs

## Situation

Agency is fundamental to social and behavior change (SBC) programming. Despite this, there are significant gaps in efforts to conceptualize and measure agency and to understand how agency affects health and well-being. These gaps hinder our ability to compare agency across contexts and to learn from and support empowerment-focused SBC programming. Existing agency measures generally oversimplify their representations of agency (e.g., a sole focus on decision making) and are often designed without input from the individuals they are intended to support.

## Snapshot

**Location:** Global

**Duration:** 2022–2027

**Consortium Partners:** Center on Gender Equity and Health, UC San Diego; EVIHDAF; Makerere University; Sambodhi

**Funder:** USAID

## What We're Doing

To understand what agency means to different people across different health areas and contexts, USAID's Agency for All Project uses a **multi-pronged approach**, including:

- **Consultation workshops** within and beyond the Agency for All consortium to explore, discuss, and document practitioner perspectives on how to conceptualize and measure agency and to identify priority questions relevant to SBC programming across sectors.
- A **survey of experts** working in SBC research and programming to assess how they conceptualize and measure agency and understand how it differs across sectors and geographies.
- A **scoping review** of peer-reviewed manuscripts and gray literature to explore how agency is currently measured and conceptualized in low- and middle-income settings across multiple domains of health.
- Research developing and evaluating a **culturally relevant measure of agency** for global health across contexts using innovative ethnographic and psychometric methods.

## What We're Learning

- Agency can operate differently at individual, interpersonal, and community levels and may vary depending on the context or health outcome. However, most published research has investigated agency at only the individual level. Additionally, existing measures of agency are often not assessed for reliability and validity, bringing contextual relevance into question.
- We have limited understanding of an individual's ability to continue action in the face of opposition, with research to date primarily focusing on an individual's efficacy to engage in an action and behave in a manner than aligns with their goals or choices.
- SBC researchers, practitioners, and policy makers want better and cross-culturally relevant measures of agency, specifically interpersonal and collective agency, as well as ways to assess how agency manifests over the life course.

## Impact

Understanding what agency means to different people around the world and identifying similarities and differences in how agency manifests within and across communities will allow us to develop a measure of agency that can support SBC programs across a variety of settings. This work is a unique opportunity to bring local voices to the forefront of measure development to create a tool to understand where, when, and why agency influences health and well-being outcomes.

This research overview and the Agency for All Project are made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the terms of the Cooperative Agreement No. 7200AA22CA00003.



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