

Nomophobia and Its Effects on Stress and Loneliness among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Today's dependency on mobile phones have made us more prone to its addiction. We all are roaming with these invisible handcuffs in our hands called mobile phones which has trapped our entire life within them. We are dependent on mobile phones for almost everything which begins with an alarm in the morning till setting our schedules on phone for the next day. This dependency has created a no mobile phone fear among individuals which we call nomophobia. Overuse of mobile phones may result in psychological distress such as stress, anxiety or loneliness, as they make us completely dependent on them. The current study aims at finding the relationship between nomophobia, loneliness and stress. The study was conducted on 44 participants (25 females, 19 males) in age range 18-25 years. Standardized measures of nomophobia, loneliness and stress were administered on participants. The findings of the study showed that there was a significant positive correlation of nomophobia with stress and loneliness. Hence, the young generation must be made aware of the psychological distresses that are occurring because of the excessive usage of mobile phones. They must be taught on cautious and productive usage of mobile phones.

Keywords: *Nomophobia, Mobile Phones, Loneliness, Stress*

"A smartphone is an addictive device which traps a soul into a lifeless planet full of lives."
-Munia khan

Today's generation spends hours on mobile phones which makes them more prone to its addiction which rather than being helpful is becoming a curse. We are so dependent on mobile phones that we cannot imagine our life without them. Even the site of losing our mobile phones can arise emotions like stress, anxiety, fear etc. in us. This fear is relatively a new generation of fear which has arisen with an increased usage of mobile phones and our dependency on them. In today's virtual world technology has played the most important role which has resulted in more usage of mobile phones. The things which were possible only on computers or big devices can be performed on our mobile phone very easily. Technology aims at making our lives easier but somehow it has become our master and turned the human race into slaves. A study by Ansari et al., (2019) describes nomophobia as a behavioral addiction towards our smart phones and the anxiety it causes

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because of its unavailability or inaccessibility. It has multi-dimensional traits which may range from psychological, social and physiological symptoms which are because of our dependency on mobile phones. Mobile phone has become an immensely popular electronic device which is used by young adult generation. It gives you the access to all the information you may need with just a single click. It gives us the opportunity to connect with the whole world just by sitting in comforts of our own rooms with a mobile phone in our hand. It opens a world of great opportunities but with great power comes great responsibility. People are now used to getting all the information in their hands with just a single device, which leads to a discomfort if at any time they are unable to access that information such as news, regular updates, communicating with others and family. It is a source of staying connected when not around. People prefer talking on phones and conducting their meetings or talks online rather than meeting people personally, which in turn is decreasing our sense of belongingness with others. Hence, mobile phones have become an essential device of our technology culture. They are gaining more popularity among young adults who are more dependent on these devices. It also adds to your daily stress, anxiety, well-being, lifestyle and other psychological factors like loneliness.

Nomophobia

The term, nomophobia, is an abbreviation for no-mobile-phone phobia and it was first coined during a study by UK in 2008 post office to investigate anxieties mobile phone users suffer. Nomophobia is a specific phobia that is defined as "the discomfort or anxiety caused by the non-availability of a mobile phone, personal computer or any other virtual communication device" (King et al., 2014). Nomophobia is a no mobile phone phobia i.e., a person feels anxious or discomfort if he/she does not have access to a working mobile phone with them. In an article by Secur Envoy (2015) Nomophobia, or no mobile phone phobia, is "the fear of being out of mobile phone contact". Smart phone has become a necessity and enables the individual to satisfy their requirements but then at the same time, it may induce many problems. Some studies have shown that smartpones may cause compulsive checking habits (Oulasvirta et al., 2012), that smartphones may lead to compulsive usage and increased distress and addiction. Shambare et al., (2012) claimed that cell phones are "possibly the biggest non-drug addiction of the 21st century". Nomophobia is currently in its early stage, not many people are aware of it or its consequences. Study by Correr et al. (2017) found out that young people exposed to intensive and irrational use of technology are only aware of the advantages it offers and not the risks they may suffer from as a consequence to its dependency or addiction. However, recent research done by Gezgin et al. (2018) suggests that nomophobia is a field of study that is currently in the early stages of research, so most of the research are in the exploratory phase. They also showed that nomophobia is closely associated with individual mental health, internet addiction and behavioral modification.

Stress

Stress is a state of tension which may arise either from a positive or negative event in someone's life. It prepares our body for the upcoming event. When we experience or perceive challenges to our physical or emotional well-being that exceed our coping resources and abilities, the psychological condition that results are typically referred to as stress (Shalev, 2009). Stress is fundamentally an interactive and dynamic construct because it reflects the interaction between the organism and environment over time (Monroe,2008). Stress arises in a person when he sees a situation as a threat and tries to cope with it with all possible strategies, organism struggle to cope with the situation and adapt to the ever-changing environment. There can be negative stress such as excess workload or it can also

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be a positive stress like some big event such as wedding. A study by Wolfers et al., (2020) states that nomophobia should be higher in times of high stress, in which access to the resources accessible through smartphones are of particular importance. Studies have earlier associated nomophobia with stress, suggesting nomophobic persons are assumed to experience more stress than non-nomophobic persons in situations, in which they do not have their mobile phones with them (Tams et al., 2018).

Loneliness

Loneliness can be defined as the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's networks of social relations is deficient in some important way, either quantitatively or qualitatively (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). A person can feel lonely even when he/she is surrounded by many people, it's an emotion rather than a situation. It is an experience involving a total and often acute feeling that constitutes a distinct form of self-awareness signaling a break in the basic network of the relational reality of self-world (Sadler & Johnson, 1980). A study on relationship between nomophobia and loneliness was studied on Turkish students in which they found out that it can be ascertained that loneliness of adolescents predicts their nomophobia levels to a certain extent (Gezgin et al., 2008). In a study conducted by Bian & Leung (2014), they state that smartphones provide people with an option to avoid face-to-face communication or even by voice and, escape from uncomfortable situation with people and interact virtually with everyone around the world. So, in this sense it can be claimed that overuse of smartphone as a result of this might correlate with loneliness. Increase in social phobia can be leading cause for loneliness which is very much prevalent in today's society such as nomophobia, which is associated with an increased risk of many other mental health problems, including anxiety depression, low self-esteem and increased stress.

Purpose

The present research aims to study the impact of nomophobia on stress and loneliness among young adults.

Hypothesis

There will be a positive correlation between nomophobia & stress among young adults.

There will be a positive correlation between nomophobia & loneliness among young adults.

METHODOLOGY

Sample: The study was conducted on 44 young adults from 18-25 (25 females, 19 males) from Delhi and Delhi NCR. The sample mainly consisted of college going students.

Measures

The standardized tools used for this test are:

- **Nomophobia Questionnaire (NMP-Q):** Nomophobia Questionnaire is used to measure nomophobia (Yildirim & Correia, 2015). The NMP-Q consists of 20 items, each scored on a 7-point Likert scale. that cover four main dimensions of nomophobia: not being able to communicate, losing connectedness, not being able to access information, and giving up convenience.
- **Perceived Stress scale (PSS):** The Perceived stress scale (PSS) by Cohen (1994) is the most widely used 10 item psychological instrument for measuring the perception of stress. It measures the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful. The scale also includes a number of direct queries about current levels of

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experienced stress. The questions in the PSS ask about feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, respondents are asked how often they felt that way.

- **UCLA Loneliness scale:** UCLA is a 20-item scale designed to measure one's subjective feelings of loneliness as well as feelings of social isolation given by Russell et al., (1978). It is four-point Likert scale measuring feelings of loneliness among individuals.

Procedure

The participants received the questionnaire through google forms and were informed about the purpose of the research. Standardized psychological tests were administered on the participants. They were asked to respond honestly and were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and results. They were thanked for their time and cooperation.

RESULTS

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation were worked out to find out the relations.

Table 1: Showing mean and standard deviation of all variables. (N=44)

	Nomophobia	Stress	loneliness
N	44	44	44
Mean	86.9	23.2	23.1
Standard deviation	21.8	5.83	13.1

Table 2: Showing correlation among variables:

	Nomophobia	Stress	Loneliness
Nomophobia	—		
Stress	0.431	**	—
Loneliness	0.330	*	0.042

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The results found out that there is a positive significant correlation between nomophobia and stress ($r=0.431$, $p < .01$) and nomophobia and loneliness ($r=0.330$, $p < .05$). However, there is no significant correlation between stress and loneliness. Hence, our hypothesis stands proved, there is a significant positive correlation of nomophobia with stress and loneliness. Mobile phones have both positive and negative effects. On one side they have become an integral part of our life and helps us in performing our jobs quite quickly and efficiently, they have improved worldwide communication and made our lives easier and comfortable but on the other side it has many negative aspects as well, their long-term usage may lead to its addiction, which can be seen in today's generation, people are becoming more dependent on mobile phones and feel discomfort and anxiety if they don't have access to their smart devices. Though nomophobia is not yet included in Diagnostic manual of statistical and mental disorders- DSM, but the existing data shows that the fear of no mobiles is growing

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rapidly and enormously among the youth. Smart-phone addiction and nomophobia share comorbid disorders such as social phobia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, loneliness, and atypical depression (Park, 2005). Some studies suggested that nomophobia could be so stressful that it warrants to be considered a psychopathology (Bragazzi & Puente, 2014). Some recent studies have also found a significant relationship between nomophobia and stress, one recent empirical research indicate that people suffering from nomophobia also suffer from stress when their phones are out of reach (Samaha & Hawi, 2016). Stress affects an individual in its daily functioning and well-being and adds to the risk of other psychological disorders. Study done by Tams et al. (2018) found nomophobia to be a great stressor except under the combination of two conditions a) low uncertainty about the duration of a phone withdrawal situation and b) high control over the situation. Purpose of mobile phone was to bring people closer, to give the access to connect to other people and bring them close instead it has resulted in something opposite to what it was supposed to do. People are becoming more lonely with increased use of mobile phone. People try to fit in with everybody through social media and other tools but do not realize when this habit becomes a problem. Billieux (2012) found a correlation between loneliness and problematic excessive use of smart phone. According to Townsend (2000), the basic purpose of mobile phones was to allow people to be present in two different places to communicate instantly, which should have actually helped to decrease the anxiety and loneliness that might arise because of being apart but instead it was found that there was a statistically significant relation between nomophobia and loneliness, and it can be ascertained that loneliness of adolescents predicts their nomophobia levels to a certain extent.(Gezgin et al.,2018). Hence, many previous studies also support our findings that nomophobia does have a statistically significant relationship with stress and loneliness among the individuals who are young adults and are exposed to the technology and electronic devices and they do not know how they can negatively affect their health and well-being which should be brought under light immediately so that we can protect our coming generations from such disorders.

CONCLUSION

Constant use of mobile phones has resulted in prevalence of nomophobia. Our dependency on mobile phones have increased and made us more susceptible to bad mental health and well-being. Nomophobia is a major cause of our increasingly stressful and lonely lives. It has added to our normal screen times which results in stress, we tend to spend more time looking at our screens than looking at our surroundings. Instead of increasing our sociability, it has limited us to just phone interactions. People are becoming lonelier as they are surrounded by these technological devices rather than other people which are usually a constant source of love and support. Human beings are social animals and they are meant to be in a social institution with other social interaction and not just with technological devices, if we interfere with this setting, it'll surely affect our mental health. Young generation must be made aware of this new emerging phobia and must be counselled on its usage and harmful effects. It must be seen as a potential cause for our deteriorating mental health. Nomophobia leads to a higher degree of stress and loneliness among the individuals. It is necessary to educate people about this phobia, identify the addiction and then act accordingly. It must begin with teachers and family to teach the upcoming young generation to handle the technology carefully as it can easily turn from being a helpful device to a source of addiction. If things are not handled carefully, it will be the other way around very soon, technology will be controlling us rather than us controlling the technology.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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