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Research Paper

Social Anxiety, Coping and Phubbing among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Phubbing is the act of ignoring the people and surrounding in order to check your phone. Phubbing has been associated with various forms of addictions, personality traits and psychological well-being. This study aims to understand the relationship between social anxiety, coping and phubbing. Data was collected from a sample of 100 college students, a group which could be high on phubbing, using reliable and valid scales of phubbing, social anxiety and coping skills. The results indicate that phubbing, is positively related to social anxiety. Phubbing is also negatively related to coping skills. Coping skills were negatively related to social anxiety. The study concludes that the higher the coping skills, the lesser the social anxiety and the lesser the phubbing.

Keywords: Coping, Phubbing, Social Anxiety, Youth

A few years ago, phones were just devices used to call others. But now, the smart phones available provide a wide range of facilities such as connectivity across people from all parts of the world, entertainment through access of internet and various other sources, efficiency in performing any task and so on. This has increased the dependency on smartphones to levels never seen before (Al-Saggafetet al, 2018). Excessive use of smart phones leads to the habit of phubbing - act of snubbing someone in a social setting to concentrate on our phones. This also serves as a threat to the social lives of human beings as it deteriorates the quality of face-to-face communication. Apart from the increased dependency, nomophobia, perceived conflict and other addiction factors, social anxiety while interacting and our ability to cope may possibly play a significant role in causing phubbing.

Phubbing makes face to face conversations less meaningful and it seemed to have negative effects on relationship between partners (Krasnovaet al, 2016) and family members (Kadylak, 2020). Phubbing threatens our four fundamental needs- belongingness, self-esteem, meaningful existence and control as it makes phubbed people feel excluded and ostracised. (Chotpitayasunondh et al, 2018). It is also found to be a predictor of somatization, reduced life satisfaction and increased phone use (Ergün, Goksu&Sakiz, 2020). There is empirical evidence that people phub those who are close to them than those who are not. This may be reason why their relationships are likely to deteriorate.

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(Miller-Ott& Kelly, 2015; VandenAbeele, Antheunis, & Schouten, 2016; VandenAbeele & Postma-Nilsenova, 2018), reducing the sense of emotional connection (Nakamura, 2015), and undermining perceptions of empathetic concern, closeness, interpersonal trust, and the quality of conversation. Even though phonesare devices that helps to connect individuals, it has also caused people to draw apart.

Social anxiety is the fear of social situations or events that involve interaction with other people. It is the anxiety someone faces when they feel they can be negatively evaluated or judged. People feel socially anxious not only when they are currently being evaluated but also when the prospect or possibility of interpersonal interaction exists (Kowalski et al, 1988). A study by (Grieve et al, 2021) showed how vulnerable narcissists prefer online environment for social interaction and hence are prone to the risk of phubbing. Since socially anxious people consider face to face interaction as taxing and a superior medium for expressive and intimate contact, they may resort to their phones for communication even in the presence of their close ones (Reid et al, 2007).A study by (Grieve et al, 2021) showed how vulnerable narcissists prefer online environment for social interaction and hence are prone to the risk of phubbing.

Coping means to invest one's own conscious effort to solve personal and interpersonal problems, in order to master, minimise or tolerate stress and conflict. The term coping can refer to reactive coping, which means that coping follows a stressor. It can also be proactive, which occurs when we anticipate or respond to a future stressor on order to neutralize it. Social coping occurs when we rely on social support or assistance to overcome a stressful situation. This research aims to assess the behavioural, emotional and cognitive methods of coping. Cognitive coping includes strategies like optimism, pessimism, meaning making, cognitive reframing, psychological growth and self-efficacy. Behavioral coping strategies are overt physical or verbal activities. Emotion coping is oriented towards management of emotions that accompany the perception of stress.

This research primarily focuses on the effect that social anxiety and coping skill have over the behaviour of phubbing. It is hypothesised that a positive correlation will be observed between phubbing and social anxiety, whereas a negative correlation will be observed between phubbing and coping as well as social anxiety and coping.

METHODOLOGY

Aim-To understand the relation between social anxiety, levels of coping and phubbing among young adults.

Research problem- Will the levels of coping and social anxiety influence phubbing?

Objectives
1. To find the relation between social anxiety and phubbing among youth
2. To find relation between coping levels and phubbing
3. To find the relation between social anxiety and coping levels
4. To find the variance of phubbing and its correlation to social anxiety and coping among sexes.

Procedure
The samples in this study included young adults between the age range 17-22. They were selected based on inclusion exclusion criteria; Informed consent was obtained from all

samples collecting data. The scales were administered to the samples through Google forms. The respondents were given assurance based on ethical guidelines.

Sample and sampling

The study had 227 participants of which 152 (67%) were females and 75 (33%) were males. Purposive sampling method was used to select the sample. The samples in this study included young adults between the age range 17-22.

Tools

This study used the following scales to collect data from the participants.

- **Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS).** (Mattick and Clarke, 1998) SAIS is a self-report scale which measures distress while meeting and talking with others. It is used in clinical settings and among social anxiety researchers. It consists of 20 item scale. The client rates how much each item relates to them on a 5 point scale.
- **Coping Scale.** (Hamburg, Grych and Barnyard, 2013) This coping questionnaire assesses cognitive, emotional, and behavioural methods of dealing with problems. It is a 13-item factor, consisting of items reflecting both appraisal and behavioural methods of coping. Each item is rated on a 4 point scale.
- **Generic Scale of Phubbing (GSP).** (Chotpitayasunondh, Douglas, 2018). The GSP questionnaire assesses the behaviour of phubbing using a 7 point and 15 items scale.

Data Analysis

The data was processed in Excel and statistical analysis was done using IBM SPSS version 21. The frequencies of the socio-demographic variables were computed. The data that was collected was analysed using Spearman correlation test and the differences among the gender was analysed using independent sample t-test.

RESULTS

The data collected was statistically analysed to find the relationship between social anxiety, coping and phubbing. The means for each scale for the total sample as well as the males and females separately are given below. The results obtained for each of the hypothesis were as below.

Table 1- Mean and SD for the sample and subgroups

	Mean	SD
Phubbing -Total	41.70	13.88
Phubbing -Females	42.22	14.55
Phubbing -Males	40.80	12.55
Social Anxiety -Total	27.36	13.81
Social Anxiety- Females	28.58	13.78
Social Anxiety- Males	25.31	13.63
Coping Skill-Total	37.48	6.30
Coping Skill- Females	36.54	6.26
Coping Skill-Males	39.39	5.97

H1: There will be a positive correlation between social anxiety and phubbing

Table 2 Spearman's correlation between phubbing and social anxiety

Dimension	Phubbing	Males	Females
Social anxiety	.512**	.702**	.437**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A significant positive correlation was observed between phubbing and social anxiety. This means that an increase in social anxiety causes an increase in phubbing and vice versa. Hence, this proves the hypothesis that there is a positive correlation between social anxiety and phubbing. The table also shows that this relationship (phubbing and social anxiety), is higher for males when compared to women

H2: There will be a negative correlation between coping skills and phubbing.

Table 3 Spearman's correlation between phubbing and coping

Dimension	Coping	Males	Females
Phubbing	-.175**	-.243*	-.146

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

A high significant negative correlation was observed between phubbing and coping skills. This means that an increase in level of coping would cause a decrease in phubbing, and vice versa. Hence this proves the hypothesis that there is a negative correlation between phubbing and coping. Among males, a significant negative correlation was observed between phubbing and coping, whereas no significant correlation between phubbing and coping is observed among females.

H3: There is a negative correlation between social anxiety and coping

Table 4 Spearman's correlation between social anxiety and coping

Dimension	Social anxiety	Males	Females
Coping skills	-.343**	-.327**	-.332**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

A significant negative correlation is observed between social anxiety and coping skills. This means that when social anxiety increases, the level of coping will decrease and vice versa. Hence this proves the hypothesis that there is a negative correlation between social anxiety and coping.

Table 5 Independent sample t-test between male and female respondents
H4: There will be no difference among the gender in (i) phubbing, (ii) social anxiety and (iii) coping

t- test for Equality of means

	Group	Mean	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Phubbing	Female	42.217	.723	225	.470
	Male	40.800			
Social Anxiety	Female	28.461	1.625	225	.106
	Male	25.307			
Copingskills	Female	36.546			
	Male	39.387	-3.321	153.520	.001

The difference among the gender in levels of phubbing and social anxiety was found to be not statistically significant. However, it was seen that males were significantly higher than females in coping skills.

DISCUSSION

Phubbing is a relatively new phenomena that is increasingly seen among youth and young adults and it has put a strain on many a relationship. The present study which was conducted on 227 young adults within the age range of 17-22 indicates that phubbing was prevalent among Indian youth too, but the mean of the sample indicated that the levels were at a moderate level (Table 1). Females had a slightly higher mean score on phubbing than males, though it was not significantly different. The aim of the study was to find whether the level of social anxiety and coping skills has a relationship to the level of phubbing.

The results showed that there was a high significant positive correlation between social anxiety and phubbing (Table 2). High correlation between social anxiety and use of socially interactive technologies was also seen in other studies (Pierce et al, 2010). A study conducted by Guazzini, 2019 which found a high correlation between trait anxiety and social anxiety also provides further support to this finding. The correlation between phubbing and social anxiety was observed to be quite higher among males than females indicating that men indulge in phubbing more than women, when they feel social anxiety.

A significant moderate negative correlation was seen between phubbing level and coping skills for the sample (Table 3). The lower the coping skills, the higher the phubbing level and vice versa. However, an analysis based on gender revealed that this negative relation was significant only for the males and not for the females. This could be because increased stress caused by phone addiction, may contributes to the exhaustion of decision making and problem-solving abilities, lowering coping abilities (Jeong et al, 2016). Better coping skills are usually associated with lower social anxiety as found in the results of this study (Table 4). This may occur when an individual with increased social anxiety when exposed to stimuli experience increased stress. This may further lead to increased cognitive overload due to which our problem-solving ability or coping may decrease.

A gender-based analysis revealed that the two genders were not different from each other in their levels of phubbing or social anxiety, but were different in coping skills level. The males had a higher mean level of coping skills. However, in the relationship between phubbing and both social anxiety as well as coping skills, the males had a much higher correlation than women. This could indicate that phubbing was resorted to by males when social anxiety was high and also when coping skills were low and vice versa. It also indicates that women are not indulged in phubbing as much as a defence against social anxiety as men do. Women use of phubbing was not seen connected to coping, or as much due to social anxiety as men. Women could be using phubbing for other social purpose than due to anxiety or distress.

CONCLUSION

Phubbing, the act of ignoring people and surroundings using one's phone is positively related to social anxiety. Phubbing is also negatively related to coping skills in men. As coping skills are related to reduced social anxiety, the lower the coping skills level, the higher the social anxiety and the greater the phubbing.

Though males were significantly different from females in their coping skills, and were higher on it, results indicate that males use phubbing more when socially anxious and when their coping skills were low. This trend was not as visible among women.

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