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## Phubbing, Social Anxiety and Perceived Control in Young Adults

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### *Abstract*

This study examines the complex interactions among ten empirical studies on social anxiety, phubbing (phone Snubbing) and perceived control. Psychological research has focused a great deal of attention on social anxiety, which is characterized by the fear of being negatively evaluated in social situations. Phubbing, the practice of people prioritizing their phones over interpersonal interactions, has become more common in recent years due to the widespread use of smartphones, which may exacerbate social anxiety. Perceived control, or the personal conviction that one can affect results, has also been found to be an important component of anxiety management. This integrative review clarifies the complex relationships between these constructs through a meta synthesis approach along with semi structured interviews with participants who experience social Anxiety. A total of 10 Peer reviewed Studies from 2000-2004 were selected for review from peer reviewed databases, including PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, and Web of Science. Meta Synthesis and Thematic Analysis is used for Data Analysis.

***Keywords: Social Anxiety, Phubbing, Perceived Control, Social Media, Social Interaction***

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Phubbing, a term coined from "phone" and "snubbing," refers to the act of ignoring someone in a social setting by focusing on a mobile device instead of engaging with the present company (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). This behavior has garnered increasing attention as a psychological concern, with implications for social interactions and mental well-being. Perceived control, the extent to which individuals believe their actions are under their voluntary control is a critical factor in psychological well-being. While extensively studied in health and behavioural sciences, its relationship with phubbing and social interactions remains underexplored. Closely related to these behaviors is social anxiety, also known as social phobia, which manifests as fear, stress, or discomfort in social situations. Individuals with social anxiety often feel scrutinized, anticipate negative judgment, and fear embarrassment, leading to avoidance of interpersonal interactions. Research suggests that those experiencing social anxiety and communication avoidance are more likely to develop

excessive reliance on smartphones and social media. Studies indicate that phubbing is associated with greater social withdrawal, diminished communication quality, and lower interpersonal trust, all of which contribute to heightened anxiety (Beranuy et al., 2009; Thomée et al., 2011; Roberts & David, 2016). Moreover, phubbing behaviours negatively impact relationship satisfaction and overall fulfilment in personal relationships (Água et al., 2018; Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018a; González-Rivera et al., 2018; Knoll et al., 2017; Krasnova et al., 2016; Vanden Abeele et al., 2016). Research has shown that the mere presence of a mobile device during face to face interactions can reduce engagement and connection, as individuals using a phone are both socially and cognitively disengaged from their immediate environment (Katz & Aakhus, 2002).

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973), which suggests that individuals actively seek out media, including smartphone to fulfill specific needs such as entertainment, social connection, and escapism. In the context of phubbing, people may turn to their phones for instant gratification, prioritizing digital engagement over in-person interaction. This behavior, driven by personal motivations, can weaken interpersonal connections and reduce engagement in real-life social situations.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau, 1964) provides insight into how phubbing impacts relationships. SET suggests that human interactions are based on cost-benefit analyses, where individuals assess whether a relationship is rewarding or costly. In the case of phubbing, being ignored by a conversation partner may be perceived as a relational "cost," reducing feelings of appreciation, trust, and satisfaction. This imbalance can lead to frustration, resentment, and ultimately, deteriorating relationships.

Phubbing has emerged as a significant psychological and social phenomenon, driven by various cognitive, behavioral, and emotional factors.

## **1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION**

To what extent does phubbing behaviour influence social anxiety and perceived control among young adults, and how can an integrative synthesis of empirical literature combined with qualitative insights enhance understanding and inform targeted interventions?

## **1.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

This study is based on the pragmatic research paradigm, which prioritizes the use of diverse methods to address research questions in a flexible and context-sensitive manner. Pragmatism acknowledges the value of both objective and subjective knowledge and allows for the integration of multiple data sources to generate practical and meaningful insights. Given the study's focus on understanding the interplay between social anxiety, phubbing, and perceived control, the pragmatic paradigm provides a suitable foundation for combining an integrative review of empirical studies with thematic analysis of data derived from semi-structured interviews. This approach facilitates a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon by balancing theoretical perspectives with experiential data.

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

David (2017) explores the negative consequences of phubbing, emphasizing that individuals

who experience being phubbed often feel socially excluded. This sense of exclusion builds a greater need for social validation, prompting individuals to turn to social media as a means of re-establishing a sense of connection and belonging. Nazir (2016), in the study *Phubbing: A Technological Invasion Which Connected the World But Disconnected Humans*, reports that the use of social media and mobile applications has surged significantly. Poor communication skills may weaken interpersonal relationships, as individuals often immerse themselves in digital interactions rather than engaging with their immediate surroundings. The widespread presence of smartphones in modern society highlights their importance, yet also contributes to social disengagement. Many individuals frequently use their devices for communication, browsing, or entertainment in public settings, often leading to inattentiveness to their environment, which increases the risk of accidents. In response, some countries have introduced designated "mobile phone lanes" as a precautionary measure. However, such solutions remain temporary, whereas a more sustainable approach involves increasing awareness and encouraging individuals to prioritize direct human interactions. Ivanova (2020) asserts that excessive mobile phone dependency and increased phubbing behaviors are correlated with higher levels of depressive symptoms. The association between depression and smartphone addiction is mediated by phoning, and this impact is further moderated by loneliness. Interestingly, the moderating effect of loneliness differs by gender: for men, phubbing and depression are more strongly correlated when loneliness is higher, whereas for women, the relationship between phubbing and sadness is less pronounced as loneliness increases.

Benvenuti (2020), in research on the *Factors Associated with Phone Snubbing Behavior in Emerging Adults*, identifies a connection between diminished self-regulation and heightened internet dependence. The study further suggests that increased internet addiction elevates the likelihood of phubbing, while self-esteem and overall well-being appear unrelated to internet addiction. Grieve (2021), in *More than a Preference for Online Social Interaction: Vulnerable Narcissism and Phubbing*, examines the intricate relationship between vulnerable narcissism and phubbing. According to the study, people with susceptible narcissism have a significant propensity for social connection online, which helps to explain why they indulge in phubbing. Phubbing is directly and significantly correlated with sensitive narcissistic features, albeit this mediation is not absolute. This behavior may serve as a strategy to meet contingent self-esteem needs, which are often more easily satisfied in the asynchronous and controllable digital environment. Additionally, other dimensions of narcissistic vulnerability appear to contribute to increased phubbing tendencies. Akat (2022) suggests that the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) plays a key mediating role in the relationship between Dark Triad personality traits and phubbing behaviors. In a cross-sectional study, Chi (2022) examined the relationships among personality factors, phubbing, social media addiction, and FoMO. The results showed that while the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) showed a substantial negative link with phubbing, the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) and FoMO showed a positive correlation with phubbing. Renz (2023) Performed a systematic meta-analytic study analysing 79 studies with 526 effect sizes to identify predictors of phubbing. The study categorized predictors into ten groups, including sociodemographic factors, personality traits, technological norms, device usage, and patterns of problematic use. Problematic usage patterns emerged as the most robust predictors. Sun (2023) Investigated the mediating role of problematic smartphone use between insecure attachment styles and phubbing. The study utilized the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) scale to assess attachment styles, the Smartphone Addiction Scale-Short Version (SAS-SV) for problematic smartphone use, and a 5-item communication disturbance factor from Karadağ et al.'s phubbing scale. Data analysis involved structural equation modeling (SEM) with

mediation analysis, employing bootstrapping techniques to test indirect effects. Chotpitayasunondh et al. (2023): Validated the 8-item Phubbing Scale (PS-8) across samples from Bangladesh, Iran, and Pakistan. The PS-8 comprises two factors: Communication Disturbance and Phone Obsession. Psychometric evaluations included confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), network analysis, and Rasch analysis to assess the scale's reliability and validity across different cultural contexts. Dănăiață et al. (2023): Explored the mediating role of loneliness between perceived phubbing and psychological distress/life satisfaction. The study used the Generic Scale of Being Phubbed to measure perceived phubbing, the Satisfaction with Life Scale to measure life satisfaction, the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) to measure psychological distress, and the abbreviated version of the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale.

The existing literature emphasizes the detrimental effects of phubbing, including increased social exclusion and elevated depressive symptoms, particularly among individuals with mobile phone addiction. Various psychological factors, including poor communication skills, internet dependency, vulnerable narcissism, and FoMO, contribute to phubbing behaviors. While some solutions, such as designated mobile phone lanes, have been introduced as temporary measures, a more effective long-term approach involves raising awareness and promoting in-person interactions. However, gaps remain in the literature. One overlooked area is the relationship between phubbing and social anxiety. Limited research has explored how social anxiety influences phubbing behaviors, particularly whether individuals use smartphones as a coping mechanism to alleviate social discomfort or if excessive phone use exacerbates social anxiety symptoms. Additionally, the role of perceived control in phubbing is relatively underexplored. While studies have examined addiction, narcissism, and other psychological factors, little research has investigated how an individual's perceived control over smartphone use affects their likelihood of engaging in phubbing. Addressing these gaps could provide deeper insights into the behavioral mechanisms underlying phubbing and its psychological impact.

### **3.METHOD**

#### **3.1 AIM**

This study aims to explore the complex relationships between Phubbing, Social Anxiety and Perceived Control among young adults through a qualitative meta synthesis approach along with semi structured interviews with participants who experience social Anxiety.

#### **3.4 Search Strategy**

10 Peer Reviewed studies from Databases, including PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, and Web of Science, were identified to ensure number of relevant literature.

#### **3.5 Inclusion Criteria**

Studies published in peer-reviewed journals.

Studies examining the relationship between phubbing behavior and social anxiety or perceived control among young adults (18-35 years).

Studies available in English language.

### **3.6 Exclusion Criteria**

Studies on populations outside the 18-35 age range.

Studies not assessing the relationship between phubbing and social anxiety or perceived control.

### **3.7 Criteria for Study Selection**

Studies published between 2000 and 2024 were included to understand research trends.

Both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies were included.

No minimum sample size requirement was set to include a broad range of studies.

### **3.8 Data Extraction**

Data extracted from eligible studies included author details, publication year, participant demographics, measures used for phubbing, social anxiety, and perceived control, effect sizes, and other relevant variables.

10 young adults were selected through purposive sampling for semi-structured interviews. These individuals reported experiences of social anxiety and difficulty controlling phone usage in social settings. The participants engaged in 30-minute online semi-structured interviews, which were analysed using thematic analysis. Common themes were identified, examined patterns in experiences related to phubbing and anxiety.

### **3.9 Data Synthesis**

A thematic analysis was conducted to identify common themes, patterns, and trends across studies. The qualitative findings provided deep knowledge of psychological experiences of phubbing.

## **4.RESULTS**

This integrative Review included data from 10 peer reviewed studies published between 2000 and 2024, examining the relationship between phubbing, social anxiety, and perceived control among young adults aged 18-35. Both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies were included, without restrictions on sample sizes. Data were extracted from studies retrieved from PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, and Web of Science using keywords such as "phubbing," "smartphone addiction," "social anxiety," and "perceived control."

Phubbing exhibited a negative association with loneliness but a positive correlation with social anxiety and perceived control. A strong correlation was observed between phubbing and the duration of phone usage. Somatization, life satisfaction, and phone usage duration were significant predictors of phubbing. Phubbing predicted all measured psychological variables except life satisfaction. Being on the receiving end of phubbing correlated negatively with life satisfaction and loneliness, while showing a positive relationship with social anxiety. Anxiety, negative self-perception, and hostility were predictors of experiencing phubbing.

Phubbing is predicted by poor social media usage, according to research findings, and internet addiction acts as a bridge between social media addiction and deteriorating mental health. Interpersonal flexibility and a sense of security were protective factors against phubbing behavior, while female gender and smartphone addiction were risk factors. Addiction to social networking sites was found to be positively connected with peer phubbing. Social anxiety was revealed to be a mediating factor in this connection, particularly for undergraduates from low-income backgrounds. Another study found that while men exhibited higher levels of self-positioning, women exhibited higher levels of phubbing behavior, emotional response, and fusion with others. It has been discovered that FOMO, which heightens anxiety and strengthens avoidance behaviors, causes phubbing.

Internet addiction serves as a link between social media addiction and declining mental health, and research indicates that bad social media consumption predicts phubbing. These revelations highlight how important it is to understand the intricate relationship between technology use and mental health.

Six themes were generated through Thematic Analysis.

#### *1. Phubbing as coping for social anxiety*

Participants reported that checking their phone in social situations helps them to avoid difficult interaction and escape situations. They also reported that it provides short term relief from social anxiety.

"Looking at my phone helps me avoid awkward conversations. it's like an escape."

#### *2. Illusions of social connections*

Participants in the semi-structured interview that they felt digitally connected but emotionally disturbed. Engagement in online conversation gave them a false sense of fulfilment but their real-world connections were really poor.

"I feel connected online, but in real life, I feel alone."

#### *3. Social avoidance*

Participants reported that even when their friends are around they keep on scrolling and phubbing contributed to disconnection from surroundings.

"When my friends are around, I keep scrolling. I don't even notice them."

#### *4. Struggle with Self control*

They struggle with self-control in phone usage participants reported that they have been feeling loss of control over phone usage and this is leading to frustration and helplessness.

"I tell myself to stop, but within minutes, I'm back to scrolling."

#### *5. Reduced Social interactions*

Participants reported that they felt like they have been ignored in favour of a phone and it led to feelings of rejections. From the interview it was also clear that phubbing was leading to relationship dissatisfaction.

"It hurts when my partner chooses their phone over me."

### *6. Digital disinhibition*

Participants reported that they felt more comfortable interacting digitally but on the other hand real interaction were difficult for them. This digital confidence reinforces offline avoidance and affect their social skills.

"I can text anyone, but talking face-to-face makes me anxious."

## **5.DISCUSSION**

Phubbing is linked to various psychological factors, including anxiety, negative self-perception, and hostility, while also being negatively associated with loneliness and life satisfaction. Furthermore, its predictors include smartphone addiction, emotional reactivity, and social fusion. One of the most significant findings is that fear of missing out (FOMO) plays a crucial mediating role in the relationship between self-differentiation and phubbing. While social media addiction does not directly impact mental health, it exacerbates anxiety through internet addiction and phubbing. This study consolidates evidence from different methodologies, including psychometrically validated scales, anonymous self-report questionnaires, and daily surveys, a comprehensive examination of the phenomenon. The findings emphasize that phubbing contributes to rising social anxiety and diminishing perceived control among young adults. The study highlights cultural and contextual variations in phubbing behavior, underscoring the need for future research to explore these nuances. The positive correlation between social media use and anxiety suggests that interventions should incorporate digital behavior management in anxiety treatment. A better understanding of the mechanisms behind phubbing could lead to the development of targeted psychological interventions.

Our findings from semi structured interviews show that phubbing serves as a coping mechanism for social anxiety, offering temporary relief but weakening real-world connections. Participants reported feeling digitally connected yet emotionally isolated, with excessive phone use leading to social avoidance and reduced face-to-face interactions. Many struggled with self-control, experiencing frustration and helplessness over their phone habits. Digital confidence often reinforced offline avoidance, further impairing social skills. These insights highlight the need for interventions promoting mindful phone use and stronger real-world connections.

## **6.CONCLUSION**

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the negative effects of phubbing behavior on the social well-being of young adults. Through a synthesis of existing literature, we identified a consistent pattern linking phubbing to increased social anxiety and decreased perceived control. Our findings underscore the need for further research into the complex relationship between phubbing, perceived control, and social anxiety, particularly in cross-cultural

contexts. Addressing this research gap will deepen our understanding of the underlying mechanisms of phubbing behavior and inform the development of targeted interventions. Such interventions should encourage responsible technology use, mitigate the psychological risks associated with phubbing, and promote healthier social interactions among young adults.

## **6.1 LIMITATIONS**

Several limitations must be acknowledged. Reliance on self-reported data across numerous studies may introduce bias, as participants may underreport or overreport their phubbing behaviors and related psychological factors. Cross-sectional design of many included studies limits the ability to infer causality between phubbing and its psychological correlates. Social variability in the expression and perception of phubbing also presents a challenge, as most studies focused on specific regions, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings to other cultural settings. Wide range of measurement tools used across studies, while providing different perspectives, introduces variability that may affect the consistency of results. The rapid evolution of technology and social media behaviors means that findings may quickly become outdated, necessitating ongoing research to keep pace with changing trends.

## **6.2 IMPLICATIONS**

Need for increased awareness regarding the psychological and social consequences of phubbing. Educational initiatives and interventions promoting mindfulness, digital etiquette, and self-regulation can help mitigate the adverse effects of phubbing. Encouraging young adults to develop healthier technology use habits can foster more meaningful social interactions and reduce the reliance on digital devices as coping mechanisms for anxiety. Because social media use and anxiety are positively correlated, digital behavior management should be a part of anxiety therapy methods. The creation of focused psychological treatments may result from a deeper comprehension of the mechanisms behind phubbing. Our results emphasize the importance of further research, particularly in diverse cultural contexts, to gain more understanding of how phubbing, social anxiety, and perceived control interact. Future studies should also explore intervention strategies that address the psychological mechanisms underlying phubbing behavior, ensuring that technological advancements are balanced with mental well-being and social cohesion.

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