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RESEARCH ARTICLE

NOMOPHOBIA: A PREVALENT MODERN AGE PHOBIA AMONG INDIAN STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Technological advancements are occurring at an unprecedented rate in today's rapidly evolving world. These innovations not only save us time but also make our lives more comfortable and convenient. However, this increasing reliance on technology has led to a phenomenon known as Nomophobia, which is an addiction to mobile devices. The mobile phone, initially designed as a tool for communication, has gradually permeated all aspects of our lives, leading to the development of Nomophobia. Those who exhibit addictive behavior towards their mobile devices are referred to as Nomophobics. This study aims to explore the prevalence of Nomophobia among Indian students and its impact on their mental, emotional, and social well-being. The findings of this research will serve as an eye-opener not only for students but also for parents and other stakeholders in the education system.

INTRODUCTION

Nomophobia is defined as "the fear of being without a mobile phone or unable to use it." Nowadays, it is considered a modern age phobia. It is to be considered as a form of behavioral addiction. (Ind Psychiatry J. 2021 Jul-Dec; 30(2): 230–233). The term is an abbreviation for "no-mobile-phone phobia," which was coined during a 2010 study by the UK Post Office. The Post Office commissioned YouGov, a research organization, to look at anxieties suffered by mobile phone users. The study found that nearly 53 percent of mobile phone users in Britain tend to be anxious when they "lose their mobile phone, run out of battery or credit, or have no network coverage" (R Elmore T. 2021). Excessive addiction of mobile phones affects health mentally, physically, and socially. They feel angry, disappointed, stressed, irritated, worried, terrified, and more psychological abnormalities, when they lose their mobile phone or run out of battery and network (Bhattacharya S, Bashar M, Srivastava A, Singh A. 2019). The engagement in physical activities tends to decrease, leading to a heightened level of lethargy and an increase in procrastination in academic pursuits. A plethora of physical abnormalities, including muscle pain, stiffness, discomfort in the neck, back, and headaches, as well as eye strain, often afflict students. These physical ailments not only affect their body stamina and digestion but also contribute to the development of obesity and weight gain, which are common symptoms.

Symptoms and Causes of Nomophobia. Nomophobia, a condition characterized by anxiety and stress in response to the absence of one's mobile phone, presents symptoms similar to those of other anxiety and stress disorders, including altered breathing patterns, trembling, excessive sweating, agitation, disorientation, anxiety, hypertension, and irregular heartbeats. Several factors have been identified as potential causes of Nomophobia, including low self-esteem and confidence, which lead individuals to rely on social media as a means of boosting their self-worth and alleviating anxiety and depression. Loneliness is another contributing factor, as individuals who experience loneliness often turn to their mobile phones as a source of companionship and use social media to engage with others and seek attention. Additionally, a reliance on technology and an excessive dependence on smartphones and digital devices have been identified as potential factors in the development of Nomophobia. Research also suggests that learned behavior, or imitation of others, may contribute to the development of Nomophobia.

Prevalance of Nomohobia in Indian Students: The following text, which discusses the issue of Nomophobia among Indian students, was published by Kumar, Ravi, Kumari, Supriya, Bharti, Puja, and Sharma, Divyam in 2021. The study sought to gauge the prevalence of Nomophobia among the Indian population aged between 15 and 35 years.

Out of the 2061 participants, 52.9% were male and 47.1% were female. Furthermore, 92.2% of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 24. Additionally, 79.1% of the participants were undergraduates or pursuing their graduation. In terms of geographical distribution, 35.5% of the participants were from metropolitan cities, 38.8% from urban cities, 12.15% from semi-urban cities, and the remaining 13.6% from rural areas. Overall, 74.8% of the participants were classified as moderately nomophobic, 18.9% as severely nomophobic, and 6.3% as mildly nomophobic. (4). According to a cross-sectional study conducted by Asok, A. S., Singh, L. T., Meetei, N. R., & Akojam, B. S. (2020) on the prevalence of Nomophobia among college students in Bishnupur District of Manipur, 96% of participants began using mobile phones at the age of 15 or older. Fifteen percent of participants owned more than one mobile phone. The majority of participants, 45%, spent less than Rs 200 on mobile phone recharges. With regard to the estimated hours of mobile phone usage, more than half of the participants reported using their phones for 2-4 hours per day. Three percent of participants reported using their phones for more than 8 hours per day, while only 3% used them for less than an hour. (1) Another study conducted by Shirodkar, Sridhar Sanjay; Deo, Medha V.; and Parekh, Khushboo (2023) evaluated the prevalence of Nomophobia among junior college students in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region using a web-based survey. The results indicated that 100% of the students exhibited symptoms of Nomophobia, with 58% experiencing moderate levels, 28% experiencing mild levels, and 14% experiencing severe levels. (6) According to a recent study by Bartwal, Janki, and Nath (2020) conducted in North India, among the 451 medical students surveyed, approximately 70 (15.5%) had mild Nomophobia, 303 (67.2%) had moderate Nomophobia, and 78 (17.3%) had severe Nomophobia. (2)

Remedies to Nomophobia: There is no specific treatment to Nomophobia. Exposure therapy is a behavioral technique in which you will learn to gradually face your fears. In the case of Nomophobia, you will progressively get used to going without your phone. You might start very small (like leaving your phone in another room for a certain amount of time) and then progressively work your way up to longer periods of time without your phone (such as leaving it home while you go to the store or turning it off while you are busy doing something else).

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy: Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is a method that entails addressing the harmful and illogical thought patterns that lead to maladaptive behaviors. During this process, your therapist will guide you in recognizing these thought patterns and substituting them with more reasonable and realistic alternatives. For example, instead of believing that you will be deprived of something crucial if you do not constantly check your phone for messages, CBT will assist in reminding you that it is unlikely that you will miss anything important as long as you check your phone at regular intervals.

Medications: Although there is no specific medication that has been approved by the FDA for the treatment of Nomophobia, medical professionals such as psychiatrists or doctors may recommend anti-anxiety medications or antidepressants to alleviate some of the symptoms associated with the condition.

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, including Lexapro, Zoloft, and Paxil, are commonly used as first-line treatments for anxiety and depression. (9) It is important to note that medication alone may not be sufficient to treat Nomophobia, and a combination of therapy and medication may be necessary for optimal results.

Behavioral Therapy for Phobias: If you struggle with excessive smartphone use or feel that you are addicted to your device, there are several steps that you can take to better manage your usage. Set boundaries- Establish guidelines for your personal device usage, such as refraining from using your mobile device during specific times of the day, like during meals or before bedtime. Find balance- It is essential to maintain face-to-face interactions with others, and engaging in these interactions can help you avoid relying on your smartphone for social connections. Take short breaks- Breaking the smartphone habit can be difficult, but starting small can help. Begin by leaving your phone in another room during meals or when you are engaged in other activities. Engage in alternative activities- If you find yourself using your phone excessively out of boredom, seek out other activities to occupy your time. Consider reading a book, taking a walk, playing a sport, or engaging in a hobby that you enjoy.

CONCLUSION

Nomophobia, or the fear of being without one's mobile phone, is a growing concern, along with other fears and behavioral addictions related to technology use. With the widespread reliance on smartphones for work, school, news, entertainment, and social connectedness, it can be a challenging problem to overcome. It is not advisable to completely eliminate smartphone use, but establishing limitations and restrictions on its usage can be beneficial. Taking periodic breaks from using your smartphone and engaging in activities unrelated to it can be a good starting point. Implementing a Digital Health and Wellness Curriculum in schools is necessary, where teachers can educate students about the symptoms of gadget addiction. Parents should also be oriented on this matter, as it can affect their children's physical, psychological, and social well-being. Symptoms of gadget addiction can lead to mood swings, aggression, and a lack of interest in real-life interactions. Social networking in the virtual world can cause individuals to become isolated, even when they are surrounded by real people. Gadget addiction can also result in posture issues, eye problems, and backaches. Other symptoms may include insomnia, lack of concentration and focus, memory problems, and difficulty in decision-making. Digital Dementia is a prevalent condition that has emerged as a result of excessive use of electronic devices. This disorder affects the brain cells and chemistry, leading to symptoms such as stress, anxiety, and communication disorders, as well as other detrimental physical and psychological issues. To prevent children from becoming addicted to technology, it is recommended to limit their use of television, computers, and mobile devices. Encouraging them to pursue a hobby and setting designated times for device use can also be helpful. Additionally, engaging in physical activities or reading and drawing during leisure time can provide healthy alternatives to screen time.

It is also advised to refrain from having electronic gadgets in the bedroom and to put them away after use. Designating tech-free zones, such as the bedroom, dining area, and car, can also be beneficial. It is important to understand the value of moderation, as excessive use of technology can have negative consequences. Making time to communicate, interact, and share family values can also help in preventing digital dementia.

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