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NOMOPHOBIA EXACERBATION AMONG THE MILLENNIAL LEARNERS IN THE 'NEW NORMAL'

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Abstract:

The mobile technology has revolutionized the world so hastily that to fathom the degree of the impact is practically impossible. Smartphones owing to their ubiquitous element are synonymous to the most basic bodily needs of humans and indispensable. COVID 19 accelerated the use of smartphones to unprecedented levels which led to an emergence of high numbers of technological addicts. Nomophobia understood as phobia associated with "no mobile phone" is a state of experiencing irrational fear and anxiety by individuals when not able to access their mobile phones or in situations when they are not online. Mobile phone addiction is serious and alarming. Self-esteem, personality, anxiety, stress, mental and physical health issues, academic performance are all getting affected due to nomophobia. The present study while reviewing the research done in the field of nomophobia seeks to answer two research questions- 1. What is the prevalence and levels of nomophobia among students? 2. How severe is the impact of nomophobia among students? In the wake of the potential threats posed by nomophobia, the paper presents some strategies that education systems can adopt to curb the challenges posed due to smart phone addiction in educational spaces.

Keyword*: nomophobia, anxiety, mental health, education*

Introduction:

There is no denying that the revolutionary digital era is credited with creating communication networks that have transcended world boundaries. A mobile phone is now next to probably oxygen and nutrition in the basic need hierarchy. Information technology is so intricately integrated in the life systems that a world without smart phones and likewise gadgets is now out of question.

COVID-19 scare led to a confinement in the home during the lockdown and even post it. There was a massive shift in the way one processed the daily life activities which included both the routine and the non-routine personal and professional life. Mobile phones became an inseparable component of lives as their indispensability lied in their capacity to become drivers of professional lives. Be it working from homes, scheduling tasks and jobs in online modes to teaching learning, e commerce and online transactions, all were now done with the smart phone in the hand.

Education systems saw remarkable and extremely quick transformations because of COVID 19. Online education models which were hastily adopted dominated educational spaces. There is no denying that across the world, access to the digital world tremendously supported education during the pandemic phase. Education

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systems without undergoing the gestational phase of preparing for online teaching and even weighing the outcomes joined the bandwagon. Online education became the buzz world. There was no choice but to extensively use mobiles and other devices for learning purposes. The students were given smartphones and gadgets as there was no other choice.

Lockdown, social distancing, online education, and lots of other sociological, psychological factors led to a voluminous increase in the usage of mobile phones. The initial idea of using the smartphones as a mean of work and education undermined the fact that the mobile phones were now utilized for entertainment purposes. A world of extensive gaming, surfing social sites, watching videos, shopping, exploring apps etc slowly infused with the routine life. However, as the fear of pandemic diluted, the world now witnesses the underlying surface issues that emerge in enormous prominence post pandemic. While the world pre corona had also been showing a dominant trend of being addicted to mobile phones which included school going children, post corona the addiction has increased multi fold. The post corona generation emerged as a Nomophobes

Decoding Nomophobia:

Deciphering the portmanteau of the multiple words for a simpler comprehension – Nomophobia can be understood as "no mobile phone" as well as "phobia," due to this. A new psychological construct that as per clinical psychology is comprehended in terms of experiencing a state of irrational fear and anxiety in by individuals in situations when either they are unable to be online or cannot get an access their mobile phones.

This modern age phobia is a by-product of mobile addiction. Rampant developments in technological world leading to unprecedented increase in usage of mobile technology have given rise to a technological addiction called Nomophobia. (Bragozzi et al. 2019) which is characterised by discomfort faced due to not being in touch with the virtual communication world. Nomophobia when seen as a public health problem seem to be very typical type and is characteristic of the digital revolution (Antonio-Manuel Rodríguez-García , Antonio-José Moreno-Guerrero and Jesús López Belmonte, 2020)

A UK research agency called YouGov in 2008 can be credited with first coining the word 'Nomophobia' as a result of a survey conducted to investigate the anxiety and stress experienced by mobile phone users when they were separated from their devices. The results of the survey revealed that 53% of mobile phone users experienced anxiety and stress when they were unable to use their devices. Since then, research has shown that nomophobia is a real and growing problem in the modern world, particularly among young people. A research study from Pakistan found that 73% of the participants experienced nomophobia (Yildirim & Correia, 2015). Another study conducted in India in the same year found that 64% of the participants experienced nomophobia (Pavithra & Madhukumar, 2014). In 2019, a study conducted in Iran found that 87.8% of the participants experienced nomophobia (Koohestani et al., 2019). A study conducted in South Korea in the same year found that 55.3% of the participants experienced nomophobia (Hong et al., 2012).A meta-analysis of studies on nomophobia conducted between 2010 and 2020 found that the global prevalence of nomophobia was 52.5% (Elhai et al., 2021).

There has been a growing concern regarding nomophobia. The present study seeks to review researches done

in the field area of nomophobia in order to answer the following research questions

R1: What is the prevalence and levels of nomophobia among students?

R 2: How severe is the impact of Nomophobia among students?

Prevalence and Levels of Nomophobia among Students:

There is absolutely no denying that globally one witnesses massive wide spread internet addictions (Shapira et al., 2003) and addictions to video games (Ko, Yen, Chen, Chen, & Yen, 2005).However, these technology driven including addiction to mobile phones have not yet gained the required clinical prominence (Blaszczynski, 2006) due to lack of substantial research evidences which are more concretized and examining the addictions in the context of a range of variables.

Mobile phone addiction is as serious and alarming as substance addiction (Tyagi, Prasad & Bhatia, 2021). Extensive usages of smartphones can result in addictive and antisocial behaviours along with threats of perceived risks (Ansari, Alas & Sulaiman 2019; Sharma, K et al., 2022). Addictions of any kind are alarming and to be taken seriously because addiction of one kind may increase the susceptibility of falling for more addictions. COVID 19 further led to a significant increase in the usage of mobile phones and comparative analysis among different professions revealed that people engaged in online teaching-learning were most impacted in terms of health problems (Tyagi et al. 2021).

A study conducted in Oman reported 65% of the university students to be having severe nomophobia (Qutishat et al. 2020). Approximately 57% and 35% of Indian university students were found in the moderate and severe Nomophobia category respectively (Kaur, Sharma & Kumari, 2021). India boasts of having the second highest mobile connections in the world after China, with more than 90 connections per 100 people.

Severity of the Impact of Nomophobia among Students:

Studies conducted across (Prasad et al. 2017; Lee et al. 2017; Ahmed et al. 2019) have revealed negative effects of nomophobia on academic performances as well as learning outcomes. A study conducted among the university students in Malaysia found that high levels of nomophobia were associated with poor academic performance (Panova & Carbonell, 2018).

Many of the research focussing on nomophobia have found that factors like self-esteem, personality, anxiety, stress, mental and physical health issues, academic performance are all getting affected due to nomophobia. Research done by Bragazzi et al (2019) indicates nomophobic people exhibit maladaptive coping strategies in stressful situations. Amongst those who were in the category of high levels of nomophobia, dysfunctional coping strategies like denials, self-destruction, and self-blame, venting and resorting to emotional support were more predominant and   significantly correlated with increased number of hours spend using mobile. Study conducted by Dziurzyńska et al. (2017)shows that those who are addicted to mobile phones when faced with stress respond to it by means of dejection, shifting blame onto others, self-pity, feeling hopeless, resigning, or doing substitute gratification.

Studies examining the relationship between low self-esteem and nomophobia a have found them to be closely connected. Students with low self-esteem were twice likely to exhibit comparatively higher level

of nomophobia against those with normal or high self-esteem. (Vagka, E., Gnardellis, C., Lagiou, A., & Notara, V. 2023). As per the study conducted by Buctot, D. B., Kim, N., & Kim, S. H. (2023), a significant and negative correlation was observed between health related quality of life and adolescent lifestyle profile. On the other hand, the study reveals that increased usage of smartphone leads to addiction, causes nomophobia, and poses threats of perceived risks.

A survey of university students in Japan during the pandemic found that students using their smartphones for longer durations had higher levels of anxiety and depression (Ozdemir et al., 2021). The study done by Gajdics, J., & Jagodics, B. (2022) focused on separation anxiety on a day when students did not carry their mobile phones to class. The study reported an increase in the anxiety levels of the participants on a mobile free school day. However, their classroom engagements were not impacted. Molina et al. (2022) found a significant relationship between anxiety and nomophobia in students engaged in learning through virtual environments during the course of pandemic.

A study done by Denprechavong, V., Ngamchaliew, P., & Buathong, N. (2022), acknowledges that the emergence of nomophobia as a mental health problem in students and a reduction in the smartphone usage is needed. The study conducted by Emiretkin et al. (2019) revealed that problematic smartphone addiction directly and indirectly positively impacted emotional abuse among adolescents and factors like depression, social anxiety as well as body image dissatisfaction were instrumental in mediating these relationships.

Excessive phone use, especially before bedtime, can lead to disrupted sleep patterns, which can result in fatigue, poor concentration, and irritability (Exelmans & Van den Bulck, 2017). Overuse of mobile phones can lead to more instances of becoming socially isolated and a fall in episodes of face-to-face communication. Both of these negatively affect mental health and social development (Twenge et al., 2018). Poor posture, eye strain, and decreased physical activity associated with excessive mobile phone use can lead to physical health problems like neck and back pain, eye strain, as well as obesity (Kim et al., 2018).

Strategies to mitigate the potential risks of nomophobia amongst students:

It is crucial to educate the students regarding how to use the technology for their benefit but not overuse it to become addicted to it and develop nomophobia (Sharma et al (2022). Strategies need to be implemented which tare instrumental in early identification, timely intervention to manage social interaction and prevention of (Kaur, A., Ani, A., Sharma, A., & Kumari, V. 2021). Certain regulations, limiting actions and polices are needed in educational spaces to restrict extensive usage of mobile phones.

Some strategies that educational institutions can deploy are:

- Promoting digital wellness and conducting programs which provide resources and education on healthy mobile phone use can be effective in reducing nomophobia and improving mental health among university students (Panova & Carbonell, 2018).
- Setting guidelines and policies for mobile phone use, such as limiting phone use during class or designated study times. Studies have shown that university students who had strict rules regarding mobile phone use had lower levels of nomophobia (Davey et al., 2021).

- Encouraging face-to-face communication by promoting social events and group activities. A United States study on college students reported that students with higher levels of face-to-face communication had lower levels of smartphone addiction (Lepp et al., 2015).

- Providing alternative activities that do not involve mobile phone use, such as sports, arts, or other hobbies. A study conducted in Turkey showee that engaging in physical activity contributed to lowering the levels of nomophobia (Can, 2021).

Conclusion:

The over usages of technology in an irrational manner by youngsters who are mindful only of the advantages of technology and not aware of the potential risks it carries is something to be concerned about (Correr, R.; Bijos, M.T. 2017). The review of related literature reveals that the research done in the area of nomophobia is still in the exploratory and nascent stage. The research done have predominantly focussed on anxiety, health related issues, psychological variables, personality, and social problems. Educational systems cannot further overlook the potential effects of nomophobia and must constructively respond. There is no U turn post corona to go back to the era of mobile phones not very much evident in educational spaces. Education systems must acknowledge the omnipresence of smartphones and gear up to combat the challenges they pose. In the 'New normal' the learners have drastically changed, and educational spaces need to remodel and redesign themselves accordingly.

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