

Nomophobia: The Invisible Addiction



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Introduction

The Mobile Phone addiction

Mobile phones are now an integral part of people's everyday life, especially young people. Mobile phone overuse and addiction is a critical social issue in many societies. Along with the high rate of mobile phone ownership, excessive or uncontrollable use of mobile phones has become a serious social concern [1]. Present-day cell-phones are critical in maintaining social relationships and conducting the more mundane exigencies of everyday [2]. Many young adults today cannot envision an existence without cell-phones. Research suggests that media use has become such a significant part of student life that it is "invisible", and students do not necessarily realize their level of dependence on and/or addiction to their cell-phones [1]. In the case of cell-phones, such an addiction may begin when an initially benign behaviour with little or no harmful consequences – such as owning a cell-phone for safety purposes – begins to evoke negative consequences and the user becomes increasingly dependent upon its use.

Owning a cell-phone for purposes of safety, for instance, eventually becomes secondary to sending and receiving text messages or visiting online social networking sites; eventually, the cell-phone user may engage in increasingly dangerous behaviours such as texting while driving. Ultimately, the cell-phone user reaches a "tipping point" where he/she can no longer control their cell-phone use or the negative consequences from its over-use. The process of addiction suggests a distinction between liking and wanting. In other words, the cell-phone user goes from liking his/her cell-phone to wanting it. This switch from liking to wanting is referred to as the "inflection point." This tipping point signals a shift from a previously benign everyday behaviour that may have been pleasurable with few harmful consequences to an addictive behaviour where wanting (physically and/or psychologically) has replaced liking as the motivating factor behind the behaviour. The same neural circuitry experienced with substance addiction is activated with this behavioural form of addiction [3].

Nomophobia

Nomophobia is defined as the fear of being out of cellular phone contact, or „feelings of discomfort or anxiety experienced by individuals when they are unable to use their mobile phones or utilize the affordances these devices provide [4].

Lin et al. [5] categorize nomophobia as a form of situational phobia and suggest its inclusion into the specific phobia in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-V) as a situational phobia [6]. Han et al. [7] defined nomophobia as a smartphone separation anxiety and argued that when a user perceives the smartphone as an extended self, he or she is more likely to get attached to the device, which in turn would lead to nomophobia by promoting proximity seeking. Recent research has found significant associations among different attachment styles and problematic use of the Internet, mobile phones, video games, and social media [8,9].

Mindfulness

Mindfulness-based mental health betterment techniques assert that behavioural tendencies that lead to psychological complications can distort individuals' perceptions of reality and may cause maladjustment [10]. Recent studies argued that mindfulness-based interventions could treat behavioural complications such as Internet addiction and video game addiction [11,12]. Problematic technology use, such as nomophobia, may also be treated by interventions that gear toward enhancing individuals' mindfulness levels [13]. Literature suggests that mindfulness cultivates a better understanding of the nature of existence by mindfully observing the dissolution of affective, cognitive, and sensory processes [14]. In addition, mindfulness is used effectively in various behavioural dependencies such as Internet gaming disorder [15,16]. Finally, it has been suggested that technology-based addictions may be treated by interventions that gear toward enhancing mindfulness [17,18].

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