Impact of Phubbing Behavior on Psychological Well-being: A Systematic Review

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Abstract
Introduction:
Phubbing- the practice of ignoring a person in face-to-face conversations due to smartphone usage has surfaced as a rising social and psychological concern globally. Beyond compromising human connection, it poses serious risks to individual mental health. This systematic review integrates current literature to investigate how phubbing influences mental health dimensions such as loneliness, anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and overall life satisfaction.
Aim:
This review seeks to evaluate the psychological consequences of phubbing and explore the roles of mediating and moderating variables, including smartphone dependency, fear of missing out (FoMO), loneliness, and tendencies toward social comparison.
Method:
The review is adopted PRISMA techniques, assessed peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2025 across databases like PubMed, Scopus, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate. "phubbing", "psychological well-being", "smartphone addiction", "loneliness", and "life- satisfaction" were among the search terms. In total, 16 studies fulfilled the criteria for inclusion.
Conclusion:
Evidence from the reviewed literature indicates that phubbing is associated with elevated psychological strain, especially when it refers to its impact on emotional isolation, reduced self-esteem, and diminished life satisfaction. The findings underscore the pressing need to address these new behavioral disorders through interventions, educational initiatives, and public awareness campaigns.

Keywords: Digital Behavior, FoMO, Loneliness, Phubbing, Psychological Well-being, and Smartphone Addiction

Introduction

Phubbing, or neglecting someone in a social situation by concentrating on a cellphone, is one of the behavioral issues brought about by the widespread usage of cellphones, which has transformed human communication. Although it is frequently dismissed, phubbing has been found to disrupt mental health and interpersonal relationships quietly. It is particularly common among teenagers and young adults, who spend an excessive amount of time on screens and increasingly depend on the internet for social validation. (Koileri, 2025; Barbed-Castrejon et al., 2024) [1][4].

Understanding Phubbing Behavior

The term, which initially appeared in a marketing campaign in 2012, has since grown to be a significant

component of sociological and psychological inquiries.

Frequent phubbing appears to be attributed in studies to many mental health issues, featuring enhanced loneliness, anxiety, inadequate self-esteem, and diminished sense of fulfilment in life (Garrido et al., 2024; Maftei & Mairen, 2023) [6][14]. Modern digital behaviors, including smartphone reliance, social comparison, and FoMO (fear of missing out), typically trigger these consequences (Tufan et al., 2025; Safdar Bajwa et al., 2023) [2][13].

Psychological Well-Being In The Digital Era

Ryff and Keyes state that psychological well-being encompasses self-acceptance, autonomy, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, personal growth, and a sense of purpose in life. However, in the modern digital world, these aspects are becoming progressively more prone to vulnerability. The foundation of social and emotional well-being is put at risk by the increased use of screen-based interactions, resulting in constant overshadowing of in-person social engagement (Al-Saggaf, 2023; Bulut & Nazir, 2020) [12][15]. The core principles of psychological well-being are becoming endangered as the consumption of screens diminishes interpersonal attachment. The requirement of analysing phubbing's consequences on mental health continues to grow as it invades regular daily life. The potential effect of phubbing on various domains is evaluated in this review.

Statement Of The Problem

Impact of Phubbing Behavior on Psychological Well-Being: A Systematic Review.

Objectives

To systematically review and analyse the available literature regarding phubbing and its impact on psychological well-being.

Materials And Methods

The methodology adhered to PRISMA standards, ensuring a rigorous and transparent process for selecting literature.

Databases searched: PubMed, Scopus, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar,

Keywords used: "phubbing", "smartphone addiction", "psychological well-being", "FoMO".

Inclusion Criteria

1. Articles published between 2020 and 2025
2. Peer-reviewed and full-text accessible
3. Focused on phubbing and psychological well-being
4. Studies in English

Exclusion Criteria

1. Articles not focusing on psychological variables
2. Studies addressing only technological or ergonomic aspects of smartphone use
3. Articles not available in full text
4. Non-peer-reviewed material

Results

Prevalence And Demographics Of Phubbing

Phubbing behavior has become extremely widespread, especially among younger people who spend an excessive amount of time in digital and academic settings.

According to Barbaed-Castrejon et al. (2024), academic burnout, excessive social media consumption, and dependence on messaging applications are the primary manifestations of phubbing, in which nearly two-thirds (64%) of college students are actively engaged.

Purwar et al. (2023) found that 84% of Greater Noida medical students self-identified as frequent phubbers, with screen time exceeding 6 hours per day was associated with both troubles falling asleep and an elevated degree of social isolation.

Tater & John (2024) emphasized the Indian context, wherein students identified phubbing as a stress reduction strategy as well as a hindrance to emotional bonding with family and peers.

Impact on Psychological Well-being

Loneliness and Relationship Satisfaction:

1. Al-Saggaf (2023) found that being phubbed stimulates emotional neglect, which makes people feel more alone, less satisfied with their relationships, and diminishes empathy, especially in romantic and parental relationships.
2. Maftei & Mairean (2023) measured this impact and found a statistically significant negative association ($r = -0.42$, $p < 0.01$) between perceived phubbing and life satisfaction. This connection

was primarily influenced by social disengagement and emotional withdrawal.

Anxiety and Self-Esteem:

1. Garrido et al. (2024) found that habitual phubbers, particularly those with social media compulsions, have low self-esteem, trouble regulating their emotions, and greater generalized anxiety ratings.

2. Al-Saggaf & Hogg (2024) emphasized that intergenerational phubbing, particularly when it is aimed at parents, negatively affects adult caregivers' mental health, including how they view their parents' self-worth.

Smartphone Addiction and FoMO as Mediators

1. Tufan et al. (2025) emphasized that smartphone addiction and FoMO are significant links between phubbing and poor mental health, suggesting that compulsive monitoring and validation-seeking behavior, rather than neglect, are the major reasons why people phub.

2. Furthermore, a moderated mediation model developed by Safdar Bajwa et al. (2023) indicates that social comparison exacerbates the psychological suffering caused by smartphone addiction and phubbing, while FoMO boosts the connection between the two.

Cross-Cultural Considerations

1. According to Kartikasari et al. (2023), phubbing exacerbates emotions of shame and social exclusion in collectivistic countries like Indonesia by altering expected patterns of mutual attention and breaching cultural standards of respect.

2. According to Yahya et al. (2024), individuals in tightly united societies that place a significant value on social presence and in-person connections are more susceptible to experiencing phubbing activity adversely.

Discussion

A Multidimensional Threat to Mental Health

Phubbing is a sign of a wider decline in personal interaction and emotional presence, instead of only a disregard for social manners. Convenience and transforming digital habits were its initial drivers; however, it has now spread to evolve into usual psychological issues, especially among emotionally sensitive populations.

Interpersonal Disconnection

Many research shows that phubbing directly harms interpersonal closeness, ultimately resulting in emotional invalidation and weakened social reciprocity (e.g., Al-Saggaf,2023; Kartikasari et al., 2023). Phubbing drastically minimizes eye contact, nonverbal clues, and conversational rhythm- all crucial components of psychological comfort and the device turns into a physical barrier that replaces empathy with digital communication.

1. Eye contact, non-verbal cues, and conversational rhythm are crucial components of psychological comfort, and phubbing significantly diminishes them.

2. In romantic relationships, persistent partner phubbing (PPP) has been associated with attachment insecurity and trust erosion, per longitudinal observations by Garrido et al. (2024)

Displacement and Digital Dependency

The Displacement Hypothesis suggests that higher smartphone surfing contributes to minimal direct physical contact among individuals. As per Tufan et al. (2025), persistent utilization of screens induces emotional drain and cognitive overload, and these ultimately isolate consumers completely from their real-world atmosphere.

1. The brain has been habituated to seek affirmation online rather than in the form of actual human interactions. As a consequence of this transition, it favors digital validation- likes, shares, and messages.

2. Eventually, it turns out, social contact in genuine life starts to appear hollow, which ultimately generates a never-ending cycle of detachment and sentimental exhaustion.

Loneliness as a Core Mediator

Loneliness repeatedly popped up as a prominent psychological mediator that fostered phubbing to additional adverse consequences (such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem).

1. Maftei & Mãirean (2023) showed that the hyperlink between phubbing and reduced life satisfaction could have been fully explained by increased loneliness.

2. This signifies that phubbing, another behavior that hinders conversation based on emotion, creates a recipient experience unnoticed and disregarded in

social circles, particularly those who are adolescents and their peers.

Vicious Cycle of Phubbing and Poor Mental Health

1. The most significant point is that phubbing and psychological and psychological are interchangeable.
2. Consumers frequently gravitate to their phones to escape from psychological anguish or feelings of inadequacy. Unfortunately, this avoidance behavior raises social isolation, leading to the exact issues that were intended to be tackled more severely.
3. Although people may adopt digital devices as an approach to coping, individuals might unknowingly exclude themselves from direct emotional support resources, which intensifies their psychological struggle.

Emerging Populations at Risk

Youth and Students:

Most susceptible are adolescents and young adults, who are still struggling to develop their perspectives on society and regulate their emotions. Frustration, unsatisfactory academic performance, and emotional exhaustion tend to be worsened by the battle within between the need for connection and feeling disengaged with modern technology.

Parents and Older Adults:

Reverse phubbing by children (as reported by Al-Saggaf & Hogg, 2024) undermines parental role satisfaction, especially in traditional households. This behavior diminishes a caregiver's sense of role fulfilment and emotional relevance, ultimately contributing to feelings of neglect and generational detachment.

Conclusion

Phubbing's major psychological shortcomings, which are highly correlated to low self-esteem, anxiety, loneliness, and decreased life satisfaction, most significantly among young people and families, are gradually starting to be acknowledged as a public wellness concern. Social comparison, cultural customs, and emotional isolation all have a direct influence on the findings, resulting in a greater prevalence of digital addictions like smartphone dependency and FOMO. As technology has the potential to affect relationships, targeted behavioral, therapeutic, and policy-level approaches are crucial to fostering significant and meaningful civic engagement.

Recommendations

1.Behavioral Interventions

- Establish "phone-free zones" in workplaces, schools, and colleges.
- To raise awareness of interactions in the real world, conduct mindfulness and digital detox programs.

2.Parental and Educational Guidance

- Instruct parents on how to set an example of responsible phone use.
- To promote better social behaviors from a young age, incorporate empathy-focused education and digital responsibility into school curricula.

3.Clinical Practice

- Phubbing behaviors should be examined by mental health specialists as another aspect of expanded psychiatric assessment.
- Add phubbing behavior to modules of cognitive-behavior treatment (CBT), mainly for teenagers who struggles with social anxiety.

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PSYCHO-PATHOPHYSIOLOGY OF PHUBBING BEHAVIOR

Stimulating Factors

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Loneliness, Low Self-esteem, Poor impulse control, Social Learning from peers & Media, Excessive use of smartphones

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Neuropsychological Activation

Enhanced anxiety (Nomophobia), Reduced prefrontal cortex regulation, Dopamine release (Reward System), Habit formation, & Neural adaptation

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Behavioral Changes: Phubber

Ignoring the current company, Checking phone frequently, Avoiding in-person interactions, Reduced verbal & Nonverbal cues

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Observable Signs

Decreased eye contact, Social disengagement, Restlessness Without phone, Poor communication

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Results

Relationship issues, Decreased academic/Work productivity, Increased isolation, Short attention span

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Impact on Psychological Well-being

Depression, Anxiety, Stress, Low Self-worth, Disrupted sleep, Decreased social connectedness

S.N.	Author (Year)	Title of Study	Participants	Methods / Measurement	Results
1.	**Koileri (2025)**	The Psychology of Phubbing and Its Treatment	Not specified	Narrative literature review focusing on the psychological underpinnings of phubbing and its treatment. Sources included observational and experimental studies.	Identified key causes like low self-control, social media addiction, anxiety, and loneliness. Suggested treatment strategies include Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), digital detox programs, and mindfulness interventions.
2.	**Tufan et al. (2025)**	The Impact of Smartphone Addiction, Phubbing, and FoMO on Social Co-operation and Life Satisfaction	University students (18–25 years)	Quantitative cross-sectional study. Tools: Smartphone Addiction Scale, Phubbing Scale, Fear of Missing Out Scale, Social Cooperation and Life Satisfaction Inventory. Participants were university students.	Found a significant negative correlation between phubbing and both social cooperation and life satisfaction. Smartphone addiction and FoMO were strong mediators. Female students scored higher in phubbing.
3.	**Guerra Ayala et al. (2025)**	Nomophobia, Phubbing, and Deficient Sleep Patterns in College Students	College students in Latin America (18–24 years)	Cross-sectional survey using validated self-report instruments on phubbing, nomophobia, and sleep patterns (sleep duration, latency, disturbances). Sample: college students in Latin America.	Increased phubbing levels were linked with poor sleep quality (late sleeping, reduced sleep duration) and nomophobia. Gender differences were noted females reported more sleep disturbances related to device use.
4.	**Barbed-Castrejón et al. (2024)**	Prevalence of Phubbing in School and University	School & university students (12–25 years)	Cross-sectional online survey conducted in Spain among school and university	Phubbing prevalence was significantly higher among university students than school-aged adolescents. Social disconnection and

		Students in Spain		students. Used Phubbing and Smartphone Addiction scales.	classroom disruption were key concerns raised.
5.	**Al-Saggaf & Hogg (2024)**	Effect of Children's Phubbing on Parents' Psychological Well-being	Parents (30–55 years)	Moderated mediation analysis. Tools: Parental Well-being Scale, Child Phubbing Behavior Checklist, Emotional Resilience Scale.	Children's frequent phubbing negatively affected parents' psychological well-being, especially for those with lower emotional resilience. Parental feelings of rejection and frustration were high.
6.	**Garrido et al. (2024)**	Phubbing and Its Impact on Individual's Psychological Well-being	General population (18–40 years)	Cross-sectional design. Tools: Phubbing Scale, WHO-5 Well-Being Index, Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21). Participants were recruited via an online survey.	Higher phubbing levels predicted lower well-being and higher depression, anxiety, and stress scores. Younger adults and female participants showed more phubbing-related suffering.
7.	**Tater & John (2024)**	Effects of Smartphone Addiction on Physical and Mental Well-being of Indian Students	Indian college students (17–24 years)	Mixed methods study. Phase 1: Surveys using the Smartphone Addiction Scale and Self-rated Health Inventory. Phase 2: Focus group discussions. Sample: Indian college students.	Identified direct impact of smartphone overuse and phubbing on mental fatigue, sleep disturbances, stress, and academic decline. Focus groups revealed behavioral patterns like device-checking compulsions.
8.	**Yahya et al. (2024)**	Determinants of Phubbing Among Youth: A Systematic Literature Review	Youth sample across studies (13–25 years)	Systematic literature review of 34 peer-reviewed articles published between 2018–2023. Reviewed databases: Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science.	Key determinants of phubbing included low self-regulation, FoMO, social anxiety, loneliness, and internet dependency. Most studies emphasized phubbing's role in deteriorating interpersonal relationships.

9.	Talan et al. (2023)	Smartphone Addiction, Social Media, and FoMO's Impact on Phubbing	University students (18–25 years)	Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) on 500 university students. Used Smartphone Addiction Scale, Social Media Addiction Scale, FoMO Scale, and Phubbing Behavior Inventory.	FoMO and social media addiction strongly predicted phubbing. The SEM model explained 78% of the variance in phubbing behavior. Gender and internet usage time moderated the relationship.
10.	Purwar et al. (2023)	Phubbing and Its Determinants Among Medical College Students	Medical college students (18–28 years)	Cross-sectional study. Used a pre-tested, semi-structured questionnaire including socio-demographics, smartphone use habits, and a Phubbing Behavior Checklist.	High rates of phubbing among medical students. Reported interference with academic focus, reduced peer engagement, and increased stress. Over 70% admitted to checking phones during lectures.
11.	Kartikasari et al. (2023)	Students' Phubbing Behavior: A Multicultural Counseling Review	Indonesian students (literature-based) - Adolescents & young adults	Review of multicultural counseling interventions related to technology addiction and phubbing. Sources drawn from Indonesian academic literature.	Suggested culturally tailored counseling strategies, including peer-group interventions and value-based counseling. Emphasized integration of religious and community values in the digital discipline.
12..	Al-Saggaf (2023)	Does Being Phubbed Affect Psychological Well-being?	Young adults (18-30 years)	Mediation model tested using Self-Esteem Scale, Relationship Satisfaction Scale, UCLA Loneliness Scale, and Perceived Phubbing Questionnaire.	Being phubbed by friends increased loneliness, decreased self-esteem and relationship satisfaction, ultimately lowering psychological well-being. Females reported greater emotional impact.

13.	Safdar Bajwa et al. (2023)	Smartphone Addiction and Phubbing Among University Students	Malaysian university students (18-30 years)	Moderated mediation model using Phubbing Scale, Smartphone Addiction Scale, FoMO Scale, Loneliness Inventory, and Social Comparison Questionnaire. Sample: university students.	Smartphone addiction was a direct predictor of phubbing. FoMO and loneliness acted as mediators, while social comparison moderated the relationship. Digital self-worth issues were evident.
14.	Maftei & Măirean (2023)	Put Your Phone Down! Perceived Phubbing, Life Satisfaction, and Psychological Distress	Adults (18-35 years)	Cross-sectional study. Used Perceived Phubbing Scale, Life Satisfaction Scale (SWLS), Kessler Psychological Distress Scale, and Loneliness Inventory.	Loneliness mediated the negative impact of perceived phubbing on life satisfaction and mental health. Participants who often felt phubbed showed higher levels of psychological distress.
15.	Bulut & Nazir (2020)	Phubbing Phenomenon: A Wildfire Invading Communication	General audience (conceptual paper)	Narrative literature review on emerging trends in digital communication and behavioral psychology literature.	Defined phubbing as a modern social disruption. Argued that phubbing damages face-to-face communication, encourages isolation, and may lead to long-term psychological effects like alienation.
16.	Ivanova et al. (2020)	Mobile Phone Addiction, Phubbing, and Depression Among Men and Women: A Moderated Mediation Analysis	The general population from Poland and Ukraine (18-45 years)	Cross-sectional study; Mobile Phone Addiction Index (MPAI), Phubbing Scale, Depression Inventory (CES-D); mediation and moderation analyses	Found that mobile phone addiction predicted depression through phubbing. Gender moderated the relationship: stronger effects observed in women. Emphasized the indirect path from addiction to depression via phubbing.

IDENTIFICATION OF STUDIES THROUGH DATABASE

IDENTIFICATION

Records identified through database searching: **n = 8125**
PubMed: 1800
Scopus: 2100
Google Scholar: 3200
ResearchGate: 1025

Duplicate studies removed
N= 3313

SCREENING

Records screened (titles and abstracts): **n = 4812**
Records excluded: **n = 4700**
Full-text articles assessed for eligibility: **n = 112**

Studies excluded not related to purpose:
n= 96
Not peer-reviewed: 35
Not focused on psychological outcomes: 42
Incomplete or irrelevant data: 20

INCLUDED

Studies included in qualitative synthesis: **n = 16**

SCREENING FLOW CHART