BEHAVIOUR ADDICTION TOWARDS MOBILE PHONES: AN EMERGING PROBLEM

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ABSTRACT

Behavioural addiction towards mobile phones is now termed as Nomophobia. Nomophobia is an emerging behavioural addiction among student populations, mainly undergraduates. It is manifested as symptoms of psychological and physical dependency. Nomophobia is the fear of being out of mobile phone contact. The term, an abbreviation for "no mobile-phone phobia", was coined during a study by the UK Post Office who commissioned a UK-based research organisation to look at anxieties suffered by mobile phone users. The study found that nearly 53% 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".

KEYWORDS

Mobile Phone, Nomophobia, Addiction.


INTRODUCTION: As a coin has two faces, similarly mobile phones have both merits and demerits. Symptoms caused such as headache, earache, blurring of vision by the radiation of mobile phones are one of the most argued problems. Other symptoms may include concentration difficulties, fatigue, dizziness, facial dermatitis, frustration, insomnia and musculoskeletal symptoms due to intensive texting. Also, electromagnetic radiations have been thought to affect the sleep electroencephalogram and melatonin production. Authors have also described disorders like textaphenias (Thinking that they have heard a message come in or felt the device vibrate when it actually has not), post-traumatic text disorder (Physical and mental injuries related to texting) and binge texting (Sending multiple texts to feel good about themselves and to attract responses). Studies suggest that majority of the mobile addicts are teenagers, who are shy and have low self-esteem. Teenagers are engaged on their mobile phones all the time on phone calls, using SMS text messages, internet surfing, using social media, playing games etc. In the past decade, there is emergence of a particular type of teen or child: the techno-trapped. These young people carry themselves differently than their peers, often fidgeting, making less effort to engage face-to-face with other people and seeming less comfortable in their bodies. This seems to be linked to excessive use of mobile phones.

A study from United Kingdom on 2163 people revealed that 53% of the subjects tend to be anxious when they lose their mobile phone, run out of battery or credit or have no network coverage. The study found that about 50% of men and 40% of women suffer from the phobia, and an additional 9% feel stressed when their mobile phones are off. About 55% of those surveyed cited keeping in touch with friends or family as the main reason that they got anxious when they could not use their mobile phones.

A recent prospective study showed that at 1 year of follow-up, increased mobile phone use is associated with symptoms of depression in subjects of either gender and increased sleep disturbances in men. Another recent study from Japan, involving 94,777 adolescents showed that use of mobile phone for calling and for sending text messages after lights out was associated with sleep disturbances in the form of short sleep duration; subjective poor sleep quality, excessive daytime sleepiness and symptoms of insomnia.

A preliminary survey done in India says that a large proportion of young adults in India are using mobile phones excessively. About one-third of the subjects fulfil ICD-10 criteria of dependence. Further the excessive use is associated with certain features suggestive of psychiatric morbidity, which may be a cause or effect of excessive mobile phone use. The excessive use of mobile phone in dependence pattern is associated with significantly higher negative psychosocial consequences.

The above studies describe Nomophobia as an emerging problem of the modern era. Multicentre studies are required to assess the real problem and thereby take appropriate steps to tackle the growing problem.

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