

# Nomophobia: Impact on Emotions, Psychological Distress and Subjective Well-Being Among Young Adults

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## Abstract

Cell phones have become a fundamental piece of our lives. India stands in second place with the highest number of smartphone users. Most of the users are young adults. Losing their smartphone or mobile data connection can make them miserable. This condition leads to nomophobia (NO-Mobile phone-PHOBIA). The present study investigates the effects of nomophobia on positive and negative emotions, psychological distress, and subjective well-being among young adults. A total sample of 72 (36 females & 36 males) aged 18 to 25 were taken. Standardized scales were used to measure nomophobia, positive/negative emotions, psychological distress, and subjective well-being. The results show no significant differences in the level of nomophobia, positive emotions, negative emotions, psychological distress, and subjective well-being across gender. However, nomophobia and positive emotion positively correlates; nomophobia and psychological distress negatively correlates, and psychological distress negatively correlates with positive emotions. Thus, it is necessary to endorse governing rules, awareness about problematic smartphone use, and educate young adults about healthy virtual equipment use for overall well-being.

**Keywords:** *Nomophobia, Emotions, Psychological Distress, Subjective Well-Being, Young Adults*

## Introduction

"HOME is where the heart is, but today, the PHONE is where the Heart is!!!" Rachitha Cabral

In 1994, IBM launched the first smartphone globally; everyone was excited and happy because we get a device that connects us with others, facilitates socialization, performs inquires, discovers new worlds, finds new knowledge, and completes work tasks. But now, it became a problematic device for us, especially young adults who are more engaged in it. Studies show that we are now becoming addicted to this & due to addiction, this directly affected our physical and mental well-being (Mehrnaz et al., 2018).

People use cell phones extensively, especially young people in developing countries (Biglu et al., 2016). According to census 2011, around 229 million people are youth in India. A substantial number of young adults use cell phones excessively (Basu et al., 2012).

Nomophobia can be harmful to a person's health as well as his or her social life. The fact that it's a phobia makes it even worse. In addition, the tremendous global growth in mobile connections has made us reliant on mobile to stay in touch with our loved ones 24 hours.

Emotions are available on practically all occasions in our lives. Emotions are feelings of pleasure in case of positive emotions; displeasure in case of negative emotions (Barrett et al., 2007). The mobile phone capabilities facilitate the creation of positive and negative emotions.

Individuals who need to feel happy or healthier may see their cell phones to solve their psychological distress and spend more time using them to deal with their present condition. Mobile phone and psychological distress are positively correlated. (Lian et al., 2021)

People who have difficulty establishing healthy social relationships in real life are more willing to meet these needs in a virtual environment. Research reported that to achieve a high level of life satisfaction and often experience positive emotions, one needs to establish good relationships with others (Çağan et al., 2014).

## **Nomophobia**

Nomophobia is a mental condition where individuals have a vast dread of being separated from their smartphones. According to King et al., (2014) “nomophobia is the modern fear of being unable to communicate through mobile phone or the Internet.”

The extreme cell phone use is one of the reason of relationship conflict. Robert (2020) speculated that nearly half of the adults reported that they were ignored by their partners using mobile phones.

In their study by Kaviani et al. (2020), the deliberate use of cell phones in dangerous or prohibited circumstances, basically during car driving, is more hazardous for passers-by.

In their study, Sharma et al. (2019) stated that people show anxiety or significant irritability if the cell phone is forbidden or not accessible.

Veerapu et al. (2019), in their study, reported that frequent and constant checking of the cell phone in every short period causation insomnia and sleep disturbance.

## **Emotions**

Scherer (2005) defined emotion as the "response to the evaluation of external or internal stimulus events related to the main focus of the organism. The state of all or most of the subsystems of the five organisms undergoes interrelated and synchronized changes."

Robbins & Judge (2013) stated that "emotions are extreme feelings which are directed at someone (person) or something (object)."

Hoffner et al. (2016) conducted a study on 272 young adult cell phone users and reported that most participants said negative emotions rather than positive emotions. They reported negative emotions when they lose their connection with others.

Fu et al. (2020), in their study on 350 college students, reported that positive emotion is negatively correlated with cell phone addiction, and negative emotions are positively correlated with cell phone addiction.

## **Psychological Distress**

Lerutla (2000) characterized psychological distress as "the enthusiastic condition that one feels when it is important to adapt to disrupting, disappointing, or unsafe circumstances."

Chalfant et al. (1990) define psychological distress as "a continuous feeling of irritability, unhappiness, nervousness and problematic relationships."

Yildirim et al. (2015) reported in their study that people with nomophobia who were not able to use their cell phones would feel psychological distress.

Wang et al. (2014) conducted a study on 5051 adolescents and reported that adolescents who had been out of contact with their smartphones felt discomfort, nervousness, distress, or even attempts to suicide.

### **Subjective Well-Being**

Lucas, Diener, & Suh (1996) defined subjective well-being as the "high level of positive emotions and low level of negative emotions."

Schwartz & Strack (1999) defined "subjective well-being as the individual current evaluation of her happiness."

Chan (2013) reported that communication with the smartphone is positively correlated with subjective well-being, and passing time activities on the smartphone positively correlate with negative affect.

Gonçalves et al. (2020) conducted a study on 495 young adults. They reported that nomophobia and psychopathology are moderately positively correlated and conclude that smartphones play a significant role in people's well-being.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main aim is to study the effects of nomophobia on positive & negative emotions, psychological distress, and subjective well-being among young adults.

### **Hypothesis**

1. There will be no significant relation between nomophobia & positive & negative emotions.
2. There will be no significant relation between nomophobia & subjective well being
3. Nomophobia will be negatively correlated with psychological distress.
4. There will be no gender difference in Nomophobia, Positive & Negative emotions, psychological distress & subjective well-being.

## Methodology

### Sample

The study was conducted on 72 participants (36 male and 36 female) from Kurukshetra, Haryana. The sample for analysis consisted of young adults aged between 18 to 25 years.

### Measures

The standardized tools used for this study were:

- 1. Nomophobia Questionnaire (NMP-Q)**- NMP-Q designed by Yildirim & Correia (2015). It has 20 items. All items fall into four dimensions. These are not being able to communicate, losing connectedness, accessing information, and giving up convenience. Each item scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.
- 2. Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS-SF)**- PANAS was invented by Watson et al. (1988). PANAS is a 20 items scale, with ten positive and ten negative affective descriptors. Responses were scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Very slightly or not at all to extremely.
- 3. The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)**- K10 was developed by (Kessler et al., 2003). It consists of 10 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging all of the time so none of the time. The possible range scores 0-40, with a higher score indicating higher psychological distress.
- 4. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)**- The SWLS was developed by (Diener et al., 1985). It is a self-reported instrument that has five items. All items are on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

### Procedure

The participants were informed about the reason for the examination. Google forms were used to fill the questionnaires. The participants were mentioned to react sincerely and were guaranteed secrecy of their

reactions. Each participant was appreciated for their cooperation. Standardized scales were administered to all participants.

### Analysis of Data Results

N, Mean and Standard deviation data is shown in table1. Table 2 shows the correlation between nomophobia, positive emotions, negative emotions, psychological distress, subjective well-being, and Table 3 shows the effects of nomophobia, positive emotions, negative emotions, psychological distress, subjective well-being across gender.

**Table 1: showing N, Mean & SD of all variables**

	Gender	Nomophobia	Positive Emotions	Negative Emotions	Psychological Distress	Subjective Well-Being
N	Male	36	36	36	36	36
	Female	36	36	36	36	36
Mean	Male	80.9	32.5	21.6	26.1	23.4
	Female	78.0	32.2	20.9	26.2	25.5
Standard deviation	Male	32.4	10.7	9.57	8.64	5.43
	Female	29.2	9.62	7.69	8.76	6.06

**Table 2: showing correlations of all variables**

	Nomophobia	Positive Emotions	Negative Emotions	Psychological Distress	Subjective Well-Being
Nomophobia	—				
Positive Emotions	0.234 *	—			
Negative Emotions	0.105	0.116	—		
Psychological Distress	-0.325 **	-0.421 ***	0.231	—	
Subjective Well-Being	-0.114	0.072	-0.167	0.060	—

Note. \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

**Table 3: showing Independent T-Test**

	Group	N	Mean	SD	Statistics	df	P
Nomophobia	Male	36	80.9	32.37	0.3975	70.0	0.692
	Female	36	78.0	29.22			
Positive Emotions	Male	36	32.5	10.71	0.1042	70.0	0.917
	Female	36	32.2	9.62			
Negative Emotions	Male	36	21.6	9.57	0.2987	70.0	0.766
	Female	36	20.9	7.69			
Psychological Distress	Male	36	26.1	8.64	-0.0406	70.0	0.968
	Female	36	26.2	8.76			
Subjective Well-Being	Male	36	23.4	5.43	-1.5772	70.0	0.119
	Female	36	25.5	6.06			

### Discussion of Results

The results found out that there is a significant positive correlation between nomophobia and positive emotions ( $r = 0.234$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The results also found a significant negative correlation between nomophobia and psychological distress ( $r = -0.325$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Hence the hypothesis that there will be a negative correlation between nomophobia and psychological distress is accepted. Also, psychological distress showed a significant negative correlation with positive emotions ( $r = -0.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, we found no gender difference in nomophobia, positive & negative emotions, psychological distress and subjective well-being.

Results are supported by the previous study where mobile phone users feel positive while interacting through social media applications. They are sharing their positive emotions (Kanjo et al., 2017). Individuals use their mobile phones as a coping tool to escape from psychological distress such as depression and anxiety (Panova & Lleras 2016).

### Conclusion

The current research aimed to investigate the effects of nomophobia on positive & negative emotions, psychological distress, and subjective well-being among young adults. In this investigation, standardized scales were administered. To check the correlations and gender differences between the variables, Pearson correlation and t-test were analyzed.

Study major finding pointed out that there is a significant positive correlation between nomophobia and positive emotions, a significant negative correlation between nomophobia and psychological distress and psychological distress showed significant negative correlation with positive emotions.

The smartphone is a device that is prevalent in young adults rapidly. This study reveals the impact of nomophobia on emotions and psychological distress among young adults. The proper use of leisure time should be taught to them. Therefore, more studies are needed to reveal the underlying causes, raise awareness, and develop intervention programs. A similar study can be recreated on a more extensive sample and at various settings.

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