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Nomophobia and Youth: Unpacking the Digital Dependence Crisis

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Abstract

Nowadays, mobile phones are at the heart of what adolescents and young adults do, enabling them to communicate, get an education and be entertained. Yet, always being connected has encouraged a condition known as nomophobia which is the fear of losing or being out of reach on our phones. This review considers how many people have nomophobia, how it affects their mental health, studies its impact on school or work and looks at how their behaviour changes, mostly in the Indian context and Uttar Pradesh. Using information from 40 scientific studies that were published from 2010 to 2025, the article investigates important roles played by personality, habits, gender and age. The results show that more people are having problems with nomophobia which impacts their mental wellbeing, school or work performance and ability to interact with others. In addition, the write-up goes over different strategies based on scientific evidence such as digital literacy, behavioural therapy, taking technology breaks and getting family members involved. The review shows why it is important for educators, parents, mental health professionals and policymakers to work together to help make youth's online world a healthier space.

Keywords: Nomophobia; Youth Mental Health; Behavioural Addiction; Intervention Strategies

1. Introduction

Nowadays, it is hard to think of daily life without smartphones which help people communicate, learn, have fun and manage daily affairs. Though technology has changed life in many ways, people overlooking phones have started suffering from 'nomophobia'—the fear of not having access to their phones¹. Because this condition is similar to not having mobile phone phobia, it was given the name Nomophobia¹. Among young people, using mobile technology so much makes them more likely to have nomophobia². Adolescents and young adults rely on mobile phones for making friends, developing who they are, looking after school matters and leisure³. Still, being dependent on devices too often can harm mental health, build weak social skills, affect schoolwork and make physical health worse⁴. This paper looks at the epidemiology, mental health effects, causes and methods of preventing nomophobia in youngsters, hoping to fully illustrate digital dependence issues and give advice to educators, mental health experts and policy creators.



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2. Methods

Studies that connected nomophobia to young people were found through our organized search. Three main parts were included in the methodology that was created.

For this research, PubMed, Scopus, PsycINFO, Google Scholar and ScienceDirect were the main databases used.

The terms "nomophobia," "smartphone addiction," "mobile phone dependence," "young people," "adolescents," "their mental health," and "digital addiction" were looked up in the search.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Papers that were released during the years 2010–2025
- Articles that were produced in English
- Most journals publish articles checked by specialists
- Be mindful of those people who are between 12 and 25 years old

Exclusion Criteria:

- These studies are not subjected to peer review
- Researches that neglect youth voice
- Articles that do not use information from research

There were 176 pieces of material that were found early in the selection. A total of 82 research articles were picked from the huge dataset for close study after reviewing the titles and abstracts. 56 articles were included in the review because they were seen as solid and pertinent to the subject⁵.

3. Findings

Many people suffer from nomophobia today. The risk of nomophobia is growing among young people globally, yet Indian growth is particularly alarming because the number of smartphone users is increasing very fast. Study results show that 77% to 91% of people between the ages of 13 and 25 go through moderate to severe nomophobia⁶. Since over 600 million people in India use smartphones, it's clear that many users are young and therefore a very vulnerable age group⁷. Having nomophobia is more common among Indian young adults who live in cities, experience high academic pressure, spend a lot of time on social media and see changes in their lifestyle⁸. Studies carried out in places like Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore show that almost all college students have moderate to severe nomophobia⁹. As people use mobile phones for online lessons, entertainment, games and social media following COVID-19, the dependence has increased even more¹⁰.

Educational conditions in UP—the country's most populated state—are also very concerning. Though there isn't much state-wide data, results from Lucknow, Kanpur and Varanasi show that about 75% of students depend on their phones and around 40–50% show severe addiction¹¹. It is evident from these statistics that mental health support in urban and semi-urban areas is still not developed, despite the quick increase in internet access across these areas¹². People in Sitapur and similar places in UP rely on mobile phones to learn online because education has moved online to some extent. At the same time, this easy access to screens has allowed many people to see more videos, leading to greater chances of nomophobia¹³. It is noted by local colleges and schools that more students are feeling anxious, angry and unable to focus when they cannot use their phones or access the internet¹⁴.

3.1 Prevalence of Nomophobia

Many people suffer from Nomophobia today. The risk of nomophobia is growing among young people globally, yet Indian growth is particularly alarming because the number of smartphones is growing very



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3. Significances of Nomophobia

3.1. The number of people who have nomophobia.

A lot of individuals today are affected by this condition. Even though nomophobia is becoming more common among young people around the world, its increase in India is especially concerning, as the fast growth of smartphones there is causing even more concerns. According to the studies, between 77% and 91% of people between 13 and 25 have severe to moderate nomophobia⁵. A large number of young users are at risk since more than 600 million people in India have smartphones. Young adults from India, who live in cities, endure a lot of studying, spend long hours on social media and notice changes in their lifestyle, are more likely to experience nomophobia. A number of studies done in Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore reveal that nearly all college students struggle with nomophobia⁷. Due to using phones more for lessons, entertainment, games and social media after the pandemic, people have become too dependent on them²⁴.

Learning conditions in Uttar Pradesh are a cause for great concern due to the state's large population. Data from Lucknow, Kanpur and Varanasi reveals that most students in Uttar Pradesh depend on their phones, and sad though it is, a large number seem to be seriously addicted as well²⁵. It appears from these data that mental health care in these areas is not yet up to date, despite the fast spread of internet services. Students in Sitapur and similar places depend on their phones to study online as education goes online to a certain degree. At the same moment, it is easier for people to watch videos now, and this can lead to a higher risk of nomophobia²⁶. Most local colleges and schools have observed that more students become irritable, worried, and unable to pay attention when they cannot access or use their phones and the internet.

Various variables are causing more cases to appear in Uttar Pradesh. Since not all parents and educators are digitally literate, it is hard to identify bullying early on. Too much interaction on the Internet can make people lose understanding of healthy habits online. Most students do not have much opportunity to receive counselling at their schools. He/she wants to stay connected with friends through WhatsApp,



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Instagram and online games, but they have no privacy any longer. Similar to what is seen across India and the world; many youth in Uttar Pradesh are affected by nomophobia because of gaps in their socioeconomic background, online access and mental health resources²⁶. For this reason, it is essential to create planned awareness programs for colleges, introduce screening tools in schools and carry out research on this growing issue at the state level.

3.2 Effects on the Mind and the Emotions

Nomophobia causes youth to experience psychological and emotional issues. It has been demonstrated that using smartphones too much may lead to more anxiety, depression, stress, sleeping difficulties, and a lack of self-esteem^{27,28}. Sometimes when young people cannot access their phones, they might feel anxious, cross, have shifting moods and concentration problems. Similar symptoms in behavioural addiction show that nomophobia might need to be seen as a wider problem²⁹.

3.3 How it Affects Learning and Thinking

Commonly, smartphone overuse causes students to lose focus, miss out on taking part in classes, delay chores, and experience disrupted sleep which leads to poor results in school³⁰. Those who have severe nomophobia usually score poorly in tests, battle with deadlines, and say their desire to engage in traditional education has lowered³¹.

3.4 Changes in Social Habits

Because of nomophobia, people's social and behavioural interactions are affected. Many youth suffering from depression tend to choose online interactions rather than talking to people face to face³². As a result, their feelings aren't recognized, less empathy is possible, and there is more fighting among family members and classmates³³. As time passes, relying on social media reduces the ability to build and keep good relationships with other people which is important for growing up socially³⁴. Frequent social media or messaging checks promote dependence and it is hard to quit this behaviour without proper assistance³⁰.

3.5 What Leads to the Development of Nomophobia Among Young People

This condition, called nomophobia, is not independent from other issues. It is affected by several things.

Age and attitude

People's age, attitudes, and actions can make the youth more at risk. Many studies reveal that nomophobia is found more often in adolescents and young adults because they become very attached to digital devices as they build their identity. More women than men often complain about having a stronger fear of not having their phones. Maybe the reason lies in the fact that people are more emotionally involved in social interactions and are more likely to look for confirmation from their phones.³⁵

PersonalityTraits

There are certain personality traits that are often associated with having nomophobia. Being emotionally unstable and anxious usually leads younger people to rely a lot on their phones. Those who have low self-control often find it difficult to control their phone use, which leads to compulsive checking. It is found that extroverted people tend to have a form of nomophobia, since they interact often and now do so mostly online.²⁷

UsageStyle

The manner in which a person uses their mobile phone is the most important sign of nomophobia. Spending plenty of time on social media, gaming, or chatting apps puts adolescents at greater danger. The habit of always reaching for your phone right before bed and as soon as you wake up shows that you



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are psychologically dependent. Notifications, the fear of not knowing and seeing what others are doing increases the chance of becoming addicted ²⁷. Being aware of these risk factors helps you find groups that need help and plan methods for early digital health protection.

4. Discussion

Because mobile devices are so widespread now, they bring some advantages and some disadvantages. Although it gives young people incredible opportunities for being informed and connected, it also leads to dependence on the internet. The research continues to prove that nomophobia is a psychosocial issue, not simply a small behavioral habit. There are several reasons why this happens. When adolescents constantly see notifications on social media, their fear of not taking part becomes stronger and boredom becomes more difficult to handle²⁹. Moreover, using a mobile phone right away can help someone feel better and cope with loneliness, anxiety and in security²⁹.

There are issues within how education is provided that add to the trouble. Spending much time in front of screens online has become one result of COVID-19 education³⁶ and has mixed ways students use their phones for school and fun. Also, children tend to adopt similar behaviours with their phones as a result of their parents' phone habits³⁷. In spite of the facts, not many people are aware that nomophobia is a valid health problem. Even though health systems rarely handle it formally, the signs of problem gambling often relate to behavioural addiction³⁸.

5. Ways to Help Youth Face Nomophobia

Since nomophobia impacts people's thoughts and behaviour in many aspects of life, solutions should be applied when youth are young and made up of different initiatives. They ought to handle the main problems, instruct young people on staying safe online, and help them handle risks when they appear³⁹.

5.1 Digital literacy education

Using digital literacy in school and college courses will allow students to regulate their use of technology better. They ought to discuss how to use gadgets wisely, get to know different algorithms, browse the web safely, and determine if they are addicted to technology⁴⁰. Taking part in seminars and workshops can help young people decide what types of media are more suitable to them⁴¹.

5.2 The application of Behavioural Therapy

A good option for people severely affected by nomophobia is to treat them with Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) or digital detox counselling, as facing anxiety, sleeping issues, or failure at school may be very troubling⁴². CBT guides people to alter how they view their phone, contain their distressing feelings, and helps find solutions to problems⁴³. In particular situations, therapy sessions are held at school by a counsellor or by a specialist in mental health⁴⁴.

5.3 Adults are advised to be aware of their children's time online and make places in the house where computer use is not allowed.

Parents have a lot to do with shaping how young people behave on the internet. Having rules against devices at the dinner table, in rooms, or while studying will help the family make better use of technology⁴⁵. They make sure that individuals interact and concentrate properly. Involvement of parents in workshops helps them understand the dangers of online life and proper ways to monitor their children⁴⁶. Taking this action improves the way parents' guide their kids, allowing them to use technology healthily and safely⁴⁷.



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5.4 Being mindful and using less technology

Using mindfulness tools like deep breathing, meditation, and reflective writing can help young people develop better focus and reduce anxiety when they are without their devices⁴⁸. These practices promote emotional balance and self-awareness, making it easier to manage digital dependence⁴⁹. Participating in initiatives like "Digital Fasting Days" or "Unplug Challenges" allows youth to experience the benefits of disconnecting from technology⁵⁰. Such activities encourage healthier screen habits and foster long-term positive lifestyle choices, leading to improved mental well-being and stronger interpersonal connections⁵¹.

5.5 Helping students interact socially and stay physically fit

Young people should be encouraged to engage in physical activities, creative pursuits, or sports rather than spending excessive time on television or the Internet⁵². Such activities promote physical health, emotional well-being, and the development of essential life skills like teamwork, discipline, and creativity⁵³. Families and educational institutions play a vital role in helping young individuals discover their interests and talents⁵⁴. By providing guidance, opportunities, and support, they can inspire youth to lead balanced and fulfilling lives⁵⁵. Shifting focus from screens to real-life experiences fosters personal growth and builds healthier, more resilient individuals⁵⁶.

6. Conclusion

Nowadays, nomophobia is a major issue affecting many adolescents and young adults who are highly prone to its negative effects. The fact that this condition causes suffering, learning difficulties and social issues shows how quickly people involved should be helped. Since more technology is being used daily, telling apart healthy habits from habitual dependence is very important. Dealing with nomophobia involves cooperation among schools, families, doctors and governments. Labelling nomophobia as a real mental health issue enables people to handle its effects and help youth get the proper digital well-being.

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