

Prevalence of Nomophobia and Analysis of Its Contributing Factors among Higher Education Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to assess nomophobia (NMP), a condition of fear of being without a mobile phone, among college students who are the main users of mobile phones. It is observed that students try to explore the features and applications of a new invention and feel the need to stay connected with their peers constantly, leading to addiction. Data from 200 college students were collected using Nomophobia Questionnaire (NMP-Q). This study showed that 12% of the participants had a mild level of NMP, 48% had a moderate level of NMP, and 40% had severe NMP. The male participants had comparatively higher NMP than female participants; postgraduate (PG) students had comparatively higher NMP than undergraduate (UG) students; Medical students had higher NMP; and other Science students had the lowest NMP. *t*-test revealed no significant difference in NMP between male and female participants ($t = 1.33, p > 0.05$). However, there was a significant difference in NMP between UG and PG students ($t = -2.667, p < 0.01$). Analysis of variance test revealed no significant difference in NMP among Arts, Engineering, Medical, and Science students ($F = 0.187, p > 0.05$). Pearson's correlation coefficient of age and NMP showed a strong significant positive relationship between age and NMP of the students ($r = 0.227, p < 0.01$). These findings suggest that there is a need for innovative solutions to address the mental health challenges faced by college students due to excessive smartphone use. Educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers can use these findings to develop effective interventions and programs to address NMP and its impact on mental health.

Keywords: Anxiety, College students, Higher education, Nomophobia, Smartphone addiction.

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INTRODUCTION

In the present day, it is common for young people to possess or have access to a smartphone with Internet connectivity. Smartphones are attractive and advanced, providing a plethora of digital information, features, and entertainment. However, there is growing concern about the psychological challenges faced by many young people, namely "nomophobia (NMP)." Nomophobia is a term derived from the phrase "no mobile phone phobia" and describes the anxiety or fear associated with being disconnected from one's mobile phone.¹ The modern era has given rise to a phobia characterized by an intense sense of anxiety or unease when an individual is unable to utilize their smartphone or avail themselves of its services.²

People who display nomophobic tendencies experience anxiety in situations where they have forgotten their mobile phones, have a low battery charge, or lack network coverage. As a result, this heightened sense of anxiety can negatively impact their ability to concentrate and carry out their daily tasks.³ Many individuals who experience NMP also report experiencing "rinxity" or "Phantom vibration syndrome," which refers to a false sensation of their mobile phones ringing. This condition has been shown to have negative effects on the mental well-being of mobile phone users. Owing to the severity of the impact, there have been proposals to include NMP in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition.⁴

The symptoms of NMP can also be attributed to preexisting mental disorders such as social phobia, social anxiety disorder, social anxiety, and panic disorder.⁵ Nomophobia can have detrimental effects on an individual's mental health and social relationships, causing them to be physically present but mentally

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absent due to their dependence on their mobile phones. The urge to constantly check and answer calls or messages can also cause work-related problems, as it can diminish attention and focus, leading to decreased work performance, longer working hours, and increased stress levels, which can ultimately impair mental health over time.⁶ Studies have demonstrated that technology use can improve multitasking abilities, enhance learning and cognitive processing, foster intellectual development, and enhance verbal or visuospatial performance, wellness, and quick decision-making skills. However, it can also have negative effects, such as increasing narcissism, diminishing cognitive capacity and intelligence, impairing memory and concentration, and delaying the development of effective strategies for organizing and retaining information.⁷ Despite the negative effects of technology use, during the COVID-19 pandemic, people found it helpful in staying connected with others and maintaining their physical and mental

well-being. However, excessive use of technology during this time also had a detrimental impact on their relationships.⁸

PREVALENCE OF NMP

Research has shown that college students are particularly susceptible to NMP,^{9–11} with rates varying between 18.5 and 73%. The prevalence of this condition can be influenced by a variety of factors including age, gender, self-image, self-esteem, self-efficacy, impulsivity, and extroversion.¹² People who suffer from NMP may experience uneasiness when switching off their mobile phones or when they are separated from them, even at night. They might also carry additional devices such as chargers, batteries, or extra phones as a preventive measure in case of battery drain, lost connectivity, or phone loss.⁹

Studies have indicated that a significant proportion of individuals experiencing NMP utilize their smartphones to watch videos on platforms such as YouTube or WhatsApp to help them sleep. Additionally, a considerable percentage of these individuals keep their phones within close proximity, with roughly 72% unable to distance themselves from their devices by more than 5 feet.¹³ The prevalence of NMP seems to be comparable across both developed and developing countries, with estimates ranging from 77 to 99%. Young adults seem to be particularly susceptible to experiencing NMP.¹³

Compared with other subpopulations, college students tend to be highly proficient in using smartphones¹⁴ and rely on them for even the simplest daily tasks.¹⁵ They spend a significant amount of time using their devices and tend to excessively use them for a variety of purposes, such as watching the news, staying socially connected, completing academic tasks, playing games, shopping, and searching for information.¹⁶ Among the various smartphone applications, search engines like Google and social media platforms are the most commonly used tools for obtaining information, staying socially connected, completing academic work, and entertainment purposes.¹⁷

According to a study, college students are more susceptible to NMP than working professionals, and 100% of smartphone owners exhibit some degree of NMP.¹⁸ The study also found that NMP is linked to the fear of missing out as many young people build their social lives and identities around their smartphone use, seeking external validation and recognition from others. However, the study also revealed that NMP tends to decrease with age, while the frequency of smartphone usage has the opposite effect, with higher usage frequency being associated with increased levels of NMP.

According to the findings, almost all of the students surveyed (99.33%) experienced NMP, with the majority exhibiting a moderate level of severity. Although those who had severe NMP had lower academic performance, the correlation between NMP and academic performance did not demonstrate statistical significance ($p = 0.706$).¹⁹ Similarly, the study revealed that there was a negative association between Nomophobia Scale (NMPS) and students' academic performance, but there was no notable distinction between NMP scores ($p = 0.152$).²⁰

Given the widespread use and reliance on smartphones, it is plausible to assume that NMP is a prevalent issue in the society. While the literature on NMP is relatively new, a significant number of studies have confirmed this assumption. This is particularly relevant for higher education students, who will be future teachers and role models for future generations. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the prevalence of NMP and examine its underlying factors among higher education students.

OBJECTIVES

- To study the prevalence of NMP among college students
- To study the gender differences in NMP among college students
- To compare the NMP among college students of different educational levels (undergraduate, UG and postgraduate, PG)
- To compare the NMP among college students of different disciplines (Science, Arts, Engineering, and Medical)
- To study the relationships between NMP and the duration of smartphone ownership

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample

Purposive sampling was used to collect the sample from 200 college-going students from different colleges of Delhi-NCR. Data were collected with the help of Google Forms distributed through WhatsApp and e-mail.

Tools

Nomophobia Scale: To obtain information on NMP, the investigators used the Nomophobia Questionnaire (NMP-Q), which was created by Yildirim and Correia. The NMP-Q is composed of 20 items that were evaluated by the participants on a 7-point Likert scale. This survey gauges four aspects of NMP and produces an aggregate score that indicates a person's general degree of NMP. The total score of the NMP-Q ranges from 20 to 140, with greater scores indicating more pronounced levels of NMP.

Statistical Techniques

Statistical techniques such as mean, standard deviation (SD), *t*-test, and Pearson's correlation were utilized for the analysis. Continuous variables were expressed as mean (\pm SD), while categorical variables were presented as numbers (%). Pearson's correlation was used to determine the correlation between continuous variables, and *t*-test was used to compare the mean scores between two groups. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare mean scores between more than two groups. The significance level was set at *p*-value of less than 0.05.

RESULTS

The results of this study have been presented using tables and graphs and discussed under various headings like demographic characteristics of the participants, mean score, frequency distribution and descriptive analysis of NMP, and the relationship between the variables.

Table 1 presents the results of the demographic characteristics of the participants, like gender, education, area of study, and duration of smartphone ownership.

The mean age of the participants was 22.82 (SD = 3.14) years (**Table 2**).

Gender: Among the participants ($N = 200$), 61% ($n = 122$) were female and 39% ($n = 78$) were male.

Education: Around 52% ($n = 104$) of the participants were UG students, and 48% ($n = 96$) were PG students.

Area of study: A total of 56.5% ($n = 113$) of students were pursuing arts-related courses, 12% ($n = 24$) were pursuing engineering, 17%

($n = 34$) were medical students, and the rest 14.5% ($n = 29$) students were pursuing other science-related courses.

Duration of smartphone ownership: Approximately 3.5% ($n = 7$) of students were using smartphones for less than 1 year, 17.5% ($n = 35$) students were using smartphones for 1–2 years, 21% ($n = 42$) students were using smartphones from 2 to 3 years, 18.5% ($n = 37$) students were using smartphones from 3 to 4 years, 14% ($n = 28$) students were using smartphones from 4 to 5 years, and 25.5% ($n = 51$) students were using a smartphone from 5 years or more than 5 years.

Frequency Distribution of Levels of NMP among Participants

The results of the frequency distribution of NMP among the participants are presented in Table 3.

Results revealed that out of the 200 participants, 12% ($n = 24$) participants had a mild level of NMP, 48% ($n = 96$) participants had a moderate level of NMP, and 40% ($n = 80$) had severe NMP. The result is visualized using the graph in Figure 1.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the participants

	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	122	61.0
Male	78	39.0
Currently pursuing		
PG	96	48.0
UG	104	52.0
Area of study		
Arts	113	56.5
Engineering	24	12.0
Medical	34	17.0
Science	29	14.5
Duration of smartphone ownership (years)		
1–2	35	17.5
2–3	42	21.0
3–4	37	18.5
4–5	28	14.0
5 or more	51	25.5
Less than 1	7	3.5

Table 2: Mean score of age and NMP

	Age	Nomophobia
N (200)		
Mean	22.82	90.02
Std. deviation	3.143	24.520

Table 4: t-Test of NMP among male and female participants

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. deviation	df	t	p
Nomophobia	Male	78	92.90	23.74	198	1.33	0.185
	Female	122	88.18	24.92			

Descriptive Analysis of NMP among Male and Female Participants

Table 4 presents the study's findings, indicating that the mean score of NMP among male participants ($n = 78$) was 92.90 (SD = 23.74), while the mean score for female participants ($n = 122$) was 88.18 (SD = 24.92). The results suggest that male participants had a slightly higher level of NMP than female participants. The result is visualized using the graph in Figure 2. However, the t-test analysis showed that there was no significant difference in NMP between male and female participants ($t = 1.33, p > 0.05$).

Descriptive Analysis of NMP among UG and PG Students

Table 5 displays the outcomes indicating that the mean score of NMP for UG students ($n = 104$) was 85.64 (SD = 24.41) on the NMPS, while the mean score of PG students ($n = 96$) was 94.76 (SD = 24.76). This finding suggests that PG students had a higher level of NMP than UG students. The result is visualized using the graph in Figure 3. A t-test indicated a statistically significant difference in NMP between UG and PG students ($t = -2.667, p < 0.01$).

Table 3: Frequency distribution of levels of NMP among participants

Levels of nomophobia	Frequency (N)	Percentage
Mild	24	12.0
Moderate	96	48.0
Severe	80	40.0
Total	200	100.0

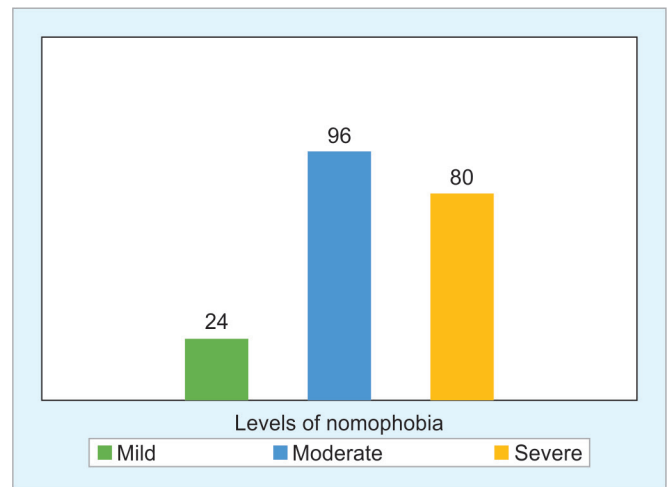


Fig. 1: Frequency distribution of levels of NMP among participants

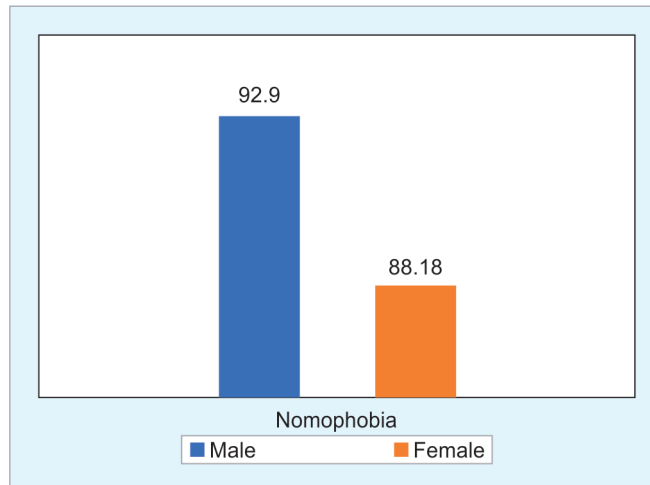


Fig. 2: Mean difference in NMP among male and female participants

Table 5: t-Test of NMP among UG and PG students

	Currently pursuing	N	Mean	Std. deviation	df	t	p
Nomophobia	UG	104	85.64	24.41	198	-2.667	0.008
	PG	96	94.76	23.86			

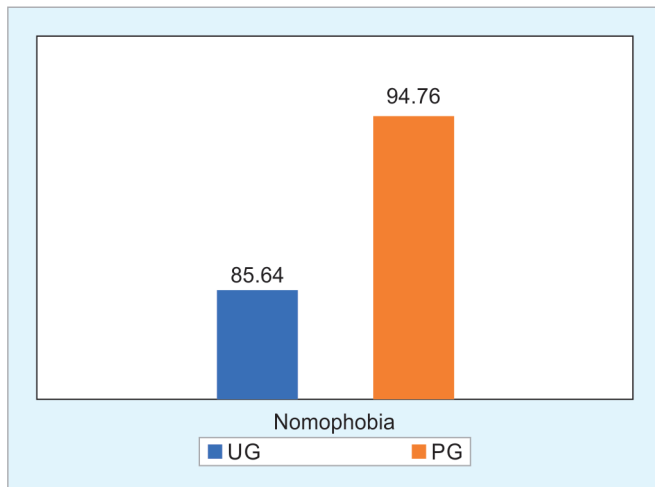


Fig. 3: Mean difference in NMP among UG and PG students

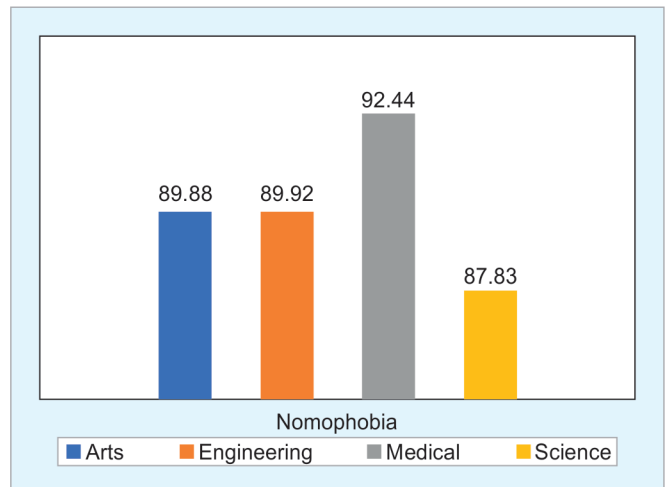


Fig. 4: Mean difference in NMP based on area of study of participants

Table 6: Analysis of variance of NMP based on the area of study

Area of study	N	Mean	Std. deviation	df	F	p
Nomophobia						
Arts	113	89.88	24.648	196	0.187	0.905
Engineering	24	89.92	28.676			
Medical	34	92.44	22.644			
Science	29	87.83	23.472			

the mean score of Engineering students ($n = 24$) was 89.92 (SD = 28.67), the mean score of Medical students ($n = 34$) was 92.44 (SD = 22.64), and the mean score of Science students ($n = 29$) was 87.83 (SD = 23.47). The result is visualized using the graph in Figure 4. This indicates that Medical students had higher NMP and other Science students had the lowest NMP. Analysis of variance revealed no significant difference in NMP among Arts, Engineering, Medical, and Science students ($F = 0.187, p > 0.05$).

Descriptive Analysis of NMP Based on the Area of Study of the Students

The analysis of the NMP score (Table 6) showed that the mean score of Arts students ($n = 113$) was 89.88 (SD = 24.64),

Relationships between Age, Duration of Smartphone Ownership and NMP

The results of Pearson's correlation coefficient (Table 7) showed a strong significant positive relationship between age and NMP of the students ($r = 0.227, p < 0.01$). This means there is an increase in NMP

Table 7: Pearson's correlation coefficient

	1	2	3
1. Age	1	–	–
2. Duration of smartphone ownership	0.340**	1	–
3. Nomophobia	0.227**	–0.064	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

with an increase in the age of the students. However, no significant relationship was seen between the duration of smartphone ownership and NMP among students ($r = -0.064, p > 0.05$).

DISCUSSION

The main focus of this study was to examine NMP among college students. The analysis of the student demographics revealed that out of the total participants ($N = 200$), 61% ($n = 122$) were female and 39% ($n = 78$) were male. Additionally, 52% ($n = 104$) of the participants were UGs, and 48% ($n = 96$) were PGs. Furthermore, 56.5% ($n = 113$) of the students were pursuing Arts-related courses, 12% ($n = 24$) were pursuing engineering, 17% ($n = 34$) were medical students, and the remaining 14.5% ($n = 29$) were pursuing other Science-related courses. In terms of smartphone usage, 3.5% ($n = 7$) of students were using smartphones for less than one year, 17.5% ($n = 35$) were using smartphones for 1–2 years, 21% ($n = 42$) were using smartphones for 2–3 years, 18.5% ($n = 37$) were using smartphones for 3–4 years, 14% ($n = 28$) were using smartphones for 4–5 years, and 25.5% ($n = 51$) were using smartphones for more than 5 years. The study by Than and Shan²¹ also reported moderate-to-severe levels of NMP among students at the Sagaing University of Education. Furthermore, Essel et al.²² found a high prevalence of NMP among university students in Ghana as the use of smartphones increased.

The descriptive analysis of NMP among male and female participants showed that the mean score of male participants ($n = 78$) was 92.90 ($SD = 23.74$), whereas the mean score of female participants ($n = 122$) was 88.18 ($SD = 24.92$) on the NMPS. Although male participants displayed slightly higher levels of NMP than female participants, the *t*-test results indicated that there was no significant difference between the two groups ($t = 1.33, p > 0.05$). Similarly, Than and Shan²¹ discovered no noteworthy disparity in NMP based on the gender of students. A study by Toda et al.²³ demonstrated that males mainly utilized mobile phones for making calls, while females used them for internet services.

The descriptive analysis of NMP among UG and PG students showed that the mean score of UG students ($n = 104$) was 85.64 ($SD = 24.41$), whereas the mean score of PG students ($n = 96$) was 94.76 ($SD = 24.76$) on the NMPS. This indicates that PG students had comparatively higher NMP than UG students. *t*-Test revealed a significant difference in NMP between UG and PG students ($t = -2.667, p < 0.01$).

The descriptive analysis of NMP based on the area of study of the students showed that the mean score of Arts students ($n = 113$) was 89.88 ($SD = 24.64$), the mean score of Engineering students ($n = 24$) was 89.92 ($SD = 28.67$), the mean score of Medical students ($n = 34$) was 92.44 ($SD = 22.64$), and the mean score of Science students ($n = 29$) was 87.83 ($SD = 23.47$). This indicates that Medical students had higher NMP and other Science students had the lowest NMP. Analysis of variance revealed no significant difference in NMP among Arts, Engineering, Medical, and Science students ($F = 0.187, p > 0.05$).

Pearson's correlation coefficient between age and NMP indicated a strong and significant positive relationship among students ($r = 0.227, p < 0.01$). However, no significant correlation was found between the duration of smartphone ownership and NMP among students ($r = -0.064, p > 0.05$). Setia and Tiwari¹⁸ reported that as individuals grow, their level of NMP tends to decrease, while their frequency of smartphone usage increases. In contrast, Yildirim et al.²⁴ found no significant differences in the levels of NMP between university students aged 18–20 years and those aged 20 years or older.

CONCLUSION

The study findings indicate that 12% of the participants exhibited mild NMP, 48% had a moderate level, and 40% had severe NMP. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that male participants had higher levels of NMP compared with female, and PG students exhibited higher levels of NMP than UG students. Additionally, Medical students had higher levels of NMP, while other Science-related students had the lowest levels. Although no significant difference was found between male and female participants ($t = 1.33, p > 0.05$), a significant difference in NMP was found between UG and PG students ($t = -2.667, p < 0.01$). The ANOVA test did not reveal any significant difference in NMP among students of Arts, Engineering, Medical, and Science courses ($F = 0.187, p > 0.05$). Interestingly, the analysis showed a strong significant positive correlation ($r = 0.227, p < 0.01$) between age and NMP among the participants. These findings underscore the need for interventions to help college students manage their smartphone usage and mitigate the negative consequences of NMP.

IMPLICATIONS

- The results of this study can provide valuable insights for faculty and administrators to develop preventive strategies aimed at addressing potential issues and enhancing the physical and academic well-being of students.
- The findings of this study may draw the attention of mental health professionals to the mental health challenges encountered by college students.
- This study will help convince college administrators to design special training programs that can help reduce NMP and enhance the well-being of the students.
- This study will help find innovative solutions to the mental health problems faced by college students due to excessive smartphone use, leading to NMP.

LIMITATIONS

This study has the following delimitations and limitations:

- The results of this study cannot be generalized as the sample size for the study covered only 200 college students.
- The study was confined to college students of Delhi-NCR.
- The data were collected online using Google Forms, hence the data collected cannot be trusted 100%.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

As it is not possible and practical to touch on every aspect of a problem, it is important to put forward some suggestions for further studies:

- The study can be conducted by taking a larger sample, including college students from other regions.
- Similar studies can be conducted by using different psychological scales.
- The role of the family environment in NMP can also be explored.
- The effects of NMP on academic achievement can also be explored in depth.

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