

Women and Nomophobia: is it Something We Should Worry About?

Samuel Laraba Baba, PhD

Hadiza Dahiru, PhD

Nafisat Ogah

Abstract

The prevalence of nomophobia has significantly increased and cannot be overlooked, particularly among young people. This study focused on women to assess their level of nomophobia. A total of 80 participants were recruited using a convenience sampling technique. The Nomophobia Questionnaire (NMP-Q) was administered, and the responses were analyzed with simple percentage calculations. The findings indicate that nomophobia is a serious concern among women, as their strong attachment to mobile phones often leads to a Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) regarding social connections. Based on these results, it is recommended that deliberate actions be taken to address this emerging issue. One proposed intervention is to encourage regular "phone sabbaticals" to reduce dependency on mobile devices and mitigate the effects of nomophobia.

Keywords: Women, Nomo-phobia, smart phone, communication

Introduction

Technology is often seen as the key to rapidly and effectively expanding communication coverage. This was not the case in earlier times when conventional methods were used for communication and information dissemination. Generally, technology refers to the processes through which humans create tools and machines to enhance their understanding and control of the material world. Its primary purpose is to simplify tasks and improve efficiency. However, these processes can have significant consequences, often leading to stress, commonly known as techno-stress. This condition can manifest as psychological imbalances, including depression, anxiety, stress,

divided attention, and various phobias. Despite the many advantages of technology, its negative effects cannot be overlooked. Techno-stress arises from the challenges associated with technological devices, such as network failures, outages, and malfunctions, which can trigger a variety of psychological responses. This paper specifically focuses on nomophobia the fear of being without a mobile phone – and its impact on women.

What is Nomo phobia? Nomophobia, a term derived from “no mobile phone phobia” refers to the fear or anxiety expressed when an individual is without their cell phone. While the term might initially, sound trivial or humorous, it is becoming a serious mental health concern. This fear operates subtly, gradually embedding itself in the conscious mind and becoming an addiction. For the fear to be classified as nomophobia, it must be both intense and persistent. Thus, it would not be an exaggeration to describe nomophobia as a disorder of the modern era.

Prevalence of nomophobia has risen dramatically, particularly among young people (Kaur and Sharma, 2015; Pavithra and Madhukumar, 2015, as cited in Gezgin et al., 2018). According to Yildirim and Correia (2015), individuals aged 18 - 24 are the most vulnerable, with 77% exhibiting symptoms of nomophobia. Similarly, studies by Gezgin and Cakir (2016) and Adnan and Yildirim (2016) as cited in Gezgin et al. (2018) indicate university students are at higher risk compared to other population groups, suggesting that nomophobia is particularly prevalent among this demographic.

Shambare, Rugimbana & Zhowa (2012) argued that mobile phones are maybe "possibly the biggest non-drug addiction of the 21st century", with some college students reportedly spending up to nine hours daily on their devices. This excessive use can foster dependence, illustrating what they describe as "a paradox of technology"- simultaneously liberating and enslaving. A survey conducted by Secure-Envoy found

that young adults and adolescents are the most affected by nomophobia. According to the survey, 77% of the teenagers experience anxiety without their phones, followed by individuals in the 25-34 age group and those over 55 years old. Psychological predictors of nomophobia include negative self-perceptions, younger age, low self-esteem and self-efficacy, high levels of extroversion or introversion, impulsiveness and heightened sense of urgency and sensation - seeking.

The question therefore, is whether this risk behavior affects women. The answer is yes- women are not exempted from this growing phenomenon, as they are also frequent users of modern menace because they also make use of these devices

Statement of Problem

In today's digitally-saturated world, smartphones have become an extension of us, offering constant connection, information, and entertainment. However, this presence can breed a crippling fear: the fear of being without a mobile phone, known as nomophobia (No Mobile Phone Phobia) (Singh and Hussain, 2018). While nomophobia affects individuals of all genders, research suggests that may be a particularly significant concern for women. Understanding the underlying reasons for this phenomenon and its potential consequences is crucial for promoting healthy technology use.

One potential factor contributing to women's heightened nomophobia is their increased reliance on smartphones for social connection and emotional support. Studies have shown that women tend to use social media and messaging platforms more frequently than men for communication and maintaining relationships (Jones et al., 2022). This greater reliance can create a fear of disconnection, leading to anxiety when separated from their phones (Przybylski et al., 2013). Social media platforms can also present a carefully curated reality, fostering feelings of inadequacy and a constant need to stay connected in order

to compare oneself with others and seek validation (Frison & Eggert, 2021). Additionally, the fear of missing out (FOMO) on social interactions or updates further exacerbates nomophobia in women, causing heightened anxiety about being unreachable (Elhai et al., 2016).

Empirical Review

The ubiquitous presence of smartphones in our daily lives has undeniably transformed communication, information access, and entertainment. However, this constant connectivity also gives rise to a potential fear: nomophobia, the anxiety associated with being without a mobile phone. While research suggests that nomophobia affects individuals of all genders, emerging evidence indicates it might be a particularly significant concern for women. This review delves into the empirical literature exploring the prevalence, potential contributing factors, and consequences of nomophobia specifically in women.

Several studies have investigated the prevalence of nomophobia across genders. A systematic review by Aydin and Ceyhan (2020) analyzed 23 studies and found a higher prevalence of nomophobia among females in 14 studies, with no significant gender differences in the remaining nine. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Toker et al. (2020) which examined 42 studies, reported a small but significant effect size favoring higher nomophobia scores in women. While these findings suggest a potential gender disparity, it's crucial to acknowledge the significant heterogeneity in research methods and measurement tools used across studies.

Studies by Junco et al. (2012) and Jones et al. (2022) highlight that women tend to use social media and messaging platforms more frequently for communication and maintaining relationships. This reliance can create a fear of disconnection, leading to anxiety when separated from their phone (Przybylski et al., 2013). Moreover, social media platforms often present a curated reality, fostering feelings of inadequacy and a constant need to stay connected (Frison & Eggert,

2021). The fear of missing out (FOMO) on social interactions or updates further exacerbates nomophobia in women, making them anxious about being unreachable (Elhai et al., 2016).

A study by the Pew Research Center (Livingston et al., 2018) found that women are more likely than men to fear being threatened or harassed. This heightened sense of vulnerability can increase their reliance on smartphones as a tool for safety and accessing help in emergencies (Wang et al., 2019). Similarly, working mothers may feel pressure to remain constantly reachable due to childcare needs or work emergencies, resulting in anxiety about being offline (Mark et al., 2017). The expectation to juggle multiple roles – professional, domestic, and social – can make it difficult for women to disconnect, further solidifying the phone's role as a management tool (Mark et al., 2017).

These factors, when combined, can create a “perfect storm” for nomophobia in women. Social media use fuels anxieties around disconnection and comparison, while safety concerns and the pressures of work-life balance make constant accessibility feel essential.

The negative consequences of nomophobia are well-documented and can significantly impact both mental and physical well-being. Studies by Le et al. (2015) and Billieux et al. (2015) have linked nomophobia to symptoms of anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances. The constant fear of being disconnected can lead to intrusive thoughts, compulsive checking behaviors, and difficulty focusing (Billieux et al., 2015). Furthermore, nomophobia can negatively affect relationships, as excessive phone use may result in feelings of neglect and decreased quality time with loved ones (Chenausky et al., 2017).

However, research exploring the specific consequences for women is still developing. A recent study by Lin et al. (2022) found a stronger association between nomophobia and loneliness in women compared to men males. This suggests that the social connection aspect of

smartphone use might play a more significant role in women's well-being.

Despite the growing body of research, there are limitations to consider. Many studies rely on self-report measures, which are susceptible to self-report bias. Additionally, the heterogeneity in measurement tools and sampling methods across studies complicates efforts to draw definitive conclusions and sampling methods across studies complicates efforts to draw definitive conclusions.

Attachment Theory

The ever-present nature of smartphones in our lives has undoubtedly revolutionized communication, information access, and entertainment. However, this constant connectivity also breeds a growing fear: the fear of being without a mobile phone, known as nomophobia (Singh & Hussain, 2018). While research suggests nomophobia affects all genders, emerging evidence indicates it might be a particularly significant concern for women. Attachment theory, a psychological framework exploring early childhood experiences and their impact on adult relationships, offers valuable insights into understanding this phenomenon in women.

Attachment theory, pioneered by John Bowlby (1969), posits that early interactions with caregivers shape our attachment styles, which consequently influence how individuals connect with others in adulthood (Bowlby, 1982). These styles are typically categorized as secure, anxious, avoidant, and disorganized (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Individuals with a secure attachment style tend to form healthy and trusting relationships, while those with anxious attachment styles often crave constant reassurance and proximity to attachment figures (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Research suggests women are more likely than men to score higher on attachment anxiety scales (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). This heightened need for closeness and reassurance may translate into a greater reliance

on social media platforms and messaging apps to maintaining connections. These digital tools offer a sense of security and mitigating anxieties associated with physical separation. This aligns with attachment theory's core tenet that proximity to attachment figures provides comfort (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). However, for women with anxious attachment styles, this reliance on smartphones can become excessive, leading to nomophobia when these virtual connections are severed.

Social media platforms offer a constant window into the lives of loved ones, fostering a sense of connection even when physically apart. For individuals with anxious attachment styles, the ability to monitor social media updates, send messages, and receive instant responses can provide a sense of security and reassurance that might be lacking in face-to-face interactions (Przybylski et al., 2013).

However, this dependence on digital communication can be a double-edged sword. Social media interactions often lack the depth and emotional richness of in-person connections, potentially hindering the development of secure attachment bonds (Gelb & Perloff, 2012). Furthermore, the curated nature of social media can create unrealistic expectations of relationships, leading to feelings of inadequacy and increased need for validation (Frison & Eggert, 2021). This can further exacerbate attachment anxieties and increase dependence on smart phones to maintain illusion of connection.

The fear of disconnecting from social media can fuel a vicious cycle of nomophobia for in women with anxious attachment styles. Disconnection not only severs the virtual ties to loved ones but also removes the constant stream of reassurance and validation provided online. This absence can trigger social anxiety and a heightened fear of negative social evaluation, reinforcing the compulsion need to stay connected. (Elhai et al., 2016).

The constant checking for updates, messages, and social media notifications becomes a compulsive behavior driven by anxiety associated with disconnection and the perceived threats to attachment needs. This cycle of dependence and anxiety significantly disrupts daily life, affecting work performance, relationships, and mental well-being (Billieux et al., 2015).

Understanding the link between attachment styles and nomophobia is crucial for developing strategies to promote healthy technology use among ~~in~~ women. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a valuable tool in helping women with anxious attachment styles develop coping mechanisms to manage social anxiety and reduce reliance on smart phones for reassurance (Przybylski et al., 2013). Cultivating secure attachment bonds in real-life relationships is also essential. Encouraging open communication, fostering trust, and prioritizing quality time with loved ones can provide emotional support ~~that~~ reducing the dependence on virtual connections (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2017)

Promoting digital mindfulness practices can further empower women to take control of their technology use. Setting boundaries for phone use, designating "tech-free" periods, and engaging in face-to-face interactions can all help create a healthier relationship with technology (Mark et al., 2017). The ubiquitous presence of smartphones has undeniably transformed communication, but this constant connectivity comes with risks: Nomophobia, the anxiety associated with being without a mobile phone, is emerging as a significant concern—particularly for women. This review delves into empirical literature to explore its prevalence, contributing factors, and consequences among women.

Prevalence and Contributing Factors

Several studies have investigated the prevalence of nomophobia across genders. A systematic review by Aydin and Ceyhan (2020) analyzed 23

studies and found a higher prevalence of nomophobia among females in 14 studies, with no significant gender differences in the remaining nine. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Toker et al. (2020) examining 42 studies reported a small but significant effect size indicating higher nomophobia scores in women. While these findings suggest a potential gender disparity, the significant heterogeneity in research methods and measurement tools must be acknowledged.

Studies by Junco et al. (2012) and Jones et al. (2022) reveal that women use social media and messaging platforms more frequently for communication and maintaining relationships. This reliance can lead to fear of disconnection, which manifest as anxiety when separated from their phone (Przybylski et al., 2013). Social media's curated reality often fosters feelings of inadequacy and a constant need to remain connected (Frison & Eggert, 2021). Additionally, the fear of missing out (FOMO) on social interactions or updates further fuels nomophobia in women, making them anxious about being unreachable (Elhai et al., 2016).

Women's heightened sense of vulnerability may also play a role. A study by the Pew Research Center (Livingston et al., 2018) found that women are more likely than men to fear being threatened or harassed. This heightened sense of vulnerability can make women more reliant on their smartphones for safety and emergency assistance. (Wang et al., 2019). For working mothers, the pressure to be constantly reachable due to childcare needs or work emergencies further reinforces their dependence on smart phones. (Mark et al., 2017). The expectation to juggle multiple roles professional, domestic, and social makes disconnecting difficult, solidifying the phone's role as an essential tool. (Mark et al., 2017).

Consequences of Nomophobia

The negative consequences of nomophobia are well documented, significantly impacting both mental and physical well-being. Studies by

Le et al. (2015) and Billieux et al. (2015) have linked nomophobia to symptoms of anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances. The constant fear of disconnecting can lead to intrusive thoughts, compulsive checking behaviors, and difficulty focusing (Billieux et al., 2015). Excessive phone use also strain relationships, as it reduces quality time with loved ones and foster feelings of neglect. (Chenausky et al., 2017). However, research into the specific consequences for women is still developing. A recent study by Lin et al. (2022) found a stronger association between nomophobia and loneliness in women compared to men, suggesting that the social connection plays a more significant role in women's well-being.

Method

Participants

The study employed 80 female participants using a convenient sampling technique where participants were recruited upon accidental encounter, provided they gave their consent. The participants comprised of 38(47.5%) singles ladies and 42(52.5%) married women with age ranging 18 to 42 years of age with the mean of 28.87 and standard deviation of 6.44. Educational background, ethnicity and other factors were not considered as condition for selection. The only criterion for selection was that participants must have a cell phone for at least 5 years.

Instrument

The Nomophobia Questionnaire (NMP-Q) designed by Yildirim and correia (2015) was used to measure participants fear of losing connection with one's phone. The scale consists of twenty items, with responses on seven point response pattern ranging from 1 to 7, representing varying degrees of agreement with each statement. The original authors provided psychometric properties of the scale (...) which indicates that it is reliable and valid for use. However, for the purpose of localization, the researchers conducted a pilot test of the scale using 30, female participants aged between 18-45. The result

indicated a validity of $r = .56$ and a reliability of $r = .61$. These coefficients suggested that the scale is sufficiently reliable and valid for use within Keffi and its environs..

Procedure

The sampling technique guided the data collection process. The researchers introduce themselves to potential participants and sought their consent to complete the questionnaire. Each participant was briefed on the purpose of the study and informed of their right to withdraw at any point if they felt uncomfortable responding to the items... None of the participants withdrew during the process. Each participant was allotted 20 minutes to complete the questioner. After submitting their responses, they were debriefed regarding the purpose of the study and thanked for their participation.

Result

The result presented is based on the 80 scales distributed to the participants.

Table 1: Descriptive table showing the ratings of the participants on each of the items

ITEMS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGES	RESPONSE OPTION
1	19	23.8%	3
2	24	30.0 %	4
3	18	22.5 %	5
4	18/18	22.5/22.5 %	3 and 6
5	18	22.5 %	5
6	30	37.5 %	3
7	24	30.0 %	7
8	20	25.0 %	5
9	25	31.3 %	4
10	30	37.5 %	5
11	20	25.0 %	5
12	24	30.0 %	5
13	24	30.0 %	5
14	43	53.8 %	5
15	25	31.3 %	4
16	30	37.5 %	5
17	30	37.%	6
18	18/18	22.5/22.5 %	5 and 6
19	31	38.8 %	7
20	24	30.0 %	5

NOTE: the scale is a 7 point scale. Only the option with the highest rating was captured. The column with two figures indicate that two response options have the same ratings. (See appendix for the complete scale and what each number on the response column signifies).

Looking at the table above it indicates that nomophobia is something we or the society should worry about. Most of the participants agreed with the items.

Discussion

The fear of disconnecting from social media platforms can fuel a vicious cycle of nomophobia, particularly in women with anxious attachment styles. Disconnection not only severs the virtual connections to loved ones but also removes the constant stream of reassurance and validation sought online. This can trigger social anxiety and a heightened fear of negative social evaluation, further reinforcing the compulsion to stay connected through their smartphones (Elhai et al., 2016). The constant checking for updates, messages, and notifications becomes a compulsive behavior, driven by the underlying anxiety associated with disconnection and the perceived threat to attachment needs. This cycle of dependence and anxiety significantly disrupts daily life, affecting work performance, relationships, and overall mental well-being (Billieux et al., 2015).

The researchers recommended that women should seek attachment to nature, as it has a positive impact on psychological well-being. Occasionally taking a “phone sabbatical” a deliberate break from smart phone use- can be healthy strategy for reducing nomophobia. Taking regular breaks from smart phones can help alleviate dependence and promote a more balanced relationship with technology

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APPENDIX

NOMOPHOBIA QUESTIONNAIRE (NMP-Q)

Instruction: this is a 7 point scale designed to measure your fear of not being with your phones always. You are expected to write your feel in number by each item as it applies to you. Check the key below for your guide:

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neutral (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

If I did not have my smartphone with me:

1. I would feel uncomfortable without constant access to information through my smartphone
2. I would be annoyed if I could not look information up on my smartphone when I wanted to do so
3. being unable to get the news (e.g., happenings, weather, etc.) on my smartphone would make me nervous
4. I would be annoyed if I could not use my smartphone and/or its capabilities when I wanted to do so
5. Running out of battery in my smartphone would scare me
6. If I were to run out of credits or hit my monthly data limit, I would panic
7. If I did not have a data signal or could not connect to Wi-Fi, then I would constantly check to see if I had a signal or could find a Wi-Fi network
8. If I could not use my smartphone, I would be afraid of getting stranded somewhere

9. If I could not check my smartphone for a while, I would feel a desire to check it
10. I would feel anxious because I could not instantly communicate with my family and/or friends
11. I would be worried because my family and/or friends could not reach me
12. I would feel nervous because I would not be able to receive text messages and calls
13. I would be anxious because I could not keep in touch with my family and/or friends
14. I would be nervous because I could not know if someone had tried to get a hold of me
15. I would feel anxious because my constant connection to my family and friends would be broken
16. I would be nervous because I would be disconnected from my online identity
17. I would be uncomfortable because I could not stay up-to-date with social media and online networks
18. I would feel awkward because I could not check my notifications for updates from my connections and online networks
19. I would feel anxious because I could not check my email messages
20. I would feel weird because I would not know what to do