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## Impact of Phubbing on Emotional Intimacy among Young Adults in a Relationship

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### Abstract:

*With the increasing use of smartphones, partner phubbing has emerged as a common relational behavior in romantic relationships, where individuals focus more on their devices than their partners during interaction (Roberts & David, 2016). Previous research has shown that these behaviors are associated with the feelings of rejection, reduced perceived attention and decreased relationship quality (Beukeboom et al, 2021). Yet, its direct influence on emotional closeness remains unclear among digitally adaptive young adults. The present study aimed at discerning the effect of partner phubbing on emotional intimacy among young adults in a romantic relationship. Data were collected from 107 participants (72 females and 35 males), aged between 20 to 35 years using purpose sampling. The scales administered were Emotional Intimacy Scale (Sinclair & Dowdy, 2005) and Partner Phubbing Scale (Roberts & David, 2016). A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine whether partner phubbing is negative predictor of emotional intimacy. The findings indicated that partner phubbing is a significant predictor of emotional intimacy with 18 % variance. Thus, these findings suggest that when partners use their phone in a way that ignores the other person, it clearly affects how close and emotionally connected they feel each other. Therefore, this study highlights the need for further research studies regarding smartphone engagement behaviour to better understand their long-term influence on romantic relationships. Hence, further research studies should focus on modification of digital habits among young adults that can improve emotional closeness in a romantic relationship.*

**Keywords:** Phubbing, Emotional Intimacy, Young Adults, Romantic Relationship

### Introduction:

In today's evolving world, smartphones have become an indispensable part of our daily life, often diverting attention away from those physically present. This is especially noticeable in romantic relationships, where partners may be absorbed in their devices, reducing opportunities for

meaningful connection and creating emotional distance (Ni et.al, 2025). This common behaviour among young adults motivated the present study, as it reflects a pressing issue in modern relationships.

The act of focusing on one's phone during face-to-face interactions is called phubbing (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). It is a portmanteau of "phone" and "snubbing" (Roberts & David, 2016). And in romantic contexts, it is termed partner phubbing (Pphubbing), where individuals prioritize their phones over communicating with their partner (Roberts & David, 2016). Given the pervasive presence of mobile phones, phubbing—particularly P-phubbing—has become almost unavoidable (Roberts & David, 2016). Emotional intimacy refers to the sense of closeness that encourages sharing personal thoughts and feelings, along with expectations of understanding and support (Sinclair & Dowdy, 2005).

According to various researches, there are several kinds of phubbing, such as: *Friend Phubbing*, this is also known as "Fphubbing", which denotes the act of engaging in phubbing within the context of interactions among friends (Sun & Wong, 2023). *Parental Phubbing*, is defined as the act of parents prioritising the mobile phone use instead of attending to their child during interactions (Zhang, Dong, Jiang et.al., 2023). This leads to feelings of neglect, emotional or behavioural issues in children like parents on phone at dinner not listening to their child (Li et.al, 2023). *Child or Adolescent Phubbing* refers to the behaviour where teenagers prioritize smartphone use over engaging with their parents or caregivers during interactions (Mulyaningrum & Kusumaningrum et.al, 2022). Workplace Phubbing, the most common kind of phubbing in a workplace is "Supervisor Phubbing" or "Boss Phubbing". "Supervisor Phubbing" refers to an employee's perception that their supervisor is distracted by their mobile phones (Langlais & Welch, 2025). For instance, Supervisor checking phones during face-to-face meetings has effects on rapport, trust, job satisfaction and perceived communication quality (Langlais & Welch, 2025). Another kind of phubbing which is common at workplace settings, is "Co-worker Phubbing" which means the act of ignoring colleagues by paying attention to one's phone (Martinsson et.al, 2025).

Intimacy refers to a sense of closeness, connectedness and connectedness experienced between individuals, characterised by trust, mutual disclosure and shared experiences (Sternberg, 1986). It encompasses multiple sub-types, including physical, intellectual/cognitive, experiential, emotional intimacy (Sun et.al, 2023). Emotional Intimacy, among these subtypes, is particularly critical in romantic relationships as it reflects the degree to which partners disclose emotions, provide empathy and feel understood by each other (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Thus, the recent researches have broadened this sub-type of intimacy by involving the components like-Self-Disclosure meaning sharing personal meanings, thoughts, fears or vulnerabilities. This is one of the most common sub-components in emotional intimacy (Sparrevohn & Rapee, 2009); Perceived Closeness/ Trust, which

refers to the feeling that one is close to the partner by feeling bonded and understood (Sinclair & Woody, 2005); Empathy/ Responsiveness, which refers to the partner's ability and willingness to be emotionally available and to respond to their partner in a supportive way (Niekerk & Schubert et.al, 2021); Mutual Sharing / Reciprocity, means where both the partners share their thoughts, feelings as well as vulnerabilities with each other (Carter & Jordan et.al, 2023). Such mutual sharing fosters deeper understanding, hopefulness, and a stronger emotional bond (Carter et.al, 2023).

Thus, Phubbing behaviour often interferes with the development and maintenance of emotional bonding between partners (Roberts & David, 2016). The study of Ni, Arhari & Roslan et.al (2025) studied the antecedents and consequences of Partner-Phubbing in a meta-analytic study (N=19000), where their results showed that Partner-Phubbing leads to relationship dissatisfaction, depleted romantic quality, depleted intimacy with depleted overall emotional closeness. Similarly, Frackowiak et al. (2023) reported that partner phubbing leads to heightened negative emotions, such as sadness and loneliness, which can erode emotional bonds between partners. Whereas, the study of Beukeboom & Pollmann (2021) shows that Partner-Phubbing is negatively linked to relationship dissatisfaction as findings reveal that partner-phubbing is the effect of feelings of exclusion, reduced partner responsiveness and lower intimacy rather than conflict of jealousy.

### **Purpose of the Study:**

Despite growing evidence that partner phubbing negatively affects emotional intimacy globally, there is a noticeable lack of studies examining this phenomenon in the Indian context. Given the widespread use of smartphones among young adults in India and the unique cultural emphasis on close interpersonal relationships, it is important to understand how partner phubbing influences emotional bonding in romantic relationships within this population. This gap motivated me to study this phenomenon in Indian context, aiming to explore the impact of partner phubbing on emotional intimacy among young Indian adults and provide insights relevant to contemporary relationship dynamics.

### **Methodology:**

To study the impact of phubbing on emotional intimacy among young adults in a relationship, employed purposive and convenience sampling, targeting young adults aged 20–35 years who were in committed romantic relationships. A total of 107 participants took part in the study. Data were collected from both male and female participants through Google Forms, ensuring easy accessibility and wider reach. To measure these variables, the study has utilised the following standardised scales.

### **The Partner Phubbing Scale (PPS):**

It was developed by Roberts and David (2016) is a widely used tool to measure the extent to which individuals perceive being ignored by their romantic partners due to smartphone use. This



Partner-Phubbing Scale has a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from “Never” to “All the time”. This Partner Phubbing Scale (Roberts & David, 2016) is a well-established tool with strong psychometric support.

### The Emotional Intimacy Scale:

It was developed by (Sinclair & Dowdy, 2005) is a brief 5-item self-report measure that captures perceptions of emotional closeness in close relationships, particularly the extent to which one feels accepted, understood, and cared for by a partner. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The scale has demonstrated strong psychometric properties for assessing emotional intimacy.

### Results & Discussion:

The analysis of the data was performed using SPSS version 25. Simple linear regression was conducted to examine the predictive value of phubbing on emotional intimacy in a romantic relationship among young adults.

**Table 1:** *Regression Coefficients of Phubbing on Emotional Intimacy*

Variable	B	$\beta$	Std. Error
Constant	28.89*	-	1.96
PHUBB	-.32*	-.42	.07
$R^2$	.18	-	-

Note.  $N = 107$

\*  $p < .05$

Table 1 shows the impact of phubbing on emotional intimacy among young adults in a relationship. The  $R^2$  value of .18 revealed that the predictor variable explained 18% variance in the outcome variable with  $F(1, 106) = 22.48, p < .05$ . The findings revealed that phubbing negatively predicted emotional intimacy ( $\beta = -.42, p < .05$ ).

These findings are consistent with the previous literature demonstrating that partner phubbing disrupts core relational processes. For instance, Nietal. (2025) reported that partner phubbing is linked to reduced intimacy and diminished emotional closeness, which aligns closely with the present results. Similarly, the study of Yam (2022) had found that phubbing leads to lower perceived romantic relationship quality as well as lower relationship satisfaction among committed individuals.

Thus, these findings reveal that phubbing leads to significant negative impact on emotional intimacy in young Indian adults in a relationship.

### Conclusion:

The aim of this study was to examine the impact of phubbing on emotional intimacy among young Indian adults in a relationship. The present study findings reveal that phubbing leads to 18% of negative impact on emotional closeness in a romantic relationship. This finding is consistent with

the previous researches such as the study of Ni et.al (2025) had found that phubbing is highly correlated with relationship dissatisfaction, depleted romantic quality as well as overall emotional closeness. Similarly, the cross-sectional study of Beukeboom et.al (2021) had shown the weak correlation between phubbing behaviour of partner with intimacy and responsiveness in a romantic relationship. One of the recent research findings shows that high phubbing behaviour of a partner is negatively associated with reduced relationship satisfaction, low mood as well as increased interpersonal conflict (Thomas et.al, 2022). Another recent research of Garrido et.al (2024) have similar findings which shows that phubbing has negative impact on individual's psychological well-being such as phubbing behaviour of a partner is highly correlated with severe depression among young women and high somatic levels among young men.

### **Limitations of this study:**

Even though the study adds to the existing research, a few limitations have been emerged. This study has relied on self-report measures, which may be subject to social desirability bias which can potentially influence the authenticity of responses. Another limitation pertains to the sample size, which may not fully represent the diversity of young adults and may reduce the statistical power of the results. Furthermore, this study did not differentiate between types or frequency of phubbing like habitual or the intentional phubbing, which could have provided a more nuanced understanding of its effects. Future research addressing these limitations would further strengthen the theoretical and practical relevance of the findings.

### **Future Implications of this study:**

The findings of the present study highlight the significant avenues for future research like, upcoming studies can explore the longitudinal designs to understand how phubbing influences emotional intimacy over the period of time. This would provide deeper insight into whether the negative effects accumulate or fluctuate with these relationship dynamics. Additionally, future research can focus on intervention-based models such as digital detox programs or couple communication training, for determining the strategies that may reduce phubbing and can improve relationship quality. Expanding this research to different age groups, cultural backgrounds and types of relationships can make the findings more generalizable. Hence, future studies can also include behavioural or physiological measures to get deeper and more accurate understanding of how phubbing effects the emotional intimacy in a relationship.

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