

# Phubbing Phenomenon: A Wild Fire, Which Invades Our Social Communication and Life

Sefa Bulut , Thseen Nazir

Counseling Psychology and Guidance Department, Ibn Haldun University, Istanbul, Turkey

Email: sefabulut22@gmail.com

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## Abstract

The purpose of merging various technologies in mobile device was to serve a great purpose for entire humanity and no doubt, it is doing the same. It made many things easy in day-to-day lives but on the other hand, it raised many psychological issues. One of the psychological issues is Phubbing, recently noticed by the researchers. The word Phubbing means snubbing someone you are talking to and simultaneously looking at his or her mobile phone. It is the practice of ignoring one's companion or companions in order to pay attention to one's mobile phone. People need to find a solution that describes this annoying situation and further to remind people, talk and spend time with each other instead of using their phone and only being present there physically. In response to this phenomenon, a new word "Phubbing" was born. It started affecting every aspect of our day-to-day lives and its impacts are deep and long lasting. It is a new phenomenon and had not been studied much early but researchers now are interested in understanding the phenomenon of Phubbing and its long lasting effects. This paper tried to trace the growth of Phubbing, understanding the phenomenon, and tried to analyze researches done in this area. This paper also tried to understand its impact on our social communication and life from various researches done in this area.

## Keywords

Phubbing Phenomenon, Social Communication

## 1. Introduction

With modern technological advancements and wide spread prevalence of mobile phones, many new concerns related to mobile phone have been raised from time to time such as Internet addiction, Gaming addiction, Facebook addiction etc. One among these new phenomena is "Phubbing" and it came under the scrutiny

of social psychologist recently. The fast growth of mobile phone users in developing countries had increased and the use of Internet, social media, and Facebook indirectly is causing mental health problems [1]. Due to excess use of mobile phones, 20% of adolescents demonstrate some mental health problems [2]. It is a common trend nowadays among people to be engaged in their mobile phones during social gatherings, family settings, offices, Universities and meetings.

Phubbing refers to the action of ignoring others during social events and hours by using smart phones, whether it is checking Facebook, using WhatsApp or using other chatting applications [3]. Ironically, individuals frequently engage in Phubbing behavior stop paying attention to the person who is physically present in his or her company and ignore him just in order to pay attention to person who is in virtual world. According to researchers, Phubbing has become a normative behavior in daily communication [4]. People usually use their mobile phones on social occasions, family and business meetings without hesitations and it is growing like a wild fire. It affects people in their everyday lives and most of people feel that it is a very serious issue. As in one of the recent studies conducted in Ankara, Turkey found that, 82.8% students think that Phubbing is a growing issue [5].

## **2. The Word “Phubbing”**

Macquarie Dictionary first coined the term Phubbing in 2013. The word Phubbing consists of two different words *i.e.* “phone” and “snubbing”. “Phubbing” is the noun form while “phubbed” is the adjective form of the word, used for someone who is subject to Phubbing. “Phubbee” refers to the person who has been phubbed [4]. On the other hand, the person who engages in Phubbing behavior is “phubber”. Perhaps due to its prevalence, Phubbing behavior has been widely discussed in mainstream media recently for example, the Guardian introduced its readers to a campaign, which strives to stop Phubbing behavior [6].

## **3. Phubbing Phenomenon in Day-to-Day Lives**

People who are involved in Phubbing behavior may not be well aware of their actions and their behaviors. However, people often consider their actions rude, irritating, disrespectful, inattentive, and cold. When people use their mobile phones, they tend to have less eye contact and their body language appears to be less attentive. This may intimidate or offend the conversational partner; consequently, the behavior may diminish the communication and people may felt completely ignored and not important. In one study conducted in Ankara. Turkey, 80.8% people felt ignored by a person who is Phubbing while sitting with them [5]. The phubber, although physically present, may not seem to be present mentally or emotionally for the conservation. Katz and Aakhus [7] described the situation as “absent-presence”.

Researchers, psychologists and sociologists are concerned about the effects of

Phubbing on social interactions. Phubbing behavior actually reduces the quality of social interactions. Person and conversations becomes less personal, less satisfying, and less meaningful [8]. Phubbing can also have negative consequences on one's "fundamental needs" such as sense of belonging, self-esteem, sense of meaning, and control in life [9] that are fundamental psychological needs of human beings [10].

Phubbing is not only having negative effect on the person who had been phubbed, but also to the phubber. Those who engage in Phubbing frequently may develop problematic communication skills such as difficulty in understanding and interpreting other social cues and maintaining eye contact during conversations. Phubber's communication style and manner can cause a vicious cycle which lead people to avoid them and perceive them as rude. The question here is what causes Phubbing behavior? Perhaps the low levels of emotional intelligence and emotional regulation, and lack of skills to empathize with others result in engagement of Phubbing behavior. Karadağ *et al.* [11] considered phubbing as an "addictive behavior". The exact determinants of Phubbing are not known yet but many researchers claimed it as an addictive behavior. Some researches claimed, addiction can predict it and there can be other responsible determinants. A research paper titled Phubbing and what could be its determinants, a dugout of Literature, tried to analyze this phenomenon from various angels and concluded that Smartphone addiction or Internet Addiction, Social Media addiction, Gaming addiction and Personal and Situational factors as important determinants of Phubbing behavior [12].

People feel distressed and uneasy if they do not constantly check their smartphone. They may feel compelled to check and answer any message they receive, which is a sign of Internet addition. Over the time, such behaviors become compulsive [13]. Regardless of its context, Phubbing seems to have negative effects on communication such as with family members at home, with teachers and peers at school, and with coworkers and supervisors at work. Additionally, "partner phubbing" refers to using mobile phone in the presence of wife or romantic partner. In Robert and David's study [14], about 50% of the participants reported that they faced partner Phubbing. They also reported that Phubbing behavior effect marriage negatively. For example, it may cause decrease in communication between couples. Consequently, partners may feel lonely, isolated, and depressed. Phubbing may also cause jealousy and consequently may result in conflicts in romantic relationships [15]. According to [16], using mobile phones may reduce meaningful interactions in couples and that may lead to a decrease in satisfaction and involvement in close and meaningful conversations. Thus, mobile phones may seem pulling people apart [16]. Mick and Fournier [17] (1998) noted cellphones as "a paradox of technology", because it can be both; connecting people or pulling them apart at the same time.

Wang *et al.* [18] Investigated effects of Phubbing on spouse relationship satisfaction and depression in married Chinese couples. Phubbing was negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction and was positively correlation with de-

pression and result shows that those who are subject to Phubbing have low levels of enjoyment in their relationships and experience high levels of depression. The relationship between Phubbing, relationship satisfaction, and depression were especially strong for the couples who have been married for seven years or more.

Nowadays the vast majority of college students have cell phones. They constantly use their phones in order to check messages or surf Internet that effect their attention towards instructors or lectures [13]. It directly or indirectly affects their achievement scores and cause poor performance. In National Report of Thailand [19], which stated that 96% of Thai individuals involves in Phubbing and playing with their mobile phones. In the same report, on the other hand, 80% of participants found that Phubbing behavior as unacceptable and rude.

As mentioned previously, Phubbing behavior seems to be prevalent in schools as well and it does seem to have effects on students as well. In a study conducted on college students in India by Davey *et al.* [20], the prevalence of Phubbing was as high as 49%. They found that the predictors of Phubbing were Internet addiction, smartphone addiction, fear of missing out, and lack of self-control. Phubbing was negatively correlated with social, relational health and self-flourishing. Most importantly, 55% of participants reported experiencing depression and distress. College students were using expensive mobile phones (45%), and WhatsApp was the main source for phubbing (33%). They phubbed at least 3 - 5 times a day and were phubbed overly by their family members at home (65%).

According to one study Karadağ *et al.* [21] female students exhibit more phubbing behavior then male students. Presumably, with a strong desire to control their partner, females use smartphones to stay in touch, chat, and keep track of their boyfriend's whereabouts. Female students also seem to react more strongly to Phubbing behavior than male students. Besides gender, age also seems to be a relevant variable: older adults show stronger reactions to Phubbing than young adults do.

Traits and personality types seems to play a role in Phubbing. People who are sensitive to rejection may evaluate Phubbing situation as very annoying and may feel hurt [22]. On the other hand, some may perceive Phubbing as a normal, acceptable social behavior, and they do not experience any hard feelings [1].

#### 4. Conclusion

Phubbing Phenomenon is a recent trend and it is becoming very common. This trend is spreading very fast because of the wide spread of the technology and the use of mobile phones in everyday life. Phubbing behavior is widely prevalent and is having negative effects on people's lives and relationships regardless of its contexts. The use of mobile phones and the way it brought ease in human life cannot be ignored but on another side, the harm it brings also cannot be marginalized. All depend on the way it can be used especially in social life. On one side, the negative side of its use leads us to addictive behaviors which harm individual but when same behavior is repeatedly done in social settings, it will harm our social life. This phenomenon of Phubbing no doubt affects our communica-

tion and had a huge impact on our relationships. Many studies above mentioned concluded how hard the Phubbing phenomenon is effecting is and how it is changing the social fabric. The aim of this paper was to trace the growth of Phubbing, understand the phenomenon, and analyze different researches, which had been done in this area and it can be concluded that this phenomenon is having negative impact on our social communication and relationships. Still there are a lot to understand regarding this issue, as there are not enough studies done on this issue. The issue needs to be studied in different social settings and what could be its determinants need in depth research. Observing Phubbing behavior in natural contexts can help us in identifying antecedents and precedents of Phubbing behavior. Understanding its causes may help clinicians to explore treatment modalities and design interventions to reduce Phubbing behavior. In addition, the changes it is bringing in the social norms must be a focus of attention and how society is looking at this behavior whether it's an abnormal behavior or just disrespect or rude.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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