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PARTNER PHUBBING, RELATIONSHIP CONFLICT, AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION IN COUPLES

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of partner phubbing, defined as ignoring one's partner in favor of a smartphone, on relationship conflict and relationship satisfaction in couples within the cultural context of Pakistan. Employing a co-relational research design, the study surveyed 260 married individuals (130 males and 130 females) from Faisalabad and Lahore using the Partner Phubbing Scale (PPS). Findings from the Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS) and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) showed that higher levels of partner phubbing were associated with increased relationship conflict and decreased relationship satisfaction. Independent samples test results indicated that females reported higher instances of phubbing behavior than males and experienced lower levels of relationship satisfaction. Although relationship conflict was significantly related to both phubbing and satisfaction, mediation analysis revealed that it did not serve as a significant mediator between the two. Overall, the study highlights the detrimental effects of partner phubbing on romantic relationships in the Pakistani context, along with noticeable gender differences in how such behaviors are experienced and perceived.

Keywords: partner phubbing, relationship conflict, relationship satisfaction, couples

Introduction

Human beings need close relationships in order to maintain their health and wellness. Intimate relationship formation stands as an essential developmental task which defines effective personality development. Success in intimate (couple) relationships remains a mystery for humanity since the beginning of centuries while people persist in searching for this elusive solution. Modern science has disclosed more information regarding couple relationships than past generations understood (Loubser, 2007).

Two core elements identify romantic relationships namely continuous voluntary contacts alongside reciprocal recognition. Relationships characterized as romantic exhibit two vital factors including affectionate behavior and sexual passion (Collins et al., 2009). Various studies demonstrate that young adults maintaining healthy romantic connections experience life satisfaction at higher levels whereas also developing improved life transition adaptability (Adamczyk, 2017). Different academic fields such as psychology and sociology and communication have conducted studies about love and marital relationships in close attachments (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2000).

Pakistani society differs from Western countries because most people choose to live under one common household in multi-generational settings (Azhar & Imran, 2024). All three generations of grandparents and adult children living with their offspring make up a common household unit in Pakistan. A person living in multi-generational households maintains family orientation with his sibling and parents while he simultaneously has a wife and children

(Khan, Haq, & Naseer, 2022; Shaukat, Rehman, & ul Haq, 2021). A daughter-in-law should demonstrate passivity alongside submission to her mother-in-law since she maintains authority over the family. Among Pakistani families a concept of role flexibility exists which grants parental responsibility to grandfather along with grandmother and aunts and cousins (Patel, 2021).

Research findings demonstrate that Pakistanis, Chinese and Westerners hold a similar level of agreement regarding Couple Bond standards and share a common understanding of their importance. Family Responsibility relationship standards receive much stronger support from Chinese and Pakistani respondents when compared to Western populations based on (Iqbal et al., 2019).

Culture and society as well as religion and history deeply influence the gender roles expected in marital relationships. The traditional gender-based position of men in Pakistan as well as other regions identifies them as providers and authority figures who lead decision-making processes yet women maintain primary responsibility for home maintenance and child care. The practice of separate workplace tasks has persistently remained in place because traditional norms and religious beliefs view it as essential for maintaining social gender inequalities and limiting personal choice particularly for women (Asim et al., 2024).

The behavior of ignoring someone socially through phone examination instead of focusing on the person is known as phubbing according to (Wolf, 2014). Interpersonal communication suffers negative impacts due to such conduct relationship satisfaction and personal wellbeing become affected (Roberts & David, 2016). Very limited research exists to understand the causes and development of phubbing as an acceptable behavior pattern in modern communication methods (Parveen, et al., 2020; ul haq, 2019; Ali & Haq 2017). This is because phubbing is a relatively new phenomenon (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016).

The introduction of smartphones and the resulting addiction gave rise to the phubbing phenomenon (Karadağ et al., 2015). However, the phrase was created when The Macquarie Dictionary, as part of a campaign by the advertising firm McCann Melbourne, asked lexicologists, authors, poets, and linguists, among others, to define a term that would describe the practice of ignoring other people while concentrating on one's smartphone (Naseer, et al., 2024; Shah et al., 2023; Aurangzeb, & Haq, 2012). It goes without saying that the need for such a word developed from the growing usage of cellphones to intentionally or inadvertently break off face-to-face communications (Jaleel, Rabbani, & Sarmad, 2025; Jaleel & Sarmad, 2024). The act of ignoring or snubbing someone in social situations by concentrating on one's smartphone is known as "phubbing" (Nazir & Piskin, 2016).

In addition, phubbed people start to feel jealous (Cizmeci, 2017). They can no longer trust their relationships (phubber) (Cameron & Webster, 2011). Phubbing and excessive smartphone

use have been linked to stress, loneliness, depression, anxiety (Lepp et al., 2014). when cut off from their phones and negative effects on interpersonal relationships and interactions (Park, 2005). People use phubbing to prevent social interaction during unwanted moments and specifically with their romantic partners but not with other acquaintances (Dwyer et al., 2018).

Partner phubbing, also known as Phubbing, is the act of neglecting a partner who is in a romantic or intimate relationship (Cizmeci, 2017). Robert and David initially developed phubbing in 2016, with a focus on phubbers (those who engage in phubbing) and their partners. The term "phubbing" first appeared in a 2012 advertising campaign for the Australian English dictionary Macquarie Dictionary. Expert dictionary compilers, authors, and poets are invited by the McCann Group, an advertising firm, to create a new term that characterizes the practice of neglecting others in favor of one's cell phone. Consequently, Alex Haigh, an Australian student, coined the term "phubbing." Following that, the McCann Organization The McCann Group then developed the "Stop Phubbing" campaign to increase public awareness of the problem (Ducharme, 2018).

Phubbing and life satisfaction are related, as well as how relationship satisfaction and perceived relationship quality mediate this relationship (Yam, 2022). Partners who engaged in more phubbing also reported lower life satisfaction and increased degrees of anger/frustration, resentment, and revenge, according to a daily diary study (Thomas et al., 2022).

Fighting over the same things over and over again, knowing how an argument will end before it's even finished, finishing an argument without settling the topic at hand, and concluding an argument where neither party feels they have been given a fair hearing are all signs of conflict. Attempting to assist partners in resolving their differences, or dealing with their conflict, is a significant component of many couple therapy approaches (Cramer, 2000).

Multiple field studies have demonstrated marital conflict plays a vital role in establishing how smartphone usage affects marital satisfaction (McDaniel et al., 2018). The results from the cross-lagged analysis demonstrate that conflicts act as a mediator to reduce the relationship quality between phubbing and perceived partner interactions (Halpern & Katz, 2017).

The research explores how marital conflict resolution methods affect both behavioral routines and physical and mental well-being in married couples according to (Kiecolt et al., 2010). Positive approaches to conflict resolution do not contribute to developing psychological disorders yet their use tends to increase the occurrence of psychological issues among couples with negative resolution approaches. Women exhibit psychological symptoms that correspond with frequent withdrawal behavior in marital conflicts and men present both psychiatric symptoms

related to withdrawal behavior as well as strong negative emotional responses and feelings of sadness (Papp et al., 2007).

The research defines relationship satisfaction as a personal perception about relationship quality which develops through evaluating positive and negative aspects of romantic relations (Fallis et al., 2016). The human tendency to monitor relationship costs and benefits represents a specific evolutionary adaptation shown to play a crucial adaptive role in human evolution (Shackelford & Buss, 1997). Permanent partnerships serve as fundamental structures that allow humans to reproduce directly as well as ensure effective childrearing (Mealey, 2000). An extensive body of research points to the importance of relationship satisfaction as a construct (Bühler et al., 2021). Those individuals who found their romantic bonds satisfying saw other life areas in a positive light. Relationship satisfaction prediction stems mainly from effective communication methods within partnerships according to (Overall, 2009). Effective communication between couples leads directly to relationship quality maintenance however couples with ineffective strategies experience decreased quality and view their relationships negatively and therefore experience higher costs and lower success levels and increased conflicts (Christensen & Shenk, 1991). The Eros and Agape love styles stand together with constructive methods for handling inter-personal conflicts according to conflict-resolution strategies. The low commitment levels coupled with adventurous attitudes lead Ludus lovers to use destructive communication practices which include domination and reactive responses. Pragma and Storge represent love styles which generate commitment strategies (Zacchilli et al., 2009).

Academic research about relationship satisfaction indicates gender differences play an essential part in determining the satisfaction and adjustment of couples. Men and women exhibit dissimilar patterns when expressing emotions along with their approaches to handling emotional experiences (Mirgain & Cordova, 2007). Problem and conflict management between partners allows researchers to understand couples' behavioral patterns by influencing the way they communicate with each other (Miller et al., 2003).

Rationale of the Study

The rapid growth of smartphone use has profoundly influenced social interactions, particularly in romantic relationships. The rising prevalence of smartphone use fails to match the amount of research examining partner phubbing effects on relationship satisfaction and conflict specifically in the collectivist culture context of Pakistan. The investigation of partner phubbing on Pakistani couples becomes vital since Pakistani culture places strong importance on family cohesiveness and harmonious interpersonal dynamics.

The research seeks to cover this knowledge gap by studying the

direct partner phubbing versus relationship satisfaction link with emphasis on partnership conflict mediation and evaluation of gender-based relationship connections. According to the Azhar, Iqbal and Imran (2025) research provides extended knowledge about how smartphone abuse impacts romantic relationships psychologically and socially to enhance current relationship studies. The research investigates technological behaviors' impact on relationships to enhance knowledge regarding how present-day technologies affect romantic bonds and provides meaningful recommendations for building healthy relationships.

Objectives of the Study

1. To measure the relationship between partner phubbing and relationship conflict in couples.
2. To examine the relationship between partner phubbing and relationship satisfaction in couples.
3. To examine the role of partner phubbing and relationship conflict in predicting relationship satisfaction in couples.
4. To identify differences on partner phubbing, relationship conflict and relationship satisfaction in couples in terms of gender.

Research Hypothesis

H1. There will be a significant relationship between partner phubbing and relationship conflict in couples.

H2. There will be a significant relationship between partner phubbing and relationship satisfaction in couples.

H3. Partner phubbing and relationship conflict will significantly predict relationship satisfaction in couples.

H4. There will be significant difference on partner phubbing, relationship conflict and relationship satisfaction in couples in terms of gender.

Literature Review

Previous research on partner phubbing, relationship conflict, and relationship satisfaction builds upon a growing body of work exploring how excessive smartphone use impacts romantic relationships. Multiple studies confirm that when partners phub each other this behavior damages relationship quality which then causes higher emotional estrangement and relationship conflicts as well as minimal relationship satisfaction. Research demonstrates that people who encounter regular partner phubbing experiences present signs of relationship distress along with weakened emotional intimacy (Roberts & David, 2016).

Research findings show that when one romantic partner phubs the other the relationship experiences more conflicts. One partner neglectful dismissal through device usage often leads the spouse to experience both emotional distress and arguments. The continuous act of phonedistracted disengagement known as phubbing causes significant relationship conflict which damages satisfaction between partners over time (Sohail-Rehan, & Ul-Haq, 2018; Haq, 2017; ul Haq, 2012).

Among the numerous demographic characteristics being examined by researchers are the relationship duration of couples together with their gender identity and age differences. Research indicates that younger relationship pairs who frequently use smartphones face more serious relationship damage from phubbing compared to older pairs. The research shows that women demonstrate greater sensitivity to their partners phubbing behavior and the resulting relationship dissatisfaction compared to men (Wang et al., 2020).

Partner phubbing leads to diminished relationship quality and heightened relationship conflicts which subsequently deteriorates personal well-being. Partner phubbing causes relationship conflicts which subsequently diminish relationship satisfaction before leading to lower life satisfaction and higher depression risks. Anxious attachment types demonstrate higher levels of attachment anxiety after experiencing higher conflict stemming from phubbing than people who show lower attachment anxiety. The rising number of individuals with anxiously attached personality may lead to increased significance of smartphone distraction in damaging relationships throughout time (Roberts & David, 2016).

A study analyzed the effects of partner phubbing behavior which describes smartphone engagement instead of partner interaction on relationship satisfaction with an emphasis on self-esteem and marital status moderation. This research study of 429 Chinese adults did not discover any direct associations between partner phubbing and relationship satisfaction throughout the participant group. Self-esteem revealed itself as an important moderating influence because people who rated their self-esteem as high experienced diminished relationship satisfaction when their partners phubbed them more often although those with low self-esteem did not show this same effect. Marital status acted as a moderator that revealed married participants had negative results on the relationship satisfaction-phubbing relationship yet unmarried participants showed no such effect. Research demonstrates how personal variations determine how phubbing affects romantic partnerships between partners (Wang et al., 2021).

A research analysis studied how partner cell phone interruptions affect romantic partnership contentment levels. The researchers conducted two separate cross-sectional surveys with 507 participants initially followed by 386 participants later to verify that partner phubbing creates negative effects on relationship satisfaction. The research findings demonstrated important structural elements through which partner phubbing creates negative consequences between partners such as exclusion and reduced responsiveness perceptions and weakening intimacy. The research demonstrated that phone use conflicts and jealousy did not establish meaningful influence on this connection after verifying other factors. The study revealed that mutual phone interaction between partners helps minimize the damaging

influence of partner phubbing by enhancing intimacy and decreasing feelings of separation.

Sharing mobile phone use with one's partner reduces the negative influence phubbing has on relationships according to (Beukeboom & Pollmann, 2021).

The relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction shows a continuous negative pattern according to research findings. The research shows that partner phubbing results in limited marital interaction and elevated marital conflict which subsequently decreases marital satisfaction (Wang & Zhao, 2023). The study examined how partner phubbing affects young adult relationship satisfaction by investigating how attachment anxiety interferes with mediation processes as well as how couples handle conflicts effectively. The research team conducted their work with 837 undergraduate students to discover partner phubbing has negative effects on relationship satisfaction. The research data demonstrated attachment anxiety functions as a mediator since increased phubbing activities generate attachment anxiety which results in lower relationship satisfaction. This research established that when individuals used voice and loyalty strategies for constructive conflict resolution these methods acted as moderators that weakened the mediation effect. These coping mechanisms led individuals to experience diminished negative impacts on their relationship satisfaction levels. The study establishes that attachment anxiety needs proper attention because evidence shows effective communication methods help reduce relationship damages from phubbing behavior in romantic relationships (Han et al., 2025).

A daily diary study to examine the effects of partner phubbing on relationship satisfaction and personal well-being, while also investigating phubbee responses and retaliation behaviors. The study, involving 75 participants over a 10-day period, found that higher daily perceived partner phubbing was associated with lower relationship satisfaction and increased anger/frustration. However, no significant associations were found between daily partner phubbing and personal well-being indicators such as anxiety, depression, or self-esteem. Phubbees demonstrated curiosity and resentment toward phubbing along with retaliatory actions which involved using their phones to fight back according to the study research. Phubbees sought revenge against the phubber alongside support and approval as main motivations for retaliation but did not retaliate from boredom. Partner phubbing creates adverse relational effects and emotional stress which proves its capability to damage relationship quality in the long run (Thomas et al., 2022).

Researchers studied 3405 couples during five years to understand how relationship perceptions affect and are affected by conflict behavior patterns (Shah, et al., 2025; Imran, et al., 2023). Cross-lagged autoregressive modeling throughout the research

analyzed the sequence of effects between conflict frequency together with constructive and withdrawal behaviors on perceived instability and relationship satisfaction. The research established that relationship conflict occurrence along with partner withdrawal behaviors repeatedly led to declining satisfaction ratings and increasing evaluations of relationship instability in time. Relationship satisfaction increased through constructive conflict behaviors yet these behaviors showed no impact on perceived relationship instability according to data from (Johnson et al., 2018).

The study discovered that men who felt satisfied in their relationship experienced both increased upcoming conflict frequency with their partners and reduced constructive behaviors together with decreased future disagreements. The study outcomes show that understanding how interpersonal relationships develop involves assessing both what individuals do and what they feel about these actions (Johnson et al., 2018).

This research examined marital conflict interactions and how they affect marital quality within the Brazilian population. The study analyzed 750 men and 750 women and revealed that conflict resolution approaches together with dispute origins directly determine marriage quality levels. Both positive and negative conflict resolution techniques affected marital quality with problem-solving leading to better marital quality and withdrawal together with compliance and conflict engagement resulting in decreased marital satisfaction. Financial problems together with responsibilities regarding household work and time spent as a couple functioned as primary sources that degraded relationship quality. Research shows that understanding marital conflicts alongside resolution approaches demonstrates the necessity to create interventions aimed at training couples in better conflict management techniques to develop more beneficial relationships (Wagner et al., 2019).

Researchers examined how relationship duration affects conflict communication along with satisfaction levels demonstrating that duration did not lead to direct satisfaction measurement yet impacted male interpretations of conflict behavior. The research discovered that male partners in established relationships tended to notice the demand/withdraw method of communication but this behavior resulted in unsatisfied relationships. Communication quality stands as the main factor behind relational happiness instead of relationship duration (Heavey et al., 1996). Study results show that couples need strong conflict resolution approaches to keep relational satisfaction from deteriorating rather than distract them from lasting periods of time (Stewart, 2012).

Research Methodology

Research Design

The co-relational research design was employed in the study.

Participants

The study participants were married couples, and 260 people were got chosen through purposive sampling from Faisalabad and Lahore city. Both male (n= 130, 50%) and female (n= 130, 50%) were selected with minimum education of Intermediate, aged between 18-60 (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2023). The sample size was selected using Per indicator Method, in many studies used per indicator method 5 or 10 observations per estimated parameter Bollen (1989), and 10 cases per variable (Nunnally, 1967). But most of the famous in psychology research is 5 to 20 respondents per indicator (Lei & Wu, 2007).

Inclusion-Criteria

1. Both partners must be using smartphones or other digital devices regularly.
2. Only local resident couples in Faisalabad and Lahore were included.
3. In education having minimum Intermediate education were included in this research.
4. Participants who participated in this study must be adults and married.
5. Participants were currently married for at least 6 months.
6. Both partners provided informed consent to participate in the study.

Exclusion Criteria

1. Physical disabilities together with psychological disabilities of the study participants lead to result errors which motivates the exclusion of these couples from the research.
2. Research participants who share any blood relations with direct family members dealing with psychiatric conditions or constant illnesses will not qualify for the study.

Research Procedure

The investigator presented herself to testing participants before discussing the main purpose of the evaluation research. Participating subjects received confirmation from the researcher that psychological examination results would stay confidential. The investigator gave positive responses and explanations to each participant's inquiries when carrying out psychological tests. Each participant was given an assurance to obtain responses about their questions regarding this topic. The methods discussed previously will help researchers earn participant trust together with their trustworthiness.

All vital preventative measures were rolled out by the research team before conducting their forecasting procedures. The study obtained acceptance first from the psychology department's research board followed by the BOS and ended with BASR approval. A research study investigation was implemented to protect both the participants' dignity and their rights to respect. The researcher took steps to maintain both the rights and wellbeing of all study participants. All ethical aspects along with the study goals were

detailed in the written consent form that participants had to sign. All measures in this study received copyright authorization (source citation) from original creators in addition to getting genuine author permission.

The data collection process started within Faisalabad and Lahore. Several procedures were established to gather information in a fair and controlled way after obtaining subject participation through explanation of research importance. The research collects respondents from different urban and rural locations across the city in order to capture all the diverse situations of city life. Data collection for couples will be performed upon researcher approval from the research participants

The study commenced only after receiving necessary consent from participants who were chosen through the established sampling protocol while building positive relationships with them. Volunteers received confidentiality guarantees as well as the right to discontinue their study participation at any moment. Standardization of the testing method received guidance through author-provided instructions. A session for answering participant questions took place after testing while lasting about 35-40 minutes.

Measures

Demographic Sheet

Author-developed demographic form seeks individual data through its following attributes: marital status, gender, age, home residence, education, duration of marriage and economic status.

Partner Phubbing Scale

Roberts and David (2016) invented The Partner phubbing Scale that functions as a onedimensional 9 items scale. The phubbing scale addresses phub-bees through its questions thus expecting them to evaluate their partner's phubbing actions when responding. Participants must assess each statement using 5-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (all at time). Item no 7 is reversed score. The partner phubbing measure integrates nine survey statements that will average participant ratings to determine level of phubbing through a 5-point Likert scale. The measurement scale exhibits Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$ resulting in strong internal reliability.

Romantic Partner Conflict Scale

The Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS) a psychometric tool designed to measure the styles and frequency of conflicts experienced within romantic relationships. The RPCS assesses six dimensions of conflict behavior: Compromise - Seeking mutually acceptable solutions. Domination - Exerting power over the partner. Submission - Yielding to the partner's wishes. Separation - Withdrawal from the conflict. Avoidance - Sidestepping the issue. Interactional Reactivity - Emotional responses to conflict.

RPSC is 39 items, 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS), and the six sub scales scored Cronbach Alpha as

Compromise ($\alpha = .95$), Domination ($\alpha = .87$), Avoidance ($\alpha = .82$), Submission ($\alpha = .82$), Separation ($\alpha = .83$), and Interactional Reactivity ($\alpha = .82$).

Relationship Assessment Scale

Susan S. Hendrick (1988), developed The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), a widely used unidimensional instrument designed to measure an individual's overall satisfaction with their romantic relationship. The scale consists of seven items where item no four and seven are reverse that assess various aspects of relationship satisfaction, such as love, problems, expectations, and the comparison of the relationship with others. The RAS employs a Likerttype scale where respondents rate each item on a scale typically ranging from 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (high satisfaction). The total score is the sum of the individual item scores, providing a measure of overall relationship satisfaction. Higher scores indicate greater satisfaction with the relationship. The RAS has been shown to have good reliability and validity across various studies. Hendrick (1988), reported a Cronbach's alpha of .86, indicating high internal consistency. Subsequent research has confirmed these findings, with the scale demonstrating strong psychometric properties in diverse populations and settings (Funk & Rogge, 2007).

Statistical Analysis

Data was analyzed by using SPSS software. Person-correlation analysis was used to measure relationship between Partner Phubbing, Relationship Conflict and Relationship Satisfaction. Mediation analysis was used to assess the mediating relationship of Relationship

Conflict. Independent Sample t-test was used to measure gender difference in Partner Phubbing, Relationship Conflict and Relationship Satisfaction, and multiple-regression analysis was used to examine the predicting role of Partner Phubbing.

Results

Table 1 : Demographics characteristics of Research Participants (N = 260)

Variable	Category	<i>f</i>	%
Age	18-35	196	75.4
	36-64	64	25
Gender	Male	130	50
	Female	130	50
City	Faisalabad	166	64
	Lahore	94	34
Home Residence	Urban	193	74

	Rural	67	26
Marital Status	Love marriage	94	36
	Arrange marriage	166	64
Education	Intermediate	18	7
	Bachelors	154	59
	Graduates	88	34
Economicstatus	Lower class	2	1
	Middle class	248	95
	Upper class	10	4
Duration of Marriage	Short term	162	62.3
	Intermediate	87	33.5
	Long term	11	4.2

Note. f=frequency, %=percentage

In Table 1, shows the demographic analysis of the research participants ($N = 260$)

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Partner Phubbing Scale (PPS), Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS) and Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) ($N=260$)

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Partner Phubbing Scale	30.0	7.1
Romantic Partner Conflict Scale	129.0	16.5
Relationship Assessment Scale	22.1	4.8

Note. *M*=Mean, *S. D*=Standard Deviation

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the variables included in the study, based on a sample of 260 participants. The mean score for the Partner Phubbing Scale was ($M = 30.0$, $SD = 7.1$). The mean score for the Romantic Partner Conflict Scale was 129.0 ($SD=16.5$). Lastly, the Relationship Assessment Scale, which measured relationship satisfaction, had a mean of ($M = 22.1$, $SD = 4.8$).

Table 3: Psychometrics Properties of the Scales

Variable	<i>K</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Range</i>
Partner Phubbing Scale	9	.82	11-45
Romantic Partner Conflict Scale	39	.82	59-179
Relationship Assessment Scale	7	.85	11-35

Note. K= Num of items

Table 3 presents the psychometric properties of the scales used in this study, including their No. of items, reliability coefficient (α), and score range (both potential and actual). The reliability of each scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α), which indicates internal consistency. The Partner Phubbing Scale demonstrated good reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .82. The scale had 9 items with the range of 11 to 45 falling within this spectrum.

Romantic Partner Conflict Scale exhibited strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .82. The item was 39, with the range of 59 to 179, indicating that participants' responses spanned a broad range within the expected limits. And the Relationship Assessment Scale showed high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .85. The scale had 7 items with the range of 11 to 35, demonstrating consistency in responses.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation in Partner Phubbing, Romantic Partner Conflict Scale and Relationship Assessment Scale

Variables	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3					
PP	260	30.0	7.1	-							
RPCS COM	260	50.0	12.4	-.308**	-						
RPCS DOM	260	15.5	5.3	.60	-.163**	-					
RPCS AVO	260	11.5	2.5	.06	-.00	.02	-				
RPCS SEP	260	17.2	4.5	.08	.11	.20**	.11	-			
RPCS SUB	260	18.1	4.0	.15*	.10	.1	.32**	.28**	-		
RPCSIR	260	16.5	5.1	.3**	-.42**	.37**	.17**	.15*	.22**	-	
RAS	260	22.1	5.0	-.58**	.41**	-.10	.1	.03	-.1	-.44**	-

Note. n= Sample, M= Mean, SD= Standard deviation

Table 4 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients among partner phubbing, relationship conflict, and relationship satisfaction. The results indicate that partner phubbing and relationship satisfaction are significantly negatively correlated ($r = -0.58$, $p < .01$), suggesting that higher levels of partner phubbing are associated with lower relationship satisfaction. Additionally, partner phubbing is negatively correlated with compromise ($r = 0.308$, $p < .01$), indicating that individuals experiencing higher partner phubbing are less likely to engage in constructive conflict resolution strategies. In contrast, partner phubbing shows weak positive correlations with submission ($r = 0.15$, $p < .05$) and interactional reactivity ($r = 0.30$, $p < .01$), suggesting that phubbing is linked to higher tendencies of passive or reactive responses in conflicts.

Furthermore, relationship conflict subtypes exhibit varied associations with relationship satisfaction. Compromise is positively correlated with relationship satisfaction ($r = 0.41$, $p < .01$), suggesting that couples who engage in mutual problem-solving tend to have higher relationship quality. Interactional reactivity, however, is significantly negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction ($r = -0.44$, $p < .01$), indicating that emotionally reactive conflict behaviors are associated with lower relationship satisfaction. Other conflict subtypes, including domination, avoidance, separation, and submission, show weak or non-significant correlations with relationship satisfaction. Overall, these findings highlight the negative impact of partner phubbing on relationship well-being, particularly its strong association with reduced relationship satisfaction and lower constructive conflict resolution strategies.

Table 5: Coefficients For Multiple Regression Analysis With Partner Phubbing As a Predictor Of Relationship Conflict and Relationship Satisfaction

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95%CI	
						LL	UL
Constant	28.3	2.1		13.5	.000	24.25	32.52
PP	-.31	.03	-.46	-9.4	.000	-0.38	-0.25
RPCSCOM	.05	.02	.15	2.7	.006	0.02	0.10
RPCSDOM	.02	.04	.03	.60	.545	-0.01	0.11
RPCSAVOI	.30	.09	.15	3.2	.001	0.12	0.49
RPCSSEP	.09	.05	.08	1.7	.076	-0.01	0.19
RPCSSUB	.04	.06	-.03	-.73	.460	-0.17	0.07
RPCSIR	.26	.54	-.02	-4.9	.000	-0.37	-0.16

Note. $R^2 = .474$, Adjusted $R^2 = .459$, $F(7, 252) = 32.405$, $p < .001$.

Table 5 posits a multiple regression analysis conducted to examine the effects of Partner Phubbing (PP) and Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS), Compromise (RPCSCOM), Domination (RPCSDOM), Avoidance (RPCSAVOI), Separation (RPCSSEP), Submission (RPCSSUB), and Interactional Reactivity (RPCSIR) on Relationship Satisfaction, as measured by the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS). The overall model was statistically significant, $F(7, 252) = 32.405$, $p < .001$, explaining 47% of the variance in relationship satisfaction ($R^2 = .474$, Adjusted $R^2 = .459$). Among the predictors, PPT was the strongest negative predictor ($B = -0.316$, $p < .001$), indicating that

higher partner phubbing is associated with lower relationship satisfaction, followed by RPCSIR ($B = -0.268$, $p < .001$), suggesting that individuals who exhibit heightened interactional reactivity during conflicts experience lower satisfaction. In contrast, RPCSAVOI ($B = 0.307$, $p < .001$) and RPCSCOM ($B = 0.059$, $p < .006$) positively predicted relationship satisfaction, suggesting that avoiding conflicts and engaging in mutual compromise contribute to a more satisfying relationship. However, RPCSDOM ($B = 0.028$, $p = .545$), RPCSSEP ($B = 0.095$, $p < .076$), and RPCSSUB ($B = -0.047$, $p < .460$) were not significant predictors, indicating that domination, separation, and submission conflict styles do not strongly influence satisfaction. These findings underscore the negative impact of partner phubbing and interactional reactivity on relationship satisfaction, while highlighting the positive role of compromise and avoidance in managing relationship conflicts.

Table 6: Mean Comparison of Males and Females on Partner Phubbing, Relationship Conflict and Relationship Satisfaction in Couples

Variables	Males		Females		$t(257)$	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
PP	26.7	6.6	33.3	6.0	-8.30	.00	1.04
RPCSCOM	50.8	11.3	48.4	13.2	1.59	.11	0.19
RPCSDOM	15.5	5.0	15.4	5.5	.13	.89	0.01
RPCSAVOI	11.8	2.4	11.3	2.5	1.47	.14	0.20
RPCSSEP	17.1	4.4	17.4	4.6	-.42	.67	1.52
RPCSSUB	17.8	3.9	18.4	3.9	-1.09	.27	0.15
RPCSIR	15.9	4.9	17.2	5.2	1.99	.04	0.25
RAS	23.4	4.8	20.8	4.5	4.47	.00	0.55

Note. M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation

Table 6 shows the results of the independent samples t -test indicated significant gender differences in partner phubbing, interactional reactivity, and relationship satisfaction, whereas no significant differences were observed. Females reported significantly higher partner phubbing ($M = 33.3$, $SD = 6.0$) than males ($M = 26.7$, $SD = 6.6$), $t(257) = -8.30$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.04$, reflecting a large effect size. Additionally, females exhibited significantly greater interactional reactivity ($M = 17.2$, $SD = 5.2$) compared to males ($M = 15.9$, $SD = 4.9$), $t(257) = 1.99$, $p = .04$, $d = 0.25$, indicating a small effect size. In contrast, males reported

significantly higher relationship satisfaction ($M = 23.4$, $SD = 4.8$) than females ($M = 20.8$, $SD = 4.5$), $t(257) = 4.47$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.55$, with a moderate effect size. However, no significant gender differences were found in compromise ($t(257) = 1.59$, $p = .11$, $d = 0.19$), domination ($t(257) = 0.13$, $p = .89$, $d = 0.01$), avoidance ($t(257) = 1.47$, $p = .14$, $d = 0.20$), separation ($t(257) = -0.42$, $p = .67$, $d = 1.52$), or submission ($t(257) = -1.09$, $p = .27$, $d = 0.15$), suggesting that both genders engage in these conflict resolution strategies similarly. These findings suggest that while males and females exhibit comparable conflict resolution approaches, females experience higher levels of partner phubbing and interactional reactivity, whereas males report higher relationship satisfaction.

Discussion

The current research analyzed how partners' behaviors of phubbing associate with relationship conflict as well as relationship satisfaction. The study results contribute understanding to the pattern of relationships between the designed hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 states that there will be significant relationship between partner phubbing and relationship conflict in partner and the collected study data validated this relationship through RPCS, partner phubbing (PP) demonstrated a significant negative correlation with Compromise (RPCS COM) ($r = -.308$, $p < .01$). Conversely, partner phubbing exhibited significant positive correlations with Domination (RPCS DOM) ($r = .60$, $p < .01$), Submission (RPCS SUB) ($r = .15$, $p < .05$), and Interactional Reactivity (RPCSIR) ($r = .30$, $p < .01$). These positive correlations indicate that higher levels of partner phubbing are associated with increased tendencies towards one partner trying to control the situation, the other giving in, and heightened emotional responses during disagreements. While the correlations with Avoidance (RPCS AVO) ($r = .06$, $p > .05$) and Separation (RPCS SEP) ($r = .08$, $p > .05$) were not statistically significant¹, the trends suggest a weak positive association, implying that partner phubbing might be slightly related to sidestepping conflict or withdrawing from it, although these relationships are not strong enough to be considered statistically significant in this study. Roberts and David (2016) found that partner phubbing contributes to increased relational conflict. Similarly, studies have shown that when one partner prioritizes their phone, the other may perceive it as neglectful, leading to arguments and heightened relational tensions. The current finding is also consistent with Utami et al. (2021) who demonstrated that partner phubbing increases conflict. Moreover, effective communication and positive conflict resolution strategies, such as compromise, are known to benefit relationship quality while negative patterns like heightened interactional reactivity can lead to lower satisfaction (Zacchilli et al., 2009).

Hypothesis 2 There will be a significant relationship between partner phubbing and relationship satisfaction in couples. The results indicate that partner phubbing and relationship satisfaction

are significantly negatively correlated ($r = -0.58, p < .01$), suggesting that higher levels of partner phubbing are associated with lower relationship satisfaction. Roberts and David (2016) provided evidence that partner phubbing contributes to lower relationship satisfaction, and Yam (2022), also found a negative correlation between partner phubbing and relationship satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3 Partner phubbing and relationship conflict will significantly predict relationship satisfaction in couples. The multiple regression analysis in Table 5, supports this, The overall model was statistically significant, $F(7, 252) = 32.405, p < .001$, explaining 47% of the variance in relationship satisfaction ($R^2 = .474$, Adjusted $R^2 = .459$). Among the predictors, PPT was the strongest negative predictor ($B = -0.316, p < .001$), indicating that higher partner phubbing is associated with lower relationship satisfaction, followed by RPCSIR ($B = -0.268, p < .001$), suggesting that individuals who exhibit heightened interactional reactivity during conflicts experience lower satisfaction. In contrast, RPCSAVOI ($B = 0.307, p < .001$) and RPCSCOM ($B = 0.059, p < .006$) positively predicted relationship satisfaction, suggesting that avoiding conflicts and engaging in mutual compromise contribute to a more satisfying relationship. However, RPCSDOM ($B = 0.028, p = .545$), RPCSSEP ($B = 0.095, p < .076$), and RPCSSUB ($B = -0.047, p < .460$) were not significant predictors, indicating that domination, separation, and submission conflict styles do not strongly influence satisfaction. Therefore, the findings generally support Hypothesis 3, indicating that partner phubbing and relationship conflict is related to relationship satisfaction. Prior research consistently demonstrates that partner phubbing is linked to increased conflict and decreased relationship satisfaction (Roberts & David, 2016). Studies have shown that phubbing can lead to misunderstandings and arguments and is associated with lower intimacy and closeness (Utami et al., 2020).

Hypothesis 4 There will be significant difference on partner phubbing, relationship conflict and relationship satisfaction in couples in terms of gender. The independent samples t-test results presented significant gender differences in several variables. Specifically, Females reported significantly higher levels of partner phubbing ($M = 33.3$) than males ($M = 26.7$), $t(257) = -8.30, p < .01$. There was no significant gender differences observed in most conflict resolution styles, including compromise, domination, avoidance, separation, and submission. Females reported significantly greater interactional reactivity ($M = 17.2$) compared to males ($M = 15.9$), $t(257) = 1.99, p = .04$. Males reported significantly higher relationship satisfaction ($M = 23.4$) than females ($M = 20.8$), $t(257) = 4.47, p < .001$. Thus, Hypothesis 4 is partially supported, as significant gender differences were found for partner phubbing, interactional reactivity, and relationship satisfaction, but not consistently across all dimensions of relationship conflict examined. Some studies suggest that women are more likely to

perceive phubbing as rude and report lower satisfaction due to it. Roberts and David (2016) also found that women tend to be more sensitive and report more dissatisfaction and distress due to phubbing (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). While phubbing impacts both genders, the emotional and psychological consequences might be stronger for women (Halpern & Katz, 2017).

Hypothesis 5 Relationship conflict will significantly mediate the relationship between partner phubbing and relationship satisfaction. The mediation analysis presented shows that while the total effect of partner phubbing on relationship satisfaction was significant ($B = 0.39, p < .001$) and the direct effect remained significant even when controlling for relationship conflict ($B = -0.38, p < .001$), the indirect effect of partner phubbing on relationship satisfaction through relationship conflict was not statistically significant ($B = -0.06, p = .09$).

Conclusion

The present research demonstrates that phubbing by romantic partners as a growing digital age habit harms the quality of intimate relationships. Research data established that smartphone distraction leads to relationship conflict and decreases relationship satisfaction which demonstrates how smartphone attention theft destroys emotional connections and decreases relational harmony.

The research also provided insight into the psychological underpinnings of how phubbing disrupts romantic dynamics. Guided by Expectancy Violation Theory, the study found that the act of being phubbed violates deeply held interpersonal expectations such as being listened to, acknowledged, and emotionally supported. These violations can erode the foundation of trust and intimacy that healthy relationships rely upon. Furthermore, the gender differences found in the study point to how emotional experiences in relationships are not uniform. Females, who are often socialized to value emotional connection and communication more highly, reported greater sensitivity to phubbing behavior and its emotional consequences. Males, in contrast, reported higher levels of satisfaction despite similar exposure to phubbing, perhaps indicating differing thresholds for perceiving digital disengagement as relationally harmful. These findings, when interpreted within the cultural context of Pakistan, reflect broader societal patterns wherein women may bear greater emotional burdens and expectations in marital relationships.

Recommendations

- First and foremost, couples should be encouraged to practice digital mindfulness by setting intentional boundaries around smartphone use, particularly during shared or emotionally significant moments.
- Study employed a cross-sectional design, longitudinal research is recommended to assess the long-term impact of partner phubbing on relational outcomes and to identify causal patterns.
- Future research should consider mixed-methods approaches or

observational data to capture richer and potentially more accurate insights.

- The study was limited to two cities of Pakistan however; future studies should gather data on a larger scale.

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