



A STUDY ON PHUBBING, EMOTIONAL AVAILABILITY, AND MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG MARRIED COUPLES

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Abstract: The rising use of digital devices had created many challenges in marital relationships due to phubbing. The present study was carried out to examine the relationship and predictive effects of phubbing and emotional availability on marital satisfaction among married couples in Kerala. Using a quantitative correlational research design, sample of 160 married couples aged 25–40 years from Thrissur district, were selected using purposive sampling. Standardized questionnaires were used to assess phubbing, emotional availability, and marital satisfaction. After analyzing the data using Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis, results revealed that phubbing showed a weak but significant negative relationship with marital satisfaction, while emotional availability showed a strong positive relationship with marital satisfaction. Regression analysis indicated that phubbing negatively predicted marital satisfaction, whereas emotional availability was a strong positive predictor, jointly explaining 71.8% of the variance. In conclusion, Emotional availability significantly enhances marital satisfaction, while phubbing adversely affects marital quality. Promoting emotional communication and reducing digital distractions may improve marital well-being.

Keywords: Phubbing, Emotional Availability, Marital Satisfaction, Married Couples

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Marriage

Marriage is interpreted as a socially and legally accepted union related to long-term commitment, shared responsibilities, and emotional investment (Cherlin, 2010). While traditional marriage relied on social conventions, economic motives, and rigid roles, nowadays marriage is closer to being about emotional mutuality, companionship, fulfilment, mutual understanding, and so on (Amato, 2010). Based on the attachment theories, the primary organizational mechanism establishes a framework where spouses function as attachment figures who provide emotional safety together with reassurance and support during periods of vulnerability (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). The two attachment orientations define how people experience emotions and perceive their married relationship. In the cognitive perspective, people assess their partner through core beliefs about love, commitment, gender roles, and emotional availability, which they use to evaluate their overall view of the marriage relationship (Beck, 1988). Social exchange and interdependence theories achieve their definition of marriage through their explanation of how partners interact with each other while they evaluate the benefits which is the emotional support and the partnership of spouses and the intimacy which leads to shared understanding as well as the drawbacks and their commitments throughout their relationship. The family systems theory holds marriage within an emotional system within a wider relational context (Bowen, 1978). The systems perspective shows how married people need to understand their joint relationship connections instead of focusing on personal psychological problems. Johnson (2004) presents an emotion-focused view which explains when a couple shows emotional responsiveness to each other, their marriage will create higher levels of marital contentment and emotional stability. Waite and Gallagher in 2000 found that people who look for satisfaction from their marriage experience better life satisfaction and positive emotional control, and they have lower levels of psychological distress. Marriage requirements and expectations undergo development through various life stages according to the developmental perspective, which sees age, life stage and social environment as its three main factors (Erikson, 1968). Couples who demonstrate emotional maturity and flexibility with their partner will have better relationship outcomes during times of change.

1.2 Emotional Availability

The relational construct of emotional availability defines how people maintain emotional presence while they fulfil their partner's emotional requirements of their relationship. Researchers have developed a new understanding of emotional availability as a multidimensional construct which includes emotional awareness, emotional expression, emotional responsiveness and emotional engagement. Contemporary relationship research shows that marital duration and role fulfilment between partners do not determine marital success because emotional connection quality between partners determines both connection success and stability

(Karney & Bradbury, 2020). Partners who possess emotional availability according to attachment-based perspectives act as secure bases for each other, which enables them to regulate their emotions and develop effective coping mechanisms (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). The emotional connection between partners experiences disruption when life changes occur which include becoming parents and facing financial difficulties and dealing with medical issues and moving to different locations for work. The ability of couples to stay emotionally connected throughout transitional periods serves as the main factor which determines whether their marriage will experience resilience (Papp, Kouros, and Cummings 2017). Emotional unavailability, which shows itself through emotional withdrawal and avoidance, dismissive behavior and inconsistent reactions, leads to relationship problems, partner disappointment and ongoing marital disputes (Overall and Simpson, 2015). Partners may report feelings of being unheard, unsupported, or emotionally disconnected, which can gradually erode marital satisfaction. Research indicates that emotional neglect in marriage can be as distressing as overt conflict, contributing to emotional burnout and relational disengagement (Overall, Fletcher, & Simpson, 2015).

1.3 Marital Satisfaction

Marital Satisfaction is the joy and fulfilment in a couple experiences in a relationship. The stability in a married life develops when there exists harmony between expectations and reality. Marital satisfaction is influenced by many factors such as interpersonal processes which include communication, emotions, behavior, social support, and conflict. It is also influenced by marital contexts such as children, life stress, economic conditions, and mate availability. Additionally, social-cognitive perspectives also influence marital satisfaction (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). Satisfy sexual relations play a crucial role in maintaining a healthy and lasting marriage. Many studies show that issues in sexual relations seek divorce (Tavakol, 2017). Social-cognitive perspectives also influence marital satisfaction (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). Men were satisfied when they engaged in enjoyable activities frequently, had a close relationship with both families' parents, and experienced fewer communication issues leading to conflict in the relationship. In women, aspects causing marital satisfaction include the enjoyment of shared activities, high intimacy with parents, and minimal issues in communication that exacerbate into conflicts (Jeon & Kim, 2013). Besides, love, loyalty, and common values are the three main marital characteristics influencing marital satisfaction (Rosen-Grandon, Myers & Hattie, 2004). Additionally, studies have shown that increased use of the internet and TV is linked to lower marital satisfaction and commitment of both partners in wife. Whereas in husbands, certain internet use (motivation and habit) was linked to higher marital satisfaction (Davies et al. 2012).

II. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Marriage is one of the important interpersonal relationships in adulthood that provides emotional support, social companionship and mental health support. High emotional availability creates a foundation for trust and intimacy while enabling effective communication and mutual understanding between partners, which leads to greater marital satisfaction. Couples today face digital interruptions during their daily interactions which makes it vital to study how phubbing behavior affects their emotional connection and marriage contentment. The examination of these constructs together enables researchers to create an all-encompassing model that explains modern marriage emotional and relational dynamics. People need to understand this dynamic because continual relationship neglect will eventually lead to marital dissatisfaction and loss of emotional safety. Thus, the present study explores on phubbing, emotional availability, and marital satisfaction among married couples. In this current scenario the increased access of digital connectivity significantly competes with the emotional intimacy. The study aims to understand how spouses experience their feelings in the digital age. Understanding how phubbing impacts on emotional presence and perceived marital quality can provide valuable insights into the changing nature of the marital interactions.

III. AIM OF THE STUDY

The present study aimed to examine on Phubbing, Emotional Availability, and Marital Satisfaction among Married Couples.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the relationship between phubbing, emotional availability and marital satisfaction among married couples.
- To determine the predictive role of phubbing on marital satisfaction among married couples
- To identify the predictive role of phubbing on emotional availability among married couples
- To assess the combined predictive role of phubbing and emotional availability on marital satisfaction among married couples.

V. HYPOTHESIS

- Ha.1 There is a significant relationship among phubbing, emotional availability, and marital satisfaction among married couples.
- Ha.2 Phubbing significantly predicts the marital satisfaction among married couples
- Ha.3 Phubbing significantly predicts emotional availability among married couples
- Ha.4 Phubbing and emotional availability significantly predict marital satisfaction among married couples.

VI. RESEARCH DESIGN

A quantitative correlational research design is used to study how two or multiple measurable variables interact with each other through their relationships without changing their values. The design uses numerical data together with statistical methods which include correlation and regression analysis, to show how variables interact in real-world situations. The design is used for research purposes when the goal is to discover relationships between variables while making predictions about their future values without proving causal relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

VII. SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

The present study was conducted in Thrissur district, which is centrally located in Kerala. The investigator has chosen the non-probability sampling method because they lack a complete sampling frame and need to study specific subgroups and their research goals require exploratory and qualitative insights. The researchers selected participants through purposive sampling because they needed individuals who met specific criteria that matched their study objectives. In the present study, the researcher selects N=160 married couples between the age group of 25-40 years.

VIII. INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Inclusion Criteria

- A couple who are legally married at the time of data collection.
- Couples between the age group of 25-40 years.
- Couples who have been married for a minimum of one year.
- Couples residing in Thrissur district in Kerala.
- Couples who are currently living together.
- Couples who gave informed consent

Exclusion Criteria

- Participants who are unmarried, separated, divorced or widowed.
- Couples who are not living together.
- Couples married for less than one year.
- Individuals below 25 years and above 40 years.
- Participants who didn't give consent.

IX. METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

In the quantitative phase, the researcher used the survey method to gather information by distributing questionnaires that include the demographic details, phubbing behaviour questionnaire, emotional availability questionnaire, and marital satisfaction questionnaire, via Google Forms.

X. TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION

- Demographic details included age, gender, and the type of family
- Phubbing Questionnaire scale developed by Karadağ et al. (2015), consisting of sub-scales - communication disturbance and phone obsessions, with a total of 10 items.
- Emotional Availability of Adult Interpersonal Relationships Questionnaire (EA-AIRQ) scale developed by Herndon (2017) that measures emotional responsiveness, sensitivity, involvement, and support between partners using 16 items.
- ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (Brief Version) scale developed by Fowers and Olson (1993) that consists of two subscales: Marital satisfaction and Idealistic Distortions, contained in 15 items.

XI. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Data collected were statistically analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software Version 25. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were calculated. Inferential statistics were done using the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient to measure the relationship between two variables having ordinal data and regression analysis to evaluate the impact of one or more independent variables on the dependent variable by evaluating the strength and the direction of the relationship.

XII. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

9.1 Relationship between phubbing, emotional availability and marital satisfaction among married couples

Ha.1 There is a significant relationship among phubbing, emotional availability, and marital satisfaction among married couples.

Using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient method, the following results were obtained:

Table 1 Relationship between phubbing, emotional availability and marital satisfaction among married couples

Correlation		Marital Satisfaction	Emotional Availability	Phubbing
Phubbing	Correlation Coefficient		-.011	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.887	
	N		160	
Marital Satisfaction	Correlation Coefficient			-.155*
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.050
	N			160
Emotional Availability	Correlation Coefficient	.823**		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	160		

Table 1 indicates that there is a weak but significant relationship between phubbing and marital satisfaction ($r = -0.155$, $p = .050$), no significant relationship between phubbing and emotional availability ($r = -0.011$, $p = .88$), and strong positive relationship between emotional availability and marital satisfaction ($r = .823$, $p = .000$). This suggests that higher the phubbing, lower the marital satisfaction whereas higher the emotional availability, greater the marital satisfaction. However, there was no influence of phubbing on emotional availability. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis Ha.1., which states that there is a significant relationship among phubbing, emotional availability, and marital satisfaction among married couples, is partially accepted.

In line with the present study, previous research has reported that partner phubbing negatively affects marital satisfaction and increases conflict and emotional disconnection (Arshad, 2022; Roberts & David, 2016; Utami, 2020; McDaniel et al., 2021). Earlier studies examined related constructs such as emotional self-disclosure, emotional intimacy, emotional skillfulness, emotional expressiveness, and emotional awareness rather than emotional availability directly (Noor, Khalid, & Ghul, 2025; Dandurand & Lafontaine, 2013; Cordova, Gee, & Warren, 2005; Yelsma & Marrow, 2003; Croyle & Waltz, 2002). Besides, emotional intimacy and closeness with less avoidant attachment enhanced couple satisfaction (Dandurand & Lafontaine, 2013), whereas poor emotional expression reduced marital satisfaction (Yelsma & Marrow, 2003). In contrast to the present study, Aljasir (2022) observed increased marital satisfaction despite phubbing, while Wang, Zhao, and Lei (2021) found no significant relationship between phubbing and marital satisfaction, with self-esteem acting as a moderating factor. Also, partner phubbing led to affection deprivation that reduced relationship satisfaction (Denes et al., 2025).

9.2 Impact of phubbing on marital satisfaction among married couples

Ha.2 Phubbing significantly predicts marital satisfaction among married couples

Using linear regression analysis, the following findings were obtained:

Table 2 Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.183 ^a	.034	.027	13.17052

a. Predictors: (Constant), Phubbing

b. Dependent Variable: Marital Satisfaction

Table 3 Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	60.939	4.371		13.941	.000
	Phubbing	-.354	.151	-.183	-2.343	.020

Tables 2 and 3 shows a correlation coefficient (R) value of .183 and the R² value of .034, suggesting that phubbing explains 3.4% of the variance in marital satisfaction, indicating a weak explanatory power. The F value of 5.488 with a significance value of $p = .020$ demonstrated that phubbing significantly predicts marital satisfaction. Further, the regression coefficient ($\beta = -.183$, $B = -.354$, $p = .020$) explains that phubbing negatively predicts marital satisfaction. To be precise, an increase in phubbing behaviour is associated with a decrease in marital satisfaction. Hence, the alternative hypothesis Ha. 2, which states that phubbing significantly predicts marital satisfaction among married couples, is accepted.

In consistent with the present study, previous research shows that partner phubbing negatively predicted relationship satisfaction and perceived romantic relationship quality (Yam, 2023), and romantic jealousy and partner phubbing found to predict marital satisfaction negatively (Arshad & Imran, 2022). However, contrasting results were shown when the effective communication skills were considered because the negative predictive effect of partner phubbing on satisfaction in the relationship became non-significant (Kılıçarslan & Parmaksız, 2023).

9.3 Impact of phubbing on emotional availability among married couples

Ha.3 Phubbing significantly predicts emotional availability among married couples

Findings after calculating linear regression analysis are shown below:

Table 4 Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.038 ^a	.001	-.005	10.99197

a. Predictors: (Constant), Phubbing

b. b. Dependent Variable: Emotional Availability

Table 5 Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	59.596	3.648		16.337	.000
	Phubbing	-.060	.126	-.038	-.477	.634

a. Dependent Variable: Emotional Availability

In the tables 4 and 5, it is given that the correlation coefficient (R) value is .038 and R² value is .001, which explains a very weak negative relationship between phubbing and emotional availability in which phubbing explains only 0.1% of the variance in emotional availability and thus has no meaningful explanatory power. The F value is .228 with a significance value of $p = .634$, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Also, the regression coefficient ($B = -.060$, $\beta = -.038$, $t = -.477$, $p = .634$) indicate no statistically significant predictive relationship between phubbing behaviour and emotional availability among married couples. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis (Ha. 3) which states phubbing significantly predicts emotional availability among married couples, is rejected.

Previous studies show that phubbing negatively affects different aspects of relationship such as relationship quality, intimacy and emotional closeness that may operate indirectly through factors like attachment styles, loneliness, and relationship satisfaction (Ni et al., 2025). Besides, some studies report that phubbing harmfully effects emotional and relationship outcomes by significantly and negatively effecting emotional closeness due to less partner availability perception (Namratha et al., 2025)

9.4 Impact of phubbing and emotional availability on marital satisfaction among married couples

Ha.4 Phubbing and emotional availability significantly predict marital satisfaction among married couples.

Given below findings were obtained after multiple regression analysis:

Table 6 Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.848 ^a	.718	.715	7.13183

a. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Availability, Phubbing

b. Dependent Variable: Marital Satisfaction

Table 7 Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.827	3.881		.213	.832
	Phubbing	-.293	.082	-.152	-3.582	.000
	Emotional Availability	1.009	.052	.828	19.541	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Marital Satisfaction

Tables 6 and 7 demonstrates the combined impact of phubbing and emotional availability on marital satisfaction among married couples. The model summary indicated a strong relationship between the predictors and marital satisfaction ($R = .848$, $R^2 = .718$), suggesting that phubbing and emotional availability together explains 71.8% variance with regard to marital satisfaction. The F value is 200.278 with a significance value of $p = .000$. The regression coefficients namely $B = -.293$, $\beta = -.152$, $t = -3.582$, $p < .01$ is found for phubbing which means phubbing significantly and negatively predicts marital satisfaction. In contrast, emotional availability significantly and positively predicts marital satisfaction ($B = 1.009$, $\beta = .828$, $t = 19.541$, $p < .001$). As per the findings, emotional availability is comparatively stronger predictor of marital satisfaction than phubbing. Thereby, the hypothesis Ha.4. those states phubbing and emotional availability significantly predict marital satisfaction among married couples, is accepted.

Likewise, similar studies show that emotional availability positively affects relationships because emotional responsiveness, intimacy and perceived partner support constitute the primary factors determining marital happiness (Debrot et al., 2012). Besides, phubbing creates a major adverse relationship effect on marital satisfaction because partner phubbing leads to increased neglect and relationship disputes which result in decreased relationship satisfaction (Wang & Zhao, 2023); Ni et al., 2025). Researchers have also found that phubbing can create indirect effects which depend on specific mediating factors that include insecure attachment and commitment to the relationship (Wang et al., 2021).

Conclusion

The present study aimed to explore the impact of phubbing and emotional availability among married couples in Thrissur district, Kerala with the data collected from 160 participants aged from 25 to 40 years gave insights into how technology related behaviours and emotional relational process influence marital well-being. The findings indicate that marital satisfaction is strongly influenced by emotional availability, while phubbing has a negative but comparatively weaker effect. The study also revealed that phubbing significantly predicts marital satisfaction negatively whereas phubbing did not significantly predict emotional availability, indicating that emotional connection within marriage may be influenced by deeper relational and psychological factors beyond technological interference alone. The results emphasize the need for awareness regarding healthy technology use and strengthening emotional communication between spouses.

Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for psychological practice, marital counselling, family well-being, policy formulation, and future research. It highlights the importance of emotional presence and responsiveness in marital relationships. Marital and family therapists in clinical practices can indulge more in strengthening the emotional availability between partners along with addressing other behavioral and communicational conflicts with more focus on emotion-focused therapies. Additionally, harmful effects of digital distractions and divided attention due to phubbing can be educated to couples through awareness programs. In terms of family welfare and policy, district and community-level mental health programs that address digital well-being education as a part of marital and family counselling services. On a theoretical level, this study reinforces the importance of considering attachment and interdependence perspectives of marriage. For the future research, the effect of repeated patterns of phubbing in influencing marital satisfaction over time could be explored using longitudinal studies. Furthermore, measures to improve emotional availability and decrease phubbing behaviors to enhance marital satisfaction should be explored with the help of intervention-based research.

Limitations

Research could have been improved in many areas. The study examined only 160 participants which is relatively a small sample. We can expand the geographic scope of the study by including a large sample size. Due to purposive sampling, a selection bias might have occurred. Even though standardized self-report questionnaires are very practical and commonly used, it may cause social desirability bias. There is a lack of dyadic analysis because the study analyzed responses at the individual level rather than collecting matched data from both partners within the same marriage

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