



RESEARCH PAPER

The Role of Interpersonal Cognitive Distortions between Phubbing and Relationship Disillusionment among Newly Married People

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to examine the role of interpersonal cognitive distortion between phubbing and relationship disillusionment. Relationship disillusionment is feelings of disappointment, regret, defeat and hopelessness in the relationship (Niehuis et al., 2011). Phubbing behavior, misperception, unrealistic expectation and rejection feeling contribute to relationship disillusionment. Sample consisted of newly married peoples from Sargodha Divisions in Punjab, Pakistan ($N = 225$). A cross-sectional research design and purposive sampling technique was used to collect data. 'The Phubbing Scale' developed by Karadağ et al. (2015), interpersonal cognitive distortions scale by Hamamci and Buyukozturk (2004) and relationship disillusionment by Niehuis and Bartell (2006) were used. The finding indicated that all variables were correlated in the expected directions and all subscales of interpersonal cognitive distortions moderate the relation of phubbing with relationship disillusionment. Moreover, women experienced higher relationship disillusionment than men. This investigation focused exclusively on newly married people. Future studies should incorporate a sample with more diverse characteristics and also need to develop intervention programs that will help partner to control phubbing behavior and interpersonal cognitive distortions to improve interpersonal relation.

KEYWORDS Interpersonal Cognitive Distortion, Phubbing, Relationship Disillusionment

Introduction

Marriage is a bond where both individuals have to spend their entire lives together. Especially in the Pakistani cultural context, marriage is mostly about committing to a lifelong partnership. After marriage, both partners should make decisions together and play an equal role. In a relationship, justice, balance, care, spending time together, and love are the pillars of its strength. This fosters mutual respect and strengthens the bond between them (Hussain, 2024).

Diamond (2020), a marriage and family therapist, proposed that the primary reason most marriages fail is due to a flawed approach to building a lasting and passionate connection. Many individuals continue to hold onto outdated ideas of love that suggest: There is a singular soul mate for everyone, necessary for experiencing true and enduring love. Once this person is found, everything else will naturally fall into place. Love will flourish, a shared life will be created, and the couple will live happily ever after. If relationship disillusionment occurs, it means the wrong partner was chosen, prompting a painful recovery and the search for the "right one" to begin again. However,

these beliefs do not offer a path to lifelong happiness; instead, they often lead to heartbreak and isolation.

Relationship disillusionment is more than just marital dissatisfaction. It involves feelings of disappointment, regret, and defeat. It also includes a sense of hopelessness in the relationship (Niehuis et al., 2011; Weigel & Shrout, 2021). A study explored partner idealization in close relationships. According to the researchers, this positive illusionary view might later lead to feelings of disappointment or disillusionment. This disillusionment can cause relationship issues in marital life (Niehuis et al., 2011). In addition, minor annoyances such as phubbing become more noticeable and irritating as romantic relationships progress. Initially liked traits in a partner can turn into dislikes as the relationship matures. This indicates that behaviors like phubbing, which might seem trivial at first, can become major sources of disillusionment over time. That is to say, phubbing can contribute to relationship disillusionment by evolving from a minor issue into a significant source of dissatisfaction (Roberts & David, 2022).

Unfortunately, the misuse of technology today has had negative impacts in many areas. Similarly, in relationships, not caring for each other, not giving time, not listening, and lacking attention are some of the negative effects that are becoming evident (Batool, 2020). One major reason for such negative aspects in marital relationships is the excessive use of mobile phones, social media, and phubbing (Adegboyega, 2022; Shittu & Bolaji, 2023; Wang et al., 2021). Phubbing is a phenomenon where a person ignores others due to being captivated by their mobile phone (Karadağ et al., 2015).

Whereas, partner phubbing is when a person prefers to use mobile phone over face-to-face engagement, specifically with their partner (Ligon-Tucker, 2023). When discussing about smartphone users it was expected that the global number would reach over seven billion (GilPress, 2024). Before this, several studies have suggested that excessive smart phone usage and phubbing has a negative connection with cognitive abilities (Edwards et al., 2023; Zahra et al., 2024). However, this study proposed that if phubbing phenomenon appears among newly married individuals, it can lead to relationship disillusionment. Moreover, if interpersonal cognitive distortions are also involved, they can further intensify this relationship disillusionment among both.

Whereas, interpersonal cognitive distortions are inflexible, irrational, and definitive ways of thinking that significantly overstate the characteristics of a relationship. These distortions lead to major misinterpretations of life events (Simsek et al., 2021). The current study measured these three types of interpersonal cognitive distortions among newly married individuals which are: interpersonal rejection, unrealistic relationship expectations, and interpersonal misperceptions. Interpersonal rejection refers to the belief that forming close bonds with others will lead to adverse outcomes (Simsek et al., 2021). According to Mark Leary, in his book 'Interpersonal Rejection', indicated that rejection is a broad term which refers to something that is no longer desired or required and further suggested that interpersonal rejection is a common and unpleasant relational experience that few persons can escape throughout their lives (Leary, 2015). The second type of interpersonal cognitive distortions under this study, is unrealistic relationship expectations. It signifies a high level of performance anticipation in personal connections, concerning both one's own and others' actions (Simsek et al., 2021). In addition, they involve desires like an individual wants to alter the core beliefs of their partner, be the sole source of their joy, or contradict the inherent masculine or feminine traits. The author suggested avoiding expecting their partner to respond or feel exactly as they do and never anticipate flawlessness (Tony Robbins, 2024). Besides, a try to interpret others' emotions and thoughts using unrealistic approaches is

known as interpersonal misperception. It can cause conflicts among individuals and strain the marital life because of the assumptions replacing communication (Simsek et al., 2021). This study anticipated that interpersonal cognitive distortions can intensify the positive association between phubbing and relationship disillusionment that impacts marital life.

Literature Review

When talking about interpersonal cognitive distortions, especially in marital relationship, three things come to mind. These are interpersonal rejection, unrealistic relationship expectations, and interpersonal misperception. The current study examined these three components to see if they have any impact on the connection between phubbing and relationship disillusionment among newly married individuals in Pakistan. Rajchert and colleagues (2022) studied that seeing someone as perfect can make you more likely to feel hurt if they let you down. Therefore, it can be suggested that in romantic relationships, especially among newly married individuals, phubbing might lead to relationship disillusionment (Rajchert et al., 2022).

Furthermore, an investigation revealed the impacts of phubbing behavior on romantic relationships. The researcher emphasized that phubbing was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction in intimate bonds. It further highlighted that 97% people in different research studies have reported that it has weakened their relation with their loved ones (Ligon-Tucker, 2023). Similarly, interpersonal cognitive distortions are common thinking mistakes and they make a person interpret events in a negative way. Many people face these distortions occasionally. However, frequent reinforcement of these distortions can worsen anxiety and depression. These distortions can also cause problems in relationships and lead to other issues (Stanborough, 2019). According to Talari et al. (2024) suggested that cognitive distortions are positively correlated with marital disaffection. According to them, negative thinking patterns contribute to dissatisfaction in relationships. The study highlighted the importance of addressing these distortions to improve marital satisfaction. The individual aspects like phubbing, interpersonal cognitive distortions, and relationship disillusionment have been studied in isolation but their combined effect on newly married individuals has not been thoroughly explored. Therefore, this study aimed to fill the gap by examining how interpersonal cognitive distortions can impact the association of phubbing behavior with relationship disillusionment in newly married individuals, in Pakistan. In the Pakistani context, where marriage is highly valued, the intrusion of smart phones can disrupt emotional connections and contribute to dissatisfaction. The insights gained from the current study could help address modern technological challenges, especially in marital relationships. The findings can also help in enhancing healthy marital relationships.

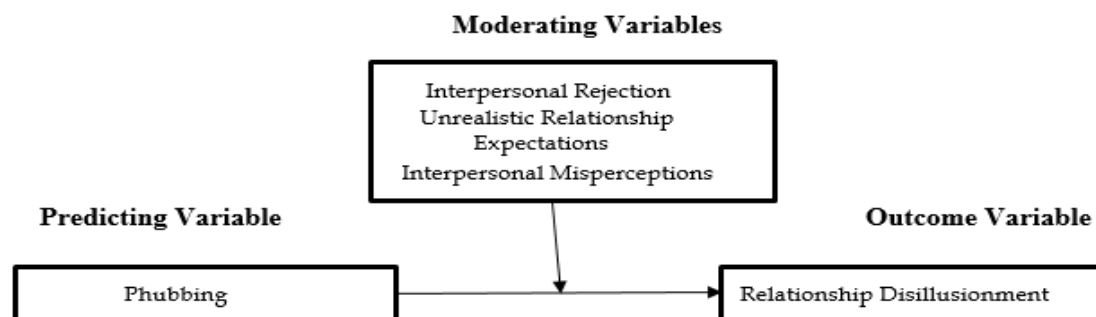


Figure 1 illustrates the moderating role of interpersonal cognitive distortions between phubbing and relationship disillusionment.

Hypotheses

- H1.** Interpersonal rejection would moderate the relationship between phubbing and relationship disillusionment among newly married people
- H2.** Unrealistic relationship expectations will moderate the relationship between phubbing and relationship disillusionment among newly married people
- H3.** Interpersonal misperception will moderate the relationship between phubbing and relationship disillusionment among newly married people
- H4.** There would be a significant mean difference of men and women on phubbing, interpersonal rejection, unrealistic relationship, interpersonal misperception, and relationship disillusionment among newly married people

Material and Methods

Nature

This study is based on descriptive quantitative approach. Correlational and Cross-sectional survey research design was used to collect the information to examine the role of interpersonal cognitive distortions between phubbing and relationship disillusionment.

Population

Newly married people whose partners were having a Smartphone and were using it more than three hours per day were included in this study from Sargodha Division, Punjab, Pakistan.

Sample size

Sample of the present study were consisted of newly married people from Sargodha Division Punjab, Pakistan ($N = 225$). Only those participants, whose partners were having a Smartphone and were using it more than three hours per day, were included in the sample. Moreover, those participants were selected who were not having any serious psychological or physical health issue and were willing to participate.

Sampling Technique

For the purpose of data collection, a cross-sectional research design and purposive sampling technique was used.

Instruments

Phubbing scale developed Karadağ et al. (2015). It is consisted of 10 items. This scale rates phubbing behavior on a five-point Likert scale, from 1 = *never* to 5 = *always*. Its scores range from a minimum of 10 to a maximum of 50. Obtained scores on this scale were interpreted in terms of low and high scores rather than cut off scores.

Interpersonal cognitive distortion scale developed by Hamamci and Buyukozturk (2004). It is consisted of 19 items with 3 subscales, items of interpersonal rejection 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 12, 13, 19, unrealistic relationship expectation, 5, 9, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and interpersonal misperception 6, 7, 8. The scale is based on negatively phrased

items which are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, response pattern ranging from *strongly disagree* = 1 to *strongly agree* = 5. Individual can minimum obtain 8 on interpersonal rejections, 8 on unrealistic relationship expectation and 3 score on interpersonal misperception scale whereas maximum scores cannot exceed 40, 40 and 15 respectively. Obtained scores on this scale were interpreted in terms of low and high scores rather than cut off scores.

Marital disillusionment scale developed by Niehuis and Bartell (2006). It consisted of 16 items. The scale is based on negatively phrased items which are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, response pattern ranging from *strongly disagree* = 1 to *strongly agree* = 5. Individual can minimum obtain 16 scores on this scale whereas maximum scores cannot exceed than 80. Obtained scores on this scale were interpreted in terms of low and high scores rather than cut off scores.

Validity and Reliability

The original reliability of the scale is .83. Ekimchik and Kryukova (2022) confirmed that the phubbing scale is both reliable and valid. Reliability of martial disillusionment is .98. scale is reliable and valid (Niehuis, 2007). The reliability of interpersonal rejection is .80, interpersonal misperception .70 and unrealistic relationship expectation .75. According to Kirchner et al. (2023) confirmed that the interpersonal cognitive distortions scale is reliable and valid.

Pilot Testing

A pilot study was conducted on the limited sample to evaluate the effectiveness of the survey instruments, data collection procedures and psychometric properties. Feedback from participants was used to improve survey techniques in challenging areas. It further helped to ensure that the procedures were practical and that the instruments effectively captured the intended constructs.

Data Analyses technique

Multiple statistical analyses were conducted. Descriptive statistics summarized key variables, and calculate the mean, standard deviations, and skewness. Furthermore, the correlation analysis explored the relationships between variables. Moderation model run to check the role of interpersonal cognitive distortions between phubbing and relationship disillusionment. Additionally, to find the mean differences between men and women, independent samples t-tests were used.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent form was filled up by all the participants which ensured that they understood the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits. It was informed to them that confidentiality will be maintained by anonymizing data and securely storing it. Further, their participation will be volunteer based with the option to withdraw at any time without any consequences. The study also minimized the harm by addressing sensitive information with care and providing support resources where needed. Besides, transparency was ensured by reporting findings honestly. Participants were also informed that they would receive a debriefing session to explain the study's goals and address the possible concerns.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Mean, Standard deviation and Pearson correlation of phubbing, forgetfulness, distractibility and false triggering

Variables	M	SD	a	1	2	3	4	5
Phubbing	25.50	9.78	.76	---	.71***	.61***	.49***	.73***
Interpersonal rejection	21.75	8.42	.81		---	.68***	.50***	.76***
URE	19.44	6.83	.84			---	.29***	.66***
Interpersonal misperception	9.34	2.97	.79				---	.60***
Relationship disillusionment	38.60	15.87	.75					---
Skewness				-.07	.13	.53	.21	.05

N = 225, *** $p < .001$, URE = unrealistic relationship expectations,

Table 2
Moderation of Interpersonal Rejection, Unrealistic Relationship Expectations and Interpersonal Misperception between Phubbing and Relationship Disillusionment

Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	B	SE	B	B	SE
Constant	38.59***		.64	34.97***		.83
Phubbing	6.11***	.39***	.88	6.39***	.40***	.82
IR	7.76***	.49***	.88	8.19***	.51***	.82
Phubbing x IR				5.14***	.22***	.83
R ²	.65			.70		
ΔR ²				.05		
Constant	38.34***		.65	36.24***		.86
Phubbing	7.06***	.45***	.88	7.54***	.48***	.86
URE	6.94***	.42***	.90	6.53***	.40***	.89
Phubbing x URE				3.25***	.14***	.91
R ²	.63			.65		
ΔR ²				.02		
Constant	38.21***		.65	37.27***		.79
Phubbing	8.17***	.52***	.78	8.52***	.54***	.80
IMP	6.09***	.38***	.79	5.54***	.35***	.83
Phubbing x IMP				1.75***	.09*	.85
R ²	.63			.64		
ΔR ²				.01		

N = 225, *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, IR = interpersonal rejection URE = unrealistic relationship expectations, IMP = interpersonal misperception

Table 3
Mean, Standard Deviation and t -Values of Men and Women on Phubbing, Interpersonal Rejection, Unrealistic Relationship Expectation and Relationship Disillusionment

Variables	Men (n = 104)		Women (n = 121)		t (198)	95% CI		Cohens'd
	M	SD	M	SD		LL	UL	
Phubbing	23.35	9.83	27.90	9.26	-3.57***	-7.06	-2.02	.47
Interpersonal rejection	19.49	8.21	23.69	8.13	-3.84***	-6.35	-2.04	.51
URE	17.22	5.54	21.36	7.25	-4.73***	-5.85	-2.41	.64
Interpersonal misperception	8.58	2.46	10.01	3.09	-3.67***	-2.19	-.66	.51
Relationship disillusionment	33.18	14.82	43.25	15.30	-4.90***	-14.04	-6.09	.66

N = 225, *** $p < .001$, URE = unrealistic relationship expectations,

Discussion

Marriage education has been a focus of research for over fifty years (Bass et al., 2007). Social relationships are crucial in human life. However, interpersonal cognitive distortions cause rigid and illogical thought patterns among partners. Ultimately, these distortions exaggerate how people perceive relationships which can lead to misinterpretations of life events. Moreover, such kinds of belief restrict social interactions and also affect relationship quality and satisfaction (Simsek et al., 2021).

The findings of the current study revealed a significant relationship between phubbing, interpersonal rejection, unrealistic relationship expectations, interpersonal misperceptions, and relationship disillusionment among newly married people. Moreover, interpersonal rejection, unrealistic relationship expectations, and interpersonal misperceptions increased the negative effects of phubbing which led to a greater relationship disillusionment. So, all the hypotheses were accepted by the results. The literature also helped in confirming the findings as Roberts and David (2022) suggested that phubbing can contribute to relationship disillusionment by evolving from a minor issue into a significant source of dissatisfaction. Similarly, an investigation emphasized how both conflict and depressive symptoms can greatly affect negative perceptions and emotional strain in relationships. The outcomes of the study found that heightened conflict was associated with more negative appraisals and blame which led to a sense of disillusionment in the relationship. Furthermore, depression served as a moderating factor with those individuals who were experiencing depressive symptoms feeling these negative effects more acutely. Therefore, it increased their vulnerability to the impact of the conflict (Weigel & Shrout, 2021).

H1 proposed that "Interpersonal rejection would moderate the relationship between phubbing and relationship disillusionment among newly married individuals". The evidence aligned with the hypothesis as the interpersonal rejection significantly affected and strengthened the positive connection between phubbing behavior and relationship disillusionment. Previous studies also backed up this hypothesis. A study discussed emotional responses to interpersonal rejection and explained that these rejections are some of the most painful and impactful experiences individuals encounter. Whether it involves a romantic refusal, the end of a friendship, exclusion by a group, estrangement from family, or simply being overlooked or left out in everyday interactions, rejection has numerous emotional, psychological, and relational effects. People often react intensely when they sense rejection from others, and much of human behavior is driven by the need to avoid such rejection (Leary, 2015). In view of study's findings and scholarly sources, it appears that interpersonal rejection worsens the relationship disillusionment resulting from phubbing.

H2 stated that "Unrealistic relationship expectations will moderate the relationship between phubbing and relationship disillusionment among newly married individuals". The results validated the hypothesis as unrealistic relationship expectations strengthened the positive association of phubbing behavior with relationship disillusionment among newly married individuals. The literature also confirmed the findings as an inquiry examined if media, especially television, affects unrealistic relationship expectations about marriage and found that overall TV viewing was associated with fewer unrealistic relationship expectations. However, watching romantic genres such as romantic comedies and soap operas was linked to higher level of unrealistic relationship expectations. Moreover, these unrealistic relationship expectations were strongly related to the increased marital intentions. The findings further indicated that specific television content can shape unrealistic views of marriage

which can cause dissatisfaction and disillusionment in real-life relationships (Segrin & Nabi, 2002). Drawing from the study's results and existing literature, it could be proposed that unrealistic relationship expectations worsen the relationship disillusionment led by phubbing.

Likewise, H3 claimed that "Interpersonal misperception will moderate the relationship between phubbing and relationship disillusionment among newly married individuals". The findings confirmed the hypothesis as interpersonal misperception strengthened the positive relationship between phubbing and relationship disillusionment among newly married individuals. The literature further validated the hypothesis. An investigation revealed that dysfunctional relationship beliefs affect marital satisfaction and adjustment. Moreover, misconceptions like thinking excessive closeness harms relationships and in turn reveals interpersonal misperceptions. Likewise, the mindreading beliefs where an individual assumes they know others' thoughts without communication, are also linked to greater marital satisfaction in females. Eventually, these dysfunctional beliefs can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts that negatively impact the marital adjustment (Hamamci, 2005). Thus, on the basis of the findings of present study and a review of the literature, it can be proposed that interpersonal misperceptions amplify the relationship disillusionment led by phubbing behavior.

Surprisingly, the results based on fourth hypothesis "There would be a significant mean difference of men and women on phubbing, interpersonal rejection, unrealistic relationship, interpersonal misperception, and relationship disillusionment among newly married individuals", revealed that women experienced higher levels of relationship disillusionment compared to men. In Pakistan, women generally go out less and participate less in outdoor activities compared to men, which means they have much leisure time to spend on mobile phone or think excessively (Laar et al., 2019). This may also be due to their less stringent work routines, which allowed more frequent use of smartphone (Muhammad & Ximei, 2022). They also have more exposure to television, which feature romantic dramas, movies and advertisements that may shape higher expectations (Segrin & Nabi, 2002). This increased exposure and accessibility can be a cause of higher levels of relationship disillusionment observed among women.

Conversely, men generally go out more and participate more in outdoor activities compared to women in Pakistan, which means their experiences with the outside world are vast (Laar et al., 2019). As a result, men tend to have more maturity and experience, which could lead to reduced disillusionment, or because they might be more understanding and mature compared to women. It might be possible also due to the vulnerability of women to experience higher levels of idealization than men (Niehuis et al., 2011). These factors could be explored further in future research. Additionally, qualitative studies can provide a deeper analysis of these factors and yield more impactful results through detailed interviews and observations. Such studies can offer clearer insights and more robust findings, presenting a thorough understanding supported by strong evidence.

To summarize, the inclusion of interpersonal cognitive distortions can significantly heighten the impact of phubbing on relationship disillusionment. Women showed greater relationship disillusionment than men. These results highlighted the role of interpersonal cognitive distortions in amplifying the impact of phubbing on relationship disillusionment, in context of different areas of Sargodha division, Punjab – Pakistan.

Conclusion

Present study confirmed that phubbing, combined with interpersonal cognitive distortions, significantly affected the relationship disillusionment in newly married people. In other words, the presence of interpersonal cognitive distortions with phubbing increased the level of relationship disillusionment in newly married people. So, addressing interpersonal cognitive distortions along with phubbing can help mitigate the adverse effects of phubbing behavior and to improve relationship quality. Moreover, women experienced higher relationship disillusionment than men. Based on these outcomes, different interventions could be introduced for men and women, especially if these trends are confirmed by further studies.

Recommendations

To address the issues identified in the current study, it is important to develop intervention programs that focus on managing interpersonal cognitive distortions in individuals. These programs should teach partners how to challenge negative thinking patterns and enhance communication skills. In addition, promoting awareness about the combined effects of phubbing and interpersonal cognitive distortions is also crucial. Educational workshops and seminars could be held to help couples understand these issues and their impacts on relationships. Similarly, counseling services could also be offered to address both phubbing behavior and interpersonal cognitive distortions, with a focus on improving emotional support and engagement. Moreover, guidelines for smartphone use within relationships can help in preventing phubbing behavior. Besides, clear rules for phone use could also be established to encourage more meaningful interactions. Additionally, providing support resources like developing online self-help mobile applications and creating informational materials for online forums, can assist individuals dealing with relationship disillusionment. Finally, further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of phubbing and interpersonal cognitive distortions on relationships and to identify effective interventions.

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