

# The Hidden Risks of Cell Phone Addiction: A Rising Concern for Health

Muhammad Ashar Khan<sup>1\*</sup> and Amnah Khan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Liaquat College of Medicine and Dentistry, Karachi, Pakistan

<sup>2</sup>Karachi Metropolitan University, Karachi, Pakistan

## Respected Editor,

In the last few years, mobile phones (MP) have transformed dramatically from simple communication devices to versatile multitasking tools, making them highly dependable for users. This dependency can lead to the MP addiction problem which has brought significant health and societal challenges, particularly among younger populations, as mobile phone addiction continues to rise. Raising awareness and advocating for interventions is crucial to addressing this growing issue. The MP addiction is characterized by a compulsive urge to use the device, leading to preoccupation, disruptions in family and social life, difficulty limiting usage, and anxiety when the MP is unavailable (nomophobia). Pakistan has over 150 million MP users and these people are susceptible to developing MP addiction [1].

A distinction between normal and abnormal usage is critical. Normal usage involves practical, necessary interactions with limited screen time suggested three hours per day while people with MP addiction have high screen time. Research shows that increased screen time can impact both sleep quantity and quality. Furthermore, it can also lead to a sedentary lifestyle, increasing the risk of obesity, high LDL, and high blood pressure which are major risk factors for CVS morbidity. Excess usage of MP can also cause postural problems and weakened vision [2].

An increase in MP users has driven a rise in social media consumption. A study shows that there is a correlation between anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem with social media use which can lead to suicidal deaths among adolescents [3]. Furthermore, it is also found that the beauty ideals displayed on social media have increased body dissatisfaction, especially among young women which leads to eating disorders like restricted diet and self-vomiting [4]. Nowadays, the availability of online games on MPs has fuelled gaming addiction, with Internet Gaming Disorder now recognized in the latest 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders criteria. Individuals indulge in video games to ease off depression and anxiety, but this often worsens their symptoms [5].

Therefore, it is necessary to address these issues at the community level. The most effective approach is through

both electronic and social media campaigns. Awareness should focus on the harmful effects of mobile phones, recognizing symptoms of addiction, and encouraging individuals to seek expert help. To enhance these efforts, specific strategies for campaign implementation and community programs should be considered. These may include community workshops and school-based programs aimed at educating individuals on the risks of excessive MP use. Collaborative efforts with healthcare professionals, local governments, and educational institutions can further amplify the impact of these campaigns. Additionally, incorporating media platforms for targeted awareness, along with user-friendly tools like digital wellness apps, can further empower individuals to manage their screen time effectively [6]. Furthermore, one clinical trial has demonstrated that Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) provides short-term benefits for internet and gaming addiction [5]. Lastly, parents should monitor and limit their children's mobile phone usage and encourage them to engage in outdoor activities. These strategies hold significant potential for reducing the adverse effects of mobile phone addiction and fostering a healthier digital environment.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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\*Corresponding author: Muhammad Ashar Khan, Liaquat College of Medicine and Dentistry, Karachi, Pakistan, Email: [mkhan.ashar@gmail.com](mailto:mkhan.ashar@gmail.com)

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