

Textaphrenia: An emerging silent pandemic

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Abstract

We read the article by Ramlall et al (2013) with great interest which presents one of the few studies conducted on African population for prevalence of Dementia and Minimal Cognitive Deficits. The study brings to the fore some important data regarding the prevalence of Minimal cognitive impairment (MCI) and dementia in the African population as well as their socio-demographic profiles. Additionally the authors have also detailed the associated medical problems with these disorders in the backdrop of the available literature. However, we would humbly like to point out an important lacuna in the diagnostic evaluations used in the study which is common to earlier prevalence studies of dementia and MCI.

Keywords: Dementia; Lewy Body Disease; Minimal Cognitive Impairment

There has been a tremendous growth in the use of mobile/smart phones for text messaging during the past fifteen years. This is due to its usefulness in communication and interactions in the sphere of work and private life. Recent studies have shown that the use of text messaging through mobile/smart phones for social networking has also helped in reducing loneliness^{1,2}. However, it is reported that an excessive use of mobile/smart phones is associated with some specific psychiatric morbidities³. One of these new emerging mental health problems is known as "Textaphrenia". It is defined as a "disease of text messages or addiction to text messages"³. In other words, Textaphrenia is an apprehension that a text message had arrived. While in reality, there is no text message arrived yet. Textiety is the anxious feeling of not receiving or sending text messages. This newly emerging mental health problem has the potential to become a pandemic of modern era⁴.

Textaphrenia is considered to be a combination of auditory hallucination and delusion where the affected individual believes that he had heard a text message tone or feel that his handset is vibrating with indication of an arrival of a new text message, while in reality there is actually no new message in the inbox of his mobile/smart phones. This newly recognized mental health disorder is spreading very quickly among teenagers who extensively use their cellphones. People who suffer from Textaphrenia usually present with the signs and symptoms of anxiety, anorexia, insecurity, disappointment, depression, irritation, excessive cellphone usage, low self-esteem, and repetitive thumb syndrome⁵.

Though it is a newly emerging public health problem, but only a few people are aware about the signs and symptoms of Textaphrenia. Due to this reason, many people are unaware that they might be actually suffering from it. The screening criteria for Textaphrenia which can be used for generation of awareness in public are as follows:⁶

- If an individual has checked his mobile/smart phones for text message at least 8 times in an hour without receiving any real text message for at least on 2 successive occasions during that hour, then he might be suffering from Textaphrenia.

- If an individual has kept his mobile/smart phones on silent mode, but still claim to hear the tone of text messages on 2 successive occasions during an hour, then he also might be suffering from Textaphrenia.

Jennie Carroll had studied the effects of modern communication among teenagers in Melbourne since 2001. It was revealed that the mobile/smart phones usage for text messaging had become an integral part of a teenagers' life. This study identified four distinct text messaging related disorders prevalent among the teenagers that are identified as Textaphrenia, Textiety, Post-traumatic Text Disorder and Binge Texting⁴.

A recent survey conducted on 150 youths aged between 18 and 25 years at the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Medical College (MGMMC) of Indore, India revealed that majority of the participants who had the habit of sending text messages frequently, also had symptoms of depression and fear.⁵ A significant proportion of females (47%) and males (39%) accepted that their addiction to text messaging habit was affecting their daily activities. Apart from this, 60% of the respondents felt that the habit was even affecting their studies. In this study, 40% of females and 45% of males admitted that they did not get sound sleep due to their addiction to texting messages⁷.

The evidences are suggestive that excessive use of mobile/smart phones for text messaging can result in developing psychological dependency and can affect the activities of daily living. Hence, there is a need to study the mobile/smart phones usage for text messaging more systematically and in detail. It is also important to draw the attention of every individual towards this newly emerging public health problem and generate adequate awareness in the community to prevent this condition.

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