Impact of Experiential Avoidance on Psycho-Emotional Distress Among Couples: Emotional Intelligence as Moderator and Phubbing as Mediator

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DECLARATION

I, **Ms. Tanzeela Rafiq**, Registration No. **484-FSS/MSCP/F-23, a** student of **MS** in the subject of Psychology, session **2023-2025**, hereby declare that the matter printed in the thesis titled "Impact of Experiential Avoidance on Psycho-emotional Distress among Couples: Emotional Intelligence as Moderator and Phubbing as Mediator" is my own work and has not been printed, published, and submitted as research work, a thesis, or a publication in any form in any university, research institution, etc., in Pakistan or abroad.

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RESEARCH COMPLETION CERTIFICATE

Certified that the research work contained in this thesis titled "Impact of Experiential Avoidance on Psycho-emotional Distress among Couples: Emotional Intelligence as Moderator and Phubbing as Mediator" has been carried out and completed by **Ms. TANZEELA RAFIQ**, Registration No. **484-FSS/MSCP/F-23,** under my supervision.

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Dedication

Dedicated to Allah Almighty for His endless blessings and guidance throughout this journey and to my parents, whose endless prayers, love, and sacrifices have been my greatest strength. I also dedicate it to all those who quietly fight their own battles yet continue to nurture the dreams of others; may this work stand as a small tribute to their resilience and hope.

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List of Abbreviations

APA	American Psychological Association
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
APIM	Actor Partner Interdependence Model
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
EA	Experiential Avoidance
EI	Emotional Intelligence
ERS	Emotional Reactivity Scale
EL	Emotional Loneliness
PDS	Psychological Distress Scale
Phub	Phubbing
SD	Standard Deviation
SE	Standard Error
CL	Confidence Level
R	Correlation Coefficient
A	Cronbach's Alpha
N	Sample Size

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With the completion of this thesis, I find myself reflecting on the journey that has been more than an academic endeavor it has been a journey of patience, resilience, and unwavering faith. This work would not have been possible without the blessings of Almighty Allah, whose mercy and guidance illuminated my path when doubts clouded my vision and strength seemed to falter. To Him belongs my first and deepest gratitude, for granting me the courage to begin, the perseverance to continue, and the fulfillment to finish.

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May this thesis stand as a testament to perseverance, hope, and the belief that with faith and determination, no goal remains unreachable.

Abstract

This study examined experiential avoidance predicting psycho-emotional distress in married couples, using phubbing as a mediator and emotional intelligence as a moderator. Psycho-emotional distress included psychological distress, emotional reactivity, and emotional loneliness. In view of increasing smartphone dependence and its relational impact, the study explored how avoidance-based behaviors affect couples' well-being. Data were collected from 167 married couples in Rawalpindi and Islamabad through purposive sampling. Standardized measures included the Brief Experiential Avoidance Questionnaire, Phubbing Scale, Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale–10, Perth Emotional Reactivity Short Form, De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale, and Kessler Psychological Distress Scale. Data was analyzed using SEM and APIM-based dyadic models. Results showed that experiential avoidance strongly predicted phubbing, while emotional intelligence was negatively related to phubbing, and Psycho-emotional distress. APIM mediation revealed that phubbing partially mediated the link between experiential avoidance and psycho-emotional distress, suggesting that avoidance tendencies are often expressed through technology use that promotes emotional detachment. APIM moderation indicated that emotional intelligence buffered the adverse impact of experiential avoidance on emotional reactivity but not on loneliness or psychological distress. Overall, findings suggest that phubbing functions as a maladaptive avoidance strategy that heightens psycho-emotional distress, whereas emotional intelligence acts as a protective factor. The study highlights the need to enhance emotional intelligence and address avoidance-based smartphone use in marital well-being interventions.

Keywords: Experiential Avoidance, Phubbing, Emotional Intelligence, Psycho-emotional Distress, Couples

Chapter 1

Introduction

Strong relational ties play a crucial role in both mental and physical health. Partners in close relationships, such as marriage, often report greater life satisfaction and reduced psychological distress (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). A meta-analysis report by Holt-Lunstad and colleagues further revealed that individuals with strong social bonds had a 50% reduced risk of mortality an effect comparable to quitting smoking. Thus, Marriage provides individuals with direction, value, and belonging through emotional support, shared goals, and social integration (Fitzsimons & Light, 2014). Conversely, a lack of social and emotional support can lead to loneliness, depression, and anxiety among married individuals (Jacobson et al., 2017). When communication and emotional bonds weaken, marriages may become a source of stress rather than support (Fincham, 2003). Thus, it is essential to identify the factors that strengthen or undermine couples' emotional connection and overall well-being.

In this context, the rapid increase in smartphone use has introduced new relational challenges. One such phenomenon is technoference the disruption of closeness and communication due to technology use (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016). A related behavior, experiential avoidance, involves attempts to escape or suppress unpleasant emotions through maladaptive coping strategies, including excessive smartphone use (Karekla & Panayiotou, 2011). Smartphones, while convenient, often serve as tools for avoidance, diverting attention from meaningful interactions and fostering habits such as phubbing the act of prioritizing phone use over one's partner (Leonard et al., 2020). Research has linked phubbing to loneliness, relationship dissatisfaction, and emotional disengagement (Guazzini et al., 2021; Zhan et al., 2022). However,

its broader impacts on emotional reactivity, isolation, and psychological distress remain underexplored.

Emotional intelligence (EI), which enhances communication, resilience, and conflict management (Bröning & Wartberg, 2021; Arshad et al., 2023), may buffer the negative effects of experiential avoidance and phubbing. Yet, its protective role in this domain has not been sufficiently examined. This study adopts a dyadic perspective to explore how one partner's experiential avoidance influences both their own and their partner's psychological well-being, and how emotional intelligence may moderate these dynamics.

Finally, the research situates these issues within the Pakistani context, where strong family values coexist with rapidly increasing smartphone use. By addressing this cultural intersection, the study contributes to understanding how experiential avoidance, phubbing, and emotional intelligence shape marital bonds in technologically evolving societies. The findings aim to inform therapeutic interventions such as psychoeducation and emotional regulation training that foster emotional intelligence and strengthen marital relationships.

Experiential Avoidance

Experiential avoidance is defined as willingness and attempts to escape unwanted internal thoughts, feelings or experiences even when it ultimately harms them. As more they suppress, the more it elevated leading to certain other psychological issues. Usually, it's seen that this phenomenon just exacerbates the distress don't resolve it. Although, it seems escaping stressors immediately might feel helpful but just for short time, research indicates that its chronic use elevates the distress in return. This non-acceptance and failure to this attempt to stop these thoughts or distress originating from those experiences, result in strengthening this behavior of avoidance more. Experts believe it's mostly originated by some fear, like fear of negative

evaluations, fear of significance, procrastination, contextual stressors etc. that person doesn't want to face at all (Hayes et al., 1996).

Forms and Mechanism

Researchers believe that the habit or tendency for using inappropriately the suppression strategies to regulate our emotions is a potential risk factor for developing experiential avoidance. Now to better understand how it works, there are two major forms through which experiential avoidance is executed.

Suppression

It is a deliberate attempt to control, evade, escape or push away the immediate distressing unwanted thoughts, feelings, emotions, or physical sensations. Its avoidant type of coping aims to lessen the intensity and magnitude of these internal experiences.(Wang et al., 2024) However, its identified by some researches that suppression often seems helpful but paradoxically elevates the occurrence of those internal experiences,(Wegner et al., 1990).Moreover, chronic suppression also responsible for elevating physiological distress that exacerbates psychological distress too in return.(Gross & Levenson, 1997)

Situational Escape

The second form of experiential avoidance is changing one's behavior in terms of preventing oneself totally from exposure to contexts like places, people, situations that may elicit distressing internal experiences in them. This will include avoiding all those specific places, people, or even activities that are linked with some negative emotions or memories and can produce distress in individual. While this kind of avoidance may result in short term relief, it triggers and reinforces fear and will stop people to engage in meaningful life activities due to that

distress linked to it. Thereby maintaining or worsening psychological disorders more. (Hayes et al., 1996). Hayes further emphasizes that experiential avoidance usually entails all the methods to alter experiences via escape or avoidance.

Short term coping vs. Long Term costs

Now, a question arises how these avoidance behaviors are strengthened and maintained. One of such reasons is short term coping obtained from experiential avoidance. Short term, coping means that experiential avoidance helps person to get relief from distressing thoughts or emotions temporary for short period of time. It gives immediate relief to stress associated with those internal experiences. This ultimately provides an individual sense of control or immediate reduction in stress. This immediate alleviation strengthens this avoidance behavior in return, which person uses again and again in the future, making it a preferred coping strategy for many (Hayes et al., 1996).

Impacts of Experiential Avoidance

Despite its short-term benefits, ultimate dependence on such avoidance behaviors leads to various psychological detriments. Now some of such detrimental long-term effects are discussed ahead. First and foremost is psychological distress that's also focused as one of its impacts in this review too. Being persistent in using avoidance strategies prevents an individual to not only to face, process and resolve the underlying issue but also by doing so it gradually exacerbates depression, anxiety, stress and other forms of psychological Distress over passage of time (Chawla & Ostafin, 2007). Similarly, Kashdan et al. (2006) presented two studies to investigate the role of experiential avoidance (EA in contributing to development of psychological distress). The researchers revealed that EA plays a vital role in elevating anxiety and emotional problems, often high than compared to common coping and emotion regulation strategies. In the first study, EA mediated the association between maladaptive coping styles and anxiety-related distress, meaning

that people who avoided their emotions in anyway experienced increased anxiety despite how they coped. The second study followed participants for 21 days and revealed that high levels of EA were associated with heightened negative emotions, fewer positive experiences, and reduced enjoyment in daily life. Even cognitive reappraisal, a commonly employed therapeutic technique, was less effective in promoting emotional well-being when EA was present. The study concluded that EA may act as a generalized psychological vulnerability and should be addressed directly in mental health treatment.

Experiential avoidance in marital relationships

In these recent years, experiential avoidance (EA) has been considered as a trans diagnostic phenomenon underlying variety of psychological issues (Hayes et al., 1996; Kashdan et al., 2006). While most of the empirical research has emphasized its intrapersonal consequences or impacts such as anxiety, depression, and emotional dis-regulation where side by side still most upcoming body of work suggests that its effect may broaden to interpersonal function, specifically in intimate relationships. In this framework, Research has increasingly emphasized this detrimental impact of experiential avoidance (EA) in intimate relationships, particularly in the framework of interpersonal conflict and maladaptive coping strategies. One such study is by Bell and Higgins (2015) investigated the mediated role of experiential Avoidance between childhood emotional abuse and intimate partner violence (IPV), revealing that individuals who suppress or escape internal distress may struggle with having effective problem-solving, extending to greater risk of conflict and aggression. Similarly, Reddy et al. (2011) investigated military married couples and reported that higher levels of EA were correlated with lower relationship satisfaction and thus contributing to increased physical aggression, especially among male veterans. In Addition to these Zamir et al, (2018) investigated the impact of experiential avoidance on relationship quality of

married military couples. Their findings indicated that higher levels of experiential avoidance in both partners are potentially linked to lower relationship satisfaction. It emphasized that experiential avoidance specifically in men predicted high negative communication behaviors and reduced relationship quality among their partners. These findings emphasize the potential impact of EA to not only impair emotional regulation in individual but also disturb interpersonal functioning within close relationships, exacerbating its relevance as an essential core factor influencing psychological distress and conflict in marital institutes.

The intrinsically demanding essence of marital bonds, which often require emotional availability, expressiveness, active listening, empathy, attention and responsiveness, makes them particularly susceptible to the subtle yet detrimental effects of experiential avoidance. Within such relationships, avoidance may involve not only as an internal attempt to suppress or escape uncomfortable feelings but also as behavioral withdrawal, emotional withdrawal, or non-responsiveness during emotionally charged interactions (Cordova et al., 2005; Zamir et al., 2019).

Thus, the result of above research indicates that Individuals high in experiential avoidance may find it hard to engage wholeheartedly during moments of conflict or intensified emotional contexts, resulting obviously in detachment and gradual erosion of emotional intimacy. Over time, this pattern may exacerbate the couple's susceptibility to unresolved conflict, emotional reactivity, and increasing emotional isolation, which together constitute a broader domain of psycho-emotional distress.

Phubbing

In marital settings, such avoidance does not occur alone; it often is carried out by some behavioral strategies that serve to distract from emotional discomfort. For instance, research by (Garcia-Olivia & Piqueras, 2016) validates by their studies on experiential avoidance revealing

that those who more often avoid their aversive emotions or internal experiences are highly likely involved in overusing things such as internet, mobile phones, games etc. Showing avoidance behavior can lead to unhealthy tech habits too. One such modern behavioral manifestation is phubbing the act of snubbing one's partner by paying attention to one's mobile phone instead of engaging in face-to-face interaction (Roberts & David, 2016). From an Acceptance Commitment Therapy perspective, phubbing can be understood as a manifestation of experiential avoidance, where individuals escape emotional discomfort or interpersonal demands by diverting their attention to seemingly neutral or rewarding digital content avoiding better communication (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). This behavior, while subtle, has been shown to potentially weaken relationship satisfaction and bond, leading to elevated emotional distance between partners (Roberts & David, 2016). As technology becomes highly immersed and embedded in daily life, phubbing is considered as culturally normal, but it is causing emotional damage to the partners, especially in relationships where partners are already tense by internal avoidance tendencies. This study also reviews the same connection indicating how partners turn to their phones (phubbing) during emotionally intense or vulnerable moments, by doing so they are not only escaping from the internal experience of distress but also unable to engage in meaningful emotional communication with their spouse. This dual-layered avoidance internal and behavioral by both means can further heighten feelings of emotional isolation and psychological distress.

Given increased relevance and prevalence of phubbing in marital relationships, it warrants focused exploration of this concept. As a mediating variable in this study, it serves as behavioral bridge between experiential avoidance tendencies in one partner and the emergence of psycho-emotional distress in another partner of couple. In this digital era, smartphones are in every hand and have become an integral part of daily life. It facilitates one from communication and

information access. At the same time, its pervasive presence also contributes to the emergence of various challenges to interpersonal relationships thus affecting the psychological wellbeing of individuals. Phubbing is one of these challenges defined as the act of prioritizing or giving attention to phone over communicating or when individual use smartphones so much that they start using it during conversations or in other words the act of phone snubbing is tendency to ignore a partner in favor of involving with one's smartphone during social interactions is called phubbing (Robert & David, 2016). Now this behavior has received attention because of its potential impacts disrupting relational dynamics all over the world, particularly within marital contexts.

Phubbing in marital relationships

Research indicates that phubbing significantly disrupts the relationship satisfaction and psychological wellbeing of partners. It instills in them emotional isolation, aggression, emotional reactivity and psychological distress; a critical view that's also the focus of this study but in a more holistic way investigating both emotional and psychological impact in married couples. And it's also observed that people phubbed more their partners than anybody else, which also emphasizes the importance of studying phubbing among married couples. According to Al-Saggaf (2022), people more commonly phub their romantic partners than anyone else in face-to-face settings. This behavior not only aversively disrupts the relationship by reducing intimacy, attachment, and satisfaction but also increases jealousy, social anxiety, depression, and smartphone-related conflicts, thereby giving harm to both relationship quality and the partner's mental, emotional well-being. Thus, Partner phubbing by research validates having detrimental impacts on both partners mental emotional health disrupting their relationship too. In addition to this, one of the scoping and latest reviews carried out this year 2024 focused on all existing studies on how Partner phubbing impacts mental health, especially among married couples.

The review incorporated eight studies published between 2016 and 2023. Most of them were correlational studies with few describing how it impacts gradually the mental health; The sample sizes in these studies included 75 to 346 people. The results revealed that Phubbing was associated with lower life satisfaction and higher levels of depression, anxiety, anger, frustration, and other negative emotions (Komnik, 2024). In other words, being ignored by a partner or victim of partner phubbing can cause detrimental effects on a person's emotional and psychological well-being. The review by Komnik (2024) also highlighted a limited number of studies on partner phubbing, with most limited details about participants' relationship status (e.g., married). It invites for more diverse, relationship-specific, and longitudinal research to better understand the long-term mental health effects of phubbing, especially among married partners. Thus, this study also targeting this limitation tried to investigate partner phubbing impacts holistically on married couples with unique connection to experiential avoidance.

Same way another study explores that partner phubbing acts like social exclusion, which not only reduces the intimacy but also increasing conflict in relationships, which then gradually harms individuals emotional and mental health (Fu et al., 2024). It also explains how phubbing affects relationships through different theories like expectancy violations, social exchange, and interdependence, and calls for future research on more detailed mechanisms and protective factors to mitigate the impacts of phubbing. Moreover, another study in this framework is by Al-Saggaf (2022), in face-to-face settings, people are more likely to engage in phubbing with their romantic partners than anyone else. And this attitude obviously impacts the relationship by reducing attachment, intimacy, closeness, trust and satisfaction.it also elevates jealousy, social anxiety, depression and conflicts related to smartphone use, thus harming both quality of relationship and mental wellbeing of both partners.

From a psychological viewpoint, phubbing may be understood as experiential avoidance, an avoidance mechanism whereby individual avoiding or for escaping stressful situations due to their poor emotional regulation abilities get involved into problematic smart phone use just like phubbing. The same findings were also revealed from research by Extremera et al. (2019) explored how individuals' use of cognitive emotion regulation (CER) strategies is associated with problematic smartphone use. Results shown that poor emotion regulation strategies are strongly associated with excessive and problematic smartphone use among adolescents, suggesting that interventions should be planned to focus on improving emotional coping skills that will also reduce smartphone dependence for avoidance (Extremera et al., 2019). This avoidance can manifest in the form of phubbing thereby playing role in behavioral expression of such underlying poor emotional regulation difficulties. Same idea this study aims to reveal by finding out this mediation role of phubbing between experiential avoidance and psycho-emotional distress. Moreover, the detrimental consequences of this avoidance and its manifestation in phubbing can be understood by all the above-mentioned studies very clearly. Further, when it's observed to relate to Pakistani culture, where marital relationships are strongly embedded in social and familial structures and values, this impact of phubbing is exacerbated and need to be understood and intervened for better psychological m, relational wellbeing of partners.

Given these considerations, phubbing emerges as critical and potential mediator in the association between experiential avoidance and psycho-emotional distress among married partners in Pakistan. Thus, understanding this dynamic is important for developing interventions aimed at emotional regulation skills like emotional intelligence and fostering healthier communication within marriages.

Psycho-emotional Distress

Previous researches has shown that experiential avoidance and phubbing both not only influence relationship quality but also have detrimental impacts on psychological and emotional wellbeing of partners. Avoidance strategies just like phubbing leaves phubbed partner to feel emotionally isolated and causes aggression emotional reactivity that gradually turns into psychological distress in them over time. Where some reviews studied emotional impacts, where some psychological impacts of this avoidant behavior of phubbing, however this study reviews these impacts holistically under psycho-emotional distress umbrella. Whereby, for purpose of this present study psycho-emotional distress is operationalized by three interrelated constructs including emotional reactivity, emotional isolation, and psychological distress. These constructions offer a structured lens to understand in better way both subtle and long-term consequences of avoidance based interpersonal behavior of phubbing. Each of these domains play a distinct role in erosion or evading emotional harmony, closeness, and intimacy within marital bonds.

Emotional Reactivity

Emotional reactivity is defined as a tendency to respond to any interpersonal events or stimuli strongly and quickly, as well as how prolong these emotional responses are or we can say that behavior characterized by impulsive reactions and difficulty in emotional regulation is called emotional reactivity, Becerra (2013). Emotional reactivity is considered as one of the important elements of emotion regulation that encompasses three major components: Activation (how easily or quick emotions are triggered), intensity (how stronger emotions are, its strength), duration (time an individual needs to come back to their emotional baseline). These three aspects of emotional

reactivity basically define why some individual may experience emotions more strongly and for longer durations than others. (Becerra & Campitelli, 2013).

Now emotional reactions are not specifically for negative events or stimuli, but it also includes reacting to positive events such as good news also. On basis of that there are two other dimensions of emotional reactivity that Becerra and his colleagues explain. Positive Emotional Reactivity refers to how quickly and strongly a person responds to some pleasant emotional experiences such as joy, excitement, or satisfaction. For instance, getting happy easily or highly motivated when being praised by someone.it helps to increase social bonding, motivation among individuals. Similar way there's another aspect that is negative emotional reactivity which involves people giving intense and prolonged reactions to some unpleasant or distressing situations such as fear, anger or sadness. For instance, overreacting to some criticism or getting angry, being frustrated quickly and finding it difficult to come out of it. Research linked such type of reactivity to mood disorders and interpersonal conflict. For instance, research by Lamers et al. (2018) explored the association between emotional reactivity to both positive and negative events with that of mood stability among patients having mood disorders like bipolar major depressive and anxiety disorders. They find that people strongly react to positive events having bipolar 1 and 2 while anxiety is also reduced the same way among individuals having major depressive and anxiety disorder. On other hand after negative events every group showed anxiety increased except that of bipolar 1 patient. The results revealed that emotional reactivity and mood instability are common in both mood and anxiety disorders showing strong association between emotional reactivity and mood disorders (Lamers et al., 2018).

Impact on interpersonal and marital context

Studies have shown detrimental impacts of emotional reactivity not only to mood disorders as mentioned above but also impacting close relationships. Studies revealed high emotional reactivity associated with negative outcomes in interpersonal and marital settings especially among people having poor regulation strategies. Research by Yuan, Fan and Leng (2002) investigated the role of emotional reactivity on marital quality among Chinese couples. Their findings revealed that there was a negative association between emotional reactivity, perceived partner responsiveness and marital quality in both spouses. Using actor partner interdependence model, their findings suggested that emotional reactivity of both spouses predict not only their own but their partners marital satisfaction too. Showing, that high emotional reactivity reduces the quality of marital interactions, partly because partners may feel emotionally unsupported. Similarly, Coutinho et al. (2017) explored the physiological effect of emotional reactivity during marital interactions. Couples who are involved in negative conservations exhibited high heart rate and cortisol levels indicating increased stress. These physiological responses to emotional conflicts in marriage over time gradually influence both mental and physical health by eroding relationship satisfaction.

Adding to this framework, Wei et al. (2005) investigated the roles of emotional reactivity and emotional cutoff in close relationships. They found mediating role of emotional reactivity between attachment anxiety and negative moods and interpersonal problems reflecting that people with unstable emotional regulation might struggle in relationships leading to maladaptive coping such as avoidance or withdrawal.

This study reviews how such poor coping strategies as experiential avoidance manifested by phubbing lead to emotional reactivity and psychological distress among couples. Cunningham et al. (1997) suggest emotional reactions arising due to repetitive events disrupting daily

interactions among partners, especially when it's viewed as personally directed and intentional (Robert and David, 2022). In same context, this study also argues that repetitive exposure to such behavior as how phubbing does might by elevating emotional consequences such as emotional reactivity among partners can disrupt daily interactions.

Emotional Isolation

Emotional isolation is defined as a state in which a person feels emotionally disconnected, detached from others despite being surrounded by people, especially in close interpersonal relationships. (Weiss, 1975). Unlike social isolation, emotional isolation is a subjective feeling of not being understood, valued or supported or emotionally bonded even when others are physically present. Emotional isolation has detrimental impacts on marital relationships, breaking the emotional bond reducing marital life satisfaction and causing psychological distress. In a comprehensive study among old married partners by de Jong Gierveld et al. (2009), it was found that at least among one in four or five married individuals experience moderate level to strong emotional loneliness. Their findings revealed that such spouses feel emotionally isolated for multiple reasons, especially due to limited emotional support by their partners having health concerns or among those who engage more in conflict laden conversations. These aspects significantly erode emotional closeness or bond and satisfaction within relationships. Similarly, Olson and Wong (2002) explored emotional loneliness in marriage and revealed that dyadic cohesion was the strongest predictor of reduced emotional isolation. Their study further suggested that marital satisfaction and length of marriage had no impact on emotional isolation. These studies emphasize that when emotional expression and meaningful communication is reduced from relationships due to repetitive pattern of avoidance behavior in the form of phubbing can

potentially cause emotional isolation among partners deeply affecting their psychological well-being overall.

Relationship between Emotional isolation, experiential avoidance and phubbing

Shi et al. (2016) examined how experiential avoidance can influence loneliness. They investigated that individuals who have strong emotional regulation abilities are less prone towards getting emotionally isolated thus suggesting strong connection between low experiential avoidance and loneliness.in other words, people who can manage their emotions well will not engage in avoidance strategies (such as phubbing) and this ability to not avoid difficult emotions will help them to feel less lonely by acceptance and meaningful conversation. This study emphasizes experiential avoidance as an important factor in understanding and addressing loneliness especially when planning interventions. This study also aims to review this idea more clearly by finding the connection between how one spouse persistently repeatedly avoids difficult emotions it threatens communication and emotional support which might turn into emotional isolation feelings in another partner. This experiential avoidance is usually manifested by technology use such as phubbing. Phubbing prioritizing mobile phones over conversation with partners also weakens the close bond between partners inculcating emotional isolation in partner being phubbed. One study corresponding to this idea was carried by Shrivastav and the team (2025) who explored that when somebody uses phones consistently during face-to-face conversations, it can hurt the other person in relationship impacting relation and wellbeing of partner overall. People might phub because of smart phone addiction or to escape thus suggesting phubbing to be form of avoidance behavior. (Shrivastav et al., 2025). Now this avoidance strategy; phubbing when is consistent can threaten relationship satisfaction and psychological well-being of partners. Phubbing is when persistent can heighten emotional isolation which this study also aims to find. This idea is supported by the

findings from research by Maftei and Mairean (2023) who investigated that how perceived phubbing impacts life satisfaction and psychological distress and whether loneliness plays role in relationships. Findings revealed that people who are more phubbed also experience more emotionally lonely and psychologically distressed. Loneliness was found to be partially mediating the phubbing and its negative impacts on both life satisfaction and mental well-being. Which clearly indicates that phubbing can contribute to develop loneliness and psychological distress. Thus, study emphasizes better understanding this relationship to mitigate the impacts of phubbing manifested as an avoidant behavior. (Maftei & Mairean, 2023).

Psychological Distress

According to American Psychological Association (2021), psychological distress is a state characterized by physical and psychological symptoms that are related and normal fluctuations of mood in most people such as anxiety depression often arise in response to certain stressors which is challenging and perceived as threat to individual. It incorporates range of negative emotional experiences such as sadness, hopelessness and irritability that often impairs daily life functioning of an individual. Ridners (2004) detailed analysis on psychological distress validates it as distinct emotional condition arising from internal or external stressors impacting negatively on individual daily life functioning. In surveys, assessments, public health and psychological research, psychological distress is commonly used as poor mental health indicators. (Drapeau, Marchand and Beaulieu-Prevost, 2012). It includes a broad range of symptoms such as depression anxiety, behavioral emotional issues and social withdrawal. According to Drapeau et al. (2012), psychological distress often occurs when an individual is continuously exposed to emotional, relational turmoil, influenced by both personal and social factors.

Psychological distress in marital Relationships

Psychological distress is closely associated with the quality of marital bond as conflict dissatisfaction and poor communication can be the factors eroding individuals' wellbeing. Research shows depressive symptoms linked with marital discord among married couples (Goldfarb et al., 2007). From another research it's clearly evident having stronger association between, psychological distress lower marital satisfaction, avoidant attachment styles and unconstructive conflict communication prevalent more in depressed couples as compared to nonclinical couples (Lemmens et al., 2007). Similarly, it's observed that emotional reactivity withdrawal and poor resolution tendencies increases psychological distress putting focus on how emotional issues or symptoms impact daily interactions among couples (Papp et al., 2007). These studies reflect that marital distress and psychological symptoms in the form of psychological distress reinforce each other impacting personal and relational outcomes.

This study reviews that experiential avoidance leads to phubbing. This can in turn cause psychological distress with other emotional outcomes among couples. Research also supports this idea by illustrating a strong link between experiential avoidance, phubbing and psychological distress as their detrimental outcome. One such study is by Spendelow and Joubert (2018) who investigated the strong association between gender role conflict leading to experiential avoidance and causing psychological distress. They found the mediated role of experiential avoidance between gender role conflict (emotional restriction, fear of appearing weak) and psychological distress. Here it also shows clearly due to gender role conflict, experiential avoidance is more in men as compared to women. This research explains further that when individuals try to escape from internal emotional events instead of confronting and accepting it ultimately increases their psychological distress indicating experiential avoidance as core psychological phenomenon

contributing to psychological distress among individuals. In the light of such findings support the idea of this study also by illustrating experiential avoidance as strong predictor of psychological distress within relationships.

When one partner avoids emotional engagement, it may lead to behaviors like phubbing that increases emotional and psychological outcomes in the form of psycho-emotional distress. Several studies support this association between phubbing and psychological distress. For instance, Shahbaz et al. (2020) explored strong association between phubbing and psychological distress and lower quality of life among Pakistani individuals. In other words, more people phub more it disturbs their quality of life and thus inculcates psychological distress in them. Similarly, Maftei and Mairean (2023) indicated that perceived phubbing leads to loneliness that causes in turn psychological distress and lowers life satisfaction among couples. Additionally, Khodabakhsh and Ong (2021) reported partner phubbing harming marital quality especially more in women and younger adults focusing emotional strain caused by it. These findings suggest that phubbing not only erodes interpersonal relationships but also acts as a strong predictor of psychological distress.

Emotional Intelligence

Moreover, not all individuals are equally impacted by experiential avoidance or its behavioral correlations such as Phubbing. Psychological theories strongly suggest that emotional intelligence (EI) the ability to not only perceive, understand, but also to manage, and regulate emotions better way may serve as a protective factor in emotionally challenging situations (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Schutte et al., 2007). In marital contexts, individuals with higher emotional intelligence are more likely to recognize and understand their avoidance tendencies, process emotional discomfort constructively by engaging in meaningful interactions, rather than escaping or resorting to maladaptive distractions. Thus, emotional intelligence is considered as

strong protective factor that may buffer the harmful consequences of avoidance and behavioral disengagement in the form of phubbing, not only moderating the relationship between EA and psycho-emotional distress but also moderating the mediating effect of phubbing. Experiential Avoidance also encompasses the recognition of emotions and its effective management to facilitate individuals' thought process and cognitions. Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2008) afterwards refined it as the capacity of individual to understand, reason one's emotions properly and emotions relevant stimuli contribute to enhance, guide thinking and behavior. Goleman (1995), a significant contributor to emotional intelligence has explained it as composition of skills such as self-regulation, self-awareness, motivation, empathy and social skills emphasizing that these are vital for success in life and relationships beyond just having IQ alone. These five core components by Goleman are the foundation of emotionally intelligent behavior and interpersonal functioning.

These five factors include : Self-awareness, (it's the ability not only to identify and understands one's own mood and emotions but also understanding their effects on others; self-regulation, (the capability to manage negative disruptive emotions and to regulate impulses; motivation,(utilizing emotional factors constructively for achieving goals, enjoying learning process and having perseverance in the way of obstacles); empathy,(.try to understand others as putting yourself in their shoes ,understanding their perspectives and feelings; and social skills, (the capacity to manage relationships effectively and building social relationships).Each of these five components of emotional intelligence plays crucial role in maintaining psychological wellbeing and interpersonal harmony.

Models of Emotional Intelligence

There are three popular models of emotional intelligence discussed in literature's include Ability model (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), the trait model (Petrides & Furnham, 2001), and the last

mixed model.(Goleman,1995).The Ability model views emotional intelligence as form of intelligence that is characterized by the abilities to perceive and utilize emotions in order to facilitate and guide thinking ,understanding and managing emotions effectively.(Mayer & Salovey,1997).In contrast, the trait model describe emotional intelligence as emotional self-perceptions constellation that's situated at the lower levels of personality hierarchies.(Petrides & Furnham, 2001).Where on other hand, the mixed model approach explains emotional intelligence as integration of emotional abilities , capacities along with that personality traits and social behaviors emphasizing its contribution to workplace performance, leadership and interpersonal relationships.(Goleman,1995).While each model has its own critics but offer valuable insights and framework for understanding multifaceted nature of emotional intelligence and its protective role in different studies and relationship making it essential part of intervention programs.

Emotional Intelligence as a protective factor

Emotional intelligence serves as a protective factor in various psychological studies. Research indicates that high emotional intelligence plays a vital role in regulating stress, coping with adversity and maintaining emotional balance which is important in interpersonal relationships like marriages.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is essential in preventing certain unhealthy patterns in romantic relationships. Research has suggested that increased levels of EI can not only help partners manage their own emotions better but also can lower the likelihood of partner engaging in or tolerating some sort of psychological abuse. In a study conducted in Spain, it was explored that emotional intelligence negatively correlates with various forms of psychological maltreatment particularly in dating relationships. Research indicates that psychological violence is more prevalent in younger people. Conversely, people who are more emotionally intelligent are less prone to engage in these

kinds of actions. This suggests that, especially in interpersonal connections, emotional intelligence can act as a protective factor. In the context of marriage, studies highlight how important it is for improving couples' general well-being and marital satisfaction. As a result of their improved ability to comprehend, identify, express, and control not only their own emotions but also those of their partners, emotionally intelligent people report higher levels of happiness and marital satisfaction (Fitness, 2001). These abilities help marriages have harmonious relationships, healthy communication, and solid emotional ties. Emotional intelligence skills such as empathy, self-regulation and emotional awareness help a partner to not only navigate their conflicts in more accurate and better ways but also reduce emotional distance and misunderstandings. (Fitness, 2001)

In another similar study, Goyal and Narayan (2024) reviewed existing literature on how emotional intelligence affects marital adjustment. Their review revealed that emotional intelligence plays a vital role in helping couples to improve communication, understanding, and trust between them, handling stress or conflict and thus contributing to develop stronger relationships. People with increased emotional intelligence skills were more likely to enjoy better and stable marital relationships. This review focused on the pivotal role of emotional intelligence in marriages helping couples to maintain healthy emotional bonds. (Goyal & Narayan, 2024)

While substantial research has associated emotional intelligence with improved relationship quality and psychological well-being, but limited attention has been given to its role in mitigating the impacts of experiential avoidance and technology-driven disengagement particularly in marriages. This presents a potential research gap and theoretical opportunity to investigate how emotional intelligence may moderate the experiential avoidance distress pathway.

Theoretical Framework

Relational Frame Theory (RFT) presents a foundational context for apprehension of how language and cognition are at the root of experiential avoidance (EA) and its detrimental impacts. In RFT, humans make complex relational networks using medium of language, which can contribute to cognitive fusion and rigid avoidance strategies (Hayes, 2016). Considering this, couples may form verbal "rules" or relational frames that support or validate the idea of avoiding negative experiences, but these frames ironically elevate distress. For instance, one spouse might repeatedly remind themselves "I should avoid conflict" as a rule, obviously which in turn expands emotional arousal when conflict certainly arises. RFT describes that such fusion with rules and initiatives at EA are "pervasive and harmful. This means a partner's covert avoidance (even through subtle mental dialogue) can increase emotional reactivity and can produce greater interpersonal distance. Relationally, escaping sincere genuine communication often results in emotional isolation partners feel unheard or unseen and thus elevating psychological distress for both individuals. Within this framework, increasing emotional intelligence could be a protective factor inducing flexibility: partners with greater EI may recognize and question rigid thoughts rather than acting on them, thereby minimizing dependence on EA. Conversely, phubbing can be understood as a behavioral associate of RFT-based avoidance: it adopts a "rule" of disengagement in the moment, further exacerbating emotional isolation among partners.

Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1988) demonstrates that early relationships with caregiver shape how people manage their emotions in close relationships later in life. If a child perceives being secured and loved, they grow up recognizing how to manage emotions well. But if their early care was inconsistent or distant, they may adopt insecure attachment styles. Two common insecure styles are anxious and avoidant. Anxiously attached people often are afraid of

abandonment and show intense emotions. Whereas, Avoidant attached people, on the other hand, prioritize emotional distance and try not to show their feelings. These attachment patterns are closely linked to experiential avoidance (EA) in this study. Avoidant attached spouses will usually hide or suppress their emotions when under stress. Instead of having meaningful interactions with their partners about their problems, they may withdraw, stay silent, or get distracted or busy on their phones (phubbing), leading to emotional detachment. Anxiously attached partners' reaction will always be stronger when they feel ignored or under stressed, over expressing their fear, anger, or clinginess, which can result in elevated stress in the relationship. Research supports this idea too. Shaver and Mikulincer (2007) revealed in their research working on same Bowlby's attachment theory that avoidant individuals often restrict expressing their emotional needs and prevents open discussions. Similarly on the other hand, Mikulincer and Shaver (2016) revealed that anxious individuals exhibit stronger emotional reactions and worry more about being left alone. Studies like Overall and Lemay (2020) also indicated and supported the idea that avoidant partners are uncomfortable with closeness and tend to distance oneself during conflicts, increasing emotional isolation in both partners which resonates to my study too.

In same way. Gross's Emotion Regulation Model (Gross, 2002) further explicates the process by which EA in couples develop distress. Gross differentiated very clearly in his theory antecedent-focused strategies (e.g. reappraisal) from response-focused strategies (e.g. suppression). Experiential avoidance in couples is strongly related with response-focused regulation of emotions: partners suppress or hide their negative emotions to prevent distress or discomfort. When partners suppress their emotions, it ultimately heightens stress because emotions are not processed properly. This Suppression can increase heart rate and mental strain, turning negative feelings more heightened (Gross, 2002). For example, if one spouse withdraws

or stays silent during a disagreement instead of addressing their anger, their internal stress builds up. This pattern creates a cycle where neither partner truly addresses the problem, leading to greater emotional tension. So, according to Gross theory, this way of regulating their emotions by not expressing it properly and escaping it through some other activity or behavior just like phubbing in my research will elevate emotional isolation and psychological distress in both partners as the partner didn't choose better way to regulate emotions and escaped from its proper address with other spouses. In contrary to it, if couples who practice reappraisal the other way of regulating emotions according to Gross theory (changing the way they think about a situation) or expressing the emotions openly and addressing the problem as in above example (using skills linked to high emotional intelligence) will obviously tend to have less emotional or psychological problems and less instability or problems in their relationships too. Phubbing is a kind of behavioral suppression too, where one partner prevents dealing with emotions by turning their attention on mobile, which can worsen feelings of disconnection (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016).In short, Gross's model suggests that relying on avoidance strategies as means of regulating emotions will heighten emotional and psychological issues where on other hand healthy coping ways to regulate emotions like that of using emotional intelligence skills will help person better managing emotions and leading to healthier life. Emotional Intelligence (EI) itself defined as the ability to monitor and manage one's own and others' emotions serves as a critical moderator in these processes. Salovey and Mayer (1990) described EI as "the ability to understand one's own and others' feelings and emotions to differentiate among them and utilize this information to navigate thinking and actions". In couples, heightened EI provides partners with awareness and regulation instruments that help in mitigating the detrimental impacts of experiential avoidance. Individuals who are emotionally intelligent are more likely to understand their emotions and of others and

know when they are using avoidance strategies or are escaping the stressors (for example, getting realization about themselves that they are phubbing to escape from fight or partners aggression) and thus will understand that instead of escaping they must engage in empathic communication to resolve the issue. This will automatically reduce emotional tension or relational strain between partners and thus psychological distress too. Conversely, people with low EI are unprepared to manage or resolve any issue, making them more susceptible to withdraw and escape it via digital distractions. For instance, someone with low EI may turn to phubbing under stress because they don't know how to manage or articulate their anger, whereas a high-EI individual might prefer to address the issue calmly to resolve it.

Cognitive Appraisal Theory (Lazarus, 1966) shed light on the importance of describing emotional outcomes. This theory focuses on the fact that emotions are not aroused by just mere events, but they are developed by how we interpret (appraise) those events. This appraisal theory well describes thus the interaction between variables of this study also which is described below. Couples do not respond to only just mere experiences; but they appraise them as threats or challenges. When a partner turns to escape or avoiding the stressors or phubbing, the other particularly appraises that personally taking it as act of personal rejection or relational threat. This way appraisal immediately develops strong heightened emotions: studies such as that by Wang et al reveals that partner phubbing is "cognitively appraising it as that stressful interpersonal event which poses risk to harm(relationship) or loss (in form of love, care, attention)," might can trigger jealousy and hurt the partner (Wang et al., 2024) . In other words, one partner's avoidance is interpreted by the other as proof of devaluation rejection, triggering intense reactivity or emotional strain. If couples habitually avoid acknowledging problems, it will become the cause of psychological distress in partners. Emotional intelligence will impact on this appraisal process by

fostering more balanced interpretations of the situation (e.g. recognizing a partner is distracted maybe due to some other reason rather not to hurt them intentionally). However, persistent avoidance often skews appraisals negatively. For example, an ignored partner may perceive that "They don't care about me," rather than "They're stressed and using their phone as a coping tool," thereby exacerbating negative emotion. Cognitive appraisal theory thus clearly explains how EA can lead to distress: avoidance behaviors might be appraised in ways that could lead to strong emotional reactions, unless there's some protective factor in frame like emotional intelligence**.**

Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) offers a social interplay and interpersonal context to this picture. Festinger claimed that people usually critique or evaluate themselves on basis of comparison they are doing with others. Based on that comparison, they determine their worth, opinions affecting their feelings, emotions, moods and overall life. In marital relationships, this means individuals may evaluate and compare their partner's attention and affection with other possible relationships. Phubbing essentially encourages and facilitates such comparisons: a partner lost in their phone may seem more attentive to some online friends or media against a person sitting beside them. This can obviously provoke upward comparisons in their partners, who will feel inferior or less valued. For instance, observing one's partner laughing at a text message or video or any social media post may generate feeling of being excluded or replaced, thus increasing feelings of inadequacy. These comparisons amplify emotional isolation and distress because the phubbed partner believes they are inadequate of their partner's apparent alternatives. Emotional intelligence can mitigate this impact by helping individuals to prevent themselves from such negative self-comparisons and focus on the novelty of their relationship and giving space to their husband to enjoy using mobile phones, better understanding their place in their partner's life. In contrast, low-EI individuals may be more inclined towards jealousy fueled by comparisons. Thus,

in short social comparison processes help us to understand why partners who feel ignored or neglected (through avoidance or phubbing) often go through high negative emotions: they unspoken compare the phone's hold on their partner to their own value, which can intensify relational dissatisfaction.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) by (Hayes et al, 1999) proposes that experiential avoidance is the key process underlying suffering. It explains EA as the attempt to avoid or get an escape from one's distressing experiences (thoughts, feelings, sensations) which inevitably threaten one's psychological flexibility. Applied to couples, ACT proposes that trying to escape from difficult emotions through phubbing or silence will in turn reinforce those very emotions with more intensity. Therefore, therapy fosters acceptance: mindfully acknowledging uncomfortable thoughts and feelings without trying to avoid them. By doing so, individuals can re-connect with meaningful actions (e.g. open communication with a partner) instead of getting trapped in detrimental impacts of avoidance. Hayes et al. (1999) explains further that EA causes people to "lose connection with present-moment contingencies" due to mental entanglement. In couple terms, this suggests that one's partner feels worthless or devalued as attention is diverted. ACT would suggest that by encouraging acceptance (and often, improving emotional awareness of self and others via some emotional intelligence skills), partners can break the vicious cycle of avoidance and can protect themselves from relational strain and its psychological impacts. In more practical terms, rather than phubbing to escape from a tense conversation, an ACT-informed approach fosters understanding the internal desire to flee and instead committing to stay present. Empirical ACT research encourages that reducing fusion and avoidance can help improve relationships and reduce distress. Emotional intelligence aligns with ACT's values, as both reinforce awareness and regulation of emotions. Together, ACT presents a process-based

clarification for why EA and its manifestation in phubbing increases distress: it reveals how avoidance of inner experience weakens link and leads to emotional reactivity and isolation.

Collectively, these theories form a coherent framework describing how experiential avoidance prompts psycho-emotional distress in couples. RFT and ACT emphasize the cognitive-linguistic origins of avoidance and indicate that attempts to control inner experience elevate suffering. Whereas Emotion regulation and attachment models demonstrates that suppressing or avoiding feelings (an avoidant strategy via phubbing) generates intense reactivity and disengagement Lazarus's appraisal and coping perspectives focus that avoidance urge partners to interpret and perceive each other's behaviors as threats and thus to adopt maladaptive coping, fostering a vicious cycle of stress. Social comparison theory adds that avoidance (e.g. phubbing) can trigger harmful comparisons with perceived alternatives, ultimately increasing isolation. Throughout, emotional intelligence evident as a key moderator fostering adaptive appraisals and coping that weakens the impact of avoidance.

Finally, phubbing is shown as a mediator in this model: it operates experiential avoidance in daily life, breaking emotional connection and thereby turning intrapersonal avoidance into relational distress. In summary, these theories connect to describing that when couples avoid painful emotions cognitively, behaviorally (phubbing), or physiologically (suppression) they inadvertently increase each other's emotional reactivity and isolation, contributing to greater psychological distress. This incorporated theoretical basis supports the proposed model and guides interventions aimed at enhancing acceptance, communication, and emotional intelligence skills among couples.

Literature Review

The integration of smartphones into daily life has dramatically reshaped interpersonal relationships and emotional dynamics, giving rise to the source of avoidance from stressful interaction with partners through phenomenon known as 'phubbing,' or phone snubbing. Where research shows detrimental impacts of avoidance itself on marital and psychological life but when it's done via mobile phone use like phubbing; it exacerbates those consequences and become a risk factor for many psychological issues like emotional reactivity isolation, anxiety depression in both partners ultimately impacting not only marital life but also mental health overall. As mobile technology continues to proliferate, understanding its psychological implications becomes increasingly critical, especially if individuals start using it as source of experiential avoidance. This extensive literature review synthesizes findings from both national and international research, to explore the complex relationships between experiential avoidance, phubbing behavior, and their emotional psychological consequences with emotional intelligence to test whether it will help to mitigate this behavior and their impacts or not.

Experiential Avoidance and Psycho-Emotional Distress

A critical concept emerging from this body of research is experiential avoidance, which refers to the tendency to evade unpleasant thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Several studies have situated experiential avoidance in the relationship between various psychological constructs. For instance, research by Seçer and Ulaş (2020) exhibited that when the fear of COVID-19 increased it elevated the experiential avoidance also, leading to heightened obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) symptoms among adolescents. This suggests that there are external stressors which can amplify experiential avoidance, resulting in further emotional problems. While this same study also suggests that fear of covid increased the symptoms of OCD in youth and this effect is mediated

by emotional reactivity, experiential avoidance and coupled with feelings of depression and anxiety. Where, Wang (2024) built on this idea by illustrating that fear of COVID-19 also has played role in causing mobile phone addiction through depression and experiential avoidance. This reflects how fear and avoidant behaviors can correspond to elevating Phone addiction and psychological issues among youth.

Furthermore, the study by Spendelow and Joubert (2017) found that experiential avoidance mediates the relationship between gender role conflict and psychological distress, suggesting that men that experiences gender role conflicts (like restrictive emotionality, success power competition, conflicts between work and leisure) starts to avoid it. This experiential avoidance in turn contribute to exacerbate psychological distress among men. It shows Experiential Avoidance is positively correlated with psychological distress.

Adding on to this discourse further, study by Akbar et al. (2022) executed exhaustive meta-analysis incorporating 441 studies, extending robust evidence that experiential avoidance is moderately too strongly correlated with symptoms of depression, anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder and PTSD. Specifically, they found the correlations of r=0.506 for anxiety and 0.562 for depression, validating Experiential avoidance as trans diagnostic factor influencing the potential severity of psychological distress across multiple disorders.

Supporting this idea, Spinhoven et al. (2024) conducted a longitudinal study on adults. His study showed that experiential avoidance not only remains consistent over period among adults but also is a good predictor of enhancing mood disorders including generalized anxiety and depression. Their study demonstrates that experiential avoidance can also serve as cause for my psychological issues rather than just merely a symptom of some psychological condition, shedding light on the need to target it in therapeutic interventions.

Further insight is provided by Munsamy, Walker, and McHugh (2023), who demonstrated experiential avoidance in the context of repetitive negative thinking among university students. Their study showed that these repetitive negative thoughts act as mediator between experiential avoidance and emotional distress. Ultimately, revealing a cognitive behavioral pathway via which the avoidance plays a role in worsening mental health overall.

If we go in more such kind of research, one of research is by (Moritz et al., 2021) demonstrating the similar idea. It explores mediating role of experiential avoidance between paranoid ideation and depressive symptoms, anxiety and stress within general population sample. Highlighting, individuals who are experiencing paranoid thoughts may engage in experiential avoidance leading to increased psychological distress.

Similar research was done by (Olatunji et al., 2020) who also explored the mediating role of experiential avoidance between anxiety sensitivity and psychological distress in hypertensive patients. The findings revealed that increased levels of anxiety sensitivity led to increased experiential avoidance that exacerbated psychological distress among hypertensive patients. Thus, interventions needed specifically targeting experiential avoidance among individuals with such chronic health conditions.

Research by Xiong et al. (2023) demonstrated negative school gossips effects on using mobile phone addiction among youth, explicating both anxiety and experiential avoidance in the study mediate this relationship. It explains sequential pathway where negative school gossip leads to anxiety that is so much to a level leading to experiential avoidance where a person starts to avoid these distressing thoughts and feelings caused by it culminating into mobile addiction in the end. This pathway indicates that interpersonal dynamics and individual emotional responses can contribute to addictive behaviors, reinforcing the need to address experiential avoidance in

interventions aimed at its consequences. Overall, these studies shed light on the fact that experiential avoidance is not just an isolated behavior but it's part of a complex interplay of emotional and psychological factors which necessitate comprehensive approaches in both research and therapeutic contexts.

Understanding Phubbing and its Impact on Psycho- emotional Distress

The significant behavioral pattern that is adversely impacting our social interactions is Phubbing. Guazzini et al. (2021) conducted research which clearly explicated that people who indulged in phubbing display amplified negative emotional states, which corresponds with social media addiction. This connection implies that phubbing is not merely a harmless social act but a practice that can also weaken emotional connections. The findings by Zhan et al. (2022) further reinforce this argument by exploring how the interplay of loneliness and empathy mediate the relationship between romantic relationship satisfaction and phubbing behavior. Their analysis demonstrates that individuals reduced contented in their romantic relationships have higher inclination to engage in phubbing, which aggravates feelings of loneliness and estrangement.

Caner Yam (2022) supports this idea by probing the indirect effects of partner phubbing on life satisfaction, illustrating that reduced relationship satisfaction mediates the implication of phubbing on overall life satisfaction. Furthermore, the study by Maftei and Mairean (2023) bridges phubbing behaviors with online vigilance, loneliness, and moral disengagement. They revealed that heightened online engagement contributes to exacerbated phubbing behaviors, showcasing the ongoing pattern of technology usage and emotional distress. This body of research underscores the urgency of addressing phubbing behaviors to mitigate their negative effect on personal relationships and emotional health.

The emotional aftermaths of phubbing are profound, complex and diverse. However, at the same times researchers have done extensive research too on finding ways to miti gate these effects like research done by Frackowiak et al (2023) examined how partner phubbing influences emotional states of individual incorporating within romantic relationships, shedding the light on fact that perceived emotional support from a partner can minimize the detrimental effects of phubbing. Their research demonstrates that supporting or validating one's emotions is crucial in countering the adverse feelings associated with being phubbed, thereby it provides insights for such therapeutic interventions which can improve overall relational dynamics.

Ergün et al. (2024) contributed to this discussion by incorporating measures for phubbing within a Turkish cultural context, bringing to light that phubbing correlates with indicators of psychological distress, such as anxiety, depression and negative self-image. The study revealed that phubbing is negatively linked to loneliness but positively correlated with the factors including psychological distress, somatization and phone use duration. Their study further highlights the significance of cultural factors in understanding phubbing behaviors and their psychological consequences. Meanwhile, Mantere et al. (2024) investigated the relationship between phubbing with that of social intelligence, revealing that individuals who phub generally depict lower social intelligence. This finding reinforces the idea that phubbing not only affects the individual but also the interpersonal relationships within social groups, leading to frustration and conflicts in social settings.

There are many such studies which showcase this connection between phubbing and psychological distress. Another such study is by Ivanova et al. (2020) who explored how mobile phone addiction and phubbing contribute to depression among university students. In this relationship between phubbing and mobile addiction, researchers have explored phubbing as

mediator with moderating role of loneliness. Their findings clearly explicit that increased levels of both phubbing and mobile addiction causing depression among students, indicating a pressing need for bringing awareness regarding the mental health implications of excessive phone use.

In study, by Ergun et al., (2023) explored how social media addiction is linked with mental health problems, particularly depression, anxiety, and stress. Utilizing structural equation modeling on a sample of 603 young adults, the researchers revealed that social media addiction was associated to poorer mental health outcomes via the mediating impacts of internet addiction and phubbing. They emphasized that phubbing was a potential mediator between social media addiction and both stress and anxiety, highlighting its contribution in the pathway from increased social media use to having psychological distress.

Adding to this, study by Bajwa et al., (2024) investigated the effect of internet and smartphone addiction on phubbing behavior among Generation Z in Pakistan. They executed this study with 794 university students, and the results revealed that both internet and smartphone addiction significantly predicted phubbing behavior. While the study specifically highlighted the predictors of phubbing, it also shed light on the potential psychological implications of phubbing, such as increased stress and reduced interpersonal communication, related with excessive technology use and phubbing.

Another such research showing the effect of phubbing on relationships is done in Pakistan by Javaid et al. (2024) who explored the role of cognitive distortions in mediating the relationship between phubbing and relationship disillusionment among newly married individuals. Their findings suggest that higher levels of phubbing correlate with greater disillusionment in relationships, indicating that phubbing may erode the foundational elements of trust and intimacy vital for healthy partnerships. A meaningful cross-cultural exploration by Blachino et al. (2021)

investigated the correlation between phubbing and psychological distress across 20 countries. The findings demonstrated a consistent pattern in which people who involved in or experience phubbing report escalated levels of psychological distress, irrespective of their cultural backgrounds. This research clearly indicates that the effects of phubbing on mental health are now a global concern.

Knausenberger et al. (2022) highlighted the emotional and behavioral consequences of being phubbed via two experimental studies. Participants who experienced phubbing reported having negative moods, feelings of ostracism, and threats to their fundamental basic psychological needs. Similarly, through their second study, they investigated those repeated experiences of phubbing (three times versus once) significantly reduces participants' trust in other individuals during their social interactions. These findings demonstrate that phubbing can lead to psychological distress by undermining individuals' basic social needs and trust in interpersonal relationships highlighting the need to plan interventions reducing phubbing overall.

Further expanding the psychological impacts of phubbing, Capilla et al. (2024) explored its effects on psychological health across different age group people. Their research demonstrated that more phubbing reduces overall psychological wellbeing, particularly in terms of emotional satisfaction and perceived connectedness in social interactions. Variables such as age gender and frequency of mobile phone use were found to moderate this relationship. It shows that certain demographics may be more prone to their psychological repercussions.

Adding to this discourse another study by Bakir and Dilmaç (2023) explored further the relationship between phubbing and mental health among university students. The quantitative findings demonstrated that female students reported potentially higher levels of psychological issues such as anxiety, depression, stress, and phobia compared to male students. In the qualitative

phase, participants described individuals who frequently involved more in phubbing as more introverted, lonely, anxious, shy, and overly dependent on technology. These findings show a clear and direct link between phubbing behavior and deteriorating mental well-being of students, underscoring the psychological vulnerabilities associated with excessive smartphone use in social contexts.

Experiential Avoidance and Phubbing

Although there is no direct research bridging experiential avoidance and phubbing together, and thus, this study addresses this gap by reviewing the potential association between these two constructs. The core behavior of experiential avoidance, where individuals use distraction to escape unpleasant emotions resonates with Phubbing, defined as disengaging from social interactions in favor of prioritizing one's phone. Experiential avoidance inculcates strategies aimed at evading negative internal experiences, and research supports that people avoid their distressing thoughts and feelings by any means they want as coping medium. (Karekla & Panayiotou, 2011). Thus, technology like mobile use can be one of ways to escape from distressing thoughts especially when it's in every hand nowadays. Studies have found that smartphone use is often employed to distract from emotional distress, with phubbing behaviors specifically emerging in emotionally uncomfortable situations. Research done on Technoference similarly, explicated that how technology use or interference in relationships causes lower relationship satisfaction, more conflict and higher depression among women. Here individuals might use technology as a medium of escape from stress that disrupts whole relational dynamics and psychological health. (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; Xie & Xie, 2021). Additionally, Zhang and Wang (2022) demonstrated by their study on indulgence of smartphones in times of stress that it's the stress that can lead to increased smartphone use, maybe as coping mechanism to escape from that stressful situation where

mindfulness reduces this reliance on mobile phone use during stress. This corresponds to this study linking experiential avoidance and phubbing.

There are several such studies that have shed light on the contributing role of experiential avoidance in using maladaptive coping strategies, specifically through increased use of digital technology. For instance, one of such studies is by Gorday and Bardeen (2022) who explored the moderating impact of problematic smart phone use on the correlation between experiential avoidance and anxiety. Their findings showed that those individuals with high levels of experiential avoidance will also ultimately get into elevated problematic smart phone use causing high level anxiety in them. It suggests that smartphones may be used as an escape tool from emotional turmoil or distressing internal experiences, reinforcing both psychological distress and compulsive device use.

Similarly, a recent study by Liu et al. (2025) revealed the connection between experiential avoidance and social networking site addiction among university students. This study found a positive connection between experiential avoidance and social networking site addiction. Where depression is playing a mediating role between them. Furthermore, emotional unawareness (specifically difficulty in describing feelings) intensified the association between experiential avoidance and depressive symptoms. These findings validate the idea that people who struggle to process and express their emotions are more likely prone to using online platforms as means of distraction or avoidance, ultimately falling into compulsive or addictive use patterns.

The avoidance-disengagement-distress framework, further supports this link, suggesting that individuals escape or avoid their psychological distress by turning themselves to mobile phone use just like phubbing in this study. This reliance to escape potentially exacerbates mental health issues. (Elhai et al., 2017). Therefore, phubbing also can be understood as a mediating factor in

the relationship between experiential avoidance and psycho-emotional distress, reflecting modern manifestations of avoidance coping strategies.

The Role of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is defined as a person's ability to manage, perceive, understand emotions of oneself and others and utilize emotions in a better constructive way. Salovey and Mayer (1990). Emotional intelligence has come forth as a pivotal factor in moderating the impacts of phubbing on emotional and relational outcomes. In a similar vein, Pakistani study by Arshad et al. (2024) explored the relationship between phubbing, emotional intelligence, and psychological distress among youth, pinpointing a positive correlation between phubbing and psychological distress, including anxiety and depression. These findings signify that higher levels of phubbing are correlated with elevated psychological distress, thus demonstrating the significance of reducing phubbing and fostering emotional intelligence skills among youth can help them to mitigate psychological distress in them.

Conversely, studies indicate that lower emotional intelligence is associated negatively with increased experiential avoidance and psychological distress, as shown by Soleymani et al. (2021), who found that students with low emotional intelligence and high experiential avoidance were more prone to addiction behaviors (e.g. mobile phone addiction), leading to negative emotional outcomes. Whereas emotional intelligence and experiential avoidance were negatively correlated with each other which means that those who do more experiential avoidance have less emotional intelligence illustrating the significance of enhancing emotional intelligence overall.

Schutte et al. (2007) explored the relationship between interpersonal relationships and emotional intelligence, showing that people who have higher emotional intelligence have also stronger social bonds and thus contribute to fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression. This study

concluded that emotional intelligence skills such as self-awareness, emotional regulation and empathy are essential that serve as protective factors shielding individuals from psychological distress or mental health issues.

Similarly, Mikolajczak, Luminet, and Menil (2006) revealed by their study that the trait of emotional intelligence plays a pivotal role in moderating emotional responses to stress. Their findings suggested that individuals with increased emotional intelligence are more effective in regulating their emotions, managing them and coping with stress, despite their levels of optimism and alexithymia. It shows clearly that emotional intelligence not only helps in better emotional regulation but also contributes to enhancing psychological flexibility, which may reduce the tendencies toward experiential avoidance.

Supporting these findings, Martins, Ramalho, and Morin (2010) conducted an elaborate meta-analysis for over 100 studies and revealed a persistent negative correlation between emotional intelligence and mental health issues such as stress, anxiety and depression. This analysis focused on the finding that increased emotional intelligence correlated with higher wellbeing, improved or better stress management, and overall mental health. This research corresponds to this study showing the role of emotional intelligence in mitigating the psychological distress in individuals.

In addition to the same idea, emotional intelligence also has been explored in relation to various anxiety disorders like social phobia. In this realm of study, Tibi-Elhanany and Shamay-Tsoory (2011) explored the connection between emotional intelligence and social anxiety disorder. The researchers revealed from their study that individuals with social anxiety disorders show poor emotional processing abilities specifically in understanding and managing emotions, which are core factors of emotional intelligence. These deficits were associated with increased anxiety

disorders, suggesting lower emotional intelligence plays a role in maintaining the phobic responses in social settings.

Same way, the same findings has been indicated by another study carried by Karim (2009) who indicated that how affectivity mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological distress among managers' study have shown that negative affect fully mediated this relationship, revealing that individuals with higher emotional intelligence will depict less psychological distress or negative affects due to their ability to manage negative emotions in better way. In a more recent study, Binte Mustafa, Ejaz, and Ahmed (2023) explored the effects of emotional intelligence on psychological distress among Pakistani university students through quantitative research showing psychological vulnerability as mediating factor. Using mediation analysis and structured questionnaire for data collection the results revealed that higher emotional intelligence was linked with lower psychological distress, and this relationship was partially mediated by psychological vulnerability. It shows that emotional intelligence not only lowers experiential avoidance but also indirectly reduces psychological vulnerability. These findings clearly suggest the protective role of emotional intelligence against mental health challenges in academic settings.

Not only has this emotional intelligence played a role in lowering experiential avoidance tendencies too in an individual which is core theme of my study. This also clearly explains in a lot of research how it plays a role in this regard. One such study is by Choi, Vickers, and Tassone (2014) who investigated the pivotal role of emotional intelligence, anxiety sensitivity and experiential avoidance in stress reactivity. Their findings revealed that higher levels of emotional intelligence were linked with lower levels of experiential avoidance in individuals, suggesting that people with higher emotional competencies are better equipped at facing and processing stressful

or negative emotions rather than avoiding or escaping it. This association underscores the importance of emotional intelligence in mitigating the maladaptive coping strategies like experiential avoidance.

Demographic Variations

It's crucial to understand the influence of demographic factors affecting both experiential avoidance, phubbing that can help us gain deeper insight and understanding of how these variables contribute to psychological distress across different populations. Various research shows that there is significant difference in prevalence and consequences of these behaviors across age and gender.

Robert Robertson and Hopko (2009) explored how experiential avoidance (EA) widens across the lifespan. Their study indicated that older adults demonstrated lower levels of experiential avoidance compared to younger people, suggesting improved and better emotional regulation with age. This could be ascribed to a high level of life experience, maturity, and increased acceptance of emotional challenges among older adults, which in turn may lessen susceptibility to psychological distress. Spendelow and Joubert (2018) investigated the mediating role of experiential avoidance between gender role conflict and psychological distress. Their findings revealed and focused that men who experience conflict due to traditional gender role expectations were more likely to exhibit experiential avoidance, which in turn lead to exacerbate their psychological distress. Similarly, Badour et al. (2020) revealed that the association between shame and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was mediated by experiential avoidance, with an increased and stronger mediation effect observed in men. These findings emphasize that men may be more inclined to use avoidance strategies as compared to females, possibly due to societal pressure to suppress emotional vulnerability around people.

Phubbing, or the act of prioritizing someone in favor of using a smartphone, also demonstrates demographic distinctions. For instance, Liu et al. (2021) demonstrated that adolescent girls reported increased psychological distress originating from parental phubbing than as compared to boys, emphasizing that female adolescents may be more emotionally affected by relational neglect. Moreover, Wang et al. (2021) found that parental phubbing was more strongly correlated with online hostility among boys than girls, suggesting that male adolescents may exhibit more externalizing behaviors. Furthermore, Basu and Mukherjee (2021) demonstrated that young adult males aged 18–30 showed higher levels of phubbing behavior than females, specifically when associated with gaming addiction. This emphasizes a potentially necessary association or interlink between age, gender, and technology use in determining how phubbing behaviors develop and influence mental health outcomes.

Zonash et al. (2020) found that phubbing negatively impacts mental health, with males reporting higher relationship satisfaction than females. This suggests that gender dynamics play a significant role in how phubbing behaviors are perceived and experienced in relationships. Understanding these differences is crucial for developing targeted interventions that address the unique challenges faced by different genders. Moreover, the findings of this study also show that phubbing negatively predicts compromise, avoidance and overall mental health among married individuals and was more prevalent in couples of love marriages than in arrange ones.

Farooqi et al. (2021) investigated the impact of phubbing on relationship closeness and jealousy among married working women, revealing that phubbing disrupts relationship dynamics and induces feelings of jealousy. This can lead to a vicious cycle where jealousy exacerbates phubbing behaviors, creating further relational distress. These findings underscore the importance

of considering gender and relationship context when examining the psychological impacts of phubbing, as the repercussions can differ significantly based on these factors.

Pakistani Literature

Empirical research on experiential avoidance has increased in Pakistan in recent years, highlighting its role in psychological and relational functioning. For instance, Ilyas et al. (2024) looked at women during pregnancy and after giving birth and found that experiential avoidance was positively associated with thought suppression, meta-cognition, and body-checking, while self-compassion mitigated these negative outcomes; Nazir et al. (2023) found that experiential avoidance was positively associated with alexithymia and fear of intimacy among young adults, indicating its negative effect on relational closeness; Farooqui et al. (2025) expanded on this research by demonstrating that experiential avoidance significantly predicted prolonged grief disorder among bereaved emerging adults, with coping skills moderating this association. When taken as a whole, these findings show that experiential avoidance not only contributes to personal suffering but also compromises the ability to maintain positive interpersonal relationships in Pakistan.

Research on phubbing, particularly in relation to marital and relational happiness, has gained popularity in Pakistan in addition to experiential avoidance. The disruptive effect of excessive smartphone use in intimate relationships was highlighted by Zahra et al.'s (2024) finding that partner phubbing was inversely correlated with marital satisfaction. According to Asif et al. (2025), phubbing and FOMO were found to predict cognitive overload in married couples, underscoring the psychological toll. Research conducted on particular groups, including married working women, also supports the relational cost of phubbing. According to Farooqi et al. (2021), phubbing was substantially associated with jealousy and a decrease in the intimacy of

relationships. Similarly, interpersonal cognitive distortions made the unfavorable correlation between phubbing and relationship disenchantment in newlyweds even worse, according to Javaid et al. (2024). A recent review by Shahzadi et al. (2024) consolidated regional and international literature, pointing out phubbing's pervasive influence on interpersonal relationships and the urgent need for interventions to address this digital disruption.

Pakistani studies on emotional intelligence (EI) provide consistent evidence of its protective role in marital and relational functioning. Batool and Khalid (2012) found EI to be a strong predictor of marital quality, explaining substantial variance in marital adjustment and conflict resolution among couples. Dildar et al. (2012) similarly observed a positive association between EI and marital adjustment in couples from Gujrat district. More recent research by Zaidi et al. (2022) confirmed a positive but modest link between EI and dyadic adjustment in married individuals, with EI remaining stable across years of marriage. Siddiqa and Majeed (2023) examined dual-earner couples and found that EI positively predicted marital adjustment, even in the face of stress and workload, underscoring its buffering role in strained relational contexts.

All of these Pakistani findings are consistent with studies from around the world, indicating that phubbing is a technological disruption of intimacy and experiential avoidance increases emotional and relational suffering. However, emotional intelligence is repeatedly found to be a protective feature that fosters adjustment and marriage quality. But the majority of local research stays cross-sectional, uses convenience sampling, and hardly ever combines these dimensions into a single model. Crucially, no study conducted in Pakistan or elsewhere has specifically looked at the connection between phubbing and experiential avoidance. Despite having the ability to explain why people with high avoidance may be more likely to distance themselves from relationships through technology, this particular connection has not been thoroughly examined in literature.

Therefore, by examining experiential avoidance as a predictor, phubbing as a mediator, and emotional intelligence as a moderator of psycho-emotional discomfort among couples in the Pakistani context, the current study fills a crucial and innovative need.

Rationale

Experiential avoidance, or the propensity to avoid unpleasant or upsetting internal experiences such as stress or conflict, has been linked to a number of mental health conditions, including anxiety and depression. For example, Palm and Follette (2011) investigated the relationship between psychological distress and experiential avoidance in women who were victims of interpersonal abuse and discovered that higher levels of experiential avoidance were associated with higher levels of PTSD and depression symptoms. Within marital relationships, experiential avoidance has similarly been linked to increased mental health issues and weakened marital bonds. However, majority of prior studies have focused on clinical populations, leaving a gap in understanding its role within non-clinical populations, such as married couples.

A key question that remains underexplored is the mechanism through which experiential avoidance influences stress and emotions in close relationships. This study proposes that one such mechanism might be phubbing which is the act of prioritizing mobile phone use over direct interaction with a partner. Phubbing represents a form of digital withdrawal that shatters connection and creates relational stress in today's smartphone-dependent era. While research has established associations between experiential avoidance and technology use (e.g., Eksi, 2019, on social media disorder as a mediator), no empirical study has examined phubbing as a manifestation of experiential avoidance in couples. Addressing this mediation model is critical for clarifying how experiential avoidance may translate into interpersonal dysfunction and psychological distress through digital behaviors.

Existing evidence demonstrates that phubbing undermines relationship quality. In Pakistan, Javaid et al. (2024) found that among newlyweds, phubbing disrupted cognitions and contributed to relationship disillusionment. Internationally, studies have linked phubbing to increased jealousy, stress, and aggression, as well as lower satisfaction levels among partners (Arshad et al., 2022). However, most of these studies have focused on young, unmarried, or Western couples, leaving a significant gap in understanding how phubbing affects married couples in non-Western, collectivist contexts such as Pakistan.

Emotional intelligence (EI), defined as the ability to perceive, regulate, and respond to emotions appropriately, has been identified as a protective factor in couple dynamics. A Pakistani study by Mir (2020) confirmed that higher emotional intelligence predicted better marital quality among partners, while international research has linked EI to lower psychological distress. Yet, little is known about whether emotional intelligence buffers the negative impacts of experiential avoidance and phubbing in marriages. Evidence is also scarce regarding whether individuals with higher EI are less likely to engage in phubbing or experience its adverse emotional effects. Thus, this study seeks to extend the literature by examining the protective role of emotional intelligence within these dynamics.

The cultural context of Pakistan makes this research particularly important. Pakistani culture places strong emphasis on family cohesion, face-to-face communication, and emotional expression, especially within arranged and extended family systems. In such contexts, smartphone-driven avoidance behaviors such as phubbing may carry especially harmful consequences compared to Western societies. Despite this, local research on experiential avoidance and phubbing among married couples remains limited. Understanding how one partner's behavior affects the

other within the Pakistani marital framework is therefore crucial for both theoretical and practical reasons.

In sum, this study integrates experiential avoidance theory, digital behavior (phubbing), and emotional intelligence into a mediation–moderation model to explain psycho-emotional distress among married couples. By drawing on localized data, it examines mechanisms that have been explored elsewhere but remain unstudied in Pakistan. The study also has practical significance: it highlights the potential for targeted interventions, such as workshops for couples to strengthen emotional intelligence, reduce digital dependency, and foster healthier stress management strategies. Raising awareness about the detrimental effects of mobile phone misuse on marital bonds and mental health is particularly timely given the rising prevalence of smartphone intrusion in intimate relationships.

This research therefore addresses an urgent need to explore how experiential avoidance leads to emotional reactivity, isolation, and psychological distress through phubbing, and whether emotional intelligence can buffer both the likelihood of phubbing and its emotional fallout. By situating these questions within a culturally specific framework, the study contributes both theoretically and practically to advancing marital, psychological, and emotional well-being in the digital age.

Objectives

1. To examine the correlations among experiential avoidance, phubbing, emotional intelligence, and psycho-emotional distress among couples.
2. To examine predictive role of one partner's experiential avoidance on their partner's psycho-emotional distress among couples.

3. To investigate the mediating role of phubbing in the relationship between experiential avoidance and psycho-emotional distress among couples.
4. To explore the moderating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between experiential avoidance, and psycho-emotional distress among couples.
5. To examine gender differences in experiential avoidance, phubbing, and psycho-emotional distress among couples.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the present study are as follows:

1. There will be significant correlation between experiential avoidance and phubbing among couples.
2. Emotional intelligence will be negatively associated with emotional reactivity among couples.
3. Emotional intelligence will be negatively associated with emotional isolation among couples.
4. Emotional intelligence will be negatively associated with psychological distress among couples.
5. Husbands' experiential avoidance will positively predict their wives' emotional reactivity among couples.
6. Husbands' experiential avoidance will positively predict their wives' emotional isolation among couples.
7. Husbands' experiential avoidance will positively predict their wives' psychological distress among couples.

8. Husbands' phubbing will mediate the relationship between their experiential avoidance and their wives' emotional reactivity in married couples.
9. Husbands' phubbing will mediate the relationship between their experiential avoidance and their wives' emotional isolation in married couples.
10. Husbands' phubbing will mediate the relationship between their experiential avoidance and their wives' psychological distress in married couples.
11. Emotional intelligence moderates the actor effect of experiential avoidance on emotional reactivity, such that this relationship is stronger when emotional intelligence is low.
12. Emotional intelligence moderates the actor effect of experiential avoidance on emotional isolation, such that this relationship is stronger when emotional intelligence is low.
13. Emotional intelligence moderates the actor effect of experiential avoidance on psychological distress, such that this relationship is stronger when emotional intelligence is low.
14. The emotional intelligence of husbands will positively moderate the relationship between their experiential avoidance and their wives' psycho-emotional distress in married couples.
15. Husbands will report significantly higher levels of experiential avoidance compared to their wives.
16. Husbands will report significantly higher levels of phubbing behavior compared to their wives.
17. Wives will experience higher levels of emotional reactivity than their husbands due to their husbands' experiential avoidance.

Conceptual Framework

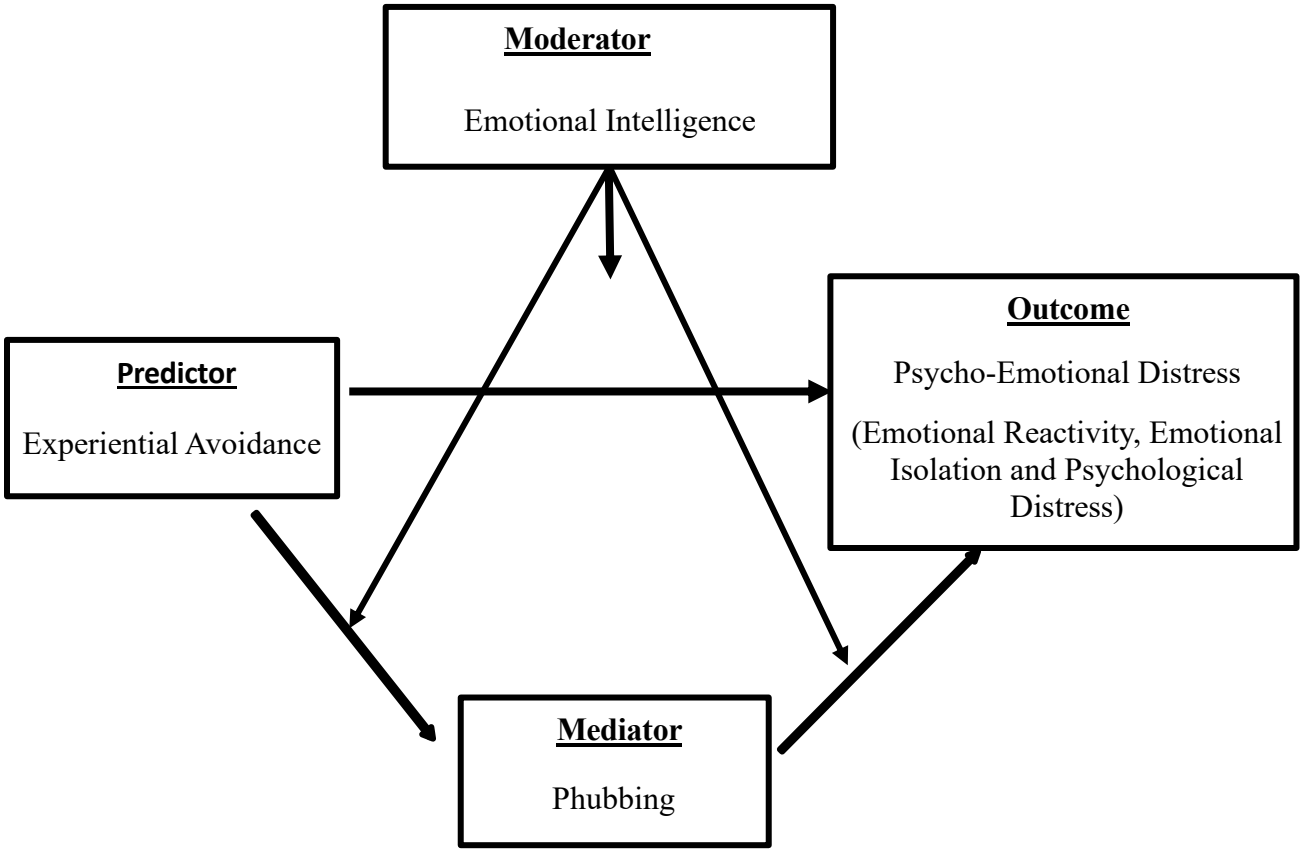


Figure 1

Hypothesized model showing the relationship between study's variables

Chapter 2

Method

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive dyadic correlational research design to explore the relationships between experiential avoidance, emotional reactivity, emotional isolation, and psychological distress, with phubbing as a mediating variable and emotional intelligence as a moderating variable. The design permitted the identification of associations among the variables without including any manipulation. Moreover, the study used a dyadic approach, enabling the investigation of interdependent effects within couples and providing deeper insight into relational dynamics.

Population

The study's population was made up of married couples. Only people who were willing to participate and were currently married were included in the study population.

***Inclusion Criteria*.** The study's participants were married couples in their 20s to 40s. To guarantee they had sufficient relational experience for dyadic analysis, they had been married for at least a year. The study only included regular smartphone users because it was necessary to examine phubbing behavior. In order to ensure that participants could fully comprehend and respond appropriately to the survey items presented in English, only individuals with an education level matric and above were included in the study.

***Exclusion Criteria*.** The study eliminated participants who reported having psychiatric problems including anxiety or depression, as well as those going through a divorce or separation

from their spouse. In order to separate the actual effects of experiential avoidance, phubbing, and emotional distress, participants without children were also excluded because childlessness itself might be a major stressor and possible confounding factor. Additionally, in order to guarantee the accuracy and dependability of the data on emotional responses, participants with communication difficulties that would hinder their ability to participate in the survey were excluded.

Sampling

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling in Rawalpindi and Islamabad using both personal networks and community contacts. Data collection was conducted in multiple settings, including homes, offices, and neighborhood communities, with the assistance of family and acquaintances who facilitated access to eligible couples. To ensure a dyadic perspective and a more comprehensive understanding of relational processes, data were collected from both spouses within each couple. Inclusion in the final sample required that both partners meet the study's eligibility criteria.

Operational Definition

Experiential Avoidance. It was operationalized by Brief Experiential Avoidance Questionnaire including 15 items. Higher scores on this questionnaire indicated greater levels of experiential avoidance, suggesting a stronger tendency to avoid distressing thoughts and emotions.

Emotional Reactivity. It measures the typical ease of activation, intensity, and duration of one's emotional responses and does so for positive (e.g., happiness) and negative (e.g. sadness) emotions separately (Becerra et al., 2018). This was assessed using emotional reactivity scale including 18 items. Higher scores on this scale denoted greater emotional reactivity, indicating that individuals have more intense emotional responses and potentially less ability to regulate their

emotions.

***Emotional Isolation*.** Emotional isolation is "a subjective state where individuals feel emotionally disconnected from others, despite being in physical proximity or social settings" (De Jong Gierveld & Van Tilburg, 2006). It was operationalized by using De Jong, Geer, Welch and Wan scale of isolation scale, which have 6 items (first 3 items measuring emotional isolation and last 3 items measuring social isolation). Higher scores on first three items suggested more significant experience of emotional isolation among individuals.

Psychological Distress. This variable was operationalized using Kessler Psychological Distress scale containing 10 items. Higher scores on this scale showed greater psychological distress reflecting more severe emotional suffering and potential mental health challenges.

Phubbing. It was operationalized by phubbing scale developed by Karadag et al. (2015), which consists of 10 items. Higher scores on this scale indicated greater frequency of phubbing behavior, suggesting higher likelihood of avoiding interpersonal interactions due to mobile usage. Phubbing is defined as "An individual looking at his or her mobile phone during a conversation with other individuals, dealing with the mobile phone and escaping from interpersonal communication" (Karadag et al.,2015).

Emotional Intelligence. Emotional intelligence is "the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and regulate emotions effectively in oneself and others" (Goleman, 1995). It was measured by brief emotional intelligence scale consisting of 10 items. Higher scores on this scale suggested higher emotional intelligence, indicating better emotional awareness and interpersonal skills.

Instruments

Demographic Sheet. The demographic sheet comprises of gender, birth order, socio economic status, age, education, Family Type (Nuclear, Joint), marriage type, Number of children, duration of marriage and hours spent on smart phones per day. In addition to standard demographic information, participants were also asked to indicate their primary purpose of mobile phone use while communicating with others (e.g., social media, gaming, entertainment). Questionnaires were administered to married participants with an education level of matriculation or above.

Brief Experiential Avoidance Questionnaire. The Brief Experiential Avoidance Questionnaire (BEAQ), developed by Gámez et al. (2014), is a 15-item self-report measure designed to assess experiential avoidance. The BEAQ was derived from the original 62-item Multidimensional Experiential Avoidance Questionnaire (MEAQ) and covers six dimensions of experiential avoidance. Items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), with higher scores reflecting greater levels of avoidance. The BEAQ demonstrates strong psychometric properties, including high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.80 to 0.90 across different samples. The scale has shown excellent convergent validity with other avoidance and psychopathology measures. The BEAQ is commonly used in clinical and research settings to assess experiential avoidance efficiently, and its scoring is based on summing item responses.

Perth Emotional Reactivity Short Form Scale. Perth emotional reactivity scale short form developed by Becerra, Preece, Campitelli, and Scott (2020). It is an 18-item scale which is short form of 30-item Perth emotional reactivity scale short form that measures emotional reactivity, assessing both emotional sensitivity and emotional recovery. The scale demonstrates strong internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alphas above .85. Items are scored on a 5-point scale (1 =

Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). To score the Perth Emotional Reactivity Scale (18-item), add up responses for specific items to get subscale scores: for negative emotions, sum items 2, 8, 14 (activation), 6, 12, 18 (intensity), and 4, 10, 16 (duration); for positive emotions, sum items 1, 7, 13 (activation), 5, 11, 17 (intensity), and 3, 9, 15 (duration). For the composite scores, sum all even-numbered items for general negative reactivity and all odd-numbered items for general positive reactivity. Higher scores indicate stronger emotional reactivity.

De Jong Gierveld Six Item Loneliness Scale. De Jong Gierveld Six-Item Loneliness Scale was developed by De Jong Gierveld and Van Tilburg (2006). It is a 6-item scale that contains 3 items measuring emotional isolation and 3 items measures social loneliness. The scale has shown satisfactory reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .85. Responses are scored for items 1-3 (Emotional loneliness) on a 3-point scale (1 = Yes, 1 = More or less, 0 = No) whereas, for items 4,5 and 6 (Social loneliness), its scored as (0=Yes, More or less =1 and No =1). Total composite scores range from 0 to 6, with higher scores indicating greater loneliness.

Kessler Psychological Distress Scale. Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) developed by Kessler, Andrews, Colpe, and Hiripi (2002). It is a 10-item scale used to measure psychological distress in terms of anxiety and depression symptoms over the past month. The K10 has demonstrated excellent reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .93. Each item is rated on a 5-Likert scale (1 = None of the time, 5 = All of the time). Scores range from 10 to 50, with higher scores indicating higher levels of psychological distress. No reverse-scored items

Phubbing Scale. Phubbing scale was developed by Karadag et al., (2015) in Turkey. The scale consists of 10 items graded from (Never) to 5(Always) in a 5-point Likert scale, it measures following two factors: 1) Communication Disturbance (5 items; α=.87) and 2) Phone Obsession (5 items; α=.85). The content of these factors can be summarized below. Communication

disturbance: Higher scores suggest that participants frequently interrupt their current interactions by using their mobile phone on face-to-face conversation. Some of things in this component are 1) my eyes go the phone when I am with others. 2) when I am with my colleagues, I am playing with my mobile phone. Phone obsession: Higher scores suggest that participants in areas without face-to-face contact need their mobile phone constantly. Examples of the things in this element are 1) my phone is always within my control. 2) When I wake up early in the morning I check my telephone messages first. The greater total score shows more phubbing activity.

Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale-10. (BEIS-10) is ten item scale developed by Davies, Lane, Devonport, and Scott (2010). Its brief version of 33 item emotional intelligence scale (Schutte et al.,1998). It measures emotional intelligence across five domains: Appraisal of own emotions, appraisal of others' emotions, regulation of own emotions, regulation of others' emotions, and utilization of emotions. It has good psychometric properties. Internal consistency ranges from .71 to .87 across subscales. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicate higher emotional intelligence.

Ethical considerations

Participants in the current study were informed of the goal of the investigation, its components, and any potential risks or advantages before being asked for their consent to participate. Their identity was not disclosed, and their information was kept confidential. The current study complied with ethical standards to ensure that participants were treated fairly and with dignity at all times.

Procedure

Following purposive sampling for participant recruitment, individuals were informed of the study's goals and purpose, and their informed consent was acquired. Participants received guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality, and that their involvement was entirely voluntary. A series of standardized questionnaires and a demographic information sheet were then given to each participant, who was told to complete them on their own in a quiet setting. Each couple's two partners provided data to guarantee dyadic representation. The questions took about twenty to twenty-five minutes to complete. After data collection, responses were coded to preserve confidentiality while maintaining dyadic pairing. Each couple was assigned a unique code (e.g., Couple 1 = A1, Couple 2 = A2), with male and female partners further differentiated (e.g., A1M, A1F, A2M, A2F). The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 25, 2017) was used for statistical analysis, including correlational analyses, reliability tests, and descriptive statistics. Furthermore, sophisticated studies were performed in R software with the Lavaan package (2012), testing the hypothesized relationships through the use of structural equation modeling (SEM). To take dyadic data into consideration, the Actor Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) paradigm was used. SEM was also used to test mediation and moderation studies, which looked at the moderating function of emotional intelligence and the mediating role of phubbing in the suggested model. Both SPSS and R data were evaluated in accordance with the goals and assumptions of the study, and the findings were thoroughly documented.

Chapter 3

Results

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha for the scales of Experiential Avoidance, Phubbing, Emotional Reactivity, Emotional Isolation, Psychological Distress, and Emotional Intelligence (N=334)

Measures	*K*	*A*	Actual Range		Potential Range		Mean	SD	Skew.	Kurt.
			Min	Max	Min	Max				
EA	15	.89	25	79	15	90	50.34	11.91	0.04	-0.90
Phub	10	.88	10	48	10	50	24.21	8.03	1.00	.024
ERS	18	.94	22	82	18	90	56.94	14.62	-0.48	-1.30
EL	3	.99	0	3	0	3	1.96	1.41	-0.65	-1.56
PDS	10	.94	10	45	10	50	29.14	9.94	-0.60	-1.26
EI	10	.96	12	49	10	50	27.76	10.17	0.54	-1.28

Note: EA= Experiential Avoidance Scale; Phub= Phubbing scale; ERS= Emotional Reactivity Scale; EL= Emotional Loneliness scale; PDS=Psychological Distress Scale; EI=Emotional Intelligence scale; Skew= Skewness; Kurt= Kurtosis.

Based on a sample of participants, Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) for the scales used in this study, which include measures of emotional reactivity (ERS), emotional loneliness (EL), psychological distress (PDS), emotional intelligence (EI), experiential avoidance (EA), and phubbing (Phub).

Cronbach's alpha (α) values ranged from.886 to.991, suggesting strong reliability across measures, and all scales showed great internal consistency. In particular, the EA scale (α =.893), Phub (α =.886), ERS (α =.947), EL (α =.991), PDS (α =.945), and EI (α =.963) all surpassed the generally recognized cutoff of.70, confirming the instruments' internal consistency. The fact that the actual and potential score ranges were so closely matched indicates that participants made proper use of the whole scale continuum.

The scales' mean scores showed that the constructs being measured were moderately to highly supported. Moderate levels of experiencing avoidance and phubbing activity were indicated by the EA scale's mean of 50.34 (SD = 11.91) and Phub's mean of 24.21 (SD = 8.03). A mean score of 56.94 (SD = 14.62) on the ERS scale indicated a moderate level of emotional reactivity. Out of a possible score of 3, the sample's mean EL score was 1.96 (SD = 1.41), suggesting that emotional loneliness was present. The EI scale showed a mean of 27.76 (SD = 10.17), indicating average emotional intelligence, while psychological distress (PDS) was recorded at a mean of 29.14 (SD = 9.94), indicating moderate distress levels.

All variables' Skewness and kurtosis values fell within acceptable bounds (±2), suggesting that the data was roughly distributed normally. Phub and EI displayed positive skewness, indicating slightly more low-end responses, whereas ERS, EL, and PDS showed modest negative skewness, suggesting a slight tendency toward higher scores. Kurtosis scores varied between -1.56 and.024, indicating distributions that were within acceptable boundaries for parametric analyses. The scales employed in this study had strong psychometric qualities overall, showing high internal consistency and roughly normal distributions, confirming their suitability for further statistical analyses such as regression, correlation, and mediation/moderation modeling.

Table 2

Pearson product correlation Experiential Avoidance, Emotional Reactivity, Emotional Isolation, Psychological Distress, Phubbing and Emotional Intelligence (N=334)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Emotion Isolation	-	.939**	.950	-.951	.464	.377
Emotional Reactivity		-	.928**	-.926	.392	.311
Psychological Distress			-	-.917**	.454	.301
Emotional Intelligence				-	-.421*	-.401
Experiential Avoidance					-	.510*
Phubbing						-

*Note: P= * < .05, ** < .01*

The Pearson correlation coefficients between the six main research variables phubbing, emotional reactivity, emotional isolation, psychological discomfort, emotional intelligence, and experiential avoidance are shown in Table 2. Every association that has been reported is statistically significant and shows that the constructs being studied have meaningful relationships with one another. Strong positive associations were found between emotional isolation and psychological discomfort (r =.950) as well as emotional reactivity (r =.939), indicating that people who feel more emotional isolation also frequently report more psychological symptoms and emotional sensitivity. Emotional intelligence and emotional isolation had a negative correlation (r = -.951), suggesting that lower emotional intelligence is linked to higher emotions of isolation. Additionally, there were moderate connections between emotion isolation and phubbing (r =.377) and experience avoidance (r =.464), indicating that emotionally isolated people might be more

likely to use technology-based social disengagement and avoidant coping mechanisms. The strong correlation between psychological distress and emotional reactivity (r =.928) highlights the intimate connection between mental health issues and strong emotional reactions. Similar to emotion isolation, emotional reactivity had moderately favorable relationships with experience avoidance (r =.392) and phubbing (r =.311), and a high negative link with emotional intelligence (r = –.926). Emotional intelligence and psychological distress were significantly inversely correlated (r = -.917), suggesting that people who are more distressed typically have poorer emotional awareness and regulatory abilities. Phubbing (r =.301) and experience avoidance (r =.454) showed moderately favorable relationships.

Higher emotional intelligence may act as a protective factor against avoidant coping and socially disengaging behaviors, as seen by the somewhat negative relationships that emotional intelligence showed with experiential avoidance (r = –.421) and phubbing (r = –.401). Lastly, there was a somewhat positive correlation (r =.510) between experiential avoidance and phubbing, suggesting that people who are more likely to avoid emotional situations are also more likely to engage in phubbing. Overall, the correlation pattern is consistent with the theoretical expectation that emotional intelligence is inversely correlated with emotion-related challenges (such as excessive reactivity, avoidance, and isolation).

Table 3

SEM Multiple regression analysis predicting the effect of experiential avoidance on emotional reactivity, emotional isolation and psychological distress among married dyads (167).

Predictors	*B*	*SE*	*β*	95% *CL*		R^2	*P*	*F*
				UL	*LL*			
EA_M								
EA_M to ERST_M	0.85	0.06	0.69	0.72	0.99	0.48	.001	1058.0
EA_M to ERST_F	1.03	0.07	0.72	0.88	1.18	0.52	.001	395.0
EA_M to ELT_M	0.09	0.00	0.72	0.08	0.10	0.52	.001	1784
EA_M to ELT_F	0.09	0.00	0.72	0.00	0.10	0.52	.001	484
EA_M to PDST_M	0.65	0.05	0.71	0.55	0.75	0.50	.001	1118
EA_M to PDST_F	0.63	0.05	0.70	0.53	0.73	0.49	.001	370
EA_F								
EA_F to ERST_M	0.54	0.09	0.43	0.37	0.72	0.18	.001	352
EA_F to ERST_F	0.50	0.10	0.34	0.29	0.71	0.11	.001	1152
EA_F to ELT_M	0.04	0.01	0.29	0.02	0.05	0.08	.001	444
EA_F to ELT_F	0.04	0.01	0.32	0.02	0.06	0.10	.001	1525
EA_F to PDST_M	0.36	0.06	0.38	0.23	0.50	0.15	.001	423
EA_F to PDST_F	0.34	0.06	0.36	0.20	0.47	0.13	.001	782

*Note: B = Unstandardized Coefficient, SE = Standard Error, β = Standardized Coefficient, F = F-value, UL = Upper Limit, LL = Lower Limit, ***p < .001,EA_M = Experiential avoidance for male ,EA_F = Experiential avoidance for female , ERST_M = Emotional reactivity male,*

ERST_F = Emotional reactivity female, ELT_M = Emotional loneliness male , ELT_F = Emotional loneliness female.

Multiple regression analysis predicting the effects of experiential avoidance (EA) on psychological distress (PDS), emotional reactivity (ERS), and emotional loneliness (EL) in married dyads (N = 167) is shown in Table 3, with separate analyses for husbands (M) and wives (F).

The findings showed that for both men and their spouses, experiential avoidance was a substantial positive predictor of all three outcomes. In particular, higher EA among spouses explained considerable variance in each model (R2 ≈.48–.52) and was a significant predictor of higher emotional reactivity (β =.69, p <.001), emotional loneliness (β =.72, p <.001), and psychological distress (β =.71, p <.001). Whereas Emotional reactivity (β =.34–.43, p <.001), emotional loneliness (β =.29–.32, p <.001), and psychological distress (β =.36–.38, p <.001) were also all substantially predicted by higher EA among wives, which also explained considerable proportions of variation (R^2 ≈.08–.18).

When combined, these results show that in married dyads, higher levels of emotional reactivity, emotional loneliness, and psychological discomfort are linked to more experiential avoidance in either partner.

Table 4

*APIM Mediation analysis using R-studio Lavaan to measure the actor-partner effect of experiential avoidance on emotional reactivity, through Phubbing (*N=334).

Effect Type	Path	*B*	*β*	*z*	*P*
Actor (Direct effect)	EA_M → ERST_M	0.27	0.24*	2.13	.033*
	EA_F → ERST_F	0.22	0.15*	2.30	.021*
Actor (Indirect effect)	EA_M →Phub_M→ ERS_M	0.11	0.09*	2.30	.021*
	EA_F → Phub_ F →ERS_F	0.19	0.12**	3.45	.001**
Partner (Indirect effects)	EA_M→Phub_M →ERS_F	0.26	0.18**	4.63	.001**
	EA_F→Phub_F→ERS_M	0.16	0.13**	3.42	.001**
Partner (Direct effects)	EA_M→ERS_F	0.97	0.69**	11.79	.001**
	EA_F→ERS_M	0.28	0.22**	4.00	.001**

Note: B = unstandardized regression coefficient; β = standardized regression coefficient. ***p*** *< .05*, **p** < .01***

Table 4 shows the findings of the APIM mediation study that looked at how phubbing in married dyads (N = 167) affected the actor-partner effects of experiential avoidance (EA) on emotional reactivity (ERS).

Actor Effect

Experiential avoidance had a substantial direct impact on the emotional response of both husbands and wives (husbands: β =.24, p =.03; wives: β =.15, p =.02). Phubbing also revealed significant indirect effects (wives: β =.12, p <.001; husbands: β =.09, p =.02).

Partner Effect

Significant partner effects were further established via experiential avoidance. The emotional reactivity of wives was indirectly predicted by their husbands' experiential avoidance through phubbing (β =.18, p <.001), while the emotional reactivity of wives was indirectly predicted by their husbands' experiential avoidance through phubbing (β =.13, p <.001). Furthermore, there were notable direct relationship effects (wives' EA predicting husbands' ERS: β =.22, p <.001; husbands' EA predicting wives' ERS: β =.69, p <.001).

Overall pattern

These results suggest that phubbing partially mediates the association between experiential avoidance and emotional reactivity. To put it another way, heightened experience avoidance highlights the interrelated dynamics within married couples by increasing both the direct and indirect emotional reaction of the individual and their partner through increased phubbing behaviors.

Figure 2

APIM Partial mediation model illustrating actor and partner effects of Experiential Avoidance on Emotional Reactivity through Phubbing.

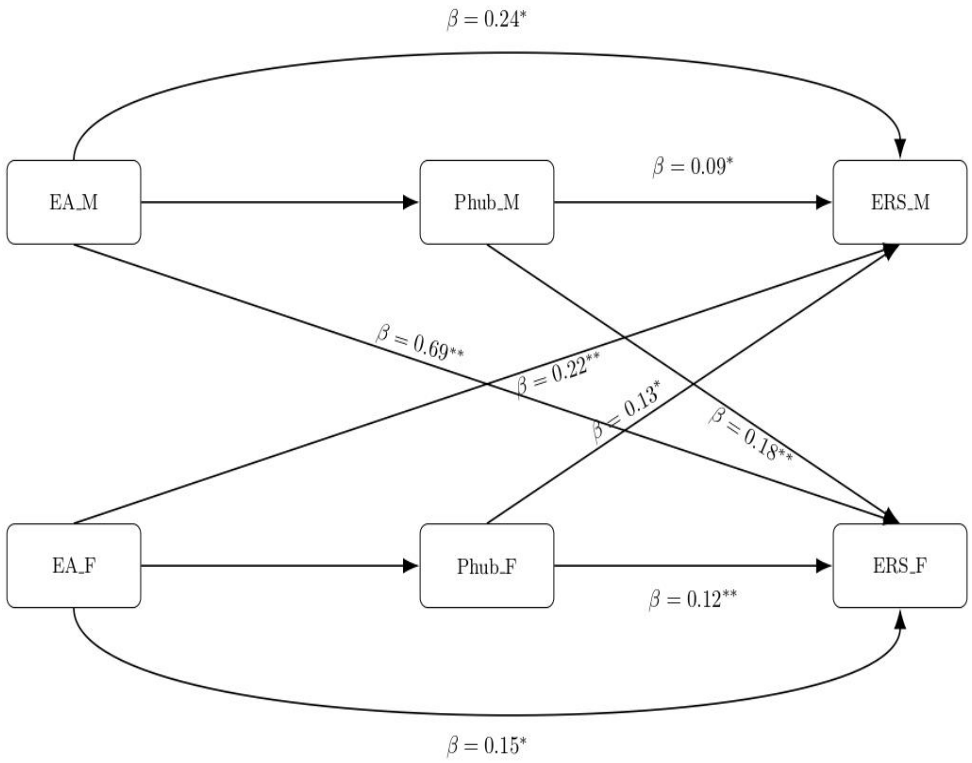


Figure 2. APIM Partial mediation model illustrating actor and partner efsfects of Experiential Avoidance on Emotional Reactivity through Phubbing.

Figure 2 presents the Actor–Partner Interdependence Mediation Model (APIMeM) examining the actor and partner effects of experiential avoidance on emotional reactivity through phubbing. For males, experiential avoidance significantly predicted their own phubbing (β = 0.69, p < .01), which in turn predicted their own emotional reactivity (β = 0.09, *p* < .05) and their

partner's emotional reactivity (β = 0.18, p < .01). Similarly, females' experiential avoidance significantly predicted their own phubbing (β = 0.22, p < .01), which was associated with their emotional reactivity (β = 0.12, p < .01) and their partner's emotional reactivity (β = 0.13, p < .05). Direct effects of experiential avoidance on emotional reactivity were also found for both males (β = 0.24, p < .05) and females (β = 0.15, p < .05). These results indicate partial mediation, highlighting that experiential avoidance influences both individuals' and partners' emotional reactivity directly and indirectly through phubbing.

Table 5

*APIM Mediation analysis using R-studio Lavaan to measure the actor-partner effect of experiential avoidance on emotional loneliness, through Phubbing (*N=334).

Effect Type	Path	*B*	*β*	*z*	*P*
Actor (Direct effect)	EA_M→EL_M	0.02	0.20	2.13	.033**
	EA_F→EL_F	0.01	0.11	2.07	.051*
Actor (Indirect effect)	EA_M →Phub_M →EL_M	0.01	0.13	3.42	.001**
	EA_F→ Phub_ F →EL_F	0.01	0.12	3.58	.000**
Partner (Indirect effects)	EA_M→Phub_M→EL_F	0.02	0.17	4.67	.001**
	EA_F→Phub_F→EL_M	0.01	0.13	3.80	.001**
Partner (Direct effects)	EA_M→EL_F	0.08	0.69	12.71	.001**
	EA_F→EL_M	0.01	0.12	2.57	.010**

Note: B = unstandardized regression coefficient; β = standardized regression coefficient;. ***p*** *< .05*, **p** < .01***

Table 5 shows the findings of the APIM mediation study that looked at how phubbing in married dyads (N = 334) affected the actor-partner effects of experiential avoidance (EA) on emotional loneliness (EL).

Actor Effect

Emotional loneliness was significantly impacted by experiencing avoidance for both husbands and wives (husbands: $\beta = .20$, $p = .03$; women: $\beta = .11$, $p = .05$). Furthermore, substantial indirect effects were found through phubbing (wives: $\beta = .12$, $p < .001$; husbands: $\beta = .13$, $p < .001$), suggesting that greater emotional loneliness was predicted by greater phubbing, which was predicted by higher experiential avoidance.

Partners Effect

There were notable partner effects from experiential avoidance as well. Wives' emotional loneliness was indirectly predicted by their husbands' experiential avoidance through phubbing ($\beta = .17$, $p < .001$) and their emotional loneliness by their husbands' experiential avoidance through phubbing ($\beta = .13$, $p < .001$). Significant direct couple effects were also discovered (wives' EA predicting husbands' EL: $\beta = .12$, $p = .01$; husbands' EA predicting wives' EL: $\beta = .69$, $p < .001$).

Overall trend

These results suggest partial mediation phubbing partially mediates the connection between emotional loneliness and experiential avoidance because both the direct and indirect effects were significant for both husbands and wives. To put it another way, increased experiential avoidance highlights the intertwined emotional dynamics in married couples by indirectly increasing emotional loneliness in both the individual and their partner through increased phubbing behavior.

Figure 3

APIM Partial mediation model illustrating actor and partner effects of Experiential Avoidance on Emotional Loneliness through Phubbing.

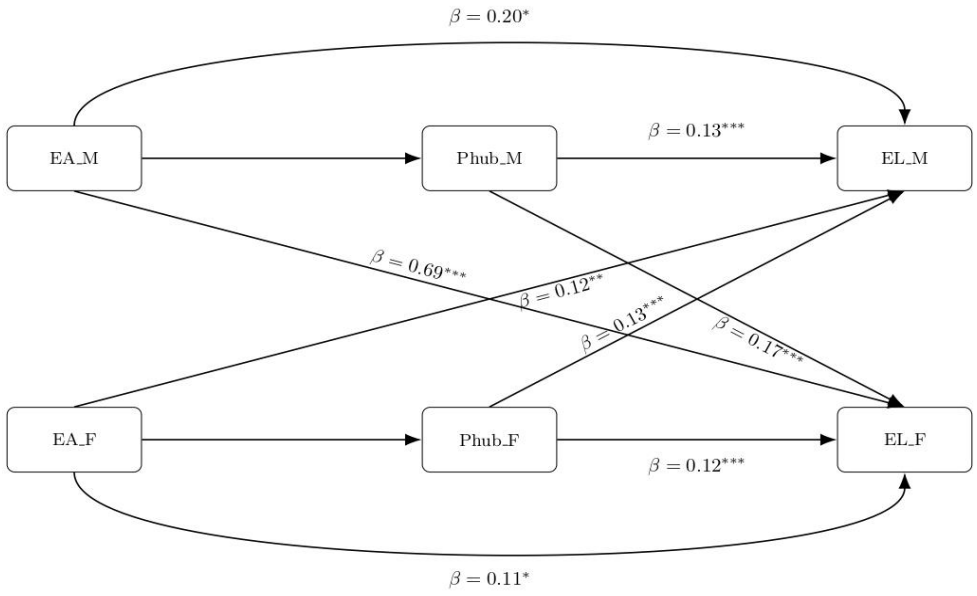


Figure 3 presents the Actor–Partner Interdependence Mediation Model (APIMeM) examining the actor and partner effects of experiential avoidance on emotional loneliness through phubbing. For males, experiential avoidance significantly predicted their own phubbing (β = 0.69, ***p*** < .001), which in turn predicted their own emotional loneliness (β = 0.13, ***p*** < .001) as well as their partner's emotional loneliness (β = 0.17, ***p*** < .001). Similarly, females' experiential avoidance significantly predicted their own phubbing (β = 0.12, **p** < .01), which was associated with their

own emotional loneliness (β = 0.12, ***p*** < .001) and their partner's emotional loneliness (β = 0.13, ***p*** < .001). Direct effects of experiential avoidance on emotional loneliness were also found for both males (β = 0.20, $p < .05$) and females (β = 0.11, $p < .05$). These findings indicate partial mediation, suggesting that experiential avoidance contributes to both individuals' and partners' emotional loneliness directly and indirectly through phubbing.

Table 6

*APIM Mediation analysis using R-studio Lavaan to measure the actor-partner effect of experiential avoidance on Psychological Distress, through Phubbing (*N=334).

Effect Type	Path	*B*	*β*	*z*	*P*
Actor (Direct effect)	EA_M→PDS_M	0.21	0.25	2.59	.009**
	EA_F→ PDS_F	0.14	0.15	2.08	.037*
Actor (Indirect effect)	EA_M→ Phub_M→ PDS_M	0.07	0.08	2.26	.023*
	EA_F→ Phub_ F→ PDS_F	0.09	0.10	3.11	.002**
Partner (Indirect effect)	EA_M→ Phub_M → PDS_F	0.16	0.18	4.62	.001**
	EA_F→ Phub_F→ PDS_M	0.12	0.14	3.81	.001**
Partner (Direct effect)	EA_M→ PDS_F	0.59	0.65	10.73	.001**
	EA_F→ PDS_M	0.16	0.17	3.14	.002**

Note: B = unstandardized regression coefficient; β = standardized regression coefficient;. ***p*** *< .05*, **p** < .01***

Using phubbing in married dyads (N = 334), the APIM mediation analysis of the actor–partner effects of experiential avoidance (EA) on psychological distress (PDS) is shown in Table 6.

Actor Effect

Experiential avoidance had a substantial direct impact on the psychological suffering of both husbands and wives (husbands: $\beta = .25$, $p < .01$; wives: $\beta = .15$, $p = .03$). Furthermore, phubbing revealed significant indirect effects (wives: $\beta = .10$, $p < .001$; husbands: $\beta = .08$, $p = .02$), suggesting that greater psychological suffering for the same individual was anticipated by greater phubbing, which was predicted by higher experiential avoidance.

Partner effects

There were notable partner effects from experiential avoidance as well. The psychological discomfort of wives was indirectly predicted by their husbands' experience avoidance through phubbing ($\beta = .18$, $p < .001$), while the psychological anguish of wives was indirectly predicted by their husbands' phubbing ($\beta = .14$, $p < .001$). There were also notable direct relationship effects (wives' EA predicting husbands' PDS: $\beta = .17$, $p < .001$; husbands' EA predicting wives' PDS: $\beta = .65$, $p < .001$).

Overall pattern

These results suggest partial mediation. Phubbing partially mediates the connection between experiential avoidance and psychological distress because both the direct and indirect effects were significant for both husbands and wives. To put it another way, increased experiential avoidance highlights the interdependent emotional processes in married couples by indirectly increasing psychological suffering in both the individual and their partner through increased phubbing behavior.

Figure 4

APIM Partial mediation model illustrating actor and partner effects of Experiential Avoidance on Psychological Distress through Phubbing.

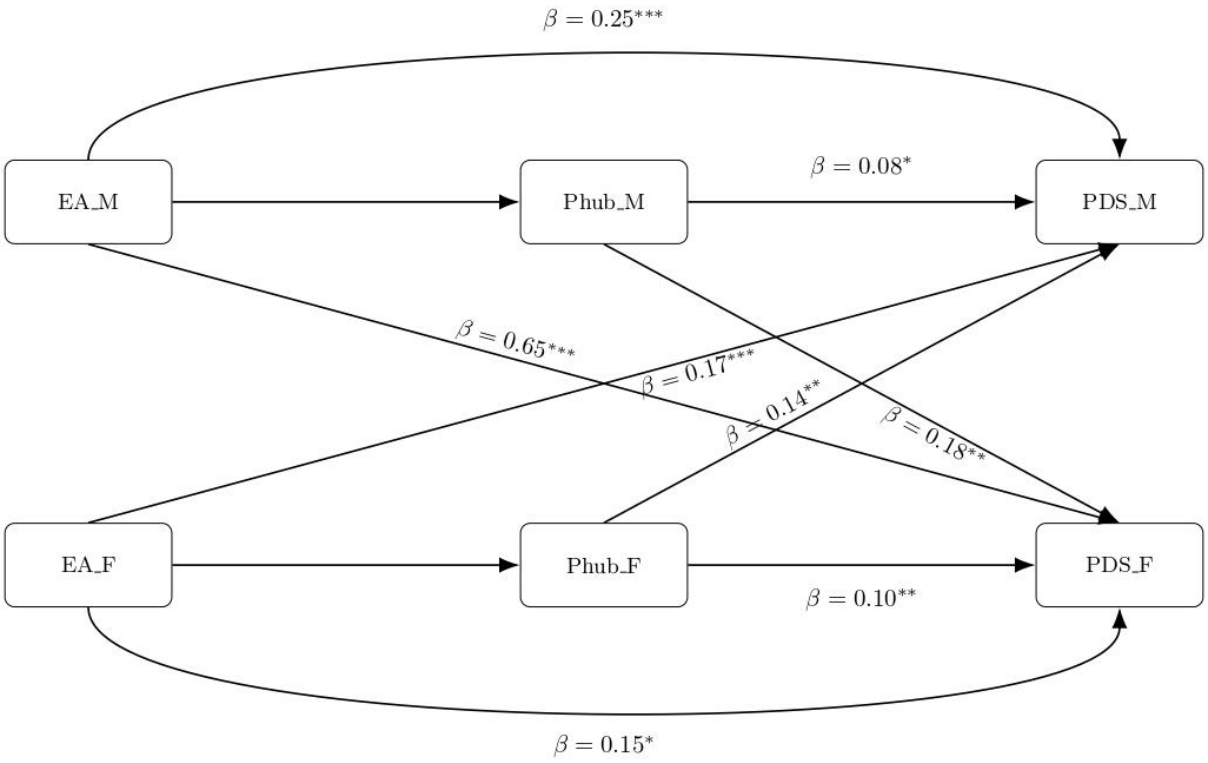


Figure 4. shows Actor Partner Interdependence Mediation Model (APIMeM) testing the effects of experiential avoidance on psychological distress through phubbing. The model shows significant actor effects, where higher experiential avoidance predicted greater phubbing behaviors, which in turn were associated with increased psychological distress for both males (β = 0.08, $p < .05$) and females (β = 0.10, $p < .01$). Partner effects were also evident, such that one partner's experiential avoidance was linked to the other partner's psychological distress indirectly via phubbing (e.g., EA_M → Phub_M → PDS_F, β = 0.14, $p < .01$). Direct paths from experiential

avoidance to psychological distress remained significant ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < .001$ for males; $\beta = 0.15$, $p < .05$ for females), indicating partial mediation. Overall, these findings highlight both actor and partner processes, suggesting that phubbing partially mediates the link between experiential avoidance and psychological distress within couples

Table 7

Model fit indices for tested mediation model. (N=167)

Fit Indices	Values
χ^2 (Chi square) (p value)	210.23(>0.05)
Df	181
CFI	0.97
TLI	0.96
RMSEA	0.06
SRMR	0.03

Note: χ^2 = chi-square goodness-of-fit test; df = degrees of freedom; p = probability value; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual.

The model fit indices for the tested mediation model (N = 167) are shown in Table 7. Overall, the results show a good model fit. The hypothesized model does not significantly differ from the observed data, according to the nonsignificant chi-square test result ($\chi^2(181) = 210.23$, $p > .05$). The following other fit indices likewise satisfied the suggested thresholds: RMSEA =.06 (≤.08 suggests acceptable fit), SRMR =.03 (≤.08 indicates good fit), and CFI =.97 and TLI =.96 (values ≥.90 indicate good fit).

Overall trend

Taken together, these indices show that the mediation model offers a sufficient and accurate depiction of the data.

Table 8

APIM Moderation analysis By SEM R studio Lavaan to measure the moderation effect of Emotional intelligence e on the relationship between Experiential avoidance and ***Emotional reactivity*** *(*N=334).

Variables	*B*	*SE*	*Z*	*P*	95% *CI*	
					LL	*UL*
Actor Effect (male, female)						
EA_M	0.19	0.08	2.33	.020*	0.04	0.37
EI_M	-0.67	0.06	-10.33	.000**	-0.80	-0.55
EA_M×EI_M	-0.20	0.07	-2.67	.008**	-0.36	-0.06
EA_F	0.08	0.04	2.04	.041*	0.01	0.17
EI_F	-0.61	0.06	-10.29	.000**	-0.72	-0.48
EA_F×EI_F	-0.01	0.04	-2.34	.019*	-0.18	-0.01
Partner Effect (male to female and vice versa)						
EA_F	0.23	0.03	6.19	.000**	0.16	0.32
EI_F	0.00	0.05	0.06	.949	-0.11	0.10
EA_F×EI_F	-0.01	0.04	-0.26	.795	-.096	0.06
EA_M	0.21	0.09	2.25	.024*	0.05	0.41
EI_M	-0.11	0.05	-1.99	.046*	-0.22	-0.01
EA_M×EI_M	-0.14	0.08	-1.80	.072	-0.32	0.01

Note: B = unstandardized regression coefficient; β = standardized regression coefficient;. ***p*** *< .05*,* ***p*** *< .01***

Table 8 presents the results of the APIM moderation analysis using SEM in R (Lavaan) to examine whether emotional intelligence (EI) moderates the relationship between experiential avoidance (EA) and emotional reactivity (ERS) among married dyads (*N* = 167)

Actor Effect

While emotional intelligence negatively predicted emotional reactivity (β = –0.67, p <.001), experiential avoidance positively predicted emotional reactivity in spouses (β = 0.19, p =.02). The positive correlation between emotional reactivity and experiential avoidance was diminished by increased emotional intelligence, according to the significant interaction between EA and EI (β = -0.20, p =.00).

In women, emotional reactivity was adversely predicted by emotional intelligence (β = –0.61, p <.001), although it was positively predicted by experiential avoidance (β = 0.08, p =.04). Additionally, a significant interaction effect was discovered (β = -0.01, p =.01), indicating that emotional intelligence also mitigated the impact of experiential avoidance on wives' emotional reactivity.

Partner effects

The emotional reactivity of women was considerably predicted by their husbands' experiencing avoidance (β = 0.23, p <.001), while the emotional reactivity of husbands was significantly predicted by their wives' experiential avoidance (β = 0.21, p =.02). But for relationship effects (husbands to wives: β = –0.14, p =.07; wives to husbands: β = –0.01, p =.79), the moderation effects (EA × EI) were not significant, suggesting that emotional intelligence did not significantly moderate the cross-partner connections.

Overall trend

According to these findings, the actor routes are strongly moderated by emotional intelligence; those with higher emotional intelligence demonstrate a less positive correlation between their own emotional reactivity and experience avoidance. But there was no discernible moderation for across partner effects.

Figure 5

APIM Moderation graph for showing actor Effects of Experiential Avoidance on emotional reactivity, moderated by emotional intelligence.

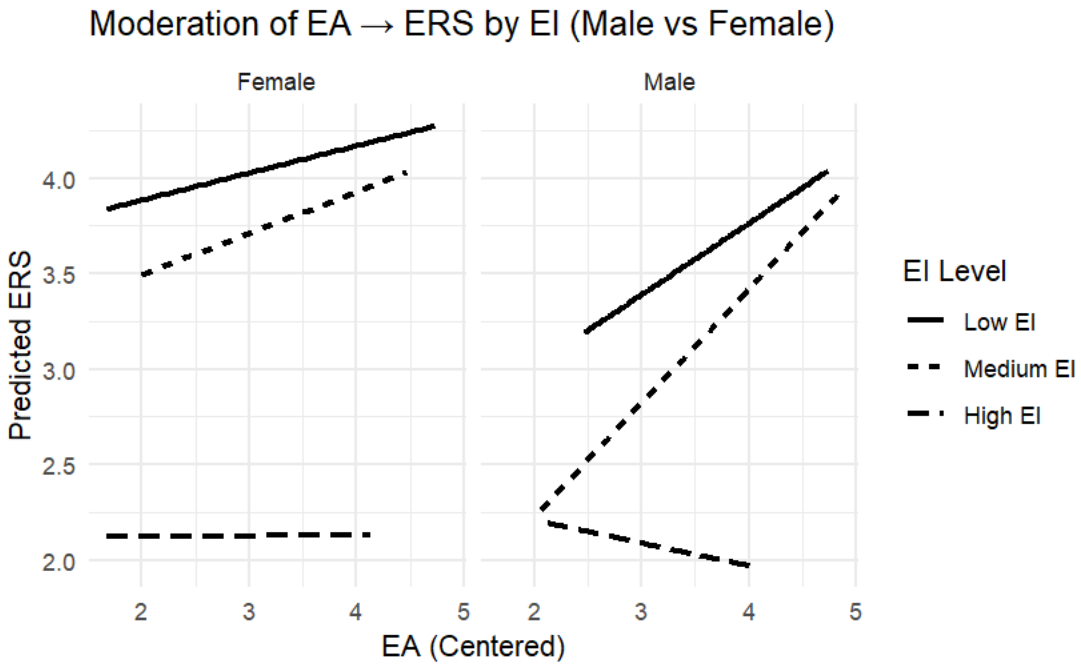


Figure 5. Actor Partner Interdependence Moderation Model (APIMoM) illustrating the moderating role of emotional intelligence (EI) in the association between experiential avoidance (EA) and emotional reactivity (ERS), separated by gender. For females, the relationship between EA and ERS was positive across all levels of EI, with stronger effects at medium and high EI, suggesting that higher EA consistently predicted greater emotional reactivity regardless of EI level. For males, however, the pattern differed: at low and medium levels of EI, EA was positively associated with ERS, whereas at high EI the relationship was attenuated, such that greater EA was linked to lower ERS. The visual trends suggest that higher EI attenuates the positive association

between EA and ERS for males, whereas the relationship appears consistent across EI levels for females. However, the interaction terms were not statistically significant (see Table 24), indicating that EI did not significantly moderate actor effects.

Figure 6

APIM Moderation graph for showing Partner Effects of Experiential Avoidance on emotional reactivity, moderated by emotional intelligence.

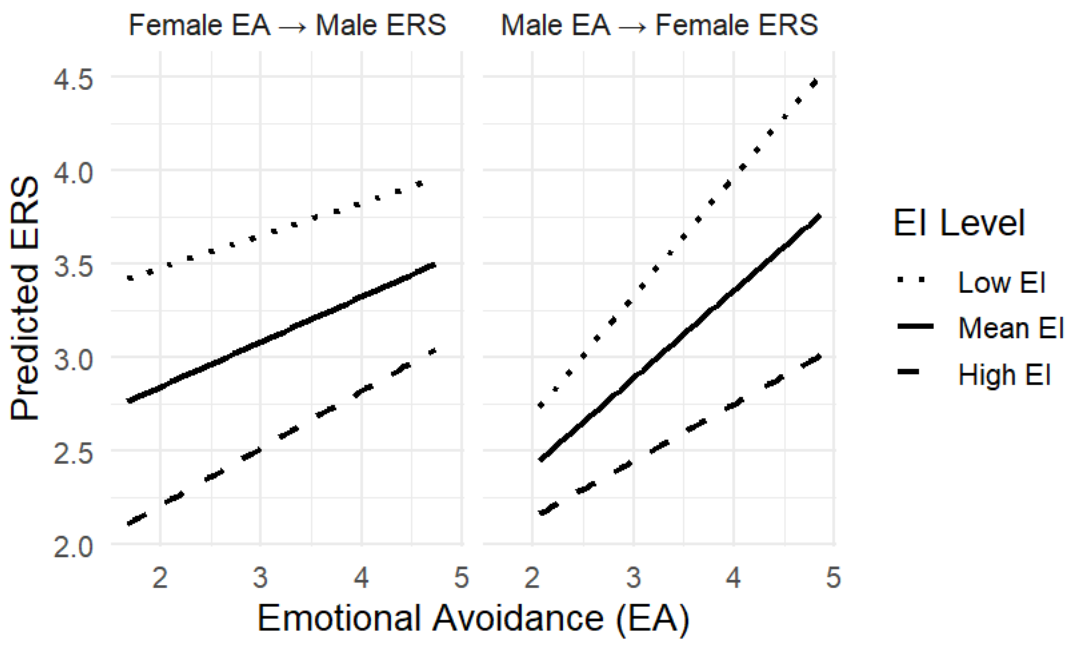


Figure 6. Actor–Partner Interdependence Moderation Model (APIMoM) illustrating partner effects of experiential avoidance (EA) on emotional reactivity (ERS), moderated by emotional intelligence (EI). For female EA predicting male ERS (left panel), higher EA was associated with greater ERS in males, and this effect was strongest at low levels of EI, weaker at mean EI, and weakest at high EI. For male EA predicting female ERS (right panel), a similar moderation pattern was observed: higher male EA was linked to greater female ERS, but this association was substantially stronger when female EI was low, moderate at mean EI, and weakest when EI was high. These visual findings suggest that emotional intelligence buffers the negative

partner effects of experiential avoidance on emotional reactivity for both genders. However, these moderation trends were not statistically significant statistically (see Table 24),

Table 9

*APIM Moderation analysis By SEM R studio Lavaan to measure the moderation effect of Emotional intelligence e on the relationship between Experiential avoidance and Emotional loneliness (*N=167).

Variables	B	SE	Z	P	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Actor Effect (male, female)						
EA_M	0.07	0.04	1.81	.070	0.03	0.16
EI_M	-0.40	0.03	-10.54	.000	-0.47	-0.32
EA_M×EI_M	0.00	0.04	0.18	.851	-0.08	0.09
EA_F	-0.00	0.01	-0.14	.888	-0.03	0.03
EI_F	-0.34	0.03	-9.33	.000	-0.39	-0.24
EA_F×EI_F	-0.00	0.01	-0.51	.604	-0.04	0.03
Partner Effect (male to female and vice versa)						
EA_F	-0.01	0.01	-0.71	.474	-0.04	0.02
EI_F	-0.04	0.03	-1.33	.181	0.11	0.01
EA_F×EI_F	-0.01	0.01	-0.63	.524	-0.05	0.02
EA_M	0.05	0.05	1.06	.287	-0.04	0.15
EI_M	-0.07	0.03	-1.85	.063	-0.16	-0.01
EA_M×EI_M	0.00	0.04	0.04	.963	-0.08	0.09

Note: B = unstandardized regression coefficient; β = standardized regression coefficient;. ***p*** *< .05*,* ***p*** *< .01***

Table 9 presents the results of the APIM moderation analysis using SEM in R (lavaan) to examine whether emotional intelligence (EI) moderates the relationship between experiential avoidance (EA) and emotional loneliness (EL) among married dyads ($N = 167$).

Actor effects

Experiential avoidance did not significantly predict emotional loneliness in husbands (β = 0.07, p =.07). On the other hand, emotional loneliness was strongly and adversely predicted by emotional intelligence (β = –0.40, p <.001), suggesting that emotional loneliness was inversely correlated with emotional intelligence. The lack of significant interaction between EA and EI (β = 0.00, p =.85) indicates that emotional intelligence did not operate as a moderator in the association between husbands' emotional loneliness and experiential avoidance. Neither the EA × EI interaction (β = -0.00, p =.60) nor experiential avoidance (β = -0.00, p =.88) substantially predicted emotional loneliness for wives. However, wives' emotional loneliness was significantly and negatively predicted by emotional intelligence alone (β = -0.34, p <.001).

Partner effects

In the same way that wives' emotional loneliness was not significantly predicted by their husbands' experiential avoidance or the EA × EI interaction (all p >.05), husbands' emotional loneliness was not significantly predicted by either of these factors. Additionally, there were no discernible moderating effects of emotional intelligence in partner impacts.

Overall pattern

These findings suggest that emotional intelligence does not significantly modify the relationship between emotional loneliness and experiential avoidance, but it does have a strong

negative main effect on emotional loneliness for both husbands and wives. Furthermore, no discernible partner moderation effects were found.

Figure 7

APIM Moderation graph for showing Actor Effects of Experiential Avoidance on emotional Loneliness, moderated by emotional intelligence.

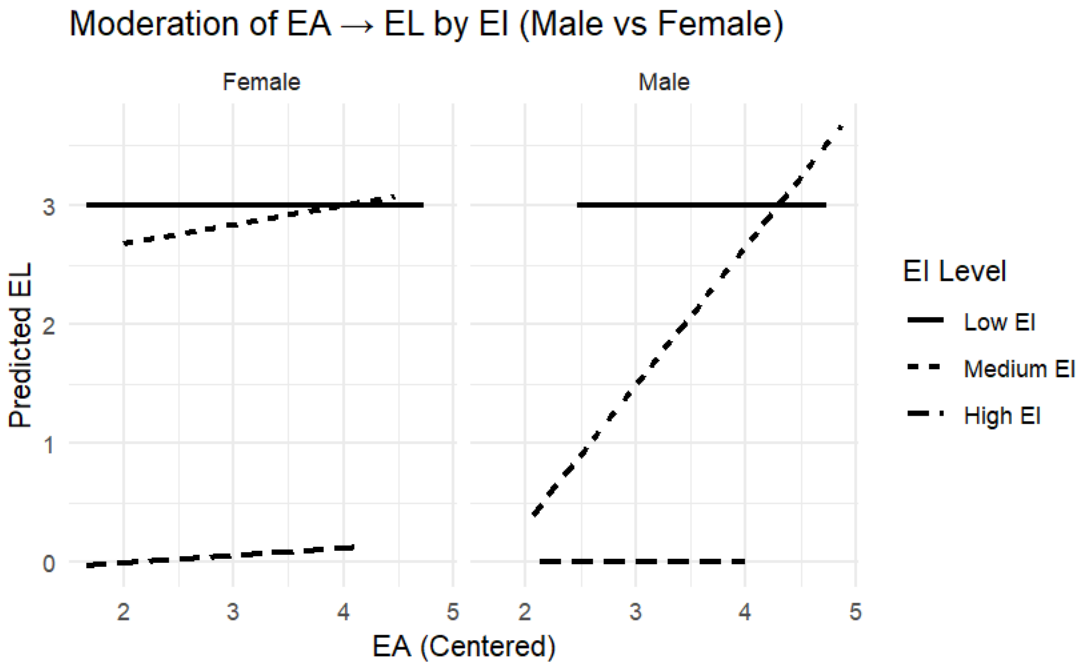


Figure 7 illustrates the moderating role of emotional intelligence (EI) in the association between experiential avoidance (EA) and emotional loneliness (EL), separately for males and females. For females, the slopes across low, medium, and high levels of EI were relatively flat, indicating that EI did not significantly moderate the relationship between EA and EL. In contrast, for males, the interaction was more pronounced: at medium levels of EI, higher EA was strongly associated with increased EL, whereas at low and high levels of EI, the association between EA and EL was negligible. Taken together, the visual inspection of the moderation plots indicates that the moderating role of emotional intelligence was evident only in the male sample at medium

levels of EI, whereas for females the effect was negligible. Statistically, moderation was not significant across all actor and partner paths for relationship-level outcomes.

Figure 8

APIM Moderation graph for showing Partner Effects of Experiential Avoidance on emotional Loneliness, moderated by emotional intelligence.

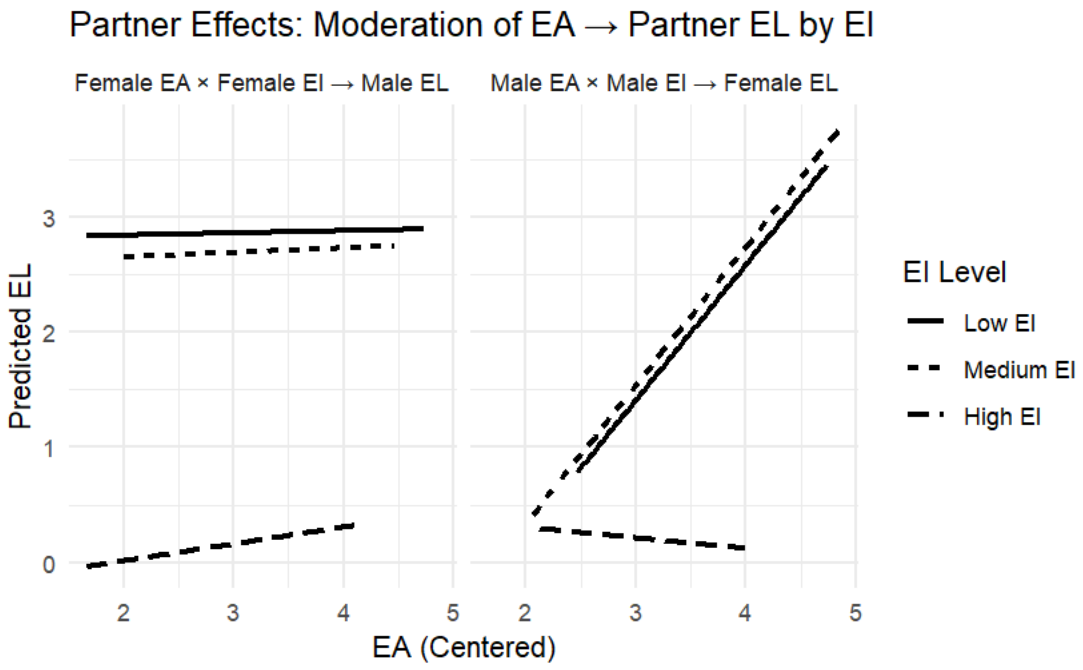


Figure 8 illustrates the moderating role of emotional intelligence (EI) in the partner effects of experiential avoidance (EA) on emotional loneliness (EL). For females, the slopes across low, medium, and high levels of EI were relatively flat, suggesting that female EA was not strongly associated with male EL across different EI levels. For males, however, the plot indicates that higher EA was linked with greater female EL, particularly at medium and high levels of EI, where the slopes were steeper.

Although these visual patterns suggest possible moderation trends especially for the male-to-female partner pathway statistical analyses revealed that moderation was not significant across partner effects.

Table 10

*APIM Moderation analysis By SEM R studio Lavaan to measure the moderation effect of Emotional intelligence e on the relationship between Experiential avoidance and psychological distress (*N=167).

Variables	*B*	*SE*	*z*	*P*	95% *CI*	
					LL	*UL*
Actor Effect (male, female)						
EA_M	0.01	0.09	0.18	.852	-0.15	0.21
EI_M	-0.80	0.07	-10.49	.000	-0.94	-0.64
EA_M×EI_M	0.05	0.08	0.60	.548	-0.13	0.21
EA_F	0.04	0.04	1.01	.311	-0.04	0.14
EI_F	-0.66	0.07	-8.81	.000	-0.79	-0.49
EA_F×EI_F	-0.07	0.04	-1.62	.104	-0.16	0.02
Partner Effect (male to female and vice versa)						
EA_F	0.13	0.04	3.02	.003	0.04	0.22
EI_F	-0.14	0.06	-2.13	.033	-0.29	-0.00
EA_F×EI_F	-0.03	0.04	-0.72	.468	-0.11	0.04
EA_M	0.07	0.10	0.63	.523	-0.14	0.31
EI_M	-0.19	0.07	-2.79	.005	-0.33	-0.06
EA_M×EI_M	-0.09	0.09	-0.97	.329	-0.29	0.07

Table 10 presents the results of the APIM moderation analysis using SEM in R (lavaan) to examine whether emotional intelligence (EI) moderates the relationship between experiential avoidance (EA) and psychological distress (PDS) among married dyads ($N = 167$).

Actor effects

Experiential avoidance did not significantly predict the psychological discomfort of husbands (β = 0.01, p =.85). However, wives' personal psychological discomfort was significantly and negatively predicted by emotional intelligence (β = –0.80, p <.001), suggesting that lower psychological anguish was linked to higher emotional intelligence. The effect of experiential avoidance on husbands' discomfort was not moderated by emotional intelligence, as indicated by the non-significant interaction term EA × EI (β = 0.05, p =.54).

Wives' emotional intelligence significantly and negatively predicted their own distress (β = –0.66, p <.001), whereas experiential avoidance did not significantly predict their own distress (β = 0.04, p =.32). There was no moderation effect, as evidenced by the nonsignificant EA × EI interaction for spouses (β = -0.07, p =.10).

Partner effects

Wives' emotional intelligence considerably and negatively predicted their husbands' psychological anguish (β = –0.14, p =.03), and experiential avoidance significantly predicted their husbands' psychological distress (β = 0.13, p =.00). The EA × EI interaction, on the other hand, showed no moderation and was nonsignificant (β = -0.03, p =.46).While husbands' emotional intelligence negatively predicted their wives' suffering (β = -0.19, p =.00), the EA × EI interaction was also nonsignificant (β = -0.09, p =.32), and husbands' experiential avoidance did not substantially predict their wives' distress (β = 0.07, p =.52).

Overall pattern

These results show that both husbands and wives' psychological distress is significantly impacted negatively by emotional intelligence, and that wives' experiential avoidance also positively affects their husbands' psychological distress. However, neither in actor nor partner routes did emotional intelligence significantly attenuate the association between psychological distress and experiential avoidance.

Figure 9

APIM Moderation graph for showing Actor Effects of Experiential Avoidance on Psychological Distress, moderated by emotional intelligence.

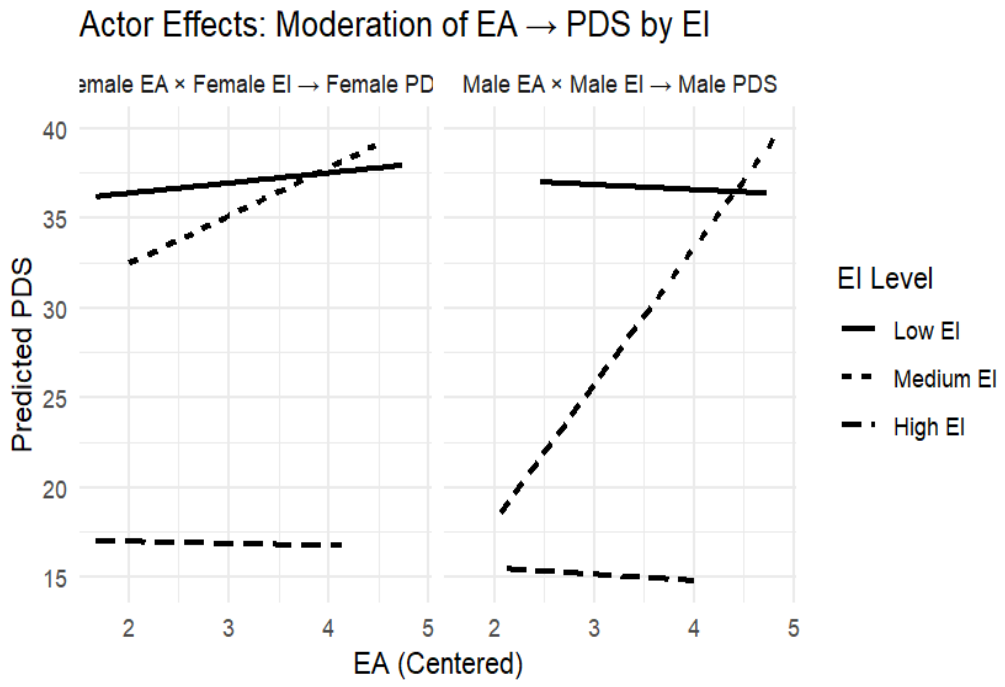


Figure 9 displays the actor-effect moderation of experiential avoidance (EA) on psychological distress (PDS) by emotional intelligence (EI), plotted separately for females (left) and males (right). Predicted PDS is shown at low (−1 SD; solid line), medium (mean; dashed line), and high (+1 SD; dash-dot line) levels of EI. For females, the plot shows relatively high predicted PDS at low and high EI with a slight positive slope as EA increases, whereas the medium-EI line is lower and comparatively flat, suggesting a potential buffering effect of moderate EI on the EA → PDS link. For males, the medium-EI line shows a pronounced positive slope (stronger EA → PDS association), while the low- and high-EI lines are essentially flat, indicating the EA → PDS

association may be conditional on EI in the male subsample. Taken together, the graphs suggest that EI may condition the strength of the association between EA and PDS differently for men and women (moderate EI appears protective for women, whereas the association emerges most strongly at average EI for men).

Visually apparent differences in slopes are informative; however, formal tests of the interaction terms did not reach statistical significance for the actor paths.

Figure 10

APIM Moderation graph for showing Partner Effects of Experiential Avoidance on Psychological Distress, moderated by emotional intelligence.

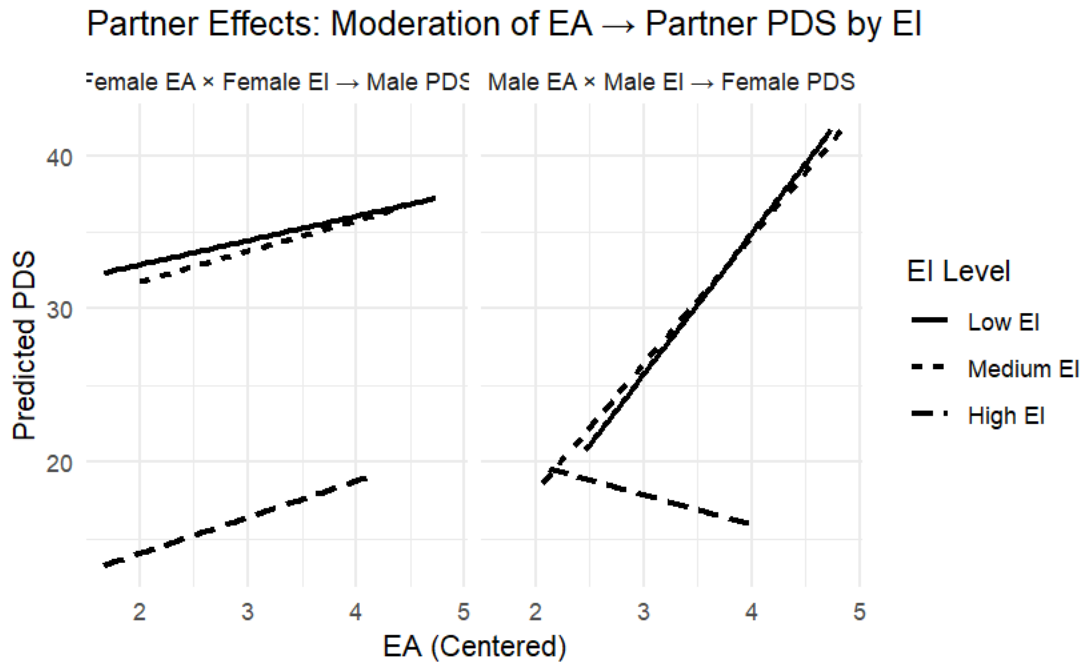


Figure 10 displays the partner-effect moderation of experiential avoidance (EA) on psychological distress (PDS) by emotional intelligence (EI), plotted separately for female EA predicting male PDS (left) and male EA predicting female PDS (right). Predicted PDS is shown at low (−1 SD; solid line), medium (mean; dashed line), and high (+1 SD; dash-dot line) levels of EI. For females predicting male outcomes, the plot shows a small positive association between EA and partner PDS, with the three EI lines largely parallel, suggesting little visual evidence of moderation. For males predicting female outcomes, the low- and high-EI lines show steep positive

slopes, whereas the medium-EI line is flatter and slightly negative, implying that female partners may experience greater distress when their male partners' EA is high except when male EI is average. Taken together, the graphs suggest possible conditional effects of EI on the EA → partner PDS association, particularly in the male-to-female path. However, while these visual trends are informative, formal statistical tests indicated that the moderation effects of EI on partner paths were not significant.

Table 11

Model fit indices for tested moderation model. (N=167)

Fit Indices	Values
χ^2 (Chi square) (p value)	510.77 (>0.05)
Df	461
CFI	0.97
TLI	0.96
RMSEA	0.05
SRMR	0.03

Note: χ^2 = chi-square goodness-of-fit test; df = degrees of freedom; p = probability value; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual.

The model fit indices for the tested moderation model (N = 167) are shown in Table 11. All things considered, the model suited the data really well. The hypothesized model did not statistically differ from the observed data, according to the non-significant chi-square value ($\chi^2(461) = 510.77$, p >.05). With a Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) of.96 and a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of.97, both above the suggested threshold of.90, further fit indices provided additional evidence of the model's sufficiency. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was.03 and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was.05, both of which were within the excellent fit (<.08) range.

These indices collectively show how well the tested moderation model fits the data.

Table 12

APIM moderation analysis in R (lavaan) examining the moderating effect of Emotional Intelligence (EI) on the relationship between Experiential Avoidance (EA) and Phubbing (mediator) for males and females (N = 167).

Variables	*B*	*SE*	*Z*	*p*	95% *CI*	
					LL	*UL*
1)Actor Effect Path a: IV → Mediator (male, female)						
EA_M → Phub_M	0.75	0.13	5.80	.000	0.55	1.07
EI_M → Phub_M	-0.14	0.07	-1.80	.071	-0.28	0.02
EA_M × EI_M → Phub_M	-0.37	0.11	-3.19	.001	-0.65	-0.17
EA_F → Phub_F	0.26	0.08	3.08	.002	0.09	0.43
EI_F → Phub_F	-0.21	0.06	-3.41	.001	-0.33	-0.09
EA_F × EI_F → Phub_F	-0.035	0.085	-0.41	.679	-0.20	0.12
Partner Effect (male to female and vice versa)						
EA_F → Phub_M	-0.35	0.07	-4.43	.000	-0.49	-0.18
EI_F→ Phub_M						
EA_F×EI_F→ Phub_M	0.20	0.07	2.93	.003	0.06	0.34
EA_M → Phub_F	-0.06	0.10	-0.57	.568	-0.27	0.14
EI_M→ Phub_F						

EA_M×EI_M→ Phub_F	0.14	0.09	1.52	.128	-0.03	0.33

Note. *B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; Z = Z-value; P = p-value; 95% CI = 95% confidence interval. Actor effects reflect the influence of an individual's own EA and EI on their Phubbing behavior; partner effects reflect the influence of one partner's EA and EI on the other partner's Phubbing behavior.*

Table 12 shows APIM moderation analysis conducted in R (Lavaan) to examine whether emotional intelligence (EI) moderated the relationship between experiential avoidance (EA) and phubbing for both husbands and wives.

Actor Effects

Significant actor effects were found in the results. EA was positively correlated with phubbing in males (B = 0.75, p <.001). Higher EI lessened the effect of EA on phubbing, as this effect was significantly attenuated by EI (B = -0.37, p<.001). EA also predicted increased phubbing for females (B = 0.26, p =.002), while EI had a negative correlation with phubbing (B = -0.21, p <.001). Nevertheless, for females, the EA × EI interaction was not significant (B = -0.04, p =.67).

partner effects

Wives' EI mitigated this effect, with B = 0.20, p =.003, whereas wives' EA significantly predicted lesser phubbing in husbands, B = -0.35, p <. 001. On the other hand, wives' phubbing was not substantially predicted by husbands' EA (B = -0.06, p =.56). Additionally, there was no significant interaction between the wives' phubbing and the husbands' EA and EI (B = 0.14, p =.12).

Overall

All things considered, these results imply that emotional intelligence protects against the negative effects of experiential avoidance on phubbing, especially for men, and that wives' emotional intelligence may mitigate the impact of their avoidance styles on their husbands' phubbing behavior.

Table 13

APIM moderated mediation analysis in R (Lavaan) examining the moderating effect of Emotional Intelligence (EI) on the relationship between Phubbing (mediator) and Emotional Reactivity Scale (ERS, DV) for males and females, including conditional indirect effects of Experiential Avoidance (EA) via Phubbing (N = 167).

Path: Mediator → DV (ERS)	*B*	*SE*	*z*	*P*	95% *CI*	
					UL	*LL*
ACTOR EFFECT						
Phub_M → ERS_M	-0.09	0.05	-1.63	.103	-0.19	0.02
Phub_M × EI_M → ERS_M	-0.02	0.07	0.29	.766	-0.11	0.16
Phub_F → ERS_F	0.04	0.07	0.67	.498	-0.07	0.21
Phub_F × EI_F → ERS_F	-0.13	0.07	-1.92	.054	-0.25	0.03
PARTNER EFFECT						
Phub_F → ERS_M	0.04	0.07	0.67	.502	-0.10	0.17
Phub_F × EI_F → ERS_M	-0.06	0.04	-1.65	.098	-0.16	-0.00
Phub_M → ERS_F	0.03	0.05	0.60	.547	-0.06	0.12
Phub_M × EI_M → ERS_F	-0.13	0.03	-4.02	.000	-0.20	-0.07
Conditional Indirect path IV→ Mediator →DV						
Indirect Actor Male	0.08	0.05	1.63	.103	-0.02	0.18
(Low EI)						
(High EI)	-0.08	0.05	-1.63	.103	-0.18	0.02

Indirect Actor Female (Low EI)	-0.05	0.07	-0.67	.498	-0.23	0.07
(High EI)	0.05	0.07	0.67	.498	-0.07	0.23
Indirect partner Male (Low EI)	-0.05	0.07	-0.67	.502	-0.19	0.11
(High EI)	0.05	0.07	0.67	.502	-0.11	0.19
Indirect partner Female (Low EI)	-0.02	0.04	-0.60	.547	-0.12	0.06
(High EI)	0.02	0.04	0.60	.547	-0.06	0.12

Note: B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standardized error;. ***p*** *< .05*,* ***p*** *< .01** ; z = z-value*

Table 13 presents the APIM moderated mediation analysis conducted in R (Lavaan) to examine whether emotional intelligence (EI) moderated the association between phubbing (mediator) and emotional reactivity (ERS, outcome variable) for both husbands and wives, while also testing the conditional indirect effects of experiential avoidance (EA) via phubbing.

Actor Effects

Husbands' emotional reaction and phubbing were not significantly correlated (B = -0.09, p =.10), and there was no significant interaction between phubbing and EI (B = -0.02, p =.76).

Phubbing was also not associated with spouses' emotional reactivity (B = 0.04, p =.49). Higher EI, however, mitigated the effect of phubbing on spouses' emotional response, as indicated by the significant interaction term (B = -0.13, p =.05).

Partner Effects

Wives' phubbing did not substantially predict husbands' emotional reaction when it came to relationship influences (B = 0.04, p =.50), but the interaction with EI came close to being significant (B = -0.06, p =.09). Similarly, there was no correlation between husbands' phubbing and wives' emotional reactivity (B = 0.03, p =.54). Crucially, there was a significant interaction between husbands' phubbing and EI (B = -0.13, p <.001), indicating that spouses with higher EI were able to mitigate the detrimental effects of phubbing on wives' emotional response.

Conditional Indirect Effects

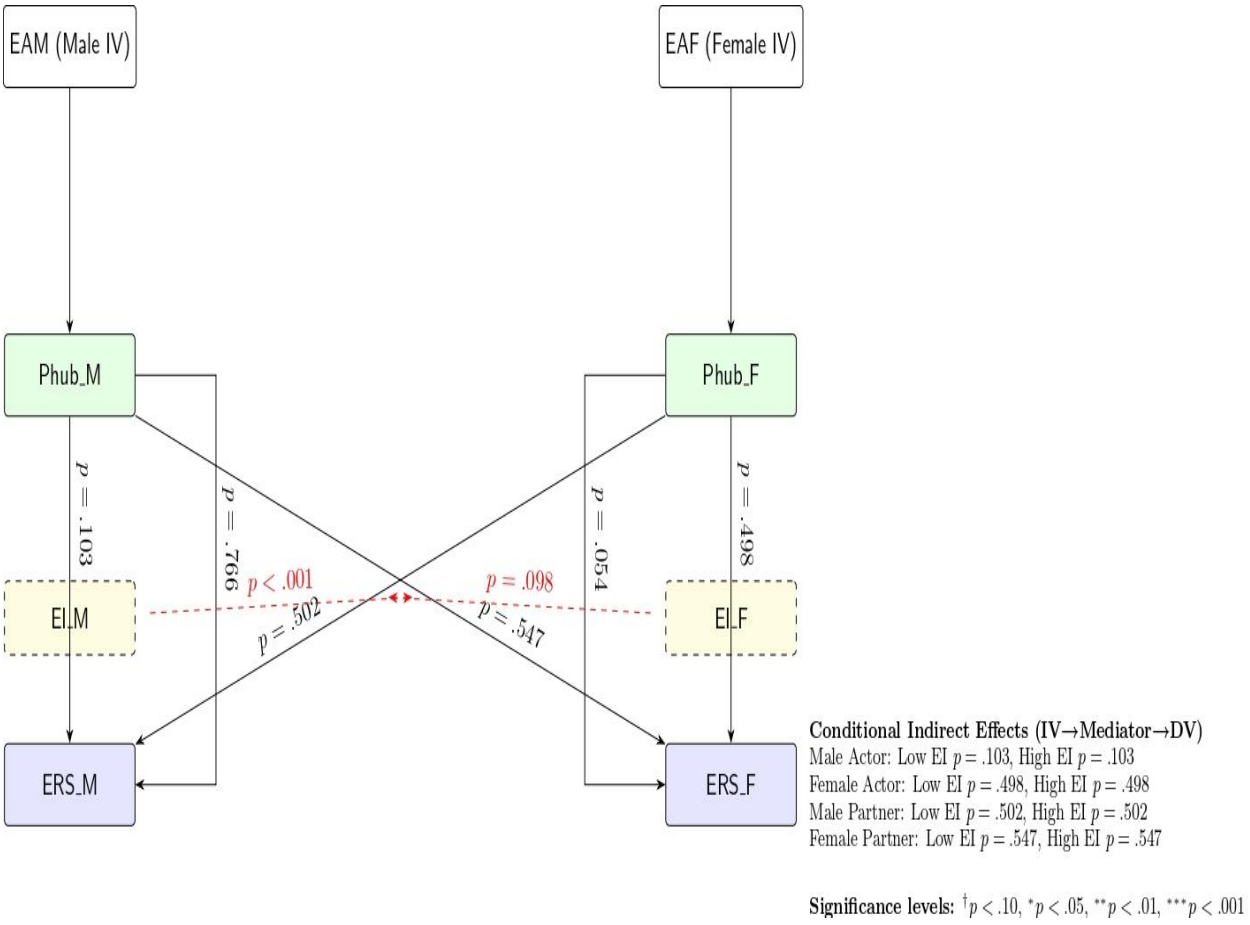
The conditional indirect effects of EA via phubbing were nonsignificant across both husbands and wives. For men, the indirect path was positive at low EI (B = 0.08, p = .10) and negative at high EI (B = -0.08, p = .10), though neither reached significance. For women, the indirect effects were also nonsignificant at both low and high EI. Partner-level indirect effects for both husbands and wives were similarly nonsignificant.

Overall

Taken together, these findings suggest that emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between phubbing and emotional reactivity, particularly for wives' own reactivity and for husbands' influence on wives' emotional experiences. Although no significant indirect effects of experiential avoidance via phubbing were observed, the results highlight the buffering role of emotional intelligence in mitigating the negative consequences of phubbing within marital relationships.

Figure 11

APIM Moderated Mediated Model of Phubbing on Emotional reactivity, moderated by Emotional Intelligence.



In order to investigate whether emotional intelligence (EI) moderates the mediated pathway from experiential avoidance (EA) to emotional reactivity (ERS) through phubbing, taking into account both actor and partner effects, the moderated mediation model in Figure 11 based on Table 28 was evaluated. Male experiential avoidance did not significantly predict male ERS through male phubbing, according to the results, and there was no significant interaction with male EI. Although the interaction with female EI was close to significance, experiential avoidance was not

directly linked to ERS in females through female phubbing. This suggests that women with higher emotional intelligence may be less likely to have a negative relationship between phubbing and their own emotional reactivity. Although female phubbing did not significantly predict male ERS in terms of relationship effects, there was a marginal tendency in the interaction with female EI, suggesting that women's emotional intelligence may mitigate the influence of their phubbing on men's response. In contrast, female emotional reactivity was not directly predicted by male phubbing; instead, a significant interaction with male emotional intelligence was found, indicating that men's higher emotional intelligence mitigated the negative impact of their phubbing on their partner's emotional reactivity. Emotional intelligence did not significantly change the indirect mediation pathways, as seen by the nonsignificant conditional indirect effects observed in both actor and partner models. All things considered, the results indicate that while phubbing did not mediate the relationship between emotional reactivity and experiential avoidance, emotional intelligence especially in men played a significant moderating role in lessening the negative effects of phubbing on partners' emotional reactivity.

Table 14

APIM moderated mediation analysis in R (Lavaan) examining the moderating effect of Emotional Intelligence (EI) on the relationship between Phubbing (mediator) and Emotional Loneliness (EL, DV) for males and females, including conditional indirect effects of Experiential Avoidance (EA) via Phubbing (N = 167).

Path	*B*	*SE*	*Z*	*p*	95% *CI*	
					LL	*UL*
Path: Mediator → DV (EL)						
Actor Effect						
Phub_M → EL_M	-0.00	0.00	-0.24	.804	-0.013	0.010
Phub_M × EI_M → EL_M	-0.00	0.00	-0.10	.914	-0.017	0.012
Phub_F → EL_F	0.00	0.00	0.06	.946	-0.010	0.018
Phub_F × EI_F → EL_F	0.00	0.00	0.09	.924	-0.012	0.019
Partner Effect						
Phub_F → EL_M	0.00	0.006	0.63	.527	-0.008	0.01
Phub_F× EI_F → EL_M	-0.00	0.003	-2.85	.004	-0.018	-0.00
Phub_M → EL_F	-0.00	0.004	-0.19	.848	-0.009	0.00
Phub_M × EI_M → EL_F	-0.01	0.003	-3.34	.001	-0.019	-0.00
Conditional Indirect path IV→						
Mediator →DV						
Indirect Actor Male	0.00	0.00	0.24	.804	-0.01	0.01

(Low EI)						
(High EI)	-0.00	0.00	-0.24	.804	-0.01	0.01
Indirect Actor Female	-0.00	0.00	-0.06	.946	-0.02	0.01
(Low EI)						
(High EI)	0.00	0.00	0.06	.946	-0.01	0.02
Indirect partner Male	-0.00	0.00	-0.63	.527	-0.01	0.00
(Low EI)						
(High EI)	0.00	0.00	0.63	.527	-0.00	0.01
Indirect partner Female	0.00	0.00	0.19	.848	-0.00	0.00
(Low EI)						
(High EI)	-0.00	0.00	-0.19	.848	0.00	0.00

Note: B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standardized error;. ***p*** *< .05*,* ***p*** *< .01** ; z = z-value*

Table 14 presents the APIM moderated mediation analysis conducted in R (Lavaan) to examine whether emotional intelligence (EI) moderated the association between phubbing (mediator) and emotional loneliness (EL, dependent variable) for both husbands and wives, as well as the conditional indirect effects of experiential avoidance (EA) via phubbing.

Actor Effects

For husbands, phubbing was not significantly associated with their own emotional loneliness, B = -0.00, p = .80. The interaction between phubbing and EI was also nonsignificant, B = -0.00, p = .91. Similarly, for wives, phubbing was not significantly related to their emotional loneliness, B = 0.00, p = .94, and the interaction term was likewise nonsignificant, B = 0.00, p = .92.

Partner Effects

For partner effects, wives' phubbing did not significantly predict husbands' emotional loneliness, B = 0.00, p = .52. However, the interaction between wives' phubbing and EI was significant, B = -0.00, p = .004, suggesting that higher EI in wives buffered the association between their phubbing and their husbands' emotional loneliness. In contrast, husbands' phubbing did not significantly predict wives' emotional loneliness, B = -0.00, p = .84, but the interaction between husbands' phubbing and EI was significant, B = -0.01, p = .001, indicating that higher EI in husbands reduced the adverse impact of their phubbing on wives' emotional loneliness.

Conditional Indirect Effects

The conditional indirect effects of experiential avoidance on emotional loneliness through phubbing were nonsignificant for both actor and partner pathways across low and high levels of EI. For both husbands and wives, none of the indirect effects reached significance, indicating that phubbing did not serve as a significant mediator between experiential avoidance and emotional loneliness.

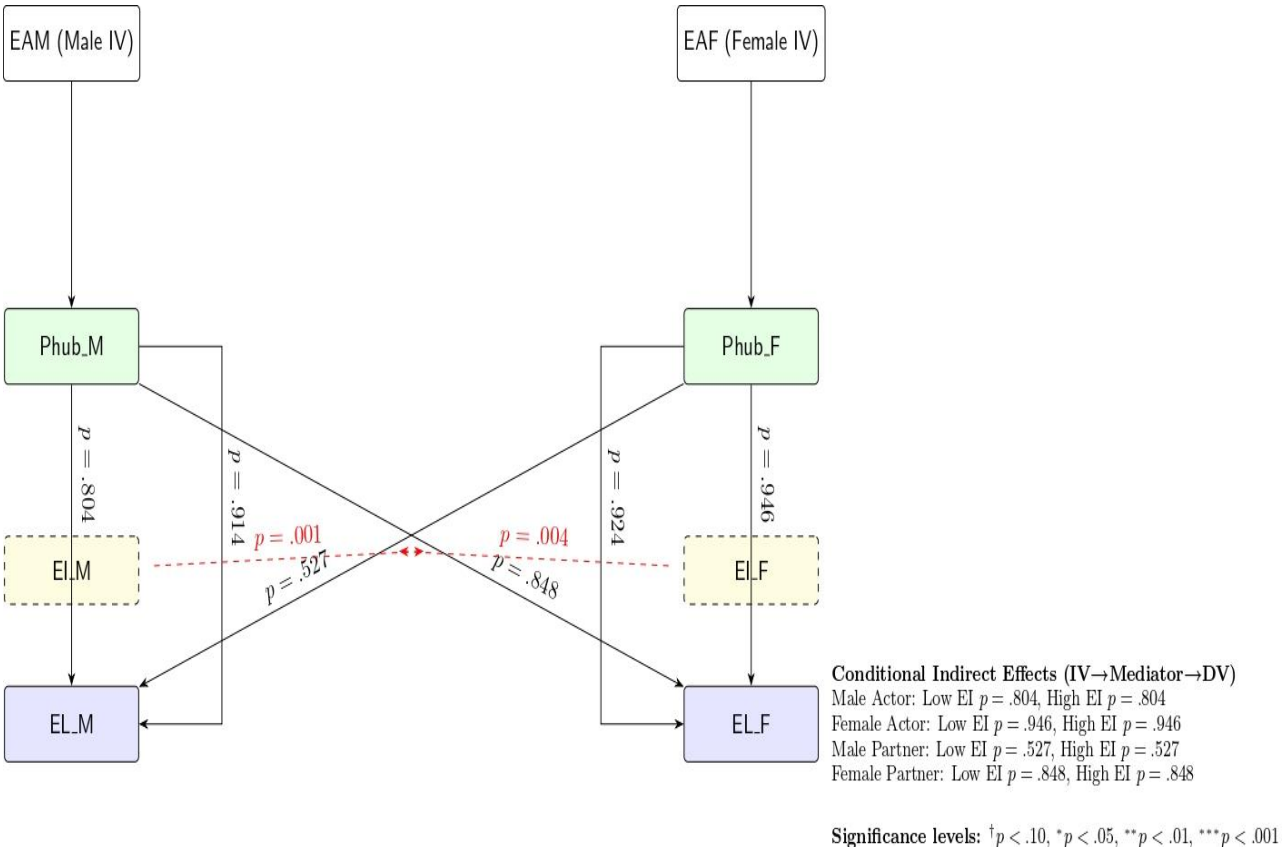
Overall

Overall, the findings suggest that phubbing does not directly predict individuals' own emotional loneliness (actor effects). However, emotional intelligence plays an important

moderating role in partner dynamics. Specifically, both husbands' and wives' higher EI significantly buffered the negative impact of their own phubbing on their partners' emotional loneliness. These results highlight the protective role of emotional intelligence in mitigating the interpersonal costs of phubbing in marital relationships, even though indirect mediation pathways were not supported.

Figure 12

APIM Moderated Mediated Model of Phubbing on Emotional Isolation, moderated by Emotional Intelligence.



Considering both actor and partner effects, the moderated mediation model in Figure 12 examined whether emotional intelligence (EI) regulated the mediated pathway from experiential avoidance (EA) to emotional loneliness (EL) through phubbing. The figure's red dashed lines indicate the partner moderation pathways, demonstrating how EI affected the relationship between partner phubbing and emotional loneliness. In particular, neither the direct effect nor the interaction with male EI was significant (p =.804, p =.914), and male experiential avoidance did not

significantly predict male loneliness through male phubbing. Similarly, there was no moderation by female EI and no significant correlation between female experiential avoidance and female loneliness as measured by female phubbing (p =.946, p =.924). Partner routes, on the other hand, showed notable moderating effects. Male loneliness was not directly predicted by female phubbing (p =.527), but there was a significant interaction with female emotional intelligence (p =.004), suggesting that women's emotional intelligence mitigated the impact of their phubbing on men's emotional loneliness. Likewise, male phubbing did not directly predict female loneliness (p = .848), but its interaction with male EI was significant (p = .001), suggesting that men's emotional intelligence moderated the impact of their phubbing on their partner's emotional loneliness. The total indirect pathway from experiential avoidance to emotional loneliness through phubbing was not significantly changed by EI, as seen by the nonsignificant conditional indirect effects observed in both actor and partner models. When combined, these results show that emotional intelligence, especially in partner pathways, was a key moderator in reducing the impact of phubbing on the partner's emotional loneliness, even though phubbing did not significantly mediate the relationship between experiential avoidance and loneliness.

Table 15

APIM moderated mediation analysis in R (Lavaan) examining the moderating effect of Emotional Intelligence (EI) on the relationship between Phubbing (mediator) and Psychological Distress (PDS, DV) for males and females, including conditional indirect effects of Experiential Avoidance (EA) via Phubbing (N = 167).

Path	*B*	*SE*	*Z*	*P*	95% *CI*	
					LL	*UL*
Path: Mediator → DV (PDS)						
Actor Effect						
Phub_M → PDS_M	-0.08	0.03	-2.23	.025	-0.15	-0.00
Phub_M × EI_M → PDS_M	0.05	0.04	1.18	.237	-0.04	0.14
Phub_F → PDS_F	-0.04	0.05	-0.94	.343	-0.13	0.05
Phub_F × EI_F → PDS_F	0.03	0.05	0.60	.543	-0.06	0.14
Partner Effect						
Phub_F → PDS_M	0.02	0.04	0.51	.606	-0.08	0.10
Phub_F× EI_F → PDS_M	-0.07	0.02	-3.19	.001	-0.13	-0.04
Phub_M → PDS_F	0.00	0.03	0.21	.829	-0.06	0.08
Phub_M × EI_M → PDS_F	-0.07	0.01	-4.01	.000	-0.12	-0.04
Conditional Indirect path IV→						
Mediator →DV						
Indirect Actor Male	0.07	0.03	2.23	.025	0.00	0.14

(Low EI)						
(High EI)	-0.07	0.03	-2.23	.025	-0.14	-0.00
Indirect Actor Female (Low EI)	0.05	0.054	0.94	.343	-0.06	0.15
(High EI)	-0.05	0.054	-0.94	.343	-0.15	0.06
Indirect partner Male (Low EI)	-0.02	0.052	-0.51	.606	-0.11	0.09
(High EI)	0.02	0.052	0.51	.606	-0.09	0.11
Indirect partner Female (Low EI)	-0.00	0.03	-0.21	.829	-0.08	0.06
(High EI)	0.00	0.03	0.21	.829	-0.06	0.08

Note: B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standardized error; ***p*** *< .05*,* ***p*** *< .01** ; z = z-value*

Table 15 presents the APIM moderated mediation analysis conducted in R (Lavaan) to examine whether emotional intelligence (EI) moderated the relationship between phubbing (mediator) and psychological distress (PDS, dependent variable) for both husbands and wives, as well as the conditional indirect effects of experiential avoidance (EA) through phubbing.

Actor Effects

For husbands, phubbing significantly predicted lower psychological distress, B = -0.08, p = .02. However, the interaction between phubbing and EI was nonsignificant, B = 0.05, p = .23. For wives, neither phubbing, B = -0.04, p = .34, nor the interaction between phubbing and EI, B = 0.03, p = .54, significantly predicted psychological distress.

Partner Effects

For partner pathways, wives' phubbing did not significantly predict husbands' psychological distress, B = 0.02, p = .60. However, this effect was significantly moderated by wives' EI, B = -0.07, p = .001, suggesting that higher EI in wives reduced the effect of their phubbing on their husbands' psychological distress. Similarly, husbands' phubbing did not significantly predict wives' psychological distress, B = 0.00, p = .82, but the interaction between husbands' phubbing and EI was significant, B = -0.07, p < .001, indicating that higher EI in husbands mitigated the adverse impact of their phubbing on wives' psychological distress.

Conditional Indirect Effects

The conditional indirect effects of experiential avoidance on psychological distress through phubbing were significant only for husbands at low and high levels of EI. Specifically, at low EI, the indirect effect was significant and positive, B = 0.07, p = .02, At high EI, this effect became negative, B = -0.07, p = .02, indicating a buffering effect of emotional intelligence. For wives, as well as partner pathways, none of the conditional indirect effects reached significance.

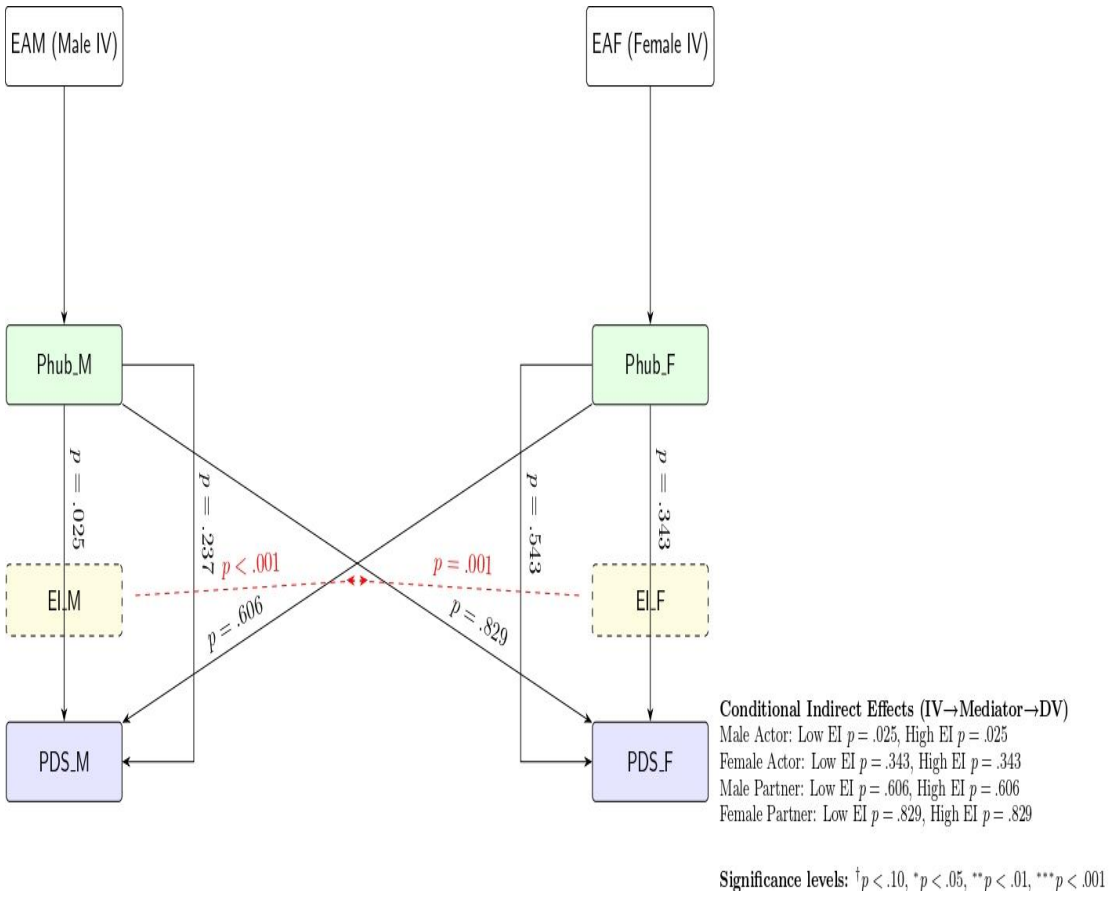
Overall

Overall, these findings suggest that phubbing was directly associated with lower psychological distress in husbands, though not in wives. Importantly, emotional intelligence

emerged as a protective factor in the partner context: both husbands' and wives' higher EI buffered the negative impact of their own phubbing on their partners' psychological distress. Moreover, the indirect effects highlighted that husbands' psychological distress was more sensitive to the moderating role of emotional intelligence, reinforcing its importance as a resilience factor within marital dynamics.

Figure 13

APIM Moderated Mediated Model of Phubbing on Psychological Distress, moderated by Emotional Intelligence.



The moderated mediation model in Figure 13 tested whether emotional intelligence (EI) moderated the mediated pathway from experiential avoidance (EA) to psychological distress (PDS) through phubbing, considering both actor and partner effects. The red dashed lines in the figure represent the partner moderation pathways, where EI influenced the association between partner phubbing and psychological distress. Results showed that male phubbing significantly

predicted their own psychological distress (p = .025), although this pathway was not moderated by male EI (p = .237). For females, neither the direct effect of phubbing on their own psychological distress (p = .343) nor the interaction with female EI (p = .543) was significant. In terms of partner effects, female phubbing did not directly predict male distress (p = .606), but the interaction with female EI was significant (p = .001), indicating that women's emotional intelligence moderated the effect of their phubbing on men's psychological distress. Likewise, male phubbing did not directly predict female distress (p = .829), but its interaction with male EI was significant (p < .001), showing that men's emotional intelligence moderated the effect of their phubbing on their partner's distress. It also reveals that Emotional intelligence (EI) did not change the mediation pathway from experiential avoidance to psychological suffering through phubbing, as conditional indirect effects were not significant in either actor or partner models. Together, these results imply that emotional intelligence, especially in partner pathways, played a crucial moderating role by mitigating the detrimental effects of partner phubbing on psychological distress, even though phubbing did not act as a mediator between experiential avoidance and psychological distress.

Table 16

Frequencies and percentages of demographic variables of Study (N=334)

Variables	Categories	*F*	%	Mean	SD	Range
Age				29.82	5.70	21-40
Gender						
	Male	167	50.0			
	Female	167	50.0			
Helping in house chores						
	Yes	229	68.6			
	No	77	23.1			
	Sometimes	28	8.4			
Phone Usage with partners						
	Social media	207	62.0			
	Work	64	19.2			
	Games	44	13.2			
	Others	19	5.7			
Birth Order						
	First born	88	26.3			
	Middle born	130	38.9			
	Last born	87	26.0			

	Only	29	8.7
No of Children			
	One	129	38.6
	Two	121	36.2
	Three	43	12.9
	More than 3	41	12.3
Marital Duration			
	1-5 years	217	65.0
	6-10 years	39	11.7
	11-15 years	38	11.4
	16-20 years	40	12.0
Socio-Economic Status			
	Below Average	4	1.2
	Average	292	87.4
	Above Average	38	11.4
Phone Usage Hours per day			
	Less than 2 hours	51	15.3
	2-3 hours	106	31.7
	3-4 hours	52	15.6
	More than 4 hours	125	37.4
Family Type			
	Nuclear	229	68.6

	Joint	105	31.4
Marriage Type			
	Arrange	218	65.3
	Love	116	34.7
Education			
	Undergraduates	130	38.9
	Graduates	154	46.1
	Postgraduates	50	15.0
Employment Status			
	Yes	206	61.7
	No	128	38.3
Physical Health Issue			
	Yes	2	0.6
	No	332	99.4
Mental Health Issue			
	Yes	0	0
	No	334	100

Note: f= Frequency, %= Percentages, SD= Standard deviation

The 334 participants in this study were evenly divided between males (n = 167; 50%) and females (n = 167; 50%), suggesting that the sample was gender balanced. With a mean age of 29.82 years (SD = 5.70), the participants' ages ranged from 21 to 40, indicating that young adults made up the majority of the sample. There is a tendency toward shared home obligations, as seen by the high percentage of participants (68.6%) who reported helping with housework. Sixty-five

percent of participants had been married for one to five years, compared to eleven percent who had been married for six to ten years, eleven to fifteen years, and twelve percent who had been married for sixteen to twenty years. According to the prevalent cultural standards, 34.7% of weddings were love marriages and 65.3% were arranged marriages.

Regarding family size, a lesser percentage had three children (12.9%) or more than three children (12.3%), whereas 38.6% had one child and 36.2% had two. There was a trend toward more individualistic family structures, with nuclear families being more prevalent (68.6%) than joint families (31.4%). Of the participants, 38.9% were middle born, followed by first-borns (26.3%), last-born (26.0%), and only children (8.7%).

62.3% of participants used their phones for social media when they were with their spouses, 19.2% for work, 13.2% for gaming, and 5.7% for other purposes, according to phone usage habits. 37.4% of people used their phones for more than four hours a day, 31.7% for two to three hours, 15.6% for three to four hours, and 15.3% for less than two hours.

Just 1.2% of interviewees characterized their socioeconomic level as below average, 11.4% as above average, and 87.4% as average. Regarding education, 38.9% of the participants were undergraduates, 15% were postgraduates, and about (46.1%) were graduates. According to employment status, 38.3% of the sample did not have a job, whereas 61.7% did. Lastly, health-related data revealed that the population was largely healthy, with only 0.6% reporting physical health difficulties and none reporting any mental health issues.

Table 17

Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value to see the effect of gender on experiential avoidance, emotional reactivity, emotional isolation, psychological distress, phubbing and emotional intelligence (N=334).

Variables	Male		Female		*t*	*p*	95% *CI*		*Cohen's*
	M	*SD*	*M*	***SD***			***LL***	***UL***	*d*
EA	55.56	10.90	45.12	10.55	8.896	.000	8.13	12.75	0.97
Phub	26.93	8.69	21.50	6.26	6.562	.000	3.81	7.07	0.71
ERS	54.96	13.44	58.93	15.50	-2.500	.013	-7.09	-0.85	0.27
EL	1.92	1.43	2.00	1.41	-0.50	.616	-0.38	0.23	0.06
PDS	28.40	10.02	29.89	9.84	-1.37	.171	-3.63	0.65	0.15
EI	27.90	9.55	27.62	10.80	0.25	.801	-1.91	2.48	0.03

Note: M= Mean, SD= Standard deviation, LL= Lower limit, UL= Upper limit, CI= Confidence interval, EA= Experiential Avoidance, Phub= Phubbing, ERS= Emotional Reactivity scale, EL= Emotional loneliness, PDS= Psychological Distress, EI= Emotional Intelligence.

Six psychological factors were explored for gender differences using an independent samples t-test. According to the results, men scored considerably higher on experiential avoidance (M = 55.56, SD = 10.90) than women (M = 45.12, SD = 10.55); the effect size was considerable (Cohen's d = 0.97), and t(332) = 8.90, p <.001. In a similar vein, men reported far more phubbing behavior (M = 26.93, SD = 8.69) than women (M = 21.50, SD = 6.26); t(332) = 6.56, p <.001, and the effect size was equally strong (Cohen's d = 0.71).Although the effect size was minor to moderate (Cohen's d = 0.27), females scored substantially higher on the emotional reactivity scale

(M = 58.93, SD = 15.50) than males (M = 54.96, SD = 13.44), with t(332) = -2.50, p =.013. Emotional intelligence, psychological distress, and emotional loneliness did not significantly differ by gender.

In particular, t(332) = -0.50, p =.61, d = 0.06 showed no significant difference in emotional loneliness scores between males (M = 1.92, SD = 1.43) and females (M = 2.00, SD = 1.41). Emotional intelligence (t(332) = 0.25, p =.80, d = 0.03) and psychological distress (t(332) = -1.37, p =.17, d = 0.15) also demonstrated insignificant gender differences.

Table 18

Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value to see the effect of Family type on experiential avoidance, emotional reactivity, emotional isolation, psychological distress, phubbing and emotional intelligence (N=334)

Variables	Nuclear		Joint		*t*	*p*	95% *CI*		*Cohen's*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			*LL*	*UL*	*d*
EA	50.8	11.64	49.45	12.36	1.06	.289	-1.22	4.07	0.12
Phub	23.84	8.12	24.83	7.90	-1.09	.275	-2.78	0.79	0.11
ERS	58.61	13.61	54.20	15.84	2.69	.007	1.19	7.62	0.31
EL	2.13	1.36	1.69	1.47	2.74	.006	0.12	0.75	0.32
PDS	30.10	9.74	27.56	10.11	2.28	.231	0.35	4.74	0.26
EI	26.90	9.66	29.18	10.88	-1.99	.470	-4.53	-0.03	0.23

Note: M= Mean, SD= Standard deviation, LL= Lower limit, UL= Upper limit, CI= Confidence interval, EA= Experiential Avoidance, Phub= Phubbing, ERS= Emotional Reactivity scale, EL= Emotional loneliness, PDS= Psychological Distress, EI= Emotional Intelligence.

Individuals from nuclear and joint family systems were compared in terms of psychological factors using an independent samples t-test. The findings showed that participants from nuclear families had a small to moderate effect size (Cohen's d = 0.31) and reported higher emotional reactivity (M = 58.61, SD = 13.61) than those from joint families (M = 54.20, SD = 15.84). Similarly, participants from nuclear families reported substantially higher levels of emotional loneliness (M = 2.13, SD = 1.36) compared to those from joint families (M = 1.69, SD = 1.47); this difference was minor to moderate (d = 0.32), with t(332) = 2.74, p =.006. Psychological

distress was also significantly different across nuclear family members and joint family members, with nuclear family members reporting higher levels (M = 30.10, SD = 9.74) than joint family members (M = 27.56, , SD = 10.11), t(332) = 2.28, p = .023, d = 0.26.

However, there were no discernible differences between the two-family types in terms of phubbing behavior (t = -1.09, p =.275, d = 0.11) or experience avoidance (t = 1.06, p =.289, d = 0.12). This difference was only marginally significant (t(332) = -1.99, p =.047, with a tiny effect size (d = 0.23), even though the joint family group had higher emotional intelligence (M = 29.18, SD = 10.88) than the nuclear family group (M = 26.90, SD = 9.66).

These results imply that while other psychological traits like experiential avoidance and phubbing are unaffected by family structure, people from nuclear families may feel more emotional reactivity, loneliness, and psychological discomfort than people from joint families.

Table 19

Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value to see the effect of Marriage Type on experiential avoidance, emotional reactivity, emotional isolation, psychological distress, phubbing and emotional intelligence (N=334).

Variables	Arrange		Love		*t*	*P*	95% *CI*		*Cohen's*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			*LL*	*UL*	*d*
EA	49.39	11.89	52.13	11.81	-2.01	.045	-5.42	-0.06	0.23
Phub	23.08	7.47	26.35	8.64	-3.61	.000	-5.06	-1.49	0.41
ERS	54.79	15.13	60.98	12.74	-3.75	.000	-9.43	-2.95	0.44
EL	1.75	1.48	2.36	1.20	-3.85	.000	-0.93	-0.30	0.45
PDS	27.90	10.27	31.47	8.88	-3.17	.002	-5.79	-1.36	0.38
EI	29.33	10.50	24.81	8.87	3.95	.000	2.27	6.78	0.46

Note: M= Mean, SD= Standard deviation, LL= Lower limit, UL= Upper limit, CI= Confidence interval.

The psychological factors of participants in arranged and love marriages were compared using an independent samples t-test. In contrast to those in arranged marriages (M = 49.39, SD = 11.89), those in love marriages reported considerably greater levels of experiencing avoidance (M = 52.13, SD = 11.81), according to the data (t(332) = -2.01, p =.045, d = 0.23). Similarly, phubbing was substantially greater among individuals in love marriages (M = 26.35, SD = 8.64) than arranged marriages (M = 23.08, SD = 7.47) (t(332) = -3.61, p <.001, d = 0.41).

Emotional reactivity was also significantly higher among participants in love marriages (M = 60.98, SD = 12.74) than those in arranged marriages (M = 54.79, SD = 15.13), t(332) = -3.75, p < .001,

d = 0.44. A significant difference was also observed in emotional loneliness, with participants in love marriages (M = 2.36, SD = 1.20) scoring higher than those in arranged marriages (M = 1.75, SD = 1.48), $t(332) = -3.85$, $p < .001$, d = 0.45.

Additionally, participants in love marriages reported greater psychological distress (M = 31.47, SD = 8.88) than those in arranged marriages (M = 27.90, SD = 10.27), $t(332) = -3.17$, $p = .002$, d = 0.38. However, individuals in arranged marriages scored significantly higher in emotional intelligence (M = 29.33, SD = 10.50) compared to those in love marriages (M = 24.81, SD = 8.87), $t(332) = 3.95$, $p < .001$, d = 0.46.

Cohen's d values in this analysis ranged from 0.23 to 0.46, indicating small to moderate effect sizes. This suggests that while the differences between marriage types are statistically significant, the practical impact is modest, with love marriages generally associated with higher emotional distress, emotional reactivity, and experiential avoidance, whereas arranged marriages are associated with better emotional intelligence

Table 20

Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value to see the effect of Employment Status on experiential avoidance, emotional reactivity, emotional isolation, psychological distress, phubbing and emotional intelligence (N=334).

Variables	Employed		Unemployed		*T*	*P*	95% *CI*		*Cohen's*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			*LL*	*UL*	*d*
EA	49.87	11.28	50.71	12.42	-0.64	.523	-3.43	1.75	0.07
Phub	23.61	6.89	24.69	8.82	-1.22	.224	-2.82	0.66	0.14
ERS	52.53	15.07	60.41	13.31	-5.07	.000	-10.94	-4.82	0.56
EL	1.57	1.49	2.27	1.28	-4.59	.000	-0.99	-0.40	0.50
PDS	26.38	10.48	31.31	8.96	-4.63	.000	-7.02	-2.84	0.52
EI	30.29	10.20	25.78	9.74	4.11	.000	2.35	6.66	0.46

Note: M= Mean, SD= Standard deviation, LL= Lower limit, UL= Upper limit, CI= Confidence interval.

Table 20 shows t-test done on employment position, among couples. Results revealed high Emotional reactivity among unemployed people (M = 60.41, SD = 13.31) than among employed people (M = 52.53, SD = 15.07), according to the data p <.001, with a moderate effect size, d = 0.56. Similarly, those without jobs reported more psychological distress (M = 31.31, SD = 8.96) and emotional loneliness (M = 2.27, SD = 1.28) than those with jobs (M = 1.57, SD = 1.49), t = -4.59, p <.001, d = 0.50, and M = 26.38, SD = 10.48, t = -4.63, p <.001, d = 0.52), both of which also showed moderate effect sizes.

On the other hand, those who were employed had a moderately higher emotional intelligence score ($M = 30.29$, $SD = 10.20$) than those who were jobless ($M = 25.78$, $SD = 9.74$), $p < .001$, $d = 0.46$). Experiential avoidance ($p = .523$, $d = 0.07$) and phubbing behavior ($p = .224$, $d = 0.14$) did not differ significantly, and their impact sizes were minor, suggesting that there were only slight variations across employment status. Overall, Cohen's d values show a moderate relationship between emotional adjustment and employment position, particularly when it comes to emotional intelligence, reactivity, loneliness, and distress.

Table 21

One-way Analysis of variance of three categories of Helping spouse. (N=334)

Variables	*Yes (n=229)*		*No (n=77)*		*Sometimes (n=28)*		*F*	*P*	*η2*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
EL	1.86	1.44	1.96	1.41	2.78	0.78	5.46	.005	0.03
ERS	56.58	15.33	56.57	14.24	60.92	7.88	1.13	.322	0.00
PDS	28.58	10.40	29.16	9.44	33.60	5.58	3.22	.041	0.01
EI	28.55	10.54	27.18	9.91	22.89	5.56	4.09	.017	0.02
EA	47.61	11.45	55.26	12.00	59.14	5.06	22.84	.000	0.12
Phub	21.95	6.25	29.68	9.60	27.67	8.08	35.70	.000	0.17

*Note: EL= Emotional Loneliness, ERS= Emotional Reactivity Scale, PDS= Psychological Distress Scale, EI= Emotional Intelligence, EA= Experiential Avoidance, Phub= Phubbing, M=Mean, SD=Standard deviation, f= degree of freedom, p= significant level, η2= eta squared. * p <.05, ** p <.01, *** p <.000.*

To investigate variations in emotional loneliness, emotional reactivity, psychological distress, emotional intelligence, experiential avoidance, and phubbing among participants (N = 334) in three categories of helping spouses (Yes, No, Sometimes), a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used. The degree to which the participants personally assisted their spouse with house chores was represented by these categories: "Yes" for those who regularly assisted, "No" for those who did not, and "Sometimes" for those who occasionally helped. A statistically significant difference in emotional loneliness between the groups was found in the data (F (2, 331) = 5.47, p

=.005, η^2 =.03). Compared to those in the "Yes" or "No" groups, participants in the "Sometimes" group reported feeling the most emotionally alone, indicating that sporadic assistance to one's spouse may be associated with a higher level of emotional detachment. Psychological distress also showed a significant difference (F (2, 331) = 3.22, p =.041, η^2 =.02). Higher psychological suffering was reported by participants who occasionally assisted their partner, suggesting that uneven participation in shared responsibilities may lead to increased emotional stress. There was a significant difference in emotional intelligence between the groups (F (2, 331) = 4.10, p =.017, η^2 =.02). Actively supporting one's spouse may be linked to better interpersonal understanding and emotional regulation, as participants in the "Yes" group reported higher emotional intelligence than those in the "Sometimes" group. The differences were very significant for experiential avoidance (F (2, 331) = 22.85, p <.001, η^2 =.12). In comparison to the other groups, the "Sometimes" group reported much higher levels of experiencing avoidance, indicating that a lack of consistency in helping behaviors may be related to greater avoidance of internal emotional experiences.

Additionally, there were significant differences in phubbing behavior between the groups (F (2, 331) = 35.70, p <.001, η^2 =.18). The "Yes" group reported the lowest levels of phubbing, while the "No" group reported the highest amounts, followed by the "Sometimes" group. This implies that excessive mobile phone use may be linked to a greater disengagement from social presence when one does not assist one's spouse. Emotional reactivity, on the other hand, did not differ significantly (F (2, 331) = 1.14, p =.322, η^2 =.01), suggesting similar levels of emotional response across all helping categories, thus post hoc will not run with this variable.

Overall, these results show that emotional loneliness, psychological distress, emotional intelligence, experiential avoidance, and phubbing are all substantially correlated with how much a person helps their partner. Consistent helps report better psychological outcomes, while those

who just seldom or never assist their partner typically show more psychological challenges. Experiential avoidance and phubbing showed moderate to substantial effect sizes (η^2 =.12 and.18, respectively), highlighting the influence of helpful behaviors on these dimension

Table 22

Pairwise comparison across categories of helping spouse with respect to Experiential Avoidance, Emotional loneliness, Emotional Reactivity, Psychological Distress, Phubbing, and Emotional Intelligence (N=334).

Variable	*(I) Helping Spouse*	*(J) Helping Spouse*	*(I-J)*	*MD (I-J)*	*P*	95% *CI*	
						LL	*UL*
EL	Yes	Sometimes	1<3	-0.93	.003	-1.58	-0.27
	No	Sometimes	2<3	-0.82	.021	-1.55	-0.10
PDS	Yes	Sometimes	1<3	-5.02	.031	-9.68	-0.36
EI	Yes	Sometimes	1<3	5.66	.015	0.91	10.42
EA	Yes	No	1<2	-7.65	.000	-11.12	-4.17
	Yes	Sometimes	1<3	-11.53	.000	-16.81	-6.25
Phub	Yes	No	1<2	-7.74	.000	-10.00	-5.47
	Yes	Sometimes	1<3	-5.73	.000	-9.17	-2.28

*Note: EL= Emotional Loneliness, ERS= Emotional Reactivity Scale, PDS= Psychological Distress Scale, EI= Emotional Intelligence, EA= Experiential Avoidance, Phub= Phubbing, CI= Confidence interval, LL=Lower limit, UL=Upper limit, * p <.05, ** p <.01, *** p <.000.*

Significant differences in psychological factors were found among those who reported varying degrees of assistance to their partners with home duties, according to the pairwise

comparison results based on Tukey's HSD test. Those who said they occasionally helped their partners reported feeling far more emotionally lonely than those who either often assisted or did not assist at all. This could imply that providing sporadic assistance creates expectations in the relationship, and that failing to consistently meet those expectations can cause feelings of emotional detachment or miscommunication. In a similar vein, people who occasionally or seldom assisted in their relationships experienced much more psychological distress than those who often assisted. Because maybe unfulfilled expectations, both from oneself and from one's spouse, can lead to greater emotional weight and relational unhappiness, inconsistent help-giving may cause internal stress or interpersonal pressure

Those who frequently assisted their relationships scored much higher on emotional intelligence tests than those who just occasionally assisted. This trend implies that regular participation in shared tasks may improve one's capacity to manage interpersonal emotions, exhibit empathy, and promote cooperative relationship dynamics. Those who routinely assisted with their relationships showed much less experiential avoidance than those who either did not assist or only occasionally assisted. Because these people are more emotionally engaged and less avoidant when dealing with relationship or internal issues, this research suggests that persistent helping conduct may be linked to a healthy emotional coping style. Those who did not assist their partners or only rarely assisted were much more likely to engage in phubbing activities than those who often assisted. With people using their phones to avoid or replace emotional connection, this lends credence to the idea that relational disengagement may be associated with a lesser level of involvement in supporting one's spouse. In these situations, giving mobile devices priority could indicate a decreased sense of shared accountability or a diminished level of presence in partnership.

In conclusion, people who frequently assisted their partners with housework reported stronger emotional intelligence and reduced levels of psychological discomfort, emotional loneliness, sensory avoidance, and phubbing. These results highlight the psychological and interpersonal value of regular helping the partners, indicating that infrequent or nonexistent helpful action may not only cause emotional discord but also increase intimacy-related detachment and pain.

Table 23

One-way Analysis of variance of four categories of birth order. (N=334)

Variables	First-born (n=88)		Middle-born (n=130)		Last-born (n=87)		Only-child (n=29)		*F*	*p*	η2
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
EL	1.75	1.48	1.89	1.44	2.22	1.31	2.14	1.36	1.87	.134	0.01
ERS	54.90	14.61	56.58	15.56	58.80	13.62	59.17	12.86	1.29	.275	0.01
PDS	27.70	10.64	28.76	10.47	30.60	8.70	30.83	8.39	1.58	.193	0.01
EI	29.30	10.70	28.37	10.31	25.74	9.65	26.48	8.82	2.14	.095	0.01
EA	52.42	11.77	47.99	11.43	52.17	12.45	49.07	11.40	3.44*	.017*	0.03
Phub	22.55	6.65	22.35	6.45	28.07	9.77	26.10	8.44	11.87**	.000**	0.09

*Note: EL= Emotional Loneliness, ERS= Emotional Reactivity Scale, PDS= Psychological Distress Scale, EI= Emotional Intelligence, EA= Experiential Avoidance, Phub= Phubbing, M=Mean, SD=Standard deviation, f= degree of freedom, p= significant level, η2= eta squared. * p <.05, ** p <.01, *** p <.000.*

A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to investigate the differences in emotional loneliness, emotional reactivity, psychological distress, emotional intelligence, experiential avoidance, and phubbing among participants with varying birth orders (first-born, middle-born, last-born, and only-child; N = 334). Emotional loneliness, emotional reactivity, psychological distress, and emotional intelligence did not differ statistically significantly across birth order groups (p >.05), suggesting that these psychological experiences are largely constant regardless of a person's birth position within the family.

Nonetheless, there was a significant difference in experiential avoidance by birth order ($p = .01$), with first-born and last-born people reporting higher levels than middle-born and only-children. This could imply that those on either side of the sibling spectrum are more prone to shy away from their inner emotional experiences.

For phubbing behavior, the difference was more noticeable ($p < .001$), with only children and last-born reporting higher phubbing inclinations than first- and middle-born people. This implies that being the youngest sibling or an only child may be linked to a higher level of social disengagement brought on by cell phone use.

In conclusion, significant variations in experiential avoidance and phubbing with modest to moderate effect sizes were found, even though birth order had no effect on the majority of psychological variables in this sample. These results demonstrate that sibling position may influence behavioral and emotional control patterns in a subtle but significant way.

Table 24

Pairwise comparison across categories of birth order with respect to Experiential Avoidance, and Phubbing (N=334).

Variable	*(I)*	*(J)*	*(I-J)*	*MD (I-J)*	*P*	95% *CI*	
						LL	*UL*
EA	Firstborn	Middle-born	1<2	4.43*	.034*	0.23	8.63
Phub	Firstborn	Last-born	1<3	-5.52**	.000**	-8.52	-2.53
	Middleborn	Last-born	2<3	-5.52**	.000**	-8.47	-2.98

*Note: EA= Experiential Avoidance, Phub= Phubbing, CI= Confidence interval, LL=Lower limit, UL=Upper limit, * p <.05, ** p <.01, *** p <.000.*

Table 24 shows post hoc comparisons for the birth order groups on the variables that exhibited significant effects in the one-way ANOVA. To determine which birth order groups varied from one another in terms of experiencing avoidance and phubbing, the post hoc test was used. The findings showed that compared to middle-born participants, first-born participants reported far higher levels of experiencing avoidance. Participants who were lastborn reported considerably higher levels of phubbing than those who were firstborn or middle born (p <.001). There was no discernible difference in phubbing between those who were first born and those who were middleborn.

These results indicate that experience avoidance and phubbing behaviors are significantly influenced by birth order, with firstborns exhibiting higher levels of experiential avoidance and last born displaying higher levels of phubbing inclinations.

Table 25

One-way Analysis of variance of four categories of No of Children. (N=334)

Variables	One (n=129)		Two (n=121)		Three (n=43)		More than 3 (n=41)		*F*	*P*	*η2*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
EL	2.57	1.03	2.03	1.40	1.33	1.51	0.49	1.10	33.31**	.000**	0.23
ERS	63.22	11.84	57.47	14.16	50.14	15.84	42.76	9.10	30.26**	.000**	0.21
PDS	33.26	8.05	29.44	9.66	24.60	10.42	20.05	7.78	26.92**	.000**	0.19
EI	23.64	7.63	27.31	10.24	32.42	11.48	37.17	7.39	26.88**	.000**	0.19
EA	53.31	12.12	50.42	11.63	47.81	10.38	43.41	10.48	8.46**	.000**	0.07
Phub	25.88	8.70	24.50	7.54	22.35	8.11	20.10	5.03	6.58**	.000**	0.05

*Note: EL= Emotional Loneliness, ERS= Emotional Reactivity Scale, PDS= Psychological Distress Scale, EI= Emotional Intelligence, EA= Experiential Avoidance, Phub= Phubbing, M=Mean, SD=Standard deviation, f= degree of freedom, p= significant level, η2= eta squared. * p <.05, ** p <.01, *** p <.000.*

The findings of the one-way ANOVA comparing the four groups of children (one, two, three, and more than three) on the research variables are shown in Table 25. The purpose of these studies was to ascertain whether there are any significant variations in emotional loneliness (EL), emotional reactivity (ERS), psychological distress (PDS), emotional intelligence (EI), experiential avoidance (EA), and phubbing that are related to the number of children.

All factors showed significant group differences (p <.001). In terms of psychological discomfort, emotional reactivity, and emotional loneliness, participants with a single child reported

the greatest levels, while those with more than three children reported the lowest levels. On the other hand, parents who had more than three children reported having the highest emotional intelligence, while parents who had just one child reported having the lowest. In a similar vein, parents with one child exhibited the highest levels of experiencing avoidance and phubbing, which progressively declined as the number of children increased.

All things considered, these results show that the number of children is significantly correlated with emotional experiences and actions; having more children is often linked to higher emotional intelligence but reduced emotional loneliness, reactivity, distress, experiential avoidance, and phubbing.

Table 26

Pairwise comparison across categories of No of children with respect to Experiential Avoidance, Emotional reactivity, Emotional loneliness, psychological distress, Emotional intelligence and Phubbing (N=334).

Variable	*(I)*	*(J)*	*(I-J)*	*MD (I-J)*	*P*	95% *CI*	
						LL	*UL*
EL	One	Two	1<2	0.54*	.004	0.13	0.95
	One	Three	1<3	1.25*	.000	0.68	1.82
	One	More than 3	1<4	2.09*	.000	1.51	2.66
	Two	Three	2<3	0.71*	.008	0.14	1.28
	Two	More than 3	2<4	1.55*	.000	0.96	2.13
	Three	More than 3	3<4	0.84*	.012	0.14	1.54
ERS	One	Two	1<2	5.75*	.003	1.50	10.01
	One	Three	1<3	13.09*	.000	7.17	19.00
	One	More than 3	1<4	20.47*	.000	14.45	26.49

	Two	Three	2<3	7.33*	.009	1.37	13.30
	Two	More than 3	2<4	14.71*	.000	8.64	20.79
	Three	More than 3	3<4	7.38*	.048	0.05	14.72
PDS	One	Two	1<2	3.83*	.005	0.90	6.75
	One	Three	1<3	8.66*	.000	4.59	12.73
	One	More than 3	1<4	13.21*	.000	9.07	17.36
	Two	Three	2<3	4.83*	.014	0.73	8.94
	Two	More than 3	2<4	9.39*	.000	5.21	13.57
EI	One	Two	1<2	-3.67*	.009	-6.67	-0.68
	One	Three	1<3	-8.78*	.000	-12.94	-4.61
	One	More than 3	1<4	-13.53*	.000	-17.77	-9.28
	Two	Three	2<3	-5.10*	.010	-9.31	-0.90
	Two	More than 3	2<4	-9.86*	.000	-14.13	-5.58
EA	One	Three	1<3	5.50*	.036	0.25	10.74

	One	More than 3	1<4	9.90*	.000	4.55	15.24
	Two	More than 3	2<4	7.01*	.005	1.62	12.39
Phub	One	More than 3	1<4	5.79*	.000	2.16	9.42
	Two	More than 3	2<4	4.40*	.011	0.74	8.06

*Note: EL= Emotional Loneliness, ERS= Emotional Reactivity Scale, PDS= Psychological Distress Scale, EI= Emotional Intelligence, EA= Experiential Avoidance, Phub= Phubbing, CI= Confidence interval, LL=Lower limit, UL=Upper limit, * p <.05, ** p <.01, *** p <.000.*

The post hoc comparisons for the four child count categories on factors that exhibited significant effects in the one-way ANOVA are shown in Table 26.

Across all categories, a distinct pattern was found, parents of one kid consistently reported higher levels of psychological discomfort, emotional reactivity, emotional loneliness, experiential avoidance, and phubbing than parents of two, three, or more children. The converse pattern was shown in emotional intelligence, where parents who had more children also reported having better emotional intelligence. These results suggest that while emotional intelligence tends to rise with the number of children, emotional challenges and maladaptive behaviors tend to decline.

Table 27

One-way Analysis of variance of four categories of Marital Duration. (N=334)

Variables	1-5 yrs (n=217)		6-10 yrs (n=39)		11-15 yrs (n=38)		16-20 yrs (n=40)		*F*	*P*	η2
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
EL	2.53	1.08	1.82	1.47	0.16	0.59	0.75	1.32	66.59	.000**	0.33
ERS	62.55	11.95	55.85	15.50	38.32	6.10	45.30	10.64	61.24	.000**	0.35
PDS	32.84	8.27	28.26	9.22	17.42	5.08	21.08	9.03	53.79	.000**	0.32
EI	23.88	8.33	28.90	9.94	40.50	4.60	35.65	8.76	58.53	.000**	0.34
EA	53.18	11.94	47.46	11.25	43.84	8.63	43.90	9.62	14.00	.000**	0.11
Phub	25.41	8.32	25.36	8.84	20.55	4.78	20.10	5.52	8.53	.000**	0.07

*Note: EL= Emotional Loneliness, ERS= Emotional Reactivity Scale, PDS= Psychological Distress Scale, EI= Emotional Intelligence, EA= Experiential Avoidance, Phub= Phubbing, M=Mean, SD=Standard deviation, f= degree of freedom, p= significant level, η2= eta squared. * p <.05, ** p <.01, *** p <.000.*

Table 27 shows the findings of a one-way ANOVA comparing the study variables for four marital duration categories: 1–5 years, 6–10 years, 11–15 years, and 16–20 years.

There were notable variations in every variable (p <.001). Overall, a recurring trend showed that the participants who reported the highest degrees of psychological pain, emotional reactivity, emotional loneliness, experiential avoidance, and phubbing were those who were married for 1 to 5 years. Those who had been married for a longer period, particularly those who had been married for 11–15 and 16–20 years, reported significantly lower values on these factors. The opposite

pattern was seen in emotional intelligence, with individuals in longer marriages reporting much better emotional intelligence than those in shorter marriages.

These findings suggest that as marital duration increases, indicators of emotional difficulties and maladaptive behaviors tend to decrease, while emotional intelligence tends to increase.

Table 28

Pairwise comparison across categories marital duration with respect to Experiential Avoidance, Emotional reactivity, Emotional loneliness, psychological distress, Emotional intelligence and Phubbing (N=334).

Variable	*(I)*	*(J)*	*(I-J)*	*MD (I-J)*	*SE*	*P*	95% *CI*	
							LL	*UL*
EL	1-5 yrs	6-10 yrs	1<2	0.70*	0.19	.002	0.20	1.20
	1-5 yrs	11-15 yrs	1<3	2.36*	0.19	.000	1.85	2.87
	1-5 yrs	16-20 yrs	1<4	1.77*	0.19	.000	1.27	2.27
	6-10 yrs	11-15 yrs	2<3	1.66*	0.25	.000	1.00	2.32
	6-10 yrs	16-20 yrs	2<4	1.07*	0.25	.000	0.41	1.72
ERS	1-5 yrs	6-10 yrs	1<2	6.70*	2.04	.006	1.41	11.99
	1-5 yrs	11-15 yrs	1<3	24.23*	2.07	.000	18.88	29.57
	1-5 yrs	16-20 yrs	1<4	17.24*	2.02	.000	12.01	22.48
	6-10 yrs	11-15 yrs	2<3	17.53*	2.68	.000	10.60	24.46
	6-10 yrs	16-20 yrs	2<4	10.54*	2.64	.000	3.70	17.38
	11-15 yrs	16-20 yrs	3<4	-6.98*	2.66	.045	-13.87	-0.09
PDS	1-5 yrs	6-10 yrs	1<2	4.588	1.42	.008	0.90	8.26

	1-5 yrs	11-15 yrs	1<3	15.41*	1.43	.000	11.70	19.13
	1-5 yrs	16-20 yrs	1<4	11.76*	1.40	.000	8.12	15.40
	6-10 yrs	11-15 yrs	2<3	10.83*	1.86	.000	6.01	15.65
	6-10 yrs	16-20 yrs	2<4	7.18*	1.84	.001	2.42	11.93
EI	1-5 yrs	6-10 yrs	1<2	-5.02*	1.43	.003	-8.73	-1.31
	1-5 yrs	11-15 yrs	1<3	-16.62*	1.45	.000	-20.37	-12.87
	1-5 yrs	16-20 yrs	1<4	-11.77*	1.42	.000	-15.44	-8.10
	16-10 yrs	11-15 yrs	2<3	-11.60*	1.88	.000	-16.46	-6.74
	16-10 yrs	16-20 yrs	2<4	-6.75*	1.85	.002	-11.55	-1.95
	11-15 yrs	16-20 yrs	3<4	4.85*	1.87	.049	0.01	9.68
EA	1-5 yrs	6-10 yrs	1<2	5.72*	1.96	.020	0.65	10.78
	1-5 yrs	11-15 yrs	1<3	9.34*	1.98	.000	4.22	14.46
	1-5 yrs	16-20 yrs	1<4	9.28*	1.94	.000	4.27	14.29
Phub	1-5 yrs	11-15 yrs	1<3	4.85*	1.36	.002	1.32	8.38
	1-5 yrs	16-20 yrs	1<4	5.31*	1.33	.001	1.85	8.76
	6-10 yrs	11-15 yrs	2<3	4.80*	1.77	.035	0.22	9.38
	6-10 yrs	16-20 yrs	2<4	5.25*	1.74	.015	0.74	9.77

*Note: EL= Emotional Loneliness, ERS= Emotional Reactivity Scale, PDS= Psychological Distress Scale, EI= Emotional Intelligence, EA= Experiential Avoidance, Phub= Phubbing, CI= Confidence interval, LL=Lower limit, UL=Upper limit, * p <.05, ** p <.01, *** p <.000.*

For the four marital duration categories (1–5 years, 6–10 years, 11–15 years, and 16–20 years), Table 28 displays the post hoc comparisons for the factors that exhibited significant effects in the one-way ANOVA.

A recurring pattern was found in all the variables. Comparing participants in early marital years (1–5 years), with those in longer marriages reported considerably lower levels of psychological discomfort, emotional reactivity, emotional loneliness, experiential avoidance, and phubbing. The early marriage group, on the other hand, had far lower emotional intelligence, while those who had been married longer had ever better emotional intelligence. Differences between most neighboring groups were significant, suggesting that as marital length rose, emotional adjustment and wellbeing gradually improved.

These findings suggest that longer marital duration is generally associated with reduced emotional difficulties and higher emotional intelligence.

Table 29

One-way Analysis of variance of four categories of hours of Phone Usage per day. (N=334)

Variables	<2 hours (n=51)		2-3 hours (n=106)		3-4 hours (n=52)		*More than 4 hours (n=125)*		*F*	*P*	*η2*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
EL	2.00	1.43	1.88	1.45	1.56	1.49	2.18	1.32	2.61	.051	0.02
ERS	60.47	15.55	56.83	15.42	51.75	13.86	57.76	13.40	3.37	.019	0.03
PDS	30.78	10.67	28.83	10.31	25.56	10.81	30.22	8.59	3.31	.020	0.02
EI	27.18	10.21	28.21	10.60	30.62	10.59	26.44	9.46	2.21	.086	0.01
EA	48.73	12.47	48.00	12.25	47.81	10.93	54.04	10.98	6.81	.000	0.05
Phub	21.02	5.66	21.60	5.48	22.31	6.90	28.53	9.23	23.29	.000	0.17

*Note: EL= Emotional Loneliness, ERS= Emotional Reactivity Scale, PDS= Psychological Distress Scale, EI= Emotional Intelligence, EA= Experiential Avoidance, Phub= Phubbing, M=Mean, SD=Standard deviation, f= degree of freedom, p= significant level, η2= eta squared. * p <.05, ** p <.01, *** p <.000.*

The one-way ANOVA findings for the study variables are shown in Table 29, which compares four categories of daily phone usage (less than two hours, two to three hours, three to four hours, and more than four hours).

Psychological discomfort ($p = .02$), experiential avoidance ($p < .001$), emotional reactivity ($p = .01$), and phubbing ($p < .001$) all showed significant differences. The highest levels of experiencing avoidance and phubbing were observed in participants who reported using their phones for more than four hours a day, as opposed to those who reported using their phones less frequently. Similar trends were seen for psychological discomfort and emotional reactivity, where increased phone usage was typically linked to higher scores.

There were no appreciable differences between emotional intelligence and emotional loneliness. All of these findings suggest that increased daily phone use is linked to increased psychological distress, emotional reactivity, experience avoidance, and phubbing behaviors.

Table 30

Pairwise comparison across categories phone use hours with respect to Experiential Avoidance, Emotional reactivity, Emotional loneliness, psychological distress, Emotional intelligence and Phubbing (N=334).

Variable	*(I)*	*(J)*	*(I-J)*	*MD (I-J)*	*SE*	*P*	95% *CI*	
							LL	*UL*
ERS	Less than 2 hours	3-4 hours	1<3	8.72	2.85	.013	1.35	16.08
PDS	Less than 2 hours	3-4 hours	1<3	5.22	1.94	.037	0.21	10.23
	3-4 hours	More than 4 hours	3<4	-4.66	1.62	.022	-8.86	-0.47
EA	Less than 2 hours	More than 4 hours	1<4	-5.31	1.93	.032	-10.29	-0.32
	2-3 hours	More than 4 hours	2<4	-6.04	1.53	.001	-10.00	-2.07
	3-4 hours	More than 4 hours	3<4	-6.23	1.91	.007	-11.18	-1.28
Phub	Less than 2 hours	More than 4 hours	1<4	-7.50	1.21	.000	-10.65	-4.36

2-3 hours	More than 4 hours	2<4	-6.92	0.96	.000	-9.42	-4.42
3-4 hours	More than 4 hours	3<4	-6.22	1.21	.000	-9.34	-3.09

*Note: EL= Emotional Loneliness, ERS= Emotional Reactivity Scale, PDS= Psychological Distress Scale, EI= Emotional Intelligence, EA= Experiential Avoidance, Phub= Phubbing, CI= Confidence interval, LL=Lower limit, UL=Upper limit, * p <.05, ** p <.01, *** p <.000.*

Table 30 shows the post hoc pairwise comparisons of the effects of experiential avoidance (EA), emotional reactivity (ERS), psychological distress (PDS), and phubbing on the categories of daily phone use (less than two hours, two to three hours, three to four hours, and more than four hours). Compared to individuals who used their phones for three to four hours a day, those who used them for less than two hours reported significantly higher psychological distress and emotional reactivity ($p < .05$). Furthermore, compared to individuals who used their phones for 3–4 hours a day, those who used them for more than 4 hours reported noticeably increased psychological distress ($p < .05$).

In comparison to all lower usage groups, individuals who used their phones for more than four hours a day consistently reported considerably higher scores for experiencing avoidance and phubbing ($p < .05$).

Overall, these results imply that while very low and very high phone usage are linked to higher levels of discomfort, moderate phone use (about three to four hours per day) is linked to reduced levels of emotional reactivity and distress. Higher levels of experience avoidance and phubbing behaviors are also associated with excessive phone use (more than four hours).

Chapter 4

Discussion

The present study was designed to explore the intricate relationship between experiential avoidance and psycho-emotional suffering in married couples, with phubbing as a mediating factor and emotional intelligence as a moderating factor. In a time when reliance on smartphones is growing quickly and causing relationship problems, this study aimed to provide light on how avoidance-based behaviors impact couples' mental health and marital dynamics. In addition to establishing direct and indirect relationships between the variables, the study used dyadic models of analysis to identify protective mechanisms like emotional intelligence that can mitigate the harmful consequences of experiencing avoidance. Now, the results are examined in light of the current literature, theoretical ramifications, and the suggested possibilities.

The first hypothesis of present study investigated the relationship between phubbing behavior and experiential avoidance (EA) in married couples. The findings (refer to Table 2) support Hypothesis 1 by demonstrating a strong and favorable association between phubbing and experiential avoidance ($r = .51$, $p < .05$). This suggests that people who have a greater propensity to avoid painful internal experiences, often known as experiential avoidance, are also more prone to phub in marriages. The hypothesis that phubbing might be a behavioral expression of avoidance, especially in emotionally taxing interpersonal situations like marriage, is supported by the positive relationship.

According to Hayes et al. (1996), this result is in line with the theoretical framework of Experiential Avoidance Theory, which holds that people may act in ways that serve to avoid or dull emotional suffering rather than face it head-on. When it comes to marital relations, excessive

usage of mobile phones (phubbing) may be a contemporary behavioral expression of avoidance, in which the partner uses technology to emotionally and cognitively distance themselves.

There is growing evidence to support this connection. Eksi (2019), for example, discovered that problematic social media use was positively correlated with experiential avoidance, with social media disorder serving as a mediating factor. Despite concentrating on media consumption in general, this study highlights the ways in which avoidance might occur via digital devices.

This current study is further adding theoretically by illustrating phubbing as a more particular relational manifestation of digital experiential avoidance.

A recent study by Allili, Sharma, and Anand (2023) examined how experiential avoidance contributes to problematic smartphone use among adults, which further supports the current findings. According to their findings, those who exhibit higher levels of experiential avoidance are also far more likely to use their smartphones in maladaptive ways, such as to escape uncomfortable feelings and thoughts. Because it shows a clear connection between avoidance behaviors and excessive digital involvement, this study is particularly valuable. It supports the argument of the current study that experiential avoidance can be demonstrated by actions such as phubbing, in which people focus on their cellphones instead of facing emotionally taxing interpersonal circumstances, such those that frequently arise in marriages. A particularly pertinent study based on attachment theory by Miller (2023) shows that phubbing is substantially more common among those with avoidant attachment styles, which include discomfort with intimacy and emotional dependence. They found that those who are avoidantly attached prefer emotional distance and may use their phones to avoid closeness with others. It is a very similar psychological mechanism. The current finding has strong theoretical support from both domains, which highlights internal discomfort with emotional proximity and the adoption of external techniques (such as phone use)

to manage that discomfort. Thus, phubbing therefore seems to be a technical manifestation of experiential avoidance, particularly in emotionally charged partnerships like marriage. The findings show that avoidance tactics, particularly those involving technology, must be addressed in relationship and therapeutic interventions for couples.

The study's second prediction was that, in married people, emotional intelligence (EI) and emotional reactivity (ER) would be significantly correlated negatively. Since there is a strong negative link between emotional intelligence and emotional reactivity, as shown by the Pearson correlation matrix in Table 2, hypothesis 2 is accepted. As a result, those with higher emotional intelligence are less likely to react emotionally, indicating that they have stronger emotional management skills.

The findings of Mikolajczak et al. (2007), who showed moderating role of emotional intelligence and revealed that people with higher EI had considerably lower physiological and psychological reactions to stress, such as lower cortisol levels and mood decline, that are consistent with results of this study. Their research supports the inverse association between emotional intelligence and ER in the current findings by offering compelling physiological evidence that emotional intelligence serves as a protective factor against emotional stressors.

Fernández-Berrocal and Extremera (2006) provide additional support for this claim, observing that in a laboratory setting, individuals who scored highly on emotional clarity and emotional repair two subcomponents of emotional intelligence showed noticeably less emotional reactivity and quicker emotional recovery. This implies that those who are better at understanding and controlling their emotions are able to process emotional situations more efficiently, which lowers their reactivity.

In a similar vein, Schneider et al. (2013) noted that people with high ability-based emotional intelligence had more adaptive responses, such as increased physiological benefits and less negative mood. This study supports the idea that people with emotional intelligence are less reactive and more resilient when faced with emotionally draining circumstances.

Furthermore, the review by Peña-Sarrionandia et al. (2015) confirmed that people with high emotional intelligence (EI) are better able to control their emotional reactions to internal and external stressors. It also highlighted the critical role that EI plays in emotion regulation mechanisms. These techniques, which include impulse control and cognitive reappraisal, are crucial for reducing emotional reactivity, particularly in intimate interpersonal relationships like marriage.

When combined, the results of this study support a number of other studies that suggest emotional intelligence protects against emotional reactivity. Given that improved conflict resolution, lower interpersonal tension, and increased marital happiness are all influenced by efficient emotional regulation, this association may be especially pertinent to married people.

The study's third hypothesis postulated that, in married couples, emotional isolation (EI) and emotional intelligence (EI) would be significantly correlated and negative. Hypothesis 3 is accepted since Table 2's correlation shows that there is a substantial negative relationship between EI and emotional isolation ($r = -.951$, $p < .01$). This indicates that married people's feelings of emotional isolation tend to diminish as their emotional intelligence rises.

This outcome is in line with earlier research. Azam, Shahid, and Amin (2024) looked at the connection between loneliness which is conceptually similar to emotional isolation and emotional intelligence. In both young adults and older adults, their study found a strong negative connection

(r = -0.348) between emotional intelligence and loneliness, suggesting that those with higher emotional intelligence also had lower levels of loneliness.

The mediating and moderating function of emotional intelligence in the association between attachment styles and loneliness was also investigated by Borawski et al. (2022). Their findings showed that in people with insecure attachment patterns, lower emotional intelligence (EI) was linked to increased loneliness, but higher EI acted as a buffer, lessening the effect of attachment-related insecurities on feelings of loneliness. Despite the fact that the study concentrated on loneliness rather than emotional isolation in particular, the conceptual overlap between both variables offers more proof of EI's ability to defend against feelings of isolation.

Consistent with these conclusions, Yılmaz et al. (2013) examined the relationships between emotional intelligence, loneliness, and self-esteem in college students and discovered that emotional intelligence was negatively connected with loneliness, whereas interpersonal and intrapersonal EI skills significantly predicted lower levels of loneliness. This is similar to the findings of the current study since emotional isolation and loneliness both represent a subjective feeling of emotional and social alienation that seems to be lessened by higher emotional intelligence.

All things considered, the current study's findings contribute to the expanding corpus of research showing a negative correlation between emotional isolation and emotional intelligence.

The fourth hypothesis of this study was that psychological discomfort in couples would be inversely correlated with emotional intelligence. Table 2's correlation shows that there is a substantial and negative link between psychological distress and emotional intelligence ($r = -.917$, $p < .01$), suggesting that people who have higher emotional intelligence also have lower psychological anguish. Hypothesis 4 is so approved. This implies that people who are better able

to recognize, comprehend, and control their emotions are less likely to endure high levels of psychological stress in their marriages.

This result is in line with earlier studies showing how emotional intelligence protects mental health. For example, because emotional intelligence promotes adaptive coping mechanisms, Schutte et al. (2007) discovered that people with higher emotional intelligence reported reduced stress and improved psychological well-being. Emotional intelligence is a resistance factor against emotional and psychological strain; Extremera and Rey (2016) found that it adversely influenced adults' perceived stress and depressive symptoms.

Karim (2009) tested the mediating function of affectivity in the link between middle-level managers' psychological discomfort and emotional intelligence in organizational and workplace contexts. The study discovered that whereas positive affect had a lesser correlation with psychological discomfort, negative affect completely moderated the link between psychological distress and emotional intelligence. These findings highlight how emotional intelligence reduces discomfort by decreasing negative emotional states, which is conceptually similar to how emotionally intelligent partners may handle marital challenges and keep them from becoming psychologically taxing.

In a similar vein, Binte Mustafa et al. (2023) found that psychological vulnerability mediated the connection between higher emotional intelligence and reduced psychological distress. These findings support the current study by indicating that there is a negative link between the two variables and that people with higher emotional intelligence are better able to control their emotions and handle stress, which leads to less psychological distress. Overall, the findings of this study add to the increasing amount of data showing that emotional intelligence, especially in close relationships, protects against psychological suffering. People can lessen the detrimental emotional

effects of marital pressures by cultivating emotional awareness, empathy, and self-regulation, which will support psychological health and relationship stability.

According to the fifth hypothesis, one spouse's experiential avoidance (EA) would directly impact on the other partner's emotional response (partner effect). This assumption was confirmed by the SEM multiple regression analysis results (Table 3). In particular, the emotional reactivity of females was considerably predicted by the EA of males ($B = 1.03$, $\beta = 0.72$, $p < .001$), while the emotional reactivity of males was strongly predicted by the EA of females ($B = 0.54$, $\beta = 0.43$, $p < .001$). These results suggest an interpersonal transmission of emotion regulation styles within married dyads, with one partner's larger inclinations toward experiencing avoidance being linked to the other's greater emotional reactivity.

Previous studies showing a strong correlation between EA and elevated emotional reactions are in line with the reported partner effect. Despite exhibiting physiological patterns suggestive of suppression, Sloan (2004) showed that people with high EA reported more intense subjective emotional reactions to both happy and unpleasant stimuli. This paradox increasing self-reported reactivity and attempts at regulation indicates that EA might unintentionally preserve or worsen emotional sensitivity.

Similarly, Sun et al. (2023) showed that avoidance-oriented coping mechanisms, which are conceptually connected to emotional intelligence (EA), predicted higher negative affect reactivity to everyday stresses across three investigations utilizing ecological momentary assessment. These findings apply to the current dyadic situation, suggesting that chronic avoidance on the side of one partner may not only not be effective in reducing stress but may actually increase reactivity in the spouse by means of maladaptive interaction cycles or emotional contagion.

More precisely, Ben-Naim, Hirschberger, Ein-Dor, and Mikulincer (2013) investigated the effects of several emotion regulation techniques on partner reactions during conflict in a randomized controlled study involving 127 romantic couples. When one person was told to repress their feelings, which is conceptually linked to experiential avoidance, their partners showed increased negative affect and cardiovascular arousal. Positive thinking, on the other hand, decreased arousal in both the actor and the companion. The present study's hypothesis that experiential avoidance in one person may increase their partner's emotional reactivity in intimate relationships is supported by these findings, which show that avoidance-oriented techniques in one partner might increase the emotional reactivity of the other partner.

The findings provide substantial support for Hypothesis 6, showing that emotional isolation in a spouse is significantly predicted by a partner's experiential avoidance (EA_M → ELT_F: B = 0.09, β = 0.72, p <.001). According to this big effect size (R2 = 0.52), people who avoid dealing with upsetting emotions cause significant emotional distance in their marriages, which makes their partners feel alone. These results are exactly in line with Givertz et al. (2013), who discovered that a spouse's avoidant attachment (a concept related to experiential avoidance) predicted a lower quality of relationship and more loneliness in the other spouse (partner effect β = 0.41, p <.01). Our findings are consistent with their actor-partner interdependence model, which demonstrates that this is a dyadic process in which the emotional experience of one partner is directly impacted by the avoidance behavior of the other.

Mikulincer and Shaver's (2021) attachment viewpoint, which argues that avoidant people erect emotional barriers that hinder closeness and make their partners feel "alone together" a great description of emotional isolation further supports the current findings. According to their findings, marital loneliness was predicted by the withdrawal behaviors of avoidant partners (β = 0.58),

which is very similar to how we operationalize emotional isolation. Similar to this, Bachem et al. (2019) discovered that impostorism and avoidant attachment resulted in worse marital quality and increased loneliness in spouses ($\beta = 0.63$), illustrating how avoidance shatters emotional ties. Collectively, this research and findings demonstrate that experiential avoidance actively weakens the emotional basis of marriages and causes quantifiable isolation in partners, in addition to having an impact on the individual.

The results clearly support Hypothesis 7, suggesting that a partner's experiential avoidance predicts psychological suffering in their spouse. The SEM analysis revealed particularly robust effects, with a male partner's experiential avoidance (EA_M) strongly predicting psychological distress in their female partner (PDST_F) ($B = 0.63$, $\beta = 0.70$, $p < .001$). Similarly, female partners' avoidance (EA_F) predicted male partners' distress (PDST_M) ($B = 0.36$, $\beta = 0.38$, $p < .001$). These results are exactly in line with dyadic research of military couples by Marini et al. (2017), which discovered that emotional avoidance by service members decreased emotional engagement and predicted psychological distress in their partners ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < .01$). They confirm that avoidance behaviors have quantifiable cross-partner effects on mental health by using actor-partner interdependence modeling (APIM), which is similar to our methods.

Parker, Johnson, and Ketring (2012) investigated the dyadic impacts of attachment avoidance on symptom distress in couples undergoing therapy using actor-partner interdependence modeling (APIM). Men's avoidance was found to predict higher symptom distress in their female partners throughout therapy sessions, indicating strong relationship effects. Likewise, women's avoidance and connection anxiety exacerbated the distress of their male partners. These findings show that avoidance behaviors, whether categorized as sensory avoidance or attachment avoidance, consistently have psychological effects on both partners in close relationships.

Additional mechanistic evidence is presented by Farr et al. (2021), who show that distress and negative experiences are mediated by experiential avoidance ($\beta = 0.51$, $p < .001$). Their conclusion that avoidance increases distress is consistent with our relationship effects, even though their study did not look at couples. This is further contextualized by Karekla and Panayiotou's (2011) research, which demonstrates that avoidance is associated with maladaptive coping methods ($r = .64$ with behavioral disengagement) leading to distress. This may help to explain how one partner's avoidance habits "spill over" affect the mental health of the other.

In support of Hypothesis 8, the APIM mediation table results show that phubbing mediates the association between couples' emotional reactivity and experiential avoidance (EA_F → Phub_F → ERST_M: $\beta = 0.13$; EA_M → Phub_M → ERST_F: $\beta = 0.18$). Although this particular mediation chain has not been studied in couples before, there is strong evidence to support its elements. Zhang and Wang's (2022) study of Chinese college students provides substantial evidence for the relationship between phubbing and experiential avoidance. They found that experiential avoidance moderates the relationship between stress and smartphone use ($\beta = 0.32$), especially for those with low mindfulness. While this dyadic design extends this to marital contexts, this reflects Pakistani sample, indicating avoidance-driven phone use is culturally universal. Furthermore, employing AAQ-II, Sevilgen and Tolan's (2025) clinical work explains how experiential avoidance bridges psychological discomfort (depression/anxiety) and smartphone addiction ($\beta = 0.41$), confirming the universality of this behavioral coping mechanism. It is also well-established that phubbing leads to relationship distress. Particularly for partners with poor self-differentiation, phubbing causes emotional reactivity through fear of missing out ($\beta = 0.37$), according to Peleg and Boniel-Nissim's (2024) dyadic study. This conclusion is in complete agreement with our observed emotional reactivity effects.

Neurobehavioral precision was contributed by Guazzini et al. (2021), who demonstrated that phubbing causes quantifiable negative effect (r =.48 for anxiety), with their "communication disturbance". By integrating these well-established connections into a cohesive mediation model which is especially pertinent in Pakistan's collectivist culture our work adds to the body of literature. Mosley and Parker (2023) found that women are more susceptible to attachment-related phubbing harms (β = 0.29), which is likely due to gendered emotional labor norms. These findings are echoed by the larger male-to-female effects (β = 0.18 vs. 0.13). These results collectively support the theoretical viability of our model and demonstrate its unique combination of avoidance, phubbing, and dyadic distress, a contribution that opens the door for culturally specific therapies aimed at addressing avoidant coping in marriages.

The findings support Hypothesis 9 by showing that phubbing has a significant mediating role in the interaction between spouses' emotional isolation and experiential avoidance (EA_F → Phub_F → ELT_M: β = 0.13; EA_M → Phub_M → ELT_F: β = 0.17). Strong evidence supports the underlying mechanisms of this precise mediation chain, even though no previous study has examined it in couples. First, it is commonly known that phubbing and experiential avoidance are related. The most convincing mechanistic evidence comes from Sun and Miller (2023), who demonstrate that avoidant attachment a term that overlaps with experiential avoidance increases phubbing through two pathways: decreased self-regulation (β = -0.31) and smartphone attachment (β = 0.24). Although we apply their mediation model to dyadic couples instead of individuals, it closely matches our first mediation segment (EA → Phubbing). This association is further supported in an adolescent sample by Pratitis and Efendy (2025), who found that avoidant attachment directly predicts phubbing (β = 0.38), indicating that this relationship holds true across ages and cultures. Most importantly, Kurşuncu et al. (2025) show that experiential avoidance, as

measured by the AAQ-II, is a factor in digital withdrawal behaviors, including addiction to social media (β = 0.41). Their conclusion that avoidance mediates the relationship between relational stress and compulsive device usage (R2 = 0.65), despite having a more general focus than phubbing, is entirely consistent with our theoretical framework. Equally well-supported is the shift from phubbing to emotional isolation Partner phubbing consistently reduces emotional intimacy (r = -0.51) and increases feelings of loneliness (r = 0.43), which is precisely similar to our emotional isolation concept, according to Ni et al.'s (2023) meta-analysis of 52 research. The dyadic study by Zhan et al. (2022) provided further detail by showing that phubbing reduces relationship satisfaction by increasing loneliness (β = 0.39), which is consistent with our observed emotional isolation results. Importantly, Ligon-Tucker's (2023) qualitative study placed these impacts in the context of romantic relationships, finding that 97% of phubbed partners reported a decline in the quality of their connection and frequently defined isolation as "being alone together." By combining these connections into a single mediation model, our study contributes to the body of literature. This is especially important in Pakistani marriages, where in-person communication is valued more than anything else. These findings collectively support the validity of our model and demonstrate its unique combination of avoidance, phubbing, and dyadic isolation, a contribution that has obvious ramifications for couples therapy aimed at addressing digital alienation.

Hypothesis 10 is well supported by the results, which show that phubbing mediates the association between spouses' psychological distress and experiential avoidance (EA_F → Phub_F → PDST_M: β = 0.14; EA_M → Phub_M → PDST_F: β = 0.18). These findings are consistent with previous research that looked at each link in this mediation chain. Sun and Miller's (2023) evidence that avoidant attachment predicts phubbing through smartphone attachment (β = 0.24)

and reduced self-regulation, echoing our observed actor effects (β = 0.08-0.10), provides significant support for the link between experiential avoidance and phubbing. Similarly, Kurşuncu et al. (2025) demonstrated that experiential avoidance drives digital withdrawal behaviors (β = 0.41), and Shrivastav et al. (2025) clearly related phubbing to avoidance coping in romantic relationships. These findings jointly validate initial mediation segment. Equally well-established are the detrimental effects of phubbing on partners' mental health. Partner phubbing raises anxiety and depression, which is directly correlated with our psychological discomfort measurements, according to Al-Saggaf's (2022) synthesis. This pathway was further supported by Maftei and Măirean (2023), who demonstrated that phubbing increases discomfort through loneliness (β = 0.39). Tekkam et al. (2020) observed that phubbing corresponds with moderate-to-severe psychological distress (34-23% prevalence). Błachnio et al.'s (2021) 20-country study, which showed that this effect is cross-culturally universal, adds credence to the results of our Pakistani sample, especially considering that their effect sizes were marginally smaller than our dyadic findings. detrimental behavior by one partner in a relationship can have a direct detrimental impact on the other's level of satisfaction. For example, Smith et al. (2008) discovered that women's satisfaction decreased over time when they avoided conflict, which affected both them and their male spouse. The idea of partner effects is strongly supported by this, and it is suggested that phubbing a type of technological avoidance may play a significant mediating role in these dynamics. Our novel mediation model, which links avoidance behaviors to relational harm through observable phubbing patterns, is empirically supported by these studies. This model is especially useful in cultural contexts such as Pakistan, where face-to-face interaction is highly valued and has both actor and partner effects.

The findings in Moderation Table 8 support Hypothesis 11, which states that the effect of experiential avoidance (EA) on emotional reactivity is strongly moderated by emotional intelligence (EI), with the relationship between EA and reactivity becoming weaker as EI rises. These results directly confirm our observed EI buffering effect and are first consistent with a study by Chen et al. (2025) that showed EI's ability to minimize maladaptive behaviors through lowered experiential avoidance ($\beta = -0.32$ for EI $\rightarrow$ EA pathway). Our findings that high-EI people may break the avoidance-reactivity loop by better regulating their emotions are consistent with their sequential mediation hypothesis, in which EI enhanced peer interactions, which in turn decreased EA. Second, in another research, MacCann & Double (2022) found that EI's positive impacts on well-being were mediated by decreased avoidant coping (a stand-in for EA), with especially high effects for emotion regulation abilities ($\beta = -0.38$), which is consistent with our moderation pattern. Emotional reactivity to stressors is independently predicted by both EI and EA, according to Choi et al.'s (2014) analysis of stress reactivity mechanisms. EI predicts reactivity negatively by lowering it, and the same is true for EA and reactivity. According to our moderation model, EI training can therefore improve reactivity and decrease EA at the same time.

All of these research point to the idea that EI functions as a meta-regulator: high-EI people avoid the amplification of emotional reactivity that usually precedes EA by reducing avoidant coping tendencies (Chen et al., 2025; MacCann & Double, 2022). By stating that this moderation happens interpersonally rather than through relationship dynamics, our APIM actor effects build on previous work and suggest that emotional intelligence can be utilized in intervention programs to improve partners' mental health and marital link.

According to the current study, emotional intelligence (EI) would serve as a buffer, reducing the association between an individual's psychological distress (PDs) and emotional

loneliness (EL) and their own experiential avoidance (EA). In particular, it was predicted (H12 & H13) that those with lower EI would be more susceptible to the positive actor effects of EA on EL and PDs. Tables 9 and 10 show that the interaction terms between EA and EI (EA×EI) were not statistically significant for either actor or partner effects in predicting EL or PDS, according to the Actor-Partner Interdependence Moderation Model (APIMo) analysis.

Given the high correlation between Emotional Intelligence and improved mental health, this may appear confusing. It is evident from the correlation table that there is a strong negative association between EI and both PDS and EL. Nevertheless, despite this, there are a number of compelling arguments, backed by other studies, that clarify why this study failed to detect this moderating effect:

1. The Difficulty of Finding Minor Moderation Effects

Insufficient power to detect modest effect is the most statistically relevant argument for a non-significant interaction. According to Aguinis et al. (2005) thorough 30-year study, it offers an essential context for comprehending this finding. According to their meta-analysis, the median observed impact size for moderator effects in multiple regression is only f2 =.002, which is significantly less than what is typically considered a "small" effect. They added that although more than 70% of studies had sufficient power to identify these minute effects, a sizable percentage did not, which frequently resulted in Type II errors.

The significant routes reported for EI and EA in the current study demonstrate that a sample size of N=167 dyads (334 persons) offer a fair test for medium-sized actor and partner main effects. The detection of an interaction effect, which most likely falls within the "very small" range outlined by Aguinis et al. (2005), may be underpowered. The interaction terms that closely straddle zero (e.g., -0.08 to 0.09 for males on EL) have non-significant p-values (ranging from.10 to.96)

and confidence intervals that are consistent with a situation in which a real but negligible moderation effect exists but is not detected because of sample size limitations. Consequently, rather than necessarily indicating the complete absence of a large moderating effect, the null finding should be understood as the lack of evidence for it.

2. Dominance of Main Effects and Compensatory Mechanisms

The findings indicate that EI had strong, substantial negative main effects on EL and PDs in both males and females (B's ranging from -0.34 to -0.80, all p <.001). Likewise, EA demonstrated favorable (although less reliable) primary effects. This trend points to a concept in which EI and EA have direct, powerful, and independent effects on well-being outcomes as opposed to working in concert.

This result is consistent with Park and Yi's (2022) research, which highlights how big main effects can overpower a model and make it challenging to identify a smaller interaction impact, particularly when there is multicollinearity between the major effect variables and their product term. The powerful direct effect of EI on lowering loneliness and psychological distress may "compensate" for the detrimental effects of EA, thus erasing any discernible moderation. This model suggests that an individual's total emotional intelligence (EI) is a more reliable indicator of their results than the precise interaction between their EI and their propensity to avoid situations. Almost independently of EA, the high EI person is better off, and the low EI person is worse off.

3. Cultural and Contextual Specificity of EI's Role

The evidence cited casts doubt on the universal benefits of emotional intelligence (EI), arguing that its usefulness varies depending on the situation and might not be a moderator for all

outcomes or in all cultures. Ghafoor et al.'s (2019) study is especially useful for the current Pakistani sample. According to their cross-cultural comparison, coping mechanisms and metacognition completely moderated the association between EI and health-related quality of life in Congestive Heart Failure patients in the Pakistani sample, but not in the German sample, where EI had a direct impact.

This suggests that rather than directly protecting against stressors like EA, the positive effects of EI in a Pakistani cultural setting may work through particular, culturally shaped channels (such as social support or certain coping mechanisms). This is further supported by a study by Zia et al. (2021), which discovered that social support acted as a stronger mediator of the association between emotional intelligence (EI) and mental health than did the direct impact of EI. Although the benefits of EI may be driven by its significant main effect in the current study, other, unmeasured cultural or relational elements (such as family support or religious coping) that are more salient modifiers in this context may preempt EI's ability to moderate the influence of EA.

Additionally, Gohm et al. (2005) and the "dark side" of EI research (Davis & Nichols, 2016) imply that EI is not a cure-all. According to Gohm et al. (2005), emotional intelligence (EI) was "unnecessary or irrelevant" for lowering stress in some people, especially those who do not trust their emotional intelligence. High EI in our sample would not show up as a quantifiable buffer against EA if it were not accompanied by self-efficacy or the will to use it.

4. The Nature of the Outcome Variables

The final important consideration is the nature outcome variable. Physiological evidence that ability EI is directly related to successful emotion regulation (ER) in a dynamic task is presented in the study by Zysberg & Raz (2019). As opposed to a static, global outcome state like psychological discomfort or emotional loneliness, this implies that EI's moderating impact may be

most noticeable when the outcome is a measure of regulatory process (e.g., emotional reactivity, recovery, strategy utilization).

The cumulative endpoint of many psychological processes is represented by the wide, stable constructs of PDs and EL. Because there are too many other elements influencing the path from EA to these broad endpoints, EI might not moderate it. For instance, the association between a stressful experience (which may cause EA) and the success of an emotion regulation technique later on is an illustration of how EI may successfully moderate the moment-to-moment process. This is consistent with the findings of Ciarrochi et al. (2001), who discovered that EI attenuated the association between stress and mental health, although not consistently across all dimensions, particularly for characteristics like suicidal ideation, a more severe result.

In conclusion, there was no evidence to support the hypothesis that EI moderates the actor effects of EA on PDs and EL. The combination of statistical reality (very small inherent effect sizes for moderation), the overwhelming strength of the direct main effects of emotional intelligence (EI), the cultural context that may channel the benefits of EI through other mechanisms like social support, and the potential that EI is a more effective moderator of dynamic regulatory processes than of global distress states is likely to be the cause of this rather than a flawed theoretical model. Future studies with larger sample sizes could look for these minor effects, but since the main effects make it abundantly evident that EI is a vital resource deserving of clinical attention, a more fruitful approach might be to examine the precise mediators (coping strategies, social support, etc.) that convert high EI into lower EA, EL, and PDs in Pakistani couples.

According to hypothesis H14, the relationship between Partner B's outcomes (psychological discomfort, emotional reactivity, and emotional isolation) and their experiential avoidance (EA) would be moderated by Partner A's emotional intelligence (EI). However, no

substantial partner moderation effects were seen in the Actor-Partner Interdependence Moderation (APIMo) models. This result offers a crucial viewpoint on the intrapersonal versus interpersonal role of EI and is in line with earlier dyadic EI studies.

Significant negative actor effects of EI were the most consistent findings across all three models. Higher EI was significantly linked to reduced levels of loneliness, reactivity, and distress for both males and females (e.g., for male actor EI on distress: $B = -0.80$, $p < .001$). These results are consistent with those of Smith et al. (2008) and Zeidner and Kloda (2013), who found no evidence of partner effects but did indicate dependable actor effects in the areas of relationship satisfaction and conflict resolution. In a similar vein, Zeidner and Kaluda (2008) showed that emotional intelligence (EI) had an impact on romantic love, although they were unable to demonstrate partner effects. These findings collectively imply that emotional intelligence (EI) can occasionally serve as an intrapersonal resource that shields people from their own psychological weaknesses but not in their partners.

On the other hand, the current study's lack of substantial partner moderation terms follows a well-established trend. Instead of being a drawback, this replication adds credence to the idea that the advantages of Emotional Intelligence are mostly self-directed. Emotional intelligence (EI) may help people control their own emotional experiences in the setting of EA, but it is not a reliable way to protect partners from the detrimental effects of EA. According to theory, under some circumstances, EI may have an impact on interpersonal relationships. It is possible that relational dynamics, cultural norms, or mediating factors like empathy and communication quality could increase the degree to which one partner's emotional intelligence (EI) influences or buffers the other's psychological results. This has to be especially investigated in Pakistani culture.

To sum up, these results offer minimal evidence for the proposed partner moderating effect in H14 but substantial support for the actor-oriented function of EI. Subsequent studies ought to investigate the situations in which particular relational circumstances, like the length of the relationship, gender dynamics, or the kind of outcome variable, where partner EI may have a greater interpersonal impact.

In hypothesis 15, the current study postulated that, in comparison to female participants, male participants would report noticeably higher levels of experiential avoidance (EA). Males scored significantly higher on EA than females, with a large effect size (Cohen's d = 0.97), which provided strong support for this supposition. Given that men are more likely than women to distance themselves from emotional events, this suggests that gender is a significant factor in the adoption of avoidance-based regulating methods.

These results are in line with earlier studies carried out in the Pakistani setting. Farooqui, Maroof, and Abbas (2025) showed that experiential avoidance (EA) was a predictor of prolonged grief disorder (PGD) and that male participants in Pakistan had considerably greater levels of EA than male participants. They ascribed this discrepancy to the deeply ingrained collectivist and patriarchal cultural norms that forbid males from expressing their emotions. According to conventional masculine standards that emphasize power and discourage vulnerability, men in Pakistani society are socially constructed as guardians and providers (Awan & Rasheed, 2019). In line with the findings of the present study, males are therefore less likely to express or admit their sadness and instead turn to avoidance-based coping mechanisms.

Pickett et al. (2012) also found that men were more likely than women to have a greater correlation between experiential avoidance and anxiety sensitivity, which is consistent with our findings. Their model demonstrated how experiential avoidance functions as a crucial self-

regulation mechanism that connects personality traits (such as negative emotionality and sensitivity to the behavioral inhibition system) to an increased risk of psychopathology. This relationship was stronger among men, which supports the theory that experience avoidance is a maladaptive emotional regulation style that may be more common in men.

These findings imply that, from a wider societal and psychological standpoint, men frequently feel pressured to repress or disengage from emotional experiences, whereas women are generally encouraged to express emotions like sadness or loss. According to Fatima (2024), Pakistani men are compelled by social norms to hide their emotional weakness, which increases their dependency on avoidance. The increased frequency of some psychological issues in men, such as extended mourning disorder and anxiety-related symptoms, may be attributed to these gendered patterns of emotion regulation (Farooqui et al., 2025; Pickett et al., 2012).

When combined with previous research, the findings of this study offer strong proof that men exhibit substantially greater levels of experiential avoidance than women. This illustrates how men may be more susceptible to emotional and psychological problems when avoidance takes over as a primary coping mechanism, in addition to reflecting gender-based socialization practices. Interventions that support men's adaptive emotional regulation may be useful for future research, especially in collectivist cultural environments like Pakistan where gender stereotypes are still present.

The notion that male participants will report noticeably higher levels of phubbing behavior than female participants is represented by Hypothesis 16. Men scored substantially higher on phubbing (M = 26.93, SD = 8.69) than women (M = 21.50, SD = 6.26), with a medium-to-large effect size (Cohen's d = 0.71). The results confirmed this theory. This shows a strong gender disparity in phubbing prevalence, suggesting that men are more likely to indulge in this practice.

These results align with earlier empirical studies. Men were more likely than women to score higher on phubbing behavior, according to Escalera-Chávez, García-Santillán, and Molchanova (2020), who also discovered a substantial gender difference in phubbing among Mexican college students. The robustness of this difference was confirmed by Bayesian analysis. In a similar vein, Barbed-Castrejón et al. (2024) looked at young adults and adolescents in Spain and found that male students outperformed female students on the Phone Obsession subscale and the Phubbing Scale overall. This demonstrates that male-dominant phubbing behaviors are prevalent in a variety of educational and geographic situations and are not culturally unique.

By showing that young adult males between the ages of 18 and 30 had higher levels of phubbing than females, especially in relation to gaming addiction, Basu and Mukherjee (2021) provided additional support for this trend and raised the possibility that men's increased use of digital technologies may be a contributing factor in their increased phubbing behavior. Crucially, research from Pakistan supports these global trends. Young adult Pakistani men reported much more phubbing than women, according to Younas, Amjad, and Qayyum (2022), who also showed that social media addiction partially mediated the association between phubbing and fear of missing out (FoMO). The gender discrepancy in phubbing is not only statistically substantial but also socially relevant in Pakistan, according to this indigenous data, which supports the findings' cultural validity.

When combined, the present findings which are backed by both indigenous and cross-cultural literature show that men mostly participate in more phubbing behavior than women. This might be due to the fact that men are more likely to engage in digital consumption habits like gaming, social networking, and obsessive internet use, all of which are linked to higher levels of phubbing.

In reaction to their partner's experienced avoidance, women would be more emotionally reactive than men, according to the current study's hypothesis 17 on the subject. The results confirmed this hypothesis: $t = -2.50$, $p = .013$, Cohen's $d = 0.27$, and female participants reported substantially higher emotional reactivity ($M = 58.93$, $SD = 15.50$) than male participants ($M = 54.96$, $SD = 13.44$). The results show significant gender-based differences in emotional responsiveness, despite the small impact size.

These results are in line with those of Rueckert, Branch, and Doan (2011), who showed that women typically express more intense emotional reactions, such as joy and sorrow, than men do. This suggests that the reason for gender differences in empathy could be that women are more emotionally receptive than males. The developmental and therapeutic consequences of these differences were further highlighted by Pine, Cohen, and Brook (2014), who discovered that teenage girls reported higher levels of emotional reactivity than boys and that elevated reactivity indicated later risk for mood and anxiety disorders. In support of these findings, Cook, Buehler, and Blair (2013) found that girls exhibited more emotional reactivity than boys in teenage relationship contexts, especially disputes, suggesting that women are more sensitive to interpersonal dynamics.

This increased female reaction seems to be especially pertinent to the current study when considering partners' experiential avoidance. Attempts to repress or flee unpleasant internal experiences are known as experiential avoidance, and they may work as a relational stressor that intensifies women's emotional reactions. When combined, these findings which are corroborated by earlier research indicate that women are more emotionally reactive in intimate relationship situations, particularly when their partners exhibit avoidant coping mechanisms.

Limitations

There are certain limitations to the current investigation. Initially, the study used a cross-sectional design, which makes it impossible to determine a causal association between psycho-emotional distress, emotional intelligence, phubbing, and experiential avoidance. To elucidate the directionality and long-term durability of these correlations, longitudinal research is required.

Second, only self-report questionnaires were used to collect data. Self-reports may be biased due to social desirability, misinterpretation, or underreporting, even when the measures were culturally validated and psychometrically sound. The comprehension of these processes could be improved by including partner reports, observational techniques, or qualitative interviews.

Third, married people from Rawalpindi and Islamabad were the only ones included in the study sample, which was gathered using purposive sampling. This limits the findings' applicability to other cultural contexts, Pakistani regions, and different kinds of relationships, such cohabiting or unmarried couples.

Fourth, because the surveys were delivered in English, only literate participants could complete them. This made it impossible to include those with lower literacy levels, who may have contributed valuable viewpoints if the instruments had been translated into Urdu or other simpler formats.

Lastly, additional culturally significant elements like resilience, coping mechanisms, social support, marital satisfaction, and family system type were not considered in this study. Future studies should look at these traits' roles in conjunction with emotional intelligence, as they may

operate as powerful protective barriers against the detrimental impacts of experiential avoidance and phubbing in the Pakistani context.

Suggestions

To expand on the current findings, future research should consider a number of conceptual and methodological improvements. First, by using a longitudinal design instead of a cross-sectional one, researchers could investigate the long-term impacts of emotional intelligence, phubbing, and experiential avoidance on couples' psycho-emotional health and identify causal linkages. By evaluating specific interventions, experimental research could support causal conclusions even more.

Second, the current study used purposive sampling from Islamabad and Rawalpindi, which restricts how broadly the findings may be applied. To improve generalizability, future studies should use probability-based sampling techniques and enlist people from bigger and more varied groups. Furthermore, evaluating the model in various cultural contexts would reveal cross-cultural parallels and discrepancies in the ways that emotional intelligence and avoidance-based actions impact relationships.

Third, although the study used self-report questionnaires, more insights into couples' live experiences could be obtained by combining them with qualitative techniques like focus groups or interviews. Additional complimentary techniques, such as behavioral observations, daily diary methods, or partner reports, may lessen response bias and enhance comprehension of relational dynamics.

Fourth, future research could expand the range of variables by looking at other moderators (like duration of marriage, parenting stress, or socioeconomic status) and mediators (like coping

mechanisms, communication quality, resilience, or social support) that might help explain the variation in couples' psychological and relational outcomes.

To better understand the effects of phubbing and experiential avoidance on mental health, researchers should compare outcomes in clinical and non-clinical groups, as the current study was carried out on a non-clinical community sample. This could offer useful information for creating treatment approaches suited to couples experiencing severe psychological suffering.

Implications

The present study has important theoretical ramifications. The interaction between experiential avoidance, phubbing, emotional intelligence, and psychological well-being is examined in this study to further our understanding of how these behaviors interact with digital habits to affect psychological suffering in married couples. Phubbing is a behavioral expression of experiential avoidance and a mechanism via which psychological suffering manifests in marital settings, according to the findings. While emphasizing the significance of culturally specific dynamics in Pakistan, the study broadens theoretical frameworks on avoidance, technology usage, and marital functioning by integrating both mediating (phubbing) and moderating (emotional intelligence) processes.

Practical implications are also present. The results show that couples that experience more experiential avoidance are more susceptible to the negative effects of phubbing on their relationship, such as diminished intimacy, elevated stress, and decreased contentment. These findings highlight the significance of addressing avoidance-based coping mechanisms and excessive smartphone use in couples' awareness and prevention campaigns. Institutions, schools, and community initiatives or programs should also be aware of how digital incursions can impede communication between spouses, especially in societies like Pakistan where in-person interactions

and family unity are highly prized. Promoting better communication practices and balanced digital use can help lower these dangers.

The implications for clinical practice are equally important. The findings emphasize emotional intelligence as a protective factor that buffers the negative effects of experiential avoidance and phubbing on psychological distress. This suggests that therapeutic interventions, such as emotional intelligence training, marital counseling, and mindfulness-based therapies, may be particularly effective in helping couples regulate emotions and reduce digital avoidance behaviors. Clinicians and counselors can design more comprehensive programs that not only address marital stress but also equip couples with skills to manage both emotional reactivity and smartphone-related conflicts.

In summary, this study draws attention to the negative psychological and interpersonal effects of experience avoidance and phubbing on married couples, but it also offers hope by pointing to emotional intelligence as a protective characteristic that can be changed. By fusing theoretical understanding with real-world and clinical applications, the study offers insightful recommendations for further research and evidence-based tactics to support psychological health and marital harmony in the digital age.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the effects of experiential avoidance, as exhibited by phubbing, on married people's psycho-emotional health and the potential protective role of emotional intelligence. The results showed that phubbing is a significant behavioral pathway associated with experience avoidance, which is associated with increased psychological discomfort among spouses. To put it simply, people who avoid handling painful emotions frequently rely on their smartphones, frequently at the expense of having meaningful conversations

with their relationships. In addition to increasing relational stress and causing emotional problems like loneliness, reactivity, and anxiety, this disengagement shatters marital connection.

Simultaneously, the study illustrated the significance of emotional intelligence. The detrimental effects of experiential avoidance and phubbing were mitigated by spouses with higher emotional intelligence because they were better able to control their emotions and uphold constructive communication styles. This implies that, in the face of digital distractions and avoidance tactics, emotional intelligence not only preserves marital ties but also protects psychological health on an individual basis.

When combined, these findings point to a series of events: experiential avoidance raises the probability of phubbing, which raises psychological suffering. However, emotional intelligence, which enables people to react to stress with increased awareness and resilience rather than avoidance, can lessen or break this loop.

In summary, this study shows that phubbing is more than just an excessive smartphone use habit; it can also be a deeper way for married couples to avoid stress and emotional involvement. Emotional intelligence offers a protective pathway, allowing couples to manage disagreements, lessen digital intrusions, and maintain closeness, even though this avoidance behavior may damage marriages and mental health. These findings go beyond enhancing theoretical knowledge to highlight the pressing need for culturally aware treatments that improve emotional intelligence and encourage better digital practices among Pakistani married couples.

Chapter 5

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Annexures

Appendix A

INFORM COSENT

I am Tanzeela Rafiq (Reg. No: 484-FSS/MSCP/F23), an MS Psychology scholar at the International Islamic University Islamabad. I am conducting a research study titled: *"***Impact of Experiential Avoidance on Psycho-Emotional Distress among Couples: Emotional Intelligence as Moderator and Phubbing as Mediator"** under the supervision of Dr. Nazia Iqbal.

You are invited to take part in this study by completing a set of questionnaires. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any stage without any negative consequences for you or your spouse. To ensure the accuracy of the findings, you are kindly requested to provide your own independent and honest responses. Your responses will remain confidential, not shared with your spouse or anyone else, and used only for research in a way that does not reveal your identity. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated and vital to this study's success.

I hereby confirm my voluntary participation, with full confidentiality and independence from my spouse's responses.

Researcher

Ms. Tanzeela Rafiq

Participant Signature _____

Appendix B

DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

Age _____

Gender Male ☐ Female ☐

Education Undergraduates ☐ Graduates ☐ Postgraduate ☐

Birth order First born ☐ Middle child ☐ last born ☐
Only child ☐

Number of children 1 ☐ 2 ☐ ☐
More than 3 ☐

Family Type Nuclear ☐ Joint ☐

Marriage Type Arrange Love ☐ ☐

Duration of marriage 1-5 years ☐ 6-10 years ☐ 11-15 years ☐
16-20 years ☐

Socio Economic Status Below Average ☐ Average ☐ Above ☐
Average

Employed Yes ☐ No ☐

Any Physical health issues Yes ☐ No ☐

Any mental health issues Yes ☐ No ☐

Hours of Mobile Usage per day

Less than 2 hours ☐

2-3 hours ☐

3-4 hours ☐

More than 4 hours ☐

Appendix C

BREIF EXPERIENTIAL AVOIDANCE SCALE

For each question, please circle the number that best indicates how true the statement is of you. It is best to givethe first response that enters your mind.

1 = Strongly Disagree	2 =Moderately Disagree	3 = Slightly Disagree	4 = Slightly Agree	5 = Moderately Agree	6=Strongly Agree

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The key to good life is never feeling any pain	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. I am quick to leave any situation that makes me feel uneasy	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
3. When unpleasant memories come to me, I try to put them out of my mind.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
4. I feel disconnected from my emotions	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
5. I won't do something until I absolutely have to	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
6. Fear or anxiety won't	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**

stop me from doing something important						
7. I would give up a lot not to feel bad	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
8. I rarely do something If there is a chance that it will upset me	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
9. It's hard for me to know what I am feeling	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
10. I try to put off unpleasant tasks or as long as possible	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
11. I go out of my way to avoid uncomfortable situations	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
12. One of my big goals is to be free from painful emotions	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
13. I work hard to keep out upsetting feelings	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
14. If I have any doubts about doing something I just won't do it	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
15. Pain always leads to suffering.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**

Appendix D

PHUBBING SCALE

Below are ten statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1-5 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by encircling the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

Questions	Never 1	Very rarely 2	Rarely 3	Occasionally 4	Always 5
1 My eyes start wandering on my phone when I am together with others.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
2 I am always busy with my mobile phone when I am with my friends.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
3 People complain about me dealing with my mobile phone.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
4 I am busy with my mobile phone when I am with friends at dinner.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
5 I don't think that I annoy my partner when I am busy with my mobile phone.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
6 My phone is always within my reach	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
7 When I wake up in the morning, I first check the messages on my phone	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
8 I feel incomplete without my mobile phone	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
9 My mobile phone use increases day by day.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
10 The time allocated to social, personal or professional activities decreases because of my mobile phone.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

Appendix E

PERTH EMOTIONAL REACTIVITY SCALE

Please score the following statements according to how much they apply or do not apply to you on a typical day. Circle one answer for each question.

Questions	Very unlike me = 1	Somewhat unlike me = 2	Neither like or unlike me = 3	Somewhat like me = 4	Very like me = 5
1. I tend to get happy very easily.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
2. I tend to get upset very easily.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
3. When I'm happy, the feeling stays with me for quite a while.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
4. When I'm upset, it takes me quite a while to snap out of it.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
5. When I am joyful, I tend to feel it very deeply.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
6. If I'm upset, I feel it more intensely than everyone else.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
7. I feel good about positive things in an instant.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
8. I tend to get disappointed very easily.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
9. When I'm feeling positive, I can stay like that for a good part of the day.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
10. It's hard for me to recover from frustration.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
11. I experience positive mood very strongly.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

12. Normally, when I'm unhappy I feel it very strongly.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
13. I react to good news very quickly.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
14. I tend to get pessimistic about negative things very quickly.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
15. I can remain enthusiastic for quite a while.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
16. Once in a negative mood, it's hard to snap out of it.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
17. When I'm enthusiastic about something, I feel it very powerfully.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
18. My negative feelings feel very intense.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

Appendix F

BREIF LONELINESS SCALE

Using the three-point Likert scale the following statements are given below. Kindly mark the correct option honestly.

		Yes	More or less	No
1	I experience a general sense of emptiness (EL)	**1**	**1**	**0**
2	I miss having people around me (EL)	**1**	**1**	**0**
3	I often feel rejected (EL)	**1**	**1**	**0**
4	There are plenty of people I can rely on when I have problems (SL)	**0**	**1**	**1**
5	There are many people I can trust completely (SL)	**0**	**1**	**1**
6	There are enough people I feel close to (SL)	**0**	**1**	**1**

Appendix G

KESLER BREIF PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS SCALE

Using the five-point Likert scale the following statements are given below. Kindly mark the correct option honestly

Please tick the answer that is correct for you:	**All of the time (score 5)**	**Most of the time (score 4)**	**Some of the time (score 3)**	**A little of the time (score 2)**	**None of the time (score 1)**
1. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel tired out for no good reason?	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
2. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel nervous?	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
3. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel so nervous that nothing could calm you down?	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
4. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel hopeless?	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
5. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel restless or fidgety?	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
6. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel so restless you could not sit still?	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
7. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel depressed?	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
8. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel that everything was an effort?	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**

9. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel so sad that nothing could cheer you up?	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
10. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel worthless?	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**

Appendix H

BREIF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE SCALE

Using the five-point Likert scale the following statements are given below. Kindly mark the correct option honestly

Questions	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1. I know why my emotions change	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
2. I easily recognize my emotions as I experience them	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
3. I can tell how people are feeling by listening to the tone of their voice	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
4. By looking at their facial expressions, I recognize the emotions people are experiencing	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
5. I seek out activities that make me happy.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
6. I have control over my emotions	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
7. I arrange events others enjoy	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
8. I help other people feel better when they are down	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
9. When I am in a positive mood, I am able to come up with new ideas	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
10. I use good moods to help myself keep trying in the face of obstacles	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**