

Phubbing (phone snubbing) happens more in the bedroom than when socialising with friends

November 1 2018, by Yeslam Al-Saggaf



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Have you ever been around people who spend more time looking at their phone than they do at you? Then you know what it feels like to be "phubbed" – and you're probably guilty of doing it yourself.

Phubbing is the practice of looking at your phone while in the presence of others. And as smartphones become ever more entwined in the everyday lives of Australians, phubbing has become so common that many people think it's normal.

People phub during work meetings, while socialising with friends at cafés, while having dinner with their family, while attending lectures and even while in bed.

But how common is phubbing in Australia? And in what social situations is it most prevalent?

To find out, we surveyed 385 people and asked them how often they look at their smartphones while having face-to-face conversations with others. They recorded their answers as: never, rarely, sometimes, often, or all the time.

We're more likely to phub family than colleagues

We found 62 percent of those surveyed reported looking at their smartphone while having a face-to-face conversation with another person or persons.

Gender made no difference to how often someone phubbed. Neither did geography, with people living in the city and the country phubbing equally as often. But younger people phubbed others more frequently than [older people](#). And people phubbed their partners most of all.

The people we phub the most

Rank	Relationship
1	Partner
2	Close friends
3	Friends
4	Siblings
5	Children
6	Parents
7	Acquaintances
8	Strangers
9	Other relatives
10	Colleagues
11	Subordinates
12	Grandparents
13	Work supervisor/manager
14	Clients/customers

Credit: Shelley Hepworth

The study also revealed [smartphone users](#) phubbed their parents and children more frequently than they phubbed their colleagues at work, clients and customers. These findings suggest a professional attitude towards using the smartphone in the workplace.

We phub more in bed than when socialising

Some [social situations](#) are more conducive to phubbing than others.

We found people phubbed each other more when commuting together on public transport, during work coffee or lunch breaks, when in bed with their partners, when travelling together in private transport and when socialising with friends.

People were less likely to phub others during meetings, during meal times with family, and during lectures and classes.

Boredom isn't the main reason people phub

We were interested in finding out whether boredom plays a role in phubbing behaviour so we asked our survey participants to complete an eight-item [Boredom Proneness Scale](#).

Sample questions included "I find it hard to entertain myself" and "many things I have to do are repetitive and monotonous."

Situations where we're most likely to phub

Rank ▼	Situation
1	Commuting on public transport
2	During work coffee/lunch breaks
3	Travelling in private transport
4	In bed
5	Shopping
6	Socialising with friends
7	Lectures/classes
8	Meal times with family
9	During other meetings
10	During work-related meetings

Credit: Shelley Hepworth

We found boredom did explain why people phub, but that the influence of boredom is [very small](#). Other factors, such as the "fear of missing out" (FOMO), lack of self-control, and internet addiction may play a [more important role](#) in phubbing behaviour.

The effect of phubbing depends on the situation

Looking at the smartphone while a person is having a face-to-face conversation with another person is a relatively new phenomenon. While it may violate some people's expectations, it's no simple task to

categorise the behaviour as good or bad.

One [theory](#) suggests that when people get phubbed they might judge the behaviour according to how important the phubber is to them. For example, phubbing among friends is probably more acceptable than a subordinate phubbing a manager during a work-related meeting.

While that might be good news for the workforce, it's not great for close relationships. Phubbing partners can make them feel less important and this can [decrease the satisfaction with the relationship](#). In the case of children, especially those at a vulnerable age, phubbing them can make them feel unloved, which can have a [detrimental effect on their well-being](#).

Our findings can be used to inform programs, policies and campaigns that aim at addressing the phubbing phenomenon.

It's clear from the research [smartphone](#) users are more likely to phub those who are closely related to them than those less close to them. So next time you get phubbed when you are out with someone, take it as a compliment – it could mean they consider you a close friend.

The research discussed in this article will be published in the Proceedings of the 2018 [International Conference on Information Systems](#) (ICIS).

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