EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ‘PARTNER PHUBBING ' AND MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG MARRIED COUPLES IN SELECTED CHURCHES IN NAKURU COUNTY, KENYA

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DECLARATION

I certify that this dissertation is my original work and has not been submitted for a degree at any other university or for any other qualifications.

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This dissertation has been submitted for examination with our approval as the University Supervisors.

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Sign ……. Date:……
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to God Almighty, my creator, my strong pillar, my source of inspiration, wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. He has been the source of my strength throughout this program, and I am grateful.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction among married couples in Nakuru County, Kenya. Its objectives included determining the prevalence of partner phubbing among married couples, assessing marital satisfaction among married couples, establishing the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction, and identifying measures that can be used to mitigate partner phubbing. The study adopted a pragmatist philosophy, which enabled the researcher to employ a convergent parallel mixed research design. The target population was 616,046 married couples. Both purposive and stratified sampling techniques were used to select a sample size of 392 respondents. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire and interview schedule. The questionnaire consisted of the Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI) and the Partner Phubbing Scale (PPS). The thematic analysis approach was employed in qualitative data analysis, while descriptive and inferential statistics, including multiple linear regression and Pearson's correlation analysis, were utilized in quantitative data analysis. The study observed the required ethical requirements, including obtaining clearance from the Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee (ISERC) of PAC University and a research permit from NACOSTI. Participation in the investigation was voluntary and free from coercion. The study found that phubbing behavior occurred at varying levels: 39.5% reported sometimes experiencing it in their marriages, 25.5% reported often experiencing it, 16.7% rarely, and 13.1% always, while 5.2% indicated they had never experienced phubbing in their relationship. Regarding marital satisfaction, 34.6% of respondents reported very high satisfaction, 28.8% moderate, and 23.2% high**.** In contrast, 10.8% of the respondents reported low marital satisfaction, while 2.6% indicated very low levels of marital satisfaction**.** The study further established that partner phubbing (t= 3.989, p=0) significantly affected the marital satisfaction of married couples. The standardized Beta coefficient suggested that partner phubbing had a weak negative impact (B= -0.223). As mitigation measures against phubbing, married couples set boundaries on phone usage (mean = 2.01, SD = 1.129), enhancing communication techniques (mean = 2.67, SD = 1.145), being mindful and present (mean = 2.48, SD = 1.131), and addressing the emotional impact of phubbing (mean = 2.53, SD = 1.174)**.** The study concluded that partner phubbing significantly and negatively influences marital satisfaction, even in a situation where the effect is weak. The study recommended that education programs on marital relationships, therapists, and marital interventions adopt differentiated and tailored methodologies in efforts geared towards addressing phubbing, noting that its frequency and impact vary widely among couples. Additionally, marital therapists must assess how, when, and why phubbing occurs in each relationship, examining the underlying causes. This kind of context-sensitive assessment will be beneficial in developing personalized interventions to minimize phubbing-related issues among married couples.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CSI	Couple Satisfaction Index
ISERC	Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
MSS	Marital Satisfaction Scale
NACOSTI	National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
PPS	Partner Phubbing Scale
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

Marital Satisfaction: This refers to the general contentment and fulfillment that couples experience in their marriage, influenced by various factors, including communication, emotional intimacy, trust, shared values, and conflict resolution skills (Bilal & Rasool, 2020). In this study, marital satisfaction encompasses a range of factors, including communication quality, marital conflict resolution, emotional connection, marital intimacy, and secure attachment.

Marriage: This term is used to refer to a formally established and recognized union that binds two individuals and outlines their legal rights and obligations (Howard, 2021). In the current study, the term marriage refers to an existing union between a man and a woman who live together as husband and wife.

Married Couples: These are two legally united people in marriage, forming a union that is recognized both in society and by law (Chambers & Gracia, 2021). In this study, married couples describe individuals who are married under the constitutionally recognized kinds of marriages in Kenya.

Mitigating Measures: These are strategies or actions taken to reduce or prevent the negative impact of excessive phone use, particularly during social interactions (Erzen et al., 2023). This term refers to the intentional act of setting boundaries on phone use, enhancing communication techniques, practicing mindfulness and being present, and addressing emotional impact.

Partner Phubbing: This is the partner phubbing behavior in which marital partners direct more attention toward their phones in the presence of their marital counterparts (Cizmeci, 2020; Sun & Samp, 2022). In this study, the term is used to refer

to behavior characterized by frequent phone use during conversations, answering calls, texts, or using social media during shared activities, addiction to cell phone use, and media dependence.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

This chapter introduces the study that explored the impact of partner phubbing on marital satisfaction among married couples in Nakuru County, Kenya. It provides a comprehensive overview of the research, including the introduction and background to the study, statement of the problem, objectives, research questions, assumptions, justification, significance, scope, limitations, and delimitations of the study. It concludes with a summary of the chapter.

Background of the Study

From a conservative viewpoint, marriage is characterised as the union between a man and a woman (Girgis et al., 2020). The institution of marriage plays a significant role in enhancing the welfare of individuals and society by promoting stability within family units and interpersonal relationships (Chambers & Gracia, 2021). The religious dimension recognises that the institution of marriage manifests diversely among various faiths. Nonetheless, the essential principles typically associated with marriage encompass the formation of a sacred connection between two individuals, guided by a higher purpose and emphasizing moral, ethical, and communal values, where traditional gender roles are regarded with significance (Anisa, 2024). From a cultural perspective, marriage is regarded as a multifaceted institution that profoundly influences community dynamics, social structures, and individual identities (Chamber & Gracia, 2021). The conservative, religious, and cultural viewpoints on marriage distinctly recognize the institution as essential, not only in representing the individual commitment between partners but also

in contributing to the broader community by reinforcing relationships, social structures, roles, and stability (Sassler & Lichter, 2020).

From a legal standpoint, marriage is a formally recognized and established union between two individuals, serving as a framework that defines their legal rights, responsibilities, and obligations within the partnership (Howard, 2021). From a gender perspective, marriage is analyzed in terms of its influence on gender identities, roles, and relationships, focusing on how evolving societal norms and legal frameworks are reshaping traditional constructs and redefining power dynamics within the marital context (Tammisalo & Rotkirch, 2022). Politically, marriage is viewed as a social contract that formalizes rights and responsibilities between marital partners while addressing broader issues of identity, power, and societal norms, emphasizing its role in reinforcing or challenging existing social structures (Girgis, 2020). This multidimensional view highlights the complexity of marriage as an institution, revealing its diverse roles and meanings across various societies and historical periods (Moret et al., 2021). Gaining a comprehensive understanding of these dimensions is essential for appreciating the essence and relevance of marriage in contemporary life (Jarnkvist, 2021).

Marital satisfaction is achieved through open communication, shared experiences, and mutual respect, which are vital for both the well-being of the individuals involved and the stability of the marital relationship (Huston et al., 2021). It often encompasses positive emotions such as contentment, tranquility, bliss, and fulfillment, which are nurtured within a healthy marriage (Atapour et al., 2021). Scholars argue that marital quality is influenced by several factors, including companionship, emotional pleasure, love, effective communication, compassion, understanding, trust, and a sense of

coherence within the relationship (Champiri & Dehghani, 2023). These elements are developed through reciprocal efforts and shared experiences, creating a bond that fosters mutual growth (Bilal & Rasool, 2020).

The importance of marital satisfaction cannot be overstated, as it significantly contributes to the longevity and resilience of the marital relationship, the well-being and harmony of the family unit, and the overall health, personal development, and happiness of both partners (Bilal & Rasool, 2020). These insights underscore the importance of cultivating marital pleasure as a means of enhancing individual well-being and preserving the stability and vitality of the marital bond (Huston et al., 2021). Through intentional efforts to nurture the relationship, couples can create a fulfilling and enduring partnership that supports their mutual aspirations and personal growth (Cizmeci, 2020). Numerous factors influence marital satisfaction, such as family structures, financial issues, psychosocial factors, personality traits, technological influences, communication styles, physical and mental health, social and economic abuses, societal norms and customs, alcoholism, and sexual relations (Abbasi, 2021). Other determinants of marital happiness include transparent communication, emotional support, aligned values and objectives, constructive conflict resolution, physical and emotional closeness, and quality time spent together as a couple (Mutunga, 2020).

Consistent smartphone use leads to a phenomenon known as phubbing, which refers to a situation where individuals are completely absorbed with their phones or other gadgets instead of conversing and interacting with people around them (Togar et al., 2023). Therefore, being phubbed refers to being ignored by a person who is engrossed in their smartphone, thereby disregarding your presence (Roberts & David, 2022a). In the family

situation, partner phubbing refers to neglectful behavior where a marital partner pays more attention to his/her phone in the presence of the other partner (Cizmeci, 2020). This behavior may cause discomfort to the other partner and, as a result, lead to a strained relationship (Rahtikawati & Ratnasih, 2021).

Partner phubbing has been described as the act of disregarding or neglecting another individual in favor of a mobile device, phone, or any other digital gadget (Sun & Samp, 2022). Partner phubbing, involving marital partners, takes away significant time that could be used for sharing and providing attention (Courtwright & Caplan, 2020). Partner phubbing is characterized by three interrelated indicators: personal attitudes toward cell phones, how spouses use their phones in their partner's presence, and the resulting disruption of communication. For example, a spouse answering a ringing phone during a conversation exemplifies such behavior (Roberts & David, 2022a).

The second aspect is involvement with cell phones, referring to how spouses try to put their cell phones close to their reach, for instance, holding a cell phone when they are with a partner or putting their cell phone close to their reach when they are with a partner (Roberts & David, 2022a). The third aspect is cellphone addiction, which is an addictive behavior associated with the disharmonious use of cell phones (Roberts & David, 2022a). This is indicated by the person's inability to control the use of cell phones when in the presence of others, especially partners (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2023). This may be exemplified by the use of a cell phone when spending time with a partner (Lenhart & Duggan, 2021).

Being phubbed by a romantic partner while in their company is almost a universal phenomenon. In the United States, research has revealed that partner phubbing is

relatively prevalent among married couples. According to research, about 45-60% of individuals have reported experiencing partner phubbing from their companions (Aljasir, 2022). In Britain, research has demonstrated a significant prevalence of partner phubbing behavior (Zonash et al., 2020). Approximately 40% -60 % of couples report experiencing partner phubbing in their union, according to a study conducted by Thabassum (2021).

Marital satisfaction describes the extent to which spouses feel content, fulfilled, and positively evaluate their marriage and relational interactions (Karney et al., 2022). It is considered a subjective phenomenon influenced by emotional, cognitive, and behavioral exchanges between partners, which ultimately affect overall well-being and relationship stability (Proulx et al., 2023). Marital satisfaction is not fixed; it evolves over time, shaped by factors such as communication patterns and external pressures, such as work-related stress (Nguyen & Clark, 2021). Couples experiencing high marital satisfaction tend to enjoy better mental health, greater life satisfaction, and more harmonious family functioning (Schoebi et al., 2024). Therefore, understanding this concept provides valuable insight into the processes that sustain long-lasting and healthy intimate relationships.

Effective communication is a foundational tenet of marital satisfaction, allowing partners to share needs, resolve disputes, and maintain emotional closeness (Raj & Silverstein, 2022). Mutual respect is another critical principle in which spouses recognize each other's individuality, opinions, and emotional needs during decision-making (Lopez & Johnson, 2021). Emotional support is essential, as providing care and responsiveness to a partner's vulnerabilities strengthens trust and relationship security (Kim &Durtschi, 2023). Commitment reflects the dedication of partners to persevere through challenges

and invest in the future of the relationship (Clark et al., 2022). Lastly, having aligned values and shared goals helps couples coordinate priorities and promotes lasting relational harmony (Chen & Xu, 2024).

Various guiding principles underpin marital satisfaction, offering a framework for understanding how couples maintain harmony, manage challenges, and strengthen relational bonds over time. The principle of reciprocity emphasizes that mutual positive actions reinforce satisfaction by fostering predictability and trust within the marriage (Peterson & Wang, 2023). Equity is vital because couples' perceptions of fairness in tasks, emotional contributions, and decision-making are strongly linked to relational contentment (Ahmed & Lee, 2022). Effective conflict management also supports marital satisfaction, with constructive strategies leading to healthier outcomes than avoidance or escalation (Martinez & Zhou, 2021). Adaptability allows couples to adjust roles, responsibilities, and behaviors in response to life changes without harming the relationship (Osei & Mensah, 2024). Finally, maintaining both emotional and physical intimacy strengthens connection and supports long-term marital fulfillment (Navarro & Gates, 2023).

Empirical findings from the Netherlands and Indonesia revealed that partner phubbing negatively influences relationship dynamics, partner attentiveness, and communication patterns. This leads to emotional withdrawal and an overall decline in marital quality (Atapour, 2021; Chmielik & Blachnio, 2022; Pollman et al., 2022; Thabassum, 2021). When one partner engages in partner phubbing, it creates a sense of distance and neglect in the relationship, ultimately eroding emotional bonds and fostering feelings of disconnection (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2023; Courtright & Caplan,

2020). In Malaysia, research has shown that a substantial number of couples, approximately 40-60%, experience partner phubbing in their relationships (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2019). In another study, Ang et al. (2019) discovered that 47% of Malaysian couples attributed their frequent arguments to the excessive use of smartphones, which accounted for 31% of their disagreements (Bernama, 2021). These findings align with global trends, whereby the prevalence of phubbing is associated with marital conflicts (Lee et al., 2019).

In Africa, research on the correlation between phubbing behavior and marital satisfaction is lacking (Asongu& Odhiambo, 2021). Most of the available studies (Kagwiria, 2022; Kimeto, 2016; Ndeke, 2020; Theuri, 2021) focus on the impact of social media on marital satisfaction. For instance, more than 50% of the married couples in a study by Theuri (2021) indicated that social media was taking a toll on their marriages, with more than half of the respondents saying that the use of social media had led to an increase in suspicion, loneliness, emotional distance, and jealousy with their spouses. The study concluded that the use of social media had a more negative than positive influence on the marriages of young, middle-class couples. These findings corroborate those by Kimeto (2016), which indicated that social media has both pros and cons that can enhance or destroy a marital relationship.

Studies have demonstrated that partner phubbing behavior has the potential to negatively impact relationships, leading to feelings of neglect or disrespect in those being phubbed (Schokkenbroek et al., 2022). For instance, Roberts and David (2020) investigated the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction, emphasizing the negative effects of smartphone-related neglect on marital quality. The

results demonstrated a significant inverse relationship, indicating that higher levels of partner phubbing corresponded with lower marital satisfaction. Additionally, reduced emotional intimacy was found to partially mediate this relationship, suggesting that neglect caused by excessive device use can weaken relational closeness. The findings highlight that inattentiveness, lack of responsiveness, and diminished communication due to phubbing can erode marital satisfaction over time. Overall, the study underscores the need for couples to maintain presence and engagement to preserve relational quality in the context of increasing smartphone use.

Within a familial context, partner phubbing is characterized by negligent behavior in which one spouse directs more attention toward their phone in the presence of the other spouse (Cizmeci, 2020). This behavior has the potential to cause discomfort for the other partner, leading to a tense and challenging relationship (Rahtikawati & Ratnasih, 2021). For instance, when a partner is absorbed in their mobile phone rather than paying attention to their companion, it can disrupt conversations (Frackowiak et al., 2022). Hence, raising awareness of the effects of partner phubbing, as informed by empirical studies, may help mitigate its impact (Dwyer et al., 2023). It is on this basis that this study aims to examine the impact of partner phubbing behaviour on marital satisfaction.

Research has increasingly examined the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction, revealing its negative impact on couple dynamics. Roberts and David (2022b) found that frequent phubbing disrupts meaningful conversations, signaling that attention to the smartphone takes precedence over the partner and reduces marital satisfaction. Miller-Ott et al. (2021) noted that such behaviors often create feelings of neglect, leaving the affected spouse with a diminished sense of importance within the

marriage. Persistent phubbing can lead to emotional distance and resentment, further weakening the marital relationship (Khodabakhsh & Ong, 2021). Studies also show that repeated phubbing is linked to declines in intimacy and overall marital satisfaction, especially when distractions contribute to misunderstandings or conflict (McDaniel et al., 2024; Thabassum, 2021). These findings emphasize that attentiveness, presence, and responsive communication are critical for maintaining a healthy and satisfying marital relationship.

Studies by Rahtikawati and Ratnasih (2021) and Thabassum (2021) indicate that relationship instability often stems from partner phubbing. This behavior jeopardizes the emotional bond between couples by creating a sense of disconnection and undermining intimacy. Partner phubbing, which involves focusing on one's phone rather than engaging with a partner, can lead to emotional distance, as both individuals may experience loneliness and neglect (CourtwrightDissertation-Finaldissertation-Finaldissertation& Caplan, 2020). Cizmeci (2020) emphasises that this behavior disrupts meaningful interactions, such as open conversations and shared experiences, which are essential for maintaining healthy communication and fostering a sense of closeness in a relationship. Over time, the partner who feels phubbed may emotionally withdraw, finding it difficult to connect even when physically present with their significant other (Bilal & Rasool, 2020). This withdrawal can further exacerbate feelings of isolation, leaving both partners feeling unfulfilled and disconnected (Kadylak, 2020).

Addressing partner phubbing requires intentional efforts to restore balance and prioritize the relationship. Open communication, where both partners can discuss how partner phubbing affects their feelings. Togar et al. (2023) state that this, combined with

the presence of mutual respect, is critical in mitigating its negative impacts. By consciously limiting phone usage during quality time and engaging in meaningful interactions, couples can work toward reducing feelings of loneliness. This, in turn, will rebuild the trust and intimacy necessary for a stronger and more resilient relationship (Atapour et al., 2021; Thabassum, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

In contemporary society, the widespread use of digital devices for communication has given rise to a behavioral phenomenon known as partner phubbing. This refers to the act of ignoring one's partner in favor of engaging with a mobile phone or similar device (Togar et al., 2024). The behavior has become a significant societal concern, as it undermines effective communication, attentiveness, and emotional connection within marital relationships (Kadylak, 2020). The growing prevalence of partner phubbing has the potential to disrupt interpersonal dynamics between couples. Which often diminishes marital satisfaction and emotional intimacy (Beukeboom & Pollmann, 2021).

Recent studies have been conducted across various regions, including the United States, Europe, and even Asia. This has consistently demonstrated that partner phubbing adversely affects marital satisfaction. While the reviewed studies provide valuable insights into the effects of partner phubbing on marital dynamics, it is important to note that most of them have been conducted exclusively in countries outside Kenya. This limited geographical scope results in a lack of culturally relevant and context-specific data, particularly in African societies. Currently, there is a dearth of empirical studies examining the impact of partner phubbing on marital satisfaction within Kenya. This gap

in the literature underscores the need for targeted research to comprehend the distinct experiences of married couples in Kenya.

The study sought to understand how excessive smartphone use during interpersonal interactions affects emotional connection, communication quality, and overall marital satisfaction. By conducting this study, the researcher aimed to fill the existing gap in the literature by analyzing the frequency and contextual factors surrounding partner phubbing behavior within Kenyan marriages. This research provided crucial insights into the relationship between partner phubbing and marital dynamics within the Kenyan context, offering a culturally nuanced perspective. Furthermore, this study paved the way for developing targeted interventions and strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of partner phubbing on marital relationships. By addressing this issue, the study aimed to contribute to enhancing marital satisfaction and fostering stronger, more fulfilling partnerships in Kenya.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction among married couples in Nakuru County, Kenya, and establish whether mitigating measures moderate this relationship.

Objectives of the Study

The following were the specific objectives of this study:

1. To determine the prevalence of partner phubbing among married couples in Nakuru County, Kenya.
2. To assess levels of marital satisfaction among married couples in Nakuru County, Kenya

3. To establish the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction among married couples in Nakuru County, Kenya.
4. To identify measures that married couples in Nakuru County, Kenya, use to mitigate partner phubbing.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

1. What was the prevalenceof partner phubbing among married couples in Nakuru County, Kenya?
2. What were the levels of marital satisfaction among married couples in Nakuru County, Kenya?
3. What was the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction among married couples in Nakuru County, Kenya?
4. What measures did married couples in Nakuru County, Kenya, use to mitigate partner phubbing?

Assumptions of the Study

To begin with, married couples in Nakuru County have engaged in or are currently engaging in partner phubbing behavior at some point during their marital relationship. Additionally, the study assumed a measurable relationship between the frequency of partner phubbing and the degree of marital satisfaction, suggesting that increased partner phubbing correlates with decreased marital satisfaction. Additional assumptions were made that: married couples in Nakuru County indicated their marital satisfaction levels without the fear of their spouses accusing them of airing their family issues to the public, the sampling method was representative of the broader population to

enable generalization of the results, and that Nakuru County has a diverse population with various ethnic groups, age ranges, and socio-economic backgrounds which allowed a comprehensive examination of how partner phubbing affects various segments of the population.

Justification of the Study

Marriage and family constitute the foundational units of society, and their stability directly affects the functioning of the wider community (Chambers & Garcia, 2021; Howard, 2021). Strong marital relationships promote emotional support, trust, and social cohesion, while disintegration can lead to societal dysfunction (Smart, 2022; Peterson & Flanders, 2023). The widespread use of smartphones has transformed interpersonal communication, creating both opportunities for connection and challenges such as divided attention between partners (Thabassum, 2021; Roberts & David, 2022). In Kenya, mobile device usage has risen sharply, becoming central to how couples interact daily (Akula, 2024; Onyango &Simiyu, 2023). Studies indicate that excessive device engagement can negatively impact face-to-face communication, emotional exchange, and relational satisfaction (McDaniel et al., 2024; Przybylski & Weinstein, 2021). Therefore, investigating the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction is critical, as these devices are often present during significant interactions, shaping the quality of marital bonds.

Exploring partner phubbing is justified because it disrupts communication, a core element of intimacy, conflict resolution, and marital satisfaction (Courtright & Caplan, 2020; Kumar & Mehta, 2022). Reduced partner attention due to phubbing can generate feelings of neglect and erode trust, intimacy, and overall relationship quality (LeFebvre et

al., 2021; Thabassum, 2021). Empirical studies (Akula, 2024; Huston et al., 2021; Sobral et al., 2022) highlight that partner responsiveness and attentiveness are strong predictors of satisfaction in marital relationships. Other studies (McDaniel et al., 2024; Przybylski & Weinstein, 2021) have linked persistent phubbing behaviors to emotional distance, misunderstandings, and decreased relationship closeness. By examining this relationship, the study provides insights into how mobile phone use influences marital satisfaction and identifies potential strategies for improving communication and relational quality. This knowledge is vital for developing interventions aimed at reducing the negative impact of partner phubbing on marriages and supporting healthier family units.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study hold immense value for a diverse range of stakeholders, including couples, families, counselors, religious organizations, researchers, and policymakers. This research offers significant insights that can help address the challenges associated with partner phubbing, a behavior stemming from excessive mobile phone use, and its impact on marital satisfaction. By presenting evidence-based recommendations, the study provides a roadmap for cultivating healthier technology use habits. These habits would be critical for strengthening marital bonds, enhancing intimacy, and fostering peaceful coexistence within relationships. Through these findings, couples can gain awareness of the potential risks of partner phubbing and adopt strategies that prioritize meaningful interactions over digital distractions, ultimately improving their overall relationship quality.

The study's results also serve as a foundation for public awareness and sensitization campaigns that highlight the detrimental effects of excessive mobile phone

use on marital success. By educating couples on these impacts, these campaigns empower them to make conscious choices about their technology use and encourage them to integrate healthier behaviors into their daily routines. Additionally, this research contributes to the broader discourse on how behaviors within the digital space intersect with the quality of social relationships, providing valuable insights that would help couples navigate the complexities of emerging technologies while maintaining strong and fulfilling connections.

For marriage counselorsand therapists, the findings offer a wealth of practical insights into the dynamics of partner phubbing and its impact on couples. This knowledge would enable them to develop effective counseling strategies and interventions aimed at resolving technology-related conflicts and improving communication skills. Understanding the specific ways in which partner phubbing affects married couples allows counselors to create personalized therapeutic approaches tailored to the unique dynamics of each relationship. These approaches would focus on helping couples establish healthy boundaries around mobile phone use, fostering open communication, and addressing conflicts constructively. Moreover, the study's findings would be particularly valuable in premarital counseling, where couples can be equipped with the tools and strategies necessary to mitigate the negative influence of mobile phones and build a strong foundation for a stable and satisfying marriage.

Religious organizations and churches would also benefit greatly from the insights provided by this study. By incorporating the findings into their community programs, they can design workshops and training sessions that raise awareness about the impact of technology on intimate relationships. These programs offer practical guidance on how to

address contemporary relationship challenges and promote effective communication strategies in the digital era. Since church leaders often play a crucial role in counseling couples and families, the study's findings enhance their ability to address the unique issues posed by technology use. The insights gained would enable religious leaders to foster both emotional and spiritual connections within marriages, emphasizing the importance of balancing technology use with meaningful human interactions. Furthermore, churches can develop initiatives that would support their members in navigating the challenges brought about by mobile devices, creating a stronger sense of community and mutual understanding.

Researchers and academicians would find this study to be a significant contribution to the growing body of empirical literature on the intersection of mobile phone use and marital satisfaction. By addressing the relatively new phenomenon of partner phubbing, the study provides a foundation for further research and identify gaps in existing knowledge that can guide future investigations. The findings would help refine existing communication theories and facilitate the development of new theoretical frameworks that capture the complexities of modern relationships influenced by digital technology. Additionally, the study's focus on partner phubbing would enable researchers to better understand how digital behaviors affect not only marital relationships but also broader social dynamics.

Policymakers and educators can also draw valuable insights from this study. By providing data-driven recommendations, the findings might inform the creation of policy interventions and frameworks aimed at improving marital satisfaction and mitigating the negative effects of partner phubbing. Public awareness campaigns and educational

initiatives can be designed to promote mindful technology use and encourage healthier relationships within families. For educators and trainers involved in relationship counseling, the study offers practical applications that can be translated into workshops, training programs, and other educational materials. These resources would help individuals and professionals address the challenges posed by digital technology in their personal and professional lives.

Scope of the Study

The study focused on exploring the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction among married couples in selected churches within Nakuru County, Kenya. Participants included married couples aged 18 years and above, ensuring representation from both younger and older couples to capture a diverse range of marital experiences. The total sample comprised 384 married couples for the quantitative component, supplemented by eight key informants for qualitative interviews, including two counselors/psychotherapists, two pastors, two young couples aged 30–40 years, and two older couples aged 50 years and above, resulting in a total of 392 participants. The study employed a convergent mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data. The study was conducted between August and October 2025, specifically examining partner phubbing asan independent variable and marital satisfaction as a dependent variable. To ensure a representative perspective, the study included couples from different age groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and ethnic communities within Nakuru County, focusing exclusively on married couples.

Limitations of the Study

One potential limitation of the study was self-report bias, as participants may have provided responses on partner phubbing that were socially desirable or underreported their own or their partner's behaviors, potentially affecting data accuracy. To minimize this bias, the researcher informed participants that the study was purely for academic purposes and encouraged them to provide objective responses. Participants were assured that their identities would remain confidential, as no names were required on the research instruments. Despite these precautions, the instruments used to measure partner phubbing

and marital satisfaction could have inherent limitations regarding validity and reliability. To address this, the researcher conducted a pretest study to assess the reliability of the tools prior to the main data collection.

To further ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the research instruments, the researcher applied content validity, carefully reviewing the tools to confirm that all study variables were adequately captured. This approach allowed participants to respond fully to the research questions, ensuring that the intended dimensions of the constructs were measured. In addition, the instruments were reviewed by subject matter experts, including counselors and psychologists, to verify that the items were relevant, clear, and aligned with the study objectives. Academic supervisors also examined the tools, providing feedback on clarity, coherence, and completeness to enhance validity. Finally, a pilot test was conducted with a small segment of the target population to identify ambiguities and ensure that participants could interpret the questions correctly, thereby strengthening the overall reliability and validity of the data collection process.

To enhance the generalizability of the findings beyond the sample drawn from couples in Nakuru County, the researcher ensured that the study included participants with diverse characteristics. The sample was designed to be sufficiently large and representative in terms of age, socioeconomic status, and ethnic background. This approach ensured that the perspectives captured reflected the experiences of a broad cross-section of married couples. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. To facilitate detailed and meaningful responses, survey instruments incorporating both

closed- and open-ended questions were utilized. These instruments enabled participants to elaborate on their experiences of partner phubbing and its perceived influence on marital satisfaction.

To encourage voluntary participation, the researcher held one-on-one conversations with participants before the commencement of data collection to explain the study's purpose and address any concerns. This approach helped build trust and ensured that participants fully understood their rights and the confidentiality measures in place. The sample size was also increased to account for potential non-responses or withdrawals during the study. Given the sensitivity of the topic, some participants initially expressed fear that their spouses might accuse them of disclosing private family matters. To address this concern, the researcher assured all participants of strict confidentiality and anonymity in handling their responses. All data collected were treated with utmost discretion and used solely for academic purposes.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced the study variables, namely partner phubbing and marital satisfaction, and provided background information on the study. The chapter has equally described the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the specific objectives, the research questions, and the justification for the study. Moreover, the chapter has outlined the significance of this study and highlighted its limitations, delimitations, scope, and assumptions. The subsequent chapter delves into a review of the relevant literature and provides a theoretical foundation for understanding partner phubbing and marital satisfaction.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter discusses literature relating to partner phubbing and marital satisfaction among married couples. This includes both the empirical and general literature as detailed by different researchers. Therefore, the literature review examines the prevalence of partner phubbing among married couples, marital satisfaction, the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction, and the measures that can be used against partner phubbing and to mitigate the effects of partner phubbing among married couples. The chapter further discusses the theories on which the study is anchored and the conceptual framework demonstrating the study variables and their relationship.

Literature Review

This section presents and discusses existing scholarly literature on the research topic of the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction among married couples. The discussion was carried out to assess past research and justify the need for the current research. This was realized by identifying new lines of inquiry, gaining methodological understanding, and identifying gaps in the literature that the current study can fill.

The Prevalence of Partner Phubbing Among Married Couples

Partner phubbing is a form of behaviour in which individuals are wholly preoccupied with their phones or other electronic devices rather than engaging in social interaction and conversation with those in their vicinity (Togar et al., 2023). In the same vein, partner phubbing has been defined as the act of disregarding or neglecting another

individual in favour of a mobile device, phone, or any other digital instrument (Sun &Samp, 2022). As a result, Partner phubbing is the term used to describe the behaviour of a spouse who is preoccupied with their smartphone during in-person interactions, thereby neglecting their partner(s) (Chmielik & Blachnio, 2022). In addition, it has been reported that partner phubbing behaviour occasionally manifests in social contexts when individuals prioritise their digital contacts over face-to-face communication (Roberts & David, 2022a). This, in turn, suggests that the act of partner phubbing between conjugal partners deprives the significant time that could be allocated to sharing and providing attention (Courtright & Caplan, 2020).

Research by Krasnova et al. (2020); Roberts & David (2022b); and Wang and Zhao 2022) indicates that people are more likely to phub significant others, such as a romantic partner, a close friend(s), and other family members, as opposed to those who are less close, for instance, a work supervisor or strangers. In support, a study conducted by Al-Saggaf and MacCulloch (2018) indicated that smartphone users phub their friends more frequently than they phub strangers. In a study carried out by Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas (2023), it was also established that a majority (70%) of couples phub their spouses at least once per day, and more than 78% of couples are phubbed at least once per day. Studies by Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas (2023) and Karadağ et al. (2021) identified possible predictors of phubbing behavior, including smartphone addiction and frequent smartphone use.

According to Grace (2020), the prevalence of smartphones has rendered partner phubbing nearly inevitable. According to Srivastava (2021), the device has decentralised communication systems, enabling real-time communication amongst numerous entities

around the world. The irreplaceability of smartphone use in human existence is clear (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2023). Nevertheless, the multifarious applications of smartphones have rendered us equally reliant on this indispensable device (Courtright & Caplan, 2020). In simpler terms, the smartphone has evolved into an indispensable peril in daily routines (Srivastava, 2021). Moreover, the widespread presence of this device in the lives of all individuals has resulted in a diverse array of issues that affect their physical, socio-emotional, and psychological well-being (Chmielik & Blachnio, 2022).

Problematic Technology Use. Research conducted by Karadağ et al. (2021) among married respondents revealed that the inherent nature of smartphones necessitates partner phubbing due to their Internet access and computer-like capabilities. As a result, the multidimensional nature of digital devices leads to partner phubbing, which is a problematic concern (Chmielik & Blachnio, 2022). Similarly, literature, as per Al-Saggaf and O'Donnell (2020), suggests that problematic technological applications, such as the use of smartphones, SMS, and social media, are associated with Partner phubbing behaviour. Smartphone problematic use has also been shown to predict partner phubbing behaviour (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2023; Yam & Kumcağız, 2020). Ivanova et al. (2020) have also identified an association between excessive smartphone usage and an increase in partner phubbing behaviour.

According to Çikrikci et al. (2020), the prevalence of partner phubbing among married couples is indicative of broader trends concerning the influence of technology on interpersonal interactions. Partner phubbing is becoming a more prevalent phenomenon among married couples due to the ubiquitous nature of digital devices, as indicated by the results of the study (Al-Saggaf & O'Donnell, 2020; Çikrikci et al., 2020;

Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2023). In addition, research has demonstrated that a substantial number of couples experience some form of partner phubbing from their spouses, with the relationship with marital satisfaction varying (Vanden Abeele et al., 2020; McDaniel & Coyne, 2021; Vandermeer et al., 2020). Lenhart and Duggan (2021) conducted a study at the University of Kent, which revealed that approximately 46% of participants reported experiencing partner phubbing from their spouses. The studies indicate that partner phubbing behaviour is a prevalent occurrence and a challenge that has the potential to substantially affect interpersonal relationships in general, as well as marital relationships (Parmaksız, 2020).

In the United States, research has revealed that partner phubbing is relatively prevalent among married couples. According to research, about 45-60% of individuals have reported experiencing partner phubbing from their companions (Aljasir, 2022). The consequences of partner phubbing may result in relationship tension and communication difficulties. Among married couples in Britain, research has demonstrated a significant prevalence of partner phubbing behaviour (Zonash et al., 2020). Approximately 40-60% of couples report experiencing partner phubbing in their union,

In Malaysia, research has shown that a substantial number of couples, approximately 40-60%, experience partner phubbing in their relationships (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2019). Ang et al. (2019) conducted a study that discovered that 47% of Malaysian couples attributed their frequent arguments to the excessive use of smartphones, which accounted for 31% of their disagreements (Bernama, 2021). These findings are in accordance with global trends suggesting a high prevalence of phubbing in relationships (Lee et al., 2019). To describe the daily

interruptions in communication and the time that romantic partners spend using their smartphones, McDaniel and Coyne (2021) coined the term "technoference." The researcher investigated the frequency and impact of such distractions in a sample of married respondents. Smartphones frequently interrupted their conversations, according to the majority of respondents (McDaniel et al., 2024).

Frequent Phone Use During Conversation. Current research shows that frequent cell phone use can lead to a partner ignoring or avoiding the other partner by not engaging in face-to-face interactions (Lenhart & Duggan, 2021). This happens through constant distractions since smartphones are designed in a way that they can capture attention through messages, calls, notifications, and social media (Birnbaum et al., 2022). The temptation to check these alerts renders spouses less available during interpersonal conversations, and with time, this tendency breeds a partner phubbing habit since priority shifts to cell phones over the partner (Vazquez et al., 2019). Moreover, it has also been established that partner phubbing occurs through constant social media communication through social media applications and messaging platforms, which offer real-time communication, providing an environment where individuals feel compelled to remain regularly connected (Vanden Abeele et al., 2020).

A study by Erzen et al. (2023) noted that phubbing was very common among married couples, and this undermines the very important eye contact, body language, and verbal signals that a couple should have. A spouse who is engrossed in their smartphone may fail to notice when a partner is trying to engage them or may not recognize that their attention is required in the conversation (Goodman-Deane et al., 2020). It has further been indicated that smartphones provide a form of escape from uncomfortable social

situations. Therefore, instead of engaging in challenging conversations, spouses turn to their smartphones as a distraction (Schokkenbroek et al., 2022). When frequently repeated, this habit becomes a form of partner phubbing that may cause damage to relations (Vazquez et al., 2019). Overall, frequent smartphone phone use fosters partner phubbing by rendering phones a frequent source of distraction, minimizing in-person interaction, and normalizing the act of ignoring significant others in favor of digital engagement.

In their study, Sobral et al. (2022) established that over 42% of couples indicated that were diverted severally by their mobile phones during in-person interactions with their spouses. In research carried out by Mahmud et al. (2023), it was determined that as the duration spent by couples on social media increases, the more their spouses experience emotional distance and loneliness, with significant effects on their marital stability. The study equally found that 78% of the married couples stated engaging in partner phubbing their spouses severally. In another research carried out by Schokkenbroek et al. (2022), 92.2% of couples stated that their partners had paid attention to their smartphones, ignoring their presence.

Answering Calls, Texts, and Social Mediaduring Shared Activities. Partner phubbing is also characterisedby conversation interruptions of picking up phone calls, replying to messages, or checking posts on social media while other people are talking, placing cell phones around sight, holding cell phones, secretly staring at cell phones when communicating with others, and glancing at cell phones while communicating with others (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2023). According to Roberts and David (2022),

partner phubbing happens when someone is talking with friends or colleagues or seeing glancing at their phones, or sending an SMS while communicating with someone.

Partner phubbing through answering calls, texting, or browsing social media in an intimate dinner setting as a spouse sits directly across is a sure way that may predispose them to feelings of being ignored and being insignificant (David & Roberts, 2021). This will undermine the quality of the conversation at the same dinner table, causing adverse effects on the relationship (Togar et al., 2024). This is consistent with Beukeboom and Pollmann (2021), who noted that the loss of a quality conversation that is enabled by the phone lowers relationship satisfaction. Being face to face and not available in conversation sends a signal of an individual not being mentally present (Kadylak, 2020) and creates feelings of loneliness, which not only lowers interaction quality but also undermines the relationship connection and stability (McDaniel & Coyne, 2021). On the same point, Courtright and Caplan (2020) comment that marital partners who engage on phones during intimate times may not recover the time lost and have low satisfaction in the relationship, which may result in conflict.

In their research, Miller-Ott and Kelly (2021) sought to determine the expectations spouses put on their partner's use of smartphones in each other's presence. From the study, 55% of the participants stated that smartphones are a positive addition to their daily communication since they facilitate continuous connection when the couple is afar. However, couples did not feel the same when their spouses were on their cell phones, and their undivided attention was required (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2021). The violations included moments when they had intimate time together and when they were

hanging out or having a meal together. It was concluded that partners in romantic relationships expect attentive behavior from their partners when a smartphone is present.

Smartphone usage is frequently linked to sociability, interpersonal sharing, development and maintenance of connections, and indirect communication, commonly mediated by texting and instant messaging applications (Volungis et al., 2020). In the context of a marital relationship, when a spouse attends to text, social media prompts, or a call during a couple's conversation, dinner, or romantic moment, the interaction is interrupted (Kadylak, 2020). The implied communication is "what I am doing on my cell phone right now is more important compared to you", "My interest in my phone is greater than my interest in you,"; or, in some circumstances, "You are unworthy of my attention." (Jomy et al., 2019). As a consequence, the other spouse is most likely to experience feelings of rejection, depression, and reduced satisfaction in the relationship (Rahtikawati & Ratnasih, 2021).

Addiction to Cell Phone Use and Phubbing. In the context of cell phone use, addiction describes the uncontrollable urge to be continually engrossed in using the phone (De-Sola Gutiérrez et al., 2019; Volungis et al., 2020). It is a situation where one has lost control over the irritating partner's phubbing behavior, irrespective of the negative consequences linked to it (Juhasz & Bradford, 2020). The increased prevalence and use of cell phones have brought about conditions of the Fear of Missing Out,'' (FOMO), whereby many cell phone owners live with the fear of being without a cell phone, being disconnected, or without internet accessibility (Volungis et al., 2020). There is also another condition called "Textaphrenia" and "Ringxiety," whereby couples get the erroneous impression of having received a text message or a mobile phone call, making

them frequently keep checking their phones (Jomy et al., 2019). The other condition is "Textiety," which refers to the fear of receiving and timely responding to text messages (Jomy et al., 2019).

The mentioned fears occasion heightened use of smartphones even when a partner requires attention and presence of mind (Atapour et al., 2021). Deprivation of this attention may imply disrespect, causing feelings of being ignored, unimportant, and demeaned (Volungis et al., 2020). Karadağ et al. (2021) opine that partner phubbing happens because of smartphone addiction, texting addiction, and social media addiction. The excessive need for cell phones has implications like too much mobile phone usage and increased levels of engagement with mobile phones, which then occasions addiction to smartphones (Karadağ et al., 2021). Various studies have also established that cell phone use behavior is closely linked to internet addiction, and this brings about similar addiction implications (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2023). Consequently, the criteria for addiction in the DSM-IV include smartphone addiction, defined as an addictive behavior that comprises psychological conditions related to disharmonious usage of cell phones (Roberts & David, 2022).

The outcome of previous studies shows that the factor that most influences phubbing is smartphone addiction (Fauzan, 2018). Consistent with this study, similar studies indicate that the intensity of smartphone use correlates with phubbing behavior by 45.1% (Syifa, 2020). According to Wolfe and Higgins (2018), smartphone addiction causes smartphone users to lose self-control, and this lack of self-control affects marital satisfaction and intimacy (Billieux, Van der Linden, & Rochat, 2020; Mumtaz, 2019).

Lack of self-control leads to attention deficit, increased irrelevant thought processes, and consequently, heightened frequency of smartphone usage (Billieux et al., 2020).

A study carried out by Isrofin and Eam (2024) sought to determine the effect of smartphone addiction and self-control on phubbing behavior. The study used a correlational research design and targeted 379 couples who were selected using a random sampling technique. The data were collected using the Smartphone Addiction Scale and Phubbing Scale, which were analyzed using regression analysis. The results indicated that smartphone addiction is a predictor of phubbing behavior by 47%, while other factors influence the rest. That higher smartphone addiction correlates with frequent phubbing behavior, whereby the addicted tend to check their smartphone even during conversations. This implies that smartphone addiction and phubbing are closely related behaviors.

Research carried out by Karadağ et al. (2021) indicates that technologies like smartphones are not solely a problem; they however bring about problems because of the applications that they use, which are mediated by the internet, including social media, texting, and search applications. Smartphone addiction predicts the occurrence of partner phubbing behavior because of internet addiction, FOMO, and lack of self-control (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2023). The FOMO refers to an individual's fear, worry, and anxiety that may be associated with being left behind in relation to something new like fashion trends, trending news, and also conversations that happen in social environments (Przybylski et al., 2020). FOMO is closely linked to excessive smartphone usage, which is a predictor of partner phubbing behavior (Carbonell et al., 2019).

Partner phubbing is fundamentally problematic in contemporary relationships since the act undermines one's ability to be available and alert to share and exchange effective interpersonal communication between partners (Togar et al., 2023). According to Vogels and Anderson (2020), 51% of couples in the United States grapple with their partners being distracted by their smartphones. The overall implication is that 51% of Americans in a romantic arrangement have suffered partner phubbing perpetrated by their partners (Vogels & Anderson, 2020). Consequently, marital couples feel ignored and demeaned when their partner engage excessively on their smartphones while trying to communicate (Chambliss et al., 2019). The scholar concluded that the high frequency of smartphone usage disrupts communications affecting relationship satisfaction, which provides a basis for marital conflict (Chambliss et al., 2019).

In advancing the relationship between the psychological influences of partner phubbing and social media, research was carried out that required smartphone users to restrict their use of social media for 24 hours. Upon doing so, their experiences were recorded (Rast et al., 2021). It was established that at the expiry of 24 hours of non-phone use, the participants had stress. The participants were still permitted to use their smartphones to get notifications from their social media. However, the stress heightened when they were asked to check their phones (Turel & Cavagnaro, 2019). The study concluded that the reason for stress was their FoMO. The participants' desire to stay updated on current trends and news or to be aware of what their friends were doing and posting on every social media site was too compelling (Turel & Cavagnaro, 2019).

Assessment of Marital Satisfaction Among Married Couples.

Marital satisfaction describes the level to which a partner or spouse satisfies the other spouse's needs and expectations through various means, including effective communication, intimacy, and sharing time (Sobral et al., 2022). Research highlights that open communication, shared experiences, and mutual respect are vital for both the well-being of the individuals involved and the stability of the marital relationship (Huston et al., 2021). Contemporary scholars argue that marital quality is influenced by several factors, including companionship, emotional pleasure, love, effective communication, compassion, understanding, trust, and a sense of coherence within the relationship (Champiri & Dehghani, 2023). In addition, marital satisfaction is critical in the subject of partner phubbing, since a spouse's partner phubbing behavior is the perception of being ignored in favor of a smartphone leading to loss of intimacy and anxiety ((Bilal & Rasool, 2020). Various scholars suggest that the need to enjoy marital satisfaction is one of the most significant premises of marriage (Akula, 2024; Flicker et al., 2020; Huston et al., 2021; Sobral et al., 2022; Tabassum, 2023).

Everyone is desirous of a life of happiness and satisfaction upon being married as a result, marital satisfaction is more critical than the marriage itself (Flicker et al., 2020). Consequently, a reduction in marital satisfaction not only yields an unsuitable setup in a family, but it equally contributes to family instability and dysfunction (Zaheri et al., 2019). This implies that marital satisfaction is a significant aspect in the maintenance of a harmonious coexistence in a marriage and ensuring its stability (Champiri & Dehghani, 2023). It is therefore pivotal to understand factors that function in marital satisfaction in order to guarantee the very critical happiness in marriage (Bilal & Rasool, 2020). Such

factors include fulfilling marital intimacy, effective communication, emotional connection, conflict resolution, and shared values among others (Atapour et al., 2021)

A study by Konstam et al. (2019) sought to establish the expectation of a romantic relationship among couples. The findings indicated that couples expected to be provided with emotional support, loyalty, marital faithfulness, assistance around the house, and commitment. Additionally, the day-to-day workings of the relationship and quality interactions in the relationship were found to offer and reinforce the daily relational expectations. For their part, Konstam et al. (2019) stated that good communication, physical presence, working as a unit, trust, honesty, and respect were the critical factors for a stable marital relationship. Research indicates that each of these factors positively on marital satisfaction when faithfully practiced (Tabassum, 2023). This suggests that the determinants of marital satisfaction fundamentally influence marital success, affecting emotional well-being, communication, conflict resolution, and overall relationship stability (Asuquo et al., 2021).

Communication Quality. Communication between marital partners is a vital component in sustaining a healthy and satisfying relationship (Huston et al., 2021). It involves both verbal and non-verbal exchanges that enable couples to share thoughts, emotions, and experiences meaningfully. Effective communication also requires understanding and respecting each other's needs, feelings, and perspectives (Champiri & Dehghani, 2023). Core elements such as active listening, honest expression of emotions, and appropriate use of nonverbal cues foster mutual trust and emotional intimacy (Huston et al., 2021). When partners communicate openly and empathetically, they are better equipped to resolve conflicts and strengthen their emotional connection.

Active Listening.In a marital setup, active listening describes the act of paying full attention to what one's spouse is saying without any attempt to interrupt (Moret et al., 2021). In research by Jarnkvist (2021) on the relationship between smartphone use and active listening among marital partners, the respondents stated that active listening fosters understanding and improves immediate communication, and this influences the longevity of their relationship as a couple. From the study, 77% of the respondents noted that regular smartphone uses significantly impacted their ability to listen actively and undermined their overall communication as marital partners. On his part, Howard (2021) found that healthy couple relationships require active listening whereby couples indulge each other during a conversation, ensuring that one only hears what the other is trying to say to understand their message, emotions, and expectations. Participants in research by Akula (2024) stated that when their partners actively listened to them, they felt heard, valued, and also respected. This is consistent with Thabassum (2021), who stated that active listening is more than simply hearing words; it is concerned with giving complete attention, acknowledging their feelings, and responding thoughtfully and respectfully.

Studies by Rahtikawati and Ratnasih (2021); Thabassum (2021); Courtright and Caplan (2020) indicate that distractions caused by smartphone use undermine the ability to listen actively since it causes one partner to feel ignored by the one in consistent use of their phone. This sends a message that the phone is more important than holding an engaging conversation, making the other partner feel unimportant or unheard. The studies also indicated that active listening through body language cues like eye contact, nodding, facial expressions are undermined when a partner looks at a phone instead of focusing on a partner and this weakens these connections. In couple interactions, there should be

minimal distractions, meaning that phones must be put down so that the focus is entirely on the spouse (Radtke et al., 2024). Also, interest needs to be shown through non-verbal cues, including maintaining eye contact, nodding, and facing each other (Zonash et al., 2020).

Research by Champiri and Dehghani (2023) indicated that active listening not only promotes communication but also preempts conflicts and strengthens relationships. The researcher counsels that one should allow the other to speak devoid of being interrupted by allowing him/her to finish speaking their perspectives before responding. Any interruption may make a spouse feel unheard while holding on until they finish, which indicates respect for their viewpoint (Akula, 2024). Similarly, validation is a critical part of active listening (Zonash et al., 2020). Even if one is not in agreement with the spouse's opinion, their emotions still need to be acknowledged. For example, by stating that, "I understand why you would feel that way." This creates a safe space for the other partner to share openly (Aljasir, 2022).

In a qualitative study carried out by Jarnkvist (2021) among couples in Britain, the participants stated that active listening can be enhanced by setting phone-free zones. Couples should agree strictly not to use their phones during meals, date nights, or important conversations. When having meaningful conversations, phone notifications should be turned off, and eye contact and nonverbal affirmations should be maintained. The study concluded that, overall, active listening enhances communication in marriage and provides a supportive environment where couples feel confident to express themselves without fear of judgment or dismissal. This encourages the spouses to feel heard and valued (Jarnkvist, 2021).

Efficacy of Communication in Couple Relationships. Shared conversations play a significant role in determining satisfaction within marital relationships, as limited communication can often lead to tension and instability. Conversely, open communication and mutual understanding foster trust, satisfaction, and happiness between partners (Hendrick et al., 2019). Effective dialogue allows couples to express their emotions and address misunderstandings before they escalate into serious conflicts. In today's era of rapid urbanization, newly married couples face unique stressors that can strain their relationships. However, these challenges can be mitigated through consistent, honest, and empathetic communication that strengthens the marital bond.

A study carried out by Ngunjiri (2023) examined the correlation between effective communication and marital satisfaction among newly married couples in Kamukunji Sub-County in Nairobi County. The research was anchored on the solution-focused theory and the sound relationship house theory. The study targeted 476 newly married couples and eight counselors recruited through a convenient sampling approach. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from newly married couples, and interview schedules were used to collect data from marriage counselors. Qualitative data was analyzed through content analysis, while quantitative data was analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics comprising correlation analysis.

It was established that effective communication skills had a positive and significant effect on marital satisfaction among newly married couples. That effectively enabled honest sharing with their spouses. From the interviews, the counselors stated that communication skills are crucial for marital satisfaction and stability since it makes partners feel good and benefits everyone when ideas flow freely between marital

partners. The counselors equally stated that communication skills enable both parties to listen actively in an attempt to understand what their partners seek to say with kindness, as opposed to looking for flaws or discarding what they hear, even if they disagree. The findings illustrate that for a stable marriage; effective communication is an important aspect. Concurrent with the study's results, Sauerheber and Bitter (2017) observed that couples must talk and share their needs and innermost feelings in order to fully understand one another so as to have a successful marriage relationship.

In a study carried out among married couples, Taggart et al. (2019) sought to assess the significance of effective communication in marriage. The study targeted married couples, and purposive sampling was used to recruit respondents. Questionnaires were used in data collection, and they were analyzed using descriptive and correlational analysis. The study found that healthy communication fosters effective conflict resolution which leads to increased marital satisfaction as opposed to their counterparts with poor communication (Taggart, et al., 2019). Further, the respondents indicated that good communication involved active listening to a spouse to understand his/her needs and address them.

On his part, Denes et al. (2020) looked into the factors promoting marital satisfaction. The study adopted a case study research design and targeted married couples attending the Catholic Church. Random sampling techniques were used to select a sample of 200, with questionnaires being used in data collection. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in data analysis. From the study, it was established that good communication skills had a positive and significant effect on marital satisfaction among married couples. The couples communicated openly with their spouses and expressed

their feelings and issues they liked and those they did not like to their partners. The couples communicate honestly with their spouses. These findings demonstrate that healthy communication between married couples minimizes misunderstandings, contributing to heightened trust among the couples.

On their part, Alipour et al. (2020) sought to determine the role played by effective marital communication. A descriptive research design was adopted, and the population targeted was married couples. Purposive sampling techniques were used in sample size selection and questionnaires were employed in data collection, while quantitative data analysis methods were used in data analysis. The study established that good communication skills enable couples to express their feelings assured that they will be attentively listened to and acted upon. The study further found that effective communication fostered transparency in marriage, leading to marital satisfaction and stability. This, therefore means that effective communication serves to minimize marital conflicts and misunderstanding, leading to increased marital satisfaction.

Similarly, Parise et al. (2019) sought to study family communication standards and what comprises effective family communication. The study used a descriptive research design and targeted married couples. The researchers found that constant feedback enabled by healthy partner communication leads to high marital satisfaction. Communication is critical to marital satisfaction since it promotes unity among married couples. From the foregoing, it can be concluded that constant communication in marriages is important in getting to understand couples' expectations of each other, and therefore, fulfilling the expectations leads to marital unity and this enhances marital satisfaction.

In a relationship characterized by open communication, the marital partners are able to share their thoughts, ideas, and needs comfortably and are also able to feel heard, yielding increased levels of marital satisfaction (Johnson et al., 2021). It is, therefore, valid to state that couples will depict signs of low relational satisfaction in the absence of effective communication. Johnson et al. (2021) further indicate that the way couples communicate frequently shows a correlation between communication and relationship distress and conflict. When marital partners manifest symptoms of distress and conflict, they largely use disengagement tactics, which may include negative nonverbal communicative cues and external conflict (Nichols et al., 2015). One such disengagement tactic that one may depict is partner phubbing. Engaging in partner phubbing and being a victim of partner phubbing may be a subtle nonverbal communicative way to disengage from a marital partner (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2021).

Marital Conflict Resolution. Marital conflict resolution defines the mechanisms and processes marital partners may use to address and resolve disagreements, misunderstandings, or conflicts within their marriage (Kienan, 2019). Effective conflict resolution is crucial if strong, lasting relationships are to be maintained (Van Pelt, 2020). When managed well, conflict may even serve to strengthen the relationship by enhancing communication, increasing mutual understanding, and deepening emotional closeness (Lewis, 2021). Conversely, when poorly handled, conflicts are able to erode trust, undermine intimacy, and damage the general well-being of the marriage (Malek, 2019). A study carried out by Van Pelt (2020) examined self-reported marital conflict behaviors over 16 years and revealed that destructive conflict approaches, like yelling and criticism, led to marital dissatisfaction and disability. A majority of respondents indicated that the effective strategies for effective marital conflated resolution comprise effective communication.

Research by Wang and Zhao (2022) established that it is critical for couples to stay calm and avoid escalating the disagreement. From the study, 67% of the respondents stated that handling conflicts with emotions made it very easy for simple issues to escalate into a fight. The study recommended that couples should remain calm, use a calm tone, and avoid shouting or name-calling, which may render resolution of the issue complex. Couples should also refrain from stonewalling, whereby a partner physically or emotionally withdraws from the conversation completely (Malek, 2019). This may be damaging to the relationship since it leaves matters in contention unresolved and occasions emotional distancing (Wang & Zhao, 2022).

It is also important to separate the individual from the problem by focusing on the specific concern at hand as opposed to attacking a partner's character. Criticizing the partner at fault personally (for instance, “You’re so selfish”) only serves to enhance defensiveness and creates emotional damage (Diamond et al., 2020). It is appropriate to consider the conflict as an issue the two of you are encountering together rather than as enemies (Lewis, 2021). It is critical to approach the matter with a problem-solving mindset, as opposed to the approach intent on winning the argument. Also, the couples should acknowledge their role in occasioning the conflict (Murray, 2020). Taking responsibility nurtures accountability and is helpful in avoiding blame games. In the same vein, Van Pelt (2020) stated that issuing a genuine apology devoid of defensiveness indicates respect for the other partner’s feelings and is helpful in rebuilding trust

Upon both partners sharing their perspectives on the issue in contention, the focus should be shifted toward getting a solution (Dildar et al., 2022). Instead of dwelling on the past or apportioning blame, the couple should focus on what can be done moving forward to resolve the issue in the long term (Asadi et al., 2021). Additionally, compromise should be involved by both partners making concessions. Being flexible and open in looking for a middle ground serves well in resolving matters without one individual feeling unheard or overly targeted (Navidian et al., 2020). Further, an attempt should be made to avoid dredging up previous mistakes or picking up unresolved issues during a conflict. Remain focused on the issue at hand to avoid heaping too many grievances at once on your spouse (Zahra et al., 2022).

It is also very easy for conflicts to bring in unrelated issues when the conversation is not kept focused (Diamond et al., 2020). It is, therefore, imperative to ensure that

couples in a conflict stay on topic and not allow minor disagreements to grow into more prominent, unrelated arguments (Wang & Zhao, 2022). If there is a need, the couple should take a cooling break because, at times, emotions may run too high for productive discussion to occur. In such situations, it is advisable to take a break and cool down (Asadi et al., 2021). Agree on a set time to discuss the issue after both partners have taken time to reflect (Abeya et al., 2020). It is also crucial to respect each other's need for space to prevent further escalation of conflict. Gichinga's (2003) research suggested that a cooling-off time enables both parties to collect their thoughts and get back to the discourse in a calmer state.

Emotional Connection. Emotional connection defines the bond of intimacy, trust, and understanding that is shared by marital partners, which is very critical for a stable and fulfilling relationship (Juhasz & Bradford, 2019). The act of partner phubbing may occasion a significant negative impact on the emotional connection in relationships, particularly romantic ones (Dikdere & Türkarslan, 2024). When partner phubbing is perpetrated, it may erode these important elements. Emotional connection operates well when partners have shared quality time together. This means that when a partner engages in partner phubbing, the time that partners could use engaging in meaningful sharing, bonding, or being available for each other is wasted. Instead, one partner is left feeling neglected or demeaned as the other is absorbed in the cell phone (Beukeboom & Pollmann, 2021). As a result, this may result in a feeling of emotional distancing that ultimately reduces the quality of their connection and marital satisfaction (Karadağ et al., 2021).

Strong emotional connection is founded on trust and security, understanding and empathy, mutual respect, shared experience, and memories (Pesando, 2022). Trust is a cornerstone of emotional connection, which comprises a feeling of safety and understanding that a partner will always be there to support you during times of need and cannot betray your trust in him/her (Walter, 2020). This assurance of emotional safety promotes openness, which is critical for a strong emotional connection. It has also been indicated that emotional connection flourishes when both partners have an understanding of the other's emotions, thoughts, and experiences, while empathy enables a partner to acknowledge and validate the other's feelings (Dikdere & Türkarslan, 2024). Furthermore, respecting each other's individuality, viewpoints, and personal boundaries is important in building a healthy emotional bond. This fosters an environment where a couple feels esteemed and appreciated (Hagey et al., 2020).

There are various indications of a strong emotional connection including mutual support and comfort, spontaneous acts of kindness, physical and emotional intimacy, and emotional vulnerability (Murray et al., 2020). Regarding mutual support and comfort, marital partners feel emotionally secure and supported. They rely on each other for consolation during challenging times, and both feel that their needs are fulfilled (Dildar et al., 2022). With emotional vulnerability, marital partners feel unhindered in sharing their true feelings, fears, and vulnerabilities, devoid of fear of judgment, and this kind of openness facilitates an in-depth, more intimate connection (Skogrand et al., 2019). Also, small, thoughtful acts like a loving note, a surprise hug, or just checking on each other are a reflection of a deep emotional bond in the relationship (Archuleta et al., 2021).

Moreover, physical affection and sexual intimacy are also a reflection of the emotional bond that couples have that enhances physical closeness (Murray et al., 2020).

Mutual Support and Comfort. Emotional connection may be strengthened through open and honest communication (Murray, 2020). Moreover, regular and open communication regarding feelings, issues, ambitions, and challenges is important. This may happen through simple daily conversations or deeper discussions regarding the relationship. In this regard, emotional availability and a willingness to listen is key (Dikdere & Türkarslan, 2024). Listening is beyond hearing and involves being effectively present and understanding what a spouse is trying to say. This implies that when a spouse is present emotionally and listens keenly, a sense of being understood and valued is fostered (Ippolito, 2020).

Acts of Kindness. An emotional connection may also be fostered through physical affection through gestures such as passionate hugs, holding hands, or cuddling (Tammisalo & Rotkirch, 2022). Proving ready support during challenging times is also helpful in deepening the emotional connection (Anisa, 2024). A spouse who comforts, reassures, and provides empathy during challenging spells develops resilience and trust in the relationship (Chamber & Gracia, 2021). Similarly, sharing uninterrupted and quality time as a couple is helpful in reconnecting couples emotionally. This may be through dates, shared leisure time activities, or quiet moments at home (Throuvala et al., 2021). Also, regular expression of gratitude and appreciation for each other's contributions can promote emotional closeness significantly (Akula, 2024)

The status of emotional connection may be challenged by a feeling of neglect or partner phubbing (Anisa, 2024). In the contemporary digital era, distractions like cell

phones may bring about neglect of emotional needs. When a spouse regularly engages with his/her cell phone at the expense of the other, it breeds emotional distance and dissatisfaction (Throuvala et al., 2021). Likewise, it is stated that over time, marital partners may get into a routine, which renders emotional engagement less of a priority (Howard, 2021). Also, prevailing unresolved emotional issues from the past may challenge the ability to bond emotionally. When old wounds are not addressed, they may hinder emotional connection and become barriers to intimacy (Thabassum, 2021).

The implication of a strong emotional connection in a marital union is in the form of increased relationship satisfaction (Stelzer, 2021). Partners who are emotionally bonded have a higher likelihood of being happy, fulfilled, and committed. Secondly, when partners are emotionally bonded, they are effectively armored to go through challenges, offering mutual support and solidarity jointly. Thirdly, lasting emotional connection helps couples stay emotionally connected as they continue to grow their relationship and develop together (Stelzer, 2021). It can, therefore be stated that emotional connection is important in maintaining a stable marriage, creating the basis for trust, communication, and intimacy, which are all critical for long-term relationship stability. By nurturing this bond through healthy communication and mutual support, married couples may enjoy increased satisfaction, resilience, and deeper intimacy together.

Marital Intimacy

Emotional connection, support, and proximity are the defining characteristics of intimacy between a couple. It is founded on the principles of trust, compassion, and acceptance. In addition to being intellectual, recreational, financial, spiritual, or creative, intimacy can be emotional, physical, or a combination of the two (Prager, 2020). Intimacy is a critical element of successful relationships, as it can lead to emotional and physical well-being, commitment, and satisfaction. It can be improved over time through the combined efforts and perseverance of both partners (Kraus et al., 2020). It comprises the sharing of both emotional and physical experiences, creating a safe environment where both partners can be their authentic selves (Alizadeh et al., 2019). Intimacy may manifest in various ways, including emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual intimacy (Prager, 2020).

Emotional Intimacy. Couples can express their emotions, thoughts, anxieties, and vulnerabilities regarding emotional intimacy (Stelzer, 2021). Furthermore, it involves the capacity to be present emotionally and supportive, understand the emotional needs of the other, and heed to one another (Prager, 2020). In the context of couples, emotional intimacy is a profound and essential element of human relationships. It involves the creation of a secure and trusting environment in which individuals are comfortable sharing their most intimate thoughts, emotions, fears, aspirations, and vulnerabilities without fear of judgment or rejection (Chamber & Gracia, 2021). This form of intimacy fosters a profound sense of acceptance and understanding, which in turn, strengthens the emotional bond between partners. incorporate supplementary viewpoints (Parhizgar, 2023). Emotional intimacy is the foundation of a successful relationship; by prioritising

and cultivating this connection, couples can create a partnership that is profoundly fulfilling, resilient, and enduring (Stelzer, 2021).

Spiritual Intimacy. Thisis a significant aspect of relational connection that involves couples engaging in shared spiritual practices, beliefs, values, and experiences. It transcends the physical and emotional domains, offering a more profound sense of purpose and unity that can improve their relationship (Tammisalo & Rotkirch, 2022). Spiritual intimacy enables couples to organise their lives in accordance with their shared values and beliefs (Kraus et al., 2020). This alignment promotes stability and unity by establishing a sense of direction and purpose within the relationship. Research done by Halpern and Katz (2019) argued that engaging in activities such as meditating, attending religious services, participating in community service, or worshipping together as a couple can fortify the spiritual bond. This mutual consent regarding foundational principles, such as humility, compassion, forgiveness, and generosity, is frequently required for spiritual intimacy. As a result, these mutual values are the foundation of decision-making and conflict resolution. (Kraus et al., 2020).

Physical Intimacy. Refers to physical closeness in the form of flirting, kissing, hugging, holding hands, and sexual intimacy (Prager, 2020). It serves to express love, affection, and comfort and therefore plays a critical role in strengthening the bond between marital couples (Przybylski et al., 2020). In intellectual intimacy, marital partners share meaningful conversations, ideas, interests, and insights (Wang & Zhao, 2022). It enables marital partners to learn from each other and develop together intellectually (Prager, 2020). Essentially, marital intimacy involves the creation of a partnership where both parties express and feel loved, valued, and respected (McDaniel

& Coyne, 2021). It proceeds beyond physical attraction, involving trust, communication, and mutual support to develop a lasting relationship (Wang & Zhao, 2022).

Halpern and Katz (2019) argued that lack of intimacy in a marital relationship may be occasioned by partner phubbing behavior since a spouse is not fully focused on communicating and sharing ideas. Fundamentally, intimate relationships are pillars of marital satisfaction among married couples. In their study, Wagner et al. (2019) investigated the relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction among married couples. The findings established a significant link between the two variables. Also, Hammond et al. (2018) assessed the influence that intimacy has on marital satisfaction and established that couples with passionate romantic relationships manifested reduced stress levels and healthy behaviors. In agreement, Karney and Bradbury's (2020) study found that marital partners who frequently shared in sexual activity reported higher marital satisfaction levels and fewer conflict instances.

Other studies, such as that of Baumann et al. (2020) and Vaillancourt-Morel et al. (2019), associated increased marital stability to intimate activities among married couples. In their study, Vaillancourt-Morel et al. (2019) established that married women who were unfaithful to their partners experienced poorer marital satisfaction as opposed to their counterparts who were faithful to their partners. This implies that close intimate relationships among marital partners improve marital satisfaction through enhanced conflict resolution. According to Kadylak et al. (2020), marital partners who continue using their smartphones during face-to-face interactions with their spouses pay little attention to the conversation and also to their spouses as they converse. For a marriage to

be stable, the partners need to pay close attention to each other in order to develop intimacy and improved connections (Rahtikawati & Ratnasih, 2021).

It can, therefore be argued that increased smartphone use during a conversation negatively impacts the intimacy of various couples (Kadylak et al., 2020). In their study, Sobra et al (2022) sought to establish whether intimacy is necessary for marital couples to feel satisfied in their relationship. The findings showed that both men and women believed that intimacy is an element of a relationship worth being in. The findings imply that losing intimacy leaves a spouse feeling left out and neglected. As a result, triggering negative emotions that spill over into conflicts (McDaniel & Wesselmann, 2021).

Relationship Between Partner Phubbing and Marital Satisfaction

A stable and flourishing marital partner relationship is achievable when both parties in a marriage are happy. However, those who are in a struggling relationship are left unhappy and unsatisfied (Finkel et al., 2020). According to Ahlstrom et al. (2019), in a relationship where partner phubbing is a constant practice, spouses report very little satisfaction. Rahtikawati and Ratnasih (2021) qualify this by noting that pubbing adversely affects marital relationships and interpersonal communication since it diverts an individual's focus time and concentration away from their spouse, leading to decreased relationship satisfaction. This non-attentive nonverbal cue may cause the illusion of lacking interest in one's spouse as one gives more attention to his/her smartphone and social media apps (Thabassum, 2021).

The adverse effects of a partner phubbing the other in a marital relationship may create a sense of loss or a reduction in relationship satisfaction. This is manifested in responses such as incessant conflicts, fights, separation, avoidance, and revengeful

tendencies (Monash, 2020). In their study, Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas (2023) sought to determine whether gender plays a role in the perception of being phubbed. The study found that both genders experienced partner phubbing at some point in their marital relationship and the outcomes of gender differences had little to no influence on the outcome of partner phubbing. Current study findings indicate that all the couples acknowledged that the act of partner phubbing is rude and disrespectful, and being phubbed ruins the quality of the moment (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2023).

Based on various studies, partner phubbing contributes to dissatisfaction a marital relationship (Halpern & Katz, 2019; McDaniel & Coyne, 2021; Roberts & David, 2021; Wang et al., 2022). This implies that the higher the partner phubbing behavior is, the lower the relationship satisfaction between married adult couples (Wang et al., 2022). Additionally, Wang et al. (2022) observes that partner phubbing also predicts the emergence of depression in partners which further destabilizes a marriage. Roberts and David (2022) also note that the interruptions and distractions occasioned by partner phubbing results in conflict which play a significant role in decreasing the quality of the relationship and partner satisfaction. The foregoing discussion centers on the effect of partner phubbing on communication, marital intimacy, emotional connection, conflict, and shared values.

Partner Phubbing and Couple Communication. When the smartphone receives more attention than the present person, the perceived expectations of communication etiquette are broken (Huston et al., 2021). Interpersonal communication among married couples is meant that couples should choose to converse and exchange messages to connect and gain understanding from each other (Burgin, 2019). The social idea of

relaying and receiving messages is undermined when two communicators elect to use their mobile phones, relaying a nonverbal message of disinterest and rejection (Mendes et al., 2020). When a spouse is more focused on his/her mobile phone as opposed to engaging in a conversation with the other spouse, it sends a message of lack of interest or disengagement (Huston et al., 2021). Several contemporary studies by Ahlstrom et al., (2019); Denes et al., (2020); Finkel et al., (2020); Wang et al., (2022) have suggested that this may contribute to misunderstandings, frustration, and a sense of not being valued, particularly when the phubbed partner fails to acknowledge the other's need for attention

A study done by Hendrick et al. (2019) argued that effective communication in relationships goes beyond words and is concerned with eye contact and body language. The act of partner phubbing limits the potential to engage in these nonverbal communication forms, which are very critical in getting to understand a partner's emotional condition (Sim et al., 2019). Getting distracted by a mobile phone during a couple's conversation causes one partner to miss crucial emotional cues from the other, and this may cause misinterpretations of the behavior or disengagement from the relationship (Taggart et al., 2019). According to Kadylak et al. (2020), when an individual uses or checks his/her smartphone during a face-to-face interaction, the expectations of face-to-face communication etiquette are violated. Bouffard et al., (2021) assert that this behavior goes against the norm of being attentive or providing the expected nonverbal and verbal cues that indicate that one is interested and available to take part in the very important marital social exchange

Partner phubbing takes away the ability of marital partners to listen and respond to their spouses and this eliminates any possibility of communicating effectively

(Bouffard et al., 2021). The non-contractual interaction between the two partners is compromised as they constantly ignore their partner in favor of their mobile phone (Sim et al., 2019). The social norms of a relationship are built over time through patterns and expectations (Denes et al., 2020). When a couple fails to meet these patterns and expectations, the partners will feel that the social contract is bridged and violated by their spouses, occasioning damage to the relationship (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2021). Consequently, it has been found that partner phubbing behavior undermines effective couple communication leading to insecurities, conflict, and diminished relationship satisfaction (Halpern & Katz, 2019; McDaniel & Coyne, 2021; Roberts & David, 2021; Wang et al., 2022).

Being phubbed by a marital partner distracts and interrupts the communication expectancies. For instance, during the COVID-19 lockdown of 2019-2020, social media applications witnessed an upsurge in use among couples by 80%, and 47% of couples complained of diminished partner connection, intimacy, and relationship quality because of partner phubbing during the lockdown (Lisitsa et al., 2020). Overall, direct and indirect communication is a very crucial aspect of any successful marital relationship. According to Johnson et al. (2021), couple communication facilitates the relationship in minimizing misunderstandings, strengthening the bond and enabling the other spouse to reciprocate and express feelings to the other.

It has been established that interpersonal communication creates an effective bond that can only be perpetuated through the sharing of one's feelings, viewpoints, and interpretations of shared moments (Bylund et al., 2021; (Lapierre & Custer, 2021). A study by McDaniel and Coyne (2021) established that partner phubbing behavior enabled

by social media use hurts face-to-face contact and communications sparking jealousy and stalking behaviors. Tandon et al. (2021) concluded that phone use hurts interpersonal communication due to the lost personal connection that face-to-face interactions provide. In the same regard, Arikewuyo et al. (2022) note that social media usage in the presence of a partner is a distraction to couples, irrespective of the duration each couple has been together, and how frequently they use their smartphones. The distraction creates distance, jealousy, and conflict between couples and ultimately destabilizes the relationship (Tandon et al., 2021).

Partner phubbing situations evidenced by a mix of lack of eye contact, motionless body, or mechanical intonations discourage any meaningful conversations. It has been stated that individual experiencing partner phubbing tend to cope with this passive condition by fighting fire with the fire type of response by similarly reciprocating the same behavior, meaning that there is a tendency of partner phubbing to be a vicious cycle of self-reinforcement (Togar et al., 2023). In overall, the behavior of partner phubbing may occasion profound negative impact on communication among marital partners. It compromises direct conversations, emotional intimacy, and relationship satisfaction, and may also lead to incessant conflict situations and mental health challenges. Therefore, to sustain healthy communication, it is critical that partners are mindful of cellphone usage, prioritize face-to-face interactions, and promote open conversations regarding how the mobile phone influences the quality of their communication and relationship. By so doing, couples in a marital arrangement may enhance their connection and control the harmful influences of partner phubbing (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2023).

Effective Communication

Partner phubbing disrupts communication, both verbal and non-verbal (Huston et al., 2021). When one partner is distracted by their phone, it's harder for them to actively listen, empathize, or engage in meaningful conversation (Hendrick et al., 2019). This communication breakdown can be a hindrance for partners to get to fully understand the feelings and needs of each other and this weakens their emotional connection (Beukeboom & Pollmann, 2021). For instance, when a partner attempts to share an important issue be it a concern, a problem, or an accomplishment, but is confronted with distracted responses or lack of response, they can stop opening up, causing emotional disconnection (Alipour et al., 2020). Such behavior can erode the trust and openness that are foundational to a strong emotional connection (Hendrick et al., 2019).

According to Ippolito (2020), partners who openly share, relay clear messages, listen keenly, understand conveyed messages and respond in an honest way have a higher likelihood of having a stable relationship that meets the expectations of both partners and maintains relational satisfaction (Ippolito, 2020). With the use of cell phones and the internet, the quality of relations in marriage has diminished (Holt-Lundstad et al., 2021). This disconnection is associated with reduced face-to-face interactions and many hours spent online and on cell phones. Higher online mobile phone use implies less time and attention to one's spouse (Yam & Ilhan, 2020). In order to foster emotional bonds and have marital satisfaction, partners need to give their full attention to their significant other (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016).

Partner Phubbing and Marital Conflict Resolution.Marital conflicts describe the disagreements, tensions, or disputes that may be experienced by marital partners

(Lenhart & Duggan, 2021). In the context of this study, one of the key consequences of partner phubbing behavior is the feeling of neglect. This implies that when a spouse is frequently distracted by their cell phone during couple conversations or interactions, the other can experience feelings of rejection, making him/her feel unworthy, unvalued, or unimportant (Vanden Abeele et al., 2020). As a result of this emotional neglect, resentment and frustration sets in. With time and consistent partner phubbing, those feelings may graduate into major conflicts, as the phubbed spouse may start to express dissatisfaction or seek to resolve this using confrontational approaches (Vazquez et al., 2019).

Any healthy relationship is founded on effective communication and partner phubbing undermines this critical relationship element (Huston et al., 2021). When a spouse gets distractions from their urge to frequently use his/her cell phone during couple interactions, the ability to fully listen or engage in the conversation is undermined (Alipour et al., 2020). This may cause misunderstandings, weaken the marital bond, and may lead to feelings of isolation (Champiri & Dehghani, 2023). When the partner phubbing behavior is continuous and consistent, the spouse who is being phubbed may become increasingly frustrated, believing that their attempts to be heard and listened to are being dismissed. The consequence is communication breakdowns and unresolved concerns may surface as conflict (Parise et al., 2019).

According to Johnson et al. (2021), partner phubbing may also create power struggles within a marital relationship. The partner who is perpetrating the partner phubbing behavior may unconsciously indicate that their cell phone is more valuable as opposed to the needs of their partner. This may be viewed as a form of control, where a

spouse asserts dominance over the interaction (Tabassum, 2023). As a reaction, the phubbed partner can feel inferior, a situation that may cause resentment and a heightened chance of conflict (Hendrick et al., 2019). This situation may can develop into a cycle of control and revenge, as both partners become exceedingly dissatisfied with the other's conduct (Taggart, et al., 2019).

Additionally, marital conflict may develop when there is a perceived lack of balance in priorities (Huston et al., 2021). When a spouse is consistently on their smartphone as the other is seeking connection, the partner being distracted by the cell phone may appear to put priority on the digital interactions as opposed to their relationship (Lenhart & Duggan, 2021). This may trigger insecurity or jealousy feelings, particularly when the phubbed partner considers the cell phone as a source of distraction away from critical relationship matters (Vazquez et al., 2019). These misplaced and competing priorities may foster arguments over time management, expectations, and the significance of shared activities (Asuquo et al., 2021). Moreover, the partner phubbing behavior may exacerbate small issues in a relationship (Vazquez et al., 2019). For instance, a minor disagreement regarding responsibilities or daily routines in the relationship may escalate quickly when one partner feels ignored or attention is lacking during the conversation or in an attempt to address the matter (Tabassum, 2023).

To demonstrate the link between an increase in conflict between marital partners and partner phubbing, Wang and Zhao (2022) did a study where couples were asked to watch 4-minute scenario videos and position themselves in a situation where partner phubbing happened in three different places and events. They were then required to explain how they would feel if their spouses had phubbed them as the scenario actors had

done in the videos. The couples observed that from the videos, there was a perceived lack of partner responsiveness and a loss or lower intimacy. Some of the couples stated that they would be confrontational, and some said they would seek to retaliate and monitor or check their partners' phones.

From the study by Wang and Zhao (2022), it is clear that frequent occurrence of partner phubbing among couples has become a significant source of conflict in most marriages. Similarly, from studies by McDaniel and Coyne (2021) and Coyne et al. (2021), Jo Hemmings, a British behavioural psychologist and relationship coach, observes that partner phubbing causes resentment in marriage relationships. This results in conflicts and a complete breakdown of communication (Coyne et al., 2021). Evidently, because of the conflict occasioned by partner phubbing, the level of marital satisfaction keeps diminishing and eventually leads to fights in the relationships and at times to the breakdown of the relationship (Coyne et al., 2021). This demonstrates that constant phone use among couples undermines their quality of communication and presence for each other leading to conflicts that threaten their marital stability.

According to Schokkenbroek et al. (2022), marital relationships characterized by high partner phubbing prevalence have a higher risk and rate of electronic partner surveillance (EPS). This is a situation whereby a partner engages in surveilling the other's smartphone and social media activities (Schokkenbroek et al., 2022). It involves checking a partner's phone, social media accounts, text messages, or location without the other partner's consent. Electronic partner surveillance is frequently at its peak when a partner is experiencing partner phubbing, exhibits little to no interest in face-to-face interaction with their spouse, and is highly protective of their smartphone

(Schokkenbroek et al., 2022). Electronic partner surveillance frequently leads to marital conflict since it signals a lack of trust and a violation of personal space and autonomy.

When a partner is found surveilling or becomes aware they are being monitored, it may result in defensive behavior (Erzen et al., 2023). The one being surveilled can feel accused of wrongdoing, leading to unhealthy arguments and resentment. They can feel like they are under constant scrutiny, a situation that may result in increased conflict (Vanden Abeele et al., 2020). In some instances, EPS may be employed as a tool of control or manipulation (Karadağ et al., 2021). A partner may employ surveillance to assert dominance over the other, and this may make them feel powerless. This situation may escalate, causing intense conflicts over autonomy and fairness in the relationship (Vazquez et al., 2019).

Moreover, when marital partners cannot reach an agreement on what comprises an appropriate intent in social interactions via mobile phones, conflicts may arise (Duran et al., 2021). Partner phubbing in partner moments or conversations may frequently leave a partner feeling anxious, suspicious, and poor response from a partner phubbing partner may cause conflicts which end up decreasing marital satisfaction (Juhasz & Bradford, 2019). According to Schokkenbroek et al. (2022), EPS ends in conflict because the partner being phubbed may suffer increased anxiety and suspicion of their partner's infidelity. This is consistent with Birnbaum et al. (2022) who observes that when EPS is employed, it frequently emanates from feelings of jealousy or suspicion of dishonesty and infidelity. For instance, if a partner constantly checks the other's smartphone out of suspicion of infidelity, they may begin to interpret innocent texts as signs of wrongdoing.

This may result in baseless accusations, heightening tension, even when there is no actual betrayal (Lenhart & Duggan, 2021).

Oliveira (2020) sought to determine the relationship between mobile device usage and marital satisfaction in Missouri, USA. The study adopted a quantitative research design to assess cell phone use during wake time spent together with one's partner, relationship satisfaction, physical affection, and conflict associated with mobile device usage. The study targeted 234 married couples in an online survey related to these variables. Findings showed that relationship satisfaction was negatively correlated with cell phone usage during time spent together, conflict over mobile device usage, and interruption due to mobile devices. In addition, conflict over mobile device usage affected relationship satisfaction. Also, cellphone use was negatively correlated with physical affection.

Partner Phubbing and Emotional Connection. Emotional connection demands mutual validation and attention (Walter, 2020). However, with partner phubbing, messages are sent signaling that the partner is less important compared to a smartphone. With time, this may render the phubbed partner feel rejected, unvalued, and isolated emotionally (Pesando, 2022). For instance, a partner who is constantly phubbed may begin to feel that their emotional needs are not a priority (Tammisalo & Rotkirch, 2022). This may make the phubbed partner feel lonely, frustrated, and disconnected. Such a situation creates marital dissatisfaction and possibly eventual instability in the relationship (Walter, 2020). Couples must prioritise face-to-face interactions, exhibit mutual attention, and address smartphone usage during shared moments in order to sustain a strong emotional bond. It has been established that these proactive behaviors are

able to alleviate the detrimental consequences of partner phubbing and foster a more emotionally connected and robust relationship (Karadağ et al., 2021).

Partner Phubbing and Marital Intimacy.Many people marry for a variety of reasons, including sharing responsibilities or working towards similar goals. However, most people enter into the marital union to have a life partner with whom they may be intimate. According to Girgis et al. (2020), marital intimacy refers to the emotional, physical, and psychological closeness among partners in the marital union which maintains a deep bond and fortifies the connection between the partners. Marital intimacy encompasses the sharing of experiences, feelings, and physical love and this serves to develop trust, communication, and mutual understanding (Hagey et al., 2020). The authors continue to state that a marriage without intimacy has a high likelihood of falling apart; meaning that intimacy is an important aspect for successful marriages.

The key aspects of marital intimacy include emotional, physical, psychological, social, and spiritual intimacy (Schoenfeld et al., 2021). Emotional intimacy includes the sharing of personal feelings, thoughts, and insecurities with each other. It enables partners to associate to a deeper extent and these fosters trust and mutual support (Anisa, 2024). It is about feeling understood, valued, and cared for by a spouse. For instance, confiding in each other regarding concerns, fears, and goals, and also offering emotional support in tough times (Chamber & Gracia, 2021). Emotional intimacy can exist in romantic relationships, friendships, or even family bonds.

Physical intimacy is concerned with love, touch, and sexual closeness. This may comprise holding hands, fondling, hugging, kissing, cuddling, and sexual contact. This mostly serves to make couples feel more connected on a physiological level. For

instance, frequent showing and engaging in physical affection through hugs or kisses, or indulging in intimate activities that both partners find fulfilling (Hagey et al., 2020). These physical acts enhance a feeling of belonging and security, promoting a strong emotional bond. For instance, a warm cuddle after a challenging day or a spontaneous kiss may provide reassurance to partners that he/she is loved, esteemed, and supported emotionally (Girgis et al., 2020).

On the other hand, psychological intimacy comprises being intellectually connected, sharing viewpoints, and discussing ideas and perspectives in a manner that promotes respect and understanding (Alizadeh et al., 2019). It frequently involves varied conversations that permeate beyond everyday issues and delve into more important aspects of life like values, ambitions, and fears. For instance, having conversations regarding each other's beliefs, ambitions, or life goals and respecting opposing views devoid of judgment (Anisa, 2024). Social intimacy involves jointly sharing experiences like taking part in social activities or supporting each other in social contexts (Prager, 2020). This helps build a sense of partnership and enables couples to feel like they are operating in unison when exploring the world together (Hagey et al., 2020). This may include couples engaging in shared leisure activities, jointly attending events, or helping each other in social circles (Anisa, 2024).

Marital partners may hold differing perceptions of what intimacy is, where for instance intimacy may entail sexual interactions for most men, while for women, intimacy may entail both sexual and emotional connections (Schoenfeld et al., 2021). The scholar further noted that some women have argued that sexual satisfaction is substandard when a couple lacks emotional connection that can be enhanced through

effective face-to-face communication. It has also been established that many couples concur that intimacy levels get lower when the spouses fail to pay attention to each other (Przybylski et al., 2020). These observations imply that the use of mobile phones in couple moments can cause diminished intimacy levels in marriages (McDaniel & Coyne, 2021). It has been found that some marriages fail because of these intimacy issues associated with cell phone use (Schoenfeld et al., 2021).

The above observation is backed by Krasnova et al. (2021) who state that partner phubbing causes feelings of jealousy toward partners and consequently poor intimacy and poor marital satisfaction. The use of cell phones in a relationship or partner phubbing can be a problem in romantic relationships by increasing conflict and causing poor relationship satisfaction and marriage (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; Roberts & David, 2016). In addition, the presence of cell phones, especially when around a partner can interfere with closeness, connection, and conversation quality (Przybylski et al., 2020). This may lead to frustration and resentment that may bring about arguments and emotional distance. This demonstrates that frequent phubbing leads to decreased relationship satisfaction since it makes the ignored partner feel undervalued and lonely.

When there are emotional and communication issues because of partner phubbing behavior, a decline in physical intimacy may be experienced among the couples concerned (Przybylski et al., 2020). In the absence of emotional connection and mutual attention, there may be a reduction in physical affection indicators like kissing, hugging, or even sexual intimacy (Hagey et al., 2020). This is because, the emotional and physical elements of intimacy are intertwined, meaning that a reduction in one may contribute to a decline in the other (McDaniel & Coyne, 2021). It has been stated that with frequent

partner phubbing, a reduction in overall relationship satisfaction is witnessed among couples (Girgis et al., 2020). A spouse who feels ignored or demeaned may be less satisfied with the relationship, and this leads to further disconnection and a lack of intimacy. If the dissatisfaction persists in the longer term, there will be a weakened relationship, reduced emotional closeness, and even a breakdown in the relationship (Alizadeh et al., 2019).

Measures to Mitigate Partner Phubbing Among Married Couples

Having established that phubbing may gradually erode emotional intimacy in a marital relationship, making one or both partners feel neglected, couples can take intentional steps to rebuild their connection and prioritize each other. This requires conscious effort and communication (Balta et al., 2020). The discussion below presents some of the practical strategies that may be used to mitigate the effects of partner phubbing and enhance couple connections. This includes setting boundaries on phone use, enhancing communication techniques, practicing mindfulness and being present, addressing emotional impact, and seeking counselling services. The discussion below focuses on the actions that can be taken to mitigate partner phubbing.

Setting Boundaries on Phone Use. The boundaries may apply during a couple of moments, whereby phone-free times are designated during shared activities or when having meals (Abramova, 2021). The setting of boundaries may also include setting rules, such as putting cell phones away when having meals, conversations, or quality time, which may help prevent partner phubbing. For instance, agreeing to turn off or silence mobile phones during shared moments enhances attention to the present moment. By so doing, the partners can have healthier, more mindful interactions and minimize the

temptation to disengage with the spouse (Cameron, 2022). Couples can also agree on the specific times for checking their phone or social media, instead of regularly interrupting conversations (Zhu &Chen, 2023). By agreeing on the appropriate time to focus on their phone, for instance, checking messages after a meeting, couples will ensure that they do not phub during crucial or meaningful interactions, and this can foster better communication and connection in marital relationships (Al-Saggaf, 2019).

Enhancing Communication Techniques. In ineffective communication, couples should implement active listening techniques such as good eye contact, nodding, and responding thoughtfully to each other's opinions, since this is a demonstration of genuine interest and engagement (Fang et al., 2020). An open dialogue should be fostered to foster honest conversations regarding the feelings of each partner regarding phone use and its impact on the relationship (Franchina et al., 2021). Couples should work jointly to find practical solutions that both partners are comfortable with. This may comprise setting limitations on cell phone use or coming up with alternative means to stay connected (Hadar et al., 2019). By maintaining open and honest communication, couples can effectively address partner phubbing and prevent it from undermining their relationship (Karadağ et al., 2021).

Practicing Mindfulness and Being Present. According to Du Plooy and De Beer (2019), marital couples should exercise good communication skills and problem-solving skills to resolve their partner phubbing-related problems and increase marital satisfaction. According to this observation, it is stated that couples who are more attached to their cell phone devices lack good communication skills and suffer from high rates of reduced marital satisfaction (Krasnova et al., 2019). Practicing mindfulness and being present

during interactions may help partners avoid the temptation of checking their phones (McDaniel & Coyne, 2021). Establishing certain areas in the home where phones are not allowed, including the dining table or bedroom, will also help enhance undistracted interaction (McDaniel & Drouin, 2019). Daily. Couples can also plan frequent activities that are cell phone free, such as going for a walk, playing together, or cooking together (Nazir & Bulut, 2019). Couples can rebuild emotional intimacy and strengthen their bond by prioritizing face-to-face interactions (Park, 2019).

Addressing Emotional Impact. Couples can also address concerns regarding partner phubbing openly with their partners to ensure both feel heard and respected (Al-Saggaf, 2019). They can express their feelings by sharing how partner phubbing makes them feel without apportioning blame. The "I" statements should be employed in conveying their emotions, like "I feel neglected when you keep checking your smartphone when we are talking" (Cameron, 2022). Couples should provide specific instances by illustrating the behavior with specific examples to enable a partner to understand the impact (Karadağ et al., 2021). Therefore, couples should avoid making it look like a personal attack (Park, 2019). They should highlight the emotional impact by explaining how partner phubbing affects their sense of connection and emotional intimacy. Emphasis should be laid on the goal, which is to strengthen the relationship (Zhu &Chen, 2023).

Additionally, making intentional efforts to prioritize having uninterrupted time together, for instance, going on dates or engaging in shared hobbies, can mitigate the impact of partner phubbing on relationships (Nazir & Bulut, 2019). Secondly, the couple can establish occasions for discussing and addressing conflicts without distractions,

which may help resolve issues more efficiently. This requires that partners focus on each other's perspectives and jointly find mutually satisfying solutions (McDaniel & Coyne, 2021). The partners can also promote emotional availability during discussions, particularly when addressing sensitive issues. This helps in preventing misunderstandings and negative reactions (Shu & Chen, 2023). Making a conscious effort to remain emotionally connected, as opposed to resorting to the phone as an escape, may stabilize the relationship and enhance seamless conflict resolution (Hadar et al., 2019).

Seeking Counselling Services. Couples are also encouraged to seek professional counseling services when partner phubbing becomes a persistent concern in the relationship and hinders conflict resolution (Vanden-Abeele et al., 2020). Also, professional counselors or therapists may offer a safe environment for exploring the underlying reasons that foster partner phubbing behaviors, which may include anxiety, social media addiction, or communication challenges (Balta et al., 2020). Therefore, counseling can help couples to learn and improve communication skills, adopt healthy boundaries about phone use, and develop practical strategies for handling technology in relationships (Vazquez et al., 2019). For couples that feel neglected or ignored through partner phubbing, professional therapy may be helpful in facilitating the processing of feelings of hurt or frustration, causing improved emotional understanding between partners (Erzen et al., 2023). Overall, therapy is an effective mechanism for addressing the emotional and relational effects of partner phubbing, promoting more meaningful connections and healthier interactions in this digital era (Deane et al., 2020).

In conclusion, partner phubbing presents very detrimental impacts on marital conflict resolution and marital satisfaction. By focusing attention away from each other

during critical moments of communication, partner phubbing exacerbates conflicts, lowers emotional intimacy, and undermines trust (Karadağ et al., 2021). In order to maintain a stable marriage and effective conflict resolution, couples need to acknowledge the effects of partner phubbing and make a conscious decision to prioritize face-to-face sharing and connection, active listening, and emotional connection (Franchina et al., 2021). By setting limits on phone usage and being available for each other during conflicts, a more supportive and harmonious relationship will be fostered among couples (Hadar et al., 2019). Overall, the effects of partner phubbing will be mitigated and relationships stabilized even as the phone continues to be a critical device enabling communication in this digital age (Erzen et al., 2023).

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is a structure that articulates the theory or theories related to the research problem being investigated (Mensah et al., 2020). On the other hand, a theory is a collection of strong assumptions that describe an occurrence, and the assumptions are a result of a series of scientific study outcomes. It is an explanation or model premised on research, observations, or justifications, particularly those that have undergone testing and been embraced as a general principle to offer explanations and assumptions regarding a given phenomenon (Rouf et al., 2020). A theory helps illuminate an aspect that a researcher is investigating to help gain a clearer understanding of the research process. This study was anchored on two theories namely attachment theory and media dependency theory.

Attachment Theory

John Bowlby established attachment theory in 1969. The theory was devised in an effort to comprehend the profound distress experienced by infants. The theory was employed to simulate the experience of being separated from caregivers or parents (Prunaset al, 2021). In addition, Bowlby's observations in England during the period of wartime separation of children from their families had an impact on the development of the theory (Newcombe & Lerner, 1982). Bowlby was of the opinion that children who are denied their fundamental socio-emotional and relational requirements will likely develop deficiencies in their relationships as they mature.

The primary idea regarding this theory is that individuals develop attachments with each other, which grow and are fortified over time based on their experience with attachment figures in the relationship (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2023). The theory views attachment as a deep emotional attachment formed between individuals. It assures a sense of security that enables individuals to explore their environment as well as a source of security and comfort (Choate & Tortorelli, 2022). The attachment or bond, which from the view of attachment theory is known as ‘proximity’, reduces loneliness, anxiety, fear, and related kinds of distress, enabling people to live harmoniously (Borawski et al, 2021).

Attachment theory offers an important platform for understanding the dynamics and impact of partner phubbing behavior, where a partner snubs or ignores another in favor of a mobile phone within the context of marital relationships. Firstly, attachment theory relates to partner phubbing through attachment styles (Mosley & Parker, 2023). In the context of this study, partners that have secure attachment styles are largely very resilient to negative conduct such as partner phubbing. They have a strong sense of self-

esteem and are confident in the reliability of their spouses (Mendez, 2023). The behavior of partner phubbing may occasion minor discomfort. However, securely attached partners are likely to resolve the matter constructively. For instance, a securely attached partner may elect to openly talk about their feelings regarding partner phubbing devoid of any feeling of being overwhelmingly feeling threatened by the behavior (David & Roberts, 2021).

On the other hand,individuals who are anxiously attached are very sensitive to behaviors that they consider an indication of being rejected or snubbed (Mosley & Parker, 2023). Therefore, when subjected to partner phubbing, their fear of abandonment and insecurity will be exacerbated, consequently making them experience heightened anxiety, dissatisfaction, and emotional distress. For instance, an anxiously attached spouse might experience feelings of being extremely neglected, hurt, or rejected by being snubbed in favor of a digital device, and this may lead to increased emotional reactions and marital conflicts (Vivacqua, 2023).

Similarly, individuals with avoidant attachment styles may be less overtly impacted by partner phubbing behavior, as they may have already adopted an emotional distance. However, prolonged and excessive partner phubbing can still evoke feelings of disconnection, potentially reinforcing their tendency towards avoidance (Allred, 2020). For instance, a spouse who has an avoidant attachment style may withdraw further or become more emotionally unreachable as a reaction to suffering partner phubbing, considering it as validation of their need for independence (David & Roberts, 2021). Moreover, individuals that have disorganized attachment styles can feel confused and suffer increased distress levels as a response to being phubbed. This attachment style is

indicated by inconsistent or ambivalent responses, which may be worsened by the unforeseeable nature of the partner's phubbing behavior. For instance, a spouse who has disorganized attachment may respond to partner phubbing with confusion and disappointment, potentially causing erratic or conflicted reactions to being phubbed or snubbed in favor of a mobile device (Borawski et al, 2021).

Partner phubbing and attachment theory intersect in explaining how technology-driven distractions can undermine emotional closeness and satisfaction in relationships (David & Roberts, 2021). Frequent phone use during interactions can signal disinterest, leading to feelings of neglect or rejection from one's partner. Attachment styles play a crucial role in how individuals engage in or respond to phubbing behaviors (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2023). For instance, those with anxious attachment may feel more distressed when ignored, while avoidant individuals might resort to phubbing as a form of emotional withdrawal. Understanding these dynamics enables couples to recognize and manage the emotional impact of technology on their relationships. Consequently, addressing attachment-related communication patterns can foster stronger emotional bonds and more fulfilling partnerships (Vivacqua, 2023).

Attachment theory relates to attachment security and relationship quality, whereby secure attachments lead to superior relationship quality by promoting trust, emotional proximity, and effective communication (Rodríguez-González et al., 2023). Therefore, the partner phubbing act may undermine these important elements of a harmonious relationship by causing distance and lowering the significant face-to-face interaction, hence diminishing the quality of a marital relationship (Sun & Samp, 2022). For instance, consistent and prolonged partner phubbing may cause diminished intimacy

and trust, consequently lowering the overall satisfaction in the relationship and heightening the chance of conflicts that undermine the stability of the union (Bröning & Wartberg, 2022).

Overall, attachment theory is helpful in explaining how partner phubbing behavior influences marital satisfaction (David & Roberts, 2021). For securely attached partners, the impact may be moderate and hence may be resolved through effective communication (Pollmann et al., 2020). In addition, the insecurely attached partners may experience a significant reduction in satisfaction because of their unmet emotional needs (Guzmán-González et al., 2020). The securely attached partner, for instance, may work through issues occasioned by partner phubbing with open communication, compared to the anxiously attached partner, who may suffer heightened dissatisfaction levels and distress (Mantere, 2022).

Getting to understand the role of attachment can be instrumental in informing interventions geared to addressing the effects of partner phubbing (Kanaganayagam, 2024). Therapists or counselors who focus on enhancing attachment security and communication can be helpful in mitigating the negative influences of the partner phubbing engagement (Mosley & Parker, 2023). Couples therapy, for instance, may focus on improving responsiveness and emotional bond, assisting marital partners to get to know and address the effect of partner phubbing on their union (Peleg & Boniel-Nissim, 2024).

The theory of attachment provides important insights into how partner phubbing, a situation where a marital partner snubs the other partner in favor of a mobile device, impacts on satisfaction in marriage. Individuals form internal working models based on

the attachment experiences they had early in life, which play a significant part in shaping what they expect to have or see and how they conduct themselves in relationships (Jarvis, 2022). If an individual is insecurely attached-anxious or avoidant attachment styles, they can be very sensitive to negative relational behaviors such as partner phubbing and can be a threat to their sense of security and connection (Guzmán-González et al., 2020). For instance, a spouse who is anxiously attached may perceive the partner phubbing behavior as an indication of rejection or absence of love, contributing to heightened anxiety and marital dissatisfaction (Mantere, 2022).

Equally, attachment styles influence patterns of communication in relationships and therefore partner phubbing can worsen the existing communication challenges or create new ones, especially for insecurely attached individuals who might already be struggling with effective communication (Sharma & Dutt, 2024). This is particularly so when partner phubbing contributes to disagreements and conflict due to a lack of attention and connection (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2023). Overall, the relevance of attachment theory in this study is based on the fact that it offers a framework for understanding the impact of partner phubbing on marital satisfaction by looking at how various styles of attachment react to and are impacted by being neglected in favor of a digital device. It underscores the significance of effective communication, emotional responsiveness, and attachment safety in delimiting the negative influences of partner phubbing behavior and maintaining satisfaction in relationships.

Media Dependency Theory

Media dependence theory shows how mass media affect audiences and how media outlets, audiences, and the environment interact (Melki & Kozman, 2023).

American researchers Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976) introduced the hypothesis. The media hypothesis suggests that people use it for knowledge and emotional support (Shensa et al., 2020). Media influences people more when they rely on it for their requirements (Cao & Yu, 2020). The notion suggests that media resources affect a person's capacity to achieve goals (Knoll et al., 2020). Their behaviour and reality may be affected by this reliance. In addition, it defines dependence as relying on another's resources to meet one's wants and goals (Zhang & Zhong, 2020). Since the idea focuses on media and audiences, one's media reliance depends on their aims and resources (Cao & Yu, 2020).

Hence, media dependency theory examines the links between media, audiences, and society, focusing on mass media information dependence (Cho, 2021). According to the notion, media consumers get information from numerous media providers (Sheng et al., 2023). Media use for information purposes increases as society becomes more complex (Nisar et al., 2020). Individual objectives affect media dependency type and severity (Shensa et al., 2020). Media dependence type and severity can alter emotional, cognitive, and behavioural outcomes (Liu et al., 2023). Ambiguity and resolution are cognitive effects of media reliance (Cao & Yu, 2020). This is especially important during societal instability or crisis since media dependence rises and declines with ambiguity resolution (Melki & Kozman, 2023).

The media dependence theory shows how the media influences people's behaviour directly and indirectly (Zhang & Hung, 2021). The idea explains the psychological and cognitive processes that promote the media effect (Al-Samarraie et al., 2022). One of the theory's three basic points is that the media provides information

people need to make decisions and comprehend the world (Melki & Kozman, 2023). The second component states that media offers emotional support and a sense of belonging, while the third states that media grows increasingly potent in altering attitudes and behaviour (Xiao et al., 2024). Finally, as individuals rely more on media for knowledge, social contact, and emotional support, their attachment to digital gadgets grows (Zheng et al., 2024).

As individuals become increasingly dependent on social media, this leads to continuous and extended partner phubbing (Sansevere & Ward, 2021). This is because individuals are prioritising online relationships above face-to-face social engagements. According to Drouin and McDaniel (2021), partner phubbing is a direct consequence of the tendency to rely on media, which has an effect on interpersonal interactions. Jarvis (2022) further argues that those who are dependent on their mobile devices may inadvertently exclude others. According to Sansevere and Ward (2021), the idea of media dependence helps explain why individuals place a higher priority on online interactions. Primarily, since their mobile devices supply them with knowledge, emotional support, and social connections all at the same time.

When a partner heavily relies on his/her phone for information, social interactions, or entertainment, this dependency may lead to reduced attention and emotional unavailability in the marriage. When a marital partner heavily depends on the phone, it may lead to feelings of neglect by the other partner, and this may impact marital satisfaction. Media dependency theory indicates that the more individuals rely on media to satisfy their needs, the higher the chances they are likely to place first priority on media usage over other engagements, especially their primary relationships.

In the context of partner phubbing, when a marital partner uses their mobile phone to satisfy the need for social interaction or entertainment, they might inadvertently place their priority on the phones over face-to-face interactions with their partner. Furthermore, the theory indicates that individuals turn to the media for social support. When, for instance, a marital partner relies on their phone to fulfill their need for social interactions as opposed to direct interactions with their spouse, it may cause feelings of isolation or absence of support within the marriage relation, and marital satisfaction is affected as a result.

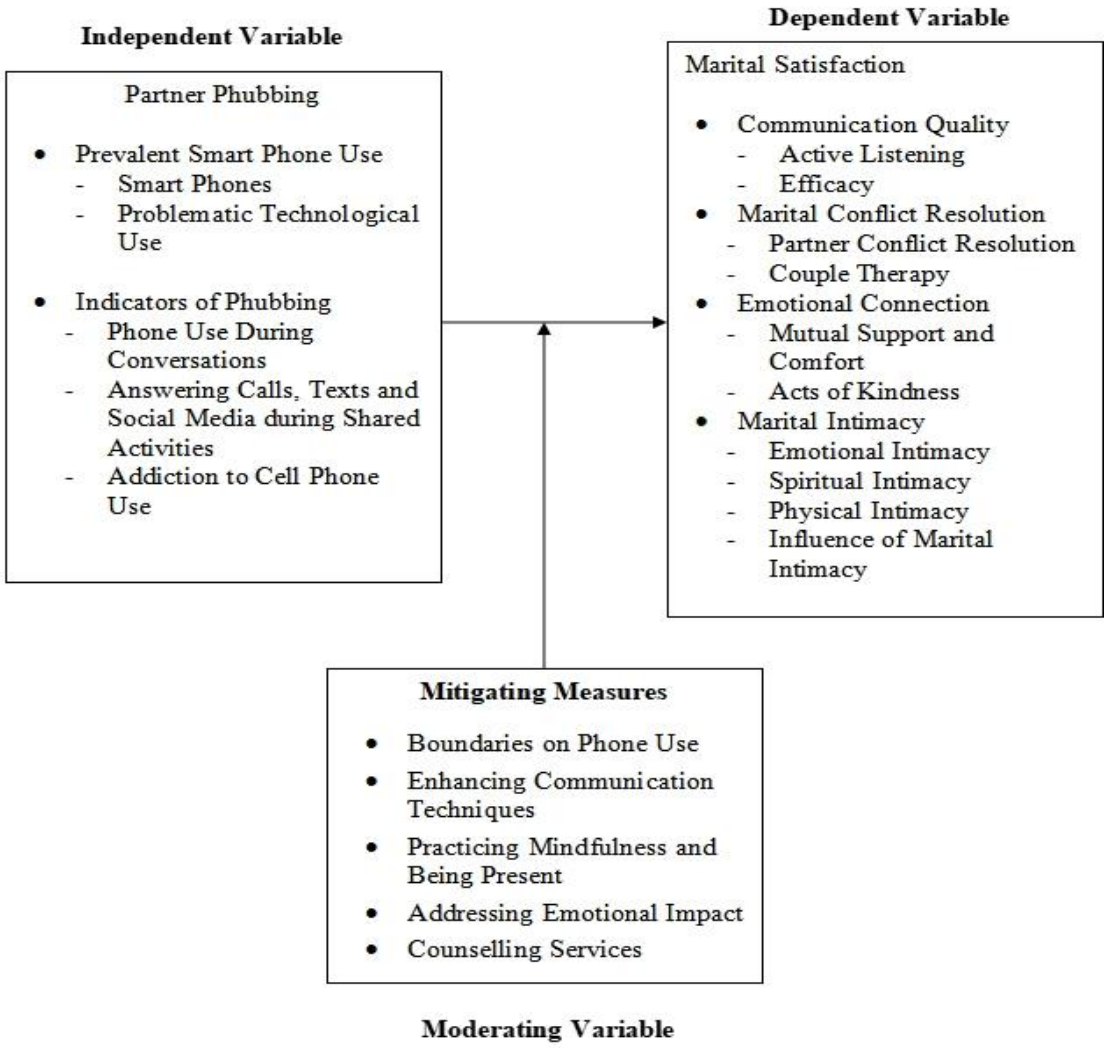
By applying media dependency theory, the investigator in the current study was able to explore various dynamics in the partner phubbing context, including the effect of partner phubbing on communication, the prevalence of partner phubbing influenced by dependency on a mobile phone, and emotional consequences of partner phubbing. In exploring how media dependency influences patterns of communication in a marital setting, the researcher was able to understand whether intensive dependency on the media is related to a decrease in face-to-face interactions and reduced marital satisfaction. Also, in exploring how dependent marital partners are on their mobile phone devices, the researcher would be able to tell how this dependency affects their relationship. For instance, whether a partner's high dependency on his/her mobile phone contributes to much more constant and prolonged partner phubbing behaviors and reduced marital satisfaction as a consequence.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a structured representation outlining the key constructs and concepts explaining the relationship between them. It offers a theoretical

foundation that governs the research activities and helps in organizing and interpreting research (Okesina, 2020). The study's conceptual framework is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: Researcher (2025)

The conceptual framework shows partner phubbing as the independent variable of the study, while marital satisfaction is depicted as the dependent variable. From the perspective of a marital relationship, partner phubbing includes ignoring or neglecting a partner in favor of phone usage or any digital device (Rahtikawati & Ratnasih, 2021). This may include spending time receiving or making calls, texting, or browsing social

media during partner conversations in the presence of a spouse, and addiction to cell phone use (McDaniel & Coyne, 2022). This behavior has the potential to generate discomfort for the other partner, resulting in a tense and challenging relationship for instance when a partner is absorbed in their mobile phone instead of paying attention to their companion, it can disrupt talks leading to conflicts that may occasion marital dissatisfaction (Lenhart & Duggan, 2021).

Marital satisfaction which defines the extent of contentment and happiness a partner has in a marriage includes emotional, sexual, and relational fulfillment (Sobral et al., 2022). The indicators of marital satisfaction include communication quality, shared values and goals, marital conflict resolution effectiveness, emotional connection, and marital intimacy (Bilal & Rasool, 2020). Marital dissatisfaction is directly linked to increased levels of partner phubbing (Zaheri et al., 2019). As a spouse indulges more frequently in partner phubbing, the other spouse feels neglected, leading to a decline in marital satisfaction. This implies that constant partner phubbing by a partner may significantly undermine the quality of conversations, frequently indicating that the smartphone holds a higher place than the partner (Flicker et al., 2020).

The moderating variable in the study is mitigating measures, which include strategies aimed at reducing the negative impact of partner phubbing on marital satisfaction (Abramova, 2021). These measures involve setting boundaries on phone use to limit distractions, enhancing communication techniques to foster better interaction between partners, practicing mindfulness to stay present and attentive in the relationship, and addressing the emotional impact to ensure that both partners feel valued and heard (Cameron, 2022; Fang et al., 2020; Karadağ et al., 2021; Zhu & Chen, 2023).

Synthesis of Literature Gaps

Generally speaking, while the reviewed studies provide valuable insights into the effects of partner phubbing on relationship dynamics, all of them have been conducted exclusively in countries outside Kenya and there this presents not only a geographical gap but also a lack of empirical literature with local relevance and context-specific data and this limits the generalizability in a broader scope. The following studies exemplify this. The study by Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas (2023) focused on the effects of partner phubbing on social interaction. The participants were required to view a three-minute animation depicting a conversation between two people. They were asked to imagine themselves as one of the people in the animation. The study presents a methodological and contextual gap since it did not involve married couples as the current study does.

The studies by Taggart et al. (2019) and Denes et al. (2020), conducted in the USA, were qualitative studies that focused on heterosexual couples to investigate the importance of good communication in marriage. This creates a methodological and contextual gap that the current study addressed. Alipour et al. (2020), conducted in Iran, focused on healthy discussions between partners as a predictor of marital success and satisfaction. The independent variable in this study was communication skills, while the dependent variable was marital satisfaction. This creates both a conceptual and geographical gap that the current study addresses by including partner phubbing as an independent variable.

Thabassum (2021) assessed the partner phubbing phenomenon by conducting a literature review of the effects of mobile phone use. The study used secondary data,

meaning that it presents a methodological gap since it did not collect any primary data to arrive at its findings. Rahtikawati and Ratnasih (2021) studied mobile phone use, marital communication, and family happiness in Indonesia. The study presents a geographical, contextual, and conceptual gap since it involved an Indonesian population, was not specific on partner phubbing through the mobile phone, and did not focus on married couples. Although it focused on partner phubbing, Cizmeci's (2020) study was conducted in Turkey, and its dependent variable was relationship satisfaction and not specific to marital satisfaction. This creates a geographical and contextual gap.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a critical review of both empirical and theoretical literature. The empirical literature review has spanned: the prevalence of partner phubbing, marital satisfaction among married couples, the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction, and mitigating measures. The chapter has also explained the theoretical framework and provided the conceptual framework. The chapter ended with a synthesis of the literature review and identification of the research gaps. The next chapter discusses the methodology that was used.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter details the research methods and approaches that were applied to address the research problem and meet the research objectives. The chapter commences with the philosophical paradigm that drove the investigation. Thereafter, the study's research design is discussed as well as the target population and the sampling technique that was adopted. Furthermore, the section on the instruments of data collection is explained. Reliability and validity testing procedures are detailed, and the pretesting procedure for the research tools is intended to guarantee the reliability of the research instruments in answering the research questions. Subsequently, the data analysis methods are proposed and explained, and the chapter closes with a discussion on the ethical principles that the study observed in all its phases.

Research Paradigm

This inquiry was driven by a pragmatism philosophy, which allows researchers to employ mixed research methodologies, enabling the researcher to address the research problem comprehensively (Hancock et al, 2021). Instead of assigning positivism and constructivism to two various ontological and epistemological camps, pragmatism requires that the researcher focus on the two different approaches to an investigation (Molina-Azorin & Fetters, 2020). It has further been stated that pragmatism is a methodological approach that permits the blending of paradigms, approaches, and data collection methods and analysis towards solving a socially situated problem (Nakaziba & Namuguzi, 2022). It has also been stated that a pragmatism approach is beneficial when employing a single research approach may fail to capture the entire problem (Dawadi,

2021), and this is the reason why a pragmatism philosophy drove the current study. Pragmatists place priority on practical results and solutions, and that they blend both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, emphasizing what works best to address the problem being investigated as opposed to strictly adopting the use of a single approach (Ansell & Arjen, 2020). Therefore, the pragmatism philosophy was behind the adoption of the mixed research design that was employed in this inquiry.

Research Design

This study adopted a convergent mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction among married couples in Nakuru County, Kenya. Mixed-methods research combines the strengths of quantitative and qualitative approaches while minimizing the limitations associated with using a single method (Mulisa, 2022). The convergent-parallel design allowed for the simultaneous collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Through this design, the researcher was able to compare and integrate findings from both data sources. This approach enhanced the credibility of the findings by enabling the triangulation of results from different forms of data.

The quantitative component involved the use of structured questionnaires and standardized tools to collect numerical data on the prevalence of partner phubbing and levels of marital satisfaction among married couples. The qualitative component involved key informant interviews aimed at obtaining deeper insights into participants' experiences and perspectives regarding partner phubbing. Through probing questions,

participants were able to explain how smartphone distractions influence communication and satisfaction within their marriages. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enabled a richer and more contextual interpretation of the research problem. Mixed-methods research is particularly valuable because it supports both statistical analysis and detailed exploration of participants' lived experiences (Dawadi et al., 2021).

Given that the study aimed to establish the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction, a correlational research design was applied in the quantitative data analysis. This approach enabled the researcher to examine the degree and direction of association between the two variables under investigation (Payne, 2022). Correlational analysis also allows researchers to determine whether variations in one variable are associated with variations in another without manipulating the variables involved (Roberts, 2021). The design was therefore appropriate for examining the natural relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction among married couples. Based on this approach, Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables.

Target Population

Population in research describes the entire collection of individuals that hold common characteristics (s) relevant to a specific investigation (Shukla, 2020). It is a specific group of cases, units, or individuals the investigator is interested in, and the research outcome may be generalized (Hancock et al., 2021). It includes all the individuals that satisfy a certain criterion related to the research variables (Bordersn & Abbot, 2022). It has been asserted that it is important to understand the study population since this helps in defining the scope and applicability of the outcome from the inquiry

beyond the sample used in a study (Casteel &Bridier, 2021). It has further been indicated that the population characteristics are helpful in influencing the research design to be adopted in an investigation, besides the sampling approaches and data collection tools (Mulisa, 2022). In this study, married couples worshipping in selected churches of Nakuru sub-counties were the target population. The churches include St. Francis Xavier Catholic in Naivasha, AIC Milimani, Nakuru, AIC Kimugul in Kuresoi South, PCEA Church in Molo, PCEA Subukia town church, AIC Njoro town, Rongai ACK Church, Sirikwa AIC, Pentecostal Church in Kaptembwo, St Augustine Church Bahati, and PCEA Gilgil.

According to the 2019 Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), Nakuru County is divided into 11 administrative sub-counties with a total of 616,046 married couples. According to Nakuru County's Statistical Abstract (2022), the people residing in Nakuru County are multi-ethnic, with all tribes in Kenya significantly represented. The married couples in the constituency engage in various sectors of employment, comprising formal jobs in education, healthcare, and services, and also in informal sector jobs including trading and small businesses. The income levels of the couples living in Nakuru County vary broadly, with some couples earning their living from stable employment and others relying on informal or seasonal income sources (Nakuru County Statistical Abstract, 2022).

Nakuru County was targeted because it has a demographically diverse population comprising various ethnic groups, age ranges, and socio-economic backgrounds, which allowed a comprehensive examination of how partner phubbing affects various segments of the population. Besides, the county includes both urban and rural areas, which can

provide an understanding of how partner phubbing behaviors vary across various contexts. This ensured diversity in the sample size of the study and also implies that the findings of the study may be applicable to married couples from other constituencies in the country. The County is subdivided into 11 sub-counties and 55 wards. The Kenya Census of 2019 established that at the time, Nakuru County's population was 2,046,395, comprising of 1,026,924 males and 1,019,471 females. Table 1 illustrates the study's population per sub-county.

Table 1: Target Population

Nakuru County sub-counties	Population	Percentage of total
Naivasha	117,633	19
Njoro	61,271	10
Rongai	52,348	8
Nakuru Town West	64,481	10
Nakuru Town East	61,398	10
Gilgil	58,920	9
Molo	41,462	7
Kuresoi North	40,359	7
Kuresoi South	34,627	6
Bahati	61,728	10
Subukia	21,819	4
Total	616,046	100

Source: KNBS (2019)

Sample Size

A sample size is the number of people or observations chosen from the target population from which data is gathered (Lakens, 2022). Researchers rely on a sample to make inferences since it is often impractical or impossible to study an entire population. The sample size has been described as a critical research element since it influences the reliability and validity of the investigative outcomes (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). A sample is also important in determining how sufficiently representative it is of the target population from which it is selected (Bolarinwa, 2022). Researchers have established that the larger a sample size is, the higher the precision of findings and also the higher the power of statistical measures are (Rahman et al., 2022).

It has been cautioned that a sample size must be carefully chosen using scientific sampling methods to minimize biases (Ahmed, 2024). The sample size is also influenced by the level of confidence, whereby bigger levels of confidence for instance 95% call for a bigger size of the sample in order to minimize uncertainty (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020). When the target population isdiverse and has variabilities like that of the current study, a bigger sample is required so to accurately capture the variabilities (Kimalu & Marimba, 2021).

In this study, the researcher applied the Fisher formula, which is particularly helpful when the researcher seeks to determine a sample size from a population that is finite (Hasan & Kumar, 2024). The formula permits researchers to state the desired margin of error, proving flexibility on how precise the researchers need their estimates to be (Nisar et al., 2022). The components of the formula include the Z-score, which represents the number of standard deviations a data point is from the mean, and the

estimated proportion of the population that has the characteristic under investigation (Hasan & Kumar, 2024). When the proportion is unknown, researchers apply 0.5 as the default value since it gives the most conservative sample size estimate that ensures the sample size is sufficiently large to yield a precise estimate (Streefkerk, 2022). The other component is the margin of error, which represents the level to which the estimated proportion may vary from the true population proportion and is typically chosen based on the desired research precision (Gan & Ross, 2021). The formula ensures that the sample size is sufficiently large enough to estimate the real prevalence within the stated margin of error (Nisar et al., 2022). Fisher Formula is as follows;

$$n=\frac{Z^2 P (1-P)}{d^2}$$

Where:

n = Sample Size (Where target population is greater than to 10,000)

Z = Normal confidence level at 95% (standard value of 1.96)

P = Estimated proportion of the population (When unknown, 0.5 is used. It maximizes the sample size

d=degree of precision at 5% (standard value of 0.05)

Substituting these figures in the formula:

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5(1-0.5)}{(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{3.84 \times 0.5(0.5)}{(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = 0.9604$$

0.0025

n = 384

Therefore, the computed sample size is 384 meaning that 384 questionnaires were administered to respondents.

Table 2 demonstrates how sampling was done to realize the final sample size of 384 respondents.

Table 2: Sample Size

Churches Targeted in Nakuru Sub-counties of Nakuru County	Sample Size	Percent
St. Francis Xavier Catholic Naivasha	73	19
AIC Njoro town	38	10
Rongai ACK Church	31	8
SDA Church Kaptembwo	38	10
AIC Church Milimani, Nakuru Town East	38	10
PCEA Gilgil	35	9
PCEA Church, Molo	27	7
Sirikwa AIC, Kuresoi North	27	7
AIC Kimugul, Kuresoi South	23	6
St. Augustine Church, Bahati, Nakuru	38	10
PCEA Subukia town Church	16	4
Total	384	100

Source: KNBS (2019)

Additionally, 8 key informants were purposively identified for the interviews including 2 counselors/psychotherapists, 2 pastors, 2 young couples of between 30-40 years of age, and 2 older couples aged 50 years and above, resulting in a total sample size of 392 study participants. The researcher personally conducted the interviews with the research questions informing the interviewing process. The questions primarily sought to probe in an attempt to seek in-depth information on the study variables. The researcher used a notebook to record the responses.

Sampling Design

This study employed a stratified random sampling and purposive sampling design to select participants for the quantitative and qualitative components of the research. The stratified random sampling technique was applied to select married couples who participated in the survey, while purposive sampling was used to identify key informants for the interviews. The use of stratified sampling enabled the researcher to organize the target population into relevant groups based on administrative sub-counties and churches within Nakuru County. This approach ensured that participants from different geographical areas and church settings were adequately represented in the study. Consequently, the sampling design enhanced the representativeness and diversity of the respondents included in the research.

In implementing the stratified random sampling technique, married couples in Nakuru County were grouped according to the eleven administrative sub-counties from which the study sample was drawn. From each sub-county, participants were selected proportionately based on the population size to ensure fair representation of the different strata. This procedure allowed the researcher to capture variations that may exist among

married couples across different regions of the county. The stratified approach also improved the reliability of the data by ensuring that all relevant sub-groups were included in the final sample. As a result, the findings of the study were more representative of married couples drawn from selected churches in Nakuru County.

Purposive sampling was applied in selecting eight key informants who provided in-depth qualitative insights into the phenomenon under study. These included two counselors or psychotherapists, two pastors, two young couples aged between 30 and 40 years, and two older couples aged 50 years and above. The selection of these participants was guided by their knowledge, experience, and involvement in marital counseling and marital relationships. Their perspectives helped to provide deeper explanations regarding the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction. This combination of stratified random sampling and purposive sampling enabled the study to obtain both statistically representative data and rich contextual information.

Data Collection Methods

Since this investigation adopted a mixed survey design, primary data was both quantitative and qualitative. Hence, the data was collected through standardized tools, designed social demographic questionnaires, and interview schedules. The instruments were structured in a way that the feedback to be received was responsive to the researcher's needs and in a way that bias was avoided. The various research instruments that were used in this study are discussed in the following sections.

Questionnaire

The researcher developed a questionnaire that helped in the collection of data related to the demographic profile of the study sample, comprising but not limited to age,

highest level of education, marital status, the prevalence of partner phubbing, and the measures that can help mitigate partner phubbing among married couples. The use of a questionnaire used in this inquiry was informed by the fact that questionnaires offer the critical convenience of reaching a huge population of respondents and allowing time for the participants to consider the responses (Rahman et al., 2022). Questionnaires are also easy to administer and score, they are self-administered and therefore do not necessarily require the researcher to interact with every respondent in order to collect the data (Kabir & Muhammed, 2020). The questionnaire had both open and closed-ended questions, where the open-ended items enabled the respondents to clarify on matters that may require in-depth information. It was categorized into four sections, where Section A addressed demographic data, section B addressed questions regarding the prevalence of partner phubbing among married couples, Section C addressed the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction, while Section D was about the possible strategies for mitigating partner phubbing behavior.

In this study, content and construct validity were adopted in ensuring that the questionnaire is valid. In content and construct validity, the researcher ensured that the research tools sufficiently covered all the research variables (Dobakhti, 2020). This implies that in the development of the research instruments, the researcher paid keen attention to the outcome expected and hence ensured that all the research questions were addressed. Additionally, the researcher consulted research supervisors to evaluate further whether the tools have sufficiently covered all the variables of the study (Hayashi et al., 2020). The feedback and recommendations from them were integrated into the tools before being administered to the respondents. This is consistent with Quintao et al.

(2020), who stated that the validity of research instruments is a quality that facilitates them to effectively measure all the constructs they are intended to measure. It is therefore a requirement that research tools are tested for validity irrespective of the research design adopted (Taherdoost, 2021).

The Marital Satisfaction Scale (MSS), originally developed, validated, and tested for reliability by Roach et al. (1981), has undergone significant modifications and adaptations over the years. These updates have been aimed at enhancing the scale's validity, reliability, and cultural applicability to meet the evolving needs of diverse populations and research contexts (Soliman et al., 2022). Initially, the MSS primarily focused on assessing general marital satisfaction. However, subsequent adaptations expanded its scope to evaluate a broader range of dimensions within marital relationships, including communication quality, conflict resolution, emotional connection, and intimacy (Mozas-Alonso et al., 2022).

To improve usability and efficiency, newer versions of the scale have been introduced, including the Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI). The CSI, developed as an advanced and refined version of the MSS, consists of 25 items that comprehensively address various aspects of marital relationships, such as communication, intimacy, conflict resolution, emotional bonding, and general satisfaction (Soliman et al., 2022). The CSIs' ability to classify specific needs and expectations that partners may have of each other—needs that are potentially affected by behaviors like partner phubbing—makes it a valuable tool for understanding marital satisfaction in greater depth. For example, sample items from the CSI include: “My partner and I share a strong emotional bond,” “We have good conversations that help us understand each other better,” and “I

am satisfied with the physical intimacy in our relationship".In this study, the CSI was utilized to measure key dimensions of marital satisfaction that may be influenced by partner phubbing, such as emotional connection, communication, intimacy, conflict resolution, and general satisfaction. These insights helped inform strategies to address specific relational challenges and promote healthier partnerships (Borek et al., 2020).

The CSI has demonstrated high reliability and validity in previous studies, which underscores its suitability for application in this research. The scale has consistently shown excellent internal consistency, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha values. In the original validation studies and subsequent research, Cronbach's alpha values for the CSI typically hovered around 0.90, which is considered excellent for psychological measures (Conroy et al., 2021). In Finkel et al. (2020), where the CSI was introduced, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95 was reported, reflecting its high internal consistency and significant positive test-retest reliability. More recent studies, such as those by Mitamura et al. (2024) and Rahat et al. (2023), reported reliability coefficients of 0.91 and 0.95, respectively, further affirming the scale's robustness and effectiveness in measuring marital satisfaction.

A Partner Phubbing Scale (PPS) specifically focuses on the use of a smartphone by a partner and the effects that this has on their relationship. The tool was developed by Roberts and David (2016) to evaluate the specific distraction brought about by the mobile phone in the relationship with a marital partner. This scale comprises of 10 items that are responded to through a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 that corresponds to never to 5 corresponds to always. The scale includes items such as: "My eyes start wandering on my phone when I'm together with others", "My mobile phone use increases day by day", and eight other statements.

The range of scores is 10 to 50 points, with higher scores indicating a higher level of perception of being ignored by an intimate partner, mediated by a mobile phone (Agua et al., 2019). The scores for each statement are added, whereby a higher total score means a higher perception of partner phubbing behavior in the relationship. In data collection, partners complete the scale to indicate their feelings and experiences in relation to the usage of their phones (Agua et al., 2019). The scoring in the Partner Phubbing Scale follows a Likert-scale model**,** where every question is rated by the respondent on a scale (1 to 5, with 1 being "never", 2-‘‘rarely’’, 3-‘‘sometimes’’, 4-‘‘often’’, 5 being ‘‘always’’) (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2023).

Interview Schedules

The interview approach to data collection was used in the collection of qualitative data and it involves a presentation of oral-verbal stimuli and participants responding through oral-verbal responses (Omair, 2025). The researcher or the individual interviewing asks questions to the participants face-to-face during the interview. An interview approach uses an interview schedule which is a systematic guide that has a defined sequence of items and topics that are to be addressed by a researcher in an interview with the participants of a study (Lakens, 2022). A typical interview schedule comprises a series of questions and probes for the interviewer that assures reliability and consistency in the collection of data. Primarily, an interview schedule contains open-ended questions that offer an allowance for detailed descriptive responses on the variables being investigated. In this study, the researcher interviewed 8 key informants who were purposively selected and included 2 counselors/psychotherapists from Liana counselling and mediation services in Nakuru, 2 pastors from the target churches, 2

young couples from the target churches aged between 30-40 years of age, and 2 older couples aged 50 years and above. Each interview lasted30 minutes.

Piloting of Research Instruments

Piloting is a preliminary process encompassing the gathering of data from respondents who have closely corresponding traits to those of the respondents who would participate in the actual research process (Payne, 2022). The process aims at conducting a pilot study which helps in ensuring that the items in the research tool are framed with clarity and convey similar meanings to the participants (Dawadi et al., 2021). The piloting procedure were conducted among married couples in Uasin Gishu which neighbors Nakuru County. This is because the population targeted in Uasin Gishu County bears related characteristics with Nakuru County in terms of the social-economic characteristics. It is also divided into various administrative sub-counties and the population is diverse in terms of cultural background, and socioeconomic demographics.

The quantitative pilot study was conducted to evaluate the clarity and reliability of the structured questionnaires prior to the main data collection. Scholars suggest that selecting approximately 10% of the study sample is adequate for piloting research instruments to test their reliability (Mulisa, 2022). Given that the quantitative component of this study had a sample size of 384 respondents, the pilot study included 38 respondents, representing about 10% of the quantitative sample. The primary aim of the pilot study was to identify any weaknesses in the design, wording, and clarity of the questionnaire and interview guide. It also enabled the researcher to estimate the time required to complete the instruments and to determine whether the respondents could easily interpret and respond to the items as intended.

The reliability of the instruments was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI) yielded a reliability value of $\alpha = 0.96$, while the Partner Phubbing Scale (PPS) produced a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.88$. These results indicated that both tools had strong to excellent internal consistency, making them appropriate for data collection in the main study.Following the pilot test, slight revisions were made to improve clarity, including rewording of a few items that were initially unclear to respondents. However, no major modifications were required since the instruments were generally found to be clear, relevant, and aligned with the study objectives. Additionally, the pilot study helped the researcher refine the data collection process, particularly in administering questionnaires and conducting interviews more effectively. Overall, the pilot study strengthened the reliability, validity, and practicality of the research instruments, thereby enhancing the quality and accuracy of data collection in the main study.

A pilot exercise was also carried out for the qualitative component to assess the effectiveness of the interview guide. Since the qualitative segment involved eight key informants, the pilot interview was conducted with one key informant, which represented roughly 10% of the qualitative sample. The selected participant possessed characteristics comparable to those of the intended key informants but did not take part in the final interviews. This preliminary interview enabled the researcher to determine whether the questions were understandable, relevant, and capable of generating comprehensive responses. It also allowed refinement of probing techniques and improvements to the organization of the interview guide before the main qualitative data collection was undertaken.

Research Procedures

Research procedures encompass the strategies established and the actions undertaken prior to and during the data collection process (Mulisa, 2022). They are the systematic stages taken in carrying out research, ensuring that data is collected, analysed and interpreted. These procedures typically include obtaining research approvals, collecting data, analyzing results, and reporting findings. The procedures not only provides a structured approach to getting study findings but also enhances the credibility of findings (Dawadi et al., 2021) In this context, necessary approval were obtained from PAC University's Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee (ISERC), and a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI).

The principal researcher conducted data collection, assisted by two research assistants who possess a professional background in psychology and are familiar with the research site. The researcher supervised the research assistants, providing training to ensure familiarity with the study design, data collection instruments, study objectives, and the informed consent process prior to instrument administration. All instruments were administered in person, with the researcher conducting interviews after securing an appointment based on the availability and convenience of key informants. Key informants were asked questions to which they responded to the best of their ability, with assurances of anonymity.

The research assistants received training to observe the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the participants. The inclusion criteria consisted of being currently married,

residing in the selected sub-counties of Nakuru County, and demonstrating a willingness to provide informed consent, thereby ensuring that respondents comprehended the study's purpose and objectives. The exclusion criteria included being a divorced or separated, single parent, as well as a refusal to sign the informed consent form. In addition to physical tools, the target sample was recruited via an online questionnaire disseminated through social networks (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and WhatsApp) and gatherings such as markets, churches, social events like weddings, and referrals from acquaintances.

Reliability and Validity of the Instruments

The Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI), developed by Ronald D. Rogge and colleagues, is a widely used measure of relationship and marital satisfaction. The instrument demonstrates high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.94 to 0.98, indicating excellent reliability across diverse populations (Rogge et al., 2017). Evidence of construct and convergent validity is established through strong correlations with other established measures, such as the Dyadic Adjustment Scale and the Marital Adjustment Test (Rogge et al., 2017). Studies applying the CSI have consistently found that higher scores are associated with greater emotional intimacy, stronger communication patterns, and enhanced relationship stability (Roddy et al., 2020; Williamson et al., 2022). These findings confirm the utility of the CSI in capturing meaningful variations in marital satisfaction and predicting positive relational outcomes. In the current study, the CSI also demonstrated strong internal consistency during the pilot test conducted in Uasin Gishu County, which neighbors Nakuru County, where it

yielded a Cronbach's alpha value of $\alpha = 0.96$**,** confirming its suitability for measuring marital satisfaction among the respondents.

The Partner Phubbing Scale (PPS), developed by James A. Roberts and Meredith E. David, measures the degree to which individuals perceive their romantic partners as prioritizing smartphone use over face-to-face interaction. The PPS demonstrates strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values frequently reported above 0.85, indicating consistent measurement of partner phubbing behaviors (Roberts & David, 2016). In the current study, the pilot test conducted in Uasin Gishu Countyproduced a Cronbach's alpha value of $\alpha = 0.88$, demonstrating strong internal consistency and confirming that the scale was appropriate for assessing partner phubbing among married couples in the study context.

Validity has been established through significant associations with related constructs, including relationship satisfaction, communication quality, and relational conflict, as well as factor analyses supporting its unidimensional structure (Roberts & David, 2016; McDaniel & Coyne, 2016). Empirical studies have shown that higher PPS scores predict lower relationship satisfaction, reduced emotional intimacy, and increased relational conflict (Roberts & David, 2016; McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; Wang et al., 2017). Collectively, these findings underscore the scale's effectiveness in capturing the relational consequences of smartphone distraction within romantic partnerships.

Together, the CSI and PPS provide complementary insights into marital relationships by measuring relationship satisfaction and technology-related relational disruptions. The CSI quantifies the positive aspects of marital quality, while the PPS

identifies behaviors that erode satisfaction, such as partner phubbing. Studies integrating these measures have highlighted the inverse relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction, demonstrating that persistent phubbing behaviors negatively affect emotional closeness, communication, and overall relational well-being. By employing both instruments, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms linking smartphone use to relational outcomes. Consequently, these tools are invaluable for studies examining marital satisfaction, relational dynamics, and interventions aimed at mitigating technology-related conflicts in couples.

Data Analysis Plan

In this study, quantitative was first cleaned whereby errors and inconsistencies were corrected, outliers were fixed and missing values were removed. This was to prevent false conclusions**, e**nsures accuracy and validity of the analysis and render the dataset reliable for statistical procedures like regression, ANOVA. The cleaned data was then numerically coded whereby every question was assigned numerical values to so they can be entered into the statistical Package for SocialSciences (SPSS) Version 30) for analysis. After that, the codes were entered into the SPSS for analysis. Data analysis was performed on the dataset using descriptive statistical techniques of transforming data and summarizing through calculation of frequencies, percentage scores, mean scores and standard deviations. Data was then presented through tables and figures. The data was then subjected to inferential analysis whereby Pearson correlation and regression analysis technique were usedto determine the strength and direction of the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction.

Upon collecting qualitative data, the researcher read through the transcripts to identify issues that participants raised. The researcher then transcribed the data by modifying and paraphrasing the transcription to enhance its understandability (Leavy, 2022). Thereafter, the data was subjected to a qualitative data analysis process using thematic technique and were presented in narrative format. This is consistent with Oladipo et al. (2015) who posited that qualitative data analysis may be manually carried out if the data set is not too large, such as in the current study that had eight interviews. With this understanding, the qualitative data in this study was accomplished through paraphrasing the responses and direct quoting of the respondents under the various categories that are based on the objectives of the study. The consolidated findings were interpreted and compared to other studies.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations encompass a set of guidelines that researchers adhere to in order to safeguard the rights and welfare of respondents (Okensina, 2020). The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the ISERC of PAC University in order to adhere to ethical principles in this inquiry. The researcher subsequently applied for a permit from NACOSTI, the regulatory body overseeing research activities in Kenya. This approach safeguarded the well-being and rights of study respondents while enhancing the researcher's ethical compliance and the credibility of the research, thereby increasing the likelihood of acceptance by the academic community and other stakeholders (Koshy, 2020). Research approvals were also obtained from the leadership of the churches whose members participated in the study.

Taking part in the study was voluntary and free from coercion or intimidation. Consequently, the researcher required respondents to sign an informed consent form indicating their understanding of the study's purpose, nature, and significance as evidence of voluntary participation (Appendix 1). The consent form outlined the research objectives and informedrespondents of their rights to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any time. Inclusion in the study is contingent upon the signing of the consent form by the respondents. The instruments remained anonymous, with no requirement for respondents to disclose their identity. To enhance anonymity, codes were utilised in place of names. A commitment to uphold anonymity was incorporated into the instruments. The informed consent form explicitly outlined this requirement for respondents before their participation in the study is permitted.

To maintain confidentiality, the researcher securely stored collected data in a locked cabinet, implement restrictive access passwords for all electronic data, and require research assistants to sign a confidentiality statement. Voluntary participation? The researcher upheld objectivity and honesty in data analysis and reporting to ensure that the findings accurately reflect the reality on the ground. The researcher will destroy the collected information two years after the study's completion. Plagiarism was mitigated at each stage of the study by accurately citing sources and referencing all information obtained from prior research. The finalized dissertation was submitted to Turnitin to evaluate compliance with plagiarism standards.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has detailed the research methods, including the mixed and correlation research designs, target population, sampling methods, data collection tools,

and data analysis techniques for both quantitative and qualitative data. It has concluded with a discussion on ethical considerations. In the next chapter, the results and discussion of the study is presented.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

The primary aim of this study was to explore the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction among married couples in Nakuru County, Kenya, and to establish whether mitigating measures moderate this relationship. This chapter presents the data, analysis, interpretation, and discussion of the results. It begins with a descriptive analysis of the response rate and the demographics of the respondents. The subsequent sections are organized according to the specific objectives, presenting findings and integrating them with views from previous studies.

Response Rate

The researcher administered a total of 384 questionnaires, out of which 306 were effectively filled out and returned, resulting in a response rate of 80%.Wilson et al. (2024) asserts that 70% or above is an excellent response rate for a study. Hence, the response rate for this study was sufficient for data analysis and reporting. Also, the researcher successfully conducted eight interviews with key informants who included two counselors/psychotherapists, two pastors, two young couples between 30 and 40 years of age, and two couples aged 50 years and above. The response rate is illustrated in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Response rate

Questionnaires	Total	Response rate (%)
Returned	306	79.69
Unreturned	78	20.31
Total	384	100
Key Informant Interviews		
Eight conducted		100

Demographic Characteristics

In this section, the researcher presents the respondents' demographic characteristics, including age distribution, level of education, duration in marriage, Nature of occupation, and spouse's nature of occupation, duration in marriage, and number of children respondents had.

Respondent Age Bracket

This section inquired into the age distribution, and the findings are illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4: *Respondent Age Bracket*

Age bracket	Frequency	Percent
18-25 years	42	13.7
26-30 years	35	11.4
31-35 years	31	10.1
36-40 years	42	13.7
41-45 years	35	11.4
46-50 years	49	16
51-55 years	37	12.1
Above 55 years	35	11.4
Total	306	100

Table 4 presents the respondent Age Bracket. The study findings show that 16% of the respondents were between 46-50 years, 13.7% were aged between 36-40 years, another 13.7% were between 18-25 years, 12.1% were 51-55 years, 11.4% were between 26-30 years, another 11.4% were above 55, while 31(10.1%) were aged 31-35 years. The

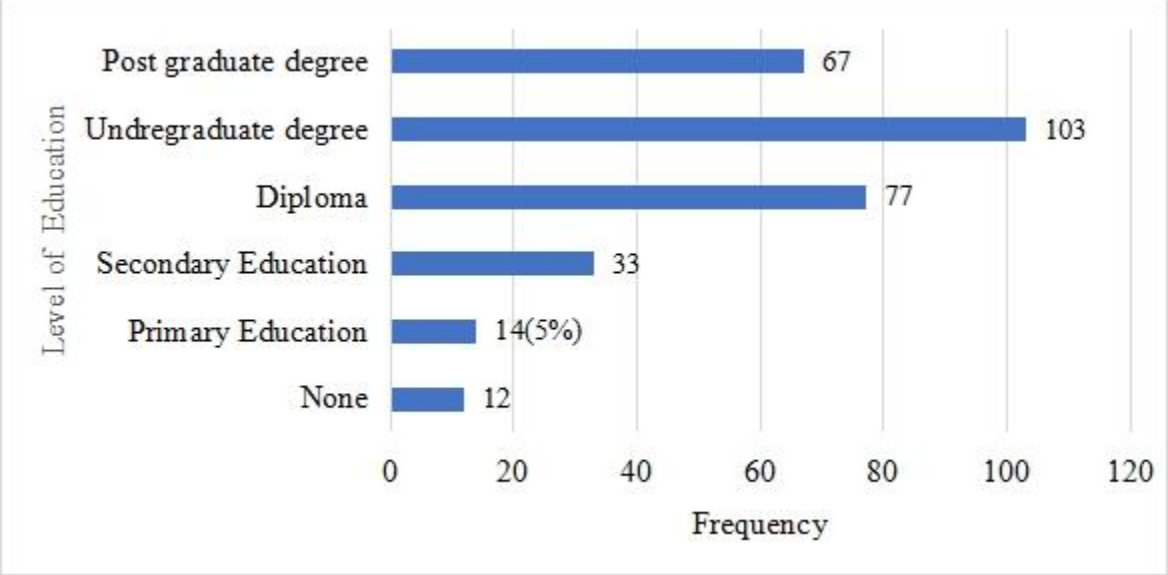
findings demonstrate that respondents of the study were spread across all productive ages. The fact that respondents came from wide age range suggests that the findings may be more applicable or generalizable across the population of married individuals. A study carried out by Hertlein, and Chan (2020) established that younger couples used their smartphones frequently checking social media, replying texts in the presence of their spouses. On the other hand, older couples were less attached to their phones or used them strictly when necessary. This may mean that phubbing is most prevalent among young couples.

Level of Education

Analysis results regarding the respondents' highest level of education are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Level of Education



The analysis findings in figure 2 indicate that 34% respondents were undergraduate degree holders, 25% diplomas, 22% had postgraduate degree, 11% had

secondary level education, while 5% had primary education and 4% had no education. This indicates that the sample is predominantly composed of educated individuals, which may be associated with greater smartphone usage, which could increase the likelihood of partner phubbing. Educated respondents may also have higher expectations for communication and relationship quality, influencing reported levels of marital satisfaction. In a similar study, Shrivastav et al. (2025) found that couples with higher education were more aware of the negative effects of phubbing and were more likely to self-regulate their phone use in marital contexts. On the flip side, couples with lower levels of education engaged more in phubbing related behaviors, constantly checking their phonesin the presence of their partners. They were also less aware of the emotional impact of phubbing on their marriages.

Nature of Occupation and Spouse's Nature of Occupation

This section sought to inquire the nature of occupation that respondents engaged in and that of their spouses. Table 5 depicts the findings.

Table 5: *Nature of Occupation and Spouse's Nature of Occupation*

Nature of occupation	Nature	Frequency	Percent
	Full-time employed	99	32.4
	Part-time employed	43	14.1
	Self-employed	94	30.7
	Unemployed	66	21.6
	Total	302	98.7
spouse's nature of occupation			
	Full-time employed	105	34.3
	Part-time employed	21	6.9
	Self-employed	83	27.1
	Unemployed	78	25.5
	Retired	13	4.2
	Total	300	98

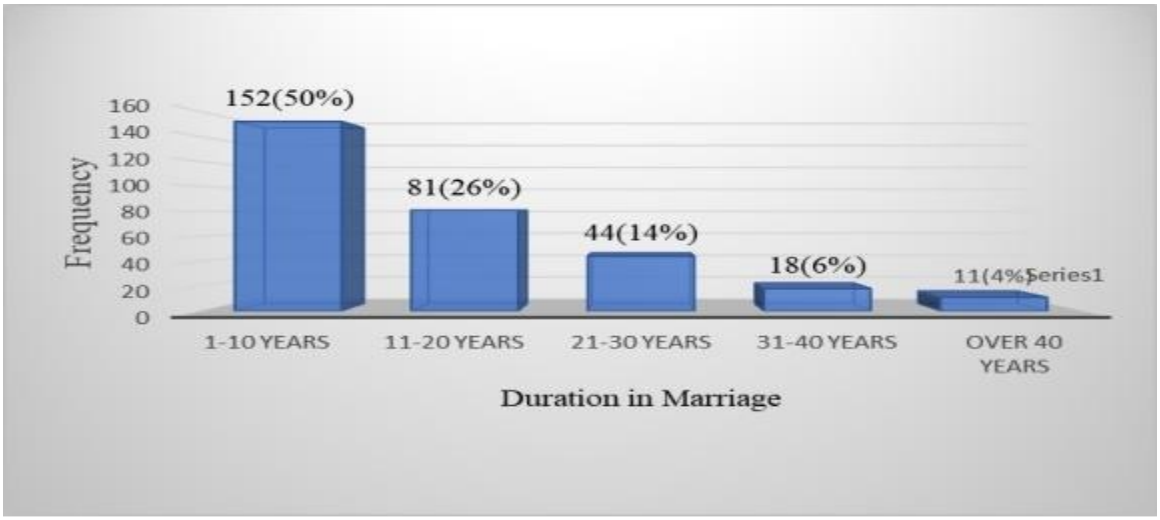
Table 5 shows the nature of occupation and Spouse's Nature of occupation. Findings indicate that 32.4% of the respondents were employed full-time, 30.7% were self-employed, 14.1% were employed part-time, while 21.6% were not employed. In regard to their spouse, 34.3% were employed full-time, 27.1% were self-employed, 25.5% were unemployed, while 6.0% worked part-time and 4.2% were retired. The findings imply that a majority of respondents were either unemployed, worked on a part-time basis, were retired, or were self-employed. This means that they had considerable free time when they were not working. A study by Alizadeh et al. (2019) found that

couples who were not very busy at work had greater flexibility and availability of time**,** which influenced the temptation to engage in phone use more, which extended into when a couple is present. This demonstrates that having free presents an opportunity for one toengage in phubbing.

Duration in Marriage

Here, the researcher sought to know the length of time or duration that respondents had spent in marriage, findings of which are illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3
Duration in Marriage



Analysis findings show that 50% of the respondents had been in marriage for between 1-10 years, 26% for 11-20 years, 14% for 21-30 years, 6% for 31-40 years, while 4% had been in marriage for over 40 years. The findings demonstrate that the respondents comprised those with huge and lower experience in marriage, meaning that the study will reflect the views of both extremes. According to Uchegbu (2024), couples in the early stages of marriage are often still building emotional intimacy, communication patterns, and trust. They may be more sensitive to perceived neglect or disconnection, making phubbing

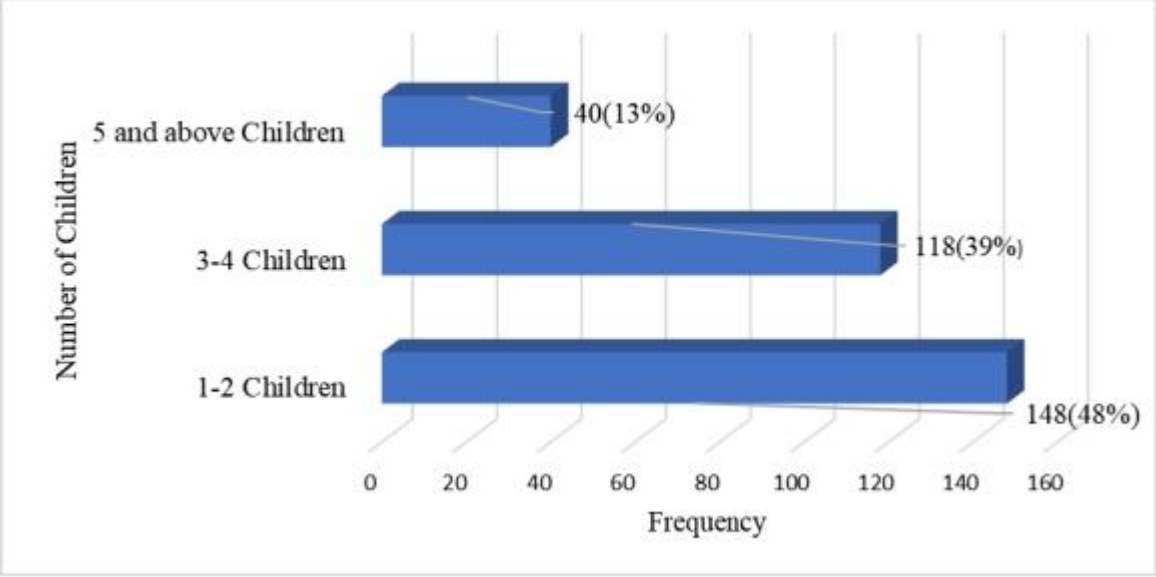
more disruptive to marital satisfaction. On the other hand, couples married for a longer time may have established routines for communication and conflict resolution, greater tolerance or reduced emotional reactivity to phone use, and amore profound understanding of each other's habits, including technology use.

Number of Children

The researcher further asked the respondents to indicate the number of children their marriage had and the results are depicted in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4

Number of Children



The results in Figure 4 show that 48% of the respondents had 1-2 children, 39% had 3-4 children, while 13% had five children or more. This implies that all the respondents had children. This may mean that the more children a couple has, the more they tend to experience higher stress levels, and as a result, they may use phones more

frequently around their partners as a way of coping with the stress, and hence increasing phubbing behavior. A study by Khodabakhsh (2021) established that couples with more children experienced greater physical, emotional, and financial responsibilities**.** This was associated with higher stress and fatigue, less quality time for the couple, and reduced chances for emotional disconnect. In such a context, phubbing may feel more hurtful because it adds to the feeling of being unsupported or ignored.

Objective One:Prevalence Partner Phubbing

This section sought to measure the degree to which marital partners engage in phubbing behavior. To achieve this, respondents were asked to respond to a series of statements which required them to indicate their level of agreement regarding phubbing-related behavior. Upon data analysis, partner phubbing was categorized into four levels as indicated in Table 6.

Table 6: *Prevalence of Partner Phubbing*

Partner phubbing	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Never	16	5.2	5.2
Rarely	51	16.7	21.9
Sometimes	121	39.5	61.4
Often	78	25.5	86.9
Always	40	13.1	100
Total	306	100	

Table 6 shows the prevalence of partner phubbing. From the analysis findings, 39.5% of the respondents indicated that they sometimes experienced phubbing in their

marriage, 25.5% indicated the often experience phubbing, 16.7% stated they rarely experienced phubbing in their marriage. In comparison, 13.1% stated they always experienced phubbing and 5.2% indicated they had never experienced phubbing in their relationship. This implies that the intensity and frequency of phubbing married couples in Nakuru County varied widely spread across the sampled couples. This suggests that there is a high degree of variation in how marital partners view or are affected by phubbing behaviors from their spouses. This demonstrates that partner phubbing is not experienced the same way by all couples.

The qualitative findings from key informants further corroborate these results by showing how partner phubbing is experienced in everyday marital interactions. One respondent stated, "*At home, my partner is mostly on the phone, even during meals, so communication has reduced."* Another participant observed, "*Sometimes I feel like I am competing with the phone for attention."* These narratives highlight the emotional strain associated with reduced face-to-face interaction in some marriages. On the other hand, some key informants reported that phubbing was not a persistent challenge in their relationships. One participant explained, "*It happens occasionally, especially when there is work-related communication, but it is not always a problem*." Similarly, another respondent indicated, "*We agreed on specific times when phones should be put aside, so it is manageable."* These responses suggest that certain couples have adopted strategies to control and regulate smartphone use within their marriages.

In contrast, a few participants described more intense experiences of phubbing. One key informant remarked, "*My spouse is always on the phone, even when I am talking, which makes me feel ignored and disrespected."* Another added, "*The phone has*

become a barrier between us; we sit together but do not really talk." These accounts point to deeper emotional dissatisfaction linked to frequent partner phubbing.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative findings indicates that partner phubbing is experienced differently among married couples. It ranges from occasional occurrences to more constant exposure, depending on individual relationship dynamics and patterns of smartphone use. The convergence of both data sets therefore reinforces the conclusion that there is considerable variation in how spouses perceive and are influenced by phubbing behaviours.

These findings are in agreement with previous studies (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas (2023); Rahtikawati & Ratnasih (2021); Yam & Kumcağız, 2020), where couples experienced phubbing at varying levels ranging from low to very high levels with its impact depending on frequency of phone use in the presence of a partner.

Descriptive Statistics Regarding the Prevalence of Phubbing

In order to determine the prevalence of partner phubbing among married couples, 10 statements focusing on phubbing among couples were used. Table 7 presents the results.

Table 7:*Prevalence of Partner Phubbing Among Married Couples*

Partner phubbing	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel emotionally close to my partner.	306	3.32	1.304
My spouse frequently checks his/her phone while we are having a conversation.	306	2.99	1.251
During shared activities like mealtime and watching TV, my spouse tends to be absorbed in their phone.	306	2.92	1.236
I often feel like my spouse is distracted by their phone when I'm trying to talk to them.	306	2.78	1.228
When we are out together, my spouse often prioritizes their phone over talking to me or enjoying the moment.	306	2.63	1.181
My spouse answers phone calls, texts, or social media notifications while we are spending time together.	305	2.89	1.199
I feel ignored or unimportant when my spouse focuses on their phone instead of our interaction.	306	2.9	1.294
When we are relaxing at home, my spouse regularly uses their phone without engaging in conversation or activities with me.	305	2.81	1.19
My spouse gets frustrated or distracted when I ask them to put their phone away during our time together.	306	2.55	1.181
I sometimes feel like my spouse is more interested in their phone than in spending quality time with me.	306	2.58	1.245

Table 7 presents the prevalence and dimensions of partner phubbing among married couples in Nakuru County. The findings indicate moderate levels of agreement across most items, with responses generally clustering around the midpoint of the scale, suggesting varied but noticeable experiences of phubbing within marriages.

Feeling emotionally close to the partner recorded a mean of 3.32 (SD = 1.304). The relatively low standard deviation indicates that responses were fairly concentrated around the scale midpoint, though variation still existed. This suggests that while some couples felt emotionally connected, others experienced emotional distance. This interpretation is supported by qualitative accounts, where one participant stated, *"Sometimes I feel close to my spouse, but the phone reduces the time we really connect."* Another added, *"We are together physically, but emotionally it feels like the phone comes first."* These voices reflect mixed emotional experiences within marital relationships.

Checking the phone during conversation recorded a mean of 2.99 (SD = 1.251), indicating frequent phone use during interactions. Qualitative responses reinforced this finding, with one respondent noting, *"Even when we are talking, my partner keeps checking messages, which interrupts our conversation."* This reflects attentional division during communication. Being absorbed in the phone during shared activities had a mean of 2.92 (SD = 1.236), suggesting moderate engagement with smartphones over joint interaction. A key informant explained, *"During family time, sometimes we are both present, but each is busy on their phone."* This illustrates emotional and cognitive displacement during shared moments.

Spouse distraction with phone during conversation recorded a mean of 2.78 (SD = 1.228). One participant remarked, *"It is hard to have a full conversation because the*

*phone keeps pulling attention away."*This highlights reduced responsiveness in interpersonal communication. Spouse prioritizing phones over talking had a mean of 2.63 (SD = 1.181), indicating noticeable but slightly lower prioritization of phones. A respondent observed, *"At times I feel the phone is more important than what I am saying."* Answering calls, texts, and notifications during time together recorded a mean of 2.89 (SD = 1.199). Qualitative evidence supported this, with one participant stating, *"Notifications always interrupt our time together."* Similarly, feeling ignored when a partner focuses on the phone had a mean of 2.90 (SD = 1.294), with respondents noting emotional neglect, such as *"I feel sidelined when my spouse is always on the phone."*Spouses regularly using phones without engaging in conversation recorded a mean of 2.81 (SD = 1.19), further reinforcing reduced verbal interaction. One respondent summarized this experience: *"We sit together but hardly talk because the phone fills the silence."*

Inoverall, the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings shows that that on average, couples became absorbed in their phones or distracted by their phone use habits during shared activitieswith their partners, withsome reporting much more or much lessof this behavior. This implies that most couples engage in phubbing behavior which end up concentration when couples are having quality time together. These convergent findings align with Media Dependence Theory, which explains that individuals increasingly rely on media for emotional, informational, and social needs, sometimes at the expense of direct interpersonal communication.

In a similar study by Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas (2023);Roberts and David (2022) and Togar et al. (2024), partner phubbing was characterized by conversation

interruptions of checking posts on social media, replying messages, picking up phone calls. The findings are further consistent those of Atapour et al. (2021) who found that some spouses frequently responded to social media prompts, or made calls during couple conversation, dinner, or romantic moments, while some stated they did this occasionally.

Qualitative data revealed two salient themes regarding the prevalence of phubbing among married couples which are discussed her below.

Theme 1: Phubbing as a Habitual, Unintentional Behavior

The theme manifested in the statements where the participants stated that *"phubbing happens almost daily…" "we both reach for our phones out of habit…especially if there is a lull in the conversation or if we are tired.''* "*My wife often checks TikTok or WhatsApp during TV time or even when we go out to eat."* "*one or both of us will be on the phone…" "we both reach for our phones…"* This indicates that phubbing is not always one-sided; it is a shared behavioral norm in the relationship that may normalize distraction, even when it undermines connection. Other participants stated that*"midway through dinner, she was busy replying to group chats." "Sometimes when we are on date nights… he gets pulled into X thread." ''My husband is addicted to Twitter. Sometimes when we're on date nights or even just having tea together, he gets pulled into a Twitter thread. It's annoying because I can tell he's not really listening"*

This shows that phubbing interrupts emotionally significant or intimate moments, diminishing their quality and emotional value. It sends the message that shared experiences are less important than digital interactions. The fourth theme is that of emotional disconnection and reduced presence, whereby the key informants stated that "it is annoying because I can tell he is not really listening.". It implies that the presence of

the phone results in reduced attentiveness and emotional presence. Even when physically together, one partner's mental and emotional engagement is compromised.The findings align with those of a study conducted by Al-Saggaf and MacCulloch (2018), which show that smartphone users phub their partners or friends more frequently than they phub strangers. Another study by Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas (2023) also established that a majority (70%) of couples phub their spouses at least once a day, and more than 78% of couples are phubbed at least once a day.

Theme 2: Impact of Phubbing on Emotional Connection and Communication

Participants consistently described reduced quality of communication due to phone distractions. Feelings of disconnect, superficial conversations, and missed emotional cues are common. For instance, they stated that *"It sometimes feels like our conversations are superficial because of distractions."* (Key informant 3)*"We used to have long, deep conversations. Now, it's shorter check-ins unless we deliberately put phones away."* (Key informant4).The participants indicated that phubbing leads to frustration, feelings of being undervalued, and even conflict. Being ignored in favor of a phone was interpreted as a lack of interest or respect. For instance, the participants stated that *"It's like what I'm saying isn't that interesting to her... it makes me hesitate to open up."* (Response 5) *"We argued because she misunderstood something I said while she was half-listening."* (Key informant 6). I feel second-place to a screen. It makes me feel like I have to "fight" for his attention, which can be exhausting emotionally (Key informant 7). Phubbing causes emotional withdrawal and disengagement, whereby the key informants stated that *"It makes me pull back emotionally... I'd rather not try to start a conversation..." "Conversations are shorter, less deep..."* This means that persistent

phubbing discourages emotional expression and initiates emotional distancing. Partners start withdrawing t

The implication of these findings is that when couples feel ignored or less important than a phone, they may begin to emotionally withdraw and this creates an emotional barrier, reducing the likelihood of honest, deep conversations. Further, repeated instances of being ignored convey a message of low relational priority, making one partner feel undervalued and disrespected, leading to resentment, emotional fatigue, and eventual detachment. Also, phone use during key interactions can be a catalyst for avoidable marital tension which weaken the emotional foundation of the relationship.

According to Przbylski (2020), when there are emotional and communication issues because of partner phubbing behavior, a decline in physical intimacy may be experienced among the couples concerned. In the absence of emotional connection and mutual attention, there may be a reduction in physical affection indicators like kissing, hugging, or even sexual intimacy (Hagey et al., 2020). This is because, the emotional and physical elements of intimacy are intertwined, meaning that a reduction in one may contribute to a decline in the other (McDaniel & Coyne, 2021). Breakdown in communication was manifested where participants noted that *"Important issues get 'heard halfway' or misunderstood*." "*The phubbed partner feels dismissed... the phubbing partner feels nagged..." This* suggests that phubbing disrupts or degrades communication quality, leading to misunderstandings, superficial conversations, and avoidance. Both parties feel misunderstood, fostering relational misalignment.

The findings are comparable to those of Huston et al. (2021), who found that when a spouse gets distractions from their urge to frequently use his/her cell phone

during couple interactions, the ability to fully listen or engage in the conversation is undermined (Alipour et al., 2020). This may cause misunderstandings, weaken the marital bond, and may lead to feelings of isolation (Champiri & Dehghani, 2023). When the partner phubbing behavior is continuous and consistent, the spouse who is being phubbed may become increasingly frustrated, believing that their attempts to be heard and listened to are being dismissed. This implies that excessive phone use among couples negatively affects the quality of interactions leading to communication breakdowns and unresolved concerns may surface as conflict.

Key informant 2, a husband aged 45 indicated that phone use during couple conversations "*definitely creates a sense of being unimportant. I sometimes feel dismissed or like the phone has more of her attention than I do. It builds a quiet frustration over time. Honestly, I feel overlooked. It feels like I'm competing with something digital. It makes me pull back emotionally, like I'd rather not try to start a conversation if I'll be interrupted or ignored."* The wife aged 40 years explained that "*phone use during family conversations or activities makes me feel unimportant at times. It also affects our ability to fully be present with each other. Conversations are shorter, less deep, and sometimes I hold back from sharing. It makes me feel invisible. Like what I'm saying isn't valuable enough to have his full attention. It hurts more when I'm talking about something meaningful."* Key informant 6, a psychologist stated that *"phubbing leads to miscommunication which increases when people aren't fully engaged. Important issues get "heard halfway" or misunderstood. The phubbed partner feels dismissed, while the phubbing partner often feels "nagged," and that cycle breeds conflict."*

These responses from key informants align with those of respondents in Kadylak (2020) study who indicated that when a spouse attends to text, social media prompts, or a call during a couple's conversation, dinner, or romantic moment, the interaction is interrupted. The implied communication is "what I am doing on my cell phone right now is more important compared to you", "My interest in my phone is greater than my interest in you,"; or, in some circumstances, "You are unworthy of my attention." (Jomy et al., 2019). This means that the spouse being phubbed experience feelings of rejection, being unwanted, and reduced satisfaction in the relationship.

Theme 3: Partner Phubbing a Sign of Deeper Relational Issues

In this regard, the one of the participants stated that "*Yes, phubbing is often a symptom, not the root. It may reflect avoidance, boredom, or unresolved tension.* In another study, Monash (2020) found that marital partners who experienced phubbing felt neglected, disconnected, ignored, and uncared for, and this drove them to engage in phubbing to cope with the feelings. *"In counseling, I help couples explore why they turn to their phones, what they are escaping or avoiding. I guide them to rediscover shared interests, re-establish communication routines, and prioritize emotional check-ins without distractions."* Another participant stated that "*yes, phubbing is usually a symptom, not the root. It is often a way to escape, to numb, or to distract oneself from unresolved tension. In counseling, I ask: What are you avoiding when you choose the screen over your spouse? Then we explore unmet emotional needs. I guide them to replace avoidance with intentional reconnection—conversation, physical affection, shared spiritual practice."*

In another study, Balta et al. (2020), professional counselors indicated that they offer a safe environment for exploring the underlying reasons that foster partner phubbing behaviors, which may include anxiety, social media addiction, or communication challenges (Balta et al., 2020). For couples that feel neglected or ignored through partner phubbing, professional therapy helped in facilitating the processing of feelings of hurt or frustration, causing improved emotional understanding between partners (Erzen et al., 2023).

Objective Two: Marital Satisfaction Among Married Couples

In this section, the researcher sought to assess marital satisfaction among married couples in Nakuru County, Kenya. To achieve this, a couple satisfaction index comprising a 5-point Likert scale question was used. Upon data analysis, marital satisfaction was categorized into four levels as indicated in Table 8.

Table 8:*Table Levels of Marital Satisfaction Among Couples*

Satisfaction level	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very low	8	2.6	2.6
Low	33	10.8	10.8
Moderate	88	28.8	28.8
High	71	23.2	23.2
Very high	106	34.6	34.6
Total	306	100	100

Table 8 illustrates the levels of marital satisfaction among married couples in Nakuru County. The results indicate that 34.6% of respondents reported very high marital

satisfaction, 28.8% reported moderate satisfaction, and 23.2% indicated high satisfaction. Conversely, 10.8% of the respondents experienced low satisfaction, while 2.6% reported very low levels of marital satisfaction. These findings demonstrate that marital satisfaction varies considerably among couples, suggesting that individuals experience marriage differently. Such variation may be attributed to differences in communication patterns, emotional connection, intimacy, and the influence of behaviours such as partner phubbing.

The qualitative findings support these results by offering deeper insight into participants' lived experiences. Respondents who reported high or very high satisfaction described strong emotional bonds and effective communication within their marriages. One participant stated, *"We communicate openly and support each other, which makes our marriage fulfilling."* Another noted, *"Even when conflicts arise, we resolve them quickly and respectfully."* These responses reflect positive relational dynamics associated with higher satisfaction.

For those indicating moderate levels of satisfaction, the qualitative data revealed a balance of strengths and challenges. One respondent explained, *"Our marriage is generally stable, but sometimes communication is affected, especially when phones interfere."* Another observed, *"Things are okay, though we need to spend more quality time together."* These views suggest that while the relationship is functional, certain issues limit full satisfaction.

Participants who reported low or very low satisfaction expressed concerns related to emotional distance and ineffective communication. One key informant remarked, *"We barely communicate, and it feels like we are disconnected."* Another added, *"My partner*

is often distracted by the phone, which affects our relationship." These accounts highlight the negative impact of reduced interaction and attentiveness on marital quality.

Taken collectively, the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings indicates that marital satisfaction differs across couples and is shaped by various relational dynamics. The convergence of these findings underscores the role of emotional closeness, communication quality, conflict resolution, and behaviours such as partner phubbing in influencing marital satisfaction. These results are consistent with previous studies (Akula, 2024; Flicker et al., 2020; Huston et al., 2021; Sobral et al., 2022; Tabassum, 2023), which also report variability in marital satisfaction influenced by relational and behavioural factors.

Couple Satisfaction Index

In assessing couples' satisfaction in their marriage, emotional connection, communication, intimacy, conflict resolution and overall satisfaction among couples were assessed. Table 9 shows the findings.

Table 9: *Descriptive Statistics on Elements of Couple Satisfaction*

Couple satisfaction	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Emotional connection	306	3.38	1.162
Communication	306	3.33	1.138
Intimacy	306	3.31	1.18
Conflict resolution	306	3.23	1.116
Overall satisfaction	306	3.37	1.218

Table 9 presents descriptive statistics on key dimensions of couple satisfaction among married couples in Nakuru County. The results indicate generally moderate and positive levels across emotional connection, communication, intimacy, and conflict resolution, although there is noticeable variation among respondents.

Emotional connection had a mean of 3.38 (SD = 1.162), suggesting that, on average, couples experience a fairly positive emotional bond, though not consistently strong across all relationships. The variation implies that while some couples feel closely connected, others experience some level of emotional distance. Qualitative responses support this interpretation. One participant remarked, *"We feel close most of the time, but sometimes the connection weakens, especially when we don't spend enough time together."* Another noted, *"At times, I feel emotionally distant because we are not as engaged as we used to be."* These views highlight differences in emotional attachment among couples. Similar findings have been reported by Beukeboom and Pollmann (2021) and Murray et al. (2020), who associate strong emotional connection with quality time, open communication, and mutual support, while weaker connections are linked to withdrawal and disengagement.

Communication recorded a mean of 3.33 (SD = 1.138), indicating that most respondents perceive their communication as relatively effective, though experiences differ across couples. Qualitative data reinforce this, with one respondent stating, *"We usually communicate well, which helps us solve issues quickly."* However, another observed, *"Sometimes communication is affected, especially when phones interfere."* These responses suggest that while communication is generally positive, it is not without challenges. This is consistent with findings by Ngujiri (2023) and Taggart et al. (2019),

which emphasize the importance of effective communication in promoting marital satisfaction and resolving conflicts.

Intimacy had a mean of 3.31 (SD = 1.18), indicating a generally positive but not optimal level of intimacy among couples. Qualitative insights reflect this variation. One participant noted, *"We share intimate moments, but not as often as we would like."* Another stated, *"There is still closeness, though sometimes we are less affectionate."*These accounts suggest that intimacy exists but may fluctuate within relationships. This aligns with studies by Karney and Bradbury (2020) and Hammond et al. (2018), which link higher levels of intimacy with increased marital satisfaction and reduced conflict.

Conflict resolution recorded a mean of 3.23 (SD = 1.116), suggesting that couples generally perceive their conflict management as moderately effective, though not consistently across all relationships. Qualitative findings illustrate this variation. One respondent explained, *"We try to resolve disagreements calmly, and most times we reach an understanding."* In contrast, another noted, *"Sometimes small issues escalate because we don't handle them well."* These responses demonstrate differences in how couples approach and manage conflict.

These findings indicate that elements of couple satisfaction are moderately positive but vary across marriages. The convergence of both quantitative and qualitative data highlights that emotional connection, communication, intimacy, and conflict resolution differ among couples and collectively influence overall marital satisfaction. These findings are comparable to those of Van Pelt (2020) who found that destructive conflict approaches, like yelling and criticism, led to marital dissatisfaction and disability. A

majority of respondents in the study reported that the effective strategies for effective marital conflict resolution comprise effective communication. According to Lewis (2021), effective conflict resolution is crucial if strong, satisfying relationships are to be maintained. This implies that when managed well, conflict may even serve to strengthen the relationship by enhancing communication, increasing mutual understanding, and deepening emotional closeness and that when poorly handled, conflicts are able to erode trust, undermine intimacy, and damage the general well-being of the marriage leading to marital dissatisfaction

Overall satisfaction had a mean 3.37 and standard deviation 1.218, The result shows that most participants are somewhat content in their marriages, although satisfaction is not extremely high. The standard deviation of 1.218 indicates high variability in responses, meaning that while many respondents report feeling satisfied, others range from neutral to dissatisfied. A study by Konstam et al. (2019) established that marital satisfaction was not evenly distributed among various couples in their study, as some couples experienced significant strain or dissatisfaction,while others reported satisfaction. Good communication, physical presence, working as a unit, trust, honesty, and respect are the critical factors for a stable relationship, and each of these factors serves to enhance marital satisfaction when faithfully practiced (Tabassum, 2023).

Key Informants' Definition of Marital Satisfaction

Key informant 1, aged 30 years, was asked to define what to him marital satisfaction meantand in response, he stated that it is ‘‘*feeling heard, supported, and respected. Having fun together, growing together, and trusting each other are key for me.* On her part, the wife of the key informant 1, aged 27, defined marital satisfaction as

"emotional *safety, good communication, physical intimacy, mutual growth, and feeling like you're a team. It's not just about avoiding fights, but about feeling valued daily"* Key informant 2 indicated that ''For me, marital satisfaction is about feeling respected, listened to, and supported. It's also about emotional closeness, having fun together, and knowing we have each other's back''. On her part, the wife looked at as ''*Feeling safe, seen, and valued. Knowing we can talk openly, laugh together, and still desire each other emotionally and physically."*

These definitions align with those of other scholars such as Sobral et al. (2022) who describes marital satisfaction as the level to which a partner or spouse satisfies the other spouse's needs and expectations through various means, including effective communication, intimacy, and sharing time. This means that marital satisfaction is characterized by open communication, shared experiences, and mutual respect, companionship, emotional pleasure, love, effective communication, compassion, understanding, trust, and a sense of coherence within the relationship.

Key Informants' Rating of Marital Satisfaction in their Marriages

In a scale of 1-10, Key informant 1 rated his marital satisfaction at 8 in overall adding that *"we have a great relationship, but these small communication gaps because of distractions do create some frustration."* His wife rated her marital satisfaction at 7.5 noting that ''*we have a strong bond, but digital distractions sometimes prevent us from connecting at the level I crave."* Respondent 2 stated that *"I'd say 7. We have a solid foundation, but the digital distractions and sometimes unresolved arguments have affected the closeness we used to have."* The wife said that *"I'd rate it a 6"* noting that *"We have shared history, kids, love, and memories. But emotionally, I sometimes feel*

alone or disconnected. I miss the intimacy we used to have." According to Konstam et al. (2019), marital satisfaction is not absolute and is rarely without weaknesses**.** It is a dynamic, evolving experience influenced by many factors, including **c**ommunication patterns, **l**ife changes and stressors, disagreements, and fluctuation of **e**motional intimacy and connection (Tabassum, 2023)**.** This implies that in marriage, there can be periods of dissatisfaction**,** arguments**,** oremotional distance.

Objective Three: Relationship Between Partner Phubbing and Marital Satisfaction

To assess the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction, cross-tabulation was done. Table 11 shows the study findings.

Table 10: *Relationship Between Partner Phubbing and Marital Satisfaction*

Partner phubbing	Satisfaction level						Total
		Very low	Low	Moderate	High	Very high	
Never	Count	0	5	14	8	13	40
	% within Partner phubbing	0.0%	12.5%	35.0%	20.0%	32.5%	100.0%
Rarely	Count	0	6	22	24	26	78
	% within Partner phubbing	0.0%	7.7%	28.2%	30.8%	33.3%	100.0%
Sometimes	Count	0	5	34	31	51	121

	% within Partner phubbing	0.0%	4.1%	28.1%	25.6%	42.1%	100.0%
Often	Count	15	15	13	8	0	51
	% within Partner phubbing	29.4%	29.4%	25.5%	15.7%	0.0%	100.0%
Always	Count	8	2	5	0	1	16
	% within Partner phubbing	50.0%	12.5%	31.3%	0.0%	6.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	8	33	88	71	91	306
	% of Total	7.5%	10.8%	28.8%	23.2%	29.7%	100.0%

Table 10 presents the cross-tabulation between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction among married couples in Nakuru County. The results show a clear pattern in which variations in phubbing frequency correspond with differences in levels of marital satisfaction.

Among respondents who never experienced partner phubbing (n = 40), none reported very low satisfaction, while 12.5% reported low satisfaction, 35.0% moderate satisfaction, 20.0% high satisfaction, and 32.5% very high satisfaction. This indicates that a majority (52.5%) experienced high or very high satisfaction. Qualitative responses from

this group reflect relatively stable relationships, although not without challenges. One participant stated, *"We are present with each other most of the time, which helps our relationship, but we still have normal disagreements."* Another noted, *"Even without phone distractions, there are other things that affect how satisfied we feel."* These accounts suggest that while the absence of phubbing supports relationship quality, it does not solely determine satisfaction.

For respondents who rarely experienced phubbing (n = 78), none reported very low satisfaction, while 7.7% reported low satisfaction, 28.2% moderate satisfaction, 30.8% high satisfaction, and 33.3% very high satisfaction. Overall, 64.1% reported high or very high satisfaction, which is higher than the group that never experienced phubbing. Qualitative insights help explain this pattern. One respondent explained, *"Sometimes my partner checks the phone, but it doesn't interfere with our relationship because we still communicate well."* Another added, *"We understand each other and make time together, so occasional phone use is not a big issue."* These responses indicate that limited and controlled phone use may coexist with strong relationship satisfaction.

Among those who sometimes experienced phubbing (n = 121), none reported very low satisfaction, while 4.1% reported low satisfaction, 28.1% moderate satisfaction, 25.6% high satisfaction, and 42.1% very high satisfaction. A large proportion (67.7%) still reported high or very high satisfaction, though experiences varied. Qualitative data reflect this diversity, with one participant noting, *"It happens sometimes, but we still try to stay connected."* Another remarked, *"There are moments when the phone becomes a distraction, but we manage it."*

In contrast, respondents who often experienced phubbing (n = 51) reported markedly lower satisfaction levels. Specifically, 29.4% reported very low satisfaction, 29.4% low satisfaction, 25.5% moderate satisfaction, and only 15.7% reported high satisfaction, with none reporting very high satisfaction. Qualitative accounts from this group reflect frustration and emotional disconnection. One participant stated, *"My partner is always on the phone, and it makes me feel ignored."* Another added, *"It affects our communication because attention is divided."*

Similarly, among those who always experienced phubbing (n = 16), 50.0% reported very low satisfaction, 12.5% low satisfaction, 31.3% moderate satisfaction, and only 6.3% reported very high satisfaction, with none reporting high satisfaction. These findings show the highest concentration of dissatisfaction. Supporting qualitative responses highlight the severity of this experience. One respondent remarked, *"The phone has completely taken over our interactions; we hardly connect anymore."* Another noted, *"I feel neglected because my partner is constantly on the phone."*

The quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrates a consistent pattern whereby lower levels of phubbing are generally associated with higher marital satisfaction, while frequent phubbing corresponds with lower satisfaction. The qualitative "voices" provide contextual depth, illustrating how partners interpret and experience these behaviours in their daily lives. The convergence of both data strands therefore confirms a negative relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction, while also showing that the effect may vary depending on how couples manage phone use within their relationships.

In a study by Champiri and Dehghani (2023), it was revealed that the absence of pubbing behavior in marital relationships meant that there was respect for shared time and attention, better emotional presence during conversations, and possibly stronger communication norms, all of which contributed to increased marital satisfaction. However, Bilal and Rascol (2020) stated that not engaging in phubbing does not guarantee satisfaction in marriage. That marital satisfaction depends on many interconnected factors, and avoiding one negative behavior (like phubbing) is only a small part of the equation. It is therefore pivotal to understand factors that function in marital satisfaction in order to guarantee the very critical happiness in marriage (Atapour et al., 2021).

According to Zaheri et al. (2019), phubbing generally has a negative relationship with marital satisfaction; however, its impact is not universal or automatic. Couples may still report high satisfaction if the relationship is strong in other areas such as the presence of high emotional intimacy, trust, and shared values, and when phubbing is not frequent.The findings are in agreement with studies showing that partner phubbing contributes to dissatisfaction in a marital relationship (Halpern & Katz, 2019; McDaniel & Coyne, 2021; Roberts & David, 2021; Wang et al., 2022). The implication here is increase in partner phubbing behavior results in reduced relationship satisfaction between married couples (Wang et al., 2022).

Multivariate Regression Analysis

Relationship Between Partner Phubbing and Marital Satisfaction

The regression model was used to examine the relationship between the partner phubbing and the marital satisfaction. Table 11 presents the model summary.

Table 11: *Model Summary for Regression Analysis of Partner Phubbing and Marital Satisfaction*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.550	0.303	0.298	0.937

a Predictors: (Constant), Mitigating factors, partner phubbing

Table 11 shows the model summary for regression analysis of partner phubbing and marital satisfaction. The findings indicate that R (Correlation Coefficient) = 0.550 and R^2 (Coefficient of Determination) = 0.303.R is the multiple correlation coefficient, indicating the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the independent variable (partner phubbing) and the dependent variable (marital satisfaction). An R value of 0.550 suggests a moderate positive correlation between the predicted and actual values of marital satisfaction from the model. The higher the R value (maximum is 1), the better the prediction. This mean that as phubbing behavior increases, marital satisfaction tends to decrease and this trend is moderately consistent across couples. In plain terms, couples who report higher levels of partner phubbing (for instance being ignored in favor of a smartphone) are more likely to report lower levels of satisfaction in their marriage. R^2 represents the proportion of variance in the dependent variable (marital satisfaction) that is explained by the independent variable (partner phubbing). An R^2 of 0.303 means that 30.3% of the variation in marital satisfaction can be statistically explained by partner phubbing. The remaining 69.7% of the variance is due to other factors not included in the model or study for instance communication style, conflict resolution, attachment style, or socioeconomic factors. In plain terms, this

means that phubbing isn't the onlything affecting how happy couples are but it does have a real, measurable impact.

The study confirms that partner phubbing is important and significantly linked to marital satisfaction and therefore, the practical implication is that counselors and therapists could integrate awareness about the negative effects of phubbing in marriage counseling programs. Also, educational campaigns or workshops can be designed to reduce phone distractions during couple interactions. The implications are in line with those in a similar study by Vogels and Anderson (2020), where the results indicated that phubbing behavior explained 47% of marital satisfaction, while other factors influence the rest. That higher phubbing correlates with marital dissatisfaction, whereby couples tended to check their smartphone even during conversations. This implies that smartphone addiction and phubbing are closely related behaviors. Research carried out by Karadağ et al. (2021) indicates that phubbing was not the sole problem related to marital dissatisfaction; it however brings about problems because of the applications that they use including social media, texting, and search applications.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Table 12: *ANOVA of Partner Phubbing and Marital Satisfaction*

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	**Sig.**
1	Regression	18.958	1	18.958	15.916	.000 b
	Residual	362.101	304	1.191		
	Total	381.059	305			

a Dependent Variable: Marital satisfaction
b Predictors: (Constant), partnerphubbing

Table 12 shows ANOVA of partner phubbing and marital satisfaction. The results of analysis of variance indicate a statistically significant regression model which was a good fit for the data. Table 15 shows that the independent variable (partner phubbing) significantly predict the dependent variable (marital satisfaction), F (1, 304) = 15.916, p (.000) < .05 hence the regression model was a good fit of the data. A statistically significant regression model means that the relationship found in the study is very unlikely to be due to chance. In this case, the findings showed that the independent variable, partner phubbing is significantly related to the dependent variable, marital satisfaction**.** In practical terms, this means that how much a partner uses their phone in a way that ignores or excludes their spouse (phubbing) has a meaningful impact on how satisfied the spouse feels in the marriage. Since the p-value is well below .05, there is strong evidence that the relationship between phubbing and marital satisfaction is not due to chance. This also implies that interventions targeting partner phubbing behavior can help improve marital satisfaction, especially in Nakuru County, where the data was collected This implication concur with Wang et al. (2022) whose study revealed that partner phubbing predicts the occurrence of marital dissatisfaction, which leads to instability in marriages. It means that the interruptions and distractions occasioned by partner phubbing results in conflict predicts marital decrease in partner satisfaction.

Table 13:*Linear Regression Coefficients for Partner Phubbing And Marital Satisfaction*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.992	0.203		14.71	0

Partner phubbing	0.238	0.06	-0.223	3.989	0

a Dependent Variable: Marital satisfaction

b Predictors: (Constant), Partner phubbing

Table 13 shows linear regression coefficients for partner phubbing and marital satisfaction. The variation in marital satisfaction caused by partner phubbing was indicated by the regression equation as indicated below.

Marital satisfaction = 2.992 + 0.238partner phubbing + 0.06 error term.

The study findings showed that partner phubbing (t= 3.989, p=0) significantly affected marital satisfaction of married couples in Nakuru. The standardized Beta coefficient suggested that partner phubbing had a weak negative impact (B= -0.223). The t-value (3.989) and p-value (p = 0) mean this result is statistically significant, in other words, the effect is real and not just due to chance. The Beta coefficient (B = -0.223**)** tells us how strong the effect is and in what direction. The Beta is negative (-0.223) which means it's actually a negative relationship, meaning that as partner phubbing increases, marital satisfaction tends to decrease. The number -0.223 shows the strength of this effect. Since it's close to zero**,** it'sconsidered aweak (small) effect. This implies that even though partner phubbing has a weak effect, it is statistically significant, meaning it does matter in real-life relationships. This suggests that small, everyday behaviors like checking a phone during partner interactions can cumulatively undermine marital satisfaction over time. In practical terms, married couples may not immediately notice the damage, but frequent partner phubbing can gradually erode emotional connection, communication quality, and intimacy. The weak Beta value (-0.223) indicates that

phubbing is one of several factors that impact marital satisfaction, but it is a measurable and addressable one. Intervening on phubbing behavior can have real benefits, even if small, especially when combined with other relationship-strengthening strategies.

This is in line with various studies where partner phubbing was found to contribute to dissatisfaction in marital relationships (Halpern & Katz, 2019; McDaniel & Coyne, 2021; Roberts & David, 2021; Wang et al., 2022). This implies that the higher the partner phubbing behavior is, the lower the relationship satisfaction between married adult couples. On their part, Mahmud et al. (2023) determined that as the frequency and duration of phubbing increases among couples, the more their spouses experience emotional distance and loneliness, with significant reduction on their marital satisfaction.

Effects of Phone Use on Marital Relationships

This section sought to inquire into the effect of partner phubbing in marital satisfaction using a 5-point Likert scale where respondents to statements on the effect of phone use behaviors with the lowest index indicating no effect, while the highest indicated adverse effect. The findings are illustrated in Table 14.

Table 14: Effects of Phone Use on Marital Relationships

Effects of phone use		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Mean	Std Deviation
I feel less emotionally supported by my spouse when they are frequently distracted by their phone	Freq	54	78	103	40	31	2.73	1.194
	%	17.6	25.5	33.7	13.1	10.1	N	306
When my spouse uses their phone during our time together, I feel emotionally distant from them	Freq	42	80	96	47	41	2.89	1.221
	%	13.7	26.1	31.4	15.4	13.4	N	306
My spouse's phone use often prevents us from having meaningful emotional conversations	Freq	47	93	93	44	29	2.72	1.17
	%	15.4	30.4	30.4	14.4	9.5	N	306
Partner phubbing has caused communication breakdowns in my marriage	Freq	67	94	89	40	16	2.49	1.126
	%	21.9	30.7	29.1	13.1	5.2	N	306
I feel that partner phubbing makes it harder for us to resolve conflicts or misunderstandings in our marriage	Freq	63	91	94	37	21	2.55	1.148
	%	20.6	29.7	30.7	12.1	6.9	N	306
My spouse's phone use often interrupts our conversations, making it hard for us to connect	Freq	54	113	79	44	16	2.53	1.099
	%	17.6	36.9	25.8	14.4	5.2	N	306
I am less satisfied with my marriage when my spouse engages in partner phubbing behaviors	Freq	60	88	96	38	24	2.6	1.164
	%	19.6	28.8	31.4	12.4	7.8	N	306
The time my spouse spends on their phone takes away from our quality time together, affecting my overall happiness in the marriage	Freq	64	84	100	33	25	2.58	1.172
	%	20.9	27.5	32.7	10.8	8.2	N	306
Partner phubbing has negatively affected our physical intimacy	Freq	79	88	86	28	25	2.45	1.201

(e.g., hugging, kissing, or sexual intimacy)								
	%	25.8	28.8	28.1	9.2	8.2		
I believe that reducing phone use would increase the closeness and intimacy in our relationship.	Freq	50	51	87	55	63	3.1	13.49
	%	16.3	16.7	28.4	18	20.6		

Table 14 outlines how phone use influences different aspects of marital relationships among couples in Nakuru County. The results generally reflect moderate perceptions, with considerable variation among respondents, indicating that the effects of phone use are experienced differently across relationships.

Feeling less emotionally supported when a spouse is frequently distracted by their phone had a mean of 2.73 (SD = 1.194). This suggests that respondents slightly tended to agree, although opinions varied widely. Qualitative responses mirror this diversity. One participant stated, *"When my partner is constantly on the phone, I feel like I'm not getting enough emotional support."* In contrast, another noted, *"Even with phone use, I still feel supported because we communicate in other ways."* These views show that while some couples experience reduced emotional support, others do not perceive it as a significant concern.

Feeling emotionally distant when a spouse uses their phone recorded a mean of 2.89 (SD = 1.221), which is close to the neutral point. This indicates that phone use contributes to emotional distance for some couples, while for others it has little or no effect. Qualitative insights support this, with one respondent explaining, *"Sometimes the phone creates a gap between us because we are not fully engaged."* Another remarked, *"It only affects us occasionally; most of the time we are still connected."*

The statement that phone use interferes with meaningful emotional conversations had a mean of 2.72 (SD = 1.17), suggesting that although many respondents did not strongly agree, a noticeable proportion felt that phone use disrupts deeper discussions. One participant shared, *"Serious conversations are often interrupted by phone use."* However, another stated, *"We still manage to talk about important issues despite the distractions."*

Partner phubbing causing communication breakdown recorded a mean of 2.49 (SD = 1.126), indicating that most respondents did not strongly view it as a major cause of communication problems, though some acknowledged its influence. Qualitative responses reflect this mixed perception. One respondent noted, *"It sometimes leads to misunderstandings because attention is divided."* Another indicated, *"It has not caused major communication problems in our relationship."*

Regarding conflict resolution, the perception that phubbing makes it harder to resolve disagreements had a mean of 2.55 (SD = 1.148), suggesting slight disagreement overall, but with differing experiences among couples. One participant explained, *"When phones interrupt during disagreements, it becomes harder to resolve issues."* In contrast, another stated, *"We are still able to handle conflicts even when phones are present."* Being less satisfied in marriage due to partner phubbing had a mean of 2.60 (SD = 1.164), indicating that most respondents did not strongly associate phubbing with reduced satisfaction, although some did. This is reflected in responses such as, *"Frequent phone use sometimes lowers my satisfaction,"* while others reported minimal impact.

Lastly, the effect of phubbing on physical intimacy (such as hugging, kissing, or sexual intimacy) had a mean of 2.45 (SD = 1.201), suggesting general disagreement,

though with some variation. One respondent noted, *"When we are both on our phones, physical closeness reduces."* Another stated, *"It has not really affected our physical intimacy."*

Taken collectively, the quantitative and qualitative findings shows that the impact of phone use on marital relationships is not uniform. While some couples experience reduced emotional support, communication challenges, and decreased intimacy, others report minimal or manageable effects. The convergence of both data sources highlights that the influence of partner phubbing largely depends on how couples manage and regulate phone use within their relationships.

Marital Challenges Related to Partner Phubbing

On the specific challenges that informant 3 (Pastor 1) had noticed in marriages that could be related to partner phubbing or the overuse of technology, the participant cited feelings of emotional abandonment by a partner, frequent arguments about "not listening" or "always being on the phone, disconnection during family meals or bedtime and suspicion or jealousy from seeing certain social media interactions. On his part, key informant 4, also a Pastor, cited the challenge of *"partners feeling like they are talking to a wall, emotional outbursts over 'small things," or a lack of empathy. Others become addicted to social media approval and start hiding their online activities. I've also seen couples report sexual disinterestbecause their minds are so overstimulated by the online world, they are emotionally unavailable offline."* In a similar study, 47% of the couples in Ang et al. (2019) study attributed their frequent arguments to the excessive use of smartphones, which accounted for 31% of their disagreements. In their study, Halpern and Katz (2019) found that couples reported a lack of intimacy, and this was attributed to

partner phubbing behavior since couples were not entirely focused on communicating and sharing ideas and were emotionally disconnected.

Qualitative data revealed various themes as discussed here below;

Theme 1:Effect of Phubbing and Communication in Marriage

In relation to how partner phubbing affects communication in marriage and whether it contributes to misunderstandings or conflict between spouses, key informant 3, a pastor, had this to say *"Yes, it limits real-time engagement. When one partner is distracted, the quality of communication drops. Non-verbal cues are missed, and tone is misinterpreted. One spouse may speak while the other nods absentmindedly. Eventually, one partner stops talking altogether. This breeds unspoken resentment, leading to bigger conflicts."* Another key informant, a pastor stated that "*phubbing makes one or both partners feel unheard, which leads to resentment. Misunderstandings often stem from partial listening, where one person believes something was agreed on, but the other wasn't truly engaged. Arguments then become about "tone" or "not caring," which are symptoms of deeper emotional disconnection. Over time, couples become emotionally distant and stop initiating conversations altogether."* Key informant 4 also echoed this saying *"when a partner is constantly on the phone, communication becomes fragmented. People don't feel heard. It leads to "emotional loneliness," even in daily interactions. Misunderstandings are common where something gets said and not fully processed, and later it explodes into an argument. When one partner always feels like they have to compete with the phone, emotional trust starts to erode."*

Studies by McDaniel and Coyne (2021) and Coyne et al. (2021) show that partner phubbing causes isolation, rejection and resentment in marriage relationships. This results

in conflicts and a complete breakdown of communication (Coyne et al., 2021). Other scholars such as Husntonetal. (2021); Hendrick et al. (2022) have revealed that partner phubbing disrupts communication, both verbal and non-verbal. When one partner is distracted by their phone, it is harder for them to actively listen, empathize, or engage in meaningful conversation. This communication breakdown can be a hindrance for partners to get to fully understand the feelings and needs of each other and this weakens their emotional connection (Beukeboom & Pollmann, 2021). This means that when a partner attempts to share an important issue be it a concern, a problem, or an accomplishment, but is confronted with distracted responses or lack of response, they can stop opening up, causing emotional disconnection. Such behavior can erode the trust and openness that are foundational to a strong emotional connection.

Theme 2: Phubbing and Couple Connection

In this regard, key informant stated that partner phubbing *"disconnects couples. Many couples tell me they feel "in the same house but in different worlds." Partner phubbing causes spouses to feel ignored, leading to frustration and emotional shutdown. Spiritually, when phones dominate every quiet moment, couples rarely pray together or study the Word as a team. It silently kills both romance and reverence".* The key informant continued to observe that partner phubbing *"disrupts the natural rhythm of listening and responding. It sends the message: "I'm not available." This leads to passive-aggressiveness, short tempers, and even contempt. Small issues become big issues simply because one spouse isn't fully present."*

Responding in the same aspect, key informant 5, a psychologist stated that *"phubbing creates emotional injury. One partner feels dismissed, the other may be*

unaware. Over time, the cycle of bid–rejection becomes a pattern—one reaches out, the other is distracted. Spiritually, phubbing can displace intentional time for shared prayer or conversation, which is essential for connection in faith-centered couples." He continued to state that *"phubbing interrupts the basic give-and-take of conversation. It also blocks vulnerability. Many arguments start with something simple but escalate due to the perceived lack of attention or care. Over time, couples stop "bidding" for attention, which erodes closeness.* The psychologist respondent continued to note that *"phubbing teaches couples to disengage. They get used to not being heard or not listening. Over time, even conflict gets avoidednot because there's peace, but because there's no point trying."*

Studies by McDaniel and Coyne (2021) and Coyne et al. (2021) show that partner phubbing causes isolation, rejection and resentment in marriage relationships. This results in conflicts and a complete breakdown of communication (Coyne et al., 2021). Evidently, because of the conflict occasioned by partner phubbing, the level of marital satisfaction keeps diminishing and eventually leads to fights in the relationships and at times to the breakdown of the relationship (Coyne et al., 2021). Studies by Rahtikawati and Ratnasih (2021); Thabassum (2021); Courtright and Caplan (2020) indicate that distractions caused by smartphone use undermine the ability to listen actively since it causes one partner to feel ignored by the one in consistent use of their phone. This sends a message that the phone is more important than holding an engaging conversation, making the other partner feel unimportant or unheard. This compromises direct conversations, emotional intimacy, and relationship satisfaction, and may also lead to incessant conflict situations and mental health challenges. This demonstrate that active listening through body language cues like eye contact, nodding, facial expressions are undermined when a

partner looks at a phone instead of focusing on a partner and this weakens couple connections.

Theme 3: Partner Phubbing and Marital Intimacy

Key informant 8 stated that *"yes, if left unaddressed, partner phubbing erodes the foundation of intimacy and connection. Over months or years, couples become strangers under the same roof. The constant feeling of being "less important than a phone" damages self-worth and trust. In extreme cases, I've seen this contribute to affairs or separation. It's not the phone, but the emotional message it sends: "You're not my priority."* Malek (2019) found that partner phubbing leads to feeling neglect, unimportant and conflict which when poorly handled, are able to erode trust, undermine intimacy, and damage the general well-being of the marriage. In their study, Lenhart and Duggan (2021) established that phubbing leads to feelings of jealousy or suspicion of dishonesty and infidelity. Suspicion of infidelity makes a partner begin to interpret innocent texts as signs of wrongdoing. It therefore implies that the suspicion of infidelity may result in accusations, heightening tension, even when there is no actual betrayal.

Theme 4: Phubbing and Conflict Resolution

On whether couples who phub each other struggle more with conflict resolution, the psychologist informant categorically stated *"yes, because resolution requires empathy, listening, and attunement. Phubbing breaks those skills down. Many of these couples resort to silent treatment, sarcasm, or shutdown instead of true repair attempts."* In their study, Roberts and David (2022) established that partner phubbing predicted more conflict, which in turn led to lower relationship satisfaction. In another study, McDaniel and Coyne (2022) found that the distractions caused by phubbing were

associated with poor conflict resolution and communication patterns. Wang and Zhao (2022) noted that phubbing is positively correlated with poor conflict resolution mainly because it disrupts communication, emotional connection, and the cooperative mindset needed to resolve disagreements effectively. The findings imply that phubbing behavior divides attention, leading to missed verbal and non-verbal cues**,** and weakens a couple's ability to meaningfully understand the other's perspective.

Communication in Marital Relationship

Regarding communication in the relationship, key informant 1 noted that open communication was huge for them observing that "*We have regular "relationship check-ins*" *where we talk about what's going well and what needs improvement. It helps avoid resentment*." The wife to key informant 1 echoed what her husband said about communication saying that it is very crucial. She continued to stated that "*When we communicate openly, I feel reassured and connected. We use "I feel" statements and also check in every Sunday during our "marriage meetings."* Key informant 2 noted that "*couple communication is extremely important. We try to talk openly, but sometimes she shuts down or gets defensive when I bring things up. We usually have our deeper talks during walks or when the kids are asleep."* His wife equally stated that *"It's vital. When we actually take the time to talk, things improve. But most of the time, we're rushing, distracted, or tired. I wish we were more intentional about regular check-ins."*

According to Lisitsa et al. (2020), direct and indirect communication is a very crucial aspect of any successful marital relationship. Couple communication facilitates the relationship in minimizing misunderstandings, strengthening the bond and enabling the other spouse to reciprocate and express feelings to the other. This shows that in a

marital relationship, effective communication is important in creating an effective bond that can only be perpetuated through the sharing of one's feelings, viewpoints, and interpretations of shared moments.

Emotional Support in Marriage

On whether key informant one felt emotionally supported, he responded recalling that "*Last year when I started my master's program, she was so supportive, taking on extra chores, encouraging me. That meant everything to me."* The wife also stated that "*When I went through a health scare last year, he was by my side for every appointment, asked questions to the doctor, and prayed with me every night. That support meant everything."* Key informant 2 recalled that "*When I lost my job during COVID, she really stepped up. She encouraged me, helped me with applications, and reminded me of my value. That's something I'll never forget."* On her part, the spouse noted that has always been very supportive and cited an instance where she said "*When my father passed away, he really supported me. He handled everything at home so I could grieve. That's when I felt most loved and emotionally held."*A study by Konstam et al. (2019) indicated that couples expected to be provided with emotional support, loyalty, marital faithfulness, assistance around the house, and commitment. Additionally, the day-to-day workings of the relationship and quality interactions in the relationship were found to offer and reinforce the daily relational expectations. These finding shows that emotional support is a critical aspect in the stability a marital relationship.

Conflict Handling in Marriage

On handling conflicts, he said "*We're getting better. Earlier, fights would escalate fast. Now, we try to pause, listen, and validate each other's feelings. It's made a big*

difference in feeling closer after conflict." On her part, the wife stated that "*We've learned to argue with each other and not against each other. We still have heated moments, but we recover faster now. That recovery process really impacts how happy I feel in the relationship."* In the aspect of conflict handling, key informant 2 respondent by saying that "*We don't always handle them well. Sometimes one of us walks away or we leave things unresolved for too long. It builds tension. But when we sit down to talk it out calmly, it does help and strengthens the bond."* Equally, the wife also stated that *"Not well, honestly. We both have a habit of sweeping things under the rug. Sometimes things explode after being bottled up. That impacts my satisfaction a lot I wish we had resolved things sooner and more calmly."*

In another study, Kienan (2019) found that couples who approached conflict calmly, listen actively, and seek compromise reported higher marital satisfaction. Effective conflict resolution is crucial if strong, lasting relationships are to be maintained (Van Pelt, 2020). When managed well, conflict may even serve to strengthen the relationship by enhancing communication, increasing mutual understanding, and deepening emotional closeness (Lewis, 2021). Conversely, when poorly handled, conflicts are able to erode trust, undermine intimacy, and damage the general well-being of the marriage (Malek, 2019). This underscores the fact that marital relations are sometimes characterized by conflicts whose effect on the relationship depends on how they are managed.

Physical Intimacy

In regard to physical intimacy, he noted that it is good observing that "*physical intimacy definitely contributes to my feeling of closeness and satisfaction. It's a way we*

reconnect when words sometimes fail." The wife underscored the importance of physical intimacy observing that "*It's one of the love languages that reconnects us when life gets busy or tense. I feel a lot more bonded after intimacy."* On physical intimacy, key informant 2 quickly noted that "*It's not as frequent as before, but when it happens, it's meaningful. I think it still plays a big role in keeping the connection alive."* The wife corroborated this by saying that *"it's become infrequent, but I think it's still important. When we make time for it, it helps rekindle some emotional closeness. But often, life gets in the way."* According to Hagey (2019), physical intimacy serves to make couples feel more connected. That frequent showing and engaging in physical affection through hugs or kisses, or indulging in intimate activities that both partners find fulfilling (Hagey et al., 2020). For instance, a warm cuddle after a challenging day or a spontaneous kiss may provide reassurance to partners that he/she is loved, esteemed, and supported emotionally (Girgis et al., 2020). This shows that practicing physical acts of intimacy enhances a feeling of belonging and security, promoting a strong emotional bond that strengthens the longevity of the relationship.

Objective Four: Measures to Mitigate Partner Phubbing

Table 15: *Descriptive statistics for mitigating factors in partner phubbing*

Mitigating factors	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Setting boundaries on phone usage	304	2.01	1.129
Enhancing communication techniques	304	2.67	1.145
Mindful and being present	304	2.48	1.131
Addressing emotional impact	304	2.53	1.174

Table 15 presents descriptive statistics on strategies used to mitigate partner phubbing among married couples in Nakuru County. The findings indicate generally low utilisation of these measures, suggesting that most couples rarely apply intentional strategies to manage phone-related interruptions in their relationships.

Setting boundaries on phone use recorded the lowest mean of 2.01 (SD = 1.129), indicating that respondents seldom establish clear rules governing smartphone use within their marriages. Qualitative responses reinforce this finding. One participant stated, *"We have not set any rules about phone use, so everyone just uses their phone freely."* Another added, *"There are no restrictions on phone use; it just happens naturally."* These responses suggest minimal effort to regulate smartphone behaviour within relationships.

Enhancing communication techniques recorded a mean of 2.67 (SD = 1.145), which, although slightly higher than other items, still reflects low adoption of this approach. One respondent explained, *"We try to communicate more, but phones still interfere sometimes."* Another noted, *"We don't really have specific ways of improving communication; it just depends on the situation."* This indicates that although communication improvement is acknowledged, it is not consistently practiced.

Being mindful and present had a mean of 2.48 (SD = 1.131), showing that couples rarely engage in intentional presence during shared time. Qualitative accounts support this. One participant remarked, *"Even when we are together, we are often both on our phones."* Another stated, *"We try to be present, but distractions make it difficult."* These responses highlight challenges in maintaining full attentiveness during interactions.

Addressing emotional impact recorded a mean of 2.53 (SD = 1.174), indicating limited practice of emotionally reflective strategies. One respondent observed, *"We rarely discuss how phone use affects how we feel."* Another added, *"We usually don't talk about the emotional effects unless problems arise."* This suggests that emotional responses to phubbing are often not actively addressed.

In overall, the quantitative and qualitative findings consistently show low engagement in mitigating strategies, despite awareness of partner phubbing. The qualitative "voices" illustrate that many couples do not deliberately adopt measures to reduce phone-related disruptions in their relationships. The findings align with Frackowiak (2022), who reported that strategies for managing partner phubbing are not regularly implemented among couples. Similarly, Rahtikawati and Ratnasih (2021) found that although some couples attempt to address phubbing and its effects, many do not, resulting in persistent challenges such as reduced intimacy, increased misunderstandings, and lower marital satisfaction. The integration of both data sets therefore indicates that while mitigation strategies exist, their actual application among couples remains limited.

Effective Partner Phubbing Mitigation Measures as Stated by Key Informants

Key informant 3, a pastor was asked to state the kind of advice he would offer to couples who are struggling with partner phubbing and technology distractions, especially those who might feel disconnected or frustrated by these issues. In response, the pastor pointed out that *"couples need to establish phone-free zones especially during meals, bedtime, or devotions and also setting a daily 20-minute "connection time" with no screens."* Key informant 5 recommended "*Tech-free rituals which included device-free meals, morning cuddles, bedtime talks, shared tech policy jointly created, replacing*

screen time with couple rituals like walks, devotionals, or check-in questions and emotional safety-building exercises to re-engage at a deeper level." In his study, Abramova (2021), established that couples set phone use boundaries which included putting cell phones away when having meals, conversations, or quality time may help lower partner phubbing and agreeing on the specific times for checking their phone or social media, instead of regularly interrupting conversations (Zhu &Chen, 2023).

Regarding how pastor 1 addresses partner phubbing during his counselling sessions as a barrier to marital satisfaction. The pastor noted that he uses several approaches including setting boundaries and habits ‘‘We develop small, manageable habits like screen curfews, charging phones outside the bedroom, or screen-free Sundays. He recommended that couples pray together or do devotionals-without phones noting that *"spiritual intimacy can reset emotional closeness."* On the same, Pastor 2 indicated that he addresses partner phubbing by creating awareness advising that *"first, help them notice how often phubbing happens and how it makes each other feel, encourage them to create joint goals for screen time, just like they would for finances or parenting and suggesting that they replace evening scrolling with activities like cooking together, walking, or playing a board game."* The pastor also advised *"encouraging couples to build "covenant connection" through prayer and shared Bible reading. When they realign their marriage under God, the distractions lose power."* Al-Saggaf (2019) recommends that couples should address concerns regarding partner phubbing openly with their partners to ensure both feel heard and respected. That they can express their feelings by sharing how partner phubbing makes them feel without apportioning blame.

That couples should provide specific instances by illustrating the behavior with specific examples to enable a partner to understand the impact (Karadağ et al., 2021).

Relationship between Partner Phubbing and Marital Satisfaction with Mitigating Factors (was there an objective like this?

Table 16: *ANOVA for Partner Phubbing, Mitigating Factors and Marital Satisfaction*

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	114.642	2	57.321	65.28	.000b
	Residual	264.305	301	0.878		
	Total	378.947	303			

a Dependent Variable: Marital satisfaction

b Predictors: (Constant), Mitigating factors, partner phubbing

The ANOVA tests the statistical significance of the model. The F-ratio in the ANOVA (Table 16) tests whether the overall regression model is a good fit for the data. The finding shows that mitigating factors in partner phubbing significantly predicted marital satisfaction, F (2, 301) = 65.28, p (.000) < .05 (i.e., the regression model is a good fit of the data).This means that these mitigating factors were strongly linked to how satisfied people were in their marriages—the connection is not random, but real and statistically meaningful.The implication of the finding is that how couples manage or buffer the effects of partner phubbing significantly influences marital satisfaction. Even if phubbing occurs, among marital relationships, partners can use protective behaviors, attitudes, or coping strategies such as open communication, empathy, quality time, or agreed-upon phone boundaries to reduce its negative impact on the relationship. Interventions to improve marital satisfaction should not only aim to reduce phone use but should also

focus on building relationship skills that help couples handle digital distractions constructively. This implication is consistent with a study by Abramova (2021) where it was established that couples having in place measures for phubbing mitigation had lower partner phubbing rates and consequently had higher marital satisfaction levels.

Table 17*: Linear Regression Coefficients for Partner Phubbing, Mitigating Factors and Marital Satisfaction*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.595	0.221		7.231	0
	Partner phubbing	0.256	0.051	0.24	4.989	0
	Mitigating factors	0.551	0.053	0.503	10.451	0

a Dependent Variable: Marital satisfaction

From the findings in the table the established regression equation was;

MaS = 1.595 + 0.256Pb + 0.551MMs+ 0.937

The regression equation above established that taking all factors into account constant at zero, marital satisfaction would be 1.595. The findings depicted a positive relationship between mitigating factors and marital satisfaction (beta=0.551, p=0). A positive Beta (β = 0.551) indicates a strong positive relationship between mitigating factors and marital satisfaction, implying that an increase in integration of mitigating factors for phubbing partners by 1 unit leads to improvement in marital satisfaction by

0.551 units.The findings imply that couples engaging in constructive behaviors are better able to buffer or neutralize the negative effects of partner phubbing or other relationship stressors. Marriage counseling and education should therefore focus on strengthening positive relational behaviors (mitigating factors), not just reducing negative behaviors like phubbing. This implication agrees with Cameron (2022), who also found that the use of phubbing mitigation measures helped couples maintain or restore marital satisfaction despite the negative effects of smartphone overuse among couples.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has carried out data analysis, presentation, and interpretation of the findings. In assessing the prevalence of phubbing among married couples, responses on phubbing behavior were analyzed and categorized into four levels of phubbing, namely never, rarely, sometimes, and always, and their means and standard deviation were also established. Marital satisfaction was also assessed in the four aspects, namely emotional connection, communication, intimacy, conflict resolution, and overall satisfaction, and the means and standard deviations were established. To assess the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction, cross-tabulation was conducted between the levels of phubbing and marital satisfaction. Both Pearson correlation and linear regression procedures were carried out to establish the strength and direction of the relationship. The study also assessed the effects of mitigating factors for couples in partner phubbing and their marital satisfaction using the regression model and also the descriptive statistics. The next chapter presents asummary of findings, their implications, conclusions, recommendations, and areas for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Introduction

The main goal of this study was to explore the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction among married couples in Nakuru County, Kenya. This chapter summarizes the key findings of the study consistent with its four objectives. The chapter further discusses the implications of the findings for theory and practice, then makes recommendations and also draws conclusions based on its findings.

Summary of Key Findings

The first objective was to determine the prevalence of partner phubbing among married couples. The study established the prevalence of various levels among the respondents, whereby 39.5% reported they sometimes experienced phubbing in their marriage, 25.5% indicated they often experienced phubbing, 16.7% stated they rarely experienced phubbing, while 13.1% stated they always experienced phubbing, and 5.2% indicated they had never experienced phubbing in their relationship. This implies that the intensity and frequency of phubbing among married couples in Nakuru County varied widely and spread across the sampled couples.

Qualitative statements from the key informants also indicated that phubbing among couples was a common occurrence. The first couple observed that phubbing happens almost daily, giving incidents such as ‘‘My wife often checks TikTok or WhatsApp during TV time or even when we go out to eat. There was a time we were at a restaurant celebrating my promotion, and midway through dinner, she was busy replying

to group chats.'' ''My husband is addicted to Twitter. Sometimes when we're on date nights or even just having tea together, he gets pulled into a Twitter thread. It's annoying because I can tell he's not really listening.'' ''I would say phone use during a couple of times happens a few times a week. During meals or when we are talking about something important, one of us might reach for the phone – usually her. I do it too, but mostly when I get a work email.'' ''My wife tends to check her phone a lot in the evenings after dinner.'' ''I would say one of us is on the phone at least once during every conversation longer than 10 minutes, especially if we're multitasking.'' ''There was a night I was telling him about something emotional that happened at work, and he was half-listening while texting. I stopped talking mid-sentence.'' "I feel lonelier in my marriage than I did when I was single because my husband spends every evening on YouTube or TikTok.''

The second objective was to assess marital satisfaction among married couples. From quantitative analysis, 34.6% of the respondents had very high marital satisfaction levels, 28.8% had moderate levels, 23.2% had high satisfaction level, while 10.8% had low satisfaction levels and 2.6% had very low levels of marital satisfaction. This implies that marital satisfaction levels were widely spread across the sample of respondents, suggesting that not all couples experienced marriage in the same way.

Emotional connection had a mean of 3.38 and standard deviation 1.162 which reflected that emotional connection was not consistent across all couples, there are notable differences in how strongly partners feel emotionally bonded. Communication among the respondents had a mean 3.33 with standard deviation 1.138 which meant that some couples reported very effective communication, and others poor or neutral communication. The respondents' level of intimacy had a mean 3.31 and standard

deviation 1.18, which suggested that a majority of the couples felt stronger intimacy with their spouses and others felt weaker or even disconnected in this aspect. Conflict resolution had a mean 3.23 and standard deviation 1.116 which also demonstrated that some couples had effective conflict resolution, while others found it hard to handle disagreements. Overall satisfaction had a mean 3.37 and standard deviation 1.218, which suggests that most couples were content in their marriages, although satisfaction was not extremely high as others ranged from neutral to dissatisfied. This underscored the fact that marital satisfaction is not evenly distributed, and some couples may be experiencing significant strain or dissatisfaction.

The key informants comprising couples indicated general marital satisfaction. In a scale of 1-10, Key informant 1 rated his marital satisfaction at 8 in overall adding that ‘‘we have a great relationship, but these small communication gaps because of distractions do create some frustration’’. His wife rated her marital satisfaction at 7.5 noting that ‘‘we have a strong bond, but digital distractions sometimes prevent us from connecting at the level I crave.’’ Key informant 2 stated that ‘‘I’d say 7. We have a solid foundation, but the digital distractions and sometimes unresolved arguments have affected the closeness we used to have’’. The wife said that ‘‘I’d rate it a 6’’ noting that ‘‘We have shared history, kids, love, and memories. But emotionally, I sometimes feel alone or disconnected. I miss the intimacy we used to have.’’

The key informants who comprised of young and old couples noted that they felt emotionally supported, one of them recalling that ‘‘Last year when I started my master's program, she was so supportive, taking on extra chores, encouraging me. That meant everything to me.’’ The wife also stated that ‘‘When I went through a health scare last

year, he was by my side for every appointment, asked questions to the doctor, and prayed with me every night. That support meant everything'' On the aspect of communication, key informant 2 recalled that ''When I lost my job during COVID, she really stepped up. She encouraged me, helped me with applications, and reminded me of my value. That's something I'll never forget''. On her part, the spouse noted that has always been very supportive and cited an instance where she said ''When my father passed away, he really supported me. He handled everything at home so I could grieve. That's when I felt most loved and emotionally held.''

The third objective was to establish the relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction. The study findings showed that partner phubbing (t= 3.989, p=0) significantly affected marital satisfaction of married couples in Nakuru. The standardized Beta coefficient suggested that partner phubbing had a weak negative impact (B= -0.223). This implies that a unit increase in partner phubbing resulted to a decrease in marital satisfaction by 0.238 units. Further, the coefficient of determination was 0.223 (22.3%) variation in marital satisfaction. This depicts a weak linear dependence between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction. Also, the results of analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated a statistically significant regression model which was a good fit for the data. In regard to the effect of mitigating factors for couples in partner phubbing and their marital satisfaction, R value (0.550) was established showing that the overall model is significant. Partner phubbing explained 30.3% of marital satisfaction represented by the R^2 where other factors not studied in this research contributed 69.7% in marital satisfaction among married couples. It was also established that the independent variable

(partner phubbing) significantly predicted the dependent variable (marital satisfaction), F (1, 304) = 15.916, p (.000) < .05.

The regression analysis depicted a positive relationship between mitigating factors (boundary-setting, communication strategies, shared technology rules) and marital satisfaction. The Standardized Beta (β) = 0.551, p = 0.000 demonstrate that the relationship is statistically significant and moderate to strong in strength. This suggests that as the integration of mitigating factors for partner phubbing increases, marital satisfaction also increases. Specifically, a 1-unit increase in the use of mitigating strategies leads to a 0.551-unit increase in marital satisfaction, Overall, the positive beta indicates that these strategies are effective at improving relationship quality.

The fourth objective was to identify measures that married couples in Nakuru County use to mitigate partner phubbing. The findings showed that setting of boundaries on phone usage had a weighted mean of 2.01 and standard deviation of 1.129, implying that the respondents used this measure but rarely worked. A similar finding was found in regard to enhancing communication techniques mean=2.67, SD=1.145), being mindful and present (mean=2.48, SD=1.131) and addressing emotional impact (mean=2.53, SD=1.174). The findings implied that most of the couples rarely embraced measures against phubbing to control or reduce phubbing**.** On their part, the key informant 3&4, who were pastors pointed out in addressing partner phubbing during his counselling sessions, they advise couples to set boundaries and habits like screen curfews, charging phones outside the bedroom, or screen-free Sundays. They also encourage them to create joint goals for screen time, engaging in activities like cooking, walking, or playing together. The psychotherapist key informants stated that they explore the emotional

impact of phubbing together, engaging in *Gottman "Stress-Reducing Conversation" or emotional validation training, setting specific behavioral goals like no phones after 9pm,one tech-free hour per day and use of cognitive behavior therapy to help the phubbing partners identify and challenge the automatic thoughts driving their behavior*."

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have various implications for practice and theory

From the data analysis, the study indicated that phubbing behaviour occurred at varying levels, with some couples reporting it rarely, others sometimes, often, or always, meaning that phubbing is not universal instead, it varying greatly in intensity and frequency across couples. It is a common issue in modern married life, however not all couples are affected equally. The implication of this finding is that intervention mechanisms should be tailored, not one-size-fits-all. For instance, some couples may only require awareness, while others may need active relationship counseling to address chronic phubbing. Also, there is need for personalized relationship support, whereby couples having frequent phubbing can be provided with mechanisms for boundary-setting, digital detox procedures, or communication skills. Those with occasional or rare phubbing can just require maintenance interventions to prevent escalation. The other implication is that professionals including counselors, therapists, educators need to begin addressing technology or phone-related challenges as part of routine marital relationship support. Further, the variability informs the formulation of targeted workshops, seminars, or educational programs for marital partners focusing on setting of tech boundaries, promotion of emotional connection and awareness creation on the emotional impact of phubbing behavior.

The study also revealed that marital satisfaction levels were widely spread across the sample of respondents, some indicating very high, high, moderate and low satisfaction suggesting that marital satisfaction is not universal; couples experience marriage very differently. The wide range of satisfaction levels implies that couples have varying needs, expectations, and challenges and highlights the complexity of marital life. That marital partners experience their relationships in highly individualized manner and this requires that relationship education, counseling, and support systems be flexible and responsive to varying needs. It underscores the importance of personalized, context-aware methodologies as opposed to generalized assumptions in regard to marriage. There is for example need for differentiated interventions, whereby partners with low satisfaction might require targeted therapy, communication training, or conflict resolution support. Couples with moderate to high satisfaction might benefit from preventive maintenance approaches and relationship enrichment strategies. Considering that satisfaction differs, opportunities for early identification of cases of reducing marital satisfaction may be resourceful in preventing adverse relationship breakdowns. The implication of this is that strategies such as constant marital check-ups or satisfaction assessment tools may be carried out in workplaces, community, or religious settings.

The study also revealed that partner phubbing ($t = 3.989$, $p = 0$) significantly affected marital satisfaction among married couples. The standardized Beta coefficient suggested that partner phubbing had a weak negative impact ($B = -0.223$). Meaning that partner phubbing has a weak negative effect on marital satisfaction, whereby a unit increase in partner phubbing resulted in a decrease in marital satisfaction by 0.238 units. The implication of this finding is that even a weak but constant pattern of phone

distraction can meaningfully lower how satisfied couples feel in their marriage, suggesting that phone-related interruptions are not trivial; they exert a huge toll on marital stability and therefore deserve serious attention in both personal and therapeutic interventions to forestall deteriorations in relationships and even breakups. That consistent or frequent attention to a phone, as opposed to one's spouse, breeds feelings of neglect, disconnection, or rejection that negatively impact or reduce marital satisfaction. Even though the Beta is small-even small, repeated behaviors, the cumulative effect of daily phubbing can undermine emotional intimacy over time.

The regression analysis depicted a positive relationship between mitigating factors (boundary-setting, communication strategies, shared technology rules) and marital satisfaction. The Standardized Beta (β) = 0.551, $p = 0.000$, demonstrates that the relationship is statistically significant and moderate to strong in strength. This suggests that as the integration of mitigating factors for partner phubbing increases, marital satisfaction also increases. Specifically, a 1-unit increase in the use of mitigating strategies leads to a 0.551-unit increase in marital satisfaction. The implication of this finding is that interventions such as setting phone-use boundaries, improving communication, and fostering shared attention are beneficial in mitigating the effects of phubbing on marital stability and satisfaction. Partners who actively manage phubbing have increased satisfaction in their marital life. The finding further means that phubbing does not need to be destructive; its effects can be managed or even reversed with intentional behaviors. Overall, these findings underscore the significance of intentional behavioral approaches in maintaining relationship dynamics that are healthy in the context of modern digital distractions.

The findings showed that the setting of boundaries on phone usage had a weighted mean of 2.01 and a standard deviation of 1.129, implying that the respondents used this measure but rarely worked. A similar finding was observed regarding enhancing communication techniques (mean=2.67, SD=1.145), being mindful and present (mean=2.48, SD=1.131), and addressing emotional impact (mean=2.53, SD=1.174). The findings implied that most couples rarely embraced measures against phubbing to control or reduce phubbing. The low mean scores indicate that couples were aware of these measures but rarely implement them in their relations, reflecting a lack of practical skills, motivation, or support towards consistent application or practice of these techniques. This further implies that there is a need for more targeted interventions that not only foster awareness but also teach and reinforce real-life use of these techniques. A further implication is that professionals such as counselors and therapists need to put priority on training couples on digital boundaries, emotional responsiveness, and active communication as part of educational regimes on marital relations.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are made;

Regarding the first objective on the prevalence of partner phubbing among married couples, the study concludes that partner phubbing is not a universal behavioral pattern among married couples but rather exhibits considerable heterogeneity in both frequency and intensity. This variability suggests that phubbing is contextually mediated and likely influenced by a combination of individual differences (e.g., personality traits, attachment styles), relational dynamics (e.g., communication patterns, relationship satisfaction), and situational factors (e.g., technology usage norms, work-life balance).

Statistically, the distribution of phubbing behaviors did not follow a uniform pattern across the sample, indicating that while some couples report frequent and disruptive instances of phubbing, others experience it minimally or not at all. This conclusion aligns with the attachment theory whereby the variation may be influenced by individual attachment styles, where securely attached partners are less reactive to minor technological distractions, while those with anxious or avoidant attachment may perceive or engage in phubbing more intensely. This underscores the role of internal working models in shaping responses to perceived partner inattention and highlights the need to consider attachment-related processes in understanding the dynamics of phubbing in marital relationships.

Regarding the second objective on marital satisfaction, it can be concluded that marital satisfaction is not a universal or uniform phenomenon, and that couples do not experience marriage in a similar way. Satisfaction levels vary significantly across couples, highlighting how marital satisfaction is a subjective experience. The broad variation in satisfaction levels demonstrate that marital stability and satisfaction is dictated by individual traits, relational dynamics for instance communication, emotional intimacy. It can also be concluded that marital satisfaction occurs on a continuum outcome, not simply “satisfied vs. dissatisfied” but satisfaction rather ranges from very low to very high, solidifying the need for clear understanding and measurement. The other conclusion is that there is no single explanation or solution that is applicable to all marriages. The conclusion underscores the inherently subjective and multifaceted nature of marital experiences. Empirical variation in satisfaction levels across couples suggests that marital satisfaction is not a fixed construct but one influenced by a complex interplay

of psychological, relational, and sociocultural factors. This heterogeneity reflects differences in individual expectations, communication patterns, conflict resolution styles, emotional intimacy, and broader contextual influences such as cultural norms and socioeconomic conditions. The conclusion aligns with theoretical frameworks such as systems theory, which posit that individuals construct meaning within relationships based on personal experiences, histories, and ongoing interactions. As such, marital satisfaction should be conceptualized not as a static outcome, but as a dynamic, subjective appraisal shaped by the unique characteristics and evolving interactions within each marital dyad.

In relation to the third objective on relationship between partner phubbing and marital satisfaction, the researcher concluded that partner phubbing significantly and negatively influences marital satisfaction, even in a situation where the effect is weak. This demonstrates that consistent phone-related distractions can undermine the quality of marital relationships and also emotional connection. The fact that partner phubbing significantly and negatively influences marital satisfaction, even when the effect size is weak, underscores the meaningful impact of persistent digital distractions on relational quality. This suggests that while phubbing may not always result in prominent dissatisfaction, its cumulative effect can erode emotional intimacy and perceived partner responsiveness over time. The significance of even a modest effect highlights the psychological prominence of attention and presence in marital interactions. From the perspective of attachment theory, consistent phone-related interruptions may activate feelings of neglect or insecurity, particularly among anxiously attached individuals. This is consistent with the media dependence theory which states that when individuals become highly dependent on their smartphones for social connection, entertainment, or emotional

regulation, they may prioritize device interaction over in-person communication. This diverts attention from the spouse, reducing quality time and responsiveness core ingredients of marital satisfaction.

In relation to the fourth objective on phubbing mitigation strategies used by couples, the study found infrequent use of phubbing mitigating measures among couples. The researcher therefore concludes that there was a general lack of proactive behavioral regulation in managing technology-related disruptions within marital interactions. This suggests that, despite the recognized negative implications of partner phubbing on relationship quality, there is limited intentional engagement in communication norms or boundary-setting practices around device use. Such low adoption of mitigating measures may reflect either an underestimation of phubbing's relational impact, a lack of awareness of effective strategies, or normalization of digital interruptions in daily life. From a behavioral self-regulation perspective, the absence of such measure’s points to a gap between relational intentions and enacted behaviors, which may leave couples more vulnerable to the cumulative erosion of intimacy and satisfaction. This pattern reflects a potential normalization of digital distractions within marital contexts, where device presence and use are not actively negotiated or managed. The absence of mitigation behaviors may exacerbate the negative relational outcomes of partner phubbing over time, particularly in the absence of shared digital boundaries or explicit communication about media use. This conclusion underscores the need for greater relational awareness and intentional technology management within intimate partnerships, highlighting a gap that could be addressed through intervention, education, or couple-based media literacy initiatives.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of the study, the researcher makes recommendations as follows.

Couples: Couples should seek guidance of therapist and counselors to help them develop customized digital use agreements such as “phone-free” zones or times, for instance during meals, bedtime, or weekly date nights, when both partners agree to put phones away. Couples should also communicate openly about phone use, especially how each partner feels when the other is distracted by their phone, and then agree on boundaries that make both partners feel respected and heard. They should also model respectful behavior, for instance, by avoiding checking their phone during conversations and showing interest in what their partner is saying to reinforce emotional intimacy. If phubbing has already created significant conflict or distance, couples consider couples therapy to address underlying issues and rebuild communication.

Families: Families should attend joint therapy sessions which will help couples identify the impact of partner phubbing on their relationship. Therapists will also help couples uncover these root causes phubbing and help them develop healthier coping mechanisms. Further, families should foster a culture of presence and attention by encouraging all family members to be fully present during family time. Families should also model attentive behavior as parents so children learn the value of face-to-face interaction. They should create family-wide screen time agreements by collaboratively setting boundaries for device use during important family activities, such as meal times and bedtime routines. They should educate children and teens on respectful tech use by explaining how excessive phone use can affect relationships, including how parents relate

to each other. Tech-free family zones can also be designated (like the dining and living room). This will encourage conversation and bonding. Last but not least, families need to practice and encourage open communication by holding regular family meetings to discuss how everyone feels about screen time and its impact on relationships.

Religious Organization: Religious leaders can partner with licensed therapists to offer faith-aligned counseling during pre-marital classes, marriage enrichment seminars, and couples' retreats and workshops. Religious organizations should incorporate teachings on digital discipline and presence, integrate sermons, Bible studies, or teachings that emphasize being present, respectful communication, and honoring one's spouse. They should organize seminars for couples focused on managing digital distractions, improving communication, and deepening emotional connection. The clergy and ministry leaders should be encouraged to model healthy boundaries with devices, especially during pastoral counseling, services, and family events. This sets a powerful example for congregants and reinforces the message of being present. Religious leaders should also encourage family devotions without distractions by recommending phone-free times during family prayers, devotions, or worship.

Researchers: Researchers should conduct long-term studies to assess how consistently partner phubbing impacts marital satisfaction over time, including its potential to contribute to separation or divorce. They should examine whether the effects intensify, stabilize, or decrease as couples adjust. The studies should also evaluate whether behavioral changes lead to measurable improvements in marital satisfaction, communication, and emotional intimacy. Researchers should also conduct studies to differentiate between types of phone use (social media, texting, work-related use) and

study whether certain digital activities are more harmful than others in the context of marriage. Researchers should also study how partner phubbing affects parenting, family cohesion, and child well-being.

Policy Makers: The government should integrate digital relationship education into family policies by updating national and county-level family welfare policies to include digital behavior as a key component of marital and family health. The government should also mandate that pre-marital and post-marital counseling programs address issues like phubbing, screen time, and digital boundaries. It needs to fund public awareness campaigns by, for instance, launching nationwide or county-level campaigns (through radio, TV, social media, churches, and barazas) to raise awareness about the effects of phubbing on emotional connection and the importance of setting phone-free times (e.g., during meals and at bedtime). The government should also partner with faith-based organizations, schools, and local leaders to offer workshops on healthy tech use in relationships and marriage enrichment sessions that teach communication and tech boundaries. The government should also take deliberate measures to strengthen marriage counseling services. This may include funding and supporting training for marriage counselors to recognize and address digital distractions in therapy and expand access to family counseling in rural and underserved areas.

Counselors: They need to encourage open, non-defensive communication about digital habits and their emotional consequences; address phubbing in couples therapy goals; and make reducing phubbing an explicit therapy goal when it is identified as a concern. Counselors should also guide partners in creating joint tech agreements (such as no phones at dinner and a device-free hour before bed) and help them align their

boundaries with their shared values and emotional needs. They should address the underlying issues behind phubbing by exploring whether phubbing is a symptom of deeper issues, such as avoidance, conflict, boredom, or emotional disconnection, and then work through unresolved feelings that may be leading one or both partners to retreat into their phones. Counselors should also educate clients about the research on phubbing and its effects, including its impact on trust, satisfaction, and intimacy.

Areas for Further Research

Given the finding that partner phubbing significantly affected marital satisfaction, the research recommends the following areas for further research.

While the current outcome indicates a significant effect of phubbing on marital relationships, it is not clear whether the effects get worse or change over time. Therefore, another study can inquire into how partner phubbing affects marital satisfaction over a longer time to reveal causal relationships and long-term outcomes.

An intervention study may be conducted to come up with and test the effectiveness of phubbing interventions (such as training on digital etiquette, setting of technology boundaries) in minimizing phubbing and enhancing marital satisfaction. While correlational findings are important, intervention studies are required to test practical solutions. Understanding the drivers of phubbing may be helpful in formulating effective preventive strategies. Therefore, another study needs to focus on the factors contributing to partner phubbing behavior among married couples.

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Appendix 1: Informed Consent Form

Opening Statement and Historical Context

My name is Roselyn Ogalle, a post-graduate student at Pan Africa Christian University. Currently, I am conducting research in preparation for the award of a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Marriage and Family Therapy. The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between marital satisfaction and companion partner phubbing among married couples in Nakuru County, Kenya. Before consenting to participate in the study, please review this form thoroughly and address any inquiries you may have.

Guarantee of Privacy

The records of this investigation will be maintained in confidence. To ensure the privacy of your identity, your name will only be included on this consent form and not in the instruments. The consent documents will be accessible exclusively to the researcher. The academic purpose of the research will be the sole use of all data, which will be stored in a locked file cabinet.

The Study's Voluntary Nature

You will not experience any adverse repercussions as a result of your decision to participate or not. You are free to withdraw at any time or refrain from responding to any query without any negative repercussions or prejudice.

Benefits and Risks

The study is free of any known risks, and there will be no monetary compensation or expenses.

Statement of Consent

I have read and comprehended the above. The researcher answered all of my queries. I have consented to participate. I received a copy of this form to retain for my records. I understand that my participation in this study is optional and that I may withdraw my permission at any time. Refusing to participate or withdrawing will result in no penalty or advantages. I gladly agree to participate in this study.

Participant Signature ……. Date……

Appendix 2: Research Questionnaire

Section A: Demographic Information

Please fill in your answers in the spaces provided.

1. What is your age bracket

a). 18-25 years [ ] b). 26-30 years [ ] c). 31-35 years [ ] d). 36-40 years [ ]

e). 41-45 years [ ] f). 46-50 years [ ] g). 50-55 years [ ] h). above 55 years [ ]

2. What is your highest level of education? (Tick one)

None [ ]

Primary education [ ]

Secondary education [ ]

Middle-level College [ ]

Undergraduate degree [ ]

Postgraduate degree [ ]

3.What is the nature of your occupation?

Full-time Employed [ ] Part-time Employed [ ] Self-employed [ ] Unemployed [ ]

4.What is your spouse's nature of occupation**?**

Full-time Employed [ ] Part-time Employed [ ] Self-employed [ ] Unemployed [ ]

Retired [ ]

5. How long have you been in your marriage?

a. 1-10 years [ ] b. 11-20 years [ ] c. 21-30 years [ ] d. 31-40 years [ ]

e. Over 40 years [ ]

8. How many children do you have?

a) 1-2 [ ] b) 3-4 [ ] c) 5 and above [ ]

Section B: Partner Phubbing Scale

6. Please read each statement carefully and indicate how much you agree or disagree with each one based on your marital relationship.

Statement	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
I feel emotionally close to my partner.					
My spouse frequently checks his/her phone while we are having a conversation.					
During shared activities like mealtime and watching TV, my spouse tends to be absorbed in their phone.					
I often feel like my spouse is distracted by their phone when I'm trying to talk to them.					
When we are out together, my spouse often prioritizes their phone over talking to me or enjoying the moment.					
My spouse answers phone calls, texts, or social media notifications while we are spending time together.					
I feel ignored or unimportant when my spouse focuses on their phone instead of our interaction.					

When we are relaxing at home, my spouse regularly uses their phone without engaging in conversation or activities with me.					
My spouse gets frustrated or distracted when I ask them to put their phone away during our time together.					
I sometimes feel like my spouse is more interested in their phone than in spending quality time with me.					

Section C: Couple Satisfaction Index

10. Indicate the extent to which the following statements apply to your spouse by ticking the appropriate box in the relevant column. Use the scale 5= Always, 4=Often 3=Sometimes, 2=Rarely, 1=Never

Statement	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Statements on Emotional Connection					
I feel emotionally close to my partner.					
My partner and I share a strong emotional bond.					
I feel understood by my partner.					
I can talk to my partner about anything that's on my mind.					

I feel that my partner truly cares about my well-being.					
Statements on Communication					
My partner and I communicate openly and honestly.					
We listen to each other's concerns and opinions.					
My partner is willing to discuss difficult topics with me.					
We have good conversations that help us understand each other better.					
I feel heard and valued during our discussions.					
Statements on Intimacy					
I am satisfied with the physical intimacy in our relationship.					
We share affection in ways that are meaningful to both of us.					
I feel that our emotional intimacy strengthens our physical connection.					
We enjoy spending intimate time together, both emotionally and physically.					

I feel loved and desired by my partner.					
Statements on conflict resolution					
My partner and I are able to resolve disagreements in a healthy way.					
We rarely hold grudges after an argument.					
We are able to talk through conflicts without escalating them.					
We can discuss sensitive topics without getting defensive.					
I feel that we can handle challenges as a team.					
Statements on Overall Satisfaction					
I am generally happy with my relationship.					
I feel satisfied with the way things are going in my relationship.					
I would describe my partner as my best friend.					
I feel that my relationship is fulfilling and rewarding.					
Overall, I am satisfied with our connection and partnership.					

11. Indicate the extent to which the following statements apply to the effect of phone use on your marital relationship by ticking the appropriate box in the relevant column. Use the scale 5= Always, 4=Often 3=Sometimes, 2=Rarely, 1=Never

Statement	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
I feel less emotionally supported by my spouse when they are frequently distracted by their phone.					
When my spouse uses their phone during our time together, I feel emotionally distant from them.					
My spouse's phone use often prevents us from having meaningful emotional conversations.					
Partner phubbing has caused communication breakdowns in my marriage.					
I feel that partner phubbing makes it harder for us to resolve conflicts or misunderstandings in our marriage.					
My spouse's phone use often interrupts our conversations, making it hard for us to connect.					

I am less satisfied with my marriage when my spouse engages in partner phubbing behaviors					
The time my spouse spends on their phone takes away from our quality time together, affecting my overall happiness in the marriage.					
Partner phubbing has negatively affected our physical intimacy (e.g., hugging, kissing, or sexual intimacy)					
I believe that reducing phone use would increase the closeness and intimacy in our relationship.					

Section D: Mitigating Measures

12. Indicate the extent to which the following measures apply in your marital relationship by ticking the appropriate box in the relevant column. Use the scale 5= Always, 4=Often 3=Sometimes, 2=Rarely, 1=Never

Statement	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Setting boundaries on Phone Use					
We set specific times when phones are not allowed during our shared activities.					

We agree to silence or turn off our phones during meals or conversations.					
We have established rules about phone use that help minimize interruptions during our time together.					
Enhancing Communication Techniques					
We maintain eye contact and respond thoughtfully during conversations.					
We have open discussions about how phone use affects our relationship.					
We work together to find solutions for managing phone use that are comfortable for both of us.					
Practicing Mindfulness and Being Present					
We prioritize being fully present with each other by minimizing phone distractions during our interactions.					
We establish phone-free zones, such as the dining area or bedroom, to encourage undistracted time together.					

We engage in regular activities without phones to strengthen our connection and emotional intimacy.					
Addressing Emotional Impact					
We openly discuss how partner phubbing affects our feelings and relationship.					
We express our emotions using "I" statements to avoid blame when discussing phone use.					
We make a conscious effort to prioritize uninterrupted time together to enhance our emotional connection.					

Appendix 3: Interview Schedule for Key Informant 1-Couples

1. Could you share a specific example of when or how your spouse engages in partner phubbing?
2. How often would you say you or your spouse use the phones during conversations or activities together?
3. In what ways has the frequency of phone use during couple conversations in your relationship affected your relationship?
4. How does it make you feel when your spouse is preoccupied with their phone while you are trying to engage with them?
5. What changes have you noticed in the emotional connection between you and your spouse due to phone usage?
6. What examples can you provide of how partner phubbing leads to misunderstanding, arguments, or feelings of neglect in your relationship with your spouse?
7. According to you, what aspects define marital satisfaction?
8. When you think about your relationship, how would you rate your overall marital satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 10, and why?
9. How important is open communication in your marriage? Can you describe how you and your spouse communicate about important topics?
10. What aspects of your relationship make you feel emotionally supported by your spouse? Can you give an example of when you felt particularly supported?
11. In your opinion, how well do you and your spouse handle disagreements or conflicts? How does this impact your marital satisfaction?

12. How would you describe the physical intimacy in your relationship? Do you feel it plays a role in your overall satisfaction?
13. How has the level of intimacy in your marriage changed over the years? In what ways has the change affected your marital satisfaction?
14. How do you and your spouse resolve conflicts? In what ways does the management of disagreements in your relationships impact your marital satisfaction?
15. How do you work through any trust issues or breaches of respect in your marriage?

Appendix 4: Interview Schedule for Key Informant 2- Pastors

1. What role do you think technology, especially smartphones, plays in the lives of married couples today?
2. How do you think the rise of social media and constant digital connectivity has changed the dynamics of marriage in your congregation?
3. How does partner phubbing among married couples in your church affect their communication, emotional intimacy, or spiritual connection?
4. What specific challenges have you noticed in marriages that could be related to partner phubbing or the overuse of technology?
5. In your pastoral experience, how does partner phubbing affect communication between couples? How does it contribute to misunderstandings, arguments, or emotional distance?
6. When couples come to you for counseling, do you often find that smartphone use is an issue in their relationship? How does partner phubbing play into those concerns?
7. In your experience, does partner phubbing lead to feelings of neglect, loneliness, or frustration in marriages? Can you share any examples from counseling sessions where this was a concern?
8. Do you think partner phubbing is a sign of deeper relational issues, such as a lack of emotional intimacy or neglect, in a marriage? How do you address these concerns in your counseling sessions?

9. From a pastoral perspective, what are the long-term effects of partner phubbing on marital satisfaction? Do you think it could lead to more serious issues like marital dissatisfaction, emotional distance, or even divorce?
10. How does partner phubbing affect communication in marriage? Do you believe it contributes to misunderstandings or conflict between spouses?
11. Do you think couples who engage in partner phubbing have a harder time resolving conflicts or working through relational challenges? How does it influence their ability to work together as a team?
12. What advice would you offer to couples who are struggling with partner phubbing and technology distractions, especially those who might feel disconnected or frustrated by these issues?
13. When counseling couples, how do you address partner phubbing as a barrier to marital satisfaction? What steps or interventions do you suggest to help couples become more present with each other?

Appendix 5: Research Permit

REPUBLIC OF KENYA

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Ref No: **702126**

Date of Issue: **10/May/2025**

RESEARCH LICENSE



This is to Certify that Ms.. Roselyn Naliali Ogalle of Pan Africa Christian University, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Nakuru on the topic: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN 'PARTNER PHUBBING', MITIGATING MEASURES, AND MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG MARRIED COUPLES IN SELECTED CHURCHES IN NAKURU COUNTY, KENYA for the period ending : 10/May/2026.

License No: **NACOSTI/P/25/4173319**

702126

Applicant Identification Number

Deputy Director
NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

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See overleaf for conditions

Appendix 6: Ethical Clearance

Pan Africa Christian University
Where Leaders are Made

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OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

25th April 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION & ETHICS CLEARANCE LETTER FOR NALIALI, ROSELYN OGALLE (PMFT/23237/0/22)

Greetings! This is an introduction letter for the above-named person a final year student at Pan Africa Christian University (PAC University), pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy in Marriage and Family Therapy.

She is at the final stage of the program and she is preparing to collect data to enable her finalize on the dissertation. The dissertation title is *"EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN 'PARTNER PHUBBING', MITIGATING MEASURES, AND MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG MARRIED COUPLES IN SELECTED CHURCHES IN NAKURU COUNTY, KENYA"*

We kindly request that you allow her obtain a research permit so as to proceed and collect data to inform her research from selected churches in Nakuru, Kenya.

Regards,

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REGISTRAR
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