

Phone attachment linked with mental health stress

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Credit: Jonathan Blundell

Thinking about your mobile when you're not using it, worrying about whether people can reach you and interrupting what you're doing when you're contacted on your phone are linked to increased depression and stress, according to a study involving an ECU researcher.

The study of smart devices and [mental health](#) found depression and

stress are more likely in people who have high "involvement" with mobile phones and tablets.

This includes the extent to which people are aware of where their phone is at all times, use it for no reason or feel disconnected if they cannot access it.

But the study found no link between poor mental health and higher use of smart devices—defined as making more [phone calls](#), sending more text messages and emails and spending more time on apps.

Co-author and ECU psychologist Adrian Scott says there is a difference between people who use their phone and then get on with life, and people who constantly think about where their phone is or feel nervous if they do not have it.

"You may use your phone a lot but as soon as your phone is out of sight you don't think about it," he says.

"That's a very different thing from the person that has their phone on constantly, always wondering where their phone is, always wondering if they're being contacted."

The research surveyed 274 UK participants and is set to be published in May in the journal *Computers in Human Behavior*.

According to a previous survey cited in the paper, 63 per cent of entrepreneurs reported they would find it tougher to spend a day without their [smart device](#) than a week without their "significant other".

"When you're talking about your significant other versus your [phone](#), your significant other is one individual whereas your smart device connects you with everything," Dr Scott says.

"It's an integral part to people's lives now."

Dr Scott says his study does not suggest smart devices are the cause of [mental health problems](#) but rather that there is a relationship between the two.

He says the key message is that more research needs to be done to understand the impact of phones and tablets, particularly with children having access to smart devices before the age of 10.

"Technology is becoming so accessible around the clock, we're now connected whenever we want to be and pretty much all mobile plans include data," Dr Scott says.

"It's all very nice and it's very good and it's very convenient but it's important that we have some consideration of what impact that's going to have."

More information: Joshua Harwood, Julian J. Dooley, Adrian J. Scott, Richard Joiner, Constantly connected – "The effects of smart-devices on mental health," *Computers in Human Behavior*, Volume 34, May 2014, Pages 267-272, ISSN 0747-5632, [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.02.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.02.006).

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