

Stuck in a Loop: Boredom, Disconnection, and Problematic Smartphone Use

Anvita Gopal, James Danckert

University of Waterloo, Canada

ABSTRACT

Boredom is an uncomfortable feeling of wanting but failing to engage with the world. Boredom proneness – the tendency to experience the state more frequently and intensely – is associated with a range of mental health concerns, including increased depression and anxiety. Boredom has also been associated with feelings of loneliness and problematic smartphone use. Here, we explored these relations more broadly to determine how boredom is associated with social connectedness. A comprehensive survey was administered online to undergraduate students from the University of Waterloo (N=575). The survey included a range of psychological scales, including the Boredom Proneness Scale (BPS), Depression Anxiety and Stress Scales (DASS), Smartphone Usage Questionnaire (SUQ), Nomophobia Questionnaire (NMPQ), Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), and UCLA Loneliness Scale (UCLA). Replicating prior work, we showed that boredom proneness was strongly correlated with Depression, anxiety, and stress scores ($r=0.51$). Those high in boredom proneness also reported higher levels of absent-minded smartphone use ($r=0.22$), nomophobia (fear of being without their phones; $r=0.2$), and loneliness ($r=0.33$). Furthermore, boredom proneness was found to have negative associations with life satisfaction ($r=-0.3$) and a general sense of belongingness ($r=-0.44$). Boredom proneness was positively related to problematic internet use ($r=0.2$). Notably, individuals with severe levels of stress and depression exhibited higher 24-hour internet and smartphone usage. These findings highlight the complex interdependencies between technology usage, boredom proneness, and mental health and contribute to the growing body of evidence regarding the effects of boredom proneness on psychological well-being.

Keywords: Boredom Proneness; Problematic Internet Use; Psychological Distress; Self-Control; Social Connectedness