



# Nomophobia, Distracted Driving and Health in Brazil after the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## Editorial

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## Editorial

Since the growth in smartphone consumption in 2007, cases of nomophobia have become more frequent. Nomophobia can be defined as derived from the expression “no mobile” (i.e. without a mobile device) and, when associated with the suffix phobia (‘no-mobile-phone phobia’), it refers to the psychological condition of the fear of staying without the cell phone (‘smartphone’) or being unable to use it, as a result of lack of internet or battery charge; can be understood, by extension, as the fear and anxiety of remaining disconnected [1]. Studies report harmful effects of excessive use of mobile devices on mental and physical health are constantly growing [2-4] and that there is concern about the effects and impacts on the mental health of hyperconnectivity after the COVID-19 pandemic, with the end of social isolation, due to the need for intense use for work and study activities during the years 2020 and 2021 [5].

We can consider as one of the indicators of excessive use of smartphones, their use in traffic by drivers, appearing among the behaviors considered as distracted driving by the Pan American Health Organization-PAHO. The distracted driving of vehicles by the use of smartphones (texting while driving, calling while driving) has become an emerging concern in relation to road safety, a problem in the relationship between traffic and health due to the popularization of smartphones, as it involves three types of distractions: visual, manual and cognitive. The concept of distracted driving is quite broad and is not restricted to cell phone use, but also encompasses several other behaviors such as eating and smoking while

driving, for example [6].

Distracted driving can be defined as activities performed concomitantly with driving and impairing the driver’s attention, dividing it and withdrawing his total dedication to driving the vehicle. These distractions can be included in three basic classifications: manual (when there is a withdrawal of hands from the steering wheel), visual (when there is a deviation of the visual focus from the road) and cognitive (when there is a deviation of thought from the vehicle driving activity) and there may be also the combination of more than one of them in the same activity [7].

Not only for drivers, but also for pedestrians, the use of cell phones in traffic generates risk, there is already a research result that points out that there was an increase of approximately 2 seconds in the crossing time of pedestrians who typed, resulting in an 18% increase in mean time for activity when compared to pedestrians who did not cross without distraction. In the study, there is also the statement that there was a four times greater prevalence of risk behaviors of pedestrians who typed while crossing, such as crossing the road without looking both ways or with the traffic light signal for pedestrians, which can represent an increase in the possibility of being run over [8].

In Brazil, there are not many national records from reliable government agencies in the area of traffic on the use of cell phones, as in the USA [9-12], although there is in the national law, the Brazilian traffic code - CTB traffic violations on cell phone use, such as talking while driving (medium infraction) text while driving (very serious infraction). Brazilian law observes that since there are studies [13-15] that bring important results on distracted driving, whether through calling while driving, with or without the use of

Bluetooth technology (the latter involving only the cognitive factor) and with the text while driving, riskier because it involves the 3 factors (manual, visual and cognitive) the punishment must exist.

Data from 2019 [16] prior to the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that 19.3% of the population of the Brazilian capital states use their cell phone while driving. The information is from the 2018 Telephone Survey of Risk and Protection Factors Surveillance System (Vigitel). The ministry also warned that traffic accidents are the second leading cause of external deaths in the country. The research also showed that people aged between 25 and 34 years (25%) and with higher education (26.1%), with 12 years of study or more, are the ones who most assume this risk behavior. The research also shows that men and women have similar prevalence in cell association and driving with 19.6% and 18.8%, respectively. The research monitored several risks and protective factors related to health, including the issue of traffic in the capitals of the 26 states and in the Federal District. In this edition, 52,395 people over the age of 18 were interviewed by telephone between February and December 2018.

As it is, we are starting to have research in Brazil that has shown evidence of an increase in nomophobia due to the experiences of the COVID -19 pandemic [17], study with one hundred and twenty-two participants answered a questionnaire between December 2020 and April 2021. The results that social isolation interfered with the incidence indicate an increased incidence of nomophobia, especially in the population aged 20 to 29 years and aged 50 to 59 years, university students or with a postgraduate degree and with 10 to 20 minimum wages. We understand that the use of cell phones while driving in Brazil will deserve attention also, as it is practically the same type of population that admits distracted driving in research [16] and that reported on the growth of nomophobia [5,17], which needs the impacts of post-pandemic COVID-19 on the mental health of Brazilians and also on health areas such as traffic accidents to be further studied.

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