

THE PREVALENCE OF FEAR OF MISSING OUT AMONG MEDICAL STUDENTS IN
AL-SHAM PRIVATE UNIVERSITYDr. Reya Khwanda*¹ and Dr. Ghena Najati²¹Faculty of Medicine, Al-Sham Private University, Rif Dimashq, Syria.²Mental Health and Behavioral Science, Al-Sham Private University, Rif Dimashq, Syria.

*Corresponding Author: Dr. Reya Khwanda

Faculty of Medicine, Al-Sham Private University, Rif Dimashq, Syria.

Article Received on 02/06/2025

Article Revised on 23/06/2025

Article Accepted on 13/07/2025

ABSTRACT

Background: Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) is a modern psychological phenomenon increasingly prevalent among university students, especially in high-pressure academic environments such as medical faculties. This study aimed to assess the prevalence of FoMO among medical college students in Syria and analyze associated psychological and social factors. **Methods:** A descriptive analytical study was conducted on a sample of 318 students from faculties of medicine, dentistry, and pharmacy in Al Sham Private University. A validated FoMO scale was used alongside demographic and social data collection. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and correlation tests. **Results:** Findings revealed a widespread presence of FoMO, particularly among students aged 21–25, females, those with medium and low income, and non-working students. No significant differences were found according to academic specialization or place of residence. Higher FoMO levels were observed among first- and second-year students compared to advanced years. **Discussion:** Results confirm that FoMO is a complex phenomenon influenced by multiple psychological, social, and cultural factors, consistent with similar global studies. The role of self-regulation and real-life engagement in mitigating FoMO was highlighted, alongside the protective role of strong family bonds in the Syrian social context. **Conclusion:** FoMO represents a growing psychological concern among university students. The study calls for institutional responses, including the development of psychological support programs that raise digital awareness, reduce compulsive social media use, and promote self-regulation strategies such as mindfulness.

KEYWORDS: Fear of Missing Out, FoMO, university students, social media, anxiety, mindfulness, mental health, Syria.

INTRODUCTION

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) refers to a psychological experience characterized by feelings of anxiety, unease, or emptiness that arise when individuals perceive themselves as being excluded from rewarding experiences that others may be having.

The unique term Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) was first introduced in 2004, and gained widespread recognition around 2010 to describe a phenomenon noticed with the rise of social media platforms. In 2013, the term was officially included in the Oxford Dictionary. That same year, British psychologists formally defined FoMO as “a pervasive apprehension that others might be having fulfilling experiences from which one is absent.” At its core, FoMO reflects a persistent desire to remain continuously connected with what others are doing, often leading individuals to monitor social interactions and updates excessively.^[1]

A strong association has been identified between FoMO and problematic behaviors in daily life; for example, individuals with high levels of FoMO tend to exhibit excessive use of smartphones and social media platforms. This phenomenon is believed to stem from unmet psychological needs- particularly the need for belonging and social connection. In seeking to fulfill these needs, individuals may increasingly rely on digital communication channels, which, in turn, can lead to dependency or compulsive usage patterns. For example, elevated levels of FoMO is connected with the increased usage of social media, and therefore, the increased probability of contracting what is known as Problematic Smartphone Use- or PSU for short.^[1]

In addition, FoMO has been linked to a range of negative academic outcomes. Among university students, higher levels of FoMO are consistently associated with lower academic performance. Studies suggest a positive correlation between FoMO and diminished cognitive functioning, which may contribute to reduced academic

achievement and a higher risk of academic burnout- especially among medical students.^[2]

This study aims to explore the concept of FoMO, identify the target audience affected by it, and shed light on its causes and symptoms. What makes this research particularly important is its focus on a relatively new and rarely discussed topic. By examining FoMO more closely, this study hopes to contribute to the broader scientific understanding of this phenomenon.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted as a cross-sectional survey in the Syrian Arab Republic and targeted students enrolled in the Faculties of Medicine, Dentistry, and Pharmacy at Al-Sham Private University during the period extending from April 2025 to May 2025. The final sample size was calculated using the Calculator.iO platform and included 318 students. Eligibility was limited to currently enrolled students at ASPU from various academic years who voluntarily agreed to participate after being informed about the study's purpose and content. Students who refused to participate or did not complete the questionnaire were excluded.

Data collection was carried out using an anonymous paper-based questionnaire specifically designed for this study. The questionnaire was distributed manually on campus following coordination with faculty departments. It included a series of questions aimed at gathering sociodemographic data, such as age (categorized as <18, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, >25 years), gender (male or female), field of study (Medicine, Dentistry, or Pharmacy), academic year (first through sixth), economic status (excellent, average, or poor), work status (working or not working), and living arrangement (with family, with friends, or alone).

In addition, the questionnaire contained several items derived from the validated Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) scale, which assesses the extent to which individuals feel anxious or concerned that others are engaging in rewarding experiences in their absence. Participants were asked to indicate how true each statement was for them using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Not at all true of me" to "Extremely true of me," based on their real-life experiences. Sample items included statements such as "I worry when I find out my friends are having fun without me," "It bothers me to miss out on planned social events," and "Sometimes I wonder if I spend too much time keeping up with what's going on."

All ethical principles were respected throughout the research process. No identifying personal information was collected, and the confidentiality of participants' responses was fully preserved. Prior to filling out the questionnaire, participants were provided with a clear explanation of the study's aim, and verbal informed consent was obtained from each individual.

Statistical Analysis

The data collected through the paper-based questionnaires were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25, for quantitative analysis. All variables were coded and numerically formatted to facilitate statistical processing. The analysis included demographic variables such as age, gender, field of study, academic year, economic status, work status, and living arrangements, along with participants' responses to the FOMO scale. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate frequencies and percentages for categorical variables, while means and standard deviations were computed for continuous variables to assess the level of fear of missing out. To test differences between groups, appropriate statistical tests were applied, including the Chi-square test for categorical data and the independent-samples t-test for comparisons between two groups. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical principles were upheld throughout all phases of the study in accordance with recognized standards for scientific research. No personally identifying information was collected, and all responses remained anonymous to ensure full confidentiality and participant privacy. The study's purpose and the contents of the questionnaire were clearly explained to each participant in advance, and verbal informed consent was obtained voluntarily without any coercion or pressure. Institutional approval was secured from the academic administration of Al-Sham Private University, and all research procedures were conducted in alignment with the ethical guidelines set forth in the Declaration of Helsinki.

RESULTS

Demographic information of study participants

The demographic analysis of the 318 participants revealed that the majority (66.4%) were aged between 21 and 25 years, while only 2.2% were younger than 18. Female students represented a slightly higher proportion (56.3%) compared to males (43.7%). Regarding specialty, most participants were medical students (47.1%), followed by dental (31.3%) and pharmacy students (21.6%). The academic year distribution was relatively balanced, with third-year students being the largest group (22.3%). In terms of economic status, most reported a moderate financial state (63.8%), while only 4% described their situation as weak. Most participants were not working (84.9%) and lived with their families (67.4%), indicating a strong familial support environment (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic information of study participants.

N=318		
Age	Frequency	Percentage
Younger than 18	7	2.2%
18-20	91	28.6%
21-25	211	66.4%
Older than 25	9	2.87%
Gender		
Male	139	43.7%
Female	179	56.3%
Specialty		
Pharmacy	69	21.6%
Dentistry	99	31.3%
Medicine	150	47.1%
Academic Year		
First	65	20.4%
Second	65	20.4%
Third	71	22.3%
Fourth	50	15.7%
Fifth	67	21.2%
Economic State		
Weak	13	4%
Moderate	203	63.8%
Excellent	102	32.2%
Work		
Yes	48	15.1%
No	270	84.9%
Living Accommodations		
On my own	64	20.1%
With friends	40	12.5%
With family	214	67.4%

Descriptive Results of the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) Scale Among Students

The findings reveal that a considerable portion of student's experience FOMO-related concerns. Specifically, 37.7% of participants strongly agreed with the statement "I fear others have more rewarding experiences than me", indicating a prevalent sense of social comparison.

A similar response was recorded for the fear that friends have more valuable experiences, reflecting emotional sensitivity toward perceived social inequality. However, the majority (55.9%) did not worry when their friends had fun without them, and 80.4% expressed no anxiety when unaware of their friends' activities, suggesting low dependence on constant connectivity.

Understanding friends' inside jokes was important to some extent, with 30.5% slightly agreeing and 18.2% moderately agreeing. Nearly 38% slightly agreed that they might be spending too much time trying to stay updated, pointing to a possible internal conflict regarding digital over-engagement. Reactions to missing social gatherings were more evenly distributed, with 47.8% indicating some level of distress, which shows a stronger

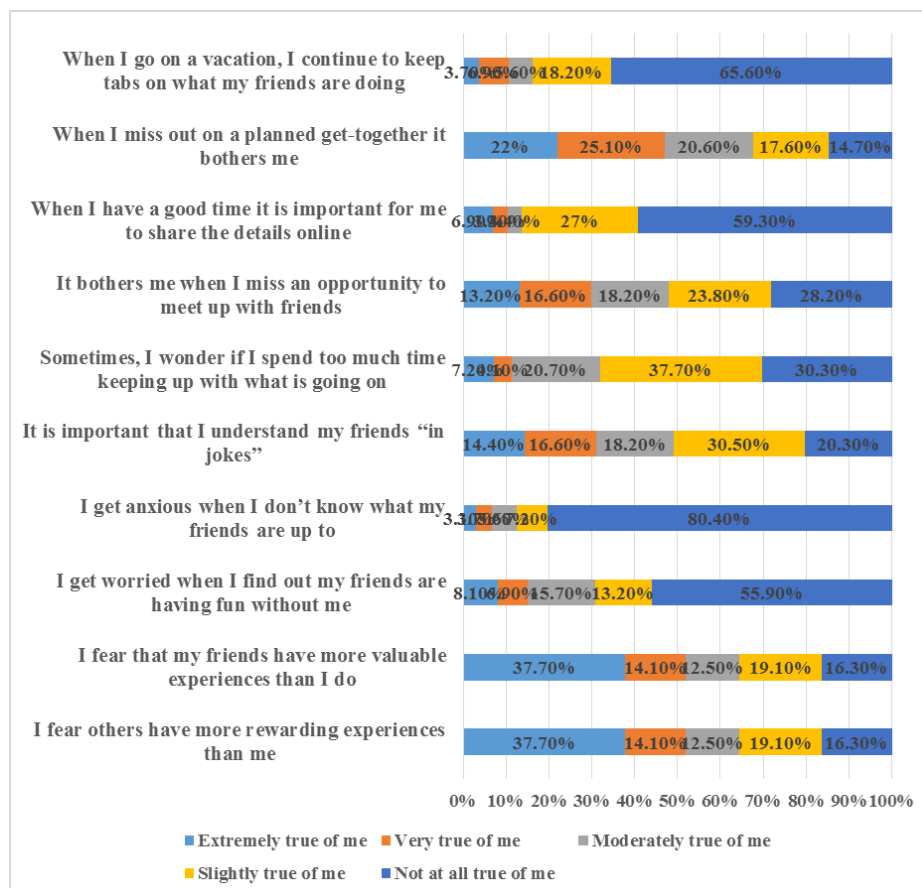
fear of physical exclusion compared to online interaction.

Interestingly, 59.3% denied needing to share good moments online, highlighting a low social media validation drive. However, 47.1% expressed discomfort when missing planned get-togethers, underlining the emotional weight of exclusion from real-life events.

Lastly, 65.6% reported not monitoring their friends during vacations, reflecting a lower level of persistent digital attachment. These patterns suggest that while FOMO exists among medical students, it is more strongly associated with in-person social exclusion than digital or online pressures.

Table 2: Descriptive Results of the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) Scale Among Students.

	Extremely true of me	Very true of me	Moderately true of me	Slightly true of me	Not at all true of me
N=318	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
I fear others have more rewarding experiences than me	120 (37.7%)	45 (14.1%)	40 (12.5%)	61 (19.1%)	52 (16.3%)
I fear that my friends have more valuable experiences than I do	120 (37.7%)	45 (14.1%)	40 (12.5%)	61 (19.1%)	52 (16.3%)
I get worried when I find out my friends are having fun without me	26 (8.1%)	22 (6.9%)	50 (15.7%)	42 (13.2%)	178 (55.9%)
I get anxious when I don't know what my friends are up to	10 (3.1%)	12 (3.7%)	18 (5.6%)	23 (7.2%)	250 (80.4%)
It is important that I understand my friends "in jokes"	46 (14.4%)	53 (16.6%)	58 (18.2%)	97 (30.5%)	64 (20.3%)
Sometimes, I wonder if I spend too much time keeping up with what is going on	23 (7.2%)	13 (4.1%)	66 (20.7%)	120 (37.7%)	96 (30.3%)
It bothers me when I miss an opportunity to meet up with friends	42 (13.2%)	53 (16.6%)	58 (18.2%)	76 (23.8%)	88 (28.2%)
When I have a good time it is important for me to share the details online	22 (6.9%)	11 (3.4%)	11 (3.4%)	86 (27%)	188 (59.3%)
When I miss out on a planned get-together it bothers me	70 (22%)	80 (25.1%)	65 (20.6%)	56 (17.6%)	47 (14.7%)
When I go on a vacation, I continue to keep tabs on what my friends are doing	12 (3.7%)	22 (6.9%)	18 (5.6%)	58 (18.2%)	208 (65.6%)

**Figure 1: Descriptive Results of the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) Scale Among Students.**

Differences in Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) among Medical Students According to Demographic Variables

The Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) scores varied significantly according to several demographic variables. Age: There were statistically significant differences in FoMO scores across age groups ($F = 37.392$, $p < 0.001$). Students aged 21–25 years reported the highest mean FoMO score (16.9 ± 0.874), followed closely by those aged 18–20 years (16.4 ± 0.856). In contrast, students younger than 18 years and those older than 25 years reported significantly lower FoMO scores (11.8 ± 0.66 and 13.4 ± 0.913 , respectively) (Table 3).

Gender: A significant difference in FoMO scores was observed between genders ($t = 8.13$, $p = 0.012$). Female students exhibited higher levels of FoMO (11.49 ± 0.501) compared to male students (10.68 ± 0.963) (Table 3).

Specialty: No significant differences were found in FoMO scores across different medical specialties ($F = 1.11$, $p = 0.612$). Students from Dentistry, Pharmacy, and Medicine had comparable mean scores (13.5 ± 2 , 12.8 ± 3 , and 12.4 ± 2 , respectively) (Table 3).

Academic Year: FoMO scores significantly differed based on academic year ($F = 36.12$, $p < 0.001$). First- and second-year students reported the highest scores (16.9 ± 0.874 and 16.4 ± 0.856 , respectively), whereas scores decreased progressively in later academic years, reaching the lowest in third-year students (11.8 ± 0.66) (Table 3).

Economic Status: A significant relationship was found between economic status and FoMO levels ($F = 47.04$, $p = 0.001$). Students with weak and moderate economic backgrounds reported higher FoMO scores (16.9 ± 0.874 and 16.4 ± 0.856 , respectively) compared to those with excellent financial status (11.8 ± 0.66) (Table 3).

Employment Status: Working students exhibited significantly higher FoMO scores (15.3 ± 0.386) compared to non-working peers (12.4 ± 0.218) ($t = 15.4$, $p = 0.001$) (Table 3).

Living Accommodations: No statistically significant differences in FoMO scores were observed based on living arrangements ($F = 4.047$, $p = 0.502$). Students living alone, with friends, or with family had comparable mean scores (13.489 ± 0.592 , 13.65 ± 0.362 , and 12.15 ± 0.702 , respectively) (Table 3).

Table 3: Differences in Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) among Medical Students According to Demographic Variables.

N=318			
Age	Mean \pm SD	Test Value (F or T test)	p-value
Younger than 18	11.8 ± 0.66	37.392	0.000*
18-20	16.4 ± 0.856		
21-25	16.9 ± 0.874		
Older than 25	13.4 ± 0.913		
Gender			
Male	10.68 ± 0.963	8.13	0.012*
Female	11.49 ± 0.501		
Specialty			
Pharmacy	12.8 ± 3	1.11	0.612
Dentistry	13.5 ± 2		
Medicine	12.4 ± 2		
Academic Year			
First	16.9 ± 0.874	36.12	0.000*
Second	16.4 ± 0.856		
Third	11.8 ± 0.66		
Fourth	13.4 ± 0.913		
Fifth	12.5 ± 0.785		
Economic State			
Weak	16.9 ± 0.874	47.04	0.001*
Moderate	16.4 ± 0.856		
Excellent	11.8 ± 0.66		
Work			
Yes	15.3 ± 0.386	15.4	0.001*
No	12.4 ± 0.218		
Living Accommodations			
On my own	13.489 ± 0.592	4.047	0.502
With friends	13.65 ± 0.362		
With family	12.15 ± 0.702		

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the levels of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) among medical and health sciences students and analyzed how demographic variables influenced these levels. Overall, the findings highlight that FoMO is a common psychological phenomenon among students, particularly among younger, early-year students and those from less favorable economic backgrounds.

Age Differences

Age appeared to be a significant factor, with students aged 18–25 years showing the highest FoMO levels. This is consistent with previous literature suggesting that young adults, particularly those transitioning through adolescence and early adulthood, are more vulnerable to social comparison and the need for social inclusion due to developmental and psychosocial factors.^[2,3] In contrast, students below 18 and those older than 25 exhibited lower FoMO levels, possibly due to less exposure to peer-driven social platforms or more mature coping mechanisms, respectively.^[4]

Gender Variations

Female students reported significantly higher FoMO scores than males. This aligns with findings from a study by Przybylski *et al.*, which suggested that women may experience greater emotional involvement in social connections and are more affected by perceived social exclusion.^[2] Similar patterns were observed in a study conducted in Saudi Arabia among university students, where female participants demonstrated greater levels of FoMO and social media engagement.^[5]

Academic Year Influence

FoMO levels were highest among first- and second-year students, with a marked decline in third and subsequent years. This could be attributed to the transition phase that early-year students experience as they adapt to university life, relying more on social media to maintain peer relationships.^[6] Additionally, senior students may develop more academic maturity, reduced social reliance, or greater control over digital habits, contributing to the decline in FoMO.

Economic Status

A significant association was found between FoMO and students' economic status, with students from weak or moderate economic backgrounds experiencing higher FoMO. This may be due to the heightened perception of missing out on experiences that peers with better financial resources can access, such as travel, entertainment, or technology-related activities.^[7] Such findings support previous studies which showed that financial constraints can amplify social comparison, leading to increased FoMO, especially on platforms like Instagram and Snapchat.^[8]

Employment Status

Interestingly, students who reported being employed had significantly higher FoMO scores. This contradicts the

assumption that working students might be less engaged with peer activities due to time constraints. One plausible explanation is that working students may feel left out from their peers' social experiences due to their responsibilities and thus experience greater psychological distress related to missing out.^[9] Alternatively, some might engage more actively on social media to compensate for limited physical participation in social gatherings.

Specialty and Living Accommodations

No significant difference in FoMO scores was observed between students from different academic specialties or those living in various accommodations. This suggests that FoMO transcends professional and living environments and is more influenced by personal and psychosocial factors. Studies from multiple countries, including the U.S. and Turkey, have echoed similar findings where academic discipline and living conditions did not significantly alter FoMO tendencies.^[10,11]

FoMO Dimensions

The descriptive analysis of the FoMO scale revealed that students frequently reported concerns about others having more rewarding experiences, underscoring the role of social comparison in driving FoMO. However, the relatively low levels of anxiety when unaware of friends' activities or missing online interactions suggest that digital detachment may be more common than assumed. This is in contrast to earlier literature where constant connectivity was strongly associated with higher FoMO.^[2,12]

Nonetheless, a significant proportion of students expressed distress when missing in-person events, which aligns with findings from Elhai *et al.*, who noted that real-life exclusion was a stronger predictor of anxiety and depression compared to digital exclusion.^[13] Furthermore, the fact that most students did not feel the need to share good moments online may reflect a shift away from validation-seeking behaviors, potentially driven by growing awareness of the negative impacts of overuse of social media.

Implications and Future Research

These findings emphasize the need for universities to implement mental health and digital wellness programs, particularly targeting early-year students and those with financial challenges. FoMO can affect academic performance, sleep, and emotional well-being^[14], and should be recognized as a potential risk factor for student distress.

Further research is warranted to explore the longitudinal trajectory of FoMO among university students and to investigate the impact of cultural norms, especially in Arab societies, on the expression and coping strategies related to FoMO.

CONCLUSION

The current study revealed that Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) is moderately prevalent among medical students, with higher levels observed among younger age groups, students in early academic years, and those with moderate or weak economic status. Significant gender differences were found, with female students reporting higher FoMO levels. In contrast, no significant differences were observed across medical specialties or types of living arrangements. These findings highlight the need for increased psychological and social awareness within university settings and the development of targeted support programs for students more vulnerable to socially-driven anxiety in the digital age.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding this study.

Funding

This research received no external funding and was conducted through the independent efforts of the researchers.

Authors' Contributions

Reya Khwanda contributed to the study design, data collection, analysis, and drafting of the initial manuscript.

Ghina Najati participated in statistical analysis, writing the results, and discussing the findings.

Both authors collaborated on reviewing and approving the final version of the manuscript.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors express their sincere gratitude to all students who participated in the study and to Al-Sham Private University for its support and facilitation of the research process.

Abbreviations

FoMO – Fear of Missing Out, PSU – Problematic Smartphone Use, SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, ASPU – Al Sham Private University.

REFERENCES

- Gupta M, Sharma A. Fear of missing out: A brief overview of origin, theoretical underpinnings and relationship with mental health. *World J Clin Cases.*, Jul. 6, 2021; 9(19): 4881-4889. doi: 10.12998/wjcc.v9. i19.4881. PMID: 34307542; PMCID: PMC8283615.
- Przybylski AK, Murayama K, DeHaan CR, Gladwell V. Motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of fear of missing out. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2013; 29(4): 1841–1848.
- Baker ZG, Krieger H, LeRoy AS. Fear of missing out: Relationships with depression, mindfulness, and physical symptoms. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science*, 2016; 2(3): 275–282.
- Riordan BC, Cody L, Flett JA, et al. The Fear of Missing Out (FoMO): A review of current research. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 2020; 36: 109–114.
- Al-Menayes JJ. The fear of missing out scale: Validity and reliability of the Arabic version. *International Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2016; 6(2): 41–46.
- Alt D. College students' academic motivation, media engagement and fear of missing out. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2015; 49: 111–119.
- Wegmann E, Oberst U, Stodt B, Brand M. Online-specific fear of missing out and Internet-use expectancies contribute to symptoms of Internet-communication disorder. *Addictive Behaviors Reports*, 2017; 5: 33–42.
- Dhir A, Yossatarn Y, Kaur P, Chen S. Online social media fatigue and psychological wellbeing—A study of compulsive use, fear of missing out, fatigue, anxiety and depression. *International Journal of Information Management*, 2018; 40: 141–152.
- Kuss DJ, Griffiths MD. Social networking sites and addiction: Ten lessons learned. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 2017; 14(3): 311.
- Buglass SL, Binder JF, Betts LR, Underwood JD. Motivators of online vulnerability: The impact of social network site use and FOMO. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2017; 66: 248–255.
- Balta S, Emirtekin E, Kircaburun K, Griffiths MD. Neuroticism, trait fear of missing out, and phubbing: The mediating role of social media addiction. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 2020; 18(3): 628–639.
- Oberst U, Wegmann E, Stodt B, Brand M, Chamarro A. Negative consequences from heavy social networking in adolescents: The mediating role of fear of missing out. *Journal of Adolescence*, 2017; 55: 51–60.
- Elhai JD, Yang H, Fang J, Bai X, Hall BJ. Depression and anxiety symptoms are related to problematic smartphone use severity in Chinese young adults: Fear of missing out as a mediator. *Addictive Behaviors*, 2020; 101: 105962.
- Elhai JD, Levine JC, Dvorak RD, Hall BJ. Fear of missing out, need for touch, anxiety and depression are related to problematic smartphone use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2016; 63: 509–516.