



## Relationship Break-Ups: Some Contributions And Consequences Among Bangladeshi University Students

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### ABSTRACT

Interpersonal relationships, particularly intimate relationships, are important for people in general and university students in particular. Intimate romantic relationship break-ups are common among university students and can affect them adversely. This study was interested in some of the contributions and consequences of break-ups. Twenty-five Bangladeshi university students completed a multiple choice survey which asked about romantic relationships and break-ups. Among the sample, the majority believed both males and females contribute to break-ups and that the main cause is mental disagreements. Furthermore, many of the students believed that there can be mental health consequences and impaired functioning from break-ups. The results also indicated that talking to one's partner was believed to be the best way to prevent a break-up. Lastly, talking to friends and family to cope with a break-up was indicated as preferable to talking to a professional.

### KEYWORDS

Bangladesh, Break-Up, Mental Health, Romantic Relationships, University Students.

### INTRODUCTION

A relationship can be generally defined as 'the way in which two or more people or things are connected, or the state of being connected.' (Lexico.com, n.d.). Hence,

relationships are formed between people who build bonds and mutual interests together. Relationships often grow and are strengthened through periodic mutual

meetings. Relationships are dynamic and changing (Hendrick et al., 1988.). There are essential ingredients – such as skills, information, inspiration, practice, and social support– that can enable individuals to effectively participate in and benefit from relationships (Flora & Segrin, 1998; Relojo et al., 2015.). There are many different types of interpersonal relationships such as acquaintances, family, work colleagues, schoolmates, community, and friends, among others. Relationships also can occur in a vast array of contexts, including, for instance, schools and universities.

Intimate relationships are unique relationships that involve a certain closeness that is not present in other relationships. As compared to non-intimate relationships, intimate ones involve ‘knowledge, interdependence, caring, trust, responsiveness, mutuality, and commitment’ (Miller, 2014, p. 2). One particularly unique intimate relationship type is the romantic relationship. Not all intimate relationships are romantic, but many romantic relationships are intimate. An intimate romantic relationship is reciprocal and involves ‘commitment and positive affective, cognitive, and physical closeness’ (Moss & Schwebel, 1993, p. 33). There is great variety when it comes to romantic relationships. For example, people might participate in monogamous, polyamorous, open, or separated relationships. Having such a variety of romantic relationships allows for people to have the option to partner up with others who match their lifestyle, character, and values (Geller, 2018).

Intimate romantic relationships, when going well, have a number of benefits including greater resilience and better physical and psychological well-being (Moss & Schwebel, 1993). However, lack of such relationships or distressed romantic relationships can have the

opposite effect (Moss & Schwebel, 1993). Should such relationships deteriorate into break-up, they have been known to contribute to adverse mental health symptoms and consequences not limited to increased anxiety, stress, depression, self-harm, suicidal and homicidal ideation or completion, and disturbed functioning (Lee & Sbarra, 2013; Scourfield & Evans, 2014; Vangelisti, 2006; Wilson & Daly, 1993). Intimacy issues may be related to college student break-up (Field et al., 2010). Hence, there appears to be a great rationale to want to know more about how relationships end among college students.

Romantic relationships often go through four phases. Some stages may need more time than others and some people may need more time at any stage (Connolly, n.d.). These stages are as follows: 1) initial attraction; 2) curiosity, interest, and infatuation; 3) ‘illumination’ and becoming a couple; and 4) commitment or engagement. At every stage, there is the possibility of moving forward, stagnating, regressing, or withdrawing from the relationship.

Should one or both parties begin withdrawing from the relationships, they risk deterioration or possibly even termination (Lee, 1984). Not all relationships end but generally those that do end tend to have some signs of a problem first. Deterioration is when relationships are less committed and they start to collapse. The final phase of a relationship, termination, marks the end of the relationship, either by death or separation. The dissolution of relationships, whether voluntary or involuntary, can be problematic for many. Since individuals often invest a lot of tangible and intangible resources into intimate romantic relationships, it seems to make sense that break-ups may have painful repercussions. In fact, research has shown that identical areas of the brain can become activated when

individuals experience psychological pain as when they experience physical agony (Mee et al., 2007). Break-ups may also cause people to experience symptoms similar to drug withdrawal since romantic love might activate the brain in similar ways that addiction does (Fisher et al., 2010).

Unfortunately, nowadays break-ups are common across the globe among all ages and particularly among college students. Many college students struggle with maintaining long-term, meaningful romantic relationships. Break-ups can cause grief among college students, particularly if they felt close to their ex-partner (Reimer & Estrada, 2021), negatively affect their perceived academic performance (Field et al., 2012), and contribute to distress including symptoms of anxiety, depression, anger, and sleep disturbance (Field et al., 2011). The current study explored these topics among a rarely studied population, Bangladeshi college students.

### **Background in Bangladesh**

Bangladeshi university students face a wide range of biopsychosocial challenges that might contribute to mental health, social, and academic concerns (Ara & Khan, 2019). Similar to other settings, break-ups and the likely subsequent consequences are likely to be common in Bangladesh, especially among college-aged students. Very little is known about this population in regard to break-ups due to a lack of research. Some reasons found for break-ups among Bangladeshi school-aged and university students included different beliefs, lack of understanding, immaturity, infidelity, selfishness, or arguments (Parvej, 2013). While Parvej's study shines some light on this topic, it was limited to only five university students, and it was the only study found to focus specifically on break-ups in this population.

While not specifically examining break-ups, there were a few other studies that mention break-ups among Bangladeshi university students. One study reported that more than 50% of Bangladeshi undergraduate students who experienced a recent break-up were depressed (Choudhury et al., 2018). Ara and Khan (2019) also listed a recent break-up as one of the antecedents of depression among this population. Other recent studies found that a recent break-up was associated with problematic internet use among graduate students (Islam & Hossin, 2016) and university students (Sayeed et al., 2020) in Bangladesh.

Besides these limited number of studies, little else is known about relationship break-ups among Bangladeshi university students. Therefore, it becomes important to better understand the processes and antecedents of break-ups in order to try to prevent the adverse consequences on college students' mental health and academics in this rarely studied population.

### **Research questions**

The study attempted to learn more about the following questions among Bangladeshi college students: (1) What contributes to break-ups? (2) What are some of the consequences of break-ups? (3) What helps prevent break-ups? (4) What might help to cope after break-ups?

### **Hypotheses**

There are two hypotheses for this study. First, both male and female college students will be found to have contributed to break-ups. Second, break-ups will have adverse consequences on college students' mental health and academics.

## METHODS

The first author developed an 11 question quantitative, multiple choice survey based on the research theme and what he considered to be important based on his experience of being part of the population studied. The survey was shared online among a population of college students at large private university in

Bangladesh. The sampling method was random convenience sampling. A total of 25 random individuals responded to the survey.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

#### Question 1

The first question asked: ‘Were you ever in a relationship?’

Figure 1

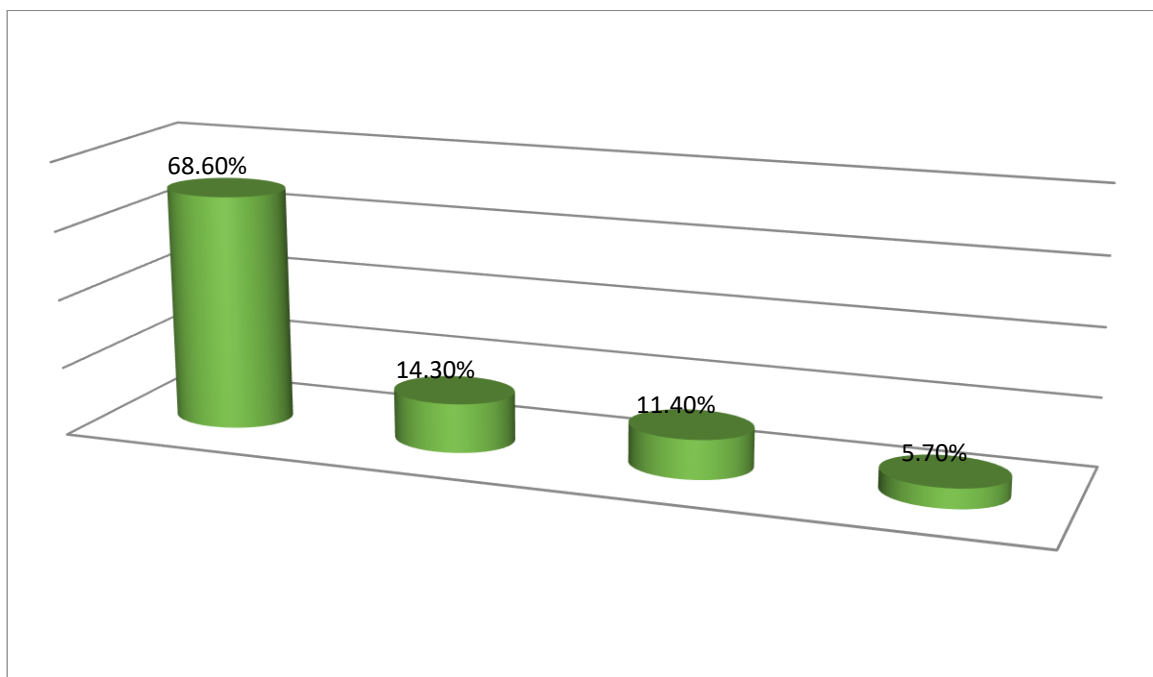


Figure 1 clearly shows that the majority of participants (nearly 69%) had had a relationship and think it is beautiful experience to be in a romantic relationship. An additional 14% responded that they have also had a relationship and deemed that being in a relationship is necessary to live. The remaining approximately 17% had never had a relationship. Among these, 11% did not have a previous relationship because they had not

found anyone attractive while the remaining 6% believed that relationships are a waste of time.

#### Question 2

The second question was: ‘What makes you feel that your boyfriend/girlfriend is the right person for you?’

Figure 2

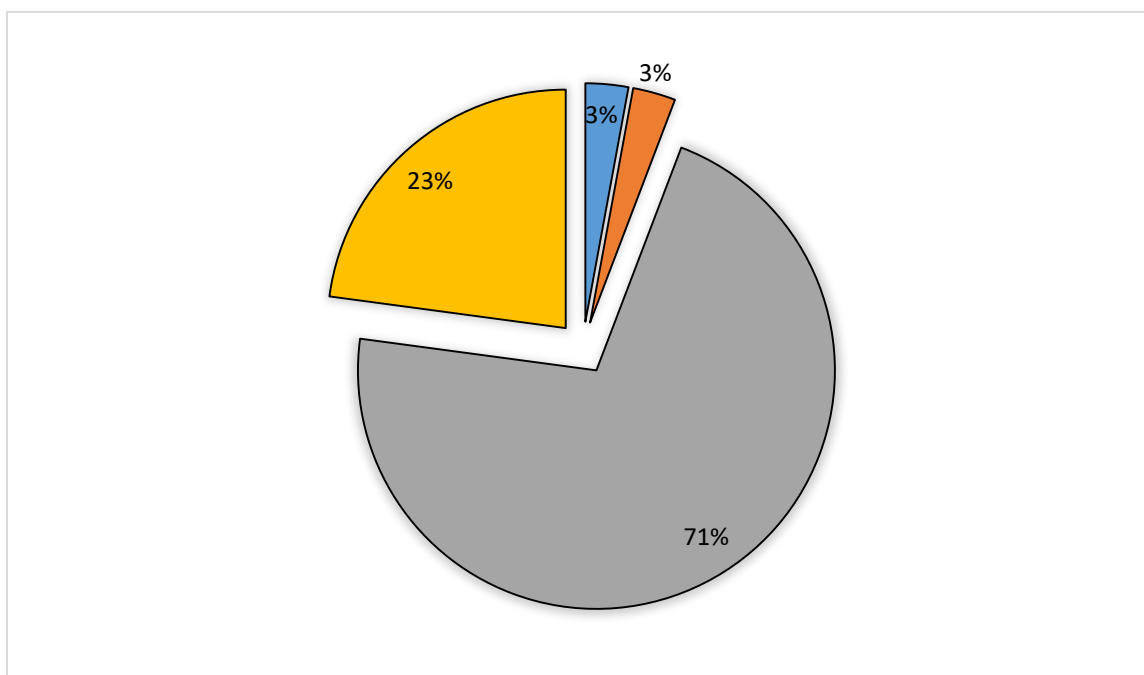


Figure 2 indicates the participants' responses to question 2. Most participants (71%) preferred that their partner has a beautiful mind. An additional 3% each either equally preferred their partner to be very wealthy or very good looking. The remaining 23% of participants selected the 'all of the above' option including wanting a beautiful mind,

being very wealthy, and being very good looking.

### Question 3

The third question asked: 'Do you think relationships between boys and girls last long nowadays?'

Figure 3

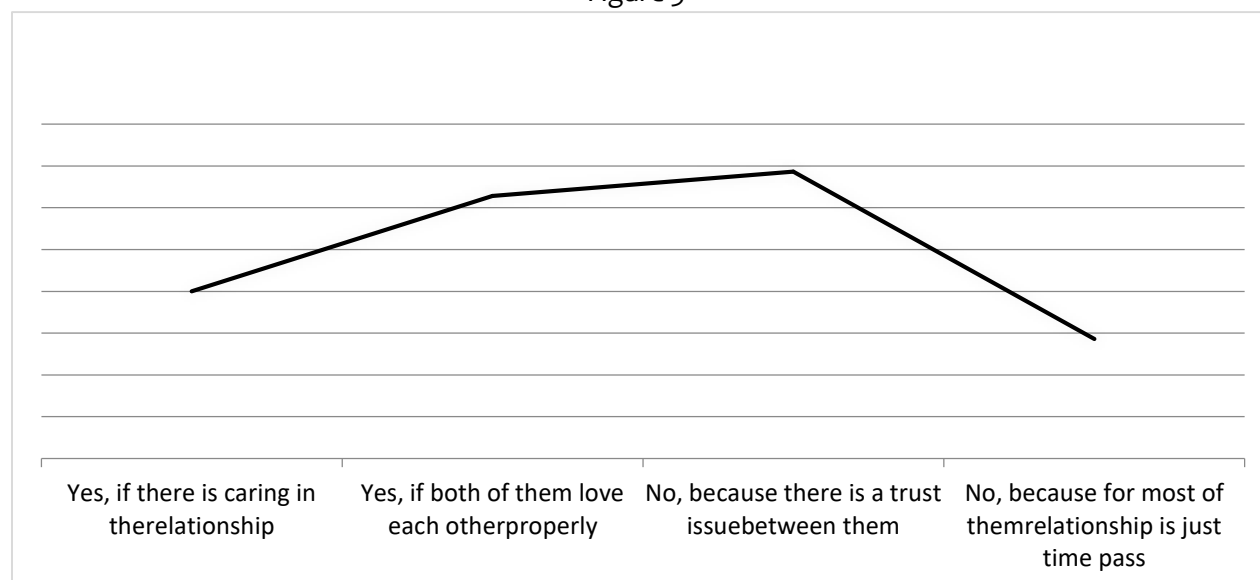


Figure 3 shows the answers to question 3. Many (34%) participants indicated they thought that relationships do not last long because of problems with trust. An additional 15% think that relationships do not last because many people prefer relationships today as a way to pass time. Nearly 31% believe that a relationship can be maintained better if they both love one another while another 20% of participants

indicated that the best way to maintain relationships is through caring.

#### Question 4

The fourth question asked: ‘Which of the following factors might lead a fair relationship to an unfair end called a break-up?’

Figure 5

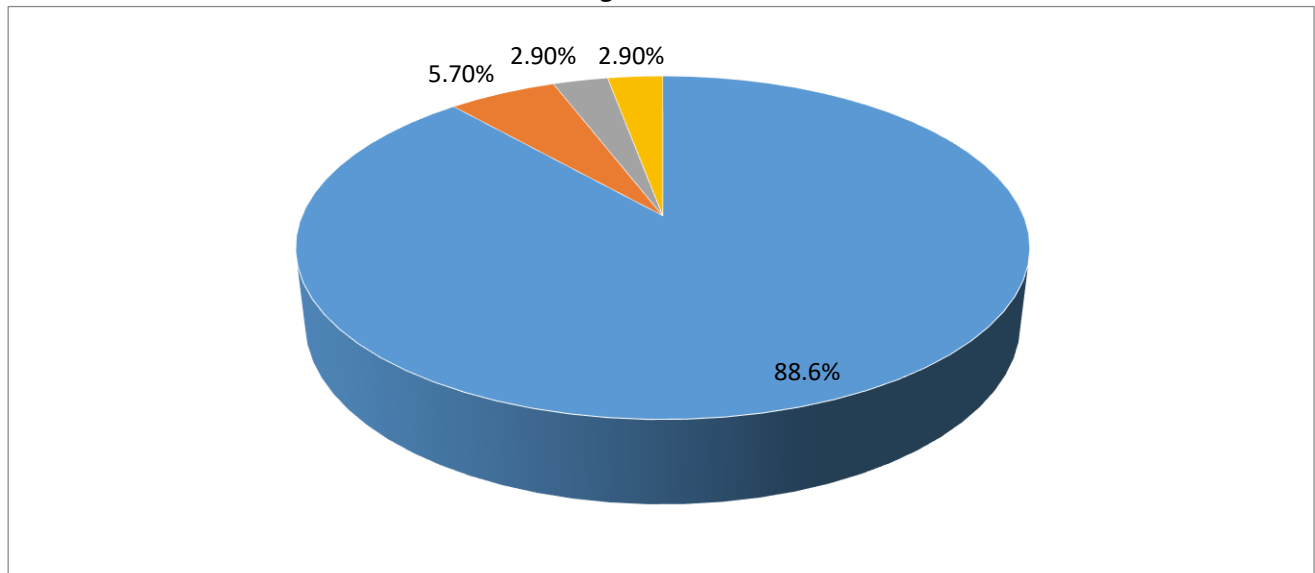


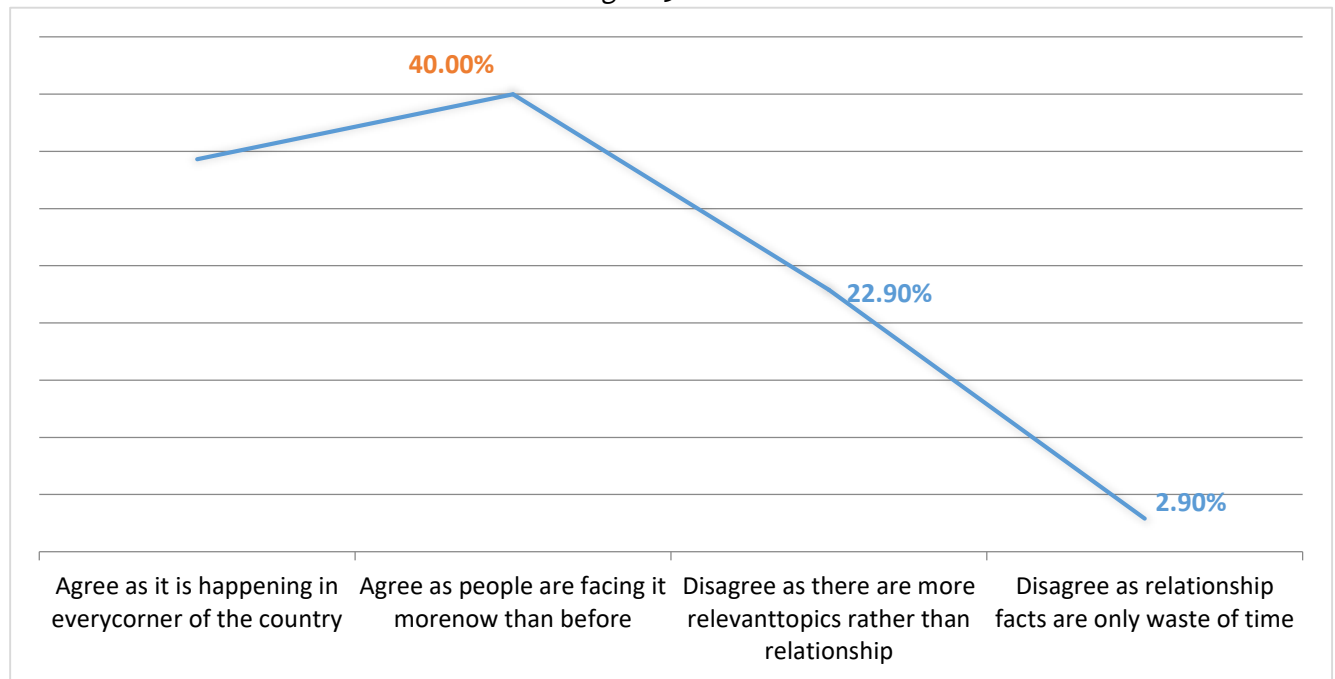
Figure 5 shows that almost 89% of all participants think that the key cause for a break-up is the mental conflict between a boy and a girl. Almost 6% think that differences in social status is the cause of the disruption. The remaining 6% equally think that either sexual unhappiness or other causes contribute to a break-up. If the partners cannot understand

and agree with each other, the likelihood of a break-up is more pronounced.

#### Question 5

The fifth question asked: ‘Nowadays broken relationships are an important issue. What is your opinion?’

Figure 5



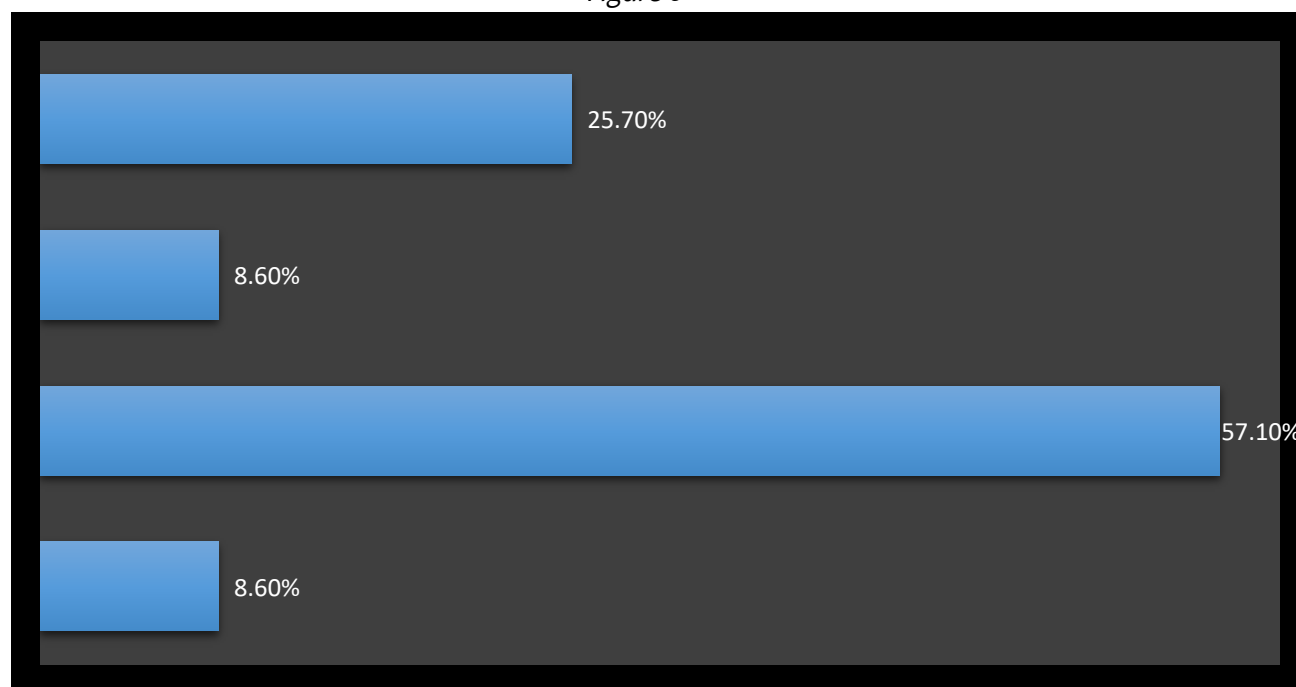
As can be observed in Figure 5, the study found that 40% of participants consider break-ups to be a significant question, as it is experienced everywhere. An additional 34% think that it is seen more frequently now than before. Nearly 23% believe that there are other more important topics than relationships. The remaining 3% consider it to be a complete

waste of time to talk about relationship break-ups.

#### Question 6

Question 6 asked: 'Who do you think are mainly responsible for the break-up in a relationship?'

Figure 6

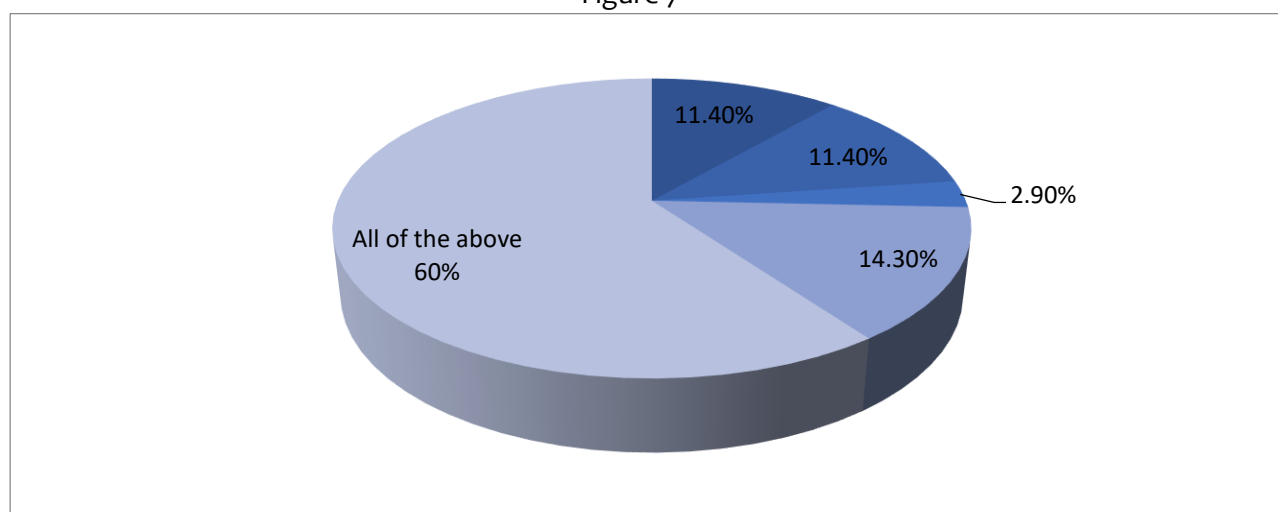


The data are displayed in Figure 6 which shows that almost 57% of all participants believe that the breakdown of a relationship is caused by both boys and girls. Nearly 26% think boys take the initiative to break-up while just 9% think girls are the cause of break-ups. The remaining 9% believe nobody is the cause of any break-up.

#### Question 7

The seventh question asked: 'What can be the effect of a broken relationship?'

Figure 7



As Figure 7 indicates, 60% of all people believe that all the options (getting depressed, loss of

interest and trust, and bad behaviour) could result from a break-up. Nearly 14% think that



trust of someone new would be hindered. Nearly 11% think a break-up leads to depression and more than 11% think it leads to a loss of all interests. Just 3% think the result of a break-up would be bad behaviour. It is clear after a break-up college students' emotional well-being will be affected.

### Question 8

Question 8 asked: 'How does a broken relationship affect a student's life?'

Figure 8

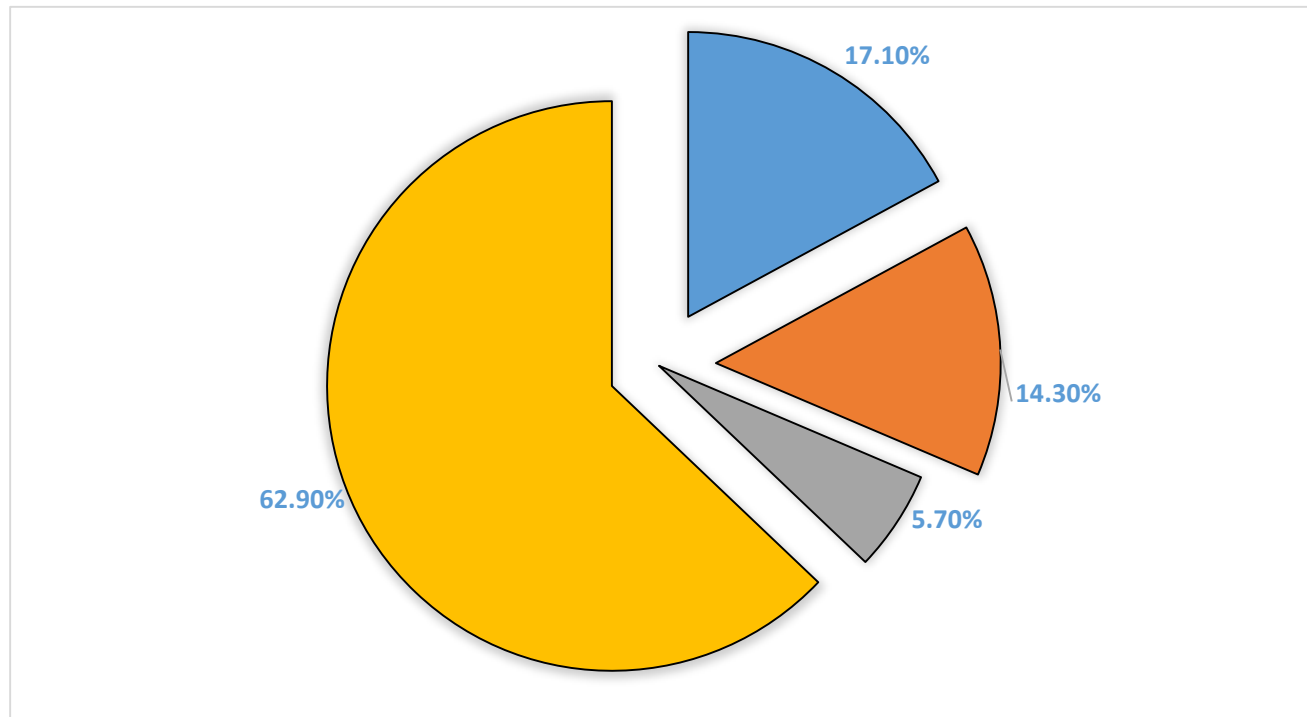


Figure 8 shows that nearly 17% think a break-up leads to depression that then affects academics. Almost 14% believe that because of a break-up in a student's life, their goal focus would be lost. Just 6% think they would lose face in front of their family. The figure shows that the remaining nearly 63% of the responding students have chosen all the choices, meaning they think that a break-up

can lead to depression that affects academics, loss of goal focus, and loss of face.

### Question 9

Question 9 asked: 'What would you do if either your or your boyfriend / girlfriend's family does not accept your relationship?'

Figure 9

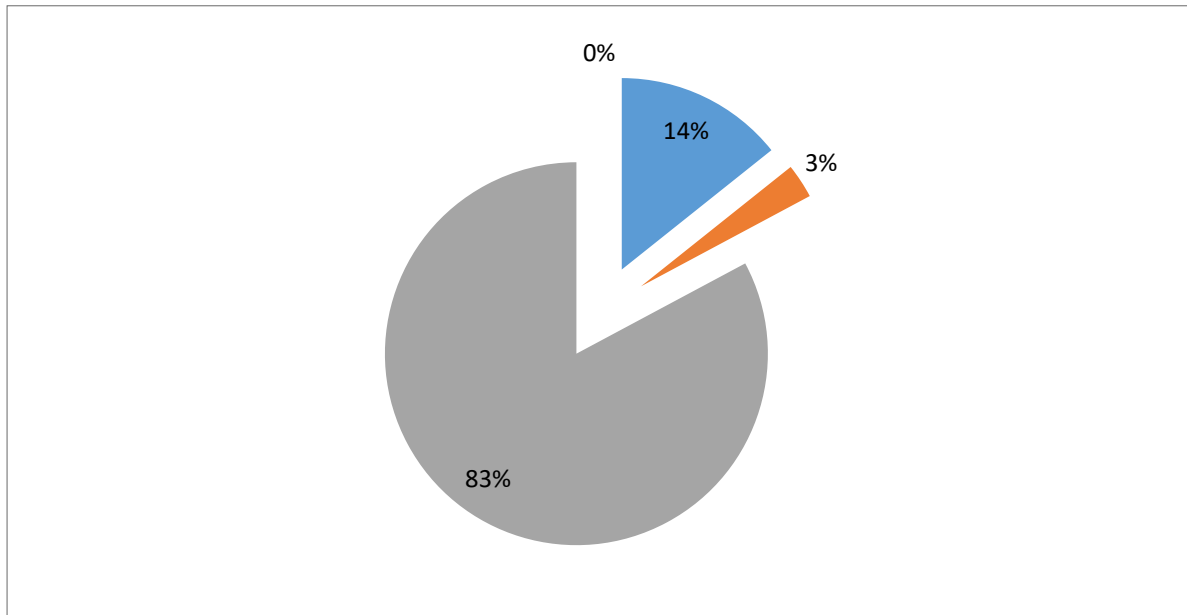


Figure 9 reveals that almost 83% would choose to persuade their family if this kind of situation comes up. Nearly 14% would accept the situation. Just 3% would marry anyway, even though their family does not accept the relationship. No one responded that they would feel disappointed and lose all hope.

#### Question 10

Question 10 asked: 'What can you do to keep your relationship safe from break-up?'

Figure 10

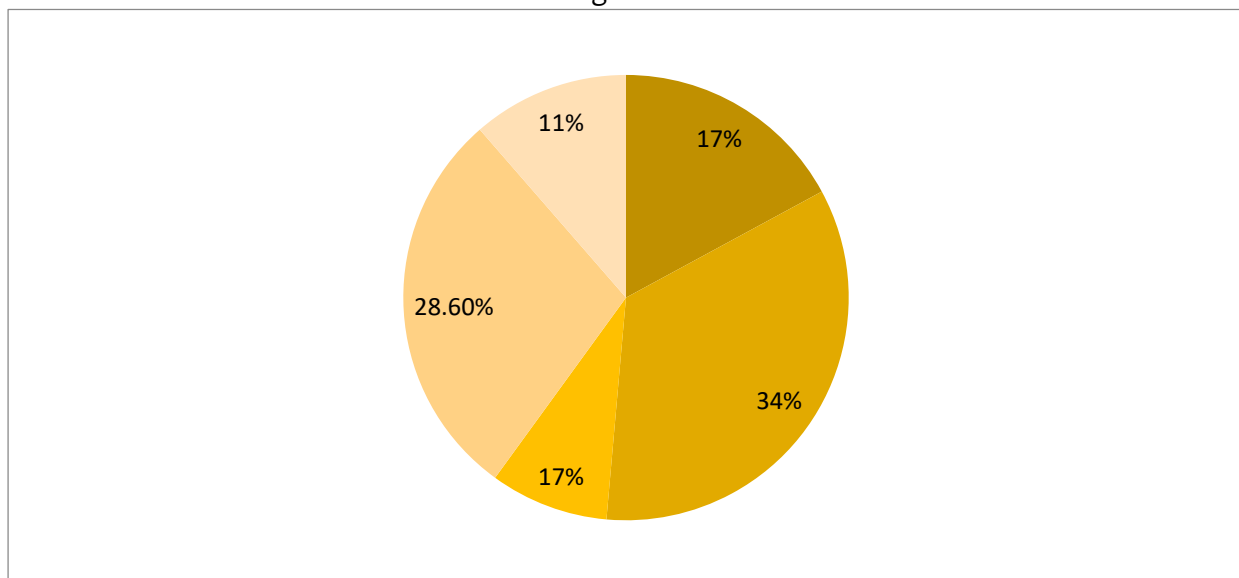


Figure 10 shows that almost 34% of people consider talking and eliminating all confusion as the best way to prevent a break-up. Almost 17% believe that spending time with their partner will minimise the risk of break-up. Another 17% believe in starting over and regaining trust. Nearly 29% believe that all choices are fine (talking to eliminate confusion, spending time,

and starting over). The remaining 11% do not want to be in a relationship.

#### Question 11

Question 11 asked: 'What possible solution can be implemented to get over a break-up?'

Figure 11

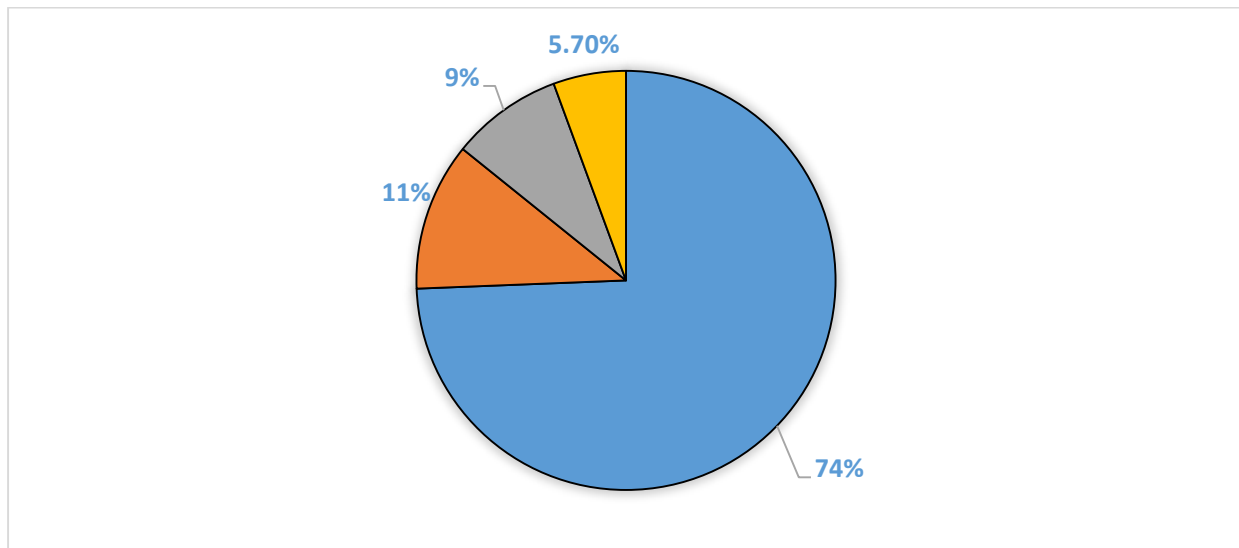


Figure 11 reveals that nearly 74% think the best way to cope with breaking up is to spend more time with family and friends. Almost 11% believe it is appropriate to consult a doctor to address the issue. Almost 9% believe the best way to overcome a failure is to go back to the relationship with the ex-partner. Only 6% think the best solution is to get through a break-up by starting a new relationship.

#### Summary of Research Findings

The data obtained supports the hypotheses. First, many in this sample (83%) have had a relationship and appear to think

positively about relationships. If they found that their family does not approve of their partner, the majority responded that they would try to convince their family. The majority also indicated that they prefer their partner's mind-set over good looks and wealth. In terms of whether students believed that relationships could last, there was an almost 50/50 split. The majority (74%) of participants agree that relationship break-ups is an important issue to be considered. It was found that the majority of the college students surveyed here believe that the main cause of break-ups is a mental disagreement between a couple. Furthermore, over half of the participants (57%) believed that both males and

females contributed to break-ups while approximately 1/4 blamed it exclusively on males in comparison to approximately 1/10 blaming it on exclusively on females. The remaining almost 1/10 did not attribute blame to either gender.

When it comes to the consequences of break-ups, most of the students in this study appeared to be in consensus that it can lead to mental health concerns such as loss of interest and depression. Next, many students in the current study indicated that they thought break-ups can adversely affect other relationships through loss of trust, loss of face, and bad behaviour. Furthermore, they also indicated that a break-up might lead to impairment in functioning that might affect goal pursuit and academics.

In terms of prevention, a higher number of students surveyed believed that talking to their partner to eliminate confusion is the best way to prevent a break-up. Another relevant and interesting result relates to coping with break-ups: an overwhelming majority of students believed it to be more useful to talk with friends and family after a break-up than talking to a counsellor/doctor, returning to their ex-partner, or starting a new romantic relationship.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

This study naturally had many limitations. First, the questionnaire was not professionally developed and validated and no psychometric properties were checked. Next, since demographic information was not collected, comparisons (e.g., compare male to female responses) were not completed. Lastly, the limited sample size of 25 limits the ability to generalise to wider populations. However, this study contributes relevant information about a

rarely studied population on an important topic which should be pursued more. Hence, future researchers should take these limitations into consideration when replicating and designing more scientifically sound future studies.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

As one of the first studies of its kind exploring some of the antecedents and consequences of break-ups among universities students in Bangladesh, this study has certain implications. The pain and disruption caused by romantic break-ups mean that recovering can be challenging and some university students may require substantial internal and external resources to recuperate their mental health and functioning. That break-ups might contribute to depression among Bangladeshi university students is also in line with previous research (Ara & Khan, 2019; Choudhury et al., 2018) and therefore should be taken seriously. The results of the present study might be useful for universities and mental health professionals in order to better understand and support university students who might be negatively affected when they go through romantic break-ups.

A break-up may be the most upsetting event in a university student's life. The results of this study might have implications for the students themselves who experience break-ups and their friends and family who have the ability to support them. This study might help normalise that relationship break-ups and the mental health consequences are common among Bangladeshi university students. Such normalisation is critical to reduce the adverse impact as mental health and depression are often ignored or stigmatised in Bangladeshi society (Choudhury et al., 2018). Possibly related to such stigma, this study also points

out that the majority of responding students would prefer to receive support from their friends and family rather than from a professional (Anderson & Greene, 2011). Therefore, reducing stigma surrounding break-up and mental health is important, especially since previous research (i.e., Moller et al., 2003) shows social support can sometimes buffer the harmful effects of a break-up and thus help university students adjust to the situation with less distress. The ability of a university student's social circle to support them post-break-up seems even more pertinent given the lack of professional mental health support, funding, and policies in Bangladesh (Ara & Khan, 2019).

## CONCLUSION

Regardless of how the relationship ended, it can turn the student's world around and trigger a vast array of complicated and disruptive emotions. It is important that they remember that they can go through this troubling experience and even continue with a renewed sense of hope and trust rather than suffering the adverse consequences if they are able to receive the support they need either via loved ones or professionals. It should be normalised that, after a break-up, many uncomfortable feelings are likely to surface, students may not be able to function optimally, and they may not be interested in the same things they used to be interested in but that such feelings should decrease with time and support (Langeslag & Sanchez, 2018).

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