

**PERCEIVED STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH OF STUDENTS HAVING AFFAIRS  
WITH OPPOSITE SEX PARTNERS: A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY PERSPECTIVE**

\*Mohd. Ashik Shahrier<sup>1</sup>, Md. Nurul Islam<sup>2</sup>, Kazi Imrul Kayesh<sup>1</sup>, Md. Takbir Hasan<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Psychology, University of Rajshahi

<sup>2</sup> Department of Psychology, University of Chittagong

<sup>3</sup> B.Sc. (Hon's) in Psychology, University of Chittagong

\*Corresponding author: email: ashikpsy@ru.ac.bd

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**Abstract:** The present study designed to investigate the perceived stress and mental health of public university students having affairs or no affairs with opposite sex partners. Towards this end, the study was conducted on 120 respondents of Chittagong University. The respondents were selected purposively. Instruments used in this study include: 1) Structured Interview Form, 2) Perceived Stress Questionnaire (Keya, 2006) and 3) Bangla version (Ilyas and Ayesha, 2002) of the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) originally developed by Goldberg (1978). Findings of the study showed that perceived stress and mental health scores of the overall respondents, respondents having affairs, and respondents having no affair were significantly negatively associated. Findings also revealed significant differences in perceived stress and mental health of respondents in terms of relationship status. Results also indicated respondents' scores of 'duration of affairs' and 'duration of physical relations' was significantly positively associated.

**Keywords:** Perceived stress, mental health, affair, opposite sex partner

সারাংশ : পাবলিক বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের শিক্ষার্থীদের বিপরীত লিঙ্গের সঙ্গীর সাথে প্রণয়ঘটিত সম্পর্ক থাকা বা না থাকার প্রেক্ষিতে তাদের অনুভূত চাপ এবং মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য অনুধ্যানের জন্য বর্তমান গবেষণাটি পরিকল্পিত হয়েছিল। এ মর্মে গবেষণাটি চট্টগ্রাম বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের উদ্দেশ্যমূলকভাবে নির্বাচিত ১২০ জন শিক্ষার্থীর ওপর পরিচালিত হয়। বর্তমান গবেষণায় ব্যবহৃত মাণক সমূহ হলোঃ (১) কাঠামোবদ্ধ সাক্ষাৎকার তালিকা, (২) অনুভূত চাপ মাণক (কেয়া, ২০০৬) এবং (৩) সাধারণ স্বাস্থ্য মাণক (গোল্ড বার্গ, ১৯৭৮) এর বাংলা অনুবাদ (ইলিয়াস এবং আয়েশা ২০০২)। গবেষণার ফলাফল হতে দেখা যায়, সামগ্রিক শিক্ষার্থী, প্রণয়ঘটিত সম্পর্ক রয়েছে এমন শিক্ষার্থী এবং প্রণয়ঘটিত সম্পর্ক নাই এমন শিক্ষার্থীদের অনুভূত চাপ এবং মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য সাফল্যাংকের মধ্যে তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ বিপরীতমুখী সহসম্পর্ক বিদ্যমান। ফলাফল হতে আরো দেখা যায়, প্রণয়ঘটিত সম্পর্ক থাকা বা না থাকার প্রেক্ষিতে শিক্ষার্থীদের অনুভূত চাপ এবং মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যের ক্ষেত্রে তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ পার্থক্য পরিলক্ষিত হয়। ফলাফল আরো নির্দেশ করে যে, প্রণয়ঘটিত সম্পর্কের সময়কাল এবং শারীরিক সম্পর্কের সময়কালের সাফল্যাংকের মধ্যে তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ একমুখী সহসম্পর্ক রয়েছে।

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## Introduction

Romantic relationship is one of the major parts of life which can greatly influence an individual's mental health, especially college or university students just entering into early adulthood and having started exploring such relationships. According to Spanier (1972), romanticism is a general disposition an individual has toward love, marriage, the family and with relationships involving male-female interaction in which the affective component is regarded as primary and all other considerations are excluded from conscious reflection. A romantic relationship has been termed in this study as 'Affair (non-marital)' with opposite sex partner in case of university students. Love/romanticism/Affair/romantic relationships, all are important in healthy relationships, but what type of love/affair it may be, is most important. There are two main types of love: (1) companionate love, which is based on friendship, and (2) passionate love, which is based on attraction and preoccupation with the partner (Fehr, 2001).

Although passion may get a relationship started, it fades. A romance with a partner who may also be the best friend is more likely to stand the test of time. When thinking about love, we must avoid the mistaken belief that love conquers all. Love/affair is a key ingredient, but it does not mean that one should tolerate disrespectful or abusive behavior. Although a majority of relationships don't experience physical or verbal abuse, the prevalence of dating violence is growing and occurs in approximately 1 out of 3 college relationships (Amar & Gennaro, 2005). Yet, people in abusive relationships often believe that because it happens to them it must be "normal" and happening in most relationships (Pipes & LeBov-Keeler, 1997). But if we look back at the statistics, most college students are in happy, healthy relationships. Factors that can promote relationship violence may be high levels of dependency (Charkow & Nelson, 2000) and alcohol use (Lewis & Fremouw, 2000).

Considered on these perspectives, in the present study a public university's students were chosen to see whether they had any romantic relationship or affair (non-marital) with opposite sex partners or not. And if their answer was 'Yes' then it was tried to know the duration of their affairs and whether it has reached into a physical relation or not. If the answer regarding physical relation was 'Yes' then again tried to know the duration of their physical relations. In regards to their response patterns through a structured pre categorized fixed response interview form, respondents in this study were categorized as two groups based on their relationship status i.e. 'students having affair' and 'students having no affair' with opposite sex partners. Then an attempt was made to know whether the variations in respondents' relationship status would create variations in their perceived stress and mental health. In defining perceived stress, Phillips (2013) said that "perceived stress is the feelings or thoughts that an individual has about how much stress they are under at a given point in time or over a given time period." On the other hand, in defining mental health, WHO (World Health Organization) mentioned that mental

health includes "subjective well-being, perceived self-efficacy, autonomy, competence, intergenerational dependence, and self-actualization of one's intellectual and emotional potential, among others."

A substantial body of literature, focusing predominantly on opposite-sex couples, has developed around exploring the structure and dynamics of intimate relationships and the myriad of ways partners influence and impact one another's perceptions of that union. Relationship dissatisfaction and lower evaluations of the quality of the relationship are associated with higher levels of depression (Coyne, Kessler, Tal, Turnbull, Wortman, & Greden, 1987; Whisman, 2001) and higher levels of neuroticism (Kurdek, 1997). Several researchers found that the effect of relationship duration on depression was greater for men than women (Horwitz, White & Howell-White, 1996; Gove, 1972). The findings of a study suggested that increasing duration of partner relationships is associated with decreasing rates of mental health problems (Gibb, Fergusson & Horwood, 2011). Kamp Dush & Amato (2005) conceptualized committed relationships as lying on a continuum of commitment, with marriage at the highest point of the continuum and casual (non-committed) dating relationships at the lowest point. They found that increasing commitment was associated with greater self-reported subjective well-being.

Individuals in satisfying relationships exhibit greater well-being across a number of different indices (see Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001) and that improving relationship quality leads to commensurate gains in mental health (Beach, Fincham, & Katz, 1998). However, those in poor quality relationships do not experience the same benefits and may, in fact, be at increased risk for a number of physical and mental health problems ranging from compromised immune functioning (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1987) to depression (Beach, Katz, Kim, & Brody, 2003; Fincham, Beach, Harold, & Osborne, 1997) to mortality (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001).

Braithwaite et al. (2010), in their research, concluded that although the romantic relationship of teens and young adults can cause emotional and social performance improvements, they can be used as a source of stress as well. Unfavorable romantic relationships at this time can be used as a predictor of emotional properties such as anxiety, nervousness, depression and jealousy. This point is particularly important among girls, because girls are prone to these properties more than boys in romantic relationships (Davila, Steinberg, Kachadourian, Cobb, Fincham, 2004).

Public university/college students in many cases would like to secret their romantic relationships due to various social, familial and academic pressures. Foster and Campbell (2005) have concluded that keeping secret romantic relationships with the opposite sex has negative effects on mental health of individuals. The result of the research (Foster and Campbell, 2005) also suggests that students having a romantic relationship with the opposite sex have physical symptoms of anxiety, morbid-more and less overall mental health. As it was already mentioned,

the romantic relationship among students with less social support in the community and their concerns of whether parents or other members of society might be aware of these relationships can increase depression and anxiety and risk their mental health. The results of this study are in congruent with the research of Joyner and Udry (2000), Steinberg & Davila (2006), Doyle et al. (2003), La-Greca and Harrison (2005), and Davila et al. (2006). Chen et al. (2009) investigated the associations between romantic relationships and emotional and behavioral consequences for Chinese adolescents. With a representative sample of 7-12 grades adolescents in Beijing, they found that romantic involvements are related to more depressive symptoms and behavioral problems for adolescents especially for those being involved in early adolescence and that stress from dealing with these relationships, especially from breakups, may explain such consequences. Regarding gender differences in such impacts, they suggested that girls appeared to be more vulnerable to negative relationship events than boys. Joyner and Udry (2000) argued that females are much more vulnerable to romantic involvements which could be an important reason why girls are more depressed than boys during adolescence.

Romantic relationships or affair with the intimate partner may lead to intimate partner violence where in most cases women are the victims of these incidents. When relationship progresses some months or even some years then conflict arises regarding various issues of romanticism especially about multiple sex partners of any one of the couples or for both. The number of studies describing the effects of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) on women's mental health has increased significantly, the most prevalent mental health sequel being depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and anxiety. Furthermore, IPV is strongly associated with suicidal behavior, sleep and eating disorders, social dysfunction, and an increased likelihood of substance abuse (Campbell, 2002; Martínez, García-Linares & Picó-Alfonso, 2004; Campbell, Kub & Rose, 1996; Golding, 1999; Woods, 2000). Wenzel et al. (2005), Altemus (2006), and Pilar (2006) asserted that women's mental health in traumatic situations is more threatening. The results of their researches indicate that students who begin romantic relationship with opposite sex, they may suffer from psychological problems than those who have no such relationships.

Simon and Barret (2010) conducted an empirical study examining the different mental health impacts of non-marital romantic relationships on young adults which fills a gap of previous literature almost exclusively focusing on adolescents. Their results showed that break-ups and involvement in relationships impact women's mental health more than men's even though they also found that another two dimensions of relationship quality (support and strain) affect men's mental health more than women's. Heim and Snyder (1991) found a greater amount of the variance in depressive symptoms of women to be associated with relationship factors than was the case for men. A large number of literature (Simon, Eder & Evans 1992; Thorne 1993;

Hatfield & Rapson 1996) has long suggested that women tend to attach more importance to intimate relationships and thus more vulnerable than men in relationship events.

Researchers found that females tend to place a greater emphasis on intimacy than do males (e.g., rating qualities such as "warmth" as more important) and to be more pragmatic in their orientations (e.g., rating qualities such as "financial security" as more important), and that males tend to place a greater emphasis on sexuality than do females (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Dindia & Allen, 1992; Howard, Blumstein, & Schwartz, 1987; Laner, 1977; Nevid, 1984; Simpson & Gangestad, 1992). Girls are most vulnerable to increases in depression if their first sexual encounter occurs in a relationship that is lacking emotional commitment. Girls who end a relationship that is acknowledged in their social network experience increases in depression whether or not the relationship included sex, but those who had their first sexual experience in these relationships experience an additional increase in depression. First sexual experiences are associated with a decrease in self-esteem among girls who have sex at a young age relative to the norms of their peers and who are not in a romantic relationship when they have sex. Males do not experience a significant increase in depressive symptoms after first sex, regardless of age norms or relationship status (Meier, 2007). It was also found that females who were sexually active were more depressed and reported more stress (Harvey & Spigner, 1995).

### **Objective of the Study**

The objective of the present study was to investigate the perceived stress and mental health of students having affair or not with opposite sex partners with reference to certain correlates like gender, duration of affairs and duration of physical relations (if exists).

### **Rationale of the Study**

Romanticism, love or affair is essential for healthy relationships. But it should not reach in such a level between partners where possibility to be abused due to so much dependency grows in any one of the partners or both. Although a majority of relationships don't experience physical or verbal abuse, the prevalence of dating violence is growing and occurs in approximately 1 out of 3 college relationships (Amar & Gennaro, 2005). This scenario seems to be congruent with the present scenarios of the students of public universities of Bangladesh. Though the ultimate results of these relationships may be abusive or painful experiences by any one partner in most cases but this relationship starts with a passionate love. Latent desire of sexual gratification and the way to its fulfillment through some sorts of activities like academic or financial help to opposite sex partner seem to be the main motive of these types of romantic relationships among university students. Conflict very soon arises among these intimate partners due to familial, social, moral, academic, financial, sexual and other issues. As a consequence, physical or verbal abuses occur more frequently between partners especially victims are usually the females. On the

other hand, there are partners, though they may be less in quantity, possesses companionate love to each other and their relationships are matured enough in regards to romance and stability. At the big screen, a large portion of university students seems to have no romantic relationship or affair with opposite sex partners. They keep themselves busy in academic and extracurricular activities. By taking these factors in close concern an attempt in this study was made to see the perceived stress and mental health of the university students having affair or not with opposite sex partners with reference to certain correlates like gender, duration of affairs, duration of physical relations.

### Hypotheses

Some specific hypotheses formulated in this study are as follows:

- 1) There will be differences in perceived stress and mental health in terms of respondents' relationship status.
- 2) There will be differences in perceived stress and mental health in terms of respondents' gender.
- 3) Perceived stress and mental health scores of the respondents will be significantly correlated.
- 4) Respondents' scores of 'duration of affairs' and 'duration of physical relations' will be significantly correlated.

### Materials and Method

#### Sample

The sample of the present study comprised of 120 respondents (60 males and 60 females) who were the students of Chittagong University (CU). Respondents were selected purposively from residential male and female halls and from different departments and institutes of Chittagong University. Respondents were categorized in terms of their relationship status (students having affairs/students having no affairs) and gender (male/female). Students having affairs were 69 in numbers (28 males, 41 females) and students having no affairs were 51 in numbers (32 males, 19 females). The sample distribution of the present study is given in Table-1 according to gender and relationship status.

**Table-1: Sample Distribution of the Respondents according to Gender and Relationship Status**

Gender		Male	Female	Total
Relationship Status(Having Affair or Not)	Yes	28	41	69
	No	32	19	51
Total		60	60	120 (N)

## Instruments

Three instruments used in this study are discussed below.

**1. Structured Interview Form:** It contains pre-categorized closed questions of fixed responses. This interview module contained questions relating to those factors including 'Gender', 'relationship status with opposite sex partner (having affair/not)', if the answer was 'Yes' then, 'the duration of affair', 'whether it has reached into a physical relation (Yes/No)', If the answer was 'Yes' then finally, 'the duration of physical relations'.

**2. Perceived Stress Questionnaire, PSQ (Keya, 2006):** Keya (2006) developed the Perceived Stress Questionnaire (PSQ) culturally appropriate to Bangladesh. This scale used in the present study to measure perceived stress of the respondents having affairs or no affairs with opposite sex partners. The scale contains 20 items in a 5 point Likert form. Higher scores in this scale indicate high perceived stress and lower scores indicate low perceived stress of the respondents. The internal consistency of the PSQ was determined using Cronbach's Alpha reliability and Cronbach's alpha of the total scale was acceptably high ( $\alpha= 0.77$ ). The PSQ was constructed with 20 items as an internally consistent and reliable measure of perceived stress. Temporal stability of the scale was established using test-retest method ( $r=0.73$ ). Content and criterion related validity was studied for the PSQ and scores on PSQ were found to be much higher for those who were evicted from their shelter compared to the non-evicted. Thus the developed PSQ was shown to be psychometrically sound in all cases with a Likert scoring method and seemed to be a valid questionnaire for measuring stressful experience. Respondents were asked to rate each item on a 5 point scale with not at all (0), a little bit (1), a moderate amount (2), quite a bit (3), and a great deal (4) as response categories. Item no. 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12 were reversed prior to the scoring. High score reflected high perceived stress.

**3. Bangla Version (Ilyas and Ayesha, 2002) of the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12):** A modified Bangla version (Ilyas and Ayesha, 2002) of the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) originally developed by Goldberg (1978) was used to measure mental health of the respondents. It is a self administered screening test for detecting minor psychiatric disorders in general population. It is a Likert Type scale of 12 items out of which 6 are true keyed (item no. 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 12) and 6 are false keyed (Item no. 2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11). For scoring the true keyed items, weights of 0, 1, 2 and 3 are assigned for 'not at all', 'somewhat', 'to a considerable extent' and 'to a great extent' respectively. The scoring for the false keyed is reverse. The possible range of score is 0 to 36. The higher score in the scale indicates better mental health. Banks et al. (1980) used it as an indicator of mental health and found it to have provided a useful estimate of mental health. The development studies (Goldberg, 1978) showed high internal consistency ( $r=0.65$ ), test-retest reliability ( $r=0.73$ ) over a period of 6 months and validity in terms of good linear

relationship with clinical check-up records as the criteria ( $r = 0.70$ ). English and Bangla versions were administered to 30 subjects with a gap of 7 days between them. Half of the participants were administered English version first and the remaining half of the participants was administered Bangla version first. Significant correlation ( $r = 0.625$ ,  $p < .0005$ ) between scores of English and Bangla versions indicated translation reliability of the scale. Test-retest reliability of Bangla version with a gap of 2 weeks was 0.565. The alpha coefficient of internal consistency of Bangla version was 0.8136. Hence all versions of the scale exhibited high correlation with one another.

### **Procedure**

Standard data collection procedure was followed to collect data from the respondents in this study. The respondents were the students of Chittagong University (60 male and 60 female students). The data of the respondents were collected purposively from residential male and female halls and from different departments and institutes of Chittagong University, Bangladesh. At first, the respondents were provided a consent form that made clarification about the purpose of the research assuring the respondents that highest confidentiality and research ethics would be maintained in collecting information. Then after getting consent, respondents were interviewed through a 'Structured Interview Form' containing pre-categorized closed questions of fixed responses. This interview module contained questions relating whether CU students had any affair or not with opposite sex partner and if the answer is 'Yes' then how long was the duration of their affairs and whether it has reached into a physical relation or not. If the answer regarding physical relation was 'Yes' then how long was the duration of their physical relations. After attempting these answers through structured interview form, respondents were provided two developed scales i.e. 'Perceived Stress Scale' and 'General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12)' to know whether the variations in respondents' relationship status would create variations in their perceived stress and mental health. Prior to responding the items or statements on the questionnaires, participants were requested to make a silent reading of the standard instructions on each questionnaire. Along with this, they were also given verbal instructions. The respondents were told to read the items of the instruments attentively and to respond carefully. All necessary clarifications were made regarding the items. They were asked to put Tick ( $\checkmark$ ) mark in the appropriate box. They were also told that there was no right or wrong answers so give responses honestly to the statements, otherwise, the objectivity and accuracy of the results in this study would be at stake. The respondents were provided the instruments entered into an envelope and after giving responses through these instruments, they were requested to back the envelope closed with gum or being stapled so that highest confidentiality could be maintained. Respondents were also assured that there were no options in the questionnaires to mention



respondents' name or other personal information that may hamper their self regard or social status. All data were collected within 38 days.

### Data Processing and Statistical Analyses

The responses of the participants were scored according to the scoring systems of Perceived Stress Scale and General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12). Before it, through the 'Structured Interview Form' it was confirmed whether the respondents had any affair with opposite sex partner. Each participant received an average perceived stress score and mental health score. To analyze these scores, the field data were assembled, coded and recorded. Then the variables were defined and accordingly data were input into the SPSS program (Version 15.0). Then obtained data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, correlation coefficients, and t-test. Before carrying out t-test the assumptions of normality were tested through 'Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test' and by histogram and normal Q-Q plots.

### Results

To analyze the collected data, descriptive statistics, *t*-test and correlation coefficients were used. The results of the present study are illustrated in the following section.

Table-2: *Frequency Table of Students having Affair or Not with Opposite Sex Partner*

Have an Affair		Frequency	Percentage
Response	Yes	69	57.5%
	No	51	42.5%
Total =		120(N)	

From Table-2, it is seen that the frequency of students having affair with opposite sex partner was 69 which was 57.5% of the total respondents (N=120). And the frequency of the students having no affair with opposite sex partner was 51 which was 42.5% of the total respondents (N=120).

**Table-3: Frequency Table of the Respondents' Duration of Affairs (N=69) with Opposite Sex Partners**

Duration of Affairs	Frequency	Percentage
1 month	1	.8%
2 months	1	.8%
4 months	1	.8%
5 months	2	1.7%
6 months	3	2.5%
7 months	2	1.7%
9 months	2	1.7%
1 Year	11	9.2%
2 Years	19	15.8%
3 Years	8	6.7%
4 Years	7	5.8%
5 Years	8	6.7%
6 Years	3	2.5%
7 Years	1	.8%
Total =	69(N)	57.5%

Table-3 showed that among 69 respondents of 120 having affairs, 15.8% (n=19) had affairs since last 2 years, 9.2% (n=11) since last 1 year, 6.7% (n=11) since last 5 years, 6.7% (n=11) since last 3 years, 5.8% (n=7) since last 4 years, 2.5% (n=3) since last 6 years, 2.5% (n=3) since last 6 months, 1.7% (n=2) since last 9 months, 1.7% (n=2) since last 7 months, 1.7% (n=2) since last 5 months, 0.8% (n=1) since last 7 years, 0.8% (n=1) since last 4 months, 0.8% (n=1) since last 2 months and 0.8% (n=1) had affair with opposite sex partner since last 1 month.

**Table-4: Frequency Table of the Respondents' Duration of Physical Relations Having Affairs (N=69, 57.5% of the Total 120 respondents) with Opposite Sex Partners**

Duration of Physical Relations	Frequency	Percentage
No Physical. Relation	21	17.5%
1 month	4	3.3%
2 months	4	3.3%
3 months	8	6.7%
4 months	1	.8%
5 months	2	1.7%
6 months	6	5.0%
7 months	1	.8%
8 months	2	1.7%
9 months	1	.8%
1 Year	8	6.7%
2 Years	4	3.3%
3 Years	4	3.3%
4 Years	3	2.5%
Total =	69(N)	

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Table-4 showed that 21(17.5%) out of 69 respondents having affair had no physical relations with their opposite sex partners. Among the rest 48 respondents out of 69, 6.7% (n=8) had physical relations since last 1 year, 6.7% (n=8) since last 3 months, 5.0% (n=6) since last 6 months, 3.3% (n=4) since last 3 years, 3.3% (n=4) since last 2 years, 3.3% (n=4) since last 2 months, 3.3% (n=4) since last 1 month, 2.5% since last 4 years, 1.7% since last 8 months, 1.7% since last 5 months, 0.8% (n=1) since last 9 months, 0.8% (n=1) since last 7 months and 0.8% (n=1) had physical relations with opposite sex partner since last 4 months.

Table-5: *Differences in Perceived Stress and Mental Health of the Respondents in terms of Relationship Status (Having Affair or Not)*

Variables	Groups	N	Mean	Sd	df	t	p
Perceived Stress	Yes	69	36.64	9.80	118	2.97	.004*
	No	51	31.69	7.84			
Mental Health	Yes	69	20.10	6.20	118	2.59	.035**
	No	51	22.51	6.04			

\*p<0.01; \*\*p<0.05

An inspection of mean scores in Table-5 revealed that there exists a significant difference in perceived stress of the groups having affair and having no affair with opposite sex partners (df=118, t=2.97, p<0.01). That is, group having affairs (M=36.64) with opposite sex partners reported more perceived stress as compared to the group having no affair (M=31.69). Results also reported in Table-5 reveal that there exists a significant difference in mental health between the groups ‘having affair’ and ‘having no affair’ with opposite sex partners (df=118, t=2.59, p<0.05). That is, group having affairs (M=20.10) with opposite sex partners reported poor mental health as compared to the group having no affair (M=22.51).

Table-6: *Gender Differences in Perceived Stress and Mental Health of the Respondents Having Affair*

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Sd	df	t	p
Perceived Stress	Male	28	39.25	7.46	67	1.86	.067
	Female	41	34.85	10.85			
Mental Health	Male	28	17.86	5.91	67	2.59	.012*
	Female	41	21.63	5.98			

\*p<0.05

Results reported in Table-6 reveals that there exists no significant difference in perceived stress between male and female respondents having affair with opposite sex partners ( $df=67$ ,  $t=1.86$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). But from the mean differences it was found that male respondents ( $M= 39.25$ ) reported more perceived stress as compared to their female counterparts ( $M= 34.85$ ). Again from the results in Table-6 it was seen that there exists a significant difference in mental health of male and female respondents having affair with opposite sex partners ( $df=67$ ,  $t=2.59$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). That is, male respondents ( $M=17.86$ ) reported poor mental health as compared to their female counterparts ( $M=21.63$ ).

Table-7: *Gender Differences in Perceived Stress and Mental Health of the Respondents Having No Affair*

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Sd	df	t	p
Perceived Stress	Male	32	29.09	4.83	49	3.37	.001*
	Female	19	36.05	9.92			
Mental Health	Male	32	23.34	5.98	49	1.29	.204
	Female	19	21.11	6.03			

\* $p<0.01$

Results reported in Table-7 reveals that there exists a significant difference in perceived stress between male and female respondents having no affair with opposite sex partners ( $df=49$ ,  $t=3.37$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). That is, male respondents ( $M= 29.09$ ) reported less perceived stress as compared to their female counterparts ( $M= 36.05$ ). Again from the results in Table-7 it was seen that there exists no significant difference in mental health of male and female respondents having no affair with opposite sex partners ( $df=49$ ,  $t=1.29$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). But from the mean scores it was found that male respondents ( $M=23.34$ ) reported better mental health as compared to their female counterparts ( $M=21.11$ ).

Table-8: *Correlation Coefficients between Perceived Stress and Mental Health of the overall Respondents, Respondents Having Affair and Respondents Having No Affair*

Categories	Variables	Perceived Stress	Mental Health
Overall Respondents	Perceived Stress		
	Mental Health	-.452 (**)	
Respondents Having Affairs	Perceived Stress		
	Mental Health	-.458 (**)	
Respondents Having No Affair	Perceived Stress		
	Mental Health	-.371 (**)	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table- 8 indicated significant negative correlations between perceived stress and mental health scores of the overall respondents ( $r = -.452, p < 0.01$ ), respondents having affairs with opposite sex partners ( $r = -.458, p < 0.01$ ) and the respondents having no affair with opposite sex partners ( $r = -.371, p < 0.01$ ). That is, the higher the perceived stress scores (e.g. higher scores indicate **more perceived stress**), the lower will be the scores of mental health (e.g. lower scores indicate **poor mental health**) of the respondents and vice versa.

Table-9: *Correlation Coefficients between Duration of Affairs and Duration of Physical Relations of the Respondents Having Affair*

Variables	Duration of Affairs	Duration of Phy. Relations
Duration of Affairs		
Duration of Phy. Relations	.667 (**)	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table-9 indicated a significant positive correlation between the scores of duration of affairs and duration of physical relations of the respondents having affair with opposite sex partners ( $r = .667, p < 0.01$ ). That is, the more the duration of affairs, the more will be the duration of physical relations of the respondents having affairs with opposite sex partners and vice versa.

## Discussion

The objective of the present study was to investigate the perceived stress and mental health of Chittagong University students having affair or not with opposite sex partners with reference to certain correlates like gender, duration of affairs and duration of physical relations (if exists). Reviewing the relevant literatures in detail, it was hypothesized: 1) there will be differences in perceived stress and mental health in terms of respondents' relationship status; 2) there will be differences in perceived stress and mental health in terms of respondents' gender; 3) perceived stress and mental health scores of the respondents will be significantly correlated; 4) respondents' scores of 'duration of affairs' and 'duration of physical relations' will be significantly correlated. In order to test these hypotheses, the present study conducted on 120 respondents (60 males and 60 females) selected purposively from residential male and female halls and from different departments and institutes of Chittagong University (CU).

Following standard procedures the instruments used in this study were administered to measure the perceived stress and mental health of CU students 'having affair' or 'having no affair' with opposite sex partners with reference to certain correlates. Obtained data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-test and correlation coefficients. Important features of the findings are discussed below in a coherent manner.

It was found from the present study that the students having affairs with opposite sex partners was 57.5% (n=69) of the total respondents. And students having no affair with opposite sex partners was 42.5% (n=51) of the total respondents (Table-2). As 51(42.5%) out of 120 respondents had no affair with their opposite sex partners so among the rest 69 respondents out of 120, had affairs at various durations (Table-3). Again from Table-4 it was found that 21(17.5%) out of 69 respondents (57.5% of the Total 120 respondents) having affairs had no physical relations with their opposite sex partners. Among the rest 48 respondents out of 69 had physical relations with opposite sex partners at different durations.

Findings of the present study also revealed that group having affairs with opposite sex partners reported more perceived stress and poor mental health as compared to the group having no affair with opposite sex partners (Table-5). This finding provided confirmation to the first hypothesis ( $H_1$ ). The result is consistent with the results of researches which indicate that students who begin romantic relationship with opposite sex, they may suffer from psychological problems than those who have no such relationships. (Wenzel et al.,2005, Altemus, 2006 and Pilar, 2006).

From the findings of the present study it was also found that there exists no significant difference in perceived stress between male and female respondents having affair with opposite sex partners. Again, from the results it was found that male respondents having affairs reported poor mental health as compared to their female counterparts (Table- 6). These findings are opposite to the previous several research findings (Hochschild 1979; Simon, Eder & Evans 1992; Thorne 1993; Hatfield & Rapson 1996; Simon, Eder & Evans 1992; Thorne 1993; Hatfield & Rapson 1996). Consistent with these findings Joyner and Udry (2000) argued that females are much more vulnerable to romantic involvements which could be an important reason why girls are more depressed than boys during adolescence.

Findings of the present study also showed a significant difference in perceived stress between male and female respondents having no affair with opposite sex partners. That is, male respondents reported less perceived stress as compared to their female counterparts. From results it was also seen that there exists no significant difference in mental health of male and female respondents having no affair with opposite sex partners (Table-3.7). The results are consistent with the finding where it was found that unfavorable romantic relationships during adolescence can be used as a predictor of emotional properties such as anxiety, nervousness, depression and jealousy. This point is particularly important among girls, because girls are prone to these properties more than boys in romantic relationships (Davila, Steinberg, Kachadourian, Cobb, Fincham, 2004). The results provided partial confirmation to the second hypothesis ( $H_2$ ) of the present study.

Significant negative correlations found in this study between perceived stress and mental health

scores of the overall respondents, respondents having affairs with opposite sex partners and respondents having no affair with opposite sex partners. That is, the higher the perceived stress scores (e.g. higher scores indicate **more perceived stress**), the lower was the scores of mental health (e.g. lower scores indicate **poor mental health**) of the respondents and vice versa (Table-8). The findings of the study provided confirmation to the third hypothesis (H<sub>3</sub>). The findings are consistent with the previous work of Chen et al. (2009) who investigated the associations between romantic relationships and emotional and behavioral consequences for Chinese adolescents and found that romantic involvements are related to more depressive symptoms and behavioral problems for adolescents especially for those being involved in early adolescence and that stress from dealing with these relationships, especially from breakups, may explain such consequences. The results of the present study are also in congruent with the research of Steinberg & Davila (2006), Doyle et al. (2003), La-Greca and Harrison (2005), and Davila et al. (2006). A significant positive correlation found in this study between scores of duration of affairs and duration of physical relations of the respondents having affairs with opposite sex partners. That is, the more the duration of affairs, the more was the duration of physical relations of the respondents having affairs and vice versa (Table-9). This finding provided confirmation to the fourth hypothesis (H<sub>4</sub>) of the present study. This result is somewhat opposite to the previous findings of a study which suggested that increasing duration of partner relationships is associated with decreasing rates of mental health problems (Gibb, Fergusson & Horwood, 2011).

### **Implications of the Study**

Some specific implications of this study have been stated below.

- 1) This study would provide an insight to public university students about the possible threats of physical or verbal abuses of partners appeared in non-marital romantic relationships or affairs.
- 2) The present study would emphasize on companionate love for healthy relationships to carry on academic and extracurricular activities smoothly among students of university levels.
- 3) From the present study a clear message can be found about the impacts of non-marital romantic relationships on young adults' mental health.
- 4) From the present study, students having affairs and students having no affairs, both groups will become aware about the positive and negative social, psychological, moral, academic, familial and financial impacts of non-marital romantic relationships and accordingly will take initiatives to keep a good mental health or psychological well being of themselves.

### Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Although the present study tried to maintain a sound methodology and analysis of collected data, nevertheless it is not free from certain limitations. The data of the respondents in this study were collected only from Chittagong University, Bangladesh but if it was collected covering students of different public universities throughout Bangladesh by taking a relatively large sample size, the sample would be more representative and the results of the study would become more accurate. Moreover, the significant findings of the study could not be emphatically generalized without substantial empirical researches in this area with reference to other relevant variables. Here, the basic necessity for future research lies. It can be argued that the problem of researching perceived stress and mental health of public universities' students having affairs or not is too vast to be dealt with in such a relatively short research. However, it throws light into the area, which needs further studies and exploration.

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