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How the COVID-19 lockdown affects social relationships in Bangladesh: A social media-based cross-sectional study

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Abstract

For controlling the rapid spread of COVID-19 infections, the Bangladesh Government imposed lockdown to ensure social distancing among the mass. The study aimed to investigate the effect of COVID-19 lockdown on social relationships among Bangladeshi nationals. A social media-based cross-sectional study was conducted from May 15 through June 7, 2020. The study used a survey questionnaire to ascertain the people's perception on COVID-19 pandemic and its associated lockdown, and on how the lockdown affected their social relationships. In this study, social relationships referred to the connections between family members, friends, and relatives. Linear regression was employed to determine the predictors of social relationships. A total of 352 survey responses were collected, out of which 64.2 per cent reported that their social relationships became stronger during lockdown. Age, marital status, occupation, and financial condition exhibited significant associations with social relationships. More specifically, young through middle-aged, married, housewives, and financially solvent people had a significant association with having strong social relationships. This study found that the COVID-19 lockdown revealed a positive impact on the social relationships of Bangladeshis. Healthy bonding and cordial support of family and friends are understood to have helped them to mitigate their mental stress, leading to positive health implications.

1 | INTRODUCTION

In late December 2019, the world witnessed the first case of viral pneumonia of unidentified cause in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, and later it was named novel COVID-19. Due to its rapid spread, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared this viral illness of COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (WHO 2020). The exponential rise in cases of COVID-19 infection compelled the world to choose an unprecedented containing measure – lockdown – which was suggested as the

only effective measure to tackle the rapid increase of COVID-19 cases. The lockdown measure was attempted throughout the world to ensure social distancing so that it could help to reduce the number of infectious cases and fatality rates (Lau *et al*. 2020). The word "lockdown" may have different meanings by different users and can be explained from different perspectives. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the term "lockdown" has been characterised as limiting the movements, functions, and activities of community people (Future Learn 2020; Resnick 2020). More specifically, there are studies that looked into the impacts of lockdown from the perspective of mental health, economic well-being, as well as the quality of life in Asian countries (Le *et al*. 2020; Tran *et al*. 2020).

On March 23, 2020, a temporary lockdown was announced by the Bangladesh Government effective through April 4, 2020, to protect the population from infection, which was later extended. This lockdown was imposed to restrict the mass movements for the purpose of controlling the number of infected cases as well as to save the lives of the vulnerable or at-risk. Except for the emergency services, any type of regular activities were banned, such as the opening of public and private offices, educational institutions, markets, public transport, airports, and railways. Instantaneously, the lockdown became to be regarded as one of the best-known coping strategies to limit the COVID-19 infections, however with a caveat that it could affect mental health negatively (Le *et al*. 2020; Naser *et al*. 2020). Hence, lockdown might also have an impact on people's families and social life.

Apart from mental health issues of anxiety, fear, depression, loneliness, insomnia, and rage, which were evident in the past experiences of quarantine/isolation in the context of a SARS pandemic (Severe Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome 2003), this lockdown had caused panic (due to regular increase in death cases), triggered suicidal behavior (Khan *et al*. 2021), and elevated worries regarding the supply and price of kitchen essentials and basic amenities. Therefore, this sudden restriction of free movement made people feel like they were being imprisoned in their own houses (Grover *et al*. 2020).

Generally, people's family and social life are mainly comprised of their shared relationships with family members, friends, neighbours, colleagues, and other associates (August and Rook 2013), and this pandemic situation acutely influenced their daily lives irrespective of age, inclusive of the old to school children. The elderly were kept isolated due to their physical vulnerability; children got stuck at home freed from their hectic study life, and the middle-aged were stressed about providing day-long services to both age groups. Many adults had to continue their job responsibilities at home.

It is generally thought that the familial bonding of Bangladeshi people is strong, and they are comparatively more social and committed to maintaining rituals such as religious festivals and family and social ceremonies which demand various sorts of social gatherings. So it can be assumed that a continuous lockdown imposed for 66 days (Shawon 2020) might have a significant impact on the social relationships of Bangladeshi people.

Several reports highlighted the economic disadvantages experienced in Bangladesh due to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as Siddiquee and Faruk (2020), who rightly pointed about declined domestic and international demands, low output, and nominal wage rate index in the manufacturing and service sectors. Rahman *et al*. (2020) also underlined the reduction in economic activities, household earnings, employment, trade, and investment, which was pertinent as well but ignored the impact of the COVID-19 situation on social relationships.[1] Because social relationships and specifically family relationships can be seen as key to ensure an individual's well-being, strong connections and bonding of our social relationships enable us to control our emotions, give us strength to cope with stress, and help us to remain resilient during stressful situations like COVID-19 (Naser *et al*. 2020). Even the WHO announced that the disconnection of social relationships could be a crucial challenge to peoples' immunity and health issues. Interestingly, the global battle to tackle the rapid spread of COVID-19 infections was mainly highlighting the measure of social distancing (Courtet *et al*. 2020).

To the author's knowledge, Naser *et al*. (2020) investigated the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on social relationships in Jordan, but so far no study has explored how the COVID-19 lockdown affected the social relationships of Bangladeshi people. Even regional survey data to assess the lockdown impact on family affairs, for urban and rural communities, is unavailable at this moment. Therefore,
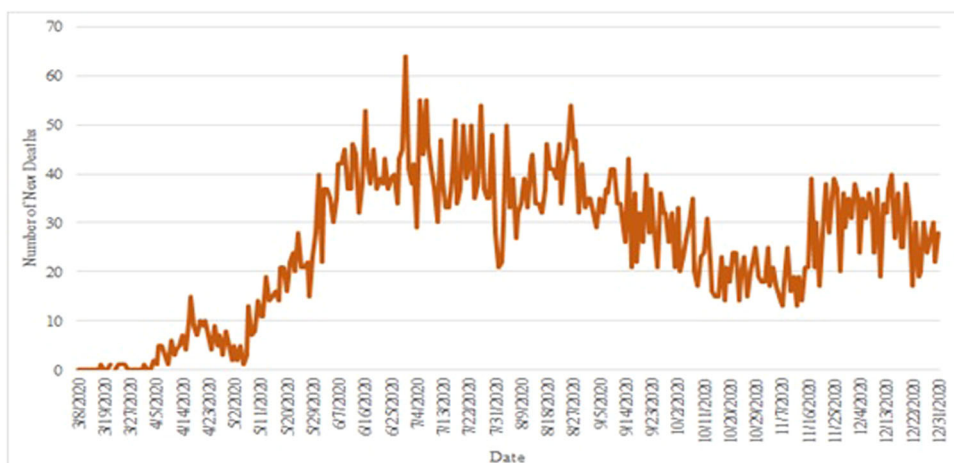
FIGURE 1 Number of new deaths between March and December 2020; Source: IEDCR, Bangladesh [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

this study attempted to evaluate the effect of lockdown on social relationships due to the COVID-19 emergency in Bangladesh.

2 | COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND LOCKDOWN SCENARIO OF BANGLADESH

In Bangladesh, the first three cases of COVID-19 were confirmed on March 8, 2020, and after 10 days, the first COVID-19 inflicted death was reported (see Fig 1). The government-imposed "general holiday" (i.e., lockdown) came into effect on March 26, pre-announced on March 23, and was initially stated to be effective until April 4 but was later extended. On April 5, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced a stimulus package for reviving the economic activity of all the sectors amounting to approximately US$8billion.

On April 14, 2020, Bangladesh experienced confirmed COVID-19 cases exceeding 1,000 and 100 related deaths after a week. However, the general holiday was withdrawn and a limited reopening of all the sectors from May 31 to June 15 was announced for the evaluation of the prevailing situation. As the maintenance of lockdown for an indefinite period was not possible for the sake of the livelihood of marginalised people in Bangladesh, Bangladesh had witnessed a lockdown for a long period from March 26 to May 30. Hence, it can be expected that the lockdown caused by COVID-19 could have a prominent effect on the social relationships of Bangladeshi people.

3 | MATERIALS AND METHOD

3.1 | Study population and design

A social media-based (Facebook app) cross-sectional online survey was conducted in Bangladesh from May 15 through June 7, 2020. The study population could be defined as Bangladeshi nationals in a broad sense. The survey respondents were mainly urban residents[2] of Bangladesh and their ages ranged from 18 to 65 years. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown, the researcher was bound to conduct the survey online, not face-to-face. Hence, the study samples were confined to internet users, more specifically, Facebook users only. The questionnaire as a survey instrument was

developed in reference to the previous literature on the COVID-19 pandemic and the social responses in different times to health pandemics (Center for Disease Control and Prevention n.d.; Davis *et al*. 2015; Naser *et al*. 2020). Then, a structured questionnaire was constructed to observe issues that arose within the family as well as with the families of friends and colleagues.

Friends, families, and acquaintances were asked to provide their opinions through a questionnaire developed in "Google questionnaire form" and the form link was circulated to their Facebook and email inboxes. The consent of the respondents was taken before their participation in this online survey, and their approval was requested through private and group chats on Facebook (Rahman *et al*. 2021). At the very beginning of the questionnaire, respondents were asked whether they wanted to volunteer for the survey or not. When the questionnaire was displayed on their device and only when they said "yes" to volunteering to participate in the survey, they were redirected to the next step; they were exempt from the survey if they said "no". The link to a Google questionnaire for survey participation was sent to those who consented to the required instructions. Survey respondents were assured that their provided information would be used only for research purposes with anonymity and confidentiality.

The questionnaire comprised of a total of six sections with 44 items, including respondent's socio-demographic characteristics, adherence to precautionary measures of COVID-19 taken by the respondents, their perceptions regarding the lockdown period, and how their stay at home was affecting their relationship with family members and relatives in terms of communication that characterises social relationships. The first section comprised the items that concerned the demographic features of the respondents. In order to combat COVID-19 and particularly to design the disease control strategy, it is crucial to assess people's knowledge, attitude, and practice (KAP) of COVID-19 (Rahman *et al*. 2020). Hence, the second section highlighted the general questions on knowledge, attitude, and practice on COVID-19 preventive measures and participants' perceptions on lockdown.

The next three sections cover how the lockdown affected individuals' relationships with their parents, spouse, and children in terms of the level of communication. And the last section included three items that asked about the overall feeling of the respondents about their relationships with family and relatives throughout the pandemic including period of lockdown in Bangladesh. Six items were chosen to score the social relationships (see the six questions of the first section in Table 3) with the score range of 0 to 2, the former representing weaker and the latter representing stronger social relation and communication all through the lockdown period (Naser *et al*. 2020). A score of 0 was assigned to the respondents who opposed to better social relationships, score 2 was assigned to the respondents who agreed on better social relationships, and score 1 was assigned to the respondents who claimed that the status of their social relationships did not change during the pandemic lockdown. For six items, the total maximum score was 12, and the total score could be explained based on the mid-point of the highest possible score of the rating scale. The higher the total score, the better the quality of social connections in the period of the COVID-19 lockdown.

3.2 | Sampling technique

The study employed the purposive sampling method, a non-probability sampling technique to gather information. This sampling procedure involves an iterative procedure of choosing the study samples rather than using a pre-planned sampling frame (Robinson 2014). A number of studies are available on various issues (Bodrud-Doza *et al*. 2020; Ferdous *et al*. 2020; M. A. Hossain *et al*. 2020; M. T. Hossain *et al*. 2020; Islam *et al*. 2020; Zubayer *et al*. 2020) which used this sampling technique to collect data on the outbreak of COVID-19 in Bangladesh. However, the respondents were requested and invited to participate in this online survey through Facebook via both private chats and public groups and they were also encouraged to ask their friends to take part in this survey voluntarily. Since the data were collected during the period of lockdown when the respondents were physically unreachable, the

survey respondents were restricted to internet users. The objective of the study was made clear to the respondents before they decided to respond to the survey.

3.3 | Sample size

The sample size calculation suggested collecting a minimum of 385 responses for ensuring a 95 per cent confidence interval with an error margin of 5 per cent. Although the study intended to attain that minimum sample size, due to response bias and/or missing information, the dataset obtained was for 352 respondents.

3.4 | Data analysis

The study investigated the socio-demographic features, knowledge, attitude, and practice (KAP) information relevant to COVID-19 preventive measures, their perceptions on lockdown, and their opinions on social relationships. Questions were intended to assess the status of the respondent's social relationships on the basis of a 3-point Likert scale with the range from 0 (disagree) to 2 (agree). The internal consistency of the questionnaire was confirmed by Cronbach's Alpha test. The Alpha coefficient value of the test was 0.75 indicating the reliability and consistency of the social relationship variable in the survey questionnaire. Separate types of representation were provided for quantitative and qualitative variables.

The central measures, i.e., mean and standard deviation, were reported for quantitative variables. Qualitative variables were represented in terms of the figure of frequencies and percentages. Respondents' scores (indicating the impact of lockdown on their connection and communication with family and friends due to the pandemic) were inferred using a continuous scale based on scale midpoint, where the scores above the scale midpoint indicated strong social connections and communication (Naser *et al*. 2020). A Student t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of two groups and a one-way ANOVA test was used as appropriate to compare the mean scores between different demographic strata.

In addition, the variables that came out significant in univariate analysis ($p \leq 0.25$) were also used for logistic regression analysis to determine the predictors of strong social relationships and communication. The logistic regression model provided the estimated coefficients of odds ratios (ORs) and 95 per cent confidence intervals (CIs), where the level of significance was predetermined as 5 per cent. STATA 15.1 software was used for data analysis.

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Respondents' characteristics

The study collected a total of 352 individuals' information through the online survey. Most of the study respondents (25.81 per cent, $n = 207$) were middle-aged, i.e., 26–35 years. More than 60 per cent of the respondents (62.78 per cent, $n = 221$) were males, and the majority (62.78 per cent, $n = 221$) of them were married and graduates.[3] Out of the 352 respondents, 70.74 per cent ($n = 249$) were service holders. More than 80 per cent of study respondents claimed themselves as financially solvent, i.e., their financial condition is stable (Table 1).

A substantial percentage (97.73 per cent, $n = 344$) of the respondents reported that they have sufficient knowledge of the precautionary measures to fight COVID-19. The respondents were also asked about their actions based on the preventive knowledge: 93.75 per cent ($n = 330$) admitted that they already adopted the safety measures in their day-to-day lives; for example, washing hands frequently

TABLE 1 Respondents' demographic characteristics

Demographics	Frequency (%)
Age ($n = 352$)	
18–25 years	71 (20.17)
26–35 years	207 (58.81)
36–45 years	58 (16.48)
46 years and above	16 (4.55)
Gender ($n = 352$)	
Male	221 (62.78)
Female	131 (37.22)
Marital Status ($n = 352$)	
Unmarried	122 (34.66)
Married	221 (62.78)
Separate/Divorced/ Others	9 (2.56)
Occupation	
Service holder	249 (70.74)
Business	13 (3.69)
Housewife	17 (4.83)
Others	73 (20.74)
Financial Condition ($n = 352$)	
Poor	7 (1.99)
Slightly affluent	29 (8.24)
Rich	14 (3.98)
Reluctant to inform	15 (4.26)
Medial affluent	112 (31.82)
Affluent	175 (49.72)

Source: Author's calculation

or sanitising them, not touching eyes, nose, and mouth unnecessarily, and ensuring mask-wearing when outside. When they were asked about their awareness of COVID-19 severity, 94.03 per cent ($n = 331$) said that they were aware of it. More than 45 per cent ($n = 165$) agreed that they were feeling medial during their stay at home in the lockdown (Table 2).

Surprisingly, a handsome share (89.20 per cent, $n = 314$) of the respondents considered spending a long time and quality time with their family members as positive. They believed that this lockdown after the spread of COVID-19 allowed them to make their social relationships stronger. A total of 95 per cent ($n = 333$) thought that the declared lockdown was reasonable in order to control the spread of the virus. Even after the lockdown announcement, more than 75 per cent ($n = 277$) of respondents took a temporary preparation to protect themselves from being infected, for instance, by holding cash in hand, stocking dry food items, and/or giving leave to the house help (Table 2).

4.2 | The impact of COVID-19 lockdown on family and social relationships

To measure the effectiveness of the COVID-19 lockdown on family and social relationships, the study used a few indicators as presented in the first section of Table 3 with their respective share among the total study population. The mean score of the COVID-19 lockdown influence on family and social

TABLE 2 Adhere to the precautionary measures against the pandemic of Coronavirus

Adhere	Frequency (%)
Do you know the preventive measures of the Coronavirus?	
Yes	344 (97.73)
Do you practice all the preventive measures of the Coronavirus?	
Yes	330 (93.75)
Do you aware of the severe fatality of the Coronavirus?	
Yes	331 (94.03)
How do you feel being on house arrest due to lockdown?	
Considerate	98 (27.84)
Medial	165 (46.88)
Unchanged	89 (25.28)
What is your attitude towards spending a long time with family in lockdown?	
Positive	314 (89.20)
Did you take any temporary preparation before lockdown?	
Yes	277 (78.69)
Do you think this lockdown was essential to tackle the Corona infection?	
Yes	333 (94.60)

Source: Author's calculation

relationships in this study was 8.875 (SD: 2.72) out of 12 (equals to 88.75 per cent), which indicates the presence of better social relationships for the period of lockdown. Only 10.79 per cent ($n = 38$) of the study respondents has a total score below 6 (the midline), which exhibits the negative impact of the lockdown period on peoples' perceptions towards relationships and communication with close people in their lives.

About 72.73 per cent ($n = 256$) of the respondents replied that they had a good time with their parents as they were comparatively less busy on those days. Moreover, 43.75 per cent ($n = 154$) of the respondents grouped as sons and 28.98 per cent ($n = 102$) of them as daughters agreed that they had a lively discussion about their funny childhood memories with their parents. The parents also enjoyed the time with their less busy daughters or sons. Those who had wonderful times with their parents felt the urge to continue the cherished bonding even after they went back to fast-paced life, and 80 per cent ($n = 284$) of respondents agreed with this view. Those days are gone when people used to have frequent visits to their relatives' places and spend hours talking to their friends and close relatives on the land-line phone. But they were able to reconnect themselves with those close people in their lives in this lockdown, and the respondents of the survey admitted this reality (Table 3).

Globally, several surveys were conducted on the husband-wife relationship that were seemingly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in China, where the COVID-19 epidemic began, a significant increase in the number of divorce cases was filed due to domestic violence (Dai *et al.* 2021; Zhang 2020). A similar scenario was also observed in the Middle East (Halawa 2020; Karakaş 2020; Abuhammad 2021; Adibelli *et al.* 2021), the western world (Kennedy 2020; Hayley *et al.* 2020), as well as in the other parts of the globe (Lucila *et al.* 2020). A few other surveys also revealed the rising cases of domestic violence in the Middle East and the western world. On the contrary, this online survey reported that 50 per cent ($n = 176$) of married respondents have acknowledged that they helped their partner in household chores and also tried new recipes for their spouse. Interestingly, out of those 50 per cent of married people, the share of male respondents was 34.4 per cent ($n = 121$) and female respondents was 15.6 per cent ($n = 55$). Those respondents also admitted that they spent joyful time

TABLE 3 Respondents' responses regarding the influences of COVID-19 on social relationships

Variables	Agreed %	Disagreed %	Not applicable % or Unchanged
Did you enjoy spending time with your parents during the lockdown and want to continue it in the future as well?	80.68%	7.67%	11.65%
Did the lockdown period enable you to improve the relationship between you and your spouse?	35.8%	7.39%	31.53% or 25.28%
Did the relationship between parents and children of the family become strong during the lockdown period?	55.97%	4.55%	39.49%
Did the bonding between the family members become stronger during the lockdown period?	64.20%	11.36%	24.43%
Did you have more contact with relatives/close friends than usual during the lockdown?	61.93%	34.66%	3.41%
Was your experience good in your home stay during the uncertain time of corona lockdown?	77.27%	22.73%	-
Did you get the chance to recall your funny childhood memories with your parents during the lockdown?	72.73%	15.63%	11.65%
Did you give support to your spouse in household chores during the lockdown?	50%	9.66%	40.34%
Did you get the opportunity to have a lively discussion with your spouse during the lockdown?	50.28%	9.66%	40.06%
Did you help your children in their studies or play with them during the lockdown?	48.86%	8.24%	42.90%

Source: Author's calculation

interacting with their spouse; among them, 36 per cent ($n = 126$) of the respondents believed that they got the chance to revive their saturated relationship through regular nurturing during the lockdown. Since children also had to stay within the house during the COVID-19 lockdown period, the survey results report that majority of the children passed their home time with textbooks, television, mobile, and laptop. Being confined at home, many of them also got the time to enjoy their hobbies, such as singing, dancing, and painting. Besides, children acquired an additional opportunity to play or study with their parents. A total of 49 per cent ($n = 172$) of the respondents opined that they got more time to play with their children and were able to give more attention to their study (Table 3). This is quite a satisfactory percentage because 57 per cent ($n = 202$) of samples confirmed that they have children in their family who stayed with them in the lockdown.

Table 4 reports that the difference in the mean score was insignificant across different age groups and genders. Besides, the mean score across the different categories of marital status ($p = 0.0000$) and financial condition ($p = 0.0003$) of the respondents differed significantly. The results indicate that both marital status and financial condition posited a positive association with having a better average social relationships score in this study, which implies strong social connections during the lockdown period.

TABLE 4 Respondents' average score stratified by their demographic characteristics

Demographics	Mean	Standard deviation	p-value
Age			
18–25 years	8.943662	2.304575	0.6534
26–35 years	8.874396	2.808391	
36–45 years	9.017241	2.704716	
46 years and above	8.0625	3.336041	
Gender			
Male	8.954198	2.607276	0.6744
Female	8.828054	2.785895	
Marital status			
Unmarried	8.180328	2.857544	0.0000*
Married	9.39819	2.344199	
Separate/Divorced/ Others	4.285714	4.535574	
Financial condition			
Poor	7.714286	3.683942	0.0003*
Slightly affluent	8.517241	2.473007	
Rich	6.214286	3.662252	
Reluctant to inform	7.933333	4.061433	
Medial affluent	8.75	2.778618	
Affluent	9.354286	2.286937	

Note:
*p<0.0005

4.3 | The effect of the predictor variables on social relationships

The linear regression model was used in this study to explore how the respondent's demographic characteristics explained their better social relationships in Bangladesh during the lockdown time (Table 5). Here, the dependent variable was the social relationships score and the predictor variables were categorised into two or more groups except for the variable age. The detailed variable descriptions are presented in Appendix (Table AI).

In the simple linear regression model, all categorised predictor variables, including age, marital status, occupation, and financial status, positively affected the social relationship score, coming out as significant. In multiple linear regression, the study found that the young (18–25 years) and the middle-aged (26–35 years) respondents exhibited a positive and significant impact on having a better social relationship. The positive and significant outcome of the married category indicates that they were more likely to have better social relationships during the COVID-19 lockdown. The respondents who were housewives were more likely to have healthy social relationships. And the significant impact of financial condition on social relationships led us to understand that rich and financially solvent respondents are more likely to have better social relationships.

5 | DISCUSSION

A new shape and dimension of social relationships emerged during the unprecedented situation of the COVID-19 pandemic. The lockdown period forced and brought family members closer (Conway 2020) and gave a chance to rekindle lost family relationships (Times of India 2020), though friends,

TABLE 5 Linear Regression Outcome (social relationship [= dependent variable] on predictor variables)

Independent Variables	Simple linear regression			Multiple linear regression		
	Coefficient	Standard errors	P>|z|	Coefficient	Standard errors	P>|z|
Age	.0140377	.0200129	0.483	.0714095	.0511396	0.164
Age (in category)						
18–25 years	8.943662**	.3231671	0.000	6.346873**	1.703795	0.000
26–35 years	8.874396**	.1892654	0.000	4.896925*	1.911252	0.011
36–45 years	9.017241**	.3575546	0.000	4.158253	2.218254	0.062
46 years and above	8.0625**	.6807637	0.000	3.039448	2.982614	0.309
Marital status						
Unmarried	8.180328**	.2357904	0.000	1.142566	.9802158	0.245
Married	9.39819**	.1751903	0.000	2.768022**	.9182107	0.003
Separate/Divorced/ Others	5.444444**	.8681301	0.000	-	-	-
Occupation						
Service holder	9.136546**	.1700364	0.000	-.0248661	.4528173	0.956
Business	8.307692**	.744166	0.000	-.7763924	.8386987	0.355
Housewife	7.058824**	.6507543	0.000	-1.839358	.7561426*	0.016
Others	8.506849**	.3140365	0.000	-	-	-
Financial condition						
Poor	7.714286**	1.000618	0.000	-1.379352	.9907595	0.165
Slightly affluent	8.517241**	.4916073	0.000	-.7857519	.5139302	0.127
Rich	6.214286**	.7075438	0.000	-2.267529**	.7365977	0.002
Reluctant to inform	7.933333**	.6835523	0.000	-.9635946	.6863779	0.161
Medial affluent	8.75**	.2501545	0.000	-.546834	.3085676	0.077
Affluent	9.354286**	.2001236	0.000	-	-	-
Adj R-squared = 0.1404						
P-value = 0.0000						

Note: Regression coefficients.
*$p < 0.05$ and
**$p < 0.01$.
The end category of marital status, financial condition, and occupation are omitted for collinearity in multiple regression.

extended family members, and relatives who were apart from each other. As a precautionary measure of COVID-19, people were isolated from their friends and community individuals (Al-Tammemi 2020; Brooks *et al*. 2020; Liu 2020). Against this backdrop, this study aimed to investigate the impact of the lockdown on social relationships in Bangladesh. Needless to say, it is an irony that despite living together under a single roof, parents and children barely manage to enjoy quality time together normally. This period of staying at home gave people that unique opportunity to enjoy each other's presence, such as through mealtime conversations, doing household chores together, understanding each other, extra time for hobbies, frequent audio/video conversations with friends and relatives, etc. (Times of India 2020).

The study findings revealed that a substantial percentage (more than 90 per cent) of respondents adhered to protective COVID-19 battling measures comprised of hygiene practices, wearing a mask outside, and social distancing, and more than 50 per cent of the respondents belonged to the 26–35-years age group. On the other hand, previous studies found that people belonging to the young age group are usually less responsive to the safety measures, such as social distancing and hygiene

practices (Al-Tammemi 2020; Liu 2020). Although social distancing discourages the direct interaction of one person with others (Bavel *et al.* 2020), this measure has been the only one identified as an indispensable measure for decelerating the pandemic impact.

The study findings postulated that around 65 per cent of the respondents believe that their familial relationships have become stronger during the declared general holiday in Bangladesh. Such findings contradict the findings of other studies (Wang *et al.* 2021; Chao *et al.* 2020; Brooks *et al.* 2020), which determined that the lockdown imposed restrictions on several normal activities and services and, therefore, caused anxiety issues such as boredom and loneliness. Chao *et al.* (2020) and Brooks *et al.* (2020) found a positive association between boredom and anxiety or stress that arises from the quarantine and social distancing in the period of the pandemic. Furthermore, the official workforce and business persons, in general, transferred to working from home with a limited public appearance (Al-Tammemi 2020). In addition, there became a high level of uncertainty as people had no clue of how long this pandemic was going to last and whether the "physical distancing" was going to become the new normal (Claridge 2020).

The study data was collected in the second month of the pandemic in Bangladesh when people were panicking about future consequences of the pandemic. This research emphasised the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on relationships among parents, spouses, children, and extended family members. A total of 80 per cent of the respondents reported that they had a good experience during their stay at home with their loved ones in the pandemic. Notably, the relationships between parents, spouses, and children were improved; hence, the study results support that more than 45 per cent of the respondents acknowledged their good time with their family members. Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic exerted a positive impact on the relationships among immediate family members. This finding is in line with the findings of Naser *et al.* (2020), who also found the same results during the pandemic for Jordan. However, the results do not support the findings of other studies, like Owen (2020), which reported that forced proximity increased the incidence of domestic violence in Asia and similar findings were revealed by Sharma and Khokhar (2021) and Zhang (2020) for India and China.

Families were able to manage to spend time and communicate with family members and to support each other in the period of lockdown. In the case of South Asia, many families have religious practices and cultural beliefs, which may lead them to have faith in this crisis moment, and hence their family relationships either remain unchanged or enhanced. Several studies testified that low-income families are more vulnerable in response to any kind of uncertainties or emergency than others, while solvent families were more resilient and better survived through the disasters (Calhoun and Tedeschi 2014). In the study, 28 per cent of the respondents claimed that they felt delighted to spend plentiful amount of time with their family members after the breakout of COVID-19. According to Prime *et al.* (2020), this improved communication among family members had greatly contributed to the strengthening of the resilience within the family.

The study findings also claimed that the relations with friends and relatives were positively affected by the lockdown. A total of 62 per cent of the respondents reported that they managed to have frequent contact through social media (Facebook, WhatsApp), audio and/or video calls during their less busy time of lockdown. Indeed, a few studies provided evidence that online interactions can also foster a sense of connection, by helping to reduce feelings of loneliness (Brooks *et al.* 2020). A study by Doré *et al.* (2017) found that the online interaction in terms of receiving and giving support may contribute to enhancing individual well-being. Hence, the maintenance of social distance does not necessarily always imply weaker social relationships among individuals (Bavel *et al.* 2020).

The respondents' social relationship scores were grouped based on demographic characteristics, the findings showed that there is a statistically significant difference among the group mean scores regarding the impact of lockdown on social relationships in the cases of marital status and financial condition. However, all the demographic groups exhibited above-average scores of having better social relationships in the lockdown. A few studies (Bavel *et al.* 2020; Liu 2020) reported that older people are especially at high risk of severe symptoms from COVID-19 infection and also very prone to isolation. In the case of marital status, the category that included separated, divorced, and others turned

FIGURE 2 Number of new deaths between January and April 2021; Source: IEDCR, Bangladesh [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

out to have weaker social relationships score in comparison with others. This association is somewhat expected, as this group of respondents generally suffered a lot in the COVID-19 pandemic and this lockdown has made them vulnerable not only financially but also socially as people were deprived of the company of friends and community. Both poor and rich people in this group have a low score, indicating a marginal effect on social relationships. Because the poor people were facing a continuous struggle to survive and the rich people were quite busy with their job responsibilities, both groups were deprived of the opportunity to enjoy their time with their loved ones.

However, simple linear regression speculated that each category of predictor variables exhibited a positive and significant impact on social relationships. Besides, multiple linear regression revealed that individuals within the age group of 18–25 and 26–35 were more likely to have good relationships throughout the lockdown period. This outcome could be attributed to the ability and responsible behaviour of people in this age group to develop good relationships through online communication and social media use. The study results presented that marital status (married people), occupation (housewives), and financial condition (financially solvent people) were more likely to have a significant impact on social relationships. People with a partner had a higher likelihood of having strong relationships with family and friends; this finding led to confirm how crucial companionship is for social life. The likelihood is higher for housewives to possess better bonding with their parents, husband, kids, and friends. The probable reason would be the dual responsibility; for instance, working individuals (irrespective of gender) were not fully exempt from their assigned tasks in a true sense during the lockdown, and some people had to work from home in their scheduled office hours like regular days. Affluent individuals probably hold a secure job with a guaranteed salary that makes their life less challenging than others and it is quite obvious that financial security is always a relief in a crisis. Thus, during the period of lockdown, most affluent individuals either have been working from home or were on leave and could avail additional time to spend with family than their regular busy life, increasing their enjoyment of celebrating their relationships.

6 | STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

This social media-based survey investigated the linkage between COVID-19 lockdown and social relationships, which will be the first such study of its kind in Bangladesh. Attempting an online survey on social relationships, more specifically on family relationships, is one of the strengths of this study.

The study addressed this crucial topic because strong social relationships may positively affect health resistance and immunity. This study proved that the strong bonding of family and friends served as a catalyst to provide us with the physical and mental strength to fight this unseen foe. The limitation of the study is that it was conducted during the initial phase of the pandemic in May 2020. Since then, Bangladesh has experienced another lockdown from April 5, 2021, to May 23, 2021; due to the sudden spike in the number of new deaths from COVID-19 (see Fig 2). That could have warranted a follow-up study. Also, the study findings cannot be generalised to the whole population of Bangladesh due to its small sample size (352 respondents). For the nature of an online survey, the study might have missed some demographic groups.

7 | CONCLUSION

People spent the entire period with their own families during the COVID-19-induced lockdown and the quality of that time was quite essential. Generally, in such circumstances, when people have to have a continuous battle with an invisible enemy, healthy bonding and cordial support of closer ones can help to mitigate both physical and mental health stress levels. Hence, the study tried to investigate the association between lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic and social relationships in Bangladesh using primary data from an online survey. The previous experience of the SARS pandemic in 2003 taught us about the psychological impacts of this kind of crisis. Fear of getting infected or any death incidences of loved ones, and ensuring social distancing and isolation as safety measures could initiate psychological mediators like a nervous breakdown, loneliness, helplessness, frustration, and anger (Xiang *et al*. 2020; Mamun and Griffiths 2020; Mukhtar 2020; Banerjee 2020). But unfortunately, such kinds of mental health problems are not always confined to those symptoms; these issues can sometimes lead to suicidal behaviour (e.g., suicidal thoughts, attempting suicide, and materialising suicide) in extreme situations (Bhuiyan *et al*. 2020; Mamun and Griffiths 2020; Khan *et al*. 2021).

The outcome of this research leads us to argue that even amidst this crisis, the lockdown strategy to tackle COVID-19 has nourished the familial bonding of Bangladeshi people and also made respondents to realise the real value of passing the time with family. That is why the lockdown experience of people was not as horrible as it was thought before. This finding is consistent with the report of Desai (2020) on India. The study findings for Bangladesh revealed that 64.2 per cent of survey respondents believed in having stronger social relationships, and 77.27 per cent of respondents reported having a good experience on their stay-at-home period during the COVID-19 lockdown. Regression outcomes disclosed that marital status, occupation, and financial condition have exhibited a significant association with social relationships in lockdown. In general, being young to middle-aged, married, and a housewive have a significant impact on the probability of having better social relationship. The financial condition of the respondents also made a difference in this lockdown period; affluent and financially solvent respondents are more likely to have a better social relationship. Although this outcome cannot be generalised for people of all income groups since there are many low-income families out there who have struggled very hard every day to survive in this lockdown.

Thus, it can be recommended that understanding the strength of family relationships backed by physical nearness may help to reduce the drastic psychological impact of situations like domestic violence, oppression, and suicide within the family. Good behaviour and a positive attitude toward family, and valuing each other can play a crucial role in maintaining a happy and healthy family life, which could eventually lead to positive health implications. Therefore, better social connections and communication with family and community could enable them to cope better with any crisis like COVID-19 and also play a role in ensuring societal well-being.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE

There is no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The dataset is provided as a supplementary file.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Broadly, social relationships refer to the existing connections between people, including relationships between family members, friends, neighbours, coworkers, and other associates (August and Rook 2013). But this study referred to social relationships as the relationships between family members (parents, spouse, and children), friends, and relatives.

[2] The study's respondents were volunteering in this online survey and urban people are more exposed to internet connectivity. In addition, the public movement restrictions during the lockdown period were a bit stricter in the urban areas in comparison to rural area.

[3] The information regarding the educational level was not asked in the questionnaire as it was already known to the researcher that all their Facebook friends and acquaintances were at least graduates i.e. bachelor degree holder.

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APPENDIX

TABLE AI   Variable descriptions

Variable	Description
Social relationship	Social relationship score is constructed using the six items relevant to respondent's opinion about their relationship with family and friends and the range of the given score to each item ranged from 0 to 2.
Gender	Respondent's gender
Age	Reported age of the respondent
Marital status	Reported marital status of the respondent
Occupation	Reported occupation of the respondent
Financial condition	Reported financial condition of the respondent

Source: Author's compilation