

Effects of Romantic Dissolution: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

In the present article, an effort has been made to study the different effects of romantic relationship dissolution. In the past literature, a lot has been studied regarding the dynamics of initiating and maintain the relationship but there are very limited number of researches in the area of romantic dissolution i.e. the phase of ending the relationship and its post effects. There are many significant effects of romantic dissolution found in the literature related to mental health issues which mainly include depression, stress, anxiety. The severity of the effects is studied by the researchers, where it was seen that romantic dissolution could result in insomnia, heart break syndrome and compromised immune system as well. Age and gender also play a crucial role in this. Teenagers and Females showed more severe symptoms as compared to males. The outcomes compiled in the present article will hope to help the research scholars and professionals to envision significant effects of a breakup and romantic dissolution and will help the individuals by providing right therapeutic assistance and guidance.

Key Words: *Romantic Dissolution, Teenage, Relationship, Breakup.*

INTRODUCTION

In the literature, relationship formation has attained more attention of the researchers as compared to romantic dissolution, its significant factors and its effects. Romantic relationships are a major part of an individual's life. They are common in teenagers and young adults. Teenagers involve in one to five or more sentimental/ romantic relationships or partners in their high school years (Connolly & McIsaac, C., 2009). Teenagers and young adults have an average of four romantic relationships either before or during their high school years (Zimmer-Gembeck, 1999). Over 50% of teenagers have dtd by the age of 15. (Price, Hides, Cockshaw, Staneva, & Stoyanov, 2016). The number continue to rise in adults. This shows that individuals both initiate and end several romantic relationships in their youth age. A breakup can be a difficult experience and can result to many psychological disorders. (Robak & Weitzman, 1998). Regardless of the occurrence of relationships and breakups, researchers have only recently started to study the effect of romantic dissolution on the wellbeing and overall development of an adolescent. It is very crucial to understand and explore the relationship dissolution and its impact on the life. Studying the end of a romantic/sentimental relationship is as significant as the process of relation formation and its dynamics (Rollie & Duck, 2006). Understanding the importance of the study of romantic dissolution, research in this area is rare (Norona & Welsh, 2017).

Price and colleagues (2016) did a qualitative study using records of around four thousand counselling sessions with teenagers of 10 to 18 years of age who were seeking help post their relationship dissolution. The research studied the type of concerns for which the adolescents seek help, (ii) how those concerns correlate with mental health problems, suicide and self-harm, (iii) whether there is any gender or age difference in these associations. The participants of the study were adolescents who were seeking help from counsellors and reported relationship concerns through telephone, email and real-time web counselling. The counsellors firstly assessed the nature of romantic concerns and categorised them into eight different types. They gave operational definitions to three stages of the relationship which included- (i) Initiation- which is the first stage that relates to the enquires regarding the concerns of initiating contact and dating, (ii) Maintenance- second stage relates to the intimate romantic stage and exhibits concerns regarding fidelity of the romantic partner, considering ending the relationship, (iii) Dissolution- relates to the last post-relationship stage which exhibited the concerns like coping and re-establishing the life after breakup, dealing with the ex-partner.

The counsellor analysed 2014 cases for mental health issues out of which around 36.8% (N= 742) of the cases exhibited mental health issues. The presence of self-harming behaviour was recorded in 2000 cases out of which 22.6% (N= 452) cases revealed engagement in self-harming behaviour. The presence of suicidal

ideation was assessed in 2417 cases out of which 9.9% (N= 239) cases reported encountering suicidal ideation after their romantic dissolution.

Yildirim and Demir, 2015, studied the ability of adolescents to adjust to the relationship dissolution and its predictors. For this purpose, the researcher used convenient sampling method within a university of Turkey. Total 283 subjects participated in the study including 140 females and 140 males who have encountered at least one breakup in past one year. The age of the participant varied from 18 to 31 years. For the measurement, Fisher Divorce Adjustment Scale (FDAS) and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) were used. FDAS is a Likert type scale with 100 items developed by Fisher in 1976. It measures an individual's social and emotional adjustment to a breakup or divorce. The items are statements and responses range from 1 (almost always) to 5 (almost never). A low score indicates better adjustment to breakup or divorce and higher score indicates poor post breakup adjustment. MSPSS is used to measure an individual's perception of competence of social support that he/she gets. It comprises 12 items which are scored on a 7-point Likert scale which ranges from 7 (absolutely yes) to 1 (absolutely no). Lower scores are indication of lower perceived social support and higher scores are indication of higher perceived social support. The scale is having internal reliability of coefficient of .89 and Chronbach's alpha value of .88. For the statistical purpose, regression analysis was conducted.

The result of the study indicated that the role of initiator status, existence of a new partner and perceived social support as the main predictors in breakup adjustment. The research concluded that individual who did not initiate the breakup (non-initiator) can suffer from mental health issue as breakup is considered to be undesired outcome and they fail to accept the breakup. They feel loss of control which can cause poor adjustment and initiation of future romantic relations.

Matthew Larson and Gary Sweeten (2012) studied the effect of romantic dissolution on the young adults. For this purpose, the researcher used waves 6 and 7 of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 cohort (NLSY97). The survey used a representative sample of U.S. population who were born from 1980 to 1984. The interview with the sample began in 1997 and was conducted once in a year ever since. This the beginning of the interview, relationship questions were asked from the participants and at the end of that longitudinal survey, criminal offending questions were asked from the sample. The researcher stated that the subjects who stayed with their partners in the initial stage of the survey, committed lesser crime, drank less alcohol and engaged less in drugs than those who broke with their romantic partners. Males in the survey experienced heightened offending and increased alcohol and substance use. Whereas females engaged more in binge drinking and increased use of marijuana post relationship dissolution. The study concluded that breakup is hard and effects the wellbeing of the individual. The individual who undergo a romantic dissolution not only engage in criminal activities, they also use more marijuana, alcohol and illegal drugs.

Field in 2011 did a literature review suggesting that dissolution of Romantic relations can lead to bereavement symptoms like heartbreak syndrome, insomnia, intrusive thoughts and compromised immune system as well. The researchers argued that the biochemical changes of both romantic dissolution and romantic bereavement are somewhat similar. They found that university students who had a romantic dissolution in preceding months, exhibited high scores in insomnia scale and intrusive thoughts scale.

Chen, et al. (2009) studied the emotional and behavioral effects of relationship and breakup. For this purpose, 11,555 students from 94 schools of Beijing were selected through randomisation. Depressive symptoms were measured with the help of Center for Epidemiological Studies- Depression Scale (CES-D) which comprises of 20 items. Externalizing Behavior problems were measured with the help of Aggressive and Delinquent subscale of the Youth Self-Report Inventory (YSR). The scale is a three-point Likert scale which has responses of 0 (not true), 1 (Somewhat or sometimes true and 2 (Very true). The participants reported the degree of a behavior that they have committed in past 6 months. The result showed that the girls had more depressive symptoms as compared to boys. They also compared the depressive symptoms and behavioral problems of romantically involved students to the students who had recent breakup, and found the presence of these variables at a higher level in the students who recently faced a romantic dissolution.

Field, Pelaez, Diego, & Deeds, (2009) Studied the distress after the breakup in university students. With a sample of 192 students who went through a breakup in the recent time. For measuring the distress, Breakup Distress Scale was used. The results of the research showed a higher breakup distress scale score for female participants. In addition to this, the group who scored higher on this scale also scored higher on Intrusive Thought Scale, Sleep disturbance scale and on depression and anxiety scale as well. This shows that the scores of all these scale correlate.

Verhallen, Renken, Marsman and Host, (2019) argued that the stressful events increase the probability of developing depression. The main aim of the study was to examine the dissolution of a sentimental relationship as a model to study depression like symptoms. In total, 117 students of the age 18 to 26 years participated in the study. Out of this sample, two different groups were made, First group of those who had a breakup in receding 6 months and second group was relationship group which had the participants who were in a relationship from preceding 6 to 24 months. A self-report questionnaire was administered to attain the behavioral and psychological information of the subjects. Another heartbreak questionnaire battery which comprised Depression Inventory, Inventory of Complicated grief, Perceived Relationship quality Components Inventory, Positive and Negative Affect Schedules, Hurt Proneness Scale and Passionate Love scale were used. After the statistical analysis to the data gathered, it was concluded that only 2.2% of participants of relationship group showed mild symptoms of depression. Whereas, 12.7% of participants of breakup group showed symptoms of mild depression and 1.4% reported moderate to severe level of depression. Overall, Severity of depressive symptoms were high in the participants of the breakup group.

Discussion

The present meta-analysis highlights the behavioral and psychological effects of romantic dissolution or breakups. Presence of a romantic partner effects the overall wellbeing and adjustment of the individual (Prigerson & Jacobs, 2001). Romantic dissolution is a considered to be a complex psychological, behavioural and biochemical phenomenon. Researchers have found its effects similar to that of romantic bereavement including symptoms like insomnia, broken heart syndrom and more serious complexities (Field, 2011). It was found that romantic involvement and dissolution correlated with depressive symptoms and other externalizing behavioral problems (Chen, et al., 2009). Moreover, the effects of romantic dissolution effected some individual to an extent that they involved in more criminal activities and drug use and abuse including marijuana and illegal drugs as well. (Larson & Sweeten, 2012). It was also found that if the person himself or herself initiated the breakup then the effects are less as compared to the individuals who did not initiate the breakup. They face mental health issues as they are not able to accept the breakup. They might feel loss of control over the events happening in their lives which inturn effects their future romantic involvements (Yildirim & Demir, 2015). Romantic dissolution is not always negative event. There are studies who state that sometimes in particulr circumstances, like fidelity and feeling of insecurity, dissolution of the relaitonship can prove to be a positive event in an individual's life. But, the negative effects of romantic dissolution are a serious concern to the health of the individuals and hence they can not be ignored. There is need of further researches into this field.

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