

Country Situation Paper

on

Elderly Population in Bangladesh: Issues, Challenges, and Recommendations

Concept of Aging

Aging is defined as the impact of the accumulation of a wide variety of molecular and cellular damage over time on the body. This change leads to significant decrease in psychological and physical capacity, high risk of morbidity and finally death (World Health Organization, 2021). Aging begins as soon as adulthood is reached and like infancy, childhood, and adolescence this is also a part of human life. With biological changes this aging is associated with a significant change in behavioral, environmental and social processes as well (Ebrahim, 1995). Globally population aging is considered as an unavoidable consequence of demographic transition and the shift to lower fertility and mortality of a country (Kluge et al., 2014). Population aging is such a phenomenon which occurs when the median age of a country's rises and shifts the distribution of a country's population towards older ages. (Ebrahim, 1995). This older population has been classified between the ages of 65 and 74 years as youngest-old, those between ages 75 and 84 years as middle-old, and those aged over 85 years as oldest-old (Chou & Chi, 2002).

With the development of medical technology and healthy lifestyle, worldwide people are living longer than at any time in history. Nowadays an individual person can expect to live in the sixties and beyond. It is estimated that by 2030, 1 in 6 people of the world

population will be aged 60 years or over. By 2050, the world's older population will be around 2.1 billion. Moreover, the number of persons aged 80 years or older is expected to reach 426 million by 2050 (World Health Organization, 2021). However, this continuous shift in the distribution of a country's population towards aging, started in high-income countries but now low- and middle-income countries are also experiencing the greatest change. By 2050, two-thirds of the world's older population will live in low- and middle-income countries (World Health Organization, 2021).

Situation of the Older Persons in Bangladesh

Currently, Bangladesh is also going through this experience with a mentionable portion of the older population.

- The present scenario shows that Bangladesh is having around 8.3 percent of the aging population (60 years and over) (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2021).
- Moreover, the country is presently one of the top countries in the world in terms of absolute number of older persons and this number is likely to rise almost more than two times (20.2 percent) by 2051 and more than four times (37.1 percent) by 2100.

- The oldest category of older population will also increase from 0.9 percent in 2015 to 3.6 percent by 2050 (United Nations, 2015).
- However, around 95% of the older persons of Bangladesh are suffering from health problems with their increase of lifespan, among them mostly have multiple and chronic health problems (Rahman, 2017).

Selected Indicators	2019	2050
Population aged 60 and above (total)	13,960,000 (2020)	36,871,000
Population aged 60 and above (% of the total population)	8.3 (2020)	21.9
Older women aged 60+ (% of total population)	3.88	11.55
Life expectancy (males)	71.5 (2020)	78.11
Life expectancy (females)	74.5 (2020)	81.45
Life expectancy at age 60	18	
Healthy life expectancy aged 60	13.8	
Pension coverage	39%	
Old-Age Dependency Ratio (Age 65+ / Age 15-64)	7.7	23.5
Older persons living alone aged 60+ (% of total population aged 60+)	1.77	

Sources: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2021 & <https://ageingasia.org/ageing-population-bangladesh/>

This Increasing number of older populations in Bangladesh is emerging such a situation where they will require special need and care giving services from their family, community and also health care system to address their health needs. But this is really a challenge for a developing country like Bangladesh due to scarcity of its resources, nucleation of the family and increasing urbanization all over the country (Rahman, 2017).

- As Bangladesh is experiencing the third stage of epidemiological transition, the proportion of older

Problems faced by elderly

- In Bangladesh 80% older persons suffering from non-communicable disease (Dementia, H.B.P, Diabetes, depression)
- Negligence and deprivation
- Senile diseases
- Poor financial support
- Absence of proper health facilities
- Socioeconomic insecurity
- Social isolation and loneliness
- Little access to use of new technology
- Lack of knowledge about digital technologies

persons, not being different, were also found suffering more from non-communicable diseases compared to the communicable diseases than before (Mascie-Taylor, 2012; Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2015).

- This shift from communicable to non-communicable patterns of diseases and causes of death are raising new challenges amidst COVID-19 to the health system of the country to provide appropriate healthcare delivery to the older persons.

Digital Equity Issues for the older persons in Bangladesh

This year the theme of International Day of Older Persons 2021 was “Digital Equity for All Ages” affirms the need for access and meaningful participation in the digital world by older persons. The 21st century is absolutely characterized by increasing use of digital technologies. Modernization and digitalization has almost revolutionized our lifestyle and living criteria. It has transformed all sectors of society, including how we live, work and also communicate to each other. The use of mobile phones, the internet and laptop/computer are very common in this digitalized world. People now use these modern digital tools to work from wherever and access entertainment. As the absolute number of our older persons is likely to rise by almost 20.2 percent by 2051, in future digitalized world they will face challenges in daily life activities without enough technical knowledge. The internet is already being used for reading newspapers, creating and reading blogs, booking vacations, and searching for and sharing health and well-being information. For older people, technology can be a great tool for staying in touch with friends and family, as well as participating in games and hobbies, but a lack of support networks can make technology adoption difficult. Moreover in future using digital devices using internet will be helpful for services like online taxation system and online bank services.

But sadly, our older population are far behind in the usage of these modern digital technologies and they are less digitally connected than youth who were born into the digital age.

- According to Alliance for Affordable Internet initiative & Access to information (2019) in Bangladesh, internet users are predominantly between 15-34 years old.
- Only 2.7 percent of the 60+ aged people use the internet.
- The users tend to be higher educated than the non-users.
- However, there is a large gap in Internet use between men and women in the country which is almost 55.6%.
- Thus, female older persons are more vulnerable in terms of internet usage than their counterparts.

So, it is clear that our older persons are not fully beneficiaries of this digital world and its life easier facilities. It is high time to provide them enough training and opportunity regarding this digitalization according to their needs and interests. Moreover, internet-based health care is a burning issue nowadays amidst COVID-19 pandemic. Older persons need to know the proper way of using that facility using digital devices. Policymakers need to think about these possibilities and challenges to keep them healthy and safe ensuring the best of the technology.

Government and Non-Government initiatives: Different programs, laws, and policies

The National Policy for Older Persons 2013

- The National Policy for Older Persons 2013 aims to strengthen health care services for older people, and primary health provide support

with age-friendly health centers. It also focuses on increasing referral services and temporary mobile camps for those in mobile areas.

- Education about healthy lifestyles and illness prevention is a priority, with efforts to raise awareness about risk factors and non-communicable diseases. Safe water sanitation, nutrition and gender-inclusive services are of great importance in Bangladesh.
- The National Policy for Older Persons 2013 also emphasizes the contributions from older people within communities, stressing the importance of communication and social facilities.
- Older people are directly involved in monitoring the implementation of the policy and the successes of different programs such as education and training, poverty reduction, financial security, and healthcare.

The Parents Care Act 2013

- The Parents Care Act 2013 safeguards senior citizens' social security and compel the children to take good care of their parents.
- According to the law, the children will have to take necessary steps to look after their parents and provide them with food, clothing, medical facilities, accommodation, and company.
- Furthermore, children are allowed to send their parents in old homes beyond their wishes under no circumstances. The law also allows aggrieved parents to file cases against their children if they decline to support them.

8th Five Years Plan (July 2020- June 2025)

- The 8th five-year plan emphasizes developing appropriate technologies, care services, and infrastructure to accommodate the needs of older persons, commensurate with the stage of economic development and societal norms, structures etc.
- It also emphasizes the plan to ensure that the growing number of urban residents, including the poor, have secured access to primary health care services including water, sanitation, etc. by addressing the safety concerns of women, girls, children, and older persons, and by ensuring more coherent and coordinated service delivery at the national level.

Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2021-2041

- The perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2021-2041 focuses on a wider network of safety nets for the poor, elderly and disabled population.
- Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2021-2041 also highlights the Population, Health, and Nutrition (PHN) area of the older persons.
- Social support and respect have been also highlighted in the Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2021-2041.

Old Age Allowance

- One-third of the older Bangladesh population receives Old Age Allowance. The Old Age Allowance provides 500 Taka a month to men over 65 and women over 62, who qualify after means-testing according to socio-economic

factors. There is only one permitted recipient of the Old Age Allowance per household. Of those over the age of eligibility, 27.3% claim the pension.

There is no specific government policy referring to **Older People's Associations (OPAs)**.

- However, a program run by HelpAge and SHARE Foundation called “Strengthening Ageing Network in Asia (SANA II)” aims to improve the wellbeing of older people, their families, and their communities through resilient and self-sustaining community-based organizations and improved social protection.
- The project contributes to establishing an advanced OPA model, including older citizen monitoring (OCM) based OPA and Self-help club. Besides, AID Comilla, BITA, and Bohubrihy have implemented the Community Disaster Management Committee (CDMC) at the community level.

NGOs Initiatives for the older persons of Bangladesh

A very few NGOs are directly involved with the elderly issues in Bangladesh. Among them, the Bangladesh Association for the Aged and Institute of Geriatric Medicine (BAAIGM) serves the physical, social, and psychological services to the elderly as well as to be aware of other generations about the issues of the elderly welfare. Old and Child Rehabilitation Center (BOSHIPUK) has accommodations with socio-cultural and geriatric facilities. Resource Integration Center (RIC) has housing and health care facilities,

recreation, funeral support, and pension along with a microcredit program. Bangladesh Women's Health Coalition (BWHC) is working to improve the health and social status of elderly women. Lastly, Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) assists elderly people to access social safety services, financial benefits, and primary health care services.

Way Forward

Bangladesh is rapidly moving towards an aging society due to the demographic transition paving the way for a second demographic dividend. The demographic dividends will not come automatically; instead, the country needs significant investment to tackle older adults' emerging issues and challenges. In a time of the fourth industrial revolution and consequent technological advances, we must revitalize the vision of Digital Bangladesh and ensure digital equity for all ages. Therefore, Bangladesh needs to

- Establish geriatric corners in all primary and tertiary health care centers
- Ensure universal coverage of old-age allowance
- Improve elderly-friendly infrastructures
- Encourage mobile health services and telemedicine for elderly health care
- Introduce healthy life-related issues in the school curriculum

As older persons experience digital inequity to a greater extent than other groups in society, the following steps may be taken to ensure Digital Equity for All Ages:

- Create Information Center for Older People where they can get information about using digital technologies and social media sites
- The young generation may play a vital role through voluntary service to make the older person aware of how to use digital devices.
- Arrange digital campaigns to encourage older people to use digital technologies.

Further research and granular data are needed on the state of digitalization of the elderly population as well as other age groups in Bangladesh

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