

## The hidden crisis: Exclusion of women from wellness spaces in Bangladesh

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A woman's self-actualisation, growth, and productivity are directly tied to her well-being. When women are deprived of holistic wellness, it affects families, communities, and the entire nation. In Bangladesh, systemic barriers continue to exclude women from spaces that promote physical and mental well-being.

### Barriers to women's wellness

From a young age, girls in Bangladesh are sidelined from sports and recreational spaces. Cricket fields, football grounds, and beaches remain male-dominated. While some trailblazing girls have entered these arenas, they face resistance and harassment.

Child marriage further compounds the issue. According to the World Bank, women who marry as children have, on average, 1.11 more live births than those who marry as adults, increasing risks to their



physical and mental health.

Mental health remains a crisis. Women are twice as likely as men to experience depression and anxiety, yet less than 0.11% of the population has access to free psychotropic medications. Nutritional disparity also persists, with men and boys often prioritised in food distribution. Meanwhile, 89% of women face intimate partner violence, making wellness a distant reality.

### Dhaka Flow's response

Dhaka Flow promotes self-care through festivals, workshops, and corporate wellness programs. The upcoming Heal Dhaka program, launching April 19, will provide access to yoga, dance, kickboxing, art healing, and meditation.

### The path forward

For true change, Bangladesh must: #Promote gender equality in sports.

- Enforce child marriage laws.
- Invest in mental health services.
- Ensure equitable nutrition.
- Strengthen protections against domestic violence.

Women's wellness is not a luxury—it is a necessity.

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## How chronic pain and mental health are connected

Chronic pain is more than just a physical condition—it affects mental well-being and overall quality of life. A study published in *Arquivos de Neuro-Psiquiatria* highlights how individuals suffering from chronic pain often experience mental health challenges, particularly depression and anxiety.

A study, conducted at a pain clinic in Brazil, found that a significant number of chronic pain patients also struggled with psychological distress. The persistent discomfort not only limited their daily activities but also contributed to emotional suffering, making it harder to manage their pain effectively. This creates a cycle where pain worsens mental health, and poor mental health, in turn, amplifies the perception of pain.

Understanding this connection is crucial for improving patient care. Traditional pain treatments often focus solely on physical symptoms, but this study emphasises the need for a more holistic approach. Effective management should include mental health support, such as counselling, stress reduction techniques, and medications when necessary.

Raising awareness about the link between chronic pain and mental health can also help reduce stigma. Many patients hesitate to discuss their emotional struggles, fearing judgement. However, recognising and addressing mental health as part of pain management can lead to better outcomes.

This research reinforces the importance of integrated healthcare approaches, where medical professionals collaborate to treat both physical pain and psychological distress. By adopting a comprehensive treatment strategy, healthcare providers can help patients regain control over their lives and improve their well-being.

## A new standard for medical malpractice

Medical malpractice laws are changing, and that could benefit both patients and doctors. Traditionally, courts have judged malpractice based on whether a doctor followed the "customary" practices of their profession. But a recent change by the American Law Institute (ALI) shifts the standard from "customary" to "reasonable" care.

This means that instead of simply doing what most other doctors do, physicians will be expected to follow modern, evidence-based medical guidelines. A recent JAMA article explains that this shift acknowledges the role of legitimate,



authoritative guidelines in defining competent medical care. This could help ensure that outdated or ineffective treatments are phased out, making medical care safer and more reliable for patients.

For patients, this change is important because it encourages doctors to rely on the best available science rather than outdated habits. It also means that a doctor cannot be sued simply for following legitimate medical guidelines—something that has happened in the past. A case discussed in JAMA in 2004 highlighted how a

doctor was sued for following evidence-based recommendations, a scenario that is now less likely under the new legal framework.

For doctors, this could reduce the pressure to practice "defensive medicine," where unnecessary tests and procedures are ordered just to avoid lawsuits. Instead, they can focus on providing the best care based on current medical knowledge.

While changes in malpractice law take time to be fully implemented, this is a step toward a system that prioritises both patient safety and fair legal standards for healthcare providers.

## The guilt trap we fall into: Why our actions and beliefs do not always align

SRINJOYA JUNAN

It has been a long, draining day at work, and by the time you head home, you are absolutely starving. You promised yourself you would eat healthier—home-cooked meals, less junk food—but the thought of chopping vegetables and standing over a stove feels unbearable right now.

Then, you spot a fast-food place up ahead. Just this once, you tell yourself, pulling into the drive-thru. As you take the first bite of your burger, a pang of guilt creeps in. I was supposed to be eating better. But almost immediately, you push the thought away. You justify it by thinking, One meal will not hurt, or I have had a long day; I deserve a treat. Just like that, the guilt fades, replaced by the comfort of crispy fries and the illusion that everything is fine, even though it conflicts with your original goal.

If this sounds familiar, you have experienced one of psychology's most interesting phenomena: cognitive dissonance, a term coined by psychologist Leon Festinger.

**The first demonstration of cognitive dissonance:** Festinger's 1957 experiment at Stanford University changed how we understand human behaviour. Participants were asked to do a boring task—turning pegs on a board for an hour. Afterward, they were asked to lie to another participant (an actor) and tell them the task was exciting. Some were paid \$1, others \$20.

When asked how enjoyable the task was, those paid \$20 admitted it was boring, as their large reward justified the lie. But those paid \$1 convinced themselves the task was fun. Why? They did not feel the \$1 was enough to justify lying, so they changed their belief to align with their behaviour.

**How cognitive dissonance affects us:** This experiment revealed a crucial point: when our

actions contradict our beliefs, we often change our beliefs instead of admitting inconsistency. This explains why we justify purchases we regret, stay in jobs we dislike, or defend decisions that do not align with our values.

Cognitive dissonance is powerful. For example, imagine someone who has decided to quit smoking for health reasons but lights up after a stressful day. To ease the discomfort of this contradiction, they might change their belief: smoking is not that bad, or justify the behaviour—I will quit later. This explains why habits, even harmful ones, can be so hard to break.

### Using cognitive dissonance for self-improvement:

Cognitive dissonance can actually be a tool for growth if we learn to use it consciously. When you feel uneasy about a decision, take a moment to reflect:

1. Why do I feel this way?
2. What belief or value is this action contradicting?
3. How can I adjust my behaviour to be more in line with my values?

For example, if you keep telling yourself you will start working out but find yourself on the couch instead, you have two choices:

1. Justify it. I will start next week.
2. Face it head-on. Admit your actions do not align with your goals and take a small step, like a 10-minute walk.

The more you act in alignment with your goals, the less you will feel the gap between your intentions and actions. Soon, your desired habits will not feel like a struggle—they will just be part of your routine.

Next time you catch yourself justifying behaviour that conflicts with your values, ask: Am I reducing cognitive dissonance, or am I making real change?

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Ramadan bazaars are a cherished part of the fasting month, offering a variety of meals for iftar. However, rising temperatures due to climate change are increasing food safety risks, making it challenging for vendors to maintain hygiene and prevent foodborne illnesses.

**Food safety challenges in ramadan bazaars:** Extreme heat accelerates food spoilage, creating ideal conditions for bacterial growth. Vendors preparing food in open-air markets often lack refrigeration, making perishable items like meat, dairy, and seafood vulnerable to contamination. Harmful bacteria such as Salmonella and E. coli multiply rapidly in warm temperatures, posing health risks to consumers.

High temperatures also increase the risk of cross-contamination. Food handlers working in the heat may sweat excessively, and improper hygiene practices—such as infrequent handwashing or using contaminated utensils—can further heighten foodborne illness risks. Additionally, storing cooked food at unsafe temperatures for extended periods allows bacteria to thrive.

### Health risks for consumers:

Foodborne illnesses peak during warmer months, and crowded Ramadan bazaars amplify the risk of outbreaks. Contaminated food can cause gastrointestinal issues like

diarrhoea and vomiting, which are particularly dangerous for children, the elderly, and immunocompromised individuals.

Dehydration worsens food poisoning symptoms, making food safety precautions even more critical. Fasting individuals, already at risk of dehydration due to prolonged hours without water, may experience severe effects if they consume spoiled food.

**Implementing adaptation strategies for vendors:** To combat high temperatures, vendors must take proactive food safety measures. Proper temperature control is essential—portable refrigeration units, insulated storage containers, and ice packs should be used to keep perishable ingredients fresh. Placing storage in shaded areas or using reflective materials can further reduce heat exposure.

Hygiene practices must be strictly followed. Vendors should wash hands frequently with soap and water or use alcohol-based sanitisers if running water is unavailable. Disposable gloves should be changed regularly, and food preparation surfaces must be sanitised after each use. Wearing caps and aprons prevents sweat from contaminating food.

Menu adjustments can also improve food safety. Vendors should incorporate heat-resistant ingredients like dried legumes and grains while limiting perishable items. Fresh produce should be stored in cool,

ventilated spaces, and cooked meals must be served promptly or kept above 60°C to prevent bacterial growth.

Local authorities play a crucial role in supporting vendors. Mandatory food safety training before Ramadan can help vendors understand safe food handling. Providing shared refrigeration units, cooling stations, and shaded canopies can mitigate the effects of extreme heat. Regular health inspections should enforce compliance with food safety regulations.

By systematically implementing these strategies, vendors can reduce foodborne risks and ensure consumers have access to safe, hygienic meals throughout Ramadan.

**Ensuring safe and enjoyable iftar meals:** As climate change intensifies heatwaves, safeguarding food safety in Ramadan bazaars is more urgent than ever. Consumers can also protect themselves by choosing freshly prepared meals, observing hygiene practices, and buying from vendors who maintain cleanliness.

With vendor adaptations, regulatory support, and consumer awareness, Ramadan bazaars can remain a beloved tradition while ensuring public health. Addressing high-temperature challenges will help create a safer food environment, allowing families to enjoy their iftar meals with peace of mind.

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### NEW GUIDELINES

## When can you drive after a heart attack?

A heart attack is a life-changing event, and recovery involves more than just medical treatment—it also includes knowing when it is safe to resume daily activities like driving. While many people feel eager to regain independence, getting behind the wheel too soon could pose serious risks.

Different countries have varying guidelines on driving after a heart attack. European recommendations suggest waiting 1 to 4 weeks, depending on complications, while Canadian guidelines base restrictions on heart



function. However, there are no official US recommendations.

Recent research suggests that the highest risk for another cardiac event, such as a heart attack, fainting, or stroke, is within the first 15 days after a severe heart attack. Older individuals are especially vulnerable, which is why experts recommend that those over 65 wait at least a month before driving again. Younger patients, on the other hand, may not need any driving restrictions.

These findings can help patients and doctors make informed decisions about when it is safe to drive. Returning to the road too soon could put both the driver and others at risk. By following recommended waiting periods, patients can improve their recovery while ensuring road safety.

If you or a loved one has had a heart attack, talk to your doctor about when it is safe to drive. Taking a little extra time to heal can make a big difference in long-term health and safety.

Source: Circulation

## The hidden toll of COVID-19: years of life lost beyond the virus



The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected millions worldwide, but its impact extends far beyond the lives directly lost to the virus. A new study published in *PLOS Medicine* reveals the broader consequences of the pandemic, particularly the years of life lost due to both direct and indirect effects. By analysing health data from 18 European countries, researchers found that over 16 million years of life were lost between 2020 and 2022, many of which would have been lived without disability.

**Understanding the loss:** Most discussions about COVID-19 focus on the number of deaths, but this study looked deeper. It examined not only lives lost but also the years of healthy, disability-free life that people missed out on due to the pandemic. Many individuals who died from COVID-19 could have lived longer, healthier lives if the pandemic had not occurred. The study found that more than half of the lost years were years that could have been lived independently and without major illness.

The impact was not only due to COVID-19 itself. Many deaths resulted from disruptions in healthcare services, delayed treatments, and the worsening of other conditions such as heart disease and dementia. While deaths directly caused by COVID-19 declined after 2021 due to vaccination efforts, deaths from other causes continued to rise in many countries, adding to the overall burden of lost years of life.

**Why this matters to everyone:** This study highlights a crucial aspect of the pandemic's impact: the indirect toll on health systems and the long-term effects on people's lives. It also reveals that countries with lower economic resources experienced greater losses per person, widening existing health inequalities. The pandemic disproportionately affected vulnerable populations, including the elderly, people with preexisting conditions, and those in lower-income regions.

**Lessons for the future:** The findings emphasise the need for comprehensive pandemic preparedness. While vaccination efforts significantly reduced COVID-19 deaths, the rise in non-COVID-related deaths suggests that healthcare disruptions had severe consequences. Stronger healthcare infrastructure, better access to medical care, and proactive policies could mitigate such losses in future global health emergencies.

**What can we do?** For individuals, prioritising preventive healthcare—such as regular checkups and timely medical care—remains essential. On a broader scale, supporting policies that improve healthcare access and strengthen emergency response systems can ensure that future crises are managed more effectively.

The COVID-19 pandemic was more than a global health crisis; it reshaped lives in profound ways, many of which are only now being fully understood. By learning from these lessons, we can build a healthier, more resilient society that is better prepared for the future.