

From fossil fuels to fatalities: WHO highlights climate’s human toll

The World Health Organisation (WHO) and global partners released the 2025 Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change report, warning that continued reliance on fossil fuels and slow adaptation to climate change were already causing devastating health impacts worldwide. The report, produced in collaboration with WHO, found that 12 of 20 key health indicators had reached record levels, highlighting the human cost of climate inaction.

Dr Jeremy Farrar, WHO Assistant Director-General, stated that “every fraction of a degree of warming costs lives and livelihoods”, emphasising that climate action offered the greatest opportunity to save lives through cleaner air, healthier diets, and resilient health systems.

The report showed that heat-related deaths had risen 23% since the 1990s, reaching an average of 546,000 per year. In 2024, the average person experienced 16 days of dangerous heat, with infants and older adults facing over 20 days. Droughts and heatwaves contributed to food insecurity for 124 million people in 2023, while heat exposure caused 640 billion potential lost labour hours, equivalent to US\$1.09 trillion in productivity losses.

The report also highlighted the disparity between fossil fuel subsidies and climate finance: governments spent US\$956 billion on fossil fuels in 2023, more than triple the global climate finance pledged.

Despite these challenges, climate action yielded measurable benefits. Reduced coal pollution prevented an estimated 160,000 premature deaths annually between 2010 and 2022, renewable energy created 16 million jobs, and health-related greenhouse gas emissions fell 16% globally.

As COP30 in Brazil approached, WHO and partners urged placing health at the center of climate policy, emphasising that rapid clean energy adoption, sustainable diets, and resilient health systems could save millions of lives while curbing climate change.

SOURCE: WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION



Action, inclusion, and independence

RABEYA FERDOUS

Observed globally on 27 October, World Occupational Therapy Day celebrates the vital role occupational therapists play in helping people live fuller, more independent lives. This year's theme, “Occupational Therapy in Action,” underscores the profession’s hands-on approach to improving daily functioning and overall wellbeing.

In Bangladesh, a growing number of dedicated occupational therapists are making a difference across hospitals, rehabilitation centres, and community settings – supporting individuals of all ages to regain confidence, independence, and quality of life.

Occupational therapists provide therapy in the following settings:

- Adult neurological disorder: stroke, Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), transverse myelitis (TM), Parkinson's disease (PD), brain tumours, etc.
- Child Neurological Conditions: Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), Cerebral Palsy (CP), Intellectual Disability (ID), Stroke, etc.
- Musculoskeletal Disease: Low back pain, neck pain, shoulder pain, knee pain, ankle pain, etc.
- Hand Condition: Hand fracture, burn, nerve injury, arthritis, etc.
- Psychiatric conditions: depression, mood disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety, panic disorder, etc.

6. Elderly care: Occupational therapists have a crucial role in rehabilitating elderly people.

7. Ergonomical setup: Occupational therapists have a great role in ergonomic setup. They evaluate workplaces and tasks to identify risks, provide recommendations for workstation and environmental adjustments and educate employees on injury prevention and healthy work practices.

At present there are 496 graduated occupational therapists, and they work nationally and internationally. In Bangladesh, occupational therapists work in the following areas:

- Government Hospital
- Non-government hospital
- Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP)
- Different national and international NGOs
- Special School
- Private practice

At present there are 4 institute-run occupational therapy graduate courses. These are:

- Bangladesh Health Professions Institute (BHPi)
- Saig College of Medical Science and Technology (SAIC)
- Mymensingh College of Physiotherapy and Health Sciences (MCPH)
- Japan Bangladesh Friendship College of Physiotherapy and Health Sciences

Occupational therapists have an important role in rehabilitating all types of disabled patients. The Bangladesh government should take necessary steps to recruit qualified BSc holder occupational therapists in different government hospitals. That’s how patients can benefit.

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ACT FAST, SAVE BRAIN, SAVE LIFE

The role of physiotherapy in paralysis rehabilitation

DR MEASIN ALI

Every year, World Stroke Day is observed globally on October 29 to raise awareness about the prevention, early recognition, and rehabilitation of stroke. The theme for 2025 – “Act FAST, Save Brain, Save Life” – emphasises the urgency of early action to minimise brain damage and save lives.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), one in every four adults will experience a stroke during their lifetime. While stroke can be life-threatening, prompt medical treatment and comprehensive rehabilitation can significantly improve survival and quality of life.

What is a stroke?

A stroke occurs when the blood supply to part of the brain is interrupted or reduced, preventing brain tissue from getting enough oxygen and nutrients. Brain cells begin to die within minutes.

There are two main types of stroke.

1. **Ischaemic Stroke:** Caused by a blockage or clot in a blood vessel supplying the brain.

2. **Haemorrhagic Stroke:** Caused by the rupture of a blood vessel, leading to bleeding into or around the brain.

Causes and risk factors:

Several modifiable and non-modifiable factors increase the risk of stroke:

- Long term high blood pressure (hypertension)
- Diabetes mellitus
- High cholesterol levels
- Smoking and excessive alcohol intake

- Chronic stress and sedentary lifestyle
- Obesity
- Family history or genetic predisposition

Warning signs: remember FAST

Recognising the symptoms early can save lives. The acronym FAST helps identify key warning signs:

- F – Face: Drooping of one side of the face
- A – Arm: Weakness or numbness in one arm or leg
- S – Speech: Slurred or incoherent speech
- T – Time: Act immediately and seek emergency medical help

Other symptoms may include sudden loss of vision, dizziness, imbalance, confusion, or loss of consciousness.

Diagnosis:

Diagnostic tests such as CT scans, MRIs, Doppler ultrasounds, and blood tests help determine whether a stroke is caused by a blockage or bleeding. Early diagnosis guides the appropriate treatment approach.

Treatment options:

• **Ischaemic Stroke:** Treated with clot-dissolving drugs (thrombolytic therapy) if administered within 3–4.5 hours of symptom onset.

• **Haemorrhagic Stroke:** Requires controlling bleeding and brain pressure through medication or surgical intervention.

In all cases, managing underlying conditions like hypertension, diabetes, and cholesterol is essential to prevent recurrence.

Physiotherapy rehabilitation:

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Many stroke survivors experience paralysis (hemiplegia) on one side of the body. Physiotherapy plays a vital role in restoring mobility, independence, and confidence.

1. **Early stage (Acute Phase):**

- Promotes blood circulation and prevents complications like joint stiffness and muscle contracture.
- Maintains passive movement to prevent spasticity.

2. **Rehabilitation stage:**

- Gradual re-education of movement, including sitting, standing, walking, and maintaining balance.

• Balance training, gait training, stretching, and strengthening exercises help restore functional independence.

3. **Advanced recovery:**

- Incorporation of electrical stimulation and task-orientated exercises to enhance motor control.
- Collaboration with speech therapists and occupational therapists to improve speech, hand function, and daily activity performance.

Stroke is not only treatable but also largely preventable through a healthy lifestyle, balanced diet, regular exercise, stress management, and avoidance of smoking and alcohol.

Timely medical intervention combined with dedicated physiotherapy-based rehabilitation can help stroke survivors reclaim their independence and live a meaningful, active life once again.

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A PERSONAL JOURNEY

The tao of healing touch

LUBNA MARIUM

I had been confined to a wheelchair for months, crippled by scoliosis and uncertainty. It was during this dark phase that my friend An Jing (Lynda) – a Chinese businesswoman living in Dhaka trained in *Tui na* (a form of alternative medicine) and orthopaedic therapy, introduced me to Traditional Chinese Medicine. Under her care, the pain began to ease. Then she urged me to travel to Beihai, Guangxi, to meet Dr Wang Fenghua, founder of the Yi Jin Fu Gu Dian – “Hall of Muscle-Tendon Transformation and Bone Adjustment”.

When Dr Wang met me at the station, I asked, “Can you help me?” He smiled: “Bangladesh has crossed the sea to come to China. China will, of course, help.” That moment began a healing far deeper than the physical.

A sixth-generation master of *Anmo* (a massage technique) and *Zheng Gu Shui* (a traditional Chinese herbal liniment, Bone-Setting Water, used for pain and injuries), Dr Wang descends from a century of “Golden-Hand Bone-Setters.” His father, Wang Hongbin, a teacher and healer, taught that true medicine unites Buddhism, Taoism, Confucian ethics, martial discipline, and the art of life.

Founded on August 8, 2008, Dr Wang’s Beihai clinic embodies this spirit of balance and compassion. Its guiding words are “Don’t get angry over disputes; don’t blame others.” For him, a calm heart is worth more than a hundred techniques.

The Taoist view sees the human as a microcosm of the cosmos; healing, therefore, restores harmony between internal and external rhythms. Walking through the neighborhood after each session, I was greeted by the warmth of Beihai’s residents – shopkeepers, café owners, and street – food vendors who, with translation apps and bright smiles, made a foreigner feel at home. Their kindness, too, was part of the treatment.

When I left Beihai, I walked unaided. The Tao, I realised, lives not only in ancient wisdom but in human kindness – where each compassionate touch becomes the path to wholeness.

The writer is a dancer, researcher, and cultural activist in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

From crisis to care: Why Bangladesh needs a mental health vision

SHIABUR RAHMAN

In a factory outside Gazipur, a 19-year-old operator once told a counsellor from SAJIDA Foundation, “Apa, my hands don’t shake because of the machines. They shake because of what I am carrying inside my chest.” She was not alone. Across Bangladesh, countless people carry their struggles silently – unseen in policy and uncared in national conversations.

The country is living through an age of compound crises. Rapid urbanisation, climate disruptions, economic transitions, and disasters are colliding with something silent yet destructive – psychological distress. Beneath every migration story or workplace burnout, statistic lies an unspoken layer of mental strain. Yet mental health has long remained an afterthought in Bangladesh’s development discourse. The neglect has a cost: families suffer, productivity drops, and the most vulnerable slip to the margins.

SAJIDA Foundation chose to invest in mental health. Its philosophy is simple yet radical – dignity is impossible without mental wellbeing.

CEO Zahida Fizza Kabir believes mental health must be a system woven through health, social protection, and enterprise. SAJIDA built a continuum of care stretching from community

helplines to advanced clinical facilities. This led to the creation of SHOJON, a tele-mental health platform connecting individuals with trained professionals via phone and digital channels, normalising help-seeking behaviour.

At the clinical end, Psychological Health and Wellness Care (PHWC) emerged as a pioneering one-stop facility combining psychiatrists and psychologists under one roof for individual, family, and group counselling.

Complementing this is The HUB – SAJIDA’s Neuroscience & Psychiatry Hub – offering assessment, diagnosis, and treatment in a nurturing environment. For children with special needs, Inner Circle Private Limited (ICPL) provides Bangladesh’s first certified early intervention centre offering ABA, occupational, and speech therapies aligned with global standards.

SAJIDA’s Proshanti programme, recognised by the WHO South-East Asia Regional Office, offers community-based supported living for people with chronic mental illness, helping them rebuild skills and reintegrate into society – a regional milestone in community psychiatry.

As climate threats intensify, SAJIDA has linked mental wellbeing with environmental stress through its Community Mental Health

Initiative (CMHI), supporting climate-vulnerable communities and addressing emerging issues such as adolescent distress, workplace burnout, and climate anxiety.

To bridge the shortage of mental health professionals, SAJIDA, in partnership with India’s Banyan Academy of Leadership in Mental Health (BALM) and Dhaka University, developed a six-month course in Community Mental Health Care to train non-specialists in ethical, person-centred support.

Its partnerships span public hospitals, universities, development partners, and private enterprises. SAJIDA’s helplines are referenced by UN Women, its counselling services are embedded in hospitals, and its research collaborations are shaping data-driven policy reform.

Over the next five years, SAJIDA plans to expand investments in technology-driven solutions, women and youth mental health, and community resilience.

If Bangladesh is to move from crisis to care, from neglect to dignity, mental health must be placed at the centre of national development. SAJIDA has drawn the roadmap. The question is whether the rest of us will follow its lead.

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