

Ageing with dignity: Why Bangladesh must invest in long-term care



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Bangladesh is ageing rapidly. By 2050, nearly one in every five citizens will be 60 years or older. Yet today, most elderly persons in Bangladesh receive care from unpaid family members, most of whom are women, with little or no public support. While caregiving remains a deeply rooted social norm, the growing burden of elder care in a changing society is fast outpacing traditional systems. It is time for Bangladesh to reimagine care for its ageing population, not as charity or family obligation, but as a pillar of public policy and human dignity.

Elder care in Bangladesh is not only a demographic or health issue but rather a gender justice issue. Women

SNAPSHOT:

Bangladesh's elderly population is growing rapidly, while formal care systems remain minimal.

1. Most elder care is provided by unpaid women, reinforcing gender inequality and economic loss.
2. National research shows institutional care reaches fewer than one percent of older persons.
3. Social protection schemes provide cash support but largely ignore daily care needs.
4. A phased, policy-driven long-term care system could support families and protect dignity.

and girls account for more than 80 per cent of informal caregivers. Many sacrifice income, education, or health to care for ageing parents or in-laws. At the same time, older women - who live longer, earn less, and often live alone - face heightened vulnerability. Without a system to support care work, the country is entrenching gender inequality and leaving both caregivers and recipients unsupported.

In 2025, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), in collaboration with Ayat Education and in partnership with the Department of Social Services (DSS), completed the first national diagnostic study on long-term care (LTC) in Bangladesh. The study included over

1,200 interviews with older persons, caregivers, community health workers, and local officials.

The findings were sobering. Formal institutional care reaches fewer than one percent of the elderly population, and where services do exist, they remain fragmented, poorly resourced, and largely unregulated. Older persons without family support such as widows, people with disabilities, or men living alone are often left entirely outside the care system. Existing social protection schemes also fall short, offering limited financial support but rarely addressing the daily care needs of older adults or the unpaid caregivers who support them.

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