

The hidden price of being poor and sick in Bangladesh

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UMMAY FERHIN SULTANA

In Bangladesh, falling ill is not always the greatest worry. For millions, the bigger question is whether they can afford to get better. A blood pressure test, a month's diabetes medicine or a journey to the nearest hospital can become a financial burden that many families struggle to bear.

A new World Health Organisation (WHO) report, published on 20 October 2026, reveals a troubling reality: where people live, how much they earn and how far they have studied can determine their chances of staying healthy and receiving treatment.

The report, examining inequalities within countries worldwide, highlights how disadvantaged communities face greater risks from heart disease, cancer, diabetes and long-term breathing problems. They also encounter more obstacles in getting tested, diagnosed and treated.

THE PRICE OF STAYING HEALTHY

In Bangladesh, diseases such as diabetes, cancer and heart disease account for approximately 71 per cent of all deaths. Meanwhile, patients pay 79.31 per cent of healthcare costs directly from their own pockets, according to World Bank figures cited in the source material.

Imagine a rickshaw puller who develops high blood pressure without knowing it. Feeling perfectly healthy, he continues working until a sudden medical emergency changes everything.

Or consider a garment worker diagnosed with diabetes. She understands the importance of regular medicines but must choose between buying them and meeting her family's daily expenses.

These are illustrative situations, but they reflect the difficult choices financial hardship can create.

WHEN YOUR POSTCODE DETERMINES YOUR HEALTH

The WHO findings reveal that poorer communities often struggle to access basic healthcare. People living in rural areas may have fewer opportunities to check and treat high blood pressure, while disadvantaged women are less likely to receive screening for cervical cancer.

The inequalities begin even before illness develops. Healthy food may be unaffordable. Safe spaces for exercise may be unavailable. Tobacco exposure and polluted surroundings can further increase health risks.

Simply telling people to eat better, exercise more or visit doctors regularly cannot solve problems rooted in poverty and limited access.

HEALTHCARE SHOULD NOT DEPEND ON INCOME

Experts emphasise that preventing disease is only half the battle. Ensuring affordable and continuous treatment is equally important.

For Bangladesh, this means making blood pressure and diabetes checks more accessible, keeping essential medicines available and strengthening healthcare services closer to communities.

Financial protection is crucial so that families are not forced to sacrifice food, education or household necessities to pay medical bills.

Health authorities must also look beyond national averages and identify which communities are being left behind.

Ultimately, a healthier Bangladesh cannot be measured by hospitals built or awareness campaigns launched. Its real achievement will be ensuring that everyone, regardless of income, education or address, has a fair chance to live a healthy life.

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The heatwave threat begins in the womb

As temperatures soar and heatwaves become increasingly intense, extreme heat is emerging as more than just a seasonal discomfort. Beyond dehydration and exhaustion, rising temperatures pose a silent but growing threat to human health, particularly for those least able to protect themselves. Pregnant women, newborns and young children are especially vulnerable, raising concerns about how a warming planet could affect health even before birth.

On 21 October, the World Health Organisation (WHO), Unicef and two other United Nations agencies unveiled the first global framework to track how extreme heat affects mothers and children.

The warning is alarming. Research suggests extreme heat exposure is associated with a 26 per cent increase in the odds of premature birth. Babies under one experienced 389 per cent more heatwave days in 2024 compared with the 1986–2005 average.

Worldwide, approximately 1.5 billion children face increasingly frequent, prolonged or intense heatwaves.

The new framework encourages countries to monitor premature births, stillbirths, low birthweight, pregnancy complications and childhood deaths during extreme heat. Even school attendance could reveal how rising



temperatures disrupt children's lives.

For Bangladesh, the findings highlight the importance of heat warnings, accessible healthcare and protecting vulnerable families, particularly those living in overcrowded homes or working outdoors.

Experts stress that tracking heat-related illnesses alongside temperature changes could help authorities identify dangers earlier and prevent avoidable deaths.

As temperatures climb, protecting the next generation must begin before birth.



Why the kindest people sometimes explode



DR SUMAIYA KHALED

Some people spend their entire lives being understanding. They forgive easily, avoid arguments, apologise even when they are hurt and put everyone else's happiness before their own. Then, one ordinary day, something insignificant happens, and they explode.

Why does someone who has always been so patient suddenly become so angry?

Psychologists suggest that years of suppressing emotions, avoiding confrontation and constantly pleasing others can gradually build resentment. What appears to be an overreaction to a small incident may actually reflect years of unexpressed frustration.

A 2025 international review published in Nature Human Behaviour examined 249 articles involving more than 150,000 participants across 37 countries and regions. Researchers explored how hiding or controlling emotional expressions relates to mental health. Their findings showed that these relationships differ across cultures, highlighting how emotional suppression can affect wellbeing in different ways.

The brain also plays an important role. When someone experiences prolonged stress, the brain becomes more alert to perceived threats, while its ability to manage strong emotions may weaken. Consequently, minor disagreements can feel overwhelming, triggering anger that seems disproportionate to the situation.

Mental health experts explain that repeatedly ignoring personal needs can contribute to emotional exhaustion. People who struggle to establish boundaries may eventually feel invisible, unappreciated or taken for granted.

Interestingly, anger is not always the primary emotion. Beneath it may lie sadness, disappointment, rejection or years of feeling unheard. A seemingly harmless comment can become the final trigger for feelings accumulated over time.

However, occasional anger does not necessarily indicate a mental health condition. Frequent, uncontrollable outbursts, particularly those affecting relationships or everyday life, may require professional support.

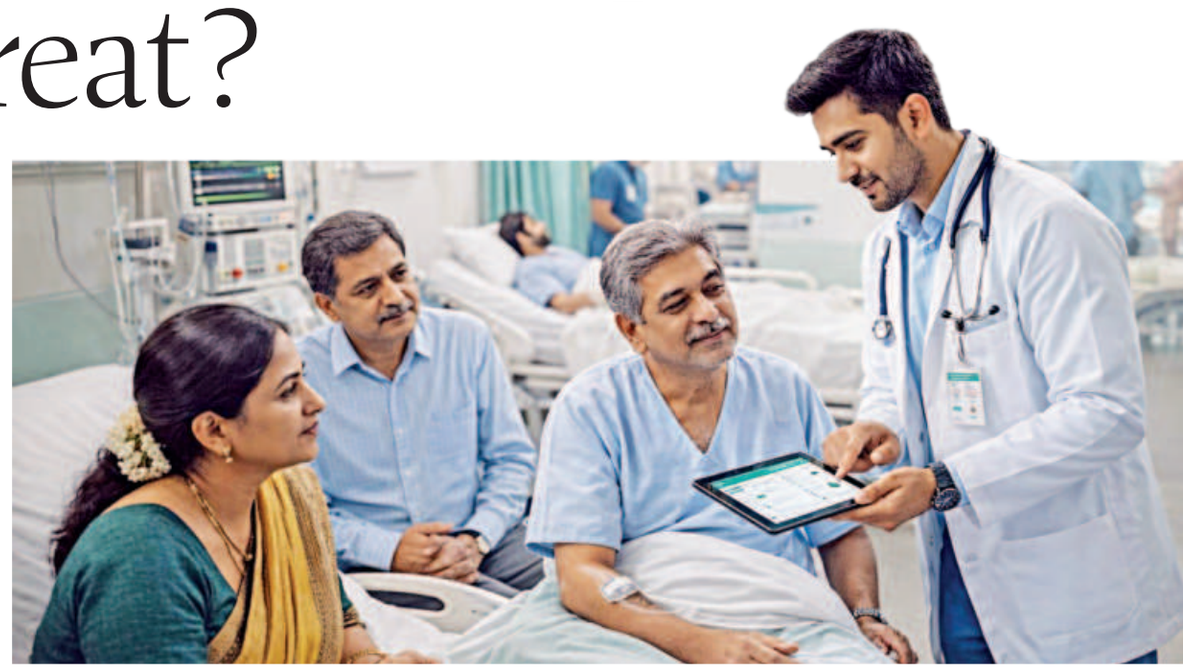
The solution is not to stop being kind, but to stop confusing kindness with self-sacrifice. Learning to say no, expressing disappointment early and recognising personal limits can prevent resentment from accumulating.

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What makes a hospital truly great?



DR MD ABU KAUSAR SHAPON



In Bangladesh, walking into a hospital can be overwhelming. Long queues, unfamiliar procedures, unexpected expenses and unanswered questions often leave patients feeling helpless. While modern equipment and experienced doctors matter, something equally important determines whether patients feel safe and respected: how they are treated.

A truly successful hospital rests on three simple principles: care, communication and commitment.

Care begins with kindness. Patients are not merely bed numbers or medical reports. They are individuals carrying pain, fear and uncertainty. A reassuring smile, a nurse who listens patiently or a staff member helping an elderly visitor can transform an otherwise frightening experience. Clean surroundings, shorter waiting times and respect for privacy are equally essential.

Communication builds confidence. Imagine waiting anxiously for test results without knowing when they will arrive. Or agreeing to treatment without understanding its cost. Such experiences can create frustration and mistrust. Doctors and hospital staff must explain procedures, expenses and treatment plans clearly, allowing patients and families to ask questions without hesitation.

Commitment turns promises into practice. Hospitals must consistently uphold safety, honesty and accountability. When mistakes happen, identifying their causes and preventing repetition matters more than simply assigning blame. Every employee, from senior doctors to reception staff, shares this responsibility.

These three principles cannot work independently. Kindness without clear explanations creates confusion. Good communication without responsibility produces empty promises. Efficiency without compassion makes healthcare feel cold and impersonal.

For Bangladesh's growing healthcare sector, the message is simple: better hospitals are built not only with investment, but also with humanity.

Ultimately, patients may forget the machines they saw, but they rarely forget how a hospital made them feel during their most vulnerable moments.

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Obesity on the rise: A global wake-up call

Obesity is no longer just a matter of appearance or personal lifestyle choices. It is a growing global health concern, affecting people of all ages and placing increasing pressure on healthcare systems. From unhealthy food environments to increasingly inactive lifestyles, the causes go far beyond individual habits. As the world grapples with this expanding challenge, the urgent question is whether governments can turn promises into meaningful action.



The Madrid Global Obesity Summit, held from 26 to 28 October 2026, brings together governments, health organisations, young people and individuals living with obesity to explore practical solutions.

Co-hosted by Spain's Ministry of Health and the World Health Organisation (WHO), in collaboration with UNICEF and the World Bank, the summit aims to accelerate worldwide efforts to tackle obesity by 2030.

Discussions focus on what countries have achieved, which strategies have worked and how governments can make prevention and treatment more accessible.

The summit concludes on 28 October with a global call for stronger political commitments and coordinated action over the next four years.

For Bangladesh, the message is particularly relevant. Preventing obesity requires more than advising people to eat less or exercise more. Affordable nutritious food, healthier schools, safer walking spaces and accessible healthcare all matter.

As global leaders renew their promises, the real challenge remains turning ambitious declarations into healthier everyday lives for millions.