

Status of the Elderly and Emergence of Old Homes in Bangladesh: Policies and Practices

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Abstract: The increase in aging populations is one of the most important issues facing the world today. Although families constitute the core of elder care throughout the world, due to changing culture, the adoption of modern living patterns, and variations in people's nature, their obligation towards the elderly has been drastically reduced. This situation has led to the issue of community care for the elderly and the emergence of old homes as institutional rehabilitation centers. At present, familial support for older people has declined and the issue of elderly care has become more complicated in Bangladesh. Often, older parents are subjected to various repressions and negligence by their children and family members. Therefore, a large number of older people are joining old homes as community-based elderly care has become a new reality in society. However, there are not enough governmental old homes rather private old homes are providing different facilities to the elderly. In practice, the protective provisions for older people remain insignificant in national plans and policies in Bangladesh. The Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (Registration and Control) Ordinance, 1961 (amended in 2007), is the main law for establishing old homes under the supervision of the social welfare ministry, but this law is not updated. Though the National Policy on Older Persons 2013 and the Maintenance of Parents Act 2013 have been enacted, they have not been implemented properly. Due to the absence of rules and monitoring mechanisms, many older people are living miserable lives outside of the family. This study focuses on the status of older people in present society and analyzes the relevant policies of institutional rehabilitation centers and old homes in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Elderly care, old homes, institutional rehabilitation.

1. Introduction

Being a South Asian country, Bangladesh always processes a tradition and religious beliefs that encourage the younger generation to look after their elderly with proper care and respect.¹ It is a fact that things are changing with time in Bangladesh and other regions of Asia. Moderation in social and religious values, adaptation of western culture, and socio-economic and demographic transformations are changing people's perceptions and lifestyles. As a result, most of the younger generation tends to live in cities and likes to adopt a nuclear family structure while leaving their parents behind at home in their villages. This new trend of living alone and adopting a nuclear family structure is breaking down the

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¹ M. A. Kabir, 'Elderly Care in Bangladesh, Challenges Ahead', The Daily Star, Dhaka, 2015.

traditional extended family structure of Bangladesh.² Senior citizens, who are considered an integral part of society, are now slowly losing their values, both in families and in societies. Accordingly, the demand for holistic care for senior citizens tends to grow fast.³

As of today, approximately seven hundred and twenty million people across the world fall into the elderly group, which tends to reach 1.5 billion by the end of 2050.⁴ Currently, Bangladesh has approximately fifteen million people who fall into the older generation due to being in their sixties and above. In the 2022 population census, around 9.28 percent (more than 2.5 crore) of the total population comprised the elderly (aged sixty or above) of the country. Besides this, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) has predicted that the older age group will cover 10.09 percent of the population in 2025, while the number is expected to increase enormously to around 17 percent in 2050.⁵ Similarly, the UN census reported that the proportion of elderly people in the country is increasing by about 2.68 percent annually and will nearly treble from 2020 to 2050.⁶ It's an alarming sign for the country, as the percentage of active labor force in the age group starting from 15 to 59 years will decrease to 0.604 percent from 0.651 percent.

Bangladesh is heading towards an intermediate stage of aging, challenging the economic and social aspects of the country. The increasing number of elderly populations, the breaking down of joint families and the diminishing trend of cultural heritage might result in high demand for accommodation, medical care, and rehabilitation facilities.⁷ Elderly people are facing problems like lack of care, emotional support, economic support from the family, etc. Apart from this, a rapid increase in the elderly population aging sixty years and older could lead to a crisis due to a lack of preparation and concern for elderly care, treatment, and financial aid facilities. At certain ages in life, humans need a lot of care and attention, which is a full-time job. Many families failed to ensure such care and attention due to their busy work schedules, regardless of their willingness. Therefore, in order to ensure proper care, attention, and treatment for elderly people, it is much needed to adopt rehabilitation centers or old homes. Sometimes, elderly people who are forced to live in old homes usually do not have any alternatives in their lives. The older people who have families and friends to look after them often stay in old homes when they are abandoned by their families.⁸

² ASM Atiqur Rahman, 'Ageing', *Banglapedia*. <https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Ageing>

³ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 'Elderly Population in Bangladesh: Current Features and Future Perspectives', *Population monograph of Bangladesh*, vol. 4, Ministry of Planning, 2015, 1.

⁴ Sheikh Iraj, 'Old age homes: Remove the stigma', *The Independent*, 9 November 2019.

⁵ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), *Report on Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2020*, Statistics and Informatics Division (SID), Ministry of Planning, June 2021, Bangladesh.

⁶ UNDP Report, *World Population Prospects*, 2017.

⁷ M. Nazrul Islam and Dilip C. Nath, 'A Future Journey to the Elderly Support in Bangladesh', *Journal of Anthropology*, Volume 2012, 2.

⁸ Md. Zillur Rahman, 'The Life of Older People', *Arafat's Publication*, Dhaka, 2012, 124.

Many Asian countries have financial assistance programs as well as old home and rehabilitation center facilities. All these initiatives clearly show the importance of old homes and rehabilitation centers across the globe, especially for those elderly people who are really unfortunate and do not have a place to stay at the end of their lives. Gradually, this issue will be a vital challenge for the government of Bangladesh as the number of elderly people is increasing without harmonizing steps to ensure their basic needs.

Under the Department of Social Services, in six divisions of Bangladesh, there are six old age homes that are working dedicatedly to provide care to the elderly.⁹ Apart from the Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (Registration and Control) Ordinance, 1961, there are several private registered old age homes and rehabilitation centers that are working to ensure proper care and shelter support for the elderly. No agency shall be established or continued except in accordance with the provisions of this Ordinance.¹⁰ Thus, all old age homes across Bangladesh need to be registered and maintain the guidance provided by the Ministry of Social Welfare. In order to ensure a safe, sanitized, and secured living condition in old homes, monitoring and management are needed. Therefore, elder people will get proper nutrition and a healthy diet, standard care facilities, and feel more alive both mentally and physically.

The National Policy on Older Persons 2013 considers institutional care the last resort for older people when their personal circumstances are such that they need to stay in old homes. It recognizes that the care of senior citizens must stay vested within the family, which would involve the community, government, and private segments. Therefore, the Maintenance of Parents Act 2013 makes it a moral obligation for children to maintain their older parents. There is no proper implementation yet. Due to a lack of legal framework, there are several challenges facing older people in the near future. They will not get the opportunity to complain regarding the service and infrastructure of the old homes and rehabilitation centers in the country. The study aims to present the elderly situation in the family as well as outside of the family in old homes and analyze the laws and policies relating to older care support to determine to what extent institutional services protect older residents in old homes.

The study is mainly qualitative in nature. It is designed mainly based on the relevant laws and policies of elderly protection outside of the family, especially in institutional rehabilitation centers and old homes in Bangladesh. The necessary data is collected from secondary sources. Secondary data have been collected from different sources, such as reading materials, journals, research articles, the internet,

⁹ Ministry of Social Welfare, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Available from: <http://www.msw.gov.bd/site/page/18350636-86ea-46fc> (accessed on 04 January, 2023).

¹⁰ The Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (Registration and Control) Ordinance, 1961, sec 3.

leading cases, international conventions, government statistics, newspapers, and so on.

2. Scenario of Older Population in the World

According to the United Nations, in 2017, there were around 962 million people aged 60 or over in the world, comprising 13 percent of the global population. Between 2015 and 2030, the number of elderly people (aged 65 years and above) in the world, except in Africa, will increase by at least 200 million. From the below table, it has been found that the majority of the state will face not only rapidly aging populations but also significant increases in the costs of looking after the elderly in the next 20 to 30 years.¹¹

Table 1: Population of the World and Regions in 2017, 2030, 2050 and 2100 according to the Medium-Variant Projection

Region	Population (millions)			
	2017	2030	2050	2100
World	7550	8551	9772	11184
Africa	1256	1704	2528	4468
Asia	4504	4947	5257	4780
Europe	742	739	716	653
Latin America and the Caribbean	646	718	780	712
Northern America	361	395	435	499
Oceania	41	48	57	72

Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision*. New York: United Nations

Throughout the world, the number of elderly people is increasing rapidly. As the number of 65-year-olds increases, it will become increasingly important for families to cover the costs of looking after and caring for their elderly parents. Now it is a big challenge to fulfill and ensure the healthy and successful care of elderly parents. In this world, there are different ways of providing care services in different states to impose institutional support for the elderly. Many countries have differing legal, ethical, and political traditions to provide care, but the aging population will be of great significance in the coming years.¹²

¹¹ See World Population Prospects: Key Findings and Advanced Tables (2017 Revision), United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division, New York: United Nations, 11. available at <<https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/world-population-prospects-the-2017-revision.html>> accessed on 12 July 2022.

¹² Seymour Moskowitz, Adult Children and Indigent Parents: Intergenerational Responsibilities in International Perspective, 86 Marquette Law Review, 2001, 406-411.

Usually, older people are revered and protected within the family, community, and societal levels of South Asian culture. Many countries in the Asian region have paid attention to developing elderly protection laws. Since late 1980, many countries in Asia, like Japan, have felt the necessity of establishing elderly support programs and laws that can ensure their rights. But for low and middle income generating countries like Bangladesh, things and action are a bit slower and narrower than actual demand.¹³ Therefore, the establishment of a proper law and additional resources is very essential to ensuring the care and safety of older people.

3. Challenges of Elder Generation

The old-age dependency ratio of Bangladesh is expected to triple in the next few decades, which will have an adverse impact on the economy because, with time, there will be fewer working-age people who can ensure economic support during old age. Aside from this, a rapid increase in the elderly population aging sixty years and older could lead to a crisis due to a lack of preparation and concern for elderly care, treatment, and financial aid facilities. As social and family traditions go down, many older people live apart from their sons or daughters' families. Consequently, they are vulnerable in terms of living arrangements, food consumption, health care, mental recreation, social dignity, mobility services, and possessions of wealth and protection.¹⁴

A good number of elderlies are now facing three major challenges, negligence from family and relatives, encountering various forms of disease, and a financial crisis. In Bangladesh, around 80 percent of elderly people live in rural areas, and they are often ignored by their near and dear ones beyond the knowledge of the public. The majority of elderly people who live in rural areas are abandoned by their family members. Government agencies or authorized bodies can hardly reach this group of people. As a result, the actual demand for old homes and rehabilitation centers is much higher than the documented demand. Indeed, to ensure minimum dignity, care, respect, and treatment for the elderly living across the country, the concept of setting up an adequate number of old homes and rehabilitation centers has become a burning issue. Ongoing socio-economic strategies are forcing people to live separately, and as a result in millions of elderly members are residing alone. Although the Bangladesh government has already taken this issue into consideration and set up old homes and rehabilitation centers for the elderly people but a much more aggressive planning and programs are required to meet the actual demand for such services across the country.

¹³ Md Mehedi Hasan Khan, *Changing Family Demography and Emergence of Aged Care Law and Policy in Bangladesh*, Paper to be presented at the International Seminar on Family Demography and Family Law around the World on 16th December 2020,

¹⁴ Sazzadul Alam, 'Elderly people in Bangladesh: Vulnerabilities, Laws and Policies', Report of BRAC, 30 November, 2015, 12.

Though the Department of Social Service (DSS) of the Ministry of Social Welfare is responsible for the implementation of social security programs like the Old Age Allowance (OAA) program for older people. The main objective was to ensure socio-economic development and social security and to treat senior citizens within their families and communities.¹⁵ The males older than 65 and the females older than 62 are getting BD TK 500 per month, but it covers a small portion of the elderly population and is mostly in rural areas. Moreover, the considered amount of money for old age allowance compared to the recent life-leading cost is so much less.¹⁶ Elderly individuals suffer extremely due to their age, and in this situation, they have to bear necessary expenses later in life.¹⁷

People who are at the end of their life cycle like to have adequate company and care from their surroundings. In most cases, it is being observed that these older groups of people often fail to receive adequate support and care from their families and friends. This situation might not be intentional in all cases, but this unintentional situation in many cases may lead to many harms, damages, and challenges for the elder generation. In different parts of the world, old homes and rehabilitation centers for elders are common and well accepted, especially in developed nations. But some developing countries are still fighting with this dilemma of whether it is safe and reliable to let their elderly group stay in old homes or send the older generation to rehabilitation centers.

Thus, the issue of older care remains immaterial in family, social institutional support and in legal framework which deteriorate their situation. Accordingly, older persons are ordinarily disregarded in the family and the community as there is no policy level initiatives and social security of outside the family.¹⁸ Though the National Policy on Older Persons formulated in 2013 but is not implemented for lack of sincere efforts by the authorities concerned. Equally, the Parents' Maintenance Act 2013 is not being enforced for lack of its rules and awareness among people. Moreover, geriatric problem is usually ignored as there are no specific elderly health policy and monitoring system in the hospitals, community clinics and old homes.¹⁹

¹⁵ Md. Anisar Uddin, 'Social Safety Nets in Bangladesh: An Analysis of Impact of Old Age Allowance Program', Unpublished Dissertation, Institute of Governance Studies (IGS), BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2013, 18-19.

¹⁶ Md. Humayun Kabir, 'Local Level Policy Development to Deal with the Consequences of Population Aging in Bangladesh', United Nations, New York, 1994, 33-74.

¹⁷ Anuradha Barrdhon, 'Field Practice Experience on Aging Issue in Bangladesh', *Bangladesh Journal of Geriatrics*, vol. 47, 2012, 15-16.

¹⁸ Mohammad Abdul Hannan Pradhan, and et al., 'Demographic Transition and Home Care for the Elderly in Bangladesh: An Urban Rural Comparison', *Advances in Economics and Business* 5(6) 2017, 334-345.

¹⁹ Atiqur Rahman, 'Human rights situation of older persons in Bangladesh', *Bangladesh Journal of Geriatrics*, vol. 47, 2012, 91.

4. Senior Citizen Policies in Bangladesh

Elderly age is an undeniable and unavoidable stage for every human being, as is providing care and assistance for senior citizens. People from different parts of the world have been emphasizing the importance and necessities of elder care for more than a thousand years. Digging into history will show different initiatives and steps different nations have taken in the past to ensure proper care and assistance for their elderly generation. With time, such initiatives and assistance have been modified to meet the changing demands of the older generation. Many countries in the world have different customs that ensure proper care and assistance for their senior citizens.

Article 15 (d) related to social security in the constitution with the aim of ensuring social security for the elderly. It described the social security of the older person as the “provision of the basic necessities of life, including food, clothing, shelter, education, and medical care; the right to reasonable rest, recreation, and leisure and the right to social security, that is to say, to public assistance in cases of undeserved want arising from unemployment, illness, or disablement, or suffered by widows or orphans or in old age, or in other such cases mentioned in the 15 (a) (c) and (d) clauses, respectively”.²⁰

As per the constitution, older people have a right to social security, which is the responsibility of the State. Apart from these, the equal rights and opportunities of all citizens, including older persons, are especially ensured in the clauses 17, 19 and 20 of the constitution.²¹ Additionally, the fundamental rights of citizens have been guaranteed under articles 27 to 44,²² and these were mostly based on the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Bangladesh's National Social Welfare Policy was announced in 2004 with the aim of addressing the challenges faced by elderly people residing across the country. Later on, to address all possible challenges facing the elderly population, the National Committee on Aging was constituted for the first time shortly after the Vienna International Plan of Action on Aging in 1982. It is considered the first move the Bangladesh government has initiated to address the aging issues formally.²³ Thereafter, the National Health Policy of 2008 was introduced to ensure all citizens receive medical assistance from national and local healthcare centers and hospitals.

In Bangladesh, the health rights of the elderly are still extremely limited, as is the focus on national policies. In 2011, the National Health Policy focuses on many aspects and sets 19 specific objectives for quality healthcare for citizens. In the

²⁰ The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972), Part II, article15.

²¹ Ibid., Part II State Policy.

²² Ibid., Part III Fundamental Rights.

²³ The Social Welfare Policy, 2005 <<http://www.clcbd.org/document/45.html>> accessed 5 June 2023.

policy, significant health rights-related issues and concerns like accessibility to disadvantaged people, gender equity, immunization, family planning, mobile clinics, climate change-induced diseases, and e-health have been addressed.²⁴ The right to health of the elderly, including special health services, psychosocial support, and geriatric care, has not been incorporated into the policy.²⁵ In reality, due to the lack of implementation of the policy, the poor and elderly cannot get health services properly.²⁶ Limited resources, weak management, climate change, and unplanned urbanization are some major challenges to ensuring the elderly receive free health care.

In 2013, the government approved the National Policy on Older Persons and recognized the elderly as senior citizens of the country. This is the first policy in the country regarding the development and wellbeing of older people that is inconsistent with the guidelines of MIPAA.²⁷ The main purpose of this policy is to provide a healthy and secure social life for older people with dignity and free from all deficiencies, as well as to strengthen elderly health care facilities, including primary health care support and the establishment of an age-friendly health center. It also includes referral services and short-term mobile camps for the elderly who live in remote areas. Aiming to ensure a dignified, poverty-free, functional, healthy, and secure society for the elderly, the Bangladesh Government has enacted such a policy.²⁸

Equally, the policy suggested a working strategy for ensuring elderly rights in all aspects. As per the policy, it has been declared that citizens over 60 are senior citizens in the country.²⁹ Therefore, people aged 60 years or older were listed as senior citizens in 2014. It is remarkable that the policy recognized the contribution of older people to the development of the country.³⁰ Moreover, the policy concerns protecting the lives and property of older people from all types of ignorance, discrimination, and oppression in the family and community. Furthermore, it also stipulates some important guiding principles regarding legal aid and ensures the ownership of both older men and women's property.³¹

However, the policy explores a significant number of social facilities for older persons as an obligation of the state to convey through both government and non-

²⁴ *Ibid.*, section 3.

²⁵ Md Mostafa Kamal Mazumder, Report of Bangladesh Progress towards MIPAA implementation, Ministry of Social Welfare, 2017.

²⁶ Abul Barkat, Rowshan Ara, Abdus Sattar, Avijit Poddar, and Toffazel Hossain. 'Chronic Poverty among Older People in Bangladesh, Human Development Research and Centre Help Age International, 2003'. (Accessed on October 06, 2022).

²⁷ The National Policy on Older Persons, 2013.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, section 2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, section 8 (1).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, section 6.

³¹ *Ibid.*, section 9.

government measures. As per the policy, there will be a Geriatric Department in every medical college, and district hospitals will be launched.³² Similarly, older people will have ID cards, health cards, and reserved seats in public transport, according to the policy. Old homes will be established, and the government will also take initiatives to attract the private sector in this regard.³³

The policy considers institutional care the last resort of the elderly when their personal circumstances are such that they need to stay in old homes. It recognizes that the care of senior citizens must stay vested within the family, which would involve the community, government, and private segments. Additionally, it also encourages non-institutional services by voluntary organizations to strengthen the coping capacity of older people and their families. There is a protective provision in the policy that states that older persons will always get preference in terms of getting rescue, relief, and rehabilitation from any disaster or emergency situation. It also pays high attention to the importance of inter-generational solidarity and communication³⁴ to build an inter-active society that is better for all ages. Hence, many progressive strategies have been incorporated into the policy in written form only. Due to bureaucratic complications in the country, all these services for older people have not been implemented yet. Now it is needed to implement all programs as mentioned in the policy for ensuring the necessary wellbeing services for all classes of older people.

In 2013, the government enacted the Maintenance of Parents Act (*Pita-Matar Voronposon Ain*)³⁵ to ensure the social security of senior citizens living across Bangladesh. This law also compels the children to take good care of their parents, especially in their old age. Thereafter, the concept of legal obligation and the care of parents has recently been built up in Bangladesh. According to the law, the children will have to take the necessary steps to look after their parents and provide them with food and shelter. Each of the children will have to pay 10 percent of their total income regularly to their parents if they do not live with them. Moreover, children will have to meet their parents regularly if they live in separate residences. Furthermore, under no circumstances are children allowed to send their parents into old homes beyond their wishes. The law also allows aggrieved parents to file cases against their children if they decline to support them. A first-class magistrate court will settle issues related to violations of the law. For reconciliation of any issues, local government representatives such as chairmen, members, and others authorized by them will settle the disputes. The law has the provision of Tk. 200,000 as a fine and, in default, a six-month jail term for violation of the law. The spouse or any relative, including the in-laws, will be considered offenders and will be punished if they are proved to be guilty of having objected to such support.

³² Ibid, section 12.

³³ Sumaiya Sabrin Eva, 'Rights of elderly in Bangladesh', Daily Observer, 13 October 2014.

³⁴ The National Policy on Older Persons, 2013, section 7.

³⁵ The Parents Maintenance Act 2013 (Act no 26 of 2013).

However, there are no policies or rules regarding institutional care services or old homes. As per the Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (Registration and Control) Ordinance, 1961, all old age homes operating across Bangladesh need to be registered under the Ministry of Social Welfare of Bangladesh.³⁶ In practice, there is no specific authorized body that is responsible for monitoring old homes in the country. No specific mechanism has been developed to evaluate the service standards of rehabilitation centers or old homes. Due to the absence of an adequate monitoring system, the quality-of-care services in old homes is greatly affected.

5. Exploring Asian Elderly Protection Laws

Similar kinds of laws regarding elderly care have already been enacted in different South Asian countries in the last 20 years. All countries are facing a huge challenge in ensuring proper safety and care for their senior citizens. Regardless of sharing a common cultural heritage of respecting senior citizens, countries like Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Myanmar have faced a huge necessity for a proper security support system for older persons.

Bangladesh's neighboring country, India, is far more synchronized in terms of data, policy, and elder support facilities. The Older Person Act 2006³⁷ has been enacted in India for providing the social welfare and institutional services towards senior citizens on the basis of the MIPAA. Any violation of the rights of senior citizens is punishable under the law. In addition, the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizen Act, 2007 has been enacted in India for protection of rights of senior citizens. There are seven hundred and twenty-eight old homes operational across India. Moreover, the government of India has implemented various schemes and programs to ensure senior citizens have a healthy, happy, empowered, dignified, and self-reliant life. The India Social Welfare Ministry is also working to build strong social and inter-generational bonds among the younger and older generations.³⁸

Pakistani citizens life expectancy has increased by almost thirty years in the last fifty years. According to Help Age Asia, 6.7 percent of the entire population of Pakistan is composed of senior citizens who are in their sixties and above. Like other neighboring countries, Pakistan has also enacted the Maintenance and Welfare of Old Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2019 to safeguard its senior citizens. Most of the old homes in Karachi are managed by non-governmental organizations and faith-based organizations.³⁹

³⁶ The Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (Registration and Control) Ordinance, 1961, section 3.

³⁷ The Act no. 13 of 2006.

³⁸ 'Schemes for The Welfare of Senior Citizens', PIB Delhi, 16 March 2022. <[https://pib.gov.in/ Press Release Page. asp?PRID=1806506](https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1806506)> accessed 7 June 2023.

³⁹ International Labour Organization (ILO) (2020) <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.byCountry?p_lang=en> accessed 7 June 2023.

Just like in many other nations across the globe, the Senior Citizen Act, 2006, has been promulgated in Nepal to ensure safety for senior citizens. Furthermore, the number of elderly care homes in Nepal is increasing. Historically, in Nepal, immediate family members used to be the primary caregivers for the elderly. Due to the influence of western culture, modernization, mass globalization, urbanization, and the breaking down of extended families, the migration of youths to foreign locations is slowly emphasizing the necessity of old age homes across Nepal. Considering this upcoming situation, the government of Nepal has taken many initiatives. Traditionally, old homes in Nepal are designed only to support a specific group of elderly people who do not have anyone as a family member to provide care. So, the government of Nepal, at first, took initiatives to set up old age homes in religious places, targeting those elderly who do not have any family.⁴⁰

Likewise, in 2000, Sri Lanka also formulated the Protection of the Rights of Elders Act for the protection of the rights and dignity of older people. In Myanmar, the Senior Citizen Law was enacted in 2016. Vietnam has also formulated the Law on the Elderly 2009 for ensuring the rights and obligations of the elderly, including the right to employment before the age of 60, and strictly prohibited any discrimination against the older employee.⁴¹ According to the Act, it is unlawful for any organization or company to insist on the retirement of elderly persons before the age of 60. The company must treat all employees equally, irrespective of age, under the law.

By the late 1980s, the government of Japan had already started a ten-year-long Gold Plan to ensure long-term care and accommodation services for its senior citizens. It also included a community-based care and support system. Egypt used to have different care systems for senior citizens based on family type and background. Senior citizens in Greece are fortunate enough to adopt a son in case they do not have any children, who will not only look after them while alive but also be responsible for providing a proper burial and visiting the tomb on a regular basis. Such extraordinary examples can lead to the conclusion that nations across the world have been putting emphasis on ensuring proper care and assistance for their senior citizens for a long period of time.

Compared to that, Bangladesh is at the beginner stage in terms of ensuring proper care and assistance to its elderly population. The setting up of old homes, rehabilitation centers, old age allowance, maintenance of parent's laws and policies are some of the noticeable attempts of government of Bangladesh. All such efforts from both private and public initiatives are not adequate to ensure proper

⁴⁰ 'Ageing population in Nepal', HelpAge<<https://ageingasia.org/ageing-population-nepal/>> accessed 7 June 2023.

⁴¹ Law on the Elderly No, 39/2009/QH12.

care and assistance availability for the majority of senior citizens residing across the country.

6. Old Homes and Rehabilitation Centers in Bangladesh

Regardless of the long heritage and traditional history of Bangladeshi people living in extended families and taking good care of their elderly people, especially parents and grandparents, a group of visionary people felt the need for elderly care services a long time ago, in 1960. In the year 1960, even before the independence of Bangladesh, Mr. A. K. M. Abdul Wahed privately initiated the establishment of the Bangladesh Association for the Aged and Institute of Geriatric Medicine (BAAIGM).⁴² BAAIGM is a voluntary and non-profit organization devoted to ensuring the welfare of all categories of elderly people living across Bangladesh.⁴³ BAAIGM is a non-political, non-government social welfare organization that aims to serve the elderly citizens of the country.

Government initiatives and concern for elderly citizens come far later than such private initiatives to address the various needs of elderly people. After Nobel Laureate Mother Teresa laid the founder stone, the first old home was established in 1994 on Bangladeshi land and located in Gazipur. Since then, various private organizations have established many old homes in different districts across the country. Compared to government initiatives, private organizations contributions are much higher in terms of volume and service standard. Later, different laws, rules, and government initiatives came into existence.⁴⁴

Old homes and rehabilitation centers in Bangladesh can be classified into two broad classes. One class represents all old homes and rehabilitation centers established and operated by the government. The other classes represent all old homes and rehabilitation centers initiated by private bodies to meet the emerging demand for such services. As recorded until the end of 2022, under the Bangladesh Social Welfare Ministry, there are six old age homes in Bangladesh. Six old homes are mainly located in metropolitan cities, i.e., Dhaka, Chattogram, Sylhet, Rajshahi, Bagerhat, and Barishal districts. Each of these facilities can accommodate a maximum of fifty people at a time. As these numbers were not sufficient to meet the actual demand for old homes, many private initiatives came into existence. Some of these privately initiated old age homes adopted a self-run old age home strategy as well. There are eighty-five 'Shishu Paribar' or shelter homes, which can also accommodate a maximum of ten senior citizens at each facility.⁴⁵

⁴² See, <<https://archive.unescwa.org/bangladesh-association-aged-and-institute-geriatric-medicine>> accessed 7 June 2023.

⁴³ See, <<https://baaigm.org.bd/>> accessed 7 June 2023.

⁴⁴ Papia Sultana, 'Situation of Older Women Residing in BAAIGM's Old Home'. *Bangladesh Journal of Geriatrics, Bangladesh Association for the Aged and Institute of Geriatric Medicine (BAAIGM)*, vol. 48, 2013, 59.

⁴⁵ Sheikh Iraj, 'The saga of old age homes', *The Business Post*, 25 September 2021.

Alongside government initiatives, several shelters and traditional old homes are also effectively participating to meet the emerging demand for old homes and rehabilitation centers across the country. Private old homes like 'Prabin Hitoishi Sangha' have approximately eighty branches across the country.⁴⁶ Still, this number of both private and public initiatives is not sufficient to meet the emerging demand for old homes and rehabilitation facilities in the country. Recently, the government announced plans to build "Shanti Nibash" for senior citizens in eight divisions across the country, which will have a capacity of accommodating twenty-five elderly people in each facility.⁴⁷

There are plenty of other private old homes operating in the country under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Welfare. Some well-known private old homes are established in the country. *Boyoshko Punorbashon Kendro*, the biggest old age home for senior citizens, was established in 1987 at Gazipur. Older people aging sixty and above from any religious background, whoever is poverty-stricken, can live in an old home. This center can accommodate two thousand senior citizens with free residence, food, and clothing. Besides this, there is also provision for health care facilities, along with many tending activities like gardening, livestock raising and farming.

Subrata Trust is another famous old home in Dhaka city. Suberta Trust has two branches. One branch is in Shyamoli, and the other one is in Savar. Around 30 elderly people can be accommodated there. *Apon Nibas* old home opened in 2010 for the shelter of elderly women. Shanti Nibas, or the Peace Home at Faridpur, has accommodated nineteen elderly females and four males at their facilities. Apart from these private initiatives, there are a number of other initiatives like Prova Home Care, Child and Old Care, Milton Home Care, Protigga Probin Nibash, and YPSA elderly care and support activities in Bangladesh.

7. Reality of Elderly Care Services in Old Age Homes

The support system for the elderly population is not fully prepared in many countries, like Bangladesh. In many parts of the world, especially countries in the Asia-Pacific region, caring for and supporting senior citizens is gradually declining, and many countries are still waiting for the alarm to sound to ensure proper support and care for their senior citizens. Therefore, it is high time for a developing nation like Bangladesh to identify all gaps regarding facilities available for its senior citizens. Some of the major shortcomings and gaps in the services of the old age homes are very visible during any physical visit to such facilities, which are mentioned below:

Shortage of old homes

⁴⁶ Tawsia Tajmim, 'Are old-age homes a need of the hour?', The Business Standard, 1 October 2019.

⁴⁷ TBS Report, 'Govt to build old age homes in eight divisions', The Business Standard, 1 October 2022.

There is a sufficient number of old homes, but it is not enough to meet the current and future demand for such services. Most of the old homes are located near or within metropolitan cities, which makes it hard for elderly people living in rural areas to avail themselves of such services. The government's six old homes in different metropolitan cities can accommodate around 300 elderly people at a time. Beside these facilities, there are eighty-five 'Shishu Paribar, or shelter homes for minors, which can also accommodate a maximum of ten senior citizens at each facility. In total, the government's contribution can accommodate eleven hundred to twelve hundred senior citizens with proper accommodation and food facilities. On the contrary, many private initiatives have started in full swing, but the inadequate number of such services compared to their demand is creating a huge challenge for private old homes.

Inadequate service offerings

The majority of the old homes are mainly concerned with ensuring food and shelter services. Other necessary services like daytime assistance, medical care like therapy and treatment, recreational facilities, religious and spiritual facilities, security and safety facilities, physical exercise facilities, and funeral arrangements are not available in the required format. In many cases, the absence of proper nutritionists, counselors, and therapists is creating a huge challenge for the elderly to overcome any challenging situation or physical constraints.

Limited caregiver assistance

A limited number of caregivers is also a major challenge in old homes in the country. Old people required different types of assistance and care, which in many cases was required throughout the day. The requirements for different types of care and assistance for old people vary greatly from person to person. All sorts of assistance cannot be ensured for the target group at the right time. In addition, most elderly residents of old age homes have to live in a suffocating environment due to a lack of an adequate number of caregivers, a lack of a proper monitoring officer, and high pressure on accommodation facilities in Bangladesh.

Unskilled workforce

In most old homes, caregivers or staff who are associated with such services are not skilled enough to ensure the appropriate service required by the elder population. In many cases, the unskilled workforce is failing to meet the exact demands of senior citizens in terms of medical care and recreation facilities. Increasing gaps in demand and service offerings will slowly turn these old homes into places of residence only by minimizing their actual impact.

Lack of proper health care

Elderly people are required to have an adequate amount of nutrition, vitamins, supplements, and therapy from time to time. But the absence of proper nutrition programs and rehabilitation facilities is one of the major drawbacks of old age homes, which is a great challenge for the elderly to live a healthy life. In both private and public old age homes, there are not proper rules and guidelines to ensure proper service and health care facilities for the senior citizen. Many old homes do not have enough recreation facilities available for their residents. In the long run, this makes elderly people's lives a bit more monotonous and boring. Proper recreation can improve the living standards of elderly people. Moreover, a major portion of old homes do not have sufficient space for walking or a walkway for daily walks.

Absence of regulatory and monitoring authorities

Absence of proper regulatory authorities under the Social Welfare Ministry of Bangladesh is making it difficult to process a unified standard of services of both public and private old age homes. Similarly, there is no appropriate number of monitoring and evaluation officers is depriving elderly people residing at old age homes across to avail all logical and mandatory service, care, and assistance. As a result, many elderly people are depriving from adequate amount of care and sometimes with facilities like proper nutrition's and health care.

8. Areas of Improvement of Old Age Homes

To support the senior citizens of the country, the government has taken many initiatives, but none of them is significant or adequate to support the increasing demand for old homes. Bangladesh's old home services are still emerging in terms of quality of service and coverage areas. There are many major service areas in old homes that need immediate attention and proper monitoring to ensure quality services for all elderly people staying there. In many cases, the service quality of both private and public old homes varies greatly depending on the financial contribution of the service providers. Some of the most important areas that need improvement are mentioned below:

Increase the number of old homes and proper facilities

Although the number of old homes has increased at a rapid rate, the number of available old homes compared to the required number is still significantly low. More old homes need to be established through private and public initiatives to support present and future demand. In this context, it is mandatory for senior citizens to intake proper nutrition and vitamin supplements to support their diminishing and deteriorating health conditions. Many parts of the human body need additional care and assistance due to malfunctioning. The human physical condition depends partially on the transmissible structure, the manner of living, and supporting environmental factors. Thus, the government must ensure

authorized bodies look after the environmental condition of all old homes on a regular basis and maintain proper hygiene systems as well.

Most senior citizens who reside in old homes are mentally broken. In order to live longer at such an advanced age, it is mandatory to provide constant motivation and inspiration to live a more energetic life. A sufficient number of caregivers should be appointed in the old homes to assist the vulnerable older people in conducting regular activities. The government needs to develop mechanisms that can ensure a supportive livelihood system for senior citizens who are physically capable enough to earn a living. It will not only improve their self-respect but also inspire them to live a healthy life for much longer than their lifetime.

Improve the monitoring system and implement policies

In Bangladesh, a number of old homes are established voluntarily by different social workers and NGOs. Now, it needs to be monitored by the government. These old homes can be demoralized into coming forward. So, along with focusing on the monitoring system, the government should also ensure some incentives for those who voluntarily sell their old homes. Incentives can be in the form of a direct grant or a tax credit under the income tax ordinance. When the government provides them with sufficient incentives, it can have a legitimate claim to bring their old homes under its supervision. Thus, the government must ensure authorized bodies look after the environmental condition of all old age homes on a regular basis and maintain proper hygiene systems as well. Hence, an adequate amount of monitoring and evaluation should be done to improve the service quality and quantity of old age homes operating across the country.

In the above discussion, it is stated that the government should come forward with more meaningful assistance for institutional care for the elderly. It is evident that the elderly need economic support, including food, clothing, medical care, and housing, as well as cultural support. In these regards, programs and policies relating to specific needs, including health, financial, civic amenities, etc., should be formulated for the growing older population. Accordingly, the issue of aging should be incorporated into social, economic, and health planning for providing an age-friendly living environment.⁴⁸ A comprehensive legal framework should be formulated for protecting rights, getting social services, and monitoring elderly service provider organizations.⁴⁹ For the betterment of specialized health care, a separate national health policy should be enacted that prescribes guidelines for hospitals, clinics, old homes, and shelter homes on how they will provide service

⁴⁸ Md. Anisar Uddin, 'Social Safety Nets in Bangladesh: An Analysis of Impact of Old Age Allowance Program', 51.

⁴⁹ Ferdous Ara Begum, 'Social Inclusion and Awareness Raising in an Ageing Society: A Policy Approach to Protect the Human Rights of Older People', Second International Forum on the Rights of Older Persons, Mexico City, 3-6 June, 2014, 15-17.

to the elderly without suffering financial hardship. Therefore, along with public initiatives, private initiatives also play a very vital role in ensuring proper assistance and support for the elderly generation. More awareness-raising programs should be initiated to make the younger generation aware of the important role senior citizens can play both in improving life and society. The younger generation must be aware enough to accept living with their senior citizens willingly and happily.

9. Conclusion

Getting old is an undeniable fact of human life. With the increasing number of older populations, it is becoming extremely important for the government of Bangladesh to ensure proper care and assistance for the senior citizens. Just like in different parts of the world, the concept of old homes and caretakers is becoming popular in Bangladesh as well. Although it is not much appreciated by different layers of society, the increasing demand for old home facilities has forced the government and authorization bodies to repeatedly think about this alarming issue. The government has initiated many policies regarding old homes and elderly care, but several significant issues are still not addressed in existing policies, like the monitoring tools, evaluation mechanisms, regulation bodies, and role of law enforcement agencies in case of any violation. Therefore, the government must act fast to meet the predicted demand for old homes and rehabilitation centers, along with the legal framework to safeguard the dignity, rights, and wellbeing of every senior citizen.