

# Social Status of the Rural Older People in Bangladesh: Ideas and Realities

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**Abstract:** *Objectives:* The objective of this paper is to depict the social status of the older people in a village of Bangladesh. *Methods:* Quantitative research approach has been applied in this paper. Data were collected using survey and observation methods. Both primary and secondary sources of data have been used in this paper. As techniques, purposive and simple random samplings were applied. The village was selected purposively as it represents the significant number of respondents. The older people as respondents were selected following simple random sampling. *Results:* This study consisted of N=101 Bangladeshi older people. The findings highlight that about 49.50% engage in buying and selling; 44.55% can receive treatment; 55.44% need permission for leaving home; 50% have no ability to control family members; 60.39% are invited in social and religious programs; 82.19% are able to mediate the familial dispute, 42.57% can participate in rural development activities; 60% older people are not considered important in family. So, the social status of the older people in the study village is not up to the mark satisfactory and matches with existing ideas. *Conclusion:* This paper may help policymakers to think about this issue in a new way and it may increase an eagerness among the academicians and researchers to undertake more empirical studies to explore the social status of the older people from the context of the other villages of Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** Bangladesh; Ideas; Realities; Role; Rural Older People; Status.

## INTRODUCTION

The role and status of the older people are intermingled. Role refers to the activity of the people and status, on the other hand, refers to the position of people in society. According to Riley, Johnson, and Foner (1972), society determines the role and social position of man in society based on race, class, sex, and age. Bangladesh, a rising developing country, has a vision to fulfill the goals of sustainable development (SDGs). In this regard, it is needed to emphasize all classes of people including older people. Zafrani and Nimrod (2019) think that “population aging is expected to be the most significant demographic transformation of the 21st century, with implications for nearly all sectors of society”. Maximum studies, according to Doane, Seward, and Murphy (2022), encompass a greater range of ages. United Nations made a prediction that older people will double by 2050 (United Nations [UN], 2020). By 2050, people 60 years and above in the context of Bangladesh society will constitute 22% of the total population (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2022). This increasing trend and other impacts are creating ageing problems so acute for the older people, society, and the government. This group of population is adding with our existing dependent

population. According to Lehnert, Heuchert, Hussain and Konig (2018), “higher dependency ratios indicate a greater burden on the workforce in supporting the older (dependent) population”. Therefore, it is an urgent need to do research on this issue to explore the real picture.

## OBJECTIVE

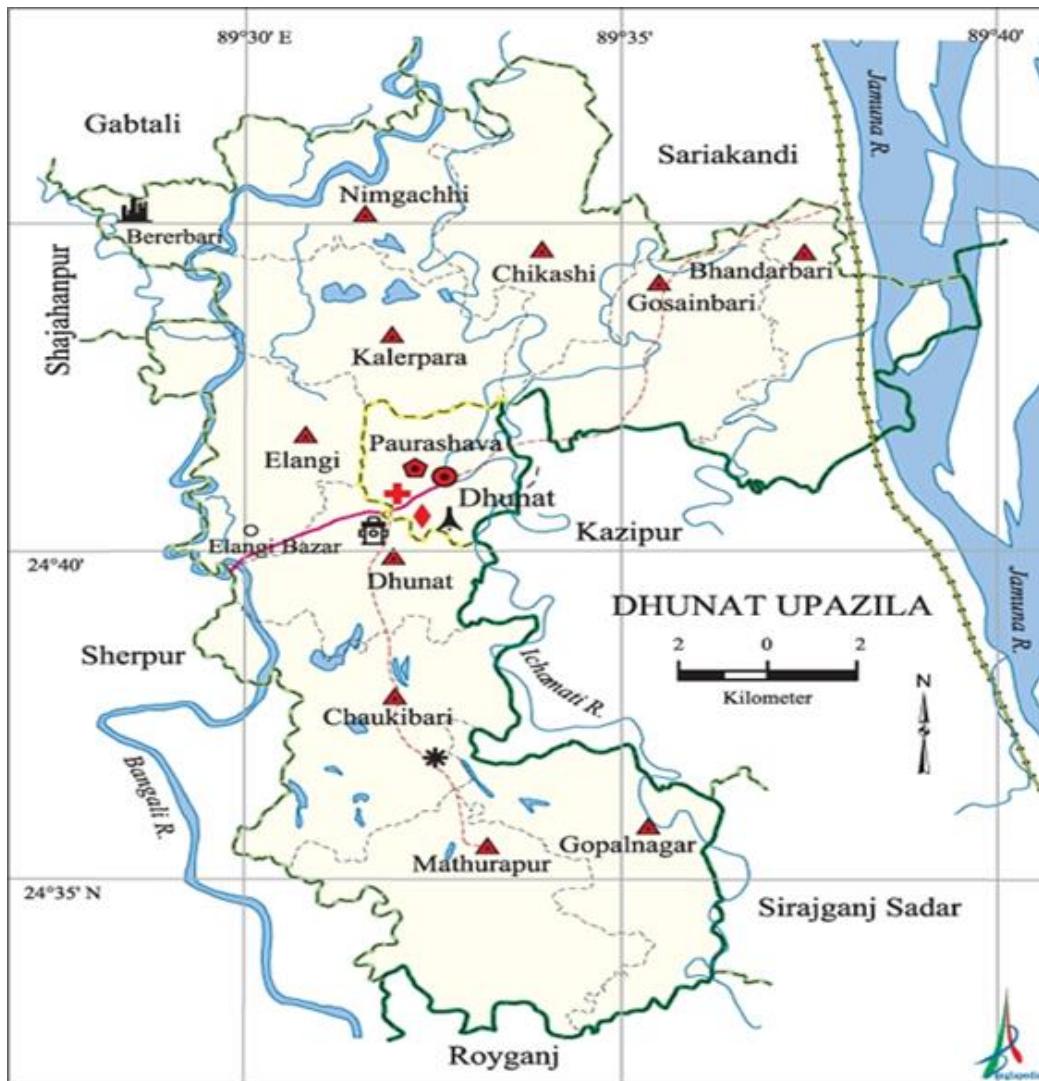
The increasing number of ageing in the human population and its concomitant effects are important to researchers, policymakers and practitioners. So, smart objectives are to set for obtaining the expected results. “The objectives of the study should be clearly stated and specific in nature” (Kumar, 2011, 193). However, the objective of this article is to explore the social status of the rural older people in a village of Bangladesh.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology is a philosophy of conducting research. It is a general orientation regarding conducting research (Marvasti, 2004). This paper has been prepared from a research project of mine on Social Status of the Rural Elderly in Bangladesh: Myth and Reality, Funded by Faculty of Social Science, University of Rajshahi,

Rajshahi-6205, Bangladesh. Maintaining the ethical concerns, the objectives of the study has been informed the respondents. After receiving their consent, data have been collected in a friendly manner. This study followed quantitative research approach. According to Flick (2009), different methodological perspectives can play the supplementary roles in studying any issue. Neuman (2011) on the other hand thinks that the two approaches have significant differences. It is impossible to solve the rival causal factors and

that's why multiple methods of observation are to be conducted (Patton, 1990). Method refers to the techniques by which researchers try to make understand the problem and answer. The survey and observation methods applied in this study. Both purposive and simple random sampling techniques used in this paper. A village named Konogaty from Gopalnagar union of Dhunat Upazila under Bogura district was selected purposively.



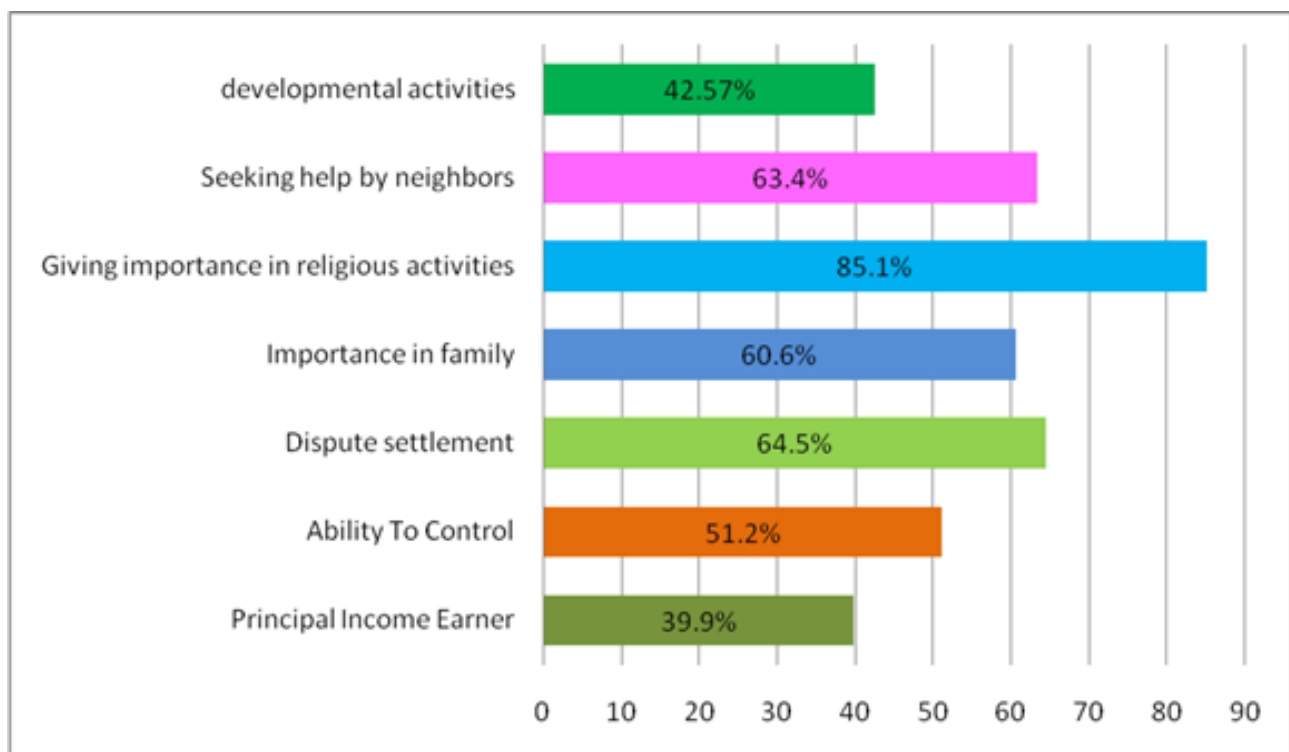
Map of Dhunat Upazila

The rationale is that when the study was conducted the older people constituted 7.4 of our population; the rate of older people in this village was nearly 8% (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics [BBS], 2012). At present the number of older people 60 and above in Bangladesh is 9.28% (Census, 2022). Households were selected to find out the respondents. According to Babbie

(2007:92), “unit of analysis, then, are those things we examine in order to create summary descriptions of all such units and to explain differences among them”. The older people have been considered as the unit of analysis. Out of 317 older people, 101 were selected as study respondents and studied by structured questionnaire. Data were processed using SPSS.

The social status refers to the position of people in their social settings. It is the synonym of social position. Older people consider themselves important if they think that they have active participation in familial activities. This study represents that about 48.51% older people can take part in building and construction related decision in family. About 49.50% older people are engaged in buying and selling activities. Nearly 44.55% older people receive treatment in family (**Table 1**). The social position of the elderly can be understood by some indicators. It is apparent that more than 80% older people do not have any role to educate the children. About 52.47% older people are not considered in voting opinion. Nearly 55.44% respondents ensured that they need permission for leaving home (**Table 2**). Activity theory describes that social activity is the essential for life. It also outlines that productive ageing happens when older people stay active and maintain social interactions (Loue & Sajatovic, 2008). Approximately 34.65% older people are invited in social and cultural activities. It is also clear that young older people get more invitation than the middle or old-aged ones. Older people are the mentors of the family. They should have proper role to solve problems. The data describe that about 82.19% older people are able to mediate the familial dispute. So, it is undoubtedly a positive sign (**Table 3**). Older people have stock knowledge; they are supposed to

participate in rural developmental activities. The findings of the study show that nearly 42.57% older people participate in rural development activities. Older people have seen and observed many things throughout their lives. Now they are to contribute to society and disseminate their wisdom and experience in their societal settings. They expect that the neighbor will come to seek advice any issue. The data explain that about 63.37% neighbors come to the older people for help. Older people are the storehouse of all kind of knowledge. So, they are supposed to give importance. It is understandable from the data that 85.15% family members show respect to older people in religious activities. So, it is a positive aspect to older people. Family plays vital role for all classes of people including older people. Here it is mentionable that about 60% older people are not considered important in family. Seemingly it may seem significant percentage but expectation does not permit it as enough. From ancient to modern ages, older people have had the meditative role. At present the scenario is not satisfactory. Nearly 35.5% older people can take part in rural arbitration. Ability to control the members is the indicator of social status. However, the data highlight that 50% older people have the ability in this respect. It is apparent that nearly 40% income earners are the older people (**Figure 1**).



**Figure 1:** The position of older people in terms of some indicators.

**Table 1: Decision Makers in Buying, Selling, Building, and Receiving Treatment**

Persons	Buying and Selling		Building and Construction		Receiving Treatment	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Son	33	32.68	36	35.65	38	37.63
Older people	50	49.50	49	48.51	45	44.55
Widow	5	4.95	2	1.98	3	2.97
Daughter	2	1.98	3	2.97	2	1.98
Widower	10	9.90	10	9.90	12	11.88
Other	1	0.99	1	0.99	1	0.99
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 2: Information on Seeking Suggestion from Older People about Children's Education, Voting and Leaving Home**

Sex	Children's Education				Voting Opinion				Leaving Home				Total	%
	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%		
Male	11	10.89	38	37.62	28	27.72	21	20.79	17	16.83	32	31.68	49	48.51
Female	9	8.91	43	42.57	20	19.80	32	31.68	39	38.61	13	12.88	52	51.49
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19.80</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>80.19</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>47.52</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>52.47</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>55.44</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>44.56</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 3: Position of Older People in Different Socio-Religious Programs and Solving Familial Disputes**

Age	Invitation in Socio-Religious Programs				Participation of Older People in Solving Familial Disputes				Total	%
	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%		
<b>60 – 65</b>	18	17.82	39	38.61	47	46.54	10	9.90	57	56.44
<b>65 - 70</b>	5	4.95	9	8.91	12	11.88	2	1.98	14	13.86
<b>70 - 75</b>	7	6.93	9	8.91	15	14.85	1	0.99	16	15.84
<b>75 - 80</b>	1	0.99	4	3.96	3	2.97	2	1.98	5	4.95
<b>80 - 85</b>	3	2.97	2	1.98	4	2.97	1	0.99	5	4.95
<b>85 -90</b>	1	0.99	3	2.97	2	1.98	2	1.98	4	3.96
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>34.65</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>65.35</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>82.19</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17.82</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>100</b>

Although the existing ideas illustrate that the older people had absolute social status in the family and society, the findings of this paper state that the social status of the older people in a Bangladeshi village is not satisfactory. From total respondents, merely 40% are the income earners; about 49.50% engage in buying and selling activities in the family; Nearly 48.51% can take part in building and construction related decision making; 44.55% can receive treatment; 55.44% need permission for leaving home; 50% have no ability to control family members; 60.39% are invited in social and

religious programs; 35.5% can take part in rural arbitration; 82.19% are able to mediate the familial dispute, 42.57% can participate in rural development activities; 60% older people are not considered important in family. Since ageing is becoming a great concern in the 21st century, the issue of social position should be studied importantly through personal, academic, policy concerns and other points of view. More and more empirical study covering all villages of Bangladesh can uphold the real picture.

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## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT**

Although this paper prepared from my project on Social Status of the Rural Elderly in Bangladesh: Myth and Reality funded by the faculty of social science, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh, there is no conflict of interest corresponding author and coauthors. Because, after completing the project it is required to submit final copy of the report to faculty and the faculty encourage publishing a paper.

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## **DATA AVAILABILITY**

### **STATEMENT**

The data which supported the findings of the study are available to corresponding author. It will be provided by corresponding author upon request.

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