

Gender Roles and Relations at a Later Age: Perceptions and Practices of Older Couples in Dhaka City, Bangladesh

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Abstract

This article reveals the gendered impacts of ageing by examining the lived experiences of older couples in Dhaka city. Based on an analysis of data collected through in-depth interviews, the findings reveal that the value of aged parents remains significant in families of urban working couples. However, with advancing age and the break down of traditional family systems, older couples experience substantial changes in their gender roles and power status within the domestic sphere. Losing family breadwinner roles, lonely retired men suffer more from a feeling of powerlessness, whereas their wives continue with caregiving responsibilities. The altered life circumstances boost a sense of equality in some men, making them more caring and empathetic towards their wives. On the contrary, guided by traditional norms and values, several older men remain dominant and exercise control over their spouses which is similar to the behavior throughout their married life.

Keywords: Ageing, Gender roles, Gender relations, Family, Urban

1. Introduction

With modern science and technological advancements, primarily through the development of medicine and healthcare facilities, nations worldwide have been able to decrease high mortality rates. As a result, the older population has been increasing considerably, and concerns about aged people are rising as well. In this context, gerontology research has flourished worldwide, especially

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in developed countries, where older people now exceed the active population. Scholars from that region have widely examined the vulnerable conditions of people in old homes by portraying their needs, worries, and the underlying policy gaps in assisting this group (Barford et al., 2006; Little, 2016). Taking a different stand, they have also explored the beauties of old age (Calasanti et al., 2006; Heilbrun, 1997; Segal, 2013). Some have observed the liberty of older women and their ability to retain self-worth (Fin et al., 2017), while new scholarships in this area have articulated the struggles of masculine men to fit in the shoes of less valuable older men (Meadows & Davidson, 2006).

Research on old age has also been gaining popularity in developing countries like Bangladesh, as the aged population size is expanding significantly due to demographic transitions. Of the country's population in 2019, 8.2 % belonged to 60 years and above, and 5.2% were 65+ years old (HelpAge, 2019). Following cultural tradition, most had been living in joint families as dependants. They were nevertheless exposed to several maladies and exclusionary practices (Islam & Nath, 2009; Siddique, 2014). Overall, there is a shortage of health services and social security schemes for older people (Alam, 2015). Rapid urbanization and the rise of the nuclear family system have been accelerating manifold pressure on these older adults (Islam & Nath, 2010). Hence, the bulk of research related to older people of Bangladesh tends to showcase their vulnerable conditions and the advancing pressures on families, communities, and the country added by the growing population size (Kabeer et al., 2013). Based on the objective and observable dimensions of a good life, relevant analyses have strengthened the argument for better public policies for older people (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2015; Islam & Rahman, 2010; Khanam et al., 2011).

Still, there is a dearth of studies on the subjective experiences of the old age population in urban areas (Rahman, 2017). This creates gaps in understanding personal expectations, feelings, or evaluations of the subtle changes in the life course (Ferring & Boll, 2010). Against this backdrop, this study aims to underscore the gender-specific changes added to the lives of older married couples living in Dhaka city. Specifically, this paper focuses on understanding how older adults experience changes in their gender roles within the domestic sphere and to what extent those changes affect gender relations or the power relations between married couples.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study borrows a sociological perspective that considers the role as the expected behavior associated with a status. Accordingly, gender roles are

performed according to social norms and shared rules that guide individual women and men's behavior in specific situations. For example, social norms determine the privileges and responsibilities of any status, e.g., mother, father, young woman, older man, and so on. The status of a mother calls for expected roles involving love, nurturing, homemaking, etc., whereas the status of a father primarily demands breadwinner roles. In traditional societies, gender roles are defined and practiced, which creates stereotypes (Lindsey, 2016). Men's participation in paid work associates them with agency and power, whereas women's nurturer roles connect them with communion. The socially created gender division gives men and women different skills, and it mirrors asymmetric gender relationships which prevail not only in the micro-social systems/institutions but also across the macro-level, conforming to men's predominance over women (Connell, 1987)

Patriarchal societies continue to consider the socially constructed gender divide and hierarchical relationships between women and men as natural, justified, and immovable. However, established social norms and status may disrupt or fall into a state of flux, and the possibility of developing new ones emerges, keeping pace with a changing society (Connell, 1987; Lindsey, 2016).

Based on these insights, this study analyses the gender roles and gender relationships within family institutions, which persist over time but remain responsive to the individuals' changing social context and life circumstances. Specifically, we have examined how along with ageing (which is a biological determinant) and changing family compositions (that reflect the changing state of society), older couples readjust and evaluate respective gender roles and the power relationship between them.

3. Methodology

The research idea emanates from the close observation of the grandparents' experience of one of the authors, who migrated to Dhaka in their old age to support the dual-earning families of their children. To substantiate this personal experience, the authors designed the research to understand how married women and men reconstitute gender roles and interpersonal (conjugal) relationships in their later lives.

The authors followed a qualitative research methodology and conducted in-depth interviews for data collection. The field investigation of this study continued from August to mid-October 2019. A semi-structured interview guideline was developed based on informal conversations with four older women and men, and 20 aged couples were interviewed until authors reached saturation. The selection of the participants was made in a purposive way.

Known older couples who were residing and providing family care support were first approached. Through them, the researchers came to know about similar-aged couples. The selections were based on the criteria of old age (60+ years) and family type (joint family where older couples lived with their biological son or daughter) (Table 1).

Table 1: Participants' Profile

Gender (W= Woman, M= Man)	Age	Education	Occupation	Monthly Household Income	Family Type
W1	70 years	BA	School Teacher	BDT 1,00,000	Living with son
M1	78 years	BA	Government Service Holder		
W2	69 years	HSC	Homemaker	BDT 85,000	Living with son
M2	76 years	BCom	Banker		
W3	65 years	HSC	Homemaker	BDT 80,000	Living with son
M3	75 years	MA	Government Service Holder		
W4	69 years	MA	Banker	BDT 1,00,000	Living with son
M4	78 years	BCom	Banker		
W5	63 years	HSC	Homemaker	BDT 90,000	Living with son
M5	72 years	BA	School Teacher		
W6	65 years	SSC	Homemaker	BDT 90,000	Living with son
M6	74 years	HSC	Private Service Holder		
W7	65 years	HSC	Homemaker	BDT 95,000	Living with son
M7	72 years	MA	Government Service Holder		
W8	62 years	SSC	Homemaker	BDT 1,00,000	Living with son
M8	75 years	BA	Thana Education Officer		
W9	68 years	BA	Homemaker	BDT 90,000	Living with son
M9	75 years	MA	Manager in Ship		
W10	62 years	HSC	Homemaker	BDT 1,00,000	Living with son
M10	75 years	BCom	Banker		
W11	65 years	SSC	Homemaker	BDT 80,000	Living with son
M11	72 years	BA	Government Service Holder		

W12	65 years	Grade IX	Homemaker	Tk 70,000	Living with son
M12	70 years	HSC	Government Service Holder		
W13	62 years	SSC	Homemaker	BDT 1,00,000	Living with son
M13	70 Years	MA	Banker		
W14	65 years	HSC	School Teacher	BDT 90,000	Living with daughter
M14	70 years	BA	School Teacher		
W15	68 years	HSC	Homemaker	BDT BDT 80,000	Living with daughter
M15	75 years	BSc	Government Service Holder		
W16	68 years	BA	Homemaker	BDT 1,00,000	Living with daughter
M16	74 years	BSc	Private Service Holder		
W17	62 years	Grade VIII	Homemaker	BDT 90,000	Living with daughter
M17	75 years	HSC	Government Service Holder		
W18	61 years	Grade VIII	Homemaker	BDT 90,000	Living with daughter
M18	70 years	HSC	Government Service Holder		
W19	62 years	HSC	Homemaker	BDT 95,000	Living with daughter
M19	73 years	BA	Banker		
W20	69 years	SSC	Homemaker	BDT 1,00,000	Living with daughter
M20	76 years	BCom	Private Service Holder		

Source: Data collected from field interviews

The authors obtained written informed consent for participation from the interviewees. All the interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. They were transcribed into Bangla and then English. A thematic analysis method was followed for further analysis of primary data. The relevant secondary data had been extracted from scholarly articles, reports of various development organizations, and the government sources such as the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

Study Location

The research participants were from six residential areas of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, which has grown its population to more than 20 million (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2019). It is one of the most densely populated cities in the country, with primary industrial operations and other business services. This historical city has grown organically without planned

interventions. Therefore, urbanization has become a messy and uneven process in this city, which has resulted in substandard living conditions, congestion, and vulnerability of people (Siddiqui et al., 2016).

Dhaka city draws on an ever-expanding labor force, of which women comprise a significant part. Higher educational achievements, new job openings, and city living expenses have been triggering women to seek paid work. However, the city still needs to develop adequate infrastructure and services for working mothers (Dey et al., 2021). Childcare facilities are inadequate in Dhaka, preventing young women from entering the labour force. Without childcare services, dual earners (husband and wife) rely heavily on their older parents' support to raise their children.

On the contrary, Dhaka city still possesses traditional values and practices, reflected in the continuation of the traditional joint family system in the urban structure. In these families, older parents reside with a son and his wife and grandchildren, holding significant power and status. At a mature age, a son is responsible for providing food and other necessities to his biological parents (Barikdar et al., 2016). The old home concept is waiting to be positively accepted by mass people.

Over time, the traditional son-led joint family system has been disrupted due to rapid urbanization, the influx of modern ideologies and lifestyles, and particularly women's growing participation in the industry and service sectors (Amin, 1998; Kabeer, 2012; Mahmud, 2003). In many ways, these dynamic factors have been creating pressure on the older population of Dhaka City. For the unavailability of official statistics, it is not easy to provide details of the status of aged people and their families in Dhaka. Several studies and household surveys convey that around 55% of older parents in Bangladesh live on their arrangement and more than 25% live with their sons. Moreover, approximately 11% of them live with their daughters (Kabir, 1994), which marks a non-conventional joint family system in Bangladeshi society.

The field investigation we conducted in Dhaka city replicates this reality. We found two types of joint families- the majority consisted of a son and his wife, the son's older parents, and children, which illuminated the normative patriarchal family structure. The presence of a new form of the family, consisting of a daughter and her husband, the daughter's biological parents, and children, became apparent in the field. Older couples were found to live with sons' or daughters' families as dependants and family caretakers. The following sections will elaborate on how these older couples reconstituted their day-to-day gender roles and relationships and mark differences (or not) in their life course at their new residential locations.

4. Gender Roles and Division of Labour among Young Couples

The field investigation reveals that the gender roles between married couples vary according to gender identity, and their roles change over time. Seventeen couples who participated in this research had started their married life in a traditional joint family. In contrast, three couples formed a nuclear family following marriage. Between the couples, as a wife, women were held primarily responsible for everyday household chores, taking care of the children, husband, and in-laws, and nursing the sick. As a mother, they had to feed their children, help them with home tasks assigned by educational institutions, take care of them when they were sick, and give them emotional support whenever required. One of the women (W5) talked about her previous family life:

From my adulthood, I was a homemaker. I did not earn money. I took care of my children, maintained the family, and cared for my in-laws. I came to my parent-in-law's household after my marriage. My mother-in-law told me that I was the elder daughter-in-law of that house. So, it was my responsibility to maintain the house. As a married woman, my first duty would be to take care of my family members, especially my husband. Cooking responsibility was also passed to me. I listened to every word of her and followed her orders.

Although a few (three) who participated in this study had a formal job, like the full-time homemakers, they also felt that taking care of the family is the primary responsibility of a wife/mother. They used to complete household responsibilities before going to work and after coming back. Referring to her everyday struggles a woman (W4) said:

I was a banker [in Cumilla]. I had to reach my office at 9 am sharp. Before that, I had to manage every task and duty towards my children. Coming back [from the office], I had to do the rest of my household chores like cooking, cleaning the house, helping the children with education, etc. I had to look after my father-in-law as he was a bedridden patient.

The women we interviewed took these responsibilities as natural because, from their early childhood, they observed their mothers and grandmothers shouldering these responsibilities and were told to follow their path. Thus, families played a vital role in socialising daughters to become good women by bearing domestic responsibilities. Women also enunciated that due to the prevailing social norms and values, they did not think differently and

never expected that husbands would share their reproductive tasks and responsibilities. A woman (W18) stated in this way:

As a homemaker, I had to focus on my reproductive roles immediately. My husband did not have any time to perform such functions. From my childhood, I saw my mother and grandmother do household chores with all their hearts and minds. I followed them and did my duty. It was the social norm that we must have to obey and practice.

Another woman (W9) stated why only she had to perform the reproductive roles:

My husband was a ship manager and had to stay on the ship most of the time. I stayed here with my children and my laws. He could not do anything, but he sent money regularly. I managed our house, our children, and my in-laws. I was pregnant for the first time when he joined this job, and from then, I have taken the responsibilities of educating them, and making decisions about them. I invested my whole time in these responsibilities. I have a BA degree but could not join any job as I had to maintain the house alone.

After growing older, these women were found willing to lessen the burden of younger ones, especially their working daughters, which has been discussed in the later part of the article.

The men we interviewed shared that they started playing the role of family breadwinners from the beginning of their marriage. Therefore, their primary responsibility was to earn money and fulfill manly duties such as buying a home, bearing the living expenditures of biological parents, saving money, and managing the cost of raising children, etc. One of them (M2) recalled:

I was engaged in earning money. I was my family's only breadwinner, so I had to emphasise my productive roles. I had less contribution to my children's education or looking after them. I was there to give money whenever it was needed.

Another man (M16) reflected a similar life story saying:

My most important duty was to earn money and make property. I have three daughters and no son. At a young age, I thought my daughters had to get married, and I had to secure their future.

These men were nevertheless taught from childhood that adult Bangladeshi men must shoulder these responsibilities. Performing as family breadwinners, they

retained high value and were designated as the head of the family or household. These men were not allowed to do any household work by their wives because they did not count them as experts in this sector. Most importantly, they regarded it against cultural tradition. In the words of a man (M20):

Though I remained busy with my job, sometimes I wanted to help my wife by looking after the children, taking care of them, helping with cooking, etc. She never allowed me to do those, always told me I do much hard work in the office, and she has nothing to do without these reproductive tasks. I should take a rest whenever I get time. She would manage the home.

The interviews further indicate that men offered occasional assistance to their wives. Still, it did not mean they nurtured a sense of gender equality or an empathetic attitude towards women. Another older man (M8) stated:

I did not even know about or did not have time to think about the reproductive burden of my wife. My mother always told me to give my concentrate on my job. It was my wife's duty to maintain the house and children, and there was no need to think about it. Sometimes I gave time to my children. I played with them, but I did not do any care work like bathing or feeding them, as these were my wife's tasks.

These 'productive' men were also active in the community sphere, where their wives were less visible because they were busy with mandatory reproductive tasks. Again, this gender division had its root in the patriarchal culture, and it was followed over the generations. Women were restrained from being active in the public domain. The man (M11) added:

I participated actively in community roles, such as I was in the mosque committee and my village's primary school governing body. Our [men's] duty was to work for our community's welfare. All the community welfare group members were men, and they had many responsibilities.

Another man (M1) stated:

Community roles were mainly done by my father and uncles, meaning the older men of our time. In our house, women were not allowed to join community groups as our family was conservative, and in our society, it was considered a men's responsibility. My father was the head of a community group. When he passed away, my *chacha* [uncle] was the head.

Overall, the field findings illuminate the traditional gender roles and division of responsibilities between married couples that were assumed to be essential for the continuation of family life. Men were socialised in a way that drove them to occupy the roles of family breadwinners and community workers, whereas women were held responsible for unpaid family work. Although some women had monetary contributions to the family, it was not highly valued. The normative expectations from men and women created stereotypical images. With ageing, women and men experienced changes to their respective gender roles that affected gender ideologies and everyday practices. We have carried on this discussion in the following section.

Reorganised Gender Roles in the Later Age

The field investigation reveals that married couples experienced changes in their gender roles with ageing. They moved to live with either a married son or a married daughter's family. In both types of families, they were treated as dependent members. With this significant shift, the study participants experienced a substantial change in gender-specific roles, responsibilities, and power positions.

The interviews disclose that compared to men, women encountered fewer changes after growing older. Once they were a wife and mother, and afterwards, they embraced grandmother status. With this change, their burden of family care did not dwindle, but there existed little difference between the two types of families. Those who lived with their son's family had less pressure to do reproductive activities. They had the opportunity of utilising the labour of a daughter-in-law. Mothers-in-law claimed they used to help their daughters-in-law in the kitchen, and both took care of the male family members. However, the burden of taking care of grandchildren primarily went to them. This help had been crucial for the daughters-in-law, especially those heavily occupied with extended office hours. In some cases, older women drew support from husbands to accomplish this task. Such a woman (W1) stated:

My daughter-in-law is doing a job in the bank. During the daytime, I look after my grandchildren. She [daughter-in-law] completes cooking before going to the office. So I can look after my grandchildren. Returning from the office, she does other work, but I sometimes help her. I have to take care of my husband, also. My husband helps me to take care of our grandchildren. He takes the first one to school.

On the contrary, women living with a daughter had heavier workloads than women who lived with a son. The first group of women felt ashamed

of living with a daughter's family (which was, in their words, against the social norm), and they felt more obligated to serve the family members, including the son-in-law, grandchildren, and their own husbands. As a result, compared to the other women (who were living with a son), these women suffered more from time poverty. They had no time for self-care or meeting close relatives, friends, and former colleagues. A woman (W20) described:

I live with my daughter's family. She [my daughter] works in a foreign company and is a manager there. She can give less time to the family. I must do the household chores and take care of my grandchildren. My daughter's parents-in-law sometimes visit for a few days. We live with their elder son. I feel very uncomfortable then. We are living here to support the family but living with their daughter is very derogatory. It is against our cultural tradition.

In a similar vein, a previous working woman (W14) mirrored the perils of old age by saying:

I do many tasks for the household. I have no time for myself. Family members do not allow me to go outside as I am old now, but these tasks are hectic. My daughter is very busy with her job, so her reproductive responsibilities trap me.

According to the field data, older women were well-occupied with traditional gender responsibilities despite facing associated problems. As opposed to this, only seven men had been able to engage them in reproductive work, especially taking care of grandchildren (e.g., dropping and picking them up at schools, home tutoring, spending merry times with them, etc.). Unlike women, older men were in a significant crisis, losing their previous roles and associated prestige and power. After retirement from formal work, men found it extremely challenging to remain home for 24 hours and switch to a subordinate status from the family breadwinner position. One older man (M19) stated:

I am retired now and living with my daughter. I have nothing special to do all day. I go to drop my grandchild at school and take him back. I am a mere aged person in the family now. I have retired from my family's head position.

Our data nevertheless reflect that some men were enjoying their retired life. Those who lived with a son were found to play significant roles outside the family domain. They had more time and interest in activities like mosque

management, social network building, etc. One of them (M5) said:

A son must look after his parents. We brought him up, and now he is responsible for looking after us till our death. My son does not allow me to make any monetary contribution as he handles the family's expenditures. I do not have to worry about it. My son also does not let me do any reproductive tasks, though I do them for my grandchildren, like taking them to school. On the other side, I am accepted as the chief member of the community meetings nowadays because I have experience.

Like the mothers, older fathers also faced stigmas while living with a married daughter and her husband. To retain self-worth, they were more dedicated to adapting to the 'new mode of life' by continuing economic and non-economic contributions to the family. Such an older father (M17) stated:

I have a Madrasha [Islamic Institution] in my village. I earn money from it [an amount from the tuition fees] as I am now living at my daughter and son-in-law's house. It would be shameful if I could not contribute economically to my daughter's house. I care for their young children, and my wife does most of the household work. I have no time to invest in community activities.

The field data reveal some unique experiences. In Bangladeshi society, old age is marked as the end of everything. Still, some women participants had been exploring old age with new opportunities. One of them (W6), who was not an earning person previously, happily shared:

I am doing productive work in my old age as I have some leisure time now. I am teaching Arabic at an Islamic institution in my area. My son and husband permitted me to do so. In the home, I only look after and observe the works of the maidservant. My daughter-in-law manages the household by commanding what to do and when to do it.

One of the male participants (M16), living with a daughter, also expressed a similar view:

I think ageing is an opportunity to live with my family. I was young and busy making money for my family and children. I could not give time to my wife and my children. I can now spend time with my wife, children, and, most importantly, my grandchild, who is only seven years old.

It is clear from the interviews that older men and women who participated in

this study experienced ageing differently depending on their gender identity and different family arrangements. Overall, aged parents within a traditional son-led joint family system had a more relaxed life than those living with their daughters' families. The traditional son-led family system allowed them to retain the feeling of self-worth, whereas the prestige and power of older parents substantially diminished at their daughter's residence. At the same time, between the couples, women shared the caregiving responsibilities of the daughter/daughter-in-law. In contrast, men's responsibilities lessened significantly in later life, and they remained almost idle within closed home boundaries. As conferred below, along with these reconstituted gender roles and responsibilities, gender relationships between older couples enter into a state of flux.

Reconstituted Gender Relations

According to the research participants, changes in the gender roles within the domestic sphere significantly affect the gender relationship between older couples. As reported by them, the previous social context was different, which broadly endorsed that a married woman should be placed under the control of her husband. That is why men were the key decision-makers and the head of the family, and women were bound to obey their every instruction. A man (M1) shared his early-life gender perception and dominant position:

I took the significant decisions of the households and other vital issues as I knew more about everything. My wife could do only household chores and family care. She was not capable of making decisions about important issues.

Such ideologies and practices strongly prevailed among some older men whom we interviewed. They adapted to little changes, although their life circumstances changed significantly. A man (M2) who was living with his son's family said:

At this age, my wife is busier with her reproductive tasks. My daughter-in-law is also doing the household chores. My wife takes care of me; she serves me food and medicine from time to time. She listens to my words. My daughter-in-law will not obey her husband if she does not listen to my words. I saw my mother, who followed my father. I cannot help my wife in the kitchen. I have never done this kind of work and do not want to do it. These are feminine tasks. A wife is always bound to follow her husband. It is our social learning, and this is how our relationship continues.

It is reflected in the interviews that aged men living with their sons possessed a dominant attitude. On the other hand, their wives were under pressure to manage routine household work and two authoritative men – the husband and the adult son. In the words of the wife (W2) of the man mentioned above:

My husband remained the same as he was in his youth. At this age, he does not permit me to do anything according to my wish. Another authoritative man, my son, has been added to my life. He [her son] also makes decisions for me. Sometimes I feel he [her husband] never has feelings for me. Till now, I must ask him before I spend some money. It has become more severe than before. He does not allow me to go outside as I have to take care of him. Our relationship is as discriminatory as it was in the previous life phase.

On the contrary, the older couple living with their daughter had different experiences. In the family led by a son-in-law, an older man failed to find the scope to exercise decision-making power or share it with another man. Therefore, these older men felt powerless and helpless, which developed an empathetic attitude. It was evident that these men were more willing to lessen the daughter's workload and support the wife. An older man (M16) said:

Living in this family makes me understand the importance of my wife's responsibilities. Before shifting to this home, I never understood her position and how she constantly felt under someone, following someone's words. I can relate to my present situation with my wife. For this reason, I have become a friend of my wife now. I talk with her; I want to know her thoughts and feelings. I help her in the kitchen. I do not go outside; I stay with her and share her responsibilities. It has made our relationship happier than before.

The woman (W16) from this couple also narrated happily:

Nowadays, my husband has totally changed. He became my good friend. I do not feel any gap in our relationship now. He respects my decisions. Whenever I want to go to my relative's house, he tries to take me there. As our daughter works, we cannot go all the time. He helps me in the kitchen. He talks to me. He helps me in taking care of our grandchildren. He does not impose his decisions on me. We are happy now though we miss our own family- our house. However, we are happy now.

The findings of this section demonstrate that family composition plays a vital role in shaping gender relationships between couples. The traditional practice of living with a son allowed the older parents, particularly men, to exercise power and maintain a hierarchical relationship with their marital partners. In this family setting, older women were less privileged and under the control of two men (husband and son). The findings also mirrored that with advancing age, the newly evolved practice of living with a married daughter instead of a son resulted in growing more gender-egalitarian relationships between older couples.

5. Discussion

The above findings reflect the basic tenets of role theory, leading to the understanding that the established gender norms shape women's and men's gender-specific roles and responsibilities within the domestic sphere. As expected, this role division endorses a hierarchical gender relationship, leading men to rule over women. The family remains a key institution in creating and sustaining that asymmetrical gender relation (Connell, 1987), normatively followed over the generations (Lindsey, 2016)

The findings reiterate that broader socio-political and individual life circumstances may trigger shifting gender norms, expectations, and relationships (Arber et al., 2003; Connell, 1987; LeBlanc, 2020). In line with this view, the findings suggest that married couples embrace significant changes in their respective gender roles and responsibilities under new family arrangements. Like many other studies on older people, detailed accounts of everyday life mirror numerous gender-specific challenges that appear in the context of old-age vulnerabilities (Arber et al., 2003). Simultaneously, for a few, old age opens new avenues of life to be explored.

The narratives regarding revised gender roles reflect a significant gender difference. Compared to men, women adapted to little changes. With few exceptions, they were engrossed with typical feminine roles and responsibilities in their later age (Fin et al., 2017). In contrast, the new life phase made men less potent than before; they could no longer comply with the ideals of masculinity that patriarchal societies expect (see Meadows & Davidson, 2006). The study shows that powerless status sometimes equates men with women; they tend to develop more egalitarian relations with them. Still, as also noticed by scholars (e.g., Sullivan, 2006), men's reconstituted gender roles do not always lead to ideological transformation and improved gender practices within the domestic sphere.

On the other hand, changes reflected in this study are associated with the attributes of a rapidly changing urban society. In the context of women's growing participation in paid work, high living costs, and unplanned urban development, living with a daughter instead of a son mirrors a practice of 'normlessness' (Lindsey, 2016). However, older couples' continuing struggles and negative feelings in such families advise that the new social system requires more time to be developed and widely accepted.

6. Conclusion

This article is about the changes in gender roles and relationships that happen due to the ageing of married couples. It borrows the role theory and includes the lived experiences of older urban couples who reside with a son or daughter's family to gather deep insights into gender inequalities, divides, struggles, and vulnerabilities that sustain in the domestic sphere through everyday practices. The paper also underscores the socio-cultural factors that trigger couples to revise or replicate stereotypical gender roles and relationships over the life course.

Based on the analysis of field data, this paper argues for an acceptance that change is inevitable as society progresses and individuals become biologically fragile. At the same time, it forwards that traditional norms and values persist in a society that allows the continuation of conventional gender roles and hierarchical power relations that people routinely perform in daily life. However, we should be cautious while making such claims because this study is based only on Dhaka city, and the number of participants is small.

Despite counting this limitation, this article conveys a few recommendations for the welfare of older urban people. First, the state should ensure the objective well-being of the older population. Therefore, special health care services, residential facilities (old homes), and financial aid (pension schemes) should be offered to older people. In this regard, planners should pay special attention to the older population's needs while sketching city and town plans. Moreover, the family and community members should be motivated to respect senior citizens. It can be done by making policies, implementing laws³ to protect older people's rights, and portraying the strengths of the joint family system before mass people through media campaigns. Finally, older women and men should act positively to retain their values and happiness. They should hold self-worth, nurture gender equality within the family and enhance participation in domestic/community activities.

³ In 2013, the Maintenance of Parents Act was enacted in Bangladesh to give maintenance to parents by the children.

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