

Environmental Wellbeing of Older Adults Living with Dementia: Facilitators and Barriers in Residential Settings in Dhaka

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ABSTRACT

Persons living with dementia (PLWDs) show increasing trend all over the world. World Health Organization recognizes dementia as a public health priority. However, environmental wellbeing of community-dwelling older adults living with dementia received little attention in ageing studies. This study dives deep into identifying the barriers and facilitators of safety, cognition, and wayfinding as perceived by older persons living with dementia in residential environments of Dhaka – a high-density megacity in South Asia. Walk along interviews with 15 PLWDs (aged 60 and above) were conducted followed by a 16-item environmental audit of their residential settings. Analytical findings reveal that spaces such as balconies and rooms with large windows, pleasant views, and natural light are favored by PLWDs. PLWDs spend their leisure times mostly by watching television, reading, and talking with family members. Environmental concerns frequently mentioned by PLWDs included slippery bathrooms or toilets, hazardous furniture layout, unrecognizable elevator buttons, and stair cases without hand-rails. Many caregivers restrict PLWDs from kitchens due to safety risks. Outdoor visits were infrequent for the majority of PLWDs. Most PLWDs were accompanied by caregivers while they visited doctors, restaurants, and markets. Findings from the environmental audits revealed that PLWDs' residential settings lacked safety features (e.g., grab bars in toilets, fire safety measures in kitchens, and slip-resistant flooring) more compared to cognition (e.g., color contrasts, memory aids) and wayfinding (e.g., signage) features. Findings from the study suggest renewed attention to small-scale and person-centric retrofitting of PLWDs' residential settings.

Keywords: Older persons living with dementia, wellbeing, safety, cognition, wayfinding