

Growing Fire Incidents in Bangladesh: An urgent Call for Health Policy Makers

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Dear Editor,

Bangladesh has been experiencing an increasing number of fire incidents in recent years, causing significant damage to residential houses, business establishments, and factories. The recent fire outbreak in Banga Bazar, a prominent clothing market, resulted in the loss of almost 50,000 jobs and caused an economic loss of over 700 crore taka (65 million USD). Despite the absence of fatalities, the fire's impact on people's mental health and the country's economy is significant. The main causes of these incidents are the crowded population, low safety standards in factories and industries, poorly constructed buildings, and the lack of adequate fire safety precautions. The public's lack of knowledge and instruction on fire safety is also a significant concern. The government and public authorities need to take prompt action to prevent such incidents, including stricter safety regulations, the installation of appropriate fire safety equipment, and more significant public awareness campaigns. Additionally, steps must be taken to ensure the mental wellbeing of fire-affected people and firefighters who are often traumatized by witnessing the destruction of such events.

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Dear editor,

Bangladesh possesses a significant risk of fire incidents due to its crowded population. For the past several years, there have been numerous fire incidents here. These incidents are more common in our country during the ongoing summer season. Business establishments, factories and residential houses are heavily damaged by fire annually. Carelessness of the residents are the main triggering factors for these fire outbreaks. Bangladesh has witnessed many tragic fire incidents like Nimtoli, Chawkbazar, Fulbaria and Chittagong EPZ fire incidence. It has taken a huge toll in terms of mortality and economy.^[1] But recently the fire in Banga Bazar, one of the prominent clothing markets has put the country in a deep concern on the security of their life and the safety from these types of incidents. The incident has resulted zero fatalities. But it caused almost 50,000 workers to lose their jobs by burning almost 3000 shops. It contributed to a significant economic loss of more than 700 crore taka (65 million USD). Almost 50 units of fire service along with military and air forces were needed to stop this fire.^[2] Bangladesh's health and public policy decision-makers need to take prompt action in response to the rising number of fire occurrences in the nation. People's mental health is in danger, and their worry for their lives and the lives

of those close to them has caused them to experience severe depression. It is high time the policy makers took any effective precautions to prevent these types of incidents. Strict implementations of the policy on market and buildings making and the proper manner to escape from this type of incidents should be done. Along with that, steps must be taken to ensure the mental wellbeing of the people affected by this fire and the fire fighters as well who watched the cruel face of fire destruction.

Natural disasters usually affect a group of people who loose almost all of their belongings and family members. Fortunately, this recent fire outbreak has not caused any fatalities. But it has destroyed the source of income of the family who had a shop in that place. The fire burnt down almost all of the shops that area. The businessman lost their entire capital and goods kept inside the shop. Among these circumstances, depression will be a common scenario among the fire affected people. Suicidal attempts or thoughts may also be seen among the people. This fire has not only affected the shop owners of Banga Bazar but also the entire country. Bangladeshi people are very much emotionally connected to the affected people through social sites and news channels. They are deeply saddened by this incident. Further, they are fearful about their own lives as well. Insecurities and constant fear have grasped the entire people of Bangladesh. Hence, long term actions should be taken to ensure the mental health balance of fire affected people and the entire Bangladeshi population. One of the main causes of the rising number of fire occurrences is the absence of adequate fire safety precautions, such as sprinkler systems, fire alarms, and fire hydrants. The cries of business partners in the Dhaka Bangabazar Market fire must be heard in the open since we have not yet been able to become attentive.^[3] The main contributors of these occurrences have been recognized as Bangladesh's crowded population, low safety standards in factories and industries, and poorly constructed buildings. Another significant concern is the general public's lack of knowledge and instruction on fire safety, particularly employees in commercial and industrial settings. These triggering factors are applicable not only for Bangladesh but also for the most countries of South Asia like India, Pakistan etc. These fire catastrophes have caused fatalities, serious injuries, and large financial losses. Beyond the immediate harm, these disasters have an impact on the emotional and physical health of all involved, particularly the first responders.^[4]

The rising number of fire accidents in Bangladesh is a serious issue that has to be addressed right away by the government and public authorities. Fire safety has to be given top priority by the government as it has grown to be a significant public health issue.^[5] The major causes of the rising number of fire occurrences in the nation include a lack of effective fire safety precautions, poor building techniques, and insufficient safety regulations in factories and enterprises. The public has to be made more aware of the issue, tougher safety rules need to be put in place, and buildings, businesses, and industries need to have the appropriate fire safety equipment installed. Following warnings from Bangladesh's fire service and civil defense, the government should take urgent legal action against those who are failing to take significant steps (BFSCD).^[6] Apart from preventive measures against fire, emphasis must be given to the mental health of people. These sorts of incidents create a tremendous negative impact on the mental health nationwide. This incident will put a stain on the public health authorities which is already struggling to cope with COVID-19 pandemic. Concerned authorities must take short term steps to provide immediate relief as well as long term steps to restore the mental balance of the affected people and fire fighters. It is high time for Bangladesh took action and addressed the issue of fire safety and mental health of the disaster affected people.

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