

Child Labor in the Harmful Work and Concerned Issues: Bangladesh Perspective

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Abstract:

Child labor, a sheer reality in Bangladesh like many other developing countries, is one of the major socio-economic problems in the country. The working children, as a socio-economic group, happened to be the most disadvantaged because for survival of self and family. They are forced to work for living, sacrificing their childhood along with their future. Studies revealed that one in every six children in Bangladesh was working children. The gravity of the situation led my initiative to study on “Prevalence of Child Labor in Harmful Work” in the work area at Dhaka, Khulna and Kurigram. The study looked into one of the key aspects of child protection – prevalence of harmful child labor using the definition of children and harmful labor. The study also generated baseline information on major characteristics of child labor including income and household dependency on work/income from the children.

Keywords: Child labor, Harmful work, Concern Issue.

1. Introduction:

Bangladesh is the home of 6.6 million working children, accounting for more than 5% of the world's working child population numbering 120 million. National Sample Survey of Child Labor in Bangladesh defined child laborers as children in the age group of 5-14 years who were found to be working during the survey reference period (preceding 12 months of the day of survey). (Note-1) A large segment of the labor force in Bangladesh is engaged in informal activities, and child labor is a notable feature of the growing informal labor situation. They are found working as garbage pickers, shoeshine boys, electroplaters workers, metal workers, leather workers, brick breakers, coolies, porters, motor transport helpers, restaurant boys, domestic workers, vendors on streets or waysides. Those who are fortunate live in some slum and poor residence area, for others, addresses are on the footpath days or night, in rainy season or in winter. Many of them work 48 hours a week on an average, earning less than 500 taka per month. This study presents the analysis made to estimate the prevalence of harmful child labor on the basis of information collected on 15 discrete indicators namely (1) duration of work (2) no wage, (3) irregular wage, (4) minimum daily wage, (5) leave, (6) break for lunch, (7) break for education, (8) medical care, (9) Toilet, (10) safe drinking water, (11) safety measure, (12) physical risks, (13) verbal abuse, (14) physical abuse, and (15) sexual abuse. For the convenience of description, all these indicators related to workplaces were grouped into five major categories namely, (i) duration of work, (ii) wage (iii) status of basic facility, (iv) physical risk, and (v) abuse of any kind. Besides, the study also focuses on associated issues of the harmful child labor such as distribution of harmful child labor across the major occupations, its relative share with child labor, working children and all children in the sample households.

2. Meaning of Harmful Child Labor and its Sectoral Scenario in Bangladesh:

According to ILO Convention defines harmful work as *'work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children* (Note-2). The Government of Bangladesh ratified the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labor. The Convention calls for *'immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor as a matter of urgency.'* The children work in vulnerable conditions, exposed to hazards including street crime, violence, drugs, sexual abuse, toxic fumes and substances without adequate safety protection, carrying heavy loads and using high speed machinery. Child trafficking, sexual exploitation, physical torture, low payment for work are common among poor children (Note-03). A large numbers of child sex workers (prostitutes) work in brothels. UNICEF estimated that there were 10,000 child prostitutes work in the country, but other estimates show the figure as high as 29,000. According to human rights groups, 341 children were abducted, nearly 1,401 suffered unnatural deaths, and more than 660 children fell victim to serious abuses such as rape, sexual harassment, torture, and acid attack during the last year (Note-04). In rural areas, working boys spent 79% of their time in agriculture and 5% in household work. Girls spent 71% of their time in housework, 25% in agriculture and 4% in non-agricultural work (Note-05). In the construction industry, children are used in stone breaking. It is estimated that 30% of construction workers are children (Note-06). Another study shows that, about 58% of the total work force in bidi (cigarette) industry is children. The proportion of child domestic workers in Bangladesh under the age of ten is 24% (Note-07). Estimates for Dhaka alone range from 200,000 to one million, almost all are girls (Note-08). There are around 100,000 waste collectors of various kinds in Dhaka, combining through the rubbish dumps and wandering the streets with sacks over their shoulders. Up to one third of these are girls (Note-09).

In the small factories, children aged 5-15 years accounted for 40% of the total workforce and 5-14 years age group made up only 26% of municipal population. Factories with the highest proportion of child workers were candle making (71%), kite-making (58%), and electronics (58%) (Note-10). According to Bangladesh Institute of Labor Studies (BILS), nearly 2,000 child workers of the 10-14 age groups are working in the ship breaking industries. Around 10% of the garment work force was under age, which would have entailed about 80,000 children. Out of these 80,000 children, 10,500 were children between 8-14 years and most of them were girls. (Note-11). Tanneries and other chemical factories also use child labor. The child workers have to come in close contact with chemicals like sulphuric acid, sodium sulphide and chromium while working in the tanneries. The contamination from these chemicals causes fever, cough, headache, gastric, skin diseases and other diseases to the workers, especially the children. The ILO under its IPEC has identified 447 child workers under 15 working in 130 tanneries in Dhaka's Hazaribagh area and providing them non-formal education and training, so that they could quit the tanneries. The children, who are working at match factories, construction sites, bidi factories and houses, are the worst sufferers in terms of working conditions, wages, physical and mental pressure, hygiene and abuse (Note-12). The child laborers are forced to do non-stop work to separate fish from the nets, standing in the saline water for hours together. They also carry the fishes from the trawlers to the farms. The boys of poor families are easy prey to the brokers, who pay a small amount to their families in advance and also promise good salary and suitable working condition. But the boys find the real situation quite different. The captive child laborers are also given inadequate food and there is no bed for them to sleep. If the boys fail to work as per the will of the sardar (lord), they undergo severe physical torture.

Bangladesh is one of the world's leading garment exporters. With no access to education and few skills, the children had few alternatives to escape their crushing poverty. Many went looking for new jobs in stone-crushing, street hustling and prostitution - all more hazardous and exploitative than garment making. Based on the operational definition of harmful child labor by SC UK, the children of age group between 5 and 13 years, who work over 5 hours a day or the children of age group between 14 and 17 years, who work over 8 hours a day - are considered as harmful child labor. But even if the children of age group between 5 and 13 years working less than 5 hours a day, it can also be considered as harmful child labor if they do not get paid for their work, or if wages are paid irregularly or promised and not paid, or if wages are below 15 taka a day or the equivalent of one meal, or they are subject to physical, sexual and verbal abuse in the workplace, or if employers provide no basic facilities, such as leave, breaks

and conditions for health, hygiene and safety, or the work is dangerous and lead to short and long-term illness. These are also applicable for the children of age group between 13 and 17 years working less than 8 hours a day.

3. Objectives of the Study:

The key objective of the study is to find out the prevalence of harmful child labor. The specific objectives are: (a) to estimate the prevalence of harmful child work, and (b) to quantify household dependency on the income of children.

4. Methodology:

This study describes all pertinent methodology and implementation issues.

4.1 Study Area: The study is confined to and covers all relevant study areas. It has covered five sample areas from different places of the country covering 2 City corporations, 1 municipality and 2 rural unions scattered over 3 districts under Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi divisions. Among the districts, Khulna and Kurigram has both rural and urban features as opposed to Dhaka having only urban. Of the total 6 study areas, 4 were selected from urban locations and rests from rural locations. Although the study was confined to limited areas, the survey has generated useful information and insights, supported by qualitative data

Insert Figure 1 here

4.2 Study Design: Both quantitative and qualitative techniques were used to collect information on selected indicators related to the study. Here we envisaged the study in three major blocks, which are depicted in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 here

5. Analytic Approaches to Child Labor and Harmful Child Labor:

The following steps were followed to analyze prevalence of child labor and practices of harmful child labor. First, the Prevalence of Child Labor (PCL) has been defined as follows:

$$PCL = \frac{\text{Number of child labor (5-17 yrs) observed in the sample}}{\text{Total number of observed sample children (5-17 yrs)}} \%$$

95% Confidence Interval (CI) has been constructed for this indicator.

Now, every type of child labor is not counted as harmful. However, according to study indicators of the Save the Children, UK, child labor belonging to one or more of the pre-determined indicators is termed as harmful child labor.

Thus, in order to study the scenarios of harmful child labor, the following strategy was adopted:

Combinatorial Analysis to Assess Severity (harmfulness) of Child Labor:

1. Child labor being harmful one (HCL)

$$HCL = n(I_1) + n(I_2) + \dots + n(I_k) - n(I_1 \cap I_2) - n(I_1 \cap I_3) - \dots + n(I_1 \cap I_2 \cap I_3 \dots \cap I_k)$$

Where, $n(I_k)$ = number of children in k^{th} harmful indicator

$n(I_1 \cap I_2)$ = number of children having both 1 and 2 indicators of harmfulness and so on.

Above formulation provides number of sample working children having at least one indicator of child labor being harmful. Prevalence of Harmful Child Labor (PHCL) is defined as follows:

$$PHCL = \frac{HCL}{\text{Number of child labor in the sample}}$$

5.1 Prevalence of Harmful Child Labor by Major Criteria:

The study has made an attempt to estimate the prevalence of child labor in harmful work as well its distribution across the various categories related to harmful work. Almost all the child labors (99.4%) were reported as harmful in the study areas (Figure 3).

Insert Figure 3 here

Substantial variation has also been noticed across the major categories. The highest proportion of child labor, (little less than 99%) was identified harmful in terms of a major category labeled as ‘lack of basic facilities’, which includes leave/holiday, break for lunch and recreation, health and hygiene, protective measures, education. This was followed by ‘prolonged working hours’ at work places (80%). The stated proportion of harmful labor in terms of other major categories like ‘abuse’, ‘physical risk’ and ‘daily wage’ were also high with 50%, 42% and 38% respectively. The extremely high prevalence of harmful child labor may be attributed to two factors, (1) child labor *per se* is harmful, and (2) the definition (indicator) of harmfulness may be much liberal in the context of Bangladesh (e.g. lack of health facility, lack of safety measures, etc).

5.2 Degree of Harmful Child Labor among the Working Children:

Among child labor there was acute prevalence of harmful child labor. As we notice in Figure 3, about 37% child labor had to undergo 6 or 7 types (components) of harmful child labor. Even, 13% child labor faced 9 different types of harmful labor. We also noticed in Figure 5 that 47% of child labor regularly faced at least 6 different types of harmful works.

Insert Figure 4 here

About 8% of child labor faced even 75% of indicators of harmful child labor (Figure 6). On the whole we can assert that among child labor, substantial proportions were doing harmful labor regularly.

In order to have some idea about the extent of harmful child labor in the target population we have constructed few 95% Confidence Intervals (CI) as shown below.

95% CI for at least 2 Indicators: Upper Limit (UL) = 99%, Lower Limit (LL) = 97%

95% CI for at least 7 Indicators: Upper Limit (UL) = 55%, Lower Limit (LL) = 39%

Insert Figure 5 here

Above two 95% Confidence Intervals convey a signal of severe scenario of harmful child labor. In the population it can be expected that 97%-99% child labor faced at least two types of harmful labor. It is also clear that in the target population there is high chance that among 39%-55% of child labor there are at least 7 different types (50%) of harmful labor.

Insert Figure 6 here

5.3 Distribution of Harmful Work across the Sub-criteria:

For the convenience of description, some of the major criteria like daily wage, physical risks and abuse were further broken down into several sub-criteria as illustrated in Figures 7, 8 and 9 respectively. Under the major category like daily wage, it appeared that relatively higher proportions of works (27%) were marked harmful due to low wage lies with the sub-criteria termed as ‘minimum daily wage’.

Insert Figure 7 here

The information in support of harmful work was comparatively less in remaining two sub criteria stated as ‘irregular wage’ (14%) and ‘no wage’ (10%)

As regard to another major criterion – ‘lack of basic facility’ at work place, the finding of higher frequency of harmful work (84%) was largely detected in terms of each of the sub criteria stated as ‘no break for education’ and ‘lack of safety measure’ at work places. Second most appearance (75%) of harmful work was identified in accordance to the sub criterion identified as ‘lack of facility for medical care’.

Insert Figure 8 here

Determination of harmful work across the other sub criteria like 'lack of toilet facility', 'safe drinking water facility', 'leave facility' and 'break for lunch and recreation' varied substantially. According to the sub criteria stated as 'lack of safe drinking water' and 'lack of toilet facility' at work place, the prevalence of harmful work was 44% and 40% respectively. Least prevalence of harmful work was noticed under the sub category of lack of break for lunch and recreation, merely stand as 18%.

Insert Figure 9 here

With respect to the major category like 'abuse', the identification of harmful work was largely acknowledged due to frequent occurrence of the sub criterion denoted by verbal abuse (47.4%) in work places. The exposure to other stated forms of abuses at work places were relatively less reported and denoted by sub criteria like physical and sexual abuse. Abuse of any form, be it verbal, physical and sexual were considered, as harmful child labor and demonstrated proportions of physical abuse and sexual abuse were 14% and 4% respectively.

5.4 Percentage Share of Harmful Child Labor:

Figure 10 portrays the harmful child labor in terms of its relative share with 'all children', 'working children' and 'child labor'. The proportion of harmful child labor against the total child population, working children and child labor were estimated and the projected share asserted as 40%, 59% and little higher than 99% respectively. The proportions of boys engaged in harmful works were almost double compared to the corresponding girls working at different places.

Insert Figure 10 here

5.5 Harmful Child Labor by Type of Payment:

Overall 76% of all child labors received their payment regularly from their employer. Of the rest, nearly 14% received their payment at an irregular way and virtually 10% not received any payment at all against there services offered to the employers (Table 1). The prevalence of 'irregular payment' and 'no payment' were noted more in rural locations compared to the urban. As regards to gender composition, regular payments among the girls are relatively less than that among the boys, or in other words, the irregular payment is comparatively higher among the girls than their counterpart boys.

Insert Table 1 here

5.6 Harmful Child Labor by Amount of Payment per Day:

As regards to daily wage, it appeared that almost 20% of the children working for less than 5 hours received payment less than Taka 15 or the equivalent of one meal and almost 17% of the children working over 8 hours received payment less than Taka 30 or equivalent of two meals considered harmful.

Insert Table 2 here

5.7 Harmful Child Labor by Presence of Facility for Medical Treatment at Work Place:

On the whole, more than 75% of child laborer expressed that there was no facility for medical care at their work places. Similarly, on an average there was no facility for safe drinking water (44%) and toilet (41%) facility at work places (Figure 11) as stated by the respondents at the time of interview?

Insert Figure 11 here

5.8 Child Labor by Reported Abuse at Their Work Place:

The interview of the parents as well as available child laborers revealed that about half of the child laborers were exposed to verbal abuse at their work places. Though the reported occurrences of verbal abuse were almost equal at urban and rural locations but it happened more with male child laborer (54%) compared to the females child laborers (34%). *'The supervisor scolds me if we sit down on the job because (he thinks) our work becomes too slow when we are sitting. Sometimes, he scolds me in the name of my parents,'* – reports a 15 year old garment worker in Dhaka.

About 14% mentioned of verbal abuses. We also found that different types of physical abuse in different occupations such as, slap, hair pulling, etc. Location wise, the occurrence of physical abuses at work places were reported higher at urban locations (15%) than in the rural locations (9%). As regard to gender composition, exposures to physical abuses were relatively less among female child laborers compared to their male counterpart. The event of sexual abuses were reported least and accounted as low as 4%.

Insert Table 3 here

Due to unfavorable nature of our social construction, sexual harassment are highly under reported, since female are very shy to disclose any information in this regard. Moreover, there lies a threat for loss of job and for unmarried girl decreases the marriage possibility. Reported episodes of sexual abuses were mainly confined in work places located in urban areas.

Insert Table 4 here

Discussion with the child laborers further explored their understanding and perception towards harmful and non-harmful work as follows:

Harmful Work	Non-harmful Work
All those works which are difficult to do for us (children). In other words, "whatever we have to do beyond our physical capacity and which causes physical injury or illness are harmful to us".	All those works, which we can perform along with <i>our</i> study spontaneously with our own accords as well as free from any external and/or psychological pressure.

6. Recommendations:

Child labor is a sheer reality in Bangladesh. They are involved in harmful work and also under most unhygienic conditions. Yet the prevailing socio-economic and legal conditions do not permit outright elimination of child labor overnight. Experiences indicate that the elimination of child labor from one particular sector may culminate in an increase in child labor in another. Moreover, it is difficult to force the working children to attend full-time schools since the lost income is crucial to the household. Under these circumstances, government as well as international and national NGOs, education institutions, local administration, media should come forward to formulate a comprehensive plan for gradual elimination of child labor. A comprehensive study needs to be conducted to get the employers perspective (also a list of incentives) on child labor, harmful work, ensuring basic facility at work place, skill development of working children.

7. Concluding Observations:

Determinants of Child labor in Bangladesh are multifarious. Two factors are the major determinants of child labor in Bangladesh. *One* is supply factor in which poverty is the most important factor for the prevalence of child labor in the country. They contribute around 20-25% of family income. Since poor households spend most of their income on food, the earnings of working children are crucial for their survival. Usually, poor parents fail to appreciate the long-term value of education, instead of for the short-term economic gains of child labor. It is often argued that where the alternative to child work is starvation, perhaps, child's rights might include the right to feed oneself and one's family, be it through paid work. In poor families, parents as well as children consider employment in certain occupations (work in engineering workshop, metal factory) as a rare opportunity to learn employable skills. In this way, work becomes an alternative to them with more practical value than the traditional primary education. Every year, natural calamities such as floods, cyclones, river erosion causes many people homeless and helpless. Poor families can hardly cope with these. Moreover, abandonment or divorce, illness or death of parents (or adult members of a family) trap children of such family early entry in the world of work. *Second* one is demand factor. The lower cost of employing child workers is often cited to explain the demand for child labor. Employers are also tempted to hire children because they are much less aware of their rights and less likely to organize against

exploitation. As compared to the adults, they have weak bargaining power, and can easily be punished physically, and dismissed. To the employers, they are trustworthy, moreover, they can do monotonous work and are less likely to be absent from work.

These two factors of child labor urge them to engage various activities which ultimately become the harmful work for child. Our suggestions mentioned above in this regard could be the magnet in easing the harms of child in the working places. In fact, concerned authorities and organizations (national and international organizations) who are working on child have to come forward for making place convenient in the working place of child by which child or child labor could be free from all types harmful works in Bangladesh.

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Notes:

Note-01: National Sample Survey of Child Labor in Bangladesh: 1995-96 and 2002-03

Note-02: Article 32 of ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Note-03: Bangladeshi children are smuggled across the border by the traffickers and then sold to buyers in the neighboring countries of the sub continent or the Middle East. In different locations of the city of Karachi in Pakistan, such as Karimabad and Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Bangladeshi girls are sold and bought in the name of marriage or under the cover of religion and morality. They move from one lord to another and end up as slaves for life. Bangladeshi boys are sent to Dubai and other destinations in the Gulf to be used as jockeys in the camel race. Though there is restriction on using children less than 10 years of age in the camel race, children as young as 4 or 5 years old are exploited. Sometimes poor families do not hesitate to give away their children on an advance payment of only about US\$ 500 and an assurance of future employment for their children in the Middle East (Hasan, 2006).

Note-04: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2004

Note-05: Ahmed, A. and Quasem, M.A., 1991, *Child Labour in Bangladesh*. Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Dhaka. AND Stalker, P., 1996, *Child Labour in Bangladesh: A Summary of Recent Investigations*. UNICEF, Dhaka

Note-06: ICFTU, *No Time to Play*, 1996

Note-07: ILO, Md. Omar Farrukh, *Report on Child Labour in Bidi Industry in Rangpur District*, June 2001

Note-08: Stalker, P. 1996. *Child labour in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: UNICEF.

Note-09: Pelto, B., 1995, *Questions and Answers Concerning Under-aged Garment Workers and the Prospect of Schooling Program for them*. UNICEF, Dhaka)

Note-10: Karmaker, R., 1994, Child Workers in Informal Sector: A Dhaka City Scenario. Radda Barnen, Dhaka.

Note-11: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, 1992, Child Labour in Bangladesh, Dhaka.

Note-12: Barkat, A., et al 2007: Baseline Survey on Prevalence of Violence and Abuse Against Children at Family, Community and Institutions. Save the Children UK, Bangladesh, Dhaka.

Table 1: Harmful Child labor by type of payment

Type of payment	Boys			Girls			Both		
	Urban	Rural	All	Urban	Rural	All	Urban	Rural	All
Regular	79.3	68.42	77.2	76.6	50.00	73.6	78.3	64.0	76.0
Irregular	9.8	21.05	11.9	17.0	16.67	17.0	12.4	20.0	13.6
No salary	11.0	10.53	10.9	6.4	33.33	9.4	9.3	16.0	10.4
N	82	19	101	47	6	53	129	25	154

Source: Created by authors based on survey result

Table 2: Harmful Child labor by amount of payment per day

Amount of payment per day in Taka	Boys			Girls			Both		
	Urban	Rural	All	Urban	Rural	All	Urban	Rural	All
Working < 5 hrs									
< 15 Tk.	25.5	12.5	22.5	46.2	66.7	48.3	32.1	21.1	19.5
≥ 15 Tk.	74.5	87.5	77.5	53.8	33.3	51.7	67.9	78.9	45.5
Working > 8 hrs									
< 30 Tk.	33.3	100.0	40.0	61.9	33.3	58.3	45.8	66.7	16.9
≥ 30 Tk.	66.7	--	60.0	38.1	66.7	41.7	54.2	33.3	18.2

Source: Created by authors based on survey data

Table 3: Child labor by reported abuse at their work place

Abuse	Boys			Girls			Both		
	Urban	Rural	All	Urban	Rural	All	Urban	Rural	All
Verbal	57.5	52.6	56.5	33.9	33.3	33.9	47.0	50.0	47.4
Physical	17.8	10.5	16.3	11.9	--	11.3	15.2	9.1	14.3
Sexual	5.5	--	4.3	3.4	--	3.2	4.5	--	3.9
N	73	19	92	59	03	62	132	22	154

Source: Created by authors based on survey data

Table 4: Key indicators of harmful work as perceived by the working children

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Working with electricity 2. Works associated with physical contact to acid, chemical and/or corrosive 3. Works related to exposure of persistent smoke and/or fumes 4. Works with sharp and pointed instrument 5. Works lead to physical injury 6. Works lead to short or long term illness 7. Forced to work during illness 8. Cooking or working with fire 9. Working without protective measure 10. Operation of heavy machine 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Works require excessive physical strength 12. Works with fragile sharpened materials 13. Works create barrier to attend school 14. Works related to abuse of any kind 15. Works without salary or payment 16. Inadequate salary or payment 17. Irregular salary or payment 18. Continuous work without adequate rest 19. Works related to excessive load
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Figure 1: Conceptual framework of harmful child labor

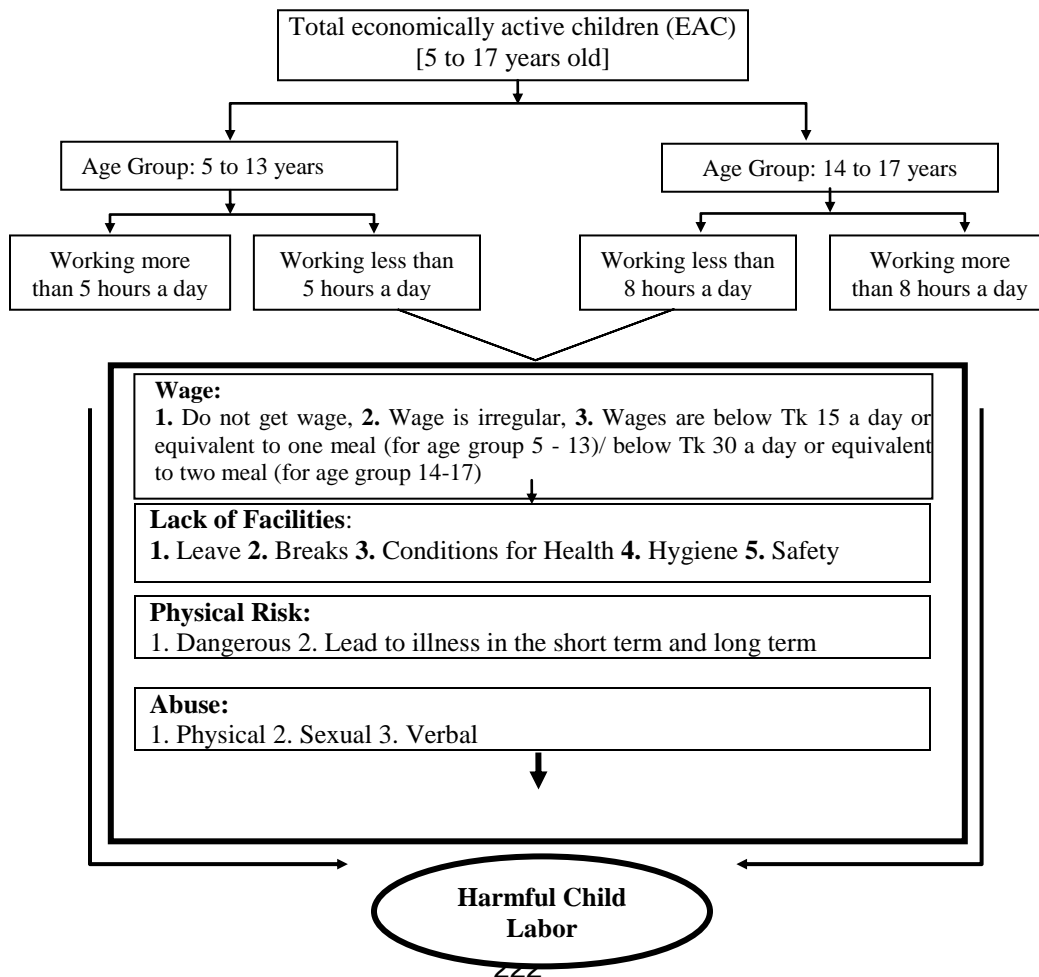


Figure 2: Study Blocks

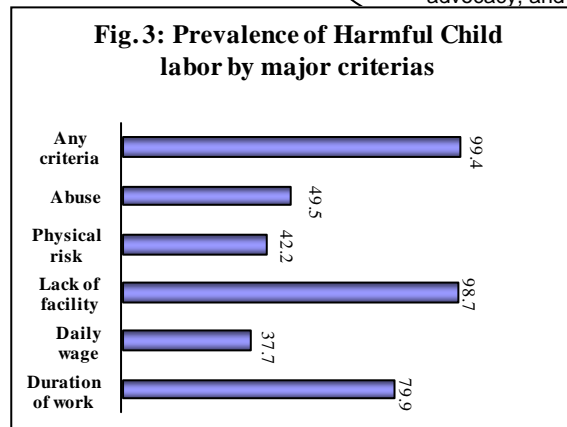
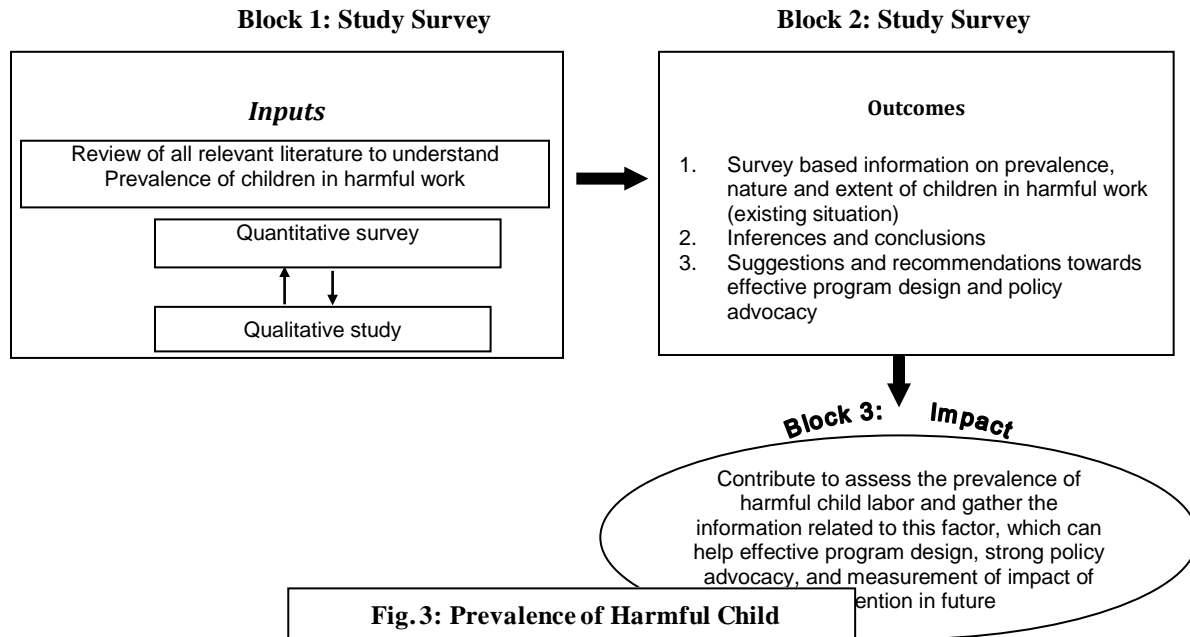


Fig. 4: Percentage distribution by degree of harmful child labor

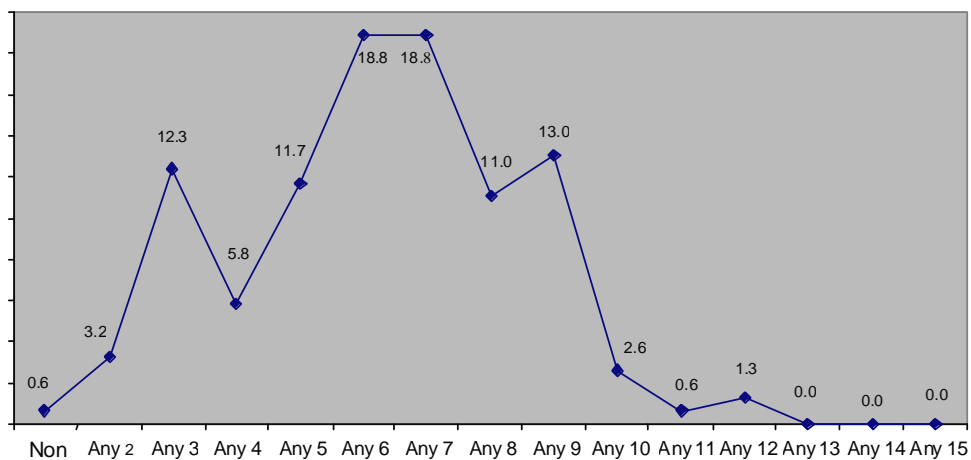


Fig. 5: Percentage distribution by lower bound (degree) of harmful child labor

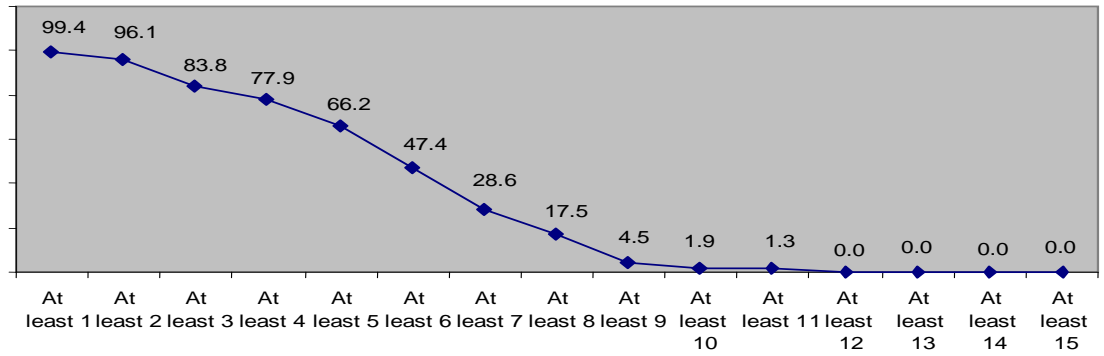
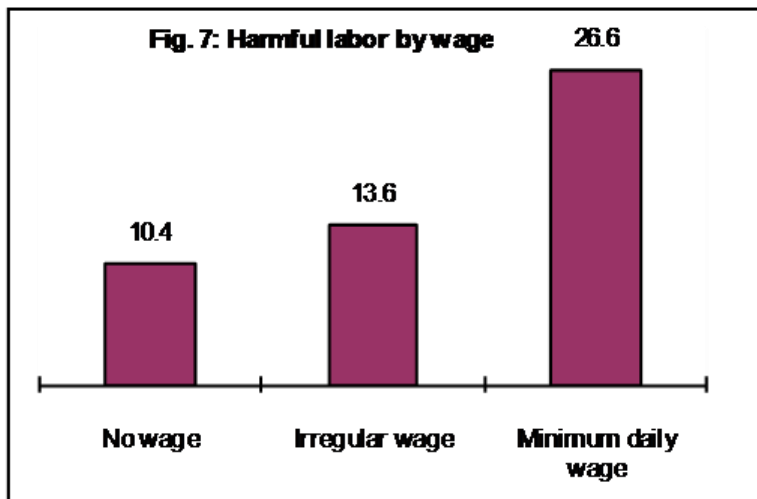
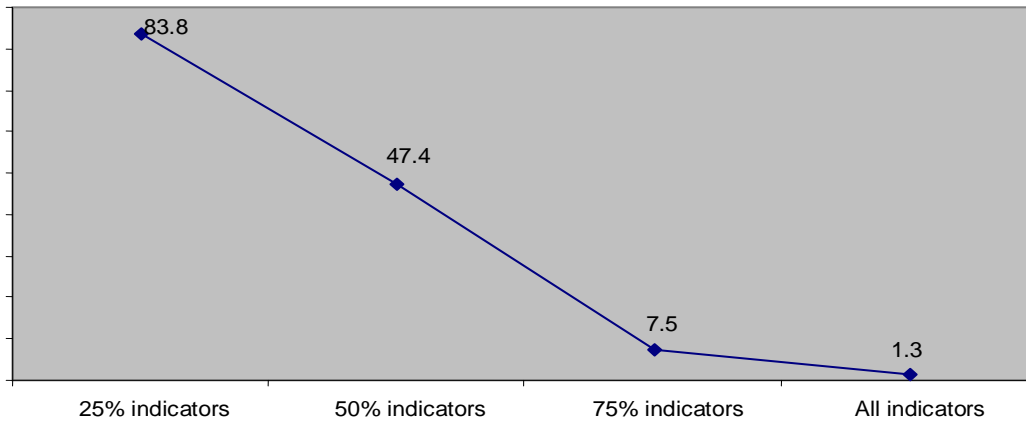


Fig. 6: Relative weight of indicators of harmful works as possessed by child labor



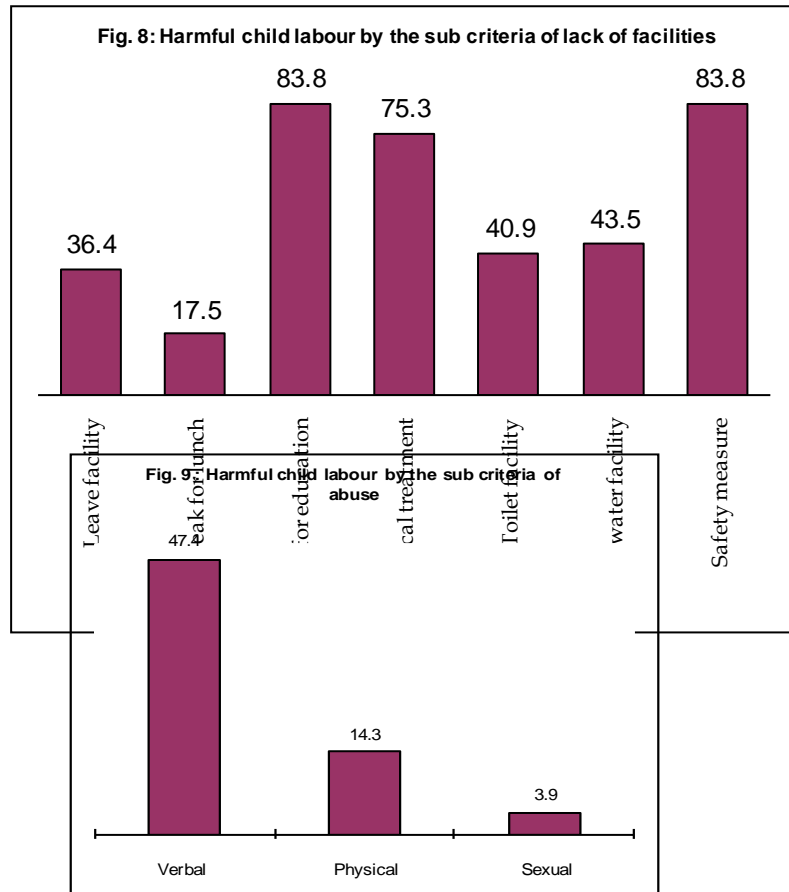
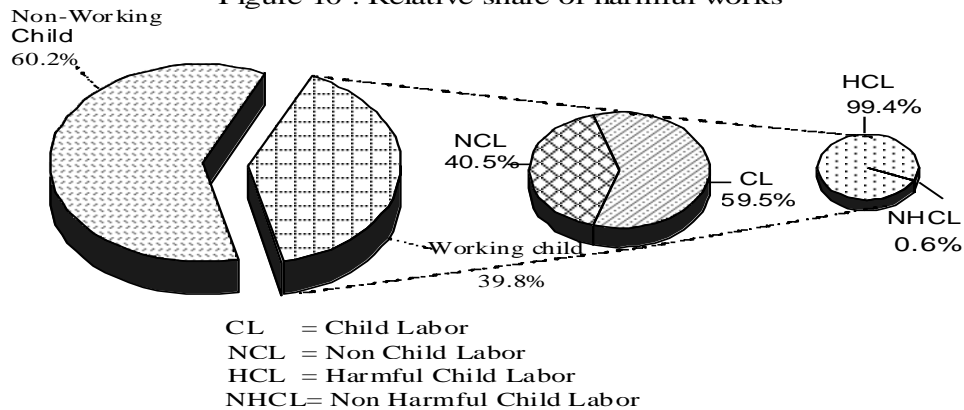
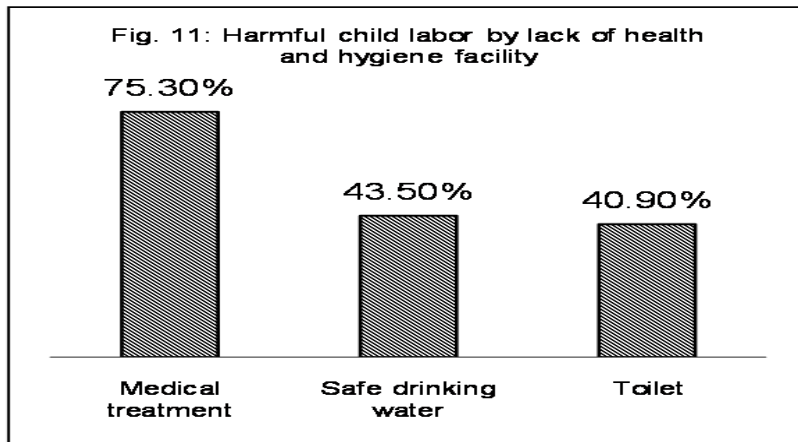


Figure 10 : Relative share of harmful works





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