

Socio-Economic Problems of Child Labor in Rajshahi City Corporation of Bangladesh: A Reality and Challenges

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Abstract

Social norms and economic realities mean that child labor is widely accepted and common in Bangladesh. Many families rely on the income generated by their children for survival, so child labor is often highly valued. Additionally, employers often prefer to employ children because they are cheaper and considered to be more compliant and obedient than adults. When children are forced to work, they are often denied their rights to education, leisure and play. They are also exposed to situations that make them vulnerable to trafficking, abuse, violence and exploitation. Millions of children are reported not to attend school, however estimated vary. Among children aged 5-18, about five million, are economically active. "Child labor" is a narrower concept than "working children". Many child laborers miss out on their right to education and fall a victim to hazardous work because they do not have the time to go to school or to study. The present study data show that duration of working hours and hazardous working environment are negatively correlated with school attendance, smooth livelihood and physical and mental development of the children. In this study, total numbers of 560 child laborers were interviewed by the author during June 15 to July 14 in 2010 from Rajshahi City Corporation in Bangladesh. Rajshahi City Corporation has 30 wards. To data collect well-organized questionnaire prepared and using interview schedule and face-to-face interviewed from the respondents. Simple random sampling techniques were used. Various socio-economic and demographics variables were considered at the time of data collection. But in this paper socio-economic variables are used. In addition, secondary data also used from various child labor's relevant books, articles, documents, and officials through Internet browsing.

Keywords: Socio-economic problems, Child labor, Rajshahi City Corporation, Bangladesh

1. Introduction

Every child, male or female, is born with right and gradually grows and develops with social responsibilities. About this social and cultural myths and conscience reveal that today's children, tomorrow's good citizens in political sense and good parents in social sense. These myths and consciences may make into reality if the children born are cared, reared and matured or developed in balanced ways. But literatures on child development and others show that child labor is a serious and crucial social problem in all developing and under developing countries as well as under developed areas of the industrialized countries (Mendelievich ed., 1980; Mehta and Jaswal, 1997). Like all other countries Bangladesh is facing many social problems like child labor. The problem of child labor in Bangladesh is rooted in its ancient history in varied forms and nature. Now the dimension of child labour problems changes in the

economic and social structure of the Bangladeshi society. Problem of child labor in Bangladesh also exist the ingredients by which a society like Bangladesh in formed. The proportion of boy and girl child workers, in the age group of 5-17 years, is 73.5 percent and 26.5 percent, respectively. The total number of working children aged 5-17 years in rural areas is estimated at 6.4 million as against 1.5 million in urban areas. As many as 93.3 percent of all working children in the age group of 5.17 years operate in the informal sector. A total number of 1.3 million children are estimated to be working 43 hours or more per week. More boys than girl are engaged (BBS: 2002-2003).

According to the Labor Law of Bangladesh 2006, the minimum legal age for employment is 14. However, as 93 per cent of child laborers work in the informal sector – in small factories and workshops, on the street, in home-based businesses and domestic employment the enforcement of labor laws is virtually impossible.

Long hours, low or no wages, poor food, isolation and hazards in the working environment can severely affect children's physical and mental health. Child laborers are also vulnerable to other abuses such as racial discrimination, mistreatment and sexual abuse. Some work, such as domestic labor, is commonly regarded as an acceptable employment option for children, even though it too poses considerable risks.

Poverty causes families to send children to work, often in hazardous and low-wage jobs, such as brick-chipping, construction and waste-picking. Children are paid less than adults, with many working up to twelve hours a day. Full-time work frequently prevents children from attending school, contributing to dropout rates. The Government of Bangladesh under the Ministry of Labor and Employment has funded a national program titled the Eradication of Hazardous Child Labor in Bangladesh. It is being implemented by NGOs and targets 21 sectors in which child labor occurs. The goal is to provide working children additional skills to allow them to transition out of hazardous occupations. The program, set to expire in June 2009, is currently in its second phase, and the Government has allocated USD 4.2 million for 3 years (US. Embassy, 2007).

The Third National Plan of Action for Children (2005-2010) commits the government to carry out a variety of tasks to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, with a particular focus on child domestic workers migrants, refugees and other vulnerable groups. The commitments include introducing regulations, ensuring working children's access to education, and strengthening the labor inspectorate (Ibid, 2005). The Ministry of Labor and Employment has a dedicated Child Labor Cell, and the Government includes a child labor component in its compulsory training program for entry-level diplomatic personnel and border guards (ILO-IPEC, 2006).The Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper includes as a strategic goal taking immediate and effective measures to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, with a target of increasing the knowledge base about child labor and children's rights, and a future priority of legal reform to bring all child labor legislation in line with international standards (GOB, 2005).

2. Problem Statement and Formulation

Child labor and its related socio-economic and environmental problems in Bangladesh are increasing day by day. According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2009) the joint ILO, UNICRF and UNECCO report on child labor and Education in Bangladesh, Current Practices and Policy Recommendations, in 2009, indicated that 4.9 million economically active children are not attending school, 72% of them are male. It is also estimated that 2.4 million

children are working and attending school. Around 837,000 of 3.2 million child laborers are attending school and working. This would indicate that 73% of child laborers who should be at school are not enrolled or attending school. Reasons for not attending school including being busy with household economic activities (16.3%); having to work for wages (9.6%); are weak in education (8.2%); have not found it possible to study or have been successful in exams (7.2%). This is quite clear that the affordability of education and economic poverty of the household are critical obstacles in children attending school. Other periodical and regional investigations reveal more or less the same rate. Although the prevalence rate of child labor may vary inter district and inter regionally. The present researcher's base line survey or perception accounts for that about 20 to 30 thousands of child laborers work in the private and semi-government economic and business sections in Rajshahi city of Bangladesh. Child labor is a concern around the globe and in the global marketplace because many countries either do not legally prohibit the employment of children or do not enforce their existing laws. The strong and often emotional feelings against child labor are especially prominent in countries generally considered part of the developed world. Therefore, many U.S. corporations have second thoughts about moving their production to Pakistan or Thailand. Because of the strong feelings that exist back home. Still, there are strong incentives to move because of the lower labor costs that are the result of the use of child workers. Child labor is often defined in terms such as work carried out to the detriment of the child in violation of international and national law. In equally negative but broader terms, child labor can be defined as "children who are denied their childhood and a future, who work long hours for low wages, often under conditions harmful to their health and to their physical and mental development, and who are sometimes separated from their families and frequently deprived of education" (Ali, 2000). Both of these definitions are loaded in a negative direction. In addition, they do not take into account the fact that definitions of which a child is vary considerably from culture to culture and country to country, and no attempt is made by either definition to define who a child is. A more neutral definition might be "work that is performed for payment and outside of the family by someone who is under the age allowed by the country in which the child resides." As one of the co-authors wrote. The present researcher also observes that the children work in Rajshahi city corporation face many psycho-social, economic and working environmental problems that impede their bio-social emotional, intellectual moral viz. human development. As a result, they may be a burden not to be good citizens for the nation.

3. Research Questions

- a. Why is the prevalence rate of child labor increasing especially in Rajshahi City Corporation of Bangladesh in spite of urban development action program at the public and private levels are existing or implementing?
- b. What are the socio-economic and working environment and schooling attendance problems of the child laborers facing in Rajshahi City Corporation of Bangladesh?

4. Two or More Possible Answers

The opportunities for earning in the urban areas of Bangladesh have increased

- a. Comparison to prior three decades due to increased industrialization and market extension. In search of work and for earning and livelihood marginal landless and day laborers of the rural areas of Bangladesh are

migration to urban town where in income earners singly or both husband and wife cannot maintain their family living. Income earners, especially father, in some respect both father and mother and burning long term hours and in absence of father in the home in there cannot control their growing age children who create anomaly in the family situation; they do not go to school; they do not read and write timely at home. Because of poverty stricken families are not pleasant of the children. As a result, parents decide their children to earn for living and admit to the labor and working sector either semi paid or unpaid in cash or kind.

- b. The children are engaging in labor force due to family poverty are without education, skill, experience are given with or without payment. With these characteristics the working children work at monetary shop, contacting shop, tea stall, garment shop, shooq shop, book stall etc for long hours, from day to night, from 8 hours to 14 hours. The job environment they work in are hazardous for their mental and physical health; sometimes. They are oppressed physically and mentally by their employers; sometimes they bear heavy load that they cannot.
- c. In order to reduce these socio-economic and working environment problems of the child laborers properly there is no private and public institutions or organization to action although public and private initiatives for destitute children and urban community development programs are existed.

5. Working Definitions

5.1. Socio-economic problems

In this study socio-economic problems means child laborer faces many unfavorable and unexpected situations like hazarder working environment, extra working duration, drop out of school attainment and fall a victim to many diseases. It also involves of juvenile delinquency, criminal activities and obstacles (Barriers) of proper and sound physical and mental development of the children.

5.2. Child labor

The term "child labor" generally refers to any economic activity performed by a person under the age of 18. On the beneficial side of the continuum, there is "light work" after school or legitimate apprenticeship opportunities, such as helping out in the family business or on the family farm. At the destructive end is employment that is:

- a. *Preventing effective school attendance;*
- b. *Hazardous to the physical and mental health of the child.*

6. Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study is to reduce problems of child laborers by educational programs and social awareness building capacities. The immediate objectives of the study are as follow:

- a. To know the socio-economic and working environmental problems of the child laborers in Rajshahi city corporation;
- b. To explore why the children poor families are becoming or engaging in the private labor force;
- c. To know and identify whether public, private and voluntary organizations work to reduce the problems of child laborers and their related families or not;
- d. To design and suggest holistic approach in which is effective to identify and reduce the problems.

7. Methodology and Materials of the Study

In this study, total numbers of 560 child labourers were interviewed by the author during June 15 to July 14 in 2009 from Rajshahi City Corporation in Bangladesh. Rajshahi City Corporation has 30 wards. To data collect well-organized questionnaire prepared and using interview schedule and face-to-face interviewed from the respondents. Simple random sampling techniques were used. Various socio-economic and demographics variables were considered at the time of data collection. But in this paper only socio-economic variables are used. In addition, secondary data also used from various child labor relevant books, articles, documents, and officials through Internet browsing. After collecting data various statistical technique are used, like coding, frequency, percentage, mean, median, standard deviation, skewness and variance. The data were edited, processed and analyzed by using SPSS 15.0 program.

8. Socio-Economic Conditions of Child Laborers in Rajshahi City Corporation

The author begins with a brief overview of the respondents with regarding to several focal (key) socio-economic conditions (Follow Table-1) 74.65% respondents come from the age group 11-15 years. There are strong cross-gender variations in child labor. Largest percentages of the child labor are Muslim (91.96). The study shows that most of the respondent's educational qualification in between class i-v (59.64), the percentage of the illiterate respondents is (22.32). There is strong variation in occupation. 43.39% of the child labor engaged in salesman, whereas only 5.54% are in carpenter. 50% children work more than 6 to 10 hours in a day, especially 45.18% work more than 11 to 15 hours in a day. It has also been observed from Table 1 that 45.71% respondents have their daily income in between Tk. 26-50 and 37.32% have their daily income in between Tk. 5-25. Only 16.97% have their daily income Tk. 51 and above. Vulnerable and poor families crying need the money that children earn. Table 1 showed that 88.39% children are engaged in labor force due to poverty. 67.50% children have been fallen victim in health hazardous works. 54.82% children intend to work against their willingness. 84.82% children want to continue their educational attainment. 73.21%. Children fail to involve in various entertainment programmed. 68.21% children fill that their working environment is very risky and 52.68% children fall a victim of physical and 47.32% mental oppressions.

Table 1: Socio-Economic characteristics of the respondents

| Variables | Frequency N = 560 | Percentage (100) |
|---|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Age of the respondents | | |
| 6-10 years | 82 | 14.64 |
| 11-15 years | 418 | 74.65 |
| 15-Above | 60 | 10.71 |
| Religion of the respondents | | |
| Muslim | 515 | 91.96 |
| Non-Muslim | 45 | 8.04 |
| Educational status of the respondents | | |
| Illiterate | 125 | 22.32 |
| Class (i-v) | 334 | 59.64 |
| Class (vi-viii) | 70 | 12.50 |
| Class (ix-Above) | 31 | 5.54 |
| Occupation of the respondents | | |
| Motor Mechanic | 99 | 17.68 |
| Hotel boy (waiter) | 185 | 33.04 |
| Salesman | 243 | 43.39 |
| Carpenter | 33 | 5.89 |
| Duration in working hours of the respondents | | |
| 1-5 hours | 27 | 4.82 |
| 6-10 hours | 280 | 50.00 |
| 11-15 hours | 253 | 45.18 |

| Variables | Frequency N = 560 | Percentage (100) |
|---|-------------------|------------------|
| Daily income of the respondents (in Tk.) | | |
| 5-25 | 209 | 37.32 |
| 26-50 | 256 | 45.71 |
| 51-Above | 95 | 16.97 |
| Working against willingness of the respondents | | |
| Yes | 253 | 45.18 |
| No | 307 | 54.82 |
| Family structure of the respondents | | |
| Nuclear | 456 | 81.43 |
| Joint | 104 | 18.57 |
| Family authority patterns of the respondents | | |
| Father | 517 | 92.32 |
| Mother | 43 | 7.68 |
| Willingness of educational attainment of the respondents | | |
| Yes | 475 | 84.82 |
| No | 85 | 15.18 |
| Health hazards of the respondents | | |
| Yes | 378 | 67.50 |
| No | 182 | 32.50 |
| Various entertainment facilities of the respondents | | |
| Yes | 150 | 26.79 |
| No | 410 | 73.21 |
| Risk ness of working environment of the respondents | | |
| Yes | 382 | 68.21 |
| No | 178 | 31.79 |
| Oppression to the respondents | | |

| | | |
|----------|-----|-------|
| Physical | 295 | 52.68 |
| Mental | 265 | 47.32 |

Causes behind the child labor of the respondents

| | | |
|-------------|-----|-------|
| Poverty | 495 | 88.39 |
| Family will | 65 | 11.61 |

Notes: Tk. is Bangladeshi currency

Table 2: Child Labor results in statistical analysis of socio-economic variables

| Socio-economic Variables | Mean | Median | Std. Deviation | Variance | Skewness |
|--|------|--------|----------------|----------|----------|
| Age of the respondents | 1.96 | 2.00 | 0.50 | 0.25 | -.07 |
| Religion of the respondents | 1.0 | 1.00 | 0.27 | 0.07 | 3.09 |
| Educational status of the respondents | 2.01 | 2.00 | 0.75 | 0.57 | .75 |
| Occupation of the respondents | 2.37 | 2.00 | 0.84 | 0.70 | -.20 |
| Duration in the working hours of the respondents | 2.40 | 2.00 | 0.58 | 0.33 | -.36 |
| Daily income of the respondents | 1.79 | 2.00 | 0.70 | 0.50 | .31 |
| Family structure of the respondents | 1.18 | 1.00 | 0.38 | 0.15 | 1.62 |
| Family authority of the respondents | 1.07 | 1.00 | 0.26 | 0.07 | 3.18 |
| Willingness of educational attainment of the respondents | 1.15 | 1.00 | 0.35 | 0.12 | 1.94 |
| Health hazards of the respondents | 1.32 | 1.00 | 0.46 | 0.22 | .74 |
| Entertainment facilities of the respondents | 1.73 | 2.00 | 0.44 | 0.19 | -1.05 |
| Risk ness of working environment of the respondents | 1.31 | 1.00 | 0.46 | 0.21 | .78 |
| Oppression to the respondents | 1.47 | 1.00 | 0.49 | 0.25 | .10 |

| | | | | | |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|
| Causes behind the child labor | 1.11 | 1.00 | 0.32 | 0.10 | 2.40 |
| Working against willingness of the respondents | 1.54 | 2.00 | 0.49 | 0.24 | -.19 |

In this section the author discuss the various socio-economic feature of the child laborer in Rajshahi City Corporation of Bangladesh. 88.39% respondents seems that causes the child labor were extreme poverty, 68.21% respondents seems that there working environment is risky, 67.50% respondents realized that they fall a victim of health hazards problems. 52.68% and 47.32% respondents said that physical and mental oppression respectively by their lord. 84.82% respondents said they are very much interested to educational attainment and make sure their future livelihood. 54.82% respondents compelled child labor against their willing and 73.21% child laborers strongly desired various sufficient entertainment facilities should be taken up for proper physical and mental development.

9. Causes of Child Labor and Impact on Family and Society in the Rajshahi City Corporation Area

The most effective area of child labor at rural even in urban area. There are many socio-economic causes (reasons) behind the child labor in the study area:

- a. Poverty
- b. Illiteracy
- c. Lack of educational attainment
- d. Lack of family bond
- e. Unconscious parents about education

According to the new National Education Policy (2010), education is free and compulsory up to grade eight (Class 8), however it is estimated that more than one million children have never been to school. Many children drop out of the education system before completing primary school and begin working due to poverty. Most working children cite an inability to bear educational expenses as the main reason for not attending school, because there are many indirect costs such as transport and uniforms. Limitation within the education system such as poor teaching quality and a high teacher-student ratio may also discourage children from completing school. Additionally, children living in slums often move frequently due to eviction, civic unrest and employment instability, and further exacerbation dropout rates. In the Rajshahi City Corporation area dropout rate is 15.18 percent due to poverty and parents unconsciousness

10. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The problem of the child labor has more pronounced now than before. Now it has increased tremendously and become national issue. As a part of vulnerable section of people, child labor has some sufferings in the society. They want to get rid of these painful experiences and deserve help from the nation of enjoy the rest of their life. As per the finding of the present study will be able to identify the effective services and formulate a policy and plan for the child labor in Bangladesh. Most will agree that eliminating child labor is clearly a goal in the long run. However, in poverty-stricken countries, work and education are often viewed as mutually exclusive in the lives of children. Cultural values and

political environments of most developing countries continue to support the use of child labor, and this poses tough challenges for organizations and individuals engaged in controlling its use. The need formulate and implement relative instead of universal strategies. Implementing universal strategies, such as imposing a complete ban on child labor worldwide, is inappropriate at this time.

We have to strongly emphasis on child labor issue. This issue broadly creates negative effect in our economy both in short run and long run. The nation has been lost great potential by the expansion of child labor participation rate. There is no alternative way to improve our economy without reduce child labor in Bangladesh. Again, it is not possible to eradicate child labor in Bangladesh within the short period of time. Gradually, we are able to shift our children from work to education. We know that, many reasons are involved behind children able to shift our children from work to education. Although poverty itself is a multidimensional factor, if we create new work opportunity to our. Poor people and reduce inequality between rich and poor, and then child labor will decline. We need to provide proper and unique education in primary study level, then we should introduce different and practical education program in the secondary level for our poor children. That will helpful for getting job, as well as, ensuring self-employment. We have to secure quality education support from GO and NGO institutes. It had better that if both bodies put forward for the child education program with mutual understanding. Child education and child nutrition both are the prerequisite for human development in any nation. Both conditions are positively relates with each other, i.e. if child education improve it enhances child nutrition as well. But our children are suffering severely with malnutrition and the malnutrition strongly affect of our child worker. We need to take some awareness program to poor parents about child education, nutrition and capacity building programs. Without hard to survive, the majority of parents can give their children to continue education. If the poor parents get aware of about future prospect of their children through proper education, they will motivate to their children to affix education. Parents and children both must have same goal about the future prospect of their family as well as nation.

The Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has already taken various steps to eliminate all forms of child labor, particularly all types of hazardous work. The Ministry of Labor and Employment (MOLE), Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments, other government organizations and field level agencies are implementing these initiatives. Government should take measures for efficient implementation of the projects that have been initiated in collaboration with different international and non-government organizations. If the existing Acts, rules and regulations are reorganized and the plan of action is adopted and implemented, our children would obviously grow up as "enlightened human beings".

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