

## Situation analysis of child workers in Sylhet city, Bangladesh

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### ABSTRACT

This study was carried out to investigate the existing situation of Child Labours in Sylhet City. In this study, a total numbers of 90 child labours were interviewed. Data were collected by well-organized questionnaire according to interview schedule and face-to-face interview of the respondents. Simple random sampling techniques were used. About 72.2% of child labours have both father and mother and more than half (53.3%) of the respondents live with their parents in a slum accommodation. In the surveyed city, about 28.9% of the respondent's fathers were rickshaw pullers and most of the respondent's mother (36.7%) worked as house servants. Majority of the respondents (61.1%) had nuclear family structure and their father is the main authority in their family. Most of them felt sad and bored during their works and they worked against their willingness. About 40.0% of the respondents in the Sylhet City wanted to continue their education in combination with their works. According to the opinion of the respondents the child working can be stopped by enhancing educational facilities and financial help but most of them (82%) replied that they have no knowledge about children right.

### INTRODUCTION

Now-a-days in Bangladesh where children from all strata of society are being increasingly targeted, harassed, raped, tortured and killed. Child rights experts have warned that the trend is going to spike every year as justice is not being ensured in most of the crimes being committed against children. According to Dhaka-based child rights promoting organization Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF), only from January till March this year, 96 children have been raped and 66 were murdered in Bangladesh besides numerous other acts of violence done against them. The statistics tallied by the NGO shows an alarming jump in the atrocities against children with every passing year in Bangladesh as 119 incidents of rape and 292 murder incidents of children had occurred in 2014. The numbers were at 150 rapes and 180 murders in 2013.

Children are the greatest gift to humanity and Childhood is an important and impressionable stage of human development. Every nation links its future with the present status of its children. By performing work when they are too young for the task, children reduce their present welfare or their future income earning capabilities, either by shrinking their future external choice sets or by reducing their own future individual productive capabilities. But Under extreme economic distress, children are forced to take up jobs which are mostly exploitative as they are usually underpaid and engaged in hazardous conditions. Child labour is a concrete manifestation of violations of a range of rights of children. It is a prefix of economic vulnerability of people, inadequate legal system and labour laws, cultural and social inequities, as well as a result of an inaccessible and low-quality educational system. On the other hand, evidence does show that child labour hinders

future economic growth and the accumulation of human capital. Children are deprived of future income generating capacities and their lifetime earning ability is reduced by 13-20% because of entering into the workforce at a young age (Ilahi et al., 2005).

The total child population aged between 5 to 17 was 42.3 million in 2003. Approximately 19.7 million of the child population was female whilst 22.7 million was male. Approximately 77.8% percent of the child population was from the rural area of Bangladesh. 1.29 million Or 3% are involved in hazardous child labour. Over 90.7% of the children involved in hazardous work are male. Two-thirds of working children have no education. 41.3% reported education up to primary level, 41.7% mentioned education up to junior high school, and only 4.2% reported education at SSC/HSC level (BBS 2003).

Child labour exposes children to series of dangers. Some of the consequences of child labour on working children include malnourishment which makes them susceptible to diseases, muscle-skeletal disorders from heavy labour, physical and sexual abuse, educational problem due to absence from and lateness to school. Many factors found to be responsible for child labour practices like globalization, population growth, socialization and violence within the family structure. Parents engaged their children in child labour in order to augment family income. That parent of child labour tend to have low educational, occupational, and income attainments and most working children come from households with low parental socio-economic status. Bhalotra and Heady (2003) in their study of Pakistan note that children from larger land-owning households work more than children from smaller land owning homes, implying that child labour does not decrease with wealth. Similarly, Edmonds and Turk (2004) find that Vietnamese households that own their own businesses tend to make their children work more. Children of large families are also more likely to work. The probability of working is also higher when parents are less educated and illiterate, as well as if they themselves worked as children (Emerson and Souza, 2003). For this reasons parental educational achievement and number of

children were also found to influence child labour practices.

Employers capitalize on the loyalty of the children recognizing that these labourers cannot legally form unions to change their conditions. Such manipulation retards the development of youths. But UNICEF does not oppose work that children may perform at home, on the family farm or for a family business – as long as that work is not a danger to their health and well-being, and if it doesn't prevent them from going to school and enjoying childhood activities.

Children in Bangladesh are engaged in the worst forms of child labour, primarily in dangerous activities in agriculture and domestic service (International research, 2010). Children working in agriculture perform a variety of tasks and may be exposed to risks such as dangerous machinery and tools, harmful pesticides and heavy loads (Rahman et al., 2010). Children, mostly girls, work as domestic servants in private households in Bangladesh. Some child domestics work in exploitative conditions and are vulnerable to abuse, including sexual abuse (ILO-IPEC, 2011). Children engage in dangerous work that includes welding, carpentry, rickshaw pulling and automobile repair (Rahman et al., 2010). Children are also involved in the production of salt, soap, matches, bricks, cigarettes, footwear, steel furniture, glass, jute, leather and textiles (BBS 2003). Children tend to work more in cities with flourishing labour markets (Levison, 1991) than in cities with high poverty.

Abolishing child labour depends on schooling. The state could help by making it worthwhile for a child to attend school, whether it is by providing students with nutritional supplements or increasing the quality and usefulness of obtaining an education. Parental and community understanding of the benefits of education, along with strong social disapproval of exploitative employers, will help diminish this hazard. Raising awareness of its harmful effects on health and development will help alleviate children's vulnerability to abuse. Social programs to support families and help them find alternative income to replace their child's employment will help prevent child labour. A part of the obligation of societies and governments, and

all who have a role in protecting and nurturing children, is also to enable children and create the conditions for children to develop their individual capabilities and realize their full potential.

Sylhet city is known as Holy place and it is totally different from the rest of the country. It is different because in last little decade urbanization take placed quickly in here and the liquidity of money in the Sylhet district is mainly responsible for this and due to above factors the tendency of child working in this city increasing at an alarming rate. Beside this an even bigger issue is the increase in kidnapping of children in urban and rural areas. One such unfortunate case had happened in Sylhet city on March 14, 2015 when the dead body of 10-year-old Abu Sayeed was found in the house of a police constable. Not only this, another heart touching death also happened in Sylhet City which was murdered of 13-year-old child Samiul Alam Rajon. So it is demand of time to investigate the current situation of the children working in this city with the aim to obtain information about their current family condition and to explore the perception and future aspiration on their works.

## METHODOLOGY

In this study, a total numbers of 90 child labours from the different areas of Sylhet city were interviewed by the author during May to July 2016. Simple random sampling techniques were used to collect data. To collect data through face-to-face interview with the respondents a planned questionnaire was developed containing both the closed and open ended queries. An area far away from the Sylhet city was selected for pretesting and improving the questionnaire. To get the suitable information considering individual, instructive status, social and financial subtle elements of the questionnaire was checked each day taking the meeting and pick up these were precisely rechecked subsequent to gathering every one of the information and coded earlier the compelling into computer. The information was altered in the event of locating inconsistency (question section, wrong passage and so forth). Then again, auxiliary information was accumulated from published and unpublished research reports, journals, and books and also from record and archives of significant organizations.

The data was processed to undergo statistical analysis using SPSS 16 windows program. To represent the tabular and chart icon Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel were utilized.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Aliveness of the respondent's parent

Alive or death of parents is an important factor that determines the engagement of child in laborious works in their earlier life. Although 72.2% of child labours have both father and mother alive but still now they are engaged in working, it is really surprising. The survey with the child labours have revealed that 26.7% of the child labours have mother but have no father. About 53.3% of the respondents live with their parents. Moreover, 33.3% of the child labours lives with their mother. 12.2% lives with their relatives in this city (Table 1).

Table 1

Aliveness of the respondent's parent and person with stay.

Aliveness of the respondent's parent		
Aliveness of the respondent's parent	Frequency N = 90	Percentage
Both	65	72.2
Only father alive	01	1.1
Only mother alive	24	26.7
Person(s) with lives		
Person(s)	Frequency N = 90	Percentage (100)
With Parents	48	53.3
With Mother	30	33.3
Step father / mother	1	1.1
With Relatives or Others	11	12.2
Total	90	100.0

### Place of living

When working children were asked where they lived, slum/low income accommodation was the most frequently mentioned category; just over half (61.0%) said they lived in a slum/low income accommodation with their parent (s). About 26%

replied that they lived in the workplace and another 13% said that they lived at a relative's house at night in the Surveyed City (Figure 1).

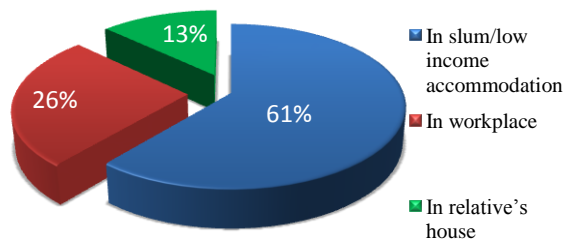


Figure 1  
Place of living of the respondents.

### Occupation of the respondent's father

A lower family income could lead children into the labour market or to assist with household chores, often at the cost of schooling. According to Basu and Tzannatos (Basu and Tzannatos, 2003) some in face of shocks and other just for daily survival, require their children to be sources of income.

Table 2  
Occupation of the respondent's father.

Occupation	Frequency N = 90	Percentage
Not applicable	24	26.7
Rickshaw puller	26	28.9
Day labour	11	12.2
Van driver	6	6.7
Physically disable	3	3.3
Guard	3	3.3
Carpenter	2	2.2
Salesman	2	2.2
Farmer	2	2.2
Tea stall business	2	2.2
Hawker	2	2.2
Working in a shop	2	2.2
Shoe maker	1	1.1
Have no permanent work	1	1.1
Mechanics	1	1.1
Works in a mill	1	1.1
Construction worker	1	1.1
Total	90	100.0

In the surveyed city, it is found that, about 26.7% of the respondents had no father (Table 2). Moreover, 28.9% were rickshaw pullers, 12.2% were day labour and 6.7% were van driver. About 3.3% of the respondents were not engaged any kind works due to their physical disability. In addition to this many of the respondent's father were involved various sorts of activities including; night guard, carpenter, salesman, farmer, tea stall business and so on in the Sylhet City.

### Occupation of the respondent's mother

As like as the respondent's fathers, their mother also involved in numerous types of works to support their family. From the Table it is found that, about 36.7% mothers of the respondent's works as house servants, 5.5% of them works in hotel and 4.4% were day labour. Moreover, 2.2% were physically disable and rest of them were involved in others works (Figure 2).

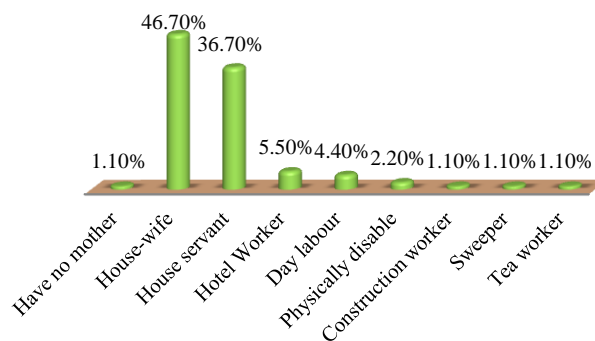


Figure 2  
Occupation of the respondent's mother.

Table 3  
Structure of the family and authority patterns.

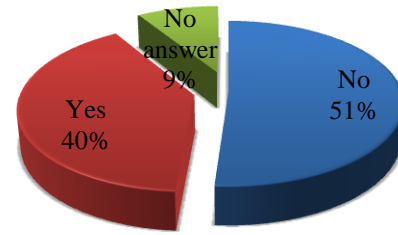
Family structure of the respondents		
Structure	Frequency N = 90	Percentage (100)
Nuclear	55	61.1
Joint	35	38.9
Family authority patterns of the respondents		
Authorized person	Frequency N = 90	Percentage (100)
Father	57	63.3
Mother	31	34.4
Grand Mother	2	2.2
Total	90	100.0

**Family structure and authority patterns of the respondents**

Majority of the respondents (61.1%) had nuclear family structure; i.e., they live with their either father and/mother, brother and sisters (if had). Rest of them (38.9%) had joint family. About 63.3% of the child labours replied that, their father is the main authority in their family but around one-third of them answered their mother’s name (Table 3).

**Perceptions and willingness of the respondents for involving in the work**

Commercial sexual exploitation of children is among the worst forms of child labour. The numbers of children who are sexually exploited are not known owing to the hidden nature of the practice. They include psycho-social problems, early pregnancy, sexually-transmitted infections (STIs), dropping out of school and early entry into work where girls particularly suffer a vicious cycle of exploitation and poverty. When asked to choose the words that best described how they felt about working in this sector, 26 percent indicated they were ‘happy’ to work. On the negative side, ‘sad’ was the one most frequently mentioned (54% of children), and a minority of the children interviewed chose the words ‘bored’ (20.0%) to characterize their feelings. However, it has been found in the in-depth interviews with the child labours that apparently satisfied child labours are not actually satisfied; rather than they have considered their current status as taken for granted. It is interesting to note that 40% children involve in working according to their own motivation, while 51% children intend to work against their willingness and 9% of them did not wanted to give any answer (Figure 3).



Willingness of the respondents

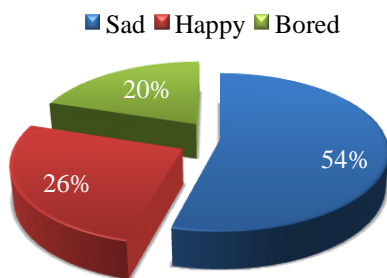
Figure 3 Perceptions and willingness of the respondents for involving in the work.

**Aspiration of the child labours**

The table 4 evident that 40.0% of the respondents want to continue their education in combination with their works, but 12.2% of them were not willing to continue their works they wants to continue their education from right now. About one-third (31.1%) of the respondents want to become a businessman while 13.3% have different idea and 3.3% of them have no idea about their aspirations.

Table 4 Expectations of child workers.

Expectations of Child workers	Frequency N = 90	Percentage
Education and work	36	40.0
Small business	28	31.1
Only education	11	12.2
Others	12	13.3
Unanswered	3	3.3
Total	90	100.0



Perceptions of work

**Ways to stop child working**

From the chart below, it is found that, 46.7% child labours opinion that child working can be stopped by enhancing educational facilities and financial help. Moreover, 16.7% of child labours gave importance about the poverty reduction. About 7.8% of them gave their opinion that if government takes serious initiatives then it is possible to stop the child working while 27.8% have no idea how child working can be stopped (Figure 4).



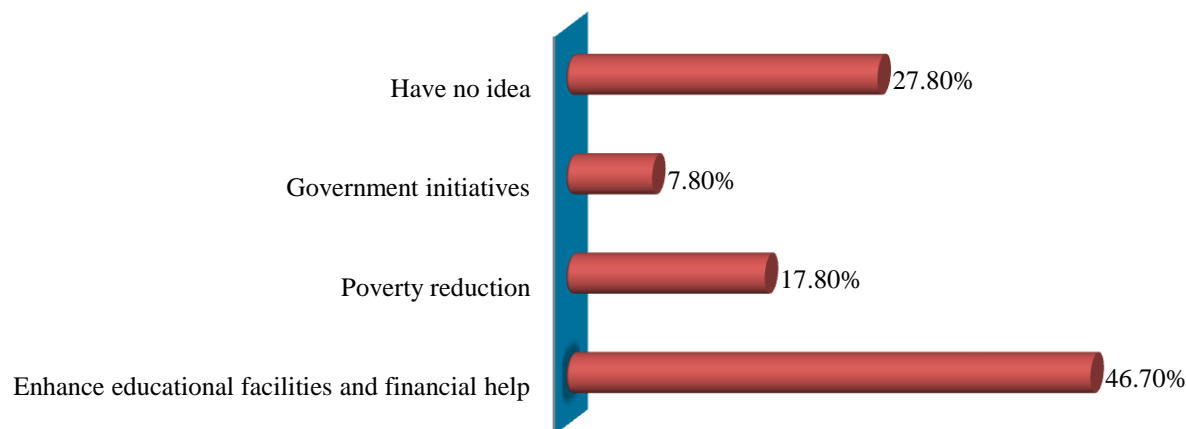


Figure 4  
Ways to stop child working.

### Knowledge about children right

Law is an important tool in order to recognize a prohibition of child labour and regulate working standards for individuals under certain ages. It generates obligations for States and employees to follow. At present, there are some special laws and ordinances in Bangladesh to protect and improve the status of children. When working children were asked, about children right most of them (82%) replied that they have no knowledge about children right (Table 5). Around one in ten (12%) reported that they have very little knowledge on this aspects like as, they know children (below 16 years old) involving in hazardous or labourious works is against the national law. Only a very few (6%) of them carried some knowledge regarding to children right such as, they have rights to continue their education, they can memorized the name of such organization these works for children rights.

Table 5  
Category of knowledge of child.

Category of knowledge	of 90	Frequency N =	Percentage (100)
No knowledge	74		82.0
Have very little knowledge	11		12.0
Little knowledge	05		6.0
Total	90		100.0

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

News of incidence of torture, sexual assault and murder of children has also surfaced in the dailies throughout the country over the past few days. The humiliation and social isolation of children can be curbed if and only if due awareness can be created in grassroots and urban communities of Bangladesh. Alive or death of parents is an important factor that determines the engagement of child in laborious works in their earlier life. Although 72.2% of child labours have both father and mother alive but still now they are engaged in working and more than half (53.3%) of the respondents live with their parents in this city. When working children were asked where they lived, slum/low income accommodation was the most frequently mentioned category; just over half (61.0%) said they lived in a slum/low income accommodation. A lower family income could lead children into the labour market or to assist with household chores, often at the cost of schooling. In the surveyed city, about 28.9% of the respondent's fathers were rickshaw pullers. As like as the respondent's fathers, their mother also involved in numerous types of works to support their family and most of the respondent's works as house servants. Majority of the respondents (61.1%) had nuclear family structure; i.e., they live with their either father and/mother, brother and sisters (if had) and their father is the main authority in their family. When asked to choose the words that best described how they felt about working in this sector, 'sad' was the one most frequently mentioned (54% of children) answer. It is interesting to note that 40% children involve in

working according to their own motivation. In the Sylhet City, 40.0% of the respondents want to continue their education in combination with their works, definitely it's a positive signs. 46.7% child labours opinion that child working can be stopped by enhancing educational facilities and financial help. Law is an important tool in order to recognize a prohibition of child labour and regulate working standards for individuals under certain ages. When working children were asked, about children right most of them (82%) replied that they have no knowledge about children right. On the basis of the results of the research, a few proposals to enhance their position in the nation are given underneath:

- As most of the children involves in working for improving their families condition, although many of them have parents still alive so it is important to take necessary step to financially stabilized those families by creating alternative mode of income
- As Working children are most vulnerable group so they should be given priority to take any types of program.
- The government and non-government organizations should come forward to take necessary steps for the working children by informing their basic right and to give them legal aid.

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