

## Struggling of child workers in Sylhet city, Bangladesh

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### ABSTRACT

A total numbers of 90 child workers were interviewed by the author during May to July in 2016 to investigate their working details in the Sylhet City. Data was collected by well-organized questionnaire and using interview schedule and face-to-face interviewed from the respondents. Simple random sampling techniques were used. The study showed that 86.7% child labours in Sylhet city were boys and 13.3% were girls. The study also reveals that 67.8% child labours came from the age group above 9-13 years and most of them (45.6%) work as hotel boy (waiter). Due to poverty most of them (66%) were engaged in these works. Although their levels of income are no so handsome (66.82 Tk. per day) but the lion's share (48%) of children's earnings was given to their parents/guardians. Their average working time was 8.43 hours per day and most of them were involved in workings for more than one and half years.

### INTRODUCTION

Working children are the objects of extreme exploitation in terms of labour for long hours for minimal pay. Children work for a variety of reasons, the most important being poverty and the induced pressure upon them to exemption from this commitment. Though children are not well paid, they still serve as major contributors to family income in developing countries. Finally, these children are deprived of the simple joys of childhood, relegated instead to a life of yoke. There must be a socio-economic change in the condition of a struggling family to free a child from the responsibility of contributing the family income with the help of hazardous work. Family subsidies can help provide this support. Their work conditions are especially worse, often not providing the provocation for proper physical and mental development. Child labour is also a symptom 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.

Though restrictions on child labour exist in most nations, many children do work. This vulnerable state leaves them prone to exploitation. The International Labour Office reports that children work the longest hours and are the worst paid of all labourers (Bequele and Boyden). They endure work conditions which include health hazards and potential abuse. There is no international agreement defining child labour, making it hard to isolate cases of abuse, let alone abolish them. Countries not only have different minimum age work restrictions, but also have varying regulations based on the type of labour. This makes the limits of child labour very ambiguous. Until there is global agreement which can isolate cases of child labour, it will be very hard to abolish. International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions 138 (ILO, 1973) and 182 (ILO, 1999) define child labourers as all children younger than 12 working in any economic activities, children 12–14 years old engaged in more than light work, and all children engaged in the worst forms of child labour – in which they are enslaved, forcibly recruited, prostituted, trafficked,

forced into illegal activities or exposed to hazards. Article 32(1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (ILO, 1989) calls for the recognition of the right of children to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with their education, or to be harmful to their health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. By March 2006, 143 countries had ratified Convention No. 138, setting minimum ages for general, light or hazardous work and 158 countries had ratified ILO Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour.

Child labour is both a cause and consequence of poverty and squanders a nation's human capital. It can impede the education of children, particularly girls. Any of the worst forms of child labour – including prostitution and trafficking – are a cause and consequence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Therefore, eliminating child labour is particularly relevant to achieving MDG 1 (eradicate extreme poverty and hunger), MDG 2 (ensuring that all boys and girls complete primary schooling) and MDG 6 (combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases).

Child labour is also relatively common on the Bangladesh labour market, and is often a last resort for survival for the child itself and his or her family. The National Child Labour Survey (NCLS) 2002-2003 conducted in Bangladesh finds that 7.9 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 are working and that 8% of the working children between the ages of 5 and 17 are hurt or become sick due to work (NCLS, 2002). These child workers often are found to work long hours in a variety of hazardous occupations and sectors that have the potential to seriously damage their health. At present, there are some special laws and ordinances in Bangladesh to protect and improve the status of children. However, there is a lack of harmony among those laws which uniformly prohibit the employment of children or set a minimum age for employment. Under the current law, the legal minimum age for employment is between 12 and 16, depending on the sector. A close collaboration and coordination of fulfilment of fundamental rights, promotion of the capabilities and potentials of children and the formation of human capital for national

development strengthens to achieve the goals of eliminating child labour. In Sylhet city numerous children live as a child worker. They live an inhuman life and a significant portion of them are involved in working. However, there was lack of knowledge about the status of these children. At this backdrop, the present study has been initiated for proper understanding of the existing situation of child labours and to explore some ways out.

## **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

Sylhet city has become one of the attractive and important cities in Bangladesh due to rapid urbanization, growth of investment holder, growth of business or commercial, activities, liquidity of money and natural resources etc. Because of these above factors the tendency of child working in this city increasing at an alarming rate as those labour can be easily buy with spending only a very few amount money sometimes at free of cost. In this study, 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. A planned questionnaire was developed containing both the closed and open ended query to collect data through face-to-face interview with the respondents. The questionnaire was pretested in areas far away from the sample areas and revised according to the feedback gained in the field level. The questionnaire was formed to obtain the relevant information considering personal, social status and economic details. The questionnaire was checked per day taking the interview and gain these were carefully rechecked after collecting all the data and coded prior the entrancing into computer technology. The data was edited in case of sighting discrepancy (doubt entry, wrong entry etc.). On the other hand, secondary data was gathered from published and unpublished research reports, journals, books, as well as from record and documents of relevant agencies. The data was processed to undergo statistical analysis using SPSS 16 windows program. Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel were used to represent the tabular and chart icon.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Relationship between gender and age**

In economic activities there are large sex-based disparities in children's involvement was observed in Bangladesh. It is suggesting that gender plays an important role in decisions concerning children's work. According to Koseleci and Kovrova the proportion of 7-14 year-old boys in economic activity is three times that of similarly aged girls. Majority of the child labours (86.7%) are boys and rest of them (13.3%) are girls in the surveyed city (Table 1).

Table 1  
Cross tabulation between gender of the respondent and their age category.

Gender of the Respondent		Age category			Total
		6-9	>9-13	>13-17	
Male	Count	13	50	15	78
	% of Total	14.4	55.6	16.7	86.7
Female	Count	0	11	1	12
	% of Total	0	12.2	1.1	13.3
Total	Count	13	61	16	90
	% of Total	14.4	67.8	17.8	100

### Occupation of the respondents

In Bangladesh child domestic work (CDW) is one of the commonest practices. They suffer different forms of abuse and exploitation during their regular works. They are usually over worked, not have clear terms of service from their employers, not paid or underpaid. Child domestic workers mainly girls are prone to the risk of sexual exploitation by the male employers and the boys in the homes where they work. In addition children who are employed as domestic workers are deprived of an opportunity to go to school or enrol in any form of productive skills training. Surveyed respondents were engaged in various kinds of laborious works. About 45.6% of them work as hotel boy (waiter). Around one-fifth (21.1%) of them are salesman. About 8.9% of them were involved in motor mechanic and house servant. Around 7.8% of the respondents serve in dining boy. Rests of them were involved in different types of activities (Table 2).

Table 2  
Occupation of the respondents.

Occupation of the respondents	Frequency	Percent
Hotel boy (waiter)	41	45.6
Salesman	19	21.1
Motor Mechanic	8	8.9
House servant	8	8.9
Dining boy	7	7.8
Works in a tea stall	2	2.2
Carpenter	1	1.1
Coolie	1	1.1
Black smith	1	1.1
Motor rickshaw puller	1	1.1
Barber	1	1.1
Total	90	100

### Causes of engaging the work and per day income

Child labour is caused by several factors. The survey with the child labours have revealed that a significant number of respondents (66.0%) have to do this work for their poverty and 23.0% respondents were engaged in this work due to their family will. Again, about 11% of the child labours in the Sylhet city were involved in the works due to meet up their personnel needs (Figure 1). Both boys and girls were involved in different sorts of works and specially most of the girls were involved in domestic services in the surveyed city. Cash was by far the most common way for children to be remunerated for their work. It has also been observed that, daily income of the respondents ranged from Tk. 00 to 200 with an average value of Tk. 66.82. Around 21% of the respondents reported that they do not receive any money from their works. About 39% respondents have their daily income between 1 to 80 Tk. and 38% have their daily income in between Tk. 81-150. Only 2% have their daily income above Tk. 150 (Figure 1). Similar result found by Koseleci and Kovrova that, more than half (56.3%) of the working children received between 500 and 999 taka per week. Analysis of the individual earnings claimed by children showed that their average income was 819 taka per week, ranging from a minimum of 100 taka and a maximum of 1,800 taka in Bangladesh.

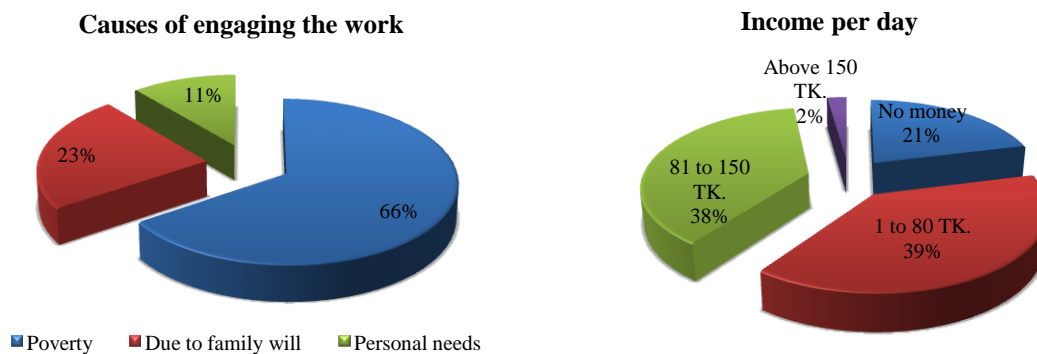


Figure 1

Causes of engaging the respondents in working and per day income.

### Earnings given to parents/guardians of working children

Actual payment for the great majority of children occurred monthly rather than weekly or daily, few of them get their money daily as they involved as a salesman, coolie and motor rickshaw puller likes activities. In case of monthly payment more than one-third (34%) of the child labour claimed that they do not get their payment on time. The lion's share of children's earnings was given to their parents/guardians. Two in five children (48%) reported giving all of their earning directly to their parents/guardians, about one-fourth (24%) said they gave some of their earnings to their parents/guardians and kept the rest. Very few working children (7%) said that they kept everything they earned (Figure 2).

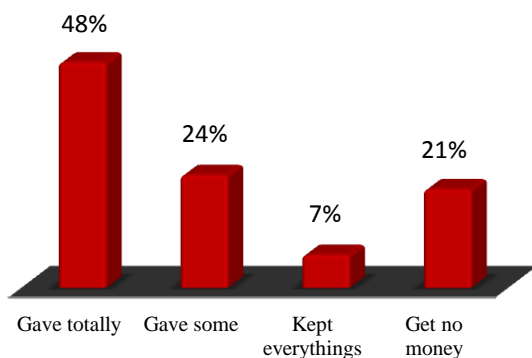


Figure 2

### Earnings Given to Parents/Guardians of Working Children

According to BBC among economically active children, 56.7% were unpaid workers receiving

remuneration in kind in the form of food, shelter and clothing (BBS, 2003). Among those who said that they retained some or all of the money they earn, (approximately one-third) put the money to practical use, such as buying food and clothing; use on entertainment purpose some of them save money for their future.

### Duration of working hours and age category of the respondents

Child labour is a common phenomenon around all over the world. The scant evidence available on this child labour suggests that they face a number of serious health and developmental threats in their future life due to long time working in a day in their earlier stage. Age of the respondents ranged from 6 to 16 years with an average of 11.86 years with standard deviation of 2.15. The majority of the child labours (67.8%) came from the age group above 9 and up to 13 years. About 17.8% of them were in aged between above 13 to 17 years (Figure 3). In a usual day, child workers said that they worked for an average of 8.43 hours, with a minimum of 2 hours and maximum of 15 hours. Average work hours were found for children aged between 6 to 9 years was 8.92 hours, above 9 and up to 9 years was 8.66 and those aged between above 13 and 17 was 7.19 hours (Table 3). Most of the respondents (51.1%) involves in working about 6 to 10 hours in a day. It's really pitiful that, about 36% of the respondents worked 11-15 hours per day do not get any free time for playing in a normal working days. Very few children (13%) reported working 1-5 hours/day (Figure 3).

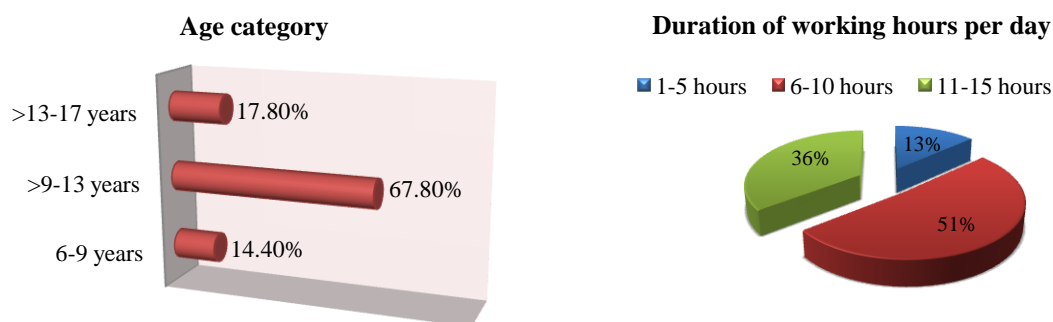


Figure 3  
Age category and duration of working hours per day.

Table 3  
Cross tabulation between duration of working hours and age category of the respondents.

		Age category			Total	
		6-9	>9-13	>13-17		
Duration in working	1-5 hours	Count	0	8	4	12
		% of Total	0%	8.9%	4.4%	13.3%
	6-10 hours	Count	8	29	9	46
		% of Total	8.9%	32.2%	10.0%	51.1%
	11-15 hours	Count	5	24	3	32
		% of Total	5.6%	26.7%	3.3%	35.6%
Total	Count	13	61	16	90	
	% of Total	14.4%	67.8%	17.8%	100.0%	
Average working hours			8.92	8.66	7.19	8.43

Base: All working children sampled=90

Table 4  
Working experience.

Experience category	Respondents	Percent	Minimum (in year)	Maximum (in year)	Mean (in year)
Up to 12 months	32	35.6			
13 to 24 months	30	33.3			
Above 24 months	28	31.1	0.25	5.00	1.6494
Total	90	100.0			

### Working experience

It has also been observed that, working experience of the respondents ranged from 0.25 year (3 months) to up to 5 years with an average value of 1.64 years. When working children were asked, regarding from how long they were engaged in these activities, most of the answered was up to 1 year

(35.6%). One third of the respondents replied that their working experienced was from above 1 year up to 2 years. About 31.1% of the child labours in the Sylhet City said that they had above than 2 years working experience in their own sector (Table 4).



### Relationship between the selected characteristics of the child labours with their income

Relationship between different characteristics of the selected child labours and their daily income was measured using the Pearson's product moment co-efficient of correlation ( $r$ ). Age of the respondents had a significant positive relationship with their daily income. The computed value of the co-efficient of correlation between the concerned variables was found to be 0.646\*\* which was strong (Table 5). This finding indicates that with the increase of respondent's age their level of income also increased. Based on the findings, it may be concluded that the age of the child workers were related with their incomes level. Similar results were found by the Koseleci and Kovrova that working children's remuneration increased proportionally with their age (Koseleci and Kovrova, 2009).

Table 5  
Computed Co-Efficient of Correlation ( $r$ ) between daily income and respondents' selected characteristics (N=90).

Daily income of the respondents (in Tk.)	Respondents' Characteristics	"r" Value
		Respondent age
	Working experience	0.723**
	Duration of working hours per day	-.096 <sup>ns</sup>

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Moreover the findings also indicate that working experiences of the child labours had a strong (value of " $r$ "=0.723\*\*) significant positive relationship with their daily income i.e. daily income level of the respondents was increased with the increasing of their personnel working experience (Table 5). Thus it was concluded that there was significant positive relationship between working experience and income level of the selected child workers in the surveyed city. On the other hand duration of working hours per day of the respondents had no significant relationship with their daily income level. As many of children spend all most all time in the workplace even sleep in workstation at night but do not get enough money. According to BBC among economically

active children, 56.7% were unpaid workers – receiving remuneration in kind in the form of food, shelter and clothing (BBS, 2003), which is similar to our present findings.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In the surveyed city most of the child labour involved in different sorts of works like hotel boy (waiter), salesman, motor mechanic, house servant, etc. Several factors are responsible for this but poverty is the basic one. The survey with the child labours have revealed that a significant number of respondents have to do this work for their poverty. Cash was by far the most common way for children to be remunerated for their work and average daily income of the respondent's is Tk. 66.82. The largest part of children's earnings was given to their parents/guardians. Reducing the dependency of households on children's labour, through the provision of support for vulnerable families to enable them generate income lost as a result of withdrawing their children from work provides an incentive for eliminating child labour. In a normal day, child workers said that they worked for an average of 8.43 hours per day which is very much pathetic sights. So another important aspect is to strengthening the capacity of all relevant institutions, reviewing the legal framework as well as improving coordination and tri-partism to enable effective delivery of elimination of child labour responsive programmes. Withdrawing, Rehabilitating and integrating children involved in the worst forms of child labour and instituting programmes for sustainable livelihoods. This is important to ensure that the children withdrawn from hazardous work do not fall back into the situation that prompted their withdrawal. On the basis of the results of the research, a few proposals to enhance their position in the nation are given underneath:

As poverty is the basic reason for their involvement in such laborious works so it is important to strengthening household livelihoods through the creation of alternative forms of income for families to enable families meet their basic needs including food, water, and clothing and other school needs for their children.

It may not be possible to completely stop these labours, but the working hours per day should be minimized as possible. Awareness should be built among guardians about the bad effects child working.

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