

Challenges to the Life of Hazardous Child Labour: A Study on their Working Environment and Food Habits

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Abstract

Child labour, particularly the hazardous form, is a matter of great concern in Bangladesh. It is considered to be a major violation of child rights. The term 'labour' does not suit to a 'child' by any means. By implication, the term child labour stands as a gross contravention of human rights. Yet, it is a reality in the socio-economic situation of Bangladesh. This study attempts to portray current scenario of child labourers, and their working place and food habit. The objectives of this study are to know the situation of child labourer, who is working at risk, and how these experiences can contribute effectively towards future actions for a child labour free Bangladesh. The study is based on primary and secondary data. After collecting necessary data from secondary sources, a sample survey was conducted to collect primary data. Data were collected on the basis of a questionnaire, and the samples were drawn purposively. The significant findings of the study reveal that child labourer is highly exploitative and his working condition is unsuited. Finally the study suggests that the exploitation of child labourer will be stopped by increasing social awareness, by carrying out activities to improve the working condition. By establishing child rights and eradicating child labour once for all from the soil of Bangladesh.

Introduction

Child labour is a crucial issue all over the world. Millions of children are to work in order to supplement family income. UNICEF estimates that around 150 million children aged between 5 to 14 in developing countries about 16 per cent fall within this age group who are involved in child labour (UNICEF-2011). ILO estimates that throughout the world, around 215 million children under 18 works many of them are in full-time. In Sub Saharan African countries 1 in 4 children aged 5-17 work, compared to 1 in 8 in Asia Pacific and 1 in 10 in Latin America (ILO-2010). Numbers suggest that more boys than girls are involved in child labour. It is estimated that roughly 90 per cent working children involved in domestic labour are girls (UNICEF-2011). Even though the prevalence of child labour is decaying in recent years everywhere exception Sub Saharan countries where it is increasing with regard to children aged 5-14 (ILO-2010).

Like other developing countries, Bangladesh is not free from the curse of child labor. It is estimated that almost 4.7 million or 12.6% of children aged below 14 in

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the work force (UNICEF -2011). Another 6.8% between ages 7 to 14 who, while going to school, also work (USDL-2012). In some slums of Bangladesh, only 25% of children below the age of 18 go to school, and the rest – work as child laborers (UNICEF-2012). Out of the child laborers engaged in the work force, 83% are employed in rural areas and 17% are employed in urban areas. Employment ranges from jobs in the formal sector, such as the garment industry, and jobs in the informal sector such as agriculture and domestic service (BBS-2006).

In 2006, Bangladesh passed a Labour Law setting the minimum legal age for employment as 14 (UNICEF-2011). Nevertheless, the enforcement of such labour laws is virtually inapplicable in Bangladesh because 93% of child laborers are employed in the informal sector such as small factories and workshops, on the street, in home-based businesses and in domestic employment (UNICEF-2011).

Review of Literature

Notwithstanding a very high child labour participation rate in Bangladesh, this issue has attracted academic attention only recently after the implementation of the Child Labour Deterrence Act (Harkin Bill 1993) in 1995. After the mid-nineties a small number of papers have focused on the issue of child labour in Bangladesh. Among these, Rahman, et al. (1999), Ravallion and Wodon (2000), Delap (2001), Amin, Quayes and Rives (2004, 2006a and 2006b), Salmon (2005), Khanam (2004 and 2006) and Khanam and Rahman (2007) are notable. However, not all of these papers have focused on the determinants of child labour in Bangladesh. For example, Rahman et al. (1999) evaluated the impact of Harkin's Bill on Bangladesh. Ravallion and Wodon (2000) examined the effectiveness of a targeted enrolment subsidy (Food-For-Education Programme) to increase school attendance and to reduce child labour in rural Bangladesh. Khanam (2004) explored the linkages between child work and both school attendance and school attainment of children aged 5–17 years using data from a survey based in rural Bangladesh. The central message from this study is that child labour adversely affects the child's schooling, which is reflected in lower school attendance and lower grade attainment. Amin et al (2006) investigated whether a child and a parent are substitutes or complements in the family labour supply decision. They found that for market work, fathers and children are substitutes or complements whereas mothers and children are complements in the family labour supply decision. Khanam (2006) focussed on the trends, patterns and policy options of child labour in Bangladesh particularly during the 1990s.

For example, a high child labour participation rate from the South Asian average and the world average

A small number of papers have focused on the determinants of child labour. For example, using the 1995-96 Household Expenditure Survey (HES) of Bangladesh, Amin et al. (2004) examined the role of poverty as a determining factor of child

labour in Bangladesh. Their result found that household poverty is an important factor in explaining child labour in Bangladesh. Subsequently, using the 2000 Bangladesh Labour Force Survey, Salmon (2005) found support of Amin et al. finding that poverty compels children to work in Bangladesh and children are the last economic resources of the household. Using data collected from Dhaka Slums, Delap (2001) however argued that socio-cultural factors are more important than economic rationality in explaining child work in urban Bangladesh. Khanam and Rahman (2007) examined the role of birth position of a child in explaining child work and schooling in Bangladesh and found that being a first-born child increases the probability of work. The present study contributes to this small but growing literature that explains the determinants of child labour in Bangladesh. As previously discussed, good understanding of the key determinants of child labour is essential for formulating appropriate policies that will reduce child labour.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study is to know the situation of the hazardous child labourers who are working at risk, and to find out the ways and means to a child labour free Bangladesh. However the specific objectives are as follows.

- a) To know the working environment of the child labourers,
- b) To identify the problems they face regularly in their daily life,
- c) To collect information from child labourers about their food habits.
- d) To investigate the degree of fulfilment of basic human needs of the child labourers,
- e) Make suggestions to overcome problems of the child labour

Methodology of the Study

Method: This is an empirical study and therefore, by its nature the study requires in-depth information. After collecting necessary data from secondary sources a sample survey was conducted to collect primary data from the field.

Area of the study: The study was conducted throughout the whole of 30 wards of Barisal city. In selecting study area, the highest concentration of the types of working children and their variations in these areas got prime importance as far as the study objective is concerned.

Population of the study: The population of the study consists of all the working children between the ages 7 to 17, engaged in 10 types of hazardous work out of 67 types identified.

Study sampling: In terms of selecting sample, total 300 samples selected from 10 occupational groups. The first consideration was to select at least 137 children from tobacco factory. The rest 163 children were selected from other occupational groups like wastage (Bhangari) collection, Automobiles, Biscuit factory, Textile,

Dock laborer, Electronic goods, Workshop labourer, Load carrying labourer and hotel or restaurant labourer out of 67 jobs hazardous for children.

Technique of data collection: Since it is an empirical study an in-depth investigation was required. For collecting data form the field interview and observation technique were followed. A questionnaire was prepared and pretested. Data was collected from the respondents through this questionnaire.

Data processing, analysis and interpretation: After completion of field study efforts were made to compile and edit the collected data to ensure the accuracy and validity of the information. Emphasis was given on qualitative interpretation while quantitative analysis was also done where necessary. Simple statistical method such as percentage, mean has been applied in some cases.

Presentation of data: The analyzed data have been presented efficiently. Bar diagram, Column diagram, and other presentation tools have been used with the data table.

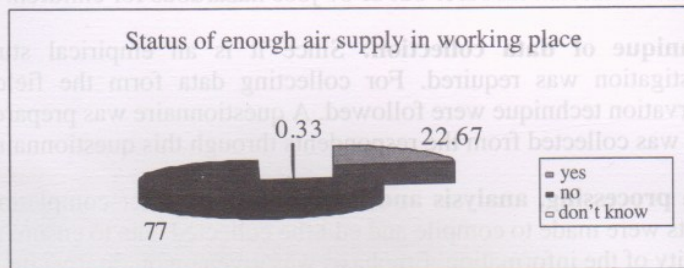
Findings of the Study: The empirical findings revealed that in terms of child rights situation in family and working place of child labourer, it was evident from both primary and secondary data that child labour not only delayed the proper physical and mental development of a child but also denied adequate recreational facilities and sleeping time even sleeping place in some cases. Other notable findings are as follows

Working condition that exists

Congenial working condition depends on various infrastructural advantages like enough space, enough light, enough air supply and adequate toilet and water facility. Moreover, good working relation between owners and workers is also crucial. Status of enough air supply in working place of child labourers' can be viewed by the following graph:

Table- 1 Distribution of child labourers by their status of working place facilities

Characteristics	Air supply		Safe water		Enough light		Toilet	
	Number	Percent (%)	Number	Percent (%)	Number	Percent (%)	Number	Percent (%)
Yes	68	22.67	72	24.0	135	45.0	53	17.67
No	231	77.0	227	75.67	161	53.67	247	82.33
Don't Know	1	.33	1	.33	4	1.33	-	-
Total	300	100	300	100	300	100	300	100

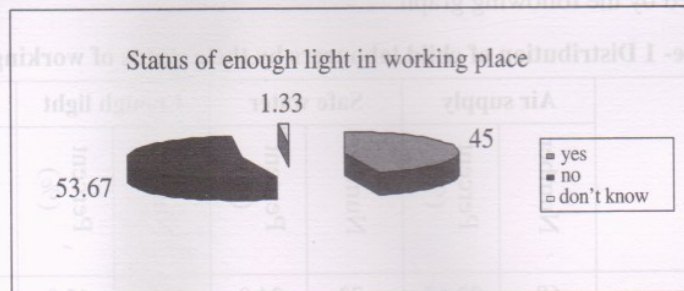
Figure-1

Source: Data Collected from the Study

The study explores the infrastructural advantages that exist in their working places. As far as enough air supply is concerned, most of the surveyed children informed that they found their working places with insufficient air supply; (77%) respondents informed that provision of air supply in their working places is not enough. But (22.67%) respondents felt that they have enough air supply in their workplace.

In terms of enough light in the working place, more than half of the respondent (53.67%) is not happy with the existing lighting facilities in their working places. Unlike air supply, in terms of light, a good number of respondents (45%) seem that provision of light was enough in their working places. A small segment of respondents were not aware of it.

Status of lighting facilities in working place of child labourers' can be viewed by the following graph:

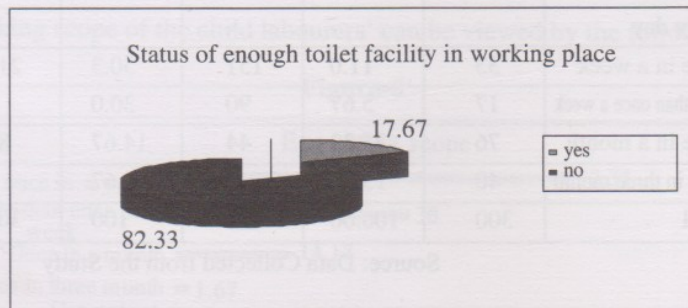
Figure-2

Source: Data Collected from the Study

In terms of enough space the respondents expressed their high dissatisfaction. A huge number of respondents informed that space in their work place was not enough (83.33%) workplace. Only (11.67%) of children felt that their working

places have enough space. A segment of children is not sure whether they work in spacious place or not. A huge number of respondents show their dissatisfaction towards the toilet facility they have. Most of the respondents (82.33%) seem that the toilet facility at their work place is not adequate. The rest of the children, around (17.67%), felt that the toilet facility they have was adequate for them. Status of enough toilet facilities in work place of child labourers' can be viewed by the following graph:

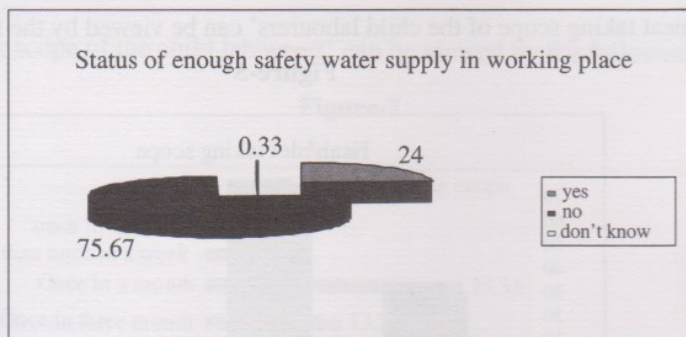
Figure-3



Source: Data Collected from the Study

Availability of safe drinking water is another important element in terms of ensuring a congenial working environment. The data reveals that more than three fourth of the respondents, (75.67%) informed that they do not have safe drinking water. The rest (24%) of respondents think that safe water was available in their work places. Status of enough safety water in work place of child labourers' can be viewed by the following graph:

Figure-4



Source: Data Collected from the Study

Food habits of child labourer**Table- 2 Distribution of food habits among children**

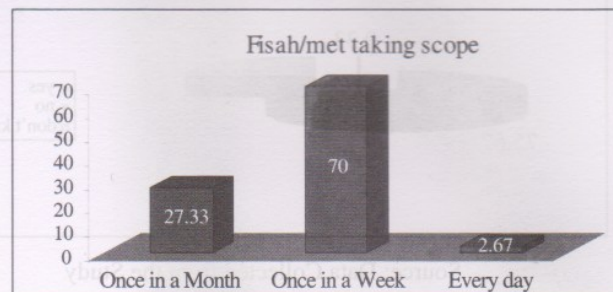
Characteristics	Milk drinking scope		Egg eating scope		Fish/meat taking scope	
	Number	Percent (%)	Number	Percent (%)	Number	Percent (%)
Cannot eat/ drink	134	44.67	10	3.33	-	-
Every day	-	-	-	-	8	2.67
Once in a week	33	11.0	151	50.3	210	70.0
More than once a week	17	5.67	90	30.0	-	-
Once in a month	76	25.33	44	14.67	82	27.33
Once in three month	40	13.33	5	1.67	-	-
Total	300	100.00	300	100	300	100

Source: Data Collected from the Study

The food habit or scope plays an important role for the physical and mental growth of the children. Hypothetically it was believed that these working children did not have enough scope to take or drink three major foods and lacking of these foods might create nutritional deficiency among children; these foods are fish/meat, egg and milk.

The data reveals that apart from few exceptions these major foods are not taken by children on a daily basis. In terms of fish/meat, the data shows that the highest number of children, more than half of the children (70%) eat fish/meat once in a week. The second position holds more than one fourth of the children who eat fish/meat once in a month. The lowest number of children, only (2.67%) of children, can eat fish/meat daily.

Fish/meat taking scope of the child labourers' can be viewed by the following graph:

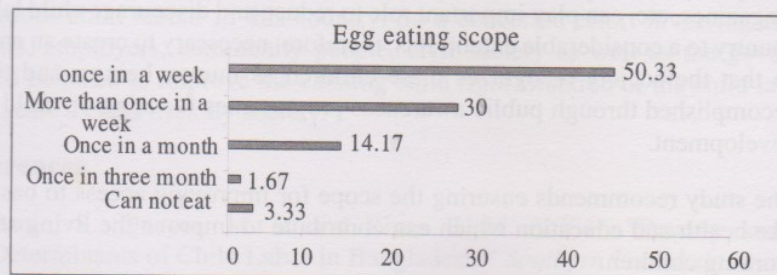
Figure-5

Source: Data Collected from the Study

In terms of drinking milk which is considered as ideal food for the children, the data shows that the highest number of children basically cannot drink milk; about half of the children (44.67%) children are deprived of drinking milk. The second highest is more than one quarter of the children (25.33%) can drink milk once in a month. Drinking milk more than once in a week is a privileged option for only a small segment of children (5.67% children). 11% informed they can drink milk once in a week. For a considerable number of children, (13.33%), children drinking milk once in three months.

Milk drinking scope of the child labourers' can be viewed by the following graph:

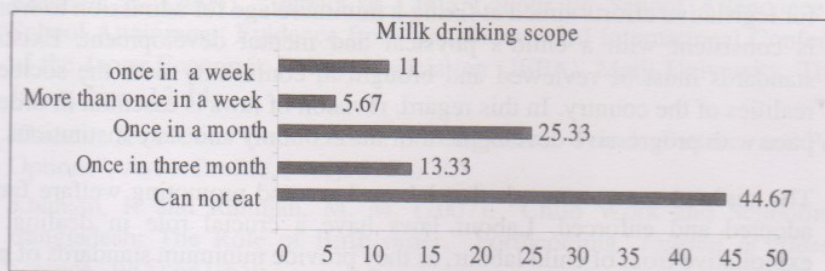
Figure-6



Eating eggs is a relatively easy option for these children compare to milk. The highest number of children, (50.33%) of the children, can take egg once in a week. Moreover, in case of milk, (45%) of children found they cannot drink it; but in case of egg (3.33%) of children found that they cannot eat egg. A considerable number of children, more than one fourth of the children, (30%) of children can eat egg more than once in a week. A segment of children, (14.67%) of children can afford egg once in a month. A small portion of children (1.67%) children can eat egg for once in three months.

Egg eating scope of the child labourers' can be viewed by the following graph:

Figure-7



Source: Data Collected from the Study

Recommendations

Along with the survey, a good number of literatures were reviewed. All the studies, including the current, show that both push and pull factor mainly stems from poverty, forcing children to enter hazardous works. Extreme poverty, lack of access to education, unemployment problem in the rural areas, lack of scope for institutional skill development, lack of knowledge about the harm of child labour are push factors. Pull factors like cheaper wage, easier handling of children than that of adult's etc. promotes child labour.

Initiative should be taken to publish the harmful aspects of child labour especially in hazardous sectors. Different media like television, radio, newspapers, magazines, etc. can play important role to reduce and discourage child labour in the country to a considerable extent. It is, therefore, necessary to create an environment so that the society recognizes these children as human beings, and this can be accomplished through public awareness programmes focusing on child rights and development.

The study recommends ensuring the scope for improving access to basic services like health and education which can contribute to improve the living standards of working children.

Pragmatic actions against child labour require collaborative intervention by the Government NGOs, and member of civil society.

The study also recommends ensuring children's participation in making decision for child labour elimination initiatives. There is a growing consensus that, the children should be given a voice to express what do they need, what are their best interests how they feel about the social responsibility in addressing their issues. In this regard, consultation with children on matters affecting them is a crucial strategy for ensuring children's participations in decision making. This initiative would help to develop an agenda for strengthening the social, economic and political position of children, in which they live and work.

The study recommends a strong commitment from the Government of Bangladesh for legislative efforts aimed at fixing a minimum age for admission to work, which is consistent with a child's physical and mental development. Existing legal standards must be reviewed and brought in conformity with the socioeconomic realities of the country. In this regard, revision of laws is essential in order to keep pace with progressive development of the economy and state institutions.

The study also recommends that labour laws and promoting welfare facilities be adopted and enforced. Labour laws have a crucial role in dealing with the exploitative from of child labour, as they provide minimum standards of protection in situations where child is inevitable and unavoidable.

Conclusion

In this research we got some new findings which are unparallel to other studies. Findings of this study reveal that most of the children are working to earn their livelihood, while there are children who were found disinterested to education. Long working hours; less payment; risky and unhealthy environment of the working places are harmful to their well-being and development. Most of the employers/owners are interested in employing children as they (children) are easy to be exploited; As a result the hazardous child labourer is highly exploitative. So, the rights of child labourer should be established for the great interest of children. It is hoped that the study will facilitate and influence in assisting policy makers, researchers and other interested stakeholders to effectively combat the problem of hazardous child labour in this country. So a concerted effort involving children, parents, employers, community people, civil society as well as the government should be taken to improve the existing child right situation of the child labourers and create a child friendly society.

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