

Hazardous Working Conditions and Employers Perception regarding Child Laborer: A study at Sylhet City of Bangladesh

Abstract

In Bangladesh, children are working under hazardous condition due to the necessity that pushes them to labor. The present study is an attempt to explore the socio-economic conditions of child laborers, working conditions as well as employer's views regarding child labors of Sylhet city. The study was conducted through personal interview with 70 child laborers and 50 employers. Simple random sampling procedure was used to select respondents. The study reveals that 48% cannot read and write. In case of occupation, 20% are automobile worker, 18% are rickshaw puller and 13% are domestic labor. 88% are the member of extended family. About 64% of child laborers are landless and 40% of the child laborer's own monthly income ranges from 600-1000 as well as 40% are dependent on employer's convenience. About 45% child laborer's working in hazardous environment and 76% are working 11 or more hours per day. Safeguard and medical facilities from owner's side are not satisfactory. According to employers view, they recruit child laborers because of their obedience, availability and lower wages. Most of the employer's recruit child laborer through the help of worker's parents/relatives. Almost all of the employers revealed that they do not provide medical, transportation, even training facilities to the child laborers. But 84% of the employers provide foods during work time. The above data are clearly reflecting the hazardous circumstances of child laborers. Finally, areas and context-specific data are essential to raise awareness against child labor and also for future policies and effective surveillance initiatives.

Key Words

Hazardous, Working Environment, Employer, Child Laborer, Sylhet City and Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

Child labor is a serious social problem found in most of the developing countries throughout the world. UNICEF and ILO acknowledging an estimated 168 million children aged 5–17

worldwide, were involved in child labor in 2013. UNICEF defines child labor as any activity that affects a child's health and education. Children aged ten to fifteen, full time economically active, may be defined as child worker (BBS, 1996). Bangladesh also possesses an enormous number of child labor, counting 6.8 million or 12.6% of children aged 5 to 14 in the work force. Intolerable forms of child labor, as categorized by the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2006), are domestic service, slavery or near slavery, hazardous occupations, and sexual exploitation. All of these forms are practiced in Bangladesh. Child labor has been increasing in Bangladesh even though child labor is on a declining trend in other South Asian countries (Khanam Rasheda, 2006). Children are engaged in over 300 different types of work activities of which 49 are considered harmful to their physical and/or mental well being. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern in 2009 that many Bangladeshi children continue to work in five of the worst forms of child labor, namely welding, auto workshops, road transport, battery recharging and tobacco factories (Ashagrie, 1997). 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). A lot of reasons are associated behind this fact. Extreme poverty in many families forces parents to put their children to work instead of sending them to school (Salaudhin, 1981). Most of the studies indicate that the economic pressure is the important feature which forces the children to earn by working inside the home (Mia, 1970). The working children had to provide their parents some amount of their earning as well as assist in daily household chores (Chowdhury & Islam, 2005). Iftekhar M. and Shafiqul Kalam (2007) added that child labor cannot be completely eliminated unless Bangladesh's economy is developed sufficiently to create job opportunities for the vast majority of its adult work force and that poverty alleviation is a pre-condition to eliminate or at least minimization of child labor. A report based on UNICEF (1991), on Elimination of Child labor reveled that unemployment of adult family members leads children to work. Maan et. al (2005) found that the behavior of the employer towards the working children was harsh. A large majority (83%) of the respondents got physical and mental punishment when they committed any mistake. The working conditions of these child workers are not uniform and vary according to their vocations. There is neither any standard guideline nor any yardstick for their work. In majority of garages there are not any safeguards, no any type of precautions, carefulness on the part of the child is only his safety. Apart from physical hazards involved and unclean nature of their jobs they may also face elements of exploitation. These children are required to work to the satisfaction of their employers which occasionally goes beyond their capacities. The child

laborers in the organized or unorganized sector are paid poorly for each completed job and often are not paid on one pretext or the other (Raja Chand, 1983).

Bangladesh is the home to more than five percent of world's working child population (The Daily Star, 2011). Many of the jobs that these children in Bangladesh perform are considered hazardous, and put their physical and mental development at risk, which will put negative effects on their long-term health and earning potential. Sylhet is also not free from this curse. The destitute and unemployed people of country side area used to come in remarkable rate in Sylhet town for searching work and earning money. They often influence their child to engage in work force for participation in family earnings. That is why, the existence of child labor is enormously found in this city too. Their tendency of involving in hazardous work force is also increasing at an alarming rate. But most surprisingly political parties, administration, City Corporation apparently are not concerned about the problem. Beside, a current bigger issue is the increase in killing and kidnapping of working children in urban areas. So it is demand of time to investigate the current situation of the children working in Sylhet deeply and thoroughly. The findings of the study in Sylhet city may reflect the real picture of child worker and it may be helpful for the different GO's and NGO's to adopt effective strategies and policies.

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To assess the socio-economic background of the working children
2. To explore the nature of employment and working environment.
3. To analyze the employers perception regarding child laborers.

2. Methods and Materials

The present research has taken considering Pathantula, Amberkhana, Shahi Eidgah, Shibgang and Court Point (Bondor) areas of Sylhet city, because child laborer are much available in these areas. Children living in the selected areas under the age of 18 years who were involved in different job sector have constituted the universe of the study. Data were collected from seventy (70) child laborers as a group one and fifty (50) employers as group two. In that case, questionnaire survey and observation techniques were used. The simple random sampling procedure was used to select respondents. At this stage utmost attempt were applied to become intimate with child laborers through gossiping, exchanging greetings, general discussions etc. The data and information were collected from the sample respondents from January to March, 2016. The collected data and information from survey were tabulated,

95 analyzed and summarized according to the objectives of the study. Descriptive statistics were
 96 used for analyzing the data.

Item		Percentage (%)
Age	6-8	12.00
	9-11	20.00
	12-14	64.00
	15-15+	4.00
	Total	100
Marital Status	Married	8.00
	Unmarried	92.00
	Total	100
Education	Can read only	28.00
	Can write	16.00
	Both read and write	8.00
	Cannot read and write	48.00
	Total	100
Occupation	Factory workers	8.00
	Rickshaw puller	18.00
	Sweeper	8.00
	Domestic aide	13.00
	Hawker	6.00
	Automobile worker	20.00
	Construction labour	8.00
	Hotel/Restaurant worker	11.00
	Porter (Coolie)	8.00
	Total	100
Family size	Nuclear	12.00
	Extended	88.00
	Total	100
Nature of guardianship	Male-headed	72.00
	Female-headed	20.00
	Without guardian	8.00
	Total	100
Possession of land	Homestead land	36.00
	Landless	64.00
	Total	100
Household Income (Taka/Month)	2000-2500	12.00
	2501-3000	20.00
	3001-3500	8.00
	3501-4000+	60.00
	Total	100
Income of the child worker	600-1000 (monthly)	40.00
	3000+ (monthly)	12.00
	Only conveyance	40.00
	No fixed salary	8.00
	Total	100
Expenditure of child workers	Give whole amount to parents	44.00
	Give a part of income to their parents	32.00
	Day to day needs	24.00
	Total	100

97 3. Result and Discussion

98 3.1 Socio-economic Characteristics of Child Laborers

Table 3.1 gives a short description of the socio-economic variables considered in the study. The prevalence of child labor is high in the age groups 9-11 and 12-14, which is 20% and 64% respectively. Study shows that 92% of the child laborers were unmarried. In case of literacy, highest 48% revealed that they cannot read and write, while 28% can only read. Study also found that, highest 20% were automobile worker, 18% were rickshaw puller, and 13% were domestic labor. About 88% were living in extended type of family while only 12% were living in nuclear family. In case of nature of guardianship, study shows that 72% are male headed family, while 8% were living without any guardianship. About 64% of child laborers were landless while only 36% own only homestead land. Table 3.1 shows that 20% of the child laborer's household income ranges from 2501-3000, while highest 60% respondents household income is above 4000. In contrary, 40% of the child laborer's own monthly income ranges from 600-1000 and 40% income level fixed up in only convenience. Highest 44% gives whole income to their parents for family expenses, while 32% gives a part of total income to their parents. From the table 3.1, it was also found that 64% of the respondents revealed that their father were illiterate and 88% of the respondents said that their mother were illiterate. In addition, 56% respondents said their fathers were involved in no-agricultural sectors, while 72% revealed that their mothers were housewives.

Table 3.1: Socio-economic Characteristics of the Child Laborer

Parents Level of Education

Level of Education	Father (Percentage)	Mother (Percentage)
Primary	16%	4%
Secondary	12%	0
Can only read & write	8%	8%
Illiterate	64%	88%
Total	100	100

Parents Level of Occupation

Father's Occupation	Percentages	Mother's Occupation	Percentages
Non-agricultural labor	56%	Housewives	72%
Small trade	8%	Day laborer	8%
Agricultural labor	24%	Hotel worker	4%
Subsistence farming	12%	Domestic servant	16%
Total	100		100

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121 **3.2 Nature of Employment and Working Environment**

122 Nature of employment and working environment expose the domination as well as hazardous
 123 working pattern. The present study comprises mode of payment, working environment,
 124 working hours, safety measure, treatment facilities, training facilities, leisure hours, etc to
 125 examine the nature of employment and working environment. The present study revealed
 126 that, 46.67% child laborers were getting their salary monthly, whereas 40% only get
 127 conveyance cost. About 55% of the respondents revealed that their working environment is
 128 favorable for them, while rest 45% found the working environment as hazardous. Table 3.2
 129 shows that, 76% of the child laborers worked 11 or more hours per day. On contrary, only 8%
 130 worked 7 to 8 hours per day. Alongside, 87% revealed that precaution or safety measure in
 131 the working place was not satisfactory. About 64% of the respondents said that there were
 132 high probabilities of happening accident in the workplace and 3% did not show any response
 133 in this aspect.

134 **Table 3.2: Nature of employment and working environment**

Item		Percentage (%)
Mode of payment	Only conveyance	40.00
	Weekly payment	13.33
	Monthly payment	46.67
	Total	100
Working Environment	Favorable	55.00
	Hazardous	45.00
	Total	100
Working Hours	7-8	8.00
	9-10	16.00
	11 or more	76.00
	Total	100
Precaution/Safeguard	Satisfactory	13.00
	Not Satisfactory	87.00
	Total	100
High probability of happening accident	Yes	64.00
	No	33.00
	No response	3.00
	Total	100

Type of Dangers at Workplace	No any Problems	27.00
	Injuries / eye injuries	9.00
	Electric Shock	11.00
	Other dangers	53.00
	Total	100
Treatment facility in workplace	Yes	3.00
	No	97.00
	Total	100
Leisure Hour	Yes	88.00
	No	12.00
	Total	100
Training Facility for Child Laborer	Yes	6.00
	No	94.00
	Total	100

135

136 The present study demonstrates that, 27% children have stated that, they have not to face any
 137 dangers while working. Highest 53% children have stated that the various other dangers such
 138 as accidents, blackening of hand and face due to smoke of diesel, congested work place,
 139 handling of delicate tools, oil spill, heavy work load, low light etc. Almost all the respondents
 140 (97%) said that they never get treatment facilities when they face any physical problem in the
 141 workplace. About 88% revealed that they do not get any leisure hour during working
 142 schedule. It was also found from the study that 94% of the total child laborers did not get any
 143 sorts of training facilities in their total working span.

144 **3.3 Employers Perception regarding Child Labor**

145 Employer's view on child labor will help to find out the root cause child labor as well as their
 146 services for the betterment of child laborer. The present section of the study covers the reason
 147 and method of recruiting child laborers and services they provide like medical, transportation
 148 and training/workshop facilities, food supply in the workplace, etc. From the present
 149 research, it was found that highest 32% employers recruited child laborers because of their
 150 obedience, 28% did it because of availability and 24% though about it because of the lower
 151 wages. Table 3.3 shows that 46% of the employers recruited child laborer through worker's
 152 parents/relatives, while 32% said that worker's were directly made contact with them for job.
 153 About 90% of the employer's revealed that they did not provide any medical facilities to
 154 workers. About 64% of the employers stated that they provide transportation facility through

providing additional wages for this, while 36% did not provide this facility. In addition, 84% of the employers said that they supply foods during the time of work. The present study also shows that highest 84% of the employers did not offer any training or workshop facilities to workers.

Table 3.3: Employers Perception regarding Child Labor

Item		Frequency of Employers	Percentage (%) of Employers
Reason for recruiting child worker	Obedience	16	32.00
	Good performance	8	16.00
	Lower wage	12	24.00
	Availability of child workers	14	28.00
	Total	50	100
Methods of recruiting child worker	By parents/relatives of workers	23	46.00
	Personal contact of employer	11	22.00
	Deliberately by the worker	16	32.00
	Total	50	100
Medical facilities given by owners	Yes	5	10.00
	No	45	90.00
	Total	50	100
Transportation facilities	Yes	32	64.00
	No	18	36.00
	Total	50	100
Food supply during work	Yes	42	84.00
	No	8	16.00
	Total	50	100
Workshop/training facilities	Yes	9	18.00
	No	41	82.00
	Total	50	100

4. Conclusion

Child labor is now an important social concern both nationally and internationally. Children working in hazardous sectors face especially high risks to their health and well-being. They are also exposed to various forms exploitation and abuse. The present research explored their deteriorated situation in some extent. From the present study, it is obvious that their socioeconomic condition is reasonably vulnerable. They are neglected from their rights and duties. Most of them are working in hazardous sectors. Most of their parents are illiterate. Their income is also low even fixed up with the convenience of owner. Most them only get travel cost but works more than eleven hours. In their workplace, risk of happening accident is higher but precaution or safeguard equipments and treatment facilities are not satisfactory.

Most of them did not get leisure time during working hour. They do not get training facility before or after starting respective jobs. The study also covered the owner's perceptions. Most of the employers recruit child worker because of easy availability, obedient and lower wages. They only look at their own economic profit. Most of them confess that they do not provide medical, transportation and training facilities as well as very limited number of employers disclosed that they only supply foods during work time. The above findings clearly state that child laborers of our country are working in very hazardous environment. So, it is high time to take urgent policies and recommendation to protect child laborers from all harmful factors and also work for their legal rights.

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