



Research article

Escaping Home, Accepting Uncertainty: Why Children Prefer to Live in the Challenging Street Circumstances

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growing concern of child protection and their well-being, a number of children are continuously forced to live on the street every year. Far from being a matter of choice, street life is imposed upon children by various circumstances, leading to physical-mental abuse, uncertainty of cognitive development, and often ruined their bright future. In order to address this issue, this research aims to identify the underlying factors that force children to live on the street. To fulfill the research objectives, Khulna District was purposively selected. A qualitative research approach was employed in this study to collect primary data, gathering through in-depth interviews using semi-structured interview guidelines. For selecting the participants, multi-stage sampling, including grab sampling and respondent-assisted sampling, was used, and data were collected from twenty street children living in different locations in Khulna District. The data were processed and analyzed by using NVivo 15 software for maintaining its accuracy. The findings of this study revealed that dysfunctional family relations arising from domestic violence, parental separation, and parental death are the key factors for compelling children to live on street life. Additionally, exploitation by caregivers such as inappropriate care from caregivers and abuse at home, emerges as a critical factor pushing children toward street life. Furthermore, economic hardship driven by poverty, forced to earn, and natural calamities pushes them into homelessness. This research highlights the key factors driving children to the street, emphasizing the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to ensure the safety and protection of their rights.

Introduction

Children are recognized as the cornerstone of a nation's demographic composition (Alam et al., 2022; Aytac, 2021; Khan et al., 2020), as they represent the foundation of its future population and societal progress (Mote, 2018). But in today's interconnected society, children navigate complex series of challenges regarding their physical safety, psychological well-being, and cognitive social development (Ferreira et al., 2024; Sciaraffa et al., 2018). A diverse array of socio-economic, cultural, religious, and political factors contributes to the creation of this challenging situation, frequently transforming it into one of the most serious global issues (Gemmell et al., 2023; Seraphin & Yallop, 2020). Recognizing this issue, a number of nations have pledged their allegiance and legally bound themselves to uphold and protect child rights (Maemunah & Sakban, 2020; Ngwu et al., 2024). Despite many policies and programs for protecting child rights, a number of children are increasingly forced to live on the

street every year (Gunhidzirai & Tanga, 2020; Ngwu et al., 2024). At present, an estimated more than one hundred million children survive on the street worldwide (Salihu, 2019).

Street children, whose livelihoods rely on the streets, are one of the most vulnerable populations (Reza & Bromfield, 2019; Ritterbusch & Cilencio, 2020). Their street dependency is not by their choice, but they are driven by the collapse of hope and meanings of their life. Different types of factors, including both "Push" and "Pull" forced a number of children to live on the streets in different parts of the world (Goodman et al., 2020; Seidel et al., 2018). Push factors encompass poverty, lack of land, homelessness, shortage of opportunities, and natural catastrophes, whereas pull factors encompass access to informal sectors and slum areas, as well as the availability of social services (Guha et al., 2023; Haanpää et al., 2019). The most noticeable factors include poverty (Abdul & Aju, 2020; Ojebuyi & Ajao, 2023), migration (Hassen & Bale-

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Robe, 2019), unemployment (Al-Jundi et al., 2020; Bayırbağ et al., 2018) and peer influence (Sah et al., 2020) severely force children to live on the street. Existing literature from global perspective indicates that social and cultural factors include family poverty, dysfunction, particularly child neglect and abuse, population growth and structural combination, migration, war, shifts in social and cultural values, and attitudes are significant factors that push a child towards a life on the streets (Chimdessa & Cheire, 2018; Chowdhury et al., 2017; Fantahun & Taa, 2022; Gao et al., 2018; Hunter et al., 2021; Mekonen et al., 2020; Özçelik & Sevinç Kayihan, 2022; Seidel et al., 2018; Yahya, 2018). Consequently, they face different types of vulnerabilities on the street in terms of basic necessities, safety, access to quality healthcare, and educational opportunities exploitation, physical and verbal abuse, controlled by adult gangs, and a lack of identity (Deb et al., 2020; Mekonen et al., 2020; Mulu et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2018; Savarkar & Das, 2019).

Especially, the prevalence of street children issues is widespread in developing countries where social and economic infrastructure is insufficient, posing a significant danger to the developmental requirements of these disadvantaged children (Hassen & Mañus, 2018; Julien, 2022). Similarly, Bangladesh, a developing country, faces this issue, as emigration, poverty, and war that contribute to the broader social, economic, and political challenges that affect children's lives and force them to lead their lives on the streets (Gao et al., 2018; Mia & Islam, 2021; Rea, 2023). The majority of the street children in Bangladesh are mainly from the poor family (Matubbar & Arifuzzaman, 2022; Mia et al., 2022) and apart from this, children having problems with parents or stepparents and experiencing domestic violence are also bound to leave their house and live on the street (Ndoromo et al., 2017; Rahman et al., 2018). Additionally, the presence of informal sectors such as domestic work, labor, street vending, and begging on the streets that influence children to live on the street because they are victims of forced labor for earning money (Suha & Shah, 2023). From several studies, street children in Bangladesh are involved in diverse livelihood activities such as scavenging for scrap materials, begging, helping with transportation, and working as porters (Haque, 2023; Kaiser & Sinanan, 2020; Kamruzzaman & Hakim, 2017; Osmani & Hossain, 2020; Rahman, 2019; Suha & Shah, 2023; Zahangir et al., 2024). These street children, without the supervision and direction of responsible people, are in significant danger of being targeted and influenced by hoodlums and miscreants (Nur, 2024; Rahman et al., 2018). Moreover, street-connected children have been involved in different forms of political violence for monetary gain (Reza & Bromfield, 2019).

However, the situation of street children in Bangladesh is more severe from social, economic, and health perspectives, as highlighted in several studies conducted in different cities in Bangladesh (Haque, 2023; Nur, 2024; Osmani & Hossain, 2020; Zahangir et al., 2024). In this regard, the safety and protection of children remains one of the most concerning issues all over the Bangladesh (United Nations, 2017; Wekerle, 2024). Hence, based on the abovementioned scenario, this study examines the underlying factors that force children to live

on the streets in Bangladesh, specifically focusing on the Khulna District.

Theoretical Framework

This study was conceptualized using two theoretical perspectives, namely the social disorganization theory and the structural analysis of push and pull factors theory. The Social Disorganization Theory proposed by Clifford R. Shaw and Henry D. McKay (1942), cited in Suha and Sik (2021), which explains that collapsed social structures and community collaboration are incapable of enforcing social standards and preserving order, which results in a variety of social issues. In this context, Kubrin (2009) and Ciobanu (2019) recognized that socio-economic characteristics such as family disorganization, residential mobility, and structural density, weaken informal social networks, including local social bonds, and lower community attachment, while other factors such as poverty and racial composition are likely to affect informal control, resulting in social problems.

From the central concept of social disorganization theory, community disorder is caused by several factors such as high mobility, poverty, poor structural capacity of social institutions, breakdown in social links and group effectiveness, and insufficient support from the family and community in Bangladesh. Consequently, it is difficult to successfully manage and uphold child protection laws in an unorganized society, resulting in a significant number of children being forced to reside on the streets and face a higher chance of being abused, exploited, or neglected.

Additionally, the structural analysis of push and pull factors is a theoretical framework developed by Kaime-Atterhög (1996) provide insights that two conceptualized factors, such as push and pull factors forced children to live on the street. The push factors are related to poverty, economic need, as well as familial issues, such as family breakdown, abuse, insufficient parental assistance and guidance, and domestic violence, among others (Ghimire, 2014; Mughal et al., 2019). On the other hand, the pull factors comprise external forces such as peer influence, the street working opportunity, as well as an urge for independence and a better life that have the power of pushing children impacted by any of the push causes to the streets (Kaime-Atterhög, 2012; Roy & Siddique, 2018).

This theoretical framework highlights that children in Bangladesh are susceptible to make the streets their place of residence or means of livelihood when they face family-level problems, such as abuse, lack of family support, and external ones, including peer pressure in their local social surroundings. Therefore, the use of this theoretical approach in this study was significant as it gave some insight into the many variables that drive children to relocate in the streets.

Materials and Methods

Study Design

The study employed a qualitative methodology as it helps to gain a comprehensive insight into the underlying factors influencing individuals' actions, and beliefs, which are shaped by their distinct experiences and perspectives (Marvasti, 2004). Given the study, by understanding human behavior, characteristics, and other factors, a qualitative approach provided a more comprehensive

elucidation of the subject matter, relying on the subjective viewpoints about the factors that forced children to the street from their family and community. The qualitative method allows collecting verifiable human experiences within a particular natural context, influenced by various factors, while demonstrating the deep personal challenges associated to causal relationships (Ela et al., 2021; Lune & Berg, 2017; Maxwell, 2012) that allows researchers to explore the unknown and hidden factors forcing children to the street in Khulna District.

Participant Recruitment

To conduct the study, a multi-stage sampling procedure was used, where in the first stage, grab sampling was used to select the first research participants because this sampling technique is used for dealing with hard-to-reach populations and allows the researcher to select the samples from the target population by employing specific inclusion and exclusion criteria based on study objectives (Daniel, 2012), and later on in the second stage, respondent-assisted sampling was used to select rest of the study participants because this sampling procedure is more successful method than other nonprobability sample designs for sampling population that are rare, have low incidence, or are difficult to contact, accordingly, this sampling technique is also useful for investigating social networks (Daniel, 2012). However, those sampling procedures were determined to produce strategic intelligence that provided the most essential facts and had the largest influence on the creation of knowledge based on the participants' statements. Hence, by using those sampling, data were collected from 20 street children by using those sampling.

Interview Outline

For collecting data, a semi-structured interview guideline was developed by reviewing relevant literature and consulting with experts. The main thematic question was (i) What are the accountable factors forcing children to live on the streets?

Ethical Issues

The ethical clearance committee of Khulna University accepted this research (Reference Number: KUECC-2024-10-81). In the study, we tried to be unbiased in any issue,

and having a strong positive research ethic to conduct this study. The data collector of this study was the researcher himself and he was ethically neutral to collect data from the field. We did not manipulate any information during analyze the data set. The information was kept strictly private. Finally, we were value-free and ethical to write this thesis. The data will not be used anywhere except for academic purposes.

Data Collection

For this study, data was collected through in-depth interviews using semi-structured interview guidelines as it helps to explore promising topics for additional study, and it also entails asking open-ended questions to informants and probing whenever required to get material considered helpful by the researcher (Guest et al., 2012; Legard et al., 2003). Before starting of every single interview, the researcher explained the purpose and procedures of the study towards the participant. The Bangla language was used to conduct the in-depth interviews, which averaged 40 to 45 minutes in length. The interviews were conducted under complete confidentiality and with the participants' prior consent. We also maintained a cooperative connection with the participants and a neutral perspective while collecting data. Additionally, participants might leave the study at any time without providing a reason. For generalization in qualitative research, the depth of the data is more important than the quantity (Bryman, 2012).

Data Analysis

After conducting in-depth interviews with participants, the recorded data were checked out and transcribed for analysis. Then, the transcribed data were coded and interpreted into themes using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 15. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis technique because the purpose of thematic analysis is not limited to providing a summary of the data but rather involves the identification and interpretation of significant elements within the data (Clarke et al., 2015). In addition, a thematic analysis highlights the most salient meaning clusters within the dataset. Researchers established a connection between the study's findings and external circumstances by correlating the theme's frequency of occurrence. The steps include the following (see Figure 1).

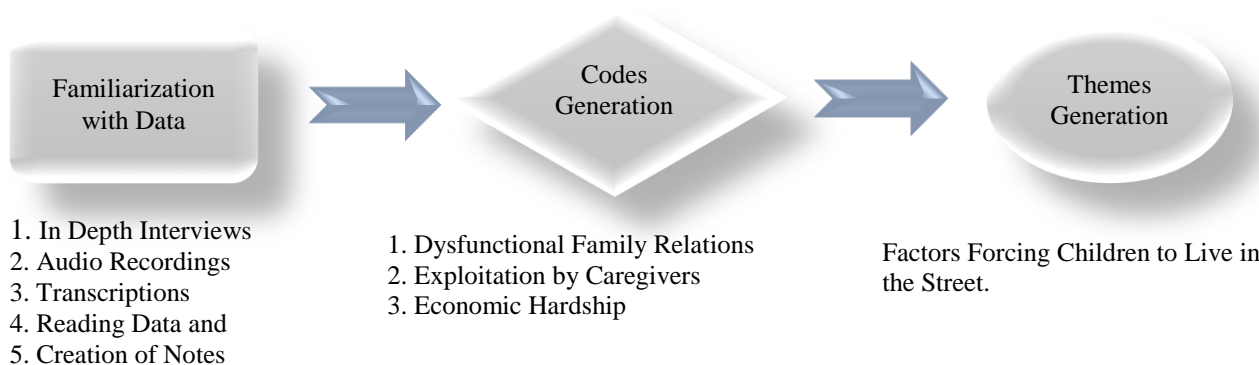
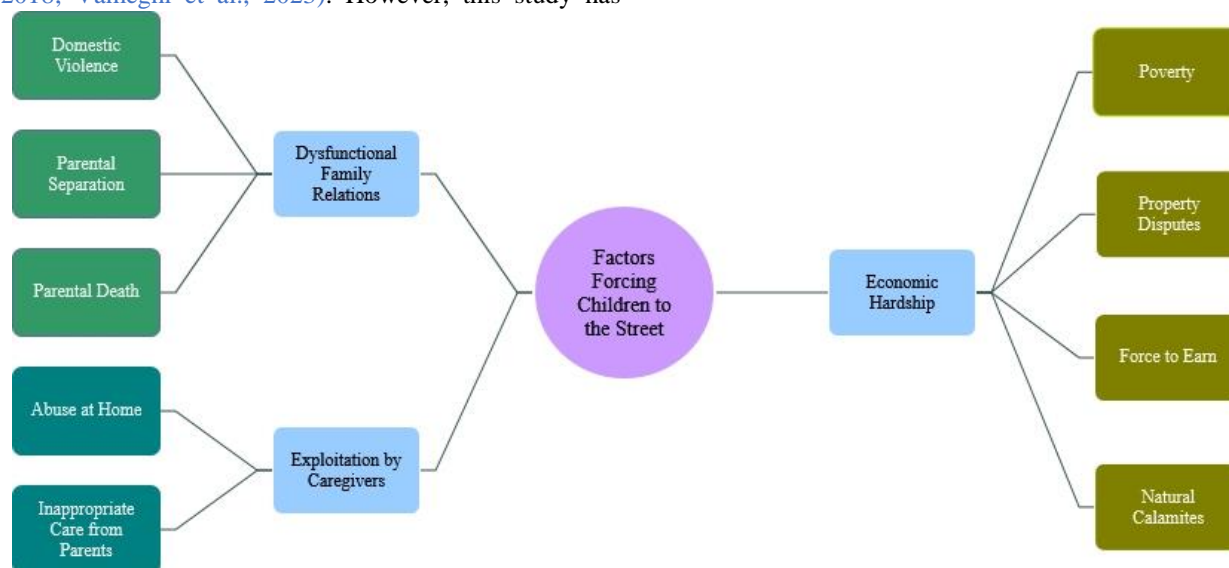


Figure 1: Process of Theme Generation

Findings

The issue of street children, a global humanitarian concern, is growing due to a wide range of interconnected factors that makes it impossible to survive within their families, resulting prefer to live on the street (Hassen & Mañus, 2018; Vameghi et al., 2023). However, this study has

identified several intensive factors that are responsible for ending up on the street in Khulna District. The mind map-1 shows the underlying factors that force children to live on the street in Khulna District.



Mind Map 1: Factors Forcing Children to Live in the Street

Theme 1: Dysfunctional Family Relations

A number of children wind up on the streets because their families are not working well (Gungor, 2021). Children often experience a sense of unease or danger inside their own households when there is a history of abuse, neglect, drug addiction, or extreme financial instability (Engel, 2023). Consequently, some children feel they have no option but to run away in searching of a better life. However, the present study reveals a number of factors those are considered as the reason of the dysfunctional family relation including domestic violence, parental separation and parental death in Khulna District.

Due to the dysfunctional family relationship, the street children in Khulna District experienced different types of danger within home in terms of abusing substances, exploitation and denied basic necessities like healthcare, education, and shelter. As a child experienced trauma, they force to search meaningful livelihood by any means resulting street life.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is an enormous factor pushing children to the streets that is created by the family's vulnerable economic condition and low level of cohesion in the family (Bhuiyan et al., 2024). Maltreatment by parents or relatives is the severe reason for leaving their home. On this ground, two of the participants (Male=5 and 11) revealed domestic violence as the reason behind their street living. One of them (Participant 11) stated that,

"My father would get drunk every day. After becoming drunk, he would violently abuse verbally and beat my mother and myself. He consistently mistreated not only me but also my

other family members. Besides my father, my uncles and my aunt's spouse would also drink and abuse me. On the other side, I studied at a madrasa. If I could not attend the madrasa, my father would physically abuse me. Because of this domestic violence, I left home and sat on a train. Later, I found myself in Khulna Railway Station when the train stopped. After that, no one came looking for me."

Parental Separation

Dysfunctional family relations caused by parental separation is a well-documented factor pushing children on the street (Mohapanele, 2023). Accordingly, a large number of parents decide to get a separation due to extra-marital relationships, conflict, and poverty without considering the future of their children in Khulna District. Because of the separation, children cannot get proper care within their family. Consequently, they find themselves forced to live on the streets. On this perspective, total three participants (Male=1, 2, and 7) expressed their experience emotionally. For instance, participant 7 expressed that,

"In my early childhood, my mother divorced my father and left me in his care. Due to my parental separation, my life goes on with too many difficulties. My father got a new marriage and brought up children within that family. After that, my stepmother and stepsiblings began to subject me to abuse. She cannot tolerate my behavior and cannot provide me with regular meals. Consequently, I left my house and started to live on the street."

Parental Death

The loss of parents often leads to the disintegration of the family structure, leaving children devoid of adequate care, attention, and numerous challenges, including food insecurity, limited access to education, and housing instability, which may force them to resort to street survival (Hasan & Chaitee, 2022). On this ground, three participants (Male=6, and Female=1 and 3) mentioned their problems as the reason behind their street life. Participant 6 mentioned that,

“Both my father and mother have passed away. My mother died from a stroke, and my father rushed off a train and died. After my parents’ deaths, no one cared for me at all. We are four brothers. Besides, my brothers used to beat me a lot without any reason. In this family, I cannot fulfill my basic needs. I cannot eat three times in a day. Unable to handle all this, I grew enraged and left my house. I come to Khulna via train for living peacefully. Since then, I have lived on the street.”

Theme 2: Exploitation by Caregivers

Children sometimes choose to live on the streets as a way to escape systematic forms of exploitation, such as forced labor, physical abuse, sexual abuse, economic exploitation, and psychological maltreatment by their caregivers, which often result in them being provided with intolerable living conditions (Haque, 2023). On this perspective, the current research identified two categories of caregivers’ exploitation that force children to live on the streets in Khulna District.

Inappropriate Care from Parents

Inappropriate care from parents causes substantial changes in children’s development and well-being, often driving them to seek alternatives on the streets (Dutta, 2018). When parents cannot take care of their children that creates a lack of fundamental necessities such as food, clothes, and shelter, children often develop self-sufficient strategies for survival that often involve street life. In this study, three participants (Male=8, 14 and 17) who explained the causes of inappropriate care from parents due to the incompetence of managing the family. One participant (Participant 14) explained that,

“My parents are working outside the family all day long. My mother works in someone’s house as a housekeeper, and my father works as a day laborer in Dhaka. As a result, my parents do not care about me and they do not have time for me. They do not feed me regularly, and my mother always beats me for no reason. Both of parents cannot take care of me properly. So, I left home and moved to Khulna to live with my grandma.”

Abuse at Home

Physical and mental abuse within homes forced children in the street worldwide (Bromfield et al., 2023). While physical abuse inflicts physical damages, emotional abuse,

which does not inflict physical injuries, fosters profound psychological trauma, compelling children to choose a life on the streets as a more favorable alternative. Six participants, who had experienced abuse in their homes, made the decision to leave from their home. A 14-year-old female participant provided an emotional explanation that,

“After my parents’ deaths, I remained at home. At home, I encounter numerous challenges. I have a cousin who wants me to perform unethical activities (sexual acts) with him. He coerced me into engaging in this activity, but I declined his offer. After that, I reported the situation to my aunt and uncle, but they did not take any action. Instead, they beat me more. I have a cousin sister who is the same age as me. When I wanted to eat, she did not give me sufficient food. She consumes almost all the food, while I receive none at all. They had me do all the housework: sweeping, washing dishes, and cleaning clothing. If I failed to perform these tasks, they would severely punish me. Everyone treated me terribly. Eventually, I left home and came to the streets.”

Theme 3: Economic Hardship

Extreme economic hardship forces families to face several challenges, such as the inability to meet basic needs like food, housing, and clothing, leading them to make desperate decisions that ultimately push children into the streets, where they seek out street-based economic activities to support themselves and their families (Intesar & Parvez, 2024). This early economic engagement with street life often transitions into permanent street residency as children become even more absorbed in street economies and societies. However, the present study has identified three major reasons as economic hardship that forced children to the street in the Khulna District.

Poverty

Chronic poverty creates fundamental challenges to fulfilling children’s basic needs and conflict within the family (Abdul & Aju, 2020). Consequently, children often face more vulnerability mentally and physically. In order to alleviate stress and manage their basic needs, some children choose to leave their home and start to live on the street in Khulna district. In this perspective, four participants (Male=2, 3, 7 and 13) shared their personal experience. One of them (Participant 13) stated that,

“I belong in a very poor family. I experience a lot of problems at my house. My father cannot manage our daily needs. As a result, conflict remains within my parents. Sometimes floods and storms ruin our house and land. The lack of land prevents my father from cultivating. With 8 family members, my father cannot adequately support the family. That is why I came to Khulna with my grandmother.”

Additionally, some children want to earn money for managing their basic needs and supporting their family in

this area. But due to their age, they cannot find any type of permanent work for earning. As a result, they have to live in the street permanently. On this ground, two of the participants (Male=4 and 16) mentioned this reason as their street life. One participant (Participant 16) mentioned that,

"I did not want to come to the streets, but my luck led me to the street. Because my family is quite poor, with a lot of members. In this situation, my father cannot fulfill our basic need properly. I could not eat properly. There was no way to obtain food or other necessities. Even when I was ill, no one cared after me. That is why I angrily came to Khulna to search for work. But no one offers me something to do because of my little age. So, I live on the streets now".

Property Disputes

Property disputes within families create insecure and unstable home conditions that mainly arise from poverty or fear of losing lands after the death of blood relatives. It often leads to an economic crisis within the family, resulting in children not being able to get minimum basic services that force children to live in the streets in Khulna district. In this context, one participant (Male=1) shared his story.

"The other children of my father from his previous marriage went to live with their maternal grandparents after the death of their mother. However, my maternal family is also uninterested in me, as they fear that I might claim my mother's property. Consequently, I was unable to reside in my maternal parents' home. Since then, I have been living on the streets."

Force to Earn

Some families recognize children merely as economic assets in Khulna district. Children are frequently forced to the street for earning money. If they cannot earn enough money, they face various forms of abuse within the home. In this context, two participants (Male=14 and Female=2) share an emotional narrative. Baisakhi, a female participant revealed that,

"My sister and I lived with my aunt. She was poor and cunning. She forced us to beg on the streets. If we earned little money, she would beat us severely. She would not feed us properly, and if we earned no money at all. She would continue to beat us without mercy. Sometimes, if I made minor mistakes, she would tie me up in the house with chains. Because of this abuse, I left my aunt's house."

Natural Calamities

Natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, and river erosion have devastated families and exacerbated extreme poverty by devastating resources (Mahadevia Ghimire, 2021). As a result, families are unable to provide basic needs and care for their children. In Khulna district, due to natural disaster, children cannot fulfill their need within house that force them to the street. In this regard, two participants (Male=9 and 15) explained their experience. Participant 15 stated that,

"In Koyra, where I live, people face almost always natural disasters. Sometimes storms, sometimes floods, and sometimes river erosion occur in this place. There is always salt in the water. Our house is right on the riverbank. Every year, storms and river erosion destroy our home, leaving us without any land for cultivation. Along with this, I have five siblings. There are many people in the family. So, I cannot eat properly. There is always fighting and quarreling between my parents over these issues. I also cannot earn the money needed to get out of this situation in Koyra. So, I have to come to Khulna for searching work. But I do not find any types of work. So, I have to live on the streets to collect my own livelihood"

Discussion

Street children are a socially at-risk population (Bromfield et al., 2023; Julien, 2022; Kathuria & Pandya, 2020) and is immobile in a vicious cycle of social oppressions that most importantly limits one of the basic human tenets – civil rights and development (Gao et al., 2018; Hassen & Mañus, 2018; Mulu et al., 2022). The journey to the streets is not a singular event but a culmination of interconnected socio-economic and family components (Goodman et al., 2020; Seidel et al., 2018). Similarly, they also encounter a variety of barriers and risks, including physical, mental, social, and economic factors, which further increase their vulnerability during their time on the streets (Rahman et al., 2018; Savarkar & Das, 2019).

This study reveals that the humanitarian issue of children ending up on the streets in Khula District is often caused by dysfunctional family relations, exploitation of the caregivers', and economic hardship. Dysfunctional family relations, driven by factors such as domestic violence, parental separation, and parental death, emerge as the primary reason for children ending up on the street. Due to dysfunctional family relations, children cannot fulfill their basic needs and fundamental human rights as well as often face abuse by their stepfamily members, which is a hindrance to their future growth. Consequently, they cannot find any means to live with their family. In a similar way, different studies conducted on street children also revealed that, children having problems with parents and experiencing domestic violence are also bound to leave their house and live on the street (Chowdhury et al., 2017; Ndoromo et al., 2017; Rahman et al., 2018; Yahya, 2018).

Meanwhile issues like neglect, abuse, and exploitation within family also forced the children ending up on the

street (Chowdhury et al., 2017; Hunter et al., 2021; Savarkar & Das, 2019; United Nations Children Funds, 2020). Similarly, this study also explores various forms of exploitation within their (street children) families, specifically physical and mental abuse by their stepparents, step-siblings and other family members which becomes a source of fear that forces children to leave their house and started living in the street. The result of this study also claim that unawareness of their parents is another main cause behind their street living. Due to inappropriate care from their parents, children cannot get proper opportunity for their well-being. Consequently, systematic neglect or intentional maltreatment places children in settings that fundamentally undermine their safety and dignity and compel them to leave their house and these findings corroborate with the study of Akpan et al. (2021) and Fantahun and Taa (2022).

The findings in Khulna District, particularly those concerning economic hardship and caregiver exploitation, align with the study conducted in Dhaka (Suha & Shah, 2023), where children are similarly induced by rural poverty, forced labor, and family dysfunction. Yet another distinctive vulnerability in Khulna is that of natural calamities, which include floods and salinity intrusion-and this goes less stressed in either Rajshahi or Dhaka studies. In Rajshahi, Osmani and Hossain (2020) found that more organized informal economic activities affected children's decisions to stay and live on the streets. Accordingly, Nur (2024), however, claim that in Cox's Bazar, pointed out trafficking and refugee-related risks that were not predominant in Khulna. These regional variations warrant locally responsive policy interventions relative to the socio-economic and environmental context of each district.

Poverty is one of the intensive drivers of child homelessness (Chimdessa & Cheire, 2018; Matubbar & Arifuzzaman, 2022; Yahya, 2018). This insight is also similar in this study. Accordingly, the present study also explores that children are often used as a means of earning for their family. In this context, if children are unable to earn enough money, they may be subjected to abuse within their family that Zoumanigui (2016) and Gbenga-Akanmu and Adesokan (2024) highlighted in their studies as well. Apart from this, one of the most distinctive findings in this study is that natural calamities are silently forcing children to the streets in Khulna District, a phenomenon that prevent children from meeting their basic needs within their families, and family members are unable to provide adequate care for them. Consequently, they are forced to migrate to the streets in order to manage their livelihood. A couple of studies conducted by Bhadra and Dyer (2022) and Patel et al. (2020) also found similar types of result in their studies.

Apart from the street children reporting these matters firsthand, the accounts of practitioners working with vulnerable children validate these findings as well. NGOs working in urban Bangladesh, like Aparajeyo-Bangladesh and Save the Children, have documented the causes for child homelessness to generally include parental neglect, economic exploitation, or even abuse (Aparajeyo-Bangladesh, 2019; United Nations Children's Fund, 2020). The social workers have noted that family breakups, especially when following domestic violence or

migration-induced stresses, leave children unsupported. These stakeholder perspectives thus reaffirm the study-identified patterns and expose the systemic nature of this vulnerability. Integrating these external perspectives bolsters the credibility of our themes and impresses the need for urgent cross-sectoral action involving the family, community, and state agencies.

The findings of this study offer critical prospective for rethinking child protection and intervention frameworks.

First, the existence of dysfunctional family backgrounds and exploitation by caregivers calls for a shift in focus away from merely reactive approaches toward more family-centered interventions. Family counseling, conflict resolution, and caregiver training in communities could help to keep children from molesting on the roadside.

Second, there is an ever-greater urgency for building cross-sectorial collaboration between government agencies, local NGOs, social workers, and the law enforcement agencies. Such a coordinated response mechanism will bring about the identification of children at risk and a timely intervention with housing, schooling, and psychosocial support.

Thirdly, since impoverishment and enforced child labor join forces in pushing children to life on the streets, the reforms must therefore also provide economic safety nets and targeted livelihood support to vulnerable families. Conditional cash transfers, school feeding, and vocational training might be placed as incentives to keep the children away from adversities at home.

Lastly, this study retains the uniqueness of climate-related displacement factors (river erosion and salinity intrusion in Khulna) as emergent agents in the migration of children to the urban streets. Hence, this will make street children an important stakeholder group within climate resilience and disaster response planning, which ordinarily has never considered them prior.

Conclusion

Street children are an intensive social issue in Bangladesh, hindering the overall progress of the country. Various factors influence this complex issue, contributing to the persistence of street children despite policy efforts to address it. In this regard, this study is conducted to explore the factors contributing forcing children to live on the street in the Khulna district. The study reveals that a complex interplay of socio-economic, familial, and environmental factors forces street children in the Khulna district into a vulnerable situation. Dysfunctional family relations, which include domestic violence, parental separations, and parental death, along with caregiver exploitation, economic hardship, and natural calamities, emerge as the driving forces behind the street situation. These factors force children to leave their homes and seek survival on the street, where they face various types of challenges, including lack of shelter, food insecurity, physical abuse, and social rejection. For protecting the child rights in order to reduce street children issue, this research emphasizes providing them with essential needs and necessary facilities within their families that will help to find out the meanings of their lives. This investigation being qualitative and relying on a limited set of participants from the Khulna district may not capture the

full diversity of experiences of street children throughout Bangladesh. Future research could, therefore, go for some form of mixed-method or longitudinal approach in several regions to greatly expand the understanding of the structural and psychological dynamics underlining the migration of children living in the streets.

Policy Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the following policy actions are recommended:

1. **Enhance Family Support Mechanisms:** Working with NGOs, the government must increase the availability of family counseling and parenting education programs to vulnerable communities to avert situations of domestic violence and family breakdown that chiefly propel children toward homelessness.
2. **Set Up Emergency Shelters and Safe Houses:** Establish a network of child protection centers at railway stations and city hubs (such as Khulna Railway Station) that will provide emergency shelter and psychosocial support for recently home-fleeing children.
3. **Community-Based Surveillance and Reporting Systems:** Community social workers and volunteers should make an effort to detect any early signs of abuse and neglect. They should be taught how to collaborate with local authorities to intervene on time.
4. **Improve Economic Resilience of Families:** Welfare initiatives undertaken by governments, such as cash transfer or food assistance schemes, should be directed at families of disaster-prone regions such as *Koyra*, where natural calamities

have been found to be among the causes of child displacement.

5. **Strengthen Legal Frameworks and Enforcement:** Enforce child labor and anti-trafficking laws more rigorously and ensure that guardians or relatives who exploit children, particularly for forced begging or labor, can be held legally accountable.
6. **NGO-Led Reintegration Programs:** NGOs should establish trauma-informed rehabilitation and vocational training programs to aid in reintegrating street children into formal society, alongside providing educational or income-generating opportunities.

Availability of Data and Materials: We declared that the collected data are original, and data were collected by the authors in accordance with the ethical standards. The data and materials used in this study are available upon the responsible request from the corresponding author.

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Competing Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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