



## SITUATION ANALYSIS OF CHILD LABOR IN KHULNA CITY OF BANGLADESH

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**Abstract:** The main focus of this study is to find out the socio-economic conditions of the child labor in Khulna city of Bangladesh. Following survey research design, the data were collected from 120 working children, selected randomly from four wards of Khulna City Corporation of Bangladesh. Findings reveal that large family size and poverty forced the children to get involved in laborious work, with inappropriate wage, at the very early age to support their family, financially. In addition, heavy and hard manual works, together with frequent physical tortures, made these young children very vulnerable, physically and mentally; hence demand special attention for remedies.

**Keywords:** Child labor, family size, poverty, recreation, physical torture

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Despite the initiatives and strong supports of international organizations and development agencies, child labor has been increasing rapidly throughout the world, from 277 million in 2000 to 322 million in 2010 (World Bank, 2012). The incidence of child labor is highest in developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, however, some countries of Asia-Pacific are experiencing a considerable decline as well (ILO, 2010). Bangladesh, on the contrary, is comprehending a sharp increase of underage workforce, rising from 57 million in 2000 to 72 million in 2010 (World Bank, 2012).

The agro-economic background of Bangladesh customarily encourages the children to get involved into economically productive activities at quite an early age, to prepare for future role adjustment and it is more prevalent in rural settings (Khanam, 2006). In urban areas, on the contrary, children are getting jobs, of industrial and commercial sectors, paid or unpaid, to unload the burden of poverty as well as to increase household income (Ray, 2000).

The sharp rise of child labor in urban areas, under different circumstances, eventually creates a gap in education, increases the incidence of violence and injuries and decreases the health care seeking behavior. Moreover, a significant portion of the child workers are living in the park or in rail stations and so on, without necessary sleeping materials and without parents (Iftekhar, 2007). Under such circumstances, the main focus of this study is to explore the actual life-experience of the child labor and to sort out the factors motivating them to get involved into work in urban Bangladesh.

Following survey research design, the study was carried out in four wards of Khulna City Corporation of Bangladesh, namely Ward no. 10, 18, 30 and 31. Allowing an error tolerance of 9 percent, at the 95 percent confidence level, the required sample size was 119 (Cole, 1980), while we chose a sample of 120 working children, aged 9-17 years. Following proportionate stratified

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random sampling method, these working children were selected. An interview schedule, containing both open and close ended items, was used to collect the primary data from the working children. Additionally, secondary sources were used to give the study a logical background.

Children in poor families, especially, in developing countries, are forced to engage in child labor. Findings reveal that (Table 1) majority of the working children (61.7%) belonged to the age group of 15-17 years, and the rests were below 15. Of them, less than one fifth of the child labor (17.5%) was female. Being members of low-income (54.2%) households, earning, on an average, around BDT 4,300 per month, about half of the children could not complete their primary education; in fact, about 23 percent did not step into the schools. They started to work to fulfill their basic needs as well as to support their families, around 58 percent of them had a family consisting of more than four members. Findings indicate that the child labors were largely (71.7%) engaged in low paying, yet physically stinging works (45.8%) for their living. It is also evident that children from large families were forced to join the labor to support their families ( $p < .01$ )

Table 1: Background information of the child labor

Variable(s)	Category(s)	Percent	Statistics
Age	9-11 (Years)	15.0	Mean = 14.4 Std. Deviation = 0.44
	12-14 (Years)	23.3	
	15-17 (Years)	61.7	
Sex	Male	82.5	-
	Female	17.5	
Education (in Year)	Illiterate	22.5	Mean = 3.79 Std. Deviation = 3.034
	1-5	49.2	
	6-10	26.7	
	11	1.7	
Occupation	Day Labor	45.8	-
	Service Holder	20.8	
	Petty Trader	11.7	
	Painter	1.7	
	Tailor	5.0	
	Rickshaw /Van Puller	7.5	
	Both Painter and Tailor	7.5	
Size of the Family	Small (1-3)	43.3	Mean = 3.40 Std. Deviation = 1.924
	Medium (4-6)	47.5	
	Large (7-9)	9.2	
Monthly Income of the Family (in BDT)	Low (1-4000)	54.2	Mean = 4333.83 Std. Deviation = 2820.493
	Medium (4001-8000)	33.3	
	High (8001 and 12000)	12.5	
Monthly Income of the Respondents (in BDT)	Low (1-2000)	71.7	Mean = 1617.1 Std. Deviation = 338.3
	Medium (2001-4000)	19.2	
	High (4001-6000)	5.0	
	No Income	4.2	

Around the world, the number of homeless people, aged and children in particular, is growing, largely because of poverty and war. In developing countries, the rapid homelessness can be attributed to none other than vicious cycles of poverty, which is also the reason for increasing working children. Findings reveal that more than one third of the working children were

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homeless. Nonetheless, a large proportion of them have access to potable water (89.2%) and hygienic sanitation facilities. Yet, majority of them (68.3%) suffered from different diseases.

In accords with their working environment and the social atmosphere, the working children experienced different states of exploitation. More than half of the working children (56.7%) were physically tortured at their working place, and more than one third (35.8%) reported having no monthly leave from their works. Subsequently, they (35%) merely participated in any sports with their peers. However, they enjoyed cinemas (58.3%) and watched television (90%), but only at night.

It is evident that children of poor families in developing countries are forced to engage in work force to support their families and to leap out from poverty. Findings also reveal that about 72 percent of the working children chose to work, instead of going school, to ease the burden of the household and to increase the total household income ( $p < .01$ ). Despite their contribution in household income, majority (65.8%) did not have access to make decisions within their households. One explanation for such behavior is that families, in Bangladesh, are generally controlled by the chief earning member, the father in most case, and he himself dictates all the decisions.

Hence, the decisive factors, intimidating children into labor force in urban Bangladesh, as evident in the study, are large family size, low household income, low standard of living and chronic poverty. In addition, rapid population growth, adult unemployment, bad working conditions, and environmental disasters are also forcing young children into work force (BBS-NCLS, 2003). Eventually, children in urban areas of Bangladesh are not attending schools rather involved in laborious works in harmful conditions, with no or little payment and security. In addition, they are deprived of leisure activities and are often subject to tortures, physical or mental.

Under such circumstances, it is visible that child labor is a colossal problem in contemporary urban Bangladesh, as under-aged children are working in economically non-productive activities for low wages, bearing exploitation and abuses, and in health-threatening conditions. As an effort, government must initiate preventive measures, such as, identifying vulnerable family, reducing poverty by creating employment opportunities and increasing household income, to minimize the rate of child labor. Besides, government must act as a watch dog to ensure favorable working environment, proper payment and to protect child labor rights and must replace relative development programs by actual development attempts, which might inevitably change the attitudes of the society towards the vulnerable child workers. Moreover, both government of Bangladesh and non-government organizations (NGOs) must work together to bring about more children under education safety net to maximize their life-chances and prospective future.

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