Attitude, Behavior, and Role of Different Agencies and Actors Concerning Child Rights: A Study on the Child Laborer in Bangladesh

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Abstract

The child labor issue is one of the prime concerns worldwide. It is one of the major problems in a developing country like Bangladesh. Children are the future of the country, but working children are deprived of proper rights, they are supposed to enjoy their childhood. This study attempts to portray current scenario in the physical, psychological, emotional, and cognitive demand of the child laborer undermined by various actors and agencies that interact with child laborer regularly. The prime objective of this study is to investigate the attitude, behavior, and role of different agencies and actors responsible for child laborer and how these experiences can contribute effectively toward the future actions for a child labor-free Bangladesh. The study is based on primary and secondary data. After collecting necessary data from secondary sources, a sample survey is conducted to collect primary data. Data are collected on the basis of a questionnaire, and the samples were drawn purposively. The significant findings of the study revealed that child laborer are the most neglected member of the society as well as his/her family. As a result, they are consistently becoming easy victims of all sorts of violence. Finally, this study suggests that child labor will be stopped by increasing social awareness and enforcing strict laws.

Keywords: Child Labor; Child Rights; Awareness; Role; Social Spaces

1. Introduction

Child labor is a major socioeconomic problem in most developing countries including Bangladesh. It is also an important human rights issue facing the world. International Labor Organization (ILO) report reveals that about 256 million children are involved in unacceptable forms of labor. Of these, 179 million, most under 15 years of age, are in hazardous employment. About 8.4 million are trapped in slavery, trafficking, and forced recruitment for armed conflicts (Rahman, 2005). 127.3 million Child labor live in Asia-pacific, 48 million child workers in sub-Saharan Africa, 17.4 million child workers in Latin America and the Caribbean countries (UNICEF, 2008). In fact, Child labor is a social problem worldwide. It has been a matter of great concern, especially for the third world countries. It is estimated that there are 21.6 million children, aged between 5 and 14 years, working in South Asia out of a total of 300 million children in this age group (BBS, 2003. p. 3).

Unfortunately, like in other developing countries Bangladesh is not free from the curse of child labor. A study detected 425 forms of child labor and 67 types of hazardous forms of child labor (Razzak, 2001). Since most of the working children are engaged in non-formal sector, it is not easy to find out real picture of child labor of Bangladesh. According to the National Child Labor Survey, conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics the incidence of child labor in Bangladesh during 2002-2003 was
estimated at about 3.2 million out of 7.4 million working children aged between 5 and 17 years. 40.6% of child labor between the ages of 5-17 was engaged in hazardous work (Khair, 2004).

It implies four children out of every 10 child laborers are working in hazardous condition. In the hazardous work which constitute about 1.3 million (3.1) percent of the total children of this age group, and 40.60% of the total child labor (BBS, 2003a).

Conventionally, in village agriculture, the working children are numerous. However, their number has been sharply rising also in urban industrial and commercial centers. Non-agricultural sectors such as industry, transport, commerce, domestic service, and independent works of various kinds in towns and cities have a large number of working children (Mia, 1973).

2. Literature Review

ILO report reveals that about 256 million children are involved in UN acceptable forms of labor of these, 179 million, most under 15 years of age, are in hazardous employment. About, 8.4 million are trapped in slavery, trafficking, and forced recruitment for armed conflicts. 127.3 million child labor live in Asia-pacific, 48 million child workers in sub-Saharan Africa, 17.4 million child workers in Latin America, and the Caribbean countries (UNICEF, 2012).

Mamun (2005) described in his study child labor is simply the most severe from of child exploitation and child abuse in the world today. He observed that in any society, working children, as a socioeconomic group, happens to be the most disadvantaged of all since. Child labor is a persistent problem worldwide, especially in developing countries (ILO, 2004). It is also pervasive in Bangladesh.

Children who are economically active work at least 1 h a week during the regular school week in any productive activity (excluding hazardous forms of labor) which is either paid or unpaid, “for a few hours or full time, on a casual or regular basis, legal or illegal” (Fares and Raju, 2007).

Khair (2011) also said that child labor is not all about human rights, it also encompasses gender culture and monetary consideration that constitute an equally significant force which affect working children in varying degrees.

Edmonds highlights the fact that countries with the highest prevalence of work outside of the household also have the highest rate of work inside the household. Sierra Leone has the highest rate of children working outside the household and second highest rate of work inside the household (Edmonds, 2007).

These statistics illustrate the incapacity of many low-income countries to regulate child labor due to weak institutions and legal infrastructure. It is assumed that child labor is a part of an antisocial crime cycle. Poverty is the main cause as well as the main consequence of it. There is a direct link between poverty and child labor. Most of the child laborers come from poor or broken family. They are bound to engage in child labor for their survival. Most of them are neglected person in his/her family, educational institute as well as others social institute. In such a situation, it was urgent to investigate that in what extent these children are deprived, what types of forces are on them to be child labor, how they suffer in the future and what can we do for them? Considering all, my research paper has been done.

3. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to know the situation of child rights in the sector of child labor. In addition, the study has been conducted through the following specific objectives to collect information from child laborer in Bangladesh.

- To investigate the socioeconomic and demographic background of the family and factors putting them (Children) to work;
- To know the attitude of the family, community, and state toward working children;
- To inquire into the attitude of the educational institute and medical center toward working children;
- To investigate the role of the family, community, and state toward working children.
4. Methodology of the Study

4.1. 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 field primary data.

4.2. Area of the study

The study has been covered whole 30 wards of Barisal city. In terms of 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.

4.3. Population of the study

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

4.4. 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 such as wastage (Bhangari) collection, automobiles, biscuit factory, textile, dock laborer, electronic goods, workshop laborer, load carrying laborer, and hotel or restaurant laborer out of 67 jobs hazardous for children. The sample of the study is selected purposively.

4.5. Technique of data collection

It is an empirical study, in-depth investigation was required. To collect data formal interview and observation technique was followed. At first selecting the required area of investigation a questionnaire were prepared for respondents. Data were collected on the basis of the questionnaire. Emphasis was given on observation so that reliable and valid data could be attained. Data were collected form September, 2009 to November, 2009.

4.6. Data processing, analysis, and interpretation

After the 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 quantitative interpretation while qualitative analysis was also applied where necessary. Simple statistical methods such as percentage mean and have been applied in some cases.

4.7. Presentation of data

The analyzed data have been presented attractively. Bar diagram, column diagram, and other presentation tools have been used with the data table.

5. Findings of the Study

The empirical findings revealed that in terms of child rights situation in family and working place of child laborer. It is evident from both primary and secondary data that child labor not only delayed the proper physical and mental development of a child but it is found that child laborer is seriously neglected in the family, working place, and the community. Other notable findings are as follows.
5.1. Attitude and behavior of different agencies and actors toward children (Table 1)

Children have to interact with various social and perpetual institutions to fulfill their emotional, functional, and cognitive demand. Positive behavior and attitude of these institutions are crucial for the holistic development of the children. In terms of family’s attitude toward children, the highest number of children half of them identify the family as cooperative institution toward children. More than one-quarter of the respondents 30.67% working children identify family as an equitable institution. 9.33% and 9.67% respondents identify family, respectively, as unco-operative and non-equitable institution toward working children.

Attitude of the family toward working children can be viewed by the following Figure 1.

Unlike family, most of respondents found educational institutions attitude toward working children as non-equitable and uncooperative. The data reveals that more than half of the respondents, 54.67% respondents identify the attitude of the educational institution as non-equitable while only 1.67% respondents identify the attitude of educational institution as equitable. About one-quarter of the respondents, 24.33% respondents identify the attitude of educational institutions as uncooperative while 18.62% seems the attitude of the educational institutions is cooperative to the working children.

Attitude of the educational institute toward working children can be viewed by the following Figure 2.

In terms of attitude of the community toward the children, the highest number of children more than half of the children 68.33% children identifies its role as non-equitable while 28.33% seems that the attitude is uncooperative. Only 2.67% it is cooperative while only 0.67% respondents feel it equitable. Attitude of the community toward working children can be viewed by the following Figure 3.

The similar type of scenario is exhibited in the attitude of medical center toward children. More than half of the children 52% working children identify the attitude as non-equitable while 40% respondents recognize the attitude as unco-operative.

Attitude of the medical center toward working children can be viewed by the following Figure 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of attitude</th>
<th>Family (N, %)</th>
<th>Educational institution (N, %)</th>
<th>Community (N, %)</th>
<th>Medical center (N, %)</th>
<th>State (N, %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>151 (50.33)</td>
<td>56 (18.67)</td>
<td>17 (5.67)</td>
<td>8 (2.67)</td>
<td>4 (1.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncooperative</td>
<td>28 (9.33)</td>
<td>73 (24.33)</td>
<td>120 (40.0)</td>
<td>85 (28.33)</td>
<td>88 (29.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equitable</td>
<td>92 (30.67)</td>
<td>5 (1.67)</td>
<td>5 (1.67)</td>
<td>2 (0.67)</td>
<td>14 (4.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non equitable</td>
<td>29 (9.67)</td>
<td>166 (54.67)</td>
<td>156 (52)</td>
<td>205 (68.33)</td>
<td>194 (64.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>300 (100)</td>
<td>300 (100)</td>
<td>300 (100)</td>
<td>300 (100)</td>
<td>300 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Attitude of the family toward working children
From the point of view of working children the attitude of the state toward them is not positive. More than half of the children 64.67% children labeled the attitude as uncooperative while 29.33% children labeled it as non-equitable. Only 4.67% respondents recognize it as cooperative while 1.33% respondents recognize it as equitable.

Attitude of the state toward working children can be viewed by the following Figure 5.

5.2. The role of different agencies and institutions for protecting child rights

The role of different institutions including state is crucially important for protecting the child rights. According to surveyed children parents have the prime and most important role to protect children. The data shows that most of the children, the highest number of children 94.67% children feel that parents are the most important part in protecting child rights. Community holds the second position where 3.67% respondents feel that community plays the most important role in protecting child rights. It seems to 1.33% children that civil society should play the most impotent role in protecting child
rights. A small segment of children also recognize the role of owner/employers in protecting child rights.

The most important role in protecting child rights can be viewed by the following Figure 6.

The study also looks at the role of family, society, employers/owners, and state in protecting child rights. In terms of family’s role in protecting child rights the highest number of respondents, more than three fourth of the children 77.33% seem that the family should create scope of education for children. 13.33% children think that family should not show any neglecting attitude toward children. 5.67% children feel that family should be sensitive toward the need of children. A small portion of children 3.67% children think that family should prioritize the opinion of children.

The family’s role in protecting child rights can be viewed by the following Figure 7.

In terms of society’s role in protecting child rights like family’s role the surveyed children also emphasize on education; the highest number of children 75% children think that society should create scope of education for children. 20.67% children think that society should not show any neglecting attitude toward children. A small portion of children 4.33% children think that society should prioritize the opinion of children.

The society’s role in protecting child rights can be viewed by the following Figure 8.

**Figure 5:** Attitude of the state toward children

![Figure 5](image1.png)

**Figure 6:** The most important role in protecting child rights

![Figure 6](image2.png)

**Figure 7:** Family’s role in protecting child rights

![Figure 7](image3.png)
The data shows that the highest number of children expects both from owner and state to play a role in creating scope of education for them. Most of the children 91.33% children expect owner should create a scope of education for children. Equal number of children 4.33% children expects financial assistance and do not engage children in hazardous work.

More than three-fourth of the children 83% children seem that the state should ensure that rights of education for all. The children also expect the reeducation of food price, right to food for all, and equal treatment for all rich and poor children. Equal number of children 5.67% children seem the role of state as price of the food should be reduced, food should be provided and equal treatment to all.

The state role in protecting child rights can be viewed by the following Figure 9.

6. Recommendations

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

Among social spaces, these working children interact with household and working place to the highest level and the study suggests that these two social spaces are lack of child rights to education. Without child rights on focusing education, there is very risk of undermining the rights of the children in these social spaces. In this circumstance, government and NGO’S should take action to educate parents and employers regarding child rights issues.

Figure 8: Society’s role in protecting child

![Figure 8: Society’s role in protecting child](image)

Figure 9: State role in protecting children

![Figure 9: State role in protecting children](image)
This research also suggests that the Government and NGO should be the first task to save the children from the exploitive and hazardous environment of their working places. Humanization of work environment is to be done on priority basis. Short-term programmers should be formulated with a view to improving the quality of working children’s life. Because complete and sudden eradication of child labor from developing countries like Bangladesh is not an easy task, it requires much time and socioeconomic planning.

Awareness of law-enforcing agencies is not very much centered on children’s rights and the protection of children working in risky environment. There is a wide range of complaints against government agencies regarding children’s rights when their cases are handled in courts of justice. To establish child rights and eradicate child labor, there should be a child-friendly justice system, and people involved in such areas should be trained about the rights of children. Since child labor cannot be banned through legislation due to the informal nature of the economy, the government should intensify its efforts to enforce the existing laws in protecting the children from extreme exploitation.

7. Conclusion

In this research, we get new findings that are unparallel of other studies. The finding of this study reveals that the child laborer is probably the most neglected members of the society and hardly has any voice within the home. As a result, they are consistently becoming easy victims of all sorts of violence. Hence, the child labor should be eliminated for great interest of humankind. It is hoped that the study will facilitate and influence in assisting policymakers, researchers, constituents, and other interested stakeholders to effectively combat the problem of hazardous child labor in this country. Hence, a concerted effort involving children, parents, employers, community people, local civil society as well as the government should be taken to improve the existing child right situation of the child laborer and contribute more effectively toward the future actions for a child labor-free Bangladesh.

References


