

Child Labor and Its Impact on Access to Primary Education in Bangladesh: An Observation

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Abstract: *This descriptive type of cross sectional study was conducted to justify child labour and its impact on access to primary education in Bangladesh with a sample size of 221 (188 children and 33 parents). The studied children were aged between 7 to 17 years. The mean age of child respondents was 12.06 ± 2.202 , while for parents it was 39.82 ± 6.88 . 49.5% of the child respondents earn a monthly income of BDT 1001-2000 and 32% earns between BDT 2001-3000. It is also revealed from the study that 60.6% and 27.3% of parents earned a monthly income of BDT 9001-12000 and BDT 9000 respectively. The present study also shows that 99.5% of child labourers and 100% of the parents feel that it is the family's financial need that hinders them from enrolling in schools, while only 0.5% of children disagreed to this view. Majority 99.5% of children and 100% of parents also mentioned that education is very important to their families as opposed to only 0.50 of children who feels that education is not an important factor in a family. Interestingly the study shows that 100% of child labourer knows that it has a negative health implication on their lives. So, this study is very much rationale to find out the causal relationship between child labor and primary education.*

Key words: Child labour, Employer, Family income, Hazardous work, Legal instrument, Poverty, Primary Education

Introduction

In Bangladesh, the social norms and economic realities mean that child labour is widely accepted and very common. Many families rely on the income generated by their children for survival, so child labour is often highly valued.

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Additionally, employers often prefer to employ children because they are cheaper and considered more compliant and obedient than adults. [1]

When children are forced to work, they are often deprived from their rights to education, leisure and games. They are also exposed to situations that make them vulnerable to trafficking, abuse, violence and exploitation. Millions of children are reported not to attend school, however estimates vary. Among children, aged 5-14, about five million are economically active. "Child labour" is a narrower concept than "working children" are. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) definition (right), there are about 3.2 million child labourers in Bangladesh. [2]

Certain groups of children are more likely to work than others, for instance boys comprise about three-quarters of all working children. In slums almost one in five children aged 5-14 are child labourers, and of these only 25 % attend school. Rapid urbanization means that more children will move into urban slums and be compelled to work. Child employment rates increase with age, but even about 2 % of five-year-olds and 3 % of six-year-olds are working children. [3]

Child labour is a visible part of everyday life in Bangladesh: young children serve at roadside tea stalls, and weave between cars selling goods to motorists. Other children work in jobs that are hidden from view, such as domestic work, which makes monitoring and regulation difficult. On average, the child labours work 55.8 hours per week (9.3 hours daily and 6.02 days weekly). About 38% child labours work more than 10 hours daily. About 65% of the working children do not wholeheartedly perceive their work as socially acceptable. On average, children work 28 hours a week and earn 222 taka (3.3 USD) a week. [4]

Many of the jobs that children in Bangladesh perform are considered "hazardous, and put their physical and mental development at risk. 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 labour, namely welding, auto workshops, road transport, battery recharging and tobacco factories. The Committee also raised concerns about the lack of mechanisms to enforce child labour laws or monitor working conditions, and insufficient public awareness about the negative effects of child labour. [5]

Many child focused multinational organizations, including UNICEF are not opposed to all work that children may perform. This is mainly because children's paid and unpaid work can make a positive contribution to child development, as long as it does not interfere with health or wellbeing, or prevent education or

leisure activities. However, child labour as earlier defined; is work that deprives children of a childhood; work that affects children's health and education; and work that may lead to further exploitation and abuse. [6]

In order to safeguard the rights of the child; the government of Bangladesh (GOB) enacted the Labour Act in 2006, which includes a chapter on child labour. This new law prohibits employment of children less than 14 years of age, as well as prohibiting hazardous forms of child labour for persons under age 18. However, children who are aged 12 and above may be engaged in "light work" that does not pose a risk to their mental and physical development and does not interfere with their education. The law however, does not provide a strong enforcement mechanism for the child labour provisions. Additionally, the vast majority of children (93 %) work in the informal sector which makes enforcement of the relevant legislation challenging. The Ministry of Labour and Employment has recently adopted a National Child Labour Elimination Policy (NCLEP) 2010, which provides a framework to eradicate all forms of child labour by 2015. [7]

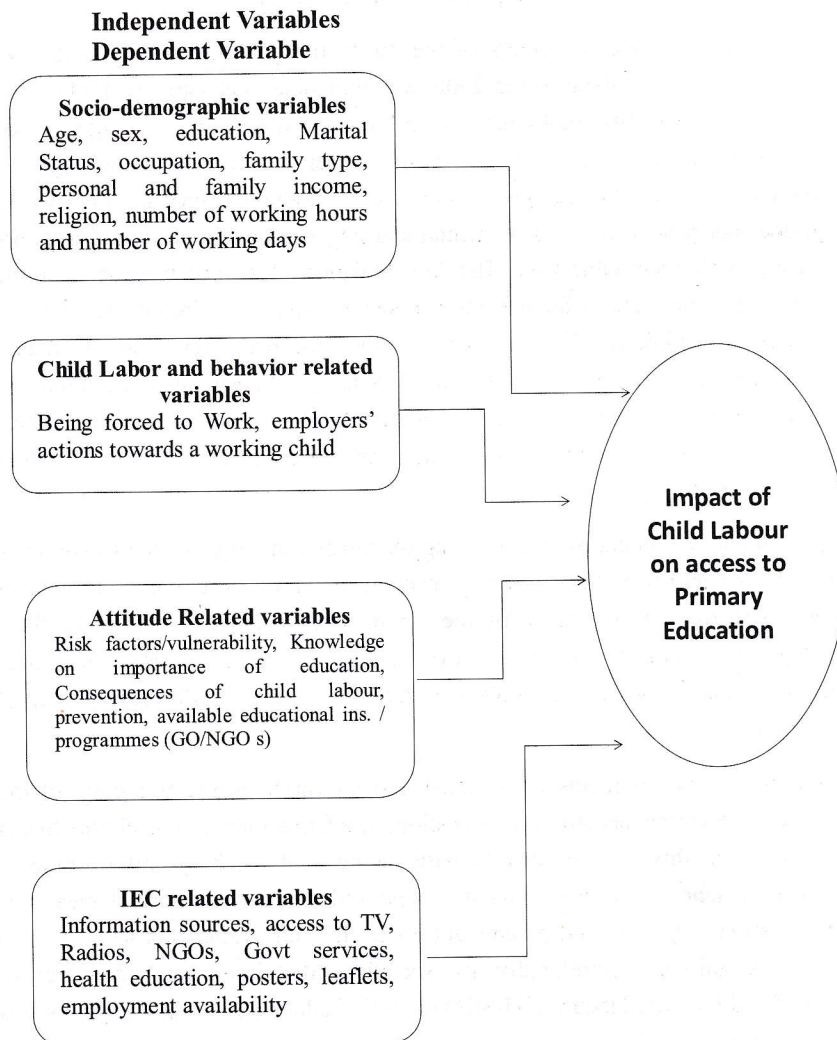
Government of Bangladesh has for long recognized the urgent need to eliminate child labour and to reduce illiteracy level by initiating programmes to address these concerns. However, with the efforts and resources injected in these strategies not so much has been achieved. School going age children who would otherwise be in primary schools continue to engage in different forms of employment. [8]

Children are the architects of a nation and education is the backbone of the children. Education, according to Encyclopaedia Britannica, is a discipline that is concerned, in this context, mainly with methods of teaching and learning in schools or school like environment as opposed to various informal means of socialization (e.g., between parents and their children). Education helps a child develop cognitively, emotionally and socially and it is an area often gravely jeopardized by child labour. UNESCO identified education, in the early 1960s as a key factor in development. [9]

Results from the Bangladesh National Child Labour Survey (IPEC-SIMPOC, 2002-03) indicate that 3.4 million or 18.5% of males, ages 5-14, work and 1.3 million or 7.8% of females, of the same age group, work resulting in 4.7 million or 13.4% of all children, ages 5-14, and working. [10]

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Conceptual Framework



Study Objectives

General Objective:

To see child Labour and its impact on access to Primary Education in Bangladesh.

Specific Objectives

1. To identify the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.
2. To find out the behaviours on child labour among the respondents.
3. To assess the attitude on child labour among respondents and its impact on accessing primary education.
4. To see the IEC related variables among the respondents.
5. To assess the association between socio-demographic characteristics and child labour and its impact on access to primary education.

Study design

It was a descriptive type of cross sectional study.

Target Population and Sample population:

All the child labour workings in Bangladesh are target population and those who have actively participated in this study from selected study area are the sample population.

Study site:

The study was carried out in Dhaka city, the capital city of Bangladesh and specifically in Khilkhet, Mirpur, Kafrul, Banani and Mohakhali areas.

Sample size:

Sample size determined as per the following formula;

$$\text{Sample size } n = \frac{z^2 pq}{d^2}$$

Where,

n= the minimum sample size

Z= the standard normal deviate usually set at 1.96 which correspond to 95% confidence level

P= the proportion of the target population estimated to have a particular characteristics =14.2% =0.142

$$\text{So, } q = 1 - p = 1 - 0.142 = 0.858$$

D= margin of error (precision), usually set at 5%

The required sample size was;

$$n = \frac{z^2 pq}{d^2}$$

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$$= \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.142 \times 0.858}{(0.05)^2}$$

$$= 188$$

Inclusion and Exclusion criteria:

Inclusion criteria:

- Only child labourers within the age bracket of 7-15 years were interviewed.
- Parents of child labourers.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Mentally retarded or sick child/parent

Sampling technique:

Non-randomized purpose sampling technique was applied for the study.

Data collection tools:

Data collection tools were pretested interviewer administered semi structured questionnaires; a verbal consent was taken from the respondents after explaining the purpose of study.

Data management and analysis:

Data collection was entered using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software (SPSS) [Chicago Version 16.0]. Data is then presented using tables and graphs like histogram, bar chart, and pie chart. Quantitatively obtained data was summarized using the descriptive statistics, the purpose being to enable the researcher significantly analyse the data with the help of Chi-square test and P-value. Finally, the data was interpreted on the basis of the study findings.

Presentation and analysis of data:

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by age n=221(Children =188 and Parents =33)

Age in years		Frequency		Percentage	
Children	Parents	Children	Parents	Children	Parents
7-9	28-32	19	6	10	18.1
10-12	34-38	93	11	49.5	33.4
13-15	40-45	62	7	33	21.2
16-17	46-52	14	9	7.5	27.3
Total		188	33	100	100
Children Mean = 12.06				Children SD ± 2.202	
Parents mean =39.82				Parents SD ± 6.88	

Table 1 shows the composition of respondent in which 49.5% were child labourers in the age bracket of 10-12 years, while for the parents 33.4% were in the age bracket of 34-38 years. 10% were in the age group of 7-9 years, 33% were aged 13-15 years and 7.5% were aged 16-17 years among child labourers, while for parents 18.1% were in the age range of 28-32 years, 21.2% were in aged between 40-45 years and 27% were aged between 46-52 years. The mean age for children is 12.06 and 39.82 for parents and standard deviation for children is ± 2.202 and ± 6.8 for parents.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by education status n=221(Children =188 and Parents n=33)

Education status	Frequency		Percentage	
	Children	Parents	Children	Parents
No-education	15	1	8.0	3.0
Can read/write	12	7	6.4	21.2
Primary	149	18	79.3	54.5
SSC	12	4	6.4	12.1
HSC	0	3	0	9.1
Above	0	0	0	0
Total	188	33	100	100

Table 2 shows that 79.3% of the children attained primary education, 8% had no education, 6.4% could read and write and another 6.4% attained SSC. While for the parents 54.5% attained primary education, 3% had no education, 21.2% could read and write, 12.1% had reached SSC and 9.1% had reach HSC. There were no respondents who had attained education level above HSC.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by family type n=221(Children =188 and Parents n=33)

Family type	Frequency		Percentage	
	Children	Parents	Children	Parents
Nuclear	39	2	20.7	6.1
Extended	73	13	38.8	39.4
Joint	13	9	6.9	27.3
Adoptive parent family	63	9	33.5	27.3
Total	188	33	100	100

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Table 3 reveals that 38.8 % of child labourers and 39.4% of their parents come from extended family, while other children come from nuclear family 20.7%, joint family 6.9% and adoptive parent family 33.5%.

**Table 4: Distribution of respondents by employer's attitude at work place
n=221(Children =188 and Parents n=33)**

Variable	Frequency		Percentage	
	Children	Parents	Children	Parents
Yes	77	0	41	0
No	111	33	59	100
Total	188	33	100	100

From table 4 it shows that 41% of child labourers and 0% of their parents interviewed agreed that employers treat child labourers well in their work place. While, 59% and 100% of children and parents respectively said "No" to this.

**Table 5: Distribution of respondents by choice of working or going to school
n=221(Children =188 and Parents n=33)**

Variable	Frequency		Percentage	
	Children	Parents	Children	Parents
Yes	47	0	25	0
No	141	33	75	100
Total	188	33	100	100

Table 5 reveals that 25% of child labourers prefer working than going to school, while 75% and 100% of children and parents respectively disagreed to this view.

**Table 6: Distribution of respondents by work related frustration. n=221
(Children =188 and Parents n=33)**

Variable	Frequency		Percentage	
	Children	Parents	Children	Parents
Yes	171	33	91	100
No	17	0	9	0
Total	188	33	100	100

Table 6 shows that 91% of child labourers and 100% of their parents agrees that child labour makes them feel frustrated and hopeless while, 9% of the child respondents said “No”.

Table 7: Distribution of respondents by feeling responsible and proud for the work n=221(Children =188 and Parents n=33)

Variable	Frequency		Percentage	
	Children	Parents	Children	Parents
Yes	156	3	83	9.1
No	32	30	17	90.9
Total	188	33	100	100

Table 7 reveals that 83% of child labourers and 9.1% of their parents said “Yes” child labour makes them feel responsible and proud while, 17% and 90.9% of children and parents respectively said “No” on this assumption.

Table 8: Distribution of respondents by family’s financial need as a reason for not going to school n=221(Children =188 and Parents n=33)

Variable	Frequency		Percentage	
	Children	Parents	Children	Parents
Yes	187	33	99.5	100
No	1	0	0.5	0
Total	188	33	100	100

Table 8 shows that 99.5% of child labourers and 100% of the parents feel that it’s the family’s financial need that hinders children from enrolling in schools while, 0.5% of children disagreed to this view.

Table 9: Distribution of respondents by children who work then go to school n=221(Children =188 and Parents n=33)

Variable	Frequency		Percentage	
	Children	Parents	Children	Parents
Yes	1	0	0.5	0
No	187	33	99.5	100
Total	188	33	100	100

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In table 9 it shows that 0.5% of child labourers said working children work then go to school after work while, 99.5% of children and 100% of parents disagreed, indicating that most children are only working and not going to school.

Table 10: Distribution of respondents according to distance from primary school n=221(Children =188 and Parents n=33)

Variable	Frequency		Percentage	
	Children	Parents	Children	Parents
Yes	173	15	92	45.5
No	15	18	8	54.5
Total	188	33	100	100

Table 10 shows that 92% of child labourers and 45.5% of the parents acknowledged that primary schools are far away from their homes, while 8% of the children and 54.5% said the schools are not very far away from their homes.

Table 11: Distribution of respondents by child labour and its health complications after childhood n=221(Children =188 and Parents n=33)

Variable	Frequency		Percentage	
	Children	Parents	Children	Parents
Yes	188	33	100	100
No	0	0	0	0
Total	188	33	100	100

Table 11 indicates that both respondents feel strongly that child labour has long term health complications in one's life.

Table 12: Distribution of respondents according to views on child labour related sicknesses n=221(Children =188 and Parents n=33)

Variable	Frequency		Percentage	
	Children	Parents	Children	Parents
Yes	185	32	98.4	97
No	3	1	1.6	3
Total	188	33	100	100

Table 12 shows that 98.4% of child labourers and 97% of the parents interviewed agreed that the children usually complain of sicknesses related to nature of their jobs.

Table 13: Distribution of respondents by association between socio-demographic variable (Gender) and attitude related variable (feeling frustrated and hopeless) n=188

Gender	Feelings of frustration and hopelessness at work place		Total	P-value
	Yes	No		
Boys	151	10	161	0.001
Girls	20	7	27	
Total	171	17	188	

Table 13 reveals that there is significant statistical association between gender and feeling frustrated and hopeless with the job children do. While the majority both boys and girls feel frustrated and hopeless, a smaller number of respondents (10 boys and 7 girls) feel that child does not make them feel frustrated and hopeless.

Findings of the study

This was a descriptive cross sectional study carried out in purposely selected areas of Dhaka city from October 2012 to January 2013. From the study it was revealed that among the child respondents, 85.6% were boys and the remaining 14.4% were girls out of which 10% of the respondents were below 10years, 49.5% were within the age limit of 10 to 12 years, 33% were within the age bracket of 13 to 15 years and 7.5% were between 16 to 17 years. (Mean age 12.06 with ± 2.202). While for the parent respondents, 81.8% were male and 18.2% were female out of which 18.1% of the respondents were below 34years, 33.4% were within the age limit of 34 to 38 years, 21.2% were within the age of 40 to 45 years and 27.3% were between 46 to 52 years. (Mean parent age 39.82 with ± 6.88). This reveals that 59.5% are in the age bracket of primary education as the entry age for primary is 6 years. Unfortunately, all these children were completely out of school, 79.3% dropped out of school within the first two years of their enrolment.

In a similar study conducted by Bureau of International Labour Affairs of the United States Department of Labour in 16 countries, it states that despite the benefits of education, about 20 % or 145 million of the world's children 6 to 11 years old (85 million girls and 60 million boys) are out of school. Most of these children are thought to be working. Although the two studies indicate a substantial rate of dropout amongst children attending primary education, these findings reflect a global trend. The differences in the two studies are on the

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scope and the sample size. While in the present study the percentage of those out of school is higher (59.5%) and in the study by Bureau of International Labour Affairs of the United States Department of Labour figure is at 20%. The present study had a sample size of 188 in part of the Dhaka city the later was conducted in 16 countries. The two studies reveal that there is a high dropout rate within the age bracket on 6 to 12 years. [11]

Dropout rate in schools have varying reasons, one reason is early marriage as the study shows that 8.0% were married and 0.5% of the child respondents were already divorced. Though the percentage may appear small, it's an indicator of another factor limiting children from accessing primary education. Although in many countries, primary education is neither compulsory nor free, and schools are not available to all children. Even when schools are available, the quality of education offered is frequently poor, and many children and their families view the content as irrelevant to their lives. The dropout rate at the age of primary education seems to be driven by the high demand for cheap labour, poverty and inadequate enforcement of policies that are geared towards elimination of child labour. [12]

As the study shows, poverty stands out as the main reason limiting children from attending school. The study indicates that 49.5% of child labourers earn a monthly income of between BDT 1,001-2,000 while 32% earn between BDT 2001-3000. And 60.6% of the parents earn a monthly income of between BDT 9,001-12,000, while 12.1% earn above BDT 12,000 and 27.3% earn less than BDT 9,000 per month. These low paying jobs by children come from the following sectors where they work; 39.1% work in shops, 22.3% in restaurant, 20% in automobile garages, 14.4% in garment factories and 8.5% in the transportation sector. This kind of pay does not give room for savings as it goes from hand to mouth, thus making it harder for them to get out of poverty.

In another study by IPEC, it concurs with the finding that children who do not access primary education, are in this position because they are forced to work by socio-economic pressures mostly poverty. It states that the opportunity costs for them or their families are far too high. The immediate needs of poverty outweigh totally any longer term returns and therefore, investment in education is just not an option. [13]

Poverty therefore is a critical factor in hindering children from accessing primary education. The long term impact is that the vicious cycle of poverty and poor health continues as the illiterate population still exist. This illiterate population will always be dependent on others thus increasing poverty levels at the same time; they will remain ignorant on the basics of prevention of most communicable diseases. The inability of parents to send their children to school is exacerbated by the direct and indirect costs of education, such as fees, supplies, books, uniforms, meals, and transportation. Further to this, financial need to meet family's basic demands also contributes greatly to children not enrolling schools. Therefore, to be effective in eliminating child labour, education must be useful, accessible, and affordable. [14]

In terms of working hours, this study indicates that child labourers in Dhaka City are working under harmful condition, because 18% work for more than 8 hours a day, 20.8% work for more than 10 hours a day and 61.2% work for 13 to 14 hours a day. The hours these children spend at work would not allow them the opportunity to enrol for primary education. This is also hazardous because it affects the physical and psychological development of the child.

Compared to a related study carried out by Rasheda Khanam in 2006, which revealed that a child's time use in schooling and work will be influenced by the parent's decisions in the following ways. For example, children's time used, are influenced by parental characteristics. Parental education influences child's school time use in two ways. Although the studies may appear to differ in findings, with the present revealing the high working hours, and the later showing the characteristics of parents in determining a child time. All the two studies zero down to poverty and illiteracy levels of the families affected. The higher the level of education of parents, the higher it creates a positive effect on their children's schooling, as parental income is a positive function of their human capital. Educated parents are more likely to earn higher income and wages that tend to increase schooling for their children. On the other hand, the level of parental education, especially mother's education, is an input of the human capital of children. [15]

In regards to child labour and the health of the children, this study found out that 98.9% of the children are aware that child labour is detrimental to their health and they know that these health impacts can manifest itself later in adult life. Children's employment is also undoubtedly damaging to children's health in Bangladesh, but this is an area where information is limited largely to that provided by the specialized baseline surveys. Neither of the two national household surveys with information on child labour (BALFS 2005-06 and MICS 2006) contained information on work-related ill-health or injury. But even if this information were available, the full health impact of employment would be difficult to assess because much of the relationship between work and health is dynamic. [16]

The 2003 baseline survey on child labour in the battery recharging/recycling sector³⁶ indicated that very few (13 %) of the children were provided with any form of protective gear, contributing to a very high rate of work-related illness and injury (23 %). On the other hand, the 2002/03 baseline survey of child labour in welding establishments indicated that welding work, is hazardous even for adult workers and was found to be worse for children: 41 % reported some form of work-related injury or illness, almost all (93 %) requiring medical attention. Almost half of children concerned reported health problems in the 2003 baseline survey on child labour in the road transport sector (bus, mini-bus, tempo, taxi, rickshaw, van, push cart, trucks, etc.) and almost one-third of children concerned reported experienced work-related ill-health in the 2002/03 baseline survey on child labour in automobile establishments. Finally, the 2005/06 baseline survey of child domestic labour indicated that 60 % suffered some form of abuse and that one in five of the domestic child labourers were not

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free to leave their job. A country's healthy labour force is more productive than a sick one, therefore preserving the health of these children means preserving the health of future labour force. [17]

If compared to another study carried out in Pakistan, which reinforces that child labour information to child labours and their families is always inadequate as most families are too poor to access information on both print and electronic media. And this loop hope creates opportunity for employers to exploit the children. This then interferes strongly with their ability to attend school the study also reveals the high frequency with which children are absent from or late for class, but evidence from several countries indicates that attendance regularity is also adversely affected by involvement in employment and the time intensity of employment. [18]

In order to reach out to the community with information on the negative consequences of child labour and its elimination the use of existing community structures could play a key role if effectively utilised. This coupled with policy enforcement on child labour would yield a positive result in ensuring the elimination of child labour and increasing access to information related to child labour. This is because; the degree to which work interferes with children's access to schooling is one of the most important determinants of the long-term impact of early work experience. Reduced educational opportunities constitute the main link between child labour and youth employment outcomes. Clearly, if the exigencies of work mean those children are denied schooling altogether due to lack of information, then these children will not acquire the human capital necessary for more gainful employment upon entering adulthood. Lack of information denies families and children from making informed decisions, thus resulting into long term negative impact on the country's human capital. In this related study it further shows that lack of information on child labour in Bangladesh appears to interfere with their ability to attend and benefit from schooling, underscoring the importance of lack of information on child labour as a barrier to achieving Education For All.

The study indicates that there is significant statistical association between monthly family income and children being enticed to work by employers through giving them material gifts. (P-value = $0.027 < 0.05$). This is because family income is inadequate to meet family needs therefore hindering the children from attending school, thus exposing them to exploitation by employers.

In the present study, there is also significant statistical association between gender and feelings of frustration and hopelessness in the work they do. (P-Value = $0.001 < 0.05$). This indicates that children have no option but to work. The study further reveals that, family structures, parent's occupation and literacy levels in Bangladesh are directly linked to influencing children to opt for working and not enrolling in schools, it further shows that 38.8 % of child labourers come from extended families, 40.4 % of their parents are day labourers and of these 79.3 % of their parents dropped out of school before completing primary education. This clearly compounds on the previous issue on poverty and illiteracy.

It is difficult to draw direct causality between child labour and education because of the interplay and inter-dependency of multiple factors. However, evidence does suggest a strong and clear relationship between child labour and education, for example nearly 50% of children drop out of primary education before completion and are therefore potential candidates for the labour market. The impact of child labour is seen in enrolment rates, attendance, school performance, drop out and transitional issues. [19]

The study also found out that 68.1 % of child labourers were enticed by material gifts given to them by the employers, although they are not paid well, they continue working because they are left with no option but to work. This is because, there are many children seeking employment and they also provide cheap labour compared to adults.

Conclusion

Child Labour and primary education has a lot more information than what has been presented in this study. However, this cross sectional study focuses on child labour and its impact on access to primary education. The study reveals that child labourers belong to illiterate and poor families in Bangladesh and this is the main reason limiting their access to primary education. Early marriage and divorce though reflected as a small percentage, it seems to indicate a broader factor in attaining primary education. The average working hours of child labourers in Bangladesh is 7.3 hours per day. This not only denies them access to education but also place them under worst form of child labour.

To the child labourers missing education is in itself a big frustration and yet they have no option but to be happy doing the work they do, despite its negative health implications. Different barriers have been described in this paper regarding the difficulties of child labour to get primary education. The present study also shows that government and NGOs are not doing enough to eliminate child labour, making them vulnerable to the employers who seek cheap labour. Child labour is therefore, contributing to the continuation of poverty, illiteracy and slowing down of the attainment of MDGs by 2015.

Lastly, Child labour is a social vice that appears to be difficult to eliminate completely due to its socio-cultural and economic constraint, but it is not impossible. Effective mechanisms, strong will-power with everyone's participation, elimination of child labour is within our reach.

Recommendations

1. Creation of extensive awareness creation and dissemination on existing policies should be carried out by both the government and the NGOs using existing community structures.

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2. To address the challenges of child labour, there is need to analyse the existing policies so as to scale-up the implementation of policies and programmes through the participation of all key stakeholders.
3. Government should design strategies for economic empowerment of the urban poor, like providing basic trainings on starting and managing a business and creating accessible financial support with low interest rates.
4. There is a need to conduct a broader study in both urban and rural areas to establish regions that are more affected by child labour incidences.

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