

Child Labor in Bangladesh and its Social Impact

Md. Nizam Uddin*

Abstract

Child labor is one of the most crucial problems of developing countries especially in the context of Bangladesh. In true sense, it is the product of poverty and unequal social structure. The prevailing social norms and economic realities prove that child labor is broadly accepted and very common phenomenon in Bangladesh where many families depend on the income earned by their children for survival. One the one hand child is highly appreciated to the poor families because of the income they earn, on the other hand, employers often prefer to provide work for children because they are cheaper and considered to be more obedient and compliant than adults. In the real practice it is a dangerous practice of children that becomes a serious obstacle to the establishment of a glorious generation. Many promising children are dropped out of their education from the very beginning of their life. Now the question arises about why children prefer labor to education. Why do poor families compel their children to earn money? How can this problem be remedied? Therefore this article attempts to solve all these prevailing problems.

Introduction

Child labor is the endemic problem of Bangladesh. There are many reasons behind the child labor in this country. Illiteracy, poverty, social norms and weak labor laws are mainly responsible for child labor. The main problem arising from child labor is illiteracy. Since education is the backbone of a country, literacy is essential to build a glorious generation. There are so many reasons behind the departure of children from education and to incline to labor since their childhood.

* MSS (Social Welfare), Institute of Social welfare and Research, University of Dhaka.

They are tempted to a myriad of factors that ultimately inspire them to labor in the tender age on the one hand, rapid urbanization lure more children to move into urban areas for better income on the other. As a consequence, the first and foremost problem that a nation faces is the ruination of a generation due to the child labor. Some children are forced to labor in different works. The problem of this forced labor is dangerous that violates so many norms of human rights. As a result of this force labor child are often denied their rights to education, leisure and play. Due to the societal problems, situations make them vulnerable and thus they fall for the victim of trafficking, abuse, exploitation and many kinds of violence. "Millions of children are reported not to attend school, however estimates vary. Among children aged 5-14, about five million, are economically active. "Child labor" is a narrower concept than "working children". According to the International Labor Organization definition (right), there are about 3.2 million child laborers in Bangladesh (UNICEF, 1-2).

The Present Scenario of Child labor in Bangladesh

The present scenario of child labor in Bangladesh is really alarming. According to a UNICEF report, certain groups of children are more likely to work than others, for instance boys include about three-quarters of all working children. Almost one in five children aged 5-14 are child laborers in slums, and of these, only 25 percent attend school. More children move into urban slums and are compelled to work in the situation of rapid urbanization. "Child employment rates increase with age, but even about two per cent of five-year olds and three per cent of six-year-olds work" (UNICEF, 1-2). The following scenario of child labor has presented the prevailing situation of Bangladesh child labor:

"Child labor 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, children work

28 hours a week and earn 222 taka (3.3 USD) a week. 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 labor, namely welding, auto workshops, road transport, battery recharging and tobacco factories . The Committee also raised concerns about the lack of mechanisms to enforce child labor laws or monitor working conditions, and insufficient public awareness about the negative effects of child labor" (UNICEF, 1-2).

Therefore, the above mentioned scenario of child labor presents us the real picture of the child labor situation in Bangladesh. Here another statistics regarding child labor have been mentioned as follows.

The following table-1 indicates the present statistics on child labor in Bangladesh at a glance, for example working children aged between 5-17 comprises about 7.4 million while children between 5-14 include 4.7 million. Child laborers according to definition comprises 3.2 million. According to following table-1, child domestic workers constitutes 421,000 while the percentage of children (aged 5-14) engaged in child labor (2006) National-12.8; Slum-19.1; Tribal-17.6 respectively.

Table1: Key Statistics of Child labor in Bangladesh

Working children, aged 5-17	7.4 million
Working children, aged 5-14	4.7 million
Child laborers (according to definition), aged 5-17	3.2 million
Children engaged in hazardous labor, aged 5-17	1.3 million
Child domestic workers	421,000
Percentage of children (aged 5-14) engaged in child labour (2006)	[National-12.8],[Slum-19.1] and [Tribal-17.6]

Source: Child Labour :UNICEF Bangladesh

Defining Child Labor

Child labor is a global problem. The word "child labor" means the appointment of children in any work that takes away maximum of their rights as children, i.e. right to attend regular school, uninterrupted mental and physical development. According to UNICEF, "Child labor is work that exceeds a minimum number of hours, depending on the age of a child and on the type of work. Such work is considered harmful to the child and should therefore be eliminated. Ages 5-11: At least one hour of economic work or 28 hours of domestic work per week. Ages 12-14: at least 14 hours of economic work or 28 hours of domestic work per week. Ages 15-17: at least 43 hours of economic or domestic work per week (UNICEF, 1).

According to ILO observation, the worst form of labor includes trafficking, slavery, armed conflict, debt bondage, sexual exploitation and hazardous work. It is a difficult task to estimate the number of children working around the world. "This practice of employing children to perform any sort of harmful and dangerous work is considered exploitative by many international organizations. A number of human rights and social welfare organizations have been working hard to reduce the number of child labor around the world (Zaman, 2014:25).

There is always a perplexity between children in employment and the children in child labor. In terms of national and international law, child labor is carried out by children which is unlawful. "Child Labor in employment must affect the children's physical and mental health and the educational opportunities they are supposed to get. On the other hand, children in employment is considered as lawful when they do not face any negative effects due to work. There are international laws which define child labor in specific way" (Shimul Reja, 2017:33). On the other hand, according to the article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) "a child is a person under the age of 18" (CRC 1989, Article 1).

Causes of Child Labor

Poverty and Family Income

"Child labor is defined as an activity with negative impact on the children who is involved in it. Although child labor is hazardous to the children, it has some beneficial sides for the children and their families (Zaman, 2014:26). There are many reasons behind the child labor such as:

Culture and Tradition

The culture of a country sometimes supports the child labor. Because support this type of labor that society also accept.

Poor Enforcement of Labor Laws

Law and order situation is liable for poor enforcement of labor laws. Labor laws have been enacted to combat child labor but cannot be operated side due to different reasons. Due to corruption and bribery law enforcing agency do not act according to the existing laws. The employers are offering bribery not to hamper working place.

Corruption and Improper Protection Guidelines

Improper protection guideline for children in a society like Bangladesh weaken the application of labor laws.

Maximum Output by Minimum Input

"Children are attractive to employers as workers motivated by profit because children are easier to control, more compliant and are less likely to claim wage increase or improved working conditions" (Zaman, 2014:26).

Social Effects of Child Labor

The social effects of child labor are identified by different ILO and UNICEF reports that have been mentioned in the following passages. Child labor violates some human rights principles as, child exploitation, violence and abuse. On the other hand, trafficking, commercial and sexual exploitation.

Effects on Education

Successive generations of social reformers mobilized to combat child labor - a practice that they cast as the moral equivalent of slavery during the nineteenth century. "Their campaigns brought together political leaders, philanthropists, social movements and literary figures motivated by a simple but compelling goal: getting vulnerable children out of exploitative employment and into education" (Brown, 2012:6). According to the new National Education Policy, education is free and compulsory up to grade eight. However it is predicted that more than one million children have never been to school. "Many children drop out of the education system before completing primary school and begin working. Most working children cite an inability to bear the educational expenses as the main reason for not attending school, because there are many indirect costs such as transport and uniforms" (Brown, 2012:6). Limitations within the education system such as a high teacher-student ratio may, poor teaching quality also discourages children from completing school. In addition, children living in slums often move frequently due to evictions, employment instability and civic unrest and, further exacerbating dropout rates. Many child laborers don't avail of their right to education because they do not have the time to go to school or to study. (ILO, 2007). Child labor deprives many a large portion of children from their right to education. According to UNICEF (p.4) report, "About half of all child laborers do not attend school at all, and among child domestic workers only 11 percent attend school. As a result, working children get stuck in low paying, low-skilled jobs, thereby perpetuating the cycle of poverty".

Exploitation, Violence and Abuse

Many children in their working places are punished even killed in some hidden jobs. According to UNICEF (2008) report working children in hidden jobs particularly in domestic are at risk of exploitation and different kinds of abuses. For example, according to a 2008 children's opinion poll, one-quarter of all working children are reported that they had been physically punished at their workplaces.

At the same time according to an ILO (2006) report, 421,000 child domestic workers (three-quarters are girls) of Bangladesh face particular vulnerabilities as they work behind closed doors. No child working in the house a holiday for domestic children in the domestic work. Children working in domestic places can hardly enjoy holiday, even in a week and 90 percent sleep at their employer's home. At the same time about 60 percent report some kind of abuse during their work, such as scolding or slapping. Again workers can not regularly receive their remuneration for example, more than half receive no wage at all. A survey of these child workers found that almost all had some sort of respiratory problem and were not provided with any safety gear or protection from brick dust¹². "Other child workers in hazardous jobs include 123,000 children working as rickshaw pullers, 153,000 children working in restaurants or tea stalls, and 56,000 working in carpentry" (UNICEF, 3).

Trafficking, Commercial and Sexual Exploitation

In many cases working people face sexual commercial harassment due to staying outside of their home. There are many reasons behind this harassment and exploitation. Working children are exposed to violence, abuse and economic exploitation because they often live away from their families in situations where they. Their vulnerable situation leads them at risk of trafficking as they seek a better life for themselves. A rapid assessment of commercially sexually exploited children proved that half worked in other sectors before being lured into sex work. Additionally, more than half had been compelled or trafficked into the industry, lured by false assurances of jobs or marriage. The life of a child sex worker is one of exploitation, violence, and physical and psychological health problems (UNICEF Bangladesh and INCIDIN, 2008:4).

Legal Protection

There are legal provisions behind the child labor such as:

National Child Labor Elimination Policy 2010

The recently finalized National Child Labor Elimination Policy of

2010 aims to eliminate children from many worst forms of child labor and every sort of hazardous category task, and to bring meaningful change to the lives of many Bangladeshi children (ICF,2012:14). The objectives of the policy have been mentioned here to eradicate child labor in Bangladesh. The specific objectives of the Policy (quoted in ICF, 2012:14) are as follows:

- i. Withdraw working children from certain forms of occupation.
- ii. Involve parents of working children in income-generating activities.
- iii. Offer stipends and grants to children and families in order to bring working children back to school.
- ix. Extend special attention to children who are affected by natural disasters.
- x. Provide special emphasis to indigenous and physically challenged children to bring them back to a congenial environment.
- xi. Ensure coordination among the concerned stakeholders who work for the welfare of working children.
- xii. Enact pragmatic laws and strengthen institutional capacity for their enforcement.
- xiii. Raise awareness among parents, the people, and civil society about the harmful consequences of child labor.
- ix. Plan and implement different short-, medium-, and long-term strategies and programs to eliminate various forms of child labor from Bangladesh by 2015.(Ministry of Labor and Employment, (2010): National Child Labor Elimination Policy 2010].

Remedial Measures

There are many measures by which the different problems of child labor can be remedied. Therefore the following measures can be mentioned in the followings passages:

Providing Access to Education

Education is the backbone of a nation. Only education can remove students from child labor. In this case parents should take care of children's education and teachers should inspire them to come to

school regularly. In this regard the role of government can play to eradicate child labor. It is the duty of the state to provide education with children as one of the fundamental human rights.

Eradication of poverty

Poverty is number one cause of child labor. Since poverty is major cause of child labor, the government should provide children with the education expenditure and food for living a decent life.

Changing Social Norms

It is necessary for the intellectual's academia and government to create awareness among the people to change prevailing social norms to eradicate child labor. Parents and employers should be compelled to guarantee the rights of working children above age 14. There should be shown as a part of campaign on TV and radio announcements; a theme song; school debate competitions on child labor; a music competition for working children in order to eradicate the child labor.

Social Protection for Vulnerable Children

Social protection for vulnerable children is essential because natural disasters such as cyclones and floods are sadly a part of life in Bangladesh. After emergencies, children are much more likely to have to work to support themselves and their family. Children who became orphaned or vulnerable following natural disaster should be given special care for their fundamental rights such as food, clothing shelter, and education.

Strengthening Legal Protection against Child Labor

Strengthening legal protection against child labor. There are many laws existed in Bangladesh regarding the elimination of child labor. The country is quite apart from their proper utilization. Therefore, the government should give special emphasis on the enforcement labor laws to remove child labor in all spheres grounds.

Conclusion

The aforementioned analysis suggests that child labor is a threat to

the overall development of Bangladesh. Since Bangladesh is a developing country and the rate of GDP is rising (now above 6 percent), so the prevailing child labor should be reduced. The major causes of child labor is illiteracy, poverty, weak enforcement of labor laws regarding child labor. At the same time the culture of a country should be strict enough against child labor. As mentioned above many families in Bangladesh depend on the income earned by their children for survival. On the one hand child labor is in a sense is highly appreciated to the poor families , on the other hand employers often prefer to provide work for children because they are cheaper and considered to be more obedient and compliant than adults. Therefore children are engaging to child labor alarmingly. To eradicate the endemic child labor practice in Bangladesh, the government should take strict initiative against child labor and families have also duties to facilitate children for providing access to education. The prevailing social norms should be changed so as the avoidance of child labor are created among the heart of societal people. Vulnerable children should be protected. Legal protection against child labor should be strengthen.

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