

## Socio-economic Condition of Child Workers: Bangladesh Perspective

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### Abstract

*Children are the future of a nation. They are also the wealth of a state. But this child becomes a labor today at a very early age when he should be free from all anxieties like food, clothing, shelter, education and medical facilities. Most of the children are deprived of all these basic necessities. Despite, in many cases they have to work for the survival of themselves and for their families as well. So, child labor is a “survival strategy” for many families of the developing countries like Bangladesh. Child laborers are in the long term threats to normal health and psychological development. The overall condition of the working children is very miserable. The employers of these establishments were not aware enough of the child rights as well as child labor legislation and they are not sympathetic to these poor and destitute children. That is why their miseries are increasing rapidly day by day. This paper aims at identifying the socio-economic condition of working children and providing some recommendations for the betterment of this neglected segment.*

**Keywords:** Child, Labour, Survival strategy, Developing country, Effective measure, Basic necessities, Industrial Revolution, Existence, Expensive labor, Abandoned children.

### Introduction

Child is the continuation of human civilization and bears the testimony of parenthood and generation. He is the foundation of a family, a society, a nation and the world as a whole. He requires careful and effective measures for his proper nourishment by the concerned person and authority. He is to be provided with the basics he requires. But unfortunately this does not prevail all over the world equally especially in the developing countries. A few fortunate children of these countries are provided with the basics while the rest are denied of their basic needs for physical and mental growth. They are compelled to offer labor for their livelihood before attaining maturity. They work with the hammer and the spade instead of working with the book and the pencil. Sometimes, circumstantially they go into the clutches of anti-social elements, creating law and order problems and finally they become the liability of the state instead of becoming an asset. In this article the original situation of child labor in Bangladesh has been depicted aptly and the author has provided some suggestions for improving the miserable condition of child workers.

### Hypothesis

The study is based on following hypothesis:

- Socio-economic encumbrance of parents compel their children to join in the labor force;
- Child worker is increasing due to partial or poor implementation of law.

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### **Objective of the Study**

The study is designed to portray the socio-economic condition of child workers in Bangladesh. So, the specific objectives of the study are:

- to analyse the socio-economic condition of child workers;
- to find out the nature of work, environment of working place, working hour, mode of payment of wages, advantage and disadvantage of work;
- to enquire the awareness of the working children regarding their rights and relevant laws.

### **Methodology**

This writing was a chapter of the Ph.D dissertation (Child Labor: Law and Practice in Bangladesh) of the writer. As it is mainly a socio-legal study, so empirical as well as analytical methods have been used here. The materials have been collected carefully and meticulously of this work. To assess the present condition of child workers in Bangladesh, two questionnaires have been served- one for child workers another for employers. The type of questionnaire is structured. The writer conducted personal interview of 150 child workers of different establishments situated in Dhaka, Rajshahi and Haragachh (Rangpur). The writer also conducted interview of 25 employers. The sample of child workers was selected randomly while employers were selected purposively. The argument for selecting the study area was to get easy access to collect necessary data because Haragachh and Rajshahi were well-known to writer and a good number of child workers were working in these localities. The reason for selecting Dhaka was that it is the most industrialised area in Bangladesh and almost all garment factories are located here. Besides these, the selected areas are easy to communicate to and from. In this article, the collected data have been presented by various charts or graphs. These charts or graphs may clarify the overall situation of child workers, specially their socio-economic condition. The writer is interested to arrange these charts or graphs chronologically as the collected data may be used most perfectly and efficiently.

### **Operational Definition**

#### **Child**

Usually the term child is used to denote human beings who are tender in age. In contemporary world, many national and international organisations and institutions have defined child from their own aims, objectives and necessity purposefully. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) a child means every human being below 18 years of age. Similarly, the Child Act, 2013 has defined children as human beings whose age limit are below 18 and the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006 defines child as a person who is under 14 years of age. But in this write up the writer would like to define a child as a human being who is below 14 years of age.

**Labor**

Labor means manual or mental work. According to International Labor Organisation (ILO), child labor is one kind of job of too young persons for long hours, which is done under strain by street children in lieu of little payment but heavy responsibility. Sometimes they have to do dull and repetitive tasks in intimidating environment. But labor is used here to indicate the manual work of a child and at the same time the labor of those children who work in factories, workshops and shops and establishments.

**Background of Child labor**

Child labor is as old as human history in all societies of the world. Young children in tribal and agricultural societies used to work to help their families and communities. Children had to work for the survival of their own and their families as well because of necessity. So child labor has been more or less in existence in some form or other in all periods of time. According to Mendelievich:

“To a greater or lesser extent, children in every type of human society have always taken part and still do take part, in those economic activities which are necessary if the group to which they belong is to survive” (Mendelievich, 1979).

It is evident that children have been exploited in different ways from the beginning of human society. A child was treated as a chattel of his parents and they had the right to kill the child at birth, to sell him, to exploit his labor or to offer him as a sacrifice to a deity (Kadushin, 1974). Despert, J. Louise opined that, “the Child’s position in the average family in the masses was for centuries roughly in this order: father, cattle, mother, child” (Louise, 1965).

In the early stages of the Industrial Revolution in Britain the children were used as the substitute for adult expensive labor. Evidence shows that without the assistance of child labor it was quite difficult to get work for a single man as well as old man. There were many parentless or abandoned children during the great social dislocations of the early Industrial Revolution called pauper children. Pauper apprentices worked in the early water-frame machines. They could easily do than adults. As they were helpless, friendless class they were abused but in some places children even seem to have been kindly treated. Obtaining steam power the newer factories were set up on coal fields near towns. The children who lived with their parents were hired by these factories. The condition of children in these factories was very distressing. There was the heated atmosphere (often eighty to eighty five degrees) and there was an enormous amount of dust. In 1816, it was impossible to see across the room in some departments of cotton spinning. The hours of work were from twelve to fourteen with only one hour off for dinner while they had to take their other meals at work. They had no scope for rest rather had to work the whole day on their feet. Children had to work overtime to make up for the irregularity of water supply in case of water-mills (Knowles, 1926).

### Causes of Child labor

Child labor is the combination of multiple causes. The main causes are poverty, large family, unemployment, absence of compulsory education, absence of scheme for family allowance, illiteracy and ignorance of parents, cheaper rates of child labor, inadequate family income, slow-process of protective labor legislation, inadequate and ineffective inspecting machinery to check up the child labor (Mendelievich, 1979). Child labor is usually a combination of poverty, poor performance of children at school, parents' desire to keep their children occupied and uncertainty at home (Mendelievich, 1979).

The causes of child labor vary from developed to less developed countries. In developed countries, children mainly work to earn some pocket money. On the other hand, in less developed countries the principal cause of child labor is poverty. Other causes are entrenched tradition, lack of schools and recreational infrastructure, tensions and uncertainties of the family. It is noted that the causes of child labor are almost similar throughout the Sub-continent viz. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (Mendelievich, 1979). In this article only the socio-economic condition of child workers of Bangladesh has been discussed.

### Child Labor in Bangladesh

In poor countries like Bangladesh poverty is considered as the main reason for child labor (Ahmad and Quasem, 1991). Most of the poor people of Bangladesh have a tendency to abandon wife with children. Dire poverty, separation and divorce of wife make women desperate. In search of livelihood they are compelled to migrate to the city with their children. The situation of children goes to worsening position if there are step-mother, step-father, addicted family members to which they belong (Islam, 1998).

Since the British period children in Bengal are integral part of the family. The peasants have formed the deprived class of people. They could not keep pace with their oversized families by their meager income. The peasant worked in the *zaminders'* field or on his own farm as a labor. They took assistance from their children. In 1971, during the War of Liberation, peasants moved with their families from place to place as refugees. Thus many children were isolated and had to fend for themselves. Bangladesh became independent with numerous socio-economic problems. This also brought a change in the type of work. Previously, while they used to work in traditional agricultural activities now they work in non-traditional hazardous sector (Subhan, 1990).

Rapid Assessment indicates three factors (Rahman, 1997) as the causes of child labor in Bangladesh. Such factors are push, pull and interactive factors. Push factor compels children to earn their livelihood or for their families. Poverty is the most powerful push factor for child labor in Bangladesh. Pull factor attracts the children to join the labor force. In nature the attractions are economic or psycho-social. The urban economy has created more economic opportunities than rural economy of the country, as for examples garment factories, match industries, small engineering workshops, biscuit factories, hosiery, construction sector and other industries and informal sectors. Interactive factor is a combination of push and pull factors. These are

continuous poverty, hunger and abuse by family members, attraction of the city life, desire to earn money. In search of livelihood children even run away and migrate to cities.

### **Garment Industries and Child Labor**

The essence of export oriented industries was felt from the poor economic condition of the country. The average growth rate of 1978-80 was only 3.5% and 3.8% during second five year plan. It indicates the poor performance of the national economy of the country. Under this circumstance utmost importance is given to export oriented industries, especially garment industry (UNICEF, 1987).

It is observed that Bangladesh attached more importance to garments industry as a potential area for earning foreign exchange from the very beginning of 1980s (Chowdhury, 1987). During this period Bangladesh government has taken some steps to encourage the local and foreign investors for garment industry. Among the steps "Foreign Investment Act of 1980" is mention worthy. Consequently, Bangladesh gets a golden opportunity to expand its market abroad. Foreign investment has also played a significant role in garments industry in Bangladesh. During the 80's Singapore, India, Korea, U.K., U.S.A., Belgium, Hong Kong, Switzerland have also made a handsome amount of money in garment industry in Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 1989).

In this way garment industries become a prosperous and profitable industry in Bangladesh. It is noted from the 80's the garment industry is the biggest foreign exchange earner and now comprises 76% of its total national exports. And within a short period a good number of poor and destitute women and children got employment opportunity in garments industries. Though there are no precise statistics of child labor, a sampling study estimates it to be around 55,000 out of a total of 600,000 earning approximately \$8 to \$12 per month (Hossain, 1993).

The need of the employment of huge workers was found in these factories. The owners of these industries found it profitable to appoint child workers at low wages along with adult workers. Child workers also found a safe haven to supplement their families with their income which is earned from these industries. The discriminatory wages of the child worker did not at the beginning attract the attention of the social workers or the government and the child workers also did not raise any objection to this wage discrimination. On a fear of being fired from job the child workers were working in the garments factories of Bangladesh under unjust service conditions and in unhealthy environment. This situation continued for over a decade and the owners of these factories and industries were amassing wealth exploiting child workers.

### **Socio-economic Condition**

In Bangladesh, the socio-economic condition of the working children is very miserable. In this writing, the writer interviewed 150 child workers. Out of the 150 children, 100 were male and the rest 50 were female. Among the respondents most of the children came from poor, destitute and broken families. Harsh reality compelled them to join into the labor force at the tender age when

they should spend their time by learning, playing along with all opportunities in which a child should belong.

The employers also take the benefit of the tender age. They are interested to employ child labor because usually child workers are low paid and they work for a long time without any overtime payment. The employer prefers children instead of adult because children can work swiftly, are easily controlled and have no bargaining capacity. In this way they are exploited by the employer for being children.

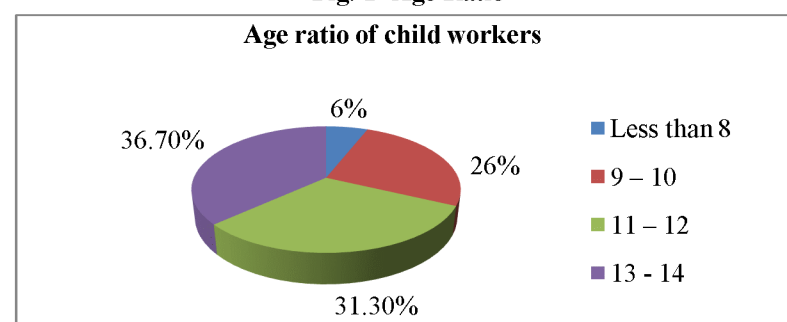
On the other hand, being illiterate, parents do not think that they may be benefitted to send their children to school. So they prefer to send their children to factory and elsewhere for job in lieu of sending them to school. They also believe that, if their children are busy with work, they will not involve themselves in any misdeeds or anti-social activities.

In this article, some data is used which have been collected by the writer at the time of her Ph.D. program. These data have been presented here by various charts or graphs. These charts or graphs may clarify the overall situation of the child worker, specially their socio-economic condition. The writer is interested to arrange these charts or graphs chronologically as the collected data most perfectly and efficiently.

#### **Age Ratio of Child Workers**

Most of the working children of study area are between 13 to 14 years of age which is 55(36.7%). The rest children are 11 to 12, 9 to 10 and 8 and below the age group which are 31.3%, 26.0% and 6.0% respectively. So it is clear that maximum (36.7%) workers are 13 to 14 age group and minimum (6.0%) workers are 8 and below the age group.

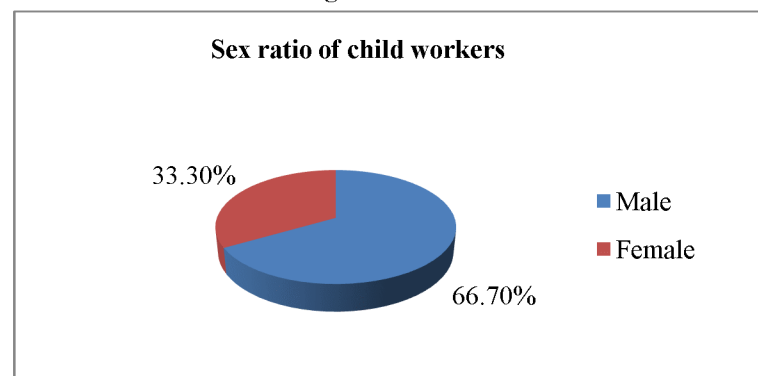
**Fig. 1- Age Ratio**



### Sex Ratio of Child Workers

In the study area maximum child workers are male. But female child workers are not insignificant. The children, who works in the households as domestic workers are almost female. Following figure will give the ratio of the male and female child workers of Bangladesh as well as the study area.

Fig. 2- Sex Ratio

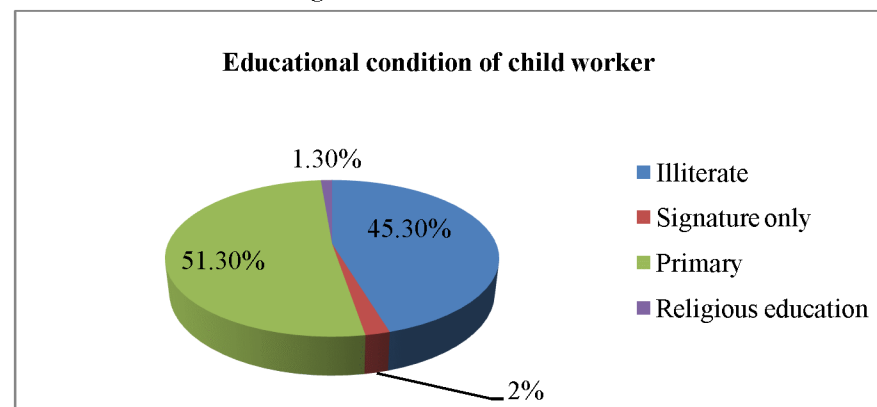


The chart gives the ratio of the male and female child workers of the study area. There are 66.7% male and 33.3% are female child workers in the study area. The female child workers are almost half of the male workers. But the researcher observed that there are very few female child workers in workshop, factory or any institutional job and on the contrary a very few male child are working in the household.

### Educational Condition of Child Workers

The educational situation of child workers is very poor. None of the children admitted themselves into higher secondary level. Though more than 50% children have completed primary education, their performance is very poor because they have not engaged in any academic activities. The educational situation of child workers has been given in the following figure:

Fig. 3- Educational Condition

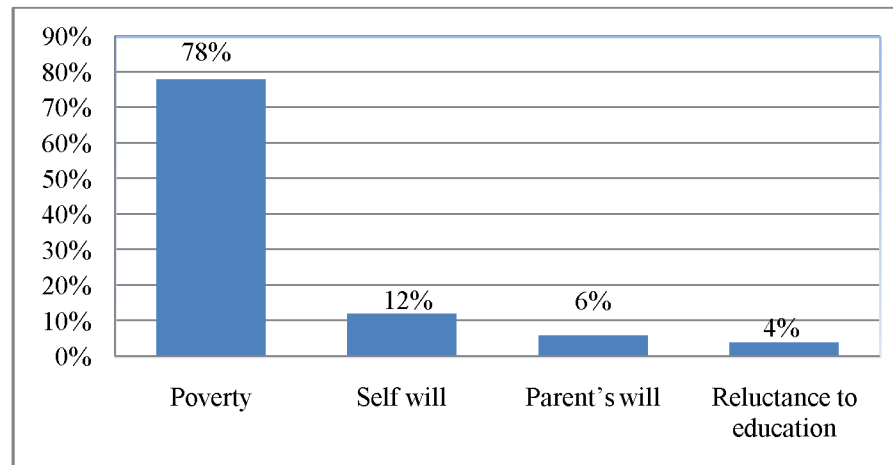


The above chart shows that 68(45.3%) child workers out of 150 are completely illiterate, they cannot even write down their own name. 3(2.0%) child workers can write their name only and 2(1.3%) can read religious books only. From the above table, we can easily realise the educational situation of the child workers of the study area as well as in Bangladesh.

#### **Causes behind Child Labor**

There are many causes behind child labor in Bangladesh and in the study area. Among the causes, poverty is the most significant. But it is not the only cause of child labor. Besides poverty, personal interest, unconsciousness about education, etc. are also responsible behind child labor. The following figure will show the causes of child labor.

**Fig. 4- Causes of Child Labor**



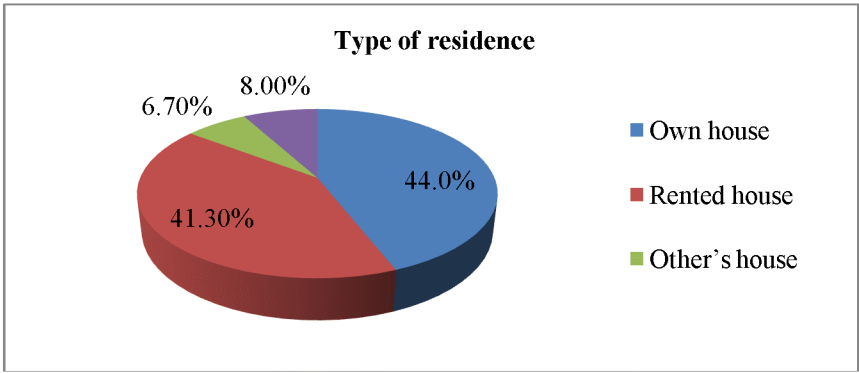
From this chart, we see that almost two-third respondents (78%) mention that poverty is the main cause behind their engagement in job. A good number of respondents (12%) say that they are working willingly and 6% say that their parents have sent them to work and 4% are working in various establishments because they are reluctant to education.

#### **Type of Residence**

Most of the child workers in the study area live in their own houses but the condition of the residence is very poor and unhealthy. Most of the working children have no house. They live in rented house and sometimes in voluntary institutions/ boarding house. Chart No.5 is the indicator of residence of the child workers.



Fig. 5- Type of Residence

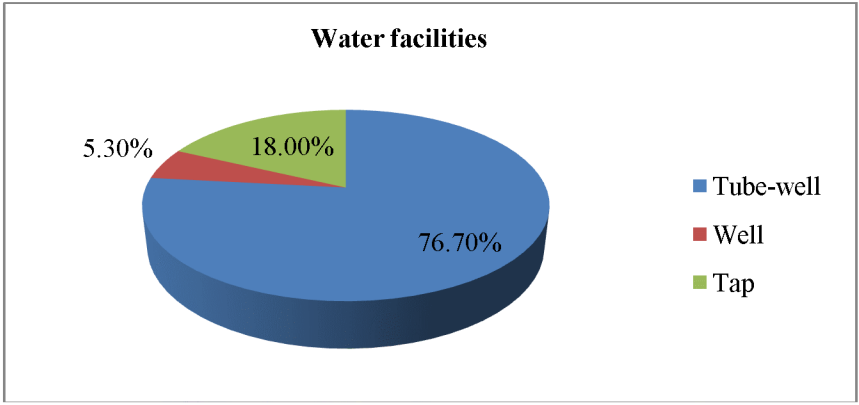


In this chart we get the pattern of the residences of the child workers. Here 44.0% children live in their own house and 41.3% live in so called rented houses. Condition of the residences is very unhealthy. Rest (8.0%+6.7%) children live in the houses of their relatives or in the voluntary institutions.

Water Facility

The child workers do not get enough water supply facilities, especially those who work in Dhaka. But usually they use healthy water sources. Figure No. 6 is the indicator of the sources of water.

Fig. 6- Water Facilities

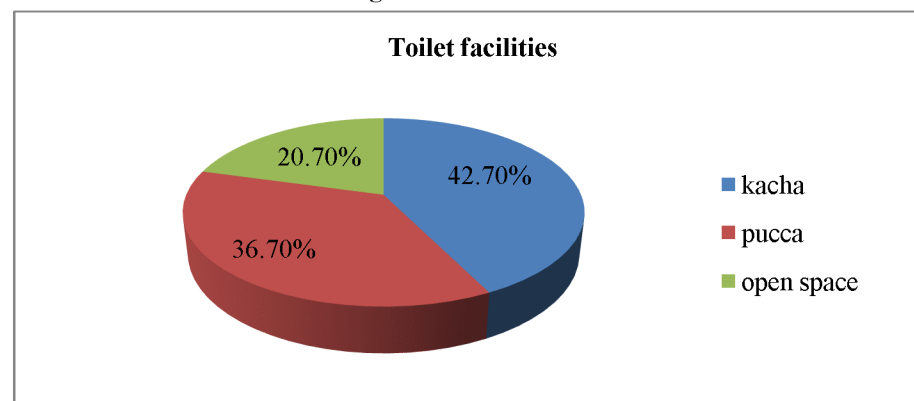


From figure no.6 we can see that 76.7% child workers use tube-well water and 18.0% use tap water in their everyday life. But only 5.3% child workers use well water which is comparatively unsafe. It is worth mentioning that they do not get sufficient water for their daily necessities.

### Toilet Facility

The toilet facility of the working children is very unhygienic. Most of them use *kacha* latrine and these latrines are not made properly. In table No. 7 the types of latrine is shown.

Fig. 7- Toilet Facilities

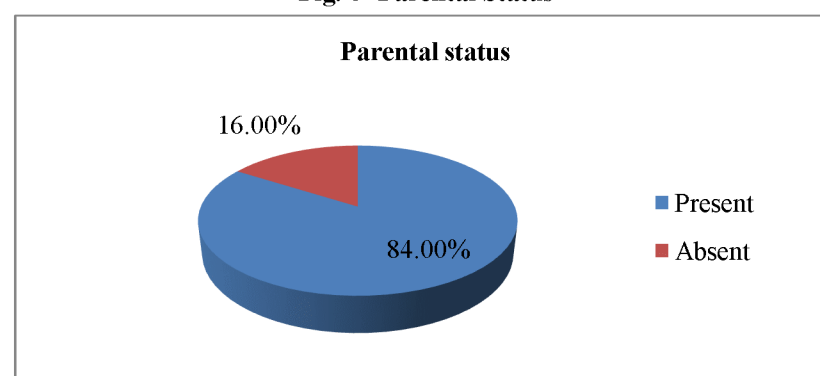


The above figure shows that 42.7% family of the working children use *kacha* latrine and 36.7% use *pucca* latrine. But 20.7% families of the child workers have no latrine. They discharge in open spaces.

### Parents or Guardians

Most of the child workers have parents but they are not responsible for their siblings in true sense and many children have no mother or father. Usually they are taken care of by their relatives. In some cases they remain guardian less.

Fig. 8- Parental Status



The above chart shows that 126 (84.0%) child labor have parents and 24 (16.0%) child workers have no parents. Among them some have fathers and some have mothers and a few children have no parents. The researcher came to know from the field observation that these parents and guardian less children are very humble though sometimes they are looked after by relatives.

Number of Family Member

In the study area, most of the families of children are single family. But the number of members of these families is very high. Being poor they do not use contraceptive. As a result, each family has more than two children though they are not able to maintain the daily expenditure of their so many siblings. The following graph shows the number of family member of the child workers.

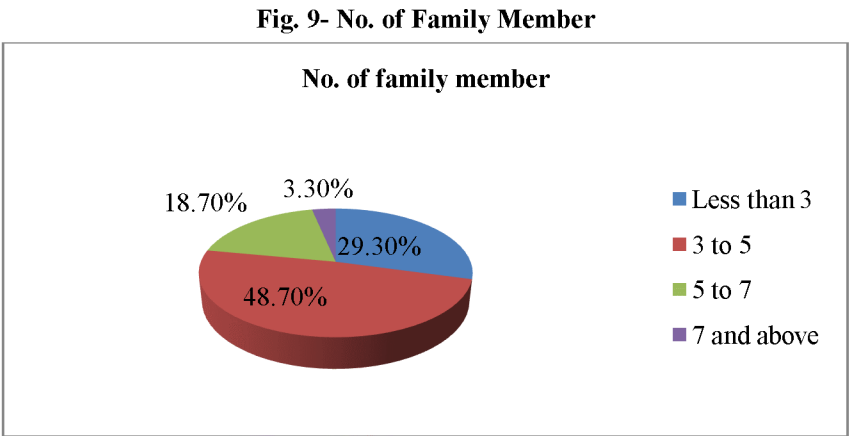
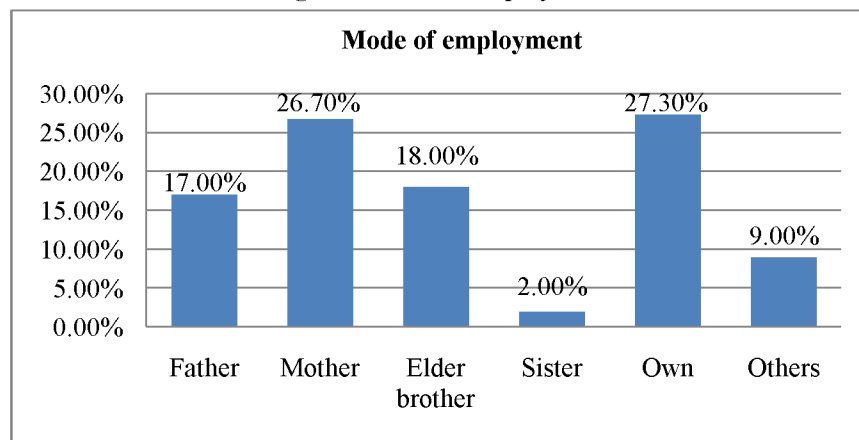


Figure-9 shows that about 50% family of the study area has 3-5 members whereas about 30% families have less than 3 children, 18.7% families have 5-7 members and 3.3% have more than 7 children. Thus we may conclude that average member of family members, the child workers is high.

Mode of Employment

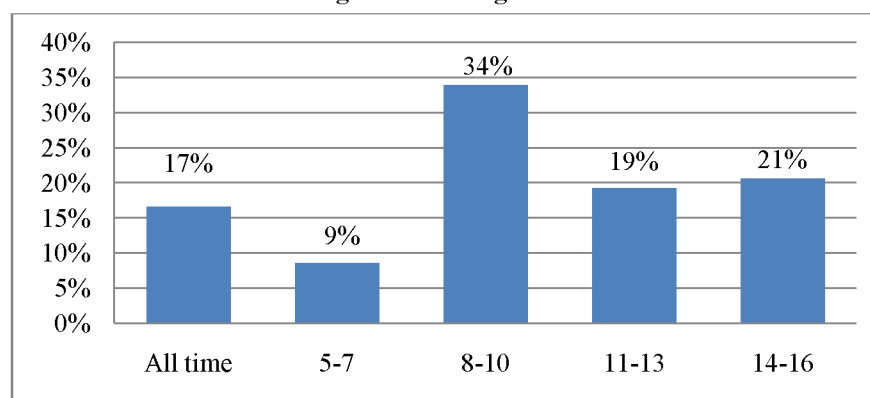
Though many children manage their job from their self-responsibility, their relatives and brokers also help them to manage jobs and sometimes they get jobs against paying some money. The following table indicates the modes of getting the job.

**Fig. 10- Mode of Employment**

The above figure shows that maximum respondents (27.3%) have managed their jobs by their own efforts. Parents also try to engage them. About 17% have got jobs through their father and 26.7% through their mother. Sometimes they get jobs through their brothers and sisters (18%+2%= 20%) and rest 9% manage their jobs through their relatives and brokers.

#### **Working Hours (Daily)**

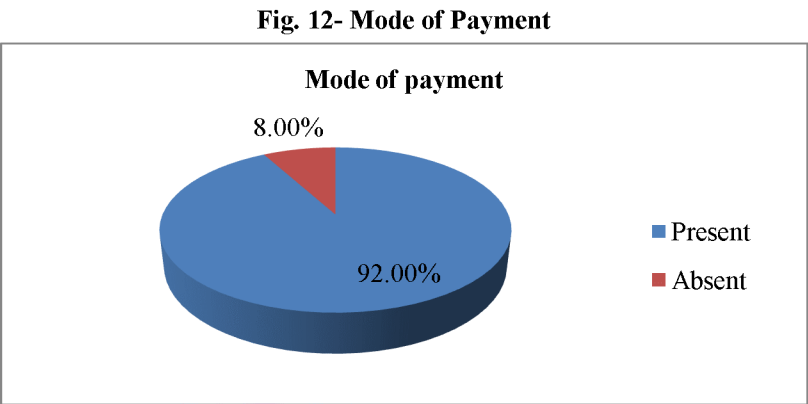
It is a matter of regret that even though child workers are low paid, they are bound to work for a long time about 10-13 hours. The following table shows the duration of working hour of child workers.

**Fig. 11- Working Hours**

The above figure shows that 16.7% child workers have to work the whole day. Especially the domestic workers belong to this category. On the other hand, some children have to work 14-16 hours and the rest have to work for about 5 to 13 hours in a day.

Mode of Payment of Child Worker

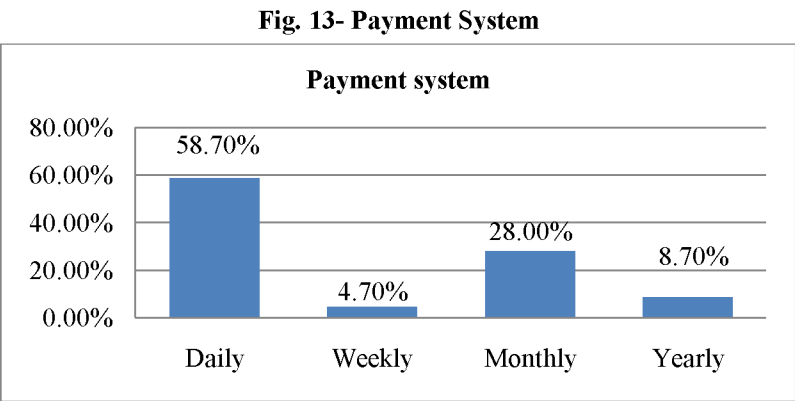
In most cases wages are paid in cash but in some cases payment is given in kind. The following table shows the mode of payment of children.



The above figure shows that 92% children are given their payment in cash and only 8% children get their wages in kind.

Payment System of Child Worker

Most of the children are given their payment daily. But weekly, monthly and even yearly payment-systems are also in vogue in the study are. The following table gives an idea of the payment system.

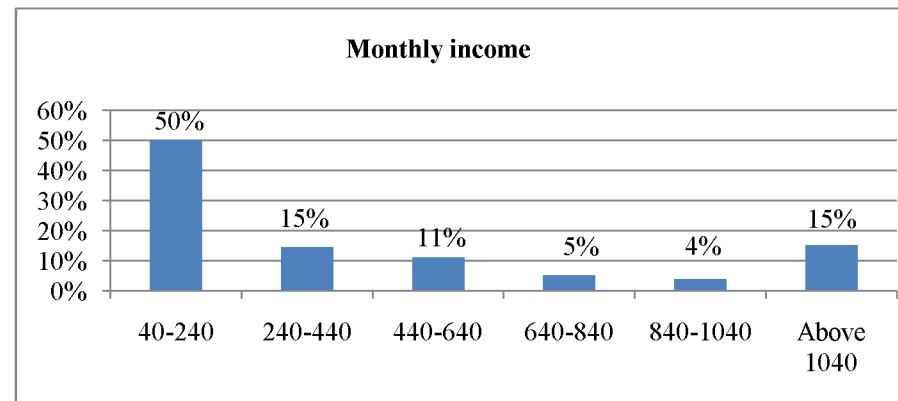


The figure shows that 58.7% child workers get their wages in daily basis and 4.7% children get their wages in weekly basis. On the other hand, 28.0% and 8.7% of the children get their wages weekly and monthly respectively. In most cases the domestic servants are given their wages monthly and yearly.

### Monthly Income

Monthly income of the child workers is very low. There is no alternative job opportunity. So they are bound to work in low payment. The owners take this opportunity and pay the wages according to their whim. In table 14 the monthly income of children is given:

**Fig. 14- Monthly Income**

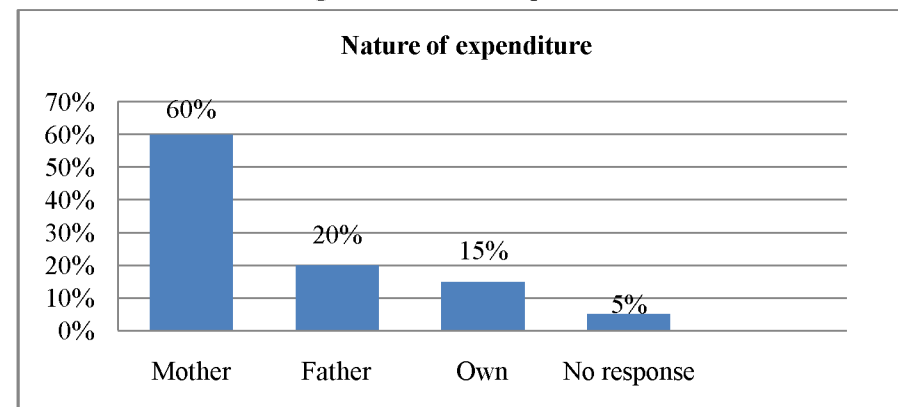


From figure-14 it is seen that the lowest monthly income of child workers is Tk. 40 and the maximum is Tk. 1040 and above. But it is noticed that most (50%) children earn Tk. 40-240 only and a few (15.3%) earn Tk. 1040 and above. The rest 39 (26%) children earn 240-640 and very few earn 640 to 1040 monthly. So it is clear that though the range of wages is between Tk. 40 to Tk. 1040 and above, their average income is very low.

### Nature of Expenditure

Being poor, most of the children expend their income to overcome their poverty through their parents. Some children remain silent about the nature of their expenditure. The following table is used to indicate the nature of expenditure of the children of the study area.

**Fig. 15- Nature of Expenditure**

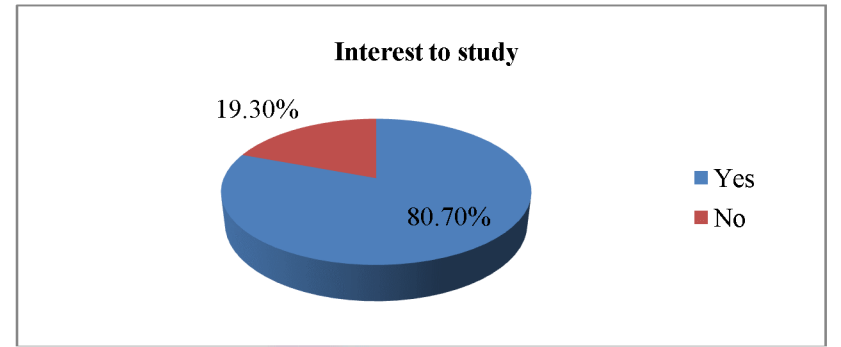


The above figure shows that 60% expend their income through their mother and 20.0% through their father and 15% expend by their own. But it is a matter of great concern that the rest (5%) remain silent about it. It is assumed that these children expend their money through wrong means such as smoking, gambling, watching cinema, VCR, and blue film. It is also noticed that the health of these children is comparatively unhealthy and it is also presumed that they are drug-addicted.

**Interest towards Education**

Most of the child workers are interested in Education but they do not get the opportunity. That is why they remain illiterate. From table 16 we can assess the interest of the children towards education.

**Fig. 16- Interest to Study**

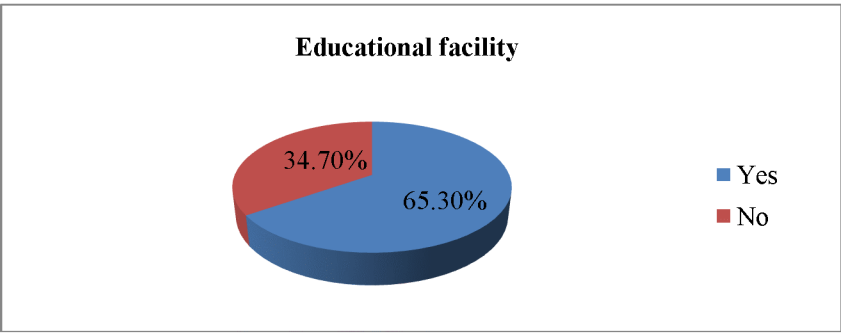


The above figure shows that 80.7% children are interested in study and only 19.3% are not interested in education. But it is observed that after discussion about the importance of education, many of the disinterested children become interested in education.

**Educational Facility**

In my study area, education facility is very limited, especially for the rural poor and working children. Table No. 17 shows the education facility of the working children.

**Fig. 17- Educational Facility**

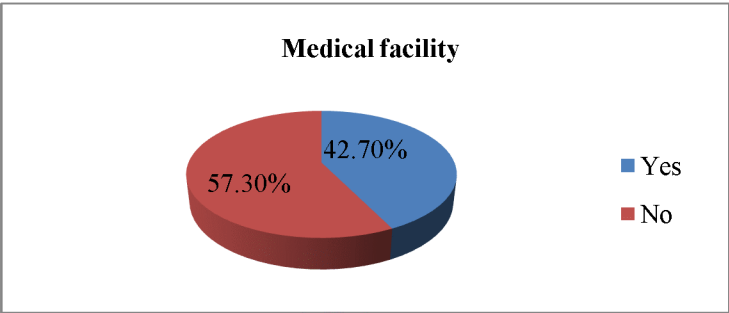


The above table shows that 65.3% children get the opportunity to be admitted in hard-to-reach urban schools and the rest 34.7% remain illiterate. Among the illiterate children most are rural poor and some are urban destitute.

**Medical Facility**

In my study area medical facilities are limited. Neither the Government nor the employers have undertaken to provide sufficient medical facilities for them. So most of the children suffer from innumerable diseases. The following table indicates the situation of the children of the study area.

**Fig. 18- Medical Facility**

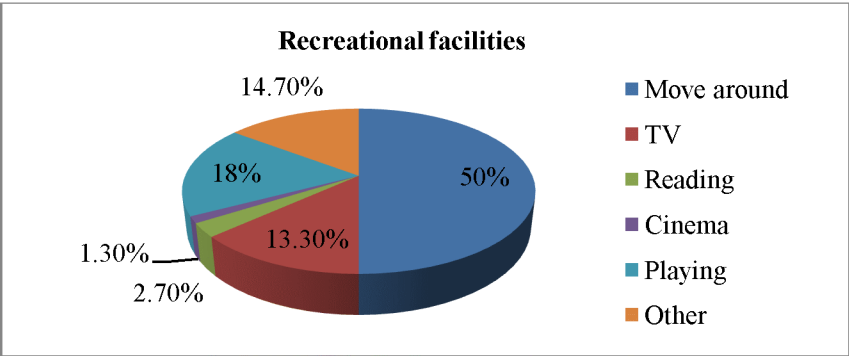


The above table shows that 64 (42.7%) children get medical facilities and 86 (57.3%) do not get any medical assistance from their employers. So it is clear that most of them are derived from medical facilities. It is noted that those who get medical facilities do not get enough for sufficient health.

**Recreational Facility**

In Bangladesh, people do not have enough recreational facilities, especially the children of poor families are exclusively deprived of these as per their requirements. The same picture is seen in the study area. Most of the children are working and spend their leisure time without any effective and constructive recreational activities. They just move about to and fro and engage themselves in misdeeds.

**Fig. 19- Recreational Facilities**





In figure No.19 it is seen that 50% children spend their leisure time only moving around aimlessly and without any constructive recreation. Though 18.0 % get recreation through playing, these games are not appropriate for their age. It is noticed that only 2.7% and 1.3% children read and watch cinema occasionally. But 13.3% enjoy TV and 14.7% children involve themselves in various other activities like sewing, knitting, dyeing, drawing and playing indoor games with their master's children.

#### Difficulties in the Working Place

The children of Bangladesh as well as the study areas have to face many difficulties in their working place. They are punished by the employers in many ways viz. cut off of payment, physical and mental torture. The following table indicates the pattern of punishment of child workers.

Fig. 20- Difficulties in the Working Place

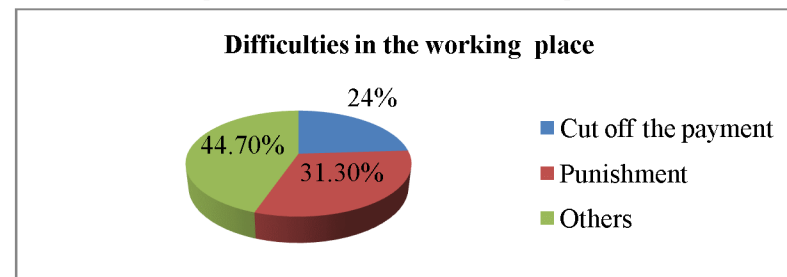
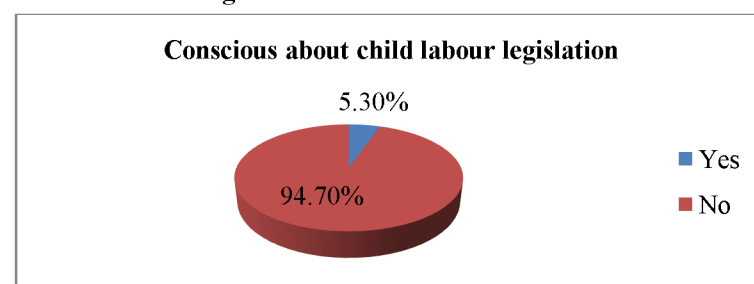


Figure No.20 shows that 36 (24.0%) respondents claim that employers have cut off their payments because of minor mistake, illnesses or for breaking instruments. On the other hand, 47(31.3%) children claim that they are punished mercilessly by their employers and adult co-workers in many ways. The rest 67 (44.7%) claims that they are sexually harassed by their employers, co-workers and some children claim that they are insulted, rebuked, scolded and so on harshly.

#### Consciousness about Law

Being illiterate and unconscious almost 100% children are not aware of child labor related legislation. They do not even get the opportunity to learn anything about their rights. The following table is a picture of consciousness about the legislation of the working children.

Fig. 21- Consciousness about Law

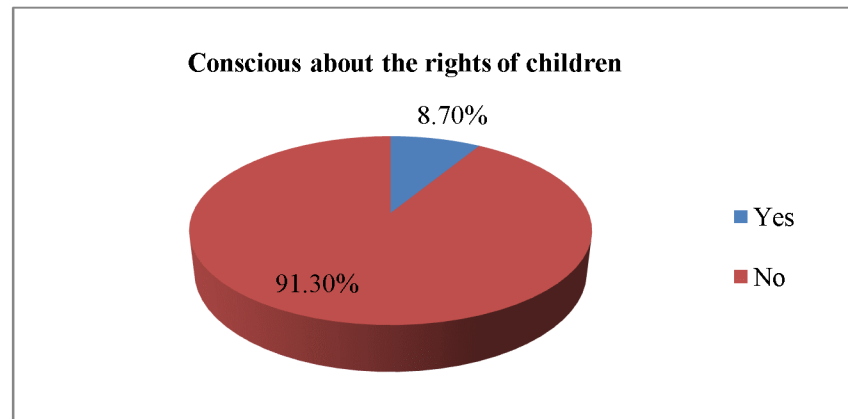


The above figure shows only 5.3% children are partially conscious about child labor related legislation, whereas 94.7% children have no idea about it.

### Conscious ness about UNCRC

Unlike the legislation, most of the child workers are not conversant with UNCRC. It is beyond their imagination because many general educated people are not aware about CRC. We can easily realise the practical situation of consciousness of child workers about UNCRC from the following table.

Fig. 22- Consciousness about the rights of children



The above figure shows that 91.3% children are not conscious at all about the CRC and only 8.7% children are partially conscious about it. From this table we can assume that child workers are not conscious about their national and international legal rights.

### Employers' Attitude Towards Child Labour

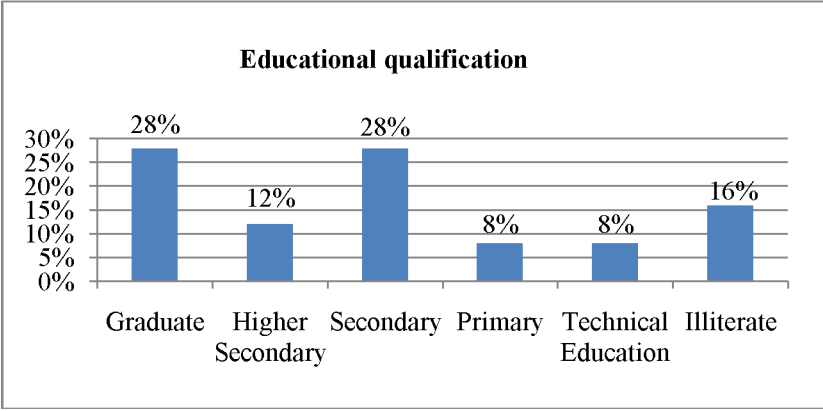
The writer interviewed 25 employers from Dhaka, Rajshahi and Rangpur (Haragachh). Among the 25, 3 were from Dhaka, 17 from Rajshahi, and 5 were from Haragachh. Out the 25, only 5 were female and the rest 20 were male. On the basis of educational qualification, 7 were graduates and the same number was SSC pass. Only 2 employers are primary pass and 3 are HSC pass. Moreover 4 employers are illiterate and 2 have technical knowledge.

Though most of the employers are educated, they are not aware of child rights and they employ child workers in their firms and factories at large. It is noted that the employers are very much conscious about their own interest but they are totally ignorant about child labor related laws and child rights. In the study area, the writer has found that most of the employers employed child workers because they work at low wages and are easily controlled. Besides these, they work very swiftly. Some respondents argued that they employed child workers for humanitarian grounds. According to them, if they do not employ the poor and helpless children, they may starve. They also argued that jobless poor children may go astray. Anyway, the specific attitude of the employers is shown in different graphs or charts.

**Educational Qualification**

In the study areas, the researcher has found that most of the employers are educated, some of them are even highly educated. The following table is the indicator of educational qualification of the employers.

**Fig. 23- Educational Qualification**



The above table shows that only 4 (16.0%) employers are illiterate the rest are educated. 7 (28.0%) have completed graduation, 3 (12.0%) are higher secondary pass and 7 (28.0%) have finished secondary level and only 2 (8.0%) have completed their primary education. The other 2 (8.0%) employers are skilled in various technical activities.

**Causes of employing Children**

In most cases human beings take decisions on the basis of cost and benefit policy. In employing children, this theory is exactly applicable. Many employers have agreed that they employed children for low payment and for their better performances. The employers are also interested to employ children because they can easily control children. Though they argued that by employing these helpless street urchins, they save them from danger and poverty. We may get the real pictures of causes of behind employing children.

**Fig. 24- Causes of employing children**

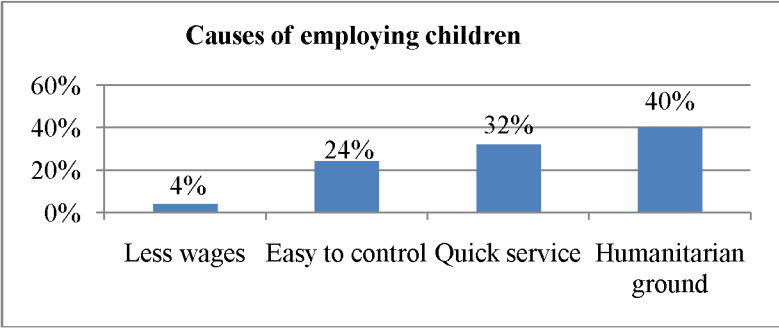


Figure No. 24 shows that 1 (4.0%) employer has responded that they employ children for less wages in comparison to adult workers. 6 (24.0%) respondents replied that children are easily controlled and that is why they are interested to employ them. 8 (32.0%) are interested to employ them because they work quickly and the rest 10 (40.0%) respondents argued that children have been employed on the humanitarian ground. Because it saves the poor and destitute children from starvation and gives shelter so that they can survive as human beings. But in practice, the employers do not take proper care of them.

#### Employers' Opinion about Working Hour

The employers have given different opinion about working hour of working children, though in practice they do not follow reasonable working hour for children. The following table is indicating the opinion of the employers.

Fig. 25- Length of working hours

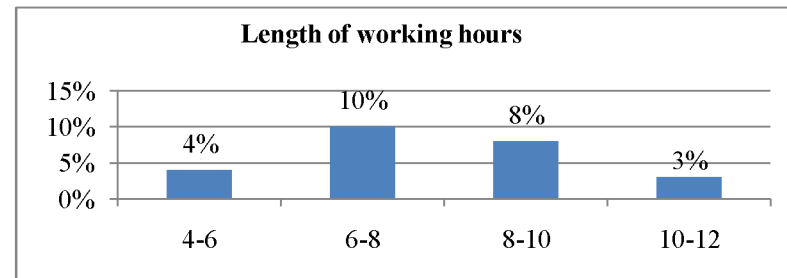
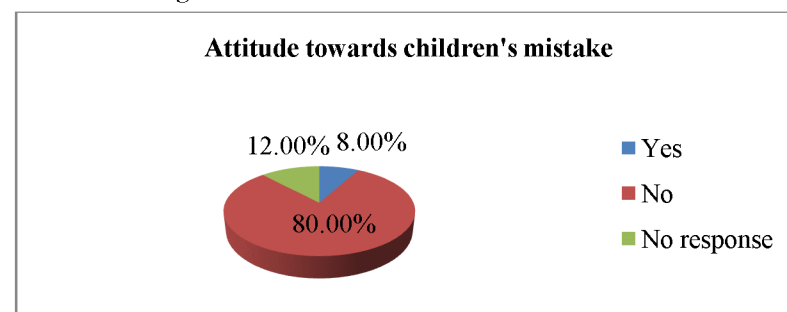


Figure No. 25 shows that 4 (16.0%) have opined that the duration of working time should be 4 to 6 hours a day but according to 10 respondents the duration should be 6 to 8 hours and the rest 8 employers think that the working hour should be 8 to 10 hours and only 3 respondents have said that the children may work 10 to 12 hours.

#### Attitude towards Children's Mistake

Though most of the employers claim that they do not give any punishment to child workers for their mistakes, the researcher observed that in practice most of the children are punished by their employers. Anyway, the responses of the employers are given in the following table.

Fig. 26- Attitude towards Children's Mistake

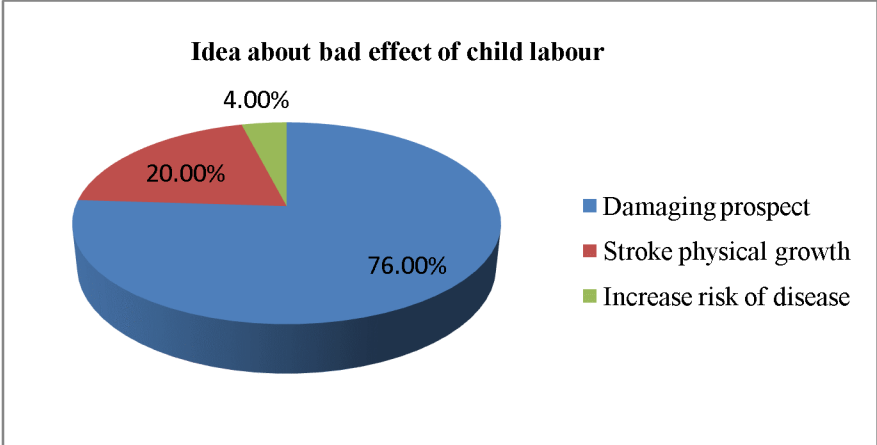


In this figure we see that 2 (8.0%) respondents admitted that they punish their child workers for their serious mistake and fault. But 20 (80.0%) respondents denied that they give them punishment and 3 (12.0%) respondents remain silent. From the nature of the response it is clear that frequently they torture the children mercilessly. So the attitude of the employers towards their child employee is very much inhumane.

Idea about Bad Effect of Child Labor:

Usually the employers think that child labor is harmful for their physical growth and mental development. But they do not hesitate to employ them in their factories, even in the risky jobs. However their opinion about the bad effect of child labor is as follow:

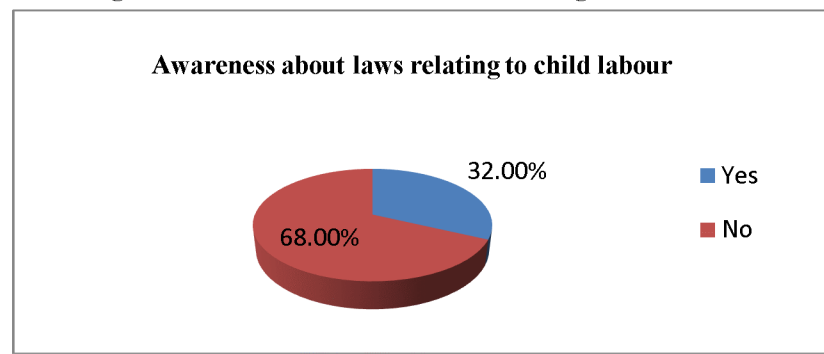
Fig. 27- Idea about bad effect of Child Labor



The above table shows that 19 (76.0%) employers think that the working children losing their bright prospects and 5 (20.0%) respondents said that child labor is harmful for their physical growth and development and only 1 (4.0%) employer think that child labor increases the risk of diseases. From their attitude it is clear that the idea about the bad effect of child labor is the outcome of their experience.

**Awareness about the Laws Relating to Child Labor**

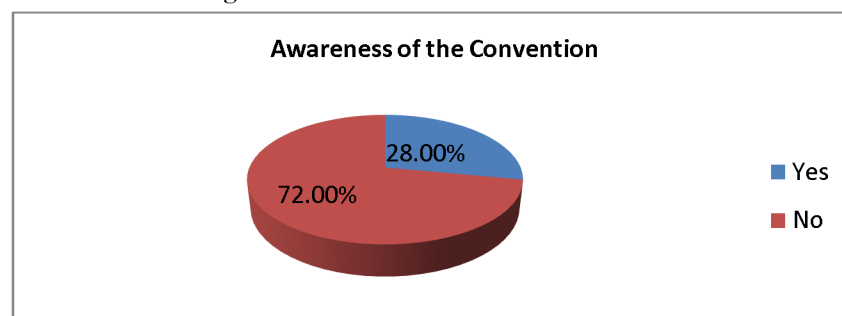
The researcher has interviewed 25 employers and observed that most of them are not conscious about laws relating to child labor. We may realize the situation of awareness of the employers from the following figure.

**Fig. 28- Awareness about the Laws Relating to Child Labor**

From figure no. 28 it appears that 17 (68.0%) employers have no idea at all about laws relating to child labor. On the other hand, 8 (32.0%) respondents are partially introduced with the terms and conditions of child labor related laws. But none of them are fully aware of those laws. That is why they fail to explain the existing laws.

#### **Awareness about the Convention of the Rights of the Child**

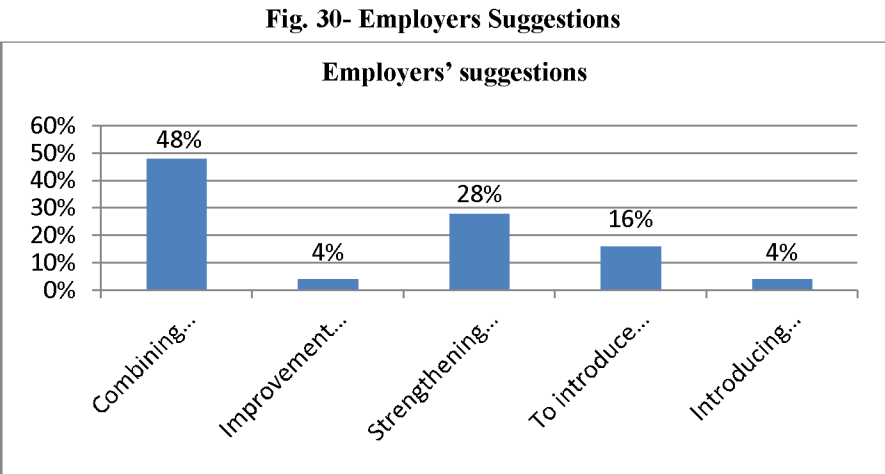
Though the employers and factory owners of Bangladesh are educated, they are not conscious about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and child labor related laws. Only a few employers have heard about UNCRC. From the following table we can easily guess about the awareness of the employers on UNCRC.

**Fig. 29- Awareness about the Convention**

The above figure shows that only 28.0% of the 25 respondents have heard about the UNCRC but they do not know the terms and conditions of the convention. And it is a matter of regret that 18 (72.0%) employers are quite ignorant about the UNCRC, such an international and well-known Convention. This situation is very harmful for child workers as well as the human development in Bangladesh.

Employers’ Suggestions about Child Labor

The employers have given a good number of suggestions for improving the situation of the child workers of the country and have offered some alternative suggestions also. We may get the nature of the suggestions given by the employers from the following graph.



The figure shows that out of 25 respondents 12 (48.0%) have suggested that education system may improve the situation of child workers of the country. Among the other respondents 7 (28.0%) suggest that education may be a better solution for child labor problem of Bangladesh. Though only 1 (4.0%) suggested for improving free education system and another 1 (4.0%) respondent emphasized on vocational education, the rest 4 (16.0%) employers think technical education may be effective for improving child labor situation of Bangladesh.

Findings of the Survey

The findings of the survey describe the original situation of child workers who are working in different establishments of Dhaka, Rajshahi and Rangpur (Haragachha). The study was carried on 150 child workers. Among the respondents, 100 were male and 50 were female which are 66.7% and 33.3% of the total children respectively. The child laborers have stated that they have managed the job by themselves, through parents or relatives. Sometimes they get job through brokers by money. According to the survey, poverty is the main cause behind child labor. It has been observed that 78.7% child workers have been compelled to work due to poverty. It is clear that poverty is the main reason behind child labor in the study area.

It is found that above 60% working children were under the age of 12 and they work from dawn to dusk, even in the late hours of night without any rest and they do not get any overtime for their extra hours. But their payment is very low. Maximum (42.0%) wage range of the child laborer was Tk. 40 to Tk. 240, 26% child laborer work for wage Tk. 240 to 640 and only 13% child

laborer have mentioned that their wages were between Tk. 640 to 1040 and 19% mentioned that their wages were above Tk. 1040. After completing the survey it becomes clear that child workers are deprived by their employers in many ways.

The educational situation is also very miserable. In the study area, about 48% child laborers have been found to be totally illiterate, about 52% were in primary level. It is noted that there were none who passed class Five. Maximum child laborers were not conscious about their education or their rights. Even their parents were not conscious about the importance of education. Though some of the children have heard about the child rights, they could not understand what these rights were.

It is crystal clear that child labor is deeply rooted in poverty. So without alleviating poverty the problem of child labor cannot be eradicated from our country. Thus the significant findings of the study are:

1. Poverty is the main cause behind child labor in the study area which reflects the actual condition of Bangladesh.
2. Illiteracy is another major cause of child labor. The illiterate people cannot take right decisions about themselves as well as their children. As a result the illiterate guardians cannot think of sending their children to school instead of financial benefit by allowing them to work for wages.
3. There is no alternative way to eliminate child labor from our society without education. But the inadequate educational facilities of our country hardly attract children to go to school.
4. The terms and conditions and time-table of school are not favorable for the poor working children especially in the rural areas. They do not get night schooling facilities and their working hours and school hours are not well planned and adjusted with their working conditions. So, they cannot take lessons from school, even the non-formal schools sits on at working hours.
5. Being illiterate, child workers are not conscious about their rights as well as child labor related legislation. They are also unaware of the harmful effects of unhealthy environment of working place and risky jobs.
6. The employers are not careful and sincere to the children and they are not conscious regarding rights and labor of the children.
7. Most of the legislations cover only the formal sector. There is not a single law for informal sector which can prevent the practice of child labor in various informal sectors, like agriculture. It is one of the major limitations of the existing legislations in Bangladesh and it creates many difficulties while implementing the existing laws.
8. Sometimes it is found that the employers compel the children to provide the wrong information about their age instead of actual one. By doing so they avoid the legal barrier engaging children in hazardous activities which are harmful and injurious for them.
9. The UNCRC is more western oriented and does not comprehensively consider the practical implications of the country like Bangladesh. At the same time the developing countries ratified the convention without considering their own interests.



10. Children are under long-term threat of normal health and physical development such as loss of sight and hearing, crippled limbs, distorted and that makes them weak physically. Working hard also stunts their growth and makes them increasingly vulnerable to diseases.
11. The social environment of the working place is not favorable for the well socialisation of the children. It is noticed that the working place is very noisy and the employers, even the co-workers and senior employees treat them roughly.
12. Physiological development and growth of the children is a very significant matter. But the researcher has observed that most of the working children are detached from their families and they do not get minimum opportunity for recreation. So this odd situation usually hampers their mental growth and socialisation.
13. From this study it is found that working children gradually loses their creativity and they do not get interest in any constructive thinking or action as they have to work under physiological pressure and the employers compel them to do the same work for a long time and they never think about their career.
14. Though the bulk of the population lives in the villages, the welfare and development activities relating to child workers are centralised in urban areas. The aforementioned findings of some study areas depict the real picture of a developing country like Bangladesh.

### Recommendations

The article has portrayed the real situation of working children and the practical difficulties of child workers in Bangladesh. It is found that poverty is deeply-rooted here. Being illiterate, poor parents are unconscious about their children's future. Employers take the opportunity of this frail condition. Harsh reality compels the children to work in different factories and households. But, it is quite impossible to overcome the situation within a short time rather a long-term process will be needed. Thus the writer would like to make some recommendations which may help to improve the socio-economic condition of child laborers in Bangladesh are as follows:

- (1) As it has found that poverty is the main cause of child labor in Bangladesh, it is suggested that the concerned government authority and non-governmental development and welfare agencies should come forward to take necessary steps for financial assistance to the marginal poor families of the country, especially to the parents of the working children. Economic emancipation may influence the parents of working children to send their children to school instead of working as laborer.
- (2) Though free and compulsory education is enshrined as a fundamental right in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. So it is suggested that urgent effective efforts be made to strengthen free and compulsory education program all over the country so that parents of the working children be motivated and convinced to send their children to school.
- (3) It is found from the survey that unwillingness and reluctance to education is one of the main causes of child labor. The existing education system is not attractive and fruitful to

the children. So the system should be reformed so as to make it more attractive to children and more emphasis should be given to technical rather than to general education with a special care to improve their socio-economic condition.

- (4) Separate schools should be established within a reasonable distance from the working places for the working children who are already in work. The time-table of schools particularly in rural areas should be well-planned and well adjusted so that the working children can avail themselves of the opportunities of both schools and working places.
- (5) Though education is free, additional costs of schooling like dress, tiffin, bags etc. should be provided by the government. Otherwise the poor children will not be able to make them available to school for learning. To make the schools attractive, schooling materials are to be supplied for the working children.
- (6) Awareness campaign of the rights of the child should be introduced so that they may become conscious about their rights which are enshrined in the national and international laws and conventions. They may also be aware of their health against hazardous, harmful and risky jobs from this campaigning. In the course of survey it has been found that most of the working children, their parents and employers are quite ignorant of the laws which may protect the rights of working children.
- (7) The neighboring developing countries like India and Pakistan have special laws for child labor. But in Bangladesh there is no single Act or law which is directly related to child labor. So it is suggested that relevant law which is directly related to child labor like Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 of India and Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act, 1992 of Pakistan should be urgently introduced in Bangladesh.
- (8) In Bangladesh, most of the laws regarding child labor are applicable only to formal and organized sectors but these are not applicable to informal or unorganised sectors. So it is suggested that a comprehensive legal framework which may cover the formal and informal, organised and unorganised sectors, be made.
- (9) In Bangladesh most of the parents and guardians of working children are unemployed or under employed. So it is essential to give them full time and standard employment opportunity so that they may be able to run their family with the intent to send their children to school for getting education.
- (10) National Child Labor Policy should be implemented fruitfully and effectively for the welfare of child workers.

### **Conclusion**

Children are the future of a nation. Considering the importance of children they should be nourished properly and taken care of appropriately. This child becomes a labor today at a tender age when he should be free from all anxieties like food, clothing, shelter, education and medical facilities. But most of the children are deprived of all these basic necessities and in many cases they have to work for the survival of themselves and for their families as well. In Bangladesh, harsh socio-economic conditions and existing legal situation compel parents to send their children to labor force. Cruel reality makes child adult. The work that children do is mainly adult work. Children do the adult's work at a low wage and even sometimes it is very insufficient.

Working children are under long term threats of losing normal health and physical development such as damaged vision of hearing, crippled limbs, distorted and weakened bodies, stunted growth and increased vulnerability to disease. Detachment from family circle, abusive and burdensome works, no opportunity to play or socialize with other children check the growth of their social and psychological development seriously. Despite, children lose their interest and creativity because of repetitive dullness and sameness of work (Bequele and Myers, 1995).

The situation of the working children is very miserable though the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has guaranteed rights of children as well as child labor. In 1990, Bangladesh ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). A National Plan of Action (NPA) has been formulated by the Government for the children. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs has set up a National Children Council (NCC). To eliminate child labor International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC) has been taken up by the Government of Bangladesh. In 1972, Bangladesh joined the International Labor Organisation (ILO) and has ratified 33 Conventions. A great achievement of Bangladesh is to ratify the ILO Convention No. 182 which deals with the worst forms of child labor. In 2006, Bangladesh Labor Act has been passed which includes a chapter on child labor. The law prohibits employment of children below the age of 14 in normal work. The Ministry of Labor and Employment has adopted a National Child Labor Elimination Policy 2010. It provides a framework to eliminate all forms of child labor by 2015.

Above all, in a poverty stricken country like Bangladesh, child labor is a harsh reality. It is sheer reality that if we fail to overcome poverty and illiteracy, the problem of child workers will remain unsolved. So, considering the importance of children welfare initiatives should be taken for the protection of working children. In fine, the national laws or initiatives made by the government and endeavors of the concerned authorities are bound to go in vain unless attempts are made to comply with the aforementioned suggestions.

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