

## Informal Economy in Dhaka City-Automobile Workshop and Hazardous Child Labor

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**Abstract:** Hazardous child labor is one of the severest forms of child exploitation and child abuse in the world today. Though it is restricted in most countries, many children do work that involves both long and short-term risks. Child labor is a matter of great concern in Bangladesh. According to The National Child Labor Survey 2002-2003, there are over 3 million children working in various sectors and 0.4 million are engaged in hazardous work in the country. Automobile workshop is one of the informal sectors of economy in Dhaka City, where a large number of children are working under hazardous circumstances. The present study was an attempt to explore in-depth pictures of child labor in automobile workshop. The fieldwork was carried out for three-month period during July to September 2004. Relevant reports of different organizations, articles and newspapers were reviewed as secondary sources of data. A significant number of children were found to work in automobile workshop in the study areas. Almost all children came from the poorest families in rural areas. They worked for very low salaries and some times were only given food in return for their labor. All types of child exploitation and exposure to various hazards were evident there. Although child labor illegal in Bangladesh, an increase in hazardous child labor, in recent years has been alarming. It is incredibly important to analyze the causes and effects of child labor and take steps to eliminate those various causes and effects. However, if the government stopped child labor rapidly, members of the poorest families may engage in violent activities such as prostitution, terrorism, robbery and hijacking. But eliminating hazards and improving the working environment of child labor is not a difficult or a lengthy process. One only needs more qualitative research on child labor and integrated attempts to eliminate the problem.

**Key words:** Informal economy, Dhaka city, child labor, hazardous child labor

### INTRODUCTION

Currently, child labor is a worldwide phenomenon. Though it is prohibited in most countries, many children do work. According to the latest report of the International Labor Organization (ILO), 246 million children between the ages of 5-17 engage in child labor. The majority of child labor exists in the developing countries of Latin America, Asia and Africa, but there are also pockets of child labor in many industrialized countries (Parker, 1997).

Child labor refers to the economically active population under the age of fifteen years old, who are employed in various industries (Grootaert, 1995). Recently, child labor has become a large topic of debate; however, in most cases, it is considered very unfavorable. There have been many controversial debates, as to whether child labor should be legal or not. Many argue that child labor is morally wrong and that the children should not work, no matter how poverty stricken their

families may be. Some are support child labor and argue that it is good because it gives poverty-stricken families a source of income. These proponents of child labor note that some child labor is clearly light, such as delivering newspapers for two hours a day (Fassa, 1999).

While there may be debate on the merits of child labor on the basis of the socio-economic condition of a child laborer's family, there is little doubt that the worst forms of child labor are totally intolerable and immoral. The 1999 International Labor Organization's (ILO) Convention 182 calls for the elimination of the worst forms of child labor. Convention 182 defines these worst forms as involving children younger than 18 in forced and compulsory labor, prostitution and pornography; illicit activities; and work which, by its nature or circumstance in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of children (ILO Convention, 1999). This last form is called 'hazardous work' and all most all child labor is included in this category.

Child labor, particularly the worst forms of child labor, is a matter of great concern in Bangladesh. The Government of Bangladesh has given due importance to the problem of child labor in the country, especially those performing hazardous work and it is working with other organization towards its elimination. Unfortunately, not much effort has so far been made to quantify the incidence and distribution of children engaged in hazardous works at the national and regional levels. According to The National Child Labor Survey 2002-2003, there are over 3 million children working in various sectors in Bangladesh. There are 0.4 million children engaged in hazardous labors in various sectors. Dhaka City has a large number of children working in various informal sectors like automobile workshop, welding machine, bakeries, cottage industries, metal works, lather works, etc. These types of small industries or workshops are not registered or authorized by the Government. The study mentioned these small and unregistered sectors as the informal economy in urban areas.

ILO Bangladesh identified 47 activities, which are hazardous for children and automobile workshop is one of them. The conditions within automobile workshops are such that working within these shops is definitely harmful to the health, safety and morals of the children. 15,923 children (all boys and no girls) aged 5-17 years were working in automobile establishments, which represent 41.8% of the total persons engaged in automobile workshops. The highest numbers of children (3939) are working in Dhaka City (Baseline Survey on Working Children in Automobile Establishment 2002-03). In this sector, children works throughout the whole day and through to midnight. The work itself and the working environments are very risky and harmful to adult, let alone to children. In exchange for labor, the child does not get sufficient wages. They work only for their livelihood, being a member of the poorest class of the society. Child labors in various sectors are also subject to physical and sexual abuse by employers. Lastly, they have no influence over their rights as workers.

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The present study followed a mixed method approach, with qualitative and quantitative methods and data given equal importance. Data was collected through both qualitative and quantitative research means. Qualitative data includes observational field notes, transcripts from the interviews with the children, employers and medical specialists. Quantitative data

comes from interviewing and other secondary sources. The Baseline Survey on Working Children in Automobile Establishment 2002-03 by The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) was the main source of secondary data. All types of primary data were collected by three months of fieldwork during the period of July to September 2004. The following study areas were selected for the fieldwork: Mirpur, Mohammadpur and Sutrapur Thana in Dhaka City. Many automobile workshops have been developed in those areas, where many children are working in child labor. Data for the study was derived through the following methods:

- Direct observations in the working places,
- Interviews (by checklist) with children, employers and medical specialists,
- A short survey by a short questionnaire,
- Case studies on child labor.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

A theoretical aspect is very important in any scientific research. The present research is based on some basic research questions such as:

- What is the physical and mental (long and short term) risk to children engaged in automobile workshop?
- In which circumstances do children work, or what is the working environment.
- Are there any measures that promote health safety or accident prevention.
- How do children, employers and medical science recognize this work and working conditions?
- Is there any physical, economic, or mental exploitation in the work place?
- Why do employers recruit children and why do children work?

Hazardous work is an ILO concept and the ILO provides some guidance on how to identify the types of work that are hazardous to children. They assume, for example, that countries consider hazardous any work that exposes children to abuse, takes place in unsafe locations, requires the operation of dangerous machinery and exposes children to harmful substances and long work hours. The inappropriate structure of difficult work schedules and the lack of supervision could increase the risk of work related injuries and illnesses. Also, certain characteristics of children and adolescents such as inexperience, lack of physical and emotional maturity,

adolescent sleep needs and the need to balance school and work would require an appropriately blanch work environment to minimize the risks to which young people are exposed (Committee on the Health and Safety Implications of Child Labor, 1998).

There are concerns that chemical exposures could have adverse effects on normal hormonal development of adolescents, altering the delicate balance of hormones and their feedback loops. Chemical exposures could result in devastating effects, given the importance of the endocrine system during this life period. Some authors also believe that exposures to toxic chemicals at a very young age could alter the body's response to future toxic exposures. Children using machines, tools and work furniture designed for adults may develop musculoskeletal disorders such as chronic repetitive-strain injuries, repetitive-motion trauma, back problems, tenosynovitis, vibration-induced disorders and white-finger syndrome. They could also be at higher risk to injuries due to fatigue. Moreover, personal protective equipment frequently does not fit children. Thus, they often have to work without it or use alternative devices that do not provide real protection (Forastieri, 1997).

Researches from ILO and almost all other organizations are quantitative and try to identify hazardous work, amount of child labor, types of work and other quantitative data. Very little research has been conducted to identify the causes and effects of child labor. It is extremely necessary to conduct in-depth research for identifying the short and long-term risks in the work and children's future life. The present research is an attempt to explore in-depth data on hazardous child labor, in particularly child labor in the automobile workshop.

### CONCEPT AND DEFINITION

**Child:** In Bangladesh there is no uniform definition of a child relating to minimum age. Based on the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child and ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, 1999 (No. 182), a child is defined as an individual under the age of 18 years. Thus, only children aged 5-17 had been considered for the purpose of the study.

**Child labor:** What sort of work performed by children should be considered as 'child labor' was not easy to define. The Encyclopedia of Social Sciences defines child labor as "when the business of wage earning of a participation in itself or family support, conflict directly or

indirectly with the business of growth and education, the result is child labor." In this study all the activities of a child which are harmful to the health, education and normal development (physical or mental) of the child is considered child labor.

**Hazardous child labor:** Hazard is defined as the capacity or potential of an object, substance or condition to produce a particular type of adverse effects to a person or groups of person. Hazards are generally classified into five types namely

- Physical hazard,
- Chemical hazard,
- Biological hazard,
- Ergonomics hazard,
- Safety hazard.

Physical hazards include noise, heat, light, radiation, vibration, dust and general housekeeping conditions. Chemical hazards are mist, fumes, smoke, liquid and solid materials, gas, vapor, and dust particles. Biological hazards are insects, bacteria, viruses, mite, parasites and other organisms. Ergonomic hazards are those pertaining to body poisons in undertaking different tasks and using tools or equipment, monotony and boredom, repetitive movements, organizational or administrative issues and psycho-social dimension. Lastly, safety hazards are concerned with accidents, injuries, falls and slips, etc. The presence of any or all of the above in the working environment is considered hazardous and the children working there are said to be engaged in hazardous child labor.

**Automobile workshop:** In this study, automobile workshop is defined as a business or establishment that is engaged in repairing, painting, renovating and overhauling all types of motor vehicles such as cars, vans, buses, tracks, tempos, etc.

**Urban informal sector criteria:** There are many small workshops and industries that have grown up in urban areas called the informal sector of urban economy. The main criteria of these sectors are as follows:

- Small capital and operation of production,
- Number of workers between 2 to 20,
- Mostly unregistered and not paying tax,
- No ToR (Terms of Reference)/contract for workers employed.

## **GENERAL GROUNDS OF CHILD LABOR IN BANGLADESH**

Bangladesh is a largely populated developing country. According to National Household Expenditure Survey 1995-1996, 47.5% of the entire population of Bangladesh lived in absolute poverty consuming less than 2122 kilo calories per person per day. Poverty in rural areas results from poor access to productive resources, particularly land, limited wage employment opportunities and low and stagnant agricultural wages. Most child labor is performed by children of extremely poor families. Child labor serves as a means for families to survive, while being on the edge of starvation.

There are also social and cultural explanations for widespread child labor in Bangladesh. Delap (2001) concluded from a survey of families in three slums in Dhaka City that purely economic explanations for child labor are not adequate to explain the phenomenon. One cultural factor motivating families to send their children to work is a fear that the children will be idle if they do not work. Delap reported that the majority of parents in a survey of the urban poor indicated that the income of working children is not critical to the family's survivable, but the children worked because "it was improper for children, especially older children, to do nothing" (Delap, 2001). Idleness was seen as especially harmful to poor urban boys, whose parents feared they would become involved in criminal activities.

Not only is idleness to be avoided, but children's work is also viewed as a means of preparing young people for work as adults. They can begin to learn the skills of farming or trade. Rahman *et al.* (1999) offered the example of employment in an engineering workshop that provides an opportunity for boys to learn an employable skill. For many girls, serving as maids in households prepare them for their future as wives and mothers. Actually the children's entry into the labor market is caused by a number of complex socio-economic and socio-demographic push, pull and interactive factors (Rahman, 1996). However, the main factors behind child labor may be summarized as follows:

**Poverty:** Poverty is the single major cause of child labor. Working children mainly come from poor families which suffer from lack of basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, etc. High dependency of agriculture, increasing landless, land fragmentation, etc. also forces the children to work for their livelihood.

**Illiteracy:** Most of the parents of the working children are both poor because they are illiterate and illiterate because they are poor. It is a vicious circle from which they cannot escape.

**Social factors:** Irresponsible parenthood and a large family are also major causes that force children into child labor. In this case, anthropologist Oscar Lewis' theory of "Culture of Poverty" is active.

**Socio-economic inequality:** Bangladeshi societies are very much unequal. Unbalance socio-economic development and unequal distribution of wealth are also responsible for child labor.

**Deception:** Employers often look for children to employ because child labor is comparatively cheap. It is also easy to control. Children are very obedient and sincere in performing their tasks.

## **CHILD LABOR PROFILE IN AUTOMOBILE WORKSHOP IN BANGLADESH**

Around the 1990s automobile workshop became economically profitable and facilitated a large number of working opportunities. In metropolitan areas the automobile workshop is seeing a lot of growth and many children are being exploited by working in conditions that are physically, mentally and economically adverse. Many children are engaged in automobile workshops in Bangladesh.

Recently, the Bangladesh government and other national and international organizations are highlighting the emergence of the automobile workshop as a sector of hazardous child labor. To get a clear insight into child labor in the automobile workshop, BBS conducted a complete sample survey on automobile workshops throughout the country. The study indicates that there were 9614 automobile workshops employing 15923 working children of aged 5-17 years, however, adult workers were 45,144. Among the total workers in automobile establishment, one-third were children. The highest numbers of children are working in 6 metropolitan cities and among these cities child labor figure in Dhaka is most significant. Twenty five percent are working in Dhaka City in an incredibly hazardous environment. The BBS study also exposed that many indicators such as average child labor per workshop, ratio of child labor to adult worker were fairly consistent by region and throughout the country that can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1: Automobile workshop and number of child labor by region**

Sl. No.	Region/former district	No. of automobile workshop	No. of adult worker	No. of child workers
1	Dhaka	1,889	13,129	3,939
2	Mymenshingh	216	1,021	411
3	Jamalpur	140	552	264
4	Kishoregonj	102	333	131
5	Tangail	203	1,059	360
6	Faridpur	453	1,761	669
7	Chittagong	890	4,586	1,633
8	Khagrachhari	37	186	81
9	Bandarban	17	79	27
10	Rangamati	41	160	70
11	Cornilla	349	1,585	706
12	Noakhali	400	1,845	633
13	Sylhet	588	2,769	919
14	Rajshahi	720	3,231	1,166
15	Bogra	345	1,634	670
16	Rangpur	459	1,888	868
17	Dinajpur	578	1,989	716
18	Pabna	37	174	56
19	Khulna	1,042	2,819	888
20	Jessore	572	2,366	943
21	Kustia	323	1,311	543
22	Barisal	171	584	182
23	Patuakhali	42	128	57
	Total	9,614	45,144	15,923

Source: Baseline survey on working children in automobile establishments 2002-2003

**Table 2: Distribution of child labor by age grad and study areas**

Study area	5-11 years		12-14 years		15-17 years		Total	
	Number	(%)	Number	(%)	Number	(%)	Number	(%)
Mirpur	22	24.18	57	23.66	26	21.66	105	23.23
Mohammadpur	30	32.96	86	35.68	41	34.17	157	34.73
Sutrapur	39	42.86	98	40.66	53	44.17	190	42.04
Total	91	100	241	100	120	100	452	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2004.% = Percentage

### **CHILD LABOR PROFILE IN AUTOMOBILE WORKSHOP IN THE STUDY AREA**

More or less all over the Dhaka City several types of informal economic sectors have been emerging and automobile workshop has a large number of working children. Though child labor is illegal in the country, it is common observation that children are working in conditions that are physically, mentally and economically adverse. The study areas evidently link automobile workshop and child labor. Four hundred and fifty two children are working in 133 automobile workshops according to the study. It may also be mentioned that all the children are boys and no girl is found to be engaged in automobile workshop. Actually if the nature of work and other socio-cultural factors are taken into consideration, it is not unusual that no girls are subjected to child labor in this industry.

Duly the age grading and location Table 2 show that the number of children exposed to child labor in the automobile engineering industry differs significantly between different age grade and location. The highest numbers of children, 190 (42.04%), are working in Sutrapur

Thana since there are more automobile workshops there. A closer look at the age distribution of child labor in the one age grading indicates that over 50% of the total employed children are in the age range of 12-14. The most mentionable statistic incident is the large number of children below 12 who are working in this sector.

### **WHY DO CHILDREN WORK IN AUTOMOBILE WORKSHOP?**

A large number of the children working in automobile workshop, in the study areas, came from poor families in rural areas. In the study areas, almost all children possessing the poorest economic status in their societies came to work to support their family. This pattern indicates that families send their children to the work place. Seventy percent of children in automobile engineering reported that they did not have three meals a day in their family and that their father brought them to the work place. A 13 years old automobile worker, Kamrul, takes care of half of the expenses of his family of 5. He says, "my father is died and my mother are working as domestic servant and now my younger brother has joined

with me.” But while poverty is the main cause of child labor in automobile workshop, it is not the only reason. During the fieldwork, there were other socio-cultural factors found, which also serve to increase the prevalence of child labor.

Raju is a 14 year old boy, working in automobile workshop in Sutrapur Thana. Two years ago, he came to this workshop to learn automobile engineering and to be a specialist. It is his dream that in the future he will establish his own workshop. Fourteen percent of child laborers, in the study areas, came to the working place for a better future. They thought that after a few years they would be automobile mechanics and they would earn enough money to improve their livelihood.

Complex family relationships are also bringing children to the working place. Twelve year old Kamal is working in an automobile workshop in Mohammadpur. His mother died when he was 7 years old. After that, his father got married again and his stepmother treated him cruelly. When he was 9 years old, his stepmother told him to stop going to school and she brought him to the automobile workshop to make some extra money. As Kamal commented, “I wanted to go school but my mother struck me when I told her.”

Some of the child laborers said that they do not like to go school and that they were passing idle time and began to learn technical work. For these children, the traditional education system could not keep them in school. This is also one of the reasons for child labor in automobile workshop. The class environment and education system in Bangladesh is not constructive for the children. The rate of children completing a five-year primary education cycle increased from 65% in 1998 to 67% in 2001. The dropout rate is high mainly due to children’s need to help with farming and household chores, child-unfriendly teaching-learning methods, overcrowded classrooms and unattractive educational environment (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2001). Regrettably, some cases are found where children came to the working place because of discontinuation of schooling program run by some development agencies.

It is easy to get work in automobile workshop. Getting a job in any formal organization is very difficult and sometimes impossible. There are some job and pay structure in formal sectors, with trade unions playing important roles in collective bargaining. Most labor laws are for formal sectors, which prohibit employing children. While the garment sector has lots of female child labor, the formal sector is relatively unfavorable for child workers.

Actually, there is not a single cause of child labor in automobile workshop, in the study areas. Various socio-

economic factors influence children to work. Sometimes they are bound to work because of their economic condition. Few children are willingly working for their better future.

### **WHY DO EMPLOYERS RECRUIT CHILDREN AS WORKERS?**

Almost all automobile workshops are informal or unregistered. As a result, they do not face any difficulties, when recruiting children as workers, though it is illegal according to some laws. Moreover, 80% of employers are not aware about the illegality of recruiting children for labor. In explaining their rationale for recruiting children, most of the employers mention that as workers, children are cheapest and more obedient than adults. One employer was quoted regarding the employment of children, “Ten to twelve years olds are the best. They are easier to control and obedient. Children are not unionized and that they will agree to work for 500 Taka (US \$7) per month when the minimum legal wage for a worker is 930 Taka. Some times they are working only for food and accommodation.”

Employers prefer children because they are easy to manage, they do not form trade unions for collective bargaining and they are far less aware of their rights. They easily accept longer hours of work and rarely protest against the poor conditions of work. Almost all times children worked as learner, employer recruit worker only for livelihood. Furthermore, when recruiting child labor, the employer need not have any formal agreement. Children are appointed by in word, so employer can quit worker’s job or give a poor salary. This is another reason for recruiting children as workers.

Sometimes employers are employing children in their work places as a gesture of kindness. About 40% of employers mention that children have been recruited at the request of their parents. In rural areas, the scope of employment is very limited. Except agriculture, there is not much economic activity in rural areas. So if any poor neighbor requests that their child be given work, they (the employer) cannot avoid it. Moreover, very few employers have knowledge about the legality of recruiting child labor.

### **EDUCATION AND CHILD LABOR IN AUTOMOBILE WORKSHOP**

Although the government has had the compulsory free primary education program in place all over the country since January 1993, the net enrollment rate was observed to be 77% in 1998 with considerable regional variation (CAMPE-UPL, 1999). In urban slums of Dhaka

Table 3: Education of child labor by study areas and level of education

Level of education	Mirpur		Mohammadpur		Sutrapur		Total	
	Num.*	(%)	Num.*	(%)	Num.*	(%)	Num.*	(%)
No education/ can't read or write	5	4.76	22	14.01	25	13.16	52	11.50
No formal education/ can read and write	8	7.62	13	8.28	15	7.89	36	7.97
Class I-III	14	13.34	16	10.19	21	11.05	51	11.28
Class IV	43	40.95	49	31.21	60	31.58	152	33.63
No complete V	26	24.76	40	25.48	49	25.79	115	25.44
Complete V	9	8.57	17	10.83	20	10.53	46	10.18
Class VII-VIII	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	105	100	157	100	190	100	452	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2004. \*Number of child,% = Percentage

city, the enrollment rate was as low as 60%. Dropout rate also remained quite high, at 35% in 2004 (UNICEF, 2001). Both enrollment and dropout rates widely varied by socio-economic groups and obviously children from the poorer families had lesser access to education and higher dropout rates.

According to the National Child Labor Survey, 2002-2003, in Bangladesh, 88.8% of the child laborers had no education at all and 9.4% had education up to class V. Consequently, lack of access to education has been a major cause of high incidence of child labor in Bangladesh. Somehow, the education of child laborers in automobile workshop is showing a similar figure with the national situation. There are few children that could finish their primary education in the study area. In this aspect, among the three study areas, there are no significant differences. Table 3 shows that only 10.18% of child laborers in the study area have primary education and among them there is not a single child who finished 8th class. The highest numbers of children, 33.63 %, dropped out from school after completing level IV and started working in automobile workshops as child laborers. It is found that because of their poor education status, employers always economically exploited them. Almost always, children could not understand their rights and how employers exploited them.

### WORKING CONDITION IN AUTOMOBILE WORKSHOP

Working conditions are very important for both adult and children workers. It is a general observation that, in automobile workshop, workers are exposed to burning-oil, smoke, paint, noise and other disturbances. Almost all workshops consist of a very small room and some open space for working. They have no extra room for sleeping. After finishing work, 82% of child laborers live in the workshops and do not go back home. There are no differences among the different study areas, regarding the working condition and living facilities for the children. But

comparatively, the conditions for automobile workshop in the Mohammadpur area are quite better than other areas because of the high socio-economic condition of the area. 80% of automobile workshops facilities are not clean and children are working in a hazardous environment. Tried to find out working conditions of automobile workshop on the basis of some variables which are as follows:

**Safety guard:** Any kinds of machine or factory work should have some special dress and protection tools for safety. Unfortunately, there is not a single automobile workshop found in any of the study areas that has some sort of safety measure in place. Children are working without hand gloves, masks, sound protectors, aprons and so on. Within this environment, work becomes more hazardous for the children.

**Working hours:** In automobile workshop, there are no specific working hours. Working hours are one of the worst sides of this sector. Typically, most of the workers are working from morning to night in each of the study areas. In some cases, they work until midnight. Table 4 shows that only 14.16% children work less than 8 h in a day. A significant number of children work more than 12 h. There are no significant differences found in different study areas. They have no weekend and have to work 7 days in a week. Though 39.60% of children are working 6 days, no children were found that work 5 days or less in a week in the study areas.

**Sanitation facilities:** Though most of the children live in the working place and work during the whole day, there are very few sanitation facilities. Only 10 % of automobile workshops have their own toilet. Ninety percent of workshops do not have their own toilet, with workers having to go outside of the working place to use the toilet. In this case, they go to nearest market, mosque, or other place, where there is a toilet. Sometimes if they ask for permission to go to the toilet, employers become

Table 4: Distribution of working hours and day by study areas

Variable	Mirpur		Mohammadpur		Sutrapur		Total	
	Num.*	(%)	Num.	(%)	Num.	(%)	Num.	(%)
Working hours in a day								
Less than 8 h	12	11.43	22	11.58	30	15.79	64	14.16
8-12 h	31	29.52	54	28.42	52	27.37	137	30.31
More than 12	62	59.05	81	51.59	108	56.84	251	55.53
Total	105	100	157	100	190	100	452	100
Working day in a week								
5 and less days	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
6 days	34	32.38	60	38.22	85	44.74	179	39.60
7 days	71	67.62	97	61.78	105	55.26	273	60.40
Total	105	100	157	100	190	100	452	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2004. \*Number of child,% = Percentage

angry with them. Sixty percent of child laborers in the study area noted that they are facing this problem. Regarding this aspect, some employers explain the reasons why they do this. One employer in Sutrapur explained that, ‘children are very clever, always they want to go toilet for making a free time.’

It is found that children are working under the very worst working conditions in automobile workshop, in the study area. The main characteristics of the working conditions, in the study area, are the absences of safety guards, long working hours and no weekends, work at night and no sanitation facilities. With these working conditions, it is difficult or harmful for an adult worker as well as children, who are members of the poorest families in society.

### EXPLOITATION AND AUTOMOBILE WORKSHOP

All kinds of economic, physical and mental exploitation are found in the study area. In the automobile workshop sector, children are doing work like other adult workers. Moreover, they work for very little or no salary. Most of the time, employers recruit children as learners or helpers without pay, which is one kind of serious economic exploitation. Though children work more time than adult workers, they receive minimal salary or no salary at all. Only 36% of child laborers, in the study area, get salary and others get food only three times in a day and yearly some cloths. Moreover, 60% of children mention that they cannot eat sufficiently and that it is rare to eat meat. Their physical structure proved that they cannot eat sufficient nutritious food or that they suffer from a lack of sustenance.

Physical exploitation or abuse is also a common observation in the study area. In this aspect, children were very afraid to talk. It was difficult to get information about this. Children have to always be on alert when ostad (adult worker) calls them for any reason. If they are a little late, they have to take notice of some vulgar words or ostad will strike them. Jakir, age 13, is an automobile worker in Sutrapur. This is his second job in this field.

Before coming here 2 years ago, he was working at another workshop in Mirpur. Though at first he felt very sad when ostad became very angry or struck him, now he is used to this situation. Moreover, he explains a very pathetic or horrible experience in his previous work place. He has no relatives in Dhaka City and his father died when he was 6. His mother lives in the village with his two younger sisters. His family did not have enough food, so one day one of his neighbors brought him to the automobile workshop. He lived in the working place with other adult workers. During the last six months of his previous work, he had to face difficult times. One adult worker always used some erotic words with him in the night and one day he was sexually abused by the adult worker. The worker threatened that if Jakir told anyone, he would loss his work and be killed by the worker. When the sexual abuse became more frequent, Jakir told his mother about it and his mother, with the assistance of the neighbor who had first found Jakir work, changed Jakir’s working place.

Incidences of sexual abuse are not uncommon observations. A large number of child laborers noted that minimum one time sexually abused by adult workers or employers, in previous or present working places. These incidences are hardly ever traced, because children in the poorest economic conditions cannot raise their voices. Here culture also plays a role in keeping children silent. In Bengali culture, if any one is sexually abused by someone, it is also shameful for the victim. Sometimes victims become more losers, because his/her socioeconomic condition is lower than the criminal. Moreover, because of age inequality, children are seldom able to establish that the incidence is fact. Many children are oppressed by age inequality and economic status. On the other hand, culture is also a big factor.

### CHILDREN ARE WORKING UNDER SHORT AND LONG-TERM HAZARDS

Regarding the socioeconomic conditions, the term hazard has become more familiar among researchers, both



GO and NGO, who are involved in investigating child labor. A child will do some work in his/her home besides their regular tasks as a child. But in the contemporary world, children are performing work, which makes them vulnerable to long and short-term physical and mental hazards. All types of hazards are found in automobile workshop, in the study area. Accidental injury, skin disease, respiratory problems, electric shock and burn are very common risks in automobile workshop. Seventy Three percent of child laborers in the study areas frequently suffered accidental injury, but only 17% children went to a doctor following their accident or injury. Actually, in many cases, the employer does not allow a child to go to a doctor, for fear of police disturbance and the cost of medical care. Most times, employers buy some medicine from the pharmacist. It is more painful for the children who suffer with their injury for a long time without proper treatment.

It is easy to collect data about accidental injury and some other short-term effects on children, resulting from the work and working conditions. It is very difficult, however, to find out long-term health risks or effects because after a certain period, children leave the working place. When faced with any physical problem in the future, children typically cannot make a relationship between their past working condition and their present problem. In this situation, tried to get more data from medical specialists. Almost all child laborers in the study area commented that they feel weak and vomit after coming to their working place. Medical specialists familiar with automobile workshop, who have a better sense of the overall working conditions, supported the relationship between health effects and the working environment. These specialists observed that it is very normal that not only children but any adult worker who works for a long time in this environment, feels weak and vomits. It has a long-term effect on children. In the future, they can lose their hearing power. They mentioned that in the future, children may have to face some hard disease such as skin-cancer, respiratory problem and some other physical problems.

It is very normal if any worker becomes sick or injured by accident within the working place that the employer will bear all expenses for treatment. During fieldwork, almost all employers noted that they provide their employees all medical expenses, but the reality is a little different. Rarely did workers get proper treatment if they were injured. "I often suffer from cold, fever and skin diseases and have to make frequent trips to the doctor. But I do not get any medical facilities from my employer," rues 15-year-old Hiru, who works in an automobile workshop in Mirpur. He cannot stop working because he has to support his family. Normally employers buy some medicine from dispensary without meeting with a medical

specialist. Almost at all times children are working with some physical problem, which may have a very bad effect on their future health.

## **CONCLUSION**

Child labor is a serious moral issue in the contemporary world. Now it is recognized as a major socio-economic problem, with poverty as one of its main causes. The poorest socio-economic conditions are pushing many children to work, as a source of income for their family. In this aspect, it would be very difficult to remove child labor from developing countries, though it is illegal and morally reprehensible. A large number of children are working in such a way that interrupts their schooling, socialization and physical and mental development. Economic activities of that are seriously detrimental to children's health, physical and mental development and endanger their overall safety, are treated as hazardous child labor by the ILO. Based upon the ILO definition of hazardous child labor, there are large numbers of children engaged in hazardous labor in several economic sectors in Bangladesh. Automobile workshop is one of the worst forms of child labor in the country.

In the study areas, it was found that children are working in very harmful environments, with tools that frequently create additional hazards. While automobile workshop is a hazardous work place for children, the overall environment, lack of safety tools, long working hours, lack of weekends and lack of sanitary facilities make it more harmful for the children. All kinds of physical, economic, mental and sexual exploitation are found in automobile workshop. There is no fixed salary and working hours for the children. Although their work is similar to that of adult workers, children almost always have no salary or very little salary compared to adult workers. On the other hand, they are often abused by employers and other adult workers. Children are sexually abused in the working place. As children, they do not get justice following instances of sexual abuse. They are suffering from age inequality and their poorest socioeconomic condition. A significant numbers of child laborers in automobile workshop have dropped out of school at the primary level. School dropout also influences children to enter the labor market. Though the government has started a compulsory primary education system and provided some initiatives for education, many children do not enroll or dropout. Whether school dropout enlarges the number of child laborers can be a subject matter for further study. Nevertheless, there are some other social factors like breaking families, family illiteracy, large family size, irresponsible parenthood and unattractive or unfriendly schooling environments, which are also factors in child labor.

Child labor prevents a child's inherent potential to become a productive asset to the country. The children who are supposed to be an asset to the country are becoming social liabilities. They will go to school and play with friends, but they are passing very hard times, in various hazardous working places. It is not possible to remove child labor suddenly. If the government stopped child labor rapidly, members of the poorest families may engage in violent activities such as prostitution, terrorism, robbery and hijacking. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to remove hazards of children's work and improve their working environment. One only needs integrated attempts. Awareness of law enforcement agencies is not very centered on children's rights and the protection of children working in hazardous environment. Relevant laws should be enforced properly. These laws should identify which kinds of work are appropriate for children, how long children may work and so on. It is very important to build up social awareness of and public opposition to child labor. Reducing poverty and removing economic and social inequality from society may largely help eliminate child labor. Income generating programs should be widely introduced by the GO, NGOs and others for those poor families who are sending their children to work instead of sending them to school. Initiatives through the media should be implemented to raise public awareness regarding the harmful aspects of child labor and children's rights and development.

The Government and other organizations have little information about informal economic sectors, where children are working under very hazardous circumstances. The government can seldom take steps against companies that employ children under hazardous working conditions. In this situation, it is very important to collect more information about these kinds of informal economic sectors. Though recently some studies have been conducted, almost all are quantitative. Removing hazards and eliminating child labor requires a mixed method of research, which will give both quantitative figures and qualitative factors. After collecting information by using this approach, if each and every social partner properly plays their respective role, it will be possible to see a child labor free society within a short time.

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