

Life and Livelihood Issues of Street Children: Evidence for Dhaka City, Bangladesh

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Abstract: Despite moderate quantitative progress in the people's living standards in Bangladesh, a large portion of people remain outside from that benefit and street children are the most deprived segment of the society. Life and livelihood of the street children has been emerged as a concerned and discussing matter reflecting its vulnerability but society is static to take the issue in consideration and to address it in effective manner. It is noted that the community are fully unaware about those children who are in vulnerable situation are passing their lives in traumatic and stigmatic situation keeping them in darkness society. This study aims to delineate the life and livelihood issues of the street children. Findings need to be scientifically utilized in developing suitable programs addressing the case of street children of the developing countries as well as Bangladesh.

Key words: Street children, livelihood, socio-economic backdrops, children, Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh has made moderate quantitative progress in the development sectors yet the country is plagued with structural rigidities, embedded in and reproduced by institutions. However, the development is not equally shared throughout the country and the poorest groups remain untouched from the advantage of such development and it is quite the same for the people in the rural areas. Without opportunities for an adequate livelihood in the rural areas, poverty increases and these force many rural poor to seek employment elsewhere leading to a rural-urban migration (Rahman and Chowdhury, 2012). Recently, most of the cities in Bangladesh are experiencing rapid but unplanned urbanization and that has resulted in job opportunities in the urban areas. As a result, migration in the urban areas is on the rise which simultaneously also increases the growth of urban population compared to the national population growth of Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, every year a large number of populations migrate in search for options of their livelihood. Migration is often seen simply as a flight from poverty as no available opportunities are there locally and so, people migrate in order to survive (Skeldon, 2003). There is a common perception that they can improve their lives by earning more in the urban areas but in reality, they are facing multiple challenges.

It is necessary to keep in mind that in the wake of rapid urban growth, the urban poor face disproportionate challenges in the competition for urban land. They are typically barred from formal access to land and they pay more for less reliable and lower quality services. This

competition over scarce land has been recognized as a source of tremendous conflict (Coelho and Venkat, 2009; Kamath and Vijayabaskar, 2009). What makes the situation worse for urban poor groups is that they often only have limited opportunities to address these conflicts as formal mechanisms to redress such grievances are inaccessible to them (ADB, 2010).

Dhaka city being the capital of Bangladesh and considered as a land of opportunities has to take the major influx of migrant population. According to one estimate, about 0.32 million migrants are annually entering in Dhaka city (Islam *et al.*, 1997). The ever increasing pressures to sustain in the context of growing need and decline of familial support have pushed people from poor families to migrate and to engage in income generating activities by staying at street. The option for them to make choices and to claim rights to decent employment along with accommodation has remained elusive in the context of survival and hence has been subjected to violence, injustices and dispossession. As a result, due to lack of absorbing capacity of the city, most of the rural migrants from poor households are living in the street of the city. So that children from those families are also live in street. Behind the story of becoming a street child and dearth of their social connection, there are many sorts of ins and outs. Most of the time, street children have no selections. Denial and distress by poverty is the leading problem in being street children.

Generally, researchers can define 'Street Children' as the younger group of population (aged 18 years or less) whose all-encompassing livelihood depends on street usually. Street children live on street. They have to cope

with road. They have to cope with poverty, violence, patriarchal social structure, crime and punishment, state and dark nights. Sometimes the street is the main coping strategy for them. Street children are fighting against hunger and unbearable poverty with their little but substantial earnings. Under these circumstances, this study is an attempt to explore the life and livelihood issues of the street children in formulating effective policies and programmes on the regarding matter.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data sources: This study is based on a sample size of 150 street children (aged ≤18 years) from different areas (Farmgate, Ramna and Neelkhet) in Dhaka city, Bangladesh. A stratified sample has been drawn randomly to ensure the inclusion of children of all categories. The data for the present study have been obtained through a survey during February to March 2013. The main instruments for data collection are well-structured questionnaires administered on respondents. Secondary data from different surveys of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), related journals and books have also been used to fulfill the objectives of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Background characteristics: A number of characteristics of respondents are there which influence the socio-economic performance considering as the subject matter of analysis and identification of the issue of street children in Bangladesh. Under these circumstances, this study aims at eliciting information on the background characteristics of the street children.

It is evident from Table 1 that 44.7% of the study respondents are in age group 15-18 years followed by 42% in age group 10-14 years. About 13% of the respondents are in the age group <10 years. Based upon the data, it is found that about 6 of every 10 respondents are male (60.7%) while 39.3% are female (Fig. 1).

Education, however, remains one of the essential tools for achieving equality, empowerment, social status and overall development (Islam, 2013) but most of the street children are deprived from the real light of education. Since, some of them are enrolled in school, they are drop out after some times. Poverty and marginalization make families particularly vulnerable to the social and economic stresses that result in children dropping out of school. School drop out interacts with other push and pull factors at the level of the individual child to precipitate street involvement, such as living in poverty, being orphaned, gang involvement and peer

Table 1: Age composition of the respondents

Age groups	Frequency	Percentage
<10 years	20	13.3
10-14 years	63	42.0
15-18 years	67	44.7
Total	150	100.0

Table 2: Educational status of the respondents

Educational status	Frequency	Percentage
No education	98	65.3
Class I-III	28	18.7
Class IV-V	19	12.7
Class VI-VIII	5	3.3
Total	150	100.0

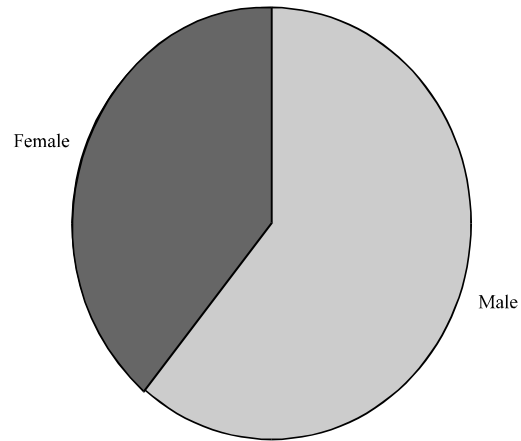


Fig. 1: Sex composition of the respondents

pressure (Ferguson, 2002). It is evident that about 7 of every 10 street children are illiterate and 18.7% have completed 1-3 years of schooling. Only 3.3% have completed 6-8 years of schooling and 12.7% have completed 4-5 years of schooling (Table 2). An interesting finding here is that the percentage of enrolled street children in school has decreased with the increased years of schooling. This indicates that they have enrolled at their earlier life and dropped out when they have grown up due to the curse of poverty and lack of other facilities related to their survival.

Though some progress has been found to prevent early marriages by spreading awareness, it is still frequently occurring especially in the rural areas and poor families. Moreover, poverty is a major underpinning factor to encourage early marriage (Rahman, 2013). Marriage at earlier age in Bangladesh is quite frequent among the street children. It is apparent from the study respondents that 3 of every 10 respondents are married at 18 years and before. About 61% street children are unmarried while 9.3% are divorced/separated (Fig. 2).

As a populous country, the number of family members in Bangladesh remains high and it is quite true for the study respondents. It is found that 44% of the

Table 3: Number of family member of the respondents

Numbers	Frequency	Percentage
1-2	42	28
3-4	66	44
5+	42	28
Total	150	100

Table 4: Occupational status of the respondents

Occupational status	Frequency	Percentage
Begging	14	9.3
Flower/Paper selling	52	34.7
Scavenging	53	35.3
Sex worker	22	14.7
Day labour	9	6.0
Total	150	100.0

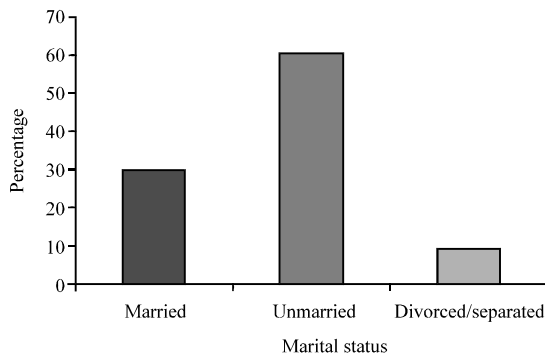


Fig. 2: Marital status of the respondents

respondents have their family member 3-4 and 28% have their family member 5 and above. Also, 28% have their family member 1-2 (Table 3).

Poverty and marginalization make families particularly vulnerable to the social and economic stresses that result in children engaging in hazardous and exploitative working situations or becoming involved in street life. Poverty and the need to earn a living is one of the most common causes stated by children for being on the streets (ODCCP, UNICEF and WFP, 2001). Street children are engaging in various occupations due to the compulsion of their survival. Majority of the street children (35.3%) are scavenger followed by flower and paper seller (34.7%), sex workers (14.7%), begging (9.3%). Also, 6% street children are day labourer (Table 4).

The street children and their families are very poor. They work hard for their survival. Under these circumstances, expenditure on accommodation remains ambitious. From the study findings, it is observed that at night 61.3% respondents are sleeping at footpath followed by parks (33.4%) and 5.3% under over bridge (Table 5).

Over the years, the monthly household expenditure has increased at an accelerated pace than that of the household income (Titumir and Rahman, 2011). Food security of the nation is currently at stake due to the

Table 5: Current sleeping place of the respondents

Current place of sleeping	Frequency	Percentage
Footpath	92	61.3
Under over bridge	8	5.3
Parks	50	33.4
Total	150	100.0

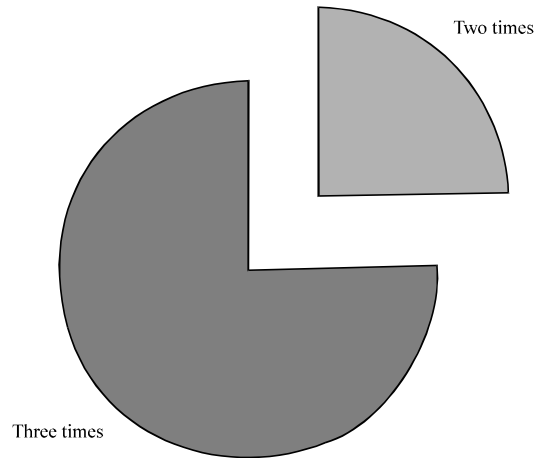


Fig. 3: Daily meal of the respondents

skyrocketing price of essential food commodities which leaves major impacts particularly on the marginalised sections of the society. Recent rise in the cost of production of food in the domestic market, together with high price of food and oil in international market, may lead to further food inflation leaving adverse effects on the poor (Rahman and Mozdalifa, 2012). Moreover, price hikes for essential commodities can force them to not only cut back on the quantity or quality of their food intake but also change their consumption patterns. This may result in food insecurity and malnutrition with adverse implications in both short and long term (Saleh *et al.*, 2011). It is observed that about 25% of the respondents have taken meal for two times per day while the remaining has taken three times per day (Fig. 3).

Health related information of the respondents: This study evinces the health related information of the street children as health may not only a consequence but also a cause of development. Good health is considered to be an integral part of development. Further, this contributes to increasing the productivity of the economically active population which in terms enhances the earnings. It is found that 73.3% respondents are suffering from various diseases at the time of 3 months prior to the survey (Table 6). Among them, 20% are suffering from fever followed by cold (18.6%), diarrhoea (18%) and 3.3% are suffering from gastric. Also, 13.3% street children are suffering form other illness like hand and leg injury from work place, accident, etc.

Table 6: Health related information of the respondents

Health related information	Frequency	Percentage
Do you suffer from illness?		
Yes	110	73.3
No	40	26.7
Types of illness		
Fever	30	20.0
Cold	28	18.6
Diarrhoea	27	18.0
Gastric	5	3.3
Others	20	13.3
Do you take treatment?		
Yes	38	25.3
No	112	74.7
Source of treatment		
Pharmacy	26	60.52
Govt. hospital	3	7.89
NGOs/Clinic	9	23.68

Additionally, it also found that among all the respondents only 25.3% are taking treatment for their illness while 74.7% are not taking. It is the matter of fact that in the recent times people are struggling to survive due to increased expenditure over income. In that case, they cut off their budget from health care and expend on other sector especially on food. Moreover, those are taking treatment for their illness, most of them are taking treatment from pharmacy (60.52%), 23.68% from NGOs/private clinic and only 7.89% are taking treatment from the government hospitals. This might be a negative indication about the services provided by the government hospitals however, services from this government hospitals is essential to ensure better health facilities for all.

Other characteristics of the respondents: Street children are facing a lot of complexities to survive. In some cases, they have not got minimum services from the state. Near about 50% of the respondents are still want to go to school. The 7 of every 10 respondents are drinking unsafe water (supply water) while only 27.3% are drinking tube well water. Due to financial crisis or lack of familial supports the street children are engaging in different types of illegal works. From the study, it is found that 11.3% of the street children are involved in different types of illegal works.

CONCLUSION

However, there is a progress in reducing poverty since independence, still a huge number of rural people (35.2%) is living below the poverty line (Ministry of Planning, 2011). Rural poverty results from lack of assets, limited economic opportunities and poor education and capabilities as well as disadvantages rooted in social and political inequalities (IFAD, 2010). Without opportunities for an adequate livelihood in the

rural areas, poverty is being increased and this forced many rural poor to seek employment elsewhere, leading to a massive rural-urban migration. More specifically, it might be said that street children are the result of household poverty. Livelihood strategies are chosen and undertaken as well by the people in order to achieve their livelihood goals. Results from this study indicate that the street children are facing difficulties in order to maintain their livelihoods. The inability to attain a minimum level of well-being of humanity is the poverty, the most fundamental economic and social problem. It is therefore, stating the obvious to declare that the reduction and ultimately the eradication of poverty must be an important goal for the people on this planet including Bangladesh. However, government in the developing countries have an urban bias in their development policies and the policies make benefited a small portion of the population, the city dwellers ignoring the majority of population in the rural areas (Lipton, 1977).

The mainstream argues that sustained and equitable economic growth inevitably leads to poverty reduction. There is widespread concern that economic growth has not been shared fairly and that the current economic crisis further widens the gap between the rich and poor. Unequal accesses in different forms of services hamper the expected level of growth in reducing poverty. Furthermore, persistent geographical or social biases in the allocation of subsidies and public investment are also not favourable to achieve the desired poverty alleviating targets. Unequal growth pattern has a weaker poverty alleviating effect and has been shown to be harmful to growth and it will also reduce the growth and thereby exacerbate poverty. Therefore, reduction of poverty is hard to pin down without addressing inequality. Moreover, it might be quite difficult to achieve the targets unless the government does not give top priorities on the issues outlined above.

To assimilate street children into mainstream society, researchers must ensure to provide minimum level of living standard through taking several initiatives. In case of protection intervention, policy makers and the authority must work to secure a social protection system with a wide variety of options for supporting street children. The promotion of household income has been given importance in policy documents but programmatic intervention is neither adequate nor implemented with vigour. It is true that despite having a modest economic growth in the country, all people cannot get benefit from growth equally due to the differentiation. To assist the people, the government may take special programmes. Furthermore, revamping of the policies in an effective manner to ensure equitable distribution of income and

wealth must precede embarking upon of those special programmes. Accelerating the rate of decline of poverty can be accomplished only by reducing poverty in source. It must be stressed that any design and strategy to improve the urban condition must correspond with similar design and strategy to improve the rural areas in order to stamp out the prevalence of the rural-urban migration. In other words, tackling the issues of sustainable development, infrastructural distributions are crucial in improving the rural drift. Without ensuring a balanced development between rural and urban areas, reduction of poverty will remain a distant dream and therefore, the rural-urban migration will continue.

The employment opportunities in non-agricultural production are needed to increase in the rural areas in addition to traditional agriculture enabling the poor to escape from poverty. With respect to policies, broader types of interventions are important: employment generating (including support for income generating activities which also include access to infrastructures and markets), capability enhancing (support for improvement of human resources including education, training and health services) and motivational (so that people aspire for good life, commit themselves for it and work hard to achieve it) as well as planned supportive activities during natural disaster. The lives and livelihood of the urban poor people are mostly twisted by the policies on employment, housing and land use and services of the urban government. The interests of the urban poor are however, neglected in urban polices and planning as they remain politically marginalized and excluded from city politics. The urban poverty, therefore, needs to be understood in relation to urban government and urban policies. The existing social protection system should be strengthened and the budgetary allocation along the coverage under social safety net should be increased.

The government needs to be creative in renewing and revising strategies and approaches including increased budgetary allocation for poverty alleviation. Therefore, provisions must be formulated for the evaluation of programmes and understanding of the impacts as well. Findings need to be scientifically utilised in developing suitable programmes addressing the causes along with the life and livelihood issue of the street children in Bangladesh. Without efforts are accelerated and appropriate measures are taken to address the phenomenon of street children, it will continue to be a major stumbling block to the socio-economic development as well as to achieve of human rights as well as of those Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

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