

Child Labor Due to Poverty: A Study on Dinajpur District, Bangladesh

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Abstract: Bangladesh is a densely populated country and her population is increasing day-by-day, but the resources are not growing at the same rate. As a result, the majority of the people of the country are becoming poorer gradually. This study finds support for the widely held hypothesis that poverty compels children to work. For this, data were collected from one thousand child laborers in some selected areas of Dinajpur district, Bangladesh. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling technique and successfully interviewed through a structured questionnaire. Logistic regression model suggests educational attainment and occupation of father, having loan of family; family members, income of household head and respondents' income used in the purpose of their family help have statistically significant effects on determining the likelihood that poverty is the major cause of child labor in the study areas. Finally, this study suggests some policy recommendations that will very helpful to combat against child labor from Bangladesh.

Key words: Child labor, poverty, major causes, Dinajpur district, logistic regression, odds ratio

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh, situated in South Asia, is a unitary and an independent country since 1971. It is a country of 1,47,570 km² and around 149 millions people with one of the world's mostly densely populated nations. Child labor is a enormous problem in Bangladesh, with around 5.4-7.9 millions, about one fifth, of all Bangladeshi children aged 5-14 years being classified as child workers (UNICEF, 2008). Poverty is the single most important factors responsible for child labor in this country.

A child is considered to be involved in child labor activities under the following classification: Children 5-11 years of age during the week preceding the survey did at least 1 h of economic activity or at least 28 h of domestic work and children 12-14 years of age during the week preceding the survey did at least 14 h of economic activity or at least 42 h of economic activity and domestic work combined (UN, 2005). International Labor Organization's (ILO, 2006), definition of child labor refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children, interferes with their schooling by depriving them of opportunity to attend school; by obliging them to leave school prematurely; or by requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.

Wright (2005) in his study investigated that there is an abundant supply of children in rural Bangladesh, who live on farms and plantations and their labor is much

cheaper than that of an adult and they are more compliant than adults. He also investigated that poor families feel the need to supplement income in every possible way and child work cannot be ignored. He showed that poverty is the most often cited reason for the use of child labor in agriculture and shortly, the employment of children increases total family income, but this may well not be the case in the longer term. Islam (2003) identified the worst forms of child labor in match industries in Bangladesh and their vulnerable younger siblings. In this study he depicted on their socio-demographic profile and attempted to find out the reasons due to why parents are impelled to send their children to workplace of match industries in Mamun *et al.* (2008), found in their study is that working hour per day, place of work and age at the time of entrance to work appeared to be the most significant factors in determining the likelihood of facing health complications. Majumdar *et al.* (2001) observed that division of labor in agricultural operation generates some types of job in which children are equally efficient to their adult counterparts. Masum (1999) described in his study child labor is simply the most severe form of child exploitation and child abuse in the world today. He observed that in any society, working children, as a socio-economic group, happens to be the most disadvantaged of all since. Child labor is a persistent problem throughout the world, especially in developing countries (ILO, 1997). It is also pervasive in Bangladesh. It is especially pre-valent in rural areas of those countries

where poverty is widespread, coupled with the lack of capacity to enforce minimum age requirements for work and schooling.

Child labor remains a widespread problem in the world today. In many families, child labor makes up about one third of their family income. Poverty and economic deprivation leads to child labor. This exploratory study is important because it will give a picture of the state of child labor that are due to poverty in the selected areas of Bangladesh and also will help to indicate necessary changes in customs and laws to improve existing child labor situation, with a view to reducing the child labor in Bangladesh.

Therefore, the present study aims to determine the effects of some selected variables on child labor that are mainly due to poverty in the study areas.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data for this study were collected from 10 selected upazilas of Dinajpur district, Bangladesh. One-hundred child labor aged 5-17 were selected using purposive sampling technique and were successfully interviewed through personal interview method. The respondents were selected from 10 upazilas of Dinajpur district, as shown in the Table 1.

Various alternative statistical tools exist for analyzing the extent of child labor over time. This study reports the results from multivariate logistic regression estimation. Logistic regression models were used to determine the relative effects of various characteristics on child labor. The considering model and dependent variable used in the model is given:

$Y = 1$, if the child comes to labor profession due to poverty (major cause) and $= 0$, otherwise

The explanatory variables considered in the model are as follows: father alive, educational attainment of father, occupation of father, loan of family, family member, father/mother/guardian landless, income of household head and income used in the purpose. The independent variables are all categorical variables.

Global situation of child labor: According to the UNICEF (2008), an estimated 218 millions children aged 5-17 are engaged in child labor, excluding child domestic labor all over the world. Some 126 millions of these children are believed to be engaged in hazardous situations or conditions, such as working in mines, working with chemicals and pesticides in agriculture or working with dangerous machinery. They are everywhere but invisible, toiling as domestic servants in homes, laboring behind the walls of workshops, hidden from view in plantations.

Table 1: The selection of respondent from 10 upazilas of Dinajpur

Upazila	Sample size
Biral	70
Bochaganj	90
Kaharole	85
Birganj	115
Chirirbandar	120
Parbatipur	75
Phulbari	80
Nawabganj	105
Birampur	135
Dinajpur Sadar	125
Total	1000

Millions of girls who work as domestic servants are especially vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. An estimated 1.2 millions children are trafficked, forced into debt bondage or other forms of slavery (5.7 millions), into prostitution and pornography (1.8 millions), into participating in armed conflict (0.3 millions) or other illicit activities (0.6 millions). However, the vast majority of child laborers -70% or more, work in agriculture. Regional estimates indicate that

- The Asian and Pacific regions harbor the largest number of child workers in the 5-14 age group, 127.3 millions in total. (19% of children work in the region).
- Sub-Saharan Africa has an estimated 48 millions child workers. Almost one child in three (29%) below the age of 15 works.
- Latin America and the Caribbean have approximately 17.4 millions child workers. (16% of children work in the region).
- Fifteen percent of children work in the Middle East and North Africa.
- Approximately 2.5 millions children are working in industrialized and transition economies.

Child labor in Bangladesh: Bangladesh is also experienced high incidence of child labor. According to 1991 census and trends in the subsequent years suggest that approximately 19% of the total people of Bangladesh works as child labor. The proportion is much higher in case of boys (22%) than in case of girls (16%). About 83% of the children employed as child labor in rural areas and the rest in urban areas and the ratio is almost the same for both boys and girls. Out of total population, 13.1% are below 5 years of age, about 26.3% are in the age of 5-14 years, about 31.8% are in the age of 5-17 years and the remaining 55.1% are in the age of 18 years and over. The average number of children aged 5-14 years per household is 1.3. The child labor in Bangladesh is 7.9 million out of the 42.4 million children in the age of 5-14 years, i.e., 18.64% of total child population is found to be economically active. Thus, child labor constitutes 10.8% of 5-14 years of age and 17% of 5-17 years of age of

the total labor force of Bangladesh (BBS, 2004). The highest portion of child labor of age 5-17 years is found in agriculture, forestry and fisheries (56.3%), followed by the service workers (3.9%), production and transport (24.9%), sales workers (13.4%), clerical workers (0.7%) and professional and technical (0.5%). In rural areas, out of total working children 64.6% are involved with agriculture sector whereas, only 21.7% children are in urban areas.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Logistic regression analysis can go some way towards identifying those variables, which are truly related to child labor. The category with the relative odds of 1.00 represents the reference category for that categorical variable. The odds ratio has a clear interpretation and is straightforward. An odds ratio of greater than 1.00 suggests that an increased likelihood of the event occurring relative to the reference category, while an odd ratio less than 1.00 indicates a decreased likelihood of the event occurring relative to the reference category. The estimate of logistic coefficients and the relative odds for each category of the categorical variables are shown in Table 2.

Educational attainment of father has significant and negative effect on reason for taking the occupation of child labor. The odds ratio corresponding to primary and secondary education is 0.402 and 0.827, respectively. It clearly indicates that child of the father having primary and secondary education go 0.402 times and 0.827 times less likely to take the profession of child labor due to major cause (poverty) than that of the child of father having no educational attainment (reference category).

From the study, it is observed that father having occupation business and other are significantly associated with the reason for taking the occupation of child labor. From Table 2, it is observed that father having occupation business is 0.477 times and others profession is 0.423 times less likely to take the occupation of child labor due to major cause (poverty) than the father having occupation agriculture.

Loan of family has significant and positive influence on reason for taking the occupation of child labor. The study shows that the family having loan of TK. 1000-3000, 3000-6000 and 6000+ are 2.278, 3.292 and 5.335 times, respectively more likely to go for child labor due to major cause (poverty) than that of the family having no loan.

From the study, it is observed that the child having family member 3-6 and above 6 have a positive significant role in determining the reason of taking the occupation of child labor. The relative odds ratio corresponding to the child having family member 3-6 and above 6 is 1.199 and 1.420, respectively. It indicates that the child having family member 3-6 is 1.199 times and having above 6 is

Table 2: Logistic regression estimates of regression coefficient and relative odds associated with child labor due to (major cause) poverty

Background characteristics	Coefficient β	Odds ratio
Father alive		
No \otimes		1.000
Yes	-0.085	0.918
Educational attainment of father		
Illiterate \otimes		1.000
Primary	-0.910*	0.402
Secondary	-0.190	0.827
Occupation of father		
Agriculture \otimes		1.000
Business	-0.740**	0.477
Day Labor	0.193	1.213
Others	-0.860**	0.423
Loan of family		
Loanless \otimes		1.000
1000-3000	0.823**	2.278
3000-6000	1.192***	3.292
6000+	1.674***	5.335
Family member		
1-3 \otimes		1.000
3-6	0.182**	1.199
6+	0.351*	1.420
Father/mother/guardian landless		
No \otimes		1.000
Yes	0.144	1.155
Income of household head		
1000-2000 \otimes		1.000
2000-3000	-2.230**	0.107
3000+	-2.401**	0.091
Income used in the purpose of		
Don't Help \otimes		1.000
Family	1.193***	3.296
Treatment	0.056	1.058
Others	0.541	1.718

Note: \otimes indicates reference category, Significant level: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

1.420 times more likely to take the occupation of child labor due to major cause (poverty) than that of the child having family member 1-3 (Table 2).

From the study, it is apparent that income of household head has a negative significant effect in taking the occupation of child labor. From the Table 2, we see that the child of household head having income of TK 2000-3000 and TK. 3000+ are 0.107 times and 0.091 times respectively less likely to take the occupation of child labor due to major cause (poverty) than the child of household head having income of TK. 1000-2000 (Table 2).

In this study, we observe that income used for family purpose has a positive significant effect on taking the occupation of child labor. The odds ratio corresponding to the child who used their income for family purposes is 3.269. It means that the child who used their income for family purposes go 3.269 times more to child labor occupation due to major cause (poverty) than that of the child who do not use their income for family purposes. At the same time, the child who used their income for treatment and for other purpose has effect on taking the occupation of child labor but he effect is not statistically significant.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Child labor is injurious to health and dangerous for the future of children as well as for the nation. This study has identified several socio-economic characteristics using logistic regression model, which influence the child in getting the labor profession due to poverty. It is observed from the study that the socio-economic conditions of the child laborers and their families lie at a lower stage and most of them are very poor. The logistic regression analysis shows that out of all the selected variables that are included in the analysis-educational attainment of the father, occupation of the father, loan of family, family member, income of household head and income used in the purpose of are the most influential factors in determining the likelihood of taking the occupation of child labor due to major cause (poverty). It clearly indicates that poverty is the main reason for the involvement of the children in various hazardous and dangerous works. Furthermore, considering global scenario there is hardly any alternative but to eliminate child labor from the society. In such a dilemma, considering socio-economic aspects particularly poverty situation, the following suggestions may be put:

- Child labor can be reduced through awareness generation and sensitization, social mobilization, developing educational infrastructure and facilities through implementation of child rights/law and ensuring social securities.
- Government, NGO's and other organizations could be coordinated and mutually facilitated all these related efforts and programs.
- The government should further intensify its efforts to enforce the existing laws to protect the children from extreme exploitation.

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