

Child Labour in Bangladesh:

The Child Labour issue is one of the great concerns throughout the world. It is quite common for children of all types of societies to be engaged in some forms of occupation depending on the economic structure and level of development. As such, the phenomenon is not connected to any particular country or culture. In fact, of the country concerned, Child Labour has been generally perceived more as a problem of poor developing countries like Bangladesh which is consistently facing challenges against poverty, high population growth, rising unemployment, natural disaster and so on.

Bangladesh Child Labour Policies:

The current population size of Bangladesh is relatively large with respect to land area. A large segment of the country's labour force is engaged in informal activities and child labour is also a notable feature of the country's growing informal labour market situation. Due to legislation enforced by Government rules there is very little scope for children to be employed in formal sectors. But in reality, many children are found working in formal sectors as well as quasi-corporations. Govt has long recognized the problem of child labour. A wide gamut of legislation exists in the country to take the various problems of child labour. These laws have had their origins in the Bangladesh Constitution, the ILO (International Labour Organization) recommendations and the UN declaration of the Rights of the Children and areas of child labour covered by legislation. Different laws and regulations have also been enacted with a view to protect children from some kinds of jobs, particularly the hazardous ones.

The GOB has formulated and adopted a National Children Policy as a commitment to the children's right. Bangladesh has ratified the ILO Convention (No.182) on the "Worst forms of Child Labour" adopted in 1999 and the UN Convention on "The Rights of the Child"(1989). This convention serves as a vehicle by which Bangladesh could take initiative to eliminate worst forms of child labour in the country.

Action Plans and Assessment Surveys:

Most recently, some actions plans and direct intervention efforts have been taken by the Govt. against child labour, specially the worst forms of child labour. A 5-year National Plan of Action (1997-2002) for children was formulated in which the child labour problem was identified for the first time as a category under the sector entitled "Children in need of special protection". To monitor the progress towards achieving set goals, more comprehensive and up-to-date statistical information on working children have to be assembled. While Child Labour is an important issue, not much effort has been taken until mid-90s to quantify its magnitude and social characteristics of working children at National level in Bangladesh. Some NGOs and Human Rights Groups took the initiative of conducting rapid assessment surveys and other child labour studies on a pilot basis, but these findings were not nationally representative. UNICEF has also taken some intervention programs against child labour particularly the WFCL.

To mitigate the deficiencies of data relating to working children Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) conducted a household-based National Child Labour Survey (CLS) for the first time in 1995-96. The CLS covered all children of ages 5-14 as per definition of children in the context of Bangladesh as articulated in the Bangladesh National Children Policy (1994).

Concepts and Definitions:

Child: A child is defined as an individual under the age of 18 years based on the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour 1999(No.189). Since it is commonly accepted that a child under 5 years of age is too young to be engaged in work or to start schooling, it considers only the child population aged 5-17 for the purpose of NCLS as well as for estimates.

Age: It is measured by number of completed years at last birthday. For ex. An aged 25 years, 10 months and 18 days has been recorded as 25 years.

Child Labour: It is based on the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973(No.138), which represents the most comprehensive and authoritative, international definition of minimum age for admission to employment or work implying 'economic activity'. Child labour as referred to in the NCLS (National Child Labour Survey) consists of all children less than 18 years of age who are economically active except-

- Those who are under 5 years old
- Those between 12-14 years old who spend less than 14 hours a week on their job, unless their activities/occupations are hazardous by nature/circumstances.

Added to this, another is-

- 15-17 year old children in WFCL (including hazardous work and work of 43 hours and more per week)

This principle has been applied for measuring CL (Child Labour) of the country, as based on NCLS data.

Working/Economically Active/Employed Children: The words are synonymous by definition in the NCLS 2002-03. Children who were working 1 or more hours for pay/profit or working without pay in a family farm/enterprise/organization during the reference period or found not working but had a job or business from which he/she was temporarily absent during the reference period (last 7 days) is a working child in case of current activity status. In the case of usual status, children who were involved in economic activity for the major part of the previous years, as judged by the respondent.

Child Labour Force: Child labour force (CLF) comprises of economically active children or employed children and unemployed children, that is CLF consists of employed and unemployed children.

Economic Activity: It is defined in terms of economic activity based on UN System of National Accounts (SNA), 1993 which covers all market production and certain types of

non-market production, including production and processing of primary production for own consumption, own account construction and other production of fixed assets for own use. Therefore, whether paid or unpaid, the activity or occupation could be in the formal or informal sector and in urban or rural areas. It excludes unpaid domestic services within own household.

Non-economic Activity: Activities of a domestic nature (household chores) performed by children in their own households are considered as non-economic activities. It can be dis-aggregated by the following:

- Clean, decorate and maintain dwelling including small repairs.
- Use, clean, service and repair household durables, vehicles or other goods.
- Prepare and serve meals for household.
- Care of siblings of household.
- Care for sick, infants or old peoples of household.
- Transportation of household members or their goods.

Informal Sector: In the light of the System of National Account 1993 as well as 15th ICLS and in the context of Bangladesh, the informal sector is defined as those economic activities, which are operated by the households-

Either in household premises or outside household with a fixed location or without fixed location, including in uncovered spaces such as streets and parks.

Mostly operated by household members.

Outside the purview of the Government regulation.

UN registered, no formal accounts keeping etc.

Formal Sector: It includes mainly corporate and quasi-corporate types of establishments. Its operations are registered with a legal authority and are regulated by the concerned laws of the country.

Hazardous work: Hazardous work by children is any activity or occupation which by its nature has, or leads to, adverse effects on the child's safety, health (physical/mental) and moral development. Hazards could also derive from excessive workload, physical conditions of work and/or work intensity in terms of the duration or hours of work even where the activity or occupation is known to be non-hazardous or safe. The following criteria are used for identification of hazardous child work:

- Any child working in mining and construction is considered to be in a hazardous work;
- Beyond mining and construction a number of occupation are considered to be of hazardous nature for ex, work with heavy machinery or exposure to pesticides;
- Any child below the age of 18 working 43 hours or more than a week is considered to be in a hazardous work.

Worst Forms of Child Labour: The unconditional WFCL includes,

- All forms of practices similar to slavery, such as sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced/compulsory labour, including forced/compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict.
- The use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or pornographic performance.
- The use of procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, particularly for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties.

Areas of Hazardous Child Labour:

In Bangladesh, children are found working in almost all the sectors of the economy except mining, quarrying, electricity, gas and water. Many of them work 48 hours a week on an average, earning less than 500 taka per month. A large number of children work in occupation and industries, which are plainly dangerous and hazardous. In 1995 the Ministry of Labour and Manpower in collaboration with UNICEF undertook a study, entitled “Hazardous Child Labour in Bangladesh” to identify the hazardous economic activities involving children.

This study identified the following economic activities as hazardous:

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| * Automobile workshop worker | * Battery recharging shop worker |
| * Bedding manufacturing worker | * Blacksmith |
| * Brick/stone crushing | * Car painting/metal furniture- |
| * Child prostitution | painting/spay painting works |
| * Construction | * Dyeing workshop worker |
| * Electric mechanic | * Engineering workshop worker |
| * Goldsmith’s assistant | * Hotel/mess cook |
| * Laundry boy | * Porter |
| * Printing press worker | * Rikshaw/rikshaw van |

The workplaces and activities that were discovered to be most hazardous included:

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|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| * Bedding manufacturing shops | * Blacksmith’s shop |
| * Making bricks or stone chips | * Printing press |
| * Welding | * Scavenging |
| * Plastic and rubber factories | * Shrimp processing |
| * Engineering workshop | * Bidi factories |

The *major hazardous elements* are exposure to flame, gas, fume, harmful chemical substances, electricity, sharp equipment, high speed machinery, extreme heat or cold, insufficient or dazzling light, heavy load, stressful working conditions and continuous work with ice and water.

National Child Labour Survey:

The NCLS, 2002-03 by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics covered the child population aged 5-17 years living in the households. The estimate number of children in

this age category was about 42.5million(as on 1st January, 2003). According to the NCLS by the BBS, 17.5% of the total child population in the 5-17 age group (approximately 7.4 million) was engaged in economic activities.

Children, being an individual workforce, are engaged in many hazardous occupations in the informal sector. Besides, working in agriculture and family enterprises, children work as domestic servant, street vendors, brick chippers, rag pickers, bidi factories, restaurants and hotels. They are engaged in diverse occupation are exploited in terms of wages, hours of work and type of work.

They are frequently denied of their remunerations, engaged in work for inter-minable hours, confined to unhygienic, unsafe and unhealthy working conditions resulting in respiratory diseases and physical disabilities.

Views of Children About Education/Schooling:

In various research works of different institutions it is observed that, young peoples' comments do not support a simplistic contrast between work as hazardous and exploitative versus school as benign and beneficial. Working children have a realistic picture of the School opportunities that are available to them. They were particularly resentful of the humiliation and harsh punishment they experienced from teachers.

During a research working children were asked: "In your present circumstances, which is best for you- 'work', 'school' or 'work & school'?"

Combining 'work & school' was the popular choice.

- A porter, at Kamlapur Railway Station, felt it would be foolhardy to give up his work for school, given the uncertainty of his job prospects:
" Even a king's food finishes one day, so it is important to continue working a little".

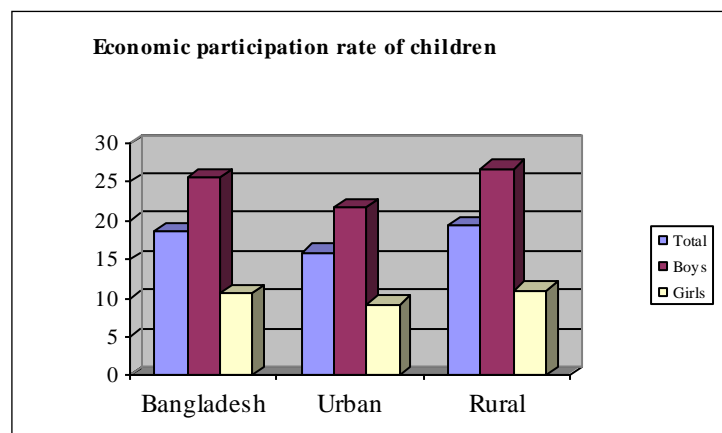
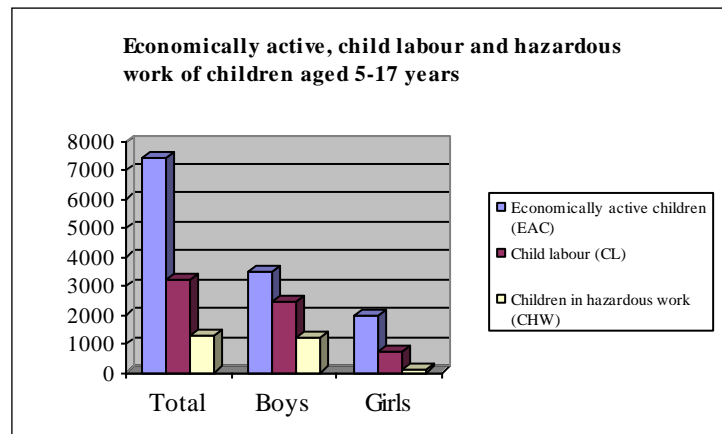
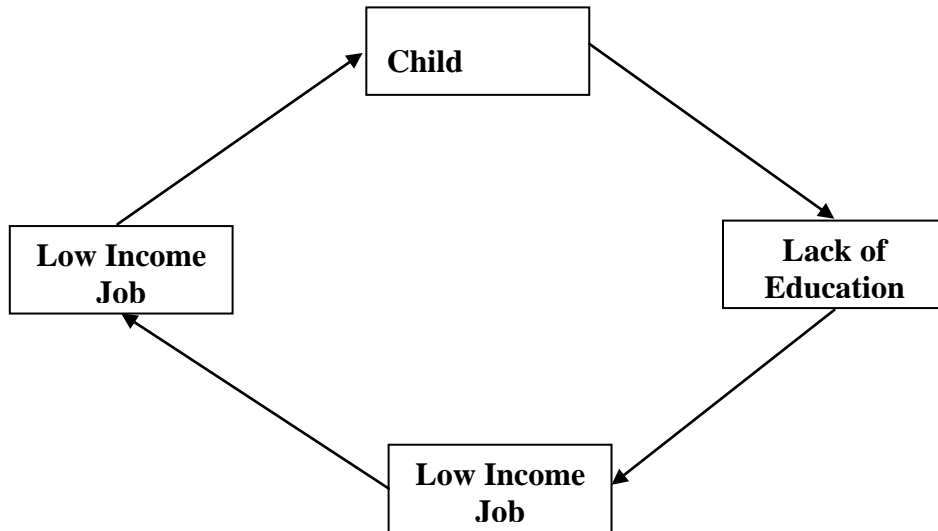
Local variations in attitudes to work and school were linked to work situation and prospects for schooling. In Bangladesh about 25% children favoured 'work only' but few favoured 'school only'. Despite this variation 2/3 of the children felt combining 'work & school' was the only feasible option.

Gender: A Strong Influence on Children's Experience: -

Many occupations are gender segregated, with boys in the higher status occupations Girls may have fewer work choices and their prospects may be more constrained. Some girls describe a 'triple burden': to carryout domestic work in their own family; to work outside the family; and to achieve in school.

Boys groups often refer to paternal expectations that they earn money. Girls are less likely to earn money in their own right or their mothers collect their wages. Girls are also more vulnerable to incidents of harassment, exploitation and abuse, especially sex workers, domestic workers and street vendors.

The Vicious Cycle of Child Labour (CL):



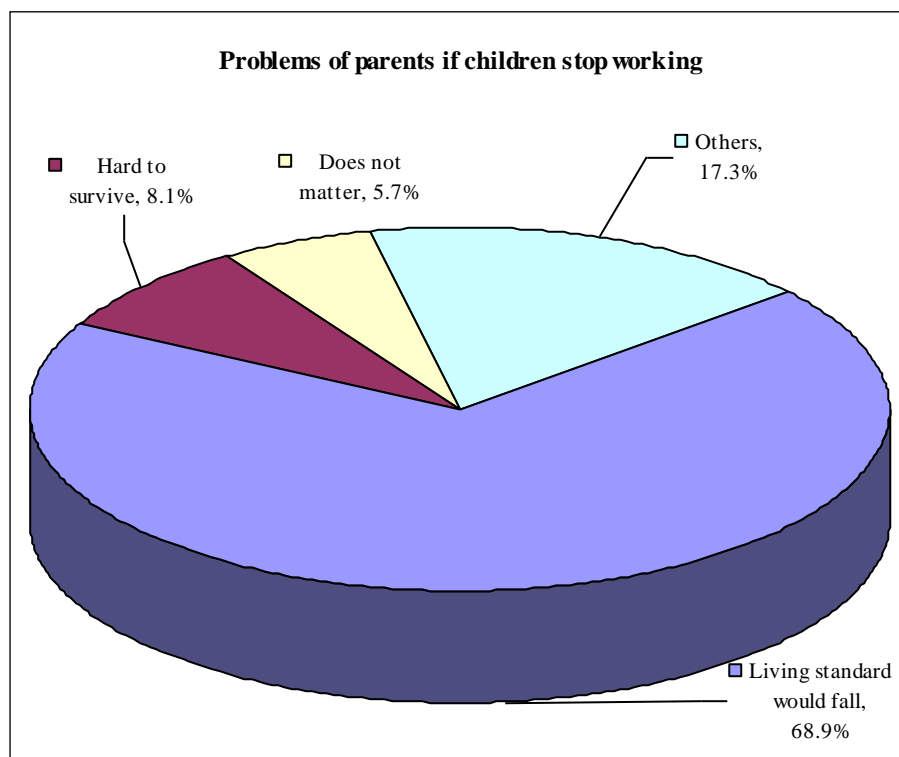


Table : Comparison of NCLS 2002-2003 with CLS 1995-1996

Sl. No.	Characteristics	1995-96			2002-2003		
		Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
1	Child population, 5-14 Years (000)	34,455	17,862	16,593	42,387	22,689	19,698
2	Child workforce:						
	Total	6,584	3,919	2,665	7,904	5,810	2,094
	Urban	1,136	637	499	1,501	1,096	404
	Rural	5,448	3,282	2,166	6,403	4,714	1,689
3	Working children (employed)	6,298	3,769	2,529	7,904	5,810	2,094
4	Average Monthly Income (Paid workers in taka):						
	Bangladesh	478.2	507.5	438.1	977	992	864
	Urban	579.3	593.7	566.7	993	993	953
	Rural	404.9	463.6	291.1	974	992	815
5	Average daily wage rate	16	17	14	33	33	31
6	Average Weekly hours worked (all working children):						
	Bangladesh	25.6	26.8	23.8	28.5	30.7	22.3
	Urban	36.4	33.2	40.5	33.1	35.6	26.2
	Rural	23.4	25.6	20.1	27.4	29.5	21.4