

# Survival Strategy of the Street and Working Children in Sylhet City of Bangladesh

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## ABSTRACT

*The plight of the street and working children all over the world has been analysed from different points of view in different studies. The overall situation of the street and working children living in developing and least developed countries is obviously much grimmer than that of socioeconomically many well-off countries. Bangladesh, as a developing country, is no better at all with regard to the situation of the street and working children. The number of these unfortunate children in Bangladesh is quite high. This paper focuses on a number of strategies that the street and working children in Sylhet city of Bangladesh have been forced to adopt in order to mere survive. It identifies some important structural issues relating to the situation of the street and working children living in Sylhet city; the issues which may be held responsible for languishing situation of our helpless children. The study is basically based on primary data collected directly from the respondents, but the data from secondary sources have also been used for substantiating our analytical points of view. An effort has been made in the study to unveil the difficulties in which these children somehow survive and concrete suggestions have been recommended for overcoming the shackles that have pushed the children to be in the situation of exploitation, deprivation and discrimination, making them miserably hopeless.*

**Key Words:** *Street and working children, Child labor, Urbanization, Vulnerability, Exploitation, Landlessness, Humiliation and maltreatment*

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Child labor is a major social problem found in most of the developing countries throughout the world. But it may be said that the way most of the children are made neglected, deprived, exploited and oppressed in Bangladesh is probably unparalleled in the world. There is another important aspect of child labor in our country is that the suffering of the girl children here is beyond anybody's imagination. A girl child is always expected to do domestic works without taking into account her rights which she is supposed to exercise.

Child labor could be of two types in Bangladesh: working and street children. The working children usually stay along with their parents or other guardians during the night. On the other hand, most of the street children do not have permanent address and their employment depends on the availability of works. These children mostly pass night on the street itself or some other place which does not belong to them. Street children may be described as homeless having no local guardians or some of them might have fled away from home.

Rahman (1997) shows that urban child workers are worst hit of the situation. Urban child worker are engaged in around 300 types of economic activities and on the other hand rural child workers in 90 types of agricultural and non-agricultural activities (Islam, 1998). Children are forced to work in order to extend financial help to their family and sometimes, of course their own survival. The situation of urban children has worsened because of decline of the traditional society, growing industrialization and urbanization, and the migration that is heavily taking place mostly from rural to urban areas.

Sylhet city is an important urban centre which has been declared as divisional center recently. So, it has become one of the six divisional centers. Sylhet city is located on the eastern edge of the country. The existence of child labor is enormously found in this city too. The increase of child labor with the increase of the population of the city is quite evident.

## **II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study adopts a combination of descriptive and analytical approach. It is primarily interpretative in nature. The research relies so heavily on what social scientists call meaningful qualitative experiential data (Das, 2003). Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Urban Appraisal (PUA) or Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), an innovative idea to participatory

research has been described by Chambers as a family of approaches and methods to people to share enhance and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions to plan and to act (Chambers, 1997). Our study has aimed to use those approaches for extracting the meaning of life of working and street children as they perceive.

### Objectives of the Study

The principal objective of the research was to have a comprehensive picture on the issues related to child labor, particularly children living on the street as well as working in formal and informal settings in Sylhet city area. The general coverage of the research was also inclusive of survival struggle of street and working children and way outs to make their living better. More precisely, another goal of the research project was to make recommendations that would help local and national service providing agencies to initiate programs so that the harsh reality of the childhood can partially be mitigated. To meet these goals, the research has incorporated following specific objectives:

- To explore background information on causes of being street and working children
- To delineate survival pattern including shelter, safety, economic activities, education etc. of the children living on the street
- To analyze the nature of employment and working environment as well as coping mechanism including shelter, education, safety, risk, nature of exploitation at the workplace of the working children
- To suggest potential focus areas for undertaking preventive measures in order to protect working and street children at risk.

### Methodology

**Design of the Research** The research project has used a blend of qualitative and quantitative design intended to discovering the dire needs and difficulties the street-dwellers as well as working children encounter. The research is conducted in three phases. In the first phase, a quantitative design that follows the principles of Participatory Learning Approach (PLA) is used to develop the concept of street/working children and their predicaments. The second phase is instrumental to use a qualitative design. The design is constructed in a way that provides an opportunity for in-depth explorations of those factors that facilitate and those that encumber the lives of the street and working children. The third phase is also in the

ambit of qualitative design; however, it has a different focus and participation including the views of the civil society, service providers and other allied agencies thinking and working in the same domain.

**Sampling** The population relevant to this research includes the street and working children and service providers of Sylhet city. Children under the auspices of institutional support are also included in the sample. The research involves surveys, in-depth interview, informal and formal discussion using 100 children each from each group of working and street children. Some individual case studies are conducted to complement the findings of the study. Deliberate efforts are made in each phase of research to have representation from the wide cross-section of the poor children in Sylhet city, from different backgrounds; e.g. age, occupation, sex, area of concentration, vulnerability. The team decided to use a purposive sampling method ensuring the representation of the cross-section of street and working children. In order to find the street children the research team toured the city to identify the areas where some of the major concentrations of street children were located. The team identified few areas including rail/bus station, markets, tourist spots, shrine etc. as well as shelter and place of economic activities of the street children. It also identified scopes and areas of employment for the working children that included industrial and residential areas, workshops, independent work places (crossing point of the roads, markets, rail and bus station etc.). From un-estimated number of street and working children, 200 samples (100 working children and 100 street children) were selected purposively from all wards of Sylhet City Corporation.

**Data Collection** At the beginning of data collection a decision was made to incorporate participatory approaches as central tenet of data collection. To meet this end, three data collection techniques were used for the research: 1) individual, face to face interview with street and working children; 2) in-depth case studies with children from both groups; and 3) a participatory urban appraisal (PUA) consists of service providers, researchers, academics, local elites, journalists and some other respectable citizens belonging to civil society was conducted.

### **Individual interviews/Case studies**

It was decided that each data collectors would conduct individual face-to-face interviews with the respondents from the both groups. Female data collectors were assigned to gather data from some sensitive groups such as

sex workers, domestic aides etc. To this extent, semi-structured open-ended interview guidelines were designed to obtain responses that encompassed the transition of moving into city for jobs, the kind of problems they faced in their daily life, the extent of fear and threat they encountered, nature of exploitation, survival strategies and questions regarding the services available to them provided by development organizations.

### III. FINDINGS ON WORKING CHILDREN

#### Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics

**Age and Working Age** The study shows that 42 percent are employed between the age of 13 and 15. Even though society tacitly recognizes the role of a child's wage earner when s/he crosses adolescence, however, one third of the participants are found to be involved in earning activities under the age of twelve years.

**TABLE 1** *Age group distribution of the Participants on the basis of Occupation*

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Age Group</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>7-9</i>	<i>10-12</i>	<i>13-15</i>	<i>16+</i>	
Carpenter	01	01	03	-	05
Helper in Electronic Shop		02	05	01	08
Welding Factory Worker	-	03	03	02	08
Hotel/Restaurant Worker	-		04	05	09
Handloom worker	-	01	01	02	04
Automobile worker	01	05	06	01	13
Factory worker (wax and other)	01	02	-	02	05
Household Aide	-	05	05	02	12
Sweeper	-		02	02	04
Rickshaw Puller and Pusher	-	03	03	01	07
Salesman/Assistant to salesman	-	08	01	-	09
Others*		03	09	04	16
Total	03	33	42	22	100

#### Family

##### *Nature of Family and Guardianship*

Overwhelming majority of the participants (81 percent) belong to the

nuclear family consisting of parents, brother(s) and sister(s), which follows the national trend where formation of nuclear family is an increasing phenomenon. Three fourth of these families are headed by male guardians (mainly father) who solely make the major decisions. In very few cases where father is absent, dead or incapable, the elder boys and mothers become the decision makers. The study finds that 16 percent children belong to the female-headed family, mostly mother. The rest have admitted that they do not have any guardian and thus live independently.

### ***Profile of the Parents and Family Members***

Both polygamy and re-marriage are found to be higher among the parents as about one fourth of the parents exercised this practice. Nineteen percent of male parents have bigamous relationship. Since most of the marriages are arranged without any official documents, women become the victims as being divorced or abandoned. Five mothers have fallen under this group who eventually get re-married with their young children.

Except one, all parents of the participants have poor economic and social status. One third of the earning fathers are employed in different occupations which are in the broad category of daily wage-earner including rickshaw-pulling and pushing, construction works, porters etc. Other dominant occupation is agriculture and small trade that constitute 14 and 11 percent respectively. One interesting finding is that the mothers of the working children are mostly housewives which can be described as a contrary to the assumption that poverty leads every member of the family to work.

The average income of each family is scanty as sixty two percent of the families earn up to four thousands taka per month. Thirty eight percent of the families have a higher income which is not more than six thousands.

**TABLE 2** *Monthly Family Income of the Participants*

<b><i>Income (in Taka)</i></b>	<b><i>Number</i></b>
Up to 1000	03
1000-2000	19
2000-3000	18
3000-4000	22
4000-5000	16
5000-6000	21
6000+	1

### ***Relation with Parents and Family Members:***

More than ninety percent of the participants have stated that other family members also make some contribution to the family income. Twenty

percent of the children have expressed their dissatisfaction because of severe pressure from the family to share more burdens. Naturally, some of them decline to do so. This is one of the reasons why the children cut off their relationship with their original family as they grow up.

Another spill-off of poverty that affects the intra-household environment is relationship between parents. As noted earlier that women remain housewives and men solely carry the burden and therefore women manage the family in a chronic resource-constraint environment. Most often women become unable to manage the household and thereby put pressure on husband to meet growing needs. This triggers violence between parents, and children are the direct victims of such circumstances. The study shows that 16 percent of children are fed up with such daily incidence.

**BOX 1** *Causes of Stressful Relationships with Parents*

<i>Variable</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poverty</li> <li>• Mothers' Second Marriage</li> <li>• Children's inability to earn and support family</li> <li>• Mother abandoned the child and Father remarried</li> <li>• Stepmother's negligence and Abuse</li> <li>• Father's torture and abuse</li> </ul>

**Education**

One quarter of the participants have never been to the school or under any other educational arrangement; six percent can write their name only and seventy percent has somewhat educational qualifications ranging from unfinished primary level to grade ten. Among the last group, an overwhelming majority are limited under primary level of education (mainly under third grade). A small portion (ten participants) has completed grade six, seven and eight and the rest scaling up to grade nine. Only one participant has studied up to grade ten.

**TABLE 3** *Education of the Participants*

<i>Total</i>	<i>Level of Education</i>							<i>Illit- erate</i>	
	<i>Primary</i>					<i>Lower Secondary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>		<i>Can Sign</i>
	<i>I</i>	<i>ii</i>	<i>iii</i>	<i>iv</i>	<i>V</i>				
100	10	12	11	13	11	10	03	06	24

**BOX 2** *Major Causes of Dropout from School***Major Causes**

Parents are reluctant to send children at school  
 Massive Poverty  
 Education is not enjoyable to the participants  
 Families are disable to maintain education cost  
 Education is not profitable to them  
 Work is more attractive than education  
 Education is considered as hard task  
 Family is dependent on participants income  
 Ignorance and lack of awareness related to education

One interesting finding is some children's on-going endeavor in education while working. A portion of working children (fifteen percent) is still having part-time education. The rest eighty five percent of respondents who do not go to school have provided reasons that finger at some serious structural issues. It is obvious that students who go to school have to maintain delicate trade-offs between school and work. Such trade-offs largely depend on the employers whose decision about the children's schooling is the final say. Often they contemplate on time spending in education as a distraction and a potential loss to children's productivity and impede employees to attend school. Participants have justified this notion as they are feared that if they attend any school during the working hours they would lose a substantial portion of meager income they earn. This is also a joint venture of poverty and cultural factors where many parents of poor background consider spending time in education is not worthy. According to this group, completion of education is challenging, very long and expensive adventure and therefore unbearable.

**TABLE 4** *Causes of Migration*

<b>Major Causes</b>	<b>Attributes</b>
Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landlessness</li> <li>• Natural Disaster</li> <li>• Lack of food and shelter</li> <li>• To support family</li> </ul>
Unemployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sole dependency on participants for economic support</li> <li>• Jobs are not available in rural areas</li> <li>• Parents send searching for job</li> <li>• Seeking opportunities in the city</li> </ul>



<i>Major Causes</i>	<i>Attributes</i>
Family Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Father drove children out of home</li> <li>• Father abandoned mother</li> <li>• Torture by stepmother/stepfather</li> <li>• Divorce between parents</li> </ul>
Village Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict with influential neighbor</li> <li>• Oppressing by local elites</li> <li>• False case</li> </ul>
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In search of better education</li> <li>• Voluntary migration</li> <li>• To make a future</li> <li>• Influenced by others</li> </ul>

### **Migration Pattern and Causes of Migration**

The most stated/convincing reasons that facilitate the migration of the family are poverty and unemployment. About sixty percent participants state multiple reasons, however, the coverage of this answers fall in the ambit of poverty such as ‘struggle to meet family’s basic needs’, ‘not able to find a regular job in village’, ‘expectation for a better job’, ‘landlessness’ etc. Shelter

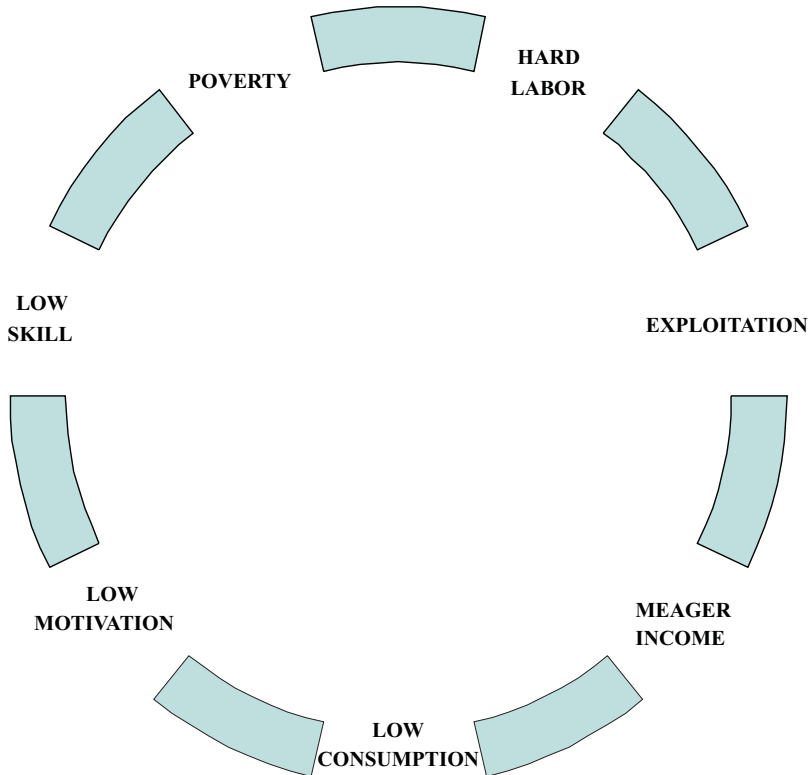
#### ***Living Arrangements***

The study shows 41 percent working children live with their family paying a monthly rent of an average Tk 750. About one quarter of participants live in the shelters provided by the employers. Participants who work in restaurants almost always live in the restaurant premises. These workers face downside of the job as they have to be omnipresent and perform many chores out of the contract. Besides, their living arrangements also remain unhealthy and filthy. Employers practice double-standard by getting them involved into unpaid overtime as well as showing the attitude that they are helping them by providing shelter. Similar practices are also common in mechanical workshops and other similar occupations. Such living arrangements are very poor where children live without proper lighting, ventilation and toilet facilities. Living arrangements are extremely inhumane for the children in domestic services. In all cases of domestic aides who represent twelve percent of samples live with their employer, a must condition to be fulfilled for the job. After working everyday as an extra long day, children sleep on the floor of the kitchen or the living room.

## Employment

### *The Reasons for Working*

Majority of the children mention poverty and poverty related issues are the major reasons for their employment. It all starts with a child being born in a poverty-ridden unfriendly world where he is deprived of childhood necessities. Parents' attitude and behavior toward the children become harsher as they approach to age. Family tension and squabbles are sometimes other reasons that drive children leave home. The cycle of poverty for a child worker is repeated and s/he never gets out of the cycle. It is a life-long process from which other than very few none of the children can escape. The cycle follows the pattern:



### *Working Hours*

The research findings manifest the nature of exploitation and its magnitude children encounter in their employment. It is reported that about half of the children (forty eight percent) work between 11 to 15 hours where it requires substantial physical vigor to accomplish the job. In particular,

children working in service sectors such as hotel restaurants, sales assistant etc. require all time engagement during the working hours which usually have longer spell than eight hours. Children in domestic services report their engagements to be 12 hours on an average.

**TABLE 5** *Working Hours*

<i>Hours</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
3-5	07
5-7	22
7-9	19
9-11	38
11-13	10
13-15	04
Total	100

Analyzing response patterns it could be concluded that one major reason for leaving the previous job is exploitation in form of less payment and physical and emotional abuses. Sometimes it happens that the children's physical strength is not compatible with their involvements compelling them to quit. In few occasions children are the victim of physical injury and forced out of the job. In some cases children have left the job willingly as they realize that they are being exploited.

#### ***Extent of Involvement, Fatigue, Risks in Job and Job Satisfaction***

An overwhelming majority of the participants (eighty four percent) admit that their work is laborious. The workload ranges from acceptable intensity to the extreme, unbearable, to the children. Twenty four participants of this group justify the workload as normal, even though they think they are overburdened.

#### **Income**

Widespread disparity persists among participants on income. Some children are so innocent and under-aged that they are not even aware of any salary they ought to have for their labor. Some work only for food. These two categories make up 9 percent of the samples. Four percent children do not have any fixed salary as they have to depend on the amount of work they have done or the profit they have brought to the employer. Among other respondents, 49 percent receive monthly salary, 36 percent daily, and only 2 percent receive weekly salary.

**TABLE 6** *Monthly Income of the Participants*

<i>Income Group (Tk)</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Up to Tk 450	37
450-900	09
900-1350	05
1350-1800	01
1800-2250	–
2250-2700	04
2700-3150	05
3150-3500	06
Only food	03
Don't know	30
Total	100

Most of the families who employ children in domestic work are highly dependent on them. If the domestic aides remain sick for long, it affects the normalcy of the family activities. Thus, the family takes her for treatment for the sake of its interest.

### **Leisure and Recreation**

According to the preference of the children, the most favorite off-time activity is watching television. Chatting is another way to spending off-time. About half of the children prefer to share their stories with friends and fellow workers. Cinema and watching video movies are two favorite recreational activities to a portion of children. One fifth of the respondents either watch movies in theater or in video on a weekly basis. Seven percent admit that they are regular spectator of pornography, especially X-rated movies.

### **BOX 3** *Perpetrators of Abuse*

<i>Perpetrator</i>
• Employer
• Family member of the employer
• Trainer of the work
• Fellow worker
• Senior Staffs
• Gang and criminal
• Bystander
• Customer
• Police
• Own parents and Family member

Major trends of exploitation are-children work for longer hours without being paid, their appointments are based on verbal contract that mostly exclude due benefits, they could be fired at any time, their safety arrangements are not in place, they have to be involved without any break, and they have to show up for work while being sick.

**TABLE 7** *Nature of Torture and Abuse Perpetrated by the Employers at work*

<i>Nature of Torture</i>	<i>Attributes</i>
Physical Torture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doesn't allow to take rest</li> <li>• Beaten up by belt and chain</li> <li>• Beaten up with shoe</li> <li>• Kicking</li> <li>• Beaten up by fellow worker</li> </ul>
Emotional Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Threatening</li> <li>• Complain to the parents and close relatives</li> <li>• Threat of physical torture</li> <li>• Verbal assault</li> <li>• Threaten to stop food</li> </ul>
Economical Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cut of salary</li> <li>• Issuing fine</li> <li>• Compensation for alleged damage of employer's property</li> </ul>
Sexual Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Force to do sex</li> <li>• Torture physically if deny sex</li> <li>• Not paying after sex</li> </ul>

The sex workers complain about harassment by the police and rail station authority. Rickshaw pullers are often harassed by passengers. Sales assistants are always under pressure not to make any mistake. Hotel and restaurant workers always have to be on their toes to perfectly serve the customer. However, making mistakes in any job invite two types of punishment-one initiated by the service seekers and the other by the employers.

### **Aspiration and Future Hope**

Around 68 percent children state that their hope for a prosperous life has been disappeared for causes related to their family problems. Poverty itself and other subsidiary consequentialities such as parent/father's death, living with step parents, ignorance in assessing importance of education etc. are major hindrances. The study finds an interesting trend that children's early

dreams have been shifted in accordance with current realities and thereby new dreams have emerged.

## IV. FINDINGS ON STREET CHILDREN

### Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics

The daily struggle of the street children is that they do not have any regular job. Considering dominant trends in their survival efforts and availability in social landscape researchers categorize street children based on their current job.

**TABLE 8** *Profile of the Street Children Based on Current Economic Engagements*

<i>Nature of Major Occupation</i>	<i>Number</i>
Scrap picker	19
Rickshaw Pusher	14
Rickshaw Puller	02
Porter	14
Construction Labor	01
Begging	12
Hotel/Restaurant Worker	01
Sweeper and Garbage Cleaner	07
Hawker	09
Transport Worker	02
Day Laborer	10
Shoe-shiner	03
Sex worker	01
Others*	05

\*Others include supplier of water in shops, helping in making handicrafts, sewing, pick-pocketing and open to any job

### *Age Group*

Age group was most difficult indicators to identify. It also happens that children had the tendency to exaggerate their age from the assumption that such miss-presentation would provide them some advantages such as security, finding job, less humiliation by the strangers etc.

Adolescents (twenty five participants) of 12-14 years old have better footing than previous two groups in terms of survival. Adolescents (nine participants) of 15+ years are relatively better instrumental to survive in a harsh environment. They often overlap from one category to the other. For instance, a child of 7 years old might be in 'better survival condition' than

a child of the third group. Also it highly depends on the location where the children work and stay.

**TABLE 9** *Age of the Participants*

<i>Age Group (year)</i>	<i>Number</i>
5-7	35
8-11	31
12-14	25
15+	09
Total	100

### **Profile of the Family of the Street Children**

The research identifies few major socio-cultural forces that contribute to the children's misery. These are- broken family, loss of either parent, polygamy or bigamous relationship among parents, separation of the parents, maltreating children by parents and/or family members as well as widespread poverty and its subsidiary consequentialities (such as poverty related stress, using children as a source of income, chaos due to inability to maintain a large family and so on).

#### ***Nature of the Family***

Families comprise five members dominate in the samples followed by six and seven members. Polygamy and remarriage are prevalent among the parents of the street children. Often it results in forcing the children out of the family life. Fathers' remarriage rate is higher than that of mothers'. Twenty seven percent have remarried and of them one quarter did this for the third time. Children's accounts leave the impression that men abandon their previous wives along with children without any legal procedure and then remarry. It also happens that men divorce their wife but keep the children from the previous marriage. Often lack of care and love from the father and maltreatment of the stepmother compel the children to choose their own ways.

#### ***Family Earning and the Occupation of the Family Members***

Family members are almost exclusively dependent on the income of the either parent where father is at the top as income earner. The research suggests that excluding participants, three fourth members of the participants' family are dependent on the income of either parent. Interestingly, 36 percent mothers are also found to be contributor to the family income.

**TABLE 10** *Major Occupations of the family members of the Participants*

<b>Major Occupations</b>	<b>Number*</b>
Housewife	59
Maid Servant	23
Rickshaw puller and pusher	27
Day laborer	48
Shop and Hotel attendant	16
Begging	11

\* More than one involvement

The family members of the street children mainly represent the working class strata. They are mostly day-laborer or employed in similar jobs which require manual work or excessive vigor such as rickshaw pushing, shop attendant, peasant etc. Mothers work as maidservant or house attendant.

**TABLE 11** *Monthly Family Income (Approximate)*

<b>Income (Taka)</b>	<b>Number of Family</b>
- 800	7
801-1600	9
1601-2400	14
2401- 3200	17
3201-4000	11
4001-4800	09
4801-5600	02
5601-6400	05
6401+	09
Without Any Regular Income	02
Unable to figure out	15
Total	100

To be frank, it was extremely difficult to calculate the average family income due to participants' inability to figure out the approximate family income.

Relationships between Parents and Father and other members

After a series of discussions, it is found that relationship between parents of the street children is often thorny. An asymmetric relationship exists in their family where father rules as a dictator.



**TABLE 12** *Relationship of the Participants with Family Members*

<b>Family Members</b>	<b>Nature of Relationship</b>			
	<b>Affectionate</b>	<b>Not Affectionate</b>	<b>Torturous Relationship</b>	<b>Severely Torturous</b>
Father	29	20	14	16
Mother	72	02	08	08
Brother and Sisters	11	02	11	01

Poverty and related stress cause man to be arrogant, frustrated and anxious. Almost all of the children's account suggest that they witness mother being often beaten up by father. When determining the reason(s) children rank monetary issues as the top cause. Brawl over money and other minor family issues start with arguments and ends up with mother being physically assaulted. Such family environment has severe implications for children's decision to flee home. Relationship with Mother

Around 72 percent children express satisfaction and describe that mother loves and takes care which shelter them against fathers' cruelties. However, 14 percent have different views. Some disassociate themselves from mother due to their negligence, rudeness and maltreatment, saying that their mother is the same torturer as their father, and some complain that their mother forces them to work which they dislike. The relationship between stepmother and children is also appalling. Like step father, stepmother deems children as burden in their financially strained environment. They want children to work regardless of their age and the nature of job.

## Education

**TABLE 13** *Participant's Present Status of Schooling*

<b>Nature of Schooling</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Govt. Primary School	01
Non-Govt. Primary School	01
Non-formal Primary Education	13
Not Attending School	85
Total	100

Most of the participants show keen interest in education which is impeded by their parents, mainly father. Over quarter respondents point out that they do not find education interesting. All the children echo that attending school in regular hours would be conflicting with their job hours

and other activities essential for survival. If there are arrangements of lodging and fulfillment of other material needs, they would go to school regularly.

### **Causes of Migration**

Hardcore poverty, family breakdown, death or disability of the earning member, loss of work, natural disaster etc force family to leave home and settle in urban centers. In a harsh urban life children are not taken care of, family breaks apart, children venture out to find new opportunities and lose ties with family, ultimately pushing them on the street.

### **Shelter**

An overwhelming majority (85 percent) does not have a specific place to spend overnight. Only a few children living with family have a kind of shelter. An insignificant number living in Santee-type housing with filthy environment suffers from lack of toilet and water facilities and above all faces seasonal catastrophes. Majority of the children who cannot afford to rent a place usually find places like island of the street, any open place with shed on top, empty office, market corridor, train and bus station, room under major bridges. These places are supposed to be free but not always. Street children are forced to pay by security person, police and local gangs if one stays regularly. One grave danger for street children is the fear of sexual abuse that happens regularly to the girls. Frequently they are molested by strangers or passerby while sleeping.

### **Employment**

The major reason for children's involvement in laborious and hazardous job is for their survival. Being secluded in a harsh environment where prevalent notion of the society labels them either as 'worthless subject' or more harmfully 'antisocial' leave them nothing but to find any means for survival. In a merciless surrounding where competition for any job is high, street children have to explore every possible window available. Thus, participants are bound to try some non-childish, heavy and hazardous but independent-type work such as porter, rickshaw-pushing, scrap-picking etc.

### ***Working Hours/ Duration of Job***

Thirty percent of the participants report that they work between 6-8 hours in wage earning involvements followed by 18 percent who work between 8-10 hours. In extreme case, 21 percent participants work between 10-14

hours. Some participants such as porters work round the clock. Nexus between their survival struggle and changing job is prominent. Children working in semi-formal settings or under wage basis are often temporary. Since the status of their job is volatile and dependent on the mercy of the employers, often they are fired without any reason.

**TABLE 14** *Average Working Hours in One Economic Involvement*

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Working Hours</i>							
	<i>Less than 2 hours</i>	<i>2-4</i>	<i>4-6</i>	<i>6-8</i>	<i>8-10</i>	<i>10-12</i>	<i>12-14</i>	<i>14+</i>
Scrap Picker	4	02	03	10	-	-	-	-
Rickshaw Pusher			01	03	02	06	02	
Rickshaw Puller			01	01				
Porter			02		04	04	03	01
Construction Laborer					01			
Begging			05		05	02		
Hotel/rest. Worker							01	
Day laborer				08	02			
Sweeper and garbage cleaner			03	04				
Hawker		01	02		02	01	02	01
Transport worker					02			
Shoe shiner			01	02				
Others	01	02		02				
Total*	05	05	18	30	18	13	08	02

\* Sex worker (one participant) has to be added with the total number

## **Income**

The findings suggest that participants' average daily income is around Tk 40 which is fettered with inconsistency and uncertainty. Near about half

a portion of the participants ends up a day with an income up to Tk 25. A portion (one sixth) even earns less than Tk 10 a day. Forty two percent earn between Tk 25 to 50. The rest enjoy relatively better income. Along the line of occupation, scrap-picker is the least income group followed by beggar. Rickshaw pusher/puller is the highest income group who earns over fifty taka daily.

**BOX 4** *Major Reasons behind Changing Job*

<i>Reasons</i>
• To increase income
• Low pay
• Excessive work load
• Risk of physical injury
• To work independently
• Fired from the work because of alleged inefficiency
• To be trained for a new occupation
• Withdrawn by parents
• Abuse at work
• Migration

**TABLE 15** *Occupations and daily income of the participants*

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Daily Income of the Participants (In Taka)</i>											
	<i>Upto Tk. 10</i>	<i>10- 15</i>	<i>15- 20</i>	<i>20- 25</i>	<i>25- 30</i>	<i>30- 35</i>	<i>35- 40</i>	<i>40- 45</i>	<i>45- 50</i>	<i>50- 55</i>	<i>55- 60</i>	<i>60+</i>
Scrap Picker	11	04	03	01								
Rick- shaw Pusher							03	02	03	04	01	01
Con- struction Worker						01						
Begging	01	02	01	02	01	02	02	01				
Hotel/ Rest. Aide						01						
Day laborer				02	01	04	03					
Sweeper and Garbage Cleaner			03	02	02							

Occupation	Daily Income of the Participants (In Taka)											
	Upto Tk. 10	10- 15	15- 20	20- 25	25- 30	30- 35	35- 40	40- 45	45- 50	50- 55	55- 60	60+
Transport Worker										01		01
Shoe shiner			01	02								
Sex worker										01		
Porter	01	01	01	02	01	02	02	03	01			
Others	04			01								

One shocking finding is many of the children (38 percent) can't stop working while being sick. Since they have to rely solely on their income, any untoward interruption in job affects their earning and thus ultimately forces them to curtail food consumption. Children who are sick follow a survival strategy. They work less hours and stop working at the moment when they can manage an amount of money to buy food.

### Leisure and Recreation

Over half of the street children (55 percent) are regular spectator of T.V. kept on display at electronic stores which they watch, keeping a safe distance from the store. According to participants' preference and practices another popular event is chatting with friends. About a quarter (24 percent) spends a chunk of their income for watching movie in a regular interval (at least once a week). This group also demonstrated their ardent desire to go to movie which was frequently hindered by economic insolvency. Excess to video cassette player has opened another window of obnoxious amusement for the children that allows them to have access to x-rated movies. Twelve participants admit that they occasionally enjoy x-rated films.

### Security, Exploitation, Physical Integrity and Abuse

Participants depict an array of violence they experience including threat, intimidation, being blamed, thrown something, pushed, grabbed, slapped, kicked, hit, hit with object, beaten up indiscriminately, choked, being stabbed with knife, pulled hair. All the participants who have been the victim of such cruelty experience multiple and repeated episode of violence. They are not the actors' rather passive subject to minimize someone's fury or

frustration. It has been the frequent case that children are severely beaten up/punished without even knowing as to why they have been tortured. Severity of such events is extremely cruel and inhumane.

**TABLE 16** *Nature and Causes of Torture encountered by the Participants*

<i>Nature</i>	<i>Causes</i>
Beaten up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entered house in order to collect scrap items</li> <li>• If demand committed salary after completion of a task</li> <li>• If refuse to pay to the criminals</li> <li>• If a portion of income is not paid to the leader of porter</li> <li>• Without any reason</li> </ul>
Verbally assaulted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did not want to do free task</li> </ul>
Threatened or Beaten up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accused of being theft</li> </ul>
Slapped and Kicked	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did not comply to do something wrong</li> </ul>
Physical and Emotional Torture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did not comply to do something free as children were at rest or doing something else</li> </ul>
Kicked out of sleeping place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because of ‘security reasons</li> <li>• Did not pay for staying overnight</li> </ul>

Other than physical abuse, a group of perpetrators inflicts pressure on children to involve in criminal activities. About a quarter (23 percent) of the participants is under continuous pressure to vow to their demands. Non compliance results in intimidation, physical harassment and threat to be killed. A child has been involved in such criminal activities whose job is pick-pocketing. Girls are often made to be the victims of sexual molestation. Participants have developed few strategies to heal their wound. They remain silent most of the time. Only in 16 percent cases children share grief with friends, discuss the matter and draw sympathy. Sometimes they complain to the local influential.

### **Expectations and Future Plan**

Sixty two percent children have a definite career dream and the other 38 percent is not sure of having any specific career dream. However, they dream for a good life. Participants blame themselves and their circumstances for unfulfilled dreams. Most of the participants blame economic hardship that has hindered their educational attainment. Some also point at family circumstances and separation between parents and its immediate impact

on them. Family culture that has put least importance on education is another point identified by the children. Even though children's dreams have been shattered and highly unlikely to come true, participants uphold the view that Phynix will emerge from the ash of their lost dreams. Thus, almost all the children are passionate to pursue new dream which have been developed from the experience of the street life.

**TABLE 17** *The Reason(s) behind Unfulfilled Aspiration*

<i>Major Reasons</i>	<i>Variables</i>
Poverty	Financial limitations, landlessness, Parents unemployment, River erosion
Skill Inefficiency	Lack of education, Lack opportunity for being trained –up for any occupations
Reluctance	Non-cooperation of Parents, Not self motivated, Low self esteem, Non cooperative attitudes of the elder brothers, Hostile attitudes of step father/mother, Misbehavior of parents
Lack of awareness	Family members are not educated, Ignorance, Parents children to earning
Absence of parents and family Environment	Early death of parents, Separation between parents, Abandoned, Parents disappearance, Constant violence/ conflict between parents and Crowded family.

## V. RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

### Recommendations

- 1) Income generating activities should be undertaken by the government and NGOs in rural areas so that migration of the poor to the cities for survival could be slowed and influx of young jobseekers in the cities may be curbed effectively.
- 2) Massive awareness programs need to be launched so that parents from the poor households can learn to value the importance of education for their children.
- 3) In many cases employers abuse and humiliate the child workers, ignore their problems and compel them to work hard without giving protection and rest. Such attitudes of the employers should change. One way of doing this is to initiate dialogue between employers and service providers.

- 4) Vocational training and/or in-job training for child workers could be arranged so that the children presently involved in hazardous jobs must have a chance to be trained for different setting.
- 5) Existing laws must be enforced in order to ensure the standard working hours for all child workers laid down by the United Nations, ILO etc. Particular attention should be paid to implement laws/legislations for preventing hazardous child labor.
- 6) Working children who want to establish their own enterprise often suffer from lack of capital and remain in their exploitative work settings for a long. Thus, microfinance program should be initiated for working and street children for alternative income generating activities.
- 7) Permanent shelters need to be established for those who do not have any place to stay overnight. These shelters should be constructed close to the areas where most of the street and working children work and live and the street and working children must have easy access to them.
- 8) Proper coordination is a necessity among all the service providers of the city area so that specific and effective programs can be launched and implemented according to the needs of the children.
- 9) Child workers have to be treated as normal human being and it is an urgent need for all of us, especially for employers' to ensure the dignity of the working and street children.
- 10) Efforts should be made to set up recreational clubs for working and street children ensuring different means of entertainment (like television, children movie, sports gears etc) for them.
- 11) A kind of union should be formed for all child workers, especially for the domestic aides for ensuring their basic rights, saving them from physical, psychological/emotional and economic exploitation.
- 12) Working and street children should be encouraged and helped to resort to legal action if necessary. Service providers should make a close relation with organizations that protect human rights and offer legal aid.
- 13) Alternative schools, specially designed to meet the needs and concerns of working children, should be established.

## **Conclusion**

It is indeed painful to note that in a country like Bangladesh where child labor in different forms is rampant may not be easy to eliminate unless



effective measures are undertaken to alleviate acute poverty especially from the rural areas. Simultaneously, we should remember that a country could be poor not only because it does not have much resources but also because the people of the country are not sufficiently mobilized in order to adopt innovative strategies. It is necessary to understand that taking care of underprivileged working and street children is in fact an investment in our vast human resources. We need to build a community which cares for all its members and the responsibility of the state in this regard must be emphasized categorically. The most important point is that we need to convince our people and mobilize the society not only to allow but emphatically demand that each child has the right for survival, and working and street children must be given the right to survive with human dignity.

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