



Prevalence of Economic Exploitations and Their Determinants Among Child Labourers in Dhaka City, Bangladesh: A Mixed-Method Study

Kazi Abusaleh¹ · M. Rezaul Islam^{2,3,4}  · Md. Mokter Ali⁵ ·
Mohammad Asif Khan⁶ · Md. Shahinuzzaman⁷ · Md. Imdadul Haque⁸

Accepted: 12 September 2021 / Published online: 27 September 2021
© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature B.V. 2021

Abstract

Taking unjust and unlawful benefits of children's labour for someone's gain or gratification can be termed as economic exploitations in child labour. The study aimed to explore the prevalence of economic exploitations and their determinants among child labourers (CLs). Labagh, Hazaribagh, and Kamrangirchar sub-districts of Dhaka district were rationally chosen as the areas of the study. The study adopted a mixed-method design, where a proportional probability sampling was used. A list of 1753 CLs comprising 543, 587 and 626 from the selected study areas was prepared through a short enumeration survey and 324 CLs were interviewed systematically from the list to collect quantitative data using a face-to-face structured interview schedule. The study also collected qualitative data through 15 in-depth case interviews (five from each sub-district). Multivariate logistic regression was employed to determine the associated factors with the economic exploitations. Thematic analysis was followed, and then a concurrent technique was employed for data analysis. Results showed that 97% of the CLs were economically exploited. The multivariate logistic regression analysis identified that the socio-economic and occupational factors were significantly associated with these economic exploitations in different variables used in the study. On the other hand, the qualitative findings showed that the CLs were physically and verbally abused, engaged long working hours with less than minimum wage, involved in various hazardous jobs while hardly received treatment costs due to occupational injury. Finding would be an important guideline for the governmental and non-governmental organizations, policymakers, human rights workers and development practitioners in the related field.

Keywords Bangladesh · Dhaka city · Child labourers · Economic exploitations

✉ Kazi Abusaleh
saleh.du_sw@yahoo.com

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

1 Introduction

Child labourers (CLs) across the world are being deprived, abused, exploited economically at work, or employed under conditions that severely affect and jeopardize their health, education, safety, morals, and dignity (UNICEF, 2014). In Bangladesh, the fundamental rights of citizens, including children, have been protected in the constitution of the country. The Government of Bangladesh has also ratified 33 conventions related to labour issues, including ILO Convention No 182 (Worst forms of Child Labour) and UN Convention on the Rights of Child (UNCRC) (Islam, 2017). Along with the ratifications of conventions, Bangladesh Government has also enacted several laws and policies after the independence of Bangladesh, including the Children Act, 1974 (repealed by Children Act, 2013), Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 (amended in 2013), and National Plan of Action to Eliminate Child Labour (2020–2025) etc., for the protection of children and their rights, and the Labour Act is considered as the most remarkable law to safeguard children's rights and welfare. According to the Children Act, 2013 in Bangladesh, all persons up to the age of 18 years shall be regarded as children.

Children in the age group of 14 and below constitute 34.64% of the total population in Bangladesh (Population and Housing Census, 2011). The matter of despair is that despite the prohibition of child labour by law, Bangladesh is the home, where more than 5% of the world's working child population reside. The CLs in Bangladesh often commonly engage in a wide variety of hazardous occupations like helpers in construction works, motor transports and motor workshops, manufacturing companies, tanneries, mining, ship breaking, also with direct contact to chemicals, pesticides, dust, and carcinogenic agents (Aktar & Abdullah, 2013; Amon et al., 2012; BBS, 2011; Kamruzzaman, 2015; Rahman et al., 2014; US Department of Labour, 2017; Zaman et al., 2014). Consequently, they face a deteriorated health and nutrition status that ultimately continues the vulnerabilities over generations in the vicious cycle (Aktar & Abdullah, 2013; Rahman et al., 2014). In some cases, children are even found to be involved in crimes of carrying arms, drugs, and other illegal types of equipment. In Bangladesh, it is estimated that around 40,000 children are alarmingly engaged in criminal activities like carrying out pistols, selling drugs and arms, and so on (Mohajan, 2014).

Poverty is the main cause of child labour in Bangladesh (Das & Mukherjee, 2007; Ray, 2004). These working children involved in informal garment production work about 16 h (US Department of Labour, 2017) and 12 to 14 h at informal economic sectors (Aktar & Abdullah, 2013). The children who work as domestic workers work from early in the morning to deep night and they do not get any leisure (Islam et al., 2014). In particular, employers recruit these children for low wages to maximize their profits (Majumdar, 2001). Children, however, are to work under such exploitations and jeopardized situations to support their families. Recent evidence shows a positive association between CLs in Bangladesh and the probability to report an injury or illness or other health problems (Ahmed & Ray, 2014). It is evidence that long strenuous working hours affect a child's

mental and physical health, social development, and general wellbeing (Zaman et al., 2014). Though Bangladesh has already initiated an appreciable number of laws and policies and ratified conventions to protect and improve the status of CLs, the country has made very steady progress in the repression of CLs due to the least application of these laws and policies.

2 Literature Review

Child labour is a work that deprives of children from their childhood and impairs their physical development, health, and education (Ahmed & Ray, 2014; Aktar & Abdullah, 2013; Karim et al., 2004). Child labour is defined as the serious violation of human rights that is conditional to the age of the child, and that includes activity that hinders children's development, denies educational opportunities, impairs their health and abstains from their movement (Chatterjee, 2011). Hazardous child labour is also a global talk as this derives from excessive workloads that extremely deteriorates the physical and mental health of children, and has adverse effects on their moral development and safety (ErdemTürkelli, 2019; ILO, 2006). Child labour is meant in this study, however, to those who are involved in strenuous work e.g., in motor workshops, garage, garments, industries, tanneries, a helper at vehicles and tea stalls and restaurants, etc. usually known as hazardous, to support themselves and/or their family. Global consensus exists that the labour of children is harmful to themselves and the country as well and that is why it is enforced that child labour should be abolished (UNICEF, 2009; Webbink et al., 2013). But still, over 152 million children are engaged in the global labour market, of which 73 million are in hazardous work (ILO, 2017). The report also sketched that girl stands for 42% of the total CLs, and Asia and the Pacific stand 3rd with 7.4% of the global total. Bangladesh is the home of 3.45 million CLs today and 1.228 million children are engaged in a hazardous job yet (Dhaka Tribune, 2016).

The term 'Economic' implies material interests that have an impact on the economy of the state, community or family while the term 'Exploitation' refers to take unfair and unjust advantage of another person through manipulation, abuse, oppression or ill-treatment (Van Der Hof et al., 2020; Warren, 2011). The notion of economic exploitation in child labour is defined as taking unjust advantage of children's work for personal profit or gain (Save the Children, 2020) and that might be through production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. Exploitative employment of children, however, refers to children who are under 18 and work in mines, factories, farms, textiles, farms, the sex trades, food service, military service, and entertainment (Chatterjee, 2011) and the usual problems associated with their exploitations are the exclusion from education, healthcare, and different important services and developmental resources (Huisman & Smits, 2015; Pinzon-Rondon et al., 2010). Employers, especially informal establishments owners, prefer to recruit children as they are cheap and easy to exploit as they oblige long working hours and poor working conditions or do not dare to protest (Norpoth et al., 2014). It has been found that CLs in Bangladesh work 12 to 14 h (Aktar & Abdullah, 2013; Zaman et al., 2014) and in some cases, 15 to 16 h (US Department, 2017) depending on the

type of work, not given proper wages and being exploited by intermediary groups/middleman (Karim et al., 2004; Aktar & Abdullah, 2013). Quattri and Watkins (2016) found that children aged between 06 and 14 years old are employed full-time and working up to 100 to 110 h per week with less than \$2 pay in a day. Employers usually pay their salary too late or in arrear to force them to persist in their job (Murray et al., 2019). Those children who are usually involved in strenuous work and seemed to receive a standard salary in comparison to their labour were chosen for this study and meant exploitative if their labour was taken through unjust, cruel and harmful treatment and remuneration was below the minimum national standard.

Karim et al. (2004) argued that CLs are comparatively more helpless and susceptible to be economically exploited in Bangladesh as most of them are from economically poor family backgrounds, and significant numbers of them have no cultivable land. Poverty, however, has been identified as the root causes of child labour in Bangladesh that make their life more helpless and this virtually leads them to sell their labour to get livelihood opportunities (Aktar & Abdullah, 2013; Das & Mukherjee, 2007; Fetuga et al., 2005; Kamruzzaman, 2015; Khanam, 2005; Norpoth et al., 2014; Ray, 2004; Salmon, 2005; Zaman et al., 2014). Other causes of child labour include the debt of parents, unemployment or low income of family members, the sudden demise of the wage earners of the family, loss of livelihood due to high natural calamities, e.g., cyclones, floods, storms, droughts, river erosion etc. Boys in Bangladesh hold most of the jobs in industry while, girls have their jobs at the household level (French, 2010; US Department, 2017). Consequently, child domestic workers, mainly girls, experience physical and sexual abuse within the household (Islam et al., 2014; US Department, 2017). Children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds also enter into the sex industry in Bangladesh. Along with trafficking, their family members sell them to brokers, being unaware of the real situation or even being aware of prioritizing financial gain over the welfare of the victim (Murray et al., 2019). Inhuman/brutal torture of CLs, however, constantly happens to CLs by their employers for breaking glass/plates at home (for domestic workers) or hotels/restaurants and for anything wrong at work (The Financial Express, 2020). Medical benefits and medication are rarely allowed to them (Aktar & Abdullah, 2013). They rarely get leisure in their working period (Islam et al., 2014) and the long strenuous working hours impact their physical and mental health (Mahmod et al., 2016; Zaman et al., 2014). As Kim et al. (2020) and Das and Mukherjee (2011) showed different dimensions of the economic exploitations and deprivation of the CLs in India; and Pinilla-Roncancio and Silva (2018) in Angola. Though child labour has a positive impact on the living standards of families (Ahmed & Ray, 2014; Smith, 1999), there is a strong theoretical and empirical association between economic miseries and the risks and shocks that pose children to sell their labour as well (ILO, 2013).

The government of Bangladesh has ratified 33 conventions related to labour issues (NCLEP, 2010) and enacted an appreciable number of laws and policies since after independence in 1971, e.g., Children Act 1974 (repealed by Children Act 2013), National Children Policy 1994, Birth and Death Registration Act 2004, Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 (amended in 2013), National Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010, The Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking

Act 2012, and National Plan of Action to Eliminate Child Labour (2020–2025) etc., for the protection of children and their rights. Though Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 is the consolidation of 25 labour laws and has incorporated significant aspects of child labour rights, the major deficit of the law is the exclusion of informal sectors (agriculture, domestic work and small-scale family businesses) from the scope of application that paves the route of exploitation of CLs (Norpoth et al., 2014). On the contrary, though adolescents (children aged 15 to 18) are allowed to work for certain hours under the labour act, no wages have been indicated. On the contrary, National Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010 said to make interim arrangements to fix national minimum wages for children and adolescents employed in formal and informal sectors until entire elimination from Bangladesh (NCLEP, 2010), this yet to be fixed that paves the way of extreme exploitations of child labourers. In general, despite these ratified and initiated laws, conventions and protocols to protect and improve the status of CLs, the country has been making steady progress in the repression of CLs and their situation in Bangladesh is quite deadly. On the other hand, considerable numbers of studies have been carried out in Bangladesh marking the nature and trend of CLs, their working conditions, and opportunities, the causes of their involvement in labour, and existed legal measures to protect their rights (Ahmed & Ray, 2014; Ahsan, 2011; IREWOC, 2010; Kamruzzaman, 2015; Norpoth et al., 2014; Salmon, 2005; Sheikh & Prodhan, 2013). Nonetheless, to date, very little is known regarding economic exploitations and their determinants and severity in real life, even though this has been considered as a prioritized topic area of SDGs for Bangladesh. Considering the gap in the literature and as a promising signatory country of SDG, therefore, the study has been carried out in Dhaka city to explore the prevalence of economic exploitation, its severity and determining factors among the CLs in Bangladesh.

3 Data and Methods

3.1 Research Approach and Research Methods

The study employed a mixed-method approach where quantitative data were collected through a cross-sectional survey method and qualitative data through in-depth case interviews. This approach was conveniently used in contemporary similar studies (notably Islam et al., 2014; Rahman et al., 2014; Sheikh & Prodhan, 2013). Besides, this kind of qualitative data provided a better understanding of the economic exploitations, their determinants and forms of CLs. The study selected Lalbagh, Hazaribagh, and Kamrangirchar sub-districts of Dhaka district as these areas predominately belong to numerous motor transport stations, and service centres, motor workshops, tanneries, and informal local industries, where thousands of CLs are engaged in hazardous works (Caleo et al., 2018; IREWOC, 2010).

3.2 Data Collection Methods and Data Collection Instruments

Quantitative data were collected through a face-to-face interview, where a structured interview schedule was used with a numerical value. On the other hand, the qualitative data were collected by using an in-depth case interview method, where a guideline was employed for such data collection.

3.3 The Sample and Respondents

The sample size was calculated using the sample size formula, $n = \frac{z^2 pq}{d^2} [\times 1.5$ (design effect)] based on a 95% confidence interval and the prevalence (4.09%) of overall current child labourers in Dhaka city (BBS, 2015). Thus, the calculated sample size was 293. A 10% non-response of 293 was anticipated, and therefore, 324 participants were finally selected as participants for the quantitative survey, who met the pre-defined inclusion criteria: both boys and girls; aged between 7 and 17 years; engaged in various hazardous and some cases, non-hazardous jobs as well, like jobs in the motor workshop, garage, industries, tanneries, a helper at vehicles and tea stalls, and restaurants.

Before data collection, a short enumeration survey was adopted that identified a list of 1753 CLs from the study areas, then used as a sampling frame. The entire list of CLs was separated following 543, 587, and 626 respectively for the three selected areas that were then used as three single sampling units of CLs, and then from these 324 participants (108 from each area) were randomly selected systematically. One in every fourth CLs was chosen as a participant (Haque et al., 2019). Though almost one-tenth of the respondents were not available during the data collection period, the next immediate participant in the frame was selected to avoid missing data. Additionally, a total of 15 in-depth interviews (5 from each sub-district) were conducted among the CLs using the purposive sampling technique (Fig. 1). The rationale to select these 15 cases to consider manpower, time and financial matters. We also believe that these numbers are adequate to get detail contextual qualitative data for this study.

Respondents' socio-demographic data (Table 1) show that 83% were boys and 17% girls, where the highest 54% were between 13 and 17 years and 46% were 7 to 12 years. Nearly 63% were primary incomplete and the rest 37% were primary pass and above. There was a significant association ($P < 0.038$) between education and the economic exploitations of CLs. The number of non-earning members was found highest more than three members nearly among 88% of the households, and the households with less than 03 members of non-earning members were found among the rest 12% only. Data showed that only 15% of the respondents' monthly family income was Taka 16,000 and more (US\$192), the national average monthly income of household as per HIE Survey 2016, while the rest 85% of the households were found to earn less and/or least than the national average of household income. However, among the total CLs interviewed under the depth case interviews showed that 09 of them were male and 06 were female, where the

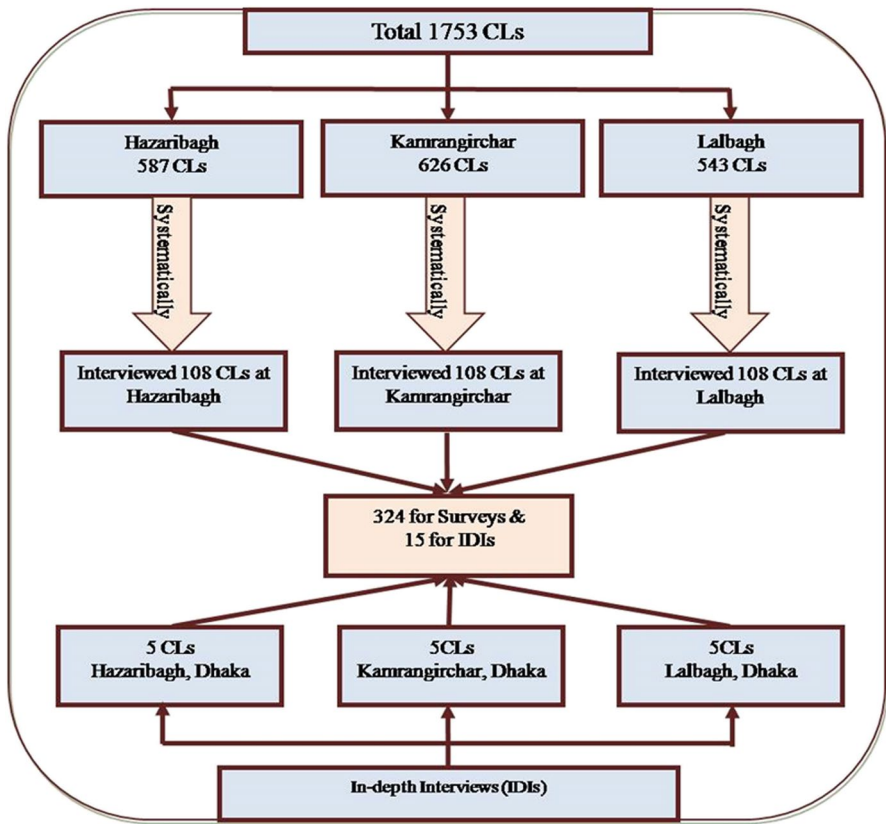


Fig. 1 Sampling strategy of the study. Source: Developed by authors

highest number (08) were between 13 and 17 and the rest 07 were between 07 and 12 years old.

3.4 Data Measurement and Data Analysis

The study used some socio-demographic indicators/variables of CLs such as age, sex, education, reasons for leaving school, number of non-earning family members, family income, working experience, and their decision-makers to be involved at work, etc. To calculate the prevalence of economic exploitations among the CLs, minimum wage >Taka. 8000 (>US\$95) suggested by Bangladesh Wage Earners Welfare Board (WEWB) was used as a standard labour wage. That is, those who were engaged full time at their works receiving >Taka. 8000 (>US\$95) were considered to be economically exploited. Field notes and a tape recorder were used for qualitative data. The research team edited and manually coded the raw data, and rearranged it, and the themes and relevant quotations/verbatim were recorded to

Table 1 Sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents

Demographic Characteristics	f (%)	Prevalence of economic exploitations, total respondents = 324		X ²	P value
		Exploited (%)	Not exploited (%)		
Sex					
Boys	268 (82.7)	258 (96.3)	10 (3.7)	0.53	0.286
Girls	56 (17.3)	55 (98.2)	01 (1.8)		
Age					
07–12 years	148 (45.7)	145 (98)	03 (02)	1.55	0.118
13–17 years	176 (54.3)	168 (95.5)	08 (4.5)		
Education					
Below primary	204 (62.96)	194 (95.1)	10 (4.9)	3.81	0.038
Primary and above	120 (37.04)	119 (99.2)	01 (0.8)		
Number of non-earning family members					
< 03 members	40 (12.3)	39 (97.5)	01 (2.5)	0.111	0.368
> 03 members	284 (87.7)	274 (96.5)	10 (3.5)		
Family income**					
< BDT 16,000	274 (84.6)	265 (96.7)	09 (3.3)	0.066	0.295
> BDT 16,000	50 (15.4)	48 (96)	02 (04)		

Fishers exact X² test was used as some of the expected cell value was found < 5

**Family income of the participants was categorized: Taka < 16,000, and Taka > 16,000, as Taka 15,945 was found an average monthly household income according to HIE Survey 2016 (BBS, 2019)

visualise the qualitative data. Afterwards, the data were translated into English and thematic analysis was performed (Abusaleh & Islam, 2019; Haque et al., 2018).

The study used the SPSS (version 26) for data analysis. A multivariate logistic regression was done to determine the associated factors with economic exploitation. ‘economically exploited at work’ was a dependent variable and socio-familial and occupational factors were used as independent variables while considering a 95% Confidence Interval (CI) for each category. Thematic analysis with some sub-headings was used, and then a concurrent technique was employed for data analysis. Finally, both types of data were triangulated to provide rich data analysis. This triangulation method was very useful to understand the contextual perspective of economic exploitations on one hand and the numerical and understandable analysis on the other. This study argues that a few studies are conducted using a mixed-method approach on the economic exploitations of child labourers, and it is particularly true in the Bangladesh context.

3.5 Research Ethics

There is no ethical body in Bangladesh that can approve the research ethics of the study. However, the study took permission from the parents of the children, and their employers as well for those who live at their workplace. Children’s

verbal consent was also taken before data collection. The research team clearly explained the research objectives and benefits of the study to the child workers, their parents/guardians, and their employers, if necessary.

4 Results

4.1 Reasons for Being Child Labourers and Their Working Environment

Poverty has been identified as one of the main causes of child labour. Findings showed that the main reason for leaving school and joining the workforce by CLs was due to poverty e.g., loss of land due to riverbank erosion, parental unemployed status or sudden demise of the wage earners members, debt back at home, etc., which constituted almost half of the total respondents (48%) (Table 2).

From the in-depth case interview, an 11-year old girl, working as a domestic worker, stated:

I left my study at a junior level due to the inability of my parents to bear my educational expenses. I cherish it if I were in school like my other friends.

Another respondent, a boy, 12 years, working in a motor workshop, narrated:

Table 2 Reasons for leaving education, and the current working conditions of CLs

Reasons for leaving education and joining in workforce	f (%)	Prevalence of economic exploitations, total respondents = 324		X ²	P value
		Exploited (%)	Not exploited (%)		
Reasons for leaving schools					
Poverty	155 (47.8)	149 (96.1)	6 (3.9)	0.205	0.217
Lack of awareness/cultural attitudes/others	169 (52.2)	164 (97)	5 (3)		
Decisions makers to be involved in child labour					
Family members	158 (48.8)	156 (98.7)	02 (1.3)	4.263	0.030
Relatives/employers	166 (51.2)	157 (94.6)	09 (5.4)		
Working experiences					
< 03 years	65 (20.1)	64 (98.5)	01 (1.5)	0.855	0.034
> 03 years	259 (79.9)	249 (96.1)	10 (3.9)		
Daily working hours					
< 08 h	47 (14.5)	47 (100)	00 (00)	1.932	0.173
> 08 h	277 (85.5)	266 (96)	11 (4)		
Whether received leisure during their working period					
No	219 (67.8)	209 (95.4)	10 (4.6)	2.826	0.068
Yes	105 (32.4)	104 (99)	01 (01)		

Fishers exact X² test was used as some of the expected cell value was found < 5

Due to river erosion, we have lost our house and moved to Dhaka with my family. To survive, I had to leave the study and chose to work in this motor workshop.

A girl, 12 years old, working in a bag producing factory during the in-depth interview said:

My father has already been died leaving one younger brother and an elder sister with a dependent older mother. After the demise of my father, there were no earning sources in my family. Hence the only option remained, with the suggestion of my uncle, I had to leave school, even my village too, to join this bag making factory.

The other reasons for leaving education were related to lack of awareness/negative cultural attitudes e.g. the failures in the exam, the force of parents/relatives, and self-reluctance. Forhad (pseudonym), a nine-year-old boy, said:

Though my parents do nothing and have no income, we have five katha (approximately 7.5 decimal) land with a semi-pucca house from which we earn about Taka 18,000 (US\$216) and lead our family... Though I do not have a monetary problem, I left my study due to my self-reluctance... I do not find interest in studying.

Persons involved in decision-making to engage in child labour were found to have a substantial association with economic exploitations of CLs ($P < 0.030$). It was found that relatives or employers usually persuade the parents or the legal guardians to involve children at work (51%) which was found to pave the route of wage exploitation compare to those whose decisions were made by family members. A boy, 13 years old, during an in-depth case interview, said:

Due to economic hardship and my parents' request, my employer recruited me... I work in this tannery till very morning tonight, but I am not paid the least (receives Taka 3500, US\$42) comparable to my other colleagues.

The majority of the CLs (80%) have been working for more than three years and their working experiences were found to be significantly associated with economic exploitations ($P < 0.034$). Nearly 86% of the children work more than eight hours in a day, usually between 11 to 13 h per day, and more than two-thirds of them (68%) mentioned that they did not receive any leisure during their working period (Table 2). Sakib (pseudonym), one of the boy respondents, 13 years, who works as a Laguna helper stated:

I join in my duty at 6 am and come back at 9 or 10 pm. In between the whole time I get an hour break for lunch and also enjoy serial maintaining sessions.

Another respondent, 15 years old boy, working at a restaurant, said:

I have been working at this restaurant since May 2018. I usually start my work from 6.00 to 6.30 am and end at 09:30 to 10:00 pm. There is no rest

period during my working hour. I usually feel pressure at breakfast, lunch and dinner time when the number of customers remains so high.

4.2 Prevalence and the Means of Economic Exploitations

The study revealed that the highest majority (96.6%) of the CLs were economically exploited (received < Taka 8000; which is below the minimum standard wage structure of the county). Only 3.4% of CLs, who were mainly involved as helpers in Leguna (human hauliers) or labour in mechanical workshops, said to receive minimum wage. During an in-depth case interview, a 10-year-old female respondent, working in a mosquito coil producing factory, said:

My employer is a good person who pays me Taka 2000 (US\$24) every month in remuneration for my work. The money is received by my mother and spent on household maintenance.

Another respondent, Robin (pseudonym), an 11-year old boy, laguna (human haulier) helper stated:

As a Leguna (human haulier) helper, I have to hang throughout the roads leaving myself at risk at every moment. I work 12 to 14 h per day and do not receive any payment while my Leguna is in maintenance or with repairmen. I earn only Taka 250 (US\$3) per day instead of my work.

CLs were asked whether they receive their salary in time, the result showed that more than two-thirds (68%) of them stated not to receive their salary regularly. Around three-fourths (73%) of them reported that they receive their payment in fractions (Fig. 2). The study also recorded various types of economic punishments that

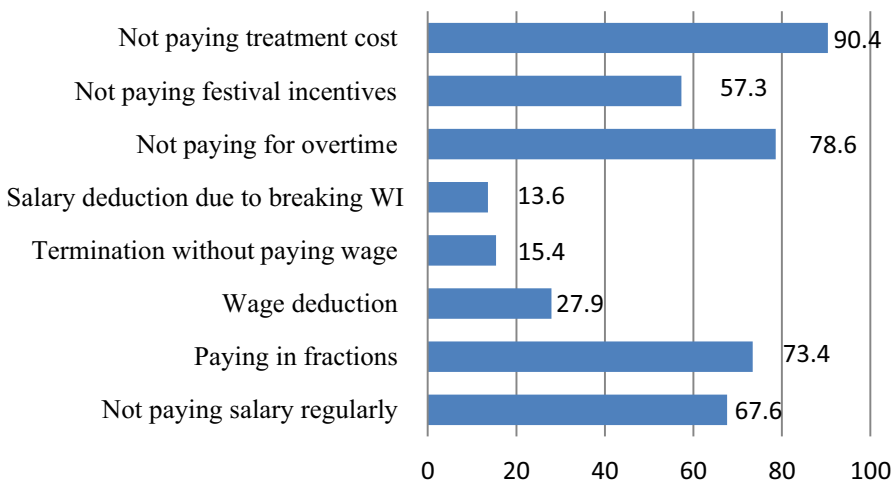


Fig. 2 Means of economic exploitations

CLs faced during their working hours such as wage deduction (28%), termination from the job without paying wage (15%), salary deduction due to breaking working instruments (14%), etc. The majority (78%) of CLs reported that they do not receive any payment for their extra service hours (Fig. 2). Girl, 15 years, working in a workshop, during an interview stated:

I am to hear doggerel speeches if I go to work late. In case of absence or failure to fill up the production target, wage deduction is the most common form of punishment here. In some cases, threats are given (by employers/managers) to terminate the job.

Another boy labour, 13 years, working as human haulier helper, said:

Once, I fail to attend my job due to my illness for a week. Afterwards, while I deem to attend my job again, my *Ostad* (boss) denies and ask me to manage another job. I request him to say that I do not have alternative options to manage a job but he does not hear my voice and starts to use slang language.

A 15-year-old labour, working at a restaurant, stated during the interview:

Though I work around 13 h per day, I am not paid any extra money than what my employer promised in the beginning. Even I am paid my salary in fraction fearing that if I leave my job at a sudden!

Around six out of ten CLs said that they were not paid any money during the annual festival. The highest majority of the participants (90%) stated that they did not even receive any treatment cost from their employer if they would get injured at workplaces (Fig. 2). A 13-year old boy worker (human haulier) said:

I never know any holiday in my job, even while I remain sick. I am to face the hot sun on sunny days, cooler environment in the winter season during my work. I usually face fever and cough... It is unimaginable! to get any treatment cost from my boss.

Boy, 14 years, working in a mechanical workshop, said:

I work in a mechanical workshop for the last five years with physical risk in every moment. I receive Taka. 5000 (US\$60) for my work. In my working tenure, many times I was severely injured but no compensation I had from my malik (Employer) side... Even I never know about any allowance during the festival!

4.3 Risk Factors Associated with Economic Exploitations

From the bivariate analysis, it was found that age, sex, current living place, decision-makers to be involved in child labour, and working experiences of the CLs were all associated with their economic exploitations (Table 3). Multivariate analysis after adjusting for possible confounders identified some factors to be significantly higher in increasing the exploitations among the CLs. Participants' younger age (7–12 years) (OR 2.3, 95% CI 0.53–8.96) were more than two times likely to be

Table 3 Adjusted risk factors associated with economic exploitations of CLs

Characteristics/Risk factors		Multivariate analysis OR (95% CI)	P-value
Age	7–12 years	2.3 (0.53–8.96)	0.023
	13–17 years	1	
Sex	Boys	1	0.47
	Girls	2.20 (0.27–17.85)	
Educational status	Primary and above	1	0.031
	Below primary	0.12 (0.02–1.29)	
Family income	> Taka 16,000	1	0.954
	< Taka 16,000	1.21 (0.21–5.10)	
Current living place	With parents/relatives	1	0.460
	Working stations	1.67 (0.43–6.44)	
Decision-makers to be involved in child labour	Family members	1	0.037
	Relatives/Influence of employers	5.22 (1.10–24.77)	
Nature of jobs	Non-hazardous	1	0.95
	Hazardous	1.04 (0.29–3.68)	
Working experiences	> 3 years	1	0.004
	< 3 years	2.57 (0.28–19.24)	
Never heard about any child labour laws	No	1	0.850
	Yes	1.23 (0.14–10.66)	

exploited compared to those aged 13–17 years. Girls (OR 2.20, 95% CI 0.27–17.85) were found to be significantly prone to be economically exploited than their boy counterparts. In an in-depth case interview, a 16-year old girl, working in a local garment, said:

When my father left us, inevitably, I had to engage in this job consulting with my mother... My close relatives also pushed me continuously to be here. My aunt works at a local garment and earns Taka. 8000 (US\$95) per month. When she observed that we are in an economic crisis, she assured me to manage a job for me. Finally, she managed this job for me. I am paid, Taka. 4000 (US\$47.50) (though the position salary usually ranges between Taka. 7000 to 10000 (US\$83 to 119)). In some cases, I just face needle attacks at my finger. They use slang language in case of late and cuts my wage if I fail to fill up the production target.

Another 10-year-old girl child, working as domestic labour, narrated:

I started working at a house last nine months. I would do every work of the household from washing dishes to cleaning the floor to coating. My employer started beating me on the fourth day of my work. Even I was not allowed to contact my parents and she (household head) did not provide me with enough food... No payment was made to my parents even.

The odds of economic exploitations were likely to double among those CLs, who lived at their working stations (OR 1.67, 95% CI 0.43–6.44) in comparison to those who live at their home or with relatives. Boy, 16 years, working in iron-case making factory staying at his workstation, said:

Once, my boss used unutterable slang in the name of my parents, and then I was insisted on continuing my job despite my sheer lack of concentration... That very day I cut my finger during my work. He seriously scolded me for the injuries. Harshly, after a few days, while my regular performance dropped down, and my salary was cut off for what I did earlier. He (my employer) very often beats me for silly reasons too. I am often deprived of giving my regular meals here as well... I cannot even share these issues with my family members as they (parents) do not want to hear.

Children whose decisions were made by the influences of relatives or employers for involving in child labouring were found to be more than five times higher to face the economic exploitations (OR 5.22, 95% CI 1.10–24.77) versus those whose decisions were made by their family members. CLs with less working experience (<3 years) were likely more than double riskier (OR 2.57, 95% CI 0.28–19.24) compared to those, who had more than three years of experience. A 12-year-old boy, working in a motor workshop, said during the interview:

As river erosion had taken everything of our life and made us evacuee, my parents moved to Dhaka, and my uncle (present employer) said my father those days to make me engage at his workshop. I started to work in this motor workshop under the surveillance of an electric machine. I very often face heat at my hand, and blister at hand is a common injury here. Though I work for a long, he does not pay my money properly saying that his business is not running well.

Another respondent, a 14- year old girl, working a plastic factory narrated:

My parents managed this job requesting an uncle. I do not face any injury except the slang from my employer here. My employer pays me Taka 4,000 (US\$48) per month (senior colleagues usually carry Taka 8000 to 12000 for the same work) and the money is received by my mother and spent on household maintenance.

The multivariate analysis showed that many other factors such as educational status, family income, and the nature of jobs were found to be insignificantly associated with the risk of economic exploitations of CLs (Table 3).

5 Discussion

The main objective of the study was to investigate the prevalence of economic exploitations and its determinants among CLs in Bangladesh. The study used a mixed-method approach, where a face-to-face structured interview schedule was

used under the survey method and a separate in-depth case interview guideline was used to collect qualitative data. A limitation of the study was the number of participants ($N=324$) across the three urban areas; this, however, has been compensated by information obtained from 15 in-depth case interviews. Also, due to the higher rate of migration/relocation among CLs, the study could not reach some participants and had to employ the next one from the sampling frame. Further, the cross-section design of the study did not permit the reflection of the casual relationship, rather limited to identify and analyse the adjusted associations (Haque et al., 2020). Despite these limitations, the study is potentially the first to document the prevalence of economic exploitations and its determinants and various means of exploitations among CLs in Bangladesh.

The study reported that the highest majority of the CLs (97%) were economically exploited in their workplaces, as they do not receive a minimum wage (Taka 8000 (US\$95) per month) in correspondence to their works. Similar findings were documented in two other studies carried out in Latin America, and India. In Latin America, 64% of CLs were found to be exploited economically (Pinzon-Rondon et al., 2010) and in India, it was reported that 96% of CLs were economically exploited (Mohapatra & Dash, 2011). The qualitative findings also showed that almost all CLs received less than Taka 8000 (US\$95). However, the possible reasons for exploitations may include that children are considered as the last option at the households, and the guardian of CLs have nothing to do, while exploited, and the employers know that poverty compels them to work (Das & Mukherjee, 2007; Kamruzzaman, 2015; Salmon, 2005).

Though the study did not find any association between the level of education of the children and their family income with the economic exploitations of CLs, this study distinctively identified various familial, socio-economic and occupational factors to be associated with the economic exploitation. From the bivariate and multivariate analysis after adjusting for possible confounders, it was observed that the likelihood of economic exploitations among the participants aged 07–12 (OR 2.3, 95% CI 0.53–8.96) was more than two times higher than their senior counterparts who were aged 13–17 years old. This finding is aligned with other studies as well. It was recorded that children are to work long strenuous hours, deprived of their basic needs, face deteriorated health and nutrition status, and all these things are significantly higher to the junior group due to their age (Blanco & Valdivia, 2006; Islam et al., 2014; Kamruzzaman, 2015; Zaman et al., 2014). Similarly, the qualitative findings of the study showed that children of lower age feel more physical as well as mental stress with their workload.

From the bivariate and multivariate test (adjusted), the study also examined that girls (OR 2.20, 95% CI 0.27–17.85) were found to become more likely to be economically exploited at their workplace compared to boys. Other studies also showed that girl's labour paves the way to heightened susceptibility to economic, sexual, and other hidden forms of abuse (UNICEF, 2009; US Department of Labour, 2017) with restricted pay and menial works (ILO, 2009). The potential reasons are that they start working at an earlier age than boys (Islam, 2010) and they involve in less visible forms of works (ILO, 2013). This study also reported that the odds of economic exploitations among the children living at their working place (OR 1.67, 95%

CI 0.43–6.44) were reported around two times compared to those who lived with their parents or relatives. Qualitative findings also substantiated this finding as it was found that the majority of the CLs get abused by their employer at either their workplace or their (employer's) residence.

The study distinguishably recorded that CLs were found to be more than five times riskier (OR 5.22, 95% CI 1.10–24.77) at economic exploitations, when their decision to be involved in child labouring was made by the relatives and/or by the influence of employers versus whose decision was made by their family members. The study further revealed that CLs with less working experience (< 3 years) (OR 2.57, 95% CI 0.28–19.24) were significantly prone to be the victim of economic exploitations compared to those who had more than three years of working experience. Though the qualitative finding substantiated that children with less experience receive a minimal salary, face more hazards at their work, and are more prone to physical as well as other forms of abuses, the exploitation, though exists, was not shown so high with the decision of involvement at labour and/or job arrangement that made by others except for family members.

It is evident from the findings that CLs exploitations are so high in Bangladesh and the most relevant reason is the less enforcement of existed laws and policies, and the ratified international instruments. The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 even cannot be applied as the law does not bind the informal sector, while one-third of the child labourers are involved in the informal hazardous sector (ILO, 2017). Employers understand their vulnerable situation, ideally their need, and take the fullest advantage to maximize their profits. Even the social protection system in Bangladesh is not so strong that could ideally shield them from selling their labour.

6 Conclusions

The study identified that the highest majority (97%) of the CLs are being economically exploited by receiving salaries less than the country's minimum standard wage, which is alarming. Besides, a good portion of the child labourers reported they did not receive their salary regularly, received that often infraction. They also had to face various forms of economic exploitations due to their discriminating occupational life such as wage deduction for a silly reason, termination from the job without paying wage, receiving no payment for their extra service hours, and rarely receiving annual festival incentives. Factors like the age of the CLs, their sex, current living place, decision-makers in involving children in labouring, and working experiences are significantly associated with economic exploitations. If child labour is not addressed seriously by the authorities, it may function as the emerging threat towards achieving the sustainable development of the country.

The study findings have strong policy implications. Finding is evidence of the violation of the commitments of the ILO conventions, CRC, 8th Five Year Plan (2020–2025), child laws and policies in Bangladesh. The finding is also important to implement SDGs in Bangladesh particularly Goal 1 (No Poverty, Targets 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4.), Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), Goal 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 5 (Gender Equality), Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic

Growth), and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequality). To consider the economic exploitations and their determinants among the CLs, this study provides the following suggestions for the wellbeing of the CLs:

- As poverty is the main cause of child labour in Bangladesh and the families of CLs perceive them as a source of income for survival, the social protection system for the child labourers and their families need to be ensured adequately.
- As almost all of the CLs reportedly economically exploited at their workplace even though pursuing their jobs more than eight hours work a day; national minimum wage and working hour criteria for CLs need to address through appropriate laws.
- The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 (amended in 2013) needs to be amended including the provision of applicability of the act in the informal economic sector of Bangladesh. Besides, though the Bangladesh government has initiated an appreciable number of laws, policies, guidelines, rules, and ratified international instruments, the proper applications of these laws and instruments with the highest compliance need to be ensured.
- As a part of community intervention, anti-child labourers campaign; posters, stickers, or games related to trafficking, slavery, economic exploitations, sexual abuses, and the efficacy of decision making by family members rather than others may be useful to create awareness among the mass people.

Acknowledgements The authors would acknowledge three anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions. The authors also acknowledge all of the child labourers who participated in the study.

Author Contributions All authors except the second author were involved in study design, data analysis, data interpretation, literature search and writing the paper and had final approval of the submitted and published versions. The second author has revised the full paper according to both reviewers' comments. He has reviewed a substantial amount of literature for the conceptual framework, methodology and discussion section. He has done the language editing of the paper. None of the authors has any competing interests in the manuscript.

Data Availability Data will be shared upon request.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval There is no ethical body in Bangladesh. However, the informed consent was taken from the children, parents/guardians and owners of the.

References

Abusaleh, K., & Islam, M. R. (2019). Traditional practices of Panchayat system among ex-enclave dwellers in Bangladesh. *GeoJournal*, 84(3), 657–669.


- Ahmed, S., & Ray, R. (2014). Health consequences of child labour in Bangladesh. *Demographic Research*, 30, 111–150.
- Ahsan, T. (2011). *The status of un-served children in education: Working children in Bangladesh*. Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE).
- Aktar, S., & Abdullah, S. M. (2013). Protecting child labour in Bangladesh: Domestic laws versus international instruments. *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology*, 10(1), 153–172.
- Amon, J. J., Buchanan, J., Cohen, J., & Kippenberg, J. (2012). Child labour and environmental health: Government obligations and human rights. *International Journal of Paediatrics*, 2012, 1–8.
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2011). *Population and housing census 2011*. Statistics and Informatics Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
- BBS. (2015). *Child labour survey Bangladesh 2013*. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Statistics and Informatics Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
- BBS. (2019). *The household income and expenditure survey 2016*. Statistics and Informatics Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
- Blanco, F., & Valdivia, C. A. (2006). Child labour in Venezuela: children's vulnerability to macroeconomic shocks. Understanding Children's Work Discussion Paper.
- Caleo, G., Dada, M., Gray, N., Sangma, M., Scozzato, L., Bangs, G. W., & Baset, K. U. (2018). Assessing the feasibility of preventing injury risks and improving work safety amongst factory workers in an urban slum: a participatory before-and-after intervention study. *Medecins Sans Frontiers*.
- Chatterjee, D. K. (Ed.). (2011). *Encyclopedia of global justice: A-I*. Springer Science & Business Media.
- Das, S., & Mukherjee, D. (2007). Role of women in schooling and child labour decision: The case of urban boys in India. *Social Indicators Research*, 82(3), 463–486.
- Das, S., & Mukherjee, D. (2011). Measuring deprivation due to child work and child labour: A study for Indian children. *Child Indicators Research*, 4(3), 453–466.
- Dhaka Tribune. (2016). *Child Labour Still Rising*. Available at: <http://archive.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2016/jan/19/child-labour-still-rising>. Accessed on 13 June 2020.
- ErdemTürkelli, G. (2019). Eradicating child labor: Ending economic exploitation of children as an objective of sustainable development. In Filho W. Leal, A. Azul, L. Brandli, P. Özuyar, & T. Wall (Eds.), *Decent work and economic growth. Encyclopedia of the UN sustainable development goals*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71058-7_3-2
- Fetuga, B. M., Njokama, F. O., & Olowu, A. O. (2005). Prevalence, types and demographic features of child labour among school children in Nigeria. *BMC International Health and Human Rights*, 5(1), 1–7.
- French, J. L. (2010). Children's labour market involvement, household work, and welfare: A Brazilian case study. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 92(1), 63–78.
- Haque, M. I., Chowdhury, A. A., Hassan, M. S., Khan, H. T. A., & Harun, M. G. D. (2019). Prevailing familial, social and cultural obstacles in keeping tobacco free homes in urban areas of Bangladesh: A mixed method study. *PLoS ONE*, 14(8), e0220777.
- Haque, M. I., Chowdhury, A. A., Shahjahan, M., & Harun, M. G. D. (2018). Traditional healing practices in rural Bangladesh: A qualitative investigation. *BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 18(62), 1–15.
- Haque, M. I., Ullah, A. N. Z., Akter, T., Chowdhury, A. A., Al Mamun, A., Tamanna, T. I., & Harun, M. G. D. (2020). Familial and socio-cultural barriers in maintaining tobacco-free homes in Bangladesh: A comparative cross-sectional study. *BMJ open*, 10(12), e039787.
- Huisman, J., & Smits, J. (2015). Keeping children in school: Effects of household and context characteristics on school dropout in 363 districts of 30 developing countries. *SAGE Open*, 15(4), 2158244015609666.
- ILO. (2006). The end of child labour: Within reach. *Global Report under the Follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*.
- ILO. (2009). *Give girls a chance: Tackling child labour, a key to the future*. International Labour Office.
- ILO. (2013). *World report on child labour: Economic vulnerability, social protection and the flight against child labour*. International Labour Organization.
- ILO. (2017). *Global estimates of child labour: Results and trends, International Labour Organization, 2012–2016*.
- IREWOC. (2010). *The worst forms of child labour in Asia, main findings from Bangladesh and Nepal*. Plan Netherlands.
- Islam, B. E., Mahmud, K., & Rahman, N. (2014). Situation of child domestic workers in Bangladesh. *Global Journal of Management and Business Research*, 13(7), 25–34.

- Islam, M. R. (2010). *The situation of domestic child labourers in Dhaka city*. Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum.
- Islam, M. R. (2017). Population shifting and risks of street children in Asia: Possible social work interventions. *Global Social Welfare*, 4(3), 149–157.
- Kamruzzaman, M. (2015). Child victimization at working places in Bangladesh. *American Journal of Applied Psychology*, 4(6), 146–159.
- Karim, A. Z., Islam, M. Z. A., & Farrukh, M. O. (2004). *Baseline surveys on child labour situation in bidi industry in Kushtia, Tangail, and Rangpur districts*. International Labour Office.
- Khanam, R. (2005). Child labour in Bangladesh: Trends, patterns and policy options. *Asian Profile*, 34(6), 593–608.
- Kim, J., Olsen, W., & Wiśniowski, A. (2020). A Bayesian estimation of child labour in India. *Child Indicators Research*, 13(6), 1975–2001.
- Labour Act. (2006). *The Bangladesh labour cct (XLII of 2006)*. Dhaka: Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Available at https://www.dpp.gov.bd/upload_file/gazettes/14212_75510.pdf. Accessed on 07 June 2021.
- Mahmod, N. A. K. N., Salleh, M. C. M., Muhammad, A. A., & Mohd, A. (2016). A study on child labour as a form of child abuse in Malaysia. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 6(7), 525–530.
- Majumdar, M. (2001). Child labour as a human security problem: Evidence from India. *Oxford Development Studies*, 29(3), 279–304.
- Mohajan, H. (2014). Child rights in Bangladesh. *Journal of Social Welfare and Human Rights*, 02(01), 207–238.
- Mohapatra, S., & Dash, B. (2011). Child labour- a product of socio-economic problem for India, findings and preventives-a case of Bhubabaneswar (A State Capital of India). *Educational Research*, 2(6), 1199–1209.
- Murray, D. F., Themimulle, S., & Sadat, F. A. (2019). *Study on modern slavery in Bangladesh*. Development Alternatives Incorporated (DAI).
- NCLEP. (2010). *National child labour elimination policy 2010*, Ministry of Labour and Employment Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Available at <https://rb.gov/qpdwko>. Accessed on 07 June 2021.
- Norpoth, J., Groß, L., & Aktar, R. (2014). *Child labour in Bangladesh-an analysis of gaps and weaknesses of the existing legal framework*. Institute of Development Research and Development Policy.
- Pinilla-Roncancio, M., & Silva, R. (2018). Children in Angola: Poverty, deprivation and child labour. *Child Indicators Research*, 11(3), 981–1005.
- Pinzon-Rondon, A. M., Botero, J. C., Benson, L., Briceno-Ayala, L., & Kanamori, M. (2010). Workplace abuse and economic exploitation of children working in the streets of Latin American cities. *International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health*, 16(2), 150–157.
- Population and Housing Census (2011). *Population and housing Census 2011*. Dhaka: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBA).
- Quattri, M., & Watkins, K. (2016). *Child labour and education: A survey of slum settlements in Dhaka*. Overseas Development Institute.
- Rahman, M. N., Mistry, S. K., & Hossain, M. I. (2014). Nutritional status of child labourers in Dhaka city of Bangladesh: Findings from a cross sectional study. *Bangladesh Journal of Child Health*, 38(3), 130–136.
- Ray, R. (2004). Child labour: A survey of selected Asian countries. *Asian-Pacific Economic Literature*, 18(2), 1–18.
- Salmon, C. (2005). Child labour in Bangladesh: Are children the last economic resource of the household? *Journal of Developing Societies*, 21(1–2), 33–54.
- Save the Children. (2020). *Economic exploitation*. Save the Children's Resource Centre, Available at <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/keyword/economic-exploitation>. Accessed on 13 March 2021.
- Sheikh, M. M. R., & Proadhan, N. (2013). The socio-economic deprivation of the child labourer: Bangladesh perspective. *Journal of International Social Issues*, 01(1), 45–59.
- Smith, J. P. (1999). Healthy bodies and thick wallets: the dual relation between health and economic status. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 13(2), 145–166.
- The Financial Express. (2020). *The challenge of eliminating child labour*. Available at <https://www.thefinancialexpress.com.bd/views/the-challenge-of-eliminating-child-labour-1591974939>. Accessed on 04 June 2021.

- UNICEF. (2009). *A study on violence against girls. Report on the International Child Conference*, The Hague, Netherlands.
- UNICEF. (2014). *Child labour and UNICEF in action*. UNICEF.
- US Department of Labour. (2017). *Bangladesh made a moderate achievement, 2017 findings on the worst forms of child labour*. Bureau of International Affairs.
- Van Der Hof, S., Lievens, E., Milkaite, I., Verdoodt, V., Hannema, T., & Liefwaard, T. (2020). The child's right to protection against economic exploitation in the digital world. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 28(4), 833–859.
- Warren, P. (2011). Exploitation. In D. K. Chatterjee (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of global justice*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9160-5_442
- Webbink, E., Smits, J., & de Jong, E. (2013). Household and context determinants of child labour in 221 districts of 18 developing countries. *Social Indicators Research*, 110(2), 819–836.
- Zaman, S., Matin, S., & Kibria, A. M. B. G. (2014). A study on present scenario of child labour in Bangladesh. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management*, 16(6), 25–36.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Authors and Affiliations

Kazi Abusaleh¹ · M. Rezaul Islam^{2,3,4}  · Md. Mokter Ali⁵ ·
 Mohammad Asif Khan⁶ · Md. Shahinuzzaman⁷ · Md. Imdadul Haque⁸

M. Rezaul Islam
 rezauldu@gmail.com

Md. Mokter Ali
 dipugb@gmail.com

Mohammad Asif Khan
 asifdmc2005@yahoo.com

Md. Shahinuzzaman
 zzamandu.508@gmail.com

Md. Imdadul Haque
 imdadul.ph@diu.edu.bd

- ¹ Transparency International Bangladesh, Dhaka, Bangladesh
- ² Institute of Social Welfare and Research, University of Dhaka, Dhaka 1205, Bangladesh
- ³ School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia
- ⁴ Department of Social Work, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa
- ⁵ Department of Sociology and Social Work, Gono Bishwabidyalyal (University), Savar, Dhaka, Bangladesh
- ⁶ Health Services Division, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Dhaka, Bangladesh
- ⁷ Department of Psychology, Faculty of Life and Earth Science, Jagannath University, Dhaka 1100, Bangladesh
- ⁸ Departments of Public Health, Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, Daffodil International University, Dhanmondi, Dhaka 1207, Bangladesh