



An Investigation on Education Awareness of Child Labor in Sylhet City, Bangladesh

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Abstract: *In South Asia, Bangladesh and India have the largest number of children in child labor. More than 35% of the children in child labor in this region are completely out of school. The percentage is further higher in case of children who work in hazardous environment. So, it's a crucial issue to focus on right now to take initiatives by using different educational strategies as a tool against child labor to achieve SDG target 8.7. Now, it's very important to understand their present mindset and awareness level before taking or formulating strategy related to education in this region. This paper has explored the current mindset and awareness level of child labors to education in the society of Bangladesh particularly in Sylhet city. The analysis focuses on different questions like: Is their education interest associated with factors i.e. gender and age group or not? It was exploratory in nature based on field survey with direct interview method by a structured questionnaire on child labors. The sample survey was conducted in Sylhet city by selecting 300 child labors from various locations by using snowball sampling method. The study found that the awareness to go to school in child labor was significantly dependent on or associated with gender of child labor that means the male child labors are more aware to go to school than the female child labors in Sylhet city. Besides, it also identified that the willingness of child labors to go to school is independent or not significantly associated to their age level in this city. So, the finding of this research suggests that different programs should be formulated in the society to enhance the education interest that means awareness of the child labor especially by focusing on female child labors. It will contribute to improve gender parity in this society of Bangladesh.*

Keywords: *Education, Awareness, Child labor, Sylhet, Bangladesh.*

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, a significant progress has been made to reduce the number of children involved in child labor from 256 million to 160 million in 2000-2020. This number represents almost one in every ten of all children worldwide. However, the rate of decline has significantly come down from (2008-12) to (2012-16) that was 3% and 1%. In last estimation period (2016-20), the rate was very disappointing showed negative trend that means the number of children in child labor rather increasing again. Similar trend is also present in hazardous work that directly endangers their health, safety and moral development. There was 73 million (2016) children in hazardous work which moved inversely to 79 million [4, 5].

This paper has made a study on the child labor of Bangladesh to understand their schooling and education awareness. Because the education can be only powerful tool to enhance the progress made in earlier time against child labor. It is observed from last two child labor estimates of ILO that a very large number (36 million or 32%) children in child labor who are out of school (2017) [4]. On the other hand, more than one third (55.9 million or 35%) of all children in child labor aged 5-17 years are excluded from school throughout the world (2020). Besides, the children who engaged in hazardous work are even more vulnerable to attending school (43.6%) in our societies. It indicates that child labor remains a persistent problem in the world today especially in low and middle income countries like India and Bangladesh [5].

So it's a critical issue to raise the awareness and positive mindset on education and schooling among these working children in these regions.

2. Literature Review

Child labor is a critical phenomenon in South Asia especially in Bangladesh and India because the majority of child labors in this region come from these two countries. ILO estimated almost 10.7 million that is about 65 per cent of the total number of working child in South Asia [8, 15]. According to ILO, Child labor includes work that is mentally, physically or morally dangerous and harmful to children and/or interferes with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school, willing them to leave school prematurely or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work [3]. On the other hand, UNICEF defines child labor as a kind of work that interferes with a child's health and education [8]. There are a huge number of children in child labor works in Asia & the pacific region (48.7 million) that is second highest in number after highest contribution from Sub-Saharan Africa (86.6 million). The Africa region and the Asia and the Pacific region together host nine out of every ten children in child labor worldwide [5]. A steady progress observed in reducing child labor in Asia & the pacific region as well as in Latin America & the Caribbean region since 2008, Although the number of children in child labor has been increasing in sub-Saharan Africa since 2012 (59 million to 86.6 million now). A breakthrough in this region is critical for the global progress against child labor [4, 5].

The overall global progress against child labor since 2016 has been constant that means the percentage of children in child labor remained stable over the last four years while the absolute number of children in child labor increased by 8.4 million. In the same way, the percentage of children in hazardous work was almost unchanged but rose in absolute number by 6.5 million children [5]. It is really a matter of concern for achieving the target of SDG 8.7 that is to end child labor in all its forms by 2025. Now it looks near impossible to achieve this target because of ongoing COVID-19 crisis which threatens to further deteriorate global progress against child labor. Recent analysis reports a further 8.9 million children will be added in child labor by the end of 2022 as a result of rising poverty in the pandemic situation. Urgent mitigation measures are needed at least to get back to the last progress trend, although it's not enough to reach to the SDG 8.7 target. It is projected that without additional mitigation measures, there will be 140 million children in child labor in 2025 and 125 million in 2030 if progress trend from the 2008-2016 period continues [5].

Education can play a significant role to improve the situation in future. Different educational strategies can be innovated through a collaborative research by involving different stakeholders of the society to reduce child labor worldwide. [3] Recent report on education of child labor shows very disappointing scenarios. More than one third (35%) of all children in child labor aged 5-17 years are excluded from school worldwide. On the other side, children who engaged in hazardous work are even more likely to miss school (43.6%) in our society. The most special matter of upsetting is that a large share of younger children in child labor (aged 5-14 years) who are out of school, although they are within the age limit of compulsory education. Almost 28% of (5 to 11) age group and 35% of (12 to 14) age group in child labor are out of school. The situation is further worst in hazardous work [5, 10]. This severely hinders their prospects for decent work in youth and adulthood. But the difference based on gender is not significant in this respect [1, 5].

On the other hand, the significant shares of children in child labor are found out of school across the following regions: Eastern & Southeastern Asia (37.2%) and Central & Southern Asia (35.3%). Most of the children in child labor who attended in school struggle to balance the demands of school and child labor at the same time. As a result, they compromise their education by poor grade & learning achievement and their leisure time. They are more likely to drop out prematurely from school [4, 5]. Bangladesh is home to over 160 million people. About 40-45 per cent of the population is children (more than 64 million) [8, 9]. The country has made significant progress on child labor in recent decades. According to BBS, it shows a 50 per cent reduction in child labor from 2003 to 2013 (3.2 million to 1.7 million children). However, it is alarming that 1.2 million children were engaged in the worst forms of child labor that involve hazardous work environment in 2013. Here, over 90% of the children involved in hazardous work are male. A survey conducted by the ILO and UNICEF has found that the child labor is currently employed in about 310 types of economic activities in urban areas of Bangladesh. Most of the activities are inhumane in nature for a child. It was found in BBS-2003 that two-thirds of working children have no education. It is expected that an updated survey report on child labor by ILO and BBS may come shortly by early 2022 [8, 11, 14]. In Bangladesh, there is significant positive change observed in the last couple of decades in case of schooling rates for girls that have increased rapidly along with boys. So, there is almost gender parity achieved in education in Bangladesh now [1]. Similar changes also observed in India at the same time [7].

But, children in the Sylhet division, northeast of Bangladesh, face complex challenges in accessing quality education at all school levels. In a report of BBS and UNICEF Bangladesh (2019), it is found that only fifteen (15%) per cent of children

attend pre-primary education where as primary and lower-secondary school completion rates in Sylhet are the lowest and second-lowest nationwide respectively. Particularly, boys who are involved in work are at significant risk of dropping out in lower secondary level that was 18 per cent in 2019 compared to 8 per cent of girls nationwide. Most important reasons behind this dropping out are poverty, distance to school, lack of family awareness and not enjoy school at all [10, 12, 13]. A study in Sylhet city (2017) on child labor showed that most of the sample respondents felt sad and bored during their works as well as they worked against their willingness. More than 40.0% of the respondents in that study were interested to continue their education along with their works. It also showed that 82% of the sample respondents were totally unaware about children right on education. But they believe enhancing educational facilities and financial help can stop child work in this region significantly [14]. Although the constitution of Bangladesh and children's Act 2013 provide a clear guideline to protect the rights of a children, but there is a huge gap in application of these legal protections in the society. [8] Children are the ultimate future leaders of the society because they will take the noble responsibility of running the society and leading the nation of tomorrow. It is very essential to groom children as worthy citizens. Now it is really impossible to ignore working child in development process. That is why it requires kind attention for improving their status in this society. Here, this study conduct a sample survey on child labor in Sylhet city to explore the facts related to schooling and education awareness which will help the concern body to understand their mind set.

3. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this research was to explore the awareness of education in child labors especially based on gender and age in Sylhet city of Bangladesh. In addition, it will draw some recommendations based on the findings for improving education awareness of child labors in this city.

4. Research Hypotheses

Based on the above research objective, the research study has formulated the following research hypotheses.

H1: Their education awareness is associated with gender of child labor that means their willingness to go to school is dependent on gender of child labor.

H2: Their education awareness is associated with age group of child labor that means their willingness to go to school is dependent on age group of child labor.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Population and Sampling

The population of the study is the child labors who are working in Sylhet city. This study has used snowball sampling method under non-probability sampling technique. The reason behind using this sampling technique is that there was unavailability of the sampling frame of child labors from where sample can be drawn based on a probability technique. The sample size is three hundred (300) child labors selected from different high commercial areas such as: Railway station, Shopping center, Super market, Bus stand, Vegetable market/bazar, School, College or University campuses and various private houses in Sylhet city.

5.2 Instrument and Data collection

The data have been collected through face to face interviews by a structured questionnaire with the target respondents (child labors) in the above selected areas. Data collection period was the month of April, 2020 to October, 2020. The items of the questionnaire were related to their demographic and family information as well as their working environment and schooling behavior.

5.3 Data analysis techniques

The sample data of this research have been analyzed by using statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics and chi-square test of independence by taking support of statistical software (SPSS 23).

6. Data Analysis and Findings

This study has used descriptive statistical method and chi-square test of independence to find the relation between their (child labors) awareness to education and different demographic characteristics i.e. gender and age. Here, **Table 01** show the demographic and other information of respondents found in sample survey. It is observed that almost half of the respondents (**48%**) are aware to go to school in sample data of child labor where as the majority of respondents comes from one earning member family (**64%**) and higher age group aged 8 years or more (**80%**).

Table 01: Basic Information of Sample Respondents

Details		No. of Respondents	Percent (%)	Total (%)
Gender	Male	176	58.7%	100%
	Female	124	41.3%	
Age Group	Lower age group (7 years or less)	60	20%	100%
	Higher age group (8 years or More)	240	80%	
Number of Family Members	2-3 Members	30	10%	100%
	4-5 Members	96	32%	
	6-7 Members	48	16%	
	8 or More...	126	42%	
Working/Earning member in Family	One Member	192	64%	100%
	Two Members	54	18%	
	Three Members	48	16%	
	Four Members	6	2%	
Awareness (Want school or Not)	YES	144	48%	100%
	NO	156	52%	

On the other hand, the following **Tables (2-3)** show the relation of gender and age of respondents with the education awareness of child labor by cross tabulation. It was clear from these tables that the relations of age of respondents with the education awareness of child labor are not significant at 5% level with calculated values of chi-square 1.923 which doesn't exceed the critical chi-square value (3.84) for 1 degree of freedom at 5% level of significance where as the relations of gender with the education awareness of child labor are significant at 1% level with calculated values of chi-square 11.611. The analyses related to hypotheses testing have been presented in more details below.

6.1 Hypothesis: 01

H10: The gender of child labor and their willingness to go to school are not dependent or associated.

H11: The gender of child labor and their willingness to go to school are dependent or associated.

Table 02: Cross tabulation for the gender by want school or not of child labor

Details		Want to school or not		Total	
		Yes	No		
Gender of the child	Male	Count	99	77	176
		Expected Count	84.5	91.5	176
	Female	Count	45	79	124
		Expected Count	59.5	64.5	124
Total		Count	144	156	300

Details	Chi-Square Test Statistic	Degree of Freedom (d.f)	p-Value
Pearson Chi-Square	11.611 ^a	1	.001

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 59.52.

Result: To test whether proportions were different in each group, the study used a chi-square test of independence with $\alpha=0.01$ as criterion for significance. The male child labors were more willing to go to school ($n_0 = 99$) than was expected ($n_e = 84.5$), but the female child labor were less willing to go to school ($n_0 = 45$) than was expected by chance ($n_e = 59.5$). According to the χ^2 test of independence, this difference was statistically significant with $\chi^2 (1, N = 300) = 11.611$, $p = .001 < .01$. The analysis provides enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. So it can be concluded that the male child labors are more willing to go to school than the female child labors in Sylhet city.

6.2 Hypothesis: 02

H20: The age of child labor and **their willingness to go to school** are not dependent or associated.

H21: The age of child labor and **their willingness to go to school** are dependent or associated.

Table 03: Cross tabulation for two age groups by want school or not of child labor

Details		Want school or not		Total	
		Yes	No		
Age Groups	Lower age group	Count	24	36	60
		Expected Count	28.8	31.2	60.0
	Higher age group	Count	120	120	240
		Expected Count	115.2	124.8	240.0
Total		Count	144	156	300

Details	Chi-Square Test Statistic	Degree of Freedom (d.f)	p-Value
Pearson Chi-Square	1.923 ^a	1	.166

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 28.80.

Result: To test whether proportions were different in each group, the study used a chi-square test of independence with $\alpha=0.05$ as criterion for significance. The lower age child labors were less willing to go to school ($n_0 = 24$) than was expected ($n_e = 28.8$), but the higher age child labor were more willing to go to school ($n_0 = 120$) than was expected by chance ($n_e = 115.2$). According to the χ^2 test of independence, this difference was not statistically significant with $\chi^2(1, N = 300) = 1.923, p = .166 > .05$. The analysis does not provide enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. So it can draw an inference that the willingness of child labors to go to school is independent or not associated to their age in Sylhet city.

7. Conclusion

The key finding of the above analyses is that the male child labors are more aware to education and schooling than female child labors where as their age level is not associated with their education or schooling awareness in this society. This research is very limited on scope that is why it should be conducted throughout the country as well as it need to cover more relevant variables to get a big picture of the society. This finding recommends proper attention of the concerned authorities to develop different programs in the society to enhance the education interest that means awareness of the child labor by having special focus on female child labors. These initiatives will work as a complementing factor to achieve gender parity in Bangladesh as well as the target of **SDG 8.7** globally.

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