

CHAPTER IV

Urban Child Labour Problem in Bangladesh: Education and Skill Training Interventions to Combat It

The problem of child labour specially in urban areas deserves a special attention because of its serious nature. On the one hand, working children in urban areas are more visible than those in rural areas and on the other hand, urban working children usually face more vulnerability, disparity and harms. They have to lead a more risky, familyless, guardianless, and shelterless livelihood. In case of migration, most of the working children choose urban areas in search of their future livelihood. The availability and diversity of work as well as the hazards in those works are also much wider in urban areas. So, there are lots of special issues regarding the urban child labour problem. As our study progresses, those issues will be discussed in the next chapters. But, in the current chapter, we shall discuss the basic issues of the urban child labour problem in Bangladesh.

4.1. Urban Child Labour in Bangladesh: Why It Is So Important

Many studies identified that child labour is a crucial problem specially for the urban areas than for the rural areas, as the problem was found to be more visible and more complex in urban areas. One of the reasons for this was the density of population, which was higher in urban areas. In addition to this, many push and pull factors (as discussed earlier in Chapter-III) were also involved as reasons for this. The situation was also assessed by the ARISE project of GOB and UNDP. Accordingly, “being a country with a very high urban growth rate, Bangladesh experiences an influx of thousands of people migrating into the cities from the rural belts each year. The present urban population growth rate is about 7% per year in the smaller cities and 9% per year in the bigger cities like Dhaka. ... Thus, a lot of children are found floating in the city, accompanied by adults and sometimes on their own, in search of shelter, income or just some food. 50% of the urban populations are extremely poor. Children living alone, and thereby neglected, are

increasing everyday. They travel from one city to the other and get involved in some economic activities” (DSS, 2001a:7). The scopes for outside economic activities are assumed to be greater in urban areas. Thus there may be a greater opportunity for urban children to be engaged in gainful works. In Dhaka, e.g., child workers are found to be working in almost all areas of economic activity (Razzaque & Rahman, 1996: 72-73).

In rural areas, the nature of jobs or works for children, the working environment, hazards in works, social structure and the livelihood of poor working children are comparatively homogeneous and simple than those of urban areas. In the past, as Pelto studied, most children lived in rural areas where their daily unpaid work contributed to the household food production and other maintenance activities in agriculture. Today rapid increase in the number of landless families in rural areas together with other economic changes, have converged to push poverty-stricken families to urban areas to seek new ways to eke out a living. In Bangladesh the magnetic force of urban jobs is strongest in the central city, the capital. Dhaka receives a disproportionately high percentage of the Bangladeshi urban migrants (Pelto, B. 1997a:2). Therefore, the rate of increase of child population as well as child labourer in urban areas, especially in the big cities, is very high. As Dr. Wahidur Rahman studied, the concentration of the child workers and the child labour issues are significantly higher in urban areas, especially in the metropolitan cities, as compared to rural areas (Rahman, W. 1996:2).

The nature of work, working environment and other related situations are also very harmful in the case of urban child labour. Most of the available jobs in these urban areas are ill-paid and with long hours. Most of the hazardous jobs are also concentrated in urban areas. Children are working as sex worker, rickshaw puller, glass factory worker, tannery factory worker, porter, brick or stone breaker, construction worker, scavenger, etc. in urban areas. All of these are very dangerous works as well as very harmful for the physical and mental development of the children. It is a rising world-wide consensus that children should not be involved in the hazardous occupations. For some occupations there should be zero tolerance.

The livelihood and living arrangements for the urban working children are more vulnerable. They are the easy victims of abuse, exploitation and all the

rudeness of urban life. Most of these urban children live in the urban slums and the rest live in the streets, open places, pavements, rail-stations, market places, etc.— with or without their families. The urban slums are undeserved areas in terms of all basic faculties, including food, nutrition, education and health.¹ Children of these poor families are the most neglected and deprived. Most of the children of school-age are out of school and engaged in physical labour to earn a living for themselves and to support their families. As described in some studies, they are, at their best, ‘Child labourers’, and at worst ‘street urchins’ (Mia, A. 1995:9-11). The rude reality is that, for many poor families there is no choice but to put their children to work – however onerous and however small the daily wages. The Government, civil societies, UN and other international organizations are trying to achieve healthy urban development and poverty alleviation – as well as to achieve the child right goals including education and health based on CRC and national child policy. As urban child labour is a major threat to achieve all of these it became one of the major concerns to the different authorities and professionals.

Lastly, in recent years, there have also been increasing influences from the international community. People overseas were concerned about exploitative and dangerous working conditions in the same way as they were concerned about hunger or malnutrition. Countries that imported goods from Bangladesh began to protest against the use and exploitation of child labour and threatened to boycott or ban Bangladeshi imports. They focussed most of their attention on the country’s most successful export industry – ‘readymade garments’ (Stalker, P. 1996:18). Considering this international concern, urban child labour became, once again, a very important issue for the country.

4.2. Major Forms of Child Labour in Urban Bangladesh

The forms of child labour in urban areas are much more wider than in rural areas. Generally, the urban environment offers a much wider array of work opportunities for children and the urban children have many more alternative sectors or occupations. There is no dominant sector in the urban areas like agriculture in the rural areas. According to the National Survey on Child Labour of

¹ This issue has been discussed in *Chapter II* under Section 2.5.

BBS in 1995-96, urban working children were involved in agriculture by 22 per cent, household and related work by 30 per cent, manufacturing work by 21 per cent, transportation sector by 4 per cent and the other services by 24 per cent (see Table 3.4 in Chapter III). The rapid Assessment Survey covered 16,373 working children in 4 metropolitan cities (i.e., Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi) and identified a wide range of occupations for urban working children in Bangladesh. In total, 300 occupations engaging young children in the four metropolitan city areas were identified by that study. Of the 300 occupations, 27 could be classified as being hazardous (Rahman, W., 1997:22).

Table 4.1: Major Economic Activities of Child Labour in Metropolitan Cities of Bangladesh (As Covered by the Rapid Assessment Study)

Sl. No.	Major Economic Activities	No. Of Wor. Ch.	%
1.	Assistant of Shops/ Sellers/Vendors	6223	38.01
2.	Tokai (<i>Scavenger</i>)	1721	10.51
3.	Workshop Worker (<i>Automobile, Welding, Lathe machine, Engineering workshops, etc.</i>)	1486	9.08
4.	Seller/ Vendor on footpath or mobile	1040	6.35
5.	Domestic servant	1017	6.21
6.	Hotel boy/Hotel cook etc	975	5.95
7.	Factory/Mills' workers (<i>Cookeries, Garments, Fish-processing, Ice-cream, Soap, Tannery factories, etc.</i>)	958	5.85
8.	Porter	830	5.07
9.	Technical workers' assistant (<i>e.g. Goldsmith, Blacksmith, Bucket-maker, Carpenter, Cobbler, etc.</i>)	254	1.55
10.	Carrying tiffin boxes (<i>to offices and shops</i>)	252	1.54
11.	Rickshaw/Van puller, Curt pusher/s' assistant	251	1.53
12.	Carrying goods to and from market	214	1.31
13.	Transport worker (<i>Helper of Bus, Tempo, Truck, etc.</i>)	162	0.99
14.	Motor cleaner/Motor garage assistant	137	0.84
15.	Hair dresser	118	0.72
16.	Sewing machine operator/Embroidering work	116	0.71
17.	Collecting tree bark, Cowdung	107	0.65
18.	Construction worker, Brick/Stone breaker	89	0.54
19.	Shoe shine boy/Shoe-shiner's assistant	80	0.49
20.	Beggar/Beggar's assistant	64	0.39
21.	Others (<i>Body massager, Canvasser's assist. Day labourer, Fish-net knitting/repairing boy, Prostitute, Sweeper, Locks smith, etc.</i>)	279	1.70
Total		16,373	100.00

Source: Prepared by the author from Table 3.2 of *Child Labour Situation in Bangladesh – A Rapid Assessment* by Dr. Wahidar Rahman, ILO- IPEC, Bangladesh, 1997.

However, Table 4.1 above shows the major economic activities of child labour in four metro cities of the country as found in Rapid Assessment Study in 1994. Of the 20 broad categories of economic activities, almost all (19) were related to the informal sector covering an overwhelming 94 per cent of the working children. The single largest economic activity was assistant or helper of shops or sellers/vendors covering 38 per cent working children. Other major activities were scavenger (10.51%), workshop worker (9%), seller/vendor on footpath or mobile (6.35%), domestic servant (6.21%), hotel boy/hotel cook etc. and worker of small factories or mills (about 6% each), and porter (5%). These 8 types of occupations covered more than 87 per cent of total working children. Children were also involved in 11 other areas of occupations like technical workers' assistant, rickshawvan puller, transport worker, hair dresser, construction worker, beggar etc. covering 1.55 per cent to 0.39 per cent each (in total only 11.21%). The remaining 1.7 per cent, however, were involved in different other activities like body massager, day labourer, prostitute, sweeper, etc.

4.3. The State of Urban Working Children in Bangladesh

According to the CLS 1995-96 of BBS, there were 1.14 million (0.64 million male and 0.5 million female) child labour force in urban areas. These children aged 5-14 years constituted 15.2 per cent (16.5% for male and 13.8% for female) of total urban labour force (BBS, 1996: 45).

a) ***Family Condition and Parental Status:*** In every consideration, the family conditions of urban working children are found to be very miserable. Shamim I. *et al.* studied on 'Child Domestic Work in Dhaka' in 1994 and the families of the domestics' parents were observed to be very poor. Around 90 per cent of them were earning less than Tk. 400 per month (1995: xi). In another study with 150 such families in 1995, Razzaque and Rahman observed that 66 per cent of the family incomes were below the survey average of Tk. 3190 per month.

The CLS 1995-96 observed that about 40 per cent of fathers were self-employed or employer, 29 per cent were day labourers, 16 per cent paid apprentices and 15 per cent employees. On the other hand, 60 per cent of the mothers were involved in household works and the remaining 40 per cent were unpaid workers

and maid-servants. CLS (1995-96) also found that in 33 per cent of the cases both the parents were working, in 49 per cent of the cases only fathers were working, in 9 per cent of the cases only mothers were working and in the remaining 9 per cent of the cases neither of the parents was working. In the last category of the families children were the only bread winners.

In a sample survey on 150 working children of Sylhet town in 1998, Hasan and Parvin observed that the main occupations of their fathers were rickshaw pulling (17%), small business (17%), day-labourers (15%), marginal farmers (10%), etc. and most of their mothers (68%) were found to be unemployed housewives. Another 20 per cent of the mothers were employed as maidservants. The study also showed that about 13 per cent of the fathers were totally unemployed and fully dependent on their wives' and children's income (Hasan & Pervin, 1999: 39-41).

b) *Employment Status and Nature of Work:* Urban child workers of Bangladesh were found to be involved mainly in the 'private informal sector'. As CLS 1995-96 observed, about 88 per cent of the urban working children were involved in this sector and the remaining 12 per cent were involved in the private formal sector. The highest number of girls (54%) were employees mainly in the garments sector but the highest number (46%) of boys were the unpaid workers (BBS, 1996:51-52). Hasan and Pervin observed that the majority (61%) of the working children of Sylhet town were 'wage employed' and the remaining 39 per cent were 'self-employed' (1999:64).

Pelto, however, has shown some positive sides of the urban working children. Many of the working children were in jobs with fairly good possibilities for career advancement. This was particularly true of children in selling occupations. Children working in various machine shops and repair shops also saw themselves as learning a trade they could pursue in adult life. Many of the girls work at home, managing the cooking and other housework, while other members of the family were employed in wage earning (Pelto, B. 1997a: 3).

c) *Age at Which Children Are Put to Work:* Many urban children are put to work at a very early age. The 1995-96 CLS identified that about 10 per cent of the urban child labourers were in the age group of 5-9 years (BBS, 1996:45). Although the great majority of these children belonged to the 10-14 year age group, many of

them started their work before their 8th birthday. INCIDIN² studied 133 child labourers aged 5-16 years at the Benarasi saree factories of Mirpur in Dhaka and observed that more than one-third of the children started their work before their 8th birthday. The mean starting age, however, was 8.67 years (INCIDIN, nd. 5).

d) Hours of Work and Provisions for Leave: Urban working children usually work for very long hours for earning a meagre amount of income. Those with the longest hours are in domestic service. They may work for upto 18 hours a day between 06:00 a.m. in the morning and 12:00 midnight everyday; 30 days a month and 365 days a year (BSAF 1998:100). As Shamim I. *et al.* observe, they get up before their employers and usually go to bed long after them. Cleaning and tidying are solely their responsibilities before going to bed (Shamim, I. *et al.* 1995: iv).

Regarding leave, it was found that there was no commonly accepted system of granting weekly or monthly leave in the informal sector. Many children were found to work even on weekly and national holidays. They got leave only 2-3 times a year. It was found that 70 per cent of the self-employed workers did not take time off from work unless it was urgently needed. In case of employment in the factories, shops and establishments, 93 per cent of the children working reported that they enjoyed a weekly holiday with pay (Rahman, W. 1997:69).

e) Earnings and Expenditure: The Pelto Survey found that those who were self-employed tended to earn most (797 Taka per month), followed by the children involved in small family businesses (474 Taka), and those in wage-employment (362 Taka) [1997: 109]. The Karmakar study found that the highest wage levels were in the jari shops (textile design) [300 Taka per week], polythene plastics (225 Taka per week), and in glass, incense stick and sanitary facilities factories (about 800 Taka per month). Also, child workers in plastic or sandal production and garage shops were reported to receive 60 Taka and 50 Taka per day respectively, which translates to about 1500 Taka and 1250 Taka per month. The garment workers in the 'formal sector' were found to earn between 600 and 700 Taka per month (Karmakar *et al.* 1994: 6). The average income of an urban child worker as found in CLS 1995-96 was 579.4 Taka per month (BBS, 1996: 53). In the *Rapid Assessment Study*, the average

² INCIDIN: Integrated Community and Industrial Development Initiative, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

monthly income of the working children was found to be 797 Taka for self-employed children and 362 Taka for wage-employed children (Rahman, W. 1997: 67). In case of street children, the weighted mean of daily income was only Taka 31.77 (about 953 Taka monthly) (DSS & UNDP, 2001: 36).

Domestic servants usually earn much less than the average, if they are paid at all. Blanchet observed that 76 per cent of them worked without fixed monetary compensation. Of the 24 per cent children who got fixed salaries, only 2.5 per cent received the money themselves. In the other cases, the salary was remitted to the parents. The average salary was 145 Taka per month (1996: 102). Generally, children's wages do increase, as they grow older. Helen Rahman's survey of child domestic workers indicated what girls received in addition to food, lodging and other support. Those aged 7-9 years usually received no salary at all; those aged 10-12 years received upto Tk. 100; 13-15 years Tk. 200; and above 15 years upto Tk. 400 (Pelto, 1995 as cited in Stalker, 1996: 15). The Karmakar study identified 158 small-scale factories that gave the children "food-for-work" in terms of remuneration. The study also found 28 factories in which the children received nothing at all, not even food! They used to do this on this hope that it might be helpful for them to get job in those factories and earn money in future. At the lowest end of children's occupations we find children engaged in prostitution.

Concerning the disposal of their incomes, children who were found to earn cash, were mostly found to give their total earnings to their families. Hasan and Parvin studied that this was true particularly for those who lived with their families, but there was another group that did not live with the families (i.e., hotel-boy) who were also found to send their earnings to their families (1999: 75). Their parents, in most cases, were dependent on these earnings to maintain their very marginal level of living.

In the Pelto's Study, it was observed that at least one-third of the children handed over their entire income to their parents and guardians, from which they then received some spending money in return. In the garment factories, over 90 per cent of the children turned over all or most of their money to their parents. The pattern of handing over their earnings to parents was particularly strong among girls than among boys (Pelto, B. 1997a: 110). As Dr. Rahman showed, "The children who

lived with their employers such as domestic servants did not have to incur any major expenditure. They generally gave their entire salary to their parents. In some cases, the employers paid the salary directly to the parents” (1997: 67).

f) Connection with Their Families: Urban child workers were found to spend a part or all of their time away from their families. All these children, however, did not have natural parents. There were some families where the mother was the second or third wife of the father. In such a condition, children were found to be reluctant to maintain frequent and close relation with their families. With the experience of Khulna, Barisal and Jessore towns, the DSS and UNDP found that most of the street children were either ran-away, abandoned or deserted by their parents, they were rather compelled to come to the towns having no means of livelihood there. It was found that about 55 per cent of the street children lived without their parents (DSS & UNDP, 1999d: 15).

Concerning the relation with families or parents, it was found that, more than half of the children (51.33%) maintained good relations with their parents, 11 per cent children were found to maintain periodical relations and in case of 5 per cent children there was no relation with their parents.³ Majority of the children in the last category were girls involved in prostitution (Hasan & Pervin, 1999: 42). The condition of domestic servants is no better. “Most domestic servants see very little of their own families. They may be allowed to visit once a year at the most. Some children lose touch with their families completely. Such a situation almost inevitably leads to the greater abuse of the child who has no one to turn to for support...” (Blanchet, T. 1996: 108).

g) Food Intake and Nutrition: The pattern of food intake has been observed to be very diverse. Dr. Wahidur Rahman found that most of the working children used to take three meals a day – whatever be the food. Mainly, they used to eat rice (57%) and bread made of flour by hand (37%). However, the children who used to eat left-over rice during breakfast, lunch and supper, turned out to be 27 per cent, 7 per cent and 3 per cent respectively. This study also concluded that, in

³ It was also found that 54% of the children’s guardians were their parents. In case of 9% ‘only mother’, 9% ‘only father’ and 15% ‘relatives’ were their guardians. 3% of the children, however, did not have any guardian at all (Hasan and Pervin, 1999: 43).

comparison to other poor children in urban slums, the working children were somewhat better off because they earned money (Rahman, W. 1997: 75).

Hasan and Pervin also found the same situation regarding food intake of working children of Sylhet town (1999: 52-53). In case of the street children in Khulna, Barisal and Jessore towns, it was found that the majority of them (71%) used to eat rice and '*rutee*' with vegetables, pulses etc. However, those children were under-nourished and physically weak compared to the normal children consuming a balanced diet.

h) *Living and Sleeping Arrangements:* The Pelto's study, the Rapid Assessment study and Hasan and Pervin's study observed that 70 per cent of the working children lived with their parents in low-cost areas or in slums in the city/town. About 20 per cent of all children slept at the workplace or at the employer's residence. The remaining ten per cent children were found to live alone. These children reported that they slept in public areas like footpaths, railway stations, market areas, *ghat* areas, under trucks and other vehicles or in the buses and trucks that they worked in. As Pelto observed, some of these children who slept out in public areas, had their family homes in Dhaka, but their homes were too far away from their work places (Pelto, B. 1997a: 103).

In case of street children, it was observed that only about 15 per cent of the street children in metro city areas slept or took rest in a somewhat protective place like a neighbourer's house or a mess but more than 60 per cent slept in open places like park, street/pavement, market or working place, railway station, launch *ghat*, bus terminal, etc. The other 25 per cent however did not respond to this question (DSS & UNDP, 2001: 42). In many studies, some children who slept in open places reported that they must pay a 'toll' to *mastaans* or else they are harassed. Both male and female children are subject to sexual abuse when they sleep in unprotected public areas (Pelto, B. 1997a: 103).

i) *Health, Diseases and Treatment:* A large number of self-employed children lose their days' earnings if they remain idle due to sickness. Most of the domestic servants and shop assistants can probably miss a few days of work without loss of pay, but many of the other children can not. For example, many garment workers lost their jobs because they were absent for illness (Pelto, B. 1997a:

106). However, it was found that, the parents bore the cost of medical treatment in the cases of about 51 per cent of the working children while the employers did so in the cases of about 25 per cent. Only 13 per cent of the working children incurred the cost of treatment themselves. Hospitals provided free treatment in the cases of only 6 per cent of them (Rahman, W. 1997: 58). Most of the children were found to get treatment and medicine from medicine shops as an alternative to a doctor (Rahman, W. 1997; Pelto, B. 1997 and Hasan & Pervin, 1999).

j) *Schooling and Education:* According to the Rapid Assessment study, 48 per cent of the children never attended school and another 43 per cent attended school in the past. Only 9 per cent of the children were found to be attending school during the study (Rahman, W. 1997: 69). Majority of the domestic servants, irrespective of their gender, were unable to read and write and illiteracy was higher among the girls (74%) than among the boys (58%) (Shamim, I. *et al.* 1995: iii). There were various reasons for the children for not attending school. Pelto studied the reasons as poverty (52%), time constraint/work (24%), not interested by themselves (15%), parents' disinterest (5%) and other reasons (4%) (Pelto, B. 1997a: 105). However, all studies noticed that many of these children had a significant desire to attain school.

In case of street children, it was found that, most of them (55%) were illiterate and the rest (45%) could only read and sign. Very few (1.11%) children were found to attend some NGO-run schools during the study. This study further learnt that they prefer NGO-run schools since those offer non-formal types of basic education outside the formal school system during any time of the day or night (DSS & UNDP, 2001: 34).

k) *Water and Sanitation:* The Rapid Assessment study found that tube-well water was used as drinking water by 70 per cent of the children and shower (bath) water by 31 per cent while public-supplied water from taps for bathing was reported by 29 per cent children (Rahman, W. 1997: 61). Hasan and Pervin also found that most of the children (67%) did not have access to sanitary latrine. Some of them used public toilet and most of them had to pay for it. About 13 per cent (in Rapid Assessment study) to 16 per cent (in Hasan & Pervin's study) of the children were compelled to use open space for toilet. Pelto also noticed that 10 per cent of the

children had to pay for their bath water and 15 per cent for their drinking water (1997a: 105). However, children who were engaged as domestic servants and shop-assistants (who lived in their employers' houses) were found to be in a better condition in respect of water and sanitation.

1) **Recreation Pattern:** The children covered by the Rapid Assessment study, had no time after work or were too tired after work to take part in recreational activities. They also lacked space for games and sports. Moreover, they could not afford the money required for some recreational activities. Nevertheless, some working children were found to participate in recreational activities such as watching the employer's TV; gossiping; swimming; playing cards, *ludo* or *kabadi*; watching a cock-fight at rode side; listening to music; sight seeing; etc. (Rahman, W. 1997: 77).

In another study, it was found that "despite their busy daily activities, nearly one half (47%) of the street children indicated that they enjoyed some kind of leisure/rest by playing and watching TV and going to cinema" (DSS & UNDP, 1999d: 24). Hasan and Pervin (1999) and Pelto B. (1997a) also found almost the same thing. Also "the working children were found to have their own sub-culture and had developed certain unique forms of games which required no money. Sometimes they were found to play modern games by using locally available inexpensive or abandoned materials" (Rahman, W. 1997: 77).

m) **Abuse, Exploitation, Violence and Hazards Faced by Urban Working Children:** Urban working children of Bangladesh, irrespective of their gender and occupation, are generally the victims of abuse, exploitation and violence. In Hasan and Pervin's study, 39 per cent of child workers reported torture by the employer, the public, police, colleagues, and customers (of prostitutes) or by others. Children were also reported to be tortured physically (43%), verbally (40%), financially (14%) and sexually (3%) (1999: 92-93). In the sample as a whole, half of the girls and a third of the boys considered themselves to be physically abused by their employers. They were slapped, beaten with a bamboo stick, or with an iron tool in a way which they felt was incommensurate with their 'mistakes'.

About 25 per cent of the domestic children (all were girls) reported to have been sexually harassed, and out of those 10 per cent admitted having been fully

raped (1996: 118-19). Another study found that “in case of girl domestics, they face some form or other sexual harassment almost everyday and a serious form of sexual harassment almost every month. For some of them, a serious form of sexual torture has been a part of their daily job performance” (BSAF, 1998: 101).

In their study, Shamim *et al* found that “a majority of the boys (67%) had suffered physical violence in the form of beating, slapping, whipping and being burnt with hot spoons or rods” (1995: vi). Blanchet also reported that “the greatest abuse done to domestic servants is carried out in the houses of those rich enough to live behind closed doors so that neighbours will not easily find out what goes inside.... Employers with a University education is no guarantee that physical or sexual abuse will not take place” (1996: 104). Another very common abuse of domestic servants, reported by Blanchet, as well as other researchers, is the practice to leaving the children locked in the house when the family members go out. As she mentioned “all the children interviewed disliked being locked in and many felt like prisoners” (Blanchet, T. 1996: 115).

Street children are the other vulnerable group in terms of abuse, exploitation and harassment. As ILO observed, a street child (boy or girl) has a strong possibility of being sexually abused and exploited. The DSS and UNDP study summarize in a long list the nature of harassment made by different elements including the law enforcing agencies to the street children. Sexual harassment (38%) tops the list, followed by rape while sleeping at night (20%) and offensive remarks (20%). Moreover, during political demonstrations, some of them are also exposed to dangers like arrest for carrying bombs, beatings and sexual abuse (DSS & UNDP, 2001: 42).

4.4. The Harms and Hazards Involved in Urban Child Labour

Children’s work in the historical perspective and in the present day context remains a reality. As we discussed above, “not all work is harmful to children”. Even “work is a valuable socialization process of personal development, as the children’s work, is the best of circumstances, usually in a family context, is an educational process and socializes them for productive adult lives” (Chaturvedi, S. 1994: 13). But, whenever this ‘child work’ is turned into ‘child labour’ – it becomes a

very harmful condition. Every child needs opportunity for proper growth and development, not only physical but also mental, through all the activities and experiences of childhood.

Child labour is exploitative and harmful. UNICEF determined that child labour is exploitative when it involves:

- a) full-time work at too early an age;
- b) too many hours spent working;
- c) work that exerts undue physical, social or psychological stress;
- d) work and life on the streets in bad conditions;
- e) inadequate play;
- f) too much responsibility;
- g) work that hampers access to education;
- h) work that undermines children's dignity and self-esteem, such as slavery or bonded labour and sexual exploitation; etc. (UNICEF, 1986: 3-4).

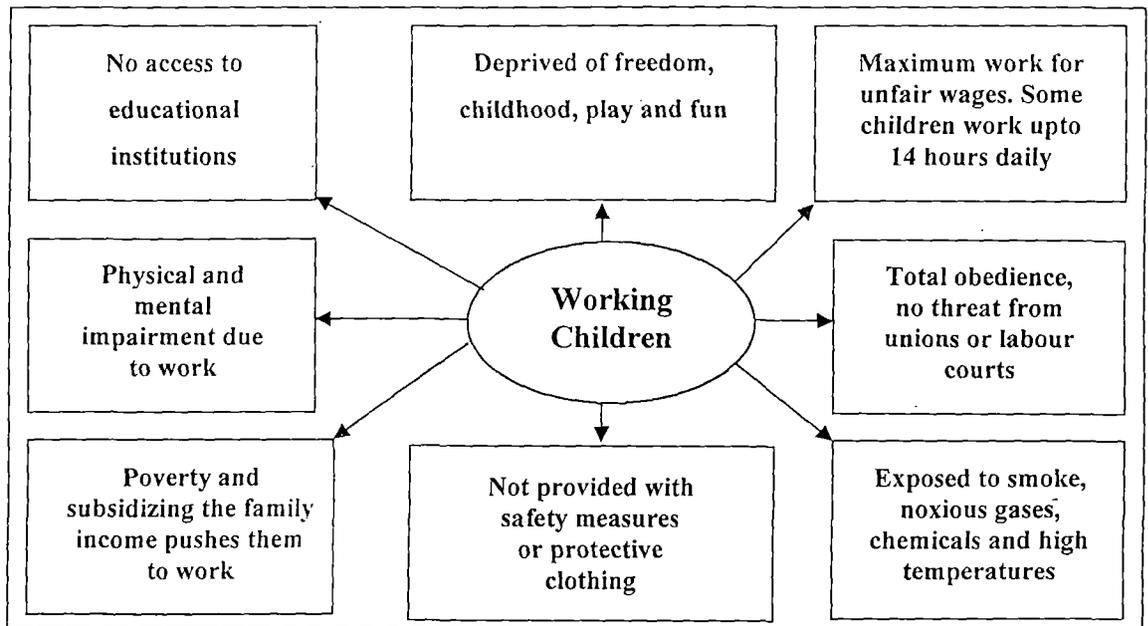
The reality is that, all sorts of these are involved in many common types of child labour in the third world countries, specially in the urban areas. Dr. Lakshmindhar Mishra⁴ identifies the characteristics of child labour as “children are subjected to a process of ruthless exploitation characterized by low wages, long hours of work, unclean, unhygienic and unsafe working and living conditions, lack of bargaining power, the discrimination sanctified by law – Minimum Wages Act and not entitled to the same facilities, amenities and services as adults” (Mishra, L. 1996), which indicates that child labour is harmful for childhood.

Aparajeyo-Bangladesh, the NGO that dedicated itself to the urban working children, specially in Dhaka, city has shown the “Life as a Working Child” by their practical experiences in the urban child labour situation in Bangladesh. This life sketch (Box 4.1) indicates the deprivations, harms and hazards that are faced by the urban working children in Bangladesh.

Child workers in urban areas are very often involved in hazardous occupations. Because children differ from adults in their physiological and psychological make-up, they are more susceptible to and more adversely affected by specific work hazards than adults. As they are not yet matured mentally, they are also less aware of the potential risks involved in the workplace. As per Dr. W. Rahman and ILO some examples of child labour in hazardous occupations and

⁴ The then Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of Labour.

Figure 4.1: The Lives that the Urban Working Children Experience in Bangladesh



Source: *Annual Report, 2000: Aparajeyo Bangladesh*, Dhaka, p. 29.

their consequences are shown in Box 4.1 below. Almost all of them are urban-based and much related to Bangladesh situation. These work hazards affect children not only immediately but they also affect their physical and mental development over the long term.

Box 4.1: Child Labour in Hazardous Occupations in Urban Areas and Its Consequences

Occupation	Main Tasks	Hazards	Possible consequences
Domestic Servant	All types of domestic work	At the mercy of the employer; long hours of work; lack of minimum facilities to sleep or rest; abuse of health and moral standards (sexual abuse, demeaning work); isolation from society	Fatigue and ill health, mental shock, lack of self-respect, pessimistic view of life
Scavenging and Rag picking	Demeaning, unsanitary work; reclaiming usable material from garbage heaps including dangerous wastes from hospitals and chemical plants, often with bare hands	Cuts from glass metal; exposure to hazardous substances; inhaling stench from putrefied matter; infestations by flies; temptation to eat left-over food, occasionally became victim of physical and mental torture by general public and police	Cuts resulting in death from tetanus; chemical poisoning and risk of contracting or carrying infectious diseases; food poisoning; burns (from build-up of methane gas and explosion), fungal infection, etc.
Street Trades/Sales	Hawking goods; selling; shoe polishing; prostitution etc.	Exposure to drugs, violence, criminal activities; danger to health and moral standards	Victims of drug addiction; branded as social outcasts (reconvicted criminals); sexually transmitted diseases

Workshop Worker (Automobile, Engineering, Lathe machine)	Working with automobile parts, sharp and rotating equipment, vibratory tools, hard and heavy metals, iron and other metallic dusts, paint and corrosive chemicals, etc.	Exposure to hazardous equipments, chemicals, splinters, heat and flame, longer working hour in a most noisy and dirty working environment, etc.	Accidental trauma, contact dermatitis, ulceration of hands, lead poisoning, arthritis, arthralgia, varicose vein (leg) thrombosis of the vein, eyeache, lacrimation and visual disturbance
Welding Worker	Working with heavy metal, different types of gas, electricity, sharp and heavy equipment, etc.	Excessive light, ultra-violet light, heated flame, attacked by different forms of gas, risk of high voltage electricity	Damage of eyes, irritation, redness and ache, conjunctivitis, lacrimation, blurring of vision, skin burn, cellulitis callosities, keloid of the hands and feet, acute pulmonary oedema, acute respiratory distress syndrome, electrical accidents, etc.
Construction Work	Digging earth, carrying loads, breaking bricks, stones or rocks; shovelling sand and cement; metal work, etc.	Being struck by falling objects; stepping on sharp objects; falling from heights; exposure to dust, heat and noise; heavy lifting	Health impairment from noise, vibration and exposure to harmful substances; respiratory difficulties, incapacitation through accidents and injury such as from falls, ulceration, bronchitis, dermatitis, etc.
Garment Factory Work	Mainly light work e.g. helper, thread cutter or in packaging, also work with sharp equipment, fast rotating machineries, cotton dust, etc.	Excessive or insufficient lighting; lack of proper ventilation and emergency exit facilities, long hours of work, late night work, extreme precision of eyes, etc.	Accidental trauma, chronic bronchitis, emphysema, eye ache, visual impairment/visual field defect, anorexia, constipation, epigastric pain, acid, eructation, hepatitis (jaundice), etc.
Match Factory Work and Fire Works	Mixing hot (steaming) chemicals, making matchsticks and stuffing cracker powder into fireworks	Exposure to hazardous chemicals; fire and explosions, etc.	Synergistic effects of chemical intoxications; respiratory diseases; burns; injuries and death from explosions; deformity, disease of respiratory system, etc.
Tannery Factory Work	Tanning and preserving hides and skins	Exposure to corrosive chemicals & bacterial contamination of hides, unhygienic horrid smell, etc.	Anthracosis, dermatitis and fungal infections; digital and nail fold ulcer, diarrhoea, anorexial vomiting
Glass Factory Work	Drawing molten glass, carrying molten loams, etc.	Radiant heat and thermal stress; noxious fumes; silica dust; stepping on or handling hot broken glass, etc.	Accidental trauma, eye injuries; heat stress; respiratory diseases; serious burns and cuts, productive sputum, loss of weight and appetite, bone pain
Weaving Worker (Zamdani, Carpet etc.)	Weaving hand-knotted Zamdani, Carpets on a loom (operated by hand) working with	Inhalation of wool dust contaminated with fungal spores, poor (squatting) work posture; poor lighting; poor ventilation;	Respiratory diseases; musculoskeletal diseases; eye strain and defective vision at premature age; chemical poisoning; aggravation of non-

	chemicals, hemp and organic dust	hazardous chemicals, etc.	occupational diseases, headache, vertigo, arthritis, tenosynovitis, difficulty in breathing, etc.
Agriculture	Working with machinery and agrochemicals	Unsafe machinery; hazardous substances	Accidents; chemical poisoning; chronic cases, often undiagnosed and attributed to non-occupational causes

Adopted from the sources of: (a) ILO-IPEC (1994); *Action for the Elimination of Child Labour: Overview of the Problem and Response*; Geneva, pp. 11-12. (b) ILO (1999 b), *Child Labour in Hazardous Occupations and Sectors*; ILO, Geneva, p. 2. & (c) Rahman, W. (1996); *Hazardous Child Labour in Bangladesh*; ILO- IPEC and Department of Labour, GOB, Dhaka, pp. 7-23.

Children who start work at an early age have a longer period of exposure to cumulative hazards. For instance, exposure in early life to substances with long latency periods, such as asbestos, increases the possibility of contracting chronic diseases like lung cancer in younger adulthood. Younger children are also less likely to be able to perceive danger or to know what to do if accidents occur (ILO 1999a).

With all of these, as we stated earlier, girl child labourers are more distressed and the works are more harmful for them. Usually they get marginal wages for work and are largely involved in domestic work. ILO observed that, girls are often discriminated against, denied the right to education and found in hidden work situations, which expose them to physical, sexual and emotional abuse. They are more likely to be concentrated in sectors and areas that are characterized by low pay and long hours; to be working in industries which are hidden and unregulated, making them more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse; to be concentrated in industries which pose excessive dangers to their health, safety and welfare; and be either excluded from education or suffer the triple burden of housework, schoolwork and economic work (ILO, 1999a).

The impact of work on a child's development is the key to determining when such work becomes a problem. Work, even that which is harmless to adults can be extremely harmful to children. However, among the aspects of a child's development that can be endangered by work are:

(a) *Physical development* – including overall health, co-ordination, strength, vision and hearing. Carrying heavy loads or sitting for long periods in unnatural positions can permanently disable growing bodies. Hard physical labour over a

period of years can stunt children's physical stature by up to 30 per cent of their biological potential, as they expend store of stamina that should last into adulthood;⁵

(b) *Cognitive development* – including literacy, numeracy and the acquisition of knowledge necessary to normal life;

(c) *Emotional development* – including adequate self-esteem, family attachment, feelings of love and acceptance;

(d) *Psychological development* – including proper socialization, personality development. Children can suffer devastating psychological damage from being in an environment in which they are demeaned or oppressed. Self-esteem is as important for children as it is for adults; and

(e) *Social and moral development* – including a sense group identity, the ability to cooperate with others and the capacity to distinguish right from wrong (UNICEF, 1997a: 24-25).

4.5. The Issue of Solutions: Non-Formal Education and Skill Training as the Tools to Combat the Problem

4.5.1. Withdrawal from Work: Is It an Effective Solution?

One may consider withdrawal of children from their work to combat the child labour problem – but many studies and observations noticed it as a wrong, even negative, process. Withdrawal cannot be treated as realistic where the parents of these children are extremely poor and partly dependent on the children's earning. Withdrawal of children from their work is very often resisted by their families because it reduces their total income and, therefore, it threatens their overall survival strategy. On the other hand, these parents prefer to send their children to school (if possible and free of cost) without withdrawing the children from work. In other words, they prefer a combination of 'earning' and 'learning' (Rahman, M. A. 1998: 71).

In her study on the eliminated child labour from the garment industry of Bangladesh, Nilima Chawla also found that withdrawal of children from their work was not a realistic solution. For example, as Chawla observed, the terminated "girls

⁵ Statement by Dr. Mark Belsey, WHO, and cited in Annie Allsebrook and Anthony Swift, *Broken Promise*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1989, p. 91.

were faced with entering domestic services, selling flowers at busy traffic intersections, or even becoming sex workers. These were all dangerous occupations that exposed the children directly to mental and physical abuse and exploitation (1996: 29).

Razzaque and Rahman have also studied the issue of banning child labour from garment factories in connection with the said Harkin's Bill and its consequences in 1995-96. They also noticed that the plain withdrawal of children from any sector like garment industry was neither helpful for children nor was it an effective process of solving the child labour problem in an underdeveloped country like Bangladesh. Studying the empirical evidence of the child labour problem in Peru and Pakistan, Ranjan Roy also pointed out that the immediate elimination of child labour is neither feasible nor desirable, especially in view of the nontrivial share of earnings that children's labour contributes to household income. He concluded that "simplistic solutions like banning child labour or implementing international trade sanctions will merely drive employed children from the formal to the informal sector, where they are less open to scrutiny and protection from the worst effects of employment" (Ray, R. 2000: 365).

4.5.2. Non-Formal Education and Skill Training as Effective Tools to Combat the Problem:

Bangladesh Constitution enshrines the right of the children to free and compulsory primary education, and also enjoins the state to remove illiteracy within a given time-frame. In the context of CRC, education was a major component in the 'National Programme of Action 1990-95'. Basic education is one of the six components included in the NAP 1997-2002 – which coincides with the Fifth Plan (1997-2002).

Throughout the world, 'basic education' is considered as the single most important instrument for absorbing children away from the labour market. "Observers, however, have noted that it is extremely difficult to coerce an unwilling population into school attendance and that the best strategy is to make schooling valuable and attractive to children and their parents" (ILO, 1996: 23). High dropout rate is the other main problem in this regard. Outside the school, there are so many

reasons for this, but within the school system, there are some reasons also. Though primary education is officially free for all in Bangladesh, there are some costs of attending school too. Parents have to pay for certain types of school equipment, and sometimes registration fees, examination fees, clean clothes and often a uniform. All the school expenses, when added to the child's lost wages, makes child's schooling a daunting prospect.

Poor quality education often causes children to drop out of school and start working at an early age. The low caliber and ill-motivation of teachers and the use of verbal punishment also have negative impacts. On the other hand, easy and accessible school time, need-based curriculum, good-quality education, well-motivated teachers and harmless teaching method, and with all of these genuinely free education (for example, providing subsidies for uniforms, books and so on, no provision of exam fees, etc.) can keep children into the school system and away from work. Hasan and Pervin, Rahman W., and others also identified that the 'economic factor' is the 'main factor' to keep the children out of school. They are too poor to afford schooling unless tuition is free, the books and other materials are supplied without much cost and the school hours do not hamper their earnings.

The negative association between years of children's schooling and household poverty has also been studied by Ranjan Ray by analyzing the child labour situation in Peru and Pakistan. Ray found that "the hypothesized relationships between child labour and household poverty and between child schooling and household poverty are both strongly confirmed by the Pakistani data. When a Pakistani household falls into poverty, it increases each child's outside paid employment by approximately 500 hours annually..." (Ray, R. 2000: 364).

Time constraint for work, however, is the other problem. So the school hours should fit with the children's working schedules. As Peltó pointed out, 74 per cent of the working children reported that they would attend school if given the opportunity. Among the garment workers, surveyed during 1995, about 90 per cent said that they were interested in getting more schooling 'if it is made available' and they also mentioned that the schooling must be available at a time of day that does not interfere with their working schedules (1997b: 161).

Mahbub-ul-Haq and Khadija Haq have identified the distinguishing features of NFE as the following:

“First, *active participation by the local community* in planning, designing, constructing, running and monitoring a school is absolutely essential....”

“Second, *attendance rates in non-formal programmes are high* because of the flexibility in setting times for classes....”

“Third, most non-formal programmes locate *schools near the homes* of students and teachers. This allows parents, children and the teachers to develop a sense of security and ownership since schools are located within the heart of the community....”

“Fourth, non-formal programmes have a *participatory and life-related* curriculum....”

“Fifth, non-formal programmes have *specially targeted underprivileged groups* in the society, in order to close the large educational gaps which exists between the rich and the poor, between girls and boys, and between urban and rural children”. And,

“Sixth, a powerful argument in favour of non-formal schools is their *low cost*....”