

IMPACT OF PHYSICAL ABUSE ON THE HEALTH OF THE WORKING CHILDREN IN A CITY OF BANGLADESH

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This paper discusses the nature of physical abuse, frequency of physical abuse and the persons involved in physical abuse of the urban working children of Bangladesh. The types of work, nature of working conditions and the reaction of the working children against the physical abuse have also been discussed. The main focus of the paper is to examine from a gender perspective to what extent the physical abuses are associated with physical injuries and hazardous working environments which affect the physical, social, intellectual and mental health of the children in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Physical. Abuse. Health. Working. Children.

Introduction

Child labor is a common phenomenon through out the world and physical abuse is the intentional infliction of injury on working children. There are at least 250 million of working children between the ages of 5-14 in developing countries (Parker,1997, ILO, 1997). It is simply the severe form of child exploitation and child abuse. Child labor was first recognized as a social problem in the late 18th century in Great Britain. Hosking and Powel (1985) have mentioned that the history of child abuse is though long but there was little interest in this subject until the 1960s. Hopper (2001) argues that a large number of children have been abused throughout human history, but recently some of the countries have taken child abuse as a social problem with the initiative of United Nations Organizations. Though the work of the children can supplement the family income, but it is endanger for their physical safety, growth and development which also impair their mental, social, and moral development (Rahman,1990).The hazardous occupations of the working children not only degrade their status but also destroy potential human resources. Economic hardships of many families force most of their children to get involved in income generating activities. Many of the children grow and live in absolute poverty deprivation. They do not get opportunities to acquire education and skills to get employment for better life.

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The child labor is not a new issue in Bangladesh. About 2.5 million of children are engaged in various hazardous occupations because they are most vulnerable groups living under threats of hunger, illiteracy, displacement, exploitation, trafficking, physical and mental abuse (Sarker, 2006). They are compelled to work for long working hours with inadequate facilities. They are paid with minimum wages without job security. Many employers prefer to employ children to get maximum services paying them minimum wage. The working children under compulsion are engaged in highly hazardous jobs under unhygienic conditions.

The working children of the age 5-14 age group are engaged in manufacturing factories, engineering workshops, tanneries, construction sector, transport sector, restaurants, maids, domestic servants and so on. In over all the children are engaged in 300 different types of activities of which 49 are identified harmful to their physical and mental well-being (US-AID, 2007). According to UNICEF (2007) the nature of jobs and working environment of the working children are highly hazardous and dangerous with little regard to their health and safety. The mission of the employers is to get maximum services with minimum wages. Consequently, the working children are the subject of exploitation in different ways by their employers. The problem of physical abuse is complex and severe among the working children in urban areas of both formal and informal sectors in Bangladesh. Pelto (1997) has identified that most of the working children are engaged as trainees and as a result they do not get any remuneration for a long period of time but physical punishment is compulsory of those children if they have done any mistake during the training period. Many children work long hours every day of the week and many of them do not enjoy week end. On average, girls work longer hours than boys and paid less than the boys doing the same type of work. Most of the girls work as paid domestics where their wage is usually low although they work day and night. It has now been realized that the question of raising the health status and quality of life of the working children who are victims of physical abuse (Basu, 1992). It should be noted that the health is a basic concern of all human being including the working children. The main focus of this paper is to examine to what extent the working children are being victims of physical abuse by their employers which not only affects their physical health but also creates problems of social, intellectual and mental health.

Conceptual Issues

It is very difficult to give a universal definition of physical abuse of working children. The legal definition of physical abuse of working children varies from one country to another. Physical abuse includes any injury to or death of a child resulting from intentional act by the care taker or employer of the children. Physical abuse is the most visible form of abuse and may be defined as any act which results in a non-accidental trauma or physical injury. Inflicted physical injury most often

represents unreasonable, severe corporal punishment or unjustifiable punishment. Physical abuse denotes the criteria of abuse in which physical torturing, injury etc. are imposed on a working child. According to Cattanaach (1995:19) physical abuse is any kind of suffering from non-accidental physical injury. Physical abuse is defined here any kind of physical aggression and torture are associated with physical injury for working children by their employers.

The working children are 5-14 years of aged who work in different sectors with or without remuneration to supplement family income or to get training keeping in view to be employed in future to provide financial support to their families and for themselves. The working children are the economically and socially disadvantaged and vulnerable and most of them live with their families. Some of the working children also live at the residence of the employers or at the working place especially those who do not have scope to live at their families due to the paucity of space. More specifically the working children are those who work as workers or apprentice in different sectors with or without salary and without any written agreement under the age of 14 years.

Health is a state of well being that maintains a good equilibrium of the different parameters of body-mind relationship and in absence of disease. According to World Health Organization health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The parameter of health is conceptualized in different perspectives involving the meaning of different connotations which denotes the real meaning of sound health i.e. wellness in holistic. Thus the holistic concept of health encompass not only the physical health but also mental, emotional, social, spiritual, and intellectual health although in this paper the concept of health is confined with physical aspect of health of the working children.

Area and Sector of Research

Rajshahi Metropolitan City is one of the Divisional cities of Bangladesh which was selected for the study of Abused Children and their Survival in Urban Bangladesh in 2003-2004. The city is situated on the north-western part of Bangladesh. The 5 wards of the city were selected out of 30 wards using the method of purposive sampling where the concentration of the working was significantly high. The main seven working sectors have been identified in the city area viz. welding engineering, automobile workshop, lathe machine workshop, goldsmith, carpentry, restaurant, and domestic servant where the female children were involved in different household activities.

Research Methodology

The survey, observation, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), use of key informants, and case study method has been applied to conduct this research project. Two

sets of questionnaire were used to conduct the survey. One was administered for working children and the other one for employers. Observation method was applied at the time of interviewing in order to collect the accurate and authentic information. The FGD method was used to collect the information from the working children and the employers holistically. Key informants were used in order to get the data from cross-section of people. Case study method was used to get in-depth information to supplement the survey data. The cases were selected from both the different categories of working children involved in different occupations in gender perspective and employers.

Background of Working Children

The socio-economic and cultural background of the working of the working children includes age, gender, religiosity, level of education, family type, parental affiliation, and occupational structure of their fathers. It has been found that about 51.9 per cent working children were belonged to the age group of 12-14 years. The second largest group was 30.6 per cent and they were belonged to 10-12 years of age. About 15 per cent children were 8-10 years of age and 2.5 per cent below the 8 years of age. It is interesting to note that about 40 per cent of female working children were involved in their work when they were reached below the 10 years of age compared to 13.3 per cent male working children. It has been observed that most of the female working children were involved in domestic work as maid servants. About 91.9 per cent children were Muslims and the rest of 8.1 per cent were Hindus. It should be mentioned that Bangladesh is a Muslim dominated country in South Asia. About 23.7 per cent children were found illiterate and rest of them had primary education. The per centage of illiteracy is significantly among the girls compared to boys because of gender dichotomization which is the common characteristic of patriarchal society. About 91.9 per cent children belonged to the nuclear families and the rest of them were from joint families. About 80.6 per cent children would live with their parents, 11.9 per cent, 6.3 per cent, 1.9 per cent, and 1.3 per cent would live with their widow, separated, divorced, and step mothers respectively. It should be noted that about 2.5 per cent working children were orphans. The fathers of the working children were poor and they were involved in ill paid occupations viz. day laborer, driving, petty business, small farming, carpentering, rickshaw pulling etc. and most of the mothers were housewives. Most of the working children were the members of hard core poor families and as a result they were the victims of deprivation of absolute poverty. Most of the male working children were involved in dangerous and hazardous occupation like welding engineering, automobile workshop, lathe machine work, goldsmith etc. On the other hand, the females were involved in household activities as maid servants.

Nature of Physical Abuse

Physical abuse may take place in multi-natural ways. Heisler (2001) notes that certain physical abuse is common among the working children but it may be happened in different forms and in different natures. It depends upon the attitude of the people towards physical punishment. Physical abuse is caused by a person's inability to control his or her anger. The symptoms of physical abuse include signs of injury such as unexplained bruises, burns, spot on the skin, rupture of heart related blood vessels, inflammation of abdominal area etc. The working children could not raise any question against their physical abuse due to the fear of drop out from their employment. A table is given below along with a pie to get the clear picture about the nature and frequency of physical abuse in gender perspective of 133 working children.

TABLE 1: Nature of Physical Abuse of the Working Children in Gender Perspective

Nature of Physical Abuse	Sex				Total	
	Male		Female		N=133	Percentage
	N=114	Percentage	N=19	Percentage		
Slap and kick	73	64.0	8	42.1	81	60.9
Beating by rod, stick etc.	12	10.5	4	21.1	16	12.0
Slap, kick and beating	20	17.6	3	15.8	23	17.3
Burn	4	3.5	1	5.3	5	3.8
Making kneel down	2	1.8	1	5.3	3	2.2
Others	3	2.6	2	10.5	5	3.8
Total	114	100.0	19	100.0	133	100

Table 1 shows that the 60.9 per cent working children were the victims of slap and kicking by their employers. The per centage is significantly high among the boys compared to girls.

About 12 per cent children were beating by stick of iron rod and 17.3 children were victims of slap, tick and beating all together. About 3.8 per cent children were abused by cigarette burns, immersion burns and dry burns caused by iron. On the other hand, 2.2 per cent children were given physical punishment by kneel down. About 3.8 were the victims of different physical punishment which includes hit on external genitals especially for girls, load of over work, etc.

To quote a maid Farida:

Farida was 11 years girl and she was migrated from rural area with her divorced mother in search of work. She started her work just 6 month before in a family of Rajshahi city. Farida had to awake early in the morning about 6 a.m. and continued her work at 12 p.m. until the Television program was off. She had to do different activities such as cleaning, sweeping, washing, and taking care of the children. She was allowed to take her meal separately when all members of the household have had their meal. Farida wanted to visit her mother once in a month but she was not allowed. Once her mother became sick and she went to visit her mother and stayed over there two days.

When she came back after two days then she was beaten by the house wife due over stay and even she was not given food for whole day. Ultimately, Farida decided to go back to her mother and she did.

Frequency of Physical Abuse

Frequency physical abuse reveals the intensity of the different nature and types of abuse through which the working children become the victims by their employers in different times in working places. The parameters of frequency of physical abuses are classified into three categories viz. at times, often, and always. A table is stated here along with a graph in that context.

TABLE 2: Frequency of Physical Abuse of Working Children in Gender Perspective

Nature of Physical Abuse	Frequency of Abuse	Sex				Total	
		Male		Female		N=133	Percentage
		N=114	Percentage	N=19	Percentage		
1. Slap.kick (I)	At times	21	28.8	5	62.5	26	32.0
	Often	39	53.4	2	25.3	41	50.0
	Always	13	17.7	1	12.5	14	17.3
	Sub-total	73	100	8	100	81	100
2. Beating by rod stick etc(II)	At times	8	66.7	2	50.0	10	62.5
	Often	3	25.0	1	25.0	4	25.0
	Always	1	8.0	1	25.0	2	12.5
	Sub-total	12	100	4	100	16	100
3. Both (I&II)	At times	13	65.0	2	66.7	15	65.2
	Often	5	25.0	1	33.3	6	26.1
	Always	2	10.0	0	0	2	8.7
	Sub-total	20	100	3	100	23	100
4. Fire burn	One times	4	100	1	100	5	100
	At times	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Often	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Always	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Sub-total	4	100	1	100	5	100
5. Making kneel down	At times	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Often	2	100	1(100.0)	100	3	100
	Always	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Sub-total	2	100	1	100	3	100
6. Others	At times	1	33.3	1	50.0	2	40.0
	Often	2	66.7	1	50.0	3	60.0
	Always	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Sub-total	3	100	2	100	5	100
Grand total		114		19		133	

It is found from the table 2 that about 50 per cent children were physically abused by their employers and senior workers at the working places using slap and kick often and on followed 32 per cent at certain times and 17.3 per cent always for the same. The frequency of slap and kick often are significantly high for the boys compared to girls because of gender difference. But at any times of slap and kick for the girls by their house wives is higher compared to boys. It

should be noted that the working children were bitten at any time irrespective of their gender identity. It has been reported that 4 boys and 1 girl were the victims of burn by their employers and house wife respectively. Frequency of making kneel down was not significant because it is time consuming and as a result if this physical punishment is implemented then it is loosing concern for the employers. Frequency of other types of physical punishment such as cutting of hair, excessive work load etc. To quote Apu:

Apu is a 12 years old boy. He was working in a goldsmith shop in Rajshahi city for the last two years. Apu's family has been migrated in this city from rural area about 10 years before due lost their property of river bank erosion. Apu has one brother and one sister and both of them are junior to him. Apu studied grade two and he did not continue his education due to acute poverty. Consequently, he decided to contribute to his family for the education of his younger brother and sister. Apu's father is a fisher man and mother is house wife. Monthly family income of his family is about US\$50. They don't have their own house. They live in a rented house. Apu was working as apprentice and as a result he was getting per month US\$2 during his training period. Apu is a hard working boy but his work was supervised by another senior experienced worker called ustad (senior worker and trainer). It has been reported by Apu that often and on he was physically abused by his ustad with a little mistake. One day Apu was physically abused with slap and tick and he was seriously injured and lost his sense about an hour and he was hospitalized for 3 days. He was found surviving with injury and pain at his neck. Apu reported that he was poor and so that he had to survive with this unexpected and stressful situation otherwise he had no alternative.

Nature of Physical Injury

It has been found that 55 working children were physically injured out of 133 while they were interviewed. The injuries of the different organs of the body are the out come of punishment given by the employers and the senior workers who supposed to supervise the activities of the working children. A table is stated here to get the clear idea about the nature and extent of physical injuries faced by the working children in gender perspective.

TABLE 3: Nature of Physical Injuries of the Working Children in Gender Perspective

Working Children Types of Injuries	Sex				Total	
	Male N=11		Female N=2		N=13	Percentage
	N=11	Percentage	N=2	Percentage	N=13	Percentage
Injuries at hand	12	25.0	3	42.8	15	27.3
Injuries at hand & leg	8	16.7	1	14.3	9	16.3
Deafness	3	5.9	-	-	3	5.5
Pain at neck	11	22.9	2	28.6	13	23.6
Pain at head	4	8.3	1	14.3	5	9.0
Back Pain	6	12.5	-	-	6	11.0
Others	4	8.3	-	-	4	2.3
Total	48	100.0	7	100.0	55	100.0

It is reflected from the table-3 that about 27.3 per cent working children were the victims of hand injuries. The per centage of hand injuries was significantly higher among the girls than to boys. It seems to be the girls were involved, cleaning, washing, and sometimes cooking. On the other hand, 16.3 children were the victims of both hand and leg injuries. Only 5.5 per cent boys were the sufferers of deafness due to adverse effect of the sound of the machines at the working places. About 23.6 per cent, 9 per cent and 11 per cent children were suffering from neck pain, head pain, and back pain respectively. There is no any significant difference between boys and girls about the problem of neck pain but it has been reported that higher per centage of girls were suffering from bad headache and boys from back pain. The main cause of these problems, the girls had to involve so many household activities and they were on stress to perform all these activities in due time. On the other hand, the reason of back pain for the boys was the long working hour in sitting position without any interval.

Impact on Health

The quality of life and well being largely depend upon the degree to which a person leads his or her life in a fullest capacity with enjoyment and reward. The quality of life and well being are also associated with the health of an individual. Unfortunately, the working children were the victims of different types of health hazards. The overall hazards may cause of damage of eyes, irritation, redness and eye ache, conjunctivitis, blurring of vision, skin burning, cellulites etc. due to the occupational involvement in welding. The children are found the victims of lead poisoning, bronchitis, and bronchial asthma while they were working in automobile workshop. On the other hand, eye ache, excessive, visual disturbance, skin irritation, skin diseases etc. are the common phenomenon for the children who work in goldsmith factory, lathe machine workshop, restaurant, carpentry factory, maid servant in household activities. Pelto (1997) found that the working children had to report to their employers during their illness otherwise they would sake from their jobs.

The working children were living on pressure from their employers. In any time they may be removed from their employment if the employers want and thus affects their mental and intellectual health due to stress (Syme and Berkman, 1990). Stress is linked to heart disease, diabetes, cancer, foetal death, stroke, and major depression (Holmes and Rahe, 1967, White, 2002). They do not have any job security and benefit excepting the fixed amount of monthly wage. Even they do not get any health allowance for their treatment when they become sick. They can get sick leave without pay if it is more than one week. A table is given below to get the clear idea about the health condition of the 135 working children.

TABLE 4: Diseases of the Working Children in Gender Perspective

Pattern of Diseases	Sex				Total	
	Male		Female		N=160	Per centage
	N=135	Per centage	N=25	Per centage		
Cough	8	5.9	2	8.0	10	6.3
Fever	5	3.7	0	0	5	3.1
Asthma	7	5.2	0	0	7	4.4
Eczema	35	25.9	4	16.0	39	24.4
Visual dimness	10	7.4	0	0	10	6.3
Irritation of eye	15	11.1	6	16.0	21	13.1
Bronchitis	3	2.2	0	0	3	1.9
Dysentery	2	1.5	0	0	2	1.3
Headache	10	7.4	3	12.0	13	8.1
Physical Weakness	12	8.9	2	8.0	14	8.8
Infectious Diseases	5	3.7	3	12.0	8	5.0
No Disease	23	17.0	5	20.0	28	17.5
Total	135	100	25	100	160	100

Note: Multiple answers have given by the children.

It has been found from the table 4 that about 82.5 per cent working children were suffering from different types of diseases. About 24.4 per cent children were suffering from eczema because of lack of knowledge about personal hygiene and unhygienic living and working environment. On the other hand about 6.3 per cent, 3.1 per cent, and 4.4 per cent children were suffering from cough, fever, and asthma respectively. More over 6.3 per cent children were the victims of visual dimness due to the shortage of vitamin A. Irritation of eyes of 13.1 per cent of the working children was the second largest health problem. When the children work in welding, lathe engineering, goldsmith, and automobile, they don't have opportunity to use anything for the protection of their eyes. The working children were exposed to excessive light, ultra-violet light, heated flame, gas etc. while they were working in those sectors. About 1.9 per cent, 1.3 per cent and 8.1 per cent children were suffering from bronchitis, dysentery, headache respectively due to their environmental problem in working places. Besides, 8.8 per cent children were the victims of physical weakness because of malnutrition and anemic problem. On the other hand, about 5 per cent children were suffering from infectious diseases. It has been found that the infectious diseases are significantly high in other countries compared to Bangladesh (Rogger et al, 2005). It should be noted that in addition to their environmental problem in working places, the housing condition, sanitation, and living arrangement are responsible for adverse effect on their health.

Policies for the Working Children

Existing legislation of Bangladesh is antiquated and deals only with children working in the formal sector. There is no single code or law dealing with the children working in informal sector. Minimum age of the children to get employment in formal sectors are different viz. in mines is 15 years, shops and

commercial establishment is 12 years, factories is 14 years, workshop where hazardous work is performed is 12 years. The situation of the working children in Bangladesh had been fairly understood during the 1990s by both the government and civil society and several initiatives to combat the problem were taken by the Government of Bangladesh with close cooperation of UNICEF, ILO, and NGOs. In 1990, Bangladesh is one of the signatories to the UN convention on the Rights of the Child and the ensuing Summit Declaration and Plan of Action.

In 1990, Bangladesh passed the Primary Education Act and, in 1993, it established the compulsory primary education system for children aged 6 years and above. Government started the Food for Education program in 1993 in collaboration with the World Food Program (WFP) keeping in view attracting poor children and their families towards primary education. With the setting-up of the primary and Mass Education Division in 1992 and the Directorate of Non-Formal Education in 1996, the Government introduced another step to protect the high dropout and low attendance in the formal school system. This trend made a substantial impact on solving the child labor.

In March 2001, the Government of Bangladesh ratified the ILO Convention No. 182 and, in December 2001, the Ministry of Labor and Employment took the initiative to develop a national policy on child labor that would constitute a policy foundation for the IPEC Time-Bound Program (TPB) and contribute to the implementation of Bangladesh's obligations under the ILO Convention No. 182. The Ministry of Labor and Employment implemented a project entitled Eradication of Hazardous Child Labor funded by USAID. To enhance the life possibilities for the working children, UNICEF Bangladesh has already developed the Basic Education for Urban Working Children, especially for girls and their families, to access their rights to education, protection and development. UNICEF Bangladesh also actively advocates for education, social and economic policies in favor of working children and their families and support the progressive elimination of child labor.

Conclusion

About 4.9 million of children are working in Bangladesh in different capacities in various sectors and many of them do not have access to education or skill development opportunity and become trapped in low-skilled, low-pay work that further binds them into the cycle of poverty (BBS, 2006). It has been observed that children with no access to education have little alternative but to enter the labor market and are often forced to perform dangerous or exploitative work without or with minimum wages. The consequence of physical abuse of the working children not only affects their physical health but also it affects their mental health, emotional health, social health, intellectual and spiritual health and the quality of life and well being (Alters and Schiff, 2003). Because children who are in growing stage

can permanently distort or disable their bodies when they carry loads or are forced to adopt unnatural positions at work for long time. There is growing international recognition of the plight of working children, their poverty, vulnerabilities and deprivations. To enhance the life possibilities for working children, UNICEF, ILO, USAID, SDC, UNDP etc. are working with the close cooperation of GOs and NGOs in Bangladesh different capacities for skill development training using the participatory teaching methods specifically designed for the needs of this group. The working children were found very much enthusiastic as well as optimistic in their skill development training and this paper is concluded with the expectation of a quotation of one optimistic 12 years working girl Shilpi:

The school of UNICEF offers livelihood training. I am very happy to be a student of this school. I started with a course in bookbinding but after one week I swapped to the tailoring course. I want to be a best tailor in our city and hope that I shall be a owner of a garment factory, and then I never beat my staff and cheat them in wage along with other facilities.

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