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Child Labour in Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC): Exploring Causes and Consequences

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ABSTRACT

Child labour is still a key socio-economic challenge in Bangladesh, especially in urban areas where poverty, migration to urban areas, financial security of the family and informal employment opportunities push children into labour market. The study explores the reasons, working conditions and effects of child labour in three sectors namely restaurants/hotels, garment factories and workshops/garages in Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC). It is a mixed method study which uses quantitative and qualitative information. Structured questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions and field observations were used to gather primary data from 150 child workers. Both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed by means of frequency and percentage distributions; and by thematic analysis. The results show that the main cause of child labour is the poverty of the family. Of the respondents, 34.7% said the main reason for working was family poverty and 25.3% said they worked to earn family income. The vast majority (84.0%) said that they earned income to pay for their household's needs. There was also significant disruption of education with 59.3% of respondents reporting that they had left school and 28.0% that were studying. The working conditions were often sub-optimal, 37.3% of the workers working 9–11 hours while 22.7% were working more than 11 hours per day. In addition, 58.7% had suffered an accident or injury in the workplace, and 68.7% said that there was no safety equipment available. There's also been a high rate of workplace abuse. Education, health, psychology and future development were determined as some of the serious impacts of child labour. Based on the study, it is concluded that child labour in DNCC is strongly linked to the poverty, the household's financial hardship, the lack of school attendance, unsafe working conditions and lack of protection. It suggests improving the effectiveness of poverty reduction programmes, extending educational opportunities, strengthening the enforcement of the labour laws, enhancing labour inspection, providing employment opportunities for parents, and promoting cooperation between government agencies, NGOs, educational institutions, employers and local communities in promoting child protection.

1. Introduction

Child labour is one of the foremost social and economic problems in many developing nations like Bangladesh. Despite the country's impressive economic growth and achievements in education and poverty alleviation, many children still engage in activities that could negatively impact their educational, health and safety outcomes and their future development through labour. Child labour should thus not be taken for granted as merely a labour-market problem. It is closely linked to poverty, inequalities, and lack of financial security in the families, lack of education, low level of social protection

and lack of enforcement of labour laws. The uploaded thesis highlights that child labour is more prevalent in urban areas where there are plenty of jobs in the informal sector. From a young age, children are not only present in restaurants but also in garment factories, workshops, garages, and in other small businesses. Urban environment poses specific problems since a large number of families move to the city of Dhaka to look for jobs but then end up with high living cost, intermittent job, poor housing and inability to provide economic security. The problems can be analysed from Dhaka North City Corporation as a very interesting context. The present study is; however, limited to child workers who work in restaurants/hotels, garment factories and workshops/garages. The sectors have been chosen as they are various types of informal and low paid employment where children can experience long hours, low pay, poor protection, risk of harm and the lack of child education opportunities. Issues surrounding children's work is not just about children working. Main focus is on the type and impact of their work. The tasks a child performs in a restaurant can involve handling heavy objects, standing for long periods, chemicals and sharp items. Workshops and garages may pose risks of machinery, electric equipment, chemicals, fire, and smoke to children working in them. Children who work in a garment related workplace might be subjected to repetitive work, physical fatigue, eye strain, low wages and supervision pressure. The thesis takes great pains to indicate these occupational dangers as significant aspects. Another issue of great concern is education. Children who work for long hours frequently have difficulty attending school regularly. Others sometimes drop out of school entirely. This educational deprivation can negatively affect their future employment and lead to an intergenerational cycle of poverty. Previous studies also have highlighted this link between child labour and human-capital formation (Basu, 1999; Becker, 1993; Chudgar et al., 2022; Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2005). The new estimates from the global level reiterate the ongoing significance. In 2024, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF estimated that about 138 million children were involved in child labour, around half of which (about 54 million) are in hazardous work (ILO & UNICEF, 2025). In spite of significant gains, the goal of the world to eradicate child labour by 2025 was not met. Evidence from more recent years also shows on-going problems in Bangladesh. At the national level data suggest that child labour is still linked to socioeconomic disadvantage and vulnerability in households, as well as to exclusion from school (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics [BBS] 2023; UNICEF 2024). A recent study also reveals that there are significant occupational-health risks among children working in informal sectors in Dhaka (Caleo et al., 2025). In the light of this, the present study examines the socio-economic causes, working conditions, educational and health impact of child labour in the selected sectors of DNCC and its future implications.

2. Statement of the Problem

Bangladesh has enacted laws and policies that aim to improve its child labour situation, but it remains a problem, especially in the informal urban sector. Young people who work in restaurants, jobs where they work with clothes, in workshops or garages, can get paid less than adults and may be asked to do heavy and dangerous work. The thesis indicates poverty to be the primary cause. Other factors are the family's financial requirements, dropouts from school, migration, irregular work of parents, the demand of low cost labour and inadequate enforcement of labour laws. Many workplaces are informal and regulation is challenging. Regular registration and inspection of small restaurant, workshop, garage or informal production units may not occur. Children therefore might still fall outside of effective systems of labour protection. Lack of detailed research specifically on DNCC and a comparative study between child labour in restaurants, garment factories and workshops is also encountered. This is recognized as an important literature gap by the thesis. Previous research has tended to concentrate on

either national statistics or poverty or education rather than workplace hazards, hours worked wages, abuse or safety conditions in these three areas when compared to each other.

3. Research Questions

The study addresses two principal questions:

1. What are the major socio-economic causes and working conditions of child labour in restaurants, garment factories, and workshops in Dhaka North City Corporation?
2. How does child labour affect the education, health, and future development of child workers in the selected sectors?

4. Research Objectives

The study aims to:

1. Identify the socioeconomic causes of child labour in restaurants, garment factories, and workshops in DNCC;
2. Examine the working conditions and workplace environment of child workers;
3. Analyze the effects of child labour on children's education, health, and social development; and
4. Provide recommendations for reducing child labour and strengthening child protection in DNCC.

5. Literature Review

Child labour is known to be caused by poverty. Poor households may have to keep their children in work because their adult income is below the minimum level required for the household to sustain the basic consumption of the household. Children in poor households may be forced into work because incomes of their adults are not large enough to support minimum household consumption. (Basu and Van, 1998) Basu (1999) expanded this line of reasoning by providing an explanation as to how child labour can be maintained through a vicious circle in which low income that leads to bringing children into the labour force also reduces the human-capital accumulation of children, and in turn, low human-capital stocks lead to low income. This theoretical explanation is very applicable in the context of Bangladesh. Salahuddin (2001) recognizes poverty, family needs, poor education and social acceptance as among the factors that contribute to child labour. Child labour in Dhaka is also linked to poverty, migration, informal employment and household survival by Khan (2001). This present study builds upon the literature on these issues by studying the contribution of children to family expenses, parental occupation, family financial pressure and household income. Children's time is often split between child labour and child education. Long working hours have a negative impact on school attendance, on study time, on academic performance, and on ultimately achieving an education (Psacharopoulos, 1997; Ravallion & Wodon, 2000). An important explanation is given by Becker's (1993) Human Capital Theory. Education is an investment that creates more future productivity and income. Absences due to early school dropout can provide children with an immediate financial benefit, but deprive them of additional future human-capital benefits. Recent studies in Bangladesh and Pakistan also show that child labour is a constraint on basic education skills (Chudgar et al. 2022). Studies specifically on Dhaka slum settlements also showed the connection between child labour and educational disadvantage (Quattri & Watkins, 2019). Child labourers can be exposed to high physical and psychological risk. Uddin et al. (2009) reported physical and psychological impacts of child labour in Bangladesh. In a similar study, Ahad et al. (2021) found that there were also links between urban child labour and risk to health. This is a heightened risk in workshop or garages where children might be exposed to machinery, chemicals,

electricity, smoke and fire. Working in a restaurant may involve children being subjected to heat, burn, sharp equipment, slippery surfaces and long periods of standing. Caleo et al. (2025) found significant occupational-health issues among children who are engaged in informal sector work in the city, which would suggest that child labour be considered an occupational-health and child-protection issue. Bangladesh has enacted legislation and policies to ensure the protection of children from hazardous labour. In 2022, the country ratified ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and in 2022; it also ratified ILO Convention No. 138 on Minimum Age (ILO, 2022). But the eradication of child labour is not possible without the support of the law. The successful implementation depends on the workplace inspection, social protection, education, family assistance, adult employment and coordination between the government and civil-society organisations. Hoque (2024) notes that Bangladesh has enacted significant legislation and policy, but has yet to see them implemented, especially in the informal sector. The literature shows that in Bangladesh, child labour has been examined in terms of economic, educational, health and legal aspects. However, there are some gaps that are identified in the uploaded thesis. Firstly, the scope of research is relatively limited and it is specifically on Dhaka North City Corporation. Secondly, there are relatively few studies that look at restaurants, garment-related workplaces and workshops at the same time. Third, previous studies have tended to focus on poverty and education, less so on working hours and workplace safety, abuse, pay and workplace injuries in small informal jobs. Fourth, quantitative studies are not able to convey the pressure, fear, abuse and family responsibilities that children experience. The present study thus takes a mixed (quantitative and qualitative) approach and a specific focus on the three areas of the DNCC that were selected.

6. Methodology

The method of the study was mixed method (quantitative and qualitative). The primary sources of data were structured questionnaire, interview, focus group discussion and field observation. Secondary data was gathered by books, journal articles, reports, government publications, newspapers and online sources. The study was conducted in selected areas of Dhaka North City Corporation and focused on three employment sectors: restaurants/hotels; garment factories; and workshops/garages. The study included 150 child workers, with 50 respondents from each sector:

Sector	Number	Percentage
Restaurants/Hotels	50	33.3%
Garment Factories	50	33.3%
Workshops/Garages	50	33.3%
Total	**150**	**100%**

A purposive sampling was used. The results are descriptive evidence of the respondents surveyed and should not be interpreted as making general statements to the broader population of child workers in DNCC, as it is a purposive sample. Frequency and percentage distributions were used to analyse quantitative information. Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative information.

7. Findings and Analysis

7.1 Gender Distribution

The detailed survey table reveals that 108 (72.0%) of the respondents were male while 42 (28.0%) were female. The thesis proposes a higher representation of boys in the sectors where the labour input is higher, like restaurants, workshops, garages etc. This finding could be attributed to gender differences

in labour market participation, but should not be attributed to a lower prevalence of child labour among girls as it could be girls' work is more likely to be invisible.

7.2 Educational Status

The educational situation of respondents was concerning.

Educational Status	Frequency	Percentage
Currently studying	42	28.0%
Dropped out	89	59.3%
Never attended school	19	12.7%
Total	**150**	**100%**

Thus, almost three-fifths of the respondents had already dropped out of school, while 12.7% had never attended. The findings strongly support the argument that child labour and educational exclusion are closely interconnected.

7.3 Reasons for Working

Family poverty was the most frequently reported reason for entering employment.

Reason	Frequency	Percentage
Family poverty	52	34.7%
Support family income	38	25.3%
Family pressure	15	10.0%
School dropout	24	16.0%
Migration to Dhaka	16	10.7%
Others	5	3.3%
Total	**150**	**100%**

Family poverty and the need to support household income together accounted for 60.0% of responses. This finding is consistent with the economic explanation of child labour advanced by Basu and Van (1998) and Edmonds and Pavcnik (2005).

7.4 Children's Contribution to Family Expenses

A particularly important finding is that 126 respondents (84.0%) stated that their income contributed to family expenses, while only 24 respondents (16.0%) reported that their income did not contribute to household expenses. This result demonstrates why simply removing children from employment without supporting their families may be insufficient.

7.5 Household Income

The household-income distribution further demonstrates economic vulnerability.

Monthly Household Income	Frequency	Percentage
Below BDT 10,000	48	32.0%
BDT 10,001–15,000	55	36.7%
BDT 15,001–20,000	31	20.7%
Above BDT 20,000	16	10.6%

More than two-thirds of households were therefore reported to have monthly incomes of BDT 15,000 or less.

7.6 Parental Occupation

The occupational background of parents also indicates economic vulnerability. Day labourers represented the largest group (29.3%), followed by garment workers (18.7%) and rickshaw pullers

(16.0%). This finding supports the argument that unstable adult employment may increase household dependence on children's earnings.

7.7 Duration of Employment

The largest proportion of respondents, 42.0%, had been working for one to three years. Another 28.7% had worked for four to six years, while 14.6% had worked for more than six years. The duration of employment suggests that child labour is not necessarily a temporary experience. For many children, it can become a sustained part of their childhood and adolescence.

7.8 Working Hours

The study found that working hours were long.

Working Hours	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 6 hours	18	12.0%
6–8 hours	42	28.0%
9–11 hours	56	37.3%
More than 11 hours	34	22.7%
Total	**150**	**100%**

Overall, 60.0% of respondents reported working at least nine hours per day. Such long working hours can restrict opportunities for education, rest, recreation, and social development.

7.9 Monthly Wages

Child workers generally received relatively low wages. The largest group (38.7%) earned BDT 3,001–5,000 per month, while 21.3% earned below BDT 3,000. Only 12.0% earned above BDT 8,000. The combination of low wages and long working hours indicates a particularly vulnerable position within the labour market.

7.10 Workplace Safety

Only 19.3% of respondents considered their workplaces safe.

Workplace Environment	Frequency	Percentage
Safe	29	19.3%
Moderately safe	67	44.7%
Unsafe	54	36.0%
Total	**150**	**100%**

Thus, 80.7% considered their workplaces either moderately safe or unsafe.

7.11 Workplace Accidents and Injuries

The survey found that 88 respondents (58.7%) had experienced workplace accidents or injuries, compared with 62 respondents (41.3%) who had not. This is one of the most important findings because it demonstrates that child labour is directly connected to occupational-health risks.

7.12 Verbal and Physical Abuse

Workplace abuse was also widespread.

- Frequently: 20.7%
- Sometimes: 49.3%
- Never: 30.0%

Therefore, 70.0% reported experiencing verbal or physical abuse either frequently or sometimes. This demonstrates that exploitation is not restricted to wages and working hours; it also includes psychological and interpersonal dimensions.

7.13 Availability of Safety Equipment

Only 31.3% of respondents reported that safety equipment was available, while 68.7% reported that it was unavailable. The absence of safety equipment is especially concerning in workshops and other workplaces involving machinery, chemicals, heat, electrical equipment, and sharp tools.

7.14 Impact on Education

The majority of respondents reported that work affected their education.

Educational Impact	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly affected	68	45.3%
Moderately affected	57	38.0%
Not affected	25	16.7%

Thus, 83.3% reported that their education was either strongly or moderately affected by child labour.

7.15 School Attendance

The current school-attendance situation was equally concerning.

Attendance	Frequency	Percentage
Regular	34	22.7%
Irregular	49	32.7%
Not attending	67	44.6%

Only 22.7% attended school regularly, while 44.6% were not attending school at all. These findings support the human-capital argument that prolonged involvement in labour can reduce educational opportunities.

7.16 Health Problems

Health problems associated with work were reported by most respondents.

- Frequently: 35.3%
- Sometimes: 46.0%
- Never: 18.7%

Consequently, 81.3% reported experiencing work-related health problems either frequently or sometimes. These results are consistent with the literature on the physical and psychological consequences of child labour in Bangladesh (Ahad et al., 2021; Uddin et al., 2009).

8. Discussion

The results show a strong link between child labour and conditions of poverty, economic insecurity of the family, lack of education, unsafe working conditions and inadequate protection of child labour in DNCC. The first big finding is on the subject of poverty. The main factor cited for working was family poverty, and the majority of those who worked gave their income for family living costs. This argument is supported by this, as it illustrates that child labour more often than not is not only a personal decision but a strategy, a survival strategy, in fact. The second key discovery is related to education. The low rate of regular school attendance and high dropout rate reflect the close link between working and not going to school. If children work a long hours, they will have less time and energy to devote to learning. This loss of human-capital development can then be a limiting factor in their future jobs. Third, the workplace results show that there is significant occupational vulnerability. Many child workers work in conditions

where they are not well protected from harm, as is evident in long working hours, low wages, accidents, non-use of protective equipment and abuse in the workplace. Fourth, the health results demonstrate that child labour is not just an economic concern. Over 4/5 reported health issues related to work, often or sometimes. The results thus further emphasize the importance of linking child labour policy to occupational-health and child-protection policy. Last but not least, the results suggest that child labour can be a vicious cycle of poverty. Children drop out or fail to learn, miss out on skills, begin informal work at a young age and as adults stay economically dependent. This is in line with the Becker (1993) view of human capital and with the economic studies of child labour conducted by Basu (1999).

9. Recommendations

Government social protection programs should target at the household level should aim at vulnerable households as poverty is the main driver of child labour. Household reliance on children's income can be mitigated by supplying cash support, food support, livelihood programs, and targeted social safety nets. Conditional cash transfers, educational stipends, emergency financial assistance and targeted support can be used to help to keep children in school instead of work. School materials, scholarships, transportation, school meals, flexibility in learning and accelerated education programs for out-of-school children should be provided to children receiving free and available education. Labour inspection must be extended to informal workplaces, such as restaurants, workshops, garages and small manufacturing units. Children involved in dangerous activities should be identified at regular inspections and these requirements should be in line with the occupational-safety requirement. Employers should ensure that suitable protective equipment, training on safety; supervision and safe working conditions are provided. Children should NOT be used for dangerous work. Parents, employers, communities, schools and local leaders should be the focus of awareness programs. It is important to challenge social normalisation of child labour. The number of job and livelihood opportunities for adults should be increased to ensure that families do not rely on children's income. Specifically recommended are vocational trainings, support for entrepreneurship, and adult skill development, all of which are promoted in the thesis. There should be a collaboration of government agencies, NGO's, schools, employers and community groups to identify vulnerable children, offer an educational component and to follow up on high-risk workplaces. Education, health, counselling and social support and appropriate rehabilitation services, not just removal from workplaces, should be provided to children already involved in labour. There are opportunities for identifying children at risk and early help to be offered by community leaders, teachers, social organisations and local authorities.

10. Conclusion

Child labour in Dhaka North City Corporation is a serious socio-economic and child protection issues. The results of this study indicate that poverty, financial insecurity of families, dropping out of school, migration and dependence on family income are the main causes of child labour. The problem is especially severe because employment frequently takes up a great deal of time, jobs are poorly paid, the working environment is hazardous, safety equipment is inadequate, accidents at work, abuse, and health issues are prevalent. Meanwhile, child labour has a significant impact on child education. It is evident that the high rate of school dropouts, irregular attendance and children who are no longer in school indicates that work can prevent children from acquiring human capital. The impact is therefore not limited to the childhood but can impact employment, income, social mobility and intergenerational poverty. The results suggest that it is not possible to eradicate child labour by enforcement. The measures of poverty reduction, family income support, quality education, workplace inspection, occupational

safety, child protection, rehabilitation and public awareness must work together. Study therefore calls for a coordinated approach by the government agencies, DNCC authorities, employers, schools, NGOs, community organizations and families. This holistic approach is vital to ensure that the children in DNCC transition from hazardous and exploitative work to education, safety, dignity and future sustainable possibilities.

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