

Chapter 1

Abuse Among Child Domestic Workers in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the prevalence and causes of child abuses e.g., physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of child domestic workers in Bangladesh. This study used a mixed method approach. Data sources were 849 child domestic workers, 849 house owners, and 15 development practitioners and experts. A household survey was carried out in three different areas in the Dhaka city. The study employed semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and observation methods. The results showed that the prevalence of child abuses was very high and manifested physically, emotionally, and sexually among the studied child domestic workers. This was noted as a violation of Bangladesh law and of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The findings of this study could be an important guideline to the policy makers, human rights practitioners, and international human and child rights organisations in seeking to alleviate these violations.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Child abuse is a complex social challenge that cannot be understood from a single disciplinary perspective (Davidov et al., 2016). The first recognisable child abuse society was instituted in the late 19th century in North America, but it was a century before the first global rights-based legislation in the form of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) came into play (Cutland, 2012). According to recent global data, more than one in four children worldwide reported having experienced severe and frequent physical abuse, while child sexual abuse was experienced by nearly one in five females and one in eleven males (UNICEF, 2012). The World Health Organization (2010) states that approximately 20% of women and 5–10% of men report being sexually abused as children, while 25–50% of all children report being physically abused. Child abuse has vast consequences include impaired lifelong physical and mental health, and the social and occupational outcomes can ultimately slow a country's economic and social development. This has profound and damaging consequences during childhood and

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adolescence and throughout adult life. Children who have experienced abuse or neglect are more likely to have poorer physical and/or mental health outcomes; social difficulties, such as insecure attachments with caregivers and problematic relationships with peers, and as adults later in life; cognitive dysfunction, attributable to the negative impact of excessive stress on brain development; high-risk behaviours, such as drug and alcohol abuse, early sexual activity and resulting teenage parenting; and behavioural problems, including aggression and adult criminality (UNICEF, 2012).

There is neither profound nor recognised statistics about the number of child domestic workers in the world as well as in Bangladesh. According to the International Labour Organization (2016), there are 17.2 million children in paid or unpaid domestic work in the home of a third party or employer in the world. Of these, 11.5 million are in child labour, of which 3.7 million are in hazardous work, of which 21.4% are child domestic workers.; It is noted that 67.1% of all child domestic workers are girls, and 65.1% of all child domestic workers are below the age of 14 years old and 7.4 million aged 5 to 11 years and 3.8 million aged 12 to 14 years. On the other hand, according to the most up to date estimates, over 52 million children in the world are employed as domestic workers. Nearly 44 million of these children are girls (International Labour Organization, 2012, Gamlin et al., 2015). In Bangladesh, there is no recent data on the number of child domestic workers. According to a Baseline Survey (BBS, 2006), there are approximately 400,000 child domestic workers aged 6-17 years old in Bangladesh. There are total 331,000 domestic workers, and the number of child domestic workers are 420,000. Among them, 83% are female, who are mostly child and young in age. On the other hand, the UNICEF (2006) reported that there are 7.4 million people are working in the informal sector, as many as 421 thousand children aged between 6-17 years are working as domestic help, of which around 132,000 are in Dhaka City alone. Child domestic work is a common phenomenon in Bangladesh. Employing children as domestic workers is socially and culturally accepted in Bangladeshi society (Islam, 2013; UNICEF, 2012). Many of these children live and work under conditions that are so extreme, exploitative and abusive that no adults would accept. As child domestic workers belong to the informal labour sector, they are excluded from legal protection, which makes them even more vulnerable (Islam, 2013; Islam, 2010).

A number of international and national policies, conventions, and laws are active to combat domestic child abuse. However, incorporating and implementing the UNCRC and other child protection based legislations on a global scale is not without difficulty and there are many obstacles to fulfilling its principles and monitoring its progress (Cutland, 2012). In addition, domestic work is a predominately female-dominated sector that is poorly regulated and often unprotected by labour law. It is also often embedded within sociocultural structures, which may make it difficult for employers to see themselves as such. Child domestic workers themselves often work long hours; have poor remuneration and little access to social protection. Their isolation and vulnerability as workers is made more complex by their invisibility in private homes and their dependence on the good will of their employers (Islam, 2013). Many, though not all, come from poor households, often in rural communities, where limited access to education and skills development, leave them with few employment opportunities and choices. They are prone to verbal, physical and sexual violence, and the impact of this abuse can leave permanent scars (Flores-Oebanda, 2006). Kane (2004) and Islam (2013) argued that the exploitation of the child domestic workers is extreme and includes trafficking, slavery or practices similar to slavery, or work which by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out is hazardous and likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children, then this constitutes the worst form of child domestic labour, and it needs to be

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