

# Unraveling the Web: Child Labour and Human Trafficking in Bangladesh

As a Bangladeshi Muslim girl who has completed her Master of Laws (LLM) degree with a specialization in Human Rights Law at Oxford Brookes University, I find it both an honor and a responsibility to shed light on the deeply intertwined issue of child labor and human trafficking in Bangladesh. These pervasive challenges not only violate the fundamental principles of human rights but also demand urgent attention and concerted efforts to address the systemic issues at play.

## **Child Labour: A Symptom of Deeper Challenges**

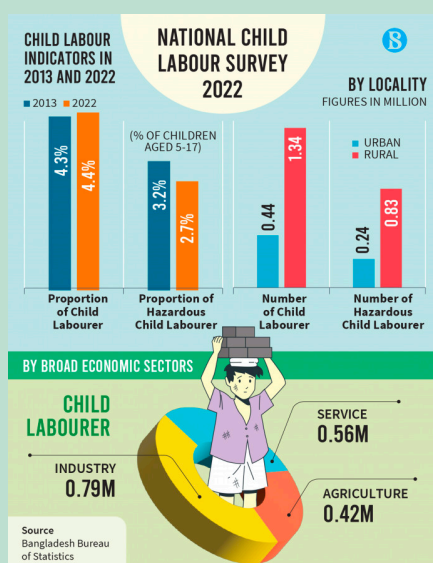
The very fabric of child labor in Bangladesh is woven with threads of poverty, lack of education, affordability constraints, low parental literacy rates, and cultural impediments. Despite legal definitions under the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, which set forth age parameters and conditions, the effectiveness of these regulations remains questionable in ensuring the rights and well-being of working children. In a developing nation like Bangladesh, where economic and legal frameworks are still evolving, child labor persists as a visible manifestation of vulnerability, hindering progress in poverty reduction and education improvement.



## **Human Rights Laws and the Dilemma of International Standards**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) outlines a comprehensive set of rights for children, emphasizing protection from economic exploitation and hazardous work. However, the implementation of these rights faces challenges, with local socio-cultural norms often complicating the application of universal standards. The Child Labour Deterrence Act of 1993, such as the Harkin Bill, intended to curb child labor in export-related industries, paradoxically may exacerbate the situation due to the socio-economic and cultural context in Bangladesh.

Despite ratifying the UNCRC in 1990, the inadequate protection services highlighted by UNICEF, coupled with fragmented legislation, leave children in Bangladesh vulnerable and underserved. The Children Act 2013 represents a step forward, but challenges persist in aligning it with UNCRC provisions and broader legislation to protect children's rights.



## **The Grim Statistics:**

The statistics paint a grim picture, with one in four children in the world's poorest nations engaged in labor, and over 150 million children aged 5 to 17 working in hazardous conditions globally. In Bangladesh, the National Child Labour Survey estimates 3.45 million child workers between the ages of 5 and 17, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive strategies and programs to address child labor.

## **Human Trafficking: A Hidden Menace**

While child labor underscores economic vulnerabilities, human trafficking adds another layer of exploitation, particularly impacting girls/women sex workers in Bangladesh. The Prevention and Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act (2012) represents a legal framework aimed at curbing human trafficking, but its effectiveness requires scrutiny.



## **Legal Framework and its Application**

Bangladesh has ratified international conventions like CEDAW and the SAARC Anti-Trafficking Convention, demonstrating a commitment to combat human trafficking. However, the extensive nature of human trafficking within the country, as well as internationally, demands a thorough evaluation of the legal mechanisms in place.

The Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012 and other related laws operate independently, each with its enforcement system. The Anti-Human Trafficking Offence Tribunal, established under the Act, aims for speedy trials, emphasizing the importance of protecting victims' identities. Yet, the effectiveness of these legal measures in providing justice for victims remains uncertain.

## **Stories of Hope and Despair**

Cases of domestic and international sex trafficking and child labour, reveal both successes and failures in combatting this heinous crime. Instances of rescue and legal action provide glimmers of hope, but the reluctance of victims to engage with the legal system, coupled with societal stigmas, impedes progress.

# Comprehensive Solutions for Child Labour and Human Trafficking

## **Education as a Shield Against Exploitation**

To break the chains of child labor and human trafficking, the Bangladeshi government must prioritize accessible and flexible education. Public awareness campaigns, inclusion of clauses in microcredit laws, and media campaigns can contribute to transforming societal norms, dissuading guardians from exploiting their children.

## **Collaborative Efforts and NGO Initiatives**

NGOs play a crucial role in urging businesses to hire adults, collaborating with government agencies, and creating child protection policies. Along side of United Nations, there are coordinated efforts between the Ministry of Social Welfare, NGOs, and UNICEF can enhance child protection policies, ensuring the well-being of those at risk.

## **Legal, Educational, and Poverty Alleviation Strategies**

A multifaceted approach involving legal policies, education, poverty alleviation, protection, and rehabilitation is imperative. International organizations such as the UN, ILO, and UNICEF should collaborate to develop and advocate for comprehensive guidelines, while governments enact laws to eradicate child labor.

## **The Integrated Approach: A Holistic Solution**

Adopting an integrated approach, as proposed by Cox and Pawar, aligns with global human rights development perspectives. This approach encompasses government commitment, legislation, community awareness, and attitude adjustments. UNICEF's "creating a protective environment" strategy, addressing root causes and providing essential services, aligns with the integrated approach.

## **Strengthening Legal Frameworks**

To combat human trafficking effectively, Bangladesh must reinforce its legal frameworks. Specialized training for law enforcement, border patrol, and security personnel, along with enhanced pre-departure training, can improve the identification and prevention of trafficking.

## **Empathy, Awareness, and Rehabilitation**

Recognizing the diverse needs of victims, especially women and girls, is essential. An empathetic and culturally sensitive approach, coupled with professional therapy, is crucial for the physical, emotional, and mental rehabilitation of survivors.



## **A Collective Call to Action**

As someone who has unlimited access to these research and solutions, I humbly urge my fellow citizens, the government, and the international community to prioritize the eradication of child labor and human trafficking. The complexities of these challenges demand a collective commitment to reshape societal norms, strengthen legal frameworks, and provide comprehensive support for the victims. It is not only our duty but our shared responsibility to protect the rights and dignity of every child and woman in Bangladesh. Through collaborative efforts, legal reforms, and a shift in societal attitudes, we can unravel the web that entangles our nation's most vulnerable, ensuring a brighter, safer future for all.