Violence against Children: A Study in Northern Region of Bangladesh

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Abstract

Violence against children takes a variety of forms and is influenced by a wide range of factors from the personal characteristics of the victim and perpetrator to their cultural and physical environments. Violence against children has been emerged as a concerned and discussing matter reflecting its vulnerability, but society is static to take the issue in consideration and to address it in effective manner. It is noted that the community are fully unaware about those children who are in vulnerable situation are passing their lives in traumatic and stigmatic situation keeping them in darkness society. This study aims to delineate this issue across the different socio-economic backdrops of the children. Findings need to be scientifically utilized in developing suitable programs addressing the case of children of the developing countries as well as Bangladesh.

Introduction

Violence against children is highly sensitive and unreported matter in the world as well as in Bangladesh, as it touches on power relation between children and adults, socio-cultural and political values and customs, social stigma, etc. There are a growing number of children who are abused, exploited, neglected and experienced violence at family, schools, institutions, community and national level. Information gathered during the past decade has provided solid evidence that violence against children continues to increase (Sirotnack and Krugman, 1994). The rights of the children are largely violated in their socio-economic, cultural and political setups. Despite the types of physical violence such as killing, rape, sexual abuse, kidnapping, trafficking and acid burn, the children who are abused and affected by social, economic, cognitive and psychological vulnerability suffer from mental repression and trauma every day and every sphere of their lives. Patriarchal values and power structures that result in different socialization processes of the children lead them to adopting different coping mechanisms and manifesting the impact of abuse and trauma in different ways on them. They are likely to experience low self-esteem and poor psychosocial care and support. So, the children are growing up, experiencing unsafe and insecure living condition and stereotyping their socio-cultural practices.

There is no universally accepted definition of violence against children. But it is regarded that, violence against children includes a wide range of behaviors against children beyond their best interests and affecting them physically, mentally and sexually and harming their dignity, physical, psychological, or social status, or development. A definition proposed by the Advisory Panel for the UN study on violence against children is as; "violence includes all forms of physical/mental (psychological/psychosocial) and sexual violence to the children in the form of abuse, neglect, exploitation, as act of commission or omission of direct or indirect forms, that endanger or harm the child's dignity, physical, psychological, or social status, or development." Violence

against children may be committed by individuals, single or collectively, by their characteristics such as age, status, knowledge, structural forms of community are in a position of differential powering situation that are falling a child into vulnerable situations leaving out them from enjoying their rights.

Millions of children throughout the world are victims of violence. They continue to be abused, neglected, maltreated, exploited and trafficked. Violence against children takes a variety of forms and is influenced by a wide range of factors, from the personal characteristics of the victim and perpetrator to their cultural and physical environments. Poverty makes children vulnerable. A number of researchers in many countries show a strong relationship between being poor and children maltreatment (Zununegui et al., 1997; Hadi, 2000). Child maltreatment is more likely to exist in disrupted families (Sedlack and Broadhurst, 1996) as well as among those living under unfavorable circumstances, suffering economic hardship (Wolfner and Gelles, 1993) or isolated from the community social network (Sedlack and Broadhurst, 1996; Coohey, 1996). More importantly, the child maltreatment makes them victims of violence. Violence against children is a global concern affecting both the developed countries as well as developing countries like Bangladesh. Empirical and programmatic evidence has revealed that the violence against children is organized in a network, with separate languages of operations and involving all spheres of the country. Socio-cultural and political factors hamper the ability of government and development agencies to address the issue. In this study, it is intending to explore the deep rooted violence against children and factor affecting the violence in socio-economic and cultural sphere in Rajshahi district.

Data Sources

In this study the street child of age 5-18 years are selected for analysis. Street child are those who live or work on street. The children's relationship to the street varies. Some live and work with their parents on the streets. Some return home at night, but work independently during the day. Others maintain their family contacts, but are forced to spend most of their time on the streets and return home once in a while to spend a night with their family. Others sleep in abandoned buildings, under bridges, or in public parks. The study is based on a sample of 170 street children from a number of areas within Rajshahi city (a divisional city in the northern region of Bangladesh situated within border belt area of Bangladesh and India).

The data collection areas included: railway station, bus stand and riverbank of Padma and its adjacent slums.

Materials and Methods

Due to constraints in conducting the study in a closed culture, it was not possible to conduct the study in traditional sampling system. Therefore, purposive sampling process was chosen as it was consistent with the objective of the study. All the data (170) were collected during October 20 to November 04, 2010. The data were edited, compiled, processed and analyzed by using SPSS 10.5 Program.

In any situation where a multivariate problem is encountered, the method of analysis should proceed from simple to complex in an ordinary manner (Srinivasan, 1979). We have performed univariate classification analysis in order to find the percentage of occurrence, factor affecting abuse etc. of the respondents. Finally, a multivariate technique named as logistic regression analysis is used for determining important factors responsible for abuse of the children.

Results and Discussions

Socio-Economic Backdrops Creating Vulnerability

The vulnerable socio-economic conditions drop the children to vulnerable situation. Table 1 shows the socio-economic backdrops of the respondents. At development stage, age is the main factor of a child in assessing the vulnerability. No age is safe. Children are always vulnerable. The violence exposure- physical, sexual or by negligence- depends partly on the age of a child (Bagley and Mallick, 2000). It is mentionable that the vulnerability of children, the evidence of occurring abuse towards children varies from child to child when they grow up. It is observed that more than half of the victims are in the age group 10-14 years. 23.5% are in the age group 5-9 years and rest of 24.7% is in the age group 15-18 years. In most countries, girls are at higher risk than boys for infanticide, sexual abuse, educational and nutritional neglect and forced prostitution. Male children appear to be at greater risk of harsh physical punishment in many countries (Straus et al., 1998; Shumba, 2001; Hunter et al., 2000). Table 1 reveals that among the total victims, 55.9% are male child and 44.1% are female child. Clearly, the wide cultural gaps that exist between different societies with respect to the role of women and the values attached to male and female children could account for many of these differences. Orphaned children were more likely to

be stunted (Lundberg and Over, 2000; Ainsworth and Semali, 2000). Children who had lost a father were more likely to be malnourished than non-orphans (Lindblade et al., 2003). Among the respondents, 57.1% children have parents. In specific, 15.9% children have only fathers and 21.2% have only mothers and rest of the children have no parents and they do not know about their parents. The impact of orphan hood is severe, which drops the children into vulnerable situation. The children's residence has demonstrated the experience of residential transformation of the children rendering them in vulnerable situation. It is also seen that, 84.1% children are living in any house and rests of 15.9% are living in street or any place.

Large family size renders the children in abusive, vulnerable and hazardous situations whether in street situation or working condition or in families or in communities. Data from many countries show that overloaded houses increase the risk of violence against children (Youssef et al., 1998). It is found that, 68.2% children's families consisted of 4-6 members, 20.6% children's families consisted of 1-3 members and rests of 11.2% consisted of 7 and above members. Numerous studies across many countries have shown a strong association between poverty and child maltreatment (Frias-Armenta and McCloskey, 1998; Hadi, 2000).The indexes of violence are higher in societies with a high unemployment level and condensed poverty (Coulton et al., 1999). Table 1 shows that only 28.3% children have their family's monthly income Tk. 3000 and above and rests of 71.7% have their family's monthly income less than Tk. 3000. In fact 22.9% children have their family's

monthly income less than Tk. 1000. These conditions could make a vulnerable situation to the children in poor setting Bangladesh. The children are the victims of forced labor, unpaid laborers, slaves and domestic workers etc. It has been explored that, vast majority (84.7%) of the children interviewed for this study are engaged in some kind of works from which they derive some income. It has been identified that different kinds of remunerative works which include domestic servant, luggage bearer, garbage scavenger, day laborer, restaurant workers, taxi helpers etc. Rests of 15.3% respondents are not working. Inadequate food security of the children could make them vulnerable to exploitation and violation their rights. Chronic hunger often leads them to involve in various hazardous work, which drops children into vulnerable situation. It is found that about one-third of the respondents have not 3 times meal in a day. Food aid programs are also quite important in upholding education levels of the children since it is exactly during crisis times that children are pulled out of school and placed on the labor market to augment family income. Globally, more than 130 million children in the age between 6 and 11 stay outside school, among which 60% are girls (Hadi, 2000). Table 1 demonstrated that almost half of the respondents stay outside school. Though 50.6% respondents were in school attainment category in the past, after sometimes a large number of respondents dropout from school due to poverty and other socio-economic and cultural situation. It also observed that a large number (69.4%) of dropout from school occur due to family poverty, which adversely affects children through its impact on parental behavior and availability of community resources (McLoyd, 1990).

Table 1: Socio-economic backdrops of the respondents

Socio-Economic Variables	Frequency N=170	Percentage (100)
Age		
<10 years	40	23.5
10-14 years	88	51.8
15-18 years	42	24.7
Sex		
Male	95	55.9
Female	75	44.1
Survival of the Parents		
Father and mother alive	97	57.1
Only father alive	27	15.9
Only mother alive	36	21.2
None is alive	5	2.9
Do not know	5	2.9
Residential Status		
Street or any place	27	15.9
Any house	143	84.1

Family Size		
1-3	35	20.6
4-6	116	68.2
7+	19	11.2
Family's Monthly income (in Tk.)		
Up to 999	39	22.9
1000-1999	34	20.0
2000-2999	49	28.8
3000+	48	28.3
Work Status		
Not working	26	15.3
Domestic servant	23	13.5
Luggage/goods bearer	16	9.4
Garbage scavenge	15	8.8
Day labour	21	12.4
Restaurant worker	19	11.2
Taxi helper	21	12.4
Others	29	17.1
Number of Meal in a Day		
1 meal	10	5.9
2 meals	47	27.6
3 meals	113	66.5
Schooling of Respondents		
School attainment	86	50.6
School non-attainment	84	49.4
Reasons for School Dropout		
Family poverty	118	69.4
To support family	23	13.5
Parents have no interest	5	2.9
Others	24	14.1

Note: Tk.= Bangladeshi Currency Taka i.e. Tk.

Abuse of the Children

Child abuse has for a long time been recorded in literature, art and science in many parts of the world. Reports, of the infanticide, mutilation, abandonment and other forms of violence against children date back to ancient civilizations (Ten Bensel et al., 1997). The International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect recently compared definitions of abuse from 58 countries and found some commonality in what was considered abusive (Bross et al., 2000). In 1999, the WHO Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention drafted the following definition (WHO, 1999): "Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitations; resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power." Some definitions focus on the behaviors or action of adults, while others consider abuse to make place if there is harm or the threat of harm to the child (Straus, 1995;

Straus and Hamby, 1997; Straus et al., 1998). Some of the literature on child abuse explicitly includes violence against children in institutional or school setting (Ketsela and Kedebe, 1997; Youssef et al., 1998). In our study we have got three types of abuse- physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Physical abuse of a child includes those acts of commission by a caregiver that cause actual physical harm or have the potential for harm. Sexual abuse includes those acts where a caregiver uses a child for sexual gratification. Emotional abuse includes the failure of a caregiver to provide an appropriate and supportive environment, and includes acts that have an adverse effect on the emotional health and development of a child. Such acts includes restricting a child's movement, denigration, ridicule, threats, discrimination, rejection and other non-physical forms of the hostile treatment.

There are a growing number of children who are abused, exploited, neglected and experienced violence at family, schools, institutions, community and national level. They are likely to experience low self-esteem and poor psychological care and support. So, they are growing up,

experiencing stereotyping their socio-cultural practices. It is observed from Table 2 that, 88.8% respondents are abused and 56.3% of them are physically abused. 19.2% are physically and emotionally abused while the percentage of sexual abused respondents remains low. Levine (1983) describes a reporting hierarchy in which physical abuse is most frequently reported. Majority of the children are abused by their family member which contains 45.7%, also 32.5% abused occurred by others like unknown persons, police, lord and those gave them work. Both in the developing countries and in those already developed poor, young, single mothers are among those who are burdened with the highest risk of using violence against their own children (Tadele et al., 1999). It also observed that majority (45.7%) of the respondents is abused in their own house and 39.1% are abused in street and others place. Studies from Bangladesh, Italy, Kenya and Sweden have also found that low education and a lack of income to meet the family's needs increase the potential of physical violence towards children (Bardi and Borgognini-Tari, 2001; Sumba and Bwibo, 1993; Hadi, 2000; Lindell and Svedin, 2001)

Table 2: Percentage distribution of the respondents according to abuse related information

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Were They Abused?		
Yes	151	88.8
No	19	11.2
Nature of Abuse		
Physical (i)	85	56.3
Sexual (ii)	7	4.6
Emotional (iii)	9	6.0
(i) and (iii)	29	19.2
(i), (ii) and (iii)	21	13.9
By Whom You Were Abused?		
Family members	69	45.7
Relatives	20	13.2
Teachers	13	8.6
Others	49	32.5
Place of Abuse		
Own house	69	45.7
Others house	23	15.2
Street	43	28.5
Others place	16	10.6

Logistic Regression Analysis for Child Abuse

Results based on the multivariate logistic regression analysis for the abuse of the children provided in Table 3 considering abuse i.e. were they abused as the dependent variable which is dichotomized by assessing 1 if the respondent was abused and 0 for not. The logistic regression analysis is helpful in observing how a predictor (independent) variable affects a response (dependent) variable in between groups or sub groups of the predictor (independent) variable (Retherford and Choe, 1973).

Vulnerability to child abuse- whether physical, sexual or through neglect- depends in part on a child's age (Dubowitz and Black, 2001). From Table 3 we observed that respondents in the age groups 15-18 years are 1.86

times significantly and more likely to face abuse than the reference category. Also, who are in the age group 10-14 years are 1.43 times more likely to face abuse than the reference category. Male children may be exposed to a higher risk of severe physical punishment in many countries (Olsson et al., 2000). Table 3 supports the argument that female child are negatively and significantly less likely to face abuse than the male children. It may bethat such abuse is seen as a preparation for adult roles and responsibilities, or else that boys are considered to need more physical discipline. It is found that children living with other people, making them vulnerable to exploitation are more likely to be abused than the reference category. Those children living in street or any place are more likely to face abuse than those living in any house. A study of a parent in Chile, for example, found that families with four or more children were three times more likely to be violent towards their children than parents with fewer children (Larrain et al., 1997). Our study supports that family with member 7 and over is 2.98 times more violent towards their children than those with fewer children.

In a study of Palestinian families, lack of money for the child's needs was one of the primary reasons given by parents for psychologically abusing their children (Khamis, 2000). In this study the children with family's monthly income between Tk. 2000-2999 are highly significant and 6.77 times more likely to face abuse than the reference category. Also those children whose family monthly income Tk. 1000-1999 and Tk. 3000+ are significantly more likely to face abuse than the reference category, which contains 3.75 times and 4.54 times respectively. It is also revealed that those going to school regularly are negatively and less likely to face abuse than those are not going. Sufficiency of food has a significant effect on the abuse of the children. Table 3 demonstrates that those have sufficient food are 2.62 times highly significantly and more likely to face abuse than the reference category. One possible reason for that children are faced abuse within their family, lords and overall by their caregivers. From Table 3 we also observed that, working children are negatively significant and less likely to face abuse than those are not working. This may indicate that, working children are less likely to depend on their family than those are not working in providing some of their needs. So, they may have less risk to be abused than those are dependent.

Table 3: Results of logistic regression analysis on the abuse of the children

Variables	ERC	SE	OR
Respondent's Age			
< 10 (ref.)	-	-	1.00
10-14	0.35	0.50	1.43
15-18	0.62*	0.60	1.86
Respondent' Sex			
Male (ref.)	-	-	1.00
Female	-0.91**	0.43	0.41
Respondent's Living Condition			
With parents (ref.)	-	-	1.00
Others	0.20	0.59	1.22
Respondent's Residential Status			
Street or any place (ref.)	-	-	1.00
Any house	-1.02*	0.67	0.36
Respondent's Family Size			
1-3 (ref.)	-	-	1.00
4-6	0.18	0.55	1.20
7+	1.09	0.74	2.98
Family's Monthly Income (in Tk.)			
Up to 999 (ref.)	-	-	1.00
1000-1999	1.32**	0.75	3.75
2000-2999	1.91***	0.72	6.77
3000+	1.51**	0.68	4.54
Regularity in School			
Yes	-0.02	0.43	0.98
No (ref.)	-	-	1.00
Sufficiency of Food			
Yes	0.96***	0.39	2.62
No (ref.)	-	-	1.00

Working Status			
Working	-0.78**	0.42	0.46
Not working (ref.)	-	-	1.00
Constant	-1.62	0.93	0.20

Notes: ERC = Estimated Regression Coefficient;
S.E. = Standard Error of ERC;
OR = Odds Ratio;
ref. = Reference Category;
Tk. = Bangladeshi Currency - Taka i.e. Tk.;
Level of significance: ***p<0.01; **p<0.05; *p<0.10

Conclusions and Recommendations

Violence against children is a serious problem not only in Bangladesh but also all over the world. Most of the worst forms of violence against children are mostly reluctant to disclose or reported. Whether reported or not, the vulnerability of children is a difficult question in socio-economic, cultural and political spheres of the community. From this study it is seen that several socio-economic factors are very much responsible in creating violence against children. This study also reveals some significant effects of socio-economic backdrops on the abuse of the children. Family conflicts and the despoliation and

dislocation of families make children to vulnerable, both physically and psychologically. The exposure of children to violence in their homes on a frequent basis, usually through fights between parents or between a mother and her partner, can severely affect a child's well-being, personal development and social interaction in childhood and adulthood (McClosky et al., 1995). Economic hardship and injustices have forced children to engage in hazardous form of work as a means of survival strategy. Their survival strategy renders them vulnerable to all forms of exploitation and abuse. Violence against children is often children's first introduction to the violent society in which they live. Violence against children confirms that such violence exits in every country of the world, cutting across culture, class, education, income and ethnic origin. In every region, in contradiction to human rights obligations and children's developmental needs, violence against children   is socially approved and is frequently legal and state-authorized. Combating violence, especially child abuse, requires a multifaceted approach to reinforce the value of human life and the commitment to a non-violent lifestyle (Copeland, 1995). Every society, no matter its cultural, economic or social background, can and must stop the violence against children. This does not mean sanctioning perpetrators only, but requires transformation of the "mindset" of societies and the

underlying economic and social conditions associated with violence. Protection of children from violence is a matter of urgency. No violence against children is justifiable; all violence against children is preventable. There should be no more excuses. Children must be provided with the effective prevention and protection to which they have an unqualified right. While legal obligations lie with states, all sectors of society, all individuals share the responsibility of condemning and preventing violence against children and responding to child victims. None of us can look children in the eye, if we continue to approve or condone any form of violence against them.

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