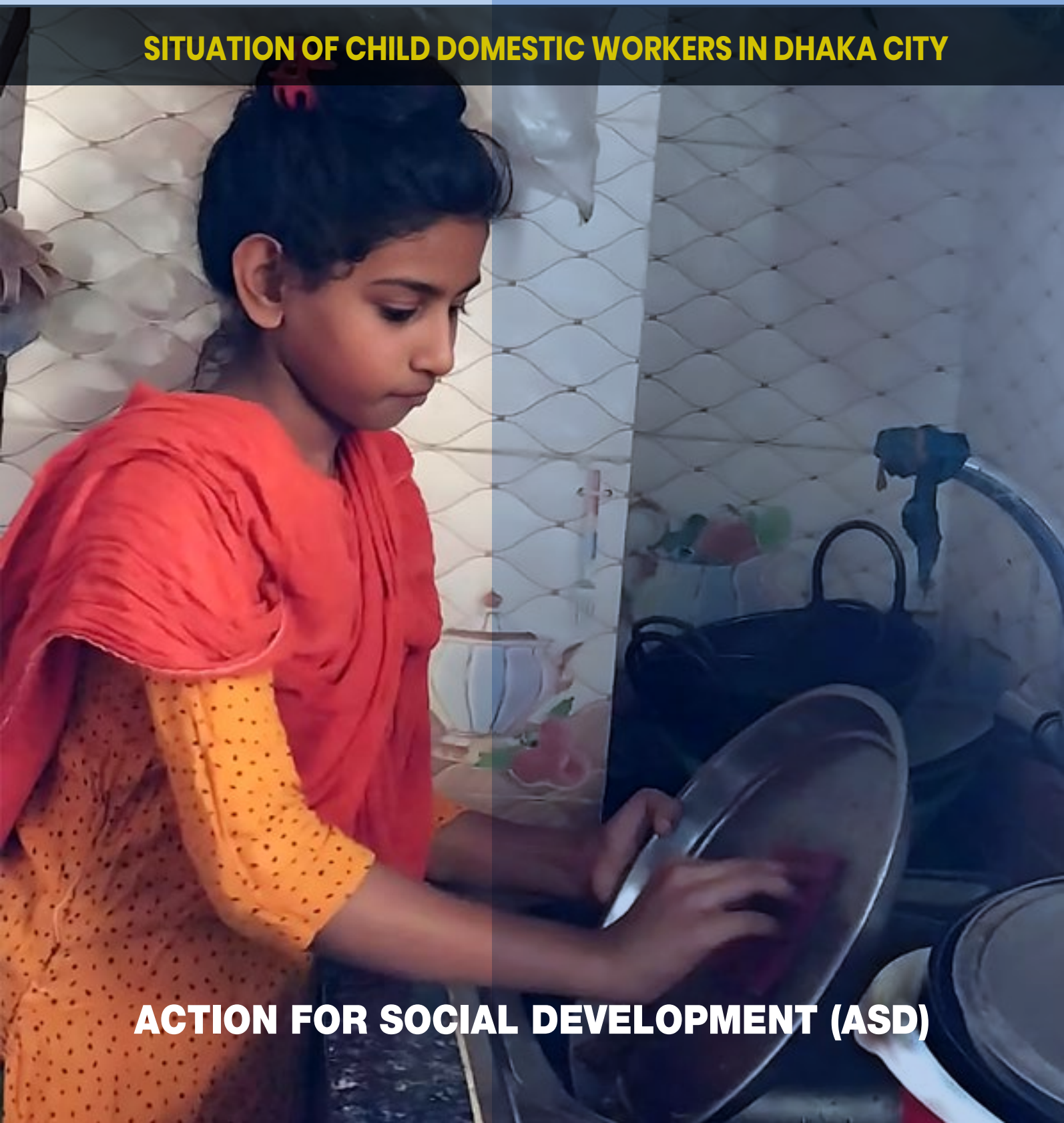
SUMMARY

STUDY REPORT

SITUATION OF CHILD DOMESTIC WORKERS IN DHAKA CITY



ACTION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT (ASD)

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STUDY REPORT

SITUATION OF CHILD DOMESTIC WORKERS IN DHAKA CITY

Study Conducted by
The Right to Education and Social Protection of Deprived Children at High Risk in Bangladesh (RESH) Project
Action For Social Development (ASD)
With the Technical Assitance of
Development Communication Network (DCN)

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INTRODUCTION

Child labour is a complete violation of child rights. Children engaged in labour are being deprived of their fundamental basic rights, which push them to a situation where their mental and physical development is jeopardized. According to the Labour Act of Bangladesh, children below the age of 14 years should not be recruited for any occupation and children below the age of 18 years should not be recruited for hazardous work. However, due to lack of proper enforcement of the Labour Act, a good number of children are engaged in work, including hazardous work.

According to the provisional report of the national child labour survey 2022 conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), there are approximately 1.77 million child labourer in the country, of which approximately 1.06 million children are engaged in hazardous child labour. However, a large number of children engaged in domestic work are not included in this survey.

According to the baseline survey jointly conducted by ILO and UNICEF in 2007, approximately 4,20,000 children were found in domestic work. Among them around 90% were girls. Domestic work is one of the most hazardous work for children considering the nature and circumstances of the work as well as the definitions provided in the ILO Convention No. 182 and Recommendation No. 190.

As a follow up to the ratification of the ILO Convention No. 182, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) through the Ministry of Labour and Employment determined the list of hazardous work for children. However, child domestic work has not been incorporated in the list, despite the strong demand made by the national and international child rights NGOs and NGO networks. As a result, a large number of children are out of the legal protection.

The GoB also formulated the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy in 2015. However, due to the absence of a law in alignment of the policy, both adult and child domestic workers are not getting the benefit out of the policy.

Child domestic workers (CDWs) are exposed to various forms of abuse and exploitations. They work for long hours under extremely hazardous environment. They get very low salary and in many cases, they work even without any salary. They often face severe forms of physical and mental torture and sexual abuse. They do not have access to education and recreational facilities. With all these, child domestic workers are being treated as slaves.

Under the above-mentioned background, Action for Social Development (ASD) under the project titled "The Right to Education and Social protection of deprived children at High risk in Bangladesh (RESH)" took the initiative to conduct this study to understand the situation of child domestic workers in Dhaka City.

The specific objectives of this study were:

(i) to identify the present situation/status/vulnerability of child domestic workers in Dhaka City;
(ii) to find out the root causes of children get involved in domestic work;
(iii) to identify the gaps in related laws and policies to establish the rights of child domestic workers; and
(iv) to find out the possible solutions to prevent and withdraw children from domestic work.

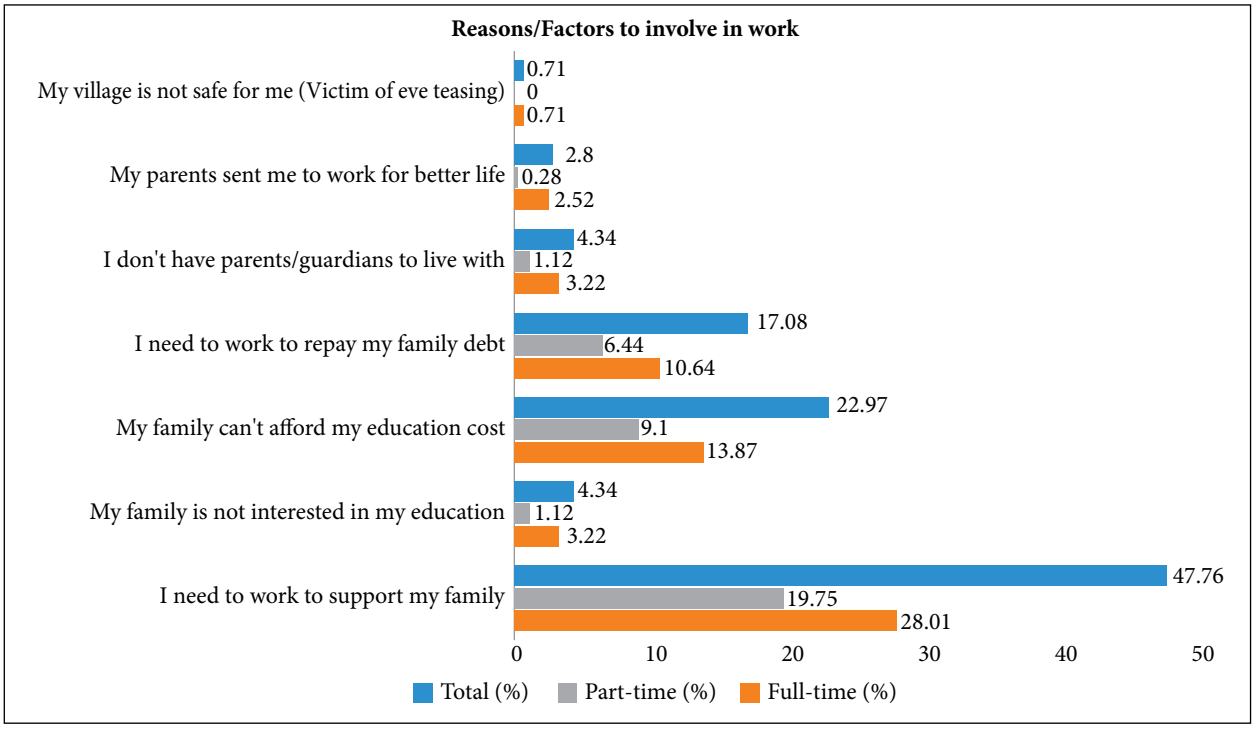
METHODOLOGY

In order to address the desired objectives, the study was conducted using a balanced mix of quantitative (measurable) and qualitative (non-measurable, descriptive) research methods and data collection tools. Three basic approaches, namely secondary documents review, quantitative survey and qualitative data collection were used to obtain required data/information for this study.

Quantitative data was collected from the CDWs through a structured questionnaire survey. A total of 352 CDWs falling within the age range of 8 to 17 years were interviewed. With a total of 352 participants, the majority, encompassing 209 individuals, are engaged in full-time domestic work, constituting 59.37% of the overall sample. In contrast, 143 respondents are engaged in part-time domestic work, contributing to 40.63% of the total respondents.

KEY FINDINGS

47.76% of the CDWs expressed the compelling need to work for the purpose of supporting their families. This underscores the vital role employment plays in sustaining familial well-being. Additionally, 22.97% of CDWs highlighted financial constraints as their families cannot afford the costs of education. Another 17.08% find themselves in the workforce to repay family debts, reflecting the broader economic struggles faced by some households. 4.34% CDWs revealed a poignant aspect of familial disengagement, noting that their families are not interested in their education. 4.34% CDWs do not have parents or guardians to live with, necessitating their entry into the workforce for survival.

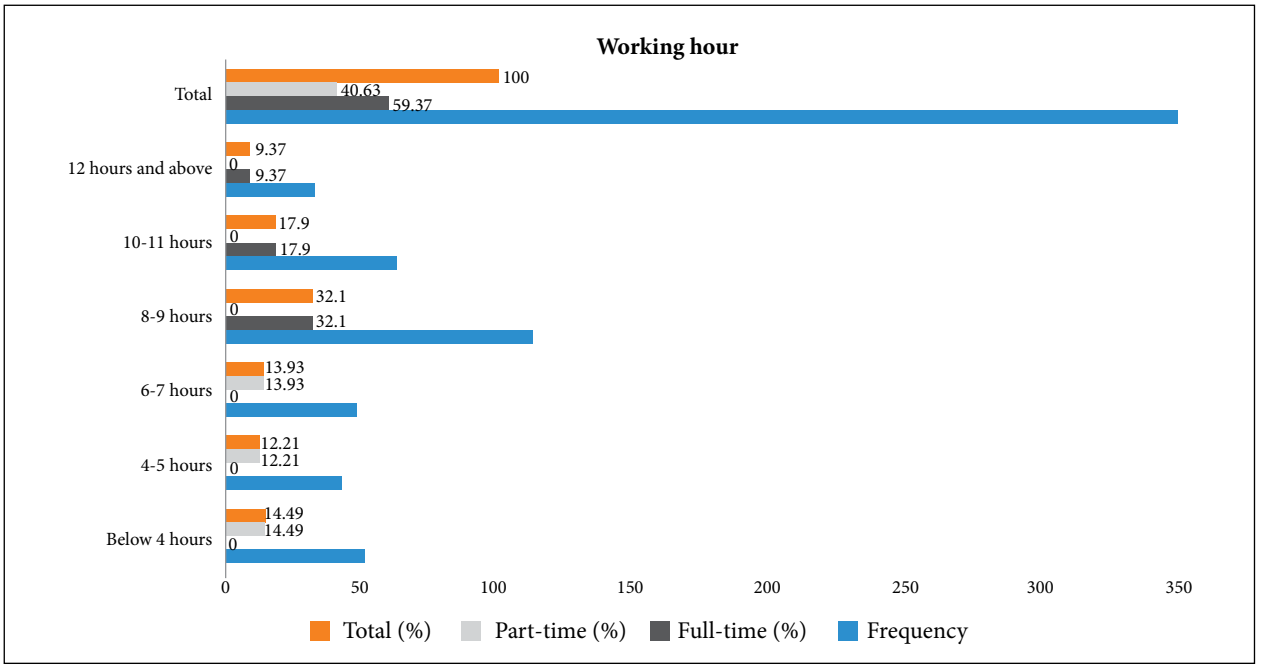


40.63% CDWs asserted that they have designated working hours. This group, constituting the Part-time category, indicates a structured schedule for their domestic responsibilities. On the contrary, 59.37% respondents reported not having any fixed working hours, falling into the Full-time category.

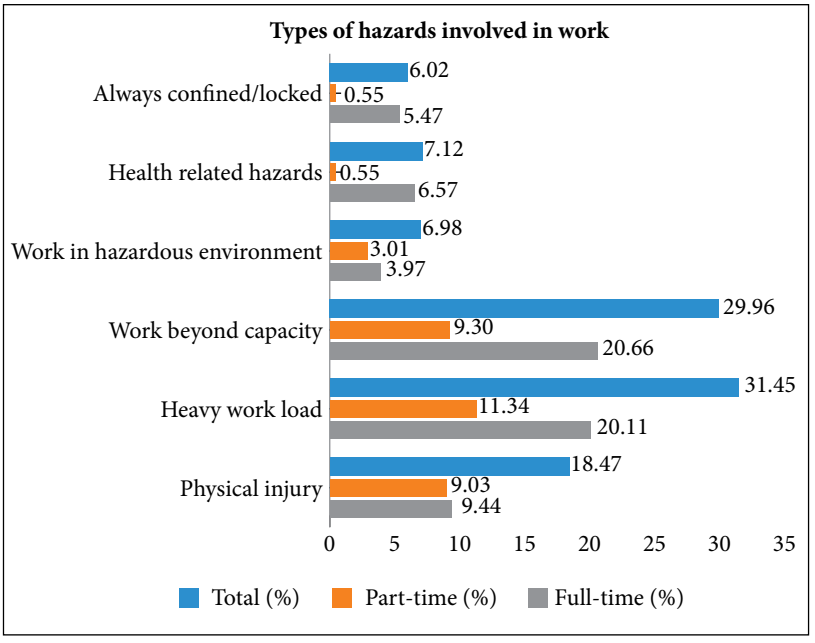
32% respondents, reported dedicating 8-9 hours to their work, representing a full-time commitment and belong to 10-12 age group. 17.9% of the respondents belong to 12-14 age group, dedicate 10-11 hours. 9.37% child domestic workers belong to 14-16 age group, extend their work commitment 12 hours and above, reflecting the strenuous and potentially exhausting nature of their employment. On the other hand, 14.49% mostly belong to 8-10 age group, work below 4 hours, and 12.21% mostly belong to 12-14 age group, work for 4-5 hours, both constituting part-time engagements. There is a notable segment, 13.93% belong to 14-16 age group, devoting 6-7 hours, showcasing a range of part-time commitments with varying durations.

29.81% CDWs earn between 500-1000 taka, with 15.89% engaged in full-time work and 13.92% in part-time. 19.32% earn in the 1501–2000-taka range, with 10.8% in full-time and 8.52% in part-time positions. The 1001–1500-taka range sees 15.06% while 11.94% earn between 2501-3000 taka, 4.55% earn below 500 taka, 10.23% reported earnings above 3000 taka.

63.88% CDWs indicated that their salaries are received by their parents or guardians. 35.27% reported that they themselves receive their salaries and 0.85% noted the involvement of a middleman in the salary transaction.

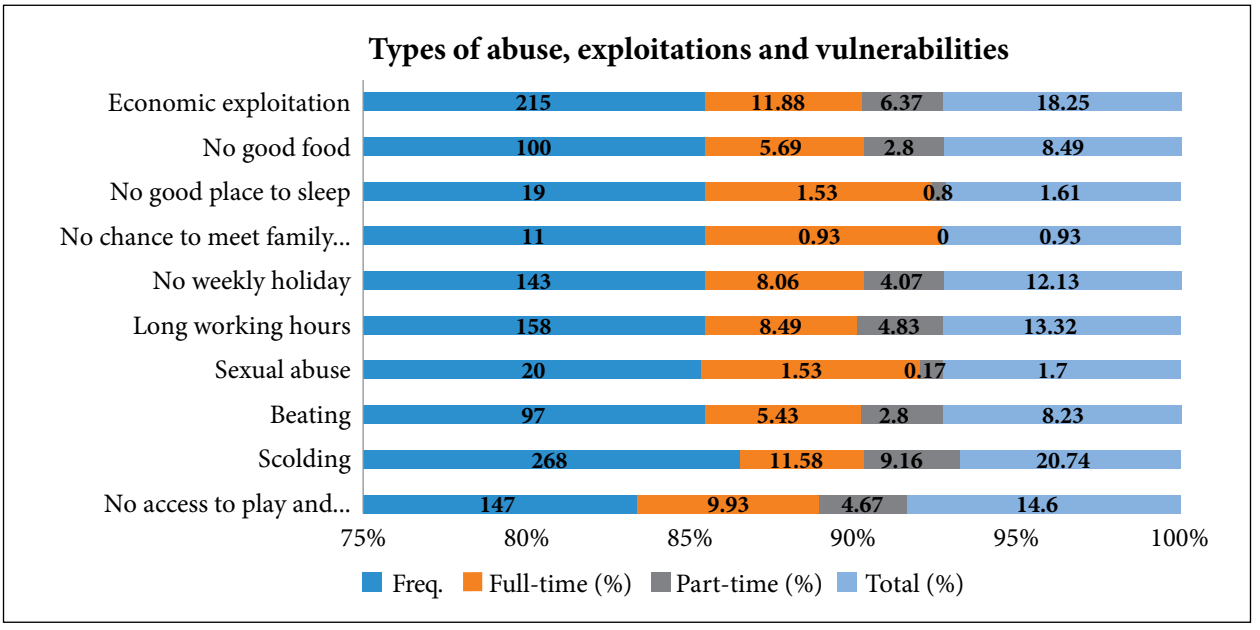


31.45% CDWs cited heavy workload as a prominent risk, with 20.11% in full-time and 11.34% in part-time positions. 29.96% expressed concerns about being compelled to work beyond their capacity, revealing the strain imposed on child domestic workers. Physical injury emerges as a prevalent risk, with 18.47%. 7.12% reported health-related hazards. 6.98% confronts the challenge of working in hazardous environments, while 6.02% expressed the distressing reality of being always confined or locked, pointing to potential threats to their freedom and safety.



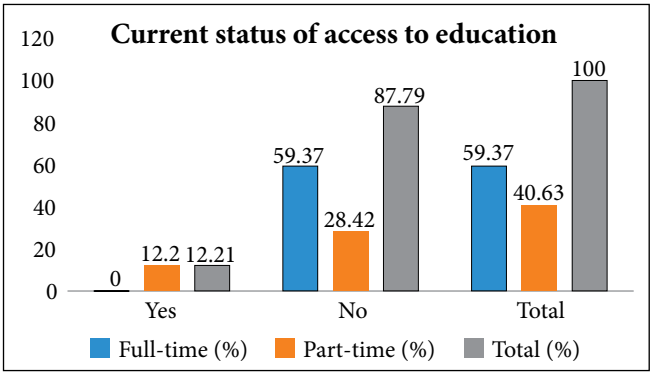
A concerning 20.74% CDWs reported experiencing scolding, with 11.58% in full-time and 9.16% in part-time positions. Physical abuse is also distressingly prevalent, with 8.23% reporting instances of beating. The vulnerability to sexual abuse is reported by a smaller yet alarming 1.7%. Moreover, 18.25% respondents expressed concerns about economic exploitation. Long working hours are a widespread concern, with 13.32% indicating the strain of extended work periods, while 12.13% bemoan the absence of a weekly holiday. Denial of access to play and recreational activities is reported by 14.6%. The deprivation of a proper sleep environment is noted by 1.61%, while 8.49% face challenges related to inadequate food. Astonishingly, 0.93% reported being denied the chance to meet their family members.

56.25% CDWs reported that they do not have any family members in Dhaka. Conversely, 43.75% respondents indicated the presence of family members in Dhaka, with a significant 40.63% engaged in part-time work and a smaller 3.12% in full-time positions.



41.21% CDWs reported that the opportunity and frequency of meeting their family members is determined by their employers' wishes, underscoring the potential impact of workplace dynamics on their personal lives. For those with set intervals, 17.58% meet their family members half-yearly and 14.7% do so on a quarterly basis. A smaller but noteworthy 4.61% meeting their families during festivals. Moreover, 1.73% have the opportunity to meet their families once a year.

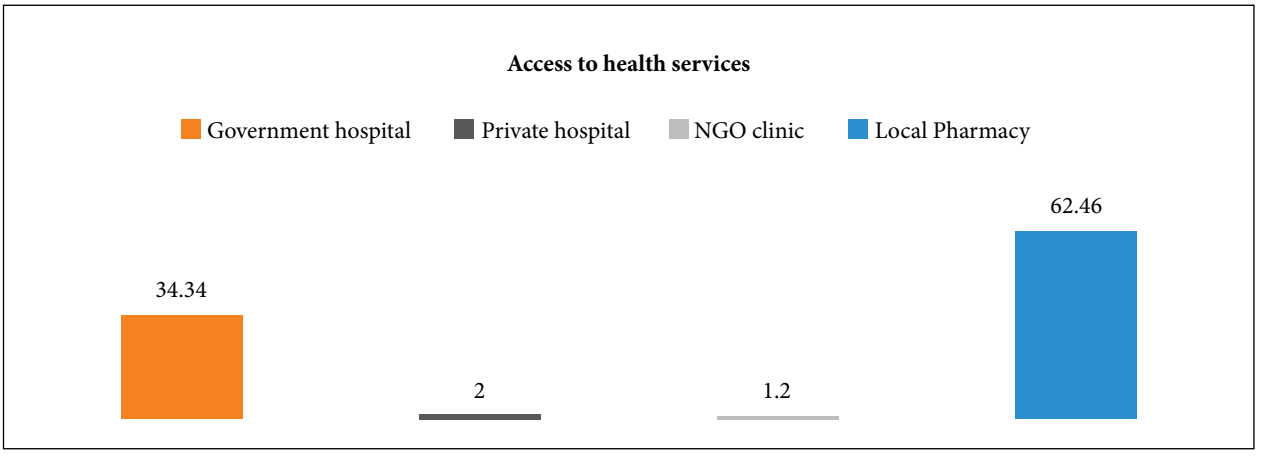
55.11% of the CDWs affirmatively stated that they have attended school at some point in their lives. Among them, 46.3% are engaged in full-time work, and 8.81% in part-time work. On the other hand, 44.89% reported that they have never attended school. The breakdown shows that 31.82% of those who have never attended school are engaged in part-time work, while 13.07% are in full-time work.



87.79% CDWs are not presently attending school, consisting of 59.37% in full-time and 28.42% in part-time work. In contrast, 12.21% respondents stated that they are currently attending school, all of whom are engaged in part-time work. For the minority of child domestic workers currently attending school, the overwhelming majority (93.04%) are attending NGO schools.

31.17% of the CDWs cited being busy with work as a significant hindrance for education. Financial constraints also emerge as a substantial barrier, with 30.76% respondents. The reluctance or disinterest in education is expressed by 7.28%. 15.01% reported that their parents are not willing for them to attend school. Another 12.54% mentioned the unwillingness of their employers, 2.02% faces the challenge of the unavailability of schools nearby, while 1.22% report being denied admission by school authorities.

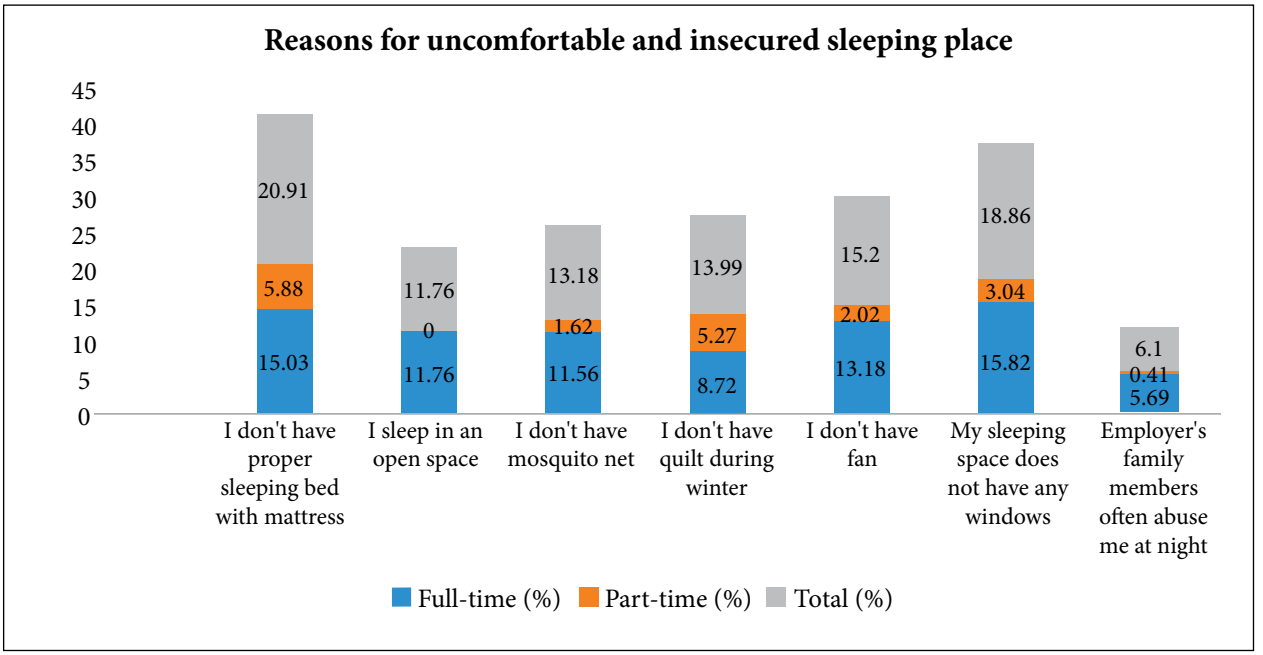
62.46% respondents reported that they rely on local pharmacies for health services. Government hospitals emerge as another major source, with 34.34% utilizing these facilities. Private hospitals are accessed by 2%. NGO clinics play a modest role, with 1.2% relying on these organizations for their health-related needs. A small yet noteworthy 3.41% respondents reported not having received health services when sick, suggesting potential barriers to accessing healthcare for a minority within this group. 52.39% of the respondents cited financial constraints as the primary barrier to get access to health services. This aligns with 38.11% in full-time and 14.28% in part-time positions. 9.52%



respondents reported a lack of support from their parents, 38.09% respondents indicated a lack of support from their employers as a barrier.

96% respondents acknowledge experiencing feelings of being upset at some point. Within this majority, 56.82% are engaged in full-time work, while 39.2% are in part-time positions. Conversely, 3.98% respondents reported not having experienced feelings of being upset.

42.94% CDWs expressed being upset when their employers scold them, 34.71%t reported not liking to work as a reason for feeling upset, 10.44% expressing distress over this aspect of their work environment. Moreover, 8.22% respondents opined missing their families as a source of emotional upset, 3.69% reported feeling upset because they want to study.

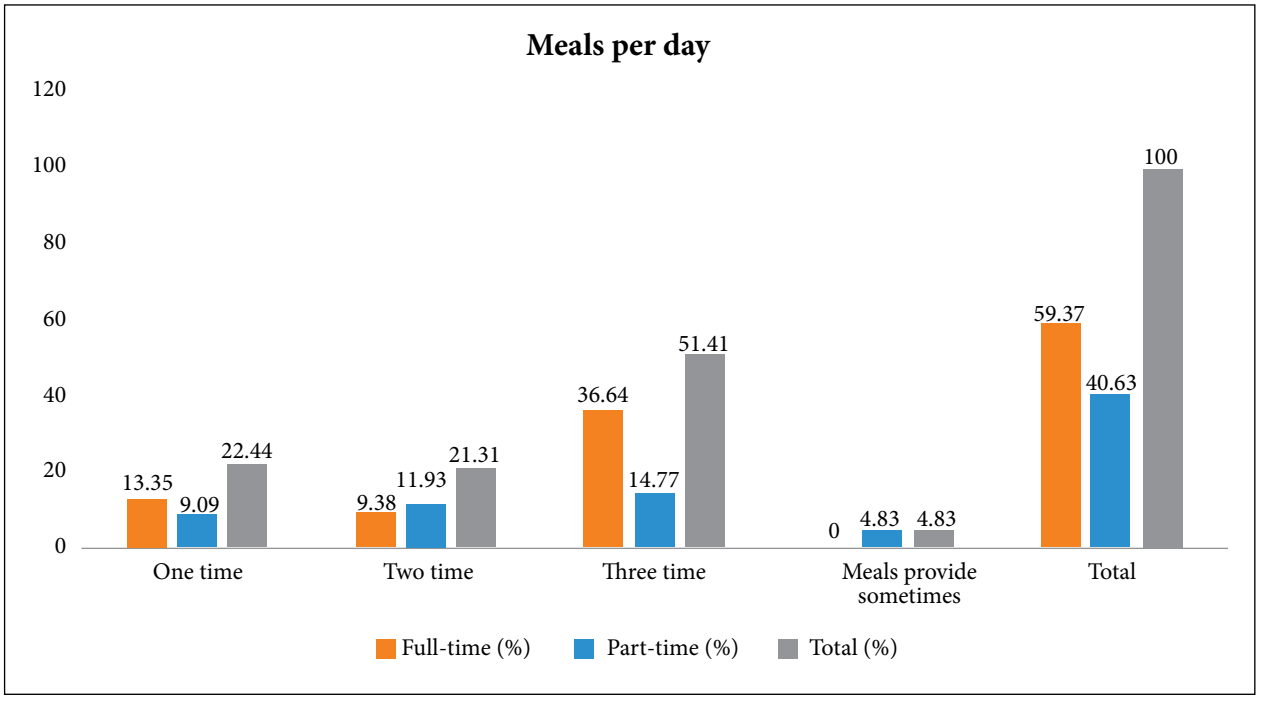


54.1% CDWs expressed a solitary response to their emotional distress by crying alone, 34.49% respondents reported doing nothing as a coping mechanism, 10.95% respondents were found share their feelings with family members, 0.46% mention sharing their feelings with their employers.

Among the full-time child domestic workers, approximately 22.49% sleep in the kitchen at their employer's home, 17.61% sleep in the drawing room, 14.73% in the dining room, and 3.41% in the veranda, all within their employer's homes. A small fraction, 1.13% respondents reported sleeping with the employer's family members.

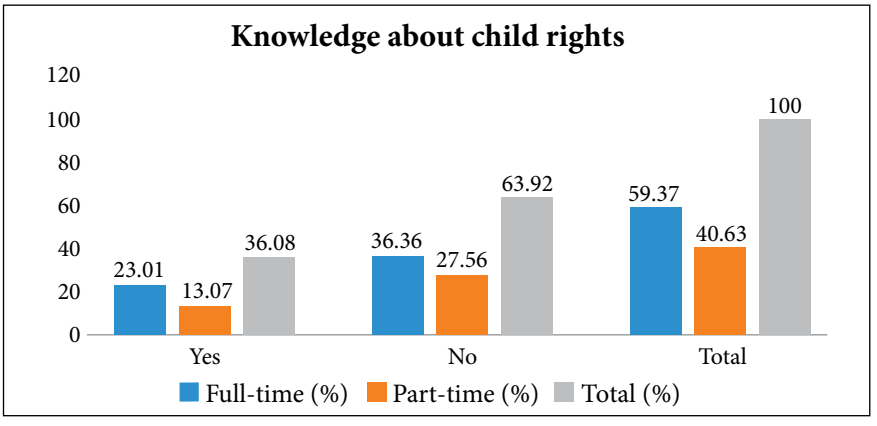
20.91% respondents reported not having proper sleeping beds with mattresses, 18.86% respondents mentioned that their sleeping spaces lack windows, the lack of mosquito nets is cited by 13.18% respondents, 15.2% respondents expressed not having a fan, 13.99% respondents stated not having quilts during winter, 11.76% respondents mentioned sleeping in open spaces, and 6.1% respondents reported experiencing abuse from the employer's family members at night.

51.41% respondents reported receiving three meals a day, 22.44% respondents receive only one meal a day, indicating a severe deficiency in nutritional intake, 21.31% receive two meals a day, 4.83% reports meals being provided sometimes, emphasizing the inconsistency in access to regular meals. 50.28% CDWs reported having some form of opportunity for recreation. Within this group, 31.25% are engaged in full-time work, while 19.03% are in part-time work. Conversely,



49.72% respondents report having no opportunity for recreation. Of this group, 28.12% are engaged in full-time work, and 21.6% are in part-time work.

36.08% reported having some understanding of child rights. Within this group, 23.01% are engaged in full-time work, while 13.07% are in part-time work. However, 63.92% respondents report having no idea about child rights. Of this group, 36.36% are engaged in full-time work, and 27.56% are in part-time work.



32.11% CDWs reported having some idea about child labour or hazardous child labour. Within this group, 18.75% are engaged in full-time work, while 13.36% are in part-time positions. However, 67.89% respondents reported having no idea about child labour or hazardous child labour. Of this group, 40.62% are engaged in full-time work, and 27.27% are in part-time positions.

The major root causes of children getting involved in domestic work include economic vulnerability at household level. The study findings also suggest this argument. According to the quantitative findings, approximately 47.76% of CDWs entered into work for the explicit purpose of supporting their families. Which was endorsed by their parents.

Rapid rural – urban migration of population has also a strong link with children getting involved in domestic work in Dhaka City. One of the main reasons of migrating to big cities is to finding livelihood opportunity. Economically vulnerable people plan to move to cities and getting engaged in various jobs, mostly in the informal sectors. The informal sectors do not provide a decent salary and therefore, almost all of the family members, including children get involved in work, mostly hazardous work for their survival. These findings were supported by the data received from CDWs. According to them, 62.63% CDWs moved to Dhaka, as their families moved for work opportunities.

High demand for child domestic workers in urban cities, especially in Dhaka City is one of the most significant reasons for children getting involved in domestic work. The reasons behind this intention include child domestic workers are easily manageable, they are low paid, they do not demand a designated living space to sleep, they do not ask for leave, they consume less food and most importantly, child domestic workers do not have a voice to raise against all forms of abuse and exploitations.

Lack of awareness among the key stakeholders and duty bearers significantly contribute to the existence of children in domestic work. Majority of the children, parents and employers do not have the awareness about child rights, child labour and laws and policies of the country to prevent and eliminate child labour.

Besides, a significant number of parents are not aware about the importance of education for their children often excused by economic vulnerability. Additionally, girl children are often considered by the parents as a liability and often poses negative attitude towards their right to education.

Lack of appropriate laws and policies and its effective enforcement is also considered as one of the major causes for the existence of child domestic workers. The GoB has formulated a good number of laws and policies to establish the rights of the working children in general. However, there are still loopholes in the existing laws and policies as well as level of enforcement of the existing laws and policies. Additionally, there is hardly any scope in the existing legal framework to eliminate child domestic work. Child domestic work still out of the perview of the list of hazardous work for children.

There is still a lack of capacity of the key duty bearers at local and national level to deal with the issue of child domestic work. Side by side, there is a poor coordination among the responsible institutions in terms of policy formulation and enforcement. As a result, influential quarters of the society are free to violate the laws.

CONCLUSION

The Government of Bangladesh made strong commitments at the national and global level to protect children from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitations through formulation and enforcement of laws and policies, implementing programs and projects, strengthening capacity of the responsible institutions. However, the issue of child protection still remains as a major challenge for the country. Specially, thousands of children engaged in domestic work facing enormous amount of abuse, exploitations and violence are still in the dark as far as law, policy and its enforcement is concern.

The GoB and the national and international child rights NGOs have been working over the last two decades with special focus on child labour, child education etc. Some of the interventions brought positive results, however, there are still long way to go to realize the desired goal of addressing the needs of the child domestic worker. Therefore, it is crucial to develop and implement appropriate interventions based on the findings of this study.

There is a lack of updated data on the situation of child domestic worker in Dhaka City, which often created hurdles to design and implement appropriate interventions. An effort has been made to identify the situation of child domestic

workers through undertaking this study. Findings of this study may enable ASD and other child rights agencies to design and implement programs and projects for the wellbeing of the children engaged in domestic work in Dhaka.

Ensuring protection for the child domestic workers would not be possible without addressing some of the root causes of children getting engaged in domestic work. Lack of awareness among the key duty bearers regarding the long-term negative impact of child labour in general and child domestic work in particular is one of the burning issues to address the issue of child domestic work. In addition, monitoring the situation of child domestic workers is crucial and bringing the perpetrators under law for legal punishment would set examples for others to comply with the laws.

There is a lack of capacity of the responsible institutions and coordination. As a result, the existing laws and policies cannot be enforced adequately. On the other hand, some of the existing laws and policies need to be amended. Therefore, it is important to take initiative to amend the laws and policies and to provide support to the responsible institutions and entities in order to ensure proper implementation of the legal framework effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strong efforts are required to closely work with the relevant government ministries and departments to enact/amend laws and policies specifically targeting the child domestic workers. For example, The Children Policy 2011, National Child Labour Elimination Policy and Domestic Workers' Welfare and Protection Policy need to be amended in order to make it consistent with other laws and policies. Besides, a new law capturing the provisions of the Domestic Workers' Welfare and Protection Policy need to be enacted.
2. Urgent effort is required to include child domestic work in the list of hazardous work for children. Collaboration be initiated with the National Human Rights Commission to expedite the process.
3. There is an urgent need to design and implement a mass awareness campaign targeting different stakeholders and duty bearers (Children, parents, employers, community people etc.) to educate people regarding laws and policies as well as negative consequences of child domestic work. This awareness campaign should also cover some of the important sources areas of child domestic worker.
4. It is crucial to closely work with the print and electronic media to publish/produce reports on various issues concerning child domestic work in Dhaka City, A media group consisting reporters from print and electronic media may be established and providing them training on CDW. They may play vital role to create pressure at local and national level.
5. Initiative may be taken to closely work with the law enforcing agencies to make them proactive to bring perpetrators under the book. Initially 5-10 Police Stations may be targeted as pilot basis.
6. Withdrawing children from domestic work would not be possible without providing alternative skills. Therefore, there is a need to provide general functional education as well as marketable skill development training to the domestic workers and ensuring job placement in decent work.
7. There is a need to set up rescue center for the victims of abuse and violence in order to provide health and legal services.
8. Initiative would be required to have joint efforts in collaboration with other like-minded NGOs and NGO networks for making the advocacy stronger.

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