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Reasons behind Child Labor in Bangladesh: Case & Policy Analysis

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Reasons behind Child Labor in Bangladesh: Case & Policy Analysis

Tasnuva Sharmin [α] & Nashiba Nawor [σ]

Abstract- **Bangladesh's socioeconomic realities include the problem of child labor. This is a huge problem that cannot be overlooked. In this study, I looked at the elements that contribute to child labor in Bangladesh. Poverty is the primary cause of children working as child laborers. The issue of child labor has become one of the most prominent challenges in developing countries. To put an end to this, societies and governments must act together. The government, in particular, must ensure that citizens' basic rights are protected. Following that, the implementation of child labor legislation and a social boycott of child work would be an effective remedy.**

I. Introduction

Child labor is now a global issue that has piqued the interest of people from all walks of life. It is, in fact, the result of an unequal society. Popular belief in high-income countries appears to be that child labor in developing countries is almost always a form of child abuse, with children working in dangerous conditions in run-down factories for insensitive enterprises. Recent efforts to combat child labor have included lowering employment opportunities for children through comprehensive and coherent global child labor standards and negative publicity of products manufactured by working children. It is difficult to estimate the number of child laborers around the world. The majority of working-age children live in low-income countries. Numerous elements of the labor supply in these countries are frequently lacking inaccurate statistics. Much more complicated, until lately, some legislators described "child labor" as financial growth that is harmful to a child's well-being.

Because of land scarcity, an absence of food, and political turmoil, the majority of Bangladeshis are impoverished and poorly educated. People in this position endeavor to disregard child care. This deplorable situation has resulted from a large proportion of households and economic problems. Approximately 44 percent of the total 160 million population is under the age of 18. This is a major issue in Bangladesh due to the proliferation of child labor. In general, street kids work for a living and spend the majority of their time on the streets. Child empowerment rates have gone up chronologically as children grew older. Some of them lack a primary caregiver. Scholars and jurists divide homeless children into two categories. One group spends the majority of their time on the street but never returns home. Some children, on the other hand, play, eat, sleep, and make friends in the street but revert home at night. Remarkably, there is a resemblance between two groups that do not go to study. It plays a prominent role throughout Bangladesh.

My goal in writing this article is to discover the major issue of child labor in Bangladesh. To do so, I will rely on some secondary data sources. These data will be compiled from the findings of other studies in which the authors interviewed child laborers. In addition, I am interested in analyzing Bangladesh's current child labor laws and policies. The main research question I will address is, "What is the primary cause of child labor in Bangladesh and other low-income countries?" What are the variables we should consider? And, at the end of this report, I will attempt to propose a solution.

II. Background

a) Political and Economic Situation

Only in 1971 did the People's Republic of Bangladesh gain independence from Pakistan. Since 1991, the country has developed into a pretty stable parliamentary government after a phase followed by a series of military coup attempts and shifting, military-backed governments. The legal system of the country is characterized as a hybrid of common law, which was passed down from the former British colonial regime, and Islamic law. The country is still classified as developing (LDC). According to Data From the World Bank, Bangladesh's economy has grown at a rate of nearly 6% per year on average, and there has been a phenomenal step towards reducing poverty. However, approximately 47 million people in Bangladesh remain impoverished. Furthermore, many people are constantly at risk of falling deeper into recession, owing to natural catastrophes that often strike the thickly urbanized, low-lying coastal country. Based on the country's sustained economic growth rate during the period, the government of Bangladesh expects the country to achieve middle-income status by 2021, which, according to the World Bank, will necessitate the state, among other things, making a contribution to economic growth, developing a more skilled labor force, and improving governance mechanisms. Notably, the export-oriented apparel industry is one of the backbones of Bangladesh's growth in the economy, making Bangladesh the world's second-largest clothing and accessories exporting country (Norpoth et al.).

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b) Current Situation of Child Labor in Bangladesh

Bangladesh made modest progress in its attempts to eradicate the most heinous forms of child labor in 2019. The government signed the Palermo Protocol on Human Trafficking and, in 2019, through its programs, removed over 1,000 working children from 558 factories, educated 1,254 street children, and rehabilitated 3,501 children. Government programs have removed 90,000 children from dangerous working conditions and over 35,000 children from extractive work since 2017. Between the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 fiscal years, the government of Bangladesh increased its spending on children by 17% across 15 ministries responsible for children in some way. Children in Bangladesh, on the other hand, are subjected to the most heinous forms of child labor, such as compelled child labor in the manufacturing of dried fish and bricks. Children are also involved in hazardous tasks in the supply chains for clothing and leather goods. Furthermore, the Bangladesh Labor Act does not apply to the informal sector, which accounts for the majority of child labor in Bangladesh, and dangerous working restrictions are not exhaustive. Furthermore, labor investigators are not allowed to appraise punishments, and when courts do, the fines are insufficient to deter child labor violations of the law (U.S. Department of Labor).

III. Conceptualizing Child Labor

a) What is Child Labor?

The phrase "child labor" refers to the employment of children in any work that deprives them of all or most of their privileges as children, such as the privilege to formal educational attendance and undisrupted mental and physical advancement. Child labor, according to UNICEF, is "work that is likely to interfere with a child's education and development; labor that exceeds a minimum number of hours, hazardous labor; and/or labor performed by a child who is underage according to state legislation. A child is defined as a person under the age of 18." (Zaman et al.). A child is defined as a person who has not finished his fourteenth year of age, according to Section 2 (63) of the Labour Code of Bangladesh. The Code creates the category of adolescent for young people between the ages of fifteen and eighteen (Norpoth et al.). The International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention states:

b) Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, 1973

Child labor is work that children should not be doing because they are too young to work, or because it is dangerous or otherwise unsuitable for them if they have reached the minimum age. Countries that ratify this Convention make a legal commitment to end child labor and ensure that children under a certain "minimum age" are not employed. By the end of 2010, 156 of the ILO's 183 member countries had ratified the Convention (Zaman et al.).

c) Problem with the Definition

The definition of child labor is extremely problematic. The very first question to consider is whether only work in work situations, i.e. work for pay or profit, should be classified as child "labor." Such a narrow definition would exclude other types of unpaid work done by children, such as assistance for the family-owned business or farm, which may also involve working with dangerous machinery or compounds, or may require long working hours that interfere with the child's school education. Clearly, a definition of child labor that departs from the assertion of safeguarding kids from the harmful effects of work and ensuring education must be expanded accordingly. Conversely, not all types of work done by children, formally or informally, should be presumed "child labor" with the notion of "child labor for elimination," because some types of work can be helpful for children up to a certain age by helping to promote their skills and social advancement. The question of which types of work should then be regarded as not harmful or beneficial elicits a wide range of responses. However, definitional issues are not limited to the types of work. To the same extent, age limits pose a challenge to the definition of "child labor." Should the general age of majority be considered when defining "child labor"? Childhood and adulthood appear to have vastly different meanings in different societies around the world. Furthermore, if certain forms of jobs should be acceptable for juveniles, what age should be considered appropriate for conducting these forms of tasks? Different gender perceptions in different parts of the world complicate the task of providing a consistent answer to this question (Norpoth et al.).

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Type of work/employment	Light Work, (not likely to be harmful to health or child development or prejudicing education, Art. 7 ILO 138)	General employment, (Art. 2 ILO 138)	Hazardous work and other worst forms of child labour, (Art. 3 ILO 138, Art. 2 and 3 ILO 182)
Age limit	12/13	14/15	18
General standard of protection that shall be achieved	Protection from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development (Art. 32 UN CRC)		

Source: (Norpoth et al.)

Figure 1: Definition of Child Labour

IV. Literature Review

Child labor can have a wide range of consequences for a child. Long, rigorous hours of activity have a negative impact on a child's mental health, physical health, social development, and overall well-being, and they frequently intrude with his or her education. Children who work extremely hard and study at the same time have more deleterious attitudes towards learning, as well as lower-class attendance and test scores than children who do not work long hours (Bunnak).

a) Why do Children Work?

Child labor is defined as any activity that has a negative impact on the children who participate in it. Although child labor is hazardous to children, it does have some advantages for children and their families. According to a Peruvian study, working children aged 10 to 12 contribute 7.5 percent of family income, while children aged 13 to 15 contribute 12 percent (Anker and Melkas). It is more likely that analysts estimate from research in rural India, where children's income accounted for only 6% of household income, provide a more comprehensive picture (Rosenzweig and Evenson). Aside from that, child labor is accepted in societies where the general public's perception of the consequences of children working or where it has become part of the culture, tradition, or family expectations. Other contributing factors to the prevalence of child labor in a community include poor enforcement of labor laws, corruption, and inadequate child protection guidelines in society. Children are appealing to employers as profit-motivated employees because they are easier to control, more compliant, and less likely to demand a wage increase or better working conditions (Zaman et al.).

b) Push and Pull Factors

Low-quality schooling, a lack of relevance in learning, the language used, physical barriers to access, and the utter lack of school in the child's community are all factors that "push" children out of school. Children who join gangs are frequently forced to engage in petty crime, sometimes for their own safeguard. These atrocities may include drug theft and sale, raising the risk of disclosure and dependency on hazardous drugs. The pull factors include economic and other poverty-related issues that "pull" kids out of school. Families frequently rely on their children for extra income and, as a result, acknowledge child labor under unforeseen circumstances. Other frequent reasons that children are drawn into child labor include non-payment of minimum wages to parents, high adult joblessness, the need to pay off the family debt and meet their own survival needs if they are trying to fend for themselves (Zaman et al.).

c) The Effects of Child Labor

In agriculture, mining and quarrying, and manufacturing, the majority of child laborers work in dangerous situations such as direct contact with pesticides, chemicals, clouds of dust, and carcinogenic agents. These factors raise the risk of bronchial problems, cancer, and other life-threatening illnesses. Child labor can entail things like operating dangerous machinery, hard lifting, repetitive chores, and bad posture, all of which can lead to musculoskeletal disorders later in life. Similarly, children working in industries such as waste recycling and waste management labor in an unprotected atmosphere and are subjected to a multitude of hazardous materials such as broken glasses, sharps, rotten food, and other substances that can have major and long-term health repercussions (Zaman et al.).

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d) Poverty and Child Labour

Due to poverty, thousands of children are forced to work as laborers. Some people work as laborers before starting school, and many people quit school to work as laborers to support their daily requirements. These youngsters, who have been traumatized by suffering since a young age, deserve psychological rehab, schooling, and economic prospects in their communities. According to the World Bank (Fallon and Tzannatos), children from 10 to 14 years old have the highest labor force participation rate in countries with a per capita income of less than $500. (at 1987 prices). The percentage is between 30 and 60 percent. In countries with an income of $500 to $1,000, however, the percentage is much lower, ranging from 10% to 30%. In prosperous emerging countries, the situation is the polar opposite. In general, parents of child laborers are those who find it essential to draw on more of the household's resources to ensure the necessary income, rather than people who allow their children to work instead of them.

V. Methodology

This research is based on secondary data gathered mostly from literature reviews and interviews with a diverse group of people and professionals. Although there are some inconsistencies across government and non-government sources, the data is reasonably consistent and dependable. Although qualitative analysis has been prioritized, quantitative data has been used to supplement qualitative analysis. This research is separated into two sections. In the first portion, we'll look at some of the interviews that were conducted (Bashir et al.) and (Islam et al.). In the second section, we'll look at Bangladesh's present child labor rules and compare them to those in other nations.

Part-I: Cases & Findings

Case-A: Child labor in industry and urban area in Bangladesh

Md. Ali, a 13-year-old boy. He has been working as a server in a Dhaka farmgate restaurant. He was from the Jhenaidah Districts' rural area. His father is also a farmer, and his mother is a stay-at-home mom. His family consists of eight members, including his parents. He has completed his studies up to class seven. In reality, Ali's father is a seasonal employee, thus it was common for him to support his family during times of economic hardship, and it is this economic uncertainty that pushes him to apply for this position. His parents also encouraged him to pursue the job. He worked from 9 a.m. until 10 p.m. every day. His daily earnings average Tk. 300. He keeps a portion of his profits for himself and sends the rest home. His boss treats him with respect. He aspires to be a restaurant owner and is unwilling to study at a later date if the opportunity arises. There are no opportunities to earn additional funds or festival bonuses. A certain amount of profits from all-day hard labor is to be provided to the Mahajan, with the remainder of child labor being divided among the conductor, assistant, and driver (Bashir et al.).

Case-B: Child labor in the rural area

Md Asmat Ali, an 11-year-old readymade clothes worker from Kushtia, came to Gazipur for employment. His father is a businessman, and his mother is a stay-at-home mom. He is the oldest of six brothers and sisters. He is the oldest in his family, which is why he has come to Gazipur to work in order to support his mother, younger brothers, and sisters. Asmat works 13 hours a day, seven days a week with no weekly vacation. Because he is new, it was decided that he would only be given three thousand taka. His boss is behaving admirably. He aspires to be an excellent technician and has no desire to continue his education in the future, even if given the opportunity (Bashir et al.)

Findings from (Islam et al.)

i. *Distribution of Child Domestic Workers (CDWs) Based on Education*

Education	Frequeny	Percent
Illiterate	7	5.8
Can sign only	14	11.7
Can read and write	32	26.7
Primary	30	25.0
Drop out (after primary)	36	30.0
Others	1	0.8
Total	120	100.0

Figure 2: Education of the Child Domestic Worker

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ii. *Employment Contract and Salary of Child Domestic Worker*

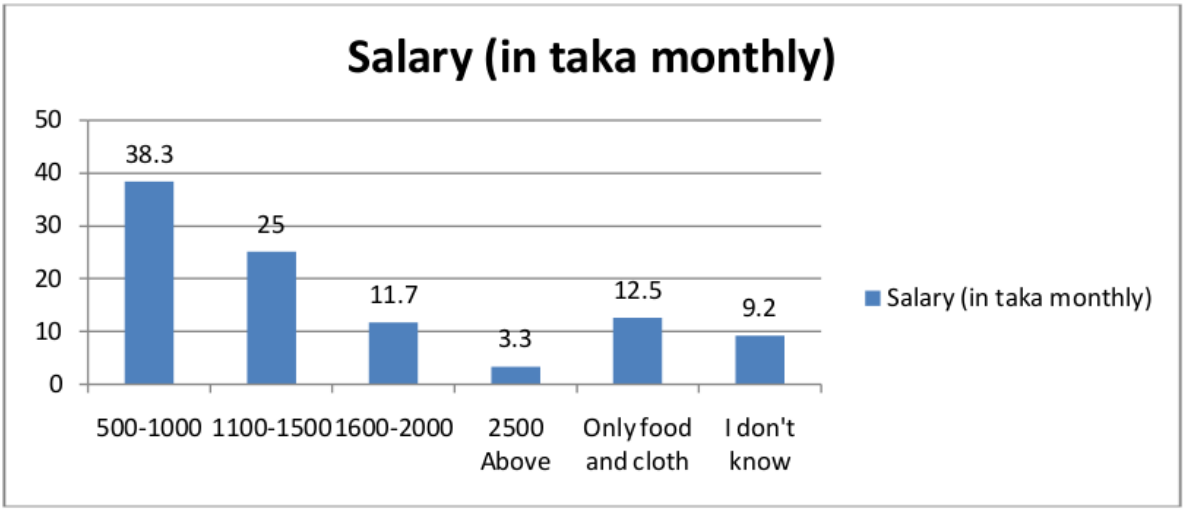


Figure 3: Monthly Salary of Child Domestic Worker

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Hope of better life	33	44.59
To build a house	02	2.70
My child will be educated	07	9.45
Wish to see family happiness	06	8.10
Wish to back to the school	11	14.86
Good husband and happy family	12	16.21
Better work except domestic work	30	40.54

Figure 4: Future thought of child domestic workers

Part-II: Policy & Law

Policy	Description
National Plan of Action on the Elimination of Child Labor (2012–2021)	Develops institutional capacity, increases access to education and health services, raises societal awareness, strengthens law enforcement, and develops preventative and reintegration initiatives. The MOLE established a National Child Labor Monitoring Core Committee in 2019. The Committee visits industries with a high risk of child labor on a regular basis and educates employers on how to avoid using child labor. On July 7, 2019, the group held its first meeting, then on July 20 and November 20, 2019, the committee visited tanneries in Savar. MOLE also ran an awareness-raising campaign on 30 private television stations during the reporting period. Through Child Development Centers, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs aided 700 children and rehabilitated 972 street children.

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Seventh Five Year Plan (2016–2020)	Includes the abolition of child labor's harshest forms, with a focus on child domestic workers and other vulnerable groups. Forming a policy for children working in the formal sector, assisting street children to protect them from exploitation, coordinating with stakeholders for effective rehabilitation, increasing working children's access to formal and non-formal learning, and providing livelihood support to poor households with children are among the actions that the government should take. A total of 1,250 street children were enrolled in school throughout the reporting period.
Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy	Sets the minimum age for domestic employment at 14 years old; all youngsters under the age of 18 must-have parental authorization to work at home. However, unless the legal framework is changed to reflect the altered policy, the policy is not legally binding. The government established a Central Monitoring Cell on Domestic Workers in 2019 to oversee the policy's implementation, and two awareness-raising workshops were held in Khulna and Barisal.
National Plan of Action for Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking (2018–2022)	Establishes a strategy to strengthen government capacity to combat human trafficking and offer economic and social safety nets for victims and vulnerable populations, especially children. In 2019, the government began steps to put the plan into action, including establishing a 24-hour legal assistance hotline and creating 2,866 new Bangladesh Police posts. 3,501 children were rehabilitated or reintegrated, 2,677 children were sent to legal aid, and 4,204 children were directed to government, private, and non-profit organizations.

Source: (U.S. Department of Labor)

1) A child is defined as a person who has not finished his fourteenth year of age, according to Section 2 (63) of the Labour Act. The Act creates the category of the adolescent for young people between the ages of fifteen and eighteen (Norpoth et al.).
2) Section 34 is the most important regulation concerning child labor. Children may not be employed in any occupation or establishment, according to Section 34 (1). Section 35 of the Act reinforces the restriction by prohibiting parents or other guardians of a child from agreeing to use a kid's services in any occupation. Section 44, on the other hand, makes an exception for light work done by children aged twelve or older, as long as the work does not interfere with their physical or mental growth or education, particularly their school attendance (Norpoth et al.).

VI. Analysis

a) Cases

(i). *Economic Class:* Both situations indicate that they are from lower-income families. Md. Ali's father is clearly a seasonal employee, as evidenced by case-A, and he must work to maintain his family. His family's financial insecurity prompted him to apply for the job. Md Asmat Ali's father is a minor businessman, and his family is likewise struggling financially, as evidenced by case-B. As a result, he is forced to work in order to provide for his family.

(ii). *Extended Family Size:* We can see that the size of the extended family is a factor in this sort of child labor. In the first scenario, the family consists of eight people, none of whom is a permanent adult wage earner. Asmat Ali had six brothers and sisters in the second instance. There are eight people in his family, including his parents. And there is just one adult in the household who earns money. In both cases, surviving on a smaller income in an extended family is difficult. As a result, the children of the households were forced to seek employment.

(iii). *Intensity of Work:* It can also be demonstrated in the circumstances where both children had to work extremely hard all week. Md. Ali works from 9 a.m. until 10 p.m., as evidenced by the first case. It's an obvious breach of the International Labor Organization's (ILO) rules. Asmat Ali, on the other hand, is required to work 13 hours each day, seven days per week. They are unable to relax as a result of their work. In both circumstances, the work timetable is quite constrained.

(iv). *Wages:* Another significant issue to think about is the laborer's wage. Md Ali is paid 300 taka (USD 3.5) every day in the first case. Asmat Ali, on the other hand, is paid 3000 taka per month (35 USD). Both youngsters will have to put in a lot of effort to earn this money. To earn a living, the former work 11 hours per day, while the latter works 13 hours per day. This is inexcusably cruel.

(v). *Future Plan of the child laborers:* The youngsters in both circumstances are uneducated. When asked about their plans for the future, we discovered that they were more interested in working than in schooling. We can see in the second scenario that even if the child was given the opportunity, he would still be uninterested in schooling. They fantasize about living a life as a worker. Another

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thing they have in common is this. This is essential because child labor at such a young age prevents children from receiving a proper education. As a result, they must endure oppression for the rest of their lives.

b) Findings Analysis

We can see some findings of child labor from Islam et al. The interpretation of the result is something we're interested in. The majority of children involved in labor are either primary school dropouts or have dropped out after finishing elementary school. A large number of children are completely illiterate or can only sign. This means that the majority of youngsters only receive a rudimentary education in order to read and write. They are unable to complete their schooling. As a result, they have a slim chance of changing their and their families' fates in the future. When we look at the salaries of domestic workers, we can observe that the majority of them are paid between $6 and $12 per month. Only a few people will be able to earn more than $30. Many of them are not paid at all. They only receive food and clothing. This type of child labor is inexcusably cruel. In almost every scenario, the youngsters must work really hard. However, they were only able to get the minimal minimum. Employers consistently break the 8-hour work regulation, as well as the minimum payment requirement, when it comes to minors. Another essential consideration is the children's future perspectives. We can see that they are adamant about not returning to school. However, the majority of people want to work anywhere but at home. This is a clear indicator that youngsters working in households are forced to work inhumanely in order to make a living. Employers have been known to beat or abuse workers.

c) Policy & Law Analysis

When we look at the rules implemented by the Bangladeshi government, we can see that the concept of a kid is ambiguous. Employers always take advantage of these advantages. Despite the fact that the laws are in place, we have yet to see them implemented. In addition, the penalty for exploiting children as slaves is unclear. There is no long-term plan for the children's rehabilitation. Domestic abuse against child laborers was also not given the attention it deserved by policymakers. The country and its system do not adhere to the ILO's standards and regulations. The fundamental issue is that the labor law does not fully address the issue of underage work. It makes some types of jobs legal for those aged 12 and up. Employers frequently take advantage of these benefits, forcing youngsters to work more intensively over time.

VII. Discussion

a) Suggestions to eliminate child labor

Methods for eliminating child labor are a difficult challenge that will require financial, moral, and political support from all levels of society.

1. Because child labor is inextricably linked to our society, efforts should be taken to reduce it beginning at the elementary level.
2. Poverty, as previously said, is the fundamental cause of child labor, and it motivates youngsters to seek jobs to avoid malnutrition and enhance their family's income. As a result, effective child labor solutions must be built on reducing economic inequality through economic and social development, with a focus on human resource development.
3. Child-centered educational sensitivity and understanding are required at the political, community, and family levels to remove the problem.
4. The existing education method should be modified to enhance educational sensitivity among parents, family members, and community people. Unfortunately, due to the system's corruption and incompetence, the education budget is insufficient and not used correctly for its intended purpose.
5. The inclusion of information about child labor in school curricula will aid in raising awareness across the country.
6. Adult employment and income generation will aid in the elimination of poverty and the problem of child labor in the country.
7. The law prohibiting child labor is adequate, but the law's faulty execution is the main roadblock.
8. Child labor should be abolished with a lot of advocacy. These ads should educate people about the dangers of child labor and the potential consequences.
9. The government must play an important role in this. The state must protect its citizens' fundamental rights.
10. The awareness should spread throughout the community. Boycotting child labor in society would be a huge success. In addition, the community should speak out in support of impoverished people's rights.

VIII. Conclusion

Child labor has always been a major issue in developing countries. In some countries, the disparities between the affluent and the poor are enormous. As a result, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. This disparity results in economic inequality in society. This disparity limits employment opportunities and makes poor residents reliant on child labor. Increased child

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labor is also a result of political events and difficulties in enforcing current regulations. In this study, I examined the current state of child labor in Bangladesh. By researching secondary source interviews as well as regulations and legislation, I attempted to discover the reasons for child labor. The most common finding in this research is that practically all of the child laborers are school dropouts. What's more surprising is that they don't want to return to their old schools. Then there's the fact that these kids have to put in a lot of effort. However, in comparison to their efforts, their pay did not even come close to meeting the bare minimum. Furthermore, they are frequently mistreated or abused by their superiors. Adult unemployment and economic suffering are the main causes of child labor in Bangladesh. Another variable is also significant in this case. Lack of education and family planning are major contributors to this form of adversity. The state and its authorities do not provide the bare minimum to its residents. Fundamental rights are rarely granted to them. As a result, low-income families are forced to send their children to work. This cycle will never end because the youngster will never have the opportunity to receive an education and a better life. Society must go forward to end child labor. A large-scale campaign against child labor can be successful. However, the most effective option would be for the government to guarantee citizens' fundamental rights before severely enforcing child labor laws.

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