



## **Causes of Migration and Life on the Street: A Qualitative Study on the Street Children in Dhaka City**

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**Abstract:** *Bangladesh suffers severe effects as a result of the presence of young children on the streets. Exclusion of street children from society deprives the country of potentially valuable human resources and implies an increase in deviant behavior, which will result in social dysfunction. Dhaka, Bangladesh's major city, is home to a considerable number of street children. They live in fear and are unable to exercise their fundamental rights. Using a qualitative approach, this study examined the street children as well as explored the reasons behind migrating in Dhaka city and the life on the streets of Dhaka. Although street children belong to one of the most neglected social groups in Bangladesh, they exhibit intense resilience against adversity. The study reveals that lack of family affection, friendly family environment and poor socio economic conditions are the primary reasons for the migration of these street children. Besides, they face several challenges while living in the streets of Dhaka.*

**Key words :** Street children, Migration.

### **1.0 Introduction:**

It is widely accepted that children are the future of a nation. When a large number of children are deprived of their most basic rights, that future becomes grim. As a result, the country's future is threatened because of the plight of the nation's street children. Without integrating the country's street children, Bangladesh will be unable to make the most of its human capital and advance social development. It is common for street children to be affected by outside influences that cause them to abandon their home. On the street, they appeared to be primarily concerned with bringing in money. They may work on their own initiative or be required to do so by their parents or guardians. Families are frequently uprooted by natural catastrophes or climate change and relocate to Dhaka, Bangladesh, to begin a new life. On some occasions, children escape familial violence or abuse by migrating to the streets of Dhaka. McAlpine et al (2010) observed that homeless children in Tanzania who had been abused at home preferred the roughness of street life to the violence of their violent home life. "Migration to the street may in reality represent an act of personal resilience, where a child believes they have a greater chance to

improve their own life and livelihood in good ways by leaving home prematurely," according to McAlpine et al (2010).

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All of these factors combine to force children to find jobs or face serious consequences. Despite working long hours every day, many youngsters remain poor. They can't do anything about their financial predicament.

The 1999 article “**Child labor: A world history companion (Vol. 5)**” by Hobbs, McKechnie and Lavalette stressed that street kids need to experience an imperilled, deficient way of life which is altogether transient with their most perceivability—in the roads, a long way from any identifiable home. Street children live single, in sets, or group(s). They mull over railroad, dispatch and transport terminals, by the sides of high streets, asphalt, commercial centers on an under the over bridges, waterlogging zones, deserted homes, pummels and shunts, broken autos, mosques and sanctuaries, working spots, i.e., inn and business’ shops, sewer vents and artistic funnels, and so on. They, even more often than not, do not shower on the day and keep one arrangement of fabric. They wear it until it is torn. They eat disposed of nourishment that is usually considered unclean and restoratively destructive (Hobbs, Lavaletter, Mackenchine, 1999).

As per Kapoor and Bhattacharyya in 2009— “**Life and employment of the poor kids living in city Dhaka: Problems, prospects and challenges, Governance and Poverty Reduction : Beyond the Cage of best Practices**” —these kids work extend periods of time for little pay, have their cash stolen, and frequently become ill since they live in an unsanitary domain. They are defenseless against brutality, misuse, open embarrassment and provocation and frequently get themselves imprisoned with grown-up criminals in jail (p.205). Experiencing broadened cruel substances, street kids soon get habituated to adapting to various difficult situations every day (Aptekar, 1994; Scanlon et al. 1998).

Bangladesh's street children were the subject of a study by Conticini and Hulme (2007), who were looking for the root causes of this phenomenon. According to the article "Escaping violence, seeking freedom: Why children in Bangladesh migrate to the street," economic poverty is one of the main causes of children taking to the streets of Bangladesh. Children left their homes for a variety of reasons, foremost among them being stress and strain that comes with living in a difficult financial situation. Researchers observed that a child's decision to leave home is strongly influenced by the breakdown of social connections . Children are motivated to leave their homes by a sense of alienation. Many children claimed that violence was a major factor in their decision to leave their families and live on the streets. They took to the streets in search of protection. "menaces, isolation, imprisonment, withholding or taking of money, threatened physical damage," "beats," and "sexual assaults" were among the many forms of physical and emotional abuse that both boys and girls reported being victims.

It's possible for opportunist groups to take advantage of street children and expose them to criminality and deviance. Theft, hijacking, and even more serious crimes like drug and weapon trafficking are among the unlawful activities that some street children engage in, according to Wares (2009). 132 of the 164 male street adolescents studied in Mumbai were found to be drug users, and the study found a direct link between drug misuse and criminal activity. School dropouts and out-of-school teens are also more likely to consume drugs, according to the study (Sharma, Barkataki, 2016).

To mainstream street children, a single entity is unable to deal with all of the complicated dynamics and difficulties on the street. To help street children become fully integrated members of society, a variety of groups, businesses, and the government must work together to implement programs that provide them with opportunity, training, rehabilitation, and other forms of social and financial support they need. As they are cut off from the rest of society, children living on the streets miss out on a lot of chances. As a result, they are unable to obtain formal employment as adults since they receive poor educational opportunities. Because of this, their children are at greater risk of living on the streets as well. It is imperative that this cycle be stopped to ensure that all children have equal access to opportunities in society.

The real problem is the existence of street children. Rather, it is a sign of a wider social issue that needs attention. Solving these issues is critical in the fight against the rising population of street children. Despite the fact that many researchers have linked the plight of street children to such things as poverty and dysfunctional families, these theories do not hold true across the board. A child's migration to the street is influenced by the socioeconomic, political, social, and cultural context of the society in which they live. In the same way, certain societies put street children at risk in specific ways. Only by considering these aspects can a sound strategy be devised. Dhaka's streets must be examined to see whether there are any distinctive or unique characteristics to be taken into account. In this regard this study aims to explore the reason behind migrating children in the streets of Dhaka city considering their livelihood strategies.

## **2.0 Objective of the Study:**

Broadly this study aims to explore the causes behind migrating in the city area as street children. More specifically this study intended-

- Exploring the factors responsible for the migration of street children.
- Exploring street children's life on the street in the Dhaka city area.

## **3.0 Methodology**

While feedback from street children aided in our understanding of the structure and dynamics of street life, as well as the societal challenges confronting the respondents, it also paved the way for future research. A focus group study was necessary to have a better understanding of street children as a social group and their interactions with society. Additionally, focus group studies

can be used to establish interventions or programs for marginalized groups, such as street children. Morgan concluded that focus group interviews have the "potential to offer underrepresented populations a voice" (1996). Thus, the gathered data highlighted relative points of street children.

This study is exploratory in nature and has followed the qualitative approach. First, a questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire focused on the following subject matters: (i) Push and pull factors of street migration, (ii) Children's perception on advantages and disadvantages of living on the street. After the questionnaire was developed, the study areas were chosen and a sampling size was chosen. This is how it worked: There were six interviews done in different parts of Dhaka city. An electronic recorder was used to record the responses of the children, and the children were made aware that their responses would be recorded. After the six FGDs were done, three case studies were done. To be fair, the FGDs did not follow an exact sampling method. In FGD, each focus group had 8 to 10 children in it. Even though the goal was to have at least eight people in each focus group, it was a very hard goal to reach. Many street children didn't want to finish the whole interview, so they left the interview midway through. An inductive coding method was used in this study. It was after the interviews were transcribed that recurring patterns and themes were found in the text. Each theme was then given a code.

## 4.0 Findings and Analysis

### 4.1. Reasons for migration of street children-

Household conflicts and disorder is one of the leading causes of street migration. Unfavorable changes in the family structure, such as the death of one or both parents or the arrival of a step-parent, often motivate children to leave home and move to the streets. They find the street environment more suitable and comfortable than their previous household conditions.

*"I left my house at the age of 8 when my father left our family, and my mother got married to another man....Thus, I started living in this area and made some new friends." (11 years old)*

The shifts in family structure may be a source of discomfort or unhappiness for some children. They dislike a step-parent or fail to build an amicable relationship with new family members, which leads to strained relationships with their step-parents and step-siblings. As a result, they lose their feeling of belongingness and feel attracted to the idea of leaving home and building new relationships out of the family. Although the street is seen as a place where children cannot enjoy basic needs, for some children, their home is no better. One respondent's words implied that he did not receive enough food at his home.

*"I left home just to make some money so that I can eat daily. My mother died when I was only six, and then my father married another woman. My stepmother didn't take care of us and*

*didn't feed us well. I left home and started living here and trying to work on a daily basis. However, it is very tough and painful to manage money for food as I earn only 200-250 taka per week." (13 years old).*

A respondent, who has lost both his parents, was left on the street and had no other choice than to adapt to the street life. His experience further suggests that changes in the family structure put children in a stressful situation. He described,

*"I lost my parents when I was just six years old. Then my uncle brought me to Dhaka and handed me over to a family. My uncle said they would take care of me and admit me to school, but day by day, they forced me to do household work, and I could not work properly. One day, the house aunty beat me and left me in an unknown place. I was crying loudly and could not find anyone around me. Then 2 street children came to me and gave me some medicine. Since then, I started living with them in the street." (11 years old).*

The interviews indicated that parental absence and neglect drive children to the street. Some children come to the street with their siblings. One of such children reported,

*"My father had left our house with another woman, and my mother died a few days later.... Now my little brother and I live here and there, and we have no family members." (10 years old).*

Domestic violence is another significant issue that forces children to the street. Some respondents reported that they had come to the street because their home was chaotic and they felt unsafe. According to one of the respondents,

*"My home condition wasn't peaceful; my father and mother quarreled all night, and sometimes my father came home drunk and beat my mother and me. One night I left my home and started living with the street children, and now I am feeling safer here." (12 years old).*

Evidently, the children have experienced extreme circumstances in their homes, which led them to construct a positive perspective of street life. In some cases, the street is indeed a better alternative than the household.

Economic reasons largely influence the household environment. Financial limitations induce frustration and anger, which can result in violence or abuse. Low-income households often struggle to provide a sound and healthy environment for children, and the children may turn to the street to overcome economic limitations. A respondent confided that,

*"I dropped out of school because I didn't have enough money to pay my school fees and buy basic school supplies like uniforms, books, school shoes, and writing pens... I've come to the street to support my family." (16 years old).*

Some of the street children were strongly motivated to contribute to their families. They come from one-parent families, so their household incomes are lower than poor but two-parent

families. The children work to increase overall household income so that they can fulfill their own and their family members' basic needs. One respondent expressed,

*“Our family consists of 4 members; I’ve two other siblings and my mother. Previously, my mother worked as a maid in several houses, but now she is sick and cannot afford her medicine, let alone our daily food. Then I’ve to come to the streets to do some random jobs from morning to night and sometimes beg.” (10 years old).*

While economic reasons and household environment acted as push factors, there were several pull factors. Freedom, agency, and desire for adventure pulled children to the street. The combined force of push and pull factors entrapped the children. According to one of the interviewees, most of the children made friends with street children before moving to the street and joining their new family. The independent lifestyle of the other street children intrigued poor children to the street. A chaotic household environment served to glorify street life compared to home. Thus, children were introduced to the street.

There are also some unusual cases. One of the interviewees reported that he had no intention of moving to the street, and he was lost in Dhaka. He said,

*“I’ve shifted to Dhaka with one of my senior brothers from our village. I had no idea where I was going; all I can remember is we came to Dhaka together by a train journey all night, but in the morning, I lost him in the station, and from then on I’m living here” (12 years old).*

## **4.2. Life on the Street**

Street children face unparalleled problems on the street. Food, sleep, clothes, medicine, and many other basic needs are unavailable to them. They lead unsafe and insecure lives.

*“We play around here, ask for money and food from people, go here and there with friends, and we aren’t sure where we will sleep tonight, and what we’ll have for a meal. All of us live with uncertainty.” (13 years old).*

Street children engage in informal work and have very little financial security. The respondents work as vendors, flower sellers, coolie, hawkers, and beggars. Their incomes are insufficient and irregular, and as a result, most of them exhibit deep frustration and dissatisfaction with their current financial situation.

*“Working on the street is very difficult for me. I have no fixed job, and sometimes I sell paper in the morning, sometimes flowers, betel leaves, cigarettes, etc. It’s very difficult to find a job on a regular basis. I have no family members here. If I can’t get any work, I can’t get any meal or food for the day.”(13 years old).*

Lack of work is a major concern for street children. No job means no money, and no money means no food. The situation is particularly challenging for children who live alone. Those who

live with a family member have fewer occasions when they starve for a day or two. However, those who live without a guardian reported a higher number of days they had starved. Famished street children usually try to secure leftovers from restaurants and hotels. They usually establish connections with hotel waiters, dishwashers, or even owners to get their leftovers.

*“I have no fixed earning. Some days, I earn 300/400 taka, sometimes 200 taka, and sometimes I don't earn a single penny. It's hard to live on the street without money...no one will feed me for free. When I fail to earn any money, I beg people for money or food; sometimes, I wait near a restaurant to get some leftover food. I start looking for restaurant and hotel garbage bins around the city hoping I can find something to eat there.” (12 years old).*

Finding work does not decrease any of the problems. The street is not a comfortable workplace, and it is especially difficult for children to work there as Dhaka is a hot and crowded city.

*“It's tough to work in the summertime. I have to work all day on the street, and the weather gets very hot. It's really difficult for me to continue working daily during this time [summer].” (16 years old).*

Neither the climate nor the people of this city are kind to the working street children; especially employers tend to underpay the children. The employers of street children are exploiters. Street children receive a meager amount of money in exchange for long and strenuous labor. Some employers even refuse to pay any wages altogether. One of the children informed,

*“Even after the workday is over, some employers refuse to pay me for everything I've done. I beg and cry to receive some compassion, but they completely don't care. I was even denied food. Some days, I just scarf down leftovers from restaurants after friends who work as dishwashers have cleaned up.” (14 years old).*

Unfortunately, even if the children do receive some amount of wages, they are not always able to spend it. They do not have any means to store their earnings and belongings. The street children do not have a place to sleep, let alone a place to save their money. All the children complained that their money and belongings frequently got stolen.

*“Street life is not safe for us. I work all day and save money, but my money has been stolen many days, and I have no idea how it happened. Not only I but most of us face this situation.” (15 years old).*

When asked about the problems of living on the street, the lack of a proper place to sleep was a prime concern among some children. This was a common problem for children who had abandoned their homes. They usually sleep in public places like markets or stations; some sleep on sidewalks and over-bridges. Their presence is generally unwelcomed in public places. Police, guards, or general people shoo them away. The respondents also affirmed that sleeping near the road is unsuitable because of extreme noise.

*“We are street children, and most of us have no family or specific places to sleep. We usually sleep beside the road or footpath or any station. Every day we have to face many*

*difficulties to get a place to sleep at night. In the station, the people shouted at us and did not let us sleep there. On footpaths or roadside, we can't sleep properly due to the sounds of vehicles.” (12 years old).*

Public places and footpaths are hazardous and unhealthy places for sleeping. Some children talked about their unpleasant experiences and problems regarding sleeping places. Their money and belongings frequently get stolen when they sleep.

*“We must sleep in places where we cannot be seen by the police or other street adults who may steal our money and other belongings, which makes finding a safe place to sleep a challenge.” (14 years old).*

The air near the main roads of Dhaka is extremely polluted, so sleeping near those areas is threatening to their health as well. A respondent even described an accident he had while sleeping. He described his experience in the following manner,

*“It is difficult to sleep on the cold floor, so I search for old bags, boxes, or newspapers in order to lie on them.....The older street boys built a fire to keep us warm because it was very cold, and we had to sleep around it. One night, when I wanted to turn around, my hand accidentally fell into the fire and got burned.” (11 years old).*

Uncomfortable sleeping places put both mental and physical stress on these children. They have to worry about finding a place to sleep constantly, and they cannot let their guard down when they do sleep. The lack of proper rest takes a massive toll on their minds and bodies.

The discussion above may draw a bleak picture, but life is not all bad for street children. Although they have countless problems, they are not wholly dissatisfied with their current lifestyle. They have learned to find the silver lining and enjoy the perks the street life offers. As discussed earlier, many street children came to the street from dysfunctional families where they had to withstand the abuse, so the street is a better place for them to live than their home. They exercise their agency to the fullest. This gives them great satisfaction. One of the respondents claimed,

*“I do enjoy living on the street with my friends. When I was at home, every day and every night, my father beat my mother and me without any reason. He always took money from my mother to buy drugs and never took care of us.” (12 years old).*

The freedom of the street may be one of the obstacles of mainstreaming. Children who are used to being completely independent may not welcome a regularized approach.

## **5.0 Discussion**

There were things that surveys didn't know about that were revealed in FGDs because of the way the group worked together. The case studies gave us a better look at the lives of street children. It



doesn't happen very often for street children to have a balanced childhood, and they are often not properly socialized. Because of this, it is very unlikely that they would grow up to be healthy and socially acceptable adults, so this is not good for them. The types of problems they face make them want to be different. Only when the other option is worse do children go out on the street. The two main things that push children to the street are having a bad home environment and not having money. The street is a dangerous place for children from poor families. There are some unusual cases, but children from low-income one-parent or no-parent families are most at risk. Since some children from these families stay at home, the question arises: why do some children go to work on the streets? Other things that make up low-income single-parent families must be found out. The FGD found that parental neglect, abuse, and a change in family structure, as well as a low socioeconomic status, push children to the street. People who have left home need to work to keep themselves alive, and there are people who need to make money to keep their families alive. There are also things that draw children in, like meeting street children and being able to make their own decisions.

There are a lot of problems that can happen when they get on the street. Street childrens have a lot of problems, like not having enough money, not having enough food, not having clean water, not having enough shelter, not having enough clothes, and being sexually harassed. As we said before, many of these children have been abused or neglected by their parents, so they've come to live on the streets. On top of that, they haven't been to school or learned how to do anything practical, and child labor isn't allowed in Bangladesh. Children have no choice but to work in an informal job market where they are often exploited. A lot of businesses underpay or don't pay any wages to street children, which makes them even poorer and puts them even farther into poverty. It could be said that poverty alone is to blame for most of the problems that street kids have, but this isn't always true. Low income means they can't buy healthy food, get clean drinking water, or rent a safe place to sleep.

## **6.0 Conclusion:**

It's not always easy for street children to find love or better opportunities for themselves and their families, but sometimes it is. These children have to leave home because they don't like living there for one reason or another. While on the street, they face many problems. The study shows that street children are in a vulnerable situation and can be dangerous to the public, even if they live with their families or are on their own. Poverty and social and economic problems were found to be the main reason they were living on the streets. In the city, the street children have to deal with a lot of hardship and difficulties every day. To help them get a better living situation and protect the country's future capital, the government of Bangladesh and other groups should work with them, as well as with other groups.

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