

Educational Conditions of Street Children in Dhaka City, Bangladesh

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Abstract

Dhaka city has been experiencing influx immigrants from the rural areas of Bangladesh, where poverty, unemployment, river erosion and social degradation have become chronic problems. Street children are the terrific reality of this unrest migration process. The trend is increasing with rapid population explosion in the country. The children migrate to Dhaka from various parts of the country to work with lack of basic human needs. Specially most of them are deprived from their basic educational right. Although the Constitution of Bangladesh and the MGD by the government have ensured the right of education for all children living in Bangladesh, especially primary education but the children living in street have no access of primary education in their lives. In the recent years various NGOs also have run non-formal educations for the street children to ensure basic rights for their lives. So the present study is an endeavor to explore the educational conditions of the street children in Dhaka City.

Keywords: Educational Conditions, Street Children, Dhaka City.

Introduction

Street children constitute one of the most vulnerable and marginal groups in Bangladesh. "Street children" are essentially the boys and girls for whom the streets, unoccupied dwellings, wastelands etc., have become homes and/or sources of livelihood, and who are inadequately protected or supervised by responsible adults. Government statistics based on a survey by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS-2005) estimate the number of street children in Bangladesh to be around 679,728 whose 55% are in Dhaka city. A little less than half of them (49.2%) are of the age group below 10 years, while the remaining fall in the age group of 11-19 years. Their gender composition is boys 77.92% and girls 22.08%. The above report estimates that by 2014 the number of such children would exceed 1,144,754 and by 2024 it would exceed 1,615,330.

The major problems of street children are: Insecure life; physical and sexual abuse by adults of the immediate community; harassment by law enforcing agencies; no, or inadequate, access to educational institutions and healthcare facilities; and lack of decent employment opportunity. The role of appropriate education for empowerment of children especially the disadvantaged groups like the street or working children has been unequivocally established. Article 17 of the Constitution of Bangladesh recognizes the right to education for all including the disadvantaged children. The National Plan of Action for Children (2005-2010) also clearly emphasizes the urgent need for "education and empowerment." Along the same vein, the National Poverty Reduction Strategy of the country provides for education as a means of "empowerment of disadvantaged groups" including children. Despite the above official rhetoric, and despite a growing recognition of their vulnerability and disadvantaged status, there have been strikingly limited efforts to improve the condition of street children especially by providing them with appropriate basic education. It will not be an exaggeration to note that this section of our society has largely remained outside the main ambit of developmental interventions.

Mostly the parents cannot afford to send their children to schools due to financial and social factors. Being members of very poor families, these children are often involved in different odd jobs to supplement their family income. Inability of educational finance for buying books, tuition fee, uniform, tutoring, etc. children have to work to help their parents. Children help with looking after their younger siblings so that their parents can work. Parents/patrons do not know about the procedures of enrolment. Parents do not realize the importance/benefit of long-term education. Parents do not know that their children have the right to study in a formal school. Much to the relief of all those who want, and aspire, to see a better future for our street children, there have been a few encouraging, albeit limited, efforts to educate them through Open Air Schools (OAS). These schools are managed and administered by a number of national NGOs, mainly in metropolitan cities. The schools are strategically located, covering the city-entry points and/or working places for street children, such as railway, launch and bus terminals, market places on riverbanks, busy city markets, parks, etc. The street school spots are typically acquired (often free of cost) from the community or relevant public authorities. A typical school functions for two to three hours everyday for up to six days a week. School operating hours are decided so that they do not interfere with the working hours of the children. Prior to commencement of classes, the concerned staff (development workers, teachers) walk around the neighboring area to identify newly arrived children and to invite regular children to classes. The learning materials

predominantly focus on various life skills related topics, those include the life skills, child rights, child labor, protection from sexual abuse and exploitation (including trafficking), creating dreams, keeping safe on the streets, dealing with the police, and HIV/AIDS/STI prevention. The idea is to create an educational foundation amongst the targeted children by blending pedagogical and practical life skills.

Nevertheless, a number of problems can be identified regarding the contents and conduct of the life skills training and capacity development sessions imparted in the schools: such as mixed age groups, limited time schedule of schools, terminologies and technical jargons used in the training sessions, bare minimum logistics and facilities, and lack any protection from weather fluctuations in the rainy and winter seasons, diversity and variations in language, inadequate supply of training materials, limited use of audio-visual materials, inadequate advanced training on teaching techniques and tools etc. So the street children are still out of proper education and development process.

Education Policy and Street Children

Education is the most cost effective possible way for Bangladesh to mainstreaming street children in the society and to ensure their rights according to the country's law and policies since the child right programming could be operated under education policy. School enrolment could be useful registration process for government to count child population and simultaneously could be helpful to operate development policies throughout school. Early learning facilities can really improve formal education of street children as most of them live without parent's supervision and guidance which was necessary before to admit in formal school system. In addition learning with joy can impact on their aim of life and can give them idea about their rights in the country.

Bangladesh formed new education policy in 2010 and it says that confirming basic education for all is constitutional responsibility of country and right of every person in Bangladesh, in that way the government gave high emphasis on primary education (National Education Policy 2010: 4). The education policy formed by considering constitution of Bangladesh and universal child right convention and it had targeted of hundred percent primary education enrolment within 2011-2012. The education policy also mentioned to enhance basic primary education from grade five to grade eight within 2012 and children could have vocational training and education after completing primary education, in addition number of vocational and technical training center will

also be increased. Students after completing primary education till grade eight could enroll in government and non government vocational and technical institute but primary education had been made mandatory and will be provided for all in Bangladesh.

Major reason for education policy failure

First of all the National Child Act 2011 and National Education Policy 2010 had not targeted to mainstream hundred percent street children by confirming that there will be no children in the street without state supervision, though those policies addressed food for education as a policy to keep street children in school but in city areas government school are very limited comparing to the number of children. There is no apparent policy that could cover all the street children under schooling program.

Besides, here comes the tradeoff between child work and child education. As because, all state policies are not targeting hundred percent children for quality accessible education and required training for later occupation, most of street children and their family prefer child work as the best way to survive. Although primary education is free and mandatory in Bangladesh but related indirect cost and lacking of government school in city areas made child work most preferable then education. In addition, there is no assurance that every child could admit in school and could have training for post education occupation. As a result, street children and their parents or relatives (If exist) think that, why should children spend time on education, they easily could be expert in work if they spend time in working instead of education and obviously will earn from work.

Objective of the Study

a. General Objective

The general objective of the study is to determine the educational conditions of street children in Dhaka city.

b. Special Objectives

The special objectives of this study are as follows:

To find out their family histories and causes of migration, their socio-economic status, health position, causes of drop-out of the children from education, their present educational opportunity and challenges, some recommendations for improving the educational conditions of the street children in Dhaka city etc.

Methodology

This study is a sample survey. But the observation method has been utilized simultaneously to comprehend the real situations of street children. The Gabtoli, Mohammadpur, Sungsad Bhaban, Mohakhali, Sayedabad, Sadarghat, and Kamlapur Railway Station areas of Dhaka city have been regarded as the study area. All street children of these areas are deemed as the population and 200 of them considered as the sample. Data have been collected directly from the sample by researcher through structured questionnaire of interviewing. The collected data have been properly edited first, then interpreted and presented respectively with some statistical methods.

Findings of the Study

The study has found that 77.92% street children are boys and 22.08% girls among the total samples. The highest numbers (88.02%) children are identified within 0-14 years old. It was revealed that the poorest children migrated to Dhaka metropolitan city from the different regions of Bangladesh. 37.08% street children's fathers are basically engaged with non-agricultural labor, 32.06% involved with agricultural labor, 12% with small business and rest of them are unemployed. 62.01% mothers are housewives and more than 21.04% street children's mothers work as maid in other households.

The process of their becoming street children in the cities mainly due to economic reasons (83.70%), which is the main attraction of migration to cities. Further, landlessness 4.30%, river erosion 1.64%, parents' separation 0.43%, social or family conflict 0.38%, land dispute 0.22%, begging 0.58%, famine or food shortage 1.03%, broken families 1.28%, parental death 0.13%, sickness 0.53%, shelter less 0.60%, accompanied with parents 5.18% etc are some of the reasons frequently cited by the respondents as to come in cities. This may be considered as forced expulsion from home or pushed migration.

Further, 42.53% of children have come to city without the consent of parents. 12.47% have come alone and 4.17% have come with friends. It was found that 11.13% have been staying at city for less than 3 months, 20.45% for 2 years, 25.97% more than 2 years, and 26.90% more than 5 years.

About three-fourth of them said that they sleep at a site they choose and stay there in every night. They choose various places as their temporary sleeping demands; such as on the street 21.25%, in a shelter 5.54%, under a bridge 10.18%, at a mosque/temple 5.18%, market 1.60%, parks 15.9%,

railway station 12.5%, bus station 8.4%, abandoned houses 2.32%, slum 15.71% and launch terminal 2.14%. During the rainy and winter seasons they also choose these above places.

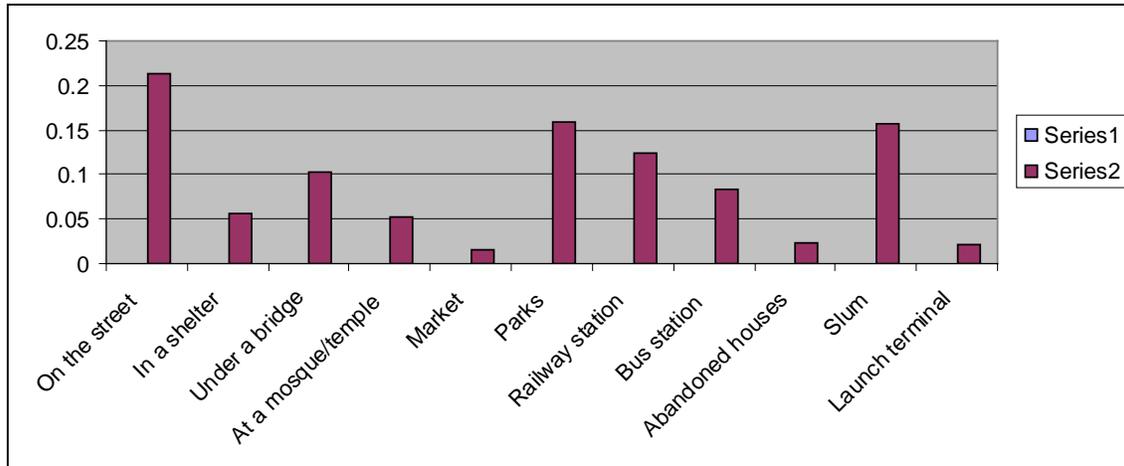


Figure 1: Street Children by type of Temporary Sleeping Place

Children shift from the present place for some reasons. 29.20% shift for police harassment, 0.9% for local mastans, 33.30% for night guard, 27.90% for insecurity, 0.5% for police payment and 8.20% shift their place for other reasons. They are also subjected to physical tortures by their employers, house masters, police and other persons who included parents, neighbors, musclemen, toll collectors, local mastans etc.

Majority (40.30%) of the children do not use any object or aid as their bed. About one-fourth use cloth or jute bag made of jute as bed. Only 13.91% use a bed sheet. Most of them (80.94%) have no any winter cloth. Only 19.06% reported that they have winter clothes. They were found unconcerned about their personal cleanliness as many of them (80%) do not take bath regularly due to non-availability of water and bath facilities. The same applies to toilets, most of them do not have access to sanitary toilets. Their 40.82% use public toilet, 34.32% use open space for urination and defecation and 16.00% use government place also. This vulnerability leads them to disease. More than half (57%) of them reported that they feel ill. They suffer from incidence of fever, diarrhoea, dysentery, skin disease and other contagious disease. A few of them also experienced sexual diseases like syphilis and gonorrhoea.

Most of the children are not conscious about their health and can't afford the cost of treatment, although some of them can afford it. Over 80% of them got treated by unconventional means such as faith healing of religious leaders/saints or quack/kabiraj. Further, 9.89% go to hospital, 0.82% go to canvasser/street vendor, 5.13% go to doctor, 3.81% go to NGO health services and

0.31% go to pharmacy for their treatment. 60.06% of street children eat their meals three times in a day, 36.64% eat two times in a day, only 2.55% eat one time in a day and only 0.75% reported that they sometimes don't get any meal in a day. Most of the street children (85.81%) usually eat at the street shops, 9.36% cook on the streets, 0.65% collect food from dustbin and a few (4.17%) beg food from restaurants.

Street children generally hold some common works. Their 3.41% involved with welding, 17.16% involved with domestic labor, 4.28% with auto mobile workshop, 39.46% with begging, 1.46% battery recharging/recycling, 7.06% restaurant activities, 3.80% road transport, 7.16% hawking, 2.50% small business, 2.46% kuli and 11.25% children working as a tokai.

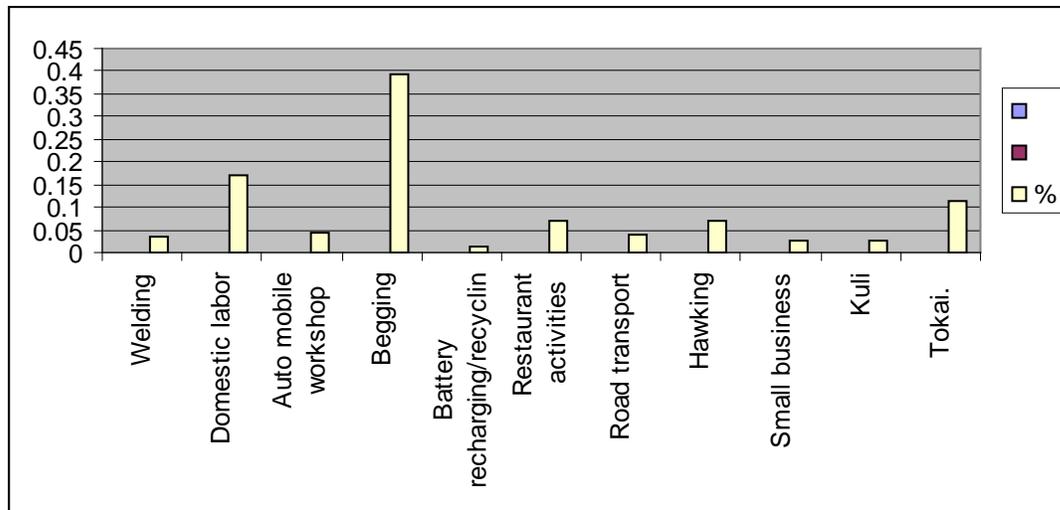


Figure 2: Current Working Status of Street Children

About 44% of them smoke. Some of them (12.7%) had an income of TK.110.39 per day which is the highest among the total income earning group. This implies that all of them live below the hardcore poverty line and an inhuman life which cannot be measured by any living standard.

About 68.05% fathers and 76.04% mothers do not have any formal schooling. It may be inferred that street children come from families having lowest exposure to formal schooling. So the children are not in school and have either had no education, or have dropped out of school during the primary school years. Some street working children try to combine school and work, but have difficulties in coping with the hours, are frequently absent and have poor grades due to lack of time to study.

It is revealed that 65.22% street children never attended at any school. 23.65% attended at formal school, 8.58% attended at non-formal school and 2.55% attended both at formal and non-formal school.

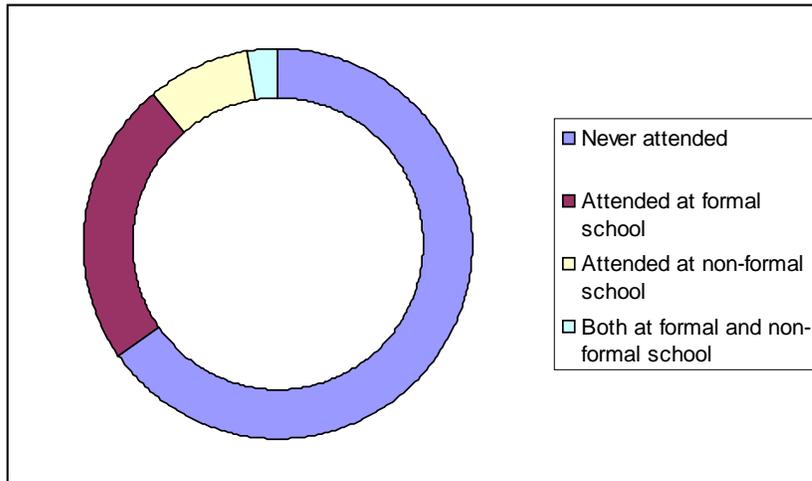


Figure 3: Previous School Attending Status of Street Children

It is further revealed that the street children’s current school going status is very deplorable. Currently most of them (91.60%) are not attending any school, only 7.30% of them attending at non-formal school and 1.10% street children attending at formal school.

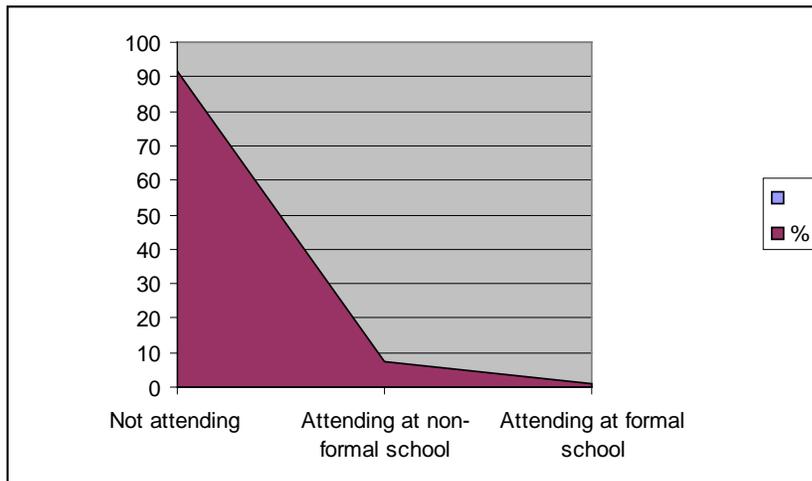


Figure 4: Current School Attending Status of Street Children

The street children have various reasons for never attended any school. 31.10% of them told that they could not afford, 9.20% could not attend for work, 44.30% told that parents did not send, 0.40% because of failing, 8.40% of them told that school was not important to them and 6.20% for other reasons never attended at school.

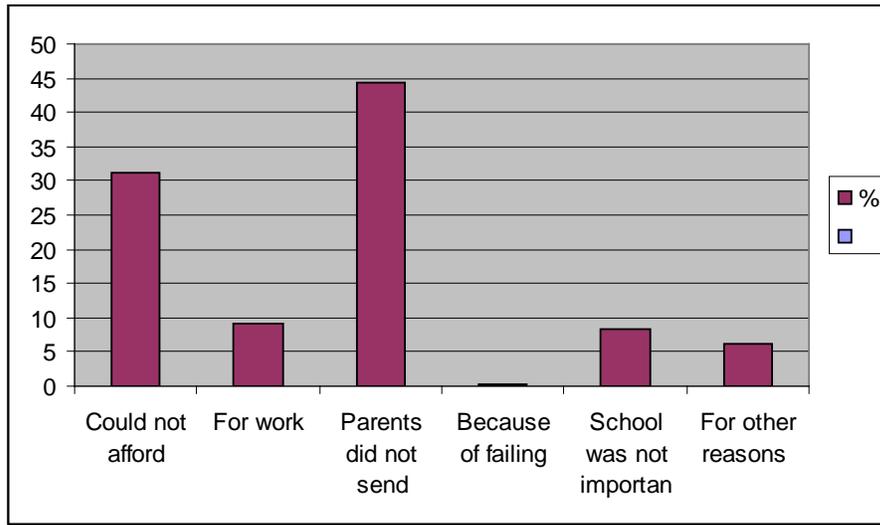


Figure 5: Reasons for Never Attended School Previously

The children further informed that they also currently are not attending any school for many reasons. 39.42% of them told that they can't afford, 37.80% do not attend for works, 6.73% told that parents do not send, 8.81% told that school is not important to them and 7.24% street children are not attending school for other reasons.

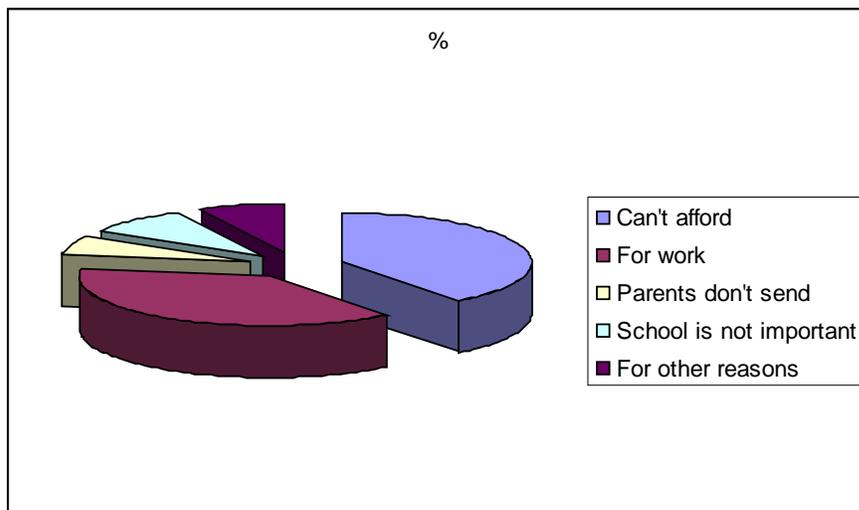


Figure 6: Reasons for Not Attending School Currently

It is got a over all reading and writing skills status according to the age group of street children in this study. From the age group of 0-11years, only 12.0% told that they can read and mostly (88.0%) can't read, from the age group of 11-14 years, 26.90% can read and 73.10% can't read, and from the age group of 14-18years, 26.70% can read and 73.30% can't read. Further, from the

age group of 0-11years, only 13.0% told that they can write and mostly (87.0%) can't write, from the age group of 11-14 years, 28.30% can write and 71.70% can't write, and from the age group of 14-18years, 26.0% can write and 74.0% can't write. Total of the street children, 23.60% can read, 76.40% can't read and 24.20% can write, 75.80% can't write.

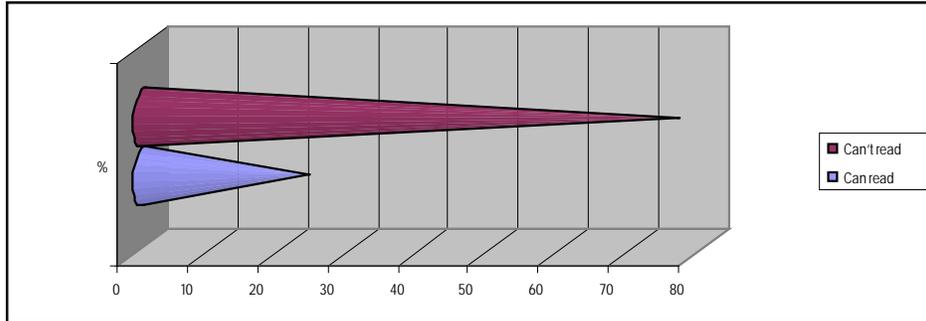
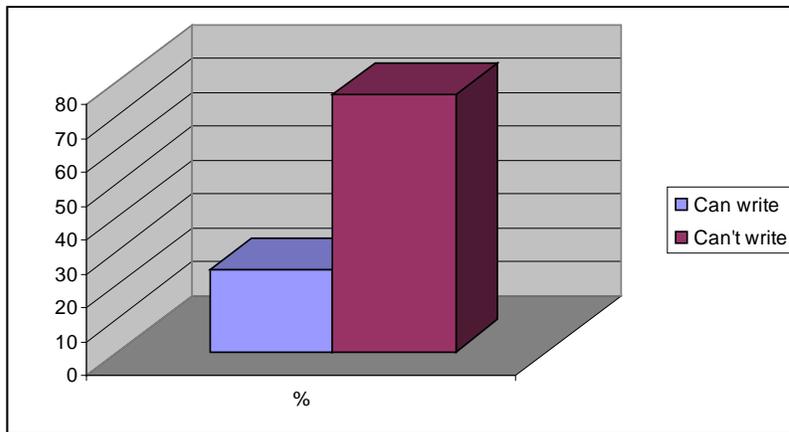


Figure 7 & 8: Overall Reading & Writing Status of Street Children



Recommendations

Above discussion and analysis of the results, it could be recommended some suggestions for future direction about the education accessibility for the street children.

1. Street children in Dhaka city are migrated and they are drop-out from mainstreaming children either poverty or other reasons. So the Compulsory Primary Education Act has to be implemented properly.
2. Boys children are very much frequent than girls in the street and families of the poor considered the boys children as a sources of income so in the primary level both boys and girls could be covered the scholarship or stipend program.

3. They are very much moving with in the city so there is a mechanism would be developed to protect their mobility to providing food, resident and other basic needs.
4. Children are very much interested to enjoyment and games and sports also. So, recreational facilities have to be parted to their education.
5. All the street children those are attending school covers by the Non-formal education by the NGOs but they have to be mainstreamed through enrollment of government primary educating and imparting technical and vocational training opportunities for their future betterment.
6. Education is the right of every child. So the education of the street children might be ensured through out various governmental and non-governmental initiatives such as educational program.

Conclusion

Street children problem in Bangladesh is social phenomena which also be given importance to enhance social and economical justice and equity. Education is the right of all children in regarding sex, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, minority, disadvantage, disability etc. For ensuring the rights of education of the street children, the attempts taken by the government are so far beyond. Education should be ensured to the street children by considering the socioeconomic status, providing safe night, fulfilling basic needs, protection form physical, mental and sexual abuse and exploitation. The accessibility of education for the children would be integral part of the society through creating opportunities to enter mainstreaming educational system in Bangladesh. The findings of the study would help to policy maker, educationist, and NGOs to plan and implement the educational system for the street children in Bangladesh.

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