

## Childhood Disabilities and Child Protection in Rajshahi City, Bangladesh

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**Abstract:** The Children with Disabilities (CWDs) from low socio-economic status are always being discriminated and subjected to abuse and exploitation within the family and society. So, the main aims of the study were to identify the childhood disabilities and protections for the disabled children including those are at-risk of sexual abuse and exploitation in Rajshahi City, Bangladesh. A total of 500 (250 males, 250 females) children at Rajshahi were assessed for identifying disabilities, as well as explored the risk of abused and protection. The 33 mothers of disabled children, 10 professionals and 4 special education teachers were participated in this study. To assess the disabilities of the children, Denver Screening Questionnaire (DSQ) and Ten Questions with Plus (TQP) were used. The 2 sets of questionnaires were used to collect demographic and household information. Another set of questionnaire was also used to explore the risk of abuse, types of abuse and identifying the abusers and whether taken action against the abusers or not. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and in-depth interview were applied to collect information from the mothers of CWDs, professionals and special educator teachers. The study results revealed that 46 (9.20%) children aged (2-9 years) were identified as any type of disability. A total of 71 (14.20%) children were abused, of them 55 (77.46%) were physically, 42 (59.15) were mentally were abused. Among the abused children, almost all (78.87%) were abused by the family members but a few guardians (35.21%) were taken action against the abusers.

**Key words:** CWDs, DSQ, TQP, child abuse, child protection

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### INTRODUCTION

Disability is defined by the United Nations (UN) as long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers, may hinder (a person's) full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (UN, 2006). With the adoption of the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has made the inclusion and development of Children with Disabilities (CWDs) a priority issue and the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that over 200 million children worldwide are at risk for not meeting their developmental potential (Grantham-McGregor *et al.*, 2007). In addition, the World Bank (WB) estimated that 20% of the poorest people in the world today are somehow or other disabled. Few data are available, however on the prevalence of and risk factors for CWDs in developing countries including Bangladesh. The

CWDs from low socio-economic status are always being discriminated. The parents of families having CWDs are always reluctant to send their children to any program thinking about their inability to contribute the family in future. Disabled children are often targeted by abusers who see them as easy victims (UNICEF, 2005). So, they are being neglected, ignored and most of the times they are deprived from all their basics (proper care, education, nutrition and treatment). While all children are at risk of being victims of violence, disabled children find themselves at significantly increased risk because of stigma, negative traditional beliefs and ignorance. Lack of social support, limited opportunities for education, employment or participation in the community further isolates disabled children and their families.

The children with physical, sensory, intellectual or mental health impairment are at increased risk of becoming victims of violence. There is considerable global concern to reduce the prevalence of childhood and to improve

health, social and educational outcomes in order to extend social protection for the disabled children (Mont, 2007). In Bangladesh, 18.8 and 21.9% of children of positive disability module screening are come from wealthiest and poorest family, respectively (UNICEF, 2008). The prevalence of all grades of disability among children in Bangladesh may be increasing with improvements in child survival (Zaman *et al.*, 1990). The violence against disabled children occurred at annual rates at least 1.7 times greater than that of their non-disabled peers (AAP, 2001). In this context, more targeted studies also indicated the reasons for serious concern (Khan *et al.*, 2008; Khan, 1998; Rabbani and Hossain, 1999; Mullick and Goodman, 2000, 2005; Izutsu *et al.*, 2005; Hamadani *et al.*, 2006). For example, one group of researchers reported that 90% of individuals with intellectual impairments have experienced sexual abuse at some point in the life and a national survey of deaf adults in Norway found that 80% of all deaf individuals surveyed report sexual abuse at some point in their childhood (Kvam, 2000). The National Center on child abuse and neglect has reported that the disabled children are sexually abused at a rate 2.2 times higher (Crosse *et al.*, 1993). The serious concern is related to the growing number of children who faced abuse and exploitation within the family, schools and other institutions, community and at national level. It has found that child sexual abuse can be done to such small children that the youngest was under 2 years of age. Both boys and girls are affected child sexual abuse. The perpetrators of child sexual abuse is someone with easy access to the child usually someone who is trusted by the family. In both groups of neighbors and friends is the biggest group of child sexual abuse. One of the features noted that sex among those who are children themselves. In terms of vulnerabilities, girls remain vulnerable as long as they are attractive enough to arouse a desire to exert power. Poverty certainly increases vulnerability to abuse as the poor are often dependent on powerful. From best of the knowledge, no sound study has concentrated on the disabled children, as well as their protection in Bangladesh. Therefore, the aims of the study are to identify the childhood disabilities and child protection for CWDs including those at-risk of sexual abuse and exploitation in Rajshahi City, Bangladesh.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The sample survey integrated children, primary caregivers of the disabled children, such as mothers or/and father, especial education teachers and Child Development Center (CDC) professionals at Rajshahi

City, Bangladesh. A total of 500 children (250 males, 250 females) of them 114 (22.80%) children aged 0-2 years and 386 (77.20%) children aged 2-9 years from Rajshahi City, Bangladesh have been taken as the study population to identify the childhood disabilities by using the screening methods, Denver Screening Questionnaire (DSQ) and 10 Questions with Plus (TQP), respectively. The 11 primary caregivers, such as mothers or grandmothers of the CWDs have attended in the two Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Most of the caregivers were mothers of the children and only few were grandmothers were attended the FGD. The 5 CDC professionals under Rajshahi Medical College Hospital were doctor, child psychologist, developmental therapist, office management and supporting staff. The 4 teachers of special education schools such as Society for the Welfare of the Intellectually Disabled (SWID), Bangladesh and Bangladesh Protibondhi Foundation (BPF) (a foundation for the disabled children) were attended in the survey. The data were collected from October to December, 2011. The teams have planned to conduct the survey by using DSQ and TQP for the children. The team have identified the area to apply the survey and prepared the questionnaire for exploring the risk of abuse at family level. After finalizing the alternatives tools, i.e., DSQ and TQP using to children, data collectors have been trained on both techniques. Then data were collected from door to door of the selected words of this city.

**Methods of data collection:** For identifying children having any disability among the children and protection issues, both primary and secondary data collection methods were applied. The quantitative tools, such as assessment for disabilities of children were administered by the primary level community workers who have been trained on DSQ, TQP and other three sets of questionnaires. A structured questionnaire, Household Form (HF) was used to collect demographic data of the children and their family. The DSQ was used for identifying the developmental delay of children aged 0-2 years. The TQP is a childhood disability questionnaire was used as a screening instrument. TQP is a modified version of the Ten Questions (TQ) developed by A.M. Clarke, L. Belmont, H.S. Narayanan and Sell in 1981 which was used in the pilot study. It was a short questionnaire, in a yes/no format, consisting of TQ with plus. One each concerns the child's vision, hearing, movement and seizures and six concerning cognitive competence and one extra question regarding other serious health problems. Each question was supplemented with additional one or more questions to further probe into the problem detected. The probe

questions were asked only if a problem was reported in response to a main question. For each 2-9 years old child listed and still living in the household, one TQP was completed. A set of semi-structure questionnaires for parents of the children were developed to gather concise yet precise understanding of the vulnerability of abuse the CWDs. The questionnaires were included closed ended questions to explore at risk of abuse and types of abuse at family level. The FGD were conducted with parents of the children with disabilities and special education teachers and service providers for collecting information on attitude, cognitive awareness, i.e., knowledge and understanding of the issue of protection of CWDs support structure of organizations, community initiatives, dealing approaches and so on.

**Ethical consideration:** The investigators were trained on DSQ and TQP, disabilities, child abuse and exploitation issues. FGD with caregivers and other stakeholders have been conducted by the consultants. The confidentiality and family prestige were fully maintained through keeping their information, name and other personal data at very restricted. The identified children with disabilities have been referred to the CDC and ensured the treatment process. Again the investigators were continuously followed up the cases of disabilities for better rehabilitation and quality services. The issues of psychosocial impact were taken seriously in the process of data collection.

## RESULTS

In this study, family status of the children, mother and children information and prevalence of childhood disabilities are presented through statistical basis. The demographical factors of the children and the parental status also indicate the risk of rights violations. The prevalence of CWDs, also shows a validation of disability rate with previous studies. Abuse and types of abuse, process of taken action against perpetrators and impact of being abused to children are also described in turn.

**Family status of the children:** This empirical study consisted of 500 children of them 250 were males and 250 were females, of them 114 were aged 0-2 years and 386 were aged 2-9 years (Table 1). Sample of the religion is dominated in Islam (99.40%) and almost all (92.6%) of the family heads were males. Among them only 46 (23 males and 23 females) children aged 2-9 years were identified as disabled. It is seen that more than half (52.60%) children did not go to school and almost all the children were taken care by their mothers.

Table 1: Background characteristics of the children in Rajshahi, Bangladesh (n = 500)

| Characteristics          | No. of children | Percentage |
|--------------------------|-----------------|------------|
| <b>Age (years)</b>       |                 |            |
| 0-2                      | 114             | 22.8       |
| 2-9                      | 386             | 77.2       |
| <b>Sex of children</b>   |                 |            |
| Male                     | 250             | 50.0       |
| Female                   | 250             | 50.0       |
| <b>Religion</b>          |                 |            |
| Islam                    | 497             | 99.4       |
| Others                   | 3               | 0.6        |
| <b>Having disability</b> |                 |            |
| Male                     | 23              | 9.2        |
| Female                   | 23              | 9.2        |
| Total disabled           | 46              | -          |
| <b>Schooling status</b>  |                 |            |
| Never go to school       | 263             | 52.6       |
| Now do not go to school  | 11              | 2.2        |
| Irregularly go to school | 22              | 4.4        |
| Regularly go to school   | 204             | 40.8       |
| <b>Take care by whom</b> |                 |            |
| Mother                   | 489             | 97.8       |
| Grandmother              | 9               | 1.8        |
| Others                   | 2               | 0.4        |
| Total                    | 500             | 100.0      |

Table 2 described the background characteristics of the family of the children. The results revealed that almost all (92.60%) family heads were males. The educational background of the family head is very low. It is seen that around one-third (27.60%) of heads of the family of children are never go to school and one third (32.40%) of family heads completed primary education and only 9.20% family head have completed graduation and above. Table 2 also indicates that almost all of them (86.40%) of family heads have own house and rests of the family either lives in rented house or others house. In terms of having land of the family, 9.80% families have no land and 77.40% families have only few amount lands (0-5 decimal). A large number of the profession of the family head is unskilled labor (31.80%), other significant number of professions of the family head are small business (19.60%) and government and non-government employee (20.20%). In case of income, one third of family's monthly income is up to 5000 Tk. and more than half (39.20%) of the family income ranges 5000-10000 Tk. and more than half (56.00%) of the family takes loan from the micro credit program.

Table 3 shows the housing condition of the children. It is found that 17.60% of the families live in the house which is built by soil house or soil wall and tin roof or wood wall and tin roof or tin wall and tin roof. But, more than half (62.20%) children live in the bricks wall with tin roofs houses. Rests of the families live in building house. It is surprisingly found that 89.00% families have electricity connection and still 11.00% family have no electricity connection which means that though all the family live in divisional city areas but the family has no

Table 2: Background characteristics of the family head of the children

| Characteristics                                   | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| <b>Sex of the family head</b>                     |           |            |
| Male  | 463       | 92.6       |
| Female  | 37        | 7.4        |
| <b>Education qualification of the family head</b> |           |            |
| Never go to school                                | 138       | 27.6       |
| Primary school                                    | 162       | 32.4       |
| Class 8   | 61        | 12.2       |
| Class 10  | 27        | 5.4        |
| S.S.C   | 42        | 8.4        |
| H.S.C   | 24        | 4.8        |
| Hon's   | 34        | 6.8        |
| Masters   | 12        | 2.4        |
| <b>Type of the house</b>                          |           |            |
| Own house   | 432       | 86.4       |
| Rented house                                      | 60        | 12.0       |
| Dependent   | 8         | 1.6        |
| <b>Land of the family head</b>                    |           |            |
| Landless  | 49        | 9.8        |
| 0-5 decimal                                       | 338       | 67.6       |
| 10 decimal  | 80        | 16.0       |
| 20 decimal  | 25        | 5.0        |
| 30 decimal up                                     | 8         | 1.6        |
| <b>Types of occupation of the family head</b>     |           |            |
| Government or non-government service              | 101       | 20.2       |
| Skillful professional                             | 4         | 0.8        |
| House wife  | 24        | 4.8        |
| Servant   | 4         | 0.8        |
| Small business                                    | 98        | 19.6       |
| Driver  | 45        | 9.0        |
| Unskillful labor                                  | 159       | 31.8       |
| Farmer  | 23        | 4.6        |
| Beggar  | 1         | 0.2        |
| Others  | 27        | 5.4        |
| Without information                               | 14        | 2.8        |
| <b>Monthly family Income (In Taka)</b>            |           |            |
| <3000   | 63        | 12.6       |
| 3000-5000   | 161       | 32.2       |
| 5000-10000  | 196       | 39.2       |
| 10000-15000                                       | 56        | 11.2       |
| 15000-200000                                      | 13        | 2.6        |
| 20000-30000                                       | 3         | 0.6        |
| >30000  | 8         | 1.6        |
| <b>Family head loan</b>                           |           |            |
| Yes   | 280       | 56.0       |
| No  | 220       | 44.0       |
| Total   | 500       | 100.0      |

capacity to have electricity in their family. More than half (54.60%) of the families have domestic animals in their family whether they live in city areas and 96.80% family have used tube well as a source of drinking water. It is found that 74.80% families are using sanitary (flush) toilet and very few family is using open toilet.

#### Mother and children's information of the survey area:

Table 4 represents the background information of mothers of the children. It is seen that 13.60% mothers are illiterate, 39.80% mothers have completed primary schools and only 9.60% mothers have completed graduate programs. In terms of the profession of the mothers, it is found that almost all (92.60%) are housewives. A few mothers (12.60%) have own income and a large number of

Table 3: Housing condition of the children (n = 500)

| Characteristics                  | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Nature of house</b>           |           |            |
| Soil house                       | 44        | 8.8        |
| Soil wall+tin roof               | 22        | 4.4        |
| Bamboo/wood+tin roof             | 19        | 3.8        |
| Tin wall+tin roof                | 3         | 0.6        |
| Bricks wall+tin roof             | 311       | 62.2       |
| Totally bricks home              | 81        | 16.2       |
| Flat                             | 1         | 0.2        |
| Others                           | 19        | 3.8        |
| <b>Electrification</b>           |           |            |
| Yes                              | 445       | 89.0       |
| No                               | 55        | 11.0       |
| <b>Having domestic animal</b>    |           |            |
| Yes                              | 273       | 54.6       |
| No                               | 227       | 45.4       |
| <b>Sources of drinking water</b> |           |            |
| Tap in room                      | 11        | 2.2        |
| Government tube well             | 5         | 1.0        |
| Tube well                        | 484       | 96.8       |
| <b>Type of latrine</b>           |           |            |
| Flush (sanitary)                 | 374       | 74.8       |
| In-sanitary                      | 121       | 24.2       |
| Deep toilet                      | 4         | 0.8        |
| Open toilet                      | 1         | 0.2        |
| Total                            | 500       | 100.0      |

Table 4: Background characteristics of mothers of the children (n = 500)

| Characteristics                          | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| <b>Mothers' educational status</b>       |           |            |
| Illiterate                               | 68        | 13.6       |
| Primary                                  | 199       | 39.8       |
| Class 8                                  | 79        | 15.8       |
| S.S.C                                    | 78        | 15.6       |
| H.S.C                                    | 28        | 5.6        |
| Hon's                                    | 22        | 4.4        |
| Masters                                  | 26        | 5.2        |
| <b>Mothers' profession</b>               |           |            |
| Employee                                 | 14        | 2.8        |
| Skillful professional                    | 2         | 0.4        |
| House wife                               | 463       | 92.6       |
| Servant                                  | 12        | 2.4        |
| Unskillful labor                         | 9         | 1.8        |
| <b>Mothers' earning status</b>           |           |            |
| Yes                                      | 63        | 12.6       |
| No                                       | 437       | 87.4       |
| <b>Loan taken by mothers</b>             |           |            |
| Yes                                      | 215       | 43.0       |
| No                                       | 285       | 57.0       |
| <b>Kinship between mother and father</b> |           |            |
| Yes                                      | 37        | 7.4        |
| No                                       | 463       | 92.6       |
| Total                                    | 500       | 100.0      |

women (87.40%) did not have any income where they depend to their husbands fully. In terms of taking loan by the mothers of the children found that 43.0% were taken microcredit loan from the different types of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). It has found that near about 7.4% of parents of the children have kinship relationships among them.

Table 5 represents the information regarding child protection in Rajshahi City, Bangladesh. The caregivers have reported that children are being abused by others

Table 5: Background characteristics regarding child abuse and protection (n = 500)

| Characteristics                      | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Abused status<sup>a</sup></b>     |           |            |
| Abused                               | 71        | 14.20      |
| Not abused                           | 429       | 85.80      |
| <b>Type of abuses<sup>b</sup></b>    |           |            |
| Physically                           | 55        | 77.46      |
| Mentally                             | 42        | 59.15      |
| Neglect                              | 6         | 8.45       |
| Socially                             | 5         | 7.04       |
| Sexual harassment                    | 8         | 11.27      |
| <b>Abused by whom<sup>b</sup></b>    |           |            |
| Family members                       | 56        | 78.87      |
| Relatives                            | 22        | 30.99      |
| Neighbor                             | 17        | 23.94      |
| Others                               | 8         | 11.27      |
| <b>Whom by reported<sup>b</sup></b>  |           |            |
| Family members                       | 10        | 14.08      |
| Relatives                            | 4         | 5.63       |
| Neighbor                             | 27        | 38.03      |
| Friend                               | 45        | 63.38      |
| Others                               | 1         | 1.41       |
| <b>Taking any step against abuse</b> |           |            |
| Yes                                  | 25        | 35.21      |
| No                                   | 46        | 64.79      |

<sup>a</sup>Reported by the caregivers; <sup>b</sup>>1 types of abuse reported for some children

which are painful for them. Considering the types of abusive situation for children, it is found that total 71 children are abused in the study area. Among the abused children, 55 (77.50%) were physically, 42 (59.20%) were mentally, 6 (8.50%) neglected, 5 (7.04%) were socially and 8 (11.30%) sexually are abused. The study results revealed among the abused children that most of them were abused by their family members (23.44%), followed by relatives (30.99), neighbors (23.44%) and others (11.27%). Most abused cases (63.38%) were reported by their friends of the children and more than one-third cases (38.03%) were reported by the neighbors. In terms of taken action against to the abusers, it is seen that two-thirds (64.79%) cases were not taken action against to the abuser of the children.

## DISCUSSION

A total of 46 (9.20%) children are having disabilities in the surveyed area in the ages 2-9 years. In terms of sex, 23 (12.0%) males and 23 (12%) females children are assessed disabled (Table 1). It is also seen that only very few cases of disabilities have been identified among the children aged 0-2 years. It seems that the deviation of developmental milestone would be difficult to explore before the age of 2 years.

It is common understanding by all respondents of the survey that each of the disabled children have gone through various types of abuse and exploitation in day to day life. However, CWDs face discrimination in the society in terms of economic support, education

accessibilities, vocational training and rehabilitation. There are no participation opportunities of the CWDs within the family and society at large. The rights violation against CWDs is happening at family, society, institution and community which are:

- Physical abuse
- Mental abuse/psychological
- Sexual abuse
- Neglected
- Maltreatment
- Being lost or trafficking

In the Winter session, local miscreants have thrown my child into cold water pond in front of my house, said a father of Down syndrome boy child. I was scared to know that a speech impaired child around my area has lost and never been found, said a mother of disabled child.

The facts identified by CDC professionals that parents continuously challenge to have proper diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation facilities from Government health support system. Moreover, in many cases mothers of CWDs are rejected by husband and others members of the family members. Primary caregiver, i.e., mothers are shown helpless and hopeless about the improvement of their disabled children. Caregivers' frustration is important issue to address the protection of children with disabilities. A mother of a female disabled child said, When my child is staying at school, i feel good because rest of the time child has been locked into room. She was 15 years old and she has been raped and it is unfortunate that my intellectual disable child was deprived to have justice form court.

## CONCLUSION

The objectives of the survey were to explore the childhood disabilities and their protection in Rajshahi City, Bangladesh. The sample was selected from the region of the city areas where the lower and middle class families are living. The finding shows that around one in ten children (2-9 years) are having disabilities in the surveyed area. Considering all the children it is seen that the caregivers have reported that their children are being abused by different modes, e.g., physically, mentally, socially and sexually. It is surprising enough that 4-5th child abusers are family members and more than two-third family heads did not take any action against to the abuser of the children. From FGD and others methods, it is found that parents and others caregivers have acknowledged that every disable children is at risk of

abuse, exploitation and maltreatment. To protect the children, the rights of CWDs have to be given importance as mainstreaming children. The rehabilitation and integration process have to be established in all divisional cities included health care, education, vocational skills, psychosocial support, social safety net, social justice and legal protection. The role of the caregivers, i.e., mothers, teachers, staffs of the services provider organizations, NGOs and GOs have to be sensitized about the rights of the disabled children and protect them from the rights violations through comprehensive support and care mechanism and process.

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