

Report

# Child labour and education

## A survey of slum settlements in Dhaka

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Cover photo: Abir Abdullah/ADB: Sohel works in an aluminium factory at Kamrangirchar in Dhaka.

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# Table of Abbreviations

<b>BANBEIS</b>	Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics
<b>BBS</b>	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
<b>CDL</b>	Child domestic labour
<b>CLS</b>	Child Labour Survey
<b>CWES</b>	Child Work and Education Survey
<b>CREATE</b>	Consortium for Educational Access, Transitions and Equity
<b>DCC</b>	Dhaka City Corporation
<b>DHS</b>	Demographic and Health Surveys
<b>FRAs</b>	Field research assistants
<b>IPEC</b>	International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>MICS</b>	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>ODI</b>	Overseas Development Institute
<b>PCA</b>	Principal Components Analysis
<b>PPS</b>	Probability Proportionate to Sample Size
<b>PSU</b>	Primary Sampling Unit
<b>UCW</b>	Understanding Children's Work
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund

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# Summary

Universal secondary education and quality learning have been adopted by the international community as goals for 2030. Child labour, which remains endemic in many poor countries, represents an obstacle to both goals. It keeps children out of school, hinders effective learning and denies children an opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to escape poverty, and that their countries need to drive inclusive growth and human development.

This report describes a unique, large-scale representative survey into the relationship between child labour and education in slum settlements located across eight Thanas (administrative units) in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh – a city and a country in which child labour remains widespread. The survey covers over 2,700 households drawn from a listing of 4,500, with children themselves as well as their parents responding to a detailed questionnaire. It is representative for a population of just over half-a-million people.

The backdrop to the survey is Bangladesh's strong record on human development. The country has registered extraordinary advances in education, notably on access and gender equity. Poverty levels have fallen with strong and relatively inclusive economic growth. Looking ahead, Bangladesh faces immense challenges. While the country is nearing universal primary school enrolment, drop-out rates remain high – and learning levels are poor. Urbanisation has been one of the engines of Bangladesh's development. But it has gone hand-in-hand with the rapid growth of urban slums marked by high levels of poverty and low levels of service provision. Child labour is rife in these slums. While our survey is not nationally representative, it provides a window on the world of child labour in the megacity of Dhaka, which accounts for almost half of Bangladesh's slum population.

We report a number of findings that differ from those to emerge from previous research and national surveys. Five themes stand out. First, there is a high work incidence among children aged 6–14, with an average rate of 15% reported across our survey sites. An equivalent proportion is neither in school nor working. Second, in contrast to previous studies, we find a high level of segmentation between work and school: the overwhelming majority of working children are out-of-school. Third, the distinction between child work and child labour is of questionable relevance in Dhaka's slums. Almost all working children are involved in what both International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions and national legislation would categorise as child labour, with hazardous work

figuring prominently. Fourth, child labour markets in Dhaka are highly segmented by age and gender. Boys make the transition to the world of work earlier and in greater numbers than girls, with labour market entry taking off from the ages of 10 and 11 respectively. Child labour levels rise from around 8% at the age of 10 to 45% at the age of 14. Fifth, the ready-made garments sector appears to be a major employer of children, accounting for two thirds of female child labour.

Wider findings from the research illustrate the damaging interaction between child labour and education in Bangladesh. Children are driven into work by economic hardship – and we find evidence that wages from child labour equalise average income across slum households with and without working children. This lends weight to the view that parents make the decision to send their children into work as a 'distress choice' aimed at meeting a minimum income level.

The education system contributes to the child labour problem by creating a 'supply' of potential recruits. Child workers enter labour markets having accumulated limited years of schooling. On average they make the transition to the world of work with just four years of schooling – and the average 14-year-old child labourer has not completed Grade 3. Basic literacy and numeracy skills are poor for all children, including those in school. But they are worst for child labourers and children who are neither in school nor working. Late entry to school, grade repetition and poor quality education all serve to push children out of education and into employment. More effective enforcement of compulsory education legislation, coupled with improvements in the quality of schooling and measures to counteract the effects of household poverty, could accelerate progress towards the eradication of child labour in Dhaka's slums. However, while current policies set ambitious goals, their effectiveness is hampered by the absence of an integrated strategy for education, the reduction of child poverty and enforcement of child labour laws.

One of the take-home messages to emerge is that Bangladesh will not achieve the 2030 development goals on education and other objectives without a strengthened commitment to eradicate child labour; and the country will not eradicate child labour without making education compulsory and free for the 6–14 age group.

As in other countries, child labour in Bangladesh is a complex phenomenon that has to be addressed in a coordinated fashion on a cross-sectoral basis. Effective

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action requires integrated approaches that span the regulation of labour markets, education, child welfare and wider strategies for poverty reduction. It also entails a process of dialogue aimed at changing attitudes. Based on the findings from our survey, we set out a number of key recommendations. These include:

- Developing an **improved evidence base** to capture the extent of child labour and the education status of child labourers, with a focus on urban slums and surveys that capture the reported experiences of children.
- Making the **eradication of child labour** a central objective of education policy.
- Raising the age for **free and compulsory education** from 10 to 14.
- **Increasing overall financing** for education to 4–5% of GDP, with a greater emphasis on provision in slum areas and overall equity.
- Improving the **quality of education** in slum areas and enhancing the school readiness of slum-dwelling children through universal early childhood provision in slums.
- Supplementing current education stipend programmes through a programme to provide **cash transfers at primary and junior levels to slum-dwelling children** – the timing and level of the transfer should be calibrated against current monthly earnings (\$47 a month on average).
- Strengthening the **regulatory environment** for child labour by ratifying ILO Convention 138, reducing the current threshold for ‘hazardous work’ from its current level of 42 hours, and expanding the list of prohibited hazardous occupations to be consistent with ILO standards.
- Investing in the **human resources** needed to ensure that regulatory agencies are equipped to conduct effective inspections.
- Imposing more **punitive fines** on employers found to be employing under-age workers.
- Reviewing **inspection arrangements for the garment sector** to ensure that factories comply with national laws.

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# Introduction

Child labour remains endemic in many of the world's poorer countries. According to the ILO, 168 million children aged 5–17 are working as child labourers – around 12% of all children in that age group. These children are not just working for a few hours a day. They are engaged in activities that compromise their opportunities for education. Half of them are in 'hazardous' occupations that pose risks for their health, safety and security (ILO et al., 2013). While the ILO reports that child labour numbers have declined since 2000, the numbers are still distressing. Millions of the world's children continue to live and work in conditions that would have been familiar to children in Europe and the US some two centuries ago.

The persistence and scale of child labour represents a barrier to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set for 2030. These goals include the eradication of poverty, decent quality learning for all children up to secondary school level, reduced inequality and the creation of decent jobs.<sup>1</sup> Mass child labour is inconsistent with these targets, notably those associated with education (Guarcello et al., 2015). For the children directly affected, early entry into the world of work represents a loss of freedom, a violation of rights, a source of vulnerability and a constraint on learning. Apart from exposure to risk of injury, these children are denied a chance to acquire what Amartya Sen describes as 'human capabilities' – the knowledge, skills and competencies needed to expand choice and extend opportunity. Children making early entry into the world of insecure, unskilled, low-paid work are unlikely to accumulate the education they need to secure decent work and break the transmission of poverty across generations. For countries, too, extensive child labour is a roadblock to human development because it erodes the human capital on which dynamic and inclusive economic growth, rising productivity and social progress depend. It is no coincidence that child labour is strongly associated with low income both across countries and within them.

There is a strong link between educational disadvantage and child labour. Children forced out of school and into work to help their families make ends meet face elevated

risks of getting trapped in a cycle of deprivation. The transmission operates in both directions. The interaction between poverty and labour markets pulls children into child labour. But 'failure' in education can generate a push-factor by creating a supply of potential child labourers from the ranks of children whose school careers have been prematurely ended.

There is a consensus that early exposure to work and withdrawal from education are harmful – and that international cooperation and national legislation should seek to restrict child labour. However, the limited progress made towards a world free of child labour is indicative of the resilience, complexity and depth of the underlying social disadvantages and power relationships that perpetuate it.

This report makes a contribution to the wider debate on child labour and education. It focuses on Bangladesh. This is a country which, over the past three decades, has made extraordinary progress on a wide range of human development indicators, notably education. Governments have put in place wide-ranging strategies for eradicating child labour. Yet the practice continues at endemic levels. Failure to tackle this will jeopardise Bangladesh's prospects for accelerating progress towards the 2030 development goals.

We present the results of a survey conducted in slum settlements in Dhaka, Bangladesh's capital city. The survey was developed and implemented by BRAC<sup>2</sup> Institute of Educational Development, BRAC University (BIED, BRACU) and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). The survey is representative for a population of over half-a-million people across eight Thanas in the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) area. The survey sample was derived from a listing of 4,500 households, from which 2,700 slum-dwelling children and their parents were randomly identified and interviewed. To our knowledge, it is the largest survey of its type with a distinctive focus on child labour and education to have been conducted in Dhaka, or in Bangladesh as a whole.

We caution against drawing national conclusions from a survey that is representative for urban slum locations in one city. However, these locations are home to the largest

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1 The SDG targets for education envisage a world in which 'all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes', with an overarching injunction 'to reach the furthest behind first' (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Widespread and persistent child labour represents an obvious obstacle to these ambitions.

2 BRAC is the world's largest development organisation, dedicated to empowering people living in poverty.

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slum populations of children out of school in Dhaka, one of the world's fastest-growing megacities in a country that is rapidly urbanising. The picture that emerges from the survey may have a wider relevance to an understanding of the complex relationship between urbanisation, child labour and human development. Looking beyond Bangladesh, our survey raises wider issues of relevance to the 2030 development goals. If the international community is intent on 'leaving no one behind' and reaching 'the furthest behind first', as envisaged in the goals, breaking the link between child labour and educational disadvantage would appear an obvious starting point (United Nations, 2016).

The rest of the report is structured as follows. Part 1 provides an overview of the concepts that underpin distinctions between child work and child labour, along

with a brief review of the wider theoretical literature on child labour and education. Part 2 sets the national context for our survey. It examines what we describe as a 'twin crisis' in education spanning access and learning, and summarises some of the wider evidence on child labour to emerge from national studies. Rapid urbanisation is one of the defining feature of Bangladesh's development and Dhaka has emerged as one of the world's megacities. We explore the place of slums in the country's urban development. Part 3 reports on our survey findings. We provide a picture of the incidence of child labour (drawing on our household listing sample), profiles of working children and an account of the interaction between child labour and education. Part 4 sets out what we see as some of the critical lessons to emerge and recommendations on policy.

# 1. Old wine, new bottles – child labour and education in the 21st century

The elimination of child labour is a contemporary concern with a long history. During the first half of the 19th century, child labour was a common feature of the social landscape in today's advanced economies. The debates among political leaders, social reformers and industrialists have a powerful contemporary resonance. One of the recurrent themes was the drive to set progressively lower limits on the hours that children spent in work, while gradually increasing the time spent in education. In this section we look at how moves towards the eradication of child labour have been shaped by shifting perceptions of childhood – and at how approaches to the measurement of child labour have changed over time.

## 1.1 The view from history

Countries such as Bangladesh are still in a state of transition away from mass child labour and towards compulsory schooling. Many of the choices facing parents and the experiences of children would have been familiar to parents and children in 19th-century Britain. Here are two brief excerpts from a British parliamentary investigation – the Sadler Committee – into child labour in the textile industry in 1832, the first is with Joshua Drake, the parent of a working child:

- Q *Why do you allow your children to go to work at those places where they are ill-treated or over-worked?*  
A –Necessity compels a man that has children to let them work.  
Q *Then you would not allow your children to go to those factories under the present system, if it was not from necessity?*  
A –No.  
Q *Supposing there was a law passed to limit the hours of labour to eight hours a day, or something of that sort, of course you are aware that a manufacturer could not afford to pay them the same wages?*  
A –No, I do not suppose that they would, but at the same time I would rather have it, and I believe that it would bring me into employ; and if I lost 5d. [English

fivepence] a day from my children's work, and I got half-a-crown myself, it would be better.

The second is with a former child labourer named Matthew Crabtree:

- Q *At what age did you first go to work in a factory?*  
A –Eight.  
Q *Will you state the hours of labour at the period when you first went to the factory, in ordinary times?*  
A –From 6 in the morning to 8 at night.  
Q *With what intervals for refreshment and rest?*  
A –An hour at noon.  
Q *During those long hours of labour could you be punctual; how did you awake?*  
A –I seldom did awake spontaneously; I was most generally awoke or lifted out of bed, sometimes asleep, by my parents.  
Q *What was the consequence if you had been too late?*  
A –I was most commonly beaten.  
Q *When you got home at night after this labour, did you feel much fatigued?*  
A –Very much so.  
Q *Had you any time to be with your parents, and to receive instruction from them?*  
A –No.

Like many other parents, Joshua Drake allowed his child to work as a consequence of economic hardship. Historians have documented the grave concerns of mid-19th century English parents over the decision to allow their children to work (Horrell and Humphries, 1995). What is striking about the first exchange is that it addresses a question that has become the staple of labour market economic analysis in child labour debates: namely, would a regulatory limit on child labour create employment opportunities for the parent (Baland and Robinson, 2000; Basu and Van, 1998). The second respondent powerfully captures the invasive and destructive impact of extreme child work on the well-being of children – and the child's awareness of the consequences.



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There is another area in which the proceedings of the 1832 enquiry have a contemporary resonance. The Sadler Committee played an important role in shaping legislation, introduced the following year, to limit to eight hours the time children could spend working in garment factories. Some 190 years later, our survey of slum dwellers in Dhaka, Bangladesh, found children reporting an average working time of 10 hours a day.

## 1.2 Measuring child labour

Debates on child labour are shaped by national contexts, history, politics and the shifting sands of values and norms. How the terms ‘child’, ‘work’ and ‘labour’ are defined has a critical bearing on any estimate of the extent of the underlying practice – and on policies to curtail or prohibit child labour.

### 1.2.1 Child labour and child work – defining the boundaries

Child labour is a legal concept with powerful ethical undertones rather than an objective condition easily captured by statistics. Translating legal norms into cross-country data is inherently problematic. The standards set by ILO Conventions represent an international reference point – and the source of the headline figures cited in the Introduction (Diallo et al., 2013; Edmonds, 2008). However, the headline statistics provide a static picture of what is a dynamic and highly differentiated condition.

For national and international reporting purposes, child labour is different to child work. Child labour represents a subset of employment or working activities. Three Conventions define the legal boundaries that separate child labour for elimination from ‘legitimate’ child work. ILO Convention 138 (1973), provides the most comprehensive and widely adopted international definition of the minimum age for admission to work (ILO, 1973). Ratified by 169 countries, it calls on states to set a threshold of at least 15 years of age as the minimum for entry to work, with a provision for 14 years of age in less developed countries. For hazardous work it raises the age threshold to 18. Hazardous work covers a range of sectors (mining and construction, for example) and occupations that run from a range of metallic and electrical engineering activities to operating textile, wood-cutting, leather product machinery, and street vending.

Convention 138 sets out parts of the boundary that separates child work from child labour. It allows children from the age of 13 (12 in less developed countries) to engage in light work which is not harmful to their health and does not ‘prejudice their attendance at school ... or training programmes’. Permissible light work is defined as any non-hazardous work by children that amounts to a total of less than 14 hours a week. Only 18 countries have not ratified the Convention.<sup>3</sup> Bangladesh is one of them.

The second boundary-setting international instrument is ILO Convention 182 (ILO, 1999) on the worst forms of child labour. This calls on states to prohibit through ‘immediate action’ all forms of slavery and compulsory labour, the involvement of children in illicit activities and work which ‘is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children’ (ILO, 1973). The Convention has been ratified by 180 countries, including Bangladesh.<sup>4</sup>

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the third legal pillar – and the most comprehensive child rights treaty. It explicitly recognises the right of the child ‘to be protected 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’. The Convention also calls on states to provide compulsory and free education (Article 28). An important aspect of the Convention is that it establishes children as ‘rights holders’ and requires parents and other adults to act in the best interests of the child (Article 3), and governments to enforce child rights through national action and international cooperation (Article 4).

Implicit in each of these Conventions is a recognition of the strong link between child work and education. Indeed, the boundaries for legitimate work are defined in part by the requirement that children should be able to develop their potential through education.

All of this serves to underscore the hazards of estimating child labour. The ILO distinguishes between children’s employment in ‘economic activity’ for at least one hour a week and child labour, as defined under the core Conventions.<sup>5</sup> In simplified form, children’s employment can be thought of as the envelope that encompasses legitimate forms of child work, and both non-hazardous and hazardous child labour (Figure 1).

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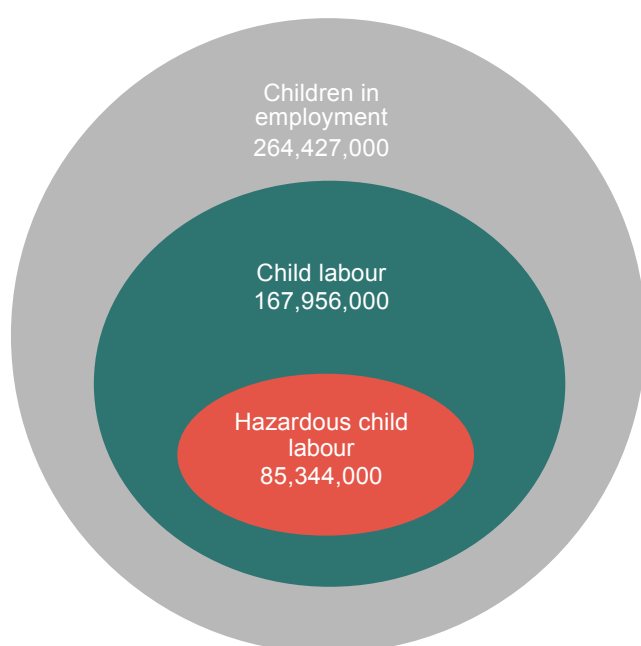
3 Other non-signatories include India and a range of OECD countries, among them the US, Australia and New Zealand.

4 India is one of the countries that has not ratified the Convention. The ILO designates hazardous occupations and sectors (see ILO, 2012).

5 Economic activity covers all market production and certain types of non-market production, principally the production of goods and services for own use (Edmonds, 2008).

Translating broad international legal norms into legislation and statistical measurement tools is intrinsically difficult. Despite ILO Convention 138, different countries have variable standards for the minimum age of work. They also have very different definitions of ‘light work’ and different interpretations of when work interferes with schooling. In the case of Bangladesh, children aged 12 years and above are permitted to engage in ‘light work’ for up to 42 hours a week – a level well in excess of the Convention 138 standard. In addition, there are divergent definitions of hazardous work, with national lists often diverging from the ILO’s hazardous work list.

**Figure 1. Children’s employment and child labour – global estimates for 2012**



*Data source: ILO et al. (2013) Marking Progress Against Child Labour: Global estimates and trends 2000-2012. Geneva: International Labour Office.*

In the absence of comparable cross-country survey data of high quality and in the face of limited country coverage, global estimates are derived through an elaborate process of extrapolation and interpolation. Misalignment between international definitions of child labour used by the ILO and national legal definitions can produce wide variations (Khan and Lyon, 2015). Indeed, estimates produced by national authorities can vary widely dependent on the definitions of child work and child labour employed.

This backdrop has an important bearing on our survey in Bangladesh. Identifying which aspects of child work constitute ‘child labour’ for elimination looks different from the perspective of national legislation in the country, than from the perspective of ILO Conventions. However, from the perspective of the children living and working in the (admittedly very distinctive) slum environments we survey, some of the standard legal distinctions drawn

between child work, child labour and hazardous labour are of questionable relevance. What is clear from our survey results is that the spirit and the letter of the injunctions set out in ILO Conventions, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and national legislation on child labour and education produce limited results in the real world of many children in Dhaka’s slums.

### 1.3 Wider literature review and evidence

Child labour is overwhelmingly concentrated in poor countries and, within those countries, among poor households. This provides a useful insight into the mechanisms linking poverty and social deprivation to child labour. Parents of working children in early 19th-century Britain were unhappy about the choices forced on them, as the proceeding of the 1832 parliamentary investigation cited earlier make clear (Horrell and Humphries, 1995; Cunningham and Viazzo, 1996). The parents of 21st-century child labourers living in the slums of cities like Dhaka or Jakarta, or poor rural areas in Ghana and India, are no different. They are similarly compelled by necessity to sacrifice their children’s education and well-being not out of free choice, but economic compulsion.

#### 1.3.1 Theoretical models on household decision-making

There is an expansive literature on the relationship between child labour and education. Much of that literature derives from theoretical models for household decision-making and labour market participation. More recently, this literature has been supplemented to empirical work on transitions to work and the relationship between employment and schooling. Both sets of literature are relevant to the analysis of child labour in Bangladesh.

Much of the theoretical analysis of child labour can be traced back to Gary Becker’s work on intra-household bargaining (Becker, 1964; Rosenzweig and Evenson, 1977). In Becker’s unitary household model, child labour is the product of unequal bargaining relationships. With children enjoying limited bargaining power, parents and employers effectively bargain over children’s wages and the share of wages to be paid as food. What shapes decisions over whether to send children to school is the relative power of the household in relation to the employer.

Another strand of literature has addressed child labour from a human capital approach (Baland and Robinson, 2000). Putting children to work in this perspective increases the basket of goods a family can consume in the short run. But there is a potential trade-off between current and future income, with sub-optimal social and economic returns over the long run. When children have to work, they risk losing out on education. Many child labourers either never attend school or they drop out early, while those struggling to combine school and work often register lower levels of learning.

The interplay between child labour and education has been extensively explored (Guarcello et al., 2015; UCW, 2015; de Hoop et al., 2016). The dynamic interactions between household poverty and parental preferences on the one side and school-related factors – such as the perceived or actual quality of schooling and accessibility of schools – is complex. What emerges clearly from the research, however, is the tension between child labour and education targets of the type adopted under the SDGs for 2030.

If children working is the problem, is a prohibition on child labour the solution? That question has been at the centre of a substantial literature since the seminal papers of Basu and Van (1998), and Basu (1999). Starting from the proposition that parents do not voluntarily or maliciously send their children to work, but do so in order to achieve a subsistence income, an obvious issue arises: would the prohibition of child labour produce more of the poverty that drives children into child labour?

Theoretical modelling produces two main predictions. The first is that the principal determinant of parental decisions to send children to work are poverty and imperfect credit markets, which prevent poor households from borrowing to realise future social and economic returns (Basu and Van, 1998; Grootaert and Kanbur, 1995; Baland and Robinson, 2000).

The second prediction is that the effect of a ban on child labour will depend on underlying market conditions. If children are withdrawn from labour markets and their wages rise to maintain household incomes at the same level, the ban could move the economy to an equilibrium without child labour (Basu, 1999). However, in an economy where many children are working, poor households are heavily reliant on child labour, and adults are unable – or unwilling – to substitute for children (perhaps because they are already fully employed), a prohibition can hurt the poorest households by keeping wages low. Outcomes depend, in part, at least on the response of firms to changing labour market equilibria (Soares, 2003).

Recourse to child labour in the underlying model is seen as an act of desperation. Parents might be aware of the social and economic costs of sending children to work, but adult wages and employment prospects are insufficient to meet a defined subsistence level with child labour. Our survey in Dhaka lends some weight to this interpretation (see Section 3).

### 1.3.2 Empirical evidence backs the theory

Empirical research on the effect of external consumption shocks confirms the transmission mechanisms operating between poverty and child labour. Panel data analysis for Tanzania found that credit-constrained households responded to transitory income shocks caused by crop losses, by increasing child labour and reducing education in order to smooth consumption. Research on the response

to the 1998 floods in Bangladesh found that child labour increased not just in relation to the scale of the shock, but also in relation to the availability of credit (Alvi and Dendir, 2011). These are illustrations of market failures in areas such as risk insurance, capital and borrowing (Grootaert and Kanbur, 1995).

Children from poorer households are consistently more exposed to the risk of child labour – and to the educational disadvantages that come with child labour. Evidence to this effect comes from all regions and a growing number of countries (Guarcello et al., 2015; UCW, 2015). In the Philippines, 9% of children from the poorest background are involved in child labour compared to 3% for the richest (Guarcello et al., 2015). Unsurprisingly, working children often struggle to combine employment and education. One review of evidence from 19 countries found that school attendance rates for children in employment were consistently lower than for non-working children (Guarcello et al., 2015). While a large share of working children do attend school, there is evidence that they lag behind their non-working peers in terms of grade progression (Khan and Lyon, 2015; Guarcello et al., 2015; UCW, 2015). The effects increase in magnitude with hours of work.

## 1.4 Social protection and cash transfer programmes

If poor households send children to work because of cash constraints and credit market imperfections, increased income and risk insurance might be expected to weaken the link between poverty, child labour and educational deprivation. An increasing body of evidence from cash transfer programmes points in precisely this direction.

Parental decision-making on school attendance is the flip-side of decision-making on labour market entry. Simple economic models for understanding school participation and household investment in education assume that parents seek to maximise life-cycle utility for their children. The decision on whether or not to send children to school will be based on perceived costs and benefits. However, parents may underinvest relative to socially optimal levels for a number of reasons, including imperfect information on the benefits of education, poverty-related credit constraints, and differences between individual and socially optimal returns to education.

Cash transfer programmes can affect child labour by changing the propensity to attend school. These programmes can increase returns to keeping children in school, reduce returns to child labour and enable households to smooth consumption in the face of exogenous shocks. By providing resources to the household they relieve poverty, lower risk and mitigate market imperfections limiting credit, thereby making it possible for households to afford more education (and forego more child labour). Programmes which condition payments on

school attendance create an incentive effect by increasing the immediate returns on children being in school and decreasing returns on child labour. Precise transmission effects will be determined by design factors, including the level and timing of transfers, and whether or not the transfers are made conditional on children attending school. De Hoop and Rosati (2014) provide a theoretical framework for understanding how cash transfers may modify household decision-making.

Conditional cash transfer (CCT) programmes in education have been extensively evaluated (Glewwe and Muralidharan, 2015; Bastagli et al., 2016). Among the consistent themes to emerge is a positive effect on school attendance, with supplementary benefits for grade progression and completion. One literature review covering 43 impact estimates associated with cash transfer programmes from 20 high-quality studies found that almost all (40 in total) were positive (Glewwe and Muralidharan, 2015). The studies cover a range of contexts. Large national programmes such as Progresá in Mexico (Behrman et al., 2009, Behrman et al., 2011) and Bolsa Família in Brazil (Glewwe and Kassouf, 2012) have registered marked gains in school attendance, grade progression and transition from primary to secondary school. In Malawi, a CCT for girls increased daily attendance rates by eight percentage points over two years (Baird et al., 2011). An unconditional cash transfer programme – the Social Cash Transfer Scheme – similarly led to a small, but significant, rise in enrolment over the next two years for girls already in school (Innovations for Poverty Action, 2011). Evaluations of Nicaragua’s Red de Protección Social found significant increases in enrolment among children aged 7–13 (Gitter and Barham, 2008). Another evaluation using a randomised selection of communities – both covered and not covered by the programme – found an increase in the number of grades completed (Barham et al., 2013). This is consistent with wider research that has found a reduction in the aggregate level of child labour among poor rural households receiving cash transfers (Del Carpio and Loayza, 2012). Introduced on a randomised control trial basis, Honduras provided grants to households conditional on children reporting 85% attendance: enrolment increased by eight percentage points (Galiani and McEwan, 2013).

None of this amounts to automatic evidence that improved school attendance is the result of reduced child labour. Households could consume or invest the cash transfer they receive (potentially drawing children into work) while seeking to maintain child work at previous levels, perhaps by reducing the leisure time available to children. This would call into question the assumptions about household decision-making outlined earlier.

Results of high-quality peer reviewed evaluations do not point in this direction. One review of 19 studies of cash transfer evaluations that include estimates for transfer impacts on child labour found eight that registered any

significant impact. All showed a decrease in child labour. Another five studies analysed in the review report on impacts related to the intensity of child labour, as measured by hours worked. All five found statistically significant reductions, ranging from 0.3 hours to 2.5 hours a week (Bastagli et al., 2016). While there are marked variations in impact ranges reflecting the size, scale and mode of delivery for the transfer, the evidence supports a conclusion drawn by de Hoop and Rosati (2014): ‘the effects of any household investments in productive assets and activities that draw children into work are offset by stronger income and substitution effects that keep children in school and out of work’.

## 1.5 Compulsory education and child labour prohibitions

In today’s advanced economies, the demise of mass child labour was associated with the introduction of legislation making education compulsory. Did a combination of prohibition on children working and compulsory schooling play the central role in consigning child labour to history? And are there any lessons from late 19th-century and early 20th-century Europe and the US that might have relevance for policy-makers in countries like Bangladesh?

These questions have figured prominently in debates on child labour (Cunningham and Viazzo, 1996; Basu, 1999). To the extent that any lesson can be drawn, it is that the evidence cautions against looking for cure-all solutions. In Britain, the introduction and enforcement of compulsory education in 1880 did contribute to a decline in child labour, along with earlier factory acts legislating for children to spend more time in schooling (Cunningham and Viazzo, 1996). Raising the school leaving age from 10 in 1880 to 14 in 1918 also made a difference, notably by redefining childhood. Once again, comparisons with Bangladesh are instructive. Compulsory education in the country today has the same duration as in the Britain of 1880.

Evidence from the US points in a different direction. The expansion of state compulsory schooling and anti-child labour laws in the four decades from 1910 was associated with a sharp increase in secondary school participation, from 18% to 71% (Goldin and Katz, 2003). However, association is not causation. Legislation is estimated to have accounted for no more than 5% of the increase in enrolments. Increased incomes, changed attitudes and a growing recognition of the importance of education were the primary drivers of change (Goldin and Katz, 2003).

Prohibition, compulsory schooling and rising living standards interacted to create a virtuous circle of more schooling and less child labour across the industrialised world. The precise mix of forces varied across countries, time periods and contexts. Legislative restrictions on child labour and the eventual declaration of child labour as illegal, were both a cause and effect of changing social

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attitudes (Hopkins, 1994; Brewer and Porter, 1994; Humphries, 2012). At the same time, it was increasing prosperity that made it possible to pull children out of work without households being consigned to poverty (Basu, 1999; Cunningham and Viazzo, 1996).

For a country like Bangladesh there are two broad conclusions to be drawn from our survey of slum-dwelling children. The first relates to legislation. Extending compulsory education to the age of 14 is likely to prove more effective than enforcing a ban on child labour through factory and informal sector inspection, though the latter certainly needs strengthening (see Section 2). Apart from anything else, monitoring a child's presence in school is administratively easier than monitoring (and potentially prosecuting) small-scale employers.

The second conclusion is that neither compulsory education nor prohibition is a stand-alone solution. The evidence on the impact of child labour bans in developing countries, whether linked to compulsory education or not, is limited. Researchers have looked at this issue through analysis of the effects of minimum employment age legislation. Evidence from Brazil (relating to 1998 legislation which increased the minimum age of employment from 14 to 16) points to a modest decline in child work, mostly on the part of boys, and a corresponding increase in the proportion of boys

studying (Piza and Portela Souza, 2016). In Pakistan, the 1991 Employment of Children's Act similarly appears to have lowered child employment, though not in agriculture (Fasih, 2007). Another study found that similar legislation in India had the perverse effect of increasing child labour, reducing wages and lowering school attendance (Bharadwaj et al., 2013). Cross-country research has found no consistent effects. One study on child labour and schooling drawing on micro-data from 60 predominantly low-income countries found no short-term effects from legislation on minimum working age.

While the evidence base remains limited, it is relevant for policy-makers in Bangladesh. Policy outcomes are clearly conditioned by the wider economic context and labour market conditions – and by the wider policy environment. Introduced as a stand-alone measure in a situation where less child labour will exacerbate poverty and increase vulnerability, the likely result is that parents will allow their children to find illicit routes back into work. If the alternative to work is the prospect of hunger, legislation on compulsory schooling will produce limited results. However, coupling that legislation with cash transfer programmes, targeted support, the provision of good quality schools, and interventions that improve the labour market position of the poorest households, has the potential to produce transformative results.



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# 2. Education and child labour in Bangladesh – strong progress and big challenges in an urbanising economy

This section provides a brief overview of the intertwined challenges facing Bangladesh in education and child labour. It provides a bird's eye view of the progress achieved and the challenges ahead. These challenges have to be addressed against a backdrop of rapid shifts in human geography, as Bangladesh becomes an increasingly urban society.

Bangladesh's achievements have been rightly lauded. The country is among the top ranking development success stories of the Millennium Development Goal era. Many of the targets set for 2015 – on child mortality, maternal mortality, education, gender equity and poverty – were met well ahead of schedule. Strong and broad-based economic growth has driven a respectable rate of poverty reduction. Growth has averaged over 6% since 2000, with per capita incomes doubling to \$3,191 in 2011 Purchasing Power Parity (PPP).<sup>6</sup> The national poverty rate fell from 49% in 2000 to 31% in 2010, while extreme poverty rates halved over the same period.<sup>7</sup> Measured on the Human Development Index scale, Bangladesh ranks 142 out of 188 countries, but it outperforms countries – including India – at higher levels of per capita income on key measures of progress (UNDP, 2015).

The progress report does not diminish the scale of the challenges ahead. Bangladesh remains a low-income country. Millions of the country's citizens live just above the poverty line: in 2010 there were 50 million living on between \$1.25 and \$2 a day. While income inequality

remains modest by global and regional standards – the Gini coefficient in 2010 was 30 – social disparities are increasingly visible, not least in cities where slums are located in close proximity to increasingly affluent areas. Employment is dominated by low-wage informal sector activity – and growth has not fuelled formal sector job creation on the expected scale (USAID and DFID, 2014). Productivity gains have been modest. Human capital constraints have been identified as a growth bottleneck and a source of skills gaps in the formal sector. There is little evidence to suggest that more access to education has reduced poverty through increased productivity (World Bank, 2013).

Education has to be central to any strategy for resolving these problems. For many Bangladeshi children, education remains a Hobbesian 'poor, nasty, brutish and short' experience followed by an early transition into the world of work. Causation operates in both directions. Limited access to poor quality education pushes many children towards labour markets. Meanwhile, poverty and vulnerability pulls many children into work even when schooling options are available. Breaking the link between child labour and education is recognised by the Government of Bangladesh as a critical requirement for achieving the 2030 goals.

Looking ahead to 2030, and the more ambitious targets set under the SDGs, Bangladesh faces a number of challenges. The current national strategy envisages

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6 Data are from Centre for Policy Dialogue (URL: <http://cpd.org.bd/>).

7 The extent of poverty was also halved, from 34% to 17%. Measured on the old international poverty line of \$1.25 (at 2005 PPP), 43% of the population was estimated to be living below the threshold in 2010, compared to 58% in 2000 (World Bank, 2013).

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middle-income status by 2021, which will require a steep increase in economic growth. The elimination of extreme poverty is an achievable goal – but it will not be achieved without more inclusive growth, human capital development and expanded investment in infrastructure (USAID and DFID, 2014). Similarly, sustained progress in human development will require a greatly strengthened focus on social groups and regions that have been left behind.

## 2.1 Education for All – the unfinished agenda

The headway that Bangladesh has made in education is widely recognised (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF Bangladesh, 2014). There has been a dramatic widening of access to primary and lower secondary education with gender parity achieved at both levels. Completion rates have improved and repetition rates have fallen. Despite these gains, Bangladesh faces a ‘twin crisis’ in education – a crisis in access and learning. Millions of the country’s poorest children do not complete a full primary school cycle, let alone make the transition to secondary school. Meanwhile, the school system is characterised by low and highly unequal levels of learning. The two sides of the crisis are linked, with poor quality learning contributing to high drop-out rates.

### 2.1.1 Basic education from 6–14

Basic education in Bangladesh is structured across two levels overseen by two separate ministries.<sup>8</sup> Legislation provides for free and compulsory education up to Grade 5, with entry to Grade 1 nominally at 6 years of age. With smooth progression across grades, primary education would cover the ages 6–10. Junior secondary schooling covers Grades 6–8 (or ages 11–13 in a normal progression). Proposals in the 2010 National Education Policy aimed at extending the primary cycle to eight years have yet to be translated into policy decisions (Bangladesh Ministry of Education, 2010). Secondary education covers Grades 9–10. Junior secondary and secondary education are neither compulsory nor free.

Schooling at the primary level involves a wide array of providers. Government primary schools account for around one third of providers, and one fifth are recently nationalised primary schools brought under government supervision. Madrashas<sup>9</sup> account for around 7% of reported provision. There is also an extensive array of non-formal provision dominated by BRAC and

Reaching-Out-of-School-Children (ROSC) centres. Most junior secondary and secondary education is delivered through non-government providers.

Bangladesh has a well-established track record in expanding access through demand-side financing. All children attending primary school are eligible for a small monthly stipend (amounting to 100 Bangladeshi takas (Tk) in 2013, about \$1 at the time), which reached 7.8 million children in 2013. The stipends are targeted at poor children selected by school authorities. However, the value of the stipend has eroded in real terms since its introduction in 2002 – and households with two or more children in school receive only 125% of the stipend (Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 2013). The stipend is applied at the same level across grades.

The junior secondary stipend for girls has contributed to gender equity by creating an incentive for parents to keep children in school. Girls making the transition to secondary school in rural areas receive a stipend and free tuition – and all children receive free textbooks. The Female Secondary Stipend Programme, introduced in the mid-1990s, provides a CCT to all secondary school female students, combined with the transfer of a tuition fee to the school they attended. Conditions are attached with regard to school attendance and students remaining unmarried.

While causality is difficult to establish, data suggests that the stipend programme has contributed to the rise in enrolment of girls in secondary schools (Schurmann, 2009). Econometric analysis based on household data indicates significant effects. On average, an additional year of stipend programme duration increases female student secondary enrolment by as much as 8%. The household level data suggest that an additional year of the programme increases enrolment of girls aged 11–18 by 12 percentage points (Khandker et al., 2013). Questions remain as to the impact of the stipend programme on delaying marriage, empowerment of girls and women and enhancing employment opportunities.

More recently, the government has introduced a poverty-targeted stipend programme (SEQAEP) in around a quarter of Bangladesh’s upazilas. Students eligible for the stipend receive from \$15 to \$40 a year, depending on their grades, and benefits are conditional on students maintaining 75% average attendance, achieving a passing grade in final examinations and remaining unmarried until they complete Grade 10. Means-tested stipends have been issued to over 1.5 million students (Parajuli, 2016). Initial evidence points to marked increases in enrolment among the poor, with the programme contributing to a reported

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8 The two separate ministries responsible for overseeing provision are the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (Grades 1–5) and the Ministry of Education (Grades 6–12).

9 Madrashas in Bangladesh are a non-graded education system that follows its own curriculum and is parallel to the mainstream education system. They are religious schools or colleges where students are taught Arabic and the Islamic religion.

10 Upazilas are administrative sub-districts of Bangladesh.



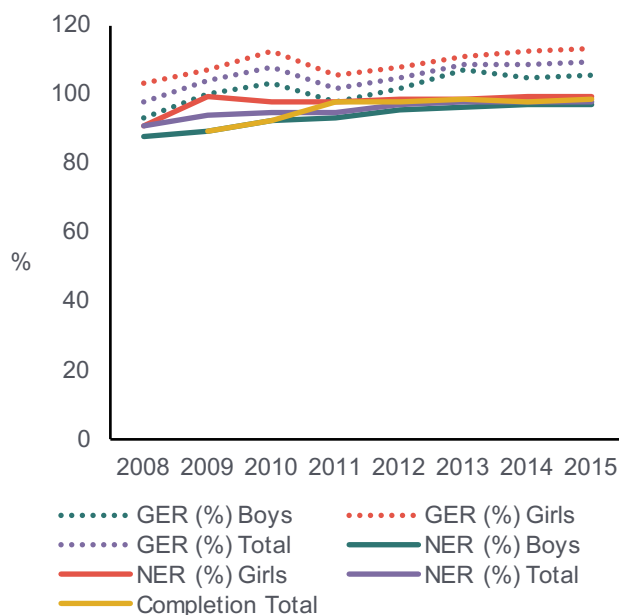
20% increase in secondary school retention for males and 15% for females, with larger effects for children from poorer households (Jolliffe et al., 2013).

### 2.1.2 The country is nearing universal primary enrolment – but retention is a concern

Bangladesh has dramatically improved access to education. Expanded supply coupled with demand-side financing through stipends has pushed the country towards universal primary enrolment. The primary net enrolment rate was most recently reported at 97% and the gross enrolment rate (GER) at 109% (Figure 2). Between 2000–2010, the junior secondary GER rose from 52% to 62% in 2013 (Jolliffe et al., 2013). There are more girls than boys in school at both levels.

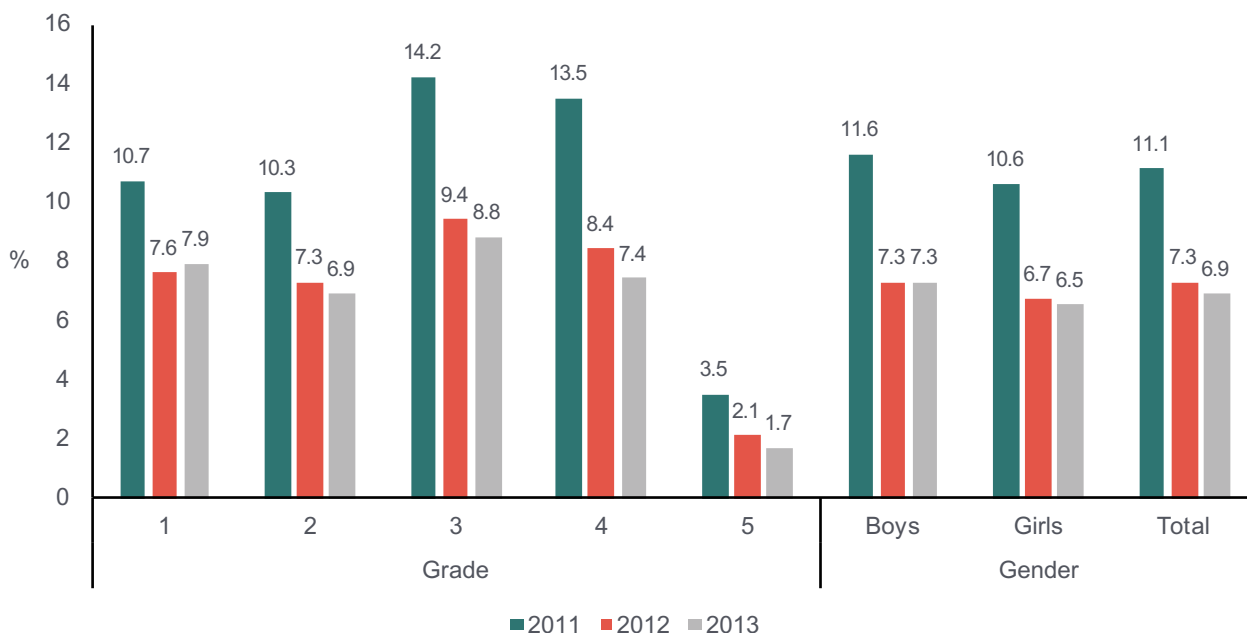
Unfortunately, enrolment rates tell only part of the story. Repetition rates have declined over time, but they remain high (Figure 3). Around 7% of pupils repeat Grade 1, which points to widespread problems with school readiness. One of the indicators for school readiness is attendance at pre-school in the year prior to entering primary school – and only 43% of children attend pre-school according to household survey data (Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 2014).<sup>11</sup> Repetition rates remain high in Grades 3–4.

**Figure 2. Bangladesh is nearing universal primary school enrolment: reported enrolment rates between 2008–2015 by gender**



Data source: Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) Annual Primary School Census (APSC) 2015.

**Figure 3. Repetition rates are falling – but remain high: repetition by grade and gender, 2011–2014**

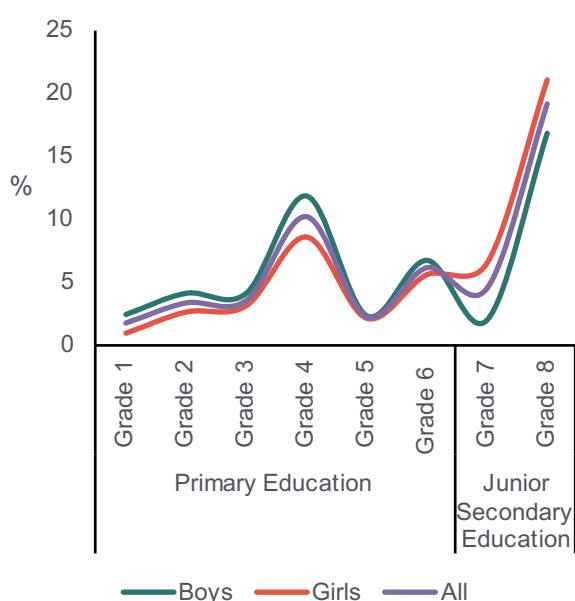


Data source: Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh (2014) Bangladesh Primary Education Annual Sector Performance Report – 2014. Dhaka: Monitoring and Evaluation Division Directorate of Primary Education.

<sup>11</sup> The Directorate of Primary Education reports a higher figure of 65% for 2013.

Many of the children entering primary education will not complete a full cycle. In 2013 the drop-out rate across the primary cycle was 21%, with a peak at Grade 4 (Figure 2.3). Drop-out rates for girls have fallen far more rapidly than those for boys, expanding a reverse gender gap. The upshot of these patterns is that of every 10 students entering Grade 1 only around 7–8 progress to Grade 5, 6–7 transit to Grade 6, and 4–5 complete a secondary cycle (BANBEIS and Bangladesh Ministry of Education, 2015). Across the full secondary cycle, girls have higher drop-out and lower completion rates than boys from Grade 6. Longitudinal evidence has identified a number of risk factors for early drop-out (Sabates et al., 2010). Grade repetition and late entry into primary school figure prominently. Poverty, low levels of parental education and time spent on household chores are all associated with early drop-out.

**Figure 4. Many children start school but do not complete a full primary cycle: drop-out rates by grade and gender, 2015**



Data source: BANBEIS and Bangladesh Ministry of Education (2015) *Bangladesh Education Statistics – 2015*. Dhaka: Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS).

Drop-out patterns have an important bearing on the link between education and work. As we show in Section 3, from the age of 10 in the case of boys and 11 for girls, children in urban slums face elevated risks of a premature transition from school to work. The ability of children to secure wages outside the home increases beyond these thresholds, as do the associated opportunity costs of keeping children in school. With a combination of a one-year delay in entry to school and repetition of an early grade, children would reach the age of 10–11 at Grade 3–4 well before completing a full primary cycle. Given

that net intake data for Grade 1 (children attending at the stipulated age of six) from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) indicates that only around one third of children are attending at the right age-for-grade, delayed entry to school is a risk factor for working children (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF Bangladesh, 2014).

Gaps between reported enrolment and the school attendance levels recorded in surveys are indicative of high drop-out rates. School enrolment figures in Bangladesh are derived from administrative reporting by schools and education authorities. They are notoriously unreliable, in part because school funding is linked to enrolment. Education authorities have acknowledged a strong bias towards overestimation of enrolment and underestimation of over-age children (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF Bangladesh, 2014). Survey evidence on school attendance by primary school age children paints a less encouraging picture. Figure 5 compares national administrative data on school enrolment with data from the 2014 Demographic and Health Survey. It is worth noting that a 2012/2013 MICS survey reported even lower levels of net attendance, at just 71%. School participation falls sharply at secondary school level, albeit with a narrower gap between enrolment and attendance.

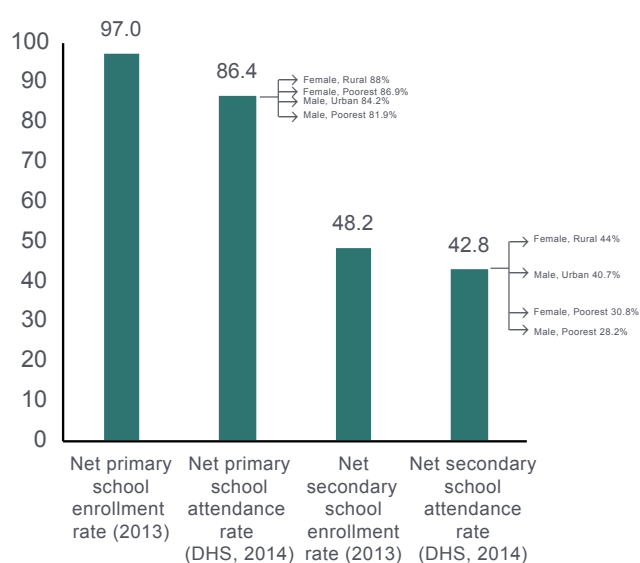
### 2.1.3 Social disparities limit school participation

The risk of being out of school is not equally distributed across social groups – and Bangladesh has some distinctive patterns, as illustrated in Figure 5. As in other countries, being born into a poor household is a major risk factor. Net attendance rates for the poorest 20% were 84.4% in 2013 compared to 89.4% for the middle wealth quintile (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF Bangladesh, 2014). In marked contrast to the pattern in other low-income countries, school participation in Bangladesh is not associated with an urban advantage – and indicators for boys lag behind those for girls. Data from the 2014 Demographic Health Survey highlights the precarious position of urban boys and, more broadly, boys from the poorest homes (NIPORT et al., 2016). There are some significant differences across national divisions, with Sylhet, Chittagong and Dhaka exhibiting lower levels of attendance and enrolment than divisions in the west of the country (World Bank, 2013; UNESCO World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE) – Data on Bangladesh, 2014). The ‘gender advantage’ in attendance enjoyed by girls in primary education is more limited for secondary attendance, with the poorest boys and girls falling far behind.

While precise figures are difficult to estimate, probably around 5.6 million children aged 6–13 are out of school. Some of these children will be late entrants (UNICEF, 2014). There is a small minority who will never enrol. However, the majority will have enrolled and dropped out before making the transition to junior secondary school.

Government strategies recognise the need to extend the reach of the primary school system. The ROSC project, which is supported by the World Bank, explicitly targets hard-to-reach children in 148 remote and disadvantaged upazilas, providing a combination of student grants, books and teacher support. An estimated 690,000 children have reportedly been reached through contacts with learning centres (Al-Zayed, 2016).<sup>12</sup> However, student retention in these centres remains problematic and the project has been introduced only on an initial pilot basis in urban slum areas.

**Figure 5. Attendance lags behind enrolment, with marked inequalities: enrolment and attendance rates, selected groups in 2013**



Data source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2013; Demographic Health Survey, 2014.

Children living in urban slums figure with some prominence in Bangladesh's out-of-school population. On average, these children participate far less in education than their non-slum urban counterparts and children in rural areas. Gross and net attendance rates for children aged 6–10 are well below the national average (Table 1). Research by the World Bank based on the 2011 Urban Slum Survey and the 2010 Household Income and Expenditure Survey found high rates of enrolment (in the range of 80–90%) for slum dwellers at 8–9 years old, with far lower rates (in the range 50–60%) at 6–7 years old – an indicator for late enrolment. However, enrolment rates fell steeply from the age of nine to just 60% by the age of 11. Within this picture of overall disadvantage, there are marked differences between the poor and the 'non-poor' living in slum areas.

**Table 1. Primary gross and net attendance rates: slums versus the urban average, 2011**

	Gross attendance rate	Net attendance rate
Slum	91	62
Boys	86	59
Girls	96	66
Urban average	102	77

Data source: Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (2014) Bangladesh Primary Education Annual Sector Performance Report – 2014. Dhaka: Monitoring and Evaluation Division Directorate of Primary Education.

Supply-side constraints figure prominently for slum populations. There were just 564 government primary schools located in slum areas in 2013 – half of them in Dhaka (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2014). The World Bank survey found there was one primary school near the entrance of a slum for every 121 children, and one secondary school for every 678 children. It should be emphasised that these schools serve both slum and non-slum communities – and that the vast majority of secondary schooling is delivered through private providers.

The experience of slum-dwelling children serves to illustrate some of the wider pressures facing poor households. Although education at the primary level is nominally free, out-of-pocket payments play an important role in education financing. The monthly education expenditure reported for a primary school student in 2011 was Tk 370 (or 3.7 times the primary school stipend) (World Bank, 2013). By far the largest share of spending reported by slum dwellers is directed to private tuition, with non-poor students spending twice as much as poor students. To the extent that private tuition spending reduces the risk of repetition and drop-out, it may have the effect of exacerbating disparities in school participation.

#### 2.1.4 Progress in learning has lagged behind progress in access

Bangladesh's success in expanding access to education stands in stark contrast to the record on learning. Education achievement levels are low and highly unequal. For many children, the marginal learning effect of an additional year in school is close to zero. Social differences in learning outcomes are evident in early grades and continue across the primary and secondary school cycles.

Student-based learning assessments underscore the weak link between school participation and learning. The 2013 National Learning Assessment (NLA) ranks students

<sup>12</sup> ROSC centres are not strictly primary education facilities. Students tend to be older (between 8 and 14 years of age) than regular primary school students, and students and teachers follow a flexible school timing to suit their mutual needs. Students are taught by a single class teacher, until they are ready to appear for the Grade 5 examination and can then join the mainstream secondary schools.

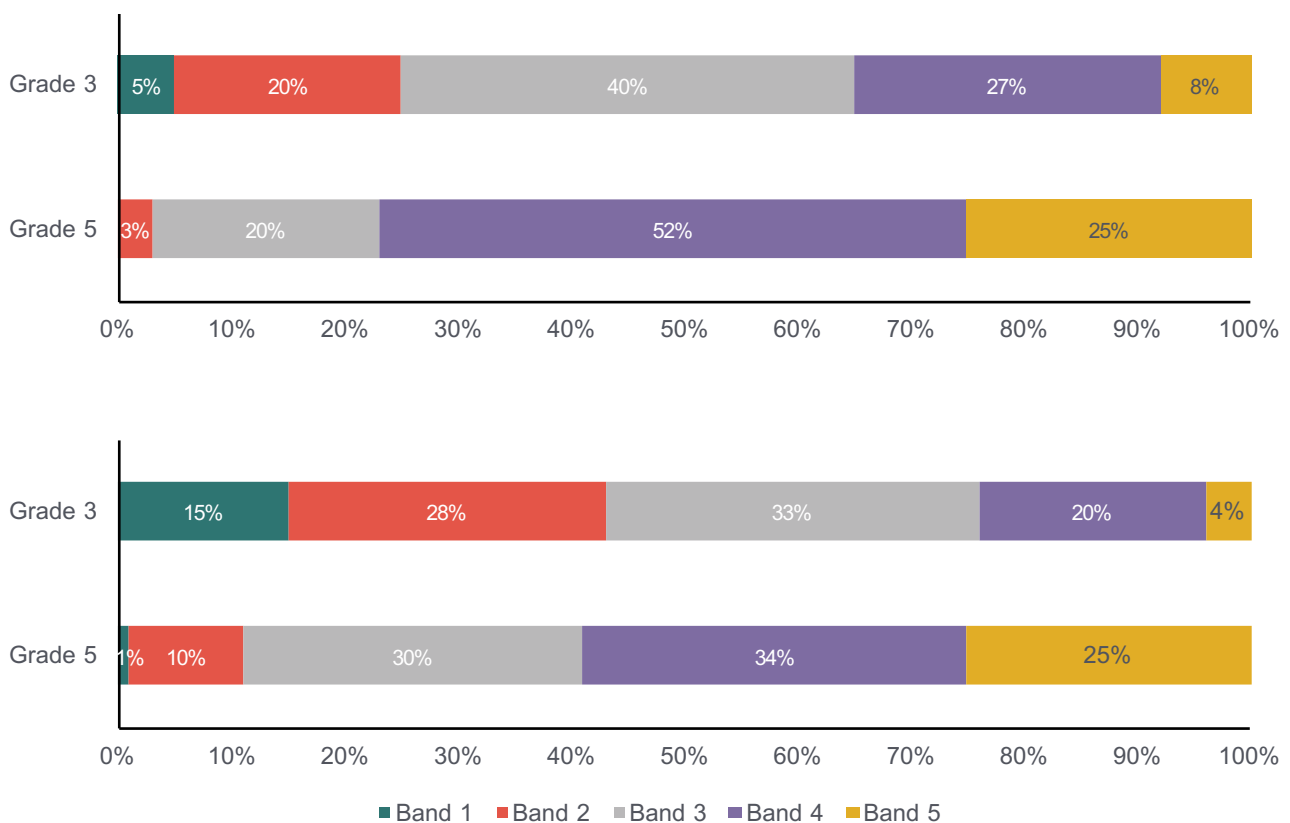
on a competency scale from 1–5 for Bangla and maths at Grades 3 and 5, with each band approximating to the learning level expected for the grade. Around one quarter of Grade 3 students performed at the lowest band for Bangla. For maths the figure rises to 43%. While there is a marked improvement by Grade 5, this may owe less to learning gains than to high drop-out rates among students at the lower end of the learning distribution. In the case of maths, just one quarter of Grade 5 students are learning at the level expected and 40% are learning at Grade 3 or less.

Breaking down these learning achievement outcomes highlights the interaction of school-based and home-based inequalities. The NLA estimated that differences between schools accounted for around three quarters of variations in score and student-related characteristics for one quarter. Government primary schools performed slightly better

than other schools, though these schools play a limited role in serving the most disadvantaged students in slums (MoPME, 2014).

Many children that make the transition from school emerge from school with limited levels of learning. One recent survey used a representative sample of over 3,000 10–17 year-old rural children to assess ability on basic arithmetic. Of children who had completed primary school, just 52% of males and 42% of females could answer three or more of four questions correctly (Asadullah and Chaudhury, 2013). Findings such as these raise serious concerns over the alignment between the quality of education delivered in Bangladesh’s schools and the type of education needed to drive poverty reduction, inclusive economic growth and human development.

**Figures 6a and 6b. Learning deficits remain large: learning achievement at Grades 3 and 5 for Bangla (Figure 6a) and Maths (6b), 2013**



Data source: Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh (2014) Bangladesh Primary Education Annual Sector Performance Report – 2014. Dhaka: Monitoring and Evaluation Division Directorate of Primary Education.

Legend

- Band 1: Students working well below Grade 3 level
- Band 2: Students working below Grade 3 level
- Band 3: Students working at Grade 3 level
- Band 4: Students working above Grade 3 level
- Band 5: Students working at Grade 5 level

### 2.1.5 Bangladesh's twin crisis – some underlying drivers

The underlying sources of the twin crisis in access and learning in Bangladesh have been extensively explored. Underinvestment in school infrastructure is part of the problem. Government funding for education represents 2.1% of gross domestic product (GDP), which is low by international standards (it averages 5% of GDP in sub-Saharan Africa). Reporting from teachers suggests that over two thirds of classrooms in government schools are in 'poor' or 'very poor' conditions.

Many children experience classroom conditions which are not conducive to effective learning. While around 86% of schools report a student-to-teacher ratio below 46 (which is higher than best practice international norms), which includes second-shift schools. Children in Grades 1–2 in these schools attend school for only 520 hours a year on average compared to an international standard of 900–1,000 hours (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2014). Teacher absenteeism is also widespread.

It is the most disadvantaged students who bear the brunt of infrastructure deficits. The poorest quintile of students face the highest student-to-teacher ratios (58). They are also taught by teachers with fewer qualifications. Just one fifth of schools in the poorest upazilas have access to electricity. These infrastructure disadvantages appear to be reinforced by capital spending which, unlike recurrent spending, is skewed towards wealthier upazilas (Steer et al., 2014).

Cutting across all of these issues are concerns over teaching practices. Government teachers at the primary level receive minimal training in approaches to cognitive development. The training they do receive places an emphasis on rote learning and memory recall. For children who have no experience of pre-school, come from homes marked by limited literacy, and enter school with low expectations, these are particularly damaging teaching models.

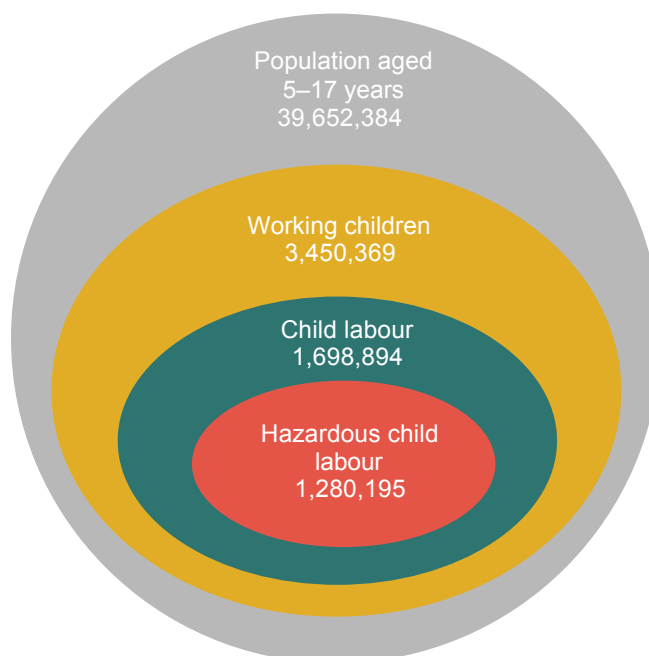
## 2.2 Child work and child labour

Child labour constitutes an obstacle to Bangladesh achieving the 2030 development goals. It harms the well-being of individual children, curtails their opportunities and locks them into a cycle of disadvantage. Children forced out of school and into work either by economic circumstances or failures of the education system are denied the chance to develop the skills and competencies they need to realise their potential, find secure and remunerative employment and break the transmission of poverty across generations. The loss of educational opportunity for these children also represents a source of capability deprivation that limits their choices and freedom (Sen, 1999). Beyond the individual cost, Bangladesh cannot afford to squander the human capital assets of its young population if the country is to secure a demographic dividend.

### 2.2.1 Child labour is widespread, but the numbers depend on definitions

Child work and child labour are widespread in Bangladesh. There are uncertainties about the extent of both practices – and the boundaries are blurred. Following the Convention outlined in Section 1, the 2013 Child Labour Survey (CLS) published by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) differentiates between different forms of child work, and between hazardous and non-hazardous child labour (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Using a representative household survey, the CLS estimated that 3.4 million of Bangladesh's 5–17-year-old children were working, or around 4% of the age group. Just under half of these children – 1.6 million – were working under conditions that constitute child labour, three quarters of them in hazardous labour (Figure 7).

**Figure 7. Estimated child work and child labour in Bangladesh, 2013**



Data source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2013) *Child Labour Survey Bangladesh 2013*. Dhaka: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and International Labour Organization.

These figures have to be interpreted in the light of Bangladesh's distinctive legislation. The Labour Act of 2006 defines 14 as the minimum age of entry to employment – and as the threshold separating a 'child' from an 'adolescent'. Children aged 5–11 are not permitted to enter employment. However, from the age of 12, children are permitted to carry out 'light work' for up to 42 hours (the ILO reference standard is 14 hours), provided it does not interfere with their education or affect their health. Children and adolescents aged 5–17 are prohibited from working more than 42 hours. Employment in excess of this level is defined as 'hazardous labour'. In 2013 the government also identified 38 types of work as hazardous activity constituting 'the worst forms of child

labour'. However, this list is more restrictive than the ILO's list.

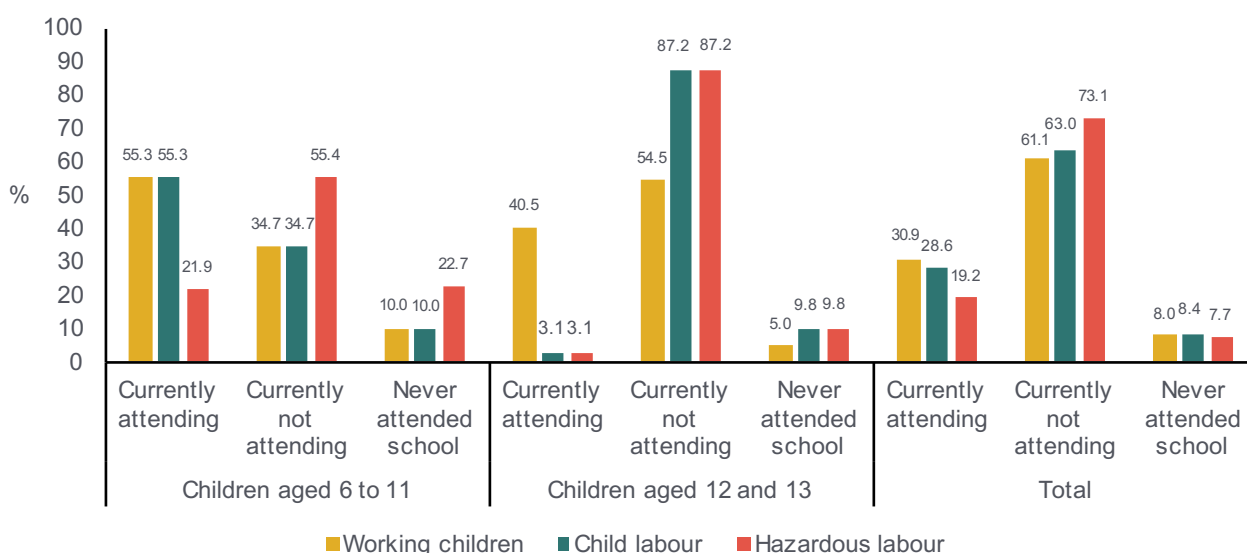
It follows that the CLS survey is not directly comparable in terms of what is being measured to the ILO global survey. Based on data from a 2006 labour force survey and a household survey from the same year, analysis by Understanding Children's Work (UCW) estimated the number of children labouring in activities falling under the 'for elimination' umbrella indicated by ILO Conventions at 5.1 million – including 3 million in the 5–14 age range (UCW, 2011). Measured on a broadly comparable scale, the incidence of child labour in Bangladesh was among the highest in South Asia (Khan and Lyon, 2015).

Child labour in Bangladesh spans a vast range of activities. One of the distinctive characteristics of Bangladesh compared to other low-income countries is the high level of reported child labour in manufacturing. According to the CLS data, manufacturing accounts for around one third of the total (and a slightly higher share of hazardous labour), or slightly more than the share in agriculture and forestry. Services such as retail, wholesale and transport also figure with some prominence, accounting for another 15%. Child domestic labour is not covered in the 2013 survey, but it is a common form of employment. An ILO study put the number involved at over 400,00 in 2006, with children from poor households in rural areas providing the main source of labour supply (ILO, 2006).

Some activities are strongly associated with child labour. Significant numbers of children are employed as 'bidi workers'<sup>13</sup> in the cigarette industry, especially in northern areas, and in the dried fish industry in Chittagong and Kuakata (UCW, 2011). As is evident from even casual observation in urban areas, many children are involved in portering activities, street vending and transport-related activities, ranging from ticketing for buses to rickshaw pulling and cleaning vehicles. More hidden is the employment documented in hazardous sectors such as welding, metallic workshops and machining. The large number of street children in the country eke out an existence hawking, collecting and recycling papers and garbage, polishing shoes and other activities.

The CLS provides a valuable snapshot of the national child labour profile, as indicated by national legislation. That snapshot makes it possible to disaggregate reported child labour by school age group. Survey estimates put the number of child labourers in the primary education age cohort of 6–11 at around 430,000, with another 39,000 aged 12–13, and 1.2 million aged 14–17. Dhaka and Chittagong divisions dominated reported child labour numbers, accounting for over one million of the national total. City corporations accounted for just 250,000 labourers. More boys were reported to be working than girls.

**Figure 8. National surveys point to an overlap between school and work: education status by age of children involved in work, 2013**



Data source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2013) Child Labour Survey Bangladesh 2013. Dhaka: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and International Labour Organization.

13 Bidis are locally-produced cigarettes.



The 2013 survey found that many working children and child labourers were also attending school (Figure 8). An estimated 29% of child labourers were in school, declining to 19% for children involved in hazardous work. The earlier UCW survey also found a large overlap between employment and child labour, with just under 7% of 7–14-year-olds engaged in both activities and 4% just employment (UCW, 2011).<sup>14</sup>

Comparisons with earlier estimates suggests that child labour levels are falling, but this has to be treated with caution. Estimates based on employment survey data for 2005 put the number of children working at 3.6 million for the 7–14 age group (UCW, 2011). Around two thirds of these children were also attending school. The same survey provided an estimate for child labour among the 5–17 age group (comparable to the 2013 CLS) at 5.1 million. However, this used a ‘child labour for elimination’ international benchmark which is only partially aligned with the definition of child labour used by authorities in Bangladesh.

The 2013 CLS provides detailed information on hours of work. On average, working children were found to be working for 39 hours a week. Two thirds of child labourers were working more than 42 hours a week, rising to 82% and 92% respectively for male and female workers in hazardous sectors. Children working in City Corporation areas were working the longest hours (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2013).

## 2.2.2 The national environment

Bangladesh has adopted a wide range of policies on child labour. The overall framework defined in legal terms by the 2006 Labour Act (Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 2006) and its subsequent amendments is underpinned by the National Child Labour Elimination Policy (2012–2016) (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2013), which includes a commitment to eliminate the worst forms of child labour by 2016, and the National Children Policy. The national strategy for eliminating child labour involves a wide range of ministries, programmes and international partners.

While the Government of Bangladesh has made strong commitments to eradicate child labour, national legislation falls short of the standards set in ILO Conventions. The country has not ratified ILO Convention 138 on the minimum working age, though it has ratified Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour.

Important gaps remain in terms of children’s legal protection (UCW, 2011). Beyond the garment sector, efforts to enforce child labour prohibitions are limited. During 2013, the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments filed just six cases of violations with the

Bangladesh Child Labour Court (US Department of Labor, 2013). Fines for violations are set at levels insufficient to have a deterrent effect. Unannounced site visits are infrequent, especially in unregistered establishments. Our survey of child labour in Dhaka’s slums suggests that the garment sector itself may be regulated far less effectively than has been assumed (see Section 3).

Beyond the weak regulatory capacity, policies suffer from a lack of coherence. While the National Education Policy sets clear goals, it does not provide a comprehensive strategy for enforcing compulsory education provision, keeping vulnerable children in school, or attracting child workers and other out-of-school children back into school. More broadly, the country lacks an integrated strategy that combines social protection, education, employment and wider interventions to eliminate child labour.

Our survey calls into question some aspects of the picture to emerge from the CLS of 2013 and other surveys. Five core issues, examined in more detail in Section 3, stand out:

**Scale of the problem:** Based on a large-scale representative study of Dhaka slum settlements with a population in excess of 400,000, we find an incidence of child labour – around 15% – higher than might have been expected on the basis of the CLS.

**The blurred boundary between child work and child labour:** Unlike previous surveys, including those by the CLS and the UCW, we do not find a marked division between child work and child labour, either as defined by ILO standards or by Bangladeshi legislation. The overwhelming bulk of child work in Dhaka’s slums appears to constitute child labour, with a marked skewing towards hazardous labour. This points to a very different pattern of child work in slums in comparison with rural areas.

**Working children in slums are overwhelmingly out-of-school:** Earlier surveys have found a large share of working children combining school with work. By contrast, we find a high level of segmentation – few children are combining work with school. If accurate, this is a finding with important policy implications, since it implies that entry into the world of work implies exit from education.

**There is a steep age gradient with labour market entry** taking off from the age of 10. Partly because of age-ordering, the 2013 CLS finds a low incidence of child labour among children aged 6–11, with a far higher incidence in the 14–17 cohort. Our findings broadly endorse the implied age gradient. However, the Dhaka slum survey finds high levels of entry into the world of work at age 10 for boys and 11 for girls, and by age 14 almost half of children are working.

**There are high levels of employment in the formal garment sector.** Contrary to our expectations, we found

14 Note that the UCW definition of employment is not equivalent to the CLS definition of child labour.



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children reporting high levels of child labour in the formal garment sector. For girls, the sector is the largest employer. However, in the absence of detailed enterprise information these findings have to be treated with caution.

Most child workers in slums exceed the 42 hour working limit marking the threshold under national legislation for child labour: Our slum survey did not reveal a clear distinction between child work and child labour as defined by the 42 hours a week threshold. The average working week reported by children in our sample was 64 hours, rising to 70 hours for the median child worker. Only 15.5% reported working for less than 42 hours a week.

## 2.3 Dhaka's urban slums – the wider environment

Slums provide a highly visible reminder of the inequality that has accompanied Bangladesh's development. Many have grown in close proximity to the enclaves of wealth and prosperity that house Dhaka's wealthier residents. Badda slum, one of the sites covered in our survey, borders two Dhaka's most affluent areas – Gulshan and Baridhara – and is home to a population estimated to be in excess of 100,000. Kamrangir Char, which is located on what is effectively a flood plain of the Buriganga River, is similarly located adjacent to prosperous areas in Dhaka South.

Dhaka is the primary engine of urbanisation in Bangladesh, and one of the world's fastest-growing megacities. In the decade after 2000, the population of Dhaka Metropolitan Area expanded by around five million (Cox, 2012). Around one third of the country's urban population is now concentrated in these areas. In total, there were around 15 million urban inhabitants in Dhaka division in 2012, including up to half-a-million new migrants that arrive each year (Gruebner et al., 2014). The vast majority of these migrants are from rural areas. Much of the expansion of settlements in Dhaka has occurred in slums. In addition to absorbing an inflow of rural populations, there is a high level of mobility across slum areas in the city.

None of the world's other megacities comes close to matching Dhaka's population density. At over 45,000 people per square kilometre, Dhaka has a density level one third greater than Mumbai, which stands second in the megacity population density league table (Cox, 2012). On one analysis of demography, migration and economic trends carried out by McKinsey, Dhaka is projected to become the world's seventh most populous city by 2025. Of considerable relevance in the context of the current study, the same projection suggests that Dhaka could hold

the world's third largest population of children (Dobbs et al., 2011).

Dhaka's slums have grown with the growth of the city's population and the economy. Slum settlements are highly dispersed. There are marked concentrations around areas with significant manufacturing and industrial units in Dhaka North, as well as port transit points, markets and hubs of informal sector activity.

There is no clearly delineated definition of a slum areas in Bangladesh.<sup>15</sup> This has led to widely varying estimates of the size of Dhaka's slum population. According to the 2014 Census of Slum Areas, there were 6,489 slums in Dhaka Division, housing around one million people – or just under half of the national total both by number of slums and slum households. These slums were spread across four city corporations. In 2011, the old DCC was divided into the two separate administrative entities of Dhaka North and Dhaka South, which account for around one quarter of all slums in Bangladesh. The 2014 Slum Census provides estimates for the number of slums and slum populations (Table 2). Measured by population, Dhaka North accounts for, by far, the largest slum population in the entire country. The 2014 census put the figure at just under 500,000, compared to 147,000 in Dhaka South. The third City Corporation, Gazipur, accounts for another 8% of the slums and a population of 185,000 recorded in the 2014 census. Narayanganj, the fourth Corporation, houses a small number of slums.

The real size of Dhaka's slum population is uncertain. Survey-based estimates of the slum population have ranged from around one third to over 60% (Cameron, 2009). The Centre for Urban Studies estimated in 2006 that there were over 4,000 slums in Dhaka, with a baste (slum and squatter settlement) population of 3.6 million – far larger than the estimate in the 2014 Census (Islam et al., 2006). These differences reflect well-known difficulties in estimating slum populations. Census estimates often exclude unregistered dwellings and slum dwellers, and the dividing line between formal and informal settlements is often blurred (Lucci and Bhatkal, 2014). Aerial surveillance systems can also under-represent slum households, especially in areas marked by high population densities on sloping areas (Lucci and Bhatkal, 2014).

While the term 'slum' captures some shared characteristics, it also obscures important differences. Slum dwellers in Dhaka are overwhelmingly poor, but there are marked differences in levels of deprivation within and across slums (Angeles et al., 2009). These differences are reflected in occupational structures, income, assets, the quality of shelter and whether or not slum dwellers own or rent their properties (Cameron, 2010; 2011). As we show

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15 The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics Census surveys identifies six characteristics of a slum area: small dwellings built of cheap materials, high population density, a concentration on government and semi-government land, inadequate water and sanitation, inadequate lighting and road facilities, low socioeconomic status (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2014).

below, inequalities within the slum-dwelling community have significant implications for patterns of children's work and education.

Monetary poverty is a pervasive feature of slum life. Poverty in Dhaka has been estimated at 15% for extreme food poverty and 31% for a higher threshold (Ahmed et al., 2010). More detailed poverty mapping reports poverty levels in excess of 55% for the poorest 10% of upazilas in Dhaka (Ahmed et al., 2010: 7). While poverty assessments do not allow for reliable estimates of poverty levels and trends for slums, they indicate poverty levels in Dhaka stagnated over the period 2005-2010 despite the marked national decline. This represented a reversal of the pattern observed between 2000 and 2005 (Jolliffe et al., 2013). Migration from the poorer and more rural Barisal and Rajshahi divisions to the urban Dhaka division could have been a contributory factor.

Social conditions in Dhaka's slums reflect the unplanned nature of the urbanisation process. Surveys carried out by the CUS and others provide valuable snapshots of slum life. Population density levels are exceptionally high: some informal settlements have densities in excess of 4,000 people for every acre, which translates into the equivalent of more than 1 million per kilometre (Cox, 2012). Over 90% of dwellings in slums comprise just one room less than 14 square metres in size (Ahmed, 2014). Many slums are located in low-lying areas near rivers that are prone to flooding (Mohit, 2012).

Even the most basic infrastructure is often lacking. Most slum dwellers have access to municipal water supplies through stand-pipes. However, sanitation and drainage is limited. The CUS survey found that only 10% of slums had adequate drainage and that one third of slum dwellers lacked access to safe sanitation. Larger slums have greatly outgrown the minimal sanitation infrastructure that is available. Only 30% of the population in slums with over 500 people covered in the CUS survey had access to safe sanitation.<sup>16</sup> Another survey of Karail, among the largest slums in Dhaka, found around half of households had access to safe sanitation (Islam et al., 2015).

Limited access to safe sanitation and poor drainage expose slum-dwelling populations to acute health risks. Flooding and water-logging are frequent occurrences. Coupled with poverty and high levels of population density, this creates fertile conditions for the transmission of communicable diseases among children, while the limited provision of quality public health services hampers effective treatment and prevention. Poor nutrition is both a cause and consequence of elevated health risks. One survey in Kamrangir Char slum, conducted in 2011, found that 4% of children reporting to health clinics showed signs of severe acute malnutrition and 23% severe chronic malnutrition. Prevalence was highest among children aged 13–24 months.

**Table 2. Dhaka City Corporation slum areas and population**

Dhaka Division	Number of slums	Number of households living in the slums	Percentage of the total number of households living in slums in urban areas of Bangladesh	Total number of slum dwellers	Percentage of the total slum population in Bangladesh
Dhaka North City Corporation	1,644	135,061	22.8	496,669	22.3
Dhaka South City Corporation	1,755	40,015	6.7	147,066	6.6
Gazipur City Corporation	1,286	56,597	9.5	185,867	8.3
Narayangonj City Corporation	81	10,804	1.8	40,485	1.8
Total in Dhaka Division	6,489	292,780	49.4	1,061,699	47.7
Total in Bangladesh urban areas	13,938	592,998	100.0	2,227,754	100.0

*Data source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2015) Preliminary Report on Census of Slum Areas and Floating Population 2014. Dhaka: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics*

<sup>16</sup> Defined in this case as access to sealed latrines or latrines linked to sewers or septic tanks.

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Slum dwellers face some distinctive patterns of vulnerability. While most slums are located on government-owned or private land, informal landlords often collect rent and can charge exorbitant fees for basic services. What has been termed the ‘informal structure of extortion and crime’ is widespread. Security of tenure is limited, with almost 80% of slum dwellers paying rent (Islam et al., 2006). Even where poor households enjoy legal ownership, their ability to enforce claims and entitlements is limited (Shafi and Payne, 2007). The resulting insecurity exposes slum dwellers to the constant threat of eviction and deters investment by slum dwellers.

Children living in slums across Bangladesh face restricted opportunities for education – and those in Dhaka’s slums are no exception. The Directorate for

Primary Education puts the net school attendance rates for children aged 6–10 in slums at 62% (Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 2014). Government provision is limited. There are fewer than 300 government primary schools in Dhaka’s slums. While the situation may have improved since 2007, when it was estimated only around one quarter of slums had a government school (Baker, 2007), provision remains limited. Non-governmental organisations have partially filled the resulting gap, along with a wide range of private and religious providers. The patchwork of providers is reflected in uneven levels of provision: one survey of four slums in 2008 found enrolment rates ranging from 56% to 83% (Cameron, 2009).

# 3. Child labour and education in Dhaka's slums

The Child Work and Education Survey (CWES) was designed to provide a window into the world of work and school as experienced by children living in Dhaka's slums. It was developed and implemented by BRAC Institute of Educational Development, BRAC University (BIED, BRACU) and the Overseas Development Institute.

The survey is not representative for slums in Dhaka, and we caution against drawing generalised conclusions for other urban slum areas. Interactions between education and children's work are shaped by the social characteristics of slum populations and local labour market conditions. However, our study combines a large-scale survey of children aged 6–14, with insights from detailed focus group discussions. The survey covers some of the most populous and fastest-growing slum settlements in Bangladesh and, by extension, the world – and the results highlight a number of concerns over the relationship between urbanisation, education and child labour.

In this section we outline the methodology used in the survey, summarise the main findings and present the results of an econometric study exploring the social characteristics of children who are working rather than attending school.

## 3.1 The Child Work and Education Survey (CWES)

The Dhaka City Corporation CWES is a unique exercise. To the best of our knowledge, it is the largest survey of its type carried out in Dhaka – or any other urban area in Bangladesh. The survey was designed to provide a window on the world of child work and education among children living in some of Dhaka's largest and fastest-growing slum communities. The CWES was implemented in eight Thanas spread across the City Corporation areas of Dhaka North and Dhaka South. Within these areas we selected Thanas and sub-Thana enumeration areas on the basis of a set of deprivation indicators associated with slums. In the absence of detailed census data, we carried out our own household listing, collecting data on over 4,000 households. From this, we identified 2,700 households with children aged 6–14 and conducted a questionnaire-based survey with them and their parents. Part of the value of the survey is that it provides a child's-eye view of the relationship between school and work on the basis of randomised and representative sampling (Box 1).

### Box 1. The CWES in context

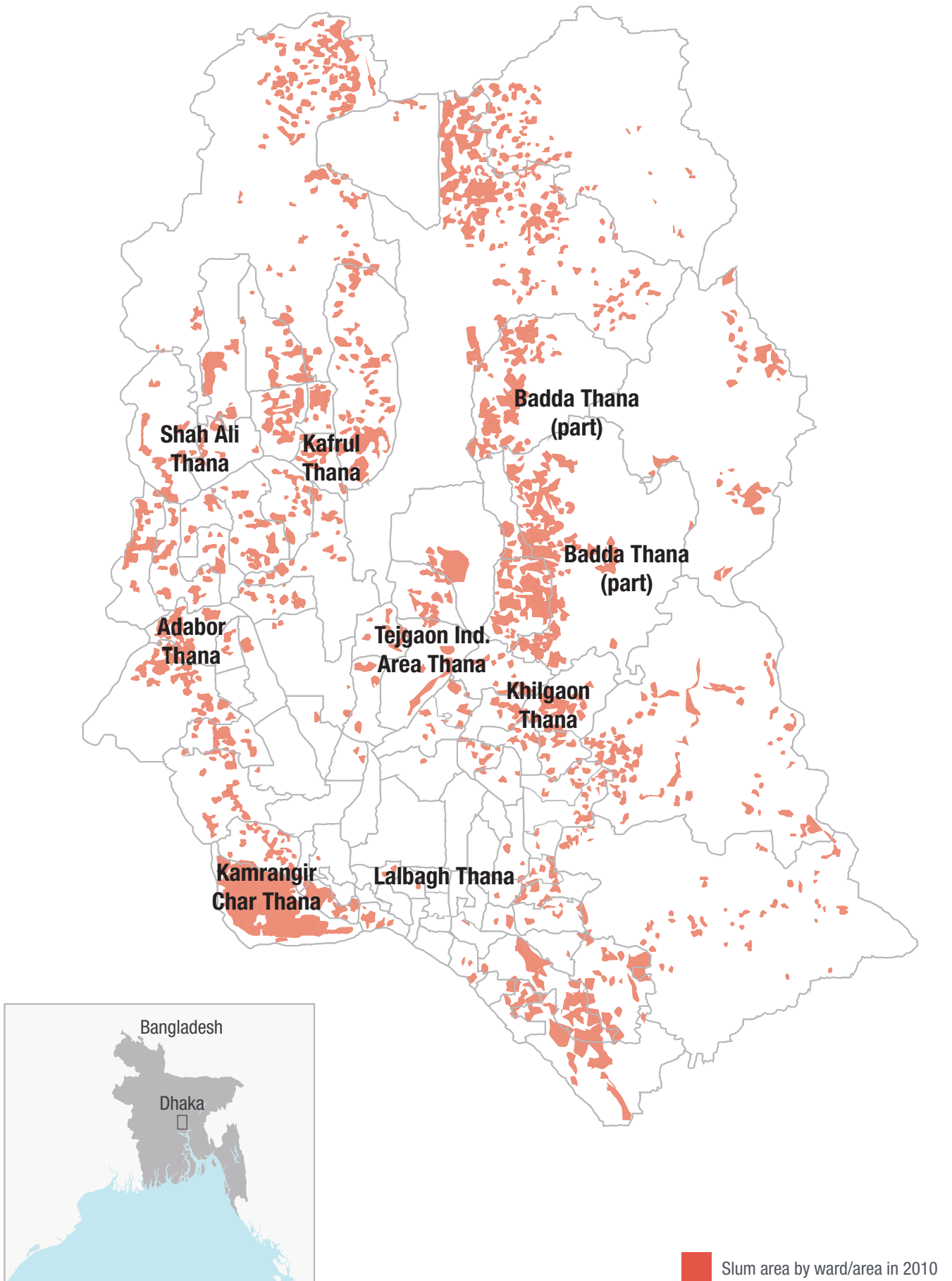
Other surveys have reviewed the extent of child work and its interaction with education from different and more partial perspectives. Our survey covers fewer households in Dhaka than the nationally representative 2013 Child Labour Survey and is less representative of Dhaka Division as a whole. However, the 2013 exercise makes no attempt to create representative samples for slums.<sup>a</sup> Another Urban Slum Survey carried out by the World Bank used a stratified two-stage random sampling methodology to produce a representative sample of slums, drawing on a 2005 database. This exercise covered 2,464 households across 50 slums in Bangladesh, with 30 located in Dhaka.<sup>b</sup> The CWES covers a larger number of households for eight slums just in DCC areas based on 2015 listings. Apart from responding better to the marked increase in slum population size, our sampling is designed to capture the extent and character of child work.

*a The 2013 Survey covers 138 non-rural Primary Sampling Units/Enumeration Areas in Dhaka, 65 of them in City Corporation areas.*

*b For purposes of comparison, an Urban Slum Survey conducted by the World Bank draws on a 2005 database developed by the Centre for Urban Studies. It includes 2,464 slum households drawn from 30 slums in Dhaka, 10 slums in Chittagong and 5 slums in both Khulna and Rangpur. Our survey covers a larger group of households in a smaller number of slums.*

17 Technical advice on the survey was provided by UCW, along with detailed comments of the design of the questionnaire, interpretation of results and the econometric exercise summarised in this report.

Figure 9. Thana survey locations



The methodology deployed for the survey is explained in detail in Annex 1. Briefly summarised, the design and implementation phase involved four steps:

**Step 1: Thana selection.** Dhaka City Corporation area spans 28 Thanas. Our concern was to identify a spread of survey sites in Dhaka North and Dhaka South. We selected Thanas through a partial ordering process by ranking each Thana on the basis of proxy slum indicator criteria, including population density, type of shelter, access to safe sanitation, illiteracy and tenure security. Data was drawn from the 2011 Population and Housing Census. We identified eight Thanas as being among the worst performing on at least three of the five criteria. Five of these Thanas were in Dhaka North and three in Dhaka South (Figure 9). Annex 1 includes detailed data on the ranking of Thanas by our selection criteria.

**Step 2: Survey site selection.** We applied another layer of selection criteria for the eight Thanas aimed at identifying wards, units, parts and sub-parts containing slum locations for survey purposes. Instead of ranking units, we introduced four cut-off thresholds (again taking into consideration budget and time availability) as follows:

- Over half of households living in poor housing
- Over half of households with either poor or no sanitation
- Over half of households renting
- Illiteracy rates in excess of 25%

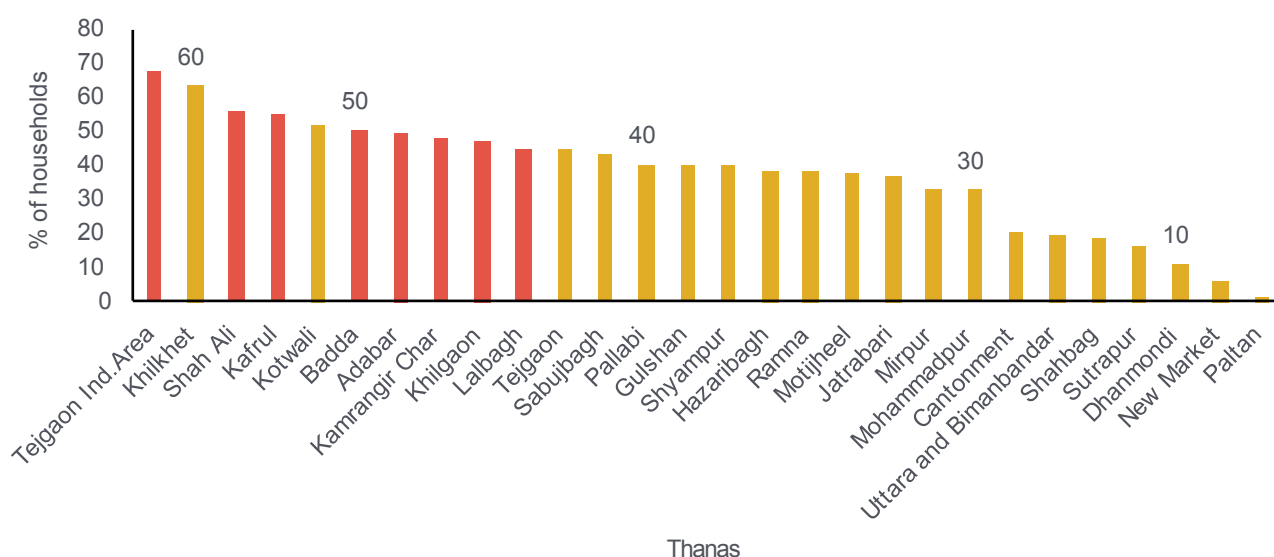
Two additional criteria were applied. First, for sampling purposes we introduced a threshold requirement that at least 150 households be present. Second, because our specific concern was to understand the interaction between child labour and educational disadvantage, we introduced a requirement that at least 30% of children aged 6–14 in

the administrative units to be not attending school. This led to the identification of 38 administrative units across the eight Thanas that met all the criteria. Conditions within these units varied, reflecting the differences between slum locations across Dhaka. Figures 10 and 11 illustrate the diversity of the Thana slum environments for two of our selection criteria – unsafe sanitation and reported adult illiteracy – which have a marked bearing on education prospects for children.

**Step 3: Sample selection.** Having identified potential locations for the survey we proceeded to establish a representative sample size – and to distribute the sample across our 38 administrative units. Our selected Thana administrative units comprised 115,000 households, or just over half-a-million members. We applied standard sampling and Probability Proportional to Sample Size and segmentation procedure. This guaranteed that each individual (child aged 6–14) in the population of children in the 38 domains selected had the same probability of being sampled. For each unit, the population aged 6–14 was clustered into segments of 100 children. These clusters formed our Primary Sampling Units. We listed 150 households in 30 clusters, creating a total of 4,500 listed households for which we collected data on household size, composition, gender, education, the number and gender of children aged 6–14 and whether they were engaged in any job. We computed the sample size for the number of children to be interviewed on a randomised basis at 2,700 (Annex 1).

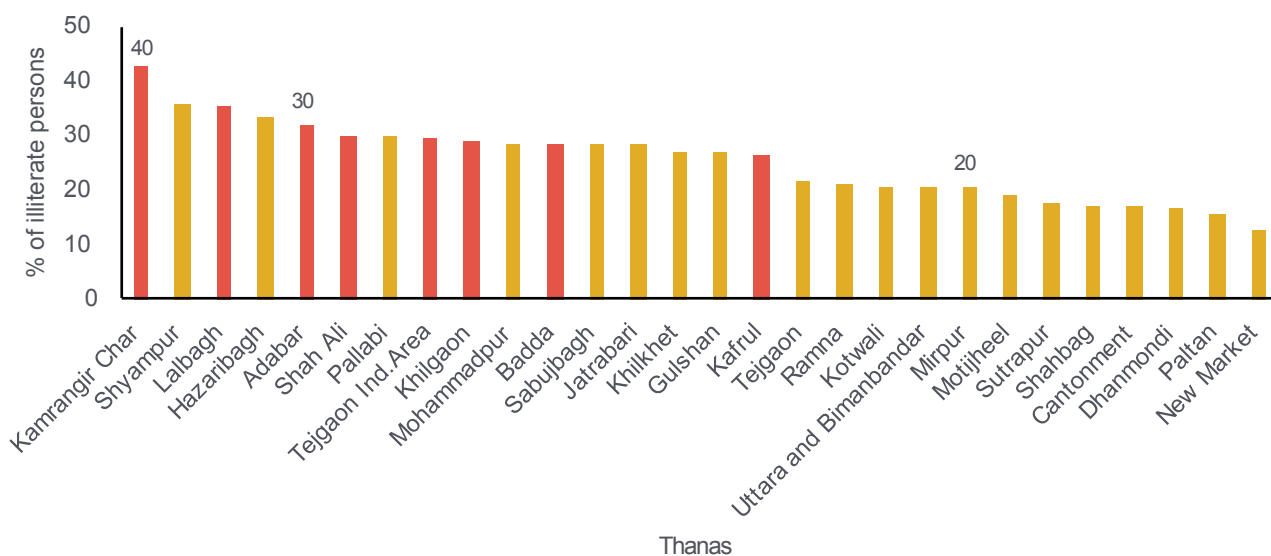
**Step 4: Survey implementation:** We developed a household listing from which the sample of 2,700 children identified in Stage 3 could be selected. These children are distributed across 23 parts and sub-parts in the 38 administrative units (Table 3).

**Figure 10. Share of population lacking access to safe sanitation in Bangladesh's Thanas**





**Figure 11. Adult illiteracy in Bangladesh's Thanas**



Note for figures 10 and 11: Thanas in red are those included in the survey.

Source of data for figures 10 and 11: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2011 Population and Housing Census.

**Table 3. Sample selection: 23 parts and sub-parts in 38 administrative units**

Thana	Ward/Union	Part	Sub-part	Total No. of segments for each domain
Adabor Thana	Ward No-43 Total	Comfort Housing Society		1
	Ward No-43 Total	Nabinagar Housing		1
	Ward No-43 Total	Shyamoly Housing Society		1
Badda Thana	Badda Union Total	Badda	Dakshin Ananda Nagar	1
	Bhatara Union Total	Bhatara	Nayanagar	1
	Satarkul Union Total	Sutibhola (Part-1)	Padaridia Purba	1
Kafrul Thana	Ward No-04 Total	Baishtek		1
	Ward No-15 (Part) Total	Dhamalkot		1
	Ward No-15 (Part) Total	Lalashari		2
	Ward No-16 Total	Dakshin Ibrahimpur		2
Kamrangir Char Thana	Sultanganj Union Total	Hashlai		1
Khilgaon Thana	Ward No-26 (Part) Total	Meradia(Part-1)		3
	Ward No-26 (Part) Total	Meradia(Part-2)		2
	Dakshingaoon (Part) Union Total	Nandi Para(Part)	Paschim Nandi Para	1
Lalbagh Thana	Ward No-91 Total	Hazrat Nagae		1
	Ward No-92 Total	Islamnagar		1
	Ward No-92 Total	East Baragram		1
	Ward No-92 Total	Mominbagh		2
Shah Ali Thana	Ward No-08 Total	Mirpur Sec-1 (Block-H)		1
	Ward No-08 Total	Uttar Bishil-Kha		1
Tejgaon Ind. Area Thana	Ward No-37 Total	Begunbari		2
	Ward No-37 Total	D.Paschim Tejgaon Ind.Elaka		1
	Ward No-37 Total	Kuni Para		1

The selected children constituted the respondents to a detailed survey questionnaire developed with technical advice from Understanding Children's Work and BRAC Institute of Educational Development, BRAC University (BIED, BRACU). At the time our survey was conducted there was no updated household census for slums in the DCC area. The 2014 Census of Slums was not specified to create representative population samples for the 6–14 age group. In the absence of detailed census information, we created our own household listing for 4,500 households with 18,522 household members. The survey was conducted over a six-week period between November 2015 and January 2016. We recruited and trained 35 Field Research Assistants (FRAs) or enumerators to carry out the survey. The FRAs operated in teams of two or three members, spending on average three days in a segment for household listing and 15–20 days for interviews. Enumerator training, robustness checks and survey supervision details are provided in Annex 1.

The limitations of the survey methodology have to be acknowledged. Our survey was restricted to children living in the defined enumeration areas. For that reason, it does not capture work carried out by children who are living-in as domestic workers. Given that the vast majority of children working in this sector are young girls, it is probable that we underestimate both the incidence of child work in general and the incidence of female child work in particular. Other aspects of our survey design may also obscure important gender effects. Because we

focus on employment outside the home, we do not capture work carried out by children within the household on domestic chores, sibling care and other unpaid activity. This is another area in which the work burden falls disproportionately on young girls (UCW, 2011). Finally, several studies have documented large numbers of children living on the streets of Dhaka (INCIDIN Bangladesh, 2006; FREPD, 2003). While the numbers are uncertain, many – perhaps a majority – of these children will be working, often in hazardous activities. Once again, our residency requirement means these children are not covered.

Other limitations are inherent in the type of exercise undertaken through the survey. Establishing the age of children was difficult because only a minority of children in the slums we covered (around 7.8%) have formal birth registration. We addressed this problem by training enumerators to work with children and their parents in establishing age through critical timelines on 'events calendars'. In our survey we also seek to capture the perceptions and experiences of children themselves. Inevitably, perception and subjective experience is difficult to calibrate against a common benchmark. For example, children may experience the same circumstances – such as risk at work or the attitude of a teacher at school – in very different ways. In developing our survey, we made a point of framing questions around the categories used by children themselves and reporting on their responses through the same categories.

## **Box 2. Dhaka City Corporation – 'North versus South'**

In 2011, the Government of Bangladesh amended the Local Government City Act to divide Dhaka City Corporation into Dhaka South and Dhaka North. While the slums selected for our survey have many features in common with respect to population density, housing quality and social deprivation, there is a partial North–South divide.

Dhaka South broadly corresponds to the administrative centre of Old Dhaka. Informal settlements are often better established than in Dhaka North. In part, this is because of the pre-existing population density and size of the slums. The CUS 2006 survey identified Kamrangir Char, located on the Buriganga River south of the University of Dhaka, as one of Dhaka's largest slums. The settlement grew rapidly during the 1990s with the expansion of the ready-made garment sector and a vibrant informal economy. Immediately adjacent to Kamrangir Char, Lalbagh Thana includes a dynamic small-scale informal sector working in metals, embroidery products and bicycle parts, along with an established ready-made garment sector.

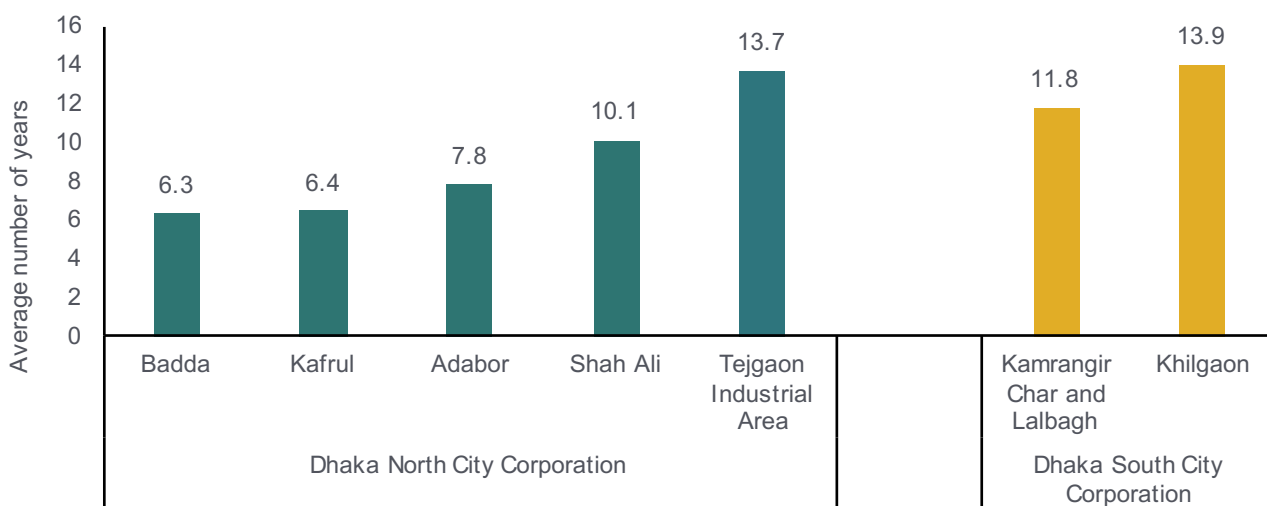
Dhaka North is in many respects the slum growth story of the past 20 years. The main commercial areas such as Mahakhali, Gulshan, Kawrbazar and Uttara have grown rapidly, driven by the expansion of the ready-made garment industry and garment-buying houses, a significant hotel and restaurant trade, banking and informal sector workshops. The Tejgaon Industrial Area, one of our survey sites, houses large-scale formal sector industries in areas ranging from garments to pharmaceuticals, foodstuffs, ceramics and chemicals, and has attracted a large migrant workforce. Expansion has in turn created an expanding informal economy and retail sector. Kafrul Thana houses a large informal handicraft sector, including embroidery, along with established ready-made garment producers.

### 3.1.1 The social panorama of slums – differences matter

The term ‘slums’ conjures up an image of uniform deprivation. That image can be misleading. Slum dwellers are uniformly deprived relative to some social groups. However, in Bangladesh as in other countries, there are marked differences between and within slums (Cameron, 2010; 2011). These differences are strongly associated with education opportunities and with the risk of premature entry into the world of work.

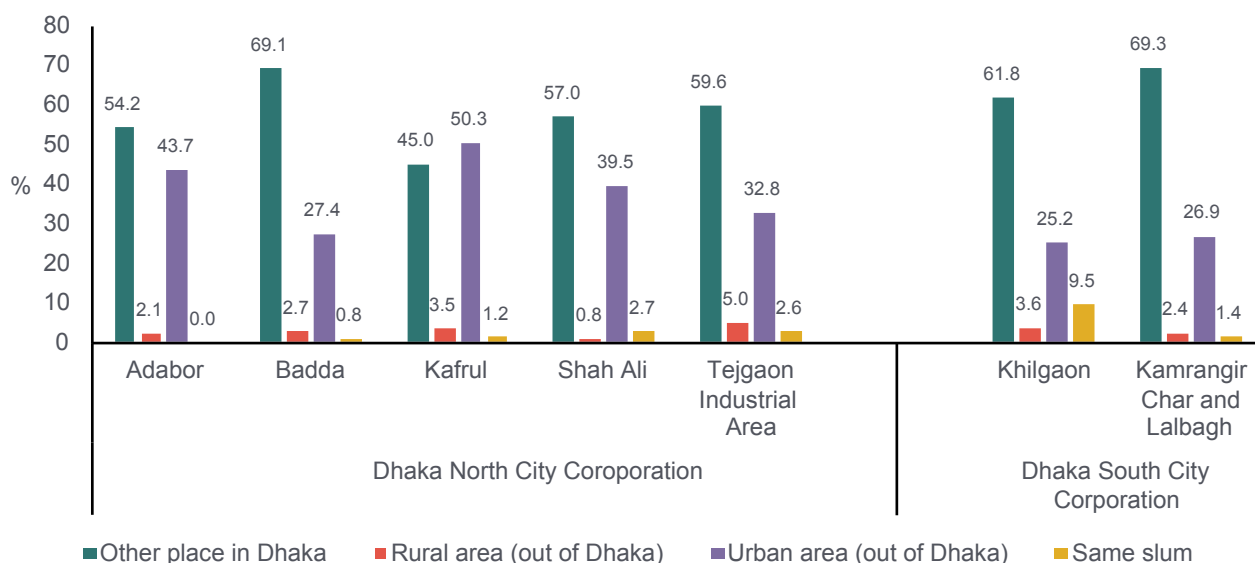
The slum areas covered in our surveys reflect the wider national picture. With the exception of Tejgaon, slums in Dhaka South have more settled habitation patterns than those in Dhaka North, reflecting the rapid growth of the latter (Box 2). The average period of residency reported by households ranged from six years in Badda to 14 years in Khilgaon (Figure 12). Patterns of migration also vary. The majority of households included in our listing moved to their current location from a prior settlement in Dhaka. Around one third came from urban areas outside Dhaka (Figure 13). Once again there were marked differences in patterns of migration across slum areas (see Annexes for details on specific slums).

**Figure 12. Slum residency varies: average number of years the child’s household has lived in the slum**



Note: Thanas in red are those included in the survey.

**Figure 13. Slums have different patterns of migration: location from which the household moved prior to residency**



The areas covered in our slum survey – The Haslai slum in Kamrangir Char is dominated by housing structures comprising tin and bamboo shelters. Because Kamrangir Char is a port area for goods entering Dhaka South, slum residents are actively engaged in loading and unloading, working as porters (*mutegiri*), street vending for fruit, vegetables and cooked food, with some also working in garment factories. In the case of Kilgaon, there are no garment factories located in the immediate vicinity of the six areas covered. Livelihoods are dominated by activities such as rickshaw pulling, hawking, bus assistant, and domestic work.

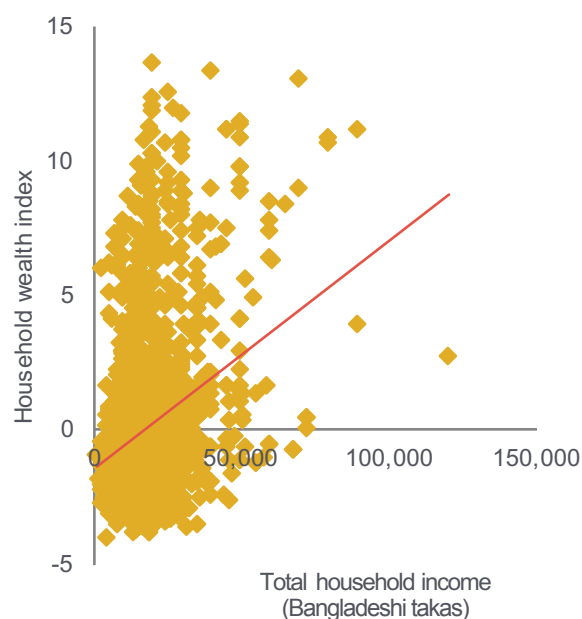
Garments figure more prominently in the livelihood patterns of slums in Dhaka North. Our slum survey sites in Kafrul and Shah Ali are adjacent to Mirpur, which is a centre for small-, medium- and large-scale garment factories. Most of the residents in the three slum sites covered in Tejgaon Industrial Area also report working in the garment factories around the slum sites. Residents in one of these slums – Dakshin-Paschim – have constructed homes by hanging polythene sheets from bamboo. Access to clean water is limited and sanitation non-existent. In the neighbouring Kunipara slum, most shelters are constructed from corrugated tin.

Residents in all of the survey areas face hazards common to slum residents across Bangladesh. The Badda slum areas have a major drainage channel running through them and one – Dakshin Ananda – has a mini-lake within the slum. Even light rain causes flooding. Slums in Adabor are located close to, but on the wrong side of, a major embankment protection system. The two slum sites in Kafrul are located close to a lake and subject to constant water-logging.

Household wealth and income levels vary across our households, as does the interaction between the two. All slum dwellers are deprived on some indicators of well-being, but some are more deprived than others. Comparisons between household income and wealth are instructive. Income is an important indicator of deprivation – and it was striking that children in our survey define their disadvantage principally in terms of monetary poverty. However, slum dwellers also define wealth and well-being in broader terms to encompass shelter, access to services, assets and security.

We created a wealth index to explore the differences and overlaps. Using a Principal Components Analysis, we ranked households by access to sanitation, housing structure, population density and asset ownership. We then compared the distribution of asset-based wealth to income distribution. Unsurprisingly, inequality levels in the slums are less marked than they are for the country as a whole. In part, this is because of how children’s wages can reduce income inequality. However, as illustrated in Figure 14, wealth is more unequally distributed than income in the slums covered in our survey. This is reflected in a higher Gini coefficient for wealth (0.30) across our sample than for income (0.27) (Annex 2). Wealth disparities may be significant in terms of participation in education. Households with more assets may be better able to withstand exogenous shocks – for example, a health episode or losses of earnings – by drawing down resources, rather than withdrawing children from school.

**Figure 14. Wealth and income disparities in Dhaka’s slums**



### 3.2 Child labour – incidence, profile and characteristics

Are children living in slum areas working, in school, combining school with work, or out-of-school and not in employment? Our survey addresses these questions by drawing on respondent data from the 4,500 household listing. As part of the listing exercise, we ask parents to report on children’s current employment and education status. This section provides a summary of the findings (the Annexes provide additional data, including a breakdown by location).

Before presenting the results, a word on terminology is in order. Our definition of ‘work’ covers paid employment outside the home and employment in a family business, whether paid or unpaid. It does not include household chores. This leads to an understatement of overall work levels, especially for young girls.

The results of the survey are striking (Figure 15). Across the 6–14 age group, just over two thirds are attending school. Another 16% are neither working nor in school. Working children account for 15% of the survey responses. Almost all these children are ‘only working’ rather than combining work with school. Boys are more likely than girls to be working, and correspondingly less likely to be in school. The fact that just under one third of the primary and lower secondary age cohort in a large sample survey of Dhaka’s slums is either working or out-of-school is clearly a cause for concern.

Disaggregating the age data provides insights into the relationship between work and school. Consistent with the picture presented by wider national surveys, there is a marked age gradient for children in work. Relatively few children enter paid work outside the home before the age of nine. Correspondingly, most children in the primary school age group are either attending school or

out-of-school and not in work. For children aged 11–14, or junior secondary school age, 30% are reported as only working, with boys entering labour markets in larger numbers. One third of boys and just over a quarter of girls in our sample are reported as only working (Table 4).

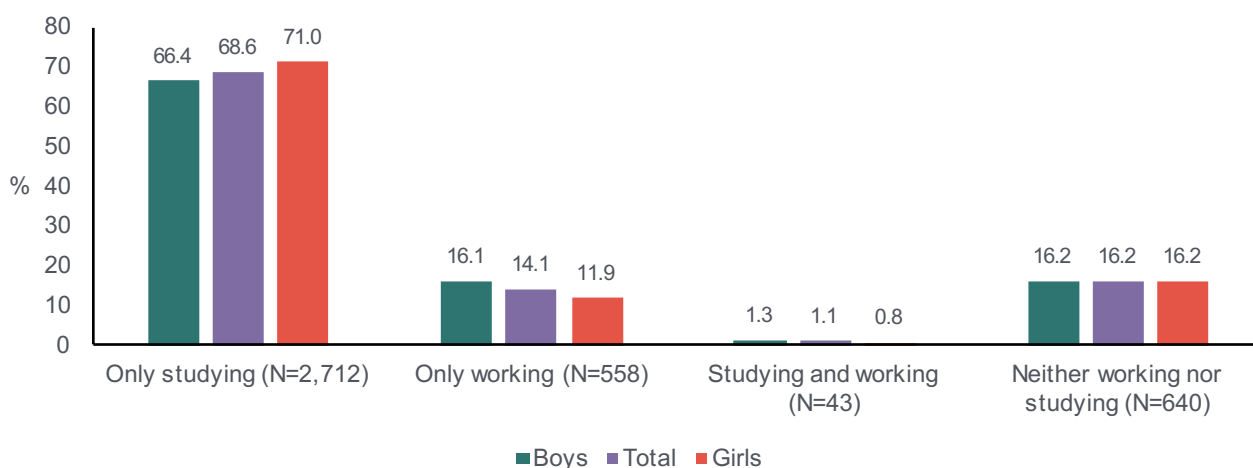
**Table 4. Education and employment status by age cohort: children aged 6–10 and 11–14**

	Children aged 6–10 (%)		Children aged 11–14 (%)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Only studying	75.8	80.9	52.8	56.6
Only working	3.9	1.7	33.7	26.8
Studying and working	0.4	0.3	2.6	1.6
Doing nothing	19.8	17.1	10.8	15.0

This does not imply that primary school age children are not working. Breaking down age cohorts into discrete years points to a marked increase in children working during the upper-primary school years. Our household data points to 9% of 10-year-olds and 15% of 11-year-olds who are only working. By the age of 14 almost half the children covered in our survey were in this category (Figure 16).

The fact that the incidence of working children rises from the age of 10 should not be interpreted as evidence that slum children complete primary school. Education in slums is marked by late entry. One third of six-year-olds and a quarter of seven-year-olds in our sample were reported as being out-of-school, implying that many start school at the age of eight or nine. Repetition is also common. The upshot is that many children are not in

**Figure 15. School and work in Dhaka’s slums: household listing data on education and work status for children aged 6–14**



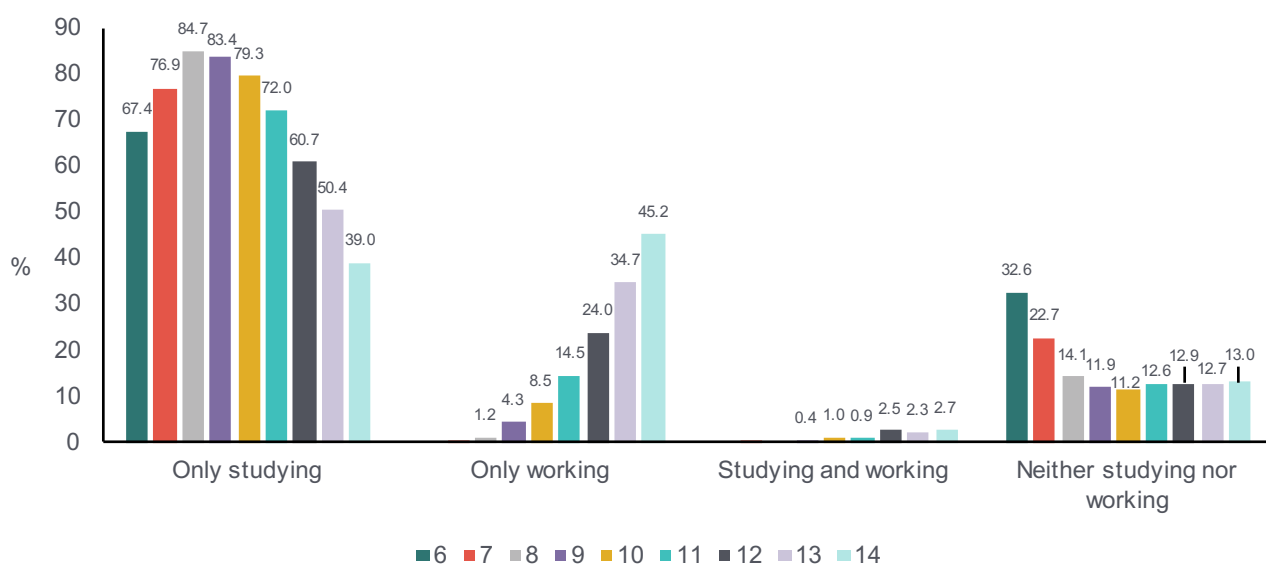
the right age-for-grade and that completion of primary education by the age of 10 is the exception rather than the rule. We return to these issues in Section 3.4.

Gender disaggregated age data illustrates the marked differences between boys and girls in labour market entry patterns (Figures 17a and 17b). An average 10-year-old boy is twice as likely to be only working, with a marked increase in the incidence of child work occurring between the ages of 10 and 11. For girls there is a big increase in the transition to work between the ages of 11 and 12, with another surge between the ages of 12 and 13. By the age of 14, working rates for boys are still seven percentage points above those for girls.

These distinctive patterns help to identify some of the critical points for public policy intervention. Between the ages of 10 and 12, around one fifth of girls and one quarter of boys in the slum make the transition to the world of work. Keeping all children in school for a full primary cycle would dramatically change this picture, especially given the widespread practice of late entry to school.

One of the most marked findings to emerge from our survey is the segmentation of school and child work. As noted in Section 2, previous studies based on national data have found a significant number of working children combining school with employment. For example, the 2013 Child Labour Survey found that 25% of child

**Figure 16. Age gradients for school and work status: children aged 6–14**



### Box 3. Out of school and out of work

Children neither working nor in school are sometimes defined for survey purposes as ‘idle’. The term is misleading. In-depth interviews with non-working out of school children in our survey sample – 16% of the 6–14-year-olds covered – found that ‘idleness’ was the exception to a rule of children effectively forced out of education and engaged in household chores. The cases of two children are illustrative (*children’s names have been changed to protect children’s identity*).

Emon is a 14-year-old boy living in Mohammadpur Thana. He went to school when he was younger but has learning difficulties. These are associated, in his father’s account, with autism. There are no schools in the slum equipped to meet Emon’s needs – and his family is unable to afford the fees that would be required to send him to a school equipped to provide specialised support. Emon works with his father during the day.

Sharmin is a 12-year-old girl living in Adabor Thana with her parents and two sisters. She was born in the slum. After completing Grade 5 with a top score in the Primary Education Completion Exam, she had to stop studying because her family faced financial problems. While the family’s position has now improved and Sharmin got admitted into Grade 6, she cannot go back to school. With her mother and elder sister working she has to take care of her younger sister and of her father, who is ill and unable to work. She now spends the entire day doing household chores. Sharmin recognises the consequences of not attending school. ‘Nothing is possible without education,’ she says, adding: ‘Education is needed everywhere, wherever you go.’ Her prospects are not promising. With her elder sister about to marry, the family will lose an important source of income and Sharmin will have to work. She is now trying to find work in the informal embroidery or formal garment sectors.

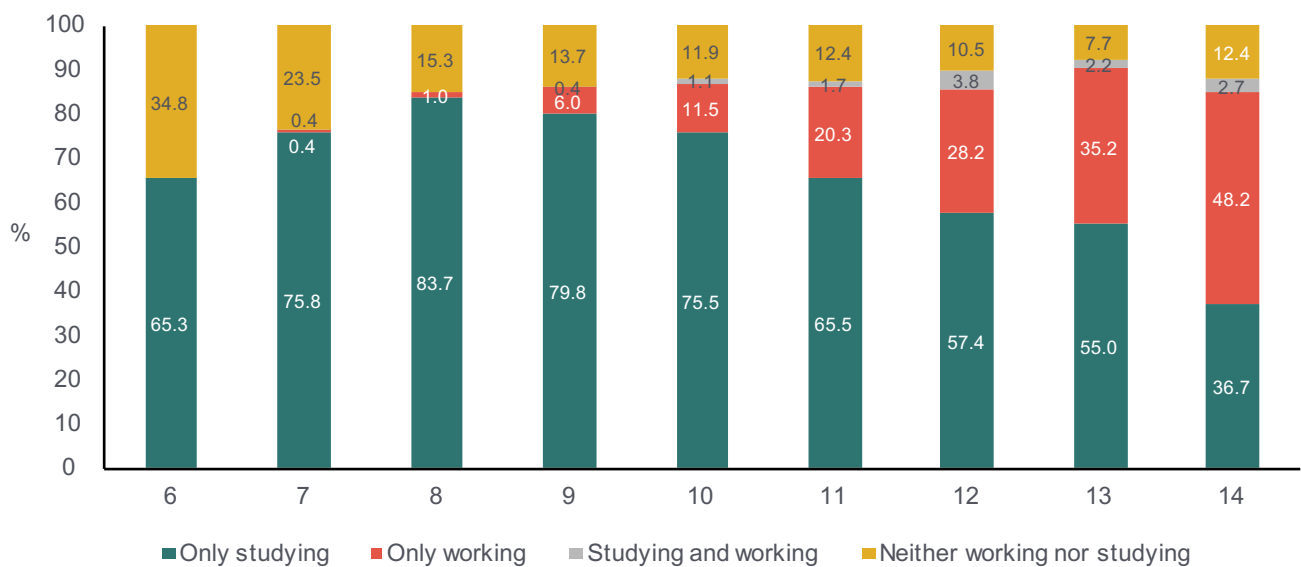


labourers in urban areas were attending school.<sup>18</sup> By contrast we find reported levels for children combining education and employment at just 1% for children aged 9–10 and less than 3% to age 14. For slum children and their parents there is a stark choice between school and working, largely as a consequence of economic pressure.

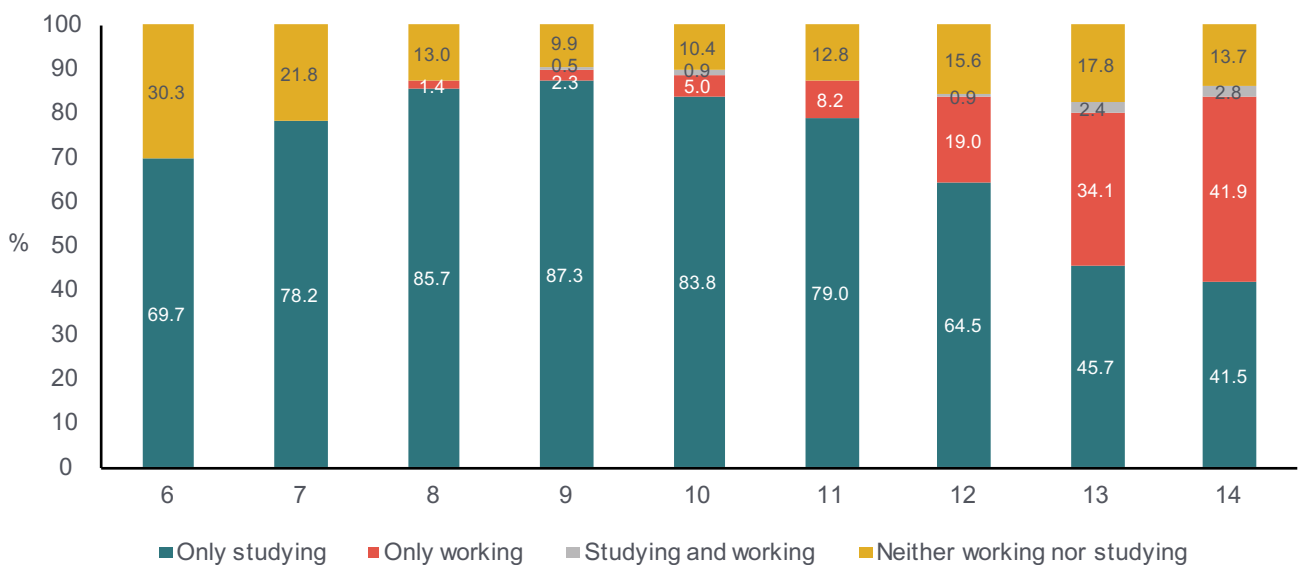
Children reported as being out-of-school and out-of-work are sometimes described in survey reporting as ‘idle’ (see Box 3). The depiction is unhelpful. Many six- and

seven-year-old children reported in this category are late entrants to primary school. This is reflected also in the peaking of the ‘only studying’ category at the age of eight. Given that this is effectively the school starting age for a significant group of children, an obvious implication is that many reported as working by the ages of 10 and 11 have received just two to three years of education. Older children – especially girls – are the ones likely to be

**Figure 17a. Working, schooling and out-of-school without work: reported status of boys (4,500 household listings)**



**Figure 17b. Working, schooling and out-of-school without work: reported status of girls (4,500 household listings)**



18 See Table 5.2.1, page 76 of the 2013 Child Labour Survey. The UCW country report for Bangladesh estimated lower numbers for children combining school and employment, with 5% of children in employment in Dhaka combining both activities (and a national average of 6.8%).

performing household chores, or to have been pushed out of school by circumstances beyond their control (Box 3).

Behind the average survey picture there are some marked differences across the seven slum areas covered in the survey (Figure 18). The incidence of working children ranges from 9% in Khilgaon to 19% in Kafrul. Similarly, the share of children reported as out-of-school and non-working ranges from 8% in Shah Ali to 30% in Adabor (where almost half of children aged 6–14 are out-of-school). Our survey data and associated analysis does not look at the distinctive drivers of children’s work and education in specific slums. However, the results underscore the potentially important roles of labour market conditions and the social characteristics of households in drawing children out of the world of school and into the world of work.

### 3.2.1 The time intensity of work

In our survey of 2,700 children (as distinct from the household listing) we asked respondents a series of questions about their hours of work. What emerges is a pattern of work in which the median child worker is working at levels well above the 42-hour threshold set by national legislation for ‘hazardous work’.

On average, children aged 11–14 report working 10.3 hours a day for six days a week. Only 15% report working fewer than 42 hours a week – the threshold under national legislation for hazardous labour. The median child worker in our survey reports 70 hours in employment – an extraordinary burden. Figure 19 captures the distribution of daily hours of work. It shows 40% of children working 12-hour days.

### 3.2.2 Child work versus child labour

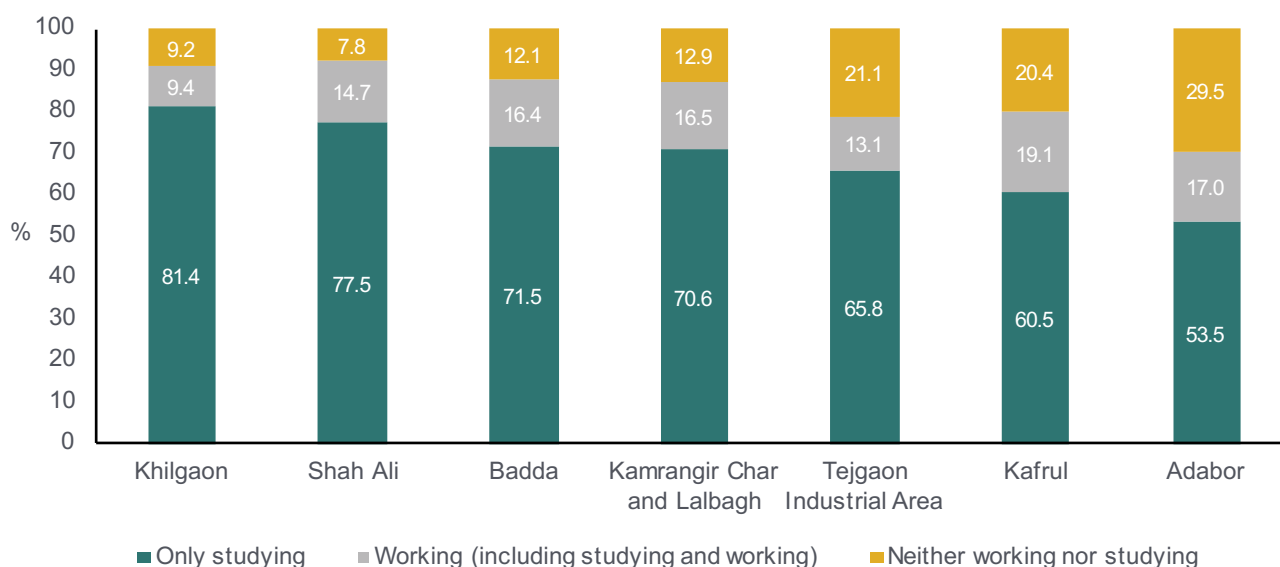
One important question is the degree to which the patterns of child work revealed in our survey constitute ‘child labour’. This question is critical for education policy, employment law and child welfare policies in Bangladesh. It also has a bearing on Bangladesh’s compliance with wider international child rights provisions, including the ILO Conventions on child labour and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Although our survey does not allow for a detailed assessment, the overwhelming bulk of the child work we document would appear to fit squarely into both national and international definitions of child labour targeted for progressive elimination. For the slum children in our sample there is effectively no border between child work and child labour.

Consider first the national legislative context. For children aged 6–11, working for any period of time in employment outside the home is defined as child labour. Working rather than attending school is also inconsistent with legislation on education. Primary education is compulsory between Grades 1–5 for any child aged 6–11. However, there is also a grey area with respect to compulsory education. Given that many children start school late and, even with smooth progression across grades, would not complete school before they were between 12 and 14 years old, there is a question over whether compulsory education law should be applied by reference to age or grade completion. Whatever the precise interpretation, fully one fifth of 10-year-olds and one quarter of 11-year-olds are either working or not attending school.

Employment legislation sets some clear parameters. As noted in Section 2, Bangladeshi law makes a distinction

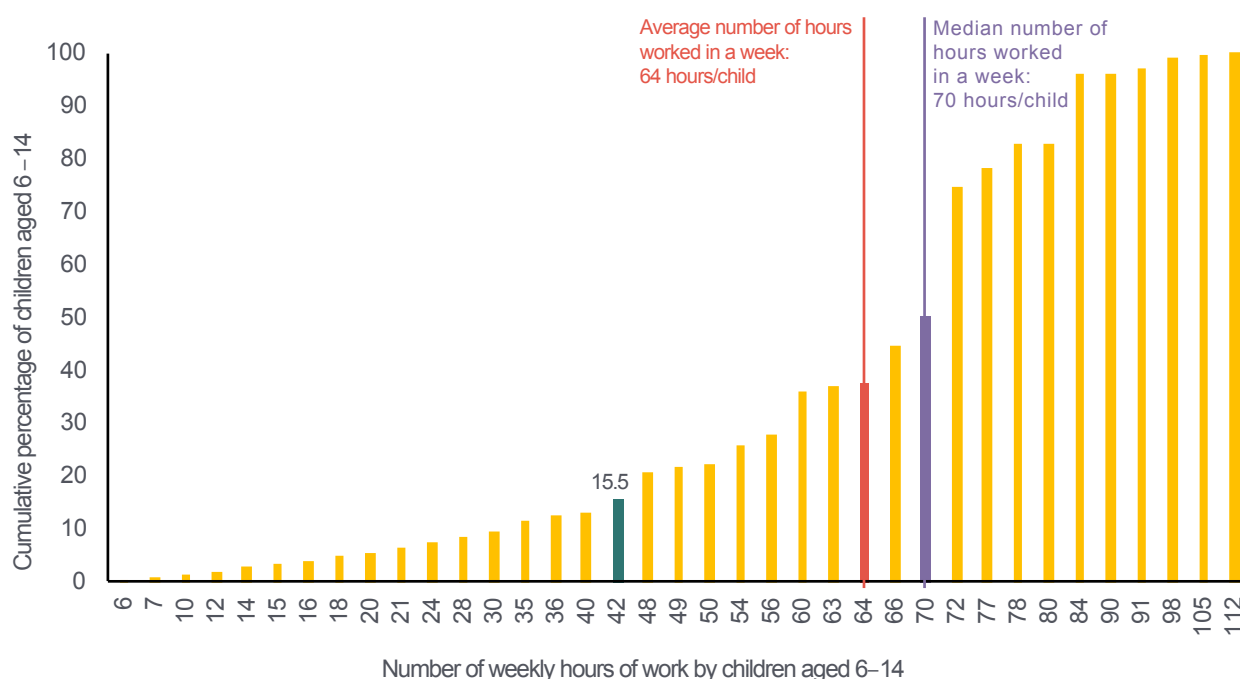
**Figure 18. Education and work status by slum location, children aged 6–14**



for children aged 12–17 between involvement in ‘light work’ and non-hazardous employment for up to 42 hours a week, and child labour defined as working for more than 42 hours a week. Even without considering the distinction between hazardous and non-hazardous employment, most of the children in our survey constitute child labourers. Only 15% report working fewer than 42 hours a week. This suggests that the provisions of the Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006 and the 2013 Children’s Act hold limited sway in Dhaka’s slums.

The situation of slum-dwelling children is similarly inconsistent with the principles underpinning international child rights, as defined by ILO Conventions and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, inconsistency is not the same as illegality in this context. The practices identified in our survey are not compatible with ILO Convention 138, which allows ‘light work’ subject to the stricture that the education of the child is not compromised. An overwhelming majority of working children under the age of 14 in our survey are sacrificing

**Figure 19. Working hours: reported weekly work hours, children aged 6–14**



**Box 4. Working lives**

Our survey provides data on a large group of children living in some of Dhaka’s slums. Behind the data are individual stories, some of which we heard during interviews and focus group discussions in Adabar Thana, north Dhaka (*children’s names have been changed to protect children’s identity*).

One of those stories belongs to Amina, aged 14. She moved to Adabar with her family seven years ago. Amina completed Grade 4 of primary school but did not sit the Grade 5 exam. Her father fell ill three years ago and she had to start working to help pay the medical bills. Amina now reports working 12 hours a day (with two short breaks) as a domestic help, earning Tk 2,500 a month (\$32). ‘I have lost a lot by not going to school. But my family are poor and my father is sick.’

Shilpa, also aged 14, completed two years of schooling in a rural area before coming to Dhaka. She completed Grade 5 in Adabar but now works in a garment factory operating a sewing machine. When asked about her hopes for the future she comments: ‘I’m happy to help my family, but I don’t have dreams – and I will not be returning to school’. She had a very positive experience of education, did well at school, and wishes she could resume her education. ‘If I studied I could learn things, find a better job and earn more’, she says.

In a focus group discussion held with 15 working children aged 11–14 in Adabar, several recurrent themes emerged. Almost all of the children reported having to leave school because of poverty and the need to earn money. Most wished they had been able to continue their education. However, several reported leaving primary school because of negative experiences, including abuse and beatings by teachers. As one 12-year-old boy put it: ‘I didn’t like school. Teachers did not respect me and I could not perform well. I was beaten and scared of going to school’.

their education. Most are working well beyond the threshold for light work recommended by the Convention. However, Bangladesh has not ratified Convention 138.

### 3.2.3 Why and where are children working?

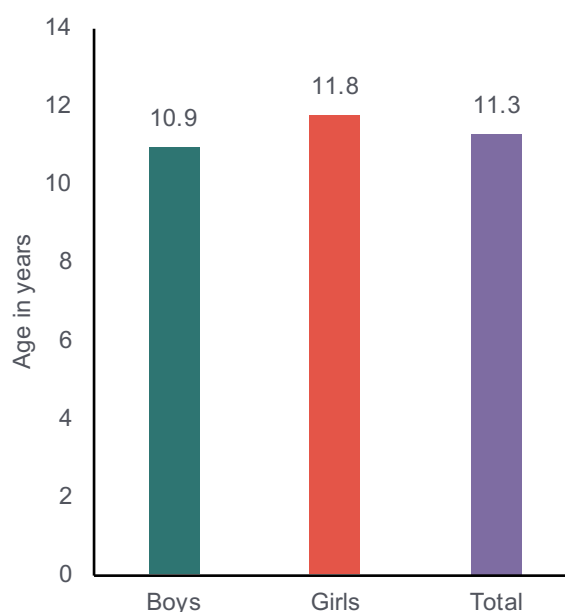
In this section we focus principally on the results of the survey related to the world of work. Through the survey questionnaire, we ask children about their employment background and their experience of work. An important caveat is that we did not conduct workplace surveys with employers to corroborate the data, in part because of the complexity of securing accurate reporting on what may be illegal employment activities.

Most children report entering the world of work before their adolescent years. The average age at which working children in our survey start work is 11.3, with girls typically starting a year later than boys (Figure 20). Given that a large proportion of working children started school after the stipulated entry age, and that many repeated grades or dropped out at some stage, a significant proportion of children start work before completing a full primary cycle.

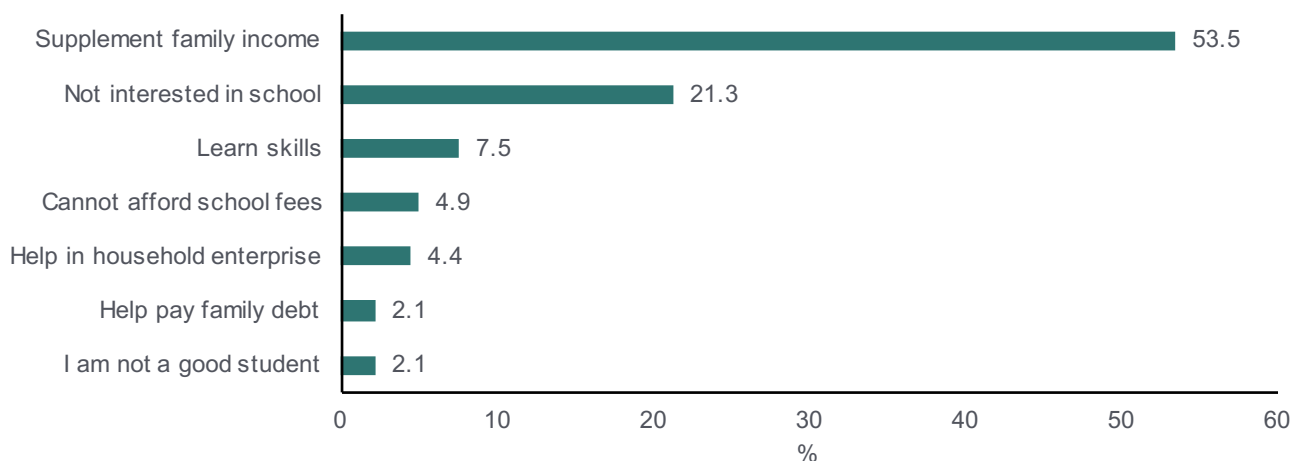
An overwhelming majority of both boys and girls reported working to supplement family income, with inability to afford school costs also figuring prominently (Figures 21a and 21b). Almost three quarters of girls cited support for family income as the biggest factor (and another 5% highlight help in paying family debt). Only a small minority cite a lack of interest in school as a factor. By contrast, just over half of boys cite supplementing family income as the primary reason for their working – but fully one fifth express a lack of interest in school as the second most important consideration (Box 4). Boys are also more likely than girls to feel that they may acquire new skills through work.

Children were asked during the survey whether they or their parents took the decision that they should start working. Strikingly, a majority of both boys and girls reported that they took the decision (Figure 22). Once again, the data has to be treated with some caution. Children and parents are clearly operating within highly constrained parameters of choice and the lines in intra-household decision-making are blurred. Parents who send children to work because they are unable to feed a household are clearly acting under compulsion (Box 5) – and children who concur in that choice in pro-actively seeking work are not in any meaningful sense ‘free agents’. Even so, many children see themselves as active participants in the decision to start working

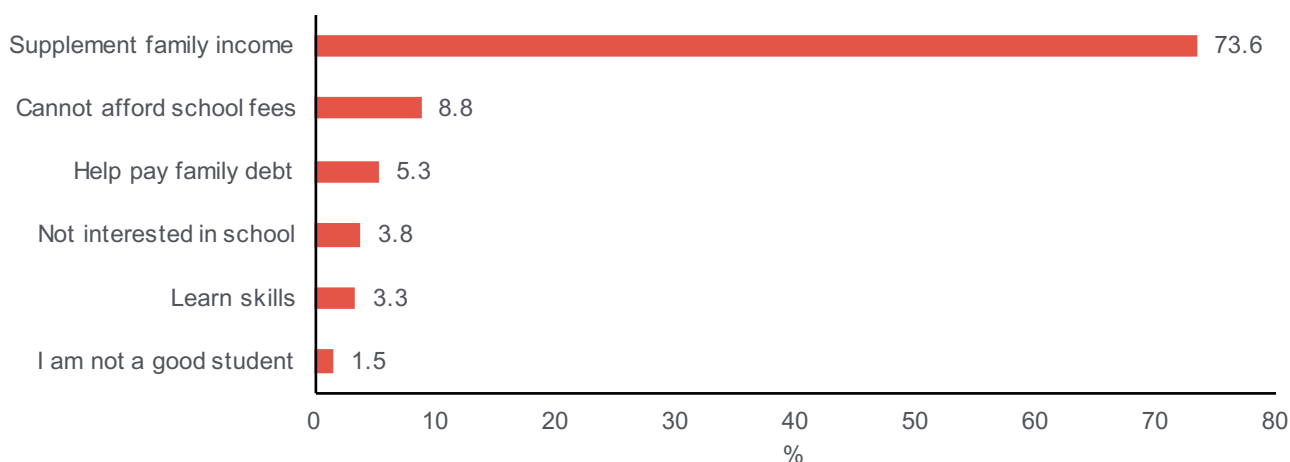
**Figure 20. Working lives start early: reported age of entry into employment for children who are working**



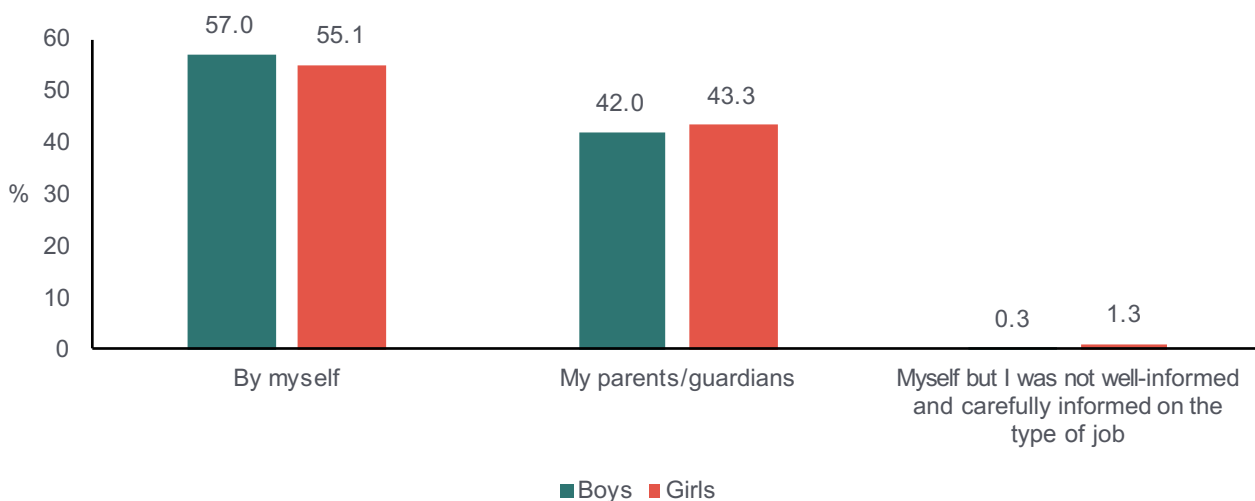
**Figure 21a. Reasons for working: top five reasons cited by boys**



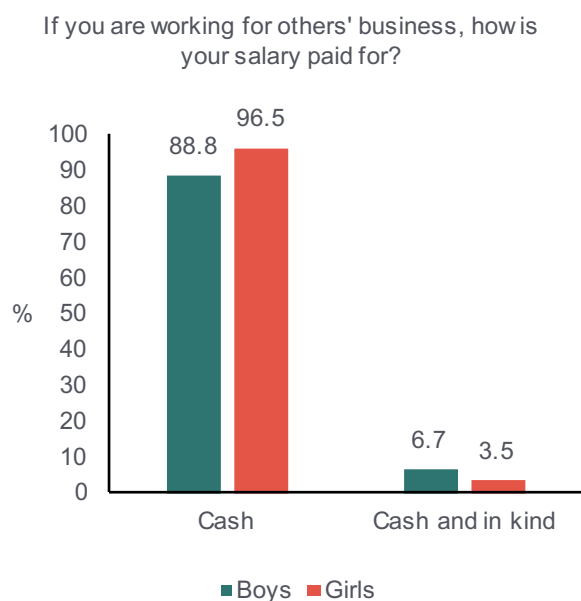
**Figure 21b. Reasons for working: top five reasons cited by girls**



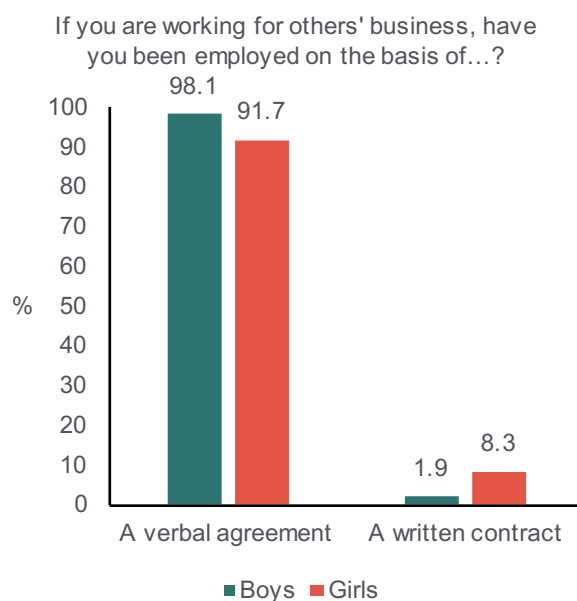
**Figure 22. Making choices: children reporting on who took the decision for them to start work?**



**Figure 23a. Cash payments dominate...**



**Figure 23b. ...And most children have no contract**



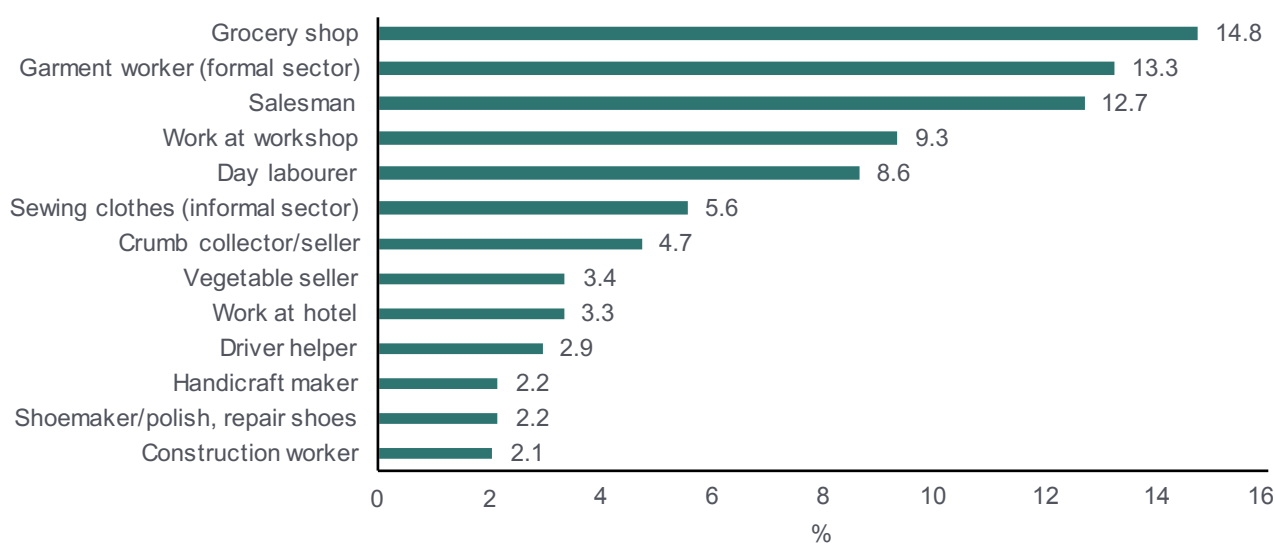
Our survey provides insights into the terms on which children enter the world of work. Only a small group of (predominantly male) children report working in a family business. The vast majority report working outside the household for cash and with no contract (Figures 23a and 23b). While this result is predictable in light of the questionable legality and, in some cases, outright illegality of the employment practices involved, it places children in a highly vulnerable position with respect to their employers. The fact that cash-based payment is the primary source of remuneration for children may serve to further limit their legal entitlements and the corresponding obligations on the part of their employers.

### 3.2.4 Source of employment

Where are children working? We asked children to report on their principal source of employment, either in terms of employer or activity. Our questionnaire does not make a generalised distinction between formal and informal

work. However, in the case of garments, respondents were given a choice between ‘sewing clothes’ (informal sector) versus ‘garment worker’ (formal sector). In cases where respondents did not fully understand the distinction, enumerators explained that formal sector garment work involves employment by a large- or medium-sized factory. Our survey does not consider whether informal garment work involves subcontracting from formal employers or not. Reported employment is highly segmented. Around two thirds of girls report working in garment factories, with another 10% working in sewing or handicrafts. For girls living in slums, the ready-made garment sector was by far the largest reported source of employment. Boys report a more diverse pattern of employment. Just 13% were working in the formal garment sector, and other activities – street vending, work in shops, employment by workshops, day labour – accounted for around half of reported employment

**Figure 24a. Where are children working: source of employment reported by boys**



**Figure 24b. Where are children working: source of employment reported by girls**

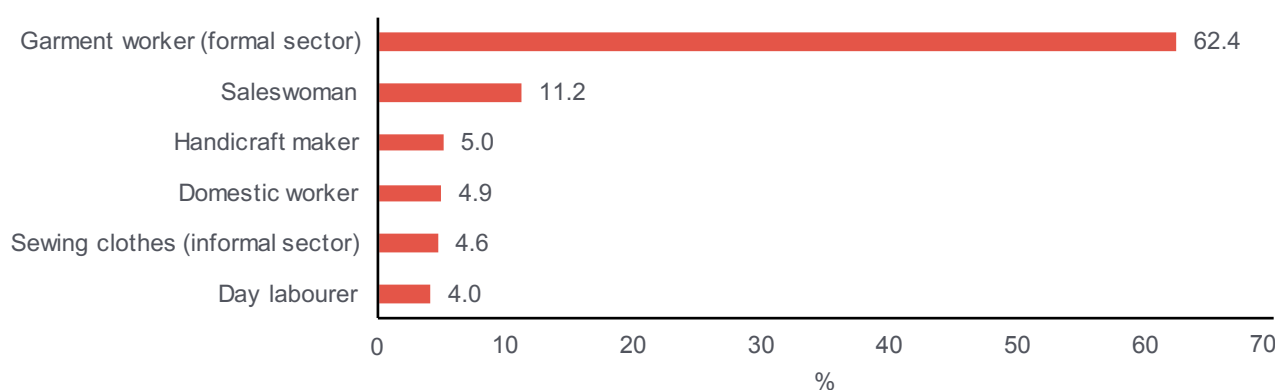
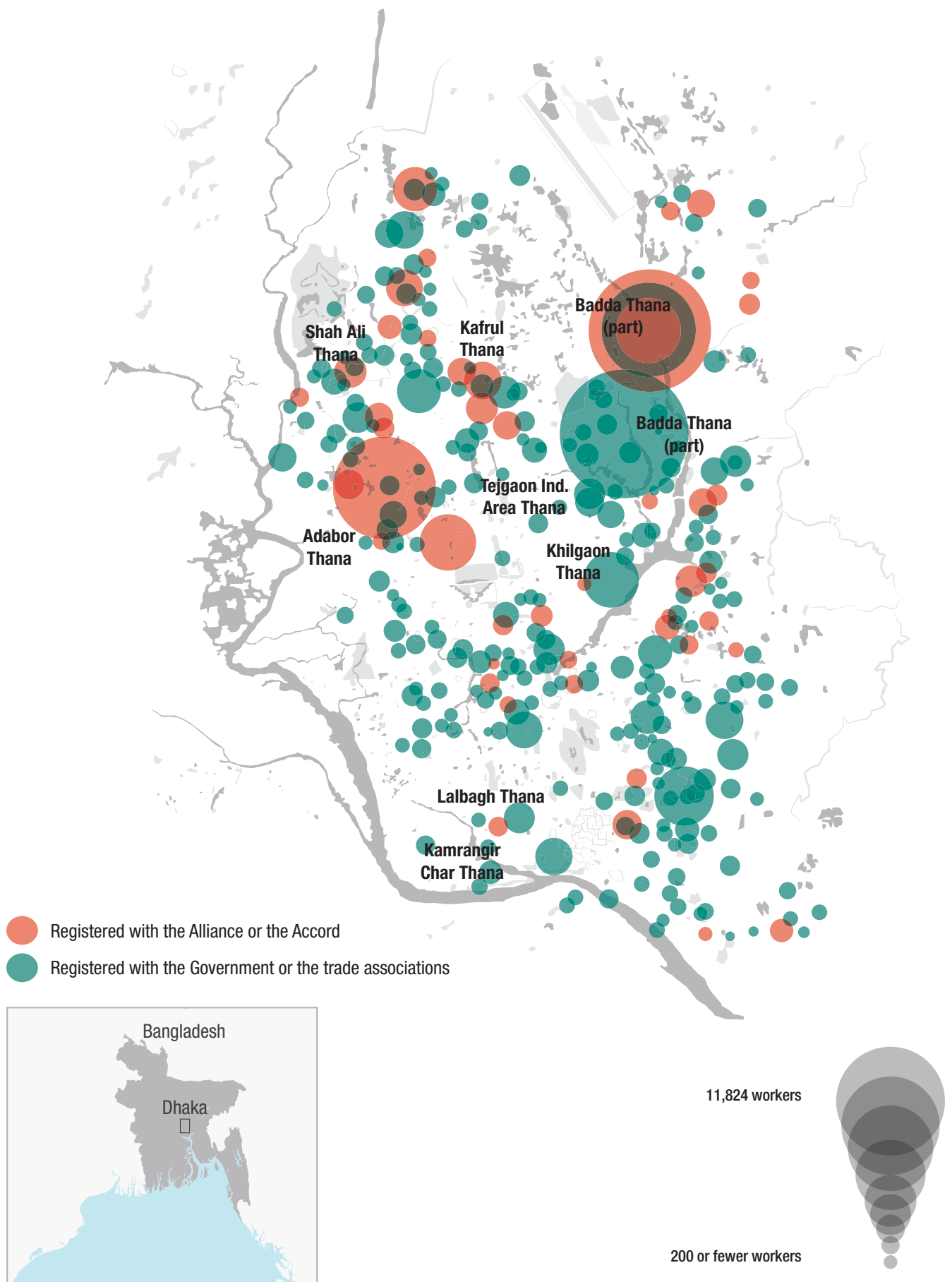




Figure 25. CWES slum locations and garment and apparel factories in Dhaka

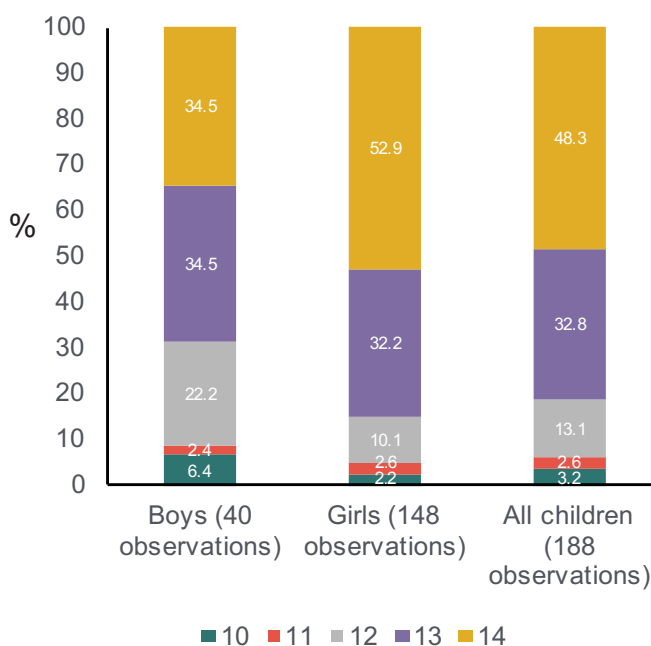


The prominent role of garment factories is one of the more surprising findings to emerge. It is widely assumed that the sector is more intensely regulated than other sectors. It might have been expected that the prospect of investigation and monitoring would deter the recruitment of under-age children. Child labour legislation is enforceable through fines – and the Chief Inspector of Factories (which operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour) is empowered to carry out unannounced spot checks.

Our survey suggests there may be a systemic problem of enforcement and compliance (Box 6 and related Figure 25). Figure 26 provides an age profile for employment in the garment sector, as reported by children. Over one quarter of the boys employed in the sector are aged 12 or under. Consistent with the wider gender pattern, girls on average report entering garment sector employment later. Just under half of those reporting working in the garment sector were aged 13 or under. Once again, many of these children are working longer than the 42 hours per week threshold stipulated in legislation.

Various factors contribute to the regulatory challenges. The fact that children do not have contracts and are paid in cash makes investigation difficult. During in-depth interviews, employers themselves drew attention to the difficulties associated with establishing the age of job applicants given the large numbers of young people lacking birth registration (Box 7). Focus groups involving children reported a generalised failure on the part of employers to request age information.

**Figure 26. The formal garment sector is reported as a major employer: age profile of 10–14 year-old children reporting work in the formal garment sector**



There are also marked differences in the profile of child work across our survey locations (the Annexes). In the slum areas of Dhaka North, the formal garment sector is overwhelmingly the largest employer, accounting for over half of total employment in Kafrul and Shah Ali. Street vending figures far more prominently in Kamrangir Char, while the Tejgaon Industrial Area combines a range of formal and informal sector activity.

### Box 5. The parents' perspective

Two accounts from parents in the Kafrul slum help to illustrate the economic pressures that drive children into the world of work (*parents' names have been changed to protect their identity*).

Mohammed Jamal moved to Kafrul in 2013 after he was unable to pay back a loan taken out following flooding and the loss of a crop on his farm. He is currently a day labourer. After moving to Dhaka, Mr Jamal reports that he had no choice but to send his children to work. He cites high rent and living costs and the cost of education as barriers. One of his daughters, now aged 12, found a job through relatives in a garment factory, but was fired after it was discovered she was under-age. She then found a similar job in another garment factory. Mr Jamal reports that she works 12 to 13 hours a day and for six (sometimes seven) days a week. She earns Tk 8,000 a month – and Mr Jamal sees this as the minimum he would need for her to return to school. He thinks that working will be beneficial for her future, because it will make it easier to arrange a 'good marriage'. Mr Jamal recognises that dropping out of school comes with costs. He believes that, if his daughter secured a Secondary School Certificate, she would get a better salary.

Mina Akter is a mother of six children, two of whom – one boy and one girl – are working. Ms Akter is employed as a domestic worker in middle-income households. She is illiterate, never having attended school. Her working son, aged 14, is a crumb collector and seller (known as Tokai and Vangari trader in Bangla). He works eight/nine hours a day for five/six days a week. Ms Akter says she has no choice about allowing her son to work because the costs are unaffordable. Asked about the implications for her son of not attending school, Ms Akter says: 'Nobody values an illiterate person'. She knows that, without education, he will have very limited opportunities in his future.

## Box 6. Garment exports and child labour

Our survey raises serious concerns over the issue of child labour in the supply of garments from factories in Bangladesh to consumers in Europe, the US and elsewhere. We did not carry out a detailed review of individual factories, but the sheer scale of child employment in the sector – and the links between small-scale factories and large-scale exporters – make it highly probable that children in Dhaka are involved in export production.

New York University's Stern Center for Business and Human Rights recently undertook detailed mapping of garment and apparel factories in Dhaka and other cities. Based on large-scale data analysis of identified factories in Bangladesh in 2015, the Center estimated 7,000 factories, employing around 5 million workers, producing for export.

Direct suppliers account for around half the sector's factories. These receive licences to import apparel and fabric duty-free for manufacture into export products. They are generally large-scale operations that have contractual relationships with foreign brands and input suppliers, and access to export credits and significant capital investment.

Indirect suppliers play a critical role in the export supply chain. These factories contract with direct suppliers, enabling the latter to adjust to shifts in demand. Around half are formal sector operators that have registered with trade associations like the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers Association (BGMEA). Around 1,000 of these factories produce for export through sub-contracting with direct exporters.

Informal factories are a sub-set of indirect suppliers. They do not register with government and trade associations. They rely heavily on sub-contracts with larger factories to fill their production lines. Of the 479 factories surveyed by Stern School researchers in 2015, around one third were informal sub-contractors. On average they employ around 55 workers, often focusing on a single specialised process, such as sewing, washing, dying or printing.

Workers in informal factories are highly vulnerable. The sector operates on thin margins and the monitoring of safety standards and labour rights is weak to non-existent. While the Stern Center survey did not report on child labour, the survey teams did observe child labour in informal factories. While precise figures are impossible to establish, it is likely that many, if not a majority, of child workers enter the sector through informal enterprises before moving into the formal sector.

Informal factories are heavily engaged in export production. In 2015, 91% were producing wholly or partly for export, with most sub-contracting for producers supplying national and international markets.

All our survey sites are close to both formal and informal factories, and one site, Mirpur, has one of the highest concentrations of registered factories in Bangladesh. The survey results add to a wider body of evidence that points to systematic employment of children in the garment sector.

We do not identify named foreign brands that can be linked to factories employing child labour. However, it stretches credibility to assume that the supply chains for these brands do not include significant employment of child labourers. First, with over 60% of working girls and 13% of working boys reporting employment in the garment industry, this is the single largest source of employment for children in our sample. Second, the operations of direct and indirect exporters, and formal and informal suppliers, are deeply integrated. Widespread sub-contracting renders it highly probable that children are producing clothing destined for international supply chains.

The vast majority of these children will be working in factories that provide limited protection. Two factory programmes – the Accord and Alliance programmes – have been established by foreign brands. However, they cover only around one quarter of Bangladesh's garment factories. Most of these are large, formal sector enterprises, constituting around 60% of factories on the direct export list. However, even this group is extensively involved in sub-contracting, and there is limited reporting on their suppliers.

Even within the elite safety group there are serious concerns over the effectiveness of regulation. As of October 2015, only eight Accord/Alliance factories had passed final inspection. The vast majority of those inspected had been required to adopt Corrective Action Plans, few of which have been successfully completed. Very few indirect exporters have been subjected to safety inspection.

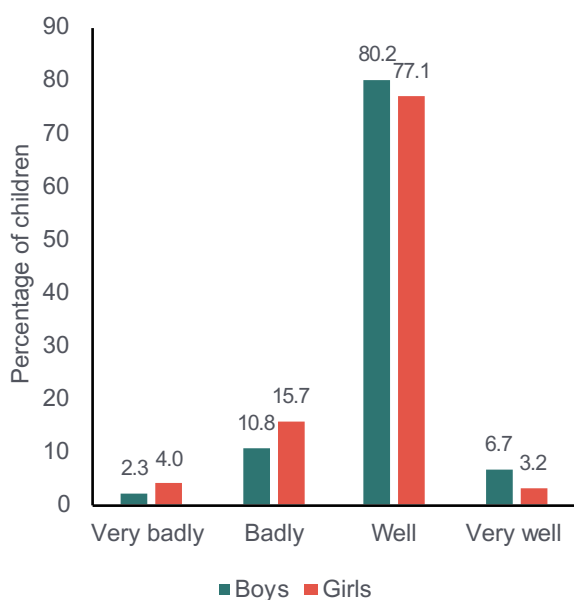
Foreign brands could do far more in terms of constructive solutions to the child labour problem. As well as requiring direct suppliers to provide more and better information on their sub-contractors, they could actively support efforts to comply with higher safety standards. While ultimate responsibility for strengthening the regulatory regime rests with the Government of Bangladesh, brands could – and should – be creating incentives for firms to comply with child labour laws.

*Source: Labowitz and Baumann-Pauly, 2015.*

### 3.2.5 Control, risk and hazard in the workplace

Assessing the conditions experienced by children at work is inherently difficult. Our survey asked children to report on the attitude of employers, along with a range of proxy indicators for risk and hazard in the workplace. The findings have to be interpreted with some caution. Children working in different sectors may have very different experiences and perceptions of risk which are difficult to compare on a common scale. The questions framed in our survey were based on the concerns identified by children themselves in a pilot exercise – and we made no attempt to evaluate the self-reported statements against a unified risk and hazard benchmark. It is also worth emphasising that children may have a limited awareness of their rights and the protection afforded by legislation.

**Figure 27. How is the child treated at work: perceptions reported by working children**



Despite these reservations, the survey results highlight a number of concerns. Most children self-report that their employers treat them well. However, around 13% of boys and 20% of girls report being treated either badly or very badly (Figure 27). Of the children reporting bad treatment, shouting and otherwise insulting behaviour was identified as the greatest concern. However, recourse to physical beating was also cited as a feature of employers' bad behaviour (Table 5).

**Table 5. Children reporting compulsion in the workplace, selected practices**

Practices identified by children: the employer sometimes compels us to...	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
Work extra time	19.2	37.2
Work without payment	4.5	6.9
Be available any time for work	6.8	6.3
Perform work that is not in the contract	6.3	13.2
Work for other employers	4.5	4.0
Being subject to freedom-less work	13.2	16.0
Children reporting on consequences of failure to comply with employer demands: I would be subjected to	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
Subjected to physical punishment	12.5	12.4
Given more work	22.2	20.1
Denied food and rest breaks	3.9	0.9
Fired	29.7	33.1

#### Box 7. In-depth interview with the manager of a garment factory

Employers report difficulties ascertaining the age of children. One manager of a garment factory acknowledged that he was employing 'around 10' children aged between 11 and 14. He explained that the recruitment process involves posting vacancies on the factory notice board and, in the case of casual or temporary employment, a 'factory gate' interview followed by a medical examination. In principle, employees are asked to provide their national identity card or birth registration card to verify they are over 18. In practice, though, the manager indicated that many employees had neither card. While aware that children aged 11–14 should not be working, he did not regard their employment as illegal.

Once hired, children receive an appointment letter, an attendance card and a factory photo identity. The manager indicated that he did not allow children to work with heavy machinery. They were principally employed in sewing clothes, cutting thread and checking material.

Many children report demands that infringe their rights, with a significant minority experiencing what amounts to bullying by employers. Around one third of girls and one fifth of boys report being forced by employers to work extra hours. Girls are also more likely than boys to be asked to perform work not agreed in their terms of employment. We asked in the survey what would happen were a child to refuse to carry out tasks assigned by the employer. ‘Getting fired’ was the single biggest anticipated response, followed by the prospect of being given additional tasks and physical punishment.

**Table 6. Percentage of children that experienced any of the following...**

Percentage of children that experienced any of the following...	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
Back pain	23.2	28.4
Extreme fatigue	36.1	34.6
Carrying heavy loads	78.8	21.2
Operating machinery/heavy equipment	44.2	55.8
Exposure to dust, fumes, toxic substances, chemical substances	20.0	24.8
Exposure to loud noise or vibration	21.5	26.3
Exposure to extreme cold or heat	21.1	19.9
Use of dangerous tools (knives etc.)	8.2	4.0

Children report exposure to health risks and hazards in the workplace. We asked respondents to report on their experience of work-related injuries and ailments over the preceding 12 months (Table 6). Significant minorities of boys and girls reported extreme fatigue (consistent with evidence on working hours), back pain and fever, along with superficial injuries. Many children – especially boys – appear to be expected to carry heavy loads. Moreover, 55% of girls and 44% of boys reported operating machinery or heavy equipment. There are also high levels of reported exposure to dust, fumes and chemical substances, loud noises, dangerous tools and extreme temperatures.

### 3.2.6 Levels of payment and expenditure priorities

Children overwhelmingly cite economic pressures as the primary force drawing them into the world of work. Combining the data on parental income with those on children’s level of remuneration provides some valuable insights into these pressures. One important finding that emerged is that income from children’s work has the effect of broadly equalising the average household income of working and non-working children. This lends support to the contention that parents allow children to work as a distress choice aimed at meeting a subsistence threshold.

Table 7 summarises the average income position of working and non-working children’s households. It highlights the critical role of the father’s income as the main source of divergence. Average reported parental income in households with no working children was Tk 13,000 compared to Tk 9,000 for households with working children. The average income derived from the work of children was Tk 3,600 (\$47), bringing the income of their households up to the average level of households without working children. This lends prima facie evidence to the argument that parents are forced by circumstance to send children to work in pursuit of a minimum income level. The reported monthly income of working children is Tk 3,664, around \$47. The role of child work in raising the income of households to the average level for the slum lends some weight to the view that recourse to child labour reflects a concern on the part of parents to achieve a minimum income threshold.

**Table 7. Reported income by household status: average income levels for mother, father and working children**

	Households of non-working children	Households of working children
Father’s income	Tk 11,582.63 (\$147.84)	Tk 6,634.14 (\$84.67)
Mother’s income	Tk 2,332.02 (\$29.76)	Tk 2,438.46 (\$31.12)
Working children’s income (6–14-year-old child who is the survey respondent)	NA	Tk 3,663.82 (\$46.76)
Other family members’ income	Tk 3,201.31 (\$40.86)	Tk 4,999.06 (\$63.81)
Total monthly income	Tk 17,115.96 (\$218.46)	Tk 17,735.48 (\$226.36)

*Currency exchange on 10 August 2016 (Tk 78.35=\$1) from <http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/>*

Our survey does not allow for a detailed review of underlying labour market conditions. Perhaps reflecting the dominance of formal sector garment employment, there is a modest wage premium in favour of girls (Tk 4,177) over boys (Tk 3,713) (Table 8). The gender premium raises an obvious question: namely, if the returns from girls’ work are higher, why do boys on average enter labour markets earlier? The answer to this question could lie partly in education or age entry requirements for the garment sector, or in the perceived returns from females attending primary school.

What is clear from our survey is the overwhelming perception among children that their work is critical to household welfare. When asked ‘how did you spend your money last month?’ around 90% of boys and girls identified contributing to family income as the most important item.

The limitations of our survey with respect to reported income have to be recognised. Children were asked to report on their daily and monthly income, along with the typical number of hours worked a day and number of days' work a week. In reality, it is likely that many working children are paid at variable levels on an intermittent basis. By reporting the observations of the child we are almost certainly smoothing what could be an irregular and erratic stream of income. This is especially true for children involved in informal work and day labour. It may be less true for children employed in the formal garment sector. Inevitably, average figures also obscure variations associated with age.

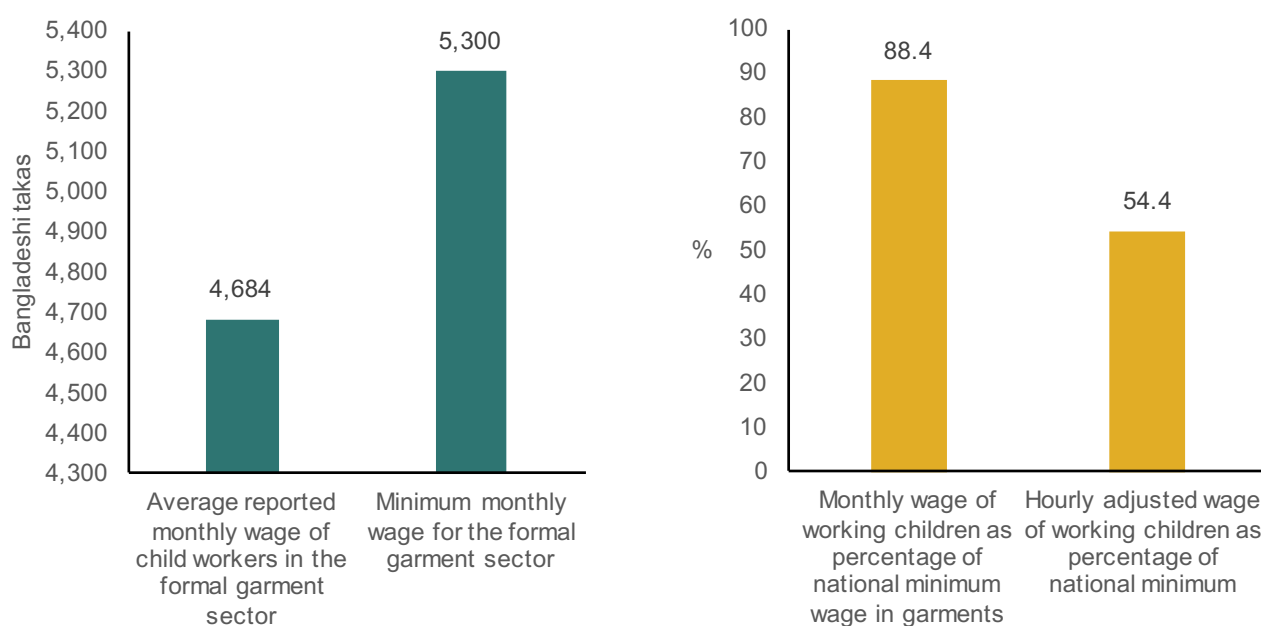
**Table 8. Reported income by household status: average income levels reported by child (Bangladeshi takas, (US \$))**

	Boys	Girls
Daily Income	Tk 130.69 (\$1.67)	Tk 143.68 (\$1.83)
Monthly Income	Tk 3,731.76 (\$47.63)	Tk 4,177.64 (\$53.32)

Currency exchange on 10 August 2016 (Tk 78.35=\$1) from <http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter>

While our data does not provide a comprehensive picture of comparative labour market returns, it does offer some insights into patterns of remuneration for children working in the garment sector. There is an established national minimum monthly wage for the formal garment sector set at Tk 5,300. This is more than the average reported wage (Tk 4,684) for the children in our survey sample. However, the simple comparison may underestimate the real gap. The national minimum wage is stipulated for eight hours' work a day for 26 days a month. Expressed differently, they work 52 hours more for 13% less income. Translated in equivalence against the national minimum wage, they are working for an hourly rate of Tk 14 an hour versus the Tk 25 required under minimum wage legislation. In other words, they are receiving only 54% of the minimum wage (Figure 28).

**Figure 28. Wage of child workers in the formal garment sector in comparison with national minimum wage (in the garment industry)**



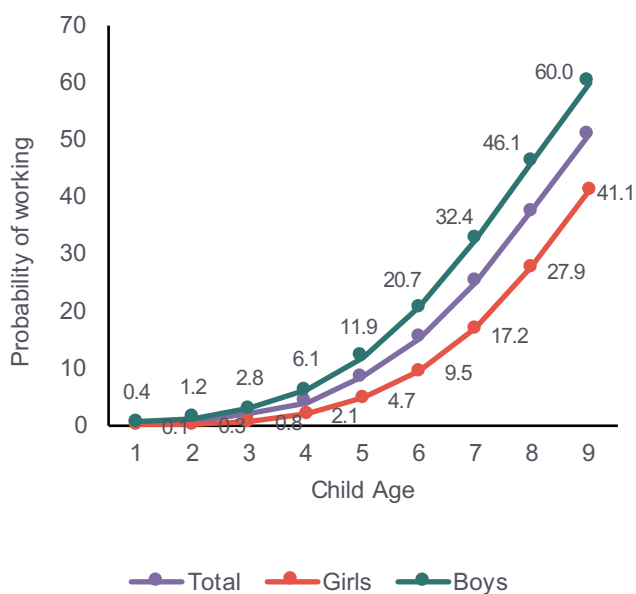


### 3.3 Some children are more at risk of child work than others

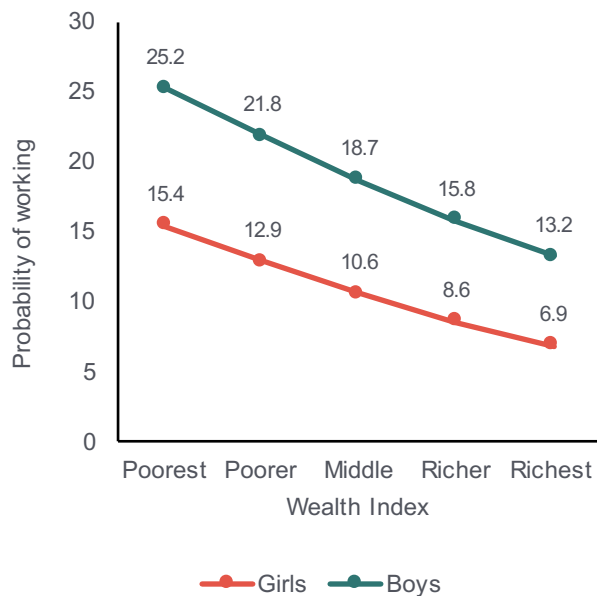
Slum-dwelling children are not a homogenous social category. They come from households with different levels of parental literacy, income and wealth. The composition of their households vary. They live in settlements with different levels of basic provision. All of this has a direct bearing on the distribution of risk within slums of being drawn into the world of work. Based on a literature review, we identified a range of potential variables that might explain the probability of a child working. We then ran a probit model from which we derived marginal effects for the probability of working. The following summarises the main findings (see Annex 3 for technical detail).

1. **There is a steep age gradient structured by gender.** As highlighted in the previous section, the probability of a child working increases sharply from the age of eight (Figure 29). By the age of 14, the children in our survey have just under a one-in-two likelihood of working. Measured in terms of absolute percentage difference, the gender gap widens steadily to the age of 14. While our survey does not address the underlying causes, there would appear to be a set of labour market factors at play interacting with parental perceptions of the relative value – and opportunity costs – of education for girls and boys.

**Figure 29. The age gradient for working children: probability of working by age and gender for a child living in slums**



**Figure 30. Wealth matters: probability of working by age and wealth index for a child living in slums**

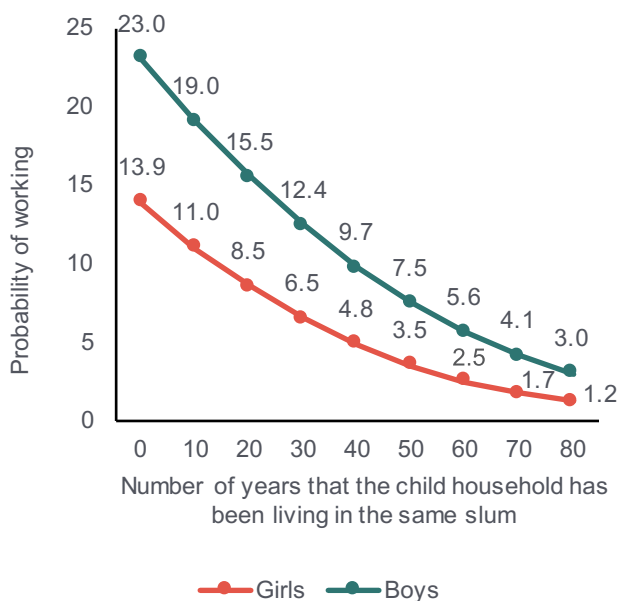


**Figure 31. More income is associated with less child labour: probability of working based on monthly household income (excluding income from the child labour)**

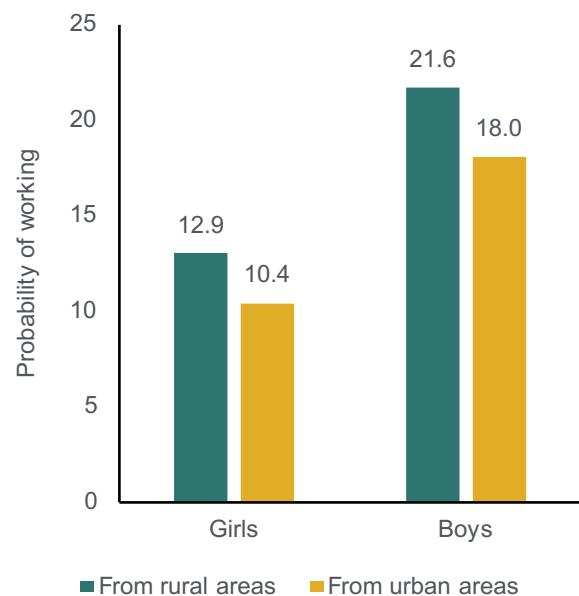


2. **Child work is inversely related to household income and, more especially, wealth.** There is a marked wealth and income gradient *within* slums. Ranked on our wealth index, male and female children from the poorest quintile are twice as likely to be working as children from the richest quintile (Figure 30). There is also an income gradient for the probability of working, though this is considerably less steep than the wealth gradient (Figure 31). The risk of children working appears to increase quite markedly at income levels below Tk 15,000. Working children themselves are more likely to self-identify as poor. In our survey, 76% described themselves as poor compared to 56% of non-working children. The gender gap converges slightly along the gradient. This may constitute evidence that the parents, defined in terms of their wealth, have the least capacity to adjust to external shocks without taking children out of school. If wages are higher and earning opportunities greater for boys at lower age levels, they are likely to be taken out of school first.
3. **More recent settlers and migrants from rural areas face disadvantages.** Households that have been living in a slum area for 10 years or more are less likely to have children working rather than attending school (Figure 32). Migrants from rural areas also appear to face elevated risks of child labour (Figure 33). This may reflect the economic consequences of distress migration or inability to access education provision – or some combination of both factors.

**Figure 32. More settled residency patterns reduce child labour: probability of working based on the number of years child household has been living in the same slum**



**Figure 33. Arrival from rural areas brings elevated risks of child work: probability of working based on rural/urban relocation**

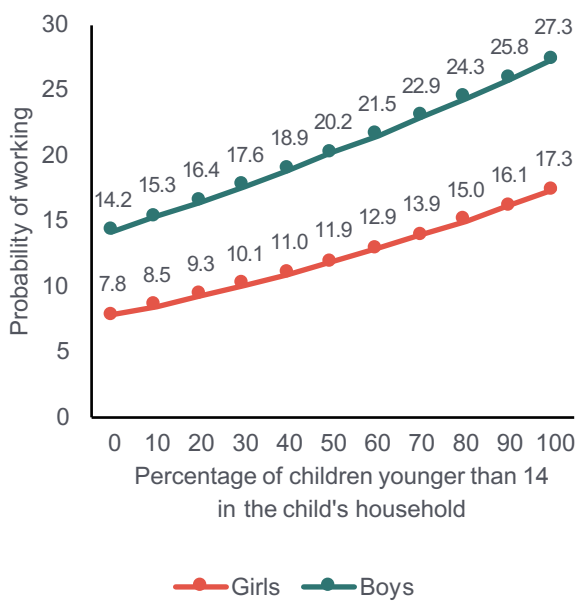


4. **Household composition and characteristics matter.** Households with more adults and fewer child siblings have more breadwinners, and are therefore better able to afford the direct costs and the opportunity costs of education. On average, working children come from households with 5.1 children as compared to 4.7 children for non-working households. The probability of a child working rises with the percentage of children aged under 14 – and the effects are quite large (Figure 34). Living in a father-headed household also greatly elevates the probability of a child working (Figure 35). Households with parents reported as having a disability and children who have been orphaned are marked by a higher incidence of children working, reflecting economic pressures. Around 10% of household heads in our survey have a reported disability. However, 15% of households with working children fall into this category. Birth registration is another variable marked by a strong association with employment status. Only a small minority of children in our sample have a birth registration card. However, working children were far less likely to be registered (2.7% of our sample) than non-working children (8.9%).
5. **The education level of parents materially affects the risk of a child working.** Both maternal and paternal education has an influence on the incidence of child work. Having a mother or father with some secondary education approximately halves the risk of a child working relative to the child of a parent with no education – the effects are marginally stronger for fathers (Figure 36). A majority of the parents of working children report never having attended school,

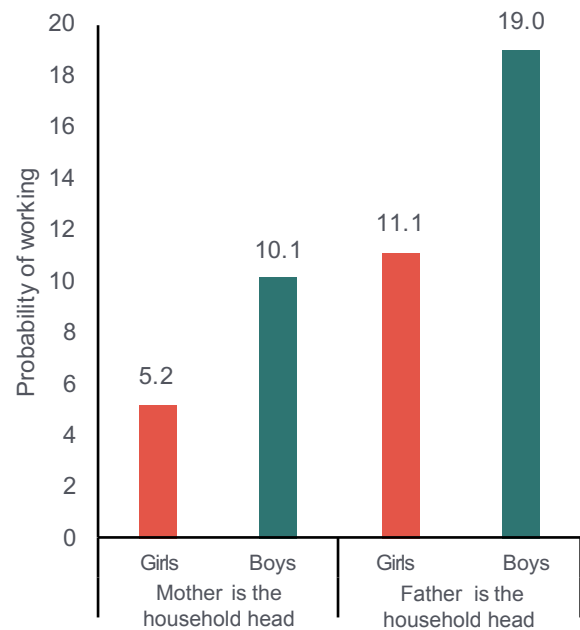
so parental education is a powerful mechanism for transmitting the risk of child work. Only 8% of the mothers of these children report having completed primary education, compared to 16% for mothers of non-working children. Beyond serving as a proxy for deprivation, parental education may influence whether or not children participate in school through other transmission channels. These range from the value placed on education, to perceptions of the benefits

associated with education and the advantages associated with a home environment in which some level of literacy prevails. We created a composite indicator based on parental reporting and perceptions of school, including cost, distance and quality. We then measured the effects of discrete improvements in individual components, which we rank by order of impact (Figure 3.29). Distance from school weighs heavily, reflecting perceived opportunity costs.

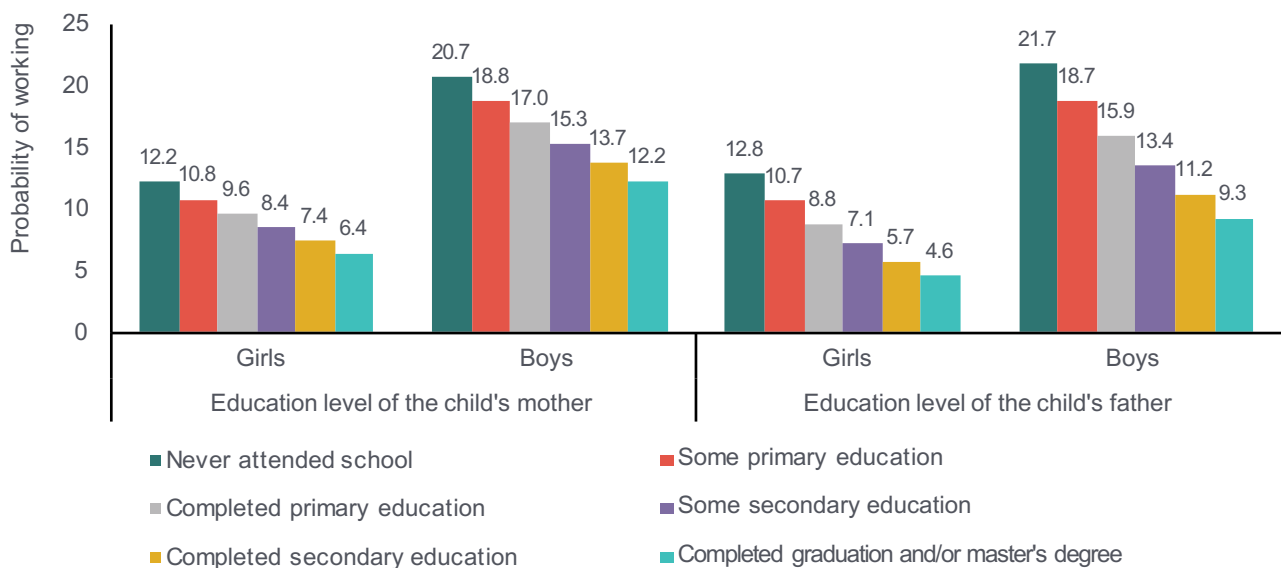
**Figure 34. Households with fewer children are less likely to have children working: probability of a child working based on the percentage of children younger than 14**



**Figure 35. Father-headed households are more likely to include working children: probability of working based on whether father or mother household head (HH)**



**Figure 36. Parental education strongly influences the child work patterns: probability of working based on the education level of the child's mother and father**



### 3.4 Schooling, learning and perceptions of education

The impact of child work on education is one of the most important transmission mechanisms for social disadvantage. Children who are working rather than building human capital through learning face a lifetime of diminished opportunity. The links operate in both directions. Children could be working because they are out-of-school – and they could be out-of-school because they are working. Whatever the precise direction of causality in individual cases, children’s employment in Bangladesh’s slums appears to have significant detrimental consequences for their education.

Children in slums across Bangladesh suffer in acute form from Bangladesh’s twin crises in education. They are less likely to progress smoothly through a full cycle of primary education into secondary school. Those that do progress will struggle to achieve levels of learning consistent with the ambition defined by the national curriculum. Within slum areas, children who are working or at risk of abandoning school for employment face a double disadvantage.

Our survey casts into sharp relief the interplay between household disadvantage and inequality in education that effectively cuts short the school careers of so many working children. It points to marked differences between working and non-working children in terms of their ability

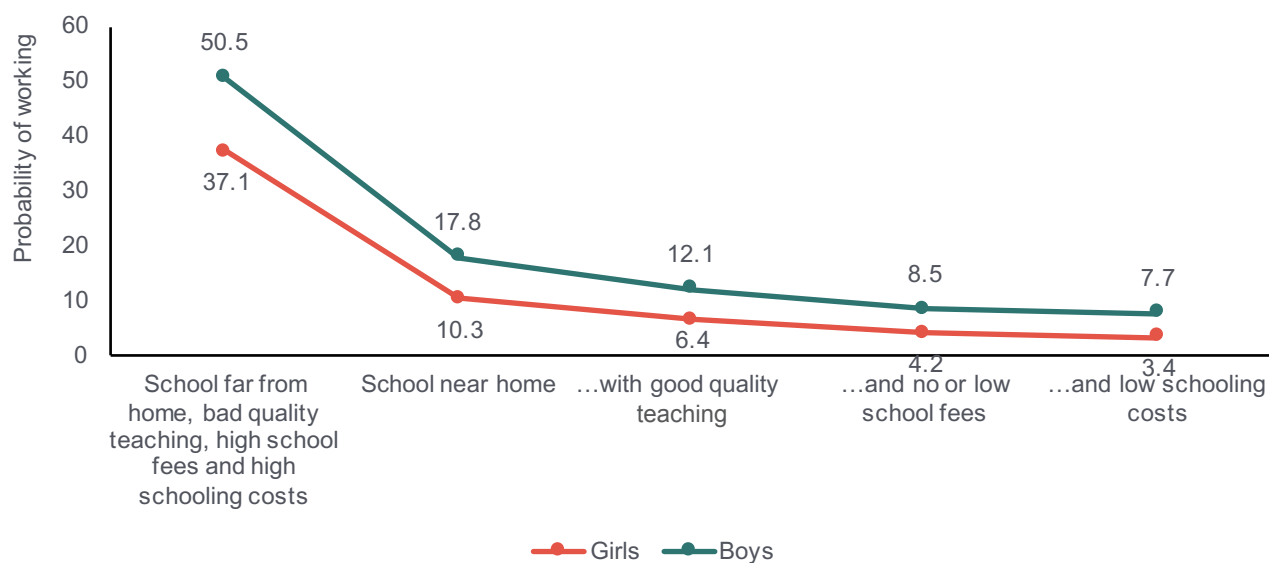
to participate in school, progress across grades and learn. The results suggest that child labour remains a major obstacle to the realisation of the national goals set for education in Bangladesh.

In this section, we present the survey data on the experiences reported by children in school, children who are working, and children who are neither working nor in school. We do not report separately on the number of children who are combining employment with education, due to the very small group.

#### 3.4.1 School attendance and grade progression

Attending school at the age corresponding to the standard grade is the exception rather than the rule among slum dwellers in our survey. Fewer than one in five children aged 6–10 and just over 1 in 10 of the 11–14 age group are at the expected age-for-grade. Figure 38 provides a detailed age-for-grade profile for our survey sample. Over 40% of our survey respondents in Grade 1 reported ages of between eight and nine. By Grade 6, just 12% of pupils are at the right age-for-grade (11-years of age in this case). These outcomes reflect a combination of delayed entry to school, grade repetition and temporary drop out. Age-for-grade improves at Grades 7 and 8, principally for the perverse reason that many over-age children drop out.

**Figure 37. Probability of working for a child living in slums of Dhaka City Corporation based on existing education opportunities**



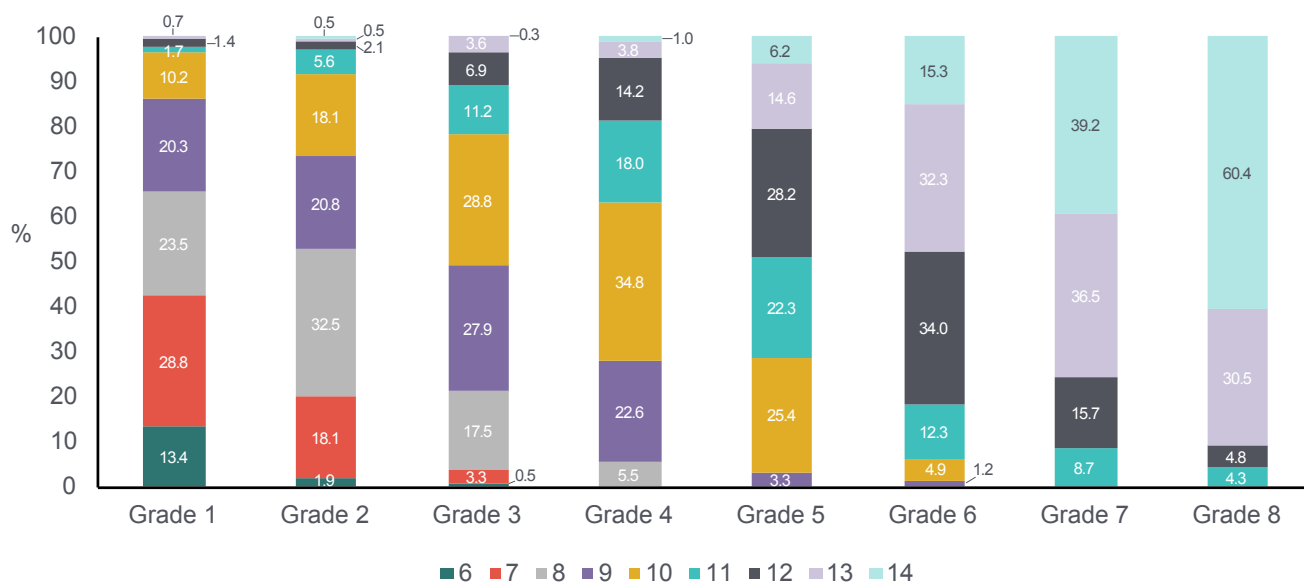
Almost all of the working children in our survey have some experience of education. Around 90% in the 11–14 age group report having attended school at some point. These children typically started school later than their non-working peers, pointing to delayed entry as a contributory risk factor for early entry to work. They entered school at an average age of 6.4, compared with 6 for non-working children.

Working children enter the world of work having accumulated limited years of school. Creating an education profile for an average child worker is a hazardous exercise – but it is one that can reveal underlying structures of disadvantage. In the case of our survey, the average child worker in the 11–14 age range dropped out of school at the age of 10.5 having accumulated four years of school, having completed a highest grade of 3.7 (Table 9). On an

uninterrupted progression pathway, children in the 11–14 age group would be expected to have completed between Grades 5–8. The implication is that they started school after the age of six and subsequently either repeated a grade or dropped out.

The average inevitably obscures differences across ages. Of the 8% of 10-year-olds who report being in work some 60% have not progressed beyond Grade 2. Almost one third of 14-year-old working children report Grade 3 as the highest level of attainment and almost three quarters ended school at Grade 5 or less (Table 10). While our sampling cannot be considered representative for individual age groups, we reconfigured our survey respondent data to capture the reported grade reached by working children at the age they left school.

**Figure 38. Misalignment in age-for-grade profiles: share of children by age in Grades 1–8**



**Table 9. The education profile of working children aged 11–14 years**

Current age of working child	Age at which the child first enrolled in school	Age at which the child left school	Average number of years in school	Highest completed grade by age	Grade that the child should have been when s/he left school
11	6.3	9.7	3.4	3.2	4
12	6.3	9.7	3.4	3.2	5
13	6.4	10.8	4.4	3.6	5
14	6.5	10.8	4.3	4.0	6
<b>Age group 11–14</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>5</b>

The static snapshot taken at the age of 10–14 obscures the more complex moving picture of grade progression by gender. Working girls are almost twice as likely as boys to reach Grade 5, though around one quarter report Grades 1-3 as the highest level attained. Only 15% of working boys have completed Grade 5, with fully 38% only completing Grades 1-3. While there is a gender advantage in grade completion for girls, the overall picture is one of 14-year-old children entering labour markets with desperately low levels of education as measured by years of schooling. Factoring in the low levels of learning achievement, this reinforces the educational disadvantage these children carry as they make the transition from the world of school to the world of work.

The line separating working children from those out-of-school but not reported as being in employment is blurred. Children reporting being ‘idle’ at the age of 11 may be working by the age of 12 or 13. To explore the profile of the group, we constructed an age-for-grade tracker comparable to the exercise we carried out for working children. As a group, ‘idle’ children have accumulated fewer years in school – just 3.7 on average. At the average age they left school they should have reached Grade 5, but had yet to complete Grade 3 (Table 11).

**Table 10. Highest reported grade for working children aged 10-14**

	Children aged 10 (%)	Children aged 14 (%)
Grade 1	22.3	5.6
Grade 2	38.8	12.4
Grade 3	27.8	14.7
Grade 4	-	18.9
Grade 5	-	21.4
Grade 6	-	8.1
Grade 7	-	5.4
Grade 8	-	4.5
Grade 9	-	0.6

Grade repetition contributes to age-for-grade misalignment. We did not observe marked differences in repetition rates between children currently attending school, working children and children neither working nor attending school. However, the survey did detect some marked differences in patterns of grade repetition. Children currently working reported having lower repetition rates for Grades 1–2, but far higher repetition rates in Grades 3–4 (Table 12).

**Table 11. The education profile of non-working children who are out-of-school aged 11–14**

Current age of child neither working nor studying	Age at which the child first enrolled in school	Age at which the child left school	Average number of years in school	Highest completed grade by age	Grade that the child should have reached when s/he left school
11	6.7	9.6	2.9	2.7	4
12	6.7	9.9	3.2	3.0	5
13	6.8	10.8	4.0	3.4	5
14	6.9	11.7	4.8	4.1	6
<b>Age group 11–14</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>5</b>

**Table 12. Patterns of grade repetition**

	Children that have dropped out of school		
	Children that are only studying (%)	Children neither working nor studying (%)	Working children (%)
Grade 1	39.4	34.3	27.4
Grade 2	23.9	29.0	25.0
Grade 3	13.4	10.7	23.8
Grade 4	4.9	6.6	12.9
Grade 5	1.0	7.4	3.0
Grade 6	1.2	0.0	1.5



Several factors may contribute to these distinctive grade repetition patterns. For children who entered school late, the prospect of repetition at Grade 3 or Grade 4 may be particularly damaging because it coincides with a typical labour market entry age. Parents and, potentially, children themselves, may view the opportunity cost of repetition as being too high. It may also be the case that exam failure is seen as signalling to parents and children that they are unlikely to succeed in education.

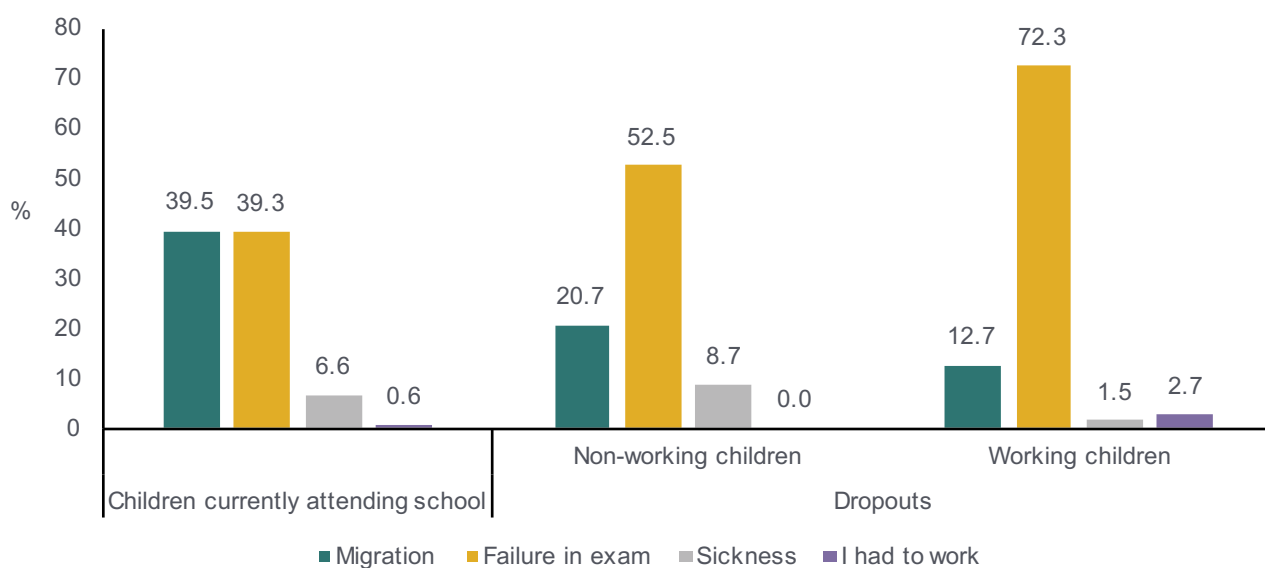
We asked children to report on the reasons for grade repetition. Here, too, there were some notable differences (Figure 39). Currently working children were by far the most likely to have repeated as a result of examination failure, pointing to challenges in learning. For children currently in school, and non-working out-of-school children, migration and sickness also figured as significant factors.

Why do children drop out of school? We asked that question of out-of-school children and their parents. What emerged was a broadly consistent pattern with some marked differences (Figure 40). Working children

and their parents both cite economic pressure and school costs as major factors. However, the children were far more likely than their parents to see themselves as being ‘poor at studying’, suggesting they had internalised the consequences of school failure. Conversely, one third of the parents of working children cited truancy and the lack of interest of the child in school as a reason for dropping out. For non-working out-of-school children and their parents the pattern is broadly similar. Children emphasise costs and being ‘poor in studies’, while parents emphasise truancy and costs.

Children report having attended different types of school. Slums in Bangladesh are home to a range of education providers, including the government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (predominantly not-for-profit) and private (for-profit) schools, and a range of Madrashas. Working children aged 11–14 were far more likely to have attended a government school or that of an NGO provider, while private schools were the principal provider for children attending school (Table 13).

**Figure 39. Reasons for repetition: different groups of children attending and not attending school**



**Table 13. Schools attended by type and child status: in school, out-of-school and work, and child labourers, ages 11–14**

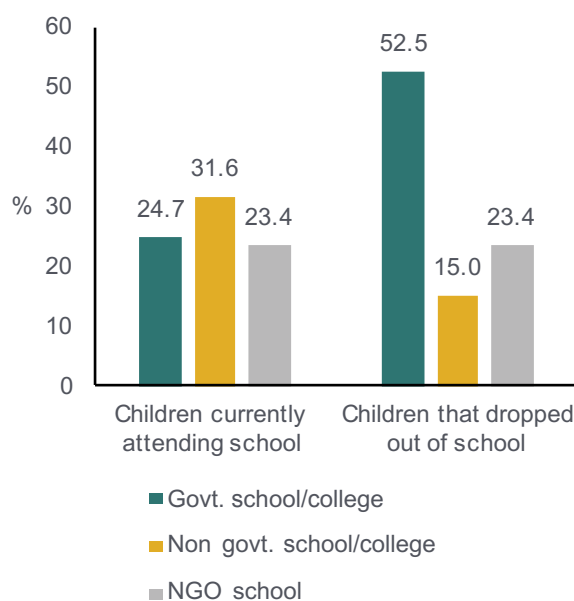
School	What kind of school are you currently attending?	What kind of school did you last attend?	
	Children only going to school (%)	Non-working children that dropped out of school ('idle' children) (%)	Working children that dropped out of school (%)
Private school/college	43.4	18.7	15.2
Govt. school/college	27.1	51.6	55.7
NGO school	18.6	23.5	20.0
Madrasha	6.0	4.2	7.2

Repetition rates were particularly high for children who had dropped out of a government school, with over half reporting repetition of at least one grade (Figure 41).

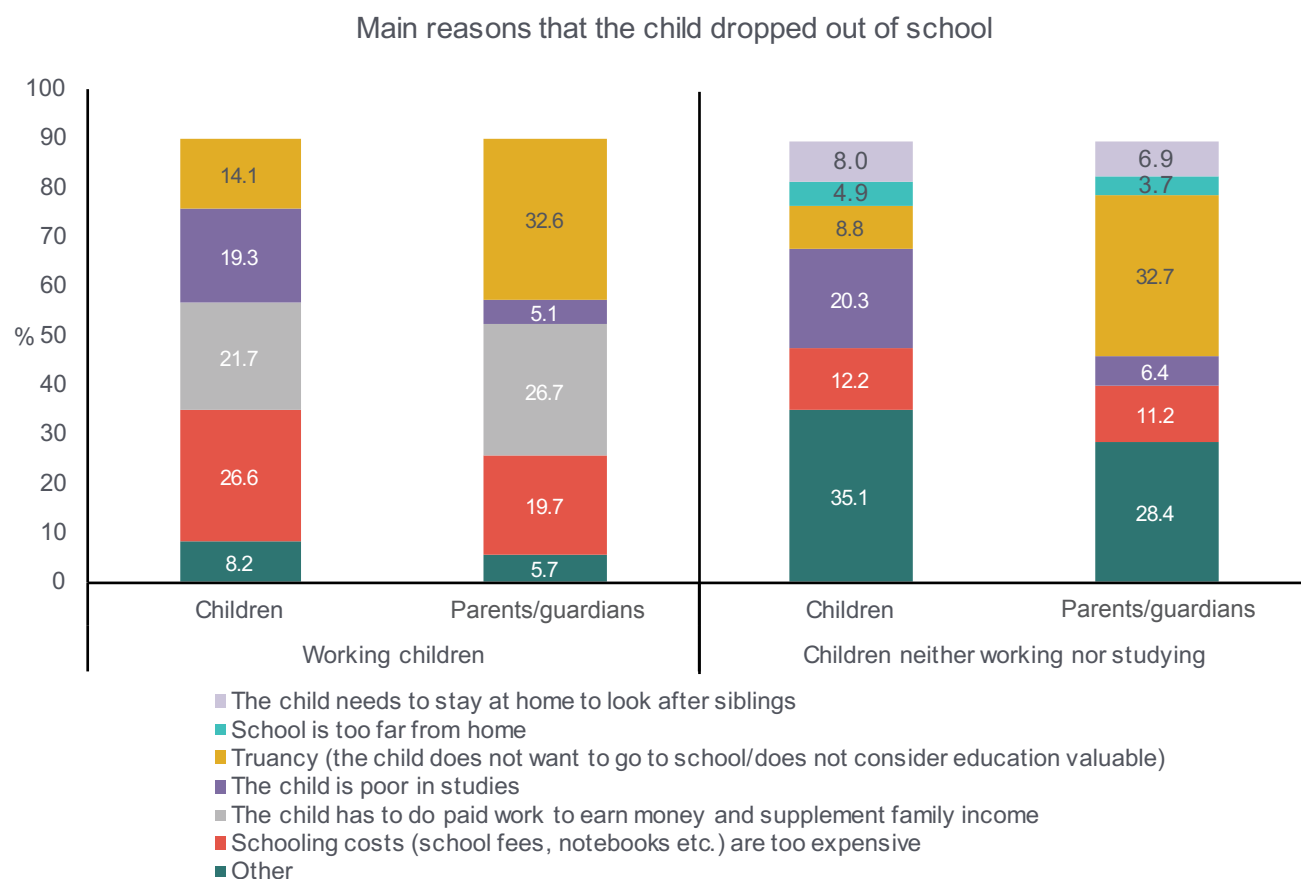
We asked parents of children attending school and child labourers for the reasons behind their selection of schools (in the case of working children, for the last school attended). The quality of the school figured with more prominence for parents in households with non-working children (Figure 42).

There is a vibrant market for private tuition in Dhaka’s slums – and this may be contributing to opportunity gaps between working and non-working children. Around half of working children report having utilised private tutors to improve exam results prior to dropping out of school. Children currently attending school have higher rates of utilisation (see Annexes). However, the biggest difference is in levels of payment. We asked parents to report on the level of payments made to private tutors. Parents of children currently attending school were more than twice as likely to be spending in the range of Tk 500 to Tk 1,000 a month, as parents of children who had dropped out of school (Figure 43). To the extent that payment levels serve as a proxy for hours of instruction and quality of instruction, this could be an important transmission mechanism for advantage and disadvantage in school.

**Figure 41. Repetition rates for in-school and out-of-school children by school type – percentage of children repeating at least one grade**



**Figure 40. Why do children drop out of school: children and parental perceptions by education and employment status**

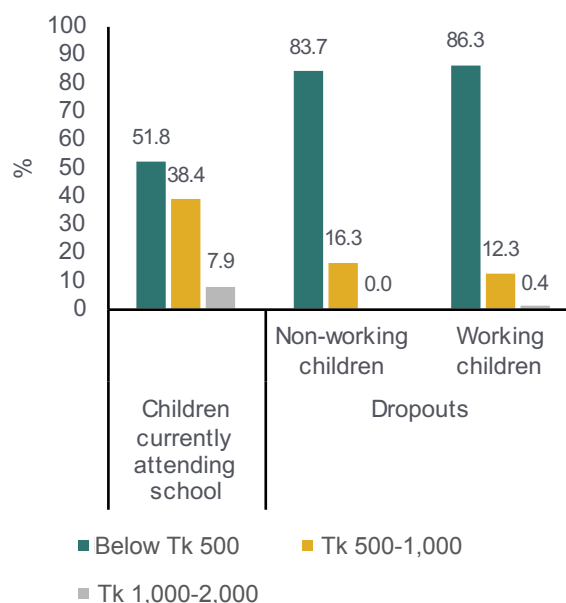


The small group of children combining work and school appears to struggle with a difficult balancing act. On average, these children report working for just under three hours a day. By the time they are 11–14 years old, they are half as likely as their non-working counterparts in school to be attending at the correct grade for their age (5.9% versus 11%) – albeit in a context where only a minority are in the correct grade. Although absenteeism rates are comparable for working and non-working children attending school at around 13%, the reasons cited for absenteeism vary. Over 80% of absenteeism among children combining work and school is accounted for by a reported need to work for payment or provide labour for the family.

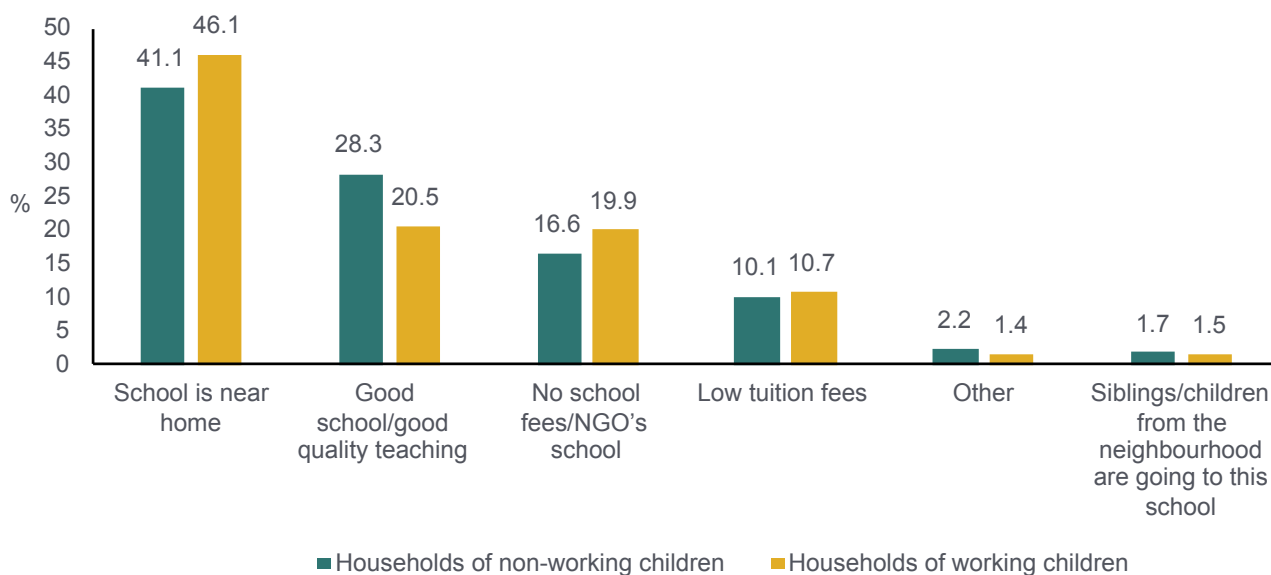
### 3.4.2 What are children learning?

School attendance is a weak proxy for learning achievement in Bangladesh, as in many other developing countries. As noted earlier, the marginal value of an additional year in school measured in terms of learning outcomes is modest on average. In order to develop a picture of learning achievement in our survey areas we administered a series of simple literacy, numeracy and reasoning tests. The results confirm a pattern of limited average learning for all children, coupled with a marked difference between working and non-working children. Early entry into the world of work carries very significant disadvantages in terms of the basic literacy and numeracy skills that have a bearing on lifetime earnings and livelihood security.

**Figure 43. Spending on private tuition varies across households: reported spending by band, differentiated by education/employment status of child**



**Figure 42. Reasons for school selection: parent (or guardian) responses on why they selected last school attended, working children (last school attended) and non-working children**



Our tests were designed to capture very basic levels of learning achievement (see Annex 4 for technical details). Difficulty levels were calibrated against competency requirements expected of children in Grades 1–3. For literacy, children were presented with 10 letters from the Bengali alphabet and then five words in Bengali (Grades 1–2). They were then asked to read two simple sentences in Bangla (Grade 3). These were as follows: ‘agricultural work is hard’ and ‘the girl is playing’. Children were then asked to read a simple passage in Bengali after which they were tested for comprehension (Grade 3).

Our maths tests assessed children at levels of difficulty spanning Grade 2–4. At the lower end of the range,

children were asked to order numbers and to identify missing numbers in a sequence (Grades 2–3). The test included standard Grade 3 level two-digit addition and subtraction, and single digit multiplication. We also included a subset of Grade 4–5 applied reasoning skills. This included familiarity with formulae and use of deduction. One of the questions was: ‘Aisha has 300 eggs. She sells 218. What is the remaining number of eggs?’

All children were tested against the same criteria. We divided respondents into two age groups, those aged 6–10 and those aged 11–14, and three comparison groups, differentiating between child labourers, non-working children and children neither in work nor in school. Tables

**Table 14. Reading for basic literacy: correct identification of 10 letters in Bengali alphabet by age and work/education status: share of children in age groups 6–10 and 11–14**

Number of letters that the child can correctly identify	Age group 6–10			Age group 11–14		
	Non-working children		Working children (%)	Non-working children		Working children
	Children only studying (%)	Children neither working nor studying (%)		Children only studying (%)	Children neither working nor studying (%)	
0	0.8	17.1	22.2	0.5	11.1	7.3
1	2.1	15.4	8.9	0.7	8.0	2.0
2	1.3	9.0	11.1	0.2	5.0	3.2
3	2.3	12.2	13.3	0.4	4.0	4.1
4	1.4	6.9	4.4	0.3	4.2	1.7
5	3.2	10.1	6.7	0.6	6.1	4.6
6	2.3	5.3	2.2	0.6	4.4	3.2
7	3.7	3.2	11.1	0.7	1.7	3.3
8	6.7	3.7	4.5	2.2	9.8	5.7
9	10.9	6.4	2.2	3.0	10.0	7.3
10	65.2	10.6	13.3	90.8	35.6	57.7

**Table 15. Reading for basic literacy: correct identification of five words in Bengali by age and work/education status: share of children in age groups 6–10 and 11–14**

Number of words that the child can correctly read	Age group 6–10			Age group 11–14		
	Non-working children		Working children (%)	Non-working children		Working children (%)
	Children only studying (%)	Children neither working nor studying (%)		Children only studying (%)	Children neither working nor studying (%)	
0	8.9	70.2	62.2	1.1	31.8	17.0
1	6.2	11.2	6.7	1.0	5.9	6.3
2	8.9	5.3	11.1	1.1	7.3	6.6
3	11.3	4.8	4.4	2.5	7.5	9.0
4	12.4	2.1	0.0	4.1	11.7	10.0
5	52.4	6.4	15.6	90.1	35.8	51.1

14 and 15 capture both the low level of basic literacy and the divergence between children in school, on the one side, and working and non-working out-of-school children on the other. Among the indicative results:

- For children who are only studying, one third of 6–10-year-olds are unable to correctly identify 10 Bengali letters and almost half are unable to read five words correctly. Alarming, 10% of children aged 11–14 still in school were unable to achieve a wholly correct score.
- Children who enter labour markets between the ages of 6–10 (around 14% of our survey sample) do so with minimal literacy skills. Over half were unable to correctly identify more than three Bengali letters and almost two thirds were unable to read a single word correctly.
- Child labourers in aged 11–14 score very low on Grades 1–2 literacy tests. Only just over half were able to identify the 10 Bengali letters and correctly read the five simple words.
- Only half of working children aged 11–14 were able to read the sentence ‘the girl is playing’, compared to 89% of children only studying (Figure 44).
- Children who are neither working nor in school perform even worse than working children, though this finding has to be treated with some caution. In the case of the 6–10 age group, many of these children have yet to enter school.

These findings are disturbing on a number of levels. It is evident that many working children learned very little while attending school – and that the basic literacy skills they did acquire erode very quickly. The performance of

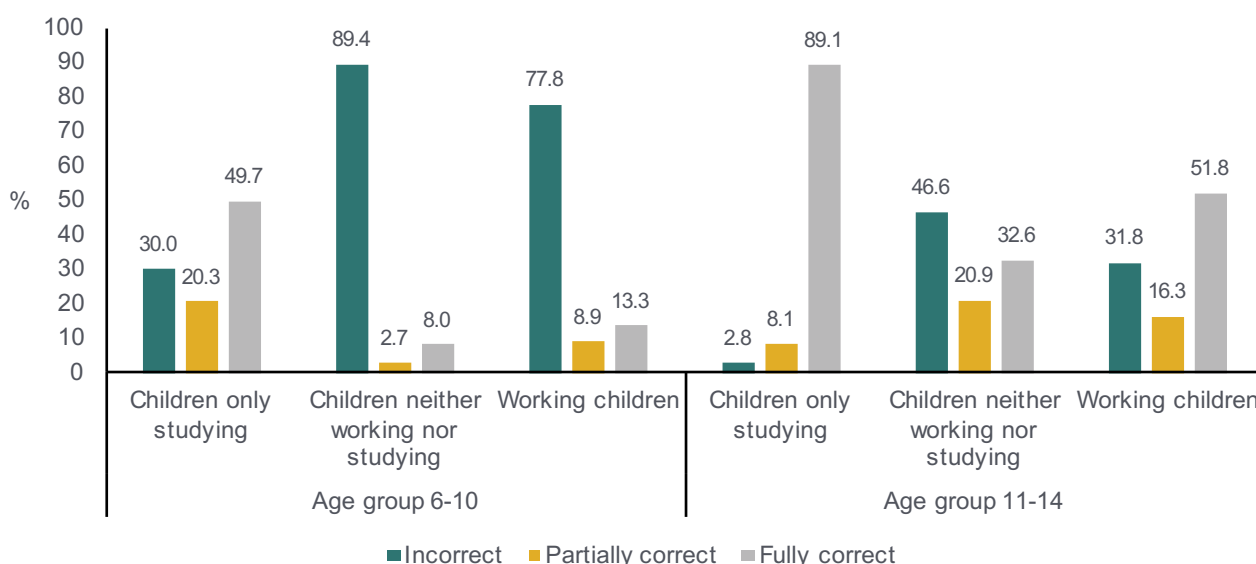
children neither working nor studying is similarly a cause for concern since a majority of these children are far more likely to enter the world of work than re-enter the world of school.

Raising the bar for learning achievement magnifies the divergence between working children and those attending school. Children aged 11–14 who participated in the survey were asked to read a seven sentence passage (Table 16 and Annexes). The passage included simple information on where a character lives, the number and age of her siblings, and her ambitions for employment. The children were tested for ability to read the passage, time taken and comprehension. As highlighted in Table 16, while children in school performed well below the levels anticipated in the national curriculum, working children scored at far lower levels. Fewer than half were able to read the passage in a minute or less (compared to 87% for children in school). Children neither working nor at school registered the worst performance scores, though consideration has to be given to the fact that this group includes some children with delayed school entry.

Comprehension scores capture the very limited literacy skills that working children accumulate, retain and take with them into the workplace. Children aged 11–14 were asked to answer a series of simple questions based on the passage tested in Table 16. Working children on average were half as likely as children in school to register correct responses (Figure 45).

Maths test scores revealed differences as well as some similarities with respect to test score. On basic Grade 3 numeracy, the gap between child labourers and children attending school in the 11–14 age group was limited (Table 17). Working children are clearly able to build upon what skills they leave school with in this area. This may reflect

**Figure 44. Accurate reading of a basic literacy sentence: percentage of children correctly reading the sentence ‘the girl is playing’ in Bengali**



the practical exigencies of mental arithmetic associated with street vending, managing expenditure, supporting families and negotiating wages. Children neither working nor studying perform far below child labourers, suggesting that the experience of work may be more important than skills acquired at school.

One of the most striking results to emerge from the survey is the desperately low level of applied maths reasoning competency. Few of the 11–14-year-olds in school are able to perform at Grade 3–4 level. Fully one third was able to derive a result involving simple three-digit subtraction; and just 17% could derive a multiplication number. Child labourers performed very poorly on maths reasoning skills, with just 5% able to correctly identify the multiplier.

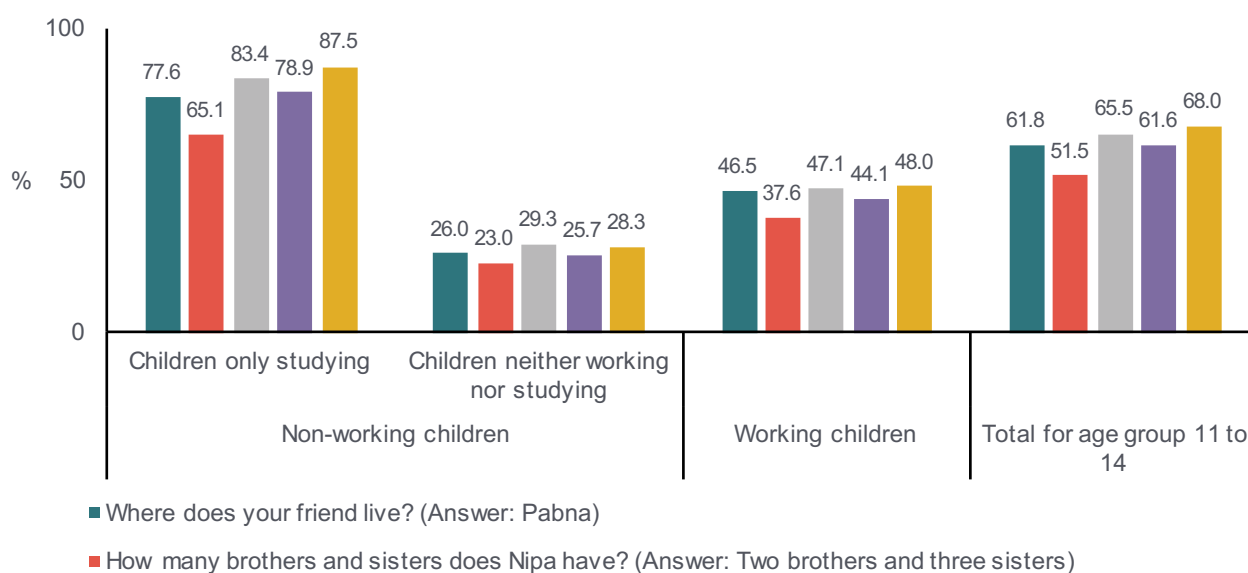
These learning results raise concerns at many levels. For working children, the very low levels of basic literacy, numeracy and applied learning capabilities is clearly a constraint on prospects for employment and earnings. These children have effectively been left with education levels that will trap them in insecure, low-wage livelihoods. The fact that basic literacy and numeracy skills acquired in school have failed to ‘stick’, raises questions over the quality of early grade teaching. More generally, if the slum-dwelling children covered by our survey are in any sense representative of children in other informal settlements across Bangladesh, it is evident that the national education system is failing to equip a large – and growing – section of society with the skills and competencies needed to sustain more dynamic and inclusive growth.

**Table 16. Testing for reading: outcomes for children aged 6–10 and 11–14, proportion able to read and time taken**

Pupils were asked to read the following passage in Bengali: *My friend Nipa lives in Pabna. She loves that place. She has two brothers and three sisters. Her brothers are older than her. My friend works at home every day. She takes care of her two younger sisters at home. She wants to become a doctor after her studies.*

	Age group 6–10			Age group 11–14		
	Non-working children			Non-working children		
	Children only studying (%)	Children neither working nor studying (%)	Working children (%)	Children only studying (%)	Children neither working nor studying (%)	Working children (%)
The reader can read the passage in a minute or less (% of children)	42.5	3.7	15.6	87.8	31.6	49.1
Time for reading the passage in seconds	55.5	58.6	57.8	44.1	56.6	53.4
The child can read the first five sentences (% of children)	53.3	5.9	15.6	93.6	38.9	57.8

**Figure 45. Testing for comprehension: share of children aged 11–14 correctly answering specified questions, by education and employment status**





### 3.4.3 Perceptions of school

How children perceive and experience school can have a material bearing on what they are able to learn. On some key indicators, our survey revealed divergent experiences which may influence learning outcomes.

Child labourers and non-working but out-of-school children report more negative experiences with respect to their teachers than children currently attending school (Table 18). They were less likely to feel they could express

an opinion or ask a question, and more likely to feel mocked, teased or scolded. Child workers were twice as likely to report having been scolded during their school years. Children currently in school report greater levels of confidence in asking teachers for advice (Figure 46). Perhaps related to these experiences, children who have dropped out, whether in work or out of work, report greater difficulty in understanding textbooks.

**Table 17. Numeracy and maths competencies: correct results by age group and education/employment status, children aged 6–10 and 11–14**

Maths' questions	Age group 6–10			Age group 11–14		
	Non-working children		Working children (%)	Non-working children		Working children (%)
	Children only studying (%)	Children neither working nor studying (%)		Children only studying (%)	Children neither working nor studying (%)	
Arrange the numbers in descending order 8, 10, 5, 11, 4	85.0	39.4	71.1	97.7	76.8	88.9
Addition 37+57=?	51.7	10.6	35.6	90.5	32.6	64.6
Subtraction 18-7=?	58.6	12.2	48.9	93.4	43.5	75.2
Multiplication 6*7=?	45.7	4.8	26.7	86.7	31.4	51.2
Aisha has 300 eggs. She sells 218 eggs. What is the remaining number of eggs that Aisha is left with?	23.6	3.7	20.0	63.2	13.2	40.8
The result of the multiplication of two numbers is 255. One of the number is 15. What is the other number?	3.5	0.0	0.0	17.2	0.0	4.8

**Table 18. Reported classroom experiences of children aged 6–14 by employment and education status: reporting on perceptions of teachers**

	Children only studying (%)	Children neither working nor studying (%)	Working children (%)
In my class, I can/could express my opinion	86.0	70.6	77.0
In my class, I can/could ask questions to the teacher/s	90.2	77.4	83.8
How often do/did the teachers praise you for doing well in class?			
a) Never	10.1	22.2	16.3
b) Some days	68.8	68.8	73.9
c) Every day	21.1	9.1	9.8
Do/did your teacher/s scold pupils when they do/did not understand the lesson?			
a) No	57.2	50.5	43.4
b) Yes, some teachers	37.7	43.0	50.4
c) Yes, all the teachers	5.0	6.5	6.1

Once again, considerable caution has to be exercised in interpreting these results. Home background and social characteristics of pupils will have had a bearing on student learning outcomes. It may also be the case that our survey is picking up changes over time: classroom teaching practices may have improved since working children dropped out. However, based on the reporting from the children themselves it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that negative attitudes on the part of teachers interacting with other factors, may have fuelled a cycle of low-expectation, poor learning outcomes and subsequent drop-out.

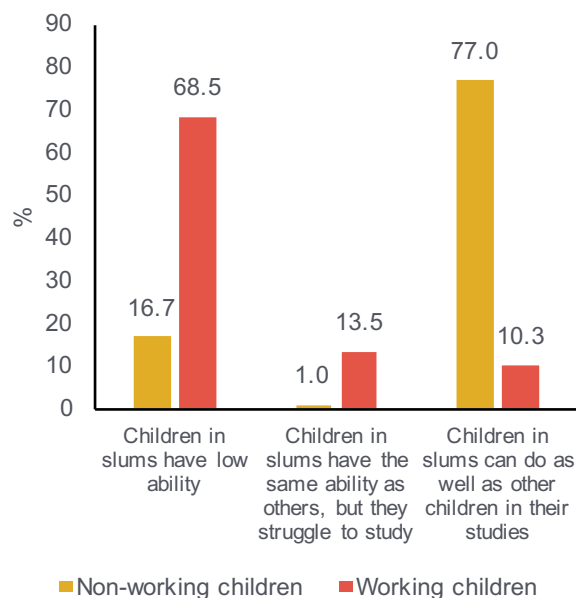
Significant differences were reported with respect to the physical environment by non-working children in school as compared to child labourers (see Annex tables). The sole exception to this rule related to an electricity connection and the presence of an electric fan.

### 3.4.4 Parents' and children's expectations

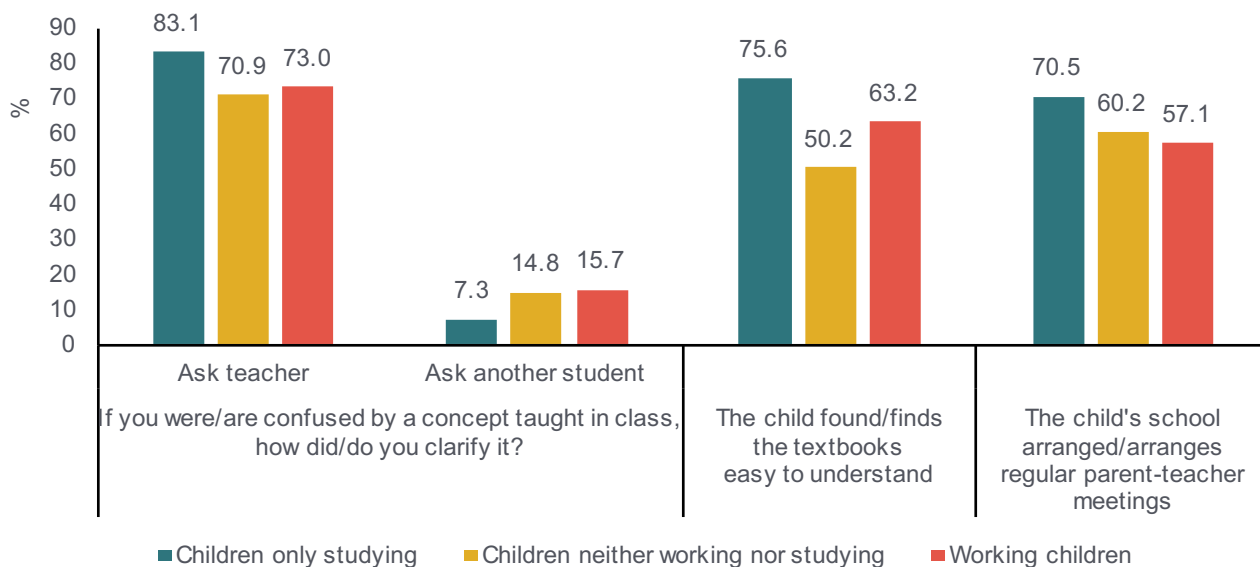
Child workers appear to have internalised low levels of expectation and to attribute limited education prospects to personal failing (Figure 47). Over two thirds of those interviewed expressed the view that children living in informal settlements lack the ability to succeed at school, which is four times the share reported by non-working children. Only 13% attributed difficulties in education to the economic pressures forcing them into work. By contrast, three quarters of non-working children felt that

children living in informal settlements could do as well as other children, with only 16% attributing failure to a lack of ability.

**Figure 47. What is the ability level of children living in slums and can they succeed in education: responses of children aged 6–14 by education and employment status**



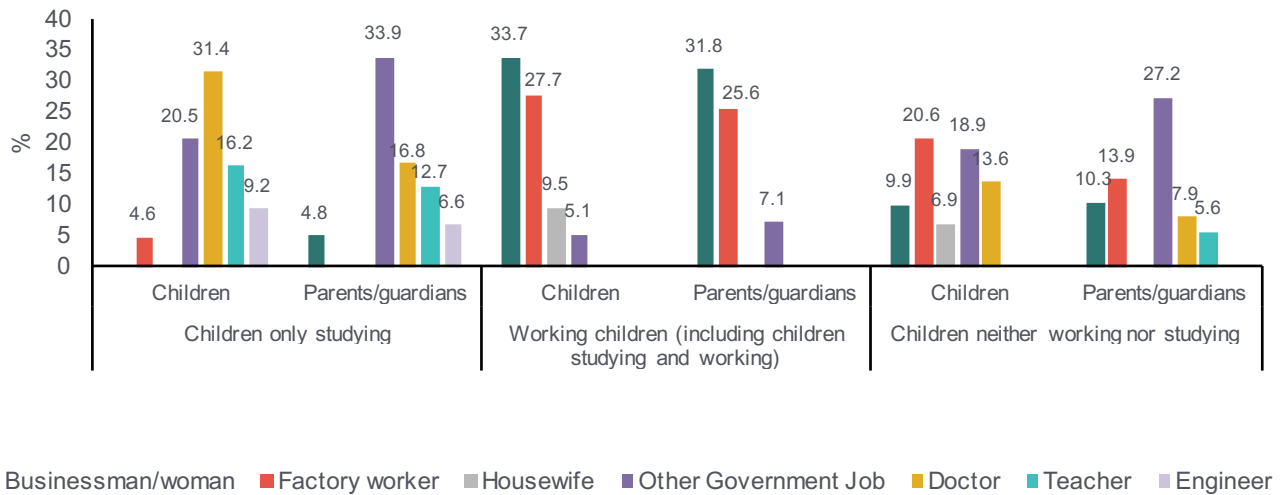
**Figure 46. School experience of children and interaction of school with parents: child's response to learning difficulties, understanding of textbooks and parent-teacher meetings, by employment/education status of the child**



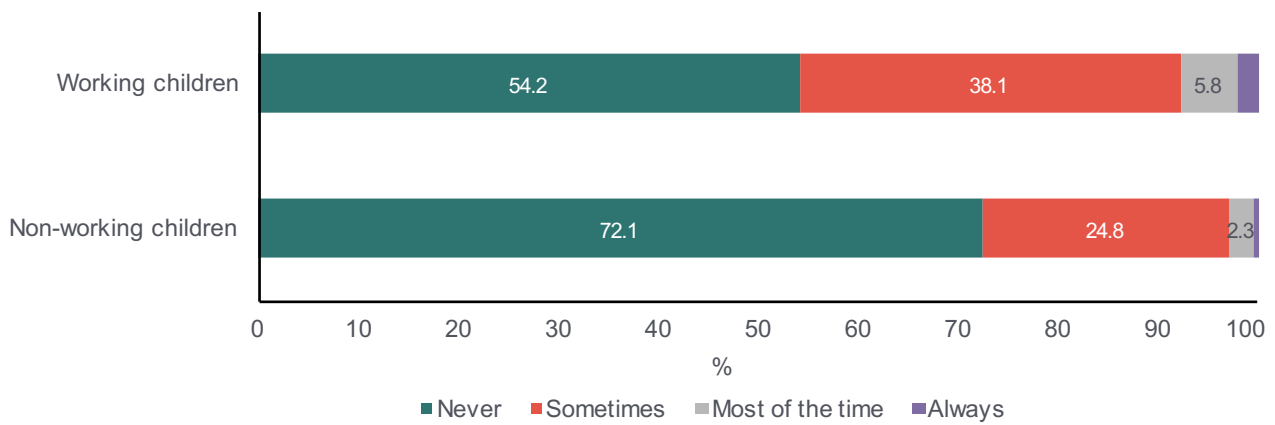
By the time they are between the ages of 11–14, child labourers and non-working children have very different expectations, as do their parents (Figure 48). The majority of working children see themselves working either in ‘business’ – in this context, usually street vending, running a stall, or providing unskilled services – or in factories, with a large proportion of girls anticipating a future as a housewife. By contrast, non-working children anticipate a future as a doctor, government worker, teacher or engineer. This broadly mirrors the expectation of their parents (Figure 48), who see education as a potentially secure route towards public sector employment.

Being in work is associated with an elevated incidence of negative feelings. Child labourers report lower levels of confidence and happiness, and higher levels of disappointment and frustration with themselves (Figures 49a, 49b and 49c). While the data has to be interpreted with some caution, it suggests that children internalise perceived self-failure as a set of outcomes over which they have limited – if any – control. By extension, child labourers also report lower levels of hope about the future.

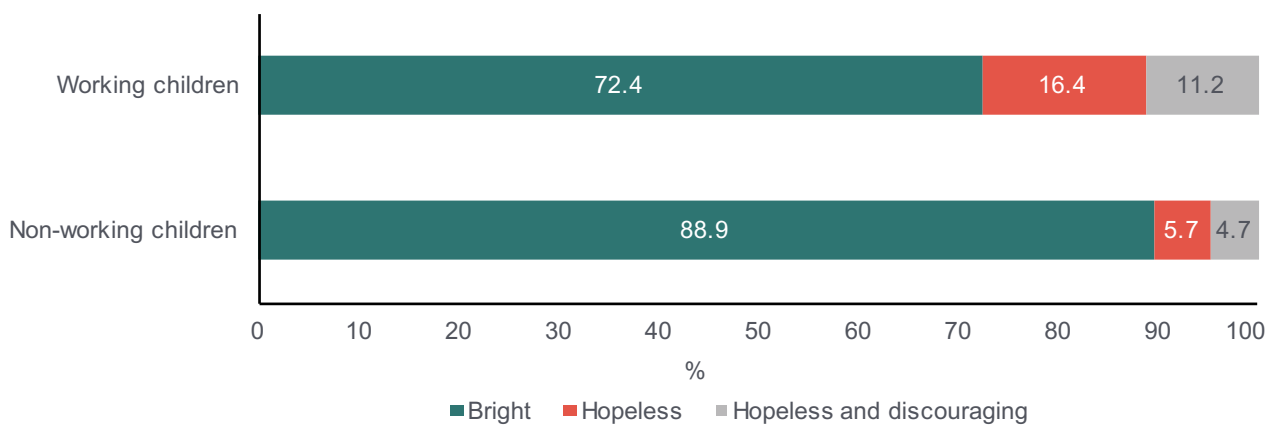
**Figure 48. Future expectations: what children and parents say about their future employment, by employment and education status**



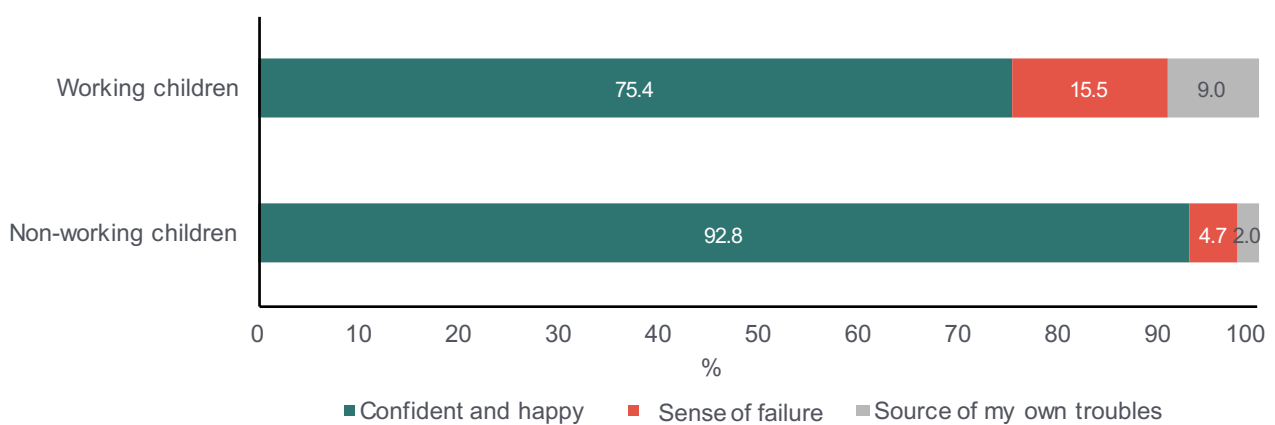
**Figure 49a. How often do you feel sad/unhappy?**



**Figure 49b. My future is...**



**Figure 49c. How do you feel about yourself?**



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# Conclusions and policy recommendations

This section briefly summarises some of the key policy issues highlighted by the Child Labour Survey and outlines our associated recommendations. Our hope is that it will contribute to the broader national dialogue on the elimination of (the worst forms) of child labour in Bangladesh – and to the international dialogue on the role of education in anti-child labour strategies.

Our survey findings serve to reinforce wider evidence on the destructive power of the two-way interaction between child labour and educational disadvantage. Children in Dhaka's slums enter labour markets for many reasons and as a result of complex processes. Household poverty and inherited social disadvantage – notably parental education – figures prominently. The fact that earnings from children's work lifts the income of their households to an average level comparable to that in households with non-working children is important. It lends weight to the proposition that parents are compelled to let their children work in order to achieve a minimum level of income. However, problems in the education system leading to high drop-out rates during the primary education cycle is part of the problem. It creates a ready supply of child entrants to the labour market. The gap between Bangladesh's impressively high levels of primary school enrolment and still depressingly low levels of completion are symptoms of wider factors, including over-age enrolment, grade repetition, and – critically – the quality of education.

Our survey findings highlight not just the scale of child labour but also the severity of the problem. Almost all of the working children in our sample are working much more than 42 hours a week. The fact that many of these children – especially girls – report working in the formal garment sector raises questions about the effectiveness of regulatory measures. For practical purposes, the reach of regulatory institutions does not extend into the informal sector. While the findings should be interpreted with caution, our survey also points to employment practices – notably cash payments with no contract – which add to the vulnerability of working children.

Working children in Dhaka's slums are overwhelmingly out-of-school. Our survey does not capture the tensions faced by children – young girls in particular – balancing

household chores with schooling. What it does capture is the stark choice between education and employment that working children make before completing the primary cycle. That choice is the product of economic compulsion *and* the educational failure generated by a schooling system that under-serves slum-dwelling children in terms of both access and quality.

In the absence of a concerted drive to eradicate the worst forms of child labour, Bangladesh will not achieve the 2030 development goal of universal secondary schooling. Whatever the underlying drivers, the endemic child labour in Dhaka's slums constitutes a formidable barrier to universal *primary* education. Developments in these slums may or may not mirror experiences in other urban centres. However, with around 30% of the children covered in our survey either working or neither working nor participating in school, the warning signs are clear. Rapid urbanisation in Bangladesh is not an automatic route to accelerated progress in education. On the contrary, in the absence of measures to expand opportunities for schooling and to curtail child labour, it could be associated with stagnation or even the reversal of past gains.

Breaking the link between child labour, social disadvantage and restricted opportunities for education will require a coordinated and comprehensive policy response. There is currently a wide range of national strategies, as well as bilateral and multilateral aid interventions, aimed at tackling child labour. However, the aggregate impact of the interventions now in place is less than the sum of their parts. This is partly because of problems in capacity and coordination across ministries; and partly because the policy frameworks remain fragmented. To take one obvious example: there is no coherent education sector strategy spanning primary and junior secondary education targeting universal enrolment among slum-dwelling children. Coordination between education ministries, the Ministry of Labour and Employment and the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs is also too weak to deliver results on the crisis, let alone at the pace required.

Based on the findings set out in previous sections we recommend policy reform in three key areas:

## 1 Building the evidence base

The Government of Bangladesh and aid partners need a stronger evidence base on child labour and education in urban slums. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' 2013 Child Labour Survey provides a high-quality nationally representative sample survey covering over 1,500 enumeration areas. However, only 343 of these are in urban locations – and there is no distinctive sample frame for urban slums. Efforts should be made to link the next Child Labour Survey to the updated Census of Slum Areas. The 2014 Census provides a valuable breakdown of the estimated distribution of slums and slum populations by division. Outside of Dhaka, which accounts for half of the total slum population, other urban centres with large and expanding slum populations include Chittagong (27% of the national total) Khulna (8%), Rangpur (5%) and Sylhet and Rajshahi (both 4%). We recommend that the Government of Bangladesh work with BRAC and others to conduct bi-annual surveys of slums in each of these divisions with a view to tracking levels of child labour and the education status of working children. Survey design should seek to capture the experience of children themselves.

The Government of Bangladesh and international partners should review national survey instruments to improve the quality of information available. There is a vast array of survey data available relating to child labour. Beyond the national Child Labour Survey, sources range from labour force surveys, to Census surveys, MICS and household income and expenditure surveys. However, there is little consistency in the design of survey instruments and sampling frames. As part of the national strategy for eliminating the worst forms of child labour, efforts should be made to avoid duplication and to ensure that each survey instrument adds a distinctive value to the understanding of child labour patterns.

## 2 Making education a more effective part of the strategy for eliminating child labour

Education must be placed at the centre of the national strategy for combating child labour, with the age for compulsory and free education provision raised from 10 to 14. There are a wide variety of national programmes and projects in place aimed at expanding opportunities for education. But the National Education Policy lacks both a coherent strategy for preventing children aged 6–14 being drawn out of school and into labour markets – and a strategy for getting children out of labour markets and back into school. There should be a single integrated strategy spanning the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education and the Ministry of Education. Raising the age for compulsory and free education to 14 would support Bangladesh's wider goals in education and child labour, provided the right enabling environment is put in place to

counteract the pressures forcing children to enter labour markets.

**Bangladesh is underinvesting in education.** Despite the increase in primary and secondary school enrolment over the past 15 years, Bangladesh continues to spend less than 3% of GDP (and 14–16% of the budget) on education. This is well below the levels recorded in sub-Saharan Africa and the average for low-income countries. An additional concern is that the capital budget in education is skewed against the most disadvantaged areas. The underfinancing of education is reflected in the limited availability of public school provision in slums, classroom overcrowding and a range of education quality concerns. While there is scope for enhanced efficiency in education spending, expanded financial resources and greater equity in resource allocation have a critical role to play in expanding opportunities for education in slum areas. As an indicative target, Bangladesh should aim to spend 4–5% of national income on education by 2020.

Demand-side financing and cash transfers could play an expanded role in strengthening school participation among urban slum-dwelling children. The parents of working children in slums and the children themselves are typically forced to choose employment over education because of economic necessity. The unaffordability of the direct costs of schooling (and, increasingly, private tuition fees) and the indirect costs, or opportunity costs, of foregoing child labour are too high. Cash transfers can lower these costs and expand choice. Bangladesh has pioneered some of the world's largest cash transfer programmes in education, ranging from the Primary Education Stipend Programme, stipends for girl students and a range of targeted programmes. Taken collectively, however, these programmes attach insufficient weight to the circumstances of slum-dwelling children forced into labour markets. Transfers at the primary level are too low to compensate working children and their parents for the opportunity costs of staying in school. Indeed, slum-dwelling children have been largely bypassed. Those dropping out of school do not benefit from the primary education stipends or the girl student secondary education stipends. Consideration should be given to the creation of large-scale targeted cash transfer programmes for children living in slums, with an emphasis on front-loaded support during the early grades.

**Both conditional and unconditional cash transfers may have a role to play.** Current cash transfers for education are conditional on school attendance – and evidence from other countries points to the success of such transfers in curtailing child labour. However, unconditional transfers targeting marginalised families may also have a role to play in reducing the economic pressures driving children into the work place. The impact of any transfer programme will be determined, in part, by the level of the transfer. Our survey documents average monthly wages for 6–14-year-old child labourers in Dhaka's slums of Tk 3,664, around \$47 – and this may provide an indication of the level of



support needed to shift household incentives. Aligning the level and timing of transfers with the critical risk factors associated with school drop-out (in particular, late enrolment and grade repetition) could increase the efficiency of transfers. However, interventions in education cannot be considered in isolation. Education outcomes will be determined in part by the degree to which the most vulnerable households are insulated through wider social protection measures from the exogenous shocks associated with food price increases, flooding and other events that increase poverty.

**Urgent action is needed to improve the learning environment.** Children living in slums experience, in acute form, the wider education quality problems evident in Bangladesh – and many carry the consequences of an abysmal learning experience with them into the world of work. The very low levels of learning reported in the early grades and the limited value of an additional year of schooling point to systemic problems. As highlighted in previous sections, there is an urgent need to improve the quality of teaching, and teachers should be better-trained and supported to help first generation learners. At the same time, slum-dwelling children carry with them into the classroom the disadvantages that come with poverty and non-literate home environments. Evidence from a range of developing countries suggests that early childhood programmes can be highly effective in addressing these disadvantages – and there are compelling grounds for the development of a national programme to deliver universal early childhood programmes in slum areas.

### 3 Linking education to strengthened child labour legislation and a more robust regulatory environment

Bangladesh could further strengthen the legislative framework for combating child labour. Recent years have seen the Government of Bangladesh adopt an increasingly robust framework for combating child labour. The Children's Act (2013), the National Children Policy (2011) and the National Plan of Action (2010) establish a set of well-defined and ambitious goals, and identify lead ministries and cross-ministry responsibilities. However, the current framework suffers from a number of weaknesses. The '42-hour' threshold for child labour (as distinct from child work) is excessive and the gazetted list of hazardous work remains partial. The conclusion drawn by an earlier report remains valid: 'current legislation still does not constitute a comprehensive legal framework for protecting children against child labour, and in particular those working in the informal sector' (UCW, 2011). Ratification of ILO Convention 138 concerning the minimum age

for admission to employment is overdue. Moreover, the machinery for enforcement and monitoring located in the Office of the Chief Inspector of Factories in the Ministry of Labour and Employment is inadequately resourced. Cases of sanction applied to employers are few and far between – and fines are pitched at a derisory level. Backing stronger legislation with a strengthened regulatory capacity and more punitive sanctions is critical. Beyond investing in human resources in the Ministry of Labour and Employment, social work agencies and the police, building a more comprehensive child monitoring system will require the deepening of international partnerships with agencies such as the ILO and UNICEF, and engagement with NGOs.

The two ministries of education should be coordinating more effectively with the Ministry of Labour and Employment and other agencies. Child work that keeps children out of school is a defining feature of child labour – and our survey suggests that most child work in slums is conducted by out-of-school children. An obvious corollary is that schools should be a key reporting conduit on child labour. School authorities should be engaging with community-based groups and municipal authorities to identify children who are either working or at risk of child labour as a consequence of school drop-out.

**The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) could set a new national standard for enforcement.** The DCC could bring together employers, school authorities, community groups and slum-dweller associations to provide more effective monitoring. It could also integrate child labour standards into its trade licensing systems, which are overseen by tax officers.

**The formal garment sector needs strengthened regulatory oversight.** While emphasising that our survey results are based on reporting by children rather than work place observation, they point to a high level of child labour in the formal garment sector. This is a matter of concern on many levels. Child labour in the garment sector cuts against the aims of national education policy. It also poses a potential threat to export markets and foreign investment. There are compelling grounds for the Government of Bangladesh, employer associations and community groups to come together in addressing the problem – and this should be a priority for the Chief Inspector of Factories.

**Accelerated progress towards universal birth registration is vital.** One of the difficulties facing employers can be traced to the low rate of birth registration in Bangladesh's slums, which in turn makes age verification difficult. It follows that any strengthening of the regulatory environment is contingent on an accelerated drive towards universal birth registration.

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