

# 45pc slum children turn workers by 14

*Says new study on child labour and education in Dhaka slums*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nearly half of Dhaka's slum children become labourers by the time they reach 14, according to a study by London-based Overseas Development Institute.

Denied an opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills needed to escape poverty, they work an average of 64 hours a week, in hazardous condition in many cases, as per the study report.

The organisation had reached 2,700 households with questionnaires for children and their parents to prepare the report published yesterday with title "Child labour and education: a survey of slum settlements in Dhaka".

Between the age group of 6 and 14, 15

percent are workers while nearly the same percentage of children don't go to school even though they do not work.

Boys make the transition to the labour market earlier and in greater numbers than girls. While only eight percent of slum children aged 10 are labourers, 45 of them take up jobs by the time they are 14.

The study report, however, acknowledged that Bangladesh "has made extraordinary progress on a wide range of human development indicators, notably education."

The practice of child labour is epidemic here though many strategies aimed at addressing the issue are in place. Failure to tackle this will jeopardise Bangladesh's prospects of accelerating its progress

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## 45pc slum children

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towards the 2030 development goals.

"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," says the report.

The survey authored by Maria Quattri and Kevin Watkins identified the ready-made garment sector as a major employer of children, accounting for two thirds of the female child labourers living in Dhaka's slums.

"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."

Children enter labour markets after an average of just four years of schooling while 14-year-old child labourer on average has not even completed Grade-3. Late entry to school, grade repetition and poor quality education push them out of school and into employment.

Basic literacy and numeracy skills of these children are poor irrespective of they be in school or not. But those who are working and those who are neither studying nor working are worst at basic education and numeracy skills, the survey observed.

The report recommends effective enforcement of compulsory education legislation, coupled with improvements in the quality of schooling and measures to counteract the effects of household poverty for accelerating

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progress towards the eradication of child labour in Dhaka's slums.

Bangladesh will not achieve the 2030 development goals on education and other objectives without a strengthened commitment to eradicating child labour. And the country will not eradicate child labour without making education compulsory for the age group of 6 and 14, Overseas Development Institute said in the report.

It recommended making eradication of child labour a central objective of the education policy and increasing funds for education with greater focus on slum areas and overall equity.

Other recommendations include improving education quality in slum areas, imposing more punitive fines on those found to be employing underage workers and reviewing the inspection arrangements for the garment sector to ensure that factories comply with national laws in the recruitment of children.