

Abstract

Introduction

Child maltreatment and child labour are global health concerns that adversely affect millions of children. In recent years, child labour has increased across the globe. These children are largely rural residents and are employed in agricultural and domestic sectors. Many of these children are physically and emotionally maltreated in these two informal labour markets. Notably, child labour research has focused primarily on economic issues and occupational injuries, while intentional maltreatment of child labourers has been largely overlooked. It is argued that child labourers are more susceptible to maltreatment than other child groups. The determinants of child labour maltreatment are different from those associated with general child maltreatment. While child labour itself poses a number of social and health hazards, it is believed that their experiences of maltreatment, such as physical and emotional maltreatment, neglect and financial exploitation both at home and at work, aggravate the dangers these children endure. This study sought to investigate the prevalence, risk factors and psychosocial effects of maltreatment of child labourers in the agricultural and domestic sectors of Bangladesh.

Methods

The study used a convergent parallel mixed-methods design involving both qualitative and quantitative methods guided by the philosophical underpinning of Belsky's ecological model. Findings were analysed in parallel. In the qualitative component of the study design, 17 key informants with expertise in child protection were interviewed. Thematic analysis was performed using NVivo 12. The quantitative study included a survey of 300 respondents (child labourers, parents and employers) using three different structured questionnaires. The study used item scales from the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect and

Paediatric Symptom Checklist instruments. To analyse survey data, both factor analysis and multiple linear regression were performed using SPSS, STATA and R programs.

Results

The integrated results indicated that the majority of child labourers have been maltreated psychologically. The key experts believed that neglect was as similarly prevalent as psychological abuse, while the quantitative results showed that physical maltreatment was the second most prevalent form of child labour maltreatment. Approximately half of all child labourers were financially exploited. Additionally, the key experts asserted that the true extent of child labour maltreatment remained unknown.

In terms of risk factors, extended working hours, low wages, living arrangements and health challenges of child labourers were identified as significant contributors to their exposure to maltreatment. A child labourer's risk of being maltreated is also related to their parents' income and employment status, land ownership and parental experience of maltreatment during childhood.

Finally, the psychosocial screening revealed that both physically and psychologically victimised child labourers resulted in internalised and attentional problems.

Conclusion

The thesis outlines a number of suggestions to alleviate the high rate of maltreatment of child labourers. Primarily, adequate research should be conducted to fill the gaps in this field. Various programs that promote social safety nets and awareness should be initiated. In Bangladesh, existing child rights legislation should place a stronger emphasis on the vulnerability of children working in informal labour markets.