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Street Children in Bangladesh: A Study on Islamic Perspectives

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Article info	Abstract
<p>Received: 17 September, 2021 Accepted: 16 October, 2021 Published: 22 October, 2021 Available in online: 27 October, 2021</p> <p>*Corresponding author:  a.k.azad@manarat.ac.bd</p>  <p>Link to this article: https://www.ijacr.net/upload/ijacr/2021-14-1025.pdf</p>	<p>Street Children are not a present phenomenon in Bangladesh. It is an older and common problem in developing countries. The children are the future of nations and blessings of Allah the almighty. Islam pays special attention to the children for their care and development. The Islamic Shariah explained the duties of parents towards children, as well as the rights and duties of children towards their parents. If children's parents are missing or dead, then their legal guardian or state will take care of those children. Bangladesh is one of the highly populated countries in the world with about 160 million population, more than 1000 people live per square kilometer throughout the country (UNFP-2021). About half of the population of Bangladesh is under the age of 18 who have considered children and more than 20 million of them are under the age of 5. About 73% of children live in rural areas and 27% live in urban areas. One-third of these children continue to live below the international poverty line (Mohajan-2014). The children have basic rights to food, shelter, education, health and nutrition, protection, recreation, safe water, sanitation, and hygiene. In many cases, the street children in Bangladesh are deprived of these basic rights. A child got the first images of life enshrined in its mind from the environment of the parents. The Prophet Mohammad (Sm.) said: "No child is born but has the Islamic Faith, but its parents turn it into a Jew or a Christian". The parents have the greatest influence on children's religion, education, and morals. Therefore, children's interests and future development depend on children's proper take care by parents or guardians. Proper education can change children's life. To emphasize education, the Prophet Mohammad (Sm.), said: "The seeking of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim." This knowledge includes all kinds of knowledge that are essential in human life and it will be started from childhood. The foundation of knowledge should be from the holy Quran and Sunnah for the Muslim. This will be a qualitative research work where primary and secondary resources will be used.</p> <p>Keywords: Street Children, Violation of Child Rights, Child Crime, Child Oppressions, Duties in Islam, Moral Values and Nation Building.</p>

Introduction

Children are the future of the nation. That's why children need to have extra care for their proper physical, mental and educational development for the greater interest of the nation. Bangladesh is a developing country. A big number of street children are struggling for a better future because of poverty and several types of social mismanagement. In many cases, street children are tortured in street, job placement, as well as they involved in different crimes like robbery, hijacking, picketing, etc. The constitution of Bangladesh and child-related different policies ensured child rights. But street children are deprived of these types of opportunities. They are missing proper guidance

because of the absence of proper guardians and parents. Islam ensures the legal rights of all children because they are the assets of the nations. This paper will try to find out the situation of street children in Bangladesh, the common problems they face in their life. On the basis of the Islamic guidelines, some recommendations will be given. It will be mainly a qualitative research work where primary and secondary resources will be used.

Objectives of the study

Bangladesh is a middle-income country, although many people of this country are not aware of their rights and responsibilities, especially the rights and responsibilities to the street children.

This paper will be explained who are children and street children, what are their rights, how to decrease child oppressions, and ensure the child rights are given by the state and Islam properly. We should emphasize stopping child trafficking and child-related crimes that negatively affect society. The main objectives of the study are to discuss the child rights that have been given by Islam and to what extent the street children enjoy in Bangladesh.

Research methodology

The present study is a descriptive study based on secondary data collected from various published sources and websites. It will be qualitative research work. The references from the Holy Quran and authentic Hadith will be considered as primary resources. The observation method will also be used as a citizen of Bangladesh.

Literature review

There are a large number of street children can be found in Bangladesh. The report from the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) projects the number of street children is 1.5 million in 2015 and it will reach 1.56 million in 2024 (Raju and Sharmin, 2016). The street children depend on peer groups as their social network for their protection, support, and solidarity. The urban poor in general also set up a sort of social network that provides them with means of support, especially economic support and solidarity (Burns, 2007). Islam ensures the rights and security of all children. Allah the Almighty says: "And Allah has made for you from yourselves mates and has made for you from your mate's sons and grandchildren and has provided for you from the good things. Then in falsehood do they believe and in the favor of Allah, they disbelieve?"¹ In another verse of the Holy Quran, Almighty Allah says: "Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth; He creates what he wills. He gives to whom He wills female [children], and He gives to whom He wills males. Or He makes them [both] males and females, and He renders whom He wills barren. Indeed, He is Knowing and Competent".² The Prophet Mohammad (Sm.) says: "Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you is accountable for his or her flock"³.

Definition of child

A young human being below the age of puberty or below the legal age of majority is called the child. A boy or girl from the time of birth until he or she is an adult (Cambridge Dictionary-2020). Biologically, "a child (plural children) is a human being between the stages of birth and puberty" (Mosby, 2013). Children generally have fewer rights and less responsibility than adults. They are classed as unable to make serious decisions, and legally must be under the care of their parents or another responsible caregiver (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2010). Children in Bangladesh are different in different laws. The Employment of Children Act of 1938 does not allow the employment of children below 12 years in regular jobs, with the exception of apprentices; while the Factories Act of 1965 prohibits employment of children below the age of 14 years in any factories. The age for admission to employment under different existing laws varies from 14 to 18 years under the new labor law, enacted in 2006. The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) defines a child as an individual less than 18 years old. The Anti-women and Children Oppression (Amendment) Act, 2003 regards

a person not over 16 years of age as a child (Mohajan, 2012). Under national Muslim law, a child becomes an adult on attaining the teenage, which is usually set at the age of 12 years for girls and 15 or 16 years for boys (Siddiqui, 2001).

Defining street children

Street children are known as the children who have no permanent houses and mostly live in the street. In many cases, they do not have their parents or guardians. Street children are minors who live and survive on the streets (Humanium, 2011). Street children are poor or homeless children who live on the streets of a city, town, or village. Homeless youth are often called street kids or street children; the definition of street children is contested, but many practitioners and policymakers use UNICEF's concept of boys and girls, aged less than 18 years, for whom "the street" has become home or their source of livelihood, and who are inadequately protected or supervised. (Benitez, 2009). It can be referred initially as all urban children who spent most of their time on the streets, whether working or not. Both the street and working children may often suffer abuse and negligence. The term street children refer to millions of destitute boys and girls who have adopted the street as their abode or source of livelihood, or both. Some street children, notably in more developed nations, are part of a subcategory called thrown-away children, consisting of children who have been forced to leave home. Thrown-away children are more likely to come from single-parent homes (Flowers, R. Barri, 2010). Street children can be found in a large majority of the world's famous cities, with the phenomenon more prevalent in densely populated urban hubs of developing or economically unstable regions, such as countries in Africa, South America, Eastern Europe, and Southeast Asia. There are two groups of street children. The first group is "Children of the street", which refers to children who are homeless, and their source of livelihood is in the streets of urban areas, where they sleep and live. The second group is "Children on the street", who work and live on the streets in the daytime but return back home at night where they sleep, although some of them sleep seldom on the streets (UNCHS, 2000). Children at high risk are those who live in households that do not satisfy their basic human needs. They may spend time in the streets to work or 'hang out and are exposed to street culture. It is this marginal group that is at most risk of becoming street children. Children in (or on) the streets are youngsters who spend a substantial portion of their time in the streets, usually as child workers but tend to maintain a strong family link. Children of the streets tend to be few compared with the multitude seen working in the streets. These children have had their family ties severed through running away, abandonment, family disintegration, or the death of their parent(s). Many are abandoned or orphaned.

The role of street children in nation building

Bangladesh is on the road to becoming a developed country. Children are the future of the nation. To build a developed nation, children play a vital role and the children living on the streets are no exception. So, it is very much essential to create plenty of opportunities that allow them to exercise their talents. There are many talented children among the street children who can be great assets for the nation if we can provide them education and other opportunities for their self-development. Because of the lack of opportunities and motivation, they become a burden instead of assets for the nation.

Street children in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a middle-income country. But there are street children in the country like other middle-income countries in the world and their number is particularly high in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) estimates that there are 1.5 million street children across the country and

1 The Holy Quran, Chapter 16, Verse no: 72, وَاللّٰهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَحْسَبُوا مِنْهَا رِجَالًا وَيَجْعَلُ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ

2 The Holy Quran, Chapter 42, Verse no: 49-50, لِلّٰهِ مُلْكُ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ يَهَبُ لِمَن يَشَاءُ اِنثًا وَيَهَبُ لِمَن يَشَاءُ الذَّكَوٰرَ (٤٩) اَوْ يُزَوِّجُهُمْ ذُكْرًا وَاِنثًا وَيَجْعَلُ مَن يَشَاءُ عَقِيْمًا اِنَّهُ عَلِيْمٌ قَدِيْرٌ (٥٠)

3 Sahih Al-Bukhari, Book of Marriage (كتاب النكاح), Chapter: The woman is a guardian in her husband's house (باب المرأة راعية في بيت زوجها), Hadith No:5200 عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ، وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْئُوْلٌ عَنْ رِجَالِ بَيْتِ زَوْجَتِهِ

that their number is set to rise substantially. During the inauguration of World Children Day and Children's Rights Week in October 2015, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had asked the ministries of women and children affairs and social welfare to take the necessary steps to ensure food, shelter, and education for every street child of Bangladesh. "No children would live on the street as the government has the capacity to feed the reportedly 34 lakh street children" she added. The Prime Minister also advised the authorities concerned to ensure admission of every child in the schools of their areas and warns that the government by no means would accept violence on domestic help and engagement of children in any risky jobs. In fact, there are no comprehensive and reliable statistics available on the actual numbers, living conditions, needs, and interests of children living on the streets. But the fact is street children constitute one of the most vulnerable and marginal groups in Bangladesh. (Raju and Sharmin, 2016). Though several acts and policies have been formulated to protect the rights of the children; the number of street children and their vulnerability is increasing along with the rapid urbanization. In the 6.2 section of the National Children Policy, it has been stated that the Social Safety Net has to be expanded to ensure the rehabilitation of all poor children and street children. In addition, the National Plan of Action for Children (2005-2010) also clearly emphasizes the urgent need for "education and empowerment." Education is one of the most urgent needs for street children that clearly been ignored over the years. Article 17 of the Constitution of Bangladesh recognizes the right to education for all including disadvantaged children. The major problems of street children in Bangladesh include insecure life; physical and sexual abuse by adults of the immediate community; harassment by law enforcing agencies; no, or inadequate access to educational institutions and healthcare facilities; and lack of decent employment opportunity while thousands of children on the streets of Bangladesh are being denied their rights according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which recognizes that every child is entitled to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. There are many reasons why street children become involved in different criminal activities. The most important is that these children are incredibly vulnerable. They live on the streets, often without parental or proper guardians' supervision. Most of them must work to survive. Professional Criminal Groups offer them always to earn money in doing criminal activities; often they pressurize them to involve in a life of crime.

The causes to be street children

The street children do not become street children by their choice but situations compel them to become street children. The following basic causes we can find for becoming street children:

1. Familial crises: Disorganization of family, separation or divorce of parents, polygamy of father or mother, stepmother or father, torture in a family by physically, mentally, sexually, or over a member of the family.
2. Social reasons: Moral deprivation, negative view about the sexual harassment in the society, abduct, misconduct about marriage, misconduct about friends, eradication of slum.
3. Economic reasons: Poverty, landlessness, the tendency to over income, pressure for the over income, change the place for more earning.
4. Emotional reasons: Basically teenagers' sadness, depression, and then left the house is another important reason for street children.
5. Other causes: River erosion, flood, overpopulation, mismanagement of wealth, and improper distribution of wealth is the most important reason for street children.

Common problem of street children in Bangladesh

1. Most of the street child grows up in their childhood with the negative attitude about their social position.
2. Street children are afraid to believe anyone.
3. Mostly they are disobedient and disrespectful to others.
4. Street children who are sexually harassed are unable to clarify this misbehavior easily.
5. Their mental and social development is not proper.
6. They are mostly at risk of drug addiction.
7. They don't build up a common relationship with their parents and guardians for poverty, illiteracy, unconsciousness, shamelessness, etc.

Common lifestyle of the street children of Bangladesh

Most of the street children spend their day and night at the street, footpath, park, bus shadow, in front of market or shops in the city. They are the most vulnerable people in the urban area. Their food habit, sanitation, and hygienic issue are not safe. They beg food or money from the people or sometimes they collect wastages in the street for sale. Sometimes they involve in temporary works for their survival. They are victims of bullying by senior street children or passersby. They try to stay in a commonplace in the street. The majority of street children are drug-addicted. They suffer in the rain, sun, and winter because of unsafe shelter. Most of the city dwellers look at the street children with a negative attitude.

Rights of the street children in Islam

All the humankind is son and daughter of Adam and Hawa (A). There are no differences among humankind on the basis of their color, caste, nationality, rich and poor. Street children are the sons and daughters of Adam and Hawa (A). So they are also brother and sister of humankind. Islam ensures the equal rights of the street children like other children. Among the eight channels of Zakah, the last and final one is for the street children. Allah the Almighty says, "The alms are meant only for the poor and the needy and those who are in charge thereof, those whose hearts are to be reconciled, and to free those in bondage, and to help those burdened with debt, and for expenditure in the Way of Allah and for the wayfarer. This is an obligation from Allah. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise."⁴ The meaning of "Ibn" is child and the meaning of "Sabil" is street or way, so we can say "Ibnis Sabil" meaning street child or wayfarer. Street children are a part of our society. They can be assets for the society and nation if we can take care of them properly. Islam has given rights to the street children to the wealth of the reach people in the society. Allah the Almighty says, "And in their wealth, there was a rightful share for him who would ask and for the destitute."⁵ The same issue has been explained in the Surah Al-Ma'arij in the verse 25 where Allah says, "And those in whose wealth there is a recognized right; For the needy and the deprived"⁶. The street children should give proper rights though they can grownup as assets for the society in state of burdens for the society. We should not disrespect them considering their birth, parents, color, lifestyle, living aria as the street children. Our prophet Mohammad (Sm.) was an orphan that's why he always respects orphan, helpless people in society. There are many street children are orphan and helpless. Allah the Almighty says, "They ask thee concerning orphans; say, the best thing to do is what is for their good; if you mix their affairs with yours, they are your brethren."⁷ So, it is very clear that we need to do the best things for the orphans; they can

4 The Holy Quran, Surah Tawbah, 9:60 *إِنَّمَا الصَّدَقَاتُ لِلْفُقَرَاءِ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْعَامِلِينَ عَلَيْهَا وَالْمُؤَلَّفَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَالْغَارِمِينَ وَفِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ فَرِيضَةً مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ*

5 The Holy Quran, Surah Az-Zariyat, 51: 19 *وَفِي أَمْوَالِهِمْ حَقٌّ لِّلسَّائِلِ وَالْمَحْزُومِ*

6 The Holy Quran, Al-Ma'arij, 70:24-25. *وَالَّذِينَ فِي أَمْوَالِهِمْ حَقٌّ مَّعْظُومٌ - لِّلسَّائِلِ وَالْمَحْزُومِ*

7 The Holy Quran, Surh Al-Bakarah, 2:220 *وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْيَتَامَىٰ فَقُلْ إِصْلَاحُ لَهُمْ خَيْرٌ مِّمَّا يُخَالِفُهُمْ فَبِخْرَانِكُمْ*

be street children and other orphans. To explain the dignity of orphans' guardians Prophet Mohammad (Sm.) says, "I and the one who looks after an orphan will be like this in Paradise," showing his middle and index fingers and separating them.⁸ A child deprived of parental care should be sponsored. His or her sponsors should act as if they are the child's parents, and are expected to provide what parents are usually expected to provide. The Islamic Shariah encourages Muslims to take up sponsorship to provide care for children in need. In compensating for the loss of parental care, the sponsors are promised a great reward; they will be in the company of the Prophet himself in Paradise.

The importance of early training is that it allows the religious practice to become an easy and acceptable habit that children will maintain and preserve. The parents or guardians should try to be role models for their children in terms of adhering to the best of conduct. They also have the obligation to provide their children with love, kindness, and mercy, and to avoid harshness and cruelty. It is in this light that we understand the Prophetic guidance, as stated by the Prophet Mohammad (Sm.) when he says: "May Allah have mercy on a parent who helps his or her child to be good to him or her. Parents have a responsibility too to get their children used to making friends with good individuals and to stay away from bad ones. They should also teach them to behave kindly and pleasantly towards their mates and to love them. They should guide their children towards what is good and beautiful, encouraging them to pursue it, and point out what is ugly and bad, warning them against it.

The Government's role for the street children

The government has the main duties and responsibilities are to ensure all the rights for street children. According to Article 17 of the constitution, the right to education is for all, including the disadvantaged children is ensured (The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2000). To ensure the rights of the street children importance should be given to education and rehabilitation in order to help children become ideal citizens of tomorrow. To reach this goal, the primary role of the government should be to make a system on ensuring their education at least up to secondary level and afterward ensuring their job security. Secondly, they need to be morally educated though they do not become frustrated and do not become targets of sexual abuse. They need to be saved from physical torture, and human trafficking. Thirdly, they need to be saved from, smuggling, criminal networks, stealing, and engaging in commercial sex work due to the miserable condition of their lives.

Findings

With this short research we find the different issues which are as follows:

1. A big number of street children are living in Bangladesh which is mostly in the big cities including the capital city Dhaka.
2. Street children are deprived of different types of basic human rights (Food, Shelter, Education, Health, etc)
3. They are the most vulnerable people especially the girl's child in society,
4. They are suffering from different diseases and mental disorders because of their poor condition of living and lack of parental guidance.
5. They are coming to Dhaka city for the reasons of family breakdown, ultra-poverty, natural disaster, etc.
6. Day by day street children population is increasing.
7. Government and different NGOs are working to empower them but it is not enough.

8. Islam ensures different rights for street children and gives proper dignity to them.

Recommendations

To empower and make them qualified human resources for the nation the following recommendations have been made on the basis of short research work:

1. It is essential to increase the significant number of rehabilitation center in the city and outside the city to reduce the number of street children. Male child center and female child center should be separated and proper arrangement of the food, cloth, education, health care facility, recreational facilities should be ensured for the rehabilitated child.
2. Ensure the proper life oriented and combination of general and technical based education for the street children by the initiatives of government and NGOs.
3. Many street children are the separated from their family and they don't know their house address. It is an initiate to find out their family members and arrange rehabilitation with them.
4. Ultra poverty is one of the major causes of street children and other child related problem. So it's essential to ensure the government poverty reduction strategies and programs.
5. Some research find out that street children are deprived mentally and physically by law enforcement force, muggers. So it is essential to ensure the proper law for protecting this type of problem.
6. Find out the channel of street children causes and resolve these problems in the proper way.
7. The street children who are involved in works, need to be given technical and others training for skilled human development and persons or organizations are recruited them they should pay properly them.
8. Zakah and other charity money can be used to ensure their all kinds of basic needs and empower them properly.

Conclusion

Bangladesh is a developing country. At present Bangladesh has achieved significant progress in many sectors like education, health, communication, and economic sectors. But still, we are struggling to overcome some social-related problems such as poverty, natural disaster, lack of job opportunities are the marking problem in the country. According to this social unrest rural people are migrated to urban areas, create slums, and increase street children, these children are growing up with negligence, and deprived of many basic rights. Every child has demanded that they should be grown up with love, care, and cooperation. To resolve the street children problem, need to emphasize the poverty eradication program. Street children can be the assets in state of burden for the society. We need to provide them all kinds of facilities to empower them as competent citizens of the country. The Bangladesh government can introduce a new program for the rehabilitation of street children.

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