

## Children in domestic service

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A large number of children and young women work as domestic-help in Bangladesh. They live and work with urban families often in complete isolation. Practically they are on duty twenty-four hours and seven days a week.

Their parents and/or guardians usually live in rural areas and do not have the means to keep in touch with their children on a regular basis. There is no organization or union to oversee their welfare or to bargain for them. These children are completely at the mercy of their employers. Their situation makes them vulnerable to abuse. An oversight program for these child-laborers is essential to protect their human rights.

A young woman came to the police station with three angry men. She sat on the cement floor in her wet cloth. She was crying and shivering from fear and from cold.

The men were talking with the police. They were talking in emotional shrill voices, interrupting each other. Their angry faces were showing their frustrations and maybe their helplessness. The police officer stayed calm and sincerely listened to them. It did not take him very long to figure out the problem. He turned to the girl and asked her to show her palm. The palms of both hands were severely scalded. He asked her name and age. She mumbled. Her name was Zamila and she was fourteen years old.

Zamila worked for a wealthy family in one of the most respectable areas of Dhaka. The mother and the daughter of the rich family both mistreated Zamila for any small mistake. She wanted to leave and that made the family very hostile toward her. They decided to teach her a lesson scalding her both hands with hot water. Then they put a lock on the door to make sure she cannot run away. One day the mother and daughter went out. They locked Zamila in the apartment from outside. Zamila climbed down four floors from the balcony of the house. There was a lake adjacent to the property. Zamila swam across the lake and reached a slum (basti) on the other side of the lake, where she contacted police with the help of local men.

The police officer asked her few questions. In a of hours police came and arrested the mother and daughter. It was an occasion of victory for the legal system (law against women and children repression) and for Zalima. But what happens to the hundreds of Zamilas who cannot escape the torturous environment; who do not meet decent caring people to take them to the police? They remain invisible. Some of these children's names appear in the newspaper as missing, wounded or dead, but by the time things have gone too far.

Everybody knows that child-labor is wrong. All children need to go to school and become better citizens and capable labor force for the future. Children are the future of a society.

However, under present economic and social conditions, elimination of the child-labor in many developing countries would not be possible. Introducing guidelines and obligations for the employers and establishing a system to monitor these child-laborers would be a more realistic approach.

These children who work in households need to be registered. Registration and monitoring could be done through a Non Government Organization (NGO) or Government organization. During registration employers need to be informed about the basic guidelines and their obligation to send the children to school. Guidelines will inform the employer about the amount of work and kind of work a child should do. This would be an opportunity to educate employers about children and women anti repression law and the consequence of child abuse. As the children would be required to go to school, the NGO could work with the local schools.

Doing this, employment of children in house holds could turn into a system that is equivalent to the fostered parenting in the west. In most of the developed countries some kinds of foster parenting system exists for children without capable parent or guardian. The children live with the foster-families, under the supervision of a child-welfare organization. Foster family is reimbursed for the expenses. In the case of developing country child-laborers would work for the family and thus cover their expenses.

We are proposing to the Governments to establish an organization to register and monitor all children who work as domestic help.

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