

BENEATH THE SURFACE

**Exploring socio-economic vulnerabilities
of street-connected boys in Dhaka city,
Bangladesh**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Bangladeshi children, who are one-third of the national population, face significant risks due to poverty, lack of education and various individual, familial and social factors (BBS, 2015). Children in Bangladesh are vulnerable to the worst forms of child labour, disabilities, child trafficking and natural disasters, which often lead to maltreatment and malnutrition, especially in rural areas and urban slums (Shahen, 2021). Although comprehensive data on children living on the streets are unavailable, estimates suggest that their numbers have been rising in recent years, predominantly in urban areas like Dhaka city¹ (BBS and UNICEF 2022; UNICEF, 2024). Various studies estimate that between 1.5 million and 3.4 million children live on the streets in Bangladesh. Additionally, as of 2022, approximately 1.77 million children were engaged in child labour (Reza and Bromfield, 2019; BBS and ILO, 2022; UNICEF, 2024).

Many street-connected children are rural-to-urban migrants seeking livelihoods, only to end up on the streets or in slums due to precarious socio-economic conditions, poverty, violence and social stigma (Reza and Bromfield, 2019; BBS and UNICEF, 2022; Bangladesh Planning Commission and UNICEF, 2022). In such vulnerable circumstances, some children experience commercial sexual exploitation (CSEC), a hidden and violent livelihood mechanism prevalent among those lacking familial or social support systems. While anecdotal evidence highlights that boys in Bangladesh are also exposed to CSEC, documentation regarding its extent, causes and impacts remains minimal. This large-scale study, therefore, was conducted in Dhaka city to examine the socio-economic vulnerabilities of boys aged 12–17 years living and working on the streets, with a small component focusing on exploring the less-documented dynamics of commercial sexual exploitation of boys (CSEB).

¹ The two city corporation areas of Dhaka district, i) Dhaka North City Corporation and ii) Dhaka South City Corporation, were considered as Dhaka city areas in this study.

Methodology

The study was carried out in two phases between August 2023 and November 2024. The first phase involved a formative study aimed at understanding the socio-economic vulnerabilities of street-connected boys, identifying specific hotspots or locations in Dhaka city where these vulnerable boys could be found, and guiding the design of the next phase. This included a desk review of existing literature and primary research through 15 key informant interviews (KIs) with relevant stakeholders, subject matter experts, implementing partners from local and international organisations, CSEB survivors and representatives from government bodies.

In the second phase, a total of 883 boys living and/or working on the streets participated in a detailed survey. The survey was conducted across 41 identified hotspots within Dhaka city, selected through the formative study. Additionally, 20 in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with surveyed boys to explore their lived experiences and highlight their multifaceted vulnerabilities and contextual realities.

Findings

Socio-demographic characteristics

The average age of the street-connected boys was 15.0 years, with nearly half (46.2%) having received below-primary level education. While most boys (79.2%) had both parents alive, the figure dropped to 64.1% for boys living on the streets without family. Almost all of the participants (97.1%) reported working for money or receiving in-kind remuneration, with the average age of starting work being 11.7 years.

Migration history

The majority (61.7%) of street-connected boys were migrants to Dhaka city from nearby districts. The primary reasons for migration included searching for work (68.1%), family migration (29.0%) and financial hardship at home (25.5%). The average migration age was 10.5 years. While most boys (69.9%) migrated with family members, one-fifth (20.2%) migrated to Dhaka by themselves. Many respondents stated that they faced poverty-related stress, unstable homes, parental loss or disability, family conflict, domestic violence and harsh discipline, including abuse and neglect.

Access to basic needs

Approximately one-third of boys (32.6%) living and working on the streets reported skipping at least one meal in the last four weeks due to lack of money. Skipping meals was notably higher (50.5%) among boys living on the streets without family. On average, these boys missed meals on six days in the preceding four weeks. Additionally, 15.4% of boys reported sleeping in unsafe places during this time, a proportion that was higher among boys living without family.

Consumption of alcohol and drugs

Around one-fifth of the boys had consumed alcohol (20.5%) or drugs (18.5%) at some point, with drugs being initiated earlier (12.7 years) than alcohol (13.4 years). Consumption frequency was relatively higher for drugs than for alcohol, and one-third (32.9%) reported using drugs daily. Boys cited the desire to ease suffering, escape pain or feel better as the main reasons for alcohol and/or drug use. Among drug users, the top three substances were marijuana (93.3%), *dandi* (a glue inhaled via plastic bags) (19.5%) and *yaba* (methamphetamine-caffeine mix) (15.8%). Overall, 29% of the boys consumed either alcohol or drugs, with 6.3% reporting being forced to consume substances, particularly among boys living with family (9.1%).

Access to social networks and support services

Street-connected boys living with family had comparatively wider access to social networks than those living without family or returning to other family. Religious institutions, grocery shops and visits to family, relatives or friends' homes were common avenues for social interaction. Nearly half of the respondents had access to social media platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, Facebook and YouTube.

Additionally, 66.6% of boys sought help from professionals, particularly healthcare providers and religious leaders. Most reported finding the professional support helpful.

Sexual engagements and CSEB

More than one in ten (11.9%) of street-connected boys reported ever being sexually active, while 4.0% experienced commercial sexual exploitation. The proportion of sexual engagements, including CSEB, was highest among the boys living on the streets without family. The average age of first experience of CSEB was 13.1 years, with nearly a quarter (22.9%) of survivors reporting experiences before the age of 12. It is important to note that many survivors of CSEB did not see themselves as sex workers, as their experiences were one-off or occasional. Moreover, stigma, fear and trauma may prevent disclosure, making it essential to interpret these findings as exploratory rather than definitive.

Prevalence of CSEB

In Dhaka district, an estimated 40,559 boys aged 12-17 years work on the streets, while 20,432 live on the streets. Based on the findings of this study, the estimated population (crude) of boys experiencing CSEB is 5,071 (with a 95% confidence interval [CI] of 4,702 - 5,439).

Recommendations

The study recommends collaboration between stakeholders – including government bodies, policymakers, law enforcement agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) – to support street-connected boys and mitigate their vulnerabilities:

Prevention

To prevent unsafe migration that contributes to children living or working on the streets, awareness raising efforts should be strengthened in high-risk areas through schools, religious institutions and social media. Protection committees should inform families about support programs such as education stipends and vocational training for children and their families. Schools should monitor attendance to identify at-risk children early, providing targeted support through various services. Additionally, child-friendly help desks should be established at key transit points to identify and safeguard unaccompanied children.

Protection

A vulnerability mapping assessment should identify street-connected boys most at risk of experiencing food insecurity, substance abuse or lacking social support. Government night shelters must be reopened, ensuring access to various social services, education and vocational training. Specialised support for substance abuse and violence should be expanded and the National Referral Mechanism should be used to provide comprehensive assistance.

Prosecution

Police and officials must be trained to address violence against street-connected children, ensuring reported crimes are investigated and perpetrators prosecuted.

Reintegration

Efforts to reunite children with families should be prioritised, ensuring risk assessments and linking families to social protection schemes. Where reunification is not possible, alternative support should include shelter, birth registration, education and vocational training to help boys transition out of street life.

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Abbreviations

BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BDT	Bangladeshi Taka
CI	Confidence interval
CBCPC	Community-Based Child Protection Committee
CSEB	Commercial sexual exploitation of boys
CSEC	Commercial sexual exploitation of children
CSO	Civil society organisation
CTC	Counter-Trafficking Committee
CWB	Child Welfare Board
DSS	Department of Social Services
IDI	In-depth interview
INCIDIN Bangladesh	Integrated Community & Industrial Development Initiative in Bangladesh
KII	Key informant interview
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SMC	School Management Committee
TLS	Time-location sampling
USD	United States Dollar
VDT	Venue-Day-Time

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND

More than 56 million children and adolescents make up a third of the total population of Bangladesh, where the country's societal reality of poverty and lack of education puts them at risk (BBS, 2015). Children in Bangladesh face vulnerable situations due to the worst forms of child labour, disability, child trafficking and natural disasters, which lead to maltreatment and malnutrition, particularly in rural and urban slum areas (Shahen, 2021). Poverty, lack of employment opportunities and violence against children are significant factors pushing households and children towards rural-urban migration, with them often ending up on the streets and in slums (Bangladesh Planning Commission and UNICEF, 2022).

While complete statistics on the number of street-connected children in Bangladesh are unavailable, a recent study estimated that 3.4 million children could represent the lower range of the actual number of children living on the streets without parental care (UNICEF, 2024). Another estimate suggests there are more than 1.5 million street-connected children in Bangladesh, with three-quarters residing in Dhaka city (Reza and Bromfield, 2019). Additionally, a recent provisional report estimated that 1.77 million children are currently engaged in child labour in Bangladesh (BBS and ILO, 2022).

Street-connected children endure precarious socio-economic conditions every day, including poverty, violence and social stigma (Reza and Bromfield, 2019). Other major issues for children living in street situations include physical, emotional and sexual abuse; harassment by law enforcement agencies; a lack of adequate educational and healthcare facilities; and a lack of decent employment opportunities (BBS and UNICEF, 2022). Common livelihoods include street vending, rag-picking, metal work, transport or drug sales. Deprived of basic rights to health, food and education, these children are more likely to experience disease, abuse, drug addiction and exploitation (BBS and ILO, 2022; UNICEF, 2024). In 2022, a survey conducted by BBS and UNICEF reported that 82.0% of the street-connected children were boys and 30.1% of children lived and slept in public or open spaces such as streets, stations, terminals, fields and parks, without access to basic amenities (BBS and UNICEF, 2022). While less frequently than for street-connected girls, street-connected boys may sometimes resort to exchanging sexual activities for food, shelter, protection or money (UNICEF, 2010).

Given the frequent changes in street situations and the lack of comprehensive data needed to inform effective policies and interventions, this study aims to provide new insights into the multifaceted experiences and socio-economic profiles of these boys and their vulnerabilities to poverty, hunger, economic and social insecurity, and abuse, including CSEB.



SECTION 2: RESEARCH DESIGN

Section 2.1 Objectives and methodology

The research study was conducted in two phases (Figure 1). Phase 1 consisted of formative research, including a desk review and key informant interviews (KIIs) with subject matter experts, implementers from local and international organisations, UN bodies, government agencies, development partners and CSEB survivors. Phase 2 involved a quantitative survey of street-connected boys in selected hotspots across Dhaka city. This phase also included in-depth interviews (IDIs) with street-connected boys selected from the survey participants. The objectives and methodology are summarised below:

Figure 1: Objectives and methodology

Phase 1: Formative research

Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To fill knowledge gaps and understand socio-economic vulnerabilities of street-connected boys in Dhaka city. To gather insights for the design of a quantitative survey among street-connected boys in Dhaka city. To identify hotspots for street-connected boys in Dhaka city. To understand characteristics and forms of CSEB in Bangladesh. 		
Timeline	August - November 2023		
Methodology	Secondary research	Literature review of previous evidence on street-connected boys and CSEB in the Bangladesh context	Desk review
	Primary research / KIIs	KIIs with experts working with street-connected boys, including activists and CSEB survivors	15 KIIs



Phase 2: Survey and in-depth interviews

Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To examine the socio-demographic and economic characteristics of street-connected boys in Dhaka city. To explore lived experiences and multifaceted vulnerabilities of street-connected boys in Dhaka city. 	
Timeline	April - November 2024	
Location	41 hotspots in Dhaka city overlapping for both boys who are living on the streets and boys who are working on the streets	
Sampling	Time-location sampling (TLS) for survey Purposive sampling for IDIs	
Data collection	Face-to-face interview	
	Boys living on the streets	Boys working on the streets
Total sample size (Quantitative survey)	441	442
Total sample size (Qualitative interview)	10	10

Section 2.2 Study population and inclusion criteria

To be part of the study, a respondent met all seven of the following criteria:

1. Currently between 12 and 17 years old (inclusive),
2. Assigned male at birth,
3. Currently resides or works within the sampled area for the study,
 - i. Living on the streets, defined as “self-reported to be currently living in the site being surveyed or have lived there for at least six months,” or
 - ii. Working on the streets, defined as “self-reported to be currently working in the site being surveyed or have worked there for at least one day during the past four weeks,”
4. Observed to be mentally capable of providing assent (following parent’s informed consent), including not being under the influence of alcohol or drugs,
5. Observed to be mentally capable of providing informed consent (in case of emancipated/unaccompanied minors), including not being under the influence of alcohol or drugs,
6. Observed to be able to freely provide assent and/or informed consent, and not under coercion by someone else to participate in the study, and
7. Understands the terms of the study and has provided written informed consent/assent.

Section 2.3 Operational definitions²

Boys living on the streets without family³

Boys aged 12-17 years who have self-reported to be currently living on the streets or have lived on the streets for at least six months in the past without family. “Without family” represents that they are on their own and not looked after by adult blood relatives (such as parents, siblings or other guardians).

Boys living on the streets with family

Boys aged 12-17 years who have self-reported to be currently living on the streets with their family or have lived on the streets for at least six months in the past with their family.

Boys working on the streets and returning to their family⁴

Boys aged 12-17 years who have self-reported to be currently working on the streets for at least one day in the last four weeks preceding the survey and who returned to their family.

Boys working on the streets and returning to other family

Boys aged 12-17 years who have self-reported to be currently working on the streets for at least one day in the last four weeks preceding the survey and who return to other family. “Other family” denotes that they live with their close relatives, friends, peers, employers or co-workers, lodgings, etc.

2 The study derived and adapted the definitions used in the “Survey on Street Children 2022” by BBS and UNICEF. The study also acknowledges the possibilities of definitional overlapping for the “boys living on the streets” and “boys working on the streets” as they experience frequent changes in living and working status between the defined timeframes. In the study, the screening questions defined whether and how boys were classified as “boys living on the street” or “boys working on the street.”

3 Boys living on the streets are floating in nature, staying in one place for a time before moving on to another. At night, they typically sleep in open public spaces such as roadsides, railway stations, bus terminals, parks or other accessible public areas.

4 Boys working on the streets are generally more settled and typically sleep in house-like or slum settings, workplaces, shops, garages or similar locations. Unlike boys living on the streets, they usually do not spend their nights in open public spaces.

Commercial sexual exploitation of boys (CSEB)

Any sexual act involving a boy aged below 18 in exchange for money or in-kind payment. In-kind payment can be in the form of goods such as food, drugs, cell phones, clothing, other gifts, and favours such as housing or shelter. Sex acts include penetrative sex, oral sex, masturbation, touching of private body parts, watching sexually explicit photographs or videos, sexual conversation/chatting and erotic performances, as well as taking pornographic photos or videos – and may be performed in-person, remotely recorded or live-streamed.

Section 2.4 Ethical considerations

Research protocols, data collection instruments, and assent and informed consent documents were approved by institutional ethical review boards at the Population Council (p. 1030, 19 Sept. 2023 and p. 1028, 15 Nov. 2023) and the Bangladesh Medical Research Council (BMRC; p. 568, 8 Jan. 2024).

Data collectors and supervisors with experience with vulnerable underage populations underwent several rigorous training and review sessions at each phase of the study. These covered topics such as research ethics, the target population, screening processes, consent forms, and sampling and data collection plans. Multiple mock tests were conducted during the training sessions to strengthen understanding of the data collection instruments. Supervisors and data collectors also received additional training to assess and adapt to the conditions at survey hotspots.

Psychosocial counselling services for both interviewers and respondents were made available with support from the research partner, INCIDIN Bangladesh, in cases where disclosure or trauma arose in response to any questions. The field team was extensively trained in trauma-informed research, psychological first aid and the referral process should respondents or data collectors show signs of distress. However, none of the respondents or interviewers requested referrals for counselling during the fieldwork period.

Section 2.5 Data collection, management, protection and analysis

Development of data collection instruments

The instruments used in the study were developed collaboratively by the research teams of the Population Council, INCIDIN Bangladesh and the Freedom Fund. The tools were guided by the research questions and study objectives, drawing on a literature review of the vulnerabilities of street-connected children and globally validated tools. The instruments were further refined by incorporating findings and recommendations from previous studies on CSEC in Bangladesh and Brazil funded by the Freedom Fund.

Site selection

Findings from the formative research guided the identification of hotspots and the selection of survey sites in Dhaka city where there is a high concentration of street-connected boys. Following careful observation, spot-checking, verification of physical existence and interviews with gatekeepers and local informants, 41 of 46 identified hotspots met all the requirements for conducting the survey.

Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained before conducting KIs with stakeholders and CSEB survivors during the formative research. In the second phase, before conducting surveys and IDIs with the street-connected boys, participants were asked whether their parents/guardians were present at the location or if they were unaccompanied minors. With the help of the participants, interviewers located parents/guardians to explain the purpose of the study and obtain their informed consent to interview their boys. Participants were then requested to provide their assent following parental/guardian consent. For unaccompanied minors – defined as street-connected boys who had been living apart from their parent/guardian for six months or longer – individual informed consent was obtained. Participants who agreed to participate were taken to a safe and private location where the interviews were conducted.



Data collection

In-person surveys and IDIs with the street-connected boys were conducted between April and May 2024. A probabilistic sampling and recruitment procedure was used for the survey, while purposive sampling was adopted for the IDIs. Participants were given BDT 300 (USD 2.50)⁵ as compensation for their time spent on the survey. Those who participated in IDIs received an additional BDT 300 (USD 2.50).

- **Survey of street-connected boys:** The quantitative survey included 883 boys (441 living on the streets and 442 working on the streets). Time-location sampling (TLS) was used to identify and interview the boys. To implement TLS, a list of venues/locations was first finalised through interviews with gatekeepers and/or local key informants. The physical existence of the locations was verified and information on gathering times and population sizes was collected. A regular day, irrespective of weekdays or weekends, was divided into four timeslots (for example, 09:00–12:00, 12:00–15:00, 15:00–18:00, 18:00–20:00).⁶ A final list of venue-day-time (VDTs) or “time-location units” was created by combining each hotspot with the time slots over a seven-day week. VDTs were then randomly selected and quotas were proportionately set for each venue based on the estimated population size. When the number of potential participants exceeded the quota, participants were randomly selected. If the number was lower than required, the team revisited the venue over the following 1–4 weeks on the same day and time. After selection, participants were taken to a safe and private location to ensure confidentiality. On average, the survey took 30–35 minutes to complete.
- **Qualitative interviews with the street-connected boys:** A total of 20 IDIs were conducted with purposively selected survey participants, all of them CSEB survivors, to ensure representation from diverse backgrounds, work conditions and lived experiences. The willingness and availability of participants for additional interviews were also considered. Ten respondents were selected from boys living on the streets and another ten from boys working on the streets to capture a wide range of experiences. On average, each IDI took 30–40 minutes to complete.

⁵ The average exchange rate during the period of fieldwork (April 2024 to May 2024) was USD 1 = BDT 120 (<https://www.bb.org.bd/en/index.php/econdata/exchangerate>).

⁶ In some hotspots, information regarding late-night gatherings of street-connected boys was received from gatekeepers or local key informants. Considering the safety and security of the interviewers and interviewees, those timeslots were not considered by the study team.

Data management and protection

Quantitative survey data and audio recordings of the KIIs and IDIs were stored on password-protected computers. Quantitative data were periodically deleted from enumerators' handsets/ tablets after confirming that the data had been securely uploaded to the cloud server. Once the transcription and translation of KIIs and IDIs were complete, the recorded audio files were deleted from the password-protected computers. Access to the data was restricted exclusively to the research team and all stored data were stripped of personally identifiable information.

Data analysis

The primary analysis of the quantitative data was descriptive and the results presented are based on unweighted data. The initial data were rigorously cross-checked to ensure consistency and to identify any missing responses. Following final data validation, SPSS Statistics version 22 was used to generate descriptive tables. For the qualitative data, a thematic analysis approach was adopted. KIIs and IDIs were recorded, transcribed and translated into English, ensuring that conversational contexts and expressional meanings were preserved. After carefully reviewing the transcripts, responses were grouped under pre-developed themes in a Microsoft Excel codebook. The data were meticulously reviewed and reorganised under new themes where necessary. The qualitative data were then analysed, triangulated and compared with the quantitative findings to identify patterns and nuances.

Section 2.6 Validation of data

To validate the findings, two stakeholder validation meetings were organised with experts and practitioners in Bangladesh working on issues affecting street-connected boys. These meetings, which were conducted separately after the formative study (Phase 1) and the survey (Phase 2) and prior to preparing the main technical report, contributed to the following:

- Gathering input to identify geographic hotspots for survey implementation.
- Obtaining suggestions on key issues to explore in the survey, including the methodology and processes required to reach the intended populations.
- Gaining insights into the survey findings and assessing the generalisability of the results for the selected populations.

Section 2.7 Study limitations

- Although conducted in Dhaka city, where the majority of the country's street-connected children reside, the study findings are not representative or generalisable for the entire street-connected child population. Additionally, the study focused solely on boys, which limits its applicability as it excludes girls in street settings – a significant segment of the street-connected population. The inclusion of boys within a specific age group (12–17 years) is another factor to consider when interpreting the study's findings in relation to the wider population of street-connected children.
- The study used the TLS method to identify and select respondents from specific hotspots at particular times. While this sampling technique effectively ensured a higher concentration of the target population at the identified locations, it acknowledged the potential exclusion of individuals who did not visit these study sites during the specified periods.
- A formative research process was undertaken to identify hotspots where street-connected boys face high socio-economic vulnerabilities. However, some hotspots may have been excluded from the study, particularly those where vulnerabilities are high and the presence of CSEB is more private or concealed, thereby limiting their visibility.

SECTION 3: KEY FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY

A total of 883 boys, 441 living on the streets and 442 working on the streets, completed the quantitative survey. Their responses contributed to the study's insights on socio-demographic characteristics, family and migration history, living and financial conditions, experiences of abuse and exploitation, exposure to alcohol and drugs, vulnerabilities to CSEB and practices of seeking support services.

Section 3.1 Socio-demographic and family conditions

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic profile of 883 street-connected boys. Of these, 31.8% lived on the streets without family, while 18.1% lived on the streets with family. Additionally, 30.6% worked on the streets and returned home to their family and 19.5% worked on the streets and returned to other family. The average age of the boys in the study was 14.8 years. Around one-fourth (24.3%) were between the ages of 12 and 13, with a higher proportion of these boys living on the streets compared to boys working on the streets, either with or without family (26.0% and 34.4%, respectively). A notable insight was the low educational attainment among the boys, especially those living on the streets. Nearly half (46.2%) had not completed primary education and 16.8% had never attended school.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of street-connected boys

Socio-demographic characteristics	Boys living on the streets without family (n=281)	Boys living on the streets with family (n=160)	Boys working on the streets and returning to their family (n=270)	Boys working on the streets and returning to other family (n=172)	Overall (N=883)
Proportion of the total sample	31.8%	18.1%	30.6%	19.5%	100.0%
Average age	14.7 years	14.3 years	14.9 years	15.2 years	14.8 yrs
Age distribution					
12-13 years	26.0%	34.4%	20.0%	19.2%	24.3%
14-15 years	35.9%	39.4%	40.7%	30.2%	36.9%
16-17 years	38.1%	26.3%	39.3%	50.6%	38.8%
Level of education					
No formal education	23.5%	19.4%	13.0%	9.3%	16.8%
Did not complete primary education	50.5%	50.0%	41.9%	42.4%	46.2%
Completed primary education	9.6%	13.8%	18.5%	16.9%	14.5%
Did not complete secondary education	14.9%	16.3%	26.3%	29.1%	21.4%
Completed secondary education	1.4%	0.6%	0.4%	2.3%	1.1%

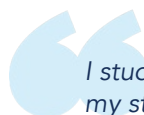
Table 2 illustrates the family conditions of the street-connected boys. While most boys had at least one living parent, the proportion of boys with both parents alive was lower (64.1%) among those living on the streets without family, compared to other sub-groups of boys who lived and/or worked on the streets. Additionally, in over one-third of cases, boys living on the streets without family had either lost at least one parent or were unsure. Boys' fathers commonly worked as drivers (15.1%), daily wage earners (14.9%), business owners (14.2%), service workers (13.3%) or rickshaw pullers (11.8%), while most mothers were homemakers (61.7%).

Table 2: Family conditions of street-connected boys

Family condition	Boys living on the streets without family (n=281)	Boys living on the streets with family (n=160)	Boys working on the streets and returning to their family (n=270)	Boys working on the streets and returning to other family (n=172)	Overall (N=883)
Whether their parents are alive					
Both parents are alive	64.1%	81.9%	90.4%	83.7%	79.2%
Only mother is alive	14.9%	13.1%	7.8%	11.6%	11.8%
Only father is alive	8.2%	4.4%	1.9%	3.5%	4.6%
Both died	7.8%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	2.7%
Can't say/ don't know	5.0%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%
Father's occupation (Top 5)					
Auto driver/ CNG driver ⁷ / driver	15.3%	17.5%	14.4%	13.4%	15.1%
Daily wage earner	15.7%	18.8%	14.4%	11.0%	14.9%
Business	11.7%	11.3%	18.5%	14.0%	14.2%
Service holder	9.3%	11.9%	17.4%	14.5%	13.3%
Rickshaw puller	11.0%	17.5%	13.7%	4.7%	11.8%
Mother's occupation (Top 5)					
Homemaker	62.6%	50.0%	55.6%	80.8%	61.7%
Domestic worker	12.1%	26.9%	24.8%	9.9%	18.2%
Service holder	8.5%	11.9%	10.0%	2.9%	8.5%
Daily wage earner	4.3%	1.3%	2.6%	2.9%	2.9%
Streetside vendor	2.1%	4.4%	3.0%	0.0%	2.4%

The IDIs with street-connected boys provided additional context on the population's low educational attainment, citing financial constraints, family instability and parental reluctance as key reasons for the boys' discontinuation of education. However, many boys expressed a strong desire to return to school if given the opportunity.

7 Compressed Natural Gas-based (CNG) three-wheelers, common in Dhaka and some large cities in Bangladesh.



I studied until class three and left school as my stepmother was reluctant to spend money on my studies. I was studying in a private school and she was unwilling to pay the fees. My father was also not interested and beat me up. I left my studies because of the family's financial issues and my stepmother's reluctance. Now, I want to continue school if I get the opportunity.

A boy living on the streets without family

Section 3.2 Migration history

Table 3 outlines the migration history of the street-connected boys. Survey results revealed that 61.7% of the boys were migrants. Boys working on the streets and returning to their family had a notably lower likelihood of having migrated than the other groups (42.2%). The average age of migration was 10.5 years, with boys working on the streets and returning to other family migrating at a slightly older average age of 12.1 years. The most frequently cited reasons for migration included seeking work (68.1%), family migration (29.0%) and poverty or financial difficulties at home (25.5%). For boys living on the streets with family and those working on the streets and returning to their family, family migration was the main reason for their movement (58.2% and 63.2%, respectively). However, boys living on the streets without family (30.5%) and those working on the streets and returning to other family (29.9%) more commonly reported poverty and financial issues as the primary reasons for migrating. A small number of boys (5.1%) indicated that they had migrated due to violence and abuse at home, with most of them eventually ending up living on the streets without family.

A significant proportion of the boys living on the streets without family migrated alone, with friends or with an acquaintance (38.4%, 11.3% and 7.4%, respectively). In contrast, boys who migrated with family members were more likely to work on the streets and return to their family (95.6%) or live on the streets with their family (89.0%). In over three-quarters of cases (76.9%), it was the parents who decided that the boys should migrate. This was most common among boys working on the streets and returning to their family (97.4%) and least common among boys living on the streets without family (54.2%). Around a quarter of the boys (22.9%) decided to migrate on their own, with the highest proportion found among boys living on the streets without family (45.3%).



Table 3: Migration history of street-connected boys

Migration history	Boys living on the streets without family (n=281)	Boys living on the streets with family (n=160)	Boys working on the streets and returning to their family (n=270)	Boys working on the streets and returning to other family (n=172)	Overall (N=883)
Proportion of migrants	72.2%	56.9%	42.2%	79.7%	61.7%
Among the migrants	(n=203)	(n=91)	(n=114)	(n=137)	Overall (n=545)
Age at time of migration					
<6 years	8.9%	18.7%	18.4%	6.6%	11.9%
6-12 years	63.5%	67.0%	63.2%	38.0%	57.6%
>12 years	27.6%	14.3%	18.4%	55.5%	30.5%
Average age	10.7 years	9.2 years	9.2 years	12.1 years	10.5 yrs
*Main Reasons for migration					
To search for work	73.4%	56.0%	51.8%	81.8%	68.1%
Family migration	11.3%	58.2%	63.2%	7.3%	29.0%
Poverty/financial problems at home	30.5%	17.6%	17.5%	29.9%	25.5%
To pay off a debt/money owed	4.9%	5.5%	5.3%	5.1%	5.1%
Violence/abuse at home	12.8%	0.0%	0.0%	1.5%	5.1%
For schooling	1.0%	4.4%	11.4%	5.8%	4.9%
*Boys migrated with					
Family members	43.8%	89.0%	95.6%	74.5%	69.9%
Alone	38.4%	9.9%	2.6%	14.6%	20.2%
Friends	11.3%	1.1%	0.9%	4.4%	5.6%
Someone else he knew before	7.4%	0.0%	0.9%	6.6%	4.6%
Person(s) who decided for the boy to migrate to Dhaka city					
Parents/guardians	54.2%	90.1%	97.4%	84.7%	76.9%
Own decision	45.3%	9.9%	2.6%	15.3%	22.9%
Someone else he knew before	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%

*Multiple response

Figure 2: Top five districts from which boys migrated to Dhaka city



Figure 2 denotes that the five most common source districts for street-connected boys in Dhaka city were Kishoreganj, Barishal, Brahmanbaria, Comilla and Mymensingh. In qualitative interviews, street-connected boys typically reported that they migrated during their early adolescence, either with their families or as runaway children. Many came from socially marginalised families characterised by economic, social, familial and physical vulnerabilities. Poverty-related stress was a common feature in these families, where steady income and a stable home were rare. The loss or disability of parents was frequently mentioned, along with issues such as multiple parental marriages, divorce, family conflict and domestic violence. Several respondents described harsh disciplinary practices, including physical and emotional abuse, food deprivation and threats of being driven out of the home.

I migrated to Dhaka alone as my stepmother used to scold and beat me. She frequently beat me and did not allow me to sleep in the house. She always forced me to do household work like cleaning the yard and dishes. If I refused, she used to kick me out of the house and did not let me sleep at night.

A boy living on the streets without family

My parents were in Chattogram and I lived with my grandparents. They kicked me out of home because they had financial constraints and did not provide me with enough food.

A boy living on the streets without family

Section 3.3 Current living conditions

Table 4 summarises the current living conditions of the street-connected boys. Living alone (47.0%) or with friends/peers (40.2%) was common among the boys living on the streets without family compared to other sub-groups. Additionally, boys working on the streets and returning to other family were more likely to live with co-workers/employers (30.8%) than those in other sub-groups. One-third of the street-connected boys (32.6%) reported skipping at least one meal in the past four weeks due to a lack of money. Meal skipping was particularly high among boys living on the streets, with or without family (37.5% and 50.5%, respectively), compared to those working on the streets and returning to their own or other family. The average number of days boys skipped at least one meal in the past four weeks was highest for those living on the streets without family (6.8 days) and lowest for those working on the streets and returning to other family (4.6 days).

Nearly one in six (15.4%) of the street-connected boys reported feeling unsafe in their sleeping place during the past four weeks. The feeling of unsafety was notably higher among the boys living on the streets without family (28.1%) compared to other sub-groups. On average, the boys slept 6.3 nights in a place where they felt unsafe during the past four weeks.

Market stall in Dhaka
©Towfiq Barbhuiya - adobestock.com



Table 4: Living conditions of street-connected boys

Living conditions	Boys living on the streets without family (n=281)	Boys living on the streets with family (n=160)	Boys working on the streets and returning to their family (n=270)	Boys working on the streets and returning to other family (n=172)	Overall (N=883)
*Boys currently live with					
Family members (Parent(s), brother/sister, spouse)	--	88.7%	100.0%	--	46.7%
Alone	47.0%	--	--	41.9%	23.1%
Friends/peers	40.2%	--	--	12.8%	15.3%
Co-worker/employer	18.5%	--	--	30.8%	11.9%
Lodging	--	--	--	2.9%	0.6%
Close relatives other than nuclear family (uncle, aunt, first cousin)	--	11.3%	0.7%	23.3%	6.8%
Proportion of boys who skipped at least one meal in the past four weeks due to a lack of money	50.5%	37.5%	21.9%	15.7%	32.6%
Number of days boys skipped meals in the past four weeks due to a lack of money	(n=142)	(n=60)	(n=59)	(n=27)	Overall (n=288)
<5 days	43.0%	50.0%	57.6%	59.3%	49.0%
5-10 days	35.9%	36.7%	27.1%	37.0%	34.3%
>10 days	21.1%	13.3%	15.3%	3.7%	16.7%
Average days	6.8 days	5.5 days	5.4 days	4.6 days	6.0 days
Proportion of boys feeling unsafe in the sleeping place in the past four weeks	28.1%	13.1%	7.4%	9.3%	15.4%
Number of nights boys felt unsafe in the sleeping place in the past four weeks	(n=79)	(n=21)	(n=20)	(n=16)	Overall (n=136)
<5 days	49.4%	66.7%	70.0%	68.8%	57.4%
5-10 days	32.9%	19.0%	15.0%	12.5%	25.7%
>10 days	17.7%	14.3%	15.0%	18.8%	16.9%
Average days	7.0 days	5.4 days	5.1 days	5.8 days	6.3 days

*Multiple response | -- Not applicable

In qualitative interviews, boys described unsafe physical and social environments where they spent most of their time. They highlighted the presence of criminal elements in their surroundings and the dangerous nature of their daily interactions. Several types of criminal groups were reportedly active in many of the public spaces where the boys gathered to earn money or stayed overnight. The first group consisted of local criminal gangs who attempted to forcibly recruit the boys for illegal activities such as stealing, pickpocketing and similar crimes. The second group involved drug dealers who coerced the boys into using or trafficking drugs. In addition to gang members, older youths, drug addicts and local thugs were reported to frequently steal money and belongings from the boys, often taking their daily earnings. Any attempt to resist or protest was likely to result in violent assault.



Some people confiscate our earned money. Suppose I have earned some money and if they learned about it, they try confiscating it and taking a share of it.

A boy working on the streets and returning to other family

The qualitative interviews also identified the police as another source of fear for the street-connected boys. They were highly vulnerable to physical abuse by police and security personnel, often facing arrest on unreasonable grounds. Many boys reported being severely beaten for alleged crimes and some were assaulted simply for being in public spaces.



Police beat and detain us without any reason and convict us of false crimes. Local thugs and miscreants beat us for money. They confiscated our money forcefully and if we refused, they beat us.

A boy living on the streets without family

Section 3.4 Current financial situation

Section 3.4.1. Work history and current earning status

Table 5 presents the work history and current earning status of the street-connected boys. Nearly all boys (97.1%) had worked to earn money or in exchange for food, shelter or favours at some point in their lives, and 96.4% had worked in the past four weeks. The average age at which street-connected boys started working for money or in-kind benefits was 11.7 years, with the lowest average age (10.9 years) found among boys living on the streets without family. While 6.7% of the boys did not earn any cash in the past four weeks, 48.5% earned between BDT 6,001 and 10,000 (USD 50–83), with a higher proportion (53.3%) of boys living on the streets without family falling into this range. The average cash income for the boys was BDT 6,726 (USD 56) over the four-week period. Common sources of income included working in shops, restaurants or tea stalls (28.7%), peddling or hawking small goods (19.4%), serving in the transport sector (12.4%), working in factories (9.6%) and repairing cars in garages (9.0%). It is worth noting that these are predominantly small, local businesses in the informal sector, often operating with low profit margins, minimal regulation and a high degree of informality, making them inherently less stable. No statistically significant association was observed between the average cash income in the past four weeks and the respondent type.

Table 5: Work history and current earning status of street-connected boys

Work history and current earning status	Boys living on the streets without family (n=281)	Boys living on the streets with family (n=160)	Boys working on the streets and returning to their family (n=270)	Boys working on the streets and returning to other family (n=172)	Overall (N=883)
Ever worked to earn money or in exchange for food, shelter or favours	94.7%	93.1%	100.0%	100.0%	97.1%
Worked to earn money or in exchange for food, shelter or favours in the past four weeks	92.9%	92.5%	100.0%	100.0%	96.4%
The average age when boys first started to work to earn money or in exchange for food, shelter, favours	(n=266)	(n=149)	(n=270)	(n=172)	Overall (n=857)
	10.9 years	11.4 years	12.1 years	12.6 years	11.7 years
Total monthly income	(n=261)	(n=148)	(n=270)	(n=172)	Overall (n=851)
No cash earning	2.3%	5.4%	8.9%	11.0%	6.7%
Up to BDT 3,000	15.3%	18.2%	15.2%	11.0%	14.9%
BDT 3,001-6,000	29.1%	29.1%	27.8%	34.9%	29.8%
BDT 6,001-10,000	53.3%	47.3%	48.1%	43.0%	48.5%
*Income sources during the past four weeks (Top 5)					
Shop, restaurant or tea stall worker	17.6%	18.9%	31.5%	49.4%	28.7%
Hawker/peddler of small goods	19.2%	23.6%	17.4%	19.2%	19.4%
Transport worker	11.9%	15.5%	10.7%	13.4%	12.4%
Factory or manufacturing worker	2.7%	10.1%	19.3%	4.7%	9.6%
Car repair/garage mechanic	6.1%	6.8%	11.1%	12.2%	9.0%
**Average cash income in the past four weeks	(n = 255)	(n = 140)	(n = 246)	(n = 153)	Overall (n=794)
	BDT 7,012 (USD 58)	BDT 6,430 (USD 54)	BDT 6,670 (USD 56)	BDT 6,610 (USD 55)	BDT 6,726 (USD 56)
**Median total monthly income in the past four weeks	BDT 7,000 (USD 58)	BDT 6,250 (USD 52)	BDT 7,000 (USD 58)	BDT 6,000 (USD 50)	BDT 7,000 (USD 58)
[middle 50%/interquartile range]	[BDT 5,000 - 10,000] [USD 42 - 83]	[BDT 4,000 - 9,375] [USD 33 - 78]	[BDT 5,000 - 9,000] [USD 42 - 75]	[BDT 5,000 - 9,000] [USD 42 - 75]	[BDT 5,000 - 10,000] [USD 42 - 83]

*Multiple response | **Calculated within the subsample who had cash earning | USD 1 = BDT 120

Further qualitative interviews revealed that unsafe migration, financial constraints and lack of guardianship placed street-connected boys in immediate hardship as they struggled to meet their daily needs for money, food, shelter and living space. To survive, most boys turned to child labour in low-paying, hazardous and informal sectors such as working as helpers on lagunas (small public transport vehicles) or buses, in restaurants, shops and warehouses, as daily labourers and workshop assistants or as mechanics, waste pickers, porters and street vendors.

Many of these boys face long and continuous working hours in unhealthy and risky environments, often lacking adequate food or sleep. They frequently reported being underpaid, having wages withheld or receiving only partial payment. This was especially common among boys who worked under the direct supervision of an adult or employer. In contrast, boys with more flexible options, such as waste picking, street vending or other temporary jobs, had greater control over their working hours and earnings. This flexibility allowed them to access multiple income sources, resulting in comparatively higher earning potential. This finding also indicates that boys with greater control over their work may have a higher earning potential and a marginally better level of agency compared to those directly employed, challenging the assumption that more precarious work always leads to greater vulnerability.

I worked as a helper in a laguna and earned between BDT 200 and 500 daily. The laguna drivers scold us and use slang frequently... they asked me to call for passengers continuously in a hot and humid situation. I do that, but they remain unsatisfied. They had their lunch, but [I] remained unfed till night... they sometimes pay us less and even blame us for theft and confiscate our deserved money.

A boy working on the streets and returning to their family

When I came to Dhaka, I was worried about where I would live, work, or how I would manage food because I didn't know anyone... afterwards, I got to know some seniors (older adolescents) here and they told me how I could work as a porter here (at a railway station) and earn money... I also worked in a juice-selling shop with some of my friends.

A boy living on the streets without family

Section 3.4.2 Current savings status

Table 6 outlines the current savings status of the street-connected boys. It was found that around a quarter (26.6%) of the boys who earned money in the past four weeks were able to save part of their monthly earnings. On average, the boys saved BDT 2,805 (USD 23) per month. Among the sub-groups, boys living on the streets with family saved the highest amount (BDT 2,936; USD 25), while boys working on the streets and returning to their family saved the least (BDT 2,707; USD 23).

The most common reason for saving was to send money to parents or family members (37.9%), which was more frequent among boys living on the streets with family (47.2%). Around a quarter of the boys (24.2%) saved for future expenses or emergencies, with this being more common among boys working on the streets and returning to their family (30.2%). Saving for food (25.4% vs 24.4%, respectively) and for illness or medical expenses (15.5% vs 17.1%, respectively) was more common among boys living on the streets without family and boys working on the streets and returning to other family compared to the other sub-groups. Additionally, 15.6% of boys saved for buying land, personal expenses or to start income-generating activities. This was particularly common among boys working on the streets and returning to their family (31.7%) compared to the other sub-groups.

Table 6: Current savings status of street-connected boys

Current saving status among boys who had cash-earning	Boys living on the streets without family (n=281)	Boys living on the streets with family (n=160)	Boys working on the streets and returning to their family (n=270)	Boys working on the streets and returning to other family (n=172)	Overall (N=883)
**Proportion of boys who can save part of their income	27.8%	25.7%	25.6%	26.8%	26.6%
Average amount saved per month	(n=71)	(n=36)	(n=63)	(n=41)	Overall (n=211)
	BDT 2,784 (USD 23)	BDT 2,936 (USD 25)	BDT 2,707 (USD 23)	BDT 2,877 (USD 24)	BDT 2,805 (USD 23)
Median amount saved per month	BDT 3,000 (USD 25)	BDT 3,000 (USD 25)	BDT 2,000 (USD 17)	BDT 3,000 (USD 25)	BDT 3,000 (USD 25)
[middle 50%/interquartile range]	[BDT 1,000 – 5,000] [USD 8 – 42]	[BDT 1,125 – 5,000] [USD 9 – 42]	[BDT 1,000 – 5,000] [USD 8 – 42]	[BDT 1,000 – 5,000] [USD 8 – 42]	[BDT 1,000 – 5,000] [USD 8 – 42]
*Reasons for saving money (Top 5)					
To send to parents/family members	36.6%	47.2%	33.3%	39.0%	37.9%
To spend at future and emergency	22.5%	19.4%	30.2%	22.0%	24.2%
To manage food	25.4%	16.7%	17.5%	24.4%	21.3%
To buy land/manage personal expenses/start an earning opportunity	7.0%	13.9%	31.7%	7.3%	15.6%
To manage illness/medicine expense	15.5%	8.3%	7.9%	17.1%	12.3%

*Multiple response | **Calculated within the subsample with cash earning | USD 1 = BDT 120

Section 3.5 Sexual engagements and commercial sexual exploitation of street-connected boys

Section 3.5.1 Sexual engagements and CSEB experienced by street-connected boys

Table 7 shows that 11.9% of the boys reported ever being sexually active, with a slightly higher proportion among boys living on the streets without family (18.5%) compared to other sub-groups. Additionally, 4.0% of the street-connected boys reported experiencing CSEB during their lifetime. Further analysis showed a statistically significant association between the respondent type (four sub-groups of boys) and the proportion of street-connected boys who experienced sexual engagement, suggesting that the living and/or working arrangements of the street-connected boys influence their exposure to sexual engagement. However, no significant association was found between the respondent type (the four sub-groups of boys) and the proportion of boys who experienced CSEB.

Table 7: Proportion of sexual engagements and CSEB among street-connected boys

	Boys living on the streets without family (n=281)	Boys living on the streets with family (n=160)	Boys working on the streets and returning to their family (n=270)	Boys working on the streets and returning to other family (n=172)	Overall (N=883)
Ever being sexually active ^a	18.5%	8.1%	10.7%	6.4%	11.9%
Proportion of boys who experienced CSEB	5.3%	2.5%	4.8%	1.7%	4.0%

^ap<.001

Section 3.5.2 Prevalence estimation of CSEB⁸

Based on the data collected from the street-connected boys, one in 25 (4.0%) had ever experienced commercial sexual exploitation. Due to the use of TLS and the need to follow safety protocols, some venues were not approached. However, if the sample was narrowed down to the hotspots where at least one CSEB survivor information was found, a higher CSEB percentage, one in 12 (8.3%), was observed.

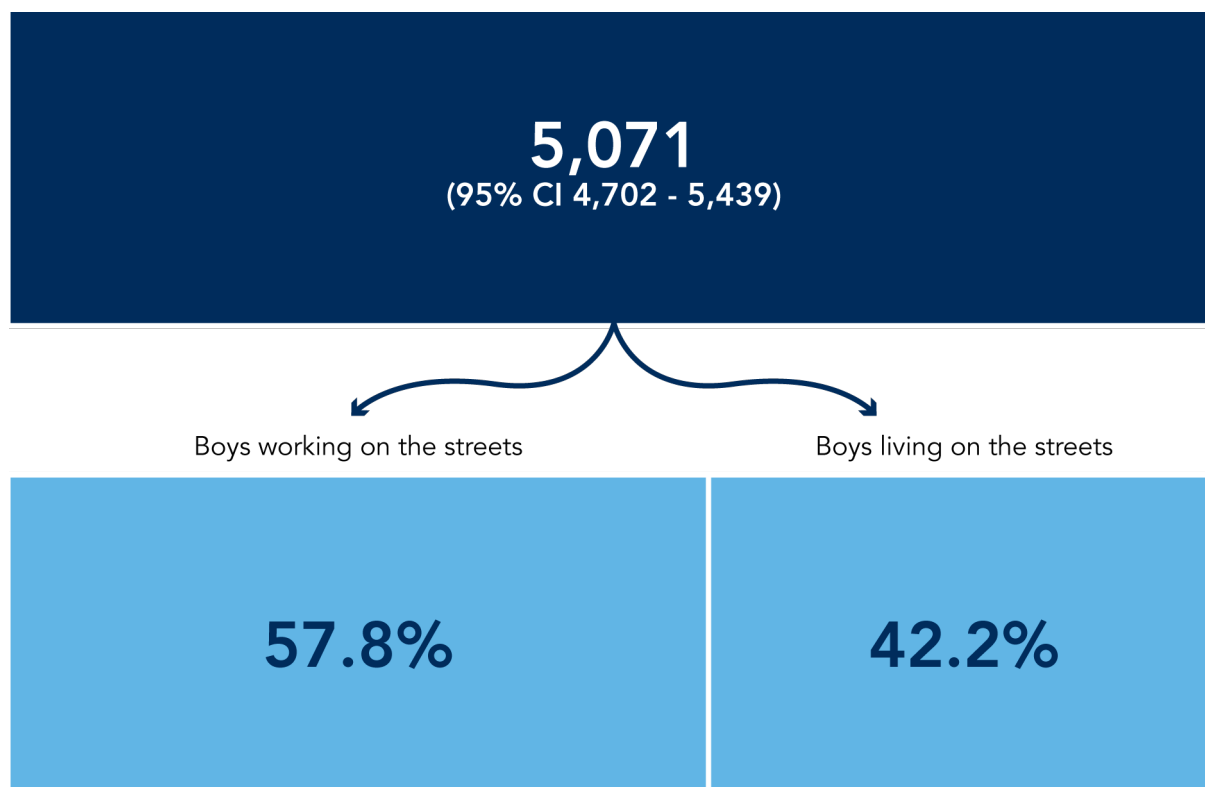
As shown in Figure 3, the projected population of boys aged 12-17 years living in floating or slum areas in Dhaka district in 2024 is 60,990⁹ (BBS Census, 2022). However, there are no direct data on how many of these boys are working. This was estimated using the proportions from the Street Children Survey 2022 (BBS and UNICEF, 2022), which found that 66.5% of street-connected children could be classified as working. This proportion was used to divide the total number of 12-17-year-old boys into two groups: those working on the streets and those living on the streets.

Using the proportion of working children, it is estimated that in Dhaka district, 40,559 boys aged 12-17 years (inclusive) are working on the streets, while 20,432 boys in the same age group are living on the streets. Based on the findings of this study, the estimated population (crude) of boys experiencing CSEB is 5,071 (with a 95% confidence interval [CI] of 4,702 - 5,439).

8 The estimated number of CSEB cases depends on the most up-to-date population figures for 12-17-year-old boys living and working in Dhaka district. For this estimation, we considered the Quick Count operation conducted by the BBS during its Survey on Street Children 2022. However, it should be noted that the BBS has stated that "the Quick Count cannot be used to make precise estimates regarding the total number of street-connected children." This report has adapted the Quick Count figures along with data from the latest Census (2022). As a result, there may be some variations in the actual numbers we have estimated.

9 Authors' projection for 2024.

Figure 3: Estimated prevalence of CSEB within street-connected boys aged 12-17 years



Section 3.5.3 Characteristics of CSEB survivors and perpetrators

This section provides a deeper analysis of the characteristics of commercial sexual exploitation experienced by street-connected boys. While the broader study includes 883 respondents, this analysis focuses specifically on 35 boys, representing 4.0% of the sample, who disclosed their history of engagement in CSEB. Given the small number of boys in this sample, caution is advised when interpreting these findings, as they do not provide a statistically reliable representation of all street-connected boys who are survivors of CSEB. It is important to note that not all of the survivors considered themselves as professional sex workers, as many of them had only experienced occasional or one-off incidents of CSEB in their lives. Additionally, many survivors, especially children, may not recognise their experiences as commercial sexual exploitation. Even if they do, survivors may choose not to disclose their past abuse due to stigma, fear or trauma. This further underscores the need to interpret the findings in this section as exploratory rather than definitive.

The average age at which survivors first experienced CSEB was 13.1 years (Table 8).¹⁰ Half of the survivors (n=18) were aged 12-14 years at the time of their first CSEB experience and approximately one-quarter (n=8) were under 12 years old. Many survivors (n=14) reported being tricked or manipulated into exploitation, while a significant number also mentioned curiosity or inquisitiveness about sexual engagements (n=10) as reasons behind their involvement in CSEB. An analysis of the CSEB survivors' alcohol and drug consumption patterns revealed that two-thirds had consumed alcohol and/or drugs (n=21 and n=20, respectively). Alcohol consumption was higher among survivors living on the streets without family and those working on the streets and returning to their family (n=10 for each group). (For more findings on alcohol and drug consumption, please see section 3.6.) A higher proportion of survivors living on the streets without family (n=12) had used drugs compared to the other sub-groups. The average age when survivors first consumed alcohol and drugs was 12.9 years and 12.2 years, respectively. Further analysis showed a statistically significant association between the respondent type (four sub-groups of boys) and the proportion of survivors who consumed alcohol. However, no statistically significant association was found between the respondent type (four sub-groups of boys) and the proportion of survivors who consumed drugs.

¹⁰ More than one-third (n=14) of survivors mentioned that their perpetrator(s) were minor(s) (below 18 years of age).

Table 8: Characteristics of CSEB survivors

Characteristics of CSEB survivors	Boys living on the streets without family (n=15)	Boys living on the streets with family (n=4)	Boys working on the streets and returning to their family (n=13)	Boys working on the streets and returning to other family (n=3)	Overall (n=35)
*Age of the survivors during the first incident of CSEB					
Below 12 years	13.3% (2)	25.0% (1)	23.1% (1)	66.7% (2)	22.9% (8)
12-14 years	60.0% (9)	75.0% (3)	46.2% (6)	0.0% (0)	51.4% (18)
15-17 years	26.7% (4)	0.0% (0)	30.8% (4)	33.3% (1)	25.7% (9)
Average	13.5 years	12.0 years	13.3 years	11.7 years	13.1 years
Proportion experienced CSEB with boyfriend/girlfriend/lover	60.0% (9)	25.0% (1)	53.8% (7)	66.7% (2)	54.3% (19)
*Reasons for involvement in CSEB (Top 3)					
Tricked/manipulated into it	26.7% (4)	50.0% (2)	53.8% (7)	33.3% (1)	40.0% (14)
Curiosity/inquisitiveness of sex/liked it or did it for pleasure	40.0% (6)	0.0% (0)	23.1% (3)	33.3% (1)	28.6% (10)
Needed money to survive	13.3% (2)	50.0% (2)	23.1% (3)	0.0% (0)	20.0% (7)
^aProportion who had ever consumed alcohol	66.7% (10)	25.0% (1)	76.9% (10)	0.0% (0)	60.0% (21)
Average age when they first started consuming alcohol	12.8 years	12.0 years	13.2 years	-	12.9 years
^aProportion who had ever consumed drugs	80.0% (12)	25.0% (1)	46.2% (6)	33.3% (1)	57.1% (20)
Average age when they first started consuming drugs	12.7 years	11.0 years	11.0 years	16.0 years	12.2 years

As the total sample size is only 35 for this table – both counts and percentages were reported.

! *Multiple response ! ^ap<.05

Table 9 summarises the characteristics of the CSEB perpetrators. It was found that the perpetrators were equally split between men and women (n=19 and n=17, respectively). While the unexpectedly high proportion of women perpetrators is notable, the small sample size limits broader generalisations. Future research with a larger dataset could provide deeper insights into this trend and its underlying factors. The average minimum and maximum ages of the perpetrators were 20.0 years and 22.5 years, respectively. However, these ages were found to be higher among the boys working on the streets and returning to other family (26.7 years and 27.3 years, respectively) compared to other sub-groups of boys. Around one-third of the survivors (n=11) identified their perpetrators' occupation as students. Perpetrators were typically able to find the boys through their peers or friends (n=12) and often met them in the workplace (n=11) or on the streets (n=10).

Table 9: Characteristics of CSEB perpetrators

Characteristics of CSEB perpetrators	Boys living on the streets without family (n=15)	Boys living on the streets with family (n=4)	Boys working on the streets and returning to their family (n=13)	Boys working on the streets and returning to other family (n=3)	Overall (n=35)
The average age of perpetrators					
Average (minimum)	19.1 years	21.0 years	19.1 years	26.7 years	20.0 Years
Average (maximum)	20.7 years	21.7 years	23.6 years	27.3 years	22.5 years
*Gender of perpetrators					
Men	46.7% (7)	75.0% (3)	46.2% (6)	100.0% (3)	54.3% (19)
Women	60.0% (9)	25.0% (1)	53.8% (7)	0.0% (0)	48.6% (17)
Third gender/ Hijra	6.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.9% (1)
*Occupation of the perpetrators (Top 5)					
Student	26.7% (4)	0.0% (0)	46.2% (6)	33.1% (1)	31.4% (11)
Daily labour	13.3% (2)	50.0% (2)	15.4% (2)	0.0% (0)	17.1% (6)
Transport worker/helper	13.3% (2)	0.0% (0)	7.7% (1)	33.3% (1)	11.4% (4)
Service holder	13.3% (2)	25.0% (1)	7.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	11.4% (4)
Rickshaw puller	6.7% (1)	25.0% (1)	7.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	8.6% (3)
*Perpetrators find the boys through... (Top 3)					
Peers/friends	20.0% (3)	50.0% (2)	38.5% (5)	66.7% (2)	34.3% (12)
Meeting them in the workplace	53.3% (8)	25.0% (1)	7.7% (1)	33.3% (1)	31.4% (11)
Meeting them on the streets	26.7% (4)	25.0% (1)	38.5% (5)	0.0% (0)	28.6% (10)

As the total sample size is only 35 for this table – both counts and percentages were reported.

! *Multiple response

Insights from qualitative interviews with CSEB survivors revealed that some boys are first exploited shortly after migrating to Dhaka city. Many were approached and lured by strangers offering work or food.

I was hungry and roaming in nearby places. At that time, I was approached by a random man. He had a recycling shop and allowed me to stay there. I was hungry, so he took me to his house. He provided me with food and afterwards had sex with me. It happened to me immediately after I came to Dhaka.

A boy working on the streets and returning to other family

In-depth interviews also highlighted that street-connected boys were often exploited in their living and working environments, with perpetrators being people from within their immediate surroundings. They were sometimes threatened, lured or deceived into engaging in CSEB. Several survivors mentioned engaging in CSEB to meet basic survival needs, such as food, money and shelter.

I was roaming near the railway station and a random woman in a private car approached me. She asked me if I could visit her house for some household work. She also asked me whether I had my food or not. She offered me money to visit her house to wash clothes. I agreed and after getting to her house, she approached me for sexual engagement. I also felt interested and got into it... I was around 12 years old. It happened two to three times with the same woman. Each time, I received BDT 500 or 600 (USD 4.2-5.0) from her.

A boy living on the streets without family

Most survivors reported fearing negative consequences if they refused the perpetrators, such as being beaten, suffering physical injury, losing their job or facing defamation. Some boys allowed the exploitation to continue so they could avoid these potential repercussions.

In Dhaka, the son of my previous shop owner used to sleep with me and had sex with me every day. This happened to me almost daily for the last 4 or 5 months... He didn't give me anything in exchange for the sex work, but he occasionally provided me with food. That's it. I was forced to do that with him. Otherwise, he used to scold and beat me and could have kicked me out of the shop. I could have lost my job.

A boy working on the streets and returning to other family

Section 3.6 Alcohol and drug consumption

Section 3.6.1 Alcohol consumption

Table 10 summarises the alcohol consumption patterns of street-connected boys. It was found that one in five boys (20.5%) had ever consumed alcohol. Alcohol consumption was highest among boys living on the streets without family (25.3%) and lowest among boys working on the streets and returning to other family (10.5%). The average age at which boys first consumed alcohol was 13.4 years, with no significant differences between the sub-groups.

A significant proportion of boys living on the streets without family and those working on the streets and returning to other family reported being attracted to alcohol independently (63.4% and 66.7%, respectively) or by imitating others (16.9% and 16.7%, respectively). Around a quarter of the boys (23.7%) were forced by their friends or co-workers to consume alcohol (this is not shown in the table). While most boys (75.7%) consumed alcohol infrequently, 5.0% were found to drink two or more days a week, with this being particularly high among those living on the streets without family (9.9%). The two most commonly cited reasons for alcohol consumption were: "feel good about myself" (57.4%) and "helps me forget life's sufferings/ease pain" (27.1%).

Table 10: Alcohol consumption pattern among street-connected boys

Alcohol consumption pattern	Boys living on the streets without family (n=281)	Boys living on the streets with family (n=160)	Boys working on the streets and returning to their family (n=270)	Boys working on the streets and returning to other family (n=172)	Overall (N=883)
The proportion of boys who ever consumed alcohol	25.3%	16.9%	24.1%	10.5%	20.5%
Among boys who consumed alcohol	(n=71)	(n=27)	(n=65)	(n=18)	Overall (n=181)
Average age when they first started consuming alcohol	13.1 years	13.4 years	13.6 years	14.2 years	13.4 years
Things attracted boys to alcohol (Top 3)					
Decided independently	63.4%	51.9%	58.5%	66.7%	60.2%
Pressured by friends	18.3%	29.6%	26.2%	16.7%	22.7%
Imitating others	16.9%	11.1%	15.4%	16.7%	15.5%
Frequency of alcohol consumption					
Two days a week or more	9.9%	3.7%	1.5%	0.0%	5.0%
At least once a week	11.3%	0.0%	4.6%	5.6%	6.6%
Rarely	71.8%	88.9%	70.8%	88.9%	75.7%
Never drank after first incident	1.4%	7.4%	10.8%	0.0%	5.5%
*Reasons/perceived benefits of alcohol consumption (Top 5)					
"Feel good about myself"	76.1%	44.4%	49.2%	33.3%	57.4%
"Helps me forget life sufferings/ ease pain"	38.0%	18.5%	24.6%	5.6%	27.1%
"Feel euphoric, feel like king"	12.7%	33.3%	16.9%	16.7%	17.7%
"Helps me perform daily tasks"	12.7%	3.7%	1.5%	0.0%	6.1%
"No influence"	9.9%	22.2%	26.2%	50.0%	21.5%

*Multiple response

Section 3.6.2 Drug consumption

Table 11 indicates that 18.6% of the boys had ever used drugs, with the highest proportion found among boys living on the streets without family (34.2%), compared to other sub-groups. The average age at which boys first used drugs was 12.7 years. Approximately two-thirds (64.0%) of the boys were drawn to drug use independently, while one-fifth (20.7%) started by imitating others. A smaller proportion (15.2%) reported being coerced into drug use by their friends, co-workers or local miscreants (this is not shown in the table). The three most commonly used drugs in street situations were marijuana (93.3%), *dandi* (19.5%) and *yaba* (15.8%). While marijuana consumption was fairly evenly distributed among all sub-groups, boys living on the streets without family reported higher levels of *dandi* (28.1%), *yaba* (21.9%) and sleeping pills (15.6%) than other sub-groups. Notably, boys living on the streets without family were the only group to commonly report use of heroin (14.6%).

Around one-third (32.9%) of the boys who consumed drugs did so regularly, with higher rates among those living on the streets without family (44.8%) compared to other groups. The most common reason for drug use was to “feel good about myself,” reported by 70.7% of the boys, a figure that was particularly high among those living on the streets (with or without family) (74.0% and 85.0%, respectively) compared to the other sub-groups. Nearly three in five (39.0%) boys stated that drug use helped them forget their life struggles and ease pain. More than one in six boys (17.7%) mentioned that drugs helped them perform daily tasks, with this being especially higher among those who worked on the streets and returned to other family (35.7%).



A tea shop in Dhaka
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Table 11: Drug consumption pattern among street-connected boys

Drug consumption pattern	Boys living on the streets without family (n=281)	Boys living on the streets with family (n=160)	Boys working on the streets and returning to their family (n=270)	Boys working on the streets and returning to other family (n=172)	Overall (N=883)
The proportion of boys who ever consumed drugs	34.2%	12.5%	12.6%	8.1%	18.6%
Among boys who consumed drugs	(n=96)	(n=20)	(n=34)	(n=14)	Overall (n=164)
Average age when they first started consuming drugs	12.6 years	12.4 years	12.8 years	13.1 years	12.7 years
Things attracted boys to drugs (Top 3)					
Started independently	67.7%	60.0%	61.8%	50.0%	64.0%
Imitating others	17.7%	35.0%	14.7%	35.7%	20.7%
Insisted by friends	12.5%	5.0%	20.6%	14.3%	13.4%
*Drugs consumed (Top 5)					
Marijuana	93.8%	95.0%	91.2%	92.9%	93.3%
<i>Dandi</i> (a glue-type drug inhaled through plastic bag)	28.1%	20.0%	0.0%	7.1%	19.5%
<i>Yaba</i> (a mixture of methamphetamine and caffeine)	21.9%	10.0%	8.8%	0.0%	15.8%
Sleeping pills	15.6%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%	10.4%
Heroin	14.6%	0.0%	2.9%	0.0%	9.1%
Among boys who consumed three or more substances (including alcohol as one of the three)	(n=117)	(n=79)	(n=27)	(n=33)	Overall (n=256)
Proportion of boys who consumed three or more substances	26.5%	2.53%	0.0%	12.1%	14.4%
Frequency of drug consumption					
Every day	44.8%	25.0%	11.8%	14.3%	32.9%
Two days a week or more	17.7%	35.0%	17.6%	28.6%	20.7%
At least once a week	10.4%	0.0%	11.8%	21.4%	10.4%
Less than once a week	4.2%	10.0%	8.8%	7.1%	6.1%
Rarely	22.9%	30.0%	50.0%	28.6%	29.9%

Drug consumption pattern	Boys living on the streets without family	Boys living on the streets with family	Boys working on the streets and returning to their family	Boys working on the streets and returning to other family	Overall
*Reasons/perceived benefits of drug consumption (Top 5)					
"Feel good about myself"	74.0%	85.0%	64.7%	42.9%	70.7%
"Helps me forget life sufferings/ease pain"	43.8%	35.0%	32.4%	28.6%	39.0%
"Helps me perform daily tasks"	17.7%	20.0%	8.8%	35.7%	17.7%
"Feel euphoric/feel like a king"	10.4%	10.0%	20.6%	7.1%	12.2%
"No influence"	10.4%	5.0%	11.8%	28.6%	11.6%

*Multiple response

Table 12 outlines the frequency of drug consumption among street-connected boys. Among those who used drugs regularly, 96.3% consumed marijuana, while an equal proportion (37.0%) used *dandi* and *yaba*. Sleeping pills were consumed by 27.8% of regular drug users and approximately a quarter (22.2%) reported using heroin. Among boys who consumed drugs two days a week or more, 5.9% used *dandi* and 2.9% used both *yaba* and heroin. Additionally, 17.6% of boys who used drugs at least once a week reported using *dandi*, while 5.9% used both *yaba* and heroin.

Table 12. Consumption frequency of different drugs among street-connected boys

*Drugs consumed (Top 5)	Everyday (n=54)	Two days a week or more (n=34)	At least once a week (n=17)	Less than once a week (n=10)	Rarely (n=49)	Overall (N=164)
Marijuana	96.3%	97.1%	88.2%	100.0%	87.8%	93.3%
Dandi (a glue-type drug inhaled through a plastic bag)	37.0%	5.9%	17.6%	0.0%	14.3%	19.5%
Yaba (a mixture of methamphetamine and caffeine)	37.0%	2.9%	5.9%	10.0%	6.1%	15.9%
Sleeping pills	27.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.1%	10.4%
Heroin	22.2%	2.9%	5.9%	0.0%	2.0%	9.1%

*Multiple response

Section 3.6.3 Usage of alcohol or drugs to exercise control over street-connected boys

As shown in Table 13, 29.0% of street-connected boys reported consuming alcohol and/or drugs. A small proportion (6.3%) stated that they were forced to consume alcohol or drugs by someone to gain control over them. The individuals who coerced them into consuming alcohol or drugs were mainly friends or co-workers (50.0%), followed by relatives or family members (31.3%), perpetrators of commercial sexual exploitation (18.8%) and drug dealers (6.3%). Further analysis found a statistically significant association between the respondent type (four sub-groups of boys) and the proportion of street-connected boys who consumed either alcohol or drugs (or both). However, no statistically significant association was found between the respondent type (four sub-groups of boys) and the proportion of boys who were forced to consume alcohol or drugs by someone to exercise control.

Table 13: Distribution of street-connected boys forced to consume alcohol or drugs

	Boys living on the streets without family (n=281)	Boys living on the streets with family (n=160)	Boys working on the streets and returning to their family (n=270)	Boys working on the streets and return- ing to other family (n=172)	Overall (N=883)
^aThe proportion of boys who consumed either alcohol or drugs (or both)	41.6%	20.6%	29.3%	15.7%	29.0%
Among boys who consumed alcohol and/or drugs	(n=117)	(n=33)	(n=79)	(n=27)	Overall (n=256)
The proportion of boys who were forced to consume either alcohol or drugs by someone to exercise control	6.0%	9.1%	6.3%	3.7%	6.3%
*Person forced boys to consume either alcohol or drugs to exercise control (Top 3)	(n = 7)	(n = 3)	(n = 5)	(n = 1)	Overall (n = 16)
Friend(s)/co-worker(s)	57.1% (4)	33.3% (1)	60.0% (3)	0.0% (0)	50.0% (8)
Relative/family member(s)	14.3% (1)	33.3% (1)	40.0% (2)	100.0% (1)	31.3% (5)
Perpetrator(s) of CSEB	28.6% (2)	0.0% (0)	20.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	18.8% (3)

^ap<.001 | *Multiple response | Both counts and percentage were reported when the total sample size was 16.

Section 3.7 Access to social networks, support and referral services

Section 3.7.1 Access to social networks

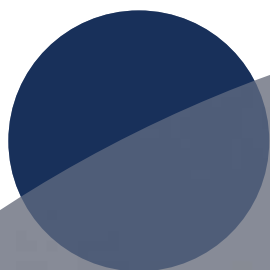
Table 14 highlights the different types of social networks accessed by street-connected boys. The findings show that access to social networks was generally higher among boys living on the streets with their family and those working on the streets and returning to their family. Commonly accessed social networks included visits to religious institutions, markets or grocery shops, family or friends' homes, as well as the use of social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, YouTube and IMO, with many boys engaging with these networks at least once a week.

Table 14: Access to social networks by street-connected boys

	Boys living on the streets without family (n=281)	Boys living on the streets with family (n=160)	Boys working on the streets and returning to their family (n=270)	Boys working on the streets and returning to other family (n=172)	Overall (N=883)
*Visited/attended these places at least once a week					
Gone to a mosque, temple or church	70.1%	86.9%	95.6%	95.3%	85.8%
Gone to a market/ grocery shop	59.8%	68.8%	80.7%	77.9%	71.3%
Gone to a friend's house	35.2%	55.6%	64.4%	47.1%	50.2%
Attended a youth group meeting	35.9%	49.4%	29.6%	22.7%	33.9%
Attended a community gathering	18.9%	26.9%	24.1%	11.6%	20.5%
Gone to a youth/ recreational centre	30.2%	33.8%	35.6%	20.9%	30.7%
Gone to the cinema	18.1%	9.4%	11.5%	8.1%	12.6%
Gone to school	2.8%	6.3%	10.0%	3.5%	5.8%
Visited family/ relatives	40.6%	76.9%	82.6%	61.0%	64.0%
Visited mazar (mausoleum)	47.0%	36.9%	31.9%	18.0%	34.9%
Visited NGO centre	13.2%	4.4%	4.4%	1.2%	6.6%

	Boys living on the streets without family (n=281)	Boys living on the streets with family (n=160)	Boys working on the streets and returning to their family (n=270)	Boys working on the streets and returning to other family (n=172)	Overall (N=883)
*Accessed traditional media sources at least once a week					
Watched television	48.0%	58.8%	70.7%	52.9%	57.9%
Listened to radio	5.3%	1.9%	10.0%	7.6%	6.6%
Read newspaper	5.0%	4.4%	8.1%	8.1%	6.5%
*Accessed social media/devices at least once a week					
Watched YouTube	52.3%	69.4%	81.5%	73.8%	68.5%
Watched TikTok	51.2%	62.5%	74.4%	62.2%	62.5%
Watched reels	22.8%	22.5%	40.0%	32.0%	29.8%
Used Facebook	31.0%	43.8%	65.6%	54.7%	48.5%
Used IMO (messaging app)	27.0%	35.6%	49.3%	50.0%	39.9%
Used WhatsApp	11.7%	11.9%	27.8%	26.7%	19.6%
Used other social media (Instagram, Telegram, Viber or Twitter)	4.3%	6.3%	14.8%	5.8%	8.2%

*Multiple response



Section 3.7.2 Access to support mechanisms

Table 15 presents the accessibility of different support mechanisms for street-connected boys. Family members (parents or siblings) were the most common source of emergency help, with 63.2% of boys relying on them. However, a significantly lower proportion of boys living on the streets without family (29.2%) had access to emergency assistance from their family members, compared to other sub-groups. Over a quarter (26.8%) of street-connected boys sought emergency help from relatives such as grandparents, uncles/aunts or other close family members, with only 12.8% of boys living on the streets without family having access to such support. Around half (48.4%) of boys living on the streets without family sought help from friends, while 22.1% of those working on the streets and returning to other family turned to employers or work colleagues for emergency assistance.

Table 15: People from whom street-connected boys sought help during an emergency

	Boys living on the streets without family (n=281)	Boys living on the streets with family (n=160)	Boys working on the streets and returning to their family (n=270)	Boys working on the streets and return- ing to other family (n=172)	Overall (N=883)
*Source of emergency support (Top 5)					
Family members (parent(s) or siblings)	29.2%	78.1%	86.7%	68.0%	63.2%
Friends	48.4%	40.0%	44.4%	36.6%	43.4%
Relatives (grandparents, uncle/aunt or close relatives)	12.8%	28.8%	34.8%	35.5%	26.8%
Employer/ work colleagues	18.5%	7.5%	8.1%	22.1%	14.0%
Neighbours	6.0%	8.8%	10.7%	9.9%	8.7%

*Multiple response

Similar findings were observed in the IDIs, where many street-connected boys reported relying primarily on their immediate surroundings, such as friends, peers, family members and employers or co-workers, for emergency support. However, a significant proportion of these boys were unable to depend on anyone for assistance in emergencies. In many cases, their requests for help were denied and some even reported being asked to engage in sexual activities in exchange for the support they needed.



I never received any assistance from others during my emergency. Whenever I approached anyone for financial assistance, they told me that if I got engaged with them sexually, they would help me. I sometimes got food from the railway staff, but in exchange, they tried to exploit me... No one helped me when I needed it.

A boy living on the streets without family

Table 16 summarises the interactions of street-connected boys with various professionals. It was found that two-thirds (66.6%) of the boys had ever sought help from a professional. Boys working on the streets and returning to their family were more likely to seek professional help (70.4%) compared to other sub-groups. Healthcare professionals (45.3%) and religious leaders (21.7%) were the most common sources of help. Only a small number of boys (8.3%) had ever approached the police or security personnel for assistance. In general, street-connected boys reported that the professional help they received was both helpful and met their needs.

Table 16: History of interaction with professionals for street-connected boys

	Boys living on the streets with-out family (n=281)		Boys living on the streets with family (n=160)		Boys working on the streets and returning to their family (n=270)		Boys working on the streets and returning to other family (n=172)		Overall (N=883)	
Has ever sought help from a professional	66.2%		61.9%		70.4%		65.7%		66.6%	
	Sought help	Found assistance useful	Sought help	Found assistance useful	Sought help	Found assistance useful	Sought help	Found assistance useful	Sought help	Found assistance useful
Doctor, nurse or community health worker	38.4%	38.1%	44.4%	43.8%	55.6%	55.2%	43.0%	43.0%	45.6%	45.3%
Religious leader	18.9%	18.5%	16.9%	16.9%	28.1%	27.8%	22.1%	22.1%	22.0%	21.7%
Someone senior	18.1%	15.7%	14.4%	13.8%	18.1%	17.4%	22.7%	22.1%	18.3%	17.1%
Youth group leader	18.1%	16.7%	13.8%	13.1%	18.1%	15.9%	9.3%	6.4%	15.6%	13.8%
Worker or union representative	6.4%	6.0%	9.4%	8.8%	15.9%	15.2%	14.0%	11.0%	11.3%	10.3%
Community leader	14.2%	13.5%	10.0%	8.8%	9.6%	8.9%	8.1%	6.4%	10.9%	9.9%
Teacher or staff at the school/ training centre	7.1%	6.8%	7.5%	6.9%	13.7%	13.3%	8.1%	7.6%	9.4%	8.9%
Police or other security personnel	9.6%	8.5%	9.4%	8.1%	11.1%	10.7%	4.1%	4.1%	8.9%	8.3%
Elected official	5.0%	3.2%	7.5%	6.9%	11.9%	9.6%	8.7%	7.6%	8.3%	6.7%
Women and children's officer or social worker	10.0%	9.6%	4.4%	4.4%	5.9%	5.9%	3.5%	2.9%	6.5%	6.2%
NGO worker	11.4%	11.4%	5.0%	5.0%	4.8%	4.4%	1.7%	1.2%	6.3%	6.1%
Helpline or hotline via phone or internet	2.5%	1.8%	1.3%	1.3%	3.3%	3.0%	2.3%	2.3%	2.5%	2.2%
Counsellor or therapist	1.8%	1.4%	0.6%	0.6%	2.6%	2.6%	1.2%	1.2%	1.7%	1.6%
Bank or micro-finance institution	0.4%	0.4%	1.3%	1.3%	2.2%	2.2%	4.1%	4.1%	1.8%	1.8%
Lawyer, judge, magistrate or other legal professional	2.1%	2.1%	0.6%	0.6%	0.4%	0.4%	0.6%	0.0%	1.0%	0.9%

*Multiple response



However, a deeper analysis of the IDIs regarding the institutional service-seeking experiences of street-connected boys revealed that only a small number of survivors had sought and received support from government, social or NGO-based services. The majority had never sought such services primarily due to a lack of awareness about their availability, whether they were focused on CSEB or on general support including information about service providers and how to access them. Additionally, negative perceptions of service providers, particularly government officials, as well as a reliance on informal support networks such as friends, senior peers and local community members, discouraged many boys from reaching out to institutional services. Furthermore, the fear of being exposed as impacted by CSEB also deterred some boys from seeking help, as they were concerned about the potential stigma and repercussions of disclosing their experiences.

I never sought any services from the government offices, NGOs or social organisations. I never felt the necessity or needed to seek their services... I am hearing about NGOs for the first time from you. I heard about the government offices but never visited them as I was not required to... I don't think they will serve me and behave well with me. I am afraid that I will be in danger if I visit them. They might hurt me.

A boy living on the streets without family

Section 3.8 Future aspirations and goals

Table 17 presents the views of street-connected boys towards their present and future aspirations. Around two-thirds of the boys reported feeling happy (65.7%), confident in their decision-making (60.1%) and positive about their ability to achieve their life goals (69.1%). The findings also highlight the importance of family networks among the different sub-groups, with a higher proportion of boys living on the streets with family and those working on the streets and returning to their family expressing that they are happy (78.8% vs 74.8%, respectively) and confident in their ability to reach their life goals (79.4% vs 76.7%, respectively). However, these positive outlooks were generally lower among boys living on the streets without family and those working on the streets and returning to other family.

Many boys also reported experiencing marginalisation and social exclusion, with some mentioning they were treated with less respect (37.7%), that others shunned them (30.8%) or that they were refused service at stores or restaurants (13.5%). These three experiences were more commonly reported by boys living on the streets without family (56.2%, 50.2% and 24.2%, respectively) compared to other sub-groups. In terms of life goals, the boys identified securing a good job (70.4%), finding happiness (63.2%) and making their family happy (57.9%) as top priorities. While these priorities were fairly consistent across all sub-groups, a relatively smaller proportion of boys living on the streets without family (38.4%) considered making their family happy as a key goal.

Table 17: Future aspirations of street-connected boys

	Boys living on the streets without family (n=281)	Boys living on the streets with family (n=160)	Boys working on the streets and returning to their family (n=270)	Boys working on the streets and returning to other family (n=172)	Overall (N=883)
Future aspirations of the boys (agreed to the statements)					
"You feel confident that you can achieve your life goals"	62.3%	79.4%	76.7%	58.7%	69.1%
"You are happy with your life at the moment"	58.0%	78.8%	74.8%	51.7%	65.7%
"It's hard to imagine a future where you are happy"	73.0%	66.9%	53.7%	55.8%	62.6%
"You are happy and making the best decisions for your life."	50.2%	58.1%	71.1%	61.0%	60.1%
"People treat you with less respect compared to other young boys of your age"	56.2%	45.0%	23.0%	23.8%	37.7%
"People refuse to talk to you or be seen with you."	50.2%	36.9%	15.9%	16.9%	30.8%
"People refuse to serve you when you go to a store or restaurant."	24.2%	15.0%	4.1%	9.3%	13.5%
*Priority goals of life considered by the boys (Top 5)					
Get a good job	66.2%	73.1%	68.9%	77.3%	70.4%
Be happy	62.3%	60.6%	65.2%	64.0%	63.2%
Make family happy	38.4%	52.5%	69.6%	76.2%	57.9%
Attend a vocational training	32.7%	34.4%	43.3%	33.7%	36.5%
Work with their community	27.0%	28.1%	38.9%	35.5%	32.5%

*Multiple response

Street-connected boys shared a range of views about their future during the qualitative interviews. While many expressed hope and aspirations for a happy future, a sense of uncertainty and a negative outlook about the days ahead were also prevalent. A significant number of boys voiced concerns about their future, mentioning societal stigma towards their reintegration and the likelihood of continued involvement in CSEB. Some survivors indicated a lack of confidence in their ability to build a positive future, while others felt that their fate would determine what lay ahead.

I am afraid that if I have ever lost my job and can't manage anything new, I may need to be regularly engaged in sex work. I am not getting enough money from my current job. I don't know, but in the future, I may continue both my job and sex work continuously.

A boy working on the streets and returning to their family

In addition to their self-esteem and aspirations, street-connected boys consistently highlighted the lack or often complete absence of vital support mechanisms such as financial assistance, food, shelter, education, work-related training and employment opportunities. They identified these challenges as significant factors contributing to their vulnerability on the urban streets of Dhaka. When asked for recommendations to address these issues, they suggested the introduction of counselling services, better access to education, the detention of perpetrators, safe workplaces, accommodation with self-development and recreational facilities, support for family reunification, health services and initiatives to reduce exposure to alcohol and drugs. Furthermore, they stressed the importance of raising awareness about the available services and interventions to help ensure a better future for them.

I would be happy if the government could provide education and shelter facilities for parentless children. It would also be helpful if counselling and work-related training could be arranged... If the government could ensure education, shelter and employment support for parentless children, it would reduce the likelihood of children being involved in CSEC... It is also required to detain the perpetrators and ensure proper punishment.

A boy working on the streets and returning to other family

Boys playing a game
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SECTION 4: DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings presented in this report are based on a large-scale study involving 883 street-connected boys across 41 selected hotspots in Dhaka city. To validate these findings, two stakeholder meetings were held with experts and practitioners in Bangladesh who work on issues related to street-connected boys. Recommendations were developed by consulting the study findings and gathering feedback from subject matter experts during the validation meetings. The discussions, conclusions and recommendations are summarised below.

The street-connected boys who participated in the study had an average age of 14.8 years, with around one-third (31.8%) living on the streets without their family. Street-connected boys generally had low levels of education, with 46.2% having not completed primary education and 16.8% never having attended any formal education. Nearly four-fifths of the boys (79.2%) had living parents, although this was lower (64.1%) among those living on the streets without family. Almost half (46.7%) of the boys lived with family members, while nearly a quarter (23.1%) lived alone.

Three in five (61.7%) street-connected boys were internal migrants to Dhaka city, primarily in search of work. Most of these boys (69.9%) migrated with family members, with an average age of 10.5 years. They came mostly from nearby districts with better communication links to the capital. The most commonly cited reasons for migration were to search for work (68.1%), family migration (29.0%) and poverty/financial problems at home (25.5%).

An analysis of the current financial situation of the street-connected boys revealed that nearly all (97.1%) had worked for money or goods at some point in their lives, typically starting work at the age of 11 or 12. While the average earnings were similar across sub-groups, around three-quarters (73.4%) of boys were unable to save any money. Common sources of income included working in shops, restaurants or tea stalls, hawking or peddling small goods, and working in the transport sector. The average amount of cash earned by the boys over a four-week period was BDT 6,726 (USD 56) and the average amount saved was BDT 2,805 (USD 23).

One-third of the street-connected boys reported skipping at least one meal in the past month due to lack of money, with this figure higher (50.5%) among boys living on the streets without family. On average, the boys missed 6.0 days of meals in the past four weeks. Additionally, 15.4% of the boys felt unsafe in their sleeping places, experiencing this feeling for an average of 6.3 days in the past month.

Roughly one-fifth of the street-connected boys reported consuming alcohol (20.5%) or drugs (18.6%), with higher rates of consumption among boys living on the streets without family (25.3% and 34.2%, respectively). The average age at which boys first consumed drugs was 12.7 years, which was lower than the average age for alcohol consumption (13.4 years). Drug consumption was also more frequent, with one-third of boys reporting regular use. Approximately two-thirds of boys were attracted to alcohol (60.2%) and drugs (64.0%) independently, with the most common reasons for consumption being to feel good about themselves, to forget their life struggles or to ease their pain. The top three drugs consumed by the boys were marijuana (93.3%), *dandi* (19.5%) and *yaba* (15.8%).¹¹

Support-seeking practices and access to social networks were higher among boys living with family. Boys living on the streets without family were more likely to seek assistance from friends, peers or those in their immediate surroundings. Common social networks included religious institutions (85.8%) and grocery shops (71.3%). Boys also accessed social media platforms like YouTube (68.5%), TikTok (62.5%) and Facebook (48.5%) at least once a week. During emergencies, boys primarily relied on family members, friends and relatives for help. Two-thirds (66.6%) had ever sought help from a professional service provider, with healthcare professionals and religious leaders being the top two groups they approached. Most of the boys reported receiving the help they needed and found it useful.

More than one in ten (11.9%) of the boys reported having ever being sexually active. Additionally, 4.0% of the street-connected boys experienced CSEB. The average age at which survivors first encountered CSEB was 13.1 years, with a quarter experiencing it before the age of 12. Perpetrators of CSEB were often young and both men and women perpetrators were involved. These perpetrators typically approached the boys through their friends or peers and met them at their living or working places.

¹¹Other relevant studies in Bangladesh show similar statistics for alcohol and drug use. The Street Children Survey by BBS reported that 12% of children aged 5-17 years consumed alcohol or drugs (13.7% for boys) (BBS and UNICEF, 2022). The Bangladesh Annual Drug Report 2020, published by the Ministry of Home Affairs, reported that 21.8% of drug users were aged 20 years or younger (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2020). The first Global School-based Student Health Survey Bangladesh, 2014, found that 1.6% of adolescents (2.4% of boys) aged 13-17 years had consumed at least one alcoholic drink in the 30 days prior to the survey. It also found that 1.7% of adolescents (2.2% of boys) had consumed marijuana in the same period and 1.9% (2.5% of boys) had consumed amphetamines or methamphetamines in their lifetime (WHO, 2018).



Stakeholder recommendations

The findings of the study underscore the urgent need for coordinated action by the government, policymakers, law enforcement agencies, survivors, NGOs and CSOs to mitigate the vulnerabilities of the street-connected boys and offer them pathways to reintegrate with their family with self-efficacy and the ability to make choices for their future.



Prevention

Increase awareness raising in source areas about the risks of unsafe migration and alternative options: Counter-Trafficking Committees (CTCs), Child Welfare Boards (CWBs) and Community-Based Child Protection Committees (CBCPCs) should increase efforts to raise awareness of the harm to children through unsafe migration. These protection entities and local NGOs should coordinate with local schools, religious institutions, community groups and social media to share information about support programs such as the government's education stipend, which provides payments to families that keep their children in school. Increasing awareness of income-generating options and vocational training and apprentice programs for boys over 14 may reduce cases of migration for survival.

Improve identification of children most vulnerable to unsafe migration: School Management Committees (SMCs) should work together with child-friendly bodies such as CWBs and CBCPCs in areas with high levels of migration to identify children who are at heightened risk of unsafe migration due to socio-economic factors (such as illness or loss of parent or parent's job) and child neglect/abuse. SMCs should regularly monitor attendance and pro-actively follow up on absenteeism to adapt preventative measures. Children identified as high risk should be provided with special support through the Department of Social Services (DSS) social workers to ensure they do not migrate unsafely merely for survival.

Establish child-friendly help desks at key transit areas: The Ministry of Home Affairs, with the support from DSS, should consider setting up child-friendly police help desks at transit areas like nodal bus stations and railway stations to promptly identify unaccompanied children and refer them to government shelters and other safe spaces so they can be connected with support services before they come to any harm. The Child Affairs Police Officer should patrol transit areas to ensure that unaccompanied children do not fall into the hands of perpetrators.



Protection

Identification of most vulnerable street-connected children: Government and NGOs working with street-connected children should implement vulnerability mapping assessment to identify boys at most risk of experiencing violence and exploitation. Children living on the streets without family should be prioritised as the most at-risk. Other indicators of high-risk assessments should include street-connected boys skipping meals, engaging in substance abuse and lacking social or community support systems.

Comprehensive support to the most vulnerable children: Government night shelters, closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, should be reopened so that street-connected children without family can receive emergency support. Through coordination with DSS social workers and NGOs, shelter can play a vital role in connecting children to other services such as Urban Safety Net Programs, education, vocational training and counselling services. These children should receive expedited access to birth registration and other documents so that they can enrol into schools and access social protection programs to support an exit from street life.

Increase specialised support services for abuse and substance misuse: Community centres, Child Hubs, shelters or other local health clinics should be equipped to identify violence, abuse and substance misuse experienced by street-connected boys – which are systematically underreported – and make onward referrals to various support services. Service providers should use the newly formed National Referral Mechanism for Protection and Care of Victims of Trafficking under the Ministry of Home Affairs to provide comprehensive support to survivors of CSEB and provide shelter and other support services necessary to keep them safe from harm. There is an urgent need to strengthen harm reduction efforts and recovery services for substance abuse. These services should offer support in reducing substance dependency and addressing the root causes that may drive boys to use substances in the first place.



Prosecution

Reduce violence against street-connected children: Police and government officials should receive training to identify and address violence against street-connected children, including boys. Crimes reported by street children should be promptly addressed with actions taken to identify and prosecute perpetrators.



Reintegration

Increase efforts made to reunite children with family members: Recognising the significant proportion of participants in the study with living family members, greater efforts should be made to reintegrate children with their families. Safe and supportive reintegration plans must include risk assessment of the family and individual circumstances and consent. Causes of family separation should be addressed and families linked to government social protection schemes. Where children are safely reunited, they should be connected to CTCs/CWBs/CBCPCs so that their welfare can be monitored. If family reunification is not in the child's best interest, comprehensive, holistic support including shelter, birth registration, education and vocational training should be provided.



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