Centre on Migration, Policy and Society

Working Paper No. 72,
University of Oxford, 2009

"No one comes on their own":
The system of child labour
migration in Bangladesh

Karin Heissler

WP-09-72

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Abstract

Networks have been identified as playing a critical role in reducing the costs and risks to migration. Yet, approaches to trafficking associate children's labour migration with exploitation, and the persons with whom they migrate as traffickers. Findings from ethnographic research undertaken in Bangladesh reveal that children's migration for work is largely contained within established social networks. Although children's migration for work is predominantly economically motivated, it is social and highly protective. The persons with whom children migrate are not 'traffickers'. Rather, the relationship between them reveals extra-household interdependencies for economic and social benefits. Although the system of child labour migration is heavily structured, girls and boys assert their own interests during the process of migrating and finding work and, in so doing, display agency and power.

Author: Karin Heissler has a D.Phil in Development Studies from the University of Oxford and is an Associate of COMPAS.

Background and introduction

This working paper focuses on the means by which children migrate and find jobs within Bangladesh. A review of the literature on children and work in Bangladesh shows that most studies on child labour focus on the nature and conditions *of* work, in urban sectors in particular (White, 2002). Yet, as Sumaiya Khair (2005) points out, none captures the dynamics of their migration *for* work. This is interesting because migration is intrinsically linked to the history of the country (Siddiqui, 2003), and internal rural-urban migration is the most prevalent form, especially among the poor who rely on it for their livelihoods (Afsar, 2003). No reliable data exist on the number of children working outside their homes (Khair, 2005). This is despite the fact that migrants are generally recognized as being young people (Toufique and Turton, 2002).

Consistent with the prevailing view of migrant children as vulnerable (O'Connell Davidson and Farrow, 2007), a great deal of attention on girls and boys living and working outside their homes –including in Bangladesh -has been placed on exploitative work and trafficking. For example, the U.S. Department of State's 'Trafficking in Persons Report 2008' contends that in Bangladesh children are trafficked internally and across borders for various purposes, including exploitative work (U.S. Department of State, 2008b) .

The tendency in research to focus on exploited and trafficked children draws attention to poverty and dysfunctional households which 'force' children to leave their households. This distorts understandings of children's migration for work, including the means by which they leave home. The broader context that creates both a demand for and supply of working children is often overlooked. Yet, it is necessary to understand these processes in order to understand the system of child labour migration.

Context, methodology and research sample

This paper draws on ethnographic fieldwork carried out on the factors involved in child labour migration from four[1] villages in Madhupur *upazila* (or sub-district) to other rural and industrial areas in and around Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, between 2006 and 2008.

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[1] The village names are Amripur, Hatipur, Kuripur and Rampara. The actual names have been changed to protect the identity of respondents.

Madhupur is situated approximately 160 km north west of Dhaka, the capital. Access is only by road, primarily by bus. It has a sizable Hindu and Christian population. However, Islam is the majority religion in the four study villages (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2007: 39).

Agriculture currently constitutes the main source of income across the study sites, in particular, rice and fruit cultivation, livestock, forestry and fishery (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2007). Yet, reflecting the national trend, villagers are increasingly looking beyond the farming sector for sources of income. Nationally, remittances from migration presently form an important part of the rural economy (Toufique and Turton, 2002). Yet, unlike other parts of the country, Madhupur is an area that has not been traditionally associated with out-migration, neither international nor internal. Accordingly, this enabled an exploration of the processes by which new practices were being created. The migration of children for work and without their parents was one such phenomenon.

Ethnographic research was carried out in both origin and destination settings. The sample comprised 58 migrant children (35 girls and 23 boys). They were identified using purposive and snowball sampling (Bernard, 2006). All of the interviewed children left their home village for another location within the country for work at least once. None migrated with their parents. The methods involved a combination of observation, in-depth face-to-face discussions with individual and groups of migrant working children, and the collection of life histories. To better understand the broad context in which migration takes place, frequent interactions took place with another 73 persons who comprised the children's parents, siblings, friends, peers, and neighbours.

The precise age of the participants was difficult to determine because the vast majority of births are not registered (UNICEF Bangladesh Country Office, 2005), and age is instead more commonly marked by life stages or culturally and biologically determined behaviours and qualities (Aziz and Maloney, 1985). According to estimates, the age at first migration varied between seven and 18 years old. As of January 2008, however, their ages ranged between nine and 25 years old.

Reflecting the highly gendered dimension of labour markets in Bangladesh (Kabeer, 2001: 72, Rahman, 2007), the majority of the migrant girls in this study were employed either as domestic workers in private households or in export-oriented garment factories. A number of girls working in garment factories had previously been employed as domestic workers. Only one girl was employed outside these two professions; she was working in a thread factory. In contrast to the females, migrant boys were engaged in a greater diversity of jobs. These included work as shop assistants; in factories making

shoes, garments or chicken feed; in construction; making bricks; painting trucks; making mattresses; as a security guard, and as a domestic worker.

Literature on children's involvement in migration 'networks'

Networks have been identified as playing both a social and economic role in many kinds of migration (Poros, 2001: 246, Massey et al., 1987: 169, Kemper, 1977). They reflect personal relationships and patterns (Castles and Miller, 2003: 27). By reducing the costs and risks associated with migration, networks constitute a form of "social capital" (Dahinden, 2005: 191). Men have been privileged in networks' research (Massey et al., 1987: 140), yet, an examination of female networks reveals how gender relations shape the migration experience (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994: 7).

While it has been established that adult men and women often use contacts that connect them to networks in the process of migrating and getting a job, when it comes to children, apart from attention drawn to traffickers, with few exceptions (see for example Camacho, 1999, Caouette, 2002, Iversen, 2002, Hashim, 2005, and Punch, 2002), are networks recognised as being essential for girls' and boys' migration. Yet, based on their review of the literature on children's independent migration, Ann Whitehead and Iman Hashim (2005: 35) importantly note "Children rarely travel and seek work alone". In her study of autonomous child migrants to Dhaka, Khair (2005: 82) found that one-quarter migrated on their own and most came with a relative (56 percent), a neighbour (16 percent), or with someone else (3 percent).

In many studies of networks in migration, ties between relatives are often seen as being among the closest. For example, despite the male bias of Douglas Massey and his co-authors' (1987: 140) ranking scheme of networks, they find that "…migrants naturally display a preference of the tie of brotherhood". Presumably Massey et al. make this assumption because kinship ties are thought to be among the most intimate, interdependent and controllable of ties.   For example, David Murray Schneider, in his critique on kinship (1984: 174), writes that the notion of 'blood is thicker than water' is taken by many as "unquestioned and unquestionable". Yet kinship is frequently defined in creative ways, as noted by Maritsa Poros (2001: 245) who, in writing on Indian migration, notes that "labels, such as friend, relative, or neighbour… can be ambiguous". Similarly, in Bangladesh, without closely examining 'kinship', one may, overlook the important role played in children's migration by individuals who do not happen to be kin yet who may be referred to as such.

The system of migration and its elements

In Bangladesh, it has been found that very few people migrate by themselves (Afsar, 2002, Kabeer, 2001). Not only does this appear to be the case for adult men and women, but also the same holds true for children (Khair, 2005: 82, Giani, 2006: 5). It has furthermore been established that adult men and women often use contacts that connect them to networks to facilitate a range of services, including employment. Md. Salim Ahmed Purvez (2005: 103) writes of the significance of networks as a catalyst to help poor people in Bangladesh make a living, including through migration for work. This shows a propensity towards viewing networks as benign instruments for migrants' betterment, even among marginalised people who are otherwise usually seen as powerless.

While this normative aspect of contacts may, at times, be used to describe the processes by which adults migrate and get jobs, this characteristic rarely features in the discourse when children use them to facilitate their migration and work. For example, unlike for adults, when girls and boys are accompanied on their journey, those people are often perceived as 'traffickers' even if force is not involved (O'Connell Davidson and Farrow, 2007: 35). This is despite the fact, as established above, some research on children's migration, including in Bangladesh, show that networks are essential for children's migration.

Social practices intended to protect children over the course of their migration are often misrepresented, and the terms used frequently have negative connotations. For example, in the Bangladesh National Child Labour Survey (NCLS) (2002-2003), the official term used to describe a person who helps find children work is a "recruiter" (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2003: 110). This term takes for granted that the child is *approached* about work, rather than allowing for the possibility that he or she *initiated* the search for employment. This conveys a minority world discourse that children are incapable of making informed decisions, least of all about work, and that peoples' involvement in any aspect of child labour is wrong. Moreover, it assumes and formalises a relationship that is likely to be quite different in practice. Indeed, according to the NCLS survey, the main source of recruitment in rural areas were relatives (at almost 42 percent) and friends (at 11 percent) (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2003: 110). Presumably, and as will be explored below, there are reasons why most children's work is facilitated through known and close contacts.

"No one comes on their own"

Empirical findings demonstrate that networks are not only a means of migration, but also concerning children's migration for work, they are *the* means of migration. For example, when villagers were asked how people find jobs outside Madhupur, some answered that they hear of work through the media, NGOs, and word-of-mouth from other villagers. Yet when it came to sharing actual experiences of migration, it was evident that all migrants –including children –had close, if not familial relationships to a contact. None of the sample migrated without having a prior contact, and almost all were accompanied by that same person to the destination.

When child migrants were asked what they would have done if they had not known anyone in the place where they ended up working, with the exception of one boy, all of them responded strongly that they would not have gone. As one girl who works in a garment factory in Dhaka explained: "No one comes [to the city] on their own. Behind them are some known village persons who stay here [in the city]. For example, I came with other people. It is not possible to come on your own…" Children's migration for work is therefore not only about economic needs; it also reflects social ties and relationships. Children may require work that necessitates migration, but they will not migrate with just anyone.

Kinship and gender

Networks based on kinship are preferred over associations based on other affiliations. For the majority of child migrants, having *apon* ('a relative' or 'relatives') in the destination is a necessary feature of the network and for migration. However, what, in fact, was meant by the term *apon* was at first difficult to disentangle because familial terms such as 'aunt', 'cousin' and 'brother', are commonly used to describe persons who are not, in fact, 'blood' relatives through marriage or descent. So, *apon* comprises both kin and fictive kin. However, not just anyone fits into that category. The process of clarifying relationships revealed a number of important features, including the importance of gender and age which affect the functioning of networks.

For girls, more important than migrating with a relative is the gender of the family member they go with: they must go with older female relatives. Of these, the most common were an older sister, an older female paternal cousin *(chachato bon)*, and a maternal and paternal aunt. More distantly related were a maternal uncle's mother-in-law *(mama shashuri)* and a former sister-in-law (an ex-husband's sister).

While the majority of female relatives who served as points of contact were relations through marriage or descent and were from households belonging to roughly the same socio-economic class as the migrant, there were a number of women described by child migrants and their families as kin who were, in fact, neighbours and friends with whom they shared close bonds. On their first experience migrating for work, 20 girls (or approximately 56 percent of the sample) went with female kin and four girls (or 11 percent) left with fictive kin. These bonds with women were also between households of the same socio-economic class.

When girls who had experienced migration were asked if having an older male relative, even a brother, was a sufficient condition for their migration specifically and girls' migration in general, none responded positively, even if they had been tempted. This is illustrated in the following discussion with Sofia[2], who first went to Dhaka with her father's brother's daughter. Her older brother joined them not long after she had started working in garments:

> K.H.:[3] *What if only your brother were there [in Dhaka], would you have gone?*
>
> Sofia: No, I would not have gone.
>
> K.H.: *Why not?*
>
> Sofia: Because there is no safety. He goes out. With a female relative there is safety. She is at home and we will always be together. He cannot take care [of me].

This illustrates the deliberate steps taken by girls in the selection of contacts who can ensure their moral and physical safety. By migrating alone or with a male, even a close male relative, there is a risk of transgression occurring that would violate norms of *purdah*[4] and therefore adversely affect the reputation of the girl and her family. With a female contact it is perceived that these types of problems are more likely to be avoided. Of additional consideration, Sofia explained that adhering to these codes is especially important for girls when they reach 'marriage age' (which occurs around puberty), which is when their actions become even more carefully monitored. For migrant girls, protection is therefore an important aspect of having a female contact because it provides an accepted means of safeguarding one's honour and status.

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[2] As with the villages, the names of respondents have been changed to protect their identity.
[3] K.H.=Karin Heissler
[4] *Purdah* means literally 'curtain' or 'veil.' It refers to the system of seclusion of Muslim women from outsiders. In Bangladesh, to varying degrees, it is practiced by women of all religions (Kabeer 2001, Rozario 1992).

Boys, in contrast, were perceived by girls as freer to move alone. Yet, although they were not bound as strictly as girls by the same norms of *purdah*, having a prior contact was still required for them to migrate for work. No boys in the sample migrated for work without having a prior contact in the destination. Not only did their contacts facilitate their jobs, but also they were seen as playing an important role in keeping them out of trouble such as mixing with a 'bad' crowd of boys and older men or 'hanging around' with girls. Nevertheless, unlike for girls, whether their contact was male or female seemed less important. On their first experience of migration for work, nine boys (or 41 percent of the sample) used contacts based on male kin, as compared to eight boys (or 36 percent) who used ones based on female kin.

As these findings show, children's migration is largely contained within social networks comprising kin or fictive kin. Trust is an important characteristic of contacts and, presumably because of shared ties, alliances based on this type of relationship are seen as being the most capable of and accountable for ensuring children's security over the course of migration and in the destination setting. Concerning girls, the gender of the person they migrate with is more important than whether or not that person is a blood relative. Although none of the child migrants and parents ever mentioned the word 'trafficking' or any terms suggesting force and migration, it was evident that an important role of contacts was to ease the gendered vulnerability persons (especially women and girls) might be exposed to during the process of migrating and finding work. More importantly, for children, girls in particular, adhering to the gendered and aged norms in which they were socialised (Aziz and Maloney, 1985, Blanchet, 1996) was seen as being facilitated by migrating with and through trusted contacts who had a connection to that child's household.

Fictive kin were of the same, or similar, class position as the household to which the child labour migrant belonged. The interdependence between child migrants and contacts was mainly along class lines as it was for actual kin. Associations made between them were therefore not about aspirations for social status. Rather, they were made with kin and fictive kin to *maintain* one's reputation and class position. This was especially for girls for whom norms of *purdah*, especially when they reach 'marriage age', are stricter than they are for boys.

Intermediaries and friends

Strangers, for example, 'intermediaries' also play a role in the system of child labour migration. They are neither related to, nor a friend of the would-be migrant, yet he or she is often from the same region and

finds employment for them. Apart from those who happened to be kin or fictive kin of several child migrants in the sample[5], none referred to them in any way that denoted a familial relationship.

Intermediaries get known by aspiring migrants and prospective employers through word-of-mouth. They are most often used to find domestic workers for urban lower middle and middle class homes in cities, but also in peri-urban areas and villages. In the study areas, intermediaries were only used for recruitment into domestic work. Migrants do not pay or give them any fee; rather employers pay them a nominal amount or give them a gift when workers have been found for their homes. This establishes that networks can comprise both social and economic transactions.

Intermediaries do not appear to feature in the mainstream migration networks literature, however, they are frequently cited in trafficking research and advocacy reports (Whitehead and Hashim, 2005: 40). Presumably this is because they are associated with placing children in harmful work conditions and are therefore seen as traffickers. Indeed, Whitehead and Hashim (2005: 35) find that intermediaries may force children into conditions of servitude, yet they also note that such persons may also be highly protective. In the Madhupur area, it was learned that intermediaries used to play a larger role in connecting potential migrants to jobs and accommodation. However, the increasing exposure of rural villagers, including children, to cities appears to be making more people aware of the available opportunities and risks in cities. Moreover, the emergence and rise of the export-oriented garment industry in the last generation has created new work options, especially for young females (Kabeer, 2001).

Given the choice of migrating with someone who has a familial connection and who is therefore known and trusted as compared to someone who is a stranger, it was no surprise to find that most would-be child migrants and their parents preferred the first option. As increasing numbers of villagers have their own contacts, and options for work have expanded, the use of intermediaries is declining in popularity. As Zuleka, a former intermediary who described herself as 'retired' put it, "before, people were more afraid of Dhaka but now, lots of people have become smarter and they go by themselves".

Not only are intermediaries less prevalent than kin and fictive kin as contacts, according to the few intermediaries identified, finding employment for people, especially girls, is no easy task: it involves taking

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[5] For example, Seheli, an intermediary, is the paternal aunt (father's brother's wife) of Sadia, Saira, Poppy and Ambia and she found domestic work for all of them. Seheli also found domestic work for Mariam, who is a neighbour and close friend of Poppy. Mariam's mother refers to Seheli as a relation even though they are fictive kin. In addition, Seheli's childhood friend Zuleka is also an intermediary who once found work for Poppy.

risks to find employment that may turn out badly and damage his or her reputation. The responsibilities that come with that role can be a strong disincentive for doing such work. For example, Rokeya, a female union parishad member[6] from Hatipur once organised household work for two girls, Parul and Poppy. She explained that she happened into that role when she went to the bank (in Tangail) to get a loan and the bank officer asked if she knew anyone to work in his home. She said she would help him if he helped her to get the loan. She then approached a mother whom she knew was 'poor' and asked if that woman's daughter, Parul, would be interested. Parul eventually went. Not long after, another bank officer contacted her and she subsequently arranged for Poppy, another 'poor' girl, to go. Rokeya told me that after the girls had left she contacted them to find out how they were doing because they were 'marriage age' and therefore even more vulnerable, and if anything bad happened to them Rokeya knew she would be blamed. When she contacted them, the girls told her that the employers were not providing them with proper food and wages so Rokeya arranged to have them brought home. She was asked if she had ever found household work for children previously and she replied strongly, "No, only those two girls and never again because of the tension I experienced. After giving those two girls I learned a lot. Before I never gave and now I will not give [any girls for work]". As this case study shows, intermediaries take additional risks with 'marriage age' girls, hence the reluctance to find work for them. This also shows how intermediaries perceive that they are policed and monitored locally, and that if anything bad happens to the child, their reputations and social positions in the community will be adversely affected. This also reveals that the system comprises protection (as will be elaborated upon in a later section of this paper).

The norms around choice of contacts explored thus far suggest that ties based on kinship (especially older female kin or fictive kin for girls) are the most trusted and therefore strongest in the system. Although all contacts are monitored, intermediaries who do not have the same close ties to would-be migrants are perceived with more suspicion. With increasing rural-urban movements, more people find their own contacts on whom to draw, and with increased options of contacts and work opportunities, intermediaries have become a less popular choice. Exploration of intermediaries also shows that the system of child labour migration involves a lot of monitoring of contacts, including their own self-monitoring.

In addition to contacts based on kin, fictive kin and intermediaries, some child migrants have their own contacts upon whom to draw, and friends play an important role in this process. As noted in the NCLS,

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[6] A 'union' is the lowest tier of administrative units in Bangladesh, presided over by a Chairman. All elected members are called 'union parishad members' or 'member', for short.

11 percent of working children were 'recruited' by their friends (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2003: 110). Although findings from this study show that same-sex friends of migrants comprise a minority of contacts for children's first experience of migration for work (they are used by 6 percent and 9 percent of migrant girls and boys, respectively), on subsequent experiences of migration for work, friends were more significant among both girls and boys. Friends of the same sex and who roughly belong to a similar age group play an important role as contacts. For example, although several mothers explained they would not allow their daughters to migrate with their friends because they did not consider them sufficiently mature, in some parts of villages, friends are significant to the system of migration. This is especially the case in one neighbourhood of Hatipur, where two sisters (Zafrin and Razia) working in garments also serve as a network for other friends' migration for work. In total, they have facilitated work for four[7] of their female friends.

Most children met their friends either because they lived in close proximity to each other, played with each other when they were young, or went to the same school. With regards to the latter, evidence suggests that school brings together children who may otherwise not have met, and these friends may eventually become contacts with and through whom to migrate. In Bangladesh, investments in education, especially for girls and at the secondary level, are widely credited for increasing girls' enrolment and attendance rates, for improving their levels of education, for postponing marriage and for increasing girls' age of marriage (Amin and Sedgh, 1998). Education has also contributed to the spatial widening of girls' friendships and networks. This is because girls must travel further distances to attend secondary school and therefore they are introduced to, and have the opportunity to make friends with girls from other villages and parts of villages than they would otherwise have met. The role of girlfriends in girls' migration for work furthermore shows that while their mobility and choice of work is far more restricted as compared to boys, this does not mean they are not resourceful and able to draw on support through social networks from friends, including those met as a result of school. Through these extra-household affiliations, they furthermore negotiate their own and their household's advancement.

Child migrants may convince other children to migrate for work. In so doing, they influence choice. For example, several girls who had migrated for work said they were drawn to it because they did not like staying at home and wanted to be with their friends. This also shows that migration is also related to and reflects social and not just familial, bonds. For example, although Sarifa had relatives working in another part of Dhaka, she chose instead to join her friends in garment work. She explained that she did not like staying at home by herself, found that all her friends were working in a garment factory and

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[7] They are Poppy, Parul, Rahima and Sarifa.

decided she would rather be with them then remain at home. She added, so close was the bond between them that, "If you are from the same village, you are relatives". This shows that children's migration for work is not only about earning an income, but that it is also associated with social allegiances.

The finding that children, who are often seen as being among the least powerful in society, play important roles as contacts for migration and work suggests the need to re-examine and refine assumptions made about 'the poor' having greater difficulty accessing networks, and how this isolation keeps them 'poor'.

The 'poor' and networks

Purvez (2005: 107) writes that the poor in Bangladesh may be at a disadvantage for cultivating relationships because of the time and other resources required. He argues that their potential inability to construct beneficial social networks may explain why they end up being the "poorest of the poor". He furthermore writes that female-headed households and child members of them may be especially disadvantaged in gaining access to networks that could help them in their daily life (Purvez, 2005: 106). Findings from this research show instead that even 'the poor' have contacts and that they serve both social and economic needs.

Being part of a female-headed household may, in fact, lead to increased support from others in the neighbourhood who may also be poor, but who may be able to offer some help through the resources they have access to. Being the subject of pity may serve as an entry point into a network that facilitates employment. This is illustrated in the following case study from Hatipur. Zarina is a mother of four children and is the third wife of a man who usually lives with his second wife. Her eldest daughter Zohura did domestic work for over six years for a family that provided no salary, only food, shelter and clothing. Instead, Arifa, the daughter of Zarina's neighbour Jamila, was working for a generous family in Dhaka. Seeing no benefits for Zohura to remain with her employer, Zarina asked Jamila to find out if Arifa's employer needed any extra help and, if so, if he would hire Zohura. Jamila agreed and the employer hired the girl. Jamila later explained why she had helped them out, "Zarina is a poor person, she has no money. Her daughter is getting older and needs money for her marriage. Zarina's husband doesn't give her anything and she is a neighbour". To cope with the pressures of life, and given the absence of social safety nets, women of the same or similar class position may find it prudent to help

each other out in the event their luck turns and they need help.[8] Networks therefore serve as 'social capital'. Pathways between and among adults and children create options and provide a means of migration for both the poor and less poor. The case study also shows economic consequences for those who lack contacts and access to networks, revealing that social isolation can lead to economic isolation.

As will be explored in the following section, this system of child labour migration, including choice of contacts, is anything but new.

Changes over time

The fact that intermediaries are less popular as contacts, and friends maybe increasing in importance indicates that the established system of child labour migration is also dynamic. Adjustments in the composition, nature and role of contacts over time are related to modernising processes in rural Bangladesh that affect households, including children. *Inter alia,* education reaches more children now than in previous generations, joint households have given way to the nuclear family as the 'normal' household structure, and increased desertion and divorce by men of their wives and families further transforms the composition of the household (Sen and Hulme, 2006: 49, Kabeer, 2001: 61-62, White, 1992). Increases in dowry[9] furthermore put additional pressure on households that own less land than previously and which, increasingly, must depend on monetised sources of income to ensure their livelihoods and meet societal demands (Toufique and Turton, 2002). To respond to these changes which add stress to households, especially those that are less capable of responding to shocks (for example, the female-headed household mentioned above), forging ties with kin and fictive kin and finding jobs through friends may be a means of reducing vulnerability and risk, thereby creating a type of extra-household interdependency.

Comparing the experiences of older sisters with those of their younger siblings whose migration they facilitated demonstrates transitions over a relatively short period of time (within approximately the last 12 to 16 years[10]) in the characteristics of female networks in particular. At that time, some girls used

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[8] In fact, Jamila's husband died a few months later which was distressing to her for various reasons, not least because her husband was deeply in debt and she had no means of paying back the loans.
[9] Although it is illegal (Sultana 2005), it emerged as commonplace from the 1970s and involves the payment of cash and gifts from the bride's family to the groom's. It is widely practiced throughout Bangladesh, and evidence suggests the amounts are increasing (Amin et al. 1006, Sen and Hulme 2006).

[10] This figure is approximate, and is based on a calculation involving key events and the spacing of events provided by respondents.

male contacts who were described as fictive kin, and others used distant family members. Yet, by 2006, when the fieldwork was first being conducted, male networks were now no longer appropriate for females. The transition appeared to be away from networks comprising male and distantly-related family members and contacts of neighbours, to networks primarily comprising close kin and fictive kin. In addition, girls and boys increasingly had their own contacts who could link them to networks for migration and work. While this would suggest an *expansion* of options and choices about work, as discussed above, the gendered and aged norms also apply to networks. So, while there may be a greater number and variation of networks, their options are *narrowing:* girls now may only go with and through close female contacts. This is likely due to the strong emphasis placed on females to maintain *purdah,* and the consequences that befall households with girls who are seen to have contravened accepted norms of behaviour. Reflecting the new practice of dowry and dowry inflation, any deviation from accepted norms may be reflected in higher amounts demanded or compromises made in the quality of grooms. Hence, for households that require girls' migration for work, going with and through trusted female contacts who are seen as best capable of preserving their reputations may be the most optimal choice.

The increased, yet more restrictive, network variations are also evident when comparing across the field sites. They reveal that differences between villages, including in norms, affect network options and choices about migration for work. For example, Hatipur, the largest of the four villages, had the most diverse and overlapping networks. Many girls and boys had the option of female relatives, close female neighbours, female and male intermediaries, and female friends with and through whom to migrate. As explored in the previous section, in two neighbourhoods of Hatipur, girlfriends played a significant role as contacts and their patterns were different and appeared more relaxed than in other areas within Hatipur and in the other three villages. In contrast, and counter-intuitively because it has a high proportion of very poor households which would seem to suggest higher rates of out-migration among girls and boys, the smallest of the villages, Kuripur, had the fewest girls, and the greatest number of boys who migrated for work. Of all four villages studied, it also had the most significant gender restrictions on girls' migration. Both boys and girls from here remarked that the social norms in their village were more restrictive of girls' outside migration for work than in other villages.

As will be explored in the following section, labour markets are also strongly connected to the system of labour migration.

The role of labour markets

As established above, contacts serve as labour recruiters which reveals that employees are not matched by skill, but rather according to their relationship to a contact. The system therefore comprises of patronage. This was confirmed by findings conducted of rural and urban labour markets: they are based on social and class relations, are gendered, and are therefore narrow.

For example, within the villages and in Madhupur *upazila,* shop owners explained that they prefer to hire kin and, if they are not available, they then choose close and trustworthy people. Concerning urban labour markets, entry to 'low' skilled work –both in formal and nonformal sectors such as garment factories and households –depends less on competition and skill, and more on access to a specific contact. Networks therefore play a key market function by serving as a recruitment agency linking children to both formal and informal sectors of work.

This also shows the extremely narrow range of work possibilities which are related to one's contact, gender and class. This, in turn, reinforces gendered and status-oriented work stereotypes and boundaries. For example, after using a contact to secure employment, children can and do shift jobs and move around. However, access to a different sector of work (for example, changing from domestic work to employment in a garment factory) depends on one's gender and requires a different network, which means a new contact. This is illustrated by the following example. Three sisters, Sadia, Saira and Poppy (discussed earlier) first worked in households and their access to that line of work was through Seheli (their father's brother's wife). After several years of household work in various homes in Dhaka, Sadia and Saira returned home because they no longer had any interest in doing that work. They eventually migrated back to Dhaka, however, this time for work in a garment factory that was arranged through their mother's two younger sisters who were already employed in that sector.

Not only are labour markets gendered, but also as Kabeer (1994) writes, there are both gendered and aged boundaries to many types of paid work. When they are very young, few girls and boys migrate independently for work because it is not accepted. Due to the social unacceptability of employment of children under 18 years old in the export-oriented garment industry[11], most girls explained that when they are asked by factory employers for their age, they tell them they are 18 years old so that they may be hired. The garment sector is, nonetheless, known for having a preference for young unmarried

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[11] Due to a concern about trade sanctions from the 'minority' world, in particular the US, export-garment factories have –since the 1990s- -had a moratorium on hiring anyone under 18 years old. See U.S. Department of State (2008a).

women (Kabeer, 2001), and, based on the sample in this study, many of them happen to be girls under 18 years old.

Having described the different aspects of the labour market that comprise the system of child labour migration, including its social dimensions, in the next section the discussion focuses on how the protection of child migrants is also an important component.

Protection and abuse

When embarking on migration for work, especially if it is their first experience, children recognise that their limited information and lack of familiarity with remunerated work and the destination site could put them at risk of harm. Protection is an especially important factor in girls' decisions about migration and work. This is not only a customary concern for protection, but also a fear of experiencing the gender-based violence prevalent in Bangladesh (Sen and Hulme, 2006: 114).

Being part of a network offers protection both during the process of migrating and in the destination site. It therefore helps to offset a great deal of the insecurity that would otherwise prevent girls from migrating. Yet, this does not mean that networks alleviate all fears, or lessen the sense of adventure girls and boys experience when they migrate.

While protection is an important aspect of the system of child labour migration, contacts –even kin and fictive kin –are not entirely benevolent: they too benefit from it. In so doing, they may take advantage of the children whose work and accommodation they facilitate. Self-interest is revealed in a number of ways and may, at times, work against the interests of child migrants. In a study of the livelihoods of the rural poor in Bangladesh, Purvez (2005) finds that social networks are not only positive, but also may create problems. For example, the relationship may break down or 'transactional costs' (such as gifts of favours) may be high for maintaining the network (Purvez, 2005: 105).

As findings from this study show, contacts have a lot of power over child migrants. This is because children are socially unable to migrate without having them, and because these persons have a monopoly over choice in the type of work girls and boys do and where they will live. As many contacts are kin or fictive kin they have a shared history. This prior relationship makes them potentially more influential than intermediaries because they are known and presumably well-trusted, even though evidence illustrated earlier shows how limited in fact their resources are, and how their actions are monitored.

Some contacts take advantage of children's lack of familiarity with the process of migrating for work, as well as some children's poor knowledge of the destination, nature of work, living costs and expected incomes. They may convince children to migrate based on their own self-interest, for example, to get children to migrate and live with them so that they may reduce their expenses and increase their savings. This occurs even among siblings. For example, Haowa said she asked her younger sister, Ruma, to join her in Dhaka so that they could both help ease their family's financial problem and save money. For Haowa, having Ruma with her meant cutting down on accommodation and food costs, thereby reducing her fixed costs. Migrants negotiate their responsibilities to the household seeking to maximise financial gains to the family while also searching for benefits for themselves that are both financial and social.

Some contacts may use deceit to convince prospective migrants to leave home. For example, Fatema went with her neighbour (described as fictive kin) Mayeeda to Dhaka for work. When Mayeeda first approached her, Fatema was told that the starting salary as a helper[12] was Taka 2000[13] per month. Fatema understood this to mean that she would start out with that salary and made her decision to migrate accordingly. In fact, at the time Mayeeda quoted that figure to her, the minimum monthly wage in garments was Taka 950[14] per month (plus overtime) which was set in approximately 1994 and which had not kept up with inflation (Mahmud, 2006). Over the course of fieldwork, no migrant girl from any of the four villages was earning as much as Taka 2000/month as a helper: most –especially those new to the job –earned much less (closer to Taka 1000/month[15]). Fatema said that Mayeeda lied to her because her starting salary as a helper turned out to be less than half of what she had been told. Fatema had no idea why Mayeeda would have deceived her. Very likely Mayeeda told this story in order to make moving to Dhaka and doing garment work appealing to Fatema. This served to cut down on Mayeeda's rent and food expenses, and also provided her with an extra person to help with cleaning and cooking.

Contacts who link children to networks make socially possible children's migration for work; they are perceived as providing them with safe options to leave the village that would otherwise not exist, and they reveal options to children that widen their horizons and get them thinking beyond village life. Contacts find ways of benefiting from the system in order to meet responsibilities to their own households and to further their own interests. In so doing, some may also take advantage of their

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[12] A 'helper' is the most common entry-level position for girls in garment factories.
[13] Approximately GBP £18. All conversations are according to www.xe.com as of 7 July 2009.
[14] Approximately GBP £8.55.
[15] Approximately GBP £9.

position through deceit and lies. Yet, migrant girls and boys show agency and power within this highly structured system of contacts and networks, even if this is constrained.

Constrained agency and power

As will be explored in this section, although contacts provide choices and facilitate decision-making concerning migration for work (Dahinden, 2005: 191, Purvez, 2005: 102), migrant working children are not powerless in these relationships. Furthermore, in exposing children to information, experiences and work, contacts may instil in them the potential for the greater (and subsequent) exercise of agency.

Children in this study are revealed as confident actors across generational boundaries. For example, girls may be limited to female networks, but to secure jobs, both girls and boys will initiate and negotiate with women older than themselves who act as contacts. They will furthermore do this independently of their parents. For example, Vanessa approached her *kala* ('mother's sister') for work, and Sohrab approached an older female neighbour who he also described as his *kala*. Furthermore, while they may feel pressure to migrate for work, if they do not like the work options available to them by their contacts, they will not go. For example, Zahangir said that he was keen to leave his village (again) for work, but explained he would only go if 'good' work was available. By this he meant work that was associated with status and security. Therefore, he had no interest in joining his older brother who occasionally works as a rickshaw driver in Dhaka or his friend who has worked in factories in Gazipur because they do 'low' status and poorly paid work. Even though he remained unhappy at home, he still rejected those work possibilities. So, while contacts are essential for migration, and ones based on kinship and friendship may be ideal, when one's aspirations exceed the work possibilities offered through one's contact, even if it is between brothers and friends, children can and do say "No" without their parents having any influence over the decision. This also shows that children assess the quality and characteristics of their contacts before deciding to migrate with them. In addition, some children migrated despite having relatively 'weak' networks (for example, distant relations and fictive kin) and, conversely, there were others with very strong contacts that still opted not to migrate for work.

Some children feel they have little choice in migrating for work because the family's situation is so bad and they are obliged to help. Yet, they may still waver over a decision and stall as a deliberate means of being assertive and keeping their pride. For example, Parul did not immediately agree to do domestic work when Rokeya (the woman who linked her to work) approached her. As described earlier in the paper, Rokeya was aware that Parul was from a needy family and would likely agree to do the work.

While this was indeed the case[16], Parul nevertheless exercised some control over the process by slowing it down. As the decision to migrate for work appeared inevitable, she explained why she had taken so long to agree: "I know there is a shortage of domestic workers. How can you agree to work when you are only asked one or two times? I want them to really want me and I don't want to show that I need the work".

Power is not just evident in saying "No" or delaying an inevitable decision; it is also apparent in choosing between contacts and jobs. This is based on timing and circumstances. Girls, and presumably also boys with access to multiple networks select which network serves their purposes at a particular time and phase in their lives. This is illustrated in the following example: although Poppy's two older sisters and maternal aunts were working in garment factories in two different areas outside Dhaka, it was to join her girlfriends working in garments (Zafrin and Razia), where she chose to migrate for work. She explained that her friends had asked her to come, whereas her sisters had not been forthcoming with an invitation. Her sister Saira explained that they had not asked Poppy to come because they had just moved to a new area, had recently started their jobs and were not in a position for her to have joined them.

Agency also evolves over the course of migrating for work, which exposes children to new living and working conditions, new people (and potential contacts), and which may also increase their decision-making abilities.

Switching jobs and contacts and exiting work

As explored in this section, it is easier to make choices when you have more experience with migration and work, and when you know and trust larger numbers of people. After initially using a network to migrate for work, some children found greater success later on, by leaving their job or changing their contact. However, exiting social networks only happened once the child had a means of leaving (such as having access to another network and the self-assurance to leave). Self-confidence evolves over the course of migration and work as circumstances change and children get used to living and working in new places. For example, Vanessa said that she worked in the same household as her *kala* for a year-and-a-half, but that the aunt often swore at her. When asked why she had stayed there for so long she replied, "At first it was okay, I didn't know Dhaka, there were no [other] relatives here, but when

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[16] Parul's father had died and her mother was the second wife and had not received any financial support since his death.

others came[17], I decided to change jobs". So, although Vanessa had long realised that she did not need to accept the treatment she was receiving from her aunt, she felt she had no option to do anything about it until another contact came along. This shows that the exposure to new places and people (including co-workers, roommates, employers and neighbours) affects one's thinking, aspirations and confidence. In addition, the direct experience of injustice, for example, being treated badly or cheated by an employer or contact within a network, affects subsequent choices. By exposing children to such experiences, networks therefore serve as the catalyst for children's choice and access to power. Over time, experience and exposure to the 'outside' reduces the dependency relationship of a child on his or her individual contacts within a network.

This is illustrated in the following case. Vanessa got both of her jobs in garment work through lying, on the first occasion with initial prompting and help from her contact, her *mama shashuri* ('maternal uncle's mother-in-law'), yet secured through her own ingenuity:

> I had never done garment work before. I went to the gate of a garment factory near where I had moved. A man at the factory gate asked, "Who wants to do work in 'Finishing'[18]?" My *mama shashuri* told me to tell the man I could do it and I did and I was brought into the factory for an interview. They asked me what class I had studied up to and I told them I had finished Class Eight and was 18 years-old [She lied; she hadn't finished Class Four and was about 16 years-old]. Then they took my photo and gave me a test to find out if I knew how to do 'Finishing'. I looked at what the other girls were doing and imitated them and got the job.

After nine months Vanessa decided to change jobs because she and a friend wanted a higher paying and status job. They did not use a contact; they went on their own initiative which showed Vanessa's increasing self-assurance and independence:

> We went to look for a job. We went to the tenth floor of one building and asked if they needed anyone in 'Quality'[19]. On the 10th floor the people said they didn't need anyone so we went to the 11th floor and asked for a job in 'Quality' and the people there said they needed four people so they asked what we did and we lied and told them that we worked in 'Quality'. My friend had studied up to SSC[20] and I lied and told them I had studied up to Class Eight. They gave us a test and asked us to tell them how many inches were on the tape measure. I didn't know and said I had forgotten. The factory people told me it was 60 inches long and I said, "Yes, I know. Sorry I have had a break [holiday] and forgot". Then they gave us trousers to check and I looked carefully and

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[17] Her older sister and father moved to Dhaka for work.

[18] 'Finishing' is a job in a garment factory where the final touches are put onto garments.

[19] 'Quality' is short for 'Quality Control'. It is work of higher status and pay than in 'Finishing'.

[20] Secondary School Certificate

pointed out the mistakes so they decided they would give me Taka 1600[21] per month and my friend Taka 1400[22] per month because she didn't find all the mistakes and didn't do as well as me. Later my friend said she didn't want the job because at Joy Fashion[23] she was earning Taka 1200[24] per month. I thought maybe my friend was jealous because I would earn more than her, even though she was more educated and would be doing the same job as me, but for a lower salary.

Vanessa circumvented hiring practices that were intended to separate the experienced from the inexperienced workers. This also shows the importance of personal characteristics and attributes that are essential aspects of agency. She is bold and audacious and did not learn these skills in school. Furthermore, her growing confidence is what led her to seek and secure a higher paying and status job.

Children may therefore further their own interests independent of, and even despite, their parents' and other adults' actions. Although children frequently appear as submissive in the process of work, as Martin Woodhead (2004: 10) writes, "children are not passive victims, who are physically and psychologically 'damaged' by their work". The findings from this study similarly show, that although many migrant working children have bad experiences, when they are cheated or taken advantage of, they assert themselves. For example, they may take the initiative to protect themselves and advance their interests through confronting or lying to adult employers without involving their contacts.

Mariam (who was then 14 years old) used to be a domestic worker in Dhaka. She worked for the same employer on three different occasions:

> The first time I worked was only for a few days because I didn't like it, but I was convinced by the woman who organised my work and by my parents to go back, which I did for two months and six days. That second time working I got sick on the oily food they served to me so I went back home. The owner gave me some medicine and I told them I needed some rest. The employers kept calling me so after three to four months at home my mother asked if I wanted to go back and I agreed to go. However, this third time the owner was not good. The *mallik*[25] asked me to massage his legs [while talking Mariam demonstrated by rubbing on her own legs what the owner was asking her to do]. I thought this was not good so I lied and told the employer that my father was sick and that I would have to return home. Only after I got back home did I tell my mother what the *mallik* had asked me to do.

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[21] Approximately GBP £14.40.
[22] Approximately GBP £12.59.
[23] The name has been changed but it is the factory where the two girls were working at the time.
[24] Approximately GBP £10.79.
[25] meaning 'employer'

As this case study shows, rather than wait for the same or worse behaviour to happen, or rely on her contact, Mariam quickly took the initiative to get herself out of the situation which involved lying to her employers. Yet, as Jenny Kitzinger (1997) writes, in most adult-centric discourses on child abuse, children's strategies to protect themselves are ignored. Nevertheless, the failure to accept children as agents of their own lives ignores their own acts of resistance.

Conclusions

The relationship between movement and work is central to trafficking and is associated with exploitation. The findings presented in this paper challenge the assumption that child labour migration is necessarily a form of trafficking and that poor people, especially children, are easily taken advantage of, especially when they are outside the home and are exposed to migration and work. Although they do not go with their parents, children do not migrate by themselves, and the individuals who accompany them are not traffickers. A sophisticated set of mechanisms exist that facilitate the experience and provide protection to them.

An examination of the processes by which children migrate shows that households are not discrete units. Rather, ties made with contacts reveal extra-household interdependencies for a variety of benefits. Networks are socially and economically constructed, and, villagers, including children, reconstruct kinship so that girls can migrate with and through female friends who they describe as being close, like relatives. The fact that all girls and boys used contacts and got involved in networks, including many initiated by themselves, suggests that even those assumed to be the most powerless have resources to draw upon to secure work for themselves or others. Contacts who link children to networks for migration, work and accommodation make socially possible children's migration, yet they also constrain their migration for work.

While the system of child labour migration is established, it is also dynamic. Modernising processes show the decline in intermediaries and reveal an interesting role of friends that requires further monitoring, especially as developments in education have widened the possibility for girls' friendships that appear, especially in some pockets of the villages studied, to serve as an important source of networks for migration and work.

Although the system –including the functioning of labour markets –is heavily structured and children's space for exercising choice is narrow, they possess ways and means to assert themselves over the

process of migrating and finding work. This is revealed by choosing not to go, stalling, changing contacts, switching jobs and/or exiting work when their contacts are not helping them to meet their demands and/or aspirations, and taking the initiative to protect themselves.

The results also challenge ideas about how decisions are made by individuals and within households, and show that children form networks independently of their parents. They may negotiate and interact with networks across generational boundaries. However, girls may not cross gendered boundaries. Networks not only serve purposes related to migration, work and recruitment, but also they reflect the dynamic structuring principles of society, and children's active engagement with them. They furthermore provide insight into the characteristics of children's social ties and allegiances, hence their resources. The findings therefore refine the understanding of networks and the ways in which they operate with regards to girls and boys.

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