

# Not Small Fry

Children's Work in Bangladesh's Shrimp Industry



Uttaran



**Save the Children**  
UK

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## ***Children's Work in Bangladesh's Shrimp Industry***

Prepared by  
**Emily Delap & Rosemary Lugg**  
for

**Uttaran**



**Save the Children**  
UK, Bangladesh programme

For copies & information:  
The Save the Children Fund (UK)  
House 28, Road 16 (New)  
Dhanmondi R/A  
GPO Box 55  
Dhaka 1209, Bangladesh  
Tel: 817561-3  
Fax: 880-2-817278  
E-mail: [scfukbd@scfbangla.org](mailto:scfukbd@scfbangla.org)

Uttaran  
Vill., PO, PS: Tala  
Satkhira  
Tel: 0471-216383  
Dhaka liaison office:  
46/2 Jhigatola  
Tel: 866184

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Report prepared by:  
Emily Delap & Rosemary Lugg

Co-ordinators:  
Khaled Ehsan  
Abu Zayed Mohammed

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## Preface

This report describes research carried out by Save the Children fund (UK) in partnership with the Bangladeshi NGO Uttaran. The final report was written by Emily Delap and Rosemary Lugg.

The project was managed within SCF by:

- Khaled Ehsan
- Abu Zayed Mohammed

Two teams conducted the research. The qualitative research team members were:

- Emily Delap, Consultant (SCF)
- Rosemary Lugg, Consultant (SCF)
- Md. Azad, Field Co-ordinator (SCF)
- Afzal Kabir Khan, Senior Researcher (SCF)
- Asma Akter, Researcher (SCF)
- Fakhruddin Karim, Researcher (SCF)
- Goutam Ghosh, Researcher (Uttaran)
- Mujibor Rahman, Researcher (Uttaran)

We would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Uttaran Training Manager Prithi Biswas and Uttaran guest house staff to the qualitative data collection process.

The quantitative team members were:

- Muhammod Shuaib, Consultant and Trainer (SURCH)
- Abdul Halim, Team Leader (SURCH)
- Abdullah Al – Mamun, Team Member (SURCH)
- Abdullah Al-Harun, Trainer and Data Analyst (SURCH)
- Gobinda Chandra Biswas, Data Checker and Data Editor/ Coder, Team Member (SURCH)
- Jamal Hossain, Team Member (SURCH)
- Masud Ahmed, Data Analyst (SURCH)
- Md. Abdul Matin, Data Analyst (SURCH)
- Md. Akter Faruq, Team Member (SURCH)
- Md. Ali Ibne Javed (Biddyut), Data Checker, Data Editor/ Coder, Team Member (SURCH)
- Md. Anwaruzzaman, Team Leader (SURCH)
- Md. Bazlur Rahman Gazi, Team Member (SURCH)
- Md. Mizanur Rahman, Team Member (SURCH)
- Md. Moklesur Rahman, Data Analyst (SURCH)
- Md. Nazrul Islam Bhuiyan, Data Checker, Data Editor/ Coder Team Leader (SURCH)
- Md. Rezaul Hoque, Survey Manager (SURCH)
- Md. Rezaul Hoque, Trainer and Data Analyst (SURCH)
- Md. Shafiqul Islam, Team Member (SURCH)
- Md. Shakwat Hossain Khan, Data Checker, Data Editor/ Coder and Team Leader (SURCH)
- Md. Waliul Islam, Data Editor/ Coder, Team Member (SURCH)
- Mohammad Ihsanur Rahman, Trainer (SURCH)
- Mozammel Hossain Miah, Data Checker (SURCH)
- Nabo Kumar Biswas, Team Member (SURCH)
- Sanjy Kumar Saha, Data Analyst (SURCH)

## Glossary

The Bengali words used in this report

<i>Bagda</i>	a type of shrimp found in rivers in Bangladesh
<i>Gher</i>	ponds constructed on farms for growing shrimp in
<i>Goan</i>	season when shrimp spawn and fry are available
<i>Golda</i>	a type of shrimp found in rivers in Bangladesh
<i>Gur</i>	sugar-like mixture made during the process of making molasses
<i>Paddy</i>	rice plants
<i>Pan</i>	Betel nut and leaf which are chewed together
<i>Purdah</i>	religious law which states that women should be restricted to private space
<i>thana</i>	local borough
<i>Tk</i>	taka, Bangladesh's currency (see exchange rates below)
<i>Van gari</i>	cycle rickshaw with trailer on the back

Acronyms used in this report

CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN Convention)
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ILO	International Labour Organisation
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SCF	Save the Children Fund, UK
UN	United Nations
US	United States (of America)
WTO	World Trade Organisation

The exchange rates at the time of writing were:

US\$ 1 = Tk 46

£1 = Tk80

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 *Why do research on children's work in the shrimp industry?*

Bangladesh's shrimp industry has been rapidly expanding since the early 1980s and is now a major source of export earnings. Despite its national economic benefits, it has been heavily criticised for its damaging environmental, social and political implications. As will be discussed in more detail in section 2, existing research suggests that the shrimp industry has led to a disruption in the ecological balance of shrimp producing regions, a reduction in paddy production, food supplies and local job opportunities and an increase in violence. Such research has largely focused on the community level impact of the shrimp industry, or on the effects of shrimp cultivation on adult populations. While existing evidence suggests that shrimp cultivation is likely to damage a number of child rights, very little research has been completed on the specific effects of the industry on children's lives. This research begins to fill this gap in our understanding by exploring the nature, determinants and effects of children's work within the shrimp industry.<sup>1</sup> It is prompted by Save the Children Fund UK's (SCF) commitment to promoting the child rights outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).<sup>2</sup> This research is particularly motivated by concerns about the violation of children's right to education, health, recreation and freedom from harmful child work. It is anticipated that information on the effects of child shrimp work on these rights will inform further research and local level programme and policy intervention.

In addition to informing local level intervention, the research was also motivated by international legislation, which could threaten children's future involvement in the shrimp industry. Bangladesh has recently been the focus of United States (US) trade sanctions against children's work. The US Child Labour Deterrence Act, which prohibits the importation of goods made in whole or part by children, led to mass expulsions of child workers from Bangladeshi garment factories. These expulsions often had a detrimental effect on children's lives, pushing them into worse professions.<sup>3</sup> SCF (UK) Bangladesh is concerned about the fate of child shrimp workers should trade sanctions be imposed on this industry. The research is needed to prepare an appropriate response to such sanctions, preventing well-meaning initiatives from having a damaging effect on children's rights.

This research is also intended to inform and develop SCF's general child labour work. SCF's child labour policy is informed by the CRC. It calls for the immediate phasing out of extremely harmful child labour, but recognises that some forms of work can be beneficial to children's well being and should not be abolished. SCF believe that poverty and social inequality, the root causes of much child work, must be addressed to tackle problematic child work in a sustainable

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this research, a child is defined as someone age 5-14 years. This age range was chosen as it is the age range used in many international conventions.

<sup>2</sup> The CRC is the cornerstone of all SCF policy. Using rights, rather than needs, at the centre of intervention promotes the idea that improving children's lives is a responsibility or obligation, rather than a matter of good will or charity. A rights approach also implies a move from dependency to empowerment, and encourages a holistic understanding of children's well being, which considers a wide range of factors (see SCF Position paper on Children's Rights, Jan. 1999).

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that some expelled garments workers were given a stipend and access to primary education which prevented them from entering alternative professions. However, many children were excluded from the garments industry before this scheme was implemented. Other children are prevented from entering garments work at all and are often forced into worse professions by household poverty.

manner. As working children and their families know their situation best, they should be consulted before action is taken. Child shrimp work is just one example of the global issue of child labour. In Bangladesh alone it is estimated that there are around 21 million child workers (Stalker 1995), many of whom work in 'hidden' occupations in the non-formal sector, which, like child shrimp work, are poorly understood by policy makers.

## **1.2 The objectives of the research**

The research was guided by the following primary objectives:

- To identify the various types of work in which children are involved in the study area, both in the shrimp industry and elsewhere.
- To examine the causes of children's shrimp work. In particular, to depict the socio-economic condition of the children and their families involved in shrimp culture in comparison with that of the families of other children in the study area.
- To examine the effects of children's work. In particular, to identify the different forms of hazardous and exploitative practices which jeopardise the development of children involved in shrimp culture in reference to the general principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The study should also consider the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention on the Worst Forms of Child labour.
- To compare the effects of children's shrimp work with the effects of other child work in the local area. In particular, to compare the hazardous and exploitative practices in the shrimp industry with the hazardous and exploitative practices in alternative child occupations in the local area.
- To emphasise the situation of girls working in the shrimp industry.
- To examine the likely impact of the implementation of the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on child shrimp workers and their families.

In addition, it was hoped that the following secondary objectives would be fulfilled during research shaped by the primary objectives:

- An analysis of the availability of services, such as education and health, in the study area.
- An exploration of the evolution of child and adult shrimp work in the study area.
- An exploration of the roles of key national and international actors in the development of the shrimp industry in the study area.

## **1.3 Outline of the report**

We begin the report by discussing the research methods used in this study. We then explore existing research on the history, future and effects of shrimp cultivation in Bangladesh. In the main part of the report, we explore the prevalence, nature, determinants and effects of children's shrimp work. To reveal the lives children may lead if forced to leave the shrimp industry, we also briefly examine alternative child occupations in the study area. Finally, in the concluding section, we summarise the research findings and explore the policy implications of the research.

## 2. The research methods

The research results presented in this report were collected using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Secondary data sources were also widely consulted. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies was chosen to provide a broad range of information on children's shrimp and other work. The qualitative research provides in-depth information on a number of subjects, including the social and cultural effects of children's work, children's feelings about their work and the causes of their work participation. Many of these subjects could not have been easily explored in a large scale survey. The quantitative data collection provides basic information on a large research population. The quantitative survey included questions regarding the prevalence of children's shrimp and other income generating work in the local area, child school attendance, and the pay, conditions and working hours associated with children's shrimp and other work. Detailed analysis of the quantitative data has also provided some information on associations between variables, such as household income and adult employment, and children's work participation. The qualitative and quantitative research was completed by two separate research teams, with the qualitative consultants managing the integration of the two studies. Integration included the use of the qualitative results to inform quantitative analysis.

The research was completed in collaboration with SCF partner NGO, Uttaran. Uttaran provided logistical support and two of the six researchers who worked on the qualitative study. They also provided essential local knowledge, such as the location of shrimp fry collection and shrimp farms and the risks associated with collecting data from shrimp farmers.

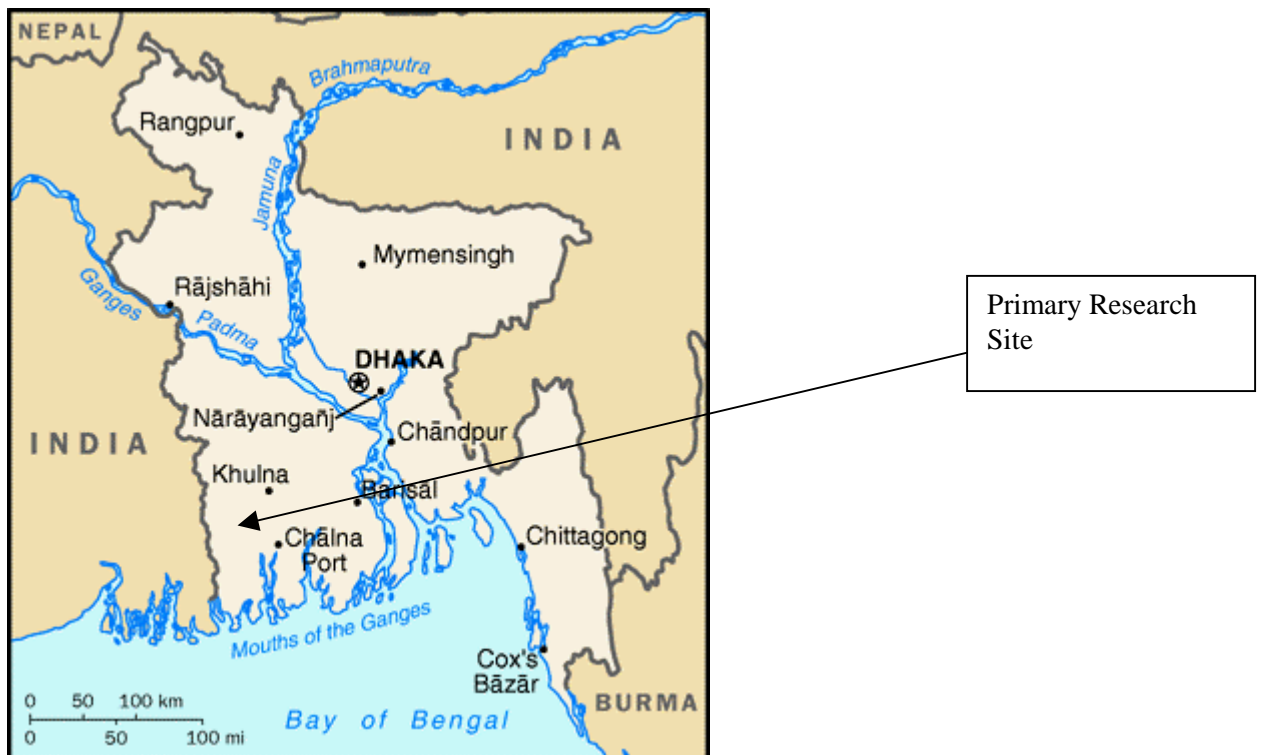
### 2.1 The research site

The research took place in the Khulna district of South West Bangladesh (see map overleaf). Shrimp cultivation also takes place in the Cox's Bazaar and Chittagong areas in the South East of the country. We decided to work in the Khulna district as evidence suggests that families and communities have been more affected by shrimp cultivation in this area than in the South East. The Khulna district contains a large number of relatively small shrimp farms. In the Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar areas, shrimp farms are larger in size and smaller in number than in the South West. The larger number of shrimp farms in the Khulna district has led to a greater amount of unrest and violence between competing shrimp farmers than in the South East. Furthermore, there is evidence that environmental degradation and the use of underhand tactics to gain land from small farmers are greater in Khulna than in Cox's Bazaar or Chittagong. This will be discussed in more detail in section 3. In Khulna, the areas that are now used for shrimp farming were formally used for paddy production and, as will be argued in section 3.3, were often forcibly transferred to shrimp cultivation. In the South East, the expansion of shrimp cultivation led to less conflict and environmental upheaval as the land now used for shrimp cultivation is often close to the sea and infertile.

Three *thanas* (boroughs) were selected from the Khulna division as the focus of this research. The *thanas* were chosen to include as many dimensions of shrimp cultivation as possible. Some of the *thanas* contained large numbers of shrimp farms, while others contained lots of processing depots and areas where shrimp fry are collected (more details of the process of shrimp cultivation can be found in section 3.2). The *thanas* were chosen adjacent to each other for logistical reasons

The three *thanas* are largely rural areas, containing a few small towns. In all three *thanas*, shrimp cultivation is an important part of the economy. As in other areas where shrimp cultivation takes place, the shrimp industry has had a major impact on community relations and the environment. Visits to the *thanas* revealed the extensive environmental impact of shrimp farming. In parts of the three *thanas* where shrimp farming dominates, huge tracts of land had been submerged to produce *ghers* (ponds used for shrimp cultivation). All human life has been reduced to tiny strips of land, with families having little room to grow vegetables or tend cattle.

## 2.2 Map showing location of primary research site



## ***The quantitative research methods***

The quantitative research involved a survey of 1006 households containing at least one child member aged 5-14 years. The households were selected using random cluster sampling. The survey was designed and then piloted over a four week period. Data collection was then completed over a two week period using 17 research staff. The survey had two parts. The first part involved questioning the household head or his/ her spouse on the demographic composition of the household, the employment of household members, household income, household expenditure and food consumption. The second part of the survey involved questions on the schooling and employment of child household members. Where possible, each child was questioned separately. However, if the child was unavailable, parents or siblings were questioned.

To provide information on the generalisability of the survey research results to a broader population, information on the characteristics of the surveyed households is provided below. As shown in table 2, around a third of the surveyed households have per capita income under Tk 300 or US \$6.5 per month. Over 60% of the surveyed households have per capita monthly incomes of Tk 450 (US \$10) or under. Around half the surveyed households have household heads who have no schooling. 71% of the surveyed households were Muslim and 28% were Hindu. For further details of the characteristics of the surveyed households, please see appendix 2.

**Table 1: Percentage distribution of per capita monthly income in the surveyed households**

Percentage of households	
Under Tk300	34.0
Tk301- Tk450	33.5
Tk451+	32.5
N	1006

*Table notes: 1. Information on income was collected by asking household heads or their spouses about all income generating activities of household members over a year period. An average monthly household income was calculated on the basis of this information. This household income was divided by the number of people in the household. During data collection several probing questions were asked to ensure that information on all income sources had been obtained.<sup>4</sup>*

## ***2.3 The qualitative research methods***

The qualitative research had two stages. In the first stage, 11 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were completed with 78 child and adult participants from poor communities in the local area. Separate FGDs were conducted for males and females. FGDs were divided according to the following groupings:

**Table 2: Participants in the Focus Group Discussions**

	No. of FGDs	No. of Participants
• Children who have worked in shrimp fry collection in the last year.	2	12
• Children who have worked on shrimp farms in the last year.	1	7
• Children who have worked in shrimp depots in the last year.	2	12

<sup>4</sup> It is recognised that using a year long recall period may have led to recall problems and some minor inaccuracies in the data. However, it was felt that collecting information over a year long period was essential to ensure that seasonal fluctuations of household income, a common occurrence in rural Bangladesh, were taken into account.

• Children have never worked in the shrimp industry.	2	12
• Parents of children who are involved in the shrimp industry.	2	17
• Parents of children who are not involved in the shrimp industry.	2	18

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We used FGDs as they enabled us to gather a broad range of opinions in a short space of time. We also anticipated that some participants would feel more comfortable in a group setting, and that group conflict and dynamics would produce interesting data. Questions and activities were used to prompt discussion. For example, in one exercise, participants were introduced to a set of cards depicting various child occupations. They were then asked to rank the cards according to which professions they felt were best for children. In another exercise, participants were asked to discuss the benefits of school and work and then decide whether just school, just work or school and work is best. The activities were based on Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods and on existing techniques developed by others who had completed research with working children (Woodhead 1996). Each FGD was facilitated by one researcher and recorded by another researcher. They lasted for approximately two hours. When children were the participants, this included a break for play. Child and adult informants for the FGDs were selected randomly from poor communities in the three research areas using Uttaran networks.<sup>5</sup>

The second stage of data collection involved eight case studies of child shrimp workers. Information was gathered using in-depth interviews with the children and their parents. Case studies were used in addition to FGDs as we anticipated that some issues could not be properly explored in a group setting. In particular, we felt that informants would be reluctant to talk about poor treatment by employers and sexual harassment in a group. We also felt that case studies could provide very detailed information on complex issues, such as the reasons for children's workforce entry, which could not be adequately examined in FGDs. The case studies were based on a checklist of questions which were developed following preliminary analysis of the FGD material. Questions varied slightly for child and adult participants. They included the reasons for children's workforce entry, children's relationship with their employer and beliefs about the importance of children's work for family survival. The child case study informants were selected from the FGD participants. They were chosen according to age, sex, school attendance and the section of the shrimp industry in which they worked. We anticipated that this selection of a broad range of child shrimp workers would illustrate a wide range of experiences of child work in the shrimp industry.

In addition to the FGDs and the case studies, qualitative data collection also involved interviews with local NGO workers, school teachers and employers. These interviews were also guided by check lists, which varied according to the informant. Subjects covered by these interviews included the availability of school facilities, the history and future of shrimp production in the local area and beliefs about the appropriateness of children's involvement in shrimp cultivation. Several of the interviews with employers were done covertly, with researchers posing as interested businessmen. For further details of the qualitative methods, please see appendix 3.

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<sup>5</sup> Aside from the selection criteria outlined in table 2, the selection of the informants for the FGDs was entirely random. Owing to time constraints, the nature of informant selection and the relatively small size of the qualitative research population, we were unable to conduct separate FGDs with individuals from different religions or income categories. However, we feel that we included a range of individuals from poor communities in the local area. For example, by chance, one of the FGDs contained almost entirely Hindu participants.

## **2.4 The range of research participants**

During the research, data was gathered from a wide range of sources. For both the quantitative survey, FGDs and in-depth interviews, information was gathered from both children and adults from poor communities in the three *thanas*. For the purpose of this research, a child is defined as someone aged 5-14 years. This age range was chosen as it is the age range used in many international conventions.<sup>6</sup> Both those involved in the shrimp industry and those not involved in the shrimp industry participated in the research. As mentioned above, data was also collected from NGO staff, school teachers and employers. We made the decision to collect information from such a wide range of sources to provide as complete a picture of children's shrimp cultivation as possible.

We decided to talk to individuals connected to the shrimp industry, and to those who were not connected to the shrimp cultivation, to provide a broad range of perspective on children's shrimp work. Talking to these two groups also enabled comparisons between children's work in the shrimp industry and children's work in other areas. This provided an understanding of alternatives to shrimp cultivation, revealing the lives children might live if forced to leave the shrimp industry.

Children were included in the research process as an understanding of their perceptions of their working lives was felt to be key. With their direct daily experience of work, children are an important source of information on the effects of their employment on their health and well being. Children also have a good awareness of some causes of their work, such as household poverty. The policy orientated nature of this research enhances the need for children's participation. Consulting children in policy matters is both an issue of child rights and programme effectiveness.<sup>7</sup>

While it is necessary to listen to children's views, it is essential not to ignore the opinions of others involved in decisions about children's lives. Children's work is often shaped by factors that are beyond their control or understanding. Their work may also have implications that they are not fully aware of. Parents participated in the research as they frequently make choices about child workforce participation in Bangladesh (Blanchet 1995 Delap 1998). As parents usually control household finances, they may also have a better understanding of the household level effects of child work than children do. Talking to both parents and children during the case studies also meant that we could crosscheck data. Parental and child choices are often constrained by the political, social, environmental and economic context in which they live. To gain a fuller understanding of these issues, school teachers, community leaders and employers were interviewed as part of the research process. Secondary data sources were also widely consulted.

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<sup>6</sup> It is recognised that alternative criteria for defining children exist within Bangladesh and elsewhere and that there is no general consensus on what constitutes a child. For example, in Bangladesh laws relating to child labour, the age which signals the end of childhood ranges from 12 years to 16 years.

<sup>7</sup> The necessity of listening to children's views on matters which concern their welfare is enshrined in UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, 1989 Article 12). There is also an accepted link between relevant and sustainable interventions and a consultation process with those likely to be affected (SCF 1995).

### 3. Background on the Shrimp Industry

#### 3.1 The history and future of shrimp cultivation in Bangladesh

This section provides background information on the shrimp industry in Bangladesh. The information presented here was mainly obtained from secondary data sources. Some information from interviews completed as part of the qualitative research is also included. As shown in table 3 below, a dramatic increase in shrimp cultivation took place in Bangladesh during the 1980s and 1990s. Shrimp exports are now worth \$290.0 million per year, accounting for 7.2% of Bangladesh's exports (Export Promotion Bureau 1997, cited in CPD-UNEP/ UNCTAD 1998a).

**Table 3: Trends in exports of shrimp from Bangladesh**

	Financial Year				
	1981	1986	1991	1994	1997
Value of exported shrimps (USD millions)	39.9	114.7	141.8	210.5	290.0
Quantity of exported shrimps (thousand tons)	7.5	17.2	24.1	25.2	38.0
Share of shrimp in the country's total export	9.8%	13.5%	8.0%	8.3%	7.2%

*Source: Export Promotion Bureau (cited in CPD-UNEP/ UNCTAD 1998a)*

The expansion of shrimp cultivation has been actively encouraged by the Government of Bangladesh and international organisations and donors, such as the World Bank. It took place within the context of structural adjustment policies that involved gradual trade liberalisation and the expansion of privately run export industries. Pointing to expanding markets, such as China, and the increasing consumption of sea-food in the western world, the National Shrimp Farmers Association argue that the rapid expansion of Bangladesh's shrimp export industry will continue in the next millennium (Aftabuzzaman 1998). However, others argue that three factors threaten the expansion of the shrimp industry.

Firstly, concerns about hygiene may mean that if shrimp processing does not modernise export earnings will fall. European Union (EU) regulations regarding food safety led to a ban on shrimp imports from Bangladesh between July 1997 and February 1998. The US Food and Drug Administration have also voiced concern about hygiene in the industry. As shown in table 4 below, several EU countries and the US import a major proportion of Bangladesh's shrimps. The US and EU concerns have prompted Government of Bangladesh action. The quality control department at the Ministry of Fisheries is currently attempting to improve hygiene in all shrimp processing factories and depots, regardless of their export capacity. The concerns about food safety have also led to a shift from smaller to larger processing depots, which can operate under more regulated and hygienic conditions. However, despite these efforts to improve hygiene, evidence suggests that the modernisation of the industry is far from complete. Smaller depots still operate in rural areas and shrimp producers have asked the government for further help improving technologies (CDP-UNEP/ UNCTAD 1998a).

**Table 4: Market structure of Bangladesh shrimp industry 1995**

	Exports (USD million)	Percentage
USA	79.3	30.4
Japan	56.0	21.5
Belgium	37.2	14.3
UK	22.5	8.6
Netherlands	22.4	8.6
Germany	19.6	7.5
European Union	130.0	50.0

*Source: Export Promotion Bureau (cited in CPD-UNEP/ UNCTAD 1998a)*

Secondly, World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules on environment, and increasing consideration of environmental issues in international policy, has prompted some to argue that concerns about the environmental impact of the shrimp cultivation may damage the industry (CDP-UNEP/ UNCTAD 1998a). These concerns will be discussed in more detail below.

Thirdly, some of the shrimp farmers that we spoke to as part of this research expressed concerns about their shrimp fry stock, arguing that they are no longer able to rely on stock from rivers which have been depleted by over fishing. These comments are confirmed by remarks from some of the child fry catchers and the shrimp processing plant manager that we interviewed. In an effort to resolve this problem, shrimp farmers are increasingly relying on hatcheries to provide them with fry. One of the shrimp farmers that we spoke to said that he had obtained all of his fry from local rivers two years ago. Last year he had to rely on hatcheries for 25% of his fry stock and this year he has obtained half of his fry from hatcheries. The shrimp farmer argued that hatcheries do not solve the problem of reduced natural stock. He claimed that hatchery fry are often unreliable as they are prone to disease and die before growing into adult shrimp.

If the shrimp industry does continue to expand, expansion may well be vertical rather than horizontal. The National Shrimp Farmers Association encourage the use of intensive or semi-intensive cultivation techniques (Aftabuzzaman 1998). Such techniques could increase productivity 10-20 times (CDP-UNEP/ UNCTAD 1998a). The National Shrimp Farmers Association also recognise that shrimp fry collection is inefficient and unsustainable and want to introduce more hatcheries (Aftabuzzaman 1998).

### **3.2 The Process of Shrimp Cultivation**

Shrimp cultivation essentially involves five stages:

- *Stage one: Catching the shrimp fry*

Two types of shrimp fry, known locally as *Bagda* and *Golda*, are caught from rivers using fine nets. *Bagda* is usually caught in the winter using drift nets which are checked every half-hour. In season there can be two tides per day, with nets set for 2-3 hours per tide. *Golda*, is caught using push nets as this shrimp is found at the bottom of the river. A greater amount of this fry is available in the summer, and work is busiest at this time. It is possible to catch up to 100 fry per day in season, but around 20 off-season.

- *Stage two: Selling the shrimp fry*

The shrimp fry are sold to agents in local markets, to local small businessmen who sell to agents, and occasionally directly to shrimp farms.

- *Stage three: Farming the shrimp*

Shrimp fry are then grown in shrimp farms, which vary in size from 1-600 acres. There are a number of activities involved in shrimp farming. These include catching, feeding and guarding the shrimp, putting bamboo rods into the ground and water to prevent people from stealing the shrimp, moving water into the shrimp farm (sometimes by pump, sometimes manually), cleaning the *gher* and checking and mending the mud boundary walls which separate different sections of the farm.

- *Stage four: Moving the shrimp from the farm to the processing depot*

The shrimp is moved from the farm to the depot on foot or by *van gari* (cycle rickshaw with trailer on the back) depending on the distance.

- *Stage five: Processing the shrimp in the depot*

Work in the depot involves cutting (snapping) the heads of the shrimp, cleaning the shrimps, packaging the shrimp, and adding ice to the shrimp.

### **3.3 A "Pink Revolution" or "The Blue Death": The costs and benefits of shrimp cultivation in Bangladesh**

The expansion of the shrimp industry in developing countries such as Bangladesh is a highly contentious issue. Some have heralded it as a 'pink revolution', which enables poor countries to acquire desperately needed foreign exchange. Others have labelled it 'the blue death' for its negative environmental and social implications.

As argued above, there is no doubt that shrimp cultivation makes significant contributions to Bangladesh's export earnings. Shrimp cultivation has also enabled Bangladesh to diversify its export industry, lessening the need to rely on more unstable traditional export products such as jute and tea (Coote 1992). In addition to the national economic benefits of trade diversification, many of those promoting the shrimp industry argue that its expansion has led to an increase in employment opportunities in local areas. Those promoting the industry often point to the particular paid work opportunities and consequent economic independence that shrimp work has given to women. Women are frequently employed in shrimp depots where they remove the shrimp heads. Women also sometimes work as day labourers, weeding and repairing embankments on shrimp farms. Prior to shrimp farming, local women's economic activities were limited and most women spent their time doing unpaid house or agricultural work.

Despite these claims about national and local economic advantages, many argue that the shrimp industry does not lead to overall benefits to the development process in Bangladesh. Firstly, as argued above, the future contributions of the shrimp industry to the economy are by no means guaranteed. The un-sustainable nature of current shrimp producing techniques, and international concerns about hygiene and environmental damage, may well threaten the industry in the future. Secondly, as argued by Coote (1992) and others, evidence suggests that the shrimp industry does not necessarily benefit local development and has damaging implications for local job markets, the environment and the health and security of communities in which shrimp farming takes place.

### 3.3.1 Local development and job opportunities

In common with other economic changes caused by structural adjustment, many argue that very little of the profits from shrimp cultivation have been invested in the local area.<sup>8</sup> In a recent piece of research in the Paikgachha and Shyamnagar *thanas* of Khulna district, legal rights NGO Ain O Shalish Kendra found that:

"No new roads, school or colleges have been constructed, nor are there any signs of industrial development. It is assumed that the total amount of shrimp earnings goes to towns and other metropolitan cities." (Kahtoon 1995 p.20)

In a recent workshop on the shrimp industry involving major stakeholders, a number of participants described employment generation in shrimp producing areas as a 'myth' (CDP-UNEP/ UNCTAD 1998c p.5). They argued that increasing landlessness, caused by transferring agricultural land to shrimp farms, has actually resulted in declining employment opportunities in shrimp producing areas. The problem is exacerbated by the use of outsiders as guards on shrimp farms. Shrimp farm owners, often outsiders themselves, are said not to trust local people, believing that they will steal the shrimps for their own consumption. Ain O Shalish Kendra supports these arguments. In their study, researchers found evidence of increasing male migration to urban areas as a result of poor employment opportunities in rural areas (Khatoon 1995). Evidence from other researchers suggests that many of the slums in Khulna, the largest town in the district, contain large number of male migrants from rural *thanas* who have been displaced by shrimp farming (Coote 1992). This evidence of reduced local employment opportunities is also supported by the comments of our research participants. One man argued that shrimp farming has dramatically reduced the amount of land available in his area for grazing cattle and growing paddy and trees. This has decreased livestock and agricultural work opportunities. Participants also argued that having less cattle and trees means that there is less cow dung and wood available for cooking fuel.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to citing increased male migration as a disadvantage of shrimp farming, Ain O Shalish Kendra dispute the argument that shrimp farming has led to entirely beneficial employment opportunities for women. Instead, their evidence suggests that many women are forced into working in shrimp depots or on shrimp farms by poverty. They argue that such work is often degrading and humiliating for women as it breaks *purdah* norms, which state that women should be restricted to the private sphere.

Recent changes implemented as a result of the EU ban of shrimp imports from Bangladesh have further affected the employment opportunities of some sections of the local community. During the FGDs carried out as part of the current research, participants complained that the closing down of smaller depots had reduced female work opportunities in the local area. A depot manager that we spoke to has been repeatedly approached for work by women who have recently lost jobs in shrimp processing. In an interview with a local NGO head as part of the current research, it was argued that thousands of girls have lost their jobs due to the move from smaller to larger and more hygienic processing plants. In another interview, with the manager of a larger processing plant, which was recently modernised to conform to EU regulations, we were told that children were not employed as they would not be able to adhere to the new stricter hygiene rules. Our observations in this plant also suggest that children would have problems fitting into the new uniforms and travelling to and from work.

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<sup>8</sup> The argument that profits generated by structural adjustment policies have not benefited the poor communities in which the changes have taken place has been widely documented (see for example SCF 1995).

<sup>9</sup> In rural Bangladesh, cow dung is often collected, dried in the sun and then burnt on cooking fires.

### 3.3.2 Environmental concerns and food supply

The changing use of land caused by shrimp farming not only affects employment opportunities, it also influences the ecological balance of the Khulna district and food supplies. Environmentalists are becoming increasingly concerned that shrimp farming in areas close to the Sundarbans, the world's largest area of mangrove forest, is leading to the destruction of the forest (CDP-UNEP/UNCTAD 1998c). Shrimp fry collection is also said to lead to the destruction of marine life in the area as many other small fish are caught with the fry and then discarded. Un-monitored fry collection may well affect breeding, eventually exhausting Bangladesh's shrimp fry stock (Rahman et al. 1995).

Concerns have also been raised about the lack of land availability for rice and other food production in shrimp producing areas. In the Khulna district of Bangladesh, much of the land that used to be used for agriculture has now been taken over by shrimp farms. Prior to the introduction of shrimp farming, families used the land around their homesteads for growing fruit trees and vegetables or for grazing cattle. Shrimp farms have also swallowed up much of this land. Saline water seeping into paddy fields from adjacent shrimp farms (Rahman et al. 1995) exacerbates problems of food supply. Salty water from shrimp farms is also said to have affected drinking water in some areas (CDP-UNEP/UNCTAD 1998c). Some have argued that such water supply problems and the loss of vegetables and fruits will affect the health and nutrition of people living in shrimp farming areas (Khatoon 1995). It is interesting to note that some shrimp farmers recognise the environmental degradation caused by their farms. One of the farmers that we spoke to as part of the current research told us that he disapproved of intensive shrimp farming as, unlike less intensive techniques, it permanently damages the land.

### 3.3.3 Violence and the transfer of land

Transferring land from paddy to shrimp production is often not an amicable process. Evidence from research completed by Ain O Shalish Kendra, suggests that shrimp farm owners use coercive tactics to force farmers to give up their agricultural land for shrimp farming. Inundating paddy plots with saline water, filing false charges against small land holders and physical violence have all been used to force the hand over of land. These policies are frequently ignored or supported by local law enforcing agencies (Khatoon 1995).

Ain O Shalish Kendra also argue that government rules designed to control shrimp production usually benefit large shrimp farmers. These rules are either written to benefit these farmers or are manipulated to act in their favour. For example, the rules state that shrimp farm owners must get the consent of 85% of peasants in the local area if they want to set up a farm. However, this is frequently manipulated by forging signatures or by using false names. In some cases, local officials are bribed by the offer of financial support to political campaigns. Ain O Shalish Kendra argue that such encouragement of increases in shrimp production contradicts other government policies, such as the allocation of land to the landless and the prevention of deforestation (Khatoon 1995).

This evidence of corruption is supported by the comments of shrimp farmers that we spoke to as part of the current research. One owner of a fairly small shrimp farm complained that government agencies and banks give all their help to big farm owners and that small farm owners can only get assistance when they pay: "We have to bribe at every step of our lives."

The atmosphere of violence created by shrimp farming has particularly negative consequences for women and girls. Guards of shrimp farms, usually from outside the local area, reportedly

harass and molest women and girls as they walk along village roads. Rapes and serious sexual abuse are also said to be on the increase. Problems of female security are exacerbated by new working patterns. Women now often work at night to catch shrimp fries or in the depot when shrimp cultivation activities are increased by high tides (Khatoon 1995). In one of our interviews, a local NGO head argued that young girls are particularly at risk from male violence when they go to shrimp farms to collect snails to sell as feed to local crab farmers. Unlike fry collection, which is usually done in groups, snail collection is often done alone, leaving girls more vulnerable to rape.

## 4. Children's work participation in the study area

### 4.1 The prevalence of child work in the study area

Children's work can be categorised into two main types: income generating work and housework. Income generating work generates an income in cash or kind. Children may or may not be paid a wage for this type of work. An example of unpaid income generating work is work on a family farm. Children's housework in their own homes does not directly generate an income for the household. However, activities such as cooking, cleaning and collecting firewood are essential for family survival and may be defined as work.

Our quantitative survey shows that 17% of children in the local area have been engaged in income generating work at some point over the last year.<sup>10</sup> Our findings suggests that, overall, a significantly larger number of boys are engaged in income generating work than girls.<sup>11</sup> Income generating work also seems to increase with age, with many more 10-14 year olds doing this type of work than 5-9 year olds.<sup>12</sup> There was some suggestion in the focus group discussions that recently children may be starting work at younger due to increasing poverty. One adult said, "nowadays the age of 12 to 14 years is not considered. Everyone pulls the *van gari* [cycle rickshaw with trailer on the back]. Age is not thought about due to hunger."

**Table 5: The percentage of children engaged in income generating work in the last year by age and sex**

	Boys	Girls	Overall
5-9 years	4.1	4.8	4.5
10-14 years	38.3	17.8	28.5
Overall	22.6	11.3	17.0
Missing cases			2
N	988	988	1998

Table notes: 1. The two missing cases refer to cases where information on the sex of the child is missing.

In addition to income generating work, the FGDs and in-depth interviews suggest that many children complete housework chores on a daily basis. This is especially true of girls, who, like their mothers, often spend long hours each day cooking, cleaning and washing clothes for their families. Girls also frequently assist in childcare tasks, for their own families and for neighbours. In contrast, boys seem to spend relatively little time on housework chores, concentrating on activities, such as firewood collection, which involve them leaving the home.

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that other research on rural child work suggests that this figure may under estimate the proportion of children engaged in income generating work (Manan 1990). For a number of reasons, it is extremely difficult to get accurate information on child work participation rates in rural areas without using time-consuming and expensive time-use techniques. Firstly, parents may under report child work participation if they are reluctant to admit this to researchers. Secondly, many of the activities that we define as income generating work are not defined as work by parents and children. Thirdly, much work in rural areas is seasonal. To overcome this problem, we asked parents and children to describe any child work completed in the last year. However, recall problems may mean that work that only took place for a short space of time has not been recalled. For this reason, we believe that the 17% figure mentioned above probably refers only to work which took place over a sustained period of time.

<sup>11</sup>  $p=0.000$

<sup>12</sup>  $p=0.000$

## 4.2 The types of income generating work that children in the local area do

The quantitative survey found children engaged in a number of occupations, both within the shrimp industry and elsewhere. Overall, almost 40% of children who have done income generating work over the last year classify work within the shrimp industry as their main occupation. This means that a larger proportion of children in the local area are involved in the shrimp industry than in any other type of work. The majority of children who work in the shrimp industry are involved in catching or selling fry. Children who sell fry usually work as helpers to their parents.<sup>13</sup> A large proportion of the working children included in the survey are also involved in shrimp farming, mainly cleaning the *ghers* or working as security guards. The FGDs and in-depth interviews suggest that children who work on farms tend to be involved in lighter work, such as putting bamboo rods into the ground to deter theft. Some of the children included in the survey also work in shrimp depots where they de-head shrimp. The FGDs suggest that the proportion of children who work in depots has been dramatically reduced over recent years. As mentioned in section 2, EU regulations have pushed much shrimp processing out of smaller depots and into larger factories where children are rarely employed.

The survey shows that children who do not work in the shrimp industry work in a broad range of professions, with the majority of children working in agricultural work, as domestic servants, in fishing or as day labourers. Day labourers assist adults in various manual activities and are paid on a daily basis.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 6: The number of children engaged in various different professions by sex**

	Boys		Girls		Overall	
	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.
<b>Shrimp work</b>						
Catching fry	21.3	64	30.2	45	24.2	109
Work on shrimp farms	5.3	16	15.4	23	8.7	39
Selling shrimp fry	8.3	25	0.7	1	5.8	26
De-heading shrimp	0.0	0	1.3	2	0.4	2
<b>Other work</b>						
Agricultural work	16.6	50	2.0	3	11.8	53
Fishing	15.0	45	4.7	7	11.6	52
Domestic service	7.3	22	16.8	25	10.4	47
Day labourer	9.3	28	6.0	9	8.2	37
Business	9.0	27	1.3	2	6.4	29
Mat making	0.0	0	14.1	21	4.7	21
Catching crab	2.3	7	0.0	0	1.6	7
Other	5.6	17	7.4	11	6.2	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>450</b>

*Table notes: 1. To gain a broader understanding of the nature of children's work in the local area, an extra 112 working children were randomly selected and surveyed from the study area. So as not to bias the findings, these cases have not been included in comparisons between working and non-working children.*  
*2. Business refers to work in family run retail businesses or as self-employed street sellers.*  
*3. Mat makers make mats from grass, usually in their own homes.*

<sup>13</sup> These children are concentrated in a few of the surveyed clusters, suggesting that children's involvement in fry selling is not common throughout the Khulna district.

<sup>14</sup> Examples of day labouring work include earth digging and cutting or collecting firewood.

The findings reveal clear gender divisions in the child workforce in our study area. Girls have far fewer employment options than boys. As shown in table 6 above, girls who participated in the survey are concentrated in just four occupations; shrimp fry catching, work on shrimp farms, domestic service and mat making. Much, but not all, of girls work can be done in or near the home, enabling them to maintain a degree of *purdah*. Girls' work outside the shrimp industry is much more likely allow girls to remain within the private sphere than girls' work within the shrimp industry. The largest group of girls who do not work in the shrimp industry work as domestic servants in other people's homes. Mat-making often takes place in the home, where girls work with older relatives. Girls who work in the shrimp industry are generally considered to out in the open and breaking *purdah* norms.

In contrast to girls, boys who participated in the survey are evenly spread over a large number of professions. Much of their work involves being in the public sphere, for example agricultural work and fishing involve working outside. Although boys appear to have more choice regarding profession than girls, the FGDs suggests that boys are restricted from entering some occupations by gender norms. Participants told us that some depot managers do not let boys de-head shrimp. This work is considered to be 'female work' as males are not believed to have the skills or 'fast hands' required to do this task. Boys exclusion from this section of the industry is not entirely based on superior female skill. Comments from male FGD participants suggest that the exclusion of males from this sector of the shrimp industry is not wholly against their interest. Many men said that they would not like to spend long hours sitting still all day and prefer to be working out in the fields. FGD participants also argued that allocating depot work to girls and women is in employers' interest as it enables them to pay their employees less. This evidence that employers pay women less is supported by the comments of a shrimp farm owner: "I do not pay the same salary [for men and women]. There is no other reason, just because they are women." De-heading is a relatively new occupation and the speed with which gender norms have been ascribed to it is remarkable.

It is interesting to note that children's work is divided in a similar way to adults. The FGD discussions suggest that women often do similar types of work to girls, and that men and boys also often dominate in the same professions. As in other aspects of life, the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions suggest that gender norms become more important with age, and that girls and boys occasionally break the 'rules'. Boys sometimes enter predominantly female professions that men would not consider working in. Girls sometimes do activities, such as climbing trees, that are not considered to be appropriate for females.

#### **4.3 Children often do combinations of different types of work**

The FGDs and in-depth interviews suggest that many children undertake several different kinds of work, within one day or across a period of time. Due to the seasonal nature of some rural income generating work, children often participate in another type of work when their main occupation is off season. Some child shrimp workers work in other sections of the shrimp industry when their main profession is off-season. For example, boy depot workers catch shrimp fry at times of year when the depot is less busy. Child shrimp workers also sometimes combine their work with non-shrimp work, including rickshaw pulling, flower selling and crab catching. Our findings suggest that children primarily engaged in non-shrimp work are less likely to have secondary occupations as they often work all year round in their primary occupation.

In addition to being involved in different types of income generating work over a year long period, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions suggests that many children do two or more types of work within one day. Some children combine two types of income-generating work. For example, several girl fry catcher combine shrimp work with sewing, which they do in between checking their nets. At least one girl is earning extra income through her tailoring activities. Girls also often combine shrimp work with housework and child care chores. This 'dual burden' of house and paid work means that girls often work for very long hours. In some cases, girl depot workers started work in the depot in the early morning and do not return home until the evening. They are then expected to do a few hours housework.

#### ***4.4 Work that children do not do***

While most of the jobs that children do, are also done by adults, our qualitative findings suggest that certain areas of work are considered to be definitely not for children. The survey shows a broader range of professions done by adults than by children (see appendix 2). The FGDs suggest that concerns about the hazards associated with some professions is often the key reason for restricting children's involvement. Many of the jobs that children do not do are male dominated and often seen to be risky for children. Adults believe that children cannot and should not drive vehicles such as taxis and buses (although they can pull a rickshaw). Children do not have the physical strength, intelligence, and skill, experience and "cool brain" needed for such work. In particular, they would not know what to do in an accident situation. Children should also not work in fishing for big fish, as they cannot use the big nets and may be scared on stormy days. Even though we met children who had worked with their fathers in gathering honey, adults said that the forest is no place for children: the risk of tigers and the dangers associated with smoking out a bee hive are too much for them.

## 5. The Nature of Children's Work in the Shrimp Industry

In this section we discuss the nature of children's work within the shrimp industry using findings from the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews.<sup>15</sup> For the FGDs and in-depth interviews, we decided to focus on three areas of shrimp work; fry catching, shrimp farm work and shrimp depot work. We decided to focus on fry catching and shrimp farming as these are the two stages of shrimp cultivation in which children dominate.<sup>16</sup> We examined depot work as this is an area of the industry in which dramatic change has occurred in the last few years. As mentioned in section 3, evidence suggests that EU hygiene regulations have led to reductions in the number of children working in depots in recent years. As will be discussed in more detail below, this seems to be an area of shrimp cultivation where child rights abuses are particularly rife.<sup>17</sup>

A key finding of our research is the complex range of different experiences within this one section of Bangladesh's child workforce. In particular, we have found that children involved in the different stages of shrimp cultivation and boys and girls have different experiences of their work. For this reason, we discuss fry catching, shrimp farm work and depot work separately. Where appropriate, we also discuss boys and girls experiences separately.

### 5.1 Pay and conditions

Fry catchers sell their fry to businessmen and local shrimp farmers. On average they earn between Tk 20 and Tk 50 per day (\$0.45-\$1.09). The amount they earn depends on the buying price of the fry, which varies between Tk 0.5 and Tk 3.5 per fry and averages at Tk 2 or \$0.04 per fry. The price of fry depends on the type of fry, with *Golda* selling for a higher price than *Bagda*, and the season, with prices falling in high season. Earnings also vary with the quantity of fry caught. The size of the catch depends on seasons and on luck.

Depot workers generally earn more for their work than fry catchers. They are paid per Kg or basket of shrimp de-headed (with baskets weighing about 10 Kg). The rates vary from Tk1-5 per Kg. In season, the maximum a depot worker can earn is Tk80 per day (\$1.74). On average they de-head 20kg per day, earning Tk 40 per day (\$0.87). The depot workers we spoke to repeatedly complained of being regularly cheated in their pay. In some cases they were paid half of what they were owed. Young girls are also required to do unpaid work in the depot such as washing the floor or cleaning the weights. Some girls argue that the pay is better in a larger factory, rather than in depots. As the rates per kilo de-headed are similar, this may be attributed to there being less cheating in the more formalised workplace. Many of the informants who took part in

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<sup>15</sup> The nature of quantitative analysis means that we were not able to get reliable figures on different occupations within the shrimp industry from the quantitative survey. The number of children in each sector of the shrimp industry is too small. However, we feel that we have gained valid information on the nature of different types of shrimp work from our qualitative research. During the qualitative research we were able to verify information on the nature of work by asking probing questions. We could also check the typicality of children's experiences by comparing stories and asking questions about typicality. We found that children from similar occupations consistently told us similar stories about the nature of their work.

<sup>16</sup> As our initial qualitative investigations suggested that shrimp farming was male dominated, we did not explore girls involvement in this section of the shrimp industry during the qualitative research. We feel that this is an important area for further research.

<sup>17</sup> We did not explore children's role in selling fry. Initial investigations suggested that very few children are involved in this work. As the quantitative survey found a significant number of children involved in selling shrimp fry, this could be an area for further research.

our FGDs argued that pay in depots is lower than in many male dominated professions as de-headers are mainly female.

Most child shrimp farm workers who participated in the FGDs and in-depth interviews are not paid as they work for their relatives for free. Child shrimp farm workers, who are paid, earn less than their adult co-workers. One boy is sometimes paid Tk 10 or 20 per day, and more usually given fish to take home by his uncle. Adult day labourers on the same farm are paid Tk 50 per day. One shrimp farm owner that we spoke to pays children only Tk 100 to Tk 150 (\$2.17-\$3.26) per month. Children say they earn less because they are “younger, so lesser” and capable of less work. However, the shrimp farm owner acknowledged that often children work as hard as adults do.

The piece rate nature of much shrimp work means that none of the children who participated in the FGDs and in-depth interviews receive pay when they were sick. As fry catchers are not responsible to an employer, they usually stop work when sick. Farm workers are also usually given time off when they were sick by the relatives that they work for. While ill-health means a loss of income for farm workers and fry catchers, the consequences are often more serious for depot workers. They are often forced to continue working when injured by the threat of losing their job to workers from elsewhere. As one girl told us: “Whether we have cuts on our hands and feet, we have to carry on deheading. If not, they will get employees from other places.” Depot workers are not given money for medical treatment of the injuries sustained at work.

## **5.2 Hours of work**

Daily, monthly and yearly seasons (or *goans/goons*) affect all shrimp work. These largely determine children’s working hours. Child fry catchers told us that fry catching is most productive in the early mornings (before sunrise until 9 to 10am) and in late afternoons (3/4pm to 5/6pm). If children work both shifts they can work up to nine hours per day. If they live too far away from the river to return in the middle of the day, or if they do not want to walk home, they can spend up to 13 to 14 hours in or around the river. Most child fry catchers involved in the in-depth interviews and FGDs reported working eight to nine hours per day. Fry catchers are able to take breaks from their work. However, many children, especially girls, are asked to do housework chores during their breaks from fishing. Fry catchers fairly flexible working hours has implications for their school attendance, which will be discussed in more detail below.

The research suggests that depot workers work similar hours to fry catchers. However, their working hours are not flexible. Depot workers hours vary according to the season and the amount of shrimp available. De-headers start work at 8am and work without breaks until 5pm, a nine-hour day. In busy seasons they may be expected to work even longer hours, until dusk and even into the night. One depot worker has to stay at the depot over-night, for two or three day stretches. She says she has to leave her parents behind and “my heart bleeds for my house.” However, most of the girls we spoke to were prohibited from working all night by their parents. Only one depot worker who took part in the FGDs reported being allowed to take a lunch break. In most cases, girls were severely disciplined for taking a break.

Child shrimp farm workers who took part in the FGDs and in-depth interviews work for between three and ten hours per day depending on the season. Shrimp farming has a two or three monthly cycle for the draining of *ghers* and rebuilding boundary walls. Children work especially long hours at times when mud walls are being re-built. In addition, there are the shrimp catching seasons every new and full moon. Breaks from work depend on how far the farm is from home

and getting permission from their relatives. One boy once had to guard the farm all night; “I stayed alone the whole night. I was afraid. That night I cried.”

### **5.3 Working environment**

Fry catchers spend their working time in or next to the river. Fry catchers complained that working all day in the river is cold, muddy and salty. In winter, the water is particularly cold.

Depot work takes place in perhaps the worst environment of all shrimp work. The depots are dirty and extremely smelly. One girl told us that the smell makes her vomit. At first girls cover their noses with cloth to cope with the smell, but gradually they say they get used to it. There are no toilet facilities at the depot, so boys use a nearby field. Girls told us that they go home if they live close enough, or to a nearby house. In most cases depot workers did not have access to soap for washing their hands. In one depot where the owner does provide soap, it is often taken away by the supervisors.

In contrast to depots, some of the shrimp farm workers loved their working environment. Shrimp farms are peaceful and children enjoyed being cooled by the wind in the summer. However, in winter they can be cold as the wind blows through vast expanses of land, and some children mentioned a fear of snakes in the *gher*.

### **5.4 People children work with**

Some of the fry catchers accompany family members, usually women, to work. Most work either with other children or on their own. The fry catchers described their relationships with each other as cordial and independent. People ask each other how many fry they have caught and joke together. The boys sometimes quarrel amongst themselves and confessed to some jealousy between them. One of the boys much prefers working with his family, and loves the mental stimulation of company: “Brother, mother, when everyone is together it feels good, when I am alone it feels odd. Everyone together makes me feel inspired and there is scope to gossip.” The girls seem to work closely together and also enjoy ‘gossiping’ while they work. Some local fishermen ‘dirty’ the girls’ nets at night, which they believe is out of jealousy.

Depot workers experienced the greatest problems with their co-workers. The de-heading depot is predominantly a female place. Girls of all ages work together in teams of five or six. The team is given a quota of work and shares the total pay at the end of the day. Some girls claimed not to have any problems sharing the money equally between them, regardless of who had worked faster and de-headed more shrimps. If one girl leaves the depot (for example to go to the toilet), the others may give her an extra share from the group’s quota to make up for her absence. Other girls reported being forced by other colleagues (usually older women) to help them do their quota, and if they refused being shouted at. It seems that in one depot the older women also hide the soap from the girls. There is also evidence to suggest that girl depot workers suffer from sexual abuse and harassment from male co-workers. This will be discussed in more detail in section 7.1.2 below.

Most child shrimp farm workers work along side members of their family, and in some cases hired day labourers. Shrimp farm workers described their relations with co-workers as good; day labourers tend not to ‘misbehave’ with the boys given that their male relatives are present.

### **5.5 Relationship with employers**

Fry catchers are not employed by others and seem to enjoy the relative freedom and independence this affords. They are not scolded if they make mistakes, although one boy said he is told off by his brother if he sells his fry below the market price.

Depot workers do suffer from abuse from their employers. On the whole, depot workers do not have much contact with the owner of the depot. However, they experience a lot of rough treatment from the supervisors. The owner does not discipline the supervisor, and so in this sense condones how they are treated. The girls are often scolded, for example if they need to go to the toilet or if they make mistakes. They are told that mistakes will be deducted from their salaries although this does not always actually happen. If they ask for an extra basket it is thrown at them and can hurt them. In some depots, workers are not allowed to take lunch breaks. If they do leave the processing room, they are refused entry when they return (called a 'late comer') and are not paid for any work they did in the morning. Boys describe being slapped once or twice by their supervisor.

Shrimp farm workers usually work as helpers to their own family or relatives. This does not necessarily mean they are well treated, for example one boy is beaten by his uncle if he does not go to work. Two boys are told to go to work by their father or brother, and although they don't want to work, the boys do not oppose their elders.

### **5.6 Travel to and from work**

Most of the shrimp workers travel to and from work by foot. In most cases the workplace is very close to their home. Girl depot workers told us that they usually travel in groups as they are often at risk of abuse when travelling to and from work. Fry catchers sometimes use a *van gari* (cycle rickshaw with trailer on the back) to get back from selling fry at the market, if they have enough money. Some child shrimp farm workers also travel to work by *van gari*.

## 6. The determinants of child shrimp work

In the first half of this section, we discuss the reasons for child shrimp workers entering the workforce. In the second half of this section, we explore the choice of shrimp work, as opposed to alternative occupations. As fry catching, depot work and shrimp farm work are different in nature, choices to enter children into these three professions are often based on distinct factors. As boys and girls have differing experiences of the shrimp industry, the determinants of children's shrimp work also sometimes vary by sex. Therefore, where appropriate, we discuss boys and girls and the three sectors of the shrimp industry separately. In general, the causes of children's shrimp work are complex and involve a combination of the factors discussed below.

Before we examine the determinants of child shrimp work, it is necessary to consider the decision making process. In general, our research suggests that parents make decisions about child workforce entry and occupation. Decisions about the work of at least five out of the eight case study children had been made by the parents. In some cases, parents had forbidden their children from doing certain types of work or from working in certain areas. For example, when local depots were closed, girl depot workers were not allowed to work in depots too far from home. This evidence of parental control confirms research by others examining child work and childhood in Bangladesh (Blanchet 1996).

Many of the children who had been told to work by their parents said that they were unhappy about parental decisions regarding workforce entry. As will be discussed in more detail below, some parents were also unhappy about sending their children to work, but were forced to do so by poverty. The fathers of two girl depot workers said that they were upset that their daughters had to work in such a place and feared for their safety. They felt that they had no choice but to send their daughters into this kind of work due to their economic situation.

### 6.1 *Reasons for child shrimp workers work participation*

#### 6.1.1 Poverty and family survival

Economic need was the most frequently given reason for children's shrimp workforce entry by children and adults who took part in the in-depth interviews and FGDs. Many informants told us that adult income is insufficient to feed and clothe the family, and that without children's income the family would not have enough to eat. For example, a father of a girl depot worker told us: "my daughter works in shrimp de-heading due to dearth in the family. What I earn, I earn alone. I could not maintain the family so she goes to work outside."<sup>18</sup> Some child shrimp farm workers who are paid in kind also reported going to work because the family needed the fish they supplied to survive. Several of the child shrimp workers we spoke to are the primary income earners in the family. Children's income was especially important in female headed households, or in families in which the father is not earning enough due to unemployment or illness. The importance of poverty as a determinant of children's work is confirmed by comments made during the FGDs regarding children working in non-shrimp occupations, and by other research on child work in Bangladesh (see for example UNICEF 1996, Delap 1998, Bissell 1999).

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<sup>18</sup> It was sometimes difficult to work out how children's income is spent and whether it is needed for household survival. It is also hard to define 'survival.' In many cases, parents and children's accounts differed. For example, some fathers of shrimp workers argued that their children's income was spent on unessential items for the child worker, such as new clothes. Child workers from these households disputed these claims, arguing that their income was spent on essential items, such as food for the whole family.

Despite this evidence of a link between child workforce entry and poverty, the research does not conclusively suggest a simple relationship between child shrimp work and low household incomes. The survey produced no evidence to suggest that child shrimp workers come from poorer families than children who do not work. As shown in table 7 below, whilst many child shrimp workers come from extremely poor families, the distribution of children in the three income categories used in the analysis is not significantly different for children working in the shrimp industry and children not working.<sup>19</sup> The survey findings suggest that some children from extremely poor households do not work. Similarly, some children from better off households work in the shrimp industry, even though their work may not be absolutely essential to household survival.

**Table 7: Child workforce participation by per capita monthly household income and work participation**

	<b>Working in the shrimp industry</b>	<b>% of children Doing other income generating work</b>	<b>Not working</b>
Under Tk300	38.1	43.3	38.4
Tk300-Tk450	38.1	35.5	31.5
Tk451+	23.8	21.2	30.1
Missing cases	1	2	4
N	106	233	1659

*Table notes: 1. Information on income was collected by asking household heads or their spouses about all income generating activities of household members over a year period. An average monthly household income was calculated on the basis of this information. This household income was divided by the number of people in the household. During data collection several probing questions were asked to ensure that information on all income sources had been obtained.<sup>20</sup>*

*2. For this table, the child's income has been subtracted from total household income.<sup>21</sup>*

Although not discussed in the current research, research from elsewhere provides a variety of explanations for children from very poor households not doing income generating work. These include the child being too young to work and a desire to send children to school instead of work (Delap 1998).

The suggestion that not all children work from necessity is supported by the in-depth interviews and FGDs, and by survey evidence on adult employment. In some cases, parents argued that children's income is helpful to family survival rather than essential. For example, one father of a shrimp farm worker told us that: "It is good that children do things for their parents. If they want they can study. In between, if they earn Tk 20 that is useful." Children's income generating work may only be considered *absolutely* essential if there is no one else available to replace their contributions. As shown in table 8 below, 93% of child shrimp workers come from households

<sup>19</sup>  $p=0.263$ . It should be noted that the lack of an association between child shrimp work and household poverty in the quantitative survey may be related to problems with accurately measuring seasonal incomes or an under-reporting of child workforce participation.

<sup>20</sup> It is recognised that using a year long recall period may have led to recall problems and some minor inaccuracies in the data. However, it was felt that collecting information over a year long period was essential to ensure that seasonal fluctuations of household income, a common occurrence in rural Bangladesh, were accounted for.

<sup>21</sup> Removing the child's income from household income removes the effect of child income on household poverty. This is important as household incomes in households containing working children may be higher because of children's contributions.

in which adults are not engaged in income generating work and could potentially replace their contributions.

Our findings suggest that in most cases it is women, rather than men, who are not engaged in income generating work and could potentially replace children's shrimp work contributions. Reasons for women not being engaged in income generating work are varied. *Purdah* norms are likely to be key. One father of a depot worker explained that he does not allow his wife to work: "I do not let her go. It feels odd to send your own wife outside. She could earn but I do not let her." Other reasons could include the lack of work opportunities (see section 3.3), adult ill-health and women being too busy with housework to become involved in income generating work. It is important to recognise that many families feel that they have good reasons for sending children out to work instead of women.

**Table 8: Percentage of working children who come from households where some adults are not engaged in income generating work by sex and type of work**

	% of children		
	Boys	Girls	Overall
<b>Shrimp</b>			
Some adults in household not do income generating work	95.2	88.6	92.6
Some women in household not do income generating work	92.4	87.0	90.2
Some men in household not do income generating work	27.7	17.9	23.8
N	105	71	176
<b>Non-shrimp</b>			
Some adults in household not do income generating work	92.3	84.6	90.1
Some women in household not do income generating work	89.7	80.5	87.1
Some men in household not do income generating work	23.4	18.9	22.1
N	196	78	274

*Table notes: 1. The figures for 'some women in the household don't work' and 'some men in the household don't work' do not add up to the figures for 'some adults don't work' as there are some households in which both men and women don't work.*

*2. For the purpose of this research, an adult is anyone aged 15 years or over.*

### 6.1.2 Duty or obedience to family or other people

In addition to working in order to survive, many child shrimp workers also work from an overwhelming sense of duty or obedience to their family. Seven out of eight of the children interviewed as case studies said they work because, and when, they are told to. Most of the children that we interviewed are told to work by their father, although one farm worker is asked by his uncle and another by his brother. Several children said they do not enjoy work and only continue to do so out of obedience. As one boy farm worker told us, "I work as my father wishes me to." Children often told us that they feel that they should contribute to the family. For example, one girl depot worker continued depot work even though she does not like it as she would not get a better income elsewhere. Another boy fry catcher, whose father has died, knows that his life would be easier if he did not have to work so hard, but says, "my problem is a family problem."

In some cases, the child's work is much more about fulfilling extended family obligations, than about bringing in money to their own household. If a child works for a member of the family in a different household, then their contribution may not directly benefit their own household. One farm worker helps his uncle on his shrimp farm; his own household gains relatively little direct

benefit from his work, but it does help the broader family network. Another child who works on his brother's farm also does not bring money into his own household, as his brother has left home and is a member of an independent household. Even so, his father is pleased that the younger brother is carrying out his duty to his older brother. Children may also be withdrawn from work if there is an argument in the family.

#### 6.1.3 Work to prevent children from being "idle"

Some of the parents who took part in the qualitative research encouraged their children to work as it keeps them busy and avoids idleness. One father said that he told his son to help on the shrimp farm because he was "wasting time playing." Another commented that his daughter should work as a depot worker because she is not busy studying. Some child shrimp workers also choose to work themselves because they do not like being idle. One girl depot worker who had had to stop a previous job started work in the depot because "I felt bad about sitting idle."<sup>22</sup> Other child shrimp workers do not see themselves as idle when they are not working as they enjoy an opportunity to play. An indication of the importance of activity is that children are expected to do housework if they are not working elsewhere. As one shrimp farmer said: "If I do not want to do *gher* work, then they [his parent's] say 'you do not do that, do another one' that means housework, like putting water on the potato field."

#### 6.1.4 Work that is also a leisure interest or hobby

Occasionally, children choose to work for fun, or as a hobby. Importantly, these children are free to choose not to work if they do not want to. Some of the girl fry catchers who participated in FGDs, and one boy farm worker, choose when they work and do so because they enjoy it. The girl fry catchers travel to the river close to their homes to collect fry together, and sew (which they also enjoy) in between checking their nets. On Fridays they take it in turns to check the nets while they watch TV at their neighbour's home. These children can spend their income on themselves or to support other hobbies, for example one girl fry catcher uses her income from fry to buy thread for sewing. One de-header said that she could use the money to "buy myself ornaments".

Work may start out as a hobby, or fun, but this diminishes if children are not free to choose not to work when they do not want to. One fry catcher started work with his family when there were many more fry. In those days he said it was fun. However, since his father's death the pressure on him to contribute to the family income has increased dramatically, the levels of fry also have dropped. Work is no longer a hobby and he does not enjoy it as much.

### 6.2 *Reasons for entering shrimp work and not other types of work*

#### 6.2.1 There are few alternatives to shrimp work in some areas

During the FGDs, many people told us that children work in the shrimp industry as there are few alternative occupations open to them. The survey suggests that children are involved in a relatively small range of occupations compared to adults (see appendix 2 and table 6 above). The qualitative research suggests that children's income generating work options are limited by their capabilities and concerns about their safety (see section 4.4). The findings suggest that girls have even less employment opportunities than boys (see section 4.2 above).

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<sup>22</sup> This findings are supported by other research completed in Bangladesh. Blanchet (1996) has noted that the idea that children should not be idle is key to Bangladeshi beliefs about childhood, particularly for older children

Children's alternative work opportunities are further reduced by families' inability to afford the capital needed to establish children in some alternative professions, such as tailoring. In contrast, depot and shrimp farm work requires no investment. Shrimp fry collection requires only a relatively small outlay for the nets. Some of the girls who took part in the FGDs and in-depth interviews work in depots because their parents cannot afford the capital investment necessary to set them up in tailoring.

As well as being limited in their employment options by their age and by the families' financial resources, the availability of alternative work for children has also been reduced by the environmental destruction caused by the shrimp industry. As mentioned in section 3.2, in pockets of the Khulna district where shrimp farming dominates, land previously used for crops and cattle has been flooded to create *ghers*. The productivity of agricultural land has also been reduced by increased the soil salinity connected to shrimp farming. In some areas, river erosion has further reduced the amount of land available for agriculture. This has led to a reduction in livestock and agricultural work opportunities. In these circumstances, shrimp work is often the only source of income for landless families. For example, one fry catcher from a family who had lost land to river erosion told us that his family would face very severe problems if he could not work in shrimp production.

#### 6.2.2 Shrimp work provides a better income than many other professions

Many of the informants that we spoke to during the FGDs told us that children work in the shrimp industry as this is the best paid work opportunity available to them. This is especially true of work in depots and in fry catching. Our findings suggest that shrimp work is a particularly well paid option for girls. Domestic service, one of the only other employment choices for girls in the area (see table 6), is notoriously poorly paid (Shamim et al. 1995). As argued above, boys have more employment choices. They therefore have more opportunity to find better paid work outside the shrimp industry.

The FGDs and in-depth interviews suggest that once children have started to earn a good income from shrimp work, it is hard for them to stop, particularly as a family's standard of living begins to rise. As one girl fry catcher told us: "the more you provide the more you require".

#### 6.2.3 Family members are already involved in shrimp work

The FGDs and in-depth interviews suggest that some children become involved in shrimp work because their family is already working in the shrimp industry. This is particularly true for shrimp farm work, where children often work on family run farms. In some cases fry catchers and depot workers also start work by accompanying parents to their workplace and learning from them:

"Previously, my mother and sister worked there [in the shrimp depot]. I was little. I went there taken by mother in her arms. I showed interest in de-heading a shrimp. My mother did not let me, thinking I was unable to. One day I de-headed one shrimp perfectly. Sitting on a stool, I copied my mother. I was asked to do it again. Then I de-headed another one. That was good also. I de-headed many. Returning home, I pleaded for money from my mother. She gave me the money. From then on I was de-heading".

#### 6.2.4 There is a river, a farm or depot close to home

Some fry catchers enter this work because the river or depot is close to their home. The girl fry catchers who took part in the FGDs all live right next to the river. They can travel to work without harassment as the men they pass "are like brothers". Some de-headers would not be

allowed to work if there was no depot close to their home. Evidence of females being restricted in their employment opportunities to those close to their home is supported by the comments of some women FGD participants. They told us that they did not catch fry because the local river was not good for fry catching, and that they could not travel to the rivers that were better, but in another area.

#### 6.2.5 Some shrimp work gives more freedom to the child

A few parents choose to send their children into shrimp work because it allows more personal freedom to the child than other forms of work do. For example, one mother chooses to send her son to catch fry because the hours are shorter, it is not such hard work and he can combine the work with schooling. She felt that the only other alternatives would involve long hours that precluded schooling. If her son has to work, she would rather he had the freedom that shrimp fry collection allows. Many children also value the freedom they get from fry catching.

## 7. The Effects of Children's Shrimp Work

Children's work in the shrimp industry has major implications for both children and their families. At the household level, children's shrimp work affects family income. This has implications for the health and nutrition of the family, and for the education of household members. Children's shrimp work also affects the households' ability to form networks with other households. At the individual level, children's shrimp work has implications for the education and health and well-being of child shrimp workers. As argued throughout this report, children's shrimp work is often different in nature for boys and girls and in different sections of the industry.

### 7.1 Effects on the household

#### 7.1.1 Household income and the health and education of household members

Children's contributions to household income was most commonly described as the major benefit of their work when informants were asked during the in-depth interviews and FGDs. As shown in table 9 below, the importance of child shrimp workers contributions to the household is supported by the survey findings. On average, children who work in the shrimp industry and are paid contribute around 15% of household income.<sup>23</sup>

**Table 9: Average child contributions to household income of children who are paid**

	Children who work in the shrimp industry	Children who work elsewhere	All working children
<b>Children's contributions to household income</b>			
Mean % of total household income contributed by child	14.5	16.4	15.6
Median % of total household income contributed by child	12.7	14.1	13.3
Standard deviation	9.3	12.7	11.4
Missing cases	0	0	0
N	71	94	165

*Table notes: 1. Information on income was collected by asking household heads or their spouses about all income generating activities of household members over a year period. An average monthly household income was calculated on the basis of this information. This household income was divided by the number of people in the household. During data collection several probing questions were asked to ensure that information on all income sources had been obtained.<sup>24</sup>*

*2. Only children who are paid for their work are included in this table.*

Our qualitative research suggests that all child shrimp workers make greater contributions through their work at certain times of the year. As described in section 5.1 above, children's

<sup>23</sup> SD=9.3

<sup>24</sup> It is recognised that using a year long recall period may have led to recall problems and some minor inaccuracies in the data. However, it was felt that collecting information over a year long period was essential to ensure that seasonal fluctuations of household income, a common occurrence in rural Bangladesh, were accounted for.

earnings are greatest in depot work and fry catching. However, it is important to recognise that while child shrimp farm workers may not be paid a wage for their work, their contributions are still important to household survival. If the child shrimp farm do not work, their fathers would either have to work harder or the family would have to spend money to hire day labour.

The income generated by children's shrimp work helps to support the whole family. The FGDs and in-depth interviews suggest that children's earnings are used to buy rice and pulses, and to pay for school fees for school going members of the household. Often girls' work in the shrimp industry supports their brothers' education. In one FGD involving 16 participants, in at least eight families the sons' education was supported by the daughters' work in the shrimp industry. This clearly reflects a biased distribution of household resources, with boys' education being favoured over girls.' In some cases, children's income is also used for household savings. One farm worker is paid Tk 3 per day by the brother he helps. He spends Tk 1 per day on food, and saves Tk 2. In the past he has managed to save Tk 50-60 which he then gave to his brother when he ran out of money.

By highlighting the significant contributions that children make to the household, these findings challenge commonly held assumptions that children are merely consumers, who are a burden to society or the family, rather than an asset. In Bangladesh, it is particularly common for girls to be viewed in this way (Blanchet 1996). The child shrimp workers that we spoke to during the research clearly rejected assumptions that they do not contribute to the family. They were usually aware of the benefits of their work to household survival. Many expressed concern about the loss of income the family suffered if they were sick. One child did not want to give up depot work, even though she does not like it, because she earned a better income there than she would elsewhere.

#### 7.1.2 Inter-household networks

The in-depth interviews and FGDs suggest that girl's work in depots can have negative implications for marriage prospects, and consequently for the family's ability to form relationships with other households. Depots are known as 'spoiled places' due to 'unsocial work' that happens there and working in a depot can ruin a girl's reputation, whether or not she is involved in this other work. Whilst adults and children are reluctant to talk openly about what is happening, they did say that many women and girls do 'unsocial activities' involving male workers at the depot. Apparently, some women engage willingly ('because of their own desire'), but for some it is forced upon them. These incidents occur 'almost daily' and, at one depot at least, in separate rooms within the depot. It seems that the men signal (by their eyes) that the women are to leave the de-heading work and go to the place where this 'other work' is done. Parents are often reluctant to send their daughters to work in depots because associations with this 'other work' shames the daughter and the family. At least one marriage has been cancelled due to depot work and several parents talked about difficulties arranging marriages for girl depot workers:

"Bad stories are started by her being there [in the depot]. It has hampered her marriage prospects. Even if she remains good, she is not good in the eyes of the village. She should not have gone there [to the depot]. In the end, I could not arrange a marriage for her."

Such a breakdown in relationships with other families can have serious ramifications for the job prospects of other family members and for credit for the household. Research elsewhere in Bangladesh has shown that marriage is a key means of forming social support networks. These networks provide information on credit and employment sources (Jesmin 1998).

Some shrimp work is likely to have a positive effect on inter-household relationships. Some shrimp farm workers help in *ghers* belonging to relatives from other households, strengthening the ties between households.

## **7.2 Effects on the child**

### **7.2.1 The health and well-being of child shrimp workers**

Children's shrimp work has serious implications for the health and well-being of child shrimp workers. Fry catchers complained of a number of health problems associated with their work during the in-depth interviews and FGDs. The children told us that they frequently get so cold in the water that they shiver and cannot feel their limbs any more. When they are cut "no blood comes out". They feel paralysed and are prone to catch colds. The mud makes their feet feel itchy and they suffer from blisters and skin diseases that "rot their legs". The children also report cutting their feet on spikes and glass in the mud. Fry catchers find it difficult to work in strong currents and are at risk of attack from sharks. Closer to the Sunderbhans forest, the risk of sharks increases and children are also scared of crocodiles and tigers. Two participants in focus group discussions had witnessed, or experienced, shark attacks.

This information on the negative health effects of fry catching is supported by evidence from elsewhere. School teachers interviewed as part of this study noted that child fry catchers tend to get more diseases than their peers. Research by Radda Barnen and the Grameen Trust found that fry-collecting children are more likely to suffer from fever, skin disease and ear infections than non-fry collecting children. This study also provided medical evidence to suggest that long hours spent in the water and sun lead to skin softening and peeling, conditions ideal for fungal infections (Hashemi et al, 1998).

Many of the depot workers who took part in the in-depth interviews and FGDs complained of the extreme discomfort of having to stay in one position for hours on end. They suffer particular pain if they have to stand for eight to 12 hours. One girl, who had travelled to another depot to work the night shift, had to stand all night. Depot workers also cut their hands and feet when de-heading shrimp, and the techniques used badly damages their nails. Apparently, live shrimp are particularly difficult to cut. As mentioned above, the depots are dirty and lack proper washing facilities. In these conditions their cuts become badly infected, and often abscessed and swollen. The girls wrap cuts in cloth or polythene but are given no money to treat injuries. Some use herbal remedies on their cuts.

Shrimp farm workers who took part in the FGDs and in-depth interviews told us that they find aspects of their work extremely strenuous. Building *gher* walls is particularly difficult and at least one farm worker we interviewed suffers ongoing back and chest pain resulting from this work. Like fry catchers, shrimp farm workers suffer from skin irritations caused by spending long hours in the water and mud. Sometimes catfish spines get stuck in their legs, which gives a burning sensation. Usually they get out of the water until the burning subsides, and sometimes will use a compress of grasses to subdue the pain. One child had to have a minor operation to remove a cat fish spine from his leg. Shrimp farm workers are also at risk of snakebites.

In addition to these physical health problems, the in-depth interviews and FGDs suggest that many child shrimp workers suffered damaging psychological effects from their work. For children working in all sectors of the shrimp industry, the need to work due to poverty can have a

range of psychological effects on a child, including stress and a sense of shame. For example, one fry catcher described his need to work as a matter of 'shame' as it defines him as poor and 'low class', so much so that he tries to keep it a secret from his peers. He recognises that he is different from many of his peers as he *has* to work, but he wants to appear to be the same as other children who just go to school, read and play. The same child talked about being deeply worried when fry are not available as his family need him to catch fry in order to survive.

Depot work is perhaps most detrimental to children's psychological well-being, especially for girls. Depot workers are commonly verbally abused by their co-workers and supervisors, and cheated by employers. Some of the girls are clearly upset by such treatment. As stated above, our findings suggest that sexual activity is common in the depots, and that female depot workers are sometimes forced into sexual acts against their wishes. This abuse has serious physical and psychological health implications for those that are actually raped or molested. It also affects the well-being of other girl depot workers. As mentioned above, reputations and marriage prospects are often ruined, whether or not girls have taken part in sexual activity in the depots. The embarrassment girls feel about the harassment they receive from men in the depots is illustrated by this comment from one girl depot worker, who describes her response to verbal abuse: "When they do this, I cover my face with a scarf. I feel shame." Girl depot workers carry this shame with them into all areas of their lives, including school. For example one girl told us that local school children "think this work is uncivil. They say 'you cut shrimp, I do not like you if you cut shrimp. You cannot speak to us if you cut shrimp, you cannot mix with us'." Evidence that the cultural value given to work can have a serious effect on children's well-being is supported by research from elsewhere: "Work which is socially valued can enhance self-concept and self-esteem, implying that work which is not approved can render children vulnerable to psycho-social distress" (Boyden et al: page 99).

Child shrimp work also has some beneficial effects on child shrimp workers health and well-being. As argued in section 7.1.1, child shrimp work often increases household income. If resources are distributed equitably, this is likely to benefit the health and nutrition of all household members, including child shrimp workers. Despite the detrimental effects of much child shrimp work, our findings suggest that many child shrimp workers gain some pleasure from their work. For example, one girl fry catcher said: "collecting fry is good work. I am not saying everybody likes it, but I love it." Some girl depot workers enjoy the opportunity to leave the house and to socialise with friends. Shrimp farms workers like their working environment and some choose to work themselves. Child fry catchers often gain particular pleasure from the sense of control they have over their daily lives and in earning an income. For example, one girl fry catcher told us that "I love to see the fry. When 10-12 fry are available, then I start calculating how much money I will have." Some farm workers who are not forced to work also enjoy the control they have over their work. As one boy said: "It is an advantage to work in your own *gher*. I work as I wish. Like today, I do not want to work. Or if I do not feel good, then I do not go. Nobody says anything." Such a sense of control is seen by many to partially mitigate other damaging effects of children's work (see Boyden et al. 1998).

### 7.2.2 The education effects of child shrimp work

The research suggests that child shrimp workers are less likely to attend school than children who do not work. As shown in table 10 below, the survey findings show that the proportion of child shrimp workers who attend school regularly is lower than the proportion of non-working children who attend school regularly. Only 40% of child shrimp workers go to school for at least

4 days per week compared with almost 90% of non-working children.<sup>25</sup> The survey provide no evidence to suggest that the proportion of child shrimp workers attending school regularly is different from the proportion of children working elsewhere attending school regularly.<sup>26</sup>

**Table 10: Percentage of children who attend school regularly (min 4 days per week) by work participation and sex**

	% of children		
	Children who work in the shrimp industry	Children who work elsewhere	Not working
Boys	44.1	50.9	89.6
Girls	42.6	56.1	88.3
Missing cases	0	0	2
N	106	233	1659

*Table notes: 1. The two missing cases refer to cases where information on the sex of the child is missing.*

*2. As the survey took place at a time when schools were closed, informants were asked to think back to the three week period before the schools closed for the holiday. Informant were asked to think about average attendance during this period.*

The FGDs suggest that being too busy to attend school because of work is the most common reason for non-attendance amongst child shrimp workers. Most child shrimp workers spoken to said that their families could not afford the drop in income if they stopped work to go to school. For example, one boy depot worker told us that: “There is no benefit of going to school. There is no food without work.” Adults agree that the need for an income from work is a main barrier to schooling. When the child shrimp worker is the primary income earner, there may be no possibility of school. For example, the mother of one child shrimp worker told us: “His father is confined to bed for three months. We are not getting enough food. How can I send him to school?”

The in-depth interviews and FGDs suggest that depot work has a particularly damaging effect on schooling. Depot workers are expected to work long and set hours, often with little or no time off during the times when schools are open. Teachers interviewed as part of the research noted that depot workers might register at the school but they do not attend regularly because of work. In contrast to depot workers, child fry catchers and farm workers have fairly flexible working hours. Off-season, these hours are usually short enough to enable children to also attend school. As one boy fry catcher said: “I do the work of fry catching as it is possible to do it and attend school. With other jobs, it is not possible to attend school, other work cannot be done after school.” However, some shrimp fry catchers and farm workers are prevented from attending school regularly because of their work. For example, one farm worker has lost two years of schooling over the past six years, as his father took him out of school so that he could work. Some children are upset that they have to miss school because of work. For example, one boy fry catcher told us that: “during season, mother tells me to go to catch fry instead of going to school, then it makes me worried about not going to school.”

Although fry catchers and shrimp farm workers are often able to combine school with work, evidence from the FGDs and in-depth interviews suggests that their work can affect their educational achievements. Several child shrimp workers who combine work and school said they

<sup>25</sup> p=0.01

<sup>26</sup> p=0.40

find it hard to study in the evenings after work. If they have to work in the evening, they have no opportunity to complete homework.

Despite this evidence of the damaging effects of shrimp work on schooling, our research suggests that the relationship between shrimp work and education is not entirely negative. Firstly, evidence from the FGDs and in-depth interviews indicates that some shrimp work can be beneficial to child workers education. For some child shrimp workers, income from work is used to pay for their own schooling. Three child fry catchers contribute specifically to their school expenses from the money they earn. Children's shrimp work can itself be important for learning and their development. For example, shrimp farm work enables the development of some vocational skills and socialises children into roles and networks within their family. Secondly, work commitments cannot be held entirely responsible for poor rates of education amongst child shrimp workers. Often, other factors are mainly responsible for or contribute to children's poor attendance and achievement. These factors are discussed in the next section and need to be addressed to ensure the school attendance of child shrimp workers.

### 7.2.3 Other factors that affect children's school attendance

- *The costs of schooling affect attendance*

Primary education is often available for free in Bangladesh. However, many child shrimp workers and their parents who participated in the qualitative research reported that the costs of uniforms, books and pens prevented children from going to school. Being presentable for school also requires soap and a little bit of hair oil, which is beyond some parents' means. In some cases, children had to pay 'unofficial' fees for their education. For example, once child fry catcher had to pay for teachers' cigarettes or *pan* (betel nut and leaf that are chewed together). Other's parents said that their children needed private tuition in order to be educated properly. Beyond Class 5 the cost of schooling rise significantly. Families must pay school fees, exam fees (which can be Tk40 per exam with three exams per year) and for books and uniforms. As the father of one de-header explained: "If I could earn then I would send the children to school. If I could buy their books and clothes, if I could earn that much, then I could send them to school."

- *Teaching styles can affect school attendance*

Some children shrimp workers who took part in the FGDs and in-depth interviews do not want to go to school as they are fearful that they will be beaten or punished. Girls in particular mentioned beating and punishments at school as a reason for their non-attendance. For example, one girl depot worker said: "I am afraid of going to school for being punished. I went one day, I was beaten, I never went again." Other girl depot workers felt that as they are never beaten at home, they should not have to put up with being beaten at school. Children said that they were beaten for absence, not studying, poor results, uncut nails, and dirty clothes. Girl shrimp workers may also be discouraged from going to school by the cynical attitudes of male teachers. For example, one girl had been told by her teacher that it did not matter whether or not she went to school as she still had to get married ("the pot will push").

Not all children objected to the way they were treated by teachers. Several child shrimp workers commented that a "little beating is good for them" and helps learning. Our discussions with teachers suggest that some teachers have a sympathetic attitude to the problems faced by child shrimp workers.

- *Dislocation from peer groups can prevent children from attending school*

The research suggests that girls who are older than their classmates at school feel “ashamed” to go to primary school at their age. One fry catcher who has dropped out will not go back to school now, as she would not be with her peer group. One girl stopped going to school when her sisters, with whom she used to study, got married. Another girl used to travel to a different village to go to school but the girls in her class were already married and she was not, and she did not like this. Some girl fry catchers said they feel more comfortable in the adult school at a local NGO than they would about returning to primary school, where, according to their age, they are told they belong.

- *Lack of support from parents and housework can affect school attendance*

In some cases, child shrimp workers did not go to school, as their parents had not encouraged them to. A few children (again, mainly girls) said that their parents had never “told them about school”, which is why they did not go. As stated above, the loss of income from shrimp work is often the key reason for parents discouraging child shrimp workers from going to school. Many children said that their parents wanted them to work, and encouraged them to do this rather than go to school. Other work also prevents some child shrimp workers from attending school. This is particularly true for girls, who are expected to help out in housework chores. Two of the girl depot workers interviewed as part of the qualitative research had dropped out of school completely in order to look after younger siblings. One girl fry catcher told us that: “No one told me not to go to school, I stopped going myself. I had to weave nets and my mother went to work in another person’s house. I have my younger brother and he needed looking after. I stopped [school] so I could cook and do housework.” She added that her parents were ‘soft-hearted’ and did not force her to go back to school when she decided to leave.

#### 7.2.4 The effects of education and the choice between work and school

Many informants that we spoke to during the in-depth interviews and FGDs felt that the lack of education of many child shrimp workers has serious consequences for their current and future well-being. Adults and children described a range of benefits of going to school.<sup>27</sup> Importantly, education is believed to provide access to better paid and higher status jobs than children are doing now. Several girl shrimp workers mentioned the possibility of earning an income through teaching if they were educated. One mother argued that gaining an education to improve job prospects was especially important for her depot worker daughter. As depot work ruins marriage prospects, this mother believed that her daughter would have to rely on her own earnings in the future.

Education was described as improving children’s status or position in society, giving them an opportunity to speak well and mix with ‘good’ people. Going to school brings respect. One non-school going child said, “if anyone does not go to school, people call them vagabond.” Many adults felt that school provided a good environment for children to learn right from wrong and how to behave correctly. A child can make friends and play at school, and even make contacts that will be useful in the future. Finally, with an education, it is possible to avoid being cheated by others. Parents told us that a better future for their child means a better future for the whole family. One father suggested if his son got a good job, he would be a rich man. Similar reasons

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<sup>27</sup> It is difficult to tell how genuine adults’ answers to questions about the benefits of education are, and how much they said what they thought we would want to hear. For example one father extolled the virtues of schooling, but has only just sent his son (aged 9) to school. Parents of shrimp farm workers did not admit to holding their children back from school during peak work seasons, nor to the amount of work their son’s were actually doing. Even so, it appears that most parents would like their children to attend school.

for highly valuing children's education have also been expressed by children from other sections of Bangladesh society. In urban Bangladesh, Bissell (1998) found that child garment workers value the opportunity to go to school as they enjoy school and believe it will lead to better jobs, a higher status in society and less chance of being cheated by adults.

Not all informants felt that education would bring all of the benefits described above. Many of those who had had experience of education themselves argued that education does not automatically lead to better jobs or improved status. However, even these informants stated that education had some important long and short term benefits, and that children's lives would be improved by attending school.

A belief in the value of education meant that many child shrimp workers who took part in the qualitative research argued that just school, or a combination of school and work, would be best for them. Children who believe that school only is best felt that this would only be possible with an increase in household income. Most felt it would be better to just study as working and studying is too tiring. Other children felt that a combination of work and study would be best. Work can be done around school hours, and they can benefit from both an income and an education. Only a few children said that work only was best. These children felt that they had to work because they need the money.

On the whole, parents also said that school only would be the best option for their children but felt it was not possible for their families. Many argued that, realistically, a combination of school and work was the best option. As argued by the children, they felt that this would enable children to benefit from an education, whilst also contributing to their upkeep. A few felt children should only work because it is not possible to work and study. For example, a father of a boy shrimp farmer told us that his son who had stopped going to school had a better attitude to work than the son who tried to combine school and work.

#### 7.2.5 Play

The FGDs and in-depth interviews suggest that children's shrimp work reduces the amount of time children have to play. Many child shrimp workers felt that they have less time to play than their non-working peers. For example, one fry catcher has to miss football and cricket games in the fry season because of work. One of the depot workers commented that she has much more time to play out of the shrimp season. Children were unhappy about their lack of leisure time.

Despite restrictions in leisure time caused by work, many child shrimp workers do find ways to fit in play around their work. This suggests that children maintain a degree of control over their lives and are not totally subordinate to work activities. Shrimp farm workers and boy fry catchers enjoy playing cricket, football and running around games when they can. One girl depot worker plays with her dolls at the end of the working day, and a girl fry catcher likes to play luedo (a board game) at night. Fry catchers can play in between checking their nets. For some children, shrimp work is play. One farm worker and some of the girl fry catchers choose to work because they love doing particular activities.

It should be noted that factors other than shrimp work can also prevent children from playing. For girls, reaching adulthood seems to be associated with the end of play. Several girls told us that they are not allowed to play. The mother of one young depot worker has stopped her going out to play with her friends. Instead, she can gossip with them, and occasionally go to the local

small cinema. For some young women, this declaration of ‘adulthood’ comes too soon, and they find ways to play in secret.

## 8. The Nature and Effects of Children's Non-Shrimp Work

In this section, we explore children's work in other professions to examine alternative income generating work to shrimp work. This exploration aims to reveal the types of work children might do if they were pushed out of the shrimp industry and continued to do income generating work. Most of the information presented here was gathered during the quantitative survey and unless otherwise stated, the data is quantitative rather than qualitative in nature. As shown in section 4.2, the survey identified a range of non-shrimp professions undertaken by children in the study area. However, children not working in the shrimp industry are concentrated in a few types of employment. Most boys are involved in fishing or agriculture (25% and 23% of working boys who do not in the shrimp industry respectively), whilst girls are mainly employed as domestic servants and as mat makers (32% and 27% of working girls who do not in the shrimp industry respectively). Owing to the nature of the quantitative analysis, we are not able to provide reliable information on all non-shrimp occupations separately. Instead, we make general comparisons with children's non-shrimp and shrimp work.

### 8.1 Pay and conditions

Our research does not suggest that wages and conditions are better in alternative occupations compared to shrimp work. In fact, as discussed in section 6.2.2, evidence from the FGDs and in-depth interviews suggest that wages in alternative paid occupations may be lower than for paid shrimp work. These qualitative findings are not contradicted by the survey, which found no significant difference between the wages of shrimp and non-shrimp child workers. The survey provides no evidence to suggest a difference in the proportion of shrimp and non-shrimp workers who are unpaid for their income generating work. 59% of shrimp workers and 55% of non-shrimp workers are not paid for their work.<sup>28</sup> The FGDs and research from elsewhere suggests that, in many cases, children who work on family farms and as domestic servants are not paid for their work (Manan 1990, Shamin et al 1995). As one ex-depot worker who now works as a domestic worker told us: "[This] work is harder work than depot work. I do not get a salary."

As shown in table 11 below, girls who work in the non-shrimp sector are more likely to be paid in kind than girls who work in the shrimp industry. Almost a quarter of girls who work in alternative income generating work are paid in kind compared with no girl shrimp workers. There is no significant difference between the proportion of boys who are paid in kind in the shrimp sector compared to the proportion of boys who are paid in kind in the non-shrimp sector. These findings suggests that if girls leave the shrimp industry they risk losing a cash income, and may be forced to work for food and shelter only. This would reduce the kind of choices the family can make about how to spend its income.

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<sup>28</sup>  $p=0.15$

**Table 11: Type of payment for working girls by occupation**

	% of girls		P-value
	Shrimp	Non-shrimp	
Earn an income through self-employed work	22.9	5.1	.10
Paid a cash wage by an employer	21.1	16.7	.40
Paid in kind by an employer	0.0	24.4	.01
Not paid for work	54.3	53.8	.40
<i>Missing cases</i>	2	0	
N	71	78	

The FGDs suggest that, like child shrimp workers, very few non-shrimp workers are given paid sick leave or medical expenses. Only two out of 12 children working in the non-shrimp sector interviewed during the FGDs, are given paid sick leave by their employers. A third child is not given sick pay, but his employer does pay for his medical expenses. On the whole, like child shrimp workers, children working in alternative occupations, do not take time off work if they are sick, unless they are seriously ill.

## 8.2 Working hours

The survey finds no evidence to suggest that boys in the shrimp industry work different hours from boys who work elsewhere.<sup>29</sup> However, our evidence suggests that girls working in non-shrimp and shrimp sectors do work different hours.<sup>30</sup> In particular, girls working in non-shrimp professions are at risk of working very long hours; around 20% of girls working in non-shrimp occupations work ten or more hours per day, compared to only 1% of girl shrimp workers.

**Table 12: Percentage distribution of average hours worked per day by sex and occupation**

	% of children		
	In the shrimp industry	In other work	p-values
Boys			
1-3 hours	41.9	34.2	0.25
4-6 hours	32.4	30.1	0.40
7-9 hours	12.4	13.8	0.40
10+ hours	13.3	21.9	0.16
N	105	196	
Girls			
1-3 hours	35.2	43.6	0.01
4-6 hours	46.5	24.4	0.05
7-9 hours	16.9	10.3	0.21
10+ hours	1.4	21.8	0.01
N	71	78	

*Table notes: 1. Working hours were measured by asking children about a typical day from a week long period. Many children could not tell the time or did not have watches. The researchers used alternative indicators of time, such as the call to prayer, sunrise, sunset and school hours.*

<sup>29</sup> p=0.262

<sup>30</sup> p=0.000

Both the survey and FGD findings suggest that, unlike shrimp work, many of the non-shrimp occupations undertaken by children in the study are not seasonal, providing children with year round work opportunities.

### **8.3 Self-employment, treatment from employers and other people children work with**

Children in non-shrimp occupations are less likely to be self-employed than children in the shrimp industry. Around 25% of child shrimp workers are self-employed compared to 12% of children in non-shrimp work.<sup>31</sup> As argued above, the qualitative research suggests that most of the child shrimp workers children who are self-employed are fry catchers. As argued in section 7.2.1, child fry catchers often like self-employment because of the greater personal freedom and control over work that it affords. A move out of fry catching is likely to mean a move into employment and a loss of this personal freedom.

Moving from self-employment to employment could also mean mis-treatment and abuse from employers. Like depot and shrimp farm work, our survey and the in-depth interviews and FGDs, suggest that many alternative occupations involve abuse from employers and co-workers. Our quantitative findings show that almost 60% of shrimp workers and around 55% of non-shrimp workers reported being punished at work.<sup>32</sup> In most cases, such punishment involved verbal abuse. However, around 30% of the child shrimp workers who were punished, and around 25% of the non-shrimp workers who were punished, reported being beaten at work. Children working in non-shrimp professions who took part in the FGDs reported many kinds of abuse at work. All the children that work with customers experience bad treatment from them, especially if they make mistakes. Research from elsewhere also suggests that girl domestic servants are particularly at risk from abuse from employers (Shamim et al. 1995).

Not all children who work with others in non-shrimp occupations say they are poorly treated. As with many shrimp farm workers, children that help in a family business and work with relatives did not report being treated badly by the people they work with during the FGDs. Children who experience physical and verbal abuse from co-workers tend to be employed by non-relatives.

### **8.4 Travel to and from work**

Boys and girls have different experiences of travel to work in shrimp and non-shrimp occupations. As shown in table 13 below, very few boys work in the home. Boys are slightly more likely to work *at home* in non-shrimp occupations compared to shrimp work. However, if they are not working at home they tend to travel further in non-shrimp occupations compared to shrimp work. In particular, boys in who work in non-shrimp occupations are more likely to travel over 5km to get to work than boys who work in shrimp related work.<sup>33</sup>

**Table 13: Percentage distribution of distance to work place from home for boys by type of work**

	Boy work in the shrimp industry	Boys who work elsewhere
Works at home	2.9	7.2
Under 1 km	66.3	45.1

<sup>31</sup> p=0.05

<sup>32</sup> p=0.430

<sup>33</sup> p=0.05

1-2 km	13.5	14.4
2-5 km	7.7	11.8
5+ km	9.6	21.5
Missing cases	1	1

N	105	196
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*Table notes: 1. Distance from home to workplace was measured by asking children where they worked and lived. Researchers then made rough measurements of the distance between the two locations.*

As shown in table 14 below, girls in non-shrimp occupations have a much greater chance of working at home than girls employed in the shrimp industry.<sup>34</sup> Many girls interviewed in the qualitative research, particularly depot workers, expressed the wish to work at home. A move out of shrimp work could enable them to do this.

**Table 14: Percentage distribution of distance to work place from home for girls by type of work**

	Girls work in the shrimp industry	Girls who work elsewhere
Works at home	0.0	51.3
Under 1 km	69.0	30.8
1-2 km	22.5	9.0
2-5 km	2.8	5.1
5+ km	5.6	3.8
Missing cases	0	0
N	71	78

*Table notes: 1. Distance from home to workplace was measured by asking children where they worked and lived. Researchers then made rough measurements of the distance between the two locations.*

## 8.5 The effects of non-shrimp work

Our findings suggest that, like child shrimp work, children's non-shrimp work has important affects on both the child and the household. Like child shrimp workers, children working in other sectors make important contributions to household income. On average children working in non-shrimp work contribute around 16%<sup>35</sup> of household income (see table 9 in section 7.1.1).

Like child shrimp work, children's non-shrimp work has a detrimental effect on their education. 51% of boys working outside the shrimp industry attend school regularly in school, compared with over 90% of non-working boys. 56% of girls working outside the shrimp industry attend school regularly compared with 89% of non-working girls (see table 10 in section 7.2.2). As mentioned in section 7.2.2, the survey provides no evidence to suggest that shrimp work has a worse effect on education than non-shrimp work. However, a teacher interviewed as part of the study believes that children would be less likely to attend school if they stopped working in the shrimp industry and started working elsewhere. The teacher argued that, on the whole, other available work has longer hours, making it more difficult for the children to combine work and school. As has been discussed in section 7.2.3, there is no simple, straightforward relationship between work and its effect on schooling. As a range of factors influences whether or not a working child will enrol at school and how regularly they are able to attend, work cannot be held

<sup>34</sup> p=0.01

<sup>35</sup> Sd=12.7

entirely responsible for the poor school attendance of children working outside the shrimp industry.

Work can also have a beneficial effect on learning. Like some shrimp work, it is likely that some non-shrimp work will help children to develop skills. For example, parents who participated in the FGDs told us that working as a shop assistant can teach children numeracy skills, business skills and networking. Tailoring was mentioned as a preferred occupation for girls as it helps children to develop a useful skill for adult life, both for employment and within the home. Tailoring is also a high status occupation as it can be done within the home. As mentioned in section 8.4, the survey suggest that working outside the shrimp industry provide more opportunities for work within the home.

## 9. Conclusions

### 9.1 *The Key Findings of the Research*

The shrimp industry employs a significant proportion of the working children in the study area, with the greatest proportion of children engaged in fry catching and on shrimp farms. Children also work in shrimp processing depots and sell shrimp fry. Evidence suggests that changes in the shrimp industry may lead to reductions in the proportion of children engaged in shrimp work. EU and government regulations on hygiene are shifting shrimp processing to larger depots where children are not employed. The possibility of a declining natural shrimp fry stock, and shrimp farmers call for more hatcheries, could also remove work opportunities for children in fry collection.

As shrimp work is seasonal, many children currently involved in the shrimp industry also do other types of paid and unpaid work as well as their shrimp work. The nature, determinants and effects of child shrimp work vary considerably with the section of the industry in which children are employed. Children's experience of their work is also often different for boys and girls, and varies with individual preferences. Child shrimp workers are generally poorly paid, especially when the enormous profits from Bangladesh's shrimp production are considered. Children involved in the shrimp industry often work for long hours, with depot workers as a group consistently working for the longest periods.

Many child shrimp workers enter the workforce because of economic necessity. However, poverty can not be used to explain workforce entry in all cases. Evidence suggests that child shrimp work is not always essential to household survival. Other key reasons for child shrimp workers starting work include duty to the family, working to avoid idleness in the face of a lack of alternative to work, and choosing to work as a leisure interest or hobby. Child shrimp workers work in the shrimp industry as opposed to other sections of the workforce for three main reasons. Firstly, there are few alternatives to shrimp work in some locations. This is especially true in areas where shrimp farm related environmental degradation has reduced agricultural work opportunities. Limited employment options for females in rural labour markets also means that it is particularly hard for girls to find alternative income sources to shrimp work. Secondly, many informants argued that pay in the shrimp industry is higher than pay in alternative occupations. Finally, shrimp work is convenient for many children. Family members are often already engaged in this type of work and rivers, depots and shrimp farms are often close to the home. Working close to the home or with other family members is believed to be particularly important for girls.

Children's shrimp work has positive and negative effects at both the household and individual level. Child shrimp work adds significantly to household income through cash and kind payments. This income is used to buy essential food items and to pay for the schooling of non-working children. The research suggests that boys' education is often prioritised over girls. Inter-household networks can be damaged by girls' depot work. Such work can ruin girls' reputations and destroy marriage prospects. Child shrimp farm work is likely to benefit networks by providing a free source of labour to be donated to other households.

Child shrimp work often has a negative effect on child shrimp workers' physical and mental health. Long hours in cold, muddy, fast moving water can lead to skin infections, colds and the risk of drowning for child fry catchers. Unhygienic working conditions and standing in one

position for long hours causes physical health problems for depot workers. Shrimp farm work can be strenuous and cold, causing chest pains and back problems. For all child shrimp workers, having to work at all can be associated with mental distress. Some children see work as a shameful activity, others feel stressed by the responsibility of having to provide for their families. Depot workers suffer additional damage to their psychological wellbeing through the abuse and shame that are particularly associated with this profession. The welfare implications of girls' depot work suggest that this is an important area that could benefit from further research. Shrimp work can also improve health and wellbeing by increasing household income and providing some children with a pleasurable activity. Having a sense of control over the working day is especially important to the amount of fun children gain from work.

Most children working in the shrimp industry do not attend school. In many cases, the need to provide an income for the family means that child shrimp workers have to go to work and do not have time to go to school. Due to inflexible working hours, work is particularly damaging to the education of child depot workers. Despite this evidence, the relationship between school and shrimp work is by no means straightforward. Firstly, work does not always damage education. Child shrimp work can be used to pay for school. It can also be an education in itself, teaching children important skills. Secondly, a number of other factors that are unrelated to child work are responsible for the low levels of education of a significant proportion of child shrimp workers. The lack of an education due to work and other factors will have long lasting consequences for child shrimp workers and their families. Education can improve job prospects and enhance status.

Some aspects of child work outside the shrimp industry are worse or no better than child shrimp work. Like child shrimp workers, many children who work outside the shrimp industry receive no pay for their work. Although both child shrimp and non-shrimp workers make important financial contributions to the family, evidence indicates that child shrimp workers earn more than other working children. Girls who work outside the shrimp industry are more likely to be paid in kind than girl shrimp workers. Kind payments offer less choice regarding use of income than cash payments. While there is no evidence to suggest that boys who work in the shrimp and non-shrimp sectors work different hours, girls who work in non-shrimp occupations are more likely to work very long hours than girl shrimp workers. Like shrimp workers, children working outside the industry are often punished at work. On average, boys who work outside the shrimp industry travel further to work than boys who work within the industry. Finally, like child shrimp work, children's non-shrimp work is often associated with low rates of school attendance.

Some aspects of child work outside the shrimp industry are better than child shrimp work. Non-shrimp work is more likely to involve year round work and a steady income than shrimp work. Importantly, for girls, unlike shrimp work, work outside the shrimp industry often means work within the home, something that they value highly. Non-shrimp work is also often higher status than girls' depot work.

From these key findings, we feel that there are several important lessons to be learnt about children's shrimp work in southern Bangladesh. These lessons may or may not apply to other types of child work.

1. *It is not always possible to put child workers into neatly defined categories.* Seasonal variations in work means that children may be labelled in different ways at different times of the year, month, week or even day.

2. *Child work is full of subtleties.* How children experience their work varies considerably between different sections of the workforce, between different occupations within one section of the workforce, between girls and boys, and between individual children.<sup>36</sup>
3. *Work can be simultaneously good and bad for the child and/ or the household.* Work cannot always be easily defined as wholly beneficial or wholly harmful.
4. *Children have clear ideas about their work and have their own criteria for evaluating their work.* For example, for child fry catchers, having a sense of control over work was felt to be an important benefit of work.
5. *Work can harm education, but other factors, which are unrelated to work, can be equally damaging.*

## 9.2 The Policy Implications of the Research

The key findings outlined above have five important implications that relate to policies regarding child shrimp workers. As outlined in the introduction, the objectives of the research included applying the research findings to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. This relevance of the findings to these two conventions are discussed in appendix 3.

Regarding child shrimp work policy, firstly, the research suggests that programmes or policies which focus exclusively on shrimp work will not solve all the problems faced by child shrimp workers. At different times of the year, month, week or day, children who work in the shrimp industry are likely to be involved in other activities which have their own hazards that need to be addressed by policy makers. In Southwest Bangladesh, it is likely that the general climate of violence caused by shrimp cultivation puts children, and other member of the community, at risk, in and outside work.

Secondly, the research suggests that, while fry catchers, depot workers and shrimp farm workers face some common problems, different interventions will be required for children working in different sections of the shrimp industry. Girls and boys may also require different programmes.

Thirdly, the simultaneously good and bad nature of shrimp work appears to offer two policy choices. Either child work in the shrimp industry can be banned and the loss of benefits compensated for, or attempts can be made to mitigate the negative effects of children's shrimp work. For example, attempts could be made to reduce working hours, or to provide schooling at times which were convenient for child shrimp workers. Of course, variations within the shrimp industry may mean that different strategies are required for different jobs and for different children. The research does not support the banning of children's shrimp work through trade sanctions that do not compensate for the loss of benefits from work. If such sanctions were implemented, one of two things would happen. Either child shrimp workers and their families would lose the income and other benefits they gained from work, or children would enter alternative professions. The evidence suggests that, as alternative occupations are often worse or no better than child shrimp work, they would not always offer a better life for child shrimp workers. This evidence is also important for policy responses to changes in the shrimp industry that may reduce the proportion of children involved in shrimp work.

Fourthly, when attempting to decide what to do about child shrimp work, it is important to remember that children's criteria for assessing their work does not always highlight benefits and

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<sup>36</sup> This argument is supported by the work of Boyden et al. (1998).

disadvantages to work that would be immediately obvious to adult eyes. For example, the benefits of having control over shrimp fry collection, or the cultural disadvantages of depot work. Therefore, failing to properly consult children could lead to poor policy responses that do not truly reflect the needs of child shrimp workers.

Finally, to improve the education of child shrimp workers a range of factors must be considered. These include:

- The in-direct costs of schooling: the loss of income through work.
- The direct cost of schooling, including books, pens and 'unofficial' school fees.
- Working hours and the flexibility of work within the shrimp industry and elsewhere.
- Household poverty.
- The perceived value of education within the family and the degree of support for schooling.

To conclude, the research promotes a holistic response to the problems faced by child shrimp workers, which considers dangers to education and well being, both in and outside the workplace. In using such an approach, varieties in children's experiences and their own interpretation of their working lives must be considered. Policy makers must also recognise that work has good and bad implications for children and their families. Banning children's shrimp work will not solve all the problems faced by child shrimp workers.

## **Appendix One: Additional Information on the Qualitative Research Methods**

### ***The Focus Group Discussion Format***

The FGDs with child participants followed the following format:

1. **My Day Activity:** This activity was designed to make children feel at ease in the research setting and to provide some background information on their daily activities. The children were given a set of coloured stickers and introduced to a number of posters depicting various of work and non-work activities. They were then asked to stick a sticker next to any of the posters showing activities they had completed the previous day. This was followed by a group discussion.
2. **Ranking Exercise:** This activity was designed to provide information on the relative merits of the work activities completed by children in the local area. Children were shown a set of cards depicting various work activities. They were then asked to rank the cards according to which activity they felt was best and to describe why they felt activities should be ranked in this way. This was followed by a discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of school and the relative merits of school and work.

The FGDs with adults followed the following format:

1. **Who Does What Activity:** This activity was designed to make the adults feel at ease and to find out how and why work in the local community is divided. Participants were introduced to a set of cards showing various work activities. They were then asked to divide the cards into child/ adult/ both piles and male/ female/ both piles according to who usually does the activity. Reasons for these divisions were then discussed.
2. **Ranking Exercise:** This activity is a repetition of the ranking exercise which is described above. It was designed to provide adult perceptions of the relative merits of the different work activities done by children in the local area.
3. **Discussion about School and Work:** This discussion aimed to explore parental perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of school and work and the barriers to children's schooling. Participants were asked a series of questions about the good and the bad things about school and work and then asked to decide whether school, work, or school and work is best. They were also asked about reasons why some children did not go to school.

### ***Lessons Learnt From the Data Collection Process***

The research has taught us a number of important lessons about gathering information on child work from child and adult participants. It has also confirmed many of our existing beliefs about the data collection process. The research highlighted the importance of recruiting a balanced research team. It is extremely difficult to find experienced researchers in Bangladesh willing to participate in a two month long research project. In general the researchers balanced each other's research capabilities, with some displaying better recording skills and others displaying better data collection skills. However, the research was hindered by the fact that only one of the six researchers was female. In general, girls felt much more comfortable talking to a female researcher than to a male researcher. Women were happy to talk to men during the FGDs. However, they were often reluctant to talk to men on a one-to-one basis in the in-depth interviews.

Once the researchers had been recruited, they received a three day training course. This preparation was essential to the success of the research. It is important that such training is tailored to the experience of the research team, and that existing knowledge is built on. Many of

the researchers working on the project were intimidated by terms such as Focus Group Discussion and case study. Further investigation revealed that some of them had actually done FGDs before, they had just not been labelled in this way. Pointing this out to them made them feel more confident about data collection.

Training continued throughout the research process as we felt it was important to reinforce the messages given during the initial training. We found that it was particularly important to continuously emphasise the flexible nature of qualitative research. The FGD activities and the questions checklists were designed as a guide only. Researchers were encouraged to change the order, re-word the questions, make up new questions, miss questions out and probe for more details depending on what they felt was appropriate at the time. Many of the researchers found this hard to do. Some had a tendency to treat the FGD question checklists as a questionnaire, asking only the questions that were given to them. However, by the end of the research process, researchers were much more willing to make up new questions and probe for further details. We feel that giving researchers the freedom to make mistakes and solve problems, and encouraging them to think about the research aims, is important for ensuring that researchers make necessary adaptations to the research tools.

During the initial training period, we discussed assumptions about child work and childhoods in Bangladesh. We also explored these assumptions throughout the data collection process. As some of the research team came into the research with assumptions that could have hindered data collection, we feel that such exploration was extremely beneficial. For example, many of the researchers assumed that children would not be mistreated if they worked with parents and relatives. This meant that they often 'forgot' to ask questions about children's relationships with their employers and co-workers when they talked to children who work on relatives' shrimp farms. We challenged this assumption and, as outlined in the main text, questioning children about abuse from relatives that they work with revealed some interesting data.

The initial training period was followed by a field test of the FGD methods. The case study methods were also field tested prior to application. These field tests were essential. They revealed some problems with participant selection and the research format, which the team then resolved together. Although the field tests led to the solution of some problems, the researchers continued to experience four main difficulties during the data collection period.

Firstly, although in most cases the researchers developed a good rapport with the local community, in a few cases, participant perceptions of who the researchers were caused mistrust and lying. In one of the research areas, local people initially gave the researchers a hostile reception as they thought that they were Christian missionaries. A visit to the local mosque by one of the Muslim members of the research team quickly resolved this problem. In other cases, researchers felt that participants lied about child work participation, either because they had heard fry collection was illegal and wanted to protect their children, or because they thought that child work participation would hinder any NGO hand-outs that the researchers were going to allocate. The researchers explained to all participants that they were from an NGO and that they would not directly receive anything for participating in the research. These problems suggest that in addition to explaining who they were, the researchers needed to find out who local people thought they might be and explain immediately who they were not. The researchers also needed to continuously emphasise that the participants would not directly receive anything from the research process.

Secondly, the researchers experienced some problems with the research space. In some cases, they were not able to complete the FGDs and case study interviews in quiet, private locations. This hindered data collection. Participants and researchers were distracted by outside disturbances. Some participants also seemed to be intimidated by the presence of on-lookers.

Thirdly, the researchers experienced problems with the ranking exercise that they completed during the FGDs. In many groups, participants found it impossible to agree on an order for the activities. In some groups, researchers resolved this by discussing the good and the bad things about each activity, without reaching an agreement on which activities were best and which were worse. These problems may be attributed to the renowned directness of local people and to their enjoyment of arguments. They could also be caused by a lack of knowledge of some of the alternative occupations being debated. Although this activity did not produce a neatly ordered list, starting with the best type of work for children and ending with the worst type, the conflict the activity generated produced some fascinating data.

Finally, the researchers experienced some problems transcribing the tape recorded FGDs and in-depth interviews. This process took longer than anticipated and often meant that the researchers were working for long hours after the FGDs had been completed. We estimate that each 2 hour long FGD took 2-3 days to transcribe.

The data collection process produced some fascinating insights into research with children. During the initial training period, researchers were asked about problems they felt they would experience when working with working children. Many of the researchers argued that children would not fully comprehend their circumstances and would have little to say about their lives. By the end of the research process these perceptions had totally changed. Many of the researchers found working with children easier than working with adults. Children were more friendly and did in fact have lots to say about their work and their lives.

While the researchers experience of working with children was largely positive, the researchers did face some problems. In the FGDs, some of the children were shy, while others dominated. This was especially true in FGDs where age groups were mixed. Younger children also had a tendency to copy older children during group discussions. Anticipating these problems, we had tried to arrange FGDs with children from similar age groups. However, this was not always possible.

Children were also reluctant to talk about issues regarding their relationship with employers and teachers, especially in group settings. The researchers believed that children were worried about others finding out about their comments. Many of the children had also been brought up to respect their teachers, rather than to criticise them. Anticipating problems with anonymity, we repeated the FGD questions about children's relationship with their employers and teachers during in the in-depth interviews. Children were much more forthcoming in these circumstances.

The research revealed challenges associated with collecting data on a seasonal occupation, such as shrimp work. As will be discussed in more detail below, work in the shrimp industry increases at certain times of the month and at certain times of the year. This caused problems with informant selection. We initially tried to collect data from participants who were involved in the shrimp industry and from participants who were not involved in the shrimp industry. However, many of the children in the local area did not fit into this simple dichotomy. Instead, they frequently changed their profession depending on the availability of work. To resolve this problem we divided the child research population into those who had worked in shrimp

production in the last year and those who had never worked in shrimp production. However, problems with accurately recollecting time meant that even this classification was not foolproof. As we were collecting data during a low season, it was also hard to observe child shrimp work and to collect reliable information about working hours and income. It should be noted that, while collecting information during the high season may have resolved some these problems, it is likely that this would have created a whole new set of problems. Our evidence suggests that children involved in the shrimp industry often work very long hours during the high season. In these circumstances, they may have been less keen to give up their free time to talk with us.

The difficulty in categorising children has also caused problems for the quantitative analysis. The quantitative research team found it hard to divide the working children in the study population into shrimp and non-shrimp categories. These problems led to some delays in the analysis process.

The research highlights the varying applicability of research tools according to area, age and sex. As mentioned above, the ranking exercise was adapted as participants in this research found it problematic. The training manager at Uttaran has experienced similar problems with other ranking exercises in the local area. However, as similar ranking exercises have been successfully completed in urban Bangladesh, this does not suggest that the ranking exercise is fundamentally flawed. Instead, factors, such the lack of knowledge of professions outside the experience of your immediate family, mean that this tool needs to be altered if used in some rural areas.

The research tools also worked with varying degrees of success depending on the age and sex of the participants. Teenaged girls were often uncomfortable in FGDs and seemed to prefer talking out of a group setting. The researchers also felt that girls liked the individual attention they received in in-depth interviews. Boys were less intimidated than girls in the group context. Men did not seem to like the conflict generated in FGDs while women enjoyed it. These findings do not necessarily suggest that different research tools should be applied to different participants in the same piece of research. This could lead to a new set of problems as data would not be comparable. However, the findings do suggest that using different types of data collection techniques with all participants is advisable. This allows the maximum amount of information to be gathered from a range of individuals.

## Appendix Two: The Characteristics of the Surveyed Households

**Table 15: Characteristics of the household heads of the surveyed households**

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Sex of the household head</b>		
Male	958	95.2
Female	48	4.8
<i>Missing cases</i>	0	-

N = 1006

	Freq.	%
<b>Education of the household head</b>		
No schooling	525	52.3
Grade 1-4	119	11.8
Grade 5-9	260	25.9
SSC and above	101	10.0
<i>Missing cases</i>	1	-

N = 1006

	Freq.	%
<b>Occupation of the household head</b>		
Day Labourer	304	30.2
Business	171	17.0
Professional work	126	12.6
Agriculture (own land)	101	10.0
Fishing	95	9.4
Transport	50	5.0
Shrimp industry	45	4.5
Agriculture (share cropper/ other land)	13	1.3
Other work	13	1.3
Not working	88	8.8
<i>Missing cases</i>	0	

N = 1006

*Table notes: 1. SSC= Secondary school certificate.*

*2. Day labourer is manual labour paid on a daily basis. Activities include agricultural work, wood-cutting and cow herding.*

*3. Professional work includes iman (religious leader) and teachers.*

*4. Not working includes the unemployed, students and housewives.*

**Table 16: Income and rice consumption of the surveyed households**

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Income</b>		
Under 300	341	34.0
Tk 301 to Tk 450	336	33.5
Tk 451+	326	32.5
<i>Missing cases</i>	3	
<b>Number of times rice eaten in a day</b>		
1 time	23	2.3
2 times	124	12.3
3 times	859	85.4
<i>Missing cases</i>	0	
N	1006	1006

**Table 17: Characteristics of the surveyed children**

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	998	50.0
Female	998	50.0
<i>Missing cases</i>	2	-
<b>Age</b>		
5-9 years	957	47.9
10-14 years	1039	52.1
<i>Missing cases</i>	2	-
N	1998	1998

**Table 18: Characteristics of the additional children surveyed**

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	75	67.0
Female	37	33.0
<b>Age</b>		
5-9 years	16	14.3
10-14 years	96	85.7
N	112	112

## **Appendix Three: The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and children's shrimp work**

In the current child labour policy climate, two international instruments stand out: The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the most widely ratified UN Convention in history. It also stands at the centre of many NGO child labour policies. The ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour was recently adopted at the 87<sup>th</sup> session of the International Labour Conference in June 1999.

### ***The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child***

The CRC takes a holistic approach to children's well being and considers a wide range of child rights. The article of the Convention that most closely relates to children's work states that: "States Parties recognise the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development." (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 Article 32).

Many of the terms given in this article are ambiguous and open to wide interpretation. Attempts have been made to define hazardous labour (see the ILO Convention discussed below) and exploitation (see for example SCF 1995). These definitions include long working hours, vulnerability to abuse, working in a dangerous environment and low pay. While article 32 of the convention most closely relates to children's work, many other articles within the CRC are also relevant. In particular, Article 31 states the right to rest and leisure, Article 28 states the right to education, Article 24 states the right to health and Article 6 states the right to life and development. As summarised in the box below, child shrimp work is both harmful and beneficial to the rights outlined in the CRC. The extent to which shrimp work will harm or benefit children's rights varies with the section of the shrimp industry (see italics in the box below) and with the individual child. For example, for some child fry catchers, depot workers and shrimp farm workers, work means less time to play, for others, work is enjoyable and provides opportunities to play.

**Child rights abuses through shrimp work:**

- Long working hours and no time to play (*all types of shrimp work*)
- Work in a dangerous environment (*all types of shrimp work, especially fry catching*)
- Physical and verbal abuse (*shrimp farm and depot work*)
- Sexual abuse (*depot work*)
- Low pay (*all types of shrimp work*)
- Damage to the education of the child shrimp worker (*all types of shrimp work, especially depot work*)
- Damage to health and general well being (*all types of shrimp work*)

**Benefits to child rights through shrimp work:**

- Opportunities to play/ enjoyment from work (*all types of shrimp work*)
- Income for the education of the child shrimp worker and other children in the household (*all types of shrimp work*)
- An opportunity to develop new skills (*all types of shrimp work*)
- Income for food and health care for child shrimp workers and other children in household (*all types of shrimp work*)

***The ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour***

The ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour aims to identify particularly hazardous forms of work and abolish children's participation in these occupations. The Convention was developed in an attempt to provide a widely acceptable legal instrument against child work participation. It is anticipated that focusing on clearly extremely hazardous occupations will lead to agreement on the need for action. The convention states that members who ratify it should take immediate measures to abolish the Worst Forms of Child Labour. As summarised in the box below, according to the convention's definition, children's fry catching, depot work and shrimp farm work could be defined as a 'worst form of child labour.'

**The ILO Definition of the Worst Forms of Child Labour includes:**

1. All forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, forced or compulsory labour, debt bondage and serfdom.
2. The use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances (*girls working in depots maybe involved in sexually exploitative activities*).
3. The use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties (*girls working in depots maybe involved in sexually exploitative activities*).
4. Work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to jeopardise the health, safety or morals of children. This includes:
  - Work which exposes children to physical, emotional or sexual abuse (*depot work and shrimp farm work*).
  - Work underground, under water, at dangerous heights or in confined spaces.
  - Work with dangerous machinery, equipment and tools, or which involves the manual handling or transport of heavy loads.
  - Work in an unhealthy environment which may, for example, expose children to hazardous substances, agents or processes, or to temperatures, noise levels, or vibrations damaging to their health (*all types of shrimp work*).
  - Work under particularly difficult conditions such as work for long hours or during the night or work which does not allow for the possibility of returning home each day (*all types of shrimp work, especially during peak seasons*).

**Applying the CRC and the ILO Convention**

In addition to highlighting child rights abuses and hazards associated with child shrimp work, the research suggests a number of issues that should be considered when attempting to apply the CRC and the ILO Convention:

1. Child shrimp work has negative and positive child rights implications. In addition to increasing the hazards that children face, work may also reduce some of the harmful consequences of living in poor families.
2. In addition to the criteria developed for international instruments, children may also have their own criteria for evaluating their work. Considering children's criteria may result in children's work being classified in a different way from the classifications encouraged by international instruments. Different classifications of children's work may alter the types of action or intervention that is considered appropriate.
3. Children's work has different hazards and rights implications depending on specific type of work and on the child.
4. Child workers also face hazards and rights abuses outside the workplace. Similarly, child workers education is also affected by factors that are unrelated to work.

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