

PRCPB Working Paper No. 10: Abstract

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In Bangladesh, as in many developing countries, there is a widespread belief amongst the public, policymakers and social workers that children 'abandon' their families and migrate to the street because of economic poverty. This dominant narrative posits that children whose basic material needs cannot be met within the household move to the street. It ignores and avoids the growing evidence that this is not the case. This paper explores this argument through the analysis of detailed empirical research with children in Bangladesh. It finds that social factors lie behind most street migration and, in particular, that moves to the street are closely associated with violence to, and abuse of, children within the household and local community. These findings are consistent with the wider literature on street migration from other countries. In Bangladesh, those who seek to reduce the flow of children to the streets need to focus on social policy, especially on how to reduce the excessive control and emotional, physical and sexual violence that occurs in some households. Economic growth and reductions in income poverty will be helpful, but they will not be sufficient to reduce street migration by children.

'I did not leave home for poverty...when I say I'm on the street because my family was poor... [people] nod... and give me coins... if I say I'm on the street because my parents were violent, people blame me saying I was not a good boy' [Interview with Rocky, a 16 years old boy, 2002].