suffer from malnutrition and 1 out of 7 die before they reach the age of 5. Some of the major causes of death are water borne diseases, respiratory deaths, and malnutrition. Aids awareness is poor and 50% of those affected are women. There is next to no sex education.

Girls of 15 years and above are 40% more illiterate than boys. Enrolment in schools at all levels is lower than boys, and the gap grows at higher levels of education. The drop out rate for girls is also higher than boys. To cut family costs the girl's education is hit first: "since the boy will take care of the family in the future, the family prefers to invest in his education." However, the trend is girls are doing better in education than boys even at higher levels.

In a land of 140 million people, 12% of the total labour force is child labour, aged between 5 and 14. In 1991 it was 4.1 million, in 1996 it was 6.6 million; girls in labour force was 1.6 to 2.7 million. More and more children are thrown into the labour market with increased impoverishment, reckless urbanisation, natural disasters, and river erosion. Child labour is part of the family economy to make do.

There are 16 registered prostitution centres. A study shows 4% of prostitutes are under 18 years; 50% of migrating prostitutes are girls between 15 and 20; 25% of girls in this profession experience first sex at the age of 10. According to Unicef, 40% are under 16 years. There are 300,000 sex workers in India from Bangladesh.

Trafficking of women and children is the ugliest form of violence and abuse. It is estimated that 400 children and girls are trafficked out every month to Pakistan, the Middle East, and even to Europe. In the last 10 years 500,000 women and children have crossed the borders and were forced into prostitution. This is modern day slave trade.

Child marriage is a violence that socially persists and at times is linked to trafficking. About 5% of children between 10 and 14 and 48% between 15 and 19 years of age are given to marriage according to ILO. According to Unicef, 50% are pregnant by 18 years and 58% become mothers by 19 years.

Not in Bangladesh alone

This is not our story alone. Bangladesh is a prototype of what is happening globally in many parts of the world. Discrimination and deprivation of the girl child made Amartya Sen, the Nobel laureate lament that due to discrimination the world has lost nearly 100 million girl children. Globally, under-5 girls have 15% less calorie intake than boys; in Punjab 25% girls are malnourished as against 2% boys. 31% girls in the Caribbean are underweight.

Child marriage is also a multi-country phenomenon. About 48% of teenagers in the world are married, despite laws setting age limits. It is worst in South Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

Child prostitution is rapidly increasing worldwide. It is estimated that nearly 1 million girls are



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