



# CHILDREN KNOW BETTER



BANGLADESH CHILD FRIENDLY REPORT

OUR VOICES

OUR STORIES

OUR DREAMS

FOR A SAFER BANGLADESH



(A child-led research project by ECPAT  
International and ACD Bangladesh)



This report was authored by the child leaders – **Sabit, Mitun, Sabitree, Sabiha, Sapla, Tamim, Aleya, Suhana, Shama, Afir, Dristy, Rabbi, Jabirul, Israt, Samad, Faisal, Laiba, Oishi, Sosema, Salauddin, Surjo, Shuvo, Shariyar, Alladi, Tusi** – who designed and carried out the entire research process. They identified the issues to be explored, developed and refined the research tools, collected evidence from their peers and communities, analysed the findings, and shaped the recommendations presented in this report.

# CONTENTS

<b>Our journey</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Why we did this project</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>How we worked as child researchers</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>What we heard from other children</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>What happens in public and online spaces</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>About child marriage and child labour</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Family and community rules</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>When people don't believe children</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Feeling safe in public spaces</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>When no one is held responsible</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>What children want adults to change</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>To the government and leaders</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>To our schools and madrasas</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>To the police and justice system</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>To social media and companies</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>To NGOs and organisations</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>To our parents, families, and communities</b>	<b>13</b>

# OUR JOURNEY

The *Children Know Better* project was created so that we could speak for ourselves about our lives, our challenges related to sexual exploitation, and our hopes for change. It gave us the chance to become researchers, to ask questions to our peers and to responsible adults, and to find answers about what really makes us feel safe or unsafe.

In Bangladesh, Rajshahi District, including Godagari and Mohonpur sub-districts. We learned, explored, and shared our voices to help adults understand what children truly go through every day. As child researchers, we wanted to show that our opinions matter. We didn't want others to always speak on our behalf, we wanted to tell our own stories, in our own words.

Through our work, we discover not just the problems children face, but also the power we have to create solutions when adults listen and work with us. 25 child researchers; 14 girls and 11 boys, aged between 12 and 16 years, talked to 189 children and 26 adults, including teachers, parents, police, and community leaders. We learned about children's experiences, their worries, and their dreams for a safer world.



# WHY WE DID THIS PROJECT

Every day, many children face teasing, early marriage, unsafe work, or hurtful comments and conduct by bad people online but also in the streets and the community. But most of the time, adults talk about us and the issues we face, not with us. We joined this project because we believe that children's experiences matter. We wanted to make sure children's voices guide the changes that affect us.

Our main goals were to:

- ★ Understand what children in our community face.
- ★ Hear directly from other children about their challenges.
- ★ Share what we learned with adults and leaders to make things safer.



# HOW WE WORKED AS CHILD RESEARCHERS

Before we started talking to other children, we needed to learn how to be child researchers. We attended training sessions organised by ACD, where we learned about:

- ★ Child rights and child protection, so we understood why our voices matter.
- ★ Safeguarding and safety, how to protect ourselves and others during the research.
- ★ How to ask questions and listen carefully, without judging anyone.
- ★ How to take notes and collect stories, with honesty and respect.
- ★ Privacy and consent, making sure every child's story is treated with care.

We practiced through fun activities like drawing, role-plays, and storytelling circles. We learned how to make everyone feel comfortable and free to share. After the training, we began our research. We met 189 children and 26 adults, including parents, teachers, police, and community leaders. We visited schools, homes, and community spaces to hear about their lives. Everyone joined voluntarily. We always explained what the project was about and reminded children that they could stop or skip questions anytime.



# WHAT WE HEARD FROM OTHER CHILDREN

After weeks of conversations and stories, we began to see a pattern. Many children shared similar experiences; some happy, some painful, and some full of hope. Children told us they face problems both at home and outside. They feel unsafe in schools, on the way to school, and even online.

Some said they are teased, followed, or touched inappropriately on their way to school. Others said that when they report abuse, adults don't always believe them. Some even get blamed. *"it is normal for us to be victims of eve teasing because we are girls."*

Some children shared that they have to work or drop out of school because their families struggle to afford school expenses. Others said they are not allowed to talk about their bodies, feelings, or safety at all. Many said they stay silent because of fear or shame. They worry adults might not protect them or might make things worse.

These stories showed us how much children want to be heard, and how important it is for adults to truly listen and act.



# WHAT HAPPENS IN PUBLIC AND ONLINE SPACES

Children said that many unsafe things happen in public spaces; on roads, in markets, and even in schools. They said strangers, shopkeepers, and sometimes even known adults say rude words, stare, or try to touch them.

*"Boys look at me badly, so I wear a burqa to feel safe."*

One of the girls said

But children made it clear, changing what girls wear is not the solution. Adults and communities must change their behaviour.

Online, children face new risks. Some receive bad messages; others are tricked into sharing photos or videos of themselves.

*"They make fake love stories online to get private pictures, then use them to threaten girls."*

One of the girls said

Many said that no one teaches them online safety, and that police and schools need to do more to stop abuse online.

# ABOUT CHILD MARRIAGE AND CHILD LABOUR

Child marriage is still common. Many families believe it protects girls, but children said it does the opposite.

*"People say, 'She's getting older, she'll bring shame,' so they marry her off quickly."*

One of the girls said

Some children shared that when girls are harassed, their families marry them off to "hide the shame." Others said poverty pushes parents to make these choices.

Children also talked about child labour; working in shops, homes, or fields to earn money. Many said they face harsh treatment, long hours, and sometimes abuse at work. They want adults to help families find other ways to earn money so that children can stay in school.



# FAMILY AND COMMUNITY RULES

Our families and communities are full of love but also rules that sometimes make children feel unheard. In most homes, adults make all the decisions, and children are expected to obey, even when it affects our safety or happiness. Many children said they wish parents would listen instead of deciding for them. They also said that boys and girls are treated differently, which makes things harder for everyone.

We realised that families and communities need to understand that children's voices matter, and that love also means listening and believing us.



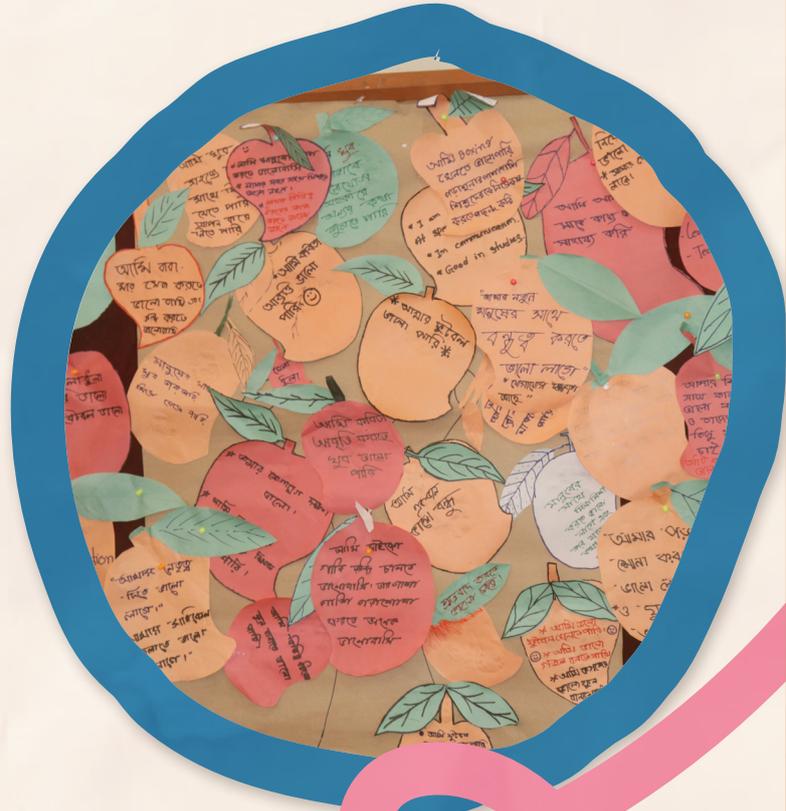
# WHEN PEOPLE DON'T BELIEVE CHILDREN

This was something we heard again and again. Even when a child tells the truth about being hurt, people often don't believe them. Some children said they were blamed for what happened. Others were told to "stay quiet" to protect the family's reputation. This makes children feel scared, ashamed, and alone.



# FEELING SAFE IN PUBLIC SPACES

Many children said they don't feel safe in public spaces. Some roads are dark, some playgrounds are far from home, and some places like bus stops or markets, are not child-friendly. Girls said they are afraid to walk alone because of teasing or staring. Boys said they often get into fights or feel pressure to act "tough." Children suggested that streets should have better lighting, safe transport, and places where we can ask for help. They also said community members should watch out for all children, not just their own.



# WHEN NO ONE IS HELD RESPONSIBLE

Many of us were surprised to hear how often people get away with hurting children. Sometimes families try to “solve” cases privately instead of reporting them. Sometimes powerful people use money or connections to avoid punishment. This makes children lose trust in the system. We believe that every child deserves fair justice, no matter who they are, or how rich or poor.

## WHAT CHILDREN WANT ADULTS TO CHANGE

After doing all the research and talking about their experiences, the child researchers from Bangladesh sat together in July 2025 to discuss what should change. They shared ideas, debated, and agreed on clear recommendations for different groups; from the government to schools, families, and communities.

## TO THE GOVERNMENT AND LEADERS

- ★ We know our country has many laws for children, but most of them are too hard to understand. We want laws that use simple words, words that really protect us, not confuse us.
- ★ We also want to be part of making those laws. Don't just make rules *for us*, make them *with us*.
- ★ No child marriage, ever! No special permission. Children should be free to dream, not married off early.
- ★ We also want help lines like 1098, 999, and 333 to really work. Many children don't even know what they are, and sometimes no one answers when we call.
- ★ In schools, we should learn about respect, consent, and how to stay safe. Teachers should talk kindly about these things, not make us feel scared or shy.

- ★ And when we travel, buses and rickshaws should be safe too. Drivers should learn about child safety and know what to do if a child needs help.

## TO OUR SCHOOLS AND MADRASAS

- ★ Schools should be safe, not scary. We want places where we can speak up and be heard.
- ★ There should be complaint boxes and private rooms where children can talk freely to a trusted teacher.
- ★ Teachers should be trained to listen and act fast when a child reports a problem.
- ★ Schools should use fun activities to teach about safety like plays, songs, art, and games.

## TO THE POLICE AND JUSTICE SYSTEM

- ★ We said that going to the police should not make us more scared. We want child-friendly reporting offices within law enforcement units and the police to be trained in how to handle children.
- ★ Police officers should talk gently, not shout or blame. They should protect us, not question us as if we had done something wrong.

- ★ Online bullying and threats happen every day. The cyber police should help fast when children report something bad online and not blame us.
- ★ The rich people should not escape punishment. Justice should be fair for everyone, no matter who they are.

## TO SOCIAL MEDIA AND COMPANIES

- ★ We love being online playing games, watching videos, chatting with friends but it's not always safe.
- ★ We want social media to stop fake accounts and remove bad videos and pictures. If we report something wrong, we want quick action, not silence.
- ★ Companies should also share safety messages in fun ways like short videos, posters, and challenges made with children!
- ★ Shopkeepers, bus drivers, and business owners should all learn how to keep children safe, because protecting us is everyone's job.

## TO NGOs AND ORGANISATIONS

- ★ Come where we are. Visit our schools, communities, and child clubs and help us build confidence through sports, art, and games so we can grow up strong, equal, and brave.
- ★ And please, always include us when you plan or review projects. Ask us what works. Ask us what doesn't. We live these experiences every day.

## TO OUR PARENTS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

- ★ We want parents to listen with love, not anger. Please talk to us about difficult things instead of shouting or avoiding them.
- ★ Everyone in our community can help keep children safe, neighbours, rickshaw pullers, shopkeepers, and leaders. Let's all work together.
- ★ Don't hide abuse. Speak up. Even if the abuser is someone you know, protecting children is more important than protecting someone's name.





328/1 Phaya Thai Road,  
Ratchathewi, Bangkok,  
10400, Thailand

Phone: +662 215 3388  
Email: [info@ecpat.org](mailto:info@ecpat.org)  
Web: [www.ecpat.org](http://www.ecpat.org)

**For more information:**

