Mapping of the Social Service Workforce

for Child Protection and a Capacity Gap Analysis in Bangladesh

December 2023

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Coram Children's Legal Centre (CCLC)

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Acronyms

APC	Acceleration of the Protection of Children
ASW	Association of Social Workers
CBCPC	Community Based Child Protection Committee
CHL	Child Helpline 1098
CPSS	Child Protection Systems Strengthening
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRF	Child Rights Facilitator
CSPB	Child Sensitive Social Protection in Bangladesh
DSS	Department of Social Services
GSSWFA	Global Social Services Workforce Alliance
KI	Key Institution
KII	Key Informant Interview
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (Bangladesh)
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoLE	Ministry of Labour and Employment
MoSW	Ministry of Social Welfare
MoWCA	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs
NASS	National Academy of Social Services
NTCC	National Trauma Counseling Centre
OCC	One stop Crisis Centre
SSWF	Social Service Workforce
TOR	Terms of Reference
UCDO	Urban Community Development Officer
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDAF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
USSO	Upazila Social Service Officer

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary[1]

This report presents the findings of a comprehensive mapping and capacity gap analysis of the Social Service Workforce (SSWF) for child protection in Bangladesh, ending in December 2023, commissioned by UNICEF Bangladesh in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) and the Department of Social Services (DSS). The assessment aimed to understand the size, scope, structure, and capacity of the workforce, and to identify strategic actions to strengthen the delivery of child protection services in line with the Children Act 2013 and international standards.

Purpose and Scope

The study assessed the government and non-government social service workforce responsible for preventing and responding to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children. It applied the UNICEF–Global Social Service Workforce Alliance (GSSWA) guidelines, covering workforce planning, development, and support, with specific attention to vulnerable children, emergency responsiveness, and coordination mechanisms.

Key Findings

1. Insufficient and Unevenly Distributed Workforce

- The total estimated child protection workforce in Bangladesh is 21,288, including government, non-government, and informal actors — covering only 21% of the estimated national need (100,000+).
- Government workers (DSS) account for only 13% of the workforce; the majority are non-government workers (71%) and informal providers (15%).
- Social workers are inequitably distributed and not allocated according to local child protection needs.

2. Limited Specialisation and Professionalisation

- Only 3% of social workers have a degree in social work or social welfare.
- Most DSS frontline workers are para-professionals with limited training in child protection.
- The CSPB-supported Child Protection Social Workers (n=190) have stronger alignment to mandated child protection roles but are funded by UNICEF with no permanent status.
- There is no national framework for social work registration, accreditation, or professional standards.

[1]While this assessment reflects data and workforce conditions as of December 2023, it is acknowledged that further progress has continued into 2024, including ongoing efforts by the Government of Bangladesh and partners to scale and institutionalize child protection workforce reforms.

3. Inadequate Case Management and Service Delivery

- Government social workers have high caseloads (average 38 children), while CSPB social workers handle up to 133 cases.
- Social workers report being unable to meet children's diverse needs; many resort to residential placement as a default, with limited focus on family-based or reintegration services.
- Probation, diversion, and reintegration services are poorly implemented, despite being mandated in the Children Act 2013.

4. Weak Training Systems and Supervision

- Over one-third of DSS workers have never received child protection training.
- Short courses are available via NASS and RTCs but have limited reach, especially to frontline workers.
- Supervision exists but lacks structure and is often limited to administrative problem-solving rather than skill development or wellbeing support.

5. Coordination Mechanisms are Fragmented

- Child Welfare Boards (CWBs) and Community-Based Child Protection Committees (CBCPCs) exist but are only functional in CSPB locations.
- Coordination between government and NGOs is inconsistent, with limited integration of informal workers or allied services (e.g., police, health).
- Social workers often lack transport, safety measures, and basic materials to carry out their roles.

Priority Recommendations

1. Expand and Institutionalise the Child Protection Workforce

- Establish a permanent cadre of child protection social workers under DSS.
- Appoint probation officers dedicated to children at the Upazila level.

2. Professionalise the Workforce

- Require minimum qualifications and establish a registration and accreditation process.
- Develop a national competency framework and clear career pathways.

3. Strengthen Case Management and Diversion Systems

- Finalise and implement the Children Act Rules.
- Scale training and tools for case management, diversion, reintegration, and alternative care.

4. Upgrade Pre-Service and In-Service Training

- Revise university curricula to integrate more robust child protection content.
- Localise and expand accredited training courses and ensure equitable access.

5. Improve Coordination and Data Systems

- Activate CWBs and CBCPCs nationwide.
- Establish a workforce monitoring system with up-to-date data on caseloads, roles, and qualifications.

6. Enhance Resources, Safety, and Wellbeing Support

- Ensure social workers have access to transport, communication, and psychosocial support.
- Establish supervision standards focused on skill development and wellbeing.

This assessment offers a foundational evidence base to guide systemic reform and investment in Bangladesh's social service workforce for child protection. It calls for urgent action by the Government of Bangladesh, development partners, and civil society to build a capable, professional, and adequately resourced workforce capable of delivering on every child's right to protection.

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Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Objectives

This report presents the findings of a mapping of the Social Service Workforce for child protection in Bangladesh, commissioned by UNICEF Bangladesh on behalf of the Department of Social Services (DSS) within the Ministry of Social Welfare of Bangladesh.

The purpose of the mapping is to assess the social service system and workforce competencies and capacities as it relates to child protection in Bangladesh (i.e. prevention and response to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children). The mapping utilises the Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Service Workforce for Child Protection, developed by UNICEF and the Global Social Services Workforce Alliance, to enable an assessment of the SSWF in terms of alignment with international standards and best practice.[2]

This mapping includes government, non-government, and informal actors engaged in core child protection functions, while excluding workers focused solely on social protection, education, or nutrition.

The mapping is a foundational step to inform the scale-up and institutionalisation of the professional child protection workforce envisioned under CSPB-II and the EU-UNICEF programme.

The objectives of the mapping are to:

1. Identify the size, scope and structure of the social service workforce, including client-to-social worker ratio (considering sex and ability of both), education/qualification and skills assessment, and social worker demographics (age, sex, background, ethnicity, years of service, etc.);
2. Assess the current structure of the social service workforce and system against relevant policies and legislation, documenting the historical evolution of the country's workforce;
3. Document the available in-service support to all levels of the social service workforce, including social worker professionalization mechanisms, uptake rates, and a recommended capacity building plan;
4. Review and assess the available developments, courses and training available (preservice and in-service) (including those for university degree, professional training curriculum, etc.) against the necessary skills and knowledge required for job effectiveness (actual job descriptions and daily tasks);
5. Assess the capacity of the social service workforce to support children and families during emergencies, such as COVID-19 or other natural disasters, including the emerging needs of social workers, their level of satisfaction, and quality of social work support provided in natural disaster-prone and climate change-affected Districts;

[2]UNICEF and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Service Workforce for Child Protection, February 2019.

6. Map the available social services and referral pathways of the social service system, assessing the quality-of-service provision and identify gaps in provision (including locations) or quality of services;
7. Identify challenges and opportunities in practice for providing gender transformative and inclusive child protection services to children and families;
8. To test and adapt data collection (tools and methods) for continuous bi-annual monitoring of the government and non-government social service workforce.

A capable and professional social service workforce is the backbone of a functioning child protection system. In Bangladesh, the lack of trained and dedicated child protection social workers undermines efforts to implement the Children Act 2013, respond to abuse and neglect, and support the most vulnerable children.

1.2 Background: Child Protection in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has a large population of approximately 165 million people[3], of which children make up 34 percent. Approximately 9 percent of children are under the age of 5 years[5]. There is limited evidence relating specifically to rates of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children in Bangladesh. However, data shows that 89 percent of children aged 1-14 years have experienced any type of physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past one month. COVID-19 increased the prevalence of violence and exploitation, with a substantially higher number of reports of child rape, child marriage and child deaths due to violence[6].

Bangladesh identifies a broad range of groups of children as vulnerable or disadvantaged (The Children Act 2013), although there are limited prevalence statistics for these groups. Children with disabilities experience widespread discrimination, violence and face significant obstacles in accessing education and key protective services, including health services,[7] and 7.3 percent of children have a functional difficulty in at least one domain. Children in contact with the law as victims and witnesses and children in conflict with the law are particular groups of children in need of child protection. The number of children in detention was 4 per 100,000, as of 2019[8]. There are thousands of cases pending in the Courts involving children in contact with the law (in conflict with the law or as victims/witnesses),

[3]Bangladesh Population and Housing Census 2022.
[4]United Nations Children's Fund, Executive Board Second regular session 2021, September 2021, Bangladesh Country programme document, p. 2.
[5]Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2012-2013, Progotir Pathey, Final Report, p. viii.
[6]UNICEF Bangladesh, 2020 Country office Annual Report, 2021, pp. 1-2.
[7]United Nations Children's Fund, Executive Board Second regular session 2021, September 2021, Bangladesh Country programme document, p. 3.
[8]UNICEF Global Children in Detention Database, 2018-2021Data source: Department of Social Welfare.
[9]Insight provided by UNICEF Bangladesh during the inception phase.
[10]https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/press-releases/unicef-new-report-details-shocking-deprivation-children-living-street#:~:text=The%20survey%20findings%20are%20based,could%20be%20in%20the%20millions.

and there are instances of violence and maltreatment in the institutions used for detention of children[9]. Children living in street situations are also particularly vulnerable to violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect. UNICEF estimates that more than one million children could be living on the streets in Bangladesh[10].

Although not the key focus of this mapping, there is evidence relating to additional child protection concerns that warrant mention. Fifty-one percent of girls are married before the legal age of 18 years[11]. Approximately 10 million children below the age of 5 years do not exist officially due to a lack of birth registration[12], and approximately 7 percent of children aged 5-17 years are involved in child labour (raising to 19 percent among children not attending school[13]). Children in Bangladesh are often subjected to the worst forms of child labour[14]. UNICEF Bangladesh has identified 20 Districts that have the poorest indicators for child protection[15].

Bangladesh is the seventh most-affected country by extreme weather events. Cyclones and floods disrupt family livelihoods, result in migration, and increase children's risk of exploitation[16]. More than 8 million people, of which 43 percent are children, in Rangpur, Mymensingh, Sylhet, Barishal, Khulna and Chattogram are confronted with annual devastating floods and cyclones[17]. A high percentage of children in Bangladesh are also at risk as a result of conflict, with approximately 1 million Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazaar District and Bhasan Char Island, of which half are children[18].

1.3 Strengthening the Social Service Workforce

A well-planned, developed and supported SSWF is an important building block for an effective child protection system that is able to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children[19]. The child protection system relies on social service workers to: receive referrals of child protection cases; undertake assessments to identify whether or not the child is in fact in need of care and protection; make decisions, in coordination with other relevant professionals and practitioners on how best to protect the child; develop and monitor implementation of a plan to ensure care and protection of the child; and close the plan when the risk of harm to the child has passed. Social service workers may also be involved in delivering services to the child.

[11]Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), Progotir Pathey, Bangladesh Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, Key Findings, 2019
[12]The Daily Star. Available at: https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/rights/news/over-half-bangladeshi-children-under-5-dont-have-birth-registration-2933701, accessed 2 April 2023.
[13]UNICEF. Available at: https://mics.unicef.org/news_entries/152/BANGLADESH-MICS-2019-REPORT:-KEY-FINDINGS, accessed, 2 April 2023.
[14]United States of America; Department of labor. Available at: https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/bangladesh, accessed 8 January 2023.
[15]UNICEF Bangladesh, District Ranking for CP programme (Draft) Ranking Map, 26 April 21, p. 1.
[16]OHCHR. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/11/bangladesh-protect-victims-trafficking-especially-within-country-says-un, accessed 8 January 2022.
[17]UNICEF Bangladesh. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/appeals/bangladesh, accessed 28 December 2022.
[18]UNICEF, Humanitarian action for Children: Bangladesh, 2023. https://www.unicef.org/media/131641/file/2023-HAC-Bangladesh.pdf
[19]UNICEF, Child Protection Systems Strengthening: Approach; Benchmarks; Interventions, September 2021; UNICEF and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance (GSSWA), Guidelines to Strengthen the SSWF for Child Protection, February 2019.

Investing in the social service workforce will yield high returns for child protection. A lack of investment in a dedicated and qualified SSWF in child protection will undermine all other efforts to strengthen the child protection system in a sustainable manner, including enforcement and implementation of policies and laws, operability and effectiveness of case management systems and service delivery[20].

The Government of Bangladesh has committed[21] to rapidly scaling up the social service workforce, which is estimated to be less than the 20 percent of that which is required[22]. In addition, the government and the UN system are aiming to reduce the percentage of children (1–14 years) who have experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers to a target of 69 percent by 2026[23].

UNICEF is working with the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) and its Department of Social Services (DSS), through the Child Sensitive Social Protection in Bangladesh (CSPB) Project, Phase-II, to strengthen the child protection social service workforce as part of the implementation of the Children Act 2013. This project aims to strengthen and expand the professional-level social service workforce with a clear mandate for child protection, including through strengthening reporting, referrals and case management for children in need of care and protection.

1.4 Key Definitions and Scope

The UNICEF GSSWFA guidelines to strengthen the social service workforce for child protection set out key definitions for child protection and SSWF strengthening[24]. These have been used to guide the definitions and approach to this mapping, ensuring they are adapted to the Bangladesh context.

[20]UNICEF and the Global SSWF Alliance, Guidelines to Strengthen the SSWF for Child Protection, February 2019, p 1.

[21]UNICEF Bangladesh. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/press-releases/government-commits-strengthening-social-services-workforce-protection-children#:~:text=Government%20commits%20to%20strengthening%20the%20social%20services%20workforce%20for%20the%20protection%20of%20children,-19%20September%202022&text=Dhaka%2C%2019%20September%202022%20%E2%80%93%20The,workforce%20from%203%2C000%20to%209%2C000, accessed 28 December 2022.

[22]UNICEF Bangladesh, 2020 Country office Annual Report, 2021, p. 9.

[23]United Nations Children's Fund, Executive Board Second regular session 2021, September 2021, Bangladesh Country programme document, p. 14.

[24]UNICEF and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Service Workforce for Child Protection, February 2019.

1.4.1 Child Protection

This project adopts the following definition of the SSWF, which will be the subject of this mapping:

'Paid or unpaid, governmental and non-governmental professionals and para-professionals, working directly with children and families to ensure the healthy development and well-being of children and families through programmes or services aimed to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation of children (i.e. child protection).'

*For these purposes, a **'para-professional'** refers to a person who typically works next to or supports the work of a professional in the same field[25]. The para-professional worker is 'trained to perform certain functions, but not always legally certified or licensed to practice as a full professional, which in some fields requires college or university degrees or specialized training.[26]*

Although not within the definition above, this mapping also sought to estimate the number of ***'informal social workers'*** carrying out the role of professionals or paraprofessionals as a means to fill gaps in child protection provisions. For these purposes, informal social workers are individuals carrying out child protection responsibilities, either alongside the government and non-government SSWF or independently, who might or might not have received any relevant training or qualifications.

In Bangladesh, the term 'social service workforce' is used to reflect workers who provide a wide range of service, including individuals completing administrative tasks and roles which would not be regarded as 'child protection' in line with international standards (for instance, cooks and security guards).

Therefore, while these individuals undoubtedly provide important contributions to ensuring the protection of children, **this mapping and capacity assessment includes only individuals who would be regarded as part of a core child protection SSWF.** The scope of the mapping includes individuals providing child protection according to the following terms:

- **'Child protection'** refers to **programmes** and **services** to **prevent** and **respond** to **violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation** of children[27].

  This captures both **tertiary level response and secondary-level prevention,** which fall within UNICEF's definition of the child protection system[28].

Key definitions for these terms are provided in table 1 below.

[25]UNICEF and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Service Workforce for Child Protection, February 2019, p 9.
[26]UNICEF and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Service Workforce for Child Protection, February 2019, p 9.
[27]UNICEF, Child Protection Systems Strengthening: Approach; Benchmarks; Interventions, September 2021, p. 10.
[28]UNICEF, Child Protection Systems Strengthening: Approach; Benchmarks; Interventions, September 2021, p. 10.

Table 1. Key definitions for child protection

Term	Definition/Categories
Child protection	Programmes and services to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children, including: **Physical abuse; Emotional Abuse; Sexual abuse; Neglect** *With recognition that poverty alleviation, child marriage and child labour prevention, provision of education, birth registration and institutional care are important forms of support for child protection, these were not within the scope of this mapping.*
Tertiary level services	Services to protect children who have experienced or are at high risk of serious harm from any form of violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation.
Secondary prevention services	Activities targeting specific families which have risk factors associated with the various forms of violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation of children (also referred to as 'early intervention services')

The mapping focused on those providing key child protection for specific groups of disadvantaged children who are listed in the Children Act 2013, as follows:

- Children whose parent(s) have died or are without legal or lawful guardians;
- Children without any particular home or residence or without visible means of living;
- Children engaged in begging or anything against welfare of the child;
- Children dependant on or living with the parents imprisoned;
- Child victims of sexual oppression or harassment; Children associated with a person engaged in prostitution, anti-social or seditious activities;
- Children with disabilities;
- Children with unnatural behaviour disorders caused by drugs or any other reason;
- Children who have fallen into ill company or who may face moral degradation or who are at the risk of entering into the criminal world;
- Children residing in a slum;
- The homeless child residing on the street;
- "Hijra" and "Harijan" children;
- Children infected with or affected by HIV-AIDS;
- Children considered by the Children's Court or the Board to be in need of special protection, care and development (includes undocumented children and asylum seeking/refugee children);
- Children in alternative care;
- Children in conflict or contact with the law

Programmes and services in the scope of this mapping included:

- Social work case management services (identification; referrals; assessments; implementing/ coordinating care plans; case closure; aftercare);
- Mental health and psychosocial assessments;
- Psychosocial counseling services;
- Prevention of family separation;
- Family tracing;
- Alternative care services (non-institutional);
- Services to support children transition from alternative care (reintegration or transition to independent living);
- Services for the protection and rehabilitation services for children in contact with the law;
- Probation services for the protection and rehabilitation services for children in conflict with the law (including diversion, bail, ADR) and follow-up;
- Social enquiry reports, assisting justice professionals in decision-making in cases involving children in conflict with the law, identifying the place of safety, organising family/case conferences);
- Drug/alcohol rehabilitation services;
- Community outreach for violence prevention and Child Protection issues;
- Emergency accommodation.

1.4.2 Social Service Workforce Strengthening

In line with the UNICEF and GSSWFA guidelines[29], the mapping focuses on the planning, development and support of the SSWF.

[29]UNICEF and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Service Workforce for Child Protection, February 2019.

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Methodology

2.1 Research Process and Phasing

The research involved an initial desk review of available documentation and legislation of relevance to the planning and development of the SSWF, and the collection of primary data using a mixed-methods approach to draw from the strengths of qualitative and quantitative data and improve the validity of results through enabling data triangulation. A number of challenges and mitigation strategies were identified prior to data collection, and stringent quality control mechanisms were in place. The research adhered to a strict ethical protocol aligning with UNICEF's Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation Data Collection and Analysis involving children. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Dhaka Institute of Health Economics Ethical Review Board (see Annex A for quality control mechanisms and ethical approval documents).

Prior to data collection, data collection tools were piloted and amended to ensure they were appropriate to context, and the research team completed a comprehensive orientation and training on the data collection methods and tools.

2.2 Data Collection Methods

Data collection methods and tools were developed by adapting the SSWF Mapping Toolkit based on the Bangladeshi context. Data collection tools are detailed in Annex D[30].

Data collection involved the administration of six types of quantitative surveys, qualitative key informant interviews, qualitative focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, detailed below.

Broadly, surveys and interviews were used to gather information about the planning, development and support of the SSWF in the government and non-government sectors to collectively address the aims of the mapping. Information was sought for the number of the SSWF, demographics, the categories of employees, services provided, mandates and functions, workforce distribution, education and qualification requirements, available education and training opportunities, key challenges facing the SSWF for child protection, and initiatives in place to strengthen the workforce.

[30]Amendments included: ensuring that correct locations, administrative structure and categories of SSWF were captured; simplifying the survey to collect information about the total workforce as opposed to asking all questions for each category of worker, due to limited data monitoring / institutional knowledge / distinct responsibilities of different categories of social worker in practice; simplifying questions relating to initiatives for strengthening the SSWF, and deleting questions where information could be obtained at KIIs with national-level stakeholders (e.g. educational requirements and accreditation processes)

2.2.1 Quantitative Data Collection

Quantitative surveys were conducted in a two-stage process. First, key institution surveys were conducted to provide an overarching view of the SSWF in each of the relevant government and non-government institutions / bodies with a SSWF involved in child protection. Information provided in the government and non-government key institution surveys was used to identify individual SSWF members to complete individual worker surveys. Surveys were conducted in-person and were administered using the Kobo software on a tablet. Responses were input by enumerators to ensure accuracy and minimise error.

2.2.2 Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative data collection involved a series of key informant interviews (KIIs) with government and non-government stakeholders at national level and focus group discussions (FGDs) with individual SSWF members and supervisors. KIIs and FGDs were semi-structured to ensure a level of standardisation in the data collected, but were used flexibly to enable a participant-led discussion.

Questionnaire schedules guided discussions to ensure a level of standardisation in the data collected; however, these were used flexibly, to enable a participant-led discussion, and were adapted depending on the interviewee's professional role, experience and availability. The table below outlines each method and sample.

Table 2: Data collection methods

Data collection method and sample	Purpose/Information gathered
Key Institution Surveys: Government and non government National level: 9 Division level: 16 District level: 46 Upazila level: 60	(DSS, Child Helpline-1098; MoWCA NTCC, OCCs and 109 helpline; NGOs) Number of SSWF; categories of SSWF; child protection roles and responsibilities; challenges to delivery of child protection services; initiatives to strengthen the workforce; data monitoring systems; recommendations
Key Institution Survey: Education/training providers Universities: 4 DSS RTCs: 6 DSS NTC: 1	Degree programmes and short courses available relevant to social work; information relating to modules and course content (particularly course relevant to child protection); Course development and accreditation processes; number of graduates; perceptions relating to challenges for the SSWF; recommendations

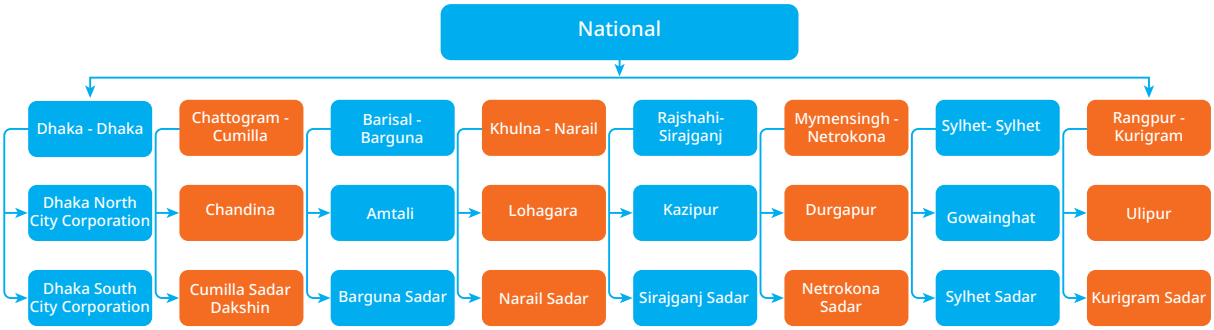
Data collection method and sample	Purpose/Information gathered
Individual worker survey Total: 390 Formal Gov workers: 105 Formal NGO workers: 176 Informal workers: 66 Gov supervisors: 24 NGO supervisors: 19	Formal: Entity, job title, perceptions relating to supervision, roles relative to job description Informal: Reasons for becoming an informal worker Supervisors: Experience providing supervision All: Geographic location; roles and responsibilities; demographic characteristics (education and specialism, age, gender); experience; training; satisfaction in role; perception of confidence in child protection responsibilities; challenges
Key informant interviews Total: 19	Gather expert perspectives on the functioning of the SSWF, the key barriers and bottlenecks to the delivery of services, the implementation of the normative framework and recommendations for strengthening the planning, development and support to the SSWF, (DSS government officials, allied government stakeholders, NGO and INGO headquarters, UNICEF, Association for Social Workers)
Life history interviews Adolescents: 6 male (12-14 years); 4 female (16-17 years) Caregivers: 8 female (26-75 years); 2 male (44-50 years)	Children's circumstances, protection needs, challenges, services received, perceptions about the services relative to needs, and recommendations.
Focus group discussions with Social Workers N = 16 (government, non-government and informal workers, one FGD in each Upazila)	Perceptions and attitudes regarding training, career progression, development opportunities, supervision, mentoring effectiveness, views on SSWF coordination mechanisms, challenges and recommendations for strengthening child protection in the SSWF.

2.2.3 Sampling for Quantitative Data Collection

A sample was selected to ensure representativeness of findings nationally. Key institution surveys were administered in each of the 8 Divisions. One District was selected in each Division, and within each of these Districts, 2 Upazilas / cities were selected (i.e. 16 Upazilas / city corporations total). This resulted in 32 mapping areas (8 Division level, 8 District level, 16 Upazila level). The following Districts and Upazilas were selected to reflect diversity in the sample in terms of urban / rural populations, child protection vulnerability, climate vulnerability, and ensuring the inclusion of the most vulnerable Districts in terms of child protection indicators identified by UNICEF (including Barguna, Narail, Netrokona, Mymensingh, Rajshahi and Sirajganj)[31].

[31]UNICEF Bangladesh, District Ranking for CP programme (Draft) Ranking Map, 26 April 21, p. 1

Figure 1: Selected research sites



Purposive sampling was used to identify key institutions to complete surveys at the national level and subnational level based on findings from the desk review, with the assistance of UNICEF Bangladesh and the DSS. Snowball sampling techniques were utilised to identify non-government institutions at sub-national level and individual social workers at Upazila level to be included in the surveys.

The sample for the individual worker surveys aimed for diversity across the social service workforce, encompassing professionals and paraprofessionals in the government and non-government sectors, in addition to informal workers providing social services for child protection and individuals supervising social workers. Individual worker surveys were implemented at Upazila level. While the intended sample for individual workers was N = 558 (based on estimate[32]), it was not possible to identify this number of workers. This is due to the low number of social workers eligible for this study identified in the field (i.e. a small SSWF focusing on core child protection responsibilities). In total, 390 individual worker surveys were conducted.

2.2.4 Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection

For the KIIs, participants were selected through purposive sampling, to ensure that a broad range of perspectives were captured in the research. Furthermore, it helped to ensure that the research only included participants who had direct knowledge of the issues most pertinent to the research. The aim was to reflect the perspectives of diverse stakeholders.

For the life history interviews, adolescent and parent/caregiver participants were purposively selected using a snowball sampling technique, identified during surveys with institutions and individual workers. Cases reflected typical child protection matters dealt with by government, NGO and informal workers and represented diversity in gender, age and location (urban and rural). Representation included children under parental care and those in alternative care (although note, it was difficult to identify child protection cases in which children were not in institutional care). Caregivers and children (aged 12-17) in the sample were unrelated, resulting in representation of 40 different child protection cases.

[32]Using population estimate, total SSWF estimate from the 2019 assessment and Slovin's Formula.

Frontline worker FGD participants were selected purposively utilizing a snowball sampling technique, whereby participants were identified during NGO and Government KI surveying. Social workers reflected the diverse government, non-government and informal workforce operating in the field.

2.2.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted on individual worker survey data to assess the structure and scope of the workforce, development and support of the workforce. Key institution data was analysed to calculate the total number of the workforce, structure of the workforce, and understand overarching frameworks in relation to planning, development and support of the workforce. Qualitative data was coded using MAXQDA software to identify key themes, connections and explanations relevant to the research questions, particularly those relating to roles and responsibilities, capacity and perceptions relating to available education and training opportunities, supervision and support. The team adopted a thematic analysis approach to exploring qualitative data.

All primary data was triangulated with desk review materials to understand the level of alignment between the normative framework and practice.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3

Findings: Planning the Social Services Workforce

3.1 Normative Framework for Child Protection

3.1.1 International Standards

The establishment of a SSWF for child protection requires a comprehensive and well-defined normative framework, setting out clear roles, functions, competencies and skills for social service workers, the establishment of governing and regulatory bodies, the standardisation of qualifications, the development and enforcement of minimum professional standards of practice, registration and licensing requirements, and opportunities for professional development[33]. The framework may be based in laws and policies, or embedded in laws relating to the protection of children[34].

3.1.2 Normative Framework in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, there is legislation establishing both child protection responsibilities of specific SSWF members, child protection concerns and groups of children at risk. The primary legislation defining child protection responsibilities is The Children Act 2013 (amended in 2018).

It should be noted that respondents from government, non-government and academic sectors highlighted that there is poor implementation of child protection laws and frameworks by the SSWF at present[35]. This is evidenced in sections 3.3.3 and 3.3.4 relating to the scope and capacity of the workforce and service delivery.

An overview of the normative framework, its limitations and implementation are provided in the table below. Details of the normative framework and its implementation are provided throughout the findings section in relation to each relevant component of SSWF strengthening.

[33]UNICEF and the Global SSWF Alliance, Guidelines to Strengthen the SSWF for Child Protection, February 2019, p. 19.
[34]UNICEF and the Global SSWF Alliance, Guidelines to Strengthen the SSWF for Child Protection, February 2019, p. 19.
[35]KIIs, September 2023

Table 3: Legislative provisions for child protection in Bangladesh

Legislation	Provisions relating to child protection	Limitations/ implementation
The Children Act 2013 (amended in 2018)[36]	• Designates the **DSS as the State body with overall responsibility for children's care**. • Establishes **a system for identification, referral and case management** of children in need of care and protection • Specifies the appointment and responsibilities of **SSWF mandated to report and respond** to child protection cases (child welfare boards [CWBs], child affairs police officers [CAPOs], children's courts, child development centres, social workers and probation officers). • Imposes a **general duty upon 'any person or organisation'** who comes into contact or becomes aware of the presence of a 'disadvantaged child' or a child in contact or in conflict with the law, to **refer** the child to a **Probation Officer,** a **Social Worker**, the **police** station or the **DSS**. • Outlines that **assessment** of the child must be carried out and endorsed by a Probation Officer, with assistance from a Social Worker. • Establishes processes for the provision of **alternative care, prioritisation of reintegration** for disadvantaged children and children in contact and conflict with the law, **family tracing**, and **diversion** for children in conflict with the law • Sets out penalties to be imposed on those who carry out **offences against children** including exploitation; cruelty; employing a child in begging; and being drunk whilst in charge of child.	• SSWF distribution is not in accordance with the Act (e.g. probation officers only allocated at District-level) • In practice, workers are both not working in accordance with their mandate • Lack of Rules outlining processes for diversion and reintegration • Diversion is limited in practice • The most common course of action for disadvantaged children and children in contact and conflict with the law is placement in safe homes, CDCs or other residential institutions, and reintegration is limited • SSWF has limited capacity to provide redress / support for child victims

[36]The Children Act 2013 entered into force on 21 August 2013 and was amended by the Children (Amendment) Act 2018. The Children Act 2013 (amended in 2018) has overriding effect (per section 3), meaning that if there are any provisions in any other laws in force for the time being which conflict with the Children Act 2013 (amended in 2018), the provisions of the Children Act 2013 (amended in 2018) must prevail.

Legislation	Provisions relating to child protection	Limitation/ implementation
	• Contains a closed list of children (defined as persons under the age of 18)[37] that constitute **'disadvantaged children'** (see section 1.4.1), to whom the DSS is responsible for ensuring '*special protection, care and development*'	
Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010[38]	• Establishes the rights and remedies available to **victims of domestic violence**, defined as: 'physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse or economic abuse against a woman or a child of a family by any other person of that family with whom victim is, or has been, in family relationship.'	*While bodies and processes have been established to provide redress to victims, their capacity is limited in practice*
Women and Children Repression Prevention (Amendment) act 2020[39]	• **Criminalises offences against** women and **children** including trafficking, injury caused by use of corrosive substances, rape or death in consequence of rape, sexual oppression and impairing the limb of a child for the purposes of begging.	
Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh[40]	• Prohibits torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment or treatment against any person, which implicitly includes any child within Bangladesh's borders. • Recognises the responsibility of the State to provide social security to orphans who are Bangladeshi citizens.	*Note, The Children Act recognises the state as responsible for ensuring 'special protection, care and development' for vulnerable children*
The Guardian and Wards Act 1890[41]	• Defines the scenarios in which the removal of guardianship may occur, including: ill-treatment or neglect to take proper care of the minor; conviction of an offence demonstrating defect of character which makes him unfit to be a guardian to the minor, and abuse of trust.	*Note, The Children Act outlines the assessment to determine the provision of alternative care*

[37]Section 4, Children Act 2013 (amended in 2018).

[38]Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 Chapter 2, Section 3.

[39]Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000, Section 5.

[40]Constitution on the People's Republic of Bangladesh 1972, Article 35(5) and Article 15(d)

[41]The Guardianship and Wards Act 1890, Article 39(a)-(j).

3.2 Institutional Framework and Planning of the Social Services Workforce

3.2.1 Ministry of Social Welfare

The MoSW is a key Ministry for human resource development, poverty eradication, and welfare of vulnerable groups in Bangladesh including "orphans" and "children at risk"[42]. The MoSW is the lead government agency for child protection and is responsible for the oversight of the Children Act 2013. The MoSW is mandated to implement programs for the development of vulnerable groups[43]. Numerous departments/organisations with child protection responsibilities sit within the MoSW, including the Department of Social Services, the Child Helpline 1098 and Street Child Rehabilitation Centres.

Department of Social Services

The Department of Social Services (DSS) is the primary protection agency in Bangladesh, with a mandate to provide services to vulnerable groups[44]. The mission of the DSS is to provide integrated and developmental social services[45]. All departments / offices at the headquarters work under the Director General of the DSS. In practice, the majority of DSS activities are related to social protection and financial assistance, as opposed to child protection. The mandated roles of relevant individuals under the DSS are summarised below in Table 4.

The main child protection activities within the DSS occur through support to children in its residential institutions and, more recently, through its activities implemented through the Child Sensitive Social Protection in Bangladesh (CSPB) project (see below).

An organogram indicates several departments within DSS headquarters with oversight of the SSWF providing child protection. These include the Institutional Services Branch (responsible for residential care) and the Probation Department, which sits within the Community-Based and Youth Services Registration Branch. Notably, a Child Protection Unit was recently established at DSS headquarters (HQ), although human resources are yet to be deployed to support the functioning of this unit. Other units under the DSS responsible for overseeing child protection activities at HQ include the institutional services branch and the probation services branch.

DSS organograms exist for each Division, detailing the social workers in District and Upazila social services offices[46]. The organogram indicates there should be:

[42]Ministry of Social Welfare website: http://www.msw.gov.bd/site/page/8f12105d-8107-4543-b501-d30253bf20c6/Ministry-of-Social-Welfare (accessed 20 December 2022).
[43]Constitution of Bangladesh, Article 15(Gha); Ministry of Social Welfare website: http://www.msw.gov.bd/site/page/8f12105d-8107-4543-b501-d30253bf20c6/Ministry-of-Social-Welfare (accessed 20 December 2022).
[44]DSS website: http://www.dss.gov.bd/site/page/06173ded-0bc3-40b0-8166-46f30a3cd690/- (accessed 15 December 2022).
[45]DSS website: http://www.dss.gov.bd/site/page/a25294f3-18a4-4167-83e7-cff39a55aec3/- (accessed 20 December 2022).
[46]E.g. Dhaka organogram, see Annex F

- One social services officer in each Division, District and Upazila social services office, municipal unit and hospital unit;
- Multiple union social workers and one field supervisor within each Upazila office;
- One probation officer in the probation and aftercare unit at District level;
- Note that there is no administrative structure or workforce allocated at the local village level.

Urban Community Development Offices (UCDOs) operate in parallel to Upazila offices in urban areas. There are a total of 80 UCDOs, including in all city corporations and District cities. Social service officers (also sometimes titled Urban Community Development Officers) within the UCDOs operate and hold the same title as the social service officers in Upazila social services offices.

There are also 12 City Corporations in Bangladesh, which have operations city corporation social service offices, within which social workers function (not outlined in organogram).

However, it should be noted that in practice, the organisational structure differs from what the organogram suggests; there are often fewer union social workers than stated, and several municipal social service units appear to have no social work function (see section 3.3.1)[47]. The administrative structure of the DSS has not altered since before Bangladesh gained independence, meaning it has not been adapted to evolving contexts in Bangladesh.

While the Children Act provides for a probation office and officer at Upazila level, these have not been established[48]. However, an amendment of the Probation of Offenders Ordinance has been submitted to the Cabinet Division for initial approval which has specific provisions for the recruitment of probation officers dedicated for child protection and to perform the roles and responsibilities as mandated in the Children Act[49].

Bangladesh Child Helpline 1098

The DSS also runs a Child Helpline 1098 (CHL 1098)[50]. In 2015 the DSS took leadership over the helpline and expanded the helpline nationally[51]. Bangladesh CHL 1098 offers free and confidential telephone and emergency response/outreach services for children including but not limited to: telephone counseling, case management, immediate/direct interventions, and referrals to appropriate services in the local community. In 2021, the helpline responded to over 120, 000 calls[52].

[46]E.g. Dhaka organogram, see Annex F

[47]Identified during data collection

[48]The Children Act 2013 (Amended in 2018), Chapter II.

[49]Information provided by UNICEF during the inception phase of this mapping.

[50]DSS, 1098 Helpline website: https://www-dss-gov-bd.translate.goog/site/page/bb38e6c2-e1b6-4798-82d5-9e261a7ea89b/%E0%A7%A7%E0%A7%A6%E0%A7%AF%E0%A7%AE-%E0%A6%B6%E0%A6%BF%E0%A6%B6%E0%A7%81-%E0%A6%B8%E0%A6%B9%E0%A6%BE%E0%A7%9F%E0%A6%A4%E0%A6%BE%E0%A7%9F-%E0%A6%AB%E0%A7%8B%E0%A6%A8?_x_tr_sl=bn&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=sc&_x_tr_sch=http, Accessed 9th January 2023.

[51]UNICEF & Child Helpline International, Standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the centralized call centre child helpline 1098 Bangladesh, September 2019.

Upon receiving a complaint, the call agents will determine the appropriate response, which will either be: providing relevant signposting information; providing centralised telephone psychosocial counseling, or referring cases which require an in-person response to a decentralised level (i.e. to Union Social Workers, who are then responsible for mobilising necessary support and following up on the case)[53]. The centralized call centre also conducts follow-up calls to support the effective delivery of services and to monitor the most critical cases. However, the call centre has no control of the services or responses which are (or should be) provided by other actors[54]. Social workers within the centralised helpline office include call agents, psychosocial counsellors and helpline managers. Standard operating procedures (SOPs) defining the responsibilities of staff were developed for the helpline in 2019 by the DSS with support from UNICEF. There are a total of 31 staff working in the helpline (including three supervisors).

Child Sensitive Social Protection in Bangladesh (CSPB) project

In phase II of the CSPB project, UNICEF and DSS have worked in partnership on a number of initiatives relating to planning and developing the SSWF. These include: strengthening CHL 1098; strengthening case management and community-based child protection mechanisms; developing and promoting a post qualifying (PQ) framework for social work practices; increasing the number of Child Protection Social Workers at Upazila and union level under the DSS to perform duties for children as mandated to the Department by Children Act 2013; strengthening Community Based Child Protection Committees to prevent, identify, report and refer child protection cases to services; strengthening the functioning of Child Welfare Boards as per Children Act 2013; policy advocacy for implementation of the Children Act, and drafting other relevant laws, policies, guidelines and standards. A Terms of Reference[55] and a circular[56] were developed by UNICEF and DSS defining the responsibilities of Child Protection Social Workers.

As part of the CSPB project, the DSS is engaging in activities in urban areas to support child protection and the provision of city probation services in accordance with the Children Act 2013[57]. Three urban outreach social service hubs have been established for children in street situations in Dhaka (each with at least one social worker/facilitator), with plans to expand to other cities. Through this project, 37 Outreach social workers have been employed to provide social services to children in street situations. These workers were not included in the scope of this mapping, as in practice, they focus provision of other services.

The table below provides a summary of each category of DSS social worker and their mandated responsibilities with regard to child protection. Details of their responsibilities in practice are detailed in section 3.3.3.

[52]UNICEF, Investing in the Social Service Workforce is crucial for the protection of millions of children in Bangladesh, Press Release, 29 March 2022: https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/press-releases/investing-social-service-workforce-crucial-protection-millions-children-bangladesh

[53]KII with UNICEF Child Protection Specialist, December 2022.

[54]UNICEF & Child Helpline International, Standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the centralized call centre child helpline 1098 Bangladesh, September 2019.

[55]UNICEF and DSS, Terms of Reference for Child Protection Social Workers, 2020.

[56]DSS, Circular for Social Workers under the CSPB project, 9th March 2022.

[57]Information provided by UNICEF during inception phase of this project.

Table 4: DSS social workers and mandated responsibilities

DSS worker category	Mandated responsibilities
Probation Officers Children Act, 2013[58]; Probation of Offenders Ordinance[59] *Should have a post in every Upazila. However, in practice, they only operate at District level.*	■ Work in coordination with the CAPO to determine course of action for children coming into contact or conflict with the law ■ To refer disadvantaged children to the Social Services Office ■ To carry out an assessment of the child ■ To monitor and support a child in contact or conflict with the law throughout the judicial process ■ To rehabilitate a child in conflict with the law ■ Family tracing ■ implement and monitor diversion ■ Monitor children in CDCs ■ Initiating alternative care ■ Reintegration ■ Rehabilitation of parents to support reintegration ■ Submitting information to the CWB
Social Services Officers *Posted in every District and Upazila social services office*	*No documentation of role provided. In practice, social service officers in District and Upazila officers have limited child protection functions, but oversee the work of social workers*
Social worker/Union social worker/Municipal Social Worker/Urban Community Development Officer The Children Act[60] Job Description Documentation and Circular/letter distributed by the DSS *Posted in every Upazila office, but are often few in number*	■ Fulfilling duties of a probation officer until their appointment ■ Family tracing ■ Assisting probation officer to carry out assessments of the child ■ Monitoring children in alternative care ■ Reintegration ■ Management and distribution of funds under the rural / urban social services programme (no child protection)[61] ■ Case management of child protection cases[62] *In practice, they have limited capacity to carry out child protection and primarily work on social protection*
Field supervisor Job Description Documentation[63] *Located in every Upazila office*	■ Oversight of cash transfer programme, supporting union and Upazila social service officers; conducting home visits, progress reviews, and 'necessary counseling' (relating to cash transfer programmes – no child protection). *In practice, they also have child protection functions*

[58]The Children Act 2013 (Amended in 2018), Chapter II.

59The Probation of Offenders Act, Section 13, http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-302/section-13463.html

[60]The Children Act 2013 (Amended in 2018), Chapter II.

[61]DSS, Job Description of Union Social Workers, Undated document shared by DSS, January 2022.

[62]DSS Circular "Strengthening Case Management Services", October 2018

Ministry	Allied workers/role
Child protection Social Worker Terms of Reference developed by UNICEF and DSS[64] and a circular distributed by the DSS in 2022.[65] *In CSPB locations*	■ Identification of child protection cases ■ Case management ■ Supporting other SSWF members develop appropriate intervention plan for the children. ■ Diversion and other support for children in conflict with the law ■ Making referrals, considering best interest of the child ■ Follow-up on cases ■ Reintegration activities ■ Support the functioning of the CWBs at Upazila level and CBCPCs ■ Promote CHL 1098 and supporting mobilisation of support
Ward and Village Welfare Volunteers Concept note.[66] *In CSPB locations*	■ Referrals; ■ Support social workers in identifying and providing appropriate support to children identified in The Children Act, including probation; ■ Support establishment and functions of CBCPC ■ Support community mobilisation and awareness-raising; ■ Reintegration and Follow-up
Child Helpline 1098 Call Agents/Psychosocial counsellors[67]	■ Responding to complaints of child abuse ■ Referring complaints to the local union social worker ■ Following up on cases to see course of action taken ■ Providing psychosocial counseling to children over the phone ■ Signposting children to services

3.2.2 Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs

The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) is the lead ministry in promoting gender equality, women's empowerment, protection and uphold the rights of women and children. MoWCA is mandated to implement the National Action Plan for Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children (2013-2025) and the National Action Plan to End Child Marriage (2018-2030). There are a number of bodies and activities under the MoWCA relating to the protection of children, including the National Trauma Counseling Centre, One Stop Crisis Centres and the Street Children Rehabilitation Programme.

[63]DSS, Job Description of Union Social Workers, Undated document shared by DSS, January 2022.
[64]DSS, Terms of Reference for Social Workers, 2020. Document provided by DSS, January 2022.
[65]DSS, Circular for Social Workers under the CSPB project, 9th March 2022.
[66]UNICEF, Concept Note, Strengthening of Community Based Child Protection Mechanisms, Document provided by UNICEF
[67]SOPs

National Trauma Counseling Centre

The National Trauma Counseling Centre (NTCC) provides psychosocial counseling support to violence against women and children, has oversight of the One-Stop Crisis Centres, and conducts different types of psychosocial counseling training for allied professionals (notably, not DSS workers) to enable them to carry out counseling services[68]. **Clinical psychologists, psychosocial counsellors** and **psychotherapists** work in the centre. No documentation was identified outlining the normative framework for the NTCCs, rather information was obtained from the website and survey data. However, the survey respondent indicated that the NTCC holds an 'Annual Programme Agreement' with MoWCA to delineate aims and responsibilities[69].

One-Stop Crisis Centre

The Multi-Sectoral Programme on Violence Against Women is an ongoing project which has been implemented jointly by the Government of Bangladesh and Government of Denmark under the MoWCA[70]. Thirteen One Stop Crisis Centres (OCCs)[71] were established under the programme, which are located in the Medical College Hospitals across Bangladesh. OCCs provide health care, police assistance, DNA test, social services, legal assistance, psychological counseling and shelter services, specifically to child and female victims of physical and sexual abuse[72]. The SSWF operating within the OCCs include psychosocial counsellors, clinical psychologists, psychiatrists and psychotherapists (in addition to allied workers, including professionals in the law enforcement, medical and legal aid sectors)[73].

No documentation was identified outlining the normative framework for the OCCs, rather information was obtained from the website and survey data. One KII reported that the one stop crisis centres will be closing in 2024 due to the end of project funding[74].

3.2.3 Other Allied Stakeholders and Initiatives

A number of ministries have allied workforce members who form important components of the broader child protection system. While they have not been included in the scope of this mapping, the table below outlines the roles of these bodies and particular allied workers involved in coordinating child protection.

[68]http://ntcc-mowca.gov.bd/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3&mk=1; KI survey, NTCC
[69]KI survey – NTCC
[70]http://mspvaw.gov.bd/contain/15
[71]Located in Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chattogram, Sylhet; Kulna; Barishal; Cumilla; Rangpur; Faridpur; Cox's Bazaae' Noakhali; Pabna; Bogura
[72]KI Surveys, OCCs
[73]KI Surveys, OCCs
[74]KII, BRAC.

Table 5: Allied workers

Ministry	Allied workers/role
MoWCA Department of Women's Affairs - Accelerating the Protection of Children (APC) Programme	**Street Child Rehabilitation Centres:** Provides shelter, non-formal education, food, psychosocial support, case management and family reintegration to street children. **Child Rights Facilitators (CRFs):** implement and supervise activities conducted in **child protection community hubs** and ensure children's access to government and non-government child protection services (awareness raising, identification and referral)
National Helpline for Violence against women and children[75]	The 109 helpline makes **r**eferrals to the CHL-1098, the OCCs, courts, police stations, Upazila Parishad Council, Education Officer, Women Affairs Officer or Nirbahi Officer (but does not provide direct child protection).[76] They have 42 social workers operating the phone lines.
Ministry of Home Affairs Child Affairs Desks[77] (*and Anti-trafficking authority; Prisons and Jails*)	**Child Affairs Police Officers (CAPO)**: Maintaining separate files and registers for the cases involving children; ensuring probation officers and parents/guardians are informed about cases involving children; providing immediate psychosocial support for the child and ensuring medical support is provided; taking necessary measures to meet the basic needs of the child; ensuring the age of the child is being determined correctly; working with the probation officer to take diversionary measures and assess the possibility of bail, OR arranging a placement in a Safe Home before producing the child in the court; sending monthly information to probation officers, police headquarters and District legal aid committee on child related cases. However, Child Affairs Desks have recently been appointed responsibility of responding to cases of women, the elderly and persons with disabilities, so CAPOs are not dedicated to children's cases alone. Competing responsibilities limits their capacity to investigate and respond to children's cases.[78]
Ministry of Education -Education Directorates	**Education officers:** Identification and referral of child protection cases, ensuring education enrolment (particularly of girls), educational counseling
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare/ Directorate of Family Planning	**Family planning officers/health assistants/family welfare assistants:** birth registration; identification and referral of child protection cases. [79]

[75]http://nhc.gov.bd/

[76]http://nhc.gov.bd/ ; KI survey with 109 helpline

[77]The Children's Act 2013 introduced the establishment of Child Affairs Desks in police stations, outlining the responsibilities of the CAPO

[78]KII with UNICEF justice specialist, February 2024.

[79]Directorate General of Family Planning Website. https://www.dgfpbd.org/index.html#

Ministry	Allied workers/role
Ministry of Labour and Employment	Leading the National Plan of Action to Eliminate Child Labour 2020-2025.[80]
Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs (MoLJPA)	**Children's Courts, Family Courts and other criminal courts:** Integral role for children in contact and in conflict with the law rendering justice **Supreme Court Special Committee on Child Rights:** Advisory body for implementation of the Children Act and other relevant laws where there is a violation of child rights, including the recommendation of recruiting additional probation officers or social workers. The Ministry, in partnership with UNICEF, is responsible for administering multisectoral training on implementing The Children Act, which includes union social workers and probation officers.[81]
Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives/The Office of the Registrar General, Birth and Death Registration	The Birth and Death Registration Guidelines (2021)[82] outlines the institutional structure and functions and responsibilities of those involved in the birth registration, in accordance with the Registration of Births and Deaths Act 2004 (amended in 2018),[83] which provides for the mandatory registration of births within 45 days. The guidelines outline the key roles of **registrars, health workers and village police** in the birth registration of children.
Residential institutions under DSS and other bodies	**DSS:** Government Children's Homes (Sarkari Shishu Sadan); Child Development Centres (Shishu Unnayan Kendra) for children in conflict and in contact with the law; Deaf and dumb school; Training and Rehabilitation Centres for Handicapped Children and for Destitute and Vagrant Children; Safe Homes; Baby homes; The Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahiyan Trust 'Children Families for girls'; National Disability Development Foundation – Home for Orphans with disabilities **Others:** Independent orphanages (licensed in accordance with the Orphan and Widow Homes Act); Lillah Boarding (orphanages attached to a madrasah)

3.2.4 Non-Government Organisations and Informal Workers

The study team found it difficult to identify a non-government SSWF carrying out the key violence prevention responsibilities. Rather, organisations tended to report focusing on ending child marriage,

[80]Central Monitoring Committee on Child Labour, National Plan of Action to Eliminate Child Labour, https://mole.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mole.portal.gov.bd/project/6038e47e_5792_45f4_8fc0_958f113443f9/NPA.pdf.

[81]KII, UNICEF Justice Specialist, February 2024.

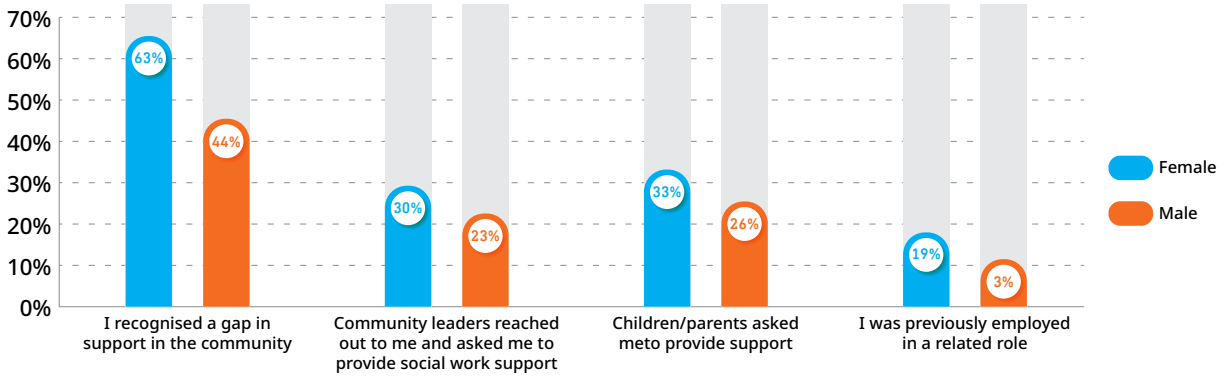
[82]Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives, Birth and Death Registration Guidelines 2021, Available at: https://orgbdr.portal.gov.bd/site/policies/fb656729-50ca-4301-94ea-c93de5bd0cb9

[83]Birth and Death Registration Act 2004 (Amended in 2018), Available at: https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/sites/unicef.org.bangladesh/files/2018-07/BR%20Act%20amendment%20%2718.pdf.

general support to children with disabilities, child labour prevention, supporting engagement of education and providing nutrition. Only NGOs who provide targeted services aiming to prevent or respond to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation were included in the mapping, and in practice, it appears that the scope of these workers is often minimal.

Informal workers have also been included in the study in order to capture to what extent, when and why individuals assume the role of social workers in the local community and their capacity to deliver child protection. When asked why informal workers assumed their role, the most popular response was that they recognised gaps in support or people in need in the community. Informal workers had previously been employed in the field of social work in only 9 percent of cases (higher for females at 19 percent).

Figure 2: Reasons for becoming an informal social worker.



3.2.5 Coordination Mechanisms

The effective planning of the social service workforce requires the establishment of a national leadership group of relevant stakeholders to coordinate SSWF-strengthening efforts[84]. A national leadership group can support ownership and commitment to the SSWF-strengthening process[85]. At the sub-national levels, effective coordination between SSWF members is also required for effective case management of child protection cases and delivery of services to meet children's needs[86]. Frameworks and key projects supporting coordination are detailed below, while the implementation and effectiveness of coordination mechanisms are outlined in section 3.3.4.

[84]UNICEF and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Service Workforce for Child Protection, February 2019, p.16.
[85]UNICEF and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Service Workforce for Child Protection, February 2019, p.16.
[86]Ibid, p.13.

Child Welfare Boards (CWB)

The Children Act 2013 establishes multisectoral child welfare boards (CWBs) to operate in all Districts and Upazilas, to be overseen by national-level CWB, chaired by the Minister of Social Welfare[87]. The Act defines the various responsibilities of the CWBs, which broadly include: providing guidelines for the rehabilitation and reintegration of disadvantaged children and children in contact or in conflict with the law into family and social life (and supervise, coordinate and evaluate activities within child development centres, prisons or other certified institutions); determining appropriate modes of diversion or alternative care, and advise the development and implementation of plans to assure child welfare and development; monitoring the number of disadvantaged children and children in contact or conflict with the law and their standards of living and using data to frame guidelines and make recommendations, and; meeting at regular intervals to discuss child welfare cases (i.e. monthly case conferences). However, while these CWBs have been established in all Upazilas in line with The Children Act, they are only active in CSPB project locations[88]. The first national-level CWB meeting was held in May 2023[89].

Community Based Child Protection Committees (CBCPC)

Although not formally mandated under legislation, the DSS is currently working with UNICEF to mainstream community-based child protection mechanisms through implementing community-based child protection committees (CBCPCs)[90]. These committees should consist of a range of local professionals (e.g. council member, health workers, religious and NGO representatives, social worker) and adolescents. The CBCPCs have duties to ensure overall development and protection of the child[91]. The most relevant activities to this mapping include: identification and reporting of disadvantaged children and abuse cases to social workers or CAPOs; providing parenting support services to reintegrate children; awareness-raising about child protection issues; and sharing relevant information to the CWBs. While it is the intention to have the CBCPCs in all wards, at present, few have been established. To support the strengthening of community-based child protection mechanisms, UNICEF and DSS are also working to establish Ward / Village Welfare Volunteers, of whom there should be one in each village / ward (and two in urban areas).[92]

[87]The Children Act, 2013 Section 7. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/sites/unicef.org.bangladesh/files/2018-07/Children%20Act%202013%20English.pdf

[88]KII with UNICEF Child Protection Section, September 2023

[89]KII with DSS representative

[90]UNICEF, Concept Note, Strengthening of Community Based Child Protection Mechanisms, Document provided by UNICEF

[91]Ibid

[92]Ibid

3.3 The Size, Scope and Structure of the Social Service Workforce

A critical component of planning a SSWF is identifying how many workforce members are needed to meet the needs of children in the country[93]. International guidelines highlight the importance of establishing a client-to-worker ratio, with consideration of the needs of the child population and diversity of SSWF member required to deal with any particular case. There is no set international standard for a specific number, as it should always take into consideration country contexts[94]. The Supreme Court Special Committee on Child Rights reported that 110, 000 social workers would be needed to meet the protection needs of children in Bangladesh[95]. Assessing these needs and establishing a nationally-recognised ratio is important for preventing staff burn out and attrition of the SSWF.

Challenges faced when mapping the size, scope and structure of the social service workforce

Across sectors in Bangladesh, the concept of 'child protection' is poorly understood and as a result, perceptions are often misaligned with the definitions adopted for this mapping. Rather, the nature of risks to which children in Bangladesh are exposed means that individuals often perceive the key areas of child protection to be child marriage, child labour, social exclusion of children with disabilities and poverty. The majority of social workers' activities in Bangladesh appear to target these areas. It was very challenging to a) identify practitioners working in child protection as defined and b) keep respondents (at institutional and individual level) focused on services targeting prevention and response to violence and ensure they separated this from activities in the other important areas. The research team worked extremely hard to support respondents to ensure the differentiation of key child protection services and accuracy in reporting.

In practice, the term 'social worker' is applied to a wide range of employees working within the DSS, including individuals who do not provide direct social work responsibilities. Due to a lack of professionalisation and specialization of the workforce at both the institutional and individual level, individuals are regarded as social workers if they contribute in any way to the wellbeing of individuals in society (for example, cooks, drivers, administrators within the DSS are regarded as social workers), and those providing these services to children are widely regarded as providing child protection. This created an additional challenge of ensuring the identification and reporting of only the 'core' social workers providing child protection, and assignment of the correct job title in surveys.[96]

[93]https://www.socialserviceworkforce.org/system/files/resource/files/Guidelines-to-Strengthen-SSW-Child-Protection.pdf p.20

[94]https://www.socialserviceworkforce.org/system/files/resource/files/Guidelines-to-Strengthen-SSW-Child-Protection.pdf p.21

[95]United Nations Children's Fund, Executive Board Second regular session 2021, September 2021, Bangladesh Country programme document, p. 14.

[96]In a small number of cases, individuals may have indicated that they are a 'child protection social worker' as part of the CSPB project, when they are a social worker who works on child protection (but are not employed under the project). Note, there were two respondents in Narail Sadar who indicated they are a CSPB worker, when documentation provided by UNICEF suggests that CSPB social workers are not located here.

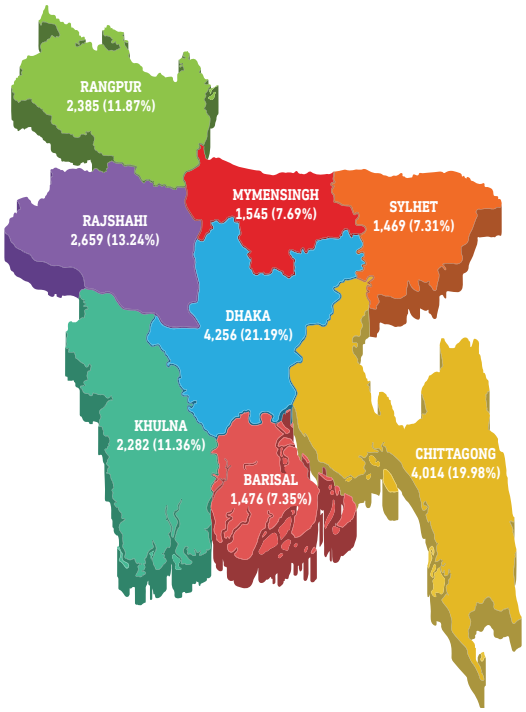
At the institutional level, while departments could identify the categories of social workers within their department, respondents were often unable to provide information relating to the number of individuals working under each category who perform child protection duties. Following the pilot, the surveys had to be simplified, and informants continued to struggle to provide all necessary information in the simplified surveys. At Division and District level, most respondents were unable to provide a breakdown of the social workers at Upazila level, which created challenges in estimating the total SSWF under the DSS. Numbers provided at Division and District level also did not always align with numbers reported at lower administrative levels.

The data provided in the field at Upazila level has therefore been used to develop estimates of the SSWF, as it is deemed to provide the most accurate picture of child protection services being delivered on the ground. However, estimates should be interpreted with consideration of the high level of variability in the number of social workers between Upazilas / Districts. For example, the number of Districts with zero social workers (like Sylhet) could not be determined nationally.

The challenges obtaining the necessary level of information from relevant departments and inconsistencies in responses indicate that, in practice, there is no clear framework for the allocation of child protection duties to specific categories of the workforce, and there is a need to strengthen workforce data management and monitoring mechanisms.

3.3.1 Size of the Workforce

Figure 3: Total Number of SSWF (government, non-government and informal)[97]



[97]Excluding 1,157 NGO workers with no specified location identified in national-level KI surveys

Government workforce

- Findings from this mapping indicate a total of **2, 809[98] social workers under DSS** working in the area of child protection (5 social workers per 100,000[99] children).[100]
- This accounts for approximately 13 percent of the total SSWF (see total estimate further below).
- This number primarily reflects DSS union social workers, Urban Community Development Officers and field supervisors, who spend little time on child protection cases (as they are primarily responsible for social protection).
- There is only one probation officer in each District (not in each Upazila in accordance with the Children Act), and they have to work on both child and adult cases.
- The government SSWF includes 190 'Child protection social workers' who have been appointed under the CSPB project, but these are funded by UNICEF, with no concrete commitment from the DSS to continue funding these posts when the project ends.

Notably, in December 2023, the DSS recruited 962 new individuals who have not been included in this estimate. It is understood that an instruction is to be issued by DSS to ensure that all newly appointed social workers carry out child protection responsibilities in accordance with the Children Act, and UNICEF is arranging training on child protection for these individuals.[101]

The number of social workers should be interpreted in the context of the findings of this report. In practice, social workers operate across the interrelated fields of social protection, social welfare and child protection, without specific duties or capacities related to each. In practice, child protection responsibilities are limited in scale. As stated in the 2022 global state of the SSWF report, DSS social workers "...are para professionals primarily focused on administrative tasks related to administering cash transfers.[102]" This was evident in the present mapping findings.

A shortage of government social workers was the most common theme to arise from interviews and FGDs. Senior DSS stakeholders stated that there are an insufficient number of social workers to meet the needs of the population and fulfill their duties[103]. This was echoed by individual workers[104] themselves, who, when asked about the challenges they face, always reported that manpower is the biggest issue. In total, Divisional social services offices indicated that there were 1, 114 vacant posts for field workers. In FGDs, several government social workers highlighted that there are vacant posts

[98]This figure is debated, and it is acknowledged that as of December 2023 less than 500 dedicated CP Workers existed. This we believe is an inflated figure due to misunderstanding and capacity on what a CPSW is and should be doing.
[99]There is a lack of a standard ratio and we recommend that the government establish a contextualised, evidence-based client-to-worker ratio.
[100]Based on 2019 population estimate
[101]Insight provided by UNICEF.
[102]Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, State of the Social Service Workforce Report 2022: The Vital Role of the Social Service Workforce in Humanitarian Contexts, p. 35.
[103]KII with DSS representative, September 2023
[104]KI survey

within their departments, and several indicated that they are required to work in multiple unions to cover the shortage. While some of these vacancies are likely to have been filled during the recent recruitment, none of these individuals have been recruited for the sole purpose of child protection, meaning the issues discussed throughout this report remain.

Social workers highlighted that their capacity to support children's needs is limited and that they would benefit from having dedicated child protection workers[105]. Individuals highlighted that child protection social workers employed under the CSPB project have helped to reduce their workload, indicating the benefits of increasing manpower and the availability of specialised social workers. However, CSPB workers noted that their position alone was not enough to meet all child protection needs.[106]

"When we initially started working at the social service office, we didn't have to handle such a heavy workload. However, at present, even though there are 10 union social workers posted in our office, only three of us are actively working. Although a new CSPB social service worker has joined recently, we used to perform these types of [child protection] tasks before."[107]

In late 2022, the government announced that it intended to recruit 6, 000 new social workers[108], which would increase the size of the workforce to approximately 9, 000 workers. However, as noted above, less than 1, 000 additional social workers have been recruited at the time of writing. While this is a positive step, the Supreme Court Special Committee on Child Rights reported that Bangladesh require a social service workforce of 110, 000,[109] meaning the total number of social workers falls far short of the number necessary to address child protection needs in Bangladesh.

The number of 'core' DSS social workers in child protection is not proportionate to the population (e.g. in Netrokona Sadar, there are 9 workers per total population of 100,000, while in Sirajganj Sadar, there are 13 social workers per total population of 100,000) and in Sylhet (district level), there are no social workers. The only municipal units with social service workers were in Dhaka, and 3 out of the 8 hospital units at district level indicated that they have no individuals working in child protection. In some locations, it appears that particularly low numbers of 'core' social workers in DSS departments are mitigated by the allocation of CSPB child protection social workers, but this was not always the case. As can be seen in Table 3, the DSS workforce accounts for only 13 percent of social workers.

[105]e.g. FGD Cumilla Sadar Dakshin; FGD Kurigram; FGD Netrokona

[106]E.g. FGD Narail

[107]FGD, Barguna.

[108]UNICEF Bangladesh. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/press-releases/government-commits-strengthening-social-services-workforce-protection-children#:~:text=Government%20commits%20to%20strengthening%20the%20social%20services%20workforce%20for%20the%20protection%20of%20children,-19%20September%202022&text=Dhaka%2C%2019%20September%202022%20%E2%80%93%20The,workforce%20from%203%2C000%20to%209%2C000, accessed 28 December 2022.

[109]United Nations Children's Fund, Executive Board Second regular session 2021, September 2021, Bangladesh Country programme document, p. 14.

There was no evidence that the distribution of the SSWF is planned according to child protections need in each geographic area. This is a particularly important issue, because it means that areas in which there are particularly prominent child protection concerns (e.g. a high concentration of children in street situations with complex needs in urban areas) do not have a sufficient SSWF to deal with such cases.

NGO and informal workforce

This mapping also captured the number of individuals carrying out child protection social worker responsibilities within NGOs and individuals who have taken on an informal role as social workers in Bangladesh.

The majority (71 percent) of the workforce is comprised of non-government social workers, and informal workers appear to make up approximately 15 percent of those providing child protection. As shown throughout this report, there are limitations to relying on a non-government workforce who are more likely to be in part-time, project based contracts, carry out limited child protection responsibilities, and have lower levels of education and training.

The number of non-government and informal social workers in child protection is also not proportionate to the population. There were some Upazilas in which there were no informal workers or NGOs carrying out child protection roles (5 out of the 16 surveyed Upazilas for informal workers and 2 out of 16 for NGOs). While in some areas, a higher number of NGO and informal workers appear to be in place where there are particularly low numbers of government social workers, this is rarely the case.

Total workforce

Taking government, non-government and informal workers into consideration, there are a total estimated 21,288 social workers in Bangladesh (37 social workers per 100,000 children).[110] This is less than one quarter (21 percent) of the 100,000 social workers needed in the country,[111] even after including informal workers. As detailed throughout the following sections, the shortage of workers is compounded by a range of issues, including: competing responsibilities; lack of relevant education and training; limited capacity to deliver core child protection services; and insufficient resources to carry out duties.

[110]See Annex E for data on SSWF per entity and category of worker, where available.

[111]United Nations Children's Fund, Executive Board Second regular session 2021, September 2021, Bangladesh Country programme document, p. 14.

Table 5: Estimates of the social services workforce for child protection in in Bangladesh, by Division.

Division	Population	Estimated SSWF	Required SSWF	Percentage distribution by sector			
				DSS	MOWCA	NGO	Informal
Barishal	9,100,102	1,476	6,060	12.5%	1.2%	73.4%	12.9%
Chattogram	33,232,326	4,014	22,130	13.9%	0.6%	69.3%	16.1%
Dhaka	44,215,107	4,256	29,443	14.9%	0.8%	68.2%	16.0%
Khulna	17,416,645	2,282	11,598	15.1%	0.6%	69.0%	15.3%
Mymensingh	12,225,498	1,545	8,141	14.1%	0.2%	69.9%	15.9%
Rajshahi	20,353,119	2,659	13,553	13.6%	0.3%	70.6%	15.5%
Rangpur	17,610,956	2,385	11,727	13.6%	0.8%	70.9%	14.6%
Sylhet	11,034,863	1,469	7,348	10.2%	1.6%	72.3%	15.9%
Unspecified	-	1,157	-	-	-	100%	-
Total	**165,188,616**	**21,288**	**100,000**	**13.2%**	**0.8%**	**71.4%**	**14.6%**

3.3.2 Structure of the SSWF

Workforce categories

Government SSWF

Key institution surveys asked respondents to indicate the categories of social workers within their departments. The distribution of social workers in practice did not always align with the institutional structure outlined in section 3.2. (e.g. 'Urban Community Development Officer' and 'Union Social Worker' were not consistently indicated within their respective departments). Some Upazila offices reported no field supervisors. Additionally, while Child Protection Social Workers are known to operate in CSPB locations, relevant departments did not often identify such workers.[112]

In surveys, departments also indicated that certain categories of workers operate within their department when they should not. For example, DSS social service office representatives often included allied workers (such as lawyers and CAPOs) within their workforce. While DSS workers likely work in coordination with these individuals, they are not part of the DSS workforce. It also appeared that responses may reflect team members within DSS carrying out the role of other categories of workers (i.e. conflation between official job title and responsibilities). For example, Probation Officers and psychosocial counsellors were reported as working within certain Upazila social services offices, when it is known that probation officers, at present, are only employed at District level, and psychosocial counsellors are only employed in the 1098 helpline and one-stop crisis centres. In FGDs, social workers indicated that due to a shortage of workers, other individuals in the team (such as vocational trainers) have to carry out duties of a social worker[113]. This was also reflected in the categories of social worker identified in the individual worker survey.

[112]No child protection social workers were reported in Barguna Sadar, despite it being a project location Upazila.
[113]E.g. FGD Sylhet.

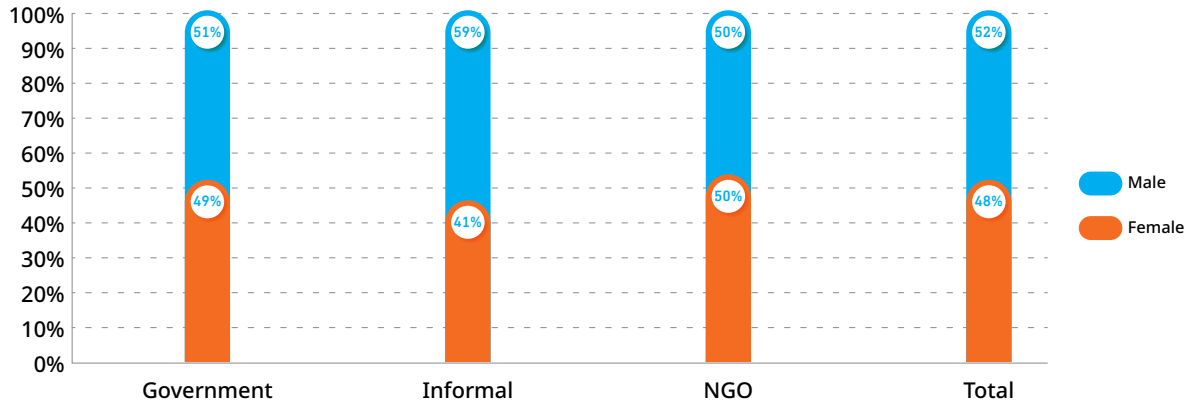
Non-government and informal SSWF

The job titles allocated to NGO workers include 'field supervisor', 'facilitator' and 'psychosocial counsellor', but roles did not necessarily align with the government workers. Other NGO roles specified in institution and individual worker surveys include 'volunteer', 'project/programme officer', 'field officer', 'teacher' 'manager/ director', 'coordinator' and, occasionally, 'mother' or 'aunt'. Within the NGO workforce, those with supervisory responsibilities were primarily called 'officer' or 'supervisor'. While the majority (83 percent) of informal social workers indicated that they are simply known by their name, some indicated that they had informally been assigned a title, including, leader, chief, secretary or community volunteer.

The demographics of social workers

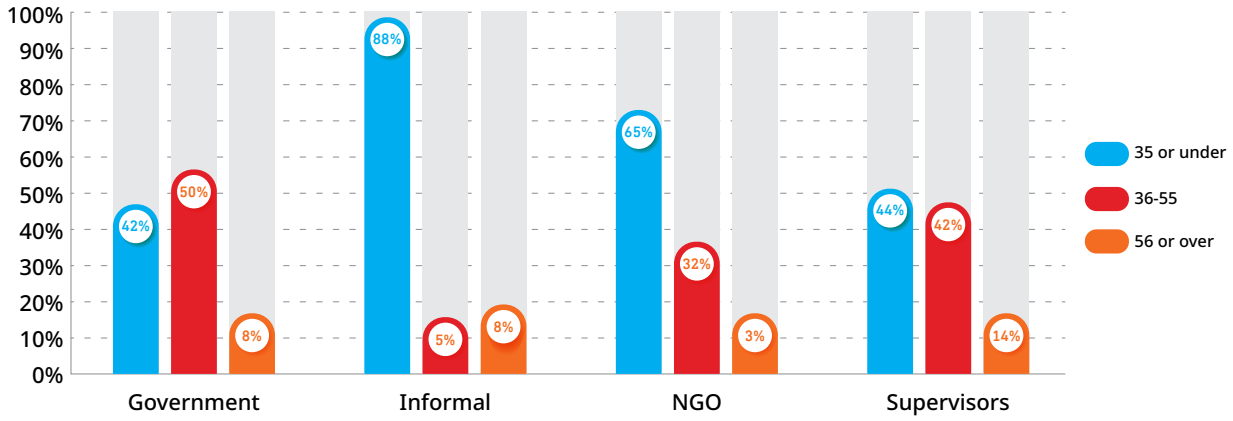
Gender: There is a relatively even distribution of Social Workers by gender, with 48 percent of the total workforce being female. Notably, it appears that informal workers are most likely to be male (59 percent). A slightly higher percentage of supervisors are male (56 percent). There are notable gender differences in the government workforce compared to the non-government workforce: almost three quarters of field supervisors are male (73 percent), while women are more likely to have been trained and employed as child protection social workers under the CSPB project (64 percent).

Figure 4: Gender distribution of the SSWF



Age: In total, the majority of social workers are aged 35 or younger (63 percent). However, the age distribution of the workforce differs between entities, with a younger workforce within non-government and informal sectors. In total, 58 percent of government social workers are over the age of 35, compared to only 12 percent of informal workers and 34 percent of NGO workers. With one exception, only informal workers were over the age of 65 (reflecting assuming the role after retirement). Supervisors were older than the general workforce (only 44 percent were 35 years or younger).

Figure 5: Age distribution of the workforce



Caseloads

The normative framework appears to be lacking with regards to outlining a mandated caseload per SSWF member, although a minority of DSS departments indicated they have a target caseload for social workers. This varied from five to 270, indicating no uniform measures for assigning cases to social workers[114].

- On average, social workers have a caseload of 25 children[115].
- Supervisors reported that they oversee social workers with a combined average caseload of 118 children.
- However, there is substantial variation between bodies and categories of worker. The caseload of informal workers is only 9 children, while for the government workforce, the average caseload is 38 children.
- Notably, the average caseload of CSPB child protection social workers was 133 children, indicating a high burden on these social workers.
- In surveys, 40 percent of social workers reported that a high workload is one of the top three challenges they face in their work.

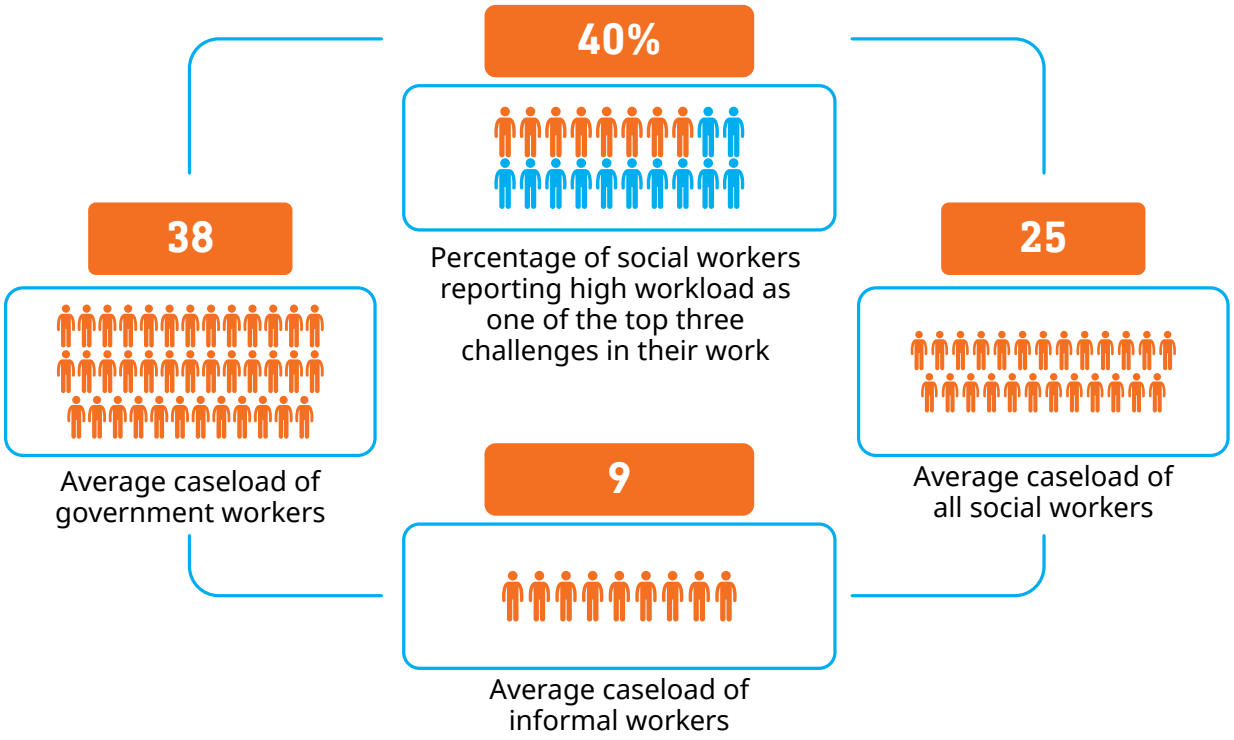
Findings also indicate that social workers spend a substantial proportion of their time on non-child protection duties. On average, social workers spend only 65 percent of their time on child protection cases (field and administration work combined), 14 percent of their time on providing financial assistance, and 21 percent of their time on other duties unrelated to child protection. Figure 7 shows this distribution between government, NGO and informal workers. Surprisingly, informal workers reported that they spend most of their time on child protection administration; this has been interpreted to mean the mobilisation and organisation of support.

[114]KI Survey data.

[115]Note that this was reported as 'lower than normal' in 40 percent of cases, indicating that this number is likely often higher.

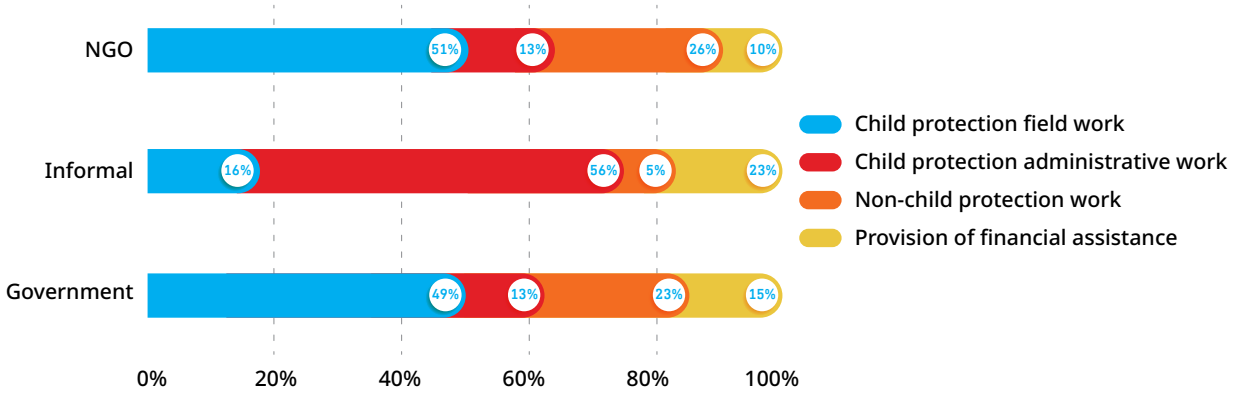
There were some notable differences in duties reported between different DSS social workers. The DSS issued a circular in July 2022 to instruct that no additional responsibilities beyond core child protection duties should be carried out by child protection social workers employed under the CSPB project[116]. This appears to be largely adhered to, although CSPB Child Protection Social Workers did report that 6 percent of their time is spent on non-child protection activities. Other DSS social workers spend substantially less time on child protection social work. DSS Social service officers and union social workers appear to spend the least time on child protection (51 percent on field and administrative work combined). Supervisors spend approximately one fifth (22 percent) of their time on supervision.

Figure 6: Caseload of the SSWF



[116]DSS, circular relating to social workers under the CSPB project, 26th July 2022.

Figure 7: Distribution of workload



A common limitation for the SSWF globally is that social workers' time is often disproportionately spent on administrative tasks at the expense of field work. While this does not appear to be an issue in Bangladesh, this may be a reflection of limited recording of case management (for which several social workers reported lacking the capacity during focus group discussions). Qualitative data also indicated that many social workers are unable to use their time in the field efficiently, due to inadequate provisions of transportation and the time taken to travel between clients[117].

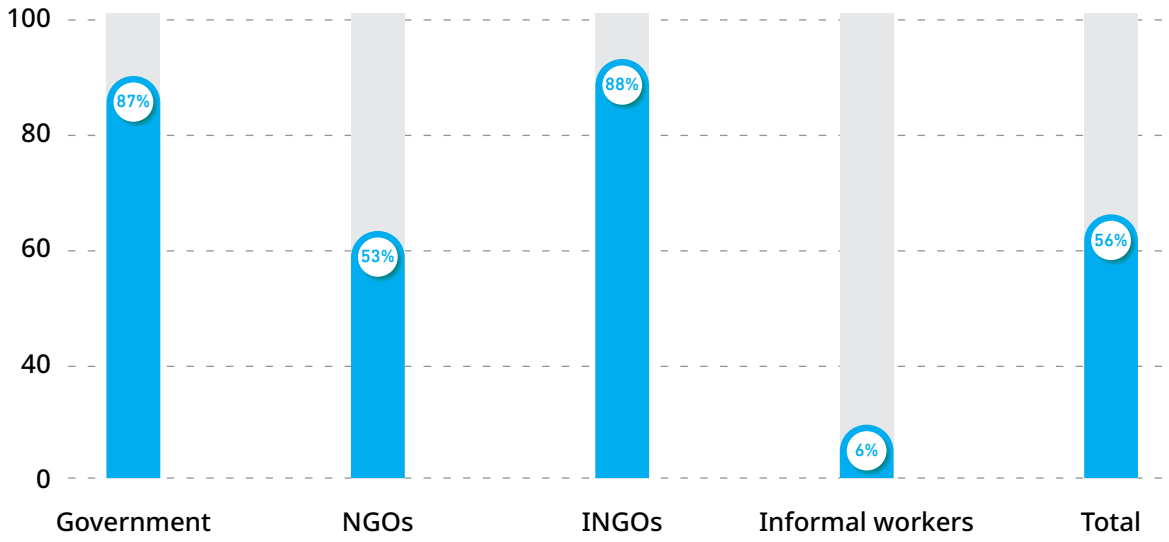
Type of employment

Knowing whether certain categories of the SSWF are particularly likely to be part-time employed (i.e. working limited hours per week) or on project-based contracts (i.e. not permanent) indicates areas where there is less consistent service provision.

In total, only 56 percent of social workers are employed full-time (see Figure 8). This reflects the high percentage of NGO social workers being employed under part-time contracts, and the fact that the vast majority of informal workers carry out their child protection role part-time. Most government social workers are employed full-time, with the majority of part-time employees being in 'other' roles that are not the primary SSWF categories. Almost all (92 percent) of supervisors work full-time.

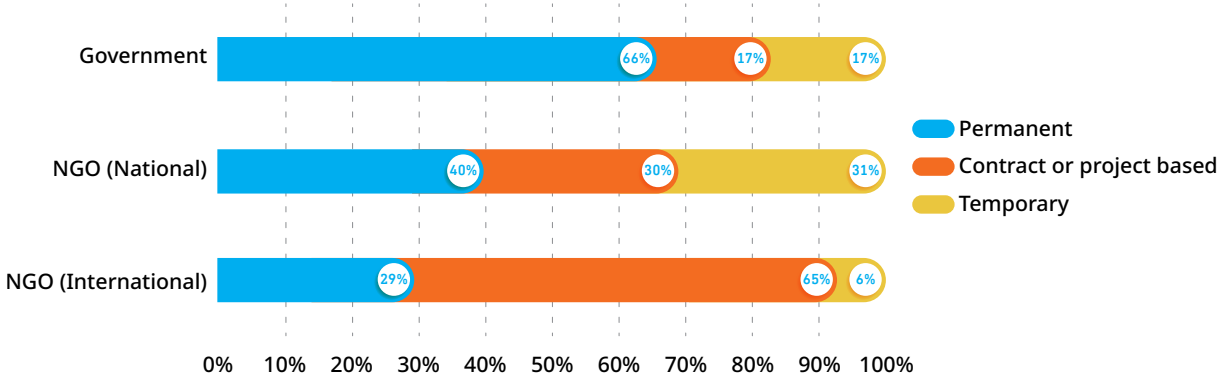
[117]FGDs with social workers; KIIs with DSS Officials.

Figure 8: Percentage of SSWF working full-time hours



Less than half (48 percent) of social workers are employed under permanent contracts (Figure 9). While INGO social workers are more likely to be full-time employed than national NGO workers, they are also more likely to be employed in temporary or project-based contracts (i.e. they have a larger scope for a shorter period of time). It is also important to note that all child protection social workers under the CSPB project are on project-based contracts. While the government initially committed to sustaining these services beyond the project end-date in 2024, it was reported that there are challenges to securing the funding to do so[118]. It was also noted by several stakeholders that there is a lack of interest in strengthening social work and child protection amongst senior stakeholders within the MOSW.

Figure 9: Distribution of permanent versus temporary and project-based contracts



The high percentage of part-time NGO workers exacerbates the challenges faced by the workforce in terms of high caseload and competing responsibilities outside of child protection. The high percentage of social workers who are employed on project-based and temporary contracts indicates that many

[118]KII with DSS official; KII with UNICEF Child Protection Section

services currently being provided to disadvantaged children are not sustainable. Together, findings indicate that there must not be a reliance on NGOs to fill gaps in government social service provisions, unless there is a coordinated response between the government and non-government sectors that ensures continuity of services between projects.

3.3.3 Scope of the Workforce

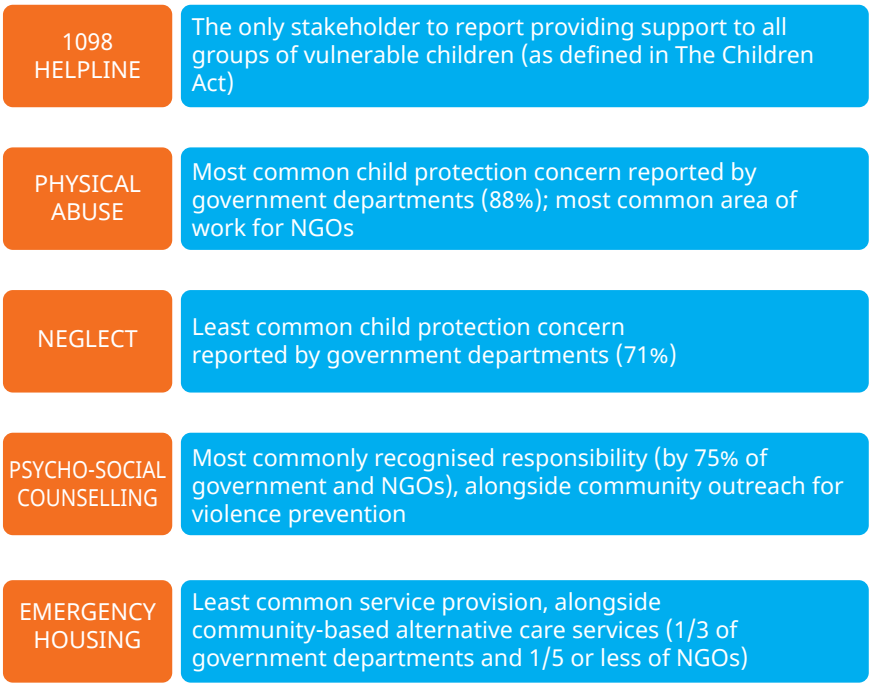
Roles and responsibilities

Institutions and individuals were asked to indicate the child protection responsibilities, groups of children and child protection risks for which they provide support. Details of social workers' responsibilities in practice compared to their mandate are provided in Annex B.

Key institution surveys

There were very few instances in which equivalent departments in different locations provided consistent answers in relation to child protection responsibilities, child protection concerns addressed or groups of children being supported. This suggests that there is variability in the roles of the workforce who should, according to the normative framework, deliver consistent support. Key Findings from the key institution surveys (i.e. by stakeholders in relevant government departments and non-government institutions at national, Division, District and Upazila level) are provided below in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Key findings from key institution surveys



Individual worker surveys

Data from individual worker surveys indicates that the support provided on the ground is not always consistent with expectations at the institutional-level (i.e. responses from individual workers did not align with the responses provided by institutions). This suggests that those at the institutional level have a limited understanding of the work carried out by social workers in practice.

There was also variability in responses between individual workers who hold the same job title / work in the same department, which suggests the responsibilities and provision of specific services differs between individuals who should, in theory, have the same role.

Child protection concerns addressed

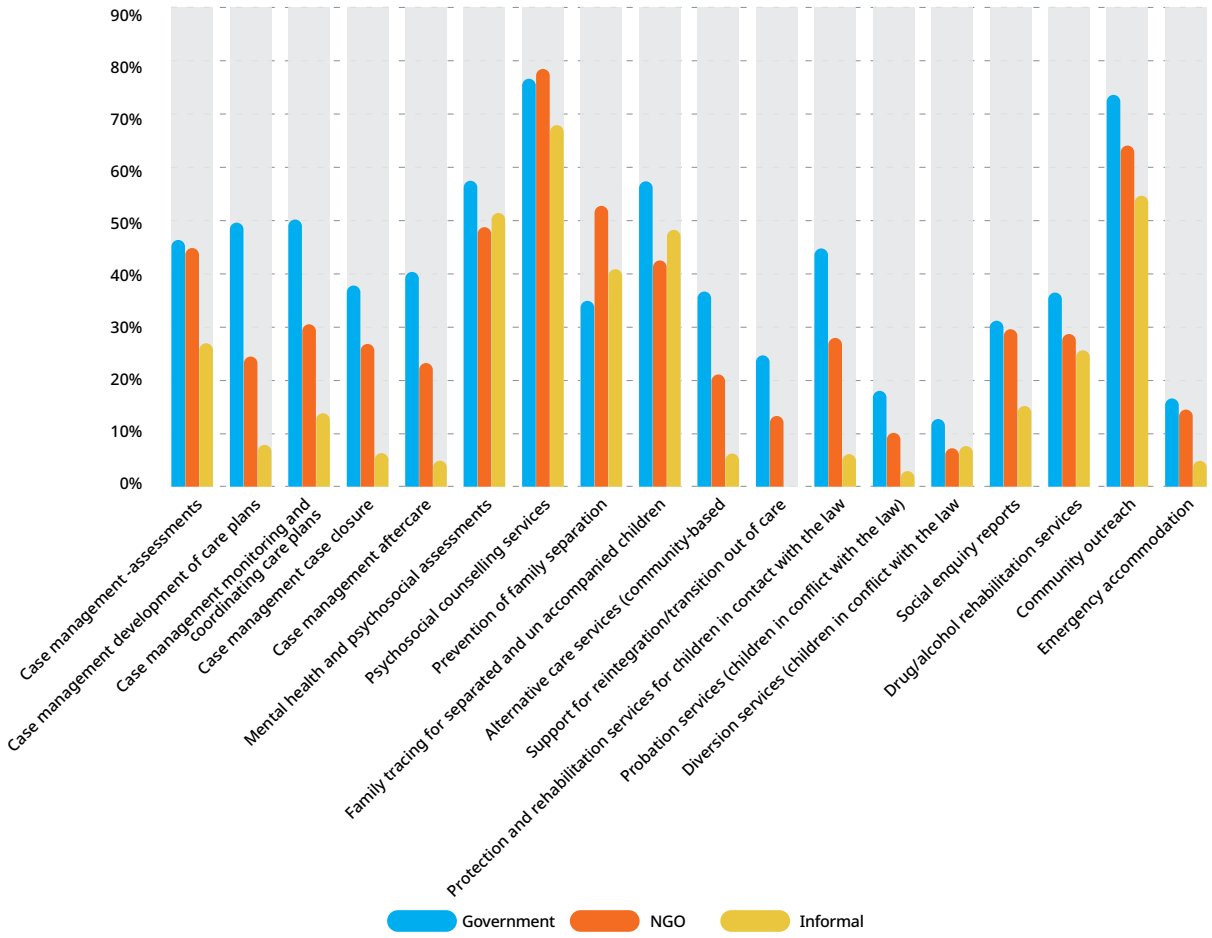
- Neglect is the most common child protection concern addressed by social workers, reported by 80 percent of social workers (despite being the least institutionally recognised child protection concern)
- Over three quarters (76 percent) reported providing services to prevent and respond to physical violence
- 70 percent of social workers address emotional violence

Child protection responsibilities and services

Figure 11 shows the percentage of the government, non-government and informal workforce providing specific child protection services.

There are overall gaps in service provision for particular elements of child protection, including diversion services, emergency accommodation services, probation services and supporting children's transition out of care (including reintegration). Conversely, a high percentage of social workers are providing community outreach services and psychosocial counseling services.

Figure 11: Percentage of government, non-government and informal social workers performing child protection duties.



Government social worker responsibilities are not always fully aligned with the normative framework. Survey data indicates that specific categories of SSWF are sometimes unable to carry out all their mandated responsibilities. For example, data indicates that some probation officers do not implement diversion or complete social enquiry reports as stipulated in the Children Act (see Annex B). Less than half of union social workers carry out case management or probation and diversion responsibilities in the absence of a probation officer, despite this being mandated in the Act.

However, on the whole, the government SSWF dominates (compared to non-government and informal workers) in the areas in which their role is defined in the Children Act (namely case management, alternative care provisions, protection and rehabilitation for children in contact with the law, probation services and diversion). While a relatively high percentage of informal and NGO workers assess the child's needs, the remaining elements of case management (i.e. developing and coordinating care plans, monitoring cases and case closure and aftercare) are primarily performed by government social workers. This pattern provides some indication of functioning case management processes and is

likely attributable to efforts of the DSS, in partnership with UNICEF, to strengthen case management. The percentage of government social workers supporting probation and diversion services is, however, concealingly low, and reflects a lack of capacity for social workers to provide adequate services in this area (see the following section for more details regarding capacity).

Unsurprisingly, DSS CSPB child protection social workers carry out the highest percentage of child protection responsibilities compared to other categories of DSS SSWF; 97 percent of CSPB social workers perform case management duties, indicating their roles are the most closely aligned with the normative framework, and again providing evidence of success in the CSPB initiative.

There are services in which NGOs and informal workers provide substantial contributions and seek to fill gaps in the government workforce, particularly the prevention of separation, psychosocial support and family tracing. Compared to government workers, a higher percentage of NGO workers are providing psychosocial counseling services. Informal workers appear to contribute particularly to prevention and response to emotional abuse and family tracing. Only 53 percent of NGO workers reported having a job description, indicating a less formalised approach to the delivery of services in this sector.

Together, findings indicate that informal and NGO workers are more likely to provide secondary prevention services, while government social workers are more focused on tertiary response.

Groups of children supported

Figure 12 shows the percentage of the government, non-government and child protection workforce supporting specific groups of children.

The majority of groups of disadvantaged children[119] have few dedicated social workers, although child orphans, child victims of sexual oppression or harassment, and children with disabilities are supported by over 50 percent of social workers. Social workers noted that there is very limited support available for children involved with narcotics, who are amongst the most vulnerable in their community[120].

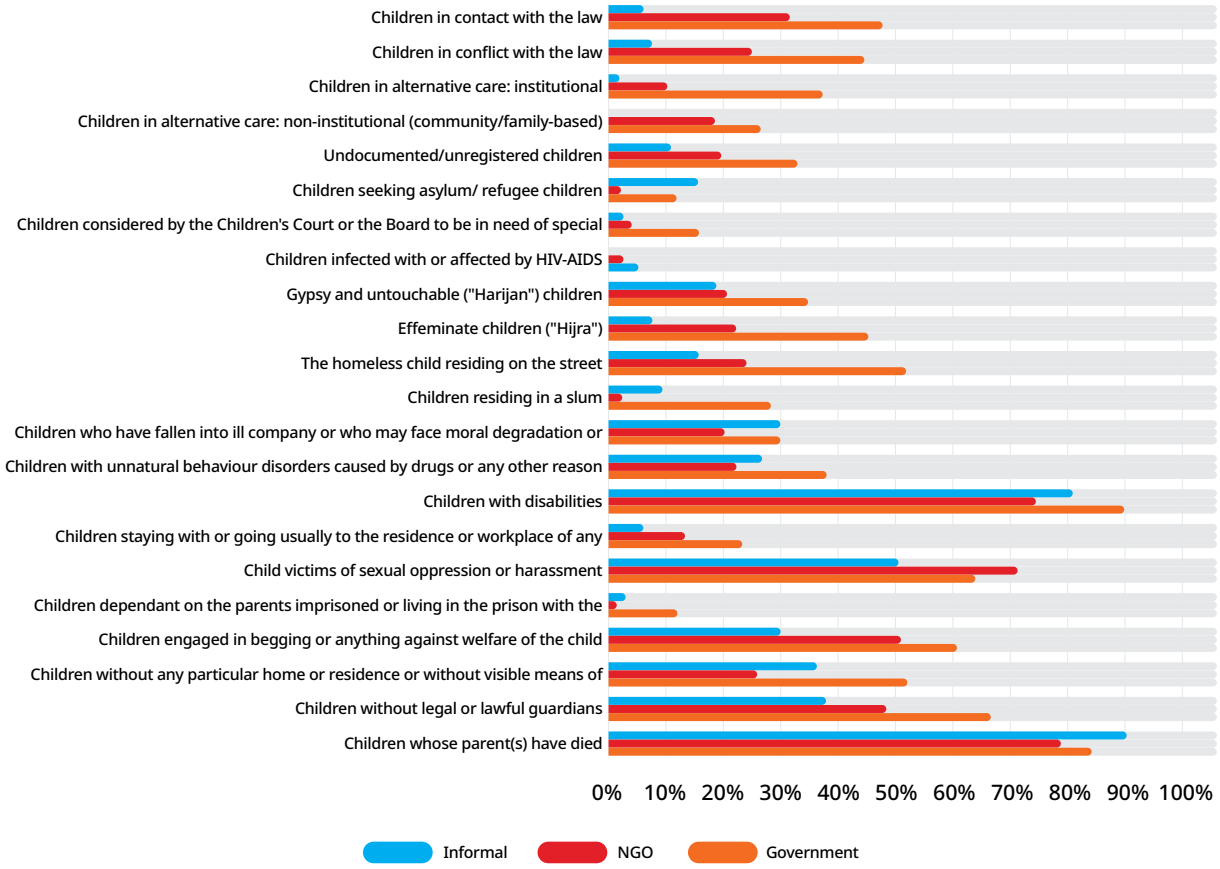
There are also certain groups of children that non-government and informal workers appear to more commonly support than government workers (providing further indication of where these workers seek to fill gaps in government support). NGO workers are the most likely social workers to support child victims of sexual abuse. Informal workers are more likely than government and NGO workers to support children whose parents have died and refugee children[121].

[119]As defined in The Children Act

[120]e.g. FGD Cumilla

[121]Note, these findings do not include the SSWF in Cox's Bazaar refugee camps.

Figure 12: Percentage of Social Workers supporting groups of disadvantaged children (The Children Act)



3.3.4 SSWF Capacity and Quality of Service Provision

Child protection responsibilities in practice

It was clear that social workers take great pride in being able to support children in the community, and go above and beyond their duty (often using their own personal resources) trying to do so[122]. However, social workers are often unable to provide support to all children they have identified as in need in the community, and they do not have the capacity to meet the different needs of different groups of children.

"Each child's needs are different. The child who has been a victim of abuse has different needs. If I only arrange for food for a child who has been a victim of abuse, it won't work. The needs of a child in conflict with the law are different. Everyone needs different types of services, but I cannot always provide services according to their needs."[123]

[122]All FGDs
[123]FGD Sylhet

It was difficult to identify children for interviews who had received child protection services that did not either primarily focus on children receiving food, financial support, education support or prevention of child marriage. For cases that related to prevention or response to violence or neglect, based on interview and FGD data, the primary courses of action appear to be either placing children into alternative care institutions, providing financial support and/or enrolling children in education.

Figure 13: Summary of capacity and quality of service provision

Psychosocial counseling: Although the majority of individual survey respondents indicated that they provide 'psychosocial counseling services', FGDs and interviews indicated that the term 'counseling' is widely used to represent general emotional support and guidance to children and parents, with limited mental health and psychosocial support in practice (i.e. psychosocial education, not therapeutic counseling). Social workers commonly mentioned that they provide counseling to parents in response to identifying physical violence or neglect, but in practice, this means instructing parents to not repeat these behaviours (often with a threat of legal action) and informing parents about the negative impacts of abuse on children. Notably, in FGDs, social workers made no reference to coordination with the NTCC or one-stop crisis centres for the provision of therapeutic support by qualified practitioners.

The term 'counseling' was also used amongst child and adult respondents to describe social workers encouraging a child on the street to return to their family home, remain vigilant towards adults who may be abusive, or not engage in risky behaviour[124]. For example, one parent discussed the counseling services offered to their son who is addicted to drugs, which appeared to reflect trying to educate him about the dangers of taking drugs[125]. The parent indicated that, while there have been improvements, their son continues to engage in drugs and his mental health needs persist. The capacity to provide mental health and psychosocial support is limited within the workforce; social workers themselves reported that they should be referred to as 'para-counsellors' because they deliver these services with no training[126]. Children who were interviewed reported that the psycho educational counseling services they had received at the CSPB hubs for street children were helpful.[127] It appears that the crisis centres are the only individuals with qualified psychologists who are able to provide therapeutic counseling, in addition (at a limited level) psychosocial counsellors within CHL-1098.

Probation and diversion: In surveys, 35 percent of social workers reported feeling only a little or not at all confident in providing probation or diversion services for children in conflict with the law. It was clear that the workforce has very limited capacity to work on probation and diversion. Probation officers only work at District level (even though the Children Act mandates probation officers in every Upazila), and there is a reliance on union social workers to deliver probation services (for which many have received no training). Second, there are no probation officers dedicated to children's cases.

Challenges to diversion are compounded by limited capacity of CAPOs. While CAPOs are required to investigate a case and determine if a case involving a child should be dismissed, or whether a child can be granted bail or diverted, their limited capacity mean that often, they send a case straight to the Children's court, meaning children are placed unnecessarily through judicial procedures. Social workers highlighted the progress that has been made in terms of working with CAPOs to ensure that children are not placed in jail. However, the main course of action when identifying a child in conflict with the law appears to be to place the child in the child development or rehabilitation centres. Diversion is rare, although it was noted that initiatives are underway through the CSPB project to increase the use of diversionary measures.

Residential care: In interviews and FGDs, it was clear that the most common course of action when identifying a child at risk or who is experiencing physical or sexual abuse or neglect is to place them in a shelter, safe home or other children's home. The placement of children in homes is seen to be a success by both social workers and parents, as it is perceived as a provision of care that ensures a child has access to food, shelter, security and (sometimes) education.

[124]E.g. Interview with boy, Sylhet
[125]Interview with parent in Dhaka.
[126]E.g. FGD Dhaka
[127]Interviews with children in Dhaka.

In some cases, it appears that institutional care is prioritised, despite The Children Act stating that this should be an act of last resort. There were cases where social workers had supported parents to place their children in shelters to protect them from physical abuse or neglect, where these children remain[128]. Concerningly, there were reports that social workers advise parents against visiting their children at the home as it 'may discourage other children' from attending the homes.[129] Government social workers reported that they have been trying to increase awareness amongst parents of the availability of their local children's home, because are unable to fill the spaces.

Community-based alternative care: A substantial number of workers reported providing community-based alternative care to children. While this may in part be linked to family tracing and placing children with other family members in the absence of a parent, FGDs indicated that there is a limited understanding of the concept of alternative care amongst social workers. In FGDs, some social workers appear to regard the 'children's families' (i.e. residential care in the form of small children's homes) as community-based care. Placement of children in community-based alternative care appears to be rare in practice.

These findings indicate a lack of SSWF knowledge relating to prevention of separation, or indeed planning in terms of prioritising prevention services when allocating resources. Almost a third (30 percent) of social workers reported feeling only a little or not at all confident in making decisions relating to the alternative care of children.

Reintegration: Interview data suggests that attempts to reintegrate children back to their families primarily involve tracing family members and asking if they are able to take the children into their home, with no resources available to capacitate families to do so[130]. Children's (particularly street children's) refusal to return to their families was sometimes cited by social workers as a barrier to reintegration and a reason for placement residential care.

Case Management and child protection: As indicated above, it appears that DSS social workers are the primary workforce responsible for case management, which is in line with the normative framework and international standards in terms of having a core government body responsible for case management and coordinating support for a child protection case. Notably, discourse in the FGDs in which CSPB child protection social workers were present was more focused on core child protection duties. These individuals provided strong examples of case management, indicating achievements of this initiative in building capacity for child protection social work. However, FGDs indicated that case management processes are limited and less formalised in areas in which there is no dedicated child protection worker. Almost a third (30 percent) of social workers reported feeling only a little or not at all confident in child friendly communication and child participation in case management, and 36 percent did not feel confident in implementing care plans.

[128]E.g. Interview with parent, Sylhet.
[129]E.g. Interview with parent, Sylhet.
[130]E.g. Interview with boy, Dhaka.

Poverty: A common discussion topic amongst social workers related to the challenges they face in delivering child protection in the context of high poverty. Social workers highlighted that they often have to prioritise ensuring families receive financial and food provisions, leaving limited time to engage in child protection issues. They also stated that it is a struggle to engage families in child protection when families are in crisis. Sometimes, families are unresponsive to social workers' bids to engage them in services, and only wish to receive financial support. Over one third (35 percent) of social workers reported feeling only a little or not at all confident in engaging families with challenging behaviours, and a quarter did not feel confident in engaging clients in developing care plans. Parents and children who had been supported primarily focused on their need of financial assistance during interviews.

Community mobilisation: Parents indicated that awareness raising and support from social workers (formal and informal) had helped bring communities together and collectively address child protection issues in the community. These types of cases primarily related to prevention and response to sexual harassment of girls, child marriage, drug use amongst children in the community, and ensuring access to justice. In most cases, parents highlighted that the social worker was one of several individuals within the community who helped address their problems. It appears that community outreach work has played a vital role in increasing communities' knowledge of child protection cases, and in turn their responsiveness when identifying child protection concerns.

Gender transformative approaches to child protection

Data indicates particular attention is paid to ensuring gender equitable approaches to social work. On average, 54 percent of workers' caseloads involve supporting girls. This is highest for informal workers (64 percent) and government workers (62 percent, although only 50 percent for supervisors).

Due to the higher likelihood of boys being identified as in conflict with the law, it is unsurprising that probation officers reported particularly high levels of cases involving boys (84 percent). Vocational trainers also had higher caseloads of boys (60 percent). Conversely, Child Protection Social Workers had a higher percentage of cases involving girls than other government social workers, suggesting that the efforts of the CSPB project are resulting in greater provision of social services for girls.

In FGDs, social workers often recognised that the needs of boys and girls differ in the community, with particular recognition of girls' vulnerability to sexual abuse. Much of the community outreach (and related activities in the area of adolescent empowerment) is indirectly focused on protecting girls from abuse, including through child marriage prevention efforts and programmes to support girls' participation in education and training. However, social workers also noted that a lack of resources limits the extent to which they can deliver tailored services to girls and boys. Some reported that they have not received the training needed to deal with cases of sexual abuse when they arise, and that

there are a lack of safe spaces for girls who come into their care, including within shelters. Others highlighted that support is disproportionately targeting girls, meaning boys are somewhat excluded from accessing support; some noted that they see more boys living on the street, engaging in begging and becoming involved in crime, but social workers do not have the means to support them.

It was clear that gender norms play a role in decision-making relating to the provision of services. Social workers highlighted that victims of sexual abuse (and exploitation in child marriage) are stigmatised and likely to be at increased risk of further abuse, and feel that the most appropriate response is to separate girls from their community:

"When a child becomes a victim of child marriage or assault, another child might victimize her. In such cases, when other children in society witness the acceptance of abuse or child marriage, they might say negative things about the affected girl. We avoid mixing other children with the affected girl. In all these cases, counseling is provided for girls, especially psycho-social counseling."[131]

Emergency response in social work

Social service workers are key humanitarian workers but are often not seen as such. They play a central role in mitigation and preparedness interventions prior to a disaster, and response and recovery after a disaster.[132] However, at the institutional level, it does not appear that the DSS has a policy prioritising child protection in emergencies or disaster preparedness.

Social workers provided some insight to the role they play in emergency response, but this is primarily in supporting families to access food and shelter. It was mentioned that the DSS worked incredibly hard to ensure social services remained available and responsive to COVID-19 and floods in 2020-2022.[133] Some noted key achievements in emergency response in terms of establishing hygiene and promoting health in the community, particularly during COVID-19 and in response to the recent increase in cases of Dengue Fever[134]. However, in general, little was reported in relation to prevention and response to abuse in emergency settings. Others highlighted that a lack of social service workers specifically to support the community during disasters is a key gap[135]. Larger NGOs and representatives from MOWCA indicated they took initiatives to adapt their services and provide support to vulnerable individuals remotely during COVID-19.[136]

[131]FGD, Kurigram

[132]Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, State of the Social Service Workforce Report 2022: The Vital Role of the Social Service Workforce in Humanitarian Contexts, p. 11.

[133]KII UNICEF

[134]KII with NGO

[135]FGD, Netrakona

[136]E.g. KII, BRAC; KII MOWCA

In Barguna, the threat of cyclones was noted as presenting challenges.[137] In Sylhet and Kurigram, it was reported that flooding disrupts social workers' ability to reach children and creates additional child protection concerns. Individuals highlighted that floods exacerbate the effects of neglect, and provided examples where children have drowned because parents were unaware of their whereabouts or sent children out to work. They provided examples of engaging in community outreach to teach parents about the dangers of leaving children unaccompanied during an emergency, and providing support to people affected by disasters (although this was often linked to shelter and hygiene, as opposed to child protection):

"In the Kurigram region, when floods occur, it is observed that parents cannot keep track of their children, resulting in the unfortunate drowning of young children. Due to the unconsciousness and negligence of parents, accidents often happen to children... We have established centers to address such issues, like a center in the Chilmari region, where pregnant mothers can stay, and adolescent girls can safely spend their menstrual periods."[137]

DSS representatives highlighted the disruptions that natural disasters cause to the functioning of social services, preventing social workers from being able to reach their place of work and disrupting administrative processes. Social workers reported that the climate crisis presents an additional barrier to the delivery of their work and that COVID-19 has resulted in an increased prevalence of key child protection issues in their community. In the survey, 13 percent of social workers reported climate related disasters as a top three challenge for delivering their services. This was notably high in INGOs (48 percent), suggesting greater awareness amongst workers in this sector of this issue.

Coordination mechanisms

The CHL 1098 is a key facilitator of coordination for child protection, as the national body responsible for referring child protection cases that are reported through the helpline to the relevant field worker, and following up on actions taken. Union social workers reported receiving referrals from the CHL about child abuse cases, and coordinating with others in the field to respond. However, the lack of services and logistical support for social workers on the ground limits the effectiveness of referrals by the CHL 1098.[140] In several cases, union social workers reported that they signpost child victims to the CHL for psychosocial support.[141]

The police were identified as a key body with whom social workers coordinate to ensure the protection of children in contact and conflict with the law. Social workers reported that they have established effective coordination mechanisms with the police, with some noting that this has greatly improved in recent years. Some mentioned that the establishment of the CAPOs and coordination between social workers and CAPOs has also led to improvements in terms of reduced violence against children perpetrated by the police:

[137]FGD, Barguna
[138]FGD, Kurigram
[139]KII DSS representative
[140]KII with UNICEF Child Protection Specialist, December 2022.
[141]E.g. FGD Barguna

"Now we get a lot of help from the police. The police are our friends now. Once upon a time it wasn't like that. Police used to misbehave with children, kick them and lock them away. It was very challenging for us to work at that time. We have arranged an in-house training with the police officers. Many things are done. Now the mentality of the police has changed a lot." [142]

In several locations, social workers reported working in close coordination with the local chairman / Union Nirbahi Officer (UNO) to address child protection concerns. Several noted that the chairman is often the individual who identifies and refers child protection cases to the union social workers, while others provided examples of cases where the chairman has been responsible for mobilising support for children and families through NGOs on the ground.[143]

In areas in which there is an operating CBCPC committee, these were indicated as providing an important role to enable stakeholders from different sectors to collectively determine the course of action in the best interests of the child.[144] In areas where there are no official CBCPC, social workers appear to have established informal committees or 'Mothers' Assemblies' to discuss child protection cases.[145] Some noted that child protection committees used to exist but are no longer functioning.[146]

At the national level, CWBs were reported as an important mechanism to increase coordination between sectors, but that, at present, these are being used for discussion more than action.[147] Some social workers reported that they sit on the CWB and use this time to discuss child protection issues in the community to try and find solutions for children, particularly for cases that the DSS social workers have struggled to address alone[148]. However, others noted that the child welfare boards 'lack active participation or a solid working mechanism.'[149]

There were also examples of cases where powerful individuals who sit on child protection committees or child welfare boards enable the abuse and exploitation of children and pressure social workers to ignore child protection issues. This happens when those perpetrating physical abuse (and entering children into marriage) are friends with community leaders and the police. It appears that hierarchical structures and the lower status of social workers in the community have an adverse impact on effective referral and coordination for the protection of children[150]. Social workers also noted that influential figures apply pressure to distribute funding to their friends in the community rather than families in need.

[142] E.g FGD Dhaka
[143] E.g. FGD Cumilla
[144] E.g. FGD Barguna; FGD Cumilla
[145] E.g. FGD Narail Sadar
[146] E.g. Ulipur
[147] KII DSS Official
[148] E.g. FGD Kurgiram; FGD Netrokona
[149] FGD Barguna
[150] Multiple FGDs; not stated for anonymity.

"A recent incident involved the mistreatment of a child. I then gave the social service officer a call. The police team was then contacted by Sir. I was with the abuser when I made the call. But, as I was speaking with the police, a powerful individual arrived [and] signalled the abuser to leave... I told him 'you are the one who made it possible for him to escape'. I am now being asked by the police officer to cover his travel expenses. 'Why should I cover your travel expenses?' I questioned him, 'You came to this place to do government work'. At this point, the police officer responded, 'You called me to come here, and now you're not paying me anything...' I'm now being questioned by the powerful person about why I called the police over such a 'ridiculous' problem. He was threatening and asked me if I had made the correct decision in doing so... The pressure from these powerful individuals hinders our ability to do our jobs."

- FGD, DSS Social worker[151]

Parents also provided examples of where they sought support for serious child abuse cases from social workers when complaints were not taken seriously by police. When police are unresponsive to complaints of child sexual abuse and child marriage made by victims or family members, social workers are sometimes required to encourage police involvement in a case or even take on the role of the police officer if they refuse to engage[152]. Other examples were provided of when there is ineffective coordination due to unavailability of key child protection actors, particularly when cases are brought to their attention during the night.[153]

It appears that NGOs try to mobilise resources between themselves and coordinate support for children[154]. However, coordination between NGOs and government social workers varies. In some cases, NGO social workers reported that they work in close coordination with the DSS to support children in the local community,[155] and some government social workers reported that they coordinate with NGO social workers to fill gaps in their manpower.[156] However, others reported working in silo and being unaware of the support available to children through other actors in the area.[157] Some NGO workers feel that they are expected to be responsive to requests from government social workers, but that this is not reciprocated. Government social workers reported themselves that they often do not have the time to respond to referrals or concerns raised by NGOs[158]. However, some NGO workers highlighted that there has been increased coordination between themselves and government social workers in recent years, and that government workers have become more receptive and responsive to child protection referrals.[159] In some cases, the FGDs themselves resulted in discussions about ways in

[151]Location withheld to maintain anonymity.
[152]e.g Interview with parent, Kurigram.
[153]e.g. Cumilla
[154]e.g. FGD Netrakona
[155]e.g. FGD Barguna; e.g. FGD Netrakona
[156]e.g. FGD Sirajganj
[157]e.g. FGD Cumilla
[158]e.g. FGD Netrakona
[159]FGD Dhaka

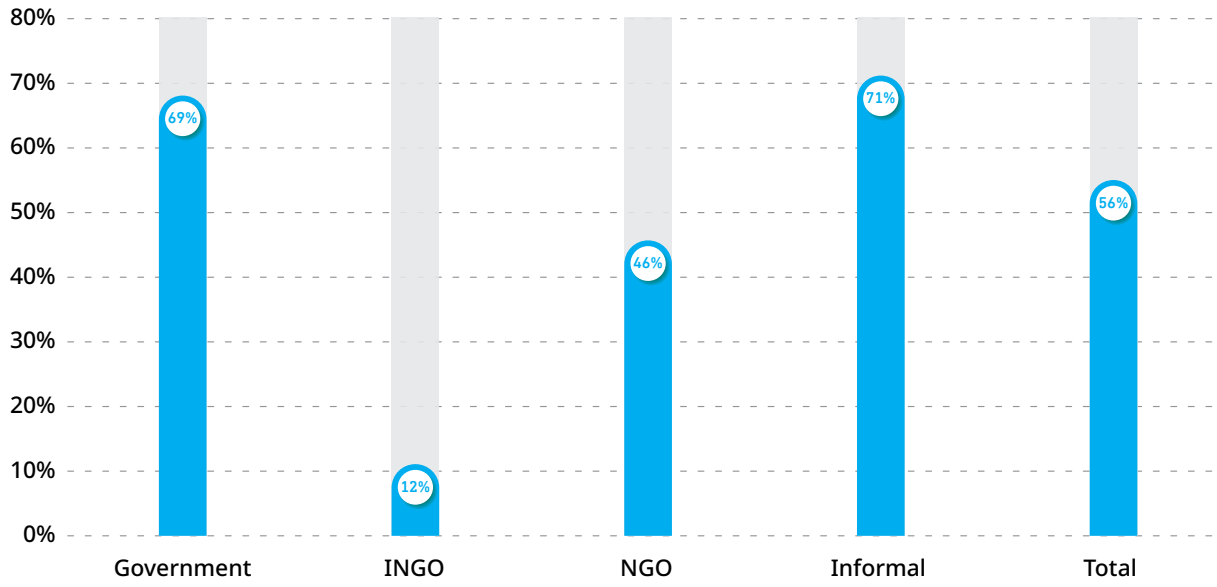
which NGO and government social workers could coordinate that they had previously been unaware of[160]. It does not appear that either NGO or government social workers coordinate with informal workers for the provision of services; rather, they only coordinate in terms of responding to referrals. In general, social workers reported that while current coordination mechanisms are invaluable for the provision of services to those in need, there is need to strengthen these coordination mechanisms.

Logistical resources and safety

In the survey, 56 percent of respondents reported that they do not have the supplies necessary to do their job. This was highest amongst informal workers (71 percent) and government workers (69 percent), but was substantially lower for NGO workers, particularly those working in INGOs. A lack of material and financial resources to fulfil duties was the second most common challenge for social workers (reported as a top three challenge by 43 percent of social workers).

A lack of supplies and resources was also a common theme throughout FGDs. In most cases, this related to an insufficient travel allowance or transportation to enable social workers to effectively carry out field visits. Social workers frequently noted that they spend their own money on travel expenses and sometimes provisions for families. Others noted that the facilities in their workplace are inadequate, referencing a lack of chairs, desks and toilet facilities.

Figure 14. The percentage of respondents reporting that they lack the equipment or supplies necessary to do their job.



[160]E.g. FGD Sirajaganj

Social workers also highlighted the lack of safety measures in place to enable them to carry out their work effectively, particularly for female workers. In total, 15 percent of social workers (17 percent of females) do not feel that adequate measures have been put in place to ensure their safety. Government workers feel less safe (21 percent) than non-government workers (7 percent). Informal workers feel the least safe (26 percent), demonstrating that the lack of organisational support may be putting these individuals at risk. In FGDs, social workers indicated that they are sometimes unable to respond to child protection referrals at night when it is unsafe for them to travel alone, an issue that is exacerbated by the lack of transportation provisions.

Education levels of the SSWF

In order to have a strong functioning SSWF, normative frameworks need to be in place requiring a minimum level of knowledge and skills required to carry out child protection functions. This is a key gap in the normative framework in Bangladesh.

A gazette issued by the Ministry of Social Welfare in 2013 provides recruitment rules for Gazetted and Non-Gazetted staff members under the DSS, which contains details on the minimum qualification requirements for each post. Notably, recruitment rules indicate that a degree in Social work is not an essential qualification. Social Service Officers are required to have a Bachelor's degree alongside experience in a government post or a Master's degree in any subject. Field supervisors are only required to have a degree (in any subject) if they do not have five years' experience in a social work field, and union social workers are only required to have either five years' experience or a Secondary School Certificate or equivalent.

The education requirements of NGOs varies. In total, 46 percent of NGOs reported that social workers are required to hold a degree, and 94 percent report that supervisors require a degree[162]. Only 17 percent of those indicating that a degree is required stated that this should be a social work degree.

Table 6 shows the qualifications of social workers and supervisors under each entity as reported in the individual worker survey. The majority of government social workers and social workers in INGOs have a degree, and a high percentage have a master's degree. Over half of NGO social workers have a degree. Informal workers are substantially less qualified than their formal counterparts. Supervisors have higher qualification levels than individual workers, with 40 percent holding a master's degree.

Notably, within the DSS, all child protection social workers have a degree, whereas only 51 percent of union / municipal social workers have a degree. Of those who have a degree, only 3 percent have a degree in social welfare / social work, while 9 percent have a degree in social science[163]. All degrees were obtained by universities within Bangladesh.

[162]Department of Social Services (Gazetted Officers and Non-Gazetted Employees) Recruitment Rules, 2013
[163]KI Survey data

Together, findings indicate that the majority of social workers do not have the necessary knowledge or foundations to carry out child protection duties. Therefore, the overwhelming majority of the SSWF in Bangladesh can only be regarded as a 'para-professional' workforce according to international standards. See Section 4 for further details on relevant degree courses and trainings available to social workers in Bangladesh.

Table 6: Educational qualifications of Social Workers (supervisor percentages in brackets)

Entity	Any degree	Master's Degree	Primary or no education
Government	62% (75%)	43% (46%)	-
INGOs	59% (67%)	35% (33%)	-
NGOs	35% (56%)	14% (31%)	7% (6%)
Informal workers	18%	9%	20%
Total	**41% (68%)**	**25% (40%)**	**7% (2%)**

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4

Findings: Development of the Workforce

An effective SSWF requires the development of skills as well as knowledge in the field of child protection and social work[164]. The effective development of the social service workforce requires the establishment of multisector structures for education and training, aligning training and education with national priorities and international standards, aligning education and training to job descriptions and scopes of work, and the availability of professional development and continuing education opportunities.[165] The section below looks at available education programmes in social work and relevant training available to the SSWF in Bangladesh.

4.1 Education providers – Degree Programmes

Surveys were undertaken with representatives from Jagannath University (JU), Rajshahi University (RU), the University of Information Technology and Sciences (UITS), the Asian University of Bangladesh (AUB) and Dhaka University (DU) to gather information on professional degree programmes available to the social service workforce.[166] Where available, syllabus documentation was also reviewed. A summary of degree programmes relevant to the delivery of social services for children is provided below, while a full list of available degrees and relevant modules in Annex C.

Table 7: Summary of Social Work/Social Welfare degree programmes

Sod al work practice and field placements	All courses include field practicum, although there is no requirement for a field placement in child protection
Courses relating to child protection	Although all cou ryes have some content relevant to ch lid protection, coverage is limited (generally to one or few lectu res). There are rarely entire modules dedicated to social work with children. All ,courses tend to have broad content on child development. Some courses include information relating to child welfare legislation in B a ng l a d esh. Most courses have. ome l evel of information about services for children available in Bangladesh, although th is tends to relate to financial assistance and institutional care, which appears to be the primary support available in the country. Some, but not all courses, contain .a module / lectu re on case management.

[164]UNICEF and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Service Workforce for Child Protection, February 2019, p.27.

[165]UNICEF and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Service Workforce for Child Protection, February 2019, p.33.

[166]Other relevant universities that were not surveyed but provide relevant courses include: People's University of Bangladesh, Department of Sociology and Social Work (BSS in Sociology and Social Work , MSS in Sociology and Social Work); Islamic University of Bangladesh, Department of Social Welfare (BSS in Social Welfare, MSS in Social Welfare).

Quality of course content	Child protection courses tend to utilise outdated resources. Limited research on the ch ild protection needs in Bangladesh is embedded into the programmes. Dhaka University and the Master's course at Rajshahi University appear to have the strongest and highest volume of content relating to child protection social work.
Number of graduates	Corn Combined, universities have over 500 social work graduates annually, but they rarely enter into the field of social work.
Degree accreditation and curricula alignment	Universities reported that accreditation and auditing processes occur through the Institutional Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC). Only two universities reported that degrees are designed to align with international standards, and reported that audits are carried out once every three years or more to ensure this alignment.
Teaching faculty	Lecturers are not required to have any field experience in social work, and only those at professional 1 level are required to hold a PhD. It does not appear that social work faculty are conducing: research on child protection issues in Bangladesh.
Effective ness of courses	As only three percent of the SSWF holds a degree in social welfare, it was difficult to ascertain whether this leads to greater capacity in child protection social work provisions. The general view among &SWF was that their education did not prepare them for their job or offer the practical learning that they needed to fulfill their social services

4.1.1 Overview of available programmes

Universities provide a range of Bachelors and Masters programmes in Social Work and Social Welfare. Content is primarily delivered through theoretical courses. In addition, all programmes appear to require a 60-day field component to gain experience in social work practice, although field experience with children is not a requirement. With regards to course content, most courses have modules relevant to child development broadly, and some have modules specifically on the delivery of social services for children and families. However, within these modules, there is limited coverage of 'child protection'.

Social work / social welfare degrees in each university have a number of relevant modules for the delivery of social services, covering topics such as social work ethics, the foundations of social work practice, professional skills for working with clients and background knowledge on human behaviour. Some universities cover case management (e.g. RU), but others do not appear to (e.g. JU). Each university appears to have a module that is relevant to the delivery of social services for children and families. For example, RU offers a module within their Master's course on 'Social Work with Families and Children'[167] while JU provides a module on 'Family and Child welfare'.[168]

Course content within these modules includes topics of high relevance with providing a theoretical understanding of child protection. Degrees in each university contain at least one lecture with content on the impact of child abuse on children, the situation of children in Bangladesh and key child protection concerns, with some including content specifically on the role of social workers in addressing these needs. However, in most cases, it appears that child protection content is limited to just one lecture.

As an example, Dhaka University's BSS contains a module on 'Human Growth: Physiological and Behavioural Aspects", which includes a lecture on "Psychological and Emotional Factors, Psychological Deprivation in Childhood, Parent-child Relationships, Child abuse and its impact on Behaviour." Additionally the module on "Social Work with Families and Children" has relevant content relating to the delivery of child protection work, covering topics including abuse and neglect, care in the family, alternative care provisions (institutional and non-institutional), family relationships and children in the context of Bangladesh, and international and national child laws and policies[169]. The broader child development topics and theories appear to align with the most common, internationally recognised theories of child development (although note that it appears there is limited research available and taught on the application of these theories in the Bangladesh context).

Some degrees in the other universities also provide a background of the existing services available for child welfare in Bangladesh,[170] and provide teachings on the convention of the rights of the child. Courses providing information on child protection services available in Bangladesh appear to primarily cover the role of rehabilitation centres and other institutional care[171]. Where social work with children is covering service delivery, courses appear to have more content relating to institutional care and financial welfare provisions than other areas of social work. Respondents from AUB and RU recognised the need for child protection to be better incorporated as its own topic in the curriculum. Dhaka University and the Master's course at RU appear to have the strongest and highest volume of content relating to child protection social work.

[167]Rajshahi University

[168]Jagannath University Masters in Social Work.

[169]Note, Jagannath University Syllabus includes very little relating to child abuse, and primarily focuses on rehabilitation for children in conflict with the law and supporting children with disabilities.

[170]E.g. Asian University. Detailed in Syllabus p.75

[171]E.g. Jagannath University Syllabus, p.61

Suggested readings for modules relating to social work for children include some recent documents (including international documents) relating to models of practice for social work with children and families. For example, Rajshahi University includes reading on the practice of social work delivery with children and families using models employed in the US (dated between 2004 and 2016)[172]. However, the vast majority of recommended reading represents broad theoretical knowledge on child development, and the documents relating to both theory and practice are mostly outdated. In some courses, recommended theoretical readings are from as early as the 1960s. Outdated materials were evident in all courses relating to child development and child protection, and there appeared to be little research or documentation specific to Bangladesh within the reading materials.

4.1.2 Availability, uptake and completion of courses

One of the key issues identified by stakeholders relates to the lack of requirement that social workers have a social work degree, meaning that in practice less than 3 percent of social workers have a degree in social work (see section 3.3.4). However, data provided by Universities indicates that there is a sizeable pool of qualified individuals who would be better equipped to deliver social services (with note of the limitations to social work courses outlined above). All programmes are offered at least once per year, meaning new graduates are available on an annual basis.

The number of available positions, uptake and completion of programmes varies between universities. In general, fewer positions are available for masters' courses (see Annex C for a detailed table). There were between 50 and 110 places available for the Bachelor's and the Master's courses.[173]

For most Bachelor's and Master's courses, the pass rate was above 90 percent. Exceptions were the Bachelors of Social Work at UITS (50 percent), and the Bachelor's and Master's of Social Work at AUB (85 percent and 80 percent, respectively). The pass rate was reported to be low for UITS undergraduates due to high dropout and low motivation of students. It is unclear why dropout is higher at UITS than other universities (although note, no teaching faculty are professors, suggesting a less qualified teaching faculty). Retention is something that UITS should consider reviewing.

Together, the pass rate for the core bachelor's and master's courses indicates that there are **more than 524 graduates of social work each year.**[174] Although the true number of social work graduates entering the field of social work are low, university representatives did however note the progression of students into graduate social work positions as a key achievement for universities, indicating this progression is regarded as an achievement as opposed to the norm:

[172]Rajshahi University MSS Syllabus, p.42.

[173]Some informants provided approximations where information on the exact count was unavailable.

[174]Note, this does not include the number of graduates from People's University of Bangladesh, Department of Sociology and Social Work or the Islamic University of Bangladesh, Department of Social Welfare

"The significant milestone is that many of our students who graduated from our university are currently working for several renowned national and International NGOs, like BRAC, Save the Children, Care, Plan International, Aparajeyo Bangladesh etc...[Alumni are] also working as probation officers and lecturers of social work departments in different Universities. They will surely strengthen our SSWF."[175]

4.1.3 Degree accreditation and curriculum alignment

A central authority accredits and authorises degree programmes for each university. Universities reported that auditing processes occur through the Institutional Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC).[176] All universities indicated that an audit of the curriculum is carried out annually, with the exception of AUB, which indicated that the most recent audit was two years ago. The curricula are audited by an expert panel, often consisting of internal experts, other universities' Social Work Departments, course alumni, and sometimes field personnel. In some cases, it appears that there are limits to the changes that can be made to a curricula; for example, the UITS indicated that a maximum of 30 percent of the curricula can be amended in any given academic year.

The content and alignment of the curricula to specific standards varied between institutions. Only RU and UIT reported that degrees are designed to align with international standards, and reported that audits are carried out once every three years or more to ensure this alignment (although note that the issues relating to relatively outdated content also existed in these universities). RU reported to follow the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) code of ethics, code of conduct and include core subjects from international curricula and institutions. UIT stated that its curriculum was formulated to keep international standards integrated, but since revisions to the curriculum have been made, these standards are not "well maintained"[177]. At JU, it was noted that while finalising content of curricula, global content is kept in mind.

An effective SSWF requires the development of skills as well as knowledge in the field of child protection and social work.[178] As noted above, most degrees appeared to include information related to social services delivered in Bangladesh. Where collaborations or consultations with governments, NGOs and researchers were concerned, only DU reported to engage with this. It appears that the volume of content relating to the child protection needs of children in Bangladesh is limited, which is unsurprising given the limited coverage of child development and child protection issues across the universities, and indeed limited availability of research on child protection needs.

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[175]KI Survey, RU

[176]IQAC is a Higher Education quality assurance mechanism implemented in 2016 by the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) under the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh. The QAU provided guidelines for IQAC operations to improve teaching, learning, and research quality and establish an effective internal quality assurance system in all higher education institutions in Bangladesh.

[177]KI Survey, RU

[178]UNICEF and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Service Workforce for Child Protection, February 2019, p.27.

As part of the CSPB project, an initiative is underway to increase coordination between universities and the DSS establish a child protection social work degree and executive course or any other degree on child rights and protection related areas with universities[179]. However, at the time of writing, no concrete outcomes in terms of curricula amendments appear to have arisen from this initiative.

4.1.4 Teaching faculty

In general, there are specific requirements for the teaching faculty delivering social work courses (Professors, Associate Professors, Assistant Professors and Lecturers) in terms of qualifications and years of teaching experience (higher positions requiring more years of experience). Notably, faculty are not required to have any practical/field experience in social work to teach on the courses, and only professors are required to have a doctorate. Note, no Professors teach social work courses at UIT. The number of faculty members in each university are provided in Annex C, alongside monitoring mechanisms and feedback given on faculty requirements. While faculty were carrying out research on social issues in Bangladesh, it does not appear that there is much research being carried out on child protection specifically.

4.2 Accredited Short Course Training Programmes

A developed SSWF should have access to competency-based training programmes that provide the adequate knowledge and skills to carry out child protection responsibilities. This is particularly important for professionals who do not hold a bachelor's degree or hold a degree in an unrelated field (which applies to the majority of social workers in Bangladesh).[180] In-service training and continuing educational opportunities should also be available and serve an important function for nurturing motivation and expanding the knowledge and skills of members of the workforce in line with emerging good practices.[181]

In Bangladesh, the NASS and RTCs offer basic social service training (BSST) and professional social service training (PSST) to the SSWF, aiming to strengthen the knowledge and skills of workers carrying out roles within this field. However, it should be noted that this training was developed by UNICEF in partnership with DSS, and, at present, UNICEF continue to lead and resource this training (through the CSPB project).[182] It is understood that only probation officers and senior officers obtain PSST from the NTCC, while social workers in the field obtain BSST at the regional training centres. As noted below, many social workers are yet to receive this training.

[179]KII with UNICEF, KII with DSS stakeholders.
[180]UNICEF, Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Services Workforce for Child Protection, 2019, p.26
[181]UNICEF, Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Services Workforce for Child Protection, 2019, p.27
[182]KII UNICEF

4.2.1 National Academy of Social Service (NASS) and Regional Training Centres (RTC)

A range of courses are provided to the SSWF by the DSS training centres: NASS and the six RTCs (located in Dhaka, Sylhet, Chittagong, Khulna, Barisal and Rajshahi). Each training lasts for a duration of 7 to 15 days. Only four courses are directly relevant to child protection (two each in NASS and the RTCs). Table 8 details the relevant child protection modules (which were developed in partnership with UNICEF).

Courses are aligned with the responsibilities of social workers as defined in the Children Act, and are designed to build capacity of social workers and increase their understanding of the issues they will be responding to in the field. The NASS representative reported that they are keen to upgrade the courses with new innovation and remain updated about the work needed in the field.[183]

Table 8: Child protection training offered by NASS and the RTCs.

Module names	Module content
NASS– Child protection and development	Children at risk; child development; psychology; management; prevention; supportive parenting; safe guarding and counseling; communication skills
NASS – Probation officer's capacity building and skills development	Child protection laws (The Children Act), alternative care, diversion, aftercare.
RTC - Academic Programme Management and Child Protection Course (6 modules).	Children at risk, child development, safeguarding policy, role of 1098 to ensure child protection, child marriage, dowry and drug addiction, role of social media, mobile app ensuring child protection, government initiatives regarding child protection, counseling services, probation, aftercare, juvenile justice management, case management.
RTC - Case Management and Psychosocial Protection of the Child (6 modules).	

It appears that course content differs between regions. For example, the RTC in Chittagong reported that modifications have been made to the child protection and development related courses[184], although it is unclear whether these adaptions were made to tailor training to the local context. Courses are certified by the corresponding RTC and the training is generally provided by the institution's internal instructors. RTCs noted that external stakeholders sometimes provide training, including DSS officials, UNICEF and facilitators from related fields (e.g. doctors, IT experts, probation officers, finance officers and CSPB workers), suggesting that at the regional level, independent initiatives are sometimes undertaken to increase the knowledge and skills of the SSWF.

[183]KI survey, NASS

[184]KI Survey, RTC Chittagong

RTC training providers regard the courses as highly important for "increasing professionalism for DSS employees and skill development"[185]. RTCs also perceive the quality of training to be high. The RTC in Dhaka noted that it was proud to be nominated as the best RTC in 2022 for "quality standard ensuring effective training programmes for SSWF"[186]. The training centres reported that they require additional funding for the effective delivery of training to all staff,[187] and believe that "more training on child protection should be provided. "[188]

Courses are provided by NASS three times per year, with 30 graduates reported to have been in the last graduating class. The child protection modules are delivered by RTCs at least once a year in all Divisions except for Rajshahi, which reported that trainings are less frequent than once a year (but did not specify frequency). The annual target of employees attending the training ranges from 500 to 1000 (depending on the size of the SSWF). Each cohort for the child protection module ranges from 25-35 social workers.

4.2.2 Other training courses

UNICEF works in partnership with the Ministry of Justice to implement multidisciplinary training for the implementation of The Children Act (developed in 2018), which involves CAPOs, Children's Court Judges, DSS social workers and probation officers. The aim of the training is to both provide guidance for implementation of The Act and strengthen coordination between actors[189]. It was noted that over 900 CAPOs have been trained to date.

4.2.3 SSWF receiving training in practice

DSS social workers

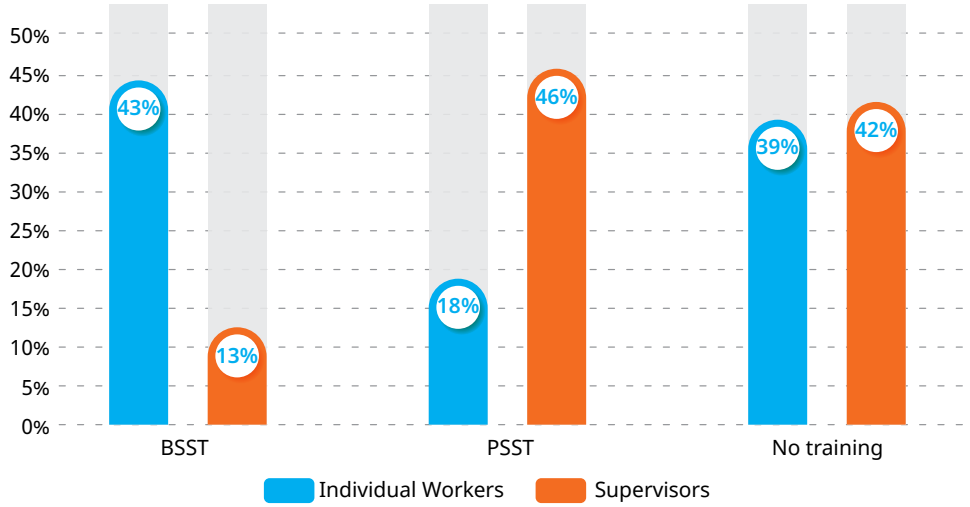
While all employees of DSS are mandated to take at least 60 hours of training per year,[190] data indicates that a high proportion of DSS social workers receive no training. In total, more than a third of DSS social workers and supervisors reported that they have never received training (see Figure 16). This is despite the fact that, in 2018, the DSS issued a letter with the instruction that all union and municipal social workers (and social service officers) should receive training on case management.[191]

Of those who have received training, 69 percent reported that this training was delivered in the last four years (i.e. since 2020). However, some reported that their most recent training was as early as the year 2000, and in FGDs, some union social workers reported that they have not received training relating to children since the 1980s. Notably, in these instances, social workers reporting that this training was linked to issues like nutrition, child labour and child marriage (i.e. not the key child protection issues of focus).[192]

[185]KI Survey, RTC Barisal
[186]KI Survey, RTC Dhaka
[187]KI Survey, RTC Sylhet
[188]KI Survey, RTC Khulna
[189]KII with UNICEF Justice Specialist, February 2024.
[190]KI Surveys, Regional Training Centre.
[191]DSS Circular "Strengthening Case Management Services", October 2018
[192]e.g. FGD Dhaka.

It is understood that UNICEF will be supporting DSS to ensure newly appointed union social workers will receive training on child protection.[193]

Figure 15: DSS social workers who have received training



In FGDs, DSS workers indicated that they rarely receive training. Some reported that the social service officer receives training at the RTC and subsequently trains field workers. However, in instances like this, some social workers reported the total duration of their training on child protection to be only 30 minutes long. Social workers expressed frustration that social services officers receive the most training when they are not the individuals delivering the services on the ground.[194]

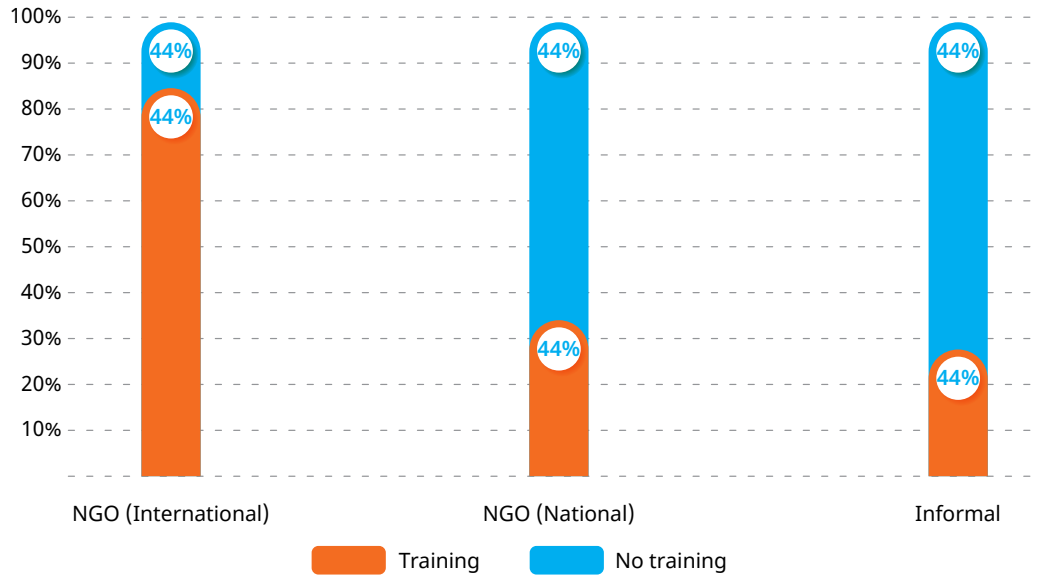
Qualitative data highlighted the difference in training received between social workers; notably, CSPB workers reported that the content of the training involved elements relating to case management and core child protection duties, while examples of training received by other DSS workers included ad-hoc training provided by INGOs relating to nutrition and supporting children with disabilities.

NGO and informal social workers

Almost three quarters of informal workers have received no training. There is a stark contrast in the training received by national and international NGOs. Almost all (94 percent) of INGO social workers have received some form of training, whilst only one third of national NGO workers have received training. NGOs provided little information relating to the specific content of the trainings they are provided. Some NGO workers reported receiving internal training specific to a project when they commence,[195] while others said that training has not been specific to child protection (rather, they have been focused on other issues such as nutrition and child labour). Some NGOs noted that they have been provided a number of courses on child protection throughout their career, including training provided by UNICEF, or other NGOs and INGOs, including Save the Children.[196]

[193]Insight provided by UNICEF child protection representative, January 2024.
[194]E.g. FGD Dhaka
[195]E.g. FGD Sirajganj.
[196]E.g. FGD Barguna

Figure 16: Training received by non-government and informal workers



Accessibility and relevance of education and training

In general, perceptions relating to training were relatively neutral, although there were key differences between entities. Notably, individuals from INGOs had much more positive views about their training, as indicated in Table 6. These individuals were much more likely than their government or national NGO counterparts to report that their training is adequate and relevant to their day to day tasks, that training is easy to implement and that trainings are geographically and financially accessible.

Table 9: Percentage respondents agreeing with statements (supervisors in brackets)

Perceptions of training	Government	INGO	NGO	Informal
Education/training is adequate to do job*	54% (50%)	88% (33%)	62% (63%)	50%
Education / training relevant to tasks day-to-day*	72%	88%	76%	77%
Easy to implement learnings in practice*	70%	94%	76%	72%
Organisation[197] encourages participation in training	64% (62%)	100% (100%)	79% (94%)	29%
Trainings are geographically accessible	39% (58%)	88% (67%)	42% (69%)	40%
Trainings are financially accessible	49% (50%)	71% (100%)	40% (69%)	7%
Enough trainings to receive promotion	36% (25%)	88% (67%)	47% (75%)	-

*Excluding 'N/A – Never received training or education'

[197]For informal workers, this referred to 'individuals in the community'

While few social workers have completed the available social work degrees, qualitative data indicated that those who have a degree in social work or social welfare found that this provided an invaluable base knowledge and was helpful for informing workers' practice in the field. Individuals with social science / psychology degrees also felt that this education had helped them deliver social services and understand the needs of individuals in their community. Conversely, the individuals who do not have relevant degrees felt that their education was irrelevant to their work and did not help them prepare for their role as social workers.

DSS social workers also indicated limitations to training in FGDs. While in general, they feel that training is helpful and relevant to their work, several highlighted that it is difficult to implement the trainings they receive in practice, due to their high workload and limited resources. Others stated that the training does not provide much information about dealing with the groups of children with whom they work in practice. Notably, the CSPB workers spoke particularly positively about the training they had received, noting that it had been helpful for understanding how to perform their child protection duties.

DSS employees spoke quite positively about the measures in place to make their training accessible. They noted that when they are requested to attend training, the DSS provides financial provisions to make the training accessible (i.e. pay for their travel to training in the RTCs). Some did note that it is a long distance from their Upazila to the RTCs and they would prefer training to be localised. A couple of social workers indicated that they are expected to attend training outside of working hours, which places additional pressure on already overworked staff. DSS staff reported that they do not have the authority to attend training unless instructed by their superior.

Government social workers were particularly likely to disagree that training supports their career development and enables them to access promotions, likely due to the limited framework in place for promotions within the DSS (see section 5. 1. 1).

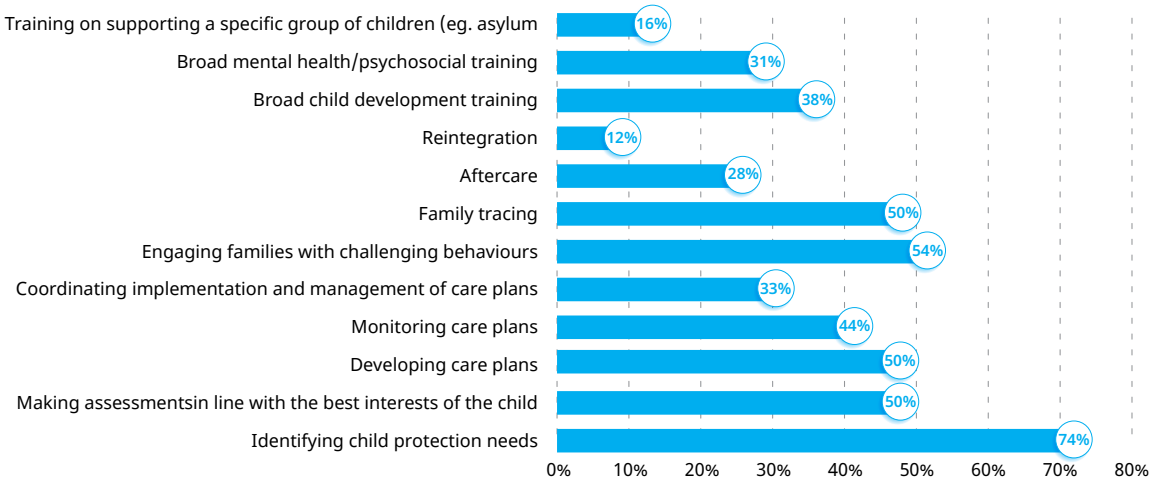
Training needs

The figure below shows the percentage of respondents reporting that they would benefit from certain types of training. Almost three quarters of social workers feel that they need training on identifying child protection needs, and 50 percent need training on making assessments and developing care plans (i.e. core case management components). The other areas in which social workers feel they would most benefit from training are Engaging families with challenging behaviours and family tracing. It was common for individuals in FGDs to report that they need more training on child protection, but had limited knowledge to identify specific areas in which they would benefit from receiving training.

Notably, a higher than average percentage of DSS workers feel that they need training on the following areas:

- Identifying child protection needs (82 percent)
- Making assessments in line with the best interests of the child (54 percent)
- Family tracing (57 percent)
- Broad child development training (41 percent)
- Mental health training (44 percent)

Figure 17: Percentage of respondents reporting specific training needs



In almost all areas, informal workers were less likely to report that they need training compared to the government and non-government workforce. However, informal workers felt that they would benefit from training on family tracing (44 percent), general child development (42 percent) and training on working with specific groups of children (27 percent). This likely represents the limited scope of child protection support provided by these individuals, rather than a greater knowledge and understanding of child protection practices.

The low percentage of individuals reporting that they need training on reintegration is likely reflective of the lack of recognition or availability of services targeting this in practice, rather than a lack of need of training in this area (see section 3. 3. 4). Notably, a quarter of INGO social workers indicated that they would benefit from training in reintegration, suggesting a higher level of acknowledgement of the necessity of this service amongst individuals who have an awareness of international standards for child protection.

Moreover, in FGDs, social workers highlighted that they would benefit from training in the following areas: IT support to enable better recording of case management; providing counseling services (for which several noted they carry out without any training); training on child protection laws; areas related to child protection, such as child marriage prevention, and supporting children who are involved with narcotics.

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5

Findings: Supporting the Social Service Workforce

5.1 Professionalisation and Uptake Mechanisms

Beyond Social Services Officials passing the entrance exam to work in the government sector (which applies to all government workers, not just social workers), there are no accreditation or licencing requirements for the SSWF, and (as indicated in Section 3. 3. 4) there is no requirement for social workers to hold a social work degree. It was widely reported that social work is not recognised as a profession in Bangladesh.[198] Social workers noted that they do not have the same access to benefits as other civil service members, and that they have a lower social standing and receive less respect than others in the civil service[199]. Senior officials within the DSS highlighted the lack of professionalisation mechanisms as a key challenge for the effective delivery of social services in the country, and other respondents highlighted the need for social worker registration processes to be implemented[200]. Moreover, as indicated below, there are limited opportunities for career progression.

Internationally, it is common practice professionalise the SSWF through a social work competency framework, which defines the expected competencies of individuals at different stages in their social work career, and outlines a path for career progression. However, there is no such framework for the social work profession in Bangladesh. Although there are no set international guidelines for developing competency frameworks, good practice examples include the 'Professional Capabilities Framework' developed by the British Association of Social Work and Social Work England[201]. This framework outlines nine competency domains, and expected competency for each of these domains at nine stages throughout the social work career (from pre-placement during social work studies through to upper management).

5.2 Career Development Opportunities and Retention

5.2.1 Retention

Workforce retention is an important part of providing a sustainable child protection system. However, it is equally important to provide social service workers with opportunities for career progression commensurate with their skills and experience, in order to motivate and sustain a skilled workforce and attract new social service workers to the sector.202

[198]E.g. KII with DSS representatives; KI survey with Obhizatrik; FGDs

[199]FGDs; KI surveys

[200]KII, Association for Social Work, Bangladesh

[201]See: https://new.basw.co.uk/training-cpd/professional-capabilities-framework/about-professional-capabilities-framework-pcf

[202]UNICEF and GSSWA, Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Service Workforce for Child Protection, February 2019, p. 29.

Overall, the survey findings show a good level of retention for social workers:

- 44 percent of individual workers have been in their current position for more than five years
- 18 percent of workers had also held a previous position in social work
- 82 percent of these individuals held their previous position for more than five years
- 21 percent of DSS supervisors and 32 percent of NGO supervisors have had their role for more than 10 years.

Table 10: Length of time in current position by entity, for individual workers (source: IW survey)

	Current position		Previous position (18% of total SSWF)	
Entity	**> 5 years**	**> 10 years**	**> 5 years**	**> 10 years**
Government	53%	30%	90%	66%
NGO	46%	12%	79%	30%
INGO	24%	6%	50%	0%
Informal	27%	12%	-	-

As can be seen in the table above, the highest retention rates for individual workers were within the government. Over half of DSS social workers have been in their current position for more than five years. Notably, this retention is even higher when excluding the CSPB child protection social workers (of whom 86 percent have held their role for less than five years). When excluding these workers, 70 percent of DSS social workers have been in their role for more than five years, with 28 percent in their role for more than 20 years.

Staff turnover appears to be higher in the NGO SSWF. Only percent have been in their role for more than 10 years, and NGO workers made up the majority (82 percent) of people who had a previous role in social work This is likely to be due to the high proportion of NGO workers on project-based contracts. In particular, 44 percent of INGO social workers have been employed for two years or less.

Notably, projects coming to a close was the most commonly reported reason for workers leaving their previous social work positions (by 60 percent of respondents; see Figure 13). A reliance on project-based NGO services often results in a lack of continuity of child protection services and instability in the SSWF.

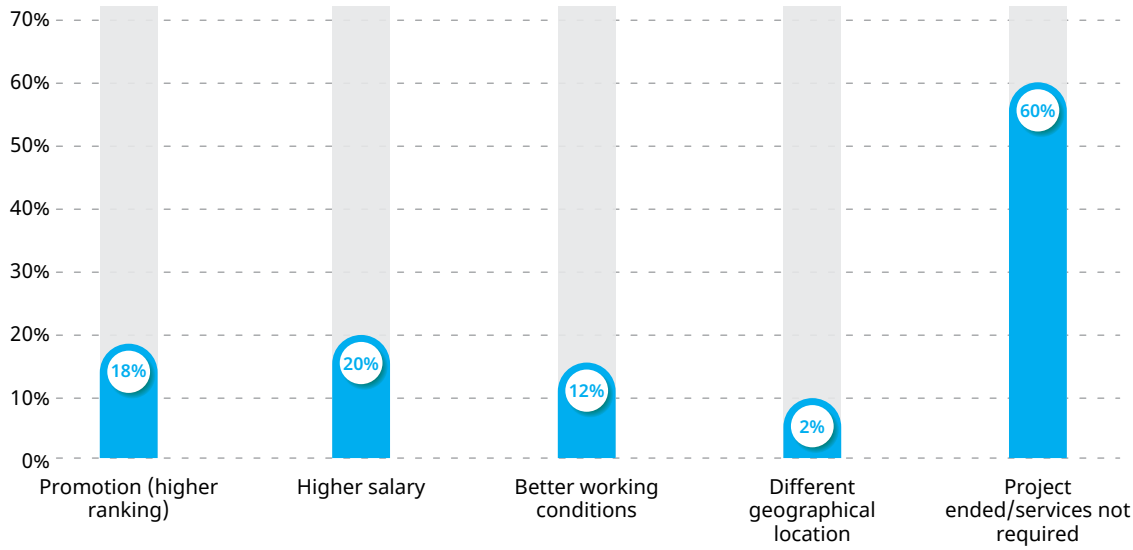
Career progression/promotion opportunities

The high retention of social workers in their role, while indicating a high level of stability in roles, also suggests a lack of career progression for workers. Across the board, social workers reported that a lack of career progression is a problem in Bangladesh and serves to demotivate social workers. DSS employees often highlighted that they have not received a promotion after more than 30 years of employment, and several who have received a promotion (e.g. from union social worker to field

supervisor) reported that they were in their previous position for up to 35 years before receiving a promotion[203]. Some noted that they receive incremental salary increases as government employees.

Another issue is that the promotion from social worker to field supervisor is a promotion only in title; there is no remuneration for this promotion[204]. As shown in Figure 13, only 20 percent of workers reported that they changed roles for a higher salary, and 18 percent reported that they changed jobs for a higher ranking. Together, these findings indicate limited opportunity for promotion.

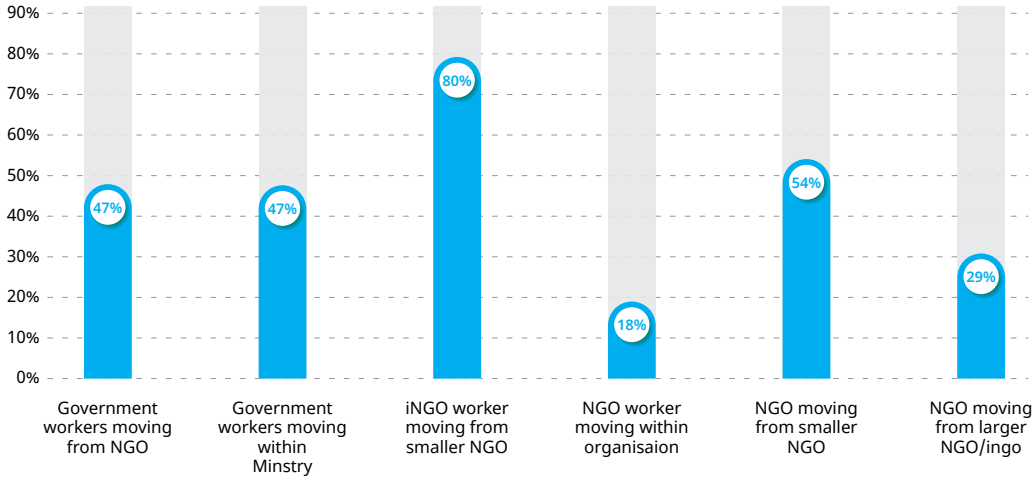
Figure 18: Reasons for leaving previous role



Some indication of promotion and motivation for changing jobs can be identified by looking at the sector in which social workers worked in their previous role (see Figure 20). The majority (80 percent) of social workers in INGOs moved from a smaller NGO, indicating movement for career progression (due to the higher salary received in INGOs, see below). There was no movement from the government sector into the non-government sector, but a high percentage of government workers (47 percent) previously worked in an NGO. Within FGDs, social workers reported that it is the preference to be a government social worker as opposed to an NGO worker due to higher stability in employment, the status that comes with this, and the higher salary in the government sector.

[203]E.g. FGD Barguna.
[204]KII with DSS stakeholder.

Figure 19: Percentage of social workers changing roles within the social work sector



Salary

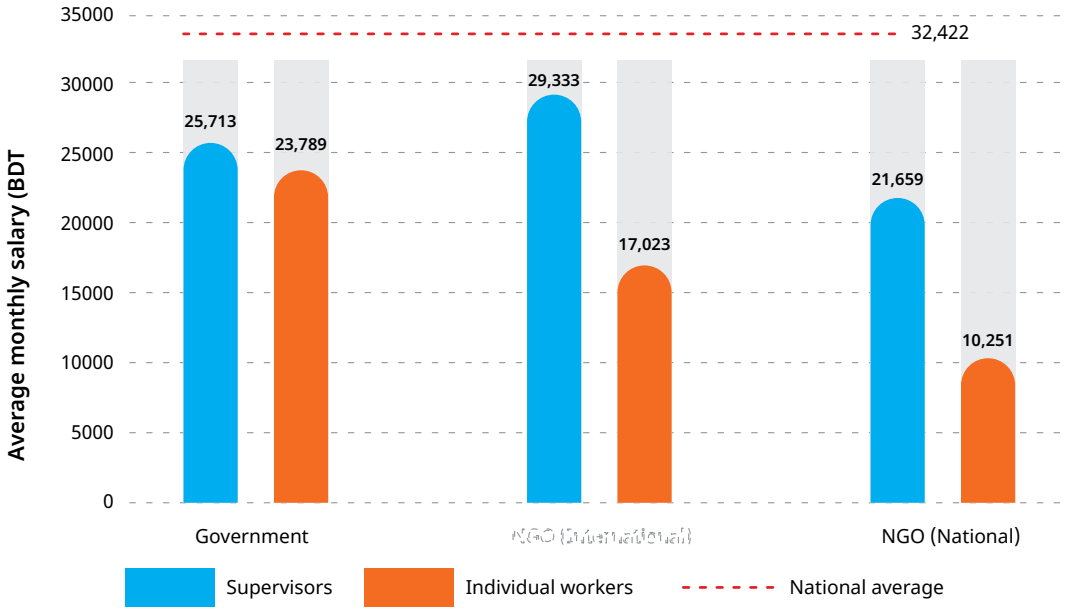
One key area that influences the retention of the workforce is salary. According to the 2022 Household Income and Expenditure Survey, the average monthly income in Bangladesh is 32, 422 BDT per month.[205] As illustrated in the figure below, the average monthly income of social workers is substantially lower than the average salary in Bangladesh across all entities. Supervisors' salaries were higher than individual workers' salaries, with the greatest disparity between worker and supervisor salary for NGOs. For individual workers, salaries are highest for government workers, whereas for supervisors, salaries are highest for those in INGOs.

Notably, one third of non-government workers are volunteers and do not receive a salary (almost exclusively national NGOs), and no informal workers receive payment from any entity for their services.

Low salary was the second most frequently reported challenge for social workers in surveys (50 percent of respondents reported that this is one of their top three challenges). Only 35 percent of social workers and supervisors are satisfied with their salary/voluntary status of their job. Despite government salaries being the highest, government workers are least satisfied (only 29 percent). Dissatisfaction with salary was a frequently discussed topic within FGDs, with many government workers noting that their salaries are not sufficient to meet their personal needs or support their families, and that their salaries are lower than their government counterparts from other departments.

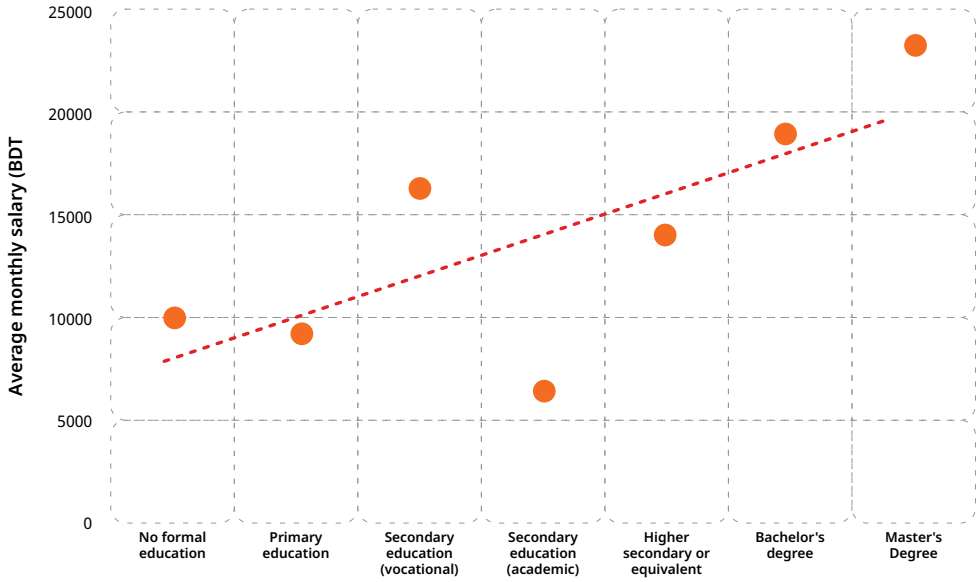
[205]Household Income and Expenditure Survey, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2022)

Figure 20: Average monthly salary reported by supervisors and individual workers (source: supervisor survey and individual worker survey)



Salary was linked to education; individual workers with basic education were on the lowest salaries, whilst those with a master's degree have the highest salary. It appears that those with vocational secondary education qualifications end up in higher paid roles than those with academic or higher secondary qualifications.

Figure 21: Average monthly salary reported by individual workers according to education level (source: individual worker survey)



Overall Satisfaction

Despite the challenges faced by social workers, 92 percent report being satisfied or highly satisfied with their job. This is highest for INGO workers at 100 percent. The main source of job satisfaction appears to be the contributions these individuals are making to society. In total, 97 percent of workers and 93 percent of supervisors feel that they are making a positive impact to people's lives through their work.

5.3 Supervision

Supervision in the social services should be a supportive relationship. It should be carried out in regular meetings, which focus on accountability, well-being and skill development. Through regular contacts, the supervisor should provide coaching and encourage social workers to critically reflect on their practice. The ultimate aim of supervision is to improve the service to clients.[206]

For social workers in Bangladesh, the practice of supervision is inconsistent. As shown below in Table 8, one fifth of government social workers do not have an immediate supervisor. Almost half of national NGO social workers have a supervisor, suggesting that there is insufficient support for social service workers within such organisations. In total, 62 percent of supervisors reported having their own immediate supervisor.

It appears that some informal workers have taken steps to implement a supervision mechanism, with 26 percent reporting that they have someone they turn to for supervisory support.

5.3.1 Ratio of Supervisors to Workers

Where supervision is in place, there is an average supervisor to worker ratio of 1:9. Although there are no fixed international standards on the appropriate ratio of supervisors to workers in the child protection sector, existing sources recommend a ratio of 1:5[207]. A breakdown of this ratio by entity (see table 11) shows that supervisors within national NGOs at a national level supervise significantly more workers than any other entity, with a ratio of 1:12.[208]

[206]Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, Guidelines for strengthening the SSWF.

[207]Casey Family Programs, What are preliminary building blocks to strengthen quality supervision?, 5 February 2018, retrieved from https://www.casey.org/what-are-preliminary-building-blocks-to-strengthen-quality-supervision/ on 12 December 2023.

[208]Note, one anomaly was removed from this ratio due to one worker reporting that they supervise 144 individuals

Table 11: Supervisor to worker ratio by entity and frequency of supervision

Entity	Percentage of social workers with a supervisor	Average supervisor to worker ratio[209]	Frequency of supervision[210]		
			daily	weekly	monthly
Government	80%	1:8	85%	12%	4%
INGO	82%	1:3	93%	0%	7%
NGO	58%	1:12	49%	40%	10%
Total	**68%**	**1:9**	**68%**	**25%**	**7%**

5.3.2 Frequency of Supervisions

International standards suggest that individuals should receive on-to-one supervision at least once a month[211]. The vast majority of social workers' supervision exceeds this standard. Almost 100 percent of individuals with supervisors receive supervision once per month, with 68 percent reporting receiving daily supervision. It appears that DSS social workers receive the least supervision; 25 percent receive supervision only monthly, compared to a seven percent average. However, this is still within the international standards. Group supervisions are another model of supervision that can be used to support the workforce[212], and again, 100 percent of individuals who have supervisors reported group supervisions at least once per month.

Examples of positive supervision and support activities for the workforce within NGOs were provided, such as workers being provided a safe space to discuss their frustrations confidentially[213]. Individuals within the government SSWF indicated that group meetings as a team and the feeling of being a collective workforce is a fundamental element of support received in the workplace, and social workers value being able to discuss and collectively find solutions to the challenges they are facing in their work.[214]

[209]Data source, supervisor survey

[210]Data source, individual worker survey

[211]Note that this is the general recommendation. The GSSWA recommends that allowance should be made for "urgent consultations with a supervisor as and when needed", a higher frequency for humanitarian and emergency situations and more regular supervision for new workers (once a week for 8-12 weeks of practice, followed by once every fortnight for the next three months; GSSWA, Guidance Manual on Strengthening Supervision for the Social Service Workforce, October 2020, pp 23-24.

[212]GSSWA, Guidance Manual on Strengthening Supervision for the Social Service Workforce, October 2020, p. 21.

[213]KII, BRAC

[214]FGDs

5.3.3 Quality of Supervision

According to the GSSWA, supervision has four core functions:

- Managerial (such as reviewing workload, providing feedback on performance, supporting the worker to undertake challenging work and helping the worker understand their roles and responsibilities);
- Supportive (providing a forum for the worker to speak openly about challenges and difficulties and helping the worker to overcome them, providing empathetic and emotional support and time to reflect);
- Developmental (such as helping the worker to improve their knowledge and practice skills through constructive feedback; coaching and practice advice; helping the worker to access additional education; a
- More recently, mediation (whereby the supervisor acts as a bridge between the worker and other staff).[215]

Supervisors and individual workers were asked corresponding questions relating to the quality of supervision and the extent to which it serves its purpose (i.e. supervisors were asked about their delivery of supervision, while individual workers were asked about their receipt of supervision).

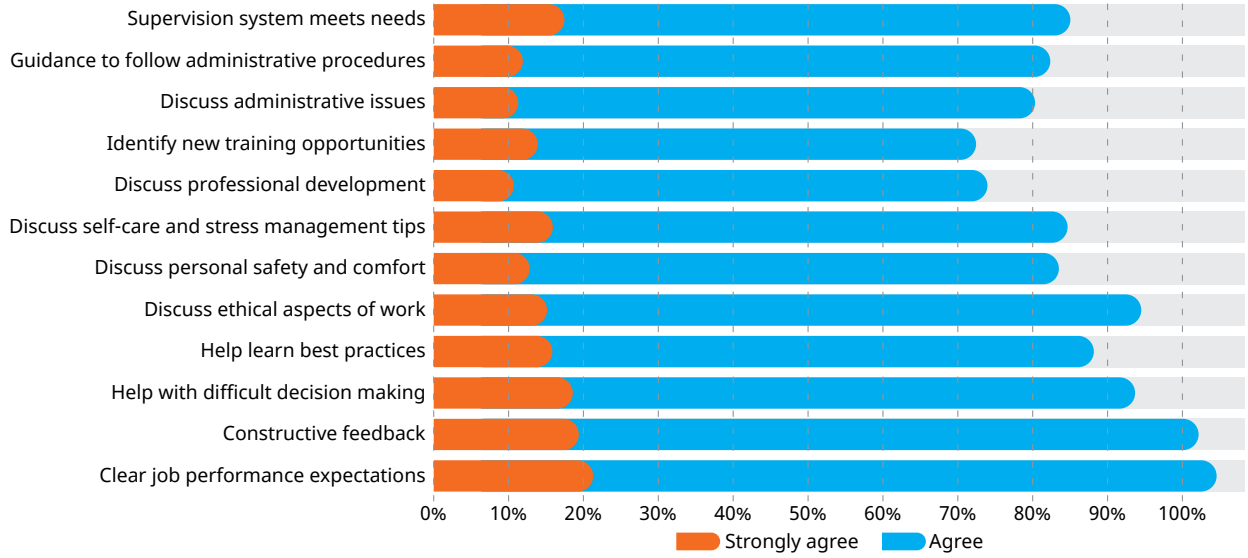
Overall, the majority of supervisors believe that they provide strong supervision. For most areas of supervision, 95-98 percent of supervisors feel that they provide strong supervision. Areas where supervisors feel that they are not meeting workers' needs are: identifying new training opportunities (7 percent) and discussing administrative issues (12 percent). This reflects some awareness amongst supervisors about the lack of training opportunities available to social workers (see section 4. 1. 2). Notably, one fifth (21 percent) of supervisors do not feel that the supervision they receive meets their needs (highest for government supervisors at 25 percent).

While 89 percent of social workers feel that supervision meets their needs, there were particular areas where social workers feel their supervisor is not providing adequate support. Figure 23 shows individuals' level of agreement. Less than 80 percent of social workers feel that their supervisor: discusses personal safety and comfort; discusses self-care and stress management; discusses professional development and training opportunities; and discusses or provides guidance for administrative tasks. While some of these areas are often not within supervisors' control (particularly those relating to training), there are areas in which supervisors are able to improve their support.

In FGDs, social workers spoke very positively about their supervisors, stating that whenever they have a problem, they can turn to their supervisor for support and guidance. Individuals also highlighted the important role that their whole internal team provides in terms of mutual support to resolve issues. However, there was little discussion about the role of supervision beyond supporting workers to address specific issues in the field.

[215]GSSWA, Guidance Manual on Strengthening Supervision for the Social Service Workforce, October 2020, p. 6.

Figure 22: Individual workers agreeing to the statement relating the support provided by their supervisor (source: IW survey)



5.4 The Role of Professional Associations

The Association for Social Workers Bangladesh (BASW) is both a professional association and trade union for social workers. It was established in 1997. The ASW is only for non-government social workers (i.e. those without any professional status) as a method for increasing professionalisation in the sector. At present, there are 1275 members of the BASW in all Divisions, although primarily in urban areas. Activities in the professional association are relatively limited due to financial constraints; the association relies on funding from the OSHE Secretariate and, at present, has only one administrative staff member to coordinate activities. However, the association tries to support social workers' access to trainings and capacity building activities, ensure that their employment contracts are in line with employment laws, and advocate for their employment rights and improvements in quality of service provision. The BASW is advocating for a formal registration process for social workers.[216]

Supervisors and individual workers were asked whether they were a member of a professional association for social work. While 14 percent of supervisors and 7 percent of individual workers stated that they were members of a professional associations for social work, the associations that were named appeared to be non-government organisations and local support groups. Nobody mentioned the ASW. This indicates both a) a lack of knowledge about the ASW and b) a lack of understanding of the purpose and function of professional associations.

[216]KII with BASW representative

6

Conclusions and Recommendations

This section provides conclusions in relation to each section of this report, followed by the key priority recommendations for each area of SSWF strengthening. Implementation of recommendations should be led by DSS, with technical support provided by UNICEF through the final phase of the CSPB project.

6.1 Planning the SSWF

Law and policy framework and responsibilities in practice

Legislation (primarily The Children Act) provides for a child protection workforce (social workers, probation officer and CAPOs). The act defines groups of vulnerable children in need of social services, and outlines responsibilities of the workforce, particularly in relation to case management, probation, diversion, reintegration and alternative care. However, a lack of Rules defining processes for these areas of child protection is a key barrier to the provision of such services (particularly for diversion). Job descriptions do not align with the Children Act, although circulars / instructions are distributed by the DSS defining workers' obligations relating to child protection.

In practice, there is often poor implementation of the Children Act (for several reasons, including lack of manpower, education/training and guidelines). In particular, probation, diversion and reintegration services are limited, in addition to prevention of separation. Most groups of disadvantaged children lack a dedicated SSWF, although children with disabilities, child victims of sexual abuse and orphans appear to have a high number of social workers providing support.

It appears that, while the government is the primary workforce carrying out case management, the NGO and informal workforce are seeking to fill the gaps in certain provisions, particularly those that focus on maintaining relations between parents and children and preventing separation. There is a general lack of understanding of the concept of child protection as defined amongst government and non-government stakeholders and social workers.

- Job descriptions of social workers should be updated to align with the responsibilities in The Children Act (i.e. instructions provided in circulars should be formally embedded in job descriptions). There should be distinct job descriptions for all category of DSS social worker.
- Finalisation and adoption of the draft rules for implementation of the Children Act should be prioritised. Uniform practice standards should be developed to provide definitions and guidelines for the provision of services. Particular attention should be paid to areas where capacity is lacking at present, namely: preventing the separation of families; diversion services and reintegration, to increase social workers' capacity to prevent children from entering childcare institutions.
- Guidelines for the provision of child protection services should apply to government and non-government social workers and be incorporated into the NGO registration process.
- UNICEF should strengthen advocacy efforts to increase understanding of child protection (i.e. prevention and response to abuse, neglect and exploitation of children)

Size and structure of the workforce

There are an insufficient number of social workers providing child protection services in Bangladesh (a fifth of the required 100,000 social workers, even after taking non-government and informal social workers into consideration). Supervisors are more likely to be male. Non-government social workers account for about three quarters of the child protection workforce. With the exception of social workers employed under the CSPB project, there are no government workers dedicated to child protection. The allocation of one probation officer in each District is a significant limitation. In practice, the shortage of workers and competing responsibilities presents key challenges for social workers carrying out child protection responsibilities as mandated in the Children Act. The SSWF does not appear to be planned and distributed according to level of child protection need according to geographical location.

- The government should establish a permanent SSWF dedicated to child protection. There should also be at least one probation officer dedicated to children's cases in every Upazila, in line with the Children Act.
- The government should expand the administrative structure to include at least one para-social worker at village level to support union and CSPB social workers.
- The government should increase the number of social workers in line with its original commitments (at least 6000) and ensure that there is enough manpower for at least one social worker dedicated to child protection in each union.
- In the long term, the child protection SSWF should be distributed in line with need and number of cases in each Upazila / municipality / city corporation, ensuring that workers have the skills to address specific needs.
- SSWF planning should focus on decreasing the gender disparity between those in frontline versus supervisory positions.

Social workers have high caseloads (average 25), but the government workforce is substantially higher (38 cases per worker). Social workers spend a substantial proportion of time on non-child protection related activities. A high percentage of the non-government workforce is employed under part-time or temporary contracts, indicating a lack of consistency in this support. The normative framework does not define a target caseload.

- The normative framework should also establish a target caseload for social workers. The target caseload should be established by taking into consideration the complexity of cases and time spent on a case (in addition to competing responsibilities). However, until such an assessment is possible, the caseload should be no more than 25 per social worker.
- Planning should prioritise sufficient allocation of social workers to ensure that caseload does not exceed the target.

Capacity of the SSWF

There were several additional areas in which the SSWF was identified as lacking in capacity and providing poor quality services. Limited options in terms of available services often leads to social workers placing children in institutional care as a response to child neglect and abuse. While there is some evidence of gender transformative approaches and responsiveness in emergencies, this is limited. A lack of physical and logistic resources to deliver services compounds these issues. Although there were positive examples of coordination and community mobilisation, coordination mechanisms appear to be largely ineffective, compounded by CWBs (although established in accordance with the Children Act) only being active in CSPB locations.

- The DSS should ensure all established CWBs are active to coordination between the DSS, allied government stakeholders and non-government stakeholders, and should work to integrate informal workers into these systems.
- Efforts should be taken to increase awareness of the importance of social work and child protection amongst allied stakeholders with whom challenges in coordination remain (including through coordinating with MOLJPA to increase the rollout of the multisectoral training for implementation of the Children Act).
- Coordination should be strengthened between DSS social workers, NTCC/one-stop crisis centre workers and NGO workers, to ensure children have access to therapeutic support from trained professionals.
- The government should increase the resources available for social workers to carry out their roles, including the provision of adequate transportation and personnel protection equipment.
- Strengthening initiatives should focus on developing guidelines and trainings to support social workers to implement alternative family-based care, diversion and reintegration, and move away from the practice of placing children in residential institutions.
- Broader child protection systems strengthening should focus on increasing the availability of child protection services targeting specific groups of disadvantaged children. This will help ensure that case managers have access to the necessary support to prevent separation and implement reintegration and diversion.
- The DSS should develop an emergency preparedness framework, and each Upazila should appoint a dedicated Disaster Response Focal Point for child protection. Training should also be developed to include a module on Child Protection in Emergencies.

A lack of specialisation of the SSWF is a significant limitation. Social workers are not required to have a degree in social work, and those at field level are not required to have a degree. No social workers are required to have a qualification relating to child protection. In practice, less than three percent of social workers have a degree in social work.

- The normative framework should include the requirement for government social workers to have a degree (or at least a diploma / conversion course) in social work (with provisions to ensure existing experienced workforce members are not excluded, such as demonstrable experience in social work delivery). This should apply to those in the field, officers and high-level officials. Governments should work with universities to recruit qualified social workers.
- Those working on child protection case management should be required, in the long term, to hold a diploma on child protection.

Data monitoring

Limited data monitoring processes within the government means that there is limited institutional knowledge of the number and roles of the SSWF, both within the government and within the NGOs and CBOs which are required to be registered by the DSS.

- The DSS human resources team should strengthen its data management to monitor the number and responsibilities of social workers in each location[217]. Clear data templates should be provided to ensure that the responsible individual within each department maintains accurate data on both government social workers and the NGOs and informal workers providing child protection services on the ground. This could be used to map available services and inform SSWF coordination and broader child protection systems strengthening.
- At a minimum, the following information should be held at HQ of every social worker: their job title, geographical location, age, gender, and whether (in practice) they manage child protection cases. At the field level, supervisors should maintain data on the caseload of each worker (total caseload and child protection caseload).

6.2 Developing the SSWF

University courses

University courses on social welfare/social work contain modules which provide a relevant theoretical background to child development and child protection, in addition to some information related to the delivery of services to children and families in the Bangladesh context. However, this content appears to be covered over the course of one or few lectures, and the recommended supportive materials are largely outdated. All courses require students to complete a field practicum, but there is no requirement for this field experience to include social work with children.

There are clear auditing processes for degree programmes, but some variation in the frequency of audits. International practices and resources are used in some, but not all degrees, and there is limited national research on child protection needs in Bangladesh available or embedded into the courses.

[217]Not to be confused with child protection case management data systems

Social workers who have completed social welfare degrees felt that it was highly relevant and helpful in terms of informing their practice, and those without related degrees reported having little relevant knowledge to support their work.

- Coordination efforts should be strengthened between the government and universities to ensure that course content is aligned with social work practice in the field. Universities should update the supportive materials on child development and child protection and increase the volume of content relating to child protection beyond single lectures.
- A specialised course (degree or diploma) in child protection should be developed, made available within universities and promoted.
- Professionalisation measures should focus on ensuring that government requirements include field experience in child protection settings and completion of child protection courses for any social workers in child protection posts
- Consideration should be taken to developing specialist courses focusing on particular types of child protection cases requiring specialist skills, particularly probation, diversion, family-based alternative care counseling and psychosocial support, to strengthen the specialisation of the SSWF.
- Universities should ensure the inclusion of faculty members with field experience in social work and/or research specialism/focus on delivery of social services and population needs in Bangladesh, including in child protection, to ensure relevant and context-specific materials can be embedded into the curriculum.
- Universities should coordinate with international specialists to ensure that curricula is aligned with international best practice for social work.

Accredited training

The DSS offers the BSST and PSST (although this is led by UNICEF, with the DSS yet to take full responsibility of ensuring social workers receive this training). Child protection social workers have received a high level of training on child protection relative to other social workers. A high percentage of government social workers have never received training, and it appears that training is prioritised for social service officers, who in practice do not operate in the field.

Perceptions of training received are largely neutral in terms of accessibility, relevance and ease of implementation, and appear to be much more positive amongst INGO workers compared to NGO and government social workers.

In terms of training needs, social workers feel that they would particularly benefit from training on identifying child protection needs, making assessments and developing care plans, engaging families with challenging behaviours and family tracing. Based on the assessment of the capacity of social workers, they would also benefit from training on psychosocial support and counseling, diversion, prevention of separation and reintegration.

- The DSS should increase development opportunities for social workers and ensure all government social workers have access to child protection training, particularly union social workers in the field.
- All newly recruited social workers should receive a mandatory child protection induction and skills training, and the DSS should commit to leading this training (i.e. reducing reliance on UNICEF for delivery of training).
- NGOs should ensure that social workers and volunteers working in the area of child protection are provided with relevant training, and efforts should be taken to support and facilitate sharing of knowledge and skills training between government, NGO (including INGO) and informal workers through coordination mechanisms, ensuring that consideration is taken into embedding local context in training.
- Further training opportunities should be developed (in collaboration with DSS, UNICEF, universities and experienced social workers) which focus on areas in which capacity is limited, particularly prevention of separation, psychosocial support and counseling, diversion and reintegration. Trainings should be strengthened to include modules on trauma informed approaches, child sensitive interviewing and communication as well as MHPSS/Psychosocial skills training.

6.3 Supporting the SSWF

Professionalisation mechanisms

There are no professionalisation mechanisms for the SSWF. The social standing and salaries of social workers is lower than other government social workers, and professionalisation and registration mechanisms are lacking for the NGO workforce. There are limited career progression opportunities in the government and non-government workforce, but retention rates are high. There is no competency-based framework to establish career progression mechanisms. The Bangladesh Association for Social Work (BASW) has established a code of conduct and social work ethics, but its role is limited in practice and has few members.

- The government should establish professionalisation mechanisms to ensure the remuneration and employment benefits for government social workers are commensurate to their skills and experience and are consistent with other civil service sectors.
- UNICEF and the DSS should work the BASW to strengthen its current functions and increase knowledge of the association amongst the SSWF. The BASW should be accessible to both government and non-government social workers.
- The BASW code of ethics should be reviewed in partnership with DSS and UNICEF, and should be universally adhered to by all social workers.

- The DSS and BASW should work in collaboration with universities to establish a competency-based framework outlining clear career progression pathways for social workers, with support from UNICEF.
- Social work registration / accreditation processes should be established for government and non-government social workers, and the Association for Social Work should hold the responsibility for this accreditation.

Supervision

A substantial proportion of social workers do not have a direct supervisor, including within the DSS (due to a shortage of field supervisors). However, amongst social workers with supervisors, all receive supervision at the frequency in line with international standards, and social workers feel well-supported by their supervisors. While there is a professional association to support the professionalisation of NGO social workers, due to funding restrictions, its activities are limited.

- Government and non-government organisations should ensure that every field worker has access to a supervisor and that the ratio of social workers to supervisors does not exceed 1:5.
- Mechanisms for supervision should be strengthened to ensure that the SSWF has sufficient access to wellbeing support, that supervisions aim to strengthen social workers' skills and confidence, and (in the long term) social workers are supported and encouraged to attend trainings that support career progression and specialisation.
- Standards of social work supervision should be developed in partnership with the ASW to ensure supervisors are accountable for monitoring and supporting social workers beyond the current practice of instruction and case-by-case problem solving.

As Bangladesh continues its journey toward strengthening its child protection system, a well-resourced, professional, and equitably deployed social service workforce must lie at its core. This mapping underscores both the urgency and the opportunity to invest in systemic workforce reform—grounded in national legislation, supported by cross-sectoral coordination, and informed by the lived realities of children and frontline workers alike. The findings serve not only as a diagnostic tool, but as a roadmap for action. With sustained government leadership, strategic partnerships, and targeted investment, Bangladesh can build a workforce that delivers on every child's right to protection, care, and dignity—now and for generations to come.

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Annex

Table 12: Responsibilities of the government SSWF in the normative framework and in practice

SSWF category /Normative Frameworks	Mandate (normative framework)	Role in Practice (surveys)
DSS		
Probation Officers Children Act, 2013[218] Probation of Offenders Ordinance[219]	■ Work in coordination with the CAPO to determine course of action for children coming into contact or conflict with the law ■ To refer disadvantaged children to the Social Services Office ■ To carry out an assessment of the child ■ To monitor and support a child in contact or conflict with the law throughout the judicial process ■ To rehabilitate a child in conflict with the law ■ Family tracing ■ implement and monitor diversion ■ Monitor children in CDCs ■ Initiating alternative care ■ Reintegration ■ Rehabilitation of parents to support reintegration ■ Submitting information to the CWB	Somewhat fulfil mandate (particularly probation and protection / rehabilitation for children in contact and conflict with the law). Areas with at least one probation officer not fulfilling responsibilities: ■ Family tracing ■ Social enquiry reports ■ Diversion ■ Reintegration

[218]The Children Act 2013 (Amended in 2018), Chapter II.

[219]<?>The Probation of Offenders Act, Section 13, http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-302/section-13463.html

SSWF category /Normative Frameworks	Mandate (normative framework)	Role in Practice (surveys)
Social Services Officers	*No documentation provided, but appear to be responsible for oversight of all social workers in the office.*	Very little child protection activity in practice. Only reported duties: ■ Mental health and psychosocial assessments (100%) ■ Psychosocial Counseling Services (100%) ■ Family tracing (12.5%) ■ Community outreach (12.5%)
Union social worker/ Municipal Social Worker/UCDOs The Children Act[220] Job Description Documentation[221] + Circular distributed by DSS regarding case management	■ Fulfilling duties of a probation officer until the appointment of a probation officer ■ Family tracing ■ Assisting the probation officer to carry out an assessment of the child ■ Monitoring children in alternative care ■ Reintegration ■ Management and distribution of funds under the rural / urban social services programme .222 ■ Case management of child protection cases[223]	■ Responding to referrals made by the CHL 1098 and mobilising support on the ground.224 ■ Indicated all child protection responsibilities. Top responsibilities: ■ 70% = Case management ■ 80% = Psychosocial counseling ■ 60% = Family Tracing ■ 88% = Community outreach for violence prevention ■ Lowest = Diversion (6%) and Emergency Accommodation (8%)

[220]The Children Act 2013 (Amended in 2018), Chapter II.
[221]DSS, Job Description of Union Social Workers, Undated document shared by DSS, January 2022.
[222]DSS, Job Description of Union Social Workers, Undated document shared by DSS, January 2022.
[223]DSS Circular "Strengthening Case Management Services", October 2018
[224]KII with UNICEF Child Protection Specialist, December 2022.
[225]DSS, Job Description of Union Social Workers, Undated document shared by DSS, January 2022.
[226]DSS, Terms of Reference for Social Workers, 2020. Document provided by DSS, January 2022.

SSWF category /Normative Frameworks	Mandate (normative framework)	Role in Practice (surveys)
Field supervisor Job Description Documentation[225]	■ Oversight of cash transfer programme, supporting union and Upazila social service officers; conducting home visits, progress reviews, and 'necessary counseling' (relating to cash transfer programmes – no child protection).[226]	■ Supervision responsibilities of field officers (36% only supervise social workers and don't carry out child protection responsibilities themselves) ■ All child protection areas. Top responsibilities: ■ Community outreach for violence prevention (64%) ■ Psychosocial counseling (55%) ■ Prevention of family separation (55%) ■ Mental health and psychosocial assessments (45%) ■ Social Enquiry reports (45%) ■ Lowest = Probation, diversion and emergency accommodation (9%)
Child protection Social Worker Terms of Reference developed by UNICEF and DSS[227] and a circular distributed by the DSS in 2022.[228]	■ Identification of child protection cases ■ Case management ■ Supporting other SSWF members develop appropriate intervention plan for the children. ■ Diversion and other support for children in conflict with the law ■ Making referrals, considering best interest of the child ■ Follow-up on cases ■ Reintegration activities ■ Support the functioning of the CWBs at Upazila level and CBCPCs ■ Promote CHL 1098 and supporting mobilisation of support	Majority of social workers fulfil some mandates, but some areas are lacking: ■ Case management (97%) ■ Reintegration (67%) ■ Diversion (24%) ■ Supporting children in conflict with the law (33%) ■ Follow-up (70%) ■ Other high areas = Psychosocial assessments and counseling (91 and 94%); Family tracing (88%) ■ Other low areas = prevention of separation (28%)

[227]DSS, Circular for Social Workers under the CSPB project, 9th March 2022.
[228]UNICEF, Concept Note, Strengthening of Community Based Child Protection Mechanisms, Document provided by UNICEF
[229]SOPs
[230]KI Survey with 1098 helpline
[231]KI survey with 109 helpline

SSWF category /Normative Frameworks	Mandate (normative framework)	Role in Practice (surveys)
Ward and Village Welfare Volunteers Concept note.[229]	■ Referrals; ■ Support social workers in identifying and providing appropriate support to children identified in The Children Act, including probation; ■ Support establishment and functions of CBCPC ■ Support community mobilisation and awareness-raising; ■ Reintegration and Follow-up	■ At institutional level, welfare volunteers were identified within Sylhet CWB, Netrokona District office and Division Social Services Offices ■ No individual volunteers were identified on the ground at Upazila level, indicating limited presence.
Child Helpline 1098 Call Agents/ Psychosocial counsellors[230]	■ Responding to complaints of child abuse ■ Referring complaints to the local union social worker ■ Following up on cases to see course of action taken ■ Providing psychosocial counseling to children over the phone ■ Signposting children to service	Four primary responsibilities[231] ■ Case management ■ Psychosocial counseling (counsellors only) ■ Prevention of separation ■ Family tracing
Other workers	4% (N=15) individual workers were government workers who did not fall within the above identified categories (primarily vocational trainers, secretaries, directors / assistant directors of an SSO, office assistants and one health worker)	Indicated all responsibilities, but a relatively low percentage covering each. ■ Highest = Community outreach (67%) ■ Lowest = reintegration, probation, diversion and emergency accommodation (13% or fewer)
Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (*note, individual worker surveys were carried out at District/Upazila level only)*		
109 Call Centre Call Agents	■ Limited child protection role ■ Primarily referral to OCCs or the 1098 helpline	Case management, psychosocial counseling and community engagement[132]

[232]SOPs

[233]KI survey data: NTCC

[234]KI survey data: All institutions ticked mental health and psychosocial assessments and/or psychosocial counseling, but reports of other responsibilities varied between locations.

SSWF category /Normative Frameworks	Mandate (normative framework)	Role in Practice (surveys)
National Trauma Counseling Centre Psychotherapists /Psychosocial Counsellors /Clinical Psychologists		▪ **Mental health and psychosocial assessments** ▪ **Psychosocial Counseling** ▪ Community outreach ▪ Prevention of Family Separation ▪ Protection and Rehabilitation Services for children in contact with the law ▪ Drug/alcohol rehabilitation[133]
One Stop Crisis Centres Psychotherapists /Psychosocial Counsellors /Clinical Psychologists	-	▪ **Mental health and psychosocial assessments** ▪ **Psychosocial Counseling** ▪ **Prevention of Family Separation** ▪ Protection and Rehabilitation Services for children in contact with the law ▪ Community outreach ▪ Emergency accommodation ▪ Case management[134]
Kishor-Kishori club volunteers/ facilitators	*Considered an allied worker but individuals identified in the field*	▪ Psychosocial counseling services and community outreach only

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