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Child Poverty Under Covid

As a mother, you want to be a good mum,
but when you're in poverty, society is not providing you with what you need.

First of all, the child feels ashamed, like they're broken
and that really destroys their morale.

Because of the pandemic,
many children are not getting free school meals any more.

Because the children are stuck at home,
we have to spend much more money on food.

And a child going hungry will not have concentration.

'A hungry belly doesn't have ears'.

Some meals are offered by charities put in place to assist families
— but only if you would first answer questions that are so invasive
and degrading and humiliating that you want to run away.

During the pandemic winter, we have spent so much more on heating
because with the kids home all the time, you can never put the heat down. And the pandemic impacts their
health because they have to stay inside. They are eating too much and moving less,
or not even moving so they are basically putting on weight.

The kids have nothing to do, so they are always on the phone.

Instagram is the only thing they have left.

But the places where they used to get internet for free are closed.

Pay-as-you-go bundles to get internet on the phone cost a lot of money.

Children need the internet for homework too.

Many children used to stay after school for internet access.

During the pandemic, one mother says: "For my daughter's homework,

I had to swallow my pride to ask our neighbour if we could piggyback

onto his network from our flat. He agreed—but I feel like I don't want to rely too much on him."

Sometimes you feel like you have to do something

and at the same time you feel like you shouldn't be doing it.

Because of the situation, you are forced to feel shameless.

My son, who has autism, has been at home since March of last year.

Every day, he says, "Mommy, I'm tired of this COVID".

Frustration builds up in children.

All year long, they're not seeing their friends, they're not entertained.

The knots of anger just build up inside them.

That takes so much energy from the parents.

And the whole family loses good habits of family dialogue.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the kids were afraid.

They wanted to know: when will the world get back to normal?

How long will we have to live like this? That fear of the future was constant. How do your children escape that fear?

And the longer the pandemic goes on,

it's like we're turning into a world of robots.

It used to be, when you do your shopping, you would chat with friends.

But now we all run away from each other for fear of sickness.

Our children are learning to become robots.

We will need time to get family life back to normal again.

I worry a lot about our children being idle.

The devil finds work for idle hands.

With nowhere to go and no choices, they feel forgotten. They lose hope.

They are ashamed to be broke and to feel useless.

Drugs seem hidden—but our children know where they are sold.

Idleness confuses our children's mood and affects their hearts.

It makes drugs seem cool.

Idleness can cause isolation, loneliness, depression, even feeling suicidal.

When you are raising children in poverty in this country,

there is a big problem. You might be going through a hard time.

And you feel ashamed to go and ask for help.

So then when the school sees that you are struggling,

they call and start talking about child protection. But this is wrong!

They think a parent who doesn't have the money to buy new socks

is neglecting the child by sending them to school

with socks of two different colours. But that is not neglect!

When you are poor, of course you might have different socks

or you might look dirty. But that just means the parents need support.

Many parents, when they struggle, they do ask social services —

but they usually don't get help. It's almost like social services

are refusing to help the parent on purpose

so that afterwards they can come and say “you are neglecting your child”.

Associating poverty with negligence is so inhuman. This is wrong.

And when we finally get out of the pandemic,

our children will need time to get back to normal again.

I hope their teachers and the social workers will understand this and be ready to support parents so that we can help our children.

Question: What's your advice for social workers?

Please don't judge us. We see you as our voice. We want you to come to us as a human being and to see what we are going through. Please understand the difference between poverty and negligence. We would do anything for our children; we just need help.

A friend once told her social worker that she was not coping, but in reality, she was just tired and drained. What happened next was that her social worker reported her as an unfit mother and she was reported and had to go to court.

My social worker has said, 'Sorry, we have no funding, my hands are tied'. Please can I know: why are you here if you can't help me? If you can't give any support, the situation will deteriorate. A lot of us are left abandoned and good parents and children pay the ultimate price.