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## **New research reveals the true extent of the impact of coronavirus on children living in poverty**

Children living in poverty are likely to be profoundly affected across the board – socially, emotionally and financially as a result of the coronavirus. That's according to new research from Little Village, the child poverty 'baby bank'. It's conducted a detailed, snap-shot survey<sup>i</sup> of 131 professionals such as health visitors, midwives, charity professionals and council family support workers who refer low income families to the organisation. During the pandemic, Little Village has seen a 66% rise in demand for its services between mid-March and mid-April.

Key findings of the survey suggest professionals believe the direct impact of the crisis on children living in poverty will be extremely severe. According to respondents:

- 70% agree children will go without essentials e.g. nappies.
- 64% agree children will go hungry.
- 88% agree children will fall behind in developmental/educational terms.
- 81% agree children will be at greater risk of neglect.
- 78% agree children will be at greater of seeing/experiencing abuse.
- 66% point to a negative impact on children's mental health and behaviour.

Little Village is like a foodbank, but for clothes, toys and equipment for babies and children up to the age of 5. In the last four years, the charity has supported 8,000 families across London, helping nearly 3,000 children in 2019. The families it helps are facing a range of challenges – homelessness, unemployment, low wages and domestic violence.

4.2 million children are growing up in poverty in the UK<sup>ii</sup>, with poverty rising fastest among children under the age of 5<sup>iii</sup>.

### **Short and long term impact**

Professionals who responded are also concerned about the short and long-term consequences of the pandemic, with over 4 in 5 (83%) agreeing that children in poverty will suffer immediate difficulties and two thirds (67%) agreeing that children in poverty will suffer long term consequences.

### **Social and emotional impact**

The negative emotional and social impact on relationships and mental health for low income families during the outbreak is also of concern to those surveyed:

- Over 9 in 10 (94%) are concerned about an increase in mental health issues such as anxiety.
- 9 in 10 (90%) are concerned about an increase in isolation and loneliness.
- Over 4 in 5 (85%) believe families are concerned about being able to afford/find essential items for children e.g. nappies and baby milk.
- 4 in 5 (81%) believe families are concerned about being able to afford or find food for the family.
- Two thirds (66%) are concerned about an increase in relationship difficulties.
- Nearly half (46%) are concerned about an increase in domestic violence.

### **Severe financial difficulties**

Meanwhile the survey highlights the stark reality of life on a low income during the outbreak with the creation of severe financial difficulties for families. Of those surveyed:

- 73% agree coronavirus has increased food costs due to supermarket shortages, price rises and delivery costs.
- Many respondents agree loss of income is a big issue for families, with 59% pointing to loss of income due to self-isolation or illness, 53% loss of income due to reduced hours and 52% due to delays in benefits payments.
- Meanwhile 18% agree that families are paying more for increased broadband costs due to home educating children.

### **Access to vital support squeezed**

Over half (55%) of respondents said demand for their services has gone up while over 9 in 10 (93%) professionals who took part in the survey agree that it is harder to support families in the way they would want to. Many respondents are now only able to provide online or phone support to families, rather than face to face contact.

Practical difficulties as a result of the pandemic mean 83% of respondents say accessing community and charity services will be harder, 71% says accessing child support services will be harder, 69% say accessing health services will be harder and 63% say accessing educational materials to support home learning will be harder.

### **Significant government support required**

- Nearly nine in ten (87%) respondents agree the government needs to put more support into looking after low-income families at this time.
- Three quarters (73%) agree that the government has not fully understood the impact that coronavirus is having on children in poverty.

### **Solutions to help families**

The top three measures that the professionals surveyed agree would most help low income families to survive the crisis are:

- Over half (56%) say government provided food and essentials packages.
- 45% say promise of rent payments being covered.
- 41% say guarantee of no eviction.

### **Sophia Parker, Chief Executive and Founder of Little Village said:**

“Children living in poverty have been subjected to a broken system for a long time. We’re facing unprecedented demand from families needing our help and this survey paints a bleak picture. Families who were already on the edge of coping before the pandemic are now struggling with the costs of essentials. Lockdown in cramped, low quality housing makes everyday life so much harder. We are also deeply concerned about the economic crisis that is likely to follow this public health crisis. Unless urgent action is taken, we think we will see a sharp increase in inequality between children trapped in poverty and their better off peers. As we know, such gaps risk affecting future life chances as well as blighting childhoods, and that is to the detriment of us all.”

### **Respondents to the survey also shared their concerns.**

One told Little Village:

*“I think that things were stressful enough for the families I have supported for years. We worked hard to create a sense of community and reduced their feelings of isolation. Now all of the things*

*they had come to rely on have become more difficult or non-existent. They are cooped up in one room, scared and alone for the most part, there are tensions running high if they are in shared accommodation and with social distancing in place, it is very hard to support them properly”.*

**Another respondent said:**

*“Children have been forgotten, unless parents feel they can speak up for them, which in my job role is only 1%. We will be picking up the pieces and repairing families for a very long time”.*

**One respondent told us:**

*“There is a real concern that children living in poverty and/or in homes where they may be suffering abuse are going unseen. These children and families have quite possibly lost all physical support from services that they may have been accessing in the community and at present it is very difficult to ensure these children are protected. The implications of the pandemic, to the health and wellbeing of some of these children will be devastating”.*

**And another respondent said:**

*“Residents are contacting us panicking because they cannot get nappies, they cannot get milk and they don’t know how to feed their kids or keep the electricity meter topped up. Those who have to self-isolate are even worse off. My heart is breaking because we don’t have the power to fix these things...”*

Little Village was one of the charities the Duke and Duchess of Sussex encouraged people to support as part of the #GlobalSussexBabyShower before their son Archie’s birth in 2019.

**ENDS**

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The charity has launched an online charity appeal, #VirtualVillage, to help support families most at risk of hardship during the pandemic: <https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/virtualvillage>

*About Little Village*

*Little Village is a ‘baby bank’, which is like a foodbank, but for clothes, toys and equipment for babies and children up to the age of 5. Since we launched in 2016, we’ve supported 8,000 visits from families across London and we saw nearly 3,000 children in 2019. Families are referred to us via a network of professionals such as midwives and social workers from over 500 organisations. As a volunteer-led movement of parents committed to alleviating child poverty, our vision is that every child in the capital has the essential items they need to thrive.*

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[i] Little Village surveyed 131 professionals working with children living in poverty between 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020 and 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020. Respondents included charity professionals, children’s centre workers, health visitors, council support workers and midwives.

[ii] Source: DWP [Households below average income](#): 1994/95 to 2018/19

[iii] Source: DWP [Households below average income](#): 1994/95 to 2017/18

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