

Mother's Day tributes: the Hong Kong mums dealing with bereavement, child illness and coronavirus misery

- ChickenSoup Foundation, an NGO, has assisted about 20 mothers without a breadwinner at home and highlights stress on the needy amid pandemic
- Two women tell the Post how they find the strength to soldier on despite challenges

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Zhen (not her real name), lost her husband to cancer, but soldiers on as a role model for her children. Photo: Edmond So

When Mrs Zhen's* husband lost his battle to stomach cancer last year, the family was devastated.

She fell into depression and some days found it difficult to get out of bed.

However, she says she found the strength to keep going for her three children: two daughters, aged 22 and 14, and an 11-year-old son.

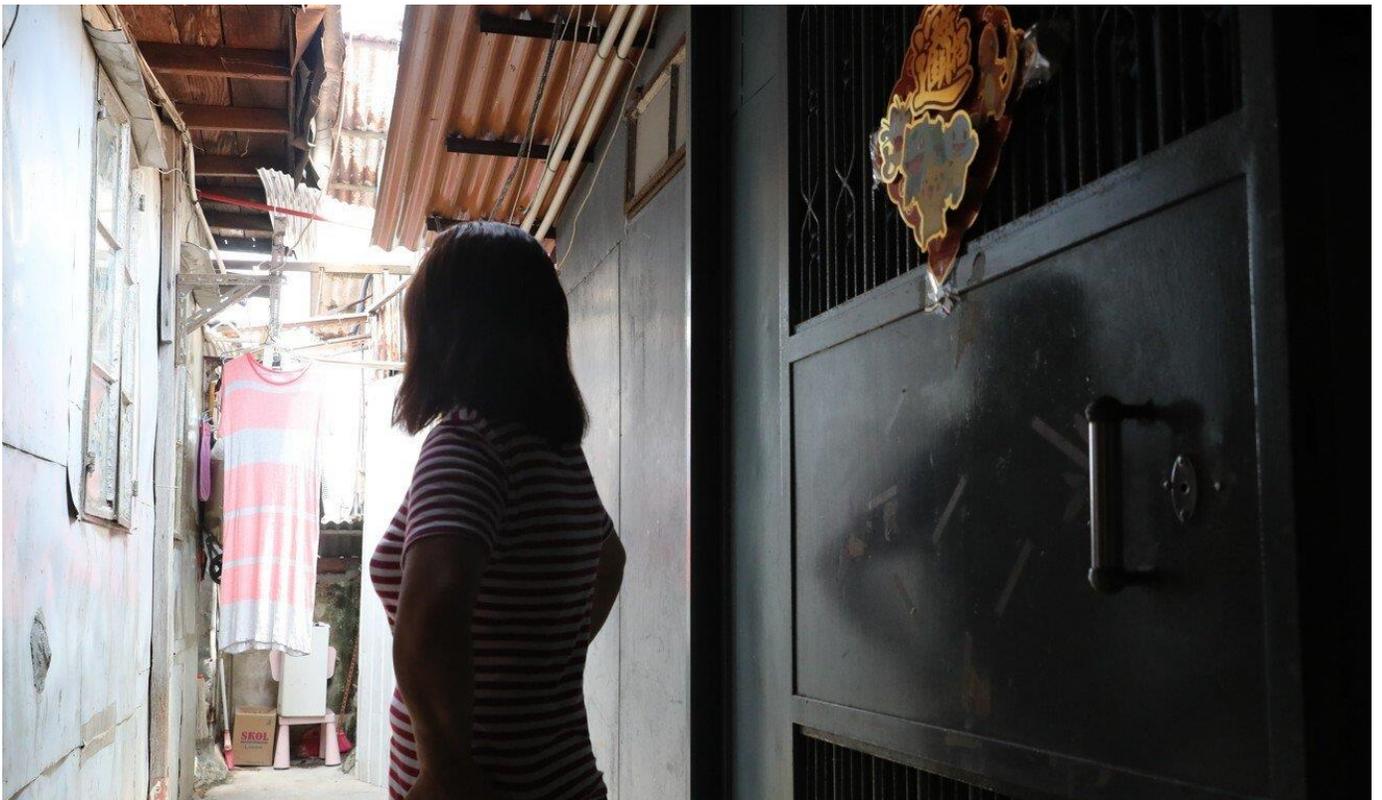
"After my husband died, what I did was try to encourage my children on a daily basis and be a role model to show them how life still goes on," says the 46-year-old mother.

Her home near Kai Tak on a ninth-floor rooftop is spotless, with plants hanging on bright yellow walls.

A sign above her sofa reads "Dream Home", in English, with her teenage daughter's taekwondo trophies proudly displayed underneath.

Books and an assortment of coloured pens and pencils are neatly stacked in the corner of the room.

Zhen says she feels more positive when her 350 sq ft flat, for which she pays HK\$4,000 (US\$515) a month in rent, is kept in its pristine state. It was not always this way.



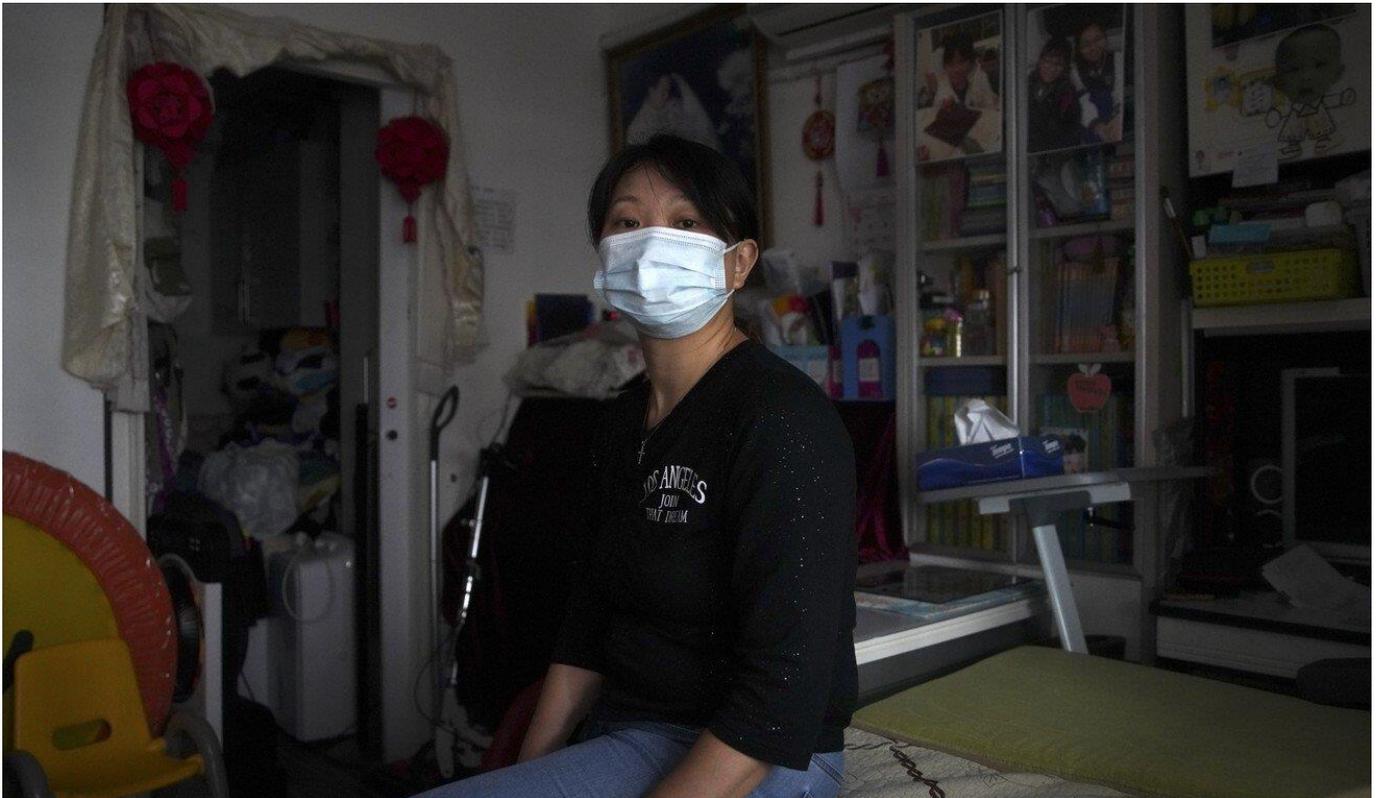
Zhen lives near Kai Tak on a ninth-floor rooftop home. Photo: Edmond So

Zhen and her husband, both from Fujian province in mainland China, had come to Hong Kong on a two-way entry permit in 2013.

Without a Hong Kong identity card, the help available to them was limited, and the couple quickly went through their small amount of savings to cover medical costs.

It was through organisations such as Sheng Kung Hui, a large church network – where Zhen has been a volunteer for around eight years – and the Chicken Soup Foundation, that Zhen was able to pay for her husband’s care. While he did not survive, the treatment gave the family hope.

Zhen is among the Hong Kong mums sharing with the *Post* how they have coped with life’s challenges ahead of Mother’s Day on Sunday.



Tsoi in her Chai Wan flat. Photo: Winson Wong

While Zhen’s children have been the impetus for her to keep going, for Tsoi, who asked to be identified only by her last name, her Christian faith has been a source of comfort and support.

The mother-of-two, who is from Donggang and has lived in Hong Kong for 16 years, had been trying for years to have children when she gave birth to her daughter in 2008.

However, at two years old her firstborn was diagnosed with a brain tumour. After several bouts of surgery, the tumour has reduced from the size of an egg to the size of a grape, and her daughter recently celebrated her 13th birthday this week.

“Throughout these years, the reason my family has been able to cope with this has been a lot to do with church support,” she says.

The Covid-19 pandemic has taken a toll on the family of four, who live in a 300 sq ft flat in Chai Wan. Tsoi's son, nine, has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD, and found it difficult to be confined to their small flat during the months of school closures.

"For my daughter's birthday, she made a wish, that she wants our family to have less arguments and be a more peaceful environment ... She wants my life to be less tough and for me to worry less," says the 43-year-old, fighting back her tears.



Edward Man, founder of the ChickenSoup Foundation. Photo: Xiaomei Chen

Edward Man Ho-wai, founder of the ChickenSoup Foundation, a charitable organisation established in 2013 to serve poor families, says the NGO has assisted about 20 mothers, without a breadwinner at home.

He has noticed an increase in underprivileged families needing help over the past year, exacerbated by the coronavirus crisis, which has pushed unemployment to a 17-year high.

"We are only seeing the tip of the iceberg," he says. "We do not have the manpower to tackle most of them. We are dealing with one case at a time."

For Mrs Zhen, tending to her vegetables in a makeshift garden next to her rooftop flat keeps her busy, and she feels hopeful for the future with her eldest daughter having found a job in marketing.

"If I can survive this, then anybody can," she says.

**Name changed at interviewee's request*

This article appeared in the South China Morning Post print edition as: Little joy for Single mums at margins

Source:

https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/society/article/3132738/mothers-day-tributes-hong-kong-mums-dealing-bereavement?module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article&campaign=3132738