

A day in the life of Umm S

Beirut

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GROUND TRUTH
SOLUTIONS



BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES



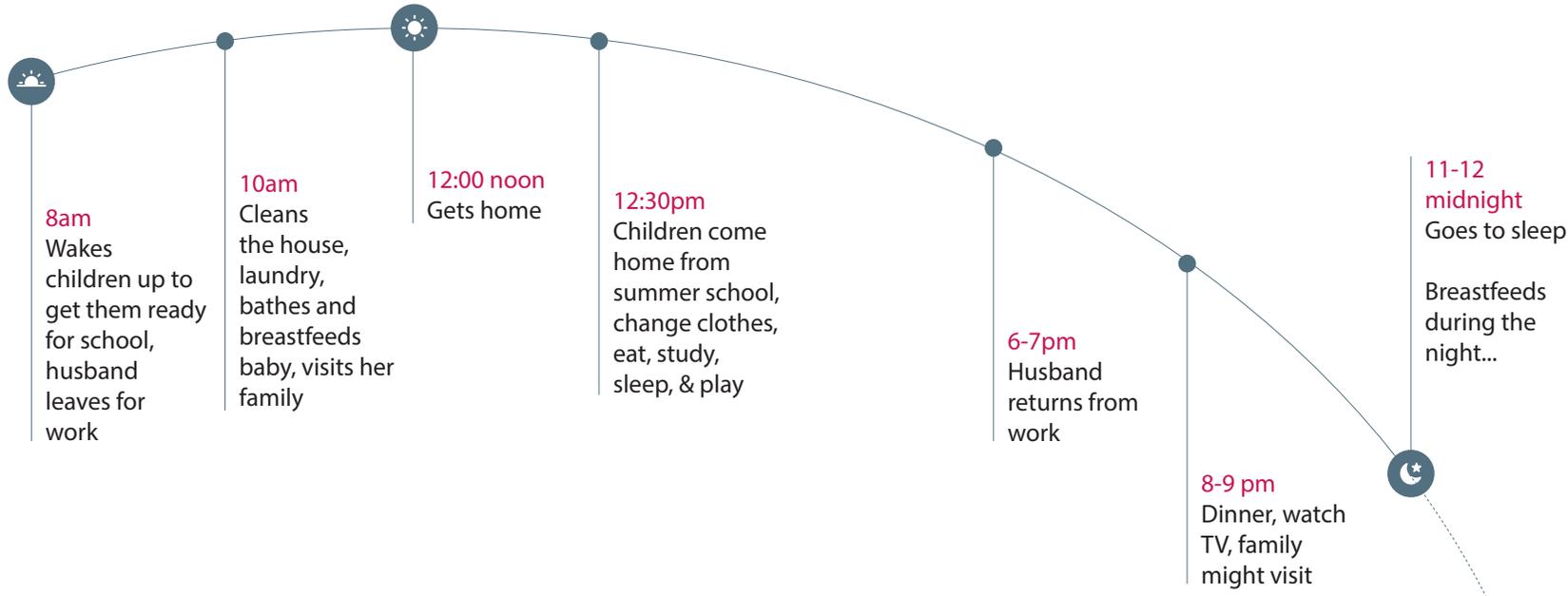
UKaid
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Profile
 Name: Umm S
 Age: 28 years old
 Hometown: Idlis, Syria

Journey
 Arrived with her husband and children to Lebanon in 2013
 Current location: Beirut, Lebanon

Family
 Status: married
 Husband: butcher
 Children: 5

A day in the life of Umm S



Expenses

Out	In	
530,000	Rent	250,000
300,000	Food	800,000
130,000	Electricity	1,050,000
120,000	Generator	
20,000	Wifi	
20,000	Telephone bills	
15,000	Satellite	
18,000	Medicine	
1,153,000	Total Outgoings	
	Monthly cash assistance	
	Husband's wage	
	Total Income	

Every month accrues 103,000 LBP worth of debt

Issues identified by Umm S also came up in our survey with 895 Syrian and Palestinian refugees across Lebanon*

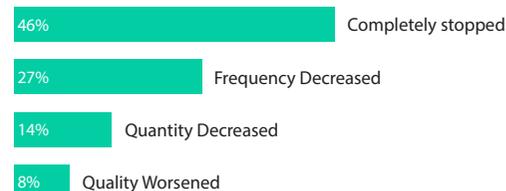
Education
 Transportation costs and travel time are cited by Umm S as preventing her from sending her daughters to the Lebanese state school, and instead she sends them to a community-run school.

GTS survey, November 2018: What are the main barriers to accessing education? (n=177)



Aid Provision Stopping
 Communication over why aid stops was highlighted by Umm S, who explains that "The UN used to pay our rent for us, and now they don't. But they didn't give us any reasons or explanation as to why they stopped."

GTS survey, November 2018: how has aid provision changed in the last 12 months? (n=154)



Debt
 Umm S explains that decreased aid provisions means that "We have to rely on mosques, friends and getting discarded food from the market to survive."

GTS survey, November 2018: what are your most important needs that are not met? (n=813)



A day in the life of Umm S

Umm S lives in central Burj Hammoud, just above a local bakery. Her living room is furnished with two wooden sofas with red and grey floral patterns. Diagonally opposite the door is a propped-up TV. A thin red curtain separates the living room and kitchen. Umm S explains that their flat was refurbished around Eid by the UN, and that they had to do a lot of work to fix up the apartment when they first arrived, as it had been full of rubbish and mice. They bought all the furniture, and this flat was where all of her extended family members stayed when first getting on their feet after arriving in Lebanon.

GTS met with Umm S and her mother-in-law, who was particularly curious about our research, and wants to know if we can help her. "I have four children, and none of them receive anything." The Grandmother often helps out with the children, but she came specifically this morning to meet us. She is confused as to why her children are no longer eligible for support, "Two of my daughters got married, maybe that's the reason? But they didn't give us any reason or explanation, we just don't know...But I had to take my son (12 or 13 years old) out of school, because the fees were too high and I needed him to work, to support the family". The stress is visible on her face. "I wish I could go back to Syria, where we have our own homes," she adds. The rationale behind humanitarian assistance is not always clear, she says: "Be fair between people – some people get rent assistance and some people get medicine provided to them – and others don't. Some people with health issues such as diabetes need medicine but the 'Ummam' (UN) don't give them anything. No reason or explanation is given for the different treatment of families." She adds, "I asked the UN why they provide food and rent to some people and not others. They answered that they do not provide this, and that it must be from another organisation. But I still don't know who provides these services."

Umm S breastfeeds and coos her baby, letting her mother-in-law take the lead. She calls over her other daughter, who is playing a game on the communal family phone in the only bedroom, and asks her to bring us water. Her daughter sets a small wooden table up by the sofas and pours some water. She is the second youngest and not at school with her sisters today. "Her sisters will be back in a couple hours, around 12.30. It is so much better now that they aren't going to the official school. I stopped the oldest two going to the Lebanese school because it was costing me 4,000 LBP a month per child for transportation. And the bus driver would take so long to get them home. They used to finish classes at 6.15pm and be driving around for around three hours. I would call the driver and shout at him. They would get home so late, that they wouldn't have time to do their homework."

The school that the children are attending now is temporary, located in Burj Hammoud. It is run by "Al-Harakah Al-Ijtimaieih" (social movement), which advocates for social development and progress through engagement with groups of individuals, local authorities and the private sector for a more just and humane society. Umm S mentions that the quality of the education at the Lebanese school was poor, "I used to teach them Arabic at home, myself, but when they came home with their exam results, they would be getting zero percent. It wasn't good. At the new school, they even provide them with lunch. A better lunch that they would eat here. They get meat, like chicken!"



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Umm S.



Umm S's other family members

The new school also provides better options. “We also don’t have to pay for the transportation. It is a three month course, and at the end of that the organisation will find a new school for them and provide all transport costs. And at the new school, they can choose all types of courses. They could choose to do a cooking course if they wanted, or even a make-up course. There are lots of options.”

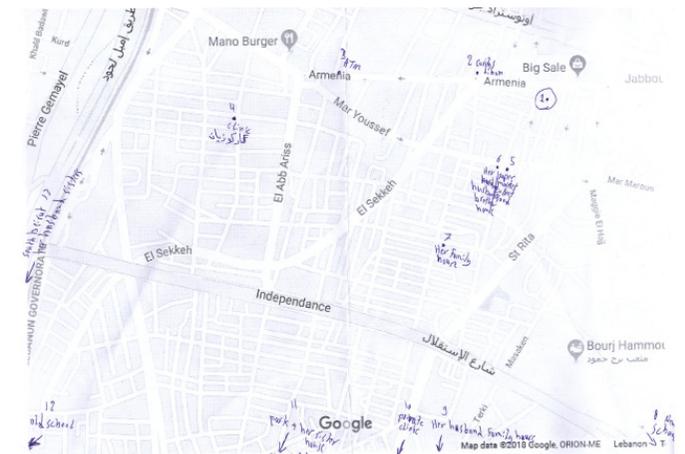
The baby begins to cry. She seems uncomfortable, and Umm S explains that she recently started a course of antibiotics. Living above the bakery means that the flat gets extremely hot when the ovens are on. “The sound and the heat begins every morning at 2am, with the machines and generators.” Red circular marks are visible on the baby, and Umm S tell me that all her children have rashes due to the heat from the bakery, “but we can’t move, maybe it would be worse somewhere else.” Rent is expensive, too. “The UN used to pay our rent for us, and now they don’t. But they didn’t give us any reasons or explanation as to why they stopped....The most important thing is for the UN to provide support for rent payments, because rent is so expensive in Lebanon.”

The Grandmother starts talking about one of her daughters, who needs medical treatment. “She used to return to Syria because the treatment is free there, but can’t anymore. Everything used to be free in Syria, the education and healthcare. And Palestinians living in Syria have rights. But here refugees do not.”

Umm S and her husband are not sure of their rights as a refugee here. Her husband was afraid to register with the UN for years, being given contradictory information by different sources. He was afraid that he would be sent back to Syria. “He is scared to speak to anyone because he needs to renew his registration papers. But we don’t have the money to pay the government. So my husband is scared to travel outside of Burj Hammoud in case he is asked for his papers. He only leaves the area if he is with me, and never wants to go far. He is really scared of everything, and we left at the first bullet of war. His health has suffered, and he has high blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes. During Ramadan, his blood pressure was 160. He takes medicine for the blood pressure and cholesterol, and is on a diet plan for the diabetes’. Getting the medicine is also a struggle. They can get it for 3,000 LBP (\$2) if it is available from the clinic. However, often it is not available, and they have to try and pay for it themselves. They frequently borrow money for things like this to be able to make ends meet. She also has a tab at the local food store, which has around two months of food debts accumulated. For Umm S, assistance is both opaque and insufficient. “The UN have visited us more than 10 times, every 4-6 months. They always ask the same questions, how much do you spend, what do you do on a daily basis.” Despite this, she says, “Towards the middle of the month, we always run out of money. We need more of an advance so that we can live till the end of the month and not just day by day.”



Umm S’s children eat dinner



Map of Umm S’s Area