

Illness and Injury Plague Mother Caring for 5 Alone



Ramin Talae for The New York Times

Zinnath Chowdhury at home in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, with her youngest child, Rahima, 2. Since her husband left for their native Bangladesh to care for his mother, Ms. Chowdhury has struggled financially.

By ANTHONY RAMIREZ

Even before a robber hit her in the face with a rock, Zinnath Chowdhury had led the hard life of an immigrant.

She was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh's capital. She immigrated to the United States in 1994 when her husband, Modmud Chowdhury, who arrived in 1987, was able to sponsor her. They lived with relatives and struggled to get by on low-paying jobs in New York City.

Their oldest daughter, Hasuhana, 14, had accompanied Mr. Chowdhury to the United States. Soon after Ms. Chowdhury arrived from Dhaka, she became pregnant and gave birth to a second daughter, Jahanara, 11. Other girls followed: Majarhan, 8; Tahera, 5; and Rahima, 2.

Now, Ms. Chowdhury, 34, is in a cramped two-bedroom apartment in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, with five daughters and no husband.

In May, Mr. Chowdhury returned to Bangladesh to care for his mother. At first, he sent money, but stopped this summer, Ms. Chowdhury said.

It was one more trouble among many.

In 2001, while she was working as a cashier in a grocery store, three robbers entered. Thinking that Ms. Chowdhury owned the store and mistaking her limited English for resistance, they smashed a rock against her face. The blow knocked loose three teeth and led to crippling migraines and depression.

After her youngest daughter was born in 2003, Ms. Chowdhury developed diabetes, hypothyroidism, kidney ailments and high cholesterol.

In a recent interview, Ms. Chowdhury went into the bedroom she shares with her two youngest girls and came out with a plastic bag filled with more than a dozen vials of medication. "Look how much," she said.

With her husband gone and a loan from a relative exhausted, Ms. Chowdhury was no longer able to pay

her rent, utilities and grocery bills.

At that low point, she found help from the Brooklyn Bureau of Community Service, one of the seven charities supported by The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund.

Ms. Chowdhury was referred to the bureau by the New York City Administration for Children's Services. The bureau provided a nanny eight hours a day, five days a week. Ms. Chowdhury is now able to keep her numerous medical appointments.

The bureau also kept the family from being evicted by paying nearly \$1,600 in back rent. The Neediest



The Neediest Cases

Previously recorded	\$3,644,680.85
Recorded Wednesday	\$27,685.00
Total	\$3,672,365.85
Last year to date	\$3,873,792.61

Cases paid \$169 for the phone bill and \$643 for two beds to replace worn ones with broken box springs.

Also coming soon are \$350 from the Neediest Cases to pay the electric bill and \$500 for clothing.

"It's a start, but there's still more to do," Ms. Chowdhury's caseworker, Rosa Cabrera, said. The family needs a larger apartment, but Section 8 federal assistance for that is essentially frozen, she said.

For now, Ms. Chowdhury sleeps on the floor, partly to ease her ailing back but partly because there is no room. She strained her back recently when she slipped in her kitchen.

Ms. Chowdhury said her husband said he would return from Bangladesh in about two or three months, but that was months ago, and she does not know when he will be back.

"I don't like my life," she said, speaking quietly. "But . . ." She did not go on.

Instead, she kissed the forehead of her 2-year-old in her lap, as if to say that her life has some blessings.