Fact Sheet on Orphans in Africa
Compiled by LF Bacher, July 2007

Orphan = child who has lost one or both parents by death due to HIV/AIDS. Keep in mind that children also lose parents from other illnesses (malaria, tuberculosis) and war. The orphan crisis is huge and the cause of orphans is much less important than our response.

Number of children orphaned due to AIDS
~13 million in 2003 (currently ~15 million worldwide, most are in Africa). This number is increasing rapidly; one estimate was that ~40 million children will be orphaned by 2010. No plateau expected until 2020.

Adult HIV/AIDS infection?
High in adult population, so that many reproductive-aged people are infected. Over 60% of all HIV infections are in sub-Saharan Africa. 77% of all AIDS deaths are to African citizens. Heterosexual transmission is the most common form, but exposure through drug use and pregnancy are also common.

Countries most affected?
Several African countries south of the Sahara Desert suffer the most. Uganda and Zimbabwe are among those hit the hardest, but some reductions in new infections have occurred. In Zimbabwe, HIV/AIDS affects ~24% of the population (2006), and there were nearly 1 million orphans in that country in 2003.

HIV/ and Pregnancy?
In some parts of Africa, about one third of pregnant women carry HIV. About 25-45% of untreated women with HIV/AIDS pass it along to their children they give birth to (in developed countries the rate is 10-30%). Nursing increases the likelihood of transmission to the child after birth. Survival rate of HIV positive women is about 9 years.

What happens to these orphans?
● Grandparents and extended families try to help – but poverty, limited resources
● Child-headed households – older children try to parent the others
● Homelessness – street kids are often abused, exploited for labor or sex
● Foster care – less culturally acceptable in many parts of Africa
● Institutionalization - not culturally acceptable and not effective

Implications of the situation?
Psychological: loss of loved one; whole generations of children with little parenting, greater social isolation, less education, fewer resources, struggle with stigma
Economic: fewer healthy adults for economic growth and productivity; fewer adults to support the next generation
Cultural: fewer adults to pass along values; isolated children get less guidance

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Types of programs to help orphans and their families

- Medical – reduce new infections; treat existing infections; protect pregnant women
- Educational – teach about HIV transmission; get orphans in school
- Family – help families take in orphans; help families provide for themselves
- Community – provide support to families with illness
- Government protection – allow greater access to financial services (savings, credit); waive school fees for orphans; implement treatment programs
- Non-governmental aid programs; many charitable agencies help with many of the above programs

A Few References (used as basis for this Fact Sheet)


*There are MANY excellent articles and websites to review.*