

HIV/AIDS & Adoption Fact Sheet

HIV is a chronic but manageable disease

Medications called ARVs (Antiretroviral medications), and more specifically HAART (Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy) which is the combination of three or more anti-HIV drugs, have significantly improved treatment of HIV/AIDS allowing it to become a chronic but manageable disease. There is a term called the Lazarus effect used to describe the amazing transformation which occurs when people who were on the brink of death begin receiving life saving ARVs. Unfortunately, around the world, people are still dying of the disease due to lack of access to medications.

HIV is not spread through casual contact

In the US levels of knowledge about HIV have not increased since 1987.¹ As a result many orphans with HIV/AIDS are overlooked in adoption. While there has been much advancement in medicine related to HIV/AIDS large portions of society still remain unaware of even the most basic transmission facts. They still mistakenly believe people can contract the HIV virus through casual contact or a family setting. People are unaware that HIV has never been transmitted in a normal household setting.

Transmission

There are three main ways HIV is contracted: sexual contact, sharing dirty needles/syringes, and mother to infant through birth or breast feeding. HIV is NOT found in tears, sweat, saliva, urine or feces. The virus IS found in semen, vaginal secretions, blood, and breast milk.

Mother to child transmission is preventable

In high income countries where there is access to ARV medication, mother to child transmission has been virtually eliminated. Less than 200² babies are born HIV positive in the United States every year. Children born with HIV who receive ARV medications are expected to live normal life spans.

HIV/AIDS and the orphan

It is estimated that the number of orphans is 163 million worldwide. If all orphans lived together in one country theirs would be the 9th largest nation in the world. It is estimated that more than 15 million children under 18 have been orphaned by AIDS. Every 15 seconds, another child becomes an AIDS orphan in Africa³ Today alone, 5,760 children will lose a parent to AIDS

In Sub-Saharan Africa it is estimated that 9% of all children have lost at least one parent to AIDS. That's approximately 11.6 million children. Some countries are so negatively impacted by the epidemic that approximately 20 percent of all their children are orphans – the majority having been orphaned by AIDS. In Ukraine and Russia 10% -15% of children who age out of an orphanage commit suicide before age eighteen. 60% of the girls are lured into prostitution. 70% of the boys become hardened criminals.⁴

Orphans and Society

Even the best orphanages struggle to meet the physical needs of children with HIV/AIDS and cannot meet the emotional and spiritual demands. Institutions are not replacement for the structure of a family.

Many of society's greatest plagues have their roots in a common problem: orphans. Children who have never received proper care stand little chance of developing into productive members of society if society has marginalized and overlooked them time again. Whether we are talking about extreme poverty, HIV/AIDS, child soldiers, or human-trafficking, often the response to such crises should begin with the care orphans.

Stigma

Stigma is a major challenge facing people infected with HIV/AIDS in the US and around the world. In the US families with adopted children who are HIV+ often suffer rejection within their communities and even among family members due to ignorance regarding transmission and stigma.

Around the globe many HIV+ individuals are shunned from their communities entirely. Relatives are afraid to care for children of infected family members for fear of catching HIV, and also fear of the reaction of the larger community. Many orphaned children are left to the street after their parents die or are taken to institutions by anonymous people who do not wish to be associated with an infected (or even potentially infected) child.

Inside institutions where there is little or no education children with HIV can be treated poorly by caretakers, even neglected. Often times sanitary conditions in orphanages are poor and exacerbate children's weakened immune systems. Opportunistic infections are common among children in orphanages and can quickly lead to death for children with HIV/AIDS. Simple antibiotics could prevent fatality in children with HIV/AIDS, yet often they are unavailable in developing countries.

1. <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/7889.cfm>
2. <http://www.pedaids.org/What-We-re-Doing/Public-Policy-Advocacy/Domestic-Policy>
3. http://www.habitatforhumanity.org.uk/current_appeal.htm
4. <http://www.hopefororphansoftheworld.org/default.aspx?id=30>