

**LINKS**  
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At the end of 2001, an estimated 13.4 million children under the age of 15 in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean had lost a parent to AIDS.<sup>1</sup> (See Figure 1.) More than 11 million of these “orphans due to AIDS” live in Africa.<sup>2</sup> (The United Nations defines “orphan” as any child under the age of 15 who has lost either one parent or both parents. Although the loss of one parent may be less of a burden on children and other relatives, it is still a cause of physical and emotional insecurity and often a trigger for extra support, where available.)<sup>3</sup> By 2010, the number of children orphaned by AIDS is projected to reach 25 million.<sup>4</sup> Most of these children—20 million of them—will live in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>5</sup>

If HIV/AIDS were not boosting mortality rates for adults, the number of children who are orphans would be declining due to overall improvements in human well-being. Unfortunately, at the moment the opposite is happening. In 2001, AIDS orphans accounted for 12.4 percent of all orphans; by 2010, nearly a quarter of orphans will be children who have lost one or both parents to this disease.<sup>6</sup> (See Table 1.)

In 2001, 12 percent of all children in sub-Saharan Africa were orphans, compared with 6.5 percent in Asia and 5 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>7</sup> The greater burden of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa accounts for much of this difference between regions; without AIDS as a factor, the figure in sub-Saharan Africa would be 8 percent.<sup>8</sup> In Zimbabwe, where an estimated 34 percent of adults are HIV-positive, more than three quarters of the orphans have lost a parent to AIDS.<sup>9</sup> In seven other African nations, orphans due to AIDS account for more than half of the total.<sup>10</sup>

Because it takes about 10 years before an HIV infection leads to an AIDS-related death, given current treatment options and availability in many poor nations, the number of children orphaned by AIDS is expected to continue rising over at least the next decade in countries

where HIV is widespread.<sup>11</sup> Botswana and Zimbabwe will be the hardest hit by 2010, with orphans due to AIDS accounting for nearly 90 percent of all children who have lost a parent; in Lesotho, Namibia, Swaziland, and Zambia, the figure is expected to top three quarters.<sup>12</sup>

Even in countries where HIV prevalence has been curbed in recent years, the number of orphans remains high. In Uganda, where adult HIV prevalence declined from 14 percent in the late 1980s to 5 percent in 2001, some 884,000 children have been orphaned by AIDS—one of the largest totals in the world.<sup>13</sup> Although this number is beginning to decline, in 2010 Uganda will still have to care for over a half-million children orphaned by AIDS.<sup>14</sup>

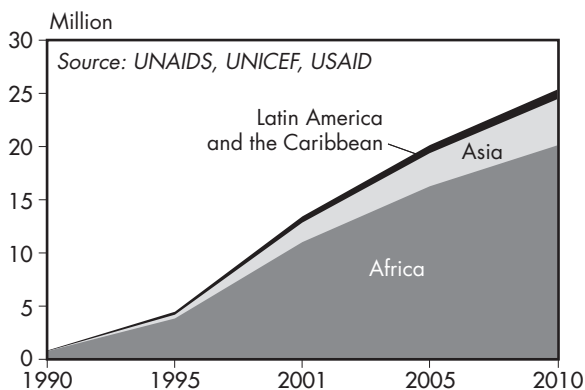


Figure 1: Orphans Due to AIDS, by Region, 1990–2001, with Projections to 2010

In Asia, the number of orphans due to AIDS, 1.8 million, was small compared with the total orphan count of 65.5 million in 2001.<sup>15</sup> Less than 3 percent of orphans in this region lost a parent to AIDS, compared with nearly a third in Africa, reflecting Asia’s large populations and low HIV prevalence levels.<sup>16</sup> Yet with growing epidemics in India, China, and Indonesia, even small increases in HIV prevalence can translate into large numbers of AIDS deaths.<sup>17</sup> In fact, projections for Asia indicate that by 2010 orphans due to AIDS will number 4.3 million, accounting for 7.5 percent of all orphans.<sup>18</sup>

Although all three developing regions will

experience an increase in orphans due to AIDS, both in absolute number and as a proportion of all orphans, Africa is distinct in one respect. The total orphan counts in Africa will be higher in 2010 than they are now by about 8 million.<sup>19</sup> In Asia and in Latin America and the Caribbean, in contrast, the total number of orphans is projected to decline slightly because the increase in the number of children orphaned by AIDS will be offset by a decline in the number of orphans from other causes.<sup>20</sup>

One of the most serious effects of AIDS is the increasing number of children who are losing both parents—called “double orphans” by the United Nations. It is likely that one parent who is infected with HIV will pass on the virus to the other. In turn, the eventual death of both parents due to AIDS within a short span of time is also likely. As a result, the number of double orphans who have lost at least one parent to AIDS is expected to increase from 3.8 million in 2001 to 6.9 million in 2010.<sup>21</sup>

All orphans, whether they have lost one parent or two, face tremendous physical and emotional insecurity. The death of a parent can mean greater responsibility to care for siblings, tend to fields, or earn an income. Orphans may face malnutrition and lose access to basic health care, clothing, housing, and education. Young girls are the first to get pulled out of school. UNICEF found that in 20 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, orphans were less likely than other children to be in school and more likely to be working more than 40 hours a week.<sup>22</sup>

Children who lose parents to AIDS can also face stigma and discrimination, including physical abuse and isolation. Without a foster family to care for them, their only option may be prostitution and petty crime while living on the streets. A study in Zimbabwe found that half of all street children are orphans, the majority due to AIDS.<sup>23</sup> Sexual exploitation and drug use heighten the risk that orphaned street children will contract the same virus that their parents succumbed to.

In sub-Saharan Africa, HIV/AIDS is also placing an immense burden on extended families, which often take in orphaned relatives.

**Table 1: Orphans Due to AIDS and Other Causes, 1990–2001, with Projections to 2010**

| Year | Orphans Due to AIDS<br>(thousand) | Orphans Due to All Other Causes<br>(thousand) |
|------|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1990 | 903                               | 104,855                                       |
| 1995 | 4,523                             | 101,923                                       |
| 2001 | 13,440                            | 94,524  |
| 2005 | 20,106                            | 88,230  |
| 2010 | 25,296                            | 81,469  |

Source: UNAIDS, UNICEF, and USAID.

Family structures are changing rapidly, with households being headed by single parents, grandparents, other relatives, or children themselves. While people try to cope by increasing income-generating activities, it is often difficult to meet needs, especially in households headed by poor women or elderly grandparents.<sup>24</sup>

Orphanages are not considered an appropriate or effective solution for providing care for orphans. First, the costs associated with building and staffing orphanages are too high for most AIDS-affected countries. Second, child advocacy organizations find that care provided in an institutional setting does not necessarily meet the needs of children, who require personal attention and broader social interactions.

In developing countries, where family and community members are the first to provide care for orphans, direct assistance should be provided to foster families. Policies that strengthen family- and community-based care through day-care centers, support groups, and skills training are also needed. Ultimately, the resources and services available to the larger community and the children themselves will determine how effectively this emerging crisis is managed.<sup>25</sup>

### ORPHANS INCREASE DUE TO AIDS DEATHS

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1. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNICEF, and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), *Children on the Brink 2002: A Joint Report on Orphan Estimates and Program Strategies* (Washington, DC: TVT Associates, 2002), p. 5. This estimate is based on 88 countries for which data are available in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
9. Adult prevalence from UNAIDS, *Report on the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic* (Geneva: July 2002), p. 190; orphans from UNAIDS, UNICEF, and USAID, op. cit. note 1, p.22.
10. UNAIDS, UNICEF, and USAID, op. cit. note 1, p. 22.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 22.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.
17. UNAIDS, *AIDS Epidemic Update: December 2002* (Geneva: 2002), pp. 7–9.
18. UNAIDS, UNICEF, and USAID, op. cit. note 1, p. 29.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 30.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 12.