

HIV/AIDS ORPHANHOOD: A SITUATIONAL ANALYSSIS
OF ITS IMPACT ON HIV/AIDS ORPHANED CHILDREN
AND THEIR CAREGIVERS IN KISUMU, KENYA.

Abstract

This study focuses on HIV/AIDS orphanhood as a social problem which is indirectly associated with HIV/AIDS, the biomedical disease and death. The choice of HIV/AIDS orphanhood as a study topic is legitimised on the basis of its scope and magnitude in Kenya, and in much of Sub-Saharan Africa; and also on account of the threat it poses on the survival chances, well being, and psychosocial adjustment of HIV/AIDS orphans. A topical literature review was conducted with the objective of documenting pertinent background information, and for purposes of eliciting data on orphan and caregivers' socio-economic status, type and level of extended family and non-family support, and for identifying salient orphan coping patterns which may be incorporated into assistance programmes for HIV/AIDS affected children and households.

The study is based primarily on empirical data obtained from 214 orphan caregivers and 47 AIDS orphans in Kisumu town and its environs. Respondents were sampled out using a combination of purposive, snowball (mudball) and random sampling. Specifically, the study site, community mobilizers and key informants were picked purposively; whereas respondents were selected using snowball and random sampling. These were augmented with field notes, direct observations and focused group discussions. Field interviews lasted from 15th December, 1996 to 15th March, 1997.

In addition to being highly selective of poor individuals and households, orphan care giving in Kisumu, Kenya is characterised by a high degree of regional and ethnic homogeneity, gender bias and high care giving status. It is therefore argued here that the problem of AIDS orphanhood is related to local socio-cultural factors; that it is complicating the problem of role conflict among an already over-burdened female gender; that it is inextricably linked to low socioeconomic status and that caregiver poverty is the main factor in orphan destitution. Although most of the 807 orphans were living with paternal family members, thus suggesting a resilient traditional fosterage system, maternal relatives maintained a higher level of social contact and material assistance.

It is therefore concluded in this study that institutional orphan support programmes are not sustainable care giving models for Kenya and other Sub-Saharan Africa countries; that orphan support agencies should recognise and build on people's own capacity to cope with AIDS orphanhood; that orphan intervention programmes should seek to assist HIV/AIDS affected children and families equally and should as a rule not isolate 'AIDS orphans' from other orphans; and that there are no model responses to the problem of HIV/AIDS orphanhood. The present study therefore recommends a mix of responses to be applied selectively, singly, or in varying combinations, as the circumstances may Warrant.