

AIDS IS THREATENING CHILDREN LIKE NEVER BEFORE

Globally, children under 15 account for 1 in 6 global AIDS-related deaths and 1 in 7 new global HIV infections. A child under 15 dies of an AIDS-related illness every minute of every day, a young person aged 15–24 gets infected with HIV every 15 seconds while 15 million children are already orphaned by AIDS.

In Malaysia, new HIV infections are doubling every three years with an average of 17 people testing HIV-positive daily. Of the 76,389 people infected in Malaysia as of 2006, almost forty (40) per cent occur in people below the age of 29. Mother to child transmission of HIV has increased from 0.2% in 1991 to 1.4% in 2006.

Psychosocial Distress

Parent's illness and death causes extreme psychosocial distress – worsened by stigma and shame attached to HIV/AIDS.

Economic Hardship

With parents unable to work, and savings spent on care, children could be asked to take on adult responsibilities of caring for the sick and supporting the family.

Education and Schooling

The pressure of earning and caring for parents and siblings can lead children to attend school infrequently or totally withdraw from school. The pressure to abandon schooling intensifies when one or both parents die.

Malnutrition and Illness

Children, especially orphans are more likely to be malnourished or fall ill and less likely to get care that they need. Poverty is the root cause, but neglect and discrimination by adults in whose care they have been left are also important factors.

Loss of Inheritance

Orphans are regularly cheated out of their inheritance.

Fear and Isolation

Dispossessed orphans may be forced out to unfamiliar and hostile places.

Increased Risk to HIV Infection

Impoverished and without parents to educate and protect them, orphans and affected children face abuse and risk, including possible HIV infection. Many are forced into exploitative and dangerous work – including exchanging sex for money; food; protection; and shelter.