

# HIV/AIDS, Gender and Poverty

## Poverty and HIV/AIDS: a Vicious Cycle

Conditions of poverty and economic inequality foster the spread of HIV/AIDS, and it is the poorer regions of the world that bear the brunt of the pandemic: as of December, 2000, 95% of all AIDS cases have occurred in developing countries.<sup>1</sup> Sub-Saharan Africa, the region with the lowest Gross National Product (GNP) per capita, has the highest prevalence rate of HIV infection (8.57%)<sup>2</sup> in the world. Because HIV/AIDS creates a huge drain on the resources of the people and nations affected, it also worsens the poverty of the most severely affected regions.<sup>3</sup> Women, who represent the large majority of the world's poorest, are disproportionately affected by this vicious cycle. Women's lack of access to economic resources and opportunities violates their basic human rights. Governments must protect women's rights to enjoy the full benefits of economic development.

Sources:<sup>1</sup>UNAIDS. *Press Release 27 June 2000*. Geneva: UNAIDS, 2000. <sup>2</sup>HIV Insite. *Sub-Saharan Africa*. San Francisco: University of California at San Francisco, 2000. <sup>3</sup>BBC. *AIDS threat to Africa's economy*. *BBC Online*. British Broadcasting Corporation, 11 July 2000.

Economic inequality and social disempowerment prevent poor women from controlling the timing and safety of sexual intercourse.<sup>1</sup>

When the primary breadwinner becomes ill with AIDS, household income falters, causing hardship and the need for child labour.

Labour migration puts young women at risk of sexual exploitation and creates unequal ratios of men and women, increasing the possibility of HIV transmission through shared partners or sex work.<sup>2</sup>



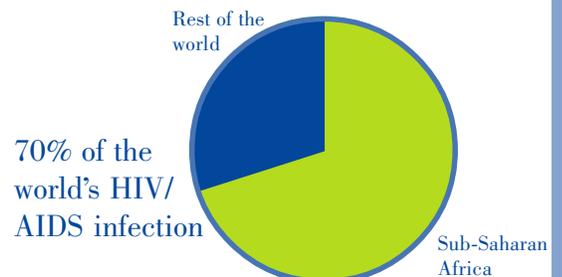
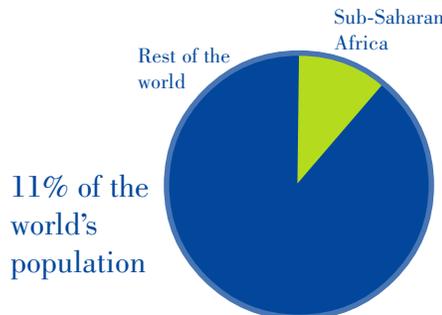
The impact of HIV/AIDS could cut the wealth of some less developed countries by as much as 20%, deepening existing poverty and drying up resources needed to fight the pandemic.<sup>4</sup>

Street youth who have to worry about day-to-day survival place higher priority on hunger and safety from violence than long-term safety from HIV/AIDS.<sup>3</sup>

In countries where women cannot own or inherit land, the wife and children of a man who has died from AIDS may lose access to their source of livelihood.

Sources: <sup>1</sup>Weiss, E., Whelan, D., and Gupta, G. *Vulnerability and Opportunity: Adolescents and HIV/AIDS in the developing world*. Washington, D.C.: International Center for Research on Women, 1996. <sup>2</sup>UNAIDS. *Gender and HIV/AIDS: Taking stock of research and programmes*. Geneva: UNAIDS, 1999. <sup>3</sup>Rivers, K. and Aggleton, P. *Adolescent Sexuality, gender and the HIV epidemic*. London: Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London, n.d. <sup>4</sup>BBC. *AIDS tops African agenda*. *BBC Online*. British Broadcasting Corporation, 12 August 2000.

**Sub-Saharan Africa, where the per capita GNP is only 10% of the world average, has:**

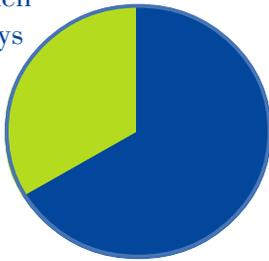


Sources: UNAIDS. *AIDS Epidemic Update, December 2000*. Geneva: UNAIDS, 2000. Population Research Bureau. *World Population – Quick Facts by Topic*. Washington, D.C.: Population Reference Bureau, 1999.

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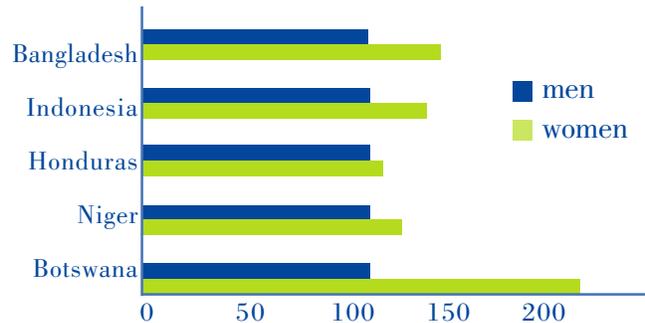
70% of the 1.2 billion people living in poverty worldwide are female

30% men and boys



70% women and girls

Ratio of women to men in poorest quintile



Sources: UN. *The World's Women 1995*. New York: United Nations, 1995. (bar graph)  
WHO. *Gender, Health and Poverty (Fact Sheet #251)*. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2000. (pie chart)

290 million people in Africa live on less than \$30 US per month (\$1 per day). Medications for HIV/AIDS would cost them \$400 US per month:

Cost of HIV/AIDS medications for one month

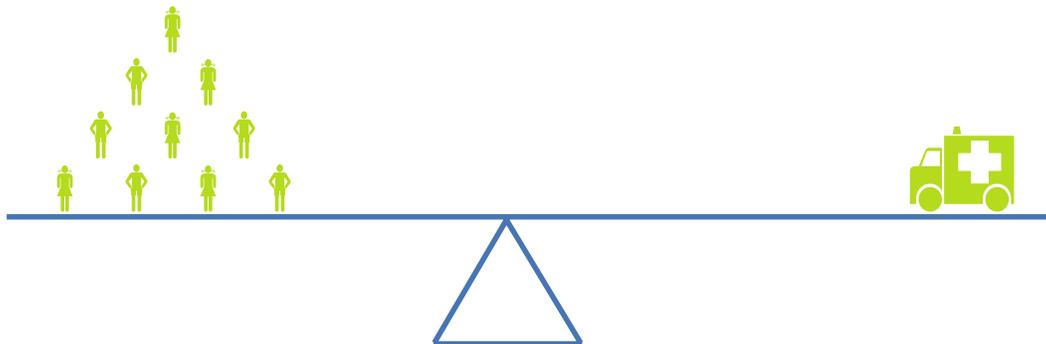


monthly income for one person

\$ = about \$10 US

Source: BBC. Stark Warning over AIDS Apathy. *BBC Online*. British Broadcasting Corporation, 10 July, 2000.

Treatment for HIV/AIDS takes resources away from other important services, such as education



The cost of treatment for one AIDS patient for one year is about equal to the cost of providing education to 10 children for one year.

Source: The World Bank. *Confronting AIDS: Public priorities in a global epidemic*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.