

While recent scientific efforts have resulted in a series of discoveries and advances in understanding and controlling the virus that causes AIDS, this progress has had limited impact on the majority of HIV infected people and populations living in developing countries. The social and economic conditions that nurture the spread of the virus have to be confronted as essential elements in local and global efforts to stem its spread and create effective solutions to halt the epidemic. The current demographics of the epidemic illustrate that this is particularly true of the conditions of human life during childhood.

HIV has found a wealth of opportunities to thrive among tragic human conditions fueled by poverty, abuse, violence, prejudice and ignorance. Social and economic circumstances contribute to vulnerability to HIV infection and intensify its impact, while HIV/AIDS generates and amplifies the very conditions that enable the epidemic to thrive. Just as the virus depletes the human body of its natural defenses, it can also deplete families and communities of the assets and social structures necessary for successful prevention and provision of care and treatment for persons living with HIV/AIDS. This is demonstrated by the estimated 30 million people living with HIV/AIDS, mostly in developing countries. Over 2 million people are expected to die from HIV related illnesses this year adding to nearly 12 million deaths attributed so far to the epidemic. The impact of HIV/AIDS extends beyond those living with the virus, as each infection produces consequences which affect the lives of the family, friends and communities surrounding an infected person. The overall impact of the epidemic encompasses effects on the lives of multiples of the millions of people living with HIV/AIDS or of those who have died. Those most affected by HIV/AIDS are children.

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