

## Africa will suffer 'millions' of AIDS orphans

**A**IDS could leave 16 million children orphaned in subSaharan Africa in 25 years' time. Forecasts from the US Agency for International Development, based on the number of pregnant women infected with HIV, suggest that the problem will be immense. The chances are that mothers with HIV will infect the father so the child will lose both parents.

The tradition of the extended family has always provided a safety net for children who lose their parents. Orphans are usually

taken in by relatives, but with many of the aunts and uncles also dying from AIDS, grandparents could be left with more children than they have any chance of being able to support.

Linda Valleroy and her colleagues at the agency modelled the course of the AIDS epidemic in women aged between 25 and 35, using actual figures for infection from pregnant women in five cities in East Africa. The incidence of infection ranged from 0.4 per cent in Maputo, Mozambique, to 24.1 per

cent in Kampala, Uganda, which is one of the worst-affected regions of Africa.

The researchers calculated how many extra women would die before their children reached five years old because of AIDS. The increase began to show by 1992. They then estimated how many extra children were orphaned because of these deaths, adjusting the figures to take into account the fact that some of the children would themselves die from AIDS before they were five.

The model predicts that in Bujumbura in Burundi and in Kampala, twice as many women in this age group who will die in 1992 will have succumbed to AIDS. The number of children orphaned in the process will also double. Running the model by the year 2015 for the whole of subSaharan Africa produced a figure of 2.4 million deaths from AIDS that year alone. And 78 per cent of the women of childbearing age who die will die from AIDS.

Such huge mortality will not only devastate the labour force and overload an already stretched health service, it will also leave countries with the enormous burden of caring for millions of orphans. Already there are signs of the turmoil to come, said Valleroy. "In the areas hit hardest by the epidemic, such as southern Uganda and northern Tanzania, there are grandparents who have been left to care for 14 or more children," she said. Some of these children are likely to have been infected with HIV.

About 30 to 40 per cent of children born to infected mothers also carry HIV. Between 50 and 90 per cent of these children die from AIDS before they reach five years old. So added to the problem of taking in an orphaned child is the prospect of caring for a very sick child.

The problem of children orphaned by AIDS is not unique to East Africa. Parts of the Caribbean and New York City will soon have to cope with large numbers of parentless children. Valleroy and her colleagues estimate that in Port-au-Prince, in Haiti, the number of orphans will increase by 60 per cent by 1992. □