

Research

- More research is needed to fully understand the impact of HIV/AIDS on older people. This will guide the development of effective programmes to support older people. Research is needed on issues such as the risk of infection for caregivers, economic and health impacts of caregiving, violation of rights of older caregivers (e.g. violence upon suspicion of witchcraft involvement), and the attitude of health workers towards older caregivers.
- The collection of HIV/AIDS prevalence data should include older people and information should be fully disaggregated by age.
- Academicians must include ageing issues as part of their HIV/AIDS research so as to inform initiatives aimed at combating the spread of the disease.

Information, Education and Communication (IEC)

- IEC strategies targeting older people must be developed at national and regional levels. The strategies should focus on older people as an at-risk group, educators, and carers for the sick and the orphaned.
- Development and dissemination of HIV/AIDS information among older people needs to be enhanced to enable them to protect themselves from infection as they care for the sick.
- The inclusion of older persons must include the design and dissemination of culturally appropriate HIV/AIDS awareness messages among them.

Advocacy

- Lobbying is needed at regional and international fora, among policy makers, the private sector, governments, and the community as a whole, so that the impact of HIV/AIDS on older people is recognised and policies changed.
- Organisations working with older people must network and build links with governments, NGOs, donors and the private sector to promote the inclusion of ageing and HIV/AIDS related issues in their programmes.
- Advocacy tools (videos, briefs, posters, etc) must be developed and disseminated.

Direct Support

- Carers' support programmes must be initiated - or where they exist supported - by organisations working with older people.
- Needs assessments must be conducted among older people affected by HIV/AIDS to enable the design of appropriate responses.
- Older people's access to support programmes for those affected by HIV/AIDS needs to be enhanced.
- Programmes should be designed, developed and implemented to meet the specific needs of older people affected by HIV/AIDS.
- HIV/AIDS programmes should be reviewed to enable them to respond to the needs of older people.
- Existing support programmes aimed at older people should be reviewed to enable them to respond to older people affected by HIV/AIDS.

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**HelpAge
International**

Leading global action on ageing

HIV/AIDS and Older People: The African Situation

"I cannot go to funerals or weddings, not even to church because I have to be with him all the time, or most of the time.... I can't even go to the fields to plough"

An older woman from Botswana who cares for her adult son suffering from AIDS



Background

The prevalence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa has reached unprecedented levels, with some countries declaring it a national disaster.

Of the 18.8 million people who have died of the pandemic, more than 14 million or 74.5% were from Sub-Saharan Africa. Life expectancy in the region is therefore expected to drop in the early part of the 21st century. However, the population of older people will increase.

Past high birth rates and significant declines in infant mortality have resulted in high numbers of middle-aged adults in Africa. Many of them are not infected by AIDS and will inevitably grow older, and in all probability live longer than previous generations. By 2030, there will be 25 million people aged between 60 and 64, a sharp increase from the current 11 million. Steep declines in fertility throughout the continent will further enhance population ageing.

Why HIV/AIDS Programmes Must Involve Older People

Older People are Sexually Active

- It is generally believed that older people are past their sex lives. This is a fallacy. Many older men and women remain sexually active and not only risk contracting HIV, but can transmit it as well.
- As a result of society's misconception, older people are not generally targeted in HIV/AIDS education and support programmes.

Older People as Carers

- 12.1 million of the global total of 13.2 million AIDS orphans are in Sub-Saharan Africa, under the care of older family members, mostly older women.
- The caring role exposes older people to the risk of HIV as they come into direct and unprotected contact with opportunistic infections and the body fluids of those who are sick.
- Caregiving places a great burden on older people. The physical and emotional pressures placed on them by HIV/AIDS puts their general health at risk.

Poverty: An Overwhelming Consequence

- The AIDS pandemic exacerbates the poverty situation of older people at a time when they should be receiving support from their families.
- Older people cannot engage in income generating activities as most of their time is taken up caring for the sick. Acquiring food is a problem with no money. Older people deny themselves the little they get to feed the family. Thus, they themselves become vulnerable to problems of food deprivation.
- Poverty is especially acute for older women who in many societies in Africa are traditionally entitled to little property. Older people sell off their meagre belongings in endless efforts to find a cure for their dying child or children.
- Many grandchildren under the care of older relatives drop out of school due to lack of school fees.
- Burials not only result in emotional distress for older people, but also add to their expenses and take them away from income generating activities.

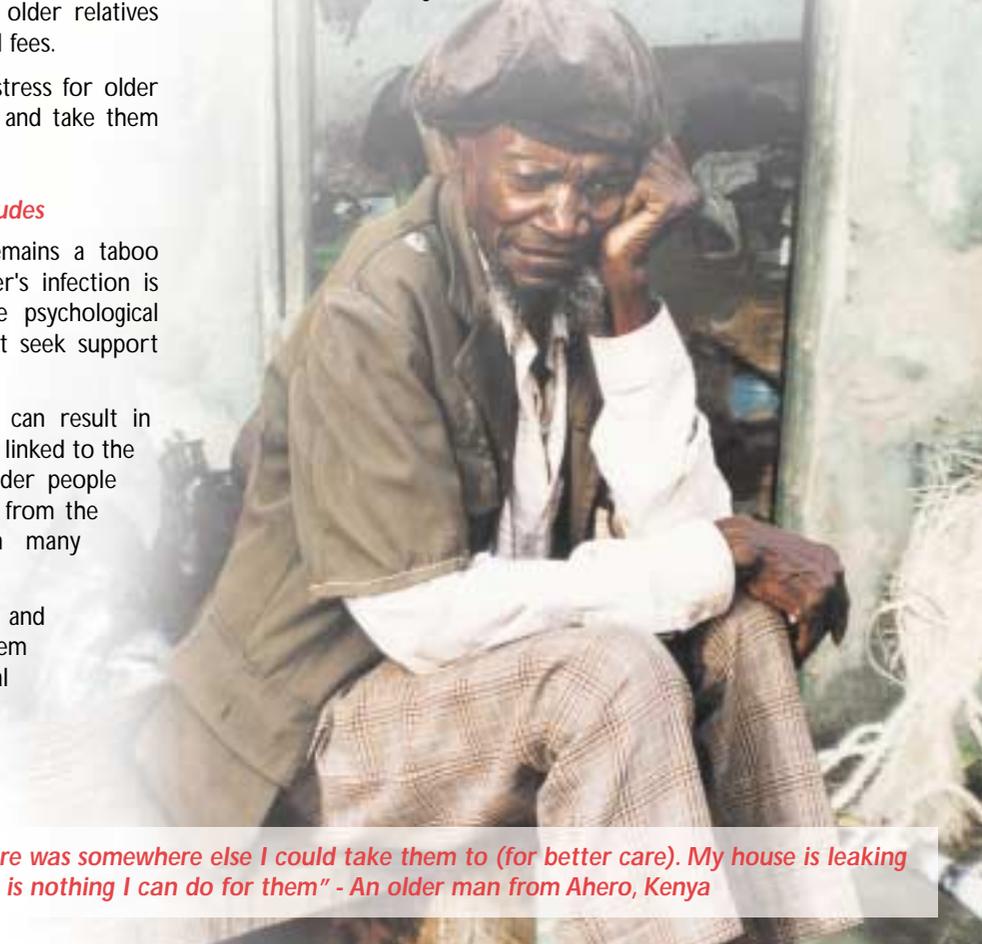
Social Burdens, Negative Societal Attitudes

- In most African communities, AIDS remains a taboo subject. Knowledge of a family member's infection is therefore concealed. This adds to the psychological distress of the older carer who cannot seek support from his/her peers.
- The stigma associated with HIV/AIDS can result in older people being accused of witchcraft linked to the deaths of young people. Reports of older people being physically abused or chased away from the community have been reported in many countries.
- Older people are faced by loneliness and isolation. The caregiving role keeps them away from their peers and other social activities. In many cases, they are shunned by friends upon realisation that they have an infected relative.

What must be done

Policy Development

- Governments and the civil society must recognise the role played by older people in the management of AIDS.
- HIV/AIDS policies, strategies and programmes at all levels must include older people. Failure to do so will not only adversely affect the older generation, but also those they care for.
- Poverty alleviation initiatives must include ageing issues.
- National policies on ageing must include HIV/AIDS as one of the issues having a great impact on older people.
- Older people must be included as change agents in actions against HIV/AIDS.



"I love my grandchildren but I wish there was somewhere else I could take them to (for better care). My house is leaking and I am lame. There is nothing I can do for them" - An older man from Ahero, Kenya