

of orphan care due to the HIV epidemic in western Kenya

Nyambedha, Erick Otieno; Wandibba, Simiyu; Aagaard-Hansen, Jens

Abstract:

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has given rise to major demographic changes including an alarming number of orphans in sub-Saharan Africa. The study describes a rural community in western Kenya in which one out of three children below 18 years of age had lost at least one biological parent and one out of nine had lost both. The main problems these children faced were lack of school fees, food and access to medical care. The high number of orphans has overwhelmed the traditional mechanisms for orphan care, which were based on patrilineal kinship ties. Thus, 28% of the orphans were looked after by culturally inappropriate categories such as matrilineal kin or strangers. Furthermore, many of the caretakers were themselves not capable due to ill health or old age. Factors such as poverty, negative attitudes, and traditional funeral customs made the orphans' situation even worse. The authors conclude that though community-based interventions are urgently needed as the most appropriate way to address the issue, the complex, local reality in which cultural factors, kinship ties, and poverty are interwoven needs to be taken into consideration if sustainable solutions are to be found.