Aids Essay, Research Paper

AIDS in Africa

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is one of the most deadly

viruses in the world. No country in Africa has escaped the virus. Some have been

effected more then others though. The spread of AIDS in Africa is because of

poor medical treatment and a lack of education on the part of the people.

HIV is the virus which causes AIDS.(Aids in Africa,1994) HIV stands for

Human Immune-deficiency Virus. The virus attacks the bodies immune system

and weakens it. Scientists have wondered about the origin of HIV ever since the

epidemic emerged.

Experts believe that the virus was contracted through Chimpanzees. (AIDS

came from Chimps, 1999) Perhaps when someone was bitten by a chimp, or a

hunter was exposed to contaminated blood while field dressing an animal. (AIDS

came from Chimps, 1999) Tests were done by Dr. Beatrice Hahn of the University

of Alabama. Her studies tracked HIV back to a virus that infects four sub-species

of chimps that live in Africa. (AIDS came from Chimps, 1999) Hahn and her team

studied frozen tissue from a chimp that died of complications at childbirth. In

this frozen tissue their was the chimp version of the AIDS virus, called SIVcpz.

The genes in SIVcpz are genetically similar to the AIDS virus. (AIDS came from

Chimps, 1999) Chimps who have probably carried this virus for thousands of

years do not get sick from it. Researchers are trying to find out why chimps are

not effected by this virus, because it may lead to a cure. (Aids in Africa,1994) This

productive finding about the virus wasn’t found until 1997 when testing started.

(Aids in Africa,1994) If it would have been found sooner maybe the massive

spread of AIDS could have been prevented.

Since the start of the epidemic an estimated 34 million people living in

Sub-Saharan Africa in 1998 were infected with HIV. (AIDS,1991) This is due to a

lack of education on the part of the people in Africa. They are not taught about

the virus as we are in the United States. In this country the public and media

educate the people about AIDS, including how to prevent the disease. Without

embarrassment, Americans openly discuss methods in which the disease is

transmitted. However in African cultures confronting sexual issues that cause

AIDS and HIV is very uncommon.(AIDS the epidemic,1994)

In Africa AIDS has become the number one cause of death, overtaking

Malaria.(The AIDS Reader,1991) The U.N. AIDS/health experts say more than 40

million people contracted the disease in 1980’s and nearly 12 million of them

have died in Africa. (The AIDS Reader,1991) If the people in Sub-Saharan Africa

were educated about preventing the spread of AIDS and HIV maybe the statistics

wouldn’t be so dramatically different from other countries.

In the African countries good medical treatment can be hard to find. The

United States has a better economy, and more highly trained professionals then

Africa. The lower quality of medical treatment in Africa has contributed to some

of the spread of AIDS in the past.(The AIDS Reader,1991)

Unfortunately the cost of drugs to slow down the disease can cost

$10,000-$20,000 per year per person. (The AIDS Reader,1991) This keeps most

infected HIV patients from getting the needed drugs because they can t afford

them.. This amount of money would cover the annual health care for 200 people

in Zimbabwe.(The AIDS Reader,1991) A family in Sub-Saharan Africa might

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spend between $600 and $1,500 to care for a person living with AIDS.(The AIDS

Reader,1991) This money could be used for a college education or other basic

necessities. This country was hit so hard with AIDS that more then one-quarter

of working-age adults are infected with HIV and are forced to use money for

health care.(AIDS the epidemic,1994)

Zimbabwe was the hardest hit country of AIDS or HIV. In this country

about half of all hospital beds are filled with patients who have AIDS and AIDS

related symptoms.(AIDS,1991) Even if we stopped AIDS now the millions of

people already living with it would make the disease continue. In Zimbabwe 25

testing sites were set up to test pregnant women’s blood for HIV virus. At two of

these sites less then 10% were infected, but at the remaining sites almost half

were infected.(Aids in Africa,1994) All pregnant women with the virus have a risk

of passing it onto the baby.

One other major problem in the spread of AIDS is through rape and

sexual abuse. In Africa these kinds of sexual actions are never discussed by the

media or by the public. All the sexual problems, whether cultural or personal, are

kept secrets. Confronting these issues is so uncommon in this culture that rapists

are often “let off the hook,” and go free.(AIDS the epidemic,1994)

In Africa young girls are not willingly being sexually active at young ages.

AIDS and HIV are getting spread through crimes and forced sexual contact. Older

men and women are spreading this disease whether they know they have it or

not.

At this point and time, AIDS is incurable, although there are drugs that

will increase a patients life span.(Aids in Africa,1994) An older AZT treatment

mixed with newer drugs called protease inhibitors will raise the T-cells in the

immune system and help strengthen it. (Aids in Africa,1994) This is not a cure,

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but it is a start in helping victims of the virus. However there is a problem; this

new drug is unavailable to African’s or to expensive.(The AIDS reader,1991)

If African health care professionals and government officials made a

greater effort to educate everyone about the danger of AIDS, in the future the

death rate could be greatly lowered. The media should be used more openly to

discuss problems with the spreading of the disease. Clinics set up in remote areas

of the country reach many people who do not have access to modern forms of

media. These clinics blend more with the people and their culture should be used

to educate the hard to reach people. Law enforcement officials could do their part

by enforcing penalties against sexual abusers and not letting them go free. If the

people of Africa were informed and had support in dealing with the sexual topics

that cause the spread of the disease. Africans would have better lives and not

have to suffer through so much sickness and death. The spread of this disease is

mainly due to miss education of Africans and poor medical treatment in Africa.

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