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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews / Revue de Livre



HIV and Aids in Africa

Edited by Ezekeil Kalipeni, Susan Craddock, Joseph R. Oppong and Jayati Ghosh. USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. ISBN 0-631-22356-8 & ISBN-0-631-22357-6

HIV/AIDS in Africa continues to grow unabated, highlighting the need to find effective prevention methods and technologies. The existence of the AIDS epidemic in Africa attests to the growing awareness of a need for a practical implementation of intervention and prevention majors within the African continent, particularly sub-Saharan Africa. Despite several interventions put in place to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS, many people living in Africa continue to lose their lives. *HIV/AIDS in Africa* is an edited book by Ezekiel Kalipeni, Susan Craddock, Joseph R. Oppong and Jayati Ghosh. This volume comprises of twenty-four chapters divided into five parts. It covers a broad range of HIV/AIDS issues, including epidemiology, politics, culture, poverty, migration and misperceptions of AIDS in Africa.

Part one focuses on disease epidemics as social processes. It looks at the spread of infections propelled by history, politics, economy and culture. It examines how western epidemiologists and health planners in the development agencies greatly underestimated the potential magnitude of HIV/AIDS in Africa. It gives a critical view on the impact of AIDS in Africa. Authors tackle the discourse of stigma and racism that surrounds AIDS, and the challenged representations surrounding heterosexual transmission of HIV. They argue that elements of racism, which used to justify slavery and colonial domination, were adapted in depictions of AIDS. The book further looks at how stigma retarded prevention campaigns and suffering endured by sick people and families by fostering social isolation.

Part two provides an overview of AIDS as it has spread through Africa for the twenty years since 1986. With close to 70% of the global total of HIV-positive people, sub-Saharan Africa bears the brunt of the havoc and destruction that HIV/AIDS has left in its trail. The statistical findings show that an estimated 13.7 million Africans have already died from the epidemic, which is quickly erasing the hard-earned gains in life expectancy in some countries. The book looks at the

medical and epidemiology arena, the different pattern of AIDS infection exhibited by African countries has resulted in a plethora of research, which resembles earlier narrow-minded colonial efforts to understand the epidemiological patterns of TB and syphilis. This book confronts some viewpoints that have guided recent AIDS research in Africa, focusing particularly on those works that overgeneralise, are ethnocentric and misrepresent Africa through cultural stereotyping. Authors argue that such viewpoints contribute little to understanding the AIDS epidemic in Africa and encourage a premature narrowing of research questions. Authors discuss at great length perceptions and misperceptions of AIDS in Africa, looking at polygamy, patrilineage, the culture of sexual permissiveness and gender stratification, and attempt to show that the sex-positive nature of traditional society which has been grafted onto contemporary urban society accounts for widespread prostitution and AIDS. They argue that patriarchy gives men the incentive to acquire as many wives as possible because of the value of children as economic assets.

Authors also map the AIDS pandemic in Eastern and Southern Africa. The book gives a comparison of HIV rates in Africa. It examines the magnitude and geography of the disease in West Africa by highlighting the puzzling inter-intra country differences, followed by specific case studies from Nigeria, Senegal and Ghana. West Africa is reported to have low HIV rates compared to Eastern and Southern Africa. What the data show is that sub-Saharan Africa is currently thought to have fully two-thirds of the total world number of people living with HIV. Yet within this overall statistic lie significant variations in levels of infection across the continent. Southern Africa continues to be the part of the continent worst affected by HIV.

Part three looks at understanding the issues in terms of gender vulnerabilities. It discusses the strategy for prevention of sexual transmission of HIV/AIDS among adolescents. A study conducted among high school students in Kenya reported that 70% of students had heard about HIV blood testing, 16% had never heard of such a test and 5% were unsure. The study tested whether there was an association between sexual activity and risky behaviours such as using alcohol, smoking cigarettes, taking drugs, frequenting discos and

association of people with these behaviours. The results indicated that all these behaviours significantly increased the odds of high school students being sexually active. The study further discussed condom use as one of the chief methods of birth control among sexually active students. The rate of consistent condom use was as low as 21% for girls and 10.7% for boys. Based on the above findings, authors recommended that there was a need to focus on adolescents because they are becoming sexually active at an earlier age. Since adolescence is characterised by experimentation and adventure, this group is at greater risk of contracting HIV/AIDS than other age groups. As sub-Saharan Africa suffers from the HIV/AIDS epidemic, there is a great need to protect all youth from initiating sexual intercourse, which may change the course of the epidemic.

Continuing the focus on gender, this section also looks at the tragic AIDS epidemic revolving around women, sexuality and culture, and issues of migracy, masculine identities and AIDS around men. It examines the psychosocial context of HIV transmission on the South African gold mines. The book illustrates the way in which miners' identities are shaped and constrained by their living and working conditions. Moreover, authors take a closer look at sex as morality and focuses on the invisible of homosexuality.

Part four focuses on the social embeddedness of HIV in sub-Saharan Africa. It discusses the processes that take place during HIV infection in the human body, and the risks involved in transmitting the virus. The African continent is disproportionately at risk from HIV/AIDS. In Zimbabwe, Kesby stated that overall

contraceptive use is relatively high and regular use of condoms is very low. The book also touches on AIDS and ethics: clinical trials, pharmaceuticals and the global scientific practice.

The last part of the book explores how HIV/AIDS is a devourer in the family. This section depicts the unimaginable personal tragedies caused by AIDS for many in Africa. The authors look at the impact AIDS has had on the African economy and communities. It is virtually impossible to portray what it must feel like to live in a hard-hit community in Africa today. It looks at a narrative story of Noerine Kaleeba and AIDS in the family, and also presents case studies of the problems posed by AIDS in the lives of two eminent men, Luomo Makiadi a musician and composer, and Sony Labou Tansi, novelist and playwright. Consideration of the lives and works of these two men tell readers about the complex relations of AIDS and activism in public lives.

Overall, this book is essential reading, as it tackles the critical arguments about HIV/AIDS in Africa. The book is interesting and relevant for the African context. It represents a call to all researchers and people working with HIV/AIDS to take account of the complex AIDS epidemic in Africa. This is the first book I have ever read that tackles the misperceptions of AIDS in Africa. As it stands, the collection represents a major contribution to academic research in Africa and globally.

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