

AIDS AS A LONG WAVE DISASTER

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper focusses on the AIDS pandemic in Uganda, which can be viewed in terms of disaster theory, although it differs in some important ways from disasters which occur as discrete events, and those which have precedents. The special characteristics of the AIDS pandemic as a disaster have far-reaching implications for the way in which society makes responses to it. A period of social experimentation is necessary, where readjustments to repeated and growing number of deaths are made, and where past experience is seen as an increasingly unreliable guide to what action to take in the future. Changes in the explanation of the disease and in expectations of life's fulfilment in the face of AIDS take place. Coping with the direct impact (illness and death to the individual and her/his family) can be seen as adaptive and experimental behaviour in the face of a slowly unfolding and unprecedented disaster. A methodology is outlined to analyse the differential socio-economic impact of AIDS on households with different access to resources, and on regions with varying patterns of labour demand in agriculture.

Keywords. AIDS, disaster, coping, farming system, access, adaptive behaviour.

Introduction

This paper first analyses the AIDS pandemic in Uganda in terms of theories and recognised causes and patterns of a disaster, and compares it with other disasters. Then a discussion follows on the ways in which people explain the disease - after all, the most effective way in which people can protect themselves against the disease relies on a scientifically sound explanation of how the disease is contracted. Then the way in which the disease is