

I spoke myself to a Zimbabwe AIDS specialist recently who says in one area 60% of all pregnant women are now infected with HIV. It is not enough just to look at seroprevalence rates however. Take a group of 100 college leavers in Uganda, aged 22. Their seroprevalence rate is falling because of behaviour change but may still be 20% in some groups. That means one in five will probably be dead in 5-10 years. However, the even bigger question is what the LIFETIME seroprevalence rate will be?

Let us say that of the group, only 80 are alive by 2005. But by then more will have become infected - say another 10-15. By 2010 only 65-70 will be alive. But the infection may continue... How many will still be free of HIV by the time they are 65 years old? According to many experts in sub-Saharan Africa, in some groups the toll could be very high, so that the majority of that generational group have died over a period of three to four decades. We are no longer talking about a health care or prevention issue, but about economics, development and total country impact. However there is some encouraging news: as I say, in Uganda seroprevalence rates do appear to be falling sharply among teenagers.