

There are currently estimated to be 16 million children in the world who would fit our definition of "orphan". That is:

"A child whose parents are unable, or unwilling, to continue to provide for his or her basic needs".

Most humanitarian and social agencies agree that the impact of HIV/AIDS alone will cause this figure will reach **32 million** within ten years.

Exposure to emotive media appeals has desensitized much of the world, (and sadly, the church) to the true plight of the orphan. Their needs have been reduced to those that can easily be visually communicated – they need 'more food', 'better clothing', 'medical attention' etc. Of course the reality is that compared to our decadent western lifestyle, a good proportion of the world's population could be said to have those same needs. If we are to respond to God's instruction to care for the orphans, we must have a full understanding of their *specific* needs and the trauma to which they are subjected. The exact conditions vary according to country and culture, but around the world orphans are:

- Bought and sold by the sex trade
- Subjected to physical and sexual abuse
- Physically and chemically restrained
- Stereotyped and homogenized by relief agencies
- Commoditized by adoption agencies
- Marginalized by communities
- Denied by embarrassed governments
- Categorized according to function and usefulness

For many, the institutional experience is the prelude to a very sad outcome. For example, in Russia when the children leave the orphanage at age 17:

- 15% will commit suicide within 2 years.
- 40% will be in prison, or leading a life of crime within 5 years.

While outcomes vary widely, the same principle operates in every country - whenever a child is deprived of his or her parental care, the hope of that child reaching adulthood with their health, self-worth, sexual purity, and dignity intact is severely compromised. This is why God's word repeatedly draws our attention to their needs.

