

MARY'S STORY – POVERTY

Mary decided to move to a nearby city, where she thought she could find work. Even a job washing clothes or selling candy on the street might be able to earn her \$1 a day with which to buy food for her children. After many weeks, Mary hadn't found any work. Because the country was in shambles and there were no social services, there was no where else to find help – no shelter, no soup kitchen. The only job offers she received were from men who offered her money to have sex with them. Day after day and night after night she refused these offers. But day after and day and night after night her children cried themselves to sleep because of their hunger. The crying of the children became weaker as they became too exhausted from starvation to even vocalize their needs. Finally, Mary made the only decision she felt that she could make in order to save her children. While Mary had compromised her own values, at least her children now had food to eat and a small shelter on the outskirts of the city to call home.

It was only about four years after moving to the city that Mary started becoming sick. At the urging of a friend, she decided to take an HIV test. Mary cried herself to sleep the day she found out she was HIV positive. Over the next few months, she did as much as she could to educate herself about the disease and what she could do to get better. She heard about anti-retroviral drugs that could extend her life. She knew she couldn't live forever with AIDS but she thought that if she could at least live long enough to see her children grow up, that would be worth something. It was only upon her return to the health clinic that she learned how expensive they were. Because of the high costs being charged by foreign drug companies, a monthly supply of drugs would cost three times her monthly income. Taking the drugs would be impossible. The news crushed Mary's spirits and her hopes for survival. Within six months, Mary was too sick to work. It was at this point that Mary retreated to her house and resigned herself to the life of a dying woman.

Poverty and HIV/AIDS

Facts show that many of the countries which are most affected by HIV are also among the most heavily indebted and poorest countries. This means those most in need of the resources to combat HIV/AIDS are the least able to afford them economically. In Africa an estimated one percent of those with HIV/AIDS have access to the drugs capable of prolonging their lives or protecting their unborn children.

Many women like Mary are left few options for feeding themselves and their children. Discuss how poverty has been a factor in Mary's story.



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Located in Mahomet, Ill., ELI is a community-based nonprofit organization emphasizing life skills for emerging youth leaders in third world countries. ELI has been formed by Paul and Virginia who have been working with youth in United States and abroad for more than 30 years. For further information on ELI, please call (217) 377-9444.