The group Amnesty International claim a "pandemic" of violence against women is playing a role in the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Nearly half the adults with HIV/AIDS are women, and mass rape and sexual violence in conflicts in countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo put women at much greater risk.

The UNAIDS and WHO report released prior to December 1, World AIDS Day, showed that in 2004 the numbers of adults and children living with HIV/AIDS reached its highest level ever, an estimated 39.4 million.

Women make up nearly half of the 37.2 million adults living with HIV.

"Traditional practices such as genital mutilation, early marriage, and the practice of newly-bereaved widows being 'inherited' by other male relatives also increased women's exposure to the virus" said Amnesty International.

Many first sexual experiences for young girls is a forced experience, and such women are afraid of being stigmatized if they report the rape.