

# WHAT IS VIRGINITY TESTING AND HYMENOPLASTY?

Virginity is a term used to describe the state of never having had sexual intercourse. In some cultures virginity is wrongfully linked to a woman or girl's worth. Virginity can equate to the 'purity' of a woman or girl. In some families/communities it is considered of high regard for the woman to be a virgin before she is married as she is believed to be presenting the 'honour' of her family within the community. In some cases, the requirement for a girl to refrain from sexual intercourse before marriage can lead to pressure to undergo virginity testing and hymenoplasty.

### **What is Virginity Testing?**

Virginity testing is an intrusive examination of the female genitalia intended to determine if a girl or woman has had vaginal intercourse. It is also referred to as hymen, '2-finger' or vaginal examination. This is an inspection of the female genitalia, intended to determine whether a woman or girl has had vaginal sexual intercourse.

### **Hymenoplasty**

The hymen: is a thin membrane which surrounds or partially covers the opening of the vagina. Its appearance and shape varies from person to person and during puberty the hymen changes, typically becoming stretchier. The appearance of the hymen is not a reliable indication of a woman having had vaginal intercourse, nor is it guaranteed the hymen will break or bleed after the first instance of vaginal intercourse.

Hymenoplasty: is a procedure in which the hymen is surgically reconstructed or stitched. The intention is to ensure a woman bleeds the next time she has vaginal intercourse. There is no guarantee the procedure will reform the hymen or cause bleeding. Hymenoplasty can cost thousands of pounds and as with virginity tests, can take place in any number of medical settings. In some cases people known as 'fixers' will find a person willing to perform the procedure and match them with those seeking someone to carry it out.

## The Consequences

Virginity testing and hymenoplasty are forms of 'honour'-based abuse. It is wrongfully believed a girl or woman may bring 'shame' or 'dishonour' onto a family or community if she is not perceived to be a virgin when she marries. In some cases an older female relative will organise the virginity test and/or accompany the woman/girl to it. It may also be carried out at the request of an intended husband or the intended husband's family as part of what is considered a 'marriage package'.

Women who are considered to not be a virgin following a virginity test, or who do not bleed on their wedding night, are mostly likely to experience physical and psychological abuse from their family and/or community as a result. In the most extreme cases they may be at risk of murder or an 'honour' killing.

## Identifying Risks:

- There could be pain and discomfort after the procedures, which may result in the woman or girl having difficulty walking or sitting for a long period of time
- Concern from family members that a woman or girl has a boyfriend, or plans for the woman or girl to be married
- Threatened with either procedure or has already undergone the procedure
- The woman or girl has already experienced or is at risk of other forms 'honour'-based abuse and harmful practices
- They are known to social services in relation to other safeguarding issues
- They disclose other concerns that could be an indication of abuse
- Have suffered trauma from being coerced and having to undergo the procedures (psychological needs, withdrawal, anxiety, and change in behaviour)
- Unexplained absence from school

This is not an exhaustive list of indicators. If any of these indicators are identified professionals should follow the appropriate safeguarding policies.

## The Law

Virginity testing and hymenoplasty are both illegal in the UK.

The legal definition under the Health and Care Act 2022 of virginity testing is the "examination of the female genitalia with or without consent, for the purpose (or purported purpose) of determining virginity". Under the same act, hymenoplasty is defined as "the reconstruction of the hymen with or without consent".

It is an offence to carry out, offer to carry out or aid or abet either procedure. Each carries a maximum prison sentence of five years and/or an unlimited fine.

Both virginity testing and hymenoplasty offences are 'extra-territorial' offences, meaning an offence may be committed if a UK national or habitual UK resident is taken out of the country for virginity testing or hymenoplasty to be carried out.

## Key Facts:

- Virginity tests and hymenoplasty can be and are carried out on girls and women of any age
- They are types of 'honour'-based abuse and harmful practices
- They centre on the wrongful idea of a woman's virginity being linked to her 'purity', and equivalent to her value in society
- Virginity testing and hymenoplasty are strongly linked to forced/child marriage
- If a woman does not bleed on their wedding night she may be at further risk of physical and psychological abuse as it could be considered of 'dishonour' to her family if it is believed she is not a virgin
- The hymen has few blood vessels and it is not guaranteed it will break or bleed during the first instance of vaginal intercourse
- The hymen can stretch or tear easily for any number of reasons before vaginal intercourse
- There is no guarantee a woman will bleed during vaginal intercourse after hymenoplasty is carried out
- Virginity testing and hymenoplasty are both illegal in the UK

## Multi-agency statutory guidance:

[gov.uk/government/publications/virginity-testing-and-hymenoplasty-multi-agency-guidance/virginity-testing-and-hymenoplasty-multi-agency-guidance](https://gov.uk/government/publications/virginity-testing-and-hymenoplasty-multi-agency-guidance/virginity-testing-and-hymenoplasty-multi-agency-guidance)

## Responding to Virginity Testing and Hymenoplasty

If someone is at risk or under threat of being pressured to take a virginity test, or undergo hymenoplasty you must immediately report it to the police.

- If the person is under 18 years old you must refer to children social care
- Follow your organisational and your local/national best practice policies and procedures
- Follow the ONE CHANCE RULE at all times. We believe that there might be only once chance to safeguard someone at risk or under threat of virginity test, or hymenoplasty, from happening
- Hold an emergency strategy/professional meeting with relevant agencies, (this should be immediately or within 24 hours)

## UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES

- Let the family, community or social network know about the disclosure
- Speak to the person at risk in front of family members or within the family home
- Approach the family or community leaders or attempt mediation
- Use members of the community to interpret
- Accidentally give out information which might jeopardise the person's safety

Caution is required about how information is shared, recorded, and safeguarded within the organisation. Information should only be shared on a need-to-know basis.

## We will end 'honour'-based abuse and harmful practices

Helpline: **0800 107 0726**

10am - 4pm, Monday to Friday



To make a professional referral to Savera UK, complete our online form:  
[saverauk.co.uk/get-help/referrals-for-professionals/](https://saverauk.co.uk/get-help/referrals-for-professionals/)

If you are an individual who needs help or advice, complete this form:  
[saverauk.co.uk/savera-uk-individual-referral-form/](https://saverauk.co.uk/savera-uk-individual-referral-form/)

**In an emergency, please call 999.**