

BY NAVJOAT KAUR

# THE VIRGINITY TEST

AKA the "two-finger" test

# Who does the testing?

It usually depends on the region, but medical officials, community leaders, members of law enforcement, trusted older women and even parents are often given the authority to perform this two-finger test to check whether the woman still has had vaginal intercourse or not, and that is used to assess their purity and honor.

# Why does this test happen?

Women and even young girls have to go through this if their parents or other family members request this testing. Potential life partners and their families are also given the right to ask for this test. Even potential employers, especially military officials, have the authority to ask their female employees to prove their virginity through this test. Most women themselves do not have enough authority to refuse this testing, and if they do say no, then they are often forced through legal means to do this test. This test is also used in cases of sexual assault as a way to determine whether penetration occurred or not.

# Where does it still happen?

According to the World Health Organization, this sort of testing is known to happen in at least 20 countries, including United States. Most people seem to think that it only happens in developing countries, but the fact is that it happens in cultures that equate virginity with purity, and the western culture definitely holds that belief.

# WHAT EVEN IS THE VIRGINITY TEST?

■ In the so-called 'two-finger test', doctors probe the vagina to determine if the hymen is intact and try to determine if the vagina is lax, which is taken as evidence that the woman routinely has sex and thus consented to intercourse. Often, the doctor is male

Table 2 The reason why the test was done

Reason	Frequency	Percent
rape	2	0.4
partner doubt	174	32
doubt on hymenoplasty	1	0.2
family insistence	38	7
prosecutor order	84	15.5
own insistence	103	18.9
confirmation	122	22.4
injury	7	1.3
police order	10	1.8
social worker order	4	0.6
Total	544	100

Table 1 General characteristics of the study population

Age	Frequency	Percent
Under10y.	3	0.6
10-14y	4	0.7
15-19	17	3.1
20-24	151	27.8
25-29	181	33.3
30-34	114	21
35-39	34	6.3
40-44	7	1.3
no data	33	6.1
Total	544	100
Civil status	Frequency	Percent
engaged	87	16
married	98	18
maiden	353	64.9
no data	6	1.1
Total	544	100

These graphs are from a study done on the virginity test in Kosovo Society. Table 1 tells us the age and marriage status of the women this test was performed on and Table 2 tells us the reason behind the test. As it shows, Partner doubt was the main reason behind the test, and most of the women were unmarried, so it points towards potential life partners asking proof of the women's "purity and honor".

IS IT  
ACCURATE?

NO!

The virginity test relies on the belief that the hymen completely covers the opening of the vagina and that it can only be broken through penetrative sex, but the fact is that it can be torn, stretched or "broken" through sports and tampon use. Also, some women aren't even born with it. So, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for someone, even medical professional, to determine with a complete certainty whether a woman is a virgin or not based only on the hymen. Along with that, it also relies on the basis that a "loose vagina" means that woman has had intercourse and is sexually active, but people choose to forget that every woman's body is different and, thus, every vagina is different which means some are just looser than others, so this is not anywhere close to being an accurate way to determining one's virginity.

DOES  
IT  
WORK?

NO!

### **The Virginity test has no scientific or clinical validity.**

This test is based on a lot of assumptions that have scientifically been proven incorrect and incomplete. The World Health Organization recommends that this test should not be performed under any circumstance because it is neither accurate, nor ethical. The United Nation agencies have called this type of testing "medically unnecessary" because its results can not be trusted because of a lot of different reasons, but mainly because of individual differences in every woman's body, and other reasons excluding sexual intercourse that could lead to the hymen tearing or stretching.

*No medical procedure exists that can accurately determine if a woman—or a man, for that matter—is a virgin.*



IS IT  
ETHICAL?

NO!

This test does not respect women's autonomy and integrity, and most of the time it is done without the consent of the person it is being performed on, and if they do give consent, it is usually forced or coerced. This test is also quite intrusive which can be harmful to that woman's psychological and physical well-being. Since the test actually does not tell us anything about a person's virginity, and even if it did, its risks and harms far outweigh any benefits.

# IMPACT ON WOMEN

## PHYSICAL

The virginity test is often painful, and women often feel violated.

Women believed to have had premarital sex face public shame, prison, or may even become victims of so-called honor killings.

If a woman is believed to not be a virgin, even if she has never had sex before, it can sometimes result in suicides because virginity is so closely tied to purity and honor, that they can not handle people believing them to be impure. Some girls also tried to commit suicide to avoid having to go through this exam.

The stigma attached to losing virginity before marriage can also women to engage in other sexual activities (oral or anal sex) and most of the time it is not done in a way that would cause them the least amount of pain. There is also the risk of STIs because if those women are trying to preserve their virginity, then it is likely that they won't try to get protection in case anybody finds out.

Research also found that long term effects of this type of testing could lead to increased risk of sexual assault because these tests often result in isolating behaviors, from the person herself, and from society.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL

The procedure of the test is humiliating and traumatic, especially if it is being performed on someone who has not had sort of sexual experience.

The test can lead to feelings of self-disgust, shame and guilt which then can lead to girls and women having depression, anxiety and negative body image.

This test is especially traumatizing for victims of sexual assault because it would make them relive what happened to them, and that could have severe negative impact on their mental health and ability to cope. It can also mimic the original assault which can increase feelings of helplessness in the victims.



## SOCIAL

The test often serves as just another way to let women know that their words aren't to be believed, that what they say doesn't matter because it can't be trusted.

It also tells women that their worth is tied with their virginity and that if they lose it before the "proper" time, they will become damaged goods that nobody will want.

Many women are mistakenly believed to be non-virgins and which leads to such negative impact on their personal and social lives. Sometimes, their potential marriages fall through, or they are not given the job even if they more than qualify for it. Some even have to go through the painful experience of completely being cut off from their families and friends because they are seen as someone who is impure and someone who brought dishonor to them.

*"I was so ashamed. I knew I hadn't done anything wrong but I was still so embarrassed,"*

- Neda 18

# WHAT STEPS ARE BEING TAKEN TO STOP THIS TYPE OF TESTING?

Enforce the ban on Two-Finger Test



End Virginty Testing



It is not possible to tell a "virgin" hymen from a "non-virgin" hymen.



End Virginty Testing



Virginty testing is rooted in:



that emphasize control of women's and girls' sexuality and bodies.



End Virginty Testing



Virginty testing, also called "two-finger testing", is unscientific, harmful, and a violation of women's and girls' human rights.



End Virginty Testing



Health care professionals must never perform or recommend virginty testing.



The World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Human Rights Council, and the UN Women's Rights Council are leading the fight against the virginity testing. This test is considered a massive violation of women's privacy, autonomy and rights. In 2018, these agencies called for a ban to be put on this practice. They have also taken an information based approach where they try to give cultures where this testing happens accurate information about virginity and the hymen, so that it can reduce myths that surround this subject, and thus put a stop at this test. They also try to challenge the social norms that have made this testing a part of a lot of cultures and communities. Another important thing to know is that laws against virginity testing already exist in most of the countries these tests are performed, but because they are not enforced, doctors and other people still force women to go through with these.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

Fejza, Hajrullah & Tolaj, Ilir & Tolaj, Jasmina & Blakaj, Flamur. (2014). Virginitv testing impact in women's life in Kosovo. This study was done on women in the Kosovo culture and their experiences with virginitv testing. It looked at their ages, marriage status, reasons behind getting the test done, and then on how many of them were believed to be virgins or non-virgins, and also on how that affected their lives. The results found that the main reason was a partner's doubt on that woman's purity and honor, and also found that the main negative impact was divorce. The study didn't really look at psychological or physical effects of the testing.

International Society for Sexual Medicine. (2018, September 21). What is virginitv testing? Why is it used, and what are its potential effects? Retrieved from <https://www.issm.info/sexual-health-qa/what-is-virginitv-testing-why-is-it-used-and-what-are-its-potential-effects/>. This article focused on the potential harmful effects of virginitv testing on women's physical and mental health, and also on their social lives and status. It also gives a bit more detail into why this type of testing is not medically accurate or reliable., and why it shouldn't be automatically assumed that the lack of a hymen means sexual experience.

Jalalzai, R. (2016, March 10). The Need To End Afghanistan's Virginitv Tests. Retrieved from <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-virginitv-tests/27602445.html>. This article focused on how religion, Muslim religion to be specific, affects virginitv testing. It also points out the severely dangerous physical punishments that women have to take if their hymen is not intact. This article also looks at the way sex is considered in countries that have Muslim majority and how that directly relates to how severe the punishment would be for losing virginitv and being impure.

Jones, E. (2018, May 28). What is it about virginitv anyway? Retrieved from <https://thegatewayonline.ca/2016/10/what-is-virginitv-anyway/>. This article focused on why so many cultures communities consider these tests important, which then leads to looking at why virginitv is so important in all cultures, even the western culture. The article then talks about how virginitv tests, specifically, may not be present in US, but there are other traditions and beliefs that give importance to being a virgin that are very much present in our society, but they only seem to exist for women.

Jones, S. (2019, November 12). Why Are American Doctors Performing Virginitv Tests? Retrieved from <https://www.marieclaire.com/health-fitness/a29488743/virginitv-testing-america-doctors/>. This article's focus was on Virginitv tests occurring in America, and it pointed out that these type of archaic things are always assumed to happen in developing countries, but that is not true because even with all the knowledge that these tests do not work, they are being performed. This article also included personal stories of american women who had these tests done on them and how negatively they impacted their mental health and social life.

Jones, S. (2019, October 30). Why Do So Many Countries Still Allow Virginitv Testing? Retrieved from <https://www.marieclaire.com/politics/a29491715/virginitv-testing-laws-regulations/>. This article focused on virginitv testing in different regions of the world, and that region's beliefs on the tests and what women have suffered if they were believed to not be a virgin. It also focused on what each of these regions have done, at least legally, to put a stop to these type of testing.

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Kale, S. (2016, January 6). Why Is Virginity Testing Still A Thing In So Many Parts of The World? Retrieved from <https://graziadaily.co.uk/life/real-life/virginity-testing-around-world/>. This article talked about virginity tests happening in Africa. It also introduced reasons besides suitability for marriage and sexual assault for virginity tests, and those reasons were being in Military or in police, and this did not just mean employment in those fields, but that women had to prove their virginity if they were even going to marry someone who worked in those two fields.

Kaur, H. (2019, November 9). So-called virginity tests are unreliable, invasive and sexist. And yet they persist. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2019/11/09/health/virginity-tests-debunking-trnd/index.html>. This article gave me information on where the virginity tests still happen, and how this test is based on myths and beliefs instead of actual. It also points that even though it's been proven that a test can tell whether someone is a virgin or not, a lot of places all around the world still believe in these tests, and make their daughters go through these.

Olson, R. M., & García-Moreno, C. (2017). Virginity testing: a systematic review. *Reproductive health*, 14(1), 61. doi:10.1186/s12978-017-0319-0. This academic research study looked at previously done studies regarding virginity testing. This study provided the information regarding what virginity tests are, their background in different cultures, how they are done, and why they are performed. It also looked at how the tests and its results impact, short term or long term, all aspects of the lives of the women they are performed on. It also included some personal stories of the women that had gone through this to show how severe the impact is.

Prunesquallor, A. (2016, January 16). Virginity Testing. Retrieved from <https://ianbcross.wordpress.com/2016/01/23/virginity-testing/>. This article was written by a doctor that worked in Swaziland, a small country in Southern Africa, and she performed virginity tests on the girls and women there, and how she handled it when the parents wanted the test done, but the girl in question was refusing. This article provides a closer look at the procedure of the testing, and it also shows how the legal system gets involved.

'Virginity testing': a human rights violation, with no scientific basis - UN | UN News. (2018, October 17). Retrieved from <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/10/1023401>. This article focused on why the United Nations agencies had called for a ban on the virginity tests, and it included information about how many countries and cultures these tests still take place in, even if there are laws and rules against it. This article also points out that these types of tests are deeply rooted in stereotypes and reinforce inequalities between genders.

World Health Organization (WHO). (2018, November 21). Interagency statement calls for the elimination of "virginity-testing". Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/virginity-testing-elimination/en/>. This is WHO website's page on Virginity testing, and it talks about the inaccuracy and unreliability of these tests. It also gave me information regarding why this test is unethical, and who it harms (physically and psychologically). This page also mentions a bit about initiatives that could be taken to stop or even reduce these type of tests.