



VirginitY testing and hymenoplasty are forms of 'honour-based' abuse and violence against women and girls. Made illegal in 2022.

There is no statutory definition for honour-based abuse but a common definition adopted is,

'A crime or incident which has, or may have been, committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and / or community' For some communities, the concept of 'honour' is prized above the safety and wellbeing of individuals. To compromise a family's 'honour' is to bring dishonour and shame – which can have severe consequences. Karma Nirvana: [The VirginitY Myth - YouTube](#)

VirginitY testing - '2-finger' or vaginal examination, is an inspection of the female genitalia, intended to determine whether a woman or girl has had vaginal sexual intercourse.

The position of the World Health Organisation and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) is that virginitY tests have no scientific merit or clinical indication as it is abusive, and no examination can exclude previous vaginal intercourse.

The hymen is a thin membrane that partially covers the entrance to the vagina. Hymens can be very different and there is no one uniform appearance. The World Health Organisation is clear that the appearance of a hymen is not a reliable indication that a woman has not had vaginal intercourse.

Hymenoplasty is a procedure undertaken to reconstruct a hymen. The aim of the procedure is to ensure that a woman bleeds the next time she has intercourse to give the impression that she has no history of vaginal intercourse.

As of the 1st July 2022, the UK government has made it illegal to carry out, offer or aid and abet virginitY testing or hymenoplasty in any part of the UK under the [VirginitY testing and hymenoplasty: multi-agency guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

The VirginitY Myth [VirginitY Myths: Karma Nirvana and Wellbeing of Women - YouTube](#) animation raises awareness of VirginitY Testing and the legislation making it illegal

VirginitY testing and hymenoplasty: multi-agency guidance [VirginitY testing and hymenoplasty: multi-agency guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Child marriage is now a crime. [Marriage and Civil Partnership \(Minimum Age\) Act 2022 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#) came into effect 27th February 2023. This Act will raise the age of marriage and civil partnership to 18 in England and Wales. This means that 16 to 17-year-olds will no longer be able to marry or enter a civil partnership under any circumstances, including with parental or judicial consent. [Child Marriage is a Crime - YouTube](#)

SAFEGUARDING RISKS AND SIGNS : virginitY testing and hymenoplasty are crimes and pose serious safeguarding concerns. It can be a precursor to child or forced marriage and other forms of family and/or community coercive behaviours, including physical, emotional and financial abuse.

Women and girls are coerced, forced and shamed into undergoing these procedures, often pressurised by family and community members in the name of supposedly upholding honour and to fulfil the requirement that a woman remains 'pure' before marriage several indicators that a woman or girl is at risk of or has been subjected to a virginitY test and/or hymenoplasty see Identifying those at risk : [VirginitY testing and hymenoplasty: multi-agency guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Women who 'fail' a virginitY test, are found to have undergone a hymen reconstruction, or do not bleed on their wedding night are at risk of further 'honour-based' abuse including emotional and physical abuse, family, or community disownment and even murder or reported 'honour killings'.

The 'White sheet' or bedsheet test may be used to describe virginitY test on the wedding night. Those at risk may attempt to buy homemade virginitY blood pills that are available online to provide 'guaranteed bleeding' on intercourse. These may be retained as foreign bodies within the vagina and carry a risk of infection.

This practice can be identified in all types of healthcare settings, so all practitioners should be aware and remain professionally curious. When dealing with potential concerns or incidents respond with sensitivity. The 5 Rs [NHSE GUIDANCE - COVID-19 \(safelives.org.uk\)](#) of asking about domestic abuse or assessing the risk of forced marriage [Forced marriage - practice briefing FINAL.pdf \(safelives.org.uk\)](#) can support conversations.

HOW TO GET HELP

Where there are signs or concerns that women's and girls' safety and welfare is at risk or likely to be at risk follow your local adults and children safeguarding procedures immediately. Safeguarding referrals may be needed for other family members who could also be at risk of harm.

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, you should call 999 and ask for the police.

An accredited interpreter should be used if required, **DO NOT** consider a local community-based interpreter or family member. **DO NOT** engage the family or try to mediate as this may increase the risk.

Remaining culturally sensitive is not a barrier to safeguarding individuals / families. Under any context forced marriage, virginitY testing and Domestic Abuse is illegal.

Support for victims, survivors and professionals is available via **Karma Nirvana** [Karma Nirvana](#) helpline Free / **0800 5999 247** / Mon-Fri 9am-5pm and email confidential support