



Llinell Gymorth Live Fear
Byw Heb Ofn Free Helpline

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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



It is now **ILLEGAL** to carry out, offer or aid and abet virginity testing or hymenoplasty in any part of the UK, as part of the Health and Care Act 2022.

A full guidance document, provided by the UK Government, can be found **Virginity testing and hymenoplasty: multi-agency guidance - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)**

What is Virginity Testing and Hymenoplasty?

Virginity testing, also referred to as hymen, '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.

For the purposes of the Health and Care Act 2022, virginity testing is any examination (with or without contact) of the female genitalia intended to establish if vaginal intercourse has taken place.

The position of the World Health Organization and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) is that virginity tests have no scientific merit or clinical indication as there is no known examination that can prove whether a woman has had vaginal intercourse.

Hymenoplasty is a procedure undertaken to reconstruct a hymen. There are a number of different techniques to achieve this, but it generally involves stitching hymenal remnants together at the vaginal opening, or surgically reconstructing a hymen using vaginal tissue. 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.

Hymenoplasty is not the same as other procedures that could be performed on the hymen for clinical reasons (for example, surgery to remove remnant fingers of the hymen that cause discomfort, or to treat an imperforated hymen to allow menstrual blood to escape).

Who is impacted by Virginity Testing and Hymenoplasty?

There is evidence that women and girls from the age of 13 to 30 are most at risk of undergoing a virginity test and/or hymenoplasty, but girls as young as 8 can be affected. Any woman or girl, of any age, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, religion, impairment or socioeconomic status could be subjected to a virginity test or hymenoplasty. Women and girls may take years to discuss their experiences due to the shame associated with these practices, the level of trauma that could be experienced and the fear of further 'honour-based' abuse.

As with other forms of so called 'honour-based' abuse, these practices often take place behind closed doors, in highly conservative communities and cultures. Because of this, the numbers of women and girls that are subjected to these practices are not known. Although prevalence is unclear, there is evidence of women and girls being under intense pressure to undergo virginity testing and hymenoplasty.

What impact could this have on victims?

Women and girls are coerced, forced and shamed into undergoing these procedures to fulfil the requirement that a woman remains 'pure' before marriage.

Virginity testing and hymenoplasty are considered to have a similar level of seriousness to assault occasioning actual bodily harm. This is in recognition of the physical and psychological harm they can cause to the individual who is subjected to them. This level of seriousness also reflects the controlling attitudes that underpin the practices.

Both virginity testing and hymenoplasty can be precursors to child or forced marriage and other forms of family and/or community coercive behaviours, including physical and emotional control. Women who 'fail' a virginity test, are found to have undergone a hymen reconstruction, or do not bleed on their wedding night are likely to experience further so called 'honour-based' abuse including emotional and physical abuse, family or community disownment and even honour killings.

The practices are degrading and intrusive. They can lead to extreme psychological trauma in the victim, and can provoke conditions including anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. The practices have been linked to suicide. They can be physically harmful. For example, virginity testing can result in damage to the hymen, tears and damage to the vaginal wall, bleeding, and infection. The risk of infection is also high in hymenoplasty, which has the added risks of acute bleeding during the procedure, scarring and narrowing of the opening of the vagina and sexual difficulties.

What to do if you have a concern that someone you know is or could be at risk of Virginity Testing and Hymenoplasty?

A full guidance document, provided by the UK Government when the legislation came in to force, can be found **Virginity testing and hymenoplasty: multi-agency guidance - GOV.UK** (www.gov.uk)



For Wales specific support:

If someone is in immediate danger **contact the police** by calling 999 and asking for the police.

follow your safeguarding procedures outlined by your employer/provider.

Support services available to victims in Wales include:

Live Fear Free helpline is a free, 24/7 service for all victims and survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence and those close to them, including family, friends and colleagues and concerned others.

Call: 0808 80 10 800

Text: 0786 007 7333

Email: info@livefearfreehelpline.wales

Live chat: gov.wales/livefearfree

Bawso is the lead organisation in Wales providing practical and emotional support to black minority ethnic and migrant victims of domestic abuse, sexual violence, human trafficking, FGM and forced marriage.

Call the helpline: 0800 731817

Email: helpline@bawso.org.uk

MEIC is a free, confidential, anonymous and bilingual helpline service for children and young people up to the age of 25 in Wales providing information, useful advice and support.

Meic are open 8am to midnight, 7 days a week, by telephone, SMS text and instant messaging.

Freephone: 0808 80 23456

Text: 84001

Live chat: www.meiccymru.org

Sexual violence support services

In North Wales (Anglesey, Conwy, Gwynedd, Flintshire, Denbighshire and Wrexham), there are 2 main sexual violence support services:

- Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre (RASASC) provides information, specialist support and therapy to anyone who has experienced any kind of sexual abuse and violence. They can be contacted on 01248 670 628 or info@rasacymru.org.uk
- Stepping Stones provides therapeutic services to adults who have been sexually abused as children. They can be contacted on 01978 352 717 or info@steppingstonesnorthwales.co.uk

In Mid, West, East and South Wales, the main sexual violence support service provider is New Pathways. They can be contacted on 01685 379 310 or

enquiries@newpathways.org.uk

Karma Nirvana is a national Honour Based Abuse Helpline, train professionals, gather data to inform policies and services, and campaign for change.

Helpline: 0800 599 9247

Forced Marriage Unit

The **Forced Marriage Unit** (FMU) is a joint Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and Home Office unit which leads on the government's forced marriage policy, outreach and casework. It operates both inside the UK (where support is provided to any individual) and overseas (where consular assistance is provided to British nationals, including dual nationals).

Call: 020 7008 0151

Email: fmu@fcdo.gov.uk

