

## Virginity Test-how is it still a Thing?

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Received date: June 14, 2018; Accepted date: June 22, 2018; Published date: June 29, 2018

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Citation: Tandon A, Kanchan T, Wadhwa C (2018) Virginity Test-how is it still a Thing? . J Women's Health Care 7: 437. doi:10.4172/2167-0420.1000437

### To the Editor

Virginity testing is an age old abasing practice, popular in diverse forms and methods in different parts of the world, the most common of which is the two finger test which involves the insertion of the index and middle finger into the vagina of a woman to determine the laxity of the vagina and hence define the state of her virginity. Even though this medically irrelevant genital exam, which is singularly performed on women and often without their consent has been annunciated an example of violence against women, it is still chaperoned in many countries. For a long time now, WHO has been propagating that this invasive and degrading two-finger test has no scientific validity and should immediately be put out of practice [1].

The 'tradition' of virginity testing is based on social norms that have been used in the past to supervise female sexual activity and condone violence against women. In many communities around the globe, girls are often thought of as properties of their fathers and/or husbands such that their bodies become gadgets of male control, and their anticipated value becomes measured by their 'immaculateness.' This drives the disparate social pressures for women and girls to remain virgins until they marry. This bias creates a fabric for men to speculate control over female sexual behaviors, and has driven to the extent of punishment and even death. It is but a form of gender-based violence and discrimination suggesting that a woman's sexual activity should be subject to open knowledge and condemnation, while a man's should not.

Virginity testing apart from being implicated in a case of rape, has been involved in various situations ranging from Job applications [2], enrollment in school [3], reduction of promiscuity in the district [4], to preventing the spread of HIV and teenage pregnancy [5]. Certain cultures demand a proof of a bride's virginity before she gets married subjecting her to a physical examination to detect the presence of an intact hymen [2]. The condition is going from bad to worse to a state where girls are resorting to measures like hymenorrhaphy or

hymenoplasty, to repair or replace a torn hymen, pass a virginity test and get a 'certificate' of a dignified and decent human being, because that is what it has resorted to.

In the recent years many countries including India have identified the deceitfulness of this test. In 2013, the Apex Court directed the government to provide improved medical facilities to affirm sexual assaults and conveyed that the two-finger test is a breach to the right of a woman's privacy [6] and in 2014, the Indian Health Ministry issued a new protocol for post-rape medical care clarifying that health workers attending to rape survivors should not conduct the two-finger test. However, this protocol is yet to be efficiently implemented across the country.

Doctors should adhere to the WHO guidelines to make sure that they conduct themselves ethically and respect a woman's privacy and poise. The need of the hour is to make the medical practitioners aware that the test has been banned in many parts of the world including India and encourage them to take steps to educate their peers to end the scourge that goes by the name of 'virginity test'.

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