



Virginit

International Association of Forensic Nurses

Statement of Problem

Virginit

In many patriarchal cultures, virginit

Even though the World Health Organization published a joint statement with the United Nation's Human Rights Office and UN Women in 2018 officially denouncing the practice of virginit



practice in various regions of the world. Virginity testing is culturally accepted and frequently conducted in Afghanistan, Brazil, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Jamaica, Jordan, Palestine, South Africa, Swaziland, Turkey, and Zimbabwe (WHO, 2018). Globalization has resulted in increased virginity testing among some communities in Canada and Europe (Crosby et al., 2020). As recently as 2016, a member of the Egyptian parliament called for virginity tests for female university entrants to discourage premarital sex (Crosby et al., 2020). Indonesia requires a virginity test when an unmarried woman applies for a job in the military (Crosby et al., 2020). Although officially banned in Afghanistan, virginity testing remains widespread, both officially by the State, and unofficially by family request (Crosby et al., 2020). In the United States, virginity testing occurs in non-immigrant populations, such as Orthodox Jewish communities and certain fundamentalist Christian groups (Crosby et al., 2020).

Virginity testing is not supported by any medical evidence. Decades of research have solidified that the appearance and condition of the hymen and other genital structures cannot diagnose consensual sexual intercourse, sexual abuse/assault, or other forms of sexual violence (Adams, Farst, & Kellogg, 2018; Drocton et al., 2008; Gallion, Milam, & Littrel, 2016; Heger et al., 2003; Heger et al., 2002; Sachs & Chu, 2002).

Virginity testing has been linked to a variety of negative short-term and long-term physical and psychosocial consequences. The examination is often painful and traumatic as damage to the genitalia with resulting bleeding and infection can occur (WHO, 2018). Virginity testing is commonly performed under unhygienic conditions potentially increasing the risk of infections including Human Immunodeficiency Virus (LeRoux, 2006). Psychological trauma can also result from virginity testing. The examination violates the individual's physical integrity, autonomy, and privacy, especially when performed without consent (WHO, 2018). The exam can result in significant negative emotions such as intense anxiety, guilt, shame, depression, loss of self-esteem, post-traumatic stress disorder, powerlessness, humiliation, and panic (Crosby, 2020).



“Failing” the exam and being labeled a “non-virgin” can result in devastating outcomes for the individual. Punishment for failing virginity testing can include beatings; sexual assaults, including gang rape; and/or denial of food (Leclerc-Madlala, 2006; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2005). Women have been murdered as the result of failing virginity testing, in some instances as “honor killings” by family members (Crosby et al., 2020). Women have committed suicide after failing virginity tests (Crosby et al., 2020). Additionally, failing the examination can result in educational, marriage, and employment discrimination (WHO, 2018). Ostracism from family and the community can also occur leaving these girls and women at heightened vulnerability for violence, including forced prostitution and human trafficking (George, 2008; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2005). The WHO (2018) states “virginity testing is detrimental to a woman’s or girl’s physical integrity and psychosocial well-being and is likely to cause long-lasting damage.”

Association Position

The International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN) asserts that:

1. Virginity testing violates an individual’s human rights.
2. Virginity testing is an example of gender-based discrimination.
3. Virginity testing is a form of sexual violence.
4. Virginity testing cannot accurately determine a woman or girl’s sexual activity status.
5. Virginity testing cannot reliably tell if a woman or girl has experienced sexual abuse or assault.
6. Virginity testing is not supported by any healthcare or medical evidence.
7. Virginity testing can result in significant physical, psychological, and social consequences.
8. Health care providers must cease performing virginity testing examinations.
9. Health care providers must educate patients, families, communities, and governments regarding the inaccuracies of virginity testing.



10. Health care providers must advocate for vulnerable individuals by educating individuals, families, communities, and governments regarding the negative short-term and long-term consequences of virginity testing.

Rationale

As the largest international forensic nursing association, the IAFN is committed to upholding human rights and abolishing sexual violence. The International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN) declares that virginity testing constitutes a human rights violation and is a traumatizing, sexually violent practice. IAFN calls for the global elimination of virginity testing.

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