



POSITION STATEMENT ON “VIRGINITY” TESTING AND HYMENOPLASTY (May 2022)

Oxford Against Cutting considers “virginity” testing and hymenoplasty to be forms of harmful practices.

We consider these procedures to be harmful because they are:

1. Unnecessary - they are not medically required in any circumstances; and
2. Exploitative - they rely on false medical information about female “virginity”, testing procedures and what “repair” surgeries can achieve;
3. Abusive - they perpetuate myths around female “virginity”, cleanliness and purity;
4. Dangerous – they provide unreliable and useless means by which communities can uphold ideas about “virginity”, which can lead to ‘honour’-based abuse and murder.

These procedures violate the physical integrity of the female body and human rights and are a form of gender-based violence. In particular, the girl child cannot consent to any such procedures. We welcome the inclusion of a ban on virginity testing and hymenoplasty in the UK Health and Care Act (2021)

We recognise that many different communities place a high value on girls and women refraining from taking part in sexual acts prior to marriage. We encourage communities to support the sexual and reproductive rights and agency of all genders equally.

We also recognise that some groups prefer to disregard the idea of virginity in its entirety, as a concept that is medically inaccurate, unhelpful and leads to illogical assumptions about character. Likewise, concepts around female virginity further entrench misogynistic and controlling behaviours.

Our charity does not seek to overturn non-harmful cultural values, however we encourage all groups to disconnect ideas of “virginity” with the worth of people. Our education work supports open and honest conversations about social norms that can lead to harm.

We call upon all health professionals, including nurses, midwives, doctors and surgeons to work together to ensure that these harmful practices are not perpetuated and that any practitioner known to be so doing faces immediate expulsion from the profession and criminal proceedings.

We call upon medical professionals to follow the Hippocratic Oath (revised 2017): ‘I will not use my medical knowledge to violate human right and civil liberties, even under threat.’