

‘A social construct with no biological reality’: Breaking down hymen myths

The belief that the hymen provides physical “proof” of sexual history is the premise of virginity testing, a practice condemned by the [World Health Organization in 2018](#) as a human rights violation. Such tests can take different forms; everything from physical examinations of measuring a hymen or vaginal laxity to wedding night rituals where a bloodied bedsheet is expected to appear, and even be shown to the bride and groom’s families.

Despite this having no scientific basis – and despite virginity itself being [a social construct with no biological reality](#) – millions around the world continue to believe that a woman’s sexual history is somehow writ into her anatomy, and that all cisgender women bleed the first time that they have sex. Neither, of course, are true – yet such beliefs can be found in languages, religions and communities across the globe.

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The hymen myth doesn’t just affect women’s sexual wellbeing and indeed equality – it can impede their access to justice. [Pakistan has only recently banned virginity tests for rape survivors in court cases](#) ; several countries, [particularly in Asia, the Middle East and northern and southern Africa](#), still perform them.

And many doctors worldwide offer highly profitable hymen repair as a surgery for women who have had pre-marital sex and fear the consequences if discovered.

[**This is an excerpt. Read the original post here**](#)