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Fresh Calls to End Afghanistan’s ‘Virginity Exams’

Imagine being arrested and taken by police to a doctor who examines your vagina and anus – without your consent. Now imagine you are sent for [several](#) of these exams, sometimes with other people [watching](#). Now imagine that these “tests” are scientifically invalid and the “findings” are medically meaningless – but still may be critical in sending you to prison.

Women and girls in Afghanistan don’t have to imagine this because it actually [happens](#). Sex outside marriage – *zina* – is [punishable](#) by between [5 and 15 years](#) in prison. Women and girls suspected of *zina* – and sometimes completely unrelated crimes like theft or murder – are routinely sent for these exams. And new [research](#) by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) finds this practice continues despite a 2017 [Ministry of Public Health policy instructing](#) government health workers not to perform these examinations, and a 2018 amendment to the [Penal Code](#) requiring a court order or consent of the person being examined.

The AIHRC surveyed 129 women who had so-called “virginity examinations” after the Penal Code change went into effect. It found that in 92 percent of cases there was neither consent nor a court order. Four respondents said a man conducted the examination, which violates Afghanistan’s Criminal Procedure Code.

So-called “virginity tests” should never be performed. They have no scientific validity, are demeaning, and can constitute [sexual assault](#). Their use is based on that mistaken belief that “virginity” can be determined by examining a person’s hymen to see if it has been broken during sexual intercourse. In fact, some girls are born without a hymen, hymens often break during daily non-sexual activities, and some hymens remain intact after sexual intercourse. The World Health Organization [says](#) the tests have no scientific validity and health workers should never conduct them.

But the AIHRC findings show they’re still happening, partly because the government has failed to compel officials to comply with even the flimsy protection the revised Penal Code offers.

Afghan women’s rights activists have bravely fought for an end to these examinations but they need more support. Short of a law ending the practice, President Ashraf Ghani should abolish these exams through an executive order – and enforce that order – and end this cruel and pointless abuse once and for all.

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summary:



Article on virginity
exams

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