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Original Research Article

Virginity Test- Do We Really Need It? A Cross Sectional Study.

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Abstract

Introduction Virginity testing or per vaginal examination, is the inspection or the examination of the female genitalia to assess whether a woman or girl has experienced sexual intercourse. **Methods:** This was descriptive cross-sectional study conducted on registered medical practitioners (RMP) of Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra. A pilot study was carried out for validation, practicality, and applicability of questionnaire. In present study 74 registered medical practitioners (RMP) of Ahmednagar city of Maharashtra participated. Out of all RMP's 62.2% (46) and 37.8% (28) were post graduates (MD/MS/Diploma/DNB) and undergraduates (MBBS) respectively. **Results:** Out of 74 respondent 54.1% (40) were aware and 45.9% (34) not aware of the name of scientific medical test use to confirm virginity. Out of those who were aware, 80% (32) of them reported that it called 'two finger test' while remaining reported test only as finger test or per vaginal (PV) examination. **Conclusion:** The present study concluded that even though it is now scientifically proven that virginity testing has inconclusive nature and its harmful effects on women, many physicians were still unaware of this fact.

1. Introduction

Virginity; there is no universal definition, its meaning transmogrifies as era, region, culture and religion. Virginity testing or per vaginal examination, is the inspection or the examination of the female genitalia to assess whether a woman or girl has experienced sexual intercourse.¹

It is generally believed that the hymen is the membrane that covers the opening of the vagina. The existence of a membrane founds many cultural understandings of the hymen, as it is often believed that a hymen breaks or tears upon virginity loss.² It is clear that the hymen plays a stronger symbolic role than a factual role in virginity examination. Virginity testing is mainly performed on unmarried women

without getting their consent or in settings where they are unable to give consent.³ Virginity testing being performed to ascertain the character of girl, her eligibility for wedding and also as a part of the sexual assault examination or prostitution charge by the authorities.^{4,5} It is unfortunate that the virginity testing not always done by doctor, even by the police personnel or a community or religious leader.^{1,4}

Virginity testing bring additional suffering to rape victim by revisiting the experience and trauma. Many women experience unpleasant short-term and long-term physical, psychological and social consequences of this practice, some taking extreme steps to commit suicide and some unfortunate; in the

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name of honor killing, are killed by their own family members.^{4,6}

Virginity testing exists on the basis of belief rather than facts therefore, it is unethical for virginity tests, which are entrenched in religious values and cultural ideology rather than standards of evidence, to be performed as a medical practice.² Due to lack of any scientific logic and interference in the fundamental rights of women, In India an appeal has been made to remove 'virginity test' from medical textbooks.⁴ To put an end to this practice, there is an urgent need to raise awareness among the doctors and the society as high prejudices present even among medical professionals. With this background present study was conducted among registered medical practitioners (RMP) to ascertain their understanding and opinions on virginity test.

2. Material and Methods

The present study was commenced after obtaining institutional ethical committees' (IEC) permission. This was descriptive cross-sectional study conducted on registered medical practitioners (RMP) of Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra. The allopathic practitioners who were practicing for three years or more and having minimum 01 year of experience in public health hospitals were eligible to participate in this study. Help from local Indian Medical Association (IMA) and other professional bodies was sought to reach all participants for maximize participation. AYUSH practitioners, visiting consultants and those who were not willing for participation were excluded from study. Purposive sampling method was used to select participants.

A pilot study was carried out for validation, practicality, and applicability of questionnaire. Through what's App group of different professional bodies appeal was made to RMP to participate in present study. These messages were content brief on problem statement, rational behind conducting study, objectives and consent of study. All participants were assured that the collected information will remain completely anonymous and no name or email id would require to fill the questioners. Those who consented are requested to join temporary what's app group which was created specifically for the study purpose. They can ask any questions/doubts regarding study on group and instructions pertaining to study were also shared on same group. Pilot tested questioner was created in google form and link was circulated on

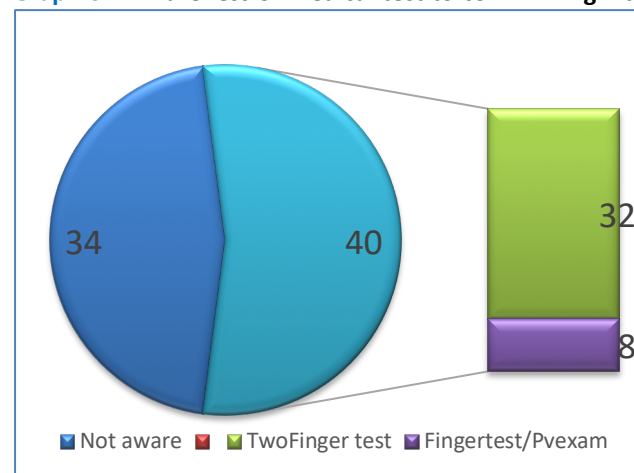
predetermined day and time for the participants. All participants informed the time limit after which link will be automatically deactivated. After dead line time spent and effort of participants were acknowledged and assured that the results of the study will be shared with them through their professional bodies. All participants were requested to exit and group was dissolved permanently. Descriptive statistics like frequency, percentages and pie chart and bar diagram was used to present data.

3. Observation and Results

In present study 74 registered medical practitioners (RMP) of Ahmednagar city of Maharashtra participated. Out of all RMP's 62.2% (46) and 37.8% (28) were post graduates (MD/MS/Diploma/DNB) and undergraduates (MBBS) respectively.

Out of 74 respondent 54.1% (40) were aware and 45.9% (34) not aware of the name of scientific medical test use to confirm virginity. Out of those who were aware, 80% (32) of them reported that it called 'two finger test' while remaining reported test only as finger test or per vaginal (PV) examination (Graph 01).

Graph 01: Awareness of medical test to confirm virginity



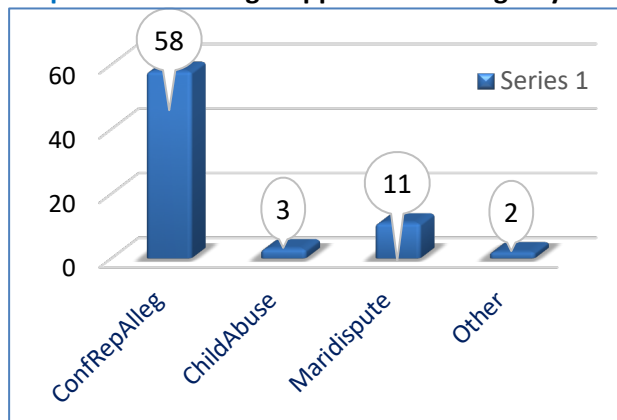
Out of all participants 74.3% does not considered intact hymen as a sign of virginity while 25.7% (19) considered otherwise. Bleeding (82%) per vagina was reported as the most common sign of broken hymen by practitioners followed by pain, and discomfort.

Majority practitioners (77%) were not aware of the various alternate ways that could be used to confirm the virginity. Only some (23%) of them reported breast examination, vaginal laxity by PV examination, DNA testing, and laboratory (mucosal, fructose) examination as alternatives to confirm

virginity. Out of all 75% of practitioners believed that laboratory tests and clinical would not be that helpful to confirm virginity.

Conventional medicolegal application of virginity test as per participants shown in [graph 02](#). Majority of them opine that currently aforementioned test is being used to confirm rape allegation, child abuse, marital/parental dispute etc.

Graph 02: Medicolegal application of virginity test



About 81% responded that it is usual to bleed after losing virginity. Significant proportion (80%) of RMP were in favor of banning of test to confirm virginity. The commonest reasons given by practitioners to ban virginity test were discrimination women's social status (30%), could be other reasons (30%) to break hymen except loosing virginity like playing sports, use to tampons etc.

4. Discussion

The present study was conducted with the aim of documenting views on important but less discussed and research topic. Practitioners of modern medicine were participants of this study. In present study as compared to undergraduate many post-graduates participated. Even though nearly half of the participants who had been practicing for many years were unaware of the name of the test commonly used to determine virginity and the practitioners who knew about it named this test as two finger tests. Many articles have now documented that there are many other causes of ruptured hymen, although about a quarter of physicians believed that an intact hymen was a sign of virginity. Bleeding per vagina reported as most common sign of broken hymen by the participants. Most physicians were unaware of the various other options that can be used for virginity testing. Many practitioners reported that currently virginity test usual used in rape allegation. Less than a quarter of physicians believe in continuing

to use the test to confirm virginity. Even after extensive research we have not found similar study to discuss the findings which confirm the lack of study on the said topic.

5. Conclusion:

The present study concluded that even though it is now scientifically proven that virginity testing has inconclusive nature and its harmful effects on women, many physicians were still unaware of this fact.

6. Recommendation

Health educators should update medical textbooks to reflect the obsolete nature of virginity testing. Similar detailed research is needed to dispel myths and misconceptions about intact hymen.

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