

# WOMEN GET 'VIRGINITY FIX' NHS OPERATIONS IN MUSLIM-DRIVEN TREND

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Women are being given controversial "virginity repair" operations on the NHS, it emerged last night.

Taxpayers funded 24 hymen replacement operations between 2005 and 2006, official figures revealed.

And increasing numbers of women are paying up to £4,000 in private clinics for the procedure apparently under pressure from future spouses or in-laws who believe they should be virgins on their wedding night.

Doctors said most patients are immigrants or British of ethnic origin.

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The popularity of the operation is said to be the result of social regression caused by Islamic fundamentalism

The trend has been condemned by critics as a sign of social regression driven by Islamic fundamentalists. Some countries have made hymen reconstruction operations illegal.

Dr Magdy Hend, consultant gynaecologist at the Regency Clinic, Harley Street, London, who started hymen reconstruction more than 18 years ago in the Middle East and the Gulf, said: "In some cultures they like to see that the women will bleed on the wedding night. If the wife or bride is not a virgin, it is a big shame on the family."

Dr Hend said he was surprised by the "very good response" to the service and said there is "big competition on the market".

Most of his clients, he told More4 News, are in their teens or early 20s.

"They might be British of ethnic background, they might be immigrants, or some people come from abroad, Asia, Middle East, the Gulf, and they don't want to have it done back home," he added.

Dr Hend said demand is increasing, particularly from UK residents.

The operation can involve suturing of a tear in the hymen, such as might be caused by sexual assault, to help healing.

But it can also be conducted as a purely cosmetic procedure. A membrane is constructed, sometimes including a capsule of an artificial blood-like substance. This operation is intended to be performed within a few days before an intended marriage. Tory health spokesman Mike Penning expressed concern. He said: "If there is any cultural or other pressure being put on the women from any source to have this done, that would be a very retrograde step. "If a woman has been violated or raped and lost her virginity, clearly everything possible should be done to assist her. "But what nobody would understand is if taxpayers' money is being used to fund operations of this kind for cultural or cosmetic reasons." Labour MP Ann Cryer said she was "absolutely horrified" to learn of the phenomenon. She added: "We should be trying to protect girls from this. "It is a form of abuse of women and it may be that the woman who is asking for the operation to be done does not recognise the abuse that is taking place against her, but in later life she certainly will. "We have to also ask whether our National Health Service should be providing this sort of facility. I don't think it should be available on the NHS." The Department of Health said "certain cosmetic procedures" are available on the NHS "to secure physical or psychological health". Virginity repair operations have become a source of controversy in France, where gynaecologists report a growing number of requests from women. The procedure is supposed to be funded by the state only if the patient claims she has been raped. But some doctors agree to carry it out for cultural or cosmetic reasons. Isabelle Levy, an author who studied the issue for her book Religion in the Hospital, said young Muslim girls are "modern and they have adventures like other Europeans - which never happened in the past. "But on the other hand, fundamentalism is spreading and these girls are getting sent back to their countries of origin to marry. And they will be rejected if it is found out that they are not virgins."

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