

Egyptian mufti says women not obligated to prove virginity: Fatwa issued by female Islamic scholar

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In a decision being hailed as a major step toward female equality in the Islamic world, the grand mufti of Egypt has said that Muslim women have no obligation to prove their virginity to prospective husbands.

Appearing on a popular Egyptian talk show, Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa said he endorsed a recent fatwa, or religious edict, that said it is permissible—though not required—for women who have lost their virginity to have reconstructive hymen surgery, according to a report February 20 in the *Daily Star* newspaper of Egypt.

The fatwa was issued by Soad Saleh, a noted female Islamic scholar at Cairo's Al-Azhar University, one of the Islamic world's most revered institutions. Saleh also received backing from Shiekh Khaled El Gindy, another Al-Azhar scholar and a member of Egypt's Higher Council of Islamic Studies.

"Islam never differentiates between men and women, so it is not rational for us to think that God has placed a sign to indicate the virginity of women without having a similar sign to indicate the virginity of men," El Gindy told the *Daily Star*. "Any man who is concerned about his prospective wife's hymen should first prove that he himself is a virgin."

Whether conservative Egyptians will accept these rulings remains to be seen. But several Muslim women welcomed the rulings.

"In a region of the world where a woman is not considered a virgin unless she bleeds on her wedding night, this is a serious blow to entrenched un-Islamic misogynistic cultural practices," wrote G. Willow Wilson, a writer in Cairo, on the popular Muslim blog www.eteraz.org.

“The fact that this idea is out in the public realm, from a man of authority in the Islamic establishment, is going to force them to think,” said Leila Ahmed, an Egyptian-born expert on Islam and women at Harvard Divinity School. “But I think this is a time everywhere, including in the Muslim world, when people are ready to hear things that challenge injustice.” *-Religion News Service*