

THE ART OF RESEARCH



Protecting women against sexually transmitted infections

Biomedical interventions such as vaginal probiotics may improve women's reproductive health.

Monalisa Manhanzva is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Cape Town, focusing on identifying the determinants of genital infections, including bacterial vaginosis and sexually transmitted infections such as HIV.

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Further information:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-020-62184-8>

An unhealthy female genital tract increases the risk of adverse reproductive health outcomes in young women, such as preterm delivery and sexually transmitted infections. Researchers at the University of Cape Town aim to develop an innovative and simple solution that women can potentially use to improve their sexual health, in order to have a better quality of life.

Young South African women are at an exceptionally high risk of HIV acquisition and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) that cannot be fully explained by behavioural risks. This suggests that other factors are at play. Studies have been carried out to investigate other factors, such as the bacterial composition of the female genital tract.

“Young adolescent girls often have limited access to information on how they can improve their reproductive health. We have shown that healthy bacteria (also known as lactobacilli) may possess the ability to protect against STIs,” says Monalisa Manhanzva.

A research team at the University of Cape Town is investigating the potential use of probiotics developed from the healthy bacteria obtained from our population as a means to promote women's reproductive health.

“We have shown the protective qualities of the vaginal lactobacilli,



An innovative approach can improve women's reproductive health.

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demonstrating the potential to develop effective biomedical interventions to prevent infections, including HIV, in the women in our

community. The development of such biomedical interventions may help to improve women's quality of life.”

