



Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemarkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

www.uct.ac.za

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Schools' sexual education needs support from other sectors – UCT study



Funeka Bango

Photo: Supplied

Though sports-based sexual and reproductive health education programmes delivered in schools attract significant investment and are widely implemented, their economic value is

not well understood. A University of Cape Town (UCT) PhD study in Public Health has found that their success depends on support from other sectors.

For example, preventing adolescent pregnancies requires access to contraceptives through the health system. This means that the economic value increases when sectors collaborate rather than operate separately, said UCT graduate and author of the study, Dr Funeka Bango.

Her work has advanced the understanding of health services costs in this field and the cost of outcomes associated with interventions that aim to promote behavioural change.

The study, titled: "The economics of school-based sexual and reproductive health education interventions" assessed whether a sports-based sexual and reproductive health education programme delivered in schools offers good value for money.

Dr Bango said her research "will assist decision-makers in designing and funding adolescent programmes that create impact and use limited resources effectively.

"By presenting costs and outcomes, my research emphasises where investments are most efficient and where increased collaboration across sectors could add value. Coordination is essential to ensure resources support young people's health, education and prospects." she said.

Bango holds an MBChB from the University of the Free State and a Master of Public Health degree from UCT. She joined the PhD programme in 2018. Before this, she worked in academia and the public and private health sectors to support the response to the HIV epidemic. She graduated for her PhD at Sarah Baartman Hall on Tuesday, 9 September 2025.

"Decisions about education programmes also impact health budgets, families, and long-term development. By providing evidence on these connections, the research offers policymakers a clearer view of how to allocate resources in ways that benefit young people and society."

Bango said economic evaluations of school-based sexual and reproductive health programmes are scarce in South Africa and worldwide. "Our study is among the first in the region to assess costs and outcomes across different sectors. It demonstrates that adolescent sexual and reproductive health involves more than just what occurs in schools and clinics; it concerns how systems collaborate to promote prevention. School-based programmes generate costs and benefits across society, and developing an evidence base will help ensure that investments in young people produce the greatest possible impact."

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Thami Nkwanyane

Media Liaison and Monitoring Officer

Communication and Marketing Department

University of Cape Town

Rondebosch

Tel: (021) 650 5672

Cell: (072) 563 9500

Email: thami.nkwanyane@uct.ac.za

Website: www.uct.ac.za