

From: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/17/south-africa-virgin-bursaries-ruled-unconstitutional-university-scholarships-women-gender-equality-education>

## **South Africa's 'virgin bursaries' ruled unconstitutional**

[The Guardian](#)

A scheme offering university scholarships to young South African women who remain virgins is unconstitutional, the country's commission for gender equality has ruled.

The "maidens' bursaries" offered by a state official triggered a nationwide debate in January, with critics calling the scheme's emphasis on virginity outdated and traditionalists saying it would help preserve African culture.

On Friday, the commission said the programme discriminated against women because male students were not subjected to the same tests. "Any funding by an organ of state based on a woman's sexuality perpetuates patriarchy and inequality in South Africa," it said.

Rights groups applauded the ruling. "It is not the cultural practice that is the problem here; it is the allocation of state funds on the basis of girls' sexuality that violates the constitutional protection to equality, dignity and privacy," said Sanja Bornman at the Lawyers for Human Rights campaign group.

Recipients of the scholarships, which were offered only to women, were required to undergo virginity testing each time they returned home for holidays, and could lose their bursary if it was determined that they had engaged in sexual activity.

Dudu Mazibuko, the mayor of the Uthukela district of KwaZulu-Natal, who initiated the programme, said in January it would help reduce teenage pregnancy and the spread of HIV/Aids as well as widening job opportunities for women in her small municipality in KwaZulu-Natal province.

Mazibuko, a member of the ruling African National Congress, argued there was already a strong culture of virginity testing in the eastern coastal province. But gender activists and some political parties condemned the practice, with the Economic Freedom Fighters opposition party describing it as "patriarchal and anti-women".