



# Risky aphrodisiacs in Ghana

**The mixes can cause prolonged painful erections and even be fatal.**

An estimated 320 million men are expected to suffer erectile dysfunctions by 2025. The treatment options include approved synthetic drugs known as PDE5 inhibitors that widen the blood vessels in the penis, causing an erection. In Ghana and other African countries, men are more likely to resort to herbal mixes to improve their sexual performance rather than synthetic drugs like Viagra. However, the use of such herbal remedies sometimes leads to priapism (prolonged, painful erections) and extreme loss of blood pressure that can result in strokes, cardiac arrests and even death. The herbal mixes often turn out to include synthetic drugs, sometimes in dangerous quantities, as Felicia Akuamo (Toxicology) discovered in her PhD research.

## **Side effects**

Akuamo studied 40 herbal mixes that are sold in the Ghanaian capital Accra as remedies for erectile dysfunction, testing them for the illegal addition of synthetic PDE5 inhibitors. More than half the herbal mixes contained synthetic inhibitors such as sildenafil (the active ingredient in Viagra). In 13 products, the concentration was between 25 and 100 mg, which is comparable to the pharmaceutical drug. Six mixtures had concentrations of over 100 mg. A high dose of the inhibitors can cause extreme relaxation of the smooth muscle cells, which could explain the side effects. The tests Akuamo developed can easily be applied in Ghana and neighbouring countries to detect the presence of illegally added inhibitors. ss