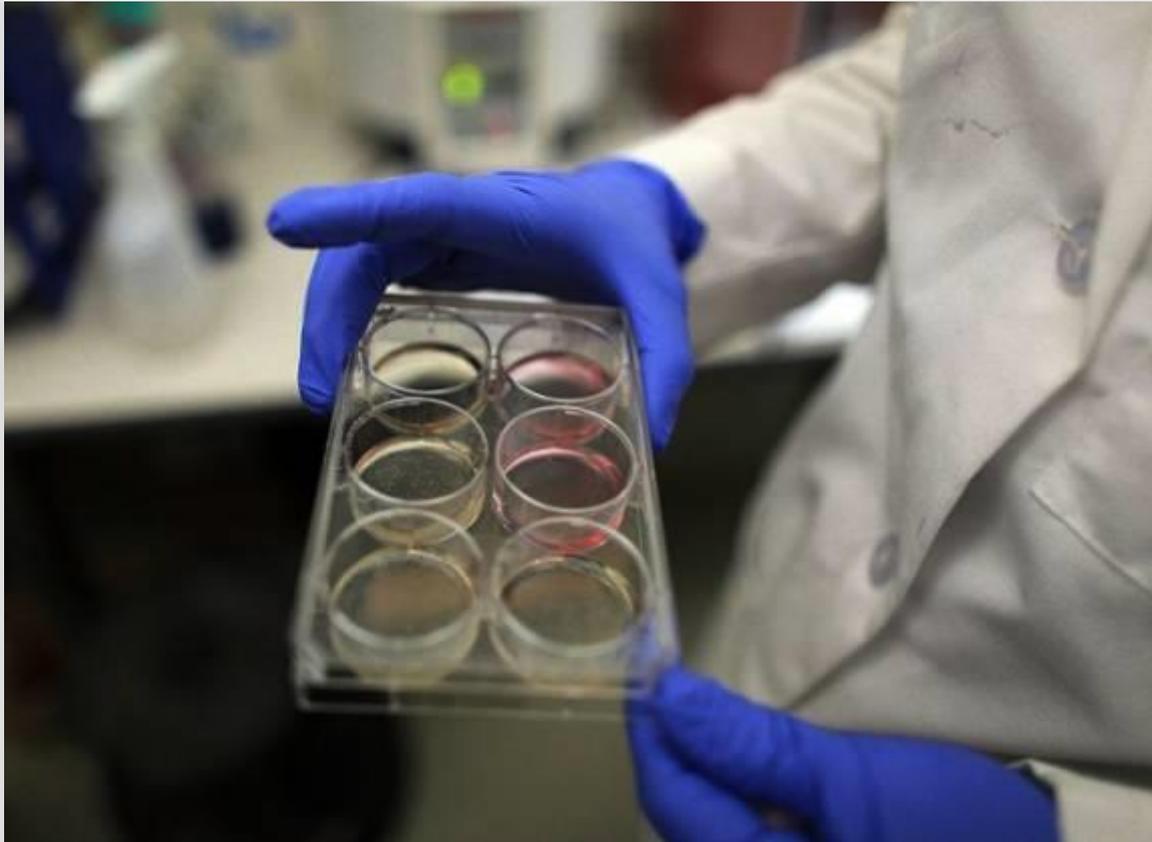


Stem cells to help sex workers



(File photo) A researcher holds a tray of stem cells - AFP

Stem cells may help commercial sex workers get a second chance at life. A stem cell expert is looking to treat sex workers with their bodies' own stem cells, so they can have tight, toned vaginal muscles.

Stem cells are a type of cells from the body that have the potential to develop into any kind of organ tissue, be it skin, blood, marrow or muscle.

"The idea of vaginal rejuvenation with stem cells was tried as a clinical trial by a team of scientists in Japan. They recruited commercial sex workers who wished to give up the trade and get married; start a new life.

However, many of them were anxious that their husbands would be disappointed with them," said Dr Himanshu Bansal, an orthopedic surgeon and specialist in stem cell therapy, who was part of the research team.

Dr Bansal also has a fellowship of microsurgery from Osaka and travels regularly between Chennai, Delhi and Rudrapur to treat patients.

The scientists derived stem cells from the subjects' own fat deposits, processed the cells and then injected them uniformly into the vaginal walls and labia area.

The clinical trial involved mostly young women, some of them mothers, who were worried that their vaginal muscles were too lax.

"The injected stem cells develop into new fibroblasts within weeks," Dr Bansal said. The therapy helps to restore the volume, the muscle tone and improve the blood flow in the area and also to tighten the vaginal canal.

Stem cells injected to the labia also sculpts the external genitalia, the Japanese team found. "It would be great to replicate the project here, especially since so many girls are forced into the flesh trade very young in life.

This would be a boon for them when they manage to leave the profession and decide to settle down with someone," says Dr Bansal, who is looking for funding, infrastructure and support for the project.

Says A.J. Hariharan, who runs the Indian Community Welfare Organization that works with commercial sex workers, "There are many young women who are willing to leave the profession and start a new life, provided that people accept them. The response would be good, if such a trial becomes possible here."

Saritha, 28, a sex worker from Nepal settled in Chennai said, "I don't need such a thing now, but who knows what the future will hold? If I meet someone who wishes to marry me, I might look for this treatment."