

'You are worth more than you think'

By [LEONIE BOLLEURS](#), issued by [University of the Free State](#)

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Poojah Jawallapersand strives for academic excellence and to empower others through research and innovation.

As South Africa commemorates Women's Day on 9 August 2020 and continues Women's Month celebrations throughout August, the UFS shines a spotlight on women who are making an impact on our three campuses on a daily basis.



Poojah Jawallapersand - Photo by Charl Devenish

One of these women is Poojah Jawallapersand, a PhD student majoring in Biochemistry. Poojah is part of the [Pathogenic Yeast Research Group](#) in the [Department of Microbial, Biochemical and Food Biotechnology](#).

In her current research study, she is investigating whether fungal yeast cells and components from the opportunistic and fungal pathogen *Candida albicans* can cause Alzheimer's disease-like symptoms, and if these symptoms can be effectively treated through drug repositioning. The study is being conducted on zebrafish larvae.

Jawallapersand explains that drug repositioning is a drug development strategy that involves finding alternative indications for existing licensed drugs for novel therapeutic purposes. "In short, the use of old drugs for new uses. There is no cure for Alzheimer's disease, hence this research will pave the way towards identifying effective treatment options to treat the disease," she says.

“Be confident and dare to be yourself because you are worth more than you think.” - Poojah Jawallapersand

An interview with Jawallapersand reveals more about the woman behind this much-needed research study.

Is there a woman who inspires you and who you would like to celebrate this Women's Month, and why?

"My mother and Mrs Deeya Domah (my high-school teacher) constantly inspire me and have played a pivotal role in my

life. My mother taught me the value of life, encouraged me to embrace my cultural heritage and spirituality, and always urged me to be 'original'."

"As a teenager, Mrs Domah introduced me and made me fall in love with the study of life (biology), to the extent that I made a career out of it. She inspired me through her timeless elegance and passion for teaching and learning, her willingness to go the extra mile in helping her students, her role in environmental and ecological sustainability, her support towards the empowerment of women, and her influence as an educator and role model in the lives of numerous individuals."

What are some challenges you have faced in your life that have made you a better woman?

"Although I have experienced several challenges in my life, the greatest challenge for me is still to master my mind and emotions. It is vital to have a strong support system to overcome these challenges; for me, this has always been my faith, my parents, and my sister. I am glad that I have gone through these trials; they taught me how to deal with some issues, to stay enthusiastic, to appreciate myself, to practice self-love, and to master the art of constantly picking myself up when I fall. I am still a work in progress and strive daily for self-improvement. However, I have become stronger, more resilient, and a better woman because of these challenges."

What advice would you give to the 15-year-old you?

"Enjoy your adolescence, have fun, make memories, live these moments, and do not rush into adulthood. Stop trying to please other people and learn to say 'no'. Be confident and dare to be yourself because you are worth more than you think."

What would you say makes you a champion woman [of the UFS]?

"I am a champion woman of the UFS; I embrace my uniqueness, and I strive for academic excellence and to empower others through research and innovation. I say no to discrimination, no to gender-based violence, and no to gender inequality. I am generation equality, and this is my legacy."

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University of the Free State

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