

# **How Khat Impacts Negatively upon Families in Hargeisa**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

## **Preamble**

This study presents a brief review of Khat and the associated effects of Khat use and misuse on families physically, psychologically, and financially including how it plays a critical role in broken marriages particularly in Hargeisa. Almost all of the Somali women are victim of Khat. The author of this paper is a Somali single mother who was curious to understand the effects of Khat on families that live in Hargeisa. Children and mothers are abandoned by fathers and husbands; the ubiquity of Khat use is deeply ingrained in the central culture of the Somali male. It is fast becoming the norm in Hargeisa.

Khat has negative effects on house hold income as the Khat chewers spend all most all their wages on chewing. Consumers can use more than half of the household expenses or a great portion of the family budget for Khat. They are too lazy and not willing to work after spending so many sleepless nights chewing, so they don't want to get out of bed till lunchtime. Although the family are struggling to survive on very little income to spend basic needs, Khat chewers never miss one day of their habits and they come back to family taking money from them by any means including force, cheating or stealing.

## **Aim of the Research**

The main objective of the research to study the impact of Khat consumption and the associated effects on families economically, socially, psychologically, as well as the health effects.

## **Paper Structure**

The paper is structured in five main sections. The first section is the introduction followed by the brief discussion about the available literature on the subject. The third section is the research methodology, data collection, instrumentation and tools of analysis. In the fourth section, the research findings and analysis are discussed. Finally, in the last section, the conclusion is presented.

### **Literature Review**

Khat or qat (*Catha edulis* as the scientific name), is a plant whose leaves or twigs are chewed for its stimulant and euphoric qualities (see Beckeleg, 2008; Anderson et.al. 2007:5). Khat is said to share the same chemical structure to that of amphetamines. Both Khat and amphetamine affect the central and peripheral nervous systems in more or less similar ways. The users experience a feeling of well-being and alertness of mind with talkativeness, enthusiasm and sometimes anxiety (Halbach1972).

The most common forms of drug use and abuse in Hargeisa community involves consuming the Khat plant, which is used as a stimulant. Khat use has increased steadily over the last decades and has become a problem of significant social and medical importance.

In Hargeisa the narcotic plant Khat is mainly imported from Ethiopia and Kenya. Khat sessions start in Hargeisa at different times, for example the first session starts from 8.00 am -12noon. This is called the Jabani session. Then the next other session starts from 12:00 Noon-10:00 pm. This is called the Jabane session. From there is another session starts which runs from 10:00pm-

3:00am; this session is called Kharxis or Biyoraacis. The supply of Khat in Hargeisa consist of four kinds including Mira from Kenya through Gowe and Lasanod, and all of these kinds are from Ethiopia like Fujis, Dadar, Jebis and Kuruus.

The price range of Khat is between \$4-58, excluding soft drinks and water that are served with Khat chewing. In the initial phase of Khat chewing there is an atmosphere of excitement, pleasure, cheerfulness and optimism and it takes about three hours. After these three hours, tension, anxiety, nervousness and irritability begin to appear, the last phase of the chewers feeling of low mood, sluggishness and sleepless. In addition to certain instabilities to the health of the user, Khat can also lead to social and economic damage to the individual and community as a whole including the loss of working hours, and over-spending (Halbach1972).

As discussed by Green (1999), Khat is believed to be a massive drain in resources especially money and time and to cause a massive reduction in productivity when looking at both house income and macro levels. Since it seems to chew up a great proportion of Somaliland's personal consumption, to waist much of the time of habitual users and to result in hangovers the next morning this is a very valid point. Khat does take the food out of families' mouths and their clothes. Khat is believed to be the largest cause of family conflict, abandonment and spouse or domestic violence.

According to the Kelix and Khan (1984, cited in Cox G & Rampes H, 2012). Family life is harmed as a result of neglect and Khat is a main factor in family arguments. One out of two divorces were said to have resulted from Khat misuse. In addition, Khat users don't want to be

held accountable for money that they use on Khat, the time that they spend on chewing and the reasons that they away from home.

Conflict, hostility, dispute and difficult relationships between married couples in Hargeisa are frequently caused by consumption of Khat and Somali counter culture. Recently there has been the phenomenon women becoming single mother and experiencing a high level of marital conflict due to the lack of responsibility shown by the men. Furthermore, domestic work, family income and child care are handled by the wife while her husband is busy with the misuse of his addictive substance. The consumers always show irresponsible behaviour and spend plenty of time away from family and this may lead family break up.

## **Research Methodology**

### Data Collection Methods

Because of the qualitative nature of the research, a non-probability sampling technique was devised. This method was the most appropriate for the data collection. According to Robson (2011), this method is commonly used in flexible designs.

### Key Informant Interviews

Face to face interview was used as part of the data collection. Voluntarily, two women and two men participated. These four participants had family members who chewed Khat. Female participants were interviewed in their houses while male participants were interviewed in their offices. The researcher had made sure that the participants were in the most convenient setting

while conducting the interviews. After a brief introduction to the study, the interviewer explained how confidentiality and anonymity were ensured.

### Focus Group Discussions

The focus group discussion was conducted in an office owned by Hargeisa University. Voluntarily, three men and three women who chewed Khat or have family members that chewed came and attended the discussion. After warm welcome for their participation and the brief introduction about the subject matter, the discussion started with expression of their views on topic.

The discussion bore fruit as they expressed their views frankly. The interviewees presented their views and opinions about the effects of Khat on families. An intense argument started when one chewer tried to defend his habitual use of Khat while other participants had a powerful and convincing argument, which was based on the experience of having family members who chewed. The results from the discussion were very helpful in the sense that the participants' discussion answered the research question and brought the controversies surrounding the substance to the surface. The discussion was recorded and later transcribed using a computer.

### Tools of Analysis

In this research paper, thematic coding analysis was chosen. The thematic coding can play a central role in qualitative analysis as it is used to interpret the ways in which interviewees describe their experiences of the research question (Robson, 2011:474). After transcribing and

translating the recordings, the data was coded into themes. The analysis was then made based on these themes. Thus, four themes were created: family conflicts, health and psychological effects, social effects and effects on children.

### Ethical Considerations

In this investigation the consent of the participants was an important consideration; participants were informed about the overall aim of the study and other necessary information concerning it. This provided the opportunity to make sure that they fully understood the research and could take a decision about their participation (Barsky, 2010). The literate interviewees were given written informed consent in Somali. Participant's information was not shared with any one in order to preserve confidentiality, except for research purposes.

## **Results and Analysis**

Khat consumption causes family instability and household poverty, creates irritability and reduces men's potency. These factors may lead to family breakup, loss of working hours and negative affects on children's life in many aspects. Khat chewing and the associated consequences for the family has reached epidemic proportions of the population in Hargeisa. This study explores this matter.

In this section the results, accompanied by an analysis of what participants have said about their experiences with Khat consumption, are presented. There are five different themes: financial problems, aggression and impairment of sexual activity in men, the effect of Khat on children, work performance and domestic responsibility.

### Financial Issues

Financial problems are the central cause of family conflict because chewers spend a considerable amount of the family budget for their habitual Khat consumption. One female participant said:

*Since our marriage, we have been fighting like cats and dogs. When my husband eats up all the family income on Khat, I could see the children are dying of starvation. That is why we argue violently all the time.*

### Aggression

The tension between married couples starts when the chewer comes home late behaving violently and aggressively towards his wife. Insufficient sleep and poor appetite often causes a

bad temper or this sometimes also flares when supplies of Khat fall short or are lacking. This is one of the main causes of family conflict. A mother who was participating pointed out:

*He [the husband] chews at night and sleeps during the day; when he gets home late, he is always aggressive, moody, feeling tension, uncomfortable and feels nervousness and irritability as he fights with us, when he hears the noise of the children around.*

### Impairment of Sexual Activity In Men

In terms of impairment of sexual activity in men, most men complain about weak ability to have sex when they chew Khat. Khat consumption can dramatically affect the sexual behaviors of the chewers. The chewing intoxication can decrease sexual arousal, decrease pleasure ability and intensity of orgasm, and increase the difficulty of attaining orgasm. A mother who was participating said:

*I am neither married nor single because I do not feel that I have a husband. I mean that he does not find me sexually attractive. The only reason I stay with him is for the sake of my children.*

### The Effect of Khat on Children

Khat consumption is an insidious habit that impacts negatively on thousands of children in Hargeisa. Khat chewing affects almost every aspect of their life.

Children always encounter confusion, poor performance in their studies, loss of concentration and finally might drop out of school. It eases them into getting involved in criminal activities and they become drug addicts at an early age. This is worse when there is a family breakup or in the absence of proper parental care. One participant who was a chewer explained:

*We do not know where the children are, what they are doing and who they are with because we get home late, while children are asleep and they go to school in the morning while we are still sleeping. Their mothers raise them alone. We have no any idea about the children's education.*

Children need to receive parental care to develop emotionally and physically. They feel insecure and scared if they witness parental conflict. Children also feel neglected when their fathers pay little attention to their needs. The parental role of a Khat chewing father is often missing, because the children need supervision and encouragement as they grow up. As one focus group participant put it:

*Khat chewing fathers hardly had the ability to fulfil the needs and the well-being of their children because they are either absent in pursuit of their Khat or have to nurse their hangovers.*

### Impact on Work Performance

In many ways, the use of Khat can affect work performance negatively. Khat chewing workers might demonstrate bad work habits or have poor relationships with their coworkers and employers because of being intoxicated, their irritability, headaches and extreme tiredness. Other reasons for poor performance at work include less productivity or loss of many working hours, absenteeism and extra sick leave.

Consumption of large amounts of Khat can cause hangovers the following day and is just problematic. Khat use can also affect the ability to concentrate at work and reduce the ability to focus on things related to the job. All these can create problems to the chewer and to his coworkers and might eventually lead to the loss of the job. One participant stated:

*“Khat chewers never go out to work but they go out for chewing only. I have one family member who chews. He left the job, to devote more time to his habitual drug use. He never works three months in a row”. Another participant argued: “They never seem to show any interest in their jobs. They are always fired because of absenteeism or hangover”*

### Domestic Responsibilities

There are three huge and great responsibilities for married couples: Providing an income for the family, domestic responsibilities and child care responsibilities. Any negligence towards one or more of these responsibilities can lead to marital disaster. Marriage usually begins with willingness of both spouses to share these huge responsibilities. One of the major sources of marital conflict is domestic work.

Traditionally, wives have taken the responsibility for most chores around the house and childcare while husbands have taken the responsibility of providing income for the family. However, when the fathers neglect the responsibility of providing income, this put a heavy burden of responsibilities on the shoulder of the mother. A participant explained:

*When mothers are much more committed to work outside the home to bring income for the family, most fathers spend great deal of their time in Khat chewing. They are not highly comfortable filling in the gap. That is why most mothers are in despair about their marriage.*

## **Conclusion**

In this research, the researcher has identified that Khat chewing is an insidious habit that affects many aspects of human life, producing social problems, economic problems, psychological problems and physical problems. Particularly, the study examined the impact of chronic Khat use on family, income, children, and marriage.

There are medical effects including constipation, anorexia, stomatitis, esophagitis, gastritis, paralytic ileus, and cardiovascular effects such as tachycardia, palpitation, sometimes with, hypertension, myocardial insufficiency, and cerebral hemorrhage.

Khat consumption causes family instability, household poverty, creates irritability and reduces men's potency. These may lead to family breakup, loss of working hours and negative effects on children's life in many aspects. Khat chewing and the associated consequences for the family have reached epidemic proportions of the population in Hargeisa. This study explores this matter.

In terms of financial problems the consumption of Khat causes a drain on resources like time and money and takes a great portion of family income. Chewers never care for the wellbeing of their children while they chew up all their wages. Khat chewing has negatively affected labor productivity since chewers spend more time in chewing with sessions lasting 3-19 hours.

As most participants indicated in the results, children always face poor performance in school or drop out, and lose concentration. They seem to experience confusion over the family conflict and it eases them into joining gangs and other criminal groups.

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