

## Supply and demand dynamics of *miraa* in selected production and consumption regions of Kenya

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#### Introduction

*Khat/ miraa* is a key source of livelihood for thousands of households either through production, harvesting, processing, transportation and marketing. To consumers, *khat* is a substance that helps them relax/ pass time as well as have fun. However, despite these positive attributes, *khat* has a number of adverse health and socio-economic effects. Some of the common health effects include loss of appetite, tooth decay, hallucinations, cardiac complications, insomnia, susceptibility to ulcers as well as diminished sex drive. Use of *khat* is also associated with waste of productive time, financial drain, and increased probability of using other drugs and substances of abuse. In the recent past, *khat* production and consumption has elicited much public debate in Kenya. This public discourse revolves around a number of policy relevant positions: to ban, to regulate or maintain the status quo.

The study was conducted in the year 2012. The aim was to deepen understanding on *khat* by assessing the awareness, availability and use of this substance. The study further assesses the socio-economic and health impacts of *miraa* consumption. Thus the study contributes, albeit in a small way, in informing policy with respect to the *khat* debate in Kenya.

#### Methodology

A cross-sectional study design was used where both quantitative and qualitative data were generated. This study was based on a randomly selected sample of 625 respondents drawn from five counties in the country. The counties included Meru, Marsabit, Isiolo, Kwale and Kitui. Meru was purposively selected as a key production county, while the rest were selected on the basis of being key destination markets for *khat*.

#### Findings

- That *miraa* production in the Meru region has been on the increase over the years. Production has extended to non-traditional growing zones such as Imenti as well as the marginal areas of the traditional growing zones of Igembe and Ntonyiri. A key concern with regard to *miraa* production was the uncontrolled use of chemicals in spraying *miraa* plants, a practice that if unregulated may pose a danger to the consumers.
- Across the five counties, 62% of the respondents held the view that *miraa* was easily available, while 33% of the respondents held a similar view in the case of *muguka*.
- Overall, accessibility varied with the type of *khat* (i.e. whether it is *miraa* or *muguka*) as well as by

county. Further, there was a widespread perception that *muguka* was relatively cheaper than *miraai* making it more accessible in terms of cost.

- 54% of the respondents were currently using *miraai*, while the lifetime prevalence in the five counties was 61%.
- Current use of *miraai* was associated with being male, residing within in the urban setting, being Muslim and residing either in Isiolo or Marsabit Counties.
- Isiolo had the highest current use of *miraai* at 67% followed by Marsabit at 58%.
- The mean age for initiation to *miraai* use was 17.6 years, with 76% of the users alluding to the role of friends in their first use of *miraai*.
- Although around 70% of the respondents considered *khat* a drug, more than 90% approve of its use.
- Data indicates that it was a substance with wide acceptability across all the counties studied. This presents a challenge in mitigating against any adverse health and socio-economic effects that may be associated with *khat*.
- *Khat* use was associated with an array of socio-economic impacts. Qualitatively, *khat* use was associated with lack of sleep, hallucinations, lack of appetite, stomach ulcers, teeth decay, low libido, effects on the unborn child if taken by a pregnant woman and loss of memory.
- From a socio-economic point of view, it was reported that *khat* use breeds idleness, crime, wastage of

household resources and the problem of addiction.

- It was also established that *khat* use fuels the use of other drugs and substances of abuse. 72% of the current users of *khat* used other drugs and substances of abuse to attain their desired level of potency.
- Among the common drugs reported to be used together with *khat* included alcohol, various tobacco products, bhang and heroin.

## Recommendations

The study recommends the following:

- Given the high linkage between the use of *khat* and other drugs of abuse, it is important for anti-alcohol and drug abuse (ADA) campaigns to focus on localized drugs and substances of abuse as a way of winning the war against ADA. This includes empowering individuals with information on the negative effects of *khat* use to help them make informed decisions.
- To mitigate against some of the adverse socio-economic and health impacts, it is important to enact some form of regulation for *khat* production, sale and consumption. Such regulation will confer benefits to the producer, enhance safety for the consumer and also mitigate against the adverse health and socio-economic effects.

*For more information on the survey findings, please visit the NACADA's Website: [www.nacada.go.ke](http://www.nacada.go.ke)*