

Abstract:

Background: The khat habit is a widespread phenomenon which has in the past two decades spread to parts of Western Europe and North America from Eastern Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Although khat has been identified as one of the most commonly abused substances in Kenya, restrictions on cultivation, trade and usage have been non-existent since its legalisation in 1977. **Objective:** To describe the socio-economic effects of khat chewing in Ijara District in the North Eastern Province of Kenya. **Design:** Cross sectional study. **Setting:** Ijara District, North Eastern Kenya. **Subjects:** Fifty respondents were interviewed. **Results:** Eighty eight percent of the respondents were khat chewers, and the majority (80%) had family members who engaged in the khat habit. There was a general lack of education on the negative effects of khat chewing. Due to reported mood changes and withdrawal symptoms when not chewing khat, many respondents used more than half of their domestic budgets on khat, but few (28%) perceived this as a waste of resources. Fifty four percent of khat chewers typically started the habit during the day, implying a waste of time for productive work. However, only 40% of the persons interviewed admitted that the drug affected work performance negatively. The khat habit was associated with strain on family relationships, anti-social behaviour and health effects such as insomnia. **Conclusion:** In spite of the negative socio-economic impact of khat in Ijara District, khat consumption remains a widespread habit.