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## Influence of Khat Farming on Learners Attendance in Primary and Secondary Schools in Kangeta Sub-Location

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### **Abstract:**

*Miraa farming has been perceived as one of the causes of indiscipline among pupils in schools. Despite the efforts of Free Primary Education (FPE), many children may still be out of school by 2017 partly due school location, cheap child labour and drug addiction. The influence of Khat production, trade and chewing has not been fully researched specifically if it contributes to primary and secondary school pupils' dropout in Kangeta Sub-location. It is on this basis that this study sought to find out how Khat farming has influenced learner's attendance in primary and secondary schools in Kangeta Sub-location. The findings revealed that children as young as 10 years had already started chewing Khat. This shows that the boys are the ones who are mostly involved in Khat farming and consumption. They end up dropping from schools and do not succeed to get the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education. The absence of female students involved in Khat business emanated from cultural tendencies where females are not expected to climb up trees according to the Meru culture. However, the community members felt that they are left out in this exercise. This showed that there is no proper coordination on planning for the interventions and strategies to deal with Khat farming and school dropout in Kangeta sub-location. Based on the findings, the paper concluded that Khat farming is a major issue that causes school dropouts in Kangeta. The implication is that the Government of Kenya through the Ministry of Education should come up with requisite policies and intervention measures to curb drop out in Kangeta sub-location and should also involve the community while doing so. All school children should be made to attend school to make use of the Free Primary Education funds provided by the government as school fees.*

**Keywords:** Khat farming, Meru culture, Indiscipline, dropout

### **1. Introduction**

The government of Kenya and other organizations such as United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse and Control (UNFDAC), the Kenya Drug Abuse and juvenile Delinquency Organization (KADDO) and Organization Fighting Against Drug Abuse and Trafficking (OFADAT) in Kenya have committed a lot of money and effort towards the control and fight against drugs and substance abuse in schools as a form of indiscipline (Mwela & Ng'ang'a, 2010). The Ministry of Education (MoE) (2001), reported that indiscipline attributed to drugs in schools, continue to be a major concern to educators, policy makers, policy implementers and the community. The Government of Kenya (GoK) in collaboration with the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST), has implemented several measures aimed at curbing the various cases of indiscipline in learning institutions particularly use of guidance and counseling in schools (MoEST, 2005). Indiscipline cases in schools include absenteeism, truancy, rudeness, bullying, noise making, verbal assault, boycotts/strikes, disrespect to teachers and prefects, high dropout rates, theft, drug and substance abuse, failure to do and complete assignments. Despite the improved access to education through Free Primary Education in 2003 to achieve the Second United Nations Millennium Development Goal (MDG2) on Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2015, governments particularly in developing countries must allocate enough money for public provision of education (Cohn & Johnson, 2006).

Khat is an evergreen shrub, which is cultivated as a bush or small tree. The plant is seedless and hardy, growing in a variety of climates and soils. Khat can be grown in droughts where other crops have failed and also at high altitudes. Khat is harvested throughout the year. Planting is staggered to obtain a continuous supply (Luqman & Danowski, 1976). Khat is mainly grown in Ethiopia, Kenya, Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, South Africa and Madagascar. It has also been found in Afghanistan and Turkistan. Previously, Khat leaves were available only near to where they were grown. Recently, improved roads and air transport have allowed a much wider distribution. Khat is harvested in the early hours of the morning and sold in markets in late morning. It is presented as a bundle of twigs, stems and leaves, wrapped in banana leaves to preserve freshness (Glenice Cox & Hagen Rampes, 2003).

Kangeta Sub-location is a big producer of Khat which is its main economic activity. Khat trade has high profit and one would expect that parents would use the money earned from it to pay school fees and to improve school attendance.

This is not the case in Kangeta Sub-location. Apart from providing cheap labour in Khat production, the pupils engage in Khat trade and chewing. The combined influence of labour provision in Khat farms, trade and chewing on primary school pupils, school dropout was not well documented. In Kenya, and specifically Kangeta sub-location, education has been characterized by declining enrolment and low completion rates, indiscipline cases characterized by high dropout rates, truancy, drug and substance abuse, bullying, rudeness, and poor school attendance are on the rise in Kangeta sub-location. Miraa farming has been perceived as one of the causes of indiscipline among pupils in schools. Despite the efforts of Free Primary Education (FPE), many children may still be out of school by 2017 partly due school location, cheap child labour and drug addiction. The influence of Khat production, trade and chewing has not been fully researched specifically if it contributes to primary and secondary school pupils' dropout in Kangeta Sub-location. It is on this basis that this study sought to investigate the effect of miraa farming on workers in Khat farms in Kangeta Sub-location, Igembe Central-Sub County District, Meru County.

## 2. General Objective

To find out how Khat farming has influenced learner's attendance in primary and secondary schools in Kangeta Sub-location.

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The design was selected in order to provide an accurate account of the characteristics such as the behavior, opinions, abilities, beliefs and knowledge of particular individuals. The design also assisted in achieving the targeted objective of the study on influence of Khat farming on learner's attendance in primary and secondary schools.

### 3.2. Population and Sample

The population of the study comprised of farmers working in Khat farms. The ethical conditions were adhered to where privacy and confidentiality of the information given by the subjects was maintained in the course of the study.

### 3.3. Instrumentation

The main instrument for data collection was the questionnaire. It was selected since majority of the respondents were literate, save on time and ensured confidentiality of respondents while providing the data.

### 3.4. Data Collection Procedure

The researcher sought permission from relevant authorities to carry out the study starting with The Technical University of Kenya and area chief of Kangeta Sub-Location. The sampled villages were visited and the local administrators; chief and sub chiefs informed about the study. The purpose of the study was explained to the respondents before filling in the questionnaire.

## 4. Analysis and Results

This section presents the results of the findings in the tables and figures below.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	61	68.5
Female	28	31.5
Total	89	100

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

The results show that 68.5% those interviewed were male and 31.5% were female. This shows that the gender distribution was skewed towards male students as opposed to the female ones. This shows that the boys are the ones who are mostly involved in Khat farming and consumption.

Dropout Level in Schools	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Primary	8	8.9
Secondary	46	51.7
Tertiary	35	39.3
Total	89	100

Table 2: Dropout Level in Schools

The results indicated that dropout was highest among the boys in secondary school constituting 51.67%. This was closely followed by those who had gone through tertiary education at 39.32% and finally those got to primary level at 8.9%. The implication is that Khat greatly influences boys from dropping out of school.

Age at First Time to Chew Khat	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	30	33.7
10-14 years	26	29.2
15 and more years	33	37.1
Total	89	100

Table 3: First Time to Chew Khat

After the researcher had assessed the age at which the respondents had started chewing Khat, those who started chewing Khat at 15 years and above were 37.07%. They were followed by those had never chewed at 33.7% and lastly those aged 10-14 years at 29.2%. The implication is that boys at around the age of 15 years and mostly in primary school were attracted to Khat chewing with the end result as dropping out of school.

Ability to Access Khat	Frequency	Percentage
Easily obtained	78	87.6
Not easily obtained	11	12.4
Total	89	100

Table 4: Ability to Access Khat

Regarding the issue of obtaining Khat, 87.64% of the responders said that it was easily obtained with 12.36% stating that it was not easily obtainable. This shows that Khat is easily obtained by boys in Kangata sub-location hence the tendency to consume it.

Category Most Affected	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Girls	10	11.2
Boys	79	88.8
Total	89	100

Table 5: Category Most Affected by Khat Consumption

The results regarding the respondents mostly affected by use of Khat indicated that 88.77% of were boys and 11.23% were girls. This implied that boys were mostly the one influenced by consumption of Khat in Kangeta sub-location.

How Does the Community Intervene on Khat Farming?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Report to the authority	59	66.3
Report the matter to the elder	7	7.9
Keep silent	18	20.2
Others	5	5.6
Total	89	100

Table 6: Community Intervention on Khat Farming

Regarding how the community intervenes on Khat, 66.29% report the cases to the authority, 20.2% keep silent, 7.86% report to the cases to the elders and 5.61% use other means to handle the cases. The implication is that there is need for education stakeholders to assist in curbing the influence of Khat consumption among the school children in Kangeta sub-location.

Responsibility of Government and Community for Planning Interventions	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	8	8.98
Disagree	32	35.95
Neutral	7	7.86
Agree	16	17.97
Strongly agree	26	29.21
Total	89	100

Table 7: Government Interventions and Strategies to Control Khat

The results of the government and the community responsibility in planning for interventions and strategies to be used in dealing with Khat farming and school dropout on school going pupils showed that 35.95% disagreed, 29.21% strongly agreed, 17.97% agreed, 8.98% strongly disagreed and lastly those who were at neutral were 7.86%.

## 5. Discussion

According to the researcher, more male was present at the data collection area as compared to the female. The findings of a high numbers of male working in the farms agree with the Meru North District Strategic Plan (2005-2010) revealed that the labour force in the region consisted 49.7% of the total population and was composed mainly of school dropouts who engaged in Khat small-scale and micro-enterprises. In 2012, the Education Permanent Secretary was concerned over the alarming rate at which boys in the region were dropping out of school to be employed as casual labourers in Khat farms, which gave them easy money (Sum, 2013).

The findings revealed that children as young as 10 years had already started chewing Khat. This study agrees with Joshua (2009) that stated that school boys who are barely 10 years old fail to enroll in school partly to pick Khat. They work from 6 a.m-9 a.m. and then hang around for the rest of the day chewing Khat (Kinoti, 2007).

Regarding those mostly affected by use of Khat, 88.77% of the respondents said that more boys than girls were affected. This shows that the boys are the ones who are mostly involved in Khat farming and consumption. They end up dropping from schools and do not succeed to get the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education. The absence of female students involved in Khat business emanated from cultural tendencies where females are not expected to climb up trees according to the Meru culture. Further, the findings indicated that the highest number of dropout cases is reported at secondary levels. Additionally, Khat business is associated by many observers, with the breakdown of family life, prostitution and a host of social evils (Beckerleg, 2008). Khat also takes a high share of the family budget where children are forced to drop out from school and work (Humud, 2002). Dessie (2013) further argues that children in Khat growing areas do not like attending school while they can make easy money through the Khat business.

The findings stated that the 45% of the respondents disagreed on the effectiveness of intervention methods and strategies put in place to curb school dropout. It was also stated that the government and the community are responsible for planning for interventions and strategies to be used in dealing with Khat farming and school dropout. However, the community members felt that they are left out in this exercise. This showed that there is no proper coordination on planning for the interventions and strategies to deal with Khat farming and school dropout in Kangeta sub-location.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the findings, the paper concluded that Khat farming is a major issue that causes school dropouts in Kangeta. Most of the learners who constituted the drop out phenomenon were boys. This was due to the fact that boys had a tendency of dropping out in order to get quick money. Child labour was also found to be a big issue in Kangeta sub-location and is an issue that requires to be mitigated. It is apparent that the issue of school dropout has not been fully reported to the authority and the community members do not feel the measures put in place as effective.

## 7. Implication

Based on the findings of this study, the implications are that the Government of Kenya through the Ministry of Education should come up with requisite policies and intervention measures to curb drop out in Kangeta sub-location and should also involve the community while doing so. All school children should be made to attend school to make use of the Free Primary Education funds provided by the government as school fees. It should also be made illegal for Khat farmers to employ underage and school children. The parents should be sensitized on the need to take their children to school. Both primary and secondary schools should take a leading role in ensuring that the school going children are retained in school through counseling them during school sessions. This will help in understanding the cause of children dropping out from school and curbing the situation at the school level. There is need to involve the community members in matters pertaining to school drop out for the community members to take a leading role in curbing this menace.

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