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# A Preliminary Investigation of Khat Use and Its Impacts on East African Communities in Melbourne

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# Background – Defining Khat

- *Catha Edulis* Forsk plant
- East Africa
- Old Islamic tradition
- Predominantly males



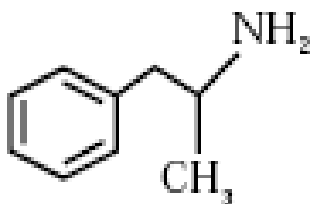
<http://maps.google.com.au/maps>

# Background – Defining Khat

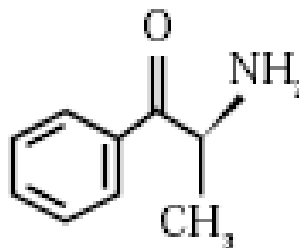
- Chew the leaves to elicit a stimulant effect
- Cathinone and Cathine
  - two active ingredients
  - affect gastrointestinal and central nervous systems



<http://www.menainfra.com/media/media-news/news-thumb/090825/khat.jpg>



Amphetamine



Cathinone



# Background – Khat Worldwide

- Varied legal status
  - Prohibited in Canada and Sweden; legal in the UK
- 2006 WHO critical review
  - International control not necessary
- 2008 study (Patel et al) on Somali community in the UK
  - Some favoured prohibition: economic burdens, social problems
  - Some anti-prohibition: culture, social, away from drugs/alcohol



# Background – Khat in Australia

- Legal to import into Australia
  - VIC, NSW, TAS: No prohibition on personal use
  - Cathinone/Cathine are controlled substances
- 1993 study (Stevenson et al) on East African communities in Melbourne
  - Social, study, work, prayer
  - Few female chewers
  - Some wanted khat prohibited
- 2008/2009 media, federal/Victorian parliament
  - Community divide



# Aims

- Gain an understanding of the opinions of khat users and of community members regarding the impact of khat;
- Determine the social and economic effects of khat use on East African communities and families in Melbourne; and
- Use the information obtained to inform future research and interventions.



<http://www.khadijahome.com>

# Methods

- 29 participants
  - East African community members in Melbourne
  - 55% users (1 female)
  - 45% non-users (3 males)
- Focus groups and in-depth interviews
  - Experiences of effects of khat use
  - Benefits and problems
  - Actions required
- Thematic analysis

# Key themes identified

- Is khat a drug?
- **The position of khat in the culture and religion**
- **Khat use and the gender roles in East African communities in Melbourne**
- **Motivations for using khat**
- Health effects
- **Social and economic problems associated with khat use**
- **Legal status and the future of khat in Australia**



# Why do people chew khat?

- “It’s like social, with your friends to have a good time, you relax.”  
(Ethiopian male)



[www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

- “Good for study and for taxi drivers.”  
(Ethiopian male)

# Who uses khat and what is its status?

- *“Mainly men, but men and women.”* (Somali male)
- 

## Non-users

- *“This drug is not part of the culture.”* (Somali female)
- *“It’s haram in Islam.”* (Somali male)

## Users

- *“Khat is a culture for all African people.”* (Somali male)
- *“I’ve never heard anything saying it’s against the religion.”* (Somali male)



# Gender roles and relations



[http://news.bbc.co.uk/media/images/40114000/jpg/\\_40114946\\_yemenqat245.jpg](http://news.bbc.co.uk/media/images/40114000/jpg/_40114946_yemenqat245.jpg)

- *“In Africa women don’t have as many rights [as in Australia] and we need the men to support the family.”* (Somali female)
- *“Choose khat or choose me and your family”.* (Somali female)
- *“Our husbands would just laugh in Africa if we gave them that ultimatum and they would choose khat because they know we can’t leave them.”* (Somali female)

# Is khat chewing a financial burden?

## YES

- *“Some of my husband’s workmates just work enough to buy khat and then they stop working.” (Somali female)*
- *“Economic problems because the man chews most of the time so he is not working.” (Somali female)*

## NO

- *“While I’m working I don’t chew khat.” (Somali male)*
- *“Every week, about \$10 or \$20.” (Somali male)*



# Social effects of khat use

## Non-users

- *“I see many women’s husbands using here and it is causing domestic violence.”* (Somali female)
- *“The men don’t come home for three days, the wife doesn’t know where he is.”* (Somali female)
- *“Khat ruined my family. My mum is now a single mum.”* (Somali female)

## Users

- *“Khat never makes you violent.”* (Eritrean male)
- *“If you have in moderation it’s ok.”* (Eritrean male)
- *“The problems are already there for Ethiopians who don’t know how to live in Australia. Khat is not the problem.”* (Ethiopian male)



# Should khat be prohibited in Australia?

## YES

- *"I would like to see khat banned. Please!"* (Somali female)
- *"It must be stopped to protect the next generations."* (Ethiopian male)
- *"Education, awareness messages, youth activities."* (Somali female)

## NO

- *"It doesn't cause problems, it doesn't need to be banned."* (Ethiopian male)
- *"If it has been banned maybe some people go away from their family to find khat elsewhere. Or maybe they start some other drug."* (Somali male)



# Conclusions

- Social problems identified as causing the most harm
  - Men being away from the home for long periods
- Likely part of a larger issue around social isolation and marginalisation in migrant and refugee communities
  - Difficult to isolate khat as the cause
- Limited evidence to suggest that prohibiting khat in Australia is required at this time
  - Many potential negative effects of prohibition
  - Other alternatives

# Future Research

- How much khat is being used and by how many people in Melbourne?
- Short and long term physical effects of khat consumption
- Is domestic violence occurring as a result of khat use?



Teenage boy in Sana'a chewing khat.  
<http://www.scielosp.org/img/revistas/bwho/v86n10/a05img01.jpg>

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