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MOTIVES FOR KHAT USE AND ABSTINENCE IN YEMEN - A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

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Background: Khat consumption is widespread in Yemeni society and causes problems both in economic development and public health. The gender-specific motives for khat use and abstinence were studied to create a toe-hold for more specific interventions.

Methods: In a sample with equal numbers of males, females, abstainers and consumers, 320 subjects were interviewed on their specific opinions about khat and its impact on subjective and public health, and on social and community functioning. Strata were compared in their acceptance and denial of opinions. Notions that could predict abstinence status or gender were identified with multivariate logistic regression analysis.

Results: Male khat users had a strong identification with khat use, while females were more ambivalent. The notion that khat consumption is a bad habit (odds ratio (OR) 3.4) and consumers are malnourished (OR 2.2) were associated with female gender among khat users. Among the females worries about health impact (OR 3.2) and loss of esteem in the family (OR 3.1) when using khat predicted abstinence. Male abstainers opposed khat users in the belief that khat is the cause of social problems (OR 5.1).

Conclusions: Distinct beliefs allow a differentiation between males, females, khat users and abstainers when targeting preventive measures. In accordance to their specific values female khat users are most ambivalent towards their habit. Positive opinions scored lower than expected in the consumers. Public opinion towards khat may have become slightl more negative in recent years. This finding creates a strong toe-hold for gender-specific public health interventions.