



Commentary on Corona Virus and Khat: The Case of Horn Africa

Mandaras Tariku^{1*}, Mustefa Mohammedhussein², Aman Dule² and Mohammedamin Hajure²

¹Department of Psychiatry, College of Health and Medical Sciences, Haramaya University, Harar, Ethiopia

²Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, Mettu University, Mettu, Ethiopia

***Corresponding Author:** Mandaras Tariku, Department of Psychiatry, College of Health and Medical Sciences, Haramaya University, Harar, Ethiopia.

Received: February 04, 2021

Published: May 22, 2021

© All rights are reserved by **Mandaras Tariku., et al.**

Abstract

This commentary describes the relation between corona virus (COVID-19 infection) pandemic and khat use (plant with amphetamine like effect), one of the most commonly used substance use, typically known for strengthening social interaction which contrast against the covid 19 prevention practices. The commentary also addresses some of the current measures to cope with the situation.

Keywords: COVID 19; Khat; Horn of Africa

Introduction

At the end of December month 2019, the world notices that the new emergency of outbreak corona virus in China and now a day it has been pandemic throughout the world. The corona virus disease is a communicable disease that affects respiratory pathways which caused by the new strain of the corona virus. For most of the global countries, it has continued to become challenged. This shows that how serious it is and how much damage it can cause.

Horn of Africa, is the region of eastern Africa. It is the easternmost extension of African land and for the purposes of this article is defined as the region that is home to the countries of Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia, whose cultures have been linked throughout their long history. It lies along the southern side of the Red Sea and extends hundreds of kilometers into the Gulf of Aden, Somali Sea and Guardafui Channel. The area is the easternmost projection of the African continent [1].

As for the Horn of Africa, the corona virus will have faced countries already facing a multitude of challenges. Prolonged armed

conflict, drought and insecurity have turned more than eight million people into refugees in their own countries, and a further 3.5 million have fled to neighboring countries where they live in overloaded refugee camps. They possess neither the capacity to contain the Covid pandemic nor to mitigate the resulting unemployment, poverty and hunger. In this region Khat is an institution, wielding enormous an economic impact, as well as playing a major social and cultural role in societies.

In the Horn of Africa, where khat is grown and traded, it has had the special quality of supporting interaction among people from different religions, ethnicities, and race. However, this scenario has been changed in different region as COVID 19 emerges disrupting the way peoples used to have social interaction especially the social gathering.

Most of the people in this region coming together and chewing Khat in different ceremonies which intended to enhance social interaction and facilitate contact with God. In the case of rural area of the region, Khat played crucial role for their devoted activities.

Farmers chew it for energy in their labor-intensive daily activities and religious devotees for all night sessions of prayer particularly during Muslims fasting period [2].

How corona virus (COVID-19) and Khat is related?

Currently, the transmission of the novel corona virus is rapidly increasing globally and there is no available vaccine and medications which are recommended by the World Health Organization. Any substances have their own physical and behavioral effects. Most of the drugs, including Khat, are increasing vulnerability to stress, and immune system suppress and poor health conditions that lead to the individuals at greater risk of COVID-19 infection and its complications.

Some studies suggested that the active ingredient found in the fresh leaves of Khat called cathinone has been an immune modulator effect on macrophages. It has suppressing the production of IL-2, B-cell proliferation and T lymphocytes, at this time most of chronic pulmonary disease will occur [3]. Similarly, review article reported that, pervasive using of Khat has various impacts on physical health. Long term use or abuse of Khat can cause insomnia, anorexia, gastric disorders, depression, liver damage and cardiac complications, including myocardial infarction. This will be complicating the courses of COVID-19 [4,5].

On besides of COVID-19, some of prevention strategies such as isolation and quarantine are elicits psychological problems such as anxiety and stress that initiate the individuals to accidental over doses of available substances in order to alleviate their negative emotions and those who will be recovered from COVID-19 may face stress and heightened strong desire to use different drugs [6,7].

How to help persons with Khat chewing?

The collective economical, psychological and social effects instigated by the pandemic, along with the difficulties in cultural aspects concerning access to treatment and adherence will definitely worsen during this period, therefore exacerbate their condition. In that sense, some strategies for prevention and treatment must be considered [8]. Care for the people with khat abuse must be reinforced, instead of postponed, in order to avoid complications of both khat related socioeconomic, political consequences and COVID-19 to prevent the transmission of coronavirus.

Moreover, at the time of new occurrences of pandemic, emotional reaction to the events and producing some psychological

and physical symptoms are normal but, when it becomes sustained they need consultation. Apart from emotional reaction toward pandemics, the withdrawal symptom has been in need special consideration during quarantine and isolation because; both symptoms synergy in each other's which led to major mental illness and potentiate adverse effect of COVID-19. Using different relaxation methods and reduce stress is paramount.

Psychosocial interventions are a vital element in the treatment of people with substance used, especially in people using different stimulants. Internet based talk therapy, internet consultation such as video chat have an important implication to overcome emotional symptoms. Furthermore, this is a good opportunity for mental and psychosocial teams to help those individuals who are voluntarily deciding to stop chewing Khat in isolation and quarantine areas [9]. Withdrawal symptoms provoked during lockdown could also jeopardize these preventive strategies, as it could drive individuals to go outside to search for khat.

Conclusion

The challenges of COVID 19 in different region of the world, particularly in the horn of Africa where khat use is widespread might ensures enormous effects on social, economic, health and related consequences. Considering the usual preventive measures, psychosocial interventions are a vital element to decrease the burden of the problem related to COVID 19.

Competing Interests

Author declare no competing interests.

Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed to writing, revising the commentary, gave final approval of the version to be published, and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Bibliography

1. Fage GEJD and Oliver R. "The Cambridge history of Africa". 2 (2008).
2. Mekuria W. "Public discourse on Khat (*Catha edulis*) production in Ethiopia: Review". *Journal of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development* 10 (2018): 192-200.
3. Gebissa E. "Khat: Is It More Like Coffee or Cocaine ? Criminalizing a Commodity, Targeting a Community". 2.2 (2012): 204-212.

4. Alvi A., *et al.* "Does khat chewing increases the risk of Mycobacterium tuberculosis infection by macrophage immune modulation?" *Medicine Hypotheses* 82.6 (2014): 667-669.
5. Guo T., *et al.* "Cardiovascular Implications of Fatal Outcomes of Patients with Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)". *JAMA Cardiology* 5.7 (2020): 811-818.
6. Volkow ND. "Collision of the COVID-19 and Addiction Epidemics". *Annals of Internal Medicine* 2019 (2020): 2019-2021.
7. Gearin P., *et al.* "Advancing Diagnostic Accuracy and Treatment With the Cultural Formulation Interview: Assessment of Psychosis in a Jamaican-American Woman". *American Journal of Psychiatry Residents' Journal* 15.3 (2020): 12-14.
8. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Considerations for the Care and Treatment of Mental and Substance Use Disorders in the COVID-19 Epidemic: SAMHSA. (2020): 2020.
9. De Crescenzo F., *et al.* "Comparative efficacy and acceptability of psychosocial interventions for individuals with cocaine and amphetamine addiction: A systematic review and network meta-analysis". *PLoS Medicine* 15.12 (2018).

Volume 5 Issue 6 June 2021

© All rights are reserved by Mandaras Tariku, *et al.*