

Women Participation in *Miraa* (Khat) Business and the Academic Performance of Primary School Children in Runyenjes Division, Embu, Kenya

Dr. Jane Ciumwari Gatumu

Senior Lecturer
School of Education
College of Education and External Studies
University of Nairobi
Nairobi, Kenya

Nicasio Njue

Graduate Student
School of Open and Distance Learning
College of Education and External Studies
University of Nairobi
Nairobi- Kenya

John Rugendo Chandi

Lecturer
School of Open and Distance Learning
College of Education and External Studies
University of Nairobi
Nairobi, Kenya

Abstract

The investigation aimed at establishing the relationship between miraa business as an occupation among women and the academic performance of the primary school pupils based on: nature of miraa business, time spent in miraa business, years of participation in miraa business and the women's attitudes towards miraa business. Focus was on the responses of the women participating in miraa business in the four main miraa trading centers namely Ena, Kawanjara, Gikuuri and Runyenjes as well as the head teachers' in primary schools where the children of the respondents studied and the standard eight examination results. The findings revealed that miraa business among women impacted negatively on the academic performance of the primary school pupils in Runyenjes division. The academic performance of pupils was significantly influenced by the three independent variables: the nature of miraa business, time spent in miraa business and the number of years their mothers had participated in miraa business. The fourth independent variable (attitude of their mothers towards miraa business) had small influence on the academic performance of the pupils.

Key words: *miraa* (khat), academic performance, business, standard eight pupils, women participation.

I. Nature of the problem

In Kenya, *miraa* has semi-legal status and is classified as an addictive drug (NACADA, 2006). According to the Agricultural Act Cap 318 Laws of Kenya, *miraa* is recognized as both horticultural and a special crop under the subsection of "others". Beckerleg (2006), Kalix and Khan (1984) state that *miraa* has adverse socioeconomic and health hazards. This is also supported by Sikiru and Babu (2009) who estimated that about one-third of all wages were spent on *miraa* consumption at the expense of vital needs, indicating dependence. Further, Kalix and Khan (1984) add that family life is harmed because of neglect, dissipation of the family income and inappropriate behavior which in many cases leads to divorce. Acquisition of funds to pay for *Miraa* may lead to criminal behavior and even prostitution (Elmi, 1983).

In his investigation, Houghton (2005) found out that it would be too costly to ban *miraa* business because it would become much more expensive and dangerous than it is in the open market. He adds that banning it would inevitably introduce cartels and black market operations. Houghton recommended for establishment of regulatory framework of the commodity.

An investigation carried out on effects of *Miraa* business on women sexual behavior by Beckerleg (2008) found out that the majority of women engaging in chewing *miraa* are not sex workers as often assumed by men to be sexually immoral. In an investigation conference on *miraa* Odenwald, Warfa, and Klein (2009), enormous adverse social economic and health impacts of *miraa* was assessed and the participants recommended for an investigation to set up a clear understanding of the place of *miraa* in peoples` lives. The finding of that investigation would guide in formulating the regulations, monitoring, creation of alternative income and demand reduction of *miraa* production and trade.

According to Booth and Dunn (1996), parent-child-school involvement is an enhancing variable which contributes to students` higher academic achievement, positive behavior, and emotional development. However, Cai, Mayer and Wang (1999) posed that the search for the kinds of parental involvement that have the greatest impact on student learning are still on search. Another investigation conducted by Shittu (2004) on the socio-economic determinants of academic performance of secondary school students in Nigeria revealed that insufficient parental income, family type and lack of funding by governments are factors influencing students' academic performance. That Nigerian study highlighted that parental education and occupational class are more strongly associated with student's educational attainment. It has the implication that parents of high socio-economic status have more positive attitudes towards their children's schooling and have high expectations for their children as they provide for their academic requirement.

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Epstein's theory (2002) formed the theoretical foundation for this investigation. Maslow's theory emphasises on the uniqueness of individual needs and behavior and hence easy to link the academic output based on children's personal needs (Simons, Irwin and Drinnien, 1987). Epstein's theory suggests that schools and families share responsibilities for the socialization of the child .

The production and reproduction role of women both in the economy and society cannot be ignored and that is why the investigators sought to tie women's participation in *miraa* business and their children's academic performance. It had been noted that the standard eight primary school leavers were performing relatively poor in Runyenjes Division compared to other Divisions in Embu in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examinations. Further, the first statistical report on *Miraa* production by the Ministry of Agriculture (January, 2011) Embu East District put Runyenjes Division on lead in terms of *miraa* production, sales and creation of employment. Thus, the purpose of this investigation was to highlight the relationship between *miraa* business among the women parents and the academic performance of primary school children in Runyenjes.

II. Objectives of the investigation

The investigation's objectives were to:

- i. Examine how the nature/ type of *miraa* business among women parents influence the academic performance of primary school pupils in Runyenjes Division.
- ii. Determine the extent to which time spent by women participating in *miraa* business influences the academic performance of primary school pupils in Runyenjes Division.
- iii. Establish how the attitude of women towards *miraa* business influences the academic performance of primary school pupils in Runyenjes Division.
- iv. Establish extent to which the number of years of women participated in *miraa* business **III** influences the academic performance of primary school pupils in Runyenjes Division

III. Methodology

The investigation used descriptive survey design with a purpose of describing and interpreting the conditions that exist, practices that prevail, beliefs, attitudes, points of views, processes that are going on as well as the effects that are being felt and trends that are developing in *miraa* business.

The investigation targeted the population of the women who are actively involved in *miraa* business in Runyenjes Division most of whom are concentrated in the four (4) main *miraa* trading centers namely: Runyenjes town, Gikuuri, Kawanjara and Ena. Purposive sampling method was utilised to select a convenient and representative sample of fifty two (52) *miraa* businesswomen i.e. thirteen (13) from each *miraa* trading center mentioned.

Semi-structured interview schedules were used to collect responses from the *miraa* and non-*miraa* businesswomen as well as the primary school head teachers whose input formed the basis for analysis. Further, focused group discussion was conducted with *miraa* business women (traders) who could not be interviewed as they were busy trading. Lastly, documentary analysis of the midterm and end term one 2011 examination results of the standard eight pupils was done.

The validity of the instruments was enhanced by conducting a pilot study in Nyambene (Maua) district where *miraa* was first domesticated in Kenya. The district provided grounds to establish the accuracy and the relevance of the various items in the instruments.

The reliability of the instruments was tested by splitting the interview schedules into two equivalent halves after administering it. Each half was then treated separately and scored accordingly. The resultant scores were then computed and the two halves correlated using Karl Pearson's Correlation Coefficient in order to estimate the reliability of the interview schedule. The correlation acquired for two interview schedules was medium (ranging 0.3 and 0.4 in the correlation scale) thus indicating a relative positive correlation of the interview schedules. This interval is acceptable in social sciences studies as it may have been influenced by the diverse demographic backgrounds of the respondents.

The data was analyzed using cross tabulation technique by comparing the dependent variable (standard eight examination results) with the independent variables: nature of *miraa* business among women, time spent in *miraa* businesswomen, attitudes of *miraa* businesswomen towards *miraa* business and the number of years women had participated in *miraa* business thus deriving the meaning of the data. Since most of the data acquired was qualitative in nature, the data was calculated and presented in form of percentages and frequencies.

IV. Findings and Discussions

The findings and their discussions are organized along the four objectives.

1. Nature of *miraa* business and academic performances of pupils in Runyenjes Division

Table 1 presents the distribution of the standard eight examination results based on the nature of the *miraa* business among the women in Runyenjes division. The scores are the combined means of the pupils based on their mothers' nature of *miraa* activity as indicated on top of each column.

Table 1 Nature of *miraa* business and their children's performance

Test	Non- <i>miraa</i> business	<i>Miraa</i> buyers	<i>Miraa</i> farmers	<i>Miraa</i> traders
Midterm	52.0	50.2	47.7	43.5
End term	52.4	48.8	44.4	43.9
Combined (mid and end)	52.2	49.5	46.1	43.7

The academic results analysis of this investigation shows that pupils whose mothers had specialized in buying *miraa* were academically performing better with a combined mean of 50.2 in the midterm and 48.8 in end term one 2011 compared to the *miraa* farmers specialists who scored a combined mean of 47.7 (midterm) and 44.4 (end term) one 2011 examinations. The parents who specialized in *miraa* trading had their children performing worst scoring a combined mean of 43.5 in the midterm and 43.9 in the end term examinations respectively. However, pupils from non-*miraa* business background were found to be performing best with a combined mean of 52.0 and 52.4 in the midterm and end term one 2011 examinations respectively. The seeming good performance of the non-*miraa* background pupils may have been attributed to the fact that neither of the non-*miraa* businesswomen respondents nor their children were either involved in *miraa* business or consumed *miraa* as it featured from the focused group discussions. All of the non-*miraa* respondents indicated that they discouraged their children from engaging in *miraa* activities.

To this extent, their children had humble time to study as well as acquire the appropriate maternal academic attention. Fraja and Oliveira (2010) and Jeynes (2003) support this finding when they suggest that parents' effort is more important for a child's educational attainment than the school's effort, which in turn is more important than the child's own effort. Thus, the amount of time spent by parents in nurturing their children is very critical in role modeling which in turn determines what the child would want to be in future and in turn this determines the amount of the effort the child would put in the academic work.

2. Time spent in *miraa* business by *miraa* business women and academic performances of pupils in Runyenjes Division

Table 2 presents the distribution of the standard eight examination results based on the time spent on *miraa* business by the *miraa* business women in Runyenjes division. The scores are the combined means of the pupils based on time of their mothers' involvement in *miraa* activity as indicated on top of each column.

Table 2 Time women spent on *miraa* activity and children's academic performance

Test	Never at all	Once a month	Once a week	Daily
Midterm	52.0	49.4	47.4	45.7
End term	52.4	48.7	47.9	46.5
Combined (mid and end)	52.2	49.1	47.7	46.1

The analysis of the term one 2011 examination results in this investigation shows that the academic performance of the pupils from *miraa* background decreased with the increase in the frequency of their mothers' participation in *miraa* business. For example, pupils whose mothers participated in *miraa* business on daily basis scored a combined mean of 45.7 and 46.5 in the midterm and end term one 2011 respectively while those who participated on weekly basis scored 47.4 and 47.9 in midterm and end term respectively. On the other hand, pupils whose mothers participated in *miraa* business on monthly basis scored 49.4 and 48.7 in the midterm and end term respectively. Pupils from non-*miraa* business background were found to be performing best with a combined mean score of 52.0 and 52.4 in the midterm and end term one 2011 respectively. This may imply that the time reserved by *miraa* business mothers to tend their children was impacting negatively on their academic performance. Soenens and Vansteenkiste (2005) and Epstein's (2002) suggest that perception of parental involvement is relatively related to academic performance and that in order for students to excel academically, parents must be all time involved through parenting which generates conducive home environment for studying. Thus, it may seem that the more time mothers spend in *miraa* business, the more time is lost in nurturing their schooling children and hence leading to poor grades.

3. Attitudes of *miraa* business women towards *miraa* business and academic performances of pupils in Runyenjes Division

Table 3 presents the distribution of the standard eight examination results based on the attitudes of the *miraa* business women towards *miraa* business and the academic performance in Runyenjes division. The respondents were asked how often they reminded their children to study and to avoid *miraa* business in future. The scores presented as combined means of the pupils based on their mothers' on attitude towards *miraa* business.

Table 3 Women's attitudes towards *miraa* business and their children's performance

Test	Always (non- <i>miraa</i>)	Once a month	Once a week	Once a day
Midterm	52.0	44.1	46.1	46.5
End term	52.4	41.9	46.5	47.4
Combined (mid and end)	52.2	43.0	46.3	47.0

The analysis of the *miraa* business women's influence on the academic performance of their children based on their attitude and support showed that pupils who received attitudinal support from their *miraa* business mothers always (non-*miraa* business) were scoring best with a combined mid and end term mean score of 52.2.

The data further highlights that pupils from *miraa* business background who received the support on daily basis were performing better (combined mean 47.0) than the pupils who received the same support on either weekly or monthly basis i.e. 46.3 and 43.0 respectively. This finding may have been attributed to the fact that when a child is properly counseled in the choice of his/her courses and vocation that matches his mental ability, interest and capability are motivated to learn. And poor performance may feature because of aspects like parent's permissiveness, inconsistent and unclear behavioral limits, unrealistic parental expectations, negative communication patterns and lack of parental monitoring (Masten and Reed, 2002). In fact, Muller (1995) states that parental attitudes towards their home background may predict the quality and regularity of the satisfaction and provision of a child's functional survival and academic needs. He adds that the employment status of mothers affects child supervision after school, the nature of parent-child activities during this time, and the degree to which the parent is able to become involved in after- school activities such as discussions on the homework, motivations, guidance and counseling.

4. Years spent in *miraa* business by *miraa* business and academic performances of pupils in Runyenjes division

Table 4 presents the distribution of the standard eight examination results based on the number of years women have spent in the *miraa* business. The scores are the combined means of the pupils based on the years their mothers' has participated in *miraa* business as indicated on top of each column.

Table 4 Number of years in the *miraa* business and their children's academic performance

Test	Never at all	Below 1yr	1-3 yrs	3-5yrs	Above 5 yrs
Midterm	52.0	50.8	47.6	45.1	44.8
End term	52.4	50.9	48.0	47.4	46.0
Combined(mid &end)	52.2	50.9	47.8	46.3	45.4

Table 4 shows that pupils' academic performance decreased with the increase in the number of years that their mothers had participated in *miraa* business. The pupils who came from non-*miraa* business background were the best performers. In addition, the data shows that majority (50%) of the *miraa* business respondents had participated in this *miraa* business for a period of over 5 years and therefore their children were performing worse than those who had participated in the same business for fewer years. The variance or trend in the examination results is perhaps attributed to the fact that most of long serving *miraa* businesswomen involved their children in the *miraa* business thus denying them time to study and to satisfy their basic or physiological needs (Booth and Dunn 1996; Sagimo, 2002 and Waikenda, 2010).

VI. Conclusions

Miraa business seems to influence negatively on the academic performance of the primary school pupils in Runyenjes division. The pupils from non-*miraa* business mothers' perform better than pupils whose mothers are *miraa* business participants. In addition, the *miraa* businesswomen who specialize in buying *miraa* for consumption only have their children academically performing better compared to the children whose parents are *miraa* farmers specialists who in turn performs better that specialists in *miraa* trading. Therefore, it can be concluded that every type of *miraa* business among women has a degree of time and effort demand that affects parenting and hence the academic performance of the children.

Women do seem not to be thoroughly aware of the socioeconomic hazards associated with *miraa* business as they get their school going children into *miraa* business. To this extent, *Miraa* business does not seem to reduce circle of poverty. If anything, it creates room for expansion for social economic inequity (Kalix and Khan, 1984). It can therefore be concluded that *miraa* business is very involving to an extent of depriving off the parental obligations in parenting. Thus in order to secure an economically sound society for the future generation, women must prioritize the academic needs of their children through time dedication in parenting and support. Also, women may need be empowered to shift from *miraa* business through financial, material and training programmes. The government also needs to intervene by regulating the production, consumption and the supply chain of *miraa*. This will foster gender protection and upgrading the quality of bringing up children.

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