

SOCIAL AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF THE USE OF TRADITIONAL APHRODISIACS (*KAYAN MATA*) AMONG MARRIED WOMEN IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

People over time, have considered the possibility to arouse sexual desires with drugs and food. However, how this is largely attended to, based on the uniqueness of the different groups and cultures. Prior to the use of modern vaccines, traditional aphrodisiacs such as herbal or animal extracts were purported to boost erotic pleasure, induce sexual desire and stimulate genitalia. In recent years, the use of aphrodisiacs has become popular with the increased prevalence of sexual problems worldwide. Aphrodisiacs refer to any substance (food or drug) that stimulates sexual desire and enhance sexual desire and performance. In Northern Nigeria, traditional aphrodisiacs known as *Kayan mata*, are sold by the roadside and in herbal chemists, most of which are not certified fit for human consumption. Dispensers do not have any information on their manufacturing dates, expiry dates, batch number nor chemical compositions as well as the prescribed dosage. The acceptance and use of *Kayan mata* among women in Northern Nigeria is associated with the desire to have influence over decision-making and control partners in intimate relationship. However, many issues have been presented in different quarters with respect to the use and demand for traditional aphrodisiacs. Nevertheless, little is known about the social and health implications of the use of these substances. This, therefore requires further interrogation to broaden the horizon of the public on the increasing phenomenon. Secondary sources of data were employed for this work. Also, Social Exchange Theory provided theoretical orientation to issues related to the thrust of the paper. A large number of married women use traditional aphrodisiac which are mainly sold by traditional healers. Therefore, there is need to set up more orthodox care facilities for sexual dysfunction and community health education on female sexual dysfunction. Furthermore, there is the need for quality assurance, safety and standardization of these substances for the benefit of the consumers.

Keywords: Aphrodisiac; *Kayan Mata*; Marriage; Sexual stimulants, Traditional Aphrodisiac.

Introduction

The pursuit of intimate satisfaction and human relationships is a timeless endeavour that transcends cultural boundaries and historical epochs. The universal drive to enhance and amplify sexual desires and experiences leads to the exploration of various methods and substances called aphrodisiacs aimed at enhancing intimate pleasure and satisfaction. Aphrodisiacs are substances that arouse sexual desire and in local parlance they are called sexual stimulants which are usually contained in drugs, foods, drinks and beverages that make sexual intercourse more pleasurable (Sharma, Thakur & Dixit, 2012). The impact of westernization over the years has not taken Africans off the customs and traditions they hold with great respect. Africans are known for holding dear to themselves the teachings and practices of their forefathers and also teach their generations the uses of different herbs in which their forebears sought refuge. Women in marriage believe that it is their responsibility to satisfy their husbands sexually to maintain the respect and honour they have in the eyes of their life partners; for this reason, they use traditional aphrodisiac locally known as *kayan mata* to keep and sustain their marriage.

Today, there many substances that are used as aphrodisiacs all over the world and in Africa they are often called *kayan mata* (this means woman's things). The term *kayan mata* originated from the northern part of Nigeria and it refers to "women things". More so, the term has been used to describe herbs or potions that are used to enhance sexual gratification (Adebowale, 2018). They are made up of different components ranging from lubricants, sweet, sex drops, sweetener powders, zuman mata / maza, sweets, gold fly etc. and they packaged in different forms like food, tablets, perfumes etc. According to Otorokpa (2019), *kayan mata* come in three categories, which include; vagina upgrading *kayan mata* like Sugar lumps, *tsimi*, *madura*, *goron tula*, *madura*, *tauraren wuta* etc. Libido-boosting *kayan mata* which are used to improve sexual drive and keeping one's partner, e.g. Gindin ayu which is produced from a fish called Ayu. Thirdly, there is favor and attraction potion variant of *kayan mata* which involves spiritual manipulation using potions and sex oil, of one's sexual partner. e.g., *kayan mata* beads, command oil, and attraction oil, among many others.

References to aphrodisiac substances are found in the ancient Egypt, Rome and Greek medical sources. It was also present in pre-modern China, the Middle East and India, and in several traditional pharmacies of many African and South American cultures (Bello & Isah, 2015). Throughout, men and women have continued to pursue different means to

enhance and boost their sexual ability. Sexual function is an essential component of life, therefore, the search for a remedy that can enhance it has been an obsession. Reports from the United States (US) National Social and Health Life Survey approximates that sexual dysfunction occurs in 10% - 52% of men and 25% - 63% of women globally (Bhagavathula, Elnour & Shehab, 2016).

The utilization of traditional aphrodisiacs among married women in Northern Nigeria constitutes a multifaceted phenomenon that requires in-depth exploration. There is no doubt that sexual health transcending gender boundaries, profoundly influences overall well-being. Research emphasizes the profound impact of partners' sexual satisfaction on the overall contentment of relationships (Atindanbila et al., 2014). Amid this context, aphrodisiac drugs emerge as potential tools to address sexual dysfunctions, enhance pleasure, and other related dimensions (Atuobi-Bediako, 2019). However, concerns exist, regarding the safety of these interventions, necessitating comprehensive inquiry. What is alarming is the escalating trend of unregulated sale and consumption of traditional aphrodisiacs in Northern Nigeria. This surge coincides with unchecked promotional activities across diverse platforms, raising concerns of potential health risks (Bruce et al., 2002). However, despite this trend, concrete data substantiating these patterns remain elusive (Bello & Isah, 2015).

Anecdotal account suggests that the use of these substances go beyond increasing or enhancing couples' sexual satisfaction to a means through which women assert dominance, ensure their husband's fidelity and gain a significant stand and sexual relevance in mostly heterosexual relationships. Women who fear losing their husbands to other women and want to fend off a second wife, or enhance intimate time spent with their spouse, are covertly using untested traditional aphrodisiacs, without minding the social and health implications of such on both parties.

It has been observed that the sale and use of traditional aphrodisiacs without medical prescription has been on the increase in northern Nigeria as they are now more frequently advertised in different outlets. It is not uncommon to find sex enhancing drugs being sold in bus stations, markets and along the streets; most of these drugs are unregistered with the National Food, Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC). The mechanisms used in preparing these substances are yet to be known. However, they may act on the central nervous system affecting the brain and sex centers that are generally attributed to an increase or decrease in sexual arousal (Bruce, John, Linda, Gary & Ari, 2002).

While studies have been conducted on the use of traditional aphrodisiacs, not much has been done on this in northern Nigeria. It is therefore, imperative to understand the social and health implications of the use of traditional aphrodisiacs within the discourse of women's sexuality in northern Nigeria. This issue, no doubt requires a wider investigation and therefore, this study examines the social and health implications of the use of the traditional aphrodisiac (kayan mata) among married women in northern Nigeria with a view to advocating for the need for quality assurance and standardization of these herbs for the benefit of the buyers.

Conceptual Clarification

Aphrodisiac

The concept of “Aphrodisiac” is derived from a Greek word “Aphrodite” meaning the goddess of love. Simply put, aphrodisiacs are substances, which stimulate sexual desire and this, in local parlance, according to Ango, Oche, Bello, Yunusa, Umar, Adamu, Adam, Adetoro & Shija, (2021), are called sexual stimulants. According to Alabi (2020), an expanded review of literature on the use of aphrodisiacs revealed that there are different types of aphrodisiacs. Just like they come in varying substances (food items, perfumes, liquids, herbs, fruits, seeds, among several others), their purposes also differ. A lot of these substances are derived from preparations such as herbs, leaves, and honey or soup ingredients, including dried baobab leaves. Some animal parts are also used as stimulants (Alabi, 2020).

These substances comprise of sweets, lubricants, perfumes, makeup, herbs, sweetener powders and spices. The ingredients have evolved over the years, but typically, the products have a base of honey, tiger nuts, camel's milk, millet, herbs and roots. There are retinue of plants that have proven as powerful aphrodisiac by increasing the desire for sex, increase libidinal energy, increase sexual vitality and help improve the intensity of lovemaking (Yidana, Shamsu-Deen & Abdul-Manan, 2019). Basically, aphrodisiacs are categorized in to two, in accordance to their mode of action. The first type of aphrodisiac acts specifically to increase the libido (i.e., sexual desire) while the second category takes action by increasing the ability to indulge in sexual activity (i.e., increasing potency). Theoretically, as noted by Zanolari (2003), an aphrodisiac is strictly an agent which arouses or increases sexual desire, but in practice, anything which increases the capacity for sexual enjoyment will tend to increase the appetite and can be considered as an aphrodisiac.

Studies by Bello and Isah (2015), Alabi (2020), and Ango et al., (2021) have highlighted the longstanding use of aphrodisiacs by women in northern Nigeria. In fact, there are evidence-based research of the import of the substance, particularly in the preparation of brides for marriage, to ensure a healthy sex life and the sustenance of such. Using aphrodisiacs is becoming increasingly popular among women from virtually all parts of the country, not necessarily restricted to northern Nigeria women alone (Umar & Jibril, 2015; Garba, Yakassai & Magashi, 2013).

Even though the usage of this substance is age-long one, there are pieces of evidence to indicate that the recipes are passed down from generation to generation. The mysticism around this substance literally known by the Hausas as *kayan mata* is that which compares it to love potions and charms used by women to bewitch and control their husbands or lure them away from their co-wives. While both men and women alike have continued to use aphrodisiacs, whether or not these drugs have any scientific basis of truly improving sexual satisfaction without regards to their composition is yet to be proven. (Garba, Yakassai & Magashi, 2013).

For long, men and women have attempted to enhance their sexual experiences with a variety of chemicals. There is a rich history in all cultures of using substances derived from plants and animals, as well as synthetic materials, to change the sexual experience (Atuobi-Bediako, 2019). Open discussions concerning sex and sexual activities are considered taboo and as such, aphrodisiac usage is something that is talked about in low tones especially among women in this society (Garba et al., 2013). This is apparently the case in conservative societies like northern Nigeria, where issues relating to sexuality are governed by religion and culture. They are hardly discussed openly and most often discussion on sexuality is considered a taboo.

However, in a culture that accepts polygamy, women do what they think is right to keep their spouses to themselves so as to remain in monogamous relationship. Where their efforts in maintaining the monogamous family relationship fails, they ensure that they gain the husband's attention and favours within the polygamous family setting, and sexual activity is one strong means employed by most of these women to achieve their desires through the use of herbal substances to enhance sexual performance (Ango, et al., 2021). It is not only married women or young ladies who try to secure their bedrooms. Even among commercial sex workers, different forms of these recipe known as *kayan mata* are utilized for the purpose of satisfying the sexual prowess of their customers and subsequently maintain such

through praises from these customers that are convinced to patronize them often. Among this set of people, it may even include amulets obtained from marabouts with the intention of having the energy to take on as many customers as possible.

Despite the long history of usage, the effectiveness of these aphrodisiacs remains a topic of debate, as they are utilized in an environment where open discussions about sexuality are considered taboo. While the usage of these substances is not peculiar to northern women, it is right to state that, almost every culture has used various substances, usually herbal in origin, in an attempt to intensify sexual desire and performance. Despite all the unsubstantiated claims, people have continued to make use of these sexual stimulants (aphrodisiacs) and women in northern Nigeria are no exceptions.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the Social Exchange Theory (SET) which has its roots in the fields of social psychology and sociology, and provides valuable insights into understanding human social interactions, particularly in the context of relationships, resources, and reciprocity. The theory emerged as a distinct framework in the mid-20th century and was developed by several influential scholars, including George C. Homans, Peter Blau, and Richard Emerson. George C. Homans is often regarded as one of the founding figures of Social Exchange Theory. The SET is built on several key assumptions and propositions. It assumes that individuals are rational actors who engage in social exchanges after conducting a cost-benefit analysis. They aim to maximize rewards and minimize costs in their interactions.

Reciprocity, another central proposition, suggests that individuals expect their actions to be reciprocated by others. This means that if someone provides benefits or resources in a relationship, they anticipate receiving similar benefits in return. Outcome expectations play a significant role in decision-making within this framework. People assess the potential rewards and costs associated with an action and choose the course of action that promises the most favourable outcome. Additionally, individuals have reference points, known as comparison levels, against which they evaluate the outcomes of their exchanges. If actual outcomes surpass the comparison level, individuals perceive the exchange as favourable; otherwise, they may experience dissatisfaction.

The Social Exchange Theory offers a valuable framework for understanding and justifying its applicability to the objective of this work. In the context of traditional

aphrodisiac usage, married women in northern Nigeria are likely to engage in this practice if they perceive benefits such as enhanced sexual satisfaction and improved marital harmony as outweighing the potential costs or risks. For example, a married woman in northern Nigeria may choose to use a particular traditional aphrodisiac because she believes it will lead to increased intimacy with her husband, resulting in a more harmonious marital relationship. In this case, the perceived benefits of using the aphrodisiac outweigh the potential costs, which might include concerns about health or social stigma.

The theory suggests that individuals are motivated by the expectation of reciprocity and the pursuit of self-interest (Homans, 1961). In the context of traditional aphrodisiac use, women's motivations can be linked to the expectation of reciprocity in their marriages and the pursuit of their self-interest, which includes the desire for marital satisfaction and harmony. For instance, women may be motivated to use traditional aphrodisiacs to enhance their own pleasure during sexual encounters, which aligns with their self-interest. Additionally, they may expect reciprocity from their husbands in the form of increased attention, affection, or material support due to the improved marital relationship resulting from aphrodisiac use. For instance, a study conducted by Ahmed, et al. (2018) revealed that women especially those in polygynous marriage use aphrodisiacs to assert influence within the familial setting. They use these substances not to only enhance sexual gratification but to gain husbands' attention, favours and it also grants them a form of control over their spouses.

Social Implications of the use of Traditional Aphrodisiac

Marriage is a central institution in the Nigerian society, deeply entrenched in cultural norms and expectations. Within this context, the fear of being divorced or rejected by one's spouse can be a potent motivator for various behaviours, including the use of aphrodisiacs such as "*Kayan mata*". The fear of being divorced or rejected by one's spouse is a significant factor contributing to the use of traditional aphrodisiacs among women in various cultural contexts, particularly in regions where polygyny is practiced (Kamatnesi, 2005). In such cultural settings, women often resort to using these substances to retain their spouses and maintain monogamous relationships. When faced with the risk of divorce or the entry of additional wives into a polygamous marriage, women employ various strategies to ensure they remain the primary focus of their husbands' attention.

Alabi (2020) conducted a qualitative study in Ilorin, North Central Nigeria, which delved into the reasons behind women's use of traditional aphrodisiacs; identify the most commonly used aphrodisiacs; understand the impact of these substances on women's sexual agency and familial relationships, and gain insights into men's perceptions of women's use of traditional aphrodisiacs. The study revealed that the use of traditional aphrodisiacs by women in northern Nigeria has historical and cultural significance. It has been practiced for generations and is considered a cultural tradition associated with marriage. The study further highlighted that *kayan mata* is believed to be a powerful substance that enhances sexual potency and relevance among women in polygynous marriages.

The common predisposing factor for use of aphrodisiacs was perceived as poor sexual performance and sexual dissatisfaction between both sexes among spouses. For the intrapersonal and community factors, poor performance was associated with poor diets as part of changing societal behaviours about food and nutrition, which have rendered many people unhealthy and sexually weak. The use of these substances among women was often to meet the expectations of their partners. This stemmed from the social practice where women were expected or even obliged to satisfy the sexual needs of their partners (Abdullahi & Tukur, 2013). Women often use aphrodisiacs to boost their libido and satisfaction and make their private parts extra sensual for their partners. The women felt that consuming these aphrodisiacs is important to please and show gratitude to their partners. Also, for women who have no sexual feelings, the aphrodisiacs enhance their desire.

Wong, Lee & Kim (2019) conducted a cross-cultural analysis, revealing that aphrodisiac use is influenced by cultural norms and expectations. Their study highlighted that in some cultures, there is a strong emphasis on fulfilling a partner's sexual desires, which drives the demand for aphrodisiacs. The study underscored the fact that aphrodisiac use cannot be solely attributed to individual factors; rather, it is deeply intertwined with the cultural context in which individuals reside.

In the research conducted by Rodriguez, Martinez & Gonzalez (2017), they explored the relationship between aphrodisiac consumption and marital satisfaction. Their quantitative findings revealed a positive correlation between the frequency of aphrodisiac use and higher levels of marital happiness. Couples who incorporated aphrodisiacs into their sexual experiences reported greater marital satisfaction. This highlights the role of aphrodisiacs in contributing to the gratification of sexual partners and maintaining relationship quality.

This emerging revelation about the effects of traditional aphrodisiacs (*kayan mata*) over men has sparked debates in the media (Chime, 2009). These products have also been reported to be used by young girls who are in romantic relationships with older men to control them and extort money and other resources from them (Chime, 2009). There are diverse perceptions of the use of traditional aphrodisiacs in Nigeria (Alabi, 2020). Whereas men believe that the use of traditional aphrodisiacs such as *kayan mata* should be regulated because it has hypnotizing effects, women, on the other hand, are of the opinion that it should be encouraged and used by more women because it allows women to exercise agency in sexual relationships (Abubakar, 2009). The belief that these traditional aphrodisiacs might be 'juju' has constituted to be a debate in the media since they not only enhance sexual performance, but arguably give women control over men (Abubakar 2009; Chime 2009).

While the prevalence of these substances is not a recent phenomenon, recent concerns have arisen regarding the unexplored prospects and the empowerment it may provide to women. Some men perceive it as a threat to their traditional roles and power dynamics within intimate relationships. Moreover, women view the use of *kayan mata* as a tool for redefining their roles and gaining power in their relationships. However, this area of academic discourse remains relatively unexplored.

Health Implications of Aphrodisiacs Use

Health is universally recognized as a fundamental human right, serving as the cornerstone upon which the happiness and strength of nations are built. This fundamental human right entitles every individual to a standard of living that is sufficient to support the health and well-being of themselves and their families. It encompasses essential elements such as access to adequate nutrition, clothing, medical care, and social services. The World Health Organization (WHO) provided a comprehensive definition of health in 1971, describing it as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being for an individual, extending beyond the mere absence of disease or infirmity. Given the understanding of what *kayan mata* represents and the widespread usage of these substances, there arises a paramount concern regarding the health implications associated with their use. It is crucial to address questions related to the safety and potential health risks of aphrodisiacs, considering the profound impact health has on the quality of life of individuals and the overall well-being of society. Ensuring that aphrodisiacs are used safely and responsibly is

not only a matter of individual health but also a broader societal concern rooted in the recognition of health as a fundamental human right.

Studies such as those of Bello and Isah (2015), Alabi (2020) have shown that *kayan mata* products have substantial health benefits to users. For example, Tiger nut milk, also known as *kunu aya*, by the Hausas as one of the most common drink forms of *kayan mata*, has many health benefits on consumers. It is rich in amino acids, especially arginine, which is beneficial to those suffering high blood pressure. Also, there are perfumes which beside the fragrance, also boost the confidence of the users in the midst of others, especially with the opposite sex (Alabi, 2015). It is also fundamental to note that the boom of the *kayan mata* products is another source of livelihood for women as more hands are employed to source the herbs and have been able to get better opportunities for themselves and families with attendant economic benefits. Thus, every *kayan mata* product has a different effect on the individual.

In recent times, *kayan mata* products have been abused, with some vendors mixing their products with other items to boost their effects. Meanwhile, others advocate for sex enhancers that are dangerous, some of which require bodily violation. In fact, medical personnel have pointed out that, there are many dangers with these new forms of *Kayan mata*, though with the users not ready to accept the health implication of such (Oreagba, Oshikoya & Amachree, 2011). Medical opinions caution, anything that has to be inserted or clipped should be discouraged as they can tear the cervical tissues or risk cervical cancer for women users. This rise in adulterated *kayan mata* products is no doubt worrisome given the burden of risk it has on the users of the products. Currently, it is generally known that, more than ever, it is essential that attention is paid to the health implications of *kayan mata* considering the rising trends of its usage.

As noted by Yidana et al. (2019), the use of aphrodisiac leads to health challenges including dizziness, headache, hypertension, restless to the unconsciousness, decrease in sex quality, priapism and in extreme case, coma. Yidana et al (2019) also observed that aphrodisiac users are likely to suffer from tachycardia and dizziness about Six (6) times than those who do not use aphrodisiac and these kinds of people are susceptible to a cardiovascular accident. Corroborating this finding, Ango et al (2021) in their study revealed that, few (14.2%) of the respondents reported some complications following use of the sexual stimulants including vaginal itching and vaginal discharge. The presence of these symptoms may not be unrelated to the fact that the substances could have been prepared through the most unhygienic processes.

Similar findings were documented in a study in Kano State by Umar and Jibril (2013) where (55%) and (16.5%) of their respondents were reported to have developed vaginal itching and vaginal discharge respectively after using the stimulants. They noted further that, up to (11.5%) and (7.7%) of the respondents developed lower abdominal pain and irregular menses respectively. These outcomes are in consonance with the findings of Abdullahi and Tukur, where (11.4%) and (5.9%) of the respondents were observed to have developed lower abdominal pain and irregular menses respectively. Since the pharmacological composition of these substances have not been ascertained, there is need for community education on the associated health risks of using sexual stimulants as some of them may have adverse effects on the organs of the body (Ango, et. al., 2021).

Ajayi and Adejuyigbe (2017) conducted a study among Nigerian women to assess the health effects of aphrodisiac use, including *kayan mata*. Their research revealed a high prevalence of adverse health outcomes among female users. Many reported experiencing severe headaches and dizziness, which had a detrimental impact on their overall well-being. These findings underscore the need for greater awareness of the potential health risks associated with aphrodisiacs among women. Kwame and Adwoa (2019) focused on the relationship between aphrodisiac use and cardiovascular events. They found that individuals who used aphrodisiacs, including traditional herbal preparations, were more susceptible to cardiovascular issues such as tachycardia. In some extreme cases, users experienced unconsciousness or coma. These findings underscore the health risks associated with aphrodisiac consumption, calling for increased monitoring and regulation of these products.

Conclusion

The utilization of *kayan mata* has sparked enduring debates both in the public space and within academic circles. The increasing prevalence of *kayan mata* among married women carries significant sociological implications, giving rise to discussions on topics like sexual intimacy, power dynamics, and sexual agency that influence both marital and non-marital relationships. In its traditional context, *kayan mata* serves the purpose of ensuring social stability by contributing to the happiness of couples in marriage. This holds particular importance in a conservative, predominantly Muslim environment where great emphasis is placed on maintaining stable and harmonious families. While *kayan mata* is not the sole determinant of marital stability, it plays a noteworthy role in achieving stability for many northern women. This cultural practice has deep roots and is easily passed down from one generation to the next, contributing to its sustained popularity.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings of the study the following recommendations suggest themselves for consideration:

- i. The potential risks of traditional aphrodisiacs considering the profound health impact it has on the quality of life for individuals and the overall well-being of society is not only a matter of individual but also a broader societal concern rooted in the recognition of a fundamental human right. To this end, there is an urgent need for strong collaboration between health professionals and herbal medical practitioners to study the pharmacological composition of the traditional sexual stimulants used by married women. This will help in determining the possible effect of these drugs not only on women sexuality but also on organs like kidney and liver in the short and long run.
- ii. Government and health care providers should come up with control measures for the practice of local or traditional medicine in Nigeria, thus, giving emphasis on ethical orientation. This is possible through developing guidelines for the practice of traditional medicine and facilitating the training, retraining and registration of traditional medical practitioners.
- iii. Maintaining good communication and foreplay should be a cardinal principle for all couples; as it may increase the level of sexual urge, enjoyment and satisfaction of the couples which could led to the underutilization of traditional aphrodisiacs.
- iv. There should be an effective counseling services on sexual relationship based on the religious and cultural teachings of the people of northern Nigeria. This should be done by Islamic teachers, parents, psychologists and even the medical practitioners. This is because the use of traditional aphrodisiacs by married women of the north especially young couples who are in their active reproductive age groups may fester. Therefore, religious seminars and sensitization programmes should be organized to educate the public about the implications of the uses of these substances.

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