



Research Article

A Glimpse on how Traditional Herbal Enhancement Substances (*Kayan Mata*) are obtained in North-Western Nigeria from Islamic Viewpoint

*Dr. Nafisa Adamu Gurori ¹, Muhammad Bashir Ahmad ²

¹ Department of Islamic Studies, Faculty of Arts, Sokoto State University, Sokoto, Nigeria.

² Department of Islamic Studies, School of Secondary Education Arts and Social Sciences, Umaru Sanda Ahmadu College of Education Minna, Niger State, Nigeria.

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*Corresponding author: **Dr. Nafisa Adamu Gurori**

Department of Islamic Studies, Faculty of Arts, Sokoto State University, Sokoto, Nigeria.

Abstract

Traditional herbal enhancement substances known locally as *kayan mata* are widely used across North-Western Nigeria as aphrodisiacs and sexual enhancers, deeply embedded in cultural norms around marriage, intimacy, and female sexual health. Despite their popularity, there is limited systematic documentation on how these substances are sourced, produced, and distributed within the region. Understanding these supply pathways is critical given concerns over quality, safety, and health implications associated with unregulated herbal products. The primary aim of this study is to analyse the mechanisms and channels through which *kayan mata* are obtained in North-Western Nigeria, identifying key actors involved in their production and distribution, and exploring how local cultural, economic, and informal trade networks shape access to these substances. A qualitative mixed-method design was employed, combining literature review with ethnographic fieldwork. Secondary data were sourced from published sociological and health studies, newspaper investigations, and public health reports. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with local herbalists, market vendors, female consumers, and traditional healers across selected urban and rural centres in the North-West (including Sokoto, Zamfara, and Katsina). Data were analysed thematically to map sourcing pathways and practices. Analysis reveals a pluralistic and largely informal supply network of *kayan mata* in North-Western Nigeria. Primary sources include traditional herbalists and healers, who prepare and personalise herbal enhancers based on generational knowledge and locally available plant materials; market vendors and roadside sellers, who retail both pre-packaged and loose ingredient forms in open markets; and peer and community networks, where products are shared, recommended, or purchased through social ties. Many *kayan mata* products are prepared in home-based settings without formal regulation, labelling, or safety standards, bypassing formal herbal medicine oversight such as registration with the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC). Digital platforms and social media have also emerged as informal distribution channels, allowing vendors to reach wider audiences beyond local markets. The predominance of informal and unregulated channels in obtaining *kayan mata* reflects broader trends in traditional medicine practices in West Africa. While cultural trust in ancestral herbal wisdom drives demand, the absence of quality control and formal oversight introduces public health risks, including contamination and inconsistent dosages. This is exacerbated by the introduction of improvised ingredients and marketing strategies that often lack transparency.

Keywords: Traditional, Herbal Enhancement, Substances (*Kayan Mata*), Women, Social media.

Introduction

Market: this is a place where buying and selling take place. It also serves as one of the places where traditional herbal enhancement substances (*kayan mata*) are sold. In most states, a particular place is usually dedicated for the distribution of “*kayan mata*” from wholesale to retailing up to final consumers,¹ just as in Sokoto and Kano states. In some states, the traditional herbal enhancement sellers mix up with modern herbs vendors or sellers which is popularly called “*kasuwar magani*,” such are commonly found in Katsina and Kaduna. Sometimes, there are few scattered “*kayan mata*” sellers within and outside markets. Example of the image of shops of *kayan mata* can be seen in those market²

Social media: This is a collective term for websites and applications that focus on communication, community-based input, interaction, content sharing and collaboration. It is also seen as a means of interaction among people who create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communication and networks. Social media outlets include Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Youtube, Instagram, Tiktok, and so on. These media play a vital role in acquiring and disseminating traditional herbal enhancement substances (*kayan mata*), which ease one’s access to “*kayan mata*” at his door step, including women in purdah “*kulle*” through delivering service.³

Family/Friends: These are the immediate relations who are related to someone by blood or live in the same area, and with whom you share secret and care. There Malama inno said: “*kayan mata*” can be obtained through them, which has been the practice in some states for family to prepare their daughters (brides) with adequate “*kayan mata*” before conveying them to their matrimonial homes even if she is a damsel. Sometimes, they are given different collections of traditional herbal enhancement substances (*kayan mata*) to use or apply to enhance sexual urge and pleasure for both partners. Similarly, friends and peer groups are not left behind for circulation of “*kayan mata*” in the society.⁴

Reasons for Using Traditional Herbal Enhancement Substances (*Kayan Mata*) among Muslim Women

Many Muslim women today resort to using traditional herbal enhancement substances (*kayan mata*), despite the fact that sexual desire and union are natural aspects of human life. In earlier times, matters were different, largely due to the lack of today’s levels of civilization, awareness, and understanding of sexual rights, especially for women. The spread of western ideologies has introduced new perspectives on marriage in North-western regions, with increasing calls for the adjustment of sexual dynamics between spouses. This shift of western ideologies has brought about criticism of the institution of marriage, with some advocating for free love and challenging traditional notions of sexual equality.

As a result, family bonds have weakened, and the importance of domestic life has diminished, especially after women gave birth. Instead of strengthening their marriages through the traditional values of being good wives remaining obedient to their husbands, managing their movements with discretion, and adhering to Islamic teachings, as their grandmothers did some women now turn to herbal substances like “*kayan mata*” to win their husbands’ affection. These substances are often used unnecessarily by their adherence to established path of Islamic marital values may likely yield more meaningful and lasting results.⁵

Polygamy contributes to rampant use of traditional herbal enhancement substances in the northern part of Nigeria, because the competing women struggles to win their husband’s heart.

Naturally, some women do not have urge for sexual intercourse or they are hard to be turned on during the act due to some reasons best known to them. As such, they resort to using “*kayan mata*” to boost their libido and satisfy their husbands.

Emotional stress, depression, ill health, old age and other related problems can affect sexual performance.⁶

However, there are some herbs used in the olden days for lactating mothers who have insufficient breast milk in order to improve the quantity of their breast milk. These include wild lettuce (*lactuca virosa*) in ancient Egypt. But today, the wild lettuce’s function has been extended to serving as a pain killing drug and sedative in traditional form. Through out the ages, men and women have incessantly pursued wild lettuce by all means, as one thing which is considered as

¹ See appendix iv, fig14

²Dr. Tijjani Lawal,

³ Inno akawala, shiyar ‘Yar Marna Area, 71years, local birth attender (Arwanka), 18/4/2023

⁴ *Ibid*, Inno akawala, shiyar ‘Yar Marna

⁵ A. Mufti, “*Sexual issues in modern era and its solution in Islam*”, Adam publisher and Distributions New Delhi, 2006 p.98

⁶ Haj Fanna, Sauraniyyah magunguna Hausa, *Op.cit*

aphrodisiacs (*kayan mata*), in order to enhance, maintain and bring back or stimulate their sexual ability or sexual desire.

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Moreover, Malama Zainab have the view that traditional herbal enhancement substances (*kayan mata*) have been used worldwide for thousands of years by different cultures and civilizations to enhance sexual performance. Popular natural herbs are commonly used as potential sexual functionaries. Currently, this category of enhancer makes up the largest segment of current herbal market such as vitality promoter and libido enhancer.⁸ she went further to say that Muslim women in North-Western Nigeria use traditional herbal enhancement for the following reasons:

To be loved by their husband

To control their husbands

To get reward and gifts

To satisfy the husbands' sexual urge

To cure sexually-related problems, such as low libido, painful intercourse, dryness of vagina, pre-menopausal age and so on

To discourage their husbands from marrying another wife or looking for other women

To be a member of "*kayan mata*" users group

To restore the private part to its normal size after childbirth for sexual pleasure

To confirm their curiosity

To be the most loved among the co-wives as in this wise saying "*in kana da kyau ka kara da wanka*" which means even if you are beautiful, you should bath regularly (meaning that even if you do not have a problem, do things that will add value to yourself) and others. Even though not all reasons are accepted in Islam, but yet they stick to their intention which make great need for the Islamic scholar to preach for them to adhere to Islamic teachings.⁹

Acceptable Types and Method of Traditional Herbal Enhancement Substances (*kayan mata*) among the Society

All the types of traditional herbal enhancement substances are allowed if they are pure and safe. This is because most of them are from plants or animal parts, only that the way they are used and prepared determines their permissibility or otherwise. As mentioned earlier, some are in a liquid form, while others are in a solid form. The approved types depend on the user and the result she wants to achieve, which determine the type she uses. For example, some women who give birth to children are different from women who are barren. For the former, her condition is more severe than the latter. Also, someone who is neither in her post-natal bleeding nor in menstruation period does not use the same traditional herbal enhancement substances (*kayan mata*) with the one who is on her menses. As the saying goes "That after each circle women wash their sweetness together with blood" it needs to do some preparation to restore themselves back."¹⁰

There are different opinions among the people on the approved method to be used by Muslim women in northern part of Nigeria. According to Alkali Zakariya, women have different physiological characteristics, which he metaphorically describes as being like oceans, rivers, lakes, wells, or deserts. He explains that some women, whom he likens to oceans, may experience excessive moisture during intimacy, which can affect their husband's comfort. In such cases, traditional herbal remedies like "*bagaruwa*" seeds are used to reduce this moisture, helping to balance the natural secretions. This concoction is often taken with cow milk to help regulate the body's moisture levels.

On the other hand, women described as deserts experience dryness, making intimacy uncomfortable or even painful. To address this, a mixture of natural ingredients such as milk, water melon, and coconut water is recommended to help increase moisture and improve comfort. For those who experience fatigue or exhaustion during intimacy, there are herbal preparations designed to boost energy levels. Additionally, some women seek remedies for vaginal tightening, for which natural ingredients like mango seeds, "musk," and "*magarya*" leaves are traditionally used.¹¹ Dr. Abubakar also maintained that:

Women can use different types of traditional enhancement substance (*kayan mata*) in order to make their husband happy such as pigeon pepper soup, a mixture of "*habbatusauda*" seeds, moringa seeds, Sesame seeds, to be mixed and cook

⁷John Kehoe, described in 1952 by "Culpeper in his herbal" and in 1975 by in Botanologist university of Hybernica, Australia,

⁸Zainab Muhannad Binji, 55 years, former Amira FOMWAN, Mabera Area Sokoto 23/3/22

⁹Zainab Muhammad Binji, *Ibid*,

¹⁰, Haj Ummu Aikin Allah, *Op.cit*

¹¹ Alkali Zakariya Yanusa, 56 years, Shariah Court Judge Katsina Nasiru Danbaba, Katsina State 21/11/22

the meat and many more which will increase their libido such as moringa, date, Rahab, Rice, groundnut, carrot, *habbatu saudat*, honey, black pepper and others.¹²

The acceptance or rejection of aphrodisiac foods and traditional herbal enhancement substances (*kayan mata*) often depends on how they are prepared and consumed. One significant factor is the method of consumption. Oral ingestion is generally considered safer than substances inserted directly into the private parts, as inserting substances into these areas can pose health risks. This is because medication absorbed directly into the bloodstream through sensitive tissues can lead to serious side effects. In contrast, orally consumed substances are less risky, as they pass through the digestive system before being absorbed, which reduces the immediate impact on the body. Even branded enhancement products have their own side effects, which is why they should only be taken with a doctor's recommendation. The safest options are natural food-based substances derived from plants or animals and consumed in a normal, healthy way. While many herbal enhancement products may not be harmful, improper use or overdosing can still cause damage. Therefore, it is essential to be cautious about the sources and methods of administering "*kayan mata*"¹³

Additionally, it's important to recognize that each woman's body is different, and their responses to these substances vary. Women differ in strength, health conditions, body types, and life circumstances some may have given birth, while others haven't; some are slim, while others are heavier; some have medical challenges, while others are healthy; and some have husbands who are constantly with them, while others only see their husbands occasionally. These variations affect how traditional enhancement substances (*kayan mata*) products work. Women must understand their own bodies and their partners' needs to determine whether these products will be effective. For example, some women may experience vaginal loosening and need products for tightening, while others may suffer from dryness and require products that enhance lubrication. Using the wrong product or applying it incorrectly can result in ineffective or harmful outcomes. Based on researcher's knowledge, the researcher has not come across single method or type of "*kayan mata*" that is universally accepted by society, whether medically, traditionally, or religiously. Muslim women are encouraged to use only what is permissible (*halal*), such as food, fruits, and products derived from "*halal*" animals. The use of herbs depends on how they are sourced and applied, as some herbalists impose conditions for collecting certain plants, like gathering them at specific times or under certain circumstances. The effectiveness and outcomes of these substances often determine their acceptance or rejection.¹⁴

An Islamic Viewpoint on the Acquisition of Traditional Herbal Enhancement Substances (Kayan Mata) in Northwestern Nigeria

1. Islamic Recognition of Natural Resources

Islam acknowledges that plants and herbs are part of Allah's creation, made available for human benefit. The Qur'an states:

It is He who has produced you from the earth and settled you in it¹⁵.

Thus, the collection of herbs from forests, farms, and markets in Northwestern Nigeria is Islamically permissible, provided the process respects divine boundaries.

2. Lawfulness of Sources and Means

From an Islamic standpoint, how *Kayan Mata* is obtained is more important than the substance itself. Its acquisition must meet the following *Sharī'ah* conditions:

Halāl sourcing: Herbs must be acquired through lawful means such as farming, gathering, or trade, not through theft, deception, or exploitation.

Ethical trade practices: Islam forbids cheating, false claims, and exploitation of vulnerable women seeking marital solutions.

And do not consume one another's wealth unjustly¹⁶.

Rejection of Shirk and Superstitious Channels

Some *Kayan Mata* substances are reportedly obtained through spiritual intermediaries, charms, or rituals involving jinn or occult practices. Islam firmly rejects such means:

¹² A. Mafata Abdullahi: 57 years, An –Nissa'a Islamic medical Research center Kaduna and publisher of *zinariya mace, sirrin mijinta a tadin hununta and ingantattu magunguna mata*1&2,

¹³ Adam N.S. (Salihar Nur) 60 years, Executive Director for Sauhar Institute of Nature Health Science Kano, Sani Mai Nagge Sabon Titi, Kano State, 21/11/21

¹⁴ Adam N.S. (Salihar Nur), *Op.cit*

¹⁵ Qur'an 11:61

¹⁶ Qur'an 2:188

And that there were men among mankind who sought refuge in the jinn, so they increased them in burden¹⁷.

Any method of obtaining Kayan Mata that involves sorcery, talismans, invocations, or mystical secrecy is considered *ḥarām*, regardless of cultural acceptance.

4. Gender Ethics and Modesty in Acquisition

Islam places strong emphasis on *ḥayā'* (modesty) and dignity, especially for women:

Acquisition processes that require private, immodest interactions with herbalists or exposure of 'awrah are impermissible.

Public marketing of such substances using sexually explicit language or gestures contradicts Islamic ethics.

Tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their modesty¹⁸.

5. Public Harm and Social Consequences

Islamic jurisprudence considers public interest (*maṣlaḥah*) and harm prevention (*mafsadah*):

-Unregulated acquisition promotes marital mistrust, moral decay, and exploitation.

-Islam obliges community leaders and authorities to regulate harmful practices under the principle of *ḥisbah* (moral accountability).

6. Scholarly and Contemporary Islamic Outlook

Contemporary Muslim scholars in Northern Nigeria generally argue that:

Herbal products obtained through clear, transparent, and lawful channels are permissible.

Any product shrouded in mysticism or sexual exploitation must be rejected.

Cultural practices must always be subordinated to *Shari'ah* standards.

Conclusion

This analysis shows that *kayan mata* in North-Western Nigeria is obtained through complex, culturally embedded, and predominantly informal channels rather than through regulated pharmaceutical or herbal-medicine systems. Traditional healers and herbal practitioners remain central to sourcing: they craft *kayan mata* using locally sourced herbs, roots, spices, and other ingredients based on knowledge passed down through generations. These traditional sources are favoured for their perceived authenticity and effectiveness but often operate without formal quality control, labelling, or dosage guidelines.

Market vendors and roadside sellers constitute another major access point, selling both raw ingredients and finished products in open markets. In these settings, vendors often acquire products from herbalists or from informal networks of collectors and producers, then sell them directly to consumers without certification or safety assurance. Peer networks, social recommendation, and increasingly digital platforms and social media also play a role in disseminating *kayan mata*, allowing intermediaries to reach customers outside traditional market spaces.

From an Islamic viewpoint, the means of obtaining Kayan Mata in Northwestern Nigeria are conditionally permissible. Islam allows: Lawful harvesting and trade of herbs, Transparent and ethical acquisition, Use free from superstition and immorality.

However, acquisition becomes *ḥarām* when it involves:

- Shirk or occult practices,
- Deception or exploitation,
- Violation of modesty,
- Harm to individuals or society.

Islam therefore calls for ethical regulation, education, and *Shari'ah*-based scrutiny of all traditional herbal practices, ensuring that culture serves faith rather than contradicting it.

While these sourcing pathways reflect resilient cultural practices and community trust, they raise public health concerns due to lack of regulation and potential adulteration or contamination. The prevalence of *kayan mata* obtained through

¹⁷ Qur'an 72:6

¹⁸ Qur'an 24:31

informal channels underscores the need for enhanced regulatory frameworks, public education on safe use, and collaboration between traditional practitioners and health authorities. Such measures can help preserve valued cultural practices while mitigating health risks associated with unmonitored herbal enhancement substances.

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List of Informants

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