BMJ Open

Exploring the association between khat use and psychiatric symptoms: a systematic review

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To cite: Edwards B, Atkins N. Exploring the association between khat use and psychiatric symptoms: a systematic review. *BMJ Open* 2022;**12**:e061865. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2022-061865

► Prepublication history and additional supplemental material for this paper are available online. To view these files, please visit the journal online (http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2022-061865).

Received 10 February 2022
Accepted 05 July 2022

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ABSTRACT

Objectives Consumption of the drug khat is high across East Africa and the South-Western Arabian Peninsula despite evidence for its adverse psychiatric effects. This systematic review aims to explore cross-sectional research in the field to determine the strength of the association between khat use and psychiatric symptoms

Methods Six databases were searched in October 2021—Ovid Medline, Embase, APA PsycINFO, CINAHL, Scopus and Proquest—using the following search terms: "khat" OR "qat" OR "qaad" OR "catha" OR "miraa" OR "mairungi" AND "depression" OR "anxiety" OR "mania" OR "psych*" OR "schiz*" OR "mental" OR "hallucinations" OR "delusions" OR "bipolar". Eligible studies were cross-sectional studies of any population or setting comparing the prevalence of psychiatric symptoms in long term or dependent khat users with non-users. The quality of each study was appraised by the Newcastle-Ottawa scale. A meta-analysis was planned using a random effects model to produce an OR with 95% CIs—using the Mantel-Haenszel method—alongside an I^2 statistic to represent heterogeneity. The quality of this meta-analysis was appraised using the Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development and Evaluations (GRADE) scoring system.

Results 35 studies were eligible for inclusion (total participants=31 893), spanning 5 countries (Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, UK). Meta-analysis suggests that khat use is associated with an 122% increased prevalence of psychiatric symptoms (OR 2.22, 95% CIs 1.76 to 2.79, p<0.00001, GRADE score: 'very low').

Conclusions The high heterogeneity of the meta-analysis is likely due to the wide variation between the studies within the evidence base. To perform a more accurate systematic review, further primary studies are needed with standardised measurements of variables, particularly khat consumption.

PROSPERO registration number CRD42020224510.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

⇒ Follows all guidelines listed in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses 2020 Checklist for systematic reviews.
⇒ Searches published and unpublished literature using search terms that include all commonly-used variations of 'khat' from around the world.
⇒ Includes both dependent and non-dependent khat use due to poor definitions of khat usage in primary research studies.
⇒ Includes both psychiatric symptoms and psychiatric disorders.

INTRODUCTION

The stimulant drug khat consists of the buds and leaves of the plant *Catha edulis*, an evergreen shrub highly prevalent in East Africa and the South-Western Arabian Peninsula.[1 2] Ethiopia is the world's largest exporter of khat, however, its consumption is highest in Yemen where up to 90% of adult males and 50% of adult females chew khat for 3–4 hours per day.[3–5] Within its local regions, khat chewing has been a cultural tradition for many generations and is thought to increase sociability, concentration, energy and spirituality.[2 6 7]

Psychiatric symptoms have been recognised as a consequence of khat use for several decades.[8 9] Milder psychological consequences related to its use include anxiety, restlessness, insomnia and dysphoric mood, all of which can reduce quality of life.[2 8–11] More severe psychological harms associated with its use include psychosis and depression, which in some cases have resulted in acts of suicide and homocide.[8–11] Users most at risk of these sequelae are those abusing larger amounts of khat—some studies have provided evidence for a dose-dependent relationship—and those with pre-existing psychiatric disorders.[8–10]

The evidence base exploring the association between khat use and psychiatric symptoms—which consists mostly of cross-sectional studies—is currently small and insufficient.[12] Studies often vary in terms of populations and regions studied, measurement of khat use, symptoms explored and quality of methodology. Hence, results can be inconsistent, making it difficult for academics, policymakers and the public to understand the psychiatric risks of khat consumption. This systematic review aims to investigate the strength of the association between khat use

and psychiatric symptoms by collating the evidence we have so far, in order to guide further research in the field and to evaluate the need for any potential interventions for khat users, for example, increased education about potential psychiatric side effects.

METHODS

The protocol for this systematic review can be found on Prospero, with registration number CRD42020224510.[13] Originally, this systematic review had two objectives: to investigate the strength of the association between khat use and psychiatric symptoms, and secondly to investigate the role of trauma within this relationship. Due to the vast amount of literature in the field, the second objective was removed from the protocol to ensure that the findings would be suitable for one single review. It is recommended that a follow-up review should be conducted exploring the role of trauma.

This review followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines at all times.[14]

Patient and public involvement

No members of the public or patients were involved in the design of this systematic review.

Literature search

A literature search was carried out independently by authors BE and NA in October 2021 using the following search terms:

"khat" OR "qat" OR "qaad" OR "catha" OR "miraa" OR "mairungi"

AND

"depression" OR "anxiety" OR "mania" OR "psych*" OR "schiz*" OR "mental" OR "hallucinations" OR "delusions" OR "bipolar"

These search terms encompassed all previously reported psychiatric symptoms associated with khat, and included all predominant cultural variations of the term 'khat' as identified by the Medical Subject Headings Thesaurus.[15] Advice was provided by the library team at the University of Birmingham. Note that studies surrounding suicidality were excluded, as suicidality is often but not always associated with psychiatric dysfunction.[16] Disagreements between the authors were discussed in person. Removal of duplicates was automated for the databases Ovid MEDLINE, Embase and APA PsycINFO, and was performed manually for the remaining databases.

Six electronic databases were searched. Five of these were databases of published literature: Ovid MEDLINE, Embase, APA PsycINFO, CINAHL and Scopus. Additionally, Proquest was searched to obtain any relevant grey or unpublished literature. The full search strategy for each database can be found in online supplemental material 1.

Study eligibility

The literature search used the following inclusion criteria:

- Population: adults (aged 18+).
- Exposure: long-term or dependent khat use.
- Comparator: no khat use or non-dependent khat use*.
- Outcome: prevalence of psychiatric symptoms in khat users and prevalence of psychiatric symptoms in non-users.
- Study design: cross-sectional studies; note that mixed-method studies are considered eligible but only the cross-sectional data will be considered for the review.
- Language: all.
- Publication type: must be a complete study but no restriction on publication status.
- Setting: all.
- Date of publication: all.

Each potentially eligible study was compared with a checklist of the above criteria to determine whether or not it should be included within the review.

*Note that non-dependent khat use was only considered a suitable comparator for studies where the exposure group were dependent khat-users, where both dependence and non-dependence were validated by a recognised tool such as the Severity of Dependence Scale.

The literature search used the following exclusion criteria:

- Population: children, animals.
- Exposure: substance abuse other than khat.
- Comparator: 'substance users' where khat use is not specifically described.
- Outcome: neurobehavioural processes, withdrawal symptoms, suicide, substance use disorders.
- Study design: any study design other than cross-sectional, for example, case control, randomised controlled trial, case report, review.
- Language: no exclusion criteria.
- Publication type: unfinished studies including abstract only, conference abstracts, letters, retracted articles, book chapters.
- Setting: no exclusion criteria.

Data collection and quality assessment

A summary of findings table—see online supplemental material 2—was created to present the following study features: population, sample, criteria for 'khat user', psychiatric measure, effect estimate. In addition, the quality of each primary study (e.g., risk of bias due to inadequate reporting methods or missing data) was assessed using the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale (see online supplemental material 3).[17 18] Data were collected manually by both authors independently, with any disagreements between the independent assessments resolved by discussion.

Synthesis of findings

The prevalence of khat-users and non-users with psychiatric symptoms from each study was entered into a meta-analysis using the software Revman, provided by the Cochrane organisation. After inputting all dichotomous

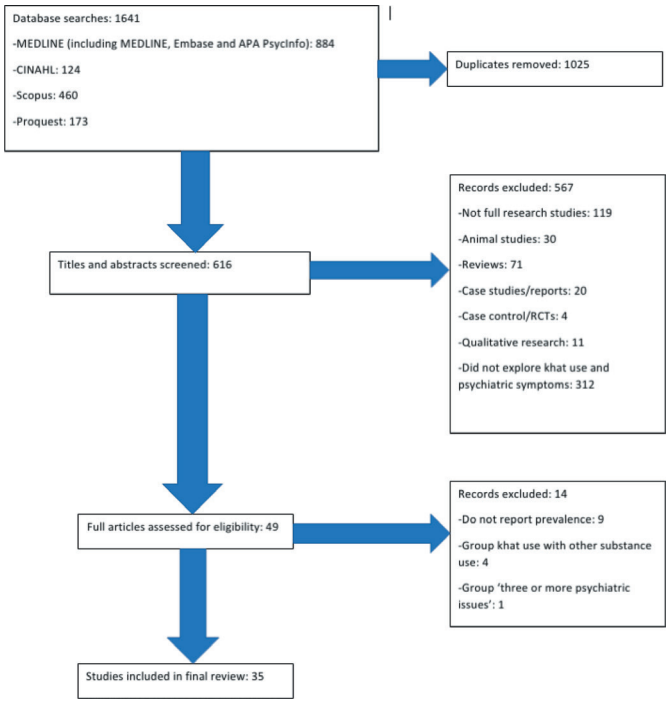

Figure 1 PRISMA flow chart of included and excluded studies. PRISMA, Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses.

values, this software created a forest plot of ORs, each with 95% CIs, using the Mantel-Haenszel method.[19] A random effects model was used as this assumes that the outcome is normally distributed, hence attributing the differences between studies to both chance and genuine variation.[19] An I^2 statistic was given to indicate variability between studies, as this is again recommended by the Cochrane organisation.[20]

A subgroup analysis was also included, grouping studies investigating similar symptoms. An OR and I^2 statistic was provided for each subgroup, as well as a χ^2 test and p value for overall subgroup differences.

A sensitivity analysis was conducted to look for any studies that are prominent outliers. Each study was removed from the meta-analysis one at a time, and the OR, 95% CIs, I^2 value and p value reported within a table.

The quality of the meta-analysis was evaluated using the GRADE (Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development and Evaluations) framework.[21]

RESULTS

Included and excluded studies

The PRISMA flow chart in figure 1 shows the number of studies included and excluded at each stage of the literature search.[14] When searching the relevant databases, 1641 results were found that included the relevant terms within their title or abstract. After removing duplicates, this number was reduced to 616.

Each title and abstract were screened, and 567 results were removed for the following reasons:

- One hundred and nineteen were not research studies, for example, these included conference abstracts, letters, and newspaper/magazine articles.
- Thirty were animal studies.
- Seventy-one were reviews, including systematic reviews and meta-analyses.
- Twenty were case studies or case reports.
- Four were case–control studies or randomised controlled trials.
- Eleven were qualitative studies.
- A total of 312 did not explore the relationship between khat use and psychiatric symptoms.

Forty-nine studies were read in full in order to determine their eligibility. Of these, 14 were excluded for the following reasons:

- Nine explored both khat use and psychiatric symptoms but not their prevalence.[22–30]
- Four did not report khat-use alone, and instead reported substance use or equivalent.[31–34]
- One only reported the prevalence of khat use alongside 'three or more psychiatric issues'.[10]

Thirty-five studies were included in the final review.[7 35–68]

Summary of included studies

The summary of findings table—online supplemental material 2—contains the effect estimates of each individual study, alongside each study's characteristics (ie, target population, sample and methods of measuring khat use and psychiatric symptoms).

A subsequent table—online supplemental material 3—provides information regarding the quality of each primary study, assessed using the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale.[17 18] According to Mekuriaw *et al*, a score of 5/10 indicates a medium-quality study while a score of 6/10 indicates a high-quality study.[69] In this systematic review, the average quality score was 6.8, with a range of 4–8. No issues due to missing data arose.

Symptoms explored within included studies

The included studies explored a range of symptoms in association with khat usage. These have been grouped into the following subgroups:

- Twelve studies explored symptoms of 'depression'; this subgroup includes 'depressive symptoms', 'feeling depressed', diagnoses of depression, and the presence of 'depressive episodes' within the last month.
- Six studies explored symptoms of' anxiety'; this subgroup includes 'feeling anxious', 'obsession–compulsion', 'phobic anxiety' and diagnoses of anxiety disorders.
- Sixteen studies explored symptoms of 'psychological distress'; this subgroup includes 'psychological stress', 'psychological distress', 'mental distress' and 'stress'.
- Six studies explored symptoms of psychotic disorders; this subgroup includes 'psychotic symptoms', 'psychosis', 'paranoid ideation', 'psychoticism' and diagnoses of 'schizophrenia'.
- One study explored psychopathy.

- Five studies explored unspecified psychiatric symptoms and disorders; this subgroup includes 'common mental disorders', 'psychiatric dysfunction', 'mental illness' and 'mental problems that prevent employment or household tasks'.
- No studies explored bipolar disorder or mania.

Meta-analysis

The meta-analysis of the 35 included studies can be seen in figure 2. This meta-analysis suggests that khat use is associated with an 122% increased prevalence of psychiatric symptoms (OR 2.22, 95% CIs 1.76 to 2.79, p<0.00001). All but one of the 35 studies were scored as at least medium or high-quality when assessed using the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale; the remaining study scored 4/10—where 5/10 is medium quality—and had a very small weighting within the meta-analysis of 1.5%. The heterogeneity of this meta-analysis is 92%, which is classified as high.[20 21]

Subgroup analysis

The accompanying subgroup analysis—grouping studies investigating similar symptoms—shows that there is a statistically significant subgroup effect of p=0.04; usually, a p value of less than 0.1 is regarded as a statistically significant subgroup effect.[70] This means that khat use has a varying association with the symptoms investigated.

The largest association found is between khat use and symptoms of psychological distress (OR 2.56, 95% CIs 1.82 to 3.61, p<0.00001). A higher OR can be found in the psychopathology category (OR 6.10, 95% CIs 2.81 to 13.28), but as this is only composed of one single study this has not been considered as a subgroup.

The two subgroups of symptoms with the lowest ORs are anxiety (OR 1.68, 95% CIs 0.93 to 3.04) and psychotic symptoms/disorders (OR 1.47, 95% CIs 0.93 to 2.30). As the CIs cross the null value in both of these subgroups, this meta-analysis suggests that neither anxiety nor psychotic symptoms are associated with khat use.

Every subgroup has at least five studies to support it, a reasonable amount of supporting evidence. Most of these subgroups have a high level of heterogeneity, apart from the subgroup of unspecified psychiatric symptoms/disorders, which has a heterogeneity of 0%. Note that while psychopathology has been listed as a separate symptom, it is not to be considered as a subgroup as only one study investigated this.

Sensitivity analysis

A sensitivity analysis of the meta-analysis data was conducted and can be seen in online supplemental material 4. Each study was removed in turn and the OR, confidence intervals, I^2 value and p value recorded. Removing the depression data from Wondemagegn *et al*[55] caused the largest change in OR, from 2.22 to 2.11. The I^2 value for heterogeneity remained at 91% or 92% regardless of which study was removed, and the p value was always <0.00001.

GRADE analysis

The meta-analysis shown in figure 2 received a GRADE score of 'very low'.[21] As per guidance in the GRADE handbook, the score automatically started as 'low', because the meta-analysis focuses on observational studies.[21] The score was then downgraded for the following two reasons: 'inconsistency of results' demonstrated by the high I^2 statistic, and 'indirectness of evidence' due to the differences between studies including populations investigated and methods of measuring khat use.[21] The score was not downgraded for publication bias, as despite occasional outliers, overall the funnel plot for the included studies was fairly symmetrical (see figure 3).

DISCUSSION

Our findings suggest that khat use is associated with a 122% increased prevalence in overall psychiatric symptoms (OR 2.22, 95% CIs 1.76 to 2.79, p<0.00001). Subgroup analyses suggest thats suggests that the strongest relationship is between khat use and psychological distress (OR 2.56, 95% CIs 1.82 to 3.61, p<0.00001). Subgroup analyses also found that the associations between khat use and anxiety, and khat use and psychotic symptoms/disorders is statistically insignificant (OR 1.68, 95% CIs 0.93 to 3.04 and OR=1.47, 95% CIs 0.93 to 2.30, respectively).

The overall prevalence of psychiatric symptoms and disorders within this systematic review is 29%. Most of the included studies were conducted in Africa, which the WHO estimates has a 5.5% prevalence of common mental disorders.[71] The prevalence of symptoms is higher in this review than expected, as many of the studies focus on populations with an increased risk of mental illness, for example, students, migrants, combatants, refugees, prisoners and psychiatric outpatients.[72–76]

This review has a strong, high-quality methodology, following all of the PRISMA guidelines for systematic reviews.[14] However, it can be argued that the evidence base surrounding khat use and psychiatric symptoms is too small to merit the pooling of data. This is reflected in the high heterogeneity of the meta-analysis conducted (I^2=92%), which suggests that the studies analysed may be too different to meaningfully compare[20]; these differences are likely to include the wide variety of populations and regions studies, the differences in khat consumption measurement, and the differences in psychiatric symptom explored. It is also reflected in the low GRADE score of the meta-analysis, however, this scoring system favours experimental rather than observational data, which would be both pragmatically and ethically inappropriate when investigating substance use.[77]

Despite these concerns, this review is important as it is currently the largest systematic review of khat usage and psychiatric symptoms. A 122% increase in psychiatric symptoms is easy for laypersons to understand, eliminating their need to evaluate various studies of varying quality against each other. Furthermore, the issues highlighted by this review are important for guiding further research.

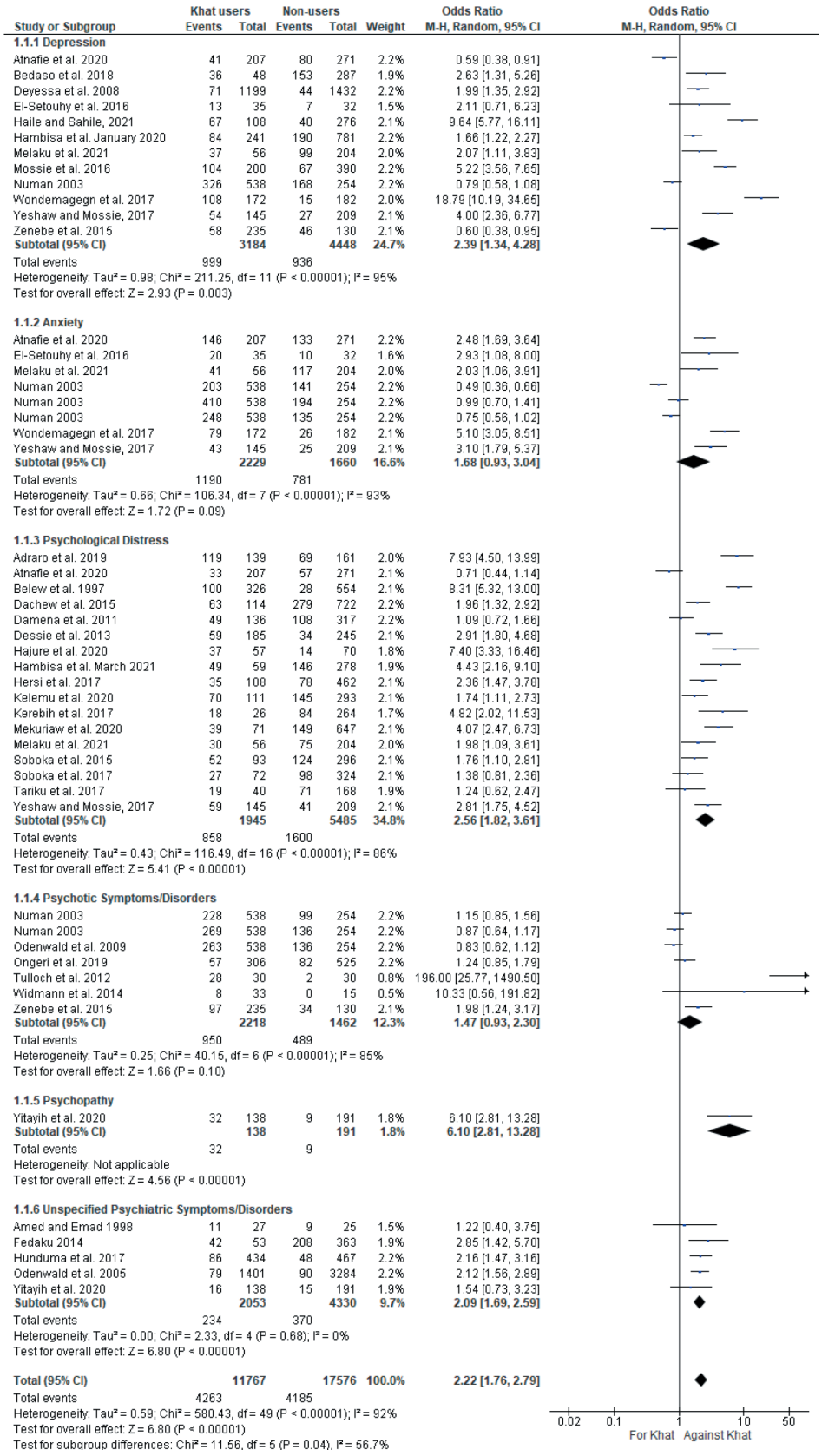

Figure 2 Meta-analysis of included studies. M-H, Mantel-Haenszel.

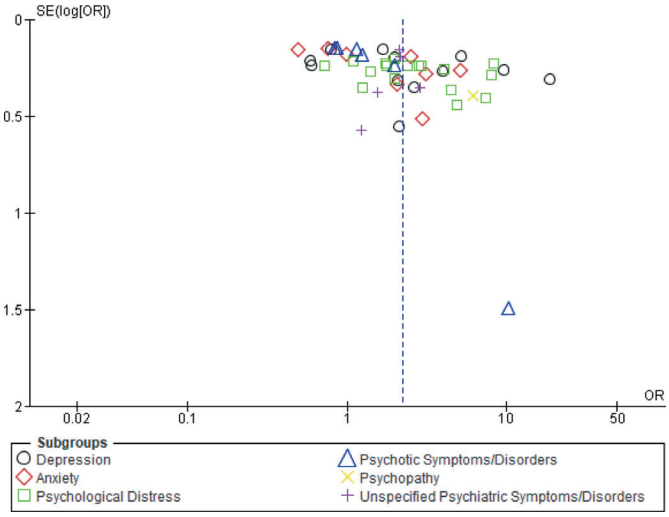

Figure 3 Funnel plot of included studies.

While the results provided by this review are unlikely to be entirely accurate, they can provide a valid estimate until the evidence base expands enough to provide a systematic review with much lower heterogeneity.

One issue in particular is the variation in measuring khat consumption between studies. This review is limited as it has included both non-dependent and dependent khat use, which are likely to have varying association with psychiatric symptoms. Many studies simply described khat users as those who had chewed within the previous week or previous month, hence it was often difficult to distinguish between current users, long-term users and dependent users. This likely contributes to the high heterogeneity of the meta-analysis of this review, and should be considered in future primary and secondary research within this field.

Another limitation of this review is that it includes both psychiatric symptoms and psychiatric disorders under the term 'psychiatric symptoms'. Out of the 35 included studies, 28 measured psychiatric symptoms using screening tools, 5 measured psychiatric disorders using diagnostic tools and 2 used a mixture of both screening and diagnostic tools. This may also have contributed to the high heterogeneity of the meta-analysis.

One final limitation of this review is that it cannot demonstrate causation between the two variables. It would be useful for future research to include cohort studies. Many researchers hypothesise that khat use is the cause of psychiatric symptoms, with its active ingredients distorting the brain's cytoarchitecture and, therefore, increasing one's vulnerability to mental illness.[78–80] Contrastingly, other researchers suggest that those with mental illness are more likely to chew khat as an attempt to self-medicate their symptoms.[81] Long-term cohort studies would be able to assess which variable predisposes the other, monitor psychiatric symptoms that take time to manifest, and investigate how the prevalence of psychiatric symptoms changes as the duration of khat use increases.

CONCLUSIONS

This review combines 35 cross-sectional studies in the field of khat use, and using meta-analysis suggests that khat use is associated with a 122% increase in the prevalence of psychiatric symptoms, particularly psychiatric distress. The high heterogeneity of the meta-analysis is likely due to the wide variation between the studies within the evidence base. To perform a more accurate systematic review, further primary studies are needed with standardised measurements of variables, particularly khat consumption. Furthermore, the evidence base is unclear about causality within this relationship, another important focus for future research.

Acknowledgements The authors would like to acknowledge Dr Keith Brain (University of Birmingham) who originally suggested the topic idea, and Dr Jesse Young (University of Melbourne) for his feedback and enthusiasm towards the project. The authors would also like to thank the library team at the University of Birmingham for their help with the literature search. Finally, the authors would like to thank the Leslie James Topham fund (University of Birmingham Medical School) for providing funding towards living costs while this research was conducted.

Contributors BE planned the review and created the protocol. BE and NA completed the independent literature searches and created the summary of findings table. BE completed the meta-analyses including the sensitivity analysis. BE and NA independently assessed the quality of the included studies using the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale, and BE completed the GRADE scoring. BE wrote the systematic review and acts as the guarantor for this paper.

Funding The authors have not declared a specific grant for this research from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Competing interests None declared.

Patient and public involvement Patients and/or the public were not involved in the design, or conduct, or reporting, or dissemination plans of this research.

Patient consent for publication Not applicable.

Ethics approval Ethical approval was not necessary as only secondary data were used.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

Data availability statement Data sharing not applicable as no datasets generated and/or analysed for this study.

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Supplementary Material 1: Search strategies

Ovid MEDLINE, Embase and APA PsycInfo	**Search Strategy**
#1	Khat.ab or khat.ti or qat.ab or qat.ti or qaad.ab or qaad.ti or catha.ab or catha.ti or miraa.ab or miraa.ti or mairungi.ab or mairungi.ti
#2	Depression.ab or depression.ti or anxiety.ab or anxiety.ti or bipolar.ab or bipolar.ti or mania.ab or mania.ti or psych*.ab or psych*.ti or schiz*.ab or schiz*.ti or mental.ab or mental.ti or hallucinations.ab or hallucinations.ti or delusions.ab or delusions.ti
#3	1 and 2
CINAHL	
#1	TI khat OR AB khat OR TI qat OR AB qat OR TI qaad OR AB qaad OR TI catha OR AB catha OR TI miraa OR AB miraa OR TI mairungi OR AB mairungi
#2	TI depression OR AB depression OR TI anxiety OR AB anxiety OR TI bipolar OR AB bipolar OR TI mania OR AB mania OR TI psych* OR AB psych* OR TI schiz* OR AB schiz*
#3	TI mental OR AB mental OR TI hallucinations OR AB hallucinations OR TI delusions OR AB delusions
#4	2 OR 3
#5	1 AND 4
Scopus	
#1	(TITLE (khat) OR ABS (khat) OR TITLE (qat) OR ABS (qat) OR TITLE (qaad) OR ABS (qaad) OR TITLE (catha) OR ABS (catha) OR TITLE (miraa) OR ABS (miraa) OR TITLE (mairungi) OR ABS (mairungi))
#2	(TITLE (depression) OR ABS (depression) OR TITLE (anxiety) OR ABS (anxiety) OR TITLE (bipolar) OR ABS (bipolar) OR TITLE (mania) OR ABS (mania) OR TITLE (psych*) OR ABS (psych*) OR TITLE (schiz*) OR ABS (schiz*) OR TITLE (mental) OR ABS (mental) OR TITLE (hallucinations) OR ABS (hallucinations) OR TITLE (delusions) OR ABS (delusions))

#3	1 AND 2
Proquest	
#1	ab(khat) OR ti(khat) OR ab(qat) OR ti(qat) OR ab(qaad) OR ti(qaad) OR ab(catha) OR ti(catha) OR ab(miraa) OR ti(miraa)
#2	ab(mairungi) OR ti(mairungi)
#3	ab(depression) OR ti(depression) OR ab(anxiety) OR ti(anxiety) OR ab(bipolar) OR ti(bipolar) OR ab(mania) OR ti(mania) OR ab(psych*) OR ti(psych*)
#4	ab(schiz*) OR ti(schiz*) OR ab(mental) OR ti(mental) OR ab(hallucinations) OR ti(hallucinations) OR ab(delusions) OR ti(delusions)
#5	1 OR 2
#6	3 OR 4
#7	5 AND 6 (limit: full texts only)

Supplementary Material 2: Summary of Findings Table

Study	**Population**	**Sample**	**Criteria for 'Khat User'**	**Psychiatric Measure***	**Results**
Ahmed and Emad 1998 [35]	Somali immigrants living in Liverpool	Convenience sample of 52 Khat users = 27	Unspecified	GHQ-28	- 11/27 khat users experienced psychiatric dysfunction, compared to 9/25 non-users (p=0.72)
Belew et al. 2000 [36]	Individuals aged 15+ from a specified community in Ethiopia	Random sample of 1200 participants Khat users = 326	Anyone who has chewed khat within the last 30 days	SRQ	- 100/326 khat-users experienced mental distress, compared to 28/554 non-users (OR = 8.31, 5.20-13.31, p=0.00) - 89/294 long-term users (over 2 years) experienced mental distress, compared to 28/554 never-users (OR = 8.14, 5.06-13.17, p=0.00)
Numan 2003 [37]	Yemeni population	Random sample of 800 participants Khat users = 67.9%	Frequent use – 4-6 days a week Heavy use – use everyday	SCL-90	- No significant differences (at p<0.05) in psychiatric symptoms: obsession-compulsion, depression, anxiety, paranoid ideation, psychoticism - Khat users had less phobic anxiety (37.7% vs 55.5%, p<0.05)
Odenwald et al. 2005 [38]	'General population' of Somalia	Random sample of 4854 Khat users = 78% of those with psychiatric issues, 4% of those without	Number of bundles in previous week recorded	CIDI, PANSS	- More positive screened individuals (mental problems severe enough to prevent employment or household tasks) chewed khat than negative screened individuals (46.6% vs 29.9%, p<0.001)
Deyessa et al. 2008 [39]	Women of reproductive age in rural Ethiopia	Random sample of 3200 Khat users = 40%	At least once per week	CIDI, ICD-10	- 5.9% of regular users had had a depressive episode in the last 12 months, compared to 3.1% of non-regular users (less than once per month) and 3.6% of non-users - AOR for regular vs non-users is 1.35 (0.92-1.99)

Odenwald et al. 2009 [40]	Armed combatants in Somali	8124 armed individuals (not random as still in conflict at time of study) Khat users = 36.4%	Anyone who has chewed khat within the last week	CIDI	- 8.9% of khat users experienced paranoid ideation compared to 2.6% of non-users
Damena et al. 2011 [41]	Adults in Jimma City, Ethiopia	Random sample of 1308 Khat users = 38%	Uses WHO-validated substance abuse questionnaire, but unsure what is classified as 'khat user'	SRQ-20	- 49/136 long-term khat chewers experienced mental distress, compared to 108/317 short-term khat chewers (less than two years), and 153/747 non-users
Tulloch et al. 2012 [42]	Adult Somali khat users living in South London	Secondary data based on 172 eligible Somali mental health patients Khat users = 47%	Anyone who has chewed khat within the last year	Diagnosis provided by service records	- 28/30 khat users experienced psychosis compared to 2/30 non-users ($p<0.001$)
Dessie et al. 2013 [43]	Students in Ethiopia	Random sample of 413 Khat users = 43%	Anyone who has ever used khat	SRQ-20	- 59/185 khat users experienced mental distress compared to 34/245 non-users (AOR = 2.23, 1.14-4.35, $p<0.05$)
Fekadu 2014 [44]	Holy water users from Entoto St Mary Church, Ethiopia	409 individuals selected using systematic random sampling Daily khat users = 12.7%	Khat use recorded as 'never' or 'daily', although no indication of the duration of daily usage	BPRS	- 42/53 daily khat-users experienced symptoms of mental illness compared to 208/363 non-users (AOR = 2.85, 1.42-5.70)
Widmann et al. 2014 [7]	Male Somali refugees living in a disadvantaged	Convenience sample of 33 users and 15 comparable non-users	SDS	CIDI, MINI	- 24% of khat users had psychotic symptoms compared to 0% of non-chewers ($p=0.044$)

	urban settlement in Kenya	Khat users = 69%			
Dachew et al. 2015 [45]	Undergraduate students from Gondar University, Ethiopia	872 patients selected using stratified, random sampling Current khat users = 16%	Questionnaire identifying 'current use'	SRQ-20	- 63/114 current khat users had mental distress, compared to 279/722 non-users (OR=1.96, 1.32-2.92, p=0.02)
Soboka et al. 2015 [46]	HIV patients at a specified facility in South West Ethiopia	All eligible adults invited to participate Sample of 389 Khat users = 93	Anyone who has chewed khat within the last month	K-6	- 52/93 khat-users experienced psychological distress, compared to 124/296 non-users (OR = 1.76, 1.10-2.82)
Zenebe et al. 2015 [47]	Psychiatric outpatients in Ethiopia	365 adult psychiatric outpatients of a specified hospital within 2-week study period Khat use = 64.4%	Anyone who has used khat within the last 30 days	Psychiatric diagnosis from psychiatric records	- 58/235 khat users had a major depressive disorder compared to 46/130 non-users (AOR = 1.43, 0.74-2.77) - 97/235 khat users had schizophrenia compared to 34/130 non-users (AOR = 0.87, 0.45-1.68)
El-Setouhy et al. 2016 [48]	Jazan region of Saudi Arabia	Volunteer sample of 70 males Khat dependent = 52.2%	SDS	Q16	- 13/35 dependent users felt depressed compared to 7/32 non-dependent users (OR = 2.30, 0.7-6.8) - 20/35 dependent users felt anxious compared to 10/32 non-dependent users (OR = 3.50, 1.2-10.0)
Hersi et al. 2017 [49]	Students in Somaliland	Stratified random sample of 570 Khat users = 19%	Use in last 12 months	SRQ-20	- 32% of khat users experienced psychological distress, compared to 17% of non-users (AOR = 2.87, 1.26-6.56)
Hunduma et al. 2017 [50]	Adults in Ethiopia	Random sample of 968 Khat users = 48%	Khat use in last 3 months	SRQ-20	- 86/434 khat users had a common mental disorder, compared to 48/467 non-users (OR = 2.16, 1.47-3.16)

Kerebih et al. 2017 [51]	Medical students in Ethiopia	Stratified random sample of 305 Khat users = 9%	Anyone who has ever used khat	SRQ-20	- 18/26 khat users experienced mental distress compared to 84/264 non-users (AOR = 6.91, 1.88-25.42, p=0.004)
Mossie et al. 2016 [52]	Adults in Ethiopia	Random sample of 650 Khat users = 34%	Khat use within the last 30 days	BDI	- 104/200 khat users had depression compared to 67/390 non-users (AOR = 10.07, 5.56-18.25)
Soboka et al. 2017 [53]	Adults with hypertension at a specified clinic in South West Ethiopia	All eligible adults invited to participate Sample of 396 Khat users = 79	Anyone who has chewed khat within the last month	K-6	- 27/72 current khat-users experienced psychological distress, compared to 98/324 non-users
Tariku et al. 2017 [54]	Students at a health sciences college in Ethiopia	Stratified random sample of 317 Khat users = 13%	Anyone who has ever used khat	Not specified	- 19/40 khat users experienced mental distress compared to 71/168 non-users (AOR = 2.29, 1.04-5.04)
Wondemagegn et al. 2017 [55]	Adolescents and adults in Nekemte town, West Ethiopia	Random sample of 359 participants Khat users = 49%	Anyone who has chewed khat within the last 30 days	DSM-IV	- 108/172 users experienced depression compared to 15/182 non-users (AOR = 25.36, 12.13-53.05, p=0.000) - 79/172 users experienced anxiety compared to 26/182 non-users (AOR = 5.49, 3.04-9.96, p=0.000)
Yeshaw and Mossie 2017 [56]	Staff of Jimma University, Ethiopia	Random sample of 363 Khat users = 41%	Anyone who has ever used khat	DASS-21	- 54/145 khat users had depression compared to 27/209 non-users (AOR = 4.99, 2.57-9.69) - 43/145 khat users had anxiety compared to 25/209 non-users (AOR = 2.94, 1.52-5.66) - 59/145 khat users had psychological stress compared to 41/209 non-users (AOR = 2.78, 1.49-5.21)
Bedaso et al. 2018 [57]	Prisoners in Ethiopia	Random sample of 335 Khat users = 14%	Unspecified, but appears to be chewing khat before incarceration	PHQ-9	- 36/48 khat users had depression, compared to 153/287 non-users (AOR = 2.48, 1.05-5.86, p=0.039)
Adraro et al. 2019 [58]	Prisoners in Ethiopia	Random sample of 300 Khat users = 46%	Anyone who has ever used khat	SRQ-20	- 119/139 khat users experienced mental distress, compared to 69/161 non-users (AOR = 4.33, 2.02-9.27, p<0.001)

Ongeri et al. 2019 [59]	Khat-growing regions of Kenya	Random sample of 831 individuals aged 10+ Khat users = 36.8%	Unspecified	PSQ	- 18.6% of khat users experienced at least one psychotic symptom compared to 15.6% of non-users (p=0.26)
Atnafie et al. 2020 [60]	Khat chewers in Amhara region of Ethiopia	Convenience sample of 508 participants Khat dependent = 43%	SDS	DASS-21	- 33/207 khat-dependent users experienced stress compared to 57/271 non-dependent users (AOR = 1.70, 0.98-2.95) - 146/207 khat-dependent users experienced anxiety compared to 133/271 non-dependent users (AOR = 2.47, 1.57-3.81) - 41/207 khat-dependent users experienced depression compared to 80/271 non-users (AOR = 6.28, 1.67-23.61)
Hajure et al. 2020 [61]	Healthcare providers in Ethiopia	Convenience sample of 127 Khat users = 45%	Khat use in last three months	IES-R	- 37/57 khat users experienced psychological stress, compared to 14/70 non-users (AOR = 5.74, 1.83-18.1, p<0.001)
Hambisa et al. 2020 [62]	Students in Ethiopia	Random sample of 1022 Khat users = 24%	Khat use within last month	BDI	- 84/241 khat users had depressive symptoms compared to 190/781 non-users (OR = 1.60, 1.22-2.27)
Kelemu et al. 2020 [63]	Students in Ethiopia	Random sample of 404 Khat users = 27%	Anyone who has ever used khat	SRQ-20	- 70/111 khat users experienced mental distress, compared to 145/293 non-users (AOR = 3.09, 1.74-5.50)
Mekuriaw et al. 2020 [64]	Pregnant women in Ethiopia	Random sample of 845 Khat users = 11%	Investigates usage but unclear what quantifies a ‘current khat user’	SRQ-20	- 39/71 khat users experienced mental distress, compared to 149/647 non-users (AOR = 3.57, 2.06-6.18, p=0.001)
Yitayih et al. 2020 [65]	Prisoners in a correctional	Random sample of 336 Khat users = 138	DAST-10	PCL:SV	- 32/138 khat users met the criteria for psychopathy, compared to 9/191 non-users

	institution in Jimma, Ethiopia				- 16/138 khat users had mental illness, compared to 15/191 non-users
Haile and Sahile, 2021 [66]	Adult primary healthcare attendees in Ethiopia	Stratified and systematic random sample of 384 Khat users = 39%	Unspecified	PHQ-9	- 67/108 khat users had depressive symptoms, compared to 40/276 non-users (AOR = 5.43, 2.55-11.56, p<0.01)
Hambisa et al. 2021 [67]	Hospitalised patients in Ethiopia	Systematic sample of 337 Khat users = 18%	Unspecified; discusses 'current khat use' and 'khat use in the previous three months'	K10	- 49/59 khat users experienced psychological distress, compared to 146/278 non-users (AOR = 4.16, 1.67-10.35)
Melaku et al. 2021 [68]	Medical students in Ethiopia	Systematic random sample of 260 Khat users = 22%	Anyone who has ever used khat	DASS-21	- 37/56 khat users had depression, compared to 99/204 non-users (OR = 2.07, 1.11-3.83) - 41/56 khat users had anxiety, compared to 117/204 non-users (OR = 2.03, 1.06-3.91) - 30/56 khat users had psychological stress, compared to 75/204 non-users (OR = 1.99, 1.09-3.61)

*List of abbreviated screening tools: GHQ-28 (General Health Questionnaire-28, for mental disorders), SRQ-20 (Self-Reporting Questionnaire - 20 items, for mental distress), SCL-90 (Symptom Checklist - 90 items, for psychological symptoms), CIDI (Composite International Diagnostic Interview - for psychiatric disorders), PANSS (Positive and Negative Syndrome Scale - for schizophrenia), ICD-10 (International Classification of Diseases, 10th revision), BPRS (Brief Psychiatric Rating Scale - for depression, anxiety and hallucinations), SDS (Severity of Dependence Scale), MINI (Mini International Psychiatric Review), K-6 (Kessler Psychological Distress Scale - 6 questions), Q16 (Questionnaire 16 for neurotoxic symptoms), BDI (Beck's Depression Inventory), DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th edition), DASS-21 (The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale - 21 Items), PHQ-9 (Patient Health Questionnaire - 9 items, for depression), PSQ (Psychosis Screening Questionnaire), IES-R (Impacts of Events Scale - Revised), DAST-10 (Drug Abuse Screening Test-10), PCL:SV (Psychopathy Checklist: Screening Version), K10 (Kessler Psychological Distress Scale - 10 questions)

Supplementary Material 3: Quality of assessment of primary studies using Newcastle-Ottawa scale [17-18].

Study	**Selection (/5)**	**Comparability (/2)**	**Outcome (/3)**	**Overall Score (/10)**	**Comments**
Ahmed and Emad 1998	1	2	1	4	- Non-random sample - No justification of sample size - 100% response rate - Questionnaire described in insufficient detail no definition of khat use - No significant differences in baseline characteristics between khat users and non-users - Uses self-report - No details of statistical analysis and no confidence intervals provided
Belew et al. 2000	3	2	2	7	- Insufficient details of non-responders; no baseline characteristics provided - Questionnaire described in limited detail but methods do define current, past and never khat use
Numan 2003	3	1	1	5	- Sample size not justified - Eight non-respondents excluded because of incomplete data - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection - Only controlled variable seems to be Yemeni nationality - No confidence intervals included
Odenwald et al. 2005	3	2	2	7	- Sample size not justified - No details of non-responders - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data

					collection - Uses clinical interviews - No confidence intervals included
Deyessa et al. 2008	3	2	3	8	- Providers reasons for non-responders but not characteristics - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection - Clinical interview
Odenwald et al. 2009	2	2	2	6	- Sample size not justified - No details of non-responders - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection - Uses self-report
Damena et al. 2011	4	1	1	6	- Providers reasons for non-responders but not characteristics - Uses WHO-validated khat use measurement tool despite definition of 'khat user' being unclear within the study - Only controlled variable seems to be region (Jimma City) - Uses self-report - No confidence intervals included
Tulloch et al. 2012	4	2	2	8	- Entire eligible sample used - Missing information discussed - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection - No confidence intervals included
Dessie et al. 2013	3	2	2	7	- No details of non-responders - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection

					- Uses self report
Fekadu 2014	2	2	2	6	- No details of non-responders - Khat usage data collection described insufficiently: 'daily' or 'never' - Uses self-report
Widmann et al. 2014	2	2	3	7	- Opportunity sample - Sample size not justified - No details of non-responders - Clinical interview
Dachew et al. 2015	2	2	2	6	- Justification of sample size unsatisfactory - No details of non-responders - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection - Uses self-report
Soboka et al. 2015	3	2	2	7	- All eligible participants invited to participate - Limited description of non-responders (gender only) - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection - Uses self-report
Zenebe et al. 2015	3	2	3	8	- No details of non-responders - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection - Medical records used
El-Setouhy et al. 2016	4	2	2	8	- Volunteer sample; no non-responders - Uses self-report
Hersi et al. 2017	3	2	2	7	- No details of non-responders - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data

					collection - Uses self-report
Hunduma et al. 2017	3	2	2	7	- No details of non-responders - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection - Uses self-report
Kerebih et al. 2017	3	2	2	7	- No details of non-responders - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection - Uses self-report
Mossie et al. 2016	3	2	2	7	- No details of non-responders - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection - Uses self-report
Soboka et al. 2017	2	2	2	6	- Invited all eligible participants - Does not discuss whether sample size is large enough for conclusions to be drawn - No details of non-responders - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection - Unclear if all variables are self-reported
Tariku et al. 2017	3	2	2	7	- No details of non-responders - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection - Uses self report
Wondemagegn et al. 2017	3	1	3	7	- No details of non-responders - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection

					- Only one community studied but no other controlled variables
Yeshaw and Mossie 2017	2	2	2	6	- Sample size not justified - No details of non-responders - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection - Uses self-report
Bedaso et al. 2018	3	2	2	8	- 100% response rate - Limited description of khat usage data collection - Uses self-report
Adraro et al. 2019	3	2	2	7	- No details of non-responders - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection - Uses self-report
Ongeri et al. 2019	2	2	2	6	- No details of non-responders - No description of what quantifies a ‘current khat user’ - Uses self-report
Atnafie et al. 2020	3	2	2	7	- No details of non-responders - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection - Uses self-report
Hajure et al. 2020	3	2	2	7	- No details of non-responders - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection - Uses self-report
Hambisa et al. 2020	3	2	2	7	- No details of non-responders

					- Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection - Uses self-report
Kelemu et al. 2020	3	2	2	7	- No details of non-responders - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection - Uses self-report
Mekuriaw et al. 2020	3	2	2	7	- No details of non-responders - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection - Uses self-report
Yitayih et al. 2020	4	2	2	8	- Provides reasons for non-responders but not characteristics - Uses DAST-10 for khat abuse -Uses self-report
Haile and Sahile 2021	3	2	2	7	- 100% response rate - No description of what quantifies a ‘current khat user’ - Uses self-report
Hambisa et al. 2021	2	2	2	6	- Providers reasons for non-responders but not characteristics - No description of what quantifies a ‘current khat user’ - Uses self-report
Melaku et al. 2021	3	2	2	7	- No details of non-responders - Non-validated but described method of khat usage data collection - Uses self-report

Supplementary Material 4: Sensitivity Analysis

Study Excluded	**Odds Ratio**	**95% CIs**	**I^2 Value (%)**	**P-Value**
Depression				
Atnafie et al. 2020	2.28	1.81-2.87	91	<0.00001
Bedaso et al. 2018	2.21	1.75-2.79	92	<0.00001
Deyessa et al. 2008	2.23	1.76-2.82	92	<0.00001
El-Setouhy et al. 2016	2.22	1.76-2.80	92	<0.00001
Haile and Sahile 2021	2.14	1.71-2.69	91	<0.00001
Hambisa et al 2020	2.24	1.77-2.84	92	<0.00001
Melaku et al. 2021	2.22	1.76-2.81	92	<0.00001
Mossie et al. 2016	2.17	1.73-2.73	91	<0.00001
Numan 2003	2.27	1.80-2.87	91	<0.00001
Wondemagegn et al. 2017	2.11	1.69-2.64	91	<0.00001
Yeshaw and Mossie 2017	2.19	1.74-2.76	92	<0.00001
Zenebe et al. 2015	2.28	1.81-2.87	91	<0.00001
Anxiety				
Atnafie et al. 2020	2.22	1.75-2.80	92	<0.00001
El-Setouhy et al. 2016	2.21	1.75-2.79	92	<0.00001
Melaku et al. 2021	2.22	1.76-2.81	92	<0.00001
Numan 2003	2.29	1.83-2.86	91	<0.00001
Numan 2003	2.26	1.79-2.86	92	<0.00001
Numan 2003	2.27	1.80-2.87	91	<0.00001
Wondemagegn et al. 2017	2.18	1.73-2.74	91	<0.00001
Yeshaw and Mossie 2017	2.20	1.75-2.78	92	<0.00001
Psychological Distress				
Adraro et al. 2019	2.16	1.72-2.71	91	<0.00001

Atnafie et al. 2020	2.27	1.80-2.87	92	<0.00001
Belew et al. 2000	2.15	1.72-2.69	91	<0.00001
Dachew et al. 2015	2.23	1.76-2.82	92	<0.00001
Damena et al. 2011	2.26	1.78-2.85	92	<0.00001
Dessie et al. 2013	2.21	1.75-2.79	92	<0.00001
Hajure et al. 2020	2.17	1.72-2.73	92	<0.00001
Hambisa et al. 2021	2.19	1.74-2.76	92	<0.00001
Hersi et al. 2017	2.22	1.75-2.80	92	<0.00001
Kelemu et al. 2020	2.23	1.77-2.82	92	<0.00001
Kerebih et al. 2017	2.19	1.74-2.76	92	<0.00001
Mekuriaw et al. 2020	2.19	1.74-2.76	92	<0.00001
Melaku et al. 2021	2.23	1.76-2.81	92	<0.00001
Soboka et al. 2015	2.23	1.77-2.82	92	<0.00001
Soboka et al. 2017	2.24	1.78-2.83	92	<0.00001
Tariku et al. 2017	2.25	1.78-2.84	92	<0.00001
Yeshaw and Mossie et al. 2017	2.21	1.75-2.79	92	<0.00001
Psychotic symptoms/disorders				
Numan 2003	2.26	1.78-2.86	92	<0.00001
Numan 2003	2.27	1.80-2.87	91	<0.00001
Odenwald et al. 2009	2.27	1.80-2.87	91	<0.00001
Ongeri et al. 2019	2.25	1.78-2.85	92	<0.00001
Tulloch et al. 2012	2.14	1.70-2.68	91	<0.00001
Widmann et al. 2014	2.20	1.75-2.77	92	<0.00001
Zenebe et al. 2015	2.23	1.76-2.82	92	<0.00001
Psychopathy				
Yitayih et al. 2020	2.18	1.73-2.74	92	<0.00001
Unspecified psychiatric symptoms/disorders				

Ahmed and Emad 1998	2.24	1.78-2.83	92	<0.00001
Fedaku et al. 2014	2.21	1.75-2.79	92	<0.00001
Hunduma et al. 2017	2.22	1.76-2.81	92	<0.00001
Odenwald et al. 2005	2.23	1.76-2.82	92	<0.00001
Yitayih et al. 2020	2.24	1.77-2.82	92	<0.00001