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## Community Awareness and Preferences for Wild Mushrooms: An Ethnomycological Study in Kandy District, Sri Lanka

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### Abstract

Wild edible mushrooms, a key component of traditional cuisine worldwide, have been recognized since ancient times, especially in Asian cultures, for their culinary and medicinal properties. The indigenous ethnomycological knowledge used to distinguish wild edible mushrooms from poisonous ones is crucial but remains poorly documented in Sri Lanka. This study aims to document the ethnomycological knowledge of a selected community in the Kandy District regarding wild mushrooms. Data were collected through structured interviews and questionnaires with 100 individuals from ten suburbs, representing various demographic and socioeconomic circumstances. Approximately 61% of individuals in the study group demonstrated the ability to differentiate edible mushrooms from poisonous ones. All participants have consumed mushrooms as part of their diet, though none were aware of their potential medicinal benefits. Findings reveal that 70% of the respondents prefer wild mushrooms due to their better taste, nutritional value, and lack of chemical additives. Some of the most preferred wild mushroom varieties were *Schizophyllum commune* Fr. (Lena hathu), *Termitomyces microcarpus* (Berk. & Broome) R. Heim (Heenveli hathu), and *Volvariella volvacea* (Bull.) Singer (Piduru bimmal). Despite their preference for commercially available mushrooms, none of the respondents had attempted to preserve or cultivate wild mushrooms. Findings indicate that individuals over the age of 45 possess significantly more knowledge about wild mushrooms, highlighting a generational gap in traditional knowledge. This underscores the urgent need for public education on the safe use of wild mushrooms. Conserving this knowledge will promote informed and sustainable use of wild fungi and their value for future generations.

**Keywords:** Ethnomycology – identification – respondents – survey – traditional cuisine