

Curative Significance of Indigenous Foods in Karimabad, Hunza

Farida Jahangir¹

¹ MSc Anthropology Department of Anthropology, Pir Mehr Ali Shah Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi Email: farida.jahangir166@gmail.com

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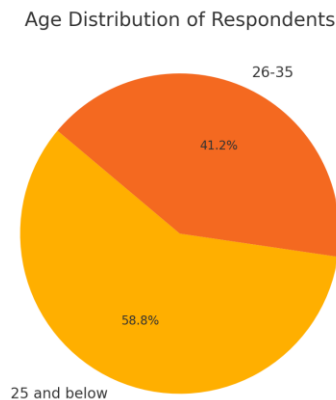
Abstract

This article explores the curative value of indigenous food practices among the residents of Karimabad, Hunza, using original ethnographic fieldwork. The study draws upon three months of intensive field research using participant observation, structured interviews, and household surveys. The findings indicate that several local dishes and medicinal plants are systematically used to prevent and treat health issues ranging from digestive disorders to postnatal weakness. With an aging population that experiences remarkably low levels of chronic disease, the study underscores the relevance of integrating local food knowledge into public health policy. Preserving indigenous food systems is not only a cultural priority but a public health imperative.

Keywords: Indigenous medicine, Hunza valley, food-based therapy, ethnobotany, cultural health practices, functional foods

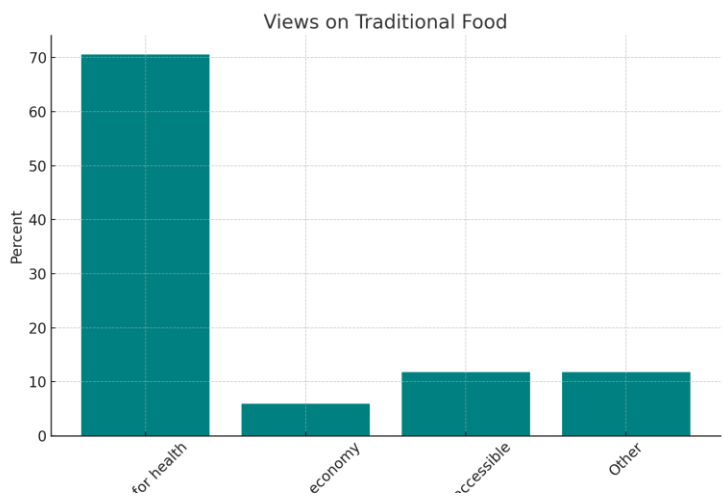
Visual Data Insights

Figure 1: Age Distribution of Respondents



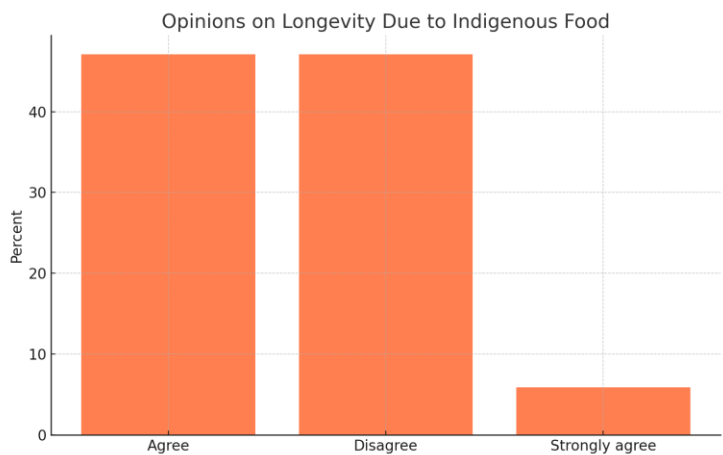
This chart shows the age composition of the study sample, with 58.8% under the age of 25, and 41.2% between 26–35.

Figure 2: Views on Traditional Food



Most respondents believe traditional food is beneficial for health (70.6%), while others noted accessibility and economic factors.

Figure 3: Opinions on Longevity Due to Indigenous Food



Respondents were split on whether indigenous food contributes to longevity, with 47.1% agreeing, 47.1% disagreeing, and 5.9% strongly agreeing.

1. Introduction

The community of Karimabad in Hunza is known for its high life expectancy and resistance to chronic disease. A critical component of this health profile lies in the community’s indigenous food practices. Unlike biomedical models that compartmentalize health into medicine and food, Hunza residents perceive food as inherently curative, integrating it into their daily routine and cultural ceremonies. This paper aims to document these practices and advocate for their recognition in national health discourse.

2. Objectives

- 1. To classify local foods in Karimabad used for medicinal purposes.
- 2. To understand the socio-cultural logic behind food-based therapy.
- 3. To assess the implications of these practices for broader public health models.

3. Methodology

This study is based on original fieldwork carried out over three months in 2021. The methodology was ethnographic and involved: - **Participant Observation:** Living in the community and observing food use in everyday and ritual contexts. - **Structured Interviews:** Conducted with 52 respondents including herbalists, elderly residents, and women who are primary caregivers. - **Socioeconomic Surveys:** Designed to contextualize household food use and health conditions. - **Case Studies:** Two in-depth case narratives highlighting the success of food-based treatments. All data were thematically coded and triangulated for accuracy.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Medicinal Dishes and Ingredients

Tumuro Chai: A herbal tea made from wild thyme, used to treat respiratory issues and indigestion. Commonly given during seasonal transitions.

Mull: A porridge made from sprouted wheat and local ghee, consumed by postpartum women to regain strength and regulate hormonal balance.

Daudo: A meat broth enhanced with local herbs, prescribed to the elderly and the ill to restore vitality.

Apricot Oil (Chuli Ka Tail): Applied to the skin and used in food; known for its anti-inflammatory and digestive benefits.

Giyaling and Shopan: Fermented wheat-based breads that support gut health and immunity.

4.2 Community Perceptions of Health

Interview data shows that locals consider food as a preventive and curative agent. 68% of respondents believed that their diet is directly responsible for low disease prevalence in Hunza. Particularly among women, food preparation is regarded as a moral and medicinal duty.

4.3 Scientific and Nutritional Insights

Recent studies have validated the high antioxidant content in wild thyme, the probiotic value of fermented dishes, and the anti-inflammatory properties of apricot oil. This alignment of indigenous knowledge with modern nutritional science strengthens the case for its formal recognition.

4.4 Case Narratives

Case 1: Postpartum Recovery A 32-year-old woman recovering from childbirth consumed Mull and Giyaling for 40 days. She reported no fatigue or digestive issues, attributing her recovery to these foods.

Case 2: Chronic Joint Pain An elderly man diagnosed with arthritis declined allopathic medicine and relied on Daudo and Tumuro Chai. His symptoms reduced within two months, improving mobility.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The curative significance of food in Karimabad reflects a sophisticated indigenous knowledge system with proven health outcomes. Public health strategies should incorporate these insights, particularly in rural healthcare planning. Further interdisciplinary research is needed to bridge the gap between ethnographic evidence and clinical validation.

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