

Knowledge assessment and practices related to food safety and hygiene of street food consumers

■ NIDHI GUPTA AND MAHIMA TAPARIA

See end of the paper for authors' affiliations

Correspondence to:

MAHIMATAPARIA

Tribal Farm Women Training
Center, Anand Agriculture
University, Devgadhi Baria,
DAHOD (GUJARAT)
INDIA
mahima_ranu@yahoo.co.in

ABSTRACT

Risk communication and consumer education to promote safer handling of food can be the best way of managing the risk of food borne illness at the consumer end of the food chain. The present study aimed to determine consumers' awareness, their preferences, knowledge and the practices for food safety while they were eating out in street food units. A sample size of 300 street food consumers from different food service providers were interviewed using a descriptive survey design of Ahmedabad, Gujarat. Majority of the consumers had knowledge about food borne diseases, adulteration, sanitation and microorganisms but while selecting a street food unit, consumers generally prefer taste and ignore other aspects of food safety and hygiene. Consumers ranked the restaurants very satisfactory in terms of quick service, hygiene, sanitation, food quality, taste, cost, convenience, etc. and usually prefer to dine out only on the weekends for a change or as a temporary arrangement. Consumers shouldn't eat at those SFU's which are unhygienic and poorly maintained, not compromising on food safety aspects, which will compel the SFU's to improve on their food quality safety and hygiene aspects.

KEY WORDS : Food safety, Food hygiene, Sanitary practices, Personal hygiene, Street food unit.

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Eating out has rapidly become a key part of the majority of consumers' lifestyles with both choice and opportunity growing steadily hand in hand. Consumers are relying increasingly on street foods because they are convenient, quick, and easy. It is now neither a rare nor privileged event with large numbers of consumers thinking nothing of eating out at least once a week. This report looks at the influences causing such a high frequency leisure activity and examines which factors are determining eating out habits. As consumer expenditure and disposable income have risen, eating out establishments has consistently kept their share of the wallet. The driving forces behind eating out have been examined in this report to identify why it enjoys the popularity that it does. Different consumer groups were examined in detail to establish not only which outlets they are using but also what their attitudes are towards the eating out experience. The financial freedom of increased affluence and the time restraints of a working population remove the monetary barriers and create the need for convenience which is driving much of the eating out activity. Effective food safety and nutrition policies improve public health without imposing unnecessary costs

on industry or the public.

Food borne illnesses impose a substantial economic and quality of life burden on society. A population based study on self-reported symptoms gastroenteritis in Ireland estimated that there were approximately 3.2 million episodes of acute gastroenteritis on the island each year (Scallan *et al.*, 2005). Although gastroenteritis is not always caused by food, foodborne gastroenteritis remains as substantial cause of morbidity and mortality. Evidence from studies worldwide suggests that food borne illnesses most commonly occur with a large proportion caused by cross contamination and improper food handling (Worsfold and Griffith, 1997)

Risk communication and consumer education to promote safer handling of food can be the best way of managing the risk of food borne illness at the consumer end of the food chain. Thus, an understanding of the overall status of food handling knowledge and practices is needed. Although traditional qualitative reviews can be used for combining information from several studies on specific food handling behaviours, a structured approach of meta-analysis can be more advantageous in a holistic assessment. Findings from 20 studies using meta-analysis