
Hygiene Practices in Food Handling: Pertinent to Healthy Living (A study of Fast Food Outfits)

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ABSTRACT

Food handling, preparation, and service practices are the major factors considered in determining the food hygiene. Food hygiene encompasses people working in the establishment and individual personal hygiene and habits. It has been observed that unhealthy hygiene practices can lead to poisoning resulting from food contamination. Also, improper sterilization of some kitchen equipment such as spoon, pot and the environment could be attributed to the contamination of the food. This study therefore sought to investigate the hygiene practices among food handlers. This study adopted survey technique and case study research design and the target population comprises of food handlers in Lagos state from selected fast food but specifically Tantalizer fast food as a case study. One self-constructed Questionnaire on Assessment of the Hygiene practices (AHP) was administered to respondents in this study. This study revealed that the level of awareness on hygiene practices among food handler's employees is very high. It also revealed that the level of compliance with rules and regulations on food handling process would enhance food hygiene practices. It can be concluded that there must be synergy among regulatory agencies for effective implementation of rules and regulations on proper hygiene.

Keywords: Hygiene Practices, Food handling, Food borne diseases, Healthy living

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1. INTRODUCTION

The eating of food or drink is a general routine among every living thing. The nutrients the body acquired during the process gives energy which transmits to healthy living. Food is any substance that when taking into the body could maintain and sustain life (Eastham *et al.* 2001). The increase in migration of people from rural to urban for industrialization and development is one of the reasons made it imperative for people to patronize public food vendors. It cannot be overemphasized on the need to take critical look at the process of preparing, packaging and eating the food itself. Handling of food is a fundamental process in preparing and packaging the food which sometimes is within the auspices of food industry. Therefore, proper handling of foods, utensils and dishes among the employees of food industry is very important to healthy living. Employees of organization where food are handled could be a potential source of infections of various pathogenic bacteria, protozoa and intestinal helminthes. Food handlers is anybody assigned the role to handle both packaged and unpackaged food and beverages in the preparation or production , packaging, ascertaining the quality, serving of food and beverages items (Ifiadike, Ironkwe, Adogwu & Nnebwue, 2014).

Food handling involves preparation, service practices and other important factors to determine safety of the food. Food-handlers who are indisposed and suffering from one or two borne diseases could excrete intestinal parasites and some pathogenic bacteria that might contaminate foods from their faces through their fingers and probably contaminate the food, and finally to healthy individuals (Okojie, Wagbatsoma, Ighoroge, 2005). The improper hygiene among food handlers is worrisome and posing a great challenge to developing countries like Nigeria. The need to consume healthy diet is of utmost important to every individual which are essentials for well-being of humans being. Food and drink could pose a great threat to one's health because of inability to employ proper handling of food hygiene practices. Poor handling of food could lead to several illnesses from various borne diseases such as Dysentery, Diarrheal, Cholera and Typhoid, Diarrheal, and Dysentery and so on. Plant (2000) opined that the consumption of contaminated or unsafe foods may result in illness referred to as food borne diseases. Food borne diseases is still a fundamental issue among health stakeholders in developing and developed countries globally.

Food handlers such as food vendors at restaurant and fast food are prone to transmitting food borne diseases. There are some vital principles of food hygiene such as avoid touching of the food items by those handling the food and also comply with proper hygiene and sanitation techniques. This will enable them to minimize the direct contact with the food because it is related and depended on their hygiene practices. It is pertinent for food handlers to ensure there are proper hygiene and sanitation techniques when handling anything that is edible and consumed by human being. Food hygiene is the systematic process of applying some set of rules on their surrounding during processing, preparing or producing, delivery, transporting, selling, packaging and serving of food in a way that is safe for human consumption and of high quality (Ifeadike *et al.*, 2014). Food hygiene is the systematic process of preparing, selling, packaging and serving the food in a way that it's safe to consume. Food hygiene rests directly on the state of personal hygiene and habits of the personnel working in the establishments. In developing countries such as Nigeria, the normal atmospheric temperature could stimulate the multiplication of micro-organisms which could lead to food poisoning (Obionu, 2007). Sometimes food might be attractive and of good aroma and taste but yet could cause acute illness almost immediately after consumption or after some time due to toxins produced by bacteria.

Okojie *et al* (2005) study on assessments of hygiene practices among food handlers in tertiary institutions in Nigeria revealed that hygiene practices awareness among food handlers were relatively low. Ramsley and Ingram (2014) stated that prevention is better than cure. According to World Health Organization (1987), the cost of treating outbreaks of food-borne diseases is always on the high side and it creates a great burden on the social and economic burden on the community's health system and manpower productivity. Food handling, preparation, and service practices are the major factors considered in determining the food hygiene. Food hygiene encompasses people working in the establishment and individual personal hygiene and habits. It has been observed that unhealthy hygiene practices can lead to poisoning resulting from food contamination. Also, improper sterilization of some kitchen equipment such as spoon, pot and the environment could be attributed to the contamination of the food. This study therefore sought to investigate the hygiene practices among food handlers.

1.1 Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- (1) Assess the level of awareness among food handler's employees on hygiene practices.
- (2) Determine the compliance level of hygiene practices among food handlers employees

1.2 Research Question

- (1) What is the level of awareness on hygiene practices among food handlers?

1.3 Null Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant association between enforcement level of compliance with hygiene and sanitation regulations among food handlers

3. Methodology

This study adopted survey technique and case study research design because the variables were not manipulated but studied as they occurred. This design was utilized to examine the after the effect of food handlers hygiene practices among fast food. The target population consists of food handlers in Lagos state from selected fast food restaurants in the metropolises, Lagos state but specifically Tantalizer food as a case study. There are fifteen registered fast food centres in around Lagos mainland metropolis, Lagos classified as small, medium and big (NTDC, 2015). A multistage random sampling technique was used in selecting respondents for the study. Random sampling was employed to sample a total number of 150 customers from various sections of Tantalizer. One self-constructed Questionnaire on Assessment of the Hygiene practices (**AHP**) was administered to respondents in this study. It was develop from the review of relevant literature on the topic and subjected to validity and reliability test. A total of one hundred and fifty (150) questionnaires were administered but only one hundred and twenty one (121) were returned. The research instrument was subjected to face and content validity test methods. Test-retest method was used to measures the reliability of the instrument and the reliability of data collection instrument were tested using the psychometrically prescribed statistical procedure. The test-retest reliability estimation method was employed after an interval of two weeks with a correlation coefficient of 0.62. The required information was obtained from the stakeholders (food handlers and customers) in the study area.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Experience

Experience	Frequency	Percentage %
Below 6years	28	23
6-10 years	26	22
11-15 years	30	25
16- 20 years	22	18
21 years above	15	12

Table 1 above shows the distribution of respondents by experience, It reveal that 42.3% of the respondents have below 6 years of experience, 29.5% have between 6-10 years, 15.4% have 11-15 years of experience, 9.0% have 16-20 years of experience while 3.8% have 21 years above experience. This implies most of the respondents have below 6years of experience.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Academic Qualification

Staff	Frequency	Percentage %
Non-formal	13	11
Olevel	15	12
OND/NCE	36	30
HND/BSc	38	31
MBA/MSc	19	16

Table 2 above shows the distribution of respondents by staff category, it reveal that 31% of the respondents are Higher National Diploma (HND) or bachelor of Science, 30% of the respondents are Ordinary National Diploma (OND) or National Certificate Of Education (NCE), 16% of the respondents are Masters of Business Administration (MBA) or Masters of Science and 12% are O'level holders This implies most of the respondents were graduates.

Research Question 1: What is the level of awareness on hygiene practices among food handlers?

Table 3: Distribution of respondents on Hygiene practices

S/N	Statement	SA (5)	A (4)	UD (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	\bar{X}	Remark
1	There is Lagos state agency guideline on restaurant Hygiene and sanitary	71 (59)	31 (26)	10 (8)	3 (2)	6 (5)	4.31	High
2	Washing of hands before touching the food is made compulsory	44 (36)	42 (35)	12 (10)	17 (14)	6 (5)	3.84	High
3	There is need to wash your hands to remove germs and bacteria	44 (36)	30 (26)	29 (24)	9 (7)	9 (7)	3.67	High
4	Disposal of waste is guided by rules and regulation	39 (32)	27 (22)	13 (11)	32 (27)	10 (8)	3.44	High
5	Cleaning of kitchen and its equipment's are fundamental to good hygiene practices	43 (36)	31 (26)	9 (7)	34 (28)	4 (3)	3.62	High
6	Disinfecting and sterilization has equal retention to kill bacteria in the kitchen	48 (40)	28 (23)	34 (28)	7 (6)	4 (3)	3.91	High
Weighted Mean = 3.80								

N.B *Figures in parentheses is percentages

From table 3 above, half of the respondents 59.0% of the respondents strongly agree and 26.0% agree with the statement that there is Lagos state agency guideline on restaurant Hygiene and sanitary, 8% undecided. Also, 36.0% of the respondents strongly agree and 35.0% of the respondents agree respectively with the statement that washing of hands before touching the food is made compulsory while 14.0% disagree. Also, 36.0 % and 26.0 % strongly agree and agree respectively with the statement that there is need to wash your hands to remove germs and bacteria while 24.0% undecided and 7.0% disagree and strongly disagree with the statement. Also, 32.0% strongly agree with the statement that disposing of waste is guided by rules and regulation while 22.0% agree and 27.0% disagree with the statement.

Furthermore, 36.0% strongly agree and 28.0% disagree with the statement that cleaning of kitchen and its equipment's are fundamental to good hygiene practices while 26.0% agree with the statement. Also, 40.0% of the respondents agree and 28.0% undecided with the statement that disinfecting and sterilization has equal retention to kill bacteria in the kitchen while 23.0% agree and 6.0% disagree with the statement. The weighted mean is 3.80 which imply that the level of awareness on hygiene practices among food handler's employees is very high.

Null Hypothesis

Ho: There is no statistically significant association between enforcement level of compliance with hygiene and sanitation regulations among food handlers.

Table 8: Non parametric Chi-square test of enforcement and level of compliance

	Level of compliance
Chi –square	31.01 ^a
df	4
Asymp. Sig	0.00

From the table 8, since the P-value is 0.05 is significant at 0.00. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is statistically significant association between enforcement level of compliance with hygiene and sanitation regulations among food handlers. It implies that level of compliance with rules and regulations on food handling process will enhance food hygiene practices

4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

4.1 Summary of Findings

This study revealed that the level of awareness on hygiene practices among food handler’s employees is very high. It also revealed that the level of compliance with rules and regulations on food handling process will enhance food hygiene practices.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

What follows are recommendations based on findings from the research

- (i) There is need for regular assessment of food handling process among food vendors
- (ii) Communities Health workers and agencies should organize seminars for food vendors on proper hygiene process
- (iii) There is need for employers in food industry to ascertain the health status of their workers to prevent outbreaks of diseases
- (iv) There must be synergy among regulatory agencies for effective implementation of rules and regulations on proper hygiene

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