

SAFETY OF SCHOOL VENDED FOODS

A Project Report

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ABSTRACT**A STUDY OF THE SAFETY OF SCHOOL VENDED FOODS****TARALEEN N. MALCOLM**

Background: Food safety is a growing public health concern globally and the foods serve to student at school are of major Public Health importance. In Jamaica student find it more convenient to purchase food at school.

Aim: This study aimed at evaluating the safety of school vended foods for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not they posed a risk to students.

Design: A cross-sectional survey.

Sample: School canteens and itinerant vendors at schools that catered to student between the ages of 4 to 12 years. The study population comprises of thirteen school canteens and thirty-one itinerant vendors with both a quantitative and a qualitative component. Forty-four (44) food samples were collected and analyzed for faecal coliform, total coliform and standard aerobic plate count.

Results: The study indicated that women played a major part (68.2%) in the provision of meal for students. Food handlers were found to be knowledgeable on some aspects of food safety but this knowledge was not reflected in their practices in most cases. Facilities such as running water, sanitary conveniences and solid waste services were available and majority of the itinerant vendors prepared food onsite. All of the foods tested satisfied the standard for total coliform, 88.7% for faecal coliform and 93.1% for Mesophilic aerobic plate count. Overall only 18% of the samples had microbial counts higher than required levels. There was no statistical difference between the microbial quality of food served by itinerant vendors and that of the school canteens ($p>0.05$).

Conclusion: While the microbiological quality of most meals served in these schools was acceptable. However some foods had levels for indicator organisms which exceeded the stipulated standard. The potential therefore exists for outbreaks to occur as a result of consumption of school vended foods.