

ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF CONSUMERS' KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, PRACTICES AND PERCEPTION CONCERNING SELECTED FOOD SAFETY ISSUES IN THE HOME.

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Household food safety poses a major challenge not only to the preparers of food but to public health and other food regulatory authorities. Studies have shown that family home rank high in the list of places where foodborne diseases are acquired and transmitted.

To describe the knowledge, attitude, practices and perception of householders in North Central Saint Andrew one hundred and ten householders, eighteen years and over, were interviewed during January and March, 1999. The study, cross-sectional in design, included respondents who were randomly selected from three distinct socio-economic classes. Four key informants representing public sector and non-government organizations involved with food safety programmes were interviewed to explore additional ways of strengthening household food safety.

The survey found that householders were very concerned about the food they purchased for preparation at home; displayed strong concerns about sanitation of food handling establishments; food handlers practices and the appearance of the foods purchased. There was significant gender difference in the concern for the appearance of food ($X^2 = 4.45$; $p < 0.05$). There were no other significant gender differences for the major concerns when purchasing food ($p > 0.05$).

Respondents adopted varying actions to improve food safety at home. Ninety-eight per cent of respondents never contacted the Local Health Department or the Ministry of Health as part of their information seeking opportunity regarding food safety.

The lifetime prevalence of food-borne illness was found to be approximately 46%. Diarrhoea, stomach pain, vomiting and nausea were the major symptoms reported. Milk/yogurt/ice cream, beef, chicken, pork and fish/shellfish were the main food items implicated as being associated with the foodborne illness.

Respondents gave a low rating to Government departments/agencies for their contribution to the food safety efforts. While respondents reported a fairly high knowledge of safe food handling practices, 52% and 62% respectively did not know the correct temperature for cooling and freezing foods. Similarly, approximately 71% practised unsafe methods of thawing frozen foods.

Most respondents had average or fair attitude concerning food safety. There was no significant difference between socio-economic class with respect to attitude towards household food safety.

A properly designed and executed household food safety public education campaign; inclusion of safe handling instructions on raw meats, poultry and fish/shellfish and the operation of a food safety hotline are suggested as additional methods of enhancing household food safety.