CONSUMER KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES TOWARD FOOD SAFETY IN TRINIDAD & TOBAGO: A POPULATION STUDY.

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INTRODUCTION

Lifestyle changes have been known to influence household food choices and food preparation. Foodborne illnesses continue to threaten public health with a possible cause being unsafe food preparation at home and by food businesses. However, consumers are more conscious of food safety issues as the global number of reported food-borne illnesses have increased recently. The ability to evaluate these issues in Trinidad and Tobago is limited due to a lack of data. In this respect, a national study was carried out with the aim of investigating the knowledge of citizens in Trinidad and Tobago on important food safety practices. Thus, the objective of the research was to assess demographic determinants, food safety knowledge and food handling practices among residents in Trinidad and Tobago.

METHODS

Data was collected from a cross-sectional retrospective population survey conducted among 2145 randomly selected households in Trinidad and Tobago. Face to face interviews were administered to individuals with the next upcoming birthday from selected households. The survey enquired about: foodborne illness; demographic characteristics; hand washing; food handling; and cooking practices by residents one month prior to the interview date. P values less than 5.0% were considered significant.

RESULTS

The response rate of the survey was 99.95%. From the completed questionnaires, 5.2% of respondents reported that they had experienced an episode of foodborne illness (characterized by the sudden onset of 3 or more loose watery stools within 24 hours) in the 4 weeks prior to the interview date. Persons less than 14 years of age were significantly more susceptible to foodborne illness than any other age group. This finding is consistent with international trends where a higher prevalence foodborne illness is usually found among young children.

Foodborne Illness had no significant effect on demographic determinants such as sex, education and income in Trinidad and Tobago. Lifestyle changes have been known to influence household food choices and food preparation. Foodborne illnesses continue to threaten public health with a possible cause being unsafe food preparation at home and by food businesses. However, consumers are more conscious of food safety issues as the global number of reported food-borne illnesses have increased recently. The ability to evaluate these issues in Trinidad and Tobago is limited due to a lack of data. In this respect, a national study was carried out with the aim of investigating the knowledge of citizens in Trinidad and Tobago on important food safety practices. Thus, the objective of the research was to assess demographic determinants, food safety knowledge and food handling practices among residents in Trinidad and Tobago.

RESULTS CONTINUED

It was also found that 64.7% and 46.5% of respondents practiced unsafe storage and thawing of meat products, respectively. This is very critical since unsafe storage of meats can lead to cross contamination with other food stuffs, which can eventually lead to foodborne illnesses.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that residents of Trinidad and Tobago are aware of basic food safety practices but there is still a need for more public food safety education. Understanding the relationship between foodborne illness and demographic determinants is necessary to guide prevention and intervention efforts. Ideally, these ‘high risk groups’ (especially persons less than 14 years) should be considered when allocating resources for education and food safety in order to reduce this burden in Trinidad and Tobago.

REFERENCES