

Examine employees' motivators and barriers to following food allergy accommodation practices in independently-owned restaurants

Nelson M. Placa, MS

Anirudh Naig, Ph.D.

Introduction

Background

- More than 32 million Americans have food allergies (Food Allergy Research & Education [FARE], 2019).
- A food allergy reaction occurs every three minutes in the United States sending an individual to the emergency room.
- In the United States, 1 in every 13 children or almost 2 in every classroom and 10% of adults are affected by food allergies (Gupta et al., 2019; FARE, 2019).

Problem Statements

- There's little research on motivators and barriers to the following food allergy accommodation practices in independently-owned restaurants.
- Because more food is consumed outside the home it is important to assess motivators and barriers to accommodating food allergy practices in foodservice establishments.

Purpose of the study

This study aimed to identify employees' motivators and barriers to the following food allergy accommodation practices in independently-owned restaurants.

Research Objectives:

1. Identify motivators and barriers to following food allergy accommodation practices in independently owned restaurants.
2. Compare foodservice workers' perceptions of motivators and barriers to following food allergy practices based on demographic characteristics.
3. Evaluate foodservice workers' perception of motivators and barriers to following food allergy practices based on operational characteristics.

Literature Review

- Communicating consumers' desires and concerns with food allergies can be compounded by language barriers, unfamiliar ingredients, and special food preparation techniques (Harris, 2016).
- Development of behavioral changes within the foodservice industry presents a challenge, particularly long-term behavior change (Erasmus et al., 2010; Soon et al., 2012; Viator et al., 2015).
- Providing food safety education materials in English and Spanish can decrease language barriers (Panchal, Liu, & Dworkin 2012).

Methodology

Sampling and Data Collection

- Target population was frontline employees from independently-owned restaurants in Metro Orlando, Florida.
- List of independently-owned restaurants ($N = 1,123$) was obtained from the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation, Division of Hotels and Restaurants (Florida DBPR) website.

Questionnaire

- The questionnaire was adapted from previous studies that assessed food safety motivators and barriers among foodservice workers.
- The questionnaire was delivered electronically via email.
- The questionnaire was translated into Spanish, then back-translated to English to check for accuracy.

Data Analysis

- Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data distribution, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations.
- ANOVA was used to examine significant differences in motivator and barriers to following food allergy accommodation practices and demographic characteristics.
- A chi-square test of independence was conducted to determine whether there was a significant relationship between variables.
- Data was collected using Qualtrics® and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 27.0 software.

Results

- Sixty-two questionnaires were completed and 58 were usable.
- Females were the predominant gender ($n = 31, 53.4\%$).
- 45% of participants were between the age 18 – 25 years.
- Hispanic or Latino represented 57% ($n = 33$) of the sample.
- 31% of participants attained an associate degree.
- Most participants were servers ($n = 26, 44.8\%$) and worked at casual full-service foodservice operations ($n = 22, 37.9\%$).
- Average years of foodservice experience was 1–5 (45%).
- American cuisine represented majority of sample (48.3%).
- 51.7% ($n = 30$) of participants did not receive food allergy training.
- The highest rated perceived motivator was “keeping customers satisfied” ($M = 4.66, SD = 0.71$) and the least important perceived motivator was “no policies/procedures for following food allergy practices ($M = 4.66 \pm 0.71$).”
- The highest rated barrier was “no policies/procedures in restaurant requiring safe food allergy practices” ($M = 2.74 \pm 1.48$) and “afraid of co-worker's action” as the lowest rated barrier ($M = 2.09 \pm 1.29$).”
- Findings can be used by owners/managers to foster a culture of food allergy prevention.

Limitations

- COVID-19 pandemic enable PI to visit foodservice operations to share survey links.
- Sample population was limited due to foodservice operations closures impacted by COVID-19.
- Low response rate from foodservice employees and limited access to employees' e-mail addresses made data collection challenging.
- Language barriers played an essential part in communicating with specific demographic groups.

References are available upon request

