

Evaluate Current Food Allergy Policies and Procedures in Existing Policies and Procedures in Independently-owned Restaurants

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Introduction

Background

- The foodservice industry accounts for majority of the food consumed by consumers away-from-home (USDA, 2019).
- With the increased spending by consumers in foodservice establishments, providing safe food is essential for establishments to prevent lawsuits, preventing loss or closure and/or other possible negative impacts.
- Consumers are becoming more proactive about sharing food allergy information with restaurants (Kwon & Lee (2012).

Problem Statements

- Food allergies are an increasing food safety and public health concern affecting more than 32 million Americans (FARE, 2019).
- Little research exists regarding policies and procedures for food allergy accommodations in independently owned restaurants.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine differences and similarities in existing food allergy policies and procedures in independently owned restaurants and owners'/managers' attitudes and knowledge of food allergy accommodations.

Research Objectives:

1. Assess current food allergy policies and procedures in independently- owned restaurants.
2. Examine differences and similarities in existing food allergy policies and procedures (e.g., food allergies policies and procedures, food allergy meal preparation process, food allergy training, and demographic characteristics) in independently-owned restaurants.
3. Assess food allergy attitudes and knowledge of owners in independently-owned restaurants.

Methodology

Instrument

- The online questionnaire consisted of Likert-style items adapted from a questionnaire developed and validated by Abdelmassih, Rajagopal, and Arendt (2016).
- Data was collected using Qualtrics®.

Sampling and Data Collection

- Population were owners/managers ($N = 1,123$) of independently owned restaurants in Metro Orlando, Florida.
- Restaurant owners/managers ($n = 957$) were contacted by telephone, and the purpose of the phone call and research study was explained.
- In total, 601 restaurants provided email information, of which 60 email addresses were undeliverable, making the final sample ($n = 601$).

Data Analysis

- Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data distribution (e.g., frequencies, means, standard deviations).
- Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to measure reliability.
- A chi-square test of independence examined the relationship between two nominal variables.
- Bivariate correlation analysis was carried out to assess the relationship between independent variables and owners/managers self-commitment (dependent variable) to food allergy accommodation.
- Data analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (version 27.0).

Results Cont'd

- Total of 111 questionnaires were returned and 103 (92.8%) were usable.
- Thirty-nine percent were casual full-service operations represented ($n = 40, 38.8\%$), followed by quick-service operations ($n = 35, 34.0\%$).
- Sixty-nine percent of the establishments accommodated customers with food allergies.

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Results Cont'd

- Sixty-one percent of establishments indicated not having any written food allergen policies and procedures in place.
- Sixty-six participants (64.1%) did not have food allergy training in multiple languages.
- More than half of the restaurants (53.4%) had designated individuals who could explain allergen-free menu options to customers with a food allergy.
- Participants reported (80.6%) host(ess) and (65.1%) servers were not required to ask customers if they need food allergy accommodations.
- Sixty-one percent of employees were required to contact the manager/supervisor for questions about available food allergy accommodation.
- Fifty percent of participants described not having an emergency plan in case a customer has an allergic reaction in the restaurant.
- Owners/managers (62.1%) had received formal food allergy training.
- Communication between server and back-of-house about customers who need food allergy accommodation was reported at 89.3% .
- Findings suggest a need for developing formal policies for food allergy management in independently-owned Florida restaurants.

Limitations

- The COVID-19 pandemic made access to participants challenging.
- Limited access to participant email addresses and the low questionnaire response rates limits the generalizability of the findings.

References are available upon request

