

LEADING BY EXAMPLE: A THREE-WAVE SEQUENTIAL MIXED METHOD FOOD SAFETY STUDY

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Introduction

According to the most recent government data, approximately 61% of foodborne illness outbreaks were attributed to lack of personal hygiene and improper food handling by employees in the foodservice industry. Foodservice employees fail to adhere to safe food preparation practices, may directly introduce pathogens that can cause illness and death. Few qualitative studies have examined the barriers of effective managerial practices that influence employee's food safety behaviors. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to explore employees' perspectives about managerial practices that influence their food safety behaviors.

Methods

A five-month longitudinal mixed method design, which allows a nest-purposeful sampling strategy to identify key informants for interviews, was used. A total of 642 foodservice employees (wave-1) currently working in the United States participated in a survey to be accessed for food safety knowledge and food safety behavioral variables. Among these 642 employees, 263 were purposefully invited to participate in qualitative data collection (wave-2) by answering a set of open-ended questions. A total of 36 participants responded out of 263, and after the analyses, two participants were selected for in-depth interviews. A total of three core themes with 19 codes relevant to the purpose were extracted.

Results/Discussion

Results from the wave-1 survey showed that most of the foodservice employees have strong intentions to perform food safety, demonstrated strong personal self-efficacy regarding food safety practices, but have failed food safety knowledge test. After the qualitative analyses (wave-2 and 3), the results noted the urgent needs to improving food safety practices during rush hours or when the restaurant is bustling. The key informants identified two reasons to forgo food safety might be caused by not enough staff scheduled for the shift, and the 'customer-first' philosophy to cut corners and serve the customers promptly. Contracted to the popular business model that puts speed over safety, our participants (wave-2) suggest that a clean and well-practiced food safety always results in happy customers thus brings long-term profits. Other critical findings through qualitative analyses identified several factors for successful food safety management including: managers being the role-model and take account for their actions, or managers physically engaging in activities that display skills, techniques, commitment toward professional behaviors. Others noted that it is important for managers to keep an open communication and provide adequate on-site monitoring and appropriate retraining overtime. It is important to note that most managers (wave-2) agreed that following-up after training, and being able to monitor practices at work, is one of the critical elements needed to improve the current food safety training programs.

References are available upon request