

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**DETERMINING FOODHANDLERS' FOOD
SAFETY KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES
AT RETAIL FOOD OUTLETS**

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ABSTRACT

The influx of tourists into Malaysia despite the economic downturn and the outbreak of H1N1 flu shows the increasing popularity of Malaysia as a tourist destination. With the increasing arrivals of tourists, it is expected that an increasing number of people will be patronizing food establishments. Hence, the safety and cleanliness of food being served should be the utmost priority for food establishments; especially the retail food industries as food poisoning cases in Malaysia have been on the rise over the past few years. This study explores the safety of eating in retail food outlets in Malaysia from the food handler's practices perspective. A total of 169 food handlers from 40 retail food outlets in Kuala Lumpur (KL; national capital) and Kota Kinabalu (KK; state capital) participated in the study. The aim was to determine their food safety knowledge and practices as well as to evaluate the kitchen area of food outlets. The result of this study revealed that food handlers from Kota Kinabalu scored better for food safety knowledge. Moreover, it was the food handlers from urban settings that reported better practices with mean rank value of 89.31 as compared to KK, a less urban area with mean rank value of 79.47. Observations of the kitchen area showed that the hygiene and safety level of eating in food outlets in Kuala Lumpur and Kota Kinabalu ranges from satisfactory to good. Findings also confirmed that some of the areas that are more prone to food safety violations include time and temperature control, cross-contamination, washroom and hand washing facilities, and garbage bins/disposal. Findings indicate that the knowledge of food handlers' concerning food safety is mainly dependent on the frequency and type of training received. Statistical analysis using the Kruskal-Wallis test demonstrated that positive food safety practices are reliant on the number of years of experience in the foodservice industry and the food handlers perceived level of information regarding food safety issues. Additionally, this study found that food handlers are often ill-informed and make mistakes in certain food safety aspects like time and temperature control and personal hygiene. Findings confirmed that the more knowledgeable the food handlers are, the better their food safety practices. Lack of training and implementation programmes were also highlighted in this study as only 70.5% of food handlers have actually attended training. The results suggest a need for a revised food safety programme for educating the public and a need to enhance the grading/award system. There is also a need to have a planned kitchen layout in line with the food safety/HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) requirements.

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