SOP-05: Knowledge, practices and associated factors with knowledge and practices of food safety and hygiene among food handlers in Galle Municipal Council

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Introduction: There is an increasing trend of consumption of outside food due to urbanisation and changes in consumer behaviour. Therefore, food handlers' knowledge on food safety and hygiene and related practices play a major role in preventing foodborne diseases. Although studies have been done across the globe regarding food safety and hygiene, only a small number of studies have been conducted in Sri Lanka targeting restaurants. Hence, this study was carried out to assess the knowledge, practices and associated factors of food safety and hygiene among food handlers working in restaurants in Galle Municipal Council (MC).

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out among 125 food handlers working in restaurants in Galle MC Area. From 412 registered restaurants 100 restaurants were selected using systematic sampling. A list of food handlers were collected from each selected restaurant and an interviewer-administered questionnaire was used to assess the knowledge and practices among food handlers with a working experience of more than 3 months. Data were analysed using SPSS version 25. Frequency and percentages were used to present descriptive data and Chi-squared test was used to assess the associations with knowledge and practices.

Results: In the study, most of the subjects were between 18-50 years (n=101; 80.8%), males (n=96; 76.8%) and supporting cooks (n=59; 47.2%). The study revealed a significant association between knowledge and the practices on food safety and personal hygiene ($p=0.006$). Education level ($p=0.026$), occupation related education ($p<0.01$) and monthly income ($p<0.01$) were found to have significant associations between practices of food safety and personal hygiene. Education level ($p=0.007$) and occupation related education ($p=0.048$) also has a significant association between the knowledge of food safety and personal hygiene.

Conclusions: Steps have to be taken in order to improve the knowledge on food safety and hygiene among food handlers and thereby improve practices. Supportive supervision and targeted training should be given. Regular medical check-ups and strict hygiene follow-ups should be encouraged.

Keywords: food safety, food handlers, personal hygiene, knowledge, practices

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