

Knowledge And Perceptions of Fish Handlers on Risk Factors Associated With Contamination and Spoilage of Fish and Fish Products in Kirinyaga County

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ABSTRACT

Foodborne diseases have currently received increasing attention due to various cases reported in Kenya on food contamination in which some have resulted to loss of lives. Studies have shown that fish and fish products are prone to pathogenic contamination and especially those that are sold in open markets. In contrast, relatively few or no studies have focused on fish handlers' knowledge and perceptions on fish foodborne diseases. In view of this, a study was conducted to evaluate fish vendors' perceptions and knowledge on food health practices associated with different fish products and to bridge the gap on understanding of fish vendors' quality evaluations of fish and possible risk factors that result to fish spoilage. Structured questionnaires were administered to 50 fish handlers through a direct face-to-face interviews focusing on the key informant. Data was analyzed using SPSS for windows version 22.0. Results on fish storage practices showed that 68 % of fish handlers refrigerated their fish products, 6 % of the respondents used display unit without ice while 4 % stored their fish products on open shelves in low quantities to avoid spoilage. To assess quality, 30 % of the fish vendors pressed the fish, while 68 % observed gills. On disease awareness, 58 % of the respondents were aware of cholera while 48 % were cautious in handling food. Interestingly, 39 % of the respondents reported complications after consumption of fish products. Majority of the fish vendors thought that lack of proper storage facility was the main challenge they experienced. Several respondents attributed the rise in changes of consumer preferences in terms of fish species to changes in seasons and consumers attitude. Poor sales and unstable prices affected some (32 %) of the fish vendors. Cold boxes are recommended for the transportation of fish products unless transported

and sold while alive in the market. Policy reforms that target fish handlers should be undertaken to create awareness on the importance of proper and safe fish handling. Carelessness and poor handling of fish products posed threat due to spoilage and infestation from bacterial pathogens resulting to post-harvest losses and risk of food borne diseases.

Keywords: Risk factors, Foodborne Diseases, Fish Spoilage, Poor Handling, Pathogenic, Contamination.

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