

Food Safety Awareness at Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDC) in Soweto, Gauteng Province

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Abstract

There are approximately 6.5 million South African children under the age of seven, the majority of whom are negatively impacted by a range of social and economic inequalities including under nutrition and food safety issues. Under nutrition is a major global public health problem that is responsible for lost potential, morbidity, and death. It is responsible for nearly half of all deaths in children under five years of age. Coupled with under nutrition, lack of food safety awareness has increased the risks of diseases at ECDC. In 2017, nine children from an ECDC in Soweto, fell ill and were hospitalized for listeriosis that they had contracted after consuming contaminated food at the centre. The causative agent, *Listeria monocytogenes* proliferated in the implicated food. Food handlers working in ECDC can play an important role in the prevention of outbreaks of foodborne diseases. The aim of my research was to investigate the food safety knowledge and awareness of food handlers working at ECDC in SOWETO, a densely populated township that forms part of the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality in Gauteng Province. A cross-sectional, quantitative research method wherein food handlers were interviewed using a structured questionnaire was used. A total of 200 food handlers from randomly selected ECDC participated in the survey. The vast majority of the respondents were females of 36 years and older with a high school education. Beyond 90% of food preparation facilities neither had a hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP) programme in place nor heard about it and South African Food Legislation. 90 % of the food handlers did not know the correct procedures used to avoid cross contamination and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPS) were not implemented. >90 % food handlers were lacking in knowledge, awareness, and attitude on many important aspects of microbial food safety hazards. There is limited training among childcare professionals in the area of food safety. Continual food safety training for management of ECDC and food handlers is pivotal in order to provide a safe environment for young children. This kind of training will impart knowledge and understanding of the South African food legislation.