

Researchers find independently owned ethnic restaurants have more food safety violations

February 16 2010

Diners who are skeptical of the food safety practices in ethnic restaurants have new research to back up some of their assumptions.

In a study of independently owned restaurants in 14 Kansas counties, Kansas State University researchers found a significantly higher number of food safety violations in ethnic restaurants than in nonethnic restaurants. The next step for their research is to understand the reasons for these differences and to work alongside restaurant operators to remedy the problems.

Leading the study were Junehee Kwon, associate professor, and Kevin Roberts, assistant professor, both of the department of hospitality management and dietetics. They found that independently owned ethnic restaurants had significantly more violations for several food safety categories, including time and temperature control, [hand washing](#) and proper use of utensils. The independent ethnic restaurants in the study also had more inspections than their nonethnic counterparts. Kwon said many of those repeat visits were driven by customer complaints.

The research will appear in an upcoming issue of the journal *Food Protection Trends*. Co-authors are Carol Shanklin, dean of the K-State Graduate School, and Pei Liu and Wen S.F. Yen, doctoral students in human ecology.

Because independent operations don't have the support of a corporate office that sets policies and organizes food safety training programs, the

researchers would like to see their studies help independently-owned ethnic restaurants improve their food handling and, eventually, food safety records.

Underscoring the importance of this study, Kwon said U.S. census data indicate that restaurants are one of the most common businesses for immigrants to start.

"There are some challenges to ethnic restaurants," Kwon said. "We can't tell what they are yet. We don't know what operators know and think about opening a restaurant in the United States and following the regulations. It's likely they have different perceptions of the risk of inadequate food safety, as well as the language barrier."

Roberts and colleagues are pursuing funding to study the barriers that keep employees from understanding and practicing food safety techniques. His co-principal investigators are Kwon and Kevin Sauer, assistant professor in the department of hospitality management and dietetics.

"What we want to do with the new project, should it be funded, is to look at whether it is a cultural thing and learn what we can do in food training programs," Roberts said. "Now, programs only deal with knowledge, but it doesn't persuade people to change their behaviors."

Kwon said she looks forward to working with the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Greater Dallas and hopes to collaborate with Hispanic Chambers of Commerce in Kansas locations to reach more restaurant owners and employees. She said collaborating with owners on research can be difficult because of skepticism that some immigrants have about government involvement in their businesses.

To understand different food safety perceptions among foreign

nationalities, Roberts and a graduate student are pursuing research that will ask international students at K-State about their countries' cultural norms and food safety attitudes.

Provided by Kansas State University

Citation: Researchers find independently owned ethnic restaurants have more food safety violations (2010, February 16) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-02-independently-ethnic-restaurants-food-safety.html>

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