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Food Allergy Sufferers' Perception of the Food Service Industry- A Study

Presented by
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Introduction

Dr Paulino (Lino) Schembri , D Prof. , MSc. (UCLan)

Studies;

HACCP Specialist, Procert, EPFL, Switzerland

MSc in Food Safety Management, UCLan, UK

Professional Doctorate in Food Safety Management Systems, UCLan, UK.

Expertise; HACCP Implementation, Food Safety Management, Food Allergen Management in SMEs.



Literature review

Food allergy sufferers experience difficulties in restaurants due to the lack of training and knowledge of the service staff regarding food allergies (Lee & Kwon, 2011).

Allergy sufferers tend to have a negative aptitude when faced with the prospects of having to eat food where they had no control in its preparation (Allergy UK, 2015; Pratten & Towers, 2004).



Literature review cont.

The food allergy sufferers' perception of the food service industry is that there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of the consequences food allergens have on sensitive individuals (Bailey et al, 2011)

Food allergy sufferers' perception of the loose food industry is that most of the front of house staff do not check the allergen status of the meals (Leitch, Walker & Davey, 2005; Bailey et al, 2011)

Literature review- some numbers

- In general, 60% of consumers find restaurant menus misleading and lacking information (Prattern & Towers, 2003).
- 92% of food allergy sufferers state that panic and distress impact their ability to eat in restaurants (Allergy UK, 2015).
- 82% consider the impact as worrying when going on holidays (Allergy UK, 2015).
- 62% of allergy sufferers feel that people avoid inviting them because of the discomfort (Allergy UK, 2016).



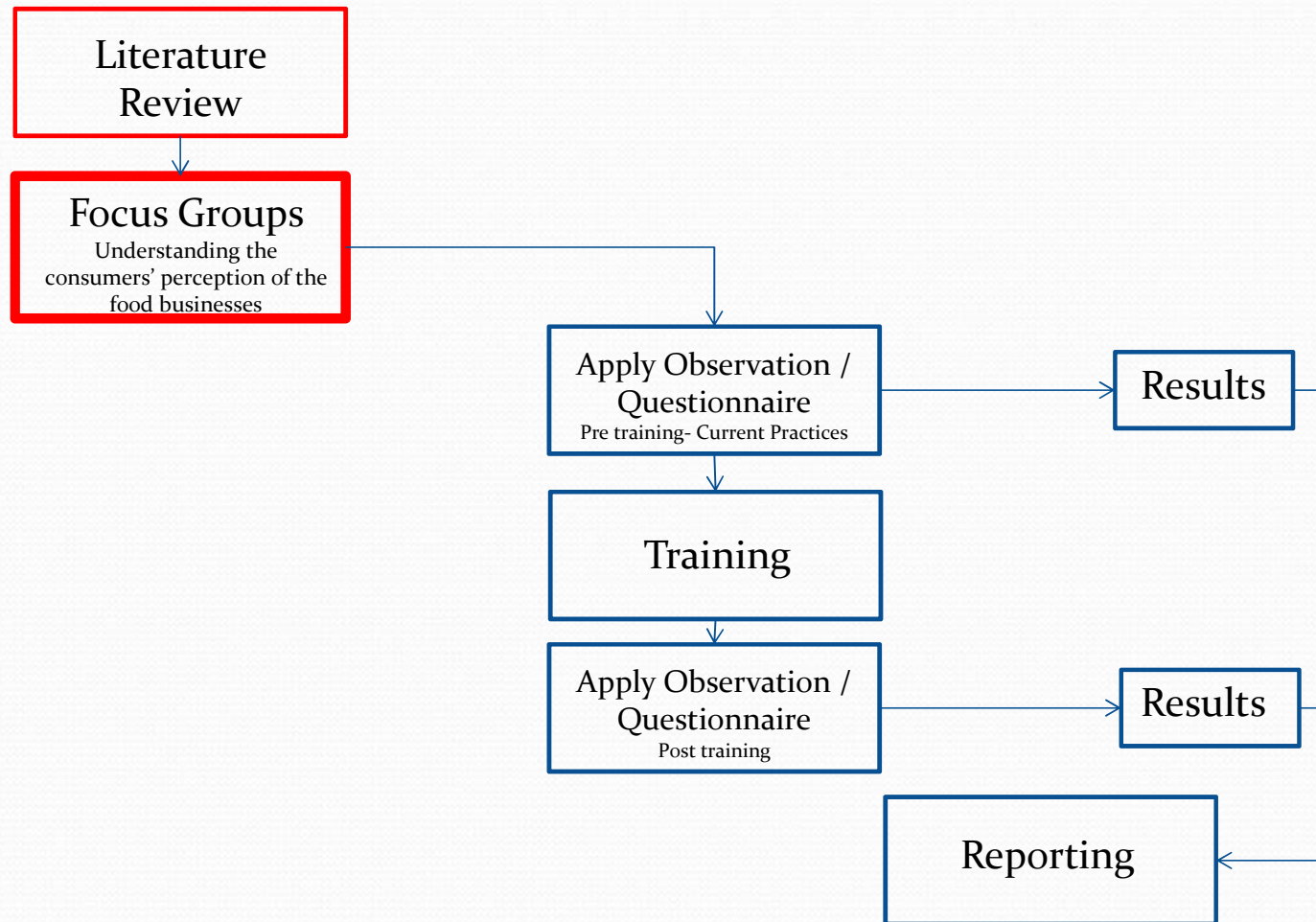
Aims of the study

This study unlike previous research looked at the all aspects involved in food production, preparation and consumption in relation to food allergen management.

Selected Aims of the study;

- The mechanics by which accurate ingredient information could be obstructed throughout food preparation, up to service, and how these issues could be overcome.
- To evaluate the expectations of the allergy sufferers when eating outside their homes with special attention to micro and small food service industry and the perception and confidence in the industry.

The study framework



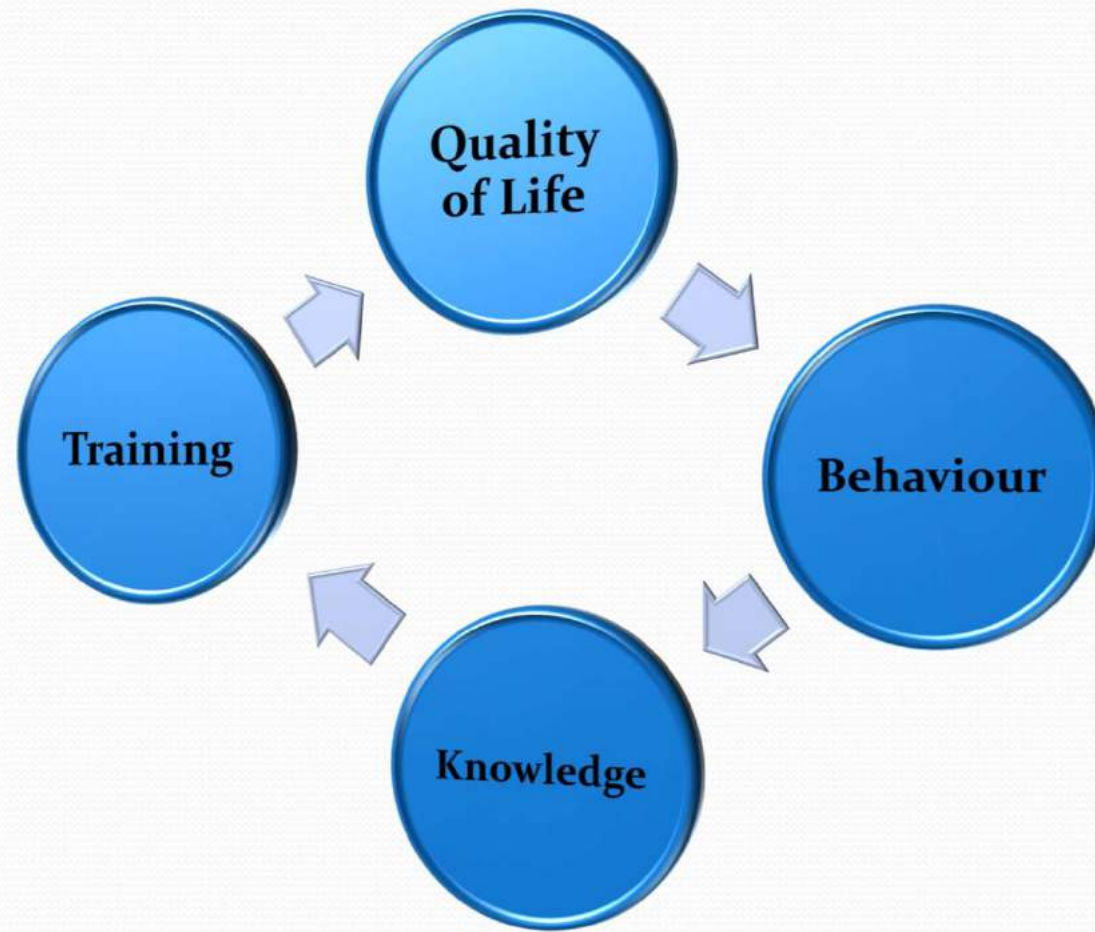
Focus of discussion

Literature Review



Focus Groups
Understanding the
consumers' perception of the
food businesses

Through the Focus group discussion four themes emerged;



Quality of Life

Focus group participants claimed that;

'at receptions I will not eat anything'

'I take my own food'

'I live in a world of my own'

'I am shocked when I receive an invite and to be extremely safe I take my own food'

'holidays are always in self-catering....I always carry my own food'



Quality of Life

This indicates that the allergy sufferers;

- Abstain from eating
- Prepare and carry their own food
- Are worried of getting sick when invited
- Prefer to prepare their own food
- Are anxious when they do not have full control over their food preparation.



Consequences of ingesting the offending food

They fear a negative consequence of consuming food stating;

‘Yes I got an attack after eating out’

‘I cannot say I would go to a restaurant and feel assured 100%’

‘imagine you would have gastric flu every day, I came down to 45 kilos’

These incidents and other similar ones erodes the confidence of the allergy sufferer from eating out.



Some respite

Small restaurants are preferred as personal attention is more accessible;

‘In small restaurants where staff understands the practices is crucial, this where is felt safest’

‘In a small restaurant he (chef) would be sooner prepared to listen to you, he would have better control of the kitchen’

Behaviour

Food allergy sufferers tend to look for safety before anything else when they are considering a restaurant.

The main concerns were wrapped around;

- The misconception of what is truly an allergen
- The lack of understanding of the consequences of ingesting the culprit food would bring about
- The insult of offering compensation after a incident

They claimed;

'lack of awareness, ignorance and misinformation'



Expectations

The allergy sufferers felt that the service staff should be;

- *More attentive to their requests*
- *More informed of the consequences*
- *Better trained and aware of their legal obligations*

This is in line with the Food Information Regulation (FIR) EU1169/2011 which requires food businesses to deliver accurate ingredient information to the consumer.



Knowledge

The service staff could not make a distinct link between;

- *Butter and milk*
- *Peanuts and peanut oil*
- *Gluten free and bread*

when they were asked to prepare food without these allergens.

Lack of knowledge was identified as a major gap in addressing the need of food allergy consumers.

Another common barrier identified was language



Reactions

The food allergy sufferers felt that they were being;

- *Singled out*
- *Vulnerable*
- *Told not to be paranoid*
- *Or Fussy*

The fact that the service staff did not understand the requirements needed to serve food allergy sufferers resulted in blaming the consumers rather than understanding their own lack of adequate knowledge to serve safe food.



Training

The study has shown that cognitive knowledge had improved however the practices had not.

The classroom training did little to no effect to improve practices.

This indicates that formal training might not have the desired effect of improving old practices.

Assisted on the job instructions might have a better outcome.



Effective Training

The focus group participants had indicated that;

- *Human errors*
- *Contamination concerns*
- *Reliability*
- *Lack of Knowledge*

are direct results of lack or inappropriate training.



Training development

Lack of appropriate training results in mismatching the food requirements of food allergy sufferers with the actual food served.

Not knowing what and how the food is prepared can be detrimental to the consumer, more so when the staff are over confident in their knowledge of the ingredients used.

Chefs qualifications are not regulated in many countries and very little evidence of prior training in food allergen management is required.



Key Findings

Factors indicated by the focus group which effected their perception of the Food Service Industry in their ability to prepared safe food;

- *Language Barriers*
- *Lack of Awareness*
- *Lack of Accurate Ingredient Information and Tracking*
- *Misconception of Food Allergies*
- *Time to understand and note accurately their requirements*
- *Lack or Inappropriate Training*

Some conclusions

- Food allergy sufferers want to know what ingredients are in their food and how these were prepared.
- Lack of essential knowledge to manage food allergies
- Weak and sometimes over confident, yet incorrect solutions
- Training needs to improve handlers' behaviour to register positive change
- Accurate ingredient information listed in Standard Operation Procedure (SOPs) (Recipes).
- Knowledge alone does not lead to safer food.
- Good Manufacturing Practices based on principles entrenched in food safety management systems, not stand alone.



The rest of the study

- Video observations were undertaken to measure pre and post training practices.
- Development of a food allergy management training program
- Development of a infographic displaying the most common 14 allergens in the EU
- Development of an innovative toolkit which delivers accurate ingredient information to the consumers



Questions

Thank you for your attention