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Abstract

This study aims to explore the status of cabin crew food safety training in different airlines. Using the snowballing technique, 26 cabin crew managers, supervisors and trainers (from 20 international airlines) participated in in-depth, structured interviews. The interview schedule was developed to determine and evaluate implementation and perceptions of cabin crew training. Data was analysed using a qualitative content analysis approach. All respondents perceived cabin crew food safety/hygiene issues are important in relation to on-board food-handling, for example: "food safety is always an important issue". Findings indicated that while most of the airlines (90%) train cabin crew on food safety, different cabin crew roles perceived the same level of food safety training. The results obtained can be used to inform development of future training programmes, methods and evaluation.

Keywords: Cabin crew - food safety - training- airlines – qualitative

1. Introduction

Airlines are obliged to carry cabin crew on aircrafts to meet the minimum requirements of the Civil Aviation Authority (Cabincrew, 2010). Some airlines therefore hire thousands of cabin crew, for instance, the number of Emirates' cabin crew was over 17,000 in February 2014, hired from over 130 countries and collectively speaking more than 50 languages (Emirates Group, 2015). Cabin crew responsibilities not only include ensuring the safety of the aircraft and its passengers, but extend to food handling which includes the safe receipt, storage, reheating and serving of meals on board and thus challenges regarding safe and standardised airline food service are present (IFSA, 2015).

On-board, cabin crew handle high-risk foods, including salads, meat and fish, served hot or cold pre-prepared and plated cold meat and fish, canapés and special meals. These food handling-related duties, unless carefully and critically practiced, may lead to microbiological, chemical, physical and allergic hazards (McMullan et al., 2007; Abdelhakim, 2016; IFSA, 2015). Specifically, it has been reported that cabin crew mishandling of food has resulted in eight out of twelve reported food poisoning outbreaks due to malpractices and unhygienic behaviours. Examples of such reported malpractices include consumption of passengers' meals instead of eating their foods provided specifically for them to avoid any risk of food contamination (Hatakka, 2000), and were incapable to handle some in-flight allergic reactions (Greenhawt et al., 2013).

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