



Study of Requirements, Preventive Controls Measures, and Policies to Ensure Food Safety and Public Health

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Key Messages:

1. Handling of baby food is not maintained, and the seller-buyer relationship could be more optimal.
2. Irregular food safety monitoring and the cold chain need to be appropriately maintained.
3. Checking/testing imported food items and raw materials needs improvement. In most cases, the company destroys expired date items.
4. Monitoring is usually irregular and needs to be more coordinated. Involvement of multiple agencies leads to discouragement and demotivation among the stakeholders. They opined that the food safety training and inspection manuals, protocols, SOPs, guidelines, and checklists must be revised. They also pointed out that the shelf-life of food items is not tested.
5. Chemical contamination was discovered to be difficult to eradicate or mitigate and should be addressed first. Some package labelling was considered too small or illegible and needed to be more informative to the buyers.

Introduction

Health policy is a multidisciplinary approach to public policy that identifies the financial source that can be used for administration, planning, and action. In the context of the current study, it further includes the issue of food safety. For it to be effective, it must be supported by data and integrated across all relevant ministries and organizations. To create, organize, implement, and oversee a successful and dependable food safety and public health policy, we must comprehend the components of rules and regulations that interact with the stakeholders. In Bangladesh, many agencies are engaged in food safety issues.

On the other hand, there are variations in the laboratory findings in food testing and its implementation. It is crucial to contextualize the health policy situation to understand the detection methodology and theory challenges. Policymakers, government administrators, and NGOs need data on the complete pathways to prioritize and effectively target interventions to inform evidence-based decision-making processes. The study attempted to assess the current rules and regulations for food safety, to understand the picture of the rules, their user, and execution, and to inform the policymakers, local government officials, and local NGOs about evidence-based decision-making processes.

Methodology

A cross-sectional study design was adopted with a bottom-up approach among the stakeholders of the food safety component of the health policy. The study comprised field-level surveys from general buyers, retailers, and super shop personnel (n=205). Survey participants were interviewed face to face, and group discussions were held with suppliers and manufacturers to identify gaps between the existing rules, regulations and laws and how they are being implemented. In the end, an Integration meeting was held between Regulatory investigators, Policymakers, and Academicians focused on bridging the gaps and looking for policy recommendations.



Research Findings

Most regular buyers (87.1%) knew about foodborne diseases, and most retailers and supershop employees knew that their items might contain preservatives (69.8% and 92.2%, respectively). Regarding package puncturing to stack more packets on the racks, most retailers and super shop employees (52.8% and 66.7%) acknowledged that this practice harms food but blamed the suppliers. Most retailers (86.8%) and super shop staff (96.1%) were aware of current food safety legislation, which they have learned through word-of-mouth (45.3% & 11.8%, respectively), followed by news (35.0% & 17.6%) and training (5.7% & 66.7% respectively). Despite training, only 44.9% of supermarket employees knew all the authorities responsible for enforcing food safety rules. Food safety violations landed to 15.1% of retailers and 7.8% of super shop employees. Concerning the various Food safety requirements, 18.9% of retailers and 15.7% of super shop employees saw this as a problem. Food safety laws are known by 96.1% of super shop staff, and packaging laws are known by 78.4%, while this is 86.8% and 58.5% for retailers, respectively.

Table 1: Proportion of respondents having Knowledge of Legislation

Respondents	Food Safety Laws	Packaging Laws
Retailers	86.8%	58.5%
Super shops	96.1%	78.4%

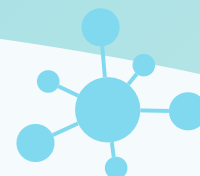
Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to Medium for Knowledge of Legislation

Respondents	Training	News	Word of Mouth
Retailers	5.7%	35.0%	45.3%
Super shops	66.7%	17.6%	11.8%

According to the interviews and group discussions, the handling of baby food and cold chain is not maintained correctly, the seller-buyer relationship needs to be more optimal, imported food items and raw materials checking/ testing needs to be adequate, and shelf-life tests of food items are virtually nonexistent. According to the respondents, there are excessive Food Safety laws, and the involvement of many agencies in dealing with them is viewed as a burden by the relevant stakeholders. Food safety training was found to need to be improved. Monitoring was also considered as generally sporadic. Similar comments and concerns were observed during the integration meeting with policymakers and academics. Chemical contamination is not easy to eliminate or reduce. Some package labels need to be more extensive, readable, and transparent for buyers.

Policy recommendations

- In the Integration meeting, policymakers, regulatory officials, and academics advocated for a national food safety policy with a clear mission, vision, objectives, and goals to provide safe food for all.
- In terms of operations, they advocated for uniform and integrated activities, preferably by a single agency as a one-stop solution.
- It was suggested that the quarantine process be maintained and that all imported food and raw materials be tested regularly at the port of entry.
- Media sometimes cause social difficulties by disseminating non-scientific messages; thus, accurate scientific messages should be circulated through responsible agencies and media personnel awareness programs.
- Regular training, certifications, and awareness campaigns are required to maintain the quality of food safety operations.
- Package labelling should be legible and informative enough in simple language for the buyers.
- Because multiple food safety laws/ordinances and agencies are considered a burden by stakeholders, it was proposed that they could be streamlined and merged into a single legal organization to the greatest extent practicable.



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