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FOOD HYGIENE IN MAKESHIFT RESTAURANTS AT KISANGANI CENTRAL MARKET, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

KAKULE LWANGA Lwanga¹@, AMOSI KIKWATA Guld¹, BASANDJA LONGEMBE Eugène¹, TAGOTO TEPUNGIPAME Alliance¹, KAZADI MALUMBA Zoé² and PANDA LUKONGO KITRONZA¹

¹University of Kisangani, Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy, Department of Public Health ²University of Kisangani, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Biotechnological Sciences

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Food safety in makeshift restaurants impacts public health. This study aims to assess the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of restaurant owners regarding food hygiene, as well as associated factors, in order to propose solutions to preserve consumer health.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 63 makeshift restaurant owners at Kisangani's central market, from November 1 to 30, 2023. Data were collected using guided interviews and direct observation techniques.

Results: More than half (50.8%) of the restaurant owners had good knowledge of food hygiene measures, 65.1% had a favorable attitude, and 68.3% had inadequate practices. Restaurant infrastructure characteristics: buildings made of semi-durable or makeshift materials (44.5%), earthen floors (61.9%), dirty premises (52.4%), difficult-to-clean (56.9%) and unsanitary (54.9%) furniture, lack of toilets (90.5%) and garbage cans (30%), non-hygienic garbage cans (70%). Water supply: public tap from Regideso (93.6%), storage in open containers (76.2%), lack of handwashing stations (52.4%), presence of water in handwashing stations (87.3%), availability of soap (98.4%).

Conclusion: Hygiene conditions in makeshift restaurants at Kisangani's central market are deficient, characterized by insufficient knowledge and inadequate practices despite a favorable attitude. These conditions are favored by the absence and/or poor dissemination of normative documents and the lack of



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training for restaurant owners. This exposes consumers to foodborne illnesses. Corrective measures are necessary to preserve the health of users.

KEYWORDS: knowledge, attitude and practices, food hygiene, makeshift restaurant, Kisangani.

I. INTRODUCTION

Food, a fundamental need for human beings, requires impeccable quality to ensure consumer safety. Food safety is a major public health issue worldwide. Unsafe food can cause various illnesses, ranging from diarrheal disorders to cancers [1]. These diseases, caused by microbial pathogens, biotoxins, or chemical pollutants, pose a serious threat to the health of millions of people. They place a heavy burden on health systems and hinder economic development.

Various factors can contaminate food: soil, water, air, plants, animals, humans, equipment, and packaging [2]. Contamination often results from inadequate hygiene conditions during preparation, poor conservation practices [3], or the use of unsuitable equipment. Street restaurants, while providing an affordable food source in urban areas, contribute to the transmission of these diseases [4-5].

For populations with limited resources, street food is an economical and accessible solution for daily sustenance. This phenomenon, exacerbated by crises and precariousness, affects all social strata in major sub-Saharan African cities, including the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

In the DRC, street restaurants, known as "Malewa," are ubiquitous in major cities like Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, and Kisangani [6-7]. Despite their socio-economic role and popularity, hygiene in these establishments is a concern. The sanitary quality of food is often compromised by mass production, lack of staff training, and consumer exposure to foodborne illness risks [8-10].

In Kisangani, street restaurants are numerous, particularly near markets. They are frequented by residents seeking affordable meals. However, non-compliance with hygiene rules, unsanitary conditions, water supply problems, and precarious hygiene measures endanger consumer health.

Given the scale of this problem, it is crucial to study the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of restaurant owners at Kisangani's central market regarding food hygiene, as well as the hygienic factors likely to be associated with subsequent health risks.



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II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Study Setting

This study was conducted at the central market of Kisangani city, the capital of TSHOPO province, in the Northeast of the DRC. This market, open 7 days a week, is a point of interaction between traders and customers from diverse backgrounds. Approximately fifty makeshift restaurants are officially recognized by the market administration, in addition to an undetermined number of clandestine establishments [11]. With an estimated population of 1,356,640 inhabitants in 2021 [12], Kisangani ranks as the fifth most populous city in the country.

2.2. Study Population

The study population consisted of makeshift restaurant owners at the central market of Kisangani, estimated at 63 individuals [11].

2.3. Study Design and Period

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted at the central market of Kisangani from November 1 to 30, 2023.

2.4. Sampling

We performed an exhaustive sampling, including all 63 restaurants in the central market. At each restaurant, one restaurant owner was selected, and the workspace was observed.

2.5. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out using guided interviews with a questionnaire and direct observation, as follows:

Interviews with restaurant owners were conducted using a mixed survey questionnaire (Annex 1), including open and closed questions. The questionnaire was encoded in the "Kobo Toolbox" tool incorporated into a smartphone and covered the various parameters of the study. The interview was conducted in vernacular languages (Lingala, Swahili) or French, according to the respondent's choice, and lasted approximately 20 minutes.

Observation was performed using a structured observation grid (Annex 2) to document observations systematically. Its objective was to identify potential risk factors related to food contamination, observable at the level of makeshift restaurants.

2.6. Study Variables

The variables studied in this work were:

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Sociodemographic characteristics: age, sex, marital status, education level, number of dependent children; Knowledge of food hygiene (notion, foodborne diseases, food contamination sources, prevention), attitudes related to consumer protection, the need for continuing education for restaurant owners, and practices of hygiene measures at the restaurant-by-restaurant owners (food items, water, hands, waste management, sanitation of floors, furniture, utensils; ...).

Infrastructural characteristics of restaurants: type of shelters (durable, semi-durable, makeshift material), floor covering (cement, beaten earth), floor appearance (clean, dirty), furniture (present, absent), type of furniture (easily washable or not), furniture appearance (clean, dirty), kitchen separation – other segments (Yes or no), toilet access (presence or absence).

Characteristics related to water used in restaurants: access to a drinking water source (Yes or no), drinking water quality (reliable or dubious source), water source for domestic work (Regideso, Wells, ...), drinking water source (Regideso, Wells, Packaged water in sachets ...), water storage (adequate or not), handwashing station (present or absent), soap availability (Present or absent), water availability in the handwashing station (Present or absent).

2.7. Data Analysis Techniques

Data collected via "Kobo collect" were encoded in an Excel database and then analyzed using STATA 13.1 software. Quantitative data were described using mean \pm SD and median and interquartile range, depending on whether the distribution was symmetrical or not. Categorical data were explored using proportions.

The categorization of the knowledge level of food hygiene rules was performed as follows:

Score < 50%: Poor knowledge

Score \geq 50%: Good knowledge.

The attitude of restaurant owners towards food hygiene measures in restaurants was categorized as follows:

Score < 50%: Unfavorable attitude

Score \geq 50%: Favorable attitude

The practices of restaurant owners regarding food hygiene were categorized as follows:

Score < 70%: Inadequate practices

Score \geq 70% of correct answers: Adequate practices



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III. RESULTS

VARIABLE	Modalities	Frequency	Percentage
Age	30 (40-26) years	-	-
Sex	Female	57	90.5
	Male	6	9.5
Marital Status	Single	24	38.1
	Married	37	58.7
	Widowed	2	3.2
Education Level	Illiterate	9	14.3
	Primary	37	58.7
	Secondary	16	25.4
	Higher / University	1	1.6

Table I. Sociodemographic Characteristics

This table reveals that the median age of the participants was 30 years, and they had an average of 4 dependent children. Most were married, and their education level was mainly limited to primary education.

VARIABLE	Modalities	Frequency	Percentage	
Knowledge	Poor	31	49.2	
	Good	32	50.8	
Attitudes	Unfavorable	22	34.9	
	Favorable	41	65.1	
Practices	Inadequate	43	68.3	
	Adequate	20	31.7	

Table II. Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices of Respondents Regarding Food Hygiene

This table shows that restaurant owners had good knowledge of food hygiene rules and were favorable towards them, but did not apply them correctly in their daily practices.



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VARIABLE	Modalities		y Percentage
Type of Shelters	Makeshift material (old she metal, sacks, etc.)	^{et} 52	82.5
	Durable material	11	17.5
Floor Covering	Cemented	24	38.1
	Beaten earth	39	61.9
Floor Appearance	Clean	30	47.6
	Dirty	33	52.4
Kitchen Concerting Other Concerts	No	40	63.5
Kitchen Separation – Other Segments	Yes	23	36.5
Furniture	Absent	12	19.1
	Present	51	80.9
Type of Furniture (N=51)	Difficult to wash	29	56.9
	Easy to wash	22	43.1
Furniture Appearance (N=51)	Clean	23	45.1
	Dirty	28	54.9
Toilets	Absent	57	90.5
	Present	6	9.5
Proximity to Contamination Sources (sew	er Less than 25 meters	45	71.4
holes, stagnant water, garbage)	More than 25 meters	18	28.6
Garbage Cans	Absent	19	30.2
	Present	44	69.8
Quality of Garbage Cans (N=44)	Non-hygienic	44	100
	Hygienic	0	0

Table III. Characteristics of the Physical Environment of Restaurants

The market restaurants were characterized by buildings made of semi-durable materials, dirty earthen floors, difficult-to-wash and unsanitary furniture, and an almost total lack of toilets. In most cases, garbage cans were present but non-hygienic. Moreover, more than two-thirds of the restaurants were located less than 25 meters from contamination sources.



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VARIABLE	Modalities	Frequency	Percentage
Connection to Drinking Water Network	^r No	58	92.1
	Yes	5	7.9
Water Source for Domestic Work	Public Tap (REGIDESO)	59	93.6
	Source / Well	4	6.4
Drinking Water Source	REGIDESO	31	49.2
	REGIDESO and Sachets	24	38.1
	Sachet	8	12.7
Water Storage	Open containers (open jerry cans, pots, tanks without lids)	47	74.6
	Closed containers (jerry cans with lids, tanks with lids)	16	25.4
Availability of a Handwashing Station	² No	33	52.4
	Yes	30	47.6
Availability of Soap	No	8	12.7
	Yes	55	87.3
Availability of Water for Handwashing	r No	1	1.6
	Yes	62	98.4

Table IV. Characteristics of the Water Supply System in Restaurants

Almost all restaurants were not connected to the drinking water network; most restaurants get their water from the Regideso public tap at the central market. Water was mainly stored in open jerry cans and tanks without lids; half of the restaurants served REGIDESO water for drinking, while the others used sachet water or a combination of both. More than half of the restaurants did not have handwashing stations, but most had soap and water for handwashing.



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IV. DISCUSSION

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Sociodemographic Characteristics

The makeshift restaurant owners in Kisangani had a median age of 30 years, with a majority between 26 and 40 years old (58%). Studies conducted in Mbuji-Mayi and Goma found similar median ages (32 and 35 years respectively), with majorities in comparable age ranges. The median number of 4 children per restaurant owner in Kisangani is lower than the average of 5.2 children per restaurant owner observed in Mbuji-Mayi, and 4.8 children found in Goma [13-14].

The predominance of women among makeshift restaurant owners in Kisangani (90.5%) is similar to that observed in other studies in Africa, and can be explained by cultural and economic factors that limit employment opportunities for women [15]. The majority of makeshift restaurant owners in Kisangani are married (58.7%). This proportion is comparable to other studies conducted in Africa, such as in Ghana [16-17], Senegal [18], and other countries. Studies in Mbuji-Mayi and Goma found slightly different proportions of married restaurant owners (56% and 62% respectively) [13-14].

The education level of makeshift restaurant owners in Kisangani is generally low, with 58.7% of respondents having only a primary education level. This situation limits their access to information and training on food hygiene, and can be an obstacle to adopting good practices in this area.

The results of this study on the sociodemographic characteristics of makeshift restaurant owners in Kisangani are consistent with those of other studies conducted in the DRC and Africa. There is often a predominance of women, a relatively young average age, a high number of dependent children, and a low level of education among makeshift restaurant owners in these different regions [4, 13-14, 19].

In Côte d'Ivoire, restaurant spaces were areas set up by small vendors to meet a massive food need. They resemble makeshift canteens around schools, public services, administrations, or factories and were 90% run by women. Informal popular catering has two advantages: the preparation of dishes that meet the taste of the population and prices that are kept as low as possible [20].

The emergence of makeshift restaurants is a reality in developing countries. It appears as an incomegenerating activity for less educated women who do not have enough job opportunities and becomes an important source of household income. It also appears as a response to food needs adapted to the income conditions of the population. The regulation of their establishment and the improvement of their service conditions are essential.



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Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices

Nearly half of the makeshift restaurant owners at Kisangani's central market (49.2%) had insufficient knowledge of food hygiene. Despite generally appropriate attitudes (65.1%), their practices remained mostly inadequate (68.3%), exposing consumers to health risks. This situation reflects a lack of awareness of basic food hygiene principles and suggests that even those who have knowledge in this area do not always apply it correctly.

Studies conducted in other Congolese [21-24] and African cities [25-28] reveal similar shortcomings, although there are nuances regarding knowledge levels and practices [29-30]. These nuances can be explained by methodological differences, varied socio-economic contexts, or heterogeneous awareness and training efforts.

The lack of knowledge of the mandatory implementation of good practices by food services was observed in Brazil despite the availability of a large number of laws on this program. The need to intensify inspections and increase incentives for prevention programs, such as the distribution of educational materials, was recommended [31].

Also, training in good food production practices should be the starting point for owners and food handlers of restaurant establishments, to preserve consumer health and maintain the real estate market [32].

During a study conducted in the DRC, it was observed that most restaurant owners did not have training on food hygiene or food handling practices [33].

The results of another study showed that the most serious hygiene deficiencies in restaurants were related to the lack of documentation and standardization of processes, which underscores the importance of the presence of a legally responsible and duly qualified professional in these restaurants [34].

Interventions targeting restaurant owners and consumers, as well as capacity building, controls, and regulations, are necessary to improve food hygiene in makeshift restaurants at Kisangani's central market.

Restaurant Characteristics

The state of infrastructure and furniture in Kisangani's makeshift restaurants poses significant risks to public health. The majority of restaurants (82.5%) were built with makeshift materials, ensuring neither hygiene nor safety. The lack of separation between the kitchen and other areas (63.5%) promotes cross-contamination of food. The earthen floor (61.9%), often dirty (52.4%), is a breeding ground for bacteria. The absence of furniture in 1 out of 5 restaurants and its poor condition in others (dirty 54.9% and difficult



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to wash 56.9%) increase the risks of contamination. More than 2/3 of the restaurants (71.4%) are located less than 25 meters from contamination sources, exposing food to pathogens and promoting the proliferation of vector-borne diseases. Almost all restaurants (90.5%) do not have toilets, which is a major threat to public health and exceeds even the shortcomings observed in other studies in the DRC and Africa [35-37].

During a study conducted in Brazil, it was recommended that catering services implement permanent operational procedures regarding the following: facilities, equipment and furniture sanitation; integrated control of urban vectors and pests; sanitation staff hygiene and food handling of water tanks [38].

The presence of garbage cans in most restaurants (69.8%) is a positive point, but they are all non-hygienic; and their regular maintenance and emptying are essential. Several studies have shown that the presence of garbage cans is not always guaranteed in makeshift restaurants [35-37].

These infrastructural deficiencies are widespread in makeshift restaurants in the DRC [39-43] and sub-Saharan Africa [44-49]. They result from a lack of resources, education, and enforcement of regulations. These conditions increase the risk of food contamination and negative impact on public health.

The hygiene of utensils, the environment, and the handler are mandatory to ensure the hygienic-sanitary quality of prepared food. Thus, standardized hygienic-sanitary procedures in restaurants can be a useful tool to ensure food safety through good food handling practices [50].

Interventions targeting the improvement of infrastructure and furniture are necessary to guarantee consumers a healthy environment in restaurants and thus protect their health.

Water Supply System Characteristics in Restaurants

The absence of handwashing stations in more than half of the restaurants (52.4%) and the lack of drinking water constitute major risks to public health. The majority of restaurants (93.6%) get their water from the public tap at the central market, a source that is not always potable. Storing water in open containers (open jerry cans, tanks, or pots without lids) and using unreliable water sources increase the risks of contamination.

Most restaurants (87.3%) have soap and almost all (98.4%) have water for handwashing, crucial practices to prevent food contamination. REGIDESO tap water is the most common drinking water source (49.2%). A significant proportion uses a combination of tap water and sachet water (38.1%); 12.7% use only sachet water (variable quality).



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The deplorable state of water and handwashing hygiene exposes consumers to numerous risks. Studies in the DRC and Africa have found similar results [47, 51-55]. The absence of drinking water and handwashing stations is common (85% of makeshift restaurants in Cameroon did not have drinking water [47]). Alternative water sources (public taps, wells) represent a health risk [52-53].

Urgent actions are needed to improve access to drinking water, promote hygienic water storage and handling practices, install handwashing stations, and raise awareness of the importance of frequent and effective handwashing.

CONCLUSION

This study highlighted the problem of hygiene in makeshift restaurants in the city of Kisangani. It appears from our results that the makeshift restaurant owners at Kisangani's central market have an average knowledge of food hygiene and adopt mostly inadequate practices, exposing consumers to health risks. These conditions are favored by the absence and/or poor dissemination of normative documents and the lack of training for restaurant owners.

Urgent and multisectoral interventions with a view to regulation, compliance with hygiene rules, inspections, awareness, and training are necessary to improve food hygiene, sanitation, and waste management in these establishments.

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