

Food Safety Practices among Consumers and Food Retailers in Three Districts of Buenos Aires City after COVID 19 Pandemic: Analysis of Consumer Interview Findings and Observations from Food Safety Experts

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Introduction

Proper food safety practices should be usual and systematic, however basic failures or lack of "food safety culture" are contributing factors to foodborne illnesses. Considering the recommended sanitary practices provided during COVID-19, we studied whether consumers and food retailers have incorporated food safety knowledge and habits resulting in a better food safety culture.

Purpose & Schedule

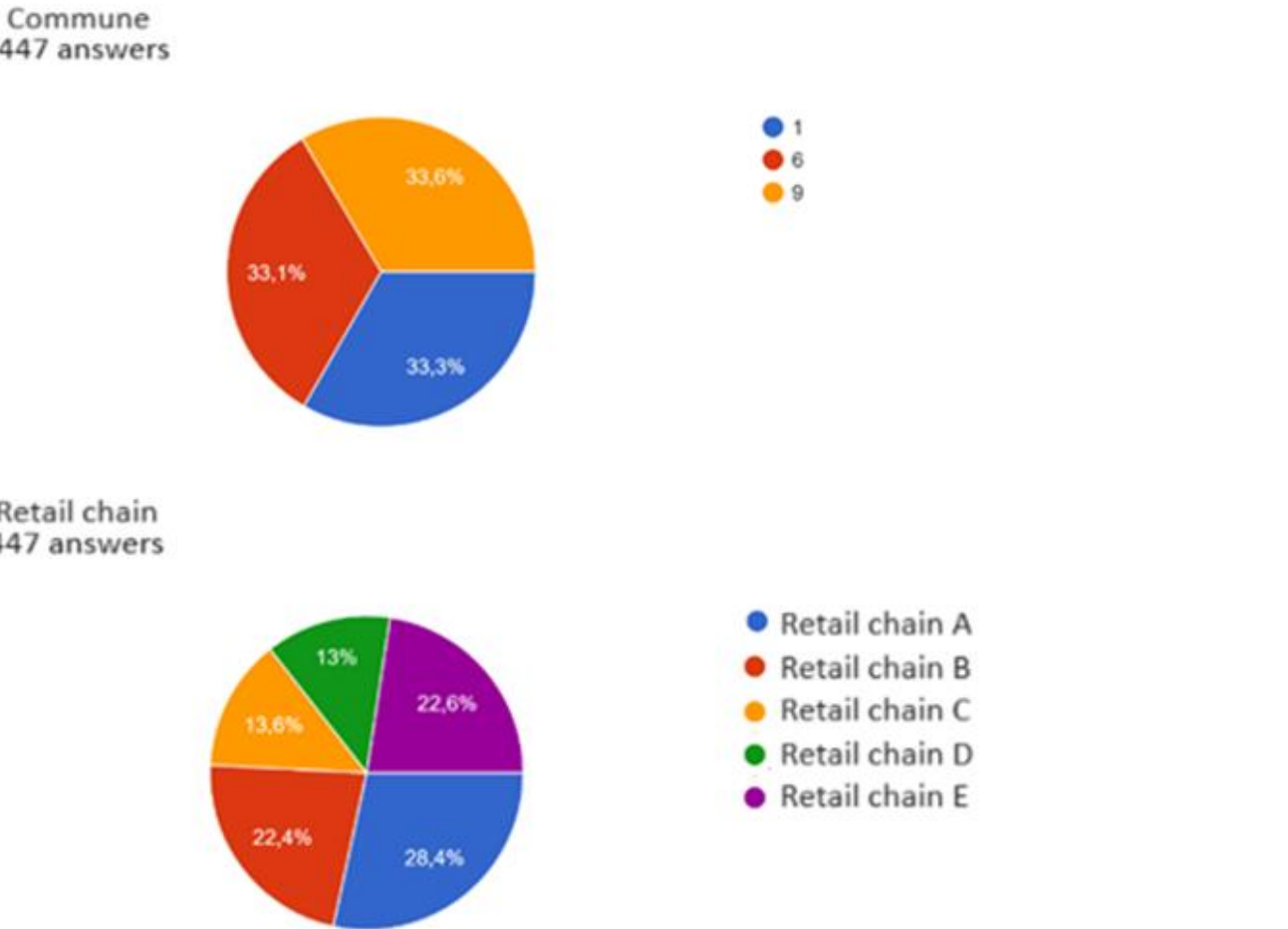
Explore the level of food safety culture through the evaluation of knowledge and food safety behaviors in food retailers and their customers in 3 specific districts of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Activity	Month									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Preparation of surveys	█	█								
planning of the schedule	█	█								
Pilot test	█									
Data collection		█	█	█	█	█	█	█		
Analysis of data							█	█	█	
Report writing									█	█

Methods

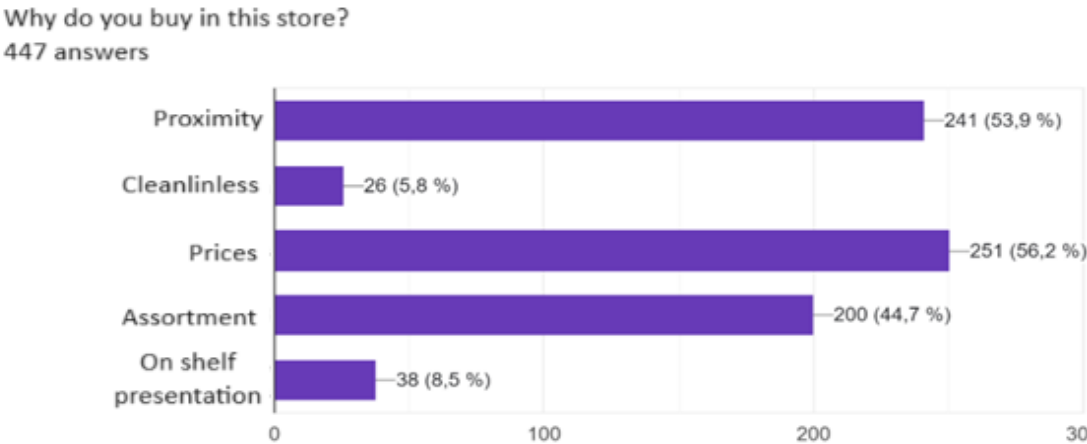
62 retail stores were observed by experts to assess hygiene and adherence to regulations, and 447 consumers were interviewed after leaving the stores.

Retail stores were divided in 5 categories according to the following criteria:
 Retailer A: Proximity grocery store
 Retailer B: International franchise supermarket
 Retailer C: National Supermarket
 Retailer D: International supermarket
 Retailer E: International mini market



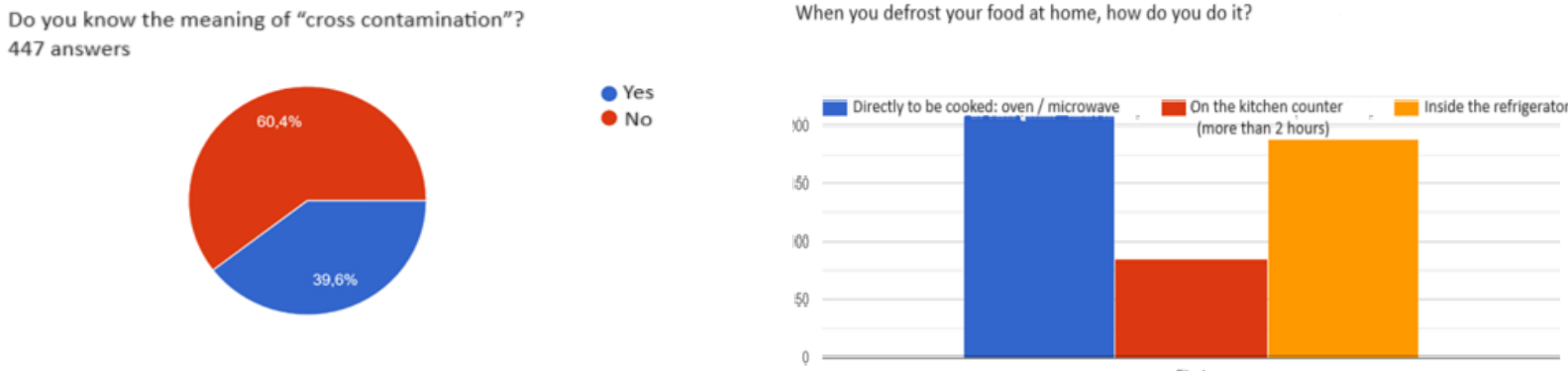
Results

1-Main motivation to choose the food retail store was proximity (53.9%), meanwhile cleanness was in the last place.



2- 60.4% of the people did not know the meaning of "cross-contamination". This percentage was higher in younger people and in consumers with lower educational level.

3- 20% of the people defrost food at room temperature.



4- More than 50% said that they washed their hands for more than 30 seconds, and clean cans before storing them but most stopped using alcohol for hand disinfection.

5- 41% of consumers picked refrigerated / frozen food at the beginning of the purchase.

6- 92.4% of the consumer considered that the general hygiene of the store was good, meanwhile the experts observed that only 71% of the refrigerators were clean and the housekeeping was poor in 17% of the stores.



7- Differences were found among retailer categories The highest number of the GMP/hygiene gaps (27%) were found in Retailer A and the lowest (2%) in Retailer D.

Conclusions

The study showed that many consumers do not prioritize the hygiene of the stores when choosing them to buy food, that they are not aware of the concept of cross-contamination, and that they don't follow some of the most basic food safety practices. COVID-19 pandemic partially contributed to the creation of hygiene habits, so additional measures are needed to generate a genuine food safety culture among consumers.

Differences in knowledge linked to age and educational level were found, showing that it is necessary to incorporate basic concepts into the educational programs from the primary school.

Regarding retailers, the absence of a Food Safety Management System and external certifications could explain the higher number of gaps found in small local stores (where these systems have not been developed yet)

References

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