

ASSESSMENT OF FOOD SAFETY BY YOUNG PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT - Assessment of food safety by young people

The significance of food safety is indisputable. Every process that endangers health protection must be taken seriously. In this work an attempt has been made to understand familiarity with food safety of young adults. Answers have been searched how they are informed about food safety issues. Deceitful information or ignorance can easily cause distrust and sometimes panic between the consumers. Young adults are very active and conscious parts of the consumer society; furthermore they are flexible and open-minded which can be beneficially used in the future. With the applied questionnaire the demographic characteristics, food consumption behaviors, food safety beliefs, and exact knowledge in this area were assessed. Young adults (aged between 19 and 28) who participated were male and female in almost equal rate, the married status was in 1/3 rate, and 80% lived in cities. One of the most positive issues is that many of them are aware of the importance of food safety, and perceived the changes in comparison with the last years. They trusted in Hungarian food products, but unfortunately the connection with the traditional home products is not tight enough. Sadly the young consumers are not aware of their rights in the field of food safety, they are usually uncertain during shopping or consumption. On one hand the lack of direct communication from the market on the other the proper inquiry of them about food safety, young adults have insufficient and incomplete information.

Keywords: food safety, young people, questionnaire

“If we know the truth, we will surely want to change things for the better!”¹

INTRODUCTION

The share of food industry is significant from the world economy. This is the first sector of processing industry in the European Union, with 13,4% share and employees more than 4 million people. Consequently in food industry and in the connecting areas strong competition has been formed involving growers, producers and traders. Over and above making profit striving has been made to produce and distribute foodstuff in appropriate quantity, nutritive value and absolutely safety condition. It is well known that foodstuffs have an effect on human health condition. Three groups can be distinguished based on the effects (Lehoczkiné, 2006):

- Food safety problems in consequence of polluted foodstuffs.
- Damages in consequence of health condition and individual reactions of human body.
- Nutrition problems tracing back under or over consumption of certain food or food components.

¹ <http://freefromharm.org/understand-the-issues/food-and-public-opinion/>

These problems are not the result of the modern age, they had existed in the world from centuries. The main difference can be perceived in the quantity of occurrence as well as the detection and documentation of events. In the last 15 years the coordination and regulation of food safety had changed significantly in consequence of food borne illnesses and connecting events.

Food is more than something we eat, therefore the food choices we make have strong effect on state of health. The result of the unhealthy and unsatisfactory nutrition can be the obesity, heart disease, diabetes etc, but the choices we make can result in positive changes in our lives. In the last decade, public concern over the safety, quality, ethics and sustainability of our food system has been on the rise. Our purchasing decisions, and the messages we send to leaders in both the private and public sectors, will ultimately determine how this process plays out. But we need to better understand where our food comes from and learn to better evaluate facts from fiction.²

Health and well-being are highly valued in today's society and food is considered to play a major role. Food safety issues are complex and consumers vary greatly in their knowledge of the science of food safety. With the expansion of services and the marketing activities built on that the examination of consumer attitude has come to the front. Nowadays the food purchase and the consumer attitude is a separate topic of the food research, the trends are explored and results are utilized comprehensively. The consumer attitude is the sum activity of attaining and using products and services, where the aim is to gain positive customer satisfaction. (Kajári, 2006). Besides the customer habits these assessments highlight on the mechanisms of the customer decisions. Within the customer behavior the food consumption can be separated as a complex attitude. The attitude of food consumers has been affected by the biological, economical, demographical, psychological, social and cultural factors. Under the biological factors the sensory properties are the most important as well as the foodborne diseases e.g. food intolerances or allergies. Regarding the economical and demographical effect, it can be stated that the consumption of food stuffs slightly depends on the “price flexibility” of the product, rather than on the income, on the relative price of the replaceable products, on the price movements, and the change of the customer preferences. Beside the psychological effects it is understandable, that strong emotion results in strong motivation for purchasing attitude (Balla, Siró, 2007).

The object of this paper to know more about the behavior of young people aged between 19-28. The main characteristic of this age-group is the separation from the parents from the home, they have make own decisions, they have break away from the childhood. According to Erikson studying is a key factor in young people's life, they suit and form fraternities, start to develop their own life. Their personal evolution cannot be separated from the society, the choice of the workplace and the carrier is most important in this age. After marriage the situation is more complex, they get into conflict because of the irreconcilability of friends, family and workplace (Erikson, 2002)

In the course of survey of customer attitude the classification of society is important by age. Certain products and habits are connected to this age-group, and serve as symbol to articulate belonging to the effective or the desired level of society (Hofmeister, 2008)

² <http://freefromharm.org/understand-the-issues/food-and-public-opinion/>

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The attitude for food safety of young adults was surveyed using a questionnaire with 34 questions. For the sake of the better explanation the survey contained questions referring to food quality as well. The research was performed in summer 2010, big cities were selected where university can be found. The survey cannot be considered representative, rather than diagnostic, descriptive and illustrative (Scipione, 1997). Paper based data collection was applied and completed with personal assistance. Although this personal attendance limited the number of inquiry, gave a remarkable hand for the asked persons. The combination of open and closed format questions was applied, and the questionnaire was tested on a smaller sample before. The filling of a paper took up less than 10 minutes; finally 150 questionnaires were available for evaluation. The data were prepared and depicted in Excel program.

RESULTS

The first group of questions refers to the asked persons, namely to the age, gender, marital status, qualification and residence. The rate of the male and female was around 50%, the single persons were in majority (60%), and the qualification was the following: skilled workers 8%, graduated 61% and higher graduated 31%. The 93% of asked persons live permanently in cities, from this 30% in county center, and 7% in the capital. To understand better the perception of food safety by young people additional information was collected about the purchase and consumption attitude. All respondents purchase food products; the majority not alone but typically with friends (22%) or with family (30%) and altering-wise 38%. It is surprising that 90% are conscious customer on their own admission, but the frequency of eating does not reflect this. Only 72% keep the daily three meals. The 10% who don't care about the healthy nutrition are almost men (8%). The next question refers to the determining factors of purchases, more answers were acceptable. The price sensitivity was expected ahead (93%), but the looks of the parlor (17%) and the characteristic of attendants (8%) were at the end.

The next three questions refer to the general knowledge about food safety. Firstly the people had to choose the appropriate definition of food safety. The 70% of them knew the concept correctly and 17% chose the answer about food security. Laboratory examinations (8%), own produced and bio foods (5%) were appointed in almost equal rate. It should be noted that finishing the questionnaire people came back to this question and wanted to change their opinion namely they was not aware of this idea.

Secondly young people were asked about the importance and changes of food safety. (see *Fig.1.*)

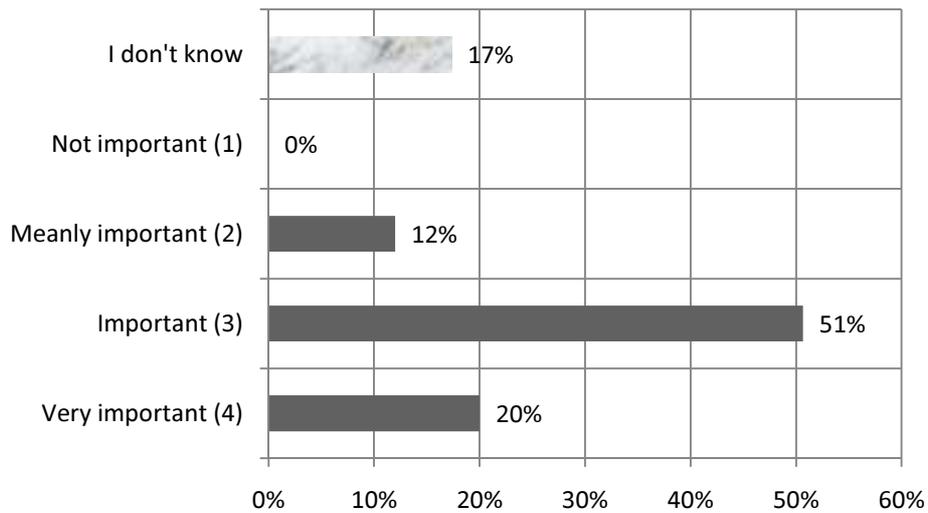


Figure 1: The importance of food safety (average= 3.1; s_N= 0.23)

Two observations can be done, on one hand no people decided that food safety is not important, on the other 17% have no opinion or are not able to make a decision about the importance. The middling improvement of food safety was felt by 67%, distinct improvement by 14%, and according only 3% the change was not positive in the last decade. 16% did not feel any change.

In our survey we try to find a connection between the judgment of food safety and vendibility of Hungarian products. We asked the cause of selection of domestic food stuff, more answers were acceptable. 63% rely on Hungarian product better, 50% defend the domestic economy, and 27% are fond of Hungarian tastes. The results indicate that food products from other countries often generate distrust thus affects the inclination of purchasing. Perhaps the Hungarian products are overrated against the foreign gratuitously. The producers often take advantage of ethnocentrism, and emphasize the Hungarian origin of the product. This appears in advertisements as well on the package of the food stuff. This is fortified since 79% of asked young person every time or usually checks the customer information of the product, 19% only rarely and only 2% never.

We were curious what the people check on the label of food product. More answers were acceptable; the asked indicated 2 items on average. The results are in *Fig.2*.

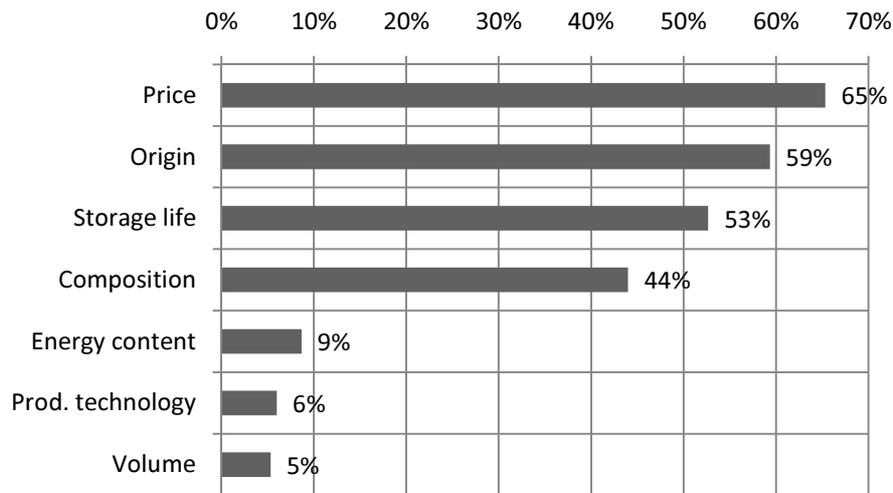


Figure 2: What do you check primarily on the label?

Expectedly the price got into the first place, but the place of origin, the storage life or shelf life and the quality of component were in the range of interest. The energy content, the production technology and the volume or mass of the product were not in the focus of interest.

From the next question it was cleared that the quantity of food additives keeps back many people (74%) from the purchase, the high rate was surprising. 19% were not frightened away from purchase and 7% did not remember such a situation.

Connecting to the previous question the opinions about the modern production technology were tested. 17% of asked young people purchase these products often and certainly, 22% rarely, 4% don't buy them and 57% don't know (!) if they buy them or not. Investigating the reaction about preservative processes of food production the result is similar to the food additives. According to 3% of the youth the preservative processes strongly endanger the human health, 85% think there is less risk, 4% are not afraid at all and 8% don't know. Connecting to this we wanted to know with samples if trust was lost in food products. 36% of them had distrust one time at least, 30% had more bad experiences, 20% never met, and 14% did not remember such a situation. Not all people wrote examples in the first two cases, but we had 42 items at all. Among the products the followings are the most important: ice cream, tinned food, soft drinks, coffee, chocolate, dairy products, cold buffet products, pre-packed sandwiches, pastry, baker's products, honey, meat products, cake, rice, cereal, jam, dehydrated stock and sauce.

The importance of the place of production had no sense (66%) and 20% don't know the answer. 14% of people said the place had great importance, but what is very interesting the share between the large and small production places are almost equal, 48% and 52%.

The judgment of food safety authorities was absolutely positive, the 78% of asked young people are satisfied fully or generally, 21% did not know and only 1% was dissatisfied.

The young adults don't know who should have been applied for aid in the case of unsafe food. This was an open question, therefore only 29% of the asked people were answered, the detailed result can be seen in *Figure 3*.

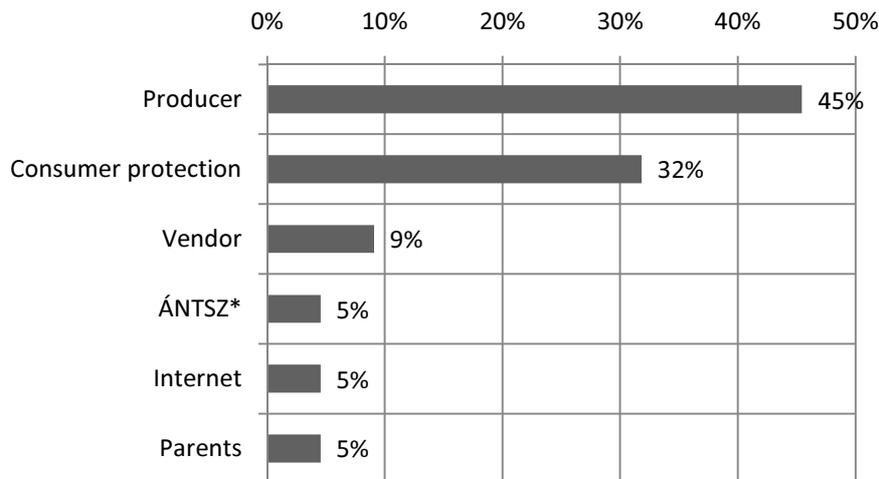


Figure 3: The possible sources of aid in the case of unsafe food stuff
 (*ÁNTSZ: National Public Health and Medical Officer Service)

Next question refers to the check up of food stuff before the release. The result is very important, 77% of the asked people did not know if the food was checked up completely and according 23% the products are under control fully or partly. Nobody stated that products can be released without any control, namely people trust in foods.

40% of the asked people had foodborne disease one time; most of them had changed their consumption habits, they don't purchase the same product any more, or check the product must better. 32% have not had such a disease and 28% did not remember.

The young people are not informed sufficiently about the food safety questions. 78% could not mention any food safety system or food safety program, from the others who had any idea only HACCP system and ISO 9001 standard were mentioned in a few cases. Presumably mentioning HACCP system in a closed format question more people should have noted as a possible solution.

The most preferred source of the food safety is the customer information of a product (66%), then the television (26%), the written prospectus and press (6-6%) and internet (3%). Nobody indicated the family, friends and radio.

The most information about foodborne disease came from television (63%), from the press and the internet (13-13%), from family and friends (10%) and from written prospectus (7%). Nobody indicated the radio.

The asked people feel they got appropriate information about foodborne disease. 18% were totally and 72% on average satisfied, only 8% did not get enough information and 2% did not know the answer.

The last topic was the responsibility, namely who is responsible to warn against hazards or to give an instruction for this process. According to 47% people are interested in food safety and do everything to avoid hazards. 20% have an opposite opinion and 33% does not know. The asked people had to formulate their own opinion about the following questions: What is to be done in case of hazards? Who is responsible? 72% of the people answered for the first question, the result can be seen in Fig. 4. 82% said that the government and authorities are mainly liable for action, partly the media and the manufacturer. They did not name concrete authority.

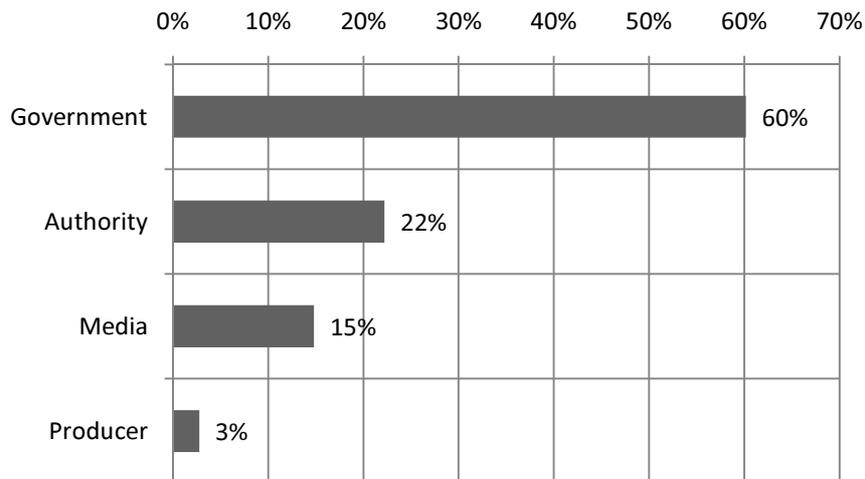


Figure 4: The responsibility of giving instruction about food safety

75% of asked people have an opinion if the product can be hazardous. Most of them should withdraw the food from the circulation, or immediately destroy it.

CONCLUSION

The young adults increasingly take into consideration food safety; they feel a positive change of the food treatment. This age-group come to a decision consciously and expect reliable foods with perfect quality. In the area of communication contradiction can be observed. On one hand they get sufficient information about foodborne disease, on the other they did not know food safety systems, or programs, furthermore they don't know where they get more information from. In the lack of knowledge they can rely upon the information of media. In general they are ambiguous, thus their knowledge must be increased by trainings and educations. Food safety is public health, affects everybody, in absence of knowledge of food safety risks distrust or panic can be evolved.

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