Behavioral Intention of School Nutrition Employees to Perform Food Safety Practices

Kevin R. Roberts, PhD, Kevin Sauer, PhD, RDN, LD, Paola Paez, PhD, Carol Shanklin, PhD, RDN, & Michelle Alcorn, MS

**Introduction**

- Employee food safety knowledge and attitudes are important to protect children from foodborne outbreaks (Henroid & Sneed, 2004).
- Research has shown that increasing employee knowledge is not enough to change on-the-job behavior (Roberts et al., 2008).
- Interventions to change employee behavior should focus on behavioral, normative, and control beliefs; which precede behavior and behavioral intention (Mitchell, Fraser, & Bearon, 2007).

**Purpose**

Determined school nutrition employees’ beliefs about three food safety practices:

1. Proper cleaning/sanitizing of food contact surfaces,
2. Proper handwashing, and
3. Proper use of a food thermometer

**Methods**

**Sample**

- School nutrition employees from 163 randomly selected school districts in 7 states.

**Questionnaire Development**

- 31 questions (Direct measures, indirect measures, and demographics)

**Data Collection**

- 3,850 surveys mailed to school nutrition directors, who distributed it to employees

**Data Analysis**

- Descriptive statistics
  - Mean score range -21 to 21
- Linear regressions

**Results**

- A total of 408 usable questionnaires were received, for an usable response rate of 10.6%.
- **Behavioral Beliefs:** Employees generally favor performing the three food safety practices. For example to decrease the likelihood of students getting sick (cleaning and sanitizing M=20.1±4.1; handwashing M=20.4±2.5; thermometer use M=20.6±2.1).

**Applications to Child Nutrition**

- Training and educational interventions should use emotional and motivational strategies to motivate behavior change.
  - Perspectives of health inspectors, supervisors, and school nutrition directors should be considered.
- School nutrition directors, managers and/or supervisors should emphasize the importance of food safety and ensuring employees have the necessary resources.