

# Food Safety and Handling Knowledge and Practices of Lebanese University Students

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The aim of this study was to assess the level of food safety handling knowledge and practices among 1172 Lebanese university students (mean age 20.0±1.6 SD) and to explore the association between their knowledge/practices and the socio-demographic and academic characteristics. Participants were undergraduates enrolled in the Lebanese American University from different majors and years of study, different areas of residence, living alone or with others, and having working or non-working mothers. They completed a questionnaire of 16 food handling practices and 14 food safety knowledge questions related to preparation, cross contamination, storage and hygiene. On average, the students scored 53.6±15.8% and 44.7±14.3% on the knowledge and practices parts, respectively. Female students scored higher on both practices and knowledge questions than male students; however, the difference was significant ( $P<0.001$ ) for the practices part only. Health-related majors scored significantly ( $P\leq 0.001$ ) better on both practices and knowledge questions. Senior students scored highest on the knowledge questions compared to younger ones and the difference was borderline significant ( $P=0.07$ ). The area of residence had a significant ( $P=0.006$ ) effect on the food safety practices questions. Students living with parents scored higher in both parts than those living alone or with roommates; however, the difference was significant ( $P=0.009$ ) in the knowledge part only. Students who cook all the time showed a significant ( $P=0.001$ ) lower difference in terms of their food safety knowledge compared to those who cook less frequently. Food handling practices and food safety knowledge scores were significantly ( $P<0.001$ ) related with a weak-to-moderate correlation coefficient ( $R=0.231$ ).