



POSTER PRESENTATION

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Canadians' perception of food allergy risk

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Objective

The purpose of this research is to explore the determinants of the perceived risks associated with food allergy and anaphylaxis.

Methods

Households (n = 3,666) were selected at random, as part of a national food allergy prevalence survey, and data were collected *via* telephone. In addition to determining household allergy status, respondents were asked about environmental health risks, including those associated with food allergy/anaphylaxis. Multivariate logistic regressions, weighted to the age-sex structure of the Canadian population, were used to determine the characteristics of respondents who ranked the risks of food allergy and anaphylaxis as 'High' or 'Moderate'.

Findings

One-fifth of the sample reported having at least one food allergy in the household. Almost 70% of respondents ranked the risks of food allergy as high or moderate risks, compared to just over 60% for anaphylaxis. Determinants include well-established demographic predictors of health risks perceptions (*e.g.*, age, gender). Other important covariates suggest that general attitudes towards environmental health risks in general, knowledge about food allergies, and worldviews are significant predictors of food allergy and anaphylaxis risk. In terms of risk experience, only respondents with multiple food allergies in the household significantly ranked the perceived risks as high or moderate (OR: 2.77, 95% CI: [1.56, 5.27]). Broad regional differences in risk perception were observed in this survey. Respondents from Quebec reported a greater degree of perceived societal

risk for food allergy (OR: 2.07, 95%CI: [1.63, 2.63]) and anaphylaxis (OR: 1.34, 95%CI: [1.08, 1.67]).

Conclusions

Studies of risk perception have established the importance of understanding risk perceptions for explaining how the public responds to risk. In the context of food allergy, and anaphylactic food allergy, there is a need to develop appropriate policy responses that can protect allergic individuals, while accommodating the general population. This research contributes to this need by characterizing the societal response to the prevalence of food allergies and anaphylactic food allergies. Analyses revealed marked differences between Quebec and other provinces. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the policy environment in this province in particular is a key determinant of the experience and perception of allergy-related risk. Results from this research indicate that both the perceptions of affected *and* unaffected populations are modified in this context. Policymakers need to consider these impacts as advancements in regulations and policy emerge in this area.

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