

The Impact of Hair-Covering in the Kitchen: A Case Study of Le Pelle Suites and Towers Badagry, Lagos

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Abstract

This paper examines the importance of covering the hair in the kitchen. It has been observed that many cooks are unaware of the importance of hair-covering in the kitchen. Hence, this study intends to emphasise the importance of hair-covering which include hygiene and avoidance of food poisoning through bacteria that fall from the hair into foods. Therefore, the study adopted a field survey approach, whereby 350 specimen questionnaires were administered and 300 were retrieved. Also, simple percentage was used to analyse the data, findings revealed that many cooks are found in the habit of not properly covering their hair during production. It is recommended that all caterers (cooks) must cover their hair while handling food.

Keywords: food-poisoning, kitchen, cooks, production

1. Introduction

Importantly, every food handler in the food production must be aware of the fact that food must be cleaned and safe for consumption (Albert 2014). There is no doubt there are germs everywhere, particularly in and on our bodies and some of these germs are transferred to food which may cause illness and in some cases, death.

David (2013) posits that normally every food handler has hair grown on the head. Every of such persons must importantly cover this part of the body i.e. the head in other to avoid any stray hair from falling into the food. In the opinion of Kinton (2001), there is Chef's hat which is used in covering the head and can be made of either stretchable fabric or come with adjustable closure to ensure that no stray hair falls. He, therefore, submits that the bacteria causing food-poisoning live in humans (nose, throat, skin etc) and food-poisoning can be defined as an illness that is associated with stomach pains and diarrhoea and sometimes vomiting.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the research paper are to

- (i) examine the important of hair-covering in the kitchen;
- (ii) ensure that staff in food producing areas, comply with hygiene rules of covering the hair while cooking;
- (iii) examine the importance of chef's hat; and
- (iv) avoid food poisoning bacteria from falling from the hair into food.

2. Historical Background of Le Pelle Suites and Towers, Badagry

Le Pelle Suites and Towers, which is situated along Mavi Street, off Danison Road, Badagry is a 114 room suite. It has a population of 138 staff (both senior and junior), with two very large kitchens. The suite was founded by Proprietor John Melad in the year 2012, and has since then been one of the leading hotels in the area.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Purpose of Wearing the Hat to Cover the Hair in the Kitchen

- **Aesthetic purposes:** Much of the tradition of the chef's hat has to do with its beauty and appreciation. It conveys a professional appearance. A well groomed chef will attract good prospective customers. The pleats on the hat convey expertise. Legend has it that the 100 folds in the hat represent the 100 ways an egg can be prepared (Iyiola 2011).
- **Sanitary Purpose:** This consideration is a major reason why the kitchen staff wear hats today. Hat can keep hair under wraps and help prevent stray hairs from falling into the food. The brim of the hat also absorbs sweats to keep it from dripping down the staff's face or worse yet, into the food (Brave 2012).
- **Comfort Purpose:** Not only do the hats prevent hair from falling into the food, but it also keeps hair out of the kitchen staff's face for better visibility (Steve 2010)

3.2 Desirable Features of a Chef's Hat

- Kitchen staff spend a large part of their time in the kitchen in front of hot ovens and stoves causing them to sweat profusely and often. Their hats should protect them and their sewings from excessive perspiration. Cotton hats are ideal in this respect.
- Stains are common when working with greasy food. Materials used in making the hat should be stain-

resistant and easy to wash. The fabric should withstand frequent scrubbing and not react when it comes in contact with water. A hat that does not shrink and does not require ironing often would also be convenient (Williams 2012).

3.3 Causes of Hair Loss

It is very important as a kitchen staff to cover the hair while cooking. This is because hair as a result of many factors, fall off even to cover because hair unknown to the person and this can get the food contaminated.

Most people normally shed 50 to 100 hairs a day. But with about 100,000 hairs in the scalp, this amount of hair loss should not cause noticeable thinning of the scalp hair. As people age, hair tends to gradually thin according to Olaoluwa (2013). Other causes of hair loss are:

- Hormonal Factors - The most common cause of hair loss is a hereditary condition called male-pattern baldness or female-pattern baldness. Hormonal changes and imbalances can also cause temporary hair loss. This could be due to pregnancy, child birth, discontinuation of birth control pills or the onset of menopause. (Olatunbosun 2013).
- Medical Conditions - A variety of medical condition cause hair loss, including thyroid problems. The thyroid gland helps regulate hormone levels in the body and if the gland is not working well, hair loss may result.
- Alopecia Areata: This disease occurs when the body's immune system attacks hair follicles – causing smooth, roundish patches of hair loss. It is a condition that causes hair loss on the scalp and sometimes other parts of the body.
- Scalp Infection: Infections such as ringworm, can invade the hair and skin of the scalp, leading to hair loss (Bamijoko 2013).

3.4 Implications of not covering the Head while cooking in the kitchen

- Customers have negative or bad impression thereby staying back from such kitchen, hence low customer patronage.
- There are sometimes fallen hair in soup served at restaurant which causes embarrassment and loss of good image of such restaurant.
- The habit of not covering the head while cooking can cure illnesses like diarrhea, stomach pain, vomiting etc which is caused by food –poisoning bacteria living on the hair that falls into the food.
- The hotel can run into problem of closure should any court of law pass an injunction especially in case of death of an affected customer.
- The workforce can be reduced, hence compounding the duties of the remaining staff.
- More money is spent on treatment of illnesses rather than on developmental projects.

3.5 Strict Adherence to Personal Hygiene Rules

The practice of clean habits in the kitchen is the only way to achieve a satisfactory standard of hygiene. These habits are as follows:

- Hair must be kept clean and covered in the kitchen and it should not be combed or handled near food.
- Only healthy people should handle food
- Hands must be washed frequently and always after using the toilet.
- Bathing must occur frequently
- Nose and mouth should not be touched with the hands
- Cough and sneeze should be in the handkerchief and not over food.

3.6 Signs and Symptoms of Hair Loss

Hair loss may appear in many different ways, depending on the problem that is causing it. It can come suddenly or gradually and affect just the scalp or whole body. Some types of hair loss are temporary while others are permanent (Brave 2012).

* Gradual thinning on top of head: This is the most common type of hair loss, affecting both men and women. In men, hair often begins to recede from the forehead in line that resembles the letter M. Women typically retain a line of hair at the forehead but experience a broadening of the part of their hair.

* Circular or patchy bald spots: Some people experience smooth bald spots, often about an inch (2.6 centimeters) across. This type of hair loss usually affects just the scalp, but it sometimes also occurs in beards of eyebrows. In some cases, your skin may become itchy or painful before the hair falls out (Steve 2010)

* Sudden loosening of hair: A physical or emotional shock can cause hair to loosen. Handfuls of hair may come out when combing or washing your hair or even after gentle tugging. This type of hair loss usually causes overall hair thinning and not bald patches (Brave 2012).

* Full-body hair loss: Some conditions and medical treatment, such as chemotherapy for cancer, can result in the loss of hair all over your body. The hair usually grows back after treatment ends (Brave 2012).

3.6.1 Treatment of Alopecia Areata (Hair Loss)

- **General** - Correction of predisposing factors such as anemia, emotional factors, infections and others (Iriajen 2010).
- **Topical Preparations** - Many preparations are used to treat alopecia, where some of these have side effect sometimes as result of the advice of non-professionals.
 - i. The simplest method is to paint the area with an irritant such as tincture, iodine and psoralenes lotion that may cause irritation and erythema due to increased vascularity of the areas. After improvement of irritation, hair begins to grow.
 - ii. The traditional method of treatment which is usually free of charge advised by barbers is to scratch the area by his scalpel and rub it rigorously with one or two lobes of garlic. In spite of severe irritation, hair will grow again (Okoli 2013).

3.6.3 Home Remedies for Hair Loss that Actually Work

- **Use of Onion and Garlic:** Onion and garlic are rich sources of sulphur and the element sulphur increases the production of collagen which in turn helps the hair to grow (Iriajen 2010).
- **Use of Coconut:** Coconut provides a host of ingredients that naturally condition and promote growth of hair. The milk in the coconut contains proteins, essential fats and minerals like potassium and iron. Using this mixture regularly can reduce the breakage of hair.
- **Henna:** This is known for long as a natural hair colour and conditioner in the Asian countries. It has a major role to play in strengthening hair when combined with mustard oil, it works even better (Brave 2012).

4. Methodology

Information generated in this study were obtained from related literature, published and unpublished materials including documentary papers. Interviews were also conducted among respondents drawn from hotel proprietors, hotel staffers, hotel customers, and fast food kitchen staff.

Responses from the interviews, personal observations and questionnaires were used to confirm and corroborate the facts obtained from the literature. For the purpose of research work, structured and unstructured questionnaires were designed and employed. The subjects of the study comprised both staff and guests of Le Pelle Suites and Towers, Badagry, Lagos State. The questionnaires were distributed and only 300 were successfully retrieved out of 350 copies..

5. Findings

The various interviews conducted revealed that:

- i. Many of the cooks fail to observe the ethics of the profession which requires them covering the hair as confirmed by Brave (2012).
- ii. Some of the cooks are too fashion conscious as they believe their hair would be made wet by the heat under the chef's hat, thereby roughening their well dressed hair as posited by Turton (2013).
- iii. Fallen or stray hair in the food has caused lots of embarrassment and high loss of patronage to many hotels in line with the submission of Steve (2013).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18 – 36	250	83
37 – 50	30	10
51 and above	20	7
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

The above Table shows that 83% of the respondents are of ages 18 – 36, 10% of the respondents are of age 37 – 50 and only 7% of them are 51 and above.

Table II: Occupation of Respondents

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Cooks	45	15
Waiters	85	28.3
Business tycoons	120	40
Civil servants	50	16.7
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

From the Table above, the number of respondents that are cooks is 45 which forms 15%, the waiters, 85 which forms 28.3% business tycoons, 120 forming 40% and civil servant 50 which forms 16.7%. The above Tables shows that 155 respondents are Christians forming 51.7%, Muslims 130, traditional are just 15 in number, forming 5%.

Table IV: Lack of Hair Covering can Lead to Food Poisoning

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
True	255	85
False	30	10
No idea	15	5
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

From the above Table, a good number totaling 255 and forming 85% agreed that lack of hair-covering can lead to food poisoning. 30 out of the respondents answered false while 15 of the respondents forming only 5% had no idea of the questionnaire item.

Table V: Covering if Hair Avoids any Stray Hair from Falling into Foods

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
True	262	87
False	20	7
No idea	18	6
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

It can be seen from the Table above that 87% of the respondents identified that covering of hair avoids any stray hair from falling into food. 7% of the respondents disagreed while 6% never had any idea of the questionnaire item.

Table VI: Food Poisoning Bacteria Live On Human Hair

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
True	255	85
False	30	10
No idea	15	5
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

Considering the above Table, 85% of the respondents believe that food poisoning bacteria leave on human body, 10% said 'no' while only 5% had no idea.

Table VII: It Possible to Find any Stray Hair in Food

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
True	262	87
False	20	7
No idea	18	6
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

From the Table shown, 262 forming 87% of the respondents agreed that it is possible to find any stray hair in food. 7% disagreed while 6% of the respondents had no idea.

To answer these questions items I, II, III, IV, V, VI and VII of the questionnaire were used as shown in Tables above. The summation of the overall "TRUE" option points is $255 + 262 + 255 + 262 = 1034$

$$\frac{1034}{1200} \times 100$$

The question has scored above the total points obtained for acceptance. As such, the question is considered answered in the affirmative.

6. Conclusions

- i. It is very important to note that the ethics of catering profession among which 'covering of hair' is part, must be strictly adhered to, so as to avoid any stray hair in the food.
- ii. Any stray hair in food, can cause food poisoning.

Recommendations

- i. All staff in the food producing units should wear hair-coverings regardless of their experience and culture.
- ii. The hair-covering i.e. the hat that fits all sizes of heads, would solve the problems relating to fittings, which will prevent any stray hair from falling.
- iii. Any staff who notices sudden or patchy hair loss or more than usual loss when combing hair at their different homes should see the doctor.
- iv. Regular medical check-ups should be conducted for the staff.
- v. Hotel at all levels, must promote hospitality professional education to the staff.

The above recommendations are by no means exhaustive but if taken into consideration by cook, they will go a long way to improve the hygienic standard in the hotels and homes. Further research should concentrate on other aspects such as the importance of foot wear, essential tools, time management etc. in the kitchen.

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