



**EFFECTIVENESS OF HAZARD ANALYSIS AND CRITICAL CONTROL
POINT SYSTEM BASED ON MICROBIAL QUALITY OF POULTRY-
BASED FOOD AND FOOD CONTACT SURFACES**

By

RAMESH SUBRAMANIAM

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my family, parents, and friends for their support.



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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December 2023

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Increased reliance is placed on the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) system to ensure poultry meat's quality and microbiological safety in food service industries. However, epidemiological data revealed that many foodborne infections are attributed to the consumption of poultry meat, challenging the efficacy of the existing food safety system. This pronounced contrast necessitates a critical evaluation of the effectiveness of the HACCP framework in ensuring food safety. The study's objective was to evaluate the effectiveness of HACCP applications through a 30-month assessment of their impact on the microbial quality focused on the presence of total plate count (TPC), coliform, *Escherichia coli*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, and *Salmonella* spp. in HACCP establishments. The analysis of 699 ready-to-market poultry meat samples from three companies revealed variable coliform and *E. coli* levels, indicating sporadic fecal contamination and episodic presence of *S. aureus* and *Salmonella* spp., which could be potential breaches in the HACCP system. The statistical analyses, Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U tests, further confirmed

these findings, showing significant differences ($P<0.05$) in TPC across companies. The expanded investigation into RTE foods and contact surfaces in 16 upscale dining and six private medical HACCP-certified establishments analyzed 377 RTE food and 825 contact surfaces, demonstrated variability in TPC and coliform levels. Medical establishments exhibited lower TPC and better microbial control than dining facilities, as shown by the Mann-Whitney U test ($P<0.05$). Nonetheless, hygiene issues were identified, with high non-compliance in TPC and coliform levels on contact surfaces and hands. Antibiotic susceptibility testing on isolates from poultry meat processing plants and food serving establishments revealed a concerning level of resistance among 23 *Salmonella* spp. to commonly used antibiotics such as ampicillin (100%), chloramphenicol (87%), and cephalosporins. Similarly, 30 *S. aureus* demonstrated high resistance rates to tetracycline (87.5%), chloramphenicol (81.2%), and penicillin (81.2%). The Multiple Antibiotic Resistance (MAR) index further highlighted the potential high risk of infection that may be difficult to treat with conventional antibiotics. This study reflects that the HACCP system failed to prevent the dissemination of resistant bacteria through the food chain. The study's aim to investigate the adherence of isolated *S. aureus* to different types of surface material commonly used in food preparation environments (glass, GL; stainless steel, SS; and polyethylene, PE), with different surface conditions (with biofilm vs non-biofilm and rough vs smooth) as well as to evaluate the efficacy of chemical sanitizers (Quaternary Ammonium Compounds, QAC, and chlorine) in reducing bacterial adherence on these surfaces. Study shows that *S. aureus*'s adherence was high on rough surfaces and further increased with the presence of biofilm. Compared to PE, QACs demonstrated significantly better sanitization efficacy ($P<0.05$), on GL and SS smooth surfaces without biofilm. Choosing low-adherence surface materials in food facilities and

determining optimal sanitization time for food-contact surfaces can be beneficial in ensuring food safety. The study conclusion is critical, highlighting the urgent need to enhance food safety compliance, particularly within HACCP-certified establishments. The current shortcomings of the HACCP system, especially in upscale dining venues, present a notable concern. This emphasizes the essential need for HACCP teams to apply HACCP principles effectively, especially in hazard identification, verification, and implementing corrective actions.

Keywords: HACCP, Hospital, Hygiene, Pathogen, Poultry meat.

SDG: GOAL 1: No poverty, GOAL 2: Zero hunger

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**KEBERKESANAN ANALISIS MUDARAT DAN TITIK KAWALAN
KRITIKAL BERDASARKAN KUALITI MIKROB MAKANAN
BERASASKAN AYAM DAN PERMUKAAN SENTUHAN MAKANAN.**

Oleh

RAMESH SUBRAMANIAM

Disember 2023

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Kebergantungan pada sistem Analisis Mudarat Dan Titik Kawalan Kritikal (HACCP) untuk menjamin kualiti makanan telah dipertingkatkan. Namun demikian, data epidemiologi mendedahkan semakin banyak jangkitan bawaan makanan dikaitkan dengan hidangan daging ayam, mencabar keberkesanan sistem keselamatan makanan sedia ada. Kontras yang ketara ini memerlukan penilaian kritikal terhadap keberkesanan system HACCP dalam kepatuhan keselamatan makanan. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk menilai keberkesanan aplikasi HACCP melalui penilaian selama 30 bulan terhadap impaknya terhadap kualiti bakteria yang tertumpu kepada kehadiran jumlah kiraan plat (TPC), koliform, *Escherichia coli*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, dan *Salmonella* spp. Analisis 699 sampel daging ayam sedia untuk dipasarkan daripada tiga syarikat mendedahkan paras koliform dan *E. coli* yang tidak sekata, menunjukkan pencemaran najis sporadis dan kehadiran episodik *S. aureus* dan *Salmonella* spp., yang menunjukkan ketidak patuhan sistem HACCP. Analisis statistik, ujian Kruskal-Wallis dan Mann-Whitney U, menunjukkan perbezaan ketara

($P < 0.05$) dalam kehadiran TPC merentasi tiga syarikat. Kajian diperluaskan ke atas makanan sedia dimakan (RTE) dan permukaan sentuhan di 16 restoran dan enam hospital swasta yang diperakui HACCP dengan menganalisis 377 sampel makanan RTE dan 825 permukaan sentuhan, termasuk tangan pengendali makanan, menunjukkan variasi dalam tahap TPC dan koliform. Hospital swasta mempamerkan TPC yang lebih rendah dan kawalan mikrob yang lebih baik daripada restoran, seperti yang ditunjukkan oleh ujian Mann-Whitney U ($P < 0.05$). Walau bagaimanapun, isu kebersihan telah dikenal pasti, dengan ketidakpatuhan yang tinggi dalam TPC dan tahap koliform pada permukaan sentuhan dan tangan. Ujian kerintangan antibiotik ke atas bacteria daripada kilang pemprosesan daging ayam dan tempat penyajian makanan mendedahkan tahap rintangan yang membimbangkan di kalangan 23 *Salmonella* spp. kepada antibiotik yang biasa digunakan seperti ampicillin (100%), kloramfenikol (87%), dan sefalosporin. Begitu juga, 30 *S. aureus* menunjukkan kadar rintangan yang tinggi terhadap tetrasiklin (87.5%), kloramfenikol (81.2%) dan penisilin (81.2%). Indeks Rintangan Antibiotik Berbilang (MAR) menyerlahkan lagi potensi risiko tinggi jangkitan yang mungkin sukar dirawat dengan antibiotik konvensional. Kajian ini mencerminkan bahawa sistem HACCP gagal menghalang penyebaran bakteria tahan antibiotik dalam rantai makanan. Salah satu faktor yang menyumbang kepada kawalan bakteria yang lemah ialah pembersihan dan sanitasi permukaan sentuhan yang tidak konsisten. Matlamat kajian untuk menyiasat pematuhan *S. aureus* dipencil kepada pelbagai jenis bahan permukaan yang biasa digunakan dalam persekitaran penyediaan makanan (kaca, GL; keluli tahan karat, SS; dan polietilena, PE), dengan keadaan permukaan yang berbeza (dengan biofilm vs tanpa biofilm dan kasar vs licin) serta untuk menilai keberkesanan sanitizer kimia (Sebatian Ammonium Kuaterner, QAC, dan klorin) dalam mengurangkan lekatan

bakteria pada permukaan ini. Kajian menunjukkan bahawa lekatan *S. aureus* adalah tinggi pada permukaan kasar dan terus meningkat dengan kehadiran biofilm. Berbanding dengan PE, QAC menunjukkan keberkesanan sanitasi yang lebih baik ($P < 0.05$), pada permukaan licin GL dan SS tanpa biofilm. Memilih bahan permukaan sesuai dalam industri makanan dan menentukan masa sanitasi optimum untuk permukaan sentuhan makanan boleh memberi kelebihan dalam keselamatan makanan. Rumusan kajian adalah kritikal, menonjolkan keperluan mendesak untuk meningkatkan pematuhan keselamatan makanan, terutamanya dalam pertubuhan yang dipraktikkan HACCP. Kelemahan semasa sistem HACCP, terutamanya di restaurant, menimbulkan kebimbangan yang ketara. Ini menekankan keperluan penting bagi pasukan HACCP untuk menggunakan prinsip HACCP dengan berkesan, terutamanya dalam pengenalpastian bahaya, pengesahan dan pelaksanaan tindakan pembetulan.

Kata Kunci: HACCP, Hospital, Hygiene, Pathogen, Poultry meat.

SDG: MATLAMAT 1: Tiada kemiskinan, MATLAMAT 2: Tiada kelaparan

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIEC	Adherent-invasive <i>E. coli</i>
AOAC	Association of Official Agricultural Chemists
APTVM	Arahan Procedur Tetap Perkhidmatan Veterinar Malaysia
AS	Australian Standard
BAM	Bacteriological Analytical Manual
BGLB	Brilliant Green Bile Lactose Broth
BPW	Buffered Peptone Water
C	Celsius
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CDEC	Cell detaching <i>E. coli</i>
CFU	Colony forming unit
COVIT-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CLSI	Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute
DAEC	Diffuse adherent <i>E. coli</i>
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
DOSM	Department of Statistic Malaysia
dsLTB	Double Strength Laurly Sulphate Broth
<i>E. coli</i>	<i>Escherichia coli</i>
EAEC	enteroaggregative <i>Escherichia coli</i>
EDTA	Ethylenediamine tetra acetic acid
EFSA	European Food Safety Authority
EHEC	enterohemorrhagic <i>E. coli</i>
EIEC	enter invasive <i>E. coli</i>
EPEC	enteropathogenic <i>E. coli</i>
ETEC	enterotoxigenic <i>E. coli</i>

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FSIS	Food Safety and Inspection Services
g	Gram
GMP	Good Manufacturing Practice
h	Hour
HACCP	Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point
HUS	Haemolytic Uremic Syndrome
ICMSF	The International Commission on Microbiological Specifications for Foods
IFSAC	The Interagency Food Safety Analytics Collaboration
IFT	Institute of Food Technologists
LTB	Lauryl Sulphate Broth
MDR	Multidrug Resistance
MKTTn	Muller-Kauffmann Tetrathionate-Novobiocin
mL	millilitre
mm	millimetre
MPN	Most Probable Number
MRSA	Methicillin-Resistant <i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>
NTS	Non-typhoidal <i>Salmonella</i>
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PR/HACCP	Pathogen Reduction, Hazard Analysis, and Critical Control Point (PR/HACCP) System
PRP	Prerequisite program
rRNA	Ribosomal ribonucleic acid
QAC	Quaternary Ammonium Compounds
RTE	Ready-To-Eat
RVS	Rappaport Vasiliadis Soy

<i>S. aureus</i>	<i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>
S.Enteritidis	<i>Salmonella</i> Enteritidis
SE	<i>Staphylococcus aureus</i> enterotoxin
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SPI	<i>Salmonella</i> pathogenicity islands
spp	Species
STEC	Shiga toxin-producing <i>E. coli</i>
T3SS	type III secretion system
TPC	Total Plate Count
TSB	Tryptic Soy Broth
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture's
VRSA	Vancomycin-Resistant <i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>
WHO	World Health Organization
XLD	Xylose Lysine Deoxycholate Agar

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Foodborne illness remains a serious challenge in Malaysia, as this Southeast Asian country has not yet fully implemented an effective national food control system and is thus exposed to substantial health hazards (Salleh et al., 2017). Although the annual foodborne incidence rates in the country fluctuate, they have remained high in the recent decade, with 47.34 (2014), 60.28 (2015), 55.21 (2016), 42.25 (2017), and 45.71 (2018) per 100 000 persons reported by Ministry of Health (MOH, 2019). Yet, despite such high occurrence of food poisoning incidents, in the absence of an outbreak, the food industry does not seem to be compelled to adopt scientifically validated safe food handling practices (Abu Bakar et al., 2021; Saad et al., 2013; Soon et al., 2011).

However, referring foodborne illness to a specific food group can be difficult as most foodborne bacteria can spread easily and contaminate food products through utensils and food preparation services. Identifying an illness to a specific food is rarely possible until respective health authorities investigate a foodborne illness outbreak (O'Bryan et al., 2022). While findings related to such investigations conducted in Malaysia are lacking, according to Painter et al. (2013) and The Interagency Food Safety Analytics Collaboration (IFSAC) (2020), 14.0–17.9% of all foodborne illnesses in the United States are associated with poultry meat consumption. These assertions are supported by several epidemiological studies indicating that poultry meat products are among the most prevalent vehicles for transmitting foodborne pathogens (Abebe et al., 2020; Doulgeraki et al., 2012; Gonçalves-Tenório et al., 2018; Greig & Ravel, 2009). Thus,

foodborne illness caused by poultry meat consumption continues to be a significant health risk across the globe (Abebe et al., 2020; Salleh et al., 2017).

This issue has emerged partly due to the decline in the consumption of red meat in the last several decades (González et al., 2020), accompanied by a considerable increase in the demand for poultry meat. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development-Food and Agriculture Organization for the United Nations (OECD-FAO, 2020), this shift in consumer preferences is mainly attributable to a favorable price–quality ratio, good nutritional value, and ease of preparation for poultry-based ready-to-eat (RTE) food. The benefits from the producer’s perspective include a short life-cycle and excellent feed conversion while allowing high nutritional (especially protein) content to be attained at a relatively low cost (Kralik et al., 2018). In Malaysia, these advantages are compounded by the flexibility in developing new products and the lack of cultural or religious limitations (Jayaraman et al., 2013; Shafini et al., 2017). According to the Department of Statistics, Malaysia (DOSM, 2018), in 2017, 52.0 kg of poultry meat was consumed per capita, which is expected to be sustained.

However, as poultry meat and products are easily perishable and highly susceptible to contamination by foodborne pathogens, they pose a considerable risk of foodborne disease transmission, especially gastrointestinal infections (Barroug et al., 2021; Pessoa et al., 2021; Zerabruk et al., 2019). Consumers are primarily exposed to zoonotic pathogens such as *Escherichia coli*, *Bacillus* spp., *Campylobacter* spp., *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Pseudomonas* spp., and *Salmonella* spp. via consumption of contaminated poultry

meat (Bintsis, 2017). These bacterial contaminants can be disseminated during poultry meat processing, storage, and food preparation processes. While most infecting microorganisms merely lead to spoilage and are non-pathogenic to humans, others—such as *Salmonella* spp. and *S. aureus*—can be dangerous (Saharan et al., 2020), requiring stringent control measures.

Yet, these strategies are difficult to implement due to the high prevalence of conventional poultry farms where animals are kept in confined spaces in large numbers (Cobanoglu et al., 2014). Under these conditions, antibiotics are routinely used for preventive and therapeutic purposes to mitigate risks of disease outbreaks and reduce operational costs (Van Boeckel et al., 2015; Van Cuong et al., 2021). However, intensified antibiotic use has resulted in antibiotic resistance or multi-drug-resistant development among foodborne pathogens (Adzitey, 2020; Golden et al., 2021; Manyi-Loh et al., 2018; Mehdi et al., 2018; B. M. Marshall & Levy, 2011) that can easily enter the food chain, thus jeopardizing the treatment effectiveness in both humans and animals (Mendelson & Matsoso, 2015).

While this is not a new issue, it was brought into focus by recent foodborne illness outbreaks involving *Salmonella* spp., *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Campylobacter*, and potential COVID-19 transmission through the food chain interaction have refocused attention on the role of the environment, food animals, and food handlers in disease transmission (Ceniti et al., 2021; Ehuwa et al., 2021; Olaimat et al., 2020; Sanlier et al., 2020). Most countries have specific acts, legislation, guidelines, and regulations on food safety and quality management systems to govern safe practices in poultry meat better. Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP), a risk-based food safety

method used in the food supply chain, is one of the Codex Committee's well-recognized preventive measures (Faour-Klingbeil & Todd, 2020). Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) published the "Pathogen Reduction, Hazard Analysis, and Critical Control Point (PR/HACCP) System." A set of regulations to restrict and prevent the occurrence of foodborne pathogens in poultry meat products subsequently minimizes foodborne illness (FSIS, 1996). In Europe, according to Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 and of the Council of 29th April 2004, chapter 1, Article 4 on the hygiene of food states that food business operators shall adopt specific hygiene measures to eliminate, control, and prevent food safety hazards (Wallace et al., 2018). In the United Kingdom, food hygiene is mandated by Article 5 of the Food Hygiene Regulation (2006), stating that the operators of food businesses must establish, implement, and maintain a permanent HACCP-based procedure (Egan et al., 2007).

In April 2001, Malaysia established the HACCP certification scheme, followed by the Food Hygiene Regulation (Section 34 of the Food Act 1983) in 2009 to protect the public from foodborne diseases and ensure access to safe and quality food. Other measures, such as the Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) food safety program, are also in place to ensure that food producers, owners, and occupants of food facilities, food handlers, and caterers adhere to stringent hygiene measures (Saad et al., 2013).

In Malaysia, adopting HACCP has significantly enhanced food safety standards, particularly in the food production and export sectors. Through various regulatory bodies, the government has implemented HACCP as a mandatory requirement for certain food business operators. In Malaysia, both HACCP and GMP certifications are typically issued by certification bodies that are accredited by national or international

accreditation organizations. As a part of this endeavor, the HACCP system is adopted when conducting risk assessments of biological, chemical, and physical hazards related to food processing and preparation. The HACCP plan also defines the allowed limits, provides management tools for processors, and defines ways risks can be contained within the specified safety thresholds.

In many countries, including Malaysia, the HACCP system is adopted in abattoirs, including those responsible for poultry processing, to improve microorganism control by developing a resource-targeting strategy that maximizes the control options. For this purpose, various indicator microorganisms are used to determine the nature of the foodborne hazard, some of which may generate toxins, while others are pathogens. However, microbial indicator parameters are most widely adopted, as this is the fastest way to assess hygiene and food safety. For example, total coliform count indicates environmental contamination, whereas the presence of *S. aureus* indicates poor handling, cleanliness, and storage conditions. In some cases, specific tests are developed for non-typhoidal *Salmonella* (NTS), particularly *Salmonella enteritidis*, as this is a common disease-causing bacterium associated with poultry and poultry products that serve as natural hosts for many NTS serovars (Althaus et al., 2017; Maharjan et al., 2019). Other measures focus on equipment cleanliness, environmental contamination, and food handling processes, as unsanitary conditions in any stage of food preparation can lead to microbial cross-contamination (Abu Bakar et al., 2021; Al-Ghazali et al., 2020; Alrasheed et al., 2021).

Although food safety throughout the food chain is vital, it must also be ensured at the point of consumption. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

(CDC), more than half of all foodborne illness outbreaks in 2015 occurred in restaurants (Kearney, 2018). Nonetheless, any outlet that serves a substantial number of consumers, such as restaurants, hospitals, and catering services, can have a substantial effect on food safety and public health (Hughes et al., 2007; Osei Tutu & Anfu, 2019; Rebouças et al., 2017). The risk increases when serving RTE meals, as indicated by the findings reported by the European Food Safety Authority EFSA (2018) and the CDC (2017), suggesting that their consumption is responsible for over 60% of foodborne diseases.

These findings are particularly disconcerting, given that immunocompromised individuals, very young children, and institutionalized elderly individuals are at a heightened risk of gastroenteritis (Scallan et al., 2011), as well as compromised digestion and nutrient absorption due to food poisoning (Barrie, 1996; Hayes et al., 2003; Uçar et al., 2016). Hospitalized patients are also a vulnerable group, as they need a balanced, healthy, and safe diet to heal quickly, and any pathogens that could cause foodborne nosocomial infections can hinder their recovery (Lahou et al., 2015; Touimi et al., 2019). These claims are supported by Meakins et al. (2003) findings, which show that the mortality risk in nosocomial epidemics of infectious intestinal disease is much higher than in community outbreaks.

In this study, several hypothesis have been set up, respecting the current situation of poultry meat processing plants, poultry meat-based food serving establishments, and the cleanliness of food contact and non-food contact surfaces and food handlers' hands. The microbiological quality of processed poultry meat, meat products, and food served in food service establishments can cause food poisoning. Besides, food handlers and

food and non-food contact surfaces can cross-contaminate final products. Sanitization can reduce the microbial population, including those highly resistant to antibiotics in food contact surfaces, and subsequently reduce the risk of foodborne illness. Still, biofilm on type of contact surfaces in production and food servicing facilities poses a significant challenge, as it can protect microbial populations from sanitization procedures and contribute to the persistence and potential transfer of spoilage and pathogenic bacteria.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The ultimate goal of HACCP is to ensure food safety by controlling hazards throughout food production and distribution. Even though the food industry widely adopts preventative measures based on the HACCP principles, the effectiveness of these food safety management systems for poultry meat products in Malaysia has never been examined (Nidaullah et al., 2017; Shafini et al., 2017). While there is substantial research on the effectiveness of HACCP systems in enhancing food safety in poultry meat processing, a significant gap exists in understanding the direct impact of these systems on the microbiological quality of the end products. Most existing studies have concentrated on the prevalence of pathogens in the processing environment or at various stages of production. Conversely, there is limited comprehensive analysis focused on the final product, especially regarding how well HACCP-certified plants control microbiological hazards in the end products that reach consumers. This gap highlights a need for detailed investigations into the microbiological safety and quality of poultry meat and meat products at the point of sale, considering the final step in the food safety management system where HACCP's effectiveness is ultimately tested.

Despite the rigorous controls during the processing phase, there remains an underexplored area concerning the final step in the food chain: the microbiological safety and compliance of poultry meat based RTE food when served. Existing literature and studies have primarily concentrated on the processing stages, knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP), focusing less on how these safety measures translate into the actual serving environment. This oversight is critical, considering the CDC and EFSA report highlighting the significant role of food service establishments in foodborne illness outbreaks. The gap, therefore, lies in the empirical examination of microbiological quality and HACCP compliance at the point of serving within HACCP-certified dining and medical facilities. At this juncture, the risk of cross-contamination and poor hand and surface hygiene could undermine earlier safety efforts.

Beyond the issue of foodborne pathogens, the poultry industry is also compromised by the unethical use of antibiotics for growth promotion. This has facilitated the development and spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria through both vertical and horizontal gene transfer, significantly endangering public health. (Haulisah et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2018). As a result, poultry meat-based products are among the primary causes of foodborne illnesses, and this issue is particularly pronounced in establishments serving poultry-based RTE meals. Therefore, it becomes evident that while the implementation of HACCP systems in Malaysia has been explored, there remains a significant gap in understanding their real-world effectiveness, particularly in poultry meat processing plants, dining outlets serving food to general populations, hospital settings with vulnerable populations, and the cleanliness of food handlers' hand in food preparation kitchens. Studies that have already been conducted

have mostly concentrated on the theoretical underpinnings of HACCP and its compliance aspects; even so, their practical effectiveness in lowering the levels of foodborne pathogens, bacteria resistant to antibiotics, and surface and food handler cleanliness to a compliance level have not been fully explored. This gap in knowledge is critical, as it impedes the development of more effective strategies and policies to ensure food safety. This study aims to bridge this gap by providing an empirical evaluation of HACCP-certified facilities, thereby contributing valuable insights into the effectiveness of these systems in controlling foodborne pathogens in the Malaysian context.

While numerous studies have highlighted the efficacy of common sanitizers such as chlorine and quaternary ammonia compounds (QAC) in reducing microbial loads on poultry products and in hospitality settings, there appears to be a scarcity of research focusing specifically on their effectiveness in the presence of biofilms. Biofilms pose a significant challenge due to their protective matrix made of polyanionic polymer, which can shield microorganisms from the effects of sanitizers. At the same time, organic matter within polyanionic polymer (Cloete, 2003) can neutralize sanitizer, potentially leading to persistent contamination and reduced sanitizer efficacy. This gap is critical, considering the prevalent use of these sanitizers in Malaysian poultry meat processing and hospitality establishments with HACCP certification.

1.3 Objectives

To this end, several specific objectives were defined, as outlined below:

1. This study aims to assess the microbiological safety of poultry meat and products from HACCP-certified plants at the point of distribution, focusing on

indicator bacteria against Malaysia's Veterinary Department standards. The goal is to evaluate HACCP's effectiveness in producing safe final products for consumers, thereby guiding future improvements in food safety practices.

2. To comprehensively assess the microbiological quality of poultry-based RTE foods, cleanliness of food handlers' hand, and contact surfaces in HACCP-certified dining and medical facilities and verify compliance with microbiological reference limits. This objective aims to explore the interconnectedness of HACCP certifications at the raw material processing and RTE food preparation stages, determining their collective impact on reducing microbiological contamination and enhancing food safety for consumers.
3. To determine the prevalence and antibiotic resistance patterns of *Salmonella* spp. and *S. aureus* isolated from HACCP-certified establishments.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of chlorine and QAC sanitizer against biofilm formed on different type and surface conditions by *S. aureus* bacteria isolated from poultry meat processing plants and dining establishments.

1.4 Hypothesis

1. Hypothesis 1 (H1): HACCP-certified poultry meat processing plants will uniformly comply with the microbiological reference limits set by the Veterinary Department of Malaysia for indicator microbes, indicating not only the effectiveness of HACCP systems in maintaining food safety standards but also the consistency in their implementation across these establishments.
2. Hypothesis 2 (H2): HACCP certification across two food-serving establishments (Medical and Dining) significantly influences the prevalence and compliance of indicator bacteria at the point of serving RTE food, on kitchen surfaces, and on food handlers' hands at both establishments.

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