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Analysis of fish marketing conditions at supermarkets and public-markets at the Metropolitan Region of Recife (PE-Brazil)

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Public-markets and supermarkets perform a crucial socioeconomic function as they are popular points for the sale of natural foods and foods of animal origin. However, the way these foods are sold has the potential to cause changes in the quality of the products, especially fish that have a high nutritional richness, but depending on storage and handling they can pose risks to the consumer's health. In this sense, the objective of this work was to analyze the conditions for selling fish in public markets and supermarkets in the Metropolitan Region of Recife. Visits were made to twelve supermarkets and two public markets in the metropolitan region of Recife without prior appointment and anonymously, from October 2023 to January 2024 to evaluate the quality, storage and characteristics of the products sold. There was no exposure of the locations to maintain the safety and ethics of the establishments visited. After collecting all the information, the recorded images were analyzed, and the different establishments were then compared, evaluating compliance with the rules and health legislation for the sale of fish. In the public markets visited, sanitary problems are quite evident and serious while in supermarkets the current legislation was better met. Eight of the supermarkets visited used horizontal freezers to display the fish, and in two of them the fish were packaged in plastic film and Styrofoam trays, which makes it difficult for the consumer to see both sides of the product. Furthermore, after some time in this form of packaging, the product may have a slight plastic flavor and, if the product already has an off-flavor (unpleasant flavor), it may become more pronounced. Three of the supermarkets visited had problems with fish storage where in one of them the freezer lids were broken, not maintaining the storage temperature, leaving the fish softened inside the packaging. In the other two, the packages had ice inside, indicating that there had been thawing and refreezing, compromising the preservation of the fish. Furthermore, in these same establishments the presence of dirt and even pieces of other fish from damaged packaging inside the freezers was noted. Only one of the supermarkets presented the classic display for supermarkets, where the fish is displayed on refrigerated counters, with the products out of packaging, and preserved in ice using scales. In public markets, fish are offered without signs about the expiration date, fishing date or origin of the products, and they are displayed on counters and refrigerated with ice that melts due to the heat, as it is an open space and there is no air conditioning. Furthermore, the water from the melted ice mixes with fish fluids and mucus, which accelerates the putrefaction process. Furthermore, it was also observed that the employee who treats the fish is the same one who sells it, without gloves, masks, caps, boots or appropriate clothing. Furthermore, the processing materials are old, dirty and arranged in such a way that they are visited by flies and other insects. In view of the above, supermarkets have better sanitary conditions than public markets, probably due to the fact that supermarkets have a better structure for storing fish and processing materials, as well as for air conditioning in general.

Palavras-chave: storage, fish selling, health conditions.