

Agency funded research to determine understanding of the term 'non sterile' in relation to powdered infant formula

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Background

- **World Health Assembly (2005)**
- **MS should inform caregivers about :**
 - **best practices for preparation, use and handling of PIF**
 - **that PIF may contain pathogenic micro-organisms through an explicit warning on pack**



Research Objectives

Amongst consumers

- Explore current understanding of the term 'non sterile'
- Explore reaction to infant and follow-on formula being labelled as 'non sterile' and the impact on parental attitudes
- Examine information and advice needs from parents with regard to powdered infant formula

Amongst Health Care Professionals

- Explore information requirements
- If/how targeted information should indicate that powdered infant formula is non sterile
- Reaction towards labelling powdered infant formula as non sterile



Methodology

i) 9 Parents Groups (7-8 respondents for 1 ½ hours)

Individuals were selected according to the following criteria:

- **Feed** - Formula or mixed feeding
- **Motivation for formula feeding** - planned or unplanned
- **Lifestage** - first time parent or previous children
- **Age** - younger or older
- **Parent** - Mum or Dad
- **Social Economic Group**
- **Location** - Scotland, London, North England, Wales, Midlands, Northern Ireland



Method

- ii) 1 'At Risk Babies' Parents Group (6 respondents for 1 ½ hours)

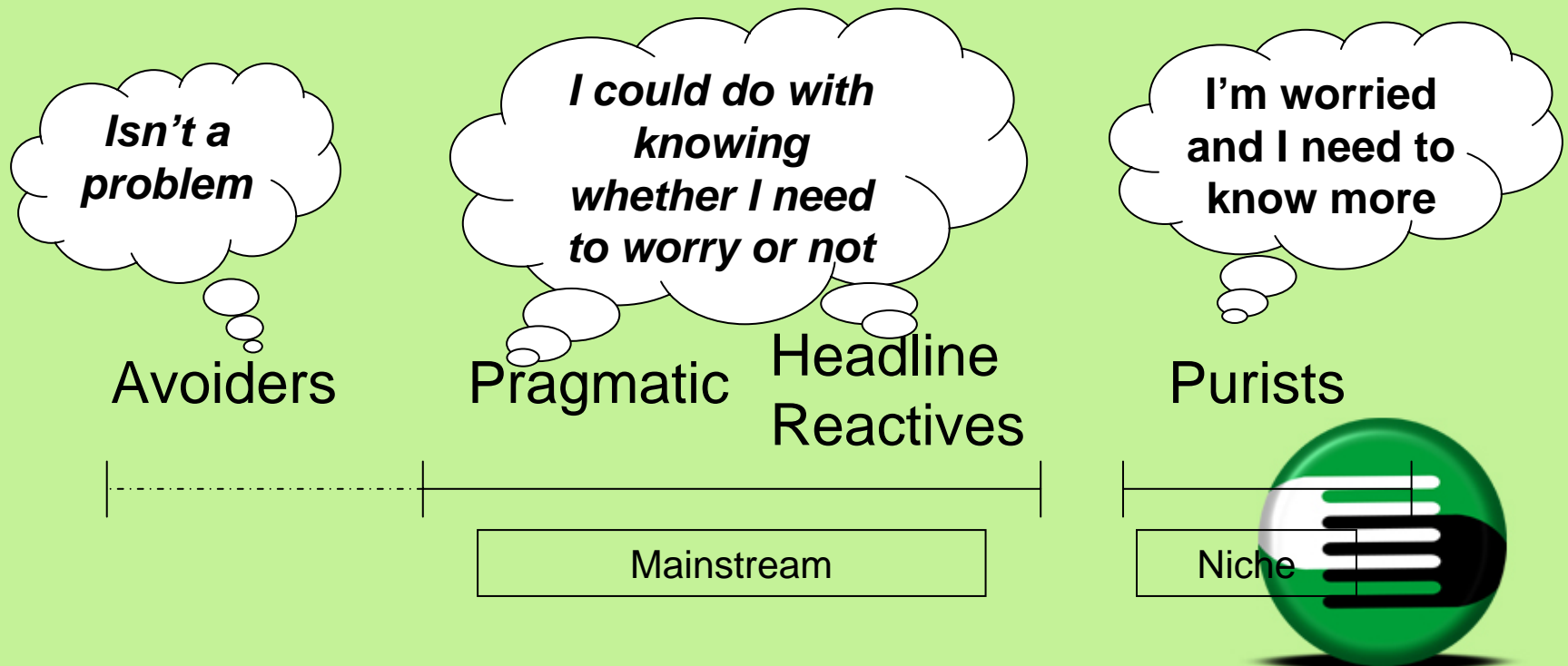
- iii) 1 Health Care Professional Group (5-6 respondents for 1 ½ hours)

- iv) 5 Health Care Professional face-to-face depth interviews (for 1 hour)



Overview of Attitudinal Types

- 4 key different attitudes to food issues identified from previous relevant research
- Implications for level of concern, behaviour & information needs



Sources of information

- **Wide range of written and spoken information and advice → diverse knowledge**
- **When beginning or during bottle feeding, info sourced from:**
 - On-pack preparation instruction and important feeding guidelines
 - Other on-pack information, e.g. important feeding information
 - Info given when pregnant
 - Leaflets, magazines and internet



There are more risks than I thought
[G6]

Perceptions of risk

• Good understanding that very young, premature & ill are at greatest risk

But

• Wide variation in understanding & appreciation of both risk factors & consequences for all:

Maybe puke [sick] but I don't know if it's dangerous
[G6]

Avoiders

My baby hasn't been at all ill ...
[G7]

- Vague understanding and denial of lax practices reinforces more casual/unsafe approach

Mainstream

- Knowledge relates to importance of following advice (as on pack) to avoid illness/harm but don't consider reasons and practices can slip if evidence of no harm

Purists

- More knowledgeable about consequences & causes

I was told storing could give stomach ache or make them ill so I make them up fresh

[G6]



I think I know... but you think it's sterile because it's sealed
[Hosp. MW]

Non sterile – Health professionals

- Some awareness
- Importance of safe practice acknowledged but not prompted by non-sterile issue
- No spontaneous connection with need to change information to parents beyond current advice, but general:
 - the need to be careful with PIF
 - importance for babies health and safety
 - awareness of lax practices

There can't be an issue babies survive on it
[Health visitor]

It can't be completely sterile because its freeze dried powder. I've know since I was a student but its not considered a big deal unless we started getting huge gastroenteritis problems
[Health Visitor]

They need background information ... not just a change in advice
[Comm.MW]

It would be taken off the market of it contained bacteria
[Comm. MW]



Non sterile – Parents

*I thought it would be sterile
till opened ... like ready
made cartons
[G7]*

- Negative associations
- Initial shock and further reactions to non sterile varied:
 - Majority assume that all food & drink, especially products intended for babies are sterile, at least until opened
 - Minority have better understanding and recognised the sterile food types
- **Most anticipate that powdered infant formula is sterile**

*UHT is definitely
sterilised [G8]*

*I've never really
thought about it
before
[G4]*



Parents Immediate Response

Concerns:

- It should be sterile
- Parents should be told
- Puts my baby at risk
- Dangerous/harmful product
- Government responsibility
- Would have been taken off the market
- Should be taken off the market

Questions:

- What are the risks? Is it a low risk?
- Why do you sterilise bottles then?
- Which brands are affected?
- Pro-breast tactic?
- What do I do now?
- Must be safe enough?
- How can you make it safer?



Parents level of concern

Avoiders

- Lower level of concern
- High rationalisation
- More accepting
- Fewer questions

Mainstream

- Medium level of concern
- Some rationalisation
- Question need to worry?
- Need for additional info

Purists

- Higher level of concern
- Fear of past and future
- More cautious
- Need for detailed info



Communicating non-sterile

*Don't say
not sterile
as it will
cause
panic
[G4]*

- Different channels can be used as appropriate to deliver varying information needs

*You can't just
say - not sterile!
[G3]*

*The longer you keep
it the worse it gets
[G3]*

- When communicating non-sterile should explain to reassure and maximise understanding

- Relative risk
- How to reduce risk
- Need for adult responsibility

*As long as you follow
the rules the chances
are minimal
[G9]*

*Too much
information will
scare people
[G7]*



Communicating non-sterile on packs

- Overall message should increase parental responsibility
- Simple balanced message
- Research suggests the phrases “Scientific opinion / experts agree” are more acceptable
- Avoid exacerbating concern
- **HOWEVER**, they are useful in making parents understand the reason to change behaviour



Conclusions

- UK-wide focus groups
- Little awareness amongst consumers that PIF is non-sterile
- All agreed that parents should be informed about the reasons for behavioural changes
- on pack by:
 - a simple and clear message that stated PIF was non-sterile
 - info on risk reduction steps



Other Research

- **B13R0002** - An Investigation into the Attitudes and Behaviours of Caregivers in the Preparation, Handling, Storage and Feeding of Powdered infant Formula Inside and Outside the Home
- **B13R0004** - Bactericidal preparation of powdered infant milk formulae.
- Effect of water temperature on the nutrient composition of powdered infant formula



Acknowledgements

- Define
- COI
- Helen Ralph FSA (Consumer branch)
- Adam Hardgrave FSA (MSD)
- Harriette Lascelles FSA (MSD)



