Title:

Predicting older adults' intentions to adopt safe food handling practices using a theory-based approach

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Abstract:

Introduction: Older adults (60+) are particularly susceptible to the severe consequences of foodborne illness due to natural aging and development of chronic diseases. In addition, they have unsafe storage practices in the kitchen, which can further increase their risk of listeriosis. No research has applied the Theory of Planned Behavior to investigate safe food handling outcomes in older adults.

Purpose: The objective of this study was to apply the TPB to determine which psychosocial factors were predictors of older adults' safe food storage practices at home.

Methods: Two behavioural intention outcomes were investigated: (a) thawing meats safely and (b) storing leftovers within recommended guidelines. An online structured questionnaire was developed and administered to older adults. The survey instrument measured socio-demographic and TPB variables: attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and intentions. A measure of self-reported habitual behavior was also recorded and used to determine whether past practice influenced behavioural intentions.

Results: Respondents (n = 78) demonstrated good intentions to safely defrost meats (M = 5.17, SD = 1.55) and store leftovers (M = 5.58, SD = 1.15). The regression models accounted for 41 and 48% of the variance in intentions to perform safe storage behaviors. Attitudes (β = 0.31, p < 0.01) and subjective norms (β = 0.36, p < 0.01) were predictors of intentions to safely thaw

meats. Habitual behavior (β = 0.40, p < 0.001) was a significant predictor of behavioral intentions to safely store leftovers. Perceived behavioral control was a significant predictor of intentions to thaw meats (β = 0.32, p < 0.01) and store leftovers (β = 0.33, p < 0.05).

Implications: The results indicate theory-based solutions to improve food safety among older consumers may be a feasible strategy.