

UNDERSTANDING HOUSEHOLDERS' INTENTIONS TO ENGAGE IN PEST CONTROL: THE USE OF THE HEALTH BELIEF MODEL

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Abstract Pests in the home are a health risk because they can be reservoirs or mechanical vectors for several bacterial, parasitic, fungal and viral disease agents. Other associated health risks are allergies and damage to building structure by gnawing. The aims of this study were to use a social cognitive model that is widely used in psychology, the health belief model, to investigate which factors influence householders' intention to control pests and to record which categories of pests are reported in homes in the Netherlands. An online questionnaire was developed to record the following variables: demographic variables, health motivation, perceived susceptibility/severity of contracting diseases through pests, and the costs/benefits of pest control. The survey was placed online between 11 September and 31 November 2015 and was completed by 413 respondents. Regression analysis revealed that perceiving the benefits of pest control and expecting severe consequences of zoonotic infections predicted higher intention to control pests. Intentions towards pest control were not influenced by perceiving oneself as susceptible to catching a disease from pests, health motivation (striving towards a healthy lifestyle), or by the expected costs of pest control. Interestingly, pet owners and farmers were less likely to control pests than others. A large majority of respondents reported pests in or around their home within the previous year. The prevalences were: rodents 62%, flying insects 98%, crawling insects 85%, birds 58%, and moles 20%. In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest that interventions aimed at improving the effectiveness of domestic pest control should focus on increasing the benefits that individuals associate with effective pest control and on underlining the severity of the diseases that pests may carry. That animal owners are less likely than other people to engage in pest control should be taken into account.