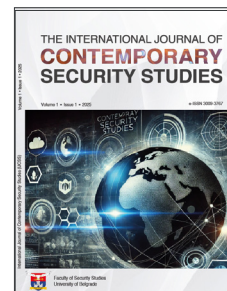




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Article

Assessing the Implications of Scavengers' Activities on the Security of Kwara State

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the implications of scavengers' activities on the security of Kwara State. The scavengers (*baban bola*), classified into two groups- itinerant and middlemen, have both been perceived as causing insecurity in the state. This study uncovered the veracity of this perception. The research adopted the theory of structural violence and employed both quantitative and qualitative research designs. Data were collected from Kwara residents through 204 questionnaires administered to residents of Ilorin, Offa, and Jebba; interviews with 2 KWEPA staff; interviews with 14 police officers; and FGDs with 20 scavengers. The data were systematically analysed to establish how scavenging affects scavengers' livelihoods; whether scavenging affects the security of lives and property; and the relationship between scavenging and environmental security. The research's findings revealed that scavenging negatively affects scavengers' livelihoods, as their daily earnings of \$1.68 fall below the poverty line of \$2.15; 80.39% of the respondents also believe that scavengers are exposed to danger, while the police confirmed receiving security complaints from scavengers. 93.24% of respondents believe that scavengers pose a security threat to them, while 78.43% affirm that they have evidence to support this belief. KWEPA corroborated the finding that 62.75% of respondents think scavenging has environmental benefits during the interview. The study concluded that scavengers' activities in the state cause more harm than good. To ameliorate the challenges, some recommendations include: regulation of scavengers' activities by the government; implementation of a sound waste management system by residents; and introduction of communal security measures.

KEYWORDS

Security; implication; human security; scavenger; Kwara state.

1. 1. Introduction

Security can be perceived as a means to an end and an end in itself. The notion of security has been evolving significantly because what is termed as security is subject to divergent opinions. Hence, Williams (2008), while explaining the scope of security studies, argued that four fundamental questions are pertinent to ask and answer. These questions are: What is security? Whose security are we talking about? What counts as a security issue? Moreover, how can security be achieved?

In the contemporary world, the concept of security has transcended national security and is now viewed mainly through the lens of human security. From human security concerns, what security is has expanded



tremendously to the point that anything that affects people's livelihoods has security implications and thus becomes a security issue. One such issue is the activities of scavengers, specifically those who deal in metal and other material scraps, commonly known as '*baban bola*'. Generally, scavengers' activities are tied to waste, either to sanitary work in India or to many categories of waste, including metal scrap and electronic waste, in Ghana and many other developing countries. Their activities are felt and have security implications for them, others living in the community, or the environment.

Nas and Jaffe (2004) described a scavenger as: a relatively poor person, has a low ascribed social status, is an immigrant (mostly from rural areas), and engages in this form of work generally as an adaptive response to chronic poverty (quoted in Benjamin, 2007). In India, scavengers engage in manual latrine cleaning and carry night soil in baskets on their heads; as Siddaramu (2013) explains, they belong to the lowest rung of society and suffer extreme forms of discrimination, exclusion, and powerlessness.

In Kwara State, and Nigeria in general, scavengers who deal in scraps are of two types: the itinerant scavenger and the middleman scavenger. The itinerant scavengers' activities involve moving from one place to another, carrying bags or pushing barrows to collect scraps, which are then sold to middlemen scavengers stationed at their preferred sites. The scraps, which include metal scraps, plastic bottles, irons, aluminium, paper, etc., are picked wherever they are found and sometimes bought from the owners. During these movements and transactions, many security issues occur. These include allegations of theft attributed to scavengers, physical assaults, health risks posed to scavengers, the poverty cycle of scavengers, and environmental pollution. In 2019, for instance, news surfaced online on how a clash between (Hausa) scavengers and (Yoruba) area boys almost led to an ethnic crisis, resulting in looting and blockade of the Lagos/Abeokuta Expressway before it was resolved by the police (Phenomenal, 2019). It is evident that scavengers' activities have security implications; however, despite the impending security threats posed by scavengers, especially itinerant ones, the security implications of their activities have not received adequate attention from security experts, researchers, and the government. In fact, most research on scavengers is conducted by scholars in the fields of the environment, waste management, health, and sustainable development. This assertion is further stressed by Medina (2011), who concluded that, despite the existence of approximately 15 million scavengers globally and their significant economic contributions, the informal recycling sector remains largely overlooked by researchers and development agencies, with no dedicated academic programmes addressing their role in poverty reduction, job creation, or industrial competitiveness.

As an activity, scavenging therefore affects the security of lives and property, the state's economy, and the environment. On the positive side, scavenging is a source of livelihood, an informal and cheap way of clearing the streets of certain waste materials, a source of acquiring recyclable materials for industrial use, and a source of revenue generation by the state, among others. As for its negative security implications, scavenging has led to the loss of lives and property, caused environmental insecurity, and left the scavengers in a state of perpetual poverty.

With this background, it is appropriate to say that scavenging has both positive and negative implications for the security of Kwara State. The state has, however, not done enough to harness the potential positive contributions of scavenging and has done very little to mitigate its negative security implications within its territory. Most citizens hold negative opinions of scavengers and see them as a security threat to the state.

This research, therefore, aims to assess the implications of scavengers' activities on the security of Kwara state by examining the relationship between scavenging and security in the state. This study is significant for the following reasons:

- The study is a trailblazer in discussing the security implications of the activities of scavengers, as most previous studies on scavengers have mainly focused on their economic, environmental, and health impacts. It will therefore be an eye-opener for other security scholars to research scavengers and the security implications of their activities in greater depth.
- Scavenging has many effects on society, but it seems the government focuses on its economic and environmental impact. At the same time, security agencies also appear oblivious to the security implications of scavengers' activities. They operate in the informal sector, freely scavenging on the streets of the state without any obvious regulation to check them or ensure that they pose no threat to themselves or others. This study is, therefore, a wake-up call to the government to formulate relevant policies to prevent po-

tential security threats posed by scavenger activities. It will also showcase the positive side of scavenging and highlight ways to ensure cordial relationships between scavengers and the general populace.

The research questions include:

- Does scavenging affect scavengers' livelihood positively or negatively
- Does scavenging have an impact on the security of the lives and properties of the people
- Is there a relationship between scavenging and environmental security

The objectives of the research are as follows:

- To understand if scavenging affects scavengers' livelihood positively or negatively
- To find out if scavenging has an impact on the security of the lives and properties of the people
- To establish the relationship between scavenging and environmental security

The research was conducted on the premise of the following hypotheses:

- Scavenging positively affects scavengers' livelihood
- Scavenging hurts the security of the lives and properties of the people
- There is a relationship between scavenging and environmental security

1.1. Literature Review

Research Question 1: Does scavenging affect scavengers' livelihood positively or negatively?

Scavengers face a myriad of challenges, threats, and risks on duty. Agyekum (2010), as cited in Oteng-Ababio et al. (2014), explained that the first challenge faced by informal recyclers is neglect from the government. He explained further that, as a shadow of the formal economy, the scavengers suffer from low income, stigmatization, hostility from government authorities, poor access to infrastructure and social services, such as credit facilities. Yahaya (2018) explained that scavenging of materials for recycling purposes is dangerous, as scavengers use their bare hands to search through waste dumps. Based on their research on e-waste management, the ILO (2014) identified threats facing informal waste workers (scavengers), including health and environmental risks, limited power to negotiate for better working conditions, and a low recovery rate of recyclable materials from waste, while contaminating themselves and the environment in which they operate. For Abad (2008), while scavenging is physically exhausting, resident scavengers who scavenge in the Smokey Mountain are comparatively more comfortable than street scavengers, who are beaten up without just cause, treated like scum of the earth, and met with disdainful looks.

Citing Oteng-Ababio, Kalantidou, and Walsh (2016), the authors explained that harmful substances are numerous in e-waste, and heavy metals such as lead and mercury cause IQ deficits and developmental abnormalities in children. They explained further that the inhalation of such heavy metals damages the kidney and respiratory tissue, and also leads to lung cancer. For Jerie (2016), scavengers suffer health risks, including musculoskeletal disorders; safety and health hazards like diarrhoea, viral hepatitis, and cases of obstructive and restrictive disorders.

The above literature reveals that scavenging has a predominantly negative impact on scavengers' human security; however, not all scavenging is security-threatening, as scavengers do provide essential services, earn decent incomes, and contribute to recycling (Medina, 2011). This study will delve deeper to assess whether scavenging improves scavengers' security.

Research Question 2: Does scavenging have an impact on the security of the lives and properties of the people?

The security implications of scavengers' activities in Nigeria have rarely been discussed by academics, with most coverage in Nigerian newspapers. In several Nigerian cities, scavengers have been implicated in the theft of cables, rods, manhole covers, building materials, and the infiltration of construction sites. For instance, in the FCT, there have been reports of scavengers attacking people commuting at night and also serving as inform-

ants to criminals (Vanguard, 2023). The scavengers working in the South-Eastern states in Nigeria have been accused of vandalism, stealing, spying, and being informants to kidnappers, among other things (Ibid, 2024). Furthermore, scavenging has been linked to vandalism of Nigeria's critical public infrastructures, resulting in recurrent breakdowns in the power and telecoms sectors (Guardian, 2025). Some reports link scavenging with increased loitering, informal settlements around dump sites, and scavenging clusters. In Abuja, for instance, residents of certain suburbs blamed the rise of scavengers/beggars for burglaries, kidnappings, and general insecurity (Daily Post, 2025). As summarized by Ulo et al. (2024), some individuals perpetrate crimes such as immoral dress and carrying weapons in the name of metal waste collection, and this has led to their ban in Borno and Yobe states.

In conclusion, communities widely believe that scavengers' activities threaten their security, but this is not always the case; this study will address gaps in the literature in this area while focusing on Kwara State.

Research Question 3: Is there a relationship between scavenging and environmental security?

Analysis of the literature on the relationship between scavenging and environmental security reveals both positive and negative contributions, and it is not easy to determine which is greater.

For instance, by extracting recyclables, scavengers reduce the volume of waste reaching landfills and supply secondary materials to informal and formal recycling chains (Agunwamba, 2003; Oteng-Ababio, Amankwaa & Chama, 2014). This service, according to the ILO (2014), can be interpreted as enhancing environmental security as it helps reduce pollution and conserve material resources, particularly in developing countries with weak waste management systems. Medina (2011) emphasized that scavenging supports environmental security by reducing energy use and greenhouse gas emissions through the recovery and recycling of inorganic materials, which have a lower environmental impact compared to virgin resources.

On the other hand, unregulated scavenging in West African cities is characterized by exposure of scavengers and others to hazardous substances (e-waste toxins, biomedical waste, leachate) and injuries arising from unsafe handling, leading to public-health issues (Owusu-Sekyere, 2014; Jerie, 2016). Oteng-Ababio et al. (2014) argue that these occupational hazards translate into environmental insecurity by reducing households' and communities' capacity to cope with environmental shocks and chronic pollution. Further, unregulated dumping and the concentration of scavenging activities around informal dumpsites can intensify localized contamination and vector proliferation, with spillover effects for adjacent communities (Agunwamba, 2003; Benjamin, 2007). Most of the literature analysed is from studies conducted outside Nigeria so this study will add to the limited literature in this area in Nigeria, especially in Kwara State.

Structural Violence Theory

Structural violence theory was introduced in 1969 by Johan Galtung, a Norwegian sociologist, who had first published works on peace and violence since 1964. Galtung identified two types of peace, namely, positive peace and negative peace. Negative peace is the absence of violence and war, while positive peace is the integration of human society. Structural violence refers to violence in which a social structure or social institution may harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. Structural violence occurs when people are disadvantaged by political, legal, economic, or cultural traditions due to long-standing structural inequalities that are usually accepted as the way things are and always have been (Christie et al., 2001).

This theory is relevant to this study because scavenging jobs are fraught with security threats to scavengers and to people living in the community where scavenging takes place. Scavengers work in the informal sector of the economy and face economic and life-threatening risks resulting from physical attacks, discrimination, exposure to disease, and poverty, among others. Their unequal access to education, health care, and union formation is a form of structural violence against them. One of the primary reasons people take up scavenging is to earn a living. However, the government and most of the general public, instead of providing support to make their task easier, often neglect them and, in some cases, ban them from operating.

2. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to assess the security implications of scavengers' activities in Kwara State. The research design included surveys, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), semi-structured interviews, and direct observation.

Study Area

The study area is Kwara State, a state created on 27th May, 1967, and one of the six north-central states in Nigeria. The land area is 33,433 km², and based on the 2006 population census, the state's population is estimated at 3,192,900. The state, located at latitude 8°97'N and longitude 4°39'E, shares boundaries with Niger, Kogi, Ekiti, Osun, and Oyo states, and borders the Republic of Benin to the west.

Kwara State is made up of sixteen (16) Local Government Areas (LGAs), with a significant city, Ilorin, and two major towns, Offa and Jebba. Other towns are Patigi, Erin-Li, Lafia, Adeleke Igbewere, Ejidongari, Osi, Lafagi, Gure, Afon, Kaiama, Isanlu-Isin, Omu-Aran, Egbejila, Iota, Iponrin, and Igbaja (Kwarastate.gov.ng). This study focused on Ilorin, Offa, and Jebba, as waste collection and disposal are usually limited in rural areas (Agunwamba, 2003).



Figure 1. Map of Kwara State showing the 16 Local Government Areas (LGAs).

Participant Selection

Participants were selected using purposive and stratified sampling techniques. The study targeted four key groups: scavengers involved in metal scrap collection, residents of Kwara State, officials from the Kwara State Environmental Protection Agency (KWEPA), and officers of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF). Stratification was based on geographical zones—Kwara Central (Ilorin), Kwara North (Jebba), and Kwara South (Offa)—to ensure regional representation.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The researcher selected study participants from three (3) major cities in the three (3) Kwara state senatorial zones: Kwara Central, Kwara North, and Kwara South. To determine the sample size, a calculator (calculator.net) was used.

Questionnaires were addressed to 204 urban residents, divided as follows: 100 residents of Ilorin city (made up of Ilorin east, Ilorin south, and Ilorin west LGAs) were selected in Kwara central; while from Jebba town, Moro LGA of Kwara north, and Offa town, Offa LGA in Kwara south, 52 residents were selected each. People of different ages, sexes, occupations, religions, and locations, among others, were selected in each location to ensure an accurate representation.

Other study participants include: twenty (20) scavengers that deal in metal scraps made up of ten (10) scavengers in Ilorin, and five (5) scavengers in each of the two towns of Offa and Jebba; two (2) KWEPA officials; and 14 NPF officers spread across different police stations (6 from Ilorin and four from each of the two towns).

The study samples were carefully selected based on their importance to the research. The scavengers, for instance, are in the best position to explain the security threats they face; Kwara residents bear the significant impacts (either good or bad) of scavengers' activities; KWEPA as the waste management authority is tasked with the duty of managing waste and those who deal in it among other functions, hence they are in good position to authoritatively explain how the business of metal scrap scavenging is being done and how the state monitors it; the NPF personnel as the manager of security within the state are capable of providing security and unbiased account of security threats posed to and by scavengers within the state while recommending solutions. To determine the sample size, a calculator (calculator.net) was used.

Data Collection Tools and Validation

The questionnaire, administered to residents, was pre-tested with a small sample (n=20) to ensure clarity and relevance. Feedback from the pilot informed revisions aimed at improving reliability. FGDs and interviews were guided by structured protocols developed from literature and expert input. Triangulation of data sources enhanced the validity of findings.

Reliability Measures

To ensure reliability, all data collectors were trained on ethical standards and data recording procedures. Responses from different tools were cross-verified, and thematic consistency was checked during analysis. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used for qualitative data, while descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to quantitative data.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was secured verbally from all participants. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were provided. Hausa-speaking research assistants facilitated communication with non-English-speaking scavengers.

Method of Data Analysis

Data obtained through the questionnaire were analysed using quantitative analysis and subjected to simple statistical analysis and interpretation. The Data obtained through FGD, interviews, and observation were thematically analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis.

3. Results

This section presents both descriptive and inferential findings from the study. Data were collected from 204 residents, 20 scavengers, 14 police officers, and 2 KWEPA officials across Ilorin, Offa, and Jebba.

Table 1. Outcome of Respondents' Demographic Features (Kwara Residents).

Variables	Frequency				Percentage (%)
	Ilorin	Jebba	Offa	Total	
Respondents	100	52	52	204	100
Sex					
Male	59	38	35	132	64.71
Female	41	14	17	72	36.29
Marital Status					
Married	46	30	30	106	51.96
Single	54	17	20	91	44.61
Widowed	0	2	2	4	1.96
Divorced	0	3	0	3	1.47
Age (years)					
15-35	72	23	34	129	63.24
36-60	25	23	17	65	31.86
Above 60	3	3	1	7	3.43
5-14	0	3	0	3	1.47
Educational Level					
Tertiary	97	26	41	164	80.39
Secondary	2	11	9	22	10.78
No formal Education	1	9	2	12	5.88
Primary	0	6	0	6	2.94
Religion					
Islam	52	34	43	129	63.24
Christianity	48	15	9	72	35.29
Traditional	0	3	0	3	1.47
Occupation					
Public Servant	63	23	18	104	50.98
Self Employed	13	12	13	38	18.63
Student	17	3	10	30	14.71
Private Employment	3	6	8	16	7.84
Unemployed	2	8	3	13	6.37
Retired	2	0	1	3	1.47

The demographic profile of the respondents shows a predominantly male population, with 64.71% identifying as male. A slight majority were married, accounting for 51.96%, while 44.61% were single. Most respondents were young adults aged 15-35, accounting for 63.24% of the sample. Educational attainment was notably high, with 80.39% having a tertiary education, particularly in Ilorin, although a small portion had no formal or only a primary education. In terms of religion, 63.24% were Muslim, followed by 35.29% Christians, and a minimal number practicing traditional beliefs. Occupationally, over half were public servants, while others were self-employed, students, or privately employed; unemployment was relatively low at 6.37%. Overall, the sample reflects a diverse, educated, and economically active population, which is essential for understanding perceptions of security and scavenging in Kwara State's urban areas.

Table 2. Socio-demographic data of the scavengers.

Scavenger	Age	Sex	State of Origin	Education Level	Marriage Status	Economic Status (Poor, Middle class, Rich)	Daily Earnings	Years in Business
1	28	M	Kebbi	Primary	Single	Poor	2,000	5
2	22	M	Kebbi	Primary	Single	Poor	1, 000	1
3	25	M	Kebbi	Primary	Single	Poor	1, 000	1
4	22	M	Katsina	Primary	Single	Poor	1, 000	1
5	23	M	Sokoto	Primary	Single	Poor	1, 000	2
6	18	M	Zamfara	Nil	Single	Poor	1, 000	3
7	17	M	Sokoto	Nil	Single	Poor	1,500	2
8	20	M	Kebbi	Nil	Single	Poor	1000	2
9	21	M	Niger	Nil	Single	Poor	1500	2
10	19	M	Katsina	Nil	Single	Poor	1000	1
11	16	M	Kebbi	Nil	Single	Poor	1000	1
12	20	M	Sokoto	Nil	Single	Poor	1500	2
13	21	M	Katsina	Primary	Single	Poor	1000	1
14	15	M	Kano	Nil	Single	Poor	1000	1
15	16	M	Kebbi	Nil	Single	Poor	1000	1
16	20	M	Katsina	Nil	Single	Poor	1000	2
17	16	M	Kebbi	Nil	Single	Poor	1, 000	1
18	21	M	Katsina	Nil	Single	Poor	2, 000	3
19	17	M	Katsina	Nil	Single	Poor	1, 000	2
20	20	M	Sokoto	Nil	Single	Poor	1, 000	1

4. Interpretation of Scavenger Demographics

The above table reveals that the scavengers are all young males, aged 15-28 years, predominantly from northern Nigerian states such as Kebbi, Katsina, Sokoto, Zamfara, Niger, and Kano. Most of them have no formal education or only primary-level schooling, and all are single and identify as poor. Their daily earnings range from ₦1,000 to ₦2,000, which is below the global poverty line, and most have been scavenging for 1 to 3 years. This profile highlights the precarious conditions under which scavengers operate and supports the study's argument that, while economically necessary, scavenging exposes participants to structural vulnerabilities.

Table 3. Socio-demographic Data of KWEPA Officials

S/N	Name	Sex	Designation
1	Isiaka Jamiu Abiodun	M	Senior Scientific Officer
2	Alhaja Fatima	F	Principal Scientific Officer

The two KWEPA officials interviewed were both desk officers managing scavengers' activities in the state.

Table 4. Socio-demographic Data of Police Officers

S/N	Name	Sex	Location
1	Umar	M	Ilorin
2	Adama	F	Ilorin
3	Best	M	Ilorin
4	Ayinde	M	Ilorin
5	Ilyasu	M	Ilorin
6	Comfort	F	Ilorin
7	Adekunle	M	Offa
8	Rasaq	M	Offa
9	Nike	F	Offa
10	Alex	M	Offa
11	Oluwatoyin	F	Jebba
12	Ndana	M	Jebba
13	Usman	M	Jebba
14	Felicia	F	Jebba

NB: fictitious names are used to hide the identities of the officers.

The table presents the demographic distribution of 14 police officers interviewed across three locations in Kwara State: Ilorin, Offa, and Jebba. Of the total respondents, Ilorin had the highest representation with six officers, followed by Offa and Jebba with four officers each. The gender distribution shows a predominance of male officers, with 10 males and four females across all locations. This composition reflects a relatively balanced inclusion of perspectives from different regions and genders within the state's law enforcement community, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of security issues related to scavenging activities.

5. Discussion

The relationship between scavenging and security

As explained earlier, the concept of security, though not negating national security, has, however, morphed with a focus on human security, which includes seven areas, namely economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security (UNDP, 1994). Therefore, anything that affects any of the seven areas listed above has security implications.

To find out whether there is a relationship between scavenging and security, the researcher therefore researched how scavenging affects the lives of the scavengers themselves, the residents of the state, and the environment. Thus, the researcher administered questionnaires to residents of the state, conducted FGDs with scavengers, and interviewed police and KWEPA officers.

The findings will be presented for each research question.

Research Question 1: Does scavenging affect scavengers' livelihood positively or negatively?

The research used indices such as economic, personal, health, and food security to analyse whether and how scavenging affects the human security of scavengers.

For the scavengers, scavenging is a means to earn income and sustenance. From the FGDs, an average scavenger earns N1,175 (about \$1.68) per day, that is, \$0.47 short of the poverty line of \$2.15 as fixed by the World Bank in September 2022 (The World Bank, 2022). Based on the economic security factor, one can safely conclude that the scavengers are not economically secure, as they live below the poverty line.

Scavenging negatively affects the personal security of the scavengers, and evidence is a statement from the FGD that goes thus:

"Sometimes, we are accused wrongly of stealing, and before we know it, the police would have arrested us, and we would have to give them money before they free us... We do not go to the hospital for treatment because we don't have money or any registration with any hospital. If we fall sick, we take care of ourselves. Nobody cares about our health." — FGD Participant (Scavenger)

On the positive note, most scavengers eat between 2 and 3 times daily, and since scavenging does not impede their access to food, we can conclude that it supports food security.

As a strategy to validate the results of data gathered from scavengers regarding whether scavenging affects their security, the researcher collected relevant data from residents and police officers. Residents were asked whether they think scavengers are exposed to danger, and 80.39% of respondents agreed. The police officers were asked whether scavengers had brought cases to the police station and, if so, what types of cases they had brought. A police officer in Jebba explained thus:

"The scavengers do bring cases to the police station. These cases are sometimes brought against another scavenger, especially based on an accusation of theft, and sometimes against the people of some communities on matters such as being beaten up by some people in the community and an accusation of stealing."

Furthermore, a police officer in Offa added:

"... scavenger items are often stolen from their shops. They sometimes report cases like stealing and trespassing at the station against some miscreants in the community."

In conclusion, the literature review paints a largely negative picture of scavenging, emphasizing its association with crime and urban insecurity. While the findings from Kwara State support some of these concerns—particularly regarding personal and community security—they also reveal that scavenging plays a vital role in ensuring food access and basic income for marginalized populations. Therefore, the study contributes a more balanced perspective to the discourse, highlighting the need for policy interventions that address both the risks and the socio-economic functions of scavenging.

Research Question 2: Does scavenging have an impact on the security of the lives and properties of the people?

To analyse whether and how scavenging activities affect the security of residents' lives and property in Kwara State, questionnaires were administered to 204 residents, and interviews were conducted with police officers and KWEPA staff. Table 5 below presents data from the questionnaire to assess whether scavenging affects residents' security.

Table 5. Does scavenging affect the security of lives and properties?

Question	Value	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Do you think scavengers pose a security threat to lives and properties?	Yes	190	93.14
	No	14	6.86
Have you ever witnessed or received reliable information about a security threat caused by scavengers?	Yes	160	78.43
	No	44	21.57
Are you suspicious of scavengers whenever you see them around your home?	Yes	181	88.73
	No	23	11.27

The survey responses indicate a strong public perception of scavengers as security threats. A large majority of respondents, 93.14%, believe scavengers pose a threat to lives and properties. Additionally, 78.43% have either witnessed or received reliable information about security incidents involving scavengers, suggesting these concerns are grounded in experience. Furthermore, 88.73% of respondents admit to feeling suspicious when they see scavengers around their homes, reflecting a high level of distrust. These findings suggest that scavenging, while economically relevant, is widely viewed as a source of insecurity, highlighting the need for regulation and community engagement (Garba & Akaan, 2025; Metić, 2025).

To ensure balanced research on whether scavenging affects people's security, police officers were interviewed to validate the questionnaire results, as explained above. The police officers were therefore asked whether their police stations had ever received security-related complaints about scavengers and whether they had ever had to arrest them based on those complaints. All 16 police officers interviewed confirmed that their stations had received security complaints about scavengers and had been involved in arresting them on various grounds. For instance, one of the police officers, Umar, responded thus:

"Yes, we have received complaints about scavengers. We have received complaints ranging from theft, receiving stolen properties, house breaking, and loitering when people are not around."

The researcher went further to interview 2 KWEPA officers working on scavenger-related activities to find out whether the government keeps records of itinerant scavengers and regulates their activities. Their responses were negative, as their monitoring activities start and end with the middlemen scavengers who stay at the site where the scraps they acquire are kept. Jamiu explained thus:

"Yes, the government is keeping the record of metal scrap scavengers working in the state. All the scavengers working within the state are registered with the Kwara State Ministry of Environment, and their registration list is being sent to KWEPA for regulatory functions. So, we regulate their activities in KWEPA, but they are registered with the Ministry of Environment. Yes, the government regulates their activities by inspecting their sites, their activities, and we inspect them to check their level of compliance with environmental laws and regulations."

Based on the survey and interviews conducted, it can be concluded that the public widely perceives scavengers as a security threat in Kwara State. This perception is supported by both quantitative data—over 93% of respondents believe scavengers pose risks to lives and property—and qualitative insights from police officers, who confirmed receiving and acting on complaints about theft, trespass, and loitering by scavengers. Furthermore, the lack of government regulation over itinerant scavengers, as revealed by KWEPA officials, contributes to the unchecked nature of their activities and reinforces public distrust.

The convergence between the literature and the study's findings suggests that, in its current unregulated form, scavenging is perceived as a significant security concern in Kwara State, mirroring trends observed across other parts of Nigeria. While scavenging serves an economic function for marginalized populations, its association with criminal activities and the absence of comprehensive regulation exacerbate public fear and insecurity. Therefore, a balanced approach is needed—one that addresses the socio-economic drivers of scavenging while implementing effective oversight and community engagement to mitigate security risks.

- Research Question 3: Is there a relationship between scavenging and environmental security?

Scavenging activities are inherently environmental matters; no wonder the agency of government saddled with the responsibility for managing them in Kwara State is KWEPA.

Based on observation, the itinerant scavengers picked up scraps from the streets and sometimes from dump sites. These are objects that have hitherto littered the environment and often cause injury to humans, spoil vehicle tyres, and block drainage, thereby causing floods.

Table 6. Which of the following do you believe are the advantages of scavenging metal scraps?

Benefits of scavenging	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Poverty alleviation (A source of livelihood for the scavengers)	140	68.63
Environmental benefits (Reduction of metal and iron scraps littering the streets)	128	62.75
Economic benefits (providing raw materials for industries)	122	59.8
Source of revenue for the government	31	15.2
Other benefits (please mention)	7	3.43

The above data is represented in Figure 2 below:

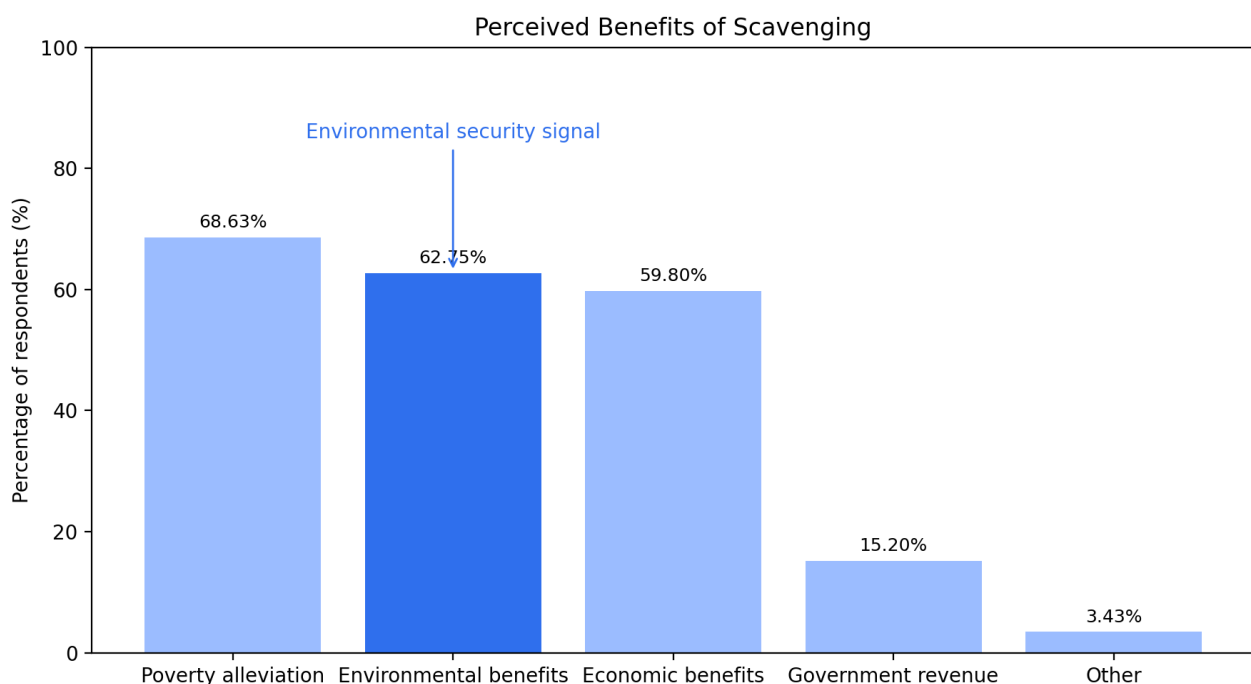


Figure 2. Benefits of scavenging.

Environmental benefits, specifically the reduction of metal and iron scraps littering the streets, were acknowledged by 128 respondents, representing 62.75% of the sample. This places environmental benefits as the second-most recognized advantage of scavenging, closely behind poverty alleviation at 68.63%. The high percentage suggests that the public perceives scavenging as a meaningful contributor to environmental cleanliness and waste reduction. In contrast, economic benefits and government revenue generation were less emphasized, indicating that environmental impact is a more immediate and visible benefit to the community.

During the interview with KWEPA officials, they corroborate the finding that scavengers support environmental security. Fatima, one of the KWEPA officers interviewed, explained that,

“...They do contribute positively to society simply by ensuring that this metal scrap does not litter the environment...”

As observed, the scavengers that could cause environmental insecurity are the middlemen scavengers who are domiciled in a place and collect scraps from the itinerant scavengers. The surroundings of such scavengers often look untidy and unsafe. To mitigate this environmental insecurity, KWEPA monitors them and ensures compliance with environmental and safety regulations.

The findings from Kwara State reinforce the dual narrative presented in the literature: **scavenging contributes positively to environmental security by reducing waste and promoting recycling**, but **also poses environmental risks when unregulated**. The public's recognition of these benefits, alongside government efforts to monitor scavenging activities, suggests a growing awareness of the role scavengers play in environmental management.

However, the environmental risks associated with unregulated scavenging—particularly at middlemen collection points—highlight the need for **stronger policy frameworks, improved waste management infrastructure, and formal integration of scavengers into the waste management system**. This would help maximize the environmental benefits of scavenging while minimizing its risks.



Figure 3. Picture of A (Middleman) scavenger's site.

Study Limitations and Future Research

This study was limited by its geographic scope, focusing only on three urban locations in Kwara State. The findings, therefore, may not fully represent rural areas or other Nigerian states with different socio-economic dynamics.

Future research should explore comparative studies across multiple states to understand regional variations in scavenging practices and their implications. Further studies could also assess the impact of regulatory interventions over time. Moreover, exploring the gender dynamics within scavenging and the role of technology in formalizing the sector would provide deeper insights into sustainable waste management and inclusive urban development.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to assess the implications of scavengers' activities on the security of Kwara State, focusing on three dimensions of human security: the livelihood of scavengers, the safety of residents, and environmental security. The findings reveal a complex interplay of both positive and negative outcomes.

On the one hand, scavenging provides a source of livelihood for marginalized individuals, particularly young, uneducated males from northern Nigeria. It contributes to food security, as most scavengers reported eating two to three meals daily. Additionally, scavenging helps maintain environmental cleanliness by removing metal and plastic waste from public spaces, thereby reducing pollution and potential hazards.

On the other hand, the study uncovered significant negative implications. Economically, scavengers earn below the global poverty line, indicating a lack of financial security. They also face personal and health risks, including police harassment, community hostility, and exposure to hazardous materials. From the residents' perspective, scavengers are widely perceived as threats to lives and properties, with over 93% of respondents affirming this belief. Police officers corroborated these concerns, citing frequent complaints and arrests of scavengers for theft, trespassing, and loitering.

Environmental security also presents a dual narrative. While itinerant scavengers contribute positively by cleaning the environment, middleman scavengers often operate at untidy sites, contributing to localized pollution and safety concerns.

In summary, scavenging in Kwara State is a double-edged sword. While it offers socio-economic and environmental benefits, its unregulated nature exacerbates security risks. The study underscores the need for a balanced approach that mitigates the negative impacts while enhancing the positive contributions of scavenging to human and environmental security.

This research revealed that scavenging causes more harm than good to people, but this need not be the case, as scavenging is an economic activity that can contribute positively to the state's security when properly regulated and monitored.

To mitigate the risks posed by scavengers' activities, the following are recommended:

Comprehensive Regulation of Scavenging Activities

- The government should extend its regulatory oversight to include itinerant scavengers, not just middlemen. This includes issuing operational licenses, uniforms, ID cards, and tracking numbers. A formal registration system will help monitor their activities, reduce criminal infiltration, and enhance accountability. Training programs should be introduced to educate scavengers on safety, hygiene, and legal boundaries.

Improved Waste Management Systems

- The prevalence of scavengers on the streets is symptomatic of poor waste disposal practices. The government must invest in efficient waste collection and disposal infrastructure. Public awareness campaigns should be launched to discourage indiscriminate dumping and promote responsible waste management among residents.

Designated Scrap Collection Points

- Establishing centralized, accessible drop-off points for recyclable materials will help streamline scavenging activities. These points should be strategically located across urban centers and managed in collaboration with local authorities and waste management agencies. This will reduce street scavenging and its associated security concerns.

Zoning and Regulation of Middlemen Scavenger Sites

- The government should designate specific zones for middlemen scavengers to operate. These zones must meet environmental and safety standards and be subject to regular inspections by KWEPA. This will help mitigate the environmental degradation caused by unregulated scrap yards.

Strengthening Security Infrastructure

- The study revealed a shortage of police personnel and inadequate security coverage in some areas. The government should invest in expanding and equipping security forces to respond effectively to complaints involving scavengers. Community policing initiatives should also be encouraged to foster trust and collaboration between residents and law enforcement.

Community-Based Security Initiatives

- In areas with limited police presence, communities should be encouraged to establish community policing initiatives or engage vigilante groups. These groups can help monitor scavenger activities and report suspicious behavior, thereby enhancing communal safety.

Stakeholder Engagement and Sensitization

- A multi-stakeholder approach is essential. Government agencies, scavengers, residents, traditional leaders, and security personnel should collaborate to develop inclusive policies. Regular town hall meetings and sensitization campaigns can help bridge the trust gap and promote mutual understanding.

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