

## Original Research

## Poor quality of life: an associate of socially stigmatized scavenging children

**Authors:**

Abid Jan<sup>1</sup>,  
Ashfaq U Rehman<sup>2</sup>,  
Ihsan Ullah Khan<sup>3</sup> and  
Majid Khan<sup>1</sup>

**Institution:**

1. Department of Rural  
Sociology, The University of  
Agriculture Peshawar,  
Pakistan.

2. Department of Political  
Science, Women University  
Swabi, Pakistan.

3. Department of Sociology,  
University of Peshawar,  
Pakistan.

**Corresponding author:**

Ashfaq U Rehman

**Email ID:**

rehman.phd@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT:**

The present study was aimed to find the association between social stigma associated with scavenging life style and quality of life of scavenging children in unhealthy environment . The study was conducted in Canal Town, Board Bazar, Tahkal Payan and Gulbahar Town, Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. A sample size of 196 respondents was proportionally allocated to each town and selected through simple random sampling. The data was collected on a three level likert scale covering the measurement of dependent variable scavenger's quality of life and independent variable social stigma associated with scavenging life style in unhealthy environment . Association of variables was tested by using chi square test. The results from our study revealed a significant association of scavenger's Quality of life with family forced children to perform scavenging (P=0.000), hostile attitude towards scavengers (P=0.008), feelings of inferiority (P=0.002), feeling of segregation from mainstream society (P=0.041), avoiding meals with scavengers (P=0.000), non participation in game with other children (P=0.000) and people pay attention towards needy scavengers (P=0.002). A healthy environment should be provided to scavenging children where they feel secure physically and mentally through the implementation of child protection policies in its true spirit and active involvement of all related stakeholders. The study suggested that besides the implementation of child protection policies I required in its true spirit to protect the children against physical, psychological and economic harms, especially at workplace.

**Keywords:**

Quality of children's life, Deprivations, Social stigma, Scavengers.

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## INTRODUCTION

Scavenging children are those who collect usable stuff from home to home, waste dump and garbage in residential or commercial areas (Alam *et al.* 2011) of the polluted environment. Developing cities have informal and dynamic refuse, collection and scavenging which provides an opportunity for migrants, children, women, unemployed and handicapped individual to reuse or recycling it to survive in the society because these children are poor, deprived and isolated segment of the developing countries living in an unhealthy environment and struggling for basic needs of life (Medina, 1997). The unsatisfactory working of solid waste management, demand for child labor is generated for collection of solid waste in an unhygienic environment. On the other side, the widespread poverty in Pakistan, particularly from the last ten years, due to low investment and from higher levels of unemployment has tended to supply surplus labor, including children of age 18 years and below in response to the increasing demand for child labor in solid waste management (Akhtar, 2016).

Scavenger's occupation and living condition/environment are the ascribed lowest status of the society; they are historically minor and outcasts groups and consider untouchable. In search of recyclable material, scavenger visit door to door and collect recyclable stuff like plastic, steel, rubber, paper, old shoes and clothes, etc. The entrance of poor rural migrants towards cities is linked with an increasing number of scavenging children (Blinow, 1986; Furedy, 1984). It is the chronic poverty and the industrial supply demand for recyclable material, open dumpsite, unemployment, and failure of solid waste management system and lack of government development policies that initiate and promote scavenging in the developing countries (Medina, 1997). In Pakistan, according to a survey report by the government of Punjab, investigated many barriers of child labors it was explored that children working in different kind of labour activities in a very forceful situation under their

masters, where their rights are violated. Scavengers are vulnerable to different kind of hazards, physically, socially and psychologically because their workplace is unsafe and terrible which makes them negative consequences on their life. Scavenging children are compelled to work in this unsafe and complicated situation. There is no one to care for these children; their parents are not interested in their future and healthcare. They are illiterate, poor and have no permanent source of income; their first priority is to get food due to which they have given a free hand to their children to help their family. Waste collecting children are vulnerable to various health risks they have no protection tools to search reusable stuff in the waste (Gov't of Punjab, 2006). The untouchable practice of scavenging made them isolated from the rest of the normal human activities and working groups and they have limited participation in social and other formal activities as compared to other children of society (Rehman *et al.* 2017a; Siddaramru, 2013). Character of handling refuse or waste material is denied by society; therefore, the scavengers are also stigmatized. The social stigma attached to this profession increases the challenges of scavenger's life.

The scavengers develop a feeling of isolation and social deprivation as they cannot participate in normal social activities, like game and gathering to which other children face no problem to participate. Such forceful rejection from society may have some negative consequences on the quality of life scavengers (Gerold, 2009; Rehman *et al.* 2017b; Safdar *et al.* 2018). Most of the waste picking activity or illegal or unpermitted so scavengers usually face harassment from local community people, authoritarian, from the police and they are unable to register their formal complaint (Bhutta and Ali, 2017; Khan *et al.* 2018a; Medina, 2000). Manual scavengers are treated very badly in their school by their teachers, they are exploited in front of other students, they are forced to perform cleaning and scavenging

work due to which their confidence level and dignity is discriminated. This attitude made the children in fear situation and hopeless from future desire which causes them to drop out of the school (Khan et al. 2018b; Sajid and Ali, 2017; Navsarjan, 2008).

Mostly children are unaware of the stigma attached to waste picking than an adult, children are working in this field affect more than an adult physically, psychologically and socially they are isolated from the mainstream society (Caroline, 1996). Moore and Davis critiqued that functionalism emphasizes on the reward and incentive to doctors and scientists. In contrast, Moore and Davis devised that the same reward only deserves by the scavengers or garbage collectors and nurses as their job is directly concerned with the humanity. According to them scavengers and nurses serve their respective services to the entire society and make their own lives risky. They are the people of whose in efforts society exists and survive as well. So, Moore and Davis strongly opposed that the incentives and reward to be not merely given to doctors and scientists while scavengers and nurses truly deserve the same prestige and respect in society as they are only who make their jobs more vulnerable than any other profession (Skidmore, 1979).

Those who not follow the socially prescribed way are labeled as deviant and anti-social or law-breaker. They confront strong social stigma which ruins their life. Similarly, society has labeled scavengers as untouchable and deviant of their nature of the job they do in the daily routine of life. Of this label, they confront enormous challenges like low self-esteem, stress, degraded and see their self as socially excluded, discriminated and exploited by the rest of the society. The theory also explained that scavengers are more prone to become criminals of the societal label attached to their

profession and status of the society which significantly affects their quality of life (Plummer, 1963). As WHO, defines QoL as “One’s overall well-being i.e. Physical well-being, Social well-being, Psychological well-being and emotional well-being”. Similarly, merely the absence of disease does not mean a sound QoL while it has domains and sub-domains. QoL is a multi-dimensional approach which could be measured from different dimensions (World Health Organization, 1997). Economists refer QoL as “a person is capable of fulfilling his basic needs by himself rather than begging from others. Psychologists view QoL as a state of happiness and mental stability one usually enjoy and the leisure he or she gets from life. Similarly, Sociologists determine QoL very distinctively, as one’s balanced relationship with another in society, actively performing the assigned social role (*Ibid*).

**Justification of the study**

Scavengers are the most deprived and excluded segment of the society. Although they have functional contributions to society in terms of waste recycling, still they lead a socially dejected way of life includes disapproval from people. Social stigma associated with this profession shut the societal doors for these people to participate in normal societal activities. The result is a low quality of life in terms of social, economic and psychological terms. This study is designed to investigate the psychological troubles that affect the quality of life of scavengers and to come up with some sound recommendations for improving their life quality.

**Objectives of the study**

- To study the existing state of scavenger children with respect to, Social stigma associated to scavengers and to determine the present state of quality of life with respect to scavenger children.
- To find out the association of social stigma, with

**Table 1. Conceptual Framework**

S. No	Independent variable	Dependent variable
1	Social stigma attached to scavenging lifestyle	Scavengers quality of life

scavengers quality of life.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study comprised of four towns namely, Canal town, Board Bazaar, Tehkal Payan, and Gul Bahar town of the district of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan for primary data collection. A pilot survey was conducted by the researchers to estimate the population of scavenging children in the study area. This study was conducted under quantitative methodology where statistical tools was used (Leedy 1993; Bell and Bryman, 2007). According to the pilot survey, the total population of scavenging children was 400 in four different residential towns. The required sample size of 196 respondents was proportionally allocated to each town and selected through simple random sampling technique (Sekaran, 2003). The study variables (Table 1) i.e. social stigma associated to scavenging life style (independent variable) and scavenger's quality of life (dependent variable) were measured by pooling attitudinal statement from existing literature and taking responses on three levels of the likert scale. The dependent variable (Scavengers Quality of life) was indexed and cross tabulated with independent variable (Social stigma attached to scavenging lifestyle) to determine their association. Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test was used to test the hypothetical association, as outlined by Tai (1978) through the formula:

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^c \sum_{j=1}^r \frac{(O_{ij} - e_{ij})^2}{e_{ij}}$$

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Frequency and percentage distribution of the respondents regarding, social stigma attached to the scavenging life style

Collecting usable from dumps or garbage is a characteristic feature of scavenging children. This ugly job distinguishes scavengers from other children and is

a source of disapproval for this group. These children, therefore, are disapproved and stigmatized by larger society as their life styles differ from prevailing dominant cultural norms. Personal feelings of scavenger children, of being stigmatized or not, were collected of a series attitudinal statements, given in Table 2. The result indicated that majority of 52.6% respondents agreed that they were forced by their family members to perform scavenging. Similarly, 65.3% respondents agreed that people had hostile attitude towards them and 66.3% respondents agreed that people considered them inferior. Scavenging is an extreme odd job to which children are compelled by their families. The scavenging children were considered inferior, therefore receive odd reactions from society and people disapprove contacts with scavengers. Siddaramu (2013) supported the result that, due to the practice of scavenging the scavengers were believed as untouchable and treated very badly by the people. In this article, we have reported that scavenger were socially, physically and psychologically tortured and exploited in every form of life due to social stigma associated to the scavenging profession. Likewise, 60.7% respondents felt them-self segregated from the mainstream society. Scavengers, due to its ugly nature of work were distinctly rejected in the society. The dejection from the society made scavengers feel themselves as inferior and segregated with respect to other societal groups. Finding of Rastriya (2011) supported this result that scavengers are considered polluted and untouchable where their social identity and respect received in a very lower category. The stigma and caste discrimination compelled them to live in isolated communities. Moreover, 79.1% respondents agreed that they were allowed by people to enter their streets. Besides that 78.6% respondents viewed that people did not like to eat or drink with scavengers. Poverty, ugly job and feeling of social dejection compelled some of the community people to disallow scavengers in their streets. This probably is due to the fear of theft and transmission

**Table 2. Frequency and percentage distribution of the respondents regarding, Social stigma attached to scavenging life style**

S. No	Statement	Yes		No		Total	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	SD ( $\sigma$ )	$\bar{X}+\sigma$	$\bar{X}-\sigma$	Dev.%	
		O.V	V%	O.V	V%						Sample 1	Sample 2
1	You are forced by your family to perform cleaning and scavenging	103	52.6	93	47.4	196	98	7	105	91	16	6
2	People don't have hostile attitude towards you	68	34.7	128	65.3	196	98	42	140	56	10	9
3	People consider yourself inferior	130	66.3	66	33.7	196	98	45	143	53	20	4
4	You feel yourself segregated from mainstream society	119	60.7	77	39.3	196	98	30	128	68	18	5
5	You are disallowed by people to enter their streets	41	20.9	155	79.1	196	98	81	179	17	6	10
6	People eat / drink with you	42	21.4	154	78.6	196	98	79	177	19	6	10
7	You participate with other children in game	85	43.4	111	56.6	196	98	18	116	80	13	7
8	You are invited for functions by other people	0	0	196	100	196	98	139	237	-41	0	13
9	People pay attention to you when you are in need	51	26	145	74	196	98	66	164	32	8	10
10	You get any incentive or support from government, NGOs or other stakeholders	0	0	196	0	196	98	139	237	-41	0	13
11	Scavenging is associated with ethnicity	21	10.7	175	89	196	98	109	207	-11	3	12

of diseases from scavengers to restrict their entry in posh colonies, people wanted to help scavengers but did not share their meals with them.

Siddaramru (2013) supported this result that scavengers were disallowed to eat in hotels with others or sitting there, they were not allowed to come nearer to other people as they were untouchable due to their occupation; they were treated as polluted and inferior in the society. Furthermore, the table explained that 56.6% respondents did not participate with other children in games, whereas 100% respondents claimed that they were not invited for any functions by other people.

Scavengers due to prevailing community response, pose the picture of social exclusion and isolation. They rarely had the leisure of playing game with other children and were disallowed by other groups to attend the culture ceremonies like marriages and other festivals. Kshitij (2004) findings supported the result that due to the practice of scavenging, these children became isolated from the mainstream society and social activities, they lead a socially dejected way of life in an unhealthy environment.

Similarly, 74.0% respondents agreed that people did not like to pay attention to them when scavengers

need their attentions, while 100% respondents claimed that they did not receive any incentive or support from government or other stakeholders to fulfill their needs. It is one's social morality that compels people to help each other in trouble. Sometime special organizations are instituted to help people in trouble. The scavengers however reported lack of support from the society or other organizations in time of need. This creates a sense of withdrawal from main stream society. Findings by Medina (1997) supported this result that authorities have often ignored the rights of scavengers and their opinions when designing policies regarding the waste management. The author further elaborated that when scavengers are socially, psychologically and economically supported, they can contribute more efficiently and can earn higher income than formal sector workers. In addition, 89.3% of the respondents disagreed that scavenging was associated with ethnicity. This result made it evident that scavengers were not a closed group based on any ethnic reason, rather they also have opportunity break the chain of poverty and climb on the higher ranks of social ladder. Blincow and Furedy (1984 and 1986), results are against this inference that scavenging occupation is usually ascribed to ethnic groups which are historically marginal and outcasts group such as migrants, slaves and gypsies have performed recycling of waste material activities in the developing countries.

It is concluded that children, due to poverty, are forced by parents to perform scavenging. General masses pose adverse attitude towards scavenging children by disallowing them to participate in leisure activities with their children or even their entry in residential streets. These children are ignored in normal social participation and seldom helped for, when they are in trouble.

#### **Association between social stigmas attached to scavenging lifestyle and scavengers quality of life**

Collection of usable material by scavenger children is connected with dirty life style, denied by society; therefore, the scavengers are also stigmatized. Social

stigma attached to this profession increases the challenges to scavenger's life. The scavengers develop feeling of isolation and social deprivation as they cannot participate in normal social activities, like game and gathering to which other children face no problem to participate. Such forceful rejection from society may have some negative consequences on quality of life scavengers. The relationship between scavengers quality of life and social stigma associated to scavenging life style is given in Table 3.

A highly significant ( $P=0.000$ ) association was found between scavengers quality of life and their family forced them to perform scavenging. Moreover, significant ( $P=0.008$ ) association was found between scavengers quality of life and people hostile attitude towards scavengers. Likewise, significant ( $P=0.002$ ) association was found between scavengers quality of life and people's inferior look towards scavengers. Waste pickers live in worst situations. Social stigma attached with scavenging create gap between scavengers and other people of the society. It badly affected dignity of scavenging children and restricted social inclusion of poor children in the mainstream society. Such stigmatized children felt hopeless and inferior among the society. They were unable to live a respectful way of life despite of their capability and confidence to earn for themselves and family to survive in the society. Finding of Siddaramu (2013) supported these results that scavenger were victims of extreme form of exploitation and discrimination. They were compelled to live in isolated location from the village community. Due to the practice of scavenging they were untouchable and treated very badly from the upper castes occupying decent residential locations and other facilities of life.

In the same way, significant ( $P=0.041$ ) association was found between scavengers quality of life and their feeling of segregation from the mainstream society. The scavengers that develop feelings of segregation were more likely to exhibit poor quality of life. Scaven-

**Table 3. Association between social stigmas attached to scavenging lifestyle and scavenger quality of life**

S. No	Statement	Percep- tion	Scavengers Quality of Life						Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	SD ( $\sigma$ )	$\bar{X}+\sigma$	$\bar{X}-\sigma$	% Deviation			Chi- Square $\chi^2$	P value		
			Good		Fair		Poor						Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3				
			O.V	% V	O.V	% V	O.V	% V										Total	% V
1	You are forced by your family to perform scavenging	Yes	3	1.5	46	23.5	54	27.6	103	52.6	34	27	62	7	3	45	52	$\chi^2 = 23.396$	p=0.000
		No	7	3.6	68	34.7	18	9.2	93	47.4	31	33	64	-2	8	73	19		
2	People don't have hostile attitude towards you	Yes	4	2	49	25	15	7.7	68	34.7	23	23	46	-1	6	72	22	$\chi^2 = 9.686$	p=0.008
		No	6	3.1	65	33.2	57	29.1	128	65.3	43	32	75	11	5	51	45		
3	People consider yourself inferior	Yes	5	2.6	66	33.7	59	30.1	130	66.3	43	33	77	10	4	51	45	$\chi^2 = 12.686$	p=0.002
		No	5	2.6	48	24.5	13	6.6	66	33.7	22	23	45	-1	8	73	20		
4	You feel yourself segregated from mainstream society	Yes	5	2.6	62	31.6	52	26.5	119	60.7	40	30	70	9	4	52	44	$\chi^2 = 6.393$	p=0.041
		No	5	2.6	52	26.5	20	10.2	77	39.3	26	24	50	2	6	68	26		
5	You are disallowed by people to enter their street	Yes	1	0.5	29	14.8	11	5.6	41	20.9	14	14	28	-1	2	71	27	$\chi^2 = 3.513$	p=0.173
		No	9	4.6	85	43.4	61	31.1	155	79.1	52	39	91	13	6	55	39		
6	People eat and drink with you	Yes	6	3.1	30	15.3	6	3.1	42	21.4	14	14	28	0	14	71	14	$\chi^2 = 17.787$	p=0.000
		No	4	2	84	42.9	66	33.7	154	78.6	51	42	93	9	3	55	43		
7	You participate with other children in game	Yes	6	3.1	61	31.1	18	9.2	85	43.4	28	29	57	-1	7	72	21	$\chi^2 = 15.790$	p=0.000
		No	4	2	53	27	54	27.6	111	56.6	37	29	66	8	4	48	49		
8	People pay attention to you when are in need	Yes	5	2.6	37	18.9	9	4.6	51	26	17	17	34	0	10	73	18	$\chi^2 = 12.27$	P=0.002
		No	5		77	39.3	63	32.1	145	74	48	38	87	10	3	53	43		
9	Scavenging is associated with ethnicity	Yes	0	0	15	7.7	6	3.1	21	10.7	7	8	15	-1	0	71	29	$\chi^2 = 2.338$	p=0.311
		No	10	5.1	99	50.5	66	33.7	175	89.3	58	45	103	13	6	57	38		

ger community has ascribed lowest status of the society as their occupation was connected with dirt and unsafe workplace. They were isolated and considered as the pauperized and marginalized sector of the society. Medina (2000) findings supported the results that untouchable practices of scavenging isolated scavengers from rest of the normal human groups and they had limited participation in social and other formal activities as compared to other societal members. Moreover, a highly significant ( $P=0.000$ ) association was found between scavengers quality of life and people who eat and drink with scavengers. People sideslip participating scavengers in social activities as they were considering polluted, untouchable and inferior class of society. They did not like to eat, drink or sit with them. Scavenger's living standard and participation in societal activities was limited to their own communities. However, those that were allowed by the societal members to eat with them were more likely to have a better quality of life. Finding of Gonzalez *et al.* (1993) supported the results that unfair and discriminated attitude towards scavengers and ignoring their rights in existing policies made them inferior class of the society. There was widespread public contempt against scavengers due to their poverty and perceived lack of hygiene.

Moreover, a highly significant ( $P=0.000$ ) association was established between scavengers quality of life and participation with other children in games. Allowing children to participate in games improved scavenger's quality of life. Social stigma associated to scavenging created sense of isolation and inferiority among scavengers due to which socio-psychological gap between scavengers and other children of society have been increased. Other children of community did not like to mix with scavengers children as their occupation was connected with dirt. Social stigma associated with scavenging strongly pushed them away from the normal leisure activities. Similarly, significant ( $P=0.002$ ) association was found between scavengers quality of life

and people attention towards scavengers when they were in need. It is obvious from the results that those scavengers that were helped by the people, when in need, were more likely to have a better quality of life. Waste pickers work in hostile and risky condition. They were vulnerable to different dangerous situations like beating from community people and unfavorable attitude of resource merchant. Scavengers needed help in worrisome conditions like cuts of sharp object in searching of recyclable material etc. So in this sort of situation they needed help from other people. However, in most cases they were not helped due to unsympathetic attitude of the society. Mayer (1987) supported the result that scavengers faced various hazard and problem due to their activities and waste collection process. They were more vulnerable to different kinds of problem and diseases because they worked in the unsafe environment and lacked safety knowledge, equipment and support of the government and private stakeholders.

Conversely, non-significant ( $P=0.173$ ) association was found between scavengers quality of life and prohibition of scavengers to enter the streets. Similarly, a non-significant ( $P=0.311$ ) association was found between scavengers quality of life and scavengers as a separate ethnic group. Scavengers or waste pickers usually migrated from rural to urban area, in search of labour. They were from poor and lowest segment of the society struggling to survive. However, in current study scavenging was associated with poverty and not the ethnicity. Furedy (1984) reported that the entrance of poor rural migrants towards cities is linked with an increase number of waste picker. Scavengers in many countries belong to minorities groups based on religion and ethnicity for example in Kolkata, India, the Muslim minorities and ethnic cultural minorities were the waste picker and in the whole India, the dalit (low caste) people occupy scavenging sector i.e. waste collecting and emptying latrine. In Egypt the Coptic Christians were waste pickers and waste collectors. In Lebanon scaven-

gers were mostly Palestinians and Syrians. In Pakistan the quantity of Afghani refugee's scavengers is greater as compare to others.

## CONCLUSION

Character of handling refuse or waste material is denied by the society; therefore, scavengers are also stigmatized. This ugly job distinguishes scavengers from other children and is a source of disapproval for this group because they are involved in an unhygienic environment. The scavenging children are not only physically forced to perform odd jobs but also are socially neglected among the society. These children are excluded from participation in normal social activities like sports, friendship gathering etc., to which other children freely participate. People are reluctant to mix their children with other scavengers or come forward to help scavenging children and treat them sympathetically. Besides unhealthy environment, these physical and psychological stresses negatively affect the quality of life of scavenging children. Some suggestions have been put forward in the light of the results and analysis of study. Protection of child's physical and socio-psychological rights by creating awareness among general masses about children rights through the active participation of religions and political leaders. Besides implementation of child protection policies we suggest in its true spirit to protect the children against physical, psychological and economic harms especially to provide a hygienic, clean and comfortable environment at workplace and the society. It is very necessary to provide a hygienic environment and also provides the clean and healthy food to these scavengers because they are also human being and the part of the society.

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APPENDIX

**Tools of Data Collection  
Social Stigma Associated to Scavenging lifestyle**

S. No	Statement	Yes	No	Uncertain
1	You are forced by your family to perform cleaning and scavenging			
2	People don't have hostile attitude towards you			
3	People consider yourself inferior			
4	You feel yourself segregated from mainstream society			
5	You are disallowed by people to enter their street			
6	People eat / drink with you			
7	You participate with other children in game			
8	You are invited for functions by other people			
9	People pay attention to you when you are in need			
10	You get any incentive or support from Govt, NGOs or other stakeholders			
11	Scavenging is associated with ethnicity			

**Scavenger quality of life**

1	You are physically sound and healthy
2	You are satisfied from your quality of food
3	You are provided with sufficient food to eat
4	You can bear your load easily
5	You spent upto five hour every day on scavenging
6	You face life threats regularly
7	You have access to education
8	You have sufficient number of clothes
9	Your cloths are suitable according to seasonal requirements
10	Your family have sufficient amount to feed you
11	Your family have sufficient amount to pay utility bills.
12	You have sufficiently spaced house
13	You play games with your friend

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