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## INFLUENCE OF SCAVENGED FOOD ON HEALTH STATUS OF FOOD SCAVENGERS AMONG RURAL HOUSEHOLDS OF ARAMOKO EKITI, EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

Food insecurity and poverty among households has led some households to food scavenging. This study assessed the factors associated with food scavenging amongst rural households in Aramoko Ekiti. The specific objectives were to describe the socio economic characteristics of the identified food scavengers, determine the influence of the scavenged food on their health status and describe the dietary Diversity of the identified food scavengers in Aramoko Ekiti. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 30 food scavengers who were consistently spotted at social gatherings; data was collected through the use of interview schedule. Focus group discussion was used to measure the quantitative data. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics. Results show that 56.7% of the food scavengers were female with the mean monthly income of N2,100.00. Body Mass Index shows that most (88.9%) of the food scavengers were within the normal range of 18.5 – 24.99. Majority (76.7%) of the food scavengers had low dietary diversity. Major determinants of food scavenging were insufficient family resources (73.3%), poverty (56.7%) and unstable home environment (53.3%). Majority (66.7%) of the respondents were identified to be consistent food scavengers. Respondents' household size ( $\chi^2=6.00$ ), education ( $\chi^2=20.40$ ), food expenditure ( $\chi^2=5.17$ ), unstable family background ( $\chi^2=12.26$ ) were significantly related to food scavenging. The food scavengers' low dietary intake is due to small monthly income earned and insufficient family resources, this compelled them to compromise the standard and quality of food they consumed therefore the identified food scavengers should be supported through extension service education and other incentives that will assist them in farming in order to alleviate their poverty level.

**Keywords:** Food scavengers, Rural households, Body Mass Index (BMI) Poverty and Dietary diversity.

### INTRODUCTION

In order to avert the inadequate supply of food to meet the requirement of family consumption, food scavenging has been used as an alternative to achieving food security by rural households. Food is the most basic needs for man which must be available both in quality and quantity at the needed time to sustain life and promote human growth (FAO, 2010). Hence it is very important for human existence. According to FAO (2012), food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

Research findings reveal that most of the rural populace are food insecure and suffer from malnutrition and diseases. According to Gebre (2012) and Sasson (2012), food insecurity has attracted much attention from programme implementers and policy makers due to the high impact of hunger and malnutrition on people. Lomborg 2004 noted that eliminating hunger and malnutrition is one of the most fundamental challenges facing humanity. According to Okwoche and Asogwa (2012), rural farmers have the highest prevalence of under nutrition and estimated that about 66% of Nigeria's populations live below poverty line as portrayed by their level of food security. Going by this definition, it could be said that most rural Nigerian households are not food secure because they do not consume the right

proportion of food at the needed time for a healthy and active life. Food Security Guide (2011) emphasizes that poverty is the driver of food insecurity and that lack of money precludes the purchase of food. Kpakol (2008), define poverty as the inability of a person to acquire the empowerment needed to substantively control the challenges of the environment. Therefore, people involved scavenged for food in order to ensure they meet their households consumption needs neglecting the fact that the calories consumed is not up to the recommended average calories of 2,550 kcal (World Bank, 2005). However, these have effect on their health status resulting to either underweight or overweight. Lokosang (2011), stated that the risk of inadequate access to food is determined by household's capacity to produce food, household purchasing power and several other socioeconomic factors that directly or indirectly affect these three major factors. Food scavenger refers to someone who collects food that have been discarded by others or excess food from parties (invited or non-invited), and/or searches through refuse bins for food and useful materials such as money and clothing. Although, they cannot be regarded to as the poorest among the people in their community, their occupation is generally ascribed to the lowest status where they are.

In Nigeria like other developing countries varying number of poor individuals survive by scavenging for food at ceremonies. These people recover materials such as plastic and bottles to sell

for reuse. They may build up their "stands" in hotels, restaurants, and food shops. Foods gathered are used to sustain their family. Many children and older individuals survive by food scavenging due to their low educational level and due to the difficulty of parent in performing a paid service while taking care of their children. According to Genemo (2010), some families cannot survive without the contribution of every member of the family. Muktar (2011) stated that in Nigeria, like other developing countries, scavenging among youths begins with the collection of plastic bottles and cans, and it mostly takes place in the informal sector. In rural areas of Nigeria due to their culture, food scavengers are not permanent beggars but on the contrary; they normally hold their jobs but intermittently practice begging at ceremonies.

Based on the foregoing, this study assessed the factors associated with food scavenging amongst rural households of Aramoko Ekiti. The specific objectives were to:

1. describe the socio economic characteristics of the identified food scavengers.
2. determine the influence of the scavenged food on their health status.
3. describe the dietary Diversity of the identified food scavengers in Aramoko Ekiti.

## METHODOLOGY

The study area is Aramoko Ekiti, Ekiti State Nigeria. Purposive sampling techniques were used to collect responses from consistent 30 food scavengers at social gatherings, those identified were followed through their daily activities to collect the necessary information for the study. Data was collected through the use of structured interview schedule and focus group discussion was used to measure the quantitative data. Body mass index was used to determine the influence of scavenged food on health status of the respondents.

$$BMI = \frac{\text{weight}_{kg}}{\text{height}_m^2}$$

A BMI of 18.5 is underweight, 18.5 to 25 is normal weight, 26 to 30 is overweight and over 30 is obese for adult and for children of age 2 to 20 a BMI that is less than the 5<sup>th</sup> percentile was considered underweight, between 5<sup>th</sup> percentile and 84<sup>th</sup> percentile is normal weight, 85<sup>th</sup>- 95<sup>th</sup> percentile are considered to be overweight and above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile was considered obese. World Health Organisation International Classification 2010 was used for comparative purposes.

Also, the 24-hour dietary recall was used as a reference period to measure household dietary diversity (a proxy for quality of diet) as used by Okwoche, and Asogwa 2012. Data for household dietary diversity was collected by asking the

respondents yes and no questions on 12 food groups. Each item was scored 1 if the household had eaten the food group during the previous 24 hours and 0 otherwise. The sum of the value of a response qualified the indicator for each household. A household with dietary diversity of 8 points and above was regarded as having high dietary diversity while those below 8 Points was regarded as having low dietary diversity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Socioeconomic characteristics of respondents

The result in Table 1 reveals that that majority (60.0%) of the food scavengers in the study area were between the age of 25 and 50years, with a mean of 36years. Most of the identified food scavengers were female (56.7%) and married (66.7%) with a large households size of more than five persons. They have no formal education (40.0%), hence they do not have a stable occupations; they do mainly odd jobs with meager earning of less than N5, 000 per month.

Most of the respondents (56.7%) were female who are still in their active age between 25-50years. At this age bracket, they are expected to be willing to take risk and easily strive for a livelihood to have food so as to feed their families. People in this group bear the financial burden of providing food and non-food items for their households which lead them into food scavenging. Most of the identified food scavengers (40.0%) had no formal education. Education has an important role to play in an individual's life, it predisposes the individual to innovation on how to change life pattern and acquaint them with various knowledge for livelihood diversification. This is consistent with Falowo and Adebo (2014) that high educational status is expected to predispose the food scavengers to innovations and better ways to cope with food insecurity challenges.

Majority of the food scavengers (73.3%) had more than 3 persons per family but depended on a monthly income of less than N5,000 out of which they can afford to spend less than N1,500 (\$5) per month on food items due to their meagre earning which resort them to food scavenging. The implication is that with the meagre earning and fairly large household size to buy good food in the right quality and taken in the right proportion (having the correct nutritional requirement) is low among the households of the identified food scavengers which indicate that calories and protein consumed by these household members fall short of the standard requirements. This analysis agrees with Idrisa, Gwary and Shehu (2008), that both family size and level of income could affect the food security status of the family. Ndhleve *et al.*, (2012) noted that income influences consumption



up to a certain level. According to the response of one of the respondents,

*“Before my husband died we have already given birth to four children, since I have no job and do not know how to cope with my life, my late husband brother inherit me. I had two*

*additional children for him before he left. I am married to another man with children and the man does not know and care about how I live. I have a large family size without an occupation except washing clothes”.*

**Table 1: Socio economic characteristics of the food scavengers in Aramoko Ekiti (n =30)**

Socio economic characteristics	Frequency	Percentages (%)	Mean
<b>Age</b>			
<25	7	23.3	36 years
25-50	18	60	
>50	5	16.6	
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	13	43.3	
Female	17	56.7	
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Single	6	20	
Married	20	66.7	
Divorced	2	6.6	
Widowed	2	6.6	
<b>Educational Status</b>			
No formal education	12	40	
Primary	10	33.3	
Secondary	6	20	
Tertiary	1	3.3	
Others	1	3.3	
<b>Household Size</b>			
<3	8	26.7	5 persons
3-5	11	36.7	
5-8	4	13.3	
>8	7	23.3	
<b>Occupation</b>			
Farming	0		
Civil servant	2	6.7	
Trading	5	16.6	
Odd jobs	23	76.7	
<b>Income</b>			
<N5000	14	46.7	N2,100
N5,000-N10,000	12	40	
N10,000-N15,0000	2	6.7	
N15,000-N20,000	2	6.7	

### **Influence of Scavenged Food on the Health Status of Scavengers**

The Body Mass Index was carried out for the identified food scavenger's household's members and the World Health Organisation International Classification (2010) was used to assess the impact of scavenged food on their health status. The result in table 2 shows that majority (88.8%) of the identified food scavengers has normal body weight while few of them (11.2%) fell within underweight and mild thinness. This implies that the scavenged food does not have negative effect on most of the respondent's health status. It was also revealed that

they rarely come across health problems like diarrhoea, stomach upset and typhoid as a result of their food intake which signifies that their body system has become adapted to any kind of food consumed. For the few ones that are negatively affected with the scavenged food, it is recommended that there should be addition of more proteinous food such as beans and fish in order to improve their health status. According to Gorselink (2012), protein plays an important role in body weight regulation and potential treatment of obesity.

**Table 2: Body Mass Index of Adult and children Food scavengers in Aramoko Ekiti**

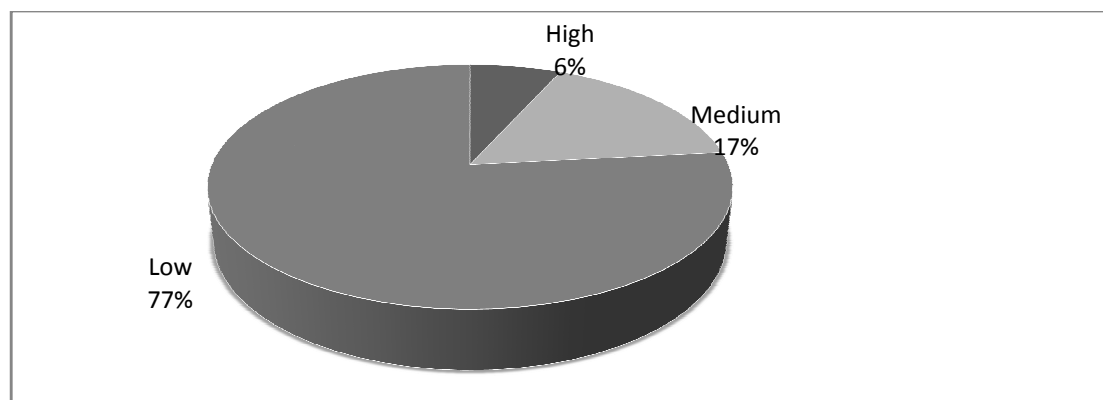
	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Adult</b>		
Normal weight	36	26.6
Mild thinness	6	4.5
<b>Children</b>		
Underweight	6	4.5
Normal weight	84	62.2
overweight	3	2.2

**Household dietary diversity of the identified food scavengers in Aramoko Ekiti**

The distribution of the dietary diversity scores among the identified food scavengers is presented in figure 1. The result shows that majority (76.7%) of the food scavengers has low dietary diversity while few (23.3%) has medium and high dietary diversities respectively. The identified food scavenger that has low dietary diversity consumed less than eight foods out of the

listed thirteen food items within 24 hours and the food consumed is of low quality.

They consumed more of carbohydrate food (such as *Garri, Fufu, Eba, Rice* etc.) with little protein. This implies that food security is not an issue to them but rather how to survive hunger. It is recommended that most of the identified households with low dietary diversity should maintain adequate balanced diet by adding little protein to their daily food.



**Figure 1: Households Food Dietary Diversity of the Identified Food scavengers in Aramoko Ekiti**

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Most of the identified food scavengers in the study area were youth, with no formal education and no stable occupation. These bring about their low income per month and contribute highly to their involvement in food scavenging. Food security is not of utmost importance to the identified food scavengers but rather how to survive hunger. Therefore, the identified food scavengers were compelled to compromise the standard and quality of food they consumed.

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn from this study, the following recommendations were made:

- Households in the study area should be educated by NGOs and medical practitioners on the use of family planning so as to check mate their family size. Having found that large-sized households were less food secure.
- In order to reach the first millennium goal by reducing the number of undernourished

people to half by 2015, effort should be made by both governmental organisation and NGOs in providing empowerment programmes for scavengers’ parents. This will increase their per capital income and reduce food scavenging. The identified food scavengers should be supported through extension service education and other incentives that will assist them in farming in order to alleviate their poverty level.

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