Surviving on Scraps: *Pagpag* as an Alternative Food Source

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ABSTRACT

The consumption of recycled food collected from waste as an alternative to hunger is commonly known as *pagpag*. Some previous studies on *pagpag* have not explored the relationship between food waste and food insecurity, and some also rely on surveys that lack in-depth analysis. On the other hand, this study sought to address these gaps. The research used a mixed-methods study to first determine the prevalence, frequency, and level of awareness of the health risks and perceived benefits through a quantitative approach, while also exploring the moral, ethical, and emotional dimensions of *pagpag* consumption through a qualitative analysis. Study 1 employed a descriptive quantitative design with a structured survey to assess patterns, levels of awareness, and perceived benefits. The results revealed that 38.8% of families and 36.8% of individuals consume *pagpag* frequently, while 26.1% and 31.3% consume it daily, indicating regular consumption. Additionally, 49.5% have consumed *pagpag* for more than 10 years. Meanwhile, Study 2 employed a qualitative case study design, using in-depth interviews and observations to explore participants' lived experiences. Furthermore, participants described *pagpag* consumption as a practical response to hunger, a normalized community practice, and an act of responsibility towards families. Faith and perseverance were identified as key coping mechanisms in enduring poverty and social stigma. Overall, the study concludes that the consumption of *pagpag* remains a deeply rooted survival strategy shaped by economic hardship, food insecurity, and poverty. The findings showed that the majority of respondents experience food insecurity, meaning they do not have the choice to select safer food because of economic hardship. Furthermore, the findings also indicated a long-term dependence on *pagpag* as a response to poverty and food insecurity.

Keywords - *Pagpag* consumption, food insecurity, poverty, health risk awareness, survival strategy, alternative food source.

INTRODUCTION

Food insecurity remains a persistent challenge in marginalized communities in the Philippines, particularly in densely populated areas of Metro Manila. One of the visible manifestations of extreme poverty is the practice of *pagpag*, the recovery and consumption of leftover food collected from garbage or fast-food discards, which is cleaned, reheated, and eaten. The term "*pagpag*," which literally means "to dust off," reflects the act of removing visible dirt before food is prepared for consumption. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA, 2024), the Philippines recorded a poverty incidence of 15.5% among individuals in 2023, equivalent to approximately 17.54 million Filipinos living below the national poverty threshold. During the same year, poverty incidence among families stood at 10.9%, representing approximately 3.0 million poor families. These figures highlight the economic challenges faced by many Filipinos, which may limit access to sufficient and affordable food. Under these conditions, access to safe and nutritious food may become secondary to affordability and immediate survival. Poverty, unemployment, informal labor conditions, and rising food prices may further intensify food insecurity and encourage marginalized communities to seek alternative food sources. The World Bank (2021) has also emphasized that undernutrition and food vulnerability remain concerns among low-income populations in the Philippines.

Existing literature argues that *pagpag* is a public health hazard. Chua et al. (2018) examined *pagpag* practices and identified serious sanitation risks associated with consuming discarded food exposed to contaminants.

Alonzo et al. (2024) also found that economic necessity influences consumers' decisions to purchase and consume *pagpag*, despite awareness of possible health risks. Similarly, Sumadlayon et al. (2024) noted that food scavenging may become part of the coping strategies of families experiencing extreme poverty. These findings place *pagpag* within the broader issues of food insecurity, poverty, and limited access to safe and affordable food.

Despite existing research on the health risks and consumption of *pagpag*, there remains limited exploration of the long-term lived experiences and moral reflections of individuals who rely on it. Much of the existing research focuses on health risks and economic factors, while less attention is given to the social, emotional, and personal experiences that influence continued consumption. Understanding these experiences is important because *pagpag* consumption is connected not only to food access but also to family needs, economic hardship, and everyday survival.

This study, therefore, examined *pagpag* consumption among residents of Barangay 105, Tondo, Manila. Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, the study examined the frequency of *pagpag* consumption, awareness of associated health risks, and perceived benefits, and explored consumers' lived experiences, moral reflections, and coping strategies. By integrating quantitative findings and qualitative narratives, the study offers a deeper understanding of *pagpag* consumption as a survival practice shaped by food insecurity, poverty, and economic hardship.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-method design to examine *pagpag* consumption in Barangay 105, Tondo, Manila. This design began with a quantitative descriptive phase and was followed by a qualitative approach. The quantitative phase used a descriptive method to determine the prevalence of *pagpag* consumption, estimate the level of awareness of its associated risks, and assess the perceived economic benefits of collecting and selling *pagpag* as an alternative food source. Calderon & Gonzales (1993) state that the use of a descriptive approach was appropriate, as it allowed researchers' to quantify demographic data, the identification of patterns in prevalence and awareness, and the interpretation of benefits. On the other hand, the qualitative phase employed multiple case studies that delve into the experiences of *pagpag* consumers, specifically examining the moral and ethical context, their challenges, and their individual coping strategies. Yin (2018) emphasized that through in-depth interviews and participant observations, researchers could uncover their experiences and how these shape their self-concept, as well as how consumers live with the stigma, survival, and social identity associated with *pagpag* consumption. This approach emphasizes common narratives toward poverty, non-formal food practices, and the dignity of marginalized communities.

Research Participants

The participants of the study were selected to provide both measurable and in-depth information about *pagpag* consumption as an alternative food source. The study focused on individuals with direct experience consuming *pagpag* because their experiences were relevant to understanding its consumption patterns, awareness of health risks, perceived benefits, and the social and economic circumstances surrounding the practice. The researchers selected participants from Barangay 105, Tondo, Manila, the primary research site. Purposive sampling was used to identify individuals who met the study's eligibility criteria and could provide information relevant to its objectives. The participants were divided into two groups: quantitative respondents, who completed the survey questionnaire, and qualitative participants, who were interviewed to provide deeper accounts of their lived experiences. This approach allowed the researchers to examine the phenomenon through both measurable data and detailed personal narratives, consistent with the study's mixed-methods approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

For the quantitative phase, 307 respondents participated in the study. The respondents were adults with direct experience consuming *pagpag* in Barangay 105, Tondo, Manila. Data were collected using a researcher-developed survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was constructed based on a review of relevant literature on *pagpag* consumption, food insecurity, health-risk awareness, and perceived benefits, including the study by

Alonzo et al. (2024). The instrument underwent validation and pilot testing before its final administration to assess the clarity, validity, and reliability of its items. The quantitative approach was used to describe observable patterns and characteristics of *pagpag* consumption through measurable data, consistent with descriptive research that examines existing conditions and patterns (Calderon & Gonzales, 1993).

For the qualitative phase, 10 adult participants aged 18 to 65 years were interviewed in depth. They were selected through purposive sampling based on their experience with *pagpag* consumption and their ability to provide detailed accounts. The selection of 10 participants was guided by the study's multiple-case approach, which emphasizes the richness and depth of qualitative data rather than statistical generalization (Dworkin, 2012). Marshall et al. (2015) also noted that multiple case studies may involve a range of participants, supporting the researchers' selection of 10 participants for the qualitative phase. The interviews focused on the challenges, circumstances, and reasons surrounding *pagpag* consumption, including its moral, ethical, social, and economic dimensions. Yin (2018) specified that the use of a qualitative case study enabled the researchers to examine the participants' lived experiences in their real-life contexts. While Merriam and Tisdell (2016) emphasized the value of qualitative case studies in understanding the meanings individuals assign to their experiences and how these shape their interactions and self-concept.

Research Instruments

To gather appropriate data, a total of two (2) instruments were created, validated, and utilized:

1. *Structured Survey Questionnaire*: The results of the quantitative phase were collected through a structured survey questionnaire formulated by the researchers and carefully constructed based on several related studies in relation to the potential health risks of *pagpag* and food insecurity among *pagpag* consumers, which was later validated and revised by various experts. The 25-item questionnaire included the demographics of the qualified participants, health risk awareness regarding *pagpag* consumption, and perceived benefits of *pagpag* consumption, assessed using open-ended, multiple-choice, and Likert-scale items. The self-made survey questionnaire was developed in English and later translated into Filipino to ensure participants' comfort during the assessment. The survey also underwent pilot testing with 30 participants. The outcome showed acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.72–0.78$), moderate to strong test-retest stability (Pearson's $r = 0.56–0.68$; Spearman's $\rho = 0.55–0.66$; p less than 0.01), and high inter-rater agreement (~96%). Although some missing responses affected the estimates, the instrument's overall reliability was deemed satisfactory.

2. *Semi-Structured Interview Questionnaire*: The data of the qualitative phase were gathered by semi-structured interviews that obtained the narratives of the participants with their experiences with *pagpag*. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to assess the experiences of *pagpag* consumers, with a greater focus on the ethical and moral aspects of the practice. The questions were reviewed by experts, and researchers were assisted in appropriately revising the intended questions. The questions were written in Filipino to ensure content and language appropriateness and comprehensiveness.

Data Collection Method

Prior to the data collection, the researchers sought permission from the officials of Barangay 105, Tondo, Manila. The quantitative data collection was conducted over two days. On September 29, 2025, from 6:15 A.M. to 11:35 A.M., and on September 30, 2025, from 6:26 A.M. to 12:33 P.M., the researchers administered the survey questionnaire to qualified respondents. An official from Barangay 105 accompanied the researchers during the data gathering. After each survey, the researchers immediately tallied the responses on the same day.

The qualitative data collection was conducted three weeks and two days after the quantitative phase, on October 23, 2025, from 7:30 A.M. to 12:59 P.M. The delay was due to weather conditions and other circumstances. The researchers explained the purpose of the study, obtained participants' consent, and conducted semi-structured interviews to gather their experiences and perceptions regarding *pagpag* consumption. The responses were then organized and prepared for analysis. The day after, follow-up member checking was conducted to verify transcript accuracy, enhancing credibility and trustworthiness.

Data Analysis

For the quantitative phase, descriptive statistics were used to summarize the respondents' demographic characteristics and patterns of pagpag consumption. Frequency and percentage were used for categorical variables, while means and standard deviations were used to describe the levels of health-risk awareness and perceived benefits. The internal consistency of the questionnaire scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to assess the normality of the item-level responses, and Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to examine associations among the questionnaire items.

For comparisons involving multiple independent groups, Welch's one-way analysis of variance (Welch's ANOVA) was used to examine differences in health-risk awareness and perceived benefits. This procedure does not assume equal population variances. Where appropriate, Games-Howell post hoc comparisons were used to identify which groups differed significantly. The inferential analyses and their corresponding results were interpreted using the reported test statistics, degrees of freedom, and p-values. The specific grouping variable and number of groups were identified for each analysis to ensure consistency between the research questions, methodology, and results.

For the qualitative phase, thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to examine the interview data. The process involved six stages: (1) familiarizing the researchers with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. Interview transcripts were reviewed repeatedly, relevant statements were coded, and similar codes were grouped into broader themes and subthemes. The qualitative analysis focused on participants' lived experiences, including their reasons for consuming or selling *pagpag*; experiences of food insecurity and poverty; perceptions of health risks and benefits; coping strategies; and experiences of social stigma and discrimination. The qualitative findings were then used to provide deeper explanations for the patterns identified in the quantitative phase.

The interpretation of the findings was guided by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development. Maslow's framework was used to understand *pagpag* consumption in relation to basic physiological needs, particularly the need for food and immediate survival. This framework helped explain how food insecurity and economic hardship may influence individuals to prioritize immediate access to food despite awareness of possible health risks. Meanwhile, Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory was used to interpret participants' moral reflections and reasoning surrounding the consumption, preparation, and collection of *pagpag*. It provided a framework for examining how participants understood their actions, responsibilities, and decisions within the context of poverty, family needs, and survival. Together, these frameworks guided the interpretation of quantitative patterns and qualitative narratives, helping to connect the findings to the broader experiences of *pagpag* consumers.

Ethical Considerations

Approval was obtained from the Local Government Unit of Barangay 105, Tondo, Manila, prior to data collection. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to decline questions or withdraw at any time without penalty. Informed consent was secured before participation. Given the sensitivity of topics involving *pagpag*, food insecurity, poverty, and personal experiences, the researchers conducted interviews with respect, empathy, and cultural sensitivity. Personal information and responses were anonymized, kept confidential, and handled in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173). The researchers also minimized potential risks and ensured that all participants' dignity, privacy, safety, and welfare were protected throughout the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Guided by the research objectives, this section presented the study's quantitative findings, outlining the occupational and educational profiles of the respondents. It detailed the frequency and duration of *pagpag* consumption, the time between collection and consumption, and the respondents' awareness of its health risks and perceived benefits.

Quantitative Results

Respondents Occupational Status

The data showed that the majority of respondents were either unemployed (109) or self-employed (103), indicating economic instability within the community. A smaller proportion held full-time employment The high number of unemployed and informally employed individuals suggested limited and irregular income sources, which may have contributed to reliance on alternative food sources such as *pagpag*.

Table 1. Respondents' Occupational Status

Options	Responses
Employed Full-Time	14
Employed Part-Time	30
Self Employed	103
Unemployed	109
Informal Sector Worker	32
Student	4
Retired	13
Others	2
Total	307

Respondents Educational Background

Most respondents attained only an elementary (101) or junior high school level (79) education. Very few reached college level (15) or graduated (2). The data indicated low educational attainment, which may have limited employment opportunities and income stability. This educational profile reinforced structural vulnerability and food insecurity within the community.

Table 2. Respondents' Educational Background

Options	Responses
Elementary Level	101
Elementary Graduate	64
Junior High School Level	79
Junior High School Graduate	29
Senior High School Level	9
Senior High School Graduate	8
College Level	15
College Graduate	2
Total	307

Frequency of Pagpag Consumption Among Family Members

The majority of families consumed *pagpag* either frequently (119) or daily (80), indicating that *pagpag* was not merely an occasional alternative but a regular food source.

Only 15 respondents reported that their family had never consumed *pagpag*. These findings suggested a normalized and sustained pattern of consumption within households.

Table 3. Frequency of *Pagpag* Consumption Among Family Members

Options	Responses
Daily	80
Frequently	119
Occasionally	33
Barely	60
Never	15
Total	307

Individual Frequency of Pagpag Consumption

Respondents reported high levels of consumption: 113 frequently and 96 daily. Notably, no respondent selected "never," confirming universal exposure among participants. This reflected a high prevalence and indicated that *pagpag* consumption was deeply embedded in daily survival practices.

Table 4. Individual Frequency of *Pagpag* Consumption

Options	Responses
Daily	96
Frequently	113
Occasionally	44
Barely	54
Never	0
Total	307

Duration of Engagement in Pagpag Consumption

A significant majority (152 respondents) reported consuming *pagpag* for more than 10 years. This demonstrated long-term consumption rather than short-term crisis coping. The data indicated that *pagpag* consumption was a sustained survival strategy embedded across years, even decades.

Table 5. Duration of Engagement in *Pagpag* Consumption

Options	Responses
Less than 1 year	23
1–2 years	41
3–5 years	50
6–10 years	41
More than 10 years	152
Total	307

Time Interval Between Collection and Consumption of Pagpag

Most respondents consumed *pagpag* within a few hours (122) or immediately (110) after collection. This may suggest attempts to minimize spoilage and health risks. However, despite these precautions, the practice still exposes consumers to potential contamination. The data highlight awareness of perishability but continued engagement due to necessity.

Table 6. Time Interval Between Collection and Consumption of *Pagpag*

Options	Responses
Immediately	110
Within a few hours	122
Later that day	54
Next day	11
After more than one day	10
Total	307

Health Risk Awareness and Perceived Benefits of Pagpag

The Health Risk Awareness mean of 2.32 suggested that respondents were "Moderately Aware" of the dangers associated with their food choices. However, this awareness was broad and lacked technical depth, as the text noted "Low to Very Low" awareness regarding specific pathogens like E. coli or Hepatitis A. The respondents' moderate level of health-risk awareness may be discussed alongside the possible limitations of common food-preparation practices. Some consumers may perceive washing and boiling as sufficient ways to reduce the risks associated with pagpag. Washing can help reduce certain forms of surface contamination, while thorough cooking can destroy many harmful microorganisms. However, these practices do not guarantee that contaminated food becomes safe. Certain bacterial toxins may remain even after heating, and washing cannot reliably remove every possible chemical contaminant (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service [USDA FSIS], n.d.). Food safety also depends on the condition of the food before preparation, the possibility of contamination during handling, and how the food is stored. These limitations highlight the difference between reducing some hazards and ensuring that food is safe for consumption. In the context of pagpag consumption, this issue should be considered alongside the economic conditions that may limit access to affordable food alternatives. Therefore, health-risk awareness should not be interpreted in isolation from the food insecurity and financial hardship experienced by consumers.

In contrast, the Perceived Benefits score of 1.90 for verbal interpretation was "Strongly Agree." This indicated that, for this demographic, the immediate utility of the food, likely its cost-effectiveness and role in staving off hunger, was perceived more strongly than the health risks. Essentially, the findings suggested that when a person was hungry, the perceived benefit of having a full stomach was a stronger motivator than the moderate fear of a future illness that they did not fully understand.

Table 7. Health Risk Awareness and Perceived Benefits of *Pagpag*

Variables	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Health Risk Awareness	2.32	Moderately Aware
Perceived Benefits	1.9	Strongly Agree

Differences in Health-risk Awareness and Perceived Benefits Across Employment and Educational Status

The Welch's one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a statistically significant difference in Health Risk (HR) scores across employment groups, $F(7, 13.90) = 7.44$, $p < .001$. This indicates that health risk awareness varied significantly among the employment groups included in the analysis. The Games–Howell post hoc test further showed that retired respondents reported significantly higher health risk awareness than unemployed respondents ($p < .001$), self-employed respondents ($p = .007$), part-time employed respondents ($p = .001$), and full-time employed respondents ($p < .001$). Additionally, informal-sector workers ($p = .011$), unemployed respondents ($p = .028$), and self-employed respondents ($p = .003$) reported significantly higher health risk awareness than full-time employed respondents. No other statistically significant differences were found among the groups. These findings suggest that awareness of the potential health risks associated with pagpag consumption differs across employment categories. However, the results do not establish the reasons for these differences or demonstrate that employment status directly influences health risk awareness.

For Perceived Benefits (PB), Welch's one-way ANOVA yielded F(7, 14.80) = 2.72, p = .050. This result falls at the conventional significance threshold of .05 and should therefore be interpreted cautiously. The finding suggests a possible difference in perceived benefits across the educational groups; however, the result should not be treated as definitive without considering the precision of the reported p-value. The Games-Howell post hoc results should also be examined to determine whether significant differences exist between specific groups.

Overall, the findings indicate that respondents' health risk awareness and perceived benefits of *pagpag* consumption should be examined in relation to their circumstances and experiences. Although some respondents may recognize the potential health risks, the perceived benefits of pagpag may remain important in the context of food insecurity and limited financial resources. Nevertheless, this interpretation should be supported by the study's survey or interview findings and should not be treated as a direct conclusion of the ANOVA. The results highlight the importance of considering both health awareness and the socioeconomic conditions surrounding pagpag consumption.

Table 8. Differences in Health-risk Awareness and Perceived Benefits Across Employment and Educational Status

Measure	**F**	**df1**	**df2**	**P**
Health Risk Awareness	7.44	7	13.9	less than .001
Perceived Benefits	2.72	7	14.8	0.05

Demographic Profile of Respondents'

Table 9 showed that the study had 307 respondents, with males comprising the majority (58.3%) and females accounting for 41.7%. In terms of age, most respondents were 30–49 years old (45.3%), followed by those aged 20–29 (22.5%), 50–64 (19.5%), and 65 years old and above (12.7%). This indicated that the respondents were mostly adults, particularly those within the 30–49 age group, providing perspectives from individuals with varied life and work experiences related to *pagpag* consumption.

Table 9. Demographic Profile of Respondents

	f	**%**
Male	179	58.3
Female	128	41.7
20-29	69	22.5
30-49	139	45.3
50-64	60	19.5
65-85+	39	12.7

Qualitative Results

The qualitative phase involved ten adult participants from Barangay 105, Tondo, Manila, who shared their experiences with *pagpag* consumption. Their accounts provided insight into the economic difficulties, food insecurity, family responsibilities, health-risk perceptions, coping strategies, and social judgments associated with the practice. To present the findings more concisely, the participants' demographic characteristics are summarized in Table 10. The discussion then proceeds to the cross-story thematic analysis, which identifies recurring patterns and differences across their narratives using illustrative quotations.

Table 10. Demographic Profile of Qualitative Participants

Participant	**Age**	**Gender**	**Occupation**
1. Rey	18	Male	Laborer
2. Maybelline	41	Female	Thrift-clothing seller

3. Cleofe	61	Female	Scavenger
4. Jennifer	48	Female	Housewife
5. Floryn	31	Female	Housewife
6. Sheena	32	Female	Seller
7. Merly	65	Female	Not stated
8. Celeste	48	Female	Housewife
9. George (Jojo)	48	Male	Pagpag collector and seller
10. Danill	49	Male	Scavenger

Cross-story Thematic Analysis

Survival and Economic Necessity

Across the participants' narratives, economic hardship and the need to provide food for their families emerged as important factors associated with pagpag consumption. However, the extent to which participants depended on pagpag varied. For some, it served as an affordable source of food during financial difficulties, while for others, it was also connected to their livelihood and ability to support their households.

Participant 1 explained that he sought work to afford food, stating, "Na… pag kakain ka ng pagpag, dumidiskarte ako ng trabaho para makabili." Similarly, Participant 2 described the potential consequences of losing access to pagpag, emphasizing that its disappearance would greatly affect her family. Participant 6 also connected pagpag to her responsibilities as a parent, explaining that the income she obtained helped provide for her children's school allowances. These accounts demonstrate how food insecurity and family responsibilities influenced participants' reliance on affordable food sources.

Food Security and Daily Routine. For some participants, pagpag had become a regular part of their household meals rather than an occasional response to hunger. Participant 7 stated, "Araw-araw talaga naming ulam to," demonstrating how frequently pagpag appeared in her family's daily meals. Participants 5 and 9 also described its practical value in meeting household needs. These accounts suggest that repeated consumption was shaped by affordability, familiarity, and the need to ensure that food was available. Nevertheless, dependence varied across participants. While some regarded pagpag as essential to their daily needs, Participants 8 and 10 indicated that its disappearance would not greatly affect them. This difference shows that pagpag did not hold the same level of importance in every household.

Economic Dependence and Resourcefulness. Beyond consumption, pagpag also served as a source of livelihood for some participants. Participant 7 explained that losing access to pagpag would mean losing both food and income, stating, "Malulungkot kami kasi wala kaming kita, wala rin kaming ulam." Participant 9 similarly described the importance of collecting and selling pagpag to support his family. He emphasized its contribution to his children's education, stating, "Dahil sa pagpag, nakatapos ang mga anak ko." These accounts illustrate how pagpag could function simultaneously as an affordable food source and an economic resource. Taken together, the participants' experiences show how financial limitations shaped their food choices and, in some cases, connected pagpag consumption and livelihood to family survival.

Normalization and Social Acceptance

The participants' narratives revealed that familiarity with pagpag contributed to its normalization in their daily lives. Several participants described consuming it as an ordinary practice and expressed little concern about other people's opinions. However, their experiences also showed that acceptance was not uniform across social settings. While some participants felt comfortable consuming pagpag within their community, others recognized that the practice could be judged negatively by people outside it.

Participant 7 described pagpag as a regular part of her household's meals, stating, "Araw-araw talaga naming ulam to." Participant 9 similarly responded, "Normal lang," when describing his feelings about consuming pagpag. These statements reflect how repeated consumption made pagpag familiar and ordinary in their

everyday experiences. Participant 4 also expressed indifference toward negative opinions, saying, “Wala akong pakialam kung ano ang sasabihin nila.” Such accounts suggest that familiarity and practical necessity could influence how participants perceived the food and responded to social judgment.

Emotional Neutrality and Familiarity. Several participants expressed neutral or positive feelings toward pagpag, reflecting their familiarity with the practice. Participant 2 described it as acceptable and tasty, while Participant 4 stated that she continued to crave it because she found it delicious. Participant 8 likewise expressed positive feelings, saying, “Masaya din, masarap.” These responses indicate that participants’ perceptions were shaped not only by financial circumstances but also by personal experience and familiarity. For some, pagpag was no longer viewed primarily through the negative associations attached to discarded food; instead, it had become a familiar part of their food choices.

Community Acceptance and External Judgment. Although several participants expressed little concern about judgment, Participant 5 provided a more specific account of the difference between acceptance within the community and perceptions elsewhere. She explained that consuming pagpag was acceptable in her neighborhood because other residents also ate it, but she felt embarrassed about eating it in other places because it was considered leftover food. Participant 1 similarly expressed indifference toward what others might think. These accounts suggest that social acceptance may depend on the surrounding environment. Pagpag could be considered ordinary within a community where it was commonly consumed while still carrying negative social associations outside that setting. Therefore, normalization did not necessarily mean that stigma had disappeared; rather, participants developed different ways of responding to how others perceived their food choices.

Redefined Dignity and Morality

The participants’ narratives suggested that dignity and morality were often understood in relation to survival, honest work, and family responsibility. Rather than judging pagpag consumption solely according to social expectations, some participants emphasized the circumstances that led them to rely on it. Their accounts showed that obtaining food and supporting their families were important considerations in how they understood the acceptability of consuming pagpag.

Participant 1 considered consuming pagpag acceptable under circumstances in which he lacked money for food. He explained, “Tama,” followed by, “Kasi… kung wala kang pangkain… kung wala kang pang-ano… ‘yon ang binibili ko.” His response connected the acceptability of consuming pagpag to the immediate need to obtain food. Similarly, Participant 3 emphasized the importance of finding ways to survive without engaging in wrongdoing, stating, “Wag kang magnakaw ganyan. Idaan mo sa mabuting gawain.” These accounts indicate that financial hardship did not necessarily lead participants to view their food choices as morally wrong. Instead, their responses emphasized necessity and the importance of finding ways to meet basic needs.

Dignity Through Survival and Family Responsibility. Several participants placed greater importance on providing food for their families than on other people’s judgments. Participant 6 explained, “Di ko naman iniisip kung anong sasabihin nila basta kami busog kami.” Her statement highlights how meeting her family’s immediate needs took priority over social opinions. Participant 9 also associated pagpag with his ability to support his children and contribute to their education. For these participants, dignity was connected to their efforts to provide for their families despite financial limitations. Their accounts suggest that consuming pagpag did not necessarily diminish their sense of self-worth because they understood the practice in the context of their responsibilities and circumstances.

Moral Judgment and Personal Agency. The participants also differed in how they responded to the social judgments surrounding pagpag. Participant 1 expressed indifference toward other people’s opinions, while Participant 5 acknowledged feeling embarrassed about consuming pagpag outside her community. In contrast, Participant 3 emphasized honest actions and perseverance as ways of responding to life’s difficulties. These differences demonstrate that participants did not share one uniform response to stigma. Some rejected the importance of external judgment, others distinguished between community acceptance and outside perceptions, and some emphasized the moral importance of working and finding lawful ways to survive. Collectively, their experiences suggest that the meaning of dignity was shaped by personal values, economic circumstances, and

social context.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicated that *pagpag* consumption in Barangay 105, Tondo, Manila, was shaped by the interaction of health awareness, economic hardship, long-term dependence, and the need to provide food for family members. The quantitative findings showed that respondents had moderate awareness of the health risks associated with consuming *pagpag*. A majority acknowledged that reheating leftover food could cause illness; however, regular consumption persisted. This finding was consistent with Alonzo et al. (2024), who examined *pagpag* consumers in Barangays 105, Aroma, and Happyland and found that health-risk awareness did not fully explain why people continued to consume *pagpag*. Their study also identified motivations related to the accessibility and characteristics of *pagpag*. The qualitative findings further explained this pattern, as participants described *pagpag* as a practical response to hunger and financial difficulty. This suggested that awareness of health risks did not necessarily result in avoiding *pagpag* when food choices were limited by economic conditions.

The quantitative findings also revealed that nearly half of the respondents had been consuming *pagpag* for more than 10 years, indicating long-term dependence on the practice. This finding was further supported by the qualitative accounts, particularly those of participants who had consumed *pagpag* for several years or even decades. Participants 4 and 10, for example, described *pagpag* consumption as ordinary due to their long exposure to the practice. Similarly, participants 7 and 9 described *pagpag* as part of their everyday food practices. Sumadlayon et al. (2024) likewise described *pagpag* as a survival mechanism within a family experiencing economic hardship. These findings suggested that long-term exposure could transform pagpag from an emergency food source into a familiar and normalized part of everyday life.

The quantitative finding on long-term consumption was also connected to the participants' experiences of food insecurity and economic necessity. The qualitative findings showed that participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 described financial difficulties that influenced their dependence on pagpag. Participant 4, for instance, described the difficulty of earning money as a housewife, while participants 7 and 8 emphasized their family's financial situation. Participant 6 also expressed that being full was more important than feeling ashamed of consuming *pagpag*. These accounts provided context for the quantitative results by showing that continued consumption was not simply a matter of personal preference but was closely tied to respondents' ability to secure sufficient food. This was consistent with Chua et al. (2018), who examined *pagpag* as an alternative food source among families in an urban poor community in the Philippines.

The qualitative findings further revealed that *pagpag* served not only as food but also as a source of livelihood for some participants. Participant 9 explained that collecting *pagpag* provided him with income, while Participant 10 described how his previous experience as a scavenger contributed to his family's survival. Participant 1 also described working to bring *pagpag* home to his family. These experiences strengthened the quantitative findings concerning the economic dimension of *pagpag* and showed that the practice operated within a broader cycle of food and livelihood insecurity. Martinez (2021) similarly discussed food recycling as an economic and survival practice among people living in an urban informal settlement.

The findings concerning health risks also became clearer when viewed alongside the qualitative responses. Quantitatively, respondents demonstrated awareness that pagpag could cause illness, while qualitatively, several participants acknowledged that improperly cleaned, stored, or cooked *pagpag* could be unsafe. However, participants generally believed that careful cleaning and cooking could make *pagpag* acceptable for consumption. This showed a gap between recognizing potential health risks and continuing the practice as a necessary food option. Alonzo et al. (2024) likewise highlighted health-risk awareness among *pagpag* consumers, showing the importance of understanding both awareness and the motivations that sustained consumption.

The qualitative findings also revealed the normalization and social acceptance of *pagpag* within the community. Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, and 10 described *pagpag* as common or ordinary in their daily lives. Participant 7 considered it part of their everyday ulam, while Participant 9 described it as normal and even a preferred food in the community. Participants 4 and 10, who had consumed *pagpag* for decades, also expressed

familiarity rather than embarrassment. This helped explain why awareness of health risks did not automatically lead to discontinuation. Repeated exposure, community familiarity, and economic necessity may have gradually made the practice feel ordinary.

Another important qualitative finding was the redefinition of dignity and morality. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10 generally did not view consuming *pagpag* as morally wrong. Instead, they associated dignity with the ability to provide for their families, endure hardship, and obtain food through honest means. Participant 5 emphasized that outside judgment mattered less as long as her family was fed, while Participant 3 connected morality with surviving without stealing or harming others. Sumadlayon et al. (2024) similarly demonstrated how *pagpag* could become part of a family's survival strategies in the context of poverty. These findings showed that participants understood *pagpag* consumption not simply as a food choice but as an action connected to family responsibility and survival.

The qualitative findings on coping and perseverance further strengthened the quantitative results. Participants described different ways of dealing with financial hardship, social judgment, and daily struggles. Participant 5, for example, emphasized prayer and finding solutions during difficult situations. Other participants relied on family, perseverance, and maintaining a positive outlook. These experiences showed that *pagpag* consumption existed within a wider set of coping strategies used to manage poverty and food insecurity.

Overall, the quantitative and qualitative findings complemented one another. The quantitative findings established the patterns, including health-risk awareness, frequency and duration of consumption, delayed consumption, and the economic conditions surrounding *pagpag*. The qualitative findings explained these patterns by showing how poverty, food insecurity, livelihood needs, family responsibility, normalization, and coping strategies influenced participants' decisions. The findings were consistent with Alonzo et al. (2024), Chua et al. (2018), Martinez (2021), and Sumadlayon et al. (2024), which collectively supported the understanding of *pagpag* as a practice shaped by both health concerns and socioeconomic necessity.

Thus, the findings suggested that *pagpag* consumption could not be understood solely as a matter of food safety or individual choice. While respondents recognized its potential risks, their lived experiences showed that economic hardship, food insecurity, livelihood needs, and family survival strongly influenced their continued dependence on *pagpag*. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative findings, therefore, demonstrated that addressing the risks associated with *pagpag* required not only health education but also attention to the socioeconomic conditions that made this practice necessary for some families.

CONCLUSION

The study’s findings established that *pagpag* consumption among respondents in Tondo, Manila, was primarily driven by poverty, food insecurity, unstable income, and limited access to affordable food. Although respondents demonstrated moderate to high awareness of the health risks associated with *pagpag* consumption, awareness alone did not prevent continued consumption, as *pagpag* had become a normalized and practical coping strategy for many families. These findings supported Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, as the participants’ immediate physiological need for food took priority over concerns for safety and health when access to sufficient and affordable food was limited. The findings also related to Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development, particularly in how participants’ decisions were influenced by their responsibility to provide for and protect their families, demonstrating that moral judgments were shaped by family obligations, social values, and the circumstances surrounding survival.

Thus, *pagpag* consumption was not simply a matter of individual choice but a response to structural and economic limitations. Addressing this issue requires interventions that go beyond health-risk awareness by strengthening food security, creating sustainable livelihood and employment opportunities, improving sanitation and food safety practices, and expanding social protection. Ultimately, reducing dependence on *pagpag* requires addressing the underlying conditions that make it a necessary survival strategy while providing sustainable alternatives that uphold the dignity, well-being, and basic needs of affected communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To the Local Government of Barangay 105, Tondo, Manila, and the City Government of Manila: strengthen food security programs and health interventions for communities where *pagpag* is consumed as an alternative food source. The local government should provide greater support for existing social assistance programs and establish accessible food distribution initiatives that offer safer, more nutritious food options to families experiencing food insecurity. Proper monitoring of food waste disposal should also be strengthened to reduce potential health risks associated with the collection and consumption of discarded food. In addition, livelihood and skills training programs should be expanded in partnership with relevant government agencies to provide low-income households with more stable sources of income. These efforts may help lessen the community's dependence on *pagpag*, improve access to safe and nutritious food, and address the wider problems of food insecurity and poverty.

2. Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), public health agencies, and other local groups should support community-based programs that provide safer, more accessible alternatives to *pagpag*. Community kitchens, food banks, feeding programs, and urban gardening projects may be organized in coordination with Barangay 105 and its residents. Information campaigns about food safety, nutrition, proper food handling, and the possible health risks of consuming discarded food should also be conducted. These efforts can help residents become more aware of food-related health risks, practice safer food handling, and strengthen community support for families experiencing food insecurity.

3. To*Pagpag* Sellers and Other Individuals Involved in the Collection and Selling of *Pagpag*, livelihood assistance and skills training should be made available to help provide alternative sources of income. Their experiences and economic situations should also be considered when developing food safety and livelihood programs, as they are part of the larger system surrounding *pagpag* consumption. Providing opportunities for skills development, employment, and other sustainable sources of income may help reduce economic dependence on collecting and selling discarded food while addressing some of the conditions that contribute to its continued practice.

4. To Future Researchers, allow sufficient time for proper review, validation, and reliability testing of research instruments to ensure that the data gathered are accurate and consistent. Future studiesshould further examine the long-term health effects of *pagpag* consumption, the socioeconomic factors that contribute to its continued prevalence, and the effectiveness of community-based interventions. Longitudinal studies may be conducted to observe potential health outcomes over time, while socioeconomic data may be examined to better understand the factors influencing *pagpag* consumption. It is also recommended that future researchers include *pagpag* sellers as participants to provide a broader perspective on the issue and better understand the experiences of both consumers and sellers. Furthermore, future studies may be conducted in other communities in Tondo, Manila, and in areas with similar socioeconomic conditions to determine whether the findings are applicable to other settings. These efforts can contribute to a better understanding of *pagpag* consumption and support the development of evidence-based programs addressing food insecurity, food safety, public health, and sustainable livelihood opportunities.

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