



# Socio-economic Phenomenological Study: Analysis of the Causing Factors of Poverty in Fishermen's Families in Gentung Village, Pangkep Regency

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## ABSTRACT

Coastal areas often present a welfare paradox, where abundant marine resource potential is not always directly proportional to the level of welfare of fishing communities, so that poverty remains a structural and multidimensional issue. This study aims to analyze the meaning of poverty in the lived experiences of fishing families and identify the social and economic factors that shape their vulnerability. The study used qualitative methods with a phenomenological approach to explore the awareness, perceptions, and survival strategies of fishing families in the face of economic uncertainty. The study was conducted in Gentung Village, Pangkajene and Kepulauan Regency, with data collection techniques using in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The results show that fishermen's poverty is influenced by low levels of education, strong patron-client relationships, and cultural constructs that interpret risk as part of destiny, which indirectly limit social mobility and economic innovation. Economically, income fluctuations due to seasonal dependence, limited access to formal financial institutions, and high-interest informal lending practices reinforce the cycle of debt and household vulnerability. This study recommends strengthening educational and financial literacy, developing more inclusive community-based economic institutions, and contextual and participatory business diversification strategies to encourage social transformation and improve fishermen's welfare sustainably.

**Kata Kunci:** Socio-economic; Phenomenological Study; Fishermen's poverty; Gentung Village; fishermen's welfare sustainably.

## ABSTRAK

Wilayah pesisir sering kali menghadirkan paradoks kesejahteraan, di mana potensi sumber daya laut yang melimpah tidak selalu berbanding lurus dengan tingkat kesejahteraan masyarakat nelayan, sehingga kemiskinan tetap menjadi persoalan struktural dan multidimensional. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis makna kemiskinan dalam pengalaman hidup keluarga nelayan serta mengidentifikasi faktor sosial dan ekonomi yang membentuk kerentanan mereka. Penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologi untuk menggali kesadaran, persepsi, dan strategi bertahan hidup keluarga nelayan dalam menghadapi ketidakpastian ekonomi. Lokasi penelitian dilaksanakan di Desa Gentung, Kabupaten Pangkajene dan Kepulauan, dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kemiskinan nelayan dipengaruhi oleh rendahnya tingkat pendidikan, kuatnya relasi patron-klien, serta konstruksi budaya yang memaknai risiko sebagai bagian dari takdir, yang secara tidak langsung membatasi mobilitas sosial dan inovasi ekonomi. Secara ekonomi, fluktuasi pendapatan akibat ketergantungan pada musim, keterbatasan akses terhadap lembaga keuangan formal, serta praktik pinjaman informal berbunga tinggi memperkuat siklus utang dan kerentanan rumah tangga. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan penguatan literasi pendidikan dan keuangan, pengembangan kelembagaan ekonomi berbasis komunitas yang lebih inklusif, serta strategi diversifikasi usaha yang kontekstual dan partisipatif guna mendorong transformasi sosial dan peningkatan kesejahteraan nelayan secara berkelanjutan.

**Keywords:** Sosio-ekonomi; Studi Fenomenologis; Kemiskinan nelayan; Desa Gentung; kesejahteraan nelayan berkelanjutan

## 1. PENDAHULUAN

Poverty in coastal fishing communities is a structural issue that continues to be a focus in studies of regional development and the maritime economy in Pangkajene and the Islands Regency. Coastal areas, geographically endowed with abundant marine resource potential, often face a welfare paradox, with the majority of fishing families living in economically vulnerable conditions (Agus et al., 2023; Lucas et al., 2024; Teh et al., 2024). This phenomenon is not only influenced by limited access to capital and technology, but also by the social, cultural and institutional dynamics that shape the life patterns of coastal communities (Alam et al., 2026; Allison & Ellis, 2001; Anang et al., 2024; Bene, 2003; Birdsong & Hunt, 2021). In Gentung Village, the poverty of fishing families exhibits complex characteristics, ranging from dependence on fishing seasons, fluctuating fish prices, and low livelihood diversification. Therefore, an analytical approach is needed that is not solely quantitative but also able to understand the lived experiences and social meanings inherent in the reality of poverty.

Socio-economically, fishing families in Gentung Village face multidimensional pressures encompassing income, education, health, and access to public services. The economic structure of fishing households generally depends on the systems and environmental conditions that serve as the basis for their livelihoods (Islam et al., 2022; Josephraj et al., 2022; Mulyasari et al., 2025). Furthermore, limited access to formal financial institutions traps some fishermen in informal, high-interest lending practices. This situation is exacerbated by low levels of education, which limits their ability to adapt to fisheries technology innovations and alternative economic opportunities (García-lorenzo et al., 2024; Islam et al., 2022; Lucas et al., 2024). Thus, the poverty experienced by fishing families is not only economic, but also structural and cultural.

From a phenomenological perspective, poverty is not only understood as a material deficiency, but as a life experience that shapes perspectives, survival strategies, and social relations in fishing communities (Anang et al., 2024; Birdsong & Hunt, 2021; Boateng et al., 2025; Cossette-laneville, 2025; Luki & Tonkovi, 2018). This approach positions fishing families as subjects with awareness and interpretation of the conditions they experience. For example, the uncertainty of catches is often interpreted as part of the "sea and river risks" accepted as a consequence of the profession, thus fostering both a sense of resignation and strong social solidarity among community members (Omer & Mohamoud, 2026; Soares et al., 2025). This solidarity serves as crucial social capital for maintaining survival, but on the other hand, it can hinder social mobility when collective norms dominate over innovation. Therefore, a socio-economic phenomenological analysis is relevant for uncovering the deeper meanings behind the economic practices and decisions of fishing families.

Furthermore, the factors causing poverty among fishing families in Gentung Village are also related to coastal resource policy and governance. Unequal access to modern fishing gear, weak price protection for catches, and a lack of sustainable empowerment programs contribute to reinforcing the cycle of poverty (Alam et al., 2026). On the other hand, environmental pressures such as climate change, coastal ecosystem degradation, and overfishing are increasingly restricting the productivity of traditional fishermen. Furthermore, declining river water quality is also impacting fish catch productivity (Nasrul, Amal, et al., 2024; Nasrul, Arfan, et al., 2024; Nasrul, Qaiyimah, et al., 2024; Qaiyimah et al., 2024; Rasyid et al., 2025). This situation indicates that poverty among fishermen is the result of an interaction between internal household factors and external factors, such as political-economic structures and ecological dynamics. Without interventions based on a comprehensive understanding of the social realities of coastal communities, poverty alleviation policies have the potential to miss their intended targets.

The novelty of this research lies in the integration of a phenomenological approach with socio-economic analysis to more comprehensively identify the causes of poverty among fishing families in Gentung Village, Pangkajene and Kepulauan Regency. This research not only maps economic variables such as income, assets, and access to capital, but also explores subjective meanings, survival strategies, and social constructions that shape intergenerational poverty patterns. Thus, the research results are expected to provide recommendations based on the local context, including strengthening fishing economic institutions, diversifying livelihoods based on coastal potential, increasing financial literacy, and designing participatory and sustainable empowerment policies. This approach is expected to serve as an alternative analytical model in coastal poverty studies in other regions with similar characteristics.

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1 Type and Location of Research

This research uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach based on the constructivist paradigm. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it aims to understand the lived experience of fishing families in facing poverty as a social reality experienced directly in their daily context. Therefore, this study not only seeks to identify conditions of poverty descriptively but also explores the meanings that fishing families give to these

conditions, including how they understand the risks of uncertain catches, fluctuating fish prices, limited access to capital, and dependent relationships with middlemen or financiers. Through this approach, researchers explore the awareness, perceptions, interpretations, values, and coping strategies developed by fishing families in response to the socio-economic pressures they experience. The phenomenological approach allows for in-depth exploration of subjective, emotional, and reflective dimensions that cannot be reduced to mere statistics, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon (Hartman & Squires, 2024; Marsitadewi & Hamel, 2025; Nasrul, Qaiyimah, et al., 2024; Partington et al., 2025).

The research was conducted in Gentung Village, Pangkep Regency, South Sulawesi Province. This area was selected purposively, considering that the majority of its residents earn their living as small-scale traditional fishermen who still face structural and ongoing poverty issues. Geographically, Gentung Village is located in a coastal area characterized by high economic dependence on the capture fisheries sector, influenced by seasonal conditions, weather, and the dynamics of marine resources. This dependence on daily catches causes household incomes of fishermen to fluctuate and are vulnerable to external shocks, both environmental and market factors. Furthermore, limited access to education, formal financial services, adequate fishing technology, and social protection exacerbates the complexity of poverty issues in this region. With these characteristics, Gentung Village is a relevant and representative location for an in-depth study of the factors causing poverty among fishing families and the accompanying socio-economic dynamics within the context of coastal communities.

## **2.2 Research Subjects**

The research subjects were fishing families residing in Gentung Village, meeting the following criteria:

1. The head of the family is an active fisherman (boat owner or fishing laborer),
2. Has at least five years of experience working as a fisherman, and
3. Being categorized as a low-income family based on village socio-economic indicators.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, selecting informants based on specific considerations relevant to the research objectives (Mohamad et al., 2012; Razak et al., 2020). In addition to fishing families as primary informants, this study also involved supporting informants such as community leaders, village officials, and representatives of fishing groups to gain a more comprehensive perspective on the socio-economic conditions of coastal communities.

## **2.3 Data Collection Techniques**

Data collection techniques in this study included:

1. In-depth interviews  
Conducted in a semi-structured manner to explore the lived experiences of fishing families related to the causes of poverty, survival strategies, social relations, and perceptions of government policies.
2. Participant observation  
Researchers conducted direct observations of economic activities, living conditions, social interaction patterns, and the dynamics of daily life of fishing families.
3. Documentation  
Secondary data collection included village statistics, community socio-economic profiles, policy documents, and archives of fishing institutions relevant to the research.

These techniques were used to obtain in-depth and contextual data in accordance with the characteristics of phenomenological research.

## **2.4 Data Analysis Techniques**

The data analysis technique used was the phenomenological analysis model of Colaizzi (1978). This model was chosen because it systematically uncovers the essential meaning of informants' experiences. The analysis stages included:

1. Reading the entire interview transcript to gain a comprehensive understanding.
2. Identifying significant statements related to the experience of poverty.
3. Formulating the meaning of each significant statement.
4. Grouping the meaning into main themes (clusters of themes).
5. Creating a comprehensive description of the phenomenon under study.
6. Identifying the essential structure of informants' experiences.
7. Validating the results with informants (member checking).

The analysis was conducted interactively and iteratively until an in-depth picture of the factors causing poverty in fishing families was obtained from the perspective of their own experiences.

## **2.5 Triangulation for Data Validation**

To ensure data validity, this study employed triangulation techniques, including:

1. Source triangulation, which compared information obtained from fishing families, community leaders, and village officials.
2. Technical triangulation, which compared data from interviews, observations, and documentation.

3. Member checking, which reconfirmed the researcher's interpretations with informants to ensure consistency of meaning.

Through this triangulation process, it is hoped that the data obtained will have a high level of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, so that the research results can be scientifically justified.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Results

Based on the results of the phenomenological analysis, two major themes were identified as the causes of poverty among fishing families in Gentung Village: social factors and economic factors. These themes emerged from significant statements from informants, which were then grouped into meaning clusters and formulated into an essential structure of the experience of poverty among fishing families.

#### Social Factors Causing Poverty

##### 1. Low Levels of Education and Literacy

Interviews revealed that most heads of fishing families only completed primary education. This situation results in limited access to information, technological innovation, and alternative employment opportunities outside the fisheries sector.

One informant (IN-01) stated:

*"Iyee', nak. Saya ta' sekolah tinggi. SMP saja tidak tamat. Jadi apaji' bisa ku kerja selain melaut? Anak-anak juga kadang berhenti sekolah bantu-bantu di laut dan sungai."* Indonesian with a Bugis Accent  
*"Yes, son. I didn't go to college. I didn't even finish junior high. So what can I do besides fishing? Even children sometimes drop out of school to help out at sea and river."*

This statement demonstrates the intergenerational reproduction of poverty. Limited education fosters a pragmatic and short-term mindset, where going to sea becomes the only rational option available. Phenomenologically, education is understood not simply as formal access, but as an opportunity to escape the cycle of poverty, a strategic necessity that has not yet been fully recognized.

##### 2. Social Dependence on Middlemen

The patron-client relationship between fishermen and middlemen is a significant finding. Socially, this relationship is seen as a form of "mutual assistance," but structurally, it reinforces economic dependency.

An informant (IN-03) said:

*"Kalau tidak ada punggawa, susah ki' turun melaut atau ke sungai. Dia yang kasi modal solar sama es. Tapi nanti hasil tangkap ta' harus dijual ke dia. Harga ya ikut dia."* Indonesian with a Bugis Accent  
*"If there's no crew, it's hard to go out to sea or river. He's the one who provides the capital, the diesel and ice. But then we have to sell our catch to him. The price is determined by him."*

The meaning emerging from this statement indicates a process of normalizing dependency that has become deeply rooted in the social structure of fishing communities. The relationship between fishermen and punggawa, or middlemen, is not merely understood as a transactional economic relationship, but rather as a social bond imbued with the values of trust, protection, and security. In the fishermen's lived experience, the presence of punggawa is interpreted as "guarantor of their continued fishing," especially when they lack cash to purchase fuel, ice, or repair fishing gear. When access to formal financial institutions is limited, this patron-client relationship becomes a practical solution, considered normal and even necessary.

However, behind this sense of protection lies an unequal power structure. Dependence on capital causes fishermen to lose their autonomy in determining the selling price of their catch. Their bargaining position is weakened because their catch is automatically sold to the financier at a unilaterally determined price. In the long term, this condition hinders the process of capital accumulation and limits fishermen's opportunities to scale their businesses. Phenomenologically, fishermen often interpret this situation not as a form of exploitation, but as a logical consequence of a "debt of gratitude" and moral obligation.

##### 3. A Culture of Resignation to Risks at Sea and in Rivers

The subjective dimension of poverty is also evident in how fishermen interpret risk. The uncertainty of their catch is considered "the fate of the sea and river."

IN-05 stated:

*"Namanya juga kerja di laut, kadang banyak hasil, kadang kosong. Itu sudah resiko. Kita cuma bisa pasrah sama cuaca."* Indonesian with a Bugis Accent

*"That's just the way it is when you work at sea and in rivers, fishing. Sometimes you catch a lot, sometimes you don't. That's the risk. We can only surrender to the weather."*

The attitude of resignation to maritime risks expressed by informants cannot be simply interpreted as a sign of weakness or helplessness. In the context of coastal life, this attitude actually fosters psychological resilience that enables fishermen to persist amidst uncertain catches, extreme weather changes, and fluctuating fish prices. Submission is defined as a mechanism of acceptance of something beyond human control. For fishermen, the sea is a workspace that is not entirely predictable; therefore, accepting risk as part of their professional destiny becomes a mental strategy for maintaining emotional stability and the sustainability of family economic activities.

However, on the other hand, a strongly internalized attitude of resignation also has implications for limited incentives for innovation and business diversification. When risk is perceived as natural and uncontrollable, the space for critical reflection on potential change is limited. Fishermen tend to orient themselves toward short-term survival strategies, such as borrowing during the lean season or reducing household consumption, rather than developing alternative livelihoods such as seafood processing, aquaculture, or non-fishery businesses. In this situation, poverty is not only produced by structural economic factors, but is also reinforced by constructions of meaning that frame risk as something to be accepted, not managed.

## **Economic Factors Causing Poverty**

### **1. Income Fluctuations and Seasonal Dependence**

Interview data shows that fishermen's income is highly dependent on the season and weather conditions. During the west wind season, most fishermen do not go to sea.

IN-02 states:

*"Kalau musim barat datang, biasa dua minggu sampai sebulan tidak turun melaut tapi untuk disungai tetap setiap hari tapi besar resikonya. menurun pemasukan, mau tidak mau harus dikontrol lagi pengeluaran."*

Indonesian with a Bugis Accent

*"When the west monsoon arrives, we usually don't go out to sea for two weeks to a month, but we still go out to the river every day, but the risks are high. If income decreases, we have no choice but to rein in our expenses."*

Income fluctuations, which are highly dependent on seasons and weather conditions, directly impact the economic instability of fishing households. During the abundant fishing season, income can increase significantly in a short time. However, this situation is short-lived and is often not accompanied by adequate financial management. Conversely, when the west wind or high wave season arrives, fishing activities cease and income is practically nonexistent. This imbalance between "harvest" and "lean" periods creates an uncertain and unpredictable income pattern.

This situation increases the risk of debt because household needs—such as daily consumption, children's education, health care, and social needs—continue despite the cessation of income. Without savings or access to adequate social protection schemes, the most realistic option for fishermen is to borrow money from *punggawa*, middlemen, or other informal institutions. These loans often come with the consequence of having to sell their catch at a predetermined price, further reducing the space for capital accumulation. In other words, debt is not merely a temporary solution, but part of a recurring economic cycle.

### **2. Limited Access to Capital and Formal Financial Institutions**

The majority of fishermen do not have access to banking due to a lack of collateral and low financial literacy. IN-06 said:

*"Bank susah kasi pinjam karena tidak ada jaminan. Jadi biasa ke punggawa atau koperasi kecil, tapi bunganya tinggi."* Indonesian with a Bugis Accent

*"Banks have difficulty giving loans because they lack collateral. So they usually go to small cooperatives or small cooperatives, but the interest rates are high."*

Reliance on informal loans is one mechanism that systematically reinforces the cycle of debt in the economic lives of fishing families. These loans are generally obtained from *punggawa* (traders), middlemen, or small cooperatives, with procedures that are simpler than those of formal banking institutions. The absence of complicated administrative requirements makes these schemes seem like a quick solution when fishermen face urgent needs, especially during the lean season. However, this easy access is often accompanied by high interest rates, a profit-cutting system, or the obligation to sell catches at below-market prices.

In practice, debts cannot always be fully repaid because income earned after the fishing season is often only sufficient to cover a portion of previous obligations. When household needs arise again—school fees, boat repairs, or consumption needs—fishermen are forced to borrow again. This pattern creates a recurring cycle in which old debts are covered by new ones, resulting in stagnant or even further economic pressure on families. Structurally, this situation hinders the accumulation of productive capital that could otherwise be used to increase business capacity, such as purchasing more efficient fishing gear or repairing boats.

### 3.2. Discussion

#### **Social Dimensions of Poverty**

The social dimensions of poverty in fishing families in Gentung Village demonstrate that poverty is not only produced by material limitations, but also by social constructions, relationship patterns, and systems of meaning that exist within the fishing community. Research shows that the low level of education of the head of the family is a primary factor limiting opportunities for social mobility. With most fishermen completing only primary education, access to alternative employment, technological innovation, and financial literacy is severely limited. This situation reinforces the reproduction of intergenerational poverty as children tend to follow in their parents' footsteps and even drop out of school to help out at sea and river.

This finding is in line with research Novira et al. (2024) stated that low access to education and limited literacy were the dominant factors causing poverty among fishermen in Deli Serdang. The study emphasized that education plays a crucial role in opening up opportunities for job diversification. In addition to education, the patron-client relationship between fishermen and their retainers is a social structure that reinforces dependency. Socially, this relationship is understood as a form of solidarity and protection, as retainers provide operational capital such as diesel fuel and ice. However, structurally, this relationship creates a power imbalance, as fishermen lack the freedom to determine the selling price of their catch. This dependency is legitimized by moral values such as indebtedness and loyalty, and therefore is rarely perceived as a form of exploitation.

This condition is in line with a study Obie (2024) which states that the patronage structure in Indonesian fishing communities often maintains social stability, but at the same time limits the economic independence of fishermen. Acceptance of maritime risks also represents a crucial social dimension. For fishermen, the uncertainty of weather and catches is perceived as part of fate. This attitude builds psychological resilience but also limits innovation and business diversification. Research on the cultural poverty of fishermen in Muttaqin & Ismail (2023) shows that cultural constructs that accept risk as "fate" influence income management patterns and the low propensity for long-term investment. Thus, the social dimension of poverty in Gentung fishing families does not stand alone, but is formed through the interaction between low education, patronage structures, and cultural constructions regarding risk and uncertainty.

#### **Economic Dimensions of Poverty**

Economically, the poverty of fishing families is significantly influenced by income fluctuations and seasonal dependence. Research shows that the westerly season or extreme weather conditions prevent fishermen from going to sea for certain periods, resulting in a stagnation in income while household needs continue to be met. This pattern creates an imbalance between "harvest" and "lean" periods. This finding is consistent with research on the poverty of freshwater fishermen in East Kalimantan which states that fishermen's income is very vulnerable to changes in seasons and environmental conditions, thus causing household economic instability (Arsita et al., 2024).

This income instability increases the risk of debt. When the lean season arrives, fishermen are forced to borrow to cover consumption needs, education costs, and fishing gear maintenance. Debt becomes a recurring survival mechanism, not a temporary solution. This pattern narrows opportunities for capital accumulation because a significant portion of the next season's income is used to pay off previous obligations. Limited access to formal financial institutions exacerbates these conditions. Banks require collateral and administrative fees that are difficult for traditional fishers to meet. Consequently, they prefer informal loans with high interest rates or a profit-sharing system. Research in Fahrur et al. (2021) shows that limited access to formal capital forces fishers into a prolonged cycle of debt, making it difficult to increase their production capacity.

However, there is quantitative research on the coast of Jakarta which shows that productive asset factors such as boat size and fishing gear have a more significant influence on poverty levels than education (Emt et al., 2023). These differences indicate that local context significantly determines the structure of poverty. In areas with better market access, asset factors may be more dominant. Meanwhile, in communities like Gentung, which still rely on patronage relationships and have minimal access to formal capital, a combination of income fluctuations and social dependency are the primary factors. Overall, the economic dimension of poverty in Gentung fishing

families is characterized by income instability, recurring debt cycles, and limited access to formal financial institutions. These three factors interact and exacerbate the economic vulnerability of fishing households.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the poverty of fishing families in Gentung Village, Pangkajene and Kepulauan Regency, is a multidimensional phenomenon formed by the complex interaction of mutually reinforcing social and economic dimensions. Socially, low levels of education, strong patron-client relationships with officials, and a cultural construct that interprets maritime risks as part of destiny shape a pattern of poverty reproduction that persists continuously and intergenerationally; this condition not only limits social mobility but also narrows opportunities for job diversification outside the fishing sector. Furthermore, while a resigned attitude to maritime uncertainty builds psychological resilience, in the long term it tends to diminish the drive for innovation and critical reflection on opportunities for economic change. Economically, poverty is reinforced by income fluctuations due to dependence on seasons and environmental conditions, limited access to formal financial institutions, and high-interest informal lending practices that trap fishing households in a cycle of recurring debt and hinder the accumulation of productive capital. This instability in income structures makes fishing households vulnerable to ecological and market shocks, thus emphasizing that poverty is not simply a matter of material deprivation, but rather the result of interconnected social, cultural, and institutional structures. Therefore, poverty alleviation efforts need to be designed comprehensively through increasing access to education and financial literacy, strengthening more inclusive and equitable economic institutions, and business diversification strategies based on local potential, while still considering the life experiences and construction of meaning of the fishing community so that the resulting transformation is sustainable.

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