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The Cost of Culture: Examining the Socioeconomic Disparities caused by Cockfighting among Ilonggo Bettors

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Abstract: Cockfighting remains a deeply rooted cultural practice in the Philippines; however, when persistently pursued as a form of gambling, it generates significant but often hidden socioeconomic costs. This study explores these socioeconomic disparities caused by persistent cockfighting involvement. Anchored in Becker and Murphy's (1988) Rational Addiction Theory, it examines how habitual gambling, despite an awareness of long-term harm, follows a rational yet destructive pattern motivated by short-term rewards such as excitement, social connection, and perceived financial gain. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the study identified three (3) major themes: intensified financial vulnerability, declining employment commitment, and erosion of family relationships. These themes encompass twelve (12) subthemes: (1) cockfighting expenses consume daily earnings; (2) bettors borrow to cover losses; (3) savings and income plans are disrupted; (4) loss of financial control; (5) absenteeism from work; (6) declining job performance; (7) weakened work commitment; (8) mismanagement of work schedules; (9) household financial strain; (10) emotional family conflicts; (11) neglect of family roles; and (12) erosion of emotional family support. Findings show that the normalization of cockfighting within communities reinforces these destructive behaviors. The study highlights the urgent need for multi-sectoral interventions and further research to address the broader consequences of this culturally embedded yet socially harmful form of gambling.

Keywords: cockfighting, socioeconomic disparities, rational addiction theory

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1. Introduction

Cockfighting had been deeply embedded in Filipino culture for centuries, particularly in Iloilo, which hosted the prestigious Candelaria International Derby, the largest and most celebrated cockfighting event in the country (Rendon 2025). Historical accounts traced their origins to pre-colonial times, when early Ilonggos engaged in cockfighting for entertainment, social bonding, and ritualistic purposes (Wardhana et al. 2021). Spanish colonization institutionalized the practice, regulating it through taxation and licensing to generate government revenue (Davis 2013). Over time, cockfighting evolved into a multi-billion-peso industry, supporting businesses in gamefowl breeding, veterinary services, and cockpit operations (The Freeman 2022). Beyond its economic contributions, cockfighting fueled a culture of high-stakes gambling, where bettors risked substantial amounts of their income in pursuit of financial gain (Murota 2023). According to Becker and Murphy's (1988) Rational Addiction Theory, individuals persisted in gambling due to the perceived long-term rewards despite financial losses. However, research showed that gambling addiction led to debt accumulation, financial instability, and strained social relationships (Asia News Network 2022). Many bettors engaged in "chasing losses," a behavior in which they repeatedly gambled to recover previous setbacks, often worsening their financial distress (Dellosa 2022). Families of addicted bettors frequently experienced household neglect, emotional distress, and financial insecurity (BBC News 2022). In communities where cockfighting was normalized, gambling addiction often remained unaddressed, further deepening its impact on affected households (Philippine News Agency, 2023). Studies also noted that cockfighting disproportionately affected lower-income individuals, as wealthier informants could absorb losses, whereas marginalized bettors faced economic ruin (Wardhana et al. 2021). While some saw cockfighting as an alternative source of livelihood, research suggested that gambling rarely led to sustained financial success (Murota 2023). Despite its widespread acceptance, the negative socioeconomic consequences of cockfighting ad-

diction remained underexplored, particularly in regions like Iloilo, where derbies were deeply embedded in local traditions. Given its prominence and the long-term impact on bettors and their families, it was essential to examine how cockfighting addiction contributed to socioeconomic disparities among Ilonggo bettors.

While several studies had analyzed cockfighting from historical, cultural, and economic perspectives, limited research focused on its role in reinforcing socioeconomic disparities. A knowledge gap existed because prior gambling research had centered on e-cockfighting, casinos, and sports betting, leaving traditional cockfighting largely unexamined (ABS-CBN News 2022). Additionally, an empirical gap was evident, as existing studies often emphasized the economic benefits of cockfighting while overlooking the financial hardships and social instability faced by addicted bettors and their families (Philippine News Agency 2023). There was also an application gap, as government policies and interventions had primarily targeted e-cockfighting addiction, leaving traditional bettors with fewer support mechanisms (The Freeman 2022). In Iloilo, where cockfighting was both culturally ingrained and socially accepted, the absence of financial education and intervention programs left bettors vulnerable to long-term financial distress (Asia News Network 2022). Many low-income bettors viewed cockfighting as an opportunity to escape poverty, despite evidence that gambling addiction restricted financial mobility (Murota 2023). The lack of structured rehabilitation programs or financial recovery support for cockfighting gamblers further worsened the situation (Philippine News Agency 2023). Studies showed that gambling addiction often led to employment instability, preventing affected individuals from securing sustainable income sources (Delloso, 2022). Families of addicted bettors frequently experienced financial strain, emotional distress, and domestic conflicts, contributing to intergenerational economic struggles (BBC News 2022). Research also suggested that gambling-related financial distress could lead to increased borrowing, asset liquidation, and even engagement in illegal activities (ABS-CBN News 2022). These socioeconomic consequences were particularly evident in lower-income households, where financial losses from gambling had a more severe impact (Wardhana et al. 2021). Given the limited research on traditional cockfighting addiction, there was a pressing need to investigate how it contributed to long-term socioeconomic disparities among Ilonggo bettors. Addressing this gap would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the financial, social, and economic effects of cockfighting addiction in Iloilo communities.

This study aimed to examine the socioeconomic disparities resulting from cockfighting. Specifically, it aimed to answer the question: How does cockfighting bring about socioeconomic disparities, particularly in terms of financial stability, employment, and family relationships? Many bettors, particularly those from lower-income backgrounds, gambled in hopes of financial gain but often fell deeper into economic hardship. As gambling losses accumulated, household resources dwindled, forcing families to sacrifice basic needs such as food, education, and healthcare. The financial strain pushed some bettors into cycles of debt, borrowing from informal lenders with high-interest rates or selling assets just to sustain their gambling habits. Employment stability was also affected, as addicted bettors struggled with absenteeism, decreased productivity, or even job loss due to gambling-related stress. This instability further limited their ability to recover financially, making it difficult to secure long-term economic mobility. Families bore the brunt of these struggles, experiencing constant financial insecurity, emotional distress, and strained relationships. Children suffered the consequences as educational opportunities were compromised and household tensions rose. In communities where cockfighting was deeply ingrained, these financial hardships were not isolated cases but collective struggles that weakened local economies. Instead of circulating within productive sectors, money was funneled into gambling, restricting economic growth and widening financial gaps. The normalization of cockfighting in Ilonggo culture often masked its long-term consequences, leaving affected individuals without proper financial guidance or intervention. Social relationships deteriorated as financial stress fostered distrust, conflicts, and even domestic violence within households. Given these widespread effects, addressing the socioeconomic disparities caused by cockfighting addiction was essential to breaking cycles of financial instability and protecting the well-being of Ilonggo communities.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive-qualitative research design to examine the socioeconomic consequences of habitual cockfighting participation among Ilonggo bettors. It was anchored on constructivist epistemology and an interpretivist theoretical perspective, specifically utilizing Becker and Murphy's Rational Addiction Theory. This theoretical lens suggested that individuals might have become addicted through a series of rational decisions that prioritized short-term gratification, even when they were aware of the potential long-term harm. Furthermore, the descriptive-qualitative design allowed for a systematic exploration of the lived experiences of informants, providing insights into how persistent gambling behaviors affected various aspects of their socioeconomic life. Thus, this study sought to examine the socioeconomic disparities caused by cockfighting in terms of (1) intensified financial vulnerability, (2) declining employment commitment, and (3) erosion of family bonds.

2.2 Instrument

The study utilized a researcher-made semi-structured interview guide composed of three (3) parts: (1) demographic profiling questions to gather basic personal and background information; (2) a set of questions focused on the emotional, financial, cultural, and social or relational impacts of cockfighting; and (3) additional questions related to job attendance, debt management, and decision-making processes. The interview guide was translated into Hiligaynon to ensure clarity, relatability, and comfort among informants during the interview sessions. The guide was developed based on the objectives of the study and was designed to elicit in-depth and reflective responses from individuals involved in cockfighting. To ensure its appropriateness and relevance, the interview guide was pilot-tested on one (1) individual with cockfighting experience who met the inclusion criteria. It was then validated by a research expert with specialization in qualitative research to ensure the clarity, flow, and adequacy of the questions. Furthermore, the researchers employed purposeful sampling to select informants who had long-term involvement in cockfighting. This approach was suitable as it allowed the researchers to gather detailed and meaningful responses from individuals who were directly affected by the phenomenon.

2.3 Informants

Five (5) Ilonggo cockfighting bettors served as the study's informants. The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- (1) The informant is aged 40-80 years old; and
- (2) The informant has been betting in cockfighting for at least ten (10) years, either in small local games or in large coliseum events.

Table 1 summarizes the profile of the informants, all of whom were male. The youngest informant was 41 years old, followed by those aged 43, 45, 48, and 59. They all had significant experience in cockfighting, ranging from 18 to 35 years of continuous involvement. All informants were properly briefed about the research objectives and ethical considerations, including confidentiality measures and the voluntary nature of their participation.

Table 1. Profile of Informants

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Years of Cockfighting Experience
Naldo	Male	45	30 years
Elmar	Male	48	27 years
Eyong	Male	59	35 years
Ely	Male	43	20 years
Ambot	Male	41	18 years

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process commenced following the approval of the study by the Dean of the College of Education. The researchers subsequently submitted a formal letter to the barangay captain of the town where the research was conducted. Prior to the interviews, the researchers secured informed consent from all informants. They were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and the ethical considerations, particularly the assurance of anonymity using pseudonyms and the confidentiality of the information they provided. Once consent was confirmed, the researchers conducted face-to-face interviews using mobile devices to record conversations. A semi-structured interview format was employed to maintain consistency while allowing flexibility for informants to share their experiences in depth. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 90 minutes, depending on the informant's availability and willingness to elaborate. Observational notes were also taken to document tone, body language, and pauses that conveyed emotional depth. The researchers ensured ongoing communication and followed up with the informants when necessary for clarification or additional insights.

2.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted using Clarke and Braun's (2006) six-phase framework, which includes familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and final reporting. Transcripts were carefully reviewed and manually coded to identify recurring patterns across participant narratives. Key themes were grouped under three core areas:

- (1) Intensified financial vulnerability
- (2) Declining employment commitment
- (3) Erosion of family bonds.

Codes reflected informants' experience with income loss, over-indebtedness, missed workdays, workplace underperformance, neglect of family duties, and emotional distance. Triangulation with field notes and relevant literature enhanced the credibility and reliability of the findings. Cross-verifying different data sources helped eliminate bias and ensured that the emerging themes genuinely reflected the lived experiences of the informants. This analytical process revealed how cockfighting participation, though perceived as rational in the short term, evolves into an addictive cycle that reshapes every aspect of life, from household economics to emotional well-being.

3. Findings

The testimonies gathered in this study capture the raw and often painful experiences of Ilonggo bettors. These disparities caused by persistent cockfighting involvement were categorized into three (3) major themes:

- (1) Intensified financial vulnerability
- (2) Declining employment commitment
- (3) Erosion of family bonds

These thematic categories encapsulate the broad socioeconomic consequences of habitual cockfighting participation and are further broken down into twelve (12) recurring subthemes, each reflecting a different dimension of the problem.

The *Intensified Financial Vulnerability through Habitual Betting* indicate that Ilonggo cockfighting bettors experience serious financial instability as a result of their gambling behavior. This vulnerability manifests in the way their income is used, their access to savings, and their ability to make sound financial decisions. Specifically, this theme is reflected in four (4) key ways:

- (1) Cockfighting expenses consume a significant portion of daily earnings;
- (2) Bettors frequently resort to borrowing money to cover losses;
- (3) Monthly savings and income plans are often disrupted due to constant betting; and (4) bettors gradually lose control over their financial decisions and budgeting.

Cockfighting expenses consume a significant portion of daily earnings. Informants consistently admitted that a large part of their wages was often lost to gambling.

Naldo confessed, "*Kada payday, ang kwarta nga para sa pagkaon, napusta ko na. Wala gani ko kabakal bugas isa ka bes,*" [Every payday, the money meant for food, I already gambled. There was even a time I couldn't buy rice.]

Elmar shared a similar experience: "*Gakaon kami sardinas kada adlaw sang kabataan ko. Tungod kay napusta ko na tanan.*" [My children and I eat sardines every day because I've gambled everything away.]

Ely also admitted, "*Tanan nga income ko, nagalabay lang sa akon kamot. Sabong lang ang padulungan.*" [All my income just passes through my hands. It always ends up in cockfighting.]

Ambot added, "*Wala ko na manage ang kwarta ko. Sang una, gabilin ko para sa groceries. Subong, tanan pusta.*" [I no longer manage my money. Before, I set some aside for groceries. Now, it all goes to betting.]

These narratives reveal the damaging consequences of gambling compulsivity and the prioritization of short-term gratification over basic needs.

Another concerning pattern that emerged is bettors' frequent reliance on borrowing money to cover gambling losses. Dependence on *utang* (debt) became a regular coping strategy, especially through loans from family members or informal lenders.

Eyong explained, "*Nangutang ko liwat kay naperde ko sang weekend. Sige lang ko panigurado, pero indi gid ko daog.*" [I borrowed it again because I lost over the weekend. I kept convincing myself I'd win, but I never did.]

Ely added, "*Nagapanghulam ko bisan kabalo ko nga indi ko ka bayad. Wala na ko choice, may bulang pa.*" [I borrow money even when I know I can't repay. I have no choice, there's still another match.]

Ambot shared, "*Nangutang ko sa utod ko, pero ginaaway ko sang asawa niya. Sakit pero ginpili ko gihapon ang sabong.*" [I borrowed it from my brother, but his wife confronted me. It hurt, but I still chose cockfighting.]

Elmar also admitted, "*Tanan nga utang ko subong, tungod na sang sabong. Lain na gid, indi na ini palagpat.*" [All my current debts came from cockfighting. It's too much now, it's not a joke anymore.]

The pattern of borrowing here is not incidental but habitual, often placing bettors in worsening cycles of obligation and shame.

Further, many informants described how their attempts at saving and income planning were constantly disrupted by the lure of betting. Despite intentions to secure money for future needs, cockfighting consistently derailed their plans.

Ambot stated, "*Maski may plano ko mag-save, permi ko lang ginakuha para lang may ipusta.*" [Even if I plan to save, I always end up using it just to place a bet.]

Elmar admitted, "*Ginsulod ko sa paluwagan, pero ginbalik ko lang tanan sa sabong.*" [I joined a savings group, but I just spent it all again on cockfighting.]

Naldo said, "*May kwarta ko sa alkansiya, pero ginbukas ko man sang may laban.*" [I had money in my piggy bank, but I broke it open during a big match.]

Ely remarked, "*Nagaplano ako para sa tuition, pero mas ginauuna ko ang sabong. Daw indi ko na kilala sarili ko.*" [I plan for tuition, but I end up putting cockfighting first. I don't even recognize myself anymore.]

These examples emphasize the difficulty bettors face in preserving income, showing how compulsive gambling behavior overtakes long-term financial planning.

Over time, many bettors also reported a gradual erosion of control over their financial decisions and budgeting practices. What initially seemed like manageable spending evolved into destructive habits that dominated household finances.

Elmar revealed, "*Ginagasto ko lang ang kwarta ko bisan may kinahanglan pa ko bayaran. Indi ko na mabudget sang maayo kay pirmi ko lang ginapusta.*" [I just spend the money even if I still have bills to pay. I can no longer budget properly because I always gamble.]

Eyong shared, "*Sang una ginaobra ko budget, subong indi na. Tanan ginabutang ko sa pusta.*" [I used to make a budget, now I don't. Everything goes to betting.]

Ely admitted, "*Wala na ko pulos magdala kwarta. Daw kada kwarta nga maabot sa akon, sabong dayon.*" [I'm no longer good with money. Every peso I get goes straight to cockfighting.]

Naldo added, "*Pirmi ako kaprenda sang cellphone kag gamit. Daw indi ko na kabalo mag-uyat kwarta.*" [I always end up pawning my phone and things. I don't know how to hold onto money anymore.]

These statements illustrate the gradual breakdown of financial autonomy, reinforcing how cockfighting transforms money management into a chaotic and destructive process.

The *Declining Employment Commitment due to Gambling Involvement* reveals that cockfighting participation disrupts work ethics and professional obligations. Gambling not only diverts physical presence from the workplace but also diminishes mental focus, motivation, and long-term career goals. This theme unfolds in four (4) key aspects:

- (1) Some bettors skip work or arrive late to attend cockfighting matches;
- (2) Job performance suffers as attention shifts from responsibilities to gambling;
- (3) Commitment to job responsibilities declines over time; and
- (4) Work schedules are mismanaged to accommodate gambling activities.

Some cockfighting bettors admitted that they skip work or arrive late because of cockfighting matches. Several informants openly shared instances where they chose the cockpit over their workplace obligations.

Ely confessed, "*May mga adlaw nga indi ako magsulod kay may derby. Kabalo ko indi insakto, pero indi ko gid malikawan.*" [There are days I don't go to work because there's a derby. I know it's wrong, but I can't help it.]

Naldo added, "*Nagahambal ko nga may sakit ko, pero ara ko sa sabungan. Biskan importante ang trabaho, mas ginapili ko sabong.*" [I tell them I'm sick, but I'm actually at the cockpit. Even if the job is important, I still choose cockfighting.]

Elmar shared, "*Wala ko pasulod duha ka adlaw kay may laban. Ginpili ko pa sabong kaysa obra.*" [I skipped work for two days because there was a long derby. I chose cockfighting over my job.]

Eyong remarked, "*May deadline na ko, pero gin-absent ko gihapon. Kabalo ko may risgo, pero ginpadayon ko.*" [I had a deadline, but I still took the day off. I knew there was a risk, but I did it anyway.]

These statements demonstrate how cockfighting competes with, and often overrides, professional responsibilities.

Beyond absenteeism, job performance itself deteriorates as bettors' focus shifts from work to gambling. The mental preoccupation with cockfighting often prevents them from concentrating on their tasks or meeting deadlines.

Elmar shared, "*Bisan ara ako sa trabaho, ang isip ko ara sa sabungan. Daw indi ako makahimo sang maayo nga trabaho.*" [Even when I'm at work, my mind is at the cockpit. I can't do my job well.]

Naldo noted, "*Ginapapati ko lang nga naga obra ko, pero wala na ko gana. Ang huna-huna ko, sunod nga pusta na.*" [I pretend I'm working, but I have no motivation. My mind is on the next bet.]

Eyong said, "*Permi ko gina-check ang cellphone para sa update sa derby. Daw wala ko na ginapangabudlayan trabaho ko.*" [I always check my phone for match updates. It's like I'm no longer taking my work seriously.]

Ely added, "*Nabudlayan na ako mag-concentrate. Kada tunog sang cellphone ko, nagakurog ako kay basi may bulang na.*" [I struggle to concentrate. Every time my phone rings, I get nervous in case there's already a match.]

These responses highlight the psychological grip of cockfighting and its negative effects on work quality and attention span.

Over time, this distraction and disengagement evolve into a weakening of overall commitment to job responsibilities. Bettors expressed growing apathy toward professional growth, deadlines, and long-term career goals.

Ely remarked, "*Daw wala na ko gana magpadayon. Daw obra ko para lang may kwarta ipusta.*" [I no longer feel motivated. I work just to have money to bet.]

Eyong shared, "*Dati gusto ko mag-apply promotion. Subong, indi na. Basta may pang sabong ko, okay na.*" [Before, I wanted a promotion. Now, I don't. As long as I have money to gamble, I'm fine.]

Naldo stated, "*May evaluation ko, pero wala ko na ginhuna. Sabong lang ang mas ginaplano ko.*" [I had an evaluation, but I didn't care. I'm more focused on planning for cockfighting.]

Elmar said, "*Damo nako palya sa ubra. Ginakabig ko na lang nga temporaryo ni tanan.*" [I've failed too many times at work. I just consider everything temporary now.]

These patterns show how the addiction compromises professional ambition and deteriorates long-term work engagement.

Equally troubling is how time management becomes distorted as cockfighting takes increasing priority over work schedules. Informants described deliberately rearranging their time and routines to accommodate betting.

Eyong admitted, "*Ginahuman ko lang dayon trabaho para makalakat sa sabungan.*" [I rush my work just to go to the cockpit.]

Elmar shared, "*Gapangita ko sang rason para makapauli sang temprano. Tapos sabong dayon.*" [I find excuses to leave work early—then it's straight to cockfighting.]

Ely said, "*Ginakompromiso ko na mga meeting para lang indi ko ma-miss ang laban.*" [I skip meetings just to make sure I don't miss a match.]

Naldo stated, "*Biskan may overtime, way ko na ginapatos nga ubrahan. Kay kabalo ko may derby sa piyak.*" [Even if there's overtime, I don't do it. Because I know there's a derby somewhere else.]

These examples reveal how cockfighting dominates their time management, distorting priorities and weakening professional stability.

The *Erosion of Family Bonds through Emotional and Functional Neglect* emphasizes that cockfighting weakens the emotional and structural integrity of families. Relationships become strained due to mismanaged finances, broken promises, and increasing emotional distance. This theme is revealed through four (4) major points:

- (1) Cockfighting-related spending causes financial strain within the household;
- (2) Emotional conflicts arise between family members due to gambling habits;
- (3) Family roles and responsibilities are increasingly neglected by the bettors; and
- (4) Continued gambling weakens emotional support and closeness within the family.

A key theme from the interviews was the strain that cockfighting-related spending placed on household finances. Many informants admitted that a significant portion of their income was diverted to betting, leaving little for basic needs.

Naldo stated, "*May tion nga indi ko na mabakal pagkaon para sa kabataan kay naubos ko na sa sabong.*" [There were times I couldn't buy food for my kids because I spent it all on cockfighting.]

Eyong added, "*Gakaon lang kami sang itlog kag asin. Kay wala na budget kay napusta na tanan.*" [We just eat eggs and salt. Because there's no more budget—it was all gambled.]

Ely shared, "*Ang asawa ko nagapanikasog nga magtipid, pero ginahaboy ko lang sa sabong.*" [My wife tries her best to save, but I throw it all away on cockfighting.]

Elmar admitted, "*Nagakalatulo na lang luha ko usahay. Kay kabalo ko ako rason ngaa gapangabudlay kami.*" [Sometimes I just cry. Because I know I'm the reason we're struggling.]

These responses emphasize the heavy financial toll cockfighting imposes on family life.

As financial problems deepened, emotional conflicts within the household also tended to escalate. Many informants described how their gambling habits led to frequent arguments and eroded family relationships.

Eyong shared, "*Ginaaway ko permi sang asawa ko. Sige lang ko pasalig nga indi na ko mag sabong pero gabalik gid ko.*" [My wife always fights with me. I keep promising to stop but I always go back.]

Elmar said, "*Indi na ako ginapasugtan magsulod balay kon kaisa. Ginakastigo ako sang ginikanan ko sang una.*" [Sometimes I'm not allowed in the house. My parents punish me.]

Ely added, "*Daw way na ko ginapaminsar sang asawa ko. Sigi lang siya kasunggod.*" [It's like my wife doesn't care about me anymore. She's always angry.]

Naldo confessed, "*Gapangayo pasensya ang mga bata ko. Pero wala na gid siguro pagsalig sa akon.*" [My kids ask for forgiveness, but I don't think they trust me anymore.]

These emotional confrontations reflect the breakdown of trust and affection within the home.

The family roles and responsibilities are neglected by bettors. Daily routines such as helping with chores, assisting children with schoolwork, or attending family events are abandoned.

Ely said, “*Daw indi na ko kilala sang anak ko. Permi ko siya ginapabay-an kay ara ko sa sabungan.*” [It’s like my child no longer knows me. I always neglect them because I’m at the cockpit.]

Eyong admitted, “*Wala na ko kaatender bisan piyesta sa balay. Sabong na lang permi.*” [I don’t even attend fiestas at home. It’s always cockfighting.]

Elmar shared, “*Nagapaningkamot asawa ko, pero ginapabayaan ko na lang siya. Wala na ko gana magbulig.*” [My wife works hard, but I just leave her alone. I no longer feel like helping.]

Naldo stated, “*Ginapabay-an ko bisan bata ko may sakit. Indi ko gid mapunggan ang kaugalingon ko.*” [I neglect even when my child is sick. I just can’t control myself.]

These accounts demonstrate the functional disconnection gamblers develop from their roles within the family unit.

Over time, continuous cockfighting involvement weakens emotional support within the family. Informants described growing emotional distance, particularly from their children.

Naldo said, “*Waay na ko ginastorya sang mga bata ko. Daw wala na sila gana mag-upod sa akon.*” [My kids don’t talk to me anymore. They don’t even want to be around me.]

Eyong shared, “*Naglain na panulok sang asawa ko sa akon. Daw ginakabudlayan na siya mag-istorya sa akon.*” [My wife looks at me differently now. It’s hard for her to talk to me.]

Elmar added, “*Gina-palayaan na ko sang pamilya ko. Daw indi na ko welcome sa balay.*” [My family avoids me now. I don’t feel welcome at home anymore.]

Ely confessed, “*Nagakumod ang mga bata ko kung ari ko. Daw indi sila gusto mag-upod sa akon.*” [My children hide when I’m around. They don’t want to be with me.]

These responses reflect how cockfighting creates emotional disconnection, compounding the social damage of addiction within households.

4. Discussion

This study examined the persistent and destructive patterns of cockfighting involvement among Ilonggo bettors. These disparities caused by persistent cockfighting involvement were categorized into three (3) major themes:

- (1) Intensified financial vulnerability
- (2) Declining employment commitment
- (3) Erosion of family bonds.

These themes encapsulate the broad socioeconomic consequences of habitual cockfighting participation and are further broken down into twelve (12) recurring subthemes, each reflecting a different dimension of the problem. Financial vulnerability emerged as a central consequence of regular cockfighting involvement. Many cockfighting bettors described how their daily earnings were consistently redirected toward gambling, often at the expense of essential household needs. They acknowledged spending money originally intended for food, children’s allowances, transportation, and bills. This behavior corresponds with the findings of Reyes et al. (2012), who reported that gambling activities commonly divert income away from necessary expenditures, aggravating poverty in lower-income Filipino households. Becker and Murphy’s theory explains this as a rational calculation, wherein bettors perceive short-term satisfaction, such as winning or entertainment, as more valuable than long-term savings or debt avoidance. As losses mount, many bettors admitted to borrowing money from friends, family, or informal lenders just to continue betting, thereby reinforcing the addiction cycle. This borrowing often led to mounting debts and deteriorating trust within social networks. Over time, bettors lost the ability to manage their finances, creating a persistent pattern of economic instability. Delfin (2020) noted that in economically vulnerable communities, gambling often becomes a misguided survival tactic, an attempt to escape poverty that ironically deepens it. The normalization of cockfighting in many barangays further complicates this cycle; it becomes not only a regular activity but a financial expectation. As budgeting practices erode and the unpredictability of wins grows, the ability to plan for future expenses is diminished. This downward spiral reflects a shift from financial management to reactive decision-making driven by addiction and false hope.

Employment-related issues were the second major area affected by habitual cockfighting participation. Several cockfighting bettors revealed that they frequently skipped work, arrived late, or mentally disengaged from their responsibilities due to preoccupation with cockfighting events. Some would even leave work early or take sudden absences to attend derbies, disrupting both productivity and workplace relationships. These patterns are consistent with Pertierra’s (2012) observations that gambling culture in the Philippines can intersect with and negatively impact labor behavior, especially among those in informal or non-permanent jobs. From the perspective of Rational Addiction Theory, this behavior reflects a decision-making process where immediate gratification from cockfighting takes precedence over the long-term benefits of job retention, promotion, or income stability. As betting becomes habitual, work is increasingly seen not as a livelihood, but as a means to fund future bets. This reframing of work reduces motivation, weakens commitment, and erodes professional discipline. One cockfighting bettor shared that even while physically present at work, his mind was constantly at the *sabungan* (cockpit), demonstrating how addiction alters cognitive focus. The mismanagement of time and growing apathy towards responsibilities can eventually lead to job loss or underemployment. In some cases, this decline in work performance also exacerbated the financial struggles mentioned earlier, thus creating a reinforcing loop of economic hardship and compulsive gambling. These effects point not only to individual irresponsibility but to a systemic problem shaped by cultural acceptance of gambling and lack of structured intervention.

The erosion of family relationships was perhaps the most emotionally impactful consequence reported in this study. Cockfighting bettors frequently described how their gambling disrupted their roles as providers, partners, and parents. Many disclosed that their gambling habits caused significant strain on household finances, which led to conflict with spouses and emotional distancing from children. This aligns with Tan’s (2014) findings on how gambling can destabilize family structures in Filipino communities by shifting financial and emotional resources away from the home. Rational Addiction Theory accounts for this breakdown by suggesting that the gambler perceives greater immediate utility in the cockfighting environment, social connection, personal excit-

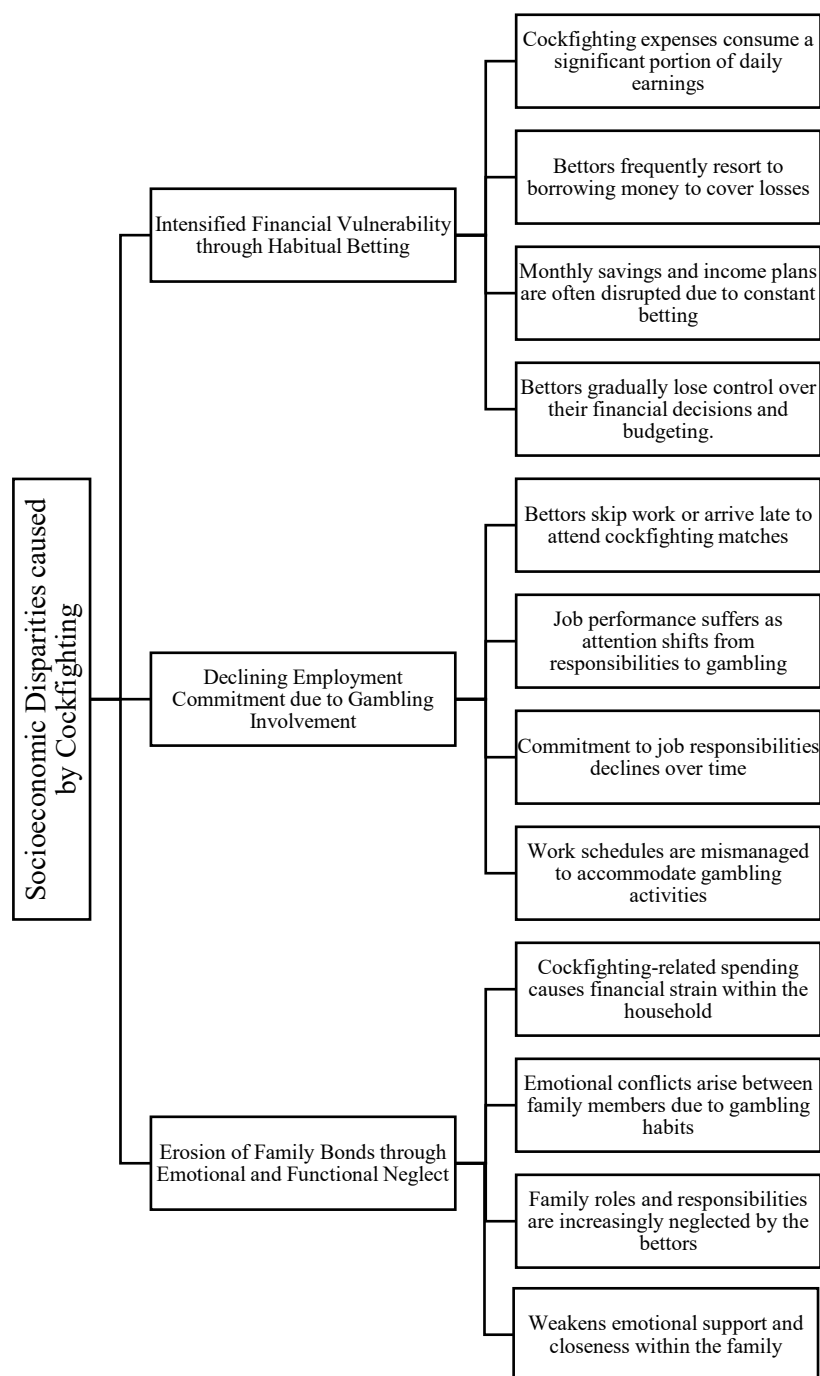


Figure 1. Thematic Map of the Informant's Socioeconomic Disparities caused by Cockfighting

ement, or financial risk than in maintaining long-term family stability. As cockfighting takes priority, time that could have been spent in caregiving, emotional bonding, or household participation is instead allocated to betting. One father admitted that he often missed his children's school events because he was too consumed with matches, while another shared that his wife had threatened separation due to repeated financial neglect. These stories paint a vivid picture of how addiction alters relational dynamics, leaving families fragmented and unsupported. Over time, family members may begin to emotionally detach, develop resentment, or mimic the gambler's coping strategies. In more severe cases, emotional neglect and abandonment can have intergenerational effects, shaping how children view responsibility, conflict, and risk. The weakening of familial cohesion underscores that cockfighting is not merely a private vice but a socially contagious problem that alters domestic life. As family roles dissolve under the weight of addiction, the household becomes not a place of refuge but a site of tension and instability.

This study demonstrates that the effects of cockfighting extend far beyond financial loss. When viewed through the lens of Rational Addiction Theory, it becomes clear that persistent betting behavior is underpinned by a consistent, albeit destructive, logic: the pursuit of immediate benefits, even at the cost of long-term damage. The three themes, (1) intensified financial vulnerability,

(2) declining employment commitment, and (3) erosion of family bonds are deeply interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Previous studies by Reyes et al. (2012), Pertierra (2012), Delfin (2020), and Tan (2014) support these findings, highlighting that gambling in the Philippine context is not solely an economic issue but a complex cultural and psychological phenomenon. The continued normalization of cockfighting in both rural and urban community risks entrenching these harms even further. Addressing these problems will require more than legal prohibition; comprehensive interventions, such as targeted education, financial literacy training, workplace monitoring, and family-centered counseling must also confront the rational yet harmful decision-making patterns that sustain addiction. Without sustained, multi-level action, the cycle of socioeconomic harm driven by habitual cockfighting participation will likely persist. It is imperative that future interventions are informed by a deeper understanding of both individual motivations and the broader sociocultural context in which these behaviors are embedded.

Although this study has examined the socioeconomic disparities among bettors, several limitations should be addressed in future studies. Firstly, the number of informants interviewed was limited to only five (5) individuals, all of whom were biologically male. Since the study employed a descriptive-qualitative design focusing on a small group of Ilonggo bettors, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other regions, gambling practices, or gender perspectives. It is recommended that future researchers broaden their inclusion criteria to include female bettors or individuals of diverse gender identities to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue. Secondly, future studies may utilize quantitative methods to supplement and validate these findings, enhancing their generalizability to larger populations. Thirdly, this study only gathered perspectives from bettors themselves; future research could incorporate insights from family members, employers, and community leaders to further enrich the analysis. Fourthly, all informants were drawn from a single locality; expanding future studies across different regions or cultural contexts could reveal important variations in cockfighting-related behaviors and impacts. Lastly, this study focused primarily on the socioeconomic dimensions of cockfighting involvement; future research could explore its psychological, legal, and community-wide impacts to develop a more holistic understanding of this deeply rooted social phenomenon. However, despite these limitations, this paper provides adequate findings that explain the socioeconomic disparities of cockfighting bettors. Furthermore, the findings from this study could lay the groundwork for future studies.

5. Conclusions

Families were ruined, jobs were neglected, and financial lives spiraled into instability, all because of persistent cockfighting involvement. Bettors, driven by short-term rewards, often prioritized gambling over basic needs, workplace responsibilities, and financial stability. The cycle of borrowing, debt accumulation, and deteriorating family relationships reflected a deepening crisis that extended beyond personal vice. The normalization of cockfighting in many communities rendered these harms invisible or socially acceptable, further entrenching the addiction. As entertainment blurred into compulsion, individual lives and community well-being were increasingly at risk. Left unchecked, this cycle could pass on fractured family dynamics to children, trap households in poverty, and reduce local productivity. Recognizing these impacts is a necessary first step toward crafting effective interventions. Simple prohibition or moral condemnation will not suffice. A comprehensive response must address both individual behavior and the wider cultural environment. Public education should challenge the social acceptance of cockfighting while raising awareness of its consequences. Counseling and rehabilitation services must be made accessible to those trapped in addiction. Community-based programs should engage families and local leaders to foster healthier alternatives. Policymakers must develop culturally sensitive legal and economic strategies to disrupt normalization and offer sustainable opportunities. Without such coordinated action, the harm caused by habitual cockfighting will deepen and affect future generations. The urgency to act is clear before communities become further damaged. Beyond policies, deeper reflection is required. The cocks are not the only ones fighting; they symbolize struggles against hunger, frustration, powerlessness, and despair. For many bettors, the cockpit is not just entertainment but an escape from poverty and unmet hopes. The bloodshed mirrors silent battles within homes and workplaces. Unless these struggles are addressed, legal bans will fail to break addiction's grip. A humane, empathetic response is needed, one that looks beyond the arena and into the human conditions fueling this destructive cycle.

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