



Volume 5	Issue 3	March (2026)	DOI: 10.47540/ijqr.v5i3.2633	Page: 241 – 247
----------	---------	--------------	------------------------------	-----------------

Patterns of Dependency in Patron-Client Relations in the Coastal Community of Dawi-dawi Subdistrict, Pomalaa District, Kolaka Regency

Nur Azisyah Mukmin¹, Andy Budi Nofrianto², Asrani¹

¹Department of Sociology, Universitas Halu Oleo, Indonesia

²Graduate School of Engineering and Science, University of the Ryukyus, Japan

Corresponding Author: Nur Azisyah Mukmin; Email: lisamukmin24@uho.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Coastal Communities, Informal Institutions, Patron-client, Social Security.

Received : 21 February 2026

Revised : 02 March 2026

Accepted : 27 March 2026

ABSTRACT

The continuous growth of coastal populations increases the complexity of social and economic problems in fishing communities, particularly related to dependency on patron-client relationships. This study aims to analyze the pattern of dependency in patron-client relations within the fishing community of Dawi-dawi Subdistrict, Pomalaa District, Kolaka Regency. The research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. Informants were selected purposively, consisting of fishermen as clients, fish dealers as patrons, and community leaders. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, and then analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing with triangulation techniques to ensure data validity. The results of the study show that patron-client relations are formed due to unequal access to capital, markets, and means of production. Fishermen's dependency is reinforced through debt mechanisms, obligations to sell catches below market price, and informal socio-economic support from patrons. In the context of fluctuating income due to uncertain seasons and weather, patronage functions as an informal social safety net that fills the gap in access to formal financial institutions. However, this relationship also reproduces structural inequalities that limit the economic independence of fishermen. This study affirms that patron-client relations are not only an adaptive strategy but also a social structure that has the potential to hinder the empowerment of coastal communities. Therefore, strengthening formal institutions and community-based empowerment strategies are needed to reduce dependency and promote the independence of fishermen.

INTRODUCTION

The population living in coastal areas continues to grow and plays an important role in social, economic, and environmental dynamics. In 2018, approximately 7.29 billion people lived on Earth, 38.1% of whom resided within 100 km of the coastline and 44.6% within 150 km. Moreover, 15% of the global population lives very close to the coast, at a distance of less than 10 km from the shoreline (Cosby et al., 2024). These conditions indicate that coastal settlements have expanded significantly over recent decades, thereby increasing exposure to sea-level rise, land subsidence, and extreme weather events.

Indonesia, as an archipelagic country comprising 17,001 islands, has a substantial coastal

population: 161 million out of a total of 250 million, or around 60%, live in coastal regions. Uncertainty in fishing seasons, limited human resource capacity, restricted access to financial institutions and capital, and extreme weather conditions contribute to the marginalization of fishing communities (Mukramin et al., 2023).

Coastal communities in Indonesia typically possess distinctive social structures, one of which is reflected in patron-client relationships. These relationships are characterized as "unequal," involving hierarchical ties between patrons (middlemen) and multiple clients (followers or labor fishers), based on asymmetrical exchanges of services (Nicky Roberts, 2022). Limited capital, information, and market access compel small-scale

fishers to depend on patrons or capital owners. As a result, fishing communities often remain unaware that they are trapped in dominant and exploitative relations.

Research on dependency patterns within patron–client relations among coastal communities has grown rapidly. An empirical study in Taiwan, for instance, shows that control over fisheries resources shapes livelihood identities and fosters social bonding through kinship, community ties, and long-standing social relations (Matovu et al., 2025). Coastal communities face livelihood uncertainties caused by climate change, thus requiring investment planning to strengthen capital (Pezza & Pinto, 2019; Scott, 1985). In Indonesia, increases in capital for coastal communities are commonly obtained through patron–client ties, resulting in strong emotional and economic dependence (Rajab et al., 2025).

Patron–client relations in coastal societies illustrate asymmetric socio-economic dependency between actors who possess access to resources and capital (patrons) and those who rely on such assistance (clients). In traditional capture fisheries systems, patrons typically occupy positions as owners of production assets, financiers, or marketing intermediaries who provide funding, fishing gear, vessels, and distribution channels to fishers with limited capital and market access (Firzan & Erawan, 2020). Consequently, fishers are obligated to sell their catch to patrons at predetermined prices and through established mechanisms (Rajab et al., 2025). Patron–client patterns influence local social relations, economic structures, and even household decision-making among fishing families (Rajab et al., 2025). The patron–client pattern has an impact on local social relations, economic structures, and even decision-making in fishing households. (Daniella Ferrol-Schulte, 2014).

This study draws on three complementary perspectives: Patron–client theory explains socio-economic dependency in fishing communities (Scott, 1972). Social capital theory refers to networks of social relations embedded within communities that grow and function within social interactions rather than belonging to individuals alone (Putnam, 2015). Empowerment is understood as a process of fulfilling community needs by

strengthening their capacity to manage available resources independently (Prasetyo et al., 2023)

According to the Southeast Sulawesi Provincial Statistics Office, there were 1,281 capture fisheries households in Kolaka Regency (BPS, 2016). Dependency patterns within patron–client relations in coastal communities constitute a complex phenomenon. They are shaped through repeated socio-economic interactions that reinforce the role of patrons in providing capital and facilities, while clients remain in disadvantaged positions that foster long-term dependency. Therefore, this article aims to analyze patterns of dependency, power inequality, informal social protection, and survival strategies among coastal communities in Dawi-dawi Subdistrict, Pomalaa District, Kolaka Regency. This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to efforts that promote the empowerment of coastal communities.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to gain an in-depth understanding of dependency patterns within patron–client relations in coastal communities. This approach was chosen to examine social phenomena holistically through an exploration of meanings, experiences, and social interactions among the involved actors (Asaka & Awarun, 2020). The research site was selected purposively in a coastal area known to exhibit patron–client practices, namely Dawi-dawi Subdistrict, Pomalaa District, Kolaka Regency, Southeast Sulawesi. Informants were selected via purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the patron–client system. The main informants consisted of fishers as clients, patrons (boat owners, financiers, or middlemen), and supporting informants such as community leaders and local officials knowledgeable about the socio-economic conditions of the community.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation analysis to gather information related to work mechanisms, access to capital and production tools, marketing systems, and forms of economic and social dependency experienced by fishers (Yin, 2018; Ningi, 2022). Data analysis included three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles, 1994). Data validity

was ensured through source and method triangulation by comparing information obtained from various informants and techniques. Thus, the findings are expected to possess adequate credibility and reliability in describing dependency patterns within patron–client relations in coastal communities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Structure and Dependency Patterns in Patron–Client Relations

Patron–client relations in coastal communities form part of the social structure that reflects unequal distribution of power and access to resources (Scott, 1972). Social structure refers to relatively stable and institutionalized patterns of relationships among individuals or groups, encompassing hierarchy, stratification, and differentiated roles. The social structure in fishing communities is marked by disparities in capital ownership, market access, and control of production facilities between patrons and clients (Miaji & Islam, 2025).

Patron–client relationships involve personal, asymmetric, and continuous social exchanges, with patrons providing protection and resources, while clients offer loyalty and support (Scott, 1972). An interview with Mr. G, a fisherman, clearly illustrates this reality. He explained: “Here, we already have boats, but we are tied to the middlemen. Wooden boats cost around 15 million rupiah. If rented, fishermen must give their daily income to the middleman according to the agreement. If purchased, they must sell their fish to the middleman at 15,000 rupiah/kg, whereas market prices reach 25,000 rupiah/kg” (Interview, 10 January 2026).

In practice, some fishers use boats owned by middlemen either through rental or purchase arrangements. Under rental systems, the daily catch is shared with the middleman according to mutually agreed rules. Meanwhile, fishers who purchase boats are obligated to sell their catch to the patron at prices below market rates. This dependency is reproductive, as debt mechanisms and sales obligations make it difficult for fishers to escape economic subordination. Limited access to formal financial institutions and open markets strengthens the patron’s role as the primary mediator of economic distribution (Foster, 1961).

Patron–client ties do not occur on an equal footing; rather, they are institutionalized through debt, economic assistance, and informal social protection (Guevara, 2024). Dependency among fishers arises when patrons provide fishing capital, consumption needs, or assistance during lean seasons, while fishers rely solely on motorized boats as their primary technology for livelihood adaptation (Roy & Sharma, 2015). This produces patterns of loyalty in which fishers consistently sell their catch to patrons at predetermined prices. Fishermen and fish farmers often persist with more vulnerable practices (Truong Van et al., 2025).

Dawi-dawi Subdistrict in Pomalaa District, Kolaka Regency, Southeast Sulawesi, has a population of 9,508, comprising 4,875 males and 4,633 females (Kecamatan Pomalaa dalam Angka, 2025). The community’s occupational structure reflects typical coastal characteristics, including fisheries, trade, agriculture, and informal employment. The dominance of sea-based economic activities reinforces Dawi-dawi’s identity as a coastal community dependent on marine resources.

The occupational composition shows that 55% of residents work as fishers, 25% as traders, 10% as private employees, and 10% as farmers. The dominance of fisheries, along with low and fluctuating income levels, significantly contributes to the formation of dependency within patron–client relationships (Huynh et al., 2024; Van Ha et al., 2004).

Fisher incomes are inherently unstable and unpredictable due to the variability of marine resources, weather conditions, seasons, and fish availability (Matovu et al., 2025). This volatility heightens economic vulnerability among fishing households. In an interview, a middleman noted: “Operational costs for one fishing trip reach around 200,000 rupiah, covering 10 liters of diesel fuel and household consumption needs” (Interview, 12 January 2026). Meanwhile, fishers using traps (bubu) earn around 200,000 rupiah per five-day cycle, depending on the fishing method. Longline fishers may catch 20–30 kg of fish under favorable conditions, but such yields are inconsistent, and often they return with no catch at all. This imbalance between fixed production costs and uncertain income creates financial pressure, pushing

fishers to seek support from patrons (Roy & Basu, 2020).

Middlemen thus function both as adaptive and structural mechanisms, providing access to capital and ensuring the continuity of fishing activities, while simultaneously reinforcing dependency in patron–client relationships. Patron–client relations serve as social institutions filling gaps left by absent formal economic protections, yet they also reproduce inequalities in resource access (Caspersen & Gueudet, 2025). Therefore, such relations must be understood not only as livelihood strategies but also as manifestations of social structures that constrain autonomy and empowerment (Prasetyo et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2019).

Patronage as Informal Social Protection in Coastal Areas

Social capital is fundamentally rooted in networks, norms, and trust (Putnam, 1995). It can be understood as a binding element that enables systems or networks to function effectively (Prasad et al., 2012). From a network perspective, social capital encompasses resources that exist or potentially emerge from social ties among individuals or groups and can be mobilized to achieve shared goals. Social capital plays a crucial role as a buffer that reduces risks and strengthens economic resilience, especially where formal financial access is limited (Ignatjeva et al., 2025).

In Dawi-dawi Subdistrict, there is a cooperative owned by middlemen that receives fishers' catch and also provides lending services with an interest rate of 1.6%. This was emphasized by Mr. J, who stated: "Fishers who wish to transact may choose between cooperative loans with 1.6% interest or loans from my personal funds based on an agreement" (Interview, 12 January 2026). The government or related parties need to ensure that the community has a stable income (De Sherbinin, 1996). Fisher cooperatives represent local institutions functioning as informal social capital within coastal communities (Kebede, 2018).

The LEPP M3 (Mina Bahari Micro Coastal Development Institution) cooperative, owned by the patron, currently serves 180 fisher debtors. This scheme strengthens fishers' dependence on patrons both economically and socially (Majid & Memon, 2019; Sheeja & Ajay, 2023). There are 190 fishers in Dawi-dawi Subdistrict, grouped into the Lintas

Samudera Group (68 people), Bahari Group (43 people), and Sitabangang Group (79 people).

Ownership of capital and access to informal institutions such as cooperatives enable patrons to control not only the distribution of catch but also the provision of economic assistance to fishers (Prasad et al., 2012). Patrons often serve as social protectors by assisting clients with non-productive needs such as education, health, and household expenses (Osiki, 2020). Thus, patron–client relations are not purely exploitative but also protective. Nevertheless, the structural inequality persists because clients lack the bargaining power to determine prices or market access independently. Patron–client relations encompass two key dimensions: economic relations related to livelihoods and subsistence needs, and non-economic relations involving social, cultural, political, and social protection aspects (Jedd et al., 2021).

Empirical findings indicate two main factors that shape patron–client relations in Dawi-dawi Subdistrict, Pomalaa District. The first factor is the low and unstable income of fishers. Their economic vulnerability compels them to borrow from patrons or cooperatives to meet basic needs such as food, health care, and education (Iddris et al., 2025). This relationship is not merely a rational choice but an adaptive response to the structural limitations they face (Do, 2025). The second factor concerns changes in wind patterns, which directly influence the intensity of fishing activities. Seasonal variations, including the west wind, east wind, and transitional seasons, often force fishers to suspend fishing operations for safety reasons, resulting in the loss of income. In these circumstances, patrons provide economic protection through lending mechanisms, which in turn strengthen the dependency of fishers on their patrons (Truong Van et al., 2025).

This condition restricts fishers' ability to improve their welfare and hinders economic independence. Therefore, patron–client relations in Dawi-dawi Subdistrict represent not only survival strategies but also power relations that potentially reinforce structural inequalities in coastal communities.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that patron–client relations among fishers in Dawi-dawi Subdistrict, Pomalaa District, are rooted in unequal access to capital, markets, and production tools. Fishers’ dependency on middlemen is not only economic but also social and institutional, manifested through debt, obligatory catch sales, and non-productive assistance such as food and household support. Under volatile income conditions due to seasonal factors and uncertainties in marine resources, patron–client ties serve as informal social protection that compensates for limited access to formal financial institutions.

However, despite their protective and adaptive functions, patron–client relations continue to reproduce structural inequalities that limit fishers’ economic autonomy. Patron dominance in capital ownership and distribution networks reinforces unequal bargaining positions, making it difficult for fishers to escape subordination. Thus, patron–client relationships in coastal regions should be understood not only as survival strategies but also as social structures that may hinder community empowerment. The findings underscore the importance of strengthening access to formal institutions, diversifying livelihoods, and developing community-based empowerment strategies to reduce dependency and promote economic self-reliance among fishers. It is necessary to increase awareness of fishing communities through innovation support and training, especially for young people (Aryeh-Adjei & Amarteifio, 2025)

REFERENCES

- Aryeh-Adjei, A. A., & Amarteifio, J. (2025). Innovative Indigenous Packaging Practices for Sustainable Waste Management and Environmental Conservation in Coastal Ghana: A Meta-Synthesis Study Aligned With SDGs 12 and 13. *The Journal of Environment & Development*, 0(0), 10704965251412784.
- Asaka, D. S., & Olabode Awarun. (2020). Understanding Mechanistic Explanation as A Strategy of Analytical Sociology. *Indonesian Journal of Social and Environmental Issues (IJSEI)*, 1(3), 191-197.
- BPS. (2016). *Jumlah Rumah Tangga Perikanan Tangkap*.
- Caspersen, N., & Gueudet, S. (2025). ‘No longer what you used to be’: Renegotiating relations between de facto states and their patrons. *European Journal of International Relations*, 31(1), 178-202.
- Cosby, A. G., Lebakula, V., Smith, C. N., Wanik, D. W., Bergene, K., Rose, A. N., Swanson, D., & Bloom, D. E. (2024). Accelerating growth of human coastal populations at the global and continent levels: 2000–2018. *Scientific Reports*, 14(1), 22489.
- Daniella Ferrol-Schulte, S. C. A. F., Marion Glaser (2014). Patron–client relationships, livelihoods and natural resource management in tropical coastal communities. *Elsevier*, 100(November 2014), 63-73.
- De Sherbinin, A. (1996). Human Security and Fertility: The Case of Haiti. *The Journal of Environment & Development*, 5(1), 28-45.
- Do, T. D. (2025). Rural Modernization and Livelihood Transitions in Peri-Urban Vietnam: Lessons From New Rural Development in Dai Loc. *The Journal of Environment & Development*, 0(0), 10704965251407168.
- Firzan, M., & Erawan, E. (2020). Patron-Client Relationship in Fisherman Community in Tanjung Limau Village, Kelurahan Gunung Elai Kecamatan Bontang Utara, Bontang City. *Progress In Social Development*, 1(2), 16-22.
- Foster, G. M. (1961). The dyadic contract: a model for the social structure of a Mexican peasant village. *American Anthropologist*, 63(6), 1173-1192.
- Guevara, J. (2024). A Peasant’s Satire of the Politics of Debt (Luke 16:1–8a). *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 54(1), 13-25.
- Huynh, D. V., Duong, L. H., Truong, T. T. K., Nguyen, N. T., & Downes, N. K. (2024). Empowering Employees’ Environmental Citizenship Behaviour: Insights From Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in Climate-Threatened Tourism Destinations. *The Journal of Environment & Development*, 33(4), 730-754.

- Iddris, K., Grant, R., & Oteng-Ababio, M. (2025). Toward a Circular Economy for a Sociotechnical Transition in Ghana's e-waste Sector. *The Journal of Environment & Development*, 34(4), 1021-1048.
- Ignatjeva, O. A., Zubakov, V. M., Kondrateva, E. V., Abdullin, I. I., & Galeev, Z. G. (2025). Economic Security and Social Responsibility of Cooperatives. In *Corporate Social Responsibility to the Green Growth of Business and Economy* (pp. 275-279). Springer.
- Jedd, T., Fragaszy, S. R., Knutson, C., Hayes, M. J., Fraj, M. B., Wall, N., Svoboda, M., & McDonnell, R. (2021). Drought Management Norms: Is the Middle East and North Africa Region Managing Risks or Crises? *The Journal of Environment & Development*, 30(1), 3-40.
- Kebede, G. F. (2018). Social Capital and Entrepreneurial Outcomes: Evidence from Informal Sector Entrepreneurs in Ethiopia. *The Journal of Entrepreneurship*, 27(2), 209-242.
- Majid, H., & Memon, R. (2019). Patronage and Public Goods Provisioning in an Unequal Land. *Social Indicators Research*, 145(3), 805-830.
- Matovu, B., Mammel, M., Lee, M.-A., Hsieh, Y.-L., Lee, T.-P., Hsiao, Y.-J., Korowi, L. G., Zhang, W.-N., Chen, J.-L., Beegum, S., & Kamaruzzaman, Y. N. (2025). Save Us Before We Die: Unmasking Socioecological Systems Complexities and Their Implications On Coastal Fishers' Livelihoods in Select Regions Of Yunlin, Taiwan. *The Journal of Environment & Development*, 0(0), 10704965251401399.
- Miaji, M. Z. I., & Islam, M. N. (2025). Clientelism, Brokers Dominance, and Rigged Election: A Process of Authoritarian Democracy in Bangladesh. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 60(1), 635-650.
- Miles, M. B. (1994). Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook. *Thousand Oaks*.
- Mukramin, S. u., Nulhaqim, S. A., Gunawan, W., & Sulaeman, M. (2023). Homogeneity of Livelihoods of Bajo Tribe Fishermen: Analysis of Determinant Factors of Poverty and Local Economic Empowerment Strategies. *Migration Letters*, 20(S9), 1483-1493.
- Nicky Roberts, B. M., Muh. Rifadly Utina, Farhan Muhatar, Anugerah, Arham Iwardanhi, R. Muhammad Zulkifli, Austin Humphries (2022). Patron-client relationships shape value chains in an Indonesian island-based fisheries system. *Elsevier*, 143.
- Ningi, A. I. (2022). Data Presentation in Qualitative Research: The Outcomes of the Pattern of Ideas with the Raw Data. *International Journal of Qualitative Research*, 1(3), 196-200.
- Osiki, A. (2020). 'Esusu cooperative' as a means of extending social protection to the Nigerian informal economy. *Contemporary Social Science*, 15(4), 461-475.
- Pezza, D. A., & Pinto, C. A. (2019). Applying Systems Thinking to Coastal Infrastructure Systems. *Public Works Management & Policy*, 24(1), 71-87.
- Prasad, S., Jain, A., Tata, J., & Parthan, S. (2012). From Rags to Riches: Tapping the Social Capital within the Solid Waste Informal Sector. *South Asian Journal of Business and Management Cases*, 1(2), 77-89.
- Prasetyo, T., Widodo, P., Saragih, H. J. R., Suwarno, P., & Said, B. D. (2023). Poverty reduction for coastal communities in Indonesia through community empowerment training. *International Journal Of Humanities Education and Social Sciences*, 2(6), 2003-2009.
- Putnam, R. D. (1995). Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital. *J. Democracy*, 6, 65.
- Putnam, R. D. (2015). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. In *The City Reader* (pp. 188-196). Routledge.
- Rajab, M. A., Suhaeb, F. W., & Kamaruddin, S. A. (2025). Patron-Client in Socio Economic Relations of Fisherman in the Coastal Area of Bandar Lampung City, Indonesia. *Asian Journal of Agricultural Extension, Economics & Sociology*, 43(2), 89-95.
- Roy, A., & Basu, S. (2020). Determinants of Livelihood Diversification Under Environmental Change in Coastal Community of Bangladesh. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Rural Development*, 30(1-2), 7-26.

- Roy, A. K., & Sharma, S. (2015). Perceptions and Adaptations of the Coastal Community to the Challenges of Climate Change: A Case of Jamnagar City Region, Gujarat, India. *Environment and Urbanization ASIA*, 6(1), 71-91.
- Scott, J. C. (1972). Patron-client politics and political change in Southeast Asia. *American Political Science Review*, 66(1), 91-113.
- Scott, J. C. (1985). *Weapons of the weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance*. Yale University Press.
- Sheeja, S., & Ajay, A. (2023). State led social security and inclusion of marine fisherfolk: Analyzing the case of Kerala, India. *Marine Policy*, 147, 105392.
- Truong Van, T., Hanh, T. T. H., Huynh Anh, P., & Truong Quang, D. Livelihood Transitions as Responses to Social-Ecological Stressors: Insights From the Central Coast of Viet Nam. *The Journal of Environment & Development*, 0(0), 10704965251401392.
- Truong Van, T., Hanh, T. T. H., Huynh Anh, P., & Truong Quang, D. (2025). Livelihood Transitions as Responses to Social-Ecological Stressors: Insights From the Central Coast of Viet Nam. *The Journal of Environment & Development*, 0(0), 10704965251401392.
- Van Ha, N., Kant, S., & MacLaren, V. (2004). The Contribution of Social Capital to Household Welfare in a Paper-Recycling Craft Village in Vietnam. *The Journal of Environment & Development*, 13(4), 371-399.
- Yang, J., Owusu, V., Andriese, E., & Dziwornu Ablo, A. (2019). In-Situ Adaptation and Coastal Vulnerabilities in Ghana and Tanzania. *The Journal of Environment & Development*, 28(3), 282-308.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications* (Vol. 6). Sage Thousand Oaks, CA.