

Original Research Article

Beyond the Bet: The Lived Experiences of Sugarols in Vista Alegre, Anilao, Iloilo

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Abstract: Sugarols are individuals who take part in sugal sa lamay, a practice linked with gambling which, in some Filipino communities, also functions as a setting for companionship, social interaction, and support for families who have lost a loved one. The present study looked into the lived experiences of sugarols who took part in sugal sa lamay in a rural community in the Philippines. Its objective was to examine how the participants acquired, interpreted, and maintained the meanings connected with the practice within their families and communities. A qualitative phenomenological research design based on George Herbert Mead's Symbolic Interactionism was used. Four sugarols, comprising two men and two women aged between 48 and 67 years, were chosen using purposeful and snowball sampling. Data were collected with the help of an interview guide that had been developed by the researcher, validated, and piloted, and the data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach, with data triangulation employed as a support. The findings identified three main themes: Learning and Normalizing Sugal sa Lamay, Fostering Communal Support and Social Connection, and Regulating Participation Through Moral Values and Social Responsibility. The participants stated that the practice was learned through exposure within the family, by observation and through involvement in the community. It gave them emotional relief, strengthened relationships, promoted a sense of solidarity and provided financial help to bereaved families. Participation was governed by fairness, respect, self-control, accountability and community expectations. The study concludes that sugal sa lamay is a socially embedded practice which expresses the traditions, relationships, support and shared responsibility that exist during times of grief.

Keywords: Sugal Sa Lamay, Sugarols, Lived Experiences, Filipino Funeral Practices, Communal Support, Cultural Tradition.

1. Introduction

Death is more than the end of life; it is also a social and cultural event where families and communities come together to express grief, preserve traditions, and strengthen relationships. In the Philippines, funeral wakes provide spaces for collective mourning and cultural practices that reflect pakikiramay, companionship, and mutual support. One such practice is sugal sa lamay, where games are played during wakes. Although commonly associated with gambling, the practice may also serve as a means of companionship, community presence, and assistance to bereaved families (Sabanpan-Yu, 2009; Jocano, 1999; Reuters, 2015).

Previous studies have discussed the cultural and social functions of Filipino wakes and gambling practices. Sabanpan-Yu (2009) described wakes as communal gatherings where religious activities coexist with conversations, games, and other social activities that support the bereaved. Mijares (2021) emphasized the transmission of funeral traditions across generations, while Salazar (2012) noted that gambling may serve as leisure, social interaction, and diversion. Reuters (2015) and Dela Torre (2024) also highlighted its social and financial dimensions, particularly community presence and assistance with funeral expenses.

However, limited attention has been given to the lived experiences of sugarols themselves. Previous literature focuses more on the functions of the practice than on how participants learn, understand, and give meaning to it. Understanding these experiences is important because cultural practices are sustained through the meanings individuals develop through social relationships.

George Herbert Mead's Symbolic Interactionism provides a lens for understanding this process. The theory explains that meanings are developed and interpreted through social interaction. In sugal sa lamay, participants may attach meanings to cards, money, companionship, community expectations, and their roles during the wake.

Against this backdrop, this study explores the lived experiences of sugarols participating in sugal sa lamay in Barangay Vista Alegre, Anilao, Iloilo, using a phenomenological approach. It seeks to answer the question: What are the lived experiences of sugarols participating in sugal sa lamay? The study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how participants construct and sustain meanings related to tradition, communal support, social relationships, and responsibility within this local practice.

2. Methods:

2.1 Research Design

In this study, a qualitative research design was utilized to explore and understand the lived experiences, meanings, and perspectives of individuals who participate in sugal sa lamay. This design allows researchers to examine social phenomena within their natural settings and gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences through their own narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study is anchored on the Theory of Symbolic

Interactionism, which posits that individuals create and assign meanings to objects, events, and social practices through interaction with others (Mead & Blumer, 1969). Thus, this study aims to identify *sugarols*' creation of the meaning of *sugal sa lamay*.

This study used a researcher-made interview guide divided into nine (9) sections namely: (1) Meaning (Symbolism) to explore how participants personally define and understand *sugal sa lamay* and the meanings they attach to the practice; (2) Social Construction of Meaning, to determine how participants developed their understanding of *sugal sa lamay* through interactions with family, friends, and the community; (3) Language and Symbols, to identify the words, objects, gestures, and practices that participants use as symbols in *sugal sa lamay*; (4) Interaction, to examine how face-to-face interactions influence participants' behavior while gambling during a wake; (5) Interpretation, to understand how participants interpret situations, social cues, and the appropriateness of their actions during *sugal sa lamay*; (6) The Self: "I" and "Me", to explore the participants' internal dialogue between their personal desires and the social expectations imposed by the community; (7) Role-Taking, to determine how participants view themselves from the perspectives of others and how these perceptions influence their behavior; (8) Generalized Other, to examine the influence of community norms, shared expectations, and social approval on participants' behavior; and (9) Closing Integrative Question, to obtain the participants' overall understanding of the role and significance of *sugal sa lamay* within the community.

2.3 Informants

Table 1. Informants of the Study

INFORMANTS	AGE	SEX	OCCUPATION
Aling Rosa	48	Female	Businesswoman
Mang Pedro	50	Male	Businessman
Mrs. Carmen	67	Female	Retired Teacher
Kap. Ernesto	52	Male	Barangay Captain

Four (4) *sugarols* were participants of this study. They were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) he/she participated in *sugal sa lamay*; (2) he/she is knowledgeable and experienced about practices, meanings, and interactions surrounding *sugal sa lamay*; and (3) he/she agrees to be interviewed and share his/her experiences about the ritual. The informants are divided into two (2) female and two (2) male participants. The youngest participant is 48 years old, followed by another at age 50, then 52, and the oldest is 67. To identify these participants, the researchers used snowball sampling. This is

to locate those who could provide detailed information about their perceptions and experiences about *sugal sa lamay*.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process began after the Research Adviser and the Dean of the College of Education approved the study. The researchers then presented a formal letter to each of the informants. Upon approval, the researchers sent letters to formally inform the informants about their involvement in the study, and explained the ethical considerations, including the anonymity and the confidentiality of the data collected. Once the respondents approved, the researchers conducted the interview using mobile phones to record the conversations.

2.5 Data Analysis Procedure

After data collection, the interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. Inductive and reflexive thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and themes that emerged from the data (Byrne, 2022). The study followed Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis framework:

- 1) Familiarize yourself with the transcripts. The researchers repeatedly read the transcripts to understand the informants' experiences and perceptions of *sugal sa lamay*.
- 2) Generating initial codes. Significant statements, phrases, and ideas relevant to the research questions were identified and assigned codes.
- 3) Identifying potential themes. Related codes were grouped to identify recurring patterns and develop themes and subthemes.
- 4) Reviewing the themes. Emerging themes were compared with the original responses and refined when necessary.
- 5) Defining and naming themes. The central meaning of each theme was identified and organized with its related subthemes and codes.
- 6) Writing the findings. The final themes were presented using relevant statements from the informants and interpreted in relation to the research questions, Symbolic Interactionism, and related literature. Data triangulation was also employed to strengthen the credibility of the findings by examining the data from multiple perspectives (Moon, 2019).

3. Findings

To explore the lived experiences of sugarols regarding *sugal sa lamay*, the findings reveal that the practice extends beyond gambling and functions as a culturally embedded activity through which individuals learn community traditions, cope with grief, strengthen social relationships, and regulate their behavior during wakes. Rather than viewing *sugal sa lamay* solely as a recreational activity, participants described it as an integral part of mourning that reflects shared cultural values and communal practices. The analysis generated three (3) major themes, eight (8) sub-themes, and twenty-five (25) categories that collectively describe the meanings and experiences associated with *sugal sa lamay*.

Findings suggest that learning and accepting sugal sa lamay is a gradual social process that develops through everyday interactions within the family and community. Divided into two (2) sub-themes, namely (1) Sustaining Cultural Traditions and (2) Normalizing the Practice through Family Exposure.

3.1.1 Sustaining Cultural Traditions

Sustaining Cultural Traditions demonstrates how sugal sa lamay continues across generations through shared cultural practices and active community participation. This sub-theme includes (1) Inheriting Cultural Traditions and (2) Preserving Community Practices.

Inheriting Cultural Traditions

Repeated exposure during wakes gradually shapes the participants' understanding of the activity as a normal and expected part of community mourning. Aling Rosa shared: *"Amo man gyapon ah, siyempre normal na siya kung may namatyan [It has become normal whenever someone dies]."* Kap. Ernesto stated, *"Nagdako ako nga ginakabig ini nga normal nga parte sang paglamay [I grew up thinking that it is a normal part of a wake]."*

Preserving Community Practices

The continuity of the practice remains highly visible through the active collective involvement and sustained engagement of individual community members during wakes. Kap. Ernesto explained, *"Daw kabahin na gid ini sang tradisyon nga ginatamdan sang mga tawo [It has become part of tradition that people are used to]."* Mang Pedro noted, *"Normal gid man [It is already normal]."*

3.1.2 Normalizing the Practice through Family Exposure

Normalizing the Practice through Family Exposure illustrates how family interactions and early community experiences shape participants' understanding of sugal sa lamay. This sub-theme includes (1) Receiving Parental Influence, (2) Experiencing Early Social Exposure, and (3) Learning through Observation.

Receiving Parental Influence

Parents functioned as the participants' first source of cultural exposure, bringing them to wakes and normalizing the practice as a form of paying respect to bereaved families. Mrs. Carmen recalled, *"Kun may namatyan sa palibot, ginadala ako ni tatay kag nanay [Whenever there was a death nearby, my father and mother would bring me along]."*

Experiencing Early Social Exposure

Regularly witnessing gambling activities within the neighborhood reinforced the perception of the practice as an ordinary, customary component of community life. Kap. Ernesto explained, *"Una ko gid ini nabal-an halin pa sang gamay ako kay pirmi ko makita kada may lamay sa amon lugar [I learned about this when I was young because I always saw it whenever there was a wake in our place]."*

Learning through Observation

Observation plays a foundational role in transmitting behavioral expectations, showing newcomers how to conduct games with structural integrity. Kap. Ernesto explained, “*Sila ang nagapakita kung paano himuon ini nga malinong, patas, kag may respeto [They showed how to do it peacefully, fairly, and with respect]... Kung makita ko nga ang iban naga sunod sa patas nga paagi kag wala daya, amo man akon ginatuman [If I see others playing fairly and without cheating, I also follow that].*”

3.2 Fostering Communal Support and Social Connection

The findings indicate that sugal sa lamay extends beyond recreational gambling by fostering communal support and strengthening social relationships during wakes. Divided into three (3) sub-themes, namely (1) Coping with Grief Through Emotional Relief, (2) Building Social Support Through Community Solidarity, and (3) Providing Supplementary Financial Assistance.

3.2.1 Coping with Grief Through Emotional Relief

Coping with Grief Through Emotional Relief illustrates how sugal sa lamay provides participants with opportunities to temporarily ease the emotional burden associated with death. This sub-theme includes (1) Managing Emotional Burdens and (2) Diverting Attention from Grief.

Managing Emotional Burdens

The activity creates a safe avenue for collective structural interaction, facilitating laughter and conversation that temporarily counteracts bereavement. Mang Pedro shared, “*Pero kung may sugal, bisan paano, daw maka bawas sa ila kalisud [But if there is gambling, somehow, their hardships feel lighter]*” Aling Rosa added, “*Sadya sadya lang ah, tungod sa sugal nag megohay kamo, nag ka kilalahay kamo [It is just for fun. You laugh and get to know people because of the game].*”

Diverting Attention from Grief

Engaging directly in card games or peripheral social conversations offers periods of companionable distraction, reducing the immediate emotional intensity of loss. Aling Rosa shared, “*Mabuhinan ila kasubo, may kaistorya sila [Their sadness is reduced because they have people to talk to].*”

3.2.2 Building Social Support Through Community Solidarity

Building Social Support Through Community Solidarity demonstrates how sugal sa lamay strengthens relationships and reinforces collective support during wakes. This sub-theme includes (1) Expressing Empathy and Emotional Support, (2) Strengthening Interpersonal Relationships, (3) Promoting Community Cohesion, (4) Encouraging Reciprocity and Mutual Aid and (5) Cultivating Belongingness and Community Acceptance.

Expressing Empathy and Emotional Support

A participant's physical presence at the game tables serves as a visible expression of compassion, signaling to mourning families that they are not alone. Mang Pedro explained, *"Para gani maka buylog ka sa namatyan, indi lang man siling ga sugal lang, kundi makita nila nga ara kamo [You join the wake not only for gambling, but so the family can see that you are there with them]."* Mrs. Carmen stated, *"Nag kadto ikaw sa lamay in order to empathize with the family..[Being present is a way of showing that I am part of the community and willing to help in their time of hardship]."*

Strengthening Interpersonal Relationships

Shared participation provides a relaxed venue where neighbors and relatives can network, joke, and deepen existing social ties. Mrs. Carmen shared, *"Nagmessage don daan ang mga kontra sa Mahjong para magabot bala kami... magahampang na, kag dira man naga umipisa ang pagpalapad sang relasyon sa komunidad [People talk, joke with one another, and this becomes the start of strengthening relationships within the community]."*

Promoting Community Cohesion

The gathering brings together peripheral community members who might otherwise skip official civic assemblies, aligning them toward a single communal purpose. Mrs. Carmen shared, *"Ang komunidad daw naga tipon-tipon gid para maghatag kusog sa pamilya nga nabilin [The community gathers together to give strength to the family left behind]..."* Mang Pedro added, *"Naga pasalamat na sila nga naga kadto ikaw, kay daw gina kabig nila nga pamilya ang naga buylog sa ila kalisud [They are thankful that you came because they already consider those who accompany them in difficult times as family]."*

Encouraging Reciprocity and Mutual Aid

Attending a wake operates within an ongoing, unwritten system of mutual community reassurance, ensuring that local families receive aid with the expectation of future cyclical return. Mang Pedro stated, *"Kabalaslan man nila eh, kung sa pila ka adlaw, may ano man sa inyo, ara man sila [They will also return the favor because someday, if something happens to your family, they will also be there]."* Mrs. Carmen added, *"Nami gid panumdumon nga naga buylog ang isa ka komunidad para mag bulig sa isa ka pamilya [It is good to see the community coming together to help one family]."*

Cultivating Belongingness and Community Acceptance

Active execution of social roles during the wake enables gamblers to build trust, reinforce their community value, and secure interpersonal validation. Mang Pedro shared, *"Manamian kaw, kay na appreciate ka nila bala aw [They like you more because they feel appreciated]."* Mrs. Carmen added, *"Malipay gid ikaw kay appreciated ikaw even though gamay lang nga bagay ang gin ubra mo [The family will appreciate your presence because you are there during their time of sadness]."*

3.2.3 Providing Supplementary Financial Assistance

Providing Supplementary Financial Assistance demonstrates that sugal sa lamay functions as an informal means of assisting bereaved families with funeral-related expenses. This sub-theme includes (1) Contributing Financial Resources, (2) Pooling Collective Resources, and (3) Supplementing Abuloy or Daguro.

Contributing Financial Resources

The revenue accrued from gambling operates as an immediate cash reserve earmarked to offset costly burial procedures. Mang Pedro shared, *“Luwas sa abuloy, may tong, e dugang na sa ila ang gastos kag kinahanglanon [Aside from donations, the money collected from the card games adds to the family’s expenses and needs].”* Mrs. Carmen stated, *“Para bulig man sa ila mga galastoson, kay tam-an ka gasto kun may patay [You help with their expenses because having a death in the family is very costly].”* Aling Rosa added, *“Isa gid ini ka pamaagi sang pagbulig sa pamilya sang napatay, labi na sa pinansyal [It is also a way of helping the family of the deceased, especially in the financial aspect].”*

Pooling Collective Resources

Financial stability is reinforced when fractional table bets from numerous individual community members combine into an impactful aggregate fund. Aling Rosa stated, *“Bisan gamay, ginakabig ko ini nga importante [Even a small contribution is important because it adds strength to their emotional and financial situation]... Gina ekspektar man nga may adlaw daa para mag buylog kag mag buruligay kita [These occasions are opportunities for everyone to come together and help one another].”*

Supplementing Abuloy or Daguro

The systematic collection of table commissions (tong) serves as a vital monetary layer that works in tandem with traditional voluntary donations rather than supplanting them. Mang Pedro stated, *“Luwas sa abuloy, may tong sa baraha [Aside from donations, there are additional proceeds from the card games].”*

3.3 Regulating Participation Through Moral Values and Social Responsibility

The findings reveal that participation in sugal sa lamay is guided by shared moral values and social responsibilities that shape how sugarols conduct themselves during gambling activities. Divided into three (3) sub-themes, namely (1) Maintaining Fairness Through Informal Rules, (2) Practicing Self-Control Through Conflict Prevention, and (3) Fulfilling Social Expectations Through Role-Taking.

3.3.1 Maintaining Fairness Through Informal Rules

Maintaining Fairness Through Informal Rules demonstrates how participants regulate gambling activities by adhering to unwritten rules that are collectively recognized within the community. This sub-theme includes (1) Establishing Shared Agreements, (2) Observing Fair Play, (3) Demonstrating Respect, and (4) Upholding Integrity.

Establishing Shared Agreements

Stipulating game guidelines and financial payout structures before gameplay begins drastically reduces subsequent transaction friction. Mang Pedro stated, “*May ara man gid patakaran sa sugal nga waay lang dayaay tapos kwarta kwarta lang, waay pag-uway. Para waay gamo [There are rules in gambling, such as no cheating and only money bets, no fighting, so there will be no trouble].*” Aling Rosa added, “*May ara man nga kinahanglan may kasabutan antes magsugod, agud malikawan ang indi paghangop sa ulihi [There should also be an agreement before the game starts to prevent misunderstandings later].*”

Observing Fair Play

Maintaining absolute transparency and eliminating deceptive behavior protects interpersonal player trust over long evening hours. Mang Pedro stated, “*Wala gid dayaay, tapos ning fair lang bala, kwarta kwarta lang [No cheating, just fair play, only money involved].*” Kap. Ernesto shared, “*Kung makita ko nga ang iban naga sunod sa patas nga paagi kag wala daya, amo man na ang akon ginatuman [If I see others playing fairly and without cheating, I also follow that].*”

Demonstrating Respect

Respect demands total compliance with individual boundaries, validating the choices of those who opt out due to competing moral frameworks. Mrs. Carmen stated, “*Kung may indi pabor, ginarepseto gid ini. Indi dapat piliton ang bisan sin-o nga mag-upod kay ang pagrespeto sa opinyon sang iban amo man ang isa ka importante nga parte sang komunidad [If someone does not agree, it should be respected. No one should be forced to join because respecting others’ opinions is also an important part of the community].*”

Upholding Integrity

Personal accountability involves keeping promises and executing precise, correct financial settlements without delay. Mrs. Carmen stated, “*Para man sa akon, yes there are several, the most common behavior that signals disrespect would be ang pangdaya [The most common behavior that signals disrespect would be cheating].*” Aling Rosa added, “*Shempre sa respect naman ya, bayad insakto, kung pira ya gin istoryahan ninyo [Respect means paying the correct amount based on what was agreed upon].*”

3.3.2 Practicing Self-Control Through Conflict Prevention

Practicing Self-Control Through Conflict Prevention illustrates how participants regulate their own behavior to preserve peace and harmony during gambling activities. This sub-theme includes (1) Exercising Behavioral Discipline, (2) Setting Personal Limits, and (3) Preventing Conflict.

Exercising Behavioral Discipline

Conscious behavior modification prevents internal gaming passions from spilling over and compromising the overall solemn architecture of the wake. Kap. Ernesto stated, “*Ginabalanse ko ang akon gusto kag ang respeto paagi sa pagpakita sang disiplina sa*

akon kaugalingon. [I balance my personal desires and respect through self-discipline. I know how to assess the situation and understand the limits of my participation in the game]... Aling Rosa added, “Ginapaninguhaan ko gid nga magpabilin nga may respeto kag indi magpasobra sa akon ginahimo bilang konsiderasyon sa ila kahimtangan [I try to remain respectful and not go beyond my limits as consideration for their situation].”

Setting Personal Limits

Setting internal financial and temporal boundaries prompts individuals to leave the table responsibly once personal allocations are spent. Kap. Ernesto stated, “*Pag halimbawa, damo tawo, naga hinagaday man nga ‘dali kita, malingaw-lingaw lang ah, ma untat ta kung wala na kwarta’ [When there are many people, they invite each other saying, ‘Come on, just for fun. We will stop at this time or when the money is gone.’]*.” Mrs. Carmen added, “*Kabalo gid ako magtan-aw sang lugar kag tiyempo—kung hasta diin lang dapat ang akon pag-intra sa hampang [I know how to look at the place and the time—I know my limits in participating in the game].*”

Preventing Conflict

De-escalating potential structural tension hinges upon early, clear verbal alignment regarding right and wrong interactive behaviors. Mang Pedro stated, “*Sa sugal sa lamay, dapat magkaisa kamo kun ano ang sala kag tsakto kay kun indi ti dira pwede mag umpisa ang gamo [In gambling during a wake, you should agree on what is wrong and what is right because if not, conflict can begin].*” Aling Rosa shared, “*Actually no, wala gid. Kay shempre sa una pa lang aware don kamo kag may mga inistoryahan don kamo, so ma avoid niyo gid ang conflict once agreed kamo sa isa ka bagay [Actually, no. Everything is already discussed beforehand, so conflicts can be avoided once everyone agrees].*”

3.3.3 Fulfilling Social Expectations Through Role-Taking

Fulfilling Social Expectations Through Role-Taking highlights how participants align their behavior with the expectations and values upheld by the community. This sub-theme includes (1) Complying with Community Norms, (2) Demonstrating Accountability, and (3) Fulfilling Communal Obligations.

Complying with Community Norms

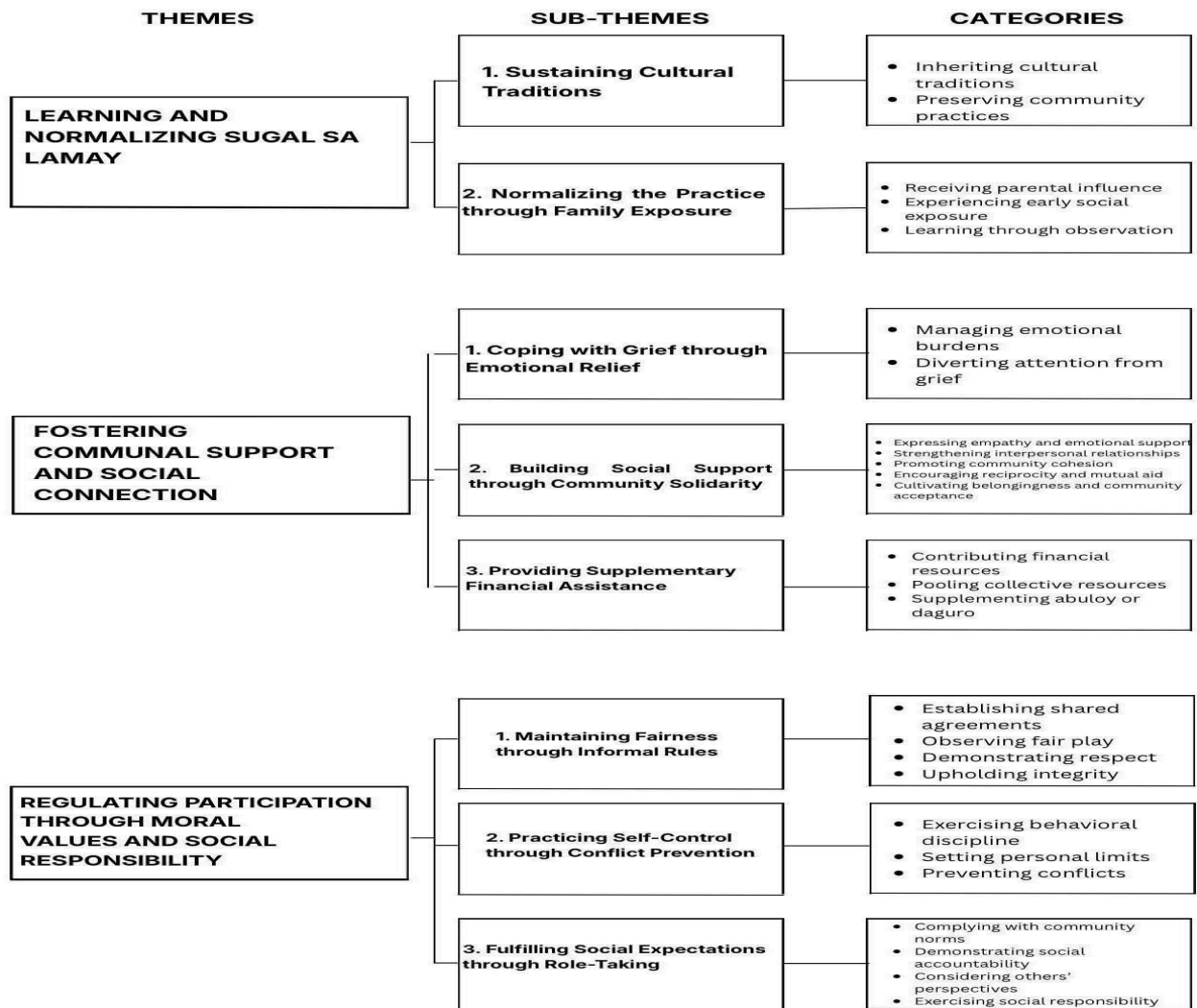
Participants intentionally conform their actions to match deep-rooted neighborhood standards, actively utilizing community-approved roles to express ongoing solidarity with families weathering sudden loss. Kap. Ernesto shared, “*Siyempre, subong nga kapitan, dapat makita man sang tawo nga nagasugot kita sa kon ano ang naandan naton sa komunidad basta wala man sing may nagagamo [Of course, as captain, people need to see that we respect what is customary in our community as long as no one causes trouble].*” Mrs. Carmen added, “*Indi man tsakto nga magpain-pain ka; kon ano ang tradisyon sang kalabanan, ginasunod gid naton para sa pag-upod [It's not right to isolate yourself; whatever the tradition of the majority is, we follow it for the sake of solidarity].*”

Demonstrating Accountability

This category highlights how players accept full responsibility for their financial transactions and verbal conduct at the gaming table, ensuring that personal behaviors do not disrupt the collective space. Mang Pedro emphasized, “*Kon pirdi ka, batunon mo. Himoan mo gid sing paagi nga mabayaran ang obligasyon mo kay lamay ini, indi ini ordinaryo nga sugalan* [If you lose, you accept it. You must find a way to pay your obligation because this is a wake, not an ordinary gambling den].” Aling Rosa noted, “*Responsibilidad mo nga magpugong sang imo kaugalingon. Panindugan mo kon ano ang ginkasugtan* [It is your responsibility to control yourself. You have to stand by what was agreed upon].”

Fulfilling Communal Obligations

Active participation is ultimately framed as a social duty to keep the wake alive through the night, preventing loneliness and ensuring the bereaved family feels protected by their peers. Mrs. Carmen explained, “*Obligasyon naton nga updan ang pamilya tubtob magbuntag. Ang sugal amo ang nagapukaw sa mga tawo para indi mabiyaan ang minatay* [It is our obligation to accompany the family until morning. Gambling is what keeps people awake so the deceased is not left alone].” Kap. Ernesto concluded, “*Dako gid ang bulig sini kay kon wala sing nagahampang, kamingaw gid sang lamay kag daw ginasikway naton ang nagalilong* [This is a huge help because if no one is playing, the wake becomes too lonely, and it feels like we are neglecting the bereaved].”



4. Discussion

This study explored the lived experiences of sugarols regarding *sugal sa lamay* in Barangay Vista Alegre, Anilao, Iloilo. Across the participants' narratives, *sugal sa lamay* emerged as more than a gambling activity; rather, it was experienced as a culturally embedded social practice woven into the community's way of mourning, where traditions are preserved, relationships are nurtured, and shared responsibilities are fulfilled during times of loss. The participants' experiences further demonstrate that the meaning attached to the practice develops through repeated interactions with family members, fellow participants, the bereaved family, and the wider community. These experiences were reflected in the interconnected themes of Learning and Normalizing Sugal sa Lamay, Fostering Communal Support and Social Connection, and Regulating Participation Through Moral Values and Social Responsibility, which collectively illustrate how the practice is learned, experienced, and sustained. This progression is consistent with Mead's Symbolic Interactionism, which explains that meanings are created, interpreted, and reinforced through social interaction.

Learning and Normalizing *Sugal sa Lamay* is a process wherein people learn about the tradition by being exposed to and participating in it in the family and community. Sustaining Cultural Traditions was achieved through the description of how the tradition has been passed on from generation to generation, and was even inherited. The process of normalizing the Practice through Family Exposure was achieved by the responses of the participants on how they were exposed to the tradition through parental influence, social exposure, and learning the rituals and practices by experience at an early age. These experiences correspond with Jocano (1999), who emphasized that Filipino cultural values and practices are learned through family and community interaction, and Sabanpan-Yu (2009), who described Filipino wakes as communal spaces where traditions and social relationships are maintained. Mijares (2021) further emphasized the persistence of Filipino funeral traditions across generations. The findings therefore suggest that the normalization of *sugal sa lamay* occurs through a process of observation, participation, and repeated social interaction, through which individuals gradually acquire the shared meanings attached to the practice.

Fostering Communal Support and Social Connection is how *sugal sa lamay* provide emotional, interpersonal, and financial functions in the mourning process. Coping with Grief Through Emotional Relief is achieved through dealing with emotions and shifting the grieving person's attention away from their loss: gambling, conversation, and laughter help the mourner forget their sadness for a while. Building Social Support Through Community Solidarity, on the other hand, is demonstrated through expressing empathy to the grieving and providing emotional support, strengthening interpersonal relationships, promoting community cohesiveness, encouraging reciprocity and mutual aid, and fostering belongingness and community acceptance. In addition, the function of Providing Supplementary Financial Assistance is observed when people contribute financially to the grieving or pool funds to give supplementary *abuloy* or *daguro* to the grieving family. These support Salazar (2012), who found that gambling in Filipino communities can function as leisure, social interaction, and psychological relief; Reuters (2015), which reported that gambling during wakes may encourage continued presence while generating funds for funeral expenses; and Dela Torre (2024), who described informal practices during wakes as extensions of *abuloy* and expressions of empathy, solidarity, and collective responsibility. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the social meaning of *sugal sa lamay* is constructed through shared experiences of companionship, emotional support, solidarity, and mutual assistance.

Regulating Participation Through Moral Values and Social Responsibility focuses on how individuals negotiate their desires with the expectations of the community and the seriousness of the wake. Maintaining Fairness Through Informal Rules focuses on establishing mutual agreements, observing fairness, showing respect, and upholding integrity. This is demonstrated by the informal rules described such as cheating and fighting. These expectations are supported through Practicing Self-Control Through Conflict Prevention. By practicing behavioral discipline, setting limits, and preventing conflicts, participants can manage their conduct and avoid disrupting the wake. Social

expectations emerge through Fulfilling Social Expectations Through Role-Taking by showing compliance with community roles, displaying social accountability, considering social perspective, and social responsibility. These findings correspond with Pertierra (2002), who emphasized the recreational and social dimensions of gambling and participants' capacity for controlled participation, while PAGCOR (2022) highlighted the importance of responsible behavior and community norms in traditional gambling practices. Sabanpan-Yu (2009) further emphasized the communal expectations surrounding Filipino wakes, where presence and participation signify solidarity and respect. The findings consequently illustrate how participants interpret the expectations of others and regulate their behavior accordingly, reflecting Mead's concepts of Role-Taking, the "Me," and the Generalized Other, wherein social expectations influence how individuals act within a particular situation.

Overall, the findings reveal that *sugal sa lamay* is a socially constructed practice whose meaning is continuously developed and reinforced through interaction. Cultural inheritance, parental influence, early exposure, and observation contribute to its normalization, while emotional relief, companionship, solidarity, reciprocity, and financial assistance give the practice broader communal significance. At the same time, fairness, respect, self-control, accountability, and social expectations provide boundaries that regulate participation and preserve harmony within the wake.

The study is limited to four informants from only one barangay which limits the generalizability of the findings. Purposeful and snowball sampling might have led to selection bias because informants were recruited from overlapping social circles. Data were collected through one-off interviews, providing a cross-sectional rather than longitudinal view of how experiences may change over time. Interviews were conducted in Hiligaynon/Kinaray-a and translated into English, which may have lost some nuance in meaning. Finally, as in qualitative research, the interpretation of themes had some subjectivity on the part of the researcher, but triangulation and validation by experts helped to improve the credibility. These limitations imply that the results should be interpreted as context-specific and not as broadly generalizable.

5. Conclusion

The Family, community ties, cultural customs and common values of sugarols are closely linked to their experience of *sugal sa lamay*. This practice is acquired through taking part in family activities, by observing others and being involved in community events, which enables sugarols to come and understand the significance and importance of it. *Sugal sa lamay* gives people a sense of comfort when losses occur, helps to strengthen friendships and community relationships, demonstrates solidarity and allows sugarols to give financial assistance to families who have suffered a loss. Furthermore, sugarols follow informal rules such as fair play, respect and self-control, rules which have been influenced by their own experiences and by expectations of their community. Indeed, these lived experiences prove that *sugal sa lamay* is not simply a game of chance since it has social and cultural meaning

that links sugarols to their families, community and traditions while at the same time providing emotional support and helping to strengthen relationships during times of grief.

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