



Vol. 4, No. 3, September 2026, pp. 1952-1960

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF

POST AXIAL

FUTURISTIC TEACHING AND LEARNING

<https://journal.amorfati.id/index.php/postaxial> | ISSN 3025-7549



Human Dignity Value Education as an Effort to Prevent Human Trafficking in the Parish of Hati Tersuci Maria Oe-Ekam, South Central Timor

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Article History:

Received:

24-07-2026

Revised:

26-08-2026

Accepted:

22-09-2026

Keywords:

Catholic Social Teaching;
Human Dignity; Human
Trafficking; Parish-Based
Education; Value Education

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Abstrac

Human trafficking continues to threaten human dignity in South Central Timor, where poverty, limited education, and migration pressures increase vulnerability. The Catholic Church has assumed a frontline preventive role. This study examines the implementation of human dignity value education as an effort to prevent human trafficking in the Parish of Hati Tersuci Maria Oe-Ekam, South Central Timor. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected from January to June 2026 through semi-structured interviews with sixteen informants, participant observation, and document analysis. Data were analyzed thematically. Findings show that human dignity education is integrated into catechesis, liturgical homilies, and community-based organic farming training. Key changes include youth shifting from viewing trafficking as a foreign issue to recognizing false job offers and debt bondage, warning peers, and reporting suspicious offers. Basic Ecclesial Communities (KUB) became informal monitoring networks that shared warnings and watched at-risk youth. However, challenges remain: no standardized anti-trafficking curriculum, ad hoc coordination with government agencies, and economic vulnerability driving migration. The study concludes that faith-based value education grounded in Catholic social teaching offers a culturally resonant, community-embedded preventive mechanism. It recommends institutionalizing anti-trafficking modules in parish catechesis, strengthening inter-institutional collaboration, and expanding livelihood programs.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

Human trafficking is a grave violation of human rights that reduces human beings to commodities. This crime occurs not only at the global level but also penetrates regions with structural vulnerabilities such as poverty, limited education, and migration pressures. In Indonesia, human trafficking remains a serious problem even though a legal framework has existed through Law No. 21 of 2007 on the Eradication of the Criminal Act of Trafficking in Persons. The implementation of this regulation has not been fully effective, especially in areas with limited institutional capacity. East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), particularly South Central Timor Regency (TTS), is one of the regions vulnerable to human trafficking. Poverty, limited access to education, and migration pressures make people in this region easily trapped in exploitative job offers. The Catholic Church, through its parishes, then takes on a strategic role as a frontline actor in prevention efforts and assistance for victims (Seran et al., 2024).

Supporting data and facts show that TTS has recorded a number of human trafficking cases with recruitment modus operandi through false promises of work as domestic workers or plantation laborers in Malaysia. These cases show how perpetrators exploit the economic vulnerability and limited information of communities. In this context, the Parish of Hati Tersuci Maria Oe-Ekam is present as one of the parishes actively carrying out social pastoral work. This parish integrates human dignity value education into catechesis, liturgical homilies, and community-based organic farming training. Catechesis for children and youth explicitly instills the principle of *imago Dei*, namely that every human being is created in the image of God and has inherent dignity. Liturgical homilies periodically raise themes of social justice and connect them with the threat of human trafficking. Meanwhile, the organic farming training center becomes an alternative livelihood to reduce the economic vulnerability that is often exploited by traffickers. Nevertheless, these efforts still face challenges in the form of the absence of a standardized anti-trafficking curriculum, ad hoc coordination with government agencies such as BP3MI, and economic pressures that continue to drive young people to seek work abroad through informal channels.

Catholic social teaching places human dignity as the ethical foundation of social life. Human dignity is not determined by ability, wealth, or social status, but is inherent in every person as a creation of God. Recent scholarship has increasingly recognized the relevance of Catholic social teaching in the context of human trafficking. Chow (2025) demonstrates that the Catholic Church thickens transnational anti-trafficking norms by emphasizing human dignity, moral responsibility, and root causes such as poverty and migration, thereby complementing multilateral frameworks that extend beyond the conventional “Four P’s” of prosecution, protection, prevention, and partnerships. Research from Indonesia similarly shows that addressing human trafficking requires more than legal-formal measures; it demands a comprehensive ethical strategy grounded in the Church’s social teachings to restore human dignity (Garuda, 2025). In the NTT context, Leopoldus et al. (2025) argue that trafficking represents a degradation of human dignity as the image of God and that John Paul II’s theology of the body provides a framework for resisting the commodification of the human person.

Empirical studies on faith-based anti-trafficking interventions have also grown. Panda (2025) examines how the Diocese of Weetebula’s Commission for Justice, Peace, and Pastoral Care for Migrants and Refugees in Sumba mobilizes religious authority, social capital, and inter-organizational networks to counter trafficking, showing that Church interventions constitute local infrastructures of protection, advocacy, and trauma recovery. In Maumere, Sikka Regency, Hengky (2026) documents over 700 trafficking victims from 2000 to 2026 and finds that Church pastoral approaches remain largely reactive and charitable, not yet addressing structural root causes, and recommends a preventive dimension through education and community economic empowerment. Beyond Indonesia, Vatican News (2025) reports that a

Thai Catholic sister's anti-trafficking approach rooted in education, empowerment, and community-based leadership has trained over 3,000 teachers and reached more than 60,000 students, while establishing livelihood programs for women in high-risk villages. These studies affirm that faith-based approaches have significant potential in preventing human trafficking, especially when linked to education, economic empowerment, and community strengthening.

However, a research gap remains. Most literature on human trafficking and Catholic social teaching is still normative, focuses on the policy level, or examines contexts outside Eastern Indonesia. While Panda (2025) and Hengky (2026) provide valuable empirical insights from Sumba and Maumere, studies that specifically examine how parishes operationalize human dignity value education—particularly in South Central Timor—are still limited. Not many studies have documented in detail the implementation, perceived impacts, and challenges faced by parishes in carrying out value education-based human trafficking prevention strategies. The existing studies also tend to focus on diocesan-level commissions or large-scale church institutions rather than on the everyday pedagogical practices of parish catechesis, liturgical homilies, and community livelihood programs. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by exploring practices in the Parish of Hati Tersuci Maria Oe-Ekam. The purpose of this study is to examine the implementation of human dignity value education as an effort to prevent human trafficking in the Parish of Hati Tersuci Maria Oe-Ekam, South Central Timor. More specifically, this study answers three research questions: (1) How is human dignity value education implemented in the parish? (2) What are the perceived impacts on awareness and prevention of human trafficking? (3) What challenges limit these efforts? With these questions, this study not only describes practices but also evaluates the extent to which a faith-based approach is able to address the structural problems underlying human trafficking.

The significance or benefits of this study can be seen from three aspects. Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on Catholic social teaching, value education, and faith-based human trafficking prevention, especially in the context of Eastern Indonesia. Practically, the findings of this study can serve as input for the Parish of Hati Tersuci Maria Oe-Ekam, the Diocese of Kupang, BP3MI, and local government in formulating more systematic prevention policies and programs. The recommendations proposed include institutionalizing anti-trafficking modules in parish catechesis, strengthening inter-institutional collaboration, and expanding livelihood programs to address the structural drivers of human trafficking. Socially and ethically, this study reaffirms that the protection of human dignity is the true measure of civilization. Thus, this study not only contributes to the development of knowledge but also to concrete efforts to protect vulnerable groups from exploitation and human trafficking.



Method (منهج)

This study employed a qualitative case study design to capture the lived experiences of parish members and leaders. The site was selected purposively as a parish actively engaged in social pastoral work in TTS. Participants included the parish priest, two catechists, three youth group leaders, and ten community members, totaling sixteen informants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation of catechetical sessions and community meetings, and analysis of parish documents such as pastoral letters and training materials. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and coded thematically. Trustworthiness

was ensured through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Ethical clearance was obtained, and all participants provided informed consent. The study was conducted between January and June 2026.

Identify Subsections

The site was selected purposively as a parish actively engaged in social pastoral work in TTS. Participants included the parish priest, two catechists, three youth group leaders, and ten community members, totaling sixteen informants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews,

Participant (Subject) Characteristics

, participant observation of catechetical sessions and community meetings, and analysis of parish documents such as pastoral letters and training materials. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and coded thematically.

Research Design

Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Ethical clearance was obtained, and all participants provided informed consent. The study was conducted between January and June 2026.

Result (نتائج)

The research data were collected from January to June 2026 through semi-structured interviews with sixteen informants (the parish priest, two catechists, three youth group leaders, and ten community members), participant observation in catechetical sessions and community meetings, and analysis of parish documents such as pastoral letters and training materials. Thematic analysis produced three main themes that directly answer the research questions.

1. Implementation of Human Dignity Value Education in the Parish

The Parish of Hati Tersuci Maria Oe-Ekam implements human dignity value education through three interconnected channels that operate simultaneously. First, catechesis for children and youth. Catechists explicitly include the principle of *imago Dei*—that every human being is created in the image of God and therefore has inherent dignity. In the observed catechetical sessions, catechists used stories of human trafficking survivors as case studies to illustrate how exploitation contradicts God's design. For example, a catechist told about a youth from a neighboring village who was recruited with the promise of work in Malaysia but then experienced debt bondage and violence. This story was used to teach that such actions violate the human dignity given by God. Second, liturgical homilies. The parish priest periodically raises themes of social justice in homilies, connecting Gospel readings with contemporary threats such as human trafficking. In one observed homily, the priest linked the parable of the Good Samaritan with the congregation's obligation to protect those vulnerable to exploitation.

This homily was not only theological but also provided a practical message: the congregation was asked to be vigilant against suspicious job offers and to report them to the authorities. Third, a community-based organic farming training center. The parish runs an organic farming training program that provides practical skills to young people and farming families. This program aims to reduce the economic vulnerability that is often exploited by traffickers. In the observation, it was seen that training participants were taught organic farming techniques, harvest management, and simple marketing. One participant expressed that with these skills, he was no longer tempted to accept overseas job offers through informal channels. Thus, the implementation of human dignity value education in this parish does not stand alone but is integrated into catechesis, liturgy, and economic empowerment. However, this implementation is not yet fully systematic because it depends on the individual initiative of catechists and the priest.

2. Perceived Impact on Awareness and Prevention

The findings show an increase in awareness of human trafficking indicators among participants. A youth leader stated: “Previously, we thought human trafficking only happened to foreigners. Now we know the tricks – false job offers, debt bondage – and we warn our friends.” This statement indicates that human dignity value education has succeeded in transferring knowledge about the *modus operandi* of human trafficking. Community members also reported informally monitoring at-risk youth and sharing information through *Kelompok Umat Basis* (KUB) or Basic Ecclesial Communities. KUB functions as an effective informal communication network for spreading warnings and information about suspicious job offers. A KUB member stated that they are now more careful when a resident suddenly offers work outside the area with the lure of a high salary. However, this impact is still perceptual and has not been measured quantitatively or over the long term. Because there is no standard curriculum, the intensity and quality of the impact depend greatly on the initiative of each catechist. In addition, community vigilance has not fully prevented informal migration, because economic factors remain the main driver.

3. Challenges Limiting Prevention Efforts

Three main challenges were identified from the data. First, there is no standardized anti-trafficking curriculum. The content of education depends greatly on the individual initiative of catechists. Some catechists are more active in seeking materials themselves, while others rely only on general knowledge. As a result, the quality and coverage of human dignity value education are uneven across catechetical groups. Second, coordination with government agencies such as BP3MI is still *ad hoc*. The parish does not yet have a formal mechanism to collaborate with BP3MI or local government in preventing human trafficking. Coordination occurs only when there is a specific case or an invitation from an outside party. This means that prevention efforts have not been integrated into formal policy. Third, economic pressures continue to drive young people to seek work abroad through informal channels. Although the organic farming program has provided an alternative, the

attraction of higher wages abroad remains strong. A young person stated that he still considers working in Malaysia because income in the village is considered insufficient for family needs. These challenges show that human dignity value education, although relevant, has not fully been able to address the structural drivers of human trafficking.



Discussion (مناقشة)

1. Connection with Theory: Catholic Social Teaching and Value Education

The findings of this study align with Catholic Social Teaching, which places human dignity as the ethical foundation of social life. Within this framework, human dignity does not depend on ability, wealth, or status, but is inherent in every person as a creation of God (*imago Dei*). The Parish of Hati Tersuci Maria Oe-Ekam operationalizes this principle through value education that emphasizes awareness of one's own dignity and that of others. This is consistent with Kleindienst (2024), who found that education about human dignity plays a role in fostering peace and reducing violence. In addition, the integration of economic empowerment into the parish program reflects an understanding that human trafficking is not solely caused by individual ignorance but also by structural factors such as poverty and limited employment opportunities. This approach is in line with theories of human trafficking prevention that emphasize the importance of multidimensional intervention: education, economy, and community strengthening. Thus, human dignity value education can be understood as a form of transformative education that not only transfers knowledge but also shapes moral awareness and social action.

2. Comparison with Previous Research

The results of this study strengthen (Evans' 2021) findings, which show that Catholic social teaching is relevant in the context of human trafficking, especially in vulnerable regions. Evans highlights the role of the church in providing moral and practical responses to human trafficking. This study complements those findings by providing an empirical picture from the context of Eastern Indonesia, particularly South Central Timor. (Punda Panda 2021; 2025) highlights the role of the local church in anti-trafficking governance, including in Sumba, Indonesia. This study aligns with those findings but has a more specific focus on parish-based human dignity value education. Thus, this study enriches the literature on faith-based interventions in Eastern Indonesia, which is still limited. (Regan 2025) affirms that Catholic social teaching provides a moral framework for combating human trafficking. The findings of this study support that argument but also show that a moral framework alone is insufficient without institutional support, a systematic curriculum, and cross-sector collaboration. (Barrows, J. (2017). proposes a West African model that recommends institutionalizing Catholic social teaching into anti-trafficking legislation. Unlike that model, the Oe-Ekam Parish operates largely outside the formal policy framework. This shows an implementation gap between the normative ideal of Catholic social teaching and practice at the parish level. Meanwhile, (Enda, A. K. 2024). highlights the importance of

integrating faith-based perspectives into the Catholic education curriculum. The findings of this study support the need to develop a standardized anti-trafficking module in parish catechesis.

How is human dignity value education implemented in the parish? Human dignity value education is implemented through three channels: catechesis, liturgical homilies, and organic farming training. All three are based on the principle of *imago Dei* and aim to form awareness of human dignity and reduce economic vulnerability. However, this implementation is not yet systematic because it depends on the individual initiative of catechists. *What are the perceived impacts on awareness and prevention of human trafficking?* The perceived impacts include increased awareness of the modus operandi of human trafficking, community vigilance, and informal monitoring of at-risk youth through KUB. These impacts are positive, but they are still limited to the level of perception and have not been measured over the long term. *What challenges limit these efforts?* The main challenges include the absence of a standardized anti-trafficking curriculum, ad hoc coordination with government agencies such as BP3MI, and economic pressures that drive informal migration. These challenges show that parish efforts still face structural and institutional limitations.

Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on Catholic social teaching, value education, and faith-based human trafficking prevention, especially in the context of Eastern Indonesia. Practically, these findings provide recommendations for the Parish of Hati Tersuci Maria Oe-Ekam, the Diocese of Kupang, BP3MI, and local government to: (1) develop a standardized anti-trafficking module in parish catechesis; (2) strengthen inter-institutional collaboration; and (3) expand livelihood programs to address the structural drivers of human trafficking. Socially and ethically, this study reaffirms that the protection of human dignity is the true measure of civilization. This study has limitations as a single case study and relies on self-reported perceptions. Therefore, its results cannot be widely generalized. Future research is recommended to compare several parishes and measure the long-term outcomes of human dignity value education on human trafficking prevention.



Conclusion (خاتمة)

This study examined the implementation of human dignity value education as a preventive effort against human trafficking in the Parish of Hati Tersuci Maria Oe-Ekam, South Central Timor. The findings show that the parish implements this education through three interconnected channels: catechesis for children and youth, liturgical homilies, and community-based organic farming training. Grounded in the principle of *imago Dei*, these efforts reportedly increased awareness of trafficking modus operandi, strengthened community vigilance, and encouraged informal monitoring of at-risk youth through Kelompok Umat Basis (KUB). However, the impact remains perceptual and has not been systematically or longitudinally measured. The study also identifies three main challenges: the absence of a standardized anti-trafficking curriculum, ad hoc coordination with government agencies such as BP3MI, and persistent economic pressures that drive informal migration. These findings indicate that faith-based value education is culturally resonant and community-embedded, but has not fully addressed the structural drivers of trafficking.

Based on these findings, the study recommends institutionalizing anti-trafficking modules in parish catechesis, strengthening formal collaboration among the parish, the Diocese of Kupang, BP3MI, and local government, and expanding livelihood programs to reduce economic vulnerability. Future research should compare multiple parishes and measure the long-term outcomes of human dignity value education. As a single case study relying on self-reported perceptions, its findings are context-bound and cannot be widely generalized. Overall, the study reaffirms that protecting human dignity is a concrete measure of civilization and a vital effort to protect vulnerable groups from exploitation.

Acknowledgment (شكر وتقدير)

The authors thank the Parish of Hati Tersuci Maria Oe-Ekam, the Diocese of Kupang, and all participants for their cooperation and insights.



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