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FAITH AMID EMPLOYMENT ANXIETY: A CONTEXTUAL-SOCIOLOGICAL THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE JOB HUGGING PHENOMENON IN INDONESIA

Mulia Wongdi[1], Yanto Paulus Hermanto[2]
Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Kharisma Bandung
muliawongdi@gmail.com[1], yantopaulush@gmail.com[2]

Abstract

The phenomenon of *job-hugging* has emerged increasingly in the modern workplace as a response to post-pandemic economic uncertainty. To date, however, it has predominantly been examined through economic and psychological frameworks. This study explores *job hugging* from a theological perspective by analyzing the relationship between faith and anxiety in the context of contemporary working life in Indonesia. This research employs a contextual, systematic, theological approach using a qualitative, reflective method grounded in a review of theological literature, the theology of work, and contemporary pastoral theology. The findings indicate that *job-hugging* does not merely reflect a survival strategy but also reveals a crisis of modern faith, namely, the displacement of ultimate security from divine providence to employment and worldly stability. Anxiety is understood both as a spiritual symptom of weakened faith and as a reflective space that may lead to a deepening of existential faith. The novelty of this study lies in its interpretation of *job hugging* as a theological phenomenon that manifests the dialectical dynamic between faith and anxiety, as well as in its formulation of pastoral implications that situate work as vocation within the framework of *providentia Dei*. This study affirms the contribution of systematic theology in enriching contemporary discourse on the modern world of work and in strengthening the pastoral accompaniment of believers.

Keywords: faith; anxiety; contextual systematic theology; job hugging; world of work

Abstrak

Fenomena job hugging semakin mengemuka dalam dunia kerja modern sebagai respons terhadap ketidakpastian ekonomi pascapandemi, namun sejauh ini lebih banyak dianalisis melalui pendekatan ekonomi dan psikologis. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji job hugging secara teologis dengan menelaah relasi antara iman dan kekhawatiran dalam konteks kehidupan kerja modern di Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan teologi sistematik kontekstual dengan metode kualitatif reflektif berbasis studi literatur teologi, teologi kerja, dan teologi pastoral kontemporer. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa job hugging tidak hanya merefleksikan strategi bertahan hidup, tetapi mengungkap krisis iman modern, yakni pergeseran pusat rasa aman dari penyelenggaraan Allah kepada pekerjaan dan stabilitas duniawi. Kekhawatiran dipahami sebagai gejala

spiritual dari iman yang melemah, sekaligus ruang reflektif yang dapat menuntun pada pendalaman iman eksistensial. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada pembacaan job hugging sebagai fenomena teologis yang memperlihatkan dinamika dialektis antara iman dan kekhawatiran, serta pada perumusan implikasi pastoral yang menempatkan pekerjaan sebagai panggilan dalam kerangka providentia Dei. Studi ini menegaskan kontribusi teologi sistematik dalam memperkaya diskursus dunia kerja modern dan pendampingan iman umat.
***Kata Kunci**:* iman; kekhawatiran; teologi sistematik kontekstual; *Job-hugging*; dunia kerja

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, the world of work has undergone significant transformations due to economic globalization, the acceleration of digital technology, and the socio-psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Frihatini et al., 2025). These changes have not only affected the structure of the labor market but also created ongoing economic uncertainty for many workers. This instability has led to the emergence of various survival strategies, one of which is the phenomenon of job hugging, which is the tendency for workers to remain in jobs that no longer provide satisfaction or meaning, solely for the sake of maintaining financial security(Augustine, 2025).

The phenomenon of job-hugging is becoming increasingly relevant in the Indonesian context, especially amid a competitive, fragile job market. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that in February 2025, 59.40% of Indonesia's workforce was in the informal sector, meaning that the majority of workers lacked social protection and income security (BPS, 2025). At the same time, the open unemployment rate (TPT) was recorded at 4.76%, with the number of unemployed people increasing from 7.20 million to 7.28 million compared to the previous year (BPS 2025). Although the TPT percentage has decreased, the high absolute number of unemployed people reflects limited opportunities for decent work, prompting many workers to stay put rather than take the risk of job mobility.

So far, job hugging has generally been analyzed through economic and psychological approaches, particularly in relation to insecurity, anxiety, and individual adaptation strategies in the face of uncertainty. However, these approaches have not fully captured

the deeper dimensions of workers' experiences, particularly regarding meaning, self-worth, and sources of security. In this context, the phenomenon of job hugging can also be interpreted as a spiritual symptom, in which work unconsciously becomes the primary source of security and identity in life (Sampe & Petrus 2021). Thus, this issue is not only structural or psychological in nature, but also touches on the theological realm.

Christian theology affirms that faith does not stand apart from human social reality, including the world of work. Faith is always lived out in a concrete context marked by tension, economic pressure, and the search for meaning in life (Halawa et al. 2024; Pranoto 2025). Therefore, theological reflection on job-hugging is important for understanding how faith functions, even amid modern economic uncertainty, and how it experiences crisis. A theological approach allows this phenomenon to be read not only as a matter of work resilience, but as an expression of human relations with God, especially in terms of trust and concern for the future.

Based on this background, this study aims to answer the main question: how can the phenomenon of job hugging be understood theologically in light of the relationship between faith and the concerns of modern humans? The purpose of this study is to analyze job hugging as a socio-economic phenomenon in the Indonesian context, examine its theological meaning through a contextual systematic theology approach, and formulate pastoral implications for the Church in accompanying congregations struggling with job uncertainty. This article is structured as follows: the first section discusses the conceptual framework and context of job hugging; the second section outlines a theological analysis of faith, anxiety, and God's providence; and the third section offers reflections and pastoral implications for church ministry in the contemporary world of work.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a contextual systematic theology approach within a reflective theology framework, using qualitative methods grounded in a literature review. It is explicitly

not an empirical study. This study focuses on conceptual analysis to interpret the theological meaning of job-hugging in relation to the Christian faith, existential concerns, and God's providence, without collecting field data.

The data sources are journal articles and scientific books in the fields of theology, pastoral theology, work theology, and Christian psychology, selected based on thematic relevance, academic quality, and their contribution to contemporary theological discourse, especially those discussing the dynamics of the modern world of work and the implications of the post-COVID-19 pandemic, while still selectively referring to classical literature as a theoretical foundation.

Data analysis was conducted through thematic qualitative content analysis, which included identifying key concepts, grouping major theological themes (faith, concern, work, and God's providence), and reflective synthesis to construct a systematic, coherent, and academically accountable theological argument for interdisciplinary readers.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Job Hugging as an Indicator of Modern Faith Crisis

The phenomenon of job-hugging in the modern workplace can be seen as an implicit indicator of a crisis of faith. Excessive dependence on work as a source of security and identity indicates a shift in the orientation of faith from a relationship with God to economic structures and productivity. Within the framework of systematic theology, this shift marks both an anthropological and a theological problem: humans define themselves primarily in terms of function and performance rather than as relational beings before God.

Renti Sihombing and Eddy Rundjan show that when work becomes the basis of self-worth, gratitude as a created being is replaced by anxiety about maintaining one's status (Sihombing & Rundjan, 2019). This analysis aligns with contemporary theology-of-work thinking, which emphasizes that the absolutization of work leads to the idolatry of work (Volf 2001; Keller & Alsdorf, 2012). In the phenomenon of job hugging, work is no longer placed as a means of

participation in God's work, but as the main determinant of survival and the meaning of existence.

Kaleb Yusuf et al. refer to this condition as a "hidden crisis of faith," in which religious practices continue but the source of existential trust shifts (Yusuf, Rudianto, and Bambangan 2025). Theologically, this condition reflects what Paul Tillich calls the ultimate concern, an orientation of faith directed toward what is considered most decisive for human life. When work and economic stability become the greatest concern, they replace God as the source of meaning and security, causing faith to lose its transcendent orientation (Tillich, 1957, pp. 1–2). Thus, job-hugging is not only a rational response to economic uncertainty but also a spiritual manifestation of the fear of losing a non-theological foundation in life.

Trivina Ambarsari Sutanto notes that after the COVID-19 pandemic, this kind of crisis has intensified because the fragility of the global economic system has been widely exposed (Sutanto, 2021). However, instead of encouraging deeper reflection on faith, this uncertainty has actually strengthened attachment to work. At this point, the theology of faith is challenged to be present not only as a normative framework but as a critical lens for re-reading the relationship between humans, work, security, and God.

Anxiety as a Symptom of Fragmented Spirituality

Anxiety is often understood only as an emotional response to uncertainty. However, in contemporary theology, anxiety is a spiritual symptom of the weakening of human relationships with God.

In the phenomenon of job hugging, anxiety functions as the main motor that drives defensive survival behavior. This anxiety cannot be reduced to merely a psychological response; rather, it must be understood as a spiritual symptom of a fragmented relationship of faith. In existential theology, anxiety is understood as a sign of the loss of existential trust in God as the foundation and Sustainer of life (Tillich, 1952).

Yanti Imariani Gea explains that concerns arise when humans attempt to take control of an uncertain future (Gea, 2020). This analysis parallels Luther's thinking about

incurvatus in se, namely the tendency of humans to fold themselves into self-control rather than relying on God, as explained by Oswald Bayer in his reading of Luther's theology (Bayer 2008, pp. 54–56). In the context of job-hugging, this concern manifests as excessive attachment to work as a guarantee of livelihood.

Michelle Clarine and Juliana Hidrajat show that in the modern world of work, financial dependence often replaces spiritual dependence (Clarine & Hidrajat, 2025). This aligns with international pastoral analysis, which affirms that modern anxiety is closely related to the collapse of the narrative of providence in everyday life (Smith 2009; Nouwen, 2002). Job hugging can thus be read as an existential strategy to reduce anxiety, but at the same time, it deepens the crisis of faith.

Pastoral research shows that such concerns cannot be adequately addressed through psychological approaches alone. Yustus Nesimnasi emphasizes the importance of reconceptualizing faith as the center of recovery (Nesimnasi, 2024). This perspective aligns with the theological-pastoral approach, which views anxiety as a space for spiritual formation rather than merely an emotional disturbance (Benner, 2012, pp. 133–42). Thus, job hugging opens up opportunities for theological reflection on how faith can be restored as a source of non-contingent security.

Faith as Existential Belief in an Unstable Work Reality

The phenomenon of job hugging sharply highlights the difference between faith as a theological concept and faith as an existential trust. In modern systematic theology, faith is not understood merely as doctrinal agreement, but as an act of entrusting oneself totally to God amid life's uncertainties (Barth 1961; McGrath, 2011).

Johan Natanael Sitinjak and Otieli Harefa emphasize that faith is existential because it involves a decision to live without absolute worldly guarantees (Sitinjak & Harefa, 2025). However, job-hugging shows the opposite tendency, in which faith is transferred to measurable realities such as salary, employment contracts, and status.

Triani Devita Sinaga refers to this condition as the reduction of faith to a means of self-protection (Sinaga, 2018).

Conversely, Christian faith, rooted in a relationship with God, enables humans to face loss without losing their sense of self. Josep Tatang et al. assert that this kind of faith frees humans from the logic of ownership to the logic of trust (Tatang et al., 2021). This thinking aligns with Miroslav Volf's theology of work, which situates work within the framework of grace rather than as a source of legitimacy for existence (Volf, 2001).

In the modern workplace, faith also serves as a source of spiritual resilience. International research shows that mature faith contributes to moral and emotional resilience amid structural pressures (Pargament, 2013, pp. 274–78). Thus, faith does not eliminate economic challenges, but shifts how humans deal with them from control to trust.

Integrating Faith and Work as a Theological Response to Job Hugging

The phenomenon of job-hugging reveals a failure to integrate faith and work in everyday life. When faith is practiced separately from the world of work, work easily becomes a source of anxiety and false identity. Yohanes Sawarno Praptowarso et al. emphasize that integrating faith and work is a prerequisite for spiritual health and the sustainability of work's meaning (Praptowarso et al., 2021).

In contextual theology, work is understood as participation in *missio Dei* (Wright, 2006, pp. 29–34). Yakub Hendrawan Perangin Angin and Tri Astuti Yeniretnowati emphasize that work is not merely an economic activity, but part of human involvement in the stewardship of creation (Perangin Angin & Yeniretnowati, 2023). This perspective is reinforced by Timothy Keller, who asserts that when human identity is built on work achievements, work can easily become a source of self-worth. In contrast, the Christian calling is rooted in God's grace rather than in performance or productivity (Keller & Alsdorf, 2012).

Within this framework, job hugging can be transformed from defensive behavior into a reflective moment, namely, an opportunity to reassess the orientation of faith in

work. The Church has a strategic role in this process through contextual faith education and sensitive pastoral care that are attuned to the economic realities of the congregation (Utomo, 2019; Du Toit, 2023).

The Church plays an important role in fostering this awareness through contextual faith education. Bimo Setyo Utomo emphasizes that every job, whether in an office, factory, school, or home, is a form of calling to glorify God (Utomo, 2019). When people understand that their work is part of their spiritual calling, they can find new meaning in their daily activities, even in difficult economic conditions. In this context, job hugging can be transformed from a defensive behavior into a reflective action, namely, a moment to reassess the spiritual motivation behind dependence on work.

The Spirituality of Calmness as a Theological Alternative to Work Anxiety

Theological reflection on job-hugging leads to the restoration of the spirituality of tranquility. Peace is understood not as the absence of problems, but as the capacity to live in trust amid uncertainty (Moltmann, 1993, pp. 60–65). Nursanti Magdalena Waruwu describes it as a condition in which a person finds peace not because their life is under control, but because their heart is surrendered to God (Waruwu, 2022). The spirituality of tranquility challenges a work culture oriented toward relentless performance. In international literature, this kind of spirituality is understood as a form of faith resistance against the totalitarian logic of the economy (Brueggemann, 2014). The Church, as a community of faith, is called to be a space of rest that restores humans from structural anxiety (Wolfteich, 2024).

Thus, job-hugging not only reveals the fears of modern humans but also opens a theological space for presenting a liberating faith. Christian faith offers a radical alternative: living and working in the belief that God's providence transcends all forms of economic uncertainty.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study aims to examine the theological meaning of the

relationship between faith and anxiety *in the context of modern working life, as reflected* in the phenomenon of job hugging. Through a contextual systematic theology approach, this study concludes that job hugging cannot be understood solely as an economic or psychological response, but rather as an expression of the crisis of faith in modern humans. This crisis is evident in the shift of the center of security from God as the source of sustenance to work and worldly stability. Anxiety arises when trust in *providentia Dei* weakens, while, in its existential sense, Christian faith leads humans to remain surrendered and to live with hope amid uncertainty.

The discussion results show that faith and worry are not mutually exclusive but rather exist in a dialectical relationship that shapes spiritual maturity. Worry can become a space for reflection that reveals human limitations and redirects dependence to God. In this framework, work is reinterpreted not as a source of identity and livelihood, but as a calling lived out in relationship with God who sustains life. These findings confirm that faith has a transformative role in helping modern humans navigate the pressures of the workplace without being entangled in fear of loss.

Based on these theological findings, this study proposes several operational recommendations applicable to the Church, pastoral ministry, and faith education.

First, for local churches, it is recommended to develop a worker ministry that specifically addresses the relationship between faith and work. This ministry can be realized through thematic classes, small groups, or pastoral seminars that help congregations reflect on work as a calling (vocation), rather than as the primary source of identity. The training material needs to explicitly raise issues of work anxiety, economic uncertainty, and job hugging, and relate them to the teachings on God's providence and existential trust.

Second, in pastoral ministry, the Church needs to strengthen pastoral accompaniment for congregants experiencing work-related anxiety. This accompaniment should not only take the form of individual counseling, but also include a communitarian approach through safe spaces for sharing work

struggles. Pastoral ministers are encouraged to develop theological sensitivity in reading work anxiety as a potential hidden crisis of faith, so that accompaniment does not stop at emotional strengthening, but leads to the restoration of faith and trust in God.

Third, in the context of faith and theological education, this study recommends developing a more contextually grounded theology-of-work curriculum. This curriculum needs to integrate systematic theology, Christian ethics, and the realities of the contemporary world of work, including issues of economic uncertainty and productivity pressures. Theological education, both in churches and theological institutions, is encouraged to avoid separating faith from everyday work experiences, so that graduates and congregations have a mature theological framework for engaging the modern world of work.

Fourth, at the level of church social praxis, churches are advised to be more actively involved in labor issues, such as advocating for fair labor practices, work-life balance, and workers' mental health. This involvement is a concrete manifestation of faith that not only speaks of inner peace but also presents structural concern for oppressive working conditions. Thus, the Church functions as a community of faith that is theologically relevant and socially significant.

This study has several limitations. The study is reflective-theological in nature, based on a literature review, and does not yet involve empirical data from workers who have experienced job hugging. In addition, the study focuses on a contextual systematic theology perspective, without in-depth exploration of other disciplinary approaches.

Therefore, further research is recommended to develop this study through an empirical-pastoral or interdisciplinary approach, for example, by involving qualitative studies of working congregations, integrating pastoral psychology, or examining Christian work ethics. Further research could also focus on the context of local churches or specific employment sectors to enrich our understanding of how faith is lived out concretely in the world of

work. In this way, the study of faith, concerns, and related issues can continue to be developed not only as theological reflection but also as a real contribution to the life of the Church and society.

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