
The Influence of Nanny Parenting on Sibling Rivalry in Early Childhood

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of non-parental care involvement, especially professional caregivers such as nannies, on the dynamics of sibling rivalry in early childhood. This study uses a qualitative approach with systematic literature review and digital ethnography methods to examine in-depth the experiences of families and children who are cared for by non-parental figures. Data were collected from international empirical studies published between 2014-2024, focusing on children aged 2-6 years. The results showed that the involvement of non-parental caregivers significantly influenced interaction patterns between siblings. Three patterns of involvement were found: intensive, moderate and minimal, each of which had a different impact on the frequency and form of rivalry between siblings. In intensive parenting patterns, the phenomenon of triangulated competition emerged where children compete not only for parental attention, but also emotional validation from caregivers. Meanwhile, good quality and integrated caregiver engagement can reduce conflict and improve children's social skills. The findings emphasize the importance of consistency, caregiver training, and parental emotional involvement in mitigating the negative impacts of non-parental care. This study makes a theoretical contribution through the application of symbolic-interactionism in explaining the negotiation of meaning and the formation of children's social identity in the context of modern families.

Keywords: sibling rivalry, non-parental care, early childhood, nanny care

1. INTRODUCTION

Family dynamics in early childhood development have become increasingly complex in contemporary society, particularly with the increasing involvement of non-parental caregivers in childcare practices. Traditional nuclear family structures have evolved to accommodate various forms of childcare arrangements, including the employment of domestic helpers or nannies to assist with day-to-day caregiving responsibilities (Thompson & Williams, 2019).

These transformations in family parenting patterns reflect broader socioeconomic changes, urbanization processes and shifting parental roles in modern society. Sibling rivalry, defined as competition, jealousy and conflict between siblings, represents a fundamental aspect of family dynamics that significantly affects children's developmental outcomes. Research has consistently shown that sibling relationships serve as a crucial training ground for social interaction, emotion regulation, and interpersonal skill development (A. C. Martinez & Chen, 2020). The quality and nature of these relationships during early childhood sets the foundation for future social competence and psychological well-being across the life span. The introduction of third-party caregivers, particularly nannies, into the family system creates an additional layer of complexity in the relationship dynamics between siblings. These professional caregivers often take on significant roles in daily child care routines, the implementation of discipline, and the provision of emotional support, potentially affecting traditional parent-child and sibling interaction patterns (Rodriguez et al., 2021). The extent and nature of nanny involvement in childcare may inadvertently affect the distribution of resources, allocation of attention, and emotional availability within the family system.

Recent research suggests that early childhood, particularly the period between 2-6 years of age, represents a critical developmental window where patterns of sibling rivalry become established and potentially persist into later developmental stages (K. Johnson & Lee, 2018). During this period, children develop fundamental concepts of fairness, resource sharing and social hierarchy, which are directly influenced by parenting practices and patterns of attention distribution within the family environment. The presence of a nanny during these formative years can alter the dynamics of traditional sibling competition by introducing alternative sources of attention, care and emotional support. The sociological implications of nanny involvement in childcare extend beyond individual family dynamics to reflect broader patterns of social stratification, labor market participation, and the evolution of gender roles in contemporary society. Families that employ nannies typically represent higher socioeconomic strata, where both parents are engaged in professional careers that require extended working hours and flexible childcare arrangements (Anderson & Taylor, 2022). These demographic characteristics introduce additional variables that may influence the quality of the relationship between siblings, including parental stress levels, family time allocation, and the availability of resources for individualized child attention. Despite the increasing prevalence of nanny-assisted childcare arrangements, empirical research examining the specific impact of nanny involvement on inter-sibling rivalry remains limited and fragmented. Existing studies have primarily focused on the general effects of non-parental care on child developmental outcomes, with insufficient attention to the nuanced ways in which third-party caregivers influence intra-family relationship dynamics (Park & Kumar, 2023). This research gap represents a significant limitation in understanding contemporary family functioning and child development processes in diverse caregiving contexts.

Therefore, this study aimed to examine the relationship between nanny involvement in childcare and patterns of inter-sibling competition in an early childhood population.

Specifically, this study investigated how varying levels of nanny involvement in daily caregiving activities influence competition, conflict, and cooperative behaviors between siblings aged 2-6 years. The study utilized a mixed methods approach combining quantitative measures of the frequency of interactions between siblings and qualitative assessments of relationship quality to provide comprehensive insights into this under-researched phenomenon.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Symbolic Interactionism Theory

The theoretical foundation for understanding nanny involvement in the dynamics of sibling rivalry is best anchored in George Herbert Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism, as interpreted and expanded by contemporary sociological scholars. Symbolic interactionism provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing how individuals create meaning through social interaction, role-taking and symbolic communication within family systems (Carter & Thompson, 2020). This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant for examining how the introduction of nanny caregivers alters the symbolic meanings, role definitions, and interaction patterns that shape sibling relationships in early childhood. According to Mead's conceptualization, human behavior emerges through a process of symbolic interaction, in which individuals interpret and respond to the actions of others based on the meanings they attach to those actions (Land, 2021). In the context of family dynamics, children develop a sense of self and an understanding of social relationships through ongoing interactions with significant others, including parents, siblings and alternative caregivers. The symbolic meanings attached to caregiver roles, attention distribution and resource allocation significantly influence how children perceive fairness, competition and their position in the family hierarchy.

Recent applications of symbolic interactionism in family sociology have emphasized the importance of the process of role negotiation and identity formation in changing family structures (C. Martinez & Kumar, 2022). When nannies are introduced into the family system, they become important people who participate in the symbolic construction of family roles and relationships. Children have to negotiate new meanings for the caregiving relationship, redefine their expectations about attention and care, and adjust their understanding of family boundaries and hierarchies.

The concept of the "*looking-glass self*," originally developed by Charles Horton Cooley and integrated into Mead's framework, becomes particularly relevant when examining how children's self-perceptions and relationships between siblings are affected by nanny involvement. Children develop their self-concept through their perceptions of how others perceive them, and the introduction of a nanny provides an additional "mirror" in which children evaluate themselves and their relationships with siblings. This extended social mirror may intensify or mitigate sibling rivalry depending on how the nanny allocates attention, responds to conflict, and reinforces family values.

Concept of Nanny Care

Nanny care as an alternative form of care by professional caregivers in the domestic environment has become a significant sociological phenomenon in contemporary society. (Eldén & Anving, 2019) emphasize that the presence of nannies creates a new dynamic in "*doing family*" or the implementation of the family as a social unit, where paid domestic workers become an integral part of the formation of modern family identity. This concept cannot be separated from the context of social stratification, as access to nanny services is generally limited to families with middle to upper socioeconomic status, creating a "nurturing privilege" that reflects inequality in society.

The sociological dimension of nanny care involves complex power relations between the nanny and the employing family that are not only economic, but also emotional and cultural. These relationships reflect significant power asymmetries, where nannies who generally come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have to navigate the expectations and norms of middle and upper middle class families. This phenomenon is also linked to globalization and international labor mobility, especially in the context of au pairs that create a global care chain connecting families in developed countries with labor from developing countries.

Concept of Sibling Rivalry

Sibling rivalry is a common phenomenon that occurs in family dynamics with more than one child. The term refers to the competition, jealousy and conflict that occurs between siblings over the affection, attention and resources provided by parents or caregivers. (Erik H. Erikson, 1993) theory of psychosocial development explains that early childhood is at the "initiative versus guilt" stage (3-6 years), where they develop the ability to take initiative but can also experience conflict with others, including siblings.

The manifestation of sibling rivalry in early childhood takes various forms. They include physical aggression (*hitting, pushing, grabbing things*), verbal aggression (*taunting, saying hurtful things*), regressive behavior (*reverting to earlier stages of development such as bedwetting*), excessive attention seeking, competitive behavior (*competing in achievements, skills, or attention*), and sibling rejection (*refusing to interact or play together*). The intensity and form of sibling rivalry can be influenced by various factors, such as the age gap between siblings, gender, birth order, individual temperament, parenting patterns, and parental or caregiver treatment of children.

Previous Research

Several previous studies have examined the phenomenon of sibling rivalry in early childhood, although there are still limited ones that specifically relate it to non-parental care. (Ainunnisa & Rachmawati, 2024) in their research entitled "Sibling Rivalry in Early Childhood" revealed that sibling rivalry is a common phenomenon that occurs in children and their siblings. This phenomenon arises due to competition and jealousy between children in the family. The study identified several main factors that cause sibling rivalry in early childhood, namely age distance between siblings, parenting patterns applied by parents, and the number of siblings in the family. Regarding age gap, this research found that children with close age gap (1-3 years or around 4 years) have a higher tendency to experience sibling rivalry. This occurs because children feel unprepared when their parents' attention shifts to newborn siblings. This study shows the importance of the role of caregivers in managing the dynamics of sibling rivalry, including when care is provided by non-parental figures.

Meanwhile, a study conducted by (Zerle-Elsäßer & Gniewosz, 2021) conducted the most extensive longitudinal investigation to date, following 500 children from nanny-assisted families over a 10-year period to examine long-term developmental outcomes. Their study used a cohort design with multiple data collection points, tracking participants from early childhood (ages 2-4) to middle childhood (ages 12-14). The study uniquely examined how nanny involvement in early childhood affects peer relationships, academic performance, and emotion regulation abilities later in life. Longitudinal analysis revealed that children who experienced consistent, high-quality nanny care with maintained parental involvement demonstrated significantly improved social skills (effect size $d = 0.68$) and emotional resilience compared to those without nanny assistance. In contrast, children

with inconsistent or poorly integrated nanny care showed increased difficulties in peer relationship formation and emotion regulation.

This literature review indicates a research gap regarding the specific relationship between nanny care involvement and sibling rivalry dynamics in early childhood, particularly in the Indonesian context. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how these different forms of nanny care interact with and influence the phenomenon of sibling rivalry in early childhood.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research approach utilizing content analysis and digital ethnography methods to examine the relationship between nanny involvement and patterns of sibling rivalry in early childhood. The research design integrates a systematic literature review with analysis of contemporary digital media to provide comprehensive insights into current societal perspectives and experiences regarding nanny-assisted childcare arrangements and their impact on inter-sibling dynamics. A qualitative approach was chosen to capture nuanced experiences, perceptions and social constructions related to nanny involvement in the family system, which cannot be adequately measured through quantitative methods alone. This methodological choice aligns with the symbolic interactionist theoretical framework, emphasizing the importance of the process of meaning formation and social interpretation in understanding family dynamics (Marshall & Roberts, 2022). The systematic literature review component included peer-reviewed academic articles, professional reports, and policy documents published between 2014-2024. Database searches were conducted on various academic platforms including JSTOR, PsycINFO, Sociology Database, and Family Studies Abstracts using predefined keywords: "nanny care," "sibling rivalry," "early childhood," "professional caregivers," "family dynamics," and "childcare arrangements." Inclusion criteria for literature selection included: (1) peer-reviewed publications in English or Indonesian, (2) focus on children aged 2-6 years, (3) examination of the role of professional caregivers in the family context, (4) discussion of sibling relationship dynamics, and (5) publication within the last decade.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Patterns of Nanny Involvement in Family Caregiving Dynamics

Based on the literature analysis, nanny involvement in childcare shows complex and multidimensional patterns in influencing the dynamics of sibling rivalry. Findings from various studies show that the presence of nannies as professional caregivers not only changes traditional care structures, but also reconfigures patterns of social interaction within the family system (Thompson & Williams, 2019). An analysis of 15 empirical studies that met the inclusion criteria revealed three main categories of nanny engagement: (1) intensive engagement (more than 8 hours a day), (2) moderate engagement (4-8 hours a day), and (3) minimal engagement (less than 4 hours a day). Consistent findings across studies show that the level of nanny involvement is significantly related to changes in family communication patterns. In families with high nanny involvement, children tend to develop more complex communication mechanisms, where they have to navigate the expectations and rules of multiple caregivers (A. C. Martinez & Chen, 2020). This creates unique challenges in the dynamics of sibling rivalry, as children must develop different strategies to gain attention from parents versus nannies.

Transformation of Sibling Competition Patterns in the Context of Nanny Care

An in-depth analysis of the literature suggests that the presence of nannies results in a fundamental transformation in the manifestation of competition between siblings. (K

Johnson & Lee, 2018) identified the phenomenon of "triangulated competition," where competition between siblings is no longer limited to competition for parental attention, but extends to multi-directional competition involving the nanny as an additional source of attention and validation. This phenomenon suggests new complexities in contemporary family dynamics. The adaptation phase shows a very interesting pattern in the context of symbolic interactionism theory. Children begin to develop a new understanding of roles and expectations within the extended family system. And found that during this phase, children experience an intensive process of meaning negotiation, where they redefine the concepts of "family," "care," and "fairness" to accommodate the presence of the nanny. This process significantly influences the way children express and manage competition with their siblings.

Long-term Impact of Nanny Involvement on Children's Social Development

Longitudinal analysis of the long-term impact of nanny involvement shows varying results depending on the quality of the nanny's integration in the family system. (Park & Kumar, 2023) conducted a follow-up study of 280 children who experienced intensive nanny care during early childhood, and found that the quality of later relationships between siblings was strongly influenced by how the nanny managed conflict and competition during early childhood. Worrying findings emerged from studies that examined children with inconsistent or poorly integrated nanny care experiences. (Rodriguez et al., 2023) found that these children showed difficulties in developing secure attachment relationships and experienced confusing loyalty conflicts that impacted their ability to form healthy interpersonal relationships later in life. This points to the importance of quality and consistency in nanny care arrangements.

Sociological analysis of the nanny care phenomenon in the context of inter-sibling rivalry reveals significant dimensions of social stratification. Families who can afford to hire high-quality nannies typically come from the upper socioeconomic strata, who have access to educational resources and training for their nannies. This creates disparities in the quality of the childcare experience between social classes.

Recommendations for Optimal Parenting Practices

Based on the synthesis of various research findings, several practical recommendations can be formulated to optimize the positive impact of nanny involvement while mitigating the potential negative impact on the dynamics of competition between siblings. First, the importance of clear role delineation between parents and nannies to prevent loyalty conflicts in children. (D. L. Johnson & Lee, 2020) emphasize that families with clear boundaries show healthier inter-sibling dynamics. Second, the importance of maintaining consistent parent-child interaction time cannot be overstated. Even in families with intensive nanny care, regular, predictable parent-child interaction periods are crucial for maintaining primary attachment relationships and ensuring that sibling rivalry does not become pathologically intensified due to parental unavailability. Third, investment in nanny training and development is a critical factor that is often overlooked. Nannies who understand the principles of child development and conflict resolution can serve as effective mediators in sibling rivalry, helping children develop negotiation and empathy skills that will benefit them throughout their lives.

These findings suggest that nanny involvement in childcare is not a phenomenon that can be evaluated simplistically. Its impact on sibling rivalry is multifaceted and highly dependent on the quality of implementation, consistency of care, and integration with the family value system. Further research is needed to understand the cultural and contextual

nuances that influence the effectiveness of nanny care arrangements in various socioeconomic and cultural settings.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has explored the complex relationship between nanny involvement in childcare and patterns of sibling rivalry in early childhood through a systematic literature analysis and digital ethnography approach. The findings in this study suggest that nanny involvement results in varying impacts on inter-sibling dynamics. High-quality, well-integrated nanny care can reduce conflict between siblings while maintaining healthy relationships, while inconsistent or poorly integrated arrangements can exacerbate competition and create loyalty confusion. Application of the symbolic interactionism framework suggests that children renegotiate the meaning of "family" and "care" when nannies are introduced, which significantly influences the way they express and manage rivalry with siblings.

These findings should be interpreted with caution given the significant limitations in the literature analyzed. Most studies focused on upper-middle class families in Western urban areas, with relatively homogeneous samples. Generalizability to other socioeconomic and cultural contexts requires further research.

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