

Digital Babysitting and Technoference: Shifts in Parenting Structures and Early Social Alienation Among Academic Families in Papua

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation within academic environments has fundamentally altered the domestic landscape of educated middle-class families in Papua, triggering the phenomena of digital babysitting and technoference. This study aims to analyze structural shifts in child-rearing practices, identify technoference typologies, and unravel their structural implications for the socio-emotional character of young children among faculty members and educational staff at IAIN Fattahul Muluk Papua. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach grounded in family sociology and education, empirical data were gathered through in-depth interviews with 12 purposively selected informants, naturalistic observations, and documentary analysis. Data credibility protocols were strengthened through source triangulation, technical triangulation, and inter-researcher thematic coding consistency checks to ensure qualitative objectivity. Data analysis was executed using the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings reveal that digital babysitting is intentionally adopted as a rational-instrumental coping strategy to overcome dual-role conflicts triggered by the invasion of digital bureaucratic workloads into the domestic sphere. Meanwhile, technoference manifests through spontaneous communication interruptions and divided parental attention, systematically degrading primary socialization functions within the family. Consequently, early social alienation emerges in young children, characterized by diminished face-to-face communication capacity, emotional co-regulation failures such as digital tantrums, and hindered intergenerational cultural transmission, directly impacting children's learning readiness in formal educational institutions. This study concludes that digital technology has denaturalized conventional parenting roles and given birth to new social vulnerabilities within contemporary domestic institutions in Papua.

Informasi Artikel

Kata Kunci:

Digital Babysitting, Alienasi Sosial, Sosiologi Keluarga, Technoference, Keluarga Akademisi, Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini.

ABSTRAK

Transformasi digital di lingkungan akademik telah mengubah lanskap domestik keluarga kelas menengah terdidik di Papua secara fundamental, memicu fenomena *digital babysitting* dan *technoference*. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pergeseran struktural praktik pengasuhan anak, mengidentifikasi tipologi *technoference*, serta menguraikan implikasi strukturalnya terhadap karakter sosio-emosional anak usia dini di kalangan dosen dan tenaga kependidikan IAIN Fattahul Muluk Papua. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif berbasis sosiologi keluarga dan pendidikan, data empiris dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan 12 informan terpilih, observasi naturalistik, dan analisis dokumen. Protokol kredibilitas data diperkuat melalui triangulasi sumber, triangulasi teknik, serta uji konsistensi pengkodean tematik antarpelaku. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *digital babysitting* diadopsi secara sadar sebagai strategi koping rasional-instrumental untuk mengatasi konflik peran ganda akibat invasi beban kerja birokrasi digital ke ruang domestik. Sementara itu, *technoference* termanifestasi melalui interupsi komunikasi spontan dan keterbelahan perhatian orang tua, yang secara sistematis mendegradasi fungsi sosialisasi primer dalam keluarga. Akibatnya, alienasi sosial dini muncul pada anak usia dini, yang ditandai dengan penurunan kapasitas komunikasi tatap muka, kegagalan ko-regulasi emosi seperti *digital tantrums*, serta terhambatnya transmisi kultural antargenerasi, yang berdampak langsung terhadap kesiapan belajar anak di lembaga pendidikan formal. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa teknologi digital telah mendenaturalisasi peran pengasuhan konvensional dan melahirkan kerentanan sosial baru di dalam institusi domestik kontemporer di Papua.

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1. Introduction

In the contemporary digital era, the penetration of information and communication technology (ICT) no longer operates merely at a macro-structural level to reshape socio-cultural landscapes in public spaces. Instead, technology has deeply infiltrated the most intimate realm of social systems: the domestic family sphere [1]. The family, historically and sociologically positioned as the foundational bastion of primary socialization and a child's earliest educational environment, is currently undergoing structural shocks due to the ubiquitous presence of smartphones and tablet devices. Global and national empirical data consistently indicate massive digital media exposure among young children (aged 3–6 years), with daily usage durations ranging from two to five hours [2]. Within the framework of family sociology and education, this accumulated screen time must not be superficially interpreted through a clinical-medical lens as mere physical health issues or passive sedentary screen time. Rather, it must be sociologically deconstructed as a definitive indicator of a fundamental shift in value orientation and social reproduction functions within modern households [3] [4].

This structural transformation has birthed a new parenting paradigm wherein dual-earning, educated parents consciously delegate portions of their interactive child-rearing responsibilities to visual algorithm-driven digital agents [5]. The practice of utilizing digital devices as surrogate caregivers to pacify or distract children is sociologically known as *digital babysitting*. Reliance on gadgets as electronic substitute caregivers reflects a decentralization of parental authority. Under this condition, the family institution increasingly shares its primary socialization territory with profit-oriented platform capitalism and child content providers [3] [6].

Healthy socio-emotional character development in children fundamentally requires warm, responsive, dialogic, and sustained interpersonal interactions. Through such organic face-to-face exchanges, moral values, societal norms, complex body language, and empathetic capacity are smoothly transmitted from one generation to the next. However, the current wave of total digitalization triggers a novel socio-cultural disturbance within the domestic space, known as *technoference*. *Technoference* is defined as constant intrusions or interruptions from digital technology that hinder, disrupt, or sever face-to-face social interactions among individuals [7]. When parents habitually prioritize their screens over communication efforts with their children, the vital process of socio-emotional co-regulation the socio-psychological capacity of parents to help children recognize, articulate, and manage emotions becomes stagnant.

The macro-sociological consequences of accumulated *digital babysitting* and *technoference* culminate in what is identified as early social alienation. Young children experience profound estrangement from their immediate real-world environment, lose sensitivity toward micro-social structures, and display severe

sociological adaptation dysfunctions [8] [9]. This alienation manifests through delayed verbal articulation, deficits in peer social skills, aggressive behavioral outbursts (*digital tantrums*), and uncured blind imitation of foreign digital content that directly contradicts local cultural values [10] [7], which in turn hampers children's learning readiness in early childhood education (ECE) institutions [11].

Although scientific investigations regarding gadget impacts on young children have surged, the existing literature remains largely confined to micro-individualistic developmental psychology approaches, leaving a distinct research gap in family sociology and education [12]. Previous studies largely failed to analyze the dialectical correlation between macro-structural demands from external workplaces and technology adoption as domestic escape mechanisms. Sociology must critically examine how institutional workloads force parents into rational calculations that inadvertently sacrifice the quality of children's socialization and early education [13].

This sociological vulnerability is acutely experienced by academic families comprising faculty members and educational staff at the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Fattahul Muluk Papua. As educated middle-class intellectual workers operating in a socio-geographic region undergoing rapid modernization and bureaucratic digitalization, they find themselves trapped in the structural squeeze of dual-role conflicts. On one hand, state university apparatuses demand relentless academic productivity and instantaneous administrative responsiveness via digital applications around the clock, blurring the spatial and temporal boundaries between workplace and home (*blurring boundaries*) [14].

On the other hand, the majority of the campus academic civitas consists of urban migrants geographically separated from their extended family networks, completely stripping away traditional childcare support systems. Crushing digital administrative duties, the complete absence of close relatives to share domestic burdens, and exorbitant economic costs to hire professional babysitters in Jayapura force these academic families to deploy digital devices as daily domestic safety valves. This phenomenon aligns with prior empirical evidence within the same institutional ecosystem, confirming that the digital campus landscape actively constructs academic actors' behaviors, leading to structural space-time blurring that jeopardizes task management and pushes official workloads into the domestic realm [15].

Grounded in this sociological background and local context, this study aims to comprehensively analyze how *digital babysitting* practices are articulated within academic households, identify *technoference* typologies, and dissect the macro-structural implications for the socio-emotional character development of young children at IAIN Fattahul Muluk Papua.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-

analytical design to conduct an in-depth, critical, and contextual dissection of *digital babysitting* and *technoference* within structural working-class academic family boundaries. A qualitative approach was chosen for its capacity to capture underlying meanings, hidden motives, and the sociological depth of digital parenting realities [16].

The research setting was purposively established at IAIN Fattahul Muluk Papua, located in Jayapura city, with a field data collection period spanning intensively over 6 months (covering the active academic semester). This locus was selected because it represents a microcosm of educated middle-class professionals in Papua at the forefront of state bureaucratic digitalization.

Primary empirical data were extracted directly from 12 key informants chosen via rigorous purposive sampling under strict inclusion criteria:

1. Active employment status as academic faculty members (lecturers) or educational staff (administrative personnel) at IAIN Fattahul Muluk Papua.
2. Parents of at least one biological child currently in the early childhood developmental stage (aged 3–6 years).
3. Subject to high professional workloads requiring extensive use of digital devices or laptops at home outside official working hours.
4. Active and intensive adoption of digital devices (smartphones or tablets) as daily childcare instruments.

Qualitative Data Coding and Validation Protocols:

To meet qualitative methodological rigor standards (addressing reviewer-requested reliability and validity aspects), coding procedures were strictly governed:

1. Number of Annotators/Researchers (Coders): Interview transcript analysis and labeling were conducted independently by three primary researchers to avoid subjective bias (*coder triangulation*).
2. Coding Guidelines: Researchers utilized structured sociological thematic guidelines divided into three core categories: (a) economic-structural motives of *digital babysitting*, (b) forms of *technoference* intrusion, and (c) indicators of socio-emotional child alienation.
3. Discrepancy Resolution: Any interpretive or labeling discrepancies among researchers were resolved through consensus discussions based on raw transcript evidence (*member checking* and *peer debriefing*) until absolute agreement was reached.
4. Inter-Rater Reliability: Coding consistency was tested via percentage of agreement, with inter-researcher agreement exceeding 85%, indicating high data credibility.

Field data collection integrated three core qualitative techniques:

- a. In-Depth Interviews: Semi-structured protocols

extracted thick descriptions regarding bureaucratic rhythms, domestic time management strategies, reasons for digital pacification, technoference, and observed child behavioral shifts.

- b. Naturalistic Observation: Researchers conducted unannounced direct observations in informants' residences during afternoons and evenings to capture unscripted, organic parent-child interactions.
- c. Documentary Analysis: Reviewing device log histories regarding child screen time, tracking parental digital work hours, and examining supporting institutional documents.

Data analysis adhered to the interactive model [17], involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Source and technical triangulation were applied to guarantee data validity. All informants signed informed consent forms with anonymized pseudonyms (e.g., Informant DS-1, Informant TK-2) to protect privacy.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Digital Babysitting Practices: Instrumental Rationality in Navigating Dual-Role Conflicts

Qualitative exploration of field data indicates that 100% of key informants (12 out of 12 interviewed academic parents) routinely and intentionally practice *digital babysitting* in their domestic spaces. Handling internet-connected gadgets to young children among faculty and staff at IAIN Fattahul Muluk Papua has mutated into a daily survival mechanism (*coping strategy*) to manage systemic dual-role conflict pressures [18].

As intellectual workers operating within a state Islamic higher education institution undergoing aggressive administrative digitalization, informants face overwhelming institutional mandates. Lecturers are burdened with pedagogical delivery, accreditation files, journal publication targets, and continuous performance reporting via online apps. For administrative staff, mandatory WhatsApp coordination enforces permanent availability (*standby status*). When these demands spill over into home hours at night, they collide with social reproduction imperatives and child rearing.

Sociologically, this phenomenon is analyzed through Max Weber's Theory of Instrumental Rationality (*zweckrational*). The calculated ends for parents are the timely completion of academic reports to protect professional standing and performance allowances. Curated video digital devices are identified as the most efficient, instantaneous, and friction-free means to pacify children, granting parents temporal autonomy to execute institutional labor without physical disruptions.

This structural reliance is exacerbated by Jayapura's socio-geographic realities. Most faculty and staff live isolated from extended family networks, lacking grandparental support, while facing an expensive, unregulated commercial babysitting market [19].

Informant DS-1 (lecturer, 34 years old) stated:

"The mandate to input performance metrics into the BKD online system is extremely time-sensitive. Administrative instructions from the dean's office regularly arrive at 8:00

PM with strict morning deadlines. Here in Jayapura, we are isolated migrants without family support. Hiring a private nanny drains our finances. Giving my child a tablet with YouTube animations is the most rational and economically viable option. The second the screen touches her hand, she becomes completely calm and frozen in place, allowing me to type my institutional reports for three hours uninterrupted."

Analyzing these dynamics through Disciplining [20], framework of Digital Enclosure and Body Disciplining, gadgets function as microscopic calming instruments within the domestic realm, instantaneously forcing active young bodies into static, obedient spatial coordinates. However, the sociological price is the radical commodification of primary socialization.

3.2 Technoference Typologies in Domestic Interaction Structures

A second observed structural anomaly is *technoference*. Unlike *digital babysitting*, which serves as a deliberate substitution strategy, *technoference* operates as a structural byproduct of parents' psychological and professional attachment to devices, creating micro-interruptions that fracture organic parent-child bonds:

1. Spontaneous Communication Interruptions (*Phubbing* / *Phone Snubbing*): Parents abruptly sever eye contact and cognitive focus due to incoming device notifications.
2. Parental Dual-Tasking: Parents are physically present next to the child (sitting on the living room floor) while cognitive faculties remain split with laptops or smartphones.
3. Delayed Responsiveness: Significant temporal lags when a child calls or signals emotional needs because parents are engrossed in work-related digital correspondence.

The empirical thematic matrix below outlines these *technoference* typologies:

No	Technoference Typology	Field Manifestation (Naturalistic Observation Data)	Macro-Sociological Impact on Children
1	Spontaneous Interruption (<i>Phubbing</i>)	A parent abruptly stops listening to a child's story to reply to a department head's WhatsApp message.	The child halts verbal production, displays rejection signs, and withdraws from future verbal initiatives.
2	Parental Dual-Tasking	A mother sits beside her child playing blocks while her right hand continuously scrolls social feeds or reads drafts.	Interaction loses organic warmth; the child senses parental psychological absence and slips into social apathy.
3	Delayed Responsiveness	A child calls "Papa" four times for help, but the father only looks up after finishing typing a digital text.	The child escalates behavior through destructive means (throwing objects) or internalizes neglect.

Informant DS-4 (senior faculty member, 39 years old) confessed:

"I carry immense guilt. Just last week, my son ran to me with his sketchpad, radiant with joy, wanting to show me a drawing. But right at that second, I was engaged in a fierce argument on our department WhatsApp group about lecture scheduling. I glanced at him for a second, didn't really process his drawing, and muttered 'yeah, good, go play' while my thumb never stopped typing. My son went completely silent, closed his sketchpad, and walked back to his room sadly. Our moments of intimacy are being systematically destroyed by this phone."

This validates [7], theoretical assertions on Social Presence Deprivation within domestic units, where homes are stripped of their emotional sanctuary function, turning into fragmented transit zones marked by *absent presence*.

3.3 Socio-Emotional Character Implications: The Trajectory of Early Social Alienation

The long-term cumulative impact of relentless *digital babysitting* paired with chronic *technoference* is the manifestation of Early Social Alienation in young children, directly threatening their mental and socio-emotional readiness upon entering formal educational institutions (ECE/Kindergarten):

1. Acute Emotional Dysregulation (*Digital Tantrums*): Children fail to process disappointment and boredom organically. When gadget access is restricted, children unleash destructive aggressive responses (*digital tantrums*) due to collapsed interpersonal co-regulation, hindering their classroom disciplinary adaptation.
2. Empathy Atrophy and Micro-Social Symbol Deficits: Children display diminished empathetic capacity, struggle to decode non-verbal cues, and act apathetic toward guests or peers, impairing collaborative group learning skills in class.
3. Language Disorganization and Cultural Dislocation: Speech delays resulting from minimal two-way dialogue, alongside blind absorption of aggressive vocal inflections and foreign accents from global cartoon characters that contradict local Papuan politeness and Islamic values.

Informant TK-5 (administrative staff, 32 years old) stated:

"If I dare take the phone from my 5-year-old child now, she explodes in horrific anger, hitting my face and breaking drinking glasses. What breaks my heart is her language; she mimics the exact screaming style and aggressive words of YouTube influencers. When her cousins visit from rural villages, she refuses to look at them or speak a word. It feels as if I am raising an absolute stranger in my own home."

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *digital babysitting* and *technoference* among academic families at IAIN Fattahul Muluk Papua are direct structural consequences of bureaucratic modernization encroaching upon domestic spaces. Grounded in Weber's Theory of Instrumental Rationality, parents rely on

gadgets as coping strategies to navigate acute dual-role conflicts amidst socio-geographic isolation.

However, professional efficiency comes at a devastating sociological cost. Chronic *technoference* fractures family communication and triggers early social alienation in young children including *digital tantrums*, empathy atrophy, and language disorganization which directly harms children's socio-emotional readiness in educational institutions. The nuclear family institution within contemporary educated urban settings in Papua experiences a profound hollowing out of its primary socialization functions under digital technology intrusions.

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