



Right to Disconnect at Work and Children's Digital Well-Being: An HR Perspective on Indirect Protection in the Digital Age

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Abstract

The overuse of digital media by children has emerged as a serious concern in the area of public health, education, and development. Although parenting practices, media use, and educational programs have been extensively examined as antecedents of children's digital media use, the role of parents' work environment as a factor that shapes children's digital environment has been overlooked. Today's digital workplace requires employees, especially parents, to remain connected even after the end of the workday. Being constantly connected affects family life, reduces the quality of parent-child interaction, and leads to excessive screen time at home. The theoretical framework of work-family spillover together with digital labor research and current studies on parental technoferece will be used in this conceptual study to analyse how the absence of a workplace right to disconnect leads to increased digital usage by children. The research paper demonstrates that HRM policies which regulate after-work communication will create better family dynamics and result in improved digital health outcomes for children. The paper extends current discussions about work-related disconnection rights by showing how these rights affect society beyond their impact on worker health.

Keywords: Digital work culture, HR policies, Right to disconnect, Technoferece, Working parents.

1. Introduction

The nature and form of work have been significantly altered by digital technology. Workers can now work remotely at different times and places through the use of smartphones and laptops and cloud computing and instant messaging software which enables them to work more effectively throughout their day. The lines between work and personal life are becoming more hazy as a result of the increased pressure to be available all the time brought on by these technologies (Mazmanian et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2021). The work schedule for most employees who have children extends into their evening and weekend and family time.

At the same time, the use of digital media among children has risen significantly worldwide. Children now use screens for entertainment and educational purposes and socializing with others throughout their daily activities. Controlled screen time can deliver educational advantages to users, but unrestrained screen time results in multiple detrimental impacts. The research study identifies four major effects which include decreased physical activity and sleep disturbances and attention problems and emotional regulation difficulties (Madigan et al., 2019; Nagata et al., 2022). Research shows that parental and familial factors shape how children interact with digital media according to their access to technological devices.

Although there are parallel debates on workplace digitalization and children's excessive screen time, these two topics are rarely investigated together. Most of the research on children's digital well-being focus on parenting styles, parental engagement, and educational support, while research on digital work culture primarily investigate employee stress, burnout, and work-life balance. The potential spillover effects of digital expectations in the workplace on intergenerational relationships are still not well researched.

This research addresses this problem by investigating how the absence of a right to disconnect in the workplace could have an indirect effect on children's digital well-being through parents' screen use and work-family spillover effects. This paper argues that from a human resource management (HRM) perspective, policies that limit after-work digital connectivity can be considered proactive policies that improve family interactions and children's digital behavior. Through this, this paper expands the discussion on right-to-disconnect policies from an employee outcome

perspective and asserts the importance of HRM in promoting societal and intergenerational well-being.

2. Children's Digital Overuse and Developmental Concerns

Children today start using digital media at earlier ages than they did in previous times. Young children often use smartphones and tablets together with streaming media to access entertainment and educational content while controlling their behavior. Digital media provides cognitive development benefits to children when used properly, but excessive screen time creates multiple developmental hazards. Research demonstrates that children who spend too much time watching screens experience language development delays together with shorter attention spans and poorer sleep quality and increased emotional and behavioral problems (Madigan et al., 2019; Przybylski & Brusso, 2023).

More recent studies since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic report that their children's screen time increased due to online schooling and parents working from home and this trend continued through the period after COVID-19-related restrictions on businesses were lifted (Nagata et al., 2022). The increasing normalization of excessive screen usage has raised concerns about its effects on children's development which occurs when children watch screens more than they should while their parents use digital devices as their main source of contact.

Digital behavior of children shows strong connection to parental digital behavior. The social learning theory states that children learn social conduct through parental observation because parents function as primary educational sources for their children. Research demonstrates that parental screen time serves as a main factor which determines how much time their children spend using screens (Lauricella and colleagues, 2015; Radesky and colleagues, 2023). A child develops the belief that constant digital device use is normal when a parent regularly uses their mobile device or laptop for work purposes.

The research studies about parental technofence have shown that this phenomenon acts as the main way that adults use digital devices to create negative impacts on their children's growth. Technofence describes the way digital devices create breaks in time that parents and children should spend together. The study found that as parental technofence increased through the day, the researchers observed that children developed greater behavioral problems which resulted in emotional distress and reduced parent-child relationship quality according to Stockdale et al 2020 and McArthur et al 2022. Children establish their digital interruption patterns when they watch their parents work with digital devices because this activity creates a continuous pattern of behavior.

The study found that children who use digital media excessively display various behavior patterns that go beyond their personal choices and the parenting methods used by their parents. The work environment of parents together with their job characteristics determines how children behave, even though these factors remain hidden from observation.

3. Digital Work Culture and Constant Connectivity

The digital work environment is characterized by the need for and pressure to promptly respond, be always available and to use the electronic devices for communication. Although these types of organizational practices may promote greater productivity; however, they will increase the amount of demand placed on employees to perform within their jobs and create challenges for employees to establish clear time delineations between working time and leisure time (Barber & Santuzzi, 2015; Kellogg, et al., 2020).

Research indicates that employees who engage in work-related conversations outside of typical business hours experience an increase in their level of work-family conflict, as well as an overall decrease in their ability to mentally separate themselves from work during their free time (Wang et al., 2021). As a result, psychological detachment is viewed as one of the primary factors contributing to recovery and wellbeing. If separation is difficult, employees are constantly stressed and have less time for high quality family interactions.

The family area which connects with work devices and the internet functions as the primary workspace for working parents who need to access these resources. The adults working in this space together with their digital equipment create an environment which teaches children to consider screens as essential for continuous viewing. Children who interact with their parents through these digital behaviors and organizational practices will develop digital presence beliefs which show how they relate to other people (Duxbury et al., 2022).

Parents who work experience interruptions from their digital tasks which prevent them from sharing emotional and cognitive moments with their children, thus creating challenges to build strong family bonds. Parents who receive minor interruptions from their work emails and messages will experience disruptions which break their ongoing conversation and collaborative work, thereby decreasing their relationship standards. The above examples reveal that digital work culture impacts families not only through the organizational aspect but also as a socializing influence.

4. The Right to Disconnect: Concept and HR Relevance

The right to disconnect is about people who work being able to not answer or read work, related messages or calls on their phones, emails, etc., after work hours and not get bad things happening to them for doing so. Policy Makers are recognizing the potential for this issue to create overload, fatigue, and poor work/life balance in workers because of Digital Overload. The number of countries that react to the issue of workers having the right to Disconnect is

increasing as a number of countries (e.g. France, Spain, Ireland, and Australia) have either established a right to Disconnect through legislation or developed regulations to do so (Eurofound, 2021).

In developing a Human Resource strategy; the right to Disconnect must be addressed as an issue that reaches beyond simply meeting legal requirements. It means a company's policies, ways of leading, and beyond that, the culture of the company in the sense of the employees' attitudes to their being available and answering if they receive a request at any time of the day or night. Experiments in implementing the right to disconnect have demonstrated that such measures, if taken seriously, can reduce stress, improve the balance between work and private life, and generally lead to better health of the employees (Charalampous et al., 2022; Peters et al., 2022).

However, the success of these policies is largely dependent on the culture of the organization and the support of the leadership. Without leaders leading the way and using performance assessment systems to communicate the message, disconnect policies can only be symbolic and not really change anything. Human resource managers play a pivotal role in embedding disconnect concepts into everyday work through, among other things, setting communication standards, training the managers, and supervising online activities that occur after working hours.

Most discussions around the right to disconnect currently center on the impact it has on employees. This article goes a step further by pointing out how the concept can have an indirect influence on the interactions within families and children's digital wellness, thus increasing the societal value of HR policies.

5. Linking Right to Disconnect Policies and Children's Digital Well-Being

Workplace connectivity and children's digital behavior can be explored by applying workfamily spillover theory. The theory explains that workplace experiences affect family life through behavioral, emotional, and time use changes (Allen et al., 2020).

If parents have to be at work after hours through digital means, their screen time at home will increase, thus reducing the opportunities for focused interactions with their children. Children observe and imitate these habits, which strengthens screen, dependent behavior patterns. Thus, these settings lead to the confusion of excessive digital interaction as normal and the breaking down of household digital rules.

Right to disconnect policies work through limiting the encroachment of work into the personal time of employees. These policies provide parents with the opportunity to disengage from work screens, thus leading to sharing of routines, face-to-face communication, and activities not involving screens. Research indicates that greater parental availability and fewer work-related interruptions are associated with greater family satisfaction and improved parenting quality (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Domoff et al., 2021).

Furthermore, disconnection policies promote parents to be good role models with respect to digital behavior. Children find it easier to adopt healthy digital behaviors when their parents are responsible and moderate in their use of technology (Radesky et al., 2023). In this way, work-related connectivity policies can be considered an indirect form of public health intervention, influencing the digital context of children via parental behavior.

6. HR Implications and Practical Interventions

There are several practical measures through which HR managers can implement family sensitive digital policies. For example, organizations may establish clear after hours communication policies that specify acceptable response times and encourage delayed responses. On the other hand, leadership behavior plays a big role; leaders who respect digital boundaries show their sincerity and thus decrease employees' obligation to be always available.

Third, digital well-being programs can help people get more tech-free family time and thus better family relations, especially if parents are working. Secondly, HR analytics may look at intercommunication habits outside the working hours and identify the teams that are more liable for over-communication.

By positioning the right to disconnect programs as family friendly, organizations can simultaneously improve employee well-being, enhance employer branding, and contribute to the achievement of broader societal well-being objectives.

7. Conclusion

The overuse of digital devices by children is not only a concern for parents and teachers but is also impacted by broader structural factors, such as digital demands in the workplace. This study argues that the absence of the right to disconnect largely in an indirect manner contributes to children's overuse of digital devices by modifying the digital behaviour of the parent. In highlighting the role of HRM by the right to disconnect for employee welfare, this paper proves HRM to be an indirect component in the right digital development of the children.

Future research must attempt to test the given relationships using longitudinal and multilevel approaches. As digital work is becoming a big part of human lives, the protection of the digital well-being of children also requires immense effort.

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