

The Power to Disconnect

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References: Sinclair, B., 2025, viewed 23/4/2025.

<https://sinclair.org.au/bern/yourrightsandthepowertodisconnect/Your-rights-and-the-Power-to-disconnect-ICN-2025.pdf>

Methodology

Literature review of published articles on the "Right to Disconnect" (RTD).

Introduction

- Technological advances have changed how work is performed & how people connect.
- Smart phones allow ease of contact.
- It is easier now to be contacted by the employer when employees are not at work but while they are engaged in family life & responsibilities, leisure activities & rest time.
- ↑ Invasion of non-work time by the employer.
- It is time to re-establish boundaries between work & home life.
- This has raised the issue of the "Right to Disconnect".
- People need to move away from the "always on" work culture.
- There is a global response to this problem.
- This literature review outlines a definition of RTD, effects of not disconnecting, what countries have RTD, how it can work for employees & what research shows about this change.

What is the Right to Disconnect?

It is legislation which protects employee's:

- right to rest,
- right to have their personal time & privacy respected or
- right to refuse to monitor, read or respond to contact from employer outside work hours, unless refusal is unreasonable.
- There is work time & there is rest time. The two are mutually exclusive.
- Regardless of the intensity or output of the work, any activity performed by the employee is considered work time, even if it is after work hours.
- Fines or imprisonment may apply to employers who breach the legislation.

What countries have introduced RTD?

Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Luxembourg, Mexico, Ontario (state of Canada), Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia & Spain.

Why should workers disconnect?

- Increased workloads & work hours = anxiety, burnout & work life imbalance.
- Increased stress, diminished health & wellbeing = depression, burnout & ↓ sleep.
- Out of hours contact can disrupt rest & recovery time, exacerbating stress.
- Workers with time off interrupted, report more sick leave due to poor work life balance, display lower work motivation & are less loyal to their employer = issues with workforce participation, financial insecurity & social cohesion.
- Not disconnecting can cause at least one negative consequence, reported in 81% of workers.
- Workers experience 2 negative consequences on average.
- Negative consequences = physical tiredness, stress & anxiety, feeling mentally drained, effects on personal life & relationships, unfulfilling non work time, reduced motivation to work & poor job satisfaction.
- Interference with family times = gendered maldistribution of caring duties, affects family wellbeing & child development.
- Unpaid work/year equals AUD \$131 billion.

How can RTD work for employees?

- Use legislation or a code of practice for RTD.
- Talk to colleagues & managers to raise awareness of RTD.
- Include RTD in workplace enterprise agreements or contracts.
- Develop policy defining boundaries between work & non-work time.
- Managers promote RTD, raise awareness of work life balance & lead by example & not contact staff when staff not at work.
- If staff work after hours (ie phone calls or texts) regardless the length of time or quality of work, then they should be paid.
- Staff who are available to be called in to work, should be paid "on call allowance".
- If contact is non-urgent, staff have right to disconnect & not respond to manager.
- If contact is for working extra shifts, then staff can decide if they respond or not.

Outcomes and Recommendations

- In Australia, paid overtime is down 33%.
- Longitudinal studies on the introduction of RTD are lacking.
- There is no nursing research on RTD.
- This is a valuable & interesting subject for nurse researchers.
- Re-establish boundaries between work and home. Choose to disconnect.