



The role of partners and children for employees' daily recovery ☆,☆☆

Verena C. Hahn ^{a,*}, Carmen Binnewies ^b, Christian Dormann ^c

^a Institute of Psychology, University of Mainz, Wallstr. 3, D-55122 Mainz, Germany

^b Institute of Psychology, University of Muenster, Fliehdnerstr. 21, D-48149 Muenster, Germany

^c Gutenberg School of Management & Economics, University of Mainz, Jakob Welder-Weg 9, D-55099 Mainz, Germany

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ABSTRACT

This multi-source diary study examined the role of partners for employees' daily recovery in a sample of dual-earner couples. We hypothesized that employees' daily psychological detachment from work during the evening should be positively associated with their partners' daily psychological detachment during the evening. Employees' affective well-being (serenity and negative activation) at bedtime should be influenced not only by their own psychological detachment, but also by their partners' psychological detachment. Moreover, we hypothesized that the presence of children in a couple's household should moderate the relations between partners' psychological detachment on the one hand, and employees' psychological detachment and affective well-being on the other hand. Fifty-three dual-earner couples completed daily electronic surveys via handheld devices at bedtime over the course of one work week. We used dyadic multilevel path modeling to analyze our data. Results showed that employees' and their partners' levels of daily psychological detachment were positively related. Employees' psychological detachment predicted their own negative activation, but not their serenity at bedtime. Partners' psychological detachment predicted employees' serenity and negative activation only in couples without children. Hence, our study provides support for the relevance of partners and children for employees' daily recovery after work.

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Since World War II, the percentage of dual-earner households has increased markedly (Whitehead, 2008). Nowadays, in European countries and the United States, the dual-earner pattern prevails among couples living together in a household and many of these dual-earner couples have children living in their home (UNECE Statistical Division Database, 2009). In dual-earner couples both partners face the challenge of juggling their job and their home demands (e.g., ten Brummelhuis, Haar, & van der Lippe, 2010). After a busy day at work, both partners strive to recover from job stress to recharge their batteries for the next work day. Being able to switch off from work during off-job time (i.e., psychological detachment) is crucial for employees' recovery (Sonnentag, 2012). Thus, in dual-earner couples both partners need to find ways to switch off from work during the evening to recover from job stress.

Previous research showed that employees' overall perception of their ability to detach from work and their global assessment of their well-being may be influenced by their partners' general ability to detach from work (Hahn & Dormann, 2013). However, these

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: verena.hahn@uni-mainz.de (V.C. Hahn), carmen.binnewies@uni-muenster.de (C. Binnewies), cdormann@uni-mainz.de (C. Dormann).

global assessments of employees' psychological detachment reflect employees' general—more trait-like—long-term recovery strategies; hence they cannot give insight into employees' daily—more state-like—psychological experiences and short-term recovery processes as they unfold. Although the relationships between employees' and their partners' psychological detachment and well-being do not necessarily have to be different when examined on a daily short-term level, it is important to study both long-term and short-term processes to arrive at more comprehensive understanding of employees' and their partners' recovery.

Moreover, prior research showed that there is a substantial intraindividual variation in employees' psychological detachment from day to day. For example, daily diary studies show that typically between 42 and 50% of the variance in psychological detachment is due to intraindividual variation (e.g., [Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005](#); [Sonnentag & Binnewies, 2013](#); [Volmer, Binnewies, Sonnentag, & Niessen, 2012](#)). It is unclear if and how the fluctuations in employees' and their partners' daily psychological detachment affect employees' and their partners' daily recovery processes.

The present study addresses this question by investigating the role of partners for employees' recovery processes with a daily diary design. More specifically, we examine if fluctuations in partners' daily psychological detachment from work are related to employees' daily psychological detachment and well-being at bedtime. Additionally, as many dual-earner couples have children in their homes, we consider the role of children for dual-earner couples' recovery processes. As having children may reduce the time couples spend together and may draw their attention away from each other (cf. [Song, Foo, & Uy, 2008](#)), we examine if the relation between partners' psychological detachment and employees' psychological detachment and well-being is the same for couples with and without children. Thus, we examine the presence of children as moderator.

Our study will contribute to the literature in several ways. First, our study with its daily diary design will allow capturing the short-term aspects of partners' influence on employees' daily recovery processes. Hence, our study will go beyond prior research that examined the influence of partners' psychological detachment on employees' psychological detachment and well-being focusing on general recovery strategies or experiences ([Hahn & Dormann, 2013](#)). Our daily diary study will help to gain more insight into the role of partners in employees' daily recovery as the diary design offers the unique possibility to track psychological effects as they unfold ([Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003](#)).

Second, our diary study allows us to study the dynamics of employees' and their partners' daily recovery processes by examining fluctuations *within* couples. Studying fluctuations in employees' and their partners' recovery does not only allow for investigating the implications of these fluctuations for employees' and their partners' well-being, but can also help to rule out one alternative explanation for the association between both partners' recovery experiences. [Hahn and Dormann \(2013\)](#) acknowledged that their finding of a positive relation between employees' and their partners' general psychological detachment could be due to assortative mating or selection effects rather than to a true influence of the partner. Their cross-sectional between-couple design did not allow ruling out this alternative explanation. As we focus on fluctuations *within* couples, our daily diary design can rule out this alternative explanation. Finding within-couple relationships between partners' psychological detachment and employees' psychological detachment and well-being thus can make us more confident that partners indeed influence employees' recovery processes.

Third, by studying the presence of children in a couple's home we aim at capturing employees' social context more completely. Only recently, scholars began to acknowledge the importance of the social context for employees' recovery from job stress ([Hahn, Binnewies, & Haun, 2012](#); [Park, Fritz, & Jex, 2011](#)). Given that many couples have children in their home, it is important to consider the role of children—as important members of the social context—in employees' recovery.

1. The recovery concept

Dealing with job demands and expending effort to fulfill work tasks deplete employees' resources throughout the workday and lead to strain reactions ([Meijman & Mulder, 1998](#)). After work, employees usually have time to rest and recover from job stress. Recovery is a process opposite to the stress process as it reduces and reverses the harmful effects of job demands ([Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007](#)). During recovery periods, short-term stress reactions can be offset and hence it can be prevented that short-term stress reactions develop into long-term health problems ([Meijman & Mulder, 1998](#)). A growing body of empirical research demonstrates that recovery processes during off-job time benefit employees' short-term as well as long-term well-being and health (see [Koch, Hahn, & Binnewies, 2013](#)). Additionally, research shows that being recovered is associated with employees' engagement and performance at work ([Binnewies, Sonnentag, & Mojza, 2009a](#); [Sonnentag, 2003](#)).

Recovery can occur when no demands similar to employees' preceding job demands are put on the employees ([Meijman & Mulder, 1998](#)) and when drained resources are replenished or when new resources such as energy or self-regulation are built up ([Hobfoll, 1989](#)). As being exposed to job stressors can lead to impaired affective states such as high negative activation and low positive affect (e.g., [Ohly & Schmitt, 2013](#)), successful daily recovery after work which undoes these strain reactions becomes evident in increased positive affective states and low negative affective states at bedtime ([Sonnentag & Geurts, 2009](#)).

Employees' affective experiences both at work and at home states can be described in the context of [Russell's \(1980\)](#) circumplex model which differentiates between affect of positive and negative valence on one dimension and high and low activation on the second dimension. Prior research showed that employees' recovery processes are associated with affective states from all four quadrants of the affective circumplex ([Fritz, Sonnentag, Spector, & McInroe, 2010](#); [Hahn et al., 2012](#); [Sonnentag, Binnewies, & Mojza, 2008](#)). However, not all affective states from all quadrants of the affective circumplex are equally suited for studying recovery at bedtime. For example, while it is desirable that employees feel positively activated in the morning when they start to work, feeling activated at bedtime might impair employees' ability to fall asleep ([Morin, Rodrigue, & Ivers, 2003](#)). Hence, in this study, we focus on the affective states of serenity and negative activation because these affective states seem

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