Transforming Work–Life Boundaries: AI-Powered Home Monitoring for Working Parents

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ABSTRACT

India's workforce has changed dramatically over the past two decades. More women are holding professional positions, more households run on two incomes and more parents are leaving home each morning with their minds pulled in two directions. The question this paper tries to answer is deceptively simple: can a parent sit in an office meeting without quietly dreading what might be happening at home? That tension — between showing up professionally and remaining emotionally present for children — is the starting point of this research. We examine how AI-powered home monitoring technologies, particularly smart cameras and sensor-based systems used for childcare supervision, are being adopted by working parents in Mangalore city. Through direct conversations with 20 working parents across 10 dual-income households, we try to understand whether these tools genuinely reduce workplace anxiety or simply relocate it. Our findings reveal that monitored reassurance can meaningfully improve focus and emotional availability at work — but only when technology is used with intention rather than compulsion. This paper also proposes a practical framework for HR leaders and families, one that treats employee wellbeing not as an abstract policy goal but as something shaped daily by the competing pulls of office and home.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Work–Life Balance, Working Parents, Childcare Monitoring.

Introduction

As one walks into any office in an Indian city today and one will find parents-particularly mothers - who carry an invisible second shift with them to work. Not the domestic labour that waits at home, but the mental weight of wondering: is my child alright? Did the ayah turn up? Why is she not picking up the call? The issue is therefore not simply about productivity; it reflects a deeply human concern about children's wellbeing during the working day. This is the central concern of this paper. India's family structure has undergone a quiet but profound shift. The joint family, once a reliable safety net that ensured grandparents or relatives were always present to supervise children, has been eroded by urbanisation and migration. Couples relocate to cities for employment, often far from their support networks. Nuclear households with two working adults and young children have become far more common.

According to Baporikar (2013), dual-earner households have grown steadily among educated, urban couples for whom two incomes are both aspirational and economically necessary.

For many families this shift has brought clear advantages, including higher household income and greater professional participation for women; who a generation ago may not have had these opportunities. But it has also created an all new anxiety. A parent who cannot delegate domestic supervision- either because domestic help is unreliable, extended family is absent, or institutional daycare is unavailable or unaffordable - carries that worry into their professional day. Research consistently shows that this persistent cognitive load undermines concentration and deepens what scholars call work–family conflict: the condition where the demands of employment and the demands of parenthood pull in opposite directions and cannot easily be reconciled (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Evolving gender norms in dual-earner families are reshaping arrangements for how childcare is divided. With an increasing number of women in the workforce, AI-enabled home monitoring technologies are appearing and designed to support connectedness between working parents and children. Such changes contribute to sweeping transformations around caregiving roles and technology-mediated parenthood in present-day India (Kumar & Choudhury, 2022).

It is against this backdrop that AI-powered home monitoring tools have entered Indian households. Smart cameras, motion sensors, and audio alert systems - initially marketed for home security - are increasingly being used by working parents to check on their children during the day. A parent in a meeting can glance at their phone, see their toddler napping beside the caretaker and return their attention to the agenda. For many parents interviewed in this study, that brief glance was the difference between productive engagement and gnawing distraction.

Yet this technology is not uncomplicated. Privacy concerns, caregiver dignity, the psychological effects of surveillance, data security risks and the danger of compulsive checking all demand serious attention. This paper does not treat AI monitoring as either a cure or a threat. It treats it as a social reality that is already present in several homes in Mangalore City; this paper attempts to understand - from working parents themselves - what it is actually doing to their working lives.

Research Methodology

Objectives

- To understand the nature and extent of work–home tension experienced by working parents in households in Mangalore city.
- To examine whether and how AI-powered home monitoring systems affect parental anxiety during working hours.
- To propose a practical framework for the responsible integration of AI monitoring tools in family and organisational contexts.

Scope of the Study

This study is conducted in Mangalore city and focuses on dual-income families with young children. This researcher has considered working parents with at least 1 child below the age of 12 years, for the purpose of this study. The researcher's own familiarity with the local context - as a working parent and academic in the city - shaped the decision to concentrate on this geography rather than attempt a broad national survey. The emphasis is on private caregiving arrangements within the home: the domain of domestic help, grandparental care, or children left alone under video supervision. Institutional childcare is outside the scope of this study.

Research Design

The study is descriptive and conceptual in nature. It draws on a synthesis of existing academic literature alongside primary fieldwork. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with working parents, allowing participants to speak in their own terms rather than respond to fixed questionnaires. This approach was chosen deliberately: the researcher wanted to hear the real emotions and human voices of parents' experiences rather than reduce them to numerical scores.

Data Collection

Primary data was collected through personal interviews with 20 working parents (10 couples) in Mangalore city. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, with the criterion that both partners in each couple were employed and had at least one child below 12 years of age at home. Interviews were conducted in the month of January and February 2026 and lasted between 10 and 25 minutes each. Secondary data was drawn from academic journals, research articles, industry reports and credible online sources. Interview notes were analysed thematically, and representative responses are cited throughout this paper with participant consent.

Limitations

The study's primary limitation is scale. Twenty parents constitute a small, purposively selected sample and cannot be taken as representative of all dual-income parents in India or even in Mangalore. The findings presented here are indicative rather than generalisable. It should also be noted that participants were selected from educated, urban and digitally comfortable households. Families without consistent access to smartphones, Wi-Fi, or disposable income sufficient to afford monitoring devices may have very different experiences of the work–childcare tension. Finally, the study cannot claim to eliminate researcher bias: as a working parent herself, the first author brought her own interpretative lens to the interviews, which may have shaped both the questions asked and the themes identified.

Literature Review

Over the last three decades, researchers studying Indian families and analysing the traditional family structures have repeatedly pointed to a noticeable shift in household structures, particularly in urban areas where nuclear, dual-earner families are common. Baporikar (2013) notes that the rise of nuclear dual-earner households among urban educated couples has fundamentally altered the architecture of domestic support. Where once grandparents or extended family provided a taken-for-granted backstop for childcare, many urban working parents now operate without any such network. The absence of extended family support is more than a practical difficulty. For many working parents it creates everyday pressures that can affect both work performance and personal wellbeing.

The theoretical foundation for understanding these consequences is well established. As early as in 1980's ample research has been conducted this this area. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined work–family conflict as a form of inter-role tension in which the demands of work and family roles become mutually incompatible. This conflict is not symmetrical: for working mothers in particular, studies have consistently found higher levels of strain and role overload than their male counterparts. Vashisht, Sharma, and Kumar (2022) documented this specifically in the Indian context through their interviews with dual-career couples, finding that the mental preoccupation with home during work hour -what they described as "cognitive contamination" - was a persistent feature of dual-income family life in Indian cities. Mendonça (2023), added texture to this picture through his study, finding that working mothers frequently report compromised career ambitions as a direct result of childcare anxiety.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted and then accelerated these dynamics in unexpected ways. Vaziri et al. (2020) documented how the collapse of work–home boundaries during lockdown created new forms of role conflict, as parents tried simultaneously to work and care for children in the same space. However, the pandemic also accelerated the adoption of home technology in India. AI-enabled cameras, smart doorbells and child monitoring apps entered the Indian consumer market rapidly between 2020 and 2024. Several studies have been conducted to understand the adoption of Internet of things (IoT) in India. Several studies pointed that smart home technology adoption on india was relatively low up until 2020's. the reasons cited varied from lack of awareness to infrastructural limitations. (Chitnis et al., 2016; Kapoor & Dwivedi, 2018). Even people who had initially purchased such devices for security purposes began using them for a different function: the ability to check on their children remotely during the working day.

Academic literature on AI-based child monitoring has grown correspondingly. Khan (2021) demonstrated that intelligent baby monitoring systems using computer vision can detect sleep posture, movement irregularities and distress signals, alerting parents in real-time. Zainab et al. (2025) extended this work to show that smart home monitoring systems can support early childhood safety through continuous behavioural tracking and risk detection. Much earlier than any of these studies, Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020), in their landmark study of parenting in the digital age, had observed that AI-enabled monitoring tools are becoming embedded in everyday family life and also cautioned that the relationship between technology and parenting is complex, contextual and often contradictory. Parents may simultaneously find monitoring reassuring and anxiety-inducing.

Beyond childcare safety, AI is being used to compensate for parental absence in learning contexts. Holmes et al. (2019) examined AI-enabled educational companions that assist children with homework and personalised instruction when parents are unavailable. Viswanathan et al. (2024), in a co-design study with parents, explored AI-supported wellbeing systems that detect shifts in children's emotional states through behavioural indicators, providing working parents with insights into their child's mood and psychological state during the day.

Unfortunately, the studies over the years have not been totally optimistic. Lupton (2020) raised important questions about data sovereignty and the commodification of family life through digital monitoring. Zuboff (2019) offered a broader critique, warning that surveillance technologies marketed for safety and convenience frequently serve the commercial interests of platform companies rather than the wellbeing of individual users. These concerns are particularly salient in the Indian context, where data protection frameworks remain in development and consumer awareness of data rights is variable.

Clark's (2000) work–family border theory provides a useful lens through which to examine how AI monitoring technologies function in the domestic context. Clark argued that the boundary between work and home is not fixed but actively negotiated and that the permeability of this boundary has direct consequences for role engagement and wellbeing. AI monitoring tools, by allowing parents a window into the home from the workplace, modify this boundary in important ways - ways that can be either stabilising or destabilising depending on the context and the user's relationship with the technology.

Findings and Theoretical Discussion

- **What Parents Actually Said**

Across the twenty interviews conducted for this study, one experience recurred with striking consistency: the moment of checking the camera. Parents described a brief, habitual glance at their phone - most commonly just after arriving at work, during a lunch break and before leaving the office. For the majority of participants, this was not a compulsive behaviour but a deliberate, bounded one. "I check three times a day, not more," said one mother, a bank employee. "Once I see she is fine, I can do my work. It's like a door closing -after that, I realise I'm at work and need to concentrate. Once I check on her, I'm satisfied and able to relax. I understand I'm at work, not at home."

Several fathers also described the monitoring tools as changing how they relate to the caregiving role during work hours. One engineer said: "Earlier I used to feel like I was leaving everything to my wife to worry about. Now we both are free to check, which we do regularly – at different intervals. We discuss it over lunch on WhatsApp as well. It has actually brought us closer." This observation was not unique; four other couples mentioned that shared access to the monitoring system had redistributed the mental burden of childcare oversight more equitably between partners.

Interestingly, what parents described here resonates with Hobfoll's (1989) conservation of resources theory. which argues that stress arises when individuals perceive their psychological resources to be under threat or depleted. For the parents in this study, the cognitive resource being consumed was attentional capacity: the ability to be mentally present at work. Several parents mentioned that once they quickly checked the camera and saw that everything was fine at home, they found it easier to focus on their work again.

- **When Technology Becomes a Problem**

Not all participants reported this experience positively. Two couples in the study had discontinued using their monitoring systems within months of purchase. One mother, a nurse who worked variable shifts, described the camera as having made her more anxious rather than less: "I would check it from the ward, then check again, then wonder if I had missed something. In fact on a few occasions, I have called my husband and requested him to go home and check on our son, as he was not visible in the camera. A couple of times my supervisor noticed that I was distracted. Eventually I switched it off." Her husband agreed: "The problem was not the camera. The problem was that she trusted it too much and then doubted it too much. It became another thing to manage."

One couple refused outright to recommend the technology to other parents. Their concern was not primarily about their own experience but about the caregiver's dignity. "Our maid has been with us for six years," the wife explained. "She is like family. Installing a camera to watch her would be a betrayal. What message does that send?" This is not a minor objection. The watcher gains reassurance; the watched lives under observation. In the domestic context, this asymmetry falls almost entirely on already-vulnerable informal workers.

- **The Question of Trust**

Perhaps the most consistent theme across the interviews was the relationship between monitoring and trust. Several parents made unprompted observations about this: they were not using the camera because they distrusted the caregiver, but because they distrusted their own ability to cope with not knowing. This is a subtle but important distinction. The anxiety being managed is less about the

caregiver's competence than about the parent's own psychological need for reassurance. If the technology is primarily used to manage parental anxiety rather than to monitor domestic workers, it opens a different angle to the study. Also, one cannot undermine the contribution and support of extended family in childcare. Would they be willing to be monitored throughout the day by the parents or would they term it as a question on their ability to look after the children in the absence of their parents.

Proposed Framework for Responsible AI Integration

Drawing on the literature review and conversations with working parents in this study, we propose a three-component framework for the responsible use of AI home monitoring in dual-income families. This framework is not prescriptive; it is offered as a practical guide for families, HR professionals, and institutional policymakers navigating this still-emerging terrain.

- **Component 1: Bounded Reassurance:** AI monitoring should be used as a bounded, intentional practice rather than a continuous, passive one. Based on conversations with participants, we suggest that parents establish clear and mutually agreed checking routines — for instance, three fixed times during the working day — rather than leaving the camera feed accessible throughout. This boundary-setting reduces the risk of compulsive monitoring and mirrors what Clark (2000) describes as productive "border work": the active management of the psychological line between work and home. Parents who had developed explicit routines around camera use consistently reported lower levels of overall anxiety and higher levels of work engagement than those who monitored continuously or unpredictably.

- **Component 2: Caregiving Dignity:** The use of monitoring technology in the home must be transparent, consensual, and bounded by respect for the caregiver. This means informing domestic workers that a camera is present, discussing its purpose openly, and — where appropriate — establishing camera-free zones (for instance, in the caregiver's personal space). Families may also consider involving the caregiver in the monitoring arrangement as a collaborative rather than adversarial participant: sharing observations, seeking their perspective, and treating the technology as a communication tool rather than an instrument of control. This approach is consistent with the ethics of relational care and may reduce the caregiver attrition that some participants reported experiencing once monitoring was introduced.

- **Component 3: Data Responsibility:** Parents using AI home monitoring systems are generating continuous records of domestic life — records that include footage of children, domestic workers, and household routines. Zuboff (2019) and Lupton (2020) both caution that such data is commercially valuable in ways that users rarely understand or consent to. We propose that families using such technologies take a minimum of three concrete steps: review and restrict data storage settings on their devices, avoid purchasing systems from providers with opaque data-sharing policies, and delete stored footage on a regular cycle. This is not an abstract digital hygiene recommendation but a practical safeguard for families who may not have considered the downstream uses of the data they are generating.

Implications

- ***For HR Leaders*:** The experiences described by parents in this study have direct implications for how organisations think about employee wellbeing. Most HR policies address work–life balance at the level of leave entitlements, flexible working arrangements, and employee assistance programmes. These are important. But they do not fully acknowledge the day-to-day cognitive burden that working parents carry — particularly in the hours when they are physically at work but psychologically straddling both domains.

What organisations can do is relatively modest but meaningful: acknowledge this tension explicitly in managerial conversations, create psychologically safe environments where employees can discuss caregiving concerns without stigma, and consider whether workplace wellbeing programmes should extend to parenting support resources. Several participants mentioned that their managers had no idea they were managing childcare anxiety during work hours. The silence around this topic is itself a problem, and HR leadership can play a role in breaking it.

Organisations should also be cautious about inadvertently creating expectations that employees remain digitally connected to their homes during working hours. The same technology that allows a parent to check on their child can also be used to monitor the parent's own availability and responsiveness. The boundaries are worth maintaining with care.

- ***For Working Parents and Their Families:*** The parents in this study who reported the most positive experiences with AI monitoring were those who had made explicit, shared decisions about how to use it. They had talked with their partners about checking frequency, discussed the technology's presence with their domestic workers, and were candid with themselves about when checking was providing reassurance and when it was feeding anxiety rather than resolving it. For families considering these tools, the most useful question to ask may not be "Is this technology good or bad?" but rather "What is it doing to our family, specifically?" The answer will differ across households, depending on the age and temperament of the children, the nature of caregiving arrangements, the reliability of local support networks, and the working conditions of both parents. Technology is not a universal solution. It is a variable one, and its value depends almost entirely on how consciously it is used.

Conclusion

This study began with a simple question: can working parents in dual-income households find in AI-powered home monitoring tools a genuine resource for managing work–life tension or is this technology solving one problem by creating several others? The honest answer, based on conversations with twenty parents in Mangaluru, is: it depends, and the "depends" matters enormously. For the majority of participants, limited and intentional use of smart cameras reduced workplace anxiety and improved their sense of presence at work. The technology functioned, as one father put it, like "a door you can open briefly and then close again." That image stayed with the researcher: not a surveillance system, not a substitute for trust, but a door. Something that can be opened when needed and closed when not.

But for a minority of participants, the door would not stay closed. The technology invited compulsive checking, heightened rather than reduced anxiety, and created discomfort in caregiving relationships that had previously been stable. These experiences do not necessarily indicate that the technology itself has failed. Rather, they reflect the complex ways in which people interact with and interpret technology in their daily lives. What became clear from the conversations in this study is that the usefulness of these devices depends less on the technology itself and more on how consciously families choose to use it. The parents who benefited most had thought carefully about why they were using the technology and had made their choices transparent to everyone in the household. Those who struggled had not.

For researchers, this points to a need for more primary, participant-centered studies of how AI technologies are actually being used in Indian homes — not in the abstract, but in the specific and complicated daily realities of working families. For HR leaders, it reinforces the case for treating employee wellbeing as something shaped by domestic life as well as workplace conditions. What we need to reconsider is the fact that, the usefulness of such tools depends on how thoughtfully families choose to incorporate them into their daily routines.

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19.   *All conceptual framing, analysis and interpretation are the authors' own.*

20.   *AI-assisted language refinement tools were used for editing clarity*.

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