Welcome to

The effects of fly-in fly-out (FIFO) workforce practices on families in Australia

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Chair: Steve Hackett

This webinar is part of the CFCA information exchange webinar series:

Please note: The views expressed in this webinar are those of the presenters, and may not reflect those of CFCA, the Australian Institute of Family Studies, or the Australian Government
Fly-in Fly-out workforce practices in Australia

The effects on children and family relationships

Veronica Meredith, Research Officer
Child Family Community Information Exchange
Fly-in, Fly-out work practices

Key Messages

- Limited available research
- Potential impacts on children can be both positive and negative
- Parenting is a challenge
- Access to communication is important
- Roster cycles
- Unique challenges
- Further research is needed
- A FIFO lifestyle does not suit everyone
The influence of contextual factors

- Organisational Factors
  - Management practices and workplace policies
  - Recruitment practices and FIFO expectations
  - Workplace culture
  - Roster cycles
  - Accommodation and facilities at worksite

- Individual and Family Factors
  - Reasons for entering FIFO lifestyle
  - Family structure, age and number of children
Key Findings

- Family Functioning
- Wellbeing, including mental health
  - FIFO worker
  - At-home partner
- Couple Relationships
- Parenting
- Effects on children
Family Functioning

- Most FIFO families function in the healthy range for communication and cohesion.
- No difference between FIFO families, military families and families in the general community.
- Some indication that fathers away for longer (> 5 months per year) have less affective involvement and behavioural control.
Wellbeing, including mental health

- Most studies indicate FIFO employees and partners no more likely to
  - have high stress levels,
  - poor relationship quality
  - poor health behaviours

- But - higher incidence of psychological distress among FIFO workers in one recent study
Wellbeing including mental health

- FIFO Families
  - Highly compressed rosters have more negative impacts
    - 28 days on followed by 7 days off (Ratio: 4:1)
    - 8 days on followed by 6 days off (Ratio: 1.3:1)
  - Return to home and departure points
    - Higher stress periods, greater likelihood of arguments at these transition points
Wellbeing including mental health

- FIFO Worker
  - Quality of accommodation, food, facilities and activities available on site
  - Missing important family events
  - Being away from family and friends
Wellbeing including mental health

- At-home partner
  - Lack of flexible employment
  - Lack of regular and affordable child-care
  - Physical and emotional demands of managing children and household alone
  - Feelings of loneliness and social isolation
  - Overall psychological wellbeing healthy
    - Small number finding work arrangements stressful
Couple Relationships

- No difference to other couple relationships
- Existing tensions?
- Couples with children
  - Relationship satisfaction and affectional expression lowest where youngest child < 5 years old
- Communication as a “proxy”
- No empirical evidence for greater separation and divorce
Parenting

- Greatest challenge to FIFO parenting
  - Transitioning
  - Confusion around who makes decisions and partner roles
- High levels of parenting conflict
  - Child rearing issues
- Parenting less rewarding and more challenging
Effects on children

- Limited research
  - Potential negative impacts
    - Negative emotions, experiences of bullying
    - Lack of daily interaction with FIFO parent
    - Restriction to activities
  - FIFO is not a discrete, homogenous risk factor
  - Positive impacts
    - Extended time with FIFO parent when they are home
  - Mothers may act as a “buffer” for effects on children
Overall conclusion

- Limited research
- Positive effects, Negative effects, Few effects
- High degree of complexity
- Important to consider the individual contextual complexities
Implications of review findings

- Implications for policy and practice
- Implications for research
- Implications for current and potential FIFO families
  - Weighing up the benefits versus the challenges to FIFO lifestyle
- Implications for mining organisations
Acknowledgements

This presentation is based on
Available at http://www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/
The effects of fly-in fly-out (FIFO) workforce practices on families in Australia

A limited but growing amount of Australian research into fly-in fly-out (FIFO) work practices tentatively suggests that a FIFO lifestyle can have positive, negative or few effects on children and on family relationships – depending on the circumstances.

Key messages

**FIFO Families**
Most FIFO families are healthy functioning families when the right conditions are in place, such as a balanced work/family roster.

**Parenting**
Parenting can be challenging, especially for partners at home.

**Potential impacts on children**
- **Negative**
  - Negative emotions
  - Increased behaviour problems
  - Bullying at school
  - Pressure to succeed academically
- **Positive**
  - More time with parent when they are home

**Communication**
FIFO families need to be able to communicate:
- Regularly
- Privately
- Effectively
- Spontaneously

**Further research is needed that is:**
- Longitudinal
- Collects data pre-entry to FIFO
- Engages with all types of HFO workers and their families

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**FIFO lifestyle**

**Benefits**
- High Income
- Independence
- Quality, extended time at home
- Getting things done during leave
- Meeting new people
- Travelling to new locations
- Clear separation between work and personal life
- Regular exercise on the job
- Healthy food on site

**Challenges**
- Emotional and functional adjustment to leaving and returning cycle
- Loneliness and isolation
- Hopelessness
- On site physical exertion and fatigue
- Reduced communication
- Absence at family events
- Difficult for at-home parent to undertake work or study
- Reduced social opportunities
- Restricted opportunity to get home in a family emergency

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Design: Australian Institute of Family Studies

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FIFO FAMILIES

Working effectively with FIFO families

Paula Washington
Family Relationship Services Manager
Centacare North Queensland
**KEY FINDINGS FROM PRACTICE MIRRORS LITERATURE**

**Practice observations, community consultation and surveys by Centacare North Queensland 2011-2012.**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Literature</th>
<th>Practice example</th>
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| **Hoath and Haslam McKenzie (2013):** Conflicting expectations of FIFO parents (eg. parenting/household tasks, finances) lead to greater vulnerability to feelings of isolation or depression | **Consultation** - Increase in client numbers of FIFO family members. Main issues were family conflict, depression, finances, loneliness, role expectations, stress. 
**Consultation** - FIFO employees (current or previous) identified as 2nd highest cohort seeking Dispute Resolution at Townsville FRC. Defence community largest single identified cohort. 
(both have high demographic representation in the region but still a disproportionately high representation at the service) |
| **Henry (2013), Torkington (2011):** ‘General reluctance to seek help’ reinforced by a culture of not engaging in help seeking behaviours. Observations that help for physical health is more likely to be addressed or acted upon than emotional well-being or mental health issues. | **Survey** – repeated references to reluctance to engage in services related to emotional health or well-being. 
**Survey + Consultation** – supports identified included colleagues, friends, families. Counselling viewed as a ‘last resort’ measure and such help would likely be sought when ‘in town, not out at work’ (SOURCE community) |
| **Hoath & Haslam McKenzie (2013):** The juncture between existing issues and inherent challenges associated with FIFO can result in a compound effect on FIFO workers and families. 
**Gent (2004), Sibbel (2010):** Support for education or other intervention to provide families with an understanding and realistic expectations of the impact of FIFO on the family. | **Survey** – ‘people need to know what it’s like beforehand’ 
**Survey** – ‘if things weren’t ok before FIFO they won’t be after’ 
**Consultation** – Common theme of issues being AMPLIFIED by the FIFO context rather than CAUSED by it: ‘problems can be made worse’ 
**Consultation + survey** – Common theme of ‘PREPARATION for families. Examples include: Company inductions should include spouses, education and briefing prior about potential impact on family and self. 
**Consultation + Survey** - High rate of feedback around incapacity to engage in community due to FIFO. Eg. adjustment after night shift, shifts impacting on contact arrangements with kids, playing sport, owning a pet, important family events etc. |
EXPERIENCE AND RESEARCH DRIVING SERVICE RESPONSES

**Learnings in working with FIFO families:**
- Services in SOURCE & HOST communities
- Diversity of service delivery medium (online, phone, face to face, self-paced)
- Recognising and responding to different needs of Employee/Partner/Children
- Understanding the SOURCE city is not always the HOMETOWN – established supports and family may not be in SOURCE city
- Understanding the ‘Pre-FIFO’ situation:
  * Eg. In NQ there is a high rate of ex-Defence personnel in mining/FIFO issues already of concern (violence, abuse, substance misuse, relationship issues, conflict)

**Centacare NQ’s approach:**
- Education/support course for FIFO families: “Digging Deep”
- Use of self-contained modules of information rather than a sequential structure of courses
- Using “Digging Deep” as a referral pathway to other services
- Linking with local recruitment agencies and mining companies/contractors to be a part of inductions
- Extended service hours and flexible delivery
Fly-in fly-out workforce practices in Australia: The effects on children and family relationships

Anne Sibbel
Community Psychologist
FIFO Research

- Rapid increase in number of FIFO employees over previous 25 years
- Lag in FIFO research and understandings
- Need for research to inform policy, practice, employers, FIFO employees and families, host and home communities, politicians
- What we know
  - No “one size fits all” FIFO work profile
  - No “typical” FIFO experience
  - Stressors associated with FIFO living and working
  - FIFO reflection of wider Australian community
  - The impacts on families
- Research challenges
  - Access to participants
  - Funding
  - Industry support
  - Implementation of findings
Filling the Gaps

- Exploring the “who” and the “how”
  - Understanding the “how” of FIFO impacts
  - Profiling the “who” of FIFO employment in Australia
  - The longitudinal view of FIFO
  - Those who no longer FIFO

- Other considerations
  - Implementing current understandings
  - Residential research
  - Political footballs
  - Re-inventing the wheel
  - Who will benefit?
FIFO work and families in Australia

Nicole Ashby

Founder and Director, FIFO Families

www.fifofamilies.com.au
FIFO Families

What we do

• Est.2010
• Servicing approx. 15,000 families across the country and into NZ
• Creating localized safety nets (groups)
• Saving lives and relationships
• Lobby local, state and federal governments as well as industry bodies
• Bring the issues of the industry to the forefront AND the SOLUTIONS to match them
• Engage and work with industry to improve their bottom line by supporting the family
• Educating industry, workers and families on how to make FIFO/DIDO a successful and manageable lifestyle

What we know

• FIFO is a choice; not for everyone
• Mitigating factors are;
  1. Roster
  2. Family/extended support
  3. Preparedness for the lifestyle
  4. Knowing what resources are out there and when to access them
  5. Childcare options/flexibility

www.fifofamilies.com.au
What we see and hear

• “It would have been nice to hear about families working longer rosters...it gives the impression that we all “COPE” when in reality we do not.
• “FIFO is not a piece of cake because it is a 9:5 roster. It is very draining on both my husband and I and 4 days together a fortnight isn’t ideal in any family relationship”

- Increased stress levels on some partners and children
- Isolation and loneliness and lack of understanding from wider community
- Exhaustion in particular where very young children are involved
- Uneven & longer rosters impact greater
- Increased levels of mental health impacts on both worker and family (Dr Jennifer Bowers, ACRRMH)
- Impacts/effects surfacing in education system in WA

What needs to be done

• More research; longitudinal and larger numbers
• More education and support across the country
• Openly acknowledging the challenges of the lifestyle; from companies, government and wider community
• Flexible childcare arrangements/options

www.fifofamilies.com.au
FIFO in Australia

Emmanuel Hondros
Manager – People Strategies
The Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia (CME)
26 February 2014
Why FIFO?

- WA resources sector has a strong regional presence
- Complementary workforce models of FIFO and residential employment give the employer and the employee greater choice
“FIFO families are likely to be healthy, functioning families that demonstrate high levels of communication and cohesion”
Organisational factors

• CME member companies have a range of strategies to attract and retain FIFO workers:
  – Flexibility with rosters
  – Attractive, safe and high quality camp facilities
  – Access to timely and private communication options
  – Targeted employment assistance programs and support structures

• Best practice in FIFO integration: PICC Guiding Principles
1. Carrying out research and consultation to identify the potential economic, social and environmental effects and opportunities for host communities
2. Undertaking planning, implementing and monitoring strategies to manage effects and optimise economic social and environmental returns
3. Responding to stakeholder expectations by locating and integrating transient worker accommodation with local neighbourhoods, where appropriate, and investigating the potential for shared use of facilities
4. Fostering mutual respect and a sense of connection between the FIFO employees and the host community
5. Developing understanding respect and tolerance of differences in cultures, heritages and faiths, within FIFO and residential workforces, as well as the host community
6. Identifying potential collaborations that will mutually benefit the community, FIFO employees and companies
7. Providing a safe environment with access to high quality amenities and services that will enhance the health and wellbeing of FIFO employees
8. Assisting FIFO employees and their families to understand and embrace the lifestyle that may result from long distance commuting
For organisations to consider

- Encourage greater take up internally of the existing support structures and employee assistance programs
- Provide greater access to educational guides and resources for employees living the FIFO lifestyle, such as this guide from the Queensland Resources Council and engagement with community groups