

Fathers, Adolescent Sons and the Fly-in/fly-out Lifestyle

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The effects of Fly-in/fly-out (FIFO) employment on the relationships between adolescent boys and their fathers are poorly understood. Using a phenomenological methodology, this study investigated the experiences of male adolescents whose fathers have FIFO employment. In-depth interviews were conducted with 8 male adolescents to understand how the FIFO lifestyle influences their lives and relationships. Analysis identified two main themes of (1) opportunities afforded by the lifestyle and (2) family relationships. Adolescents reported lifestyle benefits associated with their father working FIFO, described how they maintained father son connections and how FIFO impacted on their family. Further research into the long term impacts of FIFO employment on adolescent development is indicated.

The resources industry in Western Australia includes both offshore oil and gas and land-based mining. Together, these sectors directly employ more than 75,600 workers; more than 80% of whom are male (Chamber of Minerals and Energy, 2008; Department of Mines and Petroleum, 2010). The geographic remoteness of many sites and the prohibitive costs of establishing infrastructure to service these sites has led mining companies to increasingly utilise fly in/fly out (FIFO) employment in their operations (Price, 2008). It is estimated that more than 20,000 families in Western Australia alone are involved in the FIFO lifestyle (Gallegos, 2006). FIFO is defined as:

...work in relatively remote locations where food and lodging accommodations are provided for workers on the work site, but not for families. Schedules are established whereby workers spend a fixed number of days working at the site, followed by a fixed number of days at home. (Storey, 2001, p. 135)

Early studies into the effects of FIFO on family functioning focussed primarily on

the effects of this lifestyle on workers and their partners (e.g., Morrice & Taylor, 1978; Morrice, Taylor, Clark, & McCann, 1985; Storey, Lewis, Shrimpton, & Clark, 1986). More recently, studies have emerged with the primary goal of examining the potential impacts of FIFO on the well-being of children and families (e.g., Beach, 1999; Gallegos, 2006; Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2008; Sibbel, 2001). However, to date, no research has sought to explore the psychosocial impacts of FIFO on adolescent well-being and development.

Adolescence

Adolescence is a transitional period, typically described as between 12 and 24 years of age. It is characterised by significant cognitive, social, emotional and physical changes (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2007; O'Brien & Scott, 2007). Identity formation, self-esteem and social competence are associated with the adolescent's ability to successfully gain independence, strive towards their educational aspirations and form meaningful peer relationships in their communities (Goldstein, Davis-Kean, & Eccles, 2005). Challenges to the formation of social identity and connectedness can place them at risk of being socially isolated within their

communities (Hall-Lande, Eisenberg, Christenson, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007; O'Brien & Scott).

Positive parent-adolescent relationships have been found to protect against social isolation through the provision of social support and creating a sense of family connectedness (Hall-Lande et al., 2007; O'Brien & Scott, 2007; Richmond & Stocker, 2006). A sense of connection to family can enhance individual feelings of self-worth and hence ameliorate the impacts of social isolation (Amato & Booth, 1997; Rubin & Mills, 1988).

Historically, fathers were seen as peripheral influences to children's development; that is, important as material providers for their offspring but providing little in respect to the children's social and psychological development (Mott, 1994). However, more recent understandings acknowledge the separate contributions made by fathers and mothers to their children's development (Davis, Crouter, & McHale, 2006; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). Studies have repeatedly found that when the mother-child relationship is controlled for, fathers exert a unique parenting influence over and above that of mothers (e.g., Flouri & Buchanan, 2000, 2002, 2003a, 2003b; Veneziano & Rohner, 1998). In particular, a positive father-child relationship has been found to contribute to better academic outcomes and higher social competence for some adolescents while reducing the likelihood of anti-social behaviour (Davis et al., 2006; Zimmerman, Salem, & Maton, 1995). In addition, whilst paternal involvement has a significant role in protecting against psychological maladjustment in male and female adolescents (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003a; Flouri & Buchanan, 2003b), this effect appears to be greater for boys than girls (Bronte-Tinkew, Moore, & Carrano, 2006). Fathers frequently play a more active role in their sons' development than in their

daughters' and this involvement with their sons increases as they age. By the time children reach adolescence, compared to girls, boys report a greater degree of emotional and behavioural connectedness to their fathers (Videon, 2005).

Absence of Fathers Due to Employment

There is however some evidence that work-based demands placed on parents in Western cultures can negatively impact on parents' and children's opportunities to develop and maintain supportive family relationships (Pocock, 2001, 2003). Such demands include extended working hours and the 'spillover' of workplace-based stress into the home (Galinsky, Kim, & Bond, 2001). Long hours of employment, such as 12-hour shifts, can impact directly on the worker and have flow-on effects to the family (Pocock, 2001). For example, Bond, Galinsky, and Swanberg (1998) found long working hours can negatively influence father-child relationships through the reduction of time available for family interaction. In addition, the spillover of stress and negative interactions from the workplace to the family can impact on a father's emotional capacity to positively engage with his children (Bumpus, Crouter, & McHale, 2006; Crouter, Bumpus, Maguire, & McHale, 1999; Hughes & Parkes, 2007).

However the relationship between parents' working arrangements and home life is complex (Pocock, 2001). For example, in her review of the literature on the effects of long working hours on family life, Pocock reported that increased income resulting from longer working hours can relieve family stress associated with financial strain. She also reported that while children acknowledged the benefits associated with increased family income, they also expressed a need to have more time with their parents. It has been suggested that the combination of stressful, demanding jobs and extended working hours can have the most negative effects on families (Pocock, 2001).

Australians generally work longer hours when compared with workers in other countries (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2008). Recent data indicates that 15% of Australian men work more than 50 hours per week (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010) and 38% work weekly overtime (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). These longer working hours potentially impact on family wellbeing and the opportunities for children to engage with their fathers (Pocock, 2001). Hughes and Parkes (2007) found that conflicting work demands and family needs often resulted in work interfering with family life leading to lower family satisfaction and higher psychological stress. When compared with younger children, adolescents were more likely to feel they did not have enough time with fathers and that when fathers were available they were not able to engage fully due to the demands of their fathers' work (Crouter, Bumpus, Head, & McHale, 2001; Crouter et al., 1999; Galinsky, 1999).

The type of industry in which the father works can contribute to the disruption of parent-child relationships. Industries that use shift work or FIFO work practices result in families whose fathers are absent for varying periods of time, potentially creating disjointed routines in the family environment (Zvonkovic, Solomon, Humble, & Manoogian, 2005). The resource sector is one such industry which utilises both shift work and commuting practices.

Approximately 47% of Western Australians who work in the resource sector are employed in a FIFO capacity, which requires them to live away from home for various periods of time (Chamber of Minerals and Energy, 2008). However, due to differing work requirements within the resource sector, FIFO rosters (the time away and at home), can vary widely ranging from 5 days away/2 days home to 9 weeks away/4 weeks home (Beach & Cliff, 2003; Gallegos, 2006; Pilbara Regional Council, 2004). In the current

economic and employment climate, 8 days away/6 days home is an increasingly more common roster for land-based mining, while even time rosters such as 2 weeks away/2 weeks home are more usual in the oil and gas industry.

The effects of land-based mining and oil and gas off shore FIFO employment rosters on families have been investigated in both the international and Australian contexts since the 1980s. These earlier studies particularly focussed on the potential impacts of FIFO on family function and relationship stress between employees and their partners (Clark & Taylor, 1988; Eastman, Archer & Ball, 1990; Morrice et al., 1985; Storey, Shrimpton, Lewis, & Clarke, 1989). Typically the practice was associated with increases in stress and loneliness for the at home partner, and difficulties negotiating roles and responsibilities for each adult in the relationship, however there was also evidence of the use of positive coping strategies by the majority of these couples. More recent Australian studies have demonstrated that FIFO families are generally resilient to the particular challenges of the lifestyle and their levels of family functioning are similar to those of the general community (Keown, 2006; Reynolds, 2004; Sibbel, 2010; Taylor & Simmonds, 2009).

Other Australian studies have explored the experiences of children from FIFO families. Those few that have been completed were undertaken with younger children and have yielded mixed results. For example, Beach (1999) found that FIFO disrupted family relationships such that children had difficulty re-engaging with their fathers on their return. These families were all on a longer roster (4 weeks away and 1 week home). On the other hand, Kaczmarek and Sibbel (2008) found that compared to a control (community-based group) group, children aged from 8 to 12 years who had a parent engaged in FIFO did not display raised levels of depressive symptomatology or

anxiety. In her qualitative study of families with children aged between 10 months and 13 years, Gallegos (2006) found children were adaptable to the lifestyle but the degree of adaptability was influenced by the parents' ability to manage the frequent transitions associated with the particular roster.

To date, little research has been completed on the impacts of FIFO employment on the adolescent sons of FIFO employees and thus the impacts are currently not well understood. In particular, little is known about adolescent boys' perceptions of the impacts of their fathers' FIFO employment on themselves and their families. Understanding these experiences is important as the FIFO fathers' constant 'comings and goings' have the potential to impact on the relationship with their adolescent sons which in turn could significantly influence their psychological and social well-being and educational aspirations. Adolescents have different durations of experience of FIFO. For some, it is a familiar lifestyle as their fathers may have been engaged in this type of employment for a long period of time. However, for other adolescents it may be a new experience as a consequence of the migration of workers into the resource sector in response to industry workforce requirements (Chamber of Minerals and Energy, 2008).

The Present Study

The aim of this study was to explore adolescent boys' experiences of their father's FIFO employment. In doing so it posed the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of adolescent boys whose fathers work away from home for extended periods on a FIFO basis?
2. What are the adolescent social and psychological issues that arise from such a father-son relationship?

Method

Research Design

Qualitative methodologies assume that people actively create their social worlds (Smith, 1990). The current study sought to understand the lived experiences of adolescent boys whose fathers were currently employed in a FIFO capacity and thus a qualitative methodology was deemed appropriate. In particular, a phenomenological approach was utilised as understanding the participants' subjective experiences and the meanings they associated with FIFO living were central to the study (Crotty, 1998). Phenomenological approaches are based on the epistemological understanding of personal knowledge and subjectivity, that people are "active creators of their world and have a consciousness that communicates to them everyday experiences and knowledge" (Sarantakos, 1993, p. 48). The reality of an experience is inextricably linked to an individual's consciousness of that experience as well as the outward experience (Becker, 1992; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Phenomenology also requires researchers to bracket or set aside their own preconceived ideas about the phenomenon in order to understand it through the voices of the informants (Creswell, 2003).

Participants

Eight adolescent males, as described in Table 1, participated in this study. Informants' ages ranged from 13 years 9 months to 21 years 10 months. Each of the adolescent informants was a member of a two-parent family in which the father was currently engaged in FIFO work in the resources sector. Two informants lived with their biological mother and step-father. The majority of the fathers ($n = 7$) were employed by resource companies; six worked in the off-shore oil and gas industry and one in land-based metalliferous mining. The remaining father was self-employed, operating contracts for a number of companies covering both

Table 1
Demographic Information of Participants

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>FIFO Duration</i>	<i>Current Roster</i>
Michael	13yrs 9mnths	20+yrs	2wks on/off
Jacob	15yrs 6mnths	16+yrs	2wks on/off
Toby	15yrs 5mnths	15+yrs	Variable
Sean	21yrs 10mnths	8yrs	1mnth on/off
Travis	17yrs 4mnths	7yrs	4wks on/off
Mark	19yrs 4mnths	7yrs	1mnth on/off
Josh	15yrs 10mnths	2yrs	1mnth on/off
Andrew	14yrs 1mnth	1yrs	2wks on/off

Australian-based and international mining projects.

The number of years the fathers had worked in a FIFO capacity ranged from 1 to 20+ years. Three informants had grown up with FIFO, and the remaining five had experienced their father having FIFO employment and non-FIFO employment at different stages of their upbringing. The fathers' FIFO rosters were typically even rosters (symmetry between the days at work and days at home). One father's roster varied as a consequence of his type of work and as such was not regular. Most informants had experienced different rosters in the past including; 2 weeks away/1 week home, 4 weeks away/2 weeks home, 7 weeks away/1 week home and 3 months away/1 month home.

Procedure

Following ethical approval from the Edith Cowan University Ethics Committee, informants were recruited through school newsletters and snowballing techniques. Informants completed face to face interviews guided by a semi-structured interview schedule which encouraged them to provide

in-depth accounts of their experiences of having a father work in a FIFO capacity. The interview schedule was informed by earlier research that acknowledges the difference in experiences that occur when the FIFO worker is at home and when he is away. Questions included: What do you and your dad do together when he is at home? Tell me about how things are at home compared to when he is away? What is it like for you when dad goes away? What do you feel when he goes? How do you think dad's being away affects your mum?

Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed on completion. Ethical considerations such as voluntary participation, confidentiality and freedom to withdraw from the research at any time were adhered to. Sampling was undertaken until data saturation was achieved (Creswell, 2003).

Data Analysis and Research Rigour

Each interview was transcribed as soon as possible after the interview to access the essential meaning of the description of the phenomenon. Transcripts were initially analysed using Creswell's (2003) data

Table 2
Adolescents’ Perceptions of the FIFO Lifestyle

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Sub-Themes</i>
Opportunities afforded by the lifestyle	Financial rewards Extended periods of time at home and away
Family relationships	Relationships when Dad’s home Relationships with Dad when he’s away Comings and goings

analysis spiral, which employs a process of “moving in analytical circles rather than using a fixed linear approach” (p. 142). This iterative approach provides for alternating cycles of analysis and reflective consideration and is deemed appropriate for analysing phenomenological data (Creswell, 2003). Key words and phrases were extracted from each transcript and coded. Bracketing of the researcher’s preconceived ideas and judgements of FIFO was an essential part of this process (Crotty, 1998). Common issues were then grouped resulting in two overarching themes and five sub-themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Individual transcripts were also compared to identify experiences which were common across participants and those that were unique. This enabled the identification of patterns of occurrence and meaning occurring across the participants’ lives.

A reflective journal was kept by the primary researcher (the first author) to record thoughts and feelings encountered during the analysis (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Research rigour was achieved by the review of transcripts and themes by an independent reviewer and member checking. Four participants were also contacted by telephone to seek feedback regarding the accuracy of the themes and issues identified from their

interviews. All expressed agreement with interpretations of the data.

Findings and Interpretations

The aim of this study was to explore adolescent boys’ experiences of their fathers working FIFO and the meaning they make of the experiences including the impacts on themselves and their family. Analysis of the interview transcripts identified the following overarching themes and sub-themes (see Table 2). The interviews revealed the boys’ experiences of the FIFO lifestyle were generally described as positive; however, although they were aware of the benefits afforded by the lifestyle, they were also mindful of the challenges FIFO presented for themselves and their families.

A number of developmental differences were evident in the perspectives offered by the informants. Younger informants appeared to have a more egocentric focus and spoke predominantly of how FIFO affected their personal lives while older informants were generally more aware of the effect of FIFO on the family system and their parents, as well as themselves. The ability to recognise multiple dimensions of experience develops into adolescence and development of this skill is influenced by the parent-child relationship (Burack, Flanagan, Peled, Sutton, Zygmuntowicz, & Manly, 2006).

Opportunities Afforded by the Lifestyle

One of the two major themes that emerged from the adolescents' perceptions of FIFO was the opportunities afforded by the lifestyle for both the individual and their family. In particular, informants recognised the financial benefits of FIFO employment and the opportunities for extended interaction with their fathers during their 'chunks of time' at home. However, as discussed later, there was also recognition that these benefits came with a cost.

Financial rewards. Informants perceived that one of the main reasons for their father having FIFO employment was the high level of income and the resultant financial and material benefits for themselves and their family rather than preferring the FIFO lifestyle itself. Travis commented "he gets good pay in his job" while Sean acknowledged "he made a lot more money than when he worked at home." However Michael's comment that, "if he had a job with the same amount of money with the same type of work that he does...but it was in Perth he'd take that straight away," indicates an awareness that the financial rewards rather than the FIFO lifestyle itself was the main reason his father had FIFO employment.

A particular perception of many of the informants was that their father's FIFO employment provided them with the resources and opportunities to enjoy a lifestyle which included for example, outings and local, interstate, and international holidays that might not be available to them if their fathers had non-FIFO employment. Some families enjoyed regular outings to the theatre and concerts and meals at restaurants. Several informants mentioned their family holidays. For example, Michael described their travel to New South Wales, Tasmania, China, and Hong Kong, stating that the latter trip was "for my birthday because I really wanted to go overseas." Josh mentioned surfing trips to the south west region of Western Australia and a trip that was being

planned to Bali, while Andrew talked about a family holiday to Queensland. There was an understanding that these trips were possible because of the FIFO income.

While their father's role as material provider was recognised by all the participants, two demonstrated a particular regard for what it meant at a personal level. Jacob stated, "(I am) proud of him. I've got a Dad doing something he doesn't want to just so Mum and I can have a good life. In that way I find dad a pretty good man." Michael described his dad as a "saint" and stated "he makes sacrifices all the time. I think he misses out on a lot more than I do."

Furthermore, participants such as Jacob, Michael and Sean recognised the conflict between the financial cushion provided by the lifestyle and the cost in the form of the effect on their fathers (Galinsky, 1999; Pocock, 2001). Jacob stated:

That's why he's doing all this...because he feels that if he doesn't ...that it's letting mum and I down. So he's given us this house and the car and my school... He feels he has to do it because he wants the best for mum and I.

Extended periods of time at home and away. In addition to the comfortable lifestyle and increased recreational activities afforded by the financial benefits the informants described the positive outcomes of the concentrated 'blocks' of time at home that are characteristic of FIFO work (Gallegos, 2006). Most informants stated that one of the best things about FIFO was when their father was home he did not have to work. Josh described how he looked forward to his father coming home because "we get to spend time with him." Similarly Sean commented that:

The best thing about him being home [is] that he has more time...The fact that he doesn't come home in the afternoon and is

tired from working all day and then just wants to have dinner and go to bed. He is more sociable and can spend time doing stuff with us.

Sean's comments reflect the value placed on the quality of the time with their fathers as well as the quantity of time FIFO allowed them to have with their fathers. In particular Sean was better able to interact with his father because he wasn't tired from working all day in a standard residential job.

Andrew's life experiences included both the FIFO and standard work-hours lifestyles as his step father had only commenced FIFO within the past year. In a comparison of the two work types he stated he believed he was not disadvantaged by FIFO stating:

Yeah. It's almost the same now because I never used to see him back then as well because he was always going in and out. It's good here because I get to spend more time with him now. I like this job better actually because on the old job he'd have to get up at six o'clock and he'd never get home until about 5.30. So we'd get that hour but he'd be pretty tired. He did that for weeks and [unclear] bad business and that's why we moved over here [Western Australia] in the first place. They would always pull him in on weekends to do stuff. I'm glad he changed jobs because now I get two weeks and nothing interrupts.

Some participants acknowledged that in addition to the benefits associated with their father's extended periods of time at home, there were also positive experiences for themselves and their family when their father was away (Mauthner, MacLean, & McKee, 2000). These positive outcomes varied between the informants. For example, Toby commented that home was "more relaxed

when he (Dad) was away" and that if his father had a standard job where he was home every day Toby's life would "probably be a lot more stressful." Travis's experience related to a perception of having more freedom when his dad was away, "Mum lets us have people over like not too many but Dad would hardly let us have anyone over." For Andrew, it related to time with his Mum:

Sometimes it gives me and mum more chance to relax together because when he's home I'm usually spending more time with him than I would do with her. It gives us a lot of time but like I said before it does cause strain.

Family Relationships

The second major theme arising from the informants' narratives was that of family relationships and in particular the relationship between FIFO father and son. Within this theme two sub-themes were apparent: relationships when the FIFO father was home and relationships while he was away. The overall impression of the father-son relationships was that they were generally positive and healthy with the majority of respondents talking about their fathers with warmth, affection and humour. However, Toby's narrative also reflected the complex nature of father-son relationships and highlighted the difficulty in understanding the particular contribution of the FIFO lifestyle to these relationships. Toby described his father as "a stressful, critical person ...who always has to be right (and) get his own way. He always thinks he's always the victim and never anyone else," but when asked what the best thing was about having his father home, Toby replied, "he is pretty funny and he is good to talk to about stuff."

Central to the father-son relationship is the range of roles that the fathers play in their son's lives. Despite the regular absences of their fathers, the boys described a variety of roles their fathers played in their lives, such as "mates" (Michael, Josh, Travis, Mark,

Sean), “teachers/mentors” (Michael, Andrew, Jacob), “role models” (Michael, Jacob), and “protectors” (Michael, Toby, Travis, Sean). In particular the importance of ‘mateship’ in the father-son relationship was evident in statements such as “he’s my best mate” (said twice by Michael as well as Josh and Mark), “we talk about stories most of the time” (Michael), “father-son but also sort of friends as well” (Mark), and “Dad and I talk a lot when he’s home” (Jacob). The description of their fathers as friends and mates seems to indicate that despite the regular absences of their fathers, for these adolescents it seems their relationships with their fathers were maintained and able to continue to develop as the boys went through adolescence.

Relationships when Dad’s home. The main connections between father and son was maintained for all of the informants through sharing of activities, particularly sporting, when the father was home, as Mark described, “we play sport, we watch sport.” Some fathers had an active role in coaching their sons or assisting with sporting matches on the days they were at home. Other commonly shared activities were associated with either “surfing” (Michael, Josh, Travis), the “beach” (Toby, Andrew) or “fishing” (Jacob). Perth’s location and climate encourage such outdoor activities. Homework also featured as a shared activity, with three of the six school-aged informants relying on their fathers rather than their mothers to assist them with school-related tasks.

Galinsky (1999) found that adolescents look for opportunities for ‘hang around time’, that is the ability to spend time with their parents that is not rushed and that is focussed on the interaction between parent and adolescent. The experiences of many of the participants reflected this in statements referring to shared time as the opportunity to “hang out” (Sean, Mark), “chill out” (Travis), “spend time together” (Josh), or “talk” (Michael, Jacob). The ‘chunks’ of time

at home afforded by their FIFO lifestyle were valued by the participants as extra opportunities for this type of interaction with their fathers. These findings are similar to the experiences of adult participants in earlier FIFO research who valued the extra time afforded by the FIFO lifestyle to interact with family members (e.g., Gallegos, 2006; Sibbel, 2010).

Another related finding to emerge from this study regarded the informants’ perceptions of their father-son relationships compared with that of their friends whose fathers were home every day. Previous studies have found that the quality of father-son interactions is more important than quantity in determining positive adolescent outcomes (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003b; Parke, 1996). When asked to compare their father-son relationship with that of their friends, the participants were unanimous in their perceptions that their relationship was no different from that of their friends, and indeed some boys described it as better. Although some said they would have preferred their father to be home, they also believed they were not disadvantaged by not having their father home every day. As Mark explained, “It doesn’t really bother me much because when he’s home it’s good.”

Many indicated they believed that their relationship was actually stronger because of FIFO. For these adolescents FIFO employment meant that when their fathers were home they were not distracted by work and could therefore concentrate on interacting with their sons (Crouter et al., 2001; Crouter et al., 1999). As Travis described:

I think I get along better with my dad [than my friends with their dads] because their dads are always there. They’re all stressed out because they’re working every day. When dad gets back he doesn’t have to work.

Relationships with Dad when he's away. Previous research has demonstrated that 'quality' father involvement can be measured by how often fathers talk to their adolescents, and their knowledge of and involvement in their adolescents' activities. This has been found to have a strong positive association with adolescents' well-being (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2006; Brotherson, Yamamoto, & Acock, 2003; Carlson, 2006).

Earlier FIFO related research has found maintaining relationships during the away part of the roster can be a particular challenge for FIFO couples and families (Gallegos, 2006; Sibbel, 2001). In this study, a common factor in maintaining the connection between father and son was the ability to communicate while the father was away. The opportunity to keep in contact during the away periods depends in part on the availability of communication facilities at the FIFO worksite and these can vary between sites (Sibbel, 2010). Each of the participants had a number of available options and communicated with their father either by telephone, Skype or email with varying frequency and duration depending on personal preference, either the father's or the son's. These conversations might be just a quick hello or a longer conversation about such topics as "school" (Toby, Andrew, and Michael), "sport" (Travis, Andrew) and general events that had been happening in the family (Toby, Sean, Mark, Travis). As Josh described, "he rings about once every three days but that's only for about two minutes because he has to get back to work. Sometimes not even two minutes so it's real quick say hello."

For Andrew, the communication was initiated by his father and maintained their common sporting interests even when apart. This seemed to provide some security in his relationship with his dad:

He always calls up to wish me 'good luck' in my game every Friday. He always checks the

score afterwards, checks with Mum if I played good or not... I'm glad he's keeping tabs. I wouldn't want him not to because I like him to know what I'm doing, if I'm doing good or not.

Despite the regular separations it seems these adolescents and their fathers were able to establish levels of communication between them that were relevant and acceptable to meet their personal needs and that maintained healthy connections between them. Such paternal contact is an important positive influence on male adolescent development (Dolgin & Rice, 2008).

Concern for their father during his absence emerged as a common theme for a number of informants. This included concern for safety as well as for their father's physical and mental health. Some adolescents were aware of the often physical demands of FIFO employment and worried about its effect on their fathers. "He's really the one who supports the family and he works very hard for it, too" (Michael). "He's getting old and he's doing a physically demanding job...He's working so hard (Jacob)." Several also worried about their father's safety: "Sometimes I wonder if the helicopter crashed on the way out" (Andrew) and "Sometimes [I] worry about him. He's done a lot to himself" (Jacob). Sean commented about the dangers of working overseas:

When he was working in Africa it's a fairly dangerous place and half the countries in Africa have travel advisories not to go there at all... If you saw something on the news you'd think: "Is it anywhere near Dad?"...and then when the hurricanes went through the Gulf of Mexico he was there...

In a discussion about the possibility of having FIFO employment Josh expressed concern for his father's emotional well-being:

I'd try not to FIFO work. [unclear] I know it's affecting Dad at the moment. I don't really want that. Because he has to do it. He doesn't want to do it. I know he doesn't want to do it. He feels he has to do it. He feels he has to do it because he doesn't want to feel like he's left mum and I down. He feels he has to do it because he wants the best for mum and I. I know he doesn't want to do it...

However safety issues were of no concern for other informants, as Travis explained, "He's the Safety Officer so he should be safe."

Comings and goings. Previous research has identified the impacts of the regular comings and goings on household routines and relationships (Beach, 1999; Gallegos, 2006; Storey et al., 1986). Informants in this study described their perceptions of the impacts of FIFO on household routines and family relationships. For some, the home routine was unchanging in the face of their father's departures and returns, "when dad's home it's still the same" (Michael), whereas others reported changes: "sometimes it changes a lot because he comes back and there's a lot more tidiness around the house" (Andrew). Nevertheless many eagerly anticipated their father's return: "Excited...I want him home all the time" (Michael) and "I love it when he's home" (Andrew).

On a personal level several respondents described the impact of their father's return on their daily activities as "curbing their freedom. We can't have people over because we have to spend the time we do have with him [dad]" (Josh) and "he doesn't like us listening to heavy music" (Toby).

The adolescents were also aware of the impact of the FIFO lifestyle on individual family members and on family relationships. In particular this was apparent in their descriptions of the effect on their mothers

and changes seen in their father. Each of the participants perceived FIFO as having some negative impacts on their mothers. Consistent with findings from earlier studies (e.g., Reynolds, 2004; Sibbel, 2001; Storey et al., 1989) these included loneliness and having to take on extra household responsibilities while the father was away. This was evidenced by: "She's a lot more happier when he's here because she misses him while he's away" (Josh), "Mum's always stressed out" (Travis), "Mum's more relaxed, happier when dad's home" (Mark), "she doesn't enjoy having to solve all the problems when dad isn't here" (Sean), "she gets annoyed at little things far more when dad's away" (Andrew), and "she does it hard" (Jacob). Toby's description demonstrated insight into the complexities of the FIFO lifestyle and its impacts:

When he's here she can be a little more stressed. Also feels better. When he's gone it's the same thing....So it's sort of the same both ways but she is more happy when he is here. But when he is not here she is probably really happy as well but can do other stuff. So it sort of balances.

Informants had varying views on whether their mother's stress impacted on their relationship with their mother. While each of the participants appeared to have a good relationship with their mother, some made statements indicating the occurrence of occasional stress in the relationship. This is consistent with some earlier findings (e.g., Sibbel, 2010). Andrew saw that his step-father's absence provided an opportunity to develop a closer relationship with his mother but that "it also leads to more arguments" and that "mum says I don't listen to her has much as I listen to [step-father]." Sean believed that his mother's stress meant that "small things blew out of proportion" and that "little things...got between us."

Previous research has demonstrated that the comings and goings of the FIFO lifestyle often results in ongoing adjustment to the roles and responsibilities of family members (Gallegos, 2006; Sibbel, 2001, 2010; Taylor & Simmonds, 2009).

Awareness of such impacts was shown by the participants' descriptions of the roles and relationships within their families. In this study the participants reflected more traditional views of parental roles. Mothers were seen as responsible for the day-to-day care and running of the household, while fathers were seen as providers and protectors. Informants recognised that mothers carried a heavy burden but this recognition did not generally translate into a desire to assist; rather it was often seen as the father's role to help out at home when he returned from work. When asked what the best thing about Dad being home was, Travis replied his father "...helps Mum out so she doesn't have to do everything and stuff like that so Mum's not angry." Mark also saw his father as fulfilling a role assisting his mother with household duties: "...it's not just mum doing everything. He (Dad) can help out as well."

Previous research has identified the impact of the periods immediately prior to the FIFO employee's leaving for work and returning home on family dynamics (Gallegos, 2006). In the present study informants reported that they observed changes in their father's moods during the time when he was at home. Consistent with previous findings nearly all reported that their father was tired on returning home and consequently slept for the first day (Beach, 1999; Collinson, 1998; Gallegos, 2006). Some reported that their father's fatigue made their father 'grumpy' while others saw no change. There was a divergence of opinions regarding fathers' moods while he was home. Comments ranged from "relaxed" (Sean), and "happy" (Andrew), to "grumpy and uptight" (Jacob). Four participants reported a change in their father

in the days leading up to his departure, for example, "He's getting more business-like, getting ready into the role of work, stepping out of the family man and getting into a role... an emotional (change)" (Andrew). Sean observed:

...as it gets closer to the day he is away again he isn't as relaxed...there is a subtle change... He is planning to go back to work where he's getting into that working headspace. He's quite focussed on organising a lot of things... He just seems a little bit preoccupied...

Mark said his father became more "sentimental" while Michael said his father became "grumpy". However, while acknowledging their fathers' different emotional states the adolescent also seemed to accept these as just part of their lives. Gallegos (2006) found that FIFO workers and their partners experienced a similar range of contradictory emotions surrounding the worker's departure and return including: anticipation, relief, conflict and anxiety and that families developed individual ways of coping with these times.

Conclusion

The findings from this study present an emerging understanding of male adolescent experiences of the FIFO lifestyle and the meaning they make of these experiences. The adolescents in this study appeared to be resilient to the impacts of the FIFO lifestyle and recognised the opportunities it provides for them and their families. Despite regular father absence adolescents acknowledged their fathers' contribution to their social and psychological development.

Informants described predominantly positive relationships with their fathers despite the frequent and prolonged paternal absence. All informants expressed positive regard for their father and, while most missed him, this did not translate into a belief that

they were in any way disadvantaged by not seeing their father every day. Indeed, the participants believed that their relationships with their fathers were no worse than other father-son relationships where the father was home every day and, in some cases, there was a belief that aspects of their father's FIFO employment such as the extended periods of time at home provided opportunities to strengthen their relationships.

Shared activities, particularly sporting, were crucial to the underpinning of the father-son relationship. The mutual experience of these activities fostered the connectedness between father and son, both when the father was home and when he was away. Sport was often the conduit through which conversations flowed. Sport was also important to bolstering adolescent identity as seen through the pride expressed by the participants when their fathers attended matches. This connectedness to their fathers was evident for all informants. Thus these adolescents perceived their FIFO fathers had a continuing active role in their development (Videon, 2005).

There was an awareness of the subtle effects of the FIFO lifestyle on family dynamics. In particular, the impacts of the fathers' comings and goings and the shifting of family responsibilities onto the mother were commented on. They acknowledged their mothers' loneliness and the burden of extra household responsibilities assumed while their father was away (Beach, 1999; Taylor & Simmonds, 2009). This was evidence of an appreciation of the sacrifices parents were making in order to have a particular lifestyle which included the informant's comfort and wellbeing. It appears however that these families were able to adjust to the comings and goings and work out strategies to maintain connectedness (Hall-Lande et al., 2007; O'Brien & Scott, 2007; Richmond & Stocker, 2006).

Past studies have demonstrated that the separation of work and home lives by FIFO

employment can protect families from the potential negative effects of shift work and spillover between work and home lives (Gallegos, 2006; Sibbel, 2010). This study further supports these earlier findings. Participants frequently described how the chunks of time their father had with them was uninterrupted by the pressures of work intruding into the home (Bumpus et al., 2006; Crouter et al., 1999; Hughes & Parkes, 2007).

Limitations

This exploratory study represents the lived experiences of a small group of adolescents engaged in the FIFO lifestyle, thus the findings should not be seen as generalisable to the wider FIFO population. However, these findings can be used to inform understandings of the impacts of a FIFO lifestyle on adolescents and their families.

The participants' age range of 13 to 21 years represents a broad cross section of potential adolescent developmental perspectives. Adolescence is marked by evolving relationships, and therefore it is difficult to separate the impacts of FIFO from general adolescent development in any discussion of family relationships. Furthermore, two participants were members of blended families and were not the biological offspring of the fathers mentioned, thus adding another dimension to the experiences of these boys. Finally, each participant's father's profile of FIFO differed with respect to length of roster, type of operation and duration of FIFO employment demonstrating that there was no typical FIFO experience that could have influenced these findings.

Future Directions

FIFO will continue to be a common employment practice in the Australian resources sector in the foreseeable future. As such, it is important that we continue to evolve our understandings of the impacts of this lifestyle on the wellbeing of employees,

their families and communities. The findings arising from this study provide an initial understanding of adolescent experiences of FIFO. Further research using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies is warranted to extend understandings in this area. Investigation into the experiences of adolescent females in order to gain insight into the potential effect of FIFO on father-daughter relationships could also be undertaken.

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