

School of Psychology

**Children and the Fly-in/Fly-out Lifestyle: Employment-related
Paternal Absence and the Implications for Children**

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Doctor of Philosophy
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DECLARATION

I, Greer Bradbury, declare to the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis titled: “*Children and the Fly-in/Fly-out lifestyle: Employment-related paternal absence and the implications for children*” contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree of diploma in any university.

Signature:

Date:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I almost wish I hadn't gone down the rabbit hole - and yet - and yet - it's rather curious, you know, this sort of life!

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

To begin, my sincere thanks and gratitude to all the children who took part in the project - for sharing their time, their thoughts, their feelings and their laughter. It was pleasure to meet each and every one of you. A special thanks to the mothers and fathers who contributed to the project for their enthusiasm and interest in the topic.

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Finally, I would like dedicate this thesis to my niece, Xanthe, and my nephew, Griffin, who were the inspiration for the project and always a constant reminder that there was life beyond the rabbit hole.

ABSTRACT

There has been growing interest in the implications of paternal fly-in/fly-out employment (FIFO) for families and children. The current research had a dual aim, first to investigate children's well-being in relation to family functioning and paternal FIFO employment characteristics and, second, to access children's own experience, perceptions and attitudes about the FIFO lifestyle and *employment-related paternal absence*. The research was multi-method in design, with a quantitative study measuring child, parent and family functioning and a two-stepped qualitative component consisting of a content analysis of written responses and a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with children.

Forty-eight children, aged between 8 and 16 years, and their parents (i.e., 48 mothers, 47 fathers) from 49 families completed the quantitative questionnaires. Overall, the children's emotional-behavioural functioning was healthy and not significantly related to paternal FIFO employment characteristics. The boys reported more emotional-behavioural difficulties than girls, in particular hyperactivity. The children's well-being was associated with several maternal-reported variables but none of the paternal-reported variables. However, the children's level of emotional-behavioural functioning was predicted by their self-report of paternal care and nurturance. Addressing parental well-being, the participating women reported more emotional difficulties than the men, with over one third of the women reporting stress symptoms in the moderate to severe clinical range. While the majority of children and their parents reported healthy family functioning and the parents reported healthy relationship quality, over 50% of the mothers and fathers in the study reported parenting conflict in the clinical range.

Participating children endorsed the extended, quality time with their fathers and the financial remuneration of paternal FIFO employment as the key benefits of the FIFO lifestyle. The adolescents in the study viewed employment-related paternal absences as a respite from fathering as well as a loss of paternal support. The main costs of the FIFO lifestyle for the children were the negative emotions related to paternal absence, the loss

of physical and emotional paternal support, and the restriction to their lifestyle and activities. A subset of 15 children from the original study and 12 of their siblings ($n = 27$) were interviewed. The majority of the children demonstrated successful adaptation to paternal FIFO employment. The key themes to emerge from these interviews were the children's emotional and personal changes (e.g., increased responsibility, greater independence) and family changes (e.g., alternating household systems, family self-reliance). The children demonstrated knowledge of their father's work and were also aware of the potential impact of FIFO employment on family and personal relationships.

The overall findings suggest that paternal FIFO employment does not act as a discreet homogeneous risk factor for children. However, there was some evidence that boys negotiate employment-related paternal absences differently from girls, with boys expressing more ambivalence toward paternal absences. The significant finding of high maternal stress in the study indicates that mothers may "buffer" the strains of regular family disruption from the other family members. The participating children's ability to balance the benefits of the FIFO lifestyle with the costs of paternal absences, to understand parental employment decisions, and to demonstrate resilience to family changes was positive news for FIFO families and those families considering the FIFO option.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Community must be understood in relation to families and work; work must be understood in relation to communities and families; families must be understood in relation to communities and work.

(Kagan & Lewis, 1998, p. 5)

As our global community has shifted toward a 24/7 economy, where service and manufacturing industries operate continuously, our expectations about *how*, *when* and *where* we work have inevitably been restructured (Presser, 2004; Strazdins, Korda, Lim, Broom, & D'Souza, 2004). Increasingly, more Australians are working longer hours, working evening and night shifts, and working away from home (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2006; Pocock, 2001; Wilkins, Warren, Hahn, & Brendan, 2010). This shift in the way we work has direct implications for working families and their children. Parental work schedules can directly affect the structure of family life and as a result, children can be positively or adversely affected by their parents' work choices - by decisions parents make about work (e.g., length of hours, location) and by the demands that work places on parents (e.g., overtime, fatigue, stress) (Jensen & McKee, 2003; McKee, Mauthner, & Galilee, 2003; Pocock, 2006).

Of interest in the Australian work environment has been the increasing use of fly-in/fly-out employment by the mining and resources industry (Chamber of Minerals & Energy Western Australia [CMEWA], 2005; 2007; Storey, 2001). Fly-in/fly-out (FIFO) is a form of long-distance commuting. The mining and resources employees are flown to and from remote onshore and offshore projects where they work and reside for an extended period of time. The length of time spent working onsite can vary for FIFO employees. Work shifts or *swings* can range from approximately one week to six or eight weeks, depending on the employee's job position, the type of industry or company schedule. As a result, there has been considerable interest in the impact of FIFO employment on the health and well-being of the FIFO workforce (Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining [CSRMI], 2002; Clifford, 2009; Keown, 2005; Watts, 2004) and their families (Gallegos, 2006; Gent, 2004; Kaczmarek & Sibel, 2008; Reynolds,

2004; Sibbel, 2001, 2010; Taylor & Simmonds, 2009). Key areas of FIFO family research have included the experience of family adjustment to the cycle of separations and reunions, as one parent exits the family to work and then returns from work, and the implications of this cycle on individual and family functioning. Since the mining and resources workforce remains predominately male, the dominant FIFO family experience is fathers leaving their partners and children at home for fixed lengths of work time. As a result, the majority of children in FIFO families experience periods of time when their fathers are physically absent from their lives, compensated by periods of time when their fathers are at home. This pattern of intermittent paternal absence and presence can be classified as an *employment-related paternal absence* (Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2008).

At the same time, there has been growing interest in the role fathers play in their children's healthy development. The contribution of paternal involvement to a child's optimal health and emotional well-being has become the focus of parenting research (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003b; Lamb, 1997) and recent social commentary (Biddulph, 1995; Flood, 2003). Addressing children's experience of employment-related paternal absence, there has been initial investigation into the psychosocial implications of paternal FIFO employment for children (Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2008; Sibbel, 2001) and some exploration of children's attitudes to parental employment, which has included FIFO employment (Mauthner, Maclean, & McKee, 2000; McKee et al., 2003). However children's experience of the FIFO lifestyle remains insufficiently understood. The findings from related adult FIFO research have indicated that parents are uncertain about the consequences of intermittent fathering for their children. Some parents in FIFO families have suggested that paternal absences may be more problematic for boys (Reynolds, 2004) or for older children (Gallegos, 2006), and that father-child relationships may be adversely affected by the periods of separation (Parkes, Carnell, & Farmer, 2005). However, these parental views have yet to be confirmed or disconfirmed by the children in FIFO families.

In Western Australia, the decision by the resources industry to utilise FIFO workforces on onshore and offshore projects and the willingness of FIFO employees to commute long-distance from home to work have resulted in some change to our community's understanding and expectations of employment options. FIFO employment

has been described as offering the *best of both worlds*, that is, both substantial financial reward and quality time-off for employees (Toohey, 2008; Watts, 2004). Yet, there is also some indication that the Western Australian community considers FIFO employment to be an unsettling phenomenon for the community, by placing extra demands on families (Cusworth, 2007; Irving, 2006; Quartermaine, 2006) and by damaging the productivity of regional areas (Watts, 2004).

While acknowledging that long-distance commuting is a valid employment option for many parents, members of FIFO families experience a continuous cycle of separation and reunion, which routinely restructures the family from a two-parent system to a one-parent system, and exposes children to periods of paternal absence and sole-parenting. Past research has indicated that employment-related paternal absences and inadequate paternal involvement can be potential risk factors for children's healthy development (Bumpus, Crouter, & McHale, 1999; Davis, Crouter, & McHale, 2006; Strazdins et al., 2004) yet there remains limited research attending to children's attitudes and feelings toward the paternal absences intrinsic to the FIFO lifestyle. Over the last several years, FIFO employment has become an accessible and attractive option for many families in the Australian mining and petroleum industry, and therefore it is important to understand how children experience this novel lifestyle. I hoped that the outcomes from the current research would benefit families, the resources industry and the community, and better inform them about how children negotiate the FIFO lifestyle and employment-related paternal absence.

1.1 Aim and Scope of Study

The overall aim of this research was to investigate children's experience of paternal FIFO employment by directly addressing children's behaviour and perceptions. To date, few studies have investigated children's responses to paternal FIFO employment. Sibbel (2001) examined the psychological well-being of children in FIFO families and a number of FIFO family studies have explored parental perceptions of children's well-being and coping (Gallegos, 2006; Reynolds, 2004). However, work/family balance research has increasingly recognised that children play an important role in the interface between their parents' working demands and family life (Mauthner et al., 2000; McKee et al., 2003; Näsman, 2003; Pocock, 2006). Parental

work demands may influence children's present emotional functioning and their later employment aspirations (Mauthner et al., 2000; McKee et al., 2003; Pocock, 2006). By taking a child-centred focus for this project, I hoped to more accurately capture how children experienced the family disruption and paternal absences associated with the FIFO lifestyle. A second key aim of the project was to determine children's well-being within FIFO families, by examining children's emotional-behavioural functioning in the context of family environment factors such as parental and family functioning. This part of the project built on the small body of research which has explored the psychosocial implications for children in FIFO families (Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2008; Sibbel, 2001).

The selection of research methodology was fundamental to the project. Within the historical context of childhood research, the veracity and validity of children's accounts of their experience have been previously questioned. Yet childhood researchers are increasingly committed to giving children a voice to express their views and perceptions of family life, of parenting behaviours and of community issues that impact on their lives (Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Greene & Hill, 2005; Jensen & McKee, 2003). The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child was instrumental to our changed understanding of children's rights. Importantly, the Convention supported children's right to participate in society, alongside their rights to care and protection (Sinclair Taylor, 2000). As a consequence, the current research has developed a child-centred perspective, which encompasses the child's right as an individual to hold and express unique opinions and attitudes about his/her life, which may or may not reflect the opinions and attitudes of their family or the community (Freeman & Mathison, 2009).

1.2 Overview of Thesis

Overall, this research project was situated within the context of three intersecting bodies of literature and research: a) work/family balance; b) the role of fathers and paternal involvement; and c) family and child coping and adjustment. In Chapter 2, the implications of parental employment for children are considered within the context of work/family balance literature, in particular, the research on non-standard working hours. A history of Australian and international FIFO family research is examined alongside related industry research, including military and sea-faring family research. Research limitations relating to children's experiences of work/family balance are

outlined. The chapter aims to clarify the need for further investigation of children's perceptions of the FIFO lifestyle and employment-related paternal absence.

In Chapter 3, the potential impact of the FIFO lifestyle on children is explored within the context of research investigating the role of fathers in optimal parenting. Positive paternal involvement is defined, and direct (i.e., father/child) and indirect (i.e., father/partner/family) pathways of influence are outlined, as these relationships may be challenged by fathers working away. In addition, employment-related paternal absence is explored in the context of family and child coping literature. A theoretical framework is proposed to understand the possible direct and indirect consequences of paternal FIFO employment for children, and the vulnerability factors for children and families are examined. This chapter aims to clarify the need for further investigation into children's experience of paternal FIFO employment, by addressing parenting and family factors.

In Chapter 4, the rationale for investigating children's experience of the FIFO lifestyle is presented within the context of recent FIFO family research and child-centred work/family balance research. Overall aims and objectives of the research project are outlined, including methodological choices, and key research questions and hypotheses. Finally, an overall plan of the research project is described.

Chapters 5 to 8 report on the results from the three studies comprising the research. In Chapter 5, responses from child and parent questionnaires are quantitatively analysed and the findings are reported. Chapter 6 examines results from the content analysis of open-ended questions from the questionnaire and key emergent themes are identified. Chapter 7 reports on the findings from the thematic analysis of children's semi-structured interviews.

Finally, Chapter 8 concludes with a combined discussion of the quantitative and qualitative findings and their implications for children in FIFO families. It outlines the key findings from the research, the theoretical and clinical implications of these findings, and draws conclusions, with recommendations pertinent to families, the resources industry and the general community.

CHAPTER 2: FIFO, CHILDREN AND WORK/FAMILY BALANCE

On balance, it appears that FIFO provides social benefits for workers who choose this form of employment, although there are issues associated with stresses in families that warrant further investigation, so that potential problems can be detected and addressed effectively.

(CMEWA, 2005, p. 18)

In order to examine the potential advantages and disadvantages of the FIFO lifestyle for children, it is important to understand the nature of FIFO employment in the Western Australian mining and resources industry, and to review the findings from recent FIFO family research. Second, it is important to consider the FIFO lifestyle within the broader context of work/family balance literature. More specifically, paternal FIFO employment should be examined in relation to research investigating the effects of parental non-standard working hours on children and families.

2.1 Fly-in/Fly-Out Employment

Fly-in/fly-out (FIFO) employment is a form of long-distance commuting used by the mining and resources industries worldwide. The companies fly employees, residing in urban or regional areas, to and from isolated onshore or offshore worksites. The FIFO employee lives and works onsite for an allocated period of time then returns home for a similar or shorter period of time. The length of time at work and the length of time at home (i.e., *roster swings*) can vary depending on the worksite location, the employee's job description, and the type of industry (i.e., construction, mining, or petroleum). As a result, the FIFO rosters can vary widely, from the shorter *swing* cycles of several days to a week away at work, through to more extended *swings* of six to eight weeks away. Additionally, the length of time a FIFO employee spends onsite may be evenly balanced with the length of time spent at home (i.e., *even time* rosters), or may exceed the time spent at home (i.e., *uneven time* rosters). Even time rosters are most commonly used by

the offshore petroleum industry while uneven time rosters are more commonly found in mining and construction operations (CMEWA, 2005). FIFO employment is also characterised by extended working hours. As the majority of mining and petroleum projects operate continuously, the employee work shifts are often longer than typical working days (i.e., up to 12 hours), and alternate between day and night shifts. Therefore, the FIFO rosters are based on the number of days spent at work compared to the days spent at home, as well as the number and type of shifts (i.e., day or night). As FIFO employment comprises both long working hours and extended time away from home and family, it can be categorised as a non-standard working hours employment.

First implemented in the 1950s by the offshore oil operations in the Gulf of Mexico, FIFO employment has become fundamental to the petroleum industry, where daily commuting from mobile drilling rigs or production platforms is unfeasible (Shrimpton & Storey, 2001). However, FIFO employment has also been extensively adopted by *onshore* mining operations internationally. Introduced to the Canadian mining industry during the 1970s and later to the Australian mining industry in the 1980s, FIFO employment was seen as a financially-efficient and time-effective solution to the costly alternative of constructing residential towns in proximity to mine sites (CMEWA, 2005; Storey, 2001). The construction of residential mining towns in Canada and Australia was also made more problematic by the increasing remoteness of the mining operations and the adverse environmental conditions of these locations (e.g., excessive heat or cold).

2.1.1 Development of FIFO in Western Australia.

The mining industry has been central to the social and economic development of Western Australia, and has generated considerable wealth, employment and regional development within the state. Beginning with the discovery of gold in the Kalgoorlie region during the 1890s, Western Australia has been considered one of the most productive and diversified mineral regions, with the development of the Pilbara iron-ore operations in the 1960s and later petroleum, gas and diamond operations in the Kimberley (ABS, 2002). The Western Australian resources industry maintains substantial production of approximately 50 different minerals, including bauxite, nickel, lead and zinc (Storey, 2001, see Figure 2.1). Today, Western Australia's mineral and

petroleum industry is valued at \$61 billion and comprises approximately 40% of Australia's total exports (Department of Mines and Petroleum, 2010b).

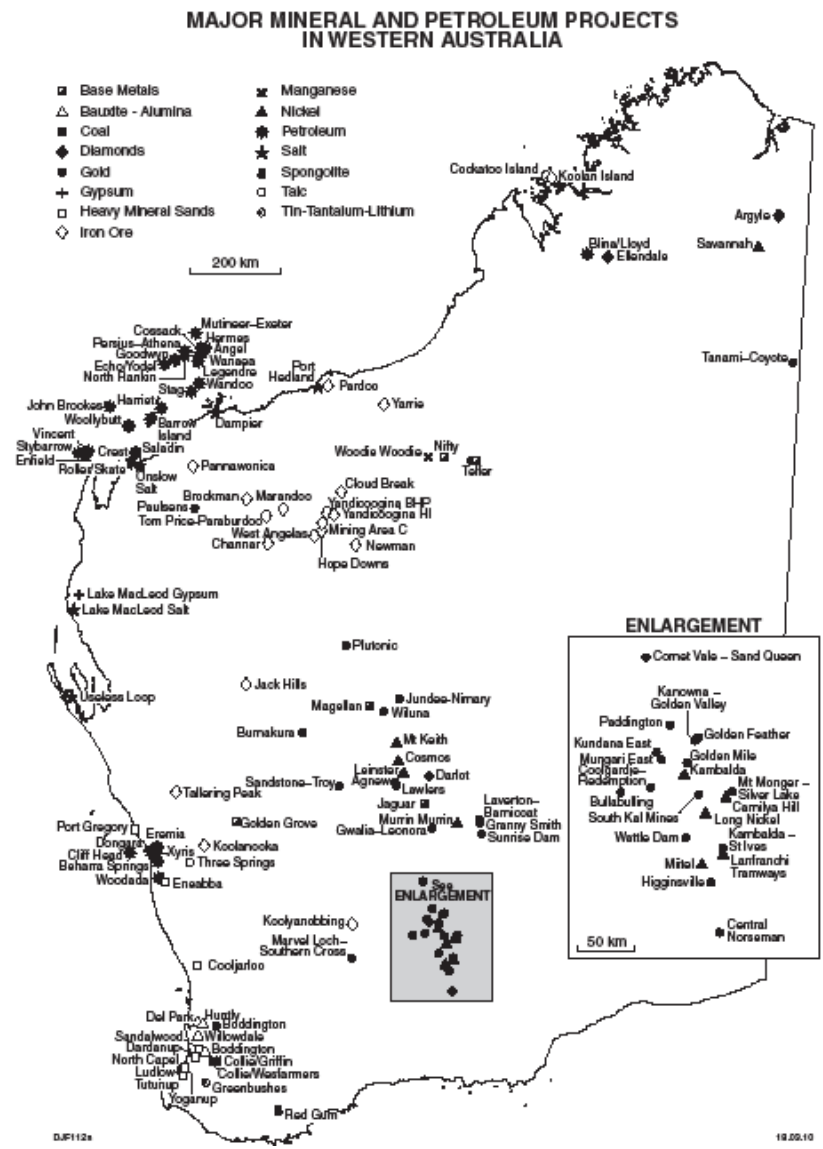


Figure 2.1 Map of the major minerals and petroleum operations in Western Australia from the Department of Mines and Petroleum (2010a).

Historically, the discovery of mineral reserves and the establishment of mining operations in regional areas of Western Australia led to the development of towns and mining communities to service these operations (e.g., Newman, Goldsworthy, Tom

Price). However, the introduction of FIFO employment has altered this trend (Storey, 2001). In the 1980s, FIFO employment was adopted by the resources sector for two key reasons: first, to reduce costs associated with constructing residential communities in remote areas of Western Australia and second, to increase productivity by utilising short-term mining and offshore projects (CMEWA, 2005). FIFO operations have been found to be more cost-effective than residential options when mining projects have a short-term life, that is, between three and five years (Storey, 2001). Since its introduction, FIFO employment in Western Australia has rapidly expanded for short- and long-term mining operations and currently almost half of the mining workforce is employed on a FIFO basis (CMEWA, 2005). While offering industry cost-effective options and greater flexibility, FIFO employment can offer mining employees increased earning capacity and an alternative to living in residential mining communities which are often remote and poorly serviced for families.

From the mid-1990s, Western Australia experienced a resources boom which resulted in an increased demand for professional, skilled and non-skilled workers in the remote areas of the state. According to CMEWA figures (2006), the mining and resources industry substantially increased throughout the early 2000s (e.g., in 2003-2005 by 25%; in 2006 by 23%) and the sector was valued at \$48.4 billion. During this period, approximately 61,709 workers were employed in the mining and resources industry, with approximately half of the workforce employed on FIFO arrangements and earning an average of 60% more than the all-industries' average weekly income for that period of time (CMEWA, 2006).

The Global Financial Crisis in mid-2008 resulted in a rapid decline in the demand and price of resources however the forecasts from industry bodies such as the CMEWA (2008) and the Department of Mines and Petroleum (2010b) have remained optimistic. In a recent outlook report, the CMEWA (2008) estimated that the demand for labour in the resources industry would be constrained either moderately or severely until 2012, and then gradually return to expected growth. According to the ABS (2010), the Australian mining industry recorded a 34.7 % increase in total income (\$47.2 billion) during the 2007-2009 period. Future projections from the CMEWA report proposed that the majority of the mining and resources workforce would be FIFO-employed and that

as the FIFO workforce eventually exceeded the residential site workforce, there could be increasing consequences and challenges for the community (e.g., regional development, transport and communication).

Western Australia also provides a base for international mining and petroleum companies, including BHPBilliton, Chevron, Halliburton, Rio Tinto and Woodside Petroleum. Anecdotally, Perth has become recognised as a global mining centre with local, national and international projects (e.g., Africa, South America, Asia) originating from Perth-based companies (University of Western Australia, 2010). As such, the FIFO employees based in Western Australia are not restricted to working within the state or Australia, but may be commuting back to Perth from overseas worksites (e.g., the Timor Sea, Nigeria, India). These international FIFO employees may experience longer roster swings and longer commute times.

2.1.2 FIFO employee demographics and work schedules.

Approximately 43% of the total Australian mining and petroleum industry workforce are employed within Western Australia, which corresponds to an estimated 5% of the total workforce in the state (ABS, 2010; Department of Minerals and Petroleum, 2010). The mining and resources workforce is predominately male (84%) and aged between 25 and 55 years (79%) (CMEWA, 2006; Department of Minerals and Petroleum, 2010). Considering these age and gender trends, it can be assumed that a significant number of FIFO employees are husbands or partners and are also fathers. Although there are no accurate figures on the relationship and parental status of FIFO workers, approximately half (50%) of respondents in the recent adult FIFO research have been partnered with children (CSRM, 2002; Clifford, 2009; Sibbel, 2010).

According to ABS (2009) and CMEWA (2007) figures, mining and resources employees frequently work longer hours, work rotating shifts and have their work hours compressed for the maximum efficiency of the mining operation. The average weekly working hours for mining employees was 45.6 hours, which was approximately 20% greater than the all-industries' weekly average of 38.3 hours (ABS, 2009; 2010). Mining and resources employees also work extended shifts from 10 to 12 hours per day, and also rotating day and night shift schedules. In Western Australia, the most common roster cycles are: a) 5 days on/2 days off; b) 7 days on/7 nights on/7 days off (i.e., 14

days on/7 days off); c) 2 days on/1 night on and 4 days off (i.e., 3 days on/4 days off); and d) 8 days on/6 days off (CMEWA, 2007). One of the main compensations for working the longer hours and rotating shifts is the higher income available for mining and resources employees. On average, mining employees earn \$2,067.80 per week compared to the all-industries' average of \$1280.40 (i.e., 60% higher), while managerial mining positions pay on average \$3,341.70 per week compared to the all-industries' average of \$1804.70 (i.e., 85% higher) (ABS, 2009).

2.1.3 Implications of FIFO employment.

There appears agreement among the Western Australian community (Cusworth, 2007; Taylor, 2006; Watts, 2004), the resources industry (Beach & Cliff, 2003; CMEWA, 2005) and community spokespersons (Quartermaine, 2006) that the incentives offered by FIFO employment (i.e., higher incomes, extended time-off) can be offset by the increased physical and emotional stress on employees, as a result of the long rotation shifts and the cycle of regular commuting. There is also industry acknowledgement that FIFO employment may have adverse implications for the families of employees and the community (CMEWA, 2006; Department for Communities, 2009). Mining management has conceded its employees can suffer *FIFO fatigue* from the constant separations and reunions that workers and their families endure, which can “wear them down” and disrupt family life (Beach & Cliff, 2003). There has been speculation within the mining industry that the higher employee turnover, estimated at between 10% and 28%, may be attributed to the strain of the FIFO lifestyle (Beach, 2004; Beach, Brereton, & Cliff, 2003). Mining operators interviewed for the CSRSM report (Beach et al., 2003) agreed that employee turnover rates exceeding 20% were detrimental to productivity. However, recent figures from the CMEWA (2006) indicate the industry turnover has stabilised and has become more aligned with the all-industries figures.

In addition, it has been assumed that the increased physical and emotional stress experienced by FIFO employees (Keown, 2005; Muller, Carter, & Williamson, 2008) and by their at-home FIFO partners (Gallegos, 2006; Reynolds, 2004; Shrimpton & Storey, 2001) may contribute to relationship tension and dissatisfaction (Gent, 2004), and to family disharmony (Watts, 2004). Couple counselling agencies (e.g., Relationships Australia) have reported an increase in the number of FIFO employees

and their partners attending their services (Irving, 2006). Yet, a recent investigation into the health and lifestyle of Western Australian FIFO mining employees found that FIFO employees and their partners reported similar levels of physical health, emotional well-being, and relationship satisfaction as the wider community, and rated FIFO working arrangements as only “moderately stressful” (Clifford, 2009).

The community response to the growth of FIFO employment in the state has been varied. The Western Australian media has implicated FIFO employment in the recent increase in divorce rates (Quartermaine, 2006), the demise of community cohesion in rural areas, and FIFO has been nicknamed “the cancer of the bush” (Taylor, 2006). In the general community, there has been critical and judgemental perceptions of people who choose FIFO employment, which has given rise to disparaging terms such as “cashed-up bogans” (Toohey, 2008). The term carries an insinuation that men and women who decide on FIFO employment pursue financial and material gains, above other considerations such as family harmony and children’s well-being. In 2004, the Pilbara Regional Council in Western Australia released a comprehensive report (Watts, 2004) exploring the regional impact of FIFO operations. The report identified a range of positive experiences for FIFO workers (e.g., career advancement, financial satisfaction, increased independence and competence, enhanced quality family time), and negative experiences (e.g., poor communication, loneliness, substance abuse, marital and family dissatisfaction). The impact for regional communities included the loss of economic opportunities, population decline, higher housing and accommodation costs and the lack of infrastructure.

2.2 Work/Family Balance

Work/family balance is a ubiquitous term used by academics, business professionals and the community to describe the harmonious or conflict-free relationship between two key domains of adult life - work and family (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Frone, 2003; Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007). The simplicity of the term contradicts the complex interactions between work and family systems, with work pressures interfering with family life and/or family pressures interfering with work performance (Allen et al., 2000; Frone, 2003). One of the key outcomes of an overload or imbalance in either the work or family domain is greater stress for the individual, which has been

related to reduced personal well-being, reduced life satisfaction, increased family distress and greater family dissatisfaction (Allen et al., 2000; Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007; Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, & Crouter, 2000).

In this way, stress can *spillover* from one domain to another (e.g., an employee with high work demands transfers frustration and stress into his/her home life) or *crossover* from one family member to another (e.g., stress can be transmitted by the employee to the partner at home) (Bakker, Westman, & van Emmerik, 2009; Lewis & Cooper, 1999; Westman, 2001). Naturally, work-family interactions need not have negative outcomes, and positive effects of a person's engagement in work can facilitate family life, and family experience and skills can inform work performance (Bakker, et al., 2009; Frone, 2003). Non-work social roles are also not limited to family roles and may include engagement with friends, the wider community, leisure, and study. These additional social roles may also positively or negatively influence the broader work and family relationship (Frone, 2003). Inherent within the concept of work/family balance are two assumptions. First, balance between work and family roles is desirable and achievable and second, imbalance between work and family roles contributes to increased stress for individuals, and has adverse outcomes for work and family functioning. Work-family research has predominately investigated the effects of work stress on employee well-being (e.g., burnout), family outcomes (e.g., relationship quality) and the workplace outcomes (e.g., turnover) (Allen et al., 2000; Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007).

The Australian experience of work/family balance has been outlined in the Australian Work and Life Index Survey (AWALI; Pocock, Skinner, & Williams, 2007; Skinner & Pocock, 2008). The majority of the 2, 831 surveyed Australians (68. 3%) reported an overall satisfaction with their work-life balance, however, employees also reported that work commitments impacted negatively on their time with family (25%) and their connection with the community (40%). Over half the respondents also endorsed being currently overloaded at work and "pressed for time" (Skinner & Pocock, 2008). The AWALI survey classified industries according to work/life interaction. Those with long, unsocial hours such as the mining, media and telecommunications industries were rated the "worst" for work/life balance and the retail trade industry was

rated the “best” (Skinner & Pocock, 2008). The findings from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics (HILDA) Survey also provide a unique insight into Australian working lives (Weston, Gray, Wu, & Stanton, 2004; Wilkins et al., 2010). As found in the AWALI surveys, Australians reported good job satisfaction (7.5 out of 10) and moderately high satisfaction with their working hours and current salary (7 out of 10) (Wilkins et al., 2010). Findings from these two surveys indicate that work/life imbalance is more likely associated with longer working hours, reduced social and community interaction and certain types of industries, such as mining. In the HILDA survey, men who worked extended hours (i.e., more than 40 hours per week) were more likely to report that their work demands adversely impacted on their family life, personal health and personal well-being (Weston et al., 2004).

The Australian work/family researcher and social commentator, Barbara Pocock (2003), has attributed the Australian experience of work/family imbalance to a lag between the rapid changes in work/home environments and workplace reform. Over the last two decades, key changes within the work environment have included a greater percentage of women in the workforce, the increased use of non-standard working hours and overtime arrangements, and increased commuting times (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC], 2007). These workplace changes have resulted in subsequent changes in the home environment, including less family time for employees, fewer women remaining at home, and the increased use of child care services (HREOC, 2007; Pocock, 2003). In contrast, there has been minimal change to the cultural expectations of men and women. Research has indicated that women continue to do the majority of housework and there has been limited increase in the number of stay-at-home fathers (HREOC, 2007). In addition, business and institutions have remained relatively inflexible to these changes. For example, the provision of parental leave remains limited and a national paid parental leave scheme has only been introduced in 2011. As well, there has been greater utilisation of casual employment by employers which provides less job security and fewer rights for employees (HREOC, 2007; Pocock, 2003).

2.2.1 Work/family balance and children.

Parental employment and changes associated with parental work patterns or locations could also have differing effects for parents and children.

Jensen & McKee (2003, p. 3)

While the AWALI survey (Pocock et al., 2007; Skinner & Pocock, 2008), the HILDA report (Weston et al., 2004; Wilkins et al., 2010) and the ABS figures provide information to better understand how adult Australians are negotiating their work/family demands, less is understood about how children are influenced by their parents' working lives. According to the most recent ABS Australian family characteristic figures (2008), there were 2.6 million families in Australia with at least one child aged up to 17 years living at home (i.e., 44% of all Australian families). Of the families with children, the majority were coupled (80%) and 20% were sole-parent families. Further, of the coupled-families, most were dual-earning (63%) that is, both parents were employed.

Frequently, children's experience of parental employment has been overlooked in work/family balance literature. Yet the majority of family households are organised around an adult working schedule, and children, as key members of the household, necessarily interact and are influenced by these parental work demands (McKee et al., 2003; Näsman, 2003; Piotrkowski, 1979). It is clear that a child's world does not exist in isolation from the adult (parent) world of work/family pressures (Kagan & Lewis, 1998; Lewis & Cooper, 1999; Mauthner et al., 2000; Perry-Jenkins et al., 2000). Therefore, there has been growing interest in exploring children's experience of work/family balance over the last several decades. This trend toward child-centred research has been attributed to the development of the United Nation's Rights of the Child Act, that stated children were active participants in their lives and had the right to express their opinions and attitudes (Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Sinclair Taylor, 2000). As a result, there has been wider investigation of children's perceptions of family and community life, and there has been greater acceptance of the uniqueness and validity of children's experiences by the research community (Greene & Hill, 2005; Jensen & McKee, 2003). Of interest to the current project was the previous research exploring children's negotiation of family changes that result from their parents' work choices (e.g., parental absence, limited supervision). Children have minimal control over the decisions about

how and *when* their parents work, and minimal agency to change or modify parental work arrangements (McKee et al., 2003).

On one hand, recent Australian research on children's experience of parental employment found that most children were realistic about the need for their parents to work, and were aware of the material gains that parental incomes had brought them (Lewis & Tudball, 2001; Pocock, 2006). This finding of children's pragmatism toward parental employment was consistent with similar international work/family research on children (McKee et al., 2003; Näsman, 2003). On the other hand, children's experience was often complicated by their emotional responses to employment-related parental absences, and children frequently expressed sadness and longing for the working parent. In her recent book, Pocock (2006) interviewed 93 Australian children within two age groups (10 - 12 years; 16 - 18 years) about their experience of work/family balance. The children interviewed could identify positive work spillover effects (e.g., financial security, parental work satisfaction, social benefits) and negative work spillover effects (e.g., parental fatigue, stress, low mood). Pocock (2006) considered children to be parental "mood monitors". As such, they were vulnerable to negative work spillover and parental mood fluctuations, which, in turn, could adversely affect their own mood and behaviour. Approximately half of the children interviewed believed their parents worked long and unsocial hours. These "hyper-breadwinners" (Pocock, 2006) were most often fathers receiving financial compensation for working longer hours (e.g., overtime, non-standard hours, long-distance commuting) and for being separated from their family. The children of "hyper-breadwinners" were aware of parental concern about employment-related absences and could identify compensation strategies that these working parents used to offset their absence. These strategies included parents discussing and apologising for absences, parents rewarding children with *special* time or material gifts, and parents providing *experiential* rewards (e.g., holidays, family days, movies) (Pocock, 2006).

2.2.2 Parental non-standard working hours and children.

Employment that is characterised by working weekends, evening and night shifts or work that takes parents from the home (e.g., FIFO employment) can be defined as

non-standard working hours employment. Recent ABS figures (2006) have indicated that Australian parents are working longer hours and some are also working less traditional hours due to the demands of our 24-hour economy (Dockery, Jianghong, & Kendall, 2009; Hosking & Western, 2008). According to the HILDA survey, the majority of Australian men (73.8%) remain in traditional work schedules, while 7.6% work rotating shift schedules (i.e., similar to FIFO employment), 1.2% work irregular hours and the remaining 6.4 % work regular evening/night work, split shifts or are on call (Ulker, 2006). Taking into consideration the global changes to employment patterns, recent work/family research has focussed not only on *how much* parents are working but *when* they are working, and are investigating the effect of atypical employment schedules on personal and family well-being (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2000).

Non-standard working schedules are assumed to compromise the quality of time that employees can spend with their partners and children, which may lead to relationship and family dissatisfaction. For example, parents working non-standard hours have reported more disruption to family life, less shared family time and fewer activities with partners, as compared to parents working standard hours (La Valle, Arthur, Millward, Scott, & Clayton, 2002). In La Valle et al.'s study of British families ($N = 720$), fathers working atypical hours were over twice as likely to report restrictions to their time spent with children (i.e., playing, assisting with reading and homework) as compared to other-employed fathers. Working non-standard hours was also associated with employee and partner dissatisfaction about the amount of time that the working parent had available for the family. Addressing Australian HILDA survey data, Hosking and Western (2008) found fathers (and not mothers) who worked weekends or irregular schedules reported increased work/family imbalance, compared to fathers with traditional working hours. Non-standard working hours have also been significantly linked to relationship instability in couples with children (Presser, 2000). From the findings of the large community sample ($N = 3,476$ couples), Presser (2000) concluded that non-standard working hours complicated the lives of couples with children, and increased the risk of separation and divorce compared to couples without children.

For many children, the accessibility or quantity of time spent with an individual parent comprises the key ingredient to a *good* parent or having a *good* relationship with

that parent (Lewis & Tudball, 2001; Pocock, 2006). In Pocock's research (2006), children whose parents worked longer, non-standard hours expressed sadness that their parents were absent and not involved in their school and sporting activities. These children also identified that informal or less structured time was important to their relationship with working parents, which they described as "hanging time" or "just being together" (p. 75). In particular, young people interviewed were concerned about the lack of time they spent with their fathers, and older male adolescents (16 - 18 years) frequently expressed a desire for extra "unstressed, unstructured" time with their fathers (Pocock, 2006).

Work-family researchers have recognised important outcomes for children in families where parents work non-standard hours. For example, Strazdins et al. (2004) found negative associations between children's well-being and parental work schedules in a study of dual-earning Canadian families with children aged between 2 and 11 years ($N = 4,433$). Children whose parents worked non-standard hours were more likely to experience emotional or behavioural difficulties compared to children of parents working standard hours. Paternal non-standard working hours were associated with children's externalising behaviours (e.g., physical aggression, conduct problems, property offence) and maternal non-standard working hours were associated with children's property offences (Strazdins et al., 2004). Paternal working commitments may also affect the child-father relationship. Bumpus et al. (1999) and Repetti (1994) examined the influence of paternal work stress on children, and found that heightened work stress in fathers was related to their withdrawal from the family, and their lack of knowledge about children's lives. Therefore, paternal non-standard working hours can potentially reduce the amount of paternal involvement in children's lives and may adversely influence children's well-being and their relationships with their parents.

Work/family research has also investigated the relationship between parental employment and children's developmental age (Davis et al., 2006; Dockery et al., 2009; Lewis, Noden, & Sarre, 2008; Strazdins et al., 2004). Strazdins et al. (2004) found pre-school children were more vulnerable to parental work demands than older children, with stronger association effects between children's emotional and behavioural difficulties and parental non-standard work hours for younger children when compared

to school-age children. However, adolescence can also be considered a challenging developmental phase for families when a parent works non-standard hours. Adolescence is frequently marked by changes to the child-parent relationship and the increased importance of parental monitoring and supervision of children (Craig & Sawrkar, 2008; Dockery et al., 2009; Lewis et al., 2008). Investigating the effect of shiftwork on the quality of the relationship between parents and adolescents, Davis et al. (2006) found father-adolescent relationships were negatively affected by shiftwork, but there was no corresponding effect on mother-adolescent relationships. The quality of the parent-adolescent relationship was measured along four dimensions: parental involvement, intimacy, conflict, and parental knowledge. Overall, the results indicated that adolescents in the study spent less time with their parents than younger children, spent more time with their mothers than with their fathers (regardless of work schedules), and reported greater intimacy (and more frequent conflict) with their mothers than with their fathers (Davis et al., 2006). However, adolescent girls, whose fathers worked non-standard hours, reported higher levels of conflict with their fathers compared to other father-adolescent groups (Davis et al., 2006). In addition, the presence of conflict in the parental relationship was found to predict lower intimacy in father-adolescent relationships. Addressing parental knowledge, mothers (regardless of work schedule) reported superior knowledge of their children's whereabouts and friends compared to fathers. The fathers on shiftwork knew significantly less about their children than typical working fathers, because they relied on their partners to inform them about their children's daily lives (Davis et al., 2006). The researchers concluded that it was important to raise awareness of the challenges facing families involved in non-standard working schedules, and to educate families about effective communication and co-parenting strategies.

In contrast, recent Australian research investigating the relationship between parental work schedules and adolescent mental health found non-standard working hours did not significantly influence adolescent well-being in coupled families (Dockery et al., 2009). However, adolescent children in sole-parent families reported lower emotional well-being than their peers. Although these results appear to contradict earlier findings by Davis et al. (2006), it should be noted that the outcome measures of each study

captured theoretically different variables, that is, child-parent relationships (Davis et al., 2006) as opposed to children's mental health (Dockery et al., 2009).

Adolescent attitudes to parental employment-related absences were also explored in a series of interviews with 50 adolescents (Lewis et al., 2008). The majority of adolescents enjoyed the unsupervised periods before and after school as *time-out* from parents. However, for a minority of children, unsupervised time was lengthy and included extra care duties with younger siblings (Lewis et al., 2008). Overall, children were accepting of parental working schedules but were concerned about parental stress and their parents' unhappiness due to work pressures. For adolescents in the study, their parents' emotional availability and engagement were more important than their physical accessibility (Lewis et al., 2008).

2.2.3 Summary.

There have been various work/family studies which have found adverse effects for children related to parental non-standard working hours (Bumpus et al., 1999; La Valle et al., 2002; Lewis et al., 2008; Presser, 2000; Pocock, 2001, 2006; Strazdins et al., 2004). Paternal working arrangements can be as important as maternal working arrangements for children's well-being, and have been related to externalising behaviours in children (Strazdins et al., 2004) and less paternal involvement (Bumpus et al., 1999; La Valle et al., 2002). Paternal non-standard working hours have also been related to marital conflict (Presser, 2000) and poor parental well-being (Bumpus et al., 1999; Hosking & Western, 2008), which may potentially create an adverse family environment for children. Developmental considerations may also influence the relationship between parental non-standard working hours and children's well-being, with pre-school children (Strazdins et al., 2004), and adolescents (Davis et al., 2006) at potentially increased risk.

While non-standard working hours research has broadly examined the effects of atypical parental employment on families, a smaller body of research has investigated the implications of specific employment types that require extended periods of parental absence from the family. Specifically, this research has explored the impact of working conditions and employment-related absence on employees, and their families, and has included research into the mining and petroleum industries (Clifford, 2009; Mauthner et

al., 2000; McKee et al., 2003; Morrice, Taylor, Clark, & McCann, 1985; Parkes et al., 2005; Sibbel, 2010), the military (Eastman, Archer, & Ball, 1990; Jensen, Martin, & Watanabe, 1996; Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2008), sea-faring families (Forsyth & Gramling, 1990; Thomas, 2003), and business travellers (Espino, Sundstrom, Frick, Jacobs, & Peters, 2002; Westman, Etzion, & Gattenio, 2008).

2.3 FIFO and Family Research: Investigating Employment-related Absence

As a non-standard employment that consists of extended hours, rotating shiftwork and periods of absence from the family, FIFO employment can challenge traditional family expectations and has been alleged to have adverse effects for employees and their families (Cusworth, 2007; Quartermaine, 2006; Taylor, 2006). Consequently, there has been a growing body of Australian FIFO research investigating employee and partner health and well-being (Clifford, 2009; Keown, 2005; Muller et al., 2008, Sibbel, 2010), children's well-being (Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2008; Sibbel, 2001), relationship satisfaction (Clifford, 2009; Gent, 2004; Reynolds, 2004), parenting issues and family functioning (Gallegos, 2006; Reynolds, 2004; Sibbel, 2001; Taylor & Simmonds, 2009). A general overview of the Australian FIFO family research will assist in providing a wider context for the current study. Consistent with the majority of work/family balance research, FIFO research has predominately relied on the adult perspective of children's experience, with few studies accessing children's own reports and opinions.

One of the initial areas of investigation was the health and emotional well-being of FIFO employees and their partners. Based on work/family research, it had been assumed that the long hours, shiftwork and family dislocation would result in increased emotional strain for employees and partners. The findings have been mixed. In a study of mining employees in the Goldfields area of Western Australia ($N = 510$), Keown (2005) found 28% of mining employees reported clinical levels of distress (i.e., anxiety or depression). In contrast, a study of 137 mining employees working FIFO schedules found all respondents were emotionally healthy (Clifford, 2009). Of the 57 partners of FIFO employees surveyed in Clifford's study, only two reported clinical levels of emotional distress. In addition to self-report measures, Clifford (2009) also assessed the short-term impacts of FIFO employment by collecting daily waking cortisol levels from

32 FIFO employees and partners over the length of one roster. In contrast to the low reported stress levels, the physiological stress levels of FIFO workers and partners fluctuated significantly during the roster period. Cortisol stress levels increased during the departure transition as the FIFO employee prepared to leave the family to return to work. Clifford (2009) concluded that the discrepancy between perceived stress levels and actual cortisol levels was related to the participants' familiarity with the consistent routines associated with FIFO employment.

Another area of FIFO family research has investigated the effect of FIFO work arrangements on the intimate relationships of FIFO employees. Based on work/family research, it was anticipated that relationship quality and satisfaction would be compromised by the periods of absence and limited communication associated with FIFO employment. However, the findings have been inconsistent. In Gent's study (2004), FIFO employees ($n = 132$) reported lower overall relationship quality when compared to established norms, and endorsed two main areas of dissatisfaction - couple agreement and couple satisfaction - as measured by the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976). In contrast, Sibbel (2010) found the relationship satisfaction for FIFO employees ($n = 58$) and FIFO partners ($n = 32$) was in the healthy range of functioning, as measured by the DAS. Clifford (2009) also found the relationship satisfaction of FIFO employees ($n = 137$) and FIFO partners ($n = 59$) was unaffected and aligned with community norms, using the Quality of Relationship Inventory (Pierce, 1994). These participants endorsed the importance of regular communication as a factor in their relationship stability (Clifford, 2009). However, approximately half of them also reported that FIFO employment had negative effects on their relationship with partners, as measured by a scale designed to assess the impact of FIFO employment on a number of key life domains, including relationships, parenting, and community involvement.

As FIFO employment regularly disrupts the family unit with alternating periods of dual-parenting and sole-parenting, family functioning has been another area of research interest. In Sibbel's original study (2001), women with FIFO partners ($n = 30$) reported more family dysfunction than their peers in four areas: 1) communication within the family, 2) family role fulfilment, 3) interest and involvement between family members, and 4) discipline and family rules, as measured by the McMaster Family

Assessment Device (FAD; Epstein, Bishop, & Baldwin, 1983). However, this finding was not replicated in her later research (Sibbel, 2010), and other recent FIFO studies have found minimal impairment to family functioning (Clifford, 2009; Taylor & Simmonds, 2009). Addressing family cohesion and the use of effective communication within FIFO families, Taylor and Simmonds (2009) found that the majority of FIFO employees ($n = 33$) and FIFO partners ($n = 30$) endorsed healthy family functioning and reported high levels of family communication, above expected norms. The researchers concluded that regular effective communication was a strength for these FIFO families. Similarly in Clifford's study (2009), most of the FIFO employees (62%) reported their FIFO work arrangements were *suitable* to their family life and lifestyle compared to 42.6% of the FIFO partners. Nevertheless, the majority of FIFO employees (73.3%) and FIFO partners (61%) also reported some disruption to their social and leisure activities as a result of FIFO employment, including reduced participation in community and missed family events (Clifford, 2009). This trend was consistent with Keown's research (2005) which found that FIFO employees reported greater strain on family functioning, and social and domestic activities as a result of their FIFO work schedules. Interestingly, FIFO employees in the study reported more frequent use of positive coping strategies to manage stress and crisis compared to the residential mining employees. These strategies included active coping, planning and positive reframing (Keown, 2005).

Parenting issues have also been addressed in qualitative studies of paternal FIFO employment (Gallegos, 2006, Reynolds, 2004). Reynolds (2004) interviewed partners of offshore FIFO petroleum employees ($n = 22$) and identified a range of positive and negative implications of the FIFO lifestyle. Positive outcomes for women included quality time with partners, a sense of independence, financial rewards, and improved communication with their partners, while negative effects included periods of problematic family re-adjustment, loneliness, and their partners missing significant family events. Women's responses were analysed according to the stage of their family cycle: 1) no children; 2) young children; 3) teenage children; and 4) adult children. The women with teenage children (12 - 18 years) reported more stress, fatigue and coping difficulties than the other women, related to parenting issues such as decision-making, discipline, and transport practicalities. Parenting issues were also the focus of Gallegos'

(2006) interviews with 32 FIFO couples with children under six years of age. Her study explored the adaptive coping strategies of these FIFO families as they managed the arrivals, departures and absences of the FIFO employee. The FIFO couples discussed the effects of regular separations, the changing work and family roles, problematic decision-making and communication, and their impact on parental mood and the family's functioning. From their responses, Gallegos (2006) mapped a cycle of emotional responses that corresponded with roster cycle for the FIFO employees and for the FIFO partners. This cycle included feelings of sadness and loneliness on separation, anxiety and nervousness prior to reunion, frustration and anger during the settling-in transition, and also a period of happiness and adjustment during their partner's time at home. The parents also identified some emotional and behavioural effects for their children as a result of family fluctuations, including sadness and grief and increased externalising behaviours (Gallegos, 2006).

2.3.1 FIFO and child-specific outcomes.

Within the scope of FIFO family research, there have been few investigations on the outcomes for children. In 2001, Sibbel examined the possible psychosocial implications for children (10 - 12 years) in FIFO families, by measuring internalising behaviours and perceptions of family functioning. She compared the incidence of anxiety and depression symptoms, and perceived family functioning in children from FIFO families ($n = 30$) to children in typical working families ($n = 30$). All children reported emotional and family functioning in the healthy non-clinical range. Children's perceptions of family functioning as measured by the General Functioning Scale of the FAD (Spanier, 1976) did not significantly differ between FIFO and community groups. In an extension of Sibbel's original study, Kaczmarek and Sibbel (2008) compared the FIFO and community child samples to children from military families ($n = 30$) on the same measures of internalising behaviours and family functioning. Kaczmarek and Sibbel (2008) found no significant differences between the groups on levels of emotional well-being, and children's well-being was not significantly related to the length of paternal absences from the family. A similar trend was found in a small unpublished qualitative study of eight adolescent boys with fathers who were FIFO employed (Macbeth, 2008). The boys interviewed were accustomed to the FIFO lifestyle

and could identify benefits of their father's working arrangements, including improved income and quality, extended times with fathers at home (Macbeth, 2008).

For their 2008 study, Kaczmarek and Sibbel designed a measure of *employment-related paternal absence* by collating the average length of paternal absences from the family home in a 12-month period for each industry type. Overwhelmingly, the FIFO employees spent more time away from home annually than the military employees and community participants. According to Kaczmarek and Sibbel (2008), 96.6% of the FIFO employees in the study were absent from their families for five or more months per year compared to 50% of military employees. None of the men from the community group fell into this category and the majority (96.6%) spent less than one month away from their families. This rudimentary measure highlights the significant amount of employment-related paternal absence that children in FIFO families experience, and it appears the majority of these children are without their fathers for six months of every year.

As previously mentioned, our understanding of the implications of FIFO employment for children is often sourced from their parents, yet parental opinion in FIFO family research can be inconsistent. For example, some FIFO parents have reported that younger children experience emotional-behavioural difficulties such as sadness, anger and naughtiness related to paternal absences (Gallegos, 2006). Other parents have expressed minimal concern for younger children (under 4 years) and believe employment-related paternal absences becomes more salient as children enter adolescence (Gallegos, 2006) or is more emotionally distressing for boys than girls (Reynolds, 2004). Nevertheless, paternal employment demands do affect children. Over half of the FIFO employees (57.4%) in Clifford's study (2009) reported their work arrangements had a negative impact on relationships with their children, independent of the child's age. These varied parental viewpoints have yet to be compared to their children's own attitudes and opinions of the FIFO lifestyle and employment-related paternal absence.

2.3.2 International FIFO research.

There has been considerable international research on the families of offshore petroleum employees based in the North Sea (Collinson, 1998; Morrice et al., 1985;

Parkes et al., 2005; Shrimpton & Storey, 2001). The early studies identified a pattern of family stress related to the FIFO employee's absences from the family and the subsequent family re-adjustment, which became known as the *intermittent husband syndrome* (Morrice et al., 1985). The syndrome was described as a unique pattern of stress symptoms (e.g., low mood, sleep and appetite disturbance, sexual difficulty) experienced by the onshore partners of the petroleum employees and linked to their husband's work patterns. However, later research demonstrated that the prevalence of the intermittent husband syndrome had been inflated and that the partners of offshore employees did not significantly differ from community samples on reported emotional functioning and health (Taylor, Morrice, Clark, & McCann, 1985).

Revisiting the phenomenon, Parkes et al. (2005) interviewed the partners of offshore employees in Aberdeen ($n = 39$). Women described a cycle of emotional adjustment related to their partner's roster schedule, including a period of annoyance on their partner's return which was followed by harmony as the family resettled, and then an escalation of tension prior to their partner's departure which was followed by periods of loneliness during his absence. In addition, onshore partners reported problematic decision-making, family role confusion and ongoing frustration from the repeated separations and reunions (Parkes et al., 2005). Women also expressed concern about the impact of the FIFO work cycle on their children. For example, some women attributed their partner's regular absences from the family to the development of problematic father-child relationships, and reported incidences of children's ambivalence or even hostility towards their father on his return home. Paternal absences also resulted in changes to parental responsibilities. For example, some women reported they had assumed the role of disciplinarian in the family so as not to "spoil" the quality time children had with their fathers (Parkes et al., 2005). On the other hand, other women reported important benefits for their children of the FIFO lifestyle, including the extended quality time that fathers had at home to bond with their children, and children's increasing resilience and ability to cope with paternal separations and reunions (Parkes et al., 2005).

Finally, there has been relevant ethnographic work/family balance research conducted with children from oil and gas families in Aberdeen (Mauthner et al., 2000;

McKee et al., 2003). As part of a broader community study investigating children's perceptions of parental employment, work/family balance and work aspirations ($n = 33$), Mauthner et al. (2000) interviewed 10 primary-school children (8 to 12 years) who had fathers or stepfathers employed offshore. Additional follow-up home interviews were conducted with a selection of these children, their siblings, relatives, and friends. In general, the children were found to be pragmatic about parental employment although they missed working parents, especially when parents worked longer hours, weekends or offshore. Mauthner et al. (2000) observed that children from offshore oil and gas families were generally more accepting of their father's time away than other children and enjoyed the extended, quality time they spent with fathers when they were home. Nevertheless, some children in offshore families expressed frustration with ongoing paternal absences and worried about their father's safety on the oil rig. According to Mauthner et al. (2000), negative work spillover effects such as parental stress and fatigue also contributed to personal impacts for some children. These "knock-on" effects included increased sadness, more frequent conflict with their fathers and perceptions of extra discipline.

In an extension of the previous study, McKee et al. (2003) interviewed children from professional middle-class families employed in the offshore oil and gas industry ($n = 17$). As in Mauthner et al.'s study (2000), the children had become accustomed to employment-related paternal absences, which varied between individual families from a week away to several months away. However, children described missing their fathers and particularly their father's involvement in physical recreational activities. The majority of children described a traditionally organised family life, with mothers as the care providers in the family and fathers as the breadwinner. Consequently, maternal employment ($n = 6$) in these families was lower than expected national UK levels. As part of paternal FIFO employment conditions, many of these families had also experienced international relocation (e.g., Alaska, Australia, Indonesia, Nigeria, Venezuela). Discussing relocation, the children reported adverse effects to their schooling and personal friendships, and were aware of the increased family stress related to living in different cultures. The children in these families were sensitive to the emotional and physical demands on their parents as a result of paternal oil and gas

employment, and were attuned to the extra workload for mothers in managing the home and international moves alone (McKee et al., 2003). Despite the children's reports of frustration and distress at paternal absences and relocation, McKee et al. (2003) observed that children held an "uncritical" acceptance of their parental work-family life.

2.3.3 Related Industry family research.

FIFO family research can also be considered within the wider context of research investigating employment-related parental absence for families of military personnel, seaman, and business travellers. For military families, the combination of stressors including extended parental absence, unpredictable parental departures and safety fears had been assumed to have negative outcomes for children. However, Eastman et al. (1990) found no direct relationship between children's well-being and parental deployment in their study of naval employees ($n = 785$). In contrast, children and partners of military personnel deployed to Operation Desert Storm in 1990 reported more symptoms of depression than non-deployed military families (Jensen et al., 1996), and boys and younger children were found to be more vulnerable to depressive symptoms than girls and older children in the deployed group. In both studies (Eastman et al., 1990; Jensen et al., 1996), military spouses reported high levels of life stress and family dysfunction.

In qualitative family research conducted by the Seafarers International Research Centre (Thomas, 2003), the partners of seamen ($n = 15$) endorsed similar themes associated with employment-related paternal absence as found in recent FIFO family research (Gallegos, 2006; Reynolds, 2004). Corresponding themes from the semi-structured interviews included the challenge of re-adjustment on the seaman's arrivals and departures, social isolation for partners, and family role uncertainty. The women also described the importance of children in their lives, and considered them *companions* when seamen were away. The women believed caring and raising children had relieved a former loneliness or "emptiness" that they had experienced in their partner's absence. However, these women also discussed the burden of sole-parenting, and their feelings of social isolation and exhaustion. One onshore partner described her role as a "single parent, only without the money difficulties that are usually associated with sole parents" (Thomas, 2003, p. 68).

Additionally, international business travel can be considered a form of long-distance commuting and a non-typical employment schedule, as it features periods of employment-related parental absence from the family (Espino et al., 2002; Westman et al., 2008). In recent studies, international business travellers have reported greater emotional stress than their non-travelling colleagues, and regular business travel has been related to greater stress for partners left at home, and to adverse changes in children's behaviour and to perceived family functioning (Espino et al., 2002).

2.4 Summary

Changing work demands associated with the 24/7 global economy continue to affect the lives of Australian employees, and influence their health and well-being, their relationships with family, and their integration into the community (Pocock, 2003). Long and unsocial working hours can adversely affect the well-being of family members and family functioning (Pocock, 2001; Presser, 2000; 2004). Of recent interest to the Australian community has been the growing utilisation of FIFO employment in the mining and resources workforce. As FIFO employees are periodically separated from their families, FIFO employment can present unique challenges to many families. The negative implications of FIFO employment have been anecdotally reported (Cusworth, 2007; Irving, 2006; Quartermaine, 2006; Taylor, 2006) and as a result, the FIFO lifestyle has become the focus of industry and community research (Beach et al., 2003, 2004; Clifford, 2009; CSRM, 2002; Gallegos, 2006; Gent, 2004; Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2008; Reynolds, 2004; Sibbel, 2001, 2010).

Of particular relevance for children in FIFO families is the phenomenon of regular paternal absences. The majority of FIFO employees are separated from their families for more than 5 months in a year (Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2008). Related work/family research on the effects of non-standard working hours have found that children can be directly affected by employment-related paternal absences due to the disruption to their regular emotional and physical contact with fathers (Bumpus et al., 1999; Davis et al., 2006; Jensen et al., 1996). Children can also be indirectly affected by employment-related paternal absences due to the loss of a co-parent for the period of time fathers are working away, which places extra demands and stress on their partners and family at home (Eastman et al., 1990; Espino et al., 2002; Parkes et al., 2005;

Thomas, 2003). However, the implications of employment-related paternal absence for children in FIFO families have not been fully explored, and parents in FIFO families appear conflicted about the potential impacts of the lifestyle on their children (Clifford, 2009; Gallegos, 2006; Reynolds, 2004). While FIFO families have reported parenting challenges (Gallegos, 2006; Reynolds, 2004; Sibbel, 2001), there is some evidence that children's emotional well-being may be unaffected by paternal FIFO employment (Sibbel, 2001). As the mining and resources industry becomes increasingly reliant on FIFO employment (CMEWA, 2005), further investigation into children's perceptions and experience of the FIFO lifestyle is necessary. To better understand the potential effects of employment-related paternal absences for children, the following chapter outlines the role of fathers in children's lives, the significance of paternal involvement and further, it examines models of family coping and adaptation.

CHAPTER 3: FIFO, FATHERS, AND FAMILY ADAPTATION

Over the past 20 years, the depiction of fathers has changed substantially, from the *breadwinner* in the family to the involved and nurturing parent (Biddulph, 1995; Flood, 2003). At the same time, parenting research has confirmed the importance of positive parental involvement in children's development and healthy emotional well-being (Lamb, 1997; Pleck, 2007). The "twenty-first century Dad" has been portrayed as wanting closer physical and emotional relationships with his children, evidenced by the additional time fathers are willing to spend with their children (Equal Opportunities Commission [EOC], 2006). According to the EOC report (2006), men in Great Britain are currently interacting with children eight times more often than their fathers did during the 1970s, with the majority of men taking time off for births and reporting increased confidence in caring for babies. The Australian figures demonstrate a similar trend (ABS, 2006). Australian fathers who live with children under 15 years reported spending an average of eight hours caring for children per week. Paternal care included providing physical and emotional care, minding their children, teaching or disciplining their children, and playing with or reading to their children.

However, the recent ABS data (2006) on paternal work-family balance highlighted the increasing tension between men's work demands and the responsibilities of contemporary fathering. While Australian men are spending more time with their children, they are also facing increasing pressure to work longer hours. According to the ABS figures (2006), approximately half of the Australian men (54%), who were employed full-time and had children under 15 years of age, worked between 42 and 43 hours per week, while 30% of fathers worked in excess of 50 hours per week and an additional 16% of fathers worked over 60 hours per week. Longer working hours can place constraints on family time and may result in greater stress and strain for fathers, who are trying to balance family finances with the emotional needs of their children (Richardson, 2005; Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberlaid, & Brember, 2008).

3.1 Researching Paternal Involvement

To understand the implications of paternal absences in children's lives, it is important to examine the existing research on the nature and effects of paternal involvement. Over the last 30 years, research investigating the role of a father's presence and involvement in his child's life has refined our knowledge of paternal involvement and clarified outcomes for children (Lamb, 1997). Fathering can be considered a multi-faceted role that interacts within the family system *directly* (i.e., in the relationship between father and child) and *indirectly* (i.e., in the inter-relationship between father, partner, child and family) and can influence children's emotional, social and physical outcomes. Research has shown that children with caring and involved fathers demonstrate greater cognitive, emotional and behavioural competence than their peers (e.g., higher internal locus of control, greater expressed empathy, less sex-stereotyped beliefs) (Lamb, 1997).

The term *paternal involvement* has often been used over-generally to describe a father's presence in his child's life. Lamb (1997) more accurately conceptualised *positive* paternal involvement using three key dimensions: accessibility, engagement and responsibility. The *accessibility* component directly related to a father's presence and availability in a child's life, while the *engagement* component referred to a father's direct contact with a child through play, nurturing, care-giving and/or shared activities and finally, the *responsibility* component encompassed the proactive actions taken by fathers in parenting and child-rearing decisions (Sarkadi et al., 2008). The more complex understanding of fatherhood is reflected in the changing focus of fathering research. Much of the earlier research exploring the influence of fathers in children's lives focused on a basic presence and absence polarity, as measured by Lamb's *accessibility* dimension of paternal involvement. However, more recent research has attempted to tease out features of *effective* fathering by using all three domains of Lamb's model of paternal involvement: accessibility, engagement and responsibility (Sarkadi et al., 2008).

3.1.1 FIFO and paternal accessibility: Time.

As children grow older and become more independent, the amount of time they spend with parents naturally decreases. However, relative to the amount of time children

spend with their mothers, the time spent with their fathers increases with children's age, and research has indicated that children may derive increased benefit from paternal involvement during their later childhood and adolescence (Davis et al., 2006; Yeung, Sanderberg, Davies-Kean, & Hofferth, 2001). Research examining the relationship between employment demands and paternal involvement can assist in understanding how paternal FIFO employment may impact on father-child relationships. For children in FIFO families, the amount of time spent with their fathers fluctuates between intense periods of time together when fathers are at home to periods of physical unavailability when fathers are at work, which may be complicated by additional limitations such as inadequate communication.

For example, Yeung et al. (2001) found men who worked longer hours for superior wages spent less time with their children than men who worked in other industries. However, this time constraint only affected men's weekday interactions with their children and the amount of weekend time spent with children remained unchanged. Paternal involvement during the weekend days included play and other shared activities, achievement-related events (e.g., sport), and social activities. In a survey of Australian families where fathers worked long, unsocial hours ($n = 50$), "work-away" fathers expressed a sense of sadness and loss about the quantity of time they had missed with their children, and believed the relationships with their children had been compromised by these periods of absence (Pocock, 2001). The work-away fathers also conceded their employment-related absences had flow-on effects for their partners at home who accepted the greater responsibility for children's upbringing and the greater burden of parenting and household management (Pocock, 2001).

3.1.2 FIFO and paternal engagement: Contact.

According to a meta-analysis of longitudinal fathering research (Sarkadi et al., 2008), positive paternal involvement is related to a reduction in behavioural problems in childhood and adolescence, better socio-emotional functioning in childhood and adulthood, and better educational attainment. More specifically, high levels of paternal *engagement* (i.e., direct contact) is related to fewer behavioural problems in boys, less risk of delinquency in early adulthood for both boys and girls, and fewer psychological problems in young women (Sarkadi et al., 2008). The authors concluded that "regular

and active” paternal involvement can positively influence children’s emotional, social, behavioural and cognitive outcomes. For example, paternal involvement in childhood can act as a protective factor against later adult mental illness, independent of the levels of maternal involvement (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003b, 2003a). In these studies, paternal involvement was also positively related to children’s current emotional well-being, with no significant differences between the sexes. Flouri and Buchanan (2003a) concluded that paternal involvement had a unique and salient impact on a child’s life, separate to the levels of maternal involvement. In related research, Cookston and Finlay (2006) also found paternal involvement contributed to positive outcomes for children, and was negatively associated with depressive symptoms, delinquency and alcohol use in adolescents.

For children in FIFO families, their engagement or direct contact with fathers is challenged by FIFO work schedules, and several FIFO family studies have reported parental concern about the loss of paternal support for older children when fathers are away (Gallegos, 2006; Parkes et al., 2005; Reynolds, 2004). The recent fathering research also suggests that paternal involvement may be of greater significance for children in later childhood and adolescence (Cookston & Finlay, 2006; Flouri & Buchanan, 2003a). Potentially, there may be adverse outcomes for older children in FIFO families as a result of employment-related paternal absences, which limit children’s opportunities to interact with their fathers.

3.1.3 FIFO and paternal responsibility: Co-parenting.

The *responsibility* dimension of paternal involvement refers to a father’s willingness and ability to co-parent his child, and includes competencies such as making parenting decisions, monitoring and supervising children, and interacting with child-centred communities (e.g., schools, recreation activities) (Lamb, 2007; Pleck, 2007). However, paternal employment demands can frequently constrain the co-parent role. For example, Yeung et al. (2001) observed a general trend for fathers to limit co-parenting to the weekend days because of their employment demands during the week days.

Nevertheless, the financial contribution that fathers bring to families through their employment remains an important factor towards positive family functioning and child well-being (Amato, 1998). For many FIFO families, the financial remuneration

associated with FIFO employment was central to their decision for fathers to work away (Clifford, 2009; Gallegos, 2006; Sibbel, 2010). However, employment-related paternal absences may tax other important parenting responsibilities, including a father's ability to effectively co-parent or to access their local community. A FIFO employee's time away at work removes his everyday practical support from the family.

3.2 FIFO and Employment-related Paternal Absence

... there's a man who's torn away from his family for two weeks. He has his emotions, misses the kids. It's not all fun and games for them out there.

Irving (2006, p. 4)

Research investigating the effects of paternal absence on children has traditionally encompassed their experience of separation, divorce and sole-parenting. However, paternal employment conditions (e.g., long hours, non-standard hours) can also result in periods of paternal absence (Flood, 2003; Pocock, 2001). The term *employment-related paternal absence* can be used to differentiate between these different experiences (Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2008). When considering the nature of paternal absence in children's lives, it is important to also distinguish between *emotional* or *psychological* absence and *physical* absence, as a father's emotional presence in the family may not be contingent on his continual presence in the household (Boss, 1977). For example, a FIFO father's emotional involvement with his children may be compromised during work periods when he is physically separated from the family, however it may be considered a different and less profound loss of paternal involvement than that experienced by children without fathers or with non-residential fathers. Recent fathering literature has proposed that it is the *quality* of paternal involvement as opposed to the *quantity* of access time that is important for a child's healthy well-being (Flood, 2003).

Nevertheless, paternal FIFO employment can limit the amount of time a FIFO employee has to engage in important family roles (e.g., father, partner, son) and the extended separations from families can potentially contribute to tension between their work and family lives (Clifford, 2009; Keown, 2005) and affect family adjustment (Gent, 2004; Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2008; Sibbel, 2001; Staines, 1986). While the home and social environments remain constant for children in FIFO families, protective well-

being factors such as regular contact with fathers, emotional and physical closeness to fathers, and consistent communication with their fathers may be compromised by the FIFO lifestyle.

3.2.1 Pathway model.

To better illustrate the potential impact of employment-related paternal absences on children in FIFO families, a mediation model developed from non-standard working hours research (Strazdins et al., 2006) is outlined in Figure 3.1. Strazdins et al. (2006) proposed the mediation model to explain the relationship between parental non-standard working hours and children's emotional and behavioural well-being. Three key mediational factors were identified within the family environment that may be challenged by parental non-standard working hours - *family functioning*, *parental mental health* and *parenting competency* – and that may negatively influence children's well-being. This mediation model can assist in our understanding of the interactions between paternal work demands, and child and family variables in FIFO families, and may assist in teasing out salient factors that influence children's well-being.

In Strazdins et al.'s research (2006), the families with fathers working non-standard hours reported lower family functioning and less effective, more hostile parenting compared to the families with parents working standard hours. Additionally, increased parental distress was reported in the families with mothers or both parents working nonstandard hours. These family environment factors are illustrated by Path 1 of the mediation model (see Figure 3.1). Meanwhile, children's emotional and behavioural difficulties, as reported by their parents, were associated with lower levels of family functioning, greater parental distress, and higher levels of ineffective, hostile parenting, as illustrated by Path 2 of the mediation model. Strazdins et al. (2006) found that the association between parental non-standard working hours and children's well-being was only partially mediated by an adverse family environment, as measured by family dysfunction, parental depression and ineffective parenting.

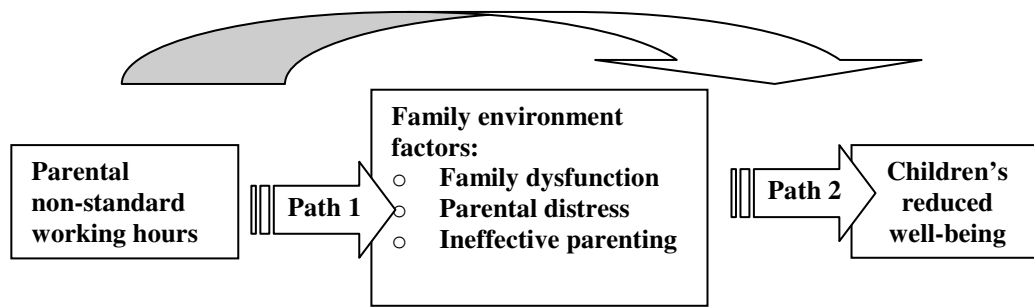


Figure 3.1 The Strazdins et al. (2006) mediation model of parental non-standard working hours and children's well-being.

3.3 FIFO and the Family System

The Family Systems Theory provides a framework to understand the direct and indirect effects of *employment-related paternal absence* on FIFO families. Family Systems Theory proposes that the family unit is a dynamic and self-regulating social system. That is, *how* family members interact and relate to each other is crucial to healthy individuals and to healthy family functioning (Broderick, 1993; Jones, 1993; Montgomery & Fewer, 1988). In this way, the relationship between a father and his child can be seen as a *dyadic* system which exists and interacts within the context of a larger family system. As a result, the father-child relationship will be influenced by and, in turn, influences other relationships in the system (e.g., between fathers and mothers/siblings/grandparents). According to Family Systems Theory, to function effectively family members need to be certain of *who* makes up the family system, or more simply who is *inside* and who is *outside* the system. Therefore, a parent's extended absence from the family may cause tension and uncertainty within the family system, or *boundary ambiguity* (Boss, 1977; Rosenblatt, 1994). For example, a father who is FIFO employed is physically both *in* and *not in* the family, depending on his work schedule. This intermittent paternal presence may generate uncertainty and confusion for family members regarding their *roles* (e.g., parenting, discipline), their *responsibilities* (e.g., supervision, sibling support), and for the completion of *tasks* (e.g., cleaning, maintenance) within the family system (Boss, 1977).

3.3.1 Coping within the family system: The double ABCX model.

Within a family system, the tension between work and family commitments (i.e., work/family imbalance) is most frequently characterised by 1) time constraints, 2) increased demands on individual members and 3) increased stress for family members (Pocock, 2001; Pocock et al., 2007). To illustrate the complex interactions between parental work demands and family functioning, the double ABCX model of family stress (Lavee, McCubbin, & Patterson, 1985; McCubbin et al., 1980) is pictured below in Figure 3.2. The model was initially developed from military research investigating the effectiveness of family adaptation to foreign relocation and as such, it provides a relevant framework to understand how FIFO families respond and adapt to stress related to employment-related paternal absence (Lavee, 1985 et al.; McCubbin, 1979; McCubbin et al., 1980). The original relocation study conducted by Lavee et al. (1985) identified significant difficulties for military families associated with their experience of separation and absence, which contributed to adverse outcomes for overall family functioning. As a result of these findings, the military introduced systematic protective policies for families to assist in family adjustment to stressful experiences such as military deployment and relocation (Lavee et al., 1985; McCubbin et al., 1980).

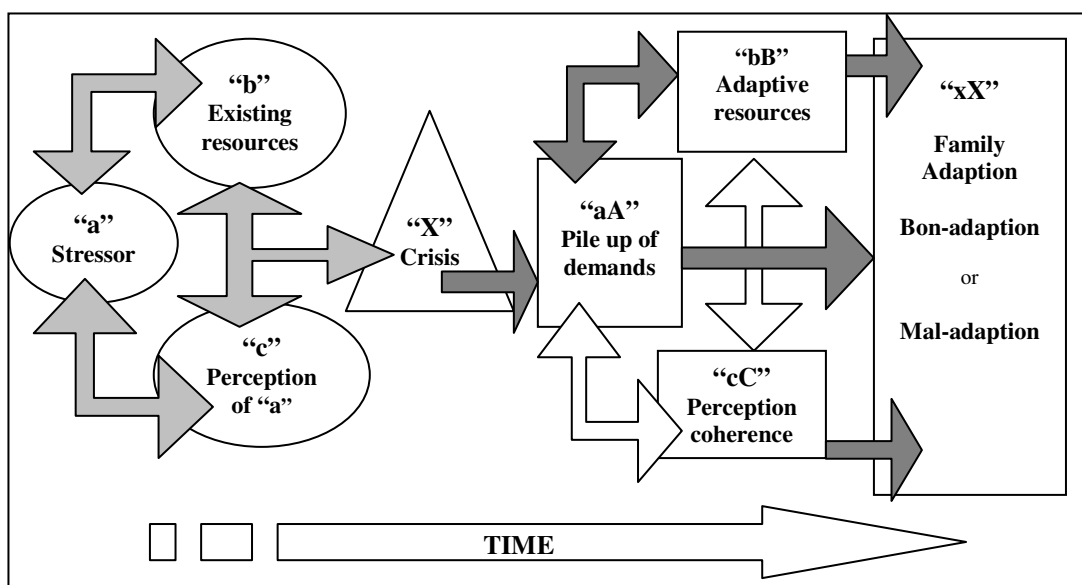


Figure 3.2 The double ABCX model of family coping (Lavee et al., 1985)

In the double ABCX model, the sources of *stress* (“a”) may be either normative (i.e., developmental and life transitions) or non-normative. The outcome, family disruption or adjustment, is dependent on how the family *perceives* the problem (“c”) and the *resources* (“b”) that can be accessed. For example, a stressor can be perceived as either manageable or overwhelming, and family resources accessed can be either internal (i.e., inter-family support) or external (i.e., extra-family support). However, the initial crisis outcome (“X”) can be further complicated by additional pre- and post-crisis stressors which accumulate over time, which are termed *pile-up demands* (“aA”). Again, family outcome is reliant on the adaptive *resources* of the family (“bB”), including personal and family characteristics, coping strategies, and social support, and how the family make sense of these additional *stressors* (“cC”).

So for families new to FIFO, their existing resources and perceptions of work demands become modified by the new FIFO work schedule and the consequences of family separation and paternal absences. Additional *pile-up demands* may include the length of FIFO roster swings, a child’s adverse response to paternal separation or family illness, which can place extra demands on the partner and children at home. Adaptive resources of the FIFO family may also be modified by involving extended family or utilising childcare in the support network. Alternatively, for FIFO *veterans* (i.e., families who have been exposed to many years of paternal FIFO employment), stressors may include a child entering adolescence, changes in maternal employment, family relocation or the increasing demands of ageing parents. In this case, the family’s existing resources and perceptions of FIFO employment may be modified as a consequence of the new stressors. The FIFO *veteran* family may utilise more adaptive resources such as increasing inter-family communication, involving extended family, seeking improved FIFO working conditions or alternative employment. Finally, how the individuals in both hypothetical FIFO families *perceive* these changes to the family dynamic (i.e., beneficial or detrimental) will also influence the outcome, since individual family members may *appraise* the family changes differently. Taken together, these family variables influence the FIFO family’s successful or unsuccessful adaptation to stressors and affect the psychological and physical well-being of family members and their satisfaction with the FIFO lifestyle.

Walsh (1996, 2002) further developed the concept of family adaptation and proposed that a family's experience of change and conflict is as essential to family functioning as stability and continuity. She considered the ability of a family to successfully adjust to ongoing crisis and challenges (e.g., transition to FIFO) to be a form of *family resilience*. In this way, families not only develop ways of coping in particular situations but also build on their resilience in the process, which, in turn, can strengthen family functioning. Walsh (2002) identified three key processes in family functioning that contributed to increased family resilience: 1) family belief systems, including a family's ability to make meaning of the experience and to maintain a positive outlook; 2) organisational patterns, including a family's ability to be flexible and remain connected; and 3) clear, open communication and collaborative problem-solving. These processes mirror key features of the double ABCX model (Lavee et al., 1985; McCubbin et al., 1980). Walsh's first component, the family belief systems, reflects the double ABCX concept of *perception coherence* or a family's shared meaning of an experience. The family organisation and communication components incorporate the double ABCX concept of individual and family adaptive resources that can be drawn on to buffer stressors. In her explanation of family adaptation, Walsh (1996) concluded that a family's successful resolution to a crisis not only reflects positive adaptation to that stressor but can lead to the strengthening of these family resilience factors, and the development of a family's sense of competence and confidence to cope with future challenges.

3.3.2 FIFO and family risk factors: Parental distress, parenting stress, and family management.

Taking into consideration the fathering research and family adaptation literature, paternal FIFO employment may have significant effects for men, their partners and children, and for overall family functioning. In recent FIFO studies, FIFO employees have consistently endorsed moderate to high levels of interference to their home, social and community lives as a result of FIFO work demands (Clifford, 2009; CRSM, 2002; Keown, 2005). Physically, FIFO employees can be adversely affected by the long work hours, uneven and rotating rosters, and the demands of regular commuting (Muller et al., 2008; Shrimpton & Storey, 2001). Emotionally, men have reported that FIFO work

schedules can place pressure on their personal relationships and on their ability to maintain existing relationships or to form new ones (CSR, 2002). One of the casualties of non-standard working hours can be the quantity and quality of time that partners can spend together, and parents working non-standard hours have reported that *family* time is often prioritised over *couple* time (La Valle et al., 2002; Presser, 2000). The experience of being separated from family combined with the remoteness of worksites and inadequate communication can increase a FIFO employee's sense of social isolation and dislocation from family life, and they can feel ineffectual in times of family need (e.g., children's illness) (Collinson, 1998; CSR, 2002).

The partners of FIFO employees have also reported disruption to family and personal life as a result of FIFO work demands, and have reported increased stress and feelings of loneliness related to the periods of sole-parenting (Gallegos, 2006; Parkes et al., 2005; Reynolds, 2004; Sibbel, 2001). Maternal distress is recognised as a significant stressor for children and can be adversely related to a child's well-being (Cummings & Davies, 1993; Hammen, 1997). A mother's emotional distress (e.g., stress, anxiety and depression symptoms) may affect the quantity and quality of maternal interactions with her child. For example, mothers at risk may become negative and irritable, less attuned to their children's needs, or potentially withdraw from their children (Cummings & Davies, 1993; Hammen, 1997). Developmental research has indicated that some children of depressed mothers may also feel overly-responsible for their mother's sadness (Hammen, 1997). An increased concern for their mother's well-being may give rise to an *over-responsible* coping style in some children (Byng-Hall, 2008; Robinson, 1999). According to Robinson (1999), over-responsible or *parentified* children are prone to assuming adult duties and responsibilities before they are developmentally prepared for these challenges. Other family situations that may lead to children's parentification include parental absence (e.g., divorce, death or *parental work demands*), parental dysfunction (e.g., mental illness, disability), and parental conflict (Byng-Hall, 2008). Robinson (1999) described over-responsible children as being adept and skilled children, who display extraordinary coping skills in certain situations. However, he cautioned that their over-functioning coping style in childhood may lead to entrenched self-critical attitudes and unrealistic expectations of self in later life. Byng-Hall (2008) identified

some adaptive consequences of children's over-responsibility or parentification, including improved self-worth, self-efficacy in caring ability, and an increased sense of responsibility. Nonetheless, the excessive burden of caring and responsibility in the family may lead some children to experience a sense of inadequacy, increased social isolation, and emotional difficulties (Byng-Hall, 2008).

An additional risk factor of the FIFO lifestyle is the constant cycle of family re-adjustment to paternal absence and paternal presence. FIFO employees and their partners have reported increased stress and parental disagreement during these transition periods when fathers leave or re-enter the family system (Gallegos, 2006; Parkes et al., 2005; Reynolds, 2004; Sibbel, 2001). In general, the presence of a conflictual or dysfunctional marital relationship has been found to adversely affect a parent's relationship with their child, and these adverse effects has been found to be more salient for fathers and their relationships with children (Cummings & Watson, 1997; Cummings, Schermerhorn, Davies, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2006). Parenting conflict has also been associated with an increased incidence of emotional and behavioural problems in children (Dadds & Powell, 1991). However, Dadds and Powell (1991) differentiated two distinct types of parental conflict - parenting conflict and relationship conflict - and proposed that these conflict types affected children in different ways. Parenting or *inter-parent* conflict was defined as parental disagreements related to children and parenting issues while *relationship* conflict was defined as the general disagreement between partners that was not related to children or parenting. Inter-parent conflict was found to be more strongly associated with children's emotional and behavioural difficulties than the general relationship conflict between couples (Dadds & Powell, 1991; Morawska & Thompson, 2009; Stallman, Morawska, & Sanders, 2009). Further, Dadds and Powell found high levels of inter-parenting conflict were associated with aggression in children and anxiety in boys. The authors hypothesised that boys may be more vulnerable to parental conflict, and experience more difficulties adjusting to family changes and other stressors than girls.

According to the double ABCX model (Lavee et al., 1985), family change and stressors can be successfully managed by accessing intra-family support and by extending support networks beyond the family. Depending on the length of paternal

absences, FIFO families may require additional support structures while fathers are away to assist with childcare, transportation, cleaning and maintenance, and to provide companionship. As a result, FIFO families may experience alternating family management styles depending on whether fathers are at home or at work. In their study of merchant seamen and their families, Forsyth and Gramling (1990) identified different family management styles associated with employment-related paternal absence. The authors observed that onshore families managed paternal separations and absences in different ways and these family behavioural patterns could be classified into four main family management styles. The *alternate authority* management style was flexible and allowed family authority to pass back and forth between husband and wife on arrivals and departures. This family management style was more common to sea-faring families experiencing shorter and more consistent periods of paternal absence (i.e., 1- 3 weeks away). In contrast, the *conflict* family management style was characterised by parental disagreement over family authority when husbands returned home. The *replacement father* management style relied on an additional person, usually a member of the extended family, to *step-in* and assist the family. Finally, in some onshore families, the seaman's role in the household had diminished and the at-home partner had the majority of roles and responsibilities in the family, aside from main "breadwinner". This fourth management style was termed the *periodic guest* strategy. Considering the variation in the length of FIFO roster swings, from a working week to several months, FIFO families may be utilising a similar range of family management styles to cope with periods of paternal absence.

3.4 FIFO, Employment-related Paternal Absence and Children

As noted previously, paternal FIFO employment may have adverse consequences for children on both an individual and family level. First, a child's relationship with his/her father may be disrupted by repeated employment-related paternal absences, and as a result, children's *internal* well-being (e.g., mood, self-worth) and the father-child dyad (i.e., the way the child relates to that parent) may be affected. Second, employment-related paternal absences can impact *systematically* on family relationships and influence the way a child relates to the family as a whole (Piotrkowski, 1979). For example, in a FIFO family, a child's initial excitement and demands for attention on

his/her father's return from work may be frustrated by paternal fatigue, and in response a child may restrict his/her behaviour or emotional reactions (Gallegos, 2006).

On a systemic level, the intermittent paternal absences required by FIFO employment can subtly change the family structure and the amount of time children can spend with their fathers. In contrast to the minor rituals and adjustments made by children with typical working fathers who leave daily for work, children in FIFO families experience lengthy and complex parental separations, reunions and transitions during their father's work cycle. Stress and tension related to family re-adjustment has been identified by FIFO employee and their partners as one of the key difficulties of the FIFO lifestyle (Gallegos, 2006; Reynolds, 2004; Sibbel, 2001). Therefore, to fully appreciate how children negotiate employment-related paternal absences, it will be important to understand the nature of children's coping and adaptation processes.

3.4.1 Children's coping and adaptation: Risk and resilience.

In general, *coping* refers to the positive adaptation to life's stressors by using skills and resources, such as managing emotions, thinking constructively, and regulating behaviour (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Harding Thomsen, & Wadsworth, 2001; Eisenberg, Fabes, & Guthrie, 1997; Losoya, Eisenberg, & Fabes, 1998). However, *maladaptation* is also possible when personal resources are limited or used ineffectively or unhelpfully. Coping is pervasive in children's lives as they encounter and deal with novelty, change and challenge in their everyday life (e.g., separating from parents, transition to school, making friends, adolescence) (Losoya et al., 1998). Children's competency in coping and their ability to effectively use personal resources is reflected in their outcome responses to these stressful events or environments (i.e., resilient or non-resilient).

Research examining child and adolescent coping processes can refine our understanding of factors that contribute to children's successful adaptation or resilience to life stressors, such as employment-related paternal absence. With an abundance of coping subtypes, theoretical models of children's coping are predominately conceptualised along two dimensions: external and internal. First, *external* coping involves children acting on or managing the stressor in the environment. External coping styles include behavioural strategies such as *emotion expression* (e.g., venting), *overt*

action, and also cognitive strategies such as *problem-solving* and *seeking guidance* (Eisenberg et al., 1997; Losoya et al., 1998). Second, *internal* coping involves children managing themselves in relation to the stressor. Internal coping styles include improving emotional regulation through cognitive strategies such as *acceptance*, *cognitive restructuring*, and *positive reframing*. However, internal coping styles may also include less helpful *disengagement* strategies such as *denial*, *avoidance* and *distraction* (Eisenberg et al., 1997; Losoya, 1998).

Children's ability to use a wide of range of coping strategies is dependent on their developmental maturity, and children are limited to their age-related cognitive, emotional and behavioural resources (Compas et al., 2001; Eisenberg et al., 1997; Losoya et al., 1998). As language ability improves in early to mid-childhood, children develop their ability to use more complex internal or cognitive strategies to regulate emotion (Compas et al., 2001). With increasing use of more sophisticated cognitive or internal types of coping such as cognitive reframing of problem situations, distraction and positive self-talk, children become more independent and self-reliant. As a result, children are less inclined to use behavioural strategies such as venting and tantrums, and are less likely to rely on external supports such as parents and teachers for emotional soothing (Compas et al., 2001; Losoya et al., 1998).

In relation to children's responses to employment-related parental absences, recent work/family research has suggested that children develop different strategies to cope with family change due to parental work schedules (Mauthner, 1997; McKee et al., 2003; Näsman, 2003). Investigating children's experience of parental work demands, Näsman (2003) observed that children displayed positive (e.g., acceptance) and negative (e.g., resignation) ways of coping. For example, some children actively consoled parents or helped out with household duties while other children used more unhelpful coping strategies such as tantrums, protesting or exiting the room. It also appeared helpful for some children to internalise adult perceptions of employment as their own, which Näsman described as children's "masked" adult voices. Observations of the coping strategies that children in FIFO families employ to manage employment-related paternal absences will assist us to understand how children adapt to the FIFO lifestyle.

3.4.2 Children's social support.

The relationship between a child and his/her parents may be seen as the *original* social support for children, and the early experience of parental attachment can influence children's perception of the availability and effectiveness of social support in their lives (Bowlby, 1969; Sarason, Pierce, & Sarason, 1990). Essentially, attachment theory classifies the child-parent relationship as either secure or insecure. In a secure attachment relationship, parents are attuned to their children's needs and are both available and responsive to their child (e.g., attentive, caring). In an insecure child-parent relationship, children's needs are inadequately met and as a result, children become anxious or preoccupied by their parents' unavailability or unpredictability (Ainsworth et al., 1978). The early parental attachment styles have been found to contribute to children's later social competency and personal efficacy, and can influence their coping ability and self-perception (Sarason et al., 1990). For example, children with secure attachment are more likely to develop a strong sense of self-worth and self-efficacy while children with insecure attachment are more likely to develop an inadequate sense of self (Bowlby, 1969; Bretherton, 1992).

The initial attachment research predominately focused on the quality of bonding between mothers and their children however, subsequent studies have identified similar patterns of attachment between fathers and their children (Bretherton, 2010; Grossman et al., 2002). Paternal attachment is believed to become more salient in the second year of a child's life as his/her autonomy increases. Therefore, children's relationships with their parents are not fixed, and maternal and paternal attachment styles have been found to fluctuate and shift throughout childhood, from infancy to adolescence (Amato, 1998; Bretherton, 2010; Grossman et al., 2002). Children can experience convergent parental attachment styles, with either a secure or insecure bonding with both parents, or children can experience divergent attachment styles, with different patterns of attachment toward individual parents (e.g., insecure maternal attachment/secure paternal attachment).

Addressing attachment issues for children in FIFO families, some researchers have speculated that parental bonding may be compromised by the periods of paternal unavailability (Adler, 1983; Gallegos, 2006). For example, in an early clinical case study of an Australian FIFO employee and his family, Adler (1983) suggested that a child's

experience of intermittent paternal absence early in life may prolong attachment to his/her mother. Problematic father-child attachment issues have also been reported in interviews with partners of FIFO employees (Parkes et al., 2005, Sibbel, 2001).

Supportive relationships with family and with peers are key protective factors for children's emotional well-being and can assist children to cope effectively with change and stress in their lives (Eisenberg et al., 1997). Children's social support can be categorised into four main subtypes: 1) emotional support which provides care, nurturing and understanding; 2) practical support which provides physical assistance with tasks; 3) advice which provides information and instruction; and 4) companionship. Additionally, children's emotional adjustment may not solely be influenced by the availability of social support but also by their perceptions of this social support (Cauce, Ried, Lansesman, & Gonzales, 1990; Shute, DeBlasio, & Williamson, 2002). For example, younger primary-aged children predominately endorse their parents as the main providers of emotional and practical support while older children and adolescents report that peers and school staff are also key sources of support, alongside their family (Cauce et al., 1990; Shute et al., 2002). In a recent Australian study examining children's perceptions of their social support providers, school children (9 - 11 years, $n = 70$) reported that their parents provided the most emotional support, practical support and advice support, and mothers were rated more emotionally supportive than fathers (Shute et al., 2002). However, boys reported greater satisfaction with their father's support than girls and overall children rated fathers higher on companionship support compared to mothers (Shute et al., 2002).

3.4.3 FIFO and child risk factors: Age and sex.

Attachment and developmental literature indicates that age and gender may influence how children negotiate parental work demands and employment-related paternal absences. In recent work/family studies, Australian parents have expressed concern about the effects that their longer and atypical working hours have had on children (Gallegos, 2006; Pocock, 2001). Contrary to early attachment research, many parents reported that younger children were less affected by intermittent periods of paternal absence and parents identified adolescence as a critical time for those children whose fathers worked away (Gallegos, 2006; Pocock, 2001, 2006). Adolescence is a

transition period in children's lives and is characterised by a shift from family-centred activity and support to peer-centred activity and support. Children spend less time with family and more time with peers engaging in interests outside the family. Although adolescents may spend less time with parents overall, they are more likely to spend family time with their same-sex parent at this age (Hosley & Montemayer, 1997). These developmental trends suggest that adolescent children in FIFO families, and in particular adolescent boys could experience greater vulnerability to employment-related paternal absences.

3.5 Summary

Research into the social impact of FIFO employment is relatively recent and there has been limited research into the implications for children. While one study (Sibbel, 2001) has investigated the incidence of internalising behaviours in children from FIFO families, there is evidence that parenting conflict and family dysfunction can be related to children's externalising behaviours such as conduct problems and aggression (Dadds & Powell, 1991; Strazdins et al., 2004). In addition, fathering research and literature has specified the important health and well-being outcomes of positive paternal involvement for children, which may be challenged by the FIFO roster cycles. Effective fathering can be seen along three dimensions: the amount of time spent with children (accessibility), the quality of interaction with children (engagement) and the commitment to parenting (responsibility). Accordingly, paternal FIFO employment could have potentially positive or negative influences on men's fathering role as it directly limits FIFO employee's accessibility to their children, their levels of engagement with children and their degree of parenting responsibility during absences from the family. However, it is also important to understand the impact of employment-related paternal absence for children from a systemic approach, which includes the interactions and influences of all family members and the impact on individual and family functioning. As children's long-term adjustment can be affected by the quality of their relationship with *each* parent and the quality of their parents' relationship, children's well-being and resilience may be affected by their father's FIFO employment (Compas et al., 2001).

In summary, employment-related paternal absence can be considered a unique feature in the lives of children in FIFO families as compared to their peers. Yet, the potential outcomes for children in FIFO families and their responses to paternal separations and absences have been minimally examined. Therefore, the aim of the current study was to address this imbalance and investigate children's experience of the FIFO lifestyle, by examining both children's functioning and their subjective experience of paternal FIFO employment. The following chapter outlines the multi-method research design and overall study plan.

CHAPTER 4: STUDY RATIONALE AND PROJECT DESIGN

In this chapter, the rationale for investigating children's experience of paternal FIFO employment is outlined and the overall research design is described. The aims and objectives of the research project are discussed, and the selection and strengths of the multi-methods approach are examined.

4.1 Rationale for Investigating Children's Experience of the FIFO Lifestyle

As previously outlined in Chapter 2, the increased utilisation of FIFO employment in the Western Australian resources industry and the growing concern about the impact of FIFO employment on families has resulted in a number of recent studies. The studies have investigated FIFO employee and partner well-being (Clifford, 2009; Keown, 2005; Sibbel, 2010), family and relationship functioning (Clifford, 2009; Gent, 2004; Keown, 2005; Reynolds, 2004; Sibbel, 2001, 2010) and parenting issues (Gallegos, 2006). However, the children in FIFO families have often been overlooked in research or researchers have relied on parent informants to assess children's reaction to paternal FIFO employment. In recent FIFO qualitative studies (Gallegos, 2006; Reynolds, 2004), FIFO parents have identified a number of key areas they believed pertinent to their children's well-being, including parenting and family inconsistency, transition and adjustment periods, discipline issues, challenges to paternal involvement and inadequate communication. However, there still remains limited knowledge about children's own responses to the paternal FIFO employment. To date, there has been two inter-related quantitative studies that has investigated children's well-being in FIFO families (Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2008; Sibbel, 2001) and one qualitative unpublished honours thesis on male adolescents' perceptions ($n = 8$) of paternal FIFO employment (Macbeth, 2008). The findings suggested that children may be emotionally resilient to the paternal absences and family disruption related to paternal FIFO employment. However, Sibbel's exploratory study (2001) was limited to addressing internalising behaviours (i.e., anxiety and depression symptoms) and perceived family functioning in pre-adolescent children and Macbeth's (2008) study was limited in the sample size and the representativeness of children's experience. Sibbel (2001) concluded that a wider exploration of children's experience in FIFO families was necessary. In particular, she

recommended further research exploring the relationship between children's well-being and parental variables (e.g., maternal stress) and the exploration of individual and family variables that may potentially act as protective factors for children in FIFO families.

One of the key defining features of paternal FIFO employment is children's experience of regular periods of separations from their fathers. The potential implications of these employment-related paternal absences for children can be understood within the context of work/family balance research on non-standard working hours and of fathering literature. As a non-standard working hours employment, FIFO employment comprises long hours (e.g., 12 hours working days) and shiftwork, and temporarily disrupts the structure of the family. Fathers in FIFO employment are physically separated from their children, by time (i.e., length of roster swings) and space (i.e., remote location of work sites), and the length of separations can accumulate to 40% or more of a year (Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2008).

Previous work/family research has found associations between paternal non-standard working hours employment (e.g., long hours, rotating and night shifts) and reduced child well-being (Bumpus et al., 1999; Repetti, 1994; Strazdins et al., 2004). Non-standard working hours employment has also been associated with parental stress, parenting conflict, and family dysfunction, which in turn may affect children's well-being (Pocock, 2001; Presser, 2000). Parents in FIFO families have reported the negative effects of the ongoing cycle of re-adjustment from a two-parent to a one-parent family system, including parenting confusion and tension in FIFO families (Gallegos, 2006; Reynolds, 2004, Sibbel, 2001). As the consistent parenting presence in the family, mother's emotional well-being is an important contributor to children's adaptation to the FIFO lifestyle. Parenting conflict, particularly intra-parent conflict over child-rearing issues has also been associated with reduced child well-being (Dadds & Powell, 1991).

Fathering research literature provides an additional context to understand the implications of employment-related paternal absences for children in FIFO families. The ameliorative effect of positive paternal involvement in children's lives has been the focus of research (Lamb, 1997) and community interest (Biddulph, 1995, Flood, 2003). Children's ability to spend time with their fathers, to be engaged in shared activities, and to have fathers take on co-parenting responsibility have been associated with positive

child outcomes (Pleck, 2007; Sarkadi et al., 2007). It can be argued that the FIFO work schedules may interrupt children's accessibility and involvement with their fathers. How children in FIFO families respond to the repeated separation from their fathers has been minimally investigated. Overall, the complexity of children's responses and reactions to the FIFO lifestyle, to regular separation from fathers and to changing family dynamics has not been fully considered.

Methodological decisions were important to the current research. Previous FIFO family studies have used quantitative methods (e.g., Clifford, 2009, Gent, 2004), qualitative methods (e.g., Gallegos, 2006; Reynolds, 2004) or a mixed methods design (Sibbel, 2010). For this project, it was important to accurately capture child and family functioning quantitatively, using reliable self-report measures, and to explore children's attitudes and perceptions about paternal FIFO employment, by listening to what children had to say about their FIFO experience. Children's experience of important events in their lives (e.g., divorce, trauma, chronic illness) can be effectively assessed by qualitative as well as quantitative methods (Greene & Hill, 2005; Jensen & McKee, 2003; Nelson & Quintana, 2005). Qualitative methods such as face-to-face interviews can assist in eliciting important perceptions, beliefs and meanings in children's experience (Nelson & Quintana, 2005). The inclusion of the qualitative component in the current study also followed the recent tradition of related work/family research that has explored children's experiences of parental employment, (Jensen et al., 2003; Mauthner et al., 2000; McKee et al., 2003; Pocock, 2006).

To achieve the key research objectives a mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) was used. Fundamental to the mixed methods approach is the collection and merging of quantitative and qualitative data, in an effort to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the issue or experience under examination (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). By accessing both empirical and interpretative data, a mixed methods approach can provide 1) multiple data sources to enhance validity, 2) multiple methods to explore the issue, and 3) expansion and explanation of the quantitative results. For example, while the quantitative study in the current research provided a measurement of children's well-being, the inclusion of the qualitative interviews provided additional information about the personal, family and FIFO factors that

influenced children’s well-being. Further, a convergence triangulation model was followed when collecting and analysing the mixed methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). In Figure 4.1, the triangulation model is outlined, showing the concurrent and separate flows of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis for the studies. The different but complementary data were merged in the final stages that compared and interpreted the overall findings, as recommended by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007).

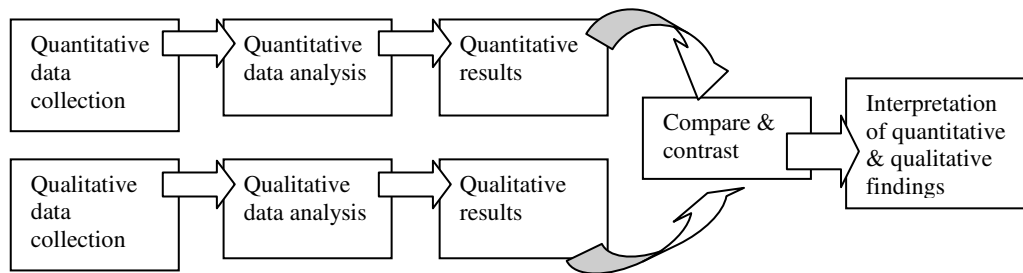


Figure 4.1 The convergence triangulation model of mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007)

In child-centred work/family research (Jensen & McKee, 2003; Mauthner et al., 2000; Nasman, 2003), children are considered to be significant stakeholders in the negotiation of work and family demands, and are considered to possess important insight and understanding into their parents’ work demands and their own work aspirations. However, the qualitative investigation of children’s lived experience of the FIFO lifestyle remains a largely neglected research area. Therefore, in my research, I was interested in exploring the implications for children of the periodic separations from their fathers and the resulting loss of paternal support. As the relationship between fathers and children exists within the context of the extended family unit and the community, I was also interested in the effects of regular family disruption and reduced parenting resources for children when their fathers were away at work.

In addition to addressing the paucity of research on children from FIFO families, I was interested in adding to the broader range of FIFO family research, as general findings of socio-emotional outcomes have been conflicting. For example, Gent (2004) found marital relationship satisfaction, as reported by FIFO workers, was significantly lower than community norms. In contrast, Clifford (2009) and Sibbel (2010) found the

relationship quality of FIFO workers and their partners was comparable to community norms. This discrepancy may be the result of the different scales used to assess relationship quality or the substantial changes to the Western Australian mining working environment of the five years period (e.g., improved communication, greater use of shorter shifts and even-time rosters). There have also been divergent results on maternal perceptions of family functioning. Sibbel (2001) found maternal perceptions of family functioning were negatively affected by the FIFO lifestyle but this finding was not replicated in her later study (Sibbel, 2010). Taylor and Simmonds (2009) also found no significant impact on family functioning, using the Family and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (Olson & Gorall, 2004). In qualitative studies (Gallegos, 2006; Reynolds, 2004), interviews with FIFO workers and their partners have identified a number of strengths of the FIFO lifestyle (e.g., quality time, financial security) and weaknesses (e.g., re-adjustment stress, parenting confusion). On an individual level, FIFO workers have reported negative impacts on their health and emotional well-being (Keown, 2005) and mothers have reported increased stress and domestic work overload as a consequence of the periods of sole parenting (Reynolds, 2004). In contrast, Clifford (2009) and (Sibbel, 2010) found healthy emotional functioning for both FIFO workers and their partners in their quantitative studies. Overall, these divergent research findings suggest complex interactions between FIFO employment, individual family members and family functioning, and indicate that further research is required.

The positive outlook of the resources industry with the promise of increased employment opportunities for Western Australians (CMEWA, 2008) continues to be counterbalanced by community concern about the adverse effects of FIFO employment for families, including divorce (Quartermaine, 2006) and family dysfunction (Cusworth, 2007; Taylor, 2006). Despite conflicting research findings, FIFO employees regularly report that the physical separation from their family and community restricts their ability to engage with partners and children, and to participate in community (Clifford, 2009; Keown, 2005; Reynolds, 2004). How children perceive the challenges of the FIFO lifestyle that their parents have reported remains largely unexplored. What domains of children's lives are affected by their father's absence and how children appraise these impacts are important to identify, as they assist in understanding the process of

children's adaptation to family changes that result from paternal employment demands. In addition, developmental research has suggested adolescence may be a time of heightened risk for children in FIFO families (Davis et al., 2006; Flouri & Buchanan, 2003a), and anecdotally mothers in FIFO families have expressed similar concerns (Gallegos, 2006; Reynolds, 2004; Sibbel, 2001). To date, the adolescent perspective of paternal FIFO employment has not been fully investigated, and further examination of their emotional well-being and their perceptions of employment-related paternal absence is required.

4.2 Aims and Objectives

The overall aims of this research were to investigate children's experience of the FIFO lifestyle and employment-related paternal absence, and to redress the limited amount of child-centred studies in FIFO family research. To achieve these aims, the project was developed in two parts: 1) a quantitative study to measure children's socio-emotional functioning in FIFO families, and included relevant parent and family variables, and 2) a qualitative study to explore how children perceived and negotiated the FIFO lifestyle and paternal absences. By taking the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods, the anticipated outcome was a broad exploration of children's experience of the FIFO lifestyle. Of particular interest was children's negotiation around the key characteristic of FIFO employment – the regular paternal absences from the family. The mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) was chosen to address the following research questions:

4.2.1 Research questions.

- Does paternal FIFO employment (and employment-related paternal absence) influence children's well-being, their perceptions of family functioning, or their relationships with their parents?
- Are there family environment factors, including parental well-being and family functioning or FIFO employment factors, including length of absence and children's exposure to FIFO, that influence children's well-being, their perceptions of family functioning or their relationship with fathers?

- What do children perceive as the advantages and disadvantages of employment-related paternal absence?
- How do children understand and manage paternal absences and changes in the family unit and household routine? What coping processes have children used to negotiate family structure changes?
- How do children in FIFO families perceive their fathers' FIFO employment and what are their own future work aspirations?

The main objective of the quantitative study was to assess children's current level of emotional-behavioural functioning, and to measure key family and work variables that may influence children's well-being. Previous family research has identified important risk factors for children, including child's sex and age (Dadds & Powell, 1991; Davis et al., 2006; Strazdins et al., 2006), reduced parental well-being (Strazdins et al., 2004), parental relationship dissatisfaction (Cummings et al., 1997), parenting conflict (Dadds & Powell., 1991), and reduced family functioning (Presser, 2000). In addition, FIFO-specific factors that may potentially act as risk factors were also investigated, including the length of paternal absences from the family and the length of children's exposure to FIFO employment (i.e., veteran or novice). As a guiding framework, the mediation model of parental non-standard working hours and children's well-being, developed by Strazdins et al. (2006), was used to illustrate the interrelationships between child, family and work factors, with minor modifications to address FIFO-specific factors as shown in Figure 4.2. In this model, paternal FIFO employment, as defined by the length of paternal absences from the family and the length of time in the FIFO industry, may influence children's well-being, as defined by their sex and age. Family environment factors comprising levels of family functioning, parenting conflict, parental relationship satisfaction and parental well-being may mediate a direct relationship between paternal FIFO employment and child well-being. According to the model (Strazdins et al., 2006), FIFO employment and employment-related paternal absence may not affect a child's well-being in isolation, but in conjunction with paternal, maternal and family well-being (i.e., family functioning,

parenting quality) factors. Therefore, it was important to consider parental and family variables in the exploration of children's experience of the FIFO lifestyle.

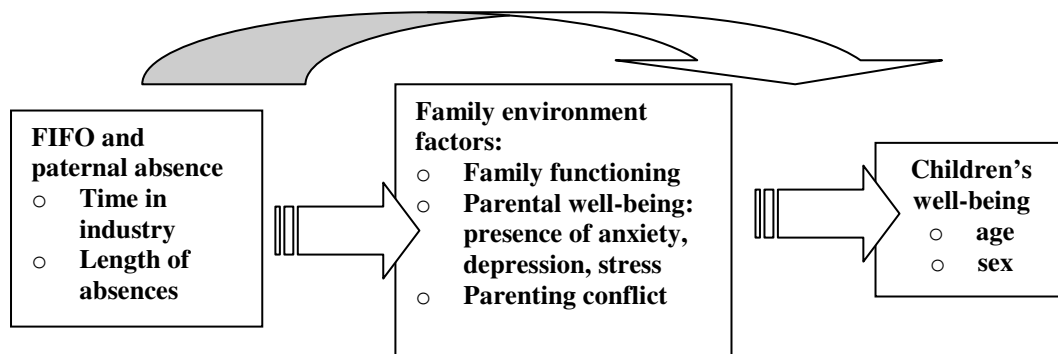


Figure 4.2 The Strazdins et al. (2006) mediation model of parental non-standard working hours and children's well-being, modified for FIFO-specific factors

The main objective of the qualitative component of the study was to elicit and explore children's thoughts, feelings and attitudes regarding employment-related paternal absence and the FIFO lifestyle. In contrast to empirical approaches, qualitative research methods provide a means of identifying and exploring patterns of meaning in people's experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nelson & Quintana, 2005). A pragmatic essentialist or realist approach was chosen as the methodological framework to understand the qualitative data from children's interviews and open-ended questions. The approach is less complex than other qualitative approaches (e.g., constructionism, grounded theory) and assumes a relatively uncomplicated relationship between what is said by the children, what is experienced by them, and what is meant by the children (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Nevertheless, the pragmatic approach is critical and interpretative, and the primary focus remains the research questions rather than the methodologies (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). In accordance with the pragmatic approach, the thematic analysis focused on the emerging themes of the children's individual motivations, experiences and personal meanings within the data. Of particular interest in the qualitative study was how children described their everyday life in a FIFO family, their attitudes toward paternal FIFO employment and their perceptions of FIFO family life.

The purpose of collecting both quantitative data (i.e., questionnaire responses by child and parents) and qualitative data (i.e., semi-structured interviews with children and open-ended questionnaire answers) was threefold: 1) to bring together the strengths of both research methods; 2) to compare and validate findings from each method and provide triangulation for the data; 3) to draw together conclusions from both methodologies. The questionnaire data provided a reliable means of exploring individual and family functioning and the interview data from children provided a means of exploring children's understanding and perceptions of the impact of their father's FIFO work schedule on themselves and the family. The multi-methods research design allowed for quantitative and qualitative data to be separately collected and analysed, and findings from both studies to be later compared and contrasted (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). It was anticipated that the findings from these two complimentary sources would produce a broader understanding of children's experience in FIFO families and that the results from the project would better inform interested stakeholders about the implications of the FIFO lifestyle for children. The stake-holders included families already engaged in the FIFO lifestyle (or those interested in the employment option), the mining and resources industry, child and family support agencies and the wider community.

4.3 Overall Plan of Research

Initially, a quantitative survey was conducted to measure the emotional-behavioural functioning of children in FIFO families, and to replicate and further expand on Sibbel's original research (2001) investigating the psychosocial well-being of children in FIFO families. First, the current research extended the participating children's age range to include adolescents as well as pre-adolescents. Second, the current research assessed children's externalising behaviours and perceptions of parental attachment alongside internalising behaviours and perceptions of family functioning. Third, the current research included parental reporting of child's well-being, parental well-being measures, perceptions of family functioning and relationship satisfaction, and a measure of parenting conflict. These parent and family factors were investigated in relation to child outcomes. The current quantitative study did not include a control group of non-FIFO families for comparison, but instead it was decided to evaluate child and

parent results against community norms for each measure. Clifford (2009) and Sibbel (2010) took similar approaches in their recent research on FIFO employees and their partners as it provided a more reliable means of comparison.

Concurrently, a qualitative study was conducted. Qualitative data were derived from two sources: 1) open-ended questions attached to the quantitative questionnaires asking children and their parents about advantages and disadvantages of the FIFO lifestyle (see Appendix A); and 2) semi-structured, informal interviews with children. The interviews were conducted with a sub-group of children ($n = 15$) from the quantitative study and their siblings ($n = 12$). Children were invited to discuss a range of topics regarding their perceived advantages and disadvantages of the FIFO lifestyle, their everyday family life and attitudes to their father's and their own future employment. Content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was used to analyse the questionnaire text that identified costs and benefits of the FIFO lifestyle as it provided a means of systematically coding text, identifying thematic topics, and quantifying frequency of these themes (Bryman, 2004). For the interview phase, themes from Gallegos' study (2006) and from related child-centred work/family research (Mauthner et al., 2000; McKee et al., 2003; Pocock, 2006) informed the key topics to be covered, which included children's perceptions of self and family, the family roles and routines, managing transition, social support and friends, communication, children's knowledge of their father's work, and children's expectations of their future work. As the aim was to identify patterns of experience and meaning from children's interviews, an inductive thematic analysis, taking a pragmatic essentialist or realist approach, was chosen to explore interview data (Aronson, 1994; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

CHAPTER 5: QUANTITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE STUDY

As part of the overall aim to investigate children's experience of the FIFO lifestyle, a quantitative study was conducted to measure child, parent and family functioning. Children's emotional-behavioural well-being and their perceptions of family functioning and parental attachment were assessed. Children's satisfaction with their father's FIFO work arrangements and level of communication were also reported. Results were compared to findings from related FIFO and work/family balance research. Previous research has demonstrated an adverse association between paternal non-standard work schedules (e.g., shiftwork, longer hours) and children's well-being (Strazdins et al., 2004) and children's relationship with their fathers (Bumpus et al., 1999; Davis et al., 2006; Repetti, 1994).

In addition, the quantitative study assessed children's family environment. Family environment factors (e.g., parental depression, family dysfunction, ineffective parenting) have been found to partially mediate the relationship between paternal non-standard work schedules and children's well-being (Strazdins et al., 2006). Measures of parental well-being, perceived family functioning, relationship satisfaction and parenting conflict were collected from mothers and fathers of participating children. To further evaluate potential risk factors for children, the study considered children's well-being in relation to their age and sex, and to FIFO-specific factors, including the length of paternal absences from home and the length of time children had been exposed to paternal FIFO employment (i.e., veteran or novice). Key research questions and hypotheses to be answered in this section were:

- Does paternal FIFO employment (and employment-related paternal absence) influence children's well-being, their perceptions of family functioning, or their relationships with their parents?
- Are there family environment factors, including parental well-being and family functioning or FIFO employment factors, including length of absence and children's exposure to FIFO, that influence children's well-being, their perceptions of family functioning or their relationship with fathers?

Hypotheses:

- It is anticipated that children in FIFO families will report more emotional-behavioural difficulties than normative child populations. In addition, it is expected that boys in FIFO families will endorse more emotional-behavioural difficulties than girls, and adolescents in FIFO families will endorse more emotional-behavioural difficulties than younger children.
- It is anticipated that children's emotional behavioural difficulties will be associated with children's perceptions of family functioning and parental attachment. That is, children reporting more emotional-behavioural difficulties will report greater family dysfunction and lower levels of parental attachment.
- In relation to parent and family vulnerability factors, it is anticipated that children's emotional-behavioural difficulties will be related to parental well-being and parent-reported family functioning and levels of parenting conflict.
- In relation to FIFO work schedule factors, it is anticipated that children's emotional-behavioural difficulties will be related to longer paternal absences from the family and to children's status as veteran or novice to the FIFO lifestyle as measured by their father's time in FIFO employment.
- It is proposed that children in FIFO families will endorse dissatisfaction with the FIFO lifestyle. In relation to gender and age factors, boys and adolescents in FIFO families are expected to endorse greater dissatisfaction than girls and pre-adolescents.

5.1 Method

5.1.1 Participants.

5.1.1.1 Participant recruitment.

The participant recruitment process targeted both industry sources and the broader community in an effort to attract a diverse range of FIFO families. Major mining and resources companies and the CMEWA were contacted regarding promoting the research project to their employees. The research project details and expressions of interest were sent to Rio Tinto, Chevron, BHPBilliton, Fortescue Metals Group and

Woodside Petroleum. Woodside Petroleum agreed to endorse the project and distributed a global email to all staff outlining the nature of the study and participation details. The email generated a modest response from employees. Simultaneously, a media release was organised through Curtin University, which resulted in several local radio interviews (ABC Radio, Nova FM, 6PR) to promote the recruitment of FIFO families directly from the metropolitan area. The interviews generated minimal community responses and subsequently, a second phase of participant recruitment was conducted and over 50 major independent and Catholic schools in the metropolitan area were approached about including the research project details in their regular newsletters to parents.

Of the 64 families who expressed interest in participating in the project, 48 children, 48 mothers, and 47 fathers returned questionnaires. Attempts were made to contact families who did not return questionnaires, however the majority of families did not respond to these requests. Of those families who did reply, one reported marital difficulties and another had ceased FIFO employment during the recruitment process. Families were included in the project if fathers were currently employed in onshore or offshore mining and petroleum projects and had been working in FIFO arrangements for at least 6 months. To ensure reliable self-reporting, children were school-aged (between 8 and 16 years), and to ensure independence of observations, only one child per family participated in the quantitative study. When more than one child in the family met criteria, a random selection process was used to select the participating child. For this part of the study, family members of 49 separate families returned questionnaires including 48 children, 47 fathers and 48 mothers, comprising 46 complete family sets in total. Of the families, two fathers and one mother (and subsequently one child) did not return the questionnaire or declined to be part of the study.

5.1.1.2 Child demographics.

Of the 48 children who completed the written questionnaire, 60.4% ($n = 29$) were girls and 39.6% ($n = 19$) were boys. Children's mean age was 12.37 years and the range of ages was 8.26 to 15.91 years. All children attended school, 54.2% ($n = 26$) of children, comprising 10 boys and 16 girls, attended primary school and 45.8% ($n = 22$)

comprising 9 boys and 13 girls, attended secondary school. The range of school years was Year 3 to Year 11.

Considering the children's family composition, the majority of children ($n = 39$) had siblings, 50% ($n = 24$) were the oldest in the family, 22.9% ($n = 11$) were the youngest children in the family, 8.3% ($n = 4$) were middle children and 18.8% were only children ($n = 9$). Of the 48 children, 35.4% ($n = 17$) can be considered *veterans* of the FIFO lifestyle (i.e., their fathers were working FIFO schedules prior to their birth) while the majority (64.6%) of children had experienced their fathers working non-FIFO and FIFO employment.

5.1.1.3 FIFO employment demographics.

All fathers in the participating families were currently working FIFO schedules, 53.1% ($n = 26$) with onshore mining and/or oil and gas projects, 44.9% ($n = 22$) with offshore oil and gas projects and one father worked with both on- and off-shore oil and gas projects. Of this group, 63.3% ($n = 31$) were employed by individual mining and resource companies and the remaining 36.7% ($n = 18$) were employed by contractors. The majority of fathers worked within Western Australia (79.6%, $n = 39$), while 6.1% ($n = 3$) worked nationally and the remaining 14.3% ($n = 7$) worked internationally. The average length of FIFO employment was 9.3 years, the range was 9 months to 22 years and 9 months. The men's job descriptions were representative of the diverse range of employment available in the mining and resources industry, including managerial (e.g., finance, mining), supervisory (e.g., maintenance, operations), service (e.g., cook, medic), and administrative positions. The men were also employed in a wide range of mining positions that involved plant operations (e.g., engineers, drillers), maintenance (e.g., fitter and turners, electricians), construction and transport (e.g., truck driver, helicopter pilot) and Occupational Health and Safety.

FIFO rosters

The men's FIFO work rosters were categorised into either *even time* rosters (i.e., same amount of time at home as at work) or *uneven time* rosters (i.e., less time off at home than at work). Of the 49 separate families, 57.1% ($n = 28$) were exposed to uneven time rosters and 42.8% ($n = 21$) to even time rosters. Further, roster cycles were grouped into three main classifications based on the length of cycle as shown in Figure 5.1: 1) *I*

to 2 week roster cycles (e.g., 8 days on/ 6 days off); 2) 3 to 4 week roster cycles (e.g., 14 days on/ 14 days off); and 3) 5 to 8 week plus roster cycles (e.g., 28 days on/ 28 days off). Overall, the participating families represented a relatively even breakdown of rosters cycles, with 39.8% ($n = 19$) of fathers working 3 to 4 week roster cycle, 32.6% ($n = 16$) working 5 to 8 week plus roster cycles, and 28.6% ($n = 14$) working 1 to 2 week cycles.

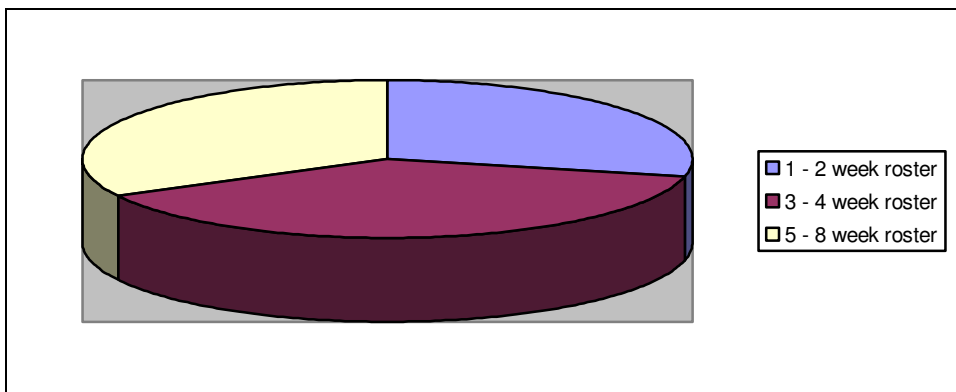


Figure 5.1 Breakdown of FIFO employee roster cycles ($n = 49$).

Income

The total family income of the participating FIFO families was categorised into five cut-off groups as shown in Figure 5.2. The most frequently reported total income was the upper cut-off group, with total family income above \$175, 000 per year (32.6%, $n = 16$). Of the remaining families, 14.3% ($n = 7$) earned between \$150,000 and \$175,000, 26.5% ($n = 13$) earned between \$125,000 and \$150,000, 20.4% ($n = 10$) earned between \$100,000 to \$125,000, and 8.2% ($n = 4$) earned less than \$100,000 per year. According to ABS figures (2009), the average mining employees' annual income without overtime is approximately \$107,525, and mining managerial incomes averaged at \$173,768.

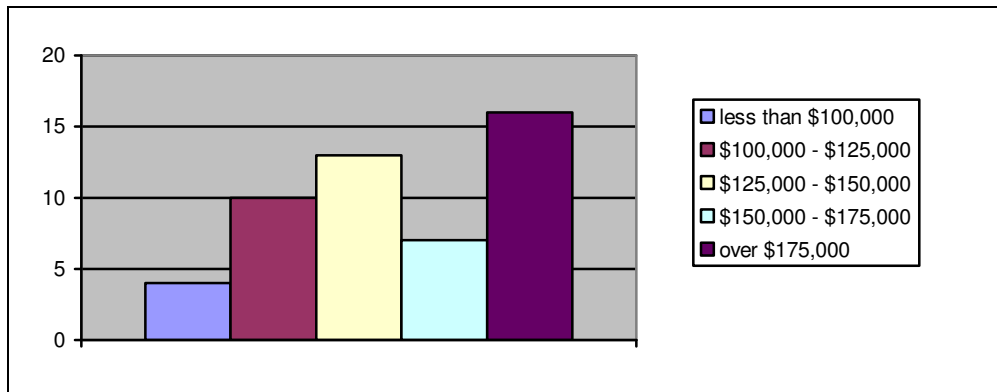


Figure 5.2 Breakdown of total family income categories ($n = 49$)

5.1.1.4 Parent demographics.

Of the 95 parents who completed written questionnaires, 47 were fathers (including 1 stepfather) with a mean age of 43.2 years ($sd = 5.0$) and ages ranged from 33 to 52 years. The age range is consistent with CMEWA (2005) figures that show the majority of mining employees are aged between 25 and 55 years. Of the 48 mothers who completed written questionnaires for the study, the mean age was 40.8 years ($sd = 5.01$) and ages ranged from 31 to 50 years. The reported length of parental relationships ranged from 5 years to 29 years and 3 months and the mean length of relationships was 17.9 years ($sd = 5.6$).

Maternal Employment

The majority of women (58.3%) were employed, consistent with recent ABS figures on maternal employment (2008). Of the working women, 35% ($n = 17$) were employed in professional or managerial positions and 23% ($n = 11$) were employed in clerical or sales positions (see Figure 5.3). The average working week for women was 27.8 hours, with the minimum working week reported as 12 hours and the maximum working week reported as 45 hours. The length of women's employment in their current position varied significantly, ranging from 1 month to 21 years, $m = 4.3$ years ($sd = 5.4$). Of the remaining women who were not currently employed (22.9%, $n = 11$), six reported being at-home mothers and five reported being students.

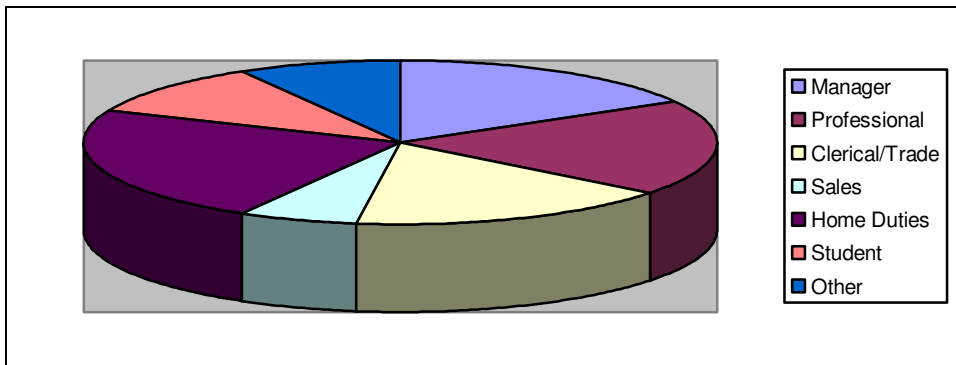


Figure 5.3 Breakdown of maternal employment type ($n = 48$)

Education

The majority of fathers in the study (48.9%, $n = 23$) had completed trade certificate qualifications while 14.9% ($n = 7$) had diploma qualifications and another 14.9% had university qualifications, either bachelor degrees ($n = 3$) or post-graduate degrees ($n = 4$). The remaining fathers (21.7%) had attained high school educations, either to Year 10 ($n = 7$) or to Year 12 ($n = 3$). Recently released mining demographic figures from the ABS have reported that the education levels of mining employees are as follows: high school education (39.8%), trade certificate (31.0%), and bachelor degree (17.2%) (Department of Training and Workforce Development, 2010). In comparison, our sample of FIFO employees reported higher skills training than the ABS figures, with the majority of fathers completing industry trade certification as shown in Figure 5.4.

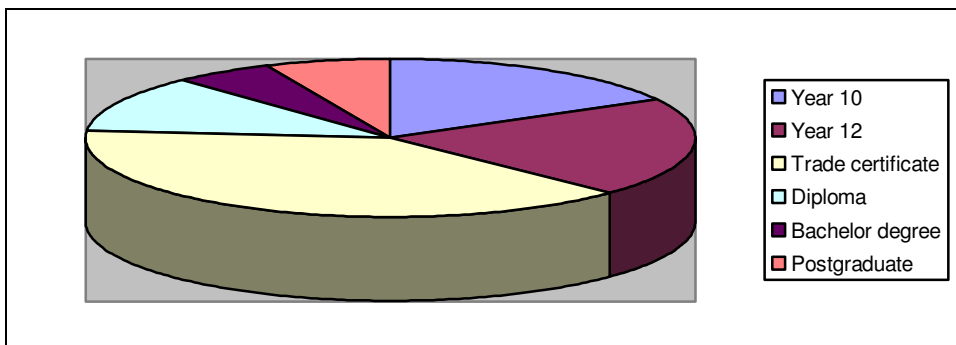


Figure 5.4 Breakdown of paternal education level ($n = 47$)

Overall, the participating mothers held higher educational qualifications than the participating fathers (see Figure 5.5), with 34% ($n = 16$) of mothers holding bachelor and postgraduate degrees, 31.9% ($n = 15$) holding diploma or trade qualifications, and 31.9% ($n = 15$) with high school qualifications (i.e., Year 10 or Year 12 completion).

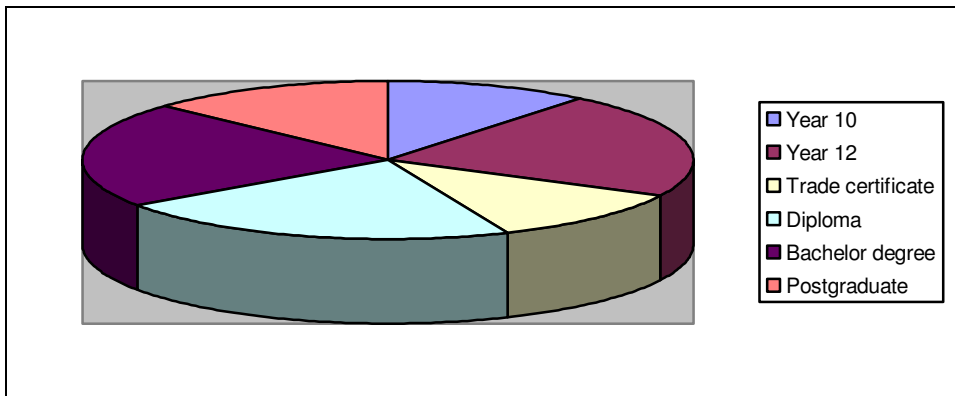


Figure 5.5 Breakdown of maternal education levels ($n = 48$)

Family Demands

To gauge the amount of additional care demands for women at home, mothers were asked two questions related to their children's health and extra care demands (e.g., eldercare). The majority of women reported no additional care responsibilities. However, 18.1% of mothers ($n = 9$) reported health issues related to the participating child including asthma, mild learning difficulties, epilepsy and allergies, and 25.6% of mothers ($n = 10$) reported health issues related to other children in the family. Finally, eight mothers (16.6%) reported extra care duties beyond the immediate family, including ageing parents and relatives.

5.1.2 Child and Parent Questionnaires.

Questionnaire Development

Separate questionnaires were developed for the participating children, their fathers and their mothers from the FIFO families (see Appendix A). Each questionnaire type comprised a selection of well-established child, adult and parenting measures frequently used in clinical and community research, such as the Triple P Parenting Program (Sanders, 1999) and the Aussie Optimism Program (Roberts et al., 2000). A parent demographic section was devised to gather relevant details of the individual families, including specific FIFO work characteristics such as the type of industry, job description, type of roster cycle, and the respondent's satisfaction with the FIFO work arrangements. The format of the demographic section was based on the child and parent questionnaires developed for the Aussie Optimism Program (Roberts et al., 2000).

5.1.2.1 Child questionnaire.

The child questionnaire comprised six brief demographic questions asking children's age, school year, family composition, and questions about communication and satisfaction with paternal FIFO employment. Children were asked to answer three questions about the frequency, method and satisfaction of their communication with their fathers at work and a question rating their satisfaction with their father's FIFO arrangements. Communication and work satisfaction questions were rated along a 4-point likert scale (i.e., not at all, somewhat, mostly, definitely). In addition, a series of reliable, validated and well-established child and family measures were included to assess children's perceptions of their current individual well-being, the level of family functioning and the level of parental care and attachment.

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and Impact Supplement (SDQ; (Goodman, 1997) was included to gauge children's opinion of their emotional-behavioural functioning. The SDQ is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire that consists of 25 items, divided into 5 subscales of 5 items describing internalising and externalising behaviours and social adjustment (i.e., conduct problems, inattention-hyperactivity, emotional symptoms, peer problems and prosocial behaviour). The SDQ is available in self-report or informant-report versions (i.e., parent or teacher) and has been used widely in research in clinical and educational settings (Mellor, 2005). The original self-report SDQ was designed for 11 to 17 year-olds however, several recent studies have confirmed that younger children from 7 years of age can successfully and reliably complete the inventory (Mellor, 2004; Muris, Meester, & Eijkelenboom, 2004). Adequate reliability has been found for the self-report SDQ total difficulties scale ($\alpha = .76$), including the emotional symptoms subscale ($\alpha = .63$), the hyperactivity subscale ($\alpha = .68$), the peer problems subscale ($\alpha = .60$) but reliability was somewhat lower for the conduct problems subscale ($\alpha = .46$), and the prosocial behaviour subscale ($\alpha = .41$) (Muris et al., 2004). Nevertheless, the self-report SDQ externalising subscales could accurately distinguish children with behavioural problems from their peers in Muris et al.'s study (2004) of pre-adolescent children (8 - 13 years, $N = 1,111$).

For this study, the self-report SDQ was offered to all child participants. Mothers were also asked to complete an informant-report on their participating child as a means

of validating the children's reporting. Cronbach alphas for parent-reported SDQ scales are adequate: total difficulties score ($\alpha = .76$), emotional symptoms ($\alpha = .61$), conduct problems ($\alpha = .54$), hyperactivity ($\alpha = .70$), peer problems ($\alpha = 0.51$), prosocial behaviours ($\alpha = .70$) (Goodman & Scott, 1999). The SDQ uses a three-point response scale for each statement: *not true* scored as 0, *somewhat true* scored as 1 or *certainly true* scored as 2 about each statement, with five items reversed scored. Scores for each subscale range from 0 to 10. To derive an SDQ total difficulties score, all subscales except prosocial behaviour are summed with the final scores ranging from 0 to 40. Proposed cut-offs for total difficulties scores are based on the 80th and 90th percentile, which corresponds to 10% of a community sample in the abnormal range and the following 10% in the borderline range (Goodman & Scott, 1999).

The SDQ *impact supplement* rates the impact of reported emotional-behavioural difficulties (Goodman, 1999). Respondents are asked whether the difficulties are problematic and then asked to rate the severity of the difficulties as *minor*, *definite*, or *severe*. The SDQ impact supplement also asks questions about the chronicity, the levels of personal distress (i.e., not at all, only a little, quite a lot, a great deal), the degree of social impact (i.e., on home, friendships, school and leisure) and the burden to others. Questions are scored in a similar manner to the SDQ symptom scales and three additional ratings are derived: a *chronicity* rating (1 - 4, recommended clinical cut-off: 2), an *impact* rating (0 - 15, recommended clinical cut-off: 5) and a *burden* rating (1 - 4, recommended clinical cut-off: 2) (Goodman, 1999).

The Family Assessment Device - General Functioning Scale (FAD-GS; Epstein, Baldwin, & Bishop, 1983) was included to measure children's perception of family functioning and to compare with parental FAD-GS scores. The FAD-GS is a subscale of the larger 60-item *Family Assessment Device (FAD)* and measures the overall health of family functioning with 12 items drawn from the complete FAD (i.e., 6 items that describe healthy functioning and 6 items that describe unhealthy functioning). Ridenour, Daley, and Reich (1999) found the FAD-GS subscale provided an adequate measure of the complete FAD and supported its use in research settings. Responses are indicated by a 4-point scale (i.e., strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree), and a final FAD-GS score (1.0 to 4.0) is derived by dividing the summed total by 12, a higher score

indicates greater family dysfunction. Good reliability and validity of FAD-GS scale was determined in a large community sample ($N = 1,869$, $m = 1.75$, $sd = .44$), with 10% of families scoring above suggested cut-off (2.17), indicating unhealthy family functioning (Byles, Byrne, Boyle, & Offord, 1988). Although established for respondents over 12 years of age, the FAD-GS has been successfully administered to children as young as 7 years with adequate reliability ($\alpha > .65$) and with reliable agreement between child and maternal reports (Bihun, Wamboldt, Gavin, & Wamboldt, 2002). The FAD-GS is considered a suitable self-report measure for younger children (Bihun et al., 2002).

Parental Bonding Instrument-Revised (PBI-R; Herz & Gullone, 1999) was included to assess children's perceptions of parental attachment, as measured by levels of nurturance and overprotection. Derived from the 25-item PBI (Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979) developed to evaluate adult perceptions of parental care, the PBI-R version was adapted to reflect the current perceived parenting care for children and adolescents. This version has been used successfully with children as young as 9 years of age (Gullone & Robinson, 2005; Herz & Gullone, 1999). The PBI-R consists of two factors, *parental care* (12 items) and *parental overprotection* (13 items) as reported by children. The *care* dimension measures children's perception of parental affection and closeness or parental coldness and rejection, and the *overprotection* dimension measures children's perception of parental overprotection and control or encouragement to be autonomous. The participating children in the study were asked to complete the questionnaire for each parent separately. The PBI-R scale has adequate reliability with Cronbach's alphas of .80 and .84 for parental care and parental control respectively. Convergent validity was established with the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment - Revised for children (IPPA-R), and the parental attachment scores of the IPPA-R were strongly positively correlated with the parental care factor of the PBI-R and moderately negatively correlated with the parental control factor (Gullone & Robinson, 2005).

5.1.2.2 Parent questionnaire (paternal and maternal).

The parent questionnaires comprised demographic questions about parental employment, family income and family composition as well as questions on communication and satisfaction with FIFO employment arrangements (see Appendix A). The participating parents were asked to answer three questions about the frequency

and modes of communication with their partners, and asked to rate their satisfaction with the communication, and with FIFO working arrangements. Communication and work satisfaction questions were rated along a 4-point likert scale (i.e., not at all, somewhat, mostly, definitely). As with the child questionnaire, the parent questionnaires included reliable, validated and well-established adult and family measures to assess perceived individual and family functioning, relationship quality and parenting conflict.

Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales short version (DASS21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) was used to assess symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress. The DASS21 consists of three 7-item self-report scales of negative emotive states: depression, anxiety and stress. The depression scale measures the presence of dysphoria, hopelessness, devaluation of life, self-depreciation, anhedonia and inertia. The anxiety scale measures the presence of autonomic arousal, muscle tension, situational anxiety and anxious affect. The stress scale measures the presence of chronic non-specific arousal, including difficulty relaxing, agitation, irritability and over-reactivity. Respondents rate the experience of each state by using a 4-point severity/frequency scale (i.e., from 0: did not apply to me to 4: applied to me very much). The DASS21 is considered suitable for research and screening of adults and adolescents in the general community and its brevity makes it advantageous in research with non-clinical populations. Reliability for each 7-item scale are as follows: depression ($\alpha = .88$), anxiety ($\alpha = .82$) and stress ($\alpha = .90$) (Henry & Crawford, 2005).

The Family Assessment Device - General Functioning Scale (FAD-GS) was included to gauge individual parent's perceptions of overall family functioning and to compare with children's FAD-GS score.

The abbreviated Dyadic Adjustment Scale (aDAS; Sharpley & Rogers, 1984) was included to assess parents' satisfaction with their current marital relationships. The aDAS was adapted from the 32-item DAS (Spanier, 1976). It is a 7-item self-report scale that has been found to be as accurate as the full DAS for classifying relationship adjustment (Sharpley & Rogers, 1984). Reliability is satisfactory ($\alpha = .76$) and the aDAS has been found to successfully differentiate between people who are dissatisfied in their relationships and those who are satisfied (Sharpley & Rogers, 1984). Possible scores on

the aDAS range from 0 to 36; lower scores indicate relationship dissatisfaction and dysfunction while higher scores indicate relationship satisfaction and adjustment.

Parent Problem Checklist (PPC; Dadds & Powell, 1991) was included to measure the level of parental conflict related to child-rearing issues. The PPC is a measure of interparental conflict which is related to the ability of parents to cooperate and work as a team. The checklist consists of 16 items including the levels of parental disagreement over rules and discipline, conflict over child-rearing practices, and whether parents undermine each other's relationship with children. The checklist is scored by totalling the number of items that cause problems, total scores range from 0 to 16. Respondents scoring 5 or more on the PPC are considered to have clinically significant levels of inter-parent conflict over child-rearing issues. The PPC is a unidimensional measure with moderate internal consistency ($\alpha = .70$) and high reliability ($r = .90$) (Dadds & Powell, 1991).

5.1.3 Procedure.

Prior to commencing the research and the participant recruitment, ethics approval for the project was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee at Curtin University. The research was conducted in accordance with National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines, and children and parents were informed about their confidentiality and the de-identification of information. Information sheets outlining project participation were sent to all families (see Appendix A).

5.1.3.1 Pilot testing.

The questionnaire booklets were tested with five purpose-selected families who experienced employment-related paternal absences. Parents and children were asked to complete the questionnaires and comment on the content, comprehension, suitability and acceptability of the questionnaire. In response to their feedback, minor grammatical and formatting changes were made to the original booklets.

5.1.3.2 Questionnaire administration.

After the successful recruitment of FIFO families, the adult participants were contacted by telephone, and the nature of the study and their participation was fully

explained. As well, the details of the participating child were confirmed to ensure they met criteria for the study. For the family members at home, a questionnaire pack was sent out by mail, which consisted of an information sheet, a consent form, and the questionnaire booklets for each parent and the participating child with a reply-paid envelope, plus a novelty pen as a small “thank-you” gift for children. For the FIFO employees working onsite, a web-based version of the questionnaire was also made available via Survey Monkey. A total of 14 fathers completed online questionnaires.

In the follow-up telephone calls to the families at home, a time was arranged to speak with the children directly about the study. The primary-school aged children (8 - 12 years) completed the questionnaires with the researcher over the telephone to ensure adequate comprehension of the questions. The older children (13 - 16 years) were also contacted to ensure they had completed the questionnaire and had no difficulties with the language used in the measures. In an effort to ensure confidentiality and independent responding, the participating children were asked to find a quiet place in the home to complete the questionnaires. Two FIFO families with younger children elected to have face-to-face meetings to complete the questionnaires, one family at their home and the other family at Curtin University. Parents were also asked to complete their questionnaire independently and envelopes were provided to seal individual completed forms. The completed questionnaires were returned to Curtin University via a reply-paid envelope. On completion of the data collection, the identification codes of all participating families went into a draw for one of 10 family movie passes.

De-identification and confidentiality

All participating FIFO families were identified by number rather than name. During the questionnaire processing, all information was de-identified and entered into the database under the family identity codes. The family contact lists with identifiable details and the consent forms were stored separately to the questionnaires and to the SPSS data files at a secure site in the School of Psychology and Speech Pathology at Curtin University. The data analysis was completed with de-identified codes.

5.2 Data Analysis

To address the study’s hypotheses, the participating child and parent results (on each psychometric measure) were compared to the normative data for these measures

and related relevant research findings. The SDQ total difficulties scores as reported by children and parents were compared to the Australian normative SDQ data developed from a random sample of 910 children, aged between 7 and 17 years (Mellor, 2005). The use of Mellor's SDQ norms provided two advantages: first, Australian norms precluded potential cultural differences in children's reporting of emotional-behavioural differences (Goodman, 1997) and second, they provided representative community norms. Child and parent FAD-GS scores were compared to the normative data (Epstein et al., 1982) and the findings from Sibbel's (2001, 2010) study. The children's PBI-R scores were compared to recent Australian community data (Gullone & Robinson, 2005; Herz & Gullone, 1999). The parental DASS21 scores were also compared to normative data (Henry & Crawford, 2005; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995), and the aDAS and PPC scores were compared to clinical cut-offs (Sharpley & Rogers, 1984; Dadds & Powell, 1991). Correlation and multiple regression analyses were used to explore the relationship between children's SDQ total difficulties scores and family environment variables - maternal and paternal DASS21 scores, FAD-GS scores, aDAS scores and PPC scores - and to explore the relationship between the children's SDQ total difficulties scores and paternal work variables – the length of absences and the length of time in FIFO employment.

5.3 Results

5.3.1 Data screening and assumptions testing.

Data from 143 questionnaires were entered into SPSS version 16. Data screening found assumptions of normality were violated for the majority of child and adult scales measuring dysfunction, which included the SDQ (child- and parent-report), the PBI-R, the DASS21, and the PPC. Visual inspection of histograms, normality probability plots and boxplots of these child and parent scale scores indicated similar variability across data distributions. For child and parent-reported SDQ scores, data were positively skewed toward normal functioning with a small number of upper range dysfunction scores. Similarly, PBI-R care scores were negatively skewed toward perceptions of high parental care and overprotection scores were positively skewed toward low parental control. The children's FAD-GS scores were normally distributed. As the sample was

drawn from a community population, it had been anticipated that dysfunction scores would display a bias toward healthy functioning. The phenomenon has been previously documented (Achenbach, 1991; Henry & Crawford, 2005) and attributed to the difference between community and clinical populations. In general, community population samples have only a minority of respondents who meet criteria for a clinical range of dysfunction while the majority of respondents fall within the normal range of functioning. As a result, the data distribution is frequently skewed. Similarly, the parental DASS21 and PPC scores were positively skewed toward normal functioning. The parental aDAS scores were normally distributed, as was the paternal FAD-GS scores while the maternal FAD-GS scores were skewed toward healthy family functioning.

Given the violations of normality and the relatively small size of the current sample, non-parametric measures of association (*viz*: Spearman's rho, Kendall's tau, and chi-square) were favoured over the more frequently used parametric measures (e.g., Pearson's correlation) (Field, 2009). Non-parametric tests still assume random sampling and independence. However, unlike parametric tests, they relax assumptions of normality. Kendall's tau and chi-square tests were conducted dependent on data type. Kendall's tau correlation is recommended for smaller data sets as it generally provides a more conservative estimate of association compared to Spearman's rho (Field, 2009). Point-biserial correlations using Spearman's rho were conducted when one variable was dichotomous as recommended by Corder and Foreman (2009). Next, multiple regressions using Spearman's rho were conducted to address the hypotheses. Correlation matrices were examined for multicollinearity, and care was taken to ensure that the predictor/case ratio was at least 1:10. For comparison between groups, Mann Whitney *U* tests, one sample *t*-tests and independent sample *t*-tests were conducted where appropriate. Finally, a decision was made to exclude Bonferroni correction analysis on the multiple tests of comparison. Recently, Bonferroni correction has been found to result in Type II error (i.e., not rejecting the null hypotheses) when studies have low statistical power (Nakagawa, 2004). Therefore, as our sample size was limited and the predicted statistical power was low, Bonferroni correction was not conducted. Instead, the observed effect size, indicating the relationship between variables was

reported along with the exact *p*-values to provide sufficient information to evaluate the results, as recommended by Nakagawa (2004).

5.3.1 Children's results.

5.3.1.1 Children's emotional-behavioural well-being.

The children's emotional-behavioural functioning was measured using the SDQ (Goodman, 1997) which derives a total difficulties score (0 - 40) from four problem subscores (i.e., emotional, conduct, hyperactivity and peer problems). Self-report SDQ total difficulties scores can be classified as normal (0 - 15), borderline (16 - 19) and abnormal (20 - 40). For the purpose of this study, the children's SDQ scores were compared to an Australian community sample of 910 school children aged 7 - 17 years (Mellor, 2004, 2005). The mean self-reported SDQ total difficulties and subscale scores, the standard deviations and normative means are reported in Table 5.1.

In the current study, 89.6% of children ($n = 43$) reported total difficulties scores in the normal range of functioning while 10.4% of children ($n = 5$) reported difficulties in the abnormal range. No child scored in the borderline range. Similar results were found in the community sample, 86% of children reported scores in the normal range, 5.8% in the abnormal range, and 8.2% in the borderline range (Mellor, 2005). On examining the demographic characteristics of the five children reporting emotional-behavioural difficulties in the abnormal range, there appeared no specific trends in sex (boys, $n = 3$; girls, $n = 2$), age (primary school, $n = 3$; secondary school, $n = 2$), or the length of time in the FIFO lifestyle (veteran, $n = 3$; non-veteran, $n = 2$). However, the length of FIFO roster swings (i.e., the length of paternal absence) was consistent. For the children reporting in the abnormal range, their fathers all worked extended roster swings and were away from the family for 4 weeks or more. These fathers also predominately worked even time rosters ($n = 4$).

Table 5.1

Children's Mean SDQ scores (N= 48) Compared to Community Norms, with Gender Breakdown

SDQ problem scales	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	Norms (N = 910)	Range	Girls	Boys
Total difficulties	9.98	(6.14)	9.25 (5.75)	0 - 27	8.52 (5.7)	12.21 (6.70)
Emotional ¹	2.27	(2.18)	2.70 (2.10)	0 - 8	2.31 (2.27)	2.21 (2.10)
Conduct ²	2.13	(1.82)	1.80 (1.70)	0 - 8	1.76 (1.40)	2.68 (2.40)
Hyperactivity	3.79	(2.53)	3.10 (2.30)	0 - 10	2.86 (2.20)	5.21 (2.37)
Peer problems	1.79	(1.76)	1.70 (1.70)	0 - 7	1.59 (1.76)	2.11 (1.76)
Prosocial ³	7.98	(1.80)	8.20 (1.70)	0 - 7	8.41 (1.27)	7.32 (2.29)

Note: ¹ Emotional symptoms; ² Conduct problems; ³ lower scores on the prosocial scale indicate difficulties

Compared to the Australian community sample, the children in the current study (the boys, in particular) reported more externalising symptoms, more hyperactivity and more total difficulties. It had been predicted that children in the study would report more emotional-behavioural difficulties compared to a community sample. One-tailed, one-sample *t*-tests indicated that only children's hyperactivity scores deviated significantly from norms, SDQ hyperactivity $t(47) = 1.90, p = .03$ (calculated effect size, $r = .27$), while differences for remaining scores were statistically non-significant: SDQ conduct problems $t(47) = 1.24, p = .11$ (calculated effect size, $r = .18$), SDQ total difficulties score; $t(47) = .82, p = .21$ (calculated effect size, $r = .12$).

To further investigate sex and age differences in the study, a standard multiple regression using Spearman's rho was conducted between the children's SDQ total difficulties scores and demographic variables (see Table 5.2). It was anticipated that older children would report more difficulties than younger children and that boys would report more difficulties than girls. The results indicate sex and age in combination did not significantly contribute to the variation of children's SDQ total difficulties scores ($R^2 = .10; F(2, 45) = 2.49, p = .09$). However, children's gender was significantly correlated with the SDQ total difficulty scores ($r_s [n = 48] = -.31, p = .03$). The boys in

the participating FIFO families ($m = 12.21$, $sd = 6.70$) reported more total difficulties than girls ($m = 8.52$, $sd = 5.37$), scoring higher on externalising symptoms, hyperactivity and peer problems. This trend was consistent with the Australian community sample which found boys scored higher on all SDQ subscales except emotional symptoms and prosocial behaviours (Mellor, 2005). The mean total difficulties scores for boys and girls did not significantly differ from the Australian community sample gender norms: boys (norm $M = 9.86$), $t(18) = 1.53$, $p = .14$ (calculated effect size, $r = .34$); girls (norm $M = 8.66$), $t(28) = -.14$, $p = .89$ (calculated effect size, $r = .03$).

Table 5.2

Multiple Regression Analysis (of the Spearman's rho Correlation Matrix) Predicting Children's Total SDQ scores from Their Age and Gender (N = 48)

Variables	SDQ	Gender	B	SE B	β	sr	p
Gender	-.31*		-3.78	1.76	-3.04	-.29	$p = .04^*$
Age	.09	-.06	.20	.43	.07	.03	$p = .64$

$R^2 = .10$
 $p = .09$

Note: * $p < .05$

In order to examine the relationship between children's emotional-behavioural functioning and paternal FIFO work arrangements, a standard multiple regression was conducted on the Spearman's correlations between the children's total SDQ score and paternal work variables. Paternal FIFO work variables were operationalised as: 1) exposure to the FIFO lifestyle as measured by the length of time children's fathers had spent in FIFO employment; and 2) length of paternal absence as measured by roster category (i.e., 1 - 2 weeks, 3 - 4 weeks, 5 - 8 weeks plus) and roster type (i.e., even time or uneven time). The variables, roster category and roster type, were selected in preference to separate measures of average length of rostered days on and rostered days off, which were highly inter-correlated ($r_s [48] = .97$, $p = .00$). Longer FIFO roster swings were more likely to be reported as even time rosters ($\chi^2 (2) = 16.54$, $p = .00$) so

fathers working extended time away were also having extended time at home. Paternal length of time in the FIFO industry was also associated with even time rosters ($r_s [48] = .35, p = .01$) so fathers working FIFO for longer years were more likely to be employed on even time rosters.

It had been predicted that the children’s emotional-behavioural difficulties would be contingent on their exposure to the FIFO lifestyle and to extended paternal absences. However, FIFO work variables in combination did not significantly account for the variation in children’s SDQ total difficulties scores ($R^2 = .09; F(2, 45) = 1.49, p = .23$) as seen in Table 5.3. Overall, paternal FIFO work characteristics were not significantly related to the children’s self-reported emotional-behavioural functioning. On inspection of correlation matrices, no paternal work variables were significantly correlated with the children’s SDQ total difficulties scores (see Table 5.4). Finally, addressing the possible effects of maternal employment on children’s well-being, the children’s SDQ total scores were not significantly correlated with the presence or absence of maternal employment, $r_{pb} [48] = -.16, p = .25$.

Table 5.3

Multiple Regression Analysis (of the Spearman’s rho Correlation Matrix) Predicting Children’s Total SDQ scores from Paternal FIFO Work Variables (N = 48)

Variable	SDQ	FIFO Years	Roster Category	B	SE B	β co-efficient	sr	p
FIFO Years	.15			.23	.14	.25	.14	.11
Roster Category	-.18	.26		-1.19	1.36	-.15	-.12	.17
Roster Type	-.16	-.35*	.58*	1.98	2.22	.16	.04	

$R^2 = .09$
 $p = .23$

Note: * $p < .05$

Table 5.4

Spearman Correlation Matrix of Children's SDQ Scores and Paternal Work Variables

	Child SDQ	Paternal years in FIFO	Roster type	Number of days at work
Paternal years in FIFO	.15			
Roster type	-.18	.27		
Number of days at work	-.15	.26	.97**	
Even or Uneven roster	.16	-.35	-.58**	-.51**

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Roster type = 1) 1-2 week cycle 2) 3-4 week cycle 3) 5-8 week cycle

Parent-reported SDQ results

The mothers in the study completed a parent-report SDQ for their participating child, and the means and standard deviations for each subscale are reported in Table 5.5. The parent-reported SDQ total difficulties scores can be classified as normal (0 - 13), borderline (14 - 16) and abnormal (17 - 40) (Goodman, 1997). The majority of mothers (85.4%, $n = 41$) reported their child's behaviour within the normal range of functioning, 10.4% ($n = 5$) in the abnormal range, and two mother reported child difficulties within the borderline range. In the Australian sample (Mellor, 2005), 82% of parent-report scores were in the normal range, 12% of scores were in the abnormal range and 6 % in the borderline range. Examining the demographic characteristics of the seven children in the borderline and abnormal ranges as reported by mothers, there appeared to be no specific trends in sex (boys, $n = 3$; girls $n = 4$), age (primary school, $n = 3$; secondary school, $n = 4$), the length of time in the FIFO lifestyle (veteran, $n = 4$; non-veteran, $n = 3$), or the length of the FIFO roster cycle (1 - 2 week, $n = 3$; 3 - 4 weeks, $n = 2$; 5 - 8 weeks plus, $n = 2$). Three children were common to both self-reported and parent-reported SDQs in the abnormal range, one girl (11 years) and two boys (11.5 and 12.75 years).

The mothers in the FIFO families reported less externalising behaviours, less hyperactivity, and fewer total difficulties in their children compared to the Australian community sample, as shown in Table 5.5. Addressing age and sex differences, a

standard multiple regression was conducted on the Spearman correlations between maternal-reported SDQ total difficulties scores and children’s demographic variables (see Table 5.6). The results indicated that sex and age did not significantly contribute to the variation of maternal-reported SDQ total difficulties scores ($R^2 = .08$; $F(2, 45) = 1.93$, $p = .16$). Finally, maternal-reported SDQ total difficulties scores were significantly positively correlated with children’s self-reports of emotional-behavioural difficulties ($\tau[48] = .48$, $p = .00$). The level of association was consistent with inter-informant correlations found in the Australian community sample ($r_s[910] = .45$, $p = .01$), indicating sound reliability of child reporting in the current study (Mellor, 2005).

Table 5.5

Maternal-reported SDQ Mean Scores Compared to an Australian Community Sample

SDQ scales	Maternal-reported SDQ ($N = 48$)		Community ($N = 910$)	
	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>
Total difficulties	7.67	(5.89)	8.18	(6.06)
Emotional symptoms	2.10	(2.13)	2.10	(2.00)
Conduct problems	1.33	(1.36)	1.50	(1.60)
Hyperactivity	2.60	(2.49)	3.10	(2.40)
Peer problems	1.63	(2.06)	1.60	(1.90)
Prosocial ¹	8.15	(1.74)	8.30	(1.70)

¹ lower scores on the prosocial scale indicate difficulties

Table 5.6

Multiple Regression Analysis (of the Spearman’s rho Correlation Matrix) Predicting Maternal-Reported Total SDQ scores from Children’s Age and Gender ($N = 48$)

Variables	Maternal SDQ	Gender	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	β	<i>sr</i>	<i>p</i>
Gender	-.15		-1.60	1.71	.20	-.15	.35
Age	.25	-.06	.70	.42	-.21	.22	.10

$R^2 = .08$
 $p = .16$

SDQ impact supplement

Examining the child and maternal reporting on the SDQ impact supplement, 54% ($n = 26$) of the children reported the presence of “minor” or “definite” difficulties while 41.7% of mothers ($n = 20$) answered similarly (see Table 5.7). Significant social impairment (i.e., quite a lot or a great deal) was reported by more children (25%) than mothers (14.6%). The maternal social impairment reports were consistent with Goodman’s original community sample (1999) in which 13.5% of children met criteria for clinical social impairment. More mothers (35.4%, $n = 17$) in the study reported their children had chronic problems (i.e., lasting 6 months or more) compared to the children’s responses (29.2%, $n = 14$). Finally, 16.7% of children ($n = 8$) rated the burden of these problems on their family as significant, which was consistent with maternal ratings (14.6%, $n = 7$). Overall, for children experiencing difficulties (i.e., child- and maternal-reported), their impact and burden ratings fell in the non-clinical range compared to clinical cut-offs (Goodman, 1999). However, the chronicity scores for the persistence of difficulties were above cut-off for child and parent ratings.

Table 5.7

Child- and Maternal-reported SDQ Impact Supplement Mean Scores and Percentage of Children Meeting Cut-off

SDQ Impact scales	Child-report ($n = 48$)	Mother-report ($n = 48$)	% child-report	% parent-report
Impact	4.00 (2.43)	4.40 (2.4)	25.0%	14.6%
Chronicity	2.92 (1.20)	3.47 (.90)	29.2%	35.4%
Burden	1.27 (1.78)	1.26 (.93)	16.7%	14.6%

5.3.1.2 Perceived family functioning.

The results from the FAD-GS indicated that the majority (83.3%) of the children in the study believed their family was functioning in the healthy range, while eight children (16.7%) endorsed family dysfunction, $m = 1.74$, $sd = .47$. According to the FAD-GS cut-offs, a score of 2.17 or below indicates healthy family functioning (Byles

et al., 1988). For the purpose of this study, the children's mean FAD-GS scores were compared to FAD-GS scores of children from Sibbel's 2001 study. The children in the current study reported healthier family functioning than both the FIFO children ($m = 1.87, sd = .42$) and the non-FIFO children ($m = 1.82, sd = .38$) in the previous study.

The participating parents also completed the FAD-GS separately. The majority of parents (82.2%, $n = 79$) reported healthy family functioning and mean parental FAD-GS score ($m = 1.79, sd = .52$) was consistent with Byles et al.'s community sample ($m = 1.75, sd = .44$). The participating FIFO fathers ($m = 1.82, sd = .45$) reported slightly more family difficulties than participating mothers ($m = 1.77, sd = .59$) although the differences were not statistically significant ($U = 1005, p = .68$). The parental FAD-GS scores were also consistent with the FAD-GS scores of FIFO employee ($m = 1.80, p = .40$) and FIFO partners ($m = 1.77, p = .54$) in Sibbel's 2010 study. To investigate the relationship between child- and parent-reported family functioning, Kendall's tau correlations were computed between children's FAD-GS scores and the maternal and paternal FAD-GS scores separately. The children's FAD-GS scores were significantly correlated with the maternal FAD-GS scores ($\tau [48] = .32, p = .00$) but not the parental FAD-GS scores ($\tau [48] = .11, p = .36$). Similar agreement between maternal and child FAD-GS scores was previously found in a community sample of 194 children (Bihun et al., 2002).

5.3.1.3 Perceived parental attachment.

The children's perceived level of attachment to their parents was measured by the PBI-R (Herz & Gullone, 1999) which derives two scores, *care* and *control/overprotection*. The participating children were asked to report on their fathers and mothers separately, and the mean scores and standard deviations for the care and overprotection factors are reported below in Table 5.8. Compared to an Australian community sample of children (9 to 15 years, $N = 281$) which measured bonding for one parent, the children in this sample of FIFO families endorsed higher perceived caring from both mothers and fathers, and less parental overprotection/control (Gullone & Robinson, 2005). Single sample *t*-tests indicated that the maternal PBI-R care score was significantly higher than the community sample PBI-R care score ($t [47] = 7.38, p = .00$, calculated effect size, $r = .73$). The maternal overprotection scores ($p = .15$), the paternal

PBI-R care ($p = .06$) and paternal overprotection scores ($p = .08$) remained consistent with the community sample.

Table 5.8

Children's PBI-R Mean Scores for Individual Parents (N = 48)

PBI-R scores	Father	Mother	Community sample (N = 281)
Care	28.81 (6.06)	31.73 (4.33)	27.12 (4.44)
Overprotection	11.77 (5.83)	11.91 (6.42)	13.30 (7.19)

Examining sex and age differences, Kendall's tau indicated statistically significant associations between child demographics and parental PBI-R *care* scores, but not parental PBI-R *overprotection* scores. Children's PBI-R care scores were negatively correlated with age; that is, older children reporting less parental nurturance than younger children (paternal, $\tau [48] = -.29, p = .01$; maternal, $\tau [48] = .29, p = .01$), and girls reported higher paternal care than boys ($r_s [48] = .56, p = .04$). In Gullone and Robinson's community sample (2005), no significant age and sex differences were found between parental care and overprotection.

5.3.1.4 Satisfaction with paternal FIFO employment.

The participating children were asked to rate their degree of satisfaction with paternal FIFO work arrangements. Overall, the children endorsed being generally satisfied with their father's FIFO employment, 41.7% ($n = 20$) reported being *mostly* satisfied and 20.8% ($n = 10$) reported being *definitely* satisfied. However, over one third of children expressed some degree of dissatisfaction, 31.3% of children ($n = 15$) reported being *somewhat* satisfied and 6.3% ($n = 3$) reported being *not at all* satisfied with paternal FIFO employment. More of the boys reported dissatisfaction than girls (42.1% and 34.5% respectively), although differences were not significant ($\chi^2 (1) = .28, p = .59$). The children in primary school (38.5%) reported similar satisfaction levels to children in secondary school (36.4%), and the children who were veterans of the FIFO lifestyle reported less dissatisfaction than other children (29.4% and 41.9%, respectively). Chi-square test results indicated that differences between FIFO veteran and non-veteran children were not significant ($\chi^2 (1) = .73, p = .39$). In relation to the children's well-

being, the children's rated satisfaction with paternal FIFO employment was not significantly related to their SDQ total difficulties scores ($r_{pb}[48] = -.08, p = .60$).

5.3.1.5 Communication with fathers away at work.

Mode

The majority of children in these FIFO families (93.8%, $n = 45$) reported using telephone communication (i.e., landline and mobile) to contact their fathers away at work, while three children reported not using this mode. Email communication was the second most common method of communication (45.8% of children, $n = 22$) with another three children using video-streaming communication (e.g., Skype). Only four children had used traditional mail correspondence to contact their fathers at work.

Frequency

The children were asked to rate how frequently they communicated with their fathers away at work. In our sample, 43.7% of children ($n = 21$) reported daily or more than daily communication, and an additional 33.3% ($n = 16$) reporting *at least twice or more a week* contact. Of the remaining children, 16.7% ($n = 8$) reported weekly contact and 6.3% ($n = 3$) reported *fortnightly or longer periods* between contact. Although the figures indicated that approximately half of the children in these FIFO families (56.3%) were not in daily communication with their fathers away at work, the majority of children (77%) reported regular and consistent communication (i.e., daily to twice weekly communication). For the remaining 23% of children, communication with their fathers at work appeared to be restricted.

Satisfaction

The children were asked to rate their degree of satisfaction with the current level of communication with their fathers away at work. Of the total sample, 41.7% ($n = 20$) reported they were *mostly* satisfied and 33.3% ($n = 16$) were *definitely* satisfied while 22.9% ($n = 11$) were *somewhat* satisfied and only one child reported being *not at all* satisfied with current communication levels. Although 75% of children in the study expressed general overall satisfaction with the amount of communication with fathers away at work, 25% of children expressed some level of dissatisfaction with communication frequency. Boys and girls reported similar levels of communication satisfaction (73.7% and 72.4%, respectively). Although more primary school children

reported dissatisfaction with communication than secondary school children (30.8% and 22.7% respectively), the chi-square test results indicated differences were not significant ($p = .53$). Finally, children who were veterans of the FIFO lifestyle were more likely to be satisfied with their level of communication than children whose fathers had changed into FIFO employment at some time later in their lives ($\chi^2 [48] = 5.99, p = .01$). In relation to the children's well-being, the children's satisfaction with their communication with fathers away at work was not significantly related to their SDQ total difficulties scores ($r_{pb} [48] = -.27, p = .06$).

5.3.1.6 Child well-being and child variables.

The relationship between the children's reported well-being and their perceptions of family functioning and parental attachment were examined. It was anticipated that children's emotional-behavioural problems would be related to family dysfunction and to lower levels of parental attachment. Spearman's rho correlation matrices (see Table 5.9) indicated significant associations between children's SDQ total difficulties scores and children's FAD-GS scores ($r_s [48] = .50, p = .00$). That is, children reporting emotional-behavioural symptoms were also reporting family dysfunction. Children's SDQ total difficulties scores were significantly related to their PBI-R scores for paternal attachment (care: $r_s [48] = -.63, p = .00$, overprotection: $r_s [48] = .46, p = .00$) and maternal attachment (care; $r_s [48] = -.50, p = .00$; overprotection: $r_s [48] = .46, p = .00$). That is, impaired well-being in the children was associated with less perceived paternal care and higher perceived levels of overprotection/ control as anticipated by PBI-R psychometric findings (Gullone & Robinson, 2005).

Table 5.9

Spearman Correlation Matrix of Children's SDQ score, Child-reported Variables, Age and Sex (N= 48)

	SDQ	Age	Sex	FAD	Paternal care	Paternal control	Maternal care
Age	.09						
Gender	-.31*	-.06					
FAD-GS	.50**	.13	-.18				
Paternal care	-.63**	-.42**	.30*	-.63**			
Paternal control	.46**	.21	-.10	.56**	-.70**		
Maternal care	-.50**	-.40**	.23	-.71**	.71**	-.57**	
Maternal control	.46**	.18	-.14	.45**	-.63**	-.69**	-.61**

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, care and control = PBI-R care and PBI-R overprotection scores for fathers and mothers.

As shown in Table 5.10, a standard multiple regression was conducted on the Spearman correlations between the children's SDQ total difficulties scores and PBI-R scores reported for mothers and fathers. The results indicated that the children's perceived parental attachment, as measured by PBI-R *care* and *control* factors, significantly explained the variation of children's SDQ total difficulties scores ($R^2 = .41$; $F(4, 43) = 7.52, p = .00$). Further investigation of *t*-values indicated that only the paternal PBI *care* variable significantly contributed to the prediction of the children's SDQ total difficulties scores. That is, the level of paternal warmth and caring is an important predictor of the emotional-behavioural well-being for children in these FIFO families.

Table 5.10

Multiple Regression Analysis (of the Spearman's rho Correlation Matrix) Predicting Children's Total SDQ Score from PBI-R Scores from (N = 48)

Variable	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	β	<i>sr</i>	<i>p</i>
Maternal care	-.09	.25	-.06	.10	.72
Maternal overprotection	.12	.17	.12	.16	.48
Paternal care	-.53	.19	-.52	-.38	.01*
Paternal overprotection	-.01	.19	-.10	-.06	.95

$R^2 = .41$

$p = .00$

Note: * $p < .05$

5.3.2 Parent Results.

5.3.2.1 Parents' emotional well-being.

The maternal and paternal depression, anxiety and stress symptoms were measured by the DASS21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) and analysed as separate groups to prevent possible intra-couple dependencies. The mean scores and standard deviations are reported in Table 5.11. Closer inspection of gender differences showed mothers in these FIFO families endorsed more depression, anxiety and stress symptoms than fathers. Examining the complete sets of parents ($n = 46$), Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed ranks tests confirmed that maternal DASS21 total scores were significantly higher than paternal DASS21 total scores ($T = -2.10, p = .03$). The maternal stress scores ($T = -2.67, p = .01$) and maternal anxiety scores ($T = -2.22, p = .02$) were significantly higher than paternal stress and anxiety scores. The maternal depression scores did not significantly differ from paternal scores ($T = -.95, p = .35$).

Table 5.11

Maternal (N = 48) and Paternal (N = 47) DASS21 Mean Scores Compared to Normative Sample

DASS21	Father (n = 47)	Mother (n = 48)	Norms (N = 1,794)
Depression	3.06 (4.03)	3.66 (4.84)	2.83 (3.87)
Anxiety	1.17 (1.72)	2.44 (2.93)	1.88 (2.95)
Stress	4.42 (3.67)	6.83 (4.69)	4.73 (4.20)
Total score	8.66 (8.46)	12.93 (11.41)	9.43 (9.66)

According to the DASS severity ratings (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995), 22.9% of the women in these FIFO families reported depression symptoms in the moderate to severe range, 14.6% reported anxiety symptoms in the moderate to severe range and 31.2% reported stress symptoms in the moderate to severe range. Single-sample *t*-tests indicated that the maternal DASS21 anxiety and depression scores remained consistent with normative scores, however maternal stress scores ($t [45] = 3.03, p = .00$, calculated effect size, $r = .41$) and DASS21 total scores ($t [45] = 2.12, p = .04$, calculated effect size, $r = .28$) were significantly higher than expected. That is, mothers in these FIFO families were reporting significantly higher levels of stress (e.g., increased reactivity, difficulty relaxing) than their partners and significantly higher levels of stress than community norms (Henry & Crawford, 2005).

In contrast, the fathers in these FIFO families reported less emotional distress overall, with only 4.3% of the fathers endorsing anxiety symptoms in the moderate to severe range, 8.5% endorsing stress symptoms in the moderate to severe range, and 21.3% reporting depression symptoms in the moderate to severe range. Although paternal DASS21 depression scores were higher than expected, the remaining paternal DASS21 scale scores were below normative averages. One sample *t*-tests test indicated that paternal DASS21 scale scores remained within expected normative ranges, except for the paternal anxiety scores which were significantly below norms ($t [45] = -3.1, p = .00$). It appears that the FIFO employees in this study were more likely to display emotional distress in the form of low mood, rather than as stress, tension or anxiety.

In Clifford's study (2009) of FIFO employees ($n = 137$) and partners ($n = 59$), a DASS21 cut-off score was used, which was derived from the upper 10th percentile ranking of converted raw total DASS21 scores from the normative sample (i.e., total score ≥ 20) (Henry & Crawford, 2005). Employing this method, 12.6% ($n = 12$) of FIFO parents in the current study fell in the abnormal range (3 men, 9 women). In comparison, Clifford (2009) found only two women fell above the cut-off score in her total sample. The DASS21 results from both studies indicate that women in FIFO lifestyles experience higher levels of emotional distress than their FIFO-employed partners, particularly stress symptoms. In addition, significantly more FIFO parents in the current study reported symptoms of emotional distress than Clifford's FIFO participants (2009). In relation to perceived family functioning, parental emotional distress, as measured by the DASS21 total score, was significantly related to the parents' FAD-GS scores, maternal ($\tau [48] = .50, p = .00$) and paternal ($\tau [47] = .33, p = .00$). That is, parents reporting more emotional distress were also reporting family dysfunction.

5.3.2.2 Relationship satisfaction.

The parents' relationship satisfaction was measured by the aDAS (Sharpley & Rogers, 1984). Although not significantly statistically, the fathers in these FIFO families reported slightly higher levels of relationship satisfaction ($m = 22.57, sd = 5.4$) than the mothers ($m = 21.79, sd = 5.7$), $t(90) = .62, p = .54$. Overall, the parental aDAS scores were consistent with norms for married couples ($m = 23.2, sd = 5.4$). Although there are no established mean cut-offs for high versus low dyadic adjustment, Sharpley and Rogers (1984) recommended referring to the range and standard deviations of individual samples. In our sample, the range of aDAS scores was large (7 to 32), with 15.8% of the scores ($n = 14$) falling below one standard deviation from the mean score, including four scores below two standard deviations. Parental relationship satisfaction was significantly correlated to parental well-being (as measured by the DASS21 total score) for the women ($\tau[48] = -.28, p = .01$) and for the men ($\tau[47] = -.27, p = .01$) in the study, and significantly correlated with perceived family functioning for the women ($\tau[48] = -.51, p = .00$) and for the men ($\tau[47] = -.55, p = .00$), as measured by the FAD-GS scores. That is, the parents in these FIFO families reporting emotional distress were also reporting relationship dissatisfaction and family dysfunction.

5.3.2.3 Parenting problems.

Parenting conflict over child-rearing issues was measured by the PPC (Dadds & Powell, 1991) which comprises three scales: rule disagreement, open conflict and parenting inconsistency. For clinical purposes, a PPC score of 5 or above is considered to represent parental disagreement in the abnormal range (Dadds & Powell, 1991; Morawska et al., 2009). The maternal PPC total scores ($m = 5.20$, $sd = 4.23$) were consistent with the paternal PPC total scores ($m = 4.83$, $sd = 3.93$), and both parental scores were significantly higher than expected norms ($m = 2.59$, $sd = 2.41$). In these FIFO families, 56.8% of parents reported interparental conflict in the clinical range, including disagreement over family rules and discipline, and inconsistency between parents. The mothers in the study ($m = 2.1$, $sd = 1.98$) reported more rules disagreement in regards to parenting than their partners ($m = 1.77$, $sd = 1.77$) although the difference was not statistically significant, $T(46) = -1.65$, $p = .10$.

The maternal and paternal PPC total scores were significantly related to parental well-being (as measured by the DASS21 total score) for the women ($\tau [48] = .50$, $p = .00$) and for the men ($\tau [47] = .27$, $p = .01$), to relationship satisfaction for the women ($\tau [48] = -.50$, $p = .00$) and for the men ($\tau [47] = -.33$, $p = .01$), and to perceived family functioning for the women ($\tau [48] = .61$, $p = .00$) and for the men ($\tau [47] = .32$, $p = .00$). That is, the FIFO parents in the study reporting emotional distress were also reporting higher levels of parenting conflict, relationship dissatisfaction and family dysfunction.

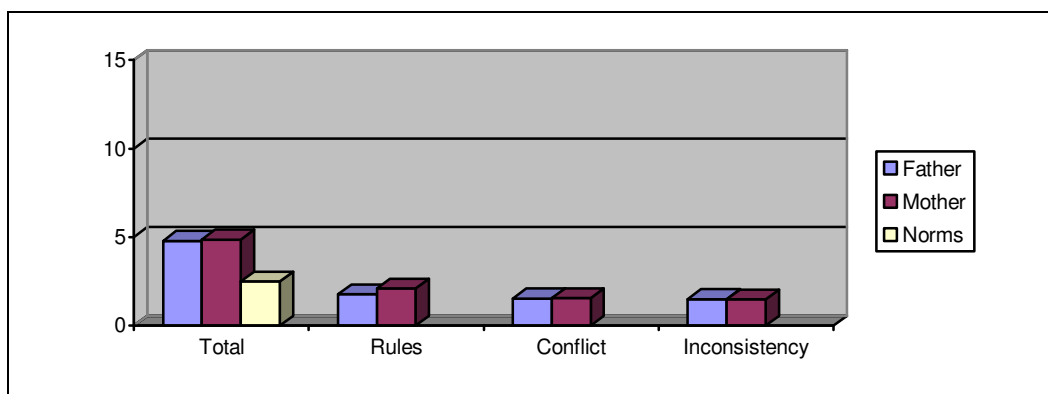


Figure 5.6 Maternal ($n = 48$) and paternal ($n = 47$) PPC total scores compared to norms, including subscales

5.3.2.4 Satisfaction with FIFO arrangements.

Parents were asked their level of satisfaction with current FIFO work arrangements. The maternal and paternal responses were consistent. Of the 47 fathers and 43 mothers who completed this question, the majority endorsed being *mostly* or *definitely* satisfied with FIFO working arrangements, 72.1% of mothers ($n = 31$) and 70.2% of fathers ($n = 33$). There were no significant differences between maternal and paternal satisfaction levels, $\chi(1) = .01, p = .90$. The reported satisfaction ratings for parents and children in the study are illustrated below in Figure 5.7. Of note, children and fathers endorsed *definitely satisfied* more frequently than mothers, while mothers reported *not at all* satisfied more frequently than children and fathers. Additionally, FIFO satisfaction was gauged by asking the parents whether they believed that FIFO employees could return home *quickly* in a family emergency. The majority of parents (i.e., 75% of women, 72.3% of men) responded positively, although they acknowledged there were realistic delays due to the remoteness of work locations and the related transportation limitations.

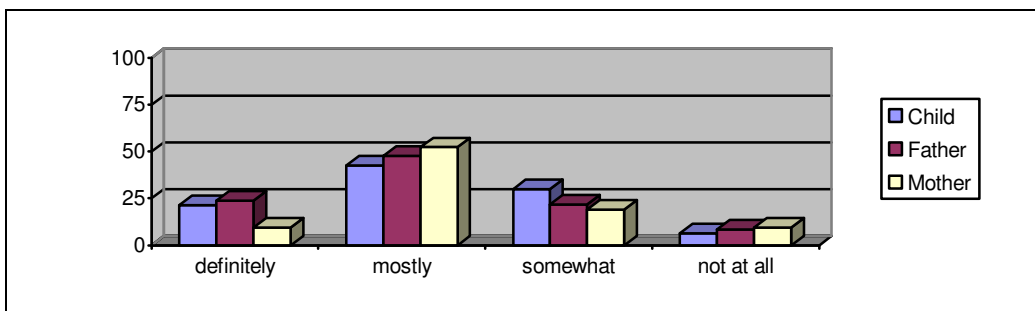


Figure 5.7 Satisfaction with paternal FIFO employment (%) as reported by children ($n = 48$), mothers ($n = 43$) and fathers ($n = 47$)

Communication

Parents were asked how frequently they communicated with each other when the FIFO employee was away at work. Of parents who responded, 80.5% ($n = 33$) of the mothers and 85.1% ($n = 40$) of the fathers in the study reported daily or more than daily communication. The overwhelming majority of parents were in frequent daily communication with each other when the FIFO fathers were at work, as compared to 43.7% of their participating children.

5.3.2.5 Children's well-being and family environment.

To investigate the relationship between children's well-being and family environment factors (i.e., parental well-being, family functioning, and parenting conflict), Spearman's rho correlation matrices were generated to examine children's SDQ total difficulties scores against maternal- and paternal-reported DASS21, FAD-GS, aDAS and PPC scores, the results are shown below in Table 5.12 and Table 5.13. The initial correlation matrices indicated significant associations between children's SDQ total difficulties score and maternal FAD-GS scores ($r_s [96] = .34, p = .02$) with near significant correlation with maternal DASS21 total scores ($r_s [96] = .28, p = .05$). The children's well-being appeared unrelated to maternal-reported parenting conflict ($p = .08$). The maternal-reported SDQ scores for children were significantly related to maternal DASS21, maternal FAD-GS and maternal PPC scores. Unexpectedly, no significant associations were found between the children's well-being and paternal-reported variables: paternal DASS21 scores ($r_s [95] = .20, p = .18$), paternal FAD-GS scores ($r_s [95] = .07, p = .65$), and paternal PPC scores ($r_s [95] = .19, p = .20$).

Table 5.12

Spearman Correlation Matrix of Children's SDQ Scores and Maternal Variables
($N = 96$)

	Child SDQ	Maternal SDQ	Maternal DASS21	Maternal FAD-GS	Maternal aDAS
Maternal SDQ	.62**				
Maternal DASS21	.28	.43**			
Maternal FAD-GS	.34*	.47**	.63**		
Maternal aDAS	-.02	-.14	-.27	-.26	
Maternal PPC	.25	.50**	.65**	.79**	-.25

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 5.13

Spearman Correlation Matrix of Children's SDQ Scores and Paternal Variables

(N = 95)

	Child SDQ	Paternal DASS21	Paternal FAD-GS	Paternal aDAS
Paternal DASS21	.20			
Paternal FAD-GS	.07	.44**		
Paternal aDAS	-.25	-.34*	-.61**	
Paternal PPC	.19	.38**	.79**	-.45**

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

As a result, a multiple regression was conducted on the Spearman correlations between the children's SDQ total difficulties scores and key maternal variables (i.e., total DASS21, FAD-GS, PPC scores). The results showed that maternal variables in combination did not significantly explain the variation of children's SDQ total difficulties scores ($R^2 = .12$, $F(3, 44) = 2.08$, $p = .12$). Details of the regression analysis are reported in Table 5.14.

Table 5.14

Multiple Regression Analysis (of the Spearman's rho Correlation Matrix) Predicting Children's Total SDQ Score from maternal Variables (N = 48)

Variables	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	β co-	<i>sr</i>	<i>p</i>
DASS21	.08	.10	.14	.16	.46
FAD-GS	3.35	2.49	.32	.18	.18
PPC	-.13	.35	-.09	-.05	.71
$R^2 = .12$					
$p = .12$					

5.4 Discussion

Findings from the quantitative study indicate that the majority of children in these FIFO families experience minimal impact from regular family disruption and employment-related paternal absences, and are satisfied with their father's FIFO work schedule. Overall, the children's emotional-behavioural functioning was in the normal, healthy range (as reported by child and mother), and comparable to normative child data (Mellor, 2005). This finding was consistent with Sibbel's original study (2001), which found the participating children in FIFO families ($n = 30$) reported non-clinical levels of depression and anxiety symptoms. Nevertheless, approximately 10% of the children in the current study were experiencing emotional-behavioural difficulties in the clinical range.

The children's emotional-behavioural difficulties were associated with their reports of family dysfunction, which was substantiated by maternal (and not paternal) reports of family functioning. Agreement between mothers and children on reports of family functioning has been found in previous community research (Bihun et al., 2002) but not in Kaczmarek and Sibbel's study of FIFO and military children (2008). In the current study, the children reported overall healthy relationships with their parents, and reported high levels of nurturance and low levels of overprotection from both parents. Additionally, the PBI-R results showed that the children's perception of parental attachment (with both their mother and father) predicted their level of emotional-behavioural functioning. Most importantly, the children's rating of their father's level of warmth and care significantly predicted their overall emotional well-being. This finding was inconsistent with the non-standard working hours research (Davis et al., 2006; Flouri & Buchannan, 2003a; Bumpus et al., 1999) that found fathers working typical hours were less intimate with their children.

Addressing the quantitative study hypotheses, it was predicted that boys and adolescents would be more vulnerable to employment-related paternal absences and report more emotional-behavioural difficulties than girls and younger children. The boys in the current study did report more externalising symptoms (i.e., conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems) than girls and in particular, the boys reported hyperactive

behaviours above expected norms. The finding may suggest that boys in FIFO families experience greater vulnerability to the FIFO lifestyle although the results should be viewed with caution as boys generally report more emotional-behavioural symptoms than girls (Mellor, 2005). The children's level of emotional-behavioural functioning was also not a function of their age, with no significant reporting differences between primary school-aged children and adolescents.

The children's emotional-behavioural difficulties were also anticipated to be related to paternal FIFO work characteristics (i.e., the length of paternal absence and the length of exposure to FIFO employment). The results indicated there was no significant variation in children's well-being according to their father's FIFO working conditions. However, all five children reporting emotional-behavioural difficulties in the abnormal range were from FIFO families where fathers were away from home for 4 weeks or more per roster swing.

Further, it was anticipated that the majority of children would express dissatisfaction with the FIFO lifestyle, yet approximately two-thirds of the children were *mostly* or *definitely* satisfied with paternal FIFO work arrangements, with no significant differences in reporting between boys and girls, and adolescents and pre-adolescents. The children's satisfaction ratings were consistent with parent satisfaction ratings, although mothers in the study were less likely to endorse being *definitely* satisfied with the FIFO lifestyle. Interestingly, the children's level of satisfaction with paternal FIFO employment appeared relatively unaffected by their levels of communication with their fathers at work. Over 50% of children reported less than daily communication with their fathers, yet three-quarters of the children in the study were generally satisfied with this amount of communication. In comparison, the majority of parents were in regular daily communication with each other and less than 20% reported being unable to talk daily.

Examining the family environment factors, the parents in these FIFO families reported overall healthy family and relationship functioning. The parental aDAS results were not reflective of Gent's findings (2004), which found FIFO employees reported lower relationship satisfaction than community norms. The current sample of FIFO employees reported levels of relationship satisfaction consistent with married couple norms, and greater than their partners. Clifford (2009) and Sibbel (2010) found similar

healthy relationship and family functioning in their samples of FIFO employees and FIFO partners.

However, more men and women in the current study reported emotional distress as compared to the FIFO employees and FIFO partners in Clifford's study (2009). In particular, the women in these FIFO families endorsed high levels of stress, which were significantly above than normative data (Henry & Crawford, 2005). Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) devised the items on the DASS stress scale to reflect an individual's pervasive state of tension as a result of stressful life demands, including symptoms of over-reactivity, hypersensitivity, and difficulty relaxing. In addition, the parents in these FIFO families also endorsed higher levels of conflict over parenting issues than expected in community norms (Dadds & Powell, 1991), with over 50% of parents reporting interparental conflict in the clinical range. Although overall relationship and family functioning remained unaffected, the FIFO parents in the study were reporting significant levels of disagreement around parenting roles and rules, and the mothers were reporting significantly high levels of stress.

Addressing Strazdins et al.'s (2006) mediation model of parental non-standard working hours (see Figure 5.8), the children's emotional-behavioural functioning in the current study was not significantly related to paternal FIFO work variables. Further, the impact of family environment factors on children's well-being was unclear. While the children and parents reported healthy family functioning, parents also reported high levels of parenting conflict and mothers reported abnormal levels of stress. As expected, parental emotional distress was related to less healthy family functioning, lower relationship satisfaction and greater parenting conflict. However, it had been anticipated that children's emotional-behavioural functioning would also be related to key family environment variables, consistent with the mediation model (Strazdins et al., 2006). Results indicated that children's emotional-behavioural functioning was more likely linked to maternal reports of family environment variables than paternal reports. Nevertheless, the majority of family environment variables (i.e., parental well-being, family functioning and parenting conflict) were not associated with children's well-being. Only the maternal reports of family functioning were significantly related to the children's emotional-behavioural functioning.

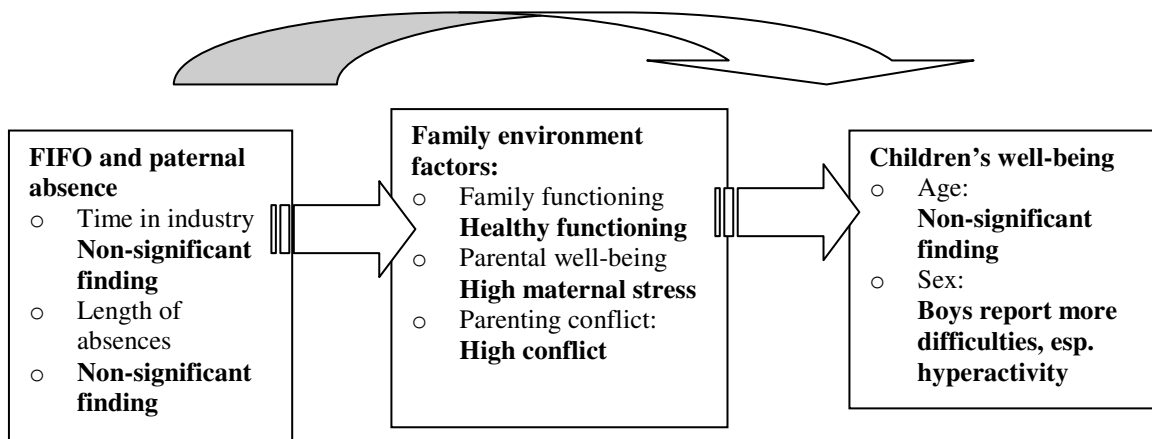


Figure 5.8 Adapted mediation model (Strazdins et al., 2006) to include FIFO variables and key findings from the quantitative study

5.4.1 Strengths and limitations.

The quantitative component of the research project collected individual and family functioning data from three family sources (child, father and mother), and was the first FIFO family study to provide such comprehensive multi-informant family information. However, the disadvantage of this approach was the ongoing difficulties associated with recruiting participants and the additional task of obtaining consent from all three family members. The problematic issue of participant recruitment has also been cited in previous FIFO research (Sibbel, 2001; Taylor & Simmonds, 2009). The final result was a protracted recruitment process and a smaller sample size of FIFO families than anticipated. Additionally, boys appeared more reluctant to participate in the research project, which resulted in two-thirds of the children recruited being girls.

The consequences of the smaller sample size for the quantitative study were the restrictions to the type of statistical analyses conducted and the reduction in statistical power for these analyses. The correlational results and calculated effect sizes indicated that the effect sizes anticipated for this part of the research were in the small ($r > .1$) to medium ($r > .3$) range, according to Cohen's conventions (1988). As such, a larger sample would have provided more robust findings. To prevent Type II error, Bonferroni corrections were not conducted on the multiple tests of comparison. Traditionally used to prevent Type I error, the Bonferroni correction has been found to result in Type II error when studies have low statistical power (Nakagawa, 2004). Finally, a control group

of non-FIFO families had been considered to provide additional comparative data. However, a small-sized control group has the potential to be non-representative of the general population. Therefore, normative data from community research and findings from related studies were used in preference to a control group.

5.4.2 Summary.

The findings from the quantitative study indicate that paternal FIFO employment may not function as a discreet, homogenous risk factor for children in FIFO families. Yet, the quantitative measures of individual and family functioning may be limited in describing the children's whole experience of the FIFO lifestyle and may provide a one-dimensional understanding of the complex interactions between children, families and parental work demands. Encouragingly, the majority of the children in the current study were emotionally healthy, and reported healthy family functioning and healthy child-parent relationships. However, there was evidence of parent and family strain related to paternal FIFO employment, with reports of elevated maternal stress and high levels of paternal disagreement over parenting roles and decisions. To further understand how children and parents subjectively assess the FIFO lifestyle and employment-related paternal absences, two-interrelated qualitative studies were conducted to explore their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of the FIFO lifestyle.

CHAPTER 6: CHILDREN’S VOICES – CONTENT ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the children’s written responses to the open-ended questionnaire items about the advantages and disadvantages of the FIFO lifestyle are examined. A content analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes and topics relevant to the FIFO lifestyle and employment-related paternal absence, under the broad classification of perceived advantages and disadvantages. The content analysis provided a rudimentary system to inspect the text, classify themes, and to calculate the frequency of recurring themes. In addition, the content from the parents’ written responses to similar open-ended questionnaire items were analysed and prevalent themes about the FIFO lifestyle were separately identified for fathers and mothers. Finally, children’s perceived advantages and disadvantages of the FIFO lifestyle were compared and contrasted to parental responses. The analyses resulted in a broader understanding of the issues pertinent to children and parents in FIFO families.

6.1 Method

6.1.1 Participants.

The participants were the children and parents who completed questionnaires in the first study; demographic details are reported in Chapter 5.1.1.

6.1.2 Open-ended questions.

The use of open-ended questions in the quantitative questionnaire (see Appendix A) allowed the children and their parents to describe their FIFO experience in their own words (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The children were asked to respond to two open-ended questions: 1) *What is good for you about your Dad going away to work?*, 2) *What is difficult for you about your Dad going away to work?*. These questions were included to specifically address the research question:

- What do children perceive as advantages and disadvantages of employment-related paternal absence?

In addition, the participating parents were asked to respond to four similar open-ended questions regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the FIFO lifestyle for

themselves and for their children: 1) *What is good for you about this lifestyle?*, 2) *What is difficult for you about this lifestyle?*, 3) *What is good for your child about this lifestyle?*, 4) *What is difficult for your child about this lifestyle?*. The parent perspective of the FIFO lifestyle was gathered to compare and contrast with the children's responses and also to compare with findings from previous adult FIFO family research.

6.1.3 Procedure: refer to Chapter 5.1.3

6.2 Data Analysis

The child and parent written responses to the open-ended questionnaire items were read thoroughly then transcribed and entered into NVivo software, version 7 (QSR International, 2006), a qualitative data analysis software. To identify and classify the responses into thematic categories, a conventional content analysis was used, as the method is recommended when describing lived experiences (e.g., the FIFO lifestyle) and when existing theory is limited (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Of interest was, first, the prevalence of identified categories relating to the costs and benefits of the FIFO lifestyle and employment-related paternal absences and, second, the overlap of categories between children and parents, and between parents. Prevalence was defined as the number of sources (i.e., participants) who endorsed each category. Word frequency searches for child, paternal and maternal written responses were run in NVivo7 to guide initial coding (Stemler, 2001). The written responses were then separately scrutinised and thematic categories identified and labelled. An iterative approach of checking and recoding of responses was used, and recoding was undertaken at least three times to ensure stability of the coding process. Finally, cumulative frequencies of categories were calculated.

6.3 Results

6.3.1 Children's results.

The cumulative frequencies for the key categories emerging from the children's responses to the two open-ended questions are reported below in Table 6.1. The themes were organised under the rubric of children's perceived advantages and disadvantages of the FIFO lifestyle.

Table 6.1.

Children's Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages of the FIFO lifestyle (N = 48)

Perceived advantages of the FIFO lifestyle	%	(n)
1) Financial rewards	50.0	24
2) Quality time with fathers	27.1	13
3) Positive family change	16.7	8
4) Special time with mothers	16.7	8
5) "Time out" from fathers	14.6	7
6) Independence and responsibility	12.5	6
7) Dad's work satisfaction and perks	12.5	6
Perceived disadvantages of the FIFO lifestyle	%	(n)
1) "Missing Dad", sadness and grief	43.7	21
2) Loss of father's support	39.6	19
3) Restricted activity and missed fun	33.3	16
4) Separation and absence	31.2	15
5) Impact on mother's well-being	31.2	15
6) Missed important events	29.2	14
7) Negative family change	25.0	12
8) Impact on father's well-being and safety	22.9	11
9) Communication	12.5	6
10) Family safety	10.4	5

6.3.1.1 Perceived advantages of the FIFO lifestyle.

For the children in the study, the main perceived advantage of paternal FIFO employment was the financial remuneration (e.g., "gets the money and stuff"). The children were aware of FIFO employment's superior earning capacity (e.g., "paid a lot of money") and endorsed positive outcomes for the family, including improved lifestyle choices (e.g., overseas holidays), purchasing power (e.g., "better stuff") and direct benefits such as presents on their father's return and more pocket money.

The only good thing about my Dad going to work is that he gets paid a lot of money so we can live in a nice house and have nice things, that is the one and only thing. (girl, 12)

The quantity and quality of time that children spent with their fathers when he was at home was another important advantage of paternal FIFO employment. The children

perceived their fathers' blocks of time-off as both extra time (e.g., "a lot of more time") and better quality (e.g., "he has surprises up his sleeves"). Compared to their peers in typical families, many of the children considered their access to and contact with their fathers was superior, because fathers did not have to work when they were at home (e.g., "spends as much time doing family stuff when he's here"). Interestingly, more of the girls (30%) endorsed quality time with fathers as an advantage of paternal FIFO employment than boys (10.5%).

It means that when he is back, we get to see him all day instead of just mornings and evenings if he worked in an office. (girl, 13)

However, the children also reported benefits of paternal absences from the family. Some of the children described positive changes to their family environment when fathers were at work, including fewer family rules (e.g., "There's not as much rules in the house"), a more relaxed household, (e.g., "everything is smooth"), greater flexibility in routines (e.g., "I can play on the tramp for more than 6 o'clock"), extra time to spend with friends (e.g., "I get to go out with friends more often"), and for two children, there were more opportunities to eat take-away meals (e.g., "can go and get Hungry Jack's and McDonalds when Dad's away"). More of the boys (26.3%) endorsed positive family changes as an advantage of paternal FIFO employment than girls (10%).

When he is away I get more time on the computer to do things as while he's home he spends quite a bit of time doing his stuff. I also get to watch more TV and watch what I want. (boy, 15)

For the adolescent children, paternal absences from the home provided emotional *time-out* from fathers. The periodic separations were seen as opportunities to ease father-adolescent tension, and for children to regulate negative emotions and to recover their emotional stability. More of the boys (21%) endorsed emotional *time-out* as an advantage of paternal FIFO employment than girls (6.7%).

If I am mad, I get to cool off when he's not around. (boy, 13)

If you are angry at him he goes away and then you get time to settle down or if he is annoying. (boy, 13)

I think that if he didn't work, not only would we fight, but our relationship would be worse. (girl, 13)

For a small number of the children, their father's time away at work was also an opportunity to take on additional responsibilities within the family (e.g., chores, sibling care) and to develop self-independence.

Because it gives me a chance to see what it is like to have to help around the house and I feel that thanks to this I help out more and mostly will. (boy, 15)

Other benefits of employment-related paternal absences for the children included special *one-on-one* time with their mothers. The girls, in particular, positively endorsed the extra time spent "shopping" and doing "girly" things with their mothers. Of the two boys who endorsed extra time with mothers as an advantage, both were pre-adolescents. Finally, some of the children believed their father's work satisfaction was an important advantage. They commented on their father's enjoyment and satisfaction with his FIFO employment, and viewed FIFO as a unique employment that took their fathers to "unusual places", which in turn, had direct benefits for them (e.g., "he has good resources at work for me and homework").

When he is actually on the rig he enjoys the work that he does so it's nice knowing that. (girl, 11)

In contrast, four of the 48 children (3 boys and 1 girl) reported little or no benefits of the FIFO lifestyle (e.g., "there's no upside to it"). Inspecting these children's emotional-behavioural functioning as reported in the quantitative study, all four children fell within the healthy range.

6.3.1.2 Perceived disadvantages of the FIFO lifestyle.

Overall, the children in the study identified more disadvantages than advantages of paternal FIFO employment. The regular separations from their fathers appeared to have multiple impacts on children's lives. The children described paternal absences from the family as: 1) a loss of physical presence (e.g., "not seeing him"), 2) a lack of time

together (e.g., “sometimes it feels like forever”), and 3) missed enjoyment (e.g., “I can’t spend time with him and have fun”).

As most people would say the most difficult part of my Dad going away would be that we don’t get enough time to spend with each other. (boy, 12)

For most of the children, the emotional experience of loss was the most significant disadvantage of their father’s time away at work. The children described experiencing negative emotions such as sadness, grief and longing as a result of paternal absences. More of the girls (50%) in the study endorsed “missing Dad” as a disadvantage of paternal FIFO employment than boys (26.3%).

And of course I miss him a lot which is the hardest thing of all. (girl, 11)

The loss of their father’s support during the *at-work* swings was also considered a major disadvantage of the FIFO lifestyle by the children. Children’s descriptions of paternal support encompassed both emotional support (e.g., “I miss his company and giving me advice”) and practical assistance (e.g., “need help on the computer, school work ...”). The responses from several of the children suggested that their father’s support was unique and difficult to replace in his absence. More of the boys (57.9%) in the study than girls (26.7%) cited the loss of paternal support as a significant difficulty of the FIFO lifestyle. However, several of the girls also considered paternal absences to be problematic (e.g., “I don’t have a male role model living with me”), and remarked on a gender imbalance in the household (e. g., “It gets really hard, it sometimes only girls in the house”).

Because if I need help when he is away, I don’t know who can help me in the way he does. (boy, 15)

Also doing the things that are best with your Dad such as fishing. (boy, 11)

Sometimes I need Dad ... oil your bike, talk about sport, school projects.

(boy, 10)

Paternal absences and the subsequent loss of paternal support appeared to influence the children’s perception of their family life. The children frequently described the family

household when fathers were away as unexciting, and the constant fluctuations of the family unit from two-parent to one-parent as problematic. In particular, the children described their one-parent family life in terms of inadequate support (e.g., “just Mum”, “there’s not another parent”), and for some of the children, the strain of paternal absences was further complicated by additional stressors, such as maternal employment and safety concerns.

My Mum works as well which leaves me home alone. (boy, 15)

Also I feel less safe in the house at night. (girl, 11)

I find it hard sometimes having only one parent instead of two. I have to get grandma cos Mum has to work. I don’t get too much time with my parents.
(girl, 9)

The children also reported that their father’s absences from the family interfered with activities in their everyday life. This included the children’s ability to engage fully in sporting and recreational interests due to the limited parental assistance and/or transport difficulties. Approximately one third of the children mentioned incidences of compromised physical activity (e.g., canoeing, bike riding, football), and more of the boys (57.9%) endorsed restrictions to their everyday activities when fathers were away than girls (26.6%).

I can’t ride my bike very often and I don’t get to the park very often. (boy, 9)

We don’t laugh as much because he is normally telling jokes. (girl, 9)

Many of the children had also experienced sadness and disappointment when fathers were unable to attend family and school events due to their FIFO work commitments. The children listed a range of missed events, including birthdays, Christmas, Father’s Day, sport competitions, graduation, dance concerts, and school presentations and performances. For many of the children, a significant cost of the FIFO lifestyle was their father’s inability to participate fully in family life and with the events that children perceived as important.

Also with my Dad working away he’s missed some important events that happened in my life. (boy, 15)

Some of the children also recognised that the FIFO lifestyle affected their parent's life and well-being. These children were aware of the additional parenting and household demands on their mothers when fathers were away, and were also aware of the emotional impact on their mothers, reporting maternal stress and sadness. More of the pre-adolescent children (36%) in the study described the negative effects for their mothers than adolescents (18.2%).

Mum has to do all the running around after me and my brother because Dad's not here to help. (girl, 14)

Half of every month, Mum gets tired and cranky when Dad's away. (girl, 11)

I get upset when he leaves and it makes it harder for Mum. (girl, 10)

The children also expressed concern for their fathers who were dislocated from family life (e.g., "worried he's missing out") and a small number of the children were worried about their father's personal safety when he was onsite.

The working condition, in which he works in, are harsh and things can go wrong. (girl, 15)

A further disadvantage of the FIFO lifestyle reported by the children was the inadequacy of communication with their fathers when he was away at work. Some of the children reported practical communication difficulties that were related to the remoteness of work locations (e.g., offshore sites), and the restricted frequency and length of communication (e.g., limited phone calls). Other children described the modes of communication (i.e., telephone and email) as unsatisfactory for certain types of discussions and missed the face-to-face communication with their fathers.

If I need to have a serious question I need to ask him I have to ring and try to express it over the phone. (boy, 13)

My Dad only calls a few times a week. (girl, 9)

Finally, the children's responses indicated that they may cope differently with employment-related paternal absences, depending on their exposure to the FIFO lifestyle. Of the ten children who reported minimal effects as a result of paternal FIFO

employment (e.g., “kind of used to it”), all were veterans of the FIFO lifestyle (i.e., fathers were working FIFO prior to their birth).

I am used to Dad going away, it has been happening since I was born. (girl, 13)

He still talks to me over the phone and on email so I don't miss him. (girl, 14)

In contrast, a small subset of the children expressed greater difficulty adapting to their father's absences from the family.

It's hard to cope. (girl, 12)

I try not to think about it. (boy, 9)

6.3.1.3 Summary.

Consistent with previous work/family balance research with children (Mauthner et al., 2000; McKee et al., 2003; Näsman, 2003; Pocock, 2006), the children in these FIFO families were able to identify the costs and benefits of their father's FIFO work arrangements, both for themselves and their parents. Themes identified from the children's responses also showed overlap with the emergent themes from earlier studies of children's perceptions of parental employment (Näsman, 2003; Pocock, 2006), including benefits of financial security, parental work satisfaction and perks, and costs such as less time with working parents, and work-affected parental mood. The main advantages cited by children (i.e., financial remuneration and quality time) and disadvantages (i.e., sadness, longing and loss of support) corresponded with themes found in adult FIFO research (Clifford, 2009; Gallegos, 2006; Reynolds, 2004).

The children in these FIFO families appeared to experience employment-related paternal absence as both *loss* and *respite*. The majority of the children described their father's periods of absence from the family in terms of loss: *loss* of physical paternal presence, *loss* of time spent together with fathers and *loss* of enjoyment. Associated with the central theme of loss, the children acknowledged a range of negative emotions - grief, sadness and longing - related to the periods of paternal absence. On the other hand, children, especially older children, categorised paternal absences as a *respite* from their fathers and as a *release* from household rules and routines.

The employment-related paternal absences were experienced as both *physical* and *emotional* loss of paternal support by these children. That is, children described a

loss of practical assistance (e.g., with computers, toy repair, homework) and a loss of parental care (e.g., physical warmth, advice). However, the periods of absence and the loss of paternal support were counterbalanced by the periods of intense physical and emotional paternal presence in these children's lives, when fathers returned home. The children frequently described this quality of time with their fathers as superior to the contact their peers had with their fathers, and was in keeping with findings that children prefer more informal, unstructured time with their parents (Lewis & Tudball, 2001; Pocock, 2006). Nevertheless, children had more to say about the difficulties of the FIFO lifestyle than the benefits. For these children, the ongoing family change and adjustment from a two-parent to one-parent system contributed to an impression that their everyday activities were restricted when their fathers were away. Inherent in the children's responses was the sense that family life was *on hold* until their fathers returned home and as such, the FIFO lifestyle was inconvenient.

Beyond implications for themselves, the children were aware of the challenges of the FIFO lifestyle for their parents. In particular, the children recognised that their father's absences from the household translated to an increased domestic workload for their mothers, and expressed concern for their mother's well-being (e.g., maternal stress and sadness). Some children also expressed concern about their father's prolonged dislocation from family life. Previous work/family research with children (McKee et al. 2003; Näsman, 2003; Pocock, 2006) has also observed children's sensitivity to parental mood and parental attitudes toward work. Mauthner et al. (2000) conceptualised this sensitivity as children's *emotional attunement* to their parent's different reactions to and perceptions about work. The authors proposed that this attunement could adversely influence children's mood and behavioural functioning, and shape children's aspirations for future work. For example, a father's frustration with FIFO commuting may spillover into his time at home and lead to increased tension, strictness and discipline in the household. As a result, children may experience ambiguous emotions on their father's arrival home and have greater appreciation for the *time-out* periods when fathers were away. As a consequence, this childhood experience may also influence children's beliefs about acceptable work schedules and their choices for future employment.

The children's perceptions and experiences of the FIFO lifestyle were not homogeneous, and some sex and age differences were indicated. Addressing sex differences, the girls in the study were more likely to endorse the emotional impact of paternal absences (e.g., sadness and longing) and the positive quality time with fathers when at home. This trend is not unexpected as girls are typically more aware and able to express greater intensity of emotions such as longing than boys (Holm, 2001). Although boys appreciated *time-out* from fathers and enjoyed the relaxation of family rules and routines when fathers were away, they were also more likely to report on the negative consequences of paternal absences compared to the girls. In particular, the boys in the study were more likely to endorse the loss of paternal support and the restrictions to family activities as problematic features of paternal FIFO employment. This trend may indicate that boys experience greater *ambivalence* toward employment-related paternal absences than girls. Addressing age differences, adolescents in the study were more likely to endorse the benefits of paternal absence and the emotional *time-out* from their fathers than younger children, which was consistent with expected developmental markers of adolescence.

6.3.3 Parent results.

The cumulative frequencies for the key categories emerging from parental responses to the four open-ended questions are reported below. The parental responses were organised separately into paternal and maternal responses. Further, parental responses were organised into: 1) the perceived impacts of employment-related paternal absence for their children, see Table 6.2 and Table 6.3, and 2) the perceived impacts of the FIFO lifestyle for men and women, see Table 6.4 and 6.5.

6.3.2.1 Children and the FIFO lifestyle - paternal responses.

Table 6. 2.

Paternal Perceptions of the Advantages and Disadvantages for Children of the FIFO lifestyle (N = 47)

Perceived advantages for children - paternal	%	(n)
1) Quality time with father	65.9	31
2) Improved father involvement	42.5	20
3) Increased lifestyle opportunities	31.9	15
4) Financial security	12.8	6
5) Children's independence and responsibility	10.6	5
Perceived disadvantages for children - paternal	%	(n)
1) Family dynamic and parenting inconsistency	40.9	18
2) Negative impact on fathering role	40.9	18
3) Missing important events	34.1	15
4) Loss of father's support: emotional and practical	29.5	12
5) Lack of physical presence	22.7	10
6) Missing father, sadness	13.6	6
7) Poor communication	6.8	3

Advantages for children

According to the fathers in the study, the key benefits of the FIFO lifestyle for their children were quality family time (e.g., "I can dedicate days instead of hours to both my children's activities") and the financial remuneration. For many fathers, the extended time at home allowed them to be better fathers (e.g., "think I am a nicer Dad being able to leave work behind completely", "I know them so well"), and to be more involved in their children's lives (e.g., "I get to take them to school and purely do heaps with them"). Many of the fathers also related their superior earning capacity to better opportunities for their children, including educational choices, sporting and recreational options, and travel opportunities (e.g., "kids may not know it, the extra income has been good for them").

We have the finances to be able to support any of the kids' dreams. (father, 41)

Several of the fathers also viewed their time away from the family as an opportunity for their children to develop additional resilience and responsibility within the family.

(He is) *able to learn to cope on his own and take responsibility in the home.*

(father, 52)

Disadvantages for children

The main costs of paternal FIFO employment for their children, according to these fathers, were the constant fluctuations of the family structure (e.g., “When I go back to work, and roles and household dynamics change”, “not a ‘normal’ family life”) and the loss of a “father figure” for the time they are at work (e.g., “not having a father around when the need may arise”). Many of the fathers acknowledged missing important occasions such as birthdays and Christmas, and school and sporting events were difficult times for their children, and associated with children’s feelings of grief and sadness. The fathers described their absence from the family in terms of the loss of parental support for children, including emotional support (e.g., “not having Dad there when something bothers them”) and practical support (e.g., “not having a Dad to play, kick footy, bowl the cricket ball for 2 weeks at a time”). Many of the fathers were also acutely aware of the amount of time they were absent from their children’s lives (e.g., “miss out on half their growing up”, “they only see me for half the year”) and the difficulties of communicating regularly and effectively with their children.

6.3.2.2 Children and the FIFO lifestyle - maternal responses.

Table 6.3

Maternal Perceptions of the Advantages and Disadvantages for Children of the FIFO Lifestyle (N = 48)

Perceived advantages for children – maternal	%	(n)
1) Improved father involvement	52.1	25
2) Quality time with father	50.0	24
3) Father's improved well-being	27.1	13
4) Improved opportunities and lifestyle	27.1	13
5) Children's independence and responsibility	10.4	5
6) Financial security	10.4	5
7) Special time with Mum	8.3	4
Perceived disadvantages for children – maternal	%	(n)
1) Family and parenting inconsistency	41.6	20
2) Missing important events	39.6	19
3) Missing fathers: sadness	33.3	16
4) Loss of father's support	29.2	14
5) Children's adjustment	29.2	14
6) Adolescence	14.6	7
7) Boys	12.5	6

Advantages for children

The mothers in the study also agreed that children benefited from their partner's blocks of rostered time-off, which created more opportunities for fathers to spend quality time with children (e.g., "[he's] so very visible in their lives"), to become intimately involved in their lives, and to develop closer father-child relationships (e.g., "the kids get him in a great way"). Some of the mothers also believed that the additional time at home allowed their partners to unwind and focus on home and family issues (e.g., "Daddy is relaxed at home so things are calm and happy when he is around").

When he's home, he can do much more with them than a 9 to 5 Dad.

(mother, 42)

Consistent with paternal responses, the mothers reported that the financial benefits of FIFO employment provided better educational and recreational opportunities for their children, including family holidays and travel (e.g., "to do things like camping on a regular basis with the kids"). Some of the mothers believed their children had developed

important life skills as a result of paternal absences, and were more responsible and independent in the family (e.g., “practice responsibility, self-sufficiency, and organisational skills”), and that the FIFO lifestyle had prepared them for future life challenges, by increasing their personal resilience and improving their coping ability.

Having only one parent around half the time means more compromises and sharing mother’s time with other children and commitments. (mother, 38)

Additionally, many of the mothers reported that paternal absences allowed them extra *one-on-one* time with their children and had enhanced their mother-child bonding.

He’s more a “Mum’s boy” ... he also loves to still jump in my bed when it’s just me. (mother, 33)

Disadvantages for children

According to the mothers in the study, the family unit inconsistency, paternal separation, and the fluctuations of family and parenting resources were key disadvantages of the FIFO lifestyle for their children (e.g., “constant periods of adjustment and upheaval”). Many of the mothers acknowledged that the regular separations from fathers had direct impacts for their children, including grief and sadness (e.g., “they miss him when he is away, often getting teary and upset usually at bed time”), and increased anxiety (e.g., “they worry a bit when he goes [security] or if something breaks”). However, the family reunions and the re-adjustment to paternal presence in the family could also be problematic for children, and several mothers expressed concern about the adverse effects for children’s relationships with their fathers. These mothers described episodes of father-child conflict (e. g., “tends to be a power *struggle* within the family between [son] and [father] when [he] first comes home”), distress (e.g., “She gets upset when Mum and Dad want time together without the kids”) and behavioural changes. Additionally, several of the mothers recognised that they had developed a tendency to treat their children as companions while partners were away (e.g., “Mum relies on child to be 'grown up' and talk like an adult”).

Behaviour differs when father home, more obedient but sulks and comes to me. (mother, 35)

Some of the mothers also believed that their children's reactions had changed as they grew older and that adolescence could complicate children's relationships with their FIFO fathers, jeopardising father-adolescent intimacy and effective communication between fathers and their children (e.g., "[he] misses doing that father-son stuff").

Torn between seeing friends and seeing Dad when he is at home. (mother, 48)

Now kids are teens, they not so keen to have Dad around. (mother, 40)

Sometimes would rather talk to Dad than Mum or do things with Dad rather than Mum – now becoming a teenager more relevant. (mother, 41)

The mothers described some indirect challenges for their children related to the inconsistency of FIFO family life, which could lead to stress and strain on family functioning. These challenges included parenting inconsistency (e.g., "Mum and Dad aren't consistent"), differing parental expectations of children and household rules (e.g., "[he] expects things done his way"), inconsistency of parental mood (e.g., "He gets used to not having them around and snaps at them"), and the instability of parenting resources (e.g., "not being able to go somewhere because Mum can't be in two places at once").

Usually have at least one 'fight' during the week he is home due to reinforcing rules and general changing of family dynamics. (mother, 33)

Having to change rules and the way things are done when he's at home and away. (mother, 35)

Also, I get grumpy because he is away and that impacts on both children.

(mother, 35)

6.3.2.3 Parents and the FIFO lifestyle.

6.3.2.3.1 Fathers and the FIFO lifestyle.

Table 6.4

Men's Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages of the FIFO lifestyle (N = 47)

<i>Perceived advantages for men</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>(n)</i>
1) Financial security	46.8	22
2) Quality time with family	44.7	21
3) Time off	38.3	18
4) Positive work spillover	36.2	17
5) Improved opportunities and lifestyle	23.4	11
6) Increased involvement with children	21.3	10
7) Projects and maintenance	10.6	5
<i>Perceived disadvantages for men</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>(n)</i>
1) Missed special events	36.2	17
2) Missing family	23.4	11
3) Adjustment to work/family	21.3	10
4) Negative work spillover	21.3	10
5) Time absent	10.6	5
6) Reduced social and leisure time	14.9	7
7) Loneliness and boredom	12.8	6
8) Out of the loop	10.6	5
9) Reduced support in emergencies	10.6	5

Advantages for men

The financial remuneration and quality time-off (e.g., “love having so much free time at home”) were again key advantages of the FIFO lifestyle for men in the study. Their improved financial security was associated with better lifestyle choices, more family holidays and the opportunity for mothers to stay at home with children. The quality time-off at home was “family and home time” for many men (e.g., “my whole time at home is able to be dedicated to my family”). During these periods, men described their hands-on involvement in parenting and childcare (e.g., school and sporting activities), their improved relationship satisfaction (e. g., “romance is healthy when I’m home”) and more opportunities to complete household projects (e.g., “able to get work done on the house”).

I have more time at home with my family than I ever have as prior to this I was working 6-7 days a week. (father, 41)

Being able to attend functions - such as sports and school that other Dad's would not be able to. (father, 51)

In contrast, two fathers reported that their time away from the family was beneficial (e.g., “to reflect about family issues” or “to train for sporting events”). Additional personal benefits for men included the favourable work conditions, career advancement opportunities, and high work satisfaction, with several men describing FIFO employment as preferable to their previous jobs in the Perth metropolitan area. Many of the men believed that they experienced less work spillover (e.g., “I don’t bring work stress home”) and that there are savings benefits when they were at work (e.g., “save on petrol while not driving your own vehicle”).

I don't find this job difficult because after working 8 years in construction which was 5½ days a week, going away seems a small price to pay for the time home. (father, 36)

Doing a similar job but working from home resulted in burnout from long hours and inadequate rest. (father, 46)

The opportunity to be involved in processes that would not normally be afforded to someone who didn't finish school. (father, 37)

Disadvantages for men

The disadvantages of FIFO employment cited by men in the study were mostly related to their periods of separation and absence from family and the community. These included missing special events, missing family, and feelings of loneliness and boredom when away at work. The periods of family re-adjustment as men re-enter the household were seen as challenging (e.g., “I need to fit into family routines, I cannot dictate them”), and the fathers described “being out of the [family] loop” (e.g., “sometimes you feel a stranger in your own family”, “life goes really quickly”). Some of the men found that their time away disrupted social and community involvement (e.g., “form[ing] friendships outside of work colleagues is difficult”), and also their ability to respond

adequately to family emergencies. The men described some negative work spillover effects, including loneliness and social isolation that often resulted from the remoteness of their workplace, the demanding work conditions (e.g., an unstable workforce, shiftwork, extended and uncomfortable commuting, roster inflexibility) and communication difficulties.

Being away from family, friends and freedom (not being able to hop in the car and drive wherever I want to go). (father, 38)

Missing watching my family grow. (father, 37)

6.3.2.3.2 Mothers and the FIFO lifestyle.

Table 6.5

Women's Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages of the FIFO lifestyle (N = 48)

Perceived advantages for mothers	%	(n)
1) Quality time	57.4	27
2) Financial security	50.0	24
3) Time for self	42.5	20
4) Self-resilience and independence	22.9	11
5) Father involvement	25.5	12
6) Opportunities and improved lifestyle	22.9	11
7) Positive work spillover	14.6	7
8) Relationship quality	12.5	6
9) Improved mother-child relationship	10.4	5
Perceived disadvantages for mothers	%	(n)
1) Coping alone : single motherhood	68.7	33
2) Separation, missed shared time and loneliness	45.8	22
3) Parenting challenges	33.3	16
4) Social isolation	31.2	15
5) Loss of partner's support	29.8	14
6) Maternal stress	25.5	12
7) Adjustment to partners return	25.5	12
8) Missed special events	22.9	11
9) Relationship stress	18.7	9
10) Communication	14.6	7
11) Reduced father involvement	12.5	6
12) Negative work spillover	10.4	5

Advantages for women

Aside from the dominant themes of improved financial security and quality time, many women in the study reported a range of personal benefits arising from their partner's time away from the home. Their partner's absence allowed women to enjoy time to themselves (e.g., "plenty of "me" time"), to enjoy an increased sense of autonomy (e.g., "greater freedom to do what I want"), and to enjoy special *one-on-one* time with their children. One woman described the FIFO lifestyle as "the best of both worlds – (he's) not here but still part of the family". For some of the women, the necessity of managing family and household matters alone had contributed to a greater sense of self-efficacy and independence. The women frequently used the term "independent" to describe themselves yet some also hinted at the negative implications of excessive self-reliance (e.g., "makes me too independent").

I appreciate my own space and independence while he's away. (mother, 40)

I have become exceptionally good at handling things alone. (mother, 43)

I can give my full attention to the kids and my job without sharing myself too thinly. (mother, 41)

Time away gives us both space and makes us appreciate each other more.
(mother, 41)

The FIFO lifestyle was also considered by some women to be beneficial to their intimate relationships, and the women reported greater appreciation of their partners as a result of the regular absences. They valued their partner's contribution to the family during at-home times and their closer involvement with children.

The partnership is constantly and enthusiastically refreshed and time together is appreciated. (mother, 41)

I don't feel solely responsible for the children and decisions regarding them.
(mother, 35)

For other women, FIFO employment had created a helpful division between their partner's work and home environments, and resulted in less negative work spillover (e.g., "not tired every day after work", "when he is home his attention is here not at work"), and greater work satisfaction for their partners (e.g., "challenges him, makes him happy").

Disadvantages for women

The main disadvantages of the FIFO lifestyle identified by women in the study were the sole parenting challenges (e.g., “I’m a part-time single Mum”, “being Dad”) and the household/family management. Many of the mothers described feeling overwhelmed and stressed by the additional household responsibilities and parenting demands when their partners were at work (e.g., “I get quite down and feel things sometimes become a burden”, “never getting a break for a month”). The key challenges included the loss of the practical and emotional support of their partners, children’s inadequate contact with their fathers, discipline issues, and heightened maternal stress. Subsequently, there was an element of resentment toward their partners which was evident in some of the women’s responses (e.g., “I still have to get things done but (he) doesn’t”, “when he is home he has time to do things that I don’t get time for”). These women believed that their partner’s life was contained and simple, either a FIFO worker when away or a father at home. In comparison, as the consistent parenting presence and often the sole parent at home, the women described their lives as “overloaded” with extra roles and responsibilities.

Having to be Mum, Dad, handyman, cook, cleaner, taxi-driver, tutor i.e., 2 people for half the year. (mother, 43)

For many of the mothers, the frequent separations from their partners were also difficult. They acknowledged feelings of loneliness and sadness about their missed time together as a couple, their social isolation (e.g., “not being able to go out weekly, weeks go by sometime”), the loss of couple identity (e.g., “nothing progresses as far a ‘us’ goes”) and increased relationship stress. Effective communication was another casualty of these separations and some of the women described the communication with their partners as haphazard and inconsistent (e.g., “I sometimes forget to tell him things/details”) and/or inadequate (e.g., “only get 10 minutes”).

I quite often have to go to parties and other outings on my own with the kids which can be a little sad. (mother, 27)

Almost have two lives – one with him, one without. (mother, 40)

However, for many of the women, their stress was not solely related to their partner's absence but also to his presence in the household, and reported a number of negative work spillover effects on their partner's return from work (e.g., fatigue, moodiness, homesickness). The women described increased personal stress and family strain on their partner's return, and expressed feelings of frustration and resentment at having to adjust household roles and routines to accommodate their partners. The women attributed the increased tension to their differing expectations of parenting, of children's behaviour, and of family routines and rules.

I get into a routine then (he) comes home and expects things to be done his way.
(mother, 35)

As the children have grown, I have found it difficult to handle all the discipline and decision-making only to have (him) return home and rescind my decisions or permit things I don't allow. (mother, 41)

Dealing with my partner's homesickness and staying positive when he is feeling down. (mother, 41)

Partner getting cross – thinking (he's) being left out of information.
(mother, 45)

6.3.3 Summary.

The parents of participating children demonstrated good understanding of the possible costs and benefits of the FIFO lifestyle for their children, and as a result there was a substantial overlap of themes between child and parent responses. Financial security, quality family time, increased paternal involvement, and children's greater responsibility and independence were key advantages endorsed by both children and their parents. Some women in the study had also observed health and well-being benefits for their partners, which had *knock on* effects for family functioning and father-child relationships. This theme was consistent with the quantitative results that indicated low paternal stress and anxiety, healthy family functioning and high paternal care and nurturance in these FIFO families.

On the other hand, the parents also identified common difficulties of the FIFO lifestyle. These challenges included the children's emotional response to paternal absences (e.g., sadness and longing), the loss of parental support (i.e., emotional and

practical), the regular family re-adjustment, and fathers missing family and community events. The parents in the study frequently used the term “inconsistent” to describe their family life with its continual cycle of departures and reunions, including inconsistent parenting and discipline, and inconsistent family roles and household rules. Also common to the child and parent responses was the problem of long-distance communication with FIFO employees, which was often described as inadequate and unsatisfactory, and identified by parents as a potential risk factor for children’s healthy relationship with their fathers.

Overall, the parental descriptions of the personal costs and benefits of the FIFO lifestyle were consistent with previous FIFO research findings (Clifford, 2009; Gallegos, 2006; Reynolds, 2004; Sibbel, 2001, 2010; Watts, 2004). The parents in the study agreed on the key benefits (e.g., financial security and increased lifestyle opportunities, quality time off, increased paternal involvement). However, the women were more likely to report personal benefits of paternal absences such as increased autonomy and independence, and improved marital and mother-child relationships. The common disadvantages shared by the parents included the emotional impact of separations (e.g., sadness, loneliness), the personal and family re-adjustments, the sense of social isolation, the impact of partners missing events and negative work spillover factors (e.g., fatigue, commuting). Overall, the women in these FIFO families identified more disadvantages to the FIFO lifestyle than men, and were more likely to report increased levels of personal and relationship stress, and difficulties associated with the loss of their partner’s support, sole-parenting and communication constraints. The corresponding disadvantages for the fathers in the study were related to their dislocation from the family, and feelings of disconnection from family and community life.

6.4 Discussion

The content analysis study aimed to clarify child and parental attitudes toward FIFO employment, by identifying the perceived cost and benefits for children and their parents. Overall, the results from the content analysis indicated that there was considerable common agreement between the children and their parents on the main advantages of the FIFO lifestyle (i.e., quality time, financial security, children’s independence and responsibility) and the major disadvantages (i.e., increased sadness,

loss of paternal support, family and personal adjustment, fathers missing important family events). While the participating parents exhibited good understanding of the possible implications of the FIFO lifestyle for their children, their children were also able to accurately describe benefits and costs for their parents. The children were particularly aware of the negative implications for their mothers when fathers were away at work (e.g., heightened stress, increased domestic workload).

According to the ABCX model of family resilience (Lavee et al., 1985; Walsh, 1996), an intra-family agreement or *perception coherence* can contribute to positive family adaptation to stressors. The general agreement found between the children and their parents in the study may indicate that these FIFO families are accustomed to paternal FIFO employment and have achieved some degree of positive adaptation to the FIFO lifestyle. However, the shared perceptions may equally be the result of parental opinions being transferred to the children. In her research on children's perception of parental employment, Näsman (2003) observed that children had frequently internalised dominant parental opinions about work and family. In addition, the children and their parents may be actively engaged in the process of *preferencing* the positive features of the FIFO lifestyle, or *benefit-finding*. In response to the difficulties associated with paternal FIFO employment, benefit-finding may be seen as a valid coping strategy that can assist in children's adaptation to the changed family conditions (Tennen & Affleck, 1999). While related benefit-finding research has predominately focused on people's coping responses to chronic or terminal illnesses, the process of benefit-finding may also be helpful in other situations where an individual has minimal control, such as children's responses to their parental work decisions.

6.4.1 Benefits of time and money.

All the participating members of these FIFO families associated FIFO employment with improved financial security and quality family time. These positive spillover effects have been reported anecdotally (Cusworth, 2007; Toohey, 2008) and in previous FIFO research findings (Clifford, 2009; Gallegos, 2006; Reynolds, 2004; Sibbel, 2010; Watts, 2004). Of particular interest was the children's awareness of their father's superior earning capacity and of the opportunities it had afforded their family (e.g., better housing, more educational options, buying power). In previous work/family

literature (Lewis & Tudball, 2001; Näsman, 2003; McKee et al., 2003; Pocock, 2006), financial security and family time have often been conceptualised as competing factors for families, with the common understanding that earning more money is related to a parent spending less time with their children. However, the children in these FIFO families appear to experience both the benefits of improved financial security and of quality periods of time with their fathers. Yet, the children's understanding of *time* was more complex. Many of the children described time with their fathers as both *plentiful*, associated with positive father involvement, and *scarce*, associated with negative emotions (e.g., sadness, longing) and loss of paternal support. Children's understanding of *good* child-parent relationships is often directly related to the amount of time that parents are able to spend with them and moreover, the type of *good* time with parents is preferably unstructured and unstressed (Näsman, 2003; Pocock, 2006). For many of the children, paternal FIFO employment appeared to offer more unstructured and relaxed time with their fathers than traditional parental employment.

6.4.1.1 Respite and time-out from fathers.

While the children described employment-related paternal absences in terms of *loss*, these absences also provided some children with *respite* from their father's expectations, his parenting style and his discipline. This tendency of children to find benefit in their father's absence as well as his presence provided an insight into how children may successfully negotiate the FIFO lifestyle. In particular, the adolescent children in the study endorsed the benefits of physical and emotional *time-out* from their fathers. However, there may also be some evidence that fathers and children may rely on these *work swings* to resolve tension and disagreements rather than tackle sensitive issues in their short time together at home. Similar themes emerged from the study of children in offshore petroleum families in Aberdeen (Mauthner et al., 2000), with children expressing relief from the *knock-on* effects of paternal moodiness and discipline when their fathers left for work.

6.4.1.2 Children's developing resilience.

The challenges of the FIFO lifestyle were frequently seen as a character-building experience for the children, and common to child and parent responses was the theme of

children's developing resilience. The regular paternal absences were seen as opportunities for children to mature emotionally, to develop effective coping skills, and to become more responsible and autonomous within the family. In contrast, a minor theme emerged from the child and maternal responses related to the burden of responsibility for children. That is, some of the children in the FIFO families expressed concern and responsibility for the healthy functioning of their family when fathers were away. This over-responsibility in children may manifest as worry or concern about their mother's well-being or their family's safety, and may be demonstrated by the children taking on an adult role in the family, by taking up extra household duties and/or the care of younger siblings (Robinson, 1999; Byng-Hall, 2008). It was also interesting that several of the mothers in the study acknowledged that they relied on their children for companionship when partners were away.

6.4.1.3 Improved father involvement.

Although paternal FIFO employment periodically restricts a father's access to his children, participating children and their parents reported high levels of paternal involvement and support when fathers were at home. In some cases, the children believed their experience of fathering was favourable to their peers, and the blocks of extended time with their fathers at home allowed for greater involvement and intimacy. A similar theme emerged from Macbeth's (2008) interviews with eight adolescent boys. The descriptions of paternal involvement encompassed Lamb's (1997) three dimensions of positive fathering: 1) access: time available for children, 2) engagement: father's involvement in children's lives, and 3) responsibility: financial and parenting. At home, many of these FIFO fathers dedicated substantial time to their children, took part in children's everyday life (e.g., school, sports), while also improving financial resources and the family's agency in respect to lifestyle, educational and recreational options.

Additionally, many of the parents believed that FIFO employment provided employees with sufficient dislocation from the workplace, prevented negative work spillover, and provided sufficient time-off for employees to unwind and re-engage effectively with their families. As a result, some parents believed that FIFO work arrangements could function positively to improve father-child relationships and that the periods of intense, quality time that fathers spent with their children had resulted in

improved intimacy, increased knowledge of their children, and greater involvement in children's everyday activities. Therefore, the key issue for children in FIFO families may not be the nature of paternal employment but *how* the parent returned from work and re-entered the home environment (McKee et al., 2003; Näsman, 2003). The themes from the content analysis indicate that the transition back into the household for FIFO employees can be stressful, can be complicated by negative work spillover effects, and may happen over several days and require re-adjustments to the family's management style.

6.4.2 Costs of employment-related paternal absence.

The children and their parents reported a wide range of negative implications of the FIFO lifestyle which could be organised into the costs of paternal absences for children and for parents, including the loss of emotional and practical support, and the costs of family re-adjustment and sole-parenting.

6.4.2.1 Emotional costs.

In contrast to the children's overall healthy well-being as reported in the previous chapter, the content analysis indicated that children experienced a range of fluctuating negative emotions related to their father's absences from the family. The children experienced periods of sadness, grief and longing for their fathers and reported distress related to the loss of paternal support and to their fathers missing important family events. These feelings of sadness and longing were common to child and parent responses, children and mothers missed fathers/husbands and fathers missed the family when away at work, which was consistent with previous FIFO family research findings (Gallegos, 2006; Reynolds, 2004, Sibbel, 2001). However, the mothers and children were more likely to acknowledge their feelings of grief and sadness than the fathers, and mothers, in general, were more aware of the intensity of the children's emotional response to paternal absences.

The analysis also indicated that boys may experience additional challenges related to employment-related paternal absences, including loss of the same-sex parent, restricted recreational opportunities and difficulties communicating with their fathers at work. As well, adolescents may negotiate paternal absences differently than younger

children. For example, more adolescents in the study utilised their father's time away at work as periods to relax, spend time alone, and to settle emotionally.

6.4.2.2 Costs of family adjustment and reduced family resources.

For the participating children, the constant re-adjustment of the family dynamic was the source of increased personal and family inconvenience. Their one-parent family life were characterised by depleted family resources (e.g., parenting support, emotional and practical support), by reduced family mobility (e. g., transport difficulties), and constraints to the children's everyday engagement in social activities (e.g., sporting, hobbies) and the community. As a result, the children's family life without their fathers was described as less enjoyable and less "fun" than when fathers were at home.

6.4.2.3 Sole parenting and maternal stress.

The overwhelming majority of mothers in these FIFO families reported negative implications of the FIFO lifestyle, specifically related to parenting and managing the family alone. The periods of sole parenting and "coping alone" were associated with the women's increased negative emotions (e.g., stress, sadness, and resentment), their increased parenting responsibilities, and additional household workload. Similar themes have been reported in earlier FIFO family studies of FIFO partners (Gallegos, 2006; Reynolds, 2004; Sibbel, 2001; 2010). Significantly, the theme of maternal overload and stress was reported by both the mothers and their children, but was not uniformly reported by the fathers in the study. It seems that the participating children were well aware and concerned about the extra demands that the FIFO lifestyle placed on their mothers.

6.5 Summary

The findings from the content analysis add to our understanding of children's experience of the FIFO lifestyle and how families may be engaged in a shared understanding of this way of life. For the majority of the children, their ability to balance the benefits with the costs of employment-related paternal absence suggested an overall acceptance of the FIFO lifestyle and indicated the children's resilience to regular family change. The results also indicated that paternal FIFO employment may improve the

quality of paternal involvement for some children, but at the same time, place additional demands on the family when fathers were away. The period of sole-parenting may have adverse effects for mothers (e.g., increased stress) and for children (e.g., worry, over-responsibility).

Finally, several of the themes from the content analysis required further investigation. In particular, the children's emotional response to paternal absences, the nature and meaning of emotional *time-out* from fathers, and the possibility that boys and adolescents experience employment-related paternal absences differently to girls and younger children. Indeed, more is needed to be understood about how children in FIFO families manage and cope with paternal separations and reunions, with their mother's increased stress levels, and with family re-adjustments. Therefore, the children were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews to further discuss the topics emerging from the content analysis. In the following chapter, a thematic analysis of these interviews is reported.

CHAPTER 7: CHILDREN'S VOICES - THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The overall aim of this part of the study was to further broaden our understanding of children's experience of the FIFO lifestyle. To achieve this aim, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subgroup of children from the original participant pool and their siblings. The objectives of the interviews were first, to further examine the themes emerging from the content analyses and second, to explore the children's perceptions about work, both their father's FIFO employment and the children's own work aspirations. Previous work/family research (Mauthner et al., 2000; McKee et al., 2003; Pocock, 2006) has also explored the influence of parental work arrangements on children's knowledge of paternal work environments and their expectations of future employment.

Initially, a rudimentary semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix B) was drafted using the main topics from the content analysis to provide direction. The intention was to expand and elaborate on these general topics, such as children's everyday experience of paternal absences, separation and reunions, the family household and family changes. In addition, the trends from the work-family literature (Mauthner et al., 2000; McKee, 2003; Pocock, 2006) and from FIFO and industry-related research (Gallegos, 2006; Reynolds, 2004; Watts, 2004) as outlined in Chapter 2 informed the composition of the interview schedule. It was anticipated that by gathering detailed descriptions of their everyday family life, the children would also express attitudes and emotions about their family and paternal FIFO employment as well as their own self-perceptions, which would assist in addressing key research questions outlined in Chapter 4:

- Does paternal FIFO employment (and employment-related paternal absence) influence children's well-being, their perceptions of family functioning, or their relationships with their parents?
- Are there family environment factors, including parental well-being and family functioning or FIFO employment factors, including length of absence and

children's exposure to FIFO that influence children's well-being, their perceptions of family functioning or their relationship with fathers?

- What do children perceive as the advantages and disadvantages of employment-related paternal absence?
- How do children understand and manage paternal absences and changes in the family unit and household routine? What coping processes have children used to negotiate family structure changes?
- How do children in FIFO families perceive their fathers' FIFO employment and what are their own future work aspirations?

Prior to the interviews commencing, ethical issues such as consent, access, privacy and confidentiality, and the researcher's role were considered (Hill, 2005; Mauthner, 1997). In accordance with the guidelines outlined by Mauthner (1997) and Westcott and Littleton (2005), the interviews with the children were informal. The interview schedule was used to prompt and direct thematic topics, however, the children were encouraged to digress and guide the conversation. As the face-to-face interview was a novel communication mode for many of these children, it was important to promote rapport between the researcher and the children. To assist in building rapport, it was decided to limit note-taking during the conversations and to use digital audio recording for the purpose of accurate collection of interview data. These data were later transcribed for thematic analyses.

In this chapter, the major and minor themes from the children's transcribed interviews are identified, including the adaptation to the FIFO lifestyle, the patterns of children's changing emotions associated with paternal absence, children's changing self-perceptions, transition into FIFO and ongoing stressors, the alternating family household, the role of fathers, children's knowledge of parental employment and their own work aspirations.

7.1 Method

7.1.1 Participants.

For the semi-structured interviews, all the children from the quantitative study

($N = 48$) were invited to take part in further informal interviews to discuss their experiences of the FIFO lifestyle. Fifteen families from across the Perth metropolitan area agreed to participate. In total, twenty-seven children (15 children from the quantitative study and 12 siblings) were interviewed in their homes (girls, $n = 14$; boys, $n = 13$). Of the 27 children aged between 7 and 16 years, fourteen attended primary school and the remaining 13 children attended secondary school. Approximately half the families were considered veterans of FIFO ($n = 7$) while the remaining eight families had experienced periods where fathers had worked non-FIFO arrangements. To ensure this subset of FIFO children was representative of the larger group of participating FIFO children, the children's well-being (as measured by the SDQ) and their perception of family functioning (as measured by the FAD-GS) were compared between the two groups. The children participating in the interview study reported similar emotional-behavioural functioning ($m = 10.00$, $sd = 6.9$) and family functioning ($m = 1.78$, $sd = .46$) as the children who did not participate ($m = 10.00$, $sd = 6.02$ and $m = 1.72$, $sd = .47$, respectively).

The fathers of participating children were currently working FIFO work schedules and employed by individual companies ($n = 11$) or contactors ($n = 4$), either on onshore operations ($n = 8$) or offshore operations ($n = 6$). The remaining father worked both types of operations. The children's fathers were predominately employed in Western Australian operations ($n = 11$) while two worked nationally and two worked internationally. The average length of FIFO employment was 10.2 years, the range was 9 months to 22 years and 9 months. The total family income for these families ranged between \$100,000 and over \$175,000, and was relatively evenly spread between the four main income cut-offs, \$100,000 - \$125,000 ($n = 3$), \$125,000 - \$150,000 ($n = 4$), \$150,000 - \$175,000 ($n = 3$), over \$175,000 ($n = 5$).

Approximately half of the fathers ($n = 8$) were working even time rosters (i.e., the same amount of time at home as at work) while the remaining seven fathers worked uneven time rosters (i.e., less time off at home than at work). Of these fathers, the majority worked either *1 to 2 week* roster cycles ($n = 6$) or *5 to 8 weeks plus* roster cycles ($n = 6$), while three fathers worked *3 to 4 week* roster cycles.

7.1.2 Procedure.

After consenting to their children's participation, the parents were contacted to arrange a suitable time to interview their child or children. All parents elected to have children interviewed in their family home after school. On arrival at the house, I introduced myself to the children, thanked them for their participation and explained the nature of the research project and the current study. The parents were asked to step out of the room so the conversations with children remained private. The confidentiality of information and the children's right to withdraw from the interview were fully explained to participating children. Verbal consent for the interview and for the use of digital audio-recording was obtained from each child. Once consent had been received, I further explained to children that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions, and that I was interested in their own feelings and experiences. The children were asked whether they would prefer to be interviewed individually or with their siblings to provide a less formal setting for the interview. Of the 27 participating children, 11 children from eight families were interviewed individually and 16 children from seven families were interviewed together with siblings.

The initial questions were informal and children were asked generally about their school activities and hobbies. For younger children, drawing paper and pens were provided to keep them engaged while older children were speaking. An example of a completed drawing is shown below in Figure 7.1. Once the children had settled into conversation, the broad cost and benefit questions were revisited to refocus the discussion (i.e., what are the good things about Dad's job? What are the not so good things about Dad's job?). Following these questions, the interview schedule was used to prompt further discussion on the children's experience of paternal FIFO employment. The children were encouraged to take greater part in the discussion and to describe their everyday lives and general family activity.

To ensure the accuracy of interview data, all interviews were digitally audio-recorded using a Sony IC Recorder. The audio files were transferred on to a secure computer at Curtin University's School of Psychology and Speech Pathology. The audio files were identified by a numerical code assigned to each child and prepared ready for transcription. To avoid disruption to the flow of the interviews, field notes were recorded

after the interviews, which included the setting of interviews, observations of the children's mood and the nature of children's engagement with the interview process.



Figure 7.1 “Playing with Dad”, drawing by girl aged 9

7.2 Data Analysis

Interviews were initially transcribed and read thoroughly then imported into NVIVO version 7 (QSR International, 2006), a qualitative data analysis software. In accordance with a pragmatic approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007), an inductive thematic analysis procedure was conducted to examine the children's responses and to identify the major and minor patterns or themes from the interviews (Aronson, 1994; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis provided a flexible framework to organise and describe the children's experience and their understanding of the FIFO lifestyle and employment-related paternal absence. For this purpose, *themes* can be generally defined as important or meaningful responses that recur within a set of data (i.e., the interview transcriptions). In the previous content analysis, the prevalence of key words or phrases was used to guide topic identification. While the recurrence of themes remained an important factor, the thematic analysis also provided an opportunity to explore in greater detail the children's descriptions of living in FIFO families, to identify divergent themes, and to extend on the themes from the content analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006).

The thematic analysis was conducted following guidelines proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, the interview data were categorised into the broad topics from the interview schedule and initial free coding of key words and phrases, and recurrent topics was completed. Second, the interviews were analysed and coded across the topic questions. At this stage, the key themes and sub-themes were identified from the initial coding and filtered into broader analytic categories. The children's responses could be included in multiple categories if relevant, and it was also important to include the children's unique or inconsistent responses. Third, the themes were reviewed and refined, and the connections between individual themes were mapped. Finally, the themes were clarified in relation to relevant family and child coping literature and the key findings from previous FIFO research. Coding reliability was achieved by multiple re-codings of the original interview data, and re-codings of the themes to ensure their accuracy and consistency over time (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2002; Richards, 2005; Whitley & Crawford, 2005). The emergent higher-order themes and lower-order sub-themes from the children's interviews were tabulated (see Appendix C). For reporting purposes, the participating children were identified by sex, age and by an alphabetical letter if there was more than one child in that category, which assisted in differentiating the children's quotes in the following results section.

7.3 Results

The dominant overarching theme that emerged from the semi-structured interviews was the children's *adaptation* to the FIFO lifestyle and their acceptance of employment-related paternal absences in their lives. Both the children who were veterans of the FIFO lifestyle and the children whose fathers had commenced FIFO employment more recently, described being accustomed to the FIFO lifestyle (e.g., "used to it") and frequently described their fathers going away to work as "normal" (e.g., "always just lived like this").

I don't find it weird, I don't think it's like Dad's come or Dad's not there... I'm kinda just used to it. (girl, 13b)

I don't think I'd be used to him staying here the whole year. I'd be like be "get out of here", I'd yell at him ... I wouldn't want him. (boy, 14a)

A person's adaptation to new experiences or new environments inherently involves a process of *change* that occurs over *time*, and during the interviews, the children described different incidences of change and adjustment. For example, the children whose fathers had previously worked standard hours described a period of negative adjustment when their fathers began FIFO employment (e.g., "a bad time"), and described coping with difficult emotions and new family tension (e.g., "it was one of those hard to get used to things"). One 10-year old boy remembered initially being angry and blamed his older sister for their father's decision to work away, while a nine-year year old girl had struggled with feelings of self-blame, and had reasoned that fathers left the family to work and "not because he doesn't like you".

I always used to yell at my Mum because I was sad ... I missed him and I used to hurt my sister, cos I felt it was her fault, I just felt like she made him go away but now I'm used to it. (boy, 10e)

At the start, I got a bit angry because she'd [mother] tell me off for things that I wouldn't get told off for usually. But I really didn't understand when I was ... cos I was in Year 5, I didn't understand but then I understood that she obviously misses Dad a lot, she's not used to being left alone and stuff. (girl, 13c)

The children observed that the passage of time and their regular exposure to the cycle of separations and reunions (e.g., "the on and off") inevitably reduced their distress, as they came to terms with the new family routine. Similarly, the older children remembered being sadder and more disturbed by their father's departures when they were younger.

Yeh, I think it was really hard the first 5 times cos I wasn't used to it. (boy, 10e)

When he first started doing it, it was a bit weird. Because I was used to having him home every night so it was a bit weird, he wasn't there like on the weekends and stuff. Um, but I don't know I kinda got used to it pretty quick. (girl, 13c)

And I was young, I'd wake up at about 4 o'clock and sit on the stairway and wait till he came out ... and see the taxi and sometimes I'd sleep through it and sometimes I sit up there on that stair ... 'bout 3 till 6. (boy, 10a)

At the same time, the children indicated they wanted more *time* with their fathers. For children whose fathers worked extended roster swings and/or internationally, extra time to spend with their fathers was especially desirable, and for children exposed to shorter roster swings (i.e., weekly), even an extra day with their fathers at home was seen as an improvement in paternal work arrangements. Some of the children expressed an interest in spending time with their father onsite (i.e., the mine site or oil rig), and others wanted their fathers to earn more money so he could eventually work less or not at all.

I don't really know ... make him come back for longer. (boy, 10c)

... closer and not as long, well maybe instead ... some Dads just work about 3 days a week or 4 days a week so they can be home all the other days. (girl, 9d)

In addition to their adjustment to employment-related paternal absences, the children described a set of stressors related to FIFO employment that had resulted in increased personal distress or family stress. These stressors included negative work spillover, the cycle of separations and reunions, changes to roster swings, and fathers being away for special events. Although their father's arrival home was commonly described as "exciting", the children frequently reported incidences of negative work spillover, mainly paternal fatigue and irritability. The children were also aware of the contributing factors to work spillover, and discussed the effects of night shifts, extended shifts, lengthy travel and jetlag for their fathers (e.g., "he's been stuck on the aeroplane and been in the helicopter"). However, the majority of children spoke affectionately and with humour about their father's need to sleep and recover from his work swing and commute home.

The day he comes home it's all excited and good then the next day he's all like grumpy and tired. (girl, 13a)

Next day, whenever he's come ... He goes to bed and comes up, "just having a rest in the bed" ... And um ... he never gets up. (boy, 8a)

Not all children successfully negotiated the negative work spillover effects. For example, one 10-year boy described being directly affected by his father's moodiness,

and expressed frustration and resignation about the continued cycle of personal and family re-adjustment.

I can annoy him cos he gets tired and grumpy ... I can't really stand it ... Yeh, just sort of get used to it, just a few days to get used to it. It's usually a bit hard to get used to him and stuff, it's hard ... but then I get used to it, him, by the time he leaves so it's a bit hard. (boy, 10d)

Inconsistent FIFO roster cycles were an additional stressor for children. While the children described being accustomed to the length and cycle of their father's regular swings, his unexpected roster changes, double swings, or extended time away were remembered as difficult times by children.

He was away for longer, he had another job when I was 10, he was away for about 3 weeks and home for 3 weeks and so that one was a bit too long... that was hard. (girl, 9a)

Additionally, some of the children described stressors related to family changes that in combination with the demands of paternal FIFO employment had created increased stress for the children and their family. These normative family challenges included older siblings leaving home, maternal employment, family illness and family relocation.

I used to have 2 sisters and brother so that wasn't too bad. But when they left and then he left, that was really bad... and I think that's only been happening for the last year, where it's been only me and my Mum home. (boy, 15b)

She's not home from 9 to 5 so neither Mum or Dad's at home on that fortnight basis, so [we're] quite aware our parents aren't at home during the day.

(boy, 14a)

I think when Nan got Alzheimer's ... so then it's hard for Mum, then got hard for everyone...and that was kind of hard on Dad being away. (girl, 16a)

I think I was a bit upset about moving to Perth cos I was moving away from my friends [in Kalgoorlie]. (girl, 12a)

Many of the children interviewed recognised the importance of *compromise* in their adjustment to the FIFO lifestyle, which was described by one adolescent as the

“give n’ take”. The children understood that their father’s absences from the family were balanced by periods of his extended presence at home and better financial security for the family, and as such they had adjusted their expectations and perceptions of family life. Many of the older children considered their father’s FIFO working arrangements to be superior to standard work schedules, and believed they spent greater quantity and quality of time with their fathers. The children also favourably compared their experience of employment-related paternal absence to more adverse family situations where fathers are absent from the family (e.g., divorce, single parent families, longer FIFO rosters).

He’ll still be around ... but it depends on what you mean by “around”, if it’s like normal to go to work at 8 come back at 5. 30 ... it will be a more or less like that, when he’s at work, but you don’t see him in the morning or the afternoon.

(boy, 15a)

It’s kinda hard but it’s also harder for kids who don’t have a Dad. At my brother’s school, there are a lot of single Mums and like they’re making things for their grandparents, and they’re his friends so it’s easier... like Dad’s not here.

(girl, 13a)

They’ve got Dads who work late ... they feel they never see their Dads either...

(girl, 13c)

However, the children demonstrated a remarkable ability to recall the length and timing of paternal absences. In the interviews, the children tallied missed family birthdays, missed Christmases, missed family holidays, missed sporting and recreational events, past and present. They were sensitive to the amount of time their fathers were away from the home but also the timing of these absences. In response to paternal absences, the children naturally expressed sadness and disappointment but also communicated a sense of *unfairness* regarding a perceived imbalance between family life and paternal work commitments. They observed work/family imbalance when their father’s FIFO work schedule was inflexible (e.g., missed important events), over-demanding (e.g., extended time away, roster changes) or unsupportive (e.g., poor communication and facilities). So although the children generally expressed an acceptance of paternal FIFO employment,

they appeared to maintain a barometer of *fairness* in relation to paternal work demands and their impact on the family.

Sometimes, at the beginning it just seems too long, it doesn't seem like ... just seems like months or years or stuff like that ... when it's about 2 weeks, you just start counting down the days. (girl, 9d)

He's missed out a lot cos he's been away and he's not meant to be. (girl, 14a)
I remember when I was younger... [brother] was playing at one of the derbies in Subiaco and Dad was allowed to come home early for that, and I just find it really annoying like when you have a really big [dance] competition on ... like I had one competition the second biggest competition in WA and he wasn't home for that and that was kind of upsetting. (girl, 13a)

Associated with their adaptation to the FIFO lifestyle and to employment-related paternal absences, the children described multiple experiences of *change* in their lives. The dominant recurring theme of *change* was broadly organised into two thematic categories: 1) the children's personal change and growth, and 2) family change. On a lower thematic level, the children's personal change and growth was organised into the sub-themes of children's emotions, perceptions and behaviours, and their developmental changes. The theme of family change was organised into two sub-themes: the structural change in the household and parental change (i.e., mood and behaviour). This thematic pattern was consistent with the double ABCX model of family adaptation (Lavee et al., 1985; see Figure 3.2). In the model, a family's adjustment to ongoing family stressors is accompanied by changes to the personal resources of family members (e.g., self-esteem, knowledge) and changes to family system resources (e.g., cohesion, flexibility, communication).

7.3.1 Children's cycle of emotional adjustment.

During the interviews, the children described different emotional reactions in response to their father's absence or presence in the family, which was often expressed as a cycle of emotions (e.g., "sad, happy, sad, happy ..."). The children's emotional responses appeared both a function of time (i.e., their length of exposure to the FIFO lifestyle) and also to their stage of development (i.e., pre-adolescent or adolescent). For

the pre-adolescent children, their experience of sadness and longing for their fathers was often intense and openly expressed. Older children generally experienced less intense emotions related to paternal absences, and were better able to identify and manage uncomfortable feelings associated with family change and loss of paternal support, which was consistent with their increasing cognitive maturity.

Sometimes I get really sad about it so when Dad's not here ... I really miss him, I just really miss him. (girl, 9a)

I dream about it [Dad away] ... nightmares. (boy, 7a)

I kinda don't feel frustrated or angry cos I understand he has to work so it's not his fault he's away. Um, I'm kinda anxious, kinda for him to come home ... but yeh, I don't feel angry or anything like that. (girl, 13b)

I tried not to show it as much cos I don't want them to be sad. (girl, 14a)

In an effort to understand children's emotional experience of paternal FIFO employment, the children's descriptions of the different emotions associated with their father's FIFO working schedule was mapped as a cycle of responses, in a similar manner to that previously constructed for adult emotional responses by Gallegos (2006). Figure 7.2 illustrates the range of emotions reported by the children during their interviews.

1) The home-coming

We like always go out running to the car screaming like, "Dad". (girl, 14a)

Lot of running, hugging, kissing, asking him what he's got in his bag ...

(boy, 10c)

As expected, the children described feelings of excitement and happiness on their father's return home and even the family pets were part of the welcome (e.g., "dog goes crazy"). Their father's arrival home was generally considered a special time (e.g., "party time") which was celebrated by special meals, dinners out, gifts and family time together. For the older children, who had experienced regular arrivals and departures for much of their lives, the intensity of their emotions and the welcome celebrations had diminished over time.

I was a lot more excited when he came home when he first went away and we always used to have his favourite dinner when he came back ... We had a family dinner instead of sitting on the couch and having dinner. But I kinda got used to him going away and stuff. We still do some of that stuff and I'm still like excited when he's been away. (girl, 13c)

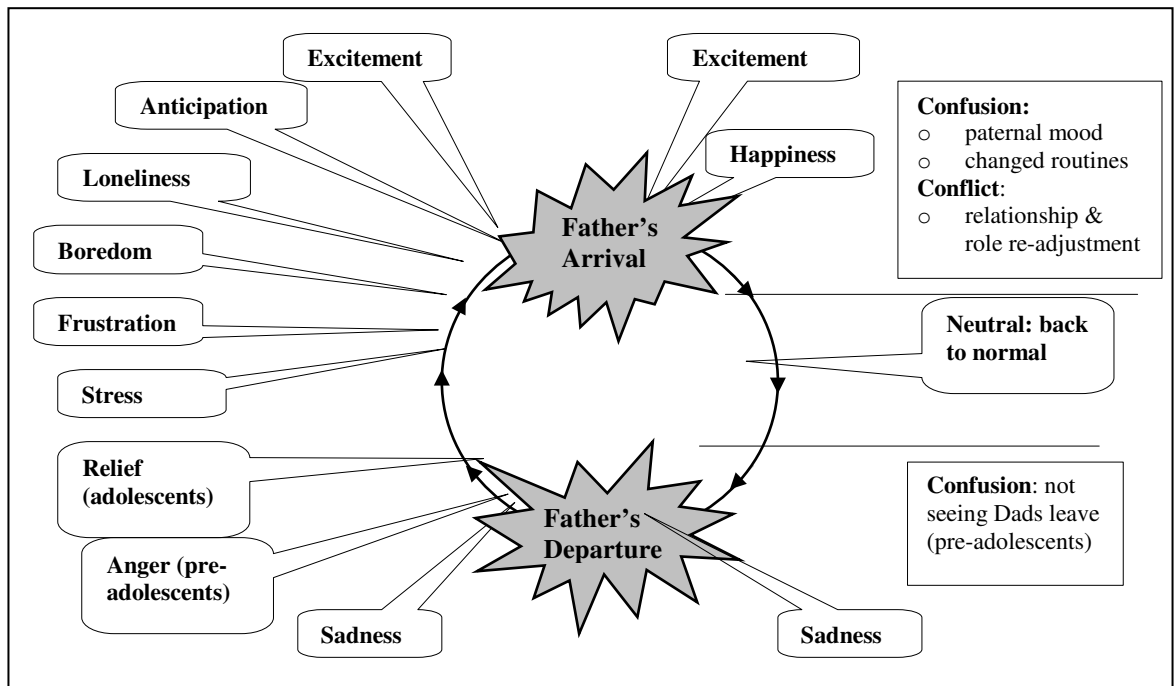


Figure 7.2 The range of emotions experienced by children during the paternal fly-in/fly-out cycle

2) Fathers at home

It's good at first cos we miss him and then 2½ weeks in [the home swing], it's like "aawww". (girl, 13b)

[The homecoming] is usually different to when it's [the home swing] half way through and everything's back to normal. (boy, 15b)

Following the excitement of their father's arrival home, the children described a period of family re-adjustment, and then a return to "normal" family life. During this transition period, the children reported incidences of family disruption and tension (e.g.,

“just a week of disturbance”). Some of the children reported minor parental conflict, and several adolescent girls reported confusion over family roles and routines. A number of boys discussed having to make behavioural changes to accommodate their father’s returned presence in the household (e.g., being less “naughty” and less “rebellious”).

Then it’s [the household] muddled up, like no routine and in after a little while there’s a routine. (girl, 13a)

They [parents] usually ... get in a hassle with Mum, start arguing about something. (boy, 13a)

3) On Departure

When he goes, normally the little one [brother, 4], he gets mad when Dad goes and sometimes refuses to give him a hug and kiss goodbye cos he’s mad at him and refuses to and at times he’s excited ... doesn’t cry, he’s just mad at him, [brother, 10] normally cries and yeh, it’s sad when he goes at first. (girl, 13b)

The children expressed varying degrees of sadness and grief related to their father’s departure from the family, depending on their age. The younger children were more likely to express intense negative emotions and describe behavioural expressions of their emotions (e.g., crying, anger, shouting, hitting). Their fathers often left for work in the early mornings or at night when children were asleep or at school, and some of the younger children described mild confusion about departures, although did not appear to be observably distressed by missed farewells.

Sometimes you don’t know cos he leaves in the morning or the night or when we’re at school so we don’t exactly know. (girl, 9a)

The older children experienced milder levels of sadness and grief on their father’s departure and frequently reported conflicting emotions. As discussed previously in Chapter 6, the adolescents interviewed expressed both sadness and a sense of *relief* when their fathers went away to work. For these children, their father’s departure provided an opportunity to “let loose”, “slack off” and relax, and several of them also admitted to misbehaving when fathers were away. The older children considered their

father's absences from the family as mutually beneficial *time-out* (e.g., "He gets a break from us ... to calm down"). This felt sense of relief may indicate that children in FIFO families experience a degree of tension during their father's time at home, possibly related to the intensity of paternal involvement and family life during these periods.

When he's home, he's like home for a long time. And it might sound mean, but another good thing is when he's home he's home all the time, and it's like so when he goes, it's sad that he goes but like finally, he's not there 24/7.

(girl, 13b)

I found I got off things a lot easier. A lot less chores. Usually Dad likes to help me with all the jobs and that...

(boy, 15b)

A little time off away from us, so we don't bug him too much.

(boy, 15a)

4) Fathers at work

So I'm home alone so don't have much to do ... usually pretty boring.

(boy, 15)

I don't know I don't normally go out ... don't feel as playful.

(girl, 9)

In response to their father's extended absence from the family, the children described a set of low intensity negative emotions, including loneliness, boredom and longing. These emotions were related to being physically and emotionally separated from one parent, and also related to the limitations of the one-parent family (e.g., reduced mobility, restricted personal and family activities). As well, the children reported feelings of frustration and stress as a result of high maternal expectations, additional responsibilities in the household and increased family stress when fathers were away, which appeared to contribute to heightened emotional sensitivity for some of the children. Several of the younger children also expressed concern about forgetting their fathers when he was away.

Like we're easily irritated when we're alone with Mum cos we need to get everything done.

(girl, 13a)

We get stressed, I don't know if you can use that as an excuse ... but it feels like she never listens because she's got too much to do. And I'll say you don't listen to me but I'll yell it.

(girl, 15a)

Well, sometimes I like forget about him and sometimes I wish he was here because like if we needed to do something we couldn't do. (girl, 9c)

Nevertheless, the children understood the predictable nature of the FIFO roster cycle and knew their fathers would inevitably return home. As such, they also described positive emotions of anticipation and hope during this period.

I feel sad, then again I feel happy because he's going to come for 3 or 6 weeks. (boy, 10a)

7.3.2 Responsibility and self-worth.

I'm a bit more... I don't know if it's confident or something. I'm a bit confident. I feel sorta like if I'm the man of the house so I feel a lot more bigger inside ... I feel sorta like if I'm the man of the house. (boy, 15b)

The sub-themes emerging from the central theme of children's personal change included their sense of increased *responsibility* within the family and their increased *self-worth* as a result of coping with paternal absences and family changes. Many of the children described taking on extra chores and duties within the household, and assisting their mothers and their siblings in the effective running of the family when fathers were away. Although the children appeared to appreciate their greater independence and maturity, their comments also implied there may be a *necessity* to "grow-up" and take on a more responsible role in the family when fathers commenced FIFO.

I was older [7 years old] when it [FIFO] first started, got into the swing of pulling my own weight... It's one of those things. (boy, 15a)

It's made me more independent at home, learnt to be more responsible around the house, helping Mum with the chores and stuff ... I feel I don't have to be babied anymore, I can do big stuff that I need to do and stuff. (girl, 12a)

Also, implicit in the children's positive descriptions of their personal change and growth was an underlying sub-theme of the burden of additional responsibility. Some of the children reported increased stress and negative emotions (e.g., frustration, uncertainty,

sadness) when their fathers were away, which they related to their additional responsibilities in the household and extra family demands.

I'm really young and can't "stand up". (boy, 15b)

Kind of hard on me, because I am the next one in authority ... we don't have babysitters anymore cos we're a bit older so I kinda have to keep him [younger brother] under control. (girl, 13a)

Yeh, we help Mum but we get agro and sad easily. (boy, 10a)

7.3.2.1 Growing up: Adolescence.

Yeh, probably like when I just started school, you turned 3 and you'd be like oh, Dad ... and everything was at home, and you'd be like really sad but now I kinda have my own life so it's not that bad. (girl, 13b)

The older children interviewed discussed their changing emotional and attitudinal responses to the FIFO lifestyle. The majority of the adolescents had grown to appreciate the periods of time when fathers were away and acknowledged less emotional disruption on their father's departures, as previously discussed in this chapter. They sought more time to be alone and to be with peers as expected at this developmental stage. The adolescents interviewed observed more significant benefits of paternal absences (e.g., increased responsibility, paternal *time out*) than the younger, pre-adolescent children interviewed. For example, one 13 year-old girl believed her father's new FIFO employment had resolved years of father-daughter conflict (e.g. , "it gave me a bit of space as well if I needed to calm down").

I do want him to go away cos it sorta gives me some time to myself at home. I don't like the house always full of people so I get some time to myself, do things I want to do. (boy, 15b)

I like being ... um I like my own kind of time. (girl 13b)

Obviously when Dad's at home he's at home a lot. So when I get home from school um, 2 days a week I'm by myself so I'm like the time ... I'm kinda of used to that when Mum works. So I like him being away, I have my own time so I can like eat when I want, clean up when I want, watch TV, read ... or like do what I want. (girl, 13c)

7.3.3 Family unit changes.

Sometimes at school I say "I've got a proper family now". (girl, 9d)

The majority of children interviewed described incidences of family change in response to their father's regular departure from the family. These descriptions of change were grouped into sub-themes about family adjustment to the changing system structure (i.e., two-parent versus one-parent). These sub-themes included 1) alternating family households – complete versus incomplete, 2) family management, and 3) family safety. However, two children from different FIFO families, classified as *veterans* of the FIFO lifestyle, reported no significant changes to their everyday family life when fathers went away.

The children's descriptions of their everyday life could be organised into two contrasting portraits of family life, which were related to paternal presence or absence in the household. Many of the children described a quiet household and an incomplete family life when fathers were away. Life without their fathers was depicted as more mundane and children reported fewer family activities and some interruption to their usual recreational interests. This portrayal of family life was contrasted with children's descriptions of a busy household and complete family life on their father's return.

I'm not used to it being as quiet ... I'm just used to him being around so ... it takes me a while to get back used to it, him not being here. (girl, 9d)

When we are having dinner it feels a bit like empty, sometimes because Dad's not there. (boy, 8)

It's a bit quieter ... When Dad's away ... riding round the place and sticking around home. (boy, 10d)

Probably quieter ... there's probably less things going on cos when Dad's home we usually do something with Dad. (girl, 12a)

For some of the children, the periods of one-parent or incomplete family life contributed to greater daily inconvenience and a more stressful and hurried lifestyle. These children described general daily hassles with family organisation, transport difficulties and under-supervision when fathers were away.

I need to get minded by other people more because Mum has to work and Dad's away so ... I always have to go to other people's houses or get the babysitter in
(girl, 9d)

We always have to go in a hurry cos when Dad's here he always putting our alarm at 6.30 to make sure we can make it out to the bus at 7.30 but when it's not ... cos when it's Mum's, she's having a shower in the morning and it's a bit later so we're all kinda in a hurry. (boy, 11a)

The sub-theme of family management emerged from the children's discussion about the challenges of a one-parent family. Many of the children described their mother's highly organised and time-managed approach to household chores and family routines when fathers were away. Mothers were seen as the architects of effective household organisation, and the children were pleased to share the details of their daily family routines (e.g., getting to school, sports and after-school activities), their duties (e.g., bedroom cleaning, dishwashing, pet care, cooking) during the interviews. Some children even displayed their chore charts for the researcher. It was interesting to note that although the majority of these children recognised the additional burden on their mothers when fathers were away, they were less likely to report problematic maternal stress. Instead, they frequently described, with pride, their mother's superior ability to manage the family alone and to deal with the family's structural transitions.

It really just goes back to who she is, she's just really organised, she takes the lead of the safety [in the] house around here and stuff. (boy, 15a)

Therefore, for some of the children interviewed, their father's return home was also a reprieve from the extra responsibilities and structured family routine, and their father's returned presence was seen as an opportunity to relax and be supported by both parents (e.g., "cos there doesn't have to be as much extreme organisation [in the household]").

Family security was an additional sub-theme that emerged from discussion with several of the children. For these children, the family home was not as safe when fathers were away, and they expressed varying degrees of unease and/or anxiety about regular

paternal absences. For example, one adolescent boy spoke about his increased concern for his own safety after a home break-in when his father was away.

Usually scared most of the time, at nights ... especially when Mum's at work, and it's just me at home that's pretty bad. (boy, 15b)

We usually sleep in Mum's bed if no one else is home. Not because we feel unsafe but because my bedroom ... my bedroom's there down that end and my mum's is the down the other end, so we're on different ends of the house ... like we're quite a bit far away. (girl, 13c)

It can be safer when Dad's home ... sometimes. Sometimes I worry, depends how I'm sleeping ... if I'm sweaty in my sleep, it scares me, yeh ... when I hear noises, I can get frightened ... but I usually don't worry about things. (boy, 10d)

7.3.4 Paternal involvement.

Some of my friends ... they don't really see him because he doesn't [come to school] ... cos Mum picks me up from school. They think ok, cos they don't really know my Dad. (girl, 9c)

Although their fathers were described as the main breadwinners in the family, the majority of children also portrayed their fathers as involved and accessible, and as actively participating in their everyday lives. Spending as much time with their fathers as possible was important for the children interviewed, and paternal FIFO employment was perceived by many of the children as providing unlimited access to their fathers when he was at home (e.g., the “24/7” father).

When he's at home during the entire weekend he'll be there for you. He can always help you because he's home for that solid 5 weeks. None of this “Sorry, I'm in a real rush, gotta go straight to work” or “Leave me alone I got to do this”. It's one of those, he's at home, he can relax, and he's there for you.

(boy, 15a)

I'd prefer him to sorta work away than just go in the morning and come back in the evening, cos then when he's on his break, he can play with us like all day.

(boy, 10b)

In contrast, there were several children who expressed some disappointment about the amount of time fathers could spend with them. For these children, their fathers were “too busy” and had to divide limited home time between their children and various household and business projects, and other family commitments (e.g., “he has no time for us”).

Cos when he’s at home he’s busy trying to do everything else everyone else wants him to. (girl, 14a)

An important gender trend emerged from the children’s discussion about the amount and the quality of paternal involvement in their lives. The boys interviewed described the impact of paternal absences as a loss of contact with their same-sex parent with whom they shared similar interests (e.g., sport, hobbies, play), and as a disruption to effective father-son communication.

Sometimes there are things I want to tell but I can’t when he’s [away]... and when he gets home, I forget what I was going to tell him. (boy, 12a)

I don’t get to play around outside that much cos he’s the only male here except for me. I don’t get to play outside with him that much. (boy, 12a)

Mum’s too tired to kick the ball so I’m usually out there kicking the ball by myself. (boy, 10c)

For example, one of the boys interviewed implied that employment-related paternal absences may have affected his relationship with his father, and another older boy reflected on the effect of paternal absences on his sense of self.

I’m not going to know him as much a Mum and ... yeh, I know Mum better than him ... a bit more. (boy, 10d)

I wouldn’t know what I’d be like, I might be a lot different to what I am now.
(boy, 15b)

7.3.4.1 Fathers and discipline.

For the children interviewed, their fathers still played an important role in their parenting and discipline, despite being regularly separated from the family. Many of the children noticed the differences in parenting behaviour and parenting expectations

between their mothers and fathers, and frequently described their fathers as “strict” and more observant of family rules and behaviour.

Like I said, Dad a bit more strict than ... Mum’s sorta nicer. (boy, 10c)

Mum’s a bit softer than Dad. So like if we be naughty, Mum will just like shout at us and stuff and ... but Dad pulls me up and say “go to your room”. (boy, 8a)

Everything’s done a lot more proper when he’s at home. (girl, 13b)

He’s usually the one who sorta gets me going when I’m not doing well [at school], he gives me a talk. (boy, 15b)

In one of the families interviewed, all three children had mobile phones so their father could be in regular contact with them individually. These children recognised the benefit of having personal rather than family conversations with their father but also the cost of their father monitoring their behaviour when he was at work.

Sister (16a): *He always rings me when I’m out ... like “are you behaving yourself?” ... Like I should feel him when he’s away...*

Older brother (14a): *Well, I got a mobile and he’s got a mobile so I’ll be playing tennis and finish my tennis match and Dad’s calling, “Hi Dad”, “What was the score?”*

Younger brother (11a): *He tries to protect like on the phone like “better be behaving yourself” and all that.*

Older brother (14a): *Yeh, lots ...”you better be behaving yourself”*

However, there may potentially be some disadvantage to FIFO fathers maintaining the family discipline role, including an over-reliance on delayed punishment or a *wait-till-Dad-gets-home* discipline strategy. For one of the boys interviewed, the excitement of his father’s return was complicated by unresolved discipline issues.

Sometimes he can get really angry with me because it depends on how I behave when Mum’s home, just with me and [sister]. Well, Mum usually tells Dad ... so then he gets be angry at me when he gets home. He can be tough on me.

(boy, 10d)

My brother like he gets told off lots of times when Dad's here so it kinda different cos Dad's more telling off [him], more than Mum. (his sister, 9)

7.3.5 Social support.

She's friends with everyone cos she's got to have those connections to us around. She'll ring up such-an-such, "they'll take you here", "they'll drop you".

(girl, 16a)

The children's perceptions of individual and family social support was explored by asking them about their friends, their extended family and external practical services that the family relied on when fathers were away. From the children's discussions, three main sub-themes emerged: 1) the self-reliant family, 2) minimal peer support, 3) community misconceptions.

7.3.5.1 The self-reliant family.

I don't need any help. I just try and do it myself. (boy 13a)

Addressing the issue of practical and extended social support, most of the children described their family needing and receiving relatively minimal external support when fathers were away, and they often described their "in-house" family coping strategies to manage paternal absences. These strategies included their mothers taking on additional family roles, children taking up extra duties, or delaying actions till "Dad get's back". However with prompting, most of the children reported some form of regular external support for their family during paternal absences, including sourcing the extended family, grandparents or neighbours for assistance, and employing professional assistance (e.g., household cleaners, gardeners).

I think we're all pretty ... we do everything ourselves but if it's really that big then Dad will come home to sort it out and stuff like that. But um ... I think we manage ourselves pretty well. (girl, 14a)

But now we're used to it [paternal absence], take turns I'll help [brother], [he] will help [sister] whenever she [Mum] needs it and we'll pitch in whenever it has to be done. (boy, 15a)

It may be helpful to consider the children's perception of family self-reliance in terms of Forsyth and Gramling's (1990) four family management strategies: 1) alternate authority, 2) conflict, 3) replacement, and 4) the periodic guest. The children's responses indicated that they see themselves as taking a "replacement" role in the family unit, particularly the older adolescents. The adolescent children in these FIFO families described assisting mothers in the running of the family and being responsible for younger siblings. As a consequence, some of the older children interviewed described a period of role re-adjustment on their father's return to the household.

Sometimes when he comes back, I'm still the same ... I forget that when he gets back he's sorta the boss ... [I] adapt pretty quickly to when he's away to when he's here. (boy, 15b)

Paradoxically, when discussing social support for the family when fathers were away, some of the children reported seeing less of their extended family, who were more likely to be available and involved when their fathers returned home.

When Dad's not here we don't see any relatives at all, unless of course it's a birthday or something. (girl, 13a)

Yeh, the house is pretty empty when he's away and then, when he is here, we have quite a lot of people over. (boy, 15b)

Several of the older children also expressed a sense of embarrassment when their family could no longer operate independently when fathers were away, and required additional external support from friends and neighbours.

It feels bad though, cos sometimes I feel bad about asking people because then it would be like a nuisance to them. Just like sometimes when we used to ask people to take me to work so we had to work out other systems. (girl, 15a)

7.3.5.2 Peer support.

They don't know what it's like ... it's different. (boy, 10d)

While friends are an important source of emotional support for children, peer support may be more complicated for children in FIFO families. The children

interviewed were relatively ambivalent about sharing the details of their family changes with their friends, and most observed that their father's absences went unnoticed by friends (e.g., "don't care" or "don't notice"). Some of the children recognised their lifestyle was *different* to their peers and this unfamiliarity made it more difficult for their friends to understand the emotional ups and downs associated with their father's arrivals and departures or to understand the importance of spending as much time with their fathers when he was at home. One of the girls explained the benefits of having a school friend whose father was also FIFO-employed.

It's good cos someone else knows what it's like ... you just feel like you can talk about things ... like maybe if you've done some things with your Dad like gone out to the movies, like when you miss him and stuff. (girl, 12a)

On the other hand, several of the older children believed that their father's FIFO employment impressed their friends, and described it as a "cool", adventurous, and even a mysterious type of job. One of the adolescent girls humorously explained how her best friend took a whole year to meet her father.

Yes ... they think it's really weird cos you don't get to see your Dad every day, they won't want that to happen to them. (girl, 10a)

Finally, observations from the children's interviews indicated that sibling support may be an important source of social support for children in FIFO families. Although not directly addressed by the current project, the children interviewed in family groups displayed a shared experience of the FIFO lifestyle, recalled each other's stories, and appeared to share a similar understanding of life in a FIFO family. However, sibling support may not be consistently beneficial. For example, two boys who participated in the study asked to be interviewed separately to their sisters.

7.3.5.3 Community attitudes.

During two family interviews, five of the children discussed the community attitudes to FIFO employment, without direct prompting from the researcher. These children had dealt first-hand with people's assumption of their family's wealth and were aware of the pejorative stereotypes of the rich, materialistic FIFO employee and the

overburdened FIFO mother, which were in contrast to their own more realistic and modest FIFO experiences.

Sister (16a): *I also ... I don't know, I think other people help sort of stereotype us like "the poor mother" has to ... cos the husband's away and she has to put up with this and I'm like ...*

Younger brother (11a): *And people predict us to be so rich cos our Dad's like that ... but lives in a house and not that rich.*

Older brother (14a): *You get quite a lot of people you just meet say what's your father work as ... do? And you say he's a miner fly-in fly-out. "Oh, he must be rich" ... not sure, probably just cos it's a boom and high pay, demand and supply and that...*

Older sister (15b): *Cos that's what everyone assumes that just because you know ... that's why we never tell anyone that my Dad works at the mines ... cos they automatically assume that he's earning big bucks but we have a mortgage, we have lots of debts, no debts but ...*

Younger sister (14b): *I told my teachers cos they asked what your parents' work ... like Mum's a nurse and Dad works at the mines and they were like ... wow, they must be earning a lot of money.*

7.3.6 Paternal FIFO employment.

He drives around pretty much and sets up bombs. (boy, 11a)

During the interviews, the children's knowledge of their father's FIFO employment was explored. Although children could describe the location and the basic activities of his job, the majority were unable to describe their father's FIFO employment in detail. In contrast, the children were able to discuss their father's everyday onsite life in greater detail (e.g., accommodation, meals, recreation). According to most of the children, their father's accommodation as "small" or "little", and food was "good" and abundant, and during the interviews, they enjoyed recounting the fun and adventurous stories their fathers had shared with them about his working life.

But now he's fulltime, he was his own room and it's very small, like really small. He has a little bed and a little cupboard. (girl, 14a)

He got to rescue a turtle, it was caught in a fishing net that another ship had put down. (girl, 13d)

Once they actually got this blow-up pool and they're always having beach parties and stuff and my sisters like "that's so goofy, a beach party on an oil rig"
(boy, 10b)

Several of the children had visited their father while he was working onsite, and were familiar with the facilities and daily routines of a FIFO mining operation. These children described their father's work and the work environment with awe and admiration (e.g., "it was really amazing what they did").

But once when we went there [the mine site] for Christmas ... I thought it was really amazing how big it was and stuff ... I think he does above ground.
(girl, 9c)

We saw ... especially when you're like far away and you can see it looks pretty small but when you see a truck and you know how big those trucks are ... You think, wow, it's got to be really big. (girl, 13a)

Many of the children were also aware of the different resources companies that their fathers had worked for, and had an understanding of the high job mobility in the resources industry. Most of the children interviewed had experienced their fathers changing companies or positions for a range of reasons including higher pay, more time-off, and better onsite living conditions.

The job he has now or the job he used to have 6 months ago? (girl, 13b)
Yeh, cos he was away for longer, he had another job when I was 10, he was away for about 3 weeks and home for 3 weeks and so that one was a bit too long. That was hard, they didn't have very good reception up there so you couldn't ring him as much and stuff. Dad saw another job in the paper and took that one.
(girl, 12a)

Overall, the children demonstrated a mature understanding about the necessity for parental employment and for their father's choice of FIFO employment.

I think it would be ... make everything easier if he was at home sorta thing ... yeh, but there's not any mines down here. (boy, 10c)

I think that's what's life's got to be ... if you want to live properly you've got to earn it ... can't just live like crazy. (boy, 14a)

I'm the youngest and I'm not that young, like we understand that he gotta to go away and he's gotta come back. (girl, 13c)

7.3.7 Children's future employment.

The participating children were asked about their aspirations for future employment and most responded with gender-specific job expectations. The majority of the boys interviewed wanted to be sports stars, engineers, mechanics, or builders, and the girls wanted to be teachers, hairdressers, in a creative profession (e.g., author, illustrator, fashion-buyer, singer) or a health profession (e.g., nurse, counsellor). Two of the boys also expressed interest in becoming artists or actors. On the possibility of future FIFO employment, several of the older adolescents spoke positively about working in the mining industry.

Yeh, Dad's Dad ... miner, Dad ... miner, Dad's brother... miner, Dad's uncle ... a miner, in the mining industry. So basically one of us sorta has to be ...
(boy, 14a)

He told me the other week, yeh, you should come up there's so many women in here now, you don't just have to mine, there's so many other things ...
(girl, 16a)

However, the majority of the children interviewed believed FIFO work arrangements would be unsatisfactory for them and that they would find extended periods of time away from family and friends distressing and challenging.

I really wouldn't like to do what he does, how you miss so much stuff ... 6 weeks. I couldn't do that, or do a certain amount of weeks away then back, I couldn't do that, I don't reckon. I'd find it too hard, I don't like being away from people.
(boy, 15b)

I don't like it. Not seeing ... if I had a family or something, I wouldn't be able to see my family and my friends and stuff like that. (boy, 12a)

No, well, you wouldn't be able to hear their voices and stuff like that, you wouldn't be able to see them for too long. And you're usually just by yourself, you don't have any relatives near you. (girl, 9c)

7.3.8 Children's advice.

It's not that easy, it changes things ... it changes from when they're home to when they fly out ... You get tired ... they're coming home and changing things. (boy, 10d)

Finally, the children were asked what advice they would offer to a friend whose father was beginning FIFO employment for the first time. The content of children's responses paralleled the main themes that had emerged from the semi-structured interviews: 1) change and adaptation, 2) the emotional impact of paternal absence, 3) appreciating time with fathers, and 4) supporting mothers at home. One pre-adolescent boy had recently supported a school friend whose father had started FIFO employment and openly discussed his friend's distress.

Cos last year, he was crying and stuff and now he's just a little bit sad ... Last year he was crying a bit at school but doesn't cry here anymore. Because he lives near our school and can see his father's taxi leave so the teacher always lets him see his Dad's taxi leave so that's good for him. Sometimes he still gets a bit sad and sometimes he talks about it to me. (boy, 10b)

7.3.8.1 Change and adaptation: "you get used to it".

Children believed it was important to inform their friend about the realities of employment-related paternal absences (e. g., "tell them what it is like"). In particular, the children would share their experience of the emotional impact of their fathers going away to work. They would tell their friend to expect to be "sad" and to "miss" their fathers, but they would also reassure their friend that he/she would inevitably adjust to the FIFO lifestyle over time.

It's not that bad ... and it's bad at first and then you get used to it. (girl, 13a)
Telling him it's not that bad that at first you'll feel sad but and it will get better
... stuff like that. (boy, 10c)

Some of the children believed it was worthwhile to promote the positive side of the FIFO lifestyle, by focussing on the benefits of their father's employment - the quality time together (e.g., "when he's at home ... he's there for you"), and the extra money coming into the family (e.g., "just think about the money").

Look on the bright side, lots of good things happen ... like your Dad gets to spend lots of time with you than he would have. (boy, 10a)

7.3.8.2 Time and contact with fathers.

Although the quality time together was one of the acknowledged assets of the FIFO lifestyle, many of the children also believed it was important not to squander available time with their fathers. In giving advice, they emphasised making the most of the time together with fathers, and ensuring that a consistent and meaningful communication was maintained when fathers were away at work.

Just to make the most of it when he's a home, cos when he's not, it's not the greatest of times. (boy, 15b)

Make sure when you're on the phone, you like talk to your parent heaps ... don't be like hi! bye!. (girl, 13b)

Just um ... try in keep in contact with your Dad as much as you can. (girl, 12a)

7.3.8.3 Supporting Mum and being responsible.

Many of the older children also suggested that children new to the FIFO lifestyle should be prepared for the changes in their parents' expectations of them and they should anticipate taking on more responsibility in the family, because it was important to support mothers when fathers were away at work.

If it was one of my mates, I'll let them know, they've got to be ready to help out around the house more ... like help their younger siblings if they need or just jobs around the house to help their mother. (boy, 15a)

Look after your Mum ... (girl, 16a)

You gotta get use to like doing stuff more yourself ... more independent stuff.

(boy, 14a)

7.4 Discussion

The overall aim of the thematic analysis was to gain a detailed picture of the everyday life of children in FIFO families and to access their thoughts and feelings about regular family disruption and paternal absences. As well, I was interested in the children's attitudes and expectations about work, in general. While the children described negative emotions and experiences associated with their FIFO lifestyle, the majority had found strengths and benefits of this way of life for themselves and their families. Many of the children provided rich, colourful, and humorous accounts of their family life and their FIFO experience. However, observation and reports from three pre-adolescent boys (aged between 10 and 12 years) indicated that regular paternal absences and family re-adjustment were problematic for these children.

Consistent with the notion that adaptation is a process that occurs over time, most of the children in these FIFO families were able to recall earlier times in their childhood when being separated from their fathers was more emotionally and practically challenging. Adaptation is also not a static process and the children interviewed also identified ongoing family and life stressors that had exacerbated individual and family stress and tension. The double ABCX model (Lavee et al., 1985; see Figure 3. 2) and the concept of family resilience (Walsh, 2002) were helpful frameworks to understand the process of family adaptation to the FIFO lifestyle. These models assisted in: 1) explaining the role of *pile-up* stressors in FIFO families (e.g., roster changes, family illness), 2) identifying the personal and family resources for these FIFO families, and 3) identifying the family perceptions of paternal FIFO employment. Figure 7.3 outlines the main life and family stressors, personal and family resources and family perceptions that the children discussed during the interviews.

The key stressors for these children in FIFO families included the initial transition into the FIFO lifestyle, the negative work characteristics (e.g., the length of time away), family unit inconsistency, age and developmental considerations, maternal employment, and family crises. According to the double ABCX model, families respond to such life stressors by modifying their resources and perceptions, in an effort to adapt

to the new situation (Lavee et al., 1985; Walsh, 2002). These modifications can be positive and assist adaptation or negative and contribute to additional family stress. Examining the themes arising from the children's interviews, it appears that these children had developed new behavioural resources (e.g., life skills), emotional maturity (e.g., distress regulation) and new interpersonal abilities (e.g., responsibility, independence) as a response to employment-related paternal absences. The development of these additional personal resources was also associated with a sense of increased self-worth for many of the children interviewed. On the other hand, the children also identified times of poor emotional and behavioural regulation, and heightened stress, which for some children was related to their over-responsibility and concern for family and maternal well-being. The children were also able to recognise changes to their family in response to FIFO work arrangements, including alternating family households, family management strategies, and the perception of family self-reliance.

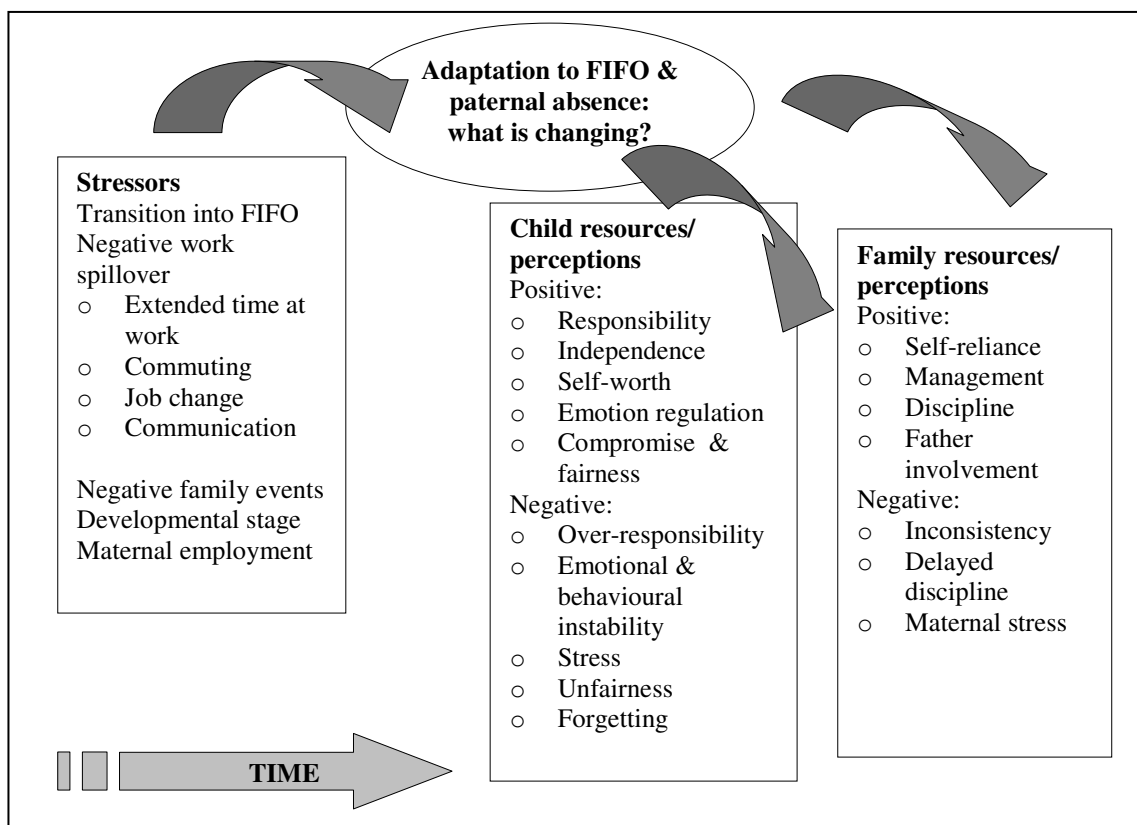


Figure 7.3 Key stressors, child and family resources related to the adaptation to the FIFO lifestyle derived from children's interviews.

Consistent with previous work/family research (Mauthner et al., 2000; McKee et al., 2003; Näsman, 2003; Pocock, 2006), the children interviewed for this section of the study expressed opinions about parental working demands and had direct experience of work/family imbalance. They were pragmatic and supportive of parental work obligations and expressed a mature understanding of the ongoing compromises between work and family commitments. The children described their changing role in the family when fathers were away, the importance of supporting their mothers, and could identify work/family imbalance in their lives as a result of FIFO arrangements (e. g., extended absence, missed special events). Although they generally approved of their father's employment choice, the children's overwhelming attitude towards FIFO employment as a future work option was negative. This pejorative view of FIFO employment was also found in the study of children in offshore petroleum families in Aberdeen (Mauthner et al., 2000), who described their father's work as "dirty" and "dangerous". In contrast, the children in the current study believed the most significant disadvantage of FIFO employment was the extended periods of time away from family, and its impact on personal relationships and the connection to community.

In the following chapter, findings and observations from the three stages of the research - the quantitative study of children and parents in FIFO families, the content analysis of child and parent perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of the FIFO lifestyle and the thematic analysis of semi-structured child interviews - are compared and discussed, and overall conclusions are drawn regarding children's experience of paternal FIFO employment.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Back and forth, back and forth ... it's silly. It's just a bit ... it must be annoying going there and coming back and like in a couple of weeks you're going back up again. (boy, 10 on FIFO commuting)

Over the last few decades, there has been growing research interest in the effects of parental employment schedules on children's lives (Mauthner et al., 2000; McKee et al., 2003; Näsman, 2003; Pocock, 2006). The research has become increasingly relevant as the nature of employment has changed, in response to the economic demands of our 24/7 economy (Presser, 2004; Strazdins et al., 2004). In Australia, more people are working longer hours, working evening and night shifts, and working away from home (ABS, 2006; Pocock, 2003). As part of this enquiry, there has been a smaller body of research addressing specific employment types that require working parents to be away from their families for substantial periods of time, including the research on military personnel (Eastman et al., 1990; Jensen et al., 1996), seamen and fishermen (Forsyth & Gramling, 1990; Thomas, 2003), business travellers (Espino et al., 2002; Westman et al., 2008), and the FIFO workforce in the resources industry, which was the focus of the current study.

In the Australian mining and petroleum industry, FIFO employment has been increasingly used by onshore and offshore operations, and it is currently estimated that nearly 50% of the mining workforce are employed on FIFO schedules (CMEWA, 2005). Over the next ten years, this figure is expected to rise, with potential implications for individuals, families and the community (CMEWA, 2005; 2008). Of particular interest in the current study were the implications of FIFO employment for children and their families. As the FIFO workforce remains predominately male, the children in FIFO families experience regular separations from their fathers or periods of *employment-related paternal absence* (Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2008). Previous research examining the effects of employment-related paternal absence has indicated that children may be adversely affected by the periodic loss of contact with their fathers, by compromising the father-child relationship (Adler, 1983; Bumpus et al., 1999; Davis et al., 2006;

Repetti, 1994) and contributing to emotional issues (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003a; Strazdins et al., 2004). Employment-related parental absence has also been associated with negative family outcomes, including parental distress (Hosking & Western, 2008; Keown, 2005; Reynolds, 2004), marital relationship dissatisfaction (Gent, 2004; Presser, 2000), family dysfunction (Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2008; Sibbel, 2001; Eastman et al., 1990), and parenting stress (Gallegos, 2006; Parkes et al., 2005; Reynolds, 2004).

The current study of children's experiences of the FIFO lifestyle examined children's well-being in relation to their family environment and paternal FIFO employment, and gathered children's perceptions of and attitudes to their parent's work arrangements and their own work aspirations. Many of the participating children had successfully adapted to employment-related paternal absences and attributed some benefit to their father's regular absence from the family. Although the majority of children in the study had become accustomed to regular separations from their fathers, it was not without challenges and periods of distress. Therefore, the anecdotal and community concern (Cusworth, 2007; Irving, 2006; Quartermaine, 2006) about the potential risks of paternal FIFO employment for children may be too simplistic in its understanding of the complex interaction between parental work demands and children. Nevertheless, FIFO work arrangements may act as a unique stressor for families, compounding existing stressors and negatively impacting on family functioning and children's well-being. In this chapter, the findings of the mixed-method research are discussed, in relation to the theoretical and real-world implications for children in FIFO families.

8.1 Key Findings

8.1.1 Children and paternal absence.

In general, the children participating in the study were well-adjusted to the FIFO lifestyle. The majority reported healthy emotional-behavioural functioning and reported an overall satisfaction with their father's FIFO work arrangements. However, boys reported more externalising symptoms (e.g., conduct problems, hyperactivity) than girls, and boys' hyperactivity symptoms were above Australian norms. Of the participating children, approximately 10% reported emotional-behavioural symptoms in the clinical

range which was consistent with community norms (Mellor, 2005). Comparing the quantitative and qualitative results, some inconsistency was observed between the children's healthy well-being and their qualitative descriptions of negative emotions associated with paternal absences from the family. The inconsistency is best explained by the different methodologies. The quantitative study investigated symptoms of emotional-behavioural dysfunction while the qualitative studies attempted to access the range of children's emotional responses, perceptions and experiences. So although many of the children did not experience clinical levels of distress, they did experience a regular cycle of emotional responses related to paternal separation and reunion, which was similar to the cycle of maternal emotional responses mapped by Gallegos (2006) in her study of FIFO couples. The children described a period of initial excitement and happiness on their father's return, followed by a period of tension as fathers re-entered the household. In this stage, the children described confusion regarding household roles and routines, and potential disagreements with fathers, and between parents. A period of *normal* life returned after this transition before children prepared for their father's departure, which was marked by feelings of sadness. Paternal departures were perceived differently by the children. The pre-adolescent children were more likely to express distress or anger, while the adolescents described feeling both sadness and relief on their father's departure, and found benefits in the periods of paternal absence (e.g., respite from the *24/7 father*, relaxation of family roles and routines). Finally, the children described a range of negative emotions during the periods of paternal absence, including loneliness, boredom, frustration and stress related to one-parent family life.

The children clearly endorsed two key benefits of the FIFO lifestyle - more money and more time with fathers, which were consistent with findings from adult FIFO research (Clifford, 2009; Gallegos, 2006; Reynolds, 2004; Watts, 2004). Many of the children believed the *quality time* with their fathers when he was at home was superior to the experience of their peers whose fathers worked standard hours. Nevertheless, many of the children expressed the desire to see their fathers more often, especially the children whose fathers worked away for extended periods (i.e., ≥ 4 weeks). Despite their reported satisfaction with paternal FIFO work arrangements, the children reported a wide range of negative implications related to paternal absences. These included their

own negative mood and emotions, the limited access to their fathers, and inconveniences to their family life (e.g., transport hassles) and lifestyle (e.g., restricted activities). The boys in the study were more likely to report problems related to the loss of their father's emotional and practical support. In particular, the boys missed engaging in physical play/sport with their fathers, missed sharing same-sex interests (e.g., fishing, football) and found their options for recreation were more limited when fathers were away at work. Although not conclusive, this gender trend may indicate that boys in FIFO families negotiate paternal absences differently than girls.

8.1.2 Mothers and maternal stress.

Of significance in the study's findings were the parental reports of emotional distress. Fifteen of the participating parents (9 women, 3 men) endorsed overall emotional symptoms in the abnormal range, and reported more emotional difficulties as compared to adult participants in related FIFO research (Clifford, 2009; Sibbel, 2010). The discrepancy may be attributed to the differences in family composition between the studies. The earlier studies (Clifford, 2009; Sibbel, 2010) comprised a combination of family types (i.e., single-parent, no children, older children) while in the current sample, all participating men and women were married with school-aged children.

One of the important findings from the study was the prevalence of high maternal stress in these FIFO families. Over one third of the women reported experiencing moderate to severe levels of stress, including symptoms of tension, over-arousal, impatience, irritability, and an inability to relax (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). The women reported increased stress related to their extra parenting and household workloads when partners were away and related to the personal and family re-adjustments when their partners returned from work. The high incidence of maternal stress in the current study was inconsistent with the findings from similar quantitative FIFO studies (Clifford, 2009; Sibbel, 2010). Additionally, it was noted that the majority of participating women were also employed outside the home. Compared to a similar international sample of FIFO families (McKee et al., 2003), there were substantially more mothers in this study who were both caring for children and engaged in paid employment. Therefore, the emotional distress reported by the participating mothers may be the result of the burden of sole-parenting *in combination* with the women's

existing work and family demands, which is consistent with Presser's research (2000) that found dual-earning couples with children, who worked non-standard hours, were more vulnerable to relationship conflict and marital instability.

In the content analysis, the women in the study endorsed more disadvantages to the FIFO lifestyle than their partners, and described the negative impact of sole-parenting and family re-adjustment challenges. In similar work-family research with children, McKee et al., (2003) and Näsman (2003) observed that mothers played an important role in "absorbing" work/family tension and were often responsible for stabilising the family after changes or crisis (e.g., retrenchment, relocation). Therefore, the high incidence of maternal stress in the participating FIFO families may indicate that FIFO mothers may attempt to "buffer" the strain associated with regular family disruption for the rest of their family. The children in the study were sensitive to their mother's changing emotional and physical states, and expressed concern about the additional domestic and parenting workload for their mothers when fathers were away. This attunement between the children and their mothers was confirmed by the quantitative results that found a significant relationship between child and maternal reports of family functioning, but not between child and paternal reports.

8.1.3 Fathers and paternal involvement.

Overall, the fathers in the current study were emotionally healthy, and endorsed healthy family functioning, relationship satisfaction, and reported less parental conflict than their partners. The men reported significantly less stress than their partners, and their anxiety levels were significantly below expected norms. The quantitative findings were consistent with the parents' qualitative observations that FIFO employment had contributed to men's improved well-being, as a result of the extended periods of time-off and reduced work spillover. For many of the participating fathers, FIFO employment provided opportunities to be better involved in their children's everyday lives, in particular with school and sporting activities. Nevertheless, fathers were acutely aware of the amount of time they were absent from their children's lives (e.g., "miss out on half their growing up"). The importance of the father-child relationship to the children in these FIFO families was highlighted by the predictive relationship between the children's reports of parental care and their emotional-behavioural functioning.

Understandably, the children's perceptions of parental attachment (i.e., maternal and paternal) was related to their well-being. However, it was the children's perceptions of their fathers' warmth and nurturance that significantly predicted their emotional well-being. Common to both the children and fathers participating in the study was a shared perception that the additional time together had translated to greater intimacy and a closer father-child relationship, than experienced by traditionally employed families.

While mothers in FIFO families have previously expressed concern about the inconsistent parenting roles (Gallegos, 2006; Parkes et al., 2005; Reynolds, 2004), the majority of children in this study considered their fathers to be the authoritarian in the family and to be responsible for the discipline within the family. One downside of the fathers retaining this parental discipline role may be an over-reliance on delayed punishment, which was observed to be affecting at least one pre-adolescent boy's relationship with his father.

8.1.4 Family and parenting.

While the majority of parents in the study quantitatively endorsed healthy family and relationship functioning, they frequently described family life as "inconsistent", and over 50% of the participating parents reported clinical levels of parenting disagreement over child-rearing issues. The inconsistency of FIFO family life was related to changing family structure, changing household roles/routines and differing parenting styles, and contributed to increased tension and confusion within the family. The theme of an *alternating family household* also emerged from the children's interviews. According to the children, family life when fathers were away was "quiet" and incomplete compared to their "proper" and complete family life when fathers were at home. While parenting conflict has been associated with adverse effects for children's well-being (Dadds & Powell, 1991; Morawska et al., 2009), the high levels of parenting disagreement found in this sample of FIFO families may also be reflective of the parents' ongoing concern for their children, who are exposed to regular paternal absences. Unlike typical working families where the family structure remains relatively constant, parents in FIFO families may need to openly communicate their parenting expectations with one another, during periods of transition and absence. In two recent FIFO family studies, the strength of family communication was highlighted as an important contributing factor to healthy

family functioning (Clifford, 2009; Taylor & Simmonds, 2009). However, findings in the current study were inconclusive, with reported parenting conflict being significantly related to maternal reports of children's well-being but not to children's self-reported well-being.

Finally, one of the important themes emerging from the thematic analysis of the child interviews was the children's perception of their family as self-reliant and resilient. As a result, the participating children often viewed themselves as active participants in family management when their fathers were away, and expressed varying degrees of responsibility for family functioning. While the majority of children responded positively to their additional family responsibilities, there was also an understanding that they could feel burdened and over-responsible in this role. Family therapists have previously identified employment-related paternal absence as one of the potential at-risk situations for children's parentification (Byng-Hall, 2008).

8.1.5 FIFO and paternal work demands.

Work/family literature has often conceptualised a parent's engagement in non-standard working hours (e.g., long hours, shiftwork, long-distance commuting) as a trade-off between the financial remuneration and their time with family. However, the families participating in this study shared a common belief that paternal FIFO employment provided superior quantity and quality of family time, along with improved financial security. Many of the children and parents believed that paternal FIFO employment had reduced negative work spillover and provided extra, unstructured time for fathers to spend with their children. This positive belief in the FIFO lifestyle was shared and communicated between family members, and can be seen as a form of *benefit-finding* (Snyder & Dinoff, 1999; Tennen & Affleck, 1999). Benefit-finding can operate as an adaptive coping strategy and assist children to adjust to employment-related paternal absences. The children in the study demonstrated a mature awareness of the positive and negative implications of paternal FIFO employment for their family, and were sensitive to the emotional and physical demands on parents, especially their mothers. At the same time, the children also *monitored* paternal absences and appeared to *weigh up* their father's absences from home against his presence in the family. It was also observed that the children's frustration and disappointment about paternal absences

was rarely directed toward their fathers, rather children blamed FIFO employment or the resources companies for their father's unavailability.

8.2 Theoretical Implications

Two theoretical models were used as the basic frameworks to assist in understanding children's experience of the FIFO lifestyle. The first model, originating from non-standard working hours research (Strazdins et al., 2006), proposed that atypical parental employment can adversely affect children's well-being, as partially mediated through the family environment. The results from the quantitative study showed a trend for the maternal-reports of parent well-being and family environment factors to influence children's well-being but not for paternal-reported variables. Additionally, the paternal FIFO work variables were unrelated to children's well-being and overall, any causal relationship between paternal work schedules, family environment, and children's well-being remained unclear.

The second model, the ABCX model of family adaptation (Lavee et al., 1985; McCubbin et al., 1980) was used to conceptualise the personal and family changes in response to paternal FIFO employment. The model originally used to explain family responses to military relocation, successfully extrapolated the individual (e.g., children's emotional and behavioural responses) and family factors (e.g., sole-parenting, family resilience) that were important to adaptation or maladaptation in FIFO families. The model also assisted in explaining the significance of *pile-up demands* or ongoing stressors for these families (e.g., ageing parents, maternal employment, child illness). In particular, key family resilience factors as defined by Walsh (1996; 2002) - that is, a family's shared beliefs, their organisational flexibility and ability to openly communicate - were consistent with the themes that emerged from the qualitative studies.

In the current study, the children and their parents shared common understanding about the benefits and costs of the FIFO lifestyle. The children held positive beliefs about their family's resilience and ability to manage and cope with the challenges of regular family disruption (i.e., the *self-reliant family* theme). The nature of the FIFO lifestyle demands substantial flexibility in family organisation, as the family fluctuates between two-parent and one-parent systems. Although there was evidence that

employment-related paternal absence could influence children's positive personal growth, the demands of FIFO employment could also interact with other family stressors to create periods of imbalance and maladaptation. For the children in the study, these additional stressors included inconsistent FIFO work schedules, family illness, family relocation and a house break-in.

The quantity and quality of communication between family members was important, and the majority of participating parents were in daily contact while FIFO workers were away. In contrast, over half of the children did not speak to their working fathers on a daily basis, and reported incidences of inadequate communication. The long-distance communication could be time-restrictive, lack immediacy and be inappropriate for intimate discussions with their fathers. Although there has been substantial improvement in telecommunications on onshore and offshore operations over the last two decades, many FIFO families have limited access to advanced video communication technologies such as Skype. Recent research on children's responses to video communication with parents suggest that younger children (under 5 years of age) tolerate short separation from parents more effectively with a "virtually-present" parent than alone (Tarasuik, Galligan, & Kaufman, 2011). Video communication may provide an important means of maintaining the child-parent relationships when a parent is physically unavailable.

8.3 Clinical Implications

In supporting families under stress, Walsh (1996) argued it would be more productive to redirect clinical intervention from the problem issues to improving and supporting family resilience. In the case of families choosing FIFO employment, changes to the family structure and to family functioning can create additional stress for individual members and the family as a whole. An additional layer of strain can also arise from the community's assumptions about working families. Certainly, the children and parents in the current study were aware of the pejorative community stereotypes and attitudes toward families choosing FIFO employment (Quartermaine, 2006; Toohey, 2008).

The children participating in the study were actively engaged in negotiating the family changes that occurred during the FIFO roster cycle and were observant of the

implications of paternal FIFO employment on the family. As such, the promotion of effective and adequate communication within FIFO families remains an imperative. The current study indicated that while parents are communicating regularly, children in FIFO families are less likely to communicate with their fathers on a daily basis. A therapeutic approach concentrating on a whole family intervention addressing family belief systems, encouraging flexibility of family roles and responsibilities, and promoting effective communication and problem-solving is indicated for FIFO families experiencing difficulty (Walsh, 1996; 2002).

The presence of maternal stress and maternal work overload for partners of FIFO employees remain consistent findings in the FIFO family research (Gallegos, 2006; Parkes et al., 2005; Reynolds, 2004; Sibbel, 2001;2010, Watts, 2004), and establishing accessible and appropriate supports for mothers managing families alone remains crucial to a family's successful transition into the FIFO lifestyle. In response to previous FIFO research findings (Sibbel, 2001), there have been several community and government programs to support FIFO families, in particular mothers and young children. These initiatives include Ngala's *Parents Working Away* workshops and the booklet, *Support for Mum when Dad works away* (Department for Communities, 2009). The findings from the current study indicate these initiatives remain important and timely.

8.4 Research Limitations

The key limitations in the present study have been discussed in earlier chapters and have resulted from the size of the participant sample and the nature of the participants. The final sample of FIFO families in the study was less than anticipated. Although there was substantial community and media interest in the research project, the recruitment of whole families for the study was a challenging process and family agreement on research participation was inconsistent. Two main issues influenced the final composition of participating FIFO families and, in turn, influenced the study's findings. The first issue was the concern expressed by some resources companies and FIFO families about my own motivation for conducting the research. People were sensitive to the community stereotypes of the FIFO lifestyle and understandably were concerned about their children's well-being. As a result, I often experienced negative responses to my recruitment enquires. For example, one mining contractor stated the

recruitment flyer was “too negative” (see Appendix A) and the principal from one metropolitan school stated that the FIFO issue was “too sensitive” for their current school community and declined to be part of the study. These responses were not without some basis. In the early recruitment phase, I was frequently approached by media outlets for a statement about the *negative* effects of paternal FIFO employment for children.

The second issue was related to the nature of the participating FIFO families. Overall, the families were relatively high functioning and remained committed to FIFO employment. Although there was a diverse range of socio-economic factors (e.g., education, job description, income), the community recruitment meant that the participating families were self-selected, and consequently those families who were struggling with the FIFO lifestyle were less likely to participate in the research. As an example, one mother who had expressed interest in participating in the study later withdrew because of sudden relationship difficulties with her husband. As a result, the participating families were skewed toward positive adaptation to the FIFO lifestyle, and consequently, the current study may have only captured a snapshot of children’s experiences in FIFO families. It should be noted that participant recruitment has been a significant issue for previous FIFO research (Clifford, 2009; Sibbel, 2001; Taylor & Simmonds, 2009).

Finally, the participant numbers influenced the choice of statistical analyses, which were restricted to non-parametric methods for the quantitative study. The end result of the smaller sample was a reduction in the statistical power in the quantitative analyses, which may have contributed to less sensitive findings. The reported calculated effect sizes indicated that the hypothesised effects of paternal FIFO employment on family environment and child well-being were in the small ($r > .1$) to medium ($r > .3$) range (Cohen, 1988), and significant results were only found for the larger effect sizes (e.g., parental attachment, $r = .73$, maternal stress, $r = .41$).

8.5 Recommendations for Future Research

The research investigating the effects of paternal FIFO employment for children is relatively recent and it is recommended that future research is conducted to replicate and extend the current and previous findings. By improving recruitment and engaging

larger numbers of FIFO families, it would be anticipated that the child and family functioning would exhibit greater diversity, which would provide a broader picture of the FIFO family experience. A larger sample size would assist in confirming trends found in this study, including clarifying the effect of paternal FIFO employment for boys and clarifying the relationship between maternal functioning and children's well-being, and would provide an opportunity to test theoretical models, such as Strazdins et al.'s mediation model (2006). The current study was also limited to complete coupled families. However, there are many different family types involved in the mining and petroleum industry, each with unique stressors and work/family demands, including estranged and blended families and families where mothers are FIFO-employed. To complete the broader picture of the FIFO family experience, it is also recommended that future research approach families who have disengaged from FIFO employment in an effort to identify the key factors contributing to a family's decision to cease FIFO employment.

With more participants, future studies could extend the enquiry of the existing research and examine the role of sibling support in children's adaptation to the FIFO lifestyle, the impact of maternal employment on children in FIFO families, and distinguish between the experiences of veteran and non-veteran FIFO families. It is also recommended that future research include younger children as there was some evidence in this study that pre-adolescent children were more vulnerable to paternal absences than older children. It may also be beneficial to include additional psychometric measures for children, including scales of resilience and self-worth.

8.6 Conclusion

This research project was the first mixed-methods study of children's experience of paternal FIFO employment, and the first to gather information from multiple FIFO family members. It demonstrated that primary school-aged children and adolescents in FIFO families have the capacity to adapt to employment-related paternal absence and to utilise personal and family resources to manage the stressors associated with family disruption and separation from their fathers. One of the strengths of the study was the multi-informant information gathered from the families, which permitted children's emotional-behavioural functioning, and perception of family functioning and parental

attachment to be compared to maternal and paternal variables. Extending the study to include a qualitative component provided further detailed information about the children's cycle of emotional responses, their attitudes to intermittent fathering and to the challenges of alternating family systems. Overall, the children demonstrated a pragmatic understanding of paternal employment demands but also expressed some ambivalence about their FIFO lifestyle. For example, the children simultaneously held opposing views about paternal absences as both *loss* and *respite*, and about the sole-parent household, which were described as both *relaxed* and *restrictive*.

The overall findings of the study suggested that paternal FIFO employment does not act as a homogenous risk factor for children although the participating boys appeared to negotiate employment-related paternal absences differently from the girls, and there was some evidence that pre-adolescent boys may be more vulnerable. Of particular concern was the finding of high levels of stress reported by women in the study, which indicated that mothers in FIFO families may "buffer" the strains of regular family disruption from other family members. Nevertheless, the children's overall acceptance of paternal FIFO employment and the evidence of their resilience to employment-related paternal absence remains positive news for current FIFO families and families considering FIFO employment.

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I would be pleased to hear from any copyright owner who has been omitted or
incorrectly acknowledged.

APPENDIX A

Project Recruitment Flyer



CHILDREN AND THE FIFO LIFESTYLE

- new research project -

CAN YOU HELP?

Children in fly-in/fly-out (FIFO) families experience a unique pattern of family life compared to children whose dads return home on a daily basis. As more Western Australians are choosing FIFO employment, the community is recognizing the lifestyle may pose different challenges for families. However, there has been little research on how children think and feel about this way of life and the advantages and disadvantages they encounter.

In an effort to gain greater understanding of children's experiences, I'm conducting research into the impact and implications of the FIFO lifestyle for young people. I expect the research will contribute to our awareness of the strengths and difficulties of this lifestyle and will directly assist individual families, industry and the community.

How you can help ...

I'm looking for families with **children aged between 9 and 15 whose fathers are in FIFO employment in the mining or oil and gas industry**. Children will be asked to complete several questionnaires about how they are feeling and their thoughts about the family and FIFO. To gain a full picture of children's experience, I shall also ask parents to fill out similar questionnaires and a demographic information sheet. Questionnaires should take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

If you and your family are interested in taking part in my study, please contact

Greer Bradbury on:

Phone: 9266 2561

Email: g.bradbury@curtin.edu.au

Your participation in this project would be greatly appreciated.

All information will be confidential and private.

About the researcher

Greer Bradbury is completing her PHD (Clinical Psychology) at Curtin University of Technology. She has gained experience working with children and parents on several research projects at Curtin.

Project Information Sheet



Children and the FIFO lifestyle: Intermittent father absence and the implications for children.

INFORMATION SHEET

Hello to all the family

My name is Greer Bradbury. I am a PHD (Clinical Psychology) student at Curtin University of Technology conducting research on children's experience of long-distance commuting or *fly-in/fly-out* (FIFO) fathers.

What do children think and feel about life in a FIFO family?

While the study acknowledges FIFO lifestyle is a valid option for many families, little research has been carried out on how children think and feel about this way of life and the advantages and disadvantages they encounter. The aim of this study is to assess how children from FIFO families think and feel as compared to children from non-FIFO families.

How?

I am asking children to complete several questionnaires about how they are feeling and their thoughts about the family and FIFO. To gain a full picture of children's experience, parents will be asked to fill out similar questionnaires regarding their feelings, and thoughts of family life and a demographic information sheet. Questionnaires should take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Are there any risks?

Although the questionnaires are not meant to be challenging, some questions regarding self and family may touch on sensitive issues. A list of recommended counselling services will be available. All information will be confidential and private. Identification codes will be used to maintain your privacy.

What are the benefits?

This information will contribute to our understanding of how children adapt to differing family lifestyles and will help industry and health professionals understand these issues from the child's perspective.

What if I change my mind?

Your participation is greatly appreciated and you or your child may withdraw consent at any time without affecting yourselves or the study.

For more information, please contact me directly 266 2561, g.bradbury@curtin.edu.au or my supervisor Professor Jan Piek 9266 7990, j.piek@curtin.edu.au. If you wish to contact someone outside the study please contact Linda Teasdale, Ethics Committee Secretary on 9266 2784. Please keep hold of this letter for later reference

Many thanks!

Child's Questionnaire



About this Booklet

Thank you for taking part in the Children and the Fly-in/Fly-out lifestyle project.

The aim of the study is to understand how young people in fly-in/fly-out families think and feel about themselves, their family and their fathers who work away.

In the booklet, you will find several questionnaires about yourself and your family. Please read the instructions for each set of questions carefully and answer all questions. It should take no longer than 30 minutes to complete.

Remember, there are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Please choose the one answer that best fits for you. Your participation is greatly valued so it is important to decide which of the responses is most like you and select that one option. You should think of your answers as private. The only person to see your answers will be the researchers at Curtin University of Technology and they will keep your answers confidential.

If you have any questions regarding questions in this booklet please call me 9266 2561 or email me g.bradbury@curtin.edu.au

PLEASE RETURN YOUR COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE IN THE REPLY PAID ENVELOPE PROVIDED

Many thanks once again for your time and commitment to answering these questions. Once your completed booklets have been received, your family code will go into the draw for one of 10 family movie passes. Good luck!

Kind Regards

**Greer Bradbury
PHD (Clinical Psychology) candidate
Curtin University of Technology**

ABOUT YOU

C _____

1. Age years months

Date of birth/..... /.....

Boy / Girl *(please circle)*

2. What year of school are you in?

3. Do you have brothers and sister living with you?
(please circle)

YES	I am the ... <i>(please specify)</i>	1 oldest 2 youngest 3 in between
NO		

4. How do you communicate with your dad when he is away at work?

(please circle one or more)

phone/mobile	email	post	Other <i>(please specify)</i>
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5. How often do you talk to your dad when he is away at work?

(please circle one number)

	fortnightly or longer	1
	weekly	2
	twice or more a week	3
	daily	4
	more often	5

6. Is this amount of communication enough for you?

(please circle one)

not at all	somewhat	mostly	definitely
------------	----------	--------	------------

Are you happy with your dad's current work arrangements?

(please circle one)

not at all	somewhat	mostly	definitely
------------	----------	--------	------------

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU

For each item, please mark the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True. It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you are not absolutely certain. Please give your answers on the basis of how things have been for you over the last six months.

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
I try to be nice to other people. I care about their feelings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am restless, I cannot stay still for long	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I get a lot of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I usually share with others, for example CDs, games, food	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I get very angry and often lose my temper	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would rather be alone than with people of my age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I usually do as I am told	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I worry a lot	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am constantly fidgeting or squirming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have one good friend or more	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I fight a lot. I can make other people do what I want	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other people my age generally like me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am easily distracted, I find it difficult to concentrate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am nervous in new situations. I easily lose confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am kind to younger children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am often accused of lying or cheating	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other children or young people pick on me or bully me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I often volunteer to help others (parents, teachers, children)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think before I do things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I take things that are not mine from home, school or elsewhere	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I get along better with adults than with people my own age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I have many fears, I am easily scared

I finish the work I'm doing. My attention is good

© Robert Goodman, 2002

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU

Overall, do you think that you have difficulties in any of the following areas: emotions, concentration, behaviour or being able to get along with other people?

No	Yes – minor difficulties	Yes – definite difficulties	Yes – severe difficulties
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you answered “Yes”, please answer the following questions about these difficulties:

How long have these difficulties been present?

Less than a month	1– 5 months	6 -12 months	Over a year
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do the difficulties upset or distress you?

Not at all	A little	A medium amount	A great deal
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do the difficulties interfere with your everyday life in the following areas?

	Not at all	A little	A medium amount	A great deal
HOME LIFE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FRIENDSHIPS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CLASSROOM LEARNING	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LEISURE ACTIVITIES	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do the difficulties make it harder for those around you (families, friends, teachers, etc.)?

Not at all	A little	A medium amount	A great deal
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR FAMILY

These items ask you to think carefully about your family AS A WHOLE.
There are 12 statements about families. Please read each statement carefully and decide how well it describes your own family. Circle the one answer you think most applies to your family as a whole.

1.	Planning family activities is difficult because we misunderstand each other	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2.	In times of crisis we can turn to each other for support	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3.	We cannot talk to each other about the sadness we feel	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4.	Individuals (in the family) are accepted for what they are	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5.	We avoid discussing our fears and concerns	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6.	We express our feelings to each other	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7.	There are lots of bad feelings in our family	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8.	We feel accepted for what we are	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9.	Making decisions is a problem for our family	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
10.	We are able to make decisions about how to solve problems	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
11.	We don't get along well together	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12.	We confide in each other	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

QUESTIONS ABOUT PARENTS

This questionnaire lists various attitudes and behaviours of parents.

Read each statement carefully and then circle the choice next to each statement that seems most true for your FATHER - circle one answer.

Do not spend too much time on any one item.
Remember, this is not a test. There are no right or wrong answers.

Speaks to me with a warm and friendly voice ...	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Does not help me as much as I need . . .	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Lets me do the things I like doing ...	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Is emotionally cold to me ...	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Understands my problems and worries.	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Is affectionate to me	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Likes me to make my own decisions	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Does not want me to grow up	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Tries to control everything I do . . .	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Invades my privacy	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Enjoys talking things over with me . . .	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike

Frequently smiles at me . . .	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Tends to baby me . . .	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Does not seem to understand what I need or want ...	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Lets me decide things for myself ...	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Makes me feel unwanted . . .	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Makes me feel better when I am upset	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Does not talk with me very much . . .	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Tries to make me dependent on him ...	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Feels I cannot look after myself unless he is around . . .	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Gives me as much freedom as I want.	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Lets me go out as much as I want . . .	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Is overprotective of me . . .	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Does not praise me . . .	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Lets me dress in anyway I please . . .	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike

QUESTIONS ABOUT PARENTS

This questionnaire lists various attitudes and behaviours of parents.

Read each statement carefully and then circle the choice next to each statement that seems most true for your MOTHER - circle one answer.

Do not spend too much time on any one item.
Remember, this is not a test. There are no right or wrong answers.

Speaks to me with a warm and friendly voice ...	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Does not help me as much as I need	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Lets me do the things I like doing	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Is emotionally cold to me ...	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Understands my problems and worries.	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Is affectionate to me	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Likes me to make my own decisions	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Does not want me to grow up ...	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Tries to control everything I do	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Invades my privacy	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Enjoys talking things over with me	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike

Frequently smiles at me . . .	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Tends to baby me . . .	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Does not seem to understand what I need or want ...	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Lets me decide things for myself	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Makes me feel unwanted . . .	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Makes me feel better when I am upset ...	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Does not talk with me very much . . .	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Tries to make me dependent on her ...	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Feels I cannot look after myself unless she is around . . .	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Gives me as much freedom as I want ...	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Lets me go out as much as I want	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Is overprotective of me . . .	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Does not praise me . . .	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike
Lets me dress in anyway I please	Very Like	Moderately Like	Moderately Unlike	Very Unlike

☺ Thank you ☺

Father's Questionnaire



Children and the Fly-in/Fly-out lifestyle: Intermittent father absence and the implications for children.

Consent Form

I, consent to participate in the research project conducted by Greer Bradbury from Curtin University of Technology, regarding children's experience of fathers who work away. I understand we will be asked to complete several questionnaires about myself and my family.

I acknowledge that the nature and purpose of the study, and my participation has been explained to my satisfaction, and that I have been provided with a Participant Information Sheet.

I understand my participation may not have any direct benefit and that I may withdraw consent at any stage without affecting my rights or the responsibilities of the researchers in any respect. I understand that all information obtained by the researchers about myself and my family will be treated confidentially.

Signature

..... **Date:**

About this Booklet

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire and for participating in the Children and the Fly-in/Fly-out lifestyle project.

In the booklet you will find a demographic checklist followed by a number of questionnaires about yourself, your participating child and your family. Please remember, only one child from each family can participate. Read the instructions for each set of questions carefully and answer all questions. It should take no longer than 30 minutes to complete.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Please choose the answer that best fits for you. It is important that you decide which of the responses is most like you and select that one option. Please remember that your responses are private and confidential and will be identified by numerical code only.

Your participating child has been sent a questionnaire booklet as well. I shall be contacting each child individually by phone to help them complete the forms. You could assist by providing a private space and time for your child to complete the form. It is important that your child's responses are their own.

If you or your child has any questions regarding the questionnaires in this booklet please call me 9266 2561 or email me g.bradbury@curtin.edu.au. Once your completed booklets have been received, your family code will go into the draw for one of 10 family movie passes. Good luck!

PLEASE RETURN YOUR COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRES IN THE REPLY PAID ENVELOPE PROVIDED

Your participation is greatly valued and I thank you again for time and commitment to the project. Once your completed booklets have been received, your family code will go into the draw for one of 10 family movie passes. Good luck!

Kind Regards

**Greer Bradbury
PHD (Clinical Psychology) candidate
Curtin University of Technology**

**Are you currently at home?
(please circle one)**

YES	
NO	<i>If no, when do you expect to be home?</i> weeks OR days

Children and fly-in/fly-out lifestyle: Intermittent father absence and the implications for children
Participant: F _____

ABOUT YOU

Age years

Date of Birth /.... /....

Your highest level of education?
(please circle one number)

	Postgraduate university degree	1
	Bachelor university degree	2
	Diploma or TAFE degree	3
	Trade or professional Certification	4
	Year 12 Secondary	5
	Year 10 Secondary	6
	Other <i>Please specify:</i>	7

Your industry?
(please circle one number)

	Mining and resource	1
	Oil and gas ONSHORE	2
	Oil and gas OFFSHORE	3
	Other <i>Please specify</i>	4

Your current job title (e. g. surveyor, dump truck driver, engineer)?

.....

Are you directly employed by? (please circle one number)

	mining/petroleum company	1
	contractor	2
	other <i>Please specify</i>	3

What is the annual household
(before tax)?
(please circle one number)

income

	less than \$74,999	1
	\$75,000 - \$99,999	2
	\$100,000 - \$124,999	3
	\$125,000 - \$149,999	4
	\$150,000 - \$174,999	5
	Over \$175,000	6

Do you work . . .
(please circle one number)

	Within Western Australia	1
	Elsewhere in Australia <i>please specify:</i>	2
	Overseas <i>please specify:</i>	3

How long are you usually away at work? Weeks OR days

How long are you usually at home? Weeks OR days

If you away less regularly, please explain the amount of time spent at home and away?

.....

Are you satisfied with your current work arrangements?
 (please circle one)

not at all	somewhat	mostly	definitely
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How often do you contact your partner when you are away at work?
 (please circle one number)

fortnightly or more	1
weekly	2
twice or more a week	3
daily	4
more often	5

How do you and your partner communicate when you are away?
 (please circle one for each)

	Phone/ mobile	Self only	Partner only	Both self and partner	Never
	email	Self only	Partner only	Both self and partner	Never
	post	Self only	Partner only	Both self and partner	Never
	Other <i>please specify</i>	Self only	Partner only	Both self and partner	Never

What communication facilities are available to you at work?

Please explain

In a family emergency, can you leave work quickly? YES / NO

Please explain

How long have you been involved in FIFO? Years months

What occupation did you have before working FIFO?

How long have you been with your current partner? Years months

How many children do you have living with you?

Are they boys/girls? What are their ages?

.....age.....
age.....
age.....
age.....

Were you working FIFO when your participating child was born?
(please circle)

YES	
NO	<i>If no, please indicate age of child when FIFO employment began?</i>

ABOUT FIFO
Your comments would be greatly appreciated

What is *good* for you about this lifestyle?

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What is *difficult* for you about this lifestyle?

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ABOUT FIFO

What is *good* for your child about this lifestyle?

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What is *difficult* for your child about this lifestyle?

.....

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR FAMILY

These items ask you to think carefully about your family AS A WHOLE.
There are 12 statements about families. Please read each statement carefully and decide how well it describes your own family. Circle the one answer you think most applies to your family as a whole.

1.	Planning family activities is difficult because we misunderstand each other	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2.	In times of crisis we can turn to each other for support	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3.	We cannot talk to each other about the sadness we feel	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4.	Individuals (in the family) are accepted for what they are	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5.	We avoid discussing our fears and concerns	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6.	We express our feelings to each other	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7.	There are lots of bad feelings in our family	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8.	We feel accepted for what we are	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9.	Making decisions is a problem for our family	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
10.	We are able to make decisions about how to solve problems	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
11.	We don't get along well together	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12.	We confide in each other	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

QUESTIONS ABOUT PARENTING

Below is a list of parenting issues that couples often discuss. Please firstly circle “yes” or “no” to indicate whether or not each issue has been a problem for you and your partner over the last 4 weeks, and secondly, circle the number describing the extent to which each issue has been a problem for you and your partner in the last 4 weeks, 1= little problem and 7 = severe problem.

	Has this been a problem for you and your partner?		To what extent has this issue been a problem for you and your partner?						
	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Disagreement over household rules e. g. , bed times, curfews	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Disagreement over type of discipline e. g. , smacking or grounding children	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Disagreement over who should discipline the children	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Fighting in front of the children	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Inconsistency between parents	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Children preventing parents from being alone	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Disagreements about sharing child care workloads	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Inability to resolve disagreements about child care	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Discussions about child care turning into arguments	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Parents undermining each other i. e. , not backing each other up	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. Parents favouring one child over another	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. Lack of discussion between parents about child care	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Lack of discussion about anything	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

14. One parent “soft” one parent “tough” with children	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. Children behave worse with one parent than the other	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. Disagreements over what is unacceptable behaviour	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

YOU AND YOUR PARTNER

Most people have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each of the following three items. Please circle the number which best fits your answer.

		Always agree	Almost always agree	Occasionally disagree	Frequently Disagree	Almost Always disagree	Always Disagree
1.	Philosophy of life	5	4	3	2	1	0
2.	Aims, goals, and things believed to be important	5	4	3	2	1	0
3.	Amount of time spent together	5	4	3	2	1	0

How often would you say the following events occur between you and your partner?

		Never	Less than once a month	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	Once a day	More often
4.	Having a stimulating exchange of ideas	5	4	3	2	1	0
5.	Calmly discuss something	5	4	3	2	1	0
6.	Work together on a project	5	4	3	2	1	0

The dots on the following line represent different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point “happy” represents the degree of happiness of most relationships. Please circle the dot which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Extremely Unhappy	Fairly Unhappy	A little Unhappy	Happy	Very Happy	Extremely Happy	Perfect

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU

Please read each statement and circle a number 0, 1, 2 or 3 which indicates how much the statement applied to you *over the past week*. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any statement.

The rating scale is as follows:

0 Did not apply to me at all

1 Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time

2 Applied to me to a considerable degree, or a good part of time

3 Applied to me very much, or most of the time

1	I found it hard to wind down	0	1	2	3
2	I was aware of dryness of my mouth	0	1	2	3
3	I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all	0	1	2	3
4	I experienced breathing difficulty (e. g. , excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion)	0	1	2	3
5	I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things	0	1	2	3
6	I tended to over-react to situations	0	1	2	3
7	I experienced trembling (e. g. , in the hands)	0	1	2	3
8	I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy	0	1	2	3
9	I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself	0	1	2	3
10	I felt that I had nothing to look forward to	0	1	2	3
11	I found myself getting agitated	0	1	2	3
12	I found it difficult to relax	0	1	2	3
13	I felt down-hearted and blue	0	1	2	3
14	I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing	0	1	2	3
15	I felt I was close to panic	0	1	2	3
16	I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything	0	1	2	3
17	I felt I wasn't worth much as a person	0	1	2	3
18	I felt that I was rather touchy	0	1	2	3
19	I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (e. g. , sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat)	0	1	2	3
20	I felt scared without any good reason	0	1	2	3
21	I felt that life was meaningless	0	1	2	3

☺ Thank you very much for your help ☺

**Children and the Fly-in/Fly-out Lifestyle Research Project
Tip Sheet**

If you or your child needs advice or assistance with issues raised by answering these questionnaires, I have listed a selection of recommended agencies and helplines:

For the family:

Relationships Australia

Toll-free Telephone Number: 1300 364 277

Your call will automatically be directed to the nearest Relationships Australia office in your area.

Head Office: 15 Cambridge St, West Leederville WA

Phone: 08 9489 6363

Fax: 08 9489 6300

Email: info@wa.relationships.com.au

Parenting Line

Information, advice about caring for children up to 18 years old

Phone: 9272 1466 or 1800 654 432

Family Helpline

A 24 hour confidential counselling and information for families with relationship difficulties

Phone: 9323 1100 or 1800 643 000

For your child:

School Psychologist:

You may wish to contact your child's school to arrange a referral

Kids Helpline:

A 24 hour counselling line for children and young people

Freecall: 1800 55 1800

Teaching University Child Clinics:

Murdoch University Psychology Clinic 9360 2570

Curtin Psychology Clinic 9266 3436

UWA Clinic 9380 3259

ECU (Joondalup) Psychological Services 9301 0011

Mother's Questionnaire



Children and the Fly-in/Fly-out lifestyle: Intermittent father absence and the implications for children.

Consent Form

I, consent to participate in the research project conducted by Greer Bradbury from Curtin University of Technology, regarding children's experience of fathers who work away. In addition as parent/guardian, I consent to my son/daughter (please circle one), participating in the project. I understand we will be asked to complete several questionnaires about yourselves and our family.

I acknowledge that the nature and purpose of the study, and our participation have been explained to my satisfaction, and that I have been provided with a Participant Information Sheet.

I understand our participation may not have any direct benefit to us and that we may withdraw consent at any stage without affecting our rights or the responsibilities of the researchers in any respect. I understand that all information obtained by the researchers about myself and my family will be treated confidentially.

Signature

..... . Date:

Please indicate if you and your child would like to be involved in the project's face-to-face interviews later this year.

(please circle)

YES / NO

About this Booklet

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire and for participating in the Children and the Fly-in/Fly-out lifestyle project.

In the booklet you will find a demographic checklist followed by a number of questionnaires about yourself, your participating child and your family. Please remember, only one child from each family can participate. Read the instructions for each set of questions carefully and answer all questions. It should take no longer than 30 minutes to complete.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Please choose the answer that best fits for you. It is important that you decide which of the responses is most like you and select that one option. Please remember that your responses are private and confidential and will identified by numerical code only.

Your participating child has been sent a questionnaire booklet as well. I shall be contacting each child individually by phone to help them complete the forms. You could assist by providing a private space and time for your child to complete the form. It is important that your child's responses are their own.

If you or your child has any questions regarding the questionnaires in this booklet please call me 9266 2561 or email me g.bradbury@curtin.edu.au

PLEASE RETURN YOUR COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRES IN THE REPLY PAID ENVELOPE PROVIDED

Your participation is greatly valued and I thank you again for your time and commitment to the project. Once your completed booklets have been received, your family code will go into the draw for one of 10 family movie passes. Good luck!

Kind Regards

**Greer Bradbury
PHD (Clinical Psychology) candidate
Curtin University of Technology**

**Is your partner currently at home?
(please circle one)**

YES	
NO	<i>If no, when do you expect him home?</i> weeks OR days

Children and fly-in/fly-out lifestyle: Intermittent father absence and the implications for children

Participant: M _____

ABOUT YOU

Age: years

Date of Birth/...../.....

Your highest level of education? *(please circle one number)*

	Postgraduate university degree	1
	Bachelor university degree	2
	Diploma or TAFE degree	3
	Trade or professional certification	4
	Year 12 Secondary	5
	Year 10 Secondary	6
	Other <i>Please specify:</i>	7

Your employment? *(please circle one number)*

	Manager/Administrator	1
	Professional (e. g. , doctor, teacher)	2
	Tradesperson/clerical	3
	Sales/service worker	4
	Production/ transport worker	5
	Labourer/unskilled worker	6
	Home duties	7
	Student	8
	Other <i>Please specify:</i>	9

If you are currently employed ...

How long have you been in your current job? Years months

How many hours do you usually work each week?

Your family's annual household income (before tax)?

(please circle one number)

	less than \$74,999	1
	\$75,000 - \$99,999	2
	\$100,000 - \$124,999	3
	\$125,000 - \$149,999	4
	\$150,000 - \$174,999	5
	Over \$175,000	6

Your partner's industry?

(please circle one number)

	Mining and resources	1
	Oil and gas ONSHORE	2
	Oil and gas OFFSHORE	3
	Other <i>Please specify</i>	4

Your partner's current job title (e. g. surveyor, dump truck driver, engineer)?

.....

Is your partner directly employed by?
(please circle one number)

	mining/petroleum company	1
	contractor	2
	other please specify	3

Does your partner work ...
(please circle one number)

	Within Western Australia	1
	Elsewhere in Australia please specify:	2
	Overseas please specify:	3

How long is your partner usually away at work? Weeks OR days

How long is your partner usually at home? Weeks OR days

If your partner works away less regularly, please explain amount of time spent at home and away?

.....
.....

How long has your partner been in his current job? Years months

Are you satisfied with your partner's current work arrangements?
(please circle one)

not at all	somewhat	mostly	definitely
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How often do you contact your partner when he is away at work?
(please circle one number)

	fortnightly or more	1
	weekly	2
	twice or more a week	3
	daily	4
	more often	5

How do you and your partner communicate when he is away?
(please complete each row)

	phone/ mobile	Self only	Partner only	Both self and partner	Never
	email	Self only	Partner only	Both self and partner	Never
	post	Self only	Partner only	Both self and partner	Never
	Other please specify	Self only	Partner only	Both self and partner	Never

In a family emergency, can your partner leave work quickly? YES / NO

Please explain

.....

.....

.....

How long has your partner been involved in FIFO? Years months

What occupation did he have before working FIFO?

How long have you been with your current partner? Years months

Was your partner working FIFO when your participating child was born?

YES	
NO	<i>If no, please indicate age of child when FIFO employment began?</i>

ABOUT YOUR PARTICIPATING CHILD

Age years months Date of Birth/...../..... Boy / Girl
(please circle)

What year of school?

Does your participating child have any physical health problems (e. g. asthma)? Or disabilities (e. g. , hearing impairment, autism, learning difficulties)?

YES, <i>please specify</i>	
NO	

Does your participating child have brothers and sisters living with him/her?

List relationship to childage.....
.....age.....
.....age.....
.....age.....

Do any of your other children have physical health problems or disabilities?

YES, <i>please specify</i>	
NO	

Do you care for any other people aside from your children on a regular basis (e. g. , elderly relatives)?

YES, <i>please specify</i>	
NO	

ABOUT FIFO
Your comments would be greatly appreciated

What is *good* for you about this lifestyle?

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What is *difficult* for you about this lifestyle?

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What is *good* for your child about this lifestyle?

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What is *difficult* for your child about this lifestyle?

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☺ **THANK YOU**

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR PARTICIPATING CHILD

For each item, please mark the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True. It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you are not absolutely certain. Please give your answers on the basis of your child's behaviour over the last six months.

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
Considerate of other people's feelings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often complains of headaches stomach-aches or sickness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shares readily with other young people, e. g. , CD's, games food	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often loses temper	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Would rather be alone than with people of my age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Generally well-behaved, usually does what adults request	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Many worries or often seems worried	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Constantly fidgeting or squirming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has at least one good friend or more	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often fights with other young people or bullies them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often unhappy, depressed or tearful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Generally liked by other young people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Easily distracted, concentration wanders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nervous in new situations. easily loses confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kind to younger children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often lies and cheats	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Picked on or bullied by other young people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often volunteers to help others (parents, teachers, children)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thinks things out before acting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Steals from home, school or elsewhere	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gets along better with adults than with other young people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Many fears, easily scared	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Good attention span, sees chores or homework through to the end	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you have any other comments or concerns?

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR PARTICIPATING CHILD

Overall, do you think that your child has difficulties in any of the following areas: emotions, concentration, behaviour or being able to get along with other people?

No	Yes – minor difficulties	Yes – definite difficulties	Yes – severe difficulties
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you answered “Yes”, please answer the following questions about these difficulties:

How long have these difficulties been present?

Less than a month	1– 5 months	6 -12 months	Over a year
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do the difficulties upset or distress your child?

Not at all	A little	A medium amount	A great deal
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do the difficulties interfere with your child’s everyday life in the following areas?

	Not at all	A little	A medium amount	A great deal
HOME LIFE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FRIENDSHIPS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CLASSROOM LEARNING	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LEISURE ACTIVITIES	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do the difficulties put a burden on you or the family as a whole?

Not at all	A little	A medium amount	A great deal
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR FAMILY

These items ask you to think carefully about your family **AS A WHOLE**.

There are 12 statements about families. Please read each statement carefully and decide how well it describes your own family. Circle the one answer you think most applies to your family as a whole.

- | | | | | | |
|-----|--|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| 1. | Planning family activities is difficult because we misunderstand each other | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 2. | In times of crisis we can turn to each other for support | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 3. | We cannot talk to each other about the sadness we feel | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 4. | Individuals (in the family) are accepted for what they are | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 5. | We avoid discussing our fears and concerns | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 6. | We express our feelings to each other | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 7. | There are lots of bad feelings in our family | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 8. | We feel accepted for what we are | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 9. | Making decisions is a problem for our family | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 10. | We are able to make decisions about how to solve problems | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 11. | We don't get along well together | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 12. | We confide in each other | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

PARENTING QUESTIONS

Below is a list of parenting issues that couples often discuss. Please firstly circle “yes” or “no” to indicate whether or not each issue has been a problem for you and your partner over the last 4 weeks, and secondly, circle the number describing the extent to which each issue has been a problem for you and your partner in the last 4 weeks, 1= little problem and 7 = severe problem.

	Has this been a problem for you and your partner?		To what extent has this issue been a problem for you and your partner?						
	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Disagreement over household rules e. g. , bed times, curfews	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Disagreement over type of discipline e. g. , smacking or grounding children	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Disagreement over who should discipline the children	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Fighting in front of the children	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Inconsistency between parents	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Children preventing parents from being alone	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Disagreements about sharing child care workloads	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Inability to resolve disagreements about child care	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Discussions about child care turning into arguments	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Parents undermining each other i. e. , not backing each other up	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. Parents favouring one child over another	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. Lack of discussion between parents about child care	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Lack of discussion about	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

anything

14.	One parent “soft” one parent “tough” with children	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15.	Children behave worse with one parent than the other	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16.	Disagreements over what is unacceptable behaviour	YES	NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

YOU AND YOUR PARTNER

Most people have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each of the following three items.

Please circle the number which best fits your answer.

		Always agree	Almost always agree	Occasionally disagree	Frequently Disagree	Almost Always disagree	Always Disagree
1.	Philosophy of life	5	4	3	2	1	0
2.	Aims, goals, and things believed to be important	5	4	3	2	1	0
3.	Amount of time spent together	5	4	3	2	1	0

How often would you say the following events occur between you and your partner?

		Never	Less than once a month	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	Once a day	More often
4.	Having a stimulating exchange of ideas	5	4	3	2	1	0
5.	Calmly discuss something	5	4	3	2	1	0
6.	Work together on a project	5	4	3	2	1	0

The dots on the following line represent different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point "happy" represents the degree of happiness of most relationships. Please circle the dot which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Extremely Unhappy	Fairly Unhappy	A little Unhappy	Happy	Very Happy	Extremely Happy	Perfect

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU

Please read each statement and circle a number 0, 1, 2 or 3 which indicates how much the statement applied to you *over the past week*. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any statement.

The rating scale is as follows:

0 Did not apply to me at all

1 Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time

2 Applied to me to a considerable degree, or a good part of time

3 Applied to me very much, or most of the time

1	I found it hard to wind down	0	1	2	3
2	I was aware of dryness of my mouth	0	1	2	3
3	I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all	0	1	2	3
4	I experienced breathing difficulty (e. g. , excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion)	0	1	2	3
5	I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things	0	1	2	3
6	I tended to over-react to situations	0	1	2	3
7	I experienced trembling (eg, in the hands)	0	1	2	3
8	I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy	0	1	2	3
9	I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself	0	1	2	3
10	I felt that I had nothing to look forward to	0	1	2	3
11	I found myself getting agitated	0	1	2	3
12	I found it difficult to relax	0	1	2	3
13	I felt down-hearted and blue	0	1	2	3
14	I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing	0	1	2	3
15	I felt I was close to panic	0	1	2	3
16	I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything	0	1	2	3
17	I felt I wasn't worth much as a person	0	1	2	3
18	I felt that I was rather touchy	0	1	2	3
19	I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (e. g. , sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat)	0	1	2	3
20	I felt scared without any good reason	0	1	2	3
21	I felt that life was meaningless	0	1	2	3

☺ Thank you very much for your help ☺

**Children and the Fly-in/Fly-out Lifestyle Research Project
Tip Sheet**

If you or your child needs advice or assistance with issues raised by answering these questionnaires, I have listed a selection of recommended agencies and helplines:
For the family:

Relationships Australia

Toll-free Telephone Number: 1300 364 277

Your call will automatically be directed to the nearest Relationships Australia office in your area.

Head Office: 15 Cambridge St, West Leederville WA

Phone: 08 9489 6363

Fax: 08 9489 6300

Email: info@wa.relationships.com.au

Parenting Line

Information, advice about caring for children up to 18 years old

Phone: 9272 1466 or 1800 654 432

Family Helpline

A 24 hour confidential counselling and information for families with relationship difficulties

Phone: 9323 1100 or 1800 643 000

For your child:

School Psychologist:

You may wish to contact your child's school to arrange a referral

Kids Helpline:

A 24 hour counselling line for children and young people

Freecall: 1800 55 1800

Teaching University Child Clinics:

Murdoch University Psychology Clinic 9360 2570

Curtin Psychology Clinic 9266 3436

UWA Clinic 9380 3259

ECU (Joondalup) Psychological Services 9301 0011

APPENDIX B

Children's Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Semi-Structured Interview Checklist

- Introduce self
- Explain nature and purpose of research
- Explain confidentiality and right to withdraw
- Explain and seek consent
- Seek permission to record interview and take notes
- Highlight there are no right or wrong questions, interested in their personal experiences
- Free to not answer any questions or stop
- Any questions

General introduction

School, hobbies, sport

- What are the good things about dad's job?
- What are the not-so-good things about dad's job?

Paternal absence/presence

- What is home like when Dad's away at work? What do you do, what does family, mum do?
- What is like home when Dad's at home? What does Dad do? What does the family do?
What do you do?

Transition

- How about when Dad just comes back? When he's just about to go?
- Have there been times in your life when dad being away was more difficult than other times?

Family roles

- What's different about how things are done when Dad is away? You? Mum? Family?
- Are you different when Dad's away? When Dad's at home?

Coping & Support

- Who helps out around the house when Dad's away? Prompt: relatives, friends?
- How often do you see your relatives? Prompt: grandparents? Aunts and uncles? Cousins?
- What do your friends think of your dad going away?

Job Knowledge

- What can you tell me about your dad's work?
- What does he do, sleep, eat?
- When you grow-up/leave school what would you like to do? Prompt: a job like your dad's/mum's?
- And what if you had to go away to work like Dad, how would you feel?

Communication

- When dad's away, how do you keep in touch with him?
- What do you talk about?
- If you could, how would you like things to be different?

Advice

- What advice would you give to a friend whose Dad was starting to work FIFO?

APPENDIX C

Higher and Lower Order Themes from the Thematic Analysis

Higher order themes	Lower order themes	
<i>Adaptation to FIFO</i>	<i>“used to it”</i>	
	Transition into FIFO	Paternal absences Being younger and sadder
	Positive work spillover	Quality time with fathers
	Ongoing stressors	Separation and reunions
	Negative work spillover	Family change: stages/events
		Maternal employment
	Compromise/Fairness: “give ‘n take”	
<i>Change</i>	Children’s cycle of emotional responses	
○ Personal	<i>Positive:</i>	<i>Negative :</i>
	Increased responsibility/self-worth	Over-responsibility/burden
	Adolescence and <i>time-out</i>	Lack of paternal bonding
○ Family	The alternating family households	
	The complete “proper” family	The incomplete “quiet” family
		Family stress
	Family management	Family safety and security
<i>Time</i>	Adaptation to FIFO	
	Adolescence and time-out	Time without fathers
	Time to self	
<i>Fathers & paternal involvement</i>	“24/7” fathers	
	Quality time	“Too busy” fathers
	“Strict Dads and discipline	Delayed punishment
<i>Social Support</i>	The self-reliant family	
	Limited peer support	Adolescent embarrassment
	Sibling support	Community assumptions

<i>Perceptions of Work</i>	Paternal FIFO employment: children's admiration	
	Children's future employment	The social impact of FIFO employment
<i>Children's Advice</i>	Adaptation, communication and contact with fathers & maternal support	