



# FIFO/DIDO Mental Health Research Report 2013



Lifeline WA, in partnership with specialist vehicle hire company Raw Hire, Australian Institute of Management WA and Edith Cowan University's The Sellenger Centre, launched a ground-breaking research study that assessed the relationship between mental health and fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) and drive-in-drive-out (DIDO) work practices.

With a sample size of 924 respondents, the Lifeline WA research study is one of the largest ever in this field of research in Australia and provides valuable insights to the benefits and challenges of this relatively new and growing work practice, including the ways in which workers cope with these challenges.

FIFO has become a significant commuter-work system in several mining industries and has provided an alternative to the construction of residential towns where remote mining operations exist. FIFO is more prevalent in Western Australia than any other state or territory due to its abundance of mineral resources, and the research has highlighted the positive impacts of the sector and FIFO work practices on the state economy. The research has also drawn out the importance of a mentally healthy workforce for the benefit not only of employees and their families, but also of employers because of the increased safety, productivity and retention on their sites.

In general, all workers reported that they get along very well with the people around them at work and at home, and that they engage in effective coping behaviours more-so than non-effective ones. This suggests many FIFO workers have within themselves resilience capabilities to manage the impact of their work arrangements on their mental health and wellbeing. However, this research has

demonstrated that the FIFO existence can be challenging, and found in particular that stress generally increased and was reported to be at the highest levels in the days leading up to leaving for work.

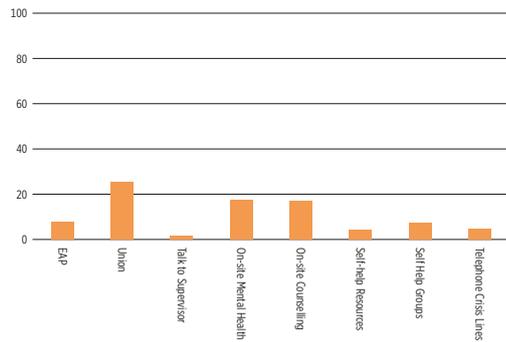
The research found that FIFO workers are predominantly unaware of and unlikely to make use of any of the modes of mental health information and services, but rather to withdraw emotionally and to ignore personal needs.

Stigma is the main barrier to help-seeking, with the principal reason workers do not reach out for assistance being the fear of appearing to be 'soft', weak or unable to cope. The other main barrier is structural, being the lack of service accessibility on-site and the lack of access to services from remote sites, including the lack of mobile phone coverage and/or internet access.

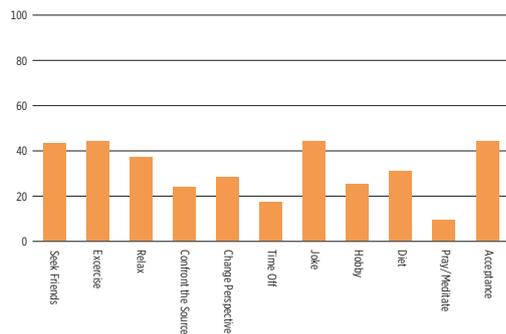
The recommendations—which are both general and targeted in nature—aim to address the help-seeking barriers and provide supports to maintain and enhance the emotional wellbeing and mental health of the FIFO and DIDO workforce.



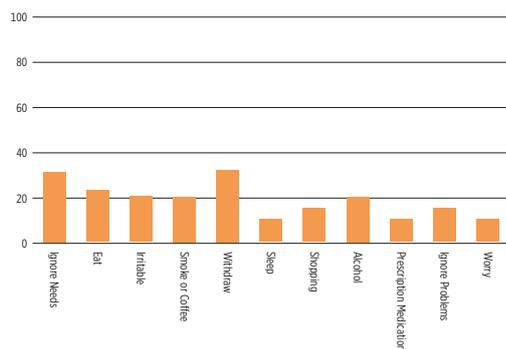
**Fiona Kalaf**  
CEO, Lifeline WA



**Figure 1.** Percentage responding support type Not Available to my industry



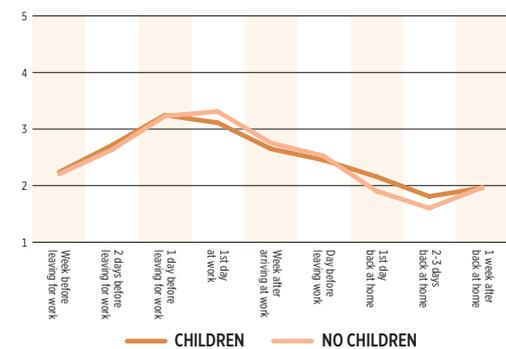
**Figure 2.** Percentage of Workers Reporting Effective Coping Strategies



**Figure 3.** Percentage of Workers Reporting Non-effective Coping Strategies



**Figure 4.** Mean stress levels at 9 points during roster rotation, plotted by relationship status



**Figure 5.** Mean stress levels at 9 points during roster rotation, plotted by parental status

## Key Findings

- **Help-seeking:** Knowledge of services and propensity to seek help is low
- **Relationships:** Generally positive
- **Coping behaviours:** Most engage in effective coping behaviours
- **Stress:** At its highest in the days leading up to leaving for work and its lowest upon returning home
- **On-boarding:** Knowledge of the FIFO work practices was low prior to job commencement
- **Benefits:** High remuneration and quality time with family

## Recommendations

1. Develop supports that focus on increasing help-seeking behaviour within FIFO populations
2. Develop supports that target the needs of specific groups
3. Develop pre-employment supports—what to expect from FIFO and how to cope
4. Develop ongoing post-employment supports that reduce stigma and address mental health literacy and coping skills
5. Address organisational culture such that seeking help is encouraged and supported

## Report Availability

Uncover more with the full report available for viewing and download here:

- [lifelinewa.org.au](http://lifelinewa.org.au)
- [rawhire.com.au](http://rawhire.com.au)
- [aimwa.com](http://aimwa.com)



**No one needs to face their problems alone.**

IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS FEELING SUICIDAL, OR NEEDS HELP NOW,  
CONTACT LIFELINE ON 13 11 14 OR [CRISISCHAT.LIFELINEWA.ORG.AU](https://crisichat.lifelinewa.org.au)