

## MEDIA STATEMENT

EMBARGOED THURSDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 10:30AM

### **GROUND BREAKING RESEARCH INTO FIFO/DIDO MENTAL HEALTH FINDINGS REVEALED**

One of the largest Australian studies into the mental health of Fly-in Fly-out (FIFO) and Drive-in Drive-out (DIDO) workers conducted by suicide prevention agency Lifeline WA, and released to the resources industry today found that although there is support available, workers are often reluctant to use it.

CEO Lifeline WA Fiona Kalaf said the number of respondents to the online, anonymous study was well over 900, making the Lifeline WA research study one of the largest ever in this field of research in Australia.

"This research provides valuable insights to the benefits and challenges of this relatively new and growing lifestyle, including the ways in which workers cope with these challenges," Ms Kalaf said.

"There is a considerable focus given to the physical safety of employees, but there is a limited focus on the emotional and mental health of these workers and their immediate families.

"In general, FIFO workers reported that they engage in effective coping behaviours, more so than non-effective ones. Many FIFO workers have 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."

Ms Kalaf said stigma is the greatest challenge to be overcome in encouraging FIFO/DIDO workers to use support services, while the quality of the workplace relationships is the greatest opportunity to be harnessed. There is a real opportunity for cultural change in these workplaces to encourage employees and employers alike to address openly the importance of mental health and emotional wellbeing.

"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 research was designed by Lifeline and psychologists from Edith Cowan University and sponsored by Pilbara based company Raw Hire.

Raw Hire CEO Byron Smith said sponsoring the Lifeline WA study was part of the company's commitment to the region.

"FIFO and DIDO workers make up a large part of our client base and we wanted to give something back to their families and communities," he said.

"We hope this research will fill the gaps for understanding both the positive and negatives effects of the FIFO lifestyle and gives workers a broader range of support, should they need it."

Through the study, Lifeline WA will assess the factors that contribute to employee risk and wellbeing, with the aim of using the findings to develop preventative programs, similar to the OHS programs that protect employee's physical wellbeing.

Australian Institute of Management WA Chief Executive, Gary Martin said that, as an outcome of the study, the Institute would collaborate with Lifeline WA to develop a series of programs to assist managers and employees to improve the FIFO and DIDO experience.

"We will give serious attention to the outcomes of this important piece of research in developing a small suite of professional development programs to help to address what might be considered to be some of the shortfalls of FIFO and DIDO experiences," Professor Martin said.

**Media Contact****Amber Sheldon @ gtmedia****(08) 9227 8195 or 0419 921 003 | [amber@gtmedia.com](mailto:amber@gtmedia.com)****KEY FINDINGS**

*Help-seeking: Knowledge of services and propensity to seek help is low.*

One in five workers claimed their industry did not have on-site mental health or on-site counselling facilities, while one in ten reported their industry as not having an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Female workers were more likely to access an EAP, on-site mental health and counselling services and self-help information, or to use their supervisors, friends and family as support structures. While younger workers reported a likelihood to access on-site counselling, older workers were less likely to talk to friends during times of stress. Tradespersons and professionals were more likely to access hometown mental health services. Single respondents working high compression roster rotations were more likely to access telephone crisis lines as support structures.

However, a significant number of FIFO workers were not likely to make use of any mode of mental health information and services, with low compression rotation workers being the least likely to use any of the modes of mental health information and services.

*Relationships: Generally positive.*

All workers reported getting along very well with the people around them, both at work and at home. High compression rotation workers who were parents reported the lowest relationship quality with family and friends compared to high compression workers who were not parents and low compression workers who were either parents or not parents.

*Coping behaviours: Most engage in effective coping behaviours.*

Overall, workers reported engaging in fewer non-effective coping behaviours compared to effective coping behaviours. Withdrawing emotionally and ignoring personal needs were the predominant non-effective coping behaviours, with respondents working high compression rotations and those who were partnered reporting engagement in the most non-effective coping behaviours.

*Stress: At its highest in the days leading up to leaving for work and its lowest upon returning home.*

During rotation, stress generally increased and was reported to be at its highest levels in the days leading up to leaving for work, reduced steadily while away and dropping to lowest levels upon returning home. Women's stress levels reduced to lower levels upon returning home compared to men's stress levels. Higher compression rotation and partnered workers reported higher stress in the lead up to leaving for work compared to lower compression workers and singles.

*On-boarding: Knowledge of the FIFO work practices was low.*

Most FIFO workers had minimal knowledge of the realities of FIFO work before starting, with the number one stress being separation from family and home. A significant dimension of family and home separation related to FIFO rosters, with longer periods at work proving to be more stressful, particularly for workers with young children.

*Benefits: High remuneration and quality time with family.*

FIFO workers reported various benefits from their work, namely high remuneration and the opportunity to spend quality time with family during periods rostered at home. However, FIFO workers would like support maintaining their family relationships and obligations, especially when family members are in need, due to illness, for example. FIFO workers also felt that having more on-site opportunities for recreational pursuits than those currently offered would be helpful in coping with being away from home.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

*Recommendation 1: Develop supports that focus on increasing help-seeking behaviour within FIFO populations.*

*Recommendation 2: Develop supports that target the needs of specific groups.*

*Recommendation 3: Develop pre-employment supports – what to expect from FIFO and how to cope.*

*Recommendation 4: Develop ongoing post-employment supports that reduce stigma and address mental health literacy and coping skills.*

*Recommendation 5: Address organisational culture such that help-seeking is encouraged and supported.*