SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MINING WORKER PERCEPTIONS OF THE BENEFITS, ENABLERS & STRESSORS OF LONG DISTANCE COMMUTING

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TODAY ..

- Definition of FIFO
- So what?
- Context –
  - Mining in Australia
  - LDC / FIFO
- our study
  - findings
  - conclusions
.. employment in which the work is so isolated from the workers’ homes that food and accommodation are provided for them at the work site, and rosters are established whereby employees spend a fixed number of days at the site, followed by a fixed number of days at home” (Storey & Shrimpton, 1989, p2.).

“..circumstances of work where the place of work is sufficiently isolated from the workers place of residence to make daily commute impractical” (Watts 2004, p.26)

.. refers to workers who travel for work, stay a pre-determined number of days (‘roster’) and then return to their home location for a set break time .. also referred to as long distance commuting (LDC) ... can include ship in/ship out (SISO) and drive in/drive out (DIDO) .. (Price , 2008)

.. work which is undertaken by long-distance commuting on a regular basis for an extended period at such a distance from the employee’s home that they are not able to return to their permanent residence at the end of a shift. (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia, 2013)
SO WHAT?

- mining has significant role in the economy
  - sustaining mining is an obvious national priority
- FIFO has significant role in mining
  - identifying strategies that work to sustain FIFO is an obvious priority for mining (& other industries)
- FIFO research important for
  - mining industry .. *workforce* .. $$
  - State & national stakeholders
  - FIFO workers, families, communities
Mining boom here to stay, says RBA

Reserve Bank deputy governor Ric Battelino says the global financial crisis is history and Australia's "very big" mining boom is here to stay.

Speaking to the Sydney Institute last night, Mr Battelino said the current mining boom could last longer than previous ones - possibly for more than 15 years - because of demand from China and India.

"The start of this boom can be dated from around 2005," he said.

"By 2007 and early 2008 it was severely testing the productive capacity and the flexibility of the Australian economy.

"All that changed in the second half of 2008 as the effects of the mining boom were offset by the impact of the global financial crisis. However now that has passed, the underlying dynamics of the resource boom are starting to reappear."
MINING BOOMS ..

important part of Australian history

- wealth & prosperity to regional centres, cities & then overseas
  - 1850 – gold rush
  - late 19th century – minerals boom
  - 1960 - 70s – minerals & energy boom
  - 1980’s – energy boom

- early 21st century – mineral & energy boom
  - wealth to overseas interests, shareholders & workers
  - less to regional communities
THIS ONE IS DIFFERENT..

- due to ↑ demand
- ↑ prices rather than volume
- ↑ terms of trade ➔ ↑ exchange rate, increasing profits

A century ago, many country people migrated to the cities in search of work as technology dictated less jobs on the land.

A century later, many see jobs being created in the mining sector in inland Australia with many of those jobs being taken up by city or coastal people who do not live where they work (FIFO/DIDO).

- different model of:
  - few mining towns being established
  - extended mine life (increased environmental impact)
  - emphasis is on export
  - increased production (& increased efficiency)

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House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia
Workforce hasn’t increased as substantially as previously
- Mining remains small proportion of overall workforce
  - ~ 268,000 workers / 8% of total
  - expected to fall 5% in next 5 years
- Workforce more dispersed than previously
- Staff drawn more from urban & coastal locations than regional centres
- ...i.e. FIFO
DEBATE

- directly benefit & those who do not
- two speed economy (Dutch disease)

There are warning signs for inland Australia, particularly in those areas that are relatively closely settled, as well as opportunities for coastal regional centres. Obviously, some areas of remote Australia can only be serviced by FIFO/DIDO workforces, but many communities are concerned about the negative impacts on their towns and feel that although they may be the site of the resource activity, they not a major beneficiary.

- diminishing industry and community diversity
- unfunded service demands
- ? environmental impact
- ? Impact on other sectors
- ? impact on workers
This inquiry heard extensive arguments from both sides of the debate – the benefits that the high wages and time at home bring to FIFO/DIDO workers and their families, and the damage that the practice is doing to the prosperity of some of those in regional communities.

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Regional Australia

February 2013
Canberra
FACT vs MEDIA ..

- FIFO key to industry, including mining
  - has existed for > 25 years in Australia
  - ~ 100,000 FIFO workers
- no doubt there are pros & cons
  - much of what is known is anecdotal / media driven
  - negative aspects generally reported over positive
  - lack of reliable data highlighted by recent federal inquiry
    - limited academic literature
    - most related to WA and Qld
IMPACT OF LDC / FIFO ..

Cons –
- ve economic community impact
- ther community changes
- families & relationships
- health impacts
- golden handcuff

Pros –
- suited to remote locations
  - construction, maintenance & shut downs
- worker & family choice
- live where preferred
  - access to education, health, family, employment for partner
- financial benefits
- lifestyle factors
- career & training

There is limited evidence to support research that suggests fly-in, fly-out workers were twice as likely to suffer depression as the rest of the community, the Chamber of Minerals and Energy has said.

A survey of 150 people over a 12-month period found workers, as well as their partners, were likely to be more prone to depression.

The initial findings of the research, by the University of South Australia, also found conflict between working and home lives was associated with sleep problems, headaches, and an increase in anxiety.

The CMEA's Emmanuel Houndrop said.

"Current mental health probe is focusing on Western Australia.

Several FIFO workers are seen in remote locations and heavy equipment.

WA inquiry to investigate rate of FIFO suicides

A parliamentary inquiry into mental health issues among fly-in fly-out workers in Western Australia will look at whether fly-in fly-out companies are doing enough to prevent suicides.

The inquiry was called after nine fly-in fly-out FIFO workers took their lives in the past year in the Pilbara region of WA.

The latest death occurred earlier this month at the giant Gorgon gas project on Barrow Island off the north-west WA coast.

Working at a mine or on oil and gas rigs is highly paid work..."
WHAT IS KNOWN ..

- both FIFO & residential employment have +ve and –ve effects on individuals, family & communities
- overall wellbeing of FIFO is similar to general population
  - FIFO have different rather than more stressors
  - general & physical health have not been shown to be different
  - mental health not been shown to be different
  - divorce rates have not been shown to be different
  - no difference in psychological wellbeing between young FIFO and non-FIFO children
  - adolescent children generally successfully adapt to FIFO parent

WHAT IS KNOWN ..

- No. of factors impact on FIFO–
  - rosters
  - size of worksite
  - accommodation
  - amenities
  - psychosocial support services
  - communication facilities
  - partners, age of children
  - workplace culture

Sibbel 2011, McKenzie 2011, Measham 2013
WHAT IS KNOWN ..

Challenges include –
- long rosters
- fatigue
- macho work cultures
- travel & work safety concerns
- poor induction processes
- loneliness, isolation
- missed family events
- concern by FIFO worker for family at home
- reluctance to use mental and other support services
- changing roles in family with to and fro
- limited support for stay at home parents
- derogatory & judgmental community attitudes

FIFO Committee report ignores realities of working in mining industry

"Fly-in, fly-out and drive-in, drive-out working arrangements are as much driven by employee lifestyle choices as by resource companies' operational requirements," says AMMA chief executive Steve Knott.

Councils say time to implement FIFO report recommendations

By Megan Hendry
Posted Fri at 1:02pm

Two central Queensland councils are calling on the State Government to address problems caused by fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) workforces.

In February last year, the House Standing Committee on Regional Australia made 21 recommendations to the Federal Government in its report into FIFO work practices in regional areas.

The Central Highlands and Isaac regional councils say it is time the State Government implemented those recommendations, including better resourcing for communities under pressure from large FIFO workforces.

Central Highlands Mayor Peter Maguire says the situation has not improved since the release of the report.
times, and rosters for contractors.

- reviewing policies and procedures that negatively impact on time spent at home such as flight times, and rosters for contractors.

- working to improve social networks via a range of strategies including the development of a mentoring scheme; providing practical support for families such as considering the implementation of an in home care or similar service; improving the flow of information from industry regarding entitlements; managing the parenting transitions.

- Fly-in fly-out employment: child development and attachment issues; emotional responses of family members to transitions; identity issues for families; decision making and communication around parenting.

- Ngala

- "Aeroplanes always come back"
OUR WORK ..

- the impact of LDC work arrangements on SA mining workers
- what LDC workers perceived as the benefits, enablers and stressors of LDC for mining in SA
METHODOLOGY / METHOD

- Ethical approval (UniSA HREC)
- Study conducted Sept 2011 – Mar 2012
- Cross-sectional, phenomenological design
- Sample – 104 volunteers
  - mining, oil/gas workers
    - lived in SA
    - mostly worked in SA
- Semi-structured interviews
  - face-to-face, telephone or focus group
    - Demographics
    - Work details
    - Advantages
    - Travel arrangements
    - Work lifestyle
    - Disadvantages
- Qualitative data analysis
- Report
## Our Sample ..

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<th>Female</th>
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<td>(%)</td>
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**Relationship Status**

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**Family Status**

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<th>FEMALE</th>
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<th>(%)</th>
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<td>20</td>
<td>(19.2)</td>
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<td>Dependent children</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>(29.8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>(8.8)</td>
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BENEFITS ..

- remuneration
  - high for semiskilled / trade work
  - compensation for time away from home & partner not able to work
  - few jobs in small communities
  - no daily living or commute expenses
  - brings lifestyle opportunities
    - property, goods & chattels
    - education, holidays
    - debt reduction, increased savings
    - early retirement
BENEFITS ..

- career opportunities
  - tertiary trained professionals
    - challenging, rewarding work not generally available in other industries for semi-skilled workers
  - Training opportunities to enable management of significant resources
    - apprenticeships, certificates
    - management, leadership, WH&S training
- rural, Indigenous incentive programs
BENEFITS ..

- lifestyle
  - live where you want
  - remain near family & other support networks
  - family can remain in large service centres
  - schooling / education not compromised
  - can maintain sporting & other community activities
  - easier mobility of employment
- travel opportunities, new places & people
ENABLERS ..

- mining culture
  - military like, regimented,
  - mateship, peer support
  - competitive, macho
- rosters
  - Shorter swings more popular – 8/6, 7/7
    - More common for mining employees vs contractors
    - reduced fatigue, less need for leave
    - better for partners, children, relationships, community, sporting, study commitments
    - reduced remuneration offset by more breaks, more time at home
ENABLERS ..

- R&R
  - extended breaks good for morale, body and soul
  - no interruptions by work as in traditional employment
  - quality time with partners, children, family
  - more time with children
  - time to tackle larger projects at home
  - can combine breaks with leave for extended R&R
ENABLERS ..

- flexible employee arrangements
  - family & employee friendly culture appreciated & valued by workers
    - flexibility for emergencies, family & other events
    - employees more loyal (less turnover) because appreciate flexibility
    - regular work team socialising
    - limited scrutiny re phone calls, internet, email
    - normalisation of class strata at workplace
    - open door policies & managers that ‘listen’
    - couples & family employment not actively discouraged
ENABLERS ..

- on-site facilities
  - good facilities appreciated since workers spend so much time away
    - good communication infrastructure
    - private rooms, air-con, including between rosters
      - quiet rooms for night shift workers
      - comfortable beds, on-suite, laundry facilities
  - cribs – good range, healthy choices
  - recreation –
    - sport, gym, TV / movies,
    - wet mess,
    - quiet areas, good coffee
STRESSORS ..

- Hard for some workers to deal with separation
  - less experienced workers often lonely, homesick
    - those with young children, new partners
  - missed family events, miss friends & family
  - hard when have to return to work
- Stay at home partners find it difficult
  - mothers with young children feel like single parents
  - family routines disrupted when father returns home
  - children unsettled before & after father leaves
  - support needed for emergencies
STRESSORS

- health issues –
  - sleep problems, obesity, stress, anxiety, depression
- fatigue –
  - long hours, shift work, physically demanding, insufficient sleep
- repetitive nature of work
- privacy
- under-reporting of illness & injury
- financial inexperience / high indebtedness
- inequity of terms & conditions of employment
SUMMARY

- unique investigation of LDC in SA
- included 30% women
- positives outweigh negatives for most
- most have good coping strategies
- older & without young children intend remaining as LDC
- benefits mainly financial
  - financial security for the future
  - increased property, goods and chattels
  - education opportunities, travel, holidays
  - debt reduction
CONCLUSION

Other benefits

- challenging & rewarding work
- career & training opportunities
- workers able to remain in their preferred communities but still enjoy rewarding job and career
- new people & new places
- regimented routines, mateship
- R&R
- separation between work / home
CONCLUSION

Enablers

- shorter rosters preferred
- extended R&R
- employee & family friendly culture
- flexible work arrangements & limited scrutiny
- good facilities & amenities
- sacrifices & stressors of LDC are offset by
  - perceived benefits & advantages
  - coping strategies of workers & families
  - favourable employer arrangements
problems (*not unique to LDC*)

- separation from partner, family, friends
- isolation, loneliness, fatigue
- overweight, obesity, stress, anxiety, depression
- drug & alcohol abuse
- WH&S issues
- inequity / lack of transparency in the workplace
- relationship problems
- indebtedness
THE END

... THANK YOU FOR LISTENING 😊