

“Aeroplanes always come back”
(Cory, aged 3)



Fly-in fly-out employment:
managing the parenting transitions

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Acknowledgements

In undertaking research of this type there are a significant number of people who work together to make it happen.

First and foremost my thanks are extended to the thirty-two fly-in fly-out couples who gave up their time and more importantly spoke freely about their experiences, relationships and parenting. Their voices are the ones you can hear throughout this report and it is their desire to be heard in order to create a better experience of fly-in fly-out for all families. Thanks also to the human resources managers who created time in their busy schedules to talk about the practical aspects of fly-in fly-out from the employer's perspective.

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Appreciation is also extended to the staff at the Centre for Social and Community Research, for ensuring the smooth management of the project.

Finally, thanks are extended to Lotterywest for providing funding for this research.

Executive Summary

This project was initiated by Ngala whose staff had identified the potential early parenting challenges for fly-in fly-out families. In 2005, Lotterywest made funds available to Ngala to partner with Meerilinga to undertake research aimed at examining the strategies used by Western Australian families with young children for dealing with the transitions in the family as a consequence of choosing a fly-in fly-out lifestyle. Using the research expertise of the Centre for Social and Community Research, the research focused on the regular transitions from parenting together to parenting apart including issues such as:

- work and family roles;
- identity issues for families;
- child development and attachment issues;
- decision making and communication around parenting;
- emotional responses of family members to transitions.

Previous research on the fly-in fly-out lifestyle has focussed on evaluating its costs and benefits. This research acknowledges that the fly-in fly-out lifestyle is a valid lifestyle choice and will continue to be a significant component of both family and community structures. Using qualitative methodology the research has given voice to families engaged in fly-in fly-out who “tell it like it is” – their words are a powerful reminder that we are not seeking to make a judgement about parenting or about fly-in fly-out. Rather, we seek to understand how families manage their parenting and concentrated work schedules. Many of the issues are common to all families, others are mediated by the environment created by fly-in fly-out.

In the body of the report the thirty two couples interviewed discuss:

- their reasons for commencing and continuing with the fly-in fly-out lifestyle which included the two main reasons namely, financial security and the capacity to spend blocks of time with their children;
- the range of emotions experienced during the home and away cycle and how these are managed;
- how families create spaces for children and the worker to reconnect;
- the negotiation of parenting tasks and how families maintain the emotional presence of the worker within the family unit;
- preparing children for departures and arrivals;
- the importance of support networks;
- household roles and responsibilities; and

- managing the separation of work and family.

The final chapter in this report highlights the advice from those families actively engaged in the fly-in fly-out lifestyle. Firstly, families offer practical advice to others considering a fly-in fly-out schedule. This includes:

- making sure the decision is a joint one;
- preparing the children as much as possible;
- maintaining regular contact;
- accepting help if offered and asking for help when needed;
- maintaining a consistent routine;
- keeping the worker involved in parenting and the household.

In order to support parents in their role as nurturers, families also had suggestions for industry and agencies and these revolve around increasing psychological, human and social capital as well as maximising time and income aspects related to family functioning. It should be noted; these suggestions have emerged not only from the interviews with couples but also discussions with agencies, industry and other current and past fly-in fly-out families. In moving forward it is essential that communication continues between all sectors and that families retain an active participative role.

The suggestions can be summarised as:

- improving the flow of information from agencies about parenting and children;
- improving the flow of information from industry regarding entitlements;
- providing practical support for families such as considering the implementation of an in home care or similar service;
- working to improve social networks via a range of strategies including the development of a mentoring scheme;
- reviewing policies and procedures that negatively impact on time spent at home such as flight times, and rosters for contractors.

Overall the families in this study voiced a clear understanding of the reality of the fly-in fly-out lifestyle and what it meant for familial relationships. They outlined strategies for managing their couple relationship and parenting in the context of a fly-in fly-out lifestyle that worked for their particular family situation.

About Ngala

For more than a century, Ngala has promoted the right of every child to grow up in a healthy, nurturing, safe and caring environment. Established in the 1890's as the House of Mercy, it later became known as the Alexandra Home for Women. In the 1950's its name was changed to Ngala meaning 'Mother and Child' or 'We Two' in the Aboriginal Bibbulmun dialect. In the late 1980's, Ngala's services were refocused to embrace a family approach to providing early parenting support. Today, Ngala recognises that while the family remains the primary means for meeting the needs of young children, the diversity of today's modern families is also important. It tailors programs to suit all families and parents as they meet the many challenges of parenthood. Ngala is now recognised as a leading resource for families with babies and young children in Western Australia.

Ngala's mission is to work with and for families to enhance the experience of parenting and development of young children. Ngala fulfills its mission to Western Australian families through services and activities that focus primarily on families with children aged 0 to 6 years. Ngala's activities include the provision of information, skill development, support, care, and research.

Ngala recognises that family life and early parenting occurs in the context of a range of life experiences and family history. The experience of parenting is influenced by the following elements;

- Biological/physical - their birth or lactation experience and their own health.
- Intrapersonal - their own experience of being raised in a family.
- Interpersonal - the relationship with their partner, their baby and other family.
- Socio-cultural factors - isolation from extended family, culture, community supports, and financial, housing and work issues.

www.ngala.com.au

About Meerilinga

Meerilinga is a not-for-profit organisation and registered charity that promotes the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*; working with children, their families, early childhood professionals, planners and the community to raise the status of children in WA.

Established in the early 1900s, Meerilinga's mission today is to raise the status of children in Western Australia by providing advocacy, leadership, services and resources for children, their families and the community. As an organisation they are committed to:

- respecting each child for the person they are now;
- respecting the diversity of their families and communities;
- focusing on the strengths of individuals, families and communities;
- working collaboratively to achieve positive outcomes for children;
- pursuing continuous improvement;
- acting with honesty and integrity.

Meerilinga's plan of action to promote positive childhoods is achieved through the key program areas of Advocacy, Children, Families and Communities, and Education and Training. Details about Meerilinga can be found on their website at www.meerilinga.org.au.

About the Centre for Social and Community Research

The Centre for Social and Community Research (CSCR) undertakes interdisciplinary research on social issues in local, regional and national communities. Key areas of interest include community health and safety, Indigenous and cross cultural issues, the life cycle, law and penal reform, and community histories. In addition to specific research projects, CSCR promotes informed discussion on broad community issues through seminars and workshops.

The Centre for Social and Community Research is able to call on the expertise of academics from numerous disciplines including psychology, history, sociology, community development, economics, media, and law. The Centre works with a range of professionals and community members who also have the community's best interests at heart. These people come from all levels of government, non-government organisations, local community groups, and private industry. With them, projects are developed that draw on CSCR's broad academic base and its extensive experience in applied research.

The Centre for Social and Community Research can provide professional research and management expertise from the initial generation of a research question, through to the preparation of grant proposals, community consultation, research and analysis, production of high quality reports and organising launches and seminars. Through action research, focus groups, literature reviews, case studies, research forums, research training and evaluation, CSCR's experienced researchers can deploy effective methodologies and approaches in current research.

www.cscr.murdoch.edu.au

Glossary

Fly-in fly-out

Fly-in fly-out is also referred to as long distance commuting. It describes the scenario in which employees' place of residence and place of work are isolated from each other such that the employer provides food and accommodation at the work site. Employers cycle through their place of residence and place of work on a set schedule with a fixed number of days in each place.

Rosters

Roster is used to describe the set cycle of days at home and days at the work site. In some cases this is described in days, as in nine days on (at work) and five days off (at home) or alternatively in weeks, as in two weeks on (at work), one week off (at home).

Furlough

Furlough is the term that has been used throughout this report to describe the scheduled period off work. It is used to distinguish it from formal leave arrangements such as annual leave or family leave. It is used in preference to "break" because while a separation from work it was not necessarily a "break" from other duties.

Discipline

The term "guiding children's behaviour" is used in preference to discipline throughout this report, although it is recognised that families use the term discipline to describe this process. The preference for "guiding children's behaviour" is that it recognises that parents understand children need to push the boundaries as part of normal development. Providing consistency and having routines ensures that the child feels secure and valued.

Formal/Informal care

The term formal in the context of childcare is used in this report to refer to regular childcare services provided by an organisation or individual trained in the provision of such care in exchange for money. Informal childcare is used to describe services provided by family, friends who are not necessarily trained in the provision of childcare on an irregular basis.

Contractor

Contractor refers to a company that provides staff on a contract basis to fulfil certain roles within the mining site. It also refers to individual employees contracted to undertake work for a fixed period of time.

Owner-operator

Owner-operator refers to the company who owns and operates particular mining sites. Owner-operator employees are those that are employed by this company directly, that is, are not employed by a contractor.

Social capital

Social capital refers to the quality of networks or relationships formed for mutual benefit between individuals, family and organisations. It is based on four key concepts, trust, reciprocity, cooperation and civic engagement.

Human capital

Human capital refers to the resources a family may use for the benefit of children. This might include education, employment, experience, beliefs, values, aspirations and traditions.

Psychological capital

Psychological capital includes parent's mental health, level of family cohesion, family stress and conflict and the perceived level of social support.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This project examines the strategies that families with young children use for dealing with the transitions in the family as a consequence of choosing a fly-in fly-out lifestyle. In particular it focuses on the regular transitions from parenting together to parenting apart and issues including:

- work and family roles
- identity issues for families
- child development and attachment issues
- decision making and communication around parenting
- emotional responses of family members to transitions.

The project was initiated by Ngala whose staff had identified the potential early parenting challenges for fly-in fly-out families. With funding from Lotterywest, Ngala formed a partnership with Meerilinga to undertake the research. As organisations with a primary focus on young children and parenting they became increasingly aware of research identifying challenges for families in managing relationships and parenting. They were also cognisant of the increase in the number of families in Western Australia engaging in concentrated work schedules as part of fly-in fly-out operations in the resources sector. Unlike other research in this area, this is not an attempt to evaluate the costs and benefits of the fly-in fly-out lifestyle. Instead, the research acknowledges fly-in fly-out as a legitimate lifestyle choice and draws on the knowledge of families as to how best manage that lifestyle with young children. Drawing on the wisdom of these families it goes on to provide strategies that can be used to support child development and the social and emotional wellbeing of families.

This report will have a number of different audiences including government and non-government agencies involved with parents and young children, the resources sector as well as parents engaged in or considering the fly-in fly-out lifestyle. It provides a range of opportunities for each of these audiences but essentially it gives voice to those fly-in fly-out families interviewed during the course of this research.

The research has been undertaken within an ecological context adopted from Bronfenbrenner (1979). This context proposes four nested systems:

- microsystem – individual experiences in a given setting, for example, the home environment with parents and siblings;
- mesosystem – links amongst settings in which the individual directly participates, for example, the impact of the home environment on confidence with peers;
- exosystem – the effect of settings in which the individual does not participate directly but effect the individual in some way, for example, parental work environments;
- macrosystem – the impact of changes in social institutions in which the individual operates, for example, changes in government policy regarding employment and working conditions.

Such a model stresses the importance of the balance between stresses and support in the family environment and the interactions between them. It also places an emphasis on the subjective perception of individual's own situations (Jack 2000). In this instance, the primary systems examined were the micro and exosystems. In the case of the microsystem, the individual experiences investigated were those of the parents and included such aspects as routines, division of labour, child behaviour management, and social supports. For the exosystem – the impact of the parental work environment, in this case the fly-in fly-out arrangement was studied. As such it is important to contextualise the work environment in which these families are operating. Using an ecological model as an underpinning also assumes a foundation that draws on a positive, strengths-based approach. Such an approach “brings together recognition of the environmental influences inherent in the ecological model, the necessity of community and family capacity building, the value of a strengths based framework, and acknowledgement of an ontological shift from welfare rights to human rights” (Sullivan 2002:8).

Importance of the early years

This research focuses on families with children under the age of six in recognition of the growing acknowledgement that these early years are critical for both social and cognitive development. Research into early brain development affirms that care in the early years has significant implications for how people develop and learn as well as their ability to cope with stress and regulate their own emotions. In particular, strong secure attachments to a nurturing adult can have a protective biological function.

Factors in these early years that have been demonstrated to impact on family functioning and support good developmental outcomes include:

- how well basic needs are met, including income, education, housing;
- social support networks, actual and perceived, encompassing the provision of emotional support, practical assistance and information and advice from both informal and formal sources;
- access to quality services and facilities;
- family friendly workplace arrangements that facilitate the achievement of balance between work and family commitments.

Given these factors, it has been suggested that interventions need to focus on supporting efforts to provide a nurturing and stimulating family environment and to appropriately support parents in their caretaking role. There has been a call for a whole of community approach that includes government, business and non-government agencies to ensure optimum environments and conditions for the development of children and to prevent long term problems. (Jack, 2000; Centre for Community Child Health, 2006; Eckersley et al., 2001; Zubrick et al., 2005; McCain and Mustard, 1999; Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000; Dunst, 2000).

Intermittent Parenting

Currently in Australia, workers are increasingly working longer hours and the debate is intensifying regarding the delivery of family friendly work practices. A report by Pocock (2001a) commissioned by the Queensland Government, examined the impact of extended hours of work on families, relationships and communities. Overall the report found that there is powerful evidence that long hours are detrimental for individuals, couple relationships, children and the community. The literature also reveals a tension between the demands on Australian employees to work longer hours and the maintenance of the family and the community. There is acknowledgement that work intensification, described as an increase in average hours beyond forty hours per week, affects not only employee health but also family wellbeing (Beach, 1999). Partners of such employees compensated by taking on additional household duties, parenting, and/or forgoing their own employment opportunities, such moves run counter to the current trends of collaborative parenting and participative fathering. The increased uptake of the fly-in fly-out lifestyle is occurring in this environment and contributes to what can be described as intermittent parenting.

There is little research on intermittent parenting roles or the management of transitions in fly-in fly-out type work arrangements. A distinction needs to be made at this point between ‘intermittently absent’ and ‘absent’ fathers. While the intermittently absent father may be physically separated from the family, it does not immediately follow that they are emotionally absent. In such cases the child is less likely to experience the detrimental emotional or psychological consequences that a child may experience with a father absent through separation or divorce (Balcom 1998). This view

is supported by research undertaken by Sibbel (2001) who in an exploratory study found no signs of depressive symptomatology, anxiety or family dysfunction in children whose fathers were engaged in fly-in fly-out. While the transition to 'intermittent parenting' may pose certain social and emotional risks for children of fly-in fly-out workers, these risks may be offset by the continuation of everyday family life, the maintenance of positive communication, and supportive interactions. It is clear that concentrated work schedules, unless managed successfully by the family, could impact significantly on the functioning of the family as well as on the social and emotional development of children. This research examines the management strategies employed by families in negotiating the transitions associated with concentrated work schedules and looks at how parenting responsibilities have been rearranged to accommodate the demands of such a schedule.

Understanding the fly-in fly-out context

Fly-in fly-out is a concentrated work schedule used extensively throughout the resources industry. It is a commonly used practice in Western Australia due to the size of the state and the isolated location of the vast mineral deposits. To date research has focussed on the potential detrimental impacts of such a schedule on couple relationships and family dynamics (Beach 1999; Sibbel 2001; Storey et al. 1989) and more broadly on regional development (Lambert 2001; Hogan and Berry 2000; Storey 2001; Watts 2004). There is little doubt that fly-in fly-out can place considerable strain on both the couple and the family unit. Whether this strain is more than that imposed by other concentrated work schedules (such as those experienced by defence personnel; truck drivers; airline pilots and attendants) or work practices that necessitate long working hours is still unclear. However, there is also little doubt that fly-in fly-out, as a cost-effective measure to undertake resource mining in remote locations, is here to stay. Employers and industry have recognised the importance of work family practices and actively seek to maintain good conditions for employees. This being the case the industry constantly reviews fly-in fly-out practices with a strong impetus for doing so being a current skills shortage. As more families engage in fly-in fly-out, so to do more families harness their strengths and develop strategies that benefit and maintain family units.

The resources industry

The resources sector is the primary driver of the Western Australian economy and is the largest single contributor to Gross State Product (GSP). In 2004-2005 it was estimated that the sector contributes 21% of the State's employment with estimates of direct employment being 54, 330 persons and indirect employment being 217, 320 persons. In the last ten years direct employment in the Western Australian resource sector has increased by approximately 77%. The resource sector also contributes to over 80% of the State's total exports and was valued, in 2005, at \$38.9 billion

(Department of Industry and Resources, 2005). In 2004, the Department of Industry and Resources (DOIR) had identified approximately 100 different principal producers of minerals and petroleum in Western Australia. This does not include those involved in exploration, consultancy or other aspects of the resources sector (Department of Industry and Resources, 2004a). The DOIR have also identified over 127 major mineral and petroleum projects currently operating in Western Australia (Department of Industry and Resources, 2004b). Most of these projects occur in remote locations. It has been estimated that fewer than fifty percent of employees are involved in fly-in fly-out operations (Hogan & Berry, 2000). See Appendix 1 for a map of current major mining and petroleum projects in Western Australia.

However, with the potential for over 20,000 families to be directly or indirectly affected by fly-in fly-out work arrangements it is not surprising that in Western Australia it has become a significant topic for discussion (Sadlier, 2005). The debate surrounding the effects of fly-in fly-out has been broadly categorised under three major headings; health and wellbeing of individuals and families, economic impacts on local business, and social vitality of regional communities.

Report outline

This report fully outlines the information collected from the couples interviewed. It begins by summarising the demographic and work details before proceeding to the reasons for participating in the fly-in fly-out lifestyle. Following this is a discussion on the communication that occurs between parents including the range of emotions and strategies used by both the worker and the partner at home during the fly-in fly-out cycle. The focus then turns to communication and connections with children including children's responses, the division of parenting tasks, managing children's behaviour, preparing children for the departure and arrival of the worker and handling special occasions when the worker is away. The report then investigates support networks used by families followed by the division of household roles and responsibilities and managing the separation of work and family. Finally, the report outlines advice from families to others considering the lifestyle as well advice to industry and agencies. This advice culminates in a list of practical suggestions for families, industry and agencies to provide assistance in managing fly-in fly-out and parenting.

Chapter 2 Methodology

The participants

Thirty-two families were interviewed. The criteria for inclusion of these families were that:

- there were at least two adults in the household
- there was at least one child aged six years or under
- they were currently involved in fly-in fly-out work arrangements in either the oil/gas or mining industries

No stipulations were made regarding length of time families had been doing fly-in fly-out, types of employment, location of employment or number of other children.

One family was included where the child was older than six years but their inclusion was considered valuable given the length of time they had been doing fly-in fly-out both in Australia and overseas.

Having a child less than six years was selected as a criterion as this represents a widely recognised foundational developmental period for the child e.g. (Stanley, 2003). Adverse social and psychological influences on development during these early years may have a lifelong impact (Berk, 2003).

How did we recruit participants?

Recruitment of participants occurred through a variety of avenues including via:

- Ngala and Meerilinga
- community newspapers;
- mining companies;
- school newsletters;
- child health clinics and day care centres;
- word of mouth.

All participants received background information regarding the project and both workers and partners at home signed the consent form before interviews proceeded. Four additional families asked for information regarding the research but were unable to take part due to consent not forthcoming from the fly-in fly-out worker.

All participants received information regarding the services provided by Ngala and Meerilinga at the completion of the interview.

Semi-structured interviews with parents

Sixty-four interviews were completed and all interviews took place in the participant's own home. Initial enquiries were made regarding interviewing workers on site but workers were not willing for this to occur due in main to twelve hour shifts and in part to the separation of work and family. Interviews with the partner at home and worker occurred wherever possible within a fortnight of each other. In some cases there was a gap of longer than two weeks due either to a long rotation or to changes in rotation.

The interviews took from twenty minutes to two and a quarter hours to complete. The average length of each interview was ninety minutes. Interviews were semi-structured to allow for the elicitation of significant detail on each of the broad issues under investigation.

The structure of the interviews was organised around the following four broad issues:

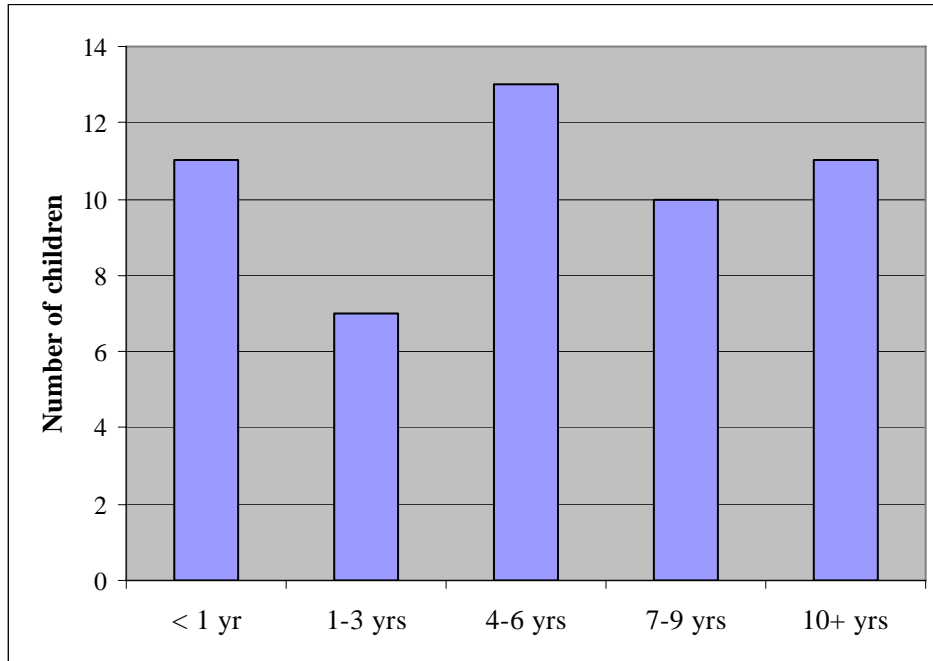
- 1) Demographics
 - a. Family structure
 - b. Length of time doing fly-in fly-out
 - c. Employment
- 2) Family dynamics and equilibrium
 - a. Social contact
 - b. Activities with children
 - c. Parenting
- 3) Emotional impacts
 - a. Tensions around arrival and departure
 - b. Perception of children's responses
 - c. Changes in personal identity
- 4) Expectations and the reality of family life
 - a. Routines
 - b. Events and occasions
 - c. Household tasks

See Appendix 2 for copies of the interview schedules.

Who did we interview?

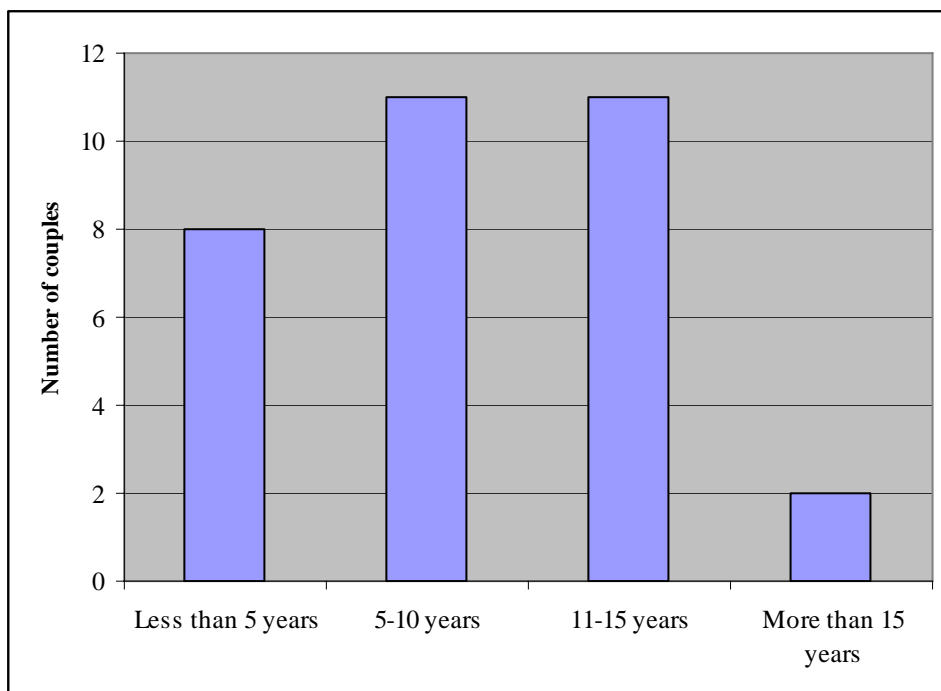
Thirty-two couples were interviewed. All but one couple had at least one child aged six years or under. The number of children in the household ranged from one to four with ages ranging from 10 weeks to thirteen years.

Figure 2.1: Number and ages of children



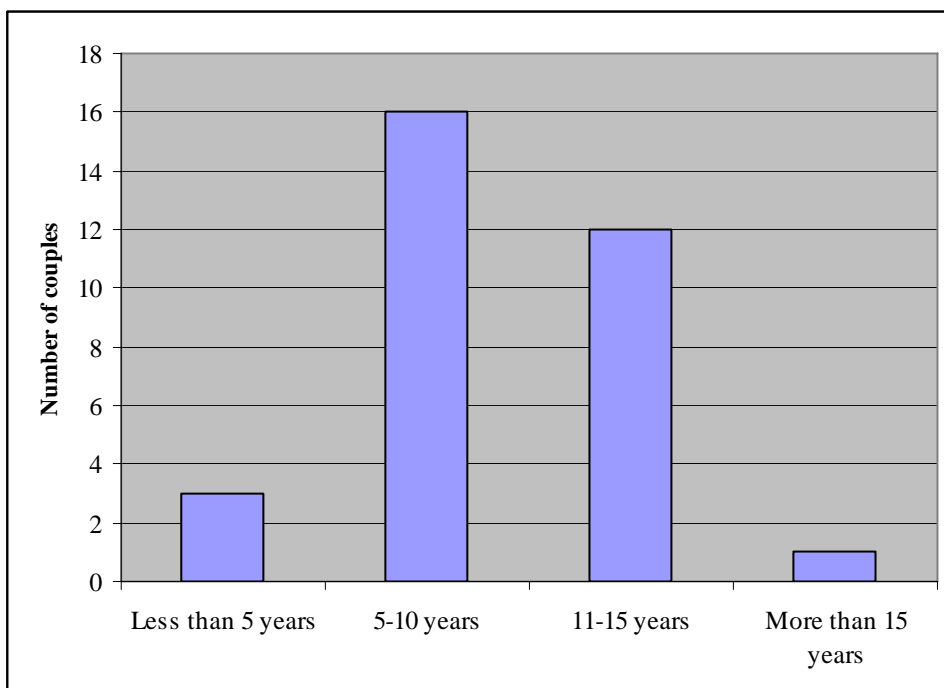
The length of time couples had been engaged in fly-in fly-out varied from 3 months up to 14 years. For five of the couples the current employee had been engaged in fly-in fly out for longer than the relationship. For nine couples fly-in fly-out commenced after the birth of their first child, for the remaining couples their first or only child was born while they were engaged in fly-in fly-out.

Figure 2.2: Length of time doing fly-in fly-out



The couples interviewed had been together for between three and seventeen years. Twenty five per cent of couples had being engaged in the fly-in fly-out lifestyle for the entire length of their relationship. Twelve per cent of the male partners and six per cent of women had a previous relationship and had children from that relationship.

Figure 2.3: Length of time together as a couple



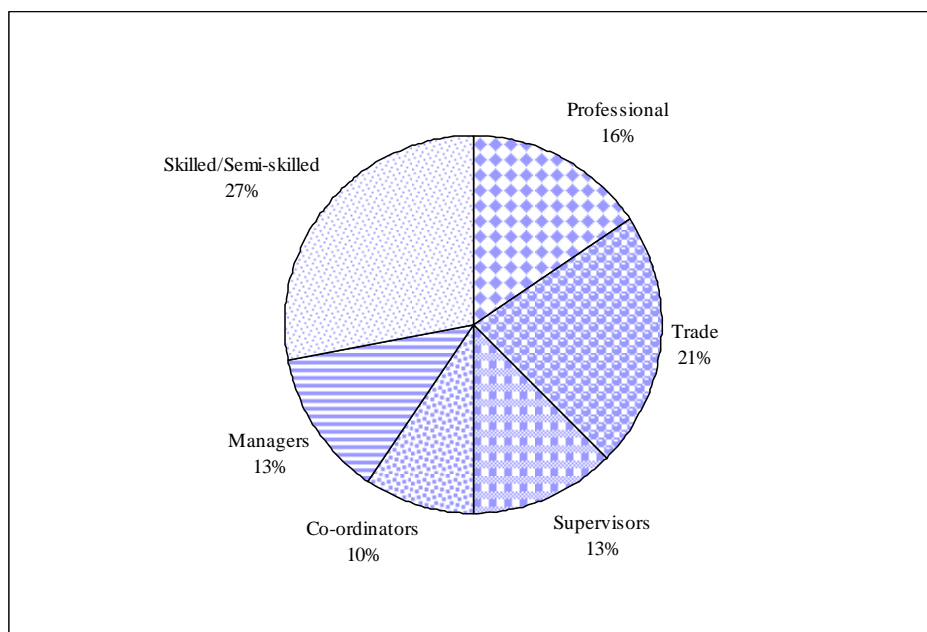
Occupation

Sixty-nine per cent of workers were employed in on-shore mining operations, twenty-one per cent were employed off-shore for oil and gas operations located off the coast of Western Australia and nine per cent or three workers were working internationally in mining and oil/gas operations in Africa, Yemen and India.

Twenty-eight per cent of the workers described themselves as contractors, that is, they were employees of a company that fulfilled specific contracts for owner-operators or they were on contract with a particular company.

Fly-in fly-out workers were employed in a range of occupations within the industries for which they worked including: skilled or semi-skilled mine/rig workers such as drillers, process technicians, production operators, shot firers, riggers, pressure testers, water truck drivers; those with a trade such as electricians, auto electricians, mechanics, welders; professionals such as exploration or resource geologists; maintenance or production supervisors; processing or production coordinators and; mine managers who were responsible for the overall management of the mine.

Figure 2.4: Types of occupations held by workers

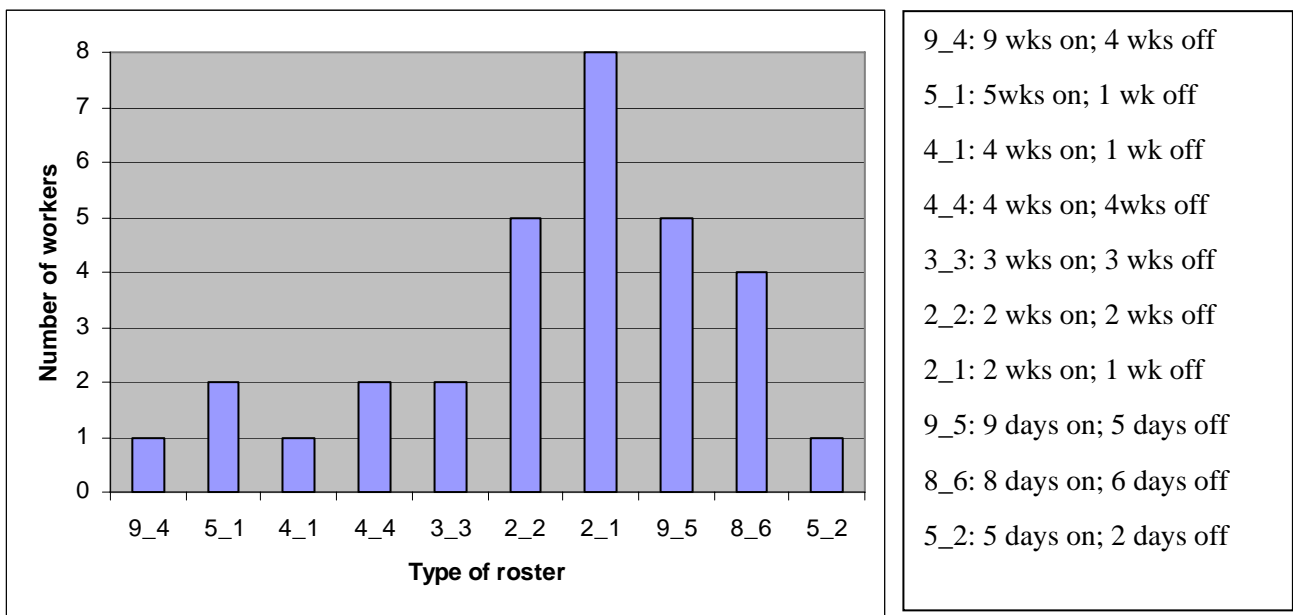


Types of rosters

The industry has, over recent times, been addressing the issue of rosters with cycles becoming progressively shorter. The most common roster in this research was two weeks on, one week off, which is standard for tradesmen, underground and production workers. A common alternative is nine days on, five days off and then eight days on, six days off. This format is the norm for professionals such as geologists, superintendents and managers. Many of those interviewed had just changed from a nine and five to an eight and six roster.

Overlaying the roster cycle is also a shift cycle. Those on two weeks on, one week off were generally on one week of day shift, one week of night shift followed by the week of furlough. Those on shorter rosters had other more variable shift arrangements. All employees were officially working twelve hour shifts.

Figure 2.5: Types of rosters



All names of those interviewed have been changed to protect the identity of participants.

Interviews with human resource managers

Human resources personnel from four companies were recruited via the Chamber of Mines and Energy. All companies were engaged in both fly-in fly-out as well as residential operations. The companies were selected for their diversity of structure and included a large company with a relatively small percentage of contract staff; a large company with a relatively large percentage of contract staff; a smaller company with a significant residential component; and a company

providing a full range of contract staff for various operations. It should be noted that the four human resource managers interviewed were not necessarily employed by companies from which participants were drawn.

All interviewed human resources personnel completed written consent forms.

Interviews revolved around policies and procedure for managing a fly-in fly-out workforce, recruitment and retention issues, and the company's perspective on reasons for continuing or discontinuing fly-in fly-out. Those interviewed were also asked to forward any relevant policy and procedure documentation that directly related to managing fly-in fly-out. All interviews took place within the Perth metropolitan area and the researcher also visited one fly-in fly-out operation.

See Appendix 3 for a copy of the interview schedule used with human resources personnel.

This research used a qualitative methodology which gave fly-in fly-out couples the opportunity to express their views on the fly-in fly-out lifestyle. However, the interviewees only represent couples who are comfortable in their relationships and with their parenting. The study did not capture those who were having marital difficulties or who had sought parenting assistance. Given that the study was trying to uncover the strengths of families in managing a fly-in fly-out lifestyle this was not considered a significant issue.

Chapter 3:

Choosing the fly-in fly-out option

Undertaking fly-in fly-out is generally considered to be a lifestyle choice, although some families had more workforce options than others. This chapter summarises the reasons families gave for commencing and continuing fly-in fly-out and why living residentially was not an option. It also discusses the concept of the fly-in fly-out plan where the central tenet is the welfare of the children.

The three predominant reasons for couples choosing to undertake and continue fly-in fly-out were:

- the money earned and the lifestyle it supported;
- the time off; and
- the intrinsic value of the work.

It was also evident that the families interviewed chose the lifestyle for a given period of time, and made continuous judgements regarding the benefits and drawbacks. At the heart of the decision to undertake and continue this form of employment were the benefits it afforded for the family; one of the primary reasons for discontinuing the arrangement was if there were any negative ramifications for children or couple relationships:

Don't think of mining as a job, you've got to think of mining as a lifestyle it's going to affect everything you do if you're happy with it that's good, but you shouldn't be trapped in a lifestyle, I mean you make choices to get out of it so. It's a matter of balancing up what you get out of it. If you're not getting anything out of it then you would have that trapped feeling. (*Jonathan*)

Financial gains

Approximately half the couples suggested that the primary reason for undertaking and continuing fly-in fly-out was economic. There was an implicit understanding that the fly-in fly-out arrangement contributed financially to the lifestyles the families were currently enjoying. This financial benefit was perceived as both direct financial gain but also indirect gain via reduced spending and reduced overheads resulting from one member of the household living away for set periods of time.

Previous research has identified financial incentives as being a powerful drawcard to the fly-in fly-out lifestyle (see Lambert, 2001; Sibbel, 2001). While the respondents in Sibbel's research describe being forced into fly-in fly-out to maintain a certain lifestyle, those interviewed in this research described less coercion and more joint decision making.

Nearly half the women interviewed mentioned financial gain as an aspect of fly-in fly-out that they particularly liked. For many of the respondents it was not a matter of funding luxury items but rather that they were able to “get ahead” financially, to be able to afford private schooling, pay off mortgages and alleviate anxiety regarding issues surrounding money. As the wider research shows (Zubrick et al., 2000:16) greater economic resources can either directly or indirectly improve the wellbeing of children, a fact acknowledged by a number of the participants cited below:

Its nice simple things like being able to buy the slightly better meat you know, and those type of things. Not having to worry, oh I've only got a hundred dollars to last this week and how am I going to make it fit and just knowing that we are getting ahead you know, we're trying hard to pay for the house, and not spending it all ... (Paula)

Basically the money really that's about it, yeah, nothing else. It's better money than down here I mean you do, do your eighty four hours a week and you're still more than doubling your money each week so, then what you would be getting down here as a tradesman so. (Grant)

Well if he was doing his [job] down in Perth, he would probably not even get half the wage that he is on up there, so it wouldn't allow us to have a beautiful house, holidays, send our child to private school later, save money, basically the luxuries in life I suppose you call them, but we're not over the top with things like that but we just, you know it comfortable and we don't you know go out buying expensive cars and things like that so it's just to be comfortable basically. (Yvonne)

There's lots of stuff [we couldn't do] because we didn't have the money. Now we can go to the movies, now we can go and buy fast food, we can go buy fast food and that's, that's just a simple treat. We couldn't afford to take the kids to the movies before he got on a better wage, so there is stuff we're doing now, but I think that's got less to do with the fly in, fly out situation and more to do with the fact that now we've got the money to do it.”(Sue)

Money is good, that's definitely a factor, it certainly helps us provide a lifestyle for not only us but we have every intention of sending our child to a private school. (Carla)

One of the reasons why I do the work I'm doing now is because of family reasons, I do have children and need to make sure I have financially stable work for their benefit, not so much for my own, but for them. (Tom)

Time away from work

The next most frequently cited reason for continuing participation in fly-in fly-out was that the roster facilitated a lifestyle which offered a block of time off that was relatively free from work commitments. The value of this arrangement included:

- time to spend with children;
- separation of work from family life.

Time with children

When considering time spent with children, participants tended to compare themselves with those engaged in more traditional work routines and generally saw themselves as better off:

Since I've had children I've come to realise that he gets so much more quality time with the kids. He has four weeks off, he's stress free, I get to go out in little bits here and there, do whatever I want and he gets to spend so much time with the kids, more than my friends you know, I see you know my friends that their husbands don't get home till six thirty, seven o'clock at night, the kids go to bed and then weekends they either work or renovate or they're too tired. I just think the time with the kids is amazing. *(Cheryl)*

But when he's home its great, it really is and he sees more of the kids than other Dads would doing that and we both know that the rotation [4 on, 4 off] is probably one of the best we'll ever, ever get. *(Frances)*

You hear of, a lot of people here they actually work nine to five, but they never really see the kids or anything like that and they you know, they're here, but they're not here and yeah I think I can get them, muck around with them and do all that kind of thing and, and it gives me a bit of time like I've built the cubby and all that out there and it took bloody a bit longer and a bit dearer than what I thought, but anyway I built it. *(Grant)*

Separation of work from family

As can be seen in the following quotes the workers described the ability to be able to "leave work behind" physically, mentally and emotionally as one of the benefits of fly-in fly out:

I leave work at work, I don't bring it home. You know you rock up to the airport and you see guys jump into their cars and they've got their uniforms on already you know, I get changed up there you know, that's where the work begins as far as I am concerned. *(Alan)*

When I do get time off it's a complete week off and you actually get to, well we stop thinking about work and just do other things. *(Damian)*

I enjoy the quality of time I get at home. While I'm home I don't have any distractions, I don't have to worry about going to work tomorrow for six out of seven days off you know, and if we want to go do something I don't have to say oh but I've, the boss' given me overtime you know. Quality of life it sort of balances itself out. *(Joshua)*

The joy of work

The attraction of fly-in fly-out was also tied up with the worker's intrinsic enjoyment of the job, a sense of job security especially for those who had previously been in unstable working arrangements and/or a strong sense of camaraderie with others on the same shift.

Well basically this is the job that he does, he's done other things and he's never been as happy as doing geology and I figure it's better he be happy than unhappy because it impacts badly on the family if he's unhappy. (*Anna*)

I like mining and its challenging, its good work you know electrical wires, its technology is full on so and all machines are automated and that sort of stuff so, and when they stop they call us, the call electrical people, so its good, its interesting and I do like the work. (*Justin*)

Oh it, it allowed me to work in the field that sort of interested me, I come from farming background so being stuck in an office in Perth wasn't really what I was after, I wanted something that was outdoors and you know, working with machinery and that sort of thing umm... so in the mining is, I couldn't stay farming... farming just wasn't paying it's way so. The rest of my family are still farming, but there just wasn't room on the farm for everybody so. (*Brian*)

I work with a good mob of guys which is... first and foremost, if I wasn't happy I wouldn't be there, the money's good which is another bonus but the main thing is the people I work with which makes it, you know, makes it comfortable... (*Arthur*)

He got a job with construction working city based but it's unreliable, he would work for nine months and he'd have to have six weeks off cause there's no work and he wasn't necessarily unemployed but there was no work. So it was so unreliable whereas, this is sort of, we had got into the mining, at least we went back into the mining and working away from home was because the construction industry was so unreliable. He has not been out of work. (*Tara*)

Considering the residential option

The participants in this study fell into three categories as far as the residential option was concerned: those who had previously undertaken the residential lifestyle and were not interested in pursuing it again; those who had no previous experience of living residentially and were not considering it; and those who had no previous experience but would consider a residential lifestyle.

In relation to this, previous studies have indicated that relocating to a regional area is not an option for some families due to the isolation from family support networks; alienation from the local community; fewer employment opportunities for the partner not involved in mining; and fewer leisure and education options for children (Pollard, 1990; Heiler, 2002).

For the families in this study, reasons for not opting for a residential lifestyle largely focussed on the needs of children and included:

- the lack of speciality services in towns offering residential options including services for children with special needs;
- access to medical facilities and emergency services especially for child and maternity services and especially in more remote locations;
- costs and lack of child care services;
- cost of living associated with living in remote areas including rental or home purchase costs and food costs;
- limited options with regard to schooling for children;
- limited job and education options for partners not involved in the resources industry;
- limited access to support networks;
- child access and maintenance issues regarding children from previous relationships requiring couples to continue to live in Perth;
- lack of separation between work and home: “we actually tried residential for a while but they kept calling him in”;
- culture of some residential towns which revolve around a drinking culture.

The following quotes illustrate the importance attached to the children’s welfare:

I think the main thing is I’d really like to stay in one area to settle the children because it’s not good, like when you’re single and stuff yeah, you can jump around, go all around the world, but you don’t want to you know, you’ve got the children making friends and then as you make friends “Oh see you we’re off again” so really that’s the sort of thing, consciously, you’ve got to, I think you’ve got to do at the end of the day, for children really. (*Simon*)

We talked about it [going residential] once and I sort of said no I wouldn’t, I wouldn’t live up there because he’d come home and there’s nothing to do you know, there’s nothing, especially in Leinster, even though it’s a live in town there’s no, you know you can go to Kalgoorlie on your days off and that’s really not exciting. That’s what I used to do and it’s just not, I mean I did it when I was drinking and at night clubs and stuff and that still wasn’t all that exciting, but yeah there’s just I mean... I can see the benefits of a small town community because that’s what I grew up in, but I so like the fact that in the city you can take your kids you know, to Freo or to the beach or down to parks and yeah, yeah exactly so you’ve got so many more options. (*Trudy*)

We talked about relocating up to Karratha though, and getting a job with another company up there, but I sort of feel that I’ve only just moved a month ago so, I don’t want to have to do it all over again, plus I’ve got, the support that I do have I don’t want to leave that and be completely isolated because [*Fred*] will still be working his twelve hour days and I’ll still be at home with the kids with no one and then I don’t even have my friends or... family so I think that’s sort of out of the question. (*Maria*)

We’ve talked about it before, but we’re limited in that we can’t move away from the other two kids, so I’m stuck in Perth, I had the opportunities within the company for residential umm... but yeah I’d like to go residential, but umm... conditions prohibit. (*Murray*)

The fly-in fly-out plan

Couples were asked if they had discussed how long they were going to continue with the fly-in fly-out lifestyle and whether it was a joint decision. The decision to commence or continue with fly-in fly-out was something almost all the couples had discussed. It was generally considered vital that it was a joint decision and that both the partner at home and the worker had the option to request that the fly-in fly-out option cease.

Some couples had instigated plans based on doing fly-in fly-out for a defined period of time or had noted that the fly-in fly-out arrangement was dependent on a range of factors. These plans or factors included:

- needs of the children;
- children's ages;
- qualifications and work options for the partner at home;
- financial goals and most notably the establishment of financial security;
- securing financial benefits based on length of service;
- developing skills and establishing a career path;
- enjoyment of work.

Needs of children

In many cases the plan to continue fly-in fly-out was dependent on the reaction of the children or on the stress placed on the relationship:

The main reason we didn't have any plans was because we didn't know how the children would handle it because we'd had children and we've sort of been around them the whole time so you know, like if it didn't work out then I'd have to sort of you know, obviously take some pay cut and come back to a city job and all that. (*Simon*)

I think, I would sell everything to keep my relationship and you know like for the kids, like if say if our child was going off the rails and I felt like it was because [*Rob*] was away, absolutely and he feel exactly the same. If he needed to be at home as in him and I or for the children, yep we would definitely come home and we would work in, work in Perth. (*Jane*)

Children's ages

In some cases it was thought that it was important to plan on ceasing fly-in fly-out as children approached their teenage years:

I'd like to think that before the kids you know, start high school ... I just think those teenaged years are probably when they can be more difficult they're pushing the boundaries, they're challenging things and I think that's probably pretty important that both parents are around and sort of more stable. (*Casey*)

Qualifications and work options for the partner at home

Some couples talked about ceasing fly-in fly-out once the partner currently at home had finished studies, had gained employment or the children had gone to school enabling a wider range of employment of options for the partner at home. In this scenario current fly-in fly-out employees could change to a potentially lower paid job with the difference being met by their partner's employment:

But you know, after a while the children get older, she goes back to work and we can get some sort of, you know, get some money really accumulating because we're just sort of fighting now, even though the salary's quite good, with [*Julie*] staying home with the children. (*Simon*)

Donna is going to start doing a course now for, for the next I don't know how long it's going to take her, but you know quite a few years I think, five or six years or something. Like it's four years full time and she's got to do it part time. Its psychology ... she reckons I've worked hard enough and she'll support me I think. (*William*)

I mean when she goes back to work yeah, well that's it for me so I'll probably try and get, I'm even looking at it now there's a bit crane drivers jobs in town so I've been ringing up some of the big companies and drive a crane locally and they still make good money. But at the moment well while she's not working I'll still do this. (*Jim*)

Financial goals

Not surprisingly, given that money was a significant reason for starting and continuing fly-in fly-out, financial matters featured heavily in the couples' planning. Thus, the plan for many of them entailed paying off a mortgage on the home they currently live in, paying off investments, and/or establishing financial security more generally. Once these things were achieved the current fly-in fly-out arrangement might end:

We're hoping like we do a lot of saving so we're hoping that we'll be fairly financially independent like in five years time when he's finished. (*Kellie*)

I'll just work for another couple of years to be fully set up with everything umm... because doing this we can have a good time, put the kids through school and have everything sorted without really stretching it for the next five years. (*Damian*)

Basically before we did it we were in a bit of a hole, not to the point where we weren't living, we were surviving and we weren't putting any money away or getting ahead, so at this stage we're on a bit of a plan, once we get our things up and going and everything's sweet. (*Arthur*)

Initially it was just going to be like for five years and then now we obviously we bought this house and you know it's just, I think he's just going to do it... I think he's just going to do it for... until we pay off our house you know... Last week we just bought a block of land in Busselton so now he's going to work a bit longer to pay off the block of land in Busselton umm... (*Cheryl*)

Life after fly-in fly-out

Many workers were continuing fly-in fly-out, but at the same time taking opportunities for self-improvement with a view to pursuing a city based, in most cases Perth-based, job in the future:

I'm only thirty-four, there's, there's a long way ahead and I can develop my skills without having to be away, but it doesn't mean I just want to stay out there doing fly-in fly-out for the rest of my life either. (*Dean*)

I'm pushing for sort of experience in resource geology which is sort of computer modelling and all that sort of stuff. So I'm sort of doing the hard time now so then in the future I can get a resource or a city based job where I can just be sitting in front of computers and do occasional site visits rather than nine days on, five days off. So I guess it's like anything you've got to do the time you know, to get the sort of benefit at the back of it sort of thing. (*Simon*)

But I could probably see myself doing this until I'm probably forty-five, another twelve years, but if I was to leave in the next five years I'd probably go into adult education which is probably where I spend most of my time up there, doing training so. (*Jonathan*)

In conclusion, while some couples directly referred to a "plan", many more said there was no plan as such but there was still a clear understanding on how long the family would be engaged in the fly-in fly-out lifestyle. In most cases fly-in fly-out was not seen as a long term option and participants in this study looked toward a future that did not include fly-in fly-out but that may include the resources industry. There tended to be a mutual understanding on future goals whether these were financial or career and in the vast majority there was an "out-clause". In the great majority of cases, there was a realistic appreciation of the costs and benefits of the fly-in fly-out lifestyle, compared with any other, coupled with a sense that it was temporary:

I don't necessarily like fly-in fly-out if you know what I mean ... but it is a means to an end, it means you can live close to the beach and you can have things... but I don't see it as a forever thing. These things help put it into perspective, yeah, I mean its, its not absolutely ideal and even though I don't like it all the time, sometimes I do like it ... that's the reality check I suppose, that give you the opportunity, its give me and it will give hopefully my family, the kids and everything the opportunities in the future.
(Alan)

Chapter 4:

Communication between parents

By its nature the fly-in fly-out lifestyle is characterised by the regular entry and exit of at least one adult member of the household. Each time the worker arrives home and departs for the site there are a series of adjustments and negotiations that occur for all family members. Most families, consequently, described a range of emotions attached to these transitions.

The range of emotions experienced by workers

The emotions attendant on managing the transitions from home to work and back again, were generally exacerbated by tiredness and in anticipating loneliness. Many participants described an emotional cycle and while not all families experienced this pattern in its entirety, all couples described components of this emotional range. In Brian's words:

Yeah I think your mood definitely does change and I guess it cycles through a bit of a low when you first get home to you know then being really good and then you know you definitely as you get close to flying out again you sort of hit a bit of a low again that you've got to go. (*Brian*)

The cycle depicted overleaf is for workers and describes a two and one roster where the most common shift cycle, in this survey, was one week of twelve hour day-shifts followed by one week of twelve hour night-shifts and then flying out for a weeks leave.

Flying in

After flying in from work, workers experienced a range of emotions and were able to reintegrate back into family life with variable degrees of success. In this respect, workers fell into three main categories, those who:

- were able to immediately embed themselves in family issues;
- required a "chill-out" zone before becoming involved;
- saw the furlough as a chance to recharge their energies for the next stint.

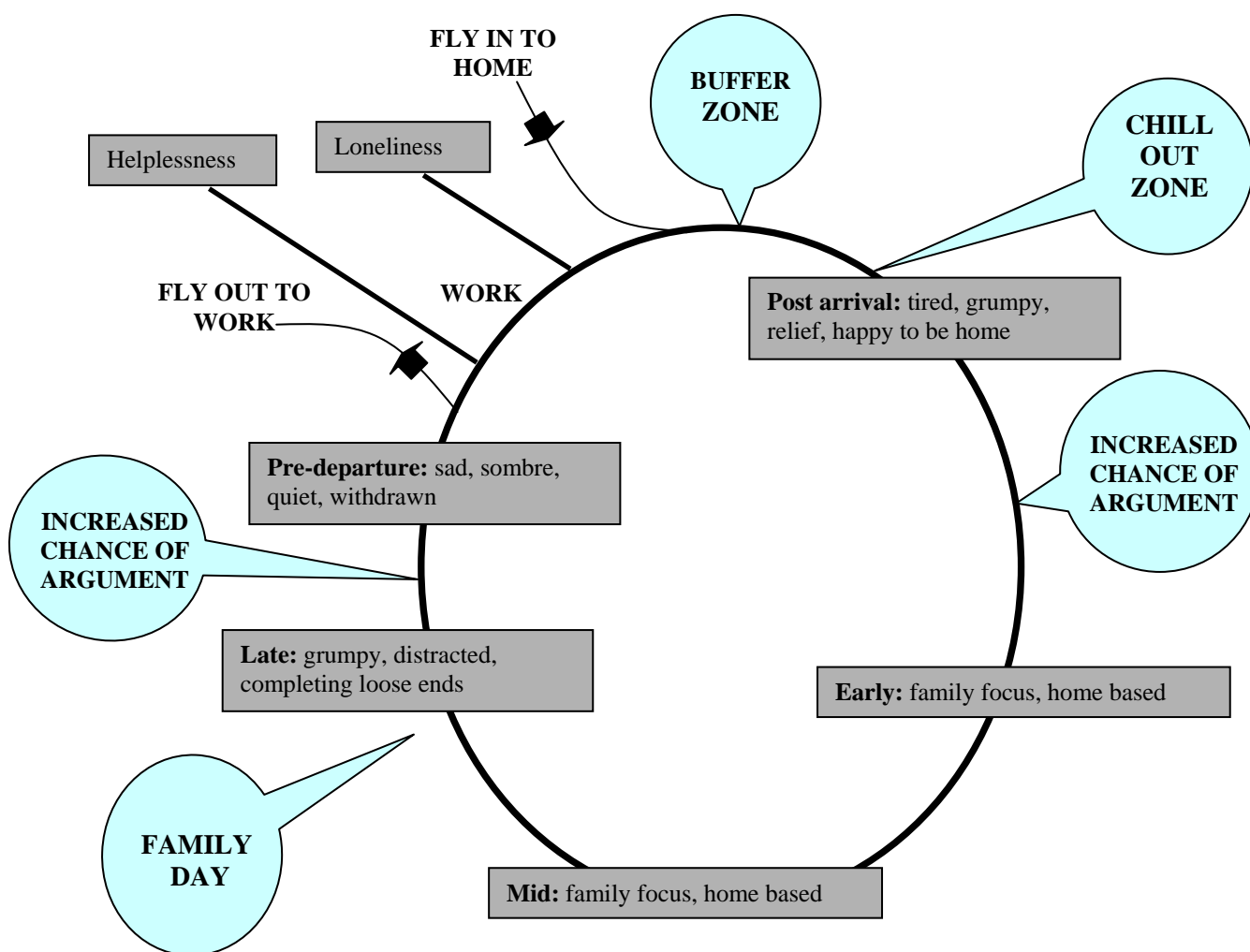
Immediate involvement in family life

In some cases workers were able to become completely embedded in the family routine on their return, after a brief sleep:

Oh it's alright I normally like, get an hour's kip on the plane in the morning and I just come home and have three or four hours in the afternoon before the kids get home [from school] and back to normal. (Grant)

If he's been doing night shift the night before he'll have a wee bit of a sleep, but he can't wait to go down and pick up the kids and that, no it's a very positive attitude when he comes down. (Sue)

Figure 4.1: Range of emotions experienced during the fly-in fly-out cycle



Chill-out zone

For others there was recognition that the twelve hour shifts had taken their toll and that the worker needed space before becoming immersed in family life. This was essentially the chill out zone. A number of participants found this hard to manage given how excited their children were to see them:

Yeah first day they know Dad's like just tiptoe around him a little bit and, but like I say I don't like go out of my way to be grumpy at them and that I, I umm, you know like as soon as they walk in the door, give them a big cuddle and say how you going and do like you do. Its hard to explain I know, you're happy to be home, and you're happy to see them but you're tired. (*Justin*)

The kids are excited to play with me and I'm buggered because once you switch off and then you're on the plane trip you really wind down and are ready to fall asleep and you get home and you want to actually do all this stuff, but your body's already gone to sleep, like I've done my two weeks, the body can stop. So that's when I need to tell the kids well Daddy's home now but Daddy'll be here when you wake up in the morning and we'll have a play in the morning. (*Damian*)

It's really hard because if you're absolutely fatigued when you come home and you're tired and you're grumpy and you can't concentrate, or your attention span is limited you know you lose focus very easy and everyone else is excited to see you and they can't understand why you're not happy as well and umm... yeah it's just very hard for them to understand. (*Brian*)

This chill-out zone was also a period of readjustment for the partner at home as well, who found their returning partner critical and snappy:

Just him trying to fit back into his role as a Dad and into our lives that always causes bits of stress here and there, particularly as I think he's a bit of a perfectionist and he likes to do things well, but I mean he can't do, there's no such thing as perfect parenting and so sometimes he'd get a bit frustrated with how things were going and that would cause stress. (*Dorothy*)

The kids just constantly talk as soon as you get in the car, he goes, oh I can't deal with that, too much noise. I mean I might be very tired and had enough dealing with the thirteen year old and stuff like that, so then I'm a bit more snappy at him and he's like, turn me around take be back to the airport, he does that quite often, I'm, "no you're coming home for a week, I need you to support me". (*Tara*)

Yeah I said to him at one point, I'm just happy to see the back of you when you go because you are such a pain when you come home it's like this, that and the other and it's just all full on straight away and I can't deal with that and also you're stressed, you're yelling and we're arguing and the kids are, you know it's all is, it's just all messy and I said and I feel extremely stressed and I don't want to feel that way. (*Melinda*)

The furlough as a “break”

In some cases there was a period of tension because both the partner at home and the worker felt that the furlough was their break, that they were the ones who deserved the break:

All I want to do is relax, that is probably the biggest thing, trying to get enough relaxation time and I know it sounds a bit lazy, but it's hard to explain when you go hard all the time, all you want to do is stop... (Joshua)

Sleep, yeah like if our child wakes up in the middle of the night [Carla] kind of used the five days I'm down as her break and if he's up in the middle of the night then it's my responsibility to get up and I get pissed off with that thinking well hang on I've just worked nine days straight, sometimes up to ten pm at night you know, I need a sleep in, in the morning... (Mitchell)

Regardless of whether the worker was able to slot straight back into family life, required a chill out zone or had to negotiate a “break”, some couples suggested that an argument often brewed around day three as a result of tiredness and a sense of anticlimax:

He'd come home we'd have real stress for two and a half days and then we'd have an argument and then everything would settle down or if we had a bit of a rest and then we'd have a really happy four days. (Hillary)

It's quite exciting I mean we organise and we're going to do this and do that, it's going to be fantastic umm... and that's probably the same for the first day or so, but then after that then you know umm... our little differences come, start arising and you know, we have a big argument and... after that I think you know sort of just work your way into. (Trent)

Flying out

Most couples agreed that after day three the routine kicked in and things settled down. However, as the day for flying back out to site came closer, workers experienced two further changes in mood. A couple of days prior to departure many felt or were described as being, grumpy, cranky, officious, anxious, tense, edgy, and moody. Much of this tension was related to:

- trying to complete tasks set for the furlough and therefore a degree of tension as attempts are made to complete them;
- moving into work mode and beginning the process of detaching from family.

The day before departure this kind of tension was replaced with a degree of sadness.

Task completion

Sometimes I leave things to the last minute and I'm totally focussed on that and I just want to get it finished, so sometimes I admit I might be a bit snappy you know, don't bother me with that insignificant, I just want to get this finished you know and I don't mean to be snappy, but sometimes I am I suppose. But umm... sometimes I feel that [Yvonne's] grumpy and of course she throws the excuse at me Oh you're always grumpy before you go and I say I'm not grumpy it's you, you know. But really I don't know, she's really pretty good (*Nicholas*)

Only that, those things that he hadn't done that he wanted to get finished so he'd get a bit tense I suppose and just the fact that he's going away and I didn't want to cause tension with him and so I get back into my little box because I didn't want to upset him because he was upset and he just picks up on the vibes I suppose and both of us are withdrawing. (*Frances*)

Oh yeah because we get frustrated because we didn't get everything done we wanted to, or on Tuesday afternoon or Tuesday night we race around trying to get everything done before he goes back to work so then we get a bit cross with each other because we didn't get everything done. (*Carmel*)

Changing to work mode

His brain starts to switch over you know the day of so before he goes and he starts to get his bag ready and that's all just the process of getting himself into the work sort of frame of mind so when he gets on the plane you know he's not still in sort of relax holiday mode, but again I just let him, happy for him to have the space to do that. (*Bev*)

Yeah, the last day, the last day before he leaves, the day before he's usually in work mode. Like he says his mind's ticking over thinking about the job he's got to do, this and this organised, is that organised and yeah, he even admits it he's in work mode and they all, all the other men they all say the same things to their wives, they have a terrible twenty-four hours beforehand so they usually have a huge, big domestic the day before they leave which is nice. But yeah, I think it's tension you've, tension from both of us because he's going and you feel guilty, you know, and he feels guilty that he's going and because he's in work mode. He's different when he's in work mode than family mode, there's a lot more tension around the house. (*Felicity*)

Sadness associated with departure

A little depressed, yeah I'm... not a good feeling separation feeling a little bit down, but well for me it doesn't... doesn't last too long because once, once I've been left on my own and they've left the airport I just start thinking about getting back there and starting work again and then that first phone call and then that second phone call, but it is a definite tear of separation there, the first degree of separation or whatever they call it, it's definitely there. (*Jeffry*)

I'm going to be going away for say eight to ten weeks umm... then I'll probably get like really, well maybe depressed I don't know, but a bit sad you know the last few days, obviously I think everyone would just only human. Umm... you get sad that you're going to be away for that period. (*Jack*)

Oh I always become a bit withdrawn on the last day or so and more introverted. (*Trent*)

Being away

Expressing how they felt about the time away at work was difficult for many of the workers. There was a sense of “just doing it” – focussing on work and maintaining regular contact with family. In some cases workers did acknowledge that while they were away they experienced a helplessness or loneliness. It was only by focussing on work or focussing on their ability to provide for their families that they were able to manage the separation.

Helplessness

The distance between the work place and home engendered a sense of helplessness often exacerbated when their partner or children were unwell:

Oh I think, I think the thing that probably hits me is... especially like if [*Julie*] is sick or the children are sick and you just feel so helpless you know like [*Julie*] said Oh our youngest child had been throwing up all night and she's like you know, eyeballs hanging out of her head and I'm thinking Oh God you know, wish I could just get on the plane and get there. I think that's it, I think it's your helplessness. (*Simon*)

It's been hard for her but, she might deny it, but it's been real hard sometimes and she's on the phone you know crying and you just got to kind of sort it out and, so you just take a deep breath, go out and have a cuppa and come back in and face it, go round two. It's hard, that's the bit I hate the most because you're talking on the phone knowing you can't just grab her and give her a cuddle or anything like that you just got to deal with it over a phone. It's so impersonal and there's no direct contact and you can't just like sit down, I'll sort it out you go door knocking whatever. Yeah, that's the hard bit, bit I hate the most trying to deal with stuff over the phone, just not right, but that's life isn't it. (*Sam*)

What I don't like about it is that sometimes when she does get sick or if she's got her hands full that you're not there to, to assist it's a sense of frustration and I think that's, that's not about woe is me, because I think they do it far harder than we do to be honest, that there's that sense of frustration sometimes that you know this is, I think this is increasing while I, I do it and I'll continue to do it and I'm certainly not bagging fly-in fly-out, but that's something more so now that it's not as, not as enjoyable as what it used to be because of that umm... I mean that's more fundamental that sense of... it's not uselessness, but it's frustration that you can't, can't help out. (*Casey*)

Loneliness

I don't know, I suppose the loneliness of it all you know, you work away, I'm a bit of a home boy now. (*Sam*)

Missing the family

While workers expressed, on the one hand, enjoyment regarding the work they did and their ability to provide for their families, they still missed their families:

I don't like being away from my wife and child full stop. I don't, I've never been, I mean if you're going to be married and be committed to your marriage and raising a child it sort of contradicts it if you're going to be away... its not something that will go on forever. (*Dean*)

Two weeks away is just a bit too long with kids. Just feels a bit too long you know. Well when you're up there it goes quite quick, but when if I take annual leave and I'm down here, I realise how long two weeks takes you know. (*Justin*)

Well being away for starters... really yah being away that's probably the worst thing about it, I don't mind the job. (*Grant*)

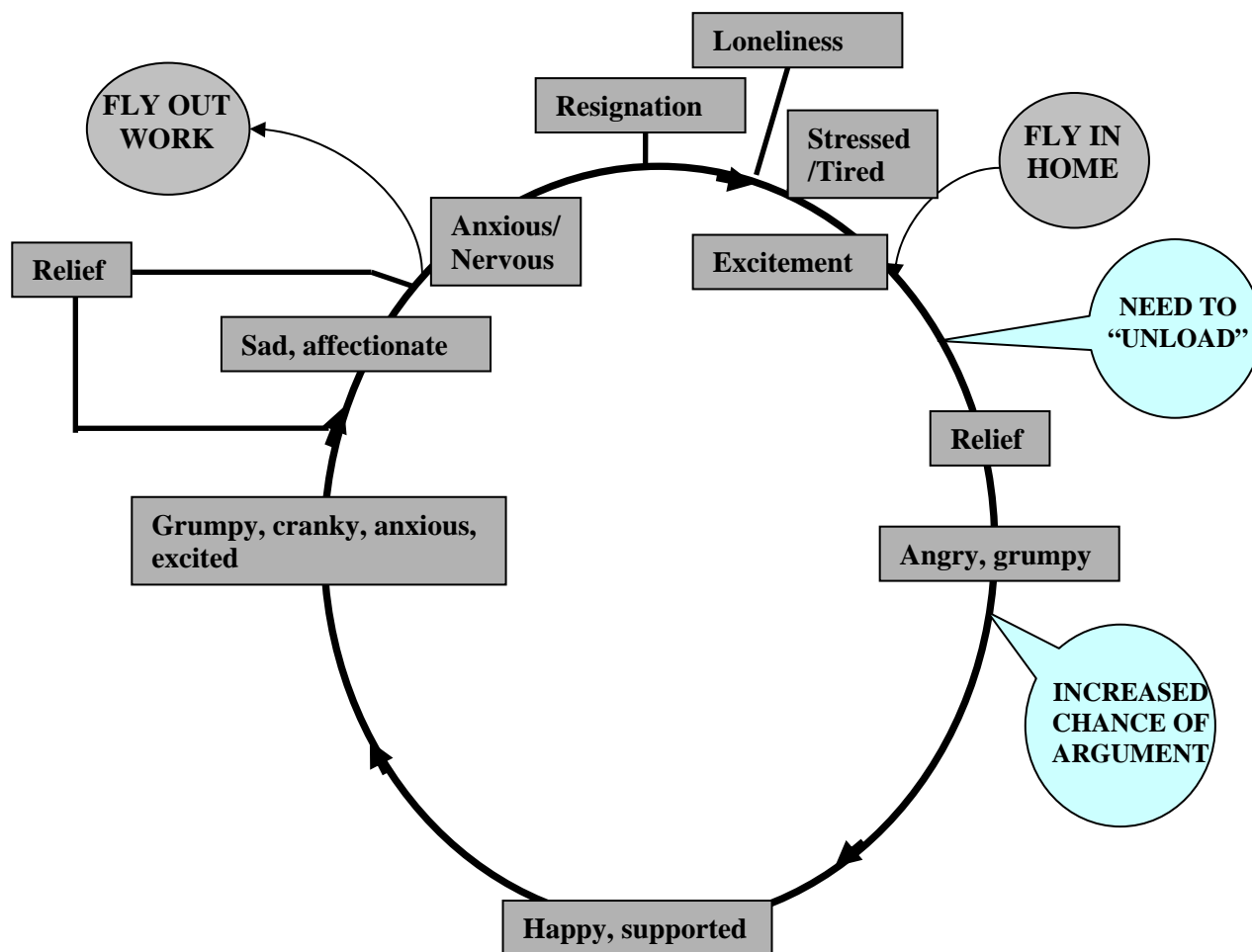
Not going back to your children and your wife every night, I think that's also difficult. But you've pretty much have to accept it. (*Brendan*)

The range of emotions experienced by partners at home

Partners at home described feeling a wide range of emotions when their partners arrived home and when they left. There was, in some cases, a sense that some of the emotions were in conflict. For example, many women enjoyed the time by themselves but felt this conflicted with the emotional and physical requirements of looking after children and a household as well as missing the companionship and intimacy.

Generally most women went through a feeling of excitement and anticipation just prior and just after their partners returned home. This was followed by a sense of relief that their partners were safe at home and there was another adult in the household for support, intimacy and companionship. However, mirroring the workers, early post-arrival there was a period of tension as couples readjusted to having another adult in the household. In part this was due to the accommodations made with regard to having another person in the household to consult and in some cases pick up after. This phase was usually short lived. Just before the workers departed for the site many women felt anxious for both their partners and for themselves – marking another changeover period as women realise that there is another stint to manage on their own. It is not however, always marked by anxiety and sadness. In some cases it can be a period of relief and happiness in anticipation of time spent on their own again.

Figure 4.2: Range of emotions experienced during the fly-in fly-out cycle



The following two women describe the full gamut of emotions felt during an entire roster:

Yeah, I get a little bit of anxiety yeah, [when he's about to leave] yeah, I know, I know it's going to happen because when he first comes home, the Friday night and you've got the weekend, you're really excited and then it, the Monday's good and I don't like Monday's only, but try and get through Monday and then by the time Wednesday comes you know that there's only a few days left and, yeah I start getting a little bit sad, but I feel I can't be like that because if the kids pick it up and you've to go, that's it well I've got to be really positive and because that'll reflect you know, on me. So yeah, I just get a little bit sad, but me and [Jeffry] always talk about it you know, should he go back up and everything like that, we're always talking about it. (Kim)

I get this sort of like sick feeling when he goes like, and I think that's just a worry, you know, being by yourself. I feel anxious...for me, mainly for me which is very selfish, but I feel you know, I've got a task ahead of me. Not, I don't really think, lay it out like that, but I think that subconsciously by myself for two weeks. When he arrives home I'm very excited and very happy ... When he's just arrived, I get a sense of, I think I've built myself up so much, I'm so happy and so excited that he's come home and then he comes home and he's tired and I feel deflated about, maybe for the first day ... So mixed emotions on that day and then we just get into the routine. (Yvonne)

Flying out

When partners flew out for their stint, partners at home experienced nervousness at being alone and anxiety about their partner's safety through to resignation at the departure. As the weeks away continued the daily physical and emotional labour of caring for children and a household began to take its toll manifesting as increasing loneliness and tiredness.

Nervousness

I feel a little bit apprehensive I suppose, knowing that it's going to be another couple of weeks before I see him again. *(Paula)*

Not the fact that I'm scared or anything, but the fact that, just not that reassurance at night, you know. *(Frances)*

If someone tries to break in at night and you're terrified you know you think I've got an alarm, I suppose that sort of thing. *(Julie)*

I guess the uncertainty, you hope that they're safe out there. *(Bev)*

Loneliness

For some partners at home the time the worker was away was also a time of loneliness. Many missed the intimacy of their partner and others missed adult company:

I miss him you know, I miss, I miss that with, because we are very intimate people and, and have a very active sex life before fly-in fly-out and ... yeah I sort of you know count down... I suppose just having somebody in my bed, just having company, someone like just not necessarily even talking, but just sitting there on the couch and holding each other's hand stuff like that. *(Kellie)*

I don't know how to say this, but knowing too you can't have you know intimate times together and I've got to wait five weeks and its really hard to do because its, I am in my thirties and its meant to be your prime time. *(Kim)*

I missed the skin to skin contact which you don't have. You can have adult conversation but the skin on skin contact you miss. *(Tara)*

It gets lonely especially having you know, not ... I have got family here but not really close. Most of my friends have moved on and that sort of thing so yeah it's trying to meet people all over again... *(Paula)*

Tiredness

By the end of the stint there can be a feeling of tiredness and longing for relief:

Having two kids like trying to be a Mum and a Dad and you know, twenty four hours a day and I don't get a break because I don't have family so I don't get a break you know. *(Kim)*

And sometimes when you're having a really bad day and the kids are having a really bad day you wish that you had you husband walking through the door at six o'clock and just here, deal with it, I've had enough - that sort of thing. *(Sue)*

Flying in

Just after the worker had flown back in, partners at home described a period of readjustment where the excitement and relief of the worker's return, turned to grumpiness as a consequence of the transition to a two adult household.

Readjustment

When he arrives home I'm often very exciting but then sometimes he takes a while like the same day or the next day in that he's home but he's not really here yet, there's a build up and then there's sort of like a patiently waiting bit and then usually its very good. (*Bev*)

During the first week home I have to keep telling myself actually you know, be more patient, be more tolerant. I think it's just the little things, you know, it's like the umm... Oh you know it's the mess you know all the time and ... I know that that's petty and I know in my you know, intellect that that's petty, but it's still an adjustment you know because you do really... run your own life you know, to suit yourself and I think that's probably the biggest down side is that you know, you are independent like that and you're not used to having to factor the other person. (*Anna*)

[When he's about to arrive home] I'm usually excited and I'm also probably a little nervous... (*Kellie*)

'Unloading'

Some of the partners at home who have been deprived of constant adult company and who have been dealing with the trials and tribulations of children felt an imperative to discuss issues that had arisen with their partners immediately on their return. As the following citations illustrate, this was something the workers did not necessarily want or appreciate:

As soon as I get in the door I get this long list of what has changed, what the routine is now, what I need to do and I can't take that all in. Then sometimes it's difficult to figure out what should happen. (*Wayne*)

Sometimes if she's, if you know we're on our way home and, or I'm at home the first night and she starts telling me all the problems about "Oh this is a problem, that's a problem" you just go just lets talk about it tomorrow you know, can it wait till tomorrow sort of thing. (*Trevor*)

Pre-departure

The next intense emotional period is just before departure. At this time there is an underlying tension between missing the worker and being excited about having individual space again. There was also an underlying sadness and anxiety:

I'm really bad the day before he goes back, I find I get really depressed. (*Melinda*)

Depends, sometimes I'm actually excited because I might have a busy week coming up and I might have something on ... before I used to get a little bit excited by the fact that "Oh yay I get my house back and I get to do my routine again". Now it's kind of like "Oh no, here we go and if I have another bad week then holy shit I'll look forward to him coming home" ((laughter)). (*Leonie*)

Usually by the end of the week I'm ready for him to go because once again it's not a normal situation to have your husband home twenty-four seven and I miss him before he comes back, when he comes back I'm just as excited as the kids. By that last twenty-four hour period I'm like okay I need some time to myself, I need some space and you get used to having that space when they're away and when you have two weeks of space and then they're there in your face twenty-four seven. (*Sue*)

Yeah, I get a little bit of anxiety that I know that he has to go back about why can't he just get a job in Perth and I do, sometimes I push things into his face and say you know, you're, you're going away soon so why don't you deal with it you know I have to deal with it when you're not here twenty-four hours a day and I shouldn't really do that because I've agreed for him to go away, but just that knowing that he's got to go away, but then like I said, once he's away and the first, you get rid of the first week or even the first three days, I'm fine, I'm just back into a normal routine you know. (*Kim*)

The partners in this study had developed a range of strategies to deal with the difficulties they experienced. These included:

- recognition by workers that the "job" at home was a difficult one and was of significant value;
- maintaining open communication lines regarding the continuation of fly-in fly-out;
- parting on good terms;
- maintaining a positive attitude.

Recognition of the partner at home's "job"

I'd go nuts if I was working nine days at home, because I mean really her job is a hell of a lot harder than mine because ... my job is pretty well looked after But it's sort of routine really, but you know her job if someone's sick or someone's this and you've got school and you've got to coordinate, you've got to, there's a lot more you know, it's a lot more tasks she's got to do so she's really, drains her out, especially trying to keep the house tidy and all this sort of stuff too you know it's, it's big work. (*Simon*)

Maintaining open communication lines

I just get a little bit sad, but me and [Jeffry] always talk about it you know, should he go back up and everything like that, we're always talking about it. That's one thing I like about him, he'll always ask my opinion, always discuss it with me without just going to do it you know like, men will say like no this is what I'm doing, you put up with it or you know, but he'll always discuss it. Even when he took this job, he didn't say yes until he had to come home and sat down with me to talk about it. (Kim)

Parting on good terms

Ensuring that the couple parted on good terms without any major arguments or disagreements helped maintain an even emotional keel during the mutual stints:

I always try to make sure that there's no tension or hard feelings happening between us. Umm... there, I guess we've just done it for so long I just sort of you know, it's all part of life now that, yeah a little bit sad. I'm never happy to see him go, we always muck around that it's time for him to leave, but he knows that that's a joke and yeah. (Trish)

Maintaining a positive attitude

When the kids were young I dreaded it you know, absolutely dreaded him going away because it was just you know, the whole physical drain again you know umm... now I think I just accept it really. I mean it's you know, it's always a you know, not a happy time that's for sure, but over the years I've found the more you, you umm... feel upset and uptight about it, the worse it actually is for you. You're better to just go with the flow and not you know say Oh this is terrible, how am I going to cope, if you do that you're actually the only one that suffers and the kids will suffer too if they hear you talk like that. You're better just say well look this is how it is, you know he's away for that time, we'll live, we'll be right you know and we'll just get on with it. (Anna)

Chapter 5:

Communication and connection with children

Children's responses

This research did not directly investigate children's responses but relied on parental insights into how well they thought their children managed the transitions associated with fly-in fly-out. The majority of families were not concerned about their children's reactions to fly-in fly-out especially if their children were under the age of four.

Sibbel (2001) has suggested from findings in an exploratory study, albeit in older children, that:

despite being exposed to the risk factors of frequent parental absence associated with hazardous employment conditions, children from fly-in fly-out families do not experience significantly higher levels of depressive symptomatology, anxiety and family dysfunction than non-fly-in fly-out children (65).

In this study most couples were keeping an open mind about their children's welfare and were willing to consider discontinuing fly-in fly-out if they considered their children were not managing the situation. In families who did have concerns about their children the fly-in fly-out arrangement had generally commenced when children were three years and older. However, some families with children under the age of one, found that they could become a little clingy when the worker departed and it took some time for the child to feel comfortable again upon their return. It was also reported that older children could go through periods of sadness, anger or naughtiness:

The children can get a little sad but I found it didn't really last for a long time as long as you're supportive and you just reinforce the fact that it's only for a little while. (*Sue*)

But like she hangs out for him to come home and when he's home he's tired and grumpy to begin with and, and then yeah, and then they fight and she goes through stages where she won't talk to him on the phone, she gets angry with him for being away and won't talk to him and, and then other times she won't let me talk to him because she wants to talk to him the whole time so I guess its all stages that children probably go through with their Mum and Dad anyway, but just in a different context because it's over the phone or whatever, no it doesn't really worry me. (*Linda*)

The first time I dropped [*Dean*] off at the airport to go, our child was very clingy that night and the next day and the day after he was back to normal. (*Rhiannon*)

Oh the kids were a complete nightmare that first swing. The older child was into the younger one's dummy, he'd throw tantrums at you know, a drop of a hat and he's normally a really, quite a good natured kid. He started kicking and biting and throwing things around and yeah, I was pulling my hair out by the end of the first week because I didn't know what to do with him. But ... the next time he left he was fine you know it was "Oh he does come back" you know he understands, and every time he saw an aeroplane go overhead would be like you know "that's like Daddy's aeroplane" and "aeroplanes come back and aeroplanes always come back". (*Paula*)

The thing that I worry about is when you're not, the children not recognising me when I get back. But when I did, he recognised me straight away which is good because it's a demoralising thing isn't it I think. The oldest is not happy when I go, but when I come back he's fine, but I think it's probably worse with the eldest one I'd say because sometimes I get a bit grumpy. (*Brendan*)

In the majority of cases couples felt they could institute strategies that helped their children come to terms with the lifestyle. These included:

- explaining fly-in fly-out and the reasons for doing it in terms children understood;
- giving the children space to express their feelings;
- facilitating ongoing telephone contact;
- concentrating on the positives;
- talking about the worker on a daily basis while they were away;
- having photographs of the worker in the house and beside the child's bed;
- putting the worker's voice on the answering machine and playing it on the loud speaker;
- giving children and the worker space to reconnect.

With these strategies in place few families had any difficulties with ensuring that children and the workers reconnected when they returned.

Partners at home facilitated this reconnection by giving children space with the worker to interact and share stories and encouraging the worker to spend solo time with the children:

I think probably the best thing to do is for them to spend some time without me around. You know I think if I like leave him with [my partner] and go to work and then I'll come back and he's happily bonded again. I think they need to spend time on their own. Might take them a couple days just to get the hang of it. (*Bev*)

When we pick him up he will sit in the back and chat, chat, chat to the kids. He sits in the back because otherwise, because I like to talk to him too, but I concentrate on driving and I just let the kids have their time Then we get home and you know, it's Oh come and look at this Daddy, come and look at (*Kim*)

The kids pretty much lunge themselves at him. There's, maybe it's just I don't know it might be different for other kids depending on their personality, but pretty much they get out of school, he's there to pick them up and they just throw themselves at him and it's just so exciting and things like that and he likes to talk to them usually talk, like especially [the oldest child], did you find any rocks Dad because Dad'll bring him home a rock you know, he'll find a pretty colour you know, it's got quartz in it or that, especially when he's doing the drilling and he'd bring him a rock. The other child pretty much just attaches herself like Velcro to him and, especially for the first couple of days, they, they seem to be really all over him so, and I think it is easy once again the two and one, there isn't as much, I think there was more of a problem in that, in that regard when he was doing the three and one. (*Sue*)

When he's home I pretty much leave her with him. Yep, I even go to mothers group without her. Yeah I think, I really believe that as much, as much time that he spends with her the better. (*Natasha*)

Yes, he will actually get out with [our second child] and practice soccer training with him which is something I do not do and I should but I don't, but [*Sam*] will get out there and he will get him training, you know or he'll get all the kids out there and he will get them playing a game that their not fighting over, you know and that's things I don't do, don't do so that is a relief when he is actually home he will entertain the kids a bit more and he started playing the base guitar, practicing the base guitar and cause our daughter's learning the flute, so they have found common interest in that and learning music and all that so him and her have been interacting a bit more because of that. The youngest one and his Dad will get on the floor and draw, like I said, Dad's a bit more fun when he comes home. (*Tara*)

In their turn, fathers talked about their wish to concentrate on the children:

Depending on what they require, sometimes we just all sit down as a big family group and we'd all do our paintings together and all that kind of stuff. I sit down with [the second child] and listen to her play saxophone and the same with [the eldest], she plays the trombone and I just go in there and she'll just you know play Star Wars or whatever it is and do that kind of thing. [The second child] asks me to play the Playstation a lot with her now and that kind of thing. I can't really help her too much, I'm good at some things, but she's better than me at most. (*Jonathon*)

The youngest one, we'll watch a movie together, he chooses his own movies, I pretend I'm interested and just sit there and he gives me a cuddle, he thinks its good so and at the end of the day that's what counts. (*Sam*)

Pocock (2001b) in her review of the literature on long working hours notes that what children need are parents who are able to provide “hang-time”, which is time spent being with the family and “focussed time”, which is time spent on a child directed or focussed activity. Fly-in fly-out would appear to provide opportunities for workers for such time that other jobs involving long hours are perhaps not able to do:

Every night when they go and jump in the bath together and so, they just do quality things together so it not, in some ways I think that probably maybe he’s a little more advantaged that some parents who have nine to five jobs, who only see their kids maybe for a couple of hours at the end of each day, he really gets to spend that time and I think that really helps [our child] recognise him and know that he’s his Dad. We don’t know what he’s thinking, but that’s our theory. (Carla)

Parenting: who does what

The transition from a one to two adult household affected the way in which the partners managed the care of their children. As with all other aspects, parenting fell along a continuum with the two extremes being:

- no change because the worker is effectively absent all the time; to
- no change because the worker has effectively maintained a household presence even while physically absent.

Well *Dorothy* basically does it, so it doesn’t really change dramatically when I get back. (Patrick)

It doesn’t really stop, he still manages to, you know the kids still get disciplined over the phone. (Kellie)

The majority of participants, however, were both involved in providing care and nurturance of children. In this respect, many felt that they were better off than families with a more conventional lifestyle:

With working a nine to five job you’d only probably have weekends off other than having to take holidays, at least with the fly in, fly out he’s around during the week and things like that to do things on weekdays umm... like he’d be able, he can come to swimming lessons because like if he was working a nine to five job he wouldn’t be able to go to swimming lessons and do things like that so that’s an advantage. (Carmel)

Yeah we have this, we have a complete week as a family together you know, because there’ll be like people I know that live in Perth that are, that only maybe see their family really on a Sunday because they work six days a week, they get home late at night and they don’t really see their family until, not until Sunday and then they’re so tired on Sunday they really don’t get quality time. So I like that week off, I get good quality time with him. (Kellie)

Because he hasn’t seen us for a couple of weeks he’s more patient. I would just be losing patience by the time he comes back whereas he spends more quality time with the kids when he’s home, than when he was working five and six days a week. (Sue)

I feel also that even though she goes to school, I can, I spend, I can spend more quality time with her in the evening as well whereas you know, if I worked nine till five or whatever it was you get home, you're tired, you're grumpy so I suppose with the two and two I just feel I get to spend a bit more quality time with her on my two weeks off, than probably people that are home every night working nine till five. (*Nicholas*)

When you work nine to five overtime plays a very big part in your life. When I wasn't earning a great deal of money ... every chance I got to do overtime, I was working every Saturday till lunch and then you get home from, from work on Saturday and I'd fall asleep on the couch in front of the telly Saturday afternoon, wake up, have dinner, go to bed and on Sunday you really don't want to do too much you know and you sort of mope around the house. (*Joshua*)

Definitely we do a lot more because of his, because he works away, because when he's home we can you know, book long weekends away, which we do quite often. We do we like pick the kids up from school, we might go to a park for a couple of hours or yeah we definitely do a lot more when he works away, together as a family so that's a bit bizarre because he's away, but then when he's away he'll ring, he'll ring three or four times a day to keep in touch with the family. (*Felicity*)

Managing transitions

As far as managing the parenting transition, the majority of families had again effectively put into place strategies that enabled things to move smoothly. Here they:

- established particular tasks for the worker to “pick up” when he returns;
- developed a consistent routine;
- attempted to be consistent and present a “united front” regarding children’s behaviour.

Unlike the research of Pocock (2001a; 2001b), the partners at home in this study generally felt they had partner support for decision making and parenting. This was facilitated by three key factors, regular communication, shorter rosters and quality, concentrated time spent with family during the furlough.

Storey and co-workers (1989) described the impact of rosters on the formation of stable family units. Those on longer even rosters (twenty-eight days on, twenty-eight days off) formed two stable family units one with the worker and one without. Those on asymmetrical rosters (four weeks on, one week off) formed a single parent family structure and a dual parent structure for the away and home stints respectively.

Our research illustrated that a combination of shorter rosters, regular and effective communication and a commitment to dual parenting resulted in stable family structures for both the away and home stints. This is not to say that the family structure is stable for the duration of the stint and furlough but the length of instability, that is, the transition periods is greatly reduced.

Task differentiation

Parenting young children involves physical labour, with its characteristic tasks of bathing, feeding, getting to bed, getting to and from school and play. By participating in these everyday physical tasks, workers were able to reconnect with their children and re-establish themselves as part of the family unit. The designation of the tasks between partners varied according to the level of comfort with the job and the level of knowledge regarding what needed to be completed:

He'll pretty much do half, I mean obviously I'm still feeding him so there's always a bit more for me to do. No he was involved really early on and if I'm playing with [our child] or he's sitting on my lap and I'll go oh no he's just done a pooh, he'll go – I'll do it and change his nappy. (*Bev*)

He might bath him or be in the shower with him or if I have him in the shower then he will take him out of the shower and then go and dress him. I mean he changes him, feeds him, does the lot. We share it like obviously when I was breastfeeding I'd get up and feed him at night, but now that he's on the bottle he'll you know, I'll do the bottle or he'll do the bottle. (*Trudy*)

I struggle with bathing a little bit. I have bathed her a couple of times, but I, I actually struggled right at the start I'm, not real flexible and the sort of way I needed to hold her was very uncomfortable for me so I was like, you know like it was sort of physically I just didn't feel comfortable doing it because I was worried that I'd have to move or something and you know. When I'm home you know while [*Natasha*] is say bathing her, I'll be starting our dinner you know, so I'm sort of trying to find another avenue because normally [*Natasha*] would have to bath her then she has to make herself some dinner so I just sort of go well you look after the bathing bit you know, and quite often I'd also maybe get her ready for the bath while [*Natasha's*] running the water you know, but then hand her over and then go in and do dinner, so I help. (*Joshua*)

As the children became older the focus shifted from feeding, bathing and getting into bed to activities associated with play and picking up and dropping off at school:

Oh you know go to the park with the guys, ride bikes get them, [the middle child] we're still trying to train him up on bike riding and stuff like that, but he's getting there and just go to the beach. Those things are probably a bit harder for her to organise too because you know she's got you know like everything to do, like she works harder than me I'm just the one who gets some money. (*Simon*)

Oh he might take our older child to like fly the plane in the park, I mean they do fishing, they haven't done that for a while. They went to the cosmos centre you know the look at the stars and all that. (*Kim*)

[We] go out on the weekends and do some bits and pieces and spoil them and spend some money on them. We go out to the shops, I'll buy them a couple of toys or something or take them down the park, down the beach, take the dog for a walk with them as well, go see a movie or something or yeah. (*Grant*)

He's good like that, he's very hands on actually, he's much better as far as umm... like the five year old, he'll read her stories before bed and he'll play games with her and he's always been better at that than me sitting down and playing for an hour or whatever. I don't have the patience to, to sit for that long and he's quite funny you know, I'll listen to them playing sometimes. (*Kate*)

Routines

The families in this study supported that consistency was the key; whether the routine was kept the same when the worker was away or whether it changed, they worked to ensure the pattern remained consistent. The scheduling of parenting tasks did not vary for most families. Core tasks such as bathing, feeding, bedtime occurred at the same set time regardless of the worker's presence or not. The flexibility of the routine was dependent on personality or alternatively, simply on the presence of "an extra pair of hands":

We just try to keep it the same I just, I just jump in try to you know, go with the flow. I'll find out what everyone's doing, I don't, yeah we don't break [the routine]. (*Simon*)

I guess when they're away for that period of time, they do need to learn how to slot into it because for the two weeks or how ever long they're away, this is the way the baby gets to know how their day runs, and of course you know when Dad gets home there's gonna be some disruption and it's gonna change a bit but I think so long as you kinda sorta get the basics, the feeding and the sleeping right and what they do as far as play time and that sort of thing, you know I don't think that there has to be hard and fast rules about that sort. (*Bridget*)

Bedtime is pretty much the same, except he'll read fifty million stories and I read three, cause I've still got dishes to do by myself, so I'm like thinking yeah it's a nice time but I'm on a time limit or else I'll be up till like nine thirty doing something. (*Donna*)

We try to keep it pretty much constant all the way through, that way there is less disruption to their routine, which I believe is better for them. (*Tom*)

For some women their routines became less structured when their partners returned home, while others said their routine became more ordered:

When he's away it's so structured. Everything is laid out the night before for the kids to the point of breakfast spoons, clothes. It's very much every minute is almost accounted for and when he's back then it doesn't have to be so structured. (*Frances*)

The routine is a bit more relaxed [when he returns] because you know they love their Daddy being home and everything and so I get a bit more relaxed with it and I let him take over more of the things. (*Carmel*)

They've got to pick up after themselves a bit more and I'm just like yeah, whatever. I just can't be bothered screaming, I can't be bothered with screaming all day everyday, do this, do that, I can't be bothered doing it. (*Kellie, youngest child aged 6*)

Communicating about parenting and routines

Like any parents, the participants in this study communicate about parenting, who did what, and any changes in their practices and routines. When differences and difficulties arose some reported giving advice, others owned to an impasse where they felt that they had 'got things wrong', while yet others simply acknowledge that there was more than one way to do the job.

Giving advice

He's not too good at asking questions, he's not that good about asking about stuff, he'll come out and say I don't know I give up, I can't put him to sleep like you do, you know you seem to have the knack and I'll say this is what I do, I don't know what you do, this is what I do, I'll try and encourage him to tell me what he's doing so I can tell him what I'm doing, we can decide whether one ways better. (Tara)

Oh [Linda] will tell me, I mean within a nice way you know, if I'm stepping out, if I'm the one doing something that can be counter productive to the go forward while I'm here, rest assured that I'll be brought up to speed. It takes several times for me to take that on board possibly. (Casey)

She will often need to tell me – she says that I'm sometimes not plugged in, I don't get some of the routines because I don't do them everyday and sometimes that can make me feel a little bit like a stranger. (Reg)

Doing something wrong

I remember a few breaks ago I gave [our child] a biscuit for morning tea and he ended up having three milk arrowroot biscuits for the day and my wife actually went off her nut at me, no, no he's not allowed to have biscuits for the next couple of weeks and I'm like thinking when did you tell me that and so I'm always on eggshells, walking on eggshells when I'm around them because I might do something wrong or something like that. (Mitchell)

I stuff up occasionally and haven't done the right thing and put her in the wrong clothes, haven't seen her for something or aware of what's going on or whatever. I'm used to it, I'm not going to get it right, and that's life. It frustrates me a bit occasionally, but I'm trying you know to give us a break but it's usually the fact that she's stressed about other things... (Simon)

More than one way to do the job

He used to always ask me how things should be done, what I wanted doing next and I guess we both thought there had to be a particular way that things were done and I've just found that my way is not the only way to do things and you know he does the best he can and [our child's] happy regardless. I've just been leaving him to his own devices and the other day when he took [child] to this birthday party, I was so impressed, he'd packed up solids for him which I probably wouldn't have done. He got a bottle of formula, he just had everything sorted out and I thought well that's great because there was no prodding from me, he did it all off his own back. (Trish)

Its male versus female and I just come to accept it you know, but it was hard for the first couple of years I suppose, its only been the last probably six to eight months that I've kind of just gone whatever. She's warm, she's comfortable, she's dressed, she's clothed and fed. (Leonie)

Dividing time

Many families felt that the fly-in fly-out lifestyle provided an opportunity to concentrate work into a discrete zone and therefore, dividing non-work time into family time, couple time and me-time was easier to achieve than it was in a traditional working routine. The shorter rosters make this division

more challenging but still more achievable than trying to fit the three designated “times” into a weekend:

I actually enjoy the week he’s off, just to spend the time like, just even going for a walk down the park I enjoy because we’re all together and it’s just relaxing ... it’s just nice to do it, you know for two weeks I sort of keep myself busy and you know and it’s nice that week he’s got off to just you know be a bit slack ... and ... I mean he still goes off and does he’s own things from here, like he might go and catch up with a few of his mates which I don’t mind, I mean he’s still got to have his own space, he doesn’t have to have you know sit next to me the whole week sort of thing. (*Wanda*)

Managing children’s behaviour

The comments of the couples interviewed suggested that concentrated work schedules brings into consciousness issues relating to the management of children’s behaviours as couples needed to negotiate when the worker is both away and at home. These issues which are relevant for all families included; the establishment of boundaries, adherence to certain values, what constitutes acceptable behaviour and the steps to take to ensure these are in place.

For those interviewed, one parent would usually take on the role of “disciplinarian”. Couples admitted that one of them was usually the “softie” and the other “more strict”. In some cases the partner at home was seen to be the enforcer of discipline and in others the workers felt they were providing more rigid boundaries. There was acknowledgement that working a concentrated schedule does increase the level of fatigue for both the partner at home and the worker. For those on longer rosters, that is, two weeks on and above, partners at home and workers accepted that rules and discipline relaxed as the weeks progressed and the level of fatigue increased. For workers coming off night shift, there was recognition that they often had a “short fuse”.

Partners at home

I think I’m the tougher one because I have to be, [and] certainly he doesn’t get as cranky because there’s normally two of us. When he’s away I can get cranky because [the oldest child] can push me absolutely limits. (*Frances*)

I’m the enforcer whether he’s down or not. It’s something we’re continually working on... but when he’s down I want a little bit of backup I can’t just be the only one doing it and he can’t just be there for fun because that’s not fair and even yesterday we were in the kitchen and they were screaming and carrying on and I was like that’s enough stop it and he’s standing there watching TV you know, having his cup of tea and I went you can hear this? (*Sue*)

I think I’m more lenient with the discipline than he is. I think I have to be because it’s day in day out and I’m good to start with and then by the end of the two weeks, I’m like do what you like, I’m just too tired to deal with it. (*Yvonne*)

[our child] seems to get away with a lot more, but I think that’s, a lot of that is because [*Wanda*], well she’s with her twenty-four seven. So I can look at things from an outside point of view and say she got away with that one you know and, and I can pick that up because I’m not here twenty-four seven whereas if I was here all the time I wouldn’t pick a lot of that up. (*Arthur*)

Workers

I can get the kids to respond better to the deeper tone of voice. [Paula] keeps saying I wish I didn't have to shout, but just talk louder and deeper to get their attention, but that's just the normal mother, father type thing. Father's always better at that sort of thing. (Damian)

Whilst I'm away [Melinda's] in charge, when I come home I suppose I take over the reins to some degree. We try to work in together as much as possible, but then I sort of have a shorter fuse than I suppose she does and I'll start jumping up and down earlier than what probably she would. (Tom)

I'm pretty liberal, I didn't realise it, but maybe I am pretty liberal. Like [Rhiannon] won't let them ride so easily around the area by themselves unaccompanied and, and I think well you know it's safe enough to do so under you know where you're going and when are you going to be back and they'll say yes. (Trent)

You're tired and you've had a big week and you've worked nine days straight, and ... the thing that on any other day of the week wouldn't irritate you, when you first get home it does. So sometimes you can be a bit short with the kids. (Casey)

Oh yeah he's a bit of an ogre like, he's like full on like he's a real disciplinarian. He comes in and growls at them all and tells them they have to do this and they have to do that and I'm, I'm a bit more relaxed with everything so. We're both very different people... like chalk and cheese. (Kellie)

He is probably stricter on the children than what I am, although I have my moments. It's pretty hard to get the parenting always right so we make a few mistakes definitely, but yeah we do have conflicts there occasionally. (Melinda)

Families identified a number of strategies regarding the management of their children's behaviour they felt were important, including:

- providing back-up for each other;
- providing phone back-up when required; and
- being consistent.

Provide back-up for each other

Couples felt that even though they might disagree on discipline issues that it was important to present a united front with the children and support each other:

Whatever you do with your child you have to do it united and if she makes a decision with if I don't like it I'll go take it up with her later and vice versa. You never disagree in front of your children. (Dean)

My main aim is to reinforce, its just a matter of telling [oldest child] no in the background so I'll say no Mummy just told you and I'll make a big point of just being you know from when Daddy comes home he'll always back Mummy up. (Damian)

He always backs me up in whatever I say and he always expects respect you know, demands respect in the way the boys treat me and I appreciate that big time. (Dorothy)

Phone back up

Couples generally agreed that providing support by talking to their partner or to their children over the telephone about issues that arose could be useful. However, given the importance of the phone as a means for communication for everyday life, it was thought using the phone as a form of discipline or using the worker as a threat “wait until your father comes home” could be counter-productive:

If we have a disciplinary matter while I’m away, if I deal with it over the phone it’s generally sort of sorted out, so that tends to work quite well. It’s amazing how much authority you can have from a remote level actually. I mean [*Hillary*] manages that pretty well anyway when I’m away so there’s only, rarely do we get anything we have to deal with. (*Brendan*)

I’ll get on the phone if someone’s out of line and they know that I’m serious... they can almost see the stare down the line, yeah. (*Sam*)

I will tell him if she’s done something naughty and he might talk to her about it but he won’t get cross over the phone. (*Linda*)

Consistency

There was an acknowledgement that the level of discipline could not be vastly different when the worker was away and when they were home. While the rules, in some cases, became more flexible, the basics did not alter. Couples were open about not wanting there to be a distinction between “grumpy Mum” and “party Dad” or for Dad to be seen on his return as the “grumpy old man”:

The discipline approach goes up and down a bit because every now and then I’ll forget or miss that *Carmel* sort of said that she wanted to try, or she’d started to introduce something while I was away and then I come and I’ll forget or just do it completely different so, but its an ongoing battle I guess between us. It’s just when and how or reminding each other that, how we should approach discipline and things, so that it’s try and be reasonably consistent, no matter who’s here. (*Liam*)

I suppose the rules do change a little bit, but not a great deal because he’s only here for a week and he knows, he doesn’t want to be that strict and you know, a grumpy old man type of thing with the children. (*Kim*)

Transitional routines

Preparing children for departure and arrival

Departure

The consensus was that children need to be prepared for the worker's departure. This preparation occurred in different ways usually dependent on the age of the children. For very young children preparation for departure was normally spending more time or doing the final routines such as feeding, bathing or putting to bed. Extra cuddles and play time were also used as strategies to smooth imminent departure:

So I spend as much time as possible I sort of do everything I can with him and [Rhiannon], and that's about all you can do just make the most of the time that you've got before you leave. (Dean)

Plus he's only nine months old and so you know, goodbye [child] and you know give him a kiss and away you go. We don't make a real big fuss we try and keep it mediocre kind of thing and mmm... just give him a few cuddles and a few extra plays. (Alan)

Couples felt that it was important that older children understood that the worker was leaving and had said goodbye. In some cases mentioning the approaching departure date took place over a few days and in other cases it was left for the last twenty-four hours. In all instances, however, it was considered important that the child did not wake to find the worker gone:

Oh you let them know, I just straight away I don't sort of sneak off or anything like that I say right Dad's going tomorrow, but I'll be back in you know, five days or something like that, five more sleeps, you talk that so they, in the morning they sort of count down the sleeps. (Simon)

But every now and then I just keep saying to the kids I've got to go in two sleeps and so forth like that. That's about it really yeah, just pack your bag and just slowly inform the kids so they can get used to it, not that they ever do, but yeah just to let them know yep, yep. (Grant)

Yeah about two days before or about the Sunday, Sunday afternoon or something say Oh say to them you know I have to go away tomorrow or two more sleeps and I have to go or and then they, they sort of know and they know what it's all about, but... but I don't think it's right to just land it on them you know, Oh I've got to go in a couple of hours or something like that, it's just not fair so if you let them know in a couple of days we you know, give them twenty-four hours or something. (William)

Some families felt it important to have a family day for the children and the worker to spend time together just prior to departure:

He helps, helps Dad pack his bag. Try and make it on the last day that they do something together, like today they're going to be pulling apart [our older child's] cot because he, you know sleeps in the bed now or something like that and yeah, or do a, yeah some kind of activity together yeah. *(Paula)*

We usually take turns at night reading stories and what have you and so on the last night I always make sure I do it and I'll lay with her until she goes to sleep and she'll say, "can you wake me up in the morning and say bye", well she doesn't usually remember. *(Nicholas)*

Yeah we just try to all sit together and go and buy KFC or something like that, no cooking, nothing just all relax get a couple of DVD's and sit around snuggling and watch movies and that's about all we can do I suppose. *(Sam)*

For children who have grown up with one parent working away, arrivals and departures are as much part of the routine as other tasks:

They know you know they give him a kiss and a cuddle every single night, they know what the routine is, they know Dad's home on a Tuesday and they know he leaves on a Tuesday morning so they sort of make their own little routine with him I suppose that's just you know, see you later Dad be safe and you know, love you and all that sort of stuff. *(Kellie)*

I tell them the night before or maybe a day before I say do you realise I'm going back to work tomorrow and blah, blah, blah and they well [the older child] knows now she's knows the time and [the youngest child] goes Oh yeah so that's just normal. *(Bob)*

The airport run - departure

Most workers made their own way to the airport either via taxi, airport bus or with the assistance of a parent. For most families this was due to the early hour of the flights and trying to juggle young children and sleep:

I always used to drop him off all the time when he was going away, that was before [our child] came along and now, like the last time he flew out, he decided to catch a taxi because it was very early in the morning, it was like, he had to leave at five am or four-thirty in the morning and that wouldn't have bothered me in the past, I still would have taken him to the airport, but we decided that he would catch a taxi because it wasn't worth getting [our child] up, dragging him out to the airport when he was still asleep. So I think pretty much now that we have a child, that will probably stay that way, probably he'll catch a taxi out and we'll just say out goodbyes at home which is actually easier to say you know, to say goodbye at home especially at four o'clock in the morning because you're too tired to get too emotional. *(Rhiannon)*

Generally, just lately I've, in the last few weeks I've been catching a lift with someone else that's more because [our child] will be asleep and rather than wake him then at this stage, we're probably better off to leave him sleeping and catch a lift umm... and the same coming home, but as soon as he's sort of more into a pattern where he'll wake up and go back to sleep without a big fuss, then we'll go back to being dropped off and picked up because I, I think that's important as well. *(Grant)*

For other families it was important for the children to see the reality of the worker leaving so that they had some connection between departures and work:

Yes, yeah it's a bit hard but well especially because we have to leave at five thirty in the morning to drop him off, but we, I think the kids cope better with that, that they actually see Daddy go in, in you know and they get to say goodbye and they're fine like they know that Daddy, Daddy goes to work and the [oldest child] knows that, every time she sees a plane go over, there's Daddy you know. (Kim)

As much as everyone'll say oh just catch a cab or whatever its still thirty bucks, thirty-five dollars a week or a fortnight that we didn't need to spend and [our child] likes saying goodbye to Daddy at the airport because I think its makes it more real that just waking up and realising that Daddy's not there. (Leonie)

As the last comment supported, financial reasons were also implicated in the decision to take the worker to the airport:

We can't, we just simply can't afford like eighty bucks it would cost us for the taxi. I haven't got anyone here to come like my Mum to watch the kids, I have to get the kids out of bed at four o'clock in the morning on a Tuesday morning, we get down, drop him off, I get home, his flight usually leaves about six fifteen in the morning, get back here, give them breakfast, get them dressed, drop them off to school, they're tired by the time they get there. (Sue)

Finally in some instances the emotional turmoil created by an airport goodbye meant that a worker preferred to make alternative arrangements to get to the airport:

I don't like them coming to the airport, I just don't like those goodbyes. The one time that we did do it I nearly quit on the spot. Our eldest child was really young and umm... she'd just started waving and all this sort of thing and when I left it was like a midday flight or something and [my partner] said oh look she's waving goodbye and oh God it was just so hard and when I got to Singapore I rang up and I said you know I nearly quit on the spot then, I said we just, not going to do that anymore you know, I said it's a pretty stupid reason to quit a job like that so yeah. I just said pick me up definitely with the kids if you can, but don't drop me off. (Trevor)

I don't like them taking me, I've been, they've only taken me once and umm... yeah I don't like the goodbye bit, I like the hello bit, but I'm usually gone, usually leave here about four-thirty in the morning to fly out. (Jim)

Arrival

There were two different views with regard to preparing children for the worker's return home. One was that there should be no fuss and that the routine should be maintained and normalised:

We try and keep it fairly low key really and just keep to the same routine. (*Brendan*)

Oh I just say guess what Dad's coming home today or he's coming home tomorrow umm... sometimes I'm really cheery about it at times I'll say well Dad's coming home tomorrow so he can help you or you can do this with Dad or something or Dad's going tomorrow so make sure you give him a goodnight's kiss and you know, that's all we do really. I think [having a countdown] is making too much of an issue of it that doesn't need to be made. It's important to, for the children to know and mentioning it for a few days before he goes away and a few days before he comes home is, is enough I think. (*Jane*)

The other was that it was important that the children have a sense of excitement about the worker coming home and that he remained a part of the children's everyday lives. For many families this involves a countdown. The length of the countdown was usually dependent on the length of the roster and the age of the children. Participants generally felt too long a countdown was counterproductive and most families settled for a countdown of one week or less. One family with very young children used a countdown strategy that involved turning around the photograph of the worker:

No, I try and talk about it, probably start from about five days before he's coming home we'll do five more sleeps until Daddy's home, each night and she'll talk to him on the phone and she'll tell him how many sleeps it is until he get home. (*Yvonne*)

We'd start the countdown from five days and that's really exciting you know, every day it's like Daddy's coming home in four days and three sleeps and two sleeps. We chose five days because it's what she can count and it's easy with one hand. (*Cheryl*)

Yep now she's older we've got a calendar and every night we do the Daddy kiss so she puts a red cross and a little love heart on the days he's away and goes goodnight Daddy at night so, and then I do a big love heart on the day he's due back so she can see it's all that time away and the closer we get that's when we go to the airport to get him. (*Frances*)

I used to do it five weeks and tick the days off, but now it's like two, probably two weeks and like just tick the days off and say well it's another week to go yet and we get you know, or we might go and buy a few special treats to put in the cupboard or something like that. Yeah just really, and we talk about it and you know Daddy's coming home and what time he's coming in, what time we have to leave here and yeah so it's a lot easier. Yeah, and [the oldest child] might be ticking off the days off the calendar, yeah. (*Kim*)

The airport run - arrival

Whether families collected the worker depended on the age of children and the timing of the flight. In some cases the timing of the return flight precluded school age children from going to the airport, although in some cases children were removed from school for that purpose. Late return flights were also thought to be too disruptive with regard to the sleeping patterns of young children and for this reason families chose to collect workers from the airport but not to go into the terminal. The airport greeting was vital for those families who could manage it:

They love coming to the airport to pick me up too and I want them there, I want them there. I, yeah, it's the best thing about the whole thing you know, getting off and seeing the kids run up and yeah, they love it. (*Jim*)

I just want for her to be there. It'd be, it'd be quite weird I suppose just getting in a taxi and coming home and knocking on the door, but yeah I look forward to seeing them at the airport. (*Drew*)

We always go out to the airport to pick him up and I know he loves walking down that tarmac and seeing me holding [our child] through the window and he's coming home to his family and I like that too, I like taking [our child] to the airport and you know, I like to dress up and look nice. (*Rhiannon*)

Regular communication

Couples considered that keeping communication lines open with each other and the children was the single most important strategy to protect family cohesiveness:

I'd say maintaining contact is the number one thing if you're going to have this fly in, fly out thing you've got to talk every day just as if you would if they were home you know, because otherwise they're going to lost track of what's going on at home and you're going to feel more alone. (*Anna*)

Couples identified a number of key features for keeping communication lines open including developing a:

- communication plan, incorporating
 - a cost effective communication strategy
 - the use of multiple communication media
- regular routine of contact, which involved
 - not worrying if there is not a lot to say
 - developing strategies for talking to children
 - picking convenient times to call

A communication plan

The couples in this study had developed various communication plans depending on the facilities available and the amount of money they were willing to spend. In most cases, the plans were mutually agreed upon and put into place within the first home-away stint.

The telephone and other media

Most sites have at least one communication option available. In many cases, companies provide telephones in each of the worker's rooms. The costs associated with line rental and calls are usually the responsibility of the worker. Some workers described using the telephone in their individual work spaces. Mobile phone coverage can also be an option although the reception can vary depending on the remoteness of the site. Where individual telephone access or mobile phone coverage is not provided pay phones are provided, this is often the case on oil rigs. In these cases privacy can be an issue with pay phones being located outside public thoroughfares or with time limits due to practical considerations.

Couples did not rely solely on the telephone as a form of communication but also used email and text messaging. Email was used by many of the participants. Some found it impersonal and therefore, good for communicating financial matters and technical information but not for developing intimacy. Others used it not to replace the telephone but to provide other points at which they could touch base. Text messaging was also used as a way of maintaining a more regular contact base, to communicate events that had just happened that partners thought the fly-in fly-out worker would be interested in knowing and for enhancing intimacy:

We often use email during the day because he, you know he finds it hard often to find the time to talk for half an hour so, during the day, so ... I'll send him an email or if there's something I want to send him or photos or yeah, documents, that sort of thing, we'll do a lot of that email and he'll send me all his travel schedules and all that. (*Anna*)

Even if it's a text message how are you going are you okay, did you sleep well, little things like that you know, like soccer results, you know our son's a goalie but he got a goal on the weekend because he was on the field and I sent a message, he got a goal and you know he sent back a message, I'm proud of him so, yeah. (*Tara*)

Maintaining regular communication

The frequency of calls depended on the facilities available, shift requirements and windows of opportunity. All couples had a sense of what constituted 'regular' contact which was variously described as more than once a day, once a day or once every other day. Regardless of the length of

time between calls there was almost unanimous agreement that regular contact was expected and essential:

Oh he's got a phone in his room so I just, he can ring me any time he likes from work or even if he's, when he gets a chance you know he gets really busy or he rings me from his room. He rings me like fifty million times a day and it just drives me nuts... (Kellie)

I probably ring her about four times a day, maybe even more like we can ring anywhere in Australia for nothing from the rig. I can ring mobiles so at smoko I'll ring up, lunch time I usually ring her, smoko and then after work. I wouldn't say four times every day, but it would be a minimum of twice a day if not four times a day yeah. (Nicholas)

He rings every night religiously. (Trish)

Depends how busy I am, but I'll ring every day, like in ten years I don't think you know, I might have missed two or three times, and you know that might be for any type of reason I might have been really busy or something like that, but yeah every day and then... you know I'll try and, I'll ring more than once a day if I can, because I like to be able to speak to the kids because you're limited with time on the phones up there too, you know. (Jim)

For those that ring more than once a day there is a sense of touching base as well as communicating. Sometimes the partner at home could find this difficult particularly if she was busy:

Just to say hello, he's lonely, loves me I suppose and wanted to hear my voice, but it was really irritating when I was out at the line and it took sometimes a lot of effort to be nice and I'd sit there and it was very hard not to say well what do you want, like then he's just rung to say hello, that's all he's rung for, to touch base, but I find it irritating. But I also realise that it's an essential part of keeping our relationship together, because if you don't have constant communication it'd fall apart. (Dorothy)

No, I just like to hear her voice, I mean I love my wife dearly, we don't always see eye to eye, but I do love my wife dearly. (Nicholas)

Talk about the little things

Talking about the little things and the mundane practicalities of life was considered to be part and parcel of regular phone calls. Couples felt that by communicating the little things they were able to include their partners in their everyday lives. It also made it easier for the worker on their return home:

I think it is just imperative that the, the wife constantly fills the husband in on, you know, today we've started swimming lessons or "Oh I think our child's you know, he's not sleeping as much in the morning now so I think his morning routine might be starting to change" If I expect him to understand when things, what things are like when he comes home, then I have to communicate. (Rhiannon)

I'll just talk about whatever's happened and you know just... which is usually nothing much I mean life just rolls along generally, but... yeah you know [our third child] got her ears pierced the other day and ... so I told him about that and you know just sort of keep him informed and tell him how it all went and yeah, because it guess sometimes it's little things that make, that just sort of make a difference. (Kate)

Talking to the children

Couples thought it was important to speak with the children, regardless of age, if not everyday then as often as possible. In this respect workers described:

- asking about the events and activities of the day based on information they had received from their partners;
- developing a telephone game or some other form of rapport;
- choosing convenient times to call:

Well [our child] sometimes will make me sing along with her and I'll sometimes I'll say Oh well I can't right now because there's other men in here, but that won't bother them you know, they won't mind and I say yeah, but it will bother me, but sometimes I do and they just have a laugh they rag you a bit, but they've all got kids themselves so they all understand. (*Sean*)

Oh I phone up every night and talk. It's been umm... difficult with [our youngest child] she was not keen to talk on the phone. I suppose she just becomes accustomed to the telephone, but that was a difficulty but you think well you know you don't actually get to speak to her for two weeks and she, you can hear in the background do you want to speak to Dad, nup. Okay and in the end I'd say Oh look, and quite often she'd get on the phone and say nothing. (*Bob*)

Natasha put her on the phone the other night to me and we blew raspberries you know and I got a ((raspberry noise)) this time ((raspberry noise)) down the phone and that was extending the phone call. I was at the pub having a beer with the boys and I'm blowing raspberries. I turned around and hung up and everyone sort of looked at me funny and I said I was having a talk to my daughter okay, remember she's seven months old and you know found the humour in it you know, I mean as hard as nails as a lot of blokes can be, once they've had kids you know, on the inside at least they're, they're all a bit more reasonable. (*Joshua*)

Yeah, they're jumping on the phone all the time. They answer, the oldest child answers the phone sometimes and the youngest jumps on and has her little jibber and... and we just tell each other that we love each other and be good. (*Jeffry*)

One of the problems of talking with the family is that it invariably is in office hours and my brain's not you know sort of whirring around on other completely different things and I can't really put a sort of mental attention into talking to the kids, that's something that would be nice to be able to do after hours you know, after having dinner and sort of change my brain mode over to domestic mode so that's a bit of a problem. (*Trent*)

Honesty

Many of the couples described taking a “warts and all” approach. In other words, they provided their partner with information regarding how they were feeling and the quality of their day without omission or downplaying:

I tell him warts and all on the phone, doesn't matter if I've had a bad day, good day, whether the kids have been stressing me out or whatever, I just don't go, no no things are fine. (*Donna*)

Like I ring up and just by the way the first two words come out of the mouth, I know if she's had an absolute shit of a day and [our child's] giving her heaps or she's bored and kicking back, ... I'm very lucky I can pick up on those things pretty quick and vice, versa like she'll say Oh you sound depressed, what's going on and I'll say Oh just had a shit of a day at work and we talk it out and we air our grievances between each other We've always been a hundred percent open from day one and I think that's, there's nothing gets bottled, I think that's the worst thing that could ever happen is to get bottled up I think you'd just explode. (*Arthur*)

Yeah, yeah she'll tell me when she's having a bad day and why you know and umm... I try and do something, I might try and organise to get a bunch of flowers sent home or something like that for her, make her feel better so and that usually works out pretty well. It makes things a bit better. (*Trevor*)

Other couples did not agree with the “warts and all” approach either because they didn't want to upset their partner or because they didn't feel either were in a good position to feel sympathetic:

There are times when if I've had a really bad day and I'm in a really bad mood, I'm not going to call *Natasha*. Why bring to her you know, she's probably had a bad day as it is, [our child's] teething, she hasn't slept a wink last night you know she's probably chewed off half a nipple with these new teeth sort of thing you know, why does she need to sort of hear me just go yep, nup, don't want to know about it. (*Joshua*)

Oh sometimes I sugar coat it because he gets upset if like I say I had a bad day or the kids are driving me mental and you know the two little ones were really naughty today, so he said “Oh I should be there to help you” or it's the opposite “Oh here we go you think you've had a hard day”. He doesn't want to hear it, doesn't want to hear the bad he only wants to hear good. So yeah I do sugar coat it sometimes, but if anything really bad happened I would never hide it from him unless it was yeah, really bad, no, no I wouldn't do that because... yeah take the consequences later. (*Felicity*)

Events and Occasions

Occasions such as birthdays, Easter and Christmas and events such as school concerts are family events where the absence of one of the members can be keenly felt. However, the participants in this study – particularly those with young children under the age of three, did not appear to find the absence of the fly-in fly-out worker at such times as being a particularly problematic.

Missing birthdays was seen as something that was inevitable. For the majority of families birthdays were celebrated on the day (without the worker) and then before or after the event with the fly-in

fly-out worker present. Attendance at school events was also not considered an issue as it was generally felt that in most families only one parent usually attended, so there was nothing particularly strange about the absence of the worker in fly-in fly-out families. Neither were the participants in this study particularly concerned about the worker missing Easter. Christmas, however, was considered a truly family occasion and people minded if the worker was rostered on for it.

Families recounted various ways they managed significant family events or occasions. These included:

- negotiating time off with other workers;
- prioritising occasions;
- requesting roster changes or annual leave;
- taking photographs or videotaping events;
- phone calls;
- participation of extended family.

Birthdays

If it continues on the two and one, he's going to be away for both of the kids' birthdays but we thought well they're not old enough to actually know yet so we'll just adjust the day of their birthday, it's only by a few days so they don't really know any different and we just do it like that. *(Paula)*

She hasn't had her first birthday yet, I'm hoping I'll be home for that, but I can't, can't promise anything umm... it won't be so important because she doesn't know. *(Joshua)*

No well with the little ones it's not too bad because they you know, they really haven't got a concept of birthdays yet. *(Jim)*

Next year when [our oldest child] turns four, she knows you know, and so I'll do something for her and then he'll be home I think two weeks after her birthday so then we'll have another special day with Daddy for her birthday, do it that way. *(Frances)*

Last year he wasn't home for [our child's] party which was a bit sad not having your Dad at the party, but they, they don't, they do tell me everything, the children, they have never said you know, that it's a problem, [our eldest child] didn't have his Dad home for his birthday last year, but he was okay about it. *(Julie)*

Christmas

Last Christmas I worked for another family man who hadn't had it off for three years, I did an extra stint, covered his and then he did an extra stint for me so he had Christmas off with his family for the first time in four years or three years and I had New Years off for the first time in four or five years whatever it was to spend it with my family and things like that. Everyone understands that you know, at times for whatever reason, you might not be able to just have rostered time off you may have to ask someone to work for you, but if you've got a reasonably good workforce like we have, yeah people will do that. I will work five days for you, you will work five days for me so I can...
(Jonathon)

I can't make my guys work over Christmas if I'm not prepared to as well so which sort of makes it a little bit hard, ... but the guys at work are pretty good the, the guys on our shift, a lot of them have been there for quite a while now and they generally work themselves out pretty good like the guys with families generally take Christmas off and the guys that, the young guys have New Years off and that sort of thing so umm... the married guys with kids tend to have school holidays and or first choice of school holidays and that sort of thing and the single guys you know, the rest of the time so.
(Brian)

School events

You sort of get away with it there's only usually Mums there. (Julie)

Oh I mean I go, I go to a lot of those school things, but the kids don't mind that Dad's not there and I don't really, not really. They love it when he is, but yeah, they understand, kids cope with those things so much better than adults. (Kellie)

I guess most Dads wouldn't be able to make it to assemblies anyway you know, on school days, but that's one of the benefits I suppose of fly-in fly-out is when you are home you can go to those things.
(Brian)

Missing milestones

It's kinda like, you know a lot of people say you know, [Sean] he might miss her first birthday or her first steps, or her first words, but you know her first words could be at day care or her first words could be during the day while he's at work, you know, you know he's still going to see her first steps or her first words, the first time in his eyes, it doesn't matter if she said them yesterday or two days ago, or today at day care, you know like, you kind of just have to accommodate those sorts of things and umm, I think because I've worked away, I'm aware of that as well. I'm a bit more sensitive about it as well. (Bridget)

Negotiating time off

As some of the previous citations have shown workers negotiated amongst themselves to ensure an acceptable distribution of rosters. Many workers also made a point of prioritising some occasions and manipulated their roster or annual leave to ensure they were home. It was recognised that this requires an element of reciprocity and that the company's willingness to negotiate leave arrangements should not be abused. Some workers and their partners felt that workers needed to be more assertive to ensure they were rostered off or could take annual leave for important family occasions.

Chapter 6:

Support Networks

The partners at home in this study had usually developed social networks to assist and provide companionship when the worker was away. When their children were very young they tended to rely on friendships formed during mother's groups, playgroups, or other child-centred activities which is consistent with the majority of families. Whether partners at home attended social functions, when the worker was away, was usually dependent on their inclination and confidence. In their turn, workers - perhaps because they were conscious that they had been away from the family unit - spoke about getting 'permission' to undertake activities such as golf and indicated that they were more likely to spend time with immediate or extended family than with wider social networks when they returned home. The majority of them indicated that they had no inclination to socialise with their co-workers:

When he's away I go out to my friends and to my family, yeah and to his family as well you know. *(Sue)*

While he's away I'll catch up with my girlfriends but I would never have friends over for dinner while he was away, I would save that up for when he came home. *(Bridget)*

So yeah it's hard, because I missed so many people's birthdays and parties and engagements and weddings and all that because of the roster, eventually they you know, when they're picking their wedding list Oh we haven't seen him for three years anyway so we'll leave him off it and that's what I was afraid of, that would start happening and I'd start getting left off the invite list and I can see that happening. *(Mitchell)*

There's a sort of running joke on his Dad's side of the family, that he doesn't really exist and that maybe I've replaced him somewhere along the line or I've buried him in the backyard or whatever because I've been to three of his cousin's weddings that he hasn't been to. *(Paula)*

Types of support

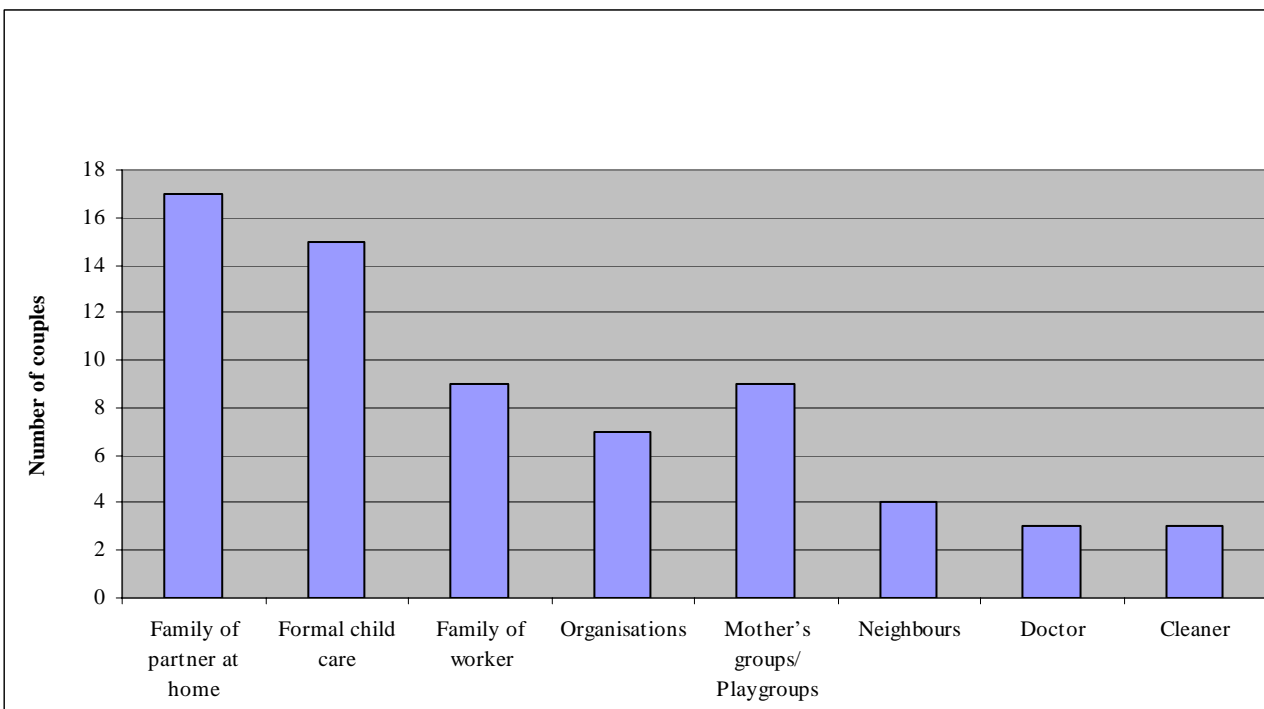
Families discussed a range of supports they had to assist with raising children and to provide practical, emotional and psychological support. Such networks become vitally important in times of crisis. These supports included:

- families of the partner at home and the worker;
- friends;
- mother's groups or playgroups;
- childcare, babysitters;
- doctors;

- neighbours;
- organisations including Healthdirect, Ngala, parenting help lines, child health nurses;
- cleaners;
- the employer;

The use of these supports are illustrated in Figure 6.1 .

Figure 6.1: Supports identified by couples



Not all partners at home felt comfortable asking for help. There was a sense that being ‘mother’ (and in some cases a paid worker too) was their job and a call for help could be seen as failure. Others didn’t feel comfortable as far as their immediate social contacts were concerned:

Yeah, I ask for more help now that I did in the beginning, only because I'm back at work now and really thought in the beginning it was a sign of failure, that I was full time home by myself, I thought I was a power women, you know like I said I was high heels, you know, suits the works you know a competent individual that was running a show in charge of people you know and to go help me, it was just a sign of failure so you know, I've definitely gotten better now. *(Trish)*

I feel guilty I mean my mother-in-law lives two streets away umm... and I just, I don't know I just hate ringing her and saying you know, sometimes I just get to the point like yesterday I thought like I needed to go do food shopping and I just thought Oh I can't be bothered taking both the kids and so I did ring her and she was fine, she came up and sat with them for an hour while I did that umm... yeah, no I don't know, I just feel guilty. *(Cheryl)*

I don't really fit into the social niche [where I live] very much. I'm, as I said, not very social and quite a umm... not antisocial but I'm very yeah, quiet type person. There are some ladies are very nice, I just don't like putting people out and it's, I do get kids over to play, but it's very sporadic because we're quite busy anyway. *(Frances)*

Family

Families were a primary source of support, followed by friends. Just over half of the couples had at least one partner who was originally from Western Australia and who still had family residing in the state:

Oh we have a very close, strong support network, very much so and, and you know his family are just like my family anyway, they're great and we get along really well. I probably see them more often than I see my own Mum and Dad and I see my own Mum and Dad anywhere from you know, once a week to once every three weeks. My Mum rings all the time I always talk to Mum so yeah, no they're really good and reliable and even his brother, and his sisters live interstate, but one of them is moving back here and she was always brilliant as far as the kids went and they're very, pretty solid. *(Rhiannon)*

But the fortunate thing is his parents are brilliant they're a really good backup and so are mine, mine live over in [*Perth suburb*] which is not a massive distance and they're all great with, you know, if we need them to watch the kids and the kids are very happy to you know, be with either, either of their grandparents so yeah. *(Kate)*

Even families who were geographically close were sometimes unable to provide ongoing physical support. The reasons for this included age, the fact that they were themselves engaged in full time or part time employment, had young children or were not willing to be called upon:

She [my Mum] will on the odd occasion baby sit, but she would never do anything on a regular basis as such you know, like where she had to be at my house at a particular time because I was at work or something. Mum's just not reliable like that you know and my brother, he lives down this way and he sort of pops over quite often in the evening and he's, he has a little chat and then he leaves. *(Kellie)*

No, my sister-in-law lives in [nearby], but she's almost due to have her baby and she's got a thirteen month old as well so it's certainly, look in an absolute dire emergency, it would have to be pretty bad for me to lump that on her because she's basically sitting with her bag packed by the door and I couldn't, I couldn't really do that plus there's some other family issues with her, I really wouldn't want to trust her with my kids so, there's not really anyone else. *(Sue)*

Our parents both live in opposite directions ... and both of them are aged you know, they're in their seventies so it's not a prospect of me saying Oh we'll just get nanna to look after or grandma to look after them umm... that wouldn't work so we really don't have that support there from, from family. *(Dean)*

Oh they, they say call us in your moment, but they tend to grizzle about it when you do so we don't often call them unless it's absolutely necessary. *(Wayne)*

My Mum works full time, most of my friends work full time and everyone seems so busy now. *(Julie)*

Sometimes it was a matter of not necessarily relying on family to provide practical support but rather simply knowing they were available as a back up or to provide emotional support over the telephone:

Mostly, I just think I need to know that there are people that think of me, just like getting a phone call my Mum rings every couple of days, my sister rings, just the phone calls make a huge difference to my day when he's away. If I don't get a phone call from anyone for a few days and I don't see anyone, I feel really terrible, I feel really down so I know that the key for me to be strong and keep going and to be happy while he's away is to keep contact even if it's just telephone contact, just to know that people are thinking of me you know. *(Leonie)*

Friends

Friends were the second major source of support for the majority of couples. Those without families in Perth called upon friends in emergencies, for day-to-day practical and emotional support:

Well umm... basically I've got a good group of friends and we help each other out with our kids and take each other's kids here and there and since [our oldest child] has been at school that's been great. Lots, lots of the children like being social now and it's really important to them so they tend to go and visit each other houses on the days off which is really good, yeah we had children here and [our oldest child] goes there to look after with ((laughter)) with friends visiting and vice versa so that's good and I don't know we just tend to cope. *(Trish)*

There was also some hesitation in using friends on an ongoing basis and an understanding that in some cases the friendship would be tested if support was overused:

She's a good friend and she's helped out with the kid and stuff but if I had to go to hospital, I can't expect her to have the kids wholly and solely, she's got three kids of her own, she can't have six kids. I'd do it for her but then, for instance, I can't have six kids, I haven't got the purse for it, I haven't got the room you know I haven't got the food that sort of stuff. (*Hillary*)

If I needed to ring someone and say look you need to drop everything and come and help me, I'm not quite sure who that would be now, my friends have small babies of their own and sometimes that concerns me a little bit, but there at a pinch there's always someone I could ring, they may not be close friend but they do me a favour if I need them to, but I probably not the sort of person who would ask very often. (*Leonie*)

Some situations are really hard, like if myself or the kids had gastro, particularly if I did, no one will come near you with gastro, I wouldn't go near anyone with gastro, so you really are isolated then. (*Frances*)

Mother's groups/ playgroups

After family and friends, partners at home tended to rely on friendships and supports developed via mother's groups and playgroups. For those families that had children of school age – support from the school regarding concentrated work schedules was generally not expected nor sought. Families generally did not tell the school that one parent worked away and issues that arose were related more to individual children. There was recognition that involvement in school activities such as committees, rosters, canteen duty and parent-teacher interviews was not ideal.

Mother's groups and playgroups often provided families with contacts that could lead to close, long term friendships:

I've got a mother's group that I go to umm... they're all older, and it doesn't bother me because they're all professional women so you know, I have much more in common with them than I would necessarily with a group of mothers my own age so umm... so yeah. But yeah, so that's every Thursday and then we've started going, some of us go and take the kids for a swim on a Friday and then we'd go, some of us go for a walk on a Monday and sometimes on a Tuesday so yeah, I do have, I do have contact with people regularly. (*Kellie*)

But the mother's group, we've actually started a babysitting roster which, so what we're going to do like once a month we will look after somebody else's baby and then they can go out like either alone or as a couple [and] ... like we all know each other, we all feel comfortable that we'd look after each other's babies okay so that, and that will be fantastic that we've got that. (*Kellie*)

I'm trying to extend out to the mothers at the playgroup like we have got mothers that are over from the UK and don't have family here and I've just said look if something ever happens just ring me because you know, if I've got to get her out of bed to help somebody, I will you know. You need to have at least one person you can ring if something happens. (*Leonie*)

Neighbours

Some families had a close reciprocal relationship with their neighbours while others were simply confident that they could call on their neighbours in the event of an emergency:

My next door neighbour she's got a little boy he's two, so we go over there for coffee every so often, so there's, the neighbourhood is actually quite good. You go down to the river to feed the ducks and there's generally at least one other person there doing the same thing with children of a similar age so. *(Carla)*

We've got some Clayton's grandparents that live next door that just stand in. They're our parent's age and they're basically like Clayton's parents to us and grandparents to the kids, so our immediate support network is them. *(Liam)*

Well I've got, I'm really close to my neighbours, both neighbours. She's got two little kids under three next door, I mean one of hers was sick the other day and she came running in and said can you look after my [little one], and I said yeah no worries so she could run off and take hers to hospital and I'd probably do the same. *(Cheryl)*

My neighbours, like this street's fantastic. Yeah, they've been, they've just been great, there were just days that I needed to get, because he got urinary tract infections as well during this two months so there were days where I'd have to sit for a good hour or so waiting to get a urine 'speci' from him and then try to get that back to the doctors and I'd just grab one of my neighbours that I just trust so much and she would just come down and sit with him while I'd just duck off to the doctors, saves taking him out again. *(Trish)*

I mean I guess our next door neighbour here, I know that if we had some problem, they would definitely help us, but there hasn't been that sort of crisis like that luckily. *(Brendan)*

Organisations

The organisations that families went to information and support included Ngala, the parent help line, parenting resource centres, child health nurses and Healthdirect. In addition to these, couples mentioned doctors and disability services as other agencies they have called upon. Only two workers mentioned the counselling services provided by their companies as potential sources of support:

I've used Ngala and my child health nurse who have both been great. *(Trish)*

I've got a really lovely child health nurse. I could go and see her every week if I wanted to because she did do that till my Mum came and she was seeing me every two. *(Frances)*

While most of the couples were comfortable and familiar with their current support networks, in at least one case the partner at home was not sure where support could be accessed:

No, I wouldn't know where to look and I must admit there's been days where I've been pretty much felt my head was going to start spinning around on my shoulders because it's been so hard, I mean most of the time it does smooth, but you know being a mother yourself there's just some days where it just all falls apart and I don't know, you've got PMS and, and, and whatever and you're just like I just can't take this and there has been times where I have lit a cigarette, made myself a cup of tea, shut the door and said stay there, don't follow me, leave me alone for ten minutes. I think every mother's done that anyway during the day, gone out the backyard, had a walk around and cooled off because I've been, I've been getting unreasonable and overreacting to situations. But I honestly wouldn't even know where to look beyond family and friends and beyond like phoning up Ngala and just asking the odd question and, and asking for ideas, I really wouldn't know where else to go. (*Sue*)

Child care

The other major source of support was child care. One-third of families were currently using some form of formal child-care; a further fifteen per cent of families had used child care in the past and another fifteen per cent were considering using child care in the future. Families were using formal child care to provide a breathing space for the partner at home, to help facilitate the "chill-out" zone when the worker returned, and to help manage family and paid employment options.

For the partners at home, child care provided not only an opportunity for their children to socialise with others but also gave them time to catch up on housework, payment of bills and other tasks that contribute to the machinery of the household:

Yeah that happened while, when I was away this time. I must say I'm not sure if I like child care or not, I think it's probably, those things are, say for both of us, but I think we need to try it. So far, so good I guess yeah. We're using it because [*Hillary*] just wasn't having any time to be able to do anything and not spending and she thought she wasn't spending a lot of time with this little one and I think also he's, he's ready for that, he's almost three and he's ready for, he hasn't had a lot of interaction with other children except for his cousins. I think it's probably a good thing. I was sort of advocating something like that, like a playgroup, but the problem with that is that umm [*Hillary*] still didn't get a lot of respite while she did that, but you know, I think it might work, but, because he's ready for the interaction with other kids. (*Brendan*)

Well we, we started that with [our oldest child] when she'd just turned one ... and then [our second child] came along so we started him a lot earlier and then it's you know, they both mingle with little kids reasonably well. They're happy to go, they're also happy to be picked up at the end of the day, but it means every week [my partner's] got you know from nine till five, child free to do all those things that you know either by herself or errands that are difficult to load the kids in and out or do things around here without two apprentices dragging along behind her so that... it's a goal for all of us that the kids mingle well so as they grow up they're doing well with their development as well it's a free day a week for [my partner] to do whatever else because it's a day that I'm not here so it's a bit of extra time to herself. (*Jeffry*)

As with all families there are those who have tried day care and it was not suitable or who will not even consider it as an option:

I don't like leaving my kids somewhere where I you know, it's not that I don't trust them, but I just like to be responsible for our own kids like with [*Felicity*] there or me there and you hear, you know you hear stories and that too and I think Ah bugger that and what was that a few weeks ago some lady went and locked up the day care centre and there's a kid still in there asleep in the toilet. (*Jim*)

Employer

The majority of couples were confident that the company would, without hesitation, fly them back in the event of a crisis at home:

If there's an emergency or a crisis you just go to the supervisor and they've got you on the next plane you know, they'll get you home or they'll have someone from the Perth office, if it's required, they'll come here and the guys on the job, once they hear what's happened to you they'll support you as well yeah. (*Jeffry*)

Yeah, if I had a crisis the company would fly me down all the time so I wouldn't even actually, wouldn't even worry asking them, to be honest. (*Brendan*)

Getting together with other fly-in fly-out families

The majority of workers indicated that, apart from the odd occasion, they were disinclined to socialise with colleagues when on their break. There was a sense that the furlough was time for family and that socialising with colleagues would effectively blur the separation between work and family. Some of the partners at home, on the other hand, indicated they would like to get together with other fly-in fly-out families, with similar aged children, as a form of support. Those with good support networks, however, were less likely to be pursuing contact with other families:

No I spend time with my wife and kids, my relaxation time, I spend enough time with the ugly mugs at work. (*Sam*)

I'm quite happy with my two weeks off and I enjoy my own company. (*Jonathan*)

I think they all come back exhausted and they don't want to see each other because they've just been together for nine days. (*Julie*)

I've never met another fly in, fly in family, so I think I might be interested in meeting other mums just to see how they manage with multiple kids. (*Natasha*)

It would be helpful [to get together with other families] so you can compare notes. I mean if you've got other people going through the same thing, I mean I think some people understand, but some people don't that it's just that little bit different. (*Sue*)

I just feel that I've got enough people in my life. I've got good friends that I've had for a long time, good friends that I've met recently, we've got good family, we've got a lot of you know, quite a lot of social contacts anyway you know, our neighbours are nice people we have a fair bit to do with them so I don't really feel like I need to go looking for other people. (*Kate*)

In moments of crisis

Couples were asked what happened or would happen if the partner at home or a child fell sick. The partner at home falling ill was a source of real concern for families and generated significant anxiety:

I've only actually managed to be very sick once with pneumonia, but he was home for that and that always is a constant worry to me because it's, his parents are just down the road and I know if it was a crisis they would come and look after the kids so that's not a problem, but actually if I was unconscious on the floor and he was away that's my, that's always been my biggest worry actually suddenly collapsing and the kids don't know what to do. They know to ring triple zero, but leaving them or actually dying or leaving them sort of by themselves that's, that's the only thing that really frightens me. *(Melinda)*

I always worry about if I get sick, that's the most worrying thing isn't, not so much if the kids get sick cause you go, kids get sick, yeah I know but if I got sick, I mean I've got to have surgery, I can't have, I don't know when I'm going to have surgery because I need to but it would mean I'm not going to be able to do anything for six weeks so. *(Tara)*

Most families had worked out what to do in the event of a crisis and whether they would put in a request to return home. The majority of workers left it to the partner at home to make the call as to whether their presence was required. Factors taken into consideration included:

- the event that precipitated the crisis and its perceived severity;
- the length of time the worker had been employed in a position and the perceived reaction of the company;
- the potential for lost income;
- the ability of the partner at home to manage the situation and her perception of the worker's response;
- support networks;
- number of children at home; and
- length of time it would take to travel from the site to home:

You got to weigh it up... like you know the situation, how serious is it, there are certain lines that you don't draw, you know for example maybe the car got stolen, is that a reason for me to disrupt the work regime and come home or can she deal with that. But if there was something more serious or sinister and you needed to be there you'd make that decision pretty quickly, you don't really think about it, but there, you have an emergency and evacuation plan already set in your mind. *(Jeffry)*

She reckoned she was that crook she couldn't move you know so, and she's never asked me to come home from work before and she rang me and said look can you see if you can come home and I went to the supervisor and I said mate I've got to go my wife's crook and he had a plane organised for me next morning. *(Bob)*

Depends how bad it was. If they're going to be fine, I probably wouldn't contact him because he's too far away and he would just be so worried. It depends if it was obviously life threatening, definitely, but if they're going to be okay I wouldn't because I could just imagine him trying to get home in a hurry and couldn't get on the flight and... I wouldn't want to worry him. *(Cheryl)*

Chapter 7:

Roles and responsibilities

Housework

In addition to caring for children, managing a household includes a myriad of tasks that need to be undertaken on a regular basis. The transition from being a one parent household to a two parent household may involve adjustments to the designation of these duties. The negotiation of household labour division is an ongoing issue for most families and fly-in fly-out families are no different (see for example Baxter 2002).

Previous research has tended to focus on the worker's inability or lack of desire to assume responsibility for household tasks, with workers described as "helping out" (see for example Storey et al. 1989). Back in 1989, Storey's study of fly-in fly-out families found that adjustments with regard to organisation and routine were the domain of women.

Our study indicates that the situation is more complex than that and adjustments are made by both the partner at home and the worker. It is too simplistic to argue that women are making the bulk of the adaptive changes. In the couples interviewed the middle ground was a collaborative, team approach with each partner contributing to the successful transition from away to home.

It is true, nevertheless, that this study indicated that the control of the housework was very much in the domain of the partner at home who then decided what was suitable for the worker to undertake. The division of household tasks occurred on a continuum from workers not assuming any household duties to workers who take over particular duties upon their return.

The categories of shared labour included:

- no household responsibility for the fly-in fly-out worker;
- a division between inside and outside work;
- fly-in fly-out worker responds to directions from partner at home;
- sharing tasks evenly;
- taking on a specific task.

No household responsibility for the fly-in fly-out worker

For some couples there is no onus on the fly-in fly-out worker to undertake any household tasks. There is an understanding that the paid work they do is stressful and the time spent at home is to recharge for the next stint. Some activities may be undertaken but the partner at home expects little:

He's good like that, but I mean I'll still, when he's back I'll do the washing and a lot of the domestic stuff, but he'll do things if he sees that they need doing like he'll wander around and sweep the floors and mop if he, if he wants to and has the time. It probably sounds very old fashioned and then it's sort of it's not really, but I think he works hard when he's there and I mean I don't expect him to come here and, and come back and sit down and put his feet up and you know, you know get me another drink or whatever, but he does enough you know, he's away and he works hard, he works twelve hour shifts. (Kate)

I certainly don't expect him to pick up any of the extra chores here, cause yeah he's been working for two weeks as well, he needs a bit of a break and a rest too. (Bridget)

Not much at the moment, he has been very very tired with this job, it's very demanding umm... but you know he hasn't really, I don't ask him because he comes home, he's so tired I don't ask him to do anything, I don't expect him to but, if I said to him can you vacuum the floor he'll do it, he'll make the bed ... But generally I don't ask him to do anything because he is just so tired, I would much prefer him to sleep in and relax because he works twelve hours, twelve, thirteen hours every day, night shift one week, day shift the next. (Tara)

Dividing inside and outside work

For some couples there was a definite distinction between inside and outside work. The male partner was seen to be responsible for outside work including lawns, gardening, maintenance of the pool, car servicing and house maintenance:

When he's away the outside goes a bit to pot you know because I just don't have the time to look after the inside of the house and the outside of the house, so you know I guess I'm just fortunate that I have a partner who understands that and he's happy to pick up the work when he gets home. (Rhiannon)

You know he is such a handyman, he's a real 'Bob the Builder', so he can do anything so all those things that you think I'm useless at, you know like hanging pictures on the walls or getting the car serviced, those sort of things, the practical sort of things suddenly doing all those as well as trying to find all the normal things for children. (Frances)

I check the car, make sure its safe. She's not mechanically minded. Do the lawn. Anything else that might need doing. I'm not averse to putting a load of washing on but tend not to, probably should. (Wayne)

You know fix the car or muck around in the garden a little bit or stuff like that, but he doesn't really like doing house, you know manual like housework. He doesn't like washing clothes or doing dishes and stuff like that. (Kellie)

I do the garden you know, pluck a few weeds and check the spa, see how it's going. Occasionally I also vacuum the floor and do the washing and do the dishes and make the bed. (Alan)

Well mainly outside, I look after the outside. (Jim)

Fly-in fly-out worker responds to directions/requests from the partner at home

Partners at home and fly-in fly-out workers were both aware that, in some cases, the worker was willing to undertake household tasks but waited for direct requests:

I find I'm the kind of person that [Tanya] needs to tell me what she wants done, if she does that then I'll do it no problem, but I'm like most males when I'm back I'll just try and chill out and rest... I try to help her out, catch up with things but she's got to tell me if it's the washing she wants hung out. Sometimes I'm a lazy bastard and don't do what I should be doing and cop and earful, that's life you know. (Murray)

He'll do anything I ask and if I ask can you bring in the washing or whatever or you know whatever, he'll do it you know, without a second thought, but yeah I don't necessarily expect him to know either you know, it's not something he deals with all the time and I mean some people say well maybe they should and maybe they should I don't know, but you know it's whatever works for you and I'm quite happy still being in control of what happens around the house you know and as long as he's happy to do it and doesn't complain then that's okay you know. If he complained about doing it well then I wouldn't be happy. (Anna)

Sharing tasks

In some instances couples said they shared household tasks when the fly-in fly-out worker was home:

We've always shared the inside stuff, that's just the way it is. If there's a load of washing to do you turn on the machine and push a button it's, yeah it's always been that way, it's never a hard task you know. (Dean)

I'm known to do I'd say, my share of mopping. General you know housework and stuff, I mean [Natasha] vacuums for instance, did the kitchen and the living area this morning and I said well have you finished vacuuming or is there more to do and she said Oh no there's still the hallway and our bedroom and stuff and you know, so I said Oh well I'll do that you know, my turn. You know I mean that was just... sharing I guess you could say. (Joshua)

I would say that it would be a fifty fifty split. She probably does the bulk of ... she won't let me do the washing. (Tom)

Oh he's brilliant, he does a lot of the cleaning and helps out with the cleaning and cooking and he buys, like I've got a full day at Uni on Thursdays and meals always on the table, or not on the table, but cooked when I get home and stuff and he does a lot of cooking and washing up and stuff and he'll go and do the shopping for me. (Trudy)

Specific tasks

In a small number of cases, workers carved out a household niche when they came home, taking over particular tasks such as shopping or cooking:

Pick up the shopping, he's done the shopping for a long time, but he would come back and shop for two weeks so I didn't have to go to the shop and he's very good, he's really good with the shopping and he's really good with the children and everything. (*Hillary*)

Well when he's back, he actually does most of the cooking because he enjoys it and he always has and that's fine with me, umm... yeah I mean even some days he'll say Oh you can cook dinner tonight, but then he'll get some idea about what he wants and he'll do it anyway. (*Kate*)

In their discussions about household tasks couples recognised the different standards that might prevail between them. In some cases, the worker was described as being more orderly, often as a function of working in the resources industry with the partner at home being more comfortable with a degree of chaos. The alternative view was also expressed with workers having a more relaxed approach and partners at home being more regimented:

I like to come home to a like clean house. It's part of the industry like everything's, the word shipshape probably sums it up,... everything has to be put away and lashed down or tidy and so there's never a lot of space around the place, so if things are left around the place it makes life difficult on board so tends to wash off in the home environment a little bit so. (*Tom*)

He's very fastidious, he's very pedantic and everything has to be done perfectly and umm, I would never call someone in to get anything done without his approval or we just didn't get it done until he was home. He's very good with things around the house but then expects you to keep that level up when he's away, like mowing of the lawns. (*Yvonne*)

She might want something done a specific way whereas I'm a bit more relaxed and just you know, bit more easy come, easy go sort of thing and... if it's not done a specific she might you know talk to me in a different tone. More often it's things not done in a certain way because she's quite regimental at times, its just a few different things whereas you know, I'm like have two or three jobs on the go and do a little bit there and get sick of that and do a little bit somewhere else whereas she'll just go through finish one job at a time and move onto the next one, a different way of doing things yeah. (*Alan*)

I've always been anal and that's probably been the hardest thing since having a baby, like just learning to let go a little bit. He chips in and does everything and I really, I have just high standards that he's forced to live up to them. (*Carla*)

I think I do my share, but it's a typical male and female thing we have different standards of cleaning and folding the washing but [*Astrid*] gets frustrated by, that I don't pick up after myself, but I think that's nothing to do with fly in, fly out it's just me and her.... (*Drew*)

The role of household tasks

Storey (1989) argued that his research showed that fly-in fly-out workers who had established tasks for their furlough appeared to cope better than those with no routine. In this research too, families talk about a range of ways in which the worker could re-enter family life via undertaking household tasks. These included:

- having set tasks the worker completes every furlough;
- having a list of tasks for the worker to complete; and
- negotiating “time-off”.

Set tasks

Having set tasks gave the fly-in fly-out worker a sense of being home or that they still had an integral role to play in home life:

I’m pretty sure I could manage a lawnmower, but I ain’t going to try, that’s, that’s his job when he’s down and I think that that gives him a sense of home as well, because he, wants to get a routine for him as well, he knows that Oh well I’ve got to mow the lawn and, and help bath the dog and all that sort of thing so. (*Sue*)

Oh I can do quite a bit of handyman stuff, but I generally try to leave it for him so that he feels important. (*Kellie*)

Setting a list of tasks

Drawing up a list was one way for couples came to an agreement about which tasks should be completed during the furlough. Most couples kept a list of some form but they were usually mutually derived or driven by the worker, kept in a visible place and not discussed to any great depth:

I just, I have to write them down while I’m away and then look at it and then just systematically go through the list. (*Jeffry*)

I used to come home and on the way home from the airport [*Donna*] would be giving me a list of jobs to do and I think Oh don’t you know I’ve only got a week and yeah, but they were tense those times actually, but I mean it’s chilled out now, but yeah. I actually do it myself. I’m always sort of got adding to and crossing out and, but she’ll put a few things on it, but she doesn’t, she knows I got a bit sensitive to it in the end ((laughter)). (*William*)

Negotiating ‘time-off’

As discussed previously, the challenge for fly-in fly-out families when negotiating household tasks is the definition of “time on” and “time off”. For the worker the furlough is time off from paid employment, for some of the partners at home the furlough can be time off from undertaking family

oriented tasks. Finding time for the relationship, the family and for you remains an ongoing challenge for all families:

I think she needs her downtime from the kids and I need my downtime from the workspace and that's where the challenge is because we both need our downtime at the same time. That's one of the things that can be tough I mean just because you don't get the obvious timeslots for your own space and you're both trying to... not that it causes conflict, but it certainly can because ... you know I need my down time and I need to sleep in more than you do sort of thing you know, it's not said but you know... (Casey)

Like I don't go okay I'm down for a week you have a rest, I'll do it all you know. I work hard too you know and so I'll do a little bit around the house, but I'll do all my jobs so she doesn't have to worry about that you know what I mean. (Justin)

Well I'm supposed to help out, but nine times out of ten I'm just exhausted, I mean I just got out of bed now, I usually get up at four every morning and knock off real late and, and work like a dog all day and all I want to do is just sleep for the first seven days and then do it all again, yeah. (Sam)

Meals

In the interviews we asked whether eating patterns changed when the worker was at home or away. In some cases when the worker's absence gave partners at home scope to privilege their own tastes. The main variations were between vegetarian and meat eaters and more adventurous and restricted eating patterns:

Vegetarian vs meat eaters

I just love fruit and veg, just plain fruit and veg and he loves his meat. (Frances)

So [Alan] does prefer to have a lot of meat with a few vegies and, so when he's home yeah, we tend to have probably more barbecues. (Trish)

When it's just myself and the kids I wouldn't cook a roast, I'm a vegetarian, the children aren't, but I'm not going to cook a big roast just for the kids and the routine like, probably one night out of two I'll give the kids something to eat and I won't be hungry, I'll have it in front of the TV and I'll just have beans on toast or a piece of toast or you know, whatever I feel like, whereas when he's home it's like well what would you like for dinner tonight so I'll cook a roast or I do spaghetti bol, so I do a little bit more cooking as such in that regard and the grocery, the grocery bill goes up. (Sue)

Adventurous vs fussy eaters:

Having been a chef in a previous life I'm more of, I like my strange food and gourmet food and that sort of thing. [Damian] is a meat and mashed potatoes man and so that because I'm, I used to be vegetarian and I don't like you know sausages or fillet steak and anything like that so when, when I'm home it's hard to just cooking for one when I'm used to cooking for lots or at least the pair of us. I eat a lot of stir fry and pasta and that sort of thing. (Paula)

Some partners at home, especially those with younger children, found the exhaustion of caring for children all day such that they “couldn’t be bothered” preparing a meal just for one person. In other cases it was just a matter of running out of time to prepare anything elaborate. There were various ways of managing this from cooking up a big meal one night and freezing the remainder, cooking meals and freezing them when the worker was home, and making sure there was a quick, easy meal in the freezer. The use of takeaway foods varied; in some cases those at home used takeaways to fill in the gaps when the worker was away, in other cases takeaway consumption increased when the worker was at home to relieve everybody of cooking duties and to enable workers their ‘fast food fix’:

I suppose I tend to eat a lot plainer meals when he’s not here and I don’t look after myself anywhere near what I would if he was here. For [our child] I still pre prepare meals vegetables and stuff, and portion it out and put it in the freezer ... and when [Reg] comes home I actually like to cook so I tend to cook a lot more and also I’m starting to cook meals and actually freeze them for myself to eat when he is away trying to get into a bit of an eating routine for myself now that I, hopefully identify what the problems are. I sometimes skip meals or I’ll just have a cup-a-soup when he’s not here and a piece of toast you know, something easy. (*Leonie*)

By the end of the day I’m lucky if I have dinner before eight o’clock now, by the end of the day I’m exhausted and I can’t be bothered doing anything. If I do cook a stir fry or pasta I’ll quite often make two or three serves and put them in the freezer, all I’ve got to do is just zap them you know and that’s it and also I’m a picker like during the day I’ll just pick at things. (*Paula*)

I suppose as I said we do have a bit of, not junk every night, but yeah the McDonald’ breakfast when he goes away and the McDonald’ before he gets home, I mean, and then maybe a treat of McDonald’ during the week or an ice-cream or something that usually like at the weekends when we’re very bored when he’s away and I think well we’ll take them and they can play, so yeah... we don’t have junk at all when [my partner’s] here, we eat properly. (*Julie*)

He’s quite happy to come home for the week and eat junk food you know, we usually have a bit more junk food in the house when he’s home then when he’s not, chockie biscuits and those sorts of things he just doesn’t get them at work and we have more take away the week that he’s home, rather than when he’s not. (*Tara*)

Chapter 8:

Work – family balance

Work and family separation

One of the purported advantages of fly-in fly-out is the ability to separate work from family life. This separation, however, varied from worker to worker and was dependant upon a range of factors including position within the company and individual personality. Workers interviewed described:

- being able to completely separate work from family;
- using strategies on the trip from work to home to detach from work;
- thinking about work in the first couple of days at home and then again the day before departure;
- having no separation of work and family.

Work and family kept completely separate

The majority of those who were able leave work behind them as soon as they were off site and to pick it up again once they are back were mine workers, tradesmen or supervisors who had been in the industry for a significant period of time:

I could have the most shittiest week at work and when I step on that plane bye, bye work, I'll forget a hundred percent about work, I don't ring, I don't email, I don't do anything. When I step on that plane to go back to work in Perth, that's when I start to think about what's happening at work ... you've got to detach because if you bring your work home with you, you just, you'll end up having arguments and it just wouldn't work. (*Arthur*)

I have to remind myself that it's a bit of a parallel universe, you do live two lives. Schizophrenic in some ways, but you do to live that life and then turn off and not bring your work home and equally so try not to take the influences from home to work as well. (*Bob*)

He has never brought work home; he's always refused to have a mobile phone. For a while he refused to be connected to the Internet for that reason. Home is home and work is work if he didn't have those things, then no one can contact him. (*Dorothy*)

Actively used strategies to separate work and family

Those who used a “buffer zone” to manage the separation of work and family talked about using the trip from the site or the wait at the airport to detach from work:

So we usually get off the plane, ring our spouse and we've landed, come and grab us you know, and I'll sit there while I'm waiting for another twenty minutes or so and sort of start contemplating what am I going to do on my break, what's happening you know and it doesn't take much to forget about work. It's the buffer zone. I think it works you know it works well, gives you a little bit of contemplation, you can sort of... tie up any loose ends running through your head with what's going on at work and I mean it doesn't always work that way because you might have had a really bad stint...you can't or you can never one hundred percent totally separate work from home because obviously that's the income that provides your life. But I can do my best not to bring any, any problems or any issues from work into the relationship. (*Joshua*)

Time required detaching from work

Some of the workers reported still detaching from work in the first couple of days at home and thinking about work a couple of days before they left. This scenario creates a tension between the desire for shorter rosters and adequate "down-time". If they had five days off this essentially only gave them a one to two day window when work was not a background feature:

It sometimes takes me a day or two to switch off from work and I can be a bit distracted. (*Reg*)

Off night shift you're physically stuffed and you do need a couple of days. (*Patrick*)

No separation of work and family

Workers who had no separation of work and family were usually those in professional positions, managers or superintendents. Many of these workers continued to answer phone calls, attend to emails and visit head office on their "break":

I was the only position in the department that wasn't covered while on break I had no one to cover so like one day I had fifteen phone calls on my first day of break and yesterday I've got a list up there of all the things that I have to achieve for the day, most of them work related. (*Mitchell*)

He quite often has to do work from home or his mobile will ring all the time from work so we have mobile free hours now. It has to get switched off if we go to the shops or we're going out for a coffee or something like that it has to get switched off because it was just ringing all the time and it's not fun standing at the shops while he talks on the phone for half an hour. (*Tanya*)

In my position I think about work most days, because of my position and what's going on, looking after the whole thing. I think I'm probably quite a bit different to you know a shift worker. As I understand it they start thinking about work the day before. It's the level of my position like it comes with the territory, I think in my position if you're not thinking and worrying about work a little bit you're not doing your job, you can't really have a feel for what's going on. (*Murray*)

The role of industry – company perspective

In this study, four human resources personnel were interviewed to get an industry perspective on what is currently offered to employees with respect to managing family and the fly-in fly-out lifestyle. As mentioned previously, it should be noted that the managers interviewed were not necessarily employed by companies from which participants were drawn. The companies represented included those with large workforce employed by the company, those with a smaller number of employed staff and a relatively high percentage of contractors and a company specialising in providing contract staff. They identified a range of strategies in place that were designed to assist the worker manage work and family. Those provided by the majority included:

- planned and unplanned leave entitlements including annual, long service, parental, special, bereavement, family and sick leave;
- policies with respect to the maximum number of working hours;
- fatigue management and “fit for work” education packages;
- on-site health promotion activities including gym and sporting facilities;
- attractive salaries;
- counselling services and peer support groups.

Other services not offered by all companies included:

- introduction of flexible work arrangements, such as job sharing, for some positions, at the discretion of the mine manager;
- flexibility with regard to place of work in times of family crisis;
- responsiveness to employee’s demand for shorter roster cycles;
- family days and family flights;
- newsletters.

At the most basic level the responsibility of the company was seen to include getting employees to the remote location from the airport, providing accommodation and food of a high standard, providing facilities to wash clothes and promoting occupational health and safety provisions. There was also recognition that the welfare of the worker’s family had a significant impact on the ability of the worker to perform their work in a safe, efficient manner. These human resource managers interviewed were open and receptive to ideas that enabled the company to further engage with worker’s families.

The role of industry – employee perspective

Some workers thought that the industry had forgotten or downplayed the role played by the partner at home and family and that they were integral to the success of the fly-in fly-out arrangement:

It's the families that tend to get forgotten you know, the partners and the children. (*Brian*)

Families were asked whether they were aware of any help the company offered. The majority of workers of owner-operated companies and their partners were aware of some strategies offered by the companies they worked for. These included:

- counselling services;
- on-site peer support programs;
- flexible leave types;
- flexibility and understanding regarding family issues;
- visits to the site for families;
- family events in Perth;
- insurance e.g discounted medical insurance;
- shorter rosters.

A small number of partners at home indicated that they were not aware of anything offered by the company:

But no, this one, not that I know of, not unless he's got it on his desk and he hasn't shown me but no, no I think they seem to think you're on the mainland so you're alright, yeah. (*Julie*)

Counselling services

Counselling services were the most often cited service offered by companies for families. In some cases this option was perceived as something for individual workers rather than the family. Some families were aware of the service but did not think it was something they would ever use or would use only if their marriage was in difficulty:

They offer assistance you know like talk to you, I've never used them myself, one of the guys at work has he went through a marriage break up you know so he went and saw the counselling mob and sort of talked him through it. (*Alan*)

I mean they do have an employee assistance program, but that mainly gets you, from what I understand from people that, you know, just have problems with you know substance abuse or you know, drinking problems and stuff, I don't know of any cases where it's been family orientated. (*Leonie*)

I mean I don't think I'm the sort of person that needs that sort of thing. (*Simon*)

I mean they have got like a counselling service and stuff like that, the fly in counselling service and stuff that you can access if you need to, but I didn't, I don't know I've never really, I suppose never, never really thought of ringing them. I, we don't even have any problems with our marriage. I would use them if we were having problems with our marriage if the work was directly affecting our relationship I think that I would. (*Kellie*)

On-site peer support

Some workers identified on site peer support programs as potentially helpful. Although they were thought to be valuable for work related issues, they were not considered a port of call for family issues:

I think they have peer support so there are guys, your workmates that are supposedly trained that you're supposed to be able to tell them you know, your innermost thoughts if you're having problems at home and what have you, but I, I don't think there's, I wouldn't be telling them. (*Nicholas*)

Flexible types of leave

Families were generally aware of the leave options available to them even though in some cases these options were not openly advertised:

There is a lot of access on our intranet and we all know how to use it and, so if you've got any issues like annual leave and stuff, you can always look it up and, and there's plenty of information out there. We've got HR people that you can go as well. (*Justin*)

You can go out on stress leave if it gets that bad that you need to leave, I know a bloke who was on stress leave for two years. (*Alan*)

I said to him when he came out [when I was sick] that he needs to investigate that because as far as I'm concerned he should be able to take that from his sick leave, because it's classified as carer's leave so I did, I got a doctors' certificate from my specialist for him and hopefully that'll go through. But it's not something that they advertise. (*Leonie*)

They do have bereavement leave; I think they're probably flexible in that sense. (*Donna*)

Their policies are pretty good, like parental leave and that type of thing, if you're having trouble at home, like you can get leave to go home and sort some things out, there's no drama there. (*Arthur*)

Flexibility and understanding regarding family issues

Another area in which the companies were thought to be proactive and supportive was when workers needed to be flown home in case of emergency, crisis or trouble at home:

They're very good about sending him back if we need him home. (*Carmel*)

The company gets you out, you know, if you need to go out in the morning, you go out the morning. (*Sean*)

They had no hesitation flying him out a couple of weeks before [our child] was born. (*Trudy*)

Visits to the site

The option of families being able to visit the site and spend some time touring and seeing where the worker lived and worked was seen as particularly valuable:

They provide one free flight for immediate families each year if you want to go up there. (*Kate*)

They had guest visits every two or three months where the family can come up for the weekend and I think that's really important. (*Bridget*)

We have things like the family flights where the family could come up and visit once a year and they would come out and do a tour around the mill and underground and all that sort of stuff so they get free flights up for the family and that's still ongoing at the moment. (*Brian*)

Family events in Perth

The fact that companies offered family events in Perth, including Christmas functions, was considered to be a generally positive way to support families:

They get women together, they do a lot, they organise SciTech days, I know they have organised women's days, they have a lot of stuff, but we just don't take it up. (*Dorothy*)

They do a Christmas do every year so you can go to that if you wanted to. (*Bridget*)

Salary and insurance

Discounted insurance and a good salary were seen to be important:

They pay us quite well. (*Bob*)

We've just gone into that Medibank Private thing and they pay a percentage for us and I think they're good if we wanted housing loans and stuff they give us good discounts. (*Wanda*)

Shorter rosters

The move to shorter rosters was widely applauded by families despite the potential for trading off salary or holiday entitlements. Many couples had moved through a range of rosters with some workers graduating from rosters as long as six weeks on, one week at home to the two and one. Partners at home admitted that three weeks is about the limit of their endurance and longer rosters were more disruptive for the family. The change from a nine-five to an eight-six was also generally well received, mainly due to the recognition that the length of time at home had increased which assisted with the physical recovery of the worker:

Four is too long. It's just that extra week it's a whole month you know, I think in a month a lot goes on within a month and if he's away for all of it I feel he misses out on some things like family life and you know school and the kids doing certain things. (*Melinda*)

We went from nine, five to eight, six and we lost about two thousand dollars a year in roster allowance and we lost some annual leave, but there was no change to base salary so I think if you went the next step it would definitely hit your base salary, but as long as that was you know, in line with how much extra time you got off, I wouldn't be concerned about that, I would be happy to sacrifice, but I'm on good money I suppose, so I can afford to say that, but umm... I would be certainly happy enough to take that salary cut for even time roster. (*Brian*)

I find that the bigger the break the better I feel as with everyone so it's a bit of a shock to the system and... but I guess the upside is I'm not up there for as long so I'm not as stressed when I get home so. The bigger break's definitely a bonus. (*Jonathon*)

Contractors

The level of assistance provided to workers employed by companies that contracted to owner operators was perceived as being considerably less than that provided to employees of owner-operator companies. The majority of partners at home of contractors were unaware of services or did not think the companies helped families at all. About one quarter of contract workers were unaware of what companies offered:

I wouldn't have a clue, nup. No one's ever said anything about it, nothing at all. (*Grant*)

Not at all, I just know he flies to work, he flies home, that's all. (*Tara*)

In the case of contractors the length of time with the company could have been a factor in the level of awareness regarding what the company was able to offer. Those workers who identified the contractor they worked for as providing assistance nominated; flying the worker back in the case of emergencies at home, counselling services and general support.

Changing work culture

Research undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s portrayed a mining/rig culture imbued with a sense of male camaraderie centred on the drinking of alcohol. This type of work environment down-played family commitments and was characterised by longer rosters and poor communication links. This current research suggests a cultural shift within the industry, towards:

- higher safety standards;
- zero tolerance alcohol/drug policies;
- shorter rosters;
- improved communication;
- stronger company commitment to assist workers respond to family crises without penalty;
- increased number of women in the workforce;
- changing attitudes towards parenting partnerships.

The following discussion concentrates on partnerships and parenting and changes in the drinking culture.

Parenting partnerships

The majority of workers indicated that they were able to ring their families without receiving any negative feedback from co-workers. Those who had been in the resources industry for ten or more years saw this as a definite cultural shift:

You talk to blokes at the table after work and everybody talks about their home life so you get to know basically what everyone's home life's like and you know I think most of the blokes I knock around with they are pretty big on family values and I didn't work in a crew that's full of young blokes and most blokes I work with have wives and kids and everyone that I sort of know only work away because its a good way to provide. (*Jim*)

It's a common thing now for people, like jokingly go, Oh I've got to report in because its my night to call home and even people at work are taking messages like you know, your wife rung or that so more open about that someone rung and left a message and obviously it wasn't work related. (*Liam*)

The foreman's a classic, never bloody changed a nappy in his life, you know but yeah I think today's world's a bit different to that. (*Drew*)

Drinking culture

The perception of the mine as a hard-drinking site was not one generally shared by this group of workers even though they acknowledged its persistence particularly among singles and those living residentially:

It's been such a gradual thing that it probably doesn't stand out but when I first got up there it was very much work all day, drink all night, back to, back to work the next day and that would be the two weeks basically. Where I work there is low staff turnover, I still work with the same people I started with but obviously everybody's a lot older and, I guess a lot of people grow out, grow out of [drinking] and when new people arrive they see that well this is not a party camp... and there's probably a lot more women working up there, all those sorts of things probably add to the change in culture. *(Rob)*

[the single guys] don't have anyone to spend the money on or that they're supporting, they've only got themselves you know so, for whatever reason they're like that, they're like that so they have extra money so they drink a little bit more than what a family man would because you can't justify drinking twenty bucks worth of grog every night you know. *(Jeffry)*

Drinking is essential to the lifestyle especially for the shift change, getting plastered on shift change is good for the camaraderie for the blokes out there, but it also gets you in with them all. For me family comes first I'm not out there to spend five hundred dollars a week on grog, I'm there to look after these little ones. *(Damian)*

Sub-cultures

As to be expected workers identified a range of sub-cultures within their workplaces. These sub-cultures impacted on family if it affected benefits, access to communication or the interaction between 'blokiess' and fatherhood. Workers identified a range of subcultures within their place of employment. These related to:

- types of operation, that is, mining construction versus production and processing;
- larger mining companies and smaller operations;
- job types within a single operation; and
- contract versus owner-operator staff.

The difference between owner-operator staff and contract staff was the major division discussed by participants. There was a strong feeling that contract staff while, in some cases financially compensated, got longer rosters, poorer accommodation, and fewer benefits and did not feel part of the organisation:

There's definitely different sub-cultures within each area and that may have to do with the pay rates as well, the processing guys are very different from the underground guys and the undergrounds guys are very different from the people who work the open cut and then within all those kind of things you have like your little sub-cultures. The underground workers themselves are very different from the engineers that are working here, similar but there's a bit of a divide. *(Jonathan)*

Some of the employees go straight into the proper cabin type rooms and the contractors go into the camp, which is just dongas. I've been there for five, six months and I still have to go for a walk, twenty metres to go to the toilet and showers, and my biggest complaint with that is on the night shift, you go to the toilet during the day, you walk out into the sunlight and it wakes you up and you can't go back to sleep. *(Damian)*

The biggest division is between staff and contractors. The contractors are at the bottom of the food chain mostly, the guys that are driving the dump trucks, doing the drilling work that kind of stuff all the real menial tasks for want of a better word. They tend to have a poor roster, say something like a two and one, three and one, four and one, that kind of thing four weeks on, one week off and their pay rates are, they're earning a lot of money, but doing a lot of hours. *(Jonathan)*

Its basically contract scum, but at the end of the day they wouldn't have a mine without us, because they won't do the work that we're doing. I think it's a bit of envy too because we earn a lot more money than they do, but mind you we've got to work five times harder than they ever would. *(Sam)*

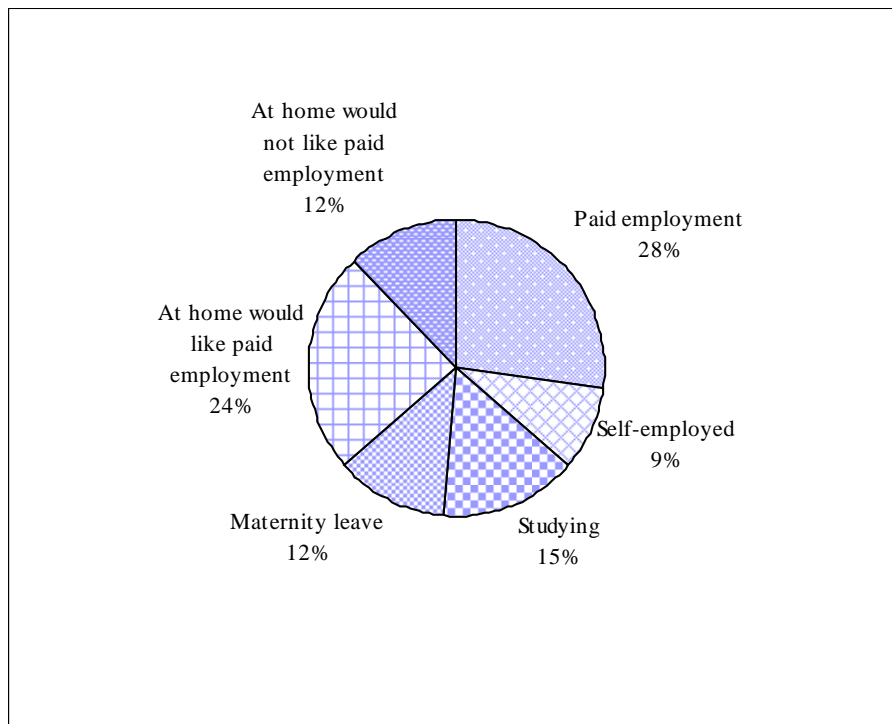
Work-family balance: partners at home

Working outside the home

The partners at home could be divided into five major groups, including those:

- in part-time work;
- self employed;
- wanting to enter the paid workforce;
- on maternity leave;
- studying;
- currently at home and would prefer not to pursue paid employment.

Figure 8.1: Employment/Study options for partners at home



In part-time work

All the women currently in paid employment were either working on a casual basis or part-time with all those women being reasonably content with the current arrangement. The majority of women were working two days per week. There were, however, difficulties including: finding employment with the required flexibility; the physical and emotional toll of managing work children and the household without a partner providing backup; and bringing work home to offset flexibility in the workplace:

I always thought doing shift work would be easy having a child, but it's really, really difficult especially having my partner work away so I just, when this job came up that was purely just you know seven o'clock until three o'clock Monday and Friday, I thought well it's perfect, I don't have to do night shift, afternoon shifts. (*Trish*)

I just started temp work so, from March until now I've had probably four different jobs and I just try and fit it around him ... and I enjoy doing it but I've got my limits. When [*Simon*] is away it's more stressful it's harder it's just more stressful, that you have to get up and get organised and I think well I've got to be home if I don't get that bus home then I miss it, I have to ring Mum to get [our child] and you know you're constantly ticking over in your mind as to what's happening whereas if he's here and I'm working I don't have to worry about that sort of thing. Then you've got to get home and get to school and dinner and bed and up the next day and do it all again, it's hard, it's hard. (*Yvonne*)

I do two days a week, but I've just recently dropped it down to one day a week. I work for a small family business as well, it's a pest control company, they work from home so I've just been doing that for the past five months but yeah just found it a bit difficult because there's just me as well and the kids, I just, I don't know whether they were missing their Dad or whether it was because they were in day care two days a week or what it was and I though I should be spending more time with them because I couldn't, I just couldn't figure out why they're just really clingy. (*Maria*)

I'm more of an office admin type person now whereas I was in a management role before, so fabulous, love the change of pace, there's no pressure, there's no expectation, the flexibility is amazing If [our child] is sick and I have to pick him up from day care then I'm not letting anybody down and I'm not made to feel bad that I'm doing that and you know I was the person before that was making people feel bad about leaving and picking up the children, so to have that different perspective and not have someone like me breathing down your neck, it's a real pleasure, yeah so it's great. (*Carla*)

Two of the women in the paid workforce indicated that while their partners were not outright opposed to them working outside the home, one found it irritating and the other had expressed a preference for her to stay at home with their child. The views of the partners of the other women varied from full support to guarded ambivalence.

Self-employed

Of the women who were currently not in the paid workforce but were considering it, four were engaged in practices that could be described as small business. One was using "Ebay" to resell children's clothing: "it just keeps my mind active and it keeps me sane"; another was selling children's craft items, and two others managed investment properties and the renovation of investment properties:

Yeah, great for her, good on her yeah, she gets her own money and a sense of self worth. I've got no qualms, if she wants to do that as long as it doesn't hurt her too much like, put too much more pressure on her than she needs, that's a good outlet for her at this time I think, yeah it's been good. (Sam)

Well I, to some degree, probably pushed her into it because she'll have a lot of free time at home and as long as it can work in with my roster at home and for the children that, the children come first, then me I suppose and then if she has any free time she can go out and find some work because I think it would be good for her to sort of, to be a little bit more financially independent, to make and to be influenced by the greater world around her rather than being insulated by just the home unit. (Tom)

Well she has started working and that's added another stress to my life. You know that she's not at home, but one day out of those five day breaks. In some ways I enjoy that because I get a whole day with [our child] and spend a bit of time with her, it's just one less day that we can do things together you know, there's a lot of kid pressures on the weekend, but you don't really have a lot of time with just the two of us. My personal preference would be for her not be working but she needs something to keep her mind active and I respect that, so we will muddle through. (Murray)

Wanting to enter paid employment

The majority of women at home who would like to be in paid employment still had a child or children at home or who had children making the transition to full-time schooling and were in the first two non-compulsory years of primary schooling. Some of the barriers to returning to work included: reactions of children having a father flying in and flying out and a mother in the paid workforce, the lack of flexibility due to their partners work situation, costs and availability of child care, lack of support networks, reduced confidence:

No I don't work outside the home, I can't, I'd love to because it's a way of meeting people and I really would like to meet people now that she's better, but I just can't do it and it's, because there is no day care, my elder boy doesn't really like the thought of me going off to work and I, because his father's away I sort of you know, because his Dad is away I don't want him to think I'm away. I'm sure I will, hopefully I'm going to do a course next year and just brush my skills up because I haven't worked for nine years, no one would employ me, so hopefully I can do a course a couple of times a week and then maybe a part time job because he is eight now, I'm sure he'd be alright about it. (Julie)

Oh I'd love to work, but it's just not possible with the kids at the moment because I just don't have the support there yeah umm... I've just, I've got to rely on day care and I've got friends around, but I can't rely on them all the time, it's not like family where you can sort of ring them up and say Oh can you have them and yeah, yeah so. (Carmel)

The reaction of workers to the prospect of their partners returning to paid employment was on the whole positive:

No definitely I mean I think she should go back to work, not so much for the money side of things it's just you know, so she can start interacting and so she doesn't turn into sort of, sort of, babysitting vegetable or something like that which is, I think that's why she thinks she's going in the way that she just wants to get her brain working. (*Simon*)

I think now the kids are at school I reckon it would be good for her you know, but I wouldn't like her working fulltime, I know because when you come home like I want to be able to spend some time with her. But yeah... I think it would be good for her socially you know and like... I just think that it would be good for her to, if she could get part time work it would give her something else to think about and get her out and about and meet people and do. (*Justin*)

Mmm, yeah the sooner the better ((laughter)) no, no it doesn't bother me. When she's comfortable and ready to go back to work yeah, ... she's only thirty-six or something like that I think, but yeah, she's not going to, doesn't want to spend the rest of her life stuck in here you know, she's going to want to you know, an interest in the career sort of thing. So yeah, I'm looking forward for her to go back for that reason as well. (*Jim*)

Maternity leave

All the women on maternity leave were considering returning to the workforce but not necessarily in the short term. A young professional mother who had previously begun a career in Canberra found that after the birth of her baby she was not keen on returning to work despite the support of her partner:

He's very supportive umm... he's actually, he's not, he's actually very keen for me to spend as much time at home with her as I would like to because he feels that that is as, you know that, that for him that's part of why he's working away so that he can give his family things that he might not be able to give them if he was home and one of that is the flexibility for me to choose whether I want to go back to work or not. So he said that if I get this job we'll get a computer so that I can do some work from home, ... he's not been old fashioned about it you know, I really believe that you should, but you know I'd like, I think it would be nice if she had umm... you know someone home. (*Natasha*)

The studying option

A number of women who were studying part-time had a view to becoming the primary salary earner upon completion of their studies. Juggling study commitments, family and fly-in fly-out was considered to be difficult but manageable:

It's pretty hard to balance I mean I'm only doing the one unit and that's more than enough. But it's good it gives me an extra outlet as well you know, to meet people and to have something else you know, through my head. [Damian] he's all for it, yep. Especially because it means once I start earning he can retire. (*Paula*)

I did two exams after he was born, I wouldn't recommend it ((laughter)). (*Trudy*)

Committed to being a stay-at-home Mum

There were three women who had made a commitment to remain at home at least for the time being:

I'm really happy at home. We could benefit from the money, but no I don't have to and the other thing is I can't, I mean I can't manage three children with my husband away and, and work. I mean I just couldn't do that so yeah. (*Hillary*)

Not now, I want to be a stay home Mum, I'm determined to be a stay home Mum umm... maybe when all the kids are at school, I'd like to do something, I don't know what, but still something just to get my brain going and, but you know, I want to be here for when the kids come home from school and stuff. (*Cheryl*)

I'm going to have to go back and do the odd shift within the next eighteen months to get my registration going because you just never know what's going to happen, but I really don't want to do it, but I'm going to have to. (*Frances*)

Chapter 9:

Advice from the coalface

Advice from families for families

In this study couples were asked what advice they would give to a family just starting fly-in fly-out who had the same aged children. Their responses fell into the following categories:

- ensure the decision to undertake fly-in fly-out is a joint one;
- allow time to adjust to fly-in fly-out;
- prepare the children as much as possible;
- have an “out-clause”;
- be prepared to negotiate with your employer;
- select your roster carefully;
- maintain regular contact;
- sort out problems before departure;
- keep busy while the worker is away;
- make space for yourself;
- accept help if offered and ask for help;
- maintain a consistent routine;
- keep the worker involved in parenting and the household;
- ensure workers have a “chill out” zone when they return;
- plan the time off;
- don’t do it.

Joint decision

Couples suggested that families should make the decision together, either as a couple or as a family, to start and continue fly-in fly-out:

Think long and hard about it and obviously it’s not every couple’s cup of tea and, and there are so many issues that come up that I don’t think, unless you’ve actually done it that you would, you’d even contemplate and again it’s easy to sit down and have a chat like yeah we think we can do it, but actually doing it is a different thing. (*Rob*)

Before they do it that they think hard about whether they do want to do it and whether their family situation is, is okay for them to do it and, and that they need to talk about it and you know, talk all the way through it because you know things can change you know, you think that it’s a great idea first up because you’re getting plenty of money and all the rest of it, but as you get you know, down the line you umm... work out that those things that you’re missing out on and then sort of, it can have a disruptive influence on your relationship. (*Brian*)

Time to adjust

There was recognition that the first few months of undertaking fly-in fly-out were possibly the hardest as family members adjust to the new lifestyle. Couples suggested it was important to have time to settle into the lifestyle before making any decisions was important:

I would just suggest I suppose if people were saying they started doing it and they were missing their family and stuff I would probably just say that it does get easier the more you do it, the less you worry about them. It takes between six and twelve months to get the hang of it. (*Justin*)

Allow it to happen and give it a go, I will always say, especially if the wife didn't want it to happen, I'd say give it a go for at least two stints and if you can't cope then, you can't cope, but you've got to give it a go for a start. (*Kim*)

Don't give up after the first three months, the first three months are the worst because you've got no routine, the kids don't know what's going on especially if they're young. If they're young children and you can't explain to a two year old like you can an eight year old, that Daddy's going to be home in a couple of weeks, that you've got to give it a chance to get into the routine. (*Sue*)

Just don't go in with a negative attitude just give it two months and see how you go. (*Damian*)

Prepare the children

Preparing the children was seen as another key factor in the success of fly-in fly-out. Explaining where the worker goes and what they do, visiting the site if possible were all considered important. In addition to preparing children for the fly-in fly-out lifestyle, giving children permission and space to discuss its effects was also recommended:

With the kids make sure they know, understand before you go as much as possible, but it's easy to go overboard, make sure they know Daddy or Mummy will be away these days and will be back in two weeks. (*Damian*)

Sit your family down and really have a good talk about it and get everyone on side because if not, if your kids aren't on side, it's not going to work so you got to sit down and you really got to be open and sit them down and explain how long you're going to be away for, what's involved with it, what type of work, try and arrange so you've got communication while you're at work and keep that open, keep the dialogue things open. (*Arthur*)

Prepare the kids before you go, let them if they're you know our age or whatever, just prepare them and make sure that they know when you're going and coming back and if you're going to ring or if you can ring or if you can't ring. (*William*)

Have an out-clause

Some families thought it was essential that if both the partner at home and the worker felt that the situation was no longer working they could acknowledge this and the worker would leave fly-in

fly-out. In addition to having an “out-clause” some families talked about the importance of staying focussed on the reasons for doing fly-in fly-out:

Don't over commit yourself financially so that your husband has to work away and you know if you don't enjoy it or you can't cope with him being away and you've over committed yourself financial, don't get yourself into that position at all. That would be the biggest thing, don't commit yourself don't rely yourself so much on the money that you leave yourself no option but for your husband to work away, cause then you just end up in all sorts of problems. (*Bridget*)

When it doesn't work when it's not working, stop. If it gets to the point where your relationship is going to fall down, say stop and put the brakes on it and reassess it and find another way. (*Jim*)

If they were in a situation where the money that's coming in is very marginal and they're just scraping by, then I'd say okay it's a good way of getting in front, but have a view or a plan to get out of it and make sure you stick with that plan. (*Murray*)

Keep focussed on why you're there. Save your money or make it work for you. (*Grant*)

Make very sure that between the pair of them they've got a goal, make sure they've got a goal about the duration of the timeframe or what other limitations there are. (*Bob*)

Take each day as it is not, not think how long is this going to go for sort of thing, just take each day as it is and, and umm... yeah focus on the bigger picture I suppose and the, the benefits that it has. (*Linda*)

Be prepared to negotiate with your employer

Couples suggested being able to negotiate in the workplace regarding family friendly responses and rosters was important:

Don't be scared to speak up if you've got to go home for a specific reason. (*Alan*)

Select your roster carefully

Families suggested that employment should be selected based on the roster selection available. Given the current skills shortage the climate is such that many workers and their families have the option of taking or refusing employment based on roster length and flexibility:

Make sure that it's a good roster, obviously the shorter the better, ... I'd suggest make sure that they keep to a strict roster and, but there's also flexibility if you need to go down to Perth or wherever you live and also look into the flights if you're going to a, a mine site that only has a flight once a week then forget about it you know, I would suggest going to work for a mining company that has one or two flights a day so if you do have an emergency you can get out. (*Mitchell*)

Don't work, don't take on anything than two weeks on, one week off, I wouldn't, if you had young children, I wouldn't recommend taking anything that's more than two weeks away. (*Tara*)

Maintain regular contact

Maintaining contact was the single most important piece of advice current fly-in fly-out families felt they could offer to prospective families. One component of that advice was to develop a communication strategy, dependent on the availability of telephones and email, before commencing employment:

Have some sort of, a plan before you go up as to what the contact's going to be ... like are you going to phone me every night, every second night, every third night, do I have to have a whole heap of change with me or shall I get the global calling card so that all he does is put the PIN in and it gets billed to the home phone so he doesn't need to worry about having money on him if he wants to phone me. (*Sue*)

The other thing is you should speak to your spouse often, ... and make a point of finding out you know, what's going on if you can. (*Brendan*)

Communicate, talk, I mean we couldn't have done it without the phone you know, we need to talk through issues, you need to make sure you're both on the same wavelength, you need to make sure your discipline practices are acceptable to both parents, there's no use one being you know, a hard arse and the other one being as lenient as, the kids get confused and it causes problems and you know, you don't, you don't want that you know, you want a happy child or happy children whatever the case may be. So yeah, just make sure you're both on the same wavelength and yeah. (*Leonie*)

Make sure that you talk to your partner regularly on the phone, even if you don't want to, even if he's boring you to tears you've got to keep those communication channels open. (*Dorothy*)

I suppose it's really important that the two of you talk to each other every night, I've really found that a lot easier because I think if you don't too much happens and you sort of grow apart because it's not there, I've found that it really helped. (*Tanya*)

Keep occupied

Partners at home talked about the importance of not getting worn down or bored:

Just to keep themselves occupied I think, because you know I think if they start getting bored that's when they start getting depressed if they're that sort of person. I mean that's how I cope with it you know just keep busy. (*Wanda*)

Make space for yourself

Partners at home also stressed the importance of ensuring maintenance of a personal identity while partners were away:

Think you've still got to have a life when your, when your partner's not around, I don't think there's any point sitting around the house waiting and, and putting things off you know, until they're back I think you should still you know, if you've got good friends well by all means go out with them, visit them, do things. If you're able to get people to look after your kids every now and then so you can study or maybe work a couple of days or whatever you want to do you should do it. (*Kate*)

I think having time to yourself is really important, it establishes who you are as a person, as opposed to being part of a family, part of a partner, part mother you know. (*Melinda*)

Accept and seek help

Families recognised that support was important. Some partners at home had struggled in difficult situations without accepting help and in hindsight realised that accepting help was not a sign of failure:

Accept any help because I haven't ... or I haven't until it's too late. But then as everyone knows you don't take that much help do you; you try and soldier on until it's too late. (*Frances*)

Have that support of people around you if you need it and don't be frightened just do it, it will be fine. (*Felicity*)

If you can do child care and things like that, do that and do get cleaners if you can and ... just to work at your budget so if it really is important to you to have a house cleaner that you do, do that because it does help you and it does make your life a little bit easier. I mean I get home after the cleaners have been here and I'm just like ecstatic. (*Linda*)

Couples recommended establishing a support network before fly-in fly-out employment commenced:

Figure out what kind of support you can get from your friends and family before it all goes, before it all starts. (*Sue*)

Be prepared, be prepared for a few hard times umm... be prepared to you know, get your support group going I think. (*William*)

Routine

The families in this study emphasised the importance of a consistent routine. This helped the partner at home manage when the worker was away, helped the worker reintegrate back into the family and helped the children manage the transitions. Maintaining a routine, while being flexible at the same time was also discussed. Workers suggested that the onus needed to be on the fly-in fly-out partner to slot back into the routine rather than expecting the routine to change to accommodate their needs:

Keep the same routine whether there's two parents around or one. I think that's very important if you try and change anything it, that'll cause all sorts of tension and stress and disruption and the rest of it. *(Brendan)*

Just get things really organised, so organised so you, you know, kids clothes are out in the morning so there's no like what do you want to wear, they're wearing that. Yeah, get everything structured, make sure even their food's ready for the next day, just so you don't have to think about it so when it comes to bedtime, they're in bed and you have that time to yourself. *(Frances)*

You know for me not changing the routine, keeping everything as normal as possible the whole time, regardless of whether he's home or not. *(Tara)*

Stay consistent with your children especially a baby, I think consistency with kids is the best thing. *(Felicity)*

Just try as much as you possibly can to make sure that the kids have the same life whether their Dad's home or their Dad's away. *(Tanya)*

I think routine is important, but I think... you have to give and take as well, you have to be, I think routine is important, but then I think you have to be flexible enough to let it go as well and I think Dad needs to be an important part of the family and needs to fit back in easily and be made to be part of the family. *(Yvonne)*

You have to be flexible, but have a routine, an overall routine in place, but flexible within it to allow for these extra components I guess you know, in the family. It's really important because if you don't that's when you have problems. *(Melinda)*

Sort out problems

In addition to maintaining regular contact families also suggested that workers should never leave a problem unresolved:

You've got to, you know if you've got a problem you've got to sort it out straight away or it can fester I mean if someone goes away with an argument for two weeks then it doesn't do the relationship any good. *(Julie)*

Ah well never leave on the wrong foot, but that's a big thing as they say never go to sleep on an argument, never as much as possible to try and get things sorted out before you leave because it's a horrible feeling being away when you've kind of left on a sour note. *(Jack)*

Keep involved

Keeping involved in parenting and the household was seen as a key to success. This was a dual process facilitated by both the partner at home and the worker:

It's just keeping involved in their life because if you don't talk to them then eventually I guess you become like this stranger who turns up every, every week or something like that and then just disappears again you know. (*Simon*)

Have them [the worker] involved just as much as possible. I think being a first time parent you, I had set ideas of how I wanted things and it's not necessarily the way to go you know. You can't do it out of a book or anything. (*Trish*)

I would highly advise men to become involved when they're home, with their kids' schooling because that's a way that they can keep in touch. Know their, know who their kids teachers are and, do the kindy rosters and know who their kids' classmates are so that when, when they do ring up on the phone they can relate to their kids and they can say how's little Betty going you know are you playing with her still and you know, has she still got that pretty pink dress so that actually ties them in and gives them some, some conversation to have with their children when they're away. (*Dorothy*)

Chill out

Ensuring space for the worker to recover after working away was seen as essential. However, equally important was the recognition that both parties had been working hard and that 'chill out' time needs to be negotiated for both:

When he comes home he wants some chill out time, but I need chill out time too, so you do have to compromise. There might be trade offs you have that morning off if I have the next morning off. There has to be compromise otherwise it wouldn't work. (*Frances*)

One thing when he first gets home, give him some time to readjust and you know let him have some moments, he needs some time for himself, but then he also has to be switched on as a Dad and have time with his children too, but also with you. (*Melinda*)

Have chill out time and respect each other and that's across the board, that you have to respect each other's jobs and, and personal space and time. (*Linda*)

There needs to be the understanding that they don't go up there for a holiday and that, and while we're busy down here, they're just as busy up there. (*Trudy*)

Plan the time off

In order to maximise the time off couples recommended planning the furlough. In planning time off, workers suggested that the last day should not be taken up with finishing off tasks:

Make plans you know like “Oh this break we’re going to do this”. Rather than sort of coming back and thinking “Oh what are we going to do” because we did that, we used to do that sometimes, I’d just come back and didn’t have anything planned and then we’d come back and we’d procrastinate and ... then by the time you look it’d be like eleven o’clock, we’d done nothing for that day. (*Simon*)

Just don’t rush too many things on the last couple of days try and be organised and by the same account when you come home umm... don’t get blind drunk on the flight home and meet your wife at the airport and you can hardly stand because that’s not, not a good look either, not saying that I’ve done that. (*Jack*)

Don’t do it

Despite considerable periods of time doing fly-in fly-out and managing the situation there were a small number of both partners at home and workers who had as their first response “don’t do it”:

I would probably say don’t do it. (*Frances*)

If you can avoid doing it, don’t do it. (*Hillary*)

Don’t do it ... No I, that’s probably a bit harsh....If you have children already, I wouldn’t do it because it’s such a big change going to a fly in, fly out, it does definitely change your family dynamics. (*Leonie*)

Advice from families to industry and service providers

Workers and their partners varied in how involved they thought the industry should be in supporting their families. The division was essentially related to length of service with those just beginning their careers less likely to indicate that the company had obligations with respect to family support. Alternatively, it was generally workers who had been in the industry for an extended period of time and who may have worked for a number of different employers who indicated that there was a need for companies to expand their roles to ensure that the entire family was supported.

Some of the issues raised are not restricted to companies in the mining or oil/gas industries. For example, the issue of work-sponsored or subsidised child-care was raised. One worker indicated that given the specific demands on families due to the fly-in fly-out operation, the mining and oil/gas industry is in an ideal position to become leaders in considering the whole family unit and in doing that they will reduce staff turnover:

My argument is that these companies need to be leading the way otherwise there going to lose their people so they need to be in front of the game, not, 'oh no one else does that so we won't do it', you know, I think the companies that do start offering that sort of support will be getting the premium workers and everyone else will be you know picking up the leftovers with the high turnover and all the rest of it and companies need to look at it differently nowadays you know. *(Brian)*

I wouldn't really put any onus on the company to do anything else except provide decent communication. *(Donna)*

I don't really expect anything from the employer. You know you accept the terms and conditions of what you're doing and before you sign on and get on with it from there. From my part I don't know if they should be obliged to do anything more. *(Bob)*

The majority of families acknowledged that companies had made inroads with respect to shorter rosters, better accommodation and responsiveness to family crises. Parts of the industry already provide the suggestions that have been made; others provide them but do not adequately communicate their availability. Given the additional stressors placed on families with one parent working fly-in fly-out, many families felt that there was an additional onus on companies to communicate, facilitate or provide additional or existing services that supported the entire family mainly in relation to crises and support.

Families that had both lived in remote mining towns and had engaged in fly-in fly-out commented on the comparative differences in family support provided by the company between the two scenarios. The impression was that families living residentially received more input from the company in an effort to engender a sense of community. While not geographically isolated, many of the families living in Perth felt socially isolated:

At least when you live remote people come around and say hello, this is what we do, this is your pack you know, this is what you get, yeah it would be good if they had like a meet once a month you know, something like that, mothers in similar situations just so that you've got someone to talk to. *(Julie)*

I think they should be more involved in your family. The only reason I say that is that when you work for a small company you wouldn't expect that, but I know what happens in Tom Price and I know how community minded they are. *(Justin)*

Support for parents at home

There was a general feeling among parents at home that other parents not involved in fly-in fly-out were unable to appreciate the particular issues they faced. Women were interested in meeting other fly-in fly-out women with children the same age either as a playgroup, informal coffee morning or formal mentoring scheme. These forms of networking were not necessarily with families from the

same workplace but rather from a broad cross-section working fly-in fly-out in the mining and oil/gas industries:

It would be nice to have almost a mentor system - you know a family that's been doing it for a while just to be able to call on them and say you know, what you do if you know, if your kid goes berserk. Like is there any strategies that you've already got you know, that you've found have worked because it is just trial and error because none of you, like don't put a lot of stock in them, but none of your parenting books or any of those sort of things deal with fly-in fly-out. *(Paula)*

Well things like getting mums of, getting the partners of their employees together you know, the average mining company must surely have a number of children in their workforce, or in the families of their workforce that they could help set up things like childcare.... If you can create an environment where these guys know that their families are safe, that there's someone keeping an eye out that if something happens and they need some help, its there - it must be good for business. *(Natasha)*

I think a mother's group situation would be fantastic, you know you've got a common interest as a group. *(Jane)*

In a company where perhaps their workers come from different geographical areas, I think they should provide some sort of opportunity for those people, for the families that are left behind because you know I've never met anyone in his company, not one. They don't do anything, they don't have anything. *(Anna)*

Seeing where the worker works

Young children connect with the places their parents work and visiting workplaces helps them visualise this more easily. Some of the parents commented that their children believe the away parent works at the airport or flies in an aeroplane all day as this is the only link they have connecting work with their father. Some offshore oil/gas sites have developed videos in order to enable children and spouses to visualise the working and living conditions. Many, but not all, onshore operations provide opportunities for families to visit sites. However, in some instances where this facility is available it is not openly advertised or encouraged. In other cases the outlay is not warranted for short term contractors or is too dangerous such as on construction sites. This being the case a bank of strategies that help connect families with the workplace could be developed. The majority of families indicated that a visit to the mine site was the most obvious way to visualise the workplace for both partners at home and children. In cases where a visit was not possible due to the remoteness of the location or safety issues families suggested:

- photographs that illustrate the accommodation, site and specific role undertaken by the worker;
- video footage that follows 'a day in the life of...';
- children's books, both pictorial and early reading that integrate parent's working lives into early education modalities:

One of the things our company does supply is we get four flights per quarter supplied so if they have come up and had a look around the place once, taking the girls out to the mine site and shown them right through, so that's good I mean a lot of guys use all their flights per year. The company also tends to invite partners up if they're having a big occasion to celebrate some kind of milestone. *(Jonathan)*

They could encourage the guest visits a bit more, I mean that's something they've already got in place. I know they've actually not had a lot of them lately because they've been really busy up there, but I really feel that's a really good thing for the families to make sure that they still have those guest visits and give everyone the opportunity to have their family to go up. *(Bridget)*

It would be nice if we got the chance to know where Daddy works or you know, something like that so the opportunity to actually be able to go and see his mine site and things like that. So the kids get to sort of see what Daddy did because quite nearly every other kid probably gets to know where their Daddy works and has been in to their Dad's office or his work or something but yeah like our child thinks that he hops on a plane and flies around all day. *(Carmel)*

Social events

Many families encouraged companies to provide more social opportunities. Against this companies indicated that Christmas parties and other functions have, in the past, been poorly attended. In the majority of cases it was the partner at home seeking more social engagements in order to be better integrated into the work networks of their partner and to make social contacts through him. It should be noted that not all families are interested in social engagement opportunities provided by the employers:

I think they have like a social gathering about once a year, but it would probably be quite nice to maybe do that a bit more often. *(Trish)*

They could organise more get together type things. Like the mine site doesn't have a Christmas party because they found it too difficult. *(Tanya)*

I think one thing we're all guilty of and we recognise that we need to do something more proactive about it is really involving the families in, really involving families in you know just big days out, barbecues and stuff like that that are often so hard to organise, you know we've tried to do Christmas parties and things, we've had three Christmas parties over three years. Last year we had about three different dinners at Burswood for partners and so on, that worked pretty well but we need to get something more to involve families so they can understand what's going on. *(Murray)*

Child care

Child care is an ongoing issue for all families and many were frustrated with the current system. There were a number of issues here including cost, support, availability and the role of the company in contributing to child care. Fly-in fly-out families, feel as if they are being penalised by the current child-care system for taking an active parenting role when on furlough:

I was just thinking about this the other day, if they found some system where they could support the families a bit better, I'm not sure how they could do that, but this thing about child care, if they worked out some way to sort that out, that would help a lot of people. *(Brendan)*

Child care really shits me off, I understand that they must know, they have to have the regular roster and all that, but umm... surely there's got to be a system for mining families and there must be thousands of us out there, that could put children on irregular days like we only put [our child] in every, for three days every fortnight, yet we get charged for six because we have to have those days booked, so that really upsets me and then they've got the gall to say even though we've paid for those days, to, to deny us to drop our child off just in crèche for that day even though we've paid for it. *(Mitchell)*

I've thought about whether it should be subsidised or whether to actually have you know the company run a child care again, you know. I don't know how the company would go about that, but certainly if you could be guaranteed a place sort of thing or you had somewhere that you could go and, because you're an employee, you could get your kids looked after. So I definitely think there'd be an opportunity there for, for companies. But I think it's not so much the cost of day care, it'd be more the availability of it so rather than subsidise you for child care that you're already getting if there was somewhere you know that, and it wouldn't have to be you know wouldn't worry us whether it was in the middle of Perth or just south of the river or north of the river really if, if that's what we wanted for that day well that would be fine sort of thing you know. So it would be more that it was there if you needed it rather than, rather than helping to pay for it. *(Brian)*

In-home care

One of the most stressful times for both workers and their partners is if a child requires medical attention or the partner at home is unwell. In these cases finding reliable, trustworthy assistance at short notice can be difficult. Parents are also conscious that if using a friend or member of the family there is an expectation of reciprocity which they feel unable to guarantee. This being the case some families expressed the need to access in-home care, that is, a qualified individual who would be available on short notice:

Maybe like they could subsidise or something the cost of like a nanny that you know, not totally the cost you know, that they share the cost with families of there being a nanny or something. *(Natasha)*

I think there's definitely room for a company to have you know, a nurse on call down in Perth you know, they can work ... do all those other corporate sorts of things. I think it would be well within what they should be doing for their people and their, their people's families definitely. *(Brian)*

If there was assistance there that would be great you know. If someone could come and help out or you could call on someone to you know, like when [my partner] was laid up with her illness you know, I mean we've got family and that sort of thing, but you know my families have got their own issues that they're dealing with and that sort of thing and you don't necessarily want to ring up and impose on people and they feel obligated to come and help, whereas if there was an agency or something available to be able to use that service would be great. *(Rob)*

The provision of quality, affordable, emergency care services is clearly a complex issue and the logistics of providing such a service would be challenging. This research indicated while some companies were interested in the concept; others were wary due to the potential for liability. The provision of in-home care requires further discussion between industry, agencies and families.

In addition to the in-home emergency child care families also suggested improving access to emergency numbers and ensuring families were notified of injuries to the worker.

Shorter rosters

For those families where the worker was on a longer contract, (usually a contractor), shortening the roster remained a priority:

Reduce the weeks I mean I know there's jobs for three weeks and two weeks, but I just think going on for five weeks is too long you know. (*Kim*)

Getting to the airport

One of the issues families were keen to resolve was the trip to the airport. Some companies pay for this trip but many indicate that it is the responsibility of the employee. When companies didn't pay the costs associated with travelling from home to the airport were often considerable. Some families opted to drive the worker to the airport, thereby minimising cost but at the same interrupting the sleep patterns of their children. Others had arranged housing so that it was within a reasonable distance of the airport. Other families simply footed the cost. Another problem was flight times. Invariably flights left in the early hours of the morning which made it more difficult for families to develop a goodbye routine.

Suggestions to help ameliorate these difficulties included:

- taxi vouchers;
- facilitating pooled transport;
- lobbying for taxi fares to be a tax deduction;
- reviewing flight times:

Some companies pay for cabs in fact this is probably the first company that I've worked for in about five years that hasn't done it. That was a major reason why we moved from to where we are living now, because it was a fifty-six dollar cab fare before which equated to two and a half grand a year which you can't claim back on tax and you can't do anything with it. *(Mitchell)*

I reckon if I can write off the taxi fare in tax then there's no dramas at all. *(Simon)*

I mean thirty bucks is neither here nor there for us, it's more about the closure, but it's the farewell bit of it, you know Daddy is going to work and we get to say goodbye to Daddy whereas I'm not going to wake her up at four o'clock to wave to a taxi driving out the driveway. *(Leonie)*

If they could get the flight times to say be more family friendly like six-thirty or seven o'clock in the morning then you can wake up, you can give the morning feed and go there as a family rather than leaving at four am from a taxi and then you know. I don't want to go up and just peer over, but I'd like to be able to you know give him a hug and let him know that I'm going to be back in nine days time rather than him going to sleep seeing me, going to sleep and waking up and I'm not there for nine days. *(Mitchell)*

These issues are complex and the suggestions made by families could have unintended consequences that may not be in their best interests. Consequently, there should be further discussion between industry and employees as to benefits and costs.

Chapter 10:

A way forward – insights from the research

This research leads to a number of suggestions for all sectors - families, industry, non-government and government organisations in managing parenting and fly-in fly-out. To help contextualise the suggestions they have been categorised according to the resource themes outlined in the *Indicators of Social and Family Functioning* (Zubrick et al., 2000). However, the suggestions included under each theme are not mutually exclusive. That is, they not only facilitate the development of capital in one area but will foster social and family functioning across the broad range of indicators. The themes are:

- human capital
- psychological capital
- social capital
- income
- time

The suggestions have emerged not only from the interviews with couples but also discussions with agencies, industry and other current and past fly-in fly-out families. In moving forward it is essential that communication continues between all sectors and that families retain an active participative role in determining the way forward.

Human capital

Human capital refers to the resources a family may draw upon for the benefit of their children. It includes education, experience, employment, beliefs, values, aspirations and traditions. Suggestions included in this section aim to improve knowledge about parenting and maximise positive parenting experiences.

Develop a fly-in fly out parenting resource

Consideration should be given to the development of a parenting resource. This resource could be developed by agencies in conjunction with families and include all the suggestions for prospective fly-in fly out families such as parent/child communication, parent/parent communication, developing communication strategies, facilitating positive interactions, and managing fly-in fly-out and children's behaviour. The resource could be made available to new and continuing fly-in fly-out employees and their families in employment packs, on industry websites and at inductions.

Provide regular parenting updates

In addition to the parenting resource, consideration should be given to providing fly-in fly-out families with regular parenting information. Parents currently downplay the critical role they play in their children's lives and regular updates could play a role in validating the work they do in maintaining an emotional presence despite physical absence, modelling fly-in fly-out parenting and encouraging ongoing positive engagements with children.

Psychological capital

Psychological capital refers to the ability of a family to manage stress and conflict. It includes parents' mental health and the perceived level of social support. Suggestions included in this section are those that provide information, skills and safety nets to ameliorate stress and facilitate positive emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Initiate discussions regarding the provision of emergency in-home child care

The provision of emergency in-home child care could potentially be valuable in providing a safety net for families and could ameliorate stress associated with partners at home or children falling ill. Facilitated discussions between industry, agencies and families should be initiated to further discuss the issue and provide practical solutions.

Provide information and education to families and service providers regarding the “emotional cycle” associated with fly-in fly-out

Information on the emotional cycle described by many families will help to “normalise” the changes in moods often experienced. Information about this cycle could be included in information provided by a range of service providers and could be incorporated into the proposed induction sessions and website outlined below.

Deliver induction sessions for families

Consideration should be given to the extension of industry induction sessions for new employees to include partners at home and children. Such induction sessions could include a site visit (if feasible), safety information, emergency contact numbers, information on policies relating to family crises, fatigue management, expectations of fly-in fly-out and other relevant issues. The term induction is used to indicate that families need to be included in the process of orientation to a new work-place, contact with families, however, need not be limited to one event prior to employment.

Social capital

Social capital refers to the development of networks and relationships that are mutually beneficial for individuals, families and communities. At the core of these relationships are trust, mutual obligations, cooperation and engagement.

Building social networks with other fly-in fly-out families

Work with families to develop fly-in fly-out specific playgroups in suburbs with higher numbers of fly-in fly-out families

Many partners at home expressed a desire to build social networks with other fly-in fly-out families. Playgroups were one strategy suggested as a means by which this could be achieved.

Develop and implement a mentoring scheme

Consideration should be given to working with families to establish a system whereby those families who would like to be involved in a mentoring scheme, either as mentor or mentee, are identified. A suitable non-government organisation working in conjunction with industry representatives could be responsible for: maintaining a database with recommended police clearances of mentors and mentees; facilitating and monitoring partnering of mentors and mentees; facilitating social engagements for fly-in fly-out parents at home e.g coffee mornings; establishing an annual education program that involved both parents on issues such as parenting, fatigue management for both worker and partner at home, stress management for parents and children.

Facilitating work connections

Building social networks with individuals and families within a work context are important in the development of overall social capital. Fly-in fly-out employees, given their close living and working arrangements, are often not keen on pursuing such networks outside of work hours. However, many partners at home perceive this as a significant gap. Facilitating work connections could be achieved in a number of ways:

Provision of work sponsored social events

While families differed in their responses to work-sponsored social events discussions should continue between employees, their families and industry on how social events can be facilitated and communicated.

Site visit

Making site visits possible for families, as mentioned above, can also be seen as a means by which work connections can be assisted.

Develop and disseminate a newsletter to families

Improving communication between companies and families was a key factor for some families. Many companies currently provide families with a company based newsletter. Ongoing consideration should be given to developing and disseminating directly to families a newsletter that provided generic rather than specific information on human resource issues, opportunities for site visits, social events and personal information volunteered by employees such as recent engagements, marriages, births, and milestones.

Develop a hub website

Fly-in fly-out families are increasingly using technology as a form of communication. Given the number of families considering a fly-in fly-out lifestyle or currently involved in the lifestyle consideration should be given by industry and agencies in working together to develop a hub website. This website could provide information on fly-in fly-out including latest research, expert opinion and advice on a range of issues, and links to organisations that can provide support. It could also support a virtual community through the development of email discussion lists for parents at home and workers.

Income and time

In ensuring families function well it is recognised that there needs to be an input of both time and money. The suggestions in this section relate to maximising the amount of money available to be spent on family and on children in particular as well as increasing the time spent by both parents with children.

Investigate and initiate ongoing dialogue with employees and families regarding transportation to the airport and to the site

As indicated the trip to the airport and flight times are problematic for some families but are complex issues with significant ramifications for both industry and families. Investigation and discussion into the feasibility of the recommended changes or alternative options to address these concerns should be considered.

Investigate and discuss options available to contractors

The issue of contractors is another complex issue with significant ramifications for both industry and families. Owner operators, contracting companies and contractors need to investigate and initiate discussions regarding working together to ensure that families of contractors are not disadvantaged in terms of roster allocation, facilities and communication options.

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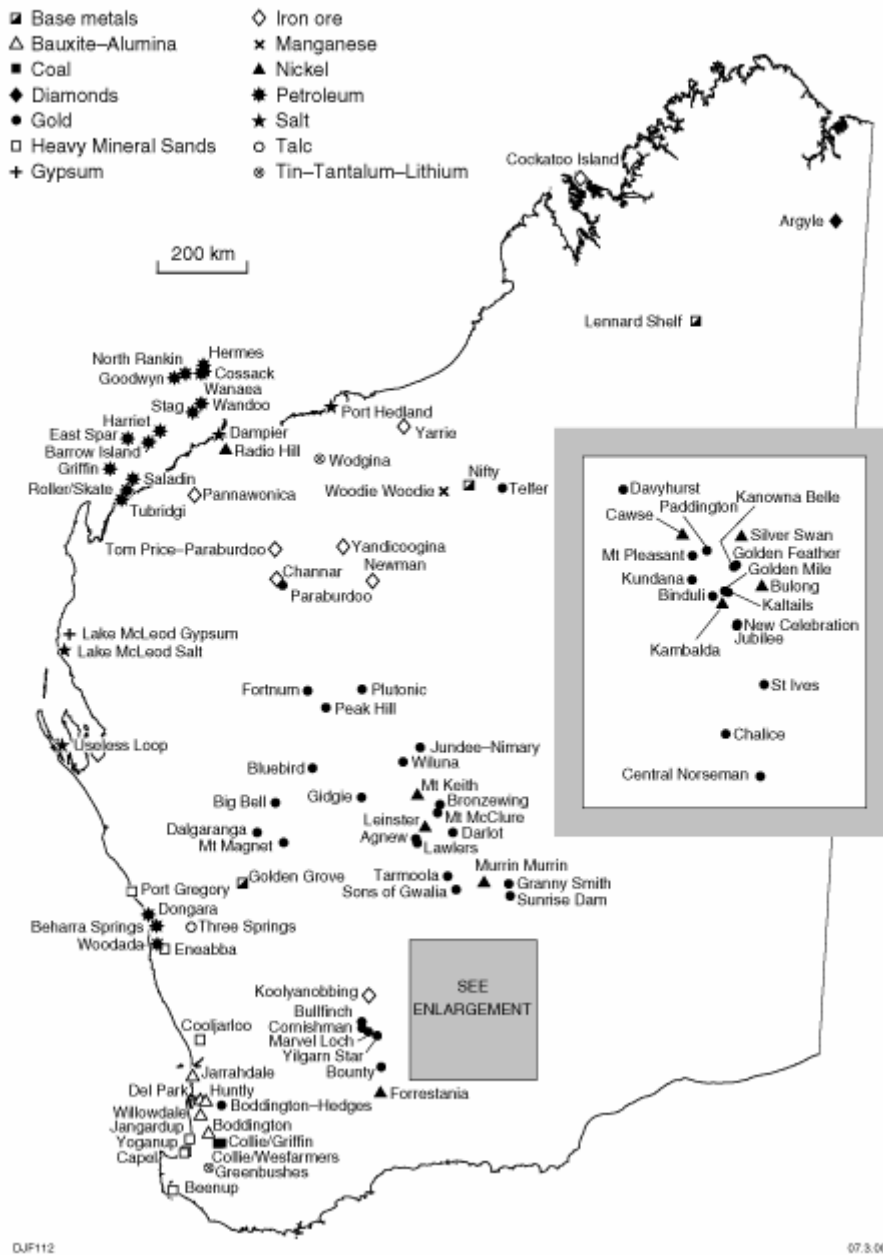
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Appendix 1

MAJOR MINERAL AND PETROLEUM PROJECTS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA



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Appendix 2

Question Schedule

Partner at home

About fly-in fly-out

This set of questions relate to the details of your fly-in fly-out arrangement.

1. How long have you been involved in fly-in fly-out?
2. What is your partner's job?
3. What kind of roster is your partner on?
4. Who does your partner work for?
5. How long has your partner been working for this company?
6. Why are you doing fly-in fly-out?
7. When you started fly-in fly-out did you have an idea about how long you would do it for?
8. What do you like about fly-in fly-out?
9. What don't you like about fly-in fly-out?

Demographic details

These questions are general questions about you, your children and where you live.

10. How many children do you have? How old are they?
11. How long have you and your partner been together?
12. Have you always lived in Perth?
13. Are you working outside the home?

Fly-in fly-out Routines/practicalities

These questions build a picture of how fly-in fly-out works in the household from a practical perspective.

14. Are there any things you do or routines that you follow when your partner is about to depart and when they are about to arrive?
15. I'm going to ask now about the regular household tasks, things such as clothes washing, lawn mowing, fixing a tap. I'm interested in knowing if things get done differently when your partner is home and when they are away.
16. Do your routines change when your partner is away compared to when they are at home? (things like bathing the kids, eating dinner, pick up and drop off at school)
17. Do you eat any differently when your partner is home?
18. What events/occasions do you celebrate in your family?
19. Do the "rules" change when your partner is home compared to when they are away? By rules it could be rules for the children such as bedtimes, tv watching, or other "rules" such as alcohol free days, or what you get to watch on the television
20. Do you ever go out (socially) when your partner is away? (with or without the children)
Are you Ok with this?
21. Is there anything that causes tension when your partner arrives home?
22. Is there anything that causes tension when your partner departs for the site?

Children and fly-in fly-out

The next set of questions relate to your children, their responses to fly-in fly-out and the strategies you use

23. How do your children respond to your partner's departures?
How do your children respond to your partner's arrivals?
24. Are there things you do with the children by yourself when your partner is away?
25. Does your partner do things with the children by himself when he comes home?
26. Do you feel you can do things by yourself with the children when your partner is home?
of things do you do with the children together?
27. Would you still do these sorts of things if you were not doing fly-in fly-out?
28. What do you do to help your partner cope with the separation from your children?
29. How do you think your partner re-connects with your children when they have been away?

You and Fly-in fly-out

We've talked about your children now I want to talk about you:

30. How do you feel when your partner is
about to leave
about to arrive
just after arrival?
31. What do you do to cope with the separation from your partner?
32. How do you maintain contact with your partner while they are away?

Supports

33. Where does the rest of your family live?
34. Do you have any other supports?
35. Do you use any care arrangements for the children?
36. How does your company help with managing fly-in fly-out and family?
37. Do you ever get together with other fly-in fly-out families?

Last question:

38. If you were talking to a family just starting fly-in fly-out what would you suggest from your own experience?

Question Schedule

Worker

About Fly-in fly-out

This set of questions relate to the details of your fly-in fly-out arrangement.

1. How long have you been involved in fly-in fly-out?
2. What is your job on site?
3. What kind of roster are you on?
4. Who do you work for?
5. How long have you been working for them?
6. Why are you doing fly-in fly-out?
7. When you started fly-in fly-out did you have an idea about how long you would do it for?
8. What do you like about fly-in fly-out?
9. What don't you like about fly-in fly-out?

Demographic details

These questions are general questions about you, your children and where you live.

10. How many children do you have? How old are they?
11. How long have you and your partner been together?
12. Have you always lived in Perth?
13. Is your partner working outside the home?

Fly-in fly-out Routines/practicalities

These questions build a picture of how fly-in fly-out works in the household from a practical perspective.

14. Are there any things you do or routines that you follow when you are about to depart and when you are about to come home?
15. What sorts of things do you do around the house when you get home?
16. Do the routines change when you are away compared to when you are at home? (things like bathing the kids, eating dinner, pick up and drop off at school)
17. Do you think the "rules" change when are home compared to when you are away? By rules it could be rules for the children such as bedtimes, tv watching, or other "rules" such as alcohol free days, or who gets to watch what on the television
18. What's the food like on site?
19. What events/occasions do you celebrate in your family?
20. How would you describe the "culture" of the mine site?
21. Does your partner ever go out (socially) when you are away?
22. Is there anything that causes tension when your partner arrives home?
23. Is there anything that causes tension when your partner departs for the site?

Children and fly-in fly-out

The next set of questions relate to your children, their responses and the strategies you use

24. How do your children respond to your departures?
How do your children respond to your arrivals?
25. Are there things you do with the children by yourself when you are home?
26. Does your partner do things with the children by themselves when you are home?
27. What do you do to cope with the separation from your children?
28. How do you re-connect with your children after you have been away?

You and Fly-in fly-out

We've talked about your children now I want to talk about you:

29. How do you feel when you are
about to leave
about to arrive
just after arrival?
30. What do you do to cope with the separation from your partner?
31. How do you maintain contact with your partner while you are away?

Supports

32. Where does the rest of your family live?
33. Do you have any other supports?
34. Do you use any care arrangements for the children?
35. How does your company help with managing fly-in fly-out and family?
36. Do you ever get together with other fly-in fly-out families?

Last question:

37. If you were talking to a family just starting fly-in fly-out what would you suggest from your own experience?

Appendix 3

Interview Schedule

HR Managers

Demographic

1. Is this a contract operation or owner managed?
2. Total number of employees
3. Total number of employees FIFO
4. Total number of contract employees
5. What is mined and where – ie site locations
6. What sort of facilities (e.g accommodation, leisure) are available for employees on site
7. Absenteeism among FIFO
8. Illness among FIFO

FIFO

1. Why do FIFO from a company perspective?
2. Are there any HR policies that help the worker manage FIFO for example wrt family illness, significant family events,
 - a. What do you see as the company responsibility
 - b. What do you see as the employee responsibility
3. Types of rosters
 - a. How are these determined/decided for an area of operation
 - i. Do staff have input into how these are determined
 - ii. How are rosters allocated?
 - iii. Is there a choice?
 - iv. Are there different rosters across your sites, what are they and for what reason
 - v. Is there scope for employees to customise their roster, how
 - b. Who is involved in the design of the roster
4. Do you have an education program regarding FIFO
 - i. How are workers trained and encouraged to prepare themselves physically and mentally for the transition between work and family
 - ii. How are families trained and encouraged to prepare themselves physically and mentally for the transition between work and family
5. What sorts of facilities are in place to help workers and their families stay in touch?
6. I am interested in exploring the nature of the relationship between the company and contract staff, company and the contractor.

Are contract staff on different rosters to employees – why, how much input do you have with the contractor in setting those rosters

Are all the services/facilities available to employees available to contract staff?

Is there any discernable tension between employees and contract staff.

What do you see as being the responsibility of the contractor?

7. What programs or initiatives are in place
 - a. Counselling
 - b. Wellness programs
 - c. Family crisis management
 - d. What things have you tried but are no longer doing. Why?
8. Why do you think families choose FIFO?
9. Why do you think families continue FIFO
10. Why do you think families discontinue FIFO
11. What sorts of things do you think families find difficult regarding FIFO?
 - a. How do they address these/what do they do about them
12. How would you describe the “culture” of the mining sites?
 - a. Is there anything about this culture which is difficult to manage from a HR perspective?