

# Children and the fly-in/fly-out lifestyle

implications of occupational parent  
absence

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# striking it rich?



**“There’s jobs galore out west. And soon there will be thousands more. If you’re lucky, a couple of years’ work could set you up for life. But be warned, it can be rough out there. Rough and very, very rewarding.”**

Liam Bartlett, Sixty Minutes, July 8<sup>th</sup> 2007

## who’s striking it rich?

- **approx 80% male**
- **approx 80% aged between 25-55**
- **approx 70% married with children**

(CMEWA, 2005)

## the rewards ...



- **We have the finances to be able to support any of the kids' dreams (father, 41)**
- **Two weeks off, good money, quality time with loved ones, sleeping-in, shopping during the normal daily hours, no work on Mondays! (father, 43)**
- **We all get to spend one whole week together versus snippets of time if we had a 'normal' employment. Financial reward ... having one parent at home to bring up children (mother, 35)**

## the rough ...



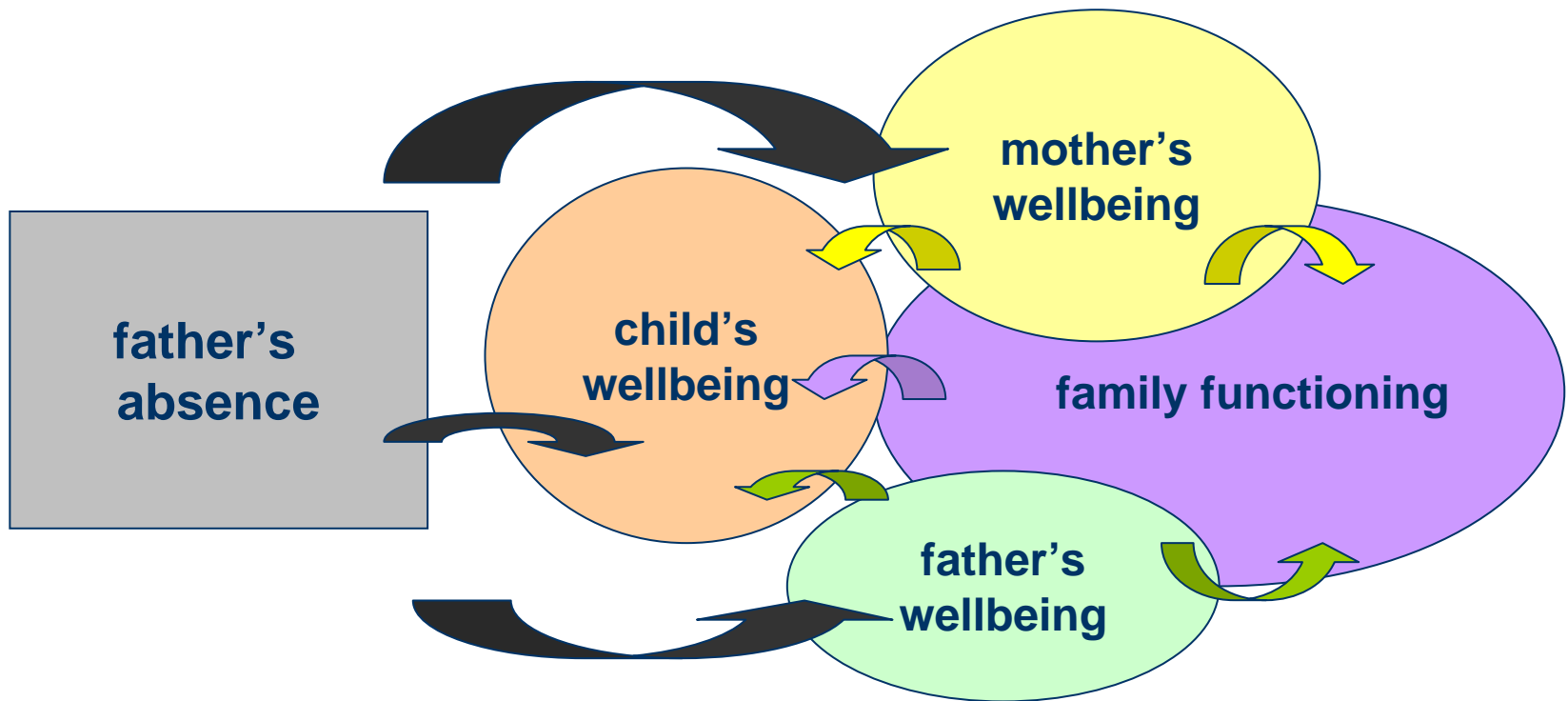
- **Loneliness is crippling ... social life is virtually nonexistent. (mother, 47)**
- **Not really being “in the loop” as far as what is happening at home (father, 45)**
- **I am a single mum for two weeks. Being separated can be hard on all of us (mother, 41)**
- **Forming friendships outside of work colleagues is difficult (father, 39)**

# why children and fifo?



- **silent voices in work-family research**
- **demands of parental working hours**
- **fifo and the 21<sup>st</sup> century dad**

# paternal absence direct and indirect impact



# past research



## **Ann Sibbel (2001)**

- investigated symptoms of anxiety and depression in children of FIFO families compared to typical children
- children reported more symptoms, non-significant
- mothers reported greater family dysfunction compared to non-FIFO mothers

## **Mauthner, Maclean & McKee (2000)**

- ethnographic study offshore families in Aberdeen
- “knock-on effects of parental especially maternal stress
- overall realistic and often pragmatic understanding of their FIFO lifestyle

# my research project



- to investigate children's experience of the FIFO lifestyle by asking them - addressing their thoughts, feelings, behaviour and attitudes to their FIFO experience both qualitatively and quantitatively
- to determine if any unique differences existed in the behaviour and perceptions of children from FIFO families compared to children whose fathers return home daily
- to determine what parent and family factors could be playing a role in these differences

# research design



## study 1 qualitative face-to-face interviews

30 children 9 - 15 years in FIFO families

topics:

- advantages/disadvantages of fifo
- experience of departures and reunions
- roles and routines in the household
- family life
- practical and social supports
- communicating with dad
- perceptions of future work
- advice

# research design



## study 2 quantitative questionnaires

100 FIFO, 100 non-FIFO families with children 9-15 years  
parenting and children measures

- **psychological**
  - Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (child)
  - Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (parent)
- **family functioning:**
  - Family Assessment Device (child and parent)
  - Dyadic Adjustment Scale
  - Maternal social support scale
- **attitudes to parents**
  - Parental Bonding Index
- **demographics**

# what the kids are saying ... about their father's absence



## practical support

- **Doing the things that are best with your dad such as fishing (boy, 13)**
- **Sometimes I need Dad ...oil your bike, talk about sport, school projects. (boy, 11)**
- **Can't play games or sport with him, Can't use things of his without him there (boy, 12)**
- **Can't do many things together like see movies at the cinema, canoeing ... (girl, 9)**

# what the kids are saying ... about their father's absence



## emotional support

- He is missing out on my life – he has no idea what goes on and will never see me grow up. I feel distanced from him (girl, 14 )
- I need to have a serious question I need to ask him, I have to ring and try to express it over the phone (boy, 11)
- We don't laugh as much because he is normally telling jokes (girl, 9)

# what the kids are saying ... security issues



## household safety

- It's difficult at night as it is only my mum and I since all my sisters and brother live away, we don't feel as safe when he's away (boy, 15)
- my mum is a bit afraid about sleeping in the house alone so she doesn't let me sleep over at my family of friends house" (girl, 11)

## work safety

- "When my dad goes I get a bit worried where he works ... lots of dangerous animals, machines (girl, 11)

# what the kids are saying ... about family dynamics



## living by two sets of rules

- When he is up north for 2 weeks, Mum treats me better but when he comes down they both exclude me, because all they want to do is see each other (girl,14)
- I find I get away with things quite a bit more and I don't have to do as much jobs around the house (boy, 15)
- Well from when he's away the rules change and so the house is a bit more relaxed so I can have more people over and everything is smooth. (girl, 15)

# what the kids are saying ... about maternal stress



- Mum has to do all the running around after me and my brother cause dad's not here to help (girl, 13)
- Mum wants Dad – Mum needs his help (boy, 11)
- Mum's sometimes the boss and nags me ... I get dad to tell mum that's she's a nag when he comes back (boy, 9)
- I miss him so much, with all my heart and its hard to cope, because there is just mum and my little two and a half year-old sister who is very annoying and stresses anyone out (girl, 12)

# financial awareness



- I'd like our mortgage to be paid off so dad doesn't have to go and dad could just get an ordinary job a to pay off your bills ... just like a job where he goes out and he can drop us off at school and then come back and ... (boy, 10)
- The only good thing about my dad going to work is that he gets paid a lot of money so we can live in a nice house and have nice things, that is the one and only thing (girl, 12)

# community attitudes



- **Some of the kids want to come over to play to see our house ... they think we live in a castle or something (boy, 12)**
- **Mum says we shouldn't tell the teachers at school what Dad's does (girl, 13)**

## it's not all bad ...



- **Because it gives me a chance to see what it is like to have to help around the house and I feel that thanks to this I help out more and mostly will (boy,15)**
- **He sees lots of things and tells us about them (girl, 9)**
- **Another thing is that he has good resources at work for me and homework so that's handy (girl, 15)**

# quality time together



- **When he's at home during the entire weekend he'll be there for you. He can always help you because he's home for that solid 5 weeks. None of this "Sorry, I'm in a real rush, gotta go straight to work (boy 15)**
- **Well, when my dad goes away I think that's it 's actually a really good thing as we earn more money and he gets to stay home for at least 3 weeks or more (girl, 11)**

# fifo veterans



- **It doesn't really affect me at all it never really did 'cos it's a routine like a timetable so its just a common thing (girl, 14)**
- **We're just used to ... never known anything different (boy 11)**

# work in progress



## study 1

- further analysis of interviews comparing age and gender of children, time in industry and roster patterns

## study 2

- second wave of recruitment into Catholic and Independent school

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