



FIFO Workers And Mental Health: Telehealth Can Help

I wonder how many other people saw the page 3 article “**Stress is greater for FIFO workers**” by Cathy O’Leary, in the May 15th 2018 edition of the “West Australian”?

Reading through the article, and the just published research article it refers to from the *Medical Journal of Australia*, I was reminded of my work with FIFO workers and what I’ve written for the Life Resolutions Huntingdale webpage in particular the blog I wrote previously. It also reminded me of my own experience a few years ago, when I (as a Psychologist) was flown to a remote site after an accidental death on site, to see how the (mainly) guys were coping and assist them where I could. (As well as informing them of services available to them.)

The Research article “**Psychological distress in remote mining and construction workers in Australia**” by Jennifer Bowers, Johnny Lo, Peta Miller, Daveena Mawren, and Brooklyn Jones was an interesting read for someone like myself who has both had FIFO workers as clients as well as having been “on-site” (although admittedly only for a few days).

The article notes how the most commonly reported stressors were; Missing Special events (86%); Relationship problems with partners (68%); Financial stress (62%); Shift rosters (62%) and; Social isolation (60%).

This article also notes how the research on FIFO workers, for a number of technical reasons, e.g. trying to compare look at different sample populations, has shown both positive and negative findings. Some of the positive findings they refer to include “...improved coping skills and stronger relationships”.

Some interesting demographics, were also given, like; 93.5% were Men; Most common age categories were 25-34 (36.9%) followed by 35-44 (26.2%); For Marital status Married or de facto (65.3%) was easily the largest percentage, with 26.5% single (the rest, separated or widowed); For those with dependents under 18, 27.4% had two or more, with 16.2% one child and 56.4% no dependants. Another interesting point was that most respondents apparently worked with the particular FIFO company they are with now, for no more than five years, with those five years plus amounting to only 14.1% of those surveyed.



What Can Be Done To Assist FIFO Workers?

As I've previously discussed with FIFO workers, these can include;

- Using Medicare Telehealth sessions to deal with or assist with Mental Health concerns while onsite;
- Helping the client look at a “longer term plan” to avoid the “Golden Handcuffs” that the high salaries can create (i.e. you get used to the high income and could have difficulty adjusting if either by your own choice or having it imposed on you, you stop getting that high income);
- Looking at ways to improve your intimate relationship or friendships;
- Examine stress management techniques that can be used on-site;
- Look at underlying mental health concerns that may be exacerbated by the time away (on-site) from family, friends and other support networks;
- As far as Life Resolutions Huntingdale is concerned, clients can also book sessions online via HealthEngine So assuming the client already has a GP Mental Health Care Plan in place, and completed the Telehealth Agreement, the guy could book an appointment at relatively short notice, either for when they return to Perth, or for a Telehealth appointment, while on-site. (Available appointments stay online till an hour before the appointment.)

So Medicare and Telehealth consultations is a way whereby FIFO guys can get assistance with Mental Health problems, even if they feel they need to Put on a Tough Front like I wrote about for the Australian Psychological Society last year.

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