

Editorial

Special Section on Fly-in/Fly-out

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Welcome to the second issue of the *Australian Community Psychologist* for 2009. This issue has a special section of papers reporting on the systemic impacts of fly-in/fly-out (FIFO) employment practices on communities, families and individuals. There is also a general section with two papers and a book review. This issue was originally proposed to focus on FIFO employment as it is practised in the resources industry, however, I am pleased that the scope of articles submitted clearly illustrates the diversity of FIFO and DIDO¹ (drive-in/drive-out) employment practices and services.

FIFO Section

FIFO employment practices are "those which involve work in relatively remote locations where food and lodging accommodation is provided for workers at the work site but not for their families" (Storey, 2001, p. 135). Workers spend a fixed number of days at the work-site followed by a fixed number of days at home. The employees usually commute from a home base located in a large city, coastal community or large established town (Gillies, Wu & Jones, 1997). Although flying is the most common form of transport for these commute arrangements, some employees drive-in and drive-out (DIDO) using either company provided or private road transport. FIFO has been used by the offshore oil industry since the 1940s and has become common in the Australian land-based mining industry since the 1980s (Storey & Shrimpton, 1991). FIFO is also used by the human services sector to provide services to rural and remote communities.

Despite the number of years FIFO has been employed in Australia, only a small number of studies have been undertaken to understand its psychosocial impacts on urban and remote communities and individuals. Greater understanding is needed to ensure that

government and corporate policies and practices, and service provision are evidence based and appropriate. The papers in the FIFO section of this issue add to our understandings of the systemic effects of FIFO employment and service provision on communities, families and individuals.

In the first paper Pauline and Bernard Guerin draw on their extensive experiences, mainly with remote Indigenous communities in South Australia, to discuss the positive and negative social effects of the use of FIFO and DIDO in the provision of human or social services on those communities. Despite some of the challenges associated with the practice, Guerin and Guerin argue that FIFO/DIDO service arrangements can be appropriate and successful if care is taken with the implementation and use of such services. They provide a matrix of guidelines for the implementation of FIFO services in a number of different contexts.

The impact of FIFO employment on family systems has been the subject of much public debate (e.g., Bowler, 2001; Loney, 2005; Watts, 2004) and is the focus of the second paper in this section. Jill Taylor and Janette Simmonds present their research investigating the levels of family satisfaction and family functioning of a group of FIFO families. Positioned within a framework of Olsen's Circumplex Model of Family Systems, their findings challenge negative stereotypes of FIFO families, and have implications for employers who use FIFO schedules and for services that offer support to FIFO communities.

The resources sector has traditionally been a male dominated workplace. In Western Australia, women currently comprise approximately 19% of the industry (Chamber of Minerals and Energy, 2008). In the third paper of this special section, Julie Pirota

reports on the experiences of 20 women working on FIFO minesites. Pirotta found that although the lifestyle provided these women with financial security and employment satisfaction, they also faced the challenges of working FIFO and living and working in a male dominated environment. In contrast, the final paper in the FIFO section investigates the experiences of male FIFO employees aged between 18 and 28 years (Generation Y) working in the offshore oil and gas sector. In this paper Tayla Carter and Elizabeth Kaczmarek provide insight into the impacts of offshore FIFO employment on self-identity and relationships.

General Section

Both papers in this section focus on the theme of creating more culturally respectful communities. In the first paper Eleanor Wertheim, Elizabeth Freeman, Margot Tinder and Glenda MacNaughton describe Phases 1 and 2 of *The Enhancing Relationships in School Communities* (ERIS) project which began in 2005 to develop better processes for cooperative conflict resolution in primary school communities, and to create more culturally respectful school communities. They provide a framework for building and restoring relationships in schools. Anne Pedersen, Anne Aly, Lisa Hartley and Craig McGarty's paper reports a nine week anti-prejudice intervention based on in-depth cross cultural analysis and learning. Their positive findings provide evidence that such interventions can contribute to bringing about change in attitudes to marginalised groups in Australia.

Book Review

The final article for this issue is Dawn Darlaston-Jones' review of the booklet *Support for mum while dad works away*. This booklet was produced by the Western Australian Government's Department of Communities to provide support and advice for families with children whose father works away from home.

References

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Note

¹ For the purposes of this editorial FIFO refers to both FIFO and DIDO practices.

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