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MEDIA RELEASE

FIFO WORKERS' PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS "ALARMING"

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MORE than one quarter of fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) workers in remote mining and construction sites rated their psychological stress as high or very high, compared with just 10.8% of the general population, according to research published online today by the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

Dr Jennifer Bowers and colleagues from Rural and Remote Health SA, Edith Cowan University in Perth, and Orygen, the National Centre of Excellence for Youth Mental Health, administered a wellbeing and lifestyle survey at ten mining sites in Western and South Australia, with 1124 FIFO workers completing the questionnaire.

They reported that 311 respondents (28%) had Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) scores indicating high or very high psychological distress, compared with 10.8% for Australia overall. In addition, a higher proportion of respondents rated their own mental health as poor or fair (22%) than did the general population (14.8%), the researchers reported.

"The most frequently reported stressors were missing special events (86%), relationship problems with partners (68%), financial stress (62%), shift rosters (62%), and social isolation (60%)," the researchers wrote.

"High psychological distress was significantly more likely in workers aged 25–34 years and workers on a 2 weeks on/1 week off roster. Workers who were very or extremely stressed by their assigned tasks or job, their current relationship, or their financial situation were significantly more likely to have high/ very high K10 scores than those not stressed by these factors.

"Workers who reported stress related to stigmatisation of mental health problems were at the greatest risk of high/very high psychological distress."

Most importantly, the researchers wrote, "the strongest predictor of psychological distress overall was fear of stigmatisation for mental health problems; workers who reported being stressed by this factor were 20 times, and those who were extremely stressed about it were 24 times as likely to have high or very high levels of distress values".

"Given that 40% of respondents rated stigma a source of stress, this finding is alarming, and highlights the importance of early interventions and suicide prevention programs based on improving mental health literacy," the authors wrote.

"Our findings have the potential to inform health and safety policy and practice more broadly, particularly given the growing awareness of the levels of mental distress and suicide rates among workers in this industry."

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