An exploration of the expressed psychosocial needs and outcomes of workers in a remote work environment and their impact on the family

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ABSTRACT

Background: Whilst there are many similarities between work in remote locations and other occupations in the potential exposure to various physical, chemical or biological hazards, a major difference is the rotational work pattern, in particular the so-called “home and away” or “fly in fly out” (“FIFO”) cycles of working. These work patterns in remote areas often require workers to spend considerable time away from home. The effect of these patterns of working away from home is not only limited to the absence of physical contact whilst away, but also to the effect on both parties (remote worker and their partner/family) due to the cycle of parting and reuniting.

Aims: To explore the psychosocial issues related to remote working in a major gas project in the Oman desert, and the effects of such remote working on the worker himself as well as his family.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey using qualitative and a quantitative questionnaires collected from 68 participants.

Results: The impact of working in a remote environment was investigated using data from 68 respondents to a questionnaire survey. Respondents varied in term of their age, education levels, marital status and their experience of working remotely. Although they described both positive and negative perceptions about working in a remote area, overall, respondents reported general satisfaction with their work. In terms of the impact on their life style the findings suggested that alcohol intake and smoking prevalence were not related to the remote work. However, among smokers an increased likelihood of higher smoking intensity was significantly associated with working away from home. The findings suggested negative impacts on workers, their children, and in relationships with friends. Concerns about the impact on participants’ wives/partners were also described. Improved communications, modifications to shift rotations, and considering the needs of partners and children at home were suggested by the majority of participants to minimize the impact of this kind of work. Additionally, the provision of information about the nature of the work to wives/partners and children was also
advocated as a means of reducing the effects of separation caused by the remote working.

**Conclusion:** The study identified many psychosocial impacts on remote workers, their partners/wives and children. The differences between the findings in this study and previous works might be due to social and cultural differences, changes in the working environment and possibly changes in the perception towards working remotely by workers and their family members. Further studies exploring the impact on all parties, will assist in better understanding of these issues.