



Submission to the “Education and Health Standing Committee”

“Mental Health in Fly-in, Fly-out Workers”

OVERVIEW

BSS Employee Assistance is a Psychology Practice. BSS has been delivering employee assistance services to the resource sector since 1999. BSS work is exclusively industry and resource sector based with more than a hundred client organisations covering approximately 50,000 to 60,000 FIFO workers in Western Australia. This includes the majority of the WA iron ore miners, and construction organisations involved in major projects, such as the Gorgon and Wheatstone projects.

More than 80% of the BSS client organisations have a majority of employees operating in a FIFO role, with other organisations having employees operating at both residential and FIFO sites.

BSS provides most services from the Perth Metropolitan area, but employs a full time psychologist, resident in Port Hedland and another psychologist working part-time in Newman.

SUBMISSION PARAMETERS

BSS Employee Assistance would like to submit information to this enquiry within the framework of our Critical Incident Response following highly stressful events and emergencies on sites in the resources sector. The focus of this submission is suicides and attempted suicides in resource sector workers, within BSS client organisations.

CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE

Critical Incidents are defined as sudden, unexpected events that put those involved or associated with the incident under great, sometimes resulting in debilitating, mental and emotional reactions (Emergency Management Australia). Critical incidents on work sites include workplace injuries, sudden death due to medical conditions, vehicle or machinery incidents or near misses, suicide of a worker on site or away from site, explosions, fires and gas leaks.

Between 01/01/13 and 12/09/14, in our role as a provider of emergency counselling and support, BSS Employee Assistance psychologists were deployed to work sites at the request of client organisations, following 67 Critical Incidents that occurred during this time. These incidents related to events which occurred at both FIFO and non-FIFO work sites.

Of the 67 Critical Incidents that BSS psychologists responded to, 18 (27%) of these related to either a suicide or attempted suicide (12 suicides and 6 suicide attempts). Of this number, 9 (13.5%) involved workers on FIFO sites and 9 (13.5%) related to workers in residential locations. (NB – A number of these completed suicides are yet to be subjected to coronial scrutiny).

| | | Suicide Completed | Suicide Attempted |
|------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 2013 | FIFO Worker | 2 | 2 |
| | Non-FIFO Worker | 2 | 1 |

| | | Suicide Completed | Suicide Attempted |
|------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 2014 | FIFO Worker | 4 | 1 |
| | Non-FIFO Worker | 4 | 2 |

BSS Employee Assistance is the largest provider of critical incident response services to the Western Australian resource sector. A review of our client records suggests that given the number of FIFO workers compared to residential workers we make services available to, the number of suicides and suicide attempts in residential workers is disproportionately higher than in FIFO workers.



AUTHORSHIP

This submission is made on behalf of BSS Employee Assistance Pty Ltd by Michael Tunnecliffe. Mr. Tunnecliffe states: "I am a Psychologist, registered with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency. I have "Clinical Endorsement" and have practiced continuously as a Clinical Psychologist for 29 years, which included almost four years of critical incident response work as the Executive Manager of the Psychology Unit with Western Australia Police and 10 years lecturing in Trauma Counselling at the University of Notre Dame Australia. I am currently a member of the Australian Clinical Psychologists Association."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Tunnecliffe".

Michael Tunnecliffe
Director,
BSS Employee Assistance