

Topic: The concept of ‘intermittent male absence’ and male offshore oil/gas workers in Trinidad and Tobago and the psychosocial impacts of these absences on the male-female relationship.

The platforms and rigs that operate in the oil and gas industry in Trinidad and Tobago constitute a unique work environment. Workers are confined to the rigs for fixed periods, separated from families physically, psychologically and emotionally, albeit temporarily. Rig workers are employed for varying shift periods including: seven days, two-week or even three week periods. Workers perform their tasks, eat, relax and sleep together on rigs that offer few private spaces. Research has suggested that a platform resembles a total institution; however, a salient difference is that the workers’ sense of separation though recurrent, is temporary. Prior research indicates that a majority of workers continued to work under stressful conditions because they were able to spend up to two weeks uninterrupted at home. The acknowledged sense of separation by males has been expressed as being depressed knowing they had to return offshore. Both work and family domains are potentially stressful. The emotional, physical, and mental demands of roles may exceed an individual’s coping resources. The interdependency between the two domains implies that strains experienced in one domain may also have an impact on experiences in the other domain. Issues of health and safety will also be analyzed because of their potential to play critical roles in work and home relationships.

Descriptors: offshore workers, male absence, family relations, interpersonal relationships, work-family stress, gender role conflict, work-fit.

Introduction

This paper is based on literature review that speaks to the work-fit conundrum and how interpersonal and intimate relationships may be shaped by these contending domains. The literature review was conducted in regard to the psychosocial issues that emerge in the male-female relationship of offshore workers in Trinidad and Tobago. Males have been absent for varying periods of time from their families in a variety of occupations. Preliminary anecdotal data gathered through exploratory work conducted with key informants in the offshore industry in Trinidad and Tobago were reflected in some of the literature reviewed. The work environment has been described as a competitive one that is heavily performance based. There is a notion of a ‘macho culture’ among the production workers. Information also indicated that there are “domestic

problems” among “rig-men” and it was “a normal thing for rig-men to go to a bar at the end of a shift”. Other descriptive data from exploratory contact with male workers suggested that infidelity, when they were away at work, is a concern. As a society issues such as infidelity and intimacy are not treated by professional therapists, and the national psyche is usually assuaged for the most part, by the ‘cultural therapies’ of music and drama. Very little information is available in relation to the topic under current research, so that, the data gathered will be of some value to a variety of stakeholders. Trinidad and Tobago’s economy is driven by the energy sector, which suggests that the holistic well-being of employees, and by extension their families, in this segment of the economy should be valued. As a first step, this current research will look at the interpersonal and intimate relations as they are impacted by the unique circumstances and characteristics that define offshore employment.

Offshore oil/gas exploration and production as field of work is far removed physically and culturally from the world of home and family. The work-fit perspective therefore provides an acute, but socially and economically significant, lens for observing the nature of the relationship between male workers in the industry and their spouses, partners and families at large (Lewis, Porter & Shrimpton 1988). The work-fit perspective addresses the correspondence between individuals’ capacities and environmental demands on the one hand, and the individual’s needs and or motives and environmental rewards on the other (Bowen & Pittman, 1993; Pittman, 1994; Pittman & Orthner, 1986a, 1988b; Teng & Pittman, 1996). Furthermore, crucial aspects of marriage and family life are buffeted by the strong cross-currents of intervening and competing loyalties of work and home. There was some indication, from preliminary discussions

with offshore workers that some wives are dissatisfied with “the work schedule because of the lack of support from their husbands” that are away for considerable periods of time and the domestic burdens therefore fall on them.

The Offshore Oil/Gas Environment

The social and economic significance of oil exploitation is enormous and the industry is usually described as a complex multinational affair. The oil and gas industry is considered to be an extractive enterprise concerned primarily with exploration, drilling and production. Offshore oil and gas extraction has a few characteristics that may alter the effects of energy development on local communities involved in the activity. In this regard, the offshore oil and gas industry fits Bunker’s (1984) model of extraction communities, because the economies can be quite volatile and even tend toward stagnation. Seydlitz et al (1993) contend that there are practical and theoretical reasons to study the impact of offshore gas and oil extraction on communities. They argue that it is of great theoretical interest to test traditional sociological theories, which suggest that rapid industrial growth spurred by the oil and gas industry can lead to disorganization in the community’s social structure and networks, and increase social problems. Lewis, Porter & Shrimpton (1988) further debate that people are not merely the passive recipients of offshore oil development. Their response involves an active interpretation of, and negotiation between, the social contours of their world and the possible positive or negative consequences of the industry.

Offshore activity is of three types: exploration, drilling and production. The drilling is mostly done by ‘jack-up’ drilling barges or ‘semi-submersible’ rigs; the jack-ups are used in shallow water. Semi-submersible rigs float on submerged pontoons and

are held in position by anchors or very powerful ‘thruster’ propellers (Clark and Taylor, 1988). Personnel in a wide variety of occupations including technical, production, management and maintenance, as well as ancillary and vitally supportive occupations including administrative, catering, and medical positions combine to ensure the effective functioning of these manmade installations (Parkes, 1998). In addition to being a dangerous and stressful environment, workers are confined to a rig or platform for a fixed period of time, and separated from their families physically, psychologically, emotionally, and socially albeit for varying periods. The rigs operate twenty-four hours a day, with most of the crew being spilt into two twelve-hour shifts. For every period spent working (and the length of this period varies, but is most commonly seven, fourteen, twenty-one or twenty-eight days) a similar amount of paid shore leave is normal. The standard shift is of two-week duration (14 days), and this period of work is the regular practice in Trinidad and Tobago. However, these cycles of absence and presence at home are compounded over time and inevitably take toll on enduring interpersonal psychosocial relationships. Suffice it to say, the rotational employment patterns of offshore workers tend to make explicit issues regarding sex roles in marriage, for example, in respect to parenting and responsibility for household labour and decision-making.

The organization of work in the offshore oil and gas industry speaks to the challenge that can be generated in family relations because of its unique and uncompromising design. Shift-work, by its design, is primarily associated with two occupational stressors: working unsocial hours and fatigue. Unsocial hours are linked to weekend work, evening and night work, and morning shifts that start very early (Colligan

and Rosa, 1990). These unsocial hours do have the tendency to disrupt normal family life (Barling, 1990) and may also impact on parental and partner roles (Barton et al., 1998; Bunnage, 1984). Unsocial hours by definition will disrupt one's normal sleep pattern and this is of concern since it contributes to fatigue (Duchon et al., 1997; Tepas et al., 1997). Constantly working excessive unsocial hours, in addition to inadequate time off between work shifts and working too many consecutive days without rest day, will have a cumulative effect that will result in fatigue and tiredness (Hildebrandt et al., 1974; Rosa, 1991; Play and Tepas, 1994; Smith, 1979). The offshore oil and gas environment is characterized by unsocial hours, which could lead to negative spillover effects. In spite of these realities, families have always, over time, generated strategies to deal with the complexities that occur in their life world. According to Habermas (1984), "the human species maintains itself through the socially coordinated activities of its members and that this coordination has to be established through communication". Therefore communication patterns in the interpersonal relationship will have varying impact on intimate relations based on the importance and kind of communication that exists between the male and female.

Males predominate the workforce on offshore oil and gas installations (McKee, Mauthner, & Maclean, 2000; Collinson, 1999) and the separation experienced by these individuals from family and community has been linked to a term called "intermittent husband syndrome" (Morrice and Taylor, 1978). This phenomenon is characterized by symptoms ranging from anxiety to depression to sexual problems and was recognized as affecting a number of 'oil wives', in Aberdeen, Scotland, whose husbands worked

offshore. These women's lives were impacted sufficiently by the periodic presence and absence of their partners to elicit concern among clinicians.

Work – Fit and Relationships

The interaction of work and family presents challenging problems both conceptually and practically and both domains are potentially stressful. In one context it refers to the notion that there is a radical separation of home and work. This separation has allowed the workplace to become the focus of attention, reducing family, kinship and community to the level of dependent variables (Clark and Taylor, 1988). Furthermore, the emotional, physical and mental demands of roles within the respective domains may exceed both partner's coping mechanisms and resources (Leiter and Durup, 1996). Consequently crucial aspects of marriage and family life are buffeted by the strong cross-currents of intervening and competing loyalties of work and home. Stress, therefore, is one important factor that must be reviewed in addressing this work-home dynamic.

The specific arrangements of offshore employment make for challenging problems both conceptually and practically in both domains with the potential for much stress. Therefore the concept of 'fit' is of particular importance to study being undertaken. According to Barnett (1998), fit is an adaptive process, and as a construct, fit can be conceptualized as a desirable outcome in the balance work and family. The adaptive reach of the fit concept also extends to the ecological thinking of Bronfrenbrenner (1979, 1986), in which the milieu of work and home are considered micro-systems whose interface and mutual influence are conceptualized as meso-systems phenomena. Bronfrenbrenner's ecological model suggests that human behaviour is influenced by a variety of biological, psychological and social factors. The ecological

point of view provides a basis for an appropriate examination of human behaviour by emphasizing the importance of an individual's life setting (microsystems) such as the workplace and the family as well as the interface of these settings (mesosystems) in influencing behaviour. Ecological theory also suggests that interactions between different important life settings for individuals can have an impact on behaviour and development. A significant mesosystem for a growing number of males and females is the nexus of work and family. Ecological theory proposes that certain individual characteristics invite or discourage reactions from the social environment (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000).

From an ecological perspective, the most logical model of a family is a system. Many researchers approach the family from what could be loosely called a "systems perspective" (Kreppner & Lerner, 1989). A systems approach to human development considers the way relationships within the family and between the family and the social environment influence individual development and family functioning. Systems theory has guiding principles that apply to all kinds of systems including business and industry, community organizations, schools, and families. These principles are helpful in understanding how families function and how families and communities interact. All behavior is viewed as interpersonal messages that contain both factual and relationship information. Rules operate as norms within a family and serve to organize family interactions (Krauss and Jacobs, 1990).

Bowen and Pittman (1993) argue for a work-family fit model that recognizes two basic varieties of mesosystems phenomena – **internal** and **external adaptation** – when considering family outcomes of work-based rewards and strains. Internal adaptation is

considered to be the impact of work-based factors on the quality of family life. This impact is reproduced in the interpersonal environment within the family and it is affected by the importance of the fit between work and family. Internal adaptation is seen in such variables as interpersonal communication, marital quality, personal adjustment, and competent childrearing. External adaptation is conceptualized as the part of the family's response to perceived work demand and reward that is relevant to its ability or willingness to accommodate the demands of the workplace.

Eckenrode & Gore (1990a) present a conceptual/methodological model that is readily extended to the fit-based approach to analysis of work-family relations. The model classifies three types of variables with which the interlocking domains of work and family may be analyzed: **stressors**, **mediators** and **moderators**. Stressors consist of events with limited duration or job characteristics that are chronic sources of strain. Mediators are variables that influence the impact of a stressor upon the family. Mediators may buffer or exaggerate these stress effects. Moderators affect the strength or the quality of the relations among stressors and family outcomes and may affect the power of mediating variables to buffer or exacerbate the effects of stress on these family outcomes. Research shows that family separations produce uniformly high levels of stress.

Marriage is most often understood as a socially established and accepted union between individuals, who commit to one another with the expectation of a stable and lasting intimate relationship. Marriage is commonly defined as a partnership between two members of the opposite sex known as husband and wife. However, marriage may function less as a social institution and more as a source of intimacy for the individuals

involved. The usual roles and responsibilities of the husband and wife include living together, having sexual relations only with one another, sharing economic resources, and being recognized as the parents of their children. Marriage and family serve as tools for ensuring social reproduction. Social reproduction includes providing food, clothing, and shelter for family members.

The proposed study will focus on the offshore male worker who identifies or describes himself as African, East Indian, Mixed, or Other, in Trinidad and Tobago who is employed on a rig or platform. The study will explore how this employment impacts on his female partner -legal, common-law or other- and how the concept of 'Intermittent Male Absence' affects their personal relationship.

Aspects of Family Types in the Caribbean

The unique characteristics of Caribbean family types have evoked a wide range of scholarship conducted and documented to categorize their various manifestations. Three basic family forms have been recognized over time; these include visiting or "friending" relationships, common law or consensual unions, and legal marriages. Research suggests that the visiting union has been most prevalent in the Afro-Caribbean lower class in which the male visits the female partner for companionship and other intimate relations. Economic support is expected from the male in this equation both for the consenting female and any children that may result from the alliance. Permanence is not a condition of the union's success or lack thereof; however, the relationship despite an appearance of casualness is governed by firm social expectations. In the friending relationship, the sceptre of gender inequity is very apparent there is the expectation of female fidelity for the duration of the union, even if the male may be engaged in other relationships with

other women. In contrast to the visiting relationship, the common law union is a more permanent residential arrangement. The common law or consensual relationship is a non legal, stable union which involves cohabitation, sexual relations and the combining of resources by the partners for upkeep of the family. The common law relationship is predicated on strict gender role expectations; the traditional breadwinner/housewife model is a feature of the family type. In this model, the woman is expected to maintain the home and care for the children, while the male earns the financial resources for the household. In this arrangement, the man may also exert a greater degree of control over his common law partner than in the visiting relationship. Legal rights can now accrue under this pattern of marriage.

The East Indian family in the Caribbean, notably in Trinidad and Guyana, has had a different genesis to that of the African. Critical to the current discourse is to recognize that the East Indian's trans-migration came without the over-riding physical and psychological shackles that delineated the African's debilitating and dehumanizing chattel slavery plantation existence. This historical fact explains some of the cohesion that allowed the family structure that arrived with the East Indian to survive more holistically than the African. Primarily, religion in general, and the Hindu religion in particular, facilitated the group's transition into its members' acceptance of their Caribbean home and eventual citizenship. In spite of the pressures of change over time and adaptation to an overarching national culture, broad swaths of the norms and mores, which arrived in the middle years of the 19th century, have endured in many villages and communities populated by East Indians in Trinidad.

The East Indians who migrated to Trinidad in the 1840s brought with them the idea that the home was the inner sanctum free from the corrupted space which was defined as the outside and world of work. To the Indian, the 'world' represented the 'polluted' space, in which the male dealt with the rest of society. The 'home' symbolized a sacrosanct space maintained by women; therefore, it required the 'purity' of the women. In the early years of intense indentured labour, "a man could only take control of his life, his wife and his children, in the home, the space where the colonizer, and other colonized and different peoples, could not enter". Consequently, the honour of the Indian community, and the characterization of Indian masculinity, was primarily dependent on the virtue of its women and the women's acceptance to recreate and secure a domestic culture that harked back to an ancestral motherland. Therefore, the home, the village and the community, which were the spatial domains allocated to women, became an important focus of Indian cultural activity. An under-girding of consciousness of a community, apart and ridiculed by others, was able, then, to be synthesized in unity. East Indians reaffirmed their legacy which came out from a rich and ancient civilization and were filled with ethnic pride even after conversion to Christianity.

Any group that held strong notions about 'purity' would necessarily have serious problems with interactions between its members and people of other ethnic groups. As such, an obvious area of dissatisfaction between the two major ethnic groups in Trinidad can "safely be located in the sphere of gender relations, in the resentment of Indian men to the mixing of the races, where women were perceived as the sex most willing to stray from the path of ethnic purity". The notion of ethnic preservation is extended to the village and household and was constantly being negotiated between Indian men and

women; the area of dress was a point of departure, since men remained conservative in the expectations of women, even if they were Christians.

Male Marginalization and the Caribbean Family

Relatively little is known about the general social impact on communities of offshore oil and gas extraction in Trinidad and Tobago; consequently, there is a dearth of literature on this social impact on families in particular. The Caribbean/West Indian family, on the other hand, has been a topic of research for several decades and literature on its interrelations and other dynamics is available. Social constructionism recognizes that all societies establish gender differentiations. The male and female spheres of influence are defined by specific characteristics, tasks and symbols. Individuals are recognized as male or female, and are evaluated according to their compliance with gender expectations. A man or a woman and the meaning ascribed to these physical attributes are a cultural construction.

The Afro-Caribbean male has been labeled, still is labeled in some quarters, as being marginal in his role in the family, unlike males of East Indian descent. This role in question is that of father/parent and the concept of time and value both in quality and quantity that he is expected to spend in family relations. The longstanding concept of identifying the Afro-Caribbean male as being merely peripheral to the family and to the roles of father and conjugal partner, or as occasional economic provider and disciplinarian of sorts, has been challenged and shown to be biased and foreign in construction (Barrow, 1998). The Afro-Caribbean male has been labeled as being marginal in his role in the family. Miller (1994) argues, however, that male marginalization is not peculiar to black males, but it is most noticeable among this group

because members have mounted a challenge to this subordinate designation and all the negatives associated with it.

Labour has been the salient reason for the African's forced migration and the high degree of social and economic manifestations that have part of this ethnic group's legacy. The concept of being marginal, according to Miller (1994), means not being holders of the reins of power in society; possessing little of the wealth of the society; generally being regarded as inferior in social status, having a belief system which justifies domination by others; and having one's position in society perpetuated by routinized relationships with others. On the other hand, being dominant relates to being on the other end of the continuum (Miller, 1994).

Miller (1994) centered his debate within the context of the theory of space which asserts that society is organized on the basis of place: the relative positions of individuals and groups with respect to power, resources, status, belief and culture. If structure is essential for society and community to function, there must be, therefore, some foundation on which to justify or allocate inequality (Miller, 1994). This socially constructed premise supports the social construction of gender and therefore allows socially constructed roles and their effects to mediate the problems manifested in interpersonal relationships, for better or worse. Barrow (1998) adopts a gender perspective and recognizes that a revised approach to masculinity is warranted. In this regard, researchers have to undertake a holistic approach and embrace all aspects of Afro-Caribbean peoples' experiences, culture and history, in order to reconstruct Caribbean masculinity in general, but males of African descent, in particular. Symbolically, some Afro-Caribbean males may be physically positioned outside the household, but they are

still, for the most, part key members of the family unit. The East Indian male, for the most part, has traditionally maintained a presence in the home. The quality of the social, interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships is a source of further debate however.

Masculinity cannot be viewed as separate and apart from other family dynamics. Reddock (1997) states that the social constructionists sought to differentiate between the biological reality of 'sex', the physiological characteristics that defined an individual as male or female, and the socially constructed experience of masculinity and femininity. This idea spoke to a person's behaviours, attitudes, emotions, and personality among other traits. Out of this school of thought, a more fluid concept of gender allowed recognition of masculine and feminine behaviours as constantly changing and not fixed and immutable. Reddock (1997) further contends that in the changing gendered landscape there is evidence as a marker to identify male insecurity over women's perceived progress. The gendered insecurities that impact men in the modern era are compounded by the insecurities of the prevailing socio-economic climate (Reddock, 1997).

Barrow (1998) insists that Caribbean men themselves must define their own levels of sensitivity and relationship, fatherhood, and level and kind of housework they need to do, for example, in order to justify and re-assert their essential personhood and thereby repel the negative label of marginality. Reddock (1997) argues that men of subordinated masculinities are being made to feel inadequate and labeled as failures, and there is the perception that women are the progenitors of this malaise. Male marginality and female-headed households continue to be reassessed. Consequently, traditional western cultural norms regarding the nuclear family and the male breadwinner/female homemaker are being seriously challenged, and merging family types are beginning to

resemble those that have endured over time in the Caribbean. In the course of this study these themes will act as parameters within which work and family interface, and how this compelling nexus impacts on interpersonal male-female relationships: communication, intimacy, and infidelity.

Family Dynamics: Home and Work- Conflict and Coping

Families have always developed myriad strategies to deal with the inevitable exigencies that occur through their life course. The modern worker is faced a changing and challenging landscape that presents a dilemma between his work and family roles, as a growing number experience both workplace and domestic responsibilities. For the most part however, contemporary institutions, including the culture and organization of paid work, domestic labour, and community services, remain predicated on the breadwinner/homemaker model (Moen and Yu, 2000). Research data describe growing evidence that workers are putting in more hours on the job (Clarksberg and Moen, 2000; Jacobs and Gerson, 1998; Schor, 1991), or at least experiencing a feeling of being rushed and overworked (Robinson and Godbey, 1997). Families with working adults, therefore, are increasingly feeling pressured. Households rarely have the support of a paid or unpaid homemaker, and a growing number of households have to grapple with two spouses having to work, instead of one. Still, work remains structured on the traditional male breadwinner model, as if employees are without family responsibilities or other non-work personal involvements (Feldberg and Glenn, 1979).

The culture and organization of paid work remains largely unchanged, as, for the most part, do men's life paths; it is typically women who are expected to adapt to the "givens" in the organization of their work patterns and in their day-to-day routines.

Moen and Yu (2000) argue that “balance” is not simply the adjudication of two competing roles (employee versus spouse/parent), but for dual-earner couples, there is a three-way juggling act of his job, her job, and their family goals, responsibilities and also their interpersonal relationships. These researchers employed three theoretical perspectives in informing their study: the life course model, the social construction of gender, and structural lag. They contend that a life course, role theoretical approach helped focus on the context of lives. In addition, gender, life stage, and one’s spouse’s circumstances constitute important contextual considerations in understanding the strains, conflicts, and overloads of workers in two-earner families. The life course formulation also underscores the notion of “linked lives” (Elder, George and Shanahan, 1996; Giele and Elder, 1998), and the paradigm of social construction of gender emphasizes how women’s “choices” are restricted by their husbands’ circumstances (Bielby and Bielby, 1992; Risman, 1998).

Menaghan (1991) suggests that analysis of existing data sets with single observations of marital or family interaction could be useful in terms of the occupational characteristics of the participants. Different occupations produce uniqueness in distress-provoking conditions, and emotional distress compromises the individual’s availability for constructive interaction. Consequently, individual responses to specific categories of partner behaviours should be more negative than average contingencies would predict. Moreover, additional prior research suggests that women are more likely than men to feel that family obligations come before personal needs, and to feel more conflict or guilt if their work role impinges on family time (Duxbury and Higgins, 1994; Hochschild, 1989; Gutek et al. 1991). The composition of workforce and work organization of oil and gas

rigs and platforms can be usefully analyzed within the context of Moen and Yu's (2000) arguments.

Contending Domains: Shift-work, Rotational work, Spill-over

Numerous studies have been conducted on the impact of work hours, work schedules and shift-work on the family relationships. Glezer and Wolcott (1999) reiterate that the essential competition between the business imperative for high levels of productivity and the need of workers to enjoy satisfying family and personal lives is at the heart of the work-family paradox. Work and family conflicts and tensions can occur as a result of role overload or role interference where time and energy becomes scarce commodities to meet the various roles and expectations and demands as the two roles converge (Duxbury and Higgins, 1994). The notion of interference in the work-family life equation is captured in the term 'spillover'. Spillover is a process in which stress from one domain accumulates within the individual and is experienced in the other domain. Negative spillover occurs when work and family interfere with each other, that is, when stressors erupt in both domains almost simultaneously. Succinctly put, negative spillover occurs when emotional states from one domain are transmitted to the other. Positive spillover, however, occurs when functioning in one domain enhances the functioning in the other and this is accomplished with support in each domain (Grzywacz et al. 2002).

The impact of the spillover process is apparent on relationship well-being and marital satisfaction because of men's extended work hours (Weston, Qu & Soriano 2002). The impact of work on family and personal lives varies across the ages and stages of peoples' lives. Work impinged the most on the lives of those where child rearing and

job and career demands were at a peak. Where both spouses were employed, the research showed that either partner's work schedule or conditions may affect family life.

However, a good day at work can spill over in to a congenial atmosphere at home; on the other hand, a difficult and trying day may produce negative spillover exhibited by reduced energy level and tolerance for handling household tasks and family interaction (Crouter, 1994; Lambert, 1990). As for the reciprocal effects of home affecting work, Frone et al. (1994) concluded that employees are better at managing the potentially disrupting influences of their family vicissitudes on work life than they are at managing the potentially disrupting influence of the work-related demands on home life.

The emotional consequences of the work domain, i.e. spillover, mediate the effect of workplace conditions on family interaction. These workplace conditions include: restriction of opportunity to exercise self-direction, work overload, poor quality interpersonal relations on the job, low opportunity for cooperative problem-solving, job insecurities, job loss, and low earnings, and they have emotional repercussions that have negative implications for family interactions (Menaghan, 1991).

Parkes (1998) states that work on offshore rigs and platforms is seen as being very stressful in its impact on the health and life style of offshore employees and their spouses and families. Sources of stress in the offshore working environment are related to the remote and isolated locations of these installations; the challenging physical environment; the confined work and living spaces; the lack of privacy; perceived hazards of offshore work; the helicopter travel to and from these locations; demanding shift patterns; fluctuating workloads with alternating boredom and high activity. Smith and Wedderburn (1998) state that long shifts of more than eight hours, up to twelve hours, are

multiplying rapidly in the world of work as a way of increasing operational availability and flexibility. This method ostensibly offers workers larger blocks of time off. These features include the nature of the work, total weekly hours, and the skill and sophistication of management. Work rosters must strike an equilibrium between operational requirements with employee availability, profitability with individual earnings, and performance efficiency with occupational and safety standards and the well-being of employees (Smith, 1993; Wedderburn, 1996).

The offshore environment has a competitive aspect about it which increases the levels of stress. Prior research highlights the increased levels of stress due to added pressure in the workplace and perceptions that it has become more difficult to balance work and family life. In addition to the intensity of the work, feelings of insecurity about one's job as redundancies or threats of layoffs take effect and can add to a feeling that one has to devote even more time to the job so as to be seen as a committed employee (Walker, 1998).

Infidelity

Preliminary exploratory work has suggested that “domestic problems” among offshore workers may be cause for some concern. In addition, it was stated that it is “a normal thing for rig-men (offshore workers) to go to a bar at the end of a shift” and that “the older generation of workers had a taste for alcohol and women but this kind of behaviour is slowly changing”. The notion of infidelity emerged in discussions with workers. With regard to infidelity in intimate relationships such as marriage, evolutionary psychologists have devoted considerable attention to the question of gender differences in emotional responses to betrayal in romantic relationships (e.g., Buss,

Larsen, Westen, & Semmelroth, 1992; Buss, 2000; DeSteno & Salovey, 1996; Harris & Christenfeld, 1996; Sabini & Green, 2004; Sagarin, 2005). An exceptional amount of data using forced-choice measures show that women are more distressed over emotional infidelity (a partner falling in love with another), whereas men are more upset over sexual infidelity (a partner engaging in intercourse with another). Clarification and elaboration indicate that instances of infidelity may occur among both partners in the population that will be researched.

There is some research evidence that infidelity is detrimental to many relationships. Many clinicians view infidelity as one of the most difficult problems to treat in therapy and one of the most damaging issues for a relationship (Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson, 1997). A study done among Americans attempted to replicate some of the findings from previous infidelity literature using a more rigorous method. The variables considered did not represent an exhaustive list of variables from the previous literature, but they did represent some of the significant domains—demographic, relationship, and environmental—that previous research has explored. A number of factors have been discovered that may lead to infidelity, and include age (Greeley, 1994; Traeen & Stigum, 1998), education (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Traeen & Stigum, 1998), history of divorce (Wiederman, 1997), religiosity (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Bell, Turner, & Rosen, 1975; Edwards & Booth, 1976; Hurlburt, 1992), and length of relationship (Bell et al., 1975; Glass & Wright, 1977; Spanier & Margolis, 1983).

Gender has been the most commonly studied variable in extramarital behavior. The typical finding has been that more men than women have engaged in infidelity (Greeley, 1994; Laumann et al., 1994; Wiederman, 1997). Furthermore, men report a

greater number of liaisons (Lawson & Samson, 1988; Spanier & Margolis, 1983) and express greater interest in infidelity (Buunk & Bakker, 1995; Seal, Agostinelli, & Hannett, 1994; Thompson, 1984). Some researchers have found evidence that men and women engage in different types of infidelity.

Conclusion

The work and home environments present challenges for the individuals who traverse both worlds. For males, who have been socialized in the breadwinner/homemaker model of economic viability, current socio-economic trends may have invalidated this model. The offshore work environment is male-dominated and generates a 'macho' culture which may be construed a defense mechanism with which to mitigate the physiological and psychological challenges they face in the workplace. Re-adjustment to onshore life will inevitably have its trials as well. A unique sense of camaraderie will develop among individuals who depend on each other in the course of the jobs and who spend time together away from spouses and children. Stress relief has been attributed to going to a bar at shift's end. This kind of behaviour can lead to a pattern that can encourage and exacerbate underlying psychosocial issues and concerns. Fieldwork in the primary stage has begun; questionnaires have been distributed and responses have started to come in. From the analysis of this data, the design of the other stages of the fieldwork will be done and will include in-depth interviews and focus groups.

