

**The Bill Blackwood
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**The Benefits of 12-hour Shifts
to the Community and Police Officers**

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ABSTRACT

Law enforcement agencies across America, unlike the typical nine am to five pm jobs, must provide reliable service to the community they serve 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. This service has traditionally been provided by officers working eight hour shifts for five days a week and two days off. Every law enforcement manager is given the challenging task of providing maximum community coverage with ever-shrinking resources, both monetarily and with manpower. One must achieve some semblance of balance between taxpayer dollars and a work environment beneficial to the employees in regards to morale, health, safety, productivity, and mental and physical well-being. The conventional 40 hour work week for police officers is now being challenged by the condensed work week that consists of 12-hour shifts. Presently, numerous agencies have implemented the rotating 12-hour shift. The resulting shift in manpower deployment from 8-hour shifts to 12-hour shifts is still being researched to determine the positive benefits and negative results.

Law enforcement agencies are being called on, more today than ever before, to handle community issues. In conjunction with the increase in calls to service, managers are being forced to do this with fewer resources. As with all agencies, the employee salaries and benefits account for a large portion of the departmental budget. While providing quality service to citizens is of paramount importance to any agency, a dedicated and skilled officer is its' greatest resource and should be protected and promoted.

The purpose of this research is to determine whether an 8-hour shift or a 12-hour shift will provide the most efficient and effective patrol officer. Budgetary issues

involving 8-hour shifts versus 12-hour shifts is a concern for law enforcement agencies and must be considered. The critical issues addressed in this research are morale, safety, fatigue, productivity, physical and mental well-being and community relations.

The methodology used in this research was a review of magazine articles, internet sources, journals, periodicals, and medical studies. The subsequent analysis verified and concluded that 12-hour shifts in law enforcement are an efficient and beneficial use of manpower. That being said, 12-hour shifts can be good for both the community and the patrol officers.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, modern businesses are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 365 days a year. Virtually every law enforcement agency in the state of Texas is considered a business, with the citizens as their primary customer. The ability to provide public service to the community around the clock has created the need for a shift worker. Shift work is not a new concept and can be traced back to the dawn of the Industrial Age when industrialists placed their employees on rotating shifts. These businessmen realized that as they operated their businesses around the clock, equipment was fully utilized, thus, maximizing production and profits.

Similarly to the business world, all police departments are charged with providing quality service to the customer, namely, the citizens. Police departments do not produce a product, but do provide something equally as valuable: reliable service. Over the years, several requests have been made of departments to evaluate and compare both eight and 12-hour shifts for their respective patrol division. After careful and deliberate consideration, some departments decided to place its patrol officers on a condensed 12-hour rotating shift. From an economically reliable and safety standpoint, shift work for the patrol officers for these agencies is a “perfect fit.”

Placing patrol officers on a 12-hour condensed schedule is a benefit, not only to the department and its employees, but to the citizens it serves. This paper will serve as a model for any agency or business, stressing that quality service is best provided by a work environment that promotes motivation, safety, and healthy work attitudes. The position presented by this research paper is that 12-hour shifts are more efficient and beneficial for police officers in relation to productivity, morale, physical and mental well-

being, and continuity with community relations. This research will show that 12-hour shifts, as compared to 8-hour shifts, are beneficial to the police department, as a whole, and the citizens they serve.

The researcher will conduct a review of literature on the subject of compressed 12-hour work schedules to determine its viability in regards to the officer's health, safety and well-being. Literature sources included medical studies, Internet articles, and magazine articles. The researcher determined that the quality of service provided to the community is directly related to the officer's morale, productivity, and health. Twelve hour shifts should be considered as a viable option for all police agencies to consider in regards to the benefits it provides to patrol officers and the community.

POSITION

Most law enforcement agencies struggle with manpower issues when it comes to placing their patrol officers on a 12-hour work schedule. However, recently, some advantages have come to light. Recent studies have revealed that 12-hour shifts increase productivity, raise morale, are better for physical and mental well-being, and increase continuity within the community.

Sundermeier (2008) stated that when employees were surveyed on performance measures on 12-hour shifts, the discipline rates showed no change compared to 8-hour shift employees. There were no complaints or disciplinary actions related to the longer work shift. The evaluation revealed that productivity levels on 12-hour shifts were at the same levels as the 8-hour shifts. According to the survey, 100% of the respondents were able to perform all police functions at the same level of quality. Sundermeier (2008) stated, "Some officers reported a new enthusiasm for the job ... that had a

measurably positive effect on their work output, but there was no evidence that satisfaction with the work schedule affected the total output of the team” (p. 4). The conclusion for this study showed that the officers were extremely in favor of the 12-hour shift schedule. They were very satisfied with their jobs and there was no negative impact on the quality of service.

Epstein (2010), in a survey of Flemington, New Jersey police officers on 12-hour shifts, reported a benefit of better teamwork. The force would be divided into four squads, whose members would always be working the same shift along with the same supervisor and officers. Consequently, this created a stronger team environment.

Jacques (2010), as part of study by the Police Officer Association of Michigan on the 12-hour shift schedule, found that officer arrest totals more than doubled. The police officer’s productivity levels were likely a result of increased patrol time, flexible scheduling, and a sense of pride as noted by the surveyed officers. Police officers working a 12-hour shift have scheduling problems because many are working extra jobs on their time off. Jacques (2010) stated that a non-rotating 12-hour shift may alleviate negative scheduling issues. The research by Jacques (2010) uses Glen McBride’s publication, “Supervising the 12-Hour Schedule”, and stated that “12-hour employees often exhibit a higher level of motivation than rotating eight-hour employees, ...Part of the reason is the better recuperation from jet lag and sleep loss, plus the stress recovery benefits of twelve-hour schedules” (p. 2). This study concluded by noting that no police department opted to return to their previous 8-hour shifts.

The second advantage experienced by 12-hour shifts is a high level of morale exhibited by the patrol officer. According to Federwisch (1998), employees working a

28 day rotating 12-hour shift schedule only work 14 days, with 14 days off. In the same time frame, 8-hour shift workers only get eight days off. Coburn, a publisher at Circadian Technologies, Inc. stated that "Today's twelve-hour shifts are part of a thirty-six to forty-eight hour workweek rather than the seventy-two to eighty hours our great-grandparents endured. That makes the twelve-hour shifts both more manageable and more desirable" (as cited in Federwisch, 1998, p. 2). Twelve hour shifts are extremely popular for shiftwork employees because more days off per month results in increased morale.

In research conducted by Folkard and Lombardi (2006), the employees were willing to make a trade of sort by working four hours more each day to be able to have additional days off each month. When a work schedule was properly designed including equitable days off and acceptable limits on successive work days, no complications were noted by departments that used the lengthier shift. Confirming the morale issue is Epstein (2010) in his study, which stated that morale was up for the officers on 12-hour shifts.

In a study by Sundermeier (2008), 12-hour shift working patrol officers and their sergeants worked the same schedule, a benefit other types of shift workers did not have. Sundermeier (2008) noted "About half the officers reported an improvement in their level of supervision, and all employees were very satisfied with the "squad concept"- always working with the same sergeant and the same group of officers" (p. 3). Of the respondents who were surveyed about their choice of shift work schedules, 84% felt an improvement in their work and 100% wanted to remain on the 12-hour shift.

Obviously, these officers experienced a sense of harmony in their lives and renewed zest for patrol work, resulting in exceptionally high levels of morale.

Also in support of the morale issue is the research documented by Jacques (2010). Police officers showed improvement in morale on the job and in their personal lives. Jacques (2010) noted, "Police officers who work the twelve-hour shift generally spend more time with their families and have more time and energy to perform routine tasks on larger projects outside of work" (p. 3). The 12-hour shift allowed officers to have alternating weekends off, more recreational time, and granted them time to plan future events. The spouses of these patrol officers were overwhelmingly supportive of the 12-hour shifts.

In medical research conducted by Tucker, Macdonald, Folkard, and Smith (1998), they found "... reported benefits following the introduction of twelve-hour shifts in terms of positive attitudes about travel to work and time off duty, improved staff morale, reduced sickness absence, reduced staff turnover, high employee acceptance, and satisfaction with the system" (p. 4). It was also reported by 12-hour shift workers that there was an increase in leisure time than the 8-hour shift workers. Tucker et al (1998) also noted, "When asked whether the advantages of their shift system outweighed the disadvantages, the twelve-hour workers rated their system considerably more positively than the eight-hour workers rated theirs" (p.14).

The third advantage to be explored is the physical and mental well-being of the patrol officers working 12-hour shifts. There are concerns from earlier studies that showed that 12-hour shifts created health issues such as cardiovascular disease, sleep disorders, and gastrointestinal disease, to name a few. According to Sundermeier

(2008), when asked about how rested they (the officers) felt after returning from days off, 82% of officers said they were “very rested.” Over half of the respondents (56%) said they were less tired on their days off. In terms of general mood, 77% rated their mood “very good.” Positive changes had been noticed by the families of 77% of respondents. The study concluded that any negative effects of shift work were tempered by officers working the 12-hour shift. Sundermeier (2008) noted, “Officers reported being more rested and ready to return to work after days off but also note there is little time for anything but work during their work days” (p. 5). In this study, the respondents and their families were very supportive of the 12-hour shift. Sundermeier (2008) also believed “A more scientific approach might provide more conclusive data, but the survey and employee comments suggest that in addition to being happier, twelve-hour workers are probably healthier as well” (p. 5).

In a study by Federwisch (1998), the question was raised as to whether 12-hour shifts were a benefit or burden. One of the advantages for employees has been more days off as a result of the condensed schedule. But that free time can be a temptation for some professionals to moonlight, pushing the workweek to dangerous excesses. Although critics of 12-hour shifts question the ability to remain alert, some respondents had never had a problem with fatigue. The 12-hour shift often gets the blame for what is really a staffing difficulty.

In research completed by Shiftwork Solutions (“Common concerns,” n.d.), 12-hour shift workers are not losing sleep as compared to 8-hour shifts workers. According to data collected on the total amounts sleep experienced by the test subjects (over a span of several days or weeks), “12-hour shifts provide twice as many days off and

employees sleep longer on their days off” (p. 2). Regardless of whether a comparison was made of a person working day shifts only, night shifts only, or a rotating shift schedule, the average hours of sleep over the four week period, are greater on 12-hour shifts.

Shiftwork is now a major feature of working life across a broad range of industries. A study conducted by Smith, Folkard, Tucker, and Macdonald (1998) compared eight and 12-hour shifts and the effects on the employees’ sleep and health. The features of the shift systems operated can impact the wellbeing, performance, and sleep of shift workers. Evidence comparing effects of 8-hour and 12-hour shifts on fatigue and job performance, safety, sleep, and physical and psychological health were considered. The results suggested few differences between eight and 12-hour shifts in terms of lower stress levels and better physical and psychological wellbeing.

In medical research conducted by Tucker, Macdonald, Folkard, and Smith (1998), “twelve-hour shifts are associated with improved ratings of sleep quality and restedness following sleep, although studies on the effects of shift length on sleep have produced inconsistent findings” (p. 5). This research used several measures to assess the quality and length of sleep periods experienced by 8-hour shift workers and 12-hour shift workers. Also noted by Tucker et al (1998), “When comparing eight- and twelve-hour systems in terms of sleep, health, and well-being, it was found a moderate advantage in favor of longer shifts, although the two groups did not differ on most of the outcome measurements” (p. 5).

A final advantage to consider in 12-hour shift scheduling is the benefit to community relations. In the article presented by Epstein (2010), one benefit observed

was better continuity and communication with the community. It would be easier to know when a particular officer is on duty for follow-ups.

In research conducted by Sharp (2003), it was determined that any agency contemplating changing patrol officers' shift length need to base its research on how it benefits the citizens, the department, and its employees. As stated in this article, finding an optimal work schedule is problematic. Regardless of whichever schedule a police department implements, not all employees will agree with the change. Sharp (2003) found that "Police officers have to be pleased with their work schedules, or they will seek better ones. That is one more reason everyone must work together to find a schedule that is mutually satisfactory" (p. 8). A poll among officers revealed that the officers requested 12-hour shifts for more days and weekends off. The 12-hour shift benefits the city; it is a win-win situation.

COUNTER POSITION

Numerous studies have been conducted on fatigue and safety risks associated with employees working eight, ten, or 12-hour shifts. Due to the nature of patrol work, as in driving a vehicle for the entire shift, fatigue and safety problems may be exacerbated. As more police agencies are considering placing patrol officers on 12-hour shifts, it is important for managers to realize some factors that such a decision may entail.

In an article by Monk (2008), it found that "The shift schedules of the police officer, like those of schoolteachers, college professors, and some medical professionals, provide extended periods of downtime for officers and create opportunities to hold second jobs" (p. 1). These types of schedules allow the employee

to have several days off following their scheduled 12-hour shifts, which affords them opportunities to work side jobs. However, there are some problems associated with off duty employment, like officer fatigue. Monk (2008) also noted, "Recent research finds that fatigue associated with overtime and outside employment may contribute to accidents and injuries involving police officers and may lead to more citizen complaints" (p. 3).

In an article written by Vila (2011) of the officers surveyed, 91% reported feeling fatigued "routinely," and 31% had fallen asleep at the wheel. Vila (2011) noted, "Fatigue decreases attentiveness, impairs physical and cognitive ability, diminishes the ability to deal with challenges, and sets up a vicious cycle: fatigue decreases your ability to deal with stress and stress decreases your ability to deal with fatigue" (p. 1). A study conducted by Amendola, Weisburd, Hamilton, Jones, and Slipka (2011) found that "those on eight-hour shifts averaged significantly less sleep per twenty-four hour period and worked the greatest amount of overtime ...caution is advised ...due to increased levels of self-reported fatigue and lower levels of alertness" (p. 1). In addressing fatigue issues, it was reported that officers working 12-hour shifts felt more tired and less alert than their 8-hour shift counterparts. It was also found that employees tended to miscalculate their own exhaustion level, thus being more tired than they believed.

In contradiction to the above arguments against 12-hour shifts, Jacques (2010) reported in his research that fatigue "did not adversely affect police officers work, attitudes to public, or working with other employees" (p. 2). None of the reports indicated any significant spike in valid citizen complaints. He concluded that the advantages of the 12-hour shift counterbalance the disadvantages. Jacques (2010)

noted, “Employers should take a detailed look at twelve-hour shifts because they have a track record of improving the quality of life for the affected officers and their families” (p. 4). Perhaps the most convincing argument for 12-hour shifts according to Jacques (2010) is the fact that he had no record of any units intentionally reverting to their previous schedule.

In a research study conducted by Tucker, Smith, MacDonald, and Folkard (1998), “twelve-hour shifts are often associated with improved ratings of sleep quality and restfulness... A comparison of eight- and twelve-hour systems in terms of sleep, health, and well-being found a moderate advantage in favor of longer shifts” (p. 5). The workers on the 12-hour systems generally reported longer sleeps than the 8-hour workers. According to this study, 12-hour shift workers reported a reduced level of chronic fatigue and a higher level of psychological well-being. Tucker et al. (1998) also found that “Twelve-hour systems were shown to be moderately favored over eight-hour systems on the majority of the outcome measures...the effects of shift length on at least some of the chronic health outcome measurements are relatively minor” (p. 17).

When addressing safety issues associated with 12-hour shifts, Aveni (1999) found that tired officers’ driving abilities are seriously impaired by lack of sleep: “Regulatory agencies, such as the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) have attributed many serious human errors to sleep deprivation” (p. 2). A research paper submitted by Cochrane (2001) stated that “any loss of sleep can have varying effects on an individual’s ability... For police officers, such episodes can have catastrophic results, such as motor vehicle accidents, shootings, inappropriate use of force, or general improper attitudes” (p. 1).

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (“Rotational shiftwork,” 2011) found that there is “strong evidence that night, evening, rotating and irregular shifts are associated with an increased risk of occupational injury. This risk is associated with worker fatigue, and less supervision and co-worker support during non-daytime shifts” (p. 4). In an article by Keaney (2011), “people generally require six to eight hours of sleep every twenty-four hours to restore memory and concentration, and physical and emotional function. Sleep-loss-related fatigue degrades performance, productivity and safety as well as health and well-being” (p. 2). The patrol officer operating a police car under the influence of sleep deprivation is, in essence, just as impaired as a drunk driver.

In support of 12-hour shifts as pertaining to safety issues, Shiftwork Solutions (“Common concerns,” n.d.) conducted a survey of 20,000 shift workers. In the article, it is stated that “Although shift worker surveys rely on self-reported safety problems rather than documented incidents, the survey results suggest that longer shifts are at least as safe as eight-hour shifts” (p. 3). Jacques (2010) confirmed this in his study, showing that “greater cause of unsafe fatigue result of variation in start times rather than long hours of scheduled work... there was no increase in officer involved accidents after switching to twelve-hour shifts” (p. 3).

In conclusion, administrators should note that there are hazards associated with 12-hour shift work and assist patrol officers during the transition period. A good manager will continuously look for ways to improve their department. By doing so, management contributes to a safe environment for all concerned parties: the department, the employees, and the public.

RECOMMENDATION

According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (“Rotational shiftwork,” 2011) “Shiftwork is a reality for about 25 percent of the North American working population” (p. 1). While many law enforcement agencies have not implemented a 12-hour shift, there are agencies that have incorporated them successfully into their patrol divisions. For these departments, 12-hour shifts have proven to be an effective improvement and feasible work schedule. Police administrators are always looking for motivational techniques to raise employee morale that do not conflict with the organization’s mission, namely, quality service to the public.

The longer rotating shift has prompted an increase in research as to its effects and the “human error” connection to recent catastrophic accidents. According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (“Rotational shiftwork,” 2011), “Many workers find that shiftwork disrupts their family and personal life and leads to health problems including chronic fatigue and gastrointestinal disorders. On the other hand, some workers prefer shiftwork because it usually allows for more free time” (p. 2). The research studies documented in this paper were used as a way to discover whether 8-hour or 12-hour shifts affected productivity, morale, fatigue, safety, community relations, and mental and physical well-being. The findings, however, revealed no convincing difference between the 8-hour or 12-hour shift.

Administrators may implement some of the following organizational approaches to 12-hour shifts that may alleviate concerns for employee health and safety. The 12-hour schedule that any police department uses has built in provisions for two weekends off a month. This provides socially advantageous time off that will help improve

employees' morale. Another plan of action would be to provide rest facilities inside the police department for "on call" patrol officers to unwind and refocus their energy. It is important that managers educate the patrol officers on potential health and safety risks of working 12-hour shifts. This will help in reducing officer involved incidents and improve their overall well-being.

Police departments must provide 24-hour service to the community.

Administrators have the difficult task of creating an "ideal" work schedule that will satisfy both the patrol officers and the public. Managers must identify the issues associated with the 12-hour shift work schedule. Supervisors must identify these issues and associated risks and offer solutions and options to help the officers in transitioning to shift work. It is incumbent on managers to educate the officers on the physical and emotional effects of sleep deprivation associated with shift work. By doing so, this will provide a safe work environment for the officers and give the public the quality of service they deserve.

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