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LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE OF TEXAS**

The Feasibility Of Twelve Hour Shifts For Patrol Officers

A Policy Research Project
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by
Durward V. Smith

Longview Police Department
Longview, Texas
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ABSTRACT

Law enforcement executives are always looking for better methods to improve the morale of their officers and, at the same time, benefit the agency. One idea that is being tried by a lot of agencies is changing from the traditional eight hour shifts for patrol officers to a compressed work schedule or twelve hour shifts. This requires the officers to work longer shifts in fewer days which gives them more days off each week or work period. Improved morale by itself can be a benefit to the agency as long as other important factors such as manpower and productivity are not adversely effected by the change.

The purpose of this research was to evaluate twelve hour shifts for patrol officers and determine whether its benefits out-weigh those of an eight hour shift. A review of literature pertaining to the history of twelve hour shifts, advantages, drawbacks and the cost to the department has been presented.

The conclusion of this research indicates that there does not appear to be any real advantages for an agency to switch to twelve hour shifts. While some agencies reported a decrease in overtime and sick leave, other reported increases. Even though there was very little effect on productivity, 90% of the agencies surveyed reported a decrease in manpower which would suggest an increase in each officers work load.

Introduction

The purpose of this project is to evaluate twelve hour shifts for patrol officers as a viable alternative to eight hour shifts. The primary question is; do the benefits of making such a drastic change out-weigh the benefits of remaining on fixed eight hour shifts?

The issues to be examined are whether; 1) the twelve hour shift is as beneficial to the agency as it might be to the officers, 2) the twelve hour shift is too long for an officer to work without fatigue and stress, 3) officer survival instincts will be adversely effected by fatigue, 4) manpower and productivity will increase or decrease, 5) motor vehicle accidents will increase or decrease, 6) complaints against officers will increase, 7) sick leave will increase or decrease, 8) overtime will increase or decrease, 9) the officers personal and family lives will be adversely affected.

This project is intended to aid the Longview Texas Police Department in determining if switching to twelve hour shifts should be considered for all patrol districts, or a single patrol district or to return to a standard eight hour shift for all districts. It may also be used by other agencies who may be considering a similar change.

Some of the information for this project was provided by published articles in professional law enforcement journals throughout the United States and Canada. Additional information has been provided by officers from other agencies in Texas who have worked both eight hour shifts and

twelve hour shifts during their career. Several books dealing with various shift schedules have also been used to obtain relevant information. I will also be using information gathered from a six month trial program sanctioned by my agency.

The intended outcome of this project is to determine if switching to twelve hour shifts for patrol officers is a viable alternative to working eight hour shifts. And if so, is it really as beneficial to the agency as it is to the officers involved?

Historical, Legal or Theoretical Context

Working twelve hour shifts has begun to catch on in the field of law enforcement over the past decade after having originated in the private sector over forty years ago (Metzger 1995).

Research on shift work in industry, which appeared in the 1960's and 1970's, pointed to negative effects on productivity and safety, disruptions created by basic body rhythms of eating, sleeping, and interferences with other roles that the individual has to serve, such as family commitment/parental demands (Cunningham 1990).

Other research during this time pointed to the advantages of a four-day or compressed work week (Cunningham 1990).

Compressed shift schedules are an attempt to enhance the benefits of a compressed work week to deal with some of the problems found with traditional shift schedules. A compressed shift schedule is a variation of shift schedules, where an individual works four-twelve hour days before taking three or four days off. The idea is to compress the

number of hours worked each week into fewer days to allow more days off work. Proponents suggest that this would improve job satisfaction, morale, and enhance the individual's marriage and use of leisure time. In most cases, the idea of the compressed shift schedule originated with police officers themselves, as an alternative to the schedule they were working. "In each case, the local police association was instrumental in encouraging management to agree to a trial period when the schedule could be introduced and evaluated" (Cunningham 1990).

In 1976, the Everett, Washington Police Department implemented a small scale schedule change in it's patrol division, consisting of a twelve hour shift, with four days on and four days off. The rationale in implementing such an unusual schedule change was simple. The many constraints placed on police administration, personnel laws, civil service rules, working agreements, and personnel ordinances, leave little room for innovation. Police administrators, therefore, must be consistently alert for methods of maximizing effectiveness, regardless of how unusual those methods may be. The trial period lasted for less than a year and was over-shadowed by the implementation of Team Policing. Because of the administration's greater commitment to Team Policing, the twelve hour shift was discontinued without being evaluated (Davis and Tracy 1980).

Other agencies have tried the twelve hour work schedule. In 1983, only five of 200 agencies surveyed followed a twelve hour work schedule

(Stenzel and Burer). By 1990, nine agencies throughout British Columbia were on a twelve hour work schedule (Cunningham 1990). In March 1995, only one of forty-one Texas agencies surveyed utilized a twelve hour work schedule (Lawrence 1995). An informal survey of 28 participants attending GMI Module I in April 1996 indicated that six agencies are either currently working twelve hour shifts or had done so in the past year. In May 1998 two agencies near Longview indicated that they had recently worked a twelve hour work schedule.

Review of Literature or Practice

Ten officers from eight Texas agencies were surveyed and the main reason most of these agencies went to twelve hour shifts was because the officers wanted the additional days off. Other factors that were considered was the officers and their supervisors would work and be off on the same days, a possible increase in manpower, a possible reduction in sick leave and because several agencies had their budgets substantially reduced. Five of these agencies were working eight hour shifts that rotated either weekly or monthly but when they changed to twelve hour shifts, they rotated monthly or semi-annually. Studies have shown that employees who work permanent shifts know the shift they work and may find it easier to adjust physically, emotionally, and socially to a single shift. However, other employees may believe it is unfair and inequitable for some employees to be assigned less favorable shifts; these employees are likely to favor a

rotating shift system (Booth 1982).

On April 15, 1996, the Longview, Texas Police Department started a six month test program of twelve hour shifts in one of three patrol districts, District "C". The test program was developed by a sergeant after he was approached by several of his officers. The program was staffed with twenty patrol officers, four sergeants and one lieutenant with just the officers already assigned to the district, which would make it a real test, instead of asking for volunteers. The program was divided into four fixed shifts with officers working six-twelve hour shifts and one-eight hour shift during a two week period and received a three day weekend every other week (Hyko 1996). Opinion poll type survey's were conducted each month to measure the success of the program and were treated as confidential. Each month several officers elected not to turn in their survey's and several officers were transferred out of the test group during the program and were replaced by volunteers. These factors may have flawed the overall intended results of the test program. Three of five agencies that completed a prepared survey, and the Longview Police Department, have discontinued their twelve hour shifts and another one, the Kilgore Police Department probably should.

Deputies in Armstrong County, after only nine months of working twelve hour shifts, requested to return to eight hour shifts mostly because of fatigue and stress. They also indicated that their family lives

deteriorated and it took them too long to recuperate to enjoy the extra days off. Manpower and productivity went down and morale was very low. There was also an increase of sick leave and overtime (Jones 1996).

Bexar County discontinued their twelve hour shifts after two years because of budget restraints and manpower cuts. Fatigue also played a part in the final decision to return to eight hour shifts. Fatigue got so bad that some deputies were using the last two hours of each shift to write reports (Garcia 1998).

The Marshall Police Department was on twelve hour shifts for approximately fifteen months before returning to eight hour shifts. One officer stated that officers voted overwhelmingly to discontinue the twelve hour shifts because of low morale and lack of manpower. The officers also complained about not being able to work very many off duty jobs because of policy restrictions and they were always too tired to enjoy the extra days off (Sellers 1998). However, an administrator advised that the only reason they discontinued the twelve hour shifts were because of manpower shortages and bookkeeping problems. He also said that morale was high and that most officers loved working the twelve hour shifts (Fletcher 1998).

The Longview Police Department discontinued their twelve hour shifts at the completion of its six month trial period. Survey's showed that the test group (District "C") had an average of only nine officers working per day or 75% of those that were scheduled to work in a twenty-four hour

period. Only 46% of the officers in District "C", 10% of those in Districts "A & B" combined, and 20% of all supervisors favored the twelve hour shifts. Sick leave in the test group was up by 3% and 60% of the officers indicated that stress and fatigue was a problem. There was an indication that the twelve hour shift did nothing to improve morale and some officers indicated that their personal lives were turned upside down by the test program (Eberz).

The Kilgore Police Department has been on twelve hour shifts for approximately twelve years and has no intention of dropping them. However, after reviewing their survey, the only thing positive for the agency is high morale among officers. Both sick time and fleet accidents have increase because of fatigue and overtime has increased because of mandated training. Manpower and productivity have not been effected except while officers are attending training. If officer attend training for four hours, then they are given the rest of the day off. And those who work nights are also let off early so they can get some sleep before attending training (Clark 1998).

Discussion of Relevant Issues

Fatigue and stress were a major contributing factor for most of these agencies who have discontinued their twelve hour shifts. In Longview, several officers missed court and blamed it on fatigue from working to many hours. Studies have shown that younger officers are more favorable

towards twelve hour shifts than older officers and officers are more favorable than supervisors. Also, older officers and female officers on night shifts had a higher rate of fatigue. Officers from two Ontario, Canada police departments stated that fatigue was a greater problem on twelve hour shifts than on shorter shifts (deCarufel and Schaan 1990). An increase in overtime because of manpower shortages, due in part to the increase in sick leave, also contributed to their decision.

There were several areas of concern that were virtually unaffected by the twelve hour work schedules according to surveys completed by the Texas agencies. Complaints against officers, fleet accidents, productivity and officer survival instincts remained about the same. About half of the agencies reported an increase in sick leave, overtime, and morale while 90% reported a decrease in manpower. Three agencies reported that their officers indicated their family and personal lives were adversely affected by twelve hour work schedules.

There were several problems that developed in Longview during their trial program which also had a bearing on the decision to discontinue the program. Because of the extended work hours, officers were permitted to take two coffee breaks up to 25 minutes long and one meal break up to 45 minutes long. Upon reports of abuse, it was discovered that on 65 occasions, officers were on coffee breaks for up to 45 minutes, on 26 occasions, meal breaks up to 60 minutes and on 10

occasions, meal breaks up to one hour and forty minutes. There were also seven occasions where officers either left work early or reported in late without any form of documentation from their supervisor(s). Each officer was assigned to work the same eight hour shift every other week, i.e. every other Thursday. However, some supervisors allowed some of their officers to change their "short day" so often that, at times, it created a manpower shortage and a documentation problem.

When Longview was conducting its test program, there were several other relatively new projects going on at the same, i.e. Command District program and Police Area Representative program, that may have had some affect on this programs outcome. The program was also conducted during the summer months which may have played a part in manpower shortages and there really was not enough officers to properly staff twelve hour shifts. It probably would have been a better test program if it would have lasted a full year, to allow officers time to adjust and included the whole Patrol Division. Most of administration was not in favor of the program when it was presented and it appears that the only reason that the program was conducted was to appease some members of the Police Association.

The cost benefits will vary from agency to agency. Before an agency can see much of a benefit, it must be able to reduce it's overtime and sick leave substantially without adversely affecting manpower and productivity. It must also be able to keep the number of fleet accidents down, which in

some cases, is inherent to fatigue. A major factor that can determine whether the above is accomplished is the officers themselves. If the officers are not completely supportive of the program, then more than likely, it will fail. In Longview, most of the officers in patrol were against the program from the outset and it failed.

Conclusion/Recommendations

This policy research project is presented for the purpose of looking at the use of twelve hour shifts for today's law enforcement officers as a viable alternative to eight hour shifts. This project provides information on the history of twelve hour work schedules, information from prior studies, and a review of nine Texas agencies that have tried twelve hour shifts.

The issues that were examined are whether; 1) twelve hour shifts are as beneficial to the agency as it might be to the officers, 2) twelve hour shifts were too long for an officer to work without fatigue or stress setting in, 3) officer survival instincts were adversely effected, 4) manpower and productivity were effected, 5) motor vehicle accidents increased, 6) complaints against officers increased, 7) sick leave increased, 8) overtime increased, 9) the officers personal and family lives were adversely effected.

After reviewing all the information submitted, there does not appear to be any major advantages for an agency to switch to twelve hour shifts. Only two agencies had a slight reduction in sick leave and only one had

a reduction in overtime expenditures. Morale was up in two agencies but down in most. There was no change in the number of complaints against officers but there was an increase in fleet accidents in one agency. Fatigue and stress was a problem in about half of the agencies. There seemed to be a slight reduction in manpower but not productivity. Officers from about one third of the agencies said that the twelve hour shifts had a negative effect on their family or personal lives. Unless an agency is faced with a major reduction in manpower, budget cuts and very low morale, twelve hour shifts would probably not be beneficial to that agency.

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