

**The Bill Blackwood  
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**12-Hour Shifts**

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**An Administrative Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Required for Graduation from the  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Compressed shifts, 12-hour shifts in particular, are relevant to contemporary law enforcement because of the value police agencies place on their community and their officers. Using compressed shift is also relevant because in today's political and social environment, it is becoming more and more necessary for police managers to explore every way possible to maximize the taxpayers' dollars. Moreover, it is also very important for police managers to place officers on a shift that will be most beneficial to the officers in terms of their health and mental well being. Along this line of thinking, managers must also find a way to schedule officers to shifts that are the most effective and efficient for the police organization, which is often a daunting task.

Today, police agencies, whether local, state, or federal, strive for excellence. A commitment to excellence means examining every aspect of what these agencies do. As with almost every industry, policing spends more money on human resources than anything else. Law enforcement's most important function is dealing with people. Therefore, it is incumbent upon each agency to utilize their manpower to the betterment of the agency, the community, and to the officers.

The purpose of this research is to determine whether or not compressed shifts (a 40-hour week worked in fewer than five days for patrol officers and their supervisors) are healthier for the officers involved and are just as effective and efficient with regards to service delivery. In today's policing environment, it is necessary to look into budgetary constraints in developing a patrol officers' schedule. If a compressed shift is more efficient with regard to an agency's budget, then this is a factor that must be

explored. Obviously, this is not the only aspect to examine, but it is a contributing factor in making a determination.

The method of inquiry used by the researcher included: a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, a survey distributed to nine police agencies, and a personal interview. The researcher discovered that 12-hour shifts for patrol officers are just as effective as traditional eight-hour shifts and are more efficient in terms of cost, sick time usage, vacation usage, and shift camaraderie. It was further discovered that 10-hour shifts are less efficient in terms of staffing around the clock and in a 24-hour day it is easier to divide the shifts up into either eight-hour shifts or 12-hour shifts.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

During the past ten years, the city of Denton, TX Police Department has experimented with a variety of patrol deployment schedules. This effort has been in an attempt to find the best schedule for the organization—a schedule that would meet the department's needs in terms of the allocation of manpower while providing around the clock police service to the citizens of Denton all year long. The Denton Police Department has also placed a great deal of effort into balancing the patrol officers' needs against the department's needs. The management staff of the organization believes that the officers' health and well being are of great importance and are vital to the long-term success of the organization. The purpose of this study is to research whether compressed shifts for patrol officers, and their supervisors, are healthier for the officers involved and are just as effective and efficient with regards to service delivery.

Traditionally, officers have worked eight-hour shifts with variations of either fixed or rotating days off. However, this researcher discovered that "compressed" schedules, a 40-hour week worked in fewer than five days, were being implemented in law enforcement as early as 1970. The researcher will conduct a review of literature on the subject of compressed work schedules, will attempt to determine if 12-hour shifts are healthier for officers, to provide current and accurate information that will substantiate if a specific shift schedule is better: compressed, or the more traditional, eight-hour schedules. In addition, this researcher will conduct a poll of police departments in the north Texas area that have experimented with 12-hour shifts. The information that these agencies can relate may prove invaluable. The researcher will also determine

whether there is a direct link between working longer hours in a compressed schedule and officer injury, sick time usage, overtime accrual, and officer morale.

This research paper will provide information regarding the alternative scheduling to any agency that is considering compressed shifts at their agency. Police agencies should look to the private sector for examples of how some of the most successful companies are providing customer service. Southwest Airlines was profitable in 2001, while other airlines were struggling financially due to the after-effects of the September 11 tragedy. While there are a myriad of reasons why, one of the most prevalent reason why the airline company continues to be successful is their commitment to customer service. But, ask their senior management what their company's number one asset is and one will be told that it is their employees. Leadership makes the employee "number one" to the company, not the customer. Customer service is a by-product of happy, well-adjusted employees. The researcher believes that this accomplishment is not only possible in policing but is necessary in today's ever-evolving world.

The intended outcome of this research paper is to provide information regarding compressed and traditional shifts and the effects of working these shifts on patrol officers at all hours of the day and night. Another anticipated finding is that the research on compressed shifts may suggest that some policing agencies may choose to switch to compressed shifts to provide increased "officer coverage" and to provide better health benefits to the agency's employees. The idea behind compressed shifts is that officers will have longer periods of rest between shifts (on their days off). Therefore, it is believed that scheduling officers to longer, yet fewer, shifts will result in officers

functioning at their best (because they will be better rested when they return to work), preserve their health and safety and will, in turn, benefit the public at large.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

If a police agency is considering a compressed work schedule, the agency should review the Texas Local Government Code—in particular, chapters 142 and 143. Chapter 142 requires cities of a population of more than 10,000 to obtain signed waivers agreeing to adopt a work schedule that requires them to work more hours in a week than is required of other city employees (Vernon's Texas Codes Annotated, pp. 33 – 34). If the police agency adapts a 12-hour work schedule, it is likely that an officer would work 32 hours in one week and 48 in the next (or, 36 one week and 44 the next). For the sake of fair pay, an 80-hour pay period should be adapted—this is what happened in Denton, TX.

The Los Angeles Police Department conducted a one-year test of compressed shift scheduling in 1994. They found that compressed work schedules were an important recruitment and retention tool. They believe that 12-hour shifts are basically cost neutral and that 10-hour shifts create a 10 – 15 percent increase in personnel and logistics. Compressed schedules have positive impact on patrol officer morale. In their experience, sick time decreased and the longer shifts had little impact on on-duty injuries (Williams 1995).

Although this researcher is concerned that productivity could decrease when working longer hours in a compressed shift, most research has indicated that this concern is unfounded. Frequent shift rotation and too little rest between shifts have far more negative effects on productivity. This has been this researcher's personal

experience, as well. It should be noted that when a police agency moves from an eight-hour shift to a 12-hour shift, the officers actually come to work 78 fewer days a year. With more time off, police officers can spend more time with their families and become more a part of the community they serve (Metzger 1995). Therefore, they may be working longer hours when at work but have more time off when not actually working. This is yet another reason that officers will be well-rested when coming to work.

There has long been concern for officers who work at night. Policing is an around-the-clock necessity in America. Therefore, officers will have to work during the nighttime and be forced to sleep during the day. The inability to adapt to daytime sleeping can lead to digestive trouble ranging from dyspepsia, epigastria, or peptic ulcers (O'Neill and Cushing 1991).

Shift work impacts officers while on and off duty. There is concern for the service to the community and the safety of officers and their health. It is reported that 20 percent of employees, policing or other industries, are not able to adjust to shift work. Supervisors and administrators must learn to identify these employees. Agencies must teach their first-line supervisors to recognize problems with officers related to shift work (Arrington 1998).

Fatigue is a widespread problem that can seriously affect a police officer's health, safety and performance. Evidence from different sources points toward high levels of fatigue among police officers. This researcher cannot find contrary evidence. Police managers and administrators want to do their best to protect their officers and their communities from the hazards of excess fatigue. Learning to manage police fatigue is



likely to leave us with safer, healthier officers and, as a consequence, safer, healthier and more just communities (Vila 2000).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research question to be examined considers whether or not police agencies should consider compressed shifts. In an ever changing field of endeavor, it is very important to spend the taxpayer's money wisely, to find a shift that is healthier for the officers involved, and to meet the needs of the department in terms of providing service to the public and to adequately staff the shift with manpower. The researcher hypothesizes that compressed shifts, working 40 hours in fewer than five days, are healthier for officers and provide effective and efficient service to the public. Another question will be to determine which compressed shift is better, 10-hour or 12-hour.

The method of inquiry will include a review of articles, journals, a survey distributed to nine police agencies, personal interviews, and previously published administrative research papers (ARPs). The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of compressed shifts will include a survey. The researcher will survey nine police agencies that have experimented with compressed shifts. The size of the survey will consist of a series of questions distributed to nine police agencies from North Texas. The survey will be conducted by the use of a telephone interview. The response rate to the survey instrument resulted in 100 percent return. This information led the researcher to draw conclusions. The researcher will analyze the information obtained from the survey by drawing conclusions from the experiences of police agencies that have experimented with compressed shifts.

## **FINDINGS**

The researcher found that of the North Texas police agencies identified that have experimented with compressed shifts, only one has gone back to a traditional eight-hour workday. This agency has now experienced decreased officer morale for this move. The other eight agencies have a 12-hour patrol deployment schedule. It has been concluded that for most agencies, a 12-hour shift schedule is preferable to all others. There are several reasons for endorsing a 12-hour schedule over 10-hour and eight-hour schedules. With 10-hour shifts, a police agency actually requires more officers because of the inherent shift overlap. The 10-hour shift is liked, and often preferred, by officers. However, from a managerial perspective, 10-hour shifts are often difficult to manage due to the fact that it does require the use of more officers. This can be very taxing on smaller agencies. The 10-hour shift configuration has problems similar to those of the eight-hour shift and has the added drawback of not fitting easily into a 24-hour day (Metzger 1995).

The eight north Texas police agencies that continue to utilize the 12-hour patrol deployment schedule report that officer morale is higher compared to the usage of the eight-hour shifts. These eight agencies also report no discernable difference in officer fatigue or errors that can be contributed to 12-hour shifts. Four cities experience no change in the use of sick time. Three cities saw initial decreases in sick leave but then use leveled off to pre-12-hour shift numbers. Seven cities experience no change in vacation usage. Two cities had slight decreases in vacation usage. None of the cities surveyed experienced a change in the amount of FMLA time used by officers.

None of the cities saw a change in the amount of officer “turnover” after implementing 12-hour shifts. One city had a “dramatic” decrease in turnover, which was attributed to officer satisfaction with the new shifts. Seven cities experienced no change in the number of police recruit applicants. One city had an increase in applicants after the implementation of 12-hour shifts. One city had an increase in applicants but it was attributed to the city’s tremendous growth rate.

None of the cities surveyed found officers to be less willing to come in on their day off to cover a shift vacancy. Two cities mentioned that because overtime has decreased as a result of 12-hour shifts and related policies, their officers are more eager now to work overtime when needed because there are fewer opportunities available. Seven cities said there was no increased negativity among shifts. It is realized that negativity is subjective and difficult to gauge. Two cities reported that there was a slight rise in negativity on the shifts. This could be explained by “the change factor”. Police officers are known to not take change well.

Seven cities reported that officer morale increased after the change to 12-hour shifts. One of these seven cities reported that the switch to 12-hour shifts is the best thing that agency has done for the employees in years. One city reported that the officers were initially against the switch from eight-hour shifts to 12-hours, but now they are very much in favor of them. In fact, this agency now has difficulty getting patrol officers to move into other departments within the agency (traffic, detective, etc.). Two cities reported that morale stayed the same.

## CONCLUSIONS

The issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not police agencies should consider deploying officers using a compressed shift schedule, working a 40-hour week in less than five days. The purpose of this research was to examine the pros and cons of compressed shifts and to attempt to determine which is “better”—a 10-hour or 12-hour shift schedule. The purpose was also to determine whether compressed shifts are healthier for the officers involved and more effective and efficient for the police agencies.

The research question that was examined focused on the health of police officers and whether an officer’s health and happiness contributed to better customer service. The researcher hypothesized that by working on compressed shifts, police officers would be better rested when returning to duty. This, in turn, would lead to better customer service. It is also hypothesized that compressed shifts are healthier for the officers and more effective and efficient for police agencies.

The researcher concluded from the findings that compressed shifts are healthier for the police officers involved because officers are better rested when they return to work. Officers have 78 more days off a year when working a 12-hour shift than an eight-hour shift, therefore they have more time with their families and in their own communities. This may prove to be healthier for families, as well (or rather, the families may have a healthier relationship). In addition, it is concluded that 12-hour shifts are more efficient for police agencies. This conclusion was drawn because of two primary reasons. First, more officers are available in a 12-hour shift configuration than an eight-hour schedule. Therefore, more officers are actually on-duty working when using a 12-

hour schedule. In Denton, when utilizing the eight-hour deployment strategy, officers and their supervisors did not always work together due to varying days off. Officers had to cover the “streets” all seven days a week—so, days off were staggered. Secondly, supervisors (patrol sergeants) generally had better days off while junior officers usually had “worse” days off. Therefore, while a sergeant might have had Saturday and Sunday off, the sergeant’s junior officers typically had days off during the week. This proved problematic. A junior officer usually requires more direct supervision than senior officers and “shift camaraderie” was much less prevalent.

Twelve-hour schedules are also more effective for agencies than 10-hour shifts due to the fact that there would be an overlap of officers on a 10-hour schedule. This overlap of officers leads to a shortage of officers. Unless the police agency has an abundance of officers, which most do not, then the 10-hour shift is less efficient and effective for the administration of the agency. Typically, officers prefer working a 10-hour shift. But administratively, it does not seem to work out as well as “12s”. The 12-hour shift is more effective and efficient than an eight-hour shift also because of the “Southwest Airline Effect” (SWA Effect). By placing officers on a 12-hour shift, they will be happier and healthier which may lead to better customer service (Dahler, C., Personal Interview 2007). The improved customer service will benefit the officers themselves, the police agency who deploys the 12-hour shift, and to the public we serve (our customers).

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