

**The Bill Blackwood
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**Impacts to Officers Working Routine Work Shifts
of 12 Hours or More**

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ABSTRACT

Police agencies are expected to do more with less and in doing so are asking more of their officers. One way agencies are meeting the demand of their communities is for officers to work 12 hour shifts or longer. On the surface this appears to be an effective strategy, however there are significant ramifications involved. This study examines the negative effects on officers after working extended hours and the consequences that are beginning to emerge as a result. It is important to understand that the effects can vary from a range of health issues to monetary consequences to the agency.

Furthermore, understanding how the body reacts when fatigued will provide leaders with invaluable insights to officer actions. If working extended hours is not challenged, a department's liability can increase as will the cost of doing business. Understanding what can occur should place a burden on agency heads to consider shortened work shifts so as not to affect the officer's health and wellness and limit their liability as job demands continue to increase.

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INTRODUCTION

Based on the wisdom of the nation's forefathers, peace officers have an awesome power entrusted to them by the people. Peace officers must guard that trust and act diligently with respect and dignity to all those they encounter in the best and worst of times. For peace officers to make split second decisions that may alter a person's life forever, they must do so with the understanding of the law and the impact it has on others. Many people entering into this profession understand there will be sacrifices made, however few realize the impact it has on personal health, quality of life, income, family, job stress, and personal longevity.

Law enforcement professionals are recruited from the communities they live in. A fundamental belief is the community are the police and the police are the community. Due to the nature of services expected by the community, law enforcement must provide available resources any time of day or night. For law enforcement organizations to fulfill the expectations of their communities, they must have peace officers who must work during the night and/or rotate between days and nights. In many industries the typical work week is Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm. However, law enforcement is a profession like few others-it has a necessary evil. It is a profession requiring people to work 365 days a year 24 hours a day 7 days a week to meet the needs of the community. Even as demands on resources increase due to the change in technology, shrinking budgets, and more work responsibilities, peace officers must still be ready to answer the call regardless of the time of day.

As law enforcement agencies work to meet the needs and expectations of the community, they must do more with less. This comes with a cost - officers working

compressed work weeks with routine schedules of 12-hour workdays. With these increased responsibilities, consequences are starting to emerge: officer fatigue, wellness, liability, and costs. Law enforcement leaders need to start understanding the effects of shift work on officer's fatigue, health/wellness, and the liability costs to both the officers and the organizations. Leaders need to understand the effects of long shifts, while at the same time balancing the necessities created by the organizations, the communities, and the officers themselves. If law enforcement leaders believe these unforeseen consequences to be true, then they must start to take action by minimizing the effects of extended hours/shifts worked by officers. Law enforcement leaders should consider the impacts on peace officers who work shifts longer than 10-hours per day routinely. If law enforcement leaders fail to reflect on the potential internal and external impacts on officers, at some point our communities will. If law enforcement organizations fail to police themselves, others will do it for them. Law enforcement leaders must set the standard for change and take a stand that the most valuable commodity is their people.

POSITION

Due to the demands from the community for 24-hour policing, there has been a shift to compressed work weeks. For many years the average work week in law enforcement was similar to many other professions, Monday through Friday from 8am-5pm; however in recent years this has changed to compressed work weeks (Pearsall, 2012). A compressed work week is when the days in the work week are shortened while still working forty hours. Some agencies work 10 hours, 12 hours, or more than 13 hours during one shift to obtain 40 hours in a week. There are many different

combinations of days worked that agencies use to get 40 hours. Some of these combinations are determined by agency needs, collective bargaining agreements, or even pay periods (Bürger & Nachreiner, 2018).

A recent shift study concluded the most efficient way for shifts to be designed, have the most positive impact to the organization, while maintaining trust, flexibility, and work life balance, was for the agency to determine the main schedule while allowing some flexibility for the employee (Bürger & Nachreiner, 2018). Law enforcement agencies have an obligation to their employees and communities to re-design their schedules.

The nature of police work is unpredictable. Officers can work an entire shift with little to no activity and in the last hour a major incident occurs requiring personnel to work extended time frames, sometimes past regularly scheduled hours. By the very nature of this unpredictability, officers will work longer than their scheduled shifts. When officers are scheduled to work 12 hours and those hours are extended by 5 to 6 hours the impact of a 17-19 hour shift can be significant on the officer. Recent studies have been completed indicating that officers staying awake into the 17th or 19th hours, even so much as 24 hours, have the impairment of an intoxicated person and in some cases perform worse than an intoxicated person (Senjo, 2011). Not only does prolonged wakefulness (longer than 24 hours) mimic behaviors of an intoxicated person, but the area of the brain that controls judgement, attention, and visual function also decreases (Lindsey, 2007).

Studies are showing the impacts of longer shifts, shift work in general, and less sleep, are affecting neurobehavioral performance and neurocognitive outcomes (Bell,

Viriden, Lewis, & Cassidy, 2015). The negative effects on “neurobehavioral performance include decreased mood, cognitive performance, and motor functions, including impairment in memory, attention, and executive skills (organizing, planning, and cognitive efficiency)” (Bell et al., 2015, p. 322). When researchers completed assessments on the neurobehavioral functions of officers who had been awake for 17 hours, officers demonstrated a performance level of an intoxicated person with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.05 (Lindsey, 2007). In addition, officers being awake in the 20th hour showed a BAC of 0.10 (Lindsey, 2007). The legal limit for drivers in most states is a BAC below 0.08 for passenger vehicles and 0.04 for commercial vehicles.

Peace officers are expected to work any hour of the day. Peace officers are expected to complete many tasks during an average day that require the use of neurobehavioral performance. Some of those tasks could include report writing, conflict resolution, split-second use of force decisions, managing critical incidents, managing emotions (self and others), interpreting and applying the law, or communicating with others, just to name a few. A study brings to the forefront nine areas of work place performance that can be influenced by fatigue, which includes: understanding large amounts of information in small time frame without interruptions, managing incidents and implementing ideas, assessing situations and anticipating responses, being able to think of innovative solutions, showing empathy for citizens, being in control of personal emotions, being self-aware of actions, being able to accurately recount information, and being able to convey information in a way others can understand (Lindsey, 2007).

For the purposes of this discussion, fatigue is defined as “a mental and/or physical state resulting from insufficient good quality sleep or from prolonged or intense physical, emotional, or mental effort that tends to decrease alertness, impair performance potential, worsen mood, and interfere with decision making” (Vila, Morrison, & Kenney, 2002, p. 5). When discussing fatigue, it is important to note the body has a natural expectation to sleep-known as the circadian rhythm (a daily cyclical rhythm). A natural circadian rhythm for many people is to be more active during the daylight or early evening and more restful/drowsy at night to allow for sleep (Vila et al., 2002, p. 5). During the peak times for a person’s circadian rhythm, “eyes focus more easily, and physical abilities and coordination peak” (Vila et al., 2002, p. 6). However, when an officer’s circadian rhythm is altered or disrupted it can have a negative effect on cognitive functions (Senjo, 2011). The lack of sleep impacts the neurocognitive functions significantly in the areas of “social, financial, and human costs” (Bell et al., 2015, p. 322).

According to Vila (2002), “the major administratively controllable culprits responsible for police fatigue are biologically insensitive shift rotation schemes, excessive mandatory or elective overtime assignments, frequent off-duty court appearances, and the use of extra and double shifts to cope with personnel shortages” (p. 5). There are other industries that have completed studies on shift work and the results strongly caution administrators before implementing 12 hour shifts or longer as it results to professions functioning in high-risk activities (Amendola, Weisburd, Hamilton, Jones, & Slipka, 2011). In research conducted on officer sleep and performance, officers who routinely had 6 hours of sleep and experienced a one-hour sleep deficit

over the course of one week, had the same performance issues of a person with a sustained wakefulness of 24 hours (Bell et al., 2015). Police work falls into one of those professions that perform high-risk activities, such as, the taking of life, restricting the freedom of individuals, and performing lifesaving activities. An officer's shift rotation schedule should be created to protect the officer's ability to rest themselves and from over scheduling. Peace officers rarely get sufficient sleep and are more probable to get too little (Bell et al., 2015).

Due to the nature of the law enforcement profession requiring officers to work around the clock, studies are showing officers being diagnosed with sleeping disorders. In many cases, officers are not even aware they may have a sleeping disorder. Researchers at Brigham and Women's Hospital conducted a sleep study involving approximately 5,000 peace officers and found just under half (40%) of the peace officers had a sleep disorder-this is about twice the average population (15-20%) (Chapman, 2013). Some of the sleeping disorders documented were: obstructive sleep apnea, moderate to severe insomnia, and shift work disorder (Chapman, 2013).

Shift Work Disorder is described as "excessive wake time sleepiness and insomnia associated with night work" (Pearsall, 2012, p. 37). While officers understand when entering this profession, they may need to work longer hours, many are not aware the profession would result in a sleeping disorder. Unfortunately, some of these disorders can carry past active years of employment into retirement because the body has difficulty readjusting after so many years (Conn, 2013). In addition to sleeping disorders, officers are at higher risk for "post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse disorder, and increased risk for suicide" (James & Vincent, 2018, p. 12).

Not only does working extended shift hours effect the amount of sleep officers' log, it also impacts their wellness and quality of life. Wellness can cover many areas, including but not limited to, mental and physical health. Officers report more concerns about health status when combining work weeks longer than 40 hours per week while working 12-hour shifts (Amendola et al., 2011). Some of the problems officers experienced when working over 13-hour shifts were: an increase in stress, irritability, lapses in judgement, daytime dysfunction, and chronic diseases (Bell et al., 2015). During another study, officers who worked 10-hour shifts enjoyed a better quality of life than those on 8 or 12 hour shifts (Bell et al., 2015). Surprisingly, while officers did not prefer to work the longer 13-hour shifts, their loved ones preferred that shift for the officer (Bell et al., 2015).

When agency administrators look at costs, sometimes looking at the real cost is the wrong area of focus. While it is important to know the actual cost, sometimes there is an incalculable cost of the impact to the employee. It is not uncommon for administrators who make rotating or extended shift hours to work the same shifts (Moore, 2006). Administrators need to understand that potential long shift hours or multiple rotations can cause potential problems. A failure to do so could also carry an unintended cost. Officers working longer hours would accrue a sleep deficit which would compile over time "negatively affecting health and performance, and decreases vigilance" and reduce the officers effectiveness as an employee (Bell et al., 2015, p. 321).

Due to the increased scrutiny of law enforcement actions and knowing fatigue can effect officer performance in a delayed or negative manner, compressed work

weeks with single shifts longer than 10 hours per day (e.g. 12 hour shifts) need to be reviewed. During Bell et al.'s (2015) study, especially in the area of cognitive abilities, officers had an increase in a lapse of focus by 3.5% for each hour of sleep lost. This could impact an officer's decision to use force and the type to use. An error in use of force could have a significant impact to the community, the officer or the agency; while also carrying a large actual cost to the governing body. If the affects of long shifts to the officer's health and wellness are not compelling on its own, increased liability should compell law enforcement leader to make changes in scheduling.

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

Law enforcement agencies have a responsibility to meet the many demands from city leaders to provide security for large-scale events and from the community regarding day-to-day service delivery expectations. To meet these expectations, many agency administrators are being asked to do more with less. Due to these demands, officers are working longer shifts and/or secondary employment. Many people inside and outside the law enforcement profession can see there may be some impacts of extended hours per shift, primarily fatigue. If law enforcement leaders fail to look to the future and see the impact of fatigue on officer's daily performance, there is a distinct possibility that law enforcement as a profession will be regulated by a federal agency, similar to "pilots, locomotive engineers, ship captains, public transportation and commercial truck drivers, firefighters, and emergency room doctors" (Lindsey, 2007, p. 2).

Dr. Nancy Collop states, "The ...sleep you need is defined by the amount that allows you to not be sleepy" (Moore, 2006, p. 37). The officer or the agency are

responsible for regulating the officer's sleeping habits. Ultimately the officers are responsible for their sleep habits, preparedness for duty and performance; not administrators (Senjo, 2011). Bell et al (2015) states "Officers often underestimated their level of fatigue" (p. 320). However, if schedules need to be extended due to agency demands, then the sooner officers could return to normal 10-hour shifts (within about 2 months of working 13-plus hour shifts) and issues with sleep quality would return to previous levels (Bell et al., 2015).

However, due to the ongoing demands, neither law enforcement administrators nor officers want to restrict work hours for various reasons (Senjo, 2011). Smaller agencies may not be able to afford the additional cost of hiring more officers and must utilize a 12-hour shift schedule to meet staffing needs. Agencies are implementing different versions of compressed work weeks, as many as 13+ hours in a day, to reduce overtime costs for the agency (Pearsall, 2012). While some agencies are implementing a 12-hour shift schedule with the belief there will be a reduction in costs, "officers who worked 10-hour shifts charged significantly less overtime" over officers who worked 8 or 12-hour shifts (Chapman, 2013, p. 14).

Through the numerous studies showing the impact fatigue has on human behavior, and especially for peace officers, many studies show there was no significant impact on officer work performance, as it applies to firearm qualifications (Bell et al., 2015), health or work-family disagreements (Chapman, 2013). While studies did not show any difference in firearm qualifications or driving performance, there was an increase in vehicle crashes in 10 and 12-hour shifts over 8-hour shifts (Bell et al., 2015). Law enforcement administrators have their reasons for maintaining 12-hour shifts and

officers do as well. Some officers are a better fit for working at night. They are not immune to the effects of fatigue but have a higher resiliency to sleep loss and recovery (Vila, Morrison, & Kenney, 2002). Some officers may not want to have their hours restricted. Possible reasons are to increase wages, to meet expectations of the organization to work more hours, the excitement the career brings, and/or to be part of a select group (Lindsey, 2007).

When working compressed work weeks, officers have more time off from work to rest and prepare themselves for the next work cycle. However, due to the traditionally low wages for officers, officers may need to supplement their income through secondary employment (i.e. shift coverage, off-duty assignments, secondary employment, etc.) with this time off (Lindsey, 2007). In some agencies, officers will work extended schedules to obtain higher level degrees for personal growth or as a requirement for promotion (Senjo, 2011). The potential for promotion appeals to officers wanting to increase their wage. Some agencies provide education reimbursement for these programs to reduce the cost to officers, however officers may still need to sacrifice their sleeping hours to attend the courses. While officers understand the need to work longer hours, officers who worked shifts over 13 hours reported a lower quality of life and preferred to work 10-hour shifts (Bell et al., 2015).

RECOMMENDATION

Law enforcement agencies should take a careful and thorough look prior to implementing compressed work week schedules of longer than 10-hours per shift. As previously mentioned, the impact of officer fatigue to the officer and the organization is significant. Law enforcement administrators must consider the officer's personal

wellness and the potential liability involved prior to implementing routine work shifts past 10 hours. This will not be an easy change because organizations can come into conflict with budgets and political/community expectations. Officers themselves may have difficulty seeing the long-term gain due to cultural expectations or working long hours, personal responsibilities to the family income, and/or to obtain achievement towards higher education.

Before a successful implementation can occur, dialogue needs to begin about the short and long-term health effects, organization and personal liabilities, and the financial impacts. Administrators need to be prepared to accept that there is an urgency to this crisis and make a call to action. The most successful implementation of any major change will require the assistance of influential leaders (both formal and informal) in an organization. These leaders need to communicate why the change is necessary. Agency administrators need to change or make new policies regarding hours worked, when appropriate regulate the maximum number of hours worked, and accept input from officers about what may be the best fit.

In the words of risk manager Gordon Graham, "predictable is preventable". Studies are showing the law enforcement professions there are negative effects of working excessively long shifts. If administrators and officers do not start making changes it is predictable what could happen.

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