

Shift comparisons for the Conway Police Department:

8 hour versus 12 hour shifts

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In emergency services, the world is a 24 hour community. In all hours of the day and night, larger cities provide continual police services to protect their citizens' lives and property. In order to accommodate this 24 hour service, patrol work schedules need to be designed that are outside of the 9 to 5 norm. These shifts have different risks and benefits that are inherent to each shift and some may differ because of the culture of the department where the shift is used. Law enforcement professionals may schedule their patrol shifts for many different reasons. However, most believe that the selected patrol shift should balance the needs of the department and the community. This is usually determined through studying where calls originate, time of day, and the concentration of the workload (Moore, 1995). With the computerization of police work, this information is fairly easy to gather and evaluate.

The individual officers' perspective regarding good shifts to work is often different than the department's. "Shiftwork experts often are asked what is the best or worst work schedule" (Rosa & Colligan, 1997, p. 5). This is a difficult question to answer. No one schedule will work with every department in every situation. In my career, I have worked many different schedules, and each has their own positive and negative aspects. Each individual officer can have his own likes or dislikes about a particular shift due to professional, personal, and stage of life issues.

The purpose of this paper is to compare the 8 hour and 12 hour shift from the officer's viewpoint. National research will be compared with information gathered from the Patrol Services Division of the Conway Police Department through a shift survey. I will compare the two shifts, look at rotating versus permanent shift, sleep and fatigue issues, and look at our results compared to another agencies published study. Through this study we will gain a better

understanding of the attitude toward the two shifts by patrol officers at the Conway Police Department.

The Conway Police Department Shift Survey

The Patrol Services Division (PSD) of the Conway Police Department is composed of four shifts of fourteen officers, two sergeants, and one lieutenant each. Including officers and supervisors, a total of 68 officers are assigned to PSD. Currently, PSD is operating on a 12 hour shift with a six-month rotation, and each officer gets a three day weekend on alternate weeks.

The survey was printed and given out at shift meetings rather than done electronically through email. Prior to its distribution, I sent out an email explaining that the survey was for my School of Law Enforcement Supervision research paper and not officially for the Conway Police Department. I requested that no names be given on the survey, only age and years seniority. Of the 68 officers, I received 34 responses to the survey. Not all of the surveys were fully completed by the responding officers.

In order to better understand the results of the survey, the returned surveys were broken down into age brackets. In the first group, group 20, the 13 officers ranged from 21-29 years of age with the average age being 25.9 years with 2.92 years of experience. In the second group, group 30, the 9 officers ranged in age from 30-39 years with the average being 35.4 years of age with 6.55 years of experience. In the third group, group 40, the 9 officers' age range was 40-49, with the average of 42.55 years of age with 15.72 years of experience. In the last group, group 50, the 3 officers ranged in age from 50-52 years with the average age being 51 with 14 years of experience.

8 hour versus 12 hour shifts

Traditionally, small and medium sized departments mostly rely on the 8 hour shift with other shifts such as the 12 hour gaining popularity (Amendola, Hamilton, & Wychkoff, 2006). Generally, the 8 hour shift is comprised of three separate shifts that run from 0600-1400 hours, 1400-2200 hour, and 2200-0600 hours. With 8 hours worked, 16 hours are left to sleep and take care of personal issues. With this shift, days off are usually decided by seniority. This creates an issue where during a busy weekend your shift may consist of the least experienced officers, supervised by the newest supervisor. Additionally, officers may only work certain days with each supervisor and therefore creating a “lack of command consistency” (Moore, 1995).

The 12 hour shift has been gaining popularity nationwide, and was introduced to the Conway Police Department about 3 years ago. With this shift, every officer is scheduled at the same time, creating a squad concept. This maintains the command consistency that is lacking with the 8 hour shift (Moore, 1995). With a study conducted in Lincoln, Nebraska, the department reported excellent coverage during peak hours, and their staggered start allowed consistent coverage. This could be done with an 8 hour shift, but would require an additional shift to help with peak hours (Sundermeier, 2011).

Although the Lincoln study found officers in favor of the 12 hour shift, the CPD survey revealed different results. Overall, 64.7% of our officers preferred the 8 hour compared to 35.2% who prefer the 12 hour shift. Only Group 20 preferred the longer shift, but only by one, 7 votes to 6 votes. Groups 30, 40, and 50 were all in favor of the 8 hour shift with scores of 7-2, 6-3, and 3-0 respectively.

The second question in the survey asked if their shift choice would be the same if seniority did not dictate days off, meaning seniority would be balanced. Overwhelmingly, the

officers responded that their choice would not change by a margin of 81.8%. If this is the case, we can conclude that the choice of 8 hour shifts is not seniority based even though several officers listed seniority as a positive component of the 8 hour shift.

Rotating versus Permanent Shifts

When discussing differences in shifts, the topic will come up whether to rotate or have permanent shifts. I suspect that many departments rotate because they believe that it is the only fair way to deploy their shifts where each officer would work on the shift he likes and also on the one that he dislikes. This does not take into account what could be best for the health of the officers.

Every person has a biological clock called a circadian cycle. This cycle regulates when we sleep and when we are awake. If it is disturbed for one day, it will take five days for urinary electrolytes to adjust, eight days for the heart rate to adjust, and six days for body temperature to adjust. If deprived of normal sleeping patterns, researchers have found that people can fall into a “microsleep” for a few seconds. This can result in the person stopping the performance of a task. Imagine this happening while driving a squad car. Another problem is the inability to make coherent decisions (Volanti).

In our survey, respondents were asked which they prefer, permanent or rotating shifts. The totals were 35.2% in favor of permanent, and 64.7% in favor of rotating. What is noteworthy of this question is the response by age groups. Group 20 preferred rotating by a score of 12-1. Group 30 preferred rotating by a score of 5-4. Group 40 preferred permanent by a score of 6-3. Group 50 preferred rotating by a score of 2-1. Except for Group 50, we can see that the desire for rotating shifts is inversely related to the age of the officer. This is supported

by research that states that an officer's ability to adjust to shift work deteriorates with age. This same research states that officers working rotating shifts have greater health problems, are more lethargic, suffer from low morale, and pose greater safety problems (Aveni, 1999). I question whether Group 50's numbers would be different if there were a larger pool of officers.

Permanent shifts reduce change. Several police departments have noticed a decline in sick leave and increased productivity with the addition of permanent shifts (Aveni, 1990). Officers were asked in the survey which shift would increase productivity and reduce sick leave. The answers tended to be 8 hour dayshift; however, this is a subjective answer so I would not put much credence in it. These are measurable statistics and would be a good topic for additional study.

Sleep and Fatigue

Most shift workers develop a sleep debt. This occurs because shift workers average 7 less hours per week of sleep. Workers on rotating shifts average 5.5 hours of sleep while on night shift. Fatigue happens when this sleep debt exists. The effect of this debt is that individuals do not perform as well in monotonous tasks such as driving a vehicle. If sleep is limited to just three hours, the effect on performance will be similar to someone drinking the legal limit of alcohol. This sleep debt also deteriorates motivation and attitude (Aveni, 1999).

The CDC tells us that 6 hours sleep is a minimum, with most people needing more. Fatigue on shift work happens because most people on night shift revert back to a day schedule on their days off. On a 12 hour shift, only 12 hours exist to take care of personal matters. People will sacrifice rest and sleep to take care of personal issues. The biggest cause for this loss is the

adjusting of sleep schedule in order to see family and friends, especially spouses or children (Rosa & Colligan, 1997, p. 16).

In an opposing opinion, Ed Jacques (2009) in an article published in the Law Enforcement Journal states that “the vast majority of employees will report little or no fatigue after two to three months. Experts say that this corrective process will take place sooner if employees are more active in their time off”. He further tells us that most officers and supervisors do not list fatigue as part of the 12 hour shift unless they were rotating. Officers on the 12 hour permanent shift said that fatigue did not adversely affect their work, relationship with peers, or attitude toward the public.

So how does our survey data compare to the information discussed? For Group 20 the average was 6.42 hours of sleep while on day shift and 6.46 while on night shift. Group 30 averages were 6.16 hours of sleep on day shift and 6.66 hours on night shift. Group 40 reported 5.77 hours of sleep while on day shift and 5.33 hours on night shift. Group 50 reported their sleep averages as 6.66 hours on day shift and 6.5 hours while on night shift. Group 50 had the smallest group of officers polled.

If we stay with the premise that 6 hours of sleep is the minimum, then we can see that all groups are getting the minimum amount of sleep except for Group 40. Group 40 is going into sleep debt on both day shift and night shift. If we go on the common belief that individuals need a full 8 hours of sleep to feel rested, then all age groups are in sleep debt.

I polled the officers regarding whether any particular shift or rotation affected their sleep. The most popular response reported by all groups is the inability to sleep during the day while on night shift. Our circadian cycle naturally wants us to be up during the day and to sleep at night. If night shift officers are reverting to a day shift on their days off, then they are causing their

rhythm to get off track. When I was on patrol, I was guilty of this, and my sleep tended to be sporadic and not restful. When I rotated to day shift, I had the opposite experience.

Most of the other comments about sleep difficulty dealt with night shift. Group 20 reported the inability to sleep because of the inconsistency of their schedule due to court appearances. Group 30 had several officers who stated that they had to care for children during the day and their sleep schedules were unreliable. Group 40 had a few officers that reported that their long drive home contributed to less time available for sleep. When combined with an hour long drive to and from work, combined with preparation for the day and unwinding after work, we can see how their “12 hours for personal issues” is greatly reduced.

The CPD survey numbers agree with the previous statement that as you age it becomes more difficult to adjust to shift work. Although groups 20 and 30 are similar in their sleep numbers, there is a dramatic drop in hours slept in Group 40. In our twenties, we are starting our adult lives, getting married, and starting a family. When we reach our thirties, our children are getting older and their schedule begins filling up with sports, school activities, and social functions. In your forties those children are in high school or college and present even more requests on your time. Or if you are like me and started your family late, you are in your forties attending your children’s activities that most people went through a decade earlier. All these things make demands on our time, and as the CDC study stated, we will sacrifice sleep and rest in order to spend time with family.

Comparison of the Conway Police Department to the Lincoln Nebraska Study

The Lincoln Police Department in Lincoln, Nebraska conducted a one year trial with the 12 hour shift. Over 300 sworn personnel work for the department, and the study was conducted

with 37 officers and supervisors. Two of the concerns prior to the trial were fatigue and court scheduling, both of which were mentioned in the CPD survey responses.

The department recognized that healthy sleep would be a priority in reducing fatigue. Supervisors played a key role in managing calls that came at the end of the shift. Some calls were held for the oncoming shift, and others were stabilized until fresh officers could respond and take over the call. One problem with this is that initially officers resented what appeared to be other officers dodging calls. In time this was alleviated by the realization the next shift would do the same for them at the end of their shift.

Court appearances were another source of sleep disruption that could contribute to fatigue. The department brought the courts and prosecutors into the conversation. By bringing in the court personnel responsible for scheduling, court appearances were scheduled to be more in tune with the officers sleep schedule. Conway Police Department did this as well and attempts are made by the courts to work with the officers, although it is not a foolproof system.

After six months, the department conducted a survey about the officers' impressions of 12 hour shifts. Some of the highlights are as follows:

100% wanted to continue with the 12 hour shift.

75% reported being somewhat tired after shift.

6% reported being very tired.

19% reported no fatigue at all.

82% felt very rested after days off.

9% felt somewhat rested after days off.

9% felt no difference from days off on other shifts.

77% rated their mood as very good.

22% rated their mood as fine.

77% reported that positive changes had been noticed by their family.

100% of officers were satisfied with the squad concept of working with the same officers.

What must be remembered is that Lincoln's experiment involved only 12 percent of the department. Their main concern prior to deployment was whether 12 hour shifts would have a negative impact on services provided. Through their trial they discovered that no negative impact occurred and generally their officer's quality of life improved (Sundermeier, 2011).

The Conway Police Department went to the 12 hour shift in 2008. Based on the survey results and observed officer attitude about the 12 hour shift, our results appear to be opposite of the Lincoln Study. As stated earlier, 64.7% of the CPD officers would prefer to go to an 8 hour shift. Additionally, the 35.2% would like the shift to be permanent. Our officers all report sleep times below the common belief of 8 hours needed and one group reports sleep time below the CDC minimum of 6 hours. Every age group reported difficulty sleeping during the day as the number one cause of fatigue. All but 4 officers state that their morale would improve on 8 hour shifts, and the same number believe that they would use less sick time on the 8 hour shift.

Conclusion

As police departments attempt to balance budgetary concerns, needs of the agency, and needs of the community, shift schedules become a tactical way to address these issues. Too many times departments can look at these issues and put the needs of the officers in a secondary position. Truthfully, there is no magic bullet for the scheduling of a police agency. If one schedule balanced all the needs, including the officer's, this would not be a topic that received much discussion.

Through the CPD survey, we can see that our response to the 12 hour shift is different than other agencies in the country. While it is seen as a viable alternative to traditional scheduling, and in many agencies improves morale, it seems to have failed at our department. Our officers believe that the 12 hour shift is detrimental to their sleep patterns; therefore, their health. We have seen how sleep debt affects the body, and our officers are reporting fatigue.

Additionally, we have seen that many of our officers want permanent shifts. Permanent shifts reduce the amount of change that the officer experiences, and is in theory easier to adapt a circadian rhythm. The 8 hour shift also gives officers a predictable work schedule, and allows for time after work to take care of personal issues.

In the comments section of the survey, many officers commented on seniority. Most stated that they thought that the police department did not respect seniority. With the traditional 8 hour shift, senior officers get first pick of days off. The result is usually that busy weekends are worked by newer officers and supervised by the newest supervisors. This could be considered a negative situation; however, I discussed this phenomenon with a Major at our department. He made a strong argument that we do not train our officers to work independently and to make their own decisions. When weekends are worked by newer officers, they learn at a

faster rate and become independent at a faster rate. This is what I experienced when I was promoted. The learning curve was steep, but I gained invaluable experience during this time of my career.

So what is the answer to the best shift for the Conway Police Department? In between the 8 and the 12, the prevailing answer seems to be the 8 hour shift. While the 12 hour shift has seen remarkable success at other agencies, it has reportedly lowered morale and caused sleep issues here. We must balance the needs of the community and the needs of the agency along with consideration for the needs of our officers. This issue should probably be revisited every 5-10 years. As new officers come into our organization the culture changes and alternate shift schedules could become more appropriate.

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