Healthy Officers are Safer Officers: The Nexus Between Performance and Health

A Harvard Kennedy School Webinar about NIJ’s Officer Safety and Wellness Research Portfolio

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With researchers:
Weisburd, Hamilton, Jones, Slipka, Heitmann, Shane, & Ortiz
Survey and Experiment


- 300 randomly selected agencies (50 or more sworn).
- 96% response rate in 2005, 100% in 2009.

Findings
- There has been a significant reduction in routinely rotating shifts; 72% now operate on fixed shifts (up from 54% in 2005).
- Agencies are moving away from traditional 8-hour schedules and trying shifts between 9 and 13 hours.
- Small agencies favor 8-hour and 12-hour shifts; Large agencies favor 10-hour shifts.

Randomized Field Experiment in Two Cities (Detroit, Michigan and Arlington, Texas)

Purpose
- To assess whether shift length has an impact on safety, health, fatigue, performance, or other critical factors
Sample & Measures

326 officers were randomly assigned to either 8-, 10-, or 12-hr shifts, and 275 participated (84%)

Measures consisted of surveys, departmental data, logs of sleep and alertness, and laboratory simulations:

- Driving simulator
- Reaction time measure
- Shooting simulator
- Video vignettes
- Pupilometer
Results

10-hr shifts had advantages over 8-hr shifts

- Officers got ½ hour more sleep per night (3.5 hrs/week)
- Officers liked the shifts better
- Officers worked significantly less overtime

12-hr shifts did not have these advantages, AND officers on these shifts were sleepier and less alert

8-hr shifts were associated with 5 times more overtime than those on 10s, and 3 times more than those on 12s
Implications

- Agencies wishing to adopt 10- or 12-hr shifts should not be too concerned about performance problems.
- However, agencies wishing to adopt 12-hr shifts should proceed with caution because
  - 12-hr officers were more sleepy and less alert
  - Past research suggests increased safety hazards, particularly when combining them with more than 48 hrs of work per week
- Agencies moving to 12-hr shifts should consider
  - Restricting or more closely monitoring overtime and off-duty
  - Establishing policies on sleep and fatigue
- Cost savings related to overtime may be realized by agencies using 10- or 12-hour shifts.
Questions?

- For additional copies of these and other reports, go to: http://policefoundation.org/indexShiftExperiment.html

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