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HOW DOES THE WORK SHIFT AFFECT THE EMOTIONAL STATE AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS OF POLICE OFFICERS?

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ABSTRACT

Law enforcement is a demanding profession, characterized by high levels of occupational stress, unpredictable environments, and non-standard work schedules. Among the various occupational stressors, irregular and extended work schedules have emerged as significant contributors to police officers' emotional strain and deteriorating interpersonal relationships. This study explores how work schedules affect the psychological well-being and personal lives of police officers, drawing from studies in occupational health, psychology, and criminal justice.

Methods: The quantitative research methods as survey, and measurement scale were used based on constructive approach. 100 police members participated in the study during 2024-2025 years. The positive statistical correlation was mentioned between work shift and emotional issues of the police members (officers, and sergeants). More longer work hours were observed more emotional problems, and burnout syndrome in their mental and physical states. These findings highlight the need for law enforcement agencies to consider the human cost of scheduling practices and to implement systemic changes that promote both officer well-being and public safety.

KEYWORDS

Police Officers, Mental Issues, Burnout, Work Shift, Job Conditions

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Introduction.

Police officers often work non-traditional hours, including rotating shifts, night shifts, weekends, and mandatory overtime. These schedules are necessary to maintain round-the-clock public safety, but they have physiological and psychological costs. Vila (2006) highlights that shift work in policing leads to circadian rhythm disruption, impacting sleep and overall functioning. Moreover, Amendola et al. (2011) found that longer shifts (e.g., 12-hour rotations) increased fatigue and reduced alertness, raising concerns about both health and job performance.

Work schedules contribute directly to occupational stress through overwork and lack of recovery time. Violanti et al. (2018) demonstrated that officers on irregular shifts reported higher levels of psychological strain, including suicidal ideation. The lack of control over one's schedule and unpredictability in hours amplify stress, undermining job satisfaction and mental health.

One of the most significant effects of irregular police work schedules is the strain it places on family life. Roberts and Levenson (2001) reported that officers' partners often experience emotional distance, lack of communication, and disrupted family routines, leading to marital dissatisfaction. The unpredictability of shift work can interfere with holidays, school events, and family dinners - key moments that foster emotional bonds.

In addition to family stress, irregular schedules can limit social interactions outside of work. Brough and Frame (2004) observed that police officers on night shifts or rotating rosters often experience social isolation,

reducing opportunities for leisure and emotional support. This social disconnection can also extend to peer relationships within the department, where officers on opposing shifts have limited interaction.

Literature Review

Amendola et al. (2011) conducted a rigorous experimental study to examine how shift length affects police officers' performance, health, and quality of life. Comparing 8-, 10-, and 12-hour shifts across multiple departments, the authors found that while 10-hour shifts were associated with improved sleep and fewer overtime hours, 12-hour shifts led to increased fatigue and reduced alertness, posing risks to both officer safety and operational effectiveness.

This is corroborated by Rajaratnam et al. (2011), who analyzed data from a national police cohort and identified a high prevalence of sleep disorders, particularly among officers working night or rotating shifts. Sleep disorders, including obstructive sleep apnea and insomnia, were strongly associated with adverse health outcomes, increased error rates, and diminished safety on the job.

Garbarino et al. (2013) further confirmed these findings in a study of Italian police officers, reporting that shift work led to excessive sleepiness and poor sleep quality, especially in those without adequate recovery time. They emphasized the need for sleep hygiene education and regular screening for sleep disorders in policing.

Mental health concerns are also prevalent among officers affected by irregular and long work hours. Violanti et al. (2018) investigated the link between shift work and suicidal ideation, finding that officers working night shifts exhibited significantly higher levels of suicidal thoughts, likely mediated by disrupted circadian rhythms and accumulated stress.

Papazoglou and Andersen (2014) addressed the importance of resilience-building programs within departments. Their intervention-based study showed that training aimed at improving psychological resilience could mitigate stress-related mental health outcomes, including depression and PTSD symptoms.

Occupational Stress, Relationships, and Retention:

Chronic exposure to occupational stress affects not only individual officers but also their personal relationships. Roberts and Levenson (2001) explored how stress “spills over” into police couples’ interactions, noting increased conflict and decreased emotional availability following high-stress workdays.

Brough and Frame (2004) highlighted the mediating role of social support in job satisfaction and retention. Officers who reported strong organizational and interpersonal support were less likely to consider leaving the profession, despite the high levels of stress associated with their roles.

Amendola, K. L., Weisburd, D., Hamilton, E. E., Jones, G., & Slipka, M. (2011) conducted by the Police Foundation to examine how shift length affects various aspects of police officers' professional and personal lives. Officers from multiple U.S. police agencies were assigned to 8-hour, 10-hour, and 12-hour shifts, and outcomes were assessed over a six-month period. No significant differences were found in terms of job performance (including response times and arrest rates) between officers working 8-hour, 10-hour, or 12-hour shifts. However, 12-hour shift officers reported greater feelings of fatigue and reduced alertness, especially at the end of the workweek.

Officers on 10-hour shifts reported the highest levels of job satisfaction and quality of life. Officers on 12-hour shifts experienced more work-family conflict due to fatigue and limited time with family, despite having more days off.

According to literature review these key findings mentioned: 10-hour shifts appeared to be the most effective compromise, offering a balance between productivity, officer wellness, and personal time. Long shifts (12 hours) may reduce the need for overtime but increase fatigue, reduce sleep quality, and negatively affect interpersonal relationships. The study strongly suggests that police departments should consider alternative scheduling models to improve officer well-being without compromising performance. Night shifts and rotating shifts were strongly associated with a higher prevalence of sleep disorders. These schedules disrupt circadian rhythms, leading to chronic sleep deprivation and impaired judgment, affecting both public safety and officer wellness (Barger et.al.2011).

Garbarino, S. and colleagues’ study aimed to investigate the relationship between shift work and sleep disorders among Italian police officers. The researchers conducted an in-depth examination of how the irregular work hours typical of law enforcement—especially night shifts and rotating shifts—affected sleep quality, daytime sleepiness, and the overall well-being of officers (Garbarino et.al., 2013). The research also sought to identify any potential connections between sleep deprivation and cognitive impairment or performance errors in the officers, recognizing that these outcomes are critical for both officer safety and public safety (Garbarino et.al., 2013). The study found that a significant proportion of officers working night shifts

or rotating shifts experienced excessive daytime sleepiness (EDS), which contributed to impaired cognitive functioning during work hours. Approximately 30% of officers in the study reported sleep disorders, including insomnia and sleep apnea. Those working night shifts were particularly affected, experiencing more severe symptoms of sleep fragmentation and poor sleep quality (Garbarino et.al., 2013).

Objectives and Hypotheses of the Study

According to literature analyzing and previous studies on this problems the main objectives were differentiated: to investigate the relationship between emotional problems and work shift of the police. An additional aim was to explore for any associations among family structure and emotional challenges of the participants.

The primary hypothesis is that emotional problem - burnout syndrome is positively related with intense work shift. Our secondary hypothesis is that depression moderates the relationship between burnout and intense job conditions. Our third hypothesis is that family support can be effective to reduce burnout symptoms.

Materials and Methods

Ethics

The IRB approval for the research had got at Baku State University, Department of Psychology. Hence, we followed the appropriate ethical procedures of the declaration of Helsinki when conducting research with human subjects. All participants were given a written informed consent about the process, and their participation.

Procedure and Participants

The present study is of a cross-sectional design and relationships among emotional state problems (burnout, depression, anxiety) and job conditions, specially their work shift were examined.

Since all participants were actively working, the assessments were conducted at their time of clinic visits; or before or after the work. As participants arrived, they were given an informed consent form which stated the aims and details of the study; its voluntary nature and that they can cease participation at any time. Participants were also asked whether they had any questions about the study and then asked to sign the informed consent form. After obtaining the informed consent, they were asked about certain demographic features. Then the researcher began the cognitive evaluation and after its completion the participants were given the three self-reported questionnaires to fill in.

At the end of the assessment, the participants were asked again if they had any questions and if they wanted to be e-mailed with the results of their assessment, and were thanked for their cooperation.

A total of 100 police officers were recruited from the general working population. The sampling method that used was a non-probability sampling method which is widely used across the social sciences and acts as an auxiliary means for accessing participants and enriching the sample size.

Assessment Tools

Burnout

The Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS) was applied for evaluating burnout levels. The MBI-GS consists of a Likert-type self-reported questionnaire which consists of 16 items and is designed to assess the three components of burnout, i.e., exhaustion, cynicism and personal efficacy. Higher scores on exhaustion and cynicism and lower scores on personal efficacy suggest higher burnout levels. Cronbach's alphas for the three subscales was $\alpha = 0.024$.

Table 1. Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance	N of Items
Item Means	18,670	11,340	31,630	20,290	2,789	126,694	3
Inter-Item Correlations	,036	-,341	,609	,950	-1,786	,203	3

Depression symptoms of the participants were measured using PHQ-9 assessment tool. The PHQ-9 is a multipurpose instrument for screening, diagnosing, and measuring the severity of depression (APA, National HIV curriculum).

0-4 (none minimal); 5-9 (mild); 10-14 (moderate); 15-19 (moderately severe), and more 20 score were interpreted severe level of depression.

Results

Descriptive Characteristics

All variables were assessed for assumptions of normality prior to conducting analyses. All variables were normally distributed, as skewness and kurtosis indices were within the normal range. Details regarding the participants' characteristics can be found in following table.

Table 2. Socio-demographic items of the participants

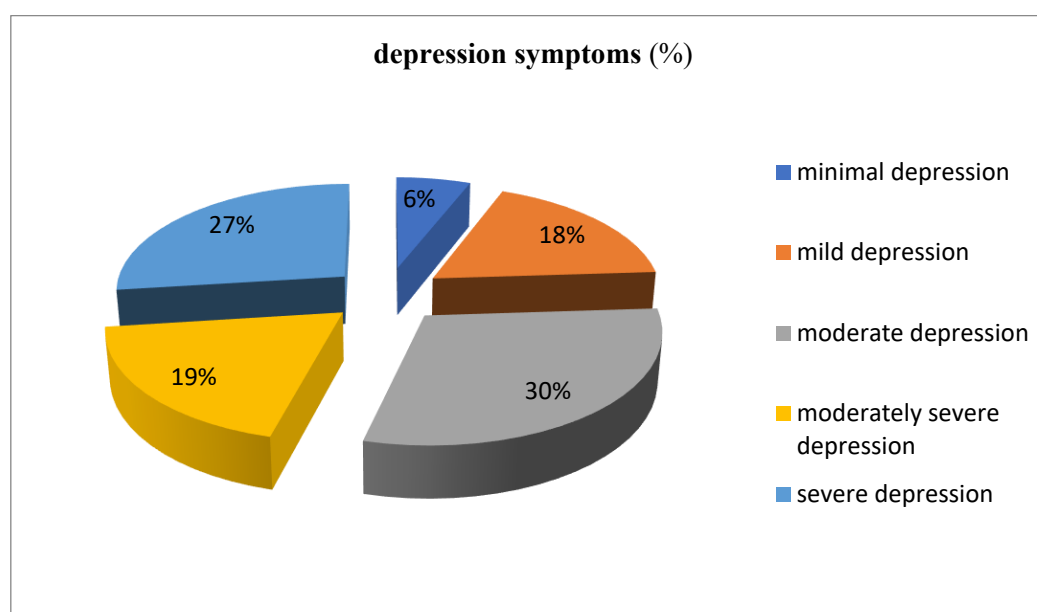
Factors				
Age	Min.21	Max.49	Mean±SD 34,3±6,3	n 100
Education level	Secondary ed. 45 (45%)	Vocational 15(15%)	High level of ed. 40 (40%)	n 100
Family (marital status)	Bachelor 27 (27%)	Married 73 (73%)		n 100
Socio-economic state	Low 10 (10%)	Middle 88 (88%)	High 2 (2%)	n 100
Work shift	<12 hours 24 (24%)	12-16 hours 44 (44%)	24 hours 32 (32%)	n 100

Applying Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS) the participants' emotional state, and burnout components were measured, and descriptive figures were presented in the following table.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of burnout components

Components	Min.	Max.	Mean ±SD
exhaustion	0	42	13,04±9,411
cynicism	0	38	11,34±6,927
personal efficacy	3	48	31,63±8,7

Depression symptoms of the police members were measured using PHQ-9 assessment tool. The results were fluctuated between 2-27; mean ±SD was 14.40±6,3. The depression level of the participants were described in the picture, and majority of them suffered moderate, moderate-severe and severe level of depression.



Correlation Analysis between Demographics, PHQ-9, and Maslach Burnout Inventory**Table 4.** Correlations between work shift and burnout symptoms

		Work shift	exhaustion	cynicism	personal efficacy
Work shift	Pearson Correlation	1	,092	-,003	-,039
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,050	,975	,698
	N	100	100	100	100
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level					
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

There was positive correlation between intense work hours and depression symptoms of the participants ($r=0,010^*$; $p=0,043$).

Table 5. Correlations between depression and burnout symptoms

		depression scale	maslach A - exhaustion	maslach B - cynicism	maslach C - personal efficacy
depression scale	Pearson Correlation	1	,569**	,370**	-,350**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,000	,000
	N	100	100	100	100
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

Discussion

The reviewed literature presents a coherent narrative: irregular and extended shift work significantly compromises police officers' sleep, mental health, performance, and interpersonal relationships. While systemic issues such as shift policies and organizational culture contribute to these challenges, research also points to practical solutions—including resilience training, fatigue management, and increased social support—that can help mitigate the adverse effects. Moving forward, a holistic approach that integrates these interventions into departmental practices is essential to safeguard both officer well-being and public safety.

The researches highlighted a strong correlation between sleep disorders and cognitive impairment, with officers reporting difficulties in concentrating and a higher frequency of memory lapses. Fatigue and poor sleep also had emotional consequences, leading to increased irritability and reduced capacity to manage stress and interpersonal conflicts. Officers who experienced more sleep disturbances were more likely to report feelings of frustration and emotional exhaustion.

According to statistical analyzing of the survey results the first hypothesis has been mentioned that intense work shift of the police members influence their emotional state. There was a positive correlation between exhaustion symptoms and intense work hours ($r=0.092^*$; $p=0,05$). The second hypothesis was also been approved that depression moderates the relationship between burnout and intense job conditions ($r=0.56^{**}$; $r=0.37^{**}$; $p=0.00$). The third hypothesis was related to family support, and its effective impact on reducing burnout symptoms. There wasn't any statistical difference between two groups: bachelors, and married participants ($14,26\pm6.2$; $14,45\pm6.4$; $F=0.9$; $t=0.1$; $df=98$; $p=0.3$). Based on this facts it can be mentioned that the family members relationship content, its quality must be searched in the following studies.

Conclusions and Recommendation

The policing profession demands high levels of physical, cognitive, and emotional resilience, often under strenuous conditions such as irregular shifts and exposure to trauma. The growing body of literature on this topic underscores significant implications for officers' performance, mental and physical health, and interpersonal relationships.

Several studies have explored how to mitigate the negative consequences of police work schedules. Flexible scheduling, peer support groups, and mental health services have shown promise in improving officer well-being. Papazoglou and Andersen (2014) emphasize resilience training as a method to help officers manage stress and maintain healthy emotional regulation. Agencies that implemented compressed schedules and sleep hygiene programs observed improved mental health outcomes and better work-life balance (Waters & Ussery, 2007).

Vila (2006) made a compelling case for managing police fatigue as a critical component of effective policing. He argued that the prevailing culture of endurance within law enforcement leads to chronic sleep deprivation, which compromises decision-making, reaction times, and public safety. Vila advocated for structural reforms, including scheduling practices that prioritize rest and evidence-based fatigue management training.

The study material consistently shows that irregular and extended police work schedules have detrimental effects on officers' emotional well-being and interpersonal relationships. Sleep deprivation, emotional exhaustion, family strain, and social isolation are common consequences. These findings highlight the need for law enforcement agencies to consider the human cost of scheduling practices and to implement systemic changes that promote both officer well-being and public safety.

The authors recommended that police departments adopt strategies to address shift work-related sleep disturbances, such as:

- Reducing the frequency of night shifts and rotating shifts in a more structured way to allow for more rest periods;
- Implementing sleep education programs for officers to increase awareness about the importance of good sleep hygiene and how to improve sleep quality;
- Incorporating wellness programs that focus on stress management and relaxation techniques to mitigate the emotional impact of poor sleep;
- Providing resources for stress management and work-life balance;
- Promoting family support programs to help officers navigate the emotional challenges of their careers;
- Introducing structured debriefing sessions or counseling to help officers process the emotional impact of their shifts;
- By addressing the impact of police work on personal relationships, departments could improve officer satisfaction, mental health, and relationship stability.

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