Unmasking the impact: unveiling the effects of 12-hour shifts on performance among South African police officers

Thabang Molokomme (a), Dee Khosa (b) *, Salome Reyneko-Cloete (c)
Danie Christo Mynhardt (d)

Faculty of Humanities, Department of Safety and Security Management, Tshwane University of Technology, Private Bag X680 Pretoria 0001 Soshanguve South Campus, Republic of South Africa

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 07 October 2023
Received in rev. form 20 Nov. 2023
Accepted 27 November 2023

Keywords:
Effects of 12-Hour Shifts, Police Officers, Performance, South Africa

JEL Classification:
O15

ABSTRACT

The South African Police Service (SAPS) has been using the shift system where police officials work for four days, which translates into 48 hours per week. The 12-hour shift system has shown to have a negative impact on police officers. This in turn seem to have a negative impact on police performance. Research on the impact of the 12-hour shift has demonstrated that the shift system has an impact on police officers' reaction time, sleep, and police officers' health, which then affect their performance. The objective of this study is to present a qualitative report of the police officer's experience on the impact of the 12-hour shift on police performance at Pretoria Central (SAPS) Police Station in Gauteng Province, South Africa. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from eight (8) participants from the SAPS, at Pretoria Central Police Station. The participants have recommended that policymakers in the SAPS should consider to review the current shift system, and to deploy more police officers at the police station in order to reduce the workload of the police officers, thus improve service delivery.

© 2023 by the authors. Licensee SSBFNET, Istanbul, Turkey. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Introduction

South Africa has experienced important socio-economic and political changes over the past twenty-nine years. This has contributed to high instances of crime and violence which results in police personnel experiencing “…a variety of duty-related stressors such as witnessing a fellow officer killed or killing someone in the line of duty, recovering bodies from a vehicle accident, witnessing domestic violence, and responding to cases involving child batterty” (Gulle, Tredoux & Foster, 1998). The issue of a shortage of officers as well as working with colleagues who are not cooperating may lead to a 24/7 shift.

Police organization across the globe utilises a 24/7 operational plan, in which they use shift work to schedule their member around the clock, and when they are understaffed, they rely on overtime (Riedy, Dawson, Vila & Violanti, 2020:484). According to Reaves (2012), almost all law enforcement agencies in the world are utilizing a 12-hour shift system which also allows for overtime hours with no restrictions and while secondary employment has restrictions. Therefore, it is clear that many police organisations are using the 12-hour shift system across the world.

According to James, James, and Vila (2017:184), police organisations are understaffed and are tasked to perform heavier duties, while in some instances they work even overtime. James et al (2017:185), further said that the police shift system, overtime work, and the 24/7 way or nature of the police agency produce a level of sleep deprivation and disruptions that may affect productivity. Studies on the impact of 12-hour shift on police officers, have focused on the impact on health, sleep, employee well-being, safety, quality of life, alertness and fatigue. Most of the studies are done internationally and utilised a quantitative research approach. Therefore, it is clear that little has been said on the impact of the 12-hour shift on the performance of police officers and particularly...
in the South African Context. Additionally, this study utilised a qualitative research approach, in which it makes this study more unique. Thus, it is necessary to explore the impact of the 12-hour shift amongst police officers in the South African Police Service (SAPS).

The obligations of the SAPS in South Africa's political history consolidated supporting the politically sanctioned racial segregation system and the persecution of millions of South Africans, which thus brought about a poor and skeptical picture of the police, especially among black South Africans (Blassius, Johnson, Kaoma, Korycki, Lind, Nasirzadeh, O'Dwyer, & Zeidan, 2013:111). The constitution laid out the rebuilding of the SAPS at a public and common level to amend the difficulties looked at by the police and expand better command over the nation (Burger, 2015:24). These progressions were joined by significant hierarchical rebuilding, investigating, and rethinking the job of the cop in the 'new' South Africa, and restoring police authenticity (Burger, 2015:24). As mentioned by Planet, Nevez, Armstrong, Averbuck, Berry, Bonetto, Carillet, Christiani, Clark, Davenport, and Di-Duca (2019: np), historically the law enforcement agencies in SA had officers working a day shift from 6 a.m. to 3.30 p.m., a night shift from 3 p.m. to 11.30 p.m., and an all-night shift from 11.30 p.m. to 7 a.m. However, the new shift arrangement calls for four days on which makes it 48-hours a week, and with day shifts from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and night shifts from 6 p.m. to 6 am, totalling a 12-hour shift (SAPS, 2021).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the impact of a 12-hour shift system among police officers in the SAPS at the Pretoria Central Police Station, in Gauteng province, South Africa. This study is important in a sense that it will add to the existing body of knowledge on policing and it will also inform the SAPS organisation of the impact of the 12-hour shift system on police officer’s performance. In order for this study to meet its objective, a sample comprising of eight (8) police officers from the Pretoria Central, who had at least two years of experience and above was collected until data saturation through face to face interviews. This study will use a thematic content analyses in order to analyse the data which was collected from individual interviews. Thematic content analysis is defined as a method of interpreting qualitative data by coding and identifying themes and patterns in a systematic manner (Harding, 2013:56). The following section discuss outlines the overview of the shift system that is worked in the South African Police Service, then it will be followed by a preliminary literature review. This will be followed by a brief outline of the methodology, the findings and conclusion of the research.

**Literature review**

**Empirical literature**

This part will outline the findings based on the main impact of the 12-hour shift on performance in law enforcement officials. Geiger-Brown, Rogers, Trinkoff, Kane, Bausell, and Scharf (2012:211) mentioned that officers on the 12-hour shifts normally experience greater levels of sleepiness (a subjective measure of fatigue) and lower levels of alertness at work. While Amendola, Weisburd, Hamilton, Jones, and Slipka (2011a:408) stressed that, the 12-hour shift system impact positively on the organisation as it reduces overtime and it is also cost-effective. Furthermore, Geiger et al (2012:213) opined that officers on the 12-hour shift reported greater fatigue, which affect their work performance. James and Vila (2015:517) also found that officers on the 12-hour shift system get fatigued normally at the end of the shift, which affects their response time and the quality of work. Velasco-Garrido, Herold, Rohwer, Mache, Terschüren, Preisser, and Harth (2022) stated that officers on the 12-hour shifts had more time to close a case before a shift ended, and follow-ups were more difficult if the case was not complete by the end of the shift. Bergen-Cico, Kilaru, Rizzo, and Buore (2020:60) pointed out poor communication between police officers and the community they serve, and lacking willingness to serve their communities, particularly during the late hour of the 12-hour shift. It was further reported that new police recruits are the ones who are most impacted by the 12-hour shift system, as they get fatigued which results in an impact on their performance, job satisfaction, personal life, sleep, and also their health (Amendola et al, 2011a:410). Again, a study published in the United State which compared the 8- hour shift and the 12-hour shift system confirmed that the advantages of the 8-hour shift outweigh the advantages of the 12-hour shift system (Julseth, Ruiz, & Hummer, 2011:243). However, Sengupta, Aydin and Lieber (2018:527) in their study discovered that officers who switched to a 12-hour shift had more positive perceptions of the shift, displayed higher morale, and reported feeling more satisfied with their jobs, noting that the 12-hour shifts provided the right balance in their lives and reignited their enthusiasm for police work (Sengupta et al. 2018:529).

The consequences of working long hours include amongst others physical exhaustion which can lead to substance abuse as well as overdosing on energy drinks to energize one body (Amendola et al, 2011b:410). In other views, those working for over 48-hours per week can get coronary heart disease compared to those who are working 40-hours per week (Kivimaki & Kawachi, 2015:5). According to Ray, Wong, White, and Heaslip (2013:255), working so many hours in a week can also cause psychological exhaustion which is normally known as burnout. Operationally, the additional time that includes off-the-clock court extra time, is an essential and regularly required piece of police work that might bring about exhaustion and lack of sleep, which disables an individual’s capacity to work at the level of one’s ordinary limit (Kivimaki & Kawachi, 2015:9). The study of Violanti, Fekedulegn, Andrew, Charles, Hartley, Vila, and Burchfield (2013:340) showed that weariness expands the chances of officials to become associated with true unfortunate behaviour, and are bound to be associated with mishaps or becoming unharmed and are more inclined to blunders in judgment bringing about litigations for the organisation.
Shift work plays a very important role in the prevention of crime, so the study by Karen, Weisburd, Hamilton, Jones, and Splipka (2013:5), alluded that the 12-hour shift system did not impact safety as much, but it impacted reaction time and it was found that those who are on the 12-hour shift system have a significantly low level of alertness at work and are sleepier. According to Vila (2016:54), for police officers who are working in high-crime areas, the shift system might affect their performance as they get fatigued.

Geiger et al (2012:213) posit that police officers experience greater level of sleepiness and fatigue due to the 12-hour shift system. This is maintained by numerous scholars who mentioned that the police are overwhelmed, emotionally drained and are unable to keep up to their work, particularly at the late hour of the 12-hour shift (Nkosi, 2019:3; Koortzen & Oosthuizen, 2012:4). This is further supported by Violanti et al. (2013:361) that the 12-hour shift system has an impact on the degradation or drop in operational performance of the police and nightshift has also been highlighted as one of the contributing factors in policing. On the other hand, Pearsall (2012:37) opined that law enforcement officers who are on night shifts find it difficult to adjust sleep schedule, and the overall effects can be difficult. Madia (2022:8) ascertained that the fatigue associated with night and rotating shift work exacerbates when a night shift is followed by daytime parental responsibilities. Also the theory of Staines (1980), alluded that the impact of the 12-hour shift on performance it results in negative spill-over, which has an impact on a number of activities (Finsterwalder & Kupperlwieser, 2020:1).

Methodology

While Williams (2011) asserts that methodology is utilised to give a clear sense of what the research is carrying out, Welman and Kruger (2013:2) maintain that research methodology is a process in which scientific procedures are employed to improve knowledge in a particular sector. Research methodology is a technique used to respond to a research topic (Newman & Gough, 2020:4-5). Contrarily, Pandey and Pandey (2021:10) state that the research technique is a useful tool for identifying and resolving social and economic societal problems. The researcher is pleased to employ qualitative research methodologies to gather data for this study due to the nature of the topic and the vitality nature of Pretoria Central Police Station as an organisation. According to Creswell (2014:4), a qualitative research approach aids in learning about and comprehending how the study participants see the issue. Thus, in order for the researcher to get more information about the subject matter, it is deemed necessary for the researcher to interview police officers from Pretoria Central about the impact of the 12-hour shift system on performance in order to get their insights into the subject matter. So, a qualitative research design was adopted for this study with semi-structured in-depth interviews and explanatory research.

Population and sampling

The population of this this study was drawn from thousand police officer who are sworn in and are deployed in the Pretoria Central police station in the Gauteng province. The non-probability sampling technique is employed in this study because it is based on understanding and analysing the impact of a 12-hour shift among police officers in the SAPS from their perspective. By using a non-probability sample, the researcher can choose volunteers depending on their availability. The researcher also chose individuals based on their rank, service history, marital status, and gender. Each of these elements had a crucial role in resolving the issues raised by this study. This study adopted the purposive sampling technique until data saturation. Interviews with participants continued until there was no more information to gather. The saturation of the data occurred after the fifth interview. To ensure data saturation, the researcher conducted three additional interviews (n=8). As a result, the interview involved a total of 8 participants, and saturation was confirmed, since participants were repeating one thing and there was no new information coming out from the interviews.

Data collection

In this study, the researcher used individual interviews as the data collection instrument, were face-to-face interviews were conducted with police officers from the Pretoria Central police station. Semi-structured interviewing technique was used as it is the most significant data-gathering tool a qualitative researcher can use. The researcher had the opportunity to ask fellow up questions in order to ensure that their clarity and the response are satisfactory. The participants were asked the following question. What is the main impact of the 12-hour shift on performance among police officers?

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data in this study. Thematic content analysis is defined as a method of interpreting qualitative data by coding and identifying themes and patterns in a systematic manner (Harding, 2013:56). Data that is pertinent to the study is obtained, organised into categories that are acceptable and intelligible, and then arranged chronologically in accordance with the sequence of occurrences (Mouton, 2014:149). Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that every research study has to ensure establish trustworthiness, in order to ensure that the findings of a study are credible. In ensuring credibility, the researcher has made sure that the research being done is on a well-known topic, and that the participants are expert in the phenomena and have experienced the impact of the 12-hour shift on performance, since it is the shift system that is being worked by the participants. Additionally, participants had a chance to check their responses to the interview schedule provided by the researcher. The findings of this study can be transferable and be used in other police station at various provinces across South Africa in order to improve police and try to minimize the negative impacts of the 12-hour shift system on police officials. Bryman (2012:392) dependability entails making sure that complete records of all research phases are kept in a way that is simple to access, including fieldwork notes, interview transcripts,
and decisions regarding data analysis, and it is referred to as an auditing strategy. To ensure a thorough account of events in this study, the researcher audiotaped the conducted interviews, took notes, and transcribed the data gathered. To make data identification and retrieval easier, data was divided into various files and labelled appropriately. The participants’ status as the sampled population, drawn from the SAPS, who work the 12-hour shift on a daily basis and have first-hand knowledge, lends credibility to the study.

Findings

The study’s participants comprised of 8 police officers from the Pretoria Central police station in the Gauteng Province. Below is the demographics of all the participants as presented in accordance to their rank, gender, race, marital status and years of experience (see below Table 1).

Table 1: Biographical data of all participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
<th>Shift system</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Years of Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>12-hour shift</td>
<td>Sergeant</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>12-hour shift</td>
<td>Sergeant</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>12-hour shift</td>
<td>Constable</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>2 and ½ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>12-hour shift</td>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>12-hour shift</td>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>21 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>12-hour shift</td>
<td>Constable</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>12-hour shift</td>
<td>Sergeant</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>19 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>12-hour shift</td>
<td>Sergeant</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>16 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors

In answering the question *what is the main impact of the 12-hour shift on performance amongst police officers?* The participants were asked to give their insight and experience on the impact of the 12-hour shift on performance in the Pretoria Central. Participants in this study were referred to as P1 to P8. Two themes have emerged after coding and are: Employees’ Exhaustion and Influence of shift system during night shift on performance. The following and the participant’s response which discusses the themes in more detail.

**Theme 1: Employees’ Exhaustion**

Many of the participants made mention of fatigue as being the main impact of the 12-hour shift system and with that being said, P1 pointed out that “it does have an impact on one’s performance as during other times you find that you feel exhausted and when you’re exhausted automatically you find it difficult to perform well on your duties successfully”. Additionally, P2 also indicated that “the fatigue that you get as an individual, you get very exhausted as an individual therefore if you come first day second day already you’re dragging your feet, and you are just pushing yourself towards the end of the shift”. It was further alluded by P3 that: “Its fatigue and I’d say the level of performance deteriorates, because this is CBD and is a busy area, normally we will be patrolling and attending to call ups, and you’ll find out that before it can even reach 12 O’clock already you’re tired and that does impact performance”. This assertions were supported by P5 who mentioned that “The fatigue, because your health gets affected as you no longer sleep 8-hours, and it also affect your balance diet, as you no longer eat health and on time and also instead of you drinking water you will be drinking a lot of cold drinks and eating junk food from the streets”. On the same vein, P4 stated that “the main impact of the 12-hour shift is fatigue or tiredness, were performance gets affected due to the reduction in productivity in the late hour of the shift, and that is affected by the fatigue that comes with 12-hour shift”. While P6 added by saying that “The main impact of the 12-hour shift is that I sometimes become tired and get to be lazy at time to pursue with my work as we speak I am tired and get to delay with my work due to the workload, and that I think affects my performance”. P7 had the same views as other participants and stated that “The impact is negative, because of the 12-hour shift is just long and tiring”. Lastly, P8 also mentioned that “The impact is negative, and the shift is very long, tiring and the workload is too much, theirs even no time for tea or lunch, you eat while driving in most cases, so you work and sweat until the shift ends.

**Theme 2: Influence of shift system during night shift on performance**

This theme is concerned with the impact of the 12-hour shift system on performance during the night shift, and it has been stated by literature that the impact of shift system does have an impact on sleep and also on police’s personal life. The night shift has been deemed to have a negative impact on performance worse than the day shift, as during night sleep level increases and in particular when one is fatigued by the work load.

It has been indicated by the participants that in most cases night shift is the most difficult shift more that your day shift. P1 has revealed that “During night shift I personally find it more difficult and exhausting than the day shift because as we know also sometimes you will become sleepy”. P2, P6, P7 and P8 had similar views, and have indicated the impact of the 12-hour shift as being same as for the day shift. However, P7 added that “the night shift is even worse, because sometimes we can a call up and then we get lazy to respond in time due to fatigue and specifically during night shift, and that affect performance”. Furthermore P3 pointed out
that “the 12-hour shift is more draining at night and you’d find that even your mind is tired”. P4 mentioned the tiring part of it which sometimes makes them not to have morale, and with that being said, P4 stated that “Night shift is tiring, and you sometimes feel sleepy around the evening”. On the other hand P5 mentioned how the night shift impact their health while specifically referring to at times when it winter, and also considering that it is during covid-19 times. P5 alluded that “the fatigue and sometimes at night you don’t have the morale to work and it leads to lack of performance, you just come to work because you have to be at work, because of theirs no morale to work, and worse during winter the impact of night shift is even more worse and you contract disease like flue and covid-19 easily, and sometimes you become server and you don’t even know whether you’ll survive the illness or not, so this 12-hour is bad”. In addition, P8 indicated the effect of the shift system as having a negative impact on the mind and in dealing with stress and traumatic incidence.

In summary, the issue of exhaustion and fatigue experienced by police official it has been stated by many participants during the interviews as a course of concern. All eight of the participants mentioned that they experience fatigue on a daily basis, as they have expressed that the 12-hour shift is a very long shift and it is regarded as stressful and tiring which does in fact affect their level of performance. This themes are concerned with the main impact of the 12-hour shift system on performance amongst police officers, and it has been stated by literature that the 12-hours shift system does have an impact on sleep and also on police’s performance. The night shift has been deemed to have a negative impact on performance worse than the day shift, as during night sleep level increases and in particular when one is fatigued by the work load.

Discussion

The issue of fatigue amongst members of the police is deemed problematic and it’s an issue that doesn’t need to be avoided as it is having a major impact on performance of the police. It is a known fact that the issue of crime in South Africa need serious attention, and it is through the performance of the police that will see community members being free from crime. Despite having four days off, some of the participants regarded those off days as being three days and also as not being enough for one to rest, putting in mind the nature of police work.

The fatigue that is experienced by the participants it is caused by the 12-hour shift system, and it is highlighted by participants that the 12-hour shift does have a major impact on performance. The findings of this study were supported by several existing literature on the impact of the 12-hour shift system on performance amongst law enforcement officers. This it’s evident from the study of Karen et al. (2013:5) that showed that the 12-hour shift system had a minimal effect on safety, but that it had a big influence on reaction time. It has also been discovered that officers who work 12-hour shifts are significantly less alert at work and sleepier (Karen et al. 2013:5). It is further asserted by Vila (2016:54), that the shift system may have an impact on police officers’ effective performance because it causes them to become weary while working in high-crime areas. The responses are also in congruence with the theory of Staines (1980), because the negative impact of the 12-hour shift on performance it results in negative spill-over (Finsterwalder & Kuperliwieser, 2020:1). Therefore, it can be deduced that the 12-hour shift has a negative impact on police officers performance.

The above findings are supported by the work of Violanti et al. (2013:361) that the 12-hour shift system has an impact on the degradation or drop in operational performance of the police and nightshift has also been highlighted as one of the contributing factors in law enforcement. It is further stated that the fatigue associated with night and rotating shift work is exacerbated when a night shift is followed by daytime parental responsibilities (Madia, 2022:8). Pearsall (2012:37) also concurs that working overnight shifts can make it difficult to adjust your sleep schedule, and the overall effects can be difficult. Also, Violanti et al. (2012:221) mentioned that night shifts might tend to offer more serious critical incidents than day shifts. Therefore, from the above it can be deduced that the 12-hour shift has a major impact on police work and performance is affected much at night.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to present a qualitative report on the police officers experience on the 12-hour shift on performance in the Gauteng province. Therefore, the study employed a qualitative research approach, were police officers from the Pretoria Central police station were interviewed until data saturation was achieved, and saturation of data was confirmed with 8 participants being interviewed. The participants were required to provide information with regards to their experience on the impact of the 12-hour shift on performance. This study has revealed that the 12-hour shift system amongst police officers does have a negative impact on their performance. The study discovered that police officers are impacted negatively by the 12-hour shift system putting in mind the demanding occupation the police service is. It was further discovered that the impact of the 12-hour shift on the overall performance of the police is negative. Also, that the shift system does affect police officers work life, workflow as well as their personal life. Recommendations were made by the police officers from the Pretoria Central police station as they revealed that officers need more boots on the ground as they feel that they workload is too much.

Additionally, it was revealed that officers need more resources as well as increase of salaries as they mentioned that the money they are getting is barely enough for a person who is working 12-hour shift. Literature also showed that the impact of the 12-hour shift is negative on many things life sleep, alertness, quality of life and on police officers health.
The recommendations for this study are very much important as they will pave away in trying to deal with the challenges associated with the 12-hour shift on performance. The research recommends that the SAPS management have to revisit the shift work of the police and try to come up with a plan that will minimise the negative impact of the shift system. Also the government through the Minister of Police and SAPS senior officials have to try and increase police officers’ salaries, employ more police and change the shift system that is currently used, so that members can rotate throughout the clock. This research further recommend that officers should return back to the shift system that was worked in the past were members worked for 8-hour and rotated throughout the clock. It is also recommended that police officials should be encouraged to join gymnasiums and also be encouraged to follow a good balanced diet so that police officials can keep fit and that will ensure that they keep up to the required performance and will reduce the fatigue experienced by police officers.

Acknowledgement

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Collection, Formal Analysis, Writing—Original Draft Preparation, Writing—Review And Editing by authors with equal participation. All authors have read and agreed to the published the final version of the manuscript.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review and approval were obtained for this study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References


Harding, J. 2013. Qualitative data analysis from start to finish. London: SAGE.


**Publisher’s Note:** SSBFNET stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

© 2023 by the authors. Licensee SSBFNET, Istanbul, Turkey. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science (2147-4478) by SSBFNET is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.