

Around the Clock: An Examination of the Leisure Lifestyles of Shift Workers

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BACKGROUND

Evenings and weekends are coveted by most of society as the ideal time to spend in leisure activities with family and friends. With the increasing demand for around the clock services more professions are working anti-social hours that fall outside of the traditional Monday to Friday, nine to five work week.

PURPOSE

While there is some emerging evidence for the impact of shift work on people's health, less is known about how working anti-social hours directly impacts one's leisure lifestyle. The research question was:



“For those working the field of Therapeutic Recreation, what factors associated with shift work affect one's leisure lifestyle?”

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Evenings and weekends are seen as the most valuable time to be spent with family and friends and work during these hours is referred to as 'anti-social' (Arlinghaus et al., 2019; Wong & Lin, 2007).
- Leisure can be defined as a state of mind and/or “personally meaningful activities done during one's free time” (Kim et al., 2015, p. 1358; Mgonja, 2020).
- Work-leisure conflict (WLC) is when employees spend resources like time and energy in their work roles, leaving few resources for things like leisure (Elbaz et al., 2019; J. Lin et al., 2014; Y. Lin et al., 2014; Mansour & Mohanna, 2018; Wong & Lin, 2007).
- Leisure has many benefits including improved wellbeing and physical fitness and is used to help moderate the effects of WLC (Anderson & Heyne, 2016; Elbaz et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2015; Y. Lin et al., 2014; Mgonja et al., 2020).
- Buffering factors such as schedule flexibility, autonomy, and social support found in the workplace can help mitigate some of the negative effects associated with shift work (Elbaz et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2014; Y. Lin et al., 2014; Pedersen & Lewis, 2012).



RESEARCH METHODS

- Purposive sampling methods were used to recruit five participants through the BCTRA listserv and Douglas College Therapeutic Recreation (TR) graduate/practitioner list.
- Participant criteria included: (1) working in the field of Therapeutic Recreation; (2) worked/are working shift work for a minimum of 3 months full time; (3) working shift work according to the definition given in this study (evenings, nights and/or weekends, this can include a combination of days as well); (4) living and working in BC.
- Each participant participated in a 30 to 60-minute semi-structured interview with field notes taken.
- Data from the interviews were then transcribed and coded for major themes.



FINDINGS

Characteristics of Shiftwork

Shiftwork schedules varied among the participants:

- Schedules included both rotating and fixed shifts, with various combinations of days, evenings, nights and/or weekends.
- Shifts ranged between participants from 8-12 hours long.

Commonalities regarding the benefits and challenges of shift work were found among the participants.



“Sometimes having a weekday off is nice for doing errands because it's a little bit less busy” (Mary)

The Value of Leisure

All participants recognized the value of leisure.



“It's...an ethical responsibility, if you're not taking care of yourself, you can't be taking care of others, you kind of have to practice what you preach” (Mary)

Leisure Barriers

Shift work presented many barriers to one's leisure, mainly:

- Anti-Social Hours – reported by all five participants.
- Burnout – reported by four of five participants.

Buffering Factors

These are factors that helped mitigate the negative effects of shift work on one's leisure, including moderating the feelings of burnout/exhaustion.

- Individual Buffering Factors – such things as being flexible in your leisure, having social support, and accepting that there are things you won't be able to do.
- Workplace Buffering Factors – such things as advanced notice, schedule flexibility, vacation days, and positive workplace culture.



“A positive was that I did have my schedule for the entire year. So, I could plan things for my days off months in advance, and was able to say that, oh, there's something happening on this day, I can, I can do that” (Yvette)

DISCUSSION

- Shiftwork took many different forms, even when controlling for the professional field (Arlinghaus et al., 2019; Driesen et al., 2010; Nascimento et al., 2019; Simões et al., 2010; Winkler et al., 2018).
- Shiftwork had its benefits, as weekdays off were coveted for running errands and making appointments.
- Shiftwork took not only time away from engaging in leisure due to anti-social hours, but also loss of energy which is consistent with the literature of WLC and burnout (Arlinghaus et al., 2019; Elbaz et al., 2019; Jamal, 2004; J. Lin et al., 2014; Y. Lin et al., 2014; Mansour & Mohanna, 2018; van Hoof & de Pater, 2017; Wong & Lin, 2007).
- Leisure was valued by all participants. Two participants described leisure as both an ethical and professional responsibility.
- The employer can help buffer the negative effects and barriers to leisure caused by shiftwork by promoting a healthy leisure lifestyle for their employees
- Buffering factors included having advanced notice, autonomy, and consistency. This allowed the ability to plan ahead in their leisure (Elbaz et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2014; Y. Lin et al., 2014; Pedersen & Lewis, 2012).
- Working longer hours allowed for more time off in-between workdays to participate in leisure and re-charge.



CONCLUSION

Shift work is becoming more common across professions which can lead to burnout and take time away from leisure activities that are needed to promote one's health and wellbeing. This most leisure opportunities still take place on evenings and weekends. It is both an individual and employer responsibility to allow time for and promote a healthy leisure lifestyle.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Researchers:

- Larger sample size.
- Control for the type of shift work schedule being investigated.

Employees:

- To advocate for their needs.

Employers

- To listen to their employees and be open to policy change to help meet the leisure needs of their employees.



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