Coping with prison shift work: Interpreting the effects of shift work on correctional officer work-life balance and well-being

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Working shifts, a scheduling system for employees who work various and alternating time blocks on days or nights, often outside the traditional nine-to-five office hours, can be taxing in any sector or industry.[1] In prison settings, shiftwork is necessary for correctional work because of the need for round-the-clock operations, care provision for incarcerated people, and institutional security.[2] [3] Within correctional institutions, Correctional Officers (COs) work different shifts to maintain security and order for individuals serving a sentence in custody.[4] While existing studies acknowledge the general stresses associated with prison shift work, a notable qualitative gap exists in relation to the specific effects of shift work on COs' work-life balance and well-being, as well as strategies for coping.

In the Canadian federal prison system, Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), COs work in fixed shifts (i.e., consistently working the same shift daily), rotating shifts (i.e., transitioning between day, evening, and night shifts), or on-call shifts (i.e., immediate shift activation as needed), along with other variants intended to meet the complex needs of prison institutions.[5] Shifts in these correctional institutions vary depending on the individual institution's policies and are typically organised based on shift duration (e.g., 8, 10, 12, or 16 hours) and employee seniority. For example, senior COs may be assigned fewer night shifts, if that is their preference.[6] Some COs often work 12- to 16-hour shifts to minimise the number of their workdays and increase days off between shifts.[7] However, longer shifts are physically demanding and, according to recent research, may increase the risk of COs experiencing mental health disorders or even death by suicide.[8]

The most common CO shift work pattern at CSC generally involves rotating schedules that encompass day, evening, and overnight shifts.[9] These schedules are often structured so COs work 2 or 3 days on a particular shift before rotating to another. While this scheduling system helps facilitate 24/7 coverage, this form of shiftwork can be daunting, particularly when COs transition quickly between day and night shifts with minimal adjustment time.[10] [11] [12] Scholars also highlight the biological effects of such rotations on

1. Pati, A. K., Chandrawanshi, A., & Reinberg, A. (2021). Shift work: Consequences and management. *Current Science, 81*(1), 32-52.
2. Correctional Service Canada. (2024). *Correctional Officer CX-1: Various regions—Continuous Intake.* CSC.
3. Neitzel, A. (2021). *Sleep and Health Concerns for Correctional Officers: The need for Health Programs and Policy Change in Workload and Work Hours.* University of Wisconsin-Platteville.
4. See footnote 2: Correctional Service Canada (2024).
5. See footnote 2: Correctional Service Canada (2024).
6. See footnote 2: Correctional Service Canada (2024).
7. Swenson, D. X., Waseleski, D., & Hartl, R. (2008). Shift Work and Correctional Officers: Effects and Strategies for Adjustment. *Journal of Correctional Health Care, 14*(4), 299–310.
8. Carleton, R. N., Ricciardelli, R., Taillieu, T., Stelnicki, A. M., Groll, D., & Afifi, T. O. (2022). Provincial correctional workers: Suicidal ideation, plans, and attempts. *Canadian Psychology / Psychologie Canadienne, 63*(3), 366–375.
9. See footnote 2: Correctional Service Canada (2024).
10. Grant B. A. (1995). Impact of Working Rotating Shifts on the Family Life of Correctional Staff. *Forum on Corrections Research, 7*(2), 40–42.
11. Ingram, P. (1986). *Shift Rotation among Correctional Officers as a Source of Shift Rotation among Correctional Officers as a Source of Perceived Job Related Stress Perceived Job Rel.* University of North Florida.
12. Ricciardelli, R., Carleton, R. N., Gacek, J., & Groll, D. L. (2020). Understanding Needs, Breaking Down Barriers: Examining Mental Health Challenges and Well-Being of Correctional Staff in Ontario, Canada. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11,* 1036.

circadian rhythms, which often result in sleep deprivation, chronic fatigue, and mental health challenges, including heightened anxiety and stress due to reduced recovery time between shifts.[13] [14] Additionally, COs report that they rarely receive adequate rest and sleep, particularly after shifts exceeding 8 hours.[15] As a result, they work during hours intended for sleep, which can significantly affect their well-being.[16]

In addition to the physical toll that comes with working shifts, COs encounter stressful and unique workplace challenges, including but not limited to being subject to threats from incarcerated people, physical and verbal assaults, emotional strain, deteriorating prison conditions, as well as being tasked with working through scenarios involving high-pressure decision-making for the purposes of maintaining safety in diverse conditions of confinement.[17] [18] [19] [20] [21] [22] [23] These challenges may contribute to high staff turnover or intention to leave, absenteeism, and poor retention, placing additional strain on remaining staff who are often required to (sometimes involuntarily) work overtime or cover extra shifts.[24] [25] [26] Earlier research showed how extra shifts caused by absenteeism and high turnover may lead to work exhaustion, decreased team dynamics, poor attention, insecurity, poor reaction time, and risk-taking behaviour.[27] [28] Additionally, these challenges can create problematic work-life relationships, diminishing COs' social engagement capacity by altering their personality traits, disposition, and attitudes.[29] Conflicts can surface and accumulate over time, causing a growing sense of disconnection from oneself, others, and society.[30] Consequently, COs often struggle to adopt effective coping behaviour to support their work-life needs and well-being.

Although there is an extensive discussion linking the nature of CO work to compromised mental health (i.e., burnout, mental health disorder prevalence),[31] [32] [33] the contextual factors seeming to influence the personal and professional ramifications of shift work have yet to be explored in-depth qualitatively through the perspectives of COs. To fill this gap in the literature, in the current qualitative interview study, we explore how federal COs in Canada cope with shift work and how shift work affects them personally and professionally.

Methods

In the current study, we explore how federal Canadian COs (N = 48) perceive the effects of and cope with prison shift work, particularly in relation to the implications for their work-life balance and well-being (see footnote 33 for more details on protocol for the broader study). Ethics clearance was received from the Health Research Ethics Board of Memorial University of Newfoundland.

13. See footnote 8: Carleton, et al. (2020).
14. See footnote 12: Ricciardelli, et al. (2020).
15. Bezerra, G. L., Carvalho, F. M., Fernandes, R. D. C. P., & Santos, K. O. B. (2022). Sleep disorders in correctional officers: Cross-sectional study. *Sleep Science, 15*(1), 34-40.
16. See footnote 3: Neitzel (2021).
17. Armstrong, G. S., & Griffin, M. L. (2004). Does the job matter? Comparing correlates of stress among treatment and correctional staff in prisons. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 32*(6), 577–592.
18. Bierie, D. M. (2012). The Impact of Prison Conditions on Staff Well-Being. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 56*(1), 81–95.
19. Ferron, R. M. (2019). *Factors associated with job satisfaction among Canadian Correctional Officers.* University of Saskatchewan.
20. Finney, C., Stergiopoulos, E., Hensel, J., Bonato, S., & Dewa, C. S. (2013). Organizational stressors associated with job stress and burnout in correctional officers: A systematic review. *BMC Public Health, 13*(1), 82
21. Johnston, M. S., & Ricciardelli, R. (2024). Invisible ghosts of care and penalty: Exploring Canadian correctional workers' perceptions of prisoner well-being, accountability and power. *Criminology & Criminal Justice, 24*(1), 291–312.
22. Mario, B., Ricciardelli, R., Johnston, M. S., & Sibley, M. A. (2024). Examining the intersection of carceral space and well?being: Correctional officers' perspectives on old and new prison design. *Canadian Geographies / Géographies Canadiennes, 68*(4), 549-559.
23. Ricciardelli, R., Power, N., & Medeiros, D. S. (2018). Correctional Officers in Canada: Interpreting Workplace Violence. *Criminal Justice Review, 43*(4), 458–476.
24. Minor, K. I., Dawson-Edwards, C., Wells, J. B., Griffith, C., & Angel, E. (2009). Understanding Staff Perceptions of Turnover in Corrections. *Professional Issues in Criminal Justice, 4*(2), 43-57.
25. Ricciardelli, R., Matthews, Z., & Martin, K. (2021). Intrinsic versus extrinsic factors: An exploration of Canadian federal correctional officer recruits' motivations toward a correctional career. *Corrections, 8*(5), 446-465.
26. Schaufeli, W. B., & Peeters, M. C. W. (2000). Job Stress and Burnout among Correctional Officers: A Literature Review. *International Journal of Stress Management, 7(*1), 20-48.
27. Petralia, R. S. (2012). *Effectiveness of Wellness Programs for Correctional Officers.* Walden University.
28. See footnote 7: Swenson, et al. (2008).
29. McKendy, L., & Ricciardelli, R. (2022). "This Job has Changed Me": Work Life Conflict, Self and Social Identity in Correctional Work. *Criminal Justice Review, 48*(4), 458–473.
30. See footnote 29: McKendy & Ricciardelli (2023).
31. Fusco, N., Ricciardelli, R., Jamshidi, L., Carleton, R. N., Barnim, N., Hilton, Z., & Groll, D. (2021). When Our Work Hits Home: Trauma and Mental Disorders in Correctional Officers and Other Correctional Workers. *Frontiers in Psychiatry, 11,* 1-10.
32. Johnston, M. S., Ricciardelli, R., & McKendy, L. (2022). Improving the Mental Health of Correctional Workers: Perspectives from the Field. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 49*(7), 951–970.
33. Ricciardelli, R., Andres, E., Mitchell, M. M., Quirion, B., Groll, D., Adorjan, M., […], & Carleton, N. (2021). CCWORK protocol: A longitudinal study of Canadian Correctional Workers' Well-being, Organizations, Roles and Knowledge. *BMJ Open, 11*(12), 1-17.

All participation in the longitudinal study was voluntary. Interviews averaged around an hour, ranging from approximately 40 minutes to over 90 minutes. Project researchers used a semi-structured interview guide to conduct interviews, meaning they had a prepared list of questions in advance and then probed as needed for clarity purposes or to garner more information, always ensuring the conversational path of the interviewee was followed. Interviews took place in a private space, and a digital voice recorder was used to preserve the respondents' words for transcription in English.

After verbatim interview transcription, the transcripts were coded according to a collectively constructed codebook by the larger research team. Research assistants at the graduate level coded data and met regularly with each other and the Principal Investigator to discuss any discrepancies in coding or to grow the codebook annually, as the context of federal prison work changes and new themes emerge. The coding scheme (subject to change) included: (1) personal history and personal information; (2) education, employment, and service history; (3) experience in the correctional training programme and continued training; (4) occupational mindset; (5) occupational challenges, hazards, and stressors; and (6) components of CO work. Within these overarching themes, there are 50 fundamental codes and numerous sub-codes. The coding process for this study followed a semi-grounded iterative approach (meaning the analytical procedure was cyclical and reflexive, informing each subsequent step in the research process) facilitated by data analysis software QSR NVivo. Researchers conducted rigorous checks on previously coded material, aiming for comprehensive coverage. Quality checking remained a crucial aspect of this project's research design.

In the current article, we focus on two primary codes (i.e., nodes), broken down into 36 sub-codes (parent, child, grandchild nodes), from the coding scheme to facilitate analysis of the research question: How do COs cope with the strains of prison shift work on their wellness? We identify themes by analysing data within nodes to see inconsistencies, contradictions, and interconnections. Hence, the first primary code, shift work, includes codes related to how COs experience their work schedules and the effects of such, including preferred schedules. The second primary code, how they spend their time outside of work (broken down into personality traits), which are coping strategies to enhance the quality of work and life, includes codes related to how they feel personally towards shift work and how they apply their personality traits to overcome shiftwork challenges, as well as strive for work-life balance and overall wellness. Our analytical approach aligns with an interrogative and realist paradigm (meaning the data/perspectives are treated as a 'reality' that constitutes truth) and mobilised an 'appreciative perspective' to (empathetically) shed light on the nuances of shift work through the perspectives and lived experiences of COs.[34]

Results

Shift work in prison is crucial, yet long; rotating shifts may impact correctional officer's mental health, well-being, coping and work-life balance.

We begin the analysis by illustrating the diverse shift schedules implemented in federal correctional facilities and their consequential effects on COs' sleep patterns and well-being. While a minority of participants expressed contentment with their work schedules, we found most COs communicated how these schedules detrimentally affected their sleep and overall well-being. Those COs who expressed satisfaction highlighted their ability to selectively determine the number of days they work, often opting for longer shifts to secure additional days off and minimise the frequency of their exposure to the prison environment. We explore and discuss these themes and how COs navigate and cope with shift work to alleviate the strains linked to shift work.

Shift patterns impact sleep routine

Some COs (n = 13) reported satisfaction with their shift schedules, arguing that longer shifts can reduce their overall workdays and provide them with opportunities to avoid daily commutes to this challenging environment. Nevertheless, these participants recognised the challenges of maintaining a healthy sleep schedule and work-life balance, particularly after working consecutive longer night shifts. Officers, for instance, illustrated various shift patterns they engage in:

> 'I'm on the 12's. So how it is, you do 6 weeks of 12-hour days. Everything is 3 on, 3 off. So

34. Liebling, A., Price, D., & Elliott, C. (1999). Appreciative Inquiry and Relationships in Prison. *Punishment & Society, 1*(1), 71–98.

12-hour days. It's, actually, 12.75 so you start at 7 in the morning and you're off 7:45 in the evening. Then you do 6 weeks of midnights. So starting at 6:30 in the evening and working till 7:15 the next morning. And then you have what I'm on right now are called short shifts. So those are either an evening shift which will either start at 2 or 2:30 till 11 and then a dayshift would be from 7-4.' [P108]

'There are multiple schedules at our jail. We just went through a roster shift so we have a lot of different schedules I could possibly choose from. The schedule that I'm on is 9, 16, 9. So I work a 9 hour day shift, a 16 hour shift and then a 9 hour evening shift. The schedule is pretty alright for me.' [P157]

'It's 6 days or 6 on 4 off 6 on 5 off and 16 in the middle. I like it better I don't do overnights. Unless they're short staff so I like it that way better.' [P125]

Their words reveal the diversity in shift schedules, reflecting the complexity of managing 24/7 prison operations. P108 shows the typical pattern involved in 12-hour shifts, with variations such as six weeks of 12-hour days followed by six weeks of midnights. Although shifts of more than 12 hours can exacerbate fatigue and increase the risk of accidents among shift workers,[35] interviewees often opted for longer shifts (12 to 16 hours) to have more days off. While P157 expresses satisfaction with the schedule, stating their schedule is 'pretty all right', P125 avoids night shifts due to harm on their sleep schedule. COs, like P106, are satisfied with their current schedule, explaining, 'With the shift pattern I have got I feel good that it gives us a decent amount of time. If I was running a seven on three off type pattern, I wouldn't be nearly as satisfied as I am with the current shift pattern'. As P106 mentions, they did not prefer working seven days straight due to the implications for their sleep schedule and work life balance.

This study uses a realist and appreciative lens to understand COs shift work experiences and coping ability.

However, consistent with other research,[36 37 38] long shifts affect sleep. Most interviewees (n = 35) agreed that shift work necessarily entails irregular hours and extended workdays, resulting in compressed rest periods between consecutive work times. These participants described how long working hours disrupt their sleep patterns. As a result, they face difficulty being alert (i.e., compromising safety and the performance of other job responsibilities). P13 explains:

'I still to this day do not understand how people are expected to work 16 hours start and stay on high alert for 16 hours straight. It's negotiated I know that the max is legally 16.5 hours straight, but I just don't know in a safety sense in a position where firearms are to handle at times, and you know you're responsible for the lives, care and control of you know 650 people.'

P13's words express how staying alert for 16 hours is difficult and hardly feasible. COs emphasised how maintaining a consistent sleep schedule could help alleviate the strain caused by extended shifts and limited opportunities for rest. But, a strict shift schedule can be challenging for quality sleep and work-life balance:

'You finish your 16-hour shift and if you live in Airdrie you get home at 11:45 at night and you have to be back here at 6:45 in the morning they expect you here at 6:30. I don't come at 6:30 I come at 6:40 but by the time you walk in your house take off your uniform wash your face, brush your teeth its quarter passed 12 by the time you fall asleep its 12:30 and you got to be up 5 hours later to drive back to work so yeah sometimes there just isn't time and when there is time you know if you're trying to live a life outside of work. You got other stuff you got to do you got to go shopping, you got to fix a broken pipe or you know you got to cut the grass like you got to do stuff.' [P13]

35. Akerstedt T., & Wright, K. P. (2009). Sleep Loss and Fatigue in Shift Work and Shift Work Disorder. *Sleep Medicine Clinics, 4*(2), 257–271.
36. Goncalves, S. G., Mesas, A. E., Bravo, D. S., Birolim, M. M., Guidoni, C. M., Andrade, S. M., & Rodrigues, R. (2023). Association between sleep quality and occupational factors in Brazilian correctional officers. *Behavioral Sleep Medicine, 21*(4), 397–410.
37. See footnote 10: Grant (1995).
38. Harma, M. (2006). Workhours in relation to work stress, recovery and health. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health, 32*(6), 502–514.

P13 details the timeline between finishing a 16-hour shift and having to return for the next shift. They mentioned falling asleep at 12:30 AM and needing to be up for work 5 hours later. Their resulting sleep deficit raises concerns about the adequacy and quality of sleep COs can achieve when working 16-hour shifts repeatedly.[39] [40] Furthermore, participants, such as P2 and P22, described their strategies for adhering to strict sleep schedules to manage challenging work shifts:

> 'I try to get to bed early, get up at 5:15, so I try to get to bed by 9 or something.' [P2]

> 'I get in late or sometimes early, and then I have to go back to work sometimes really early in the morning, and so we do not get that much sleeping hours.' [P22]

Going to bed early and aligning sleep patterns with work hours reflects a conscious effort to mitigate the potential negative effects of shift work on sleep quality, though it is often challenging to achieve due to shift work. The imbalance between work and sleep often leads to added stress and fatigue, contributing to the overall strain on well-being. COs feel working longer shifts also affects their mental state. Many reported they struggle with the dullness of daily tasks in prison. The perception of 'prison work being boring' is common among COs, who experience a lack of dynamic and engaging activities in their professional roles.[41] P33 described this phenomenon:

> 'I like to work, I like to move, I like to be part of what's going on, so for me the most challenging are the static posts…for me that's the most challenging because I don't feel like I'm part of anything. I feel like I'm sitting still, I don't like to sit still, I way rather work a unit or work a floor, and work with the inmates.' [P33]

The limited interaction with incarcerated people in certain prison settings and the absence of stimulating activities contributes to boredom among COs. Officers may find themselves in idle periods with little to occupy their attention, leading to monotony during the workday. This problem can be severe during night shifts due to compromised productivity and safety,[42] which can also make staying awake on shift very difficult — or on the drive home. As such, well-being can be compromised for COs, especially for those who commute long distances to their workplace, when exhausted after a lengthy 'back' or night shift or even when awaking for an early day shift:

> 'In terms of shift work it's tough, right, you got get up at middle of the night and drive and be there for 6 AM. I personally went through an adjustment especially coming from, I'm from East Coast so coming through a different time zone too is just an adjustment in my life but you get used to it. It must be still challenging of course given shift work and the rest of it right for sure I mean sometimes but you make it work.' [P19]

Fatigue from shift work impairs CO alertness, risking harm in workplace where vigilance is essential.

To manage the demanding work schedule especially during early morning shifts combined with a long commute, COs face the challenge of getting up in the middle of the night to drive and be at work — clearly affecting their sleep by compressing the sleep time and by changing daily routines.

Work-life misalignment on shift

COs, due to the nature of their work, often have an irregular work pattern — having to stay back for mandated overtime or being called in due to staffing requirements. The consequence of the shift work with extended hours can be hard for families by making participating in events, dinners, and so forth challenging.[43] [44] Inconsistent attendance at family events can strain relationships and create a sense of distance. As P99 demonstrated:

> 'When you're at work for 16 hours a day then you go home and only have 8 hours in the

39. See footnote 37: Goncalves, et al. (2023).
40. See footnote 7: Swenson, et al. (2008).
41. Spencer, D C., Ricciardelli, R., Hepburn T. (2024). "It's king of Preventative Maintenance": Social Capital and Policing in Rural Schools. Policing: *An International Journal, 47*(3), 394-406.
42. Folkard, S. (2003). Shift work, safety and productivity. *Occupational Medicine, 53*(2), 95–101.
43. Crawley, E. (2002). Bringing It All Back Home? The Impact of Prison Officers' Work on Their Families. *Probation Journal, 49*(4), 277–286
44. See footnote 10: Grant (1995).

> rest of your 24, how are you going to do anything with your kids? While you work the 16's I can see how that takes an effect and I can understand that if you don't spend all that time with your loved ones obviously you're going to start to go for somebody that you're spending the most time with. That's why divorce happens. I don't even remember what the rate is but we have one of the highest divorce rates because you don't see your loved one all day, and you spend all day with this girl who has the same common interest as you and you're going to get to know that person better than your loved one. So I understand why that's happens.' [P99]

P99 emphasised the consequential relationship strain when only eight hours remain in the day for personal activities, including spending time with family, after a demanding 16-hour shift. P99 relates their demanding work schedule with higher divorce rates among COs, arguing the lack of quality time with spouses can contribute to emotional distance, potentially leading to relationship breakdowns.[45] [46] While some participants preferred longer shifts in exchange for extended days off to balance their work and personal life, the preference came with its own set of challenges, particularly concerning mental health and overall well-being. After completing longer shifts, COs like P313 struggled with fatigue that extends into their off days:

> 'Only having two days off my first day is a write off, I typically will not do anything that day until the afternoon because I'm tired, I'm exhausted, I have stuff to do from the last two days that I was working that I haven't been able to do and I need almost a day to recover from working.' [P313]

As P313 points out, the demanding nature of correctional work affects their physical and mental energy. Despite having more days off, the fatigue endured during longer shifts hinders their ability to engage in normal activities during their time off, which can weaken their social relationships. Relationships also struggle due to missed events and an inability to participate in social activities, possibly leading to isolation. P228 shared:

> 'Most of my friends are Monday to Friday [laughing]. My partner's a shift worker too. Last Christmas I worked because I was scheduled and, you adjust your schedule — you have to adjust your mindset too. I worked Christmas Eve and Christmas Day and I worked Boxing Day as well. I had to excuse myself because my emotions got a hold of me 'cause it was different, I wasn't used to sitting amongst a bunch of perfect strangers with these individuals who have done horrible things right so it was a 'my god I'm spending Christmas in jail' [laughing].' [P228]

P228 chose, however many are scheduled, to work holidays. P228, despite their choice, found spending the holiday in prison challenging due to separation from family. Thus, there can be an emotional toll of working during holidays.

Research must explore practical shift limits and wellness interventions.

Managing shift work

To manage the strain of shiftwork, some interviewees reported how they engaged in physical activities, such as regular gym attendance. Many participants, like P99, valued physical exercise to manage stress induced by shift work:

> 'If you don't have your own mental health strategies and things you can turn to outside of work then you're going to turn to negative things like I go to the gym. I have my own ways of dealing with my stress. I at least try and go to the gym probably like five or six times a week and it definitely keeps me in check and I can take out whatever like aggression or whatever I'm feeling and just deal with it on the mats or in the gym as opposed to some other way [P99].

P99 presented gym going as a constructive coping strategy. Apart from engaging in physical workouts,

45. See footnote 29: McKendy & Ricciardelli (2022).
46. Obidoa, C., Reeves, D., Warren, N., Reisine, S., & Cherniack, M. (2011). Depression and Work Family Conflict among Corrections Officers. Journal of Occupational & Environmental Medicine, 53(11), 1294–1301

other COs also reported playing sports, (P12 golfs, P17 plays baseball, and P19 plays soccer), as well as other examples (P387 likes kayaking and camps), or spending time with friends:

> 'Typically hockey, hockey is my primary one, or just visiting a friend's house, hanging out, or doing various activities.' [P10]

In addition, P154 mentioned the value of hiking and being in outdoor spaces:

> 'I love to hike and be outside, and the weather is getting better for me.' [P154]

In this excerpt, pursuing physical activities appeared to be almost therapeutic, providing an escape from the stress of work temporarily, particularly when in nature. Some participants tried to spend quality time in nature with their family and pets for health preservation:

> 'I have a small child and I have two horses and dogs and stuff so that's mostly what we do in our free time (laughter), it never stops the caretaking and the policing of bad behaviour.' [P149]

P149's words reveal the strategy of combining nature, physical activity, and social connection in their processes of coping with shiftwork. These COs actively try to meet their familial responsibilities while also finding releases for the strains and pains of shift work. Of course, COs do face challenges even when pursuing these activities in nature or ensuring their engagement in de-escalation post shift techniques (i.e., exercise) because of their irregular working hours. Thus, even best efforts can be compromised by shift work, further creating barriers for health, relationships and, arguably, completely disrupting their potential for work-life balance. For example, P125 explained how shift combined with forced overtime 'changed the way I did stuff'.

Discussion

A minority of participants expressed contentment with their shift schedules; yet the majority conveyed how shift work negatively affected their health, personal and family life, and well-being. Participants recognised how shift work disrupted their sleep quality and quantity, and how 16-hour shifts impeded them from full participation in important and mandatory activities like family events.

Our findings align with broader evidence indicating sleep deprivation is prevalent among COs internationally.[47] [48] [49] Of particular concern is how continuous sleep deprivation can lead to fatigue, diminished alertness, impaired memory, and challenges in maintaining satisfactory relationships,[50] [51] [52] [53] which resonated in these data and also raises a need to understand how such states of being can lead to harm in prisons when alertness is potentially life-saving especially for COs.

Participants disclosed how certain shifts (and posts) are less fulfilling and more monotonous, contributing to fatigue and burnout, particularly when subjected to long and/or night shifts. This sentiment is consistent with existing literature underscoring the potential for prolonged shift work to accelerate both physical (e.g., cardiovascular risk) and mental (e.g., depression) health challenges.[54] [55] [56] Respondents contended their work-life balance was also adversely affected by shift work, with social events, holiday celebrations, and daily activities being missed. The irregular working hours and frequent changes in shift schedules disrupted families by reducing the time COs can spend with their loved ones and also making their presence at home unreliable. The

47. See footnote 15: Bezerra, et al. (2022).
48. Drake, C. L., Roehrs, T., Richardson, G., Walsh, J. K., & Roth, T. (2004). Shift Work Sleep Disorder: Prevalence and Consequences Beyond that of Symptomatic Day Workers. *Sleep, 27*(8), 1453–1462.
49. Sygit-Kowalkowska, E., Piotrowski, A., & Hamzah, I. (2021). Insomnia among Prison Officers and Its Relationship with Occupational Burnout: The Role of Coping with Stress in Polish and Indonesian Samples. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*(8), 4282-4306.
50. Geiger-Brown, J. M., Lee, C. J., & Trinkoff, A. M. (2012). The Role of Work Schedules in Occupational Health and Safety. In R. J. Gatchel & I. Z. Schultz (Eds.), *Handbook of Occupational Health and Wellness* (pp. 297–322). Springer.
51. Tubbs, D. C. (2016). *Overtime Work Hours, Health Behaviors and Health Outcomes for Correctional Officers: An Examination of Moderated Effects.* University of Connecticut.
52. Van Der Hulst, M., & Geurts, S. (2001). Associations between overtime and psychological health in high and low reward jobs. *Work & Stress, 15*(3), 227–240.
53. Wickwire, E. M., Geiger-Brown, J., Scharf, S. M., & Drake, C. L. (2017). Shift Work and Shift Work Sleep Disorder. *Chest, 151*(5), 1156–1172.
54. Bannai, A., & Tamakoshi, A. (2014). The association between long working hours and health: A systematic review of epidemiological evidence. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health, 40*(1), 5–18.
55. Cavallari, J. M., Garza, J. L., Ferguson, J. M., Laguerre, R. A., Decker, R. E., Suleiman, A. O., & Dugan, A. G. (2021). Working Time Characteristics and Mental Health among Corrections and Transportation Workers. *Annals of Work Exposures and Health, 65*(4), 432–445.
56. Ferdik, F. V. (2018). Correctional Officer Risk Perceptions and Professional Orientations: Examining Linkages between the Two. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 45*(2), 264–285.

unpredictability in their attendance and ability to meet their familial responsibilities has been found to strain relationships, cause emotional distance, and affect work-life balance (which appears compromised for many COs). Literature supports there are many hurdles to maintaining healthy relationships and preventing a sense of isolation among COs.[57] [58]

Participants used different strategies to cope or manage shift work and to distance themselves any experiences encountered during their shift.[59] [60] COs described exercise, nature, and social activities as strategies. However, the feasibility of participating in such activities was easily compromised by the demands of shift work and mandated overtime.

There is, of course, a need for more research and policy considerations around shift work. Shift schedules are complex — they must meet the institutional needs, those of incarcerated people, and those of COs — however meeting all needs may be an impossible problem. Therefore, more research must unpack the nuances and consequences of shift work, with serious discussion of possible restrictions on the maximum number of hours an officer can work within 24 hours period, and scholarly interrogation of the benefits and disadvantages of establishing an upper limit for hours worked per week. We further recommend sleep-information sessions, lunch and learn, and programmes targeting COs to be essential offerings to help officers manage sleep challenges, improve their sleep hygiene, and learn about countering fatigue.

Conclusion

There exists a complex interconnection between shift work and COs' work-life balance. In the current study, shift work, especially in the form of longer shifts and overtime, emerged as a significant disruptor of quality sleep, laying the groundwork for a cascade of health and personal concerns.[61] Thus, there is a need for more sleep support for COs who live in a world of shift work and overtime expectations.

The current study, however, is not with limitations. These include self-reporting biases and the lack of generalisability of qualitative findings to other provincial and territorial jurisdictions in Canada, or other correctional services internationally. Moreover, shiftwork emerged as a theme, rather than participants being directly asked about the effects of their shift work. Future research on shift work and the health consequences for COs is necessary to improve their health, wellness, and the well-being of incarcerated people.

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