



Does the Compressed Working Week affect the health and work-life balance of shift workers?

Results of a systematic review

This review was carried out as part of the Public Health Research Consortium's (PHRC) programme of research on wider determinants. Work has long been acknowledged as an important social determinant of health and health inequalities in industrialised societies.

Although the full review examined other changes to shift work schedules, only the Compressed Working Week findings are reported here, for reasons of space. Full details of the review can be found on the PHRC website at (www.york.ac.uk/phrc/).

The NHS, through policy initiatives such as *Improving Working Lives*, encourages flexible working patterns - including Compressed Working Weeks - and this review provides important evidence on the effect of this way of working on health.

The major findings of the review are:

- The past two decades have seen the development of labour market practices in which skills, working hours, contracts, conditions, pay and location are more flexible. The emergence of the 24-hour society has raised concerns about the effects of shift work on health and well-being;
- Shift work involves working at times and on days that may make it difficult to maintain a balanced domestic and social life, or 'work-life balance'. Shift work may therefore be an important determinant of health and well-being for many workers;
- One common change to the organisation of shift work involves introducing a Compressed Working Week, in which the hours worked per day are increased whilst the days worked are decreased - in order to work the standard number of weekly hours in less than five days. Such a working pattern is a radical break with the traditional eight-hour working day;
- Introducing the Compressed Working Week seems to improve the work-life balance of shift workers, with few adverse health or organisational effects. It is also generally beneficial, or at least not detrimental, to health in the short-term.
- The Compressed Working Week could be an important tool for both policy-makers and employers in terms of promoting healthier work places and improving working practices.

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