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Don't blame Starbucks: Cops may have poorer health due to night shifts

November 18, 2009 | 2:47 pm

Midnight shift workers often find it hard to get enough quality sleep on a consistent basis. Police officers are not exempt, often working late shifts and overtime as part of their job.



A new study finds that their schedule may cause cops to develop metabolic syndrome, a cluster of symptoms including high blood pressure, insulin resistance and high triglycerides that advance development of such conditions such as stroke, cardiovascular disease, and type 2 diabetes.

The research, published in the current issue of [Archives of Environmental & Occupational Health](#), focused on 98 police officers who were part of the Buffalo Cardio-Metabolic

Occupational Police Stress study, which began in 2003. The participants had their blood pressure checked, took a blood test and had their waist circumference measured. They also filled out a

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questionnaire focusing on lifestyle choices such as sleep habits, physical activity, and smoking and alcohol use.

Researchers discovered that in general, those on afternoon and midnight shifts were younger than those working during the day, and predominately male. Overall, 30% of the police officers on the night shift had metabolic syndrome. In the general population, that number was 21%, taken from the National Health and Nutritional Examination Survey. The younger officers on the night shift (average 36.5 years) also had higher rates of metabolic syndrome than age-matched men and women in the general population, who came in at 24%.

Waist circumference was larger and HDL "good" cholesterol levels were lower among night shift cops compared to the general population and to officers working day and evening shifts. Officers working nights who got less than six hours of sleep had higher averages of metabolic syndrome factors than day shift workers.

"One potential explanation for this unusual finding is that midnight shift officers were most likely to be sleep deprived because of difficulties associated with day sleeping," said John Violanti, the study's lead author, in a news release. The research associate professor at the [University of Buffalo's department of social and preventive medicine](#) added, "Sleep debt has been shown to have a harmful impact on carbohydrate metabolism and endocrine function, which could contribute to metabolic disorders."

In the study, the authors wrote, "Information gained through this study may be useful to aid further investigation of not only police officer health, but also the health of those in other first-responder occupations."

--Jeannine Stein

Photo credit: Allen J. Schaben / Los Angeles Times

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