Psycho-Social Impact of Shift Work: A Study of Ferro-Alloy Industries in Orissa

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore the effect of work related problem on shift workers’ attitude, aptitude and job satisfaction. A total of 240 shift workers in five Ferro-alloy industries of Orissa working in rotating three shift systems were participated in this study. The findings indicated that shift work has major adverse impact on psychological, social, family and conjugal life of shift worker. It has also seen that the shift work schedule curtails leisure activities, affects sleep and causes various health problems.

Keywords: Effect of Shift Work, Ferro-Alloy Industries, Job Satisfaction, Psychosocial Impact, Shift Work

1. INTRODUCTION

In modern societies, many companies and organizations stay open 24 hours a day, requiring people to work in shifts. The term “shift work” means different things to different people. The shift work is a work schedule in which a group of workers work in shifts. The shifts can be organized either in a rotation, continuity or in a discontinuous system. Day by day, the shift work becomes increasingly prevalent in contemporary life, affecting 20% to 25% of the employees in manufacturing industries and also a growing number in the service industries. However, the shift work which requires alterations in sleeping and working hours of the workers, affects their efficiency. It is realized that there is no ideal shift system which meets fully the needs of an organization and social and family needs of each and every employee. Many researchers define shift work as an employment in which two or more groups of employees work at different times of a 17-hour or 24-hour time span, including a so-called “day” shift. For a significant proportion of these employees, working after-dark hours may not only reduce satisfaction with their jobs but may also create troublesome problems for their health, family life, social activity and psychological life.

Shift work has both advantages and disadvantages. Shift work provides a number of no pecuniary advantages for some workers. Work-
ing in evenings or nights allows employees more free time during the day. Some workers enjoy a variety of rotating shifts, while others appreciate of being able to remove themselves from unwanted family situations or responsibilities. The camaraderie and sense of loyalty is satisfying features of certain evening or nighttime occupations, which can be the satisfying substitutes for normal social and family life (Hedges et al., 1979). Many shift workers have less tension and a more relaxed pace in night shift than during the day because of less supervision or fewer interruptions from clerical or management personnel. Finally, shift work accommodates “night owls”, who function poorly in day time and best during evening or night.

The attraction of shift work is considerable for many individuals. But the benefits must be weighed by shift workers and policymakers alike against the drawbacks that affect the health, interpersonal relationships, leisure time activities, and perhaps the safety of a large proportion of shift workers. The central feature of shift work that creates dissatisfaction for many evening and night workers is that, it puts them “out of rhythm” with their minds and bodies, families and social lives and routines of the rest of the community. The shift workers experience more family related problems than the day time employees because of the lack of synchrony between their hours on the job and their daily routines of the families. The most serious family disturbance is that, many people who work in the evenings and nights are less able to spend time with their children, especially with the small children who go to bed early. The shift workers cannot spend much time with their spouses because a shift worker’s wife or husband who works during the day, or who does not work, is often awake at those times precisely when the shift worker must sleep. It is argued that the shift workers get less sleep, have worse mental and physical health and have fewer friends in the society. So generally, they fall out of steps with the rhythms of life and experience disrupted family relations.

The study is about the employees of Ferro alloy industries in Orissa, India. Ferro alloy is a sector which largely feeds on iron and chrome ore and steady power supply. Because of availability of iron ore and chromites ore in Orissa, the Ferro alloy plants have witnessed a sound growth in Orissa in recent years. There are 9 Ferro alloy plants in the state in operation. These Ferro alloy plants produce different alloys depending upon the market demand and production capacity.

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

The industrial and commercial activities that operate outside normal work hours have become widespread in recent years; services such as banking, communications, transport, catering, and retailing are routinely available during evening hours and often round-the-clock. Consequently, the work patterns of a substantial proportion of the population now extend beyond regular day-work hours; variable schedules (often including evening or night work) and rotating shifts are both widespread. In a recent European survey, 28% of the workforce had variable work patterns, 10% had evening or night schedules, while 17% worked two-shift or three-shift rotating schedules (Boisard et al., 2003). Further analyses showed that the proportion of shift workers remained relatively constant up to age 45 years, but fell sharply at higher ages, particularly over 55 years (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2003), reflecting older workers’ difficulties in adjusting to shift work. Similarly, the analyses of U.S. survey data showed that in 1997, 27.6% of the workforce had flexible work schedules, while 16.8% of full-time employees had ‘alternative’ schedules involving work outside normal day time hours (06.00-18.00 hrs), 6.4% of whom worked night or rotating shifts (Beers, 2000). These proportions varied by occupation; rotating shifts were particularly common in security services (16.3%), mining (12.5%), and catering (8.7%), but infrequent among professionals and managers (1.7%). Night work was prevalent in health care, manufacturing, and manual occupations.
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