NEW STUDY REVEALS NEARLY HALF UK POLICE OFFICERS SO STRESSED THEY CANNOT SLEEP

Thursday 19 March, 2015

Widespread tiredness, fatigue and stress in police officers across six English police forces has been identified in a recent study.

With workloads increasing and officer numbers falling 82% of officers rarely or never have the chance to take their scheduled rest breaks during the working day.

Changes in shift schedules mean officers get fewer rest days off work and are required to work more night shifts. As a result 68% of officers said that because they were unable to rest properly, bouts of sleepiness interfered with daily work activities at least a few times a month.

The study also revealed that officers are so worried about their work and job prospects that 40% have taken holiday days to cover a genuine sickness absence, so as to not identify they are sick, while 14% of officers are owed more than 5 days off and a quarter of officers did not take their full holiday entitlement in the last year because they just could not get the time off.

Of the 1,956 officers who completed the online assessment; officers said they got on average just 6 hours 11 minutes of sleep a night prior to going to work and 85% of officers were not meeting their sleep need over the course of their shift schedule. 84% of officers who responded do not feel as though they achieve enough sleep with the main reasons cited as: shift schedules (61%), not having enough time (47%), work worries (48%) and personal worries (41%). Nearly half (48%) of respondents were also deemed to be at risk of insomnia.

Commenting on the results of the study Marcus de Guingand, managing director of Third Pillar of Health, who ran the study, said: "This study correlates with results from other similar studies in North America. The reduction in police numbers and the subsequent changes in shift schedules are having a serious effect on police officers. Lack of sleep and high levels of stress have implications for the health, safety and performance of UK police officers. Everyone knows how they are affected when not allowed to get sufficient rest and police officers are no different. If nothing is done to address these issues the public can expect to see more officers off sick, more accidents and an increase in complaints against police officers."

In summarising the views of the participating Federations, Paul Robertson from Hampshire Police Federation added that: "With budget cuts, Police Officer numbers falling, demand rising and sickness increasing, it's important that the remaining Police Officers are as healthy and resilient as possible to ensure they can maintain a good service to the public. With this in mind, there was a need to take a more scientific look into Police Officer fatigue. The study outlined a number of possible solutions including some fairly small changes, such as ensuring Police Officers take at least one break in a ten hour shift (currently most Police Officers don't even have a single break) and designing shift patterns that are better for health as well as dealing with the core reasons why Police Officers get fatigued. As a result it's hoped that sickness levels will decrease and efficiency and productivity will increase at what is a very challenging time for Policing."

Andy Marsh, Chief Constable of Hampshire Constabulary added, ""Our community needs healthy and fit officers and my responsibility is to create an environment that provides everything possible to ensure that. You cannot underestimate the value of a healthy and fit workforce, because this enables us to deliver the excellent service to the public that we all aspire to. I look forward to reading the full report and any learning we can identify from it which can benefit our workforce."

Notes to the editor:

About the study

The study was commissioned to examine the extent and impact of tiredness and fatigue in police officers and to explore a number of possible solutions that might help police officers improve their health, performance and resilience. As a result of the budget cuts and reduction in police numbers the participating Federations are keen to find ways to help members that result in reduced sickness absence

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and enable officers to continue to provide the best possible service to the public.

Third Pillar of Health is a fatigue management consultancy that helps organisations improve key business metrics through assessment of tiredness and fatigue and recommending "workable solutions" to counter the specific issues identified in any given population. We have worked with leading sleep research scientists to put together an online assessment and training programme. We also run face-to-face workshops and seminars for employees and key trainers and assist organisations with policies and procedures in respect of tiredness and fatigue.

For more information please visit our website: www.thirdpillarofhealth.com or to talk to a media representative call on +44 (0)845 686 0022.

The Police Federation of England and Wales is one of the largest staff associations in the UK, representing the interests of all police constables, sergeants and inspectors (including chief inspectors).

The contacts for the participating Federations / Force are:

North Yorkshire Police Federation - Will Eastwood01423 866 342

Hampshire Police Federation - Paul Robertson 02380 478920

Hampshire Constabulary - Lucy Dibdin01962 834677

South Yorkshire Police Federation - Neil Bowles0114 229 1381

Sussex Police Federation - Mark White07968964662

Thames Valley Police Federation - Lisa Stanhope01844 261 811

Company Contact:

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Third Pillar of Health

T. +44 (0)845 686 0022
E. info@thirdpillarofhealth.com
W. https://www.thirdpillarofhealth.com

Additional Contact(s):
Marcus de Guingand

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