Uniform Terminology for a Common Work Scheme?

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Use of uniform terminology in scientific communications is of paramount importance. This guarantees that the terms used are construed correctly by everyone.¹

Shift working is a stressful condition that affects body circadian rhythms. It has been shown that these changes would cause many disease conditions.²⁻⁴ However, there are various types of shift work in terms of the period workers spend at work. Furthermore, for the nature of workplace, there are jobs the worker must periodically spend more time and work more vigorously under more pressure. For example, on sea oil platforms people have to work for 12 to 16 hours a day (may be shift work in the morning and night) for two or three weeks offshore followed by one or two weeks rest period onshore.

One of the very basic steps in conducting a research is literature review. In a recent attempt, when I tried to find out relevant studies in PubMed on the health status of workers on an offshore oil platform, surprisingly I found no specific well-defined term to describe this type of work. Different researchers use different terms to describe the condition: examples are shift work; one-week on/one-week off; two-week on/two-week off; fly-in/ fly-out (FIFO),⁶ long-distance commuting (LDC),⁷ ship-in/ship-out (SISO),⁸ and drive-in/drive-out (DIDO).⁸

This inconsistency in terminologies would ultimately result in ambiguity of the situation, difficulty in retrieving the relevant documents, misunderstanding of terms used and waste of resources. I therefore propose to coin a unique term to describe this type of work. Since the word “commute” means “to regularly travel a long distance to get to work,”⁹ that inclusively reflects most of the aspects of this type of work, one proposed term to describe this type of work would be “intermittent commuting.”

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References


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