The safety of people who drive for work in the gig economy: A perfect storm of risk factors?

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What is the gig economy?

The gig economy involves people who do not get paid a salary but get paid per gig or a ‘piece rate’ whereby service providers are linked to service users via an app.

Our study:

- How is safety taken onto account in driving, riding or cycling for work
- 48 in depth interviews with drivers, riders and their managers
- Online survey – over 200 responses

Safety management

INTERVIEWS:
• Companies interested in ‘the life of a parcel than the person delivering it’
• Virtually no training given
• No safety equipment given
• Disregard of safety

SURVEY:
• No safety training
• No safety equipment such as a high visibility vest
• Company does not care about their safety whilst working
• Responsibility should be shared
Fatigue

INTERVIEWS:
• Mentally and physically fatigued
• Worked for multiple courier companies some working three weeks of 12 hour days without a break
  – One cyclist reported falling a sleep on her bike and subsequently crashed
  – One driver had to slap his face to keep awake and travelled at ‘only’ 50 mph on the motorway to limit any damage if he crashed
  – Some taxi drivers had long commutes (2 hours) to get in to London to work

SURVEY:
• 16% experienced severe fatigue e.g. struggling to stay awake
Distraction

INTERVIEWS:
• Handled their phone whilst riding to accept jobs
• The app beeping at them to announce jobs was a distraction

SURVEY:
• 40% of those using an app found them to be distracting whilst driving or riding
Violations: traffic lights

% level of agreement with statement "I have driven/ridden through a red light when I've been under pressure" by vehicle used for gig work

- Car (n=138)
- Pedal cycle (n=66)
- TWMV (n=27)
Violations: Speed

% level of agreement with statement "The time pressure of gig work can make you travel over the speed limit" by vehicle used for gig work

- Car (n=138)
- Pedal cycle (n=66)
- TWMV (n=27)

- Agree
- Neither Agree/disagree
- Disagree
Collisions

% reporting that someone has been injured in a collision they were involved in when driving as a gig worker

- Car (n=138)
- Pedal cycle (n=66)
- TWMV (n=27)

Legend: No, Yes
Key road safety themes which emerge from research among gig economy drivers and riders: A perfect storm?

- Self-regulated (i.e. no control on hours worked)
- Time pressured
- Incentive/Piece rate based
- App based (in situ)
- Not trained to manage risks/no accountability
- No safety training

Impact of work context on workers

- Physical and mental workload
- Distracting work interface
- Pressure to deliver quickly to earn income

- Fatigue
- Distraction
- Speeding

Risk factors for collisions

No management of risk by company

No risk management