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The emerging issues for management of occupational road risk in a changing economy: A survey of gig economy drivers, riders and their managers

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Executive Summary

Background to the study

The nature of work is changing with the growth of digital platforms accessible via smartphones giving rise to new independent ways of working. The gig or sharing economy describes this new trend in work. 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. Drivers and riders who earn money in this way are often referred as lifestyle workers or flex couriers or workers because they can choose when they work to fit in with other commitments. These workers are currently regarded as self-employed and are not covered by employment law. They have very few rights at work which are limited to protection for health and safety purposes and some protection against discrimination. They are responsible for managing their work in a way that does not create health and safety risks for themselves or others.

Given that many of those in the gig economy are independent workers who provide transport based services - driving or riding- it seems critical to understand and address the many health and safety issues around such employment. The aim of this study is to explore the experience of risk and risk management amongst drivers and riders and their managers and to understand how safety is taken into account in driving or riding for work for those workers engaged in the gig economy.

What we did

To understand how safety is taken into account in driving, or riding and cycling for work as part of the gig economy we carried out 48 in depth interviews with drivers, riders and their managers who are part of the gig economy and conducted an online survey which achieved over 200 responses. We talked to self-employed couriers who delivered parcels and food and self-employed taxi drivers who received their jobs via apps.

What we found

Combining the quantitative online survey results with the qualitative interviews among gig workers has given a fairly consistent and clear picture of the health and safety issues for those who drive and ride for work in the gig economy.

Many of the groups of couriers and taxi drivers we talked to enjoyed the work – the people least likely express such enjoyment were those who worked as car and van couriers. On our online survey three quarters of respondents said they enjoyed working in the gig economy because of its flexibility – still a quarter did not.

In our interviews we explored factors related to this type of working environment that may increase the risk of being involved in a collision or near miss for someone who ostensibly drives or rides for a living. These factors included impairment through fatigue, distraction and speeding and high exposure to risk in terms of mileage and being out in poor weather conditions. In the interviews we undertook we found evidence of participants being fatigued through working long hours, having high physical and mental demands, covering high mileages, long commutes and working at circadian lows. The parcel couriers we spoke to reported that they felt pressured and this often led to speeding, with some admitting going through red lights. They reported being distracted especially by their phones and exposed to risk in terms of high work load situations such as busy urban centres and in poor weather conditions. Similar results were found in our online survey. Nearly half of the online survey respondents admitted speeding, two thirds said they often parked illegally and nearly a third had driven or ridden through a red light. Of the survey respondents 40% said that the app had distracted them whilst driving or riding and 8% said they had received points on their licence whilst working. In terms of fatigue our question was phrased to detect severe fatigue i.e. struggling to stay awake whilst driving or riding - still 16% agreed that this had happened to them. In our interviews it was clear that some gig workers could self-regulate and just sign off on they were tired but others felt the pressure intensely clearly working from necessity and this affected their wellbeing.

Many of the gig workers we interviewed admitted to having a collision and experienced near misses several times each day. From our online survey 42% said they had been involved in a collision where their vehicle had been damaged and 10% of the total sample said that someone had been injured as a result and this was usually themselves.

Three quarters of respondents (75%) said that that there had been occasions while working when they have had to take action to avoid a crash.

Our interview participants said that no training was required or given apart from being directed to a number of online videos which mainly talked about the process of delivery with nothing on health and safety. Indeed, many of our participants said that with the current investigation of employment rights that their ‘company’ was recoiling from engaging with their couriers because they did not want behave in a way that could be construed as being directive. The results of our online survey showed that two thirds of respondents did not have any training on how to manage risks on the road and a similar proportion were not provided with any safety equipment. In fact most of the survey respondents (70%) bought their own equipment.

Many of the managers we talked to clearly felt the company ethos of being only interested in the life of the parcel and not the life of the person who delivers it clearly conflicted with their own views of how to manage people and have regard for their safety. Perversely, the investigation into the employment rights of gig workers has meant that the few gestures of concern have been rescinded because anything that looked like a condition of employment needed to be avoided. Most survey respondents (67%) reported that the company did not suggest they had rest breaks and did not give advice about using their phone whilst driving or riding.

This lack of care was evident in our online survey with only a round a quarter agreeing that the company cared about their safety but most (68%) feeling that the responsibility for their safety should be shared by between them and the company.

Conclusions

From a health and safety perspective the nature of the work is time pressured, often involving high physical and mental workloads and a distracting work interface and which incentivised them to go out in high risk situations. Added to this is the lack of control over their working patterns and conditions especially amongst the parcel delivery couriers. Our findings are consistent with examples given in the Select Committee Report into the gig economy which highlighted the lack of so-called flexible working with an example of a courier who couldn’t deliver all his parcels in one day and held the less urgent ones over to the next. He was threatened with service removal if he ever did it again.

The nature of this work clearly led some couriers to experience impairment caused by fatigue and pressure to violate speed limits and to use their phones. Furthermore, they also experience threats to their personal security from theft of what they are delivering or of their vehicle/cycle or of personal attack.

There is no risk management by the people who broker courier services. These faceless digital brokers take no responsibility for the health and safety of the people who accrue income for them. Most couriers think that this responsibility should be shared. It is promising that for one taxi based service driver behaviour scores were monitored and drivers were reminded to keep within speed limits and could work no more than 10 hours a day. However, such an app will not readily detect fatigue and no digital company will know how many other companies their driver or rider works for – it was clear that many of the people we spoke to were working for multiple courier companies.

The emergence of the gig worker as a way to work to satisfy the public’s appetite or fast delivery of goods, food and people could give rise to a perfect storm of risk factors affecting the health and safety not just of the people who work in the economy but for other road users. The more gig workers that enter this market the longer the hours they need to work and the greater the distances they need to drive to enable them to earn a stable income especially when vehicle operating costs have to be borne by themselves. Chasing jobs increases the exposure to risk. This would suggest that we need an estimate of how many people drive and ride for work in the gig economy. For example, we know that about 40,000 drivers are registered with Uber in London because they have to be registered with Transport for London as taxi drivers but we have no idea how many work for food and parcel delivery companies.

A particular challenge which is common across all self-employed drivers and riders is to understand their particular set of risk factors in order to develop self-help information on how to reduce the types of risk we have identified in this study. However, generating a safety culture involves leadership and accountability and a conversation between a manager and the people they manage – the digital gig economy of transport services is unlikely to provide a bedrock for such a culture to flourish.

Pressure from the courts and Government through the Select Committee process should make these service providers more aware of their employment obligations and provide safeguards for people who generate income for them.

This study is based on self-reported data and therefore people may say one thing but do another. However, the use of the quantitative data is providing a very consistent picture to the results found in the in-depth interviews and is in step with the experiences of the gig workers quoted in the Select Committee Report.

Recommendations

1. Couriers should sign up for a time block and be paid for their time not for a drop rate to depressurise the work
2. An acceptable drop rate should be established by the company which takes into account the time it takes to travel to the destinations within the speed limit and also the time it takes to perform administrative functions such as getting signatures and scanning/taking photographs of where the parcel has been left.
3. Mobile phones should not be allowed to cause a distraction and require handling to accept or reject jobs whilst driving or riding. Provided the driver and vehicle are compliant with mobile phone legislation when using the app, this could have a 'now stationary button' which would then allow jobs to be allocated and accepted. Less distracting interfaces need to be developed by the industry. Alternatively, if workers sign up for time blocks with a set number of jobs and pay this would reduce the need for sporadic messaging about available jobs.
4. A person in the company should be responsible for managing safety of the people who provide an income for them. This should be provided at a local level to ensure that vehicles are road worthy with an up-to-date MoT where applicable, and properly insured for the job being done.
5. Within the company collisions and severe near misses should be discussed and lessons learned
6. Companies should not incentivise vulnerable road users (those on two wheels) to take additional risks by paying a higher rate to ride in poor weather conditions
7. Couriers and taxi services providers should not be able to breach the current driving hours restrictions applicable to other commercial drivers – this could be done by companies sharing data on driving and riding time via the licence number of the driver/riders with built in alerts if time is exceeded on a separate digital platform.
8. Safety equipment such as hi-vis jackets (fluorescent/reflective) should be provided freely to couriers
9. The health and safety implications of carrying large back packs on two wheeled vehicles needs to be tested.
10. We recommend that the findings of this report are widely disseminated to key stakeholders including the companies themselves, the Department for Transport and the Transport Select Committee (which could make this issue a topic of an enquiry) and to the current enquiry being conducted by MP Frank Field and other organisations interested in the management of occupational road risk such as RoadSafe and RoSPA.

1. Introduction

The nature of work is changing with the growth of digital platforms accessible via smartphones giving rise to new independent ways of working. The gig or sharing economy describes this new trend in work. 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. Examples of this type of employment are Uber and Deliveroo. Drivers and riders who earn money in this way are often referred as lifestyle workers or flex couriers or workers because they can choose when they work to fit in with other commitments. These workers are currently regarded as self-employed and are not covered by employment law. They have very few rights at work which are limited to protection for health and safety purposes and some protection against discrimination. They are responsible for managing their work in a way that does not create health and safety risks for themselves or others.¹

There is growing action to regulate these forms of employment to provide workers' rights. However, little is known about how the risks of injury on the road during the course of work are embedded in these types of employment and whether workers should be provided with training. The new inquiry by the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee: "The future world of work and rights of workers"² launched in December 2016 identified questions about employment rights but none about health and safety. It has been estimated that 162 million people worldwide are employed as independent workers with official statistics suggesting that there are five million people in the UK who are self-employed. Whilst it is not known how many of these 5 million are engaged in the gig economy, these independent workers participate by choice and enjoy the flexibility and independence of such work there is a policy need to resolve the problems of employment rights and access to training including health and safety.

Given that many of those in the gig economy are independent workers who provide transport based services - driving or riding- it seems critical to understand and address the many health and safety issues around such employment. For example, evidence has shown that there is elevated risk of a road traffic injury for despatch riders/couriers³ such risks may also be experienced by gig workers who are offering transport based, time pressured services." (Christie et al 2017, <http://www.pacts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/ORR-SH-HW-and-NC-May-2017.pdf>).

Very little research has been conducted into road safety issues and risks of people who work for the gig economy whether they provide services carrying passengers or goods. The aim of this study is to explore the experience of risk and risk management amongst drivers and riders and their managers and to understand how safety is taken into account in driving or riding for work for those workers engaged in the gig economy.

2. What we did

To understand how safety is taken into account in driving, or riding and cycling for work as part of the gig economy we carried out in depth interviews with drivers, riders and their managers who are part of the gig economy (e.g. Uber, Deliveroo etc.). Topic guides for workers and managers (See Appendix A) were developed to explore:

- the context in which they work (hours of work, time of day, number of deliveries, mileage, how driving fits in with other work etc),
- the extent to which they are aware of, create or experience risks,
- what they perceive as the roles and responsibilities for safety when they drive or ride for work,

¹ <http://www.hse.gov.uk/self-employed/what-the-law-says.htm>

² <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/business-energy-industrial-strategy/news-parliament-2015/the-future-world-of-work-and-rights-of-workers-launch-16-17/>

³ https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKewi89quz1q3RAhVI6xoKHdP3AJAQFggdMAA&url=https%3A%2F%2Fosha.europa.eu%2Fen%2Ftools-and-publications%2Fpublications%2Fliterature_reviews%2Fdelivery-despatch-riders.pdf&usq=AFQjCNHJxs0S10hhwyCEcwTAR6I-iEDM_g&sig2=RcPivQNhvykygmU7N_fhlw&bvm=bv.142059868,d.d2s

- how they or their employer help manage safety.

We aimed to carry out a diverse range of interviews among people who manage them or the systems that provide them with work. As people in the gig economy use their own cars, vans, mopeds/motorcycles or bicycles we varied our sample to represent these different modes as some, by definition, are more vulnerable (cyclists/ motorbikes etc.) road users than others (car/vans).

Table 1: Recruitment targets for interview survey

Taxi services and food delivery	18 interviews: 6 van 6 car 6 cyclists/ motorcycle or moped riders	Management 6
Parcel couriers	18 interviews: 9 van drivers 9 car drivers	Management 6

A fieldwork company was used to achieve the sample through a combination of scouring recruiter networks, targeted advertising and posting on social media forums. Since some segments of workers or managers could be described as ‘hard to reach’ we knew that we would not be able to source all of the participants through traditional methods so we budgeted to supplement network recruitment with PPC (pay per click) advertising and regular posting on industry forums. PPC adverts were used where we only show ads to those who we think work in the gig economy based on their search history and online behaviours and interests. Advertisements were distributed via Google, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc. and those interested in taking part are directed to a screening questionnaire to check that they are the right fit and then they take the online questionnaire. We also posted the opportunity to online groups that cater specifically to gig economy workers such as various Deliveroo and Uber driver Facebook groups and other appropriate online forums. A similar process of screening prior to questionnaire completion was used. Participants were paid an incentive to compensate for their time. Informed consent was used to recruit participants in line with ethical guidelines

The number of qualitative interviews required to explore an issue which has little research is a contested area but it is generally agreed that around 6-12 interviews are appropriate and often as few as six will provide enough data to identify meta themes (Guest et al 2006). The qualitative data were analysed using thematic content analysis and finally a thematic map was developed to show the inter relationships between themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

We developed a questionnaire (Appendix B) based on the themes that were identified from the interview data and delivered it online via social media forums for couriers and courier organisations. The study was given ethical approval given by UCL Research Ethics Committee (number 4129/002)

3. Online survey

Characteristics of respondents to online survey

Our online survey achieved 231 responses from couriers working with over 12 different companies from around Britain. Participant’s characteristics are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Characteristics of participants and their work in online survey of gig workers (N=231)

Main type of vehicle used:	%
Cars	43
Two wheel motorised bikes	12
Bicycles	29
Vans	16
How long gig working:	
Under 1 year	36
1-2 years	31
2-3 years	9
More than 3 years	24
Hours per week:	
Under 15 hrs	24
15-35 hours	39
35-60 hours	31
More than 60 hours	6
Checks carried out by company	
Passport	57
Driver/rider	66
Criminal record	57
Insurance	37
No checks	11
Can't remember /don't know	7
How often driving licence checked	
Annually	8
Every 6 months	5
Just when I signed up	32
Never / Not at all	18
Not applicable - I ride a bicycle	22
Other (non-drivers)	15
How they signed up for work	
Via App	37
In person at depot	26
Website	37
Working for other companies	
Full time	8
Part time	17
No	75
Gender:	
Male	84
Female	16

Our sample was predominantly male, people mainly drove cars and vans though nearly a third (29%) were bicycle couriers. Over three quarters had been working in the gig economy for less than three years and over one third were relatively new entrants to this emerging business. Our survey showed that all couriers worked flexible hours and most (80%) were paid per delivery with 20% paid per time block. The survey showed that 47% of the couriers said they delivered food, 41% said they delivered parcels and 21% provided taxi services. In terms of hours most of the survey sample worked between 15 - 35 hours (38%), but a quarter worked fewer than 15 (24%) but over one third (37%) worked longer hours than this with 15 people admitting to working over 60 hours a week.

Our survey showed that sign up by app was 37%, website 37% and in person at depot 26%. Security checks included licence, national insurance and passport ID. In our survey 57% said that their passport was checked, 37% reported their vehicle insurance was checked, criminal record was 57% and driving licence 66% but a worrying 11% saying that no checks were made.

Flexibility

From the survey 75% agreed with the statement “I enjoy working in the gig economy because it gives me a flexible way to make money”. 11% disagree/disagreed strongly with this statement with the remainder neither agreeing or disagreeing. Our survey showed that a quarter worked for other companies outside the gig economy and of these a 31% (equivalent to 8% of the total sample) work in fulltime employment with the remainder working part time.

Risks and risk management

Table 3 shows most survey respondents (63%) said that the company did not provide any training on how to manage risks on the road and 65% said they did not provide any safety equipment (such as a high visibility vest). Most of the survey respondents (70%) said they provided their own safety equipment. We asked respondents whether the company suggested that they should have rest breaks. The majority of the sample (67%) said “No”. Most of the respondents said that they were not told not to use their phone when driving or riding. Only 26% of respondents agreed that the gig company they worked for cared about their safety. We asked respondents whether the responsibility for their safety should be their own, the company’s or shared – most (68%) said it should be shared. Nearly a third agreed with the statement that “There is a person at my gig company that I can contact if I have any concerns about safety at work” - but nearly half the sample (45%) disagreed.

Table 4 shows that significant proportion of our respondents experienced risk factors that are related to collision causation. In terms of distraction we asked if their work is app based had this ever caused a distraction when you are driving / riding – 40% said “yes”.

In terms of effects of fatigue, a minority of respondents (16%) agreed that they sometimes struggled to stay awake when driving or riding.

Nearly half (47%) of respondents agreed with the statement that “The time pressure of gig work can make you travel over the speed limit”. Most respondents (63%) agreed that they sometimes have to park illegally to make a delivery and nearly a third (30%) agreed that they had driven / ridden through a red light when they've been under pressure. A small minority of the survey respondents (8%) said they had received licence points while working as a gig driver /rider.

Our survey (Table 5) showed that a large proportion (42%) of lifestyle couriers and taxi drivers reported that they had experienced a collision where their vehicle had been damaged and 10% of the total sample said someone (usually themselves) had been injured. Three quarters of respondents (75%) agreed that there had been occasions while working when they have had to take action to avoid a crash.

Table 3 Views of drivers and riders in the gig economy on their company’s risk management (N=231)

	agree/agree strongly	neither agree/or disagree	disagree/strongly disagree
The gig company I work for cares about my safety	26%	30%	45%
There is a person at my gig company that I can contact if I have any concerns about safety at work.	32%	22%	45%
Who do you think should be responsible for your safety while you are working?	I should be responsible 25%	The company and I should share responsibility 68%	The company should be responsible 7%

Table 4; Agreement levels with statements about risks of diving or riding for work among drivers and riders in the gig economy (N=231)

	agree/agree strongly	neither agree/or disagree	disagree/strongly disagree
The time pressure of gig work can make you travel over the speed limit	47%	20%	33%
Sometimes I struggle to stay awake when driving or riding	16%	13%	71%
I sometimes have to park illegally to make a delivery	63%	14%	23%
There have been occasions while working where I've had to take action to avoid a crash	75%	9%	16%
I have driven / ridden through a red light when I've been under pressure	30%	14%	56%
If your work is app based, does the app ever cause a distraction when you are driving / riding?	41% 'yes'		

Table 5: Self-reported licence points, collisions and injuries among drivers and riders in the gig economy

Have you ever received any licence points while working as a gig driver / rider?	8%
Has your vehicle ever been damaged as a result of an accident whilst working as a gig driver / rider?	42%
Has anyone ever been injured in an accident that you were involved in when driving /riding as gig worker?	10%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both me and someone else 	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Just me 	8%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Just someone else 	2%

4. Qualitative interviews

4.1 Interview sample

We achieved most of the intended sample of interviews. It proved difficult to recruit as many managers as we had hoped but we successfully interviewed six managers, 15 food couriers on two wheels, 10 taxi drivers and 17 parcel couriers. The sample comprised participants from across Great Britain. The participant characteristics are shown in Table 6. We have created a pseudonym to ensure that the participant identity is anonymised and only refer to the companies involved as A, B, C followed by an indication of the type of work involved. We have used a selection of verbatim quotes to illustrate emerging themes and after each quote indicate which participant they have come from. It is difficult to 'quantify' what constitutes a theme in our work but suffice it to say that a theme represents a similar view from several participants with the likelihood that this view is mirrored many times over on the real population of courier workers.

Table 6. Interview survey participant characteristics

Pseudonym	Gender	Job description	How long worked for	Average hours per week	Urban, Suburban, rural
David	Male	Bike courier	4 months	15	Suburban
Andrew	Male	Bike courier	4 months	20	Urban
Liam	Male	Bike courier	8 months	20	Urban
Victor	Male	Bike courier	3 weeks	30 – 40	Urban
James	Male	Bike courier	3 months	10	Urban
Paul	Male	Bike courier	4 months	20 - 40	Urban
Sally	Female	Bike courier	14 months	35 - 40	Urban
John	Male	Car courier	1 year	20	All
Peter	Male	Car courier	18 months	0 - 24	Urban
Rachel	Female	Car courier	5 months	6 - 24	Rural / Suburban
Frank	Male	Car courier	1 year +	40	All
Ryan	Male	Car courier	9 months	0 - 12	Urban / Suburban
Mark	Male	Car courier	TBC	50 - 60	Urban
Gary	Male	Car courier	8 months	20 - 24	All
Carol	Female	Car courier	4 months	6 - 8	Suburban / Rural
Stuart	Male	Car courier	8 months	24	Urban / Suburban
Jamie	Male	Car courier	4 months	42 – 50	All
Craig	Male	Manager	3 years	60 – 70	All
Martin	Male	Manager	2 years	60 - 70	All
Richard	Male	Manager	3 years	40 – 45	Urban
Ray	Male	Manager	1 year / many years as courier	35	Rural
Vivian	Female	Manager	14 years	70	All
Oliver	Male	Motorbike courier	2 years	10	Urban
Louis	Male	Motorbike courier	7 months	30 - 35	Urban / Suburban
Jack	Male	Motorbike courier	18 months	25 - 30	Urban
Neil	Male	Motorbike courier	1 year	50 - 60	Urban
Tomas	Male	Motorbike courier	1+ year	35	Urban
Mary	Female	Motorbike courier	4 months	30	Urban
Jon	Male	Motorbike courier	9 months	60+	Urban / Suburban
Silvio	Male	Motorbike courier	18 months	30 – 40	Urban / Suburban
Mark	Male	Operations Manager until 31/01/2018	7 months + previously	45	Urban
Harry	Male	Taxi Driver	2 years	10 - 40	Urban
Dion	Male	Taxi Driver	1 - 2 years	60 - 80	Urban
Edward	Male	Taxi Driver	1 year	60 - 70	Urban / Suburban
Andy	Male	Taxi Driver	18 months	20 - 45	All
Alan	Male	Taxi Driver	18 months	70 - 80	All
Alex	Male	Taxi Driver	2+ years	45 – 50	All
Toby	Male	Taxi Driver	2 years	60	Urban
Arnab	Male	Taxi Driver	2 years	40 – 50	Urban
Gabriel		Taxi Driver	almost 1 year	50 – 60	Urban
Nathan	Male	Taxi Driver	1 year	25 -45	All
Sarah	Female	Van courier	15 years	46+	All
Will	Male	Van courier	18 months	60+	Urban / Suburban
Brian	Male	Van courier	2.5 years	60	All
Anne	Female	Van courier	3+ years	40	All
Dan	Male	Van courier	Not known	48	All
Ben	Male	Van courier	8 months	20	All
Kate	Female	Van courier	2 years	72	Suburban

We present the data here by different vehicle modes - cars and vans, motorbikes/mopeds/scooters and pedal cyclists couriers because each has a unique aspect related to safety.

4.2 Car and van couriers

Pressure

It was clear from the participants that parcel courier work on a self-employed basis was intrinsically pressurised because it is based on a piece rate:

We only get paid on what we deliver. The pressure is on you to deliver because if you don't deliver you don't earn. (Anne, Van courier Company D parcel delivery)

One courier worked seven days a week and drove just short of 60 hours per week for what they considered as a low rate per drop felt under immense time pressure:

I feel under immense pressure. The job itself is allegedly self-employed, but you are working in an area that is given to you by [Company E parcel delivery] and you are using a tunic they provide you with and you have to work within what's called ETAs [estimated time of arrival], so you're estimating how many deliveries you're going to do per hour slot and you've obviously got to travel from one address to another. [Company E parcel delivery] work out that it is 2 and a half minutes per parcel which includes scanning that parcel, loading that parcel in your vehicle and delivering that parcel, but that's a vast under estimation. (Sarah, van courier, Company E parcel delivery)

For those who were paid for a time block felt that they were given an excessive workload compared to employed drivers working for the same company:

they give their own drivers who are employed drivers like 50 to 60 drops a day, but they expect a self-employed driver to do nearly triple the amount of work in the same amount of time. (Will, Van courier, Company F parcel delivery)

Distraction

Many of our participants found the app a distraction because it beeps when jobs are offered and they were continually looking down at it taking their eye off the road. Also because the app acted as a 'sat nav' it often caused them to go in the wrong direction which was also regarded as a distraction:

I think you can get distracted sometimes by the fact that you're using the app, you know, sometimes the app sends you in the wrong direction or you're travelling back on yourself, so you're reversing, turning around, doing a U-turn quite a lot. That can sometimes cause you problems. You are doing U-turns quite a bit. (Carol, car courier Company A parcel delivery)

"Participant: with it constantly going off at me when you're driving, it does become a distraction.

Interviewer: How many messages are they sending?

.. can have anything up to 10 a day. Some people are saying, where's our parcel, or telling me where to deliver a parcel to or you tried to deliver to this address and the customer says you didn't give them enough time to get to the door, or the customer is now back home, can you go back and deliver it. Stupid little things.

Interviewer: It just dings and dings until you answer it?

Until you press the button to say, read, it's literally like a loud bell every 30 odd seconds.

Interviewer: Do you feel that has any impact on your safety?

It can be distracting, yes especially if you've got 10 minutes and you're going through school areas and what-not and you've got 10 minutes until your next stop. (Jamie, car courier, Company E parcel delivery)

Tiredness

Tiredness was an overarching theme of the narratives of parcel couriers. Many of the parcel delivery couriers spoke of the intense pressure of self-employed parcel delivery which impacted their sense of wellbeing and level of tiredness:

Tiredness just totally affects us in the fact that your reactions aren't as fast. You're not noticing things that you would normally notice, albeit signs, kids stepping out, a car that's got a headlight out, easy to misinterpret it as a bike, and before you know it, even road markings and especially on the rural rounds where the road markings disappear. There have been a couple of times I've clipped kerbs, or you'll clip onto the grass verges and what-not. That's just personal experience from my point of view and I know the areas I drive in especially with the weather and the days where it's dark by 4 o'clock. I would rather be off the road by then because you get tired in that state and on the roads, I work on, it's just an accident waiting to happen.(Jamie, car courier, Company E parcel delivery)

Participant: *The main risks are the long hours, the lack of breaks, the time pressure, so you don't eat, you don't drink and the risks of abuse from customers and the pressure from management who only care about getting the parcels out.*

Interviewer: *How does all that make you feel?*

Participant: *That's why I'm looking for another job. Unloved, unsupported and unappreciated. They just do not care. (Kate, van courier, Company E parcel delivery)*

One driver admitted falling asleep at wheel:

Interviewer: *You're also working a lot of hours. Do you ever feel very tired whilst you're working?*

Participant: *Yes, especially when I'm driving home, and I feel myself snoozing off. I open the windows and slap my face to wake myself. There was a time when I was very tired and kept waking myself up. I felt the van going over bumps and that wakes you up. I slowed right down to about 50 mph on the motorway and trying not to go too fast. If you do crash, it's not going to be very good if you're going too fast. (Will, van courier, Company F parcel delivery)*

The mental and physical workloads were described as fatiguing:

You've got to think all the time and you've got to get up early, you've got to organise your car yourself, and it sounds strange, but you wake up at about 6 in the morning to check parcels and see how many you've got and then when you know your round, you're automatically climbing in your head where you're going and what you're doing. When you see that you've got large ones, you're thinking how many I am going to fit in, and whether I am going to have to run some home, it does play on your mind quite a bit. You're up early and I found that when I was getting back at dinner time, I was nodding off. (Steve, Car courier, Company E parcel delivery)

I get in and out of that van, 70, 80, 90 times a day. (Anne, Van courier, Company D parcel delivery).

... by the time I get home I would be worn out because it's not just delivery driving because you're having to know where you are going every time and when you jump out the car, and as soon as I'm out the car, I'm on the app, you have to scan your parcel, check your parcel, make sure it's the right one, make sure you're in the right area, so your head's in gear all the time, so it's more mental tiredness, it's not physical, you do a bit of walking, but physically, no problems, but mentally, I think you can get mentally tired, yes.(Frank, Car courier, Company A parcel delivery)

One courier felt so tired that they had to stop driving but then felt much more pressurised as a result:

Participant: *During peak there were several times where I thought I could have easily fallen asleep at the wheel and that is being totally truthful, and I would stop and get out the car, I'd park up and get out for 5 minutes.*

Interviewer: *Is that something you felt able to do in terms of the time that you had, or did that then put you under pressure?*

Participant: *It put me under more pressure because obviously I started to get behind, but at the end of the day, I am no good to anybody if I have an accident, you've got to be aware of it. You've just got to do the best that you can. (Sarah, van courier Company E parcel delivery)*

Many couriers spoke of excessive demands at Christmas combined with dark nights affecting their level of tiredness and this led to feeling impaired, easily distracted and a conscious need to concentrate more with some relying on stimulants such as caffeine drinks to keep going, though this potentially masked their impairment:

Participant: *We've just gone through what we call peak which are Christmas deliveries. I worked 33 days solid without a break and the majority of those days were anything between 12 and 14 hours. It was a case of get up, have a coffee, go to work, come home, have a cup of tea, go to bed. I was exhausted.*

Interviewer: *What kind of impact did you find that having on you, your driving, your safety?*

Participant: *I tried to take regular breaks. I was working up until 9 o'clock at night and I was drinking a lot of energy drinks. (Sarah, van courier Company E parcel delivery)*

Yes, not so much on just the 4-hour block, but before Christmas and the lead up to it, although I was only doing 24 hours, what I was doing, was I doing them over 3 days basically, so I was doing 2 4-hour blocks back to back and particularly as you are getting to the evening, because you're doing a 4 till 8, it's dark, your eyes start to get tired very quickly, so you're having to concentrate a lot more. (Gary, car courier, Company A, parcel delivery)

Some couriers felt that could take a break when they wanted in other words they had they freedom to self-regulate and avoid tiredness:

No, I don't think it has. It hasn't for me anyway, no. For me, it's only something that I'm doing because I choose to. It's not something I have to. It's not my daily bread and butter if you know what I mean, so if I were feeling tired, or off it, or it was dark, I just simply wouldn't do it. (Carol, Company A parcel delivery)

Risks and Violations

Participants reported that the pressurised nature of the work led them to speed or take other risks to save time:

There are times where yes, you will, go faster than the speed limit, or you will gamble on an amber light just to get through it. Just to save that bit of time, so yes, most definitely. (Peter, Car courier, Company A parcel delivery)

One courier worked six days a week 7-6pm 11 hours a day and already had six points for speeding:

Interviewer: *Is speeding something you have to do to get the job done, or you just did it?*

Participant: *Yes, very much.*

Interviewer: *You feel like it is, you feel like you must speed?*

Participant: *You must stay within your time windows. The customer gets a delivery window when the parcel will be delivered and if you go out of those windows, you get fined for it. You get a service charge fine. (Will, van courier, Company F parcel deliver)]*

Some do not feel the need to take risks and want to avoid getting points on their licence:

I just drive at my normal pace because that's what I do anyway, and I know the roads around here. I will just drive at a good steady pace everywhere. It's not worth getting a ticket, it's not worth me getting any points. I might go 35 in a 30 without realising, but I mean I am not flying around everywhere. (Frank, Car courier Company A parcel delivery)

The long hours of courier work and the exposure to risk (high mileage) were identified as the key risks associated with their work:

I think it is a high-risk job, yes because you're on the road all day. (Anne, van courier Company D parcel delivery)

Six days a week, we can't work 7 and I probably do 12 hours a day roughly. That's a 9-hour route and I've got travelling time to and from the depot to where I live and leaving the depot to the first drop and from the last drop back to the depot. (Brian, van courier, company A parcel delivery)

Collisions and near misses

Participants admitted to experiencing near misses regularly and damaging their own and others vehicles:

I've had a couple of near misses where I've been reversing around, you do an awful lot of U-turns and it's quite tough on the vehicle, as I said, sometimes you might get in the car, drive 100 yards and then realise you've gone the wrong way, so you have to stop on a country lane, do a U-turn and turn around. (Ryan, car courier, Company A parcel delivery)

Yes. Just one of those things. I didn't know where I was. I didn't look in my mirrors. I spotted a plaque on someone's wall and I thought that's the road I want, turned around, and didn't look, smack into the back of someone's car. (Brian, van courier, company A parcel delivery)

Another risk identified by couriers was that because of the piece rate per parcel cars or vans were loaded to the extent that the driver could not see out of the windows:

I've had to have the back seat loaded right up to past the window which then screws up your mirrors and it buggers it up when you're turning as you can't use the windows like you usually would to look out of and get a reference point. (Jamie, car courier, Company E parcel delivery)

I think the only risks are in terms of the number of parcels they give you and the fact they don't seem to care if you can see out of your windows or not. (Rachel, car courier, Company A parcel delivery)

Improvements

We asked couriers what improvements they make if they were in charge of the business their answers suggest that they would control the number of parcels, raise awareness about safety and expect more interest from management in their safe return after work:

I would make sure that someone hadn't got a ridiculous number of parcels, so the windows are being blocked, ... I'd probably cut down the distance a bit because like I say when you realise you've got another hour to drive to make your first delivery, it does put you in a bad mood and it does perhaps make you tempted to speed. If you're thinking I've only got so much time to do this. I think they could probably work on that side of things. (Rachel, car courier, Company A parcel delivery)

...there should probably be some literature sent out to the drivers when they start, maybe a little safety booklet, an A4 guide on keeping yourself safe that sort of thing, but there are more costs involved with that.(Ryan, car courier, Company A parcel delivery)

...drivers should be paid from the time that they start to the time they return to the depot, and every driver should return to the depot, so that they know that you're safe because anything could happen while you're out, and they wouldn't know (Gary, car courier, Company A parcel delivery)

Summary

Many parcel couriers work long hours feel pressurised, mentally and physically fatigued by their work and admit being distracted by their work interface. Many of these couriers experienced regular near misses and had experienced collisions. Couriers wanted to travel less distance, be paid for their time not per drop and be given information about keeping safe.

4.3 Motorcyclist, moped and scooter couriers

Enjoyment

Many of the powered two wheel couriers enjoyed the freedom from not having a boss, control of the amount of hours they worked and the ability to set their own goals with an acceptance of the negatives of gig work:

I am very happy working with [Company C food delivery), it's not like other jobs where you get all the security and all the on-job training, but it's got other positives where you control the amount of work you want to do, the hours, you don't have to answer to a boss. There are a lot of positives. I think people that get this sort of job, they should just accept the negatives, like we shouldn't uniform all jobs, but if people want the safety and security they should go for maybe a non-gig economy job, or they accept these risks and they go for this sort of job.(Mary, motorbike courier, Company C food delivery)

Pressure

Unlike car/van drivers these couriers seemed less pressured:

I do not feel as if I'm getting rushed, but I personally feel like I've got targets myself, yes, just generally for myself (Tomas, motorbike courier, Companies B and C)

I wouldn't say not under pressure, no, because at the end of the day it's your own schedule, your own responsibilities, so you haven't got anyone breathing down your neck or anything. (Nathan, taxi driver Company B taxi)

I do, but it's totally on me because sometimes you get goal fixated, you've nearly done, say 6 drops an hour, so you get fixated on just doing as many as possible because it's more money then, but then you realise you might have a slip on the road, or sudden braking and then you think I'm going back to my regular pace. You must self-regulate when it comes to pressure. (Mary, motorbike courier, Company C food delivery)

Some of the couriers worked for multiple companies to secure a good income. This led one courier to feeling under pressure and causing them to rush in what they considered to be dangerous environments:

Interviewer: *Do you feel under pressure in this work?*

Participant: *Yes, but I feel under pressure anyway. It's the best job I've ever had and it's on my own schedule, but if I don't do this I will be under a lot more pressure because I don't have a job.*

Interviewer: *Do you feel like being under pressure ever impacts the way you ride? Does it ever impact your safety?*

Participant: *Yes, it does stress me out to be honest, but that's my fault because I don't think I should be overlapping jobs, but I'd rather do that to have a secure and nice income especially as I'm commuting there and then paying for places to stay while I'm there and that. I think it does sometimes because I will get a delivery on my app. I will get a delivery with [Company H food delivery] and then it's very rare and I would have just picked it up, so I will have to deliver that now and then I will get a delivery with [Company G food delivery] or something and a few more in opposite directions and I will have to rush it, maybe do a little bit of speed, but to be honest, I think with [Company H food delivery] , even on its own, you've always got to filter through traffic, you've always got to be quick for your destinations otherwise you're not going to make the normal target of £10 an hour, £9 an hour, you've always got to filter especially in central London, I think it is dangerous. I've been doing it for a while and I feel like hitting people sometimes.(Jon, Motorbike courier multiple food delivery companies)*

To be honest with you, most of the [Company H food delivery]drivers that I know, they all work with 3 or 4 different companies. You can sometimes see an [Company H food delivery) driver wearing the [Company C food delivery) jackets with the [Company H food delivery] trousers and, on the box, it will say another company. I think that if they want to work more, they will work more. (Oliver, Motorbike courier Company H food delivery)

Once again as with the car/van couriers participants felt that the faster you go the more you earn which led to risk taking and road traffic violations especially with regard to speed and a view that this behaviour was endemic among gig workers:

Participant: *“It’s all about yourself and getting paid more. Nobody puts any pressure on you, nobody asks you to go faster or anything. You don’t get messages or anything. It’s basically the faster you are, the more you earn*

Interviewer: *Do you think that has any impact on your safety on the roads?*

Participant: *Absolutely. You want me to be honest?*

Interviewer: *I do want you to be honest. It’s all confidential. I want you to be honest.*

Participant: *You ignore all the road signs and you just speed all the time. I got 2 tickets for running through a red light. I got a ticket for illegal parking, I’ve got 2 of them.*

Interviewer: *Sounds like it might get quite expensive?*

Participant: *Basically, you’re trying to do as many hours as possible. If you do 50 orders today, you will get £250, so it’s nothing.(Louis, Motorbike courier multiple companies)*

...I probably went over, you know, over the speed limit a few times, but I’ve never been caught. If you work for a few hours you tend to focus less because obviously you’re a little bit tired or so, so it’s easier to make a mistake, therefore you forget the traffic law, so you know, go through the lights or just do something unwise. (Silvio, motorbike courier Companies C and H food delivery)

Interviewer: *Do you ever feel like you have broken the speed limit because you’ve felt under pressure to get deliveries?*

Participant: *Yes. I think all the drivers do, yes.(Oliver, Motorbike courier Company H food delivery)*

Tiredness

We asked couriers about their experiences of tiredness and working long hours and the potential impacts this has had in their safety. Some participants said they felt exhausted by the non-stop nature of the work:

You’re literally non-stop, you’re tired and what was happening there were times when I was riding a bike and I could just feel myself so exhausted. I just wanted to close my eyes and when you reach that stage, you’re just like, you know what, you need to stop. I have seen people that don’t, they just carry on. They will go and do a load of Red Bulls, loads of Pro Plus tablets and they carry on..... I knew other riders that would literally be there from 7am and finish at 2am. Yes, they are making shit loads of money, shit loads, but you know what, they are probably going to die very soon. (Neil, motorbike courier, Company H food delivery)

One participant worked a full time job and then worked as a courier 17.00 to 24.00 and then had a 1 hour commute to negotiate:

Yes, I think so. Not from [Company B taxi], but because I am working full-time at another job, sometimes I think it is because you are hungry for money, you think I can do one more order, one more order and then when I actually start my other job from 8 in the morning and I think it’s 5 o’clock and I do a delivery and then I’m far away from home and it gets to midnight and I need to travel one hour to go home, so I do get tired with it. Not to a point where I will fall asleep while driving. I know what my limit is. I am not sure that is the case with all drivers because people that work for [Company H food delivery) do it as a full-time job and as you know it is self-employed and if they really need the money, I think yes, they will carry on doing the job.(Oliver, Motorbike courier, Company H food delivery)

Other couriers also admitted working long hours:

When I’m flat out working which is all I do when I’m down in London, like recently I’ve had a few other things going on as well, so I’ve been doing 12-hour shifts, but I work every day and I’ll get out for 9 in the morning and finish at 12 o’clock usually, so I get up at 8, start work at 9, so usually at least 15-hour shifts.(Jon, Motorbike courier-multiple companies food delivery)

Distraction

Most of the motorbike, moped and scooter couriers we talked to received work via an app on a mobile phone and most found it a distraction because there was a noise to alert them of a job and a fixed time window in which to accept a job and also because they had to look down follow the directions to the job given by the 'sat nav' function:

I must admit I just look down and swipe it with one hand whilst I am still going, probably isn't the safest thing you could do. (Jack, motorbike courier, Company C food delivery)

.It's the maps that take quite a lot of distraction, that's the main thing because once you get a job that pops up, all you've to do is tap the screen and you accept the job, but then after that, it's the map that comes up and tells you where you've got to go. You've got to follow that, so that's one of the main distractions. (Tomas, Motorbike courier, Companies C and H food delivery)

Many admitted handling their phone whilst riding to accept jobs:

You will not like go and park on the side of the road, you will just do it while driving. It is just pressing a button on the screen, but if it's busy on the road it might happen that there is an accident. I know it's illegal to use your phone whilst you're driving. (Oliver, Motorbike courier Company H food delivery)

the [Company A parcel delivery] app, it locks while you're riding, so the screen locks while it's on the map screen which it shouldn't do which is dangerous, so I would then be while I'm driving I don't want to take the wrong turning and take another 20 minutes to get to my destination, so I will try and click on it while I'm riding and then I'm looking at that and not the road ahead of me and you don't want to pull over because sometimes you can't pull over. (Jon, Motorbike courier multiple companies food delivery)

Do you? Do you ever find yourself touching the phone and pressing the phone while you're riding? Yes, I did, but I don't think it affects my safety much. I think with [Company H food delivery], you only have 30 seconds to accept an order, sometimes that can be an issue, but with [Company C food delivery], I think it's 3 or a couple of minutes. (Silvio, motorbike courier, Companies C and H)

These couriers often had their phone attached to their steering handles and found that it was a distraction and they often handled their phone whilst riding knowing they shouldn't and it might affect their safety:

Again, I always try and be as safe as possible, so the impact it has was I would be like, oh, for God's sake! I'd look at it and then maybe my mind was taken off the road because I'm looking at the app and I would have to take one of my hands off the steering wheel either to accept the job or decline the job, but most of the times accept the job and you shouldn't have one hand on the steering wheel of a motorbike. You should have both. The reason why you need to do it, very sharpish, is within a small window, I think it's a minute or 2 minutes, if you don't accept it, it will take it away like as if you rejected it. (Neil, Motorbike courier, Company H food delivery)

The distraction caused by their phone was even greater when it was raining because it made it difficult to use:

when it's raining and because it's a touch screen it sometimes doesn't work properly, so you must take out your phone and you handle it while riding just to accept an order. (Louis, motorbike courier Companies C and H food delivery)

Interviewer: *Has that ever caused you any problems having to look or touch your phone while you're riding?*
Participant: *Yes, especially if it's raining. I've taken wrong exits a few times, but I do feel very unsafe when I have to go on my phone while I'm riding and then it makes it even more dangerous because I've got to be checking my mirrors, being aware of police behind me, police next to me, maybe they're looking to see if I'm quickly tapping my phone, I know I can get done for that, so that's even more stress and then you must look at the speed limit to make sure you're slowing down for the speed cameras... (Jon, Motorbike courier, multiple companies)*

Yes, probably. If I'm fumbling with my phone whilst I am riding, then I guess I would say that's my responsibility and I should pull over safely. I should know better. I would say it has affected my attention. (Jack, motorbike courier, Company C food delivery)

For one courier the only way to avoid distraction was to keep it in her pocket to resist the temptation:

I have my phone in my pocket because I did try and have it on the scooter, but I know if I had that, I would probably look at it while I'm driving and I don't want to be doing, so I have it in my pocket, so I have to stop to use 2 hands to get it out. (Mary, motorbike courier Company C food delivery)

Risks

These couriers described risks related to safety riding in busy traffic, poor weather conditions and on poorly maintained roads and also that they are doing high mileage and therefore more exposed to these risks:

You must watch out for other riders, the other drivers, you also have to watch out for potholes and if it's raining and anything metal, you're slipping on it and the yellow paint work on bus stations and all that shit, you need to watch out as well. You've got to watch everything. (Neil, motorbike courier, Company H food delivery)

Well, every day, I think I do, it depends really, if I'm commuting that's an extra 100 miles, but if I'm down there, I'd say I would do about 80 to 100 miles a day, but then sometimes I'll be commuting to further places like Slough, Uxbridge or the opposite end like Barking, Camden, all over the place, so that could add an extra, I don't know, I'd say 80 to 140 miles a day. (Jon, motorbike courier multiple companies food delivery)

Several participants alluded to personal and third hand knowledge of security risks including being attacked, acid attacks and bike theft:

Participant: *I've been attacked a few times.*

Interviewer: *Attacked?*

Participant: *Yes, by random people.*

Interviewer: *Why do random people attack you? Has this been while you've been working?*

Participant: *Yes. It happens all the time to everyone. (Louis, motorbike courier Companies C and H food delivery)*

It happens every time, basically, your bike gets stolen, probably we've had 70 bikes stolen this year (Louis, motorbike courier, Company C and H food delivery)

I think there are a lot of risks. I am not sure if you are aware but in London there are a lot of acid attacks when people want to steal the motor bike. (Oliver, Motorbike courier, Company H food delivery)

I know for a fact that [Company C food delivery) cyclists are targeted by thieves, bicycle thieves. There seen as an easy target because of the number of riders who don't always lock their bike and because their movements are predictable. There are a lot of bicycle thefts and I can speak for myself in that my scooter was stolen late last year (Jack, motorbike courier Company C food delivery)

Weather conditions clearly posed a risk for participants on motorised two wheels. The companies they worked for incentivised carrying out work in such conditions by paying a higher than normal rate:

They will send you a message when it's raining badly and it's not nice weather, or it's snowing for instance, you would get a message from [Company H food delivery] or [Company C food delivery) saying come on guys, get out there, it's very busy, they do try and push you to get out there if it's not nice weather (Tomas, motorbike courier companies C and H)

Interviewer: *Do you ever feel any pressure to go out if conditions are bad?*

Participant: *Yes, I do, if it's light rain, if it's heavy rain, storm or very windy, I don't go out, even though they give you monetary incentives, they up the deliveries and you get an extra £1 or 50p or whatever per drop, so*

they do try and encourage, but personally, I don't feel comfortable to do it, but a lot of drivers have a lot of experience and they do feel comfortable and they do go out. It's down to the drivers to assess themselves. If you don't feel confident, then you shouldn't go and do it. (Mary, motorbike courier Company C food delivery)

Collisions and near misses

Many of our participants admitted having multiple spills and near misses which in a number of cases involved injury:

*I couldn't walk for 2 weeks because when I crashed, my ankle twisted around, so fire brigade came because I was stuck between the scooter and between the car. The police came and then the GP's and stuff like that. Company not interested just asked why I had not delivered the order....
Yes. It's not my first accident with a car. It's probably my third or fourth, so I'm used to it. (Louis, motorbike courier for Companies C and H food delivery)*

Interviewer: *How often would you say you have a near miss? You said it was regularly?*

Participant: *I'd say 3 times a day. I've just been lucky so far, I guess. I have such long days, so it doesn't seem that much, but I think in a whole day, I have about 2 or 3 at least. (Jon, motorbike courier multiple companies food delivery)*

Training and safety

Most participants felt that there was a tokenistic approach to training for the couriers and whilst document checks were carried out little attention was paid to raising awareness about safety or checking the roadworthiness of vehicles:

Participant: *Yes, they checked everything. Also, background checks, driver licence check, insurance check, safety equipment, your bike and stuff like that. In my case, my scooter.*

Interviewer: *So, they checked over your scooter, did they to make sure it was safe?*

Participant: *Not really. I think my front brake was not working while they were checking.*

Interviewer: *They didn't spot it?*

Participant: *No*

I think it was poor training, so we were with a guy, some sort of team leader and he sort of did one order with you to see if you can cycle safely. To see if you're capable for the job. It was hard to fail. (Louis, Motorbike courier Companies C and H food delivery)

Several participants observed that the companies they worked for were actually recoiling from providing any form of safety training because they did not want to be perceived as acting like an employer:

I think now because they make it clear that they are not employers and we are self-employed, they are very careful to not tell us what to do and not regulate us. It's good in a way as it gives us more freedom, but obviously, it's bad. The downside to this is they don't feel able to dictate safe terms for safety, they advise us. (Jack, motorbike courier, Company C food delivery)

At the beginning we were given special jackets and then after a while there was an announcement that we can wear anything we want to basically because they're not allowed by law to tell us what to wear (Silvio, motorbike courier companies C and H food delivery)

Responsibility

Participants felt that there the companies should have some responsibility of rider safety:

I think the fact that we are self-employed and us feeling like we must take responsibility for ourselves. I can appreciate that position, but then part of me also thinks that is kind of like having a cake and eating it in that perhaps they should take more responsibility for regulating driver safety and that kind of thing. (Jack, motorbike couriers Company C food delivery)

Improvements

We asked our participants what improvements could be made to their working conditions and their answers included:

- Reviewing riders work commitments to check whether they were overlapping jobs however with the recognition that most people overlap jobs to increase their income.
- A proper messaging system, so you can properly contact people and speak to them about the problems they are having.
- Proper tyres for the type of weather – providing them with equipment that would make it safer for them
- A heated jacket
- Speed monitoring by being reminded to stay in the speed limits and an incentive or bonus when speed limits are adhered to though for some companies it was recognised that the apps penalise you for going over the speed limit and drivers ratings go down if they go too fast.
- It was also felt that the amount of money that's given per deliver should be increased “ *so that the incentive of driving around like a headless chicken isn't so high, but it's still there because you still want the food to get to the customers at a reasonable time, you don't want the guy to be strolling there.* ” (Neil, Motorbike courier, Company H food delivery)

Summary

Many of moped/motorcyclists seem to enjoy the freedom and flexibility of courier work and seemed to feel less pressure compared to the car and van couriers. However, they reported feeling fatigued by their work (some were working for multiple companies) and distracted by the work interface and occasionally felt vulnerable when the weather/road conditions were poor. Like van and car couriers, they also experienced near misses and collisions on a regular basis. These couriers felt that there should be some management of the risks they face and that their money should be increased.

4.4 Taxi services

Enjoyment

The taxi drivers working in the gig economy enjoyed their work and saw it as less pressured and more flexible than being a taxi driver employed by a company:

There is mutual respect between the driver and the customer because they have all the details on the driver, they have all the vehicle registration details, they also have a picture of the driver, and we on the flipside of it, but as a company, [Company B taxi] have all the details on the customer they have, their telephone number, their email address and all those kinds of things, so the customers are completely different because of our mutual respect, I don't get issues with customers. (Andy, taxi driver Company B)

It is more flexible as well. I don't have to go out at a certain and come back at a certain time, that was the main reason and I can afford to sleep now.(Arnab, Taxi driver Company B)

Pressure

Taxi drivers working in the gig economy did not express many concerns about pressure despite the whole system being designed to put you under pressure:

Being at [Company B taxi], we don't feel any pressure, like time pressure as opposed being with different taxi companies where you have jobs and you must do them as quickly as possible. I see other drivers feeling panicked, but not [Company B taxi] drivers. (Alex, Taxi driver, Company B)

Interviewer: *Do you feel like you experience any time pressure doing this work?*

Participant: *No, not really because it was a normal set time before, but now they've put 10 hours limit for the driving thing, so that is why you must manage your time a little bit more now.(Arnab, Taxi driver Company B)*

Participants acknowledged that the intrinsic pressure of the job led to speeding on occasions:

I haven't done it on occasions in that you want to get to the next fare because when you get to the next fare, you're starting to make money again, so what tends to happen, is the driver limits their time they are not making money by speeding up a little bit. I don't do that now because too many points on your licence, and it means your insurance costs go through the roof anyway, so it's not worth it to be fair. (Andy, taxi driver Company B)

Tiredness did not come through as such a strong theme compared to the parcel couriers as they tended to choose their own hours and self-regulate when they felt tired:

As I said to you earlier, there's always tomorrow. When you are very tired you just go home, there's no point in working. You never know you may get one long trip which takes you far away and then how are you going to get back. (Arnab, Taxi driver Company B)

Interviewer: *Do you ever feel very tired whilst you're working?*

Participant: *No, because I choose my own hours. (Alex, Taxi driver, Company B)*

I feel tired sometimes, if you've had a late night. I put like a balancer to it and if I feel a bit tired, I don't care about my target, I will just go home. (Edward, Taxi driver, Company B)

Some participants suggested that long hours may contribute to tiredness and that these long hours were caused by long commutes for some drivers into a city to work and the fact that they are incentivised to drive late at night because the rates increase:

..not everyone lives in central London. They maybe an hour or 2 hour's drive or something like that and they're working long hours especially on the weekends).(Arnab, Taxi driver Company B)

I can see why drivers were carrying on even if they're feeling tired because it's busy and then the later it goes on into the night, as [Company B taxi] have a surge so that's when the price goes up, so obviously the later you work into Friday night, Saturday night, the prices go up so I can see why drivers would be tempted to stay out even if they're tired because that £20 job may be £50 or £60 with surge.(Harry, Taxi driver Company B)

The participants we talked said that their driving is automatically monitored via the app and they were given a driver behaviour score:

“normally the following day, you'll get a report saying whether you were braking smoothly or whether you were speeding or whatever and again it rates you (Andy, Taxi driver Company B)

Few spoke of the distraction caused by the app (as it was like any other sat nav) but acknowledged they only had a short time to accept it.

Collisions and near misses

The experience of near misses was mentioned by most couriers:

Nearly every day. You never know, anytime. It is mostly cyclists or motorbikes because they come so fast. They have a better view than us because they can see all around from the car because it's an open space, they can see much better, but they put more pressure on us that we have to look everywhere than them having to look everywhere. When you're driving you're surrounded by them at rush hour time. There should be some rules for them as well, rules are there, but nobody follows. (Arnab, Taxi driver Company B)

Responsibility

In terms of responsibility for safety most our couriers said that the company should have some responsibility for the safety of the drivers because the size and wealth and international reach of the company they worked for:

Yes, I think they should keep their drivers safe as a multi-national company (Andy, Taxi driver, Company B)

One courier showed concern that there was no control on the quality of the driver:

there is such a wide range of drivers, you get drivers that are excellent, and you can get drivers that are rubbish, that is not [Company B taxi]'s fault because you don't know how somebody's going to be behind the wheel (Harry, Taxi driver, Company B)

Other couriers felt safety was their own responsibility because they were self-employed:

No, I don't think so because in the end it's down to me and it's my responsibility for my safety and everyone's safety. (Alex, Taxi driver, Company B)

Summary

Taxi service providers seemed to enjoy their work, feel less pressurised, less fatigued and distracted by their work interface compared to van/car couriers. Taxi service providers reported that near misses were a daily occurrence. Most felt that the company who brokered their services should also have some responsibility for their safety.

4.5 Cyclists

Enjoyment

Many of the cyclist couriers we interviewed enjoyed cycling as a way to keep fit and earn a decent wage. The role seemed particularly attractive to students as a way of earning a reasonable income whilst studying:

I see it more as am being paid to go out cycling. It's more of an encouragement to go out and cycle because you're gaining the benefit of keeping fit and you're getting paid for it, what's not to lose. (James, bike courier, Company C and I food delivery)

Yes. I had my own bike. I thought as I enjoyed cycling and I'm going to be making £10 an hour average. At my age I am not going to get a job that pays better than that, am I? (Liam, Bike courier Company C Food delivery)

Pressure

There were mixed views on the pressures of the job. Like the other couriers we spoke to pressure was seen as an intrinsic feature of courier work but also that they could self-regulate as long as they kept within certain rejection rates:

The main pressure is the pay because you get paid per delivery, so if I'm waiting at a restaurant for food or I'm waiting for the customer to come to the door, I don't get paid for any of that time because it's not an hourly wage. I just want to deliver as quickly as possible, to get the food as quickly as possible so I can get another delivery to make more money, that's kind of a positive pressure for me because if I work harder, I can get paid more. (Andrew, bike courier for companies C and H food delivery)

I don't feel any pressure at all. No, not at all. You have no one above you watch down on you. I've never been told to be faster or anything doing my deliveries, literally I've got no pressure at all. The only thing I know of, is that you have to keep your rejection rate above 70% [i.e. accept at least 70% of jobs] (Liam, bike courier Company C food delivery)

Because you get 15 minutes to get to the restaurant, then 15 minutes to get from the restaurant to the customer, but they do give you leeway and are not all that strict as long as you average out over the 2-week period 15 minutes and you'll be okay. When I first started working, it was like 30 minutes, there was no real big issue, but sometimes this plays on your mind. (Sally, bike courier, Company C food delivery)

Tiredness

Most of the cyclists we talked said that they self-regulated and took breaks or signed off if they were exhausted. They acknowledged that hours could be long hours without breaks and there was no regulation on hours worked:

Interviewer: *Do they mandate breaks or anything like that?*

Participant: *No. If you wanted to work 12 hours a day, 7 days a week you could*

....If you are knackered, you can just sign out and will have to accept to be penalised. You will have to accept to maybe losing a few hours the next week or something. (Liam, bike courier, Company C food delivery)

One courier had clearly felt the effect of tiredness which was a warning to her to stop working – she later described how being tired was a factor in a collision she had:

I think it's been something simple as in the end of the night and I've done quite a few deliveries and I was tired and I closed my eyes for a little bit too long and just went a bit too close to the kerb and swerve. It wasn't anything major, but it happens sometimes, and I felt that's when I know it's bed time. Go home.....I

was tired and just forgot to brake. I wasn't going fast. I was going at 2 mph, but I just didn't stop and went straight into a pole, straight over the handlebar. (Sally, bike courier Company C Food delivery)

Risks

Like other types of couriers we spoke cyclists were incentivised by their company to deliver in risky conditions:

We get 100% of all the tips we get as well and [Company C food delivery) offer bonuses as well in the rain. If it's terrible weather, they will text you and say you're going to get an extra £1 per delivery tonight due to the weather which is brilliant. £5.50 for delivery in the rain is brilliant. (Liam, bike courier, Company C food delivery)

However, rain was seen as the main risk factors endangering their safety:

Falling off happens all the time when it rains. (Sally, bike courier, Company C food delivery)

The intrinsic pressure of the job was also seen as risk:

You take risks that you normally wouldn't do if you were pedalling easy between drops and pick-ups. You might end up looking one side through an intersection instead of looking like 3 to 4 times as you go through the intersection because you're in a rush to get through. That is the sort of thing how I see it. It's not worth it. (Victor, bike courier, Company C food delivery)

The equipment they used was also seen as causing a risk by obstructing their vision when looking behind:

The bag on your back actually stops you from seeing directly behind you (James, bike courier, Companies C and I food delivery)

Distraction

The pedal cyclist couriers we spoke to acknowledged the distracting nature of the phone app which beeped when jobs came in and acted as a 'sat nav' showing the route to the next destination drawing their attention from the road and potentially jeopardising their safety. Participants reported that they would handle their phone whilst cycling especially as they had a short time window to respond and by not responding this would reduce their acceptance rate which could mean they would not be offered further jobs:

Yes, but that's down to my own fault because I need to know wherever it is I am going, I should stop at the side of the road and have a look and I shouldn't look at it as I'm moving. (Victor, bike courier, Company C food delivery)

Whilst you're out, sometimes the app can say, your GPS location hasn't changed, so if you're in a built-up area, where it's difficult to get a satellite connection on the GPS, it could be difficult to verify that you've moved, but from the app's perspective, it assumes that you haven't. So, if you're cycling, you've got to respond to it when it flashes even though are you are moving (James, bike courier, Companies C and I food delivery)

... *Every second that you don't respond, it reduces your acceptance rate. (James, bike courier, Companies C and I food delivery)*

Participant: *If I'm riding around and things, it would be whenever I get orders, so I would use my phone on my phone which is obviously not very safe. I would use it with just one hand because I have good balance. If it's secure, it's okay.....*

Interviewer: *Has it ever impacted your safety on the road, do you think?*

Participant: *I would say yes obviously because at the end of the day if I'm cycling through a junction or if I'm cycling through something and the app is just going, 'ding, ding' and I can hear through my earphones, or anything like that. (Peter, bike courier, Company C food delivery)*

Training

Unlike the other couriers we spoke to, most pedal cyclists felt that their managers were strict about giving basic safety advice and tips:

The manager that I spoke to was very strict on people wearing their helmet. The manager's name is [name] and the other manager's name is [name], and they're strict on safety and people always locking their bikes, because a lot of bikes get stolen as well. However, they can't enforce it, so personally, I will always wear a helmet and always have lights, but they can't enforce, so obviously, if people don't do it, then there's nothing they can do to force them. (Liam, bike courier Company C food delivery)

They did cover some things about checking your bike, make sure there is air in your tyres before you go out and that sort of thing. It wasn't anything that anybody who rides a bike doesn't already know. It's basic. It didn't get too complex or anything....They did give good tips like if you're turning left, don't get in front of the vehicle as it might cut across you or whatever, that's always a good tip to give a bike rider. (Andrew, bike courier Companies C and H food delivery)

However, one participant felt the induction was farcical:

They don't check out your bike to make sure it's safe enough.It's a farce the induction. They used to give you quite a few little things like lights for your bike from what I've heard just from the older riders on the Facebook group. They don't give you anything these days. They used to take you out for a short run on your bike⁴ and show you how that worked and how it all comes together to presumably see what you're like on the bike as well, but I assume now with the amount of people that apply, all they're doing are inductions (Victor, bike courier Company C food delivery)

Collisions and near misses

Most of the cycling couriers we talked to had experienced a collision either as a result of a fall or by being involved in a collision with a vehicle:

It was at night and I thought the kerb was lower than it was, and I just hit it at the wrong angle. I scraped my knee and ripped my pants, ripped my gloves (Andrew, bike courier Company C and H food delivery)

I did get hit by a car, not seriously, but just bumped the back of me when I was going to pull out on a busy road (David, bike courier, Company C food delivery)

I have had a few incidents where I had buses come so close to me that I've fallen off my bike because I felt too close that I fell to the pavement (James, bike courier, Companies C and I)

A taxi driver turned left in front of me and knocked me off as I was carrying on going straight at this intersection. He wasn't indicating, and I was probably in his blind spot. He just cut in front of me and I was forced off onto the road. I damaged a bit of clothing and damaged my bike and a few pieces on my bike and left leg got a bit grazed and cut up. I sat at the side of the road with the medic and police officer and then after a bit of wild screaming by myself, it was get back on and do it. (Victor, bike courier Company C food delivery)

⁴ This was an accompanied ride

Responsibility

The participants felt that it was their responsibility to be safe and that the company could not do anything more because it would open the door for demands for employment rights:

I don't feel like they're responsible for my safety at all because I chose to work for them as self-employed. It is all my decision. I know the risks. I know what's going on. I don't feel like if I have a crash it's down to them or their problem at all. I don't know how many other people think that view..... I feel like they've got themselves in a kind of situation where they can't do anything more than what they're already doing because then people would kick off. If they started treating them like employees, everyone would be like, well, if we're being treated well, why can't we have holiday pay. (Liam, Bike courier Company C food delivery)

Improvements

Many of the couriers felt that much could be done to improve the safety of pedal cyclist couriers including:

- Giving cyclists free safety equipment such as lights and reflective jackets and replace of jackets when they get damaged (currently they pay for their own jacket)
- Providing a thorough induction showing the basics of how to be safe on the road and do a test
- Making sure that people are wearing their helmets
- Making sure bikes are roadworthy
- Following-up when someone's had an accident.
- Have somebody in the local area that can get in touch with and go and see.

Summary

Cyclist couriers seem to enjoy their work as a way to keep fit and earn cash and many seemed to be able to self-regulate and avoid fatigue. However, they reported that they found their work interface a distraction. Many had experienced a fall or collision whilst working and saw poor weather conditions as a risk factor and admitted that they were given a higher rate of pay to go out in such conditions. Cyclist couriers seem to have had safety training but many felt more could be done to ensure the roadworthiness of the bikes and provide safety equipment and provide some follow up if there has been an accident.

4.6 Managers views on the challenges of courier work

Managers⁵ were candid about the challenging work for van and car couriers and describing some as 'super couriers' delivering 800, 900 parcels a day for 6 days a week and some being out for 12 hours a day. Managers acknowledged the intense pressure that self-employed couriers were under and the risks they experienced:

They're rushing too much because it's piece work, they are trying to get as many done as quickly as possible, so they're likely to cut corners and put themselves and others at danger. A lot of drivers also cut corners by not putting their seat belts on, etc. They also leave the van running and unlocked while they're out of it and if you're in an urban area, is the risk to yourself from people trying to steal your parcels, you've got the risk from animals and the risk from customers. (Martin, Company E parcel delivery)

They acknowledged the pressure that they and their couriers were under to deliver to parcels irrespective of whether a courier felt unwell or had other pressures and wanted not to work:

We do have what we call cover couriers who are available, but officially, my response to that should be who's your help? Who's your cover? If they haven't got one, or they haven't got somebody who could help

⁵ We were not able to contact a taxi service manager so this only applies to parcel/food couriers

them, they can't be guaranteed that when they are feeling better, they will have work. (Vivian, Company E parcel delivery)

Some managers felt there was no interest in or compassion for the driver with the overriding concern being the delivery of the parcels:

Oh yes, I've had couriers who crashed their car and they'll phone me up and say, I've crashed my car. My first question, isn't the one I would want to, like I always ask if they're okay, but really my first question is how many parcels have you got left?(Vivian, Company E parcel delivery)

you would have people who would be like saying they've been up all night, kids have been ill and stuff like that, they would call you and then I would call my regional manager and saying I am having problems covering the round, so they would say, for example, why is John not doing that and I said he was up all night as the kids have been ill, etc. They responded, can't he go out at lunchtime and do it. (Martin Company E parcel delivery)

Just the general policy is the parcels must get out no matter what. You would get phone calls saying I am very sick today, and I've only done 5 of them, and it's like well, go to bed for an hour or 2, get up and then try and do your parcels. That's the company line, the parcels must be delivered. (Richard manager Company E parcel delivery)

Managers clearly felt uncomfortable about supporting the company ethos that parcel delivery comes first and 'at all costs' and the implicit bullying undertones in instructions to drivers that if they did not deliver the parcels then they would not be given any more work or lose a shift:

Interviewer: *How did you feel about giving out that company line?*

Participant: *Not very good to be honest because if you're feeling ill and we're employed so we could take the day off, but these guys don't have that luxury, if they didn't work, they didn't get any pay and the chances are if you didn't deliver the parcels for the following day or 2, we would have to take the work off of you, or if you've got 2 rounds, we'll take one round off you.*

Interviewer: *Even if it wasn't company policy, did you personally feel like you had any responsibility for the safety of your workers?*

Participant: *Yes, you do because you get to know these people, these couriers, and there are lot out there that have been there for quite a while, so you do realise it's their livelihood, so you don't want anything nasty to happen. Just be friendly and approachable as you can, but it's at the back of your mind the [Company E parcel delivery) policy, get out at all costs. It was hard act to separate yourself if you had a friendship with some of the couriers. Some are old guys who had been there for 50 odd years. They are doing the best, but it was never good enough for [Company E parcel delivery]. (Richard manager Company E parcel delivery)*

We asked managers what driver behaviours they monitored to see if they were interested in the about any driver behaviour such as hours worked, mileage, speed, number of drops, time between drops or collisions they were involved in, most managers said " We only monitor the life of a parcel". However, they were concerned about the risks inherent in a highly pressured courier role:

couriers at [Company E parcel delivery) are on a parcel rate, they tend to think the faster they go, obviously the more parcels they can deliver, and therefore the more money they can earn. That is the case with most parcel companies to be honest with you. Craig Company E parcel delivery)

They were also aware of how drivers would fill their vehicles to the point where the drivers view was clearly obstructed describing them in fairly derogatory terms:

The greedy ones would fill their car up, so they couldn't see out of the boot, the wing mirrors or the rear-view mirrors or anywhere. When you saw the guys filling their cars up and cramming them all in, you had to remind them to be able to see their wing mirrors. (Richard Company E parcel delivery)

Improvements

We asked managers what they would do to improve the safety of the drivers. Their responses suggest that they had a desire to improve courier's road safety:

In terms of road safety, I would need safety working practices in place, so making the drivers are fully briefed on i.e. where places are, and I'd personally make sure that everybody had that information,I think they're doing too many hours, I would look to alleviate them of some of the workload. Better planning tools in helping them by giving hints and tips on what to do, if there was a crash, I think you should go back and re-visit with them and find out why the crash happened. (Martin Company E parcel delivery)

They were keen to see policies introduced to protect the couriers who they perceived as being low paid and disenfranchised and showed awareness of the current parliamentary scrutiny on this matter:

Yes, sure like the policies they've already got in place for the employed people, roll it out to the self-employed people, show them what the policies are, offer help and advice, they've got millions of vehicles out on the road, so why should the self-employed people, the lowest paid of them all, not get any help or support from the large organisation.

The MP, Frank Field,⁶ has taken it up and the GMB union have taken it up as well because of the gig economy with all the stuff that's gone around about [Company B taxi], the [Company C food delivery] people, cycle riders down in London, everybody thought that they were self-employed, but in effect, they're not because they're given tools of the trade to work from and they're dictated to on how they work, but they're not given any rates. They should be paid properly. Some people that have lost family members aren't allowed a day to grieve, otherwise they will lose their work. [Company E parcel delivery] have put that much pressure on the field managers to get the couriers to work.

Treat them fairly, give them time off, give them proper pay, give them terms and conditions. Something's got to give because you can't work people 6 days a week for peanuts and expect them to keep on (Richard manager Company E parcel delivery)

However, because of the self-employed nature of the drivers managers felt they were not responsible for taking a proactive role in keeping them safe:

Yes, you have got responsibilities, the only problem is because they are all owner drivers, you cannot manage them, you can turn around and say, look lads, be safe out there. (Ray, Courier company developer)

Summary

Managers acknowledged the intense pressure that self-employed couriers were under and the risks they experienced. The managers felt that the couriers had a poor rate of pay and that the companies they worked for had a disregard for their safety and wellbeing. Managers would improve the situation around the risks the couriers faced and their low pay but were conflicted about whose responsibility it was to ensure their safety on the roads.

5. Discussion

Combining the quantitative online survey results with the qualitative interviews among gig workers has given a fairly consistent and clear picture of the health and safety issues for those who drive and ride for work in the gig economy.

Many of the groups of couriers we talked to enjoyed their work – the people least likely express such enjoyment were those who worked as car and van couriers. On our online survey three quarters of respondents said they enjoyed working in the gig economy because of its flexibility – still a quarter did not.

⁶ The House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, chaired by Frank Field, report 'Self-employment and the gig economy' 1 May 2017.

There are no working time directives or employment laws regarding health and safety that apply to working in the gig economy and workers have no accountability to an employer. There are no policies on health and safety and the onus is on the worker to ensure they stay within the law whilst driving or riding. However, the business model of gig companies works on incentivising people to drive or ride in ways which, from a road risk perspective, are most dangerous for example at night and in dangerous weather conditions, riding with a potentially unbalancing heavy back packs on their bike, using a distracting work interface in an intrinsically pressured environment.

In our interviews we explored factors related to this type of working environment that may increase the risk of being involved in a collision or near miss for someone who ostensibly drives or rides for a living. These factors included impairment through fatigue, distraction and speeding and high exposure to risk in terms of mileage and being out in poor weather conditions. In the interviews we undertook we found evidence of participants being fatigued through working long hours, having high physical and mental demands, covering high mileages, long commutes and working at circadian lows. The couriers we spoke to reported that they felt pressured and this often led to speeding, with some admitting going through red lights. They reported being distracted especially by their phones and exposed to risk in terms of high work load situations such as busy urban centres and in poor weather conditions. Similar results were found in our online survey. Nearly half of the online survey respondents admitted speeding, two thirds said they often parked illegally and nearly a third had driven or ridden through a red light. Of the survey respondents 40% said that the app had distracted them whilst driving or riding and 8% said they had received points on their licence whilst working. In terms of fatigue our question was phrased to detect severe fatigue i.e. struggling to stay awake whilst driving or riding - still 16% agreed that this had happened to them. In our interviews it was clear that some gig workers could self-regulate and just sign off on they were tired but others felt the pressure intensely clearly working from necessity and this affected their wellbeing.

Many of the couriers we interviewed admitted to having a collision and experienced near misses several times each day. From our online survey 42% said they had been involved in a collision where their vehicle had been damaged and 10% of the total sample said that someone had been injured as a result and this was usually themselves. Three quarters of respondents (75%) said that there had been occasions while working when they have had to take action to avoid a crash.

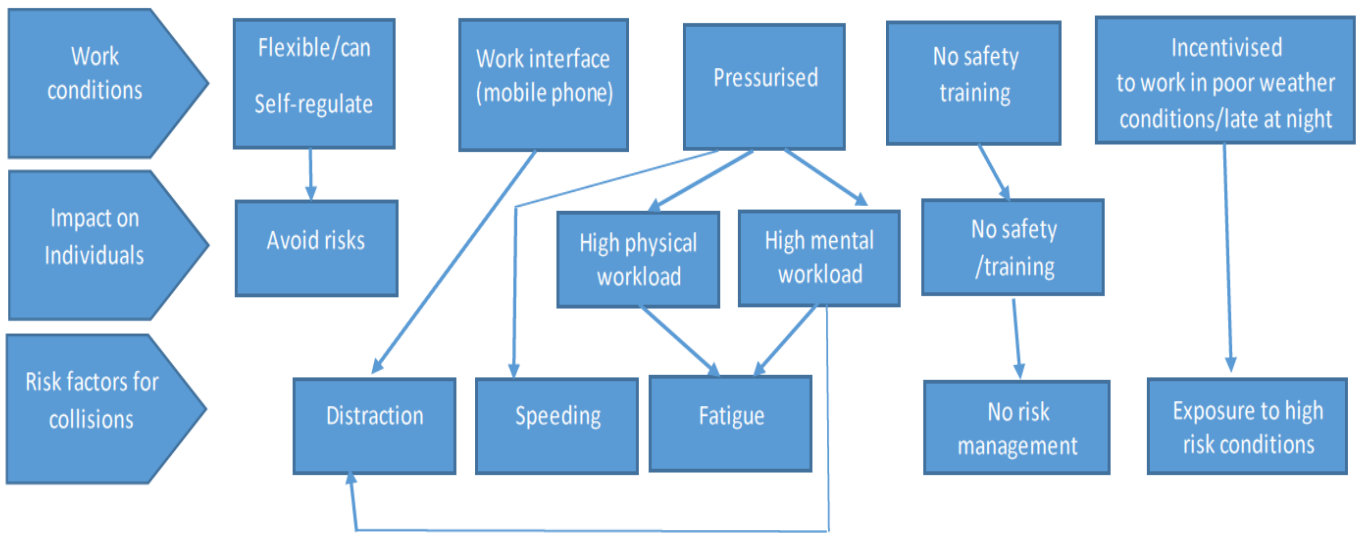
Our interview participants said that no training was required or given apart from being directed to a number of online videos which mainly talked about the process of delivery with nothing on health and safety. Indeed, many of our participants said that with the current investigation of employment rights that their 'company' was recoiling from engaging with their couriers because they did not want to behave in a way that could be construed as being directive. The results of our online survey showed that two thirds of respondents did not have any training on how to manage risks on the road and a similar proportion were not provided with any safety equipment. In fact most of the survey respondents (70%) bought their own equipment.

Many of the managers we talked to clearly felt the company ethos of being only interested in the life of the parcel and not the life of the person who delivers it clearly conflicted with their own views of how to manage people and have regard for their safety. Perversely, the investigation into the employment rights of gig workers has meant that the few gestures of concern have been rescinded because anything that looked like a condition of employment needed to be avoided. Most survey respondents (67%) reported that the company did not suggest they had rest breaks and did not give advice about using their phone whilst driving or riding.

This lack of care was evident in our online survey with only a round a quarter agreeing that the company cared about their safety but most (68%) feeling that the responsibility for their safety should be shared by between them and the company.

We have summarised the key themes emerging from our study in the thematic map in Figure 1

Thematic map showing the links between courier work conditions, impacts on individuals and their relationship with risk factors for collisions



6. Conclusions

From a health and safety perspective the nature of the work is time pressured, often involving high physical and mental workloads and a distracting work interface and which incentivised them to go out in high risk situations. Added to this is the lack of control over their working patterns and conditions especially amongst the parcel delivery couriers. Our findings are consistent with examples given in the Select Committee Report into the gig economy which highlighted the lack of so-called flexible working with an example of a courier who couldn't deliver all his parcels in one day and held the less urgent ones over to the next. He was threatened with service removal if he ever did it again.

The nature of this work clearly led some couriers to experience impairment caused by fatigue and pressure to violate speed limits and to use their phones. Furthermore they also experience threats to their personal security from theft of what they are delivering or of their vehicle/cycle or of personal attack.

There is no management of these risks by the people who broker courier services. These faceless digital brokers take no responsibility for the health and safety of the people who accrue income for them. Most couriers think that this responsibility should be shared. It is promising that for one taxi based service driver behaviour scores were monitored and drivers were reminded to keep within speed limits and could work no more than 10 hours a day. However, such an app will not readily detect fatigue and no digital company will know how many other companies their driver or rider works for – it was clear that many of the people we spoke to were working for multiple courier companies.

The emergence of the gig courier as a way to work to satisfy the public's appetite or fast delivery of goods, food and people could give rise to a perfect storm of risk factors affecting the health and safety not just of the people who work in the economy but for other road users. The more gig workers that enter this market the longer the hours they need to work and the greater the distances they need to drive to enable them to earn a stable income especially when vehicle operating costs have to be borne by themselves. Chasing jobs increases the exposure to risk. This would suggest that we need an estimate of how many people drive and ride for work in the gig economy. For example, we know that about 40,000 drivers are registered with Uber in London because they have to be registered with Transport for London as taxi drivers but we have no idea how many work for food and parcel delivery companies.

A particular challenge which is common across all self-employed drivers and riders is to understand their particular set of risk factors in order to develop self-help information on how to reduce the types of risk we have identified in this study. However, generating a safety culture involves leadership and accountability and a conversation between a manager and the people they manage – the digital gig economy of transport services is unlikely to provide a bedrock of such a culture to flourish.

Pressure from the courts and Government through the Select Committee process should make these service providers more aware of their employment obligations and provide safeguards for people who generate income for them.

This study is based on self-reported data and therefore people may say one thing but do another. However, the use of the quantitative data is providing a very consistent picture to the results found in the in-depth interviews and is in step with the experiences of the gig workers quoted in the Select Committee Report.

7. Recommendations

1. Couriers should sign up for a time block and be paid for their time not for a drop rate to depressurise the work.
2. An acceptable drop rate should be established by the company which takes into account the time it takes to travel to the destinations within the speed limit and also the time it takes to perform administrative functions such as getting signatures and scanning/taking photographs of where the parcel has been left.
3. Mobile phones should not be allowed to cause a distraction and require handling to accept or reject jobs whilst driving or riding. Provided the driver and vehicle are compliant with mobile phone legislation when using the app, this could have a 'now stationary button' which would then allow jobs to be allocated and accepted. Less distracting interfaces need to be developed by the industry. Alternatively, if workers sign up for time blocks with a set number of jobs and pay this would reduce the need for sporadic messaging about available jobs.
4. A person in the company should be responsible for managing safety of the people who provide an income for them. This should be provided at a local level to ensure that vehicles are road worthy with an up-to-date MoT where applicable, and properly insured for the job being done.
5. Within the company collisions and severe near misses should be discussed and lessons learned.
6. Companies should not incentivise vulnerable road users (those on two wheels) to take additional risks by paying a higher rate to ride in poor weather conditions.
7. Couriers and taxi service providers should not be able to breach the current driving hours restrictions applicable to other commercial drivers – this could be done by companies sharing data on driving and riding time via the licence number of the driver/riders with built in alerts if time is exceeded on a separate digital platform.
8. Safety equipment such as hi-vis jackets (fluorescent/reflective) should be provided freely to couriers.
9. The health and safety implications of carrying large back packs on two wheeled vehicles needs to be tested.
10. We recommend that the findings of this report are widely disseminated to key stakeholders including the companies themselves, the Department for Transport and the Transport Select Committee (which could make this issue a topic of an enquiry) and to the current enquiry being conducted by MP Frank Field and other organisations interested in the management of occupational road risk such as RoadSafe and RoSPA.

8. Acknowledgements

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9. References

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10. Appendix A Topic guides

Topic guide for gig transport workers

1. Intro – introduce research – MRS, ethics, confidentiality
2. Can you tell me something about why you chose to become a driver/rider for x?
 - a. What does a typical day look like?
 - b. Is this something you planned to do for a long time?
 - c. Can you describe the sign up process? Were you offered any training/documentation? Did you have any kind of on-boarding process?
 - d. Do you have other jobs? Y/N
3. If yes:
 - a. What do you do?
 - b. Do these other jobs involve any driving/riding at all (even as part of a commute)?
 - c. What sort of mileage do you do in these other jobs?
 - d. What sort of hours do you work in these others job(s)?
 - e. How does your driving/riding for X fit in with these other jobs?
4. Thinking about driving/riding for X what sort of hours do you work for them?
 - a. What times of day?
 - b. Do you ever work between 2-6.00am in the morning?
 - c. When you work those hours, do you continue to work into the next day?
5. On average, how many individual deliveries/ trips do you make in this time?
6. To what extent do you experience time pressures doing this work?
 - a. Where do these pressures come from e.g. needing the income, pressure from managers
 - b. How does the make you feel?
7. To what extent do you feel time pressure impacts on your safety on the roads?
 - a. In what ways?
 - b. Can you tell me about a specific time when you feel time pressure has impacted your safety?
 - c. Have you heard stories from other drivers about time pressure causing problems?
8. Have there been times when you have felt very tired whilst working?
 - a. To what extent do you feel it impacts on your safety on the roads?
 - b. In what ways?
 - c. Can you tell me about a specific time when you feel your tiredness has impacted your safety?
 - d. Have you heard stories from other drivers about tiredness causing problems?
 - e. Have you ever used anything to help you stay awake, like Red Bull, caffeine pills, anything else?
 - f. Have you ever driven the day after having drunk alcohol or consumed other substances? Do you feel it has impacted you?
 - g. Have you heard of any of your fellow drivers doing this? (reaffirm confidentiality, no names required)
9. Most of this type of work is app based, do you ever feel that you are distracted by your phone whilst driving or riding?
 - a. To what extent do you feel it impacts on your safety on the roads?
 - i. In what ways?
10. Have you ever experienced a crash when you have been working?
 - a. Please could you tell me about this?
 - b. How did you feel about it?
 - c. Did you report it to your company? How did they support you, if at all?
11. How often would you say you experienced a near miss? (i.e. a time when you feel a crash could have occurred?)
 - a. How did you feel about this?
 - b. Do you get any support if you experience something frightening? Do you stop working or carry on?
12. What would you say are the main risks you experience doing this work?

- a. How do you feel about this?
- 13. To what extent does the X provide any safety advice or ways to manage risk?
- 14. If a driver/ motorcycle/moped rider:
 - a. Have there been time when you have felt under pressure and exceeded the speed limit?
 - b. To what extent do you feel its impacts on your safety on the roads?
- 15. Have they have requested to see your licence or checked your insurance?
- 16. Have they ever asked whether you have been involved in a crash in the last two years?
- 17. Have they ever asked you whether you have any licence points?
 - a. Do you currently have any points on your licence?
 - i. What were these for?
- 18. To what extent do they encourage you to report any collisions or road incident to them?
- 19. In what ways do you feel they have any role in helping you keep safe on the roads?
- 20. In what ways do you feel they have any responsibility for your safety on the roads?
- 21. If you were in charge of the company, what changes would you make to make drivers/riders like you safer on the roads?
- 22. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Topic guide for gig transport managers

Intro

- 1. Explain purpose and rules of session (MRS, ethics, confidentiality)
- 2. Tell me a little bit about your role – what is a typical day like?
- 3. Who do you report to? What support/training do you get?
- 4. What are the biggest challenges and rewards of your role?

Type of workers

- 23. Can you tell me something about the types of people who sign up to the app?
- 24. What kind of contact do you have with them? Any F2F/personal contact or all through app/virtual?
- 25. What sort of information do you request from workers?
 - a. What data do you monitor about drivers or riders?
 - b. Do you look at mileage?
 - c. Do you look at the time of day that people are working?
 - d. To what extent do you monitor the mileage that workers do?
- 26. To what extent do you limit the number of individual deliveries/ trips that workers can make in day?
- 27. To what extent do you limit the hours that workers can make in day?

Road safety

- 28. Do you have a road safety policy?
 - a. Is this publicly available?
 - b. Did you receive training in this policy?
- 29. Do you provide an online road risk management modules for drivers/riders?
 - a. If yes: Are these compulsory?
 - b. If yes: To what extent do you provide advice about
 - i. Driving when tired
 - ii. Speed
 - iii. Distraction especially using mobile phones
 - iv. Wearing a seat belt
 - v. Impairment (alcohol/drugs)
- 30. To what extent do you monitor crashes?
 - a. If yes: what actions do you take as a result?
- 31. What would you say are the main risks that drivers/riders experience doing this work?
 - a. How do you feel about this?

32. Do you check driver/rider licences?
 - a. or check whether they are insured?
33. Do you ask whether they have been involved in a crash in the last two years?
34. Do you ask whether they have any licence points?
 - i. If yes: do you ask what they are for?
35. To what extent do you encourage workers to report any collisions or road incidents?
36. Do you receive any complaints from the public about the behaviour of workers driving or riding?
If yes:
 - a. What are the main behaviours people complain about?
 - b. On average how many complaints would you receive in a week/month/year?
 - c. What action do you take as a result?
37. In what ways do you feel you have a role in helping workers keep safe/manage risks on the roads?
38. In what ways do you feel you have any responsibility for workers/their passengers safety on the roads?
39. Do you have anyone in the senior management team responsible for managing road risk?
40. If you were in charge of your company, what rules would you add/change in order to increase safety of your drivers, passengers and pedestrians?
41. Is there anything else you would like to add?

11. Appendix B: Online questionnaire

Which of the following best describes your work?

- Taxi driver
- Bus driver
- Delivery driver / rider
- HGV driver
- None of the above

Which of the following companies do you work for? (If more than 1 please select all that apply).

- List anonymised
- Other gig economy company (please specify all)

Which of the following best describes the hours you work in the gig economy?

- Flexible hours with no minimum
- Full time contract with specific hours each week
- Part time contract with specific hours each week
- Are you paid per delivery / trip or for a time block?
- Per delivery / trip
- For a time block

Which of the following do you use most often when working? (If more than one, please select the one you use most often)

- Car
- Van
- Pedal cycle
- Moped / scooter
- Motorbike
- I don't use any of these

What do you transport when working in the gig economy (please select all that apply)

- Food
- Parcels
- People

How long have you been working in the gig economy?

- Less than a year
- 1 - 2 years
- 2 - 3 years
- More than 3 years

In your work as a driver / rider in the gig economy, how many hours do you work in a typical week?

- Under 15 hours
- 15 - 35 hours
- 35 - 60 hours
- More than 60 hours

What has been the most hours you have worked in a single day as a gig economy worker?

Do you currently work for any other companies outside the gig economy?

Yes
No

Is this full or part time work?

Full time (35 or more hours a week)
Part time (under 35 hours a week)

When signing up to start working in the gig economy, did you do this via an app, a website or in person at a depot?

App
Website
In person at depot

Which of the following checks did the company carry out on you?

Passport
Driver/Rider licence
Criminal record
Insurance
There were no checks
Don't know / can't remember

How often does the company check your licence?

Not applicable - I ride a bike
Just when I signed up
Every 6 months
Annually
Other
Never / Not at all

Did the company provide any training on how to manage risks on the road?

Yes
No

Did the company provide any safety equipment (eg a high visibility vest)?

Yes
No

Have you provided any of your own safety equipment?

Yes
No

Does the company suggest that you should have rest breaks?

Yes
No

Is there a person at the company you can contact if you have any queries or issues whilst working?

- Yes - we are given a phone number
- Yes - we are given an email address
- No, there is no-one to contact

How quickly do they respond if you have contacted the company with an issue?

- Immediately
- Within an hour or so
- The same day
- More than a day later
- They rarely or never respond

If your work is app based, does the app ever cause a distraction when you are driving / riding?

- Yes
- No

Are you told not to use your phone when you are driving or riding?

- Yes
- No

Who do you think should be responsible for your safety while you are working?

- The company should be responsible
- I should be responsible
- The company and I should share responsibility

Have you ever received any licence points while working as a gig driver / rider?

- Yes
- No

Has your vehicle ever been damaged as a result of an accident whilst working as a gig driver / rider?

- Yes
- No

Has anyone ever been injured in an accident that you were involved in when driving / riding as gig worker?

- Yes
- No

Who was injured in the accident?

- Just me
- Just someone else
- Both me and someone else

We would now like you to read 8 statements and tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of them.

I enjoy working in the gig economy because it gives me a flexible way to make money

Strongly Agree
Agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

The time pressure of gig work can make you travel over the speed limit

Strongly Agree
Agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

Sometimes I struggle to stay awake when driving or riding

Strongly Agree
Agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

The gig company I work for cares about my safety

Strongly Agree
Agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

There is a person at my gig company that I can contact if I have any concerns about safety at work.

Strongly Agree
Agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

I sometimes have to park illegally to make a delivery

Strongly Agree
Agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

There have been occasions while working where I've had to take action to avoid a crash

Strongly Agree
Agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

I have driven / ridden through a red light when I've been under pressure

Strongly Agree

Agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

That's the end of the questions about your work in the gig economy, we now just need to ask a few questions about you to make sure that we are speaking to a good mix of people working in the gig economy.

How old are you?

What is your gender?

Male
Female

How long have you held a driving licence?

I don't have a driving licence
Less than 1 year
1 - 3 years
More than 3 years

How long have you held a motorcycle/moped licence?

I don't have a motorcycle / moped licence
Less than 1 year
1 - 3 years
More than 3 years

Are you currently enrolled in full time education? if so which of the following?

No, I am not in education
A Levels / BTEC
University Degree
Other full time educational course

That's great, thanks very much for completing the questionnaire. Please confirm your email and/or mobile number below so that we can contact you should you win one of the £30 prizes in the draw. The survey will be closed in the next few days and winners will be contacted by 31st March. Your details will only be used in connection with this particular project and all information you provide falls under The Data Protection Act 1998

Email Address
Mobile Number

Is there anything else you would like to add about your work in the gig economy or the gig economy generally? Perhaps there are questions you feel that we should be asking but aren't?