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Emerging issues for management of occupational road risk in a changing economy:

**A survey of gig economy drivers, riders and their
managers**

**Heather Ward and Nicola Christie
Centre for Transport Studies**

What is the gig economy?

The gig economy involves people who:

- do not get paid a salary
- but get paid per gig or a 'piece rate' whereby service providers are linked to service users via an app.

Often referred as lifestyle workers or flex couriers or workers because they can choose when they work to fit in with other commitments.



Independent workers who provide transport based services

- Self-employed and are not covered by employment law.
- Very few rights at work
- Responsible for managing their work in a way that does not create health and safety risks for themselves or others.



Scale and characteristics of gig economy

(BEIS 2018)

- Estimate 4.4% of GB population had done some work in gig economy in last 12 months (about 2.8 million people)
- About a quarter live in London
- Generally young - 56% were 18-34 years
- Levels of education similar to general population
- Majority in transport services, parcel and food delivery (others e.g. removals, web development)

How is safety taken onto account in driving, riding or cycling for work?

What we did:

- 48 in depth interviews with drivers, riders and their managers
 - couriers who delivered parcels and food
 - taxi drivers who received their jobs via apps.
- Online survey which achieved over 200 responses (questions based on what we found in the interviews)
- All research cleared through UCL research committee to protect participants identity

In depth interviews

- The context in which they work
- The extent to which they are aware of, create or experience risks,
- Perceived roles and responsibilities for safety
- How they or their employer help manage safety.

Interviews: Perception of safety management

- Companies only interested in 'the life of a parcel than the person delivering it' even if the person has crashed
- Virtually no training given
- No safety equipment given
- Disregard of safety

Survey: Lack of safety training and equipment

Between two-thirds and three-quarters said:

- not provided with safety training on managing risks on the road.
- not given any safety equipment such as a high visibility vest - 70% resort to providing their own.
- the company does not care about their safety whilst working
- responsibility should be shared

Interviews: Fatigue

- Many parcel couriers work long hours feel pressurised, mentally and physically fatigued by their.
 - *Getting in and out of their cars or vans up to 90 times a day*
 - *Not knowing where they are going*
 - *operating the app, scanning and checking parcels having to take signatures*
- Many worked for multiple courier companies some working three weeks of 12 hour days without a break (especially at Christmas)
 - One cyclist reported falling a sleep on her bike and subsequently crashed
 - One driver had to slap his face to keep awake and travelled at 'only' 50 mph on the motorway to limit any damage if he crashed
 - Some taxi drivers had long commutes (2 hours) to get in to London to work

Interviews: Distraction

- Many of those on two wheels said they handled their phone whilst riding to accept jobs
- Many said that the app beeping at them to announce jobs was a distraction



Survey: distraction and fatigue

- 40% of those using an app found them to be distracting whilst driving or riding (most play a noise at intervals to alert them to a job with a fixed time window in which to accept)
- 16% experienced severe fatigue e.g. struggling to stay awake



Interviews: Violations, security, near misses and collisions

- Many admitted to speeding, going through red lights (to save time) and parking illegally because of the pressure to deliver in time
- Most experience daily near misses and many had been involved in a collision
- Many felt unsafe and had had their bike/moped stolen
- Cyclists paid more to ride when the conditions were hazardous e.g. cold or wet increasing their risk

Survey: Violations, Collisions and injuries

- 42% reported that their vehicle had been damaged in a collision
- One in ten reporting that someone had been injured.
 - 8% reported that they themselves had been injured, with 2% saying someone else had been injured.
- 8% said they had received points on their licence whilst working
- 75% said that that there had been occasions while working when they have had to take action to avoid a crash.

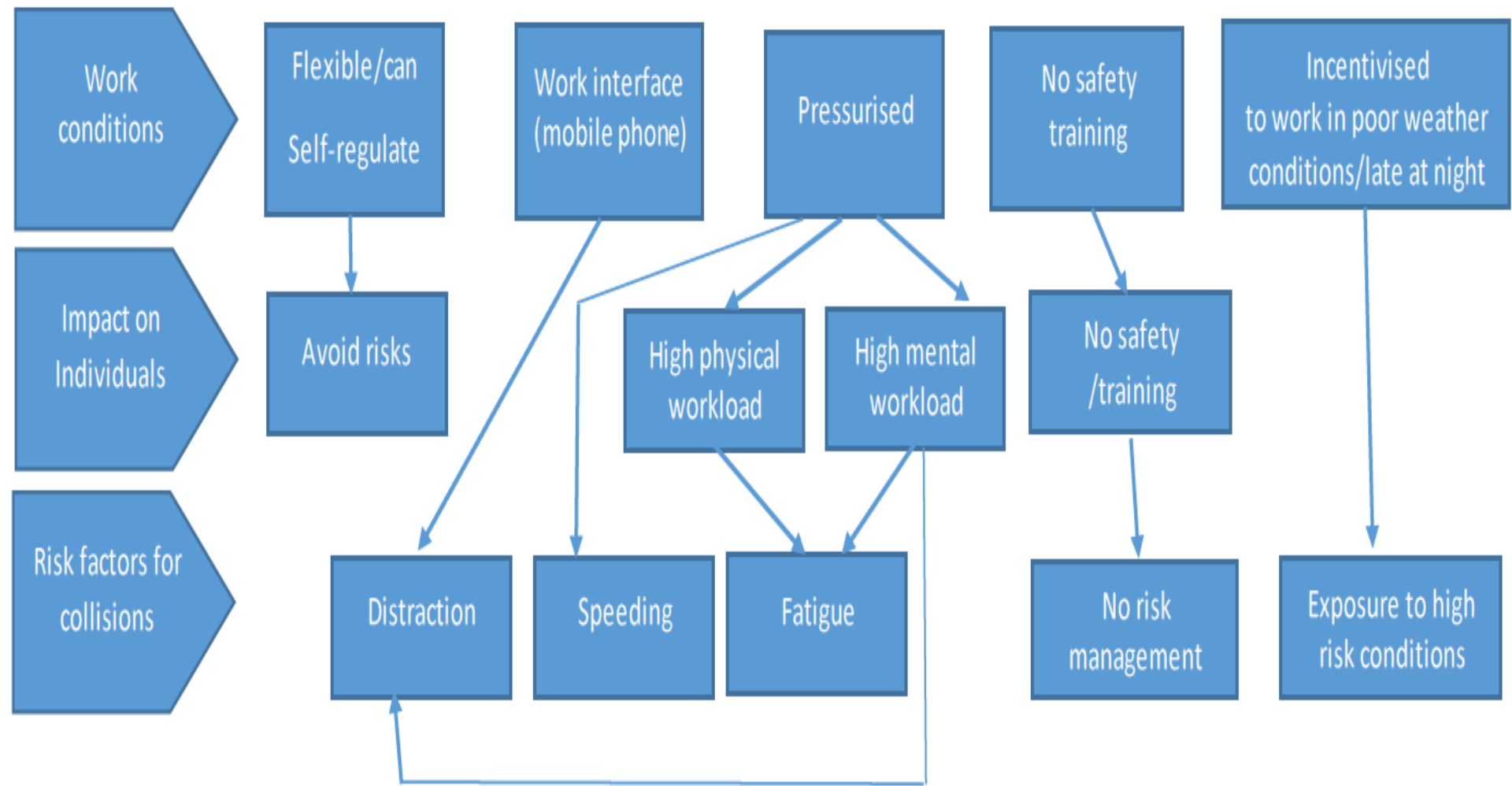
Interviews with managers

- Acknowledged the intense pressure that couriers were under and the risks they experienced.
- Felt they the drivers and riders had a poor rate of pay and that the companies they worked disregarded 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.

Differences between types of workers

- Most pressure felt by parcel couriers
- Taxi service providers seemed to enjoy their work, feel less pressurised, less fatigued and distracted by their work interface compared to van/car couriers.
- Those on two wheels more able to self regulate and stop when tired

A perfect storm of risk factors



Recommendations 1/2

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 takes into account the time it takes to travel to the destinations and admin tasks
3. Mobile phones should not be allowed to cause a distraction and require handling to accept or reject jobs. Signing 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.
5. Within the company collisions and severe near misses should be are discussed and lessons learned

Recommendations 2/2

6. Companies should not incentivise vulnerable road users (those on two wheels) to take additional risks
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. This needs to be addressed by the Transport Select Committee and key stakeholders

Full report available at

<https://iris.ucl.ac.uk/iris/publication/1589267/1>

Thank you for listening!



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