



PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK REPORT

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UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO
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The purpose is to provide brief summary feedback to participants of the research study. Full detailed results will be published elsewhere.

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About the research

Growing numbers of people in Canada and internationally are precariously self-employed. Work as a self-employed driver in the ride-share sector (increasingly called the ‘ride-hail’ sector) can be seen as a part of this larger shift to employment that falls outside of the usual social safety net (e.g. no minimum wage, retirement benefits, or health and safety protections).

Our study on ride-share health and safety explored the following key issues:

- **Health and safety risks in ride-share work**
- **Public safety risks posed by this service**
- **The regulation of safety and health risks in the ride-share sector**

This study explored various standpoints in relation to ride-share and taxi health risks in order to inform decision-making by policy makers. Our study focused on one large urban center in Canada and is time sensitive to the period we conducted the research, 2017-2018.

Methodology

The study involved in-depth qualitative research. A qualitative approach is useful when a topic is new, changing, and focused on social processes and context. Key activities and data were:

- **Document and literature review.** We conducted preliminary and ongoing document collection and analysis based on issues raised in interviews and focus groups.
- **Focus groups and interviews with Uber drivers, Uber passengers, and taxi drivers.** We conducted four focus groups and one interview with 27 Uber drivers, who had at least 3 months experience driving Uber. We conducted two focus groups with 17 Uber passengers, all of whom were regular Uber passengers. Focus groups lasted 2 hours. We conducted eight interviews with taxi drivers.
- **Interviews with ride-share managers and taxi industry managers and operators.** They included 3 senior managers and 2 middle managers with ride-share companies, and 3 taxi brokerages and fleet operators. Interviews were 30 to 120 minutes.
- **Interviews with key informants** in insurance, tax accounting, OHS policy, taxi consulting and municipal licensing. In total, there were 15 key informants in the study. Interviews were 45 to 120 minutes.

A total of 75 participants were interviewed. Interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed with participants’ consent. The data were anonymized (i.e. names replaced with pseudonyms) in order to protect participant identity. Interview transcripts were thematically coded by two team members to ensure reliability. Codes were subsequently analyzed systematically.

The research team

The research team is based at the School of Public Health and Health Systems at the University of Waterloo and led by Dr. **Ellen MacEachen**. The team includes: Dr. **Samantha Meyer** (University of Waterloo), Dr. **Agnieszka Kosny** (Institute for Work & Health), Dr. **Phil Bigelow** (University of Waterloo), Dr. **Ron Saunders** (Institute for Work & Health), Dr. **Emily Reid-Musson** (Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Waterloo), **Emma Bartel** (MSc student, University of Waterloo), and **Sharanya Varatharajan** (PhD student, University of Waterloo).

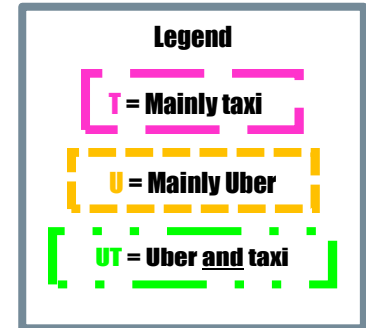
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Summary

Features such as tracking, passenger-driver ratings, and cashless transactions are associated with ride-share platforms. Some claim that they make passengers, the public, and drivers safer than older forms of taxi services.

This study provides a more complex picture of health and safety risks in the growing ride-share sector as well as for the incumbent taxi sector. Despite the image of intimacy and transparency associated with peer-to-peer ride-share connections, the findings indicate that there exists an **interconnected risk landscape** for ride-share and taxi drivers, the public, and society. The precariousness of taxi and ride-share work is evident in drivers' experiences of health, safety, legal, and financial risks of self-employment. Unique risks associated with ride-share applications existed in ratings, distractions, app penalties and rules which created particular pressures for drivers.



Risks to Whom?	The Risks
Risks for Drivers	T Occupational homicide
	T Robbery
	U Feel unable to refuse unsafe destinations and passengers
	U Ratings – low ratings could lead to loss of livelihood
	UT Poor health
	UT Assault
	UT Lack of support and representation
	UT Pressure to drive long hours
Risks for Drivers at the Society-Level	U Lack of knowledge about tax payment obligations
	UT Lack of social security
Risks for Drivers at a Public Safety Level	U App is distracting
	U Non-disclosure to personal car insurance provider
	U Ratings – created pressures to take risks to please customers
	UT Infrequent and less controlled vehicle safety maintenance checks

Taxi drivers face extreme hazards in their work: occupational homicide and robbery against drivers. The cashless nature of ride-share transactions likely alleviates the incidence of these risks.

Yet, **taxi and ride-share drivers** continued to experience serious hazards such as assault, lack of support, and economic and technological pressures to drive long hours and take driving risks.

Ride-share drivers faced new and unique hazards related to pressures created by 'the app': pressures to acquire high ratings and accepting risks to avoid penalties.

Broader social risks

Taxi and ride-share drivers are self-employed and poorly supported in terms of representation and gaps in basic social security. Many ride-share drivers were unaware of or avoided their tax and insurance obligations. These factors pose risks for drivers and society that remain unaddressed.

Public safety risks

Drivers must respond to their app which 'pings' as they drive. Ride-share drivers included inexperienced drivers whose work demanded a high level of attention. The taxi industry is more centrally regulated than the ride-share sector, while many cities have taken a 'light-touch' licensing approach to regulating ride-share.

Upsides, Downsides

Uber drivers took up driving in order to earn extra money, while others said it was their main source of income. Many sought the perceived flexibility that came with ride-share work. Negative experiences with previous precarious employment arrangements, juggling caregiving demands, unemployment and under-employment, and long-term disability were factors that led drivers to this work. Some Uber drivers had faced systemic barriers in the labour market that led them to opt for ride-share work. For instance, many employers discriminate against immigrants to Canada, as they do not recognize their credentials and qualifications.

Access to the platform for drivers was easy and took place through the app. New drivers uploaded documents to the app and Uber managed checks and licensing and tended to approve new drivers quickly.

When I signed up... the training was literally a 12-minute YouTube video.

Ahmed—Uber driver

High recruitment bonuses were paid to existing drivers for referrals to incentivize new drivers to start driving.

Drivers were not making much money. After accounting for expenses like car maintenance, insurance, and gas, Uber drivers described overall earnings as poor. Drivers were paid by ride, not distance or time. The rates were set by Uber and could change.

Drivers didn't always trust incentives such as 'surges'. Surge pricing refers to fare bonuses during periods of high demand, such as bad weather or a sports event. Uber used surge pricing to match supply and demand. However, drivers described how surge incentives would disappear as they approached the surge area.

App-level **rules and penalties** could remove choice from drivers. Drivers had to accept a certain number of rides and maintain a certain passenger rating level. For the most part, they could not choose the length or destination of the ride. Failure to meet rules and expectations resulted in deactivation warnings and 'time out' penalties where drivers were temporarily shut out of the app.

I do it every day, whenever I feel like it, however I feel like it, wherever I feel like it.

Brian—Uber driver

If it wasn't for [this work], I dunno where I'd be. I didn't have anything. No support system, nothing to fall back on. I burnt through all my savings.

Nina—Uber driver (after losing a job due to an injury)

When I was started I made approximately fifteen dollars an hour, and then I cut up my expenses, I end up making, like, seven dollars or eight dollars an hour

Sanjay—Uber driver

We decline rides all the time. But the thing is, if we do that, they turn us off the app. They log you off for, like, two minutes. And then, like, two minutes, five minutes, ten minutes, and then we can go back, but it depends.

Sanjay—Uber driver

Safety features and hazards of ride-share driving

Rides, routes and user profiles were tracked. But passengers' identities were not always known by drivers, as a user may have ordered a ride for someone else, like a child or friend.

I have sometimes, say for example, a "Natalie" is getting in my car. I pull up and then there are two guys coming into my car, opening my door. And I'm just kind of questioning like, 'this is a Natalie right here?'
TJ—Uber driver

The platform was **cashless**, reducing the incidence of robbery and assault

against taxi drivers who tend to carry cash in the vehicle. However, drivers still experienced **harassment and assault** from passengers.

Ratings could provide accountability for drivers as they had to maintain high ratings to avoid app deactivation by Uber. However, passenger ratings lost significance over time for drivers or passengers. Driver ratings emboldened passengers, who pushed drivers to take risks. Passengers asked drivers to drive quickly, take illegal U-turns, and to add more passengers to a vehicle than permitted.

Drivers accepted rides **blind-to-location**, despite the fact that Uber had information about destinations. This reduced driver control over driving time and location (they could not avoid longer rides, for example, or certain destinations).

Operating the app while driving was **distracting** to drivers. Rules of the road permitted the use of a mobile device as long as it is operated in hands-free mode or while the device was mounted.

There is a **lack of support** for drivers when things go wrong. In-person services were available but staff were not knowledgeable and often were unable to resolve problems.

Everything is tracked. Wherever you go, and you get a receipt, and it will show you wherever you go to, right.
Moeen—Uber driver

You just have to have 911 ready. Like, so I was driving. He was a big guy, his friend. They seemed a bit off. All of a sudden, somebody's massaging my neck, and like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. What are you doing? You can't touch me!"
Nina—Uber driver

The rating confuses me the most because, if you get less than 4.5 something – for a driver – Uber automatically shuts you down
Rabih—Uber drivers

That night I picked up three adult men very drunk. I already started feeling uncomfortable. So that ride took me to Brampton to the area where there's farms, where there's no more electricity. So I was supposed to drop each of the gentlemen to each of their houses and it was late.
Carolina-driver

Like, so say like I had a question, I can't directly email them anymore which kind of makes me uncomfortable. Erica—Uber driver
You can't really voice your opinion to a checkbox. Ralph—Uber driver

It's while you're moving that you have to take the ride – otherwise it will go to someone else. Then you get punished for not taking it immediately. The pings while you're moving is very dangerous.
Ralph—Uber driver

Health risks and conditions

Taxi and ride-share drivers experienced similar health problems that they related to long hours of work and being sedentary: back pain, weight gain, lack of bladder breaks, and poor diet. These health risks can be related to their lack of control over earnings combined with different economic and technological pressures on the job. Ride-share drivers felt pressured to respond to earnings incentives (such as surge pricing) while taxi drivers felt pressured to work long hours to repay their 'shift rents'.

Taxi drivers reported developing more serious health conditions than Uber drivers: kidney disease, heart disease, diabetes and musculoskeletal conditions. These conditions may reflect the cumulative effect of prolonged exposure to work-related health risks. It is possible that ride-share drivers who continue to drive may develop these kinds of health conditions.

You can lose track of time. Like five hours can go by, and oh, I haven't gotten out. (Patrick—Uber driver)

Once you get out of your car after ten hours, you feel like you're disoriented. You feel like your body is stuck. You feel dizzy. It's the surge—the surge makes you sit there. (Nina—Uber driver)

After 13 or 14 hours of driving continuously, I feel like I'm walking on the moon. (Umair—Uber driver)

Physical health risks

- Back, foot, knee, leg pain
- Prolonged sitting, lack of physical activity
- Poor diet, weight gain
- Dehydration, lack of bladder breaks
- Poor circulation; higher blood pressure
- Dizziness and fatigue
- Exposure to second hand smoke

Physical health conditions

- Heart attacks
- Degenerated disks
- Kidney disease
- Diabetes

Mental health risks

- Stress – rapid changes to the sector and downward pressure on earnings [mainly taxi]
- Stress – bad ratings, 'deactivation', HST, insurance, traffic, self-driving cars [mainly Uber]
- Verbal abuse and harassment from passengers
- Stress – financial pressures, lack of workers compensation, lack of support
- Poor mental health resulting from experiences with robberies, assaults

Legal and financial risks

Drivers had **poor job security**. They were fearful of being punished by Uber by being removed permanently or temporarily from the app for reasons beyond their knowledge. Poor ratings could result in ‘deactivation’ from the app, without notice. As companies like Uber amass large user data sets and are currently developing driverless capabilities, drivers said they were “working themselves out of a job”.

Drivers **lacked access to the right to a safe workplace and to worker compensation** as these programs and rights do not apply to self-employed workers. Though self-employed individuals may individually opt-in to worker compensation, no ride-hail drivers pursued these options because doing so was expensive and drivers were in poor financial circumstances.

Drivers worried about what would happen if they were injured in an accident or faced a short or long term illness or disability.

Drivers were considered small

business owners and had the following key obligations:

- They had to **file sale taxes (HST)** to **declare earnings** for taxation purposes. They had to declare earnings from \$0. Classified as taxi drivers by the Canada Revenue Agency, drivers did not access the \$30,000 exemption for self-employed workers.
- Uber insurance covered all parties when the app was on. Drivers had to secure permission from their **personal auto insurance providers** to use their vehicle commercially.

The majority of drivers who participated in our study **did not meet these obligations**, due to fear of related costs, lack of knowledge about their obligations, and fears about consequences of non-reporting and non-disclosure. Ride-share companies promoted driving as an easy and lucrative option, and downplayed the risks and obligations associated with ride-share driving. This put drivers in a position of financial risk.

What worries me is long-term because they're now thinking about you know getting these driverless Ubers, you know, just other ways to get around that, don't need us drivers. But it's also worrying me because my life depends on the car, right

Brian—Uber driver

If I'm physically injured and not able to work again in my life, I don't know what would ever happen to be honest with you. That's one of those things, not having a full-time job now that pays benefits—it's on your mind.

James—Uber driver

I'm making money now, but there is not gonna be benefits or pension or retirement. It's in the back of my head.

Rabih—Uber driver

Ride-share companies can offer worker compensation to drivers. One food delivery company with operations in Canadian cities pays fleet premiums under the province's worker compensation program, providing wage replacement for its delivery riders and drivers in the case of work-related injuries.

I'm not telling my insurance company. I heard that somebody told their insurance. They cancelled it and it and they flagged it to not let other insurance brokers take it.

Carolina—Uber driver

Sometimes in the jargon, you get lost in all that wordage and verbiage or whatever you call it. Uber doesn't support you when it comes to that. They just say, 'Here it is; it's your responsibility'. It's stressful, it's bad. (Nina—Uber driver)

Passengers like ride-share options and tolerate risks

Passengers were enthusiastic about ride-share experiences. They liked **short wait times** and the **low cost**. They felt **drivers were more accountable** than taxi drivers. Passengers felt safer in ride-share vehicles compared to taxis because of features like **tracking** and matched **profiles**. They said **ratings** motivated Uber drivers and positively impacted service quality.

Risks to passengers included: inexperienced drivers; lack of insurance coverage to passengers in the event of an accident in a context where drivers had failed to disclose ride-share driving to their insurance companies; and sexual harassment.

I know their name, their picture, everything is on file so if anything happens... I can't see that anything could go really wrong right so there is some comfort with that as compared to a taxi. You don't really know who is driving because they share the license so there's a little more concern in that respect.

Meghan—Uber passenger

I definitely think it [ratings] makes people accountable for their actions and I think that's really important because you want to be able to see that your Uber driver is a good driver and also I guess it keeps you accountable for being a nice person... (Maria—Uber passenger)

Prospects for taxi driver health and safety are poor

Like ride-share drivers, taxi drivers were self-employed and earned income through fares.

Licensed and regulated **taxi work was dangerous**, even for trained drivers. Robberies, threats and assaults against taxi drivers were 'expected'.

Taxi drivers also had poor health outcomes, including **physical health complaints** such as back pain, foot pain and knee pain, as well as a lack of physical activity, sitting for long periods, and poor diets. Taxi driver **mental health** was negatively impacted by financial stresses.

Rapid market and regulatory changes in the ground transportation **exacerbated the mental and physical health** stresses that taxi drivers encountered. Taxi drivers said they were working longer hours and earning less.

First of all, a few times I have been beaten by the passengers [laughs]. Yeah, it happens. [laughs] As a taxi driver, you have to expect that. I say to my family, 'I don't know whether tonight I am gonna come home or not'.

Amin—taxi driver

The business we do—stopping, taking a break, you feel like you're losing money...so basically...we don't really take a break.

Remi—taxi driver

Uber put another 35,000 vehicles on the road... and this a figure given by the City of Toronto. So, you can imagine, there were only 5,000 legal taxis, and now there is another 35,000 vehicles on the road everyday. So, it's putting a lot of burden on drivers. The drivers' income has gone drastically down ... It's risking the drivers' safety, big time. I mean, let's take my example. I never worked on Sundays, and Saturdays I always took it easy – Now, I am on the road seven days because I just can't make enough to cover my expenses and my mortgage.

Saad—taxi driver

Taxi industry standpoints: Eroded licensing standards

The taxi industry refers to organizations like taxi brokerages (or dispatchers) who dispatch rides to drivers, fleet operators who rent taxi cabs to taxi drivers, and taxi consultants who have industry knowledge and expertise.

Taxi industry representatives said **driver licensing requirements were less stringent under the new city bylaw** (i.e., the bylaw that 'legalized' ride-share services like Uber). Key issues included:

- **Cancellation of a city-operated 17-day taxi driver training program.** Currently, rideshare drivers and taxi drivers do not receive mandatory training.
- **Cancellation of city-operated taxi vehicle safety inspections.** Currently, rideshare drivers and taxi owners must submit proof of a vehicle safety certificate obtained from a Ministry of Transportation approved garage. Vehicle standards criteria for municipal inspections were more stringent and frequent than yearly required MTO vehicle safety certificate checks.
- **Cameras in taxis** are still required, but not in ride-share vehicles. Mandatory taxi cameras in the city (since 2005) have led to reduced rates of violence against taxi drivers.
- The city **does not limit ride-share driver licensing**, while the number of taxi licenses continues to be capped and regulated. This has led to a **dramatic increase in the numbers of drivers competing** in the ground transportation market and increased financial pressures on both taxi and ride-share drivers.

The license should say 'License-for-someone-who's-handed-in-a-criminal-background-check' – that's it. So, this person should not feel like they are ready to go out and drive a taxi, and move people around our city. ... The training that the city did gave them an opportunity to license or not, depending on their discretion.

Jessica—brokerage operator

Ride-share company standpoints: 'Customers trust us'

Ride-share managers argued driver and customer safety benefited from key features such as **cashless** payments, peer **profiles, tracking, and customer-driver peer ratings**. Ride-share drivers are now **licensed** in several Canadian cities and rides are **insured** in Ontario.

According to managers, historical regulatory frameworks for the taxi industry were inappropriate because ride-share organizations have stronger **customer service records** than that of the taxi industry and because **taxi regulations were outdated**. Regulations that inhibited competition were viewed as problematic for ride-share companies.

Ride-share managers said that work-related health was difficult to address since drivers operate part-time, do not fit a single occupational or demographic profile, and are independent operators (i.e., self-employed).

So, the question is, do you need the historical, traditional, regulatory requirement of sitting in a classroom for three to five weeks [taxi training], when we have GPS technology, when we have star rating systems, customer feedback that we found, through that system, in and of itself, encourages, right from the get go, better driver or customer service, and continued better customer service. Just question all those regulations.

Connor—ride-share manager

One of the challenges for a company like Uber, in this regard, is that there is no one driver. Like, you can't say there's the typical person. It's based on people who are independent contractors.

Will—ride-share manager

Other perspectives

Insurance: In Ontario, most ride-share drivers are automatically covered by ride-share company fleet insurance policies. Uber's policy, for example, applies to all parties from the time the driver logs on to the app to when s/he logs off. Drivers needed to report to their personal car insurance providers that the car is being used for commercial purposes, though many do not. It would be within the right of an insurer to drop a customer that had been driving commercially without informing them.

Municipal regulators in Ontario regulated ride-share services through changes to licensing bylaws. Municipal regulators saw the need to update taxi regulations as bylaws had become complex and overstepped their reach.

Provincial regulators responsible for employment and occupational health standards are struggling to devise policies to protect workers and regulate work among self-employed people. Provincial health and safety statutes apply to 'workplaces' and 'employees'.

Legal experts in occupational health law and labour identified **long-standing legal ambiguities in taxi driver status, and more recently, ride-share driver status**. These ambiguities are associated with poor earnings and poor health and safety outcomes. As the number of people in this category is growing, so does the significance of this issue.

Ontario's *Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, 2017* (now repealed) made **misclassifying workers as self-employed more difficult**. The law was meant to create a reverse onus on companies to prove workers were self-employed, rather than an onus on workers to prove they were 'employees'.