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Is ride-hailing in Los Angeles really a non-gendered and flexible occupation?

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Issue

Technology is reshaping transportation for both drivers and riders through app-based economies, but female workers are not entering this field at the same rate as male workers. According to 2018 statistics, the share of female drivers was 23% at Lyft and 19% at Uber, while only 1% of taxi drivers were female in the U.S. These figures show that, although the disparity is not as deep as traditional taxis, there is an existing gender gap in ride-hailing systems.

This brief is based on research that aims to understand female participation in the sharing economy through ride-hailing systems and identify the positive and negative aspects of these systems regarding the types of jobs they offer in Los Angeles. The research asks:

- » Why do women become ride-hailing drivers?
- » Are ride-hailing systems redefining the traditionally male-dominated nature of the driving occupation?
- » What challenges do female ride-hailing drivers face?
- » How do challenges differ between male and female drivers?

Study Methods

The researcher conducted a survey from ride-hailing drivers in Los Angeles, asking about daily time used at home and work, safety concerns, and the satisfaction of the drivers regarding their ride-hailing experience. There were a total 400 online survey responses, including 160 (40%) female drivers and 240 (60%) male drivers. The study also includes 20 online interviews — 50% female drivers and 50% male drivers. The interviewees were compensated with a \$50 gift card. The

interviews aimed to deep dive into drivers' experiences with the occupation. The survey and interview data are interpreted with the help of statistical and content analysis.

Main Findings

- » According to the survey responses, more than half of male and female drivers experienced sexual harassment while driving for ride-hailing platforms in Los Angeles. These numbers revealed that there is no statistical difference between male and female drivers who got sexually harassed while driving. During the interviews, both male and female drivers who experienced sexual harassment said that their riders abused them verbally. Some recounted riders asking for sexual favors or touching them without consent.
- » Despite the statistically insignificant difference in sexual harassment experience between genders, fear levels of male and female ride-hailing drivers were statistically significant (Figure 1). Survey participants were asked if they were afraid of getting sexually harassed while working; driving after dark; and driving in particular regions of Los Angeles. Female drivers responded being afraid more often than male drivers. Interviews revealed that male drivers have more confidence in themselves if they ever need to defend their safety while driving. But most female drivers responded that they were concerned because they did not think they could protect themselves or get help from ride-hailing companies in such cases.
- » Although app-based gig work provides a flexible schedule, not everyone enjoys it equally. Regardless of gender, single-parent drivers struggle to balance their

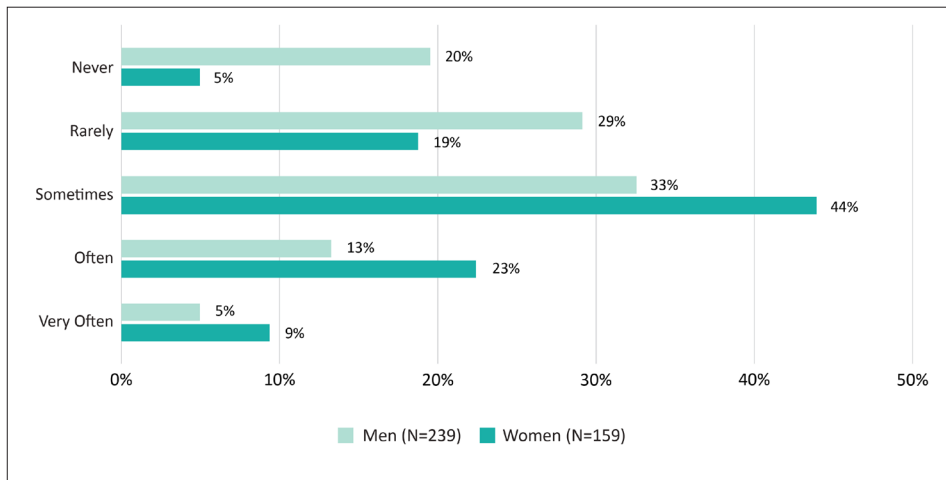


Figure 1.
Fear level of drivers getting sexually harassed, insulted, or attacked while working as ride-hailing drivers

schedules between gig work and housework while trying to make a decent income. Also, drivers taking care of an entire household are in the same position. Single drivers without family responsibilities were the one exception of those who can work flexible schedules, having time for both gig work and housework.

- » One of the common challenges drivers with children experience is time for personal life. Drivers who have responsibilities for their children and families, regardless of whether they live with partners, struggle to find personal time for themselves. Single drivers, on the other hand, can create time for themselves as they do not have to work as much as the drivers taking care of others.

Recommendations

- » Allow drivers to work in and around the neighborhoods they live in if they feel safer and closer to their children and families. Some drivers do not prefer remote neighborhoods that are far away from their homes. Providing drivers with a chance to choose preferred regions might entice more women with safety concerns and house responsibilities.
- » Provide dash-cams, protector shields for drivers to increase security. Having the security footage systems ready in the cars may help prevent harassment from riders and drivers during the rides, knowing that they are under surveillance.

- » Revamp the human resources protocol for drivers to report harassment and keep the riders accountable. Most of the drivers who reported harassment from riders said they did not receive proper support from the companies. Drivers can get suspended or terminated from the systems for many reasons quickly, but riders do not face the same consequences.
- » Employ and implement equal identification regulations for both drivers and riders. Since the ride-hailing systems do not require riders to verify their identity, it leaves room for anonymity and a possible loophole for the riders. Drivers cannot feel safe or protected knowing that the riders do not verify their identity or use others to take rides.
- » Provide designated destinations for drivers to take breaks and use restrooms. One of the main challenges of not having a designated workspace for drivers is not having access to a bathroom or a place to rest when they need a break from their long driving hours.



For More Information

Gurbuz, G. N. (2021). Participation Of Women Ride-hailing Drivers In Los Angeles; Redefining A Gendered Occupation Or Reproducing Gender Roles? (Master’s thesis, UCLA). Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3q63q867>.