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# VICTIMISATION AND FEAR OF CRIME IN THE GIG ECONOMY

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## **About the Police Foundation**

The Police Foundation is the only independent think tank focused exclusively on improving policing and developing knowledge and understanding of policing and crime reduction. Its mission is to generate evidence and develop ideas which deliver better policing and a safer society. It does this by producing trusted, impartial research and by working with the police and their partners to create change.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Technology has facilitated the growth of the food delivery gig economy in London. However, in parallel, there has been a growth in moped theft and moped-enabled crime in recent years, with food delivery couriers becoming a particular target. Not only can a stolen moped have a devastating impact on a courier's livelihood, that moped is then used to commit other offences, such as drive-by possession snatches, fuelling a wider criminal network.

This is, to our knowledge, the first study of the impact of crime on food delivery couriers in the gig economy. Through interviews, we have sought to give a voice to this “hidden” category of workers, who are often young people from disadvantaged circumstances. They are people who deserve to go about their work in safety, with respect and in a welcoming atmosphere.

There are clear feelings of vulnerability among couriers due to their involvement in the food delivery gig economy. The intense pressure to complete jobs quickly, to use working hours efficiently to maximise earnings, the competition between couriers and the long hours in return for demand-based, irregular earnings, contributes to a culture of profit over safety. Thus, fear of losing their livelihood if their moped is stolen is exacerbated by involvement in the often precarious nature of the gig economy, where falling into poverty is a very real prospect. Couriers feel they have no choice but to go to significant lengths to protect themselves, including by securing their moped, avoiding particular locations when possible and (in some instances) carrying weapons.

Couriers lack confidence in the police and commercial platforms (such as Uber Eats and Deliveroo) to protect them. The legal responsibilities of these platforms are ambiguous due to a blurred understanding of what self-employment entails. Our respondents found it difficult to communicate with the companies they worked with and reported that they were sometimes penalised after raising safety concerns. Some respondents also told us that their accounts had been suspended while a crime was investigated, leaving them without financial protection.

This contributes to our wider finding that crime in the gig economy is vastly under-reported. Factors such

as insurance criteria and illegal working may lead to a reluctance to report crime. Furthermore, our research found that couriers were not confident that the police would respond appropriately or effectively, which increased their feelings of insecurity. Couriers told us that a reduced police presence, slow response times (or an insufficient response) and a lack of investigative priority has contributed to moped-related crime and thus the victimisation of food delivery couriers.

With significant under-reporting, it has not, to date, been possible to produce an accurate analysis of the nature of the problem, including for example the relative levels of risk in different localities. Riders' understanding of their “safety landscape” is based on personal experience, rumour and “feel”, and there is a lack of faith that the police and commercial operators will provide the required intelligence to keep them safe.

We have made a number of evidence-based recommendations a result of this research. These include establishing an independent organisation to collate self-reported courier experiences of crime to identify patterns and provide real-time information to allow couriers to better assess the risks they face. In addition, we have made recommendations to enable food delivery companies to better protect couriers and to improve their protocols and communications. We also recommend that the police form better relationships with couriers that report crime and work with food delivery companies to provide training. The government and other authorities should collaborate with all parties involved to improve prevention and to increase understanding of this challenge.

The food delivery gig economy will undoubtedly continue to grow. Driven by technology, it is a highly flexible industry, able to adapt to economic and environmental pressures and, in the case of the current pandemic, public health pressures causing considerable disruption. In turn, this indicates that the sector should be innovative enough to provide greater protection for moped delivery couriers. We encourage all those involved in the sector to act upon the findings and recommendations of this report.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 THE FOOD DELIVERY GIG ECONOMY: FLEXIBILITY VERSUS (IN)SECURITY

The concept of the gig economy is not new: payment per task has long been the business model in many industries, from taxi-services to live music. But new technology (among other factors) has spurred the growth of the gig economy providing a digital platform for labour exchange, from which service providers and clients can mutually benefit.

The UK government's Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) defines the gig economy as:

*"the exchange of labour for money between individuals or companies via digital platforms that actively facilitate matching between providers and customers, on a short-term and payment-by-task basis"*

(BEIS, 2018a: 8).

Globally, the gig economy now accounts for 1.5 per cent of the world's workforce (Hunt and Samman, 2019) and in the UK approximately 3 million people<sup>1</sup> participate in it (Field and Forsey, 2019), including over 500,000 working in food delivery services (BEIS, 2018b). The UK food delivery gig economy has a market value of £8.5 billion (Statista, 2019) with Deliveroo alone providing services to 45,000 daily users, serving 30,000 restaurants and attracting around 1,000 worker applications per week (Iqbal, 2020).

Within the food delivery sector this kind of work typically involves customers ordering and paying for food via an online platform/app, (for example Deliveroo or Uber Eats), before the courier is engaged and paid as an intermediary to deliver from the restaurant to the customer. At a national level, Just Eat is the largest food takeaway service (originally operating as an ordering platform before offering a courier service) (Iqbal, 2020) and has various delivery models with a small minority of Just Eat facilitated orders being delivered by self-employed independent contractors. Deliveroo and Uber Eats specialise in navigating dense, urban areas, such as London, and therefore feature heavily in this research.

Although the gig economy frequently advertises the potential for very high earnings, the reality is dependent on demand; non-monetary factors play a vital role in shaping the welfare of gig economy workers. Deliveroo suggested that the latest compulsory "per delivery" payment format has increased couriers' average earnings from £9.50 to £12 an hour, while Indeed report that the average hourly earnings of a courier is between £7.71 and £13.89 (Iqbal, 2020). BEIS (2018b) report that 26 per cent of those providing food delivery services earned less than £7.50 per hour (Minimum Wage at the time) and 55 per cent earned less than £8.44 per hour. The National Minimum Wage is currently £8.20 for 21 to 24-year-olds and £8.72 for those 25 and over (National Living Wage), while London Living Wage is currently £10.75.

Reporting on the rise of "sham self-employment", Klair (2019) states that two million of the four million self-employed workers in the UK are earning "poverty pay". With no basic salary, when there are no orders, couriers cannot earn. The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the insecurity of this kind of work; when most restaurants closed during lockdown, couriers fell into poverty (Gough, 2020), although orders did spike again after the initial lockdown. However, it should be noted that, although 82 per cent of food delivery gig economy workers say they earn less than £10,000 a year, just eight per cent of all gig economy workers see the gig economy as their main source of income. 24 per cent of people working in the gig economy have a total personal annual income of less than £10,000, compared to 25 per cent of the general population of Great Britain (BEIS, 2018b).

For the companies, the gig working model is an opportunity to speed up and reduce the costs associated with recruitment. However, significant concerns arise regarding worker protection and social welfare (BEIS, 2018a), as critics suggest the gig economy is an exploitative and irresponsible working practice to avoid the cost of employer national insurance contributions and employee rights (Bristow, 2018).

This relates to the legal distinction between being an employee, a worker or a self-employed "independent contractor". For various reasons, employers are moving away from the traditional employer-employee relationship to the firm-contractor model, exemplified by companies

<sup>1</sup> 4.7 million, according to Partington (2019), who claims it has doubled in the past three years.

such as Deliveroo and Uber Eats in the gig economy. By nature, those who are self-employed lie outside established social security systems and therefore do not receive pension contributions, Statutory Sick Pay or annual leave entitlements (BEIS, 2018a).

According to an independent survey by ORB (2018), 73 per cent of Uber Eats couriers agree that “having the flexibility to choose my own hours is more important than having holiday pay and a guaranteed minimum wage”. The survey also found that 92 per cent of Uber Eats couriers are “very/somewhat satisfied delivering with Uber Eats” and 95 per cent agree or strongly agree that “Uber is a good company to work with”. 84 per cent of couriers say they are happy working for Deliveroo. For the worker, the flexibility offered is widely viewed as a fair trade-off for any lack of security and employment rights and can be particularly useful for those with other full-time commitments, such as students and carers (Iqbal, 2020).

Berger et al's (2018) study focuses on Uber taxi drivers in the United Kingdom to explore well-being in the gig economy. They found that the vast majority of Uber drivers were male immigrants with higher life satisfaction levels than other workers, reflecting the flexibility and autonomy the platform offers, but they also reported higher anxiety levels.

After various court hearings<sup>2</sup> attempting to address any ambiguity around the legal distinctions of their role, couriers working for Deliveroo and Uber Eats were ruled to be self-employed independent contractors. By contrast, Uber's taxi drivers are considered to be workers due to Uber setting a minimum fare, subjecting drivers to a rating system of which are subject to “quality interventions” and penalising those who decline too many trips. In 2018, the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC) confirmed this status of “self-employed”. Due to couriers being able to substitute another courier in or even abandon a job, they cannot be classified as “workers” because they are not obliged to provide a “personal service”. While couriers and the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB) challenged this ruling, their judicial review was dismissed due to couriers not being classed as “workers” for collective bargaining purposes.<sup>3</sup> The IWGB has become an increasingly popular representative body organising low-paid, precarious and migrant workers (Gough, 2020), but is not recognised in legal terms.

Klair (2019) argues that employment status should be a choice made by the worker, not the employer. Debate around a potential new category of employment that accounts for work arranged through digital platforms continues (Eisenbrey and Mishel, 2016). The Taylor Review (2017) recommends that there should be a presumption that individuals are employees or workers when an online tool is used, unless proved otherwise. Interestingly, as Mansour (2017) reports, Deliveroo couriers in Germany and the Netherlands are directly employed. This suggests that the Deliveroo model does not require self-employment but that it is facilitated by the UK regulatory framework where workers are responsible for their own costs and state-sanctioned reduced-rate national insurance contributions.

Illustrating the flexibility of this industry, Deliveroo and Uber Eats allow couriers to appoint a substitute.<sup>4</sup> It is the original couriers' responsibility to ensure the substitute meets all requirements to work, and failure to adhere to this can be a criminal offence worth five years imprisonment and a fine of £20,000. The Deliveroo website also states that the appointing courier is responsible for ensuring the substitute is able to perform deliveries safely, yet according to Watchdog (2020), Deliveroo ask no questions or have any involvement. It has been reported that a “black market” has been created by couriers, where some choose to rent out their accounts. This allows people, such as migrants, to work without having the appropriate checks to work in the UK (McCulloch, 2019).

## 1.2 CRIME AND VULNERABILITY IN LONDON'S FOOD DELIVERY GIG ECONOMY

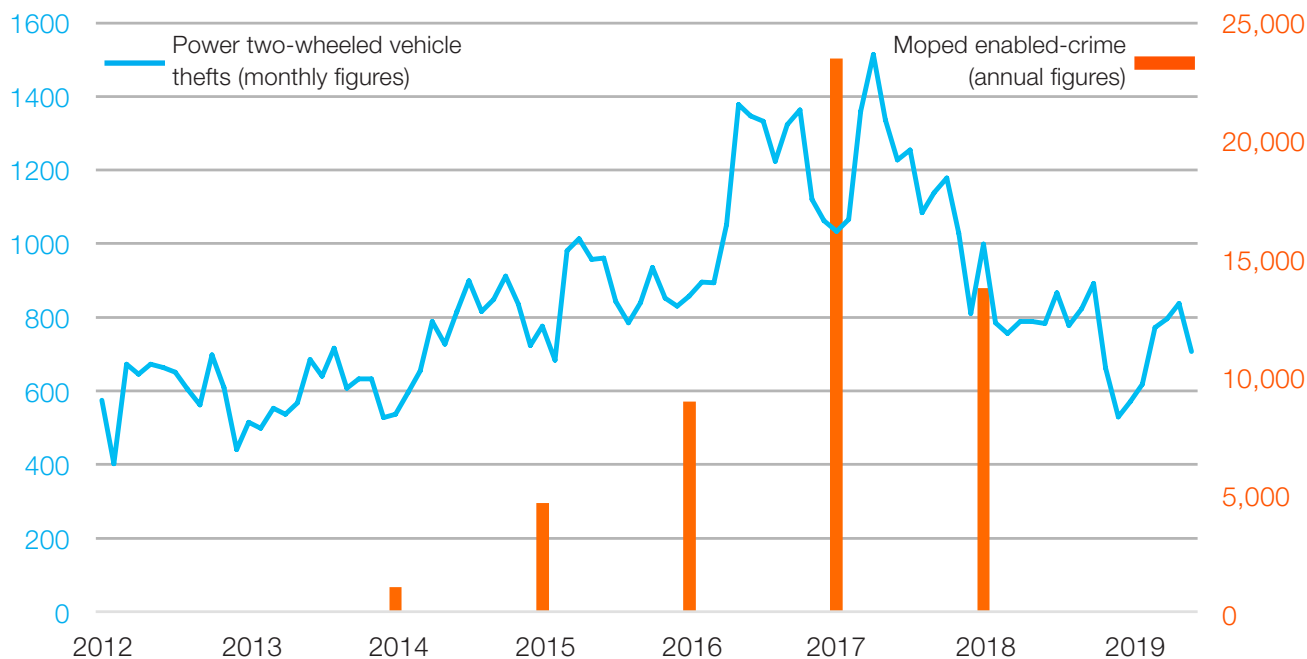
The gig economy is most effective for the worker when as many jobs can be completed in as little time as possible. Fees charged by delivery companies reflect the duration and distance of the order and couriers are not paid for time when they are not delivering. The preference of moped use reflects this; couriers can take shortcuts, weave through traffic, find a parking space more easily in often unfamiliar surroundings and pay less insurance compared to a car. Widespread use of mopeds, however, generates additional forms of insecurities for food delivery couriers, particularly in London.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/nov/14/deliveroo-couriers-minimum-wage-holiday-pay>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/nov/14/deliveroo-riders-rights-court>

<sup>4</sup> Appointing a substitute is a characteristic of all self-employed work.

**Figure 1:** Power two-wheeled vehicle theft (MPS FOI, 2019b) and moped-enabled crime in London (MPS FOI, 2019c)



Between July 2016 and June 2017, 16,388 mopeds, scooters and motorcycles were stolen in London, 5,403 of which were mopeds (MPS FOI, 2019a). As an annual figure, the number of thefts of powered two-wheeled vehicles in London reached over 14,000 in 2017, approximately doubling in the three years between 2013 and 2016 (MPS FOI, 2019b) (Figure 1). Eight boroughs (Hammersmith and Fulham, Haringey, Tower Hamlets, Islington, Brent, Lambeth, Hackney and Camden) had over 200 moped thefts in 2017 and can be considered hotspots (MPS FOI, 2017).

Stolen vehicles are then used to commit other crimes; moped-enabled crime offences, defined simply as crime carried out by someone riding a moped, in London, increased from around 1,000 in 2014 to approximately 23,500 in 2017 (MPS FOI, 2019c) (Figure 1), equating to around 450 incidents per week. An overwhelming majority of these were theft or robbery offences; 22,101 in 2017 (MPS FOI, 2018a). 40 per cent were committed in Camden and Islington where there are high numbers of street gangs and many alleyways for a scooter driver to hide from following police (Evans and Calver, 2018). Between April 2017 and March 2018, 12,343 moped-enabled thefts were committed in the London boroughs of Islington, Camden, Hackney and Westminster alone (MPS FOI, 2018b).

Metropolitan Police Detective Superintendent Caroline Haines, who heads the operation to tackle moped crime in Camden and Islington, suggests the police have control over the issue since new police tactics were

introduced and the launch of Operation Venice (Marshall, 2018). Officers have been disguising themselves as takeaway delivery drivers in an attempt to catch and disrupt criminals (Greenfield et al., 2018) and have been trained to pursue offenders using slimmer police motorbikes that are more capable of keeping up with a suspect on a moped. Remote-controlled spikes to puncture the tyres of suspects' bikes and DNA tagging sprays with an invisible, unique code that stays on skin for eight weeks and on clothes indefinitely have also been introduced (BBC, 2017). Additionally, the development of an industry standard for built-in theft deterrents on mopeds and reviewed sentences and penalties for such crimes are also thought to have contributed to a reduction in offences (Home Office, 2018).

However, officers have been known to avoid pursuing suspects for fear that they would be prosecuted for careless driving (Greenfield et al., 2018). As part of Operation Venice, police officers have used "tactical contact" which can involve ramming the suspect moped with their police car to stop them. Difficulties arise when the offender removes their helmet during a chase. For this reason, preventative measures are more effective, although more complicated and difficult. Deakin et al. (2007) suggest surveillance technologies and increased police officer presence can be successful measures to deter people looking to commit a crime. This thinking was reflected in a recent statement by Chief Supt Raj Kohli, who said "I have asked officers to be visible and active in the area to reassure the local community" (Ferguson, 2020).



Target hardening measures have included an initiative to educate the public about moped crime and encourage them to lock, chain and cover their mopeds. This has involved collaboration with moped manufacturers to introduce security measures at the point of purchase (MPS, 2020) such as built-in GPS trackers and cameras. MPS' Operation Attrition has aimed to raise awareness of the use of mopeds in snatch offences since 2016. The campaign achieved prominence on social media and through posters in transport hubs (Brown et al., 2019). Additionally, promoting pin-locking of mobile phones and the use of phone tracking applications which make phones less desirable to snatch have the potential to disrupt criminal networks (Europol, 2014).

Brown et al. (2019) suggest that when police officers interact with the public in hotspot locations to inform them of the risks of crime (usually crowded places with escape routes for criminals) this reduces the opportunities for theft.

Crime reduction initiatives involving Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) have been utilised in Islington, where urban design manipulation, such as tactically placed street furniture to block potential escape routes, CCTV, street lighting and moped bay security, have been utilised to directly and indirectly reduce moped theft (Home Office, 2018; MPS, 2020).

Although the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) report that they speak to companies using scooters as delivery vehicles about strategies to improve safety (MPS, 2020), in emergency situations, support from online platforms is reportedly "patchy". If a courier is unable to continue working for health and safety reasons, companies are seemingly quick to make clear that there is no compensation (BEIS, 2018a: 8). Borough Commander for Camden, Chief Superintendent Raj Kohli, suggests food delivery companies have a "moral and financial" responsibility to help police and local authorities keep couriers safe (Cumiskey, 2020). In response, Deliveroo and Uber Eats have improved their cooperation with the police and the Home Office, while Deliveroo has also hired 50 staff to help improve courier safety across the UK. It has also been reported that Uber Eats couriers can select up to five friends or family members as "trusted contacts" who can view their location through real-time GPS. The Uber app also has an emergency assistance button allowing couriers to call for help (Tulett, 2019). Although food delivery

companies have recorded a fall in incidents, violent crime and intimidation against their couriers remains a daily issue.

Watchdog (2020) highlights a lack of courier safety checks and training provided by Deliveroo and say that they do not ensure couriers watch the company's safety videos. However, Deliveroo claim that every courier completes a road safety programme and this content is accessible at any time. They also claim to ensure couriers' bikes are roadworthy, that hyper-visible kit is available free of charge and to provide free accident and third-party insurance.

## 1.3 THE NEED FOR NEW RESEARCH

While there is a growing body of research on the gig economy, until now there has been little focus on its criminological aspects despite frequent reports of the abuse, attacks and murders of food delivery couriers in London. A recent government paper on the experiences of individuals in the gig economy (BEIS, 2018a) fails to mention crime or the physical vulnerability of couriers.

A number of protests, particularly after the acid attack on Uber Eats driver, Javed Hussain, have increased awareness of moped crime (Greenfield et al., 2018). The death of Takieddine Boudhane in January 2020 sparked strikes and picket lines of couriers calling for greater protection and working conditions for gig economy workers (Ferguson, 2020). Jeremy Corbyn, then leader of the opposition, said "there are a lot of people working as delivery drivers. They must have better conditions of employment and employers must take more responsibility for their safety too. Police cuts have meant fewer officers on the streets, and this raises issues of safety in the community in general" (Busby, 2020). These sentiments were echoed by Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London.<sup>5</sup>

However, media reports also suggest that the protection of couriers from crime is not being given the attention it should. The racist attack by five people on a Deliveroo courier in Nottingham (a common occurrence in many other UK cities too) was reportedly followed by a company response saying the courier was "free to take a few days off [unpaid]" (Andersson, 2020).

These events have prompted criticism from delivery drivers suggesting the police and food delivery companies are not doing enough to protect them

<sup>5</sup> Tweeted on 4 January 2020: <https://twitter.com/SadiqKhan/status/1213529714624733188>



from attacks. There is a reported lack of support and understanding, illustrated by the following quotes from recent media coverage:

*"When I started, I was told I was self-employed, but after starting work, I know now that I am slave employed. When they don't need you, they close your account. They don't care about your life or your family."*

(A courier, Ferguson, 2020).

*"We came to this country because we thought it was safe. Look at how it has become."*

(A courier, Coleman et al., 2020).

*"More members of the public are treating delivery drivers with utter contempt. The companies they work for treat them awfully. If the companies, who are supposed to be the ones looking after them, are treating the riders with a lack of respect, then it sets an example to so many other people to treat them in exactly the same way"*

(The Independent Worker's Union of Great Britain, Busby, 2020).

While there are particular concerns that are specific to the food delivery sector, high levels of worry about crime among food delivery couriers also reflect wider trends. According to the latest Crime Survey (ONS, 2020), compared to an average of eight per cent of all adults, 12 per cent of people with routine and manual occupations have high levels of worry about violence. Additionally, those who earn less than £10,400 per year (19 per cent) are most likely to worry about violence, as are people in London (12 per cent).

## 1.4. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

In 2020 the Police Foundation initiated a research project focused on the experiences of food delivery couriers in London, funded by Trust for London. The project had the following aims:

- To examine the relationship between the growth of food delivery workers in the gig economy and the nature and prevalence of forms of moped and motorbike-enabled crime, both targeting delivery drivers and using stolen mopeds and other equipment to facilitate other offending.
- To examine whether and how involvement in the food delivery gig economy in London is associated with particular vulnerabilities to criminal victimisation (for example, due to the nature of the work, status as non-employees, the need to provide own equipment, places and hours of work and potentially issues such as the immigration and employment status of workers).
- To examine how gig economy status relates to the nature, extent and implications of fear of crime and experiences of victimisation and explore the experience of interacting with policing.
- To assess the response of commercial operators and the police to reports of crime against couriers.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This report is based on qualitative research undertaken by the Police Foundation from January 2020. A number of research participants were included to ensure a balance of commercial, police and courier experiences were heard. London was chosen as the study site as it is where the spike in moped-related crime has occurred and is where gig economy workers are most likely to be based (BEIS, 2018b).

### 2.1 COURIER INTERVIEWS

11 interviews were held with gig economy workers who deliver food using a moped in London. Couriers were approached and recruited on Facebook. The researcher posted on unofficial Facebook groups used by couriers to discuss work-related matters and share their experiences. The post included an introduction to the Police Foundation, a brief description of the research project and the offer of an incentive of £15 for one hour of the couriers' time (Appendix A). Couriers who expressed interest in the work were then contacted to ask if they were happy to be interviewed and verify whether they were eligible to take part.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted by telephone. Prior to the phone call, couriers were sent an informed consent form explaining the research and outlining their rights to confidentiality and anonymity and were asked to provide written or verbal agreement (Appendix B). Interviews were semi-structured, based on a discussion guide (Appendix C), allowing flexibility to explore experiences in depth. Detailed interview notes were taken and thematically analysed and coded using NVivo software.

Although our post made it clear that we wanted to speak to couriers who “may or may not have been a victim of crime”, we acknowledge the possibility that those who responded may have been particularly concerned about their safety while working and to have previously been the target of crime. However, this is appropriate for a small-scale qualitative study of this nature which seeks to explore experiences rather than estimate their prevalence.

Despite this, we believe our small sample to be generally representative of the demographic makeup of food couriers in London. Our respondent group was made up of 10 men and one woman and the majority (eight) were between 21 and 30 years old.<sup>6</sup> Most (eight) also had origins outside of the UK. The couriers' length of experience ranged between one year to five years. All respondents were currently working, or had formerly worked for Deliveroo, and most had also worked for Uber Eats. The delivery company Stuart was mentioned by two couriers.

### 2.2 COMPANY INTERVIEWS

We also invited the large food delivery companies operating in London to contribute to our research. However, all companies declined to formally engage in our research, except Just Eat. Although couriers we interviewed did not report working for Just Eat, as the largest food delivery company in the UK, we felt it was important to speak to this organisation and understand its alternative operating models. Just Eat agreed to speak to us in an initial “off the record” conversation and this was followed by written responses to a set of questions (Appendix D).

### 2.3 POLICE INTERVIEW

Additionally, we conducted a group interview and discussion with a Detective Inspector and three police officers involved in Operation Venice (the Metropolitan Police unit dedicated to tackling moped crime) to gain first-hand knowledge of the wider challenges of responding to moped crime.

The research also involved an analysis of MPS Freedom of Information (FOI) data (already in the public domain) and Crime Survey of England and Wales data. We asked commercial platforms to share any data they held on crime, but we were informed that this was not possible due to GDPR.

<sup>6</sup> Deliveroo state that 93 per cent of their couriers are male and 74 per cent are between 18 and 34 years old (Iqbal, 2020).

# 3. FINDINGS

## 3.1 LIFE AS A FOOD DELIVERY COURIER IN LONDON

*“At the beginning the money was good because there wasn’t as many workers”*

(Courier 5)

*“Work whenever you want, for as long as you want”*

(Courier 6)

The majority of the couriers we spoke to were men, in their 20s, who had immigrated to the UK. With no qualifications required, courier work in the gig economy was seen as offering a straight-forward and quick route into employment. Couriers reported multiple advantages to their work, including the flexibility to work at any time, to choose a personal work schedule (given that there is at least some level of demand 24/7) and to have some control over work/life balance. This is reflective of previous surveys as cited in Chapter 1. One respondent told us that they were only allowed to work on certain days; we understand this courier may be on an alternative contract type but they told us they were still classed as self-employed.

For our respondents, however, this relative employment “freedom” stood in a complex relationship to levels of customer demand and pay. The financial potential of gig economy courier work was seen as a significant attraction, preferable to being employed by a single restaurant, and – based on our respondents’ experiences of earnings of up to £15/16 per hour or £175 in one day – Deliveroo’s claim of potential earnings up to £120 a day does not appear unrealistic.

This level of earnings, however, overwhelmingly depends on customer demand, which can be low and unpredictable, and there is therefore no guarantee of a consistent income. This volatility generated uncertainties for our couriers whose income primarily came from gig economy work.<sup>7</sup> As a result, couriers reported sometimes needing to work extremely long hours to earn the money they require. The amount earned per delivery

is dependent on the distance of the delivery location;<sup>8</sup> the further the delivery, the higher the payment. Several couriers suggested that the courier company Stuart offered more financial stability with the option to book time slots in return for a “minimum hourly guarantee”.<sup>9</sup>

Working to satisfy financial pressure was made more difficult by competition between couriers. Our respondents reported that increasing numbers of couriers were being taken on by Deliveroo (specifically), to ensure the number of couriers available was sufficient to cover the busiest periods and provide a quick service for customers. However, this had an adverse effect on the number of deliveries each courier could make; when the number of active couriers exceeds demand, they are surplus labour – “at work” but not earning. Demand was also reported to be seasonal, with busier periods in the summer months. By contrast, Just Eat will only make “runs” available to a certain number of couriers based on predicted demand in an area at a specific time.

A typical daily schedule for a food delivery courier involved working between 7am to 2.30pm and then 5pm to 11pm to coincide with consistent orders around mealtimes (although there was some variation between couriers). In line with peak demand, it was considered normal to work at night (and alone). Daily hours ranged between nine and 12 hours on weekdays and longer at the weekend. Most respondents told us that they worked at least six days a week, meaning a 60-hour week is far from unusual.

Respondents told us that many couriers have multiple accounts with the same company, while some couriers rent out their account for a monthly fee.<sup>10</sup> This allows multiple orders to be taken at the same time to maximise earnings.

While most respondents reported full flexibility over their choice of which deliveries to accept, some mentioned being penalised for declining (or cancelling) too many trips which suggests an implicit requirement to work and a financial risk otherwise. Couriers also indicated that they were subject to a customer ratings system where a below average rating can lead to a lack of

<sup>7</sup> Contrary to BEIS’ (2018b) finding that just eight per cent of gig economy workers rely on the gig economy as their primary source of income, the majority of our respondents relied on the gig economy as their only income.

<sup>8</sup> After Deliveroo started phasing out pay-per-hour contracts.

<sup>9</sup> £8.00 for motorbikes/cars, subject to ‘Golden rules’: <https://help-partner.stuart.com/en/articles/1081170-golden-rules-for-minimum-guarantee>



work. Additionally, companies provided hand sanitiser, face masks and some financial protection for those self-isolating during the Covid-19 pandemic. These examples appear to cast some ambiguity over couriers' self-employment status.

Couriers admitted to, and demonstrated, a lack of understanding about what self-employment entails. The reported lack of explanation and support (offered by companies) is particularly difficult for those who may be new to the UK, who may struggle for example with the need to submit individual tax returns without guidance.<sup>11</sup> For one respondent, it was felt that the label of "self-employed" allowed companies to escape responsibility for couriers' safety and wellbeing.

The experiences illustrated here – demand based, irregular earnings resulting in extensive hours, courier competition and a seemingly blurred perception of self-employment – contribute to an uncertain and anxious working life for couriers.

## 3.2 SAFETY AND SECURITY

*"I'm afraid of crime but it's not something to stop me working... but I get paranoid"*

(Courier 4)

*"The people that attack you have nothing to lose, they aren't afraid. But I need to make a living"*

(Courier 5)

*"They'll come at you any time of the day; they don't care who is around"*

(Courier 9)

*"People are stealing livelihoods from people who are not wealthy"*

(Courier 10)

The majority of couriers we spoke to told us their work could often be dangerous. While road accidents are a concern, there is also considerable fear of crime among couriers who feel unprotected and vulnerable.<sup>12</sup> This concern was particularly acute for the female courier, who felt more vulnerable to crime than a road accident. With English also not her first language, she felt unable to report incidents fluently to the police and to the companies she works for.

Experiences of crime were very common within our respondent group; nine respondents had either been a victim of crime or an attempted crime. Many also knew another courier who had suffered similar experiences. The widespread extent of victimisation, and its salience in the everyday lives of couriers, is also illustrated through the constant influx of stories about specific incidents posted on social media groups

It was also clear that these experiences often go unreported to the police. We were told that some London couriers lack the legal status to work in the UK and are using family or friend's accounts (see McCulloch, 2019). This creates significant barriers to reporting moped thefts (and other crimes) to the police and insurance companies, as those working illegally would prefer to avoid contact with authorities.

Moped theft was the most-frequently mentioned concern among the courier group, either while parked (and an attempt made to break the lock) or, most frighteningly, while they were riding. Couriers emphasised that theft of their moped made it impossible to work, with a potentially devastating impact on their livelihoods. However, it is not just the equipment that couriers fear losing, they also fear losing their lives. A sample of the experiences of crimes and threatening incidents reported to us by our 11 courier respondents is included below.

### Specific experiences

- A female courier was stopped at a traffic-controlled junction in Tottenham, in broad daylight. Three people approached her. She could see that one person was carrying a knife while another grabbed her arm. She accelerated away and escaped. The incident was not reported to the police.
- On another occasion, on an evening in Seven Sisters, the same courier noticed someone watching her moped as she left it to deliver food to a door. The customer, a male, told her to go inside his house to watch. She felt insecure and uncomfortable going into his house, but felt she had no option for her own safety. The moped wasn't stolen.
- A courier was involved in an acid attack, during a series of such attacks in 2017. A friend of the courier was having his moped stolen by a group of people. Acid was then thrown on that courier. He

<sup>10</sup> This is not allowed. Uber Eats have recently launched real-time ID verification checks. See: <https://www.uber.com/en-GB/blog/identity-verification/>

<sup>11</sup> Deliveroo recommend and provide 10 per cent discount on TaxScouts who can submit an individual's tax return for £90.

<sup>12</sup> This reflects Berger's (2018) findings of high anxiety levels among Uber taxi drivers.

jumped in to help his friend who was in severe pain and acid was also thrown at him, which splashed onto his jacket and avoided his skin. There was a quick response from the police.

- The same courier, on a separate occasion, had his moped stolen at knifepoint. The police took no further action, due to CCTV being out of use at the time, and his moped was not returned. This courier has been a victim of crime while working as a food courier four times.
- A courier has been the victim of two attempted robberies of his moped but managed to accelerate away. Neither incidents were reported to the police.
- Following a parking disagreement, a courier had his moped mirror broken. It was reported to the police and the courier told them who he suspected had caused the damage. The courier told us that the police took his information and said that they would check the CCTV footage, but did not provide a reference number, did not contact the him again and reportedly told the courier to contact his local MP (who then told him this was not a matter for local government, but for the police). The courier stated to us that *"it's not a huge crime but it's big for me"*.
- A courier was chased by another moped but found a place to hide and phone the police. A similar and unsuccessful attempt to rob the same courier occurred when he was delivering on a bicycle. He recalled seeing what he thought could be a weapon on this occasion.
- The same courier reported having his moped stolen on two occasions. The first time was in St John's Wood where he left the keys in his moped outside a restaurant. It was quiet and he checked that no one was looking but it was missing when he came out of the restaurant. Although the police did not attend on this occasion, the bike was found and taken to a police compound. He was told he would have to pay to get it back. The second time was in Chalk Farm. The courier asked some young people for directions and while he was looking for a door number, they pushed the moped away. This moped wasn't found.
- A courier delivering food in Hackney was approached by a motorcycle being ridden by two people wearing balaclavas. One of them told the delivery courier to give them his moped and threatened him with a hammer. The courier refused and rode off, resulting in a high-speed chase through red lights and cameras. The courier escaped unharmed and told a patrolling

police officer about the attempt. The police officer reportedly failed to record any information and told the courier to report it at the nearest police station.

- The above courier also knows three colleagues who have had their mopeds stolen.
- A scooter without a registration plate, being ridden by someone with a blacked-out visor and with hands in their pockets, pulled up alongside a delivery courier in Tooting. They took his keys and threw him on the ground. The courier told us that he carries a baton for his own safety and so brandished this in order to deter them. Using this, he hit the hammer from one of their hands, before they drove off over his leg. The bike was not stolen and the incident was not reported to the police.
- This courier also knows someone whose bike chain-lock was removed with a grinder in front of him, while being threatened.

Other typical incidents included: groups of people smoking cannabis, shouting abuse at couriers and attempting to start fights, arguments with residents especially over parking and mugging inside apartment blocks. The police informed us that there are sometimes reports of someone ordering food to an address with the intention of stealing the courier's moped.

### 3.3 MEASURES COURIERS USE TO DETER CRIME

*"I spent a few thousand [pounds] on extra security... there's not much I can do. The security I have just makes their life harder, they'll still take it"*

(Courier 6)

*"If I know a certain area is dangerous I won't go there, I'd rather earn less in a safer area"*

(Courier 6)

*"On numerous occasions I've been followed but when you slow down and show [that I'm holding a baton] they'll back off"*

(Courier 8)

*"I was very worried about being beaten up so I thought about getting a weapon"*

(Courier 10)

Reflecting the need to prioritise earnings over safety, couriers we spoke to agreed that delivering in a car was safer but delivering on a moped is quicker. All interviewees used their own equipment which includes their moped,

helmet, phone holder, portable phone charger, branded clothing and thermal bags (which may be bought or are complimentary). On average, to begin working as a courier, the combined cost of equipment was reported to be between £1,500 to £2,500. Some couriers told us that their mopeds were worth in excess of £3,000.

A majority of couriers only insure their moped (as opposed to other potentially expensive equipment), which can cost between £100-150 a month. Deliveroo offers free courier accident insurance that covers medical expenses and loss of earnings when an injury prevents working, however this does not cover any damage to the vehicle so other insurance covers are also required. This can include social, domestic and pleasure insurance and hire and reward insurance; the latter being a specific product for food delivery workers offered by Zego, which integrates with the Deliveroo and Uber Eats app to charge (at a rate of £0.70 per hour) only when orders are accepted. To be eligible for this product, however, couriers must have had fewer than two claims in the past three years, thus making it difficult for those who have reported crime on multiple occasions. This offers another disincentive to report being a victim of crime. Furthermore, most couriers we engaged with only had third party cover, because fire and theft is too expensive.

Respondents provided extensive examples of measures they took to protect themselves

- Attaching a camera to the moped was seen as an effective way to deter offenders. A female courier we spoke to informally points her dash cam at the customer's front door to capture the delivery interaction and refuses to enter apartment buildings for fear of sexual assault. This is sometimes met with aggression from the customer.
- Sharing their mobile phone location with their family while working.
- Carrying a weapon: At least three couriers we interviewed carry or have considered carrying a weapon to protect themselves from danger. One courier routinely carried a baton, a chain and a can of legal pepper spray.
- Asking a customer to come down to the road to collect their order. (However, this can lead to the customer giving the courier a lower rating. It has been reported that when this rating goes below a certain average, the courier's account is suspended for several days meaning they are unable to work for that company until it opens again.)

- Using a very basic moped. A more expensive bike makes the courier more of a target, not least because offenders prefer a moped with better acceleration in order to escape from the police in a chase.
- Wearing a full-head helmet with the visor down in case of an acid attack.
- Fitting a GPS tracker inside the moped.
- Using a chain to lock the wheel when parked.
- Having a handlebar lock/steer lock fitted or a hidden switch that cuts off the engine.
- Investing in an alarm locker: this is connected to the moped and a mobile phone app notifies the owner if the bike moves.
- Ensuring the moped is parked in the view of CCTV or parked on a main road where it is in view of other people.
- Reducing visibility: one courier refuses to wear the Deliveroo branded clothes as they feel it makes them more of a target.
- Wearing a stab-proof jacket.
- Minimising work for Uber Eats so that the location of the delivery is known (explained in Section 3.4).

We were introduced to a start-up business that supplies and rents mopeds to food delivery couriers who may be unable to afford a moped initially. The longer it is rented for, the cheaper the price. Unlike many couriers' personal mopeds, these are fitted with one of the best tracking devices on the market, which can accurately identify its location and detect any slightly abnormal knocks. If the tracker is somehow removed it immediately notifies a team who have contact with the police. The company tells its customers that if they find themselves in an altercation, to allow the bike to be stolen to reduce the risk to the individual. These sorts of approaches, and technology, can be essential to safety provision.

Peoplesafe<sup>13</sup> offer a range of solutions including a lone worker safety service. They can provide personal alarms and mobile applications which contain a personal safety device that will silently and discreetly call for help. These contain the latest GPS, GPRS and fall detection (in case of sudden impact) and link to their Alarm Receiving Centre that operates 24/7. In the event of an incident, calls and actions are recorded should they be required for legal evidence. Peoplesafe also have unique reference numbers for all UK police control rooms.

<sup>13</sup> <https://peoplesafe.co.uk/>



Respondents clearly felt that some areas of London were particularly dangerous and to be avoided if possible, although the tension between earning and personal safety was keenly felt, with several couriers reporting having accepted trips with considerable trepidation. We also heard how couriers regularly use social media to share warnings about particular locations with each other and strategies for staying safe, including using social media.

Camden was frequently mentioned as an area to avoid, with numerous large blocks of flats, and poor lighting making deliveries more time consuming and therefore increasing the likelihood of an incident. Parts of the City of London pose the same problem, with couriers wary of being away from their moped for a prolonged period of time. Central London was to be avoided on Friday and Saturday evenings, where people that have consumed alcohol or drugs, and where frequent stops at traffic lights increased the likelihood of receiving abuse.

According to our respondents, other locations to avoid included Harrow, Tottenham (Broadwater Farm Estate was specifically mentioned by two interviewees, for its blindspots), most of Hackney, some areas in Brixton and Streatham, Islington, Kilburn, Swiss Cottage and Belsize Park. While many areas overlap with the hotspots identified in Chapter 1, there are evidently concerns throughout London.

### 3.4 COMPANY PROCEDURES AND RESPONSE

*"Companies put customer satisfaction before the safety of those working for them"*

(Courier 1)

*"You have to learn and figure it out for yourself"*

(Courier 4)

*"They don't care about workers, they just want business to go smoothly"*

(Courier 6)

*"They don't care if a courier dies, they'll just get another one"*

(Courier 10)

Uber Eats state that safety is their top priority and highlighted the following features they have developed to make food delivery safer:

- Tracking and recording every trip with GPS technology.
- Allowing couriers to share their trips by designating up to five friends and family members as trusted contacts.
- Emergency assistance: couriers can connect directly with the emergency services through the app.
- A safety centre: Uber's one-stop for safety resources developed in partnership with law enforcement and safety partners.
- Two-way accountability: couriers, restaurants and customers can report safety issues at all hours of the day and a safety team will respond and take action to hold responsible individuals to account.
- Working with the police: Uber has a team of former law enforcement professionals who are on call to work with police 24/7 to respond to urgent needs and assist in an investigation.
- Free insurance protection: all couriers who use the Uber Eats app in the UK have access to free insurance protection provided by AXA. This includes sickness, injury and maternity/paternity payments.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, a spokesperson from Just Eat told us how they can provide solutions for ensuring courier safety:

- Working with delivery partners to address specific risks, for instance, one partner provided couriers with eye wash in case of an acid attack; another provided stickers for couriers' boxes that state they are not carrying cash.
- After analysis of attack trends, Just Eat will remove street addresses from trading zones if it is felt the safety of couriers is under threat in a particular area.

However, as the following experiences illustrate, there is clearly a disconnect between the potential effectiveness of these measures and the perception of couriers. It was felt that distressing experiences with potentially devastating results are exacerbated by the lack of protection provided by the companies, although there was an overall feeling that Deliveroo showed more concern.

<sup>14</sup> Uber also offer Covid support. See: <https://www.uber.com/en-GB/newsroom/status-report-covid-19-support/>

Respondents made clear that their ability to avoid locations where they feel unsafe is dependent on which company they are delivering for. When delivering for Deliveroo (and Stuart), couriers are told in advance where the food is to be picked up from and where it will be delivered. Deliveroo states “you (couriers) can unassign yourselves from any order and you never have to work in a specific area if you feel unsafe,”<sup>15</sup> which is consistent with couriers’ experiences.

By contrast, Uber Eats do not tell couriers the location of the delivery until they have accepted the order although, after couriers pick up an order from a restaurant, they are notified of the customer’s destination (and in theory can reject/cancel the order). The majority of couriers we spoke to found this uncomfortable and it added to their feelings of insecurity because it removed their ability to avoid the areas where they have experienced danger or have been warned were a crime risk. In addition, we were told that due to Uber Eats’ ratings system, couriers felt unable to ask customers to meet them outside their residence, so as to avoid leaving their moped unattended for any significant time.

Although couriers reported an inability to cancel an order after seeing the location for fear that their account would be suspended, Uber Eats claim that couriers can cancel the trip and report the reason as “*I feel unsafe*”, that couriers would not be penalised and they will get paid for the journey made to pick up the order, but not for the unfulfilled delivery.

*“They just said they were sorry to hear it and good luck... they just wanted to know if I haven’t been able to complete the order”*

(Courier 7)

A female courier described how she had sent messages to Uber Eats on numerous occasions telling them that she feels a delivery location is dangerous. She says that they only ever tell her to deliver it anyway and have threatened to suspend her account if she doesn’t. She told us that her account has been suspended for two weeks before, meaning she was unable to work during this period. This courier also told us that Uber Eats have delayed paying her husband (also a courier) by four weeks for the same reason.

Another respondent reflected on an occasion when they informed Uber Eats that their destination was unsafe. He claimed he was confronted with having his account suspended but has also incurred a fine; we were told that the fee/penalty is usually £6 but £20 has been

deducted in the past. This courier stated that people leave for this reason but that Uber Eats know they can replace couriers easily. Couriers felt that the company’s main concern was whether the order was completed or if it was stolen.

*“If you report a crime they put your account on hold for two weeks so you can’t work”*

(Courier 3)

We were informed by several respondents that if a courier reports being a victim of crime to Uber Eats, their account is suspended for two weeks while it is investigated. This leaves couriers unable to work and earn for this period and, we were told, many couriers do not report crime for this reason.

Deliveroo gives couriers more freedom to remain in areas they are comfortable in. A spokesperson from Just Eat also stated that “we understand that if a courier has had a bad experience in a particular area, they might not feel safe going there, so empowering them with the information they need to make an informed decision about whether to accept or reject an order is something we are pleased to be able to provide”.

Respondents suggested that by being provided with locations in advance, they can keep to the localities that they know and are comfortable in. This way perceived crime hotspots can be avoided by taking an alternative route. We were told that this can also make the trip quicker, as the courier may know shortcuts or traffic-free routes that are not default. However, respondents stated that this can change depending on demand at any one time, highlighting the potential importance of profit over avoidance of crime-prone areas. Companies will offer increased rates to deliver in a specific area at a specific time if demand is high (price surging).

*“None of the companies provide any guidance on what to do in a dangerous situation or how to work in a safe way”*

(Courier 11)

We asked couriers to outline any guidance that delivery companies offer couriers during the onboarding process. Responses centred around a lack of concern for the health and safety of couriers. Uber Eats reportedly ask couriers to review several educational messages regarding food safety, road safety and payments, and they are shown the safety features available to them via the app. However, there is no guidance on how to work in the safest way or what

<sup>15</sup> <https://roocommunity.com/safety-jan20/>

to do in a dangerous situation. Their only advice is to call the police immediately. While substituting a courier is permitted, the original courier is unlikely to be qualified to provide an adequate safety induction. Overall, couriers felt that customer satisfaction was being prioritised ahead of courier safety; as protective measures may have an adverse effect on relationships with restaurants in an area.

Police forces have 24/7 access to Uber's law enforcement response portal. Uber Eats' law enforcement liaison team is formed of ex-MPS officers and proactively engages with the police on issues such as moped crime and have previously supported the MPS on Operation Venice.

A spokesperson of Just Eat stated:

*"There is no one solution to ensuring courier safety and we are all actively working with key industry stakeholders, including Scotland Yard, to explore multi-pronged solutions to courier safety issues..."*

*We regularly engage with Scotland Yard and the London Metropolitan Police to explore ways in which we might be able to tackle the issue as an industry and have attended a number of industry-wide working groups and roundtables. We continually conduct analysis on the incidents reported to us, to see if we can identify any trends to attacks, which can feed into any preventative measures."*

### 3.5 COURIERS' EXPERIENCE OF THE POLICE RESPONSE

*"When I was robbed it took the police two hours to get there"*  
(Courier 3)

*"I feel like I am alone and the police won't be able to help me"*  
(Courier 9)

*"I never ride without a stab proof leather cut [jacket] on... I carry a steel baton and a can of legal pepper spray... I also carry my motorcycle chain over one shoulder... I do this because I know the police can't get to me in time so I have to take my own measures"*  
(Courier 9)

Couriers generally felt that the people targeting them seemed comfortable committing crimes, illustrated by many occurring in daylight, in sight of other people and

with weapons. The impression created is that potential offenders have confidence that they will not be caught by the police when on a moped, which exacerbates feelings of insecurity among couriers.

One courier told us that, although the police had arrived promptly following his report of a threatening situation, they only had the intention of scaring the potential thieves away, rather than catching them. Coupled with this is poor communication with victims following an incident. The police reportedly often tell victims that there is little they can do and refer them to local government (who tell them it is a police concern), illustrating a lack of connectedness between local authorities and the police. Where there are reported instances of no action being taken when it is clear that a crime has been committed, this leaves a strong impression that the police are not on top of moped crime.

The police, for their part, clearly face a challenge in resourcing their response to such incidents. They told us that their satisfaction surveys show that the public "prefer us to say there is little in terms of lines of enquiry [CCTV, forensics, witnesses] at the time of reporting than saying someone will be in touch when it is likely nobody will as there is nothing to investigate". However, it was accepted that improvements need to be made to how victims are kept informed. This is partly the result of a younger officer workforce still at an early stage in their development.

*"They don't listen to victims and all they ever say is there is a lack of resources"*  
(Courier 1)

Courier interactions with the police were reported as being consistently negative. A number of couriers had engaged with the police on numerous occasions, sometimes reporting crimes being committed by the same people in the same places. While they felt it was important to provide the police with intelligence and that the public should be encouraged to speak to the police, the consistent view was that there are a lack of resources and that the police seem uninterested. One courier explained that they witnessed a courier being followed and reported it to the police but were told to fill out an online form.

*"If something is life-threatening they'll help, but otherwise mopeds will just drive away and the police can't do much. Later on it makes me feel scared about my well-being"*  
(Courier 6)



*“The police said they were on their way, but they didn’t turn up... It seemed very low priority. I knew they weren’t looking for it [the stolen moped] so I was looking around the estates for it myself”*

(Courier 7)

However, in response, the police told us that couriers who are renting their moped often do not know the vehicle registration mark (VRM) of the moped they are using because they are leased from rental companies<sup>16</sup> or have been provided by an insurance company after having their vehicle stolen. The police expressed concerns about these rental companies being reluctant to share information about their mopeds; they are seemingly more concerned about breaching data protection laws than their stolen moped. Without such details, “looking-up” the vehicle is impossible.

Without CCTV footage or other leads, the specific incident is usually closed. Yet recording incidents can help the police to understand the wider crime landscape and link them to other trends, so reporting still plays a vital role. The police emphasised the importance of reporting attempts; if this happens numerous times in the same area, then they can take action in that location. However, they understood the time-consuming nature of calling 111 and waiting on hold or filling out an online report when the courier is uninjured and still has their moped (and especially in a gig economy where time is money).

In terms of prevention, many couriers felt that lack of police presence is a significant part of the problem. The police told us that while a press strategy to “advertise” the introduction of new techniques such as tactical contact (see Section 1.2) “puts off” offenders, uniformed presence also has a preventative effect. While CCTV is there to support the police where they can’t be present, couriers have often reported crimes that have not been solved because CCTV was not working at the time. In turn, this makes investigations particularly difficult; catching just one offender directly cuts a lot of crime as it is well-understood that the same person will commit 20 to 30 phone snatches at a time.

We were told that the main difficulty for police tackling moped crime is that “[mopeds] can go where cars can’t go. Local authorities are currently increasing cycle-only roads and moped riders are taking advantage of these so we can’t get to them or they take quicker routes”. While an increased police presence does not necessarily make it easier to catch the offender, it does result in helmet and clothing descriptions and thus more accurate intelligence.

<sup>16</sup> Plantec Assist and Direct Accident Management (DAM) are the main rental companies. DAM have around 1500 bikes and they can lose around 40 per month in the UK, about half of which in London.

# 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Technology has facilitated the growth of the food delivery gig economy in London. However, in parallel, there has been a growth in moped-enabled crime in recent years, with food delivery couriers becoming a particular target. Not only can a stolen moped have a devastating impact on a courier's livelihood, the same moped is then used to commit other offences, such as drive-by possession snatches, fuelling a wider criminal network.

This is, to our knowledge, the first study of the impact of crime on food delivery couriers in the gig economy. Through interviews, we have sought to give a voice to this 'hidden' category of workers, and to document their subjective and often traumatic experiences. It is easy to overlook the food delivery couriers who have quickly become a familiar part of the urban environment. The reality is not only are these people working extremely hard to bring restaurant-standard food to people's doorsteps, but they are often young people from disadvantaged circumstances. They are people who deserve to go about their work in safety, with respect and in a welcoming atmosphere.

The couriers we spoke to felt vulnerable and severely exposed to crime as a result of their involvement in the food delivery gig economy. Factors contributing to this are directly related to the nature of the gig economy, such as the intense pressure to complete jobs quickly, to use working hours efficiently to maximise earnings, competition between couriers and long hours in return for demand-based, irregular earnings. This leads to "riskier" decisions being taken; if a location is considered unsafe, couriers feel obliged to carry out the delivery, prioritising income and compromising their safety. Thus, fear of losing their livelihood if their moped is stolen is exacerbated by involvement in the often precarious nature of the gig economy, where falling into poverty is an alternative reality.

Couriers go to significant lengths to protect themselves, including by securing their moped, avoiding particular locations when possible and (in some instances) carrying weapons. There is an urgent need for greater attention to the safety and protection of workers, including recognition of the impact such crime can have on a courier's livelihood. Couriers' perceptions that London is unsafe, that they will receive abuse everywhere they go, and that the food they carry is

considered more important than they are should serve as a call to action.

Respondents made it clear that there was ambiguity surrounding their employment rights; commercial platforms were seemingly content to impinge upon some elements of couriers' self-employment status but opt-out of taking responsibility for others. While the couriers' and companies' understanding of self-employment may differ, couriers should be protected regardless of their employment status. Although the commercial operators we talked to outlined how they prioritise courier safety, there appears to be a gap between rhetoric and practice.

While existing protocols go some way to making couriers feel less vulnerable, our respondents still felt obliged to take full responsibility for their own safety. Couriers reportedly received unhelpful responses or were even penalised by the commercial provider if they raised safety concerns. If they reported a crime their account was suspended while the incident was investigated, leaving them without financial protection.

The example of account suspension contributes to our wider finding that crime in the gig economy is under-reported. Factors such as insurance criteria and illegal working may also lead to a reluctance in reporting crime. The police emphasised the importance of reporting (even attempted) crime to aid a wider understanding of criminal behaviour and hotspots.

Our research found couriers lacked confidence in the police to respond appropriately or effectively, which increased their feelings of insecurity. Couriers told us that reduced police presence, a slow response, or no response at all, and a lack of investigative priority has led to contributed to a failure to tackle moped-related crime. While the police may deem moped-theft as low priority, it is far from a victimless crime.

The findings are reflective of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (year ending March 2020) which collates statistics on victim satisfaction. For all crime, the percentage of victims that were "very" or "fairly" satisfied with the police after an incident is 66 per cent; just 32 were "very" satisfied, the lowest figure since 2009. For all theft offences, 64 per cent of victims were "very" or "fairly" satisfied. The figure is significantly lower

for vehicle-related theft offences, at 57 per cent. This means 43 per cent of all victims of vehicle-related theft were dissatisfied with the police response, an increase from 27 per cent in 2016, 28 per cent in 2017, 35 per cent in 2018 and 38 per cent in 2019 (ONS, 2020).

With significant under-reporting, it has not, to date, been possible to produce an accurate analysis of the nature of criminal victimisation in the gig economy, including for example the relative levels of risk in different localities. Riders' understanding of their "safety landscape" is based on personal experience, rumour and "feel", and there is a clear lack of faith that the police and commercial operators will provide the required intelligence to keep them safe.

Just Eat, told us that they *"are actively exploring how we can introduce an employment model for delivery couriers in the UK market"*. Recently, Jitse Groen, CEO of Just Eat, has announced his intention to end gig working. He recognises the tough working conditions and wants couriers to have benefits and workplace protection and for companies to pay taxes on those workers (Josephs, 2020). Whether this can have an impact of the safety of couriers and is a sign of a wider shift in practice remains to be seen.

One important measure that would improve the safety of couriers would be for an independent body to collate self-reported courier experiences of crime (perhaps using an app) to identify patterns and provide a real-time broadcast function to allow couriers to better assess the risks they face (**Recommendation 1**).

This would aim to increase reporting and would instigate collaboration of a currently segregated system and more transparent communication between delivery companies, the police, local authorities and other organisations involved with lone working and moped rental. The Mayor of London should work with the IWGB and the voluntary sector to facilitate this. The police emphasised the need for this to be regulated so that offenders are unable to access this information and proactively avoid crime hotspots where police presence may be heightened.

We also make the following recommendations for food delivery companies:

**Recommendation 2:** Couriers should not be penalised for asking customers to collect their order from outside their residence to reduce the distance and time spent away from their moped. This is particularly important when delivering to blocks of flats or big estates where it can be difficult to locate the address.

**Recommendation 3:** Couriers must be encouraged to have GPS trackers (and/or cameras) on their mopeds. The price of these should be subsidised. They should also be company managed or branded with immediate access available for a fast reaction; this is vital for circumstances where the offender has a signal jammer and when there is a short time period to react before the tracker is removed. However, the cost of the tracker would offset the cost of investigations and the amount of property stolen by a criminal that will repeat offences.

**Recommendation 4:** The companies should inform couriers about how they work with the police so that they are aware of initiatives in place to protect them.

**Recommendation 5:** Delivery companies should formally and regularly share information with companies that provide personal protection to lone workers, such as the Send for Help Group.

**Recommendation 6:** Companies should provide comprehensive safety training (with police input) including guidance on how couriers can protect and secure their mopeds.

**Recommendation 7:** Uber Eats should allow couriers to view the location of their trip before accepting it for both risk and time management purposes.

**Recommendation 8:** Uber Eats should ensure that their communications with couriers are regularly quality reviewed and that the company protocols are followed.

**Recommendation 9:** Deliveroo should introduce an emergency button on their app that automatically contacts the police and provides their location, similar to Uber Eats' app.

**Recommendation 10:** Companies should consider offering financial protection for couriers who have had their moped stolen. They should also stop the practice of account suspension for “criminal investigation” unless financial support is offered. These measures will enable couriers to confidently report crime.

**Recommendation 11:** Companies should consider allowing couriers to deliver in pairs (and pay both workers their usual rates) in areas of high incident reporting.

**Recommendation 12.** Companies should make customers aware of the vulnerabilities couriers face through a leaflet campaign (via restaurants) and/or a recurring notification on the food delivery app. Customers should be encouraged to show supportive behaviour (such as meeting the courier outside the delivery address, if they request it). The implications of giving a courier a low rating should also be made clear. These measures could form part of a wider poster and television campaign.

Restaurants taking food orders should:

**Recommendation 13:** Ensure every food order contains a leaflet provided by food delivery companies to alert customers to the safety implications of being a courier (see Recommendation 11).

**Recommendation 14:** Ensure posters are visible inside and outside of restaurants alerting customers to the vulnerabilities couriers face.

**Recommendation 15:** Contribute to the newly founded independent reporting body while facilitating and collating incident reports for couriers at the restaurant.

Based on couriers’ experiences and on current policing practice, the police should:

**Recommendation 16:** Ensure that all information and intelligence provided by couriers is taken seriously and is acted upon, including informing couriers that this is the case. Ensure there is greater police presence (including on motorbikes to pursue) in (particularly dark) areas where incident reports are numerous and a location reaches a threshold to become a hotspot.

**Recommendation 17:** Engage with the newly founded independent reporting body.

**Recommendation 18:** Work with Deliveroo to introduce an emergency button on the company’s app.

**Recommendation 19:** Offer police-led safety and crime prevention training and advice to delivery companies and their workforce.

**Recommendation 20:** Communicate regularly and proactively with couriers to check on their wellbeing and gain intelligence on local crime affecting couriers.

The following are recommendations for the government, the Mayor of London and local authorities:

**Recommendation 21:** Proactively ensure CCTV cameras are functioning properly, including Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR).

**Recommendation 22:** Support the foundation of an independent reporting body.

**Recommendation 23:** Emphasise Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design by funding more lighting in dark areas (particularly estates where there are numerous places for criminals to hide) and limiting escape routes for offenders.

**Recommendation 24:** BEIS should include questions on crime and safety in their attitudes survey of workers in the gig economy (see BEIS, 2018b).

The food delivery gig economy will undoubtedly continue to grow. Driven by technology, it is a highly flexible industry, able to adapt to economic pressures, environmental pressures and, in case of the current pandemic, public health pressures causing considerable disruption. This indicates that the sector should be innovative enough to provide greater protection for moped delivery couriers.



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# APPENDIX A

## FACEBOOK POST

### **\*\*\*£15 FOR ONE HOUR OF YOUR TIME\*\*\***

Hi everyone, I am a researcher currently doing a project on crime victimisation and vulnerability in the gig economy, funded by Trust for London. We are NOT the police, we are independent and aim to make policing better by giving a voice to victims and those who are at risk of crime.

I would like to interview food delivery riders who deliver on a moped in London so that I can improve my understanding of the risks to gig economy workers and how work can be made safer. Everything you say will be ANONYMISED and CONFIDENTIAL.

An interview would be over the phone at a time that suits you and in return can give you £15 for your time. If you are interested in taking part, please comment on this post or send me a direct message.

Thanks, and here's some more information on the project: <http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/project/victimisation-and-fear-of-crime-in-the-gig-economy/>

# APPENDIX B

## EXAMPLE INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Sir/Madam,

### **Victimisation and fear of crime in the gig economy: examining the case of food delivery moped riders in London**

**Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed by the Police Foundation** for our new research on victimisation and fear of crime among gig economy food delivery moped riders in London. We are focusing on gig economy workers because of their employment status and need to provide their own equipment, and specifically on moped-based food delivery riders because of reports of attacks against them and the apparent relationship between those attacks and wider crime and policing trends in London.

The interview will take no more than an hour and can be conducted either face-to-face or by telephone.

#### **What we would like to ask you about**

- Your work as a delivery rider, including how you decide where and when to work
- Your experiences of crime and fear of crime and how these relate to your work
- Changes you would like to see to help you feel safer while working

#### **What we will do with what you tell us**

- We are carrying out at least 20 interviews with food delivery riders like yourself
- We will also be talking to the police to understand their response to attacks against food delivery riders and wider problems of moped-enabled crime
- We hope to talk to the companies who own the food delivery apps, as well as moped manufacturers, to understand their respective responses to victimisation of their users
- When complete, we will analyse all the interviews to identify key themes
- We will write a report based on all our interviews, which will be published on the Police Foundation website; this will include anonymous quotes from people we interview, who will not be identifiable

#### **Confidentiality and anonymity**

- We will treat what you tell us **in confidence** and won't share it with anyone else (\*unless it relates to a specific risk to your life or someone else's)
- We will use quotes from interviews (or written answers) in our report(s) but will take care to **anonymise** the people we interview, who won't be named anywhere or identifiable

#### **Further information**

You can find more information about the research on the **project page** on our website at <http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/project/victimisation-and-fear-of-crime-in-the-gig-economy/>.

There is also a **blog** about the project, including a bit more information about how it came about, at <http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/2019/12/victimisation-and-fear-of-crime-in-the-gig-economy-examining-the-case-of-food-delivery-moped-riders-in-london/>.



## Contacting us

If you have any questions about this letter or the research project, or would like to get in touch for any other reason, you can contact us as follows:

- You can email [info@police-foundation.org.uk](mailto:info@police-foundation.org.uk) or [gavin\\_hales@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:gavin_hales@yahoo.co.uk)
- You can Tweet us [@the\\_police\\_fdn](https://twitter.com/the_police_fdn) or [@gmhales](https://twitter.com/gmhales) or with the hashtag [#PFgigecon](https://twitter.com/PFgigecon)
- You can phone us on 020 8075 3106

## About the Police Foundation

The Police Foundation is the only independent think tank focused exclusively on improving policing and developing knowledge and understanding of policing and crime reduction. Our mission is to generate evidence and develop ideas which deliver better policing and a safer society. We do this by producing trusted, impartial research and by working with the police and their partners to create change. For more information, please visit [www.police-foundation.org.uk](http://www.police-foundation.org.uk).

## The Trust for London

Trust for London is an independent charitable foundation. They aim to tackle poverty and inequality in London and do this by: funding voluntary and charity groups; funding independent research; and providing knowledge and expertise on London's social issues to policymakers and journalists. For more information, please visit <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk>

I have read and understood this information and consent to taking part in the research.

.....  
Name of participant

.....  
Signature

.....  
Date

# APPENDIX C

## COURIER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

**Project:** Vulnerability in the gig economy

**Methodology:** Semi-structured interviews with food delivery drivers

**Approach:** Interviewees found using [unofficial Facebook group; snowballing]. Conducted [face to face, phone etc]. Each interview will last approximately one hour. The interview will not be recorded/transcribed and responses will be recorded in note form by the interviewer. Interviewees will receive a consent form in advance to sign digitally. Responses will be analysed using NVivo.

### Introduction

- Introduce yourself and the Police Foundation. Stress that the Foundation is not connected to the police, but is an independent charity that does research on policing and crime [to improve policing for the public].
- Research funded by Trust for London, an independent charity that works to tackle poverty and inequality in London.
- Research supported by the Independent Workers Union of GB.
- Context: reports of attacks against food delivery riders, moped enabled crime, evolving police response.
- Confidentiality and anonymity [see letter]: we're doing a number of interviews like this with delivery riders and will also be doing interviews with police, and hopefully companies like Deliveroo etc. We will treat what you tell us in confidence and analyse all of the interviews we do to write a report. We will be careful to anonymise those we interview, who will not be named anywhere.
- The aim of the research is to document how delivery riders experience crime and fear of crime, how that relates to working in the gig economy, and to use that information to help workers advocate for better protections.

### Background

- Can you tell me a bit about yourself (gender, age, nationality)?
- Which food delivery app(s)/company(y/ies) do you work for?
- How long have you been working delivering food? Has it always been for [gig economy/Deliveroo etc]?
- What made you decide to become a food delivery driver? And to work in the gig economy (rather than eg for a particular business)?
- Do you enjoy it? What are the advantages/disadvantages [what's good/bad about it]?
- Can you outline a typical shift and a typical week? (*Themes: hours, times, transport, area, owner*).
- Do you have other source(s) of income? If so, can you tell me a bit about how food delivery fits around that?

## Employment

- In relation to your work delivering food, do you receive any employee benefits (e.g. sick pay, holiday, annual bonus)?
- Do you use your own equipment?
  - Which?
  - May I ask how much it all cost you (itemise if possible)?
  - Is it insured, what does that cover and what does the insurance cost? Is there anything the insurance doesn't cover? [Point here is whether insurance – eg other than 3rd party – is prohibitively expensive, and whether riders are covered for assaults, theft etc]
  - Do riders that you know share or rent their mopeds or other equipment? [Point here about what's at stake, including potentially multiple individuals' incomes]

## Decision making relating to work

- When you are collecting and delivering food, how do you decide where and when to work?
  - Prompts: what are the factors you consider in deciding?
    - Want to unpick if possible the role of competition among fellow workers and the relationship between that and the market for their services: are there less desirable places to work that offer the potential to earn more?
    - *Perhaps to put this another way*: do you always try to maximise the amount you earn, or are there also other factors you take into account? If so, what are those?
    - *Prompt*: is this something you discuss with other delivery drivers? If so, what do you talk about?
- Are there times or places that you don't like to work, or even won't work? If so, where and why?

## Crime

We are particularly interested in the relationship between working in the gig economy and experiences of crime or the fear of crime.

- Are you afraid of crime when working – how much? How does that influence where and when you work? Can you give examples?
- Have you ever been a victim of crime while working as a food delivery driver? Can you describe what happened and how it made you feel? Did you report it/them to the police (and why/not?) – what did they do?
- *Feelings at the time, any reaction from company, police response?*
- Do you know other food delivery drivers who have been victims of crime while working? What can you tell me about what happened? How does their experience make you feel and influence your decision making, for example about where and when to work?
- Are there any other ways you have been a victim of crime that have had a bearing on your work as a food delivery rider?
  - Prompt: for example, having their moped or other equipment stolen, being unable to work due to assault etc.
- Apart from what you have already told me, do you do anything to minimise or avoid the risks of becoming a victim of crime while working delivering food?
- Does your company provide guidance on how to stay safe and warn you about dangerous areas etc? Do you find it helpful? What else could or should they do?
- Do your experiences influence the locations that you work in? (*Colleagues telling each other where to avoid*) [May already be adequately covered]

## **Future**

- Would you like to see greater protection for gig economy workers? If so, what? (*Target hardening?*)
- If you've had contact with the police, what might you want them to do differently?
- Is there anything you think the company/ies you work for could or should do differently that you haven't already mentioned?

## **Thanks and next steps:**

- Thank for taking the time to be interviewed. We would like to share a draft report in due course for your feedback before it is published – can we get in touch with you again? What is the best way to do that?



## APPENDIX D

# QUESTIONS FOR FOOD DELIVERY COMPANIES

What measures do you have in place to reduce [company name] moped riders' vulnerability to crime?

What safety training is provided to riders during onboarding?

Riders are unable to see the location of an order before accepting it. What are reasons for this?

If a rider feels unsafe going to a specific location, what is in place to protect them?

Riders have stated that on occasion, after cancelling an order due to safety concerns, their account has been suspended and/or wages have been docked. Should this happen? If not, what should happen?

If a rider is a victim of a crime and consequently cannot work (for example, after having their moped stolen), what do you do?

What steps have [company name] taken to protect riders during the coronavirus pandemic?

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