

Examining Gender Issues in TNCs and Taxis

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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Existing research suggests that women may be more likely to take more frequent and shorter trips than men. Transportation network companies (TNCs) (i.e., Uber and Lyft) and taxis are two potential modes that women may consider to meet their travel needs. However, safety and gender-equity concerns may present barriers for women to use these travel modes. This research aims to understand the gender-equity and safety concerns associated with TNCs and taxis for female passengers and drivers. In addition, this research identifies policy options that may promote the use of TNCs and taxis by women to connect to other modes (i.e., public transit) and thereby promote congestion reduction.

Key Terms

Transportation Network Company (TNC): A service that provides the traveler with prearranged and/or on-demand access to a ride for a fee using a digitally enabled application or platform (e.g., smartphone apps) to connect travelers with drivers using their personal, rented, or leased motor vehicles (SAE International, 2021)

Taxi: A service that provides the traveler prearranged and/or on-demand access to a ride service in a motor vehicle for a fee for use (SAE International, 2021)

METHODOLOGY

To explore the gender issues associated with TNCs and taxis, this research employed a mixed-methods approach including: 1) focus groups, 2) surveys, and 3) expert interviews of both female drivers, passengers, and non-users of these services. In August 2023, two focus groups were held via Zoom and lasted approximately 1.5 hours. One focus group was comprised of women who drive for TNCs (n=8), while the other included women passengers of TNCs and taxis (n=8). Together, the focus groups helped to identify emerging challenges for women driving for TNCs and taxis and informed the survey design. Two surveys were developed for women TNC and taxi drivers (n=170) and female passengers and non-users of these services (n=440). The surveys were distributed through the Qualtrics online survey platform in December 2023 to a panel of women across the U.S. The driver survey asked the respondents questions about their driving behavior (i.e., what platforms they drive for, where they drive, etc.); their income and expenses as a driver; safety incidents and precautions; and other questions to understand their experience when accepting rides from passengers who are traveling with children. The passenger and non-user survey asked women about their travel behavior, safety and precautions taken during travel, and challenges they may face when traveling with children. Respondents who were non-users of TNCs and taxis were asked about their reasons for not using TNCs and taxis and if they have experienced any incidents using these modes in the past. The research team also conducted expert interviews (n=13) with researchers, transportation professionals, and TNC drivers to obtain additional information about issues raised during the focus groups and surveys. These interviews were guided by an interview protocol, and they were conducted from January to May 2024 via Zoom. Limitations of this research include limited representation of female taxi drivers and the lack of a control group to compare perspectives from drivers and passengers who identify as male or gender expansive.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Key Findings Among Female Drivers:

- Women may start driving for a TNC to earn additional income.
- Women have experienced unsafe or uncomfortable situations as drivers (e.g., physical and verbal harassment).
- Many women take additional safety measures to help prevent uncomfortable and unsafe situations (e.g., installing a security camera, not driving late at night, restricting passengers to sitting in the back seat).

Key Findings Among Female Passengers:

- Many women take safety precautions when traveling in TNCs or taxis (e.g., confirming the driver and vehicle, sharing their location, and communicating with others about their trip plans and ride status).
- Women may experience challenges when traveling by TNC or taxi with children (e.g., bringing and storing car seats and/or strollers).

POLICY AND PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

The research team identified four key areas of concern for female drivers and passengers. Table 1 summarizes these challenges and potential opportunities to address these gender-related concerns.

Table 1. Opportunities to Address Gender Equity Challenges for Female TNC and Taxi Drivers and Passengers

Topic Area	Challenges	Opportunities
Driver Pay	Motivation for driving is often due to a desire for more income	Platforms may attempt to address day vs. night pay discrepancy to address gender pay gap for women who may feel uncomfortable working late-night hours
Driver Safety Issues and Concerns	Lack of training on how to handle difficult and/or uncomfortable situations	Platforms can implement mentorship program where existing drivers can volunteer to mentor new drivers
	Inability to verify that a passenger requested a ride	Platforms can implement more reliable passenger verification systems (e.g., unique code, pin, or barcode provided to the passenger who booked the ride)
	Difficulty navigating the reporting process and conflict resolution from driving platforms when difficult situations arise	Platforms can connect drivers with platform service members who can provide better support during driver emergency/conflict situations
	Women drivers believe they encounter more challenges with male passengers because they may be perceived to be more vulnerable than men	Expand options for women to express gender preference requests to be matched with other women and non-binary passengers (i.e., Lyft Women+ Connect)
Passenger Concerns about Safety	Passengers have concerns about drivers speeding and/or driving erratically	Platforms can monitor customer reviews regarding driving behavior complaints and restructure passenger reviews to improve data collection on important review criteria (i.e., safety of driving, cleanliness of vehicle, friendliness of driver) to make reviews more objective
	Women may feel uncomfortable with male drivers	Expand options for women to make gender preference requests for rides from women and nonbinary drivers through programs like Lyft Women+ Connect
Accommodating Children in TNCs and Taxis	Drivers are concerned about length of time required to install car seat, cleanliness of vehicle with child, and insurance impacts if they get in an accident with a child in the car	Platforms can offer a car seat program for drivers and/or drivers can provide car seats
	Drivers have little incentive to accept rides from passengers traveling with a child and car seat due to the potential risk and time consumed	Drivers can earn extra pay for accepting rides with children
	Passengers may be denied a ride when drivers see that they are traveling with a child and/or car seat	Passengers can indicate when they book the ride if they are traveling with a car seat
	Passengers may experience challenges traveling with a car seat in some situations (e.g., no place to store car seat at destination)	Passengers can opt to pay an additional fee to use a booster seat provided by the platform and/or driver

REFERENCE

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