

ADDRESSING WORK-RELATED SAFETY AND WELFARE ISSUES AMONG FOOD AND PARCEL DELIVERY RIDERS IN INDIA: A CALL FOR LEGISLATIVE REFORMS AND POLICY INTERVENTIONS

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Key findings

- **Underserved Well-being:** Despite their pivotal role in the supply chain of online food delivery and e-commerce, delivery riders in India face significant work-related safety and welfare challenges, often leading to compromised wellbeing and overlooked working conditions.
- **Multifaceted Obstacles:** Delivery riders grapple with an array of obstacles, including road accidents, inadequate safety gear, extended working hours, insufficient pay, lack of social security benefits, and restricted healthcare access, all of which collectively undermine their quality of life.
- **Policy Imperatives:** To address these challenges comprehensively, the article underscores the necessity of a robust legislative framework that enforces heightened safety standards, ensures equitable wages, and provides social security entitlements tailored to the unique circumstances of delivery riders. Moreover, addressing the practice of using privately registered vehicles for commercial purposes necessitates collaborative regulatory efforts and awareness campaigns. Strengthened enforcement mechanisms, increased awareness of rights, and fostering alliances among stakeholders emerge as crucial strategies for promoting the safety, health, and overall well-being of delivery riders and the growth of a sustainable delivery ecosystem.

Abstract

This article critically examines the work-related safety and challenges faced by food and parcel delivery riders in India amidst the rapid expansion of online food delivery and e-commerce. Despite their pivotal role in the supply chain, the well-being and working conditions of these riders often remain overlooked. This exposé underscores the gravity of these concerns and introduces a comprehensive legislative framework and policy recommendations designed to address these pressing issues.

Major Indian corporations increasingly rely on delivery riders for efficient deliveries, yet this dependence occurs amidst a backdrop of numerous obstacles that jeopardize their safety, health, and overall quality of life. Challenges encompass road accidents, inadequate safety provisions, extended and strenuous working hours, inadequate remuneration, a dearth of social security, and restricted access to healthcare services.

Moreover, a recurring practice has emerged, wherein delivery riders employ privately registered two-wheelers for commercial tasks. This practice spotlights a conspicuous policy gap, thereby prompting concerns about insurance

coverage and road safety. Addressing this disparity necessitates collaborative endeavours between regulatory bodies and delivery platforms to ensure proper vehicle registration.

To effectively address these challenges, a holistic legislative overhaul is imperative. Although foundational acts are in place, though this requires stringent enforcement and targeted amendments tailored to the unique circumstances of delivery riders. Proposed revisions must prioritize heightened safety standards, equitable wages, and robust social security provisions to bolster the financial stability and overall well-being of these riders.

In conclusion, the resolution of work-related safety and welfare issues faced by food and parcel delivery riders in India demands a multifaceted approach. Legislative reforms and policy interventions are imperative to offer substantial protection and support to this indispensable workforce. By recognizing their invaluable contributions and effecting meaningful changes, we can ensure the prosperity and dignity of delivery riders while fostering a sustainable and conscientious delivery ecosystem.

Key Words: Delivery Riders, Work-related Safety, Welfare Challenges, Legislative Framework, Policy Recommendations

Context and concern

Food and parcel delivery services have seen significant growth in India in recent years, driven by the rise of e-commerce platforms and the increasing demand for online food delivery. With the emergence of various delivery platforms, there has been a surge in the number of delivery riders employed in the country. Two-wheeler vehicles, especially motorcycles, are the primary mode of transportation for delivery riders in India. They provide flexibility, manoeuvrability, and cost-effectiveness in navigating through congested urban areas. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of online shopping and food delivery services in India. According to a report by RedSeer Consulting, the food delivery market in India grew by 38% in gross merchandise value (GMV) in 2020, reaching approximately \$5.5 billion. Several food delivery platforms, such as Swiggy, Zomato, and Uber Eats, have established a strong presence in India. These platforms have expanded their operations to cover multiple cities, leading to a surge in the number of delivery riders. In India, several major companies heavily rely on food and parcel delivery to ensure efficient and timely service to their customers. Swiggy, one of the leading online food delivery platforms, operates in over 500 cities with a fleet of over 200,000 delivery partners. Zomato, another prominent player in the food delivery sector, operates in 550+ cities and partners with over 125,000 restaurants, supported by a fleet of over 150,000 delivery partners. Amazon India, the renowned e-commerce giant, utilizes a mix of in-house delivery associates, independent contractors, and logistics partners to provide fast deliveries across the country. Flipkart, a popular e-commerce platform, relies on its in-house delivery associates and logistics partners for efficient delivery services. Bigbasket, a major online grocery delivery platform, operates in more than 25 cities and utilizes a combination of in-house delivery associates and logistics partners. These companies understand the critical role of food and parcel delivery and continuously expand their networks to meet the increasing demand for delivery services in India. And these riders, often using motorcycles or bicycles, face unique challenges and risks while carrying out their work. These challenges and issues arise due to the nature of their work, which often involves long hours of riding on congested roads, exposure to various weather conditions, and the pressure to meet delivery deadlines. Here are some common safety and health concerns faced by delivery riders in India:

1. **Road Accidents and fatalities :** Delivery riders are at a high risk of road accidents due to heavy traffic, reckless driving by others, and the need to rush through deliveries. Poor road infrastructure, inadequate traffic management, and lack of adherence to traffic rules further contribute to the risk. According to the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, India witnessed over 150,000 road traffic deaths in 2019, making it one of the countries with the highest number of road fatalities globally. A study published in the journal Injury Prevention in 2021 found that food delivery riders have a 50% higher risk of being involved in a crash compared to other motorcyclists in India.
2. **Fatigue and Overwork:** A survey conducted by the India Road Safety Campaign (IRSC) in 2020 revealed that nearly 74% of delivery riders in India had experienced at least one injury while on the job. Long working hours and demanding schedules can lead to fatigue among delivery riders. The pressure to complete a large number of deliveries within a specified time can result in riders working excessively, leading to physical and mental exhaustion.
3. **Ergonomic Strain:** Constantly riding a two-wheeler for extended periods can lead to musculoskeletal problems such as back pain, neck pain, and repetitive strain injuries. Poor posture while riding, improper seat adjustments, and inadequate rest breaks contribute to these issues.
4. **Weather-Related Hazards:** Delivery riders are exposed to various weather conditions, including extreme heat, rain, and cold. These conditions can pose health risks, such as heat exhaustion, dehydration, hypothermia, and increased susceptibility to common illnesses.
5. **Lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** Many delivery riders do not have access to proper safety gear, including helmets, reflective jackets, and gloves. This lack of PPE increases the risk of injuries in case of accidents and reduces protection against environmental hazards.
6. **Lack of Insurance Coverage:** Delivery riders often lack adequate insurance coverage, which makes them vulnerable to financial burdens in case of accidents, injuries, or theft of their vehicles or parcels. **Lack of Insurance Coverage:** A report by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2019 estimated that only 7% of the informal sector workforce in India, which includes many delivery riders, has access to any form of social security coverage.
7. **Mental Health Issues:** The demanding nature of the job, including long working hours, traffic stress, and pressure to meet delivery targets, can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety, stress, and depression among delivery riders. A study published in the International Journal of Research in Medical Sciences in 2020 highlighted that food delivery riders in India face high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression due to factors such as long working hours, traffic-related stress, and financial pressures.

Legislative framework:

There are several acts and policies in India that aim to address the concerns related to work-related safety and welfare of workers, including food and parcel delivery riders. Here are some key acts and policies:

1. **Motor Vehicles Act, 1988:** The Motor Vehicles Act governs road transport and traffic regulations in India. It provides guidelines for road safety, vehicle registration, driver licensing, and traffic rules. Compliance with these regulations ensures safer road conditions for delivery riders and other road users.

2. The Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948: This act establishes the Employees' State Insurance (ESI) scheme, which provides medical, disability, maternity, and other benefits to employees in certain industries, including those in the unorganized sector. Eligible delivery riders can avail of healthcare services and financial assistance under this scheme.
3. The Employees' Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952: This act mandates employers to contribute to the Employee Provident Fund (EPF) scheme, which provides retirement benefits and social security to employees. It applies to establishments employing a certain minimum number of workers, including delivery riders.
4. The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970: This act regulates the employment of contract laborers and ensures their welfare and working conditions. It aims to protect the rights and interests of workers, including delivery riders, who are engaged through contracts with their employers.
5. The Minimum Wages Act, 1948: This act sets the minimum wage rates that employers must pay to workers in various industries. Ensuring that delivery riders receive fair wages can contribute to their economic well-being and improve their overall working conditions.
6. The Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions Code, 2020: This is a comprehensive legislation that consolidates and amends various labor laws to provide better safety, health, and welfare measures for workers. It establishes standards for working conditions, welfare facilities, and safety provisions across sectors, including delivery services.

These acts and policies aim to protect the rights of workers, improve safety standards, and provide social security benefits. They form the legal framework to address concerns related to work-related safety, health, and welfare, including those faced by food and parcel delivery riders in India.

While acts and policies play a crucial role in addressing work-related safety and welfare concerns, there are certain factors that contribute to their perceived ineffectiveness in fully addressing these issues for food and parcel delivery riders in India. Here are some reasons:

1. Enforcement Challenges: One key issue is the enforcement of existing acts and policies. Weak enforcement mechanisms, lack of monitoring, and inadequate penalties for non-compliance can undermine the effectiveness of these regulations. Inadequate resources and manpower within regulatory agencies can also limit their ability to ensure strict adherence to safety and welfare standards.
2. Informal Nature of Work: Food and parcel delivery riders often work in the informal sector, which poses challenges for effective regulation and enforcement. Many riders work as independent contractors or are employed through thirdparty delivery platforms, making it difficult to hold a single entity accountable for their safety and welfare.
3. Limited Awareness and Accessibility: Delivery riders may have limited awareness about their rights and the existing acts and policies that are meant to protect them. Lack of accessible information, language barriers, and limited education on labor rights contribute to the ineffective implementation of these regulations.
4. Dynamic and Evolving Industry: The food and parcel delivery sector is evolving rapidly with the growth of e-commerce and changing consumer demands. This dynamic nature of the industry can outpace the development and implementation of relevant regulations, making it challenging for acts and policies to keep up with emerging safety and welfare concerns.
5. Inadequate Representation and Collective Bargaining Power: Delivery riders, particularly those working as independent contractors, often lack collective bargaining power and representation. This hinders their ability to negotiate for better working conditions and engage in meaningful dialogue with employers and policymakers to address their specific concerns.
6. Again glaring policy lacuna that has come to the forefront is the prevalent use of privately registered two-wheelers for commercial purposes by delivery riders. This practice raises concerns on multiple fronts. Firstly, the use of private vehicles for commercial activities contradicts the intended usage under private registration, potentially leading to insurance issues in case of accidents during deliveries. Moreover, the increased wear and tear on vehicles used for commercial operations could undermine the safety and reliability of these vehicles, impacting not only the riders but also other road users. This situation underscores the pressing need for more stringent regulations and effective enforcement mechanisms to bridge this policy gap. Addressing this issue calls for a collaborative effort between regulatory bodies, delivery platforms, and riders to ensure that commercial activities are conducted with appropriate registrations and adherence to safety standards. Such measures are essential to safeguard the interests of all stakeholders and to uphold road safety standards while fostering the growth of the delivery sector.

To overcome these challenges, it is essential to strengthen enforcement mechanisms, increase awareness among delivery riders about their rights, improve accessibility to information, and encourage collective bargaining and representation for their interests. Additionally, there is a need for regular review and updating of acts and policies to align with the evolving nature of the industry and address emerging safety and welfare issues effectively.

Understanding the Human Impact: Work-Related Safety and Welfare Issues Faced by Food and Parcel Delivery Riders in India:

The ineffectiveness of acts and policies in addressing work-related safety and welfare issues among food and parcel delivery riders in India has a profound impact on the human perspective. From the standpoint of the delivery riders themselves, it exposes them to various risks and hardships, undermining their overall well-being. Here are some human perspectives to consider:

1. **Safety and Health Concerns:** Delivery riders often face precarious working conditions that jeopardize their safety and health. The lack of enforceable regulations and safety standards puts them at risk of road accidents, physical injuries, and occupational hazards. This not only impacts their physical well-being but also raises concerns about their mental and emotional well-being.
2. **Economic Vulnerability:** Many delivery riders work in the gig economy as independent contractors or through thirdparty platforms. This often means they lack job security, stable income, and benefits like paid leave, insurance coverage, and pension schemes. They are more susceptible to financial instability and struggle to meet basic needs for themselves and their families.
3. **Exploitation and Precarious Work:** The informal nature of the delivery sector can lead to exploitative practices, such as low wages, long working hours, and inadequate rest breaks. Delivery riders may be subjected to unrealistic targets and performance pressures, which can lead to fatigue and burnout. This precarious work environment can negatively impact their overall quality of life and job satisfaction.
4. **Social Exclusion:** Delivery riders may face social exclusion and marginalization due to the nature of their work. They often have limited interaction with colleagues or a sense of belonging to a workplace community. The isolation can contribute to feelings of alienation and affect their social relationships and mental well-being.
5. **Lack of Voice and Representation:** Delivery riders, particularly those working as independent contractors, may lack collective bargaining power and representation. Their ability to voice concerns, negotiate for better working conditions, and actively participate in decision-making processes is limited. This absence of a platform for meaningful dialogue and advocacy further exacerbates their vulnerability.

To address these human perspectives, it is crucial to prioritize the well-being of delivery riders by implementing robust safety regulations, ensuring fair remuneration and benefits, enhancing social protection measures, and fostering avenues for meaningful representation and collective bargaining. Recognizing the human element in policy-making is essential to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for food and parcel delivery riders in India.

Recommendations:

To address these safety and health concerns, it is important for both employers and relevant authorities to take proactive measures. Some potential solutions include:

1. **Training and Education:** Employers should provide comprehensive training to delivery riders on safe riding techniques, traffic rules, and defensive driving. Additionally, education programs can raise awareness about the importance of taking breaks, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and recognizing the signs of fatigue.
2. **Provision of Safety Equipment:** Employers should supply necessary safety equipment such as helmets, reflective jackets, and gloves to their delivery riders. This ensures that riders have adequate protection while on the road.
3. **Workload Management:** Employers should establish realistic delivery targets and schedules that allow for reasonable working hours and breaks. Proper workload management can help prevent overwork and fatigue among riders.
5. **Insurance Coverage:** Employers should consider providing insurance coverage to their delivery riders, including health insurance and vehicle insurance, to safeguard them against financial risks.
6. **Mental Health Support:** Employers can offer counselling services or establish support networks to address the mental health needs of delivery riders. Awareness campaigns can also promote mental health awareness and destigmatize seeking help.
7. **Collaboration with Delivery Platforms:** Delivery platforms can play a crucial role in promoting safety and health. They can implement safety guidelines, monitor compliance, and collaborate with relevant stakeholders to address the concerns of delivery riders.

Policy Prescriptions:

Few critical suggestions to government authorities to address the work-related safety and health issues among food and parcel delivery riders in India:

- 1) Major policy lacuna that has come to the forefront is the prevalent use of privately registered two-wheelers for commercial purposes by delivery riders. This practice raises concerns on multiple fronts. Firstly, the use of private vehicles for commercial activities contradicts the intended usage under private registration, potentially leading to insurance issues in case of accidents during deliveries. Moreover, the increased wear and tear on vehicles used for commercial operations could undermine the safety and reliability of these vehicles, impacting not only the riders but also other road users. To address this issue comprehensively, several suggestions can be considered. Firstly, the regulatory authorities should collaborate with delivery platforms to ensure that all vehicles used for commercial purposes are appropriately registered under commercial categories, thus ensuring proper insurance coverage and adherence to safety standards. Secondly, awareness campaigns can be launched to educate delivery riders about the importance of adhering to proper vehicle registrations and the potential consequences of using privately registered vehicles for commercial tasks. Additionally, offering incentives such as tax breaks or subsidies for vehicles registered under the commercial category could motivate delivery riders to comply with regulations. Strengthened enforcement through regular vehicle checks and penalties for non-compliance can act as a deterrent and encourage adherence to the established norms. Lastly, involving relevant stakeholders, including delivery companies, insurance providers, and regulatory bodies, in dialogues and

consultations can lead to the formulation of effective and practical solutions to curb the misuse of privately registered vehicles for commercial purposes. Addressing this policy gap is not only vital for the safety of delivery riders but also for the overall integrity of the road transport system.

- 2) **Implement and Enforce Safety Regulations:** Government authorities should establish comprehensive safety regulations specifically designed for delivery riders. These regulations should include mandatory use of helmets, reflective jackets, and other safety gear, as well as adherence to traffic rules and speed limits.
- 3) **Work Hour Limitations and Rest Breaks:** Set limits on the maximum working hours for delivery riders to prevent overwork and fatigue. Mandate regular rest breaks during shifts to allow for adequate rest and recovery.
- 4) **Road Infrastructure Development:** Invest in improving road infrastructure, including dedicated bicycle lanes and safer road designs, to enhance the safety of delivery riders. Implement measures to reduce traffic congestion and enhance traffic management in delivery-dense areas.
- 5) **Ensuring the Employer Responsibility:** Make it mandatory for employers to provide proper training to delivery riders on road safety, defensive driving techniques, and handling of parcels. Employers should also be responsible for supplying necessary safety equipment and ensuring compliance with safety regulations.
- 6) **Insurance Coverage:** Establish a system that mandates insurance coverage for delivery riders, including health insurance and vehicle insurance. This will provide financial protection to riders in case of accidents, injuries, or theft of vehicles or parcels.
- 7) **Mental Health Support:** Create awareness about the importance of mental health among delivery riders and provide access to mental health support services. Collaborate with employers and relevant organizations to offer counseling services and establish support networks.
- 8) **Collaboration with Delivery Platforms:** Delivery platforms should actively collaborate with government authorities, employers, and relevant stakeholders to develop and implement safety guidelines and best practices. Platforms can play a significant role in monitoring compliance, providing safety training, and ensuring the well-being of delivery riders.
- 9) **Research and Data Collection:** Conduct research studies and collect data on work-related safety and health issues specific to food and parcel delivery riders in India. This data will help in understanding the challenges faced by riders and designing evidence-based policies and interventions.
- 10) **Awareness and Education Campaigns:** Launch awareness campaigns to educate both delivery riders and the general public about road safety, the importance of sharing the road with delivery riders, and the rights and responsibilities of all road users.
- 11) **Regular Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish a system for regular monitoring and evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of safety policies and interventions. This will allow for necessary adjustments and improvements based on feedback and data analysis.
- 12) **Welfare initiatives through new schemes:** Initiating a welfare scheme specifically targeting food and parcel delivery riders would be a positive step by the government. Such a scheme can provide social security benefits and address the unique challenges faced by these riders. Here are some reasons why the government should consider implementing such a scheme:
 - A. **Recognition of Their Contribution:** Food and parcel delivery riders play a crucial role in supporting the e-commerce and food delivery sectors, which have witnessed significant growth in recent years. Recognizing their contribution by implementing a welfare scheme demonstrates the government's acknowledgment of their work and the importance of their well-being.
 - B. **Ensuring Social Security:** Delivery riders often work in precarious conditions without access to formal employment benefits or social security coverage. A welfare scheme can provide them with financial protection, insurance coverage, and access to healthcare services, thereby ensuring social security and reducing their vulnerability.
 - C. **Addressing Work-Related Risks:** Delivery riders face various work-related risks, including road accidents, injuries, and health issues. A welfare scheme can include provisions for training, safety equipment, and healthcare support to mitigate these risks and promote a safer working environment.
 - D. **Promoting Compliance and Standards:** By implementing a welfare scheme, the government can set standards and guidelines for delivery platforms and employers to ensure compliance with safety regulations, working hour limitations, and other labor standards. This can contribute to improving the overall working conditions for delivery riders.
 - E. **Enhancing Social and Economic Inclusion:** A welfare scheme can contribute to the social and economic inclusion of delivery riders by providing them with access to social security benefits, healthcare facilities, and other support services. This can help uplift their overall well-being and improve their quality of life.

It is important for the government to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the needs and challenges faced by food and parcel delivery riders and design a welfare scheme that addresses these specific concerns. Stakeholder consultations with delivery platforms, employers, and rider representatives can help in formulating an effective and inclusive scheme. It's worth noting that the government's decision to initiate a welfare scheme depends on various factors, including financial feasibility, administrative capacity, and policy priorities. These policy suggestions aim to address the unique safety and health concerns faced by food and parcel delivery riders in India and create a safer and more supportive working environment for them.

It is important to recognize and address the safety and health issues faced by food and parcel delivery riders in India to ensure their well-being and create a safer working environment.

In conclusion, food and parcel delivery riders in India face significant work-related safety and health issues due to the demanding nature of their job. These issues include road accidents, fatigue, ergonomic strain, lack of safety equipment, inadequate insurance coverage, and mental health concerns. To address these challenges, several policy suggestions can be considered.

Firstly, implementing and enforcing safety regulations, such as mandatory safety gear and adherence to traffic rules, is crucial. Work hour limitations and rest breaks should be set to prevent overwork and fatigue. Investment in road infrastructure development and traffic management can enhance the safety of delivery riders. Employers should be responsible for providing training, safety equipment, and insurance coverage.

Furthermore, mental health support and awareness campaigns can help address the psychological well-being of delivery riders. Collaboration between delivery platforms, employers, and relevant stakeholders is vital in implementing and monitoring safety guidelines.

While there are no specific welfare schemes for food and parcel delivery riders at the state level currently, initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan, Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana, and Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana at the national level can benefit informal sector workers, including delivery riders.

Considering the unique challenges faced by food and parcel delivery riders, initiating a dedicated welfare scheme at the state level would be a positive step. Such a scheme would ensure social security, address work-related risks, promote compliance and standards, and enhance the social and economic inclusion of delivery riders.

It is essential for the government to conduct a thorough assessment of the needs and challenges faced by delivery riders and involve relevant stakeholders in formulating effective policies. By prioritizing the welfare and safety of food and parcel delivery riders, we can create a safer and more supportive working environment for these essential workers.

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