

# Occupational Health Internship Program (OHIP)

## New York Taxi Workers Alliance (NYTWA)

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## Workplace Violence Against Taxi Drivers

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## **I. Abstract**

Taxi driving is one of the most dangerous jobs in the country. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), taxi and livery drivers are 60 times more likely to be murdered while on the job than any other workers in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Taxi and livery drivers are also among those with the highest rate of nonfatal assault.<sup>1</sup> Risk factors include working alone, handling money, working late at night, and working in high-crime areas.

For our OHIP project, we worked with the New York Taxi Workers Alliance (NYTWA). NYTWA is an 11,000+ member union of NYC yellow taxi drivers which fights for justice, rights, respect, and dignity for the over 43,000 licensed drivers in NYC.<sup>2</sup> Our project examined the risk factors faced by New York City taxi drivers for workplace violence. The objectives of our project were to: 1) identify risk factors faced by NYC taxi drivers for workplace violence, 2) identify current prevention measures, 3) evaluate the effectiveness of those prevention measures, and 4) propose additional safety measures.

In order to achieve our objectives, we conducted key informant interviews and administered a questionnaire. We conducted in-depth interviews with taxi drivers who are affiliates of NYTWA and were known to be victims of workplace violence. We administered a questionnaire to a random sample of drivers waiting for passengers at LaGuardia Airport.

The results of our project indicate that workplace violence against taxi drivers is a serious problem. Our findings reveal that NYC taxi drivers are often subject to verbal and physical assault, which often results in physical and/or emotional trauma. Our findings also reveal that the perpetrators of violence against taxi drivers do not often face arrest or legal consequences. We produced a pamphlet that features profiles of victimized drivers, describing their incidents of workplace violence and highlighting their personal stories. The NYTWA intends to use the pamphlet in their advocacy efforts to improve the safety of all NYC taxi drivers, through the passage of legislation and other means. In addition, our OHIP final report, which contains the results of our questionnaire, will be used by NYTWA as a foundation for future advocacy efforts.

## II. Background

The taxi industry provides a great service to the New York City transportation network and for many New Yorkers it is an essential part of daily life. Taxi drivers provide service 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with most drivers working 12 hour shifts. Certain aspects of the job such as working alone, handling money, working late at night, and working in high-crime areas result in an increased risk of workplace violence against taxi drivers. Moreover, the safety of taxi drivers is further compromised because there is a lack of legislation to impose strict legal consequences for perpetrators of violence against taxi drivers. Studies have consistently documented that taxi drivers have higher incidents of assaults compared to other workers. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has reported that taxi drivers are approximately 60 times more likely to be murdered than other workers. NIOSH has also documented that taxi drivers account for 9 percent of all occupational homicides.<sup>3,4</sup>

Although there is documentation that identifies some risk factors for violence against taxi drivers, more research is needed to further assess these risk factors and potentially identify currently unknown risk factors. Similarly, it would be beneficial for further research to examine the effectiveness of current safety devices (example: partition and camera).

To investigate the issue of workplace violence against taxi drivers, we have worked with the New York Taxi Workers Alliance (NYTWA), an advocacy organization of NYC yellow taxi drivers founded in 1998. NYTWA fights for justice, rights, respect, and dignity for the over 43,000 licensed drivers in New York City. This OHIP project has supported the needs of this organization in two capacities. First, we interviewed affiliates of NYTWA who have been victims of violence and wrote detailed accounts of their experiences. Second, we designed and administered a questionnaire to taxi drivers at LaGuardia Airport to gather information about certain aspects of their job and their experiences with workplace violence.

On June 25, 2010, soon after we began working with NYTWA, the New York State Legislature passed the Taxi Driver Protection Act, a bill proposed and advocated by NYTWA. The Taxi Driver Protection Act increases the penalties associated with assaulting a taxi, black car, or livery driver and requires a sticker be displayed in every taxi that reads: "WARNING: Assaulting A Taxi Driver Is Punishable By Up To Twenty-Five Years In Prison." For misdemeanor assaults which carry a maximum sentence of one year in prison, the penalty will increase to a mandatory two year prison sentence if the victim is a driver. For felony assaults, there will be a penalty enhancement of five additional years to the sentence if the victim is a driver.<sup>2</sup> Using the Taxi Driver Protection Act as a platform, the data gathered from our project will be used to advocate for stronger legislation and other measures that will result in a safer work environment for New York City taxi drivers.

### **III. Methods**

#### *Host Organization*

The New York Taxi Workers Alliance (NYTWA) is an 11,000+ member union of NYC yellow taxi drivers. NYTWA fights for justice, rights, respect, and dignity for the over 43,000 licensed drivers in New York City. NYTWA is the first non-collective bargaining agent member of a Central Labor Council in the United States. NYTWA fights campaigns for structural change in the taxi industry and supports individual drivers through comprehensive advocacy.<sup>2</sup> Since its founding, NYTWA has increased drivers' incomes by 35%-45%, successfully negotiated the inclusion of taxi drivers for 9/11 federal disaster assistance, defended \$300,000 in civil court claims by corrupt taxi brokers, changed numerous anti-worker policies and regulations governing the taxi industry, and provided discounted or pro bono legal, financial management, and health services to drivers.<sup>2</sup> NYTWA served as the host organization for our Occupational Health Internship Program (OHIP) 2010 summer project.

#### *Interviewing Victimized Drivers*

We conducted in-depth interviews with taxi drivers who are affiliates of NYTWA and were known to be victims of workplace violence. Participants were recruited using a contact list compiled by the director of NYTWA, Bhairavi Desai. The list included taxi drivers who were known to be victims of workplace violence and who had spoken publicly about their experiences. We contacted approximately 25 drivers and were able to schedule ten interviews. The interviews were conducted in a variety of settings including the NYTWA office, the driver's home, or a restaurant. The interviews were conducted by both interns/investigators, Kelley McDonough and Deanna Stewart, and were guided by a set of pre-generated questions (Appendix: A). At the start of the interview, the subject was asked to sign a document of informed consent (Appendix: B). On average, it took approximately one hour to complete each interview. A few of the interviews took between two and five hours to complete because the drivers were very enthusiastic about sharing their life experiences. Drivers shared with us devastating stories of physical assault which in most instances had resulted in both physical and emotional trauma. Both interns recorded written notes during each interview. A photograph of each driver was taken at the end of each interview or a photograph was requested to be provided at a later date.

#### *Writing Driver Profiles*

Notes taken during each interview were transcribed and edited into succinct driver profiles. Ten profiles were written each telling a driver's personal story, focusing on his/her experience with violence in the workplace. The profiles will be included in a pamphlet that will be used by NYTWA in future efforts to advocate for legislation to protect drivers against violence in the workplace. The profiles were written with the intended audience being local and state law makers and law enforcers. The content of the profiles was reviewed by our OHIP academic mentors and NYTWA site coordinator. The profiles were edited to reflect any feedback that was received and then submitted to the layout/design person used by NYTWA to

create the pamphlet material. Whenever possible, a photograph was added to a profile as well as a direct quote from the driver.

### *Developing the Questionnaire*

In order to meet our project objectives of identifying risk factors faced by NYC taxi drivers for workplace violence, identifying current prevention measures, evaluating the effectiveness of those prevention measures, and proposing additional safety measures we developed a questionnaire to be orally administered to New York City yellow taxi drivers. Our questionnaire was built upon a foundation created by the NYTWA OHIP interns in 2008. Their project focused mainly on ergonomics, but included some content on violence. Using their questionnaire and report as a base, we developed our own research tool. We created a 51-item questionnaire (Appendix: C). For the purposes of the questionnaire, workplace violence against taxi drivers refers to any incidents that occurred while the taxi driver was performing his/her duties (e.g. driving, parking taxi, walking to/from garage, loading luggage, waiting for passengers, etc.). The NYTWA director provided guidance in the development of the questionnaire. Together we worked to include questions that covered general background information, questions about the job, and questions specifically about workplace violence. In consideration of time, not all proposed questions were included in the questionnaire. Also in consideration of time and to simplify the process of data input and analysis, all questions were designed with categorical response choices. We piloted the questionnaire on a few drivers at the NYTWA office before it was finalized and printed for use.

### *Conducting the Questionnaire*

We administered our questionnaire to a random sample of drivers waiting for passengers at LaGuardia Airport. There are two main lots where NYC yellow taxis wait to be dispatched to passengers. The number of taxis in the lot at any given time is dependent on how many passengers are in need of a taxi and thereby how quickly the line is moving. During the wait, some drivers nap or read in their taxis, some walk around to socialize with other drivers, while others take the opportunity to use the bathroom or have something to eat. To administer our questionnaire, we walked through the lot, weaving between lines of taxis, clipboard in hand, and approached drivers randomly. We offered a brief explanation as to who we are and what organization we were working with. We explained the purpose of the questionnaire (to gather information about the issue of violence against taxi drivers and draw attention to the problem in an effort to make the job safer), noted that the questionnaire would take approximately five to seven minutes to complete, and asked the driver if he/she was interested in participating. The questionnaire asked some demographic questions, but no identifiers were asked or recorded. If a driver agreed to participate, we proceeded by reading the questions to the driver and recording the driver's answers. Each intern worked with one driver at a time. Over the course of five shifts at the airport, we surveyed 191 drivers.

### *Analyzing the Data*

Data were input into Microsoft Excel, and analyzed using SPSS software. We generated descriptive statistics for all variables and analyzed cross-tab comparisons. We used SPSS to generate charts and graphs to be included in our final report.

## IV. Results

- Background and Demographics

The first section of the questionnaire pertained to general background and demographic questions. We wanted to gather data to learn more about who taxi drivers really are. Additionally, it was important to gather certain background and demographic data in order to make later comparisons to incidents of workplace violence.

### *Gender*

Of the 191 drivers surveyed, 189 were male and 2 were female; 99% of our sample was male, which is consistent with the taxi industry in New York City.

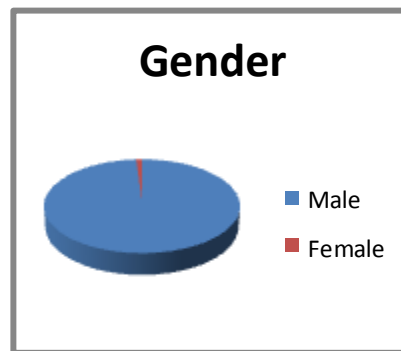


Figure 1: Gender

### *What year did you first start driving a taxi in NYC?*

We asked the drivers, “What year did you first start driving a taxi in NYC?” The mean is 1999 and the median is 2002, with a standard deviation of approximately 9.4 years. We surveyed many drivers who had been in the taxi industry for many years, but also many drivers who were fairly new to the industry.





Figure 2: What year did you first start driving a taxi in NYC?

*What country were you born in?*

Nearly 96% of drivers surveyed were born in a country other than the United States. Approximately 50% of drivers surveyed were born in India (17.8%), Bangladesh (20.4%), or Pakistan (13.6%). Amongst our sample, other countries of origin include: Ghana (5.8%), Senegal (3.1%), Haiti (5.8%), Ecuador (1.6%), and Morocco (3.7%).

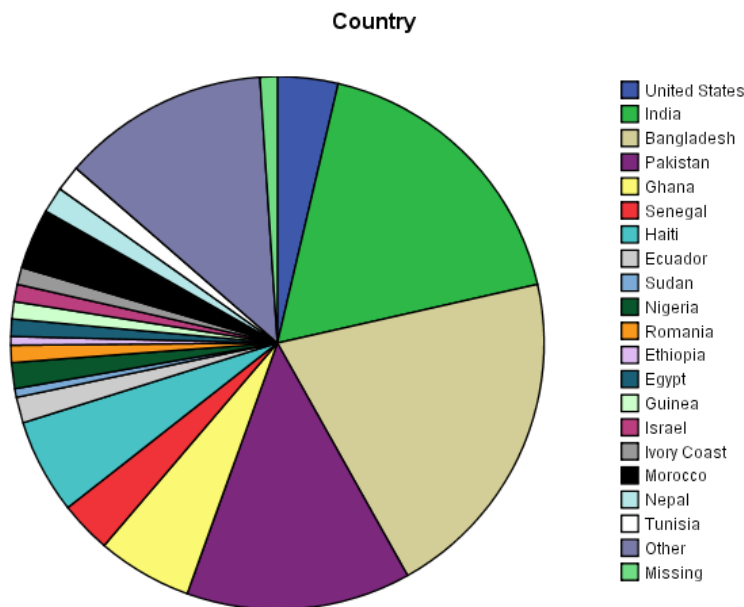


Figure 4: What country were you born in?

*If you were not born in the United States, what year did you migrate to the United States?*

We asked those drivers who were not born in the United States what year they migrated to the country. The mean is 1992 and the median is 1995, with a standard deviation of approximately 9.9 years.

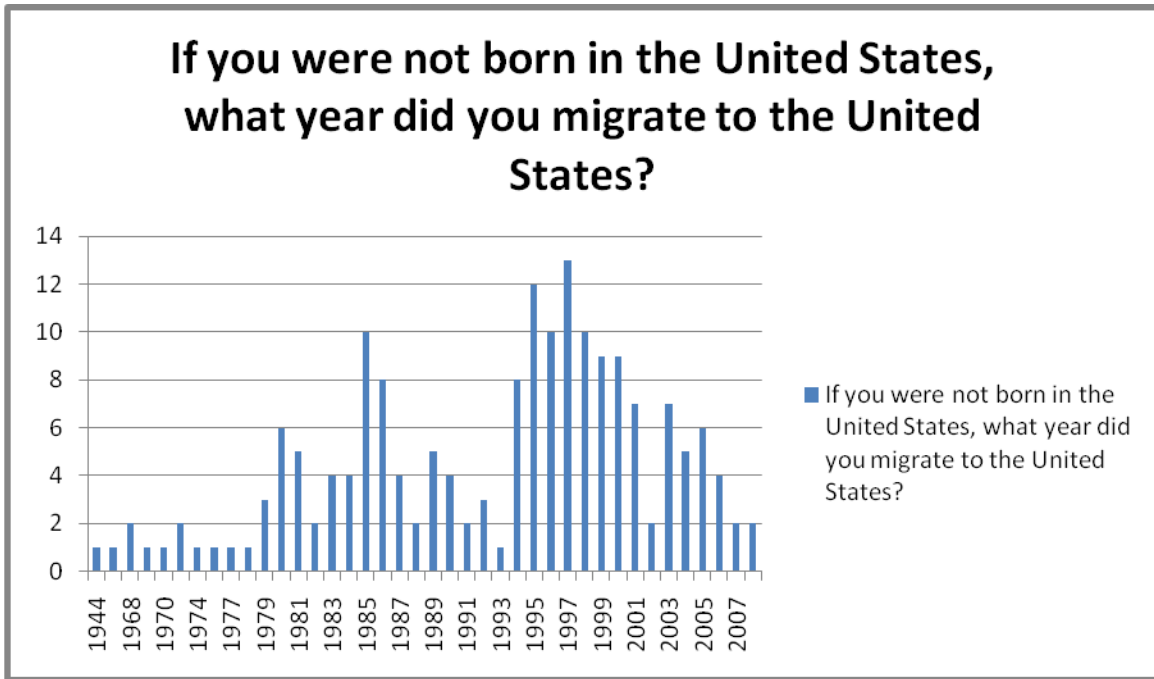


Figure 5: If you were not born in the United States, what year did you migrate to the United States?

*What is your marital status?*

We asked the drivers, “What is your marital status?” and offered the options “married”, “single”, “divorced”, “widowed”, and “separated”. The marital statuses of the drivers surveyed are as follow: 73.3% married, 20.4% single, 4.2% divorced, and 2.1% separated.

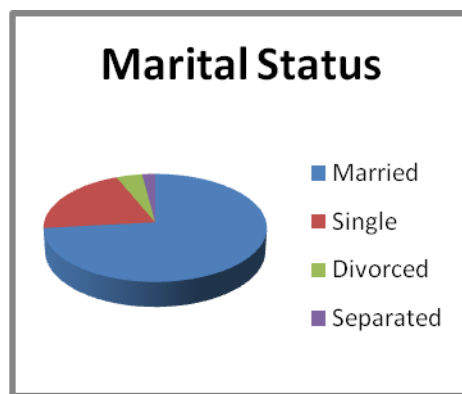


Figure 6: Marital Status

*How many children do you have?*

Many taxi drivers are in the industry because they have families to support and are unable to find a job that allows them to put in so many hours in exchange for much needed money. We asked drivers, “How many children do you have?” For our sample of drivers, the mean is 1.7 and the median is 2.0, with a standard deviation of 1.5 children. 30 percent of drivers reported having no children.

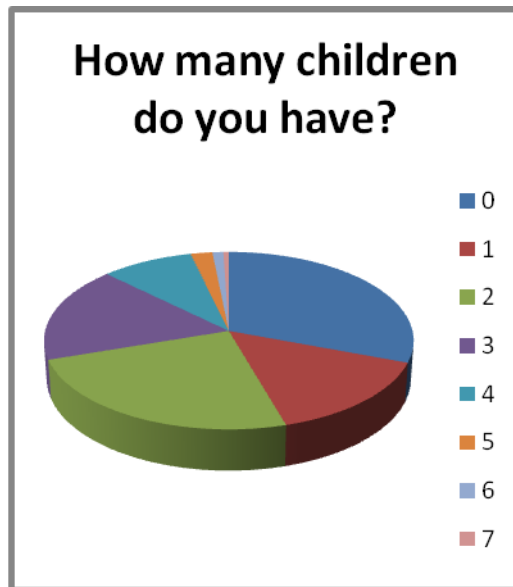


Figure 7: How many children do you have?

*Where is your family living?*

Many drivers struggle to support family living both in the United States and in their country of origin. Drivers work long hours to provide money for their families. We asked drivers, “Where is your family living?” Approximately 76% responded that their family lives in the United States and nearly 24% of drivers reported that their family lives in their country of origin.

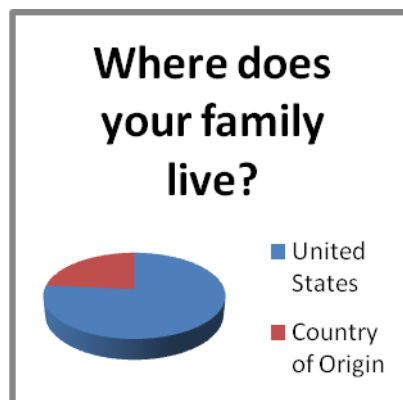


Figure 8: Where does your family live?

*What race/ethnicity do you identify yourself with?*

The taxi industry is composed of drivers from many different racial and ethnic groups. We asked drivers, “What race/ethnicity do you identify yourself with?” Drivers identified themselves as Caucasian (7.3%), Black or African American (23.0%), Asian (54.5%), Latino (5.8%), American Indian or Alaskan Native (0.5%), or Other (8.9%). We observed that drivers often times had difficulty identifying which race/ethnicity they identify with.

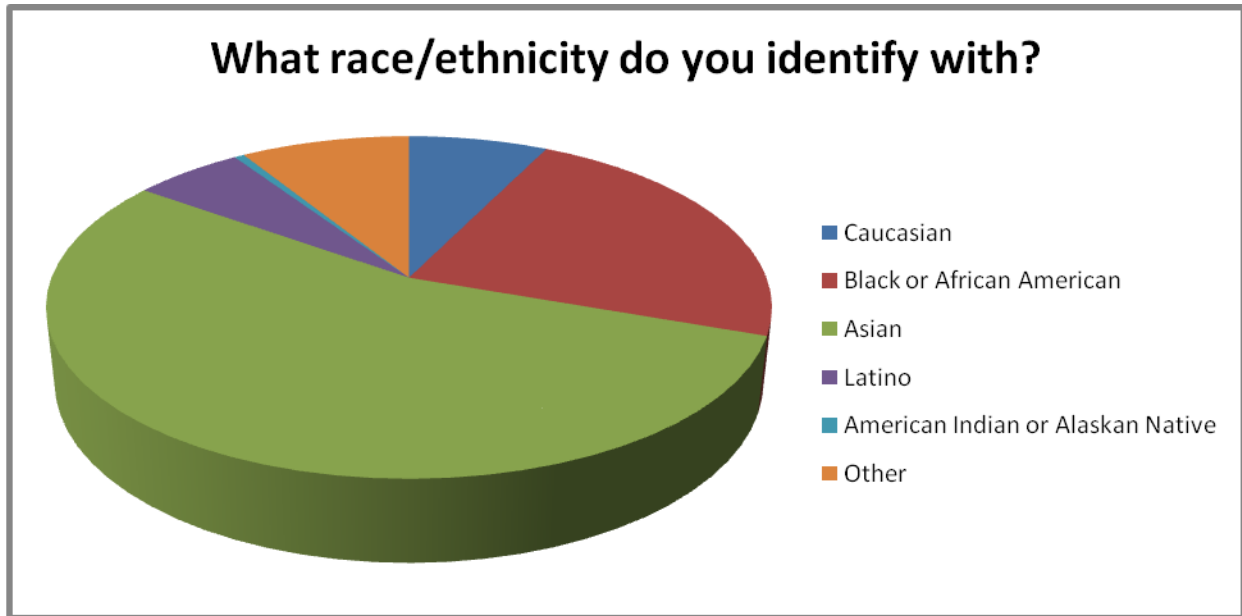


Figure 9: What race/ethnicity do you identify with?

*Are you associated with any religious affiliation?*

We asked drivers, “Are you associated with any religious affiliation?” The distribution of the religious affiliation of our sample of drivers is as follows: Not religious (27.2%), Muslim (36.1%), Christian (15.7%), Buddhist (1.6%), Hindu (5.2%), Sikh (11.5%), Jewish (1.0%), and Other (1.0%).

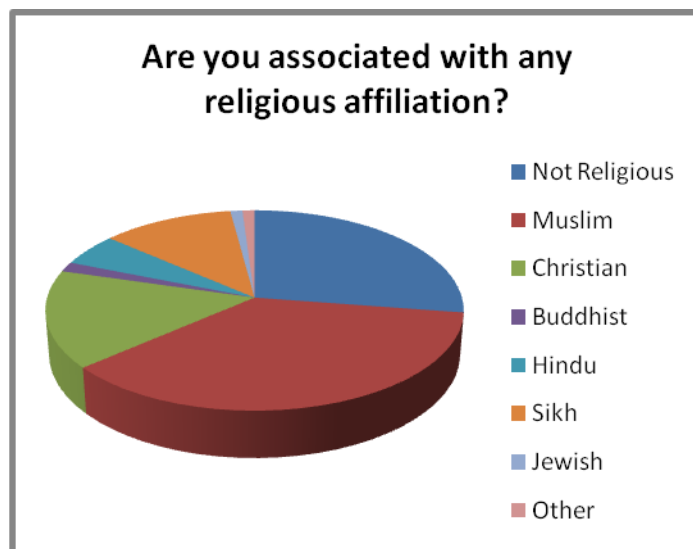


Figure 10: Are you associated with any religious affiliation?

*What is the highest level of education that you have completed?*

It is often assumed that taxi drivers are uneducated and that is why they do the work that they do. However, many drivers have completed or are in the process of completing higher levels of education. Among our sample of drivers, 2.1% completed primary/secondary school, 52.4% completed high school, 34.6% completed college, and 10.5% completed graduate school and beyond. During our time surveying, many drivers mentioned to us that they were currently enrolled in college and were driving a taxi in an effort to pay the cost of their tuition.

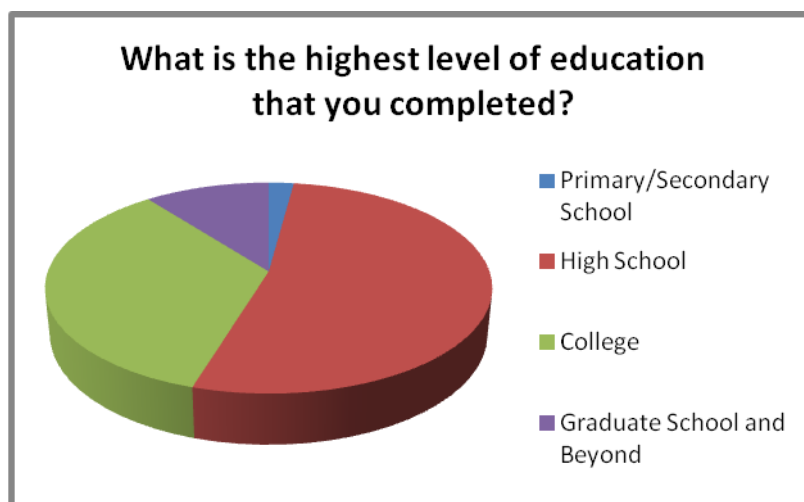


Figure 12: What is the highest level of education that you completed?

*Do you have health insurance coverage?*

36.6% of drivers surveyed have no health insurance coverage, 27.2% are on Medicaid, 1.0% is on Medicare, 8.4% receive coverage from Family Health Plus, 21.5% have private insurance coverage, and 4.7% have some other type of health insurance coverage. It is important to consider that violence against taxi drivers often results in physical injuries. Many injured workers seem to avoid filing a workers compensation claim. Workers compensation is a

complex, time consuming system, and many drivers reportedly fear that filing a claim will leave them vulnerable to retaliation from the employer. Thus, many drivers who do not have health insurance coverage are forced to pay out of pocket or sometimes forego receiving care.

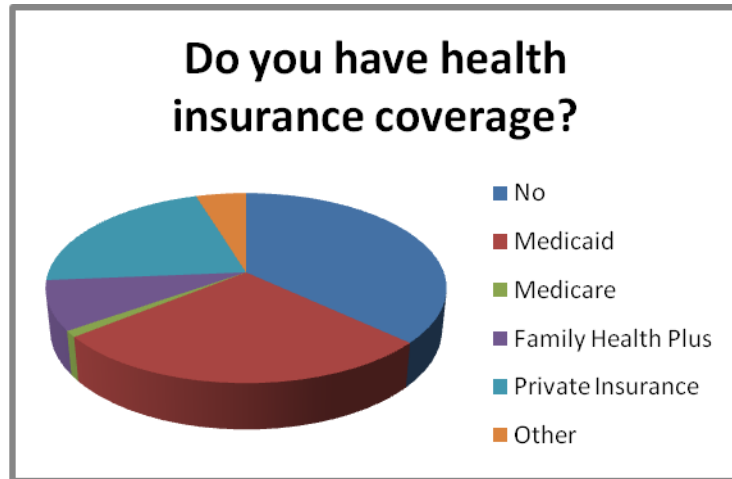


Figure 11: Do you have health insurance coverage?

*Are you a member of New York Taxi Workers Alliance (NYTWA)?*

Of the drivers surveyed, 18.3% are members of NYTWA, 55.0% are not members of NYTWA, and 26.7% do not know what NYTWA is.

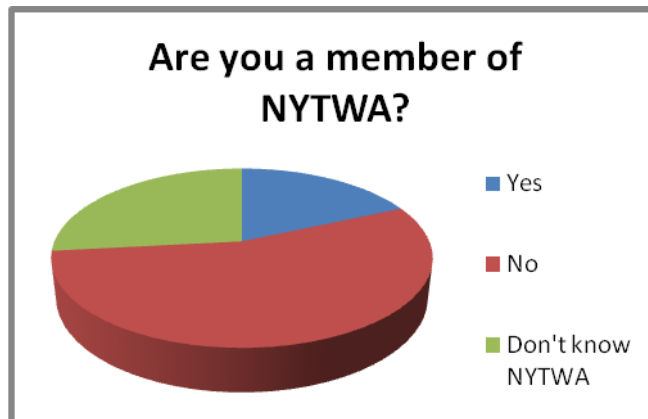


Figure 13: Are you a member of NYTWA?

- Understanding the Job

The second section of the questionnaire included questions about the overall experience of being a taxi driver. To understand the job of a taxi driver in NYC it was important to include questions in the survey that examined the everyday experiences a driver may have while driving his/her taxi.

*How many shifts per week do you drive?*

*How many hours per shift do you drive?*

Taxi drivers work many hours per week. For taxi drivers, there is no such thing as a 5-day, 40-hour work week. We asked drivers “How many shifts per week do you drive?” and “How many hours per shift do you drive?” to gain a better understanding of the time commitment required by the job. Our sample of drivers works a mean of 5.3 shifts per week and a median of 6.0 shifts per week, with a standard deviation of 1.7 shifts. The mean shift duration is 10.3 hours per shift, with a median of 10.0 hours per shift, and a standard deviation of 1.9 hours.

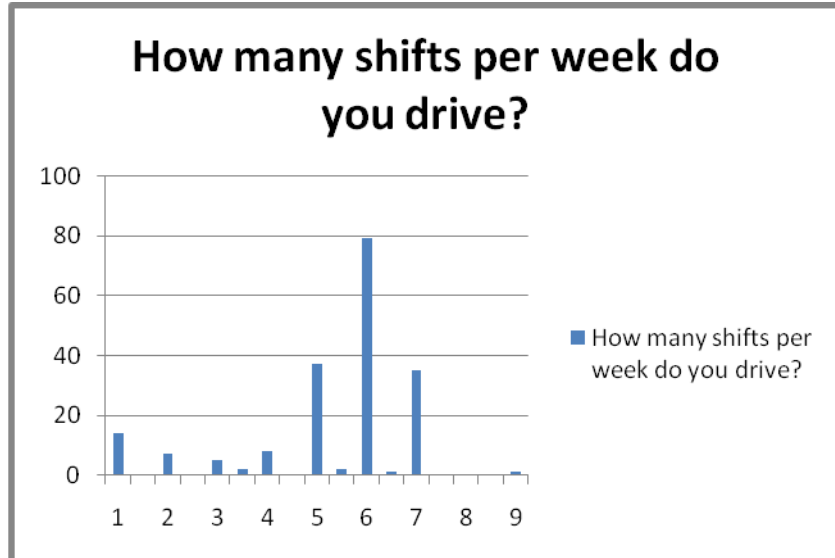


Figure 14: How many shifts per week do you drive?



Figure 15: How many hours per shift do you drive?

Please rate the overall stress that you feel from your job. You feel...

We asked drivers to rate the overall stress that they feel from their job. 6.8% of drivers said that they “feel no stress at all”, 8.9% of drivers said that they are “not very stressed”, 30.9% of drivers said that they feel “somewhat stressed”, and 53.4% of drivers reported feeling “very stressed”.



Figure 16: Please rate the overall stress that you feel from your job

On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the most dangerous, how dangerous do you feel it is to be a taxi driver in NYC?

We asked drivers how dangerous they feel it is to be a taxi driver in NYC because we were interested in examining perceived versus realistic danger. Drivers reported a mean of 6.5 and a median of 7.0, with a standard deviation of 2.5.

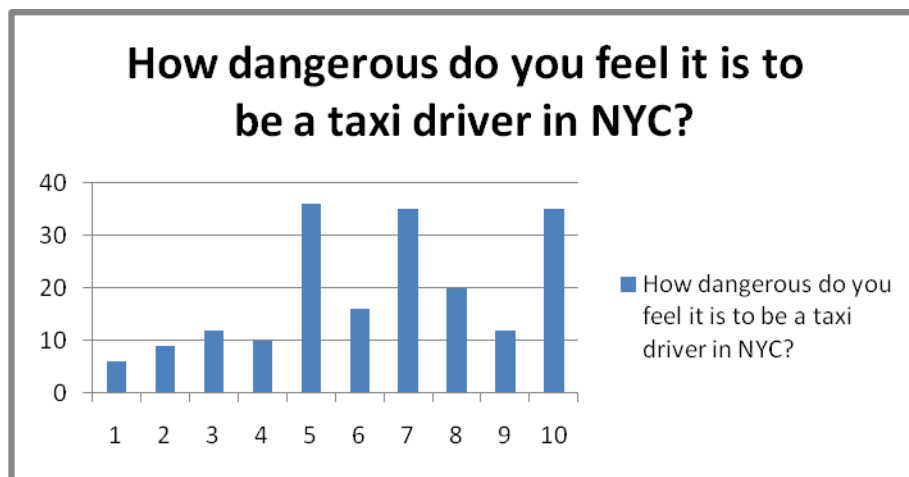


Figure 17: How dangerous do you think it is to be a taxi driver in NYC?



*Do you feel that taxi drivers are more likely to be assaulted than any other workers?*

When asked, “Do you feel that taxi drivers are more likely to be assaulted than any other workers?” nearly 78% of drivers answered “yes”, approximately 17% of drivers answered “no”, and around 4% were “unsure”.

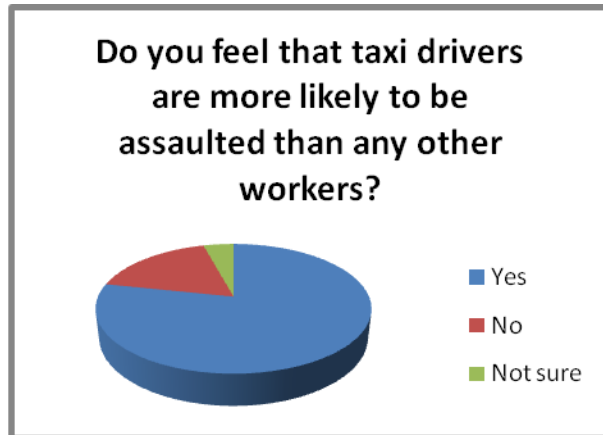


Figure 18: Do you feel that taxi drivers are more likely to be assaulted than any other works?

*In your opinion, when do you think that assaults are more likely to occur?*

When asked, “When do you think that assaults are more likely to occur?” 71.7% of drivers responded during the “day shift”, 21.5% of drivers responded during the “night shift”, 5.8% responded that they believe “time of shift does not matter”, and 1.0% of drivers were unsure.

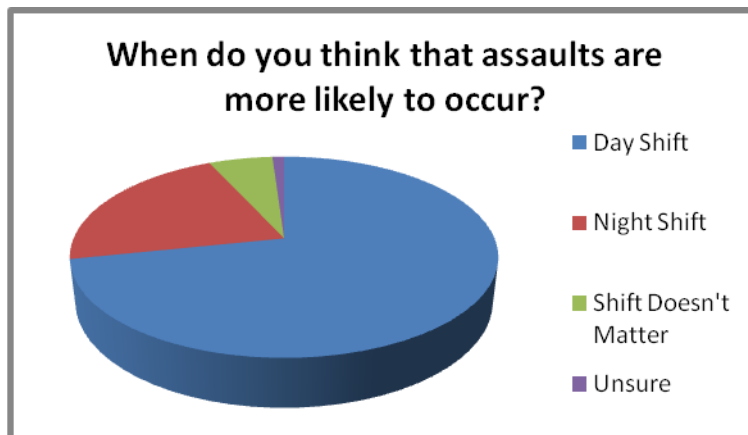


Figure 19: When do you think that assaults are more likely to occur?

## Yelled At

The survey asked about the frequency that taxi drivers were yelled at during the past 12 months in an effort to understand some of the stressors encountered in their work environment. Almost half (42.4%) of taxi drivers reported that they have been yelled at more than 7 times, 8.9 % reported that they were yelled at 5 to 7 times, 25.9 % reported that they were yelled at 3 to 4 times, 11.5% reported that they were yelled at 1 to 2 times, and 12.0 % reported that they had not been yelled at during the past 12 months. In our opinion, these responses are low for a 12 month period considering that taxi drivers are often involved in arguments with passengers, the Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC), the New York Police Department, other motorists, and pedestrians at some time while they are performing their duties. One hypothesis is that taxi drivers may have underreported the occurrence of being yelled at because they consider getting yelled at to just be part of their job.

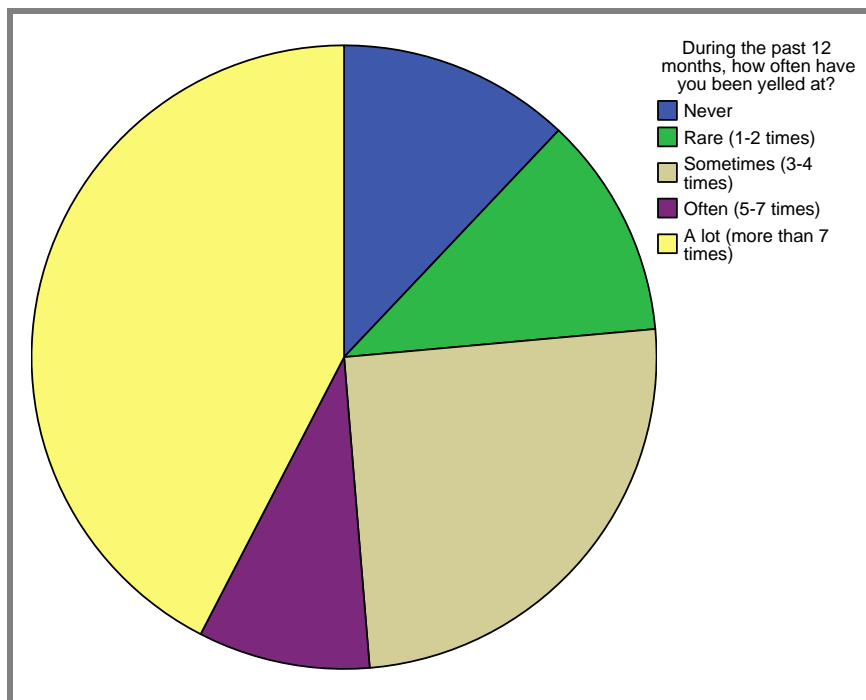


Figure 20: During the past 12 months, how often have you been yelled at?

## Racial Slurs

The data collected in this study showed that 55.8 % of taxi drivers reported that they had been called racial slurs at least once during the past 12 months. Most of the taxi drivers included in this study were born in a country other than the United States. We heard frequent reports of drivers being told, "Go back to your country!" Drivers of Asian descent from India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan reported the greatest frequency of being called racial slurs and drivers reported the least amount of occurrences. When asked about how often they had been called racial slurs in the past 12 months, some taxi drivers said that people treat them as terrorists and criminals as a result of the portrayal of South Asians in the media. It is possible that Southern Asian taxi drivers are called racial slurs more frequently than other racial groups because of the stigmatization that resulted from the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on the World

Trade Center and Pentagon. In addition, taxi drivers are frequently portrayed by the media as foreigners who are unfamiliar with the English language, and prone to overcharge, refuse, and abuse passengers further exacerbating the issue.

### *Verbally Threatened*

With regard to verbal abuse, 51.1% of taxi drivers reported that they had been verbally threatened at least once during the past 12 months. In regards to the past 12 months, 17.6% of taxi drivers reported that they had been verbally threatened 1 to 2 times, 15.4 % of taxi drivers reported that they had been threatened 3 to 4 times, 7.4 % taxi drivers reported that they had been threatened 5 to 7 times, and 10.1 % taxi drivers reported that they had been threatened more than 7 times in the past 12 months. Although a statistically significant relationship was not found between the frequency of verbal threats against taxi drivers and country of origin, drivers from India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan reported the greatest frequency of verbal threats. These drivers tended to be Muslim or Sikh.

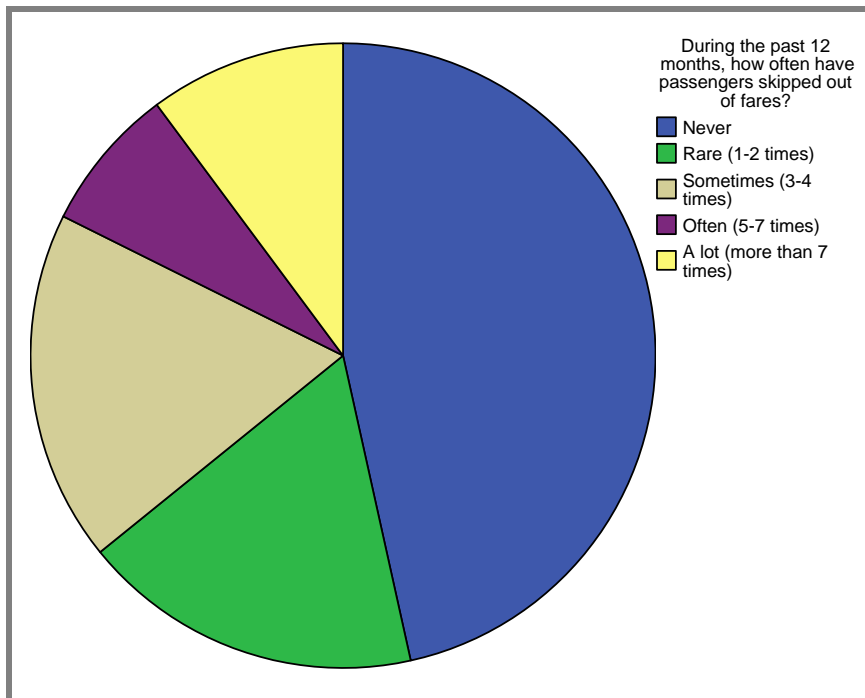


Figure 21: During the past 12 months, how often have passengers skipped out on fares?

### *Hostile Comments based on Race, Religion, and/or Apparent Country of Origin*

The collected data found that 54.5 % taxi drivers have been subjected to “a lot” of hostile comments about their race, religion, and/or apparent country of origin. However, only 12.2 % of drivers adorned their taxis or themselves with objects that would suggest a particular religious affiliation. Taxi drivers from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India reported the greatest incidents of hostile comments. These statistics show that taxi drivers from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are more likely to be targeted because of their phenotype.

### *Fare Evasion*

Many taxi drivers (53.7 %) reported that passengers have left the taxi without paying at least once during the past 12 months. 7.4% of drivers reported that passengers skipped out on fares 5 to 7 times during the past 12 months and 10.1 % reported that passengers skipped out on fares more than 7 times in the past 12 months. These findings are appalling because fare evasion lowers the income of taxi drivers who have to pay certain expenses before driving a taxi. Unlike most of the American labor force, taxi drivers are not paid a fixed salary or hourly wages. Most taxi drivers lease their taxis and their earnings are the difference between their total revenues from fares and tips and their lease fees and gasoline expenses. Additionally, because taxi drivers are considered independent taxi drivers they do not receive any employee benefits such as: unemployment insurance, disability insurance for sickness or off-hour injury, health insurance, pension, and paid vacations. Therefore, fare evasion does not only affect income but also health.

### *Robbery*

The survey also examined the occurrence of robbery in the past 12 months during and after a shift. Taxi drivers reported that robbery was more likely to occur during a shift (20.4 %) than after a shift (7.3 %). When asked about the frequency of robbery after a shift, some drivers mentioned that they are extra cautious when traveling home after a shift. Drivers noted that it is more difficult to protect their belongings during a shift when a passenger has to sit beside the driver when the back of the taxi is full, and in the event that the taxi driver is being robbed during a shift, it is very difficult to escape and call for help. Although a statistically significant relationship was not found between the frequency of robbery, religion, and country of origin, Muslim and Sikh drivers from India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan reported the greatest frequency of verbal threats.

### *Physical Assault*

The occurrence of workplace violence against taxi drivers is a matter of great concern because taxi drivers are 60 times more likely to be assaulted on the job than other workers. The data revealed that during the past 12 months, 17.3 % of taxi drivers reported that they had physically assaulted at least once, while 34.6 % of taxi drivers reported that they had been physically assaulted during their entire time as a taxi driver. Although there was not a statistically significant relationship between the occurrence of physical assault and country of origin, taxi drivers from Bangladesh and Pakistan reported the greatest number of physical assaults.

When discussing workplace violence against taxi drivers, many of the veteran drivers noted that driving a taxi used to be a much more dangerous job than it is today. However, we did not find any significant correlation between the number of years driving and the likelihood of assault.

### Perceived Effectiveness of Partition

The taxi drivers' perception of the effectiveness of the partition varied. By asking the taxi drivers to rate the safety of a partition, the drivers were able to report on the safety device that is most widely used in taxis. Twenty-five percent of taxi drivers reported that they felt very safe with the partition, 35.1% reported that they felt just safe with the partition, 10.6% reported that they did not feel very safe with the partition, and 28.7% reported that the partition was useless to prevent attacks because assailants can hurt drivers regardless of its presence. Taxi drivers also mentioned that they usually drove with the partition open to facilitate dialogue with passengers and to foster a safe and comfortable environment for customers.

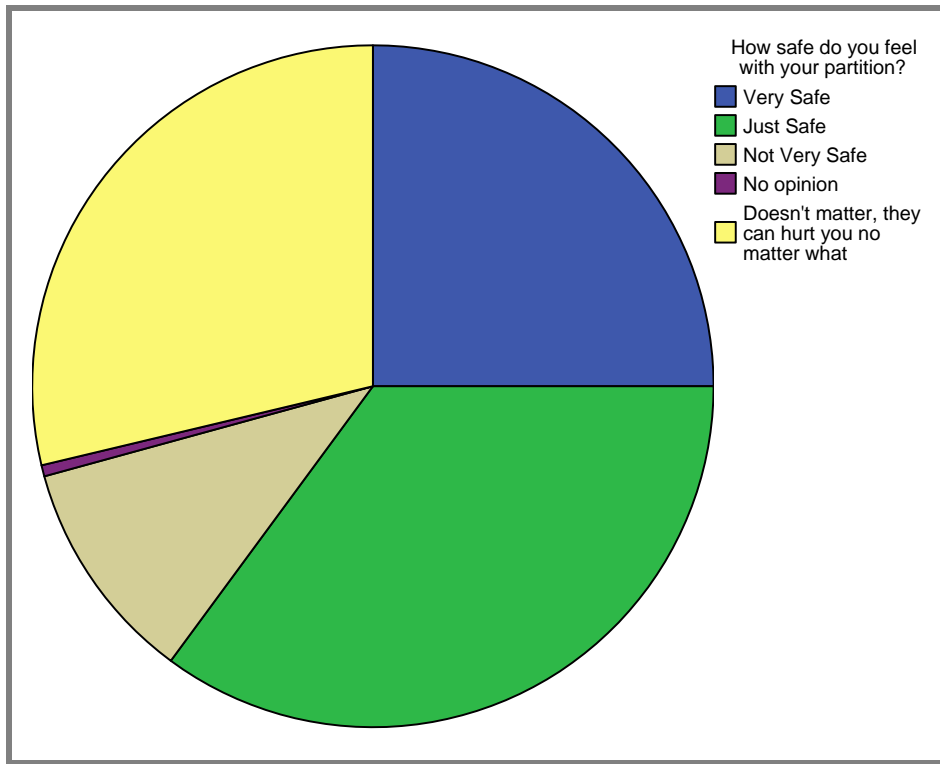


Figure 22: How safe do you feel with your partition?

### Talking as a Safety Mechanism

A person can learn a lot about and from another individual by talking and observing his/her body language. The data collected from the survey found that taxi drivers share a similar view. When asked their estimation of whether or not talking to their passenger(s) can keep taxi drivers safe, 68.8% reported yes, 27.0% reported no, and 4.2% were unsure. The statistics were in agreement with the reported frequency that taxi drivers spoke to passengers: 31.7% of drivers reported that they spoke to passengers frequently, 19.6% of taxi drivers reported that they spoke to passengers often, and 37.0% of taxi drivers reported that they sometimes spoke with passengers compared to 10.1% of taxi drivers who rarely spoke to

passengers and 1.6 % of taxi drivers who reported that they never spoke to passengers. In contrast, drivers reported that 6.3 % of passengers were interested in speaking to drivers frequently, 19.0 % of passengers often wanted to speak with drivers, 58.7 % of passengers sometimes spoke to drivers, 12.2 % of drivers were interested in speaking to drivers, and 3.7 % of passengers did not want to speak to drivers.

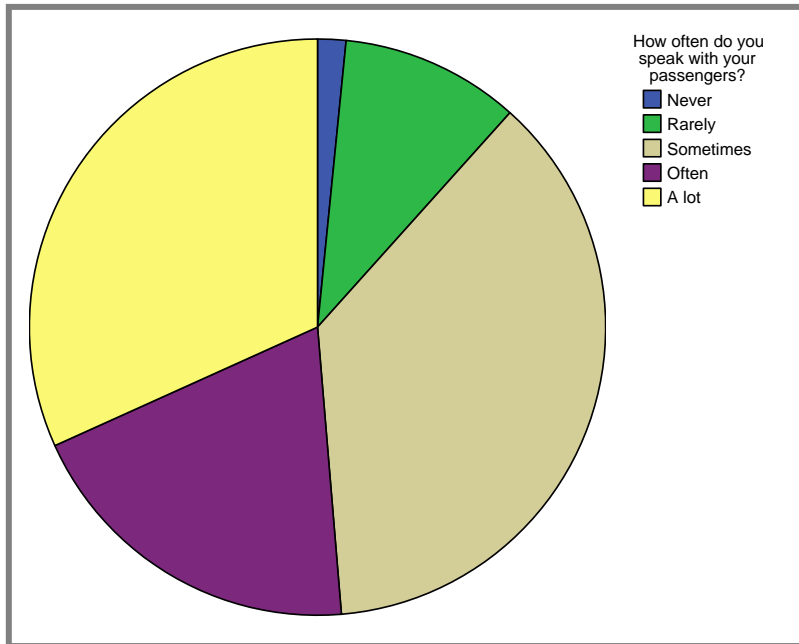


Figure 23: How often do you speak with your passengers?

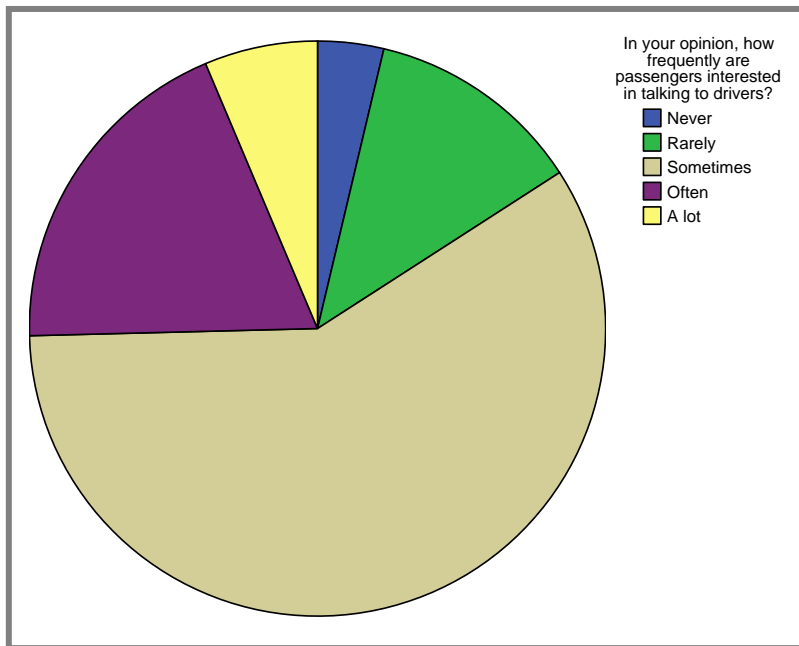


Figure 24: In your opinion, how frequently are passengers interested in talking to drivers?

## *In-depth Interviews – Selected Findings*

We conducted ten in-depth interviews with taxi drivers who were victims of workplace violence. The interviews revealed the reality of the danger taxi drivers face at work. We observed some recurring themes in our conversations with the drivers. Foremost, we noticed that drivers are not always able to recognize a potentially dangerous situation. Most of the drivers that we spoke with noted that nothing seemed noticeably unusual or alarming about the passengers who assaulted them. Mamnun Haq said that nothing seemed wrong during the drive and that he reached his passenger's destination without incident, but then suddenly, without warning, the passenger stabbed him in the back with a 10-inch knife. Zakir Howlader also noted that nothing seemed alarming about his passengers but after they exited his taxi one of the passengers murmured some inappropriate words, spat on Zakir, grabbed him by the collar of his jacket, and then proceeded to punch him repeatedly in the face until he was rendered unconscious.

Another recurring theme that we noticed is that most of the perpetrators of violence against the taxi drivers we interviewed were not arrested or did not receive any legal consequences. The perpetrators who physically assaulted Frederick D'Souza, causing him facial bruising and swelling, were arrested and charged with a misdemeanor but were later released on a reduced sentence because they were first-time offenders. Despite a broken jaw and musculotkeletal injuries, Jamil Hussain followed one of his assailants to the apartment building in which he resided and called police to the scene to make an arrest, but little effort was put into searching for the perpetrator and no one was ever arrested for the crime.

Finally, we noticed that nearly all of the drivers that we spoke with suffered physical and emotional injuries as the result of physical assaults. Mamnun Haq said that he continues to suffer from emotional trauma and finds that his anger rises when residual pain from his injuries flares up. Jamil Hussain continues to seek counseling for posttraumatic stress disorder and is often plagued by nightmares and flashbacks of his assault.

All of these recurrent themes indicate that changes must be made to reduce the issue of workplace violence against taxi drivers. Legal and engineering changes are necessary to provide taxi drivers with the protection that they deserve.

## **V. Discussion and Conclusions**

The vulnerability of taxi drivers to violence and the physical injuries that result from attacks toward them are important because some taxi drivers (36.8 %) do not have health insurance. Hence, if the taxi drivers need medical care as a result of a chronic injury, paying out of pocket for treatment would not be economically feasible. This precarious situation would cause injured taxi drivers to do one of two things: 1) become destitute from paying for medical bills or 2) forego medical treatment and live with the associated effects for a lifetime. Forty percent of assaulted drivers reported that they were injured as a result of their assault, 24.6% of taxi drivers reported that their physical injuries required them to seek medical attention and 18.5% of the taxi drivers reported that their injuries required hospitalization. Although New York State law mandates the Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) to provide taxi drivers with worker's compensation, only 4.6 % of injured drivers filed a worker's compensation claim.

The data found that taxi drivers usually reported the incidents of physical assaults to the police department; however, 35.4 % of assaulted taxi drivers did not report the incident. It is possible that these taxi drivers did not report the occurrence of physical assaults to the police department because they believed that the police would not arrive quickly enough to make an arrest before the assailant escaped or the assaulted taxi driver believed that if the assailant were arrested, there would not be any associated legal consequences. This postulation corresponds to the reported level of satisfaction assaulted taxi drivers had with the way the police handled the incident. The mean level of satisfaction reported by assaulted taxi drivers was 5.33 which suggested that drivers were neither overly satisfied nor terribly satisfied with the police department's response to their physical assaults. Because the police are the first response to emergencies, it would be advantageous for the police to provide better service to taxi drivers so that they can have more trust and satisfaction with the police department. The lack of trust in the police department is understandable because 33.8 % of assaulted taxi drivers reported that they had at least one incident when the police refused to make an arrest or write a report. Furthermore, 18.5 % of assaulted taxi drivers reported that their assailants received no legal consequences, compared to 1.5 % of assaulted taxi drivers who reported that their perpetrators received jail time and/or probation. The majority of assaulted taxi drivers (64.6 %) reported that a weapon was not used during their assault, but 16.9 % of assaulted taxi drivers reported that a gun was used, 15.4 % of taxi drivers reported that the perpetrator used a knife, and 3.1 % taxi drivers reported that another weapon was used during their assault.

Taxi drivers reported that they were victims of assault for various reasons. 38.5% of assaulted taxi drivers stated that their physical assaults were accompanied by hostile comments about their apparent race, ethnicity, religion and/or country of origin and 20% of assaulted drivers reported that such comments/feelings were the driving factor for their assault; 10.8 % of drivers were victims of assaults because of robbery; 4.6 % of drivers were victimized because of a mentally-ill passenger; 6.2 % of taxi drivers were victims of assaults because of a drunk passenger; 24.6 % of taxi drivers were uncertain why they were victims of assault; and 33.8 % of drivers were victims of assaults because of factors associated with being a taxi driver (e.g., working alone, handling money, working late at night, and working in high-crime areas).



## **VI. Recommendations**

The data collected from this project has increased our knowledge and understanding of the issue of violence against taxi drivers and the realities of being a NYC taxi driver. We hope that the recommendations provided will be used by NYTWA, law enforcement officials, legislatures, and other pertinent regulatory agencies to draw attention to the issue of workplace violence against taxi drivers to make a safer work environment.

### *Engineering Controls*

The back-only partition is the design method that would offer the greatest safety. This partition should have no openings except to pass through money and small holes in the partition to allow communication. Because many cab drivers value interacting with passengers, many leave the partition open which can in some cases jeopardize their own safety. A design method that does not give them the option of opening their partition, will prevent passengers from deeming drivers rude from closing the partition while allowing taxi drivers to communicate with passengers through small holes, all without compromising driver safety with regards to attacks against them from passengers in the back of the taxi.

Cameras should also be placed in taxis. A camera would enhance safety by providing surveillance for taxi drivers who work alone. The camera would help to identify perpetrators and individuals who evade paying the fare. Cameras can also serve as a deterrent.

### *Law Enforcement*

Police should develop a protocol for responding to violence against taxi drivers. It is imperative that: the emergency response time decrease, police write incident reports, and perpetrators of crime including fare evasion receive legal consequences.

### *Training and Education*

Before allowing prospective taxi drivers with TLC licenses to drive a taxi, they should participate in a rigorous training course that would familiarize them with the dangers of being a taxi driver and best practices to ensure their safety. Their knowledge and retention of the course material should be assessed by tests and their success in simulations of dangerous situations.

### *Legislation*

Stronger legislation is needed to protect taxi drivers from violence against them, and impose punitive consequences on those who compromise the health and well-being of taxi drivers by physical assaults and fare evasion.

### *Worker's Compensation*

There is a need for greater utilization of worker's compensation by taxi drivers. The use of worker's compensation could provide taxi drivers who suffered job-related injury or illness with medical treatment, wage replacement and other benefits.

### *Future Research*

Future research should try to replicate this project, examining new factors, and increasing the sample size. For example, the survey for the current project does not ask the taxi drivers to report the shift they drive, or the time of day when their most serious incident occurred. Having this information may be beneficial because it may show different work place occurrences in day and night shift drivers. Similarly, it would be interesting for future studies to examine whether or not the behavior of taxi drivers differs based on the time of day and location. Future studies should also see whether or not experience has a protective effect for drivers due to knowledge about the job and social networks. Additionally, future studies could further examine drivers' utilization of the police and of the workers compensation system; effectiveness, barriers, and potential improvement measures.

## **VII. Successes and Challenges**

### *Successes*

We achieved many successes during the completion of this project. Among our successes we consider: interviewing victimized drivers, surveying taxi drivers, producing a usable “give back” product, and gathering data useful for future advocacy. We were able to complete ten in-depth interviews with victimized drivers and survey 191 drivers; these figures met or exceeded our goals. We were successfully able to understand more about the realities of being a taxi driver in NYC and learn more about the issue of workplace violence against taxi drives. The pamphlet that we created, which features personal profiles of victimized drivers, will serve as our “give back” product to NYTWA. The pamphlet will be crucial for future advocacy work to secure legal protections to give taxi drivers the safety that they deserve. This final report is also a “give back” product to NYTWA and provides useful data related to the mission of the organization.

### *Challenges*

We encountered a few challenges while working on our project. We had some initial difficulty contacting victimized drivers to set up interviews. We contacted drivers by phone and explained that we were graduate students working with the New York Taxi Workers Alliance to learn more about the issue of workplace violence against taxi drivers. We were asking drivers to meet with us to discuss very personal and traumatic events, so there was some understandable hesitation to meet with us. We achieved success by enlisting the help of the NYTWA director who contacted drivers on our behalf.

There were also challenges in survey administration. One inherent challenge was short or variable taxi lot waiting time. Drivers use the time in the lot to make necessary phone calls, use restrooms, obtain food, or just rest. The amount of time that drivers must wait in the taxi lot is dependent on the volume of passengers departing the airport who are in need of a taxi. Thus, when drivers’ wait times were short, we had difficulties administering the surveys. Another challenge that we encountered was the weather. We conducted our questionnaire outside at the taxi lots at LaGuardia airport and began surveying drivers during a 100+ degree heat wave. The high temperatures reduced the amount of time that we were able to stay outside to survey drivers. Fortunately, we had allocated sufficient time in our project plan to complete the questionnaires and we were able to meet our goal.

## VIII. References

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## **IX. Appendix**

A. NYTWA Script for Interviewing Victimized Drivers

B. Interview Informed Consent

C. Questionnaire

## Appendix: A

### **NYTWA Script for Interviewing Victimized Drivers**

#### *Introduce researchers*

*Explain the reason for the study: We are interested in understanding and documenting the experiences of taxi drivers who were victims of violence while at work.*

#### Questions:

- What is your name?
- What year did you start driving a taxi?
- What is your country of origin?
- What is your race/ethnicity?
- Are you affiliated with any religious group?
- Are you fluent in languages other than English?
- Have you ever been the victim of violence while driving your taxi?
  - If answered yes, proceed.
- When did the incident occur (date and time)?
- Were you at the end of your shift?
- Please describe the perpetrator.
- Please describe the incident.
- Did the assault happen when you (the driver) were inside of/outside of your taxi?
- Did you suffer any injuries resulting from the incident?
  - If answered yes, did you seek medical treatment for your injuries?
  - How long did it take you to recover from your injuries?
  - Are you now fully recovered from your injuries?
- Was any money stolen?
- Were weapons involved?
- Was the incident reported?
- Was the perpetrator arrested?
  - Did the perpetrator receive any penalties or jail time?

- How did the assault and the way it was handled make you feel?
- Was the bullet proof partition closed when the attack occurred?
  - If answered no, why was the partition open?
- In your opinion, why do you think the incident occurred?
- Were there any other safety devices present in the taxicab (ex: camera, alarm)?
- Do you think that these safety devices are effective in reducing the frequency of assaults?
- Do you think that anything could have been done to prevent the incident?
- Are there any changes that you would like to see made to the law or to the design of the car which may help prevent violence against taxi drivers?
- Are you still a taxi driver?
  - If answered no, was it a result of the incident?
  - If answered yes, have you made any behavioral changes while working?
- Has your relationship with your family, friends and co-workers changed as a result of the incident?
- In your opinion, do you think driving a taxi is a dangerous job?

Thank driver (and family) for discussing the traumatic event

## **Informed Consent**

Title of Research: Violence against Taxi Drivers Study

Investigators: Kelley McDonough  
Deanna Stewart

### Overview

We are graduate students working as summer interns at the New York Taxi Workers Alliance (NYTWA) as part of the Occupational Health Internship Program (OHIP). We are conducting a research study to learn more about the risk factors associated with violence against taxi drivers and to identify potential solutions to prevent incidents of violence. Before agreeing to participate in this interview, it is important that you read the following explanation. This consent form describes the purpose, procedures, benefits, and risks that may exist.

### Explanation of Procedures

Participation in this study involves the completion of one interview which will last for approximately one hour. With your consent, photographs of any injuries that you sustained as the result of violence in the workplace may be collected. The interviews will be conducted in a setting that is mutually agreeable to the participant and the researchers. You can refuse to answer any question or to stop the interview at any time. Withdrawing from the project will not result in any negative consequences for you.

With your consent, your personal story, written by the researchers and based on the information received during the interview, may be included in an informational pamphlet. Any photographs provided or taken at the time of the interview may also be included in the pamphlet. The pamphlet will be distributed to politicians and others to draw attention to this issue and to improve working conditions for taxi workers.

### Risks and Discomforts

There are no risks or discomforts that are anticipated from your participation in the study. Potential risks or discomforts include possible emotional feelings of sadness when asked questions during the interview.

### Benefits

Your potential benefit from participating is the opportunity to discuss feelings, perceptions, and concerns related to the experience of violence in the workplace. Additionally, your participation will help NYTWA in its efforts to improve safety for taxi workers.



Questions

If you have any questions concerning the research project, participants can call Bhairavi Desai of the NYTWA at (212) 627-5248 or you can call Matt London (518) 785-1900 or Pyser Edelsack (212) 650-8224 of OHIP.

Agreement

This agreement states that you have received a copy of this informed consent. Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in this study. You will be given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Subject name (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher

Appendix: C

Occupational Health Internship Program

2010 Yellow Taxi Survey

Assessment on Workplace Violence against Taxi Drivers

LaGuardia Airport



Hello. I am from the New York Taxi Workers Alliance. I am conducting a questionnaire to learn about the workplace violence risks faced by taxi drivers. This will only take 10 or 15 minutes.

Your answers are confidential; we do not need your name or other identifying information. Any reports that are written will only use group information from taxi drivers, not your individual answers. The New York Taxi Workers Alliance will use this information to draw attention to the issue of workplace violence against taxi drivers and to make your jobs safer. We hope to speak with as many drivers as possible. Completing this questionnaire is voluntary.

Are you willing to participate? PAUSE FOR YES

I will be asking questions about you specifically; NOT what you've heard from other drivers. I appreciate your honesty with every question.

For the purposes of this questionnaire, workplace violence against taxi drivers includes any incidents that occurred while the taxi driver was performing his/her duties (example: driving, parking taxi, walking to/from garage, loading luggage, waiting for passengers, etc.).

1. Survey Number	
2. Date of Questionnaire	
3. Questionnaire Start Time	
4. Questionnaire Completion Time	
5. Investigator	1= Kelley McDonough 2= Deanna Stewart
6. Gender	1= Female 2= Male
<b>First I am going to ask you some general background information:</b>	
7. What year were you born?	
8. What year did you first start driving a taxi in NYC?	
9. What country were you born in?	1= United States 2= India 3= Bangladesh 4= Pakistan 5= Ghana 6= Senegal 7= Haiti 8= Ecuador 9= Jamaica 10= Sudan 11= Nigeria 12= Somalia 13= Romania 14= Ethiopia 15= Colombia 16= Egypt 17= Russia 18= Sri Lanka 19= Other _____
10. If you were not born in the United States, what year did you migrate to the United States?	
11. What is your marital status?	1= Married 2= Single 3= Divorced 4= Separated 5= Widowed
12. How many children do you have?	
13. Where is your family living?	1= United States 2= Country of Origin 3= Other
14. What race/ethnicity do you identify yourself with?	1= Caucasian 2= Black or African American 3= Asian 4= Latino 5= American Indian or Alaskan Native 6= Other
15. Are you associated with any religious affiliation?	1= Not Religious 2= Muslim 3= Christian 4= Buddhist 5= Hindu 6= Sikh 7= Jain 8= Jewish 9= Other
16. Are you fluent in any languages other than English?	1= No 2= Spanish 3= Punjabi 4= Hindi 5= Creole 6= Bengali 7= French 8= Urdu 9= Arabic 12= Other
17. Do you have health insurance coverage?	1= No 2= Medicaid 3= Medicare 4= Family Health Plus 5= Private insurance
18. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?	1= Primary/Secondary School 2= High School 3= College 4= Graduate School and beyond 5= Other
19. Are you a member of the NYTWA?	1= Yes 2= No 3= Do not know what NYTWA is
<b>Now I am going to ask you some questions about your job.</b>	
20. How many shifts per week do you drive?	
21. How many hours per shift do you drive?	
22. Please rate the overall stress you feel from your job. You feel....	1 = No stress at all 2 = Not Very Stressed 3 = Somewhat Stressed 4 = Very Stressed
23. On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the most dangerous, how dangerous do you feel it is to be a taxi driver in NYC?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
24. Do you feel that taxi drivers are more likely to be assaulted than any other workers?	1= Yes 2= No 3= Not sure
25. In your opinion, when do you think assaults (physical and verbal) are more likely to occur?	1= Day shift 2= Night shift 3= Time of shift does not matter 4= <i>No Opinion</i>
26. During the past 12 months, how often have you been yelled at?	1 = Never 2 = Rare (1-2 times) 3 = Sometimes (3-4 times) 4 = Often (5-7 times) 5 = A lot (more than 7 times)
27. During the past 12 months, how often have you been called racial slurs?	1 = Never 2 = Rare (1-2 times) 3 = Sometimes (3-4 times) 4 = Often (5-7 times) 5 = A lot (more than 7 times)
28. During the past 12 months, how often have you been robbed during a shift?	1 = Never 2 = Rare (1-2 times) 3 = Sometimes (3-4 times) 4 = Often (5-7 times) 5 = A lot (more than 7 times)
29. During the past 12 months, how often have you been robbed after a shift?	1 = Never 2 = Rare (1-2 times) 3 = Sometimes (3-4 times) 4 = Often (5-7 times) 5 = A lot (more than 7 times)
30. During the past 12 months, how often have you been physically assaulted? (hit)	1 = Never 2 = Rare (1-2 times) 3 = Sometimes (3-4 times) 4 = Often (5-7 times) 5 = A lot (more than 7 times)
31. During the past 12 months, how often have you been verbally threatened?	1 = Never 2 = Rare (1-2 times) 3 = Sometimes (3-4 times) 4 = Often (5-7 times) 5 = A lot (more than 7 times)
32. During the past 12 months, how often have passengers skipped out on fares?	1 = Never 2 = Rare (1-2 times) 3 = Sometimes (3-4 times) 4 = Often (5-7 times) 5 = A lot (more than 7 times)
33. During the past 12 months, how often have you been subjected to hostile comments about your race/ethnicity, religion, or apparent country of origin?	1 = Never 2 = Rare (1-2 times) 3 = Sometimes (3-4 times) 4 = Often (5-7 times) 5 = A lot (more than 7 times)

34. Are you or your taxi adorned with any objects that would suggest a particular religious affiliation (example: wearing a cross, hanging prayer beads, dressing in religious/cultural garb, etc.)?	1= Yes 2= No 3= Not sure
35. Please rate how safe you feel with your partition:	1 = Very Safe 2 = Just Safe 3 = Not very safe 4 = <i>No Opinion</i> 5 = <i>Doesn't matter, they can hurt you no matter what</i>
36. Do you feel that talking to your passenger(s) can keep you safe?	1= Yes 2= No 3= Not sure
37. How often do you speak with your passenger(s)?	1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = A lot
38. In your opinion, are passengers interested in talking with drivers?	1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = A lot
39. During your time as a taxi driver, have you ever been physically assaulted?	1= Yes 2= No
<b>Continue with the questionnaire if answered "yes" to Question #39.</b>	
<b>Now I am going to ask you some more specific questions about workplace violence.</b>	
40. Have you ever been physically injured as a result of an assault?	1= Yes 2= No
41. If you have been physically injured as a result on an assault, did your injuries require you to seek medical attention?	1= Yes 2= No 3= Not applicable
42. If you have been physically injured as a result of an assault, did your injuries require hospitalization?	1= Yes 2= No 3= Not applicable
43. Have you ever filed a worker's compensation claim as the result of a workplace assault?	1= Yes 2= No 3= Will file 4= Do not know what worker's compensation is
44. How often have you reported an incident of physical assault to the police department?	1 = Never 2 = Rare (1-2 times) 3 = Sometimes (3-4 times) 4 = Often (5-7 times) 5 = A lot (more than 7 times)
45. If you have reported an assault to the police, on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the best, how satisfied were you with how the police handled the incident?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
46. Have you ever had an incident when the police refused to make an arrest or write a report?	1= Yes 2= No 3= Not sure
47. Has a perpetrator been arrested for physically assaulting you?	1= Yes 2= No 3= Do not know
48. If answered "Yes" to Question #32, did the perpetrator receive any legal consequences?	1= No 2= Jail time 3= Probation 4= Monetary fines 5= Do not know 6= Not applicable
49. Has a weapon ever been used against you during an assault?	1= No 2= Gun 3= Knife 4= Other _____
50. Has a physical assault been accompanied by hostile comments about your race, ethnicity, religion and/or apparent country of origin?	1= Yes 2= No 3= Not sure
51. In your opinion, why do you believe that you have been the victim of physical assault?	1= Apparent race, ethnicity, religion, and/or country of origin 2= Robbery 3= Mentally-ill passenger 4= Drunk passenger 5= Not sure 6= Because of risk factors associated with being a taxi driver (example: working alone, carrying large sums of money, working at night, etc.)