

Personal Injury



Ride share or ride scare?

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Uber hit the market first and Lyft followed shortly thereafter. Technology enabled individuals to conveniently obtain transportation services with real time information and a cashless system. Obviously, traditional taxis were upset that they were being phased out by the polite drivers in clean vehicles, some offering mints, asking for your radio station preference and ensuring that the internal temperature of the vehicle was to your liking. These common courtesies, combined with the ease of technology used by Uber and Lyft, gained swift traction with the public, in particular

those in the 25 to 34 age range.

Ride hailing is the fastest growing sector within the online mobility services market worldwide, with continued growth expected. However, it hasn't been happily ever after for these companies — at least not yet. Aside from significant financial losses despite high revenues and other corporate issues, we have enjoyed an exciting introduction to ride share apps. But a plot twist with respect to passenger safety has now ensued: many women have

filed claims for sexual assault and rape, which have been made public in recent weeks, both in Canada and the United States.

Despite the understandable popularity of ride share apps, there are significant issues with respect to public safety. In January, CNN released an investigative report with a few shocking revelations. Uber reportedly has a Special Investigations Unit to handle “severe incidents” in North America such as “verbal threats, physical and sexual assault, rape, theft and serious traffic accidents” and, according to an internal report, in mid-2018 was managing 1,200 cases per week by 60 investigators who were paid US\$18.50 per hour.

This past Tuesday, Lyft announced three new safety features: a 911 button for passengers and drivers, a smart trip check-in feature that will flag rides with long delays or unusual behaviour, and as of this fall, drivers will need to complete a safety education course through RAINN, an anti-sexual violence group. Unfortunately, however, Lyft did not take this initiative on its own; it came in response to the damage done to its reputation due to media reports that were a result of lawsuits filed by victims alleging sexual assault by Lyft drivers.

Uber does not appear to have behaved any differently to Lyft in that it took CNN in 2018 asking questions about sexual assaults in order for Uber to announce that it would increase safety measures. Uber also improved its background check policy at that time. Once CNN had aired and published its investigation, Uber stated that it would no longer force sexual assault complainants into arbitration and signing non-disclosure agreements.

Uber and Lyft are technology driven. They have information and statistics readily available. Uber stated in its [IPO paperwork](#) that it planned to provide a safety report in 2019 and warned that releasing the information could result in negative consequences. At press time, Uber had yet to release this safety report.

Inferences can be drawn as to why Uber and Lyft aren't sharing safety statistics and information with the public. In short, it's not good news for these companies. The question then is why aren't they doing something about their shortcomings? Perhaps it is the immediate cost benefit analysis that is fuelling their failure to take preventative measures to increase public safety and awareness, which then results in crisis management mode to address issues when negative publicity requires it.

If that is their approach, it is short-sighted. It takes years to build a solid reputation and

seconds to ruin it. The same fast-paced technology that these ride share apps are using for their benefit will be used for their downfall, with information spreading like wildfire. Once done, it cannot be undone. Some advice for Uber and Lyft: get your act together and put safety first.

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