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Risks and vulnerabilities of motorcyclist workers during the COVID -19 pandemic in Brasil

Riesgos y vulnerabilidades de los trabajadores motociclistas durante la pandemia del COVID-19 en Brasil

Riscos e vulnerabilidades dos trabalhadores motociclistas durante a pandemia da COVID-19 no Brasil

ABSTRACT

Objective: to highlight the risks and vulnerabilities on which motorcycle workers are subject to, owing to their profession, during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Method: circumstance-based literature review article throughout reflection based on analysis of scientific articles present at SciELO and PubMed, legislation, and epidemiologic bulletins by the Brazilian Ministry of Health between May/June 2020. Result: approximately 17 million motorcycle restaurant food delivery workers have through fast-delivery applications a source of income. This type of labor is increasingly being characterized as an alternative to unemployment within a demanding market, being so, the reason upon which this certain function is depreciated. Throughout the COVID-19 context, the delivery service has exponentially grown, being the motorcyclist function indispensable among risks imposed by the growing pandemic. Conclusion: the working conditions precariousness and the outsourcing of motorcycle restaurant food delivery workers have significantly worsened in the actual context, together with the transmission and contamination risks by COVID-19.

DESCRIPTORS: Occupational Risks; Coronavirus Infections; Occupational Health.

RESUMEN

Objetivos: resaltar los riesgos y vulnerabilidades a los que están sujetos los mensajeros en motocicleta debido a su profesión, durante el período de la pandemia del COVID-19. Método: artículo de revisión de literature sustentado en la reflexión mediante el análisis de artículos científicos presente en SciELO y PubMed, normativos y boletines epidemiológicos del Ministerio de Salud de Brasil entre Mayo/Junio de 2020. Resultados: alrededor de 17 millones de trabajadores de mensajería en motocicleta obtienen ingresos de las aplicaciones de entrega rápida. Este tipo de trabajo se caracteriza cada vez más como una alternativa al desempleo en un mercado exigente, por lo que esta actividad se devalúa. En el contexto del COVID-19, el servicio de entrega creció exponencialmente, haciendo indispensable el trabajo de los motociclistas ante los riesgos de contaminación por la creciente pandemia. Conclusión: las precarias condiciones laborales y la subcontratación del trabajo de los mensajeros en motocicleta se han agravado significativamente en el contexto actual, junto con los riesgos de transmisión y contaminación por COVID-19.

DESCRIPTORES: Riesgos laborales; Infecciones por coronavirus; Salud del trabajador.

RESUMO

Objetivo: destacar os riscos e vulnerabilidades aos quais os motoboys estão submetidos em razão da profissão, no período da pandemia da COVID-19. Método: artigo de revisão de literatura circunstanciado pela reflexão mediante análise de artigos científicos presentes na SciELO e PubMed, legislações e boletins epidemiológicos do Ministério da Saúde do Brasil entre maio/junho de 2020. Resultado: cerca de 17 milhões de trabalhadores motoboys possuem renda advinda dos aplicativos de entrega rápida. Esse tipo de trabalho caracteriza-se cada vez mais como alternativa para o desemprego em um mercado exigente, razão pela qual ocorre a desvalorização desta atividade. No contexto da COVID-19, o serviço de delivery cresceu exponencialmente, tornando indispensável o trabalho dos motociclistas frente aos riscos de contaminação pela crescente pandemia. Conclusão: a precarização das condições de trabalho e a terceirização do ofício dos motoboys se agravaram significativamente no atual contexto, juntamente com os riscos de transmissão e contaminação pela COVID-19.

DESCRIPTORES: Riscos ocupacionais; Infecções por Coronavirus; Saúde do Trabalhador.

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Fernanda Pereira da Silva

Medical student. Nova Esperança School of Medicine.

ORCID: 0000-0001-5632-1506

Filipe Pinto de Oliveira

Medical student. Nova Esperança School of Medicine.
ORCID: 0000-0002-4795-1917

Letícia Amaral Shizue Suassuna

Medical student. Nova Esperança School of Medicine.
ORCID: 0000-0001-5578-8761

Marília Leite de Menezes

Medical student. Nova Esperança School of Medicine.
ORCID: 0000-0003-4550-4061

Roberta Guerra de Brito Oliveira Lima

Medical student. Nova Esperança School of Medicine.
ORCID: 0000-0002-8204-7755

Cleyton César Souto Silva

Teacher advisor. PhD in Nursing in Health Care. Professional Master's in Family Health. Faculty of Nursing and Medicine Nova Esperança.
ORCID: 0000-0002-6187-0187

INTRODUCTION

Today's society is characterized by urgency, immediacy and speed. In this way, with the process of globalization of capital, the compression of space-time occurred suddenly, demanding the emergence of new professions, and extinguishing others. This is how professional fast delivery motorcyclists emerged, known as 'motoboy'. Despite being active for over 30 years, his profession was regulated only in 2009, and as soon as he was a victim of the precarious process, brought by the new international division of labor and the fourth industrial revolution.¹

With the revolution of the means of work commanded by information technology, the concept of "startups" emerged, companies that start small, offering services that virtually link the producer to the consumer, however, without any guarantee of employment or benefits for workers. that act in this intermediation. With this new situation, motorcycle courier workers find themselves in a job that represents only part of their total income, being seen as "extra" income and that can bring other benefits and accumulations for personal development.²

In this context, the driver must enter the workforce, as well as the means of

production, such as the vehicle needed to start working, the costs of mobile internet, fuel, repairs, taxes and insurance, in addition to taking responsibility. for damages caused to third parties. In return, almost half of their earnings are retained by the apps they work on, forcing them to double the workday needed to produce the earnings they want.³

Sars-CoV-2, the virus that causes covid-19, was first identified in December 2019, in the city of Wuhan in China, being transmitted through the exchange of aerosols, such as saliva, through physical contact between people or contact between contaminated surfaces and objects. Because it is mostly expressed in a pre-symptomatic or symptomatic manner, this disease has shown to have a high contagious capacity, quickly reaching many countries, causing the World Health Organization (WHO), in March 2020, to declare the state of pandemic, which has been ongoing so far. In Brazil, the first case was confirmed on February 25th, 2020, currently having more than 1.5 million confirmed cases with 60 thousand deaths, exceeding the Chinese numbers. Infected people can manifest varied symptoms, from a mild flu syndrome to severe dyspnoea, diarrhea and cardiovascular repercussions.⁴

In this context, the problems of the

process of precarious work for courier couriers are even more accentuated by the pandemic of COVID-19, which has spread rapidly across the country. Prioritizing attention to public health, the protocols in Brazil are based on recommendations for individual sanitary measures, through hand hygiene with water and soap or 70% alcohol, cleaning the workplace with detergents or bleach and the use of fundamental protective equipment against biological contamination, such as masks and gloves. However, startups' support measures for motorcyclists proved to be deficient, and basic measures to protect workers have been achieved only after a lot of social pressure, especially by unions and workers.²

Based on this problem, this review article aims to identify the risks and health problems of motorcycle couriers in the context of the covid-19 pandemic, in addition to exposing what vulnerabilities these workers are exposed to during their working hours.

METHOD

This reflection was constructed based on a literature review, whose scientific articles were available in the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO)

and Public Medline (PubMed) databases. In addition, legislation, reports from the Pan American Health Organization, epidemiological bulletins and legislation from the Ministry of Health of Brazil (MS) regarding COVID-19 were analyzed.

The narrative reviews of the literature are important for science because they describe, discuss and critically reflect on a given theme from a theoretical point of view based on the reading, analysis and interpretation of available bibliographic references.⁵

In order to guide the study, the following research question was formulated: what risks and vulnerabilities are motorcycle workers exposed to during this pandemic period by COVID-19?

Data collection was carried out between May and June 2020, and the search for the articles was carried out in an uncontrolled manner, using descriptors from Medical Subject Headings (MESH) Occupational Risks, Coronavirus Infections and Motorcycles crossed through the Boolean operator "AND".

Included were original articles available in full, free of charge in the selected databases and addressing the proposed theme, articles published in 2020, in English, Portuguese and Spanish, and related to the risks and vulnerability of delivery workers. Articles in editorial format, letter to the editor or expert opinion were excluded.

The articles were analyzed through thorough reading through the titles and analysis of abstracts and full texts. A total of 30 articles were found, 15 of which were chosen after the selection process with proposed inclusion and exclusion criteria. In the texts, an analysis of the title and summary was made in order to verify those who were in agreement with the theme of the study. Of the articles selected after analyzing the abstracts, 08 met the proposed criteria and were effectively read in full and the reflections were constructed. In addition, a report from the Pan American Health Orga-

nization, an epidemiological bulletin from Agência Brasil and MS legislation on measures to combat the new coronavirus were included in the sample.

RESULTS

The search results in the databases resulted, initially, in 30 scientific papers and after analyzing the eligibility criteria, 15 articles remained, which were read the title and the abstract, and only 08 articles were chosen to be read in full, being part of the construction of this reflection together with the MoH legislation in force for the period of public health emergency of international importance and other publications. Thus, the following topics for discussion were established: the precarious working conditions and alienation of the motoboy; risks and health problems for the motorcycle courier; the work of motorcycle couriers in the context of the pandemic.

DISCUSSION

The precarious working conditions and the alienation of the motoboys

Currently, about 3,8 to 17 million people use cell phone applications as a source of income, these being in short motoboys, which need to transfer 20 to 30% of the value of deliveries to digital platforms. It is estimated that the average wage of a motorcycle courier is 4 thousand reais per month for more than 12 hours worked daily. However, this work represents only a part of the worker's total income, so any day and time are necessary to carry out the delivery work.²

The precariousness of the motoboy's work took place from the moment the movement of capital demanded that the production process be more agile, reinforcing the added value and accumulation through the work process. Thus, three types of bonds emerged from these workers: the precarious (outsourced or subcontracted contract), the formal

(formal contract) and the self-employed (informal).⁶

This type of precarious work environment emerged in the post-Fordist era, in which there is a lack of labor rights, strenuous workload and extreme difficulty in ascending socially and economically, due to the lack of time and opportunity. Thus, the economic crisis constitutes an important decisive weight for this reality of motorcycle couriers, since the fact of working as a professional motorcyclist is due to a solution for unemployment, in an increasingly exclusive market with the male and young population, being this one of the justifications for contributing to the devaluation of this type of work.⁷

In addition, there is an alienation in the motoboys work process, due to the fact that they have a false idea of freedom, understanding working hours by purely individual decision, and in most cases, there is no other alternative to meet their needs. and your family. In this context, motoboys do not feel they are employees of startups, which organize their work process and own the applications that manage the offers and demands of their jobs, creating a false vision of rationalization, entrepreneurship and discipline for motorcyclists, as well by its contractors.⁸

Risks and health problems of the motoboys

Being one of the professions with the highest risk of traffic accidents, motoboys are currently taking risks in order to shorten the waiting time of the recipient and seeking to increase productivity. However, in this work process it is often necessary to put life in check, exposing itself to various risks in order to meet delivery schedules and goals, following the logic of the 'just in time'.⁸

According to WHO, more than 1,35 million people die worldwide in traffic accidents, mostly young people. Among these fatalities we see that motoboys are part of up to 28% of them.⁹ Traffic in Brazil killed more than 37 thousand

people in 2016 as a result of traffic, according to a survey by the Ministry of Health. Since 2009, the country has become the fifth in the world ranking of fatal motor vehicle accidents.¹⁰

In the motoboys' work process, it is observed that a portion of the workers offer a labor of low social value, but extremely necessary, providing the ruling classes with the agility and speed that modern society requires. During races, these motorcyclists put their physical integrity at risk due to the impossibility of executing acceptable delivery times, resulting in their exposure to bullying with verbal aggression, traffic violence and accidents.¹¹

It is worth mentioning that in the traffic dispute between car drivers and motorcyclists, there will always be material damage to the car driver, however, for the biker the damage is beyond material, it is also physical, and can even be fatal. The underreporting of these accidents at work appears as a serious obstacle observed in the work dynamics of motoboys, who still deal with the strenuous physical load and working hours without defined breaks for food.

The lack of inspection of the working conditions and of the services provided by motorcycle couriers prevents the real dimension of the problems faced from being visualized, thus hindering access to the worker's health surveillance actions. Several arguments are used as a pretext to justify the excessive load imposed during the work process of these motorcyclists, such as the correlation between the use of the body and activity on the streets as a positive factor of occupation, being a measure against sedentarism.⁸

Finally, excessive workload at work is an important factor to be identified, since it can interfere in the nutrition of these workers due to the lack of fixed hours reserved for their food, since meal periods are the portion of most requested time for delivery. In this precarious outsourcing process, it is the worker who now enters the means of production, be-

aring the costs and risks of the activity, losing guarantees and protections.³

The great demand for delivery services in the current situation has placed motorcycle couriers at the forefront of the pandemic

The work of motoboys in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic

Following the WHO guidelines and the coping measures provided by Ordinance No. 356, of March 11th, 2020, based on Law No. 13.979, of February 6th, 2020, the federal, state and municipal governments have implemented public policies of encouraging social isolation and maintaining only essential services in the context of the new coronavirus pandemic as one of the measures to "flatten" the contagion and transmission curve of the disease.¹² Thus, the home delivery service has grown exponentially, configuring delivery couriers and couriers as indispensable workers so that people continue to respect social distancing measures.

However, despite all existing health rules, there is no way to adequately guarantee that motorcyclists responsible for delivering food or medicines, and the application companies responsible for this service, are taking effective precautions to prevent transmission

and contagion. by the new coronavirus. Thus, these workers have become one of the professions most exposed to contamination by the virus, since they circulate in the external environment and come into contact with many people, and can be a source of dissemination and transmission by not using Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) appropriate measures and measures such as hand washing and use of 70% alcohol. Therefore, there may be a considerable increase in the number of COVID-19 cases, including the contamination of the worker's family members.

The great demand for delivery services in the current situation has placed motorcycle couriers at the forefront of the pandemic, leading to an increase in the working hours and occupational risks for these professionals, but it has not necessarily increased the salary income they receive. Many workers find themselves unprotected by the hour, since the startups they work for have no responsibility for offering PPE, such as masks and gloves, or even means of hygiene with gel alcohol or hand washing facilities. This is due to the fact that most of these workers are individual microentrepreneurs and do not have employment links with these companies, which makes it difficult to inspect and demand access to the means of prevention that ensure their health.

Both the exercise of work activities and working conditions are shown as potential sources of exposure and dissemination of the virus, therefore, the analysis of the way work activities are carried out is decisive for preventing illness.¹³ Bearing this in mind, it is important to have a different look at the work process of motorcycle couriers and that public official authorities such as the Ministry of Labor and Employment and the Public Prosecutor's Office are able to effectively protect the health of these workers who are so essential in this moment of home confinement.

In addition, application companies should play the role of citizens in fight-

ting the pandemic, not aiming to increase profits without protecting their workers, offering guidance on the importance of preventive measures such as leaving orders at doors, keeping 2 meters away from the customer, prefer online debit payment to cash, use of masks and gloves, hand hygiene with gel alcohol, and at the slightest sign of symptoms remove the worker and refer him to medical assistance.

Due to the sharp increase in precarious working conditions, motoboys carried out on July 1st, 2020, a stoppage in several cities in the country to

demand better conditions. Among the requirements, the group charges companies a cost allowance for the purchase of protective equipment against COVID-19, such as masks and gloves, asks for greater transparency about the payment methods adopted by the platforms, increasing the minimum values for each delivery, more security and an end to scoring systems, blocks and "undue exclusions".

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the working

conditions to which motorcycle courier workers are subjected are, to a large extent, precarious and still lacking policies that in fact ensure the physical and psychological health of this category of work. Through this essay it was understood that the aggravations and risks of the work process to which these workers are exposed, constitute a strong obstacle to guarantee basic rights such as health, safety and dignified income. In addition, it is noticeable that the current pandemic context reinforces even more this situation of precariousness and outsourcing. ■

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