

## INFORMAL WORK AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A LOOK AT MOTORCYCLE TAXI DRIVERS IN CRATO-CE

*Trabalho informal e pandemia da Covid-19: um olhar para os mototaxistas em Crato-CE*

*Trabajo informal y pandemia de Covid-19: una mirada a los mototaxistas en Crato-CE*



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### ABSTRACT

Since the 1990s, structural adjustments, coupled with cyclical shocks in the Brazilian economy, expose a scenario of new accommodations in the labor market where the diffusion of precarious and self-employed occupations is increasing, in greater informality, both at the national level and in the context of local economies. In this scenario, the dissemination of the motorcycle taxi service is a more affordable transport alternative, where new challenges are also present in the face of the privatization of essential public services, the complexity of urban networks and the lack of incentives for non-motorized urban transport. In addition, the activity is consolidated as a possibility for occupying informal labor, especially in inland municipalities, with less diversified work options and less rigorous inspection and regulation. The objective of this study is to analyze the working conditions of motorcycle taxi drivers in Crato-CE, with emphasis on their exposure to risks during the Covid-19 period. The results point to multiple aspects of the precariousness of the motorcycle taxi service in the municipality, especially related to safety in the labor market, income, exposure to risks and accidents, representation, among others, plus the contagion by Covid-19 and decreased income during the pandemic period.

**Keywords:** Motorcycle taxi driver; Crato-CE; Covid-19 pandemic; Informal work.

### RESUMO

A partir da década de 1990, ajustes estruturais, somados a choques conjunturais na economia brasileira expõe um cenário de novas acomodações no mercado de trabalho onde é crescente a difusão de ocupações precárias e por conta própria, na esteira da maior informalidade, seja em esfera nacional, seja no contexto de economias locais. Nesse cenário, a disseminação do serviço de

<http://periodicos.apps.uern.br/index.php/GEOTemas/index>

mototáxi constitui alternativa de transporte com custo mais acessível, onde também estão presentes novos desafios frente à privatização de serviços públicos essenciais, à complexidade das redes urbanas e à falta de incentivos para transportes urbanos não motorizados. Ainda, a atividade se consolidada como opção para ocupação de mão de obra em situação informal, especialmente em municípios interioranos, com opções de trabalho menos diversificadas e fiscalização e regulamentação menos rigorosas. O objetivo desse trabalho é analisar as condições de trabalho de mototaxistas no município do Crato-CE, com destaque à sua exposição aos riscos durante o período de ocorrência da Covid-19. Os resultados apontam para múltiplos aspectos da precarização do serviço de mototáxi no município, especialmente relativos à segurança no mercado de trabalho, renda, exposição a riscos e acidentes, de representação, entre outros, acrescidos do contágio pela Covid-19 e diminuição de rendimentos no período pandêmico.

**Palavras-chave:** Mototaxista; Crato-CE; Pandemia Covid-19; Trabalho Informal.

## RESUMEN

Desde la década de 1990, los ajustes estructurales, sumados a los choques cíclicos de la economía brasileña, han expuesto un escenario de nuevos acomodados en el mercado de trabajo donde crece la difusión de ocupaciones precarias y por cuenta propia, en la estela de una mayor informalidad, tanto a nivel nacional como en el contexto de las economías locales. En este escenario, la difusión del servicio de mototaxi constituye una alternativa de transporte más asequible, donde también se presentan nuevos desafíos ante la privatización de servicios públicos esenciales, la complejidad de las redes urbanas y la falta de incentivos para el transporte urbano no motorizado. Además, la actividad se ha consolidado como una opción para ocupar mano de obra informal, especialmente en los municipios del interior, con opciones de trabajo menos diversificadas y una inspección y regulación menos rigurosas. El objetivo de este estudio es analizar las condiciones de trabajo de los mototaxistas del municipio de Crato-CE, con énfasis en su exposición a riesgos durante el período Covid-19. Los resultados apuntan a múltiples aspectos de la precariedad del servicio de mototaxis en el municipio, especialmente en lo que se refiere a la seguridad del mercado de trabajo, ingresos, exposición a riesgos y accidentes, representación, entre otros, además del contagio por el Covid-19 y la disminución de los ingresos en el período de la pandemia.

**Palabras clave:** Mototaxista; Crato-CE; Pandemia de COVID-19; Trabajo informal.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The scenario of capitalist economies at the end of the 20th century, particularly in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, was marked by significant transformations in the world accumulation and regulation regimes, which involved strong changes in the rules of the competitive game, transformations of the productive forces and technological changes and rupture of ideological and institutional paradigms, which are reflected in new accommodations within the international division of labor.

Particularly, the beginning of the 1970s exposed elements of a deep structural crisis of the capitalist system, through a scenario of loss of competitiveness, productivity and



profitability by the central countries, especially the United States. This scenario highlighted the inability to respond to current production models and forced a break from the Taylorist-Fordist rigidity of the accumulation mode towards the incorporation of elements from flexible accumulation models, combined with a profound productive restructuring and new mechanisms for managing workforce (Alves *et al.*, 2018).

The set of these ingredients formed the backdrop for the so-called “crisis in the world of work”, where the main clear element is structural unemployment, but where various forms of precarious work are growing – the foundation of the Fordist model of production. Thus, Brazil established industrialization, wages and protection in late, partial and precarious conditions, respectively (Luna; Oliveira, 2011).

The crisis of the Keynesian-Fordist production model redefined the capitalist model from the perspective of flexible accumulation and neoliberalism, elements that will be present in a set of structural changes that mark the Brazilian economy from the 1990s onwards. The repercussions were felt in a non-negligible way in the disruption of the labor market in that decade, especially involving structural and open unemployment and a strong component of informality (Dedecca; Baltar, 1997; Cacciamali, 2000). As of 2003, the trend towards informality, present in labor relations, significantly reversed compared to the levels reached in the previous decade. However, the general picture of the Brazilian labor market did not reach properly structural dimensions, marked by heterogeneity, structural surplus of workforce, high turnover, non-compliance with the law, income inequality, etc. Exploitation of the workforce grew in the face of the most latent demands for productivity, through the new configurations of work in the capitalist logic (flexibilization, deregulation of labor relations, outsourcing, structural unemployment, subsistence entrepreneurship, etc.), which erupted with considerable current momentum.

The spread of precarious and self-employed occupations became proportional to the fragility of local economies. Among these occupations, attention is directed to the dissemination of the motorcycle taxi service in different Brazilian states, which in the capitals becomes a job option for a mass of unemployed people. In turn, it is an alternative transport at a more affordable cost, relative to taxi services. This occurs amid the precarious offer of public transport, in a decade where the privatization of essential public services advances in most Brazilian states and municipalities, while the urban network becomes more complex and incentives for non-motorized urban transport are scarce, such as bicycles and cycle paths. At the same time, this type of service is fertile ground in municipalities in the interior, with less diversified job options and where supervision and regulation are less rigorous.

In Crato, located in the region of Cariri, in the south of Ceará, object of study in this work, since 2006, Law No. 2.371, of June 19, 2006, regulated<sup>1</sup> the “provision of public passenger transport services by motor vehicle type motorcycle”, with vacancies being prohibited to private companies holding capital, with the Municipal Traffic Department (DEMUTRAN) overseeing it (CRATO, 2010; 2012).

According to data from the National Traffic Department (DENATRAN – 2020), in the fleet of 56,026 vehicles, 44.67% are motorcycles, surpassing the percentage of cars, 34.36%, while the bus fleet is only 0.34 %, which reveals the importance of this mode of transport for urban and rural mobility in Crato (IBGE, 2022b). According to information from DEMUTRAN, in 2022 approximately 1,000 motorcycle taxi drivers were registered, which makes this occupation an important source of income and a reduction in poverty in the local economy.

In spite of the counterparts to the local economy, a set of elements of precarious work mark the execution of motorcycle taxi services, most associated with the operational process of the activities: lack of protection of the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT) and social security coverage; exposure to traffic accidents; excessive working hours; ergonomic discomfort; daily and excessive exposure to carbon monoxide; physical and emotional problems; exposure to conditions of violence, etc. Among the physical problems, the following are commonly cited: back pain; repetitive strain injury (RSI), especially in the wrists; excessive exposure to the sun (Luna; Oliveira, 2011; Pinto, Schor, 2013; Teixeira *et al.*, 2015). In the list of problems and vulnerabilities of the occupation, since 2020, new elements have been added, conditioned by the recent Covid- 19 pandemic.

In this sense, this research proposes to analyze the working conditions of motorcycle taxi drivers in Crato-CE, with special emphasis on their exposure to risks during the Covid-19 period.

## 2 METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

The area proposed for study is Crato, in Ceará. According to the last Census of 2010, it has a population of 121,428 inhabitants, with 83.11% living in the urban area and 16.89% in the rural area (IBGE, 2011). The estimated population for 2017 corresponds to 130,604 inhabitants (IPECE, 2017). As the occupation of motorcycle taxi drivers is an informal

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<sup>1</sup> Later amended by Law No. 2627, of June 30 - 2010, and later, Law No. 2787, of June 28 - 2012.

activity, the most recent data, with municipal information, are still from the 2010 Demographic Census. Considering the Metropolitan Region of Cariri, 25.4% of workers are engaged in self-employed activities, which earn an average income of BRL 1,827.18, lower than the income of workers with a formal contract, BRL 2,077.30. In Crajubar (Crato – Juazeiro do Norte – Barbalha), the percentage of self-employed informal workers who earn less than one minimum wage (MW) corresponds to 19.4%, revealing the precarious conditions to which these workers are subjected (IBGE, 2011).

The research in question is an exploratory-descriptive study, which also included the collection and analysis of primary data obtained through field visits and application of questionnaires. The questionnaire covered two blocks of questions, one related to the socioeconomic characteristics and general conditions of the activity and the other, with the working conditions during the Covid-19 pandemic, in 2020 and 2021, being applied, with the target public, in the first semester of 2022. To calculate the sample to be researched, the proposal by Vital, Bertolino and Fonseca (2009)  $n$  was used, in which:  $n$ : sample size (100 motorcycle taxi drivers);  $Z$ : confidence level (10%);  $p$ : population proportion of individuals who are part of the category of interest;  $q$ :  $1 - p$ ;  $N$ : population size (1,000 workers);  $\varepsilon$ : maximum tolerated error:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q \cdot N}{\varepsilon^2 \cdot (N-1) Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}$$

### **3 CRISIS, WORK PRECARIATION AND EMERGENCY OF PLATFORM SERVICES: MOTORCYCLE TAXI IN PERSPECTIVE**

Precarious and informal work is a constitutive part of the work relations established by the industrialization of the country, which has been gaining new forms, through the transformations of work with global and local repercussions.

A complex picture of transformations in the Brazilian economy marked the last decades of the 20th century. The exhaustion of the import substitution process (PSI) at the end of the 1970s marked the end of a cycle of government planning for development that expanded, diversified and modernized the domestic industrial structure. However, the PSI crisis left behind a picture of complete disorganization of the public sector, where inflation, public internal debt, explosive external debt accumulated, elements that outline the fiscal crisis of the Brazilian State (Carneiro; Modiano, 2014).

The 1980s were marked by two moments: the strongly orthodox recipe, from the



beginning of the decade, in the midst of the external debt crisis in Latin America; and, in the second half of the decade, by the failure of heterodox attempts at monetary stabilization. However, the “turning point” in the trajectory of recent economic history in Brazil occurred with the implementation of the neoliberal prescription, in the Collor government, which highlighted commercial and financial liberalization and privatizations. Added to a strongly recessive economic policy, the proposed reforms forced a defensive adjustment of the economy, especially of the Brazilian industry, which would be hard hit by the rapid and greater exposure to international competition, compelling it to intensify the process of productive, technological and business restructuring (Alves *et al.*, 2018).

This process was intensified during the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso and adaptation to the new competitive environment took place through a new ideology in the labor market that involved: policies of lower costs, higher quality and better scale of production, with more competitive products to organize production and work in order to allow a great diversity of products and services to be offered in the market (Alves; Madeira; Macambira, 2012). The results of the restructuring were, in the decade as a whole: a structural component of unemployment, associated with the process of modernization and technological incorporation in branches of industry, services and agricultural activities; and an increase in open unemployment, the degree of informalization, the number of employees without a formal contract or on their own (Neri; Camargo; Reis, 2000).

Faced with this situation, informal alternatives have appeared to fill the gaps left by the crisis in the formal labor market. The informal sector emerged as a productive chain of the formal sector, resulting from the processes of dismantling labor relations brought about by flexibilization (Mendes; Campos, 2004). In Brazil, the most recurrent manifestations of informality are small productive establishments, self-employment and work without a formal contract, these being usual manifestations of the informality process (Cacciamali, 2001).

Emphasis on the expansion of credit for the purchase of motorcycles in Brazil, through consortia and financing, especially in the first decade of the 2000s. In the private sphere, the transformation of concessionaires into finance stands out (Pinto, Schor, 2013), with accessible lines of credit and brand diversification, promoted by the intensification of commercial opening in this segment. In the public sphere, a context of reduction in national interest rates was experienced, as a result of the less orthodox policy of the second Lula government and a set of tax exemptions that contributed to greater ease of access and acquisition of this type of vehicle in the different national economies.

Motorcycle taxi is one of the categories of work that arise within this context, as an

accessible and alternative transport to the reduction of formal jobs, appearing in Crateús, Ceará, in 1996, stimulated by news that showed the use of rented motorcycles by tourists in London, England<sup>2</sup>. Although it is an alternative transport, agile and cheap service, the working conditions are not favorable because it involves several risks, even though the professionals reaffirm the freedom and autonomy of the category of motorcycle taxi drivers (Pereira Neto; Belo, 2018). In addition to the working conditions that involve regulation or not of the category, there are other variables that can be used to assess the situation of motorcycle taxi drivers: accumulation of functions excluding motorcycle taxi; strenuous and flexible workload; factors related to health (pain, circulation problems, spinal disorders, vascular problems) and safety (risk of urban violence, robberies and traffic accidents) etc. (Pontes *et al.*, 2023).

One of the most interesting points when dealing with motorcycle taxi refers to the comparisons between the absence of rights and labor ties and the notions of freedom and autonomy so proclaimed, in a discourse of self-legitimacy of its condition, as a category (Luna; Oliveira, 2011). Such annoyance is located in the scenario where, on the one hand, there are opportunities to earn a significant income according to the availability to work; on the other hand, there is no access to socioeconomic guarantees in cases of work incapacity, peculiar risks of informality. What is seen in several studies is that most motorcycle taxi drivers do not contribute to social security, even though they believe it important and necessary (Oliveira; Matos Filho; Araújo, 2012). Thus, “self-exploitation” (Antunes, 2016) can be adapted to this situation, in which there is a systemic intensification of work, coated with “autonomy”, generating a work overload that directly affects the quality of life of workers.

Either because of unemployment or because of the supplementary income, the activity of motorcycle taxi drivers is not the first choice for those looking for work. There are several sides of this service, whether explicit, marked by precariousness and informality, or implicit, positively marked by a sense of class and resistance forces, that is, the proximity network of motorcycle taxi drivers as a way of compensating for the ills of the work without legal protection, through daily coexistence and collegiality with other motorcycle taxi drivers.

Despite the formalization and regularization of motorcycle taxi services in several

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<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that Crateús has the *status* of a municipality where motorcycle taxi emerged, Sobral was the first to regulate the profession, and it was even used as a model for several municipalities in the Northeast and other regions of the country (GOMES; DUQUE, 2009). The first state capital to create a municipal law and a bidding process for this segment was Ceará, Fortaleza (Oliveira Junior; Azevedo Filho, 2002). Its regulation only occurred almost 20 years later, through Law No. 12.009 of July 29, 2009. In 2015, it was included in the Brazilian Classification of Occupations (CBO) of the Department of Labor (MTE) under No. 5191-15 (MTE, 2023).



cities in Brazil, there is still a lot to improve, especially when looking at ongoing mechanisms that escape the eyes of the State, such as, for example, app services (Uber and 99 Táxi) generated in the period after the financial crisis of 2008, which also cover motorcycle taxi drivers. The speeches in the world that involve passenger transport platform services, such as those mentioned, raise several debates about labor rights and the way drivers are treated. Even though they play relevant roles in urban mobility, easing commuting at adverse times without access to public transport, issues related to drivers' ties with Uber, for example, are still distorted and have little legal support for their workers (Talarico *et al.*, 2022).

This movement of rapid dissemination of platform services, in particular passenger transport, is due to the growing evolution of technologies, in a movement known as “uberization”, a process in which work relationships are increasingly individualized, in which workers transit between instability and lack of professional identity, surrounded by insecurity and the lack of conventional protection networks (Antunes, 2020).

Within the post-2016 political setback, with the political right wing taking over the Federal Government, the labor reform in 2017 showed the deepening of the growing informality and precariousness of work. Through Law No. 13,647/2017, under the argument of adapting labor laws to the new reality of the labor market, significant changes were made to the legislation. Such changes were configured in the legalization of labor situations previously considered precarious, informal and illegal. “Instead of expanding the possibilities of formalization through public policies aimed at labor productivity, efforts are made to make precarious jobs legal, at the risk of making jobs that are protected today precarious” (Carvalho, 2017, p. 87). Precarious work was re-signified, pejoratively, in modern legitimized work modalities (Macedo; Costa; Justo, 2019).

It is worth mentioning that the vulnerabilities and insecurities promoted in the sense of precarious work, metamorphosed through the new determinations of flexible accumulation, especially in its peripheral part, the flexibilization in work relations and by the very determinations of little active adherence in the context of globalization and massification of neoliberal orientations, give rise to new definitions of what is precarious. Here, the notion of the “precariat”, offered by Standing (2011), stands out as the worker deprived of the seven forms of job security: job market safety (such as the possibility of earning income); job security (protection against unfair dismissal); job security (possibility of job niche and ascension); safety against illness, accidents, etc.; skill reproduction safety; income security; and security of representation.

Furthermore, it is worth emphasizing the perverse effects allied to the poor



performance of the Brazilian State with the Covid-19 pandemic. The tension between economy and health was intensified in this period. As in a large part of the population, the category of motorcycle taxi drivers was exposed to the health and social vulnerabilities engendered by the pandemic, with its health risks and, at the same time, having to take risks in search of the income that guarantees their survival. This context further accentuated the categories of underemployment, informality and precarious conditions typical of the new forms of labor exploitation from a neoliberal perspective. The new paths of the labor market stimulated by this perspective have generated a disruption under the security ties conquered at a high price in labor law, a *démarche* in which the individual is even more imprisoned in work to compensate for the stability lost to the detriment of a false freedom proclaimed for supposed autonomy.

In spite of the elements (already mentioned) that put the activity of motorcycle taxi drivers at risk due to the intrinsic characteristics of the profession, the coordinated labor setbacks in recent years, in addition to the Covid-19 pandemic, made the activity even more arduous and the sacrifices are higher.

## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1 Profile of respondents

The first part of the questionnaire sought to identify the profile of the workers under study. The motorcycle taxi driver activity has been predominantly male (Pinto; Schor, 2013; Teixeira *et al.*, 2015; Silva *et al.*, 2017; Pereira, 2020; Góes, 2022), a reality that can be seen in Crato, where 100% of respondents are men. Most are married (57%); 24% are separated or divorced, 17% are single and 2% are widowed.

The average age is 38 years and 2 months and those surveyed are mostly between 30 and 40 years old (62%), which is repeated in much of the literature (Teixeira *et al.*, 2015)<sup>3</sup>. The second and third age groups that most concentrate workers have 14% of young people (up to 29 years old) and 13% between 51 and 60 years old. Over 60 years old, there are 6 surveyed.

In addition to age, it is relevant to survey how long these workers have been working as motorcycle taxi drivers, in order to have an idea of a possible turnover in this category.

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<sup>3</sup> In Silva *et al.* (2017), there is a predominance of the age group up to 29 years old.

For all those surveyed, the activity has been carried out for 14.2 years. This segment has attracted and kept professionals in practice, showing that turnover is low, as shown by the percentages of 53% of respondents practicing the profession between 11 and 20 years and 15% being in the market since the 1990s, with more of 20 years in the activity. Between 6 and 10 years, 28 workers were found. The long time of permanence in motorcycle taxi in Crato is superior to other municipal realities, which have higher percentages in the ranges of up to 10 years in the activity (Pinto, Schor, 2013; Teixeira *et al.*, 2015). This characteristic may show less possibilities of insertion in the formal labor market of the municipality and a less diversified productive structure.

Black workers predominate in the activity, corresponding to 63%, of which 20 are black and 43 are brown. Whites are equivalent to 37 workers. This is a feature of how informal work is carried out mostly by the black population. According to the continuous PNAD (IBGE, 2022a), in the second quarter of 2022, 61.3% of informal workers in Brazil were black and brown, revealing segregation in the national labor market when considering race. According to Inter-Union Department of Statistics and Socio-Economic Studies (DIEESE, 2022), based on data also from the continuous PNAD, between the second quarters of 2019 and 2022, informality and underemployment increased and the earnings of Brazilian workers decreased, with these effects being more intensely felt by black men and women, showing the persistent inequality between blacks and non-blacks in the country.

Regarding schooling, workers with complete secondary education prevail (31%), the majority in this segment, as can be seen in Pereira (2020), followed by complete elementary school (23%), incomplete high school (22%) and incomplete elementary school (17%). Only 6% access higher education, but without completing it, and only one worker is illiterate. This group of motorcycle taxi drivers has an average of 9.6 years of schooling. When compared to the average schooling of formal activities in Crato, according to data from the Annual Social Information List (RAIS) of 2021, there are more years of study both for the economy as a whole and for the service sector, 12.5 years for the first and 13.6 years for the second (BRASIL, 2021).

When considering the levels of education, the profile of the activity seems to be better than that seen at the national level and for the set of productive activities, where the individuals who contribute most to informality have four to seven years of study (incomplete elementary school). Considering the metropolitan realities, individuals with secondary education are the ones that most contribute to the increase in informal jobs, a situation closer to the Crato (Barbosa Filho; Moura, 2012). Pertinent to schooling in groups of motorcycle



taxi drivers, the literature has shown a higher concentration of workers with complete elementary education, as in Uberlândia-MG (Silva, 2007), Ituiutaba-MG (Almeida; Ferreira, 2009), Irecê-BA (Barreto, 2010) and Jequié-BA (Teixeira *et al.*, 2015) and with incomplete primary education, as in Lins-SP (Violato; Waimwan, 2005).

#### 4.2 The exercise of the activity

It is essential to understand how motorcycle taxi drivers carry out their activity. Although some interviewees have already worked with a rented motorcycle, currently all of them work with their own vehicle. Greater access to credit in the 2000s and tax incentive programs are pointed out as factors that stimulated the acquisition of their vehicles. None of the interviewees owned another motorcycle being rented in the segment.

According to Law No. 2.371/2010, which regulates the activity of motorcycle taxi drivers in Crato-CE, in its article 20, item V, motorcycle vehicles intended for the motorcycle taxi service must be licensed by the official agency (DETRAN) and motorcycle taxi drivers, in order to provide the service, according to article 21 of the same law, must be registered with Municipal Traffic Department (DEMUTRAN). According to the survey, all respondents are legalized with the official bodies. However, only 33% of workers are linked to some representative entity.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the international average weekly working hours is 36.8 hours. In a survey carried out with 40 countries, Brazil occupies the 10th position, in a ranking of more hours worked per week, with 39.5 hours (OECD, 2023). The reality of the segment under study is a daily workday of 8.9 hours, six days a week, which totals 53 hours a week. In some cases, hours worked on Sundays and holidays are reported, or at night, for contracted travel situations. The exhaustive journey is determined by the need to obtain higher yields, since gains in productivity and profit are only obtained with an increase in the number of races. Work overload affects the quality of life of these workers, not only exposing them to greater risks of accidents and disease acquisition, as reported later, but making it difficult for them to socialize, beyond the universe of colleagues and clients, depriving them of greater interactions within their family, leisure or preventing them from developing important activities, such as physical activities.

The precariousness to which they are subjected, even with so many hours dedicated to the activity, is also manifested in the reward earned, since 35% of those surveyed earn

up to one MW and 53% receive between one and two salaries. Only 12 workers claim to earn between two and three MWs in the exercise of the activity. The researched group presents, therefore, an average income between one and two MWs, corresponding to BRL1,639.46. Despite this, motorcycle taxi is an important family income, as several studies on the segment point out (Silva *et al.*, 2008; Almeida; Ferreira, 2009).

The importance of the motorcycle taxi service as a guarantee of occupation, even informal, in the labor market, is shown in the 84% of those surveyed who work only as motorcycle taxi drivers, a reality similar to that found in Jequié-BA (83.8%) (Teixeira *et al.*, 2015). It should be mentioned that the extensive working hours of the respondents influence the exercise of the single activity. Among the remaining 16%, the character of informality prevails in the extra activity (13 interviewees), who claim to do "odd jobs" as various delivery men, mason's assistant, mason or painter, waiters, watchmen or security guards and recycler. Three respondents also work with formal activities as waiters and pharmacy assistants. If one understands precariousness beyond market conditions, including a system of social relations where the quality of life, achievement and satisfaction of workers should matter, for these 16 professionals, the level of precariousness involves their own condition of dehumanization. This is seen when their shifts are mostly extended to strenuous jobs, which occupy hours at night and on weekends, which should be dedicated to rest, depriving them of leisure and family life. With regard to the income obtained from these activities, 11 workers claim to earn half a MW, three receive a MW and two of them get an extra income of one and a half wages.

Still regarding income, 81% of motorcycle taxi drivers claim not to receive any government benefit. The remaining 19% cite retirement, family allowance and sickness allowance as benefits received.

Precariousness is present in work relationships where insecurity and vulnerability prevail (Castel, 2007). The worker who is outside of job security is excluded from the social security system. As it is an informal activity, those employed in the segment in focus do not have CLT protection. The reality of the motorcycle taxi service in Crato shows that 87% of workers do not pay the National Social Security Institute (INSS) contribution as self-employed, nor are they registered as MEI and because they are not formalized, therefore, they are completely helpless in cases of leave the job or accidents in the workplace (Macedo; Costa; Justo, 2019).

Single-person domicile workers, that is, those who live alone, correspond to 14%. For 25 workers, the number of people in the household varies between two and four. 61% of



professionals in the segment work in households with more than five people. These results point to a household density of 3.2 inhab./dom. However, on average, only two of the residents perform paid work. In 26% of the households, the family income comes exclusively from the motorcycle taxi driver and in 56%, it comes from the worker and another member of the household, revealing how families are dependent on the income generated in the activity. The average family income corresponds to 2.6 MWs.

The motorcycle taxi driver profession, as already emphasized, is exposed to a set of risks and vulnerabilities, generally associated with the operational process of the activities itself, which increase especially with workers whose workday exceeds 50 hours per week.

Regarding the perception of the insecurity caused by the activity, 95% of the workers acknowledge that they are in a situation of insecurity, with violence being the factor most mentioned by them (84 motorcycle taxi drivers). Statistics reveal that the motorcycle is the vehicle that kills the most in the country, according to data from 2015, representing 39.67% of deaths in Brazil and 50.97% in Ceará. Furthermore, these vehicles account for 27% of the national fleet and 49.4% of the state fleet, confirming the risks and high lethality for their users (ONSV, 2023). Despite what the data show, the feeling of insecurity due to fear of accidents drops to 44%. Nine motorcycle taxi drivers perceive insecurity related to their vulnerability due to lack of social security coverage. None of the interviewees associated job insecurity with the risk of acquiring work-related illnesses.

About accidents that occurred in the exercise of the profession, 50% of the interviewees are in the accident statistics, with traffic stops and skids being pointed out by the majority. One driver cited collision with animals and another had a leg stroke while driving. Among workers who needed to leave due to accidents, the average time of leave was 61.8 days. The fact that the respondents are outside the CLT, due to their occupation and do not adhere to the MEI, makes them extremely vulnerable in situations of removal due to health impediments, since they are deprived of health assistance.

As emphasized by Teixeira *et al.* (2015, p. 104), the “heavy workload associated with unhealthy working conditions, whether when transporting passengers or when waiting for them at motorcycle taxi stands, can compromise the health, as well as the quality of life of these professionals”. In this way, motorcycle taxi drivers are exposed to the risk of contracting diseases associated with work. The municipal reality shows that 38% of respondents have already been affected by some type of disease, with pain and lack of mobility in the wrists, pain in the spine, in many cases, progressing to disc herniation, pain in the legs and arms and hearing problems.

Despite the precarious working conditions to which they are subjected, they can trigger situations of work stress, in view of exposure to noise, smoke, excessive cold/heat, risk of accidents, interpersonal tensions (Teixeira *et al.*, 2015), situations of violence, excessive journeys, among others, none of the motorcycle taxi drivers interviewed reported having acquired any illness associated with psychosocial aspects, such as stress, anxiety or depression. In Silva *et al.* (2017), workers identified having symptoms associated with anxiety, such as irritability, insomnia and tachycardia.

Even being exposed to a set of vulnerabilities and precarious situations, only 31% of those surveyed showed a desire to change activities, which is consistent with the long time that this group of motorcycle taxi drivers has been in this occupation; among the reasons listed for a possible change of job are, mostly, insecurity in relation to urban and traffic violence and low pay and financial instability, also pointing out the lack of social security coverage. Two respondents, who have been in the activity for more than 20 years, report relationship problems with other taxi drivers, given the excessive individualization in many cases and the reduction of collective actions, exposing the profession to fragility and undermining the power to act (Pontes *et al.*, 2023).

#### **4.3 Working conditions during the pandemic period**

The first case of Covid-19 was announced in China, in the province of Wuhan, in November 2019 and on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the spread of SARS-CoV-2 (Covid -19). In February of this year, the first cases were found in Brazil and the recognition of the state of public calamity only comes with Legislative Decree No. 3, of March 2020 (BRASIL, 2020).

The delay in the implementation of measures to prevent and combat Covid-19 by the Federal Government was reflected in the multiplication of cases and deaths and the paralysis of productive activities, with the exception of absolutely essential ones, added to the uncertainties about the evolution of the pandemic, point out for the situation of vulnerability to which the Brazilian population will be exposed, especially the groups of greater social vulnerability, including the unemployed, underemployed, informal and self-employed workers and those excluded from the social security system. The unemployment rate reached 16.6 million Brazilians in the 3rd quarter of 2020, where there were also 5.9 million people in a situation of discouragement (IBGE, 2022a).

In the surveyed segment, despite being exposed to the risks of a rapidly contagious



and highly lethal disease, 67% of motorcycle taxi drivers continued to work. Among those who are still under occupation, 80% of workers have not changed their working hours (no increase in working hours has been registered). Number similar to those verified in the state and in the country, according to data from PNAD Covid, 79.9% and 79.2%, respectively (IBGE, 2020). Among those who were away from work for some period of time, the average absence was 2.83 months. These workers report, as a reason for returning to their activities, the need to maintain their income to pay their bills and support their families. One of these workers points to the desire to keep their mental health and the other to safety in relation to the first dose of vaccine.

The permanence in the work exercise occurs even though 98 respondents have the feeling that the motorcycle taxi service exposes workers “a lot” to contagion by Covid-19. Among those who decided to remain active, 67 workers, 19 claim to have developed anxiety problems (15) and depression (4). Only four motorcycle taxi drivers sought psychological/psychiatric help.

For those surveyed, 51% say that the number of races has dropped by at least half, due to the scenario of paralyzing activities; 55 workers estimate loss of income, as observed in different parts of the country (Silva, 2022); for almost all of them, the drop would be around 50% (only for 5, the loss of income would have been between 20% and 30%). Considering the set of employed workers, in Ceará, only 17.7% had an income lower than that normally received (19.6% in Brazil), revealing that income losses are much more sensitive when informal workers are taken into account (IBGE, 2020).

It is worth mentioning that between February and March 2020, despite the denialism of the Federal Government, pressure increased for the adoption of a minimum income mechanism, in order to serve the most vulnerable population, alleviating their poverty condition at the same time as that the heating and maintenance of essential sectors was expected, reducing the negative economic impact caused, in general, by the pandemic. In this sense, a monthly allowance of BRL 600.00 was approved for informal workers, the unemployed, MEI from low-income families and intermittent workers who were inactive and therefore not paid. Also, an amount of up to BRL1,200.00 for mothers who were solely responsible for supporting their families (BRASIL, 2020).

In the research group, 58% received emergency aid during the pandemic period, with an average time of receipt of 10.4 months. This data shows the great presence of aid in families, during Covid-19. It is noteworthy, according to data from PNAD Covid, from November 2020, that 55.1% of Ceará households (41% in Brazil) had access to assistance

(IBGE, 2020)<sup>4</sup>.

Among those surveyed, 38% were affected by Covid-19; this percentage may have been higher, since some workers admit to having had some type of symptom, but they did not undergo tests. Eight of these tested positive more than once and eight developed the disease in its most serious state, requiring hospitalization. 20 workers believe they have acquired Covid-19 while carrying out their activities and the remaining 18 believe they have been contaminated in everyday movements, some citing their trips to the “market” as a place of contagion; two cite participation in family parties and two, visits to hospitalized relatives. It is noteworthy the fact that ten respondents continued working even though they were with Covid-19, ignoring the possibility of contaminating, especially, customers and co-workers. In fact, 11 motorcycle taxi drivers believe they have contaminated others.

Regarding prevention conditions, the researched group claims to have accessed general guidelines on the disease through the city hall and class entities (97%), which would have occurred via meetings and clarification booklets (for 56%; 41% did not specify the means). All respondents claim to have used some type of care as prevention, being cited: use of mask (for 100%); preventive tests (for 18%); alcohol use in all races (51%); use of alcohol in some races (31%).

With regard to preventive care for customers, respondents point out: offering gel alcohol in all races (15%); offering gel alcohol in some races (74%); motorcycle cleaning in all races (19%); motorcycle cleaning in some races (55%); helmet hygiene (96%).

## 5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The results showed that all respondents are men who work in that municipality, where more than half are married, between 30 and 40 years old (over 60%). The majority (more than 50%) have been working in the profession for more than 11 years, identifying little turnover. More than 60% are black, a trait that follows the trajectory of the correlation between informal work and being black in Brazil. Schooling is concentrated in the conclusion of high school (one third of the interviewees), showing a distribution of the level of education not so usually registered in the category.

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<sup>4</sup> The importance of emergency aid for Brazilian families in 2020 can be seen through the drop in poverty and extreme poverty rates in the pandemic year, compared to 2019, even in the pandemic scenario. The poverty rate, which in 2019 was 25.9%, in 2020 reaches 24.1% and the extreme poverty rate drops from 6.8% in 2019 to 5.7% in 2020. This trend reverses to 2022, when the percentage of the poor and extremely poor population rises to 29.4% and 8.4%, respectively (IBGE, 2022b).



All are regularized with the competent bodies. More than half receive income between one and two MWs. 84% see the importance of the activity as a guarantee of employment. Furthermore, 13 of the interviewees work “odd jobs” and three hold formal positions, in addition to working as motorcycle taxi drivers (of these, 11 receive up to half a wage). Only 19% received some assistance from the Government (retirement, family allowance, sickness allowance). 87% do not pay the INSS contribution as self-employed. More than 60% live in households with more than five people (in this situation, being mainly the provider of income for the household, it burdens them even more, forcing them to work longer, culminating in harm to their health and safety).

Even in the face of all this, almost everyone (95%) is aware of the situation of insecurity (mainly, due to the violence mentioned by 84 interviewees) and only a third showed a desire to change activities. More than half have already had a motorcycle accident.

As for the Covid-19 pandemic, the situation of motorcycle taxi drivers has worsened significantly, generating a reduction in the number of rides, an abrupt decrease in income. So much that two-thirds of respondents remained in the activity even with the pandemic. For those who left, the average was about three months. Of these, only one claimed mental health as the reason for his removal.

The understanding of what the pandemic meant, that is, high exposure and real chances of death, was clear to the vast majority. 38% caught Covid-19 (this count can be underestimated, as some admitted to having symptoms, but did not undergo tests), eight tested positive more than once and eight even underwent intensive treatments due to the severity of their condition. As for preventive care with customers, the most used measures were offering gel alcohol in some races (74%), cleaning the motorcycle in some races (55%) and cleaning the helmet (96%).

Therefore, the results show a strong trend of precariousness of the motorcycle taxi service in Crato-CE. From the perspective of the precariat (Standing, 2011), regarding “security in the labor market” and “income security”, it is noted that obtaining income is at the expense of an excessive working day. In “job security”, self-work is exercised, with no benefits related to the formal labor market, such as the possibility of rising in employment.

“Safety against diseases and accidents” is another reason for precariousness, given the exposure of workers to repetitive efforts, long hours of work, with little alternation for rest, excessive exposure to the sun, carbon monoxide, traffic stress urban, among others. About the “security of reproduction of skills”, precariousness is present in monotonous and

repetitive work, which makes it impossible to develop new skills.

Regarding the “security of representation”, there is little or no class or political representation, with claims being mostly associated with technical and operational aspects of the regulation system. It must be considered that this type of activity, as well as those involving workers by application, is characterized by “encouraging individualism and reciprocal competition among workers, [which] pose significant challenges to their collective organization” (Lourenço Filho, 2020, p. 90). Therefore, in addition to a service that serves the population, the activity is characterized as an essential service for motorcycle taxi drivers. The idea of freedom and autonomy observed by them when dedicating themselves to the category conflicts with the absence of labor and social security rights, which puts them in a situation of economic and social vulnerability, without the necessary protections when they are not exercising the activity. Thinking about ways to reduce the risk of accidents (through prevention campaigns and awareness of the use of protective equipment), improving inspection, especially those who are not duly registered, carrying out the activity without any form of control, are important to improve the conditions of the category.

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