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Uber Accused of Lax Safety Practices by Delhi Woman

By MIKE ISAAC
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Women protested in New Delhi last month after the alleged sexual assault of a female passenger by an Uber driver. Credit Anindito Mukherjee/Reuters

Updated at 5:12 p.m. with Uber statement.

A woman who says she was sexually assaulted by an Uber driver [last month in New Delhi](#) has filed a lawsuit against the company, arguing that Uber’s “hollow” safety and driver screening practices put her in an unsafe situation.

The woman, who is identified only as Jane Doe in a court document, says in the filing that despite Uber’s insistence that it maintains top safety standards, the company does not adequately screen its drivers, risking the safety of Uber customers. The suit was filed on Thursday in the Federal District Court for the Northern District of California. The company is based in San Francisco.

Uber began operating in New Delhi on Dec. 6, but [was banned in the region just days](#) after Ms. Doe accused Shiv Kumar Yadav, her Uber driver, of kidnapping and brutally raping her after she used the service for a ride home.

When it opened in New Delhi, Uber did not screen its driver partners with individual background checks, and instead relied upon whether the drivers had proof of insurance, a driver's license and a commercial permit to drive a taxi. Mr. Yadav, who has since been charged with rape, kidnapping and criminal intimidation by the Indian authorities, had a criminal record, which, under Uber's rules, would have prohibited his employment with Uber.

"Uber's focus on its bottom line over the safety of its passengers has resulted in what can only be described as modern-day electronic hitchhiking," Douglas H. Wigdor, the woman's lawyer, said in a statement.

An Uber spokeswoman said: "Our deepest sympathies remain with the victim of this horrific crime. We are cooperating fully with the authorities to ensure the perpetrator is brought to justice."

Only recently did Uber formally [institute its own background checks](#) on drivers in the region.

Uber has come under attack worldwide, including in the United States, for its driver background check practices. While the company says its background checks are "industry-leading," Uber and other ride-hailing services like Lyft have [lobbied against more stringent background checks](#) in many cities nationwide. Some lawmakers say the companies have done this in the interest of expanding the company at a faster pace.

The Delhi woman is seeking an unspecified amount of damages to be determined at trial, according to the filing. The suit also requests an overhaul of Uber's safety practices.

Last month, Uber [pledged to strengthen its background checks for drivers](#), though did not specify when that would occur, nor exactly how the new practices would look.

The woman's lawsuit asks that Uber go above and beyond overhauling its background checks. The suit asks for customer support centers in every city Uber operates, the installation of cameras in all Uber vehicles and the option to let customers request a female Uber driver.

"We hope that this lawsuit will bring about positive change that will ultimately protect people worldwide who are unaware of the serious risks of entering into an Uber car," Mr. Wigdor said.