

Examining Worker Empowerment and Decent Work Conditions in the Gig Economy: A Study in Tiruchirappalli District

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of the gig economy has transformed the global labor market, offering workers greater flexibility and new income opportunities through digital platforms. However, this transformation has also exposed significant challenges related to job security, fair wages, social protection, and workers' rights. This paper explores strategies to empower decent work within the gig economy by addressing these decent work deficits. Drawing on the International Labour Organization's framework for decent work, the discussion highlights the need for inclusive policies, ethical platform governance, and strengthened worker representation. It emphasizes the shared responsibility of governments, digital platforms, and workers' organizations to ensure fair working conditions, transparent algorithmic management, and access to social protection. Ultimately, empowering decent work in the gig economy requires balancing innovation with equity—creating a future of work that is both flexible and fair.

Keywords : Gig Economy; Decent Work; Platform Labor; Digital Work; Fair Work

INTRODUCTION

The gig economy has become a defining feature of the modern labour market, driven by rapid technological advancement and the rise of digital platforms such as Uber, Grab, Fiverr, and Upwork. It offers workers flexibility, autonomy, and diverse income opportunities beyond traditional employment structures. However, this new mode of work also presents serious challenges related to job security, fair pay, social protection, and workers' rights.

Many gig workers operate without access to benefits such as health insurance, paid leave, or retirement plans, making them vulnerable to economic instability. Therefore, empowering decent work in the gig economy has become a critical global concern. It involves ensuring that all workers, regardless of employment type, enjoy fair wages, safe working conditions, and access to social protections. By promoting policies, ethical business practices, and worker empowerment, societies can create an inclusive digital labour market that balances flexibility with fairness and human dignity.

Notwithstanding the growing understanding of the nature of gig work, we identified two knowledge gaps. First, there has been no systematic framework for evaluation of the conditions of work on gig platforms; a framework that would, for example, allow measurable comparisons between different platforms and across sectors, countries or time. Second, and related, there has been a lack of clear, straightforward information in the public domain about gig work; information that would, for example, allow consumers to make ethical choices between platforms, or would allow platforms to understand their relative performance. There have thus been calls for such frameworks and for extension of information on decent work standards to the gig economy (ILO Citation2019a; Norton Citation2017; O'Farrell and Montagnier 2020).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ravenelle (2019) examined the working conditions and experiences of gig economy workers in digital platform-based jobs. The study highlighted that gig workers often face uncertainty in employment, irregular working hours, and lack of job security. The research emphasized that many gig workers are treated as independent contractors rather than employees, which limits their access to labour rights and social security benefits. The study concluded that while gig platforms offer flexibility and autonomy, they also create economic insecurity and psychological stress for workers.

De Stefano (2016) examined the legal and labour policy challenges associated with the gig economy. The study focused on the classification of gig workers and the absence of proper labour regulations governing platform work. The research pointed out that many gig workers fall outside traditional labour laws, which prevents them from receiving benefits such as minimum wage, health insurance, and social security protection. The author emphasized the need for updated labour regulations to address the emerging challenges of digital platform work.

SCOPE OF STUDY

The study investigates the working conditions, opportunities, and challenges faced by gig workers within the contemporary digital economy. It defines gig workers as individuals engaged in temporary, flexible employment through digital platforms, such as ride-hailing and food delivery services. The research highlights that gig work offers flexibility and additional income, catering to those with varying socio-economic backgrounds, including differences in age, education, income level, and experience and also level of satisfaction among gig workers in Tiruchirappalli District.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The rapid growth of the gig economy has transformed the employment landscape, offering flexible and short-term work opportunities through digital platforms. However, despite its expansion, gig workers face several challenges that raise serious concerns. One of the primary problems is income instability, as earnings often depend on demand fluctuations, customer ratings, and platform algorithms. Unlike traditional employees, gig workers generally lack job security, fixed wages, and long-term employment benefits.

Another significant issue is the absence of social security measures such as health insurance, paid leave, pension schemes, and accident coverage. Many gig workers work long hours under pressure to meet performance targets and maintain ratings, which directly affect their future work opportunities. Additionally, there is limited legal protection and unclear employment status, making it difficult for workers to claim rights or resolve disputes.

The imbalance of power between digital platforms and workers further intensifies these problems. Therefore, there is a need to systematically examine the working conditions, socio-economic status, and job satisfaction of gig workers. Identifying these issues will help policymakers, organizations, and researchers develop strategies to ensure fair treatment, financial stability, and sustainable growth in the gig economy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To Identify key challenges faced by workers in the gig economy in Coimbatore
2. Examine the current working conditions of gig workers in Coimbatore
3. To evaluate the worker satisfaction in working condition about gig economy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study examines the gig economy of the Tiruchirappalli District. Purpose of the study is to identify the employment pattern of gig workers, about workers income, and job satisfaction in Tiruchirappalli District, where 100 respondents are selected for the study employing snow ball sampling method. The primary data were collected from the selected respondents through well- structured questionnaire. Software like SPSS and Excel utilized for quantitative data analysis, including descriptive statistics, Crosstabs, and Mean score method.

DEMOGRAPHICS PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The demographic profile presents the background information of the gig worker respondents in terms of age, gender, educational attainment, employment type, income level, and work experience.

Table 1.1

Demographic profile of Respondents

Variable	Demographic	No.of Respondents	Percentage
Gender	Male	84	56
	Female	66	44
	Total	150	100
Age	18 -25 years	44	29.3
	26-35 years	43	28.7
	36-45 years	31	20.7

	Above 45 Years	32	21.3
	Total	150	100
Educational Qualification	Up to HSC	39	26.0
	UG	39	26.0
	PG	38	25.3
	Others	34	22.7
	Total	150	100
Income	Below 10,000	30	20.0
	10,000 – 20,000	41	27.3
	20,000 – 30,000	39	26.0
	Above 30,000	40	27.0
	Total	150	100
Type of family	Nuclear	63	42.0
	Joint family	87	58.0
	Total	150	100
Size of family	1 – 2 members	54	36.0
	3 – 4 members	51	34.0
	Above 4 members	45	30.0
	Total	150	100
Area of residence	Rural	77	51.3
	Urban	73	48.7
	Total	150	100

Source : Primary Data

Table 1.1 clearly exhibits that the demographic profile of respondents among Gig workers in Trichy District. Under Gender wise classification, The respondents' gender reveals that 56 percent are male and 44 percent are females. Hence, it is observed that the majority of the respondents are male workers.

The majority of the gig workers 29.3 percent are in the age group between 18-25 years as they have a liking for making it attractive for students or those starting their careers 28.7 percent are in the age group of 26-35 years, 21.3 percent are in the age group of above 45 years and the remaining 20.7 percent of the respondents are in the age group between 36-45 years..

The majority of the gig workers 26.0 percent are in the age group between Up to hsc as they have a liking for making it attractive for students or those starting their careers 26.0 percent are in the age group of ug , 25.3 percent are in the age group of pg and the remaining 22.7 percent of the respondents are in the age group between others.

The majority of the gig workers 27.3 percent are in the age group between 10,000 – 20,000 as they have a liking for making it attractive for students or those starting their careers 27.0 percent are in the age group of Above 30,000, 26.0 percent are in the age group of 20,000-30,000 and the remaining 20.0 percent of the respondents are in the age group between below 10,000.

The majority of the gig workers 58.0,percent are in the joint family as remaining 42.0 percent of the respondents are in the age group between below nuclear.

The majority of the gig workers 36.0 percent size of family members is 1 – 2 members as 34.0 percent are in the size of family members 3-4 member, 30.0, percent of the respondents are Above 4 members.

The majority of the gig workers 51.3, percent are in the age group rural as remaining 48.7, percent of the respondents are in urban.

WORKING CONDITION

The working conditions of gig workers vary widely depending on the type of platform or service they are engaged in such as ride-hailing, delivery services, freelance digital work, or microtasks. However, common themes emerge in terms of flexibility, job security, income stability, and access to social protection.

Table 1.2

Working condition of Gig Workers

Factor	Particular	No of respondents	Percentage
Average number of hours worked per day	Less than 4 hours	29	29
	4-6 hours	26	26
	6-8 hours	20	20
	More than 8 hours	25	25
	Total	100	100
Average number of days worked per week	1 – 3 days	32	32
	4 – 5 days	38	38
	6 – 7 days	30	30
	Total	100	100
Average Monthly Income	Less than Rs.10,000	29	29
	Rs.10,001 – Rs.20,000	22	22
	Rs.20,001 – Rs.30,000	25	25
	More than Rs.30,000	24	24
	Total	100	100
Mode of Satisfaction with your current working condition	High	34	34
	Moderate	22	22
	Low	44	44
	Total	100	100

Source : Primary Data

Table 1.2 depicts that working condition of Gig workers in Coimbatore District. 29 percent of the workers working hours average per day is less than 4 hours,25 percent of the respondents are working hours average per days is

more than 8 hours, 26 percent of the respondents are working hours average per day is between 4 hours to 6 hours and 20 percent of the respondents are working average per day is 6 to 8 hours respectively.

38 percent of the respondents are worked from 4 to 5 days per week; 32 percent of the respondents have worked average per week is 1 to 3 days and 30 percent of the respondents have work 6 to 7 days average per week.

Under average monthly income of gig workers in Coimbatore district is 29 percent of the respondents are earning average monthly income is less than Rs.10,000, 25 percent of the respondents are have earning monthly income is Rs.20,001 to 30,000, and 22 percent of the respondents are earning have monthly income is more than Rs.30,000 respectively.

Overall mode of satisfaction of current working condition towards gig workers in Coimbatore district is 44 percent of the respondents are low level satisfied about their working condition; 34 percent of the respondents are highly satisfied their working conditions and 22 percent of the respondents are medium of satisfied with their working conditions.

Satisfaction of Gig workers

Gig workers' job satisfaction varies widely depending on the type of gig work, income stability, platform management, and personal expectations. While many workers appreciate the flexibility and independence, others express dissatisfaction due to low pay, job insecurity, and lack of benefits.

Table 1.3

Association between Mode of satisfaction of working condition and Gender

Gender	Mode of Satisfaction			Total	Chi Square value	Sig
	High	Medium	Low			
Male	32 (38.09)	25 (29.76)	27 (32.15)	84 (100)	1.642	.440
Female	28 (42.43)	23 (34.84)	15 (22.73)	66 (100)		
Total	60 (40)	48 (32)	42 (28)	150 (100)		

Source : Primary Data

Table 1.2 indicates that in the gender group of male respondents, 38.09 percent have high level of satisfaction, 32.15 percent have low level of satisfaction and 29.76 percent have medium level of satisfaction

Among the female respondents, 42.43 percent have a high level of satisfaction, 34.84 percent have medium level of satisfaction and 22.73 percent have low level of satisfaction

The chi-square test reveals that gender has no significant influence over the level of satisfaction since the chi-square value is not significant at a five percent level satisfaction.

It is clear from the above analysis that the level of satisfaction is higher among male respondents than female respondents..

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE GIG WORKERS

The gig economy provides opportunities for flexible work and additional income, gig workers continue to face a range of economic, social, and occupational challenges. These challenges affect their job security, income stability, well-being, and overall satisfaction.

Table 1.4

Challenges faced by the Gig workers

S.No	Problems	Mean Score	Rank
1	Irregular Income	3.91	VIII
2	Insecure	4.10	IV
3	Not receiving Social Benefits	4.02	VII
4	Long or Unpredictable Hours	4.10	IV
5	Unfair ratings	3.85	X
6	Delayed Payments	4.54	I
7	Poor Communication	4.12	III
8	Safety and security risks	4.48	II
9	Balancing Multiple Jobs	3.90	IX
10	Financially and professionally unstable	4.09	VI

Source: Primary data

Table 1.4 depicts that challenges faced by the Gig workers, delayed payments is the first rank which is the highest mean score is 4.54. the second rank is given by the safety and security risk which is highest mean score is 4.48, poor communication is given by the third rank which is mean score is 4.12, the least score given by the variable is balancing multiple jobs which is the mean score is 3.90 and tenth rank given by the variable is unfair rating which is the mean score is 3.85 respectively.

Findings

- Majority of the respondents are male workers.
- The majority of the gig workers 29.3 percent are in the age group between 18-25 years as they have a liking for making it attractive for students or those starting their careers
- The majority of the gig workers 26.0 percent are in the age group between Up to HSC qualification
- The majority of the gig workers 27.3 percent are in the age group between 10,000 – 20,000
- The majority of the gig workers 58.0,percent are in the joint family as compared to Nuclear
- The majority of the gig workers 36.0 percent size of family members is 1 – 2 members
- 51.3, percent are in the age group rural
- 26 percent of the gig workers working in a type of work is Home Services
- 27 percent of the respondents are having their work experience is 1-2 years
- Under Daily working experience among Gig workers. 26 percent of the respondents are having daily working hours is more than 8 hours
- 23 percent of the employees are satisfies their flexible working hours
- Overall mode of satisfaction of current working condition towards gig workers in Coimbatore district is 44 percent of the respondents are low level satisfied about their working condition
- Over all 44 percent of the respondents are having low level of satisfaction with working conditions towards gig workers. The chi square value is 1.961 and the level of significance is 0.375 not having under 5% level.
- Challenges faced by the Gig workers, delayed payments is the first rank which is the highest mean score is 4.54. the second rank is given by the safety and security risk which is highest mean score is 4.48, poor communication is given by the third rank which is mean score is 4.12.

CONCLUSION

The study on “Empowering Decent Work in the Gig Economy (with special reference to Coimbatore City)” highlights the growing importance of gig-based employment as a significant component of the modern labor market. In Coimbatore an emerging industrial and technological hub the gig economy has created new opportunities for income generation, particularly among youth, students, and professionals seeking flexible work arrangements. However, the findings also reveal that while gig work offers flexibility, autonomy, and accessibility, it remains characterized by economic insecurity, lack of social protection, and limited job stability.

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