

## NEW FACE OF JOB QUALITY CHALLENGE IN INDIA: GIG WORKER STUDIES

<sup>1</sup>Farhat Haque, <sup>2</sup>Abdul Rahman Dard

<sup>1</sup>XLRI Jamshedpur, India

<sup>2</sup>Business Administration Department, Nangarhar University, Afghanistan

Corresponding author:

[fh20002@astra.xlri.ac.in](mailto:fh20002@astra.xlri.ac.in)

### Abstract

#### Purpose

This research aims to describe the gig worker challenge and opportunity including job quality in India remembering that gig work is spreading rapidly among nations and has been the source of earning for most of the destitute population.

#### Design/methodology/approach

This research uses qualitative method with descriptive approach. Author used semi-structured interview to 10 (ten) informants by using purposive sampling with snowballing technique. The informants are the GIG worker who work around Indian metro cities.

#### Findings

The way their economic, psychological and social aspects are grilled with least positive chances of betterment has been our concern. The three aggregate dimensions mainly focussing towards, economic, psychological and social well-being of employees.

#### Research limitations/implications

This research may use for government to improve the job quality of GIG worker. If nations could not come up with formal and permanent employment opportunities, the job quality of gig economy can at least be enhanced.

#### Originality/value

This study describes comprehensively by using interview to reveal challenge and opportunity in gig worker job quality in India.

**Keywords:** gig worker, job quality, gig economy

### HOW TO CITE

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### ARTICLE HISTORY

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Gig-economy is an evolving labor market situation in which organizations engage independent workforces for short-term contracts referred to as “gigs”, who are connected to customers directly by means of a platform-enabled digital marketplace (Spreitzer et al., 2017; Jabagi et al., 2019). This kind of remote work arrangements gained momentum post great recession, befitting the deprived workers and negligent employers (Healy et al., 2017). In short it is a market based employment mechanism that encourages individualised work set up allowing labour flexibility (Shade, 2018). Yet again gig work has also been a patron of sharing economic model, has made workplace benefits inaccessible and labour associations rare (Ganapati & Reddick, 2018). The scalable form of workforce operating through work in demand through an app is typically a kind of just in time personnel who are paid for the piece of work done (De Stefano, 2015; Huws et al., 2018; Abilio, 2020).

In this study, authors are specifically focussing upon the ‘work on demand’ kind of arrangement as upheld by previous researchers. Typically, all those services which are platform based but mostly performed offline and are deemed lucrative by employers due to high flexibility and autonomy components (Vallas & Schor, 2020). While, other platform works may get decentralised remuneration gig workers are centrally piece rated (Stewart & Stanford, 2017). Also, in reality this kind of work has been propagator of precarious work, tight control and the claims of flexibility and autonomy are also mendacious (Duggan et al., 2020). Therefore, authors try to find out the job quality of such gig workers and also analyse if it’s the return of olden piece rated system without humanistic values. As gig work is spreading which can’t be reversed, and the major issue is normalising poor working conditions and hence, the quality of gig work has to be managed (Myhill et al., 2021).

Indian service sector has witnessed huge growth owing to various reasons, and easing of regulatory measures has been the most important one (Gaur et al., 2014). Yet again, the fastest growing sector of Indian economy being the services’ could not generate quality employment opportunities (Mukherjee, 2013). All the more, the informal sector employment is cumulatively picking up pace and clearly the legal aspects for workers have decreased the employment in formal sector (Nataraj et al., 2014). Consequently, the decline in standard jobs and the gig employment opportunities went hand in hand for Indian masses (Mehta, 2020).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gig work has not captured much attention of researchers may be due to widespread areas like attraction and retention of workforce and their satisfaction levels hardly matters for gig employments (Kuhn, 2016). As determinedly, the workers are labelled ‘independent contractors’ with ulterior motives to circumvent the employment benefits (Josserand & Kaine, 2019). Furthermore, as gig economy mostly generates low-skill jobs, it is important to capture the quality of employment (Kaine & Josserand, 2019). There may be lack of consent for defining job quality due to its multidimensional dynamics (Kalleberg & Vaisey, 2005; Findlay et al., 2013; Knox & Warhurst, 2015; Knox et al., 2015; Cazes et al., 2015). Broadly, it helps asses wages, benefits, health, safety and overall working conditions (Clark, 2005; Bernhardt et al., 2016).

In gig economy no social protection leads to low or no trust and thus the situation has been termed as commodification of labour (Wood et al., 2019). The state of affairs under gig work has been compared to old capitalist society, often called digital Taylorism where platforms easily bring on demand workforce (Altenried, 2020). As organisations can easily shift capital costs to the workers without paying out any propriety emolument through gig-based practices (Cole et al., 2020). The present platform work can be traced

back to the era of early capitalism before the standard employment relationship that originated in 20th century (Stanford, 2017).

Author would also want to differentiate the different forms of platform workers from literature. Generally, divided in three groups and the first is virtual work, other category is the freelancing who themselves define the rate of work and finally the third group who execute work mostly offline at local level who are mostly gig workers (Valenduc & Vendramin, 2017; (Vallas & Schor, 2020).

### 3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study has been designed to address our research question, pertaining to the quality of job done by gig workers. In an era of increasing gig work in most of the nations. Indian economy has been dependent upon the services import and exports but the rise of informal employments on the other hand and lack of job for growing population has been its headache. Therefore, the gig work has been a remedy for the unemployed common people. From literature and practical experiences, authors find the poor job quality of gig workers, but its popularity is sky high. To addresses these apprehensions, authors interviewed 10 (ten) informants and authors talked to Ola (an Indian taxi services start up) and Uber (San Francisco based mobility service) drivers who working in Indian metro cities as they were the most relevant and appropriate participants for our study who have been. Both of these services have been the pertinent employment generator (Kashyap & Bhatia, 2018). Combinedly, Ola and Uber hold above 90% share in the of platform taxi services in India which further give them onus of coming up with other services employing more gigs (Surie, 2018).

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics on Wage, Log Wage, and Commuting Time**

Sr.no.	Age	Gender	Education level	Years of working in the gig work	Current employment
1	37	Male	Intermediate/senior secondary	5	Ola/uber driver
2	35	Male	Graduate	6	Ola/uber driver
3	29	Male	High school	4	Ola/uber driver
4	48	Male	Intermediate/senior secondary	4	Ola/uber driver
5	35	Male	Graduate	4	Ola/uber/inDriver driver
6	28	Male	Graduate	3	Ola/uber driver
7	34	Male	High school	4	Ola/uber driver

Sr.no.	Age	Gender	Education level	Years of working in the gig work	Current employment
8	39	Male	Intermediate/senior secondary	5	Ola/uber driver
9	32	Male	Middle school drop	6	Ola/uber/inDriver driver
10	33	Male	Graduate	4	Ola/uber/inDriver driver

Purposive sampling, while availing the ride was the major scheme followed. After assuring anonymity and informing the gig service drivers about the study, a detailed interview was conducted. The interview design was semi-structured, guided basically by the direction of the prepared questions. But for a detailed interaction, authors allowed interviewees the freedom to express themselves, that helped us get profounder visions of the job quality (Banihani & Syed, 2020). Interviews were minimum of 30 minutes and maximum for 50 minutes. Authors wrote them and the transcript approximately contains 5500 words. The interviewees were providing services in two metro cities of India, the capital city of New Delhi and Kolkata. As, the rural population of India migrate to metro cities for better opportunities employment and education (Mehta, 2020).

The transcript of this inductive study was coded as per the methodology proposed by Gioia et al., (2013). As mentioned earlier, that the semi-structured interview with the help of broad research questions pertaining to job quality of gig work. The authors then got first-order concepts specifically taking the terms, expressions and allegories of the interviewees. Then the succeeding interviews made us realize the parallels and variances in the categories of responses. After which authors got our clusters for the second-order themes, consisting more of theoretical foundation related to study objectives. Moreover, extracting from these clusters authors get the final aggregate dimensions.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1 Result

The result above data analysis gave us themes regarding the quality of jobs done by gig drivers. This inductive model study gave the 1st order concepts, 2nd order themes and finally, the aggregate dimensions.

#### 4.1.1 Economic security for better job quality of gig workers

*Minimum monthly wage to be legalised.* The gig workers have uncertain income, making their lives unstable. As the drivers noted that they earn reasonable salary but they have to compromise all personal commitments. Therefore, ensuring minimum wages might be helpful especially during unforeseen situations. Also, studies have found that income of ride sharing workers are below minimum wages in the developed nations (Stewart & Stanford, 2017). Plus, we observed that most of these drivers are middle aged therefore they can manage the exertion but as their age increases. They can't follow same schedule as their lifestyle has already been poor, so health

complications are bound to arise. Therefore, minimum wages shall be fixed by appropriate authority.

*Lack of benefits in gig work.* Gig workers receive hardly any employment benefits versus the traditional economy which has the insurance, paid leaves or retirement benefits (Etzioni, 2018). As these workers are not given the status of employee by the platforms (De Stefano, 2015). Though the flexibility component is formed as basis to avoid providing benefits to gig workers (Hall & Krueger, 2018). But the study itself was questioned by Berg and Johnston (2019), as the previous study did not give the option of employment benefits to the gig taxi drivers. Most of the organisational theories are becoming irrelevant by these no benefit linked jobs (Kuhn & Galloway, 2019). Authors therefore, find it really important to get basic benefits attached to gig work.

*Economic instability of gig workers.* Gig workers face instability economically along with career uncertainty (Liu et al., 2020). As gig economy involves mostly the economically vulnerable workforce with a deep insight that only such people can remain available at odd hours for surge pricing mechanism (Zwick, 2018). In fact, the surge price that attracts majority of drivers backs the precariousness of work in gig economy (Tan et al., 2021). Therefore, authors see a nominal economic reimbursement for gig workers in turn contributes more to the precariousness. A stable economic security is the prerequisite for the coming times.

#### 4.1.2 Psychological safety of gig workers for better quality of their jobs

*Work under pressure.* Gig workers always work under some pressure which is intrinsic in nature, due to the piece rate remuneration they receive (Christie & Ward, 2019). In order to monopolise, the digital platforms always shift the pressure onto the workers (Christie & Ward, 2019). The high pressure under which gig workers have to perform leads to psychological stressful situations (Sariraei et al., 2022). As our respondents clearly intimated that pressure is all the time over them to perform.

*Perform despite all difficulties.* The precarious conditions of work under gig setup is a deep level issue (Van Doorn, 2017). The harsh weather condition or any breakdown can't be the reason to any ineffectualness of the duty. Freedom to work at any point of time comes at hefty cost (Anwar and Graham, 2021). These platform jobs are source of super-exploitation with high level surveillance (Vallas and Schor, 2020). Gig workers have been exposed to harsh situations therefore they need to express themselves and shall be allowed to form associations (Johnston and Land-Kazlauskas, 2018).

#### 4.1.3 Social challenges of gig workers

*Autonomy is nominal.* The autonomy and flexibility are just hacks to attract workers (Arnoldi et al., 2021). Clearly, gig workers enjoy nominal autonomy without any form of legal protection or job security (Zietlow, 2020). All our respondents ensured the same, that the autonomy actually lies in hands of platforms. While two of our respondents who use the new platform, 'inDriver'

(apart from ‘Ola’ and ‘Uber’) where multiple drivers options are provided to the customers and similarly the drivers get multiple options but actually its an illusion of autonomy. As cancelling the ride is possible both sides, a more of confusion is created. A considerable dominion shall be given to the service providers in real terms.

*Social bias.* These self-employed workers are subject to social biases, for which they have to adapt on their own (Jarrahi & Sutherland, 2019). As the chief operating officer of a platform was once explaining to do away with the social and cultural bias has been a proof of it existence (Wood et al., 2019). Authors get the same feedback from our respondents, and they complained of not getting high star ratings even after performing the job with all due considerations. Even communal biases are not rare and one of the respondent was denied by an individual because he was from a different community.

*Low intrinsic motivation.* For few days the job can be performed with full rigour without intrinsic motivational needs being fulfilled. Task performance of gig employees with high intrinsic motivation is better than the others (Butschek et al., 2022). But the issue arises when such need fulfilment is not possible with existing processes. As all our respondents were working as gig drivers only when they had no other employment options available. One interviewee said he tried in all police services, other said he failed to setup his business to a desired level and a third one said his earning in other profession didn't support his family's expenses.

## 4.2 Discussion

Authors try to convey the actual quality of jobs done by the gig drivers, through this study. The way their economic, psychological and social aspects are grilled with least positive chances of betterment has been our concern. The three aggregate dimensions mainly focussing towards, economic, psychological and social well-being of employees. Which is in line with prior researches searching for job quality of gig workers as the study by Goods et al., (2019). As known that job quality is a multidimensional construct and this tri-discipline approach is the most comprehensive approach (Dunn, 2020). With respect to Indian gig workers, this is the first study pertaining to their job quality. This study shows the poor job quality of gig workers in India. All can be rooted to the feeble workers associations if any and the lack of statutory compliance by the platform owners. As in Kolkata the drivers said they were associated with the national recognised unions. But the support is bare minimum or nil most of the times. Therefore, a strong governmental support is the most required step and of course strong regulatory mechanisms (Choudhary & Shireshi, 2022).

## 5. CONCLUSION(S)

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