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Assessing the Socio-Economic Status of Gig Workers in Uttar Pradesh

A Study of Income, Security, and Mobility

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ABSTRACT:

The gig economy has led to the dramatic shift of the labor market in India, and its severe consequences were noticed in Uttar Pradesh urban areas. Although the platform based employment provides flexibility, it also creates a range of challenges, such as the unstable income and lack of strong social safety measures. The current investigation assesses the socio-economic condition of 200 gig workers in Lucknow and Kanpur using the mixed-methods design that combines structured interviews and secondary data based on governmental reports and peer-reviewed literature. The results have shown that gig work, which is mainly used in the food delivery and ride-hailing industries, has a demographic that is mainly characterized by young males of various caste groups. They are mostly driven by the necessity due to financial reasons and the ease of entry that these platforms have. Though 63 percent of the respondents are able to save a part of their income, 37 percent cannot as they do not have enough pay or larger family duties. Only 60 percent are satisfied with their job terms and conditions, and an even larger percentage of 70 percent of people wants to work full-time and receive a salaried position as this factor is the most important to them. It is clear that there are health risks, as 23 per cent reported injuries, and lack of social security is an extremely graphic phenomenon, as 80-90 per cent of workers do not have the benefits. These findings highlight the precarity inherent in the gig economy, so the urgent need to implement specific policy changes. The research proposal recommends formal recognition of gig labor, the introduction of universal social security systems, the introduction of clear compensation system, and the introduction of special skills improvement courses. With such gaps filled in, policymakers can develop a fair gig economy in Uttar Pradesh and, in this manner, can comply with Sustainable Development Goal 8 and help generating decent jobs and long-term economic development.

Keywords: Gig Economy, Socio-economic Status, Gig Workers, Uttar Pradesh, Labor Policies

INTRODUCTION

In India, and the metropolitan regions of Lucknow and Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh, in particular, the gig economy has undergone a marked growth in the last decade, a growth that has been facilitated by the growing popularity of digital labour marketplaces like Ola, Uber, Swiggy and Zomato. These platforms have essentially transformed the world of employment by providing flexible on-demand employment to those who have been traditionally excluded in the formal labour markets. Definitely, the gig economy is defined by the short, task-focused interactions, which makes it an important part of the non-farm employment profile in India. People who work in this sphere are not hired as employees but as independent contractors and often they cannot afford long-term security or benefit plans.

Berg et al. (2018) estimate that the gig industry in India would create up to 90 million jobs, with 1.25 percent contribution to the national GDP, thus promoting innovation and employment across many industries (Berg et al., 2018). The resulting high rate of growth begs pressing questions of the quality of employment, income stability, social protection, and career mobility of the gig workers, which are inherently connected to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8), which states the priority of decent work and inclusive economic growth.

The backbone of the digital economy is gig workers, such as freelancers, part-time contract workers, and

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service providers based on the platform that can be offered via delivery, logistics, and ride-hailing. An analysis by Ernst & Young in 2017, The Future of Jobs in India, showed that 24 per cent of the global platform-based workforce is in India, and the country is increasingly becoming an important global centre of platform-based work. The low barriers to entry make it easy to participate regardless of gender, caste, and other educational differences, and provide a chance to marginalized communities. Yet, irregular payment, time consumption, and lack of health cover, retirement schemes, and complaints system keeps the economy in a wretched state and negatively affects the effective inclusion. The expansion of the gig economy is anchored on India's extensive informal economic framework, which engages more than 90% of the labour force (Friedman, 2014). Gig labour is an attractive alternative to traditional jobs, especially among millennials and migrants who want to work flexible hours with the help of digitalisation and the spread of smartphones due to the ICT. However, the internet elasticity often hides the precarity that labour inherently has, which includes a lack of social protection, the dependence on algorithmic surveillance, and a lack of connection to existing legal protections (Ginneken, 2002).

The gig economy can be seen as the representation of the processes involved in the neoliberal economic restructuring and post-Fordist labor framework thus highlighting flexibility, productivity, and cost-effectiveness (Unni & Rani, 2003). Platform entities act as mediators between a client and a worker, and they also hold algorithmic control of determining prices, job assignments, and judgment of performance (Lunn et al., 2019). Such an imbalance between the availability of data and decision-making procedures forms a digital hierarchy where employees take economic risks without the related forms of agency or representation (Ticona & Mateescu, 2018).

The job creation in Uttar Pradesh is growing due to immigration, inflow of venture capital and because of increased digital connectivity. Platforms like Ola, Uber, and Urban Company have generated millions of micro-employment opportunities nationwide, encompassing around 3.03 million gig workers in India's principal urban centres (Fairwork, 2023). Notwithstanding this advancement, region-specific data regarding the socio-economic status of gig workers—especially in tier-2 cities—remains limited, mostly due to the lack of formal registries and reliance on platform-governed data systems (Zwick, 2018).

The empirical gap is expected to be addressed by this study as it will analyze the economic situation, job security, as well as social mobility of the gig employees in Lucknow and Kanpur. It assesses the effect of the algorithmic control, implicit jobs and insufficient social safety nets on the lives and hopes of workers to climb up.

According to SDG 8 (Decent Labour and Economic Growth), this study will examine how the aspect of gig labour in India in the most populated state contributes to productive labour and equal income or to structural inequities and labour precarity. It also clears policy shortcomings, including the lack of adoption of the Social Security Code (2020), the lack of mobile welfare benefits, and lack of state-level data systems to manage platform work. The study will attempt to combine research findings and policy suggestions to:

(i) Assess the socio-demographic and economic factors of gig workers in Lucknow and Kanpur, including age, gender, caste, education and income changes.

(ii) Evaluate the availability of social security provisions, such as health insurance, accident cover and pension plans in the framework of existing regulatory provisions.

(iii) Analyze the motives of employees and barriers, with the particular focus on the financial need, job satisfaction, and work hazards.

(iv) Recommend policy measures to address Sustainable Development Goal 8 by promoting equitable growth, inclusive labour rights and sustainable livelihoods in the gig economy.

The paper may be considered as an empirical inquiry and policy debate and it connects the regional realities and the national labour transformations. This study, based on the experiences of gig workers in Uttar Pradesh, will inform evidence-based policymaking to achieve the vision of a Viksit Bharat (Developed India) by 2047: inclusive workforce, equitable work practices, equitable work practices, and sustainable social protection—essential components for realising the vision of a Viksit Bharat (Developed India) by 2047 (Bharat et al., 2025).

LEGAL PROTECTIONS FOR GIG WORKERS IN INDIA

The gig economy of India is growing rapidly; yet, its activities do not mostly lie within the traditional employment models. This means that the statutory protections granted to employees in the public sector, state-owned enterprises and the private sector in laws like the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 (Board & Board, 1948). Being considered as independent contractors, they are not subjected to the rights of the employees who include the minimum wage guarantees, scheduled working hours, dismissal benefits, and union rights. Although some of the existing laws may technically pertain to some of the facets of gig work, the very scope and relevance are unclear. An example related to this would be the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970, which may be used to possibly afford welfare benefits to platform workers such as those provided by first aid and canteens, but not many people follow the law, and the courts haven't yet decided how to interpret it (Objects, 1970). The Employees' Compensation Act of 1923 could also help people who get hurt at work, but it hasn't been tested in court for gig workers yet.

Code on Social Security, 2020 is a substantive policy change because it officially acknowledges that gig workers are a separate form of labour not part of the conventional employment relations. It introduces some of the precautionary measures, especially life and disability contingency coverage; however, unaddressed issues of occupational safety and loopholes in enforcement still remain.

The Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers Act, 2023 is the first state-level legislation attempting to control platform -based labour. However, despite all these legislative developments, gig workers still face a significant number of challenges, including burdensome agreements, insufficient social security benefits, and a glaring lack of the right to collective bargaining.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Informal work is the most common type of work in India, with almost 92% of the workforce doing non-standard and unregulated work (Guo et al., 2022). The gig economy, which is made up of short-term, on-demand, and digitally mediated work, has become a big part of informal work. This is in line with global trends towards flexible and non-traditional jobs. Mobile technologies have made it possible for app-based platforms like Ola, Swiggy, Urban Company, and Zomato to change the way people work in India.

Economic Opportunities in the Gig Economy

NITI Aayog (2022) says that gig work contributes to about one per cent of the gross domestic product in India and is expected to increase its participation in the labour force by two times before 2030. This guarantees that the marginalized and rural communities can benefit by allowing intrinsic access to the resource by the individuals with low formal education or physical disabilities to participate in income-generating mechanisms (Rhea Pillai asia foundation, 2022). The greatest thing about gig work is that it is flexible by nature. The participants have the freedom to decide their own time and therefore fit the work commitments with household and schoolwork commitments and usually take up more than one working position at a given time (Burtch et al., 2018). This flexibility in the structure enhances the economy particularly on people who had not yet entered the formal economy. Gig platforms can quickly respond to change in consumer needs, hence allowing employees to maximize profits during times of increased demand (Nawaz et al., 2019a).

This flexibility is what is causing systemic risks. Economic crises particularly affect the gig economy more as it is highly responsive to market changes thus making it more vulnerable. It is empirically proven that expansionary phases increase opportunities and recessions significantly limit them, which enhance income volatility and insecurity (Zaman et al., 2020). In such a way, the digital flexibility enabling the inclusion simultaneously makes precarity an unavoidable element.

Social Challenges and Labour Precarity

The gig economy, on the one hand, increases the amount of actors; on the other hand, the gig economy creates serious social challenges. The employees are usually deprived of welfare benefits like health insurance schemes, pension plans and paid leaves making them financial insecure and unstable (Spithoven, 2021). Using India as an example, the inclusion of gig workers in the country is legal under the Social Security Code of 2020, still, implementation is subpar, and the institutions do not have sufficient procedures to ensure the law is followed (MacEachen et al., 2022).

The structural holes block the opportunities of upward mobility, making the workers especially susceptible to the shocks that affect them in life cycles like sickness, disability, or unemployment. The results of the surveys indicate that a significant percentage of gig employees are working six to eight hours a day without any benefits, have to deal with wage discrimination, receive an uneven pay, and lack legal protection in case of a conflict situation (Watkins, 2023).

Also, the personal nature of gig employment leads to social alienation and causes psychological discomfort. Workers often do not have the social networks and supportive systems they are used to having in traditional workplaces when they interact through digital platforms to carry out their duties on their own (Liu, 2020).

Many companies have adopted algorithmic management, and in this case, employees are monitored, appraised, and rewarded by automated systems. This gives more control to business and drives employees towards high productivity thus creating more pressure (Wood et al., 2018). According to Rosenblat (2018), this phenomenon is referred to as digital Taylorism, which is a theoretical framework that confuses the concept of the human agency with the concept of technological governance (Xing & Sharif, 2025).

Conceptual Integration: Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical construct of precarious employment will be linked within the framework of the social security shortages to find out the structural forces in place within the gig economy of India.

- The Precarious Employment Theory describes the ways neoliberal globalization enables the development of an employment where the sources of employment are unstable, flexible, and with low security (Kalleberg et al., 2009). In the gig sector in India, algorithmic administration systems worsen unequal relations among online platforms and employees, with the focus of control and the spread of risk. Gig employees bear the entire responsibility of income risk, and the state and the employer have minimal responsibility (Moghavvemi et al., 2023).
- Gendered labour lens: the female gig workers are faced with the added precarity due to demands of unpaid domestic labour, limited mobility, and dangerous work environment (Watkins, 2023). Such intersecting gaps highlight the need to have gender responsive labour structures.

Taken together, the theories provide the conceptual framework to explain the co-existence of technological modernization, on the one hand, and the high levels of socio-economic inequality, on the other. The framework provides a lens through which one can assess the economical opportunities and social issues that gig workers in Uttar Pradesh can encounter and the empowerment possibilities and structural imbalances which will be long-term in the platform economy.

Empirical Literature and Thematic Synthesis

The empirical studies serve as the predictors of dual nature of platform-based employment, economic opportunity, and heightened vulnerability. Wood et al. (2019) show that algorithmic management in global gig platforms undermines worker autonomy and enhances the work-based pressure relations, which are reflected in the situation in India where ride-hailing and delivery partners face variable income and strict performance-quality control (Wood et al., 2018).

The technological aspects of the gig work have also been studied by research. Batool et al. (2021) and Kost et al. (2020) claim that, despite the potential of digital tools to improve efficiency, the high rate of automation and artificial intelligence implementation threatens the existence of jobs, especially in the situation when the reskilling framework has not been developed sufficiently (Batool et al., 2021). Nawaz et al. (2019) and Zaman et al. (2020) further emphasize such economic vulnerability of the gig markets, as during economic crises, platform work tends to rise, but workers are still susceptible to income shocks, since there is no unemployment insurance or official safety nets. (Nawaz et al., 2019b).

Institutional and regulatory issues are still the key points of modern discourses. MacEachen et al. (2022) focus on the challenges related to the implementation of the Social Security Code (2020) in India and note the major gaps in enforcement systems, compliance procedures, and portability of benefits (MacEachen et al., 2022). The results support the current state of agreement that gig workers are in dire need of universal social safety and institutional structures that realize the precarity of their working situations.

The empirical literature, when taken as a whole, portrays a promising, as well as an unstable gig economy. Platform work is flexible in labour market, accessible to digital technologies, and it creates entrepreneurial opportunities. However, these privileges are compensated by a weak standing of labour rights, revenues instability, and mental and physical strains. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2021) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2022), decent digital work is the prerequisite to equitable and sustainable economic development (Berg et al., 2018). The evidence highlights the need to have portable social advantages, organized skills-building schemes and joint representation schemes that will reduce uncertainty and promote innovation. The literature also emphasizes the need to implement balanced policy interventions in accordance with SDG 8 in order to encourage decent work and deal with the deficits of both opportunity and protection in the Indian developing gig economy.

METHODOLOGY

The given investigation takes the mixed-method approach to assess the socio-economic situation of gig workers in Lucknow and Kanpur that involves both quantitative and qualitative data streams, which will enable providing a complex and balanced picture of the phenomenon under research.

Research Design

The study uses descriptive case-study design with a narrow scope, that is, gig workers in the urban and peri-urban areas of Lucknow and Kanpur. Combining quantitative information that will be retrieved using structured schedules with qualitative data obtained using open-ended answers will help the mixed-methods approach carry out an in-depth analysis of the socio-economic circumstances that this population group will have to face.

Study Area

The geographical scope of the empirical investigation is confined to Lucknow and Kanpur that are the two major metropolitan centers of Uttar Pradesh which is characterized by the fast-growing gig economies. The diverse economic environment of such urban areas that includes food delivery, ride-hailing, and home services makes them an ideal place to explore the socio-economic profile of gig workers.

Sampling and Sample Size

The stratified sampling protocol has been utilized to pick up gig workers who work with major digital platforms, such as Zomato, Ola, and Urban Company. Stratification is used to ensure that different types of workers profiles, including full-time and part-time members, have been represented in the above types of services. The number of participants (200) is determined as the target sample size because it is reasonable and sufficient to conduct a narrow study of this scale and to be representative. The channels of recruitment include platform hubs, worker networks and online forums, thus making sure that the data is accessible as well as relevant.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected using structured schedule that was carried out using a face to face interview which was carried out by the enumerators who were strictly trained. They include schedule that obtains demographic information (age, gender, education, marital status), economic (income, hours worked, savings) and social-security (health concerns, job satisfaction, benefits) factors, based on the objectives of the study. The additional open-ended questions elicit qualitative data on inspirations, obstacles, and goals. The integrity and accuracy of the collected data were checked by field checks.

Secondary data, including the governmental reports, academic publications, and the policy-specific considerations, are used to model the primary findings into the general policy environment.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistical analysis by using frequencies, means, and percentages to encapsulate demographic and economic variables. Microsoft excel helped in the processing and preliminary analysis of these data. Thematic analysis processes were used to analyze qualitative answers and provide the possibility to identify common themes, including policy requirements and occupational issues. The quantitative and qualitative evidence triangulation can be used to make the analysis more robust and profound.

ANALYSIS

Demographic Characteristics

- **Age:** In the 200 respondents 10% of the workers were below 20 years or above 50 years. About 40 percent were between the ages of 21-30, 13 percent fell between ages 41-50 and 27 percent between 31-40.
- **Gender:** Among the 200, 175 men and 25 women were present, which means that there is a strong male dominance in the gig economy of Lucknow.
- **Educational Qualification**

Table 1: The Figure Represents the Educational Qualification of the Respondents in Terms of Percentage

S. No.	*Educational Qualification*	*Number of Respondents*	*Percentage (%)*
1	Primary Level Education	60	30%
2	Middle Level Education	80	40%
3	Graduate Degree and Above	34	17%
4	Others (Illiterate / Secondary / Vocational)	26	13%
Total		200	100%

The distribution of the educational attainment of the respondents is depicted in percentages as shown in Table 1. Most of them have the middle level education (40%), and then the primary level education (30%). Therefore, the majority of people joining the gig economy have basic to mid-level education. There is a particularly impressive presence of graduate-degree holders at 17% indicating that even highly educated people are attracted to the gig work, presumably because of flexibility or lack of formal job options.

- **Marital Status:** The information indicates that 60 per cent of the surveyed are married which implies that a large number of gig employees have family commitments and dependents, hence affecting their working hours, earnings, and desire to seek employment security. A significant proportion of 36.7% is single, which is probably younger people since most used gig work as a stepping-stone or part-time business during education or early career advancement. The comparatively low rate of divorced or widowed respondents (3.3 percent) is, however, a significant group, which may be interested in working as a gig worker to gain financial independence or may experience the re-entry into the labour market.
- **Domicile:** Most respondents (86.7%) belong to urban areas, indicating an intense concentration of gig workers in cities where platforms, demand, and infrastructure are more prevalent. Only 13.3% are from rural areas, suggesting relatively limited participation in the gig economy from rural backgrounds, possibly due to connectivity or access constraints.

Social Characteristics

- **Caste or group**

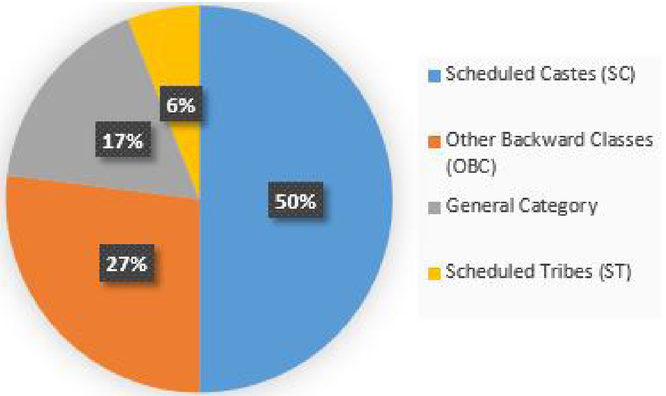

Figure 1: The Figure Represents the Distribution of Respondents into Different Social Groups
Source: Primary Data

The respondent data reveals that, respondents have a heterogeneous social background with majority (50%) of the respondents being part of Scheduled Castes class and the remaining 27% in the Other Backward Classes category. The fact that the General category 17% and Scheduled Tribes (6%) are also more represented implies that the gig industry is covering the marginalized and disadvantaged groups.

- **Household Size:** Half of the gig workers (50%) reported having medium-sized households (4–5 members), and 23.3% belonged to slightly larger households (6–7 members). A small segment lives in smaller (1–3 members) or larger households (more than seven members) — each accounting for 13.3%.

Economic Characteristics

- **Employment**

Table 2: Representing the Responses of All 200 Respondents Working in Different Platforms

	Food	*Transportation*	*Goods Delivery*	*Other*
Responses	92	48	40	20
Percentage	46%	24%	20%	10%

Source: Primary Data

The above data reveals that 46% of 200 gig workers work in the food sector, like some work for Swiggy and Zomato. Almost 24% of people work in the transportation sector, like Ola, Uber, Rapido, and Indrive, and 20% of workers work in the goods delivery sector, which includes Blinkit, Zepto, Swiggy Instamart and the remaining 10% work as service providers via platforms such as Urban Clap.

- **The period of working in the gig sector:** It was found that 40 respondents (20%) have been working in the gig sector for less than 6 months, and 100 respondents (50%) have worked for 6 months to 1 year, making this the largest group. Twenty respondents (10%) have worked for 1 to 3 years. 40 respondents (20%) have been engaged in gig work for more than 3 years,
- **The primary source of income:** It presents insights into the economic dependence of workers on gig work as their main livelihood. Among the 200 respondents surveyed, 126 respondents (63%) reported that gig work is their primary source of Income, and 74 respondents (37%) stated that gig work is not their primary income source and that they are involved in another part-time or full-time job.

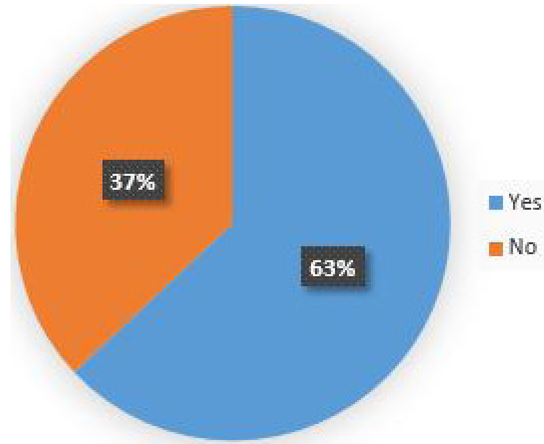

Figure 2: Representation of the Response of Gig Workers Regarding Their Primary Source of Income
Source: Primary Data

- **Average monthly Income from gig work:** The analysis has shown that 33 percent (66 respondents) incomes fell within the range of ₹15,000 to ₹20,000 which is the most common income range among the respondents. Fourteen percent (28 respondents) said that they earned above 20,000 indicating that a smaller group of gig workers can earn more; on the other hand, 10% (20 respondents) earned less than 5000 per month. These numbers are probably estimates of new workers entering the gig economy who are yet to prove their presence in it or work less frequently. A quarter (52) of the respondents earned not less than 5200 to 10,000 and 17 to 15,000 respectively (26 and 17).
- **Working hours per day**

Table 3: Representation of the Total No. of Responses Regarding Their Working Hours and Also Their Percentage

S. No.	*Working Hours*	*No. of Responses*	*In terms of Percentage*
1	Less than 4 hours	12	6%
2	4 hours to 6 hours	48	24%
3	6 hours to 8 hours	60	30%
4	More than 8 hours	80	40%

Source: Primary Data

The data reveals that most respondents (70%) are engaged in gig work for more than 6 hours daily, suggesting high commitment and time investment in this form of employment.

- **Data regarding flexibility of working hours of gig workers:** Over 90% of gig workers confirm that flexibility is a defining feature of their work, allowing them to choose their working hours, avoid fixed shifts, and effectively balance personal, educational, or secondary job responsibilities
- **Savings status:** Data shows that among 200 gig workers surveyed, 126 (63%) reported saving some income ('YES'), while 74 (37%) could not save any earnings ('NO').

Security, Satisfaction, and Motivation

Health Condition

Table 4: Representing the Responses of All 200 Respondents Working in Different Platforms Regarding Their Health Condition

S.No.	*Health Condition*	*Responses*	*Percentage*
1	Reported health issues or work-related accidents	46	23%
2	No reported health issues or accidents	154	77%

Source: Primary Data

Out of 200 surveyed gig workers, 46 (23) reported having health problems or occupational accidents whereas 154 (77) reported none. The affected workers were heavily injured with their limbs being broken, which initiated prolonged recovery time, loss of earnings, and job security, thus emphasizing the lack of health insurance policies or reimbursement systems that assist injury victims among gig workers.

Work Satisfaction

Table 5: Representing the Responses of All 200 Respondents Working in Different Platforms Regarding Their Work Satisfaction

S.No.	*Work Satisfaction Level*	*Responses*	*Percentage*
1	Satisfied with gig work	120	60%
2	Dissatisfied with gig work	80	40%

Source: Primary Data

Among the 200 gig workers who were surveyed, 120 respondents (60%) were found to be satisfied with their job and this was mostly because they had sufficient income, flexibility to support their financial needs or the ability to earn additional income through other jobs.Conversely, 80 respondents (40%), mentioned lack of satisfaction because of low pay, lack of alignment with their professional goals, long working hours as well as unpredictable earnings as the main causes of work stress as well as demotion.

Income Satisfaction

Table 6: Representing the Responses of All 200 Respondents Working in Different Platforms Regarding Their Income Satisfaction

S.No.	*Perceived Income Adequacy*	*Responses*	*Percentage*
1	Income sufficient to meet family needs	112	56%
2	Income insufficient to meet family needs	88	44%

Source: Primary Data

The evidence shows that 112 respondents (56%), believe their earnings through the gig work are enough to support their family, and 88 respondents (44%), believe that their earnings are insufficient.

Job Substitution

Table 7: Representing the Responses of All 200 Respondents Working in Different Platforms Regarding Their Job Substitution

S.No.	*Job Preference*	*Responses*	*Percentage*
1	Prefer full- time salaried employment	140	70%
2	Prefer continuing gig work	60	30%

Source: Primary Data

Out of 200 gig workers, 140 (70) indicated that they would prefer full-time salaried jobs because of regular income, social security benefits, job security, career advancement prospects, and workplace protections as the most important factors. On the other hand, 60 (30 0) expressed interest in gig work, which likely suggested that they appreciate its flexibility and the ability to fit it into the schedules of students, part-time employees, or any other person with non-standard working hours.

Motivational Factors

After analyzing the open-ended responses of 200 gig workers, the key motivational factors that emerged are:

Table 8: Representation of the Data Regarding the Motivational Reasons for Joining This Sector

S.No.	*Motivational theme*	*Responses*	*Percentage*
1	To earn money/financial needs	146	73%
2	Flexibility in working hours	28	14%
3	No qualification/barrier to entry	14	7%
4	Lack of other job opportunities	12	6%

Source: Primary Data

Financial need or the need to earn money was cited as the most common motivator by more than seventy per cent of the respondents, highlighting the constraints of necessity that compel people to engage in gig work and make it a viable means of income generation.

In addition to financial necessity, other factors that make people enter the world of the gig economy were also emphasized by the respondents. Working hour's flexibility became one of the key issues that allowed individuals to cope with both academic and caregiving commitments. The barriers to entry that relate to practice in gig platforms are also low, making these opportunities easily accessible to people who do not have formal education or previous professional experience. As a back-up strategy to another job opportunity that is not available to a group of workers, gig employment can be a welcome surprise to them; in this case, the response is not necessarily a choice of career path, but an emergency.

Out of the group of 200 surveyed gig workers, eighty to ninety per cent of them said they lacked a formal social security benefit of the platforms or the companies that employed them. A small percentage admitted poor access to accident insurance, which is usually offered by delivery-oriented applications. These policies were however very narrow in scope and only encompassed work related injuries and were often hard to manoeuvre or comprehend. All the respondents did not have any elaborate benefits such as paid leave, health coverage, or retirement plans. Some of them were even not aware of the wider idea of social security, which represents a conspicuous lack of knowledge and the lack of protective measures.

Qualitative analysis defines a spectrum of problems that faces gig workers, with financial instability being the most widespread problem. The ability of employees to make future financial investments or deal with family requirements is greatly hindered by inconsistent or inadequate income generation. Other acute issues involve the job security, whereby the participants are often faced with sudden deactivation or dismissal without any warning. The exploitative aspects of platform-based employment are magnified by long working hours alongside an ostensibly conspicuous lack of benefits. The worker vulnerability is increased by health risks and prone to accidents especially on the delivery riders and motorised drivers. Furthermore, negative customer behaviour and the overall inability to practice social respect make the situation worse, causing dissatisfaction at the workplace.

DISCUSSION

The empirical investigation carried out in Lucknow and Kanpur proves that the gig economy has condensed into a viable means of livelihood in the nascent digital labour market in Uttar Pradesh. The cohort, mostly male, deals primarily with food-delivery and ride-hailing services. The number of females involved is limited and, as such, fits the safety aspect and cultural barriers outlined by Watkins (2023) and Pillai (2022). The sample includes OBC, SC, ST, and General, which supports the claim of NITI Aayog (2022), where the entry barriers are lower, and thus, the sample is more inclusive. However, such inclusion is not equal to empowerment, and, in line with Standing (2016) and Kalleberg (2009), this is where respondents said they experienced income instability and lacked benefits, highlighting the issue of continued precarity.

The financial performance is still diverse. It was estimated that only around 63 per cent of those were always able to save, and 37 per cent was not able to do so, which is consistent with the results of the analysis of shifting platform remuneration by Burtch et al. (2018). Although they praised flexibility, 40 percent of them complained about payment and overworking, which is also reflected by Wood et al. (2019). Most (7070) respondents reported an inclination toward paid jobs, which revealed the view of gig work as a temporary profession in accordance with the findings of Sundarararajan (2017).

Vulnerability in terms of health, 23% per cent of the respondents have suffered work-related injuries and no coverage, which highlights the lack of social protection highlighted by MacEachen et al. (2022). The cognitive suffering connected to the algorithmic management supports Liu et al. (2020) and Rosenblat (2018) in the paradigm of digital Taylorism. Altogether, these findings support the precarious employment paradigm and are an indication of a dire necessity of gender-sensitive welfare policies.

As a policy point, the results have three vital implications:

- The paper creates a connection between the micro-level of Indian gig labour and the wider scholarly discussion of digital labour precarity, thus demonstrating the influence that indigenous socio-cultural processes have on the perception of technological agency.
- It promotes the institutionalisation of social safety nets-portable benefits, full-accident insurance and provisions of health care to alleviate the vulnerabilities and make it long-term sustainable.
- The evidence forces the platforms to incorporate fair working principles such as clarity of remuneration practices, the availability of grievance channels, and gender-friendly designs to support the dignity of the workers and give rise to trust.

Overall, the study predicts the two-sidedness of the gig economy in India which shifts between empowerment and exploitation, autonomy and vulnerability. These observations based on Lucknow and Kanpur highlight the need to have holistic, worker-oriented models that are responsive to Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and the dreamy Viksit Bharat 2047 utopia.

SUGGESTIONS

Swiggy, Zomato, Rapido and Urban Company are platforms that have contributed to the development of the gig economy in Lucknow. Although they do offer flexible income generating options, they are not sustainable and safe, especially to members of the vulnerable populations such as young adults, migrants and those with low formal education. As a result, the multi-stakeholder approach is critically required to improve the well-being of gig workers. First of all, there is a need to formally acknowledge the existence of a type of gig labour by providing substantive changes to labour laws and creating a clear legal identity; in its turn, such amendments would ensure the protection of the fundamental rights such as minimum wage assurances and conflict resolution procedures. In order to counter the lack of the traditional benefits, the strong social security programs including the full insurance of health and accidents, paid leaves, and the provident funds or pension funds contributions will need to be developed. Clear remuneration systems with guaranteed minimum salary and timely payment of wages will stabilize the economic situation of workers. Prevention of occupational hazards requires better working conditions in form of limitation of workload, supply of protective gears and special rest places. In addition to that, career mobility can be promoted through investments in digital literacy, government-funded vocational training programs like the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), and other support programs. Proper management of complaints requires that the sites have stringent grievance-redress provisions, worker forums, and that regular empirical surveys are carried out. Stronger infrastructure and responsibility will be built due to the careful government supervision, the implementation of ethical platform principles, and mutually beneficial public-business partnerships. Financial inclusion will give workers more power by giving them access to micro-loans and teaching them how to use digital payments. Both cities need a customised welfare policy for gig workers that includes a “Gig Worker ID” system, access to state employment programs, and health insurance kiosks at urban PHCs. The gig economy can change from a way to survive to a fair and long-lasting way to work by bringing together platforms, policymakers, and civil society. This will improve worker welfare and productivity in Lucknow’s cities.

LIMITATIONS

This study is constrained by its concentration on Lucknow and Kanpur, a limited sample size, and purposive sampling, which hinders generalisability. Its cross-sectional design also stops us from following long-term trends. Even with these limitations, the results provide useful information and a starting point for more in-depth, multi-city, and long-term research on the gig economy in Uttar Pradesh.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future research should encompass multi-city and rural contexts throughout Uttar Pradesh, utilise longitudinal designs, and investigate gendered experiences and regional disparities. Comparing states and looking at the effects of policies can help make the case for inclusive labour frameworks that fit with SDG 8 and Viksit Bharat @2047.

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