

WORK WITHOUT SAFETY NETS: MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS OF UNCERTAINTY IN GIG EMPLOYMENT

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Abstract:

The rise of gig work has reshaped the employment landscape, offered flexibility and autonomy but also created new challenges for workers. One of the most significant yet underexplored aspects of gig work is its impact on mental health, particularly related to the uncertainty inherent in such employment. This study investigates the psychological effects of uncertainty in gig work, focusing on how the lack of job stability, income predictability, and social safety nets can contribute to stress, anxiety, and other mental health issues. Drawing on qualitative case study, we examine the emotional toll of irregular work schedules, inconsistent earnings, and the absence of traditional employment benefits. The outcomes forecast the reciprocation between financial insecurity, job autonomy, and mental well-being, revealing a need for better mental health support systems and policies to mitigate the negative consequences of gig work's inherent instability. This research calls for a rethinking of labor protections to tackle the psychological problems faced by gig workers in an increasingly uncertain labor market.

Key words: mental health, uncertainty, job insecurity, social safety nets, mental health support system.

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Introduction:

To start let us understand the meaning of Gig work, we can define as gig work as a temporary job or work which is paid depending on the demand and supply basis, which are purely of day to day or hourly basis. Mainly it is through online trading platform, which are utilised by freelancers, online teaching persons, delivery stores, online music lessons, grocery delivery etc. It can be said as non- standard part- time earning job or work for unemployed persons seeking daily earnings.

Due to the rise in science and technology, one of the advantages is digital marketing, trading, online buying and selling along with gig work. It has become the need of the hour in today's fast world economy. Today a sizeable number of gig workers are working in this unorganized gig work field, which promises more rewards but end up taking on toll on the health of a

person in physical or mental form. In gig economy the intermediary process is eliminated. Amazon, Flipkart, Myntra, Zomato, Swiggy, Uber and Urban Clap are some fine examples of product of gig economy, which are associated with all of us in our daily life. Since India is aiming at achieving the target of 5 trillion dollars economy by shifting from formal to informal employment pattern. There two sides one carries the advantages and the other the disadvantages.

Literature Review:

1. "The Mental Health Burden of the Gig Economy" by Kuhn, P., Milasi, S., & Yoon, Y. (2019) *American Economic Review*, 109(8), 2399-2417.

This paper looks into the psychological toll of gig work, particularly focusing on how job insecurity and financial instability contribute to stress, anxiety, and other mental health issues. It examines data on

mental health among gig workers and compares them with traditional employees.

2. The Psychological Effects of Financial Instability: A Study of Gig Workers" by Balaram, B., Warden, J., & Wallace-Stephens, F. (2017):

RSA Report, 1-56.

This report delves into the emotional and psychological effects of income insecurity on gig workers. It discusses how financial instability leads to increased anxiety, stress, and mental health issues among those who are dependent on gig work for their livelihood.

3. Work-life Balance Challenges in Gig Work: Mental Health Implications and Coping Strategies" by Carter, T. (2020)

Journal of Social Issues, 76(3), 615-634.

This paper investigates how gig work disrupts work-life balance and explores the mental health implications of such disruptions. It also discusses coping strategies adopted by gig workers, highlighting the resilience some workers develop to manage the psychological challenges of uncertainty.

4. International Labour Organization (ILO) Reports on Gig Economy:

The ILO has published several reports examining the social and mental health impacts of gig work, especially regarding job security and worker protections. These reports provide data on how lack of stability in the gig economy affects workers' mental health, including stress and anxiety.

Methodology:

This study employs secondary sources of data collection such as research articles, scholarly journals & quantitative survey to assess the prevalence of mental health issues among gig workers. This method will provide insights into the broader psychological impacts of gig employment.

Implications of uncertainty on mental health:

As we all know that the gig work or job carries with itself the uncertainty or continuity of work, which takes a toll on an individual mental health which is quite worry some. As growth of Indian economy depends upon gig work, it is imperative to address the issues faced by the group of persons who are actually facing the issue of uncertainty in work and the effects on his anxiety and stress level which fuels the mental health problem. The basic need in today's world is of daily earnings with secured social and financial status, this particular factor seems to be missing in the gig economy. It is very difficult of a gig worker to maintain a decent social life in big cities where opportunities are ample, but less rewarding. There is lack of acceptances in the society for gig worker which demotivates, creating stress and mental health problem. They live a life of social isolation as compare to a normal working-class person having fixed income regular job.

Psychological Distress:

The major impact on the mind or mental setup of the individual being that this type of work does not carry any sort of safety cover which will benefit him in case of sickness or any other disaster in life. Here the individual becomes vulnerable for insurance cover and other retirement benefits which his counter part gets if he has a fixed pay roll job.

The Absence of Social Safety Nets and Worker Protections:

The time has come that the government wakes up and understand the core issue and formulate economical and social policies in line with the safety nets to be provided to these type of gig workers. Because as of today sizeable amount of individual are earning their means through gig work which adds to the economy of our country. The government needs to create an environment which will motivate them through social, economical support and protective cover or safety net in case of any emergency.

Work Schedule Flexibility and Its Psychological Impact:

As everybody of us after work go home and relax, or charge up for the next day routine, but in case of the gig work it is not so, since there is more uncertainty of work thereby creating mental worries, affecting the family life of a person. As loss of income brings lot of negative thoughts in human mind, where individual become addictive to alcohol and drugs, resultant effect is spoiling his own life. The major drawback of gig work carries is that the young worker has more chance of getting employed rather than the elder ones, in short after certain the person can become unemployed which gives fear, anxiety and stress.

Social Isolation and Lack of Workplace Support:

It is interesting to know how the gig workers handle the stress level and keep their mental equilibrium maintained. The government needs to understand and keep a human approach in handling this sensitive issue of mental health among gig workers, thereby providing relief by give psychological counselling free of cost which will help them in coping with the mental health problem. Any democratic country has got an history of disparity among its citizen and India is not different. Taking the case of gig economy here the disparity exists between the learned and scholarly workers employed in metropolitan cities, compared to rural gig workers such as grocery delivery boys, drivers, housekeeping staff, which gives them the feeling of injustice and demotivation.

Income disparities & Financial Uncertainty:

Here in cities like Mumbai high end gig work earn good amount of money compared to the other counter parts working in rural areas. Good example of mental health will be the COVID, pandemic period of 2019 to 2021, where gig work suffered and the daily earnings were deprived, since there was total shut down in most parts of the world. Lucky were persons having fixed jobs and were earning working from home. The need of the hour

is to provide mental health benefits to the gig workers especially working in rural and remote areas which can change the scene in in case of new pandemic breakout. Listing the disadvantages, we can summarize as follows:

- Total uncertainty of work or job,
- Affects the daily health pattern of the individual.
- Creates lot of stress which results in mental and physical health issues.
- There is room for exploitation.
- Less of benefits given to the gig workers.
- Takes long time in securing financial stability in life.
- From human rights point of view legal hurdles.

Key Figures from Quantitative Studies:

- **30% of gig workers** experience symptoms of anxiety, compared to **15% of traditional workers** (Kuhn et al., 2019).
- **40% of gig workers** report high levels of stress, compared to **18% of traditional workers** (Wood et al., 2019).
- **61% of gig workers** report unpredictable income, which correlates with higher mental health distress (Berg, 2016).
- **38% of gig workers** feel socially isolated, compared to **15% of traditional workers** (Hall et al., 2021).

Mental Well-Being Trends Among Internet-Enabled Individuals (2020-2023) :

A report analysing data from 106,427 respondents between 2020 and 2023 assessed mental well-being trends. Findings include:

- **Overall Mental Health:** Mental well-being scores in 2023 were lower compared to 2020, indicating a decline in mental health.
- **Youth Mental Health:** Individuals aged 18-24, including many gig workers, exhibited particularly low mental well-being scores.

Psychological Contract Perception in India's Gig Economy (2024) :

A 2024 study examined the psychological contract perceptions among gig workers. While specific quantitative data were limited, the research highlighted that:

- **Perceptions of Fairness:** Gig workers' perceptions of their relationship with platforms influence their mental well-being.
- **Expectations vs. Reality:** Misalignments between gig workers' expectations and actual experiences can lead to dissatisfaction and stress.

Anxiety, Mental Health, Job Insecurity, and Workplace Challenges Among Women Gig Workers (2024) :

A cross-sectional survey conducted in 2024 surveyed 603 women gig workers across major Indian metro cities to evaluate anxiety, mental health, job insecurity, workplace challenges, and overall well-being

Recommendations:

1. **Improving Mental Health Support System:** Government to enforce and implement mental health support through its health care system for workers under the category of gig economy, by way of counselling and support service centres.
2. **Social acceptance of gig worker's force:** Government policies, implementation, labour organizations, NGOs to work on the same page to address this issue.
3. **Financial benefits for gig workers:** Government to provide retirement benefits which are available to fixed income groups, or full- time employees. which will also include paid leave, health insurance to reduce the burden in their lives.
4. **Stable Income Facility:** Minimum wage package should be fixed and monitored for any abuse and exploitation for gig economy work force.

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Conclusion:

To conclude we can state that it is boon as well bane to the individual, technology has transformed our lives in all areas. Gig work is purely an informal sector which is unorganized which leaves rooms for human exploitation. The government bodies have not done enough for this sector as compared to other, after being a revenue earner in form of tax collection and employment generation. Work timings should be gender based which will impact the crime done on women gig workers working in the night.

Need for through research based on the rural and urban gig workers findings, thereby formulating new policies to make it safer and more attractive as compared to the formal working sector. Workers working under gig economy should be covered under life and disability insurance by the government, minimum wage package should be strictly implemented.

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