

## GIG ECONOMY AS A TOOL FOR RURAL WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

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### Abstract

The gig economy provides rural women with an opportunity to earn income and gain independence by offering flexible, short-term jobs through online platforms. In many rural areas, women often face limited employment opportunities, low wages, and cultural restrictions on their work. The gig economy helps break these barriers by enabling women to take on jobs like freelancing, delivery, and home-based businesses, which can be done remotely or on their own schedule. This flexibility allows women to balance work and family responsibilities, while also increasing their income and developing valuable skills. Moreover, the independence gained from these jobs boosts their confidence and economic stability. However, challenges persist, such as poor internet access in rural areas, and social barriers that may limit women's participation in the gig economy. Despite these obstacles, the gig economy remains a powerful tool for empowering rural women and improving their socio-economic conditions.

**Keywords:** Gig economy, rural women, empowerment, digital jobs, flexible work.

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### Introduction:

The gig economy is a job market where people work short-term or freelance jobs instead of having permanent jobs. These jobs can include online freelancing, food delivery, and small home businesses. The gig economy is growing quickly due to better technology and internet access.

For rural women, the gig economy can be a powerful tool for empowerment. Many rural women struggle with poverty, lack of education, and limited job opportunities.

This paper looks at how the gig economy helps rural women earn money, learn new skills, and become more confident. It also explores challenges such as low digital skills and poor internet access in rural areas.

### Review of Literature:

The review of the concerned topics is as follows:

1. **I Pober - 2019** - studenttheses.uu.nl: Drawing on administrative data, surveys and experimental studies, this paper explores the question whether the platform economy is an avenue to women's

economic empowerment. Low entry barriers and flexibility have enabled the labour market entry of those who can only work from home and other marginalised groups.

2. **A Ghosh, R Ramachandran, M Zaidi** - Available at SSRN 3944205, 2021

In the past 10 years, short-term, flexible work through apps like Uber, Ola, Urban Company, and Zomato has become very popular in India's cities. These apps allow people to:

- Work on their own schedule
- Choose when and how much to work
- Earn money quickly

This type of work is often called "gig work" because people work on short-term "gigs" instead of having a traditional 9-to-5 job.

3. **A Hunt, E Samman, S Tapfuma, G Mwaura, R Omenya – 2019:** Notably, we argue that policy-makers and platform companies should play a central role in ensuring quality work, which includes improving economic security, supporting

unpaid work, giving workers more control over schedules, ensuring their safety, and basing policy and practice on worker preferences– which also requires fostering collective action.

### Research Methodology:

This study is basically based on secondary data.

The secondary data is derived from online website, journals, books which are published on this topic.

### Objective:

1. The main aim of this study is to examine how participation in the gig economy can enhance the socio-economic status of rural women.
2. It will analyse whether gig economy jobs improve financial independence, social empowerment, and overall well-being.

### 1. How the Gig Economy Empowers Rural Women

The gig economy has significantly impacted rural women by providing opportunities for economic participation, flexibility, skill development, and social empowerment. By stepping into the gig economy, these women gain financial independence, acquire valuable skills, and transform their roles within the family and community. Let's explore these benefits in greater detail.

#### 1. Financial Independence

One of the most transformative effects of the gig economy is the financial independence it offers rural women. Gig work, however, allows these women to become financially self-sufficient and take control of their financial futures. Some examples of how rural women can earn income through the gig economy include:

- **Online Freelancing:** Women can work remotely, offering services such as writing, graphic design, virtual assistance, data entry, or customer support. The flexibility of online platforms means they can work from home, eliminating the need for long commutes to a workplace.

- **Selling Homemade Products:** Rural women with crafting, baking, or other artisanal skills can sell their products online. From handicrafts like jewellery or textiles to food items like homemade jams or baked goods, the internet allows them to reach a global market, increasing their earning potential.
  - **Delivery Services or Ride-sharing:** For those who have access to a vehicle, joining a delivery or ride-sharing service can provide a steady stream of income. This job type offers flexibility in terms of working hours, and it can be a practical way for rural women to earn money while managing other responsibilities.
  - **Agricultural Jobs:** Rural women can also tap into gig economy opportunities in agriculture. They may help with farm labor or sell produce directly to consumers through online platforms. By leveraging digital tools, women can connect with buyers beyond their local communities and improve their earnings.
- Achieving financial independence not only helps women better provide for their families, but it also opens up opportunities for personal growth and entrepreneurship.

#### 2. Flexible Work Hours

Traditional employment often requires a fixed schedule, which can be challenging for rural women who juggle multiple household responsibilities, including childcare, cooking, and cleaning. The gig economy, however, provides the flexibility that many rural women need to balance their work and home lives effectively. Gig work allows them to:

- **Choose when to work:** Rural women can choose to work at hours that suit their household schedules. Whether they prefer to work early in the morning, late at night, or on weekends, the flexibility ensures that their work doesn't interfere with family duties.

- **Work from home:** For many rural women, the ability to work from home is a game-changer. Whether they are freelancing, managing an online store, or doing administrative work, they can remain close to their families, especially children, without having to leave the house.
  - **Take breaks as needed:** Unlike traditional office jobs that require continuous work for a set number of hours, gig work allows women to take breaks whenever necessary. This is especially useful for women who need to attend to household chores or caregiving duties throughout the day.
- This flexibility allows rural women to participate in the workforce while maintaining a healthy work-life balance, which is critical for their overall well-being and family life.

### 3. Skill Development and Digital Literacy

The gig economy opens up avenues for rural women to acquire valuable skills, many of which are essential in today's digital age. As they engage with various gig economy platforms, rural women become familiar with new technologies, communication tools, and financial systems, which can improve their overall confidence and employability. Some of the key skills they develop include:

- **Using the Internet for Work:** From browsing for job opportunities to collaborating with clients or customers, rural women learn how to navigate the internet and use it effectively for work purposes. Whether it's for research, communication, or file sharing, the internet becomes a vital tool in their professional lives.
- **Digital Communication:** Many gig jobs require communication via email, video calls, or messaging platforms. As rural women learn to use these tools, they become more comfortable in digital spaces, enhancing their ability to collaborate with clients, employers, and colleagues worldwide.
- **Digital Payment Systems:** With many gig jobs requiring payments through online systems, women become familiar with mobile banking, e-wallets, UPI, and other forms of digital payments. This not only ensures that they can manage their earnings securely, but also empowers them to make independent financial decisions.

### 4. Social Empowerment and Confidence

Beyond financial independence and skill development, the gig economy offers rural women the opportunity to gain social empowerment and increased confidence. Historically, rural women have often been confined to traditional gender roles, with limited opportunities for decision-making or involvement in community affairs. However, as women contribute to their families' financial well-being, their roles within the household and community often change. The impact of this change can include:

- **More Decision-Making Power at Home:** When women contribute financially, their voice in family decisions becomes stronger. Whether it's about household budgeting, children's education, or long-term planning, financial contribution helps women have more influence in the home.
- **Greater Involvement in Community Activities:** Women who are financially independent are more likely to engage in community activities and social events. This increased involvement helps break down traditional gender barriers and encourages women to take on leadership roles within their communities.
- **Less Gender Discrimination:** As rural women participate in the gig economy and gain financial independence, they challenge traditional gender

norms and reduce the stigma around women working outside the home. Over time, this can lead to a shift in cultural attitudes, with women being seen as equal contributors in both the family and the broader community.

These changes in social dynamics contribute to a greater sense of personal empowerment. Rural women who once felt excluded or undervalued can now claim their place as active, respected members of society.

## 2. Challenges Faced by Rural Women in the Gig Economy

While the gig economy offers many benefits, rural women still face challenges:

### 2.1 Lack of Internet Access

Many rural areas have poor internet connections or no smartphones. Without technology, women can't access gig jobs. Governments and NGOs need to improve internet services in rural areas.

### 2.2 Low Digital Literacy

Some rural women are not familiar with using smartphones or computers. There need to be training programs to teach them basic digital skills.

### 2.3 Social and Cultural Barriers

In some communities, there is a belief that women should not work outside the home. Families may discourage women from joining the gig economy. Awareness campaigns can help change these attitudes.

### 2.4 Unstable Income

Gig work does not always provide a steady income. Some months may have more work, while other months may have less. Women need financial planning skills to manage irregular earnings.

## 3. Case Studies: Successful Rural Women in the Gig Economy

### Case Study 1: Self-Help Groups in India

In India, many rural women join self-help groups (SHGs) that help them sell handmade products online. Websites like Amazon Handmade and Etsy allow them to reach customers from around the world.

### Case Study 2: Agricultural Gig Workers in Kenya

In Kenya, women use apps like Twiga Foods to sell farm products directly to buyers, avoiding middlemen and making more money.

These examples show how the gig economy can change the lives of rural women.

### Conclusion:

The gig economy is a powerful tool for empowering rural women. It offers flexible work, financial independence, and skill development. However, challenges like lack of internet access and social barriers need to be addressed. With the right support from governments, NGOs, and companies, more rural women can benefit from gig work and improve their lives.

### Suggestion:

### Solutions to Improve Gig Economy Opportunities for Rural Women

#### Government and NGO Support

- **Digital training programs** – Teach women how to use apps, online banking, and freelancing platforms.
- **Improve internet access in rural areas** – Increase Wi-Fi and mobile networks in villages.
- **Financial support** – Provide small loans or grants for women to buy smartphones or start gig businesses.

#### Awareness Campaigns

- Educate families about the benefits of women working in the gig economy.
- Share success stories of rural women who have improved their lives through gig work.

**Partnerships with Gig Companies**

- Companies like Uber, Swiggy, or Amazon can create special programs for rural women.
- Local self-help groups can connect women with gig work opportunities.

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