

IMPACT OF WORKING CONDITIONS DYNAMICS ON WORK - LIFE BALANCE OF GIG WORKERS

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Abstract :

Gig Economy aims at creating win-win situation where in workers can get the autonomy and possibilities of multiple income sources, while businesses benefit from the cost-effective access to specialized skills on demand. Rapid growth in gig workers raises the concern to study the dynamics of work environment of gig workers and its impact on their psychosocial wellbeing. Gig Work is featured by short-term, flexible, task-based work engagement. Working conditions of gig workers are drastically different from traditional, long-term, permanent jobs. Though the gig economy promises autonomy and flexibility, it is required to study its real impact on psychosocial health. Work Life Balance is a crucial factor determining psychosocial health of employees. Present study aims at understanding the dynamics of working conditions of Gig Workers and analysing their impact on Work Life Balance of Gig Workers by using analytical method based on review of literature. Various working conditions dynamics like unpredictable working hours, unrealistic deadlines, social isolation, financial instability, unfair algorithmic evaluation, 'always on' mode, frequent travelling and no clearcut switch from work and family life affect Work-Life Balance of gig workers. Defining clear boundaries for working hours, skill development, building expertise, wise use of technology, developing social support and prioritising self-care will help to improve Work-Life Balance.

Keywords: Gig Economy, Working Conditions, Work Life Balance, Psychosocial Health

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Introduction:

Gig Work is characterized by short-term, flexible, task-based work engagement instead of traditional long-term work commitments. The growth of gig work is facilitated by rapid advancement in technology and consumer's preference for flexibility. Gig is a discrete project or service for which a temporary worker or independent contractor is hired for short-term basis. Some digital platforms such as Zomato, OLA, Blink it, commonly facilitate the connection between gig workers and their clients with the use of certain algorithms. Gig Economy aims at creating win-win situation where in workers get the autonomy and possibilities of multiple income sources, while businesses benefit from the cost-effective access to specialized skills on demand.

Widespread use of smartphones and improved internet connectivity has led to rapid expansion of Gig Economy. As per the statistical report by ASSOCHAM & Primus Partners, 2021 gig economy size at 15 million freelance workers engaged in projects in different sectors; 64% of them are between 24 to 38 years of age, majorly distributed in metro cities as follows: Bengaluru (2,34,000), Delhi (2,25,000), Mumbai (1,33,000), Pune (1,25,000), and Chennai (93,222). Rapid growth in gig workers raises the concern to study the dynamics of work environment of gig workers and its impact on their psychosocial wellbeing. Working conditions of gig workers are drastically different from traditional, long-term, permanent jobs. Gig workers have autonomy and flexibility in selecting their work hours and locations.

It has task-based engagements and short-term commitments. However, it also involves income variability, job insecurity, legal ambiguity, social isolation, dependency on digital platforms and algorithms, etc. Moreover, benefits like health insurance, retirement plans, paid leaves, legal protection are not available for gig workers. Gig workers often bear the cost of their tool, equipment, and maintenance of it. Therefore, the major concern affecting psychosocial health of gig workers is how these work conditions affect their work life balance.

Work-life balance is an ability to manage and prioritize both your professional responsibilities and your personal life in a way that creates a sense of harmony and well-being. It refers to find a sustainable equilibrium between the demands of your job and the needs of your personal life. Work Life Balance enhances job satisfaction. It promotes physical and psychological health. It is essential for personal growth and fulfilment. Work life Balance strengthens the social relationships and meaningful connections with people. Promoting Work Life Balance of employees is essential for organization as it facilitates productivity, creativity, and innovations. If nation invest into promoting work life balance in citizens, it will lead to healthier families, sustainable workforce, and peaceful communities. Poor work-life balance adversely impacts psychological health.

Present study aims at understanding the dynamics of working conditions of Gig Workers and analysing their impact on Work Life Balance of Gig Workers.

Objectives:

1. Understanding the aspects of working environment of Gig Workers.
2. To study the link between Working Condition Dynamics and Work Life Balance of Gig Workers.
3. Identifying features of Gig Economy enhancing Work Life Balance

4. To recommend strategies to improve Work Life Balance of Gig Workers.

Statement of Problem:

Rapid expansion of Gig Economy is attracting Indian youth in metropolitan cities for skill oriented, flexible, short term task-based jobs. However, aspects of such jobs are drastically different from traditional jobs. Though the gig economy promises autonomy and flexibility, it is required to study its real impact on psychosocial health. Major factor determining psychosocial health of employees is Work Life Balance. Whether the flexible and customized Work culture of Gig workers is really facilitating their Work Life Balance or 'always-on' work culture of Gig Economy is creating illusion of Work Life Balance is a concern to get research attention. This issue is addressed through this research study.

Methodology:

This study uses analytical method based on review of literature. Various Secondary sources of data like journal articles, books and governmental report on Gig and Platform Economy published by NEETI Aayog (June 2022) are referred to write this article.

Review of Literature:

The deterioration of Work-Life Balance creates negative impact both individual well-being and economic stability. Rapid growing Gig Economy in India opens a window to research the impact of drastically different working conditions of gig workers on their Work-Life Balance. A gig worker is a person who engages in income-earning activities outside of a traditional employer-employee relationship, as well as in the informal sector. Working independently is not a new phenomenon in India, but digital platforms and algorithm management is key feature of Gig Work Culture. It has promoted always on culture and global availability in business. (NEETI Aayog, June 2022)

Aspects of Working Conditions of Gig Workers -

The working conditions of gig workers are characterized by following unique aspects that varies from traditional work setups.

1. **Autonomy and Flexibility**

Gig workers have more control on their work as they have choice in selecting their working hours and locations.

2. **Financial Instability and Job Insecurity**

There is no fix income. It is fluctuating as per the demands, locations, and algorithm control. Gig Work is short term task-based job, so they can be easily terminated from online platforms. There are no clear laws for the protection of gig workers.

3. **Digital Platform and Algorithm Control**

Gig workers are mostly dependent on digital platforms for searching work. Their performance is evaluated by certain algorithms that may not consider many internal and external factors. Thus, they have little control on their work environment. It can adversely affect their income.

4. **Social Isolation:**

Nature of gig work does not have much scope to facilitate friendship and healthy peer relationship with colleagues. Thus, they face issue of loneliness and lack of social support.

5. **No Traditional Benefits:**

Gig workers typically do not receive benefits like health insurance, paid leave, or retirement plans, etc. They are viewed as independent contractor, so organization and employer do not have sense of accountability for gig workers. They are not provided any infrastructure. Moreover, they themselves bear the cost of purchase and maintenance of their tools and vehicles.

Illusion of work life balance created by gig economy

The gig economy promises a customized work setup with flexibility, autonomy, and power of control. In reality, it creates an illusion of work-life balance,

especially for unskilled labourers, by masking certain factors. Though it claims to provide autonomy and freedom to choose the task, is heavily dependent on platform algorithms. Ratings, performance evaluation and future opportunities are managed by algorithms. Thus, worker has no choice or autonomy in selecting tasks, working hours and locations. Financial instability and job uncertainty does not allow flexibility in selecting working hours and location. Gig economy promotes 24/7 open business culture. It promotes 'Always on' mode in gig worker building the pressure to be available anytime for the work. It blurs the boundaries between work and personal life. Gig working environment provides very limited opportunities to develop friendships and strong relationships at workplace. Compulsion to accept orders, financial insecurity, unfair evaluations, and no benefits of traditional long-term permanent jobs creates stress. All these factors lead to burnout and deteriorate Work Life Balance of Gig workers, affecting their psychosocial wellbeing.

Negative Work Conditions Dynamics affecting Work Life Balance of Gig Workers –

1. Long and Unpredictable Work Hours
2. Excessive Workload and Unrealistic Deadlines
3. Pressure to be available for 24/7
4. Job insecurity, financial instability, and inadequate pay
5. Frequent travelling
6. Lack of opportunities for social support and friendship development.
7. No clear switch from work time and family time
8. Unfair ratings, review, and performance evaluation
9. Algorithmic control on work and income opportunities, instead of algorithmic assistance

10. Lack of benefits and facilities like health insurance, paid leaves, retirement plans, legal safeguards
11. Unsupportive, demanding, and hostile management

Positive Work Conditions Dynamics affecting Work Life Balance of Gig Workers –

1. Flexibility in working Hours
2. customized work schedule
3. Opportunities to work from home reducing the commuting hours
4. Autonomy in choosing tasks and work projects
5. No expectations for long-term work commitments
6. Opportunity for freelancing and for showcasing unique talent
7. Opportunity to take a break from work when it is required for family

Recommendations for gig workers to enhance work life balance

Gig workers, due to the unique nature of their work, need to be especially proactive in maintaining work-life balance. Here are some recommendations:

1. Set Clear Boundaries –

Define your working time and communicate your clients about your availability. If possible, separate your work location from your home. Keep specific time to see notifications when you are not working to avoid constant interruption. Learn to say no and do not feel pressurized to accept gig.

2. Give time for Self-Care:

It is essential to take care of self by taking balanced and nutritious food on time. Regular exercise, meditation, spending time on your hobbies, getting enough sleep, listening music, giving quality time with family and friends, resting and spending time on leisure activities is required to prevent burnout and to manage stress.

3. Manage your fluctuating income

Start saving and investing portion of income to cover unpredictable expenditure. Consult a financial advisor for long-term financial plans.

4. Develop a Support System:

Spend quality time with family. Stay connected with your friends. Join a group of other gig workers to develop support system.

5. Plan for the Long-Term Development:

Develop your skills and build expertise in your field. Design attractive portfolio to obtain gigs. Explore multiple digital platforms rather than being dependent on a single platform. Use technology wisely and automate repetitive work to save time and energy.

6. Take Therapy if needed:

If the stress, and burnout interferes with daily life functioning, then seek help from professional psychotherapist or psychologist.

By implementing these recommendations, gig workers can create a more sustainable and fulfilling work-life balance.

Conclusion:

Rapid expansion of Gig Economy is attracting large number of youths in metropolitan cities in India. Though it promises customized work setup, autonomy, flexibility, and power to control working condition, it creates illusion of work-life balance. Sustainable Work-Life Balance plays vital role in reducing stress and strengthening the mental health and wellbeing. Various working conditions dynamics like unpredictable working hours, unrealistic deadlines, social isolation, financial instability, unfair algorithmic evaluation, 'always on' mode, frequent travelling and no clearcut switch from work and family life affect Work-Life Balance of gig workers. Deteriorated Work-Life Balance leads to mental health issues and reduced productivity. Thus, Defining clear boundaries for working hours can help to restore Work-Life Balance.

Skill development, building expertise, wise use of technology, developing social support and prioritising self-care will help to improve Work-Life Balance of gig workers. At National level, there should be clear legal safeguards available for gig workers to guarantee fairness and equity in gig work system.

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