



Interventions and policy recommendations for gig workers: A mental health perspective

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Abstract

The rapid growth of the gig economy has substantially reshaped traditional employment structures, employer–employee relationships. While platform-based work offers flexibility and income opportunities, it has also deepened employment insecurity and psychosocial stress. Gig workers often face irregular earnings, a lack of job stability, algorithmic control, and limited access to social protection. These conditions can adversely affect mental health, leading to heightened stress, anxiety, emotional fatigue, and reduced life satisfaction.

This paper explores the psychosocial challenges experienced by Gig workers and presents practical, evidence-based interventions to strengthen their mental well-being. At the individual level, promoting mental health awareness, stress management techniques, coping skills, and basic financial literacy can enhance resilience and psychological stability. At the platform level, digital companies should adopt transparent payment systems, fair task allocation mechanisms, grievance redressal processes, and accessible psychological support services to reduce uncertainty and perceived injustice.

From a policy perspective, formal recognition of Gig workers within labour frameworks such as provisions under the Code on Social Security—is crucial. Expanding social security coverage, health insurance, and inclusion in occupational health programs can significantly reduce vulnerability. Lessons may also be drawn from international labour standards promoted by the International Labour Organisation to ensure decent work conditions in emerging labour markets.

A coordinated and collaborative approach involving policymakers, platform companies, and public health institutions is essential. Strengthening regulatory protections alongside workplace-level reforms can create safer and more supportive working environments. Ultimately, safeguarding the mental health of gig workers is not merely an issue of social equity, but also a fundamental requirement for building a sustainable workforce in the digital economy.

Keywords: Online marketplace economy, psychological well-being, Work-related stress, Digital labour workforce, social protection, Regulatory reforms.

Introduction

Digital technology has led to the rapid development of platform-based employment, commonly referred to as the Gig economy, this labour arrangement facilitates flexible, on-demand work opportunities through platform-based coordination. Individuals provide services on a task-by-task basis without long-term contractual obligations. Many workers are attracted to Gig employment because of its flexibility and accessibility. However, the absence of traditional employment protections creates uncertainty and insecurity.

Compared to formally employed workers, individuals engaged in Gig work often operate without social security protections, including healthcare benefits, paid leave entitlements, and retirement support. Their income often depends on fluctuations in demand, which may lead to financial instability. Ongoing uncertainty about earnings and job availability can lead to chronic stress. Over time, this stress may contribute to psychological problems, including anxiety, depression, and burnout.

Mental health is closely connected to employment stability, financial security, and social protection. When these factors are absent, workers may experience emotional distress and reduced well-being. Therefore, it is essential to identify effective interventions and develop policies that address these risks.

Need for the Study

In recent years, the gig economy in India has grown significantly, with a large number of workers depending on

digital platform-mediated jobs as their main source of livelihood. Unlike many Western economies, where Gig work frequently functions as a supplementary or part-time income stream, in India it often constitutes the main livelihood for economically vulnerable populations. This structural dependence heightens concerns regarding income instability, occupational stress, and the absence of comprehensive social protection mechanisms. Despite the sector's growth, limited empirical research has systematically examined the psychological and socio-economic well-being of Gig workers within the Indian context. Therefore, there is an urgent need for context-specific investigation to inform evidence-based labour and mental health policy interventions.

Scope of the Study

The present study concentrates on the online marketplace economy Gig workers operating in urban centres across India, including app-mediated drivers, delivery personnel, and service providers. It seeks to analyse the influence of gig work on their financial stability, mental health, and overall social welfare. The research deliberately excludes high-skill freelancing activities (such as digital consulting or remote professional services) and non-platform informal labour to maintain analytical clarity and focus on app-based service sectors characterized by algorithmic management and income variability. By narrowing the scope to platform-dependent workers, the study aims to generate targeted insights relevant to labour regulation and social protection policy.

Research Objectives

To examine the association between working conditions in the gig economy and workers' economic, psychological, and occupational well-being.

To develop a comprehensive policy framework proposing targeted interventions to enhance mental health, job satisfaction, and social protection among gig workers.

Literature Review

The rapid growth of the gig economy has significantly transformed and reshaped the structure and experience of work across the globe. Although Gig employment is frequently associated with flexibility, autonomy, and independence, it simultaneously subjects workers to income volatility, employment insecurity, and heightened psychological stress. Consequently, scholars remain divided over whether Gig work should be interpreted as a pathway to empowerment and opportunity or as a manifestation of labour precarity and exploitation.

Early scholarship tended to frame Gig employment as a flexible alternative to conventional work arrangements. Research by Rafique (2023) ^[32] and Muhammad Usman Khan (Sheraz, 2025) ^[35] indicates that flexible scheduling may enhance perceived autonomy and, in some contexts, alleviate stress, thereby presenting gig work as particularly appealing to younger cohorts. Likewise, Doron Klunover (2023) ^[13] observed that both financial earnings and non-financial rewards—such as schedule flexibility and a sense of meaningful engagement can contribute to subjective well-being under favourable conditions.

However, this positive portrayal has been progressively challenged. Wayne Lewchuk developed the Employment Precarity Index, revealing that temporary and freelance work often involves insecurity equal to or greater than that found in unstable permanent jobs. Likewise, Marianna Mendola contended that low-skilled gig workers typically face inadequate pay, limited bargaining capacity, and social disconnection, indicating that the promised advantages of flexibility are frequently overshadowed by structural instability.

The inherent tension between autonomy and insecurity lies at the centre of contemporary debates surrounding Gig work. Toyin Ajibade Adisa research on algorithmic management highlights this contradiction: although gig workers value the autonomy linked to digital platform work, they simultaneously experience heightened surveillance, performance pressures, and reduced control over their working conditions.

express a strong desire for income stability and social protection. This ambivalence is consistently observed across diverse national and occupational settings, reinforcing the dual and often contradictory character of Gig employment.

An expanding body of research highlights the psychological ramifications of Gig work. In the United Kingdom's creative sector, Juncite documented elevated levels of depressive symptoms associated with financial uncertainty. Blurring boundaries between professional responsibilities and personal life further intensify these challenges. Similar conclusions were drawn by Siew Woon Lee (2023) ^[37] in Malaysia, where delivery riders reported reduced psychological well-being as a consequence of income instability and inadequate institutional protection.

Large-scale survey evidence further substantiates these concerns. Coutts and Madeline (2022) observed that gig

workers experienced comparatively poorer mental health and reduced life satisfaction than their counterparts in full-time and part-time employment, with financial insecurity and social isolation emerging as key predictors. Omer's study of freelancers in the Western Balkans identified notable generational differences: older workers demonstrated moderate levels of job satisfaction, whereas younger freelancers reported higher stress levels and greater difficulties maintaining work–life balance.

At the individual level, Ponchaitiwat (2025) ^[31] demonstrated that even adaptable Gig workers in digital occupations often lack access to collaborative opportunities and organisational support available to full-time employees. This absence contributes to diminished well-being outcomes. Collectively, these studies indicate that blurred boundaries, social isolation, and unpredictability substantially undermine mental health in gig settings.

Financial precarity consistently emerges as the underlying driver of these psychological outcomes. Across contexts, Gig workers cite unstable income, absence of benefits, and lack of long-term security as primary concerns. Indoria's study on financial well-being and work–life balance among Gig workers found that economic instability directly increases stress and disrupts the balance between work and personal life. Sudjai and Banks further observed that additional costs—such as fuel, insurance, and exposure to wage theft intensify financial strain.

Jokinen's research on food delivery riders vividly illustrates how financial insecurity intersects with emotional and physical risks, including erratic earnings, customer hostility, and unpaid occupational hazards. Addressing these challenges, Hooda and Singla recommended digital financial literacy as a strategic intervention to strengthen financial well-being, arguing that enhanced financial management skills and tools can help mitigate economic vulnerability.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that the Gig economy presents a complex interplay between flexibility and insecurity. While it offers autonomy and income opportunities, persistent financial instability, weak social protection, and psychological stress significantly compromise workers' mental health and job satisfaction. These findings highlight the urgent need for targeted policy interventions and mental health–focused support mechanisms tailored to Gig workers' unique employment conditions.

While many of the issues encountered by gig workers are common across contexts, their experiences differ across generations and regions. In a study of Generation Y and Generation Z gig workers, Madhavi J.S. found that limited peer interaction and lack of organisational support significantly increase stress among younger workers. In contrast, Bakhtiar's research on millennials suggests that loyalty is no longer tied to long-term employment relationships but is increasingly focused on individual goals and side projects.

International studies further highlight structural inequalities within Gig work. Uttam Bajwa and Denise Gastaldo identified severe vulnerabilities among Gig workers in low- and middle-income countries, where labour protections are frequently inadequate or entirely lacking.

Similarly, Erdenebat (2022) ^[14] reported that male location-based Gig workers in Ireland frequently experience physical exhaustion and limited awareness of their legal rights.

Comparative research by Yeong Gug Kim revealed a consistent global pattern: Gig workers tend to report a lower quality of life than traditionally employed individuals, regardless of cultural differences.

The role of technology and algorithmic management is another major theme in the literature. Digital platforms allocate tasks, monitor performance, and determine rewards through automated systems. While Angie Zhang (2022) explored participatory design approaches to make these systems more transparent and fairer, most research highlights their negative consequences. Gig workers often describe algorithmic control as opaque, impersonal, and manipulative. Studies by Nura Jabagi, Anne-Marie Croteau, and Luc K. Audebrand indicate that although flexibility initially attracts workers, algorithm-driven environments frequently fail to satisfy basic psychological needs for fairness and security.

Iqbal's theoretical model, based on the Job Demands-Resources model, explains how digital dependence increases stress and job insecurity while limiting genuine autonomy.

This creates a paradox in which workers appear independent but remain tightly controlled by platform algorithms.

A recurring theme across the literature is the tension between independence and instability. While flexibility may provide short-term advantages, it is often weakened by financial insecurity, lack of social protection, algorithmic control, and mental health strain. Scholars consistently call for policy reforms, including stronger social security measures, clearer legal frameworks, and improved digital literacy and training initiatives.

However, Long (2020)^[24] argues that research must become more comprehensive to address the wide range of well-being outcomes and the evolving life cycle of gig workers. Similarly, Gobinath's bibliometric analysis shows rapid growth in Gig economy research since 2016, but also highlights fragmentation across regions and theoretical perspectives.

Existing research suggests that Gig work is associated with both advantages and disadvantages. Flexibility allows workers to manage their schedules, but unpredictability can create insecurity. Financial uncertainty has been identified as a major contributor to psychological distress among Gig workers.

Another important factor is the lack of organisational support. Traditional employees benefit from structured supervision, peer support, and institutional protection. In contrast, Gig workers often operate independently with minimal support. This isolation can increase emotional strain.

Algorithm-based work allocation systems also influence worker well-being. Workers may feel a lack of control over their work opportunities, leading to frustration and helplessness.

Studies consistently indicate that employment insecurity is associated with poor mental health outcomes. Therefore, improving employment conditions is essential for protecting gig workers.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to formulate empirically grounded interventions and policy recommendations to improve the mental health of gig workers. The methodology integrates quantitative analysis,

qualitative inquiry, and policy review to ensure comprehensive and context-sensitive findings.

Data Analysis

A review of policy documents, government reports, and labour regulations is undertaken, including frameworks such as:

Code on Social Security

NITI Aayog reports on gig workers. Comparative international policy models are also examined to identify best practices.

Table 1: Response Distribution for Question 19 “Do you believe that such policies would enhance your job satisfaction and alleviate stress?”

Response Option	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree	0.00
Disagree	0.00
Neutral	23.08
Agree	42.86
Strongly Agree	34.07
Total	100.00

This question aimed to assess whether organisational policies could enhance job satisfaction and reduce stress among Gig workers. Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

The findings reveal a distinctly positive perception among respondents. Of the 91 participants, 42.86% selected “Agree” and 34.07% chose “Strongly Agree,” while 23.08% remained “Neutral.” Notably, no respondent expressed disagreement, indicating a broad consensus that policy interventions can improve job satisfaction and reduce stress. The mean score of 4.11 falls between “Agree” and “Strongly Agree,” reflecting an overall favourable outlook. The median (4.0) and mode (4) further confirm that “Agree” was the most frequent and representative response category. Moreover, the relatively low standard deviation (0.75) and variance (0.57) demonstrate limited dispersion in responses, suggesting a high level of consistency among participants.

Although the absence of disagreement reflects strong acceptability of policy measures, the presence of 23.08% neutral responses indicates a segment of respondents who may be uncertain or cautiously optimistic. This suggests the need for further qualitative investigation to understand their reservations or expectations.

Correlation Analysis (1.1)

To examine the relationship between gig work-related psychological distress and overall job satisfaction, Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted.

The results revealed a correlation coefficient of $r = -0.3727$, reflecting a moderate inverse relationship between psychological distress and job satisfaction. This indicates that as levels of stress, anxiety, and adverse emotional experiences increase, job satisfaction tends to decline among gig workers. Conversely, lower levels of psychological distress are linked to higher reported job satisfaction.

Although the correlation is moderate rather than strong, it is meaningful within the context of social science research, where multiple interacting factors influence human

behaviour. The negative direction of the relationship aligns with theoretical expectations, particularly the Job Demands Resources model, which suggests that high job demands, when not balanced by adequate resources, (e.g., insecurity, unpredictability) deplete psychological resources and reduce job satisfaction.

Overall, the findings provide empirical support for the argument that psychological distress significantly affects Gig workers' satisfaction levels, thereby reinforcing the importance of mental health-focused policy interventions.

In social science research, a correlation of this strength is generally regarded as significant. A coefficient of this magnitude highlights a meaningful trend. This finding indicates that psychological well-being plays a significant role in shaping subjective job satisfaction. It is consistent with existing literature showing that mental health challenges associated with precarious employment conditions such as irregular schedules, income instability, and limited social support—generally reduce overall worker satisfaction.

Correlation Analysis (1.2)

The relationship between overall job satisfaction and the perceived effectiveness of policy interventions was analysed using Pearson's correlation technique. The findings produced a correlation coefficient of $r = -0.40954$, demonstrating a moderate inverse association between the two variables.

This result suggests that greater job satisfaction is associated with a lower perceived need for policy intervention. In other words, Gig workers who report higher levels of satisfaction are less likely to consider additional policy measures necessary. In contrast, individuals with lower job satisfaction are more inclined to perceive policy support and structural reforms as essential and advantageous.

In the context of social science research, the strength of this correlation is notable, as it underscores a significant pattern: rising dissatisfaction among Gig workers tends to intensify demand for institutional protections and policy reforms. This finding aligns with broader research demonstrating that employees experiencing lower satisfaction are more likely to expect organisational or governmental support mechanisms.

From an analytical perspective, this result offers valuable insights for targeted interventions. Policies focusing on mental health support, income stability, and fair work practices may have a stronger impact on workers who are already dissatisfied. Addressing their concerns could potentially improve both well-being.

Key Findings

1. Inverse Relationship between Psychological Distress and Job Satisfaction

The correlation coefficient ($r = -0.37274$) reveals a moderate inverse relationship between psychological distress and job satisfaction. This indicates that as psychological distress increases, job satisfaction correspondingly declines. The finding reinforces prior research demonstrating that common stressors in gig work—such as income instability, limited institutional support, and job insecurity—adversely affect mental health and overall well-being, ultimately lowering job satisfaction.

2. Negative Association between Job Satisfaction and Perceived Usefulness of Policy Interventions

The correlation coefficient ($r = -0.40954$) indicates a moderate inverse relationship between job satisfaction and the perceived usefulness regarding policy measures, as workers with lower levels of job satisfaction are more inclined to perceive policy interventions as necessary and beneficial. Whereas highly satisfied workers tend to perceive less need for additional policy support. This pattern suggests that the demand for structural reforms is largely driven by dissatisfied gig workers rather than being uniformly distributed across the workforce.

Implications for Targeting Interventions

A moderate inverse relationship between psychological distress and job satisfaction serves as an important, though not sole, determinant of job satisfaction and policy perception. Other factors—such as income level, autonomy, work experience, and personal expectations—may also influence these outcomes.

Therefore, policy interventions should adopt a differentiated approach. Targeted mental health programs, income protection mechanisms, and social security provisions may be particularly effective for workers experiencing higher distress and lower satisfaction. At the same time, preventive strategies should be implemented to maintain well-being among relatively satisfied workers.

This paper uses a narrative review approach. Relevant academic literature, public health reports, and labour policy documents were examined to understand the challenges faced by gig workers.

Sources were selected based on relevance to:

Mental health

Occupational stress

Employment conditions

Social protection

The aim was to develop comprehensive intervention and policy recommendations.

Psychosocial Challenges of Gig Workers- Job Insecurity

Gig workers often lack long-term employment stability.

This uncertainty creates continuous psychological pressure.

Financial Instability

Income variation makes it difficult to plan for the future.

Financial stress is strongly associated with anxiety and depression.

Lack of Social Protection

The absence of health insurance and a pension increase vulnerability.

Occupational Stress

Performance pressure and long working hours contribute to emotional exhaustion.

Social Isolation

Limited workplace interaction reduces emotional support.

Interventions

Individual-Level Interventions

Mental Health Awareness

Education helps workers recognise stress symptoms and seek help.

Stress Management Training

Techniques such as relaxation and mindfulness can reduce distress.

Financial Literacy

Financial planning improves economic security and reduces anxiety.

Skill Development

Skill enhancement increases employment opportunities.

Organisational-Level Interventions

Platform companies play a critical role in worker well-being.

Fair Compensation

Transparent and predictable payment systems reduce financial stress.

Support Services

Access to counselling and health support improves well-being.

Reasonable Workload

Limiting excessive work hours prevents burnout.

Policy Recommendations

Legal Recognition: Formal recognition ensures worker rights.

Social Security Inclusion

Workers should receive: Health insurance, Pension benefits, Paid leave

Occupational Health Integration

Mental health services should include gig workers. Regulatory Protection Policies should ensure fair treatment.

Discussion

Gig work represents a broader restructuring of capitalism characterised by labour flexibilization, digital mediation, and the shifting of economic risk from firms to workers. Platform-based employment allows companies to externalise costs related to social security, healthcare, paid leave, and employment stability. While this model expands access to income opportunities—especially in countries like India—it simultaneously produces structural precarity. Precarity is not merely economic; it is psychological. Employment insecurity, algorithmic management, and income volatility generate sustained stress exposure, which affects mental well-being. Therefore, labour governance frameworks must incorporate mental health as a core regulatory dimension rather than treating it as a peripheral welfare issue.

1. Increased Healthcare Burden

When gig workers experience chronic stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout, untreated mental health conditions escalate into long-term health complications such as

cardiovascular disorders, sleep disturbances, and substance dependency.

Because gig workers often lack employer-provided health insurance, they rely on:

Public healthcare systems

Emergency services

Out-of-pocket expenditure

This shifts the cost burden to the state and families. In macroeconomic terms, untreated occupational stress increases public health expenditure and reduces overall societal well-being.

2. Reduced Productivity

Psychological strain directly affects cognitive functioning, decision-making capacity, and emotional regulation. For gig workers, this can manifest as:

Lower service quality

Increased customer complaints

Higher accident risk (especially in ride-hailing and delivery sectors)

Absenteeism or platform withdrawal

Over time, platforms face efficiency losses. Burnout reduces engagement and intrinsic motivation, weakening performance outcomes. Thus, neglecting mental health is economically inefficient even from a market-oriented perspective.

3. Intensified Inequality

Gig workers disproportionately belong to economically vulnerable groups, including migrants, youth, and informal-sector participants. Without social protection, mental health vulnerabilities compound existing socio-economic disadvantages.

This creates a cycle:

Economic insecurity → Psychological distress → Reduced earning capacity → Deeper vulnerability.

Structural precarity, therefore, widens inequality gaps between formal employees (with benefits and protections) and gig workers (without institutional safeguards). Ignoring psychosocial risks reinforces dual labour market segmentation.

Benefits of Proactive Interventions-

1. Enhanced Job Satisfaction-

When workers experience:

Income predictability

Transparent algorithms

Access to grievance redressal

Mental health support

They report higher perceived autonomy and fairness.

According to the Job Demands–Resources framework, increasing job resources buffers the impact of demands, thereby improving job satisfaction.

Higher satisfaction translates into:

Greater commitment

Improved service quality

Positive worker-platform relationships

2. Improved Retention-

High turnover is a persistent challenge in platform economies. Psychological exhaustion accelerates exit rates. Proactive interventions such as:

Counselling access

Flexible scheduling safeguards
Minimum earning guarantees
Reduce burnout and encourage longer platform engagement.
Retention benefits platforms by lowering recruitment and onboarding costs and maintaining service reliability.

3. Strengthened Platform Legitimacy

In an era of increasing regulatory scrutiny, platforms face legal and reputational risks. Public debates around worker exploitation can damage brand credibility.

By integrating mental health safeguards and social protection mechanisms, platforms demonstrate corporate responsibility. This:

Enhances consumer trust

Reduces regulatory backlash

Improves investor confidence

Aligns with ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) standards

Platforms that prioritise worker well-being position themselves as sustainable actors in the evolving digital economy.

Integrative Perspective

Mental health is not merely an individual concern; it is a structural labour governance issue. If policymakers and platforms fail to address psychosocial risks, the long-term social and economic costs will outweigh short-term efficiency gains.

Conversely, embedding mental health into labour policy transforms gig work from precarious survival employment into dignified and sustainable labour.

Limitations

Conceptual rather than primary empirical study

Reliance on secondary data

Context-specific to India, though globally relevant

Future research should incorporate:

Survey-based mental health metrics

Cross-country comparisons

Experimental policy pilots

Conclusion

The gig economy provides employment opportunities but also introduces mental health challenges. Comprehensive interventions and protective policies are necessary. Supporting Gig workers will improve both individual well-being and economic sustainability.

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