

Navigating the Gig Economy

An Intersectional Investigation into the Experiences and Challenges of Women in the Indian Gig Economy

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V.V. Giri National Labour Institute

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Preface

The gig and platform economy has emerged as a transformative force in our labour market, offering new avenues of work, income diversification, and digital integration. With its potential to generate more than 61.6 million jobs by 2047, this sector stands at the centre of India's economic future. For women, the gig and platform economy appear to offer new possibilities, flexible hours, income generation close to home and a chance to balance work with family responsibilities. For many, these opportunities mark an important step toward their financial independence and greater participation in the labour market. However, the promise of flexibility and autonomy within gig work remains disputed, often constrained by structural barriers and gendered realities.

Yet, as the findings of this study reveal, the reality is far more complex. Women workers often face long hours, safety concerns and hidden pressures from rating systems that restrict very autonomy gig work claims to provide. The challenges are particularly acute for women juggling caregiving duties or for those who lack digital literacy and social protection. Their experiences remind us that flexibility without security is incomplete and autonomy without safety remains fragile. This report, based on field survey brings women's voices to the forefront by showing how sector can indeed empower women by offering higher earning potential than many traditional jobs, opening doors to skill enhancement and enabling greater decision-making within households. At the same time, it underlines the urgent need for stronger protections, gender-sensitive safety mechanisms, accessible grievance redressal and pathways to formalization.

If developed with inclusive policies and fair practices, the gig economy has the power to become a vehicle for decent and dignified work for women. I hope this report contributes meaningfully to reimagining the future of work where women's aspirations are not just accommodated, but fully realized.

Dr. Arvind
Director General
V.V. Giri National Labour Institute



Message

The world of work is undergoing a profound transformation, driven by digitalisation, automation, and the emergence of non-traditional forms of employment. Among these, the gig and platform economy has gained prominence as a dynamic and expanding sector, particularly in the context of women’s participation in the labour force. Having worked at the intersection of law, policy, and gender rights for over three decades, I have had the opportunity to closely engage with these shifts and observe how they are reshaping the nature of work, especially for women navigating socio-economic vulnerabilities.

This study, *Navigating the Gig Economy: An Intersectional Investigation into the Experiences and Challenges of Women in the Indian Gig Economy*, emerges from an urgent need to critically examine a rapidly growing sector that has remained underexplored from a gendered lens. Drawing upon primary data from over 350 women gig workers across Delhi, Gurugram, and Noida, and supported by rigorous empirical methods, the study highlights both the potential and the precarity that define women’s participation in this space.

Gig work offers flexibility, autonomy, and new income opportunities, especially for women seeking alternatives to traditional employment models. Yet, as our findings reveal, it also exposes them to multiple vulnerabilities—ranging from lack of social security, algorithmic control, and health risks to the persistence of gendered work norms. Notably, most women continue to be concentrated in roles like beauty services or domestic work, reinforcing traditional divisions of labour. Moreover, the study reflects the pressing need for platforms, policies, and legal frameworks that are sensitive to women’s lived realities.

Having participated in the Labour 20 (L20) under India’s presidency of G20, which witnessed extensive global discussion on the platform economy, I am convinced that global conversations must be deeply informed by grounded, intersectional evidence such as this present study. The voices of women gig workers must not be peripheral—they must be central to policy discourse if we are to build inclusive, future-ready labour markets.

I hope this study serves as a catalyst for reform—encouraging policymakers, platform companies, and civil society to create systems that protect, empower, and truly value women gig workers. Their struggles, resilience, and aspirations deserve to be acknowledged, and it is imperative that we work collectively to secure a future where their dignity and rights are upheld. Only then can we harness the full potential of this dynamic workforce in our journey towards a just and equitable future.

Pragna Parande
Advisor

V. V. Giri National Labour Institute



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This study, “Navigating the Gig Economy: An Intersectional Investigation into the Experiences and Challenges of Women in the Indian Gig Economy”, would not have been possible without courage, honesty and kindness of the women gig workers who shared their lived experiences with us. Their stories of resilience, struggle and aspiration form the heart of this study and illuminate the realities of women’s work in India’s rapidly evolving gig economy. We are deeply indebted to them for trusting us with their voices. We are extremely grateful to Dr. Arvind, Director General, for his insightful guidance and unwavering support, which were instrumental in the successful completion of this research.

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Executive Summary

Rapid expansion of gig and platform economy is fundamentally reshaping the nature of work, promising new opportunities, flexible employment and income diversification. Gig workforce is emerging as a key driver of economic growth and labour market transformation, projected to create 61.6 million jobs by 2047. However, while this sector offers autonomy, flexibility, accessibility and efficiency, it also raises concerns about working conditions, social security, income, etc.

Women's participation in gig and platform economy is steadily increasing, offering new avenues for income generation, freedom and flexibility. It provides an alternative to the traditional employment structures that often limit their autonomy and mobility. Yet, the promise of flexibility and empowerment faces challenges on different fronts, such as wage insecurity, algorithmic control, persistent gendered barriers, and a lack of social security. This report examines the experiences of women gig and platform workers through primary survey-based evidence from Delhi NCR. The study analyses the occupational profiles, socio-economic conditions, prevailing vulnerabilities and their broader implications, as well as a comparative analysis of platform workers with traditional workers.

Gig and platform work is providing women with the opportunity to achieve economic independence. Despite necessary qualifications, women often face structural exclusion from formal employment due to factors such as career discontinuity, domestic constraints and a lack of suitable part-time roles. Interestingly, gig work generally has no such entry barriers, but certain factors such as digital literacy, access to technology, public nature of delivery work, exposure to unknown locations and socio-cultural aspects can influence participation. The analysis suggests that it offers opportunities to those with limited educational qualifications, demonstrating that formal education is no longer a barrier.

The intersection of sole earning patterns and marital status provides an interesting insight. Among the sole earners, around 83 per cent are married, which reflects a shift in the household dependency pattern, where women are becoming more central to the financial stability of their households. This shift could be attributed to changing societal norms and the increased flexibility of gig work, which allows women to balance both work and family responsibilities. Moreover, around 18 per cent of women sole earners are divorced, separated or widowed who took the full economic responsibility. Among those who are not sole earners, 76 per cent of them are married and 24 per cent are unmarried, suggesting that marital status continues to play a significant role in shaping financial roles within households.

Nearly 57 per cent of women workers earn more than Rs 20,000 per month, with over half concentrated in the Rs 20,000–35,000 range, reflecting a significant contribution to household incomes. Gig and platform work have emerged as important avenues for women's economic empowerment, offering flexible income-generating opportunities. Among the total sample, 37



per cent earn between Rs 15,000–20,000, 32 per cent between Rs 20,000–25,000, 17 per cent between Rs 25,000–30,000, and 7.9 per cent between Rs 30,000–35,000. However, only 0.3 per cent of women gig workers earn above Rs 35,000.

Women engaged in gig and platform work are increasingly contributing as key earners alongside other household income sources. Rapid expansion of gig work is allowing more women to participate and attain financial independence. However, they continue to primarily occupy the role of secondary earners. A lesser proportion of women workers report themselves as being sole earners and central to the household incomes.

Findings suggest a systemic exclusion of women workers from asset ownership, urban residency and access to welfare entitlement. Nearly 80 per cent of women gig workers do not own a house, which indicates broader marginalisation in asset ownership. Although 68 per cent of women hold a ration card, only 84 per cent of these cardholders are able to avail associated benefits. Moreover, 60.8 per cent of women are not permanent residents of the city, with 60.1 per cent of them having lived in the city for 5–10 years, indicating a migratory trend driven by factors such as rural distress, limited employment in native regions, marriage, etc. Their temporary residential status often excludes them from welfare schemes linked to domicile or voter registration, leaving them in uncertain housing and employment conditions.

One critical dimension to consider is the flexibility of women gig and platform workers. It works as a double-edged sword- offering freedom and autonomy as well as exposing them to vulnerabilities inherent in the existing work arrangement. Flexibility enables women workers to navigate and balance multiple responsibilities, such as caregiving and household duties, which are often disproportionately placed on women. Gig and platform work offers schedules that can be tailored to individual needs, allowing women to work during hours that align with family obligations or personal preferences. However, this flexibility also comes with its own set of challenges. Unlike their male counterpart, it is very difficult for women to manage multiple platforms to augment their earnings. While the ability to choose working hours can be seen as empowering, it can also result in income instability, lack of job security, and reduced access to benefits such as healthcare, paid leave, etc. Additionally, the lack of a fixed work schedule can lead to work-life imbalance, where the boundaries between personal time and work time become blurred, making it difficult for women to fully disconnect from their jobs.

Women engaged in gig and platform work encounter significant health risks and workplace safety challenges. 88 per cent of women report suffering from both mental and physical health issues. Ongoing stress and burnout are further exacerbating the health and safety challenges faced by women. These risks stem largely from the nature of gig work, which often involves long hours, irregular working conditions, and a lack of proper workplace protections. Workplace safety is a major concern. Less than 20 per cent of women reported having access to emergency safety measures, such as panic buttons or responsive protocols, with 77 per cent noting their absence—particularly concerning for those in customer-facing, location-based roles. Furthermore, 62 per cent of women reported never receiving any safety-related communication



from their platform, highlighting a critical gap in awareness of safety protocols. Moreover, there is a risk due to uncertain work environments, lack of support, and employer accountability, with 76 per cent of women feeling unsafe working at night. Additionally, 65 per cent report unease when allocated to isolated areas, underscoring the gendered geography of gig work.

Algorithmic management has become central in platform-based gig work, replacing traditional supervision with non-transparent automated systems. These algorithms impose implicit discipline through penalties for declining orders and reliance on strict rating systems, impacting workers' access to tasks and income stability. For women, this translates into adjusting working hours, tolerating client issues, or overextending availability—driven not by choice, but by fear of algorithmic consequences. While less than 10 per cent report explicit penalties for order rejection, a significant 82.97 per cent (24.79 per cent to a great extent, 57.18 per cent somewhat) acknowledge pressure to maintain high ratings and order acceptance. Moreover, 30.98 per cent are unaware of the platform's penalty policies, highlighting the lack of transparency. This system reduces perceived autonomy and traps women in a cycle of compliance dictated by platform algorithms.

Relationship between flexibility in gig and platform economy with different factors such as working per hour, working per week, health vulnerabilities, education, marital status, etc., is canvassed using a generalised ordered logistic regression model. Marital status shows positive relationship and increases the likelihood of perceiving greater freedom, potentially reflecting that stability or other support systems enable women to manage gig work better. On the contrary, longer durations of gig work tend to reduce perceptions of freedom. Moreover, less convenience, financial disempowerment and algorithmic control decrease the likelihood of higher freedom perception and highlight the overall dissatisfaction with the gig work environment.

Between gig work and traditional employment, gig and platform economy provides better earning potential for women and improved workday structure. Women workers still believe that gig work as compare to traditional employment, can be convenient in the long term if structured well and can transform the lives of women workers.

Report contributes to the policy discourse by laying down 10-Point Agenda for empowering women gig and platform workers: It considers legal and policy developments in recent years shaping the gig economy in India, including the new labour codes and legislative measures, while assessing their implications for women workers. It also puts forward a policy framework, grounded within the existing governing structure, aimed at addressing these vulnerabilities, improving welfare provisions and safeguarding the rights of women gig workers in the context of the evolving labour landscape.



CHAPTER I

Understanding the Gig Work

1.1 Introduction

In recent years, the global expansion of gig and platform economy has been accelerated by the waves of Artificial Intelligence and automation (ILO, 2021). With rapid digitalisation, new forms of labour relations and markets are emerging, and growing gig workforce among them is the most prominent one. As the fastest growing form of 'non-standard employment', it has transcended the pre-determined boundaries of formal- informal employment. It represents a broad range of new income seeking services, expanding globally and nationally, covering large businesses to small and nascent start-ups. This shift has ushered in a new dimension in the employer-employee relationship. Unlike the traditional work arrangement, it has given rise to more flexible forms of employment, including freelancers, independent contractors and self-employed, etc.

Amidst the absence of a universal definition of gig worker, Code on Social Security, 2020, in India defines gig workers as those who are earning outside the boundaries of traditional set up. Additionally, those engaging with the platforms like Zomato, Swiggy, Uber, etc. are classified as platform workers. The key characteristics that distinguish gig work from other forms of employment are- freedom of choice, low access barriers, flexible working hours, incentivization based on performance, no restriction on the amount of work that can be undertaken, no formal and rigid training requirements, etc. In contemporary times, the gig and platform economy has become an integral part of daily lives. With changing preferences, it has been rightly embraced by consumers and businesses, leading to emergence of digital labour platforms (Rani & Gobel, 2023). Digital labour platforms can be categorised into online labour platforms and location-based platforms. This study will primarily focus on location-based platform. Over the past few years, gig and platform economy has emerged as a source of both primary and supplementary income for the majority of individuals (Kim et al., 2018; Rani & Gobel, 2023). Watson points out the definitional ambiguity in gig work and emphasises the need to address it. Different definitions for same context create confusion across studies and literature (Watson et.al., 2021). Undoubtedly, gig work is the fastest growing form of non-standard employment, representing a broader concept with many undefined dimensions and establishing itself beyond the existing dichotomy of formal and informal employment arrangements (NITI Aayog, 2022). Woodcock & Graham (2020) suggest that unlike the rigid nature of traditional work arrangement, gig work offers flexibility which has made it an emerging and popular work option among the workforce. All stakeholders- employers, workers and consumers are reaping benefits out of this model. Workers can choose their work schedule and place of work. Likewise, employers can decide upon hiring workers. The customers are benefited by receiving quick services. The changing nature of the work



mediated by these platforms makes it attractive for both employers and employees (Watson et al., 2021). Delving into the intricacies of platform work, it becomes evident that platform is not only the marketplace for transaction, but also it plays much broader role, including facilitating payments, establishing trust mechanisms, exercising surveillance control and more (Banik & Padalkar, 2021).

Burgeoning gig work, which has now become the facilitator of our daily lives owing to its flexible arrangement, has both pros and cons attached to it. Gig and platform work empowers the labour with a certain space and entrusts decision-making power to set their own schedule. At the same time, several vulnerabilities such as a lack of transparency in the algorithm, long working hours, limited understanding of the digital world, etc., impede overall growth. Nair (2021) argues that gig economy presents a blurred picture of where and how the value of work is generated. Gig workers are like trapeze artists who are ready to take huge risks, but unfortunately, they lack safety nets or cushion to support them. Moreover, the rise in gig work has contributed to a disproportionate distribution of risk within the economy, leading to precarity and uncertain working conditions (Woodcock & Graham, 2020; Hickson, 2024). Amidst both pro-gig and critical literature, empirical studies such as those by AMCHAM-Uber (2024) and ILO (2021) reveal that the gig economy has grown exponentially in the global scenario owing to technological changes and changing market demands. Empirical studies suggest that one out of every six workers in US organisations are a gig worker, with the sector experiencing a rapid surge in gig work within a decade (Yildirmaz, Goldar, & Klein, 2020). A report by McKinsey Global Institute outlines that in Europe and United States, approximately 20 to 30 per cent of the population is actively engaged in independent work (Manyika, et al., 2016).

Moving further to understand the nature of the workforce joining the gig and platform economy, empirical evidence suggests that majority of the workers are below 35 to 40 years of age (Dhanya MB, 2025; AMCHAM-Uber, 2024; Rani & Gobel, 2023). In developing countries, platform work is promoted to address the employment needs. A study by NCAER (2023) reveals that platform work contributes to job creation in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities. It is also noteworthy that platform work with easy entry and exit attracts youths owing to the independence and flexibility offered. Unsurprisingly, given these conditions, platform work has also become a gateway for students to earn and participate in the 'world of work'. Banik & Padalkar (2021) depict that the growth of the gig economy has led to specialisation and increase in productivity driven by an increase in labour force participation rates and improved access to lower-wage workers. Moreover, they also point out that for the past few decades, developed countries have been experiencing a slump in labour productivity and an ageing population. In such a situation, unlike the traditional labour force participation methods, gig work provides some relief by boosting labour productivity through increased participation facilitated by online platforms. Usually, the companies assign tasks to multiple freelancers rather than hiring a single person to complete the whole task (Banik & Padalkar, 2021).



1.2 Current Trends and Future Projections

Highlighting the tremendous potential of gig work, NITI Aayog (2022) projects that by 2030, workforce in gig economy will grow to around 23.5 million, accounting for 4.1 per cent of the total livelihood and 6.7 per cent of non-agricultural employment. Gig and platform economy holds immense potential for expansion in India, with the projections estimating the workforce to grow to 61.6 million by 2047 (Dhanya M.B., 2025). The exponential growth trajectory of this sector highlights its growing economic significance. Additionally, with the employment elasticity of gig workers being more than 1 (NITI Aayog, 2022), this sector showcases a tremendous potential for expansion and job creation. These studies also underscore the long-term potential for skilled and semi-skilled jobs. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, gig and platform work experienced a growth spurt and now, it has penetrated deeper into our daily life happenings. As per Online Labour Observatory report, India accounts for 21.3 per cent of the online freelance workforce in 2024-25, far ahead of developed countries like Russia (6.6 per cent) and United States (3.7 per cent) respectively (OLI, 2025). Nevertheless, for female participation in gig economy, India's share is only 27.4 per cent while in United States, 50.7 per cent of female workers are online freelance workers (OLI, 2025). Despite India's high demographic dividend, women's participation in the workforce remains low. Gig and platform work offers to unlock this potential by providing ample opportunities for women participation in the workforce and ultimately empowering them in several ways.

1.3 Exploring Women's Participation in the Gig Economy

As transformation in the world of work reshapes the lives of workers, questions regarding livelihoods, access to employment, and related issues become pertinent in the global scenario. These concerns are especially significant for women, whose participation in the workforce has remained limited. However, gig and platform economy has opened up new avenues for women workers (ASSOCHAM, 2021). The flexible work arrangements in the gig economy provide ample opportunities for the representation of women in the labour force, ultimately facilitating their empowerment. Women often shoulder the burden of the housework, care responsibilities and other familial duties. They are often seen juggling between the unpaid housework and paid work professionally to strike a work-life balance. Here, gig and platform economy comes to the rescue as it provides freedom and flexibility to work according to their own will, pace and time (Kasliwal, 2020; ASSOCHAM, 2020; AMCHAM-Uber, 2024; The Asia Foundation, 2020). This distinctive feature of gig work attracts many people, especially women and the youth to join the sector and work independently. Nevertheless, studies suggest that the flexibility of gig work heavily depends on whether it is a primary or an additional source of income. Workers who rely on gig work as their primary source of income often experience less freedom compared to those who undertake it as supplementary activities (Kasliwal, 2020). Another strand of the literature suggest that digital labour has been becoming feminized as the global participation rate of women workers continues to rise (James, 2022; Morgana, 2025). In India, women constitute around 20 to 25 per cent of total gig workforce both as full



time and part time workers. However, their participation is still less as compared to their male counterpart (AMCHAM-Uber, 2024).

1.4 Understanding Gendered Challenges in Gig Economy

Flexibility and freedom are often regarded as the pivotal characteristics of the gig and platform economy making it more attractive and accessible to the workforce. However, several studies challenge the myth of ‘flexibility’ (Ghosh, 2021; Dewan & Sanyal, 2023). Some scholars argue that flexible nature of the work often blurs the boundaries between personal and professional life. Furthermore, it is also contended that freedom and flexibility exist only until a task is assigned; once the task is assigned, flexibility begins to diminish as the worker must meet the consumer’s expectations. In cases of denial or delays on part of the workers, they may face consequences ranging from being penalized to account suspension.

Despite the promise of freedom, flexibility and other peculiar characteristics, the precarity of these jobs remains undeniable. Gig and platform workers face several difficulties including job insecurity, absence of regular and stable source of income and a lack of access to social protections such as employment benefits, health insurance, paid leaves. Additionally, algorithmic controls put limit on their autonomy and freedom by subjecting them to the random evaluation of their performances. Unfavourable working conditions, coupled with prolonged and irregular working hours further exacerbate their hardship, taking a heavy toll on their physical and mental health (Daniels, 2024; Rani & Gobel, 2023). Moreover, inability to exercise collective bargaining remains a major challenge, weakening the negotiating power of these workers in demanding better wages, working conditions and social protection (ILO, 2023). When these vulnerabilities are examined through a gendered lens, precarity seems to increase manifold. Studies suggest that women generally join low-skill based as well as lower paying gig jobs. These jobs are often termed as ‘feminised’ tasks, including beauty work, household and personal services, etc. This occupational segregation often limits women’s career trajectory by creating a certain impression about how and where a woman gig worker fits in according to the given norms and gender narratives. Empirical studies also show that the burden of care work and domestic responsibilities often prevent women from fulfilling their commitments as quickly as their male counterparts. Women gig and platform workers face discrimination on multiple fronts including income disputes, wage differentials, workplace discrimination, and safety concerns etc. Studies further suggest that in long term, as a consequence of all these vulnerabilities, women could ultimately be pulled out of the workforce (Dewan & Sanyal, 2023).

Social protection and welfare of gig and platform workers have always been at the core of the discussion, as gig economy does not align with traditional employer-employee relationship that typically falls under the purview of the law. Literature suggests that the complicated ‘tripartite relationship’ among aggregators, workers and consumers creates complications in regulating gig economy (M G & M, 2022; Sharma, 2019). Additionally, the classification and categorization of gig workers bring another challenge at the legal and administrative front to



implement the policies. Policies and recommendations are discussed in details in subsequent sections.

Gig work, being one of the major elements of labour markets, especially in urban settings, has different facets depending on the given circumstances. Therefore, this study seeks to unravel the experiences and challenges of women gig workers through examining different aspects such as socio-economic conditions, working conditions and other related vulnerabilities. Over the past decade, gig and platform economy has been a subject of interest among academia. Particularly, after the COVID-19 pandemic and given its attractive trajectory of expansion, it has attracted significant attentions from the policy makers and other stakeholders. Numerous studies on gig and platform economy explores trends and implication of its growth, often emphasizing its economic benefits and potential. Sector-specific and platform-specific studies have highlighted the current situation and challenges of the gig economy, and several studies have also addressed different dimensions of women gig and platform workers. However, gender specific studies mapping the vulnerabilities and experiences of women platform and gig workers are scanty. There exists a lack of comprehensive data on women gig workers, their characteristics, working conditions and interaction across various industries. Much of the existing studies are dedicated to portraying the macro picture behind the dynamic gig economy through empirical methods. Furthermore, there is limited exploration of the intersectional analysis that considers the impact of different socio-economic factors such as gender, entry point inequalities, access to social security benefits, income stability, surveillance, algorithmic control within and across the gig economy. This study therefore proposes to fill these gaps by examining the experiences of the women gig and platform workers to develop a comprehensive understanding and foster evidence-based policy responses that empower women and enhance protection for gig and platform workers. The objectives of this research study, against this backdrop, are discussed in the following section.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

The research objectives of the study are

- i. Document the working conditions of women gig workers and examine their economic, health and social vulnerabilities while focusing on gender specific barriers to participate in gig work.
- ii. Analyse the impact of gig economy on women's empowerment, particularly regarding income generation and financial independence.
- iii. Examine recent laws and policies affecting gig workers in India including the labour codes and legislation with a focus on implications for women.
- iv. Suggest a policy framework within the existing structure to address the vulnerabilities, enhance welfare and safeguard the interest of women gig workers especially in the light of evolving labour codes.



1.6 Methodological Framework of the Study

A primary survey using snowball sampling method was conducted in Delhi, Gurugram and Noida between May, 2024 to September, 2024. The sample includes 355 women gig and platform workers spread across various sectors such as beauty work, domestic work, ride-hailing and food/grocery delivery. The survey aimed at capturing the engagement of women workers with the emerging gig and platform economy. Additionally, 200 traditional workers in domestic and beauty services have been surveyed to make a comparative analysis and gain insights into how gig work differs from traditional work, as well as the reluctance and barriers they face in transitioning to platform-based opportunities. Data was collected using structured and unstructured questionnaire covering work conditions, socio-economic profile, health, gender dynamics, safety and other vulnerabilities. The study also draws on secondary sources such as government reports, official websites, academic literature, and newspaper articles. Adopting a broadly empirical data design, it used mixed methods, i.e., both qualitative and quantitative techniques for analysis. A generalized ordered logistic regression model was used to identify the relationship of flexibility in gig and platform economy with different factors such as working per hour, working per week, health vulnerabilities, education, marital status etc. Model specification is discussed in a later section.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

There are certain limitations of the study that must be acknowledged. The sample is skewed towards women in beauty work with limited representation from other gig sectors. Incorporating experiences and challenges of women gig workers from different sectors would have given more space for generalisation of these findings and the inter-sectional analysis. This under-representation of women workers from other sectors restricts the cross-sector comparison and might not highlight sector specific issues and challenges. Moreover, the regression model has certain limitations which are addressed in detail in the later section. The subsequent section presents the insights from a primary survey to explore further the lives and conditions of women gig and platform workers.



Chapter II:

Ground Zero Analysis: Mapping Socio-Economic Conditions and Employment Profiles

2.1 Overview

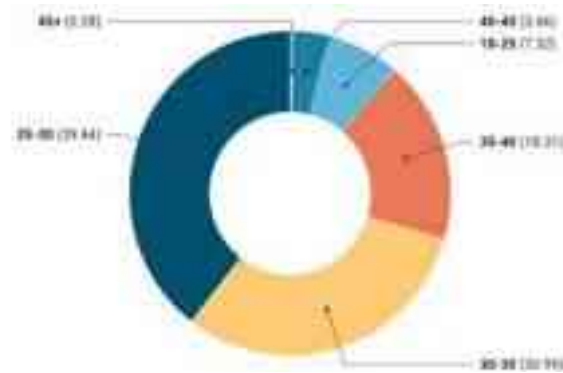
The advent of digital labour platforms has redefined the framework of employment in the 21st century. Amidst this transformation, the increasing presence of women workers marks a significant change but remain underrepresented in the gendered world of work. These women workers, often distinguished in public as a symbol of empowerment, flexibility and digital inclusion, experience a complex interplay of autonomy and precarity that warrants deeper empirical engagement. Here, survey-based primary data is analysed to provide a comprehensive view of the patterns and trends emerging from women’s responses, with a particular focus on their socio-economic conditions and employment characteristics. Furthermore, the analysis explores how various factors interact to shape this flexibility, which is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

2.2 Social and Demographic Profile of Workers

This survey result highlights demographic factors with a noteworthy share of demographic skewness toward youth age group between 25-35 years with around 70 per cent while barely 7.32 per cent of workers pertain to early youth age group between 18-25 years attribute to lack of digital literacy or societal restrictions on mobility and work participation. The relatively lower representation of workers above age 35 years suggests age-based entry barriers due to the digital skill gap, unstable income as older women may look for higher stability, excessive household and child care responsibilities in mid-age resulting in both physical and mental burnout, etc.

Since gig and platform work is grounded in flexibility, autonomy and temporary nature of work

Figure 2.1: Age Distribution of Women Gig and Platform Workers



Source: Survey Data

Figure 2.2: Age and Marital Status of Women Platform Workers

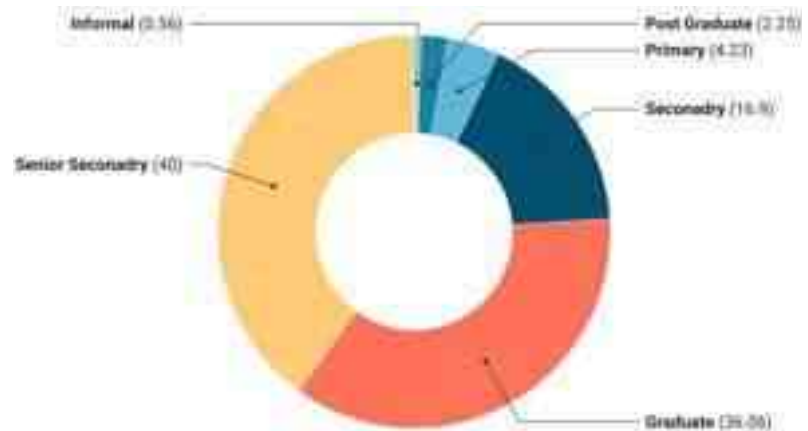


Note: 'Others' includes Divorced, Separated and Widowed



(Wood et al., 2019), it serves as an attractive option for majority of women seeking to manage work-life balance while being financially independent at the same time. As noted previously, the workforce is predominantly concentrated in the age bracket of 25–35 years, which indicates that this group is composed of married women 61.43 per cent (25–30 years) and 93.64

Figure 2.3: Educational Attainment Among Women Gig Workers



Source: Survey Data

per cent (30–35 years) signifying married women, especially those in mid years are leveraging platform work. The proportion of married women increases significantly as one moves up the age group indicating the trend that married women are considering gig work primarily as a source of secondary income and also as a space with flexible arrangement (Rani & Gobel, 2023; Kim, Pierce, Marquis, Robert Jr., & Alahmad, 2018). Certainly, around 70 per cent of early age women are unmarried showing a transitional use of gig work among them before marriage, possibly as a means of financial independence or while pursuing education. However, post-marriage, women increasingly enter or remain in gig work, reflecting the platform economy's role as a reserve or flexible livelihood choice in a patriarchal structure where conventional jobs remain inaccessible due to mobility or time constraints. These insights highlight the intersectionality of age, gender and marital status in shaping women's labour force participation in India's gig economy.

The educational distribution further deepens our understanding of the nature of women worker's existing in the gig labour market. A majority of them hold at least a senior secondary degree (40 per cent) or are graduate (36.06 per cent), suggesting their moderate level qualifications are predominantly existing in to the platform economy. This aligns with findings from Rani (2022) which emphasize, educated women desire to work as gig not out of lack of qualification, but due to the flexibility it offers in managing unpaid care responsibilities alongside paid work. However, despite being qualified, the women often face structural exclusion from formal employment due to factors like career discontinuity, domestic constraints or lack of suitable part-time roles, particularly after marriage, as earlier data suggest. Interestingly, albeit lower, the presence of informally educated (0.56 per cent) and primary educated women workers (4.23 per cent) highlights how platform work is enabling even those with limited educational backgrounds to achieve economic self-sufficiency This educational tilt reveals a paradox, while gig work enables educated women's labour force participation, it often remains low-paying and perilous, highlighting need for platform regulation, upskilling programs and portable social security system.



2.3 Residency and Asset Possession

Table 2.1 Socio-Economic Anchors: Residency and Asset Possession Among Women in Gig Work

| Variable | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Ownership of House by gig worker or her family members? | | |
| Yes | 129 | 13.8% |
| No | 766 | 81.8% |
| Ownership of personal vehicle? | | |
| Yes | 87 | 9.2% |
| No | 766 | 81.8% |
| Ownership of ration card? | | |
| Yes | 762 | 80.9% |
| No | 172 | 18.2% |
| Not answered | 7 | 0.8% |
| Working (months) from home based? (For those who say yes) | | |
| Yes | 104 | 11.0% |
| No | 76 | 8.0% |
| Whether Permanent resident of the city? | | |
| No | 276 | 29.2% |
| Yes | 606 | 64.5% |
| Years of Duration stay in the city? (For those who are not a permanent resident) | | |
| 0-4 | 133 | 14.0% |
| 5-10 | 176 | 18.6% |
| 10-14 | 49 | 5.2% |
| 15-20 | 76 | 8.0% |
| 20-24 | 8 | 0.8% |

Source: Survey Data

Moving towards analysing the socio-economic background of the women workers, the sample reveal their precarity that defines the realities of women gig workers in urban hubs. It highlights a systemic exclusion from asset ownership, insecure forms of urban residency and conditional access to welfare entitlements. These indicators further reflect deep-rooted gender inequalities that are increasingly manifesting in the platform economy. A critical

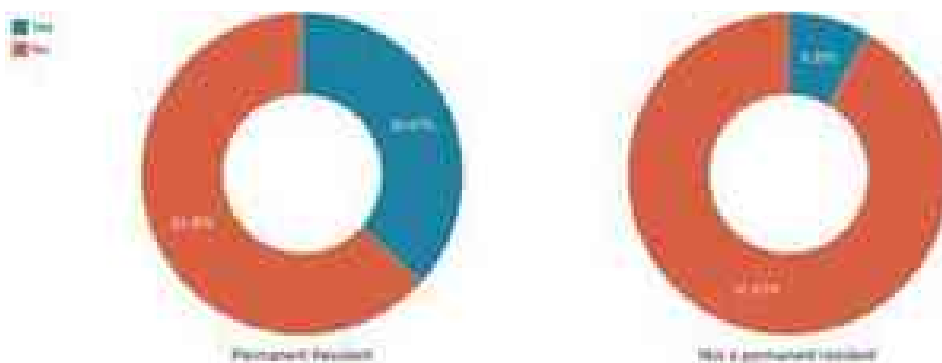


analysis of the data substantiated by contemporary research brings into focus the structural constraints within which women navigate the gig work.

Finding reflects that over 80 per cent of women gig workers do not own a house, either individually or in the name of family, pointing towards a broader marginalization in asset ownership. It aligns with the findings of Afridi, Bishnu & Mahajan (2024), which point out how deprivation of assets particularly in housing limits women's bargaining power in both the household and labour market. In urban area, this often implies dependence on short term rented accommodations or shared living spaces such as PGs or hostels, making women more susceptible to displacement, exploitation by landlords and lack of access to social protections. The absence of personal vehicle ownership among 75.5 per cent of respondents also calls for attention. In the platform economy, particularly in delivery-based roles, vehicle ownership significantly determines income potential and autonomy. It is undeniable that women's lower participation in delivery-based platform jobs is also partly due to lack of physical assets like two-wheelers, which remain disproportionately male-owned restricting not only the working choice but also reinforcing occupational segregation into feminized and underpaid services such as domestic work, beauty and wellness services.

Notably, over 68 per cent of workers hold ration cards and 84.3 per cent among them avail of associated benefits reflects that a high degree of economic vulnerability and reliance on public distribution systems still exist among women gig workers. Contrary to the perception of gig workers as independent entrepreneurs, this reflects their duality of informalization and welfare dependency. Hence, gig and platform work is clearly not acting as a path to upward mobility but as a temporary survival solution strategy, failing to ensure economic security. Furthermore, 60.8 per cent of women are not a permanent resident of the city, with the largest share (60.1 per cent) of this group having lived in the city for 5–10 years indicating a migratory trend associated with push factors such as rural distress, limited employment in native regions, economic vulnerability, marriage etc. limiting them from urban welfare schemes due to their temporary status exclude voter registration while leaving them in precarious housing and employment situations.

Figure 2.4: Housing Ownership and Residency Status among Women Gig Workers



Source: Survey Data



The rise of gig work in urban areas has increasingly attracted a large segment of women from migrant backgrounds. The platform economy, while offering opportunities for income generation, remains deeply grounded in spatial and social inequalities, especially for women who are not permanent residents of the cities in which they work. The data shows a prominent disparity in house ownership among urban men gig workers, based on their residence status, and presents critical insights into the structural precarity of migrant women workers. Among workers who are permanent residents, 36.67 per cent own houses, indicating access to intergenerational assets. In contrast, 91.67 per cent of non-permanent residents lack house in their own name, reflecting their migratory insecurity and exclusion from the affordability of houses. As previously mentioned, these workers often reside in temporary accommodations such as hostels or PGs, which limit their access to urban welfare. As UN Women (2024) notes, such precarious living conditions expand economic vulnerability and inhibit long-term urban integration. The data emphasises an urgent need for inclusive housing systems that reflect the realities of women’s participation in the gig.

Table (2.2) provides a holistic view, shedding light on the temporality, intensity and precarious nature of their work within the platform economy. A majority (over 86 per cent) have been working in gig and platform for 1 to 5 years, indicating their sustained engagement. This emphasises the continuous growth in women’s participation in gig work over the past five years, driven by flexible entry points, economic distress and rising digital penetration. In terms of work intensity, maximum workers (41.41 per cent) engage in work for an average of around 8–10 hours daily, with an additional 34 per cent working for 6–8 hours, indicating nearly full-time working schedule. This challenges the conventional narrative

Table 2.2: Nature of Work and Roles of Women Workers in the Platform Economy

| Characteristic | Percentage | Percentage |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Time duration of working in gig and platform work/years | | |
| 1-5 months | 14% | 14% |
| 6-10 months | 24% | 24% |
| 1-2 yrs | 32% | 32% |
| 3-4 yrs | 17% | 17% |
| 5-7 yrs | 13% | 13% |
| Working hours per day | | |
| 0-4 hrs | 5% | 5% |
| 5-6 hrs | 24% | 24% |
| 6-8 hrs | 34% | 34% |
| 8-10 hrs | 31% | 31% |
| 10-12 hrs | 6% | 6% |
| Working days per month | | |
| 0 | 4% | 4% |
| 1 | 24% | 24% |
| 2 | 27% | 27% |
| 3 | 45% | 45% |
| Worked 8-9 hrs for 7 and in least 20 days | | |
| Worked 8-9 hrs for 7 and in least 20 days | 34% | 34% |
| 1-3 days | 27% | 27% |
| 4-6 days | 31% | 31% |
| 7-9 days | 6% | 6% |
| 10-12 days | 2% | 2% |
| 13-15 days | 0% | 0% |

Source: Survey Data



of gig work as part-time or supplementary, particularly for women. As highlighted in the Digital Future Society (2022) report, women in platform work often experience a "double burden" balancing long work hours with unpaid domestic work, leading to time poverty and exhaustion. Moreover, 77 per cent of respondents work six days a week, with minimal of them working almost every day, pointing toward negligible rest periods and the absence of leave entitlements. Significantly, nearly 30 per cent of women reported working almost a week from 9 PM to 7 AM) in the past month. Though a higher proportion did not engage in work at night. Research from Ghosh (2023) has emphasised that women’s night work in gig economy often arises without protections such as transport support, panic buttons or grievance redressal mechanisms, exposing them to physical risks.

2.4 Employment Profile of Workers

Within patriarchal household structures and a gender-segmented labour market, women’s participation in gig work often reflects broader structural constraints, wherein economic engagement through platform work does not automatically translate into enhanced agency, decision-making power, or genuine financial empowerment within the household. The survey data (Figure 2.5) provides a significant lens through which to examine the intersection of gender, labour, and household economic structures within the platform economy in India

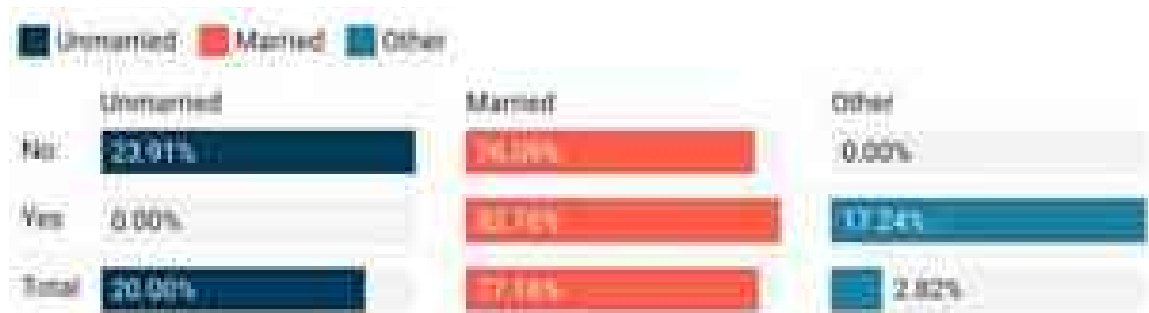
Figure 2.5: Proportion of Women as Sole Earners in the Family



Source: Survey Data

and exposes a lower proportion of women gig workers report themselves as sole earners in their families, while a substantial 83.65 per cent indicate their participation continues to be supplementary rather than central to household income, echoing patterns identified in the World Bank (2024), which emphasizes that despite rising female labour force participation in digital gig economies, women often remain secondary earners within patriarchal family structures. Further disaggregation by marital status (Figure 2.6) reinforces this narrative.

Figure 2.6: Sole Earning Patterns and Marital Status

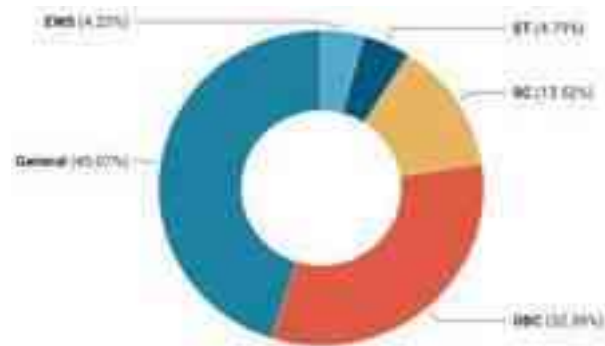


Source: Survey Data



Among those not identified as sole earners, 76 per cent are married, while 24 per cent are unmarried, strengthening existing literature that marriage often conditions women’s access to control over income. Interestingly, among those who are sole earners, 82.76 per cent are still married, which may reflect a growing, although limited shift in household dependency patterns, potentially driven by male job loss, migration, or to overcome the economic crisis due to the pandemic. A notable 17.24 per cent of sole earner women fall under 'Other' category (widowed, divorced, or separated), indicating the women who lack spousal support often shoulder complete economic responsibility, an observation supported by Holden and Smock (1991). The complete absence of unmarried sole earners may be indicative of continued economic dependence on families among young, unmarried women workers, which aligns with cultural constraints in India around women’s financial independence. The evidence calls for deeper policy engagement in terms of recognising unpaid care work, providing social security for sole women earners and ensuring institutional support such as maternity protection and household-level income recognition frameworks.

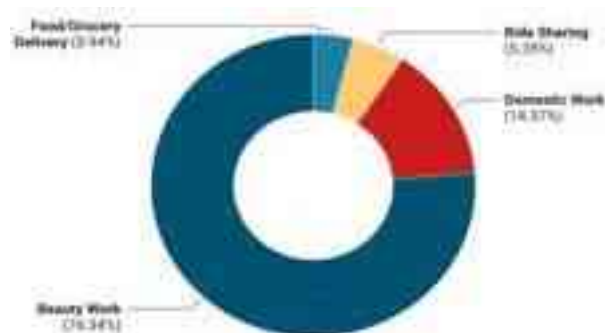
Figure 2.7: Social category of Women Gig Workers



Source: Survey Data

Despite the characteristics of autonomy & flexibility, a significant number of women workers in gig economy is from the general category, followed by other backwards castes, reflecting that social stratification continues to influence access and participation. In contrast, the under-representation of other social groups represents a persistent structural barrier, including limited access to resources and technology, patriarchal norms, socio-spatial segregation and intersecting caste and gender-based discrimination.

Figure 2.8: Women gig workers participation across different sectors



Source: Survey Data

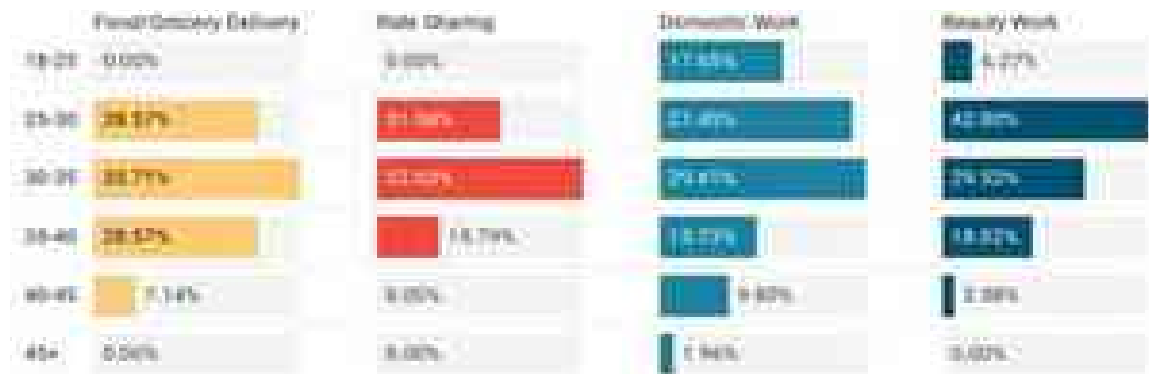
Moreover, the variation of women across sectors within the gig economy reveals a significant occupational concentration, with more than three fourth workers skewed toward beauty work, while only 14.37 per cent are employed in domestic work and less than 6 per cent in ride-sharing and food/grocery delivery services. A significant concentration of women in the beauty and wellness sector calls for a critical analysis, as it reflects the influence of various intersecting socio-cultural and economic factors shaping women's participation in the labour force in India. Firstly, beauty services are widely perceived as gender-conforming and socially acceptable forms of labour for women, particularly in urban India (Donner, 2023) which aligns



with gendered expectations of care-oriented roles. Secondly, beauty and wellness platforms such as Urban Company and Yes Madam actively employ women for beauty-related services, offering perceived safety, predictable scheduling and home-based service provision. These models provide a controlled work environment, which is critical for women facing mobility restrictions or domestic care obligations.

Women are more likely to take up platform work that is compatible with their unpaid care roles and social restrictions on public engagement. By contrast, low representation in sectors such as food/grocery delivery and ride-sharing can be attributed to safety concerns, lack of access to vehicles and male dominance in these jobs. Thus, their dominance in beauty and wellness work within the platform economy reflects not only a divergence of opportunity but also a digital persistence of prevailing occupational exclusion. Addressing this imbalance requires a wide systemic intervention including skills diversification, algorithmic neutrality, and gender sensitive safety actions to enable broader sectoral participation for women in the gig economy.

Figure 2.9: Age-Wise Participation of Women Workers across different sectors



Source: Survey Data

Notably, 30–35 years age group shows the highest participation across multiple sectors particularly among ride sharing and domestic work. However, the same cohort also maintains substantial participation in beauty work (29.52 per cent). Similarly, women aged 25–30 years demonstrate significant engagement in all work types except food/grocery delivery, where participation is slightly lower compared to the 30–35 years age group. This cohort leads in beauty work (42.80 per cent), possibly indicating the appeal of semi-skilled or informal jobs to younger women who might be at the early stages of their careers or educational transitions. The youngest age group (18–25) shows minimal engagement, with minimal participation in domestic and beauty work likely reflecting either continued education or limited access to such employment opportunities. While beauty and domestic work dominate, the nuanced age-wise distribution reveals varying motivations, barriers, and socio-economic contexts influencing women’s participation

In case of educational background of the respondents, the distribution reflects broader structural issues such as accessibility to education, skill applicability, digital literacy and socio-cultural constraints that affect women's labour choices in the gig sector. A notable trend emerges with



Figure 2.10: Women gig workers participation across different sectors by Education Level

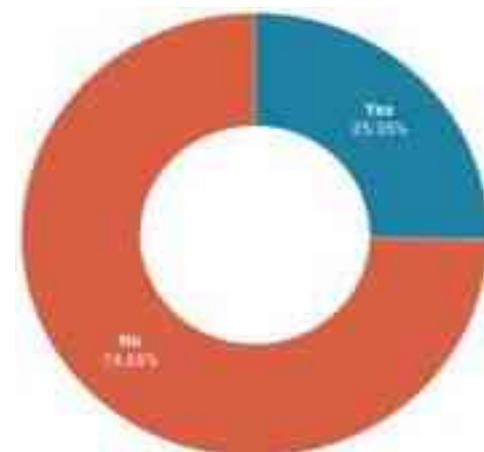


Source: Survey Data

the predominance of women possessing senior secondary and graduate-level education in most categories. In almost all the categories except beauty work, majority (57.14 per cent) of the women workers are from senior secondary background, followed by graduation degree indicating they are engaged in low entry barrier gig work, possibly due to the lack of formal employment opportunities, skill mismatches, or need for flexible work structures to manage domestic or economic responsibilities. The ILO’s 2021 report on the platform economy notes that many women resort to gig work as a last resort, rather than a preferred career path, due to structural unemployment and care-related constraints. Conversely, in case of beauty work, educational background of women workers is dominated by graduates followed by senior secondary degree holders. This sector possibly offers more flexibility, attracting women with higher educational background who seek control over their schedules or self-employed through platforms.

Moreover, women tend to prefer sectors with lower risk of harassment and controllable time commitments features which are often associated with beauty and wellness services. The absence of women with postgraduate qualifications (except a small fraction in ride sharing and beauty work) indicates, highly educated women either exit the labour market due to lack of suitable jobs or avoid gig work that doesn't match their qualifications.

Figure 2.11: Participation of Women Gig Workers Across Multiple Platforms



Source: Survey Data

2.5 Multi-platform Engagement of Women Gig Workers

While the male often engages in the multiple platforms to augment earnings (Dhanya MB, 2025), it is extremely difficult in case of women to be engaged on multiple platforms at the same time. Unlike their male counterparts, women are constrained by time poverty and safety concerns, limiting their engagement to a single platform that offers the most flexibility or least



risk. A critical issue emerging here is the increased cognitive and physical workload, leading to stress and burnout that hamper their work life balance. Another constraint is resource and cost associated with it as the limited access to high-quality devices may restrict simultaneous participation in the platform. These intersectant barriers not only limit their potential for income diversification but also reinforce reliance on a single platform, thereby diminishing their bargaining power, economic security and long-term career sustainability within gig economy.

A significant proportion of women (28.73 per cent) report having no dependent members, indicating that a considerable segment of this workforce may be unmarried, widowed, or separated. Many among this group are likely to have migrated for educational or employment purposes and are residing independently in hostels or paying guest accommodations which is the most common arrangement in urban hubs. In such contexts, familial obligations tend to be minimal, thereby enabling greater participation in gig work and presumably on multiple platforms. Notably, 21.41 per cent and 20.56 per cent of workers report having 2 and 1 dependent, respectively which reveals the increasing reliance on gig platforms by women balancing income generation with limited care-giving responsibilities, possibly indicative of nuclear family structures in urban areas. This trend reflects Kasliwals' (2023) report arguing that

women with minimal dependent often opt for the flexibility gig work offers over rigid formal employment structures. Further, 16.62 per cent have 3 and 11 per cent have 4 member dependent in the family, suggesting a non-negligible group of workers are primary breadwinners or contributing to large part of their family income in bigger families. Hence, the distribution underscores the urgent need for platform-specific welfare models, such as child care support, insurance and social protection recommendations echoed by International Labour Organization to ensure women's sustained engagement and well-being in gig economies.

Figure 2.12: Family Dependency Patterns of Women Platform Workers



Source: Survey Data

2.6 Work Profile of Workers

Building upon the earlier analysis of long working hours, the data on daily orders further highlights the intensification and flexibility of women within the platform economy. Contrary to the dominant narrative of gig work as a flexible or supplementary form of employment, the consistent volume of assignments suggests that for many women, gig work constitutes a primary and structured livelihood approach. A majority of women workers (72 per cent) report completing



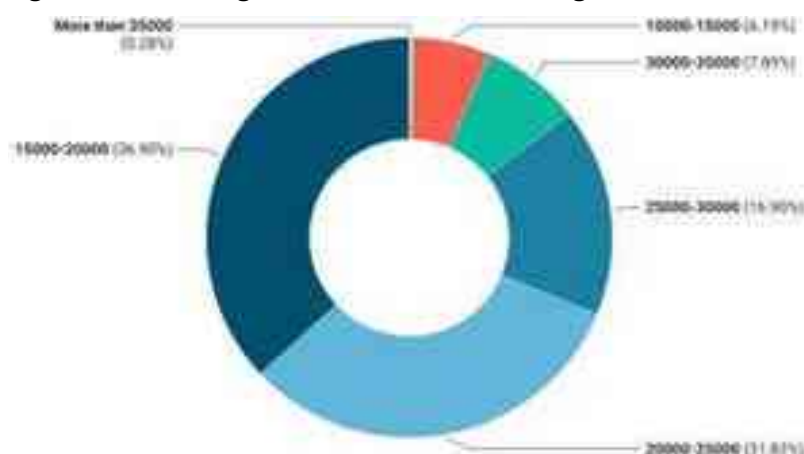
Table 2.3: Tracking the Daily Assignments of Women Gig Workers

| Orders and Assignments | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Average orders/bookings/assignment per day | | |
| 1-4 | 30 | 37.46% |
| 4-7 | 133 | 37.46% |
| 7-10 | 17 | 37.46% |
| 10-13 | 3 | 0.88% |
| 13-16 | 3 | 0.88% |
| Changes perceived in receiving orders | | |
| Yes, orders increased significantly | 208 | 73.24% |
| No changes observed | 47 | 16.29% |
| Yes, orders decreased significantly | 40 | 13.24% |
| Total size | 6 | 1.00% |

Source: Survey Data

between 4-10 assignments per day, with the highest proportion (37.46 per cent) falling within the 4–7 range, and 35 per cent within the 7–10 range. This concentration indicates not only steady platform engagement but also the quasi-formalization of gig work schedules, wherein the task frequency parallels almost the traditional way of employment. Notably, more than half of respondents perceive a significant increase in their orders, suggesting growing demand for platform services in urban area and possibly increased algorithmic allocation to highly rated gig workers. This aligns with post-pandemic digital acceleration which notes a rise in platform-mediated household services led by women. However, barely 13 per cent report a decline in orders, highlighting sometimes discriminatory nature of algorithmic distribution, a concern raised in Fairwork India’s evaluation of platform fairness.

Figure 2.13: Earning Distribution of Women Gig Workers



Source: Survey Data



A significant 37 per cent of women earn between 15,000-20,000, followed by 32 per cent and 17 per cent in the range of 20,000-25,000 and 25000-30000 respectively, indicating, more than 50 percent concentrated in Rs 20,000 to 35000 range, reflecting a significant contribution to household income. Moreover, platforms generally reward speed, availability, customer ratings and higher-ranking structure (such as Silver, Gold and Platinum level), which frequently put women into disadvantageous status who may have care-giving responsibilities or mobility restrictions that limit their algorithmic visibility and order volume. Only a small proportion, i.e., 8 per cent earn between 30,000 and 35,000, and an even smaller group make more than 35,000 income per month.

Figure 2.14: Difficulty in Mobility



Source: Survey Data

Further the data presented in the graph reflects a significant barrier experienced by women gig workers in the execution of their platform-based assignments. Over 60 per cent of workers report challenges in identifying the customer’s location, a factor that directly impacts their efficiency and earning potential which may not be merely an operational but structural concern, as it stems from a combination of factors such as inadequate digital infrastructure, low internet connectivity in certain geographical zones, ambiguous customer instructions, delays in GPS-based navigation systems etc. ILO report (2021) on digital labour platforms identifies that such technological frictions disproportionately affect gig workers, who often rely heavily on platform-based instructions for navigation due to limited access to personal mobility assets. For women workers, this not only leads to increased travel time and physical exhaustion but also exposes them to safety vulnerabilities, particularly when navigating unfamiliar areas or working during night hours.

Feminist urban theorist (such as Sylvia Chant) has long argued that mobility is not merely about movement, but is deeply shaped by social norms, spatial inequalities, and power hierarchies. For women gig workers, transportation is both a means of livelihood and a site of vulnerability, intersecting with issues of time poverty, safety, and financial stress. The data presented reflects this intersectionality. Over 54 per cent of workers agree or strongly agree that they rarely access their preferred mode of transport, indicating systemic inadequacies in public or affordable transport infrastructure. This further highlights the irregular transportation choices which often force women to either compromise on work hours or spend more time and money in transit. Financial implications are equally harsh as around 59 per cent of women report that the transportation costs hinder their ability to save, validating insights from Monroy (2016) which finds that transport expenses consume majority of earnings for informal workers. Moreover,



Table 2.4: Mobility Challenges Faced in Gig Economy: Degree of Concern

| Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral/Agree to Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|--------|---------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| In the last six weeks, I have rarely got my desired type of transportation. | 1.33% | 31.87% | 28.47% | 34.91% | 3.42% |
| The cost of transportation greatly impacts my ability to earn money. | 6.29% | 22.04% | 36.79% | 31.41% | 3.29% |
| In the last six weeks, I have experienced issues with finding the location of my client at least 3 times. | 1.47% | 31.87% | 34.62% | 27.29% | 10.75% |
| I do not get transportation easily to go home when I work at night (8 PM - 2 AM) | 18.86% | 16.61% | 41.25% | 22.81% | 10.45% |
| I feel unsafe in certain locations while commuting | 1.27% | 75.47% | 20.89% | 3.12% | 0% |

Source: Survey Data

55.49 per cent of women report frequent issues in locating clients, reinforcing the inadequacies of platform navigation systems or insufficient information provided by the customers, a challenge that reduces task efficiency and intensifies exposure to unfamiliar areas. Safety remains paramount, with over 78 per cent express that they feel unsafe in certain locations during commutes. The risks are worsened during night shifts, where around 22 per cent report difficulty finding transport. These concerns restrict not only mobility but also access to higher-paying time slots and contribute to reduction in flexibility, thereby reinforcing gendered earning gaps in platform work.

2.7 Occupational Health and Safety Concerns

While platform work is often known for its “flexibility,” scholars have emphasized that this flexibility is often illusive for women, who experience it not as freedom but as an expansion of their workday into precarious, poorly compensated and health compromising zones. In the absence of labour protections, flexible scheduling often renders into unpredictable hours, constant algorithmic monitoring which severely strain physical and mental well-being of women gig workers.

The data validates this concern, as a majority (88.45 per cent) of women gig workers report suffering from both physical and mental health issues which arise not merely from the demands of platform work itself but from the deepening burden of informal labour conditions, lack of social protection and household responsibilities. The prevalence of stress, anxiety and burnout is further worsening the situation as 54 per cent report experiencing these symptoms “sometimes,” and another 38.59 per cent as “rarely,” signifying that over majority of women gig workers live with persistent psychological strain. This is intensified by the performance linked incentive structures used by various platforms, as evidenced by the 51.83 per cent of women



Table 2.5: Occupational Health Concerns in the Gig Economy

| Concern | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Have faced any health-related issues due to work? | | |
| Physical Strain | 1 | 0.2% |
| Mental Health | 29 | 4.8% |
| Both | 17 | 2.7% |
| None | 17 | 2.7% |
| Experiencing stress, anxiety, or burnout due to platform work? | | |
| Never | 5 | 0.8% |
| Rarely | 117 | 18.8% |
| Sometimes | 192 | 30.8% |
| Often | 19 | 3.1% |
| Very frequently | 5 | 0.8% |
| Feel pressure to work long hours to meet deadlines and be eligible for incentives? | | |
| Never | 16 | 2.6% |
| Rarely | 112 | 18.2% |
| Sometimes | 34 | 5.5% |
| Often | 184 | 29.8% |
| Frequently | 115 | 18.7% |
| Vehicle ever involved in accident, resulting in damage to you or caused any physical injury? | | |
| No | 184 | 29.8% |
| Yes | 9 | 1.4% |
| Abile to fulfil nutritional needs while balancing work and fellow responsibilities? | | |
| Always | 10 | 1.6% |
| Frequently | 182 | 29.4% |
| Occasionally | 22 | 3.6% |
| Rarely | 110 | 17.8% |
| Never | 9 | 1.4% |

Source: Survey Data

who “often” feel stressed to work long hours to remain eligible for bonuses and maintain higher rating. Moreover, nutritional insecurity is a major concern. Less than 3 per cent of workers emphasized they always meet their nutritional needs, while around 37 per cent rarely do, as this highlighting the incompatibility of platform work with basic self-care which accounts for both time poverty and income insufficiency. Despite a low rate of reported accidents (2.54 per cent), this may be less indicative of safety and more reflective of women self-selecting lower risk roles due to gendered safety concerns.



Chapter III

Flexibility and Gendered Realities: Evidence from the Field

3.1 Overview

This chapter aims to capture the prevailing circumstances and lived experiences of women platform and gig workers, which goes beyond a macro narrative to uncover the micro-level facts. Based on primary data, it provides a comprehensive view of emerging patterns and trends, with a particular attention to how the flexibility offered by the sector serves as a pathway to their empowerment. In addition, it explores the interaction of various factors that significantly affect this flexibility.

Figure 3.1: Flexibility and Coping Mechanisms



Source: Survey Data

Flexibility is cited as the key advantage associated with gig work, particularly for women workers seeking autonomy over their schedules. However, the data presented reveals a more nuanced and critical reality from the ground. While 41 per cent of women workers (Figure 3.1) perceive platform work as offering sufficient flexibility to manage health-related challenges, a significant 59 per cent report that such flexibility falls short in addressing the physical and mental demands imposed by gig employment. This gap supports the argument that the notion of flexibility fails to translate meaningfully into the experiences of many women workers. The imaginary autonomy of gig work is frequently overshadowed by irregular working hours, intense burdens to maintain rating, incentive-linked targets etc., all of which diminish the potential health benefits of a flexible work model. Thus, while gig work appears flexible in theory, its real-world implementation often fails to maintain the health and well-being of women workers in precarious urban contexts.

3.2 Safety Measures and Institutional Support

The discourse around gig and platform work frequently frames it as flexible and technology-driven, accompanied by claims of safety innovations such as emergency buttons, live tracking, grievance redressal features etc. However, several research have critically questioned these claims, asserting that such measures are either symbolic, inconsistently implemented, or technologically inadequate, particularly for women workers who face sensitive risks of gender-based violence and unsafe working conditions. In similar way, the collected data explicitly highlights this systemic failure in ensuring workplace safety. Less than 20 per cent

**Table 3.1: Safety Measures and Institutional Support for Women Gig Workers**

| Variables | Frequency | Percent |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Does the platform have any safety measures or protocols in place for workers, for instance, providing an emergency/panic button that provides speedy remedy and informs the appropriate authorities in case of emergencies? | | |
| Yes | 66 | 18.8% |
| No | 279 | 77.8% |
| Don't know | 17 | 4.9% |
| Do you receive any safety information from the platform related to work? | | |
| Yes | 128 | 34.8% |
| No | 220 | 60.7% |
| Don't know | 11 | 3.0% |
| Does your platform provide you any training regarding the suggested course of action in cases of gender-based violence? | | |
| Yes | 89 | 13.8% |
| No | 184 | 50.9% |
| Do not know | 122 | 34.3% |
| Do you feel inclusion of gig work under the ambit of POSH Act would make it a more safe and secure avenue of work? | | |
| Yes | 304 | 94.08% |
| No | 11 | 3.1% |
| Do not know | 15 | 4.2% |

Source: Survey Data

of women reported that their platform has emergency safety measures such as panic buttons or responsive protocols. While a higher proportion 77 per cent reported the absence of such provisions which is particularly troubling providing many women engage in location-based, customer-facing tasks. Additionally, the lack of safety information system is prominent as 62 per cent of workers informed of never receiving any safety-related communication from their platform. This points to a critical gap in leaving workers unaware of protocols or rights.

Even more concerning is the insufficiently 13.8 per cent of workers reported of receiving training on handling gender-based violence, reflecting a lack of institutional sensitivity and vulnerability. The near-unanimous support for the inclusion of gig work under the POSH Act (94.08 per cent) highlights the urgent need for legal safeguards and formal recognition of women in digital labour environments as authentic workplaces. Similar kind of demands raised by various civil society organizations and labour rights collectives advocating for the extension of occupational safety laws to the gig sectors.

Building upon the previous analysis of institutional safety lapses within platform economies, the present chart highlights the perceptions of women gig workers regarding their own safety, further illuminating the disconnect between platform narratives and on-ground realities.



Table 3.2: Workplace Safety Challenges in Gig Economy: Degree of Concern

| Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| Feel uncomfortable accepting assignments outside of my working hours. | 11% | 21% | 22% | 24% | 20% |
| Feel unsafe while working on the platform late at night. | 1% | 12% | 21% | 24% | 42% |
| Feel unsafe while working on the platform in areas which are isolated. | 1% | 12% | 21% | 24% | 42% |
| Feel that the company should be responsible for my safety. | 21% | 21% | 21% | 21% | 14% |

Source: Survey Data

Despite the gig economy's framing as an enabler of flexible, empowering work, women workers overwhelmingly report a heightened sense of insecurity tied to spatial and temporal dimensions of their assignments.

As evident 45 per cent of respondents either agree or strongly agree of feeling uncomfortable accepting assignments outside of their designated working hours. This reluctance is not simply a matter of preference but reflects deeper sense of risk shaped by the uncertain work environments, lack of support systems, and the absence of employer accountability in extended hours. Such concerns are overstated during night hours as more than 76 per cent of women workers report of feeling unsafe working at night. Spatial vulnerability is another dominant factor. Closely 65 per cent of women express restlessness when work is allotted to isolated areas, highlighting gender-based geography of gig and platform work. These responses again line up with the Chant S. research (2013) safe public spaces initiative, which identifies the lack of intra urban mobility and poor lighting as key deterrents to women's safe mobility in urban region. Finally, the data reveals a robust demand for corporate accountability, over 78 per cent believe that platform companies should be directly responsible for their safety while gradually challenges the common industry practice of calling workers "independent contractors" to avoid accountability. The outcomes support global calls for legislative reform that recognize gig workers under formal labour protections, particularly in relation to safety rights and grievance redressal, thereby encouraging a more secure work environment for women.

3.3 Work-Life Balance in the Gig Economy: Flexibility and Gendered Realities

Work-life balance within gig and platform economy has emerged as essential but so far, a challenging dialogue. While it frequently positions flexibility as a crucial feature that enables workers to harmonize personal and professional roles (Wood et al., 2019), the actual degree of autonomy and balance often varies by socioeconomic status, gender,

**Table 3.3: Visualising Work-Life Balance in the Gig Economy**

| Variables | Frequency | percent |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Availability of sufficient flexibility in work schedule to manage personal, family, and social responsibilities. | | |
| Almost always | 23 | 6.3% |
| To a considerable degree | 248 | 67.95% |
| Occasionally | 17 | 20.82% |
| Seldom | 8 | 2.19% |

Source: Survey Data

and platform policies. For women, who bear an unequal burden of domestic work and unpaid care, the idea of flexibility appears more false than empowering. The sample data presented validates this complexity. While a sizable 67.95 per cent of women report having “considerable” flexibility in managing social and personal responsibilities, very few of them reported of experiencing such flexibility “almost always.” Almost a quarter of women workers report that flexibility exists only occasionally or seldom suggesting that while the platforms may afford some autonomy such as choosing working hours, this flexibility is often restricted by algorithmic control, incentive structures or the necessity to remain constantly available to accept tasks.

Based on earlier breakdown of perceived flexibility and work-life integration in digital labour markets, table 3.4 expands the understanding of how women gig workers rationalize their participation within the gig and platform economy. Despite earlier indicators that questioned the depth and consistency of flexibility, the present table reflects a predominant narrative of optimism. It provides insights on the workers’ perception about the opportunity, flexibility, wage and working condition and maintaining work-life balance. Income remains one of the determinants that drives the participation of women in gig and platform economy. It is often perceived as a source of financial autonomy, particularly for women who may not have access to formal labour markets due numerous barriers. Evidently, over 75 per cent of workers favoured that gig work offers a secure future through better remuneration. This optimism likely stems from the platform economy’s low entry barriers, relative autonomy, and immediate earning, which remain attractive for most women navigating socio-economic constraints. However, this comes with the lack of employment benefits, social protection, and income consistency. On the issue of gender parity, around 44 per cent of workers agreed to have both wage and working conditions are uniform between men and women on digital platforms, and a bit larger proportion (47.04 per cent) expressed neutrality suggesting limited awareness or internalization of platform-induced inequalities.



Table 3.4: Decoding Women Gig Workers’ Perspective on Work-Life Balance

| Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Return (and gig work) provides positive future by offering opportunities for more and better work assignments. | 63 | 33 | 3 | 1 |
| Continuing to adapt and working conditions (remote work and a variety of digital-based platforms). | 65 | 30 | 3 | 2 |
| Increased returns (and pay) and job significance (when compared to the past) have led to better work-life balance (wLB). | 63 | 33 | 3 | 1 |
| Ability to choose work near residence through digital-based platform, facilitating work-life balance management of work and household responsibilities. | 65 | 30 | 3 | 2 |
| Flexibility of the job offers (location) on digital-based platforms, as supportive of flexible work-life balance. | 65 | 30 | 3 | 2 |

Source: Survey Data

Furthermore, 63 per cent agree that returns from gig work are high relative to the time, skill, and capital invested, emphasizing the perceived efficiency and immediate generation of income. Though, this perception is challenged by the highly competitive, algorithm-controlled nature of digital platforms that often compromise constancy of earnings. Encouragingly, around 65 per cent of women workers believe to choose work in their nearby residence,



enabling them to adjust their household obligations, still this flexibility is often mitigated by non-transparent incentive structures, with 48.17 per cent agreeing they are supportive, while closely an equal proportion (46.76 per cent) remain uncertain. The data thus captures a balanced approach, while women workers recognized the economic potential of gig and platform work, the structural support necessitates for genuine and sustained economic empowerment such as gender equity, safety, predictable income and algorithmic transparency remains only partially realized.

3.4 Interactions and Experience with Customers

The entire architecture of gig and platform work is reinforced by algorithmic control that monitor and allocate tasks based on performance of metrics such as customer ratings, order completion history, and frequency of engagement. Within this context, customer interactions become a decisive factor due to which the workers’ rating, frequency of orders and income are settled. Women gig workers operate in an environment where even minor dissatisfaction from clients can result in severe consequences, including receiving lower orders, downgrade of ratings, and account deactivation. This imbalance of power influences the behaviour of workers, compelling them to perform as emotional labour (such as staying calm and polite even in harsh condition because their rating and income depend upon it) that remains largely unrecognized as a formal aspect of platform-based gig work. The table reflects this dynamic, with a staggering 88.45 per cent of women reporting varying levels of fear, ranging from “always” to “occasionally”, concerning severe actions during customer interactions. This suggests environment of frequent surveillance and increased anxiety. Rather than sincerely ensuring service quality,

Table 3.5: Customer Interactions and Experiences of Women Gig Workers

| Variables | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Fear or concern regarding penalties, rating downgrades, or account deactivation during client interactions. | | |
| Always | 46 | 42.9% |
| Often | 158 | 46.76% |
| Occasionally | 17 | 5.29% |
| Rarely | 39 | 11.94% |
| Never | 2 | 0.59% |
| Effectiveness of the platform's support helpline in resolving issues or addressing concerns related to customer behaviour. | | |
| Very Effective | 16 | 4.76% |
| Somewhat effective | 217 | 63.71% |
| Not very effective | 120 | 35.53% |
| Other | 2 | 0.59% |

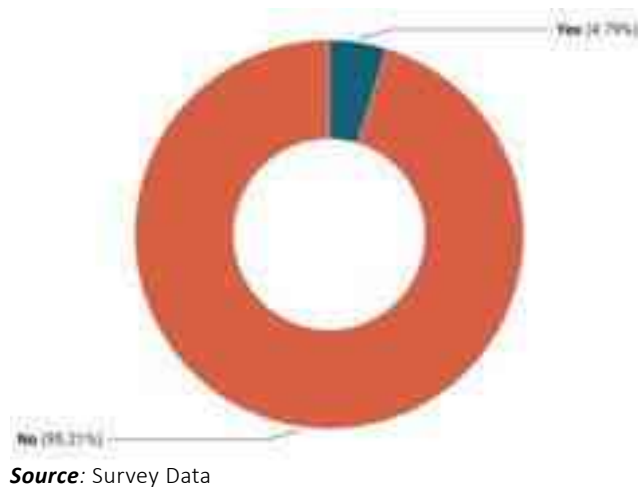
Source: Survey Data



these mechanisms often function as tools of algorithmic pressure, compelling workers to obey. Furthermore, barely few women consider the grievance mechanisms as “very effective,” with a substantial 33.8 per cent categorizing it as “not very effective.” These figures suggest an obvious disconnect between platform policies and workers' lived experiences. A recent summit of CDDP (2024) highlighted that without meaningful redressal infrastructure, such algorithm driven systems will continue to strengthen the precarity and augment the mistrust among the workers. Thus, customer interaction is structurally tied to broader concerns of job security, dignity, and fairness within the gig ecosystem.

As previous analysis shows that the shortfall in safety feature cause anxiety among the women gig workers, particularly the lack of structured safety measure and gender-sensitive protocols, the present data offers a slightly paradoxical insight. Despite systemic exposures in platform infrastructure, a substantial 95.21 per cent of women gig workers informed not having faced customer interactions that made them feel uncomfortable. However, such figures are likely to be underreported, particularly in contexts where the interviewer is male, as women may feel hesitant to reveal experiences of her distress or harassment. Underreporting of workplace harassment is a well-documented phenomenon, often driven by fear of retaliation, social stigma, or lack of trust in institutional redress mechanisms (Sarkar, 2017).

Figure 3.2: Customer-Induced Discomfort by Women in the Gig Economy



3.5 Digital Preparedness and Skill Development

Skill development is a critical pillar for sustainable development of the gig economy, as the sector continues to expand rapidly through digital platforms. In this context, the digital transition is expected to play a transformative role in enabling women workers to access an upskilling path and navigate evolving technological demands. The sample data, however, reveals a more tempered reality, while 51.55 per cent of women workers believe the digital shift has ‘somewhat’ improved upskilling opportunities, 7.61 per cent believe that it has done so ‘to a great extent’. A significant 38.31 per cent feel the impact has been ‘very little’, with negligible reporting no impact at all indicating a gap between the promise and the accessibility of skilling pathways in platform-based employment. Notably, 65.35 per cent of workers stated to pursue education or skill development alongside gig work, which reflects large proportion of women in urban hub is trying to diversify their skill to enhance financial independence through the flexibility offered by gig arrangements. However, this flexibility

**Table 3.6: Digital Readiness and Skill Development in the Gig Economy**

| Variables | Frequency | percent |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Impact of digital transition on opportunities for upskilling | | |
| To a great extent | 27 | 24.79% |
| Somewhat | 180 | 57.18% |
| Very Little | 17 | 15.23% |
| Not at all | 9 | 8.82% |
| Ability to pursue education or skill development concurrently with gig work | | |
| No | 103 | 30.98% |
| Yes | 232 | 73.98% |

Source: Survey Data

may not always translate into physical educational improvement, especially when coupled with long working hours and domestic pressure, as highlighted in earlier findings.

3.6 Algorithmic Control and the Gig Work

In platform-based gig work, algorithmic management has emerged as a key approach to oversee the workforce. Within this paradigm, penalties for non-acceptance of orders and strict rating-based evaluation mechanisms operate as implicit tools of discipline and behavioral compliance, as also highlighted by researchers (Duggan et al., 2018 and Wood et al. 2019). These structures often substitute conventional human supervision with non-transparent barometers and automated performance thresholds that significantly influence workers' access to future tasks and income stability. For women gig workers, this means strictly adjusting working hours, tolerating problematic client behavior, or overextending availability, not out of choice, but from algorithm-induced fear. The table thus reflects how gig platforms operationalize power invisibly, shifting managerial control onto workers' shoulders while absolving themselves of direct accountability. While less than 10 per cent of women workers reported explicit penalties for declining assigned orders, the more critical insight emerges from the requirement to maintain high ratings and lead acceptance, where 24.79 per cent stated this occurs to a great extent and 57.18 per cent accepted it somewhat. This reveals an understated but universal algorithmic pressure, wherein refusal to accept leads can result in limited future work, outcomes functionally equivalent to punishment. The fact that 30.98 per cent are unaware of the platform's penalty policy which further specifies a lack of transparency in the platform's functioning. Eventually, this form of domination weakens the perceived autonomy of women gig



Table 3.7: Algorithmic Management in Gig Work: Platform, Penalty and Ratings

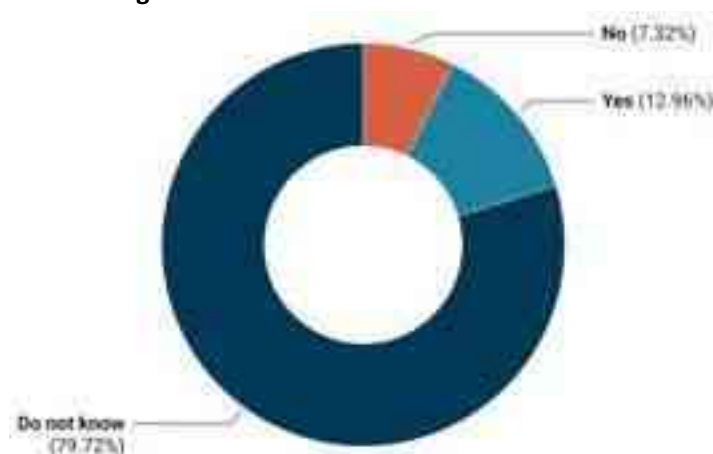
| Variables | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Penalty imposed by the platform for not accepting all assigned tasks | | |
| Yes | 32 | 12.1% |
| No | 213 | 77.9% |
| Do not know | 17 | 6.2% |
| Requirement by the platform to maintain a minimum threshold of high ratings and lead acceptance. | | |
| To a great extent | 88 | 32.3% |
| Somewhat | 208 | 77.1% |
| Very little | 63 | 23.2% |
| Not at all | 1 | 0.4% |

Source: Survey Data

work and put them in a precarious loop of behavioural assent controlled by platform algorithms.

Figure 3.3: Understanding of Rating Evaluation among Women Gig Workers

Moreover, around 80 per cent of women have no idea whether ratings have any role to play in how algorithm of platforms assign their tasks and wage assigned to it. On the other hand, a minimal percentage of them (13 per cent) feel that the ratings significantly impact the algorithm in deciding their work structure. It aligns with the existing literature that there exists a non-transparency in the working of algorithms and factors influencing it. Moreover, the algorithmic rules might change anytime without coming into the knowledge of the workers, consequently leading to uncertainty on how their actions affects the ratings and review.



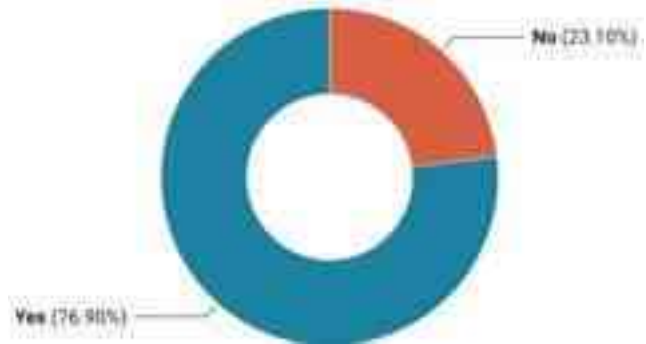
Source: Survey Data

3.7 Freedom and Flexibility: Myth or Reality?

Despite numerous structural and functional challenges faced by women gig workers, as above-mentioned, including income insecurity, algorithmic control, safety issues etc., a

majority (77 per cent) of them recognize gig and platform work as more convenient in the long term compared to traditional employment. This preference by women workers can be review within the flexibility that platform-based gig work offers, particularly in terms of scheduling and mobility, which position well with their dual responsibilities of economic and domestic work. Research by Glowacka (2020) reports that time flexibility and autonomy often compensate for the lack of job security, particularly among urban semi-skilled women. Moreover, the NITI Aayog report also notes that women are increasingly engaging in gig work to manage their domestic obligations with income generating opportunities. Consequently, despite instability, platform work presents a relatively better alternative for women workers striving to balance domestic and livelihood demands.

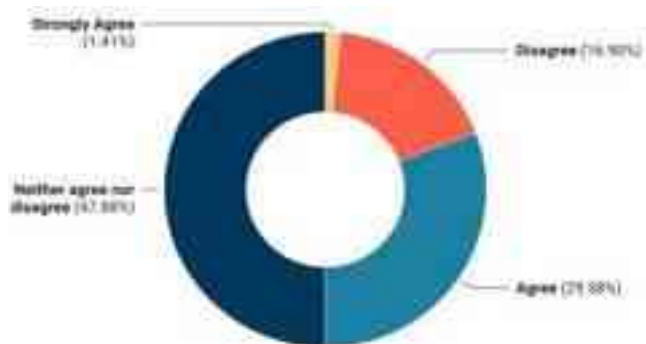
Figure 3.4: Convenience Factors Driving Women's Participation in Gig Work



Source: Survey Data

While a considerable share of workers find platform-based employment convenient, only a relatively smaller proportion (30 per cent) express a desire to remain involved in gig work over the long run. In contrast, over 21 per cent of them regard it as a transitional or stopgap arrangement rather than a sustainable or permanent livelihood option. This reluctance is primarily attributed to the intrinsic instability of the sector, where job continuity is frequently weakened by algorithm-driven mechanisms such as customer ratings and reviews. The persistent fear of receiving low ratings or negative feedback can result in the deactivation of their accounts, which is beyond their control. Such insecure conditions discourage long-term association with the gig economy. However, it is interesting to note that around 48 per cent of women workers are satisfied with their current job and do not want to think about the future prospects.

Figure 3.5: Future Aspirations: Will Women Continue in Gig Work?



Source: Survey Data

The empowerment of women in India's gig economy is a focus of growing academic and policy interest, mainly considering the escalation of digital labour platforms. Drawing insights from literature such as Ghosh (2023), it becomes evident that while gig work

opens up opportunities for women's participation in the labour force, empowerment remains multidimensional, including their socio-economic environments.



Table 3.8: Dimensions of Empowerment Among Women in the Gig Economy

| Statement | Agree | Disagree |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|----------|
| Dimension 1: Economic Empowerment (Access to resources and opportunities) | | |
| The government should provide more financial support to women in the gig economy. | 100 | 0 |
| Women should be encouraged to start their own businesses. | 100 | 0 |
| Women should be encouraged to work for multiple clients. | 100 | 0 |
| Women should be encouraged to work in different sectors. | 100 | 0 |
| Most of all | 100 | 0 |
| Dimension 2: Social Empowerment (Access to social networks and support) | | |
| Women should be encouraged to join online communities. | 100 | 0 |
| Women should be encouraged to share their experiences with others. | 100 | 0 |
| Women should be encouraged to seek help from family members. | 100 | 0 |
| Most of all | 100 | 0 |
| Dimension 3: Personal Empowerment (Access to skills and training) | | |
| Women should be encouraged to learn new skills. | 100 | 0 |
| Women should be encouraged to attend training programs. | 100 | 0 |
| Women should be encouraged to work for themselves. | 100 | 0 |
| Women should be encouraged to work in different sectors. | 100 | 0 |
| Most of all | 100 | 0 |
| Dimension 4: Political Empowerment (Access to decision-making and representation) | | |
| Women should be encouraged to participate in decision-making. | 100 | 0 |
| Women should be encouraged to represent their interests. | 100 | 0 |
| Women should be encouraged to work for themselves. | 100 | 0 |
| Women should be encouraged to work in different sectors. | 100 | 0 |
| Most of all | 100 | 0 |
| Dimension 5: Psychological Empowerment (Access to confidence and self-efficacy) | | |
| Women should be encouraged to believe in their abilities. | 100 | 0 |
| Women should be encouraged to set goals for themselves. | 100 | 0 |
| Women should be encouraged to work for themselves. | 100 | 0 |
| Women should be encouraged to work in different sectors. | 100 | 0 |
| Most of all | 100 | 0 |

Source: Survey Data



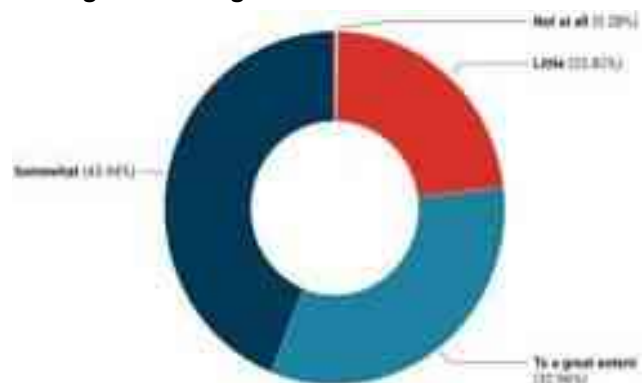
Financial empowerment is one of the most noticeable outcomes of platform employment, as reflected in the table. Around 93 per cent of women workers perceive some degree of financial improvement, with 32.11 per cent stating “much” while nominal indicating “to a great extent.” This aligns with ILO (2025) insights that gig and platform work provides income flexibility and enhances financial freedom, particularly for women without prior access to formal employment. Control over entry into gig remains almost evenly split between autonomous and family-influenced decisions. While 49.01 per cent of women claim sole agency, almost the same proportion (48.73 per cent) report shared decision-making with their family. The family influence remains a significant determinant of women’s entry even into non-traditional employment forms, particularly in conservative urban and peri-urban households (James, 2023). Regarding skill development, majority (86 per cent) of workers found gig work as worthwhile in upgrading their overall skillsets. This includes digital literacy, time management, and communication skills. However, autonomy in accepting or rejecting work is relatively constrained, as nominal of them (9.01 per cent) informed full freedom, while half of the workers felt only “somewhat” or “little” autonomy. According to Ghosh (2023), this stems from algorithmic pressures, risk of penalty, performance-linked incentives and particularly ID suspension that reduce actual freedom in decision-making. Finally, decision-making power within the household and community appears to have improved for 80.85 per cent of the workers, with 22.82 per cent experiencing “to a great extent.” Hunt and Samman (2019) reports that even small contributions to household income can restructure the gender roles, giving women a stronger voice in family and community affairs, although within limits set by existing social standards.

Building on the previous analysis, figure 3.6 further offers deeper insight into the significance of freedom and flexibility as essential components of that empowerment. 32.96 per cent workers feels that flexibility is actually present in the platform-based gig work while 43.94 per cent experienced relatively lower level of flexibility due to platform control over income and pressure of maintaining higher rating to receive more bookings in future. Nearly one-fourth of women experience little flexibility reflecting the persistent structural and socio-cultural constraints. For several women, participation in gig is driven mainly by economic necessity with survival needs offsetting considerations of schedule control, personal convenience or work life balance.

3.8 Union Dynamics in the Women Gig Workforce

Labour unionization in the gig and platform economy in India is emerging at fast pace and has gradually become a critical area of involvement, particularly

Figure 3.6: Perceptions of Freedom and Flexibility Among Women Gig Workers



Source: Survey Data



in light of the fragmented and precarious nature of platform-based employment. Traditional mechanisms of collective bargaining are often absent or ineffective in digital labour environments, leaving workers, particularly women, vulnerable to algorithmic control, exploitation and a lack of dispute resolution mechanisms. However, emerging grassroots unions such as the Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers (IFAT), GigWA, AIGWU, TGPWU etc. have begun to fill this gap, aiming to organize platform workers and assert their rights. The data reflects a significant divide between the need for collective representation and actual awareness and engagement among women gig workers. Less than one third (29.86 per cent) are aware of any trade unions that organize women gig workers for collective bargaining, and a mere 6.2 per cent are associated with any union. This low participation highlights lack of formal employer-employee relations, ambiguous legal frameworks and active resistance from platforms, all of which hinder the entry and

Table 3.9: Workers’ Rights and Representation: Union Dynamics in the Women Gig Workforce

| Variables | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Awareness of trade unions that organize women gig workers for collective bargaining with various stakeholders to assert and protect workers’ rights. | | |
| Yes | 106 | 29.86% |
| No | 249 | 70.14% |
| Association with any labour/trade unions? | | |
| Yes | 22 | 6.2% |
| No | 333 | 93.8% |
| Perception on whether regular negotiations among various stakeholders can effectively address the prevailing issues faced by women gig workers. | | |
| Strongly Agree | 12 | 3.38% |
| Agree | 158 | 44.52% |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 179 | 50.14% |
| Disagree | 6 | 1.69% |
| Assistance sought from labour or trade unions for resolving disputes with the platform. | | |
| Yes | 9 | 2.54% |
| No | 346 | 97.46% |

Source: Survey Data



operation of unions within the gig economy (Johnston & Chris, 2019). Notably, 44.51 per cent agree that regular negotiation among stakeholders help resolve issues faced by women gig workers while almost half remain neutral, indicating potential sincerity to institutional mechanisms for redressal if made accessible and inclusive. However, an overwhelming 97.46 per cent have never got any assistance from labour or trade unions in resolving any disputes faced, suggesting a lack of institutional faith as well as a deficit of outreach by existing worker organizations. The data emphasizes a persistent need for awareness campaigns, inclusive union strategies, and state-facilitated dialogue platforms to bridge the existing gaps. Strengthening collective voice through hybrid models of unionization is not only essential for worker empowerment but also crucial for embedding justice and equity in India's rapidly expanding gig and platform economy.

3.9 Model Specification

Based on the primary survey data, the study seeks to explore how flexibility in the gig economy is influenced by different factors such as marital status, years of working in gig economy, pressure of work, etc. To determine this relationship, Generalized Ordered Logistics Regression (GOLOGIT) will be used.

The model can be formulated as

From the above, it can be determined that the probabilities that Y will take on each of the values 1, ...,M are equal to

$$P(Y_i > j) = g(X\beta_j) = \frac{\{\exp(\alpha_j + X_i\beta_j)\}}{1 + \{\exp(\alpha_j + X_i\beta_j)\}}, j = 1, 2, \dots, M - 1$$

where M is the category of the dependent variable

The model specified above represents a Generalized Ordered Logistics Regression Model, commonly used for ordinal dependent variables with M ordered categories. It estimates

$$P(Y_i = 1) = 1 - g(X_i\beta_j)$$

$$P(Y_i = j) = g(X_i\beta_{j-1}) - g(X_i\beta_j), j = 2, \dots, M - 1$$

$$P(Y_i = M) = g(X_i\beta_{M-1})$$

the cumulative probability that the response variable Y_i exceeds a certain category j , expressed as $P(Y_i = M) = g(X_i\beta_{M-1})$, where g denotes the logistic function. The model incorporates category-specific intercepts α_j and a vector of covariates X_i with corresponding coefficients β_j . From these cumulative probabilities, the probability of each specific outcome category is derived as follows: the probability of the lowest category is $P(Y_i=1)=1-g(X_i \beta_j)$.



The probability of an intermediate category j is $P(Y_i=j)=g(X_i \beta_{(j-1)})-g(X_i \beta_j)$, $j=2, \dots, M-1$. And the probability of the highest category is $P(Y_j=M)=g(X_i \beta_{(M-1)})$. This formulation allows for the modelling of ordinal outcomes while accounting for the ordered nature of the dependent variable (Williams, 2006).

Figure 3.7 Factors Considered for Freedom and Flexibility through Generalized Logit Regression Model (GOLOGIT) Framework



Constraints and Limitations

This model interprets flexibility as the ability to work at one's own will, pace, and chosen time, an important aspect for women balancing paid work with responsibilities like housework and caregiving. While income was initially considered as an independent variable, it yielded statistically insignificant results. Therefore, it was excluded from the final model. The focus remains on understanding how flexible work arrangements align with women's time management needs within the gig economy. A description of all the variables is summarized in the following table.

Table 3.10: Summary of Variables Used in the Model

| S. No. | Variable | Description | Categories |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Dependent Variable | | | |
| 1. | Freedom | Depicts flexibility and freedom offered by gig economy | 1- Very little 2- Somewhat 3- To a great extent |
| Independent Variable | | | |
| 2. | Marital Status (<i>mar_s</i>) | Shows marital status | 1- Unmarried 2- Married 3- Separated/Divorce/Widow |



| S. No. | Variable | Description | Categories |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3. | How long have you been working in the gig economy? <i>(time_working_gig)</i> | Depicts the number of years since a person has been working as a platform worker | 1- <1 yr 2- 1-2 yrs 3- 2-3 yrs 4- 3-5 yrs |
| 4. | Do you find gig work to be more convenient for you than other work? <i>(gig_convenient_than_other_work)</i> | Shows whether gig work is convenient or not | 0- No 1- Yes |
| 5. | Do you feel pressure to work long hours to meet deadlines and be eligible for incentives? <i>(feel_pressure_to_work_long_hours)</i> | Portrays the pressure of work in gig economy | 1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Frequently |
| 6. | Do you feel more financially empowered on account of participating in gig work? <i>(feel_more_financially_empowered)</i> | Independent variable, depicts whether a person feels empowered or not while working in gig economy | 1- Disagree 2- Neutral 3- Agree |
| 7. | Do your rating influence the algorithm in assigning the number of orders and their monetary returns? <i>(do_ratings_influence_algorithm)</i> | Shows influence of ratings on algorithm | 0- No 1- Yes 2- Do Not Know |
| 8. | Are you aware of the labour and trade unions that organize women gig workers for collective bargaining with different stakeholders for asserting and assuring workers' rights? <i>(aware_of_labour_and_trade_union)</i> | Depicts awareness about labour union among the women gig workers | 1-Yes 0- No |

Source: Author's Elaboration



Result of Model

The regression results of the model are presented below:

a. Result of Wald test

| |
|----------------------|
| Wald Test |
| chi2 (4) = 5.83 |
| Prob > chi2 = 0.2120 |

Wald test evaluates the proportional odd assumption or the parallel lines assumption. Proportional odd assumption means that value of β 's, i.e., predictors remain constant across all the categories of dependent variable. The insignificant test statistic indicate that the model doesn't violate the proportional odd assumptions.

b. Model Output

Table 3.11: Regression Results for the Generalized Ordered Logistics Regression Model:

| Model 1: Dependent Variable: <i>Freedom</i> | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|-------------------|-------|
| Log likelihood = -294.43092 | | | Pseudo R2= 0.2217 | |
| Variables Name (as mentioned in table 3.10) | Coefficient | Standard Error | z-statistic value | P> z |
| 1 | | | | |
| mar_s | 1.28443 | 0.326333 | 3.94 | 0.000 |
| time_working_gig | -8.414512 | 0.1642316 | -5.12 | 0.000 |
| gig_convenient_than_other_work | -0.6634 | 0.358437 | -1.85 | 0.064 |
| feel_pressure_to_work_long_hours | -.211814 | 0.109404 | -1.94 | 0.053 |
| feel_more_financially_empowered | -1.038273 | .21651 | -4.80 | 0.000 |
| do_ratings_influence_algorithm | -.8265015 | .1938215 | -4.26 | 0.000 |
| aware_of_labour_and_trade_union | -.9074651 | .296444 | -3.06 | 0.002 |
| Constant | 6.159688 | 1.068777 | 5.76 | 0.000 |
| 2 | | | | |
| mar_s | .3734284 | .3417902 | 1.09 | 0.275 |
| time_working_gig | -.1508256 | .1526445 | -0.99 | 0.323 |
| gig_convenient_than_other_work | -1.581214 | .304277 | -5.20 | 0.000 |
| feel_pressure_to_work_long_hours | -.211814 | .109404 | -1.94 | 0.053 |
| feel_more_financially_empowered | -1.038273 | .21651 | -4.80 | 0.000 |
| do_ratings_influence_algorithm | -.8265015 | .1938215 | -4.26 | 0.000 |
| aware_of_labour_and_trade_union | -.9074651 | .296444 | -3.06 | 0.002 |
| Constant | 6.159688 | 1.068777 | 5.76 | 0.000 |

Source: Author's calculation

The above Generalized Ordered Logistic Regression Model examines how the variable *freedom* is affected by different independent variables included in the model. Since the probability values from the Likelihood Tests failed to reject the null hypotheses, i.e., the coefficients β 's



does not vary or the odds ratio doesn't change between the categories of the dependent variable, generalized ordered logistics regression model has been used. It relaxes the proportional odd assumption model allowing the effect of certain variables to differ across outcome thresholds.

This layered comparison provides a nuanced view of how predictors influence different levels of perceived freedom. The generalized framework is particularly suitable for modelling complex social outcomes like autonomy and freedom, which may not change linearly across categories. It thus provides a more flexible and realistic modelling approach, especially when ordinal assumptions are violated.

Here, the first panel contrasts the category 1 (Very little) with category 2 and 3 (Somewhat and upto great extent) and the second panel compares Categories 1 and 2 collectively with Category 3. This layered comparison provides a nuanced view of how predictors influence different levels of perceived freedom. The generalized framework is particularly suitable for modeling complex social outcomes like autonomy and freedom, which may not change linearly across categories. It thus provides a more flexible and realistic modelling approach, especially when ordinal assumptions are violated.

It is evident from the model that at the individual level, three variables, marital status, *time_working_gig* and *gig* work convenience does not satisfy the assumption of proportional odds and their effect on dependent variable varies across the thresholds. This highlights that the impact of these variables is not uniform across different levels of perceived freedom in *gig* work. The model fits well with the data as it explains 22.17 per cent of variation in freedom in the *gig* work.

The coefficient of marital status is positive indicating being married increases the odds of perceiving greater freedom. This may reflect the influence of household stability, shared responsibilities, or increased bargaining power within the urban area of family unit. On the other hand, the coefficient of *time_working_gig* is negative which means that the more time in *gig* work reduces the likelihood of perceiving greater freedom. This could be due to prolonged exposure to job insecurity, platform control, or lack of career progression in *gig* roles. Also, perceiving *gig* work as less convenient decreases the likelihood of getting a higher degree of freedom in the *gig* and platform work. It could be due to logistical challenges such as irregular hours, travel demands, or tech barriers which often erode the sense of autonomy. These findings highlight the complexity of freedom as a subjective experience, shaped both by the nature of *gig* work and by personal circumstances over time.

The coefficient of *feeling_more_financially_empowered* is negative, which indicates that women who feel financially disempowered have significantly lower odds of perceiving freedom in *gig* work. Financial insecurity can directly limit a worker's autonomy, making *gig* work feel more like a necessity than a choice. In such cases, flexibility may be overshadowed by economic pressures, thus undermining perceived freedom. Algorithmic influence of ratings significantly reduces the odds of perceiving greater freedom. Constant performance monitoring and



dependence on ratings may lead to stress, job insecurity, and ultimately a diminished sense of autonomy. Moreover, *awareness of labour unions* correlates with lower odds of perceiving greater freedom. It highlights the structural challenges and lack of protections in the gig sector.

In a nutshell, marital status shows positive relationship and increases the likelihood of perceiving greater freedom, potentially reflecting stability or other support systems enable women to manage gig work better. On the contrary, longer durations of gig work tend to reduce perceptions of freedom. Moreover, less convenience, financial disempowerment and algorithmic control decreases the likelihood of higher freedom perception and highlight the overall dissatisfaction with the gig work environment. These findings highlight the contrast between the core of gig work- flexibility, empowerment- and the lived experiences of women navigating through the constraints. Gig work initially appeals to women as it gives them a sense of freedom and empowerment. To sustain it as a viable and empowering livelihood, there is a need to address the underlying issues with this sector. The insights from this model underline the urgent need for better policies, platform accountability, and social protections in the gig economy, particularly for women workers.



CHAPTER IV

Traditional vs. Platform Workers: A Comparative Analysis

Gig and platform work is an emerging branch of non-standard employment, with one out of four workers is engaged in some form of gig work (McKinsey Global Institute, 2019). Particularly after COVID-19 pandemic, the relevance of non-standard work arrangements as alternative to traditional full-time employment has increased significantly, largely due to their ease of entry and greater convenience (Watson, Kistler, Graham, & Sinclair, 2021). This section attempts to compare women engaged in gig and platform work with those employed in traditional forms of work.

Besides women gig and platform workers, we collected responses from women working in the traditional forms of work. The sample consists of 200 women engaged in different activities such as domestic work-cooking, caregiving, house maids, cleaner, and beauty work. Unlike engaging with any platform, these women are working in traditional employment setup, within the boundaries of conventional employer-employee relationship. The analysis in this section attempts to provide a comparative perspective contrasting traditional workers with gig and platform workers to address a critical question on how gig and platform work is different from the traditional set up and impacts the lives of the women workers. To make the comparison, different parameters are examined in detail including income, working hours per day, working days per week, digital literacy, constraints in entering gig and platform work and inclination to join it.

The transformation of employment landscapes in India has created new opportunities and challenges particularly for women workers. Traditionally, women have been employed in informal sectors such as domestic work, construction and small-scale manufacturing units which have been undervalued in terms of both remuneration and recognition. The feminization of informal labour has long been associated to jobs that are precarious, low-paid, and lacking social protection. In contrast, a new form of work emerged as gig, in recent decade, considered by digital intrusion, task-based assignments and flexible schedules, which has introduced a new dynamic in women employment. When comparing the income standard of women in these two different employment setups, a marked difference is evident.

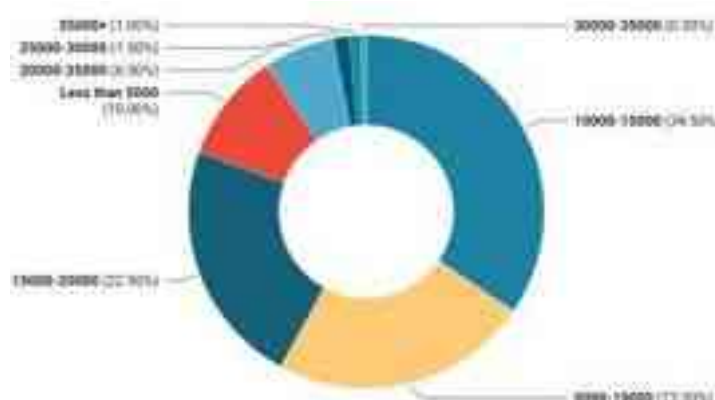
4.1 Earning Landscape of Women in Traditional Employment

In the traditional workforce, majority of women are concentrated at the lower end of income band i.e., 34.50 per cent of women earn between Rs.10,000 and Rs.15,000, while 23.5 per cent fall within the Rs.5,000–Rs.10,000 range, and 10 per cent earn even less than Rs.5,000. Higher income brackets have only marginal representation, i.e., merely 6.5 per cent earn Rs.20,000–Rs.25,000, and less than 3 per cent earn above Rs.25,000 reflecting the structural barriers in



traditional informal jobs, limited skill progression, lack of formal contracts, and suppressed wage structures. Conversely, in the gig economy, as stated about women show a relatively upward income trend with around 57 per cent of them earning above 20000 monthly. This suggests that the gig economy, despite its well-documented shortcomings offers income potential and greater economic autonomy, especially for semi-skilled and skilled women workers.

Figure 4.1: Earning Distribution of Traditionally Employed Women Workers



Source: Survey Data

This shift can be partially explained through the lens of labour market segmentation theory, wherein the gig economy appears to generate a secondary labour market that offers higher monetary rewards, driven to performance linked pay and demand for certain skill sets. Additionally, gig work, by nature, allows women to bypass traditional restrictions such as rigid work hours, commuting restraints, workplace discrimination etc. Flexibility has helped many urban women to enhance their income-generating capacity. Therefore, policy initiative must focus at improving protections in the gig sector through formalization, minimum wage assurances, social protections and accessible grievance mechanisms to ensure that the income gains observed in gig translate into sustainable and decent livelihoods for women.

4.2 Working Pattern of Traditionally Employed Workers

As shown in the previous chapter (Table 2.2), although gig work is known for providing flexibility in choosing working hours and days, the reality presents a conflicting picture. A significant number of women are engaged in long working hours, often six days a week driven by algorithmic

Table 4.1: Average Working Days and Daily Hours for Women in Traditional Employment

| Working days per week | Percent | Working hours per day | Percent |
|-----------------------|---------|-----------------------|---------|
| 3 days | 0.5% | 0-3 hours | 6.0% |
| 4 days | 1.0% | 3-6 hours | 52.1% |
| 5 days | 8.5% | 6-9 hours | 17.5% |
| 6 days | 68.0% | 9-12 hours | 4.0% |
| 7 days | 21.0% | 12+ hours | 0.5% |

Source: Survey Data



demands, client availability patterns and the economic necessity to maximize earning despite personal responsibilities. Similarly, women in traditional employment, particularly in role of domestic work, typically work six days a week, though field data reported their daily hours being comparatively shorter than those of women in gig work. This might be largely due to the task-oriented nature of such work, where tasks like cooking, cleaning and childcare are scheduled within fixed time slots, allowing completion within limited hours while still requiring regular, near daily presence to meet employers' household needs. A significant majority (68 per cent) of them are engaged in six-day workweeks while 22 per cent work all day in week, leaving barely any time for rest or personal obligations. Only a very small fraction (1.5 per cent) work fewer than five days, suggesting limited access to flexible work arrangements in traditional sectors is extremely limited which is almost similar to women workers in platform work.

Barely 4 per cent of women work for more than 9 hours a day, indicating that engaging in multiple jobs exposes a segment of workforce to prolonged and exploitative work conditions. The data also highlights that many women are engaged in long working weeks with moderate to extended daily hours, yet continue to face a lack of job security, inadequate social protections, or limited work-life balance. Similar to the perception of flexibility in gig work, traditional roles also confine women to time-intensive routines with limited autonomy.

4.3 Utilization of Digital Labour Platform by Traditionally Employed Workers

The evolving technological paradigm has enhanced the potential of digital labour platforms to transform the employment landscape for women in India. However, as the dataset reveals, the level of awareness and willingness to engage with these platforms remains relatively low

Table 4.2: Awareness and Use of Digital Platforms and Flexibility in Work Among Women Transitioning from Traditional Employment

| Variable | Total | percent |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|---------|
| Aware of digital labour platforms associated with area of work? | | |
| Yes | 69 | 31.6% |
| No | 131 | 68.4% |
| Considered working with the digital labour platforms for vocation? | | |
| Yes | 51 | 24.5% |
| No | 149 | 75.5% |
| Able to exercise flexibility over time of work at current form of employment? | | |
| Yes | 102 | 47.8% |
| No | 98 | 52.2% |

Source: Survey Data



among women engaged in traditional employment. While digital platforms may offer promise in terms of flexibility and income generation, their adoption is still at a nascent stage. Barely one third of women reported being aware of digital labour platforms relevant to their work domain, while a majority remain unaware, which could be attributed to limited digital literacy, inadequate outreach, or a mismatch between the nature of available platforms and the type of work women are engaged in.

Figure 4.2: Underlying Constraints Influencing Non-Participation in Platform-based Work



When it comes to actual interest in transitioning to a digital platform, the trend is even more pronounced, as only a quarter of women expressed willingness to consider working with digital platforms. This suggests that doubts about digital work, such as concerns around job security, limited digital literacy, stable earnings or safety concerns, may discourage women from considering it as a viable option. Moreover, prevailing norms and a lack of support mechanisms might make such transitions even more difficult.

4.4 Barriers to Participation in Platform-Based Work

Women engaged in the traditional setup shared diverse and interesting views about the barriers in joining digital platforms, giving a reality check and highlighting the ground-level issues. Their comments and answers might serve as positive feedback and help to explore the untapped potential of gig work and other forms of employment. The major reasons for not joining the gig economy are described as below-

1. **Information Gap** - Women expressed a lack of awareness about the digital platforms associated with their field of work. They also reported having limited information about how to join the digital platforms as well as employment opportunities offered through these platforms. Moreover, women workers reported their apprehensions regarding the legitimacy and stability of such work with the relative security and structured employee-employer relationship typically found in traditional employment.
2. **Barrier to Digital Inclusion** - Lack of digital literacy and skills serves as an entry point barrier to the gig and platform economy. Women workers reported facing difficulties in understanding how digital platforms function. Difficulties in handling smartphones, and navigating digital tools further hinder participation and engagement with gig and platform work. Moreover, they highlighted the difficulties related to online payments and their processing. Consequently, the digital divide continues to restrict their access to the digital workspaces.
3. **Financial and Economic Barrier**- Majority of women reported financial constraints for accessing internet connections, digital devices and making the initial investment required



to participate in gig and platform work. They also quote hefty registration costs associated with gig work as a major financial constraint and a barrier to entering the gig and platform economy. Moreover, the initial investments, for instance, training, onboarding fees, purchase of equipment and cost of transportation, pose additional challenges that cannot be overlooked when considering entry into digital platforms.

- 4. Commuting and Safety Concerns-** A significant portion of women have also mentioned transportation and safety as one of the barriers while engaging with the gig and platform economy. They have reported that juggling between the household responsibilities and travelling far for work will unnecessarily put an extra burden on them. Above all, the issues in finding desirable transportation and the high cost of commuting were frequently cited as major challenges. Safety concerns were highlighted as another key deterrent with women expressing apprehensions about personal security while travelling to distant locations or working in unfamiliar environments or taking up late night shifts.
- 5. Societal and Cultural Constraints-** A significant portion of women workers also reveal that social expectations and stereotypes around working on digital platform serves as inhibitor for participating in the gig and platform economy. These restrictions are often reinforced by family members, who discourage women from choosing certain jobs, perceiving them as inappropriate or as a deviation from norms. Some women also expressed their scepticism about joining digital platform citing several reasons such as lack of required skill sets, tough and tiring procedures, need for proper documentation etc.

Overall, the reluctance to enter in gig and platform work primarily stem from a combination of factors such as financial barriers, lack of awareness and knowledge, family dynamics, safety concerns, lack of resources, and concerns about work conditions, safety and remuneration, etc. Addressing these entry point barriers could surely open new avenues for enhancing women's participation in the labour force. National-level policies and strategies for addressing these challenges are discussed in the later sections of this report.

Although women's involvement in gig and traditional employment may reflect similar weekly schedules, the divergence is obvious when we examine the qualitative dimensions of time utilization, earning trajectories and technological integration. Women in traditional sectors such as domestic work are disproportionately concentrated in lower-income strata. In contrast gig workers, despite facing income instability, often attain relatively higher performance-linked earning. Traditional employment, typically characterized by shorter, task-oriented workdays, whereas gig work entails extended, uneven schedules shaped by algorithmic allocation and client-driven demand patterns. Engagement with digital labour platforms for traditional workers remains negligible, constrained by limited digital literacy, inadequate technological exposure, safety apprehensions and perceived income instability. Consequently, gig work demonstrates better integration into digital labour systems and enhanced earning potential, while traditional roles remain tied to low wage structures and slow technological adoption.



CHAPTER V

Evolving Policy Framework for Gig Workers in India

5.1 Background

Digital labour platforms, in recent years, have improved labour market outcomes and facilitated in increasing the labour force participation of female gig workers who make a substantial contribution to the economy. The sector is estimated to generate around 61.6 million jobs by 2047 (Dhanya MB, 2025) and currently serves as the key earning source for 32 per cent of women as compared to 29 per cent of men; however, a notable gender-based gap in wage earnings continue to exist (ILO, 2021). It is high time to address their welfare requirements and sociocultural constraints to create a more equitable workforce. Hence, Ministry of Labour and Employment at Central level and state governments such as Rajasthan, Karnataka, Jharkhand and Telangana have started enacting legislation to address the challenges faced by gig and platform workers. These regulations seek to improve working conditions, ensure social security and equitable treatment for the gig workers including women who form the backbone of this rapidly expanding sector.

While the gig economy provides flexibility and diverse income options, the absence of comprehensive regulations leaves workers vulnerable to exploitation, low earnings and restricted access to social security benefits. Hence, both the Centre and State's regulations seek to bridge these gaps and enhance the overall working environment for the gig workers. India already has a strong legal foundation to address gender inequality at work through legislations such as the Equal Remuneration Act (1976), the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (2013), the Maternity Benefit Act (1961, amended 2017), etc. To keep pace with the dynamic changes in the labour market and by leveraging this existing framework, new regulations are being formulated to respond to the specific challenges faced by the workers. For instance, Ministry of Labour and Employment, in 2024, issued an advisory for the aggregators to register their gig and platform workers on eShram portal a one-stop solution for unorganized workers which helps in finding jobs, skilling, access social security schemes under both central and state government. Additionally, Rajasthan has become the first state to enact the Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act, 2023, that mandates the creation of a welfare board for gig workers, funded by the contributions from digital platforms and government resources. The board will be responsible for overseeing the benefits including retirement savings, insurance, and other social security services. Similarly, the Karnataka Platform-based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Bill, 2023 and the Jharkhand Platform-based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Bill, 2025 have also recommended measures such as creation of welfare funds and enforcement of safety regulation for delivery and ride-hailing workers. In order to improve the quality of life for gig workers, promote long-term sectoral growth and create a more inclusive



and equitable gig economy, it is essential to encourage fair labour practices by platforms. Such measures seek to safeguard workers' rights, increase transparency in workers' and aggregators' relationships, and improve welfare and working conditions. This study will discuss these laws in detail and further examine the legal and regulatory framework that is particularly suitable for women gig workers, at the national level.

5.2 Ministry of Labour and Employment's Guideline on Gig and Platform Economy

In the recent notification (2024), Ministry of Labour and Employment issued a guideline to aggregators operating in India to register their gig workers on e-Shram portal which will help them to access numerous social security benefits. This portal is a pan India centralized database acting as a one-stop centre which is primarily designed to keep a record of unorganized workers including vendors, gig workers, construction workers, migrant labour etc. that will help to effectively implement the various social security schemes. Each registered worker is assigned a Unique Account Number (UAN) that enables access to employment opportunities, skill development and checking eligibility of various schemes. Through an advisory accompanied by a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), ministry instructed aggregators to regularly update their gig workers registration including work engagement and payment. Schemes including PMSVANidhi, PMAY-G, PMJJBY PMJAY, etc. have been planned with eShram portal database so that gig workers can easily access to these diverse social security benefits.

5.3 Code on Social Security, 2020

The Code on Social Security, 2020, one of the four labour codes was the first legislation to recognize gig and platform workers. From the perspective of gig and platform economy, it represents a significant step toward addressing the needs of India's rapidly expanding sector while creating a framework to extend social security benefits to this so far underserved employment group. By identifying gig and platform workers as distinct categories, the code provides a legislative foundation for their welfare. For women gig workers, this recognition is especially important in promoting their involvement in formal welfare systems to deal with their specific challenges. To ensure the provision of benefits, the code requires the formation of social security schemes financed by contributions from aggregators as well as central and state governments. This arrangement is especially beneficial for women gig workers, who often balance employment with care-giving responsibilities. Additionally, the code mentioned a separate chapter on Maternity Benefit ensuring comprehensive protection for women workers by limiting intense work during late pregnancy. These benefits include medical bonuses, leave for illness or miscarriage, and income for up to 26 weeks (12 weeks for women with two or more surviving children). The code further stipulates that employers are restricted from terminating women for maternity-related absences and are required to provide nursing breaks and childcare facilities. In case of non-compliance, women can file an appeal with the appropriate authorities for unjustified denial of benefit. In this way, code will help women gig workers to restrain from financial difficulties especially in high-risk job like ride-hailing and delivery services by guaranteeing financial and medical support during pregnancy and beyond.



5.4 Women in the Platform Economy: A State-Wise Lens on Inclusion and Protection

1. Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act, 2023:

Rajasthan was the first state to draft an official law for gig workers, Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act, 2023 which is a pioneering legislation in India aimed at securing social security for gig and platform workers through a welfare board and a dedicated fund. While the act represents a significant step towards formal recognition, its reliance on the definition of gig workers under Code on Social Security, 2020, which maintains the absence of an employer-employee relationship and excludes domestic work raises concerns about inclusivity of women gig workers. Women workers are mainly engaged in beauty, wellness, domestic work and home-based services (around 91 percent in our data sample), remain underrepresented and mainly invisible due to lack of gender specific data and exclusion from policy discourse.

Practical challenges such as complex registration processes, limited access to maternity and childcare systems, inadequate safety shields may disproportionately affect women. Without targeted these measures, the Act raises concerns that women gig workers may get excluded from rights, particularly in the context of shrinking budgets and limited policy focus on gender-specific needs in a male dominated gig economy.

2. The Karnataka Platform based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Bill, 2024:

Karnataka bill, to some extent, is an improvement over Rajasthan bill and may be considered pro women as it offers significant advantages to women gig workers by explicitly including special provisions for their needs of social security, algorithmic transparency in allocating task, protection from unfair termination with required fourteen days' notice, guaranteed safe working conditions and occupational health support, centralized monitoring system and dispute resolution mechanism. However, this Bill also comes with certain limitation as it does not enforce employment status to gig workers, so women still lack entitlements like ensured minimum wage or maternity leave tied to only formal employment. There is also no assurance of wage floor which means platforms may adjust pay to offset the cess that may impact women who often earn less. Finally, while safety standards are undertaken in the Bill, it lacks strong enforcement mechanisms, leaving women vulnerable.

3. The Jharkhand Platform based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Bill, 2025:

Like Karnataka and Rajasthan, Jharkhand's Bill on Platform-Based Gig Workers is a welcome step towards recognizing the rights of the gig workers in its jurisdiction. By ensuring registration, access to welfare schemes, and grievance redressal system, bill offers women workers some level of protection in a largely informal employment setup. However, despite these efforts, it lacks provisions related to maternity support, childcare, or workplace safety measures, and the nature of employer-employee relations.

4. Other State level Actions:

Tamil Nadu government in its recent budget 2025 introduced a new welfare board to support gig workers both socially and economically by establishing a social security scheme that provide



coverage for accidental and death insurance. Additionally, the welfare board has proposed a subsidy of ₹20,000 for the purchase of new EV scooter, with the objective of enabling workers to enhance their income-generating capacity (Govt of Tamil Nadu 2025). Following the similar policy, Government of Telangana released the draft Gig and Platform Workers (Registration, Social Security, and Welfare) Bill, 2025, outlining comparable provisions (PRS, 2025). Other states are also moving in this direction, with Bihar being the most recent to enact legislation for gig workers, ensuring financial assistance to their families and extending benefits such as maternity support, hospitalization aid and death insurance. However, these initiatives still have a long way to go when it comes to actually meeting the welfare of women gig workers on the ground. Given the increasing trend of gig workers in future (Dhanya, 2025), India requires a rigorous legislative framework that can address persistent vulnerabilities faced by women gig workers highlighted by field data in the gig economy. Establishing such a robust law will not only help restore their trust in digital platforms but also play a critical role in increasing women's workforce participation and promoting their economic self-reliance.

5.5 Draft Guidelines for Prevention and Regulation of Dark Patterns, 2023

Another law that came into existence for the platform by Ministry of Consumer Affairs, though, the guidelines not very focus on gig workers rather it safeguards the platform consumers from the deceptive digital platform. Dark patterns are misleading design techniques that trick or pressure consumers into doing something they don't want to, such as buying something, giving information, or unintentionally signing up for a service. These rules, which guarantee openness, equity, and consumer protection, are applicable to digital services, online markets, and e-commerce platforms. Important clauses prohibit misleading practices including forced action (requiring subsequent purchases), hidden costs (revealing charges only at checkout), false urgency (creating phony time pressure), and membership traps (making cancellations difficult). Platforms are required to explicitly display their terms of service, return policies, and full pricing. Informed consent is also emphasized by the standards, which mandate that platforms must get users' express authorization before acquiring personal information while avoiding deceptive advertising and provide simple cancellation procedures otherwise charges may be imposed for noncompliance, which is enforced by the Consumer Protection Authority. By preventing unfair business activities, these rules are essential for fostering fair competition and consumer confidence in the digital economy. The guidelines align with international initiatives to strengthen digital consumer rights, guaranteeing an open and responsible Indian online marketplace.

5.6 Aggregators' Initiatives

Although there are obstacles in addressing issues like gender-based discrimination and ensuring adequate safety measures, particularly when working in remote locations, gig aggregators and platforms in India are taking a number of steps to support women workers, such as committed training programs, safety features on their apps, flexible work hours, community building initiatives, awareness campaigns about gender equality, and advocating for policy changes to ensure better social security benefits for female gig workers.



With an emphasis on empowering women, Swiggy has introduced Sexual Harassment Redressal Policy for female delivery executives, thereby facilitating a safe working environment (Swiggy, 2022). Zomato, on the other hand, launched its 'Delivery Partner Well-Being: A Holistic Framework' which provides assistance to delivery partners, which includes Shelter Projects, emergency ambulance systems, weather alerts, tax filing assistance, EV rentals, and maternity perks. Zomato's gender inclusion strategy, Project Arya which begun in 2021 has added over 2,500 women to its delivery fleet and aspires for 20 per cent female representation in daytime warehouse shifts by 2024, extending opportunities in logistics and storage. Further, it has set its target to train around 10000 women workers across several roles. Uber, for its women gig workers, has also taken several measures for their safety. In its new initiative, it has added a new feature to prioritize the safety of their workers by filtering only for women riders. It has also introduced SOS incorporation with law administered authorities and audio recording feature for emergency circumstances which will deliver further protection throughout the journeys (Uber, 2024).

In an effort to reduce the gender wage gap and empower its female service partners, Urban Company has implemented significant initiatives. Through targeted programme, female partners in Central and Western India to earn about 15 per cent more than their male counterparts through focused training and upskilling initiatives. Urban Company invested Rs. 72 crores on training in 2022, and 80 per cent of its partners reported they had learned new skills. The business also held financial workshops with an emphasis on savings and financial advantages for 2916 women in 11 cities. With partners earning four times as much as typical offline service workers, these efforts have not only raised wages but also encouraged upward social mobility. Urban Company's dedication to financial inclusion and gender equality keeps boosting the economy and lowering disparities among its employees (Urban Company, 2023).

5.7 Other Initiatives

Along with the Ministry of Labour and Employment, the V.V. Giri National Labour Institute organized a major brainstorming workshop in 2023 to examine the working challenges of gig workers in various sectors. It was attended by the ministry officials, trade unions, aggregators, and gig workers from ride-hailing, beauty work, packaging and delivery services to raise their concerns collectively. Several female gig workers highlighted the specific challenges they encounter on a daily basis at work and demanded several regulations which particularly solve concerns of women gig workers. Although the characteristic of flexibility in gig economy attracts women workers, at the same time many expressed serious concerns about safety and lack of social security benefits. These issues underline the need for comprehensive measures to address the vulnerabilities that women face in the gig economy, notably in terms of safe working conditions, unstable income and access to social security benefits. The workshop's findings underscored the crucial need for developing regulations that address the special requirements of female gig workers, encouraging their involvement in the economy while protecting their well-being. One of the most pressing issues that came out in the workshop is the provision of social assistance programs tailored to the needs of gig workers with a particular emphasis on



women. Such programme could include comprehensive accidental benefits covering medical expenses incurred during treatment, compensation for temporary and permanent disabilities and death benefits for dependents. In addition, women gig workers should be entitled to maternity benefits, such as financial assistance and medical care during pregnancy; creche facilities for breastfeeding mothers should also be established to balance their employment and childcare duties. Furthermore, providing subsidies for the education of children particularly for single parents such as widows or divorced women would greatly reduce the economic burden on female workers while also encouraging long-term socioeconomic stability and involvement in the labour market.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) also recently organized an open house discussion with experts on the rights of gig workers highlighting specific policy suggestions for women gig workers which include implementing maternity benefits, creche facilities and safe rest points through Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. Apart from this, grievance redressal mechanism tailored to women workers, along with awareness campaign on POSH policies is crucial to ensuring workplace safety. In addition, platform aggregators should be required to review arbitrary rating systems and introduce fair mechanisms for worker representation (NHRC, 2024).

Moreover, legislation must incorporate the safety and security measures to protect female gig workers from possible risks. To improve workplace safety, all-time dashboard cameras should be installed particularly for women-driven ride hailing together with required live-location tracking functions on mobile applications and monitored by aggregator's control room. Platforms must incorporate strong security features, as well as establish clearly defined emergency response methods. Rapid-response teams or helplines should be established to respond immediate assistance in the event of emergencies or security breaches. If implemented effectively, such measures would not only reduce security risks but also build confidence and trust among women gig workers, thereby encouraging greater participation in the sector. It is equally critical to note that the platform-based gig economy in India has the potential to significantly empower women in a way that traditional sectors have not yet achieve. The gig economy offers women easier entry into the job market and work for flexible hours while performing their domestic duties. Consequently, it enables them to overcome the social and economic barriers to empower and foster the principles of an enabled household, that are likely to be transmitted across future generations (Deshpande & Kabir, 2021)



CHAPTER VI

Conclusion and Way Forward

Among the emerging forms of work which has ushered in with the changing global employment dynamics, gig and platform economy is often envisioned as the future of work. It has opened new avenues of employment for diverse group especially for women promising flexible employment and income diversification. Drawing on Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach, which emphasizes expanding individuals’ real freedoms to lead the kind of lives they have reason to value, this study brings forth the experiences of women gig and platform workers in the Delhi NCR region. The study reveals that while digital labour platforms may initially appear to offer autonomy and empowerment, they largely fall short in enhancing women’s substantive freedoms, as persistent structural barriers continue to constrain their capabilities and choices. This situation presents a complex trade-off between flexibility and vulnerability. On the one hand, by providing the opportunities to achieve economic independence, it promotes women’s participation by lowering entry barriers and alleviate some of the structural constraints typically exist in formal employment. On the other hand, it imposes limitation and expose them to precarious working conditions- long working hours, unsafe and controlled environment, physical and mental burnout, etc.

The findings of the study carry significant economic and social implications, as majority of women continue to be occupied the position of secondary earners within households having a partial influence over economic decision-making. A smaller proportion of women gig workers are engaged across multiple platforms, highlighting the onus of multiple responsibilities, such as caregiving and household duties placed upon them. This dynamic perpetuates a labour market structure in which women’s contribution remains undervalued, aligning with the dual labour market theory, which suggests women are often confined to secondary and informal segments of employment. This evident gap between the potential and realities faced by women gig

Fig 6.1- Key Areas for Policy Action



Source: Author’s conceptualisation



workers' demands immediate policy action that prioritizes not only the employment generation but also the enhancement of decent working standards, fostering long-term sustainability and protection of worker self-esteem.

'10 – Point' Agenda for Empowering Women Gig and Platform Workers

1. Ensure Social Protection

Social safety nets have long been an integral component of labour relations, providing a crucial cushion to workers. For women, however, these protections are even more important as they are often deprived of adequate societal safeguards, leaving them particularly vulnerable. To address the structural marginalization, policy interventions should focus on formalization of gig work through establishment of social security system jointly financed by different stakeholders such as state and digital platforms. Building a robust social protection system will be instrumental in expanding the coverage of social safety nets such as maternity and childcare benefits, health insurance, accident insurance, unemployment safeguard, income security and pension schemes.

2. Gender-Responsive Policies for Platform

Existing policies of the platform related to workplace condition, transportation, etc. are not often gender neutral. They fail to adequately address needs and experiences of women gig workers. Mobility restrictions and safety issues have emerged as greater concerns for women gig workers as they undermine their chances of participation and earning potential. The study exposes how fear of unsafe locations and inadequate transportation infrastructure constraints women's ability to make the most of their earnings.

Addressing these challenges require implementation of gender-responsive platform policies.

- a. **Gender Audits** – Provisions for annual or bi-annual gender audits should be incorporated to assess the impact of policy outcomes, identify disparities and highlight areas for improvement. Such audit would help in understanding the unique challenges faced by the women gig workers in their day-to-day interaction.
- b. **Gender Equity Cells** – Every platform should establish a dedicated cell or wing for women gig workers to address their specific needs and concern. Such cells should incorporate the participation of platforms, women workers and women union representatives to monitor compliance with the gender equity indicator, including training, workplace conduct and implementation of relevant policies.
- c. **Safety Standards** - Gender-sensitive safety features such as compulsory panic alert mechanisms, geofencing with threat mapping, customer risk rating algorithm, in-app audio, dashcam, GPS tracking & trip sharing, In-app messaging, and verified customer profiles on digital platforms, etc. should be adopted. Besides, wide-ranging urban improvements system such as enhanced public transportation systems and adequate street lighting should be encouraged.
- d. **Gender Sensitive Infrastructure**- This includes secure changing rooms, breastfeeding spaces, creches, sanitary vending machines, access to menstrual leave, and safe transport for night shifts. The formation of gig centres or clusters jointly developed by platforms and state across different areas will provide a safe designated space and a



much-needed relief for the women gig workers. Additionally, establishing a community support system through partnership with local self-help groups, NGOs, play-schools can help redistribute the disproportionate care and domestic responsibilities borne by women. Here, Sweden's gender-mainstreamed public transport model, which has tailored its services to women's travel patterns and safety needs, offers a strong example India can adapt to promote safer, more inclusive urban mobility.

3. **Ensure Algorithmic Transparency and Fair Rating Systems**

Algorithmic control and opaque rating systems pose potential threat to women's autonomy, often transforming perceived flexibility into an illusion. Behavioural economics suggests that when decisions are shaped by implicit constraints or hidden mechanisms, individuals experience a reduced sense of autonomy (Schmidt & Engelen, 2020). Although flexibility is perceived as a core benefit, findings suggest that true autonomy is actually restricted in certain aspect. Women face pressure to maintain high ratings, fear penalties, and risk of account deactivation leading them to accept unfavourable assignments.

To address these challenges, algorithmic management should be standardized through regulations that ensure transparency, information accessibility and restrictions on penalizing mechanisms. Moreover, platforms should be mandated to disclose work allocation and earnings, thereby fostering a fairer work environment and mitigating the undue control exerted by algorithms.

4. **Establish Grievance Redressal Systems**

To ensure fairness and accountability in the gig economy, platform must implement a comprehensive grievance redressal and dispute resolution policy. They should create a 24*7 accessible and user-friendly grievance redressal mechanism that guarantee confidentiality and protection against retaliation. They should also provide an easy and quick dispute resolution forums. Additionally, a standardized timeline should be mandated, ensuring timely acknowledgement and solution within a set period. To maintain a fair system, an independent board should be established at different levels of hierarchy, enabling both workers and platforms to present their concerns. Also, an effective communication wing should be established to disseminate decisions in a transparent and timely manner.

5. **Occupational Safety and Health Standards**

A comprehensive and robust OSH framework should be developed specifically for the women gig and platform workers. Women engaged in the gig economy often face safety and health challenges. On one side, they have to manage their caregiving and household responsibilities while on the other, they are compelled to navigate through precarious working conditions including mundane and irregular working hours. Depending upon the nature of work, platform should provide appropriate safety equipment and protective gear. Moreover, regular training and workshop on OSH should be conducted to enhance awareness and ensure safety. Regular medical evaluation and monitoring should be encouraged. A proper mechanism must be established to ensure that women workers receive medical coverage and compensations. Additionally, platforms should strive to create a conducive work environment by promoting fair working hours and taking into consideration increasing instances of mental health issues.



A comprehensive health and insurance policy tailored to the demands of women workers should be implemented. It should focus on affordable and accessible healthcare services.

6. Promote Skill Development and Digital Literacy

While both gig and traditional employment may appear similar in terms of weekly schedules, the real story lies in how women's time and earnings unfold within these structures. Traditional sector workers (domestic workers) remain concentrated in lower income brackets, unlike many gig workers who secure relatively higher, performance-linked income though coupled with volatility. Their engagement with digital labour platforms is limited by low awareness, poor digital literacy, safety concerns and income insecurity acting as key deterrents. Study reveals that gig work offers greater digital integration and higher earning potential, whereas traditional roles remain bound by lower pay and slower adaptation to emerging work models.

Bridging the digital divide by building a network support system can enhance digital literacy among women who wish to switch from traditional form of employment to gig and platform employment. Such a support system may include the establishment of community based Digital Equity Hubs that provide shared access to high-speed internet, smartphones and tech support. Additionally, these hubs can collaborate with local self-help groups, Anganwadi centres, or NGOs to promote safe and inclusive digital onboarding for gig work. Furthermore, skill development should be promoted through institutional support, peer networks and women-led support groups, which can facilitate for shared learning and provide mechanism for grievance redressal.

7. Mentorship and Training Programmes-

Women are predominantly confined to beauty and wellness services, whereas other sectors such as transportation based and food delivery services remain male dominated, reflecting occupational segregation. This trend resonates with what Gary Becker's human capital theory (1964), which highlights the misallocation of skilled resources, as many of educated women in the study are unable to utilize their full potential.

To address this imbalance, this diversification of women workers in gig and platform economy should be sought by building an ecosystem and support network for mentorship and training programmes.

Additionally, targeted skill development initiatives will facilitate women's participation in logistics, technical services and digital tasks. Moreover, dedicated awareness campaigns should be promoted to encourage women's participation in labour force. Collective efforts between platforms, government agencies and training institutions can foster opportunities for upward mobility thus mitigating gender based occupational division. India could design this system on the similar lines of Toronto Transit Commission, Canada which runs a structured mentorship and leadership programmes for women encouraging their career progression.

8. Collective Bargaining and Unionization

The absence of strong collective bargaining weakens the voice of women gig workers, thereby further worsening their vulnerabilities. Awareness and participation in trade unions



remain extremely low among women workers. They are often compelled to navigate disputes and platform policies individually, thus limiting their capacity to negotiate fairer working conditions. Formation of gig workers' cooperative can facilitate the establishment of legal aid cells where women can collectively raise their concern and challenge exploitative platform practices. Moreover, Trade unions and aggregators can adopt Charter for Women Gig Workers. Such a charter would help to safeguard the rights of women workers by outlining the rules and protections applicable to them. By formally recognizing these regulations, the charter would establish a robust framework for workers protection while fostering a harmonious work environment.

9. Inclusion of Women in Leadership Roles

To ensure a gender-equitable growth in gig economy, it is crucial to promote the inclusion of women in leadership and decision-making roles within platforms and associated organisations including unions and NGOs. A separate women wing should be mandated to enhance women's negotiating power and representation. Women leaders contribute diverse perspectives and are more likely to advocate for inclusive policies concerning pay equity, safety, healthcare, and work-life balance. Additionally, the introduction of gender quotas in union bodies should be considered. Such measures not only empower women but also foster more responsive and equitable platform design and policies.

10. Moving Beyond the Restrictive Norms

Most women entering the gig and platform economy are migrants from smaller or tier two cities, facing cultural and societal restrictions. Public visibility of delivery work, late working hours, earning and stability tradeoff, and exposure to unknown locations make it less appealing, compounded by household responsibilities. To safeguard their participation, policies should provide tax incentives or subsidies for platforms adopting fair labour practices, introduce fair work certification, mandate transparency in payment structures and rating mechanisms, and expand digital infrastructure to support safer, equitable, and sustainable work opportunities for women.

Amid the rapid expansion of digital infrastructure, the integration of women into gig economy reveals a complex interplay of empowerment and vulnerability. While gig work offers women a greater flexibility, diversified income opportunities, and avenues for skill development, it is simultaneously constrained by algorithmic control, income insecurity, limited social protection, and entrenched gender norms. Many women perceive gig work as an alternative to traditional employment; however, its empowering potential remains contingent on systemic reform. Despite policy efforts such as the Code on Social Security (2020), the e-Shram portal, and recent state-level initiatives like Bihar's legislation for gig workers, implementation gaps persist. Platform-led gender-responsive measures, including safety features and women-only fleets, remain fragmented and insufficient. To ensure empowerment, it is imperative to design policy through a gender sensitive lens that address both implicit and explicit relations. Such coordinated interventions are imperative to transform the gig economy into a more equitable and decent sphere of work for women.



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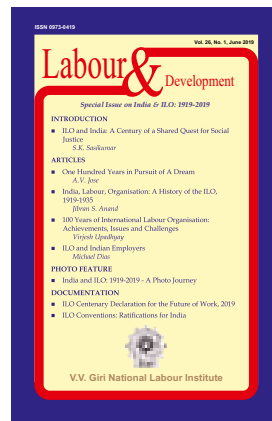
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