

Mental health, Worker well-being, and Human sustainability in platform-based gig work: Evidence from Food delivery and Quick-commerce workers in India

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ABSTRACT

Over the past few years, in-home gig-work based on platforms, semantically understood as food delivery and quick-commerce services, has increasingly come to be an important portion of urban labour in India. Practically though, platforms present a reality of income instability, algorithmic pressure, customer abuse, exhausting workload and organisational restraint under the guise of gig work as flexible and accessible. The effects of these conditions on well-being, mental health and human sustainability at work are therefore studied. Based on 34 semi-structured interviews conducted with food delivery and quick-commerce workers in India, the study employs thematic analysis to unpack the structural, economic, emotional and institutional characteristics underpinning workers' experiences. The results indicate how the well-being of these workers is impacted by algorithmic control, low and unstable earnings, vehicle and fuel costs, weather risks, abusive customer practices, lack of basic facilities and limited platform support. Psychological resilience highlights a catchier on adaptation or coping supported either by the familiar, peers and individual adopting. But resilience is mainly a kind of compensatory reaction to structural deficiencies, not an indicator of sustainable work. This study adds to the literature on gig work and human resource management (HRM) by demonstrating that platform-based work can be bad for human sustainability when worker survival relies more on coping theory than institutional mechanisms.

Keywords: gig worker; well-being; mental health; human sustainability; psychological resilience; quick commerce; India

Introduction

In India, platform-based gig work has increasingly come to be an important component of the urban labour economy. Digital applications used by food delivery and quick-commerce platforms have always bridged consumer demand to the flexible delivery workforce, notably including Swiggy, Zomato, Blinkit and Zepto, and new income opportunities have emerged. These platforms are often sold as places of autonomy, fast earnings and low-barrier employment. But the experience of platform-based delivery work in everyday life is messier. Workers are often monitored by algorithmic systems, face pressure through incentive schemes and customer rating systems (Alacovska, et al 2024). They are always at risk of uncertain earnings, long working hours and little to no corporate support. These conditions also raise critical issues about whether gig work is conducive to worker well-being and mental health, and whether it can be long-term sustainable (Anwar, et al 2020). This was made even worse by the boom in quick-commerce. Quick-commerce platforms, by contrast, are built around dark stores, set pickup points and ultra-short delivery windows, unlike traditional food delivery (Chan, et al 2022). This model might alleviate some of the uncertainty about restaurant waiting time but at the same time, increases time pressure, scrutiny of performance and the expectation that order will be fulfilled in short time. Delivery workers also need to manage traffic, weather, customer expectations, timelines defined by platforms and earnings and ratings! (Chen et al 2022). Therefore, platform-based gig work melds almost obvious flexibility with intense work effort.

Both on the development of scientific knowledge on the topic of gig work, that often finds that platform workers experiences income peals, algorithmic control, harms of social protection, customer and limited bargaining power. These conditions can impact workers psychologically (Hajiheydari, N., and Delgosha, M. S, 2024). The effects are particularly visible in food delivery and quick-commerce work where workers rely directly on their own vehicles, fuel, mobile phones and physical labour necessary to stay active on the platform. Maintenance costs, petrol costs, unsafe roads, the exposure to the rain, abusing customers and interruptions with income create a working environment in which workers bear a large portion of the risks necessary to keep the platform functioning.

While earlier research discusses both economic insecurity and the problems of algorithmic management in platform work, the intersection between worker well-being, mental health, and human sustainability has been

less explored (Liang et al, 2025). Human sustainability is significant because it moves the conversation away from the immediate survival of workers, and more toward whether their systems of work respectively make life better or worse in the long-haul. So, when it comes to platform-based gig work, this question is one that becomes especially urgent, workers may carry on working not because their work is sustainable but because they have an immediate need for income and other employment options are limited.

Here, psychological resilience in particular comes into play. Gig workers also adopt coping strategies, including emotional regulation, peer support, family support, route adjustment, selective task acceptance and self-discipline (Khan et al, 2024). This helps workers cope with work stress, continue to earn and thrive amongst challenging interactions with customers and platforms. However, resilience should not only be understood as individual strength (Sivarajan et al, 2021). When employees have to rely on individual coping strategies to make ends meet, resilience may become a coping mechanism that compensates for structural deficits such as low compensation, weak protections, working in unsafe conditions or facing abusive customers (Peng et al, 2024). In these situations, resilience may be a sign that workers are adapting to hazardous work conditions rather than living well.

For tackling these issues, this study investigates worker wellbeing, mental health and human sustainability among gig workers in India who work via a platform-based economy. Based on 34 semi-structured interviews with food delivery and quick-commerce workers, it examines how algorithmic control, economic vulnerability, operational, customer relations, platform support and social pressures mediate workers' experience. This study utilizes thematic analysis to identify the structural and psychosocial conditions impacting well-being and coping in platform-mediated work.

This study contributes three-fold to the literature. For first, it contributes to gig work and human resource management literature about the implications of platform-dominated work on worker well-being and mental health through the intersection of economic, organisational and psychosocial pressures. Second, it increases the current literature on psychological resilience by demonstrating that resilience in gig work is predominantly a coping strategy with a survival dimension and not necessarily a sign of sustainable work. Third, it elaborates the emergent concept of human sustainability at work in showing that platform-based work may well find itself in a situation of structural unsustainability when the burden of adaptation rests principally on individual workers rather than supported by systems of institutional adaptation and investment.

Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do food-delivery and quick-commerce workers experience worker well-being and mental health under conditions of algorithmic control, income instability and weak organisational support?

RQ2: What coping practices and resilience mechanisms do platform-based gig workers use to sustain participation in work despite economic, emotional and operational pressures?

1.1 Research Gap

Previous studies of platform-based gig work have shed light on economic marginalization, algorithmic control, income volatility and worker vulnerability. However, four important gaps remain.

First, a significant portion of current research has concentrated primarily on food-delivery and ride-hailing platforms, with quick-commerce workers being largely overlooked. The reason being that since quick-commerce platforms mostly function within dark stores, fixed pickup points as well as more rapid delivery windows, the nature of work here is significantly different as can be assumed from greater time pressure and elevated performance expectations.

Secondly, the available literature appears focused on the economic and labour market aspects of gig work, with little attention paid to worker wellbeing and wellbeing in the context of mental illness. While platform-based delivery workers regularly endure long working hours, customer mistreatment, weather exposure, safety risks, vehicle costs, and uncertain income, the psychological and emotional ramifications of these working conditions go undetected unless explored with more qualitative inquiry.

Third, they treated research on resilience much as an individual coping capacity. Yet, in platform-based gig work, resilience may signify the lack of effective organisational support. Workers endure on not because the work is sustainable but because they have to be supported by work with peers, regulate their own feelings and adjust themselves to their structural vulnerabilities.

Fourth, the exploration of human sustainability in gig work has thus far been rather scarce, especially in the Indian context. It focuses less on short-term revenue generation, and more on worker health well being physically, psychologically and socially in the long term. Since gig work through platforms relies on coping instead of institutions, understanding this perspective helps us assess whether it can be deemed sustainable.

This study fills these gaps by looking into worker well-being and mental health and human sustainability for food-delivery and quick-commerce workers in India. It examines how through algorithmic control, income security, customer relations, operational challenges, lack of support and social pressures, workers lived experiences and coping practices.

Table 1. Research gap and study positioning

Research gap	What prior research has focused on	What this study adds
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Platform coverage gap	Food-delivery and ride-hailing workers	Includes both food-delivery and quick-commerce workers
Well-being and mental health gap	Economic precarity, platform control and income insecurity	Examines emotional strain, mental health stressors and worker well-being
Resilience gap	Resilience as individual coping or adaptation	Shows resilience as a compensatory response to structural deficiencies
Human sustainability gap	Short-term work participation and flexibility	Assesses whether platform work supports long-term worker well-being
Indian context gap	Platform work in broader global or developed-country contexts	Provides qualitative evidence from Indian platform-based gig workers

Source: Author's own work

1.2 Research Objectives

The study has four objectives:

1. To explore the lived work experiences of food-delivery and quick-commerce gig workers in India.
2. To explore the influence of algorithmic control, income insecurity, customer pressure, operational risks and support deficits on worker wellbeing and mental health.
3. To explore the development of resilience and coping practices among platform-based gig workers in conditions of economic and organisational precarity.
4. Research to evaluate if work arrangements on the current platform support or detracts from human sustainability at work.

2. Literature Review And Theoretical Framework

This study investigates worker wellbeing, mental health and human sustainability in platform-mediated gig work drawing on four interrelated perspectives: The Job Demands–Resources model, psychological resilience, psychological contract theory and human sustainability at work. These viewpoints inform the better understanding of the work burden, the resources available, the support from the organisation, the practices to cope with and the sustainability in the long term of platform-based delivery workers. Collectively, they help make sense of why, despite income insecurity, algorithmic control, customer pressure and weak institutional protection, workers persist in gig work.

2.1 Job Demands–Resources Model and Worker Well-being

The job demands–resources model helps to clarify worker well-being by balancing job demands and job resources. Job demands – The physical, psychological, emotional and organisational features of work combined requiring sustained effort and yielding strain Job resources signify physical, social, organisational and psychological resources that assist workers to deal with the demands, achieve work objectives and over-all preserve well-being (Demerouti et al, 2001).

Gandini, A. (2019), Job demands are generally high in platform-based gig work. Time pressure, algorithmic monitoring, customer ratings, fluctuating income, long working hours, traffic hazards, weather exposure, costs associated with vehicle maintenance and income uncertainty all contribute to delivery worker's stress. These demands can have an impact on physical and mental health, increasing fatigue, stress, anxiety and emotional exhaustion (Sun et al, 2023). While workers in formal employment may have some access to various organisational resources like paid leave, occupational safety support, grievance redressal, health benefits and income protection guarantee, gig workers are generally deprived of these safety nets.

Flexible logging arrangements, daily income, knowledge of routes, the presence of friends, support from family, and the opportunity to learn through experience may all provide sustenance for a labourer. But these resources still might not be enough to meet the level of demands required by the platform. Consequently, the JD-R is helpful to provide insights into the well-being challenges of platform-based gig work when high demands are not matched with resources (Huang, et al, 2019).

2.2 Psychological Resilience and Coping in Gig Work

The ability to adapt and function despite difficult circumstances is known as psychological resilience. In work contexts, resilience is both a personal attribute and a process influenced by organisational context, social support, socio-economic conditions and available resources. Resilience is salient in platform-based gig work where workers balance uncertainty, emotional and physical risks to maintain an income on a day-to-day basis (Kelly, L, 2024).

In response, gig workers either developed different coping practices to stay in the labour force or moved to other forms of work. They involved emotional regulation in customer conflict, selective acceptance, planning a route, taking short breaks, peer advice, family support and reframing difficult experiences (Lata et al, 2023).

These practices support workers to persist through income volatility, long hours and minimal platform support.

But resilience should not only be regarded as a beneficial marker of worker robustness. Similarly, in resilient gig work, the term may also work as a compensatory device in the face of structural deficiencies. While workers may be resilient due to the lack of potential options, obligations at home, or stability of finances needed for paying bills right away. The need for resilience mainly due to poor organisational support can hint towards a work system that relies upon individual coping mechanisms, rather than progressive organisational systems.

2.3 Psychological Contract and Platform Support

Psychological contract theory describes what types of beliefs workers hold about mutual expectations and duties that arise between them and the organisation or work provider. While platform-based gig workers are formally recognized for tax and Social Security purposes as independent contractors, they too form expectations around fairness, esteem, transparency and support (Masten, A. S, 2001). They may even expect fairness in payments, no discrimination in incentives, timely grievance-redressal, help during accidents, protection against wrongful complaints and asking to be treated well (Sannon et al, 2022).

When the platforms meet that expectation, then the workers experience some measure of trust, motivation and emotional security. Workers experience psychological contract breach through sudden changes in incentives, unseen algorithmic decisions, arbitrary deactivation, no support during disputes and poor response to customer complaints (Rousseau, D. M, 1989). Such perceived violation can invoke frustration, stress, distrust and affect the wellbeing.

And this is an important perspective because work on the big platform is not just experienced as a pure economic exchange between labour and pay. Ideas of dignity, reciprocity and fairness lend platform practices a mass of meaning for the workers. Therefore, such lack of platform support can harm mental health and resilience, creating an impression of being disposable, unassisted and individually accountable for threats which are created partly by the platform system itself.

2.4 Human Sustainability at Work

Human sustainability at the workplace means work systems are able to sustain the quality of life for the worker at work; namely, the worker is physically, psychologically and socially protected and enhanced over the space of time (Lord et al, 2022). And instead of being only productive oriented, the question is also whether work helps people be healthy, dignified and socially secure in the long run (Schaufeli et al, 2009). This perspective is particularly important as workers will continue to engage in the platform economy to the extent that gig work on platforms is detrimental to their well-being.

Does flexibility and access to income truly mean good work? A human sustainability lens would raise that query. Whilst platform work can offer fast income, it can also lead workers into variable income, hours of work, abuse by customers, inadequate support systems, physical danger and psychological stress (Pfeiffer et al, 2020). If worker sustainability relies primarily on worker endurance, family support and peer coping, then the work system may continue its current functioning, but this functioning cannot be said to be sustainable for workers (Rani et al, 2021).

The current study conceptualizes human sustainability as an overarching lens through which to explore whether platform-based gig work fosters or erodes long-term health and well-being of workers. It contends that work cannot be characterized as sustainable if it requires workers to absorb economic, emotional and physical risks with little institutional support to reinforce the back-end decision-making.

2.5 Integrated Theoretical Perspective

Different aspects of these four perspectives are complementary when utilized in the study. The Job Demands-Resources model addresses the discrepancy between job demands and the resources needed to cope with them. Psychological resilience is what helps workers to deal with these pressures, and to carry on working under stress and uncertainty. Third, with respect to platform provision, value and support, theory on the psychological contract offers an understanding of workers' perceptions of platform fairness, support and neglect. It was found that human sustainability offers a broader evaluative frame in assessing if platform work supports the well-being of workers in the longer term.

In concert, these perspectives indicate that work demands, resource constraints, and perceived platform support and coping strategies together shape the mental health and well-being of workers receiving digital platform-based gig work. Workers do heavy lifting over and above resilience if demands are high, resources are low and platform support is deemed inadequate (Taylor et al, 2023). Yet such resilience may be survival where the options are limited, not true human sustainability.

Table 2. Theoretical framework of the study

Theoretical perspective	Key idea	Application to platform-based gig work	Relevance to this study
Job Demands-	Well-being depends on the balance between work	Explains how algorithmic pressure, income insecurity,	Helps analyse worker well-being and mental

Resources model	demands and resources	long hours, customer pressure and safety risks affect workers	health challenges
Psychological resilience	Workers adapt and continue functioning under stress	Explains emotional regulation, peer support, family support, route planning and continued participation	Helps understand coping mechanisms among gig workers
Psychological contract theory	Workers form expectations about fairness, support and reciprocity	Explains perceived breach when platforms provide weak support, opaque incentives or unfair grievance handling	Helps analyse trust, dignity and perceived organisational neglect
Human sustainability at work	Work should protect long-term physical, psychological and social well-being	Questions whether gig work is sustainable when it relies on individual coping and risk absorption	Provides the central evaluative lens of the study

Source: Author's own work

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted an interpretivist qualitative research approach to explore worker well-being, mental health and human sustainability experiences in platform-based gig work. Qualitative research often adopts an interpretivist stance due to its focus on exploring meaning rooted within human experience rather than testing a hypothesis in advance. The qualitative approach revealed more comprehensive understanding of workers' sense of understanding of algorithmic control, income volatility, customer pressure, operational uncertainty and the limits of organisational support.

In this paper, we used an inductive–deductive thematic style procedure during the study. The job demands–resources model, psychological resilience and theory of psychological contract and human sustainability at work informed the deductive component. Likewise, the analysis enabled themes emanating from the workers themselves. This enabled the study to link empirical accounts with theoretical positions, all the while preserving the contextual complexity of platform work in the Indian gig economy.

3.2 Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted among platform-based delivery workers engaged in food delivery and quick-commerce services in India. The platforms represented in the study included Swiggy, Zomato, Blinkit and Zepto. These platforms were selected because they represent two important forms of platform-mediated delivery work: restaurant-based food delivery and dark-store-based quick-commerce delivery.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling. To be included in the study, participants had to be at least 18 years old, currently active on a food-delivery or quick-commerce platform and directly involved in app-mediated delivery work. The final sample consisted of 34 platform-based gig workers. The sample included variation in age, marital status, platform affiliation and platform tenure, allowing the study to capture diverse experiences of work pressure, well-being and coping.

Table 3. Profile of interview participants

Participant characteristic	Category	N
Age group	21–25 years	10
	26–30 years	12
	31–36 years	12
Marital status	Married	20
	Unmarried	14
Platform affiliation	Swiggy	10
	Zomato	9
	Blinkit	8
	Zepto	7
Platform tenure	Less than 1 year	4

	1–3 years	17
	More than 3 years	13

Note: N = 34

Source: Author's own work.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were suitable because they provided a common structure across participants while allowing workers to explain their experiences in their own words. The interview guide covered five broad areas: everyday work routines and platform control, income and operational costs, customer interactions and dignity at work, physical and mental well-being, and coping practices used to continue platform work despite economic and emotional pressure.

Participants were asked about their daily working hours, order allocation, delivery-time pressure, customer ratings, incentive targets, earnings, fuel and vehicle expenses, weather-related difficulties, road safety, customer behaviour, restaurant or dark-store interactions, access to basic facilities, platform support, family responsibilities, peer support and reasons for continuing in platform work. Follow-up questions were used to obtain deeper explanations wherever participants referred to stress, unfair treatment, income uncertainty, fatigue, customer complaints or weak grievance redressal.

The interviews lasted approximately 45 to 90 minutes. They were conducted in Hindi, English or a mix of both, depending on the participant's comfort. This linguistic flexibility helped participants express their experiences more naturally. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Where interviews included Hindi or mixed-language responses, they were translated into English while retaining the original meaning and context. Care was taken during translation to preserve workers' expressions related to stress, dignity, coping and platform pressure.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis supported by ATLAS.ti. The analysis involved three stages. First, open coding was conducted to identify worker-near codes from the interview transcripts, such as "rating pressure," "fuel burden," "customer abuse," "no resting space," "family pressure," "peer support" and "working despite illness." Second, related codes were grouped into broader second-order themes, including algorithmic pressure, economic vulnerability, physical strain, support deficits, dignity concerns and coping practices. Third, these themes were integrated into four aggregate findings that explain the relationship between worker well-being, mental health, resilience and human sustainability in platform-based gig work.

Table 4. Analytical process

Stage	Analytical activity	Output
Stage 1	Repeated reading of transcripts	Familiarity with worker narratives
Stage 2	Open coding of interview data	First-order codes close to participant accounts
Stage 3	Grouping related codes	Second-order themes
Stage 4	Integrating themes with theory	Four aggregate findings
Stage 5	Cross-case comparison	Identification of recurring patterns and differences

Source: Author's own work.

3.5 Trustworthiness and Ethics

Several steps were taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. First, participants were drawn from multiple platforms to capture variation in platform work experiences. Second, the coding process was iterative, with repeated movement between transcripts, codes, themes and theoretical concepts. Third, representative participant quotations were used to support the interpretation of each theme. Fourth, reflexive notes were maintained during the analysis to avoid presenting workers only as victims or only as resilient individuals. Participation was voluntary. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to decline any question or withdraw from the interview. Identifying information was removed from transcripts and replaced with anonymised participant identifiers. Interview data were handled confidentially and used only for research purposes.

4. Findings

The thematic analysis generated four aggregate findings that explain how platform-based gig work shapes worker well-being, mental health and human sustainability. These findings show that workers' experiences are shaped by the interaction of algorithmic and economic demands, physical and emotional strain, support deficits and coping practices. Psychological resilience emerged as an important mechanism through which workers continued working, but this resilience often reflected adaptation to structural constraints rather than genuinely

sustainable work conditions.

The findings are presented through four aggregate themes. Each theme is supported by worker narratives and represented visually through ATLAS.ti network figures. The network figures show how first-order codes were connected to broader interpretive themes during analysis.

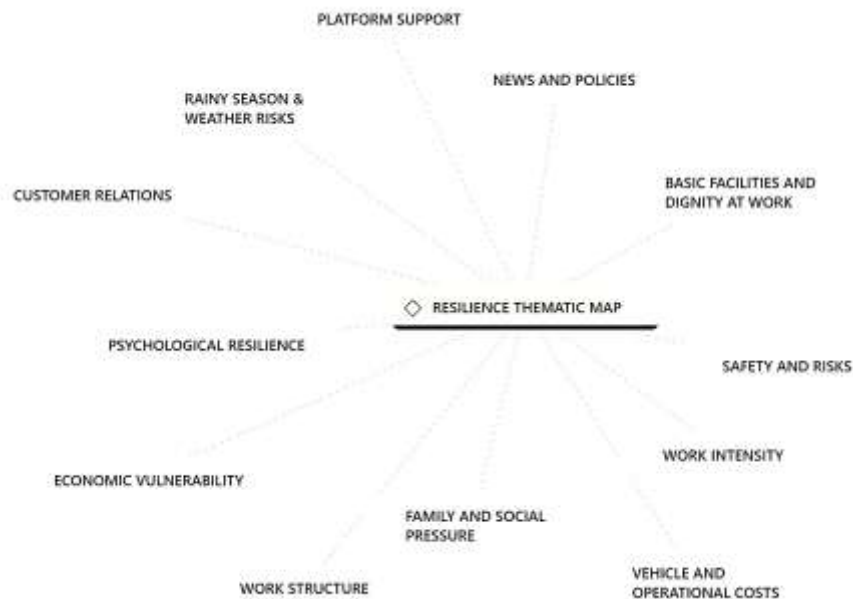


Figure 1. Overall thematic framework of worker well-being, mental health and human sustainability in platform-based gig work

Source: Author's analysis

The figure presents the overall thematic structure developed from 34 qualitative interviews with platform-based gig workers. It shows how algorithmic and economic demands, physical and emotional strain, support deficits, and resilience-related coping practices interact to shape worker well-being, mental health and human sustainability in platform-based gig work.

Table 5. Aggregate findings and supporting themes

Aggregate finding	Supporting themes	Representative first-order codes
Algorithmic and economic demands	Algorithmic pressure, pseudo-autonomy, income instability, vehicle and fuel costs	Rating pressure, incentive targets, low earnings, fuel burden, vehicle dependence
Physical, emotional and safety-related strain	Long hours, fatigue, customer mistreatment, weather and road risks	Burnout, customer abuse, rain exposure, accident risk, working despite illness
Support deficits, dignity concerns and psychological contract breach	Lack of facilities, weak platform support, perceived unfairness, lack of grievance redressal	No rest space, no toilet access, weak support, unfair complaints, deactivation fear
Resilience and limits of human sustainability	Family support, peer coping, emotional regulation, personal adjustment, policy hope and disillusionment	Talking to family, rider solidarity, controlling anger, route planning, no better option

Source: Author's own work

4.1 Algorithmic and Economic Demands

Platform-based gig work was experienced as apparent flexibility combined with strong algorithmic control. Workers recognised that platform work also meant logging on without a manager seeing them download the orders and earn. But this flexibility was highly influenced by ratings, delivery timelines, incentive targets and fear of losing work. In this sense, autonomy was not perfect, but rather contingent, for workers.

As one participant put it: "They said we are autonomous, but orders cannot be refused because incentives are influenced". A different worker said: "One wrong complaint can suspend my ID." Work came to be conducted in a way that reflected the evaluations of those platforms. Although workers formally had the right to accept or

reject orders, they were subjected to pressure to stay responsive as rejection, tardiness or customer complaints could risk income and access to the platform.

Economic demands intensified this pressure. Workers repeatedly voiced this view, saying their incomes were lower than gross earnings because they had to pay for fuel, mobile recharge, vehicle maintenance as well as food. A worker said: "With fuel this money disappears quickly." One commented explaining: "My bike is my livelihood. And if it stopped, then I stop earning". These narratives further highlight how a lot of the operational costs of platform work fall on workers. The income thus did not just depend on the volume of orders, but on the uninterrupted functioning of all of their personal technology (vehicle, mobile phone).

Workers described income instability as a mental stressor, as well. One bad week, sickness, car breakdown or rain-related disruption, and all household budgets could immediately be thrown off kilter. Workers in a marriage attribution linked the instability of income on family responsibilities, such as rent, children's education and household expenses. Unmarried workers also had significantly higher odds of reporting anxiety related to uncertainty about the future, fears of needing to live pay check-to-pay check, saving possibilities and career ambiguity.

The result is that algorithmic control and economic vulnerability were higher. Workers continued to rely on the app as a potential source of work, but they had to bear the financial burdens of being on call. Together, this produced a high-demand work environment in which workers were expected to continuously adapt their behaviour to the changing entitlements of the platforms while incurring the economic costs associated with delivery work.

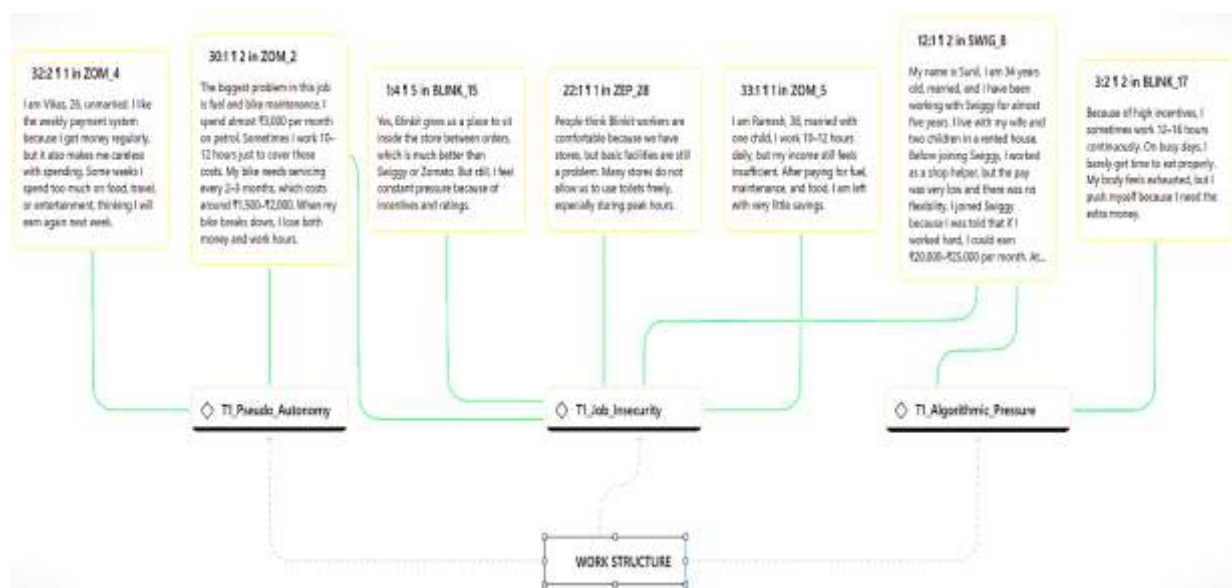


Figure 2. ATLAS.ti network showing algorithmic and economic demands

Source: Author's analysis

The figure shows the ATLAS.ti network for the first aggregate finding. It connects codes such as algorithmic pressure, pseudo-autonomy, rating anxiety, incentive dependence, low earnings. The network illustrates how app-based control and economic vulnerability jointly shape workers' everyday experience of platform-based gig work.

4.2 Physical, Emotional and Safety-Related Strain

The second major aggregate finding is the physical, emotional and safety-related strain of platform-based gig workers. Worker's spoke of long hours, fatigue, customer abuse, exposure to rain, unsafe roads and being pushed to work through illness or discomfort. The said conditions also impacted mental health along with physical health.

Nevertheless, workers frequently laboured lengthy hours, particularly when making an attempt to fulfil incentive targets. Many had days of 12 to 16 hours worked during periods of high demand. As one justifies, "Well my peak days, I touch work for 14 to 16 hours to achieve incentives." Another said, "I tire out my body, but I carry on because I need money. These accounts already demonstrate how the economic necessity and incentive structures that existed at the time forced longer hours. Workers frequently substituted rest and recovery for extra income.

Others argued that threats to the weather and to roads increased vulnerability further. Road crashes were aggravated due to rains, flooded roads, and also traffic congestion, lowering visibility, and night deliveries. This was largely the reason workers bought their own raincoats, mobile covers and protective gear. As one of the participants mentioned: "I bought a raincoat for myself because the company does not provide anything." As one of its drivers puts it: "When it rains, it's treacherous, but if I don't work, I'm losing money." Such examples demonstrate that risks associated with safety was typically individualised.

Further, the interactions with the Customers added emotional burden. A lot of times, the employees have been blamed for each delay in the delivery, wrong provide, melted articles or app-related issues—one thing they merely could not management. “They told me as well - a customer shouted at me about the wrong product but I delivered what the store gave me,” one worker said. One simply put, “I did not argue because ratings matter.” This meant agents were forced to contain customer anger while safeguarding their ratings and avoiding complaints. This meant that workers had to do emotional labour, and while some internalised this extra work as their fault, others felt they were being blamed without due process.

Physical exhaustion, danger of safety, and emotional storm generated a work environment that seemed to be mentally demanding. But the stress of income instability harms well-being not just because it is a stressor in its own right but also because the worker is constantly yanked between managing speed, managing safety, managing customer expectations and managing platform metrics. Stress in whatever was about the design of the work itself much more than difficulties that isolated people faced.

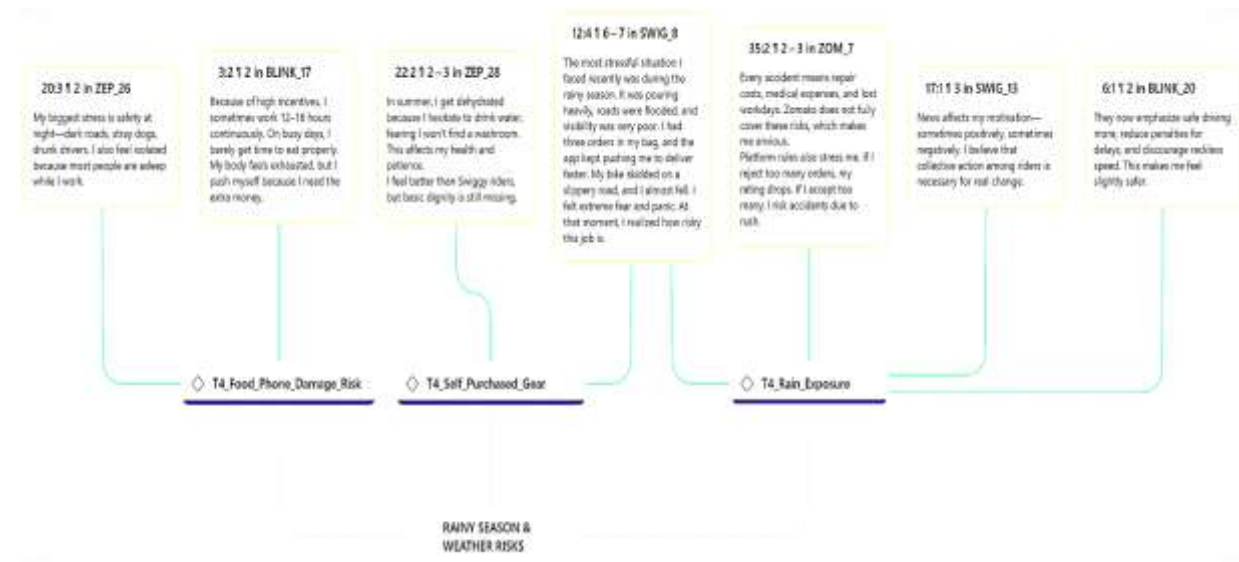


Figure 3. ATLAS.ti network showing physical, emotional and safety-related strain

The figure presents the ATLAS.ti network for the second aggregate finding. It links physical fatigue, rain exposure, road risk and working despite illness. The network shows how platform-based delivery work produces overlapping physical, emotional and safety-related pressures that affect worker well-being and mental health.

4.3 Support Deficits, Dignity Concerns and Psychological Contract Breach

The overall finding number three was the weak organizational & institutional support for workers. The most common problem highlighted by the participants was the unavailability of even basic amenities like resting shelter, toilets, drinking water and safer waiting areas. These were not trivial issues in life; they affected dignity, comfort and mental health directly.

Some workers said, ‘Restaurants are keeping us outside. One added: ‘I don’t drink water so I don’t have to use the toilet. This indicates that workers were required to be available at all times for taking up delivery work without consideration for their basic bodily needs. This felt exclusionary and insulting.

Workers also shared that they were offered little help from platforms during crashes or breakdowns, complaints, and payout problems. One worker said: “No raincoat, no fuel support, no medical cover, company will pay nothing. Another said, “They treat us like numbers.” This is one way to show that workers wanted much more than access to orders. They were counting on equity, a modicum of transparency around the rules governing the platforms they worked on, a modicum of respect, a modicum of protection from the threats that those who worked on the platforms engendered.

The discrepancy between expectation and reality in platform support represents psychological contract violation. Even while workers were stylised as independent contractors, they built up expectations of fair treatment, grievance redressal, assistance in case of accidents and dignity at work. When platforms seemed to prioritise customers over workers, or were otherwise unresponsive to worker concerns, participants felt disengaged and replaceable.

Dignity-related concerns were also present in day-to-day interactions with the restaurants, the customers and the platform systems. Customer abuse, suppression of restaurants and limited platform response solidified the belief that workers were disposable.

In general, the lack of support impacted both the working conditions in the context of work and also impacted their mental state. Absence of basic amenities, lack of grievance redressal mechanisms and limited institutional support further pushed the workers to cope on their own and rely more on informal networks. This finding

demonstrates the need to understand well-being in platform work as entangled with dignity, recognition and perceived organisational support.

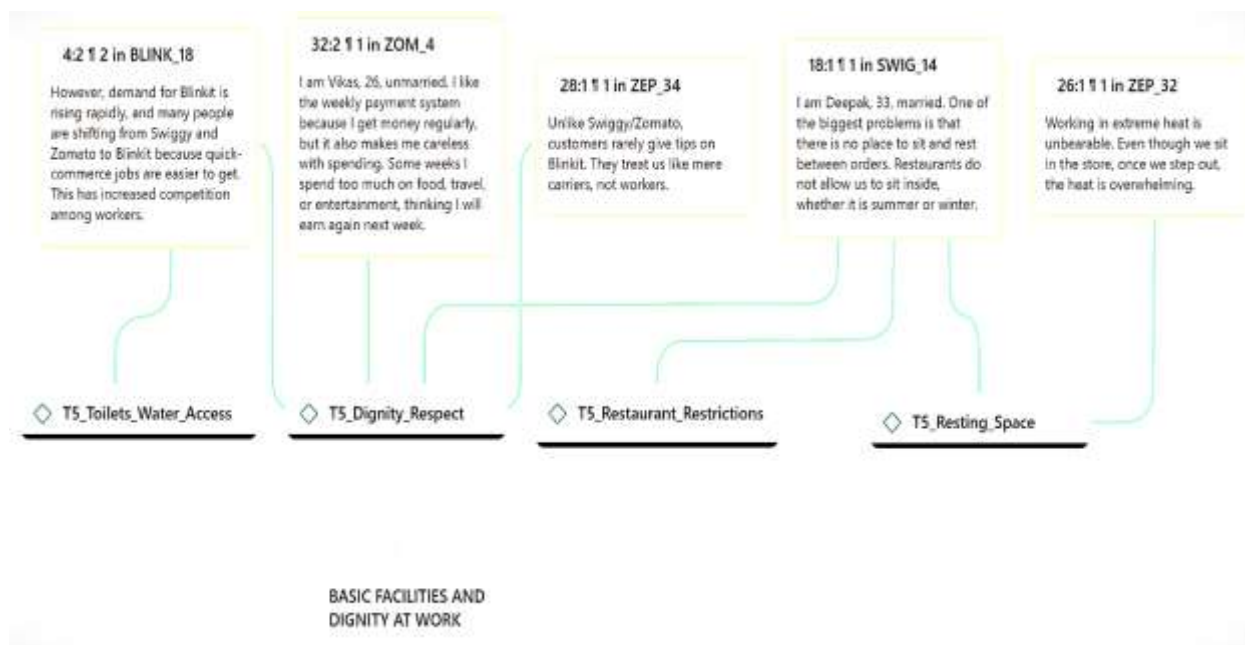


Figure 4. ATLAS.ti network showing support deficits, dignity concerns and psychological contract breach

Source: Author's own work

The figure shows the ATLAS.ti network for the third aggregate finding. It connects codes such as lack of rest space, toilet and water access, weak platform support, perceived exploitation, customer blame, restaurant restrictions, unfair complaints and deactivation fear. The network illustrates how support deficits and dignity concerns contribute to psychological contract breach and reduced worker well-being.

4.4 Resilience and the Limits of Human Sustainability

Resilience of Workers developed through Family support, Peer support, Emotional regulation, Route adjustment, and Personal discipline. These coping strategies enabled workers to seek to resume working remotely under difficult circumstances. The findings also indicate that resilience was usually the product of structural pressure rather than an indicator of sustainable work.

Previously just a theory, the effects of female support could be traced long into the future as mothers offered layers of emotional support, reassurance, and conflict resolution over the urban grind. As one respondent explained, "My wife supports me and encourages me to press on. One wrote, "I go on because my family relies on this income. These accounts illustrate how family ties proved helpful in reducing stress but in some cases also exacerbated the pressure to keep pushing on despite harsh working environments. Having family meant that family could be both a cure and a curse.

Peer support also helped extensively. And this is where they posted about routes, how long stores had taken to serve them, how customers had behaved, how the incentives shifted, and in what places they felt it was safest to work. A rider said that the riders keep on guiding us about which zones are good to be positioned and how to handle customers. But informal networks were vital for workers dealing with uncertainties in the gig economy where support from the platform was not significantly large. Peer support was utilized as an assistive tool for navigating the workforce platform.

The second secondary coping strategy was emotional regulation. Among the coping strategies were anger control, avoidance and "mentally preparing" for difficult customers; a strategy that appeared to be the most common among the workers. "I control my anger now," one worker responded. This is how the complaint will be passed on to me if I will respond. Emotional restraint helped workers protect ratings and blunt complaints, but in doing so it sometimes compelled them to swallow a grievance.

The results imply that resilience in platform-based gig work is both required and problematic.

It allows workers to keep earning and contend with challenging situations but compensates for systemic shortcomings as well. It was not that the work was entirely sustainable, but rather that workers had to fall back on personal resilience, family pressure, peer coping and practical adaptation.

At a high level, the results indicate a dialectic between the immediate liquidity of gig work on the one side and providing for long-term human capacity on the other side. Resilience enables workers to withstand the system but does not render the system sustainable. A sustainable platform work would involve better organisational support, equitable grievance redressal, availability of minimum facilities, income protection and dignity of workers.

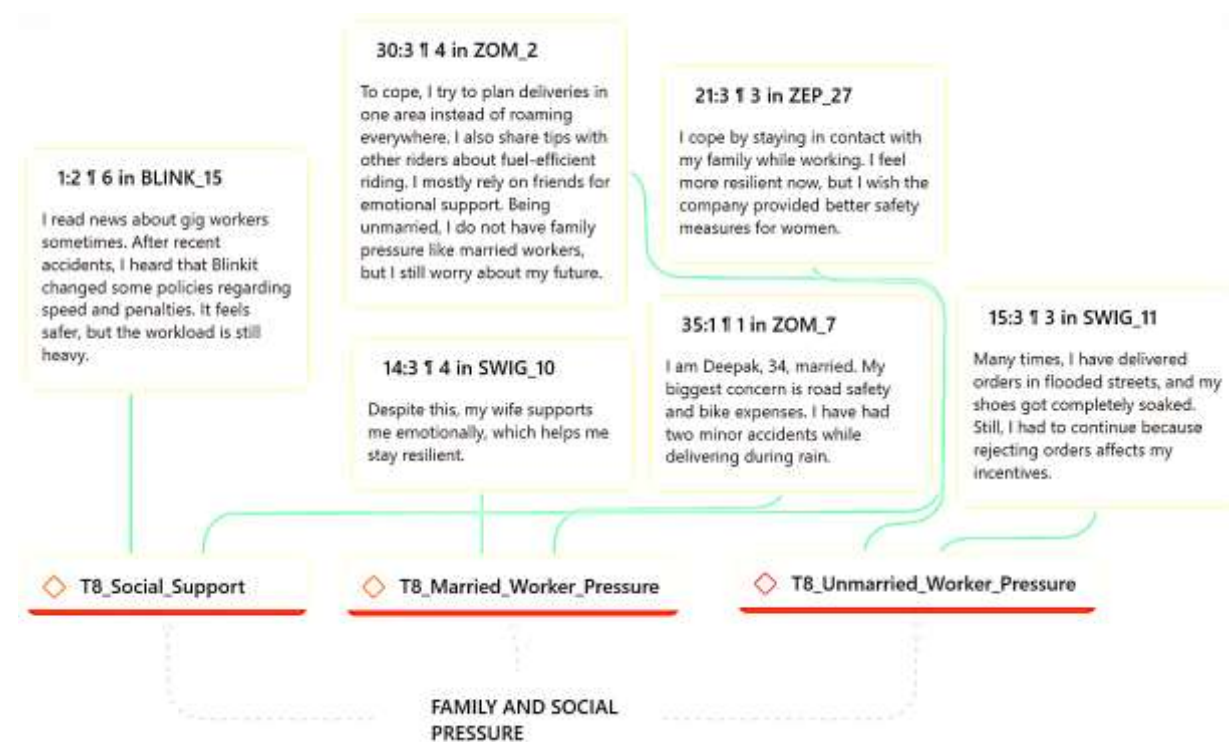


Figure 5. ATLAS.ti network showing resilience and the limits of human sustainability

Source: Author's own work

The figure presents the ATLAS.ti network for the fourth aggregate finding. It links family support, peer coping, emotional regulation, adaptive coping, personal growth, policy hope and continued participation. The network shows how resilience helps workers sustain platform work while also revealing the limits of human sustainability when coping substitutes for institutional support.

5. DISCUSSION

This study examined worker well-being, mental health and human sustainability among platform-based gig workers in India. Drawing on 34 qualitative interviews with food delivery and quick-commerce workers, the findings show that platform work is shaped by the combined effects of algorithmic control, economic vulnerability, physical and emotional strain, support deficits and worker coping practices.

5.1 High Demands, Limited Resources and Worker Well-being

The findings support the Job Demands–Resources perspective by showing that platform-based gig work is characterised by high job demands and limited formal resources. Workers faced algorithmic pressure, rating anxiety, delivery-time expectations, customer complaints, income instability, fuel costs, vehicle maintenance, long working hours, road risks and weather exposure (Timko et al, 2021). These demands were not isolated. Resources available to workers, on the other hand, were informal and limited. In the face of constant pressure, workers drew on local route knowledge, peer advice, family, flexible login options, and their own experience. But these resources fell short compared to the intensity of platform demands.

Therefore, such an insight suggests that platform-based gig work should not only be viewed through the lens of flexibility or short-term income opportunity. From the lens of OB/HRM, worker well-being results from whether job demands are engendered in proportion to resources. This trade-off was weak in the current study. While platform work gives rise to income, it puts workers under unrelenting economic, physical and psychological pressure. This imbalance is part of why workers reported fatigue, stress, insecurity and emotional exhaustion.

5.2 Algorithmic Control, Economic Vulnerability and Mental Health

In this paper, the authors discuss the evidence of how economic vulnerability and algorithmic control are interwoven in producing mental health outcomes. Workers had a certain kind of conditional independence. They might choose when to log in or not, but being in-app, their behaviour was dictated by ratings, allocation of orders, incentives, delivery timelines and fear of complaints or deactivation (Wan et al, 2024). This resulted in a workplace where so-called workers seem independent but are, in fact, very dependent upon rules defined by the platform and app-based evaluation.

That is significant because it tells us that mental health stress in gig work is not merely a matter of individual psychological trouble. It is determined by the assigning of the work itself. Precarious incomes, algorithmic

pressures and cost externalisation generate long-term uncertainty. They have to constantly compute if longer hours, delivering faster or taking on more hazard would generate a return adequate to sustain them. That kind of ambiguity can create tension, worry and emotional burnout. Mental health in platform work should therefore be conceptualized as a by-product of work design, rather than purely a function of the individual's ability to cope.

5.3 Support Deficits, Dignity and Psychological Contract Breach

This research also contributes to the theoretical extension of psychological contract theory in the gig economy context from an individual psychological contract perspective. Delivery workers are not employees but are treated like independent contractors, yet their expectations of fairness, respect, transparency and support are entirely normal. Workers expected platforms to offer clear incentive systems, handle complaints fairly, offer assistance in case of accidents and protection against arbitrary deactivation, and provide basic facilities during work. Workers felt that the platform practices were arbitrary and dismissive when these expectations were unmet.

Dignity was identified as a significant yet overlooked component of well-being. It was workers lack of rest spaces, drinking water, toilet access and safe waiting areas that compromised everyday bodily comfort and dignity.

HRM also has a lot at stake in the debate concerning the non-traditional employment relationship in that the barriers between the traditional employment relationship and one where there is no direct employee-employer relationship must be broken down to avoid saying that support for workers is only needed when there is a formal employment contract. Workers continue to interpret platform practices through fairness and reciprocity while platforms classify workers as independent contractors. Excessive violations of these expectations undermine workers' trust, motivation, and psychological well-being.

5.4 Resilience as Coping Rather Than Evidence of Sustainable Work

A central contribution of the study is its critical reading of resilience. The workers coped by emotionally regulating, learning from peers, finding family support, adjusting their routes, expending selective effort, being patient, and persisting despite hardship (Wiener et al, 2023). But the methods allowed employees to deal with stress, protect ratings, income and keep going in the circumstances.

This finding supports the notion that resilient workers, however present they may be, are not a sure sign of good work systems. Resilience in platform-based gig work may be a searching skill done in survival mode in poor working conditions (Wong et al, 2021). It is the workers' ability to adjust that makes platform work possible, but this same adaptability may mask the root causes of insecurity that its necessity implies.

In this way resilience is repositioned as a two-way process in the study. It allows for workers to earn, keep a balance of control over their lives, and keep managing uncertainty day by day. Alternatively, it may make endurance the norm and push the onus of sustaining work from platforms and institutions onto workers themselves. This understanding matters for OB/HRM research instead of praising resilience, it poses the question of whether resilience is compensating for ineffective work design.

5.5 Human Sustainability in Platform-Based Gig Work

The findings contribute to the human sustainability perspective by indicating that sustainability of work should not be conflated with continued work participation. Others remained in platform work because they needed money now, had family responsibilities and other legitimate reasons to be forced to use the platform with limited alternatives (Wood et al, 2021). Then, just because they continue to participate, does not mean that platform work promotes long term physical, psychological and social health.

Despite what these gig work narratives explain, this study therefore contends, human sustainability in gig work is not only about income access and flexible working. They depend on transparent incentive systems, grievance mechanisms that are timely and fair, protection of minimum earnings, accident and health support, safe working conditions, access to basic facilities, and the recognition of the dignity of the worker (Wood et al, 2019). In general, this study shows that work on the platform lays a double-edged sword: it offers opportunities, but also creates vulnerability. It grants access and leeway to income, but it is also saying, modifying work, and prone to both heavy demands and poor assistance and emotional labour. The system will only survive if you have resilience among the workers and resilience alone cannot make the system sustainable. Organisational and institutional arrangements which protect worker wellbeing are an essential prioritisation of the labour contract for sustainable platform work as opposed to individual coping primarily.

6. Practical Implications

The findings are relevant for platform organisations, managers, policymakers and other stakeholders that care about the future of gig work. In this study, however, platform delivery work is interpreted via many qualifiers that cannot be reduced to flexibility, order fulfilment or income access. It should be assessed also based on worker well-being, mental health and sustainability of humans.

This can happen at least in three main ways: first, platform organisations should increase algorithmic transparency. Deliveroo said it wanted to provide more transparency around how orders are allocated, why

ratings affect the opportunity to work, how incentives are calculated and how penalties or deactivations are determined. Uncertainty and stress are bred from a lack of clarity.

Second, they must strengthen their grievance resolution systems. Some workers also noted the threat of poor customer reviews without substantive justification, insufficient aid when disputes arise, and little opportunity for them to present their case. An impartial grievance mechanism where workers can challenge frivolous allegations, delayed payment, unfair ratings and sudden account suspension.

Third, platform firms must acknowledge the third-party costs to workers. While this scheme does subsidize the driver with immediate cash daily, that approval will then assess fuel expenses, the vehicle itself, mobile recharge, rain protection, money to continue their safety equipment etc, and then say earnings have been reduced. Potential areas for fuel support, aid with maintenance, accident insurance, emergency support and earning floors are being discussed with platforms.

Four, basic facilities should be included within decent platform work. Access to rest spaces, toilets and safe waiting areas are directly correlated with dignity, health and thermal comfort. Facilitate major support points for delivery workers through platforms working with restaurant partners, dark stores, local authorities, and commercial spaces.

Fifth, how to make customer-management systems fairer. Customer mistreatment, blame from peers, and customer pressure to rate them are frequent challenges workers face. Platforms must build systems that identify if a worker is making an error or if it was an error with the store, customer or app. To hammer workers based on customer complaints without verifying their genuineness is grossly unfair.

Mental wellbeing measures must be included in the support systems of platform workers. These do not require complicated programs. These simple, non-pharmaceutical Interventions such as helpline access, information dissemination on stress-management, emergency assistance, peer support groups and periodic feedback sessions with workers can help reduce loneliness and emotional distress.

Policymakers should no longer view gig work simply as flexible self-employment. Questioning whether there need minimal conditions on income security and accident experience and whether it should be here their social security and relief from injuries, health care and protection from arbitrary deactivation and others. The responsibility of mitigation of gig work Problem: Requirement is collective responsibility from platforms and between workers and institutions. A viable platform economy cannot depend on the ability of workers to endure it alone. It also has to set the stage for the long-term physical, psychological and social protection of workforces.

7. Limitations And Future Research

This study has several limitations that provide directions for future research. First, the study is based on 34 qualitative interviews with platform-based delivery workers. Although the sample was suitable for developing rich insights into worker's lived experiences, the findings are not intended for statistical generalisation. Future studies may use larger samples or mixed-method designs to examine whether the patterns identified in this study apply across wider groups of platform workers.

Second, the study focused on food-delivery and quick-commerce workers in India. These forms of platform work involve specific conditions such as app-based order allocation, customer ratings, delivery-time pressure, vehicle dependence and exposure to road and weather risks. Other forms of gig work, such as ride-hailing, domestic services, online freelancing or warehouse-linked platform work, may involve different forms of control, risk and worker coping.

Third, the study relied on self-reported interview data. Interviews are useful for understanding meaning, perception and lived experience, but they may also be influenced by recall bias or individual interpretation. Future studies could combine interviews with worker diaries, field observation, platform policy analysis or digital work records to capture real-time experiences of platform control, stress and coping.

Fourth, this study adopted a cross-sectional design. It captured workers' experiences at one point in time, while resilience and well-being are dynamic processes that may change with platform policy changes, income fluctuations, family responsibilities, health conditions and length of platform tenure. Longitudinal research would be valuable for understanding whether resilience protects workers over time or gradually turns into exhaustion, burnout or withdrawal from platform work.

Finally, future studies may further develop the concept of human sustainability in gig work. Quantitative research could test relationships among job demands, platform support, psychological contract fulfilment, resilience, mental health and continued work participation. Comparative studies across cities, platforms or regulatory contexts could also show how local labour markets and policy environments influence the sustainability of platform-based work.

8. CONCLUSION

Examining worker well-being, psychological health and human sustainability of platform-based gig workers in India. Based on 34 qualitative interviews with food-delivery and quick-commerce workers, the study finds that platform work is produced through a combination of algorithmic control, income instability, operational risks, customer pressure, weak organisational support and worker coping practices.

Results reveal that, despite the growing access to income via gig work and some degree of agency, platform

work also entails heavy demands on workers. Workers face pressure of rating, unpredictable incomes, fuel and vehicle expenditure, long hours of work, rain and road hazards, customer toll and unavailability of basic amenities and grievance redressal system. These conditions pose risks to workers' physical health, emotional well-being, and mental health.

A key take-away from the research is that resilience in gig work should not be seen simply as an individual capacity. Workers exhibit resilience through family support, peer networks, emotional moderation, route adaptation and personal perseverance. These practices support them to keep working in difficult circumstances. Yet resilience also serves as a compensatory mechanism for structural failings. It allows workers to endure the system, but it does not actually make the work system sustainable.

The findings from this study advance gig work and human resource management literature by illustrating how worker well-being in platform-based work is influenced through both the Coping Capacity of individuals but also the conditions in which such Coping becomes relatable as a necessary event due to organisational and institutional attributes of Platform Work. Consequently, the future of platform work should transform from resilience-driven sustainability to work systems ensuring long-term protection of human well-being.

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