

# A Study on the Gig Economy and its Impact on Employment Patterns and Worker Well-Being with Special Reference to Gig Workers in Coimbatore District

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**Abstract.** The gig economy, characterised by short-term, flexible, platform-mediated work arrangements, has emerged as one of the most transformative forces reshaping labour markets in India and globally. Platforms such as Swiggy, Zomato, Ola, Uber, Urban Company, Dunzo, and Porter have created millions of gig work opportunities for delivery personnel, ride-share drivers, home service professionals, and freelance workers across Indian cities. Coimbatore, with its rapidly growing food delivery, logistics, and service sector ecosystem, has experienced significant growth in its gig worker population. This study examines the impact of gig economy participation on employment patterns and worker well-being among gig workers in Coimbatore district, analysing dimensions of income stability, work flexibility, social security access, occupational health, job satisfaction, and future employment aspirations. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 120 active gig workers across major platforms operating in Coimbatore. Secondary data were gathered from NITI Aayog reports, ILO publications, academic journals, and industry reports. Statistical tools including simple percentage analysis, weighted average method, and chi-square test were employed.

**keywords:** Gig Economy, Gig Workers, Platform Economy, Worker Well-being, Employment Patterns, Social Security, Coimbatore.

## I INTRODUCTION

The nature of work is undergoing its most profound transformation since the Industrial Revolution, driven by the convergence of digital platform technology, artificial intelligence, smartphone ubiquity, and shifting workforce preferences. The gig economy, broadly defined as a labour market characterised by short-term contracts, on-demand work arrangements, and platform-mediated matching of workers with consumers, has emerged as one of the defining economic phenomena of the twenty-first century. In India, the gig economy has grown at an extraordinary pace, with the country now ranking among the world's top three gig work markets. According to NITI Aayog's 2022 report on India's booming gig and platform economy, approximately 7.7 million workers were engaged in gig work in 2020-21, with this number projected to expand to 23.5 million by 2029-30, representing one of the most significant structural shifts in the Indian labour market.

The gig economy in India encompasses a wide and rapidly expanding spectrum of work categories. At one end lie platform-dependent gig workers whose livelihoods are almost entirely mediated through digital platforms, including food delivery executives on Swiggy and Zomato, ride-share drivers on Ola and Uber, last-mile logistics workers on Porter, Dunzo, and Shadowfax, and home service professionals on Urban Company and Housejoy. At the other end lies the broader category of independent professionals, freelancers, and contract workers who leverage digital platforms to find and fulfil work engagements. What unites these diverse categories is the fundamental absence of traditional employer-employee relationships, with gig workers typically classified as independent contractors rather than employees, placing them outside the protection of most labour laws, social security schemes, and employment benefit frameworks.

Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu's industrial powerhouse and a city with a thriving commercial, educational, and hospitality ecosystem, has developed a substantial gig worker community in recent years. The city's dense restaurant and food service sector, its large student and professional population with high food delivery demand, its growing e-commerce logistics requirements, and its expanding middle-class household services market have collectively created fertile conditions for gig platform growth. Understanding the employment patterns, income dynamics, and well-being experiences of gig workers in Coimbatore is critically important for designing city-level labour welfare policies, informing platform accountability frameworks, and supporting the financial inclusion and social protection of this rapidly growing but deeply vulnerable segment of the urban workforce. This study provides the first comprehensive empirical analysis of gig economy dynamics and worker well-being in Coimbatore district.

## II. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Despite the gig economy's rapid growth and its increasingly significant role in Coimbatore's urban labour market, gig workers remain among the most economically precarious and institutionally invisible segments of the city's workforce. The classification of gig workers as independent contractors rather than employees by platform companies creates a structural exclusion from fundamental labour protections including minimum wage guarantees, provident fund contributions, employee state insurance coverage, paid leave entitlements, and statutory gratuity. This exclusion is particularly acute in a city like Coimbatore, where gig work has become a primary rather than supplementary livelihood source for a growing number of workers displaced from traditional employment by automation, industrial restructuring, and post-pandemic economic disruption.

The income volatility inherent in gig work, where earnings are directly linked to the number of tasks completed without any guaranteed minimum, exposes gig workers to severe financial insecurity, particularly during periods of illness, platform algorithmic changes, surge demand reduction, or adverse weather. The physical demands of delivery and transportation gig work, combined with inadequate occupational health safeguards and the psychological pressure of algorithmic performance management, create significant worker well-being risks that are inadequately documented at the city level. This study addresses the critical empirical gap in understanding gig worker employ-

ment patterns and well-being in Coimbatore, generating evidence needed to inform policy interventions, platform accountability mechanisms, and worker support programmes.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

- To examine the socio-demographic profile and employment pattern of gig workers operating across major platforms in Coimbatore district, including platform affiliation, work hours, and income levels.
- To analyse the income stability, financial security, and access to social protection mechanisms among gig workers in Coimbatore and assess the adequacy of gig earnings relative to living costs.
- To evaluate the occupational well-being of gig workers in Coimbatore across dimensions of physical health, psychological stress, work-life balance, and job satisfaction.
- To examine gig workers' awareness of and access to government welfare schemes designed for informal and gig sector workers, including the e-Shram portal, PM-SYM, and the Code on Social Security 2020.
- To suggest policy recommendations and platform accountability measures to improve income stability, social security access, and overall well-being of gig workers in Coimbatore district.

### **III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Valerio De Stefano (2016), in his research work *The Rise of the “Just-in-Time Workforce”: On-Demand Work, Crowdtwork and Labour Protection in the “Gig-Economy”*, explained how platform companies classify workers as independent contractors to avoid labour law obligations. The study emphasized the need for labour protection and social security for gig workers.

Lawrence F. Katz and Alan B. Krueger (2019), in their research article *The Rise and Nature of Alternative Work Arrangements in the United States, 1995–2015* published in *ILR Review*, Volume 72, Issue 2, found that gig workers had lower access to employee benefits but enjoyed greater flexibility and autonomy.

Alexandrea J. Ravenelle (2019), in her book *Hustle and Gig: Struggling and Surviving in the Sharing Economy*, observed that gig workers experienced both flexibility and insecurity due to uncertain income and lack of job security.

Steven Vallas and Juliet B. Schor (2020), in their article *What Do Platforms Do? Understanding the Gig Economy* published in *Annual Review of Sociology*, Volume 46, Issue 1, explained how algorithms and rating systems controlled gig workers and reduced their actual independence.

NITI Aayog (2022), in its report *India’s Booming Gig and Platform Economy*, highlighted the rapid growth of gig employment in India and pointed out issues such as lack of social security and unstable income among workers.

P. Suresh and T. Annamalai (2023), in their study on gig worker livelihoods in Coimbatore and Chennai, found that gig workers earned low net income after deductions and faced health and social security challenges.

## IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 1. Research Design

The study employs a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the employment patterns and well-being of gig workers across major digital platforms in Coimbatore district. The descriptive component documents the socio-economic profile, work patterns, and income characteristics of the gig workforce, while the analytical component examines associations between gig work characteristics and worker well-being outcomes through statistical testing.

### 2. Study Population and Sample

The target population comprises active gig workers engaged with major platform companies operating in Coimbatore, including Swiggy, Zomato, Ola, Uber, Urban Company, Porter, and Dunzo. A sample of 120 gig workers was selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques, given the absence of a sampling frame for the gig worker population in Coimbatore. Respondents were approached at platform partner centres, gig worker congregation points, and through peer referral networks to ensure inclusion of workers across different platform categories and income levels.

### 3. Data Collection

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered through personal interview to overcome literacy barriers among some respondents. The questionnaire covered gig worker demographics, platform affiliation and work history, daily work hours and earnings, social security awareness and enrolment, physical and mental health indicators, job satisfaction dimensions, and future employment intentions. Secondary data were sourced from NITI Aayog reports, ILO working papers on platform work, Reserve Bank of India financial inclusion reports, Tamil Nadu Labour Department publications, and peer-reviewed academic journals on the gig economy.

### 4. Tools for Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using simple percentage analysis to profile the gig worker sample, weighted average method to rank well-being challenges and job satisfaction factors, and chi-square test of independence to examine associations between gig work characteristics and worker well-being outcomes. All respondents provided informed verbal consent before participation in the study.

## V. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Interpretation: The socio-demographic profile reveals that gig work in Coimbatore is overwhelmingly male-dominated (87.5%), reflecting deep gender inequities in gig platform participation particularly in delivery and ride-share categories. The 26-35 age group constitutes the largest segment (45%), confirming that gig work primarily attracts prime working-age adults rather than students or retirees.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic and Employment Profile of Gig Workers in Coimbatore District (n = 120)

Profile Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	105	87.5
	Female	15	12.5
Age Group	18 – 25 years	36	30.0
	26 – 35 years	54	45.0
	36 – 45 years	24	20.0
	Above 45 years	6	5.0
Educational Qualification	Below SSLC	18	15.0
	SSLC / HSC	60	50.0
	Diploma / ITI	24	20.0
	Graduate and above	18	15.0
Platform / Gig Type	Food Delivery (Swiggy / Zomato)	48	40.0
	Ride-Share (Ola / Uber)	30	25.0
	Logistics / Delivery (Porter / Dunzo)	24	20.0
	Home Services (Urban Company)	18	15.0
Gig Work as Income Source	Primary and sole income	72	60.0
	Primary with part-time other work	30	25.0
	Supplementary income only	18	15.0
Years in Gig Work	Less than 1 year	18	15.0
	1 – 2 years	42	35.0
	3 – 4 years	36	30.0
	More than 4 years	24	20.0

SSLC and HSC holders form the majority (50%), indicating that gig work has become a significant employment pathway for secondary-educated workers who face limited formal employment options. A critical finding is that 60% of respondents rely on gig work as their sole primary income source, rising to 85% when those with gig work as their primary income with supplementary work are included. This high income dependency underscores the severe consequences of income volatility and platform policy

changes for gig worker livelihoods in Coimbatore. Food delivery is the largest gig category (40%), followed by ride-share (25).

Table 2: Income, Working Hours, and Financial Security Profile of Gig Workers in Coimbatore (n = 120)

Financial Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Average Daily Working Hours	Less than 6 hours	12	10.0
	6 – 8 hours	24	20.0
	9 – 11 hours	48	40.0
	12 hours or more	36	30.0
Monthly Gross Earnings (Rs.)	Below Rs. 10,000	18	15.0
	Rs. 10,001 – Rs. 15,000	42	35.0
	Rs. 15,001 – Rs. 20,000	36	30.0
	Above Rs. 20,000	24	20.0
Monthly Net Earnings after Deductions (Rs.)	Below Rs. 8,000	24	20.0
	Rs. 8,001 – Rs. 12,000	48	40.0
	Rs. 12,001 – Rs. 16,000	30	25.0
	Above Rs. 16,000	18	15.0
Income Stability Perception	Very Stable	6	5.0
	Moderately Stable	24	20.0
	Somewhat Unstable	48	40.0
	Very Unstable	42	35.0
Has Rainy Day Savings	Yes	36	30.0
	No	84	70.0

**Interpretation:** The income and working hours analysis reveals a deeply concerning picture of gig worker economic insecurity in Coimbatore. A significant 70% of respondents work nine or more hours daily, with 30% working twelve or more hours, reflecting the intensity of labour required to generate adequate earnings in a per-task compensation model. Despite these long working hours, 60% of respondents earn gross monthly incomes of Rs. 15,000 or below, and after platform commission deductions, fuel costs, vehicle maintenance, and mobile data charges, net monthly earnings fall below Rs. 12,000 for 60% of the sample. A striking 75% of respondents rate their income as somewhat or very unstable, reflecting the inherent earnings volatility of demand-linked piece-rate gig compensation. Most alarming is the finding that 70% of gig workers in Coimbatore have no savings buffer, leaving them critically exposed to any income disruption from illness, accident, or platform algorithm changes.

Table 3: Social Security Awareness and Access Among Gig Workers in Coimbatore (n = 120)

Social Security Indicator	Yes (%)	No (%)	Awareness but Not Enrolled (%)
Enrolled in e-Shram Portal	30.0	55.0	15.0
Enrolled in PM-SYM (Pension Scheme)	10.0	78.3	11.7
Has personal health insurance	20.0	80.0	–
Has accident / life insurance	25.0	75.0	–
Receives PF / ESI from platform	5.0	95.0	–
Aware of Code on Social Security 2020	18.3	81.7	–
Member of any gig worker union / association	12.5	87.5	–

**Interpretation:** The social security analysis reveals an alarming landscape of institutional exclusion and welfare coverage gaps among Coimbatore's gig workers. Only 30% are enrolled on the e-Shram portal, India's primary registration mechanism for unorganised workers, and a mere 10% are enrolled in the PM-SYM pension scheme despite its low contribution threshold. A critical 80% have no personal health insurance, leaving them entirely self-financed for medical expenses in a high-risk physical occupation. Only 5% receive any platform-provided PF or ESI contribution, reflecting the near-universal classification of gig workers as contractors rather than employees by platform companies. Awareness of the Code on Social Security 2020, which explicitly

includes platform and gig workers within its scope, is limited to 18.3% of respondents, indicating critical failures in government outreach and communication with the gig worker community in Coimbatore. Just 12.5% are members of any gig worker union or collective,

Table 4: Occupational Well-Being Assessment of Gig Workers in Coimbatore (n = 120)

Well-Being Dimension	Severely Affected (%)	Moderately Affected (%)	Mildly Affected (%)	Not Affected (%)	Mean Score (1-5)
Physical fatigue and exhaustion	45.0	35.0	13.3	6.7	4.18
Risk of road accidents and injuries	40.0	36.7	16.6	6.7	4.10
Psychological stress and anxiety	38.3	35.0	18.3	8.4	4.03
Exposure to heat, rain, and weather	43.3	33.3	16.7	6.7	4.13
Work-life and family time balance	41.7	35.0	15.0	8.3	4.10
Financial stress from income volatility	50.0	30.0	13.3	6.7	4.23
Sense of job insecurity and uncertainty	45.0	33.3	14.4	7.3	4.16
Lack of career growth opportunities	41.7	36.7	13.3	8.3	4.12

Interpretation: The occupational well-being analysis presents a sobering picture of the daily realities faced by gig workers in Coimbatore. Financial stress from income volatility is the most severe well-being concern (mean = 4.23), with 80% of respondents reporting moderate to severe impact, directly reflecting the earnings instability documented in Table 2. Physical fatigue (mean = 4.18) and job insecurity (mean = 4.16) rank second and third, followed closely by exposure to adverse weather conditions (mean = 4.13). Road accident risk (mean = 4.10) and work-life balance disruption (mean = 4.10) are equally rated, reflecting the twin dangers of Coimbatore's congested traffic environment and the long working hours required to maintain adequate earnings. Psychological stress affects 73.3% at moderate to severe levels (mean = 4.03), and the sense of limited career growth opportunities (mean = 4.12) reflects the structural ceiling

that gig work imposes on workers' professional development and upward economic mobility

Table 5: Job Satisfaction Dimensions Among Gig Workers in Coimbatore (n = 120)  
 Job Satisfaction Factor Highly Satisfied (%) Satisfied (%) Neutral (%) Dissatisfied (%) Mean Score

Job Satisfaction Factor	Highly Satisfied (%)	Satisfied (%)	Neutral (%)	Dissatisfied (%)	Mean Score
Work schedule flexibility and autonomy	45.0	33.3	13.3	8.4	4.15
Immediate and daily payment access	50.0	30.0	12.5	7.5	4.23
No fixed workplace or supervisor pressure	41.7	35.0	15.0	8.3	4.10
Income potential during peak hours	33.3	35.0	18.3	13.4	3.88
Platform app usability and support	25.0	35.0	21.7	18.3	3.67
Treatment by customers and public	28.3	36.7	21.7	13.3	3.80
Overall job satisfaction	20.0	38.3	25.0	16.7	3.62

**Interpretation:** The job satisfaction analysis reveals a nuanced picture in which gig workers in Coimbatore derive genuine satisfaction from specific intrinsic features of gig work while expressing significant dissatisfaction with structural and relational dimensions. Immediate daily payment access (mean = 4.23) and work schedule flexibility (mean = 4.15) are the two highest satisfaction drivers, confirming that the financial immediacy and temporal autonomy of gig work are genuinely valued by workers who may have previously lacked both in formal employment. The absence of direct supervisory pressure (mean = 4.10) also receives strong positive ratings. However, platform app usability and support (mean = 3.67), customer treatment (mean = 3.80), and income potential during non-peak hours (mean = 3.88) receive comparatively lower satisfaction ratings. Critically, overall job satisfaction (mean = 3.62) is the lowest-rated dimension, indicating that while specific gig work features are valued, the cumulative experi

**Findings of the Study**

The study on gig economy employment patterns and worker well-being in Coimbatore district has generated extensive, significant, and policy-urgent findings. The gig worker

population in Coimbatore is characterised by a heavily male-dominated, prime working-age profile, with SSLC and HSC holders forming the majority, reflecting gig work's role as a significant employment pathway for workers with limited formal employment options. The critical finding that 85% of respondents rely on gig work as their primary or sole income source underscores the high livelihood stakes involved in gig platform policy decisions and algorithmic changes.

The income and working hours analysis reveals a pattern of labour-intensive earnings generation at income levels that often fall below living wage benchmarks in Coimbatore. With 70% of workers logging nine or more hours daily yet 60% netting below Rs. 12,000 monthly after deductions, the effective hourly compensation of many Coimbatore gig workers is significantly below the statutory minimum wage, raising serious labour rights concerns. The finding that 70% of gig workers have no savings buffer is particularly alarming given the income volatility that 75% experience as a regular feature of their employment, creating a population highly vulnerable to economic shocks from illness, accidents, or platform disruptions.

The social security analysis reveals a landscape of near-total institutional exclusion, with 95% receiving no platform-provided PF or ESI, 80% lacking health insurance, and only 30% enrolled on the e-Shram portal. Occupational well-being is significantly compromised across all eight measured dimensions, with financial stress, physical fatigue, job insecurity, and weather exposure being the most severe concerns. Despite these formidable challenges, gig workers derive genuine and significant satisfaction from work schedule flexibility and immediate payment access, confirming that well-designed gig work can offer genuine value when adequately supported by social protection frameworks.

### **Suggestions**

The Tamil Nadu government and the Coimbatore district administration should organise special e-Shram registration drives for gig workers and encourage platform companies to integrate registration into their onboarding process. Tamil-language support services and awareness campaigns can help workers better access welfare schemes and government benefits. The provisions of the Code on Social Security, 2020 should also be implemented effectively through a contributory social security system that provides gig workers with portable benefits such as health insurance, accident coverage, and retirement savings across different platforms.

Platform companies, especially those involved in food delivery and logistics services, should provide mandatory accident insurance and affordable group health insurance coverage for gig workers. In addition, a district-level Gig Worker Welfare Fund can be established to support workers facing medical emergencies and work-related accidents. Greater transparency should also be ensured in platform operations by clearly explaining earnings calculations, task allocation systems, and account deactivation policies. A dedicated grievance redressal cell can further help workers resolve issues related to payments, unfair treatment, and platform policy violations.

Moreover, skill development institutions in Coimbatore should introduce specialised training programmes for gig workers to improve their employability and provide opportunities for career advancement. Financial literacy programmes focusing on savings,

insurance, digital banking, and investments can help workers manage income instability more effectively. Recognising gig work experience as valid employment history for formal jobs and credit assessments can also improve workers' access to banking services and future employment opportunities.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This study provides a detailed analysis of gig economy employment patterns and worker well-being in Coimbatore district. The findings reveal that the gig economy has generated significant employment opportunities, particularly for young and middle-aged workers with secondary education, by offering flexible working hours, quick income generation, and greater operational independence. For many workers, gig employment serves as an accessible alternative to formal jobs that may not provide similar flexibility or immediate earning opportunities.

However, the study also highlights several serious challenges faced by gig workers in Coimbatore. Many workers experience unstable and low incomes despite working long hours, while most remain excluded from social security and welfare protection systems. Earnings volatility, financial stress, occupational health risks, and limited opportunities for long-term career growth further increase the vulnerability of gig workers. These issues are largely linked to the independent contractor model adopted by platform companies, which reduces employer responsibility towards worker welfare and protection. The findings suggest that improving the condition of gig workers requires coordinated efforts from the government, platform companies, and welfare institutions. Stronger implementation of social security measures, welfare scheme awareness, accident and health insurance coverage, and greater transparency in platform algorithms are necessary to ensure fair working conditions. Skill development and financial literacy programmes can also help workers improve their long-term economic stability and career prospects. Overall, the study concludes that the gig economy can contribute positively to Coimbatore's economic development only when supported by effective regulation, worker protection measures, and inclusive welfare policies. Future research may focus on long-term income growth, social mobility, and the impact of welfare interventions on gig workers' quality of life.

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