The RIGHTS SURVEY

(Respect and Integrity of Gig Workers; Humanity and Trust in Service)

EMPOWERING PEOPLE

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FOREWORD

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India's gig economy has expanded rapidly in the past few years on the back of rapid improvements in access to smartphones and mobile internet as well as the pandemic-induced changes in consumer behaviour. Even as delivery workers and app-based taxi drivers have become a routine feature of our urban landscape, this economy has extended beyond these visible markers, encompassing a range of services including personal services, repair and maintenance, computer-based tasks and much more. An estimated 7 to 10 million workers are likely to be employed in this sector which includes delivery, transport, local services and other digital work. But exact estimates are hard to come by, and reliable data on numbers and kinds of gig workers at a national level is still scarce; leave alone Information on hours or conditions of work, income, types of contracts and perception of such work among workers and their families. For all these reasons, this report on a nationwide survey of platform workers, the RIGHTS survey, is a timely and important addition to our understanding of this growing but understudied segment of the Indian workforce.

The Indian economy has experienced rapid economic growth in the past few decades lifting millions of households out of poverty. As non-farm employment opportunities in manufacturing, construction and services have increased, severe forms of deprivation have decreased substantially. But for the vast majority of workers, employment continues to be informal and precarious in nature, a fact made all too painfully obvious during the Covid-19 pandemic and its associated lockdowns. As aspirations have risen with rising education levels, the inability of economic growth to create secure, well-paying and formal jobs in adequate numbers has become clear. One indicator of this is the persistently high rate of unemployment among educated young people under the age of 30. Under these circumstances, a rapidly growing sector of employment, especially for young workers, has been "gig work" or platform-based work.

This report marks an important addition to the academic and policy-oriented studies of platform-based work that have begun to emerge, particularly since the pandemic. The RIGHTS survey has been developed in consultation with gig worker unions and has been conducted by Janpahal, an organisation that has been working with gig workers for several years. With a sample of over five thousand workers surveyed across thirty-two Tier 1, 2, and 3 cities and the major industries of transport, food delivery, and package delivery, this is the largest survey of platform-based workers conducted in India.

Several major insights emerge from this report. The survey clearly reveals platform-based work to be full-time employment (as opposed to a part time "gig") where workers have little autonomy on hours of work and little knowledge of the algorithms that dictate their daily life. What emerges is not self-employment or "partnership" but rather effectively an employer-employee relationship that is not subject to the same legal provisions as other such engagements. The need for public oversight on the terms and conditions of such employment including commission rates and lack of social security or other benefits is also clear from the findings of the survey. The recent Gig Workers law enacted in Rajasthan and the proposal for a gig worker welfare fund in the latest Karnataka state budget are important steps in this respect.

Overall this study is an important intervention in the gig economy discourse. I congratulate the team on the release of this important report and look forward to the conversation that ensues.

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Among the 5,220 respondents, **57% have been drivers/ riders for two-five years, and 16% for more than five years.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

■ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The value of goods and services purchased through e-commerce in India is expected to reach USD 111 billion by 2024 and USD 200 billion by 2026. Buoyed by the growth of smartphones and digital payments, more and more urban Indians are using apps to order groceries within 15 minutes, buy food from restaurants past midnight, avail of beauty salon services at home, or call a cab to pick them up from their doorstep. The last link in this ever-growing digital bazaar is, however, still a human being represented by thousands of riders and drivers who crowd the streets of our cities. These workers are part of the burgeoning gig economy and form the segment called "location-based platform workers," where platform refers to the tech interface between suppliers of a product or service and the market. For simplicity, the rest of the report will refer to them as "gig workers,""workers," or "platform workers" interchangeably.

With growing digitalisation, the employer-employee paradigm is fast changing, and old laws and policies are proving to be inadequate in ensuring fair work practices for gig workers. Internationally, organisations like ILO have also begun to take serious note of the asymmetry of power in the platform economy, which is increasingly proving to be tilted against the workers (ILO, 2022a).

Against this background, a study was undertaken to present a deeper understanding of the issues involved through authentic reports from the ground, for informed policymaking. A nationwide survey of over 5,220 gig workers was conducted by the activist organisation Janpahal, in collaboration with the author. The survey was called R.I.G.H.T.S., which is an acronym for "Respect and Integrity of Gig workers; Humanity and Trust in Service" as it presents location-based platform workers' perceptions and opinions of their jobs along the lines of Respect, Integrity, Humanity, and Trust. In addition, over 50 personal interviews were conducted by the author across the country to understand the stories behind the numbers.

The noteworthy features of the survey are:
1. Largest survey of gig workers conducted in India
2.Covering 32 cities with representations from metros, Tier 1, 2, and 3 cities
3. Across all main sectors: transport, food delivery, and package delivery
4. Conducted through face-to-face interviews

KEY FINDINGS

1.It's not really a "gig"!

The word "gig" is American slang coined in the 1920s, by jazz musicians who would carry instruments and perform at different bars and cafes that hired them. The term came to be used for a job that lasts a specified, typically short period of time, and for which payment is made on a per-task basis. The popular conception of gig work is that of a young person driving a cab or delivering food, to earn money on the side for a few months while waiting for better prospects.

While this cohort exists as part of gig workers, our survey finds that for a majority, platform-based employment is, in fact, the primary source of income, in which they are engaged for the entire day, working for more than two-three years. Among the 5,220 respondents, **57% have been drivers/riders for two-five years, and 16% for more than five years.** Even **in the majority age group of 22-30,** which expectedly would have the maximum number of people who would treat it as a temporary job, **47% have been gig workers for more than two years**. Therefore, the engagement with the company is clearly more than a side hustle.

The **full-time nature of the job** becomes even more starkly evident when we consider the hours worked. **A mere 3% work for under four hours**, 12% for four-eight hours, and **a staggering 85% work above eight hours a day** as drivers/riders! Within that, 21% work more than 12 hours a day. If a majority of workers are on the road for more than eight hours a day, there is indeed limited flexibility that the job offers. They maybe be able to choose the specific hours in which they work, but to earn the requisite income, they are compelled to put in a full day's worth of work.

2.Underrepresentation and occupational segregation of women

Among the over 5,000 people interviewed across the country, selected randomly by surveyors, **a mere 2.3% were women**. This finding by itself is indicative of two things. The first is that unlike what has been stated in some earlier reports, all gig work is not women-friendly or gender-agnostic. Within the gig economy, women are more represented in digital gig work which is done from home. However, they are scarcely found in location-based platform work, because by its very construction, such work requires mobility. Womenare mobility-constrainedboth for socio-cultural reasons and because of the heightened risk to personal safety they face in urban public spaces. Additionally, such work requires possession of a vehicle, particularly of a two-wheeler. While Indian women's share in vehicle ownership and possession of driving licenses is improving, the representation of women in jobs requiring driving is still paltry (Ola Mobility Institute, 2021). Out of 6,37,364 professional driver's licenses issued in the year 2019-20, only 11,690 were issued to females which is less than 2% (MoRTH, 2023). The other barrier is that of safety in public spaces reinforced by **65% of women respondents in our study saying they felt unsafe in their jobs.**

Further, there is strong evidence of occupational segregation as women are present almost entirely in jobs such as beauticians or masseurs on platforms such as Urban Company or Yes Madam, replicating the gender distribution across occupations that existed in the traditional offline economy.

3. Reduced income is key to rising frustrations among workers

The prospect of higher pay is the topmost reason workers cited to leave gig work, and the most urgent problem articulated in open-ended questions was about income insufficiency. As platforms hire more and more riders and drivers, the fragmented market provides fewer and fewer opportunities, adversely impacting workers' remuneration. About 78% of respondents believed the company was paying them less than they deserved for the work performed, while 70% said they earned more in their previous jobs.

4....but it's not the only cause

The movement from a traditional setup with a supervisor and a physical workplace to a new model of driving alone all day has been quite sudden due to the pandemic. As our findings show, location-based platform workers in India today, perceive themselves to be low on respect; perceive the company to be operating behind a veil of secrecy; face poor work conditions, including mental and physical stress; and have a mutual trust deficit with the platform. This situation of gig workers strikes at the heart of "decent work" which is one of the goals of ILO's Agenda 2030, aimed at sustainable development for the planet.

As e-commerce grows and technology becomes central to daily life, jobs such as delivery workers or ride hailing cab drivers will only grow alongside. It is therefore crucial for regulators and platforms to collaborate andaddress the current anomalies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR REGULATORS:

1. Change of terminology from 'Gig Workers' to 'E-Commerce Workers'

A gig is something done for a short period. But in India, platform workers are employed for the whole day in such jobs, for many years and as a primary source of income. Permanent gig work is an oxymoron- a contradiction that cannot be allowed to exist. The word "gig" lulls us into thinking that it is something a few people are doing on the side, and hence is not a priority sector. But these workers are part of India's e-commerce sector, a vital part of India's growth story in the coming decade. Without the last-mile delivery by a human being, e-commerce cannot function, at least as of today.By officially referring to them as **'e-commerce workers'**, we recognise that they are part of a formal sector and take a first step towards formalizing the informal aspects of their work.

2. Regulation to ensure that companies establish fair and transparent payment structures.

To protect gig workers from being underpaid or exploited by companies, following regulatory action is required:

- Considering the physically intense nature of this work, the number of hours that are **'regular' hours needs to be stipulated** beyond which the platform must pay overtime.
- Payment of a **minimum wage** to platform workers will help guarantee a fixed component in the income and prevent certain risks that workers currently undertake in desperation, such as speeding on roads to fulfil as many orders as possible.
- **Workers' IDs cannot be indefinitely blocked,** rendering them unemployed for an unspecified period. A maximum time limit of, say, 1 week should be set beyond which the worker should be able to log in and resume work..

3. Invention to clear the ambiguity in nomenclature. Partners or Employees?

As our survey shows, workers are engaged full-time with the company for several years, often during their prime working life. They are contributing to the growth and profitability of the business, like employees on the company's roles do. By referring to them as "partners," platforms have been creating an arm's length distance from the workers and not taking responsibility for workers' welfare. If they are to remain 'partners', then platforms need to withdraw control on the workers through blocking of IDs, monitoring performance through ratings and allowing more freedom to decline orders they don't want to service. If they are 'employees', platforms must provide social security, health and accident insurance, they do for permanent employees. The first steps towards providing workers social security have been taken by the Rajasthan Gig Workers Act and the G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration. However, action on this front needs to be expedited.

FOR PLATFORMS:

1. Address rising voices of income insufficiency.

Platforms need to respond to worker demands such as **reducing the amount of commission** they charge per transaction or making separate **payments forworkers' fuel bill**, which keeps inflating as fuel prices rise.

2. Enable more women become platform workers.

There is tremendous potential for platforms to enable more women to become platform workers. The most important is to have a diversity quota like for regular employees where there is a stated commitment to hiring a minimum number of women. In addition, they need to address the barriers which prevent more women from joining by:

- helping to build more women's toilets.

- enabling more women to learn driving,
- sponsoring easy auto loans
- mitigating women's risks to personal safety through measures like installing an emergency button in the app which connects to the Police Control Room
- creating a supportive environment to help continue in the job

These measures can enable e-commerce companies to pave the way for more women to take up this occupation. This will not only boost women's workforce participation rate in India but can expand the base of workers for platforms and contribute positively to their business.

3. Taking responsibility for upskilling and creating a career path.

In our study, less than 5% said they would like to continue in the same job in future. Forty seven percent of respondents said their families disapprove of their job. Instead of seeing them as temporary resources, platforms could help workers build on the skills they have already developed such as customer handling, digital skills, and knowledge of city roads. Organisations could provide further learning opportunities, perhaps via the app itself, to harness the human resource it has invested in. Governments could partner with platforms under various skilling initiatives like Skill India Mission to transition these workers into better quality, longer tenure jobs.

4. Workers need support to cope with this relatively unprecedented form of conducting work.

At least some of the reasons for the rising frustration and stress among location-based platform workers are the isolated nature of the job itself that fosters alone-ness; the lack of human interface in the organisation; and being controlled by an algorithm whose logic remains unknown to them. Rather than take pains to keep their physical offices unobtrusive or impenetrable, which platforms do at present, more human-to-human interaction can help alleviate some of the mutual distrust. Training sessions to manage emotional ups and downs of their work and teaching workers to benefit from the freedom that flexibility offers, can enable workers to manage the accompanying stress of the job.

As tech-mediated work is only expected to grow with the growth of e-commerce, it is important to understand the motivations, frustrations, and expectations of the millions who are participating in it. As technological innovation evolves rapidly, and a variety of different business models emerge, the regulatory framework needs to respond promptly to these developments. Platform work is here to stay. A deeper understanding of its functioning will help to anticipate and address related challenges. This study is a contribution towards attaining that goal.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The term, "gig"came to be used for a job that lasts a specified, typically short period of time, and for which payment is made on a per-task basis."Gig" is American slang coined in the 1920s, by jazz musicians who would carry instruments and perform at different bars and cafes which hired them. A gig economy is a free market system in which organisations hire independent workers for short-term commitments. Workers can do these"gigs"apart from a main job to earn complementary income. Even before the advent of digitalisation in day-to-day life, gig work always existed. In countries like India, where workers in the unorganised sector form a large part of the labour force, gig work is an entrenched way of transacting in the market (e.g., tuition teachers, freelance blue-collar workers like plumbers, wall painters, etc.).

1.2. The advent of the tech interface has split gig workers into platform workers and non-platform workers. Roughly since the beginning of the 21st century, within the universe of gig work, technology has emerged as a mediator between the customer and seller. This has transformed the labour landscape with new and flexible types of jobs,

business models, and working arrangements, disrupting a range of industries from transport services to restaurants to beauty parlours. A platform may be defined as "a digital infrastructure that facilitates interactions between two or more distinct but interdependent sets of users (whether firms or individuals) and positions itself as an intermediary" (OECD, 2019).

1.3. As more and more work is being mediated through platforms, the "gig economy" is increasingly being referred to as the platform economy. An important bifurcation of the platform economy is into **online and insitu/location based**. The former is an invisible workforce scattered around the world, while the latter is a visible and traceable workforce (ILO, 2022a). Some studies label the two categories as location-based digital labour and web-based digital labour ("cloud-work"). Another nomenclature is "digital gig economy" for online freelance work and "physical gig economy" for on-demand work (De Stefano, 2016).

1.4. Online workers supply their services online using the platform. They are freelancers who work from their homes. They find demand for their skill on a platform like Upwork or Fiver, bid for the task, and execute it. Examples of such work could be graphic designing, content creation, data entry, translation, or image tagging. The gig worker here uses software tools to execute and deliver these tasks. The role of the platform is to act as an online marketplace to match demand and supply. For this service, it charges a commission from both parties.

1.5.Location-based workers are those who are hired by the platform to physically move from one location to another to deliver goods or services (deliveries, transport, personal care, etc.). In India, more than 80% of all gig work on labour platforms is location-based. Logistics and transportation

services (e.g., Uber, Ola, Zomato, and Swiggy) and household and personal services platforms (e.g., Urban Company) dominate the labour platforms market in India (Bester et al., 2020). However, India is also a leading provider of labour in the online marketplace. These workers comprise nearly 24% of total crowd workers in the world, which means one out of every four crowd workers is from India (FICCI, 2017).

1.6. There is a dearth of government-backed estimates of gig workers. The employment history of gig workers and data do not fit into traditional statistical categories used in collecting data on employment (Mehta et al., 2020).India's premier think tank, NITI Aayog's 2022 report on the gig economy estimates that there are a total of 77 lakh gig workers in India, comprising about 1.3% of the total workforce (NITI Aayog, 2022). However, sources in the industry believe the number to be about thrice that figure. One estimate based on data from Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) says that platform workers form only 2.4% of the total urban workforce (Arya, 2023). A recent World Bank report on online gig workers acknowledges that there are no systematic ways to estimate how many people work in the gig economy, despite its emergence as a new, growing segment of the workforce (Datta et al., 2023).

CAUSES FOR THE RAPID GROWTH OF GIG WORK

1.7. The astonishing growth of gig work around the world is the result of the confluence of various factors acting in an interconnected world. Some of the key ones are explained below:

i) A series of economic crises, including the 2008 financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Russia-Ukraine war are some of the main ones that had a ripple effect on the global economy. As job losses accumulated in the formal economy, more people joined the informal economy to survive. The economic downturn led to people looking for new revenue streams. Platforms enabled this by allowing the mobilisation of under-utilised fixed assets such as a vehicle or an extra floor of a house that can be rented out (e.g., through Airbnb).

ii) Some scholars believe that with a slow and steady decline in the manufacturing industry, data has become the engine of economic growth in this century. Hence, the companies that rely on IT, data, and the internet for their business model (digital economy) are steering economic growth in high- and middle-income countries by disrupting the old business models across sectors (Srineck, 2017).

iii) Government policies aided by a strong investor network and active participation of venture capital firms have contributed to this growth (Trica Equity, 2023). According to the Ministry of Finance, there were 1,14,000 start-ups in India as of October 2023. (Deptt.of Economic Affairs, 2024). Investments in Indian start-ups grew at a 49% CAGR (2014-2021). To put that number in perspective, investments in start-ups in China were at 12% CAGR in that period (Inc42,2024). The influx of venture capital funds led to the growth of more start-ups. This has in turn created continuous demand for labour at the last level in the form of the delivery person. From the demand side, the convenience offered by platforms such as Zomato, Swiggy, Uber, Ola, and Urban Company ensured quick and easy

adoption of the apps by the urban middle class, in turn creating a demand for workers.

iv) Two supporting pillars of the e-commerce boom have been smartphone penetration and the adoption of digital payments.India had 750 million smartphone users in 2021, and this number is expected to reach 1 billion by 2026, spurred by the government's ambition of Digital India and the imminent launch of 5G mobile technology (PTI, 2022). Digital payments through the government's United Payments Interface (UPI) have removed the prerequisite of cash or credit cards to make purchases, making it easier for more people to buy online, further providing an impetus to e-commerce. In digital payments, India has the top spot in the world and about 70% of overall payments are expected to be digital by 2030.

CHARACTERISTICS OF WORK IN THE PLATFORM ECONOMY

The new forms of work resulting from the growth of the gig economy are characterised by changing working patterns, contractual relationships, places, duration and schedule of work, increased use of information and communication technologies (ICT), or a combination of those (Eurofound, n.d). "Platforms are to the network age what the factory was to the industrial revolution – the principal site of economic activity around which everything else is organized" (IT for Change, 2018). The principal ways in which the gig economy differs from the traditional economy are enumerated in Table 1.

TABLE 1: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TRADITIONAL ECONOMY AND GIG ECONOMY

		Traditional Economy	Gig Economy
1.	Status	The employee is either permanent or temporary through a contract with a certain duration.	No platform recognises gig workers as "employees" but as partners or independent service providers.
2.	Spatial	Work is produced from a physical space such as a factory or office where workers collect.	Each worker is allocated work through the app and seldom needs to go to the office.
3.	Temporal		
	Hours worked per day	Flexible. The worker can log in to the app whenever he/she wants.	Workers need to work for long durations to earn enough, leading to mental and physical stress.
	Tenure of employment	A contract guarantees employment for the specified duration.	Although there is a contract signed by the worker, there is no fixed tenure of employment.
4.	Allocation of work	Done by a human being – a supervisor. There's a bilateral relationship between an employer and a worker.	Done by the app. Here, it's a trilateral relationship between a service provider, a consumer, and a digital platform (Dewan et al., 2020).
5.	Wages	A fixed salary or at least a fixed component + variable component.	Entirely variable, depending on how many hours of work the person logs in. For each job solicited through the platform, the company charges a flat percentage rate as a commission.
6.	Entry barriers	Relatively high as there would be a selection process conducted by the human resource department, an exam, or an interview.	Low entry barriers as the worker has to meet no criteria other than possessing a valid driver's license and a vehicle. There is no need to meet anyone. As soon as the documents are uploaded to the app, work can begin. Also, almost no skill other than driving and the ability to use the app is required.
	Communication channels	Human interface.	Almost completely tech interface.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Governments in developing countries have embraced these platforms as a means of generating employment opportunities and advancing their technological development. A June 2022 report by India's apex think tank, NITI Aayog, enumerates several advantages of the platform economy for an emerging market like India, such as low entry barriers and democratisation of jobs; enabling greater participation of women; delineation of job role and professionalisation of blue collar work; and hinterland rejuvenation, skill matching, and tech-based job allocation fulfilled in real-time by platforms, thereby improving efficiencies in many sectors of the economy (NITI Aayog, 2022).The ease of finding employment and greater flexibility to choose jobs and hours is one of the biggest positives of the gig economy. It can also provide opportunities to generate income when circumstances are not conducive for traditional full-time employment, as it happened worldwide during the COVID-19 phase.

2.2. While technocrats and governments may perceive the gig economy as a win-win situation for all actors involved, labour economists often approach it with caution and scepticism. Their primary concerns revolve around the potential drawbacks related to occupational and social protection benefits, as well as the rise of algorithmic control in the labour process. Platform operators assert that they are merely conduits, introducing "independent contractors" to their customers. Using the term "independent contractors" rather than employees, reduces entry and operating costs for platforms and allows workers greater flexibility around work hours. At the same time, it puts platforms beyond the scope of employment law that makes it obligatory for employers to provide certain social protections and guarantee minimum wages to workers. There is increasing scepticism about how platforms can conduct their entire core business through workers and yet classify them as "self-employed". Some are of the view that employment law is facing its greatest challenge, as it must deal with a very different reality to the one existing when it was created (Todoli-Signes, 2017).

2.3. While avoiding establishing an employer-employee relationship with gig workers, platforms are at the same time exercising control in the ways that a human resource department would do in the traditional offline company. For example, in pay administration where fees are automatically paid and administered (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017), performance management by enabling customers to rate a gig worker's performance (Rosenblat et al., 2017), or coordination and control of worker behaviour through remote monitoring (Lee et al., 2015). Scholars are pointing to the inherent hypocrisy of an arrangement where workers are disciplined by the firm despite not being employees of the firm (Crouch, 2019; Cherry, 2016) and for referring to the workers as "independent contractors" when they enjoy far less freedom than those with true entrepreneurial scope and autonomy in their work(Josserand & Kaine,2019; Cutolo & Kenney, 2021).

2.4. Gig workers have limited recognition under the current Indian labour laws. While the welfare of migrant workers, building and construction workers, and unorganised workers is regulated to an extent under different laws, these laws were not designed for the modern entity of gig/platform workers (Ganguly & Ramesh, 2022). In the absence of specific legislations, gig workers cannot claim

In the absence of specific legislations, gig workers cannot claim consequential benefits such as minimum wages, hours of work, overtime, leave, etc., as compared to most traditional long-term employees (Rajkumar, 2020)

consequential benefits such as minimum wages, hours of work, overtime, leave, etc., as compared to most traditional long-term employees (Rajkumar, 2020).

2.5. Governments have not kept pace with the change in business models that demand a fresh look at existing laws and policies. Governments tend to overlook the fact that there are substantially different ways in which workers engage with platform companies that defy conventional understanding and existing regulations (Sundararajan, 2017).Internationally, organisations like the International Labour Organization (ILO) have begun to recognisethat while the platform economy is an important source for creating economic activity and employment, workers may not obtain conditions of employment and social protection that are consistent with decent work standards and governments may find it challenging to regulate labour markets (ILO, 2022a).

2.6. Algorithms are rules, signals, and data that govern the platform's operation. No one other than the platform's technocrats know about the logic coded into it. Algorithmic management techniques tend to offer workers high levels of flexibility, autonomy, task variety, and complexity. However, these mechanisms of control can also result in low pay, social isolation, working unsocial and irregular hours, overwork, sleep deprivation, and exhaustion (Wood et al., 2019). Several studies have examined the way algorithms of a platform exercise control. Some of these are delineated below:

i. Determining the value of the task and therefore income earned:
When an auto is hailed off the kerb, the driver and customer fix the price through negotiation. However, in the case of an Uber ride, for example, the algorithm decides the value of a ride based on the time and place of the consumer's request, current traffic conditions, and the availability of other drivers. Workers cannot intervene in this calculation and can only accept or decline the ride (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016).

ii. Allocation of tasks
Allocation of work on platforms is organised through automated algorithms which structure the worker's day by giving instructions as to which customer must be met at what time and exactly what route he has to follow to reach the destination. The division of labour on platforms

ensures "that the labour process in its entirety is unknown to any single worker (Kassem, 2023)." The resulting opacity leads to a sense of powerlessness and alienation in workers and has been criticised as "Digital Taylorism" of the 21st century (Fairwork, 2023). The term is in reference to "principles of scientific management" drawn up by management guru Fredrick Taylor in the 20th century to improve worker productivity – breaking complex jobs down into simple ones; measuring everything that workers do; and linking pay to performance (Economist, 2015).

iii. Performance monitoring and surveillance

The platform exercises control over the worker through ratings given by the customer often setting highly strict standards of acceptability. In Urban Company, for example, women who work as beauty service providers revealed in exploratory interviews for this study that a continuous rating of 4.5 was required and any slippage would necessitate retraining. Using "gamification" techniques like customer ratings, worker rankings, reward points, and other performance metrics, platforms enable mangerialisation and monitoring of workers, reducing labour power to becoming a commodity (Gandini, 2019) and enable forms of "soft control" (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016).

2.7. In the past few years, there has been an increase in studies focussed on the Indian gig economy.

In 2021, the Boston Consulting Group's (BCG) study on the gig economy in India, pegged the number of jobs it could potentially create in the long term at 90 million, drawing up a roadmap to unlock India's gig economy at scale (BCG, 2021). Apart from NITI Ayog's report of June 2022 mentioned earlier, a study by the German development agency,GIZ, in the same year dwells on the challenges that digitalisation in India poses to the labour market (Dewan et al., 2022).The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) conducted a national telephone survey of 900+ food delivery platform workers. The ensuing report in 2023, acknowledged that platform work has moved the needle on

formalization, offers flexibility and keeps the youth productively occupied in income-earning activities while they wait for more permanent options. However, at the same time, it urges a move towards better social security for workers and recognition of the skills acquired on the job (NCAER, 2023).

A qualitative study of delivery workers in Bengaluru revealed that the stigma associated with app-based delivery work, coupled with its inherently individualistic nature, creates social isolation and imposes barriers to accessing both inter-relational and instrumental support (Seetharaman et al., 2021). Studies of cab drivers of ride-hailing platforms have reasoned that drivers experienced a breach of human rights leading to stress, resulting in counterproductive work behaviour such as offering offline rides and harassment of customers (Pati & Dhal, 2021). Critiquing the binary of employment versus entrepreneurship that forms the framework of such models, Surie (2019) has termed it a failure of public policy to keep abreast of changing times.

Most recently, a paper by the organization IT for Change sought to analyse the impact of algorithms through a legal analysis of the existing laws and judicial decisions. Among its recommendations are drafting a model law for platform workers, recognising workers' collective bargaining rights, and identifying alternatives to the platform modelusing digital public infrastructure and open networks (Sen et al., 2023).

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

3.1. This study adds to the emerging body of work in the following unique ways:

i) It is based on a national survey through a structured questionnaire, with a large sample size of over 5,000 respondents across 32 cities.

ii) All the main sectors of platform workers i.e. ride-hailing, food delivery, and package delivery, are represented.

iii) It employs mixed methods research, combining qualitative interviews with a structured questionnaire administered through face-to-face interviews.rather than telephonic or online interviews.

iv) The scope of themes covered is expansive.

v) Previously unexamined day-to-day challenges of gig workers (e.g., carrying heavy weights and problems of building societies)are dealt with in detail.

The study focuses only on location-based platform workers. For easy readability, these gig workers who are called "partners" by the company, will be referred to interchangeably as "gig workers" or "platform workers" or simply "workers". Since almost all of them are male, the pronoun "he" will be used to refer to all such workers in the pages ahead and is a stark comment on the lack of women in these jobs.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. As the research interests of the lead author, and Janpahal's objectives were aligned, the current study was conceptualised together. Janpahal has been working for the past 20years with workers in the distribution services sector focusing on livelihoods, social security, and the rights and dignity of small producers, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), small and independent traders, and street vendors. After the emergence of e-commerce, Janpahal has been striving for the rights of both frontline gig workers and those in warehouses to secure decent working conditions for them. Through these endeavours, Janpahal envisions a lively and vibrant retail democracy in India that is just and good for all.

4.2. Qualitative interviews with location-based platform workers were conducted pre survey and while the survey was underway. Between July and September 2023, the lead author conducted about 20 face-to-face interviews in Hyderabad, Delhi-NCR, Jaipur, and Trivandrumto understand the landscape of such work in India. In these interviews, inquiries were made about the workers' background, as well as their challenges and expectations from platforms. These workers were from ride-hailing platforms such as Uber and Ola; food delivery companies such as Zomato and Swiggy; and home services provider, Urban Company. Only in the last category there were a few women interviewed while the rest of the workers were all male. While the survey was underway between September and November 2023, further 30 qualitative interviews were conducted by the author and surveyors across different cities.

4.3. Janpahal held a workshop in Delhi on 12 August 2023 titled, *Research on the Working Conditions of Platform Workers*. There were 26 participants in this workshop, including Janpahal's leadership team and their representatives from across the country. Sangam Tripathi of the Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers (IFAT) who has two decades of experience working with taxi driver unions, and Shaik Salauddin, General Secretary of the All-India Gig and Platform Workers Association, were present to share their inputs and ideas about how the research should be conducted. The draft questionnaire was developed in the workshop, with an aim to understand the perceptions and attitudes of location-based platform workers about four qualitative aspects of the job: Respect, Integrity, Humanity, and Trust. The acronym **RIGHTS** was used to describe the survey, standing for

Respect, Integrity in Gig work; Humanity and Trust in Service.

4.4. The key research questions that the survey attempted to find answers to are:

i. Do platform workers feel they are respected by the company and by society for the job they do?
ii. Do platform workers believe the company is engaging with them with integrity and fairness with respect to compensation, penalties, and transparency of payment?
iii. Is the platform treating its workers with humanity, with attention to work conditions, hours of work per day, margin of error, etc.?
iv. Is there a partnership of trust between the platform and the worker as reflected by conflict resolution, level of surveillance, and sharing of information?

4.5. Based on the discussion in the workshop, a questionnaire was drawn up. To ensure that the survey questions reflect the real concerns that gig workers have on the ground, a Zoom call with about 25 representative gig workers from different cities affiliated with Janpahal was held on 14 September 2023 and the questionnaire was then fine-tuned further. The final questionnaire consisting of 31 questions was created on Google Forms in English, Hindi, Bengali, Urdu, Tamil, Kannada, Marathi, Punjabi, Malayalam, and Telugu.

4.6.In each city, surveyors were selected from amongst the platform workers affiliated with Janpahal to administer the questionnaire face-to-face. Surveyors followed either or both of two processes to meet workers. a) Requesting delivery workers who were parked on the road for an interview. These workers were identifiable by the uniforms they wore. For those not wearing uniforms, a clue for the surveyor was the presence of the mobile phone afixed on the bike' s handlebar, to enable the worker to look at the map.The interviewer would then approach them to confirm if the person was a platform worker.

5,220
respondents had answered the survey across 32 cities with representation from all city types

b) Surveyors would go to the hubs of Swiggy Instamart, BlinkIt, Amazon or Flipkart or popular restaurants where delivery workers assemble. In such hubs, workers have more time to answer questions than when they are on the road. In case of ride hailing, cabs with yellow number plates were approached or autos and bikes waiting at CNG pumps (gas stations). No pre-determined quotas were allotted for each sector to interviewers. Thus, 87% of respondents were found to belong to ride hailing, food delivery and package delivery companies. The execution of fieldwork was closely monitored by local Janpahal representatives and by the second and third authors from New Delhi. The survey was closed on 30 November 2023 by which time **5,220 respondents had answered the survey across 32 cities with representation from all city types** – Tier 1 (Delhi, NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, etc.), Tier 2 (e.g., Kolhapur, Madurai, etc.), and Tier 3 (e.g., Gaya, Rishikesh, etc.) – and regions such as North, South, East, and West. All the respondents were active on some platform at the time of the interview. To the best of our knowledge, it is the most representative survey in terms of the number of respondents, geographies, and sectors covered.

5. LIMITATIONS

5.1. North India was overly represented in the study while the Northeast was underrepresented except for a few respondents from Guwahati. The survey is limited to the extent that out of 5,220 respondents, 75% were from the North Indian cities of Delhi-NCR, Jaipur, Lucknow, Patna, and smaller towns such as Firozabad and Agra. Of these, there was a skew towards Delhi-NCR which contributed 45% of the responses from North India. The rest of India constituted the remaining 25%, though there was roughly equal representation from Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Kolkata.

5.2. Almost 98% of the respondents were male. While the number of women among location-based platform workers is indeed miniscule as found in other studies as well, this skew could be a little exaggerated in our survey as the respondents were largely from ride-hailing, food delivery, and package delivery sectors, which are almost entirely male-dominated. If the survey had deliberately included more representatives of personal/home service companies such as Urban Company, through quota sampling, there might have been more women respondents.

6. FINDINGS

6.1. PROFILE OF WORKERS

6.1.1. To create a demographic profile of the Indian gig worker, respondents were asked to indicate their age group, gender identity, level of education, marital status, and tenure of residence in the city. About 98% of the 5,220 respondents polled were male and only 2.3% female. The average age of a gig worker was 28 years. About one-third were educated below secondary school. Only 45% of respondents completed their secondary school, while 25% had studied further and acquired a diploma or University degree. The typical gig worker is unlikely to be a recent migrant to the city. Most of the respondents (as much as 53%) were local people who had lived in the same city all their lives. Of the rest, 23% had been living in the city for over 10 years. Approximately 20% of the workers were married and 64% lived with their parents.

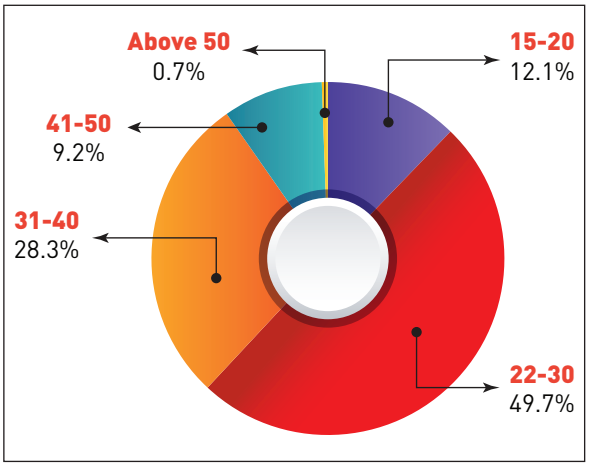

Figure 1: Age profile of respondents

6.1.2. In India, close to 1 million drivers/cleaners of private transport (buses/taxis) were out of jobs due to the extended shift to work-from-home and schools moving to the online mode during the two years of the pandemic. Though exact numbers are hard to come by, most of them enlisted as cab drivers with ride-hailing platforms like Uber and Ola (Saraswathy, 2021). Less educated, migrants and low-pay workers could not access remote work and were over-represented in jobs that required them to be at a physical location (OECD, 2022). Several of them joined food delivery companies like Zomato and Swiggy and e-commerce companies like Amazon, in what has been termed "distress-driven employment" (Mehta, 2023).

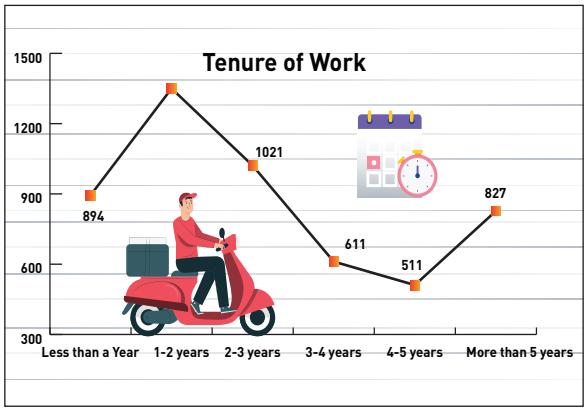

Figure 2: Tenure of location-based platform work

6.1.3. Our survey reflects these post-pandemic realities. When asked to select a reason for becoming platform workers, 31% of respondents said that they had no other option. As the graph in Figure 2 shows, the pandemic years of 2020-2022, saw the maximum influx into location-based platform work. The conventional job market shrunk and at the same time technology acted as a catalyst for the growth of platform work. Low entry barriers into location-based gig jobs made it easy for low skilled people, many of whom were displaced from other jobs to find a means of livelihood in the absence of other opportunities. The fall in the number of people joining 2023 could be either because the survey was conducted between July and November 2023, so it is not an accurate picture of the entire year. Another possibility is that workers are finding other opportunities post pandemic as the economy picks up and are joining platform work in lesser numbers. This aspect of the entry-exit into platform work could be a subject of longitudinal research in future.

6.1.4. Digitalisation does offer workers the flexibility of finding income-earning opportunities across companies and industries, without having to go through separate formalities for each, as would have been the case in the traditional economy. Around 60-70% of the respondents worked for a single platform and the remaining 30-40% worked for many platforms in the same sector but also across seemingly diverse sectors. The respondents surveyed were roughly almost equally divided between transport platforms such as Uber, Ola, and Rapido; food delivery platforms such as Zomato and Swiggy; and package delivery companies like Amazon, Flipkart, and Big Basket (see, Figure 3).[1] Working for multiple platforms within the same sector (e.g., Ola, Uber, and Rapido in transportation) is unsurprising. The interesting finding is that since entry barriers to platform work are low, a section of workers was completely agnostic to who hires their services. Since the only prerequisite is a vehicle, a valid driver's license, and a smartphone, workers had the flexibility to crisscross between logistics companies like Delhivery to e-commerce like Amazon and to food tech companies like Swiggy.

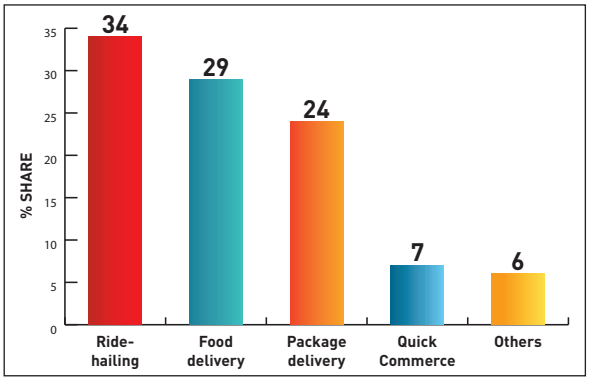

Figure 3: Distribution of respondents across e-commerce sectors

6.1.5. The temporal flexibility that platforms claim to provide is, however, hard to justify. In theory, the platform worker can choose to log in and out whenever he wants but to be able to earn the daily income that he needs to meet his financial obligations, it becomes necessary to fulfil a certain number of hours. As shown in Figure 4.1, of more than 5,000 workers surveyed, a mere 3% work for under four hours, 12% for four-eight hours, and a staggering 85% work above eight hours a day as drivers/riders. Within that, 21% work more than 12 hours to be able to earn the desired level of income.

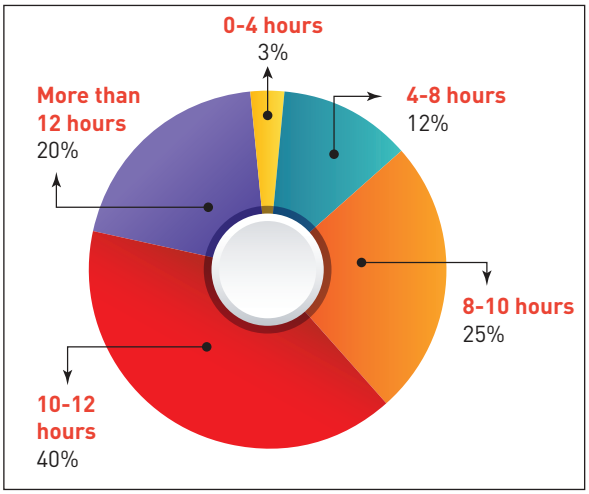

Figure 4.1: Number of hours worked per day

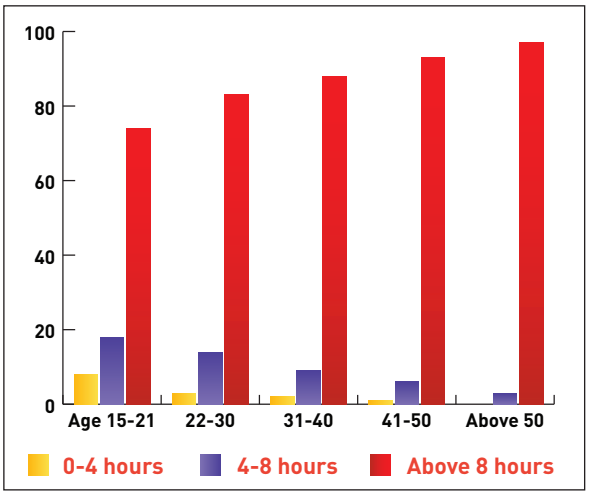

Figure 4.2: Age of workers x No. of hours worked.

6.1.6. Older workers are working longer hours. As the graph represented in Figure 4.2 shows, the number of hours worked increases as the age bracket increases. In fact, part timers who work below four hours are mainly found in the below 30 age group, many of them students, doing a gig for

The categorisation of companies into these categories was done according to the authors' discretion. Therefore, Big Basket was added to package delivery because though it is a grocery delivery company it is not in the Quick Commerce category of BlinkIt or Zepto where speed of delivery is of essence and the aim is to reach the package to the customer under 10-15 minutes. While Swiggy has an Instamart option of delivering groceries, the same workers typically deliver both food and grocery, hence they were clubbed together as food delivery workers. Home services such as Urban Company or Yes Madam are poorly represented in the sample (1%) which could explain the fewer women respondents as more women are employed in these platforms as salon professionals.

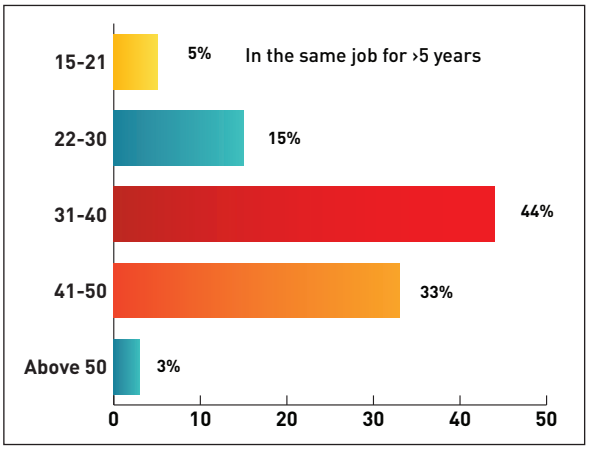

Figure 5: Age composition of those working >five years

supplementary income. Not only are older workers entering the platform economy, but they are also staying longer, possibly because it is harder to find other jobs as age increases. Among the respondents who have worked for more than five years, 33% are those above 40 years of age as shown in figure below.

6.1.7. The popular impression is that young people are doing gig work to earn money on the side for a few months, while waiting for better prospects. In emerging economies like India, platform-based employment is, in fact, the primary job in which workers are engaged in for the entire day. This is indeed a far cry from the way Uber, the first platform, was initially positioned in the US – as something for professionals to dabble in after office hours by simply logging into the app and moonlighting as cab drivers. For most location-based platform workers in India, the gig is not a gig at all but a full-time regular job. Further, as can be gathered from Figure 5, 57% of the workers have been engaged in platform work for more than two years, and 16% for more than five years.

Having sketched a profile of gig workers demographic and work profile, in the next section, we present the findings of the study with respect to the four values we set out to investigate: Respect, Integrity, Humanity and Trust.

6.2. RESPECT

6.2.1. The Respectsection of the survey poses questions that assess the respondent's perception of respect for the job in society. This is assessed in three ways:

i. A direct enquiry about what their families think about their job.

ii. A derived perception of respect based on the treatment the worker receives from those he interacts with over the day, such as security guards.

iii. Self-image when he wears the company uniform or carries the bag/box bearing the company logo and thereby visibly indicates that he is a gig worker.

6.2.2. Some workers want to shy away from public display of their identity as a platform worker, by not wearing the company uniform. Workers wearing uniforms are the visible face of the company to customers. A uniform shows one's position in the organisation, and sometimes, the actual job one does. In any organisation, workers who put on the same kind of uniform feel kinship between them and a sense of belonging and responsibility for their job. As seen in Table 2, among gig workers only 50% had a positive or neutral attitude to wearing their company uniform. Almost 40% are

TABLE 2: PARAMETERS RELATED TO RESPECT

Attitude to company uniform (excluding those who said they don't need to wear, or the company has not given them a uniform)	**% Share**	**Perception of their job by family**	**% Share**
Proud	10	They think it's a good job.	17
I feel fine, I am okay with it	40	They don't have an opinion on it	36
Embarrassed	12	They don't like it but know there is no option	37
I don't wear it	32	They don't like it and want me to quit the job	10
Other:	6		
Total	100	Total	100

"I don't want to be called out on the road as 'Hey Amazon! Or Hey Swiggy."
"The public doesn't behave well when we wear the uniform and people see us differently, [we] don't get respect."
"Why should I wear a uniform? I don't get paid to do marketing for them!"
"People don't look at us in a good light. They don't treat us with respect. The company's behaviour towards us is also not friendly."

not positively disposed to wearing the uniform, out of which 12% declared that they are embarrassed wearing it. Some comments by respondents threw more light on these views.

6.2.3. About 47% of the workers said their families did not like the job they were doing. This result must be seen in the light of the post-pandemic economy where the conventional job market shrunk, and at the same time, technology acted as a catalyst for the growth of platform work. Low entry barriers into location-based gig jobs made it easy for low-skilled people, many of whom were displaced from other jobs to find a means of livelihood in the absence of other opportunities. However, regular employment is viewed as a better-quality job due to its consistency and security of tenure and social security benefits associated with it. Casual work such as platform work, is perceived as relatively poor-quality work because of its irregularity and varying daily income. Even mortgage companies are wary about lending out to people without job security.

TABLE 3: CHALLENGES IN GATED COMMUNITIES

	% Share
Frequently stopped by security	23%
Long wait for permission to enter	26%
Long wait for lifts	15%
Separate lifts	8%
Customer doesn't answer calls	21%
I don't have any problems	7%
Others (bad treatment/long walking/ fuel waste)	0%
Total	100

6.2.4. Gated communities have an elaborate system of checks before delivery workers are permitted inside. Big, private residential spaces, enclosed by a wall and heavily guarded gates or "gated communities" have become the most visible urban form in big Indian cities. Getting entry inside these societies is a challenge for delivery boys which causes unexpected delays and can throw their tight schedule out of gear. Some platforms like Blinkit measure the time taken for the ride only up to the gates of the society as after that the variables at play are out of the delivery person's control. However, others continue to measure the speed of delivery until the doorstep of the customer. In the light of these barriers, it is unsurprising that an enormous 93% of the respondents chose at least one of the many challenges faced in entering gated communities (Table 3).

The following practical problems with gated communities were cited by delivery workers in qualitative interviews and as supplementary information to this enquiry:

i. Visitors can't be allowed unless a resident approves the entry either on an app or on the intercom. As the customer sometimes misses the delivery person's calls after he has reached the gate, he is left waiting for approval, while getting delayed for the next order. Not being able to contact the customer after reaching the destination is also a problem when it is a "cash on delivery" order.
ii. Even after the clearance for entry is obtained, reaching the doorstep of the customer, who could be living 20-30 floors above, is not a smooth process. Almost all societies have separate lifts for visitors which are typically overcrowded and have long wait times.
iii. Societies themselves are vast and extensive, hence once a delivery person enters the gate, sufficient time is spent either walking or driving around trying to find the customer's block or tower.
iv. Also, sometimes the bike is not allowed inside the society and the delivery person is obliged

to park the vehicle outside which leaves him feeling anxious about the safety of the vehicle while he goes up to the customer's residence and delivers the package.

6.2.5. By and large the food delivery personnel and restaurants see themselves as being on the same side, and the platform as the "bully" who exercises control over both. Food delivery personnel were asked how they are treated by restaurants (Table 4). When the food delivery person reaches the restaurant, he waits until the restaurant presses a "ready" button on the app at which point he picks up the packet and his clock starts ticking to begin the final phase of the journey, i.e., delivery to the customer's doorstep. Restaurants are also measured by the platform for delivery speed. Only 20% of respondents said that restaurants treated them poorly, while the majority 80% did not believe that the behaviour of restaurants displayed any disrespect towards food delivery workers.

6.2.6. While it is stipulated that delivery personnel should not carry more than 30 kgs of weight, this is often exceeded. Urban Company beauticians and masseurs, who are almost always women, need to carry a large box containing bulky equipment they need for the job. Porters, whose service offered is of porting packages, are also personnel who often have to carry heavy

TABLE 4: TREATMENT BY RESTAURANTS AND ATTITUDE TO CARRYING WEIGHTS

Treatment by restaurants	% Share
Positively and well	38
Indifferently	42
Poorly	20
Only for Amazon/Flipkart/Porter/Urban Company, etc.: Attitude to carrying heavy weights	
I don't mind it	43
I don't like it	57

weight. Carrying weight on the job is seen as a *coolie* job, lowly and animal-like. As one goes up in the job hierarchy, manual work such as lifting heavy weights becomes scarcer. Hence, carrying visibly heavy weight could be associated with less respect. It is perhaps for this reason that almost 60% of the respondents polled said they do not like to carry heavy bags on the job (Table 4). The Hindi word *majboori*, i.e., helplessness in a choiceless situation, was used frequently to say that carrying heavy weight was troublesome but had to be done in the interest of earning a livelihood.

6.3. INTEGRITY

6.3.1.The questions in the Integrity section assess workers' perception of the platform's integrity in dealing with them. This is with respect to:i) overall business model, including the commission taken by the platform and the net payment received by workers; and ii) transparency in the communication of changes in payment structure to workers.

6.3.2. Almost half the respondents thought that the existing percentage of commission that platforms charged was unfair. At present, typically platforms charge between 20-25% of the transaction value as commission. A significant 48% believed the platform needs to charge less than 10% instead. In another question relating to income, respondents were asked to agree or disagree with a set of statements. A majority of workers (70%) agreed that the payments were promptly credited, but 78% felt that the company was paying them less than they deserved for the work performed. Approximately 70% said they earned more in their previous jobs. These figures point to the acute

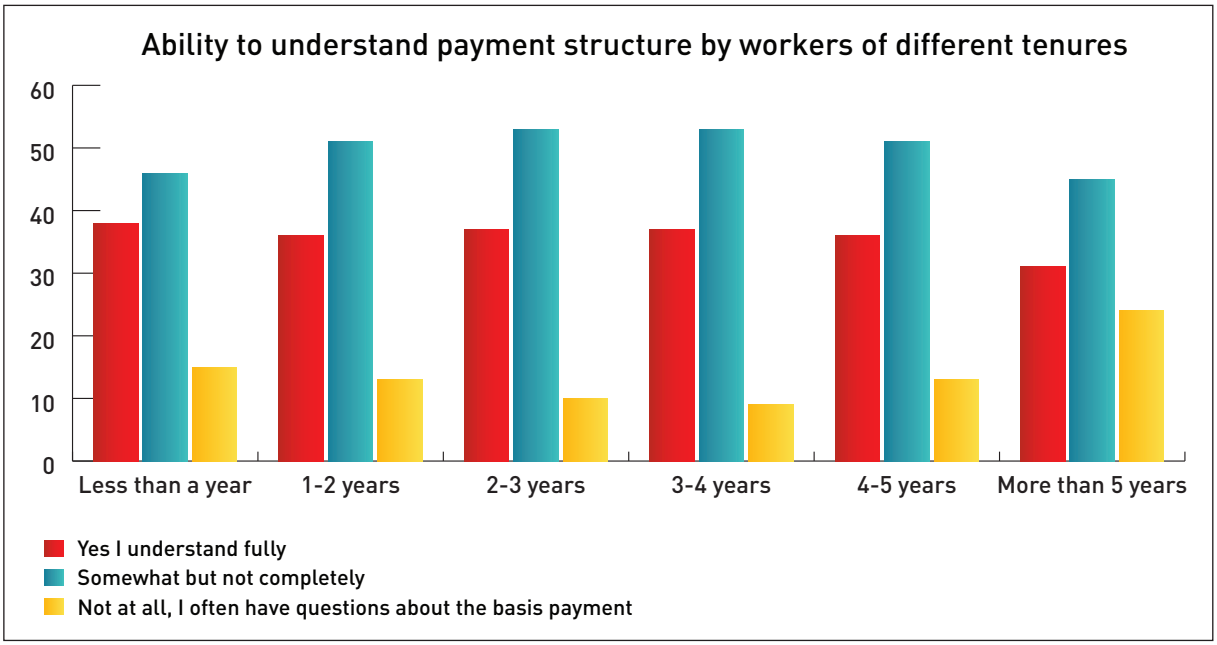

Figure 6. Ability to understand payment structure by workers of different tenures.

dissatisfaction of workers with the income they were earning in their jobs as drivers/riders. In the post-pandemic gig economy, there is an oversupply of workers, resulting in fragmented incomes and dissatisfaction among workers who compare current wages to the early halcyon days when these platforms first came into the market and each worker was earning incomes in the range of INR 60,000-70,000 per month. Now, that number has dwindled to INR 30,000-40,000 per month.[2] After deductions for vehicle loans, maintenance, and fuel, the net income earned every month is only INR 15,000-20,000. The NCAER study on food workers observed that those who worked for 11 hours (long-shift workers) were breaking even in 2019 and 2020 but not in 2021 and 2022. As fuel costs and overall inflation started to rise, workers found it increasingly difficult to meet monthly expenditures out of the monthly income earned from the platform (NCAER, 2023).

6.3.3. A remarkable 50% of the workers said they do not fully understand the accounting logic based on which their payments are processed and only 35% said they did (Table 5). These proportions remain roughly the same irrespective of how long the workers have been associated with the platform (Figure 6). This means that spending more years on the job does not make things clearer. One reason for this could also be because payment and incentive structures keep changing frequently and often without notice, as some of the worker's quotations testify.

> "They change the pattern of incentives every time without information."
>
> "The company tells us one rate and they finally charge us a different rate. Sometimes unimaginably different."
>
> "Our days are as long as 15-16 hours, but our incomes continue to be low."
>
> "We need money for bike maintenance, should get a petrol allowance as well."

A majority of workers (68%) said they get updated about changes in the payments structure on the app or through a call from the company. But the remaining 32% relied on colleagues or worked it out for themselves. It follows that though the platform is updating the app about changes, one-third of the workers are not able to keep track of these notices, which is most likely due to not being fully trained in using the app's features. In the absence

[2]Though income was not explicitly asked in the questionnaire, this figure is an estimate having posed this question to several platform workers across sectors, during the personal interviews conducted.

TABLE 5: PARAMETERS RELATING TO INTEGRITY

Existing commission rate	% Share	Ideal commission rate	% Share
The rate is fair	28	Less than 10%	48
The rate is unfair	48	10-15%	27.5
I don't know	24	15-20%	4
		Above 20%	6
		I don't have an opinion	14.5
Total	**100**	**Total**	**100**
Understanding of payment structure including penalties and incentives	**% Share**	**Communication about payment structure changes**	**% Share**
Yes, I understand fully	35	The company tells us on the app	60
Somewhat, but not fully	50	Some colleagues inform me	18
Not at all. I often have questions about the basis of payment	15	I get a call from customer care	8
		I'm not told. I work it out myself when the money comes	13
		Other	1
Total	**100**	**Total**	**100**

of any explainability of the algorithm which calculates their payments based on parameters like the number of deliveries/rides, promptness, customer ratings, not refusing an order, and other parameters that workers are not privy to, workers experience alienation in the platform economy because they "cannot collectively bargain with an algorithm, they can't appeal to a platform, and they can't negotiate with an equation" (Gearhart, 2017).

6.4. HUMANITY

Physical and mental health

6.4.1. The Humanity section of the study assess the respondents' opinions about the impact of the job on physical and mental health, as well as occupational safety while performing the job.

Frequent body ache was cited by most respondents, irrespective of age or hours worked, as the fallout of the job, which could result from driving a vehicle continuously, (especially, a two-wheeler) but also from lifting heavy packages. The more hours spent on the field, the more acutely the problem of not being able to take a break for food or toilet was felt. Remaining viable, staying organised, maintaining identity, sustaining relationships, and coping emotionally have been acknowledged as challenges for gig workers, as they adapt to the new world of work (Ashford et al., 2018); (Glavin et al, 2021). A greater proportion of younger than older people claimed to not have any issues with mental health. However, roughly 25% of the workers over 40 years, attested to feeling "depressed" and "angry and frustrated" on account of their job. The corresponding percentage of people who said they felt similarly was 16-19% in the below-40-years age group.

6.4.2. The issue of physical health of gig workers becomes critical, because more older people are working overtime (→eight hours) on such jobs, as shown in Figure 4.2. There was a clear positive association between the number of hours worked and feeling physically and mentally strained as shown in Figures 7 and 8. While this may seem obvious, its explanation lies in the fact that those who work for fewer hours (part-timers) are youngsters while older people are working longer and hence facing the impact. Being on the road for more than eight hours in the hot sun or pouring rain, exposed to dust and pollution, and battling city traffic takes a heavy toll on anyone,

TABLE 6: PARAMETERS RELATING TO HUMANITY

Impact on physical health	%	Impact on mental health	%	Safety on the job (multiple responses possible)	% Agree	% Disagree
Ways in which workers believe physical health is affected		**Ways in which workers believe mental health is affected**		I feel completely safe in my job	27	73
Frequent body ache	30	Stress	31	I feel unsafe when speeding to meet delivery-time targets	87	13
Lack of sleep	26	Anxiety and panic	18	I feel unsafe in some of the areas that I have to go to	80	20
Long hours without breaks for food/toilet	17	Depression	16	I feel unsafe while dealing with some customers	73	27
Worsens health conditions like blood pressure, cholesterol, etc.	7	Isolation and loneliness	10	I feel unsafe in some customers' houses	71	29
Cannot take a break to recover from illness/injury	10	Anger and frustration	15	I feel unsafe in the presence of dogs/animals at the customer's house/society	85	15
It does not affect my physical health	9	It does not affect my mental health	10	I feel unsafe at certain times of the day	60	40
				I think the app should have an emergency button that we can use if we are in an unsafe situation	92	8
Total	**100**		**100**			

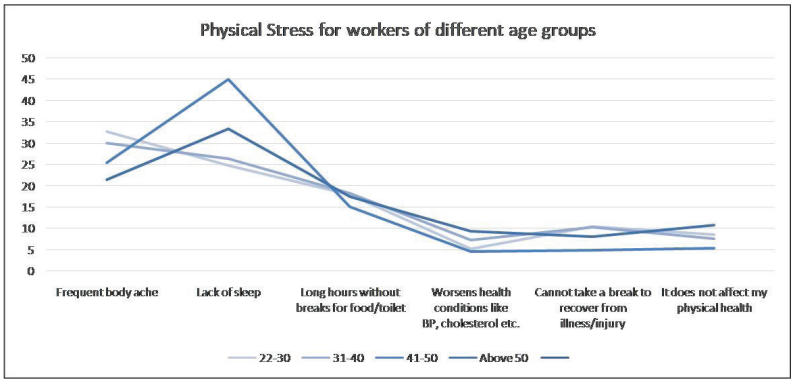

Figure 7: Physical stress for workers of different age groups

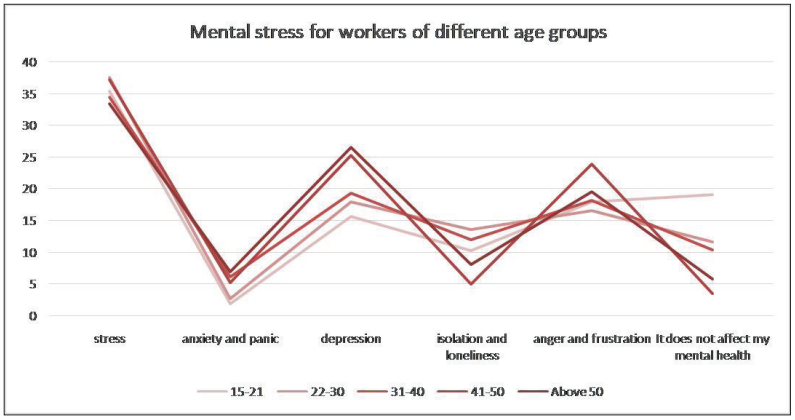

Figure 8: Mental stress for workers of different age groups

but particularly so on the 520 respondents who were above 40 years of age.

SAFETY

6.4.3. About 87% of respondents agreed that speeding to meet delivery targets was the main reason they felt the job was not safe. Although food delivery companies issue statements that they do not penalise their partners for delays, the delivery worker is invariably speeding because he cannot afford to be late.Especially in food delivery and ride-hailing, the customer is impatient to receive the parcel or begin the ride and delays may manifest in poor customer ratings. Delays also add up cumulatively and each subsequent order is affected. As payment is

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made on a per-order basis, delays directly impact earnings of the day as fewer orders will get fulfilled. All these factors lead to the need for speed. In qualitative interviews, some workers admitted that their families worry about the fact that they are driving all day and thereby increasing their risk of a road accident, and even ask them to find a different job because of this.

6.4.4. Almost 73% of respondents disagreed with the statement, "I feel completely safe in my job." Almost everybody (92%) agreed that the app should have an emergency button to press when they face dangers which could be because of certain areas they have to visit in the course of work, especially after dark. This includes some customers or customers' houses where they perceive a threat or the presence of dogs on the street, inside the society or the customer's own pets. These fears are not exaggerated. In two cases in Hyderabad in 2023, two delivery executives were attacked by the customer's dogs leading to one fatality (Basheer, 2023; Tomar, 2023). A few days before the Hyderabad fatality, in Delhi, Priyanka Devi, one of the few women drivers that Uber has, was attacked by robbers at Delhi's Kashmiri Gate (Grover, 2023).

6.5. TRUST

6.5.1. The Trust section evaluates the level of trust between the company and gig workers along the following lines: i) whether the worker feels that the company trusts him/her to be its representative in the market; and ii) whether the worker trusts the company to act fairly towards him in matters of grievance redressal. Asked whether the company trusts them as its representative, the vote was almost equally split between "Yes" and "No", with 52% believing that there was a lack of trust from the platform. Likewise, only half the respondents felt that they could report an act of misbehaviour by a colleague or a customer to the company.

6.5.2. One of the most apparent ways in which the platform shows its lack of trust in workers is in the blocking of IDs unilaterally. IDs may be blocked at the discretion of the company upon receiving a customer complaint about the worker or if there are successive poor ratings. As represented in Table 8, more than half of the workers (55%) had had their ID blocked sometime or the other. Customer complaints were the most common reason (45%) for an ID to be blocked. In an environment where human interaction is deliberately minimised and there is no day-to-day interaction with a supervisor, a worker whose ID is blocked has no recourse except to call a customer care number that typically follows the company's ideology that the "customer is always right." For those who work full-time on the platform and depend on it as their main source of income, every day of not working because of the blocked ID can substantially impact their earnings.

TABLE 7: PARAMETERS RELATING TO TRUST

Perceptions about ID blocking	% Share
Yes, it has been blocked	55
No, it has never been blocked	45
Total	**100**
Reasons for blocking the ID	
Customer complained though it was not my fault	45
I cancelled orders a few times	20
I was logged out for too long	13
The company blamed me for a financial issue	7
Not wearing company uniform/carrying company bag	9
Other	6
Total	**100**

6.5.3. Unilateral blocking of IDs creates a trust deficit between the worker and the platform. The lead author is privy to several conversations recorded by workers with the customer care of the platform presenting their case about how unfairly the ID has been blocked. But often, the plea falls on deaf ears with the customer care representative merely mouthing the spiel taught by the company to replay in such situations.

6.5.4. The range of circumstances under which

> Whatever goods the company provides, we do not get paid until we deliver them. Oftentimes, we are asked to deliver valuable goods as well, and then it's not that we would take it for ourselves and not deliver the goods. But in any case, the company has all our data. They can easily sue us, but we can't do the same to them.

> Why will the company trust us? On the contrary, we don't trust the company itself. We don't know when the delivery rate would be suddenly reduced, or when someone would cause conflict. We can't say anything against it.

> The company always tries to ensure that its work is not affected. For this, it always keeps making some new rules and keeps imposing them on us. We can say that the company does not trust us.

> There is no question of breaking trust in our line of work. All workers deliver their goods honestly. Yes, some people may have made mistakes, but they are very few. No one can get away with delivery fraud.

the ID has been blocked is revelatory of the number of situations in which the platform deems the worker worthy of punishment. One worker voiced his frustration, revealing, "haven't been told the reason till date," displaying the lack of open communication channels with the platform. Another worker admitted to taking a lot of leave. IDs were blocked as retribution for losing a packet and even one item within an order. Some workers recounted instances where they declined orders because the location was too far away. A few workers faced an ID block because they complained about the platform on social media.

6.5.5 A majority of the respondents seem to work on minimal clarity regarding the terms of their employment as well as the local company access points. About72% had not read the company contract, 55% did not know the name of their company supervisor/team leader, and 45% did not know the address of their company's local offices.

6.6. OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

6.6.1. Prospects of higher income and social protection were the reason why 47% of workers would be potentially ready to quit being a gig worker. A job which did not require driving all day and one where people were better treated, garnered almost equal shares of 16-17% as triggers for changing occupations. More respondents were pessimistic about the growth of income in this occupation in the future, with 65% saying it would not and 35% expecting it would increase.

TABLE 8: POTENTIAL REASONS FOR QUITTING GIG WORK

REASONS	%
Getting a job which pays me more	29
Job which has better social security-insurance/pension, etc.	18
Job which doesn't require driving for long hours	17
A job where workers are treated better	16
I want to study further	3
Preparing for competitive exams/entrances	2
Possibility of a permanent government job	5
If I can start my own small business	8
Nothing, I am happy to continue in this job in the future	2
Total	100

6.7. WOMEN WORKERS

6.7.1. While only 2.3% (120) of the workers surveyed are women, their responses were distinctly different from their male colleagues on several aspects. Of the women surveyed, 20% work in at-home service platforms such as Urban Company, followed by another 18.6% who work in package delivery companies such as Amazon, and 17% in food-delivery platforms while the rest were distributed among various other platforms. The transportation sector was noticeably absent as an employer of women. Since the sample is small, it would be hazardous to make generalisations about all women gig workers in India based on this. Nevertheless, we present some points which stood out starkly about the gendered nature of location-based platform work.

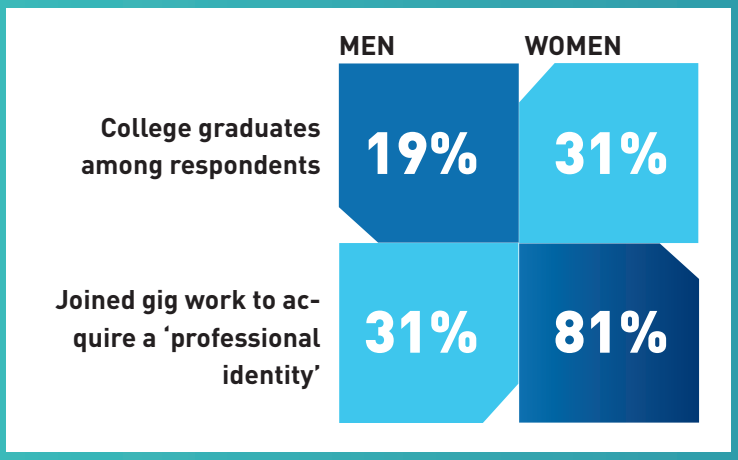
6.7.2. More educated women enter the gig workforce, looking for a professional identity. As in the case of men, half of the women are in the 22-30 age group. However, 31% of women respondents were college graduates as opposed to 19% of men who were college graduates. A thumping 81% of the women said they joined the profession because it offered them an identity as a professional, while for men the dominant reason was that they had no option. Given that a bulk of care work traditionally performed by women is unpaid and unrecognised, as well as the fact that women struggle to obtain a professional identity in most domains, platforms seem to be an easy way for women to earn professional validation, so often socially withheld from them.

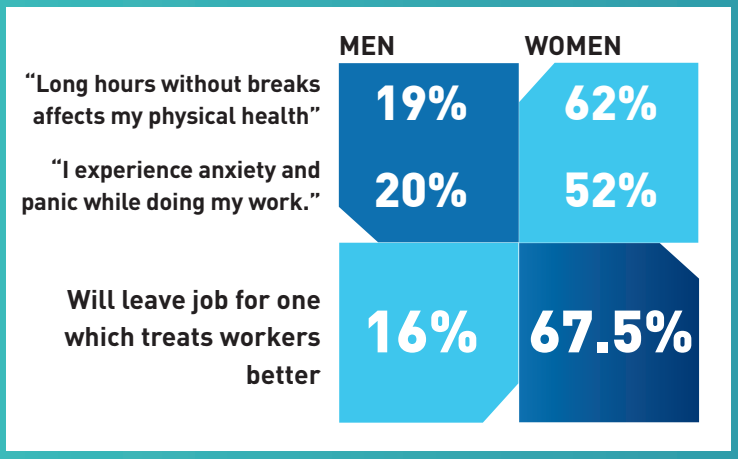
6.7.3. Once they enter the profession, women work for long hours, despite feeling less safe. Almost 76% of the women spend more than eight hours as gig workers on the road, proving that, for most women, gig work is a full-time job in the same way as it is for their male colleagues. This is despite 65% of the women respondents saying they felt unsafe at work. Additionally, 76% feel that the company app should contain an SOS emergency button for workers when in unsafe situations. Demands for customers to show their IDs and provisions for worker safety were some of the changes which women said would make them feel safer.

6.7.4. Women are affected less and differently by both physical and mental stress compared to men. While men predominantly report frequent body ache and stress as main health impacts, women refer to the absence of breaks (62%) and high levels of anxiety/panic (52%) as the biggest factors. This is in accordance with the reality of the urban environment, where seeking safe, private locations for sanitation has been a source of stress for women, as research on gendered aspects of urban sanitation has documented (Panchang et al., 2021). Hence, the absence of breaks is their biggest occupational hazard because if a woman gig worker wants to relieve herself, she must find a suitable toilet which may not be in the vicinity. In the meantime, if the phone keeps buzzing with orders, there is virtually no time to go about finding a toilet.

6.7.5. Better treatment is women workers' biggest demand. While only 16% of the male population said they would leave platform work for a job which treats workers better, the corresponding figure amongst women,was a much higher 67.5%. In this connection, it is worth noting that more women are employedin platforms providing personal services (e.g. beauty treatments) at customers' homes and are often subject to whimsical ratings by customers. Individual responses recorded a common demand for legislative intervention, minimum wage guarantee, money for overtime, and provisions for safety and insurance.

6.7.6. Being a tiny minority in a workflow that allows for no interaction with peers, and almost none with the organisation, women bear a bigger brunt of being cut off from all communication channels. While issues regarding transparency, safety, and health are of note within the overall sample, women seem to be doing worse off than their male counterparts when it comes to having clarity about work-related communication. About 87% reported a lack of clarity regarding payment structure as opposed to 65% among men. More women (47%) than men (28%) felt that the payments were not correct and prompt. Location-based platform work is a profession that by construction has workers functioning in isolation.





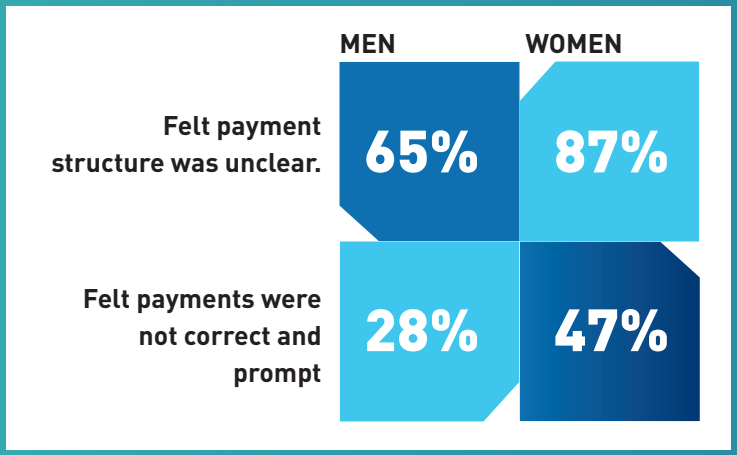


Figure 9: Sharp contrasts between responses by male and female workers.

7. DISCUSSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. In India, jobs in the platform economy are not temporary gigs but serious livelihoods for people with families, which workers continue to do for several years. Uber began in 2009 in the US by luring full-time workers to drive their cars as cabs, after working hours. However, the way platform work has developed in labour surplus, emerging economies like India, is that for a significant number of people it is the main source of livelihood. This is proven without doubt by the fact that in our survey, 85% of the workers said they logged in for more than eight hours a day, and 20% for more than 12 hours a day. Even if they are doing the job temporarily while waiting for better prospects (visa to go abroad, results of an exam, etc.) at the time they are engaged, it is no less than a full-time occupation. In our survey, 57% of respondents had been gig workers for more than two years and 15% for more than five years.

7.2. It is time to change the vocabulary we use to describe these jobs. Recognition of the difference in profile of workers pointed out above is important because the word "gig" beguiles us into thinking that it is something a few people are doing on the side, and hence is not a priority sector. Perhaps, a better word could be **"e-commerce workers"** because they are powering the entire e-commerce industry. Without the last-mile delivery by a human being of the product or service, e-commerce cannot function (at least, until technology replaces them through drones, etc.).

7.3. As the findings showed, there are vast deficits in terms of Respect, Integrity, Humanity, and Trust as perceived by platform workers in India today. Workers perceive themselves to be low on respect; perceive the company to be operating behind a veil of secrecy; face poor work conditions, including mental and physical stress; and have a mutual trust issue with the platform. This situation of gig workers strikes at the heart of "decent work"which is one of the goals of ILO's Agenda 2030, aimed at sustainable development for the planet.

7.4. Decent work is one that offers dignity, equality, a fair income, and safe work conditions. Promoting jobs and enterprise, guaranteeing rights at work, extending social protection, and promoting social dialogue are the four pillars of the ILO Decent Work Agenda, with gender as a cross-cutting theme. These are crucial to advancing the entire sustainable development agenda (ILO, 2022b). Decent work puts people in the centre of development and gives women, men, and youth a voice in what they do, preventing them from exploitation.
Against this background, the following policy interventions are recommended for the growth of the platform economy in a way that is beneficial to all stakeholders:

A. CODING AND ENUMERATION

1. The Indian Government has developed a web-based portal called e-Shram for creating a national database of unorganised workers to extend the benefits of the social security schemes to migrant workers, construction workers, as well as gig/platform workers. For the first time, e-commerce workers became a part of the national labour codes in 2020. This is a good starting point towards safeguarding decent working conditions. As per the new codes, gig and platform workers need compulsory online registration on an online portal, and the registration should be subject to fulfilment of certain condition in terms of age, number of days worked, and possession of certain documents to avail the benefits, which may not be fair to workers (Mehta, 2020). Unavailability of documents has been an impediment to lower-income groups not availing many benefits in India. An alternative is for the government to obtain gig workers' details from the platform themselves.

2. The flexibility offered by the platform to log in and out as desired, makes it impossible for any entity except the platform itself to record the duration of employment. The platform has all the data of everyone who ever logged in, but that information is currently proprietary. If it was made

In India, jobs in the platform economy are not temporary gigs but serious livelihoods for people with families, which workers continue todo for several years. It is time to officially change the terminology from ‘gig workers’ to ‘e-commerce workers’.

mandatory for platforms to share worker data, the government can know whether they are full-time workers or part-time workers, as well as the hours-worked-to-payment ratio. This will help determine the size of the gig/platform economy and enable the government to invest in policies and regulations to better its performance.

B. TRIPARTITE BOARD FOR DELIBERATION ON ISSUES AFFECTING GIG WORKERS

1. The formation of a Tripartite Board, which has representations from the Ministry of Labour, platform companies, and workers, will bring more balance to the current asymmetry of power between workers and companies. As with all times of paradigmatic change, institutions are falling behind in their attempts to understand and measure up to policymaking in the platform economy (IT for Change, 2018). The issues faced by workers as outlined in the findings of this study and by others prior to this point to various areas where policy needs to step in. Once such a board is formed, it needs to address the following issues on priority:

• **Income insufficiency:** The prospect of higher pay is the topmost reason workers cited to leave gig work, and the most urgent problem articulated in open-ended questions was about income insufficiency. As platforms hire more and more riders and drivers, the fragmented market provides fewer and fewer opportunities, adversely impacting workers' remuneration. To that end, platforms need to respond toworker demands such as platforms cutting the amount of commission they charge per transaction for their fuel bill which keeps increasing as fuel prices rise.

• **Changing employment status:** As demonstrated in various sections of the report, the platform through its algorithmic management, exercises considerable control on workers. The level of control is excessive in a client-independent service provider contract but accepted in case of a formal employee-employer relationship. "How then are we not able to enjoy the benefits that employees do," ask gig workers? In a demonstration at Delhi's Jantar Mantar, Janpahal, the NGO that has

conducted this study, held a placard that exposed this duplicity of nomenclature through the slogan *"Partner hain toh munafa do, employee hain toh suraksha do."* Translated from Hindi, it reads, "If we are partners, give us a share in your profits, if we are employees, give us social security."Perhaps the most vital area of regulatory intervention is where platforms take responsibility of platform workers'occupational health and safety as they would do for their regular employees.

• **Minimum wages for hours logged in so that there is a fixed component to the income.** This guarantee will prevent certain risks that workers currently undertake in desperation such as speeding on roads to pull in as many orders as possible and trying to circumvent the rules of the platform like offering rides offline.

• **Negotiation with the platform:** The voice of the workers needs to be represented in drawing up the rules for ID blocking or penalties that are currently decided unilaterally by the platform.

The potential challenge in setting up such a board is about selecting the representative of platform workers. Platform workers in India are at present represented by various unions: All India Gig Workers Association; The Gig Workers Association, International Federation of App Based Transport Workers, etc. Also present are some state-based unions such as the Telangana Gig and Platform Workers Association. Traditional trade unions of political parties like CITU also have taken up the cause of gig workers. Therefore, the representative of workers on such a board has to be selected after careful consideration through a consensus or democratically held elections to the post.

C. ALLEVIATING WORKER STRESS AND ENSURING SAFETY ON THE JOB

1. While the need for social security has attracted a lot of support, it is worth paying attention to the ways in which physical and mental stress is accumulated, as this study has shown.The very nature of the job of a location-based delivery worker is isolated. Unlike the traditional economy where blue-collar workers used to meet in a physical space like a factory/office and meet with their peer group, here each worker is like a unit unto himself orbiting the trajectories outlined for him by the algorithm, rarely encountering a co-worker. The entire working day, the gig worker meets strangers-in the form of customers, who are sometimes even hostile. The lack of respect encountered in building societies further fosters a sense of alienation, perhaps unknown to the worker himself. The net effect of these is significant mental stress, anxiety, loneliness, and frustration. With greater separation and autonomy from employing organisations, workers experience greater "aloneness" which can spiral into loneliness if managed poorly and affect performance on the job. (Kunda et al., 2002; Lam &Lau, 2012).

Each worker is like a unit unto himself orbiting the trajectories outlined for him by the algorithm, rarely encountering a co-worker.

2. Platforms should take up the responsibility to help workers cope with the negative externalities of the job and adopt a more humane approach in treatment of workers. Rather than take pains to keep their physical offices unobtrusive or impenetrable, which platform companies do at present, more human-to-human interaction can help alleviate some of the mutual distrust. Even in the original Taylorist mode of organising work, performance was still overseen by a human manager. In digital Taylorism of the platform economy, humans perform algorithmic work while being supervised by software algorithms, which possess no consideration for workers' humanity that a human supervisor may have had (Noponen et al., 2023).

3. Workers need support from platforms and other agencies to cope with this relatively unprecedented form of conducting work. Surviving, functioning, and thriving in the gig economy will demand much from individuals. The necessary behaviours required to thrive will tax their cognitive and emotional capabilities (Ashford et al., 2018).Training sessions to manage emotional ups and downs of their work and teaching workers to benefit from the freedom that flexibility offers, can enable workers to manage the accompanying stress of the job. Rewarding those who have been working with the platform for more than say, three years, with facilities like soft loans to buy vehicles are some of the ways companies can extend a hand.

D. ENABLING MORE WOMEN TO JOIN THE PLATFORM ECONOMY

1. With its feature of flexibility and recognition as working professional, platforms offer women important benefits. Platforms such as Urban Company even advertise the possibility of respect and accreditation for women who otherwise perform unrecognised or uncredited labour. The absence of adequate public facilities hampers women's mobility, socially and economically. For instance, the absence of easily accessible, well-designed toilets can remove an important barrier in women's participation in e-commerce (Ratho, 2018). The difficulty in acquiring their own personal vehicles and in learning driving are other impediments that prevent women from taking up location-based platform work. Partnering with the government and NGOs that are addressing these issues can enable e-commerce companies to pave the way for more women to sign up with them. Adding features like an emergency button within the app is aneasy wayto reduce the threat perception in these jobs for potential women workers. This will not only boost women's workforce participation rate in India but can expand the base of workers for platforms and contribute positively to their business.

E. PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

1. Platforms need to play a vital role in taking responsibility for upskilling the gig worker and creating a career path. In our study, 65% of workers polled disagreed with the statement:"In the future, I feel my income will grow in this job," and 35% were hopeful that this would happen. Less than 5% said they would like to continue in the same job in future. Workers need to be taught market-relevant skills that will enable them to transition to other jobs after, say, three years of being a delivery worker. Learning is a powerful engagement driver, requiring a shift in perspective of platforms, from the prevalent view that gig workers are temporary resources (Behera & Gaur, 2022).

These workers already have some training in customer handling, digital skills, and knowledge of city roads. Organisations could provide further learning opportunities, perhaps via the app itself, to harness the human resource it has invested in. Governments could partner with platforms under various skilling initiatives like Skill India Mission to transition these workers into better quality, longer tenure jobs.

A gig is something done for a short period. Permanent gig work is an oxymoron and must not become the norm. Ways to absorb India's youthful workforce beyond gig work must be urgently thought of before we lose the advantage of the demographic dividend, come 2040.

8. CONCLUSION

7.1. Digital platforms are not only market intermediaries between different groups of platform users but must move to providing governance mechanisms that are essential for the just functioning of digital markets (Busch, 2019). As gig work is only expected to grow with the growth of e-commerce, it is important to understand the motivations, frustrations, and expectations of the millions who are participating in it. This study throws light on location-based platform workers' perceptions and attitude with respect to the values of Respect, Integrity, Humanity, and Trust in the context of their jobs. It takes into account the unique socio-economic and cultural context of urban India. The findings reveal that significant gaps exist in each theme, underlying the need for corrective policies and practices in this rapidly evolving sector.

As technological innovation evolves rapidly and a variety of different business models emerge, the regulatory framework needs to respond promptly to these developments. Platform work is here to stay. A deeper understanding of its functioning will help to anticipate and address related challenges. This study is a contribution towards attaining that goal.

GLIMPSES INTO THE LIVES OF PLATFORM WORKERS

1. ANIL KUMAR: BLINKIT, DELHI

Strict monitoring and tight deadlines

Anil Kumar (31) is from Farrukhabad, Uttar Pradesh. He has a wife and two children living there. He possesses a complete secondary school education along with some rudimentary computer knowledge.

Due to the poor financial condition of his family, he came to Delhi in search of a job. "When I arrived, my friends told me that I could get a job at Blinkit and earn a decent wage. When I inquired about Blinkit, I came to know that to work there, one has to first download the app and apply for a job through the app itself. So that is what I did. I registered on the Blinkit app and applied for a job."

To apply, one must upload documents such as one's PAN card, Aadhar card, driving license, motorcycle RC, etc., along with a selfie and preferred location. The individual ID is made once these uploads are complete and have been verified. The worker then goes to the Blinkit Hub at their selected location and meets with the Blinkit Officer (supervisor). The officer performs the necessary document verification, and the worker can then start immediately.

Anil Kumar described his typical workday as follows:

"As soon as the order arrives, the siren starts ringing on the workers' phones. They accept that order. Meanwhile, the packers from the store, who also receive the same order, pack the goods and give them to delivery men like me at the counter. After this, the delivery workers have to check all items to ensure that all is in order.

I have to confirm all these things myself. If the goods are correct and complete, then I must leave immediately to deliver the goods to the customer. There is a time limit for delivering these goods. If you go over the limit, the customer complains and cancels the order. And the app monitors everything: how long you took to reach the store, to pick up the items, to set off for the customer's house, when you delivered, etc.

I am not paid for cancelled orders. I am paid only if the order is successfully delivered. I receive INR 15-30 for full-deliveries. Petrol expenses and savings must be managed within this money."

After reaching the customer's location, the motorcycle is parked at one's own risk. Oftentimes, one must climb up to four floors to deliver goods. After confirming once again that all items were correctly delivered, delivery workers go back to the store. And then the same process has to be followed to take the second order.

"Before joining Blinkit, I thought I'd earn a good amount of money every month, but nothing of that sort has happened. Blinkit's ad message promotion says, 'Dear Partner, Deliver with Blinkit and earn Rs.50,000per month. Special Joining Bonus up to Rs. 5000/.' **All these promises were not fulfilled, they are just cosmetic promises."**

2.SUNIL KUMAR: ZOMATO, DELHI

Unfair ratings, weather, and street dogs

Sunil Kumar (45) lives in Badarpur, Delhi. He has a daughter and a son. His daughter has passed 12th grade, and now wants to study further. He believes that she should work while pursuing further education. His daughter knows that he works in Zomato but doesn't have the income to afford her education.

Sunil Kumar has been working as a delivery boy in Zomato for over a year, for 10-12 hours a day, often for a week straight. He takes leaves only in the case of a serious emergency.

When he first joined, he earned good money, he said. But gradually, work reduced. While petrol rates and inflation continued to hike, no significant increments were reflected in his rate card to balance out the cost of increasing prices.

Once, when on his way to deliver an order, his bike got punctured. The repair took a fair amount of time and interfered with his delivery timing. As a result, his ratings dropped, and his ID was promptly blocked for a few days. When he talked about this with the company, they refused to listen to him. The platform had blocked Sunil Kumar's ID based on the customer's request.

Delivery workers like him often stand outside Haldiram's restaurant near Mohan Estate, Sarita Vihar, from where a lot of orders are picked up. He said that the people who work in the evenings are given more work, while those on the morning shift don't fare as well.

When speaking of the dangers of this work, he refers to extreme weather conditions. "We are always affected by the weather, sometimes it is hot, sometimes it is cold, sometimes it rains. In any season we must deliver all our orders, and that too on time. We are not even given any extra money."

Customers often return orders if the food isn't as warm as expected. This effectively deteriorates the delivery personnel's rating, even as the fault lies predominantly with the restaurant. "We get it late and by the time the order reaches it gets cold due to which the customer gets angry and returns the order."

Kumar points out another danger at work. "There are dogs, they often chase us and sometimes they even bite. Apart from the street dogs, if there is a dog at some customer's house, then as soon as we knock on the door, the dog starts barking. When the customers open the door, the dog immediately runs towards us. Despite facing so many dangers, we work with the company for up to 12 hours a day. We are paid, but the company does not consider us to be employees. If ever a problem arises, they only give priority to what the customer says and don't believe in anything we say."

Despite working for over 12 hours a day, he is only able to earn around INR 300-400. He is not able to afford petrol or even earn a living wage. Kumar understands that the company is progressing and that the company is becoming financially strong. **"The company has made us a partner. But it does not take us along in her monetary gain. How is that?It is a partnership in which the company has a lot of money and, in which we are earning money for the company.** We are forced to work under their control. They are taking advantage of our *majboori* (helplessness)."

3. PANKAJ: SWIGGY, UTTAR PRADESH

Platform work came as a boon but now it is disappointing

Pankaj is a resident of Uttar Pradesh, living on-rent in Noida with his wife and daughter. He is a graduate and used to work at an MNC but lost his job in March 2019. Soon after, on Holi, he met with a debilitating accident, fracturing a part of his right leg. After losing his job, he had hoped to start a small business with the amount that he had carefully saved. However, immobile and on bed rest, his savings soon evaporated.

"I started having troubles at home, I started living in tension. Then a friend told me about Swiggy. On 24 March 2020, I got an ID for Swiggy. Soon after that, the lockdown was imposed. Once again, I could not work. Then on 20 September 2020 I got another ID made. This time, it was for Zomato. It was a good time and I was earning well.

It used to be good. Now, there is no use in it. The target has been increased and the money has been reduced.The company only listens to customers. There is no fair hearing *(humari koi sunvai nahi hai)*. We give them all our time, but the company only takes undue advantage of us all. In the name of incentive, the company makes us do unnecessary work and we don't receive any payment for those orders. On cancellation, the company deducts our money."

4. ARCHANA: URBAN COMPANY, JAIPUR

Single mother, shocked by an unexpected ID block

Archana (35) is a single woman. Her husband passed away due to a serious illness, and so she holds the sole responsibility of raising her two children. She did a beauty parlour course and was working in a parlour near her home. That's where she learnt of Urban Company. By rounding up all her savings, and borrowing money from relatives and friends, she collected the INR 50,000 she needed to join the platform.

She had worked for only about a month when her ID was blocked without notice. The block sent her into severe shock and depression.

Archana believes she has always maintained honesty in her work, listened to customer's wishes, put in extra hours, and went beyond her stipulated duties, often persevering at the fear of bad ratings or worse, an ID block.

"I was cheated, and I cried all night thinking about what will I do now? How will the house run?"

There was once some accumulated capital, but all of it was spent in purchasing the company's products. Archana had always been deeply invested in her children's future– a future that suddenly felt murky and uncertain after her ID was blocked and savings were exhausted. "I was in shock for two days and struggled to sleep."

Soon after, she learned that she was not alone. She discovered hundreds of women who had experienced the same poor circumstances, if not worse. She got this information from a WhatsApp group, 'Block ID of Urban Company.' Archana, who met other women working for Urban Company, said that she had now found the strength and the way to struggle. Archana and all other women came together in their fight against Urban Company. Together they started protesting, attempting to raise their voices across all states. However, despite these efforts, the company stands unaffected.

"Even today our ID is still blocked. But we are not going to lose, our fight will continue."

5. JAVED RIHAN: ZOMATO, DELHI

Underage and desperate for work

"We cannot talk here, you should go to our colony," said Rihan and took the interviewer to his home in Wazirpur Industrial Area, New Delhi. Wazirpur is a densely populated industrial area. There are several factories and workers' colonies here. Rihan is a student at X&Y School (name changed). He is 15 and studies in the 9th standard.

"It's very bad so I have to work," he said, referring to the financial condition of his home.

Rihan has two sisters, along with an elder brother and two parents. Rihan's father works at a nearby factory that manufactures steel utensils. Rihan's elder brother, Faizal, works in Zomato and owns a scooter.

"My elder brother, Faizal, goes to work early in the morning. After coming back from school, I takehis ID and work till late at night. I do this so that the household expenses can be met, andI can continue my studies."

He refers to an incident that took place when he was out to deliver an order at Rohini late at night. The customer, upon recognising that the delivery boy was just a child, attempted to ease out of paying for the order, resorting to threatening Rihan and forcing him to go back.

Rihan said that he must endure a lot of misbehaviour and hardship during work but is forced to bear to keep his job. Like him, there are other young boys in Wazirpur who are

forced to work owing to the compulsion of their financial situations. However, the presence ofplatforms gives them earning opportunities that they may not have had otherwise.

6. VIJAY: AMAZON, BANARAS

One among the glut of delivery boys in Banaras

Vijay (30) is a resident of Banaras. His father had a small jewellery shop which could not function. He faced the brunt of a series of financial hardships. His family was drowning in debt. The financial crisis interrupted his education, forcing him to stop after the 12th grade. During this time, he got married and had two children. In the absence of a bread winner, he was forced to take on the sole financial responsibility of the household. He tried for a government job, but was unsuccessful. In such dire circumstances, he joined location-based platform work.

"This is how, like me, most people end up becoming delivery boys."

"People join companies' jobs only under compulsion. And when they get better options, they leave it."

Vijay started by working for Myntra. He worked there for one and a half years. He worked hard toachieve his targets and maintain his rank. In the course of his work, he once lost a package and consequently was fired from his job. Now, he is working as a delivery person for Amazon.

In conversation, he said that in this severe race of unemployment, many people from the neighbouring districts of Chandauli, Shamjam Paru, and Sonbhadra migrated to Banaras city and were working there as delivery workers for e-commerce companies.

7. YOGESH: SWIGGY, BENGALURU

An engineer-turned-delivery-boy

Twenty-eight-year-old Yogesh's family consists of his parents, his wife, and son. He has a degree in engineering. Due to the poor financial conditions at home, he was forced to start working. Motivated by a strong desire to do well and begin to immediately provide for his family, Yogesh started working as a delivery person at Swiggy. He works for 10-12 hours a day, if not more. He aims to earn around INR 30,000 a month. To achieve this, cancelling an order is not an option. Distance and route, however inconvenient, must make no difference. However, even with such restrictions, long hours and a lack of flexibility, **he is unable to earn enough to save.**

"The company is very concerned about inflation. They are hiring new workers at a higher rate. While they are providing us with sufficient work, our rates are being systematically reduced. **It is hard work all day long.** However, we do it. But we don't get orders properly. There are many issues because the app glitches often. "I started the work with high hopes, thinking that I'd earn some money." Today, he is barely able to run his house. Yogesh is clear he wants to lead a better life. He says that he will not do this work for long, because once stuck, he won't be able to achieve much else in his life.

"Every morning, we get up early, get ready, and stand outside the restaurant to wait for the order. After receiving the order, we call the customers again and again.We reach the delivery point on time, get scolded by the customer, and then go home late at night. This is our routine. **The company doesn't care if the delivery drivers are sick or dying."**

Yogesh intends to open an electric goods shop. He says that by working at Swiggy, he can't fulfil his dream in future. He hopes to leave soon.

8. YOGENDRA: AMAZON DELIVERY, DELHI

Cheated by a middleman

Yogendra (33) possesses a complete high school education and lives with his parents, two brothers, three children, and his wife.

In 2009, his family decided to move to Delhi to seek adequate treatment for his father's ailing health and find a job to support his household. After coming to Delhi, he worked as a security guard as well as a delivery personnel for Blue Dart. When informed about Amazon, he attempted to pursue a job there. Seeing the need for a vehicle, he bought a car on loan and started work at the company. Eventually his brothers joined the company, and now all three of them work as delivery boys at Amazon.

"We joined Amazon in 2019. We are somehow running our family. For the last two months my child has not been keeping well. When we consulted the doctor, he prescribed some tests which are expected to cost around INR 12,000-15,000. We told the vendor that our payment was due, and asked to be paid. He accused us of cheating, saying that all three brothers together owed about INR 45,000. We were fired without any information."

Yogendra continues to seek redressal and justice.

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ANNEXURE 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

RIGHTS - RESPECT AND INTEGRITY OF GIG WORKERS; HUMANITY AND TRUST IN SERVICE

All India Survey of Gig Workers by Janpahal

SURVEY CITY

Mark only one

- DELHI-NCR
- JAIPUR
- JALANDHAR
- AHMEDABAD
- LUCKNOW
- VARANASI
- BENGALURU
- PATNA
- AGRA
- HYDERABAD
- PUNE
- GUWAHATI
- KOLKATA
- BHOPAL
- BHUBANESHWAR
- MUMBAI
- RAIPUR
- DEHRADUN
- RANCHI
- COCHIN
- MYSORE

If 'other', please specify_____

RESPONDENT PROFILE

1. Name

2. Gender and Age (PLEASE TICK THE CORRECT OPTION OF AGE AND GENDER, ONLY 1 TICK ALLOWED). Mark only one oval per row.

- 15-21
- 22-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- Above 50

.....

- Male
- Female
- Other

3. Please indicate your education level and family status (who do you live with) (ALLOW RESPONDENT TO ANSWER AND TICK AS APPLICABLE. ONLY 1 TICK ALLOWED.) Mark only one oval per row.

- Living with parent(s)
- Living with friends/relatives
- Living alone
- Married
- Married with children
- Below class 10
- 10th-12th
- Diploma
- Graduation
- Post grad and above

4. How long have you been living in this city? (ALLOW RESPONDENT TO ANSWER AND TICK AS APPLICABLE).Mark only one oval.

- All my life
- 0-5 years
- 6-10 years
- More than 10 years

EMPLOYMENT DETAILS

5. Which company do you work for? (ALLOW RESPONDENT TO ANSWER AND TICK ALL WHICH ARE APPLICABLE. MORE THAN 1 TICK ALLOWED.)Check all that apply.

- Zomato
- Swiggy
- Urban Company
- Blinkit
- Zepto
- Dunzo
- Porter
- Amazon
- Flipkart
- Big Basket
- Ola
- Uber
- Yes Madam
- Rapido
- Other

6. How long have you been working for this company (in years)? (ALLOW RESPONDENT TO ANSWER AND TICK AS APPLICABLE.) Mark only one oval.

- Less than a year 1-2 years
- 2-3 years
- 3-4 years
- 4-5 years
- More than 5 years

7. How many hours do you log in per day? (ALLOW RESPONDENT TO ANSWER AND TICK AS APPLICABLE.) Mark only one oval.

- 0-4 hours
- 4-8 hours
- 8-10 hours
- 10-12 hours
- More than 12 hours

RESPECT

8. Why did you join this company? (READ OUT ALL OPTIONS AND TICK YES/NO FOR EACH) Mark only one oval per row.

Yes/No

- Job security
- Freedom to select client
- Flexible work timings
- Fair wages
- Identity as professional
- I had no other option
- Other:

9. How do you feel when you wear the company uniform? (READ ALL OPTIONS AND TICK AS APPLICABLE). Mark only one oval.

- Proud
- I feel fine, I am okay with it
- Embarrassed
- I don't wear it
- Other:

10. How does your family feel about your job?(ALLOW RESPONDENT TO ANSWER AND TICK AS APPLICABLE).Mark only one oval.

- They think it is a good job
- They don't have an opinion on it
- They don't like it but they know there is no other option
- They don't like it and want me to quit the job
- Other:

11. Do you have any problems when

you visit societies for your work? If yes, please specify.(ALLOW RESPONDENT TO ANSWER AND TICK ALL APPLICABLE).Check all that apply.

- Frequently stopped by security guards
- Long wait for permission to enter
- Long wait for lifts
- Separate lifts
- Customer doesn't answer calls/ messages
- I don't have any problems
- Other:

12. For Food Delivery Personnel: How do restaurants treat you? (ALLOW RESPONDENT TO ANSWER AND TICK AS APPLICABLE. IF 'OTHER', PLEASE SPECIFY DETAILS). Mark only one oval.

- Positively and well
- With indifference
- Poorly
- Other:

13. ONLY FOR Amazon/Flipkart/Porter/Urban Company, etc.: How do you feel about carrying heavy weight as part of your work? (ALLOW RESPONDENT TO ANSWER FREELY AND TICK AS APPLICABLE).Mark only one oval.

- I don't mind it
- I don't like it
- Other:

14. Are you maintaining the rating required to get regular work? (ALLOW RESPONDENT TO ANSWER AND THEN TICK AS APPLICABLE). Check all that apply.

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Integrity

15. How do you feel about the rate of commission deducted by the company? (ALLOW RESPONDENT TO ANSWER AND THEN TICK AS APPLICABLE).Mark only one oval.

- The rate is fair
- The rate is unfair
- I don't know
- Other:

16. What would be a fair percentage for the company to cut as commission?(ALLOW RESPONDENT TO ANSWER AND THEN TICK AS APPLICABLE).Mark only one oval.

- Less than 10%
- 10-15%
- 15-20%
- 20-25%
- 25-30%
- 30-40%
- Above 40%
- I don't have an opinion on this

17. Do you understand the company's payment structure, including penalties and incentives? (READ ALL OPTIONS AND TICK AS APPLICABLE). Mark only one oval.

- Yes, I understand fully
- Somewhat, but not completely
- Not at all, I often have questions about the basis of payment

18. How do you get to know that the payments/incentive structure has changed?(ALLOW RESPONDENT TO ANSWER AND THEN TICK AS APPLICABLE). Mark only one oval.

- Company tells us via the app
- Some colleagues inform me
- I get a call from customer care
- I am not told, I work it out myself when the money comes
- Other:

19. Do you know/understand how the app allots works to you? Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

20. Does the company offer to teach/ train you to use the app when you join? Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

21. Have you ever had a problem because the app was not working properly? If yes, please specify. (PLEASE WRITE DETAILS IF OTHER IS CHOSEN).Check all that apply.

- Problem loading location/map
- App hangs/glitches
- Errors in drop/pick-up location
- Delay in receiving payment after delivery/ride
- Delay in marking ride/delivery as complete
- Other:

22. Has your ID ever been blocked? If yes, why?(READ ALL OPTIONS AND TICK AS APPLICABLE. IF 'OTHER', PLEASE SPECIFY DETAILS). Check all that apply.

- Customer complained though it was not my fault
- I cancelled orders a few times
- I was logged out for too long
- The company blamed me for a financial issue
- Not wearing company uniform
- Not carrying the company bag
- Complaining on public forums like social media, news media, etc.
- No, it has never been blocked
- Other:

HUMANITY

23. In what ways do you think your work affects your physical health? Please specify, if other. (ALLOW RESPONDENT TO ANSWER FREELY AND THEN TICK AS APPLICABLE). Check all that apply.

- Frequent body ache
- Lack of sleep
- Long hours without breaks for food/toilet
- Worsens health conditions like blood-pressure, cholesterol, etc.
- Cannot take a break to recover from illness/injury
- It does not affect my physical health
- Other:

24. In what ways do you think your work affects your mental health? Please specify, if other. (ALLOW RESPONDENT TO ANSWER FREELY AND THEN TICK AS APPLICABLE). Check all that apply.

- Stress
- Anxiety and panic
- Depression
- Isolation and loneliness

- Anger and frustration
- It does not affect my mental health
- Other:

25. What do you feel about safety in your job? Please tell me if you agree/disagree with these statements. (READ OUT ALL OPTIONS AND TICK AS APPLICABLE).Mark only one oval per row.
Agree/Disagree
- I feel completely safe in my job
- I feel unsafe when speeding to meet delivery-time targets
- I feel unsafe in some of the areas that I have to go to
- I feel unsafe while dealing with some customers
- I feel unsafe in some customers' houses
- I feel unsafe in the presence of dogs/animals at the customer's house/society
- I feel unsafe at certain times of the day
- I think the app should have an emergency button that we can use if we are in an unsafe situation

26. The following statements are about income. Please tell me if you 'agree' or 'disagree' with them. (READ OUT STATEMENTS AND TICK AS APPLICABLE).Mark only one oval per row.
Agree/Disagree
- Payments are correct and prompt
- Sometimes I feel the company pays me less for the work I do
- I am unhappy because I used to earn much more earlier in this same job
- In the future, I feel my income will grow in this job

27. What will make you leave your current job? (ALLOW RESPONDENT TO ANSWER AND TICK AS APPLICABLE).Check all that apply.
- Getting a job which pays me more
- Job which doesn't require driving for long hours
- A job where workers are treated better
- I want to study further
- Preparing for competitive exams/entrances
- Possibility of a permanent government job
- If I can start my own small business
- Job which has better social security-insurance/pension, etc.
- Nothing, I am happy to continue in this job in the future
- Other:

TRUST

28. Do you feel the company trusts you as their representative? Please explain why. (RECORD ANSWER BELOW).

29. How do you communicate to your company if you have a grievanceabout anythingwrong, including payment credited, wrong penalty, unfair rating, etc.? (ALLOW RESPONDENT TO ANSWER FREELY AND THEN TICK AS APPLICABLE).Check all that apply.
- I call up customer care
- I speak to the contact person at my company (team leader/supervisor)
- I go to the local office in my city
- I don't complain to anyone even if I have a grievance
- I don't know who to complain to (e.g., company contact person, customer care, etc.)
- I don't know where to complain (e.g., local company office)
- I complain on my worker's Telegram/WhatsApp group instead
- I complain to governmental authorities instead
- Have never felt the need to complain
- Other:

29. Please answer Yes or No for the following statements. (READ OUT AND TICK AS APPLICABLE).Mark only one oval per row.
Yes/No
- If someone misbehaved with you (customer/colleague) would you be able to report it to your company confidently?
- Have you read the contract of your employment?
- Do you know your supervisor/manager's name?
- Do you know the address of the company's local office?

30. What are the major issues in this line of work? Please offer suggestions/recommendations for change.

31. Phone Number of respondent (optional)

32. Email Address of respondent (optional)

33. Name of Interviewer

About Janpahal

Janpahal is a Delhi based not-for-profit organisation with pan India operations working since 2005 with distribution sector workers with the perspective of livelihoods, social security, rights and dignity. Janpahal played a key role in the last two decades by contributing significantly to the debates around protection and promotion of retail democracy. Securing the rights of workers in the local informal economy and platform economy in the national and global context is one of the key objectives of Janpahal. To realise the objectives, Janpahal engages the stakeholders across the distribution supply chain including small and marginal farmers, micro, small and medium enterprises, small independent businesses, self-employed and wage workers, warehouse and delivery workers and consumer groups. Janpahal envisions democratic distribution services which are good for all. Details may be found at www.janpahal.com

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