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WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AND JOB INSECURITY AMONG WOMEN IN INDIA'S GIG ECONOMY: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of the gig economy in India has transformed the nature of work, particularly for women seeking flexible empolyment opportunites. While gig work promise autonomy and flexible schedules, it is often characterized by job insecurity, irregular income, and lack of social protection. For women, these challenges are compounded by persistent gender norms that assign primary responsibility for domestic and caregiving work to them. This study examines the experiences of work-family conflict and empolyment insecurity among women engaged in India's gig economy using secondary data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), Time Use Survey (2019), NITI Aayog Reports (2022), and International Labour Organization (ILO) Publications. The study adopts a sociological lens to understand how structural inequalities and gendered expectations shape women's participation in precarious labour markets. Findings suggest that while gig work offers flexibility, it often reinforces gendered precarity and intensifies work-family pressures. The paper concludes with policy suggestions aimed at improving social protection and promoting gender-sensitive labour reforms.

KEYWORDS: *Gig Economy, Women Workers,Gender Precarity,Work-Family Conflict,Job Insecurity,Labour, Empolyemnt Insecurity.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, India has witnessed a rapid growth of the gig economy, driven by digital platforms, urbanization and changing empolyment patterns. According to NITI Aayog (2022), India is expected to have over 23 million gig workers by 2030. The gig economy includes platforms based jobs such as food delivary, ride-sharing, beauty services, domestic services and freelance digital work. For many women, gig work appears attractive because of its promise of flexibility, autonomy and the possibility of combining paid work with household responsibilities.Gig work is often informal in nature, lacking job security, health insurance, maternity benefits and stable income. At the same time, Indian society continues to place primary responsibility for domestic work and childcare on women. According to the Time Use Survey (2019), women spend nearly five times more hours on unpaid domestic and caregiving work than men. This unequal distribution of labour creates additional stress for women who attempt to balance gig work with family responsibilities.

For many women in India, entry into the labour market is shaped by social expectations, family responsibilities, and limited access to formal empolyment opportunites. Female labour force participation in India remains relatively low compared to global averages (PLFS,2022-23). A Significant proportion of working women are concentrated in informal and self-empolyed sectors, where income security and social protection are minimal. In this context, gig work appears to offer a practical solution. Its promise of flexible working hours allows women to combine paid work with household duties. However, flexibility dose not automatically translate into empowerment.

From a sociological perspective, the rise of the gig economy represents a shift toward precarious empolyment structures, where risk is transferred from empolyers to workers. Women, already positioned within unequal gender relations, often experience this precarity more intensely. This study explores how gig work affects women's work-family balance and how empolyment insecurity shapes their social and economic well-being. By using secondary data and policy reports, the research situates women's gig work experiences within

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broader discussions of gendered labour market, informalization and social inequality. Understanding these dynamics is essential not only for academic inquiry but also for designing inclusive and gender-senitive labour policies in contemporary India.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), Sources of Conflict Between work and family roles, in their study they explained that conflict occurs when work and family demands are incompatible. They identified three types of conflict, time-based, strain-based and behavior-based. Their framework remains foundational for understanding how women managing paid work and family responsibilities experience role stress.

Sverke, Hellgren and Naswall (2002), in their meta-analysis on job insecrity, found a strong relationship between empolyment instability and psychological stress. Their study demonstrated that insecurity in employment leads to anxiety, reduced job satisfaction and lower overall well-being. This work is important for understanding the emotional impact of gig work.

Bianchi and Milkie (2010), in work and family research in the first decade of the 21st century, argued that although women's participation in paid work has increased, they continue to bear a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic labour. Their findings highlight the persistence of gendered division of labour within household.

Vosko (2010) in, Managing the Margins**,** emphasized that precarious empolyment is deeply gendered. She argued that women are more likely to be concentrated in insecure and undervalued forms of empolyment due to structural inequalities in labour markets.

Standing (2011), In "The precariat: The New Dangerous Class", introduced the concept of the "Precariat" referring to workers experiencing unstable empolyment, lack of social protection, and income insecurity. His work provides a theoritical foundational for understanding gig workers as part of a broader class of precarious labour.

Kalleberg (2018), In "Precarious Lives: Job Insecrity and Well-being in rich democracies",examined how insecure empolyment affects mental and social well-being. He concluded that precarious labour arrangment create long-term stress and inequality, particularly for marginalized groups such as women.

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (2020), in the "Time Use Survey 2019", reported that Indian women spend significant more time on unpaid domestic and caregiving work than men. This data provides empirical evidence of gendered household responsibilities, which intensify work-family conflict for working women.

The International Labour Organization (2021), in "World Empolyment and Social Outlook: The Role of Digital Labour Platforms", found that gig workers globally face irregular income, absence of contracts, and limited social security. The report highlights that women gig workers are particularly vulnerable due to caregiving roles and lack of maternity benefits.

NITI Aayog (2022), in "India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy", projected a significant rise in gig workders in India. However, the report also identified major challenges, including lack of social protection, absence of formal recognition and limited gender-sensitive policies.

The periodic Labour Force Survey (2022-23) revealed that a large proporton of women in India are engaged in self-empolyment and informal sectors. This suggests that gig work may reprents a continuation of informal labour patterns rather than secure formal empolyment.

The International Labour Organization (2023), in "Global empolyment Trends for women 2023, highlighted that women continue to be overrepresented in vulnerable and informal empolyment worldwide. The report emphasized that without regulatory protection, new forms of digital work may reproduce existing gender inequalities.

The World Bank (2023), in "Women, Business and the Law 2023," noted that legal framework significantly influences women's economic participation. It stressed the importance of maternity benefits,workplace protections and social security in ensuring sustainable empolyment for women.

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OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the challenges faced by women in balancing gig work and family responsibilities in India.
2. To examine the level of job insecurity experienced by women working in the gig economy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive qualitative analytical approach has been used to interpret available statistical data and policy reports. This study is based entirely based on secondary data. The study applies a sociological framework focusing on gender roles, informalization of labour and precarity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, secondary data indicates that gig work provides women with entry into income-generating activities but does not guarantee stability. Many women engage in gig work due to limited formal empolyment opportunities and family constraints. The time use survey shows that unpaid care work remains disproportionately high among women, creating role strain when combined with paid gig work. Irregular working hour and income fluctuations further increase stress levels.

The absence of maternity benefits, health insurance and job contracts exposes women gig workers to economic vulnerability. While flexibility can support work-family balance in theory, in practice it often shifts risk and responsibilites entirely onto women.
From a sociological perspective. This reflects the persistence of gendered division of labour and structural inequalities within emerging labour markets.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that women's participation in India's gig economy is shaped by both opportunity and constraint. While gig work provides flexibility and income opportunities, it also reinforces job insecurity and intensifies work-family conflict. Structural gender inequalities in unpaid domestic labour further deepen this precarity. Without institutional support and gender-sensitive labour policies, the gig economy may reproduce existing inequalities rather than reduce them.

SUGGESTIONS

- Introduction of gender-sensitive social protection policies for gig workers.
- Extension of maternity benefits and health insurance to platform workers.
- Recognition of gig workers under formal labour laws.
- Public investment in childcare services to reduce women's unpaid care burden.
- Collection of gender-disaggregated data on gig empolyment for better policymaking.

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