

## **THE HUMAN SIDE OF PLATFORM WORK- HEALTH, DEMOGRAPHICS, AND STAKEHOLDER CONFLICTS AMONG FOOD DELIVERY EXECUTIVES**

*\*Ms. Vijayasarithi.P, I MSW, Department of Social Work, Madurai Institute of Social Sciences, Madurai, Tamilnadu, India.*

*\*\*Mr. Gurumoorthi.V, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Madurai Institute of Social Sciences, Madurai, Tamilnadu, India.*

*\*\*\*Mr. Charles.S, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Madurai Institute of Social Sciences, Madurai, Tamilnadu, India.*

### **Abstract**

The concept of workforce is dynamic, since from conventional employer-employee relations to the contemporary platform-based gig workers. The platform-based food delivery services became a hit only after the pandemic and post post-pandemic situation. The study focuses on the perception health, demographics and stakeholders' conflict among the food delivery executives engaged under the gig platform. The research focuses on 100 food delivery executives in Madurai Corporation by analysing sociodemographic, work conditions, and experience with the stakeholders. The findings reveal dominated by male food delivery executives, facing physical strains, sleep deprivation and inconsistent treatment from restaurant staff, police personnel and customers. The study insists on an effective grievance resolution mechanism in enhancing the work environment, safety audit, and regular health checkup by the aggregators.

**Key Words:** *Food delivery executive, sleep deprivation, restaurant staff, police officials, customers, social security*

### **Introduction**

The workforce has evolved from feudal society through colonisation, industrialisation, modernisation, liberalisation, privatisation, globalisation and the era of neo-technocratic or digital society. It primarily functions of any work based on time, place, and individuals, where relationships between employers and employees, prescribed job roles, and timing play significant roles in any business transaction. The concept of employment can be demarcated from the post-colonial era to the globalised economy on the one hand and the age of information and digital era on the other hand. The era of globalisation has changed the concept of employment to a greater extent, the new terms of employment such as fixed term employment, contract employment, freelancer, vendors form third party were popular at that time and in the last half past one decade of digital era gig employment in India is the updated version of employment. In the neo-technocratic society, gig economy platforms have revolutionised the employment landscape, particularly in the food delivery sector. Though the concept of food delivery system is not new to the Indian scenario, the concept of Dabba Wala, a quasiquicentennial service, is very famous in Mumbai, but in the digital era, the concept has upgraded to another level, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overdependence on technology has also fostered new consumption habits and employment opportunities based on digital platforms (Biju, 2021). As a case example after the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in 2021, former Minister for Communication Technology

Syed Ahmad Shah Sadat sought asylum in Germany; despite holding a Master's degree from Oxford University, he opted to work as a food delivery executive on a gig platform due to language barriers, a lack of work experience, immediate economic needs, and the flexibility offered (Times of India, August 2021). At the same time, the food delivery platform offers flexible employment, attracting many young individuals, unskilled workers, and migrants. However, attrition continues due to the absence of social security features and employment protection mechanisms similar to those in the organised sector (Behara, A et al, n.d). In the recent past, Justice K Chandru, former Judge of the Madras High Court, insisted that the gig workers are underpaid and over loaded with work and insisted on the social security measures (23 Dec 2024 DT Next).

As a recognition for gig workers, the code on Social Security, 2020, defines gig workers as a person who works and earns other of a traditional employer-employee relationship, among another subset of gig workers are defined as platform workers, who operate through online contact (Section 2(35)). As a gig employment an emerging employment in June 2022, the NITI Aayog announced that in the financial year 2020-2021, there were 7.7 million gig platform workers and projected this number to increase to 23.5 million by 2029-2030, urging the creation of a social protection model for gig workers (NITI Aayog press release, July 2024). The labour department of the Kerala government has made arrangements to create rest centres for gig workers (11 Aug, 2024, The New Indian Express).

As a pioneer, the Kerala government also supplied essential commodities through a popular food aggregator during COVID-19 (27 March 2020, The New Indian Express). The union budget 2025 of the Indian government has provided ID cards, e-shram registration, and PM Jan Arogya Yojana for the social security benefits of the gig workers across the nation (Press release, Ministry of Labour and Employment, 02 Feb 2025).

The Tamil Nadu government announced a subsidy of 20000 rupees to assist 2000 registered gig workers to buy electric vehicles and additionally provided 1.5 lakh insurance coverage, along with providing accidental and disability benefits. Like as the Kerala government, the Tamil Nadu government has created rest centres for the gig workers (Hindustan Times, 14 March 2025). As the Government of Karnataka has approved the social security and welfare board for the gig workers ( April 11, The Indian Express).

A bill has been drafted by the government of Telangana, which mandates the aggregators to contribute 1 to 2 per cent of each transaction to the welfare fund of gig workers and imprisonment for 2 years or a fine up to 2 lakhs for violating the norms. Though the central and state governments are accelerating for the betterment of the up-growing gig employment, the gig workers face various problems in their operation of employment. This research paper particularly focused on the interface of operational contingencies faced by the food delivery executive in Madurai Corporation.

## **Review of Literature**

**Jiji (2024)** surveyed 218 gig workers in Kerala and revealed that gig employment helps to reduce unemployment and provides flexible employment. The key motivators of the gig employment are flexibility, monetary rewards and manageable work and insisted social security benefits are the lacuna.

**Batavia (2023)** explored the challenges faced by the food delivery executives in Panvel, Navi Mumbai, by using an interview schedule. Low income, insecurity in the job, and health-related issues are common among the food delivery executives.

**Kavitha (2023)** explored the significant contribution made by the platform-based workforce. The web-based work is attracting younger individuals with higher education, at the same time, the location-based work is being dominated by males, and the average income is about 17,000 rupees.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the socio-demographic profile of the platform-based food delivery executives.
2. To analyse the health-related issues faced by the food delivery executives.
3. To analyse the problems faced by the food delivery executives in their interactions with stakeholders such as hotel management, police personnel, and the customers

### Methodology

The study focuses on the demographic details, health and conflicts faced by food delivery executives, implying a descriptive research design. The study population consist of 100 platform-based food delivery executives of Madurai corporation, Tamil Nadu, India, by applying convinces sampling. The data were collected through a structured interview schedule, such as age, gender, work experience, nature of work, domicile, type of family, and income. Which also consists of questions related to problems faced by food delivery executives towards hotel management, police officers and the customers.

### Findings and Discussion

**Table 1 - Interpretation of Personal Variables of the Food delivery executive engaged in the gig platform**

Personal Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Age	Below 25	49	49
	26 to 35	29	29
	36 to 45	22	22
Gender	Male	93	93
	Female	7	7
Work Experience	Below two years	77	77
	2 yrs to 4 yrs	16	16
	4 yrs to 6 yrs	8	8
Full time/ Part time	Full time	32	32
	Part time	68	68
Domicile	Rural	4	4
	Urban	85	85
	Semi urban	11	11

Personal Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percent
<b>Education</b>	Up to Higher Secondary	38	38
	Under graduation	35	35
	Post graduation	8	8
	Others	19	19
<b>Working hours per day</b>	Up to 5 hours a day	47	47
	Up to 10 hours a day	31	31
	More than 10 hours a day	22	22
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	53	53
	Unmarried	39	39
	Divorced or separated	8	8
<b>Type of Family</b>	Nuclear family	90	90
	Joint family	10	10
<b>Daily Income</b>	Up to 750	76	76
	Up to 1000	18	18
	Above 1000	6	6
<b>Vehicle operating expenses</b>	Up to 1000	6	6
	Up to 2000	35	35
	Up to 3000	36	36
	Above 3000	23	23
<b>Type of Vehicle</b>	E bike	6	6
	Below 100 cc	8	8
	Above 100 cc	86	86
<b>Life Insurance</b>	Yes	47	47
	No	53	53

The socio-demographic details of the food delivery executive engaged in the gig platform throw light on the nature of the workforce. Little less than half (49) of the food delivery executives belong to the young age group of up to 25 years of age, more than one fourth of them are in the age brackets of 26 to 35, more than one fifth of them are in the age brackets of 36 to 45. This indicates that predominant (78 percent) food delivery executives in the gig platform are young and middle-aged. It is clear that as age increases, work engagement in the gig platform decreases.

The majority (93 percent) of the food delivery executives in the gig platform are male, and less than one-tenth (7 percent) of them are female. It reflects that female food delivery executives are much less engaged in the work field, and males are dominating in the field. Though freedom and flexibility are ensured in the gig platform, insecurity and unprotectedness are perceived by female workers. Sustainability, empowerment, and long-term growth are not clear for female gig platform executives (Ghosh, 2022). More than three fourth (77 percent) of the food delivery executives possess less than two years of experience, more than one-tenth (16 percent) of them have work experience for 2 to 4 years, and very few have up to 6 years of

experience. Again, the entry level in the food delivery gig platform is high and gradually it declines; it may be due to as many of them find it to be an initial level income generation opportunity with a flexible mode until fit in to some other job. The study also highlights that more than two third (68 percent) of them are engaged in part-time employment, and less than one-third (32 percent) of them are full-time. The majority (85 percent) of them hail from urban domicile, and more than one tenth (11 percent) of them are from semi-urban and very few of them are from rural domicile. It shows that food delivery platforms predominantly engage in high-density populations and create more employment opportunities for the youths of the urban population, rather than the rural or semi-urban youth. More than one-third of the food delivery vendors' educational qualifications are up to higher secondary education (38 percent) and under graduation (35 percent), very few of them possess postgraduate degrees, and less than one-fifth (19 percent) of them possess technical education like a diploma or ITI.

More than two-fifth (47 percent) of the food delivery executives work up to 5 hours a day, more than three-tenth (31 percent) of them work up to 10 hours, and more than one-fifth of them work more than 10 hours a day. It reveals that flexi work time, personal commitments, and personal and economic needs depend on the working hours. Half (53 percent) of the food delivery executives are married, more than one third (39 percent) of them are unmarried, and very few (8 percent) of them are disunited in the marital relation. The majority (90 percent) of them hail from the nuclear type of family and exactly one tenth (10 percent) of them are from a joint nature of family. Interestingly, more than three-fourth (76 percent) of them earn up to 750 rupees per day, less than one-fifth (18 percent) earn up to 1000 rupees, and very few (6 percent) of them earn more than 1000 rupees per day on average. More than one third (35 percent and 36 percent) of the food delivery executive's monthly vehicle operating cost hits below 2000 rupees followed by 3000 rupees, less than one fourth (23 percent) of the food delivery executives monthly operating expenses are above 4000 rupees and very few (6 percent) of the finds below 1000 rupees. The cost of monthly vehicle maintenance differs according to the type of vehicle and hours of operation; however, owning a vehicle is the fundamental capital for the food delivery executives, and significant operating costs are essential and inevitable. Notably, only a few of them own electronic vehicles and vehicles below 100 CC; the majority of them have having above 100 CC two-wheeler. More than half of them have availed of life insurance, and a little less than half of them do not have. More than half of them have availed life insurance and a little less than half of them do not have. It also differs according to work hours, type of vehicle and distance of the order for delivery. Though a vehicle for working in the gig platform is essential, a significant portion is used for the vehicle operating cost.

**Table 2 Self-Reported Health Issues of the Food Delivery Executives in the Gig Platform**

Personal Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percent
<b>Back Pain</b>	Yes	33	33
	No	67	67
<b>Shoulder Pain</b>	Yes	58	58
	No	42	42
<b>Sleep Deprivation</b>	Yes	76	76
	No	24	24

<b>Respiratory Issues</b>	Yes	5	5
	No	95	95
<b>Gastritis or ulcer-related complaints</b>	Yes	21	21
	No	79	79
<b>Diabetic</b>	Yes	9	9
	No	91	91

The following are the self-reported health issues faced by food delivery executives under the gig platform due to various reasons such as long hours of driving the vehicle, poor maintenance of driving position, traffic hazards, carrying the food delivery bags, exposure to inclement weather and constant phone usage. A little less than one-third (33 percent) of them have reported that they have back pain and more than two-third (67 percent) of them reported that they are not having back pain, which also varies according to apprehension of age factor and physical strain faced by them. More than half (58 percent) of them self-reported that they have shoulder pain, and two-fifth (42 percent) of reported that they do not have any shoulder pain, which indicates varying levels of physical condition and carrying the bag provided to them for the delivery of food.

More than three-fourth (76 percent) of the food delivery executives acknowledge that they suffer from sleep deprivation, and less than one-fourth of them denied the same, which may differ due to higher screen time and late-night food deliveries knocking down the rhythm of the wake and sleep pattern. The majority (95 percent) of the food delivery executives self-reported that they don't have any issues related to breathing or respiratory. It can be due to the age factor, such symptoms are not reflected at present. More than three-fourths (79 percent) of them self-reported that they do not have any gastritis or ulcer-related complaints. Less than one-tenth (9 percent) of the food delivery executives are diabetic.

**Table 3 Food Delivery Executives' Experience Across Stakeholders**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Agreement (%)</b>	<b>Non-Agreement (%)</b>
Food delivery executives feel recognised and treated with dignity during order pickups	27	73
Restaurant personnel are perceived as supportive and collaborative.	32	68
Restaurant staff gives priority to food delivery pickups	61	39
The majority of food orders are delivered accurately.	75	25
Adequate vehicle parking provisions are made available for delivery workers	80	20
Designated areas are allocated exclusively for food delivery pickups.	83	17
Delivery executives frequently encounter police stops during high-demand hours.	86	14
Police interventions are commonly experienced at the end of the month.	86	14



The majority of police checks occur for license and identification verification purposes.	47	53
Police stops are often attributed to the visibility of delivery uniforms.	47	53
Delivery workers experience hold-ups during police document checks.	78	22
Police officers behave with courtesy and fairness during document verifications.	37	63
Delivery workers often experience discourteous behaviour from customers.	84	16
Customers use insulting language based on the nature of the delivery job.	89	11
Negative interactions with customers are relatively frequent	92	8
Customers exhibit rude or aggressive behaviours when orders are delayed.	86	14
Verifying delivery addresses sometimes provokes customer annoyance.	74	26

### **Perceptions and Experiences of Food Delivery Executives Engaged in Gig Platforms**

The food delivery executives are the active agents of the gig economy, however, the experience in performing their role depends on business interaction with the hotel administration, positive approach of the staff members of the hotel, police personnel on the way to deliver the food order, and the end user, the customer. The happiness, psychological well-being, and economic aspects are highly influenced by the interaction with three stakeholders. A little less than three-fourth (73 percent) of the food delivery executives feel recognised and treated respectfully, and more than one-fourth of them revealed that they are not treated cordially or pleasantly as like as other customers. More than three-tenths (32 percent) of the pickup executives feel that the staff members in the restaurant are collaborative and supportive, and more than two-thirds (68 percent) of the pickup executives are not properly treated by the staff members of the restaurant. More than half (61 percent) of the food delivery executives felt that their orders are not given much more importance than the of other customer and less than half two two-fifth (39 percent) of them denied the same. This indicates that external customer is given more importance and gig platform food delivery executives are not equally treated in a business practice.

Exactly three-fourth (75 percent) of the food delivery executives find errors in the order delivered by the restaurant and customer order and exactly one-fourth (25 percent) of them denied the same. This indicates that an appropriate process has to be created with checks and balances for errorless delivery of food. The majority of them agree (80 percent) that the hotel administration has made proper vehicle parking arrangements and one-fifth (20 percent) of them find that a proper parking facility is not been provided. This indicates the owners of the restaurant have provided appropriate parking facilities for easy flow of business and vehicle congestion-free business transactions.

The majority (83 percent) of the food delivery executives find that appropriate special pick-up zones for food are made, and less than one-fifth (17 percent) of them denied the same.

An exclusive designated pickup area for the food delivery executive enhances the pleasant transaction of business. The majority (86 percent) of the food delivery executives felt that police personnel stop them during peak hours of the food delivery schedule, and experience particularly during the end of the month. More than half (53 percent) of them feel that they are not stopped for verification of documents, and at the same time, less than half (47 percent) of them acknowledge that they are been stopped solely for document verification. Appropriate coordination and understanding between the police and the gig platform have to be positive approaches for an effective business transaction.

More than two-fifth (47 percent) of them perceive that by identifying the uniform of food delivery executives, they are been stopped by the police. More than two-fifth (47 percent) of them perceive that by identifying the uniform of food delivery executives, they are been stopped by the police. The majority (78 percent) of them feel that document verification done by the police personnel is delayed. Less than two-third (63 percent) of the food delivery executives are not treated in a respectful manner by the police personnel. More than two-fifths (47 percent) of them perceive that by identifying the uniform of food delivery executive they are been stopped by the police.

The majority (84 percent) of the food delivery executives experience a discourteous manner by the customers, and at the same time, the majority (89 percent) of them feel that the customer uses abusive or insulting language, and the majority (92 percent) of the customers have relatively negative interactions. The majority (86 percent) of the customers exhibit rude and aggressive behaviour on the delay of food orders. A little less than three-fourth (74 percent) of the food delivery executives find that customers get annoyed by the verification of the delivery address. An appropriate mobile application-based feedback mechanism has to be created to assess the customer behaviour, and in addition to that, customer dealing training and soft skills to be provided to the food delivery executives to enhance their quality of work and psychological wellbeing. For example, a food delivery executive, namely Kamaraj of Bengaluru, faced vulnerability from the customer side and his ID was blacklisted and led to arrest the him. Later, the food delivery executive who defended the case revealed the truth of the other side (Indian Express, 2021)

## **Conclusion**

Apart from the conventional working nature, the platform-based food delivery services provide flexible employment opportunities at the same time, it is also a challenge. Among various pros and cons, the food delivery executives face inconsistency in their income, physical pain and stress with stakeholders in executing the work. Though the gig economy is a gradually upgrading field in the last half past ten years, a greater acceleration of the welfare tone of gig workers has been taking place in the last three years. The central and state governments have taken various initiatives related to work hours, rest places, subsidies to electric vehicles, and checks and balances towards social security benefits such as health, wellbeing, pension and disability assistance. But the awareness among the gig workers is the lacuna, the government should take the initiative to generate digital awareness. Regular health check-up, workplace safety audit, accidental and term life insurance have to be provided by the aggregators in the food delivery field. By applying the Indian Knowledge System, as an initiative to reduce stress and burnout among the food delivery executives, the aggregators can provide one month of



online yoga asanas and pranayama techniques be connected to a one-month online programme as an incentive or positive stroke. At the same time structured feedback grievances redressal system is needed for effective functioning.

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