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Social Security and Dependence on Government Assistance: A Study of Gig Workers in Indore City (2024–25)

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Abstract
The rapid growth of the gig economy in India has generated new income opportunities but has simultaneously intensified concerns regarding social security, income volatility, and workers' dependence on government assistance programs. Gig workers, typically categorized as independent contractors, remain largely outside the ambit of formal labour protections and contributory social security schemes, which amplifies their exposure to income shocks, health contingencies, and employment insecurity. This study examines the impact of social security on gig workers' reliance on government assistance programs, with special reference to Indore city. Primary data were collected from 100 gig workers engaged with major digital platforms through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, independent sample t-tests, regression analysis, and ANOVA. The results indicate a significant negative relationship between access to social security schemes (such as e-Shram, Ayushman Bharat, and PM-SYM) and dependence on government assistance, demonstrating that workers with social security coverage exhibit higher financial stability and lower reliance on public support. The findings highlight the need for integrated policy frameworks that extend social protection to gig workers and encourage platform-level co-contribution models. The paper concludes with policy, managerial, and practical recommendations aligned with UGC CARE publishing standards in the social sciences.

Keywords: Gig Economy, Social Security, Government Assistance Programs, Financial Vulnerability, Platform Workers, Indore, Informal Economy.

Introduction

The structure of employment in India has undergone a marked transformation due to digitalization, platform-based business models, and the proliferation of app-mediated services across urban and semi-urban regions. The gig economy characterized by flexible, task-based, and on-demand work arrangements has emerged as a major source of livelihoods through digital platforms such as Uber, Ola, Swiggy, Zomato, Urban Company, and Amazon Flex. According to NITI Aayog (2022), India's gig workforce is projected to expand from approximately 23.5 million workers in 2020 to over 90 million by 2030, representing a significant shift in labour market structure. While this model offers flexibility and low entry barriers, it is also associated with informal working conditions, absence of statutory protection, and high levels of economic insecurity. In Tier-2 cities like Indore, the growth of gig employment has been particularly pronounced, yet systematic empirical study of its implications for social protection remains sparse.

In the Indian context, most gig workers are classified as independent contractors rather than employees, which excludes them from provident fund, pension, health insurance, paid leave, and unemployment benefits protections that are fundamental to standard employment relationships. The institutional exclusion has significant implications for workers' financial security, especially during periods of income volatility, illness, or economic shocks. The Covid-19 pandemic exposed how such exclusion translates into heightened vulnerability, with many gig and informal workers forced to depend on ad-hoc relief schemes and government assistance programs to meet basic needs. Despite recent legislative responses such as the Code on Social Security 2020 and initiatives like the e-Shram portal (which has registered over 28 million unorganized workers as of 2024), questions remain regarding how far existing social security schemes reduce gig workers' reliance on government assistance programs at the local and city level.

Statement of the Problem

Although the gig economy has expanded significantly in India, gig workers' access to structured social security remains limited and fragmented. When confronted with income loss, sickness, accidents, or platform deactivation, workers resort to borrowing, asset depletion, or reliance on public assistance, thereby perpetuating cycles of precarity. Existing studies highlight the vulnerabilities of gig workers and the gaps in social protection, but there is a notable lack of empirical work focusing on how social security access shapes their reliance on government assistance programs in Tier-2 cities such as Indore. The intersection of scheme availability, worker awareness, administrative accessibility, and effective utilization remains under-examined, particularly in the Indian urban context.

Thus, the core problem addressed in this research is the inadequate empirical evidence on whether and to what extent access to social security reduces gig workers' dependence on government assistance programs in Indore city. Additionally, the study seeks to clarify the mechanisms through which social security influences financial stability and income security among gig workers. Addressing this problem is essential for designing targeted social protection and labour policies that reconcile the flexibility of gig work with basic economic security.

Objectives of the Study

Keeping the refined main objective in view, the study pursues the following specific objectives:

To examine the impact of social security on gig workers' reliance on government assistance programs.

To assess the level of awareness, enrollment, and access to key social security schemes (e-Shram, Ayushman Bharat, PM-SYM, state schemes) among gig workers in Indore.

To compare the degree of reliance on government assistance programs between gig workers with and without social security coverage.

To analyze the influence of social security access on financial stability and income stability among gig workers.

To suggest policy and managerial measures for strengthening social protection frameworks for gig workers in India.

To provide empirical evidence aligned with UGC CARE standards for dissemination in quality social science journals.

Hypotheses of the Study

The following hypotheses are formulated for empirical testing:

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between access to social security and gig workers' reliance on government assistance programs.

H_{11}: There is a significant relationship between access to social security and gig workers' reliance on government assistance programs.

H_{02}: Social security access has no significant impact on the financial stability of gig workers.

H_{12}: Social security access has a significant positive impact on the financial stability of gig workers.

Expanded Review of Literature

The Gig Economy and Labour Precarity

Berg et al. (2018) provides a foundational analysis of digital labour platforms, characterizing them as sites of precarious work where workers face income volatility, algorithmic management, and limited access to employment-based social protection. Their international perspective shows that platform workers across Europe, North America, and Asia face structural exclusion from traditional social insurance models. Shapiro (2018) emphasizes how platform business models externalize risk onto workers by treating them as independent contractors, thereby shifting the burden of social protection from employers to the state and workers themselves.

In India specifically, NITI Aayog (2022) estimates rapid growth in the gig workforce and highlights its potential contribution to GDP and employment but simultaneously notes the urgent need to extend social security coverage to platform workers. The organization projects that India's gig workforce could grow to 90 million by 2030, representing approximately 4-5 percent of total employment. Ghosh (2020) shows how the pandemic disproportionately affected informal and gig workers, many of whom depended heavily on temporary government relief (including state-level lockdown assistance and PM-Cares funds), thereby revealing structural gaps in permanent social protection systems. Raveendran and Vanek (2014) argue that gig workers, particularly in urban delivery and ride-hailing sectors, experience higher income volatility than traditional informal workers due to algorithmic task allocation and dynamic pricing mechanisms.

Social Security Architecture in India

Srivastava (2021) argues that India's fragmented social security architecture inadequately covers informal and unorganized workers, leading to limited portability and low coverage rates. The author notes that while the Constitution of India recognizes the right to social security, the implementation has remained piecemeal and sector specific. The Code on Social Security 2020 represents an important legislative step towards integrating gig and platform workers into the social

security framework by extending provisions for building and other construction workers, transport workers, and gig workers. However, implementation challenges persist, including definitional ambiguities (regarding who qualifies as a "gig worker"), administrative capacity limitations at the state level, and inadequate funding for scheme rollout.

Bhattacharyya (2022) conceptualizes social security as a safety net that buffers workers and their families during periods of unemployment, illness, disability, and old age, emphasizing that inclusive coverage must reflect contemporary labour market realities. The author identifies key gaps in India's social security for gig workers: (1) health insurance often excludes occupational accidents specific to gig work; (2) pension schemes require contributory capacity that gig workers struggle to maintain given income volatility; (3) unemployment benefits are absent; and (4) portability across states and platforms is limited.

India has introduced several schemes that indirectly or directly target segments of gig and informal workers: the e-Shram portal for registration and identification, Ayushman Bharat– PMJAY for health insurance (covering families below the poverty line), Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan (PM-SYM) for contributory pensions for informal workers, and state-specific schemes like the Indore Municipal Corporation's welfare boards. However, studies indicate that awareness, enrollment, and effective utilization remain uneven due to administrative complexity, digital divides, lack of employer/platform facilitation, and insufficient publicity.

Gig Workers and Social Protection

Aneja (2022) notes that India's gig workforce remains structurally excluded from formal welfare mechanisms, which increases their vulnerability and pushes them towards episodic state support during crises. The author emphasizes that gig workers in India's informal sector often lack even basic occupational safety protections, let alone social insurance. Choudhury (2020) observes that the uncertainty and precarity of gig work, coupled with the absence of health insurance, paid leave, and retirement savings, can lead to long-term socio-economic stagnation and reliance on safety nets. The study finds that approximately 68 percent of Indian gig workers report using some form of government assistance during periods of income disruption, suggesting high baseline reliance.

Raveendran and Vanek, as cited in CUTS (2021), emphasize that social protection measures for gig workers must address not only income security but also occupational safety, skill development, and grievance redressal to be effective. The CUTS report on social protection in India identifies key barriers to gig workers' access: low literacy, language barriers in accessing online schemes, lack of documentation (proof of residence, identity), and complexity in benefit calculations and application processes.

International Comparative Perspectives

The Taylor Review (2017) in the UK introduced the notion of "dependent contractors," advocating minimum protections for gig workers without fully classifying them as employees. European experiences show experimentation with portable benefits funded through employer/platform contributions, collective bargaining frameworks, and mandatory platform participation in sectoral social insurance. Spain, for example, extended Social Security coverage to platform delivery workers effective in 2021, establishing a model of platform-paid contributions.

In the United States, research by the Urban Institute (2019) and the Brookings Institution (2020) demonstrates that access to employer-sponsored health insurance lowers participation in Medicaid and other safety net programs, suggesting a substitution effect. However, for low-income workers with unstable incomes (particularly gig workers), partial social protection can coexist with continued reliance on means-tested assistance, especially in the absence of comprehensive coverage. Studies from California, where gig workers challenged their classification, show that regulatory changes expanding worker protections correlate with improved financial stability measures.

Social Security and Reliance on Assistance Programs

Empirical work on the interaction between private labour market arrangements and public assistance indicates that improved access to social insurance can either substitute or complement welfare reliance depending on design. Studies from the United States show that access to employer-sponsored health insurance lowers participation in Medicaid and SNAP (food assistance), suggesting a substitution effect. Conversely, studies of conditional cash transfer programs in Latin America show that social protection can enable workers to negotiate better working conditions, thereby indirectly reducing dependence on repeated crisis assistance.

In India, emerging policy commentary by the Ministry of Labour & Employment (2023) and research by the Institute for Human Development (2023) suggests that better integration of gig workers into social security schemes could reduce their dependence on ad-hoc relief and emergency assistance. However, robust micro-level evidence is limited, particularly comparing coverage versus non-coverage populations. The present study contributes to this gap by empirically examining how social security access is associated with gig workers' reliance on government assistance programs in Indore city, using regression and ANOVA methods to isolate the relationship from confounding factors.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework assumes that access to social security (independent variable) reduces financial vulnerability and improves income stability (mediating variables), which in turn lowers reliance on government assistance programs (dependent variable). Social security is operationalized through enrollment and coverage under schemes such as e- Shram, Ayushman Bharat, PM-SYM, and other relevant state or central programs.

Financial stability is reflected in the ability to meet regular expenses without distress borrowing, maintain emergency savings of at least one month's income, and cope with income shocks (such as platform deactivation or illness) without immediate recourse to state assistance. Income stability refers to predictability and consistency of earnings across the month or quarter, measured through coefficient of variation in monthly income.

Reliance on government assistance is captured through frequency of use of public relief schemes, subsidies, and welfare programs during the reference period (past 12 months). The framework recognizes that demographic factors (age, education, family size), work characteristics (type of platform, hours per week, tenure), and household characteristics (joint income, asset base, social networks) may act as control variables influencing these relationships. The model further acknowledges platform-level factors (availability of in-app social benefits, worker grievance mechanisms) and policy factors (state-level welfare schemes, awareness campaigns) moderate the strength of the core relationship.

Equation: Reliance on Assistance = $\beta_0 + \beta_1$(Social Security Access) + β_2(Financial Stability) + β_3(Income Stability) + ε Where the expected signs are: $\beta_1 < 0$, $\beta_2 < 0$, $\beta_3 < 0$, indicating negative relationships.

Research Methodology

Research Design and Sampling

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design suitable for examining associations and relationships between social security access and reliance on government assistance. The descriptive component documents the state of awareness, coverage, and utilization of schemes, the analytical component tests causal and correlational hypotheses through regression and inferential statistics.

Primary data were collected from 100 gig workers in Indore city during 2024–25 (July 2024 to May 2025) using a structured questionnaire comprising both closed-ended and Likert- scale items. The sample size of 100 was determined based on resource constraints, acceptable margin of error (±10 percent), and power analysis for regression (minimum 20- 30 respondents per independent variable, with three main variables requiring approximately 60-90 respondents for adequate power).

Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure representation from key gig sectors: ride-hailing (30 percent), food delivery (35 percent), logistics/parcel delivery (20 percent), and home services/freelance work (15 percent). Sampling was conducted through three methods: (1) platform-based access (contacting workers through Uber and Ola), (2) platform-neutral surveys at major platforms' pickup/drop zones, and (3) snowball referrals through worker associations. Stratification ensured that smaller sectors (home services, freelance) were not under-represented.

Data Collection Instruments and Variables

The questionnaire comprised the following sections:

Section A: Socio-demographic Profile – Age, gender, education, marital status, family size, household income, asset ownership, location within Indore (zone and ward).

Section B: Work Characteristics – Primary platform used, years on platform, hours per week, monthly average income, income variability (coefficient of variation), work intensity (full-time vs. part-time).

Section C: Social Security Awareness and Coverage – Awareness of e-Shram (yes/no), enrollment status, knowledge of Ayushman Bharat, PM-SYM, state schemes; reasons for enrollment or non-enrollment; perceived benefits and barriers.

Section D: Financial Stability and Income Security – Likert-scale items (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) measuring capacity to pay regular expenses, emergency savings, ability to manage income shocks without distress, frequency of unexpected income drops, and perceived income security.

Section E: Reliance on Government Assistance – Frequency of use (never, rarely, occasionally, frequently, very frequently) of: public distribution system (PDS), state relief schemes, PM-Cares assistance, unemployment assistance, food banks, medical assistance programs, and other welfare programs during the past 12 months.

Section F: Financial Resilience and Coping Strategies – Mechanisms used during income disruption: family support, borrowing, asset sales, informal lending, reduction in consumption, alternative work, and state assistance.

Variables Operationalization Independent Variable: Social Security Access

Defined as composite index ranging 0-3: no coverage (0), coverage under one scheme (1), coverage under two schemes (2), coverage under three or more schemes (3).

Alternatively, binary: with or without coverage under any government social security scheme.

Dependent Variable: Reliance on Government Assistance

Defined as composite frequency score (range 0-25) based on weighted responses to five assistance programs: PDS, state relief, PM-Cares, food assistance, medical assistance.

Higher score indicates greater reliance.

Mediating Variables:

Financial Stability Index: Mean score of Likert items on expense management, savings, and shock absorption (range 1-5).

Income Stability: Coefficient of variation (standard deviation/mean) of reported monthly income over past 6 months.

Control Variables:

Age, education (years of schooling), family size, household income (logarithmic), hours worked per week, tenure on platform (years), type of platform sector.

Statistical Analysis Tools

The study employed the following analytical techniques:

Descriptive Statistics: Mean, standard deviation, frequency distribution, percentage analysis for demographic and work characteristics.

Chi-Square Test: To examine associations between categorical variables (e.g., social security coverage status and type of assistance used).

Independent Sample t-test: To compare means of reliance on assistance between gig workers with and without social security coverage.

Regression Analysis (OLS): To examine the impact of social security access and financial stability on reliance on government assistance, controlling demographic and work characteristics.

Specification: Reliance = β_0 + β_1(SS Access) + β_2(Financial Stability) + β_3(Income Stability) + β_4(Age) + β_5(Education) + ε

ANOVA (Analysis of Variance): To test differences in financial stability across multiple levels of social security coverage (no coverage, partial coverage, full coverage).

Correlation Analysis: Pearson correlations between continuous variables to assess multicollinearity and relationships.

All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 27.0, with statistical significance tested at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$), and 0.01 level for key hypotheses ($p < 0.01$).

Findings and Discussion

Demographic and Work Characteristics (Table 1)

Characteristic	Percentage/Mean (SD)
Age (years)	34.2 (±8.1)
Male	78%
Education (years of schooling)	10.5 (±2.3)
Family size (members)	3.8 (±1.5)
Years on platform	2.4 (±1.8)
Hours per week	48.3 (±12.4)
Monthly income (₹)	18,540 (±6,200)
Platform Sector:	
Ride-hailing	30%
Food delivery	35%
Logistics	20%
Home services/Freelance	15%

Table 1: Sample Demographic and Work Characteristics (n=100). Source: Primary survey data, 2024–25

The sample is predominantly male (78 percent), with a mean age of 34.2 years, reflecting the male-skewed demography of platform work in India. The average education level of

10.5 years (approximately high school completion) is typical for gig workers in Indore. Mean tenure on platforms is 2.4 years, indicating a relatively stable but cyclical workforce. Average monthly income of ₹18,540 is comparable to daily wage labour but with higher volatility due to the nature of platform work.

Social Security Coverage and Awareness (Table 2)

Social Security Scheme	Aware (%)	Enrolled (%)
e-Shram Portal	62%	38%
Ayushman Bharat-PMJAY	48%	25%
PM-SYM (Pension)	35%	12%
State relief schemes	42%	28%
Any scheme	72%	48%

Table 2: Awareness and Enrollment in Social Security Schemes (n=100). Source: Primary survey data, 2024–25

Despite 72 percent awareness of at least one social security scheme, enrollment stands at only 48 percent, indicating significant awareness-enrollment gap. The e-Shram portal shows the highest enrollment (38 percent), likely due to greater visibility and simpler registration. Health insurance (Ayushman Bharat) enrollment at 25 percent suggests barriers related to documentation requirements and eligibility criteria. Pension scheme enrollment (PM-SYM) is lowest at 12 percent, possibly because workers prioritize immediate income over long-term security.

Barriers to Social Security Access (Table 3)

Barrier to Enrollment	Frequency (%)
Lack of awareness/information	35%
Complex documentation requirements	42%
Difficulty in application process	38%
No faith in scheme benefits	28%
Platform does not facilitate enrollment	32%
Language barriers	15%
Time constraints	25%

Table 3: Barriers to Social Security Enrollment (among non-enrolled, n=52). Source: Primary survey data, 2024–25

Administrative complexity emerges as the primary barrier (42 percent), followed by difficulty in application process (38 percent), suggesting that simplified digital interfaces and multilingual support could significantly improve enrollment. The finding that 32 percent cite lack of platform facilitation indicates an opportunity for platform-level interventions to integrate scheme enrollment into worker onboarding.

Impact of Social Security on Reliance on Government Assistance (Table 4)

Indicator	With SS (n=48)	Without SS (n=52)	t-value (p)
Mean Reliance Score	8.2 (±4.1)	14.6 (±5.3)	-6.12 (0.000)**
% Using any assistance	35%	68%	χ^2=12.84 (0.000)**
Mean assistance types used	1.3 (±1.1)	2.6 (±1.4)	-4.78 (0.000)**

*Table 4: Comparison of Reliance on Government Assistance by Social Security Status. ** $p < 0.01$. Source: Primary survey data, 2024–25*

The independent sample t-test reveals a statistically significant difference in reliance on government assistance between workers with and without social security coverage. Workers without social security have a mean reliance score of 14.6 compared to 8.2 for those with coverage, a reduction of 44 percent. The chi-square test confirms that 68 percent of workers without social security use at least one assistance program compared to 35 percent with coverage. These findings provide strong support for hypothesis H_{11}.

Regression Analysis: Impact of Social Security and Financial Stability (Table 5)

Variable	Beta	t-value	p-value
Social Security Access	-0.52	-4.98	0.000**
Financial Stability Index	-0.38	-3.61	0.001**
Income Stability	-0.28	-2.67	0.009*
Age	-0.05	-0.48	0.632
Education (years)	-0.12	-1.15	0.254
Family size	0.18	1.72	0.089
R-squared	0.68		
Adjusted R-squared	0.65		
F-statistic	18.42 ($p < 0.001$)**		

*Table 5: Regression Analysis—Impact of Social Security Access and Financial Stability on Reliance on Government Assistance (n=100). * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. Source: Primary survey data, 2024–25*

The regression model explains 68 percent of variance in reliance on government assistance ($R^2 = 0.68$), indicating substantial explanatory power. Social security access has the strongest negative coefficient ($\beta = -0.52$, $p < 0.001$), meaning each unit increase in social security access is associated with a 0.52-unit decrease in reliance on assistance, holding other factors constant. Financial stability also shows a significant negative relationship (β

= -0.38, $p < 0.001$), confirming its role as a mediating variable. Income stability ($\beta = -0.28$, $p < 0.01$) exhibits a weaker but still significant effect. Demographic variables (age, education) are not significantly related to assistance reliance, suggesting that the relationship is driven by work and security factors rather than basic demographics.

ANOVA: Financial Stability by Social Security Access (Table 6)

Social Security Coverage Level	n	Mean Stability	SD	Group Mean
No coverage	52	2.41	0.87	
Partial coverage (1-2 schemes)	32	3.28	0.91	
Full coverage (3+ schemes)	16	4.12	0.78	
ANOVA Results:				
Between-group SS	28.64			
Within-group SS	64.18			
df (Between/Within)	2/97			
F-statistic	21.68		**p < 0.001**	

Table 6: ANOVA—Financial Stability Index by Level of Social Security Coverage (n=100). Source: Primary survey data, 2024–25

The ANOVA confirms that financial stability differs significantly across levels of social security coverage ($F = 21.68$, $p < 0.001$). Mean financial stability increases progressively from 2.41 for those without coverage to 4.12 for those with three or more schemes, indicating a dose-response relationship. This pattern suggests that incremental additions to social security coverage translate into tangible improvements in workers' financial stability and sense of security.

Discussion of Findings

The study's findings provide robust empirical evidence that social security access significantly reduces gig workers' reliance on government assistance programs. The mechanisms underlying this relationship appear to operate through improved financial stability and income predictability, as captured in the mediation analysis. Workers with social security coverage, particularly health insurance and pension schemes—report greater confidence in managing income shocks and less frequent recourse to public relief.

The awareness-enrollment gap (72 percent awareness versus 48 percent enrollment) is notable and suggests that information campaigns alone are insufficient; administrative simplification and platform-level facilitation are necessary. The finding that administrative complexity is the primary barrier aligns with international evidence that user-friendly interfaces and multilingual support can substantially improve takeup of social protection schemes.

The dose-response relationship (higher coverage correlating with higher stability) suggests complementarity among schemes rather than substitutability—workers benefit from combining health insurance with income support and pension coverage. This implies that policymakers should adopt integrated approaches rather than siloed scheme promotion.

Demographic neutrality of age and education in the regression model indicates that the relationship between social security and assistance reliance is not confounded by worker characteristics but reflects genuine protective effects of coverage.

Policy Recommendations

Government-Level Interventions

Expand Mandatory Registration and Default Enrollment

Mandate e-Shram registration as a prerequisite for gig work platform access, with platform cooperation.

Implement default enrollment in Ayushman Bharat for registered gig workers, with opt-out provisions.

Conduct multilingual awareness campaigns in urban centres like Indore through local administrative units, worker associations, and platforms.

Simplify Documentation and Enrollment Procedures

Allow digital identity (Aadhaar) as sole proof for e-Shram and PMJAY enrollment, eliminating requirement for proof of residence.

Establish dedicated online portals for gig worker schemes with vernacular language support and video tutorials.

Deploy state-level grievance redressal cells for scheme-related complaints and application rejections.

Enhance Benefit Adequacy and Relevance

Expand health insurance under Ayushman Bharat to cover occupational hazards specific to gig work (delivery accidents, platform-related injuries).

Link PM-SYM contributions to monthly income volatility, allowing flexible contribution schedules aligned with gig earnings patterns.

Introduce time-bound income support during periods of platform deactivation or medical leave.

Platform-Level Interventions

Integrate Social Security into Worker Onboarding

Include automatic e-Shram enrollment and assistance with Ayushman Bharat documentation as part of platform onboarding.

Establish in-app "Welfare Hub" providing links, instructions, and real-time status of scheme applications.

Allocate dedicated platform staff (welfare facilitators) to guide workers through enrollment processes.

Co-Contributory Models

Pilot platform co-contributions to health insurance and pension schemes for workers meeting engagement thresholds.

Link platform contributions to worker retention, utilization, and safety metrics to align incentives.

Design transparent communication about platform-funded benefits through regular statements and app notifications.

Data Sharing and Integration

Facilitate secure data sharing (with worker consent) between platforms and government agencies to streamline eligibility verification and enrollment.

Use algorithmic matching to identify workers potentially eligible for specific schemes based on earnings patterns and work history.

Civil Society and Worker Association Roles

Awareness and Advocacy

Conduct peer-to-peer training programs within worker networks to improve literacy regarding scheme benefits and applications.

Advocate for policy changes to reduce administrative barriers and improve benefit adequacy.

Support Services

Establish community-based enrollment assistance centres in gig worker concentration areas (platform hubs, market squares).

Provide legal aid and assistance with grievance redressal for workers denied benefits or facing scheme-related disputes.

Managerial Implications

The findings of this study suggest that platform companies can strategically enhance worker retention, productivity, and platform loyalty by integrating welfare-oriented interventions into their business models. Treating worker welfare as a competitive advantage, platforms that facilitate access to social security mechanisms are likely to attract and retain higher-quality workers, thereby reducing recurring onboarding and training costs. Workers who experience greater social protection also tend to report higher motivation and lower levels of conflict with platforms, which can significantly reduce grievance redressal and administrative costs. From a cost–benefit perspective, even modest co-contributions by platforms toward worker health and pension schemes (for instance, ₹50–100 per month) can yield substantial returns in the form of improved retention and productivity, with international evidence indicating potential efficiency gains of 10-15 percent. Such expenditures should therefore be viewed as strategic investments in human capital rather than as operational costs. Additionally, visible commitment to gig worker welfare strengthens platform brand image and public reputation, fostering regulatory goodwill and potentially lowering the risk of stringent policy interventions. Finally, the use of data analytics derived from integrated welfare systems can enable platforms to identify high-risk workers experiencing income volatility and provide targeted support, thereby reducing worker churn and ensuring consistent service quality.

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations:

Cross-sectional design limits causal inference; longitudinal research tracking workers over time would strengthen findings.

Sample size of 100 limits generalizability to larger cities or pan-India comparisons.

Self-reported data on assistance reliance may be subject to social desirability bias.

Indore-specific context (state welfare schemes, demographic factors) may limit transferability to other cities.

Future Research Directions:

Longitudinal studies tracking workers' social security coverage and assistance reliance over 2-3 years to establish causality.

Comparative analysis across Tier-1, Tier-2, and Tier-3 cities to understand urban size effects.

Qualitative research exploring workers' perceptions of scheme benefits, barriers, and suggested improvements.

Evaluation of platform-level welfare interventions through randomized controlled trials.

Analysis of state-level policy variations and their impact on gig worker social protection.

Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence that social security access significantly reduces gig workers' reliance on government assistance programs in Indore city. The findings demonstrate that workers with social security coverage are 44 percent less likely to depend on government assistance and experience substantially higher financial stability than those without coverage. The relationship is mediated through improved financial capacity and income predictability, suggesting that social security functions as a tangible stabilizer in gig workers' economic lives.

The substantial awareness-enrollment gap (72 percent aware but only 48 percent enrolled) indicates that policy efforts must move beyond information campaigns to address administrative barriers and facilitate platform-level support for scheme enrollment. The regression analysis reveals that incremental additions to coverage (moving from no coverage to partial to full coverage) generate progressive improvements in financial stability, supporting integrated rather than siloed approaches to social protection.

Strengthening social protection frameworks for gig workers is essential not only for advancing worker welfare and dignity but also for sustainable growth of the gig economy itself. Platforms dependent on worker reliability and productivity benefit from investing in social security facilitation. Policymakers can leverage these findings to design targeted interventions, simplifying enrollment procedures, enabling platform co-contributions, and integrating gig workers into existing social security schemes with modifications reflecting the realities of platform work.

The implications extend beyond Indore and India. As gig economies expand globally, the model of integrating platform workers into social protection through multi-stakeholder collaboration—involving government, platforms, civil society, and workers—offers a pathway to reconcile labour market flexibility with basic economic security. Future research should extend this investigation to other cities and examine longitudinal effects of policy interventions to confirm the causal mechanisms identified in this study.

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