

Mental health and wellbeing of gig workers in India: Stressors, support systems, and policy directions

Devesh Lowe

Jagan Institute of Management Studies, Rohini, New Delhi India

Correspondence: devesh.lowe@jimsindia.org

Abstract

India's gig economy has expanded rapidly over the past decade, offering millions of workers flexible, low barrier employment through digital platforms in ride hailing, food delivery, e commerce logistics, and freelance services. While this model offers autonomy, quick earnings, and relatively inclusive entry regardless of gender, education, or prior experience, it also exposes workers to job insecurity, income volatility, algorithmic surveillance, long working hours, and social isolation. This paper synthesises secondary literature, government data, and policy documents to examine the mental health and wellbeing of gig workers in India. It traces the rapid rise of the gig workforce from an estimated 2.52 million workers in 2011 to 2012 to a projected 23.5 million by 2029 to 2030, situates Indian evidence within the broader global literature on platform dependence and psychosocial risk, and identifies five interlinked stressors: income unpredictability, algorithmic opacity, social isolation, performance pressure, and the absence of statutory employment protection. The paper evaluates the institutional architecture available to support worker mental health, including the District Mental Health Programme, the Tele MANAS helpline, and NGO led community interventions, against the backdrop of the 84.5 percent treatment gap for mental morbidity reported by India's National Mental Health Survey. It also reviews the regulatory landscape introduced by the Code on Social Security, 2020, and the 2025 to 2026 budget announcement extending e Shram registration and Ayushman Bharat health coverage to platform workers. Drawing on this evidence, the paper proposes an integrated agenda combining organisational interventions by platforms, extension of social security obligations to aggregators, and community anchored awareness campaigns. It concludes that the long term sustainability of India's gig economy depends on treating psychological wellbeing as a core dimension of decent platform work rather than a peripheral concern.

Keywords: Gig Workers, Gig Economy, Mental Health, Platform Work, Occupational Wellbeing, Algorithmic Management, Social Protection, India

JEL Classification: I10, I18, J28

1. Introduction

The gig economy refers to a labour market characterised by short term, task based, and freelance engagements mediated increasingly through digital platforms rather than traditional long term employer employee relationships. In India, this model has grown from a marginal presence to a significant segment of the non agricultural workforce within a single decade, driven by widespread smartphone adoption, low cost mobile data, and the expansion of e commerce, food delivery, and ride hailing services. According to NITI Aayog (2022), the number of gig workers in India rose from 2.52 million in 2011 to 2012 to 6.8 million in 2019 to 2020, and is projected to reach 23.5 million by 2029 to 2030 and over 60 million by 2047, forming close to 15 percent of the non agricultural workforce. This growth has been widely celebrated for democratising access to work: gig platforms typically require minimal formal qualifications, offer flexible hours, and are open to individuals historically excluded from formal employment, including women, migrants, students, and persons from economically weaker sections (Lowe, 2026). At the same time, a growing body of scholarship warns that the very features that make gig work attractive, namely algorithmic management, piece rate payment, the absence of a fixed employer, and the absence of statutory benefits, also generate chronic uncertainty that can erode workers' psychological wellbeing (Schor et al., 2020). Wood et al. (2019) describe this tension as the central paradox of platform work: workers gain a form of autonomy over when and where they log in, yet remain subject to continuous algorithmic control over what work is offered to them and on what terms, producing what they term high autonomy but low task discretion.

Mental health, once a peripheral concern in discussions of labour and employment, is now recognised as central to worker productivity, retention, and quality of life. For gig workers, who frequently work outside conventional occupational health frameworks, the risks of anxiety, burnout, and chronic stress are compounded by the absence of employer sponsored health cover, grievance redressal mechanisms, or paid leave. Recent India focused studies have begun to document these effects directly, reporting moderate to high levels of anxiety, job insecurity, and workplace related psychological strain among platform workers (Singh et al., 2025). The scale of the issue is not unique to India. The International Labour Organization estimates that digital labour platforms have grown roughly fivefold worldwide over the past decade, and its global survey of about 12,000 platform workers found that half of online platform workers earn less than two US dollars an hour, with long and unpredictable working hours and limited access to social protection reported across regions (International Labour Organization, 2021). Evidence from France similarly shows that income shocks associated with gig work can translate directly into psychological strain, although the relationship is not uniform across worker groups (Apouey et al., 2020). India's experience therefore sits within a wider global pattern even as it carries distinctive features shaped by the country's labour market structure, its treatment gap for mental health care, and the sheer scale of workers expected to enter platform work over the coming decade.

This paper aims to provide a structured and substantially expanded overview of the mental health and wellbeing landscape of gig workers in India. It examines the socio economic drivers behind the rise of gig work, reviews academic literature on the psychological dimensions of platform based employment, introduces a conceptual framework for understanding psychological risk in platform work, identifies the principal mental health issues associated with gig jobs, surveys the institutional and non governmental resources available for mental wellbeing, particularly for economically weaker sections who form a substantial share of the gig workforce, assesses the current state of mental health awareness among this population, and reviews the regulatory landscape that governs gig and platform work in India. The paper draws on peer reviewed research, government reports, and policy documents to build an evidence based picture, discusses the implications of this evidence for platforms, policymakers, and researchers, and concludes with recommendations and a note on the limitations of the current evidence base.

2. Literature Review

Academic interest in the intersection of gig work and mental health has grown substantially in recent years, though India specific evidence remains comparatively limited relative to the size of its gig workforce. Schor et al. (2020) examined dependence and precarity in the platform economy, arguing that the degree of a worker's economic reliance on a single platform strongly predicts exposure to psychological hardship, since high dependence workers are less able to negotiate terms or exit unfavourable working conditions. Building on this framework, Glavin and Schieman (2022) found that dependency and hardship in gig work are directly associated with measurable increases in psychological distress, particularly among workers with limited access to alternative income sources, using two nationally representative samples of Canadian workers.

Wood et al. (2019) extended this line of enquiry by examining job quality in the remote gig economy across several countries and found that while platform work offers workers a genuine sense of autonomy over scheduling, this autonomy coexists with pervasive algorithmic control over task allocation, pricing, and performance evaluation. They argue that this combination of high autonomy and low task discretion is a defining and largely unaddressed source of strain in platform work, a finding that has since been echoed in studies of location based platforms such as ride hailing and delivery, where the algorithm rather than a human supervisor determines the flow and pace of work.

In the Indian context, Singh et al. (2025) conducted a cross sectional survey of 603 women gig workers across major metropolitan cities and reported moderate levels of anxiety, job insecurity, and workplace related challenges, while also noting that most respondents still perceived their overall wellbeing in relatively positive terms, an indication that resilience and social support can offset some structural stressors. Their study underscores that gig work related distress is often gendered, with women facing compounded risks arising from safety concerns, unpredictable schedules, and limited institutional protection. Singh (2026) complements this with a policy

focused analysis of interventions available to Indian gig workers, arguing that financial unpredictability, algorithmic opacity, and social isolation are the three most consistently reported psychological stressors in the sector.

Legal and economic scholarship has also examined the structural roots of these mental health risks. Cherry and Aloisi (2016) analysed the classification of platform workers as independent contractors rather than employees across jurisdictions, arguing that this classification systematically excludes gig workers from labour protections that would otherwise mitigate financial and psychological insecurity. Ramya (2025) extends this analysis to the Indian context, examining how the new labour codes attempt, only partially, to close this protection gap for gig and platform workers. Complementing this, Li et al. (2023), writing in the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, examined the wellbeing of gig workers in the sharing economy during the COVID 19 pandemic using in depth interviews and daily diaries, finding that income volatility and health risk exposure during the crisis significantly intensified stress and anxiety among platform based workers globally, a pattern echoed in the Indian delivery and ride hailing sectors. Apouey et al. (2020) reached a more nuanced conclusion in their study of French gig workers during the COVID 19 lockdown, finding that financial precarity was strongly associated with poorer mental wellbeing overall, even though a subset of delivery riders reported comparatively better mental health than other precarious workers, which the authors attribute to the sense of purpose and continued activity that active gig work provided during a period of widespread unemployment.

A bibliometric analysis of the Indian gig workforce by Ramachandran and Kulandai (2025), drawing on 242 Scopus indexed documents published between 2009 and 2022, confirms that research output on gig work in India has grown sharply since 2019, with recurring themes including precarity, algorithmic management, and worker wellbeing. A more recent systematic literature review by De Saram et al. (2025), covering 35 peer reviewed articles published globally between 2015 and 2025, organises the determinants of gig worker mental wellbeing into three broad domains: economic stressors such as income variability and job insecurity, technological stressors such as algorithmic control and technostress, and social stressors such as isolation and the absence of workplace based support networks, while noting that peer support networks and scheduling flexibility can act as partial buffers against these pressures. Both reviews note that dedicated empirical research specifically on the mental health outcomes of Indian gig workers remains a comparatively under explored sub field, pointing to a clear gap that recent studies such as Singh et al. (2025) have only begun to address. Collectively, the literature suggests that Indian gig workers face a distinctive combination of structural precarity, algorithmic control, and weak social protection that together elevate psychological risk, even as flexibility and accessibility continue to draw workers into the sector.

3. Rise of Gig Workers in India

The rise of gig work in India has been fuelled first and foremost by low entry requirements. Most platforms ask only for a smartphone, a functioning bank account for digital payouts, basic identity and address proof such as Aadhaar and PAN, and, for mobility and delivery roles, a two wheeler or vehicle with a valid driving licence. Unlike traditional employment, formal educational qualifications, prior work experience, or panel interviews are rarely mandatory. Onboarding is typically completed through a mobile app within a few days, including document verification and a short orientation video, making gig platforms an unusually accessible entry point for first time job seekers, rural to urban migrants, and workers displaced from other sectors during periods of economic disruption (NITI Aayog, 2022). NITI Aayog (2022) classifies India's gig and platform workforce into three broad categories that are useful for understanding its composition: platform based workers engaged in location specific services such as ride hailing, food delivery, and home services; platform based workers engaged in web based or cloud services such as content writing, design, and data entry that can be performed remotely; and non platform gig workers engaged in casual and own account work that is not mediated by a digital platform but shares its informal and task based character. The mental health literature reviewed in this paper concerns primarily the first two categories, where algorithmic mediation is most pronounced.

A second, equally powerful driver is the promise of quick and relatively immediate money. Many platforms offer same day or weekly payouts rather than the monthly cycle of formal salaried work, which is particularly valuable for workers managing daily household expenses (Galhotra, 2024). Sign up bonuses for new riders and delivery partners, referral bonuses for bringing in other workers, and performance linked incentives for completing a set number of trips or orders within a time window are common features of the earnings structure. Surge or peak hour pricing during high demand, festivals, or adverse weather can substantially increase per task earnings, giving workers a strong incentive to remain active on the platform during these windows (Ramachandran & Kulandai, 2025). This incentive structure, combined with the option to treat gig work as either a primary income source or as a part time supplement to other work or studies, has broadened participation across age groups and life stages. Students, homemakers, retirees, and workers holding a separate primary job increasingly use gig platforms to earn supplementary income during free hours, since most apps allow workers to log in and out at will without needing to justify absence to a supervisor. Gig platforms are also frequently positioned as gender neutral in their onboarding criteria, since task allocation is nominally algorithm driven rather than dependent on interviewer discretion, and flexible scheduling can, in principle, accommodate domestic responsibilities that disproportionately fall on women in Indian households. The overall ease of employment, minimal bureaucratic friction, and the ability to start earning within days make the sector especially attractive during periods of economic uncertainty, a pattern reflected in the sharp acceleration of gig employment recorded after the COVID 19 disruption to formal labour markets (Pan et al., 2022).

However, this rapid expansion has not been free of challenges. Workers report income volatility linked to opaque algorithmic task allocation, the absence of written contracts or fixed minimum earnings, limited access to formal credit because of informal or thin file earnings records that banks struggle to assess, and exclusion from employer provided health insurance, provident fund contributions, or paid leave. Physical risks, including road accidents, extreme weather exposure, and long hours without adequate rest, add to the burden, while occasional platform side account deactivation without clear explanation leaves workers with no immediate income and no formal grievance channel. Global comparative research further highlights that developing economies such as India face distinctive structural risks in scaling the gig model responsibly, including weak regulatory oversight, uneven enforcement of the newly introduced labour codes, and limited bargaining power for individual workers relative to large aggregator platforms (Okunkova et al., 2023).

4. A Conceptual Framework for Psychological Risk in Platform Work

To organise the diverse stressors documented in the literature, this paper draws on the Job Demands Resources model developed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007), a widely used framework in occupational health psychology. The model proposes that every occupation can be characterised along two broad dimensions: job demands, which are the physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of a job that require sustained effort and are therefore associated with physiological and psychological costs, and job resources, which are the aspects of a job that help achieve work goals, reduce demands, or stimulate personal growth. Poor wellbeing outcomes, including burnout, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, arise when demands are chronically high and resources are insufficient to buffer them.

Applied to Indian gig work, the demands side of the model includes income unpredictability, algorithmic opacity and the associated loss of control, long and irregular working hours, physical risk exposure, and the emotional labour of managing demanding customers under time pressure. The resources side, by contrast, is comparatively thin for most gig workers: they typically lack a fixed salary, a supervisor who can advocate on their behalf, statutory benefits, workplace based social support, or a grievance mechanism with real teeth. Schor et al. (2020) frame this imbalance through the related concept of platform dependence, arguing that workers who rely on a single platform for most of their income face the demands of gig work with the fewest resources to offset them, since they cannot easily exit an unfavourable arrangement. Wood et al. (2019) add a further dimension by showing that the autonomy platforms advertise, namely control over when to log in, does little to offset the demand created by algorithmic control over what work is offered and how it is priced once a worker is logged in. This framework is useful for two reasons. First, it clarifies why flexibility alone, the most commonly cited benefit of gig work, does not automatically translate into better mental health outcomes: flexibility is a resource that addresses only one demand, namely rigid scheduling, while leaving income unpredictability, algorithmic opacity, and

the absence of social protection largely unaddressed. Second, it suggests that interventions are most likely to be effective when they add genuine resources, such as predictable minimum earnings, transparent algorithmic processes, accessible mental health support, and peer networks, rather than when they simply reduce demands at the margins. Sections 6 and 9 of this paper return to this framework when evaluating existing support systems and proposing organisational interventions respectively.

5. Issues of Mental Health Related to Gig Jobs

The structural features that make gig work flexible also generate distinct psychological stressors. Income unpredictability is among the most consistently reported concerns: because earnings depend on task availability, customer ratings, and algorithmic prioritisation rather than a fixed salary, workers experience chronic financial anxiety that studies associate with elevated psychological distress, particularly among those most dependent on gig income for household survival (Glavin & Schieman, 2022). This anxiety is often compounded by hidden costs such as fuel, vehicle maintenance, mobile data, and platform commission, which can erode take home earnings without warning and make monthly budgeting extremely difficult (Singh, 2026).

Algorithmic management itself is a significant source of strain. Workers often cannot see or contest how tasks are assigned, how ratings are calculated, or why access to work may be throttled or an account temporarily blocked, producing a persistent sense of powerlessness and perceived injustice that has been linked to heightened stress in the Indian platform workforce (Singh et al., 2025). Because algorithms reward continuous availability and rapid response times, workers frequently feel compelled to remain logged in for long and irregular hours, accept low value tasks out of fear of rating penalties, and stay constantly connected to the app even during meals or rest, blurring the boundary between work and personal time and contributing to fatigue, sleep disruption, and burnout. Wood et al. (2019) describe this dynamic as a form of algorithmic control that substitutes for direct supervision while remaining far less transparent or contestable than a human manager's instructions. Social isolation is another recurring theme in the literature. Unlike traditional workplaces, gig work is typically performed alone, with limited opportunity for peer interaction, collective bargaining, or workplace camaraderie, weakening the informal social support systems that often buffer occupational stress in conventional employment. This isolation is associated with reduced emotional support and a diminished sense of belonging, both of which are recognised risk factors for anxiety and depressive symptoms among platform based workers (Singh, 2026). De Saram et al. (2025) identify social isolation, alongside economic and technological stressors, as one of three principal domains through which gig work affects mental wellbeing across the global literature they reviewed. For women gig workers specifically, safety concerns while working late hours, navigating unfamiliar locations, or interacting with unknown customers add an additional layer of anxiety that is not equally experienced by their male counterparts (Singh et al., 2025).

Occupational stress is further intensified by performance pressure and the emotional labour involved in dealing with demanding or hostile customers, traffic conditions, and time bound delivery windows, particularly in food delivery and ride hailing roles where late arrival can directly reduce earnings or ratings. Over time, sustained exposure to these pressures can manifest as emotional exhaustion, irritability, sleep disturbance, and, in more severe cases, clinical anxiety or depressive disorders (Singh, 2026). Evidence from outside India suggests that the relationship between gig work and mental health is not uniformly negative: Apouey et al. (2020) found that some categories of gig workers reported comparatively better mental health than other precarious workers during a period of widespread unemployment, which suggests that the loss of activity and income associated with the alternative to gig work, rather than gig work itself, can be the more proximate driver of distress in some circumstances. This nuance does not diminish the risks documented above, but it does caution against treating gig work as uniformly harmful relative to all available alternatives, particularly in contexts of high underlying unemployment.

Finally, the absence of statutory employment protections compounds all of the above pressures. Because most gig workers are classified as independent contractors rather than employees, they are excluded from employer sponsored health insurance, sick leave, maternity benefits, and formal grievance redressal mechanisms, leaving them to bear the full financial and emotional consequences of illness, injury, or platform deactivation without institutional recourse (Ramya, 2025). Taken together, these factors indicate that mental health risk in gig work arises less from the nature of the tasks themselves and more from the surrounding conditions of financial precarity, algorithmic surveillance, social exclusion, and weak social protection, a conclusion consistent with the job demands resources framework introduced in Section 4.

6. Facilities and Resources Available for Mental Wellbeing

Since most gig workers come from economically weaker sections and cannot afford private mental healthcare, the primary avenues of support available to them are state funded programmes and NGO led initiatives designed for low income populations more broadly. At the national level, the Government of India operates the National Mental Health Programme and its District Mental Health Programme, now approved in 767 districts, which provide free outpatient consultation, early detection, referral to district hospitals, and community level awareness activities delivered partly through ASHA and Anganwadi workers. The Tele MANAS helpline, launched as the tele mental health arm of the National Mental Health Programme, offers free, twenty four hour, multilingual counselling through a toll free number, with a two tier structure: trained counsellors provide first level psychosocial support, while more complex cases are escalated to psychiatrists and clinical psychologists, including through the eSanjeevani telemedicine platform (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2022). Because the service requires no in person visit and no cost, it is, in principle, well suited to gig workers whose irregular schedules make attending fixed clinic hours difficult.

The scale of underlying need is considerable. The National Mental Health Survey of India, conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences across twelve states, estimated that nearly 150 million Indians live with some form of mental morbidity, with a current prevalence of about 10.6 percent among adults, and found an overall treatment gap of 84.5 percent, meaning that the large majority of people who need mental health care do not receive it (Gautham et al., 2020). Because gig workers are rarely covered by employer linked outreach and are dispersed across cities rather than concentrated in identifiable workplaces, they are likely to sit on the more severe end of this treatment gap even though comparable disaggregated data for the gig workforce specifically remains scarce. Non governmental organisations supplement these state efforts, particularly for economically weaker groups. NGOs have historically partnered with government health workers to deliver community based mental health training, as demonstrated by an evaluation of a four day training manual delivered to community health workers in rural Karnataka, which improved workers' ability to recognise depression and psychosis and reduced reliance on inappropriate remedies, illustrating the potential of NGO government partnerships to extend mental health literacy into underserved populations (Armstrong et al., 2011). Several state governments also run dedicated schemes, such as day care and vocational rehabilitation programmes attached to district hospitals and halfway home facilities offering counselling and vocational training for low income individuals with mental health needs. Despite this institutional architecture, access for gig workers remains constrained in practice. Gig workers rarely fall within the outreach mandate of employer linked or workplace based mental health schemes since they are not recognised as formal employees, and a shortage of trained mental health professionals outside major cities further limits practical reach. Strengthening referral pathways between Tele MANAS, District Mental Health Programme clinics, and grassroots NGOs, and explicitly including gig and informal workers within outreach planning, would substantially improve the practical reach of existing facilities.

7. Awareness of Mental Wellbeing Among Gig Workers and Weaker Sections

Awareness of mental health services remains uneven among gig workers and economically weaker sections more broadly. Public health research consistently identifies stigma and low mental health literacy as the primary barriers to help seeking in India, particularly among community health workers and low income groups who have historically had minimal exposure to structured mental health education (Armstrong et al., 2011). For gig workers specifically, this gap is compounded by their dispersed and informal working arrangements: unlike factory or office employees who may encounter workplace wellness communication, gig workers typically interact only with a mobile application and have little direct contact with any institution that might convey information about free services such as Tele MANAS. Reports on the helpline's rollout note that uneven awareness across states has led to underutilisation, with migrant workers and informal labourers among the groups least likely to know that free, confidential support exists.

Where awareness campaigns have been embedded within trusted community touchpoints, such as through ASHA workers, industrial training institutes, and local NGOs, uptake and recognition of mental health symptoms have improved measurably, suggesting that similar community anchored outreach, extended to gig aggregators and worker associations, could meaningfully raise awareness within the platform workforce (Singh et al., 2025). The systematic review by De Saram et al. (2025) similarly notes that platform design and demographic variation are underexplored levers for improving awareness and wellbeing, since the same in app channel that assigns tasks to workers could, in principle, also be used to deliver targeted mental health information at the point of contact.

8. The Policy and Regulatory Landscape

India's regulatory response to the growth of gig and platform work has developed gradually and remains only partially implemented. The Code on Social Security, 2020, was the first piece of Indian legislation to formally define gig workers and platform workers as distinct categories, separate from both employees and traditional own account workers. Sections 113 and 114 of the Code provide for the registration of gig and platform workers, the creation of a Social Security Fund financed in part by contributions from aggregator platforms, and the framing of welfare schemes covering life and disability cover, accident insurance, health and maternity benefits, and old age protection (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2024). The Code also envisages National and State Social Security Boards to advise on the design of such schemes.

As of the time of writing, several provisions of the Code, including the operational rules governing aggregator contributions and worker registration, remain in the process of being notified and implemented across states, so the practical extension of these benefits to working gig and platform workers has been gradual. The Union Budget for 2025 to 2026 took a further step by announcing the registration of online platform workers on the e Shram portal, the issue of identity cards, and health coverage under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana scheme, which provides a cover of five lakh rupees per family per year for secondary and tertiary hospital care. Although this budget announcement addresses physical health coverage more directly than mental health provision, it establishes an identification and registration infrastructure that could, in future, be extended to channel targeted mental health outreach and benefits to registered gig workers specifically. From a mental health policy perspective, the current regulatory landscape has three notable gaps. First, none of the existing labour codes or budget announcements make explicit reference to psychological wellbeing, grievance redressal for algorithmic decisions, or working hour limits designed to reduce burnout, even though these are the stressors most consistently identified in the literature reviewed in Sections 2 and 5. Second, implementation lags formal recognition: workers who have been legally defined as gig or platform workers since 2020 have, in practice, only begun to be registered on outreach systems such as e Shram in 2025, meaning that most of the social security architecture described above remains aspirational rather than

operational for the majority of the workforce. Third, the Code places compliance obligations on aggregators but does not yet mandate specific occupational health and psychosocial risk management practices of the kind found in more developed frameworks for conventional employment, an omission that Ramya (2025) and Okunkova et al. (2023) both identify as a structural weakness of the emerging Indian regulatory model relative to international good practice.

9. Actionable Insights for Companies Employing Gig Workers

Platform companies are uniquely positioned to reduce the psychological toll of gig work, since they control the algorithms, payment systems, and communication channels through which workers experience their daily job. Evidence based, low cost interventions at the organisational level can materially improve worker wellbeing while also benefiting platforms through higher retention, better service quality, and reduced regulatory and reputational risk (Singh, 2026). Viewed through the job demands resources framework set out in Section 4, the most effective interventions are those that add durable resources rather than simply trimming demands at the margins. The following actionable measures are grouped by theme.

9.1 Transparent Earnings and Algorithmic Fairness

Companies should publish clear, upfront explanations of how payouts, incentives, and surge pricing are calculated, and provide advance notice before changing commission structures or incentive slabs. Introducing a minimum guaranteed earning per active hour, alongside real time, in app breakdowns of each payment, reduces the financial unpredictability that is a leading driver of anxiety among gig workers (Glavin & Schieman, 2022; Singh, 2026). Periodic third party or regulator reviewable audits of algorithmic pricing and task allocation, similar in spirit to the transparency proposals discussed by Wood et al. (2019), would further reduce the sense of arbitrary or unaccountable decision making that workers repeatedly cite as a source of distress.

9.2 Accessible Mental Health Support

Platforms can integrate a dedicated, confidential counselling helpline or chatbot directly within the worker app, referencing free national resources such as Tele MANAS at the toll free number 14416, and partner with NGOs or telehealth providers to offer a fixed number of free counselling sessions per year. Embedding this support inside the same app workers already use for accepting tasks removes a major access barrier compared with expecting workers to separately seek out unfamiliar services, and directly addresses the low awareness documented in Section 7.

9.3 Functional Grievance Redressal

A responsive, human reviewed grievance mechanism for disputed ratings, payment deductions, or account deactivation should be established, with a defined response time and the right to appeal before permanent deactivation. Perceived injustice from opaque, unappealable algorithmic

decisions is repeatedly identified as a source of stress; a fair and visible appeals process directly addresses this driver (Singh et al., 2025).

9.4 Reasonable Workload and Rest Safeguards

In app prompts encouraging breaks after long continuous active hours, caps on consecutive working hours for high risk roles such as driving and delivery, and de prioritising incentive structures that implicitly reward uninterrupted logins can reduce burnout and fatigue related accidents. Building rest nudges into the same interface that assigns tasks is more effective than relying on workers to self regulate under incentive pressure (Singh, 2026).

9.5 Insurance, Social Security, and Financial Literacy

Companies should proactively enrol workers in accident and health insurance, and support compliance with the Code on Social Security's provisions for gig and platform workers, including contributions to welfare funds and registration on the e Shram portal described in Section 8. Providing simple, in app financial literacy modules on savings, insurance, and managing variable income can reduce the financial stress that consistently correlates with poor mental health outcomes among gig workers (Ramya, 2025; Singh, 2026).

9.6 Building Community and Reducing Isolation

Since gig work is typically performed alone, companies can facilitate peer support channels, local worker meet ups, driver or rider lounges near high demand zones, and recognition programmes that create a sense of belonging otherwise absent from app mediated work. Even limited opportunities for peer interaction have been shown to buffer the emotional strain associated with isolated, solitary work (Singh, 2026), consistent with the social stressor domain identified by De Saram et al. (2025).

9.7 Manager and Support Staff Training

Platform support team staff and local operations managers who interact with workers should receive basic mental health awareness and first aid training so they can recognise distress signals and refer workers to appropriate help, mirroring the demonstrated impact of similar training for community health workers in India (Armstrong et al., 2011). This equips the people workers actually talk to with the skills to respond appropriately rather than treating every interaction as a purely transactional support ticket.

9.8 Regular Wellbeing Monitoring

Periodic, anonymous wellbeing surveys embedded in the worker app can help companies track stress, satisfaction, and burnout trends over time and evaluate whether interventions are working, rather than relying solely on attrition or complaint volume as lagging indicators. Data from such surveys can also guide which of the above interventions to prioritise for particular worker

segments, such as night shift delivery riders or women drivers, whose risk profiles differ (Singh et al., 2025).

10. Discussion: Towards an Integrated Agenda

The evidence reviewed in this paper points toward a consistent conclusion: the mental health risks associated with gig work in India arise less from the nature of platform mediated tasks themselves and more from a set of surrounding conditions, namely income unpredictability, algorithmic opacity, social isolation, performance pressure, and the absence of statutory protection, that the job demands resources framework in Section 4 helps organise into a coherent whole. No single actor can address all of these conditions alone. Platforms control the demands and, potentially, the in app resources described in Section 9. Government policy, through instruments such as the Code on Social Security, 2020, and the e Shram and Ayushman Bharat initiatives described in Section 8, can extend the formal social protection resources that gig work currently lacks. Public health programmes and NGOs, through Tele MANAS, the District Mental Health Programme, and community anchored outreach, can extend awareness and access, addressing the gap documented in Section 7.

An integrated agenda would therefore combine three simultaneous strands of action. Platforms should adopt the organisational level interventions outlined in Section 9, treating psychological wellbeing as a retention and service quality issue rather than a peripheral corporate social responsibility activity. Policymakers should accelerate the operational implementation of the Code on Social Security's provisions for gig and platform workers, and should consider explicitly incorporating psychosocial risk management and algorithmic transparency requirements into the rules still being finalised under the Code, closing the policy gap identified in Section 8. Public health authorities should deliberately target gig worker hubs, such as delivery pick up points, driver waiting areas, and worker association meetings, for Tele MANAS and District Mental Health Programme outreach, rather than relying on workers to discover these services independently. None of these three strands is sufficient on its own; their combined and coordinated implementation is what the evidence in this paper suggests is required.

11. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This paper is a review of secondary literature, government data, and policy documents rather than a primary empirical study, and its conclusions should be read with several limitations in mind. First, India specific empirical evidence on gig worker mental health remains limited in volume and geographic coverage: the most detailed available survey, Singh et al. (2025), covers women gig workers in major metropolitan cities, and comparable large scale, representative data covering male workers, smaller cities, and rural areas is not yet available. Second, most of the international literature drawn on in Sections 2, 4, and 5 originates from higher income countries with different labour market and social protection contexts, and its findings should be extended to India with appropriate caution rather than assumed to transfer directly. Third, because the Code on Social



Security, 2020, and the 2025 to 2026 budget announcements described in Section 8 are still in the process of implementation, this paper cannot yet evaluate their actual effect on gig worker mental health outcomes, only their design and stated intent.

Future research would benefit from four priorities. Nationally representative, longitudinal surveys of Indian gig workers across platform types, genders, and geographies would allow researchers to track how mental health outcomes change as regulatory provisions are implemented and as platforms adopt or decline the interventions discussed in Section 9. Platform level administrative data, made available to researchers under appropriate privacy safeguards, would allow more precise testing of the relationship between algorithmic design choices and worker distress than surveys alone can provide. Comparative studies across Indian states, which vary considerably in the reach of District Mental Health Programme infrastructure and in the pace of labour code implementation, could help identify which combinations of policy and platform action are most effective. Finally, intervention studies that test specific organisational measures, such as in app counselling access or minimum guaranteed earnings, against control conditions would move the field from the largely descriptive evidence base reviewed in this paper toward stronger causal evidence capable of guiding both platform practice and public policy.

12. Conclusion

India's gig economy has created substantial employment opportunities for millions of workers who value its flexibility, low entry barriers, and freedom from gender based hiring discrimination. Yet the same structural features that make gig work accessible, namely algorithmic control, the absence of a formal employer, piece rate income, and exclusion from statutory benefits, also generate distinctive mental health risks, including anxiety, burnout, financial stress, and social isolation. Because most gig workers belong to economically weaker sections, they are heavily reliant on state funded mental health infrastructure such as the District Mental Health Programme and Tele MANAS, supplemented unevenly by NGO led community interventions, against a national backdrop in which the great majority of people needing mental health care do not receive it.

The evidence reviewed here suggests that while institutional capacity exists on paper, and while the Code on Social Security, 2020, has for the first time given gig and platform workers formal legal recognition, low awareness, persistent stigma, incomplete implementation, and the dispersed, app mediated nature of gig work continue to limit the practical reach of these protections among this population. Addressing this gap will require coordinated action from three directions at once: platforms adopting the organisational level interventions outlined in Section 9, policymakers completing the extension of social security and psychosocial support obligations to aggregators under the labour codes described in Section 8, and public health programmes deliberately targeting gig worker hubs for outreach and awareness campaigns as discussed in Section 10. As India's gig workforce continues to grow toward the tens of millions projected for the coming decade, embedding mental health considerations into the design of platform work, rather than treating it as

an afterthought, will be essential to ensuring that the sector's economic gains are not offset by a hidden and largely preventable toll on worker wellbeing.

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