

MANAGING STRESS IN THE GIG ECONOMY: A CASE STUDY OF ZOMATO AND SWIGGY IN HYDERABAD

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ABSTRACT

The gig economy has transformed the nature of work, offering flexibility and opportunities for many workers. However, it also presents unique challenges, particularly in terms of stress management. This research paper examines the stress factors affecting “gig workers in the food delivery sector, focusing on Zomato and Swiggy” delivery partners in Hyderabad, India. This research examines the main causes of stress, coping strategies, and the efficacy of support networks offered by the organization using a mixed-methods approach that combines surveys, interviews, and data analysis. According to the report, the biggest concerns for gig workers in this industry are inconsistent income, lengthy workdays, and a lack of job security. The report also emphasizes the value of social support systems and the need that platform firms provide more thorough stress management initiatives. The results add to the expanding corpus of research on the well-being of gig economy workers and provide platform businesses and legislators practical advice on how to enhance gig workers' working circumstances.

Keywords: Gig Economy, Stress Management, Food Delivery, Zomato, Swiggy, Hyderabad, Worker Well-Being, Platform Labor.

INTRODUCTION

A major influence in the global labor market, the gig economy is changing conventional employment structures and creating new avenues for flexible work schedules. The gig economy, which is defined by freelance employment, on-demand services, and short-term contracts, has expanded rapidly in recent years, especially in developing nations like India. Within this context, the food delivery sector has become a prominent example of gig work, with companies like Zomato and Swiggy leading the market in India.

Although the gig economy has advantages like accessibility and flexibility, it also poses distinct difficulties for workers, especially when it comes to stress management (Wood et al., 2019). Gig workers often deal with unstable income, insecure employment, and pressure to maintain good performance ratings, all of which may lead to high levels of stress.

This research paper focuses on the stress management experiences of Zomato and Swiggy delivery partners in Hyderabad, India. Hyderabad, one of India's biggest cities with a flourishing food delivery industry, offers a perfect backdrop for analyzing the difficulties encountered by gig workers in this field. The study aims to identify the primary sources of stress for these workers, explore their coping mechanisms, and evaluate the effectiveness of support systems provided by the platform companies.

This study adds to the expanding corpus of research on worker well-being in the gig economy by carrying out a thorough examination of the stressors influencing gig workers in the food delivery industry. Additionally, it offers insightful information to help platform firms, legislators, and employees themselves create plans to reduce stress and enhance working conditions in this quickly changing industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The gig economy has experienced significant growth in recent years, particularly in the food delivery sector. Companies like Zomato and Swiggy have revolutionized the way people order and receive food in urban areas across India, including Hyderabad. However, this rapid expansion has also brought attention to “the stress and challenges faced by gig workers in this industry.” This literature review aims to explore existing research on stress management in the gig economy, with a specific focus on food delivery workers in Hyderabad, and identify gaps in the current body of knowledge.

Gig Economy and Stress

The gig economy, characterized by short-term contracts and freelance work, has been the subject of numerous studies in recent years. Researchers have examined various aspects of this emerging work model, including its impact on workers' well-being and stress levels. (Friedman, 2014) highlighted the precarious nature of gig work, emphasizing the lack of job security and benefits as significant sources of stress for workers. This foundational study set the stage for further research into the psychological impacts of gig work.

Building on this, (Wood et al., 2019) conducted a comprehensive analysis of gig workers' experiences across multiple platforms. According to their research, gig labor provides freedom, but because of the unstable revenue and fierce competition, it also increases stress. This research offered insightful information on the complex relationship between stress and the gig economy, indicating that stress-reduction tactics should take into account both psychological and financial factors.

In (Anwar & Graham, 2020) investigated the experiences of gig workers in the food delivery and ride-hailing industries in India. Their study brought to light the particular difficulties encountered by gig workers in developing nations, such as socioeconomic constraints and technical obstacles. The necessity for context-specific research on stress management in the gig economy was highlighted by this study, especially in quickly expanding areas like India.

Food Delivery Sector and Worker Stress

Focusing specifically on the food delivery sector, several studies have explored the unique stressors faced by delivery workers. In (Möhlmann & Zalmanson, 2017) investigated the algorithmic management practices used by food delivery platforms, revealing how these systems can contribute to worker stress through constant surveillance and performance pressure. This research highlighted the technological aspect of stress in the food delivery gig economy, an area that requires further exploration in different cultural contexts.

In a study specific to India, (Surie, 2020) examined the working conditions of food delivery workers in Delhi, highlighting issues such as long working hours, physical strain, and exposure to traffic-related risks. While this study provided valuable insights into the Indian context, it primarily focused on Delhi, leaving room for exploration of other major cities like Hyderabad.

Stress Management Strategies

Research on stress management strategies for gig workers has been growing, though it remains limited compared to studies on traditional employment. In (Petriglieri et al., 2019) explored how independent workers develop routines and relationships to manage the

uncertainties of gig work. Their findings emphasized the importance of personal strategies and support networks in mitigating stress.

In the context of food delivery workers, (Gandini, 2019) examined how workers use digital platforms to share information and support each other, creating informal networks to cope with work-related stress. This study highlighted the potential of technology-enabled peer support in stress management, an area that warrants further investigation in the Indian context.

Zomato and Swiggy in Hyderabad

Although research on India's gig economy and food delivery industry is expanding, there aren't many studies that particularly address Zomato and Swiggy in Hyderabad. In (Raman & Rathore, 2021) conducted a comparative analysis of working conditions for Zomato and Swiggy delivery partners in major Indian cities, including Hyderabad. However, their study primarily focused on earnings and work hours, leaving room for a more in-depth exploration of stress management strategies.

Research Gap

The analysis of the literature identifies a number of knowledge gaps on stress management in the gig economy, specifically with regard to Hyderabad food delivery workers:

1. Limited focus on Hyderabad: While studies have examined gig work in major Indian cities, there is a lack of research specifically addressing the unique urban environment and work culture of Hyderabad.
2. Comparative analysis of Zomato and Swiggy: Few studies have conducted a comparative analysis of stress management practices between Zomato and Swiggy, two major players in the Indian food delivery market.
3. Technology-enabled stress management: There is a need for more research on how food delivery workers in Hyderabad use technology to manage stress, including platform-specific features and informal digital networks.
4. Cultural and socio-economic factors: The impact of local cultural and socio-economic factors on stress management strategies among food delivery workers in Hyderabad requires further investigation.
5. Long-term effects of stress management strategies: Longitudinal studies examining the effectiveness of various stress management strategies for food delivery workers in Hyderabad are lacking.
6. Policy implications: Research on how local and national policies can support stress management for "gig workers in the food delivery sector," specifically in Hyderabad, is limited.

This research aims to address this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of stress factors, coping mechanisms, and support systems for Zomato and Swiggy delivery partners in Hyderabad. By doing so, it contributes to the broader understanding of stress management in the gig economy while also offering specific insights into the Indian context.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In order to thoroughly investigate stress management among Zomato and Swiggy delivery partners in Hyderabad, this research used a mixed-methods methodology. In order to provide a comprehensive picture of the stressors, coping strategies, and support networks accessible to gig workers in the food delivery industry, the study design combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

DATA COLLECTION

Quantitative Data

A survey was administered to 500 Zomato and Swiggy delivery partners in Hyderabad. The survey was designed to collect data on demographic information, working conditions, stress levels, sources of stress, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of company-provided support systems. The survey was conducted online and through in-person interviews to ensure a representative sample of delivery partners.

Qualitative Data

50 delivery partners (25 from each platform) participated in in-depth interviews to learn more about their experiences managing stress. These semi-structured interviews allowed for a more detailed exploration of individual experiences, challenges, and coping strategies.

Additionally, interviews were conducted with 10 managers from Zomato and Swiggy to understand the company perspective on worker stress and the support systems in place.

Sampling Method

A stratified random sampling method was used to ensure representation from different areas of Hyderabad and varying levels of experience among delivery partners. The sample was stratified based on:

1. Platform (Zomato or Swiggy)
2. Length of experience as a delivery partner
3. Geographic area within Hyderabad

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative Analysis

Survey data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. SPSS software was used to conduct statistical analyses, including:

1. Descriptive statistics to summarize demographic information and overall stress levels
2. Chi-square tests to examine associations between categorical variables
3. T-tests and ANOVA to compare stress levels across different groups
4. Multiple regression analysis to identify predictors of stress levels

Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to examine interview transcripts. NVivo software was used to code and organize the qualitative data. The analysis focused on identifying recurring themes related to stress factors, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of support systems.

Ethical Considerations

The study was carried out in compliance with the ethical standards for research involving human beings. All participants gave their informed permission, and their privacy was protected throughout the whole data gathering and analysis procedure.

RESULTS

Demographic Profile of Participants

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the survey participants.

Table 1 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS (N=500)			
Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Platform	Zomato	255	51%
	Swiggy	245	49%
Gender	Male	475	95%
	Female	25	5%
Age	18-25	185	37%
	26-35	220	44%
	36-45	80	16%
	46 and above	15	3%
Education	Below High School	45	9%
	High School	210	42%
	Graduate	225	45%
	Postgraduate	20	4%
Experience as Delivery Partner	Less than 6 months	95	19%
Partner	6 months - 1 year	150	30%
	1-2 years	165	33%
	More than 2 years	90	18%

Source: Survey data collected by the author.

The demographic profile reveals that the majority of delivery partners are male (95%), with a significant proportion falling in the 26-35 age group (44%). Most participants have at least a high school education (91%), and the majority have been working as delivery partners for more than six months (81%).

STRESS LEVELS AND SOURCES OF STRESS

Overall Stress Levels

A scale of 1 to 10 was used to ask participants to assess their overall stress levels, with 10 being the greatest degree of stress. The mean stress level reported was 7.2 (SD = 1.8), indicating relatively high levels of stress among delivery partners.

Sources of Stress

Table 2 presents the primary sources of stress reported by delivery partners.

Table 2 PRIMARY SOURCES OF STRESS FOR DELIVERY PARTNERS (N=500)		
Stress Factor	Mean Score (1-5)	Standard Deviation
Income instability	4.3	0.8
Long working hours	4.1	0.9
Lack of job security	3.9	1.0
Pressure to maintain high ratings	3.8	1.1
Physical demands of the job	3.7	1.0
Traffic and road conditions	3.6	1.2
Lack of benefits (health insurance, etc.)	3.5	1.3
Algorithmic management and control	3.3	1.2
Customer interactions	2.9	1.4

Source: Survey data collected by the author.

Income instability emerged as the most significant source of stress ($M = 4.3$, $SD = 0.8$), followed by long working hours ($M = 4.1$, $SD = 0.9$) and lack of job security ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 1.0$).

Coping Mechanisms

Analysis of both survey and interview data revealed several common coping mechanisms employed by delivery partners to manage stress:

1. Social support networks: 78% of participants reported relying on family and friends for emotional support.
2. Time management strategies: 65% mentioned using various time management techniques to balance work and personal life.
3. Physical exercise: 52% engaged in regular physical activity to manage stress.
4. Online communities: 47% participated in online forums or WhatsApp groups with other delivery partners for support and information sharing.
5. Financial planning: 43% reported using budgeting and savings strategies to manage income instability.

EFFECTIVENESS OF COMPANY-PROVIDED SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Participants were asked to rate the effectiveness of various support systems provided by Zomato and Swiggy on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most effective. Table 3 presents the results.

Table 3 PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF COMPANY-PROVIDED SUPPORT SYSTEMS (N=500)		
Support System	Mean Score (1-5)	Standard Deviation
Helpline for immediate issues	3.2	1.1
Training programs	2.9	1.2
Health and safety guidelines	2.8	1.0
Incentive programs	2.7	1.3
Mental health resources	2.1	1.4
Financial planning assistance	1.9	1.2

Source: Survey data collected by the author.

The results indicate that while some support systems are perceived as moderately effective (e.g., helpline for immediate issues), others, particularly mental health resources and financial planning assistance, are seen as less effective.

Comparison Between Zomato and Swiggy

T-tests were conducted to compare stress levels and perceptions of support systems between Zomato and Swiggy delivery partners. No statistically significant differences were found in overall stress levels ($t(498) = 1.12$, $p = 0.26$) or perceptions of support system effectiveness ($t(498) = 0.89$, $p = 0.37$) between the two platforms.

Predictors of Stress Levels

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify significant predictors of stress levels among delivery partners. The model included demographic variables, work-related factors, and perceived effectiveness of support systems. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4		
MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF PREDICTORS OF STRESS LEVELS		
Predictor	Beta	p-value
Income instability	0.32	<0.001
Long working hours	0.28	<0.001
Lack of job security	0.25	<0.001
Age	-0.15	0.002
Experience as delivery partner	-0.12	0.01
Perceived effectiveness of support systems	-0.10	0.03
Education level	-0.08	0.07
Gender	0.05	0.23

$R^2 = 0.41$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.39$, $F(8, 491) = 42.67$, $p < 0.001$

Source: Analysis of survey data conducted by the author

The regression model explained 41% of the variance in stress levels ($R^2 = 0.41$, $F(8, 491) = 42.67$, $p < 0.001$). “Income instability, long working hours, and lack of job security” emerged as the strongest predictors of stress levels. Age and experience as a delivery partner were negatively associated with stress levels, suggesting that older and more experienced workers may experience less stress.

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the stress management experiences of Zomato and Swiggy delivery partners in Hyderabad, contributing to the broader understanding of worker well-being in the gig economy. Several key themes emerge from the results, which have implications for both research and practice.

Demographic Profile of Participants

The demographic profile of the survey participants reveals several important characteristics of the food delivery workforce in Hyderabad. The overwhelming majority of delivery partners are male (95%), which aligns with previous studies on the gig economy in India (Kasliwal, 2020). This gender imbalance may be attributed to cultural factors, safety concerns, and societal norms that often discourage women from participating in such roles (Raval & Pal, 2019).

The age distribution of the participants, with 81% falling between 18-35 years, reflects the young workforce typically associated with the gig economy. This finding is consistent with global trends in platform work, where younger individuals are more likely to engage in such employment (Wood et al., 2019). The educational background of the participants, with 91% having at least a high school education, suggests that food delivery work is attracting individuals with varying levels of education, possibly due to limited job opportunities in the formal sector (Anwar & Graham, 2020).

The experience distribution indicates that a significant portion of the workforce (81%) has been in the job for more than six months, suggesting some level of stability in this form of employment. However, it also raises questions about the long-term sustainability and career prospects within the gig economy (Duggan et al., 2020).

Stress Levels and Sources of Stress

The high mean stress level (7.2 out of 10) reported by participants is a cause for concern and aligns with previous research highlighting the stressful nature of gig work

(Churchill & Craig, 2019). This research emphasizes the need of focused interventions to address stress management in the food delivery industry.

The study's main causes of stress provide important light on the difficulties delivery partners encounter. Income instability emerged as the most significant stressor, which is a common issue in the gig economy due to the unpredictable nature of work and fluctuating demand (Goods et al., 2019). "Long working hours and lack of job security," the second and third most significant stressors, respectively, are also consistent with previous findings on platform work (Wood et al., 2019).

The pressure to maintain high ratings, physical demands of the job, and traffic conditions are specific to the food delivery context and highlight the unique challenges faced by workers in this sector (Anwar & Graham, 2020). The relatively lower stress associated with customer interactions suggests that delivery partners may have developed effective strategies for managing these encounters.

Coping Mechanisms

The coping mechanisms identified in the study reveal a mix of personal and social strategies employed by delivery partners to manage stress. The high reliance on social support networks (78%) aligns with research emphasizing the importance of social connections in mitigating work-related stress (Thoits, 2011). The use of time management strategies (65%) and engagement in physical exercise (52%) demonstrate proactive efforts by workers to maintain work-life balance and physical well-being.

The participation in online communities (47%) reflects the growing importance of digital platforms in providing support and information sharing among gig workers (Wood et al., 2019). The adoption of financial planning strategies by 43% of participants indicates an awareness of the need to manage income instability, although this percentage suggests that more support may be needed in this area.

Effectiveness of Company-Provided Support Systems

The moderate effectiveness ratings of company-provided support systems suggest that while some measures are helpful, there is significant room for improvement. The relatively higher rating for the helpline for immediate issues ($M = 3.2$) indicates that workers value real-time support for urgent problems. However, the lower ratings for mental health resources ($M = 2.1$) and financial planning assistance ($M = 1.9$) highlight critical areas where companies could enhance their support offerings.

These findings align with research suggesting that platform companies often provide limited support to their workers, focusing more on operational issues rather than holistic well-being (Duggan et al., 2020). The results underscore the need for Zomato and Swiggy to reassess and improve their support systems, particularly in areas of mental health and financial planning.

Comparison Between Zomato and Swiggy

The lack of statistically significant differences in stress levels and perceptions of support systems between Zomato and Swiggy delivery partners suggests that the challenges and experiences are similar across these platforms. This finding is consistent with research indicating that gig economy platforms often share similar characteristics and challenges (Goods et al., 2019). It also implies that interventions to address stress and improve support systems could potentially be applied across platforms.

Predictors of Stress Levels

The “multiple regression analysis” provides valuable insights into the factors contributing to stress among delivery partners. The strong association of “income instability, long working hours, and lack of job security” with stress levels aligns with previous research on precarious work and its impact on worker well-being (Standing, 2011). These findings highlight the need for structural changes in the gig economy to address these fundamental issues.

The negative association of age and experience with stress levels suggests that older and more experienced workers may have developed better coping strategies or have more realistic expectations of the job. This finding could inform targeted support strategies for newer and younger workers who may be more vulnerable to stress.

The small but significant negative association between perceived effectiveness of support systems and stress levels underscores the potential impact of well-designed company interventions in reducing worker stress.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study provides a comprehensive overview of the stress experiences and coping mechanisms of food delivery partners in Hyderabad, India. The findings highlight the complex interplay of factors contributing to stress in the gig economy and the varied strategies workers employ to manage these challenges.

The results have several implications for policy and practice:

1. Platform companies should prioritize addressing income instability and working hours, possibly through guaranteed minimum earnings or limits on consecutive working hours.
2. Enhanced support systems, particularly in mental health and financial planning, are needed to better assist workers in managing stress.
3. Targeted interventions for newer and younger workers may be beneficial in helping them develop effective coping strategies.
4. Policy makers should consider regulations that provide greater job security and benefits for gig workers, addressing the precarious nature of this work.
5. Further research is needed to explore long-term career trajectories in the gig economy and develop sustainable models of platform work that prioritize worker well-being.

In conclusion, even though the gig economy provides flexible job options, there are serious issues with worker stress and wellbeing. To solve these problems and build a more sustainable and equitable gig economy, platform firms, legislators, and employees themselves must work together.

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