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Daily Grind of Life of Workers on Their Own (Gig Workers): An Empirical Study in the Context of Surat City

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Abstract:

This study examines the livelihood dynamics of gig workers with a focus on the factors influencing individuals to engage in gig-based employment and the variations in satisfaction derived from such work. Primary data were collected from gig workers in Surat city during October 2024 using a structured questionnaire. The study explores key drivers such as income opportunities and flexibility that motivate participation in gig work. To assess whether satisfaction levels differ across socio-economic groups, the Kruskal–Wallis test was employed, considering monthly income groups and educational levels. The study contributes to a better understanding of the gig economy's role in urban livelihoods and offers insights for policymakers to improve working conditions and income stability for gig workers.

Keywords: Gig economy, Covid 19, Jel classification: J4

Introduction:

A new approach relative to the traditional economy has taken form. It is booming as per the changing situation and circumstances and has developed as per the need of time. An expedition that has been taken by many in their quest for employment.

Today's economy is being rapidly overpowered by gig economy. Gig economy is taking a grip over the traditional economy and is overshadowing the features of traditional employment. Gig economy has come into existence and has gained recognition due to the rising level of unemployment and the cost of living of the people. An important factor is to quench the thirst of flexibility in timings.



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Gig economy is being considered in a very broad perspective which encompasses the whole arena of freelancers, self-employed, solo entrepreneurs, online tutors and educators, independent consultants, food delivery workers, ride hailing drivers and so on.

Gig economy is a free market system in which temporary position are common and organization hire independent workers for short term commitments. The term 'Gig' is a slang word for a job that lasts a specified period of time. It was traditionally used by musicians. Gig economy is known as on demand economy or sharing economy and its prevalence in India increased during pandemic. Due to lockdown and layoffs people took up alternative ways of earning bread rather than traditional employment opportunities.

Gig workers are independent contractors, online platform workers, contract firm workers, on call workers and temporary workers. They enter into formal agreements with on-demand companies to provide services to the companies' clients.

Subject selection:

It has been noted that in this era of digitalization, people often find themselves short on time and are actively seeking platforms that can meet their needs while saving time. As a result, many have turned to various gig platforms that offer essential items delivered right to their doorsteps, such as Flipkart and Amazon. They are also utilizing transport services like Ola and Uber, as well as food delivery options like Swiggy and Zomato, available on demand. The researcher aimed to explore the experiences of gig workers associated with these platforms.

Importance of the subject:

In 2020, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic led to millions losing their jobs. During this time, the gig economy saw a significant surge as gig workers provided essential services to consumers stuck at home. Many who had lost their jobs turned to part-time and contract work to generate income. Rapid digitalization of the economy and industry, driven by advances in communication technologies and the widespread use of smartphones, transformed the landscape. As a result, on-demand digital platforms emerged, creating new types of jobs that differed from traditional offline roles in terms of convenience, accessibility, and cost. Traditionally, "work" was defined as full-time positions with set hours and benefits. However, changing economic conditions and ongoing technological advancements have reshaped this definition, giving rise to a new labor force characterized by independent, contractual employment.

Consequently, Gig economy is driving productivity improvement by reducing idle and unproductive time. Hence, it is gaining importance both in developed and developing countries. Currently, the Indian manufacturing sector struggles to offer enough meaningful employment for young people. There is a significant disconnect between educational outcomes and job skills. Additionally, states have been unable to develop adequate public work programs in urban areas to support the influx of migrants into cities and towns. In this context, the gig economy plays a crucial role by providing employment opportunities in urban settings.



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Consequently, authorities recognize the value of these platforms in alleviating urban challenges.

Review of literature:

De Ruyter and Brown (2019), they state that the types of jobs available in this economy have low entry barriers. The authors discuss the challenges and issues related to traditional labor markets. Gig workers are primarily young individuals who are either looking for jobs or still studying. As such, gig work tends to be a temporary solution until they can secure more stable forms of employment.

According to a Digital Future Society report (2019), India ranks as the second-largest freelance market, and this app-based technology removes the necessity for a middleman. For recruiters, hiring gig workers is cost-effective since they usually do not provide paid leave, health care, or other benefits typically given to full-time employees.

In the report published in Live Mint by Salman and Varsha (2019), Delhi has emerged as a leading destination for migrant workers joining the country's tech-enabled gig economy, moving Bangalore to second place. Over the last eight years, two app-based cab service providers have collectively employed approximately 1.3 million drivers.

Sindwani P. (2019), in her article published in Business Insider, mentioned that India has now positioned itself as the fifth largest market for 'Flexistaffing.' In 2015, it added 1.2 million flex workers and is projected to employ nearly three million by 2021. Many urban youth, both educated and uneducated, see the gig economy as a short-term fix while they seek better job opportunities. The report indicates that numerous workers turn to gig work as a last resort rather than a permanent career path. Additionally, the lack of regulation often leads gig workers to put in long hours to fulfill the incentives provided by the platforms.

B Pal (2021), in his article discusses the increasing popularity of the gig economy in India. The researcher clarifies that this market, defined by fixed-term contracts or project-based payments from companies, third parties, or online marketplaces, is referred to as the "gig economy."

Objectives of the study:

- To understand the various factors that lead people to join this form of work
- To compare and contrast the perceived advantages and disadvantages, as well as the risks associated with the gig economy
- To analyze the ongoing debates surrounding the regulation of gig work and suggest potential solutions for policymakers.
- To understand the level of satisfaction derived from gig work.

Hypotheses

H₀: There is no significant difference in the level of satisfaction derived from gig work across different monthly income groups.

H₀: There is no significant difference in the level of satisfaction derived from gig work across different levels of education.



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Research methodology:

The study is primarily qualitative. Which states that multiple realities exist. These realities are constructed based on individual experiences. Thus, the study attempts to understand the phenomenon of gig work based on its stakeholders' experiences. The study was conducted in October 2024. Since the choice of individuals who need to be interviewed were not fixed, the researcher used convenient sampling. To ensure that the respondents were direct stakeholders of the gig economy, the purposive sampling method (a type of non-probability sampling) is used, specifically, a homogenous sample. In India, the gig economy primarily constitutes ride-hailing platforms and food-delivery platforms. Due to the paucity of time, the study focuses only on essentials delivery platform, cab aggregators and food delivery. The research includes interviews with gig workers of the various gig platforms. The interviews aimed to understand the socio-economic background, benefits, and challenges associated with this work. Forty-three respondents were selected from north zone of Surat city.

Collection of data:

Data were collected from Surat city through convenient sampling and snowball sampling by providing structured questionnaire and taking interviews of the respondents.

Gender	Male	28	There were total 43 respondents, out of which 15 were female and rest 28 were male respondents.
	female	15	
Gender	Age		It can be observed that total 43 respondents were categorized on the basis of age groups, in the age group of 18-25 there were total 17 respondents out



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	18-25	26-35	36-45	46 above	Grand Total	
Female	10	4	1	0	15	of which 10 were female and 07 were male respondents. In the age group 26-35 years there were total 19 respondents, out of which 04 were female and 15 were male. In the age group 36-45, there were 01 female and 05 male respondents. Whereas in the age group 46 and above there was no female respondent but 01 male respondent was there.
Male	7	15	5	1	28	
Grand Total	17	19	6	1	43	
Education	Gender					we have found that maximum respondents completed their Higher secondary school (14 respondents), out of which 1 was female and 13 were male.
	Female	Male	Grand Total			
No Formal Education	1	1	2			
Secondary School	0	4	4			
Higher Secondary School	1	13	14			
Diploma/Certificate	0	2	2			
Bachelor's Degree	5	7	12			



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Master's Degree	7	1	8			Total 12 respondents were graduate, of which 05 were female and 07 were male. There were 02 respondents having No formal education of which 01 was female and 01 was male, while 01 female respondents was having Ph.D. degree.
Ph.D. or equivalent	1	0	1			
Grand Total	15	28	43			
Income	Gender					there were total 06 respondents having monthly income less than Rs.10,000 while there were no respondents having monthly income above Rs.50,000. Total 15 respondents were having
	Female	Male	Grand Total			
Below 10,000	3	3	6			
10,000 to 15,000	2	7	9			
15,000 to 25,000	8	7	15			
25,000 to 35,000	2	9	11			
35,000 to 50,000	0	2	2			



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Above 50,000	0	0	0			monthly income Rs.15,000 to rs.25,000, of which 08 were female and 07 were male respondents. 02 male respondents were having monthly income Rs.35,000 to Rs.50,000.
Grand Total	15	28	43			
working hours per day	upto 8 hours	30				69.8% (30) respondents were working up to 08 hours per day and 27.9% (12) respondents were working for 09 to 12 hours per day, 01 respondent was working for 12 to 15 hours per day as gig worker.
	9 to 12 hours	12				
	12 to 15 hours	1				
	more than 15 hours	0				
Experience	below 1 year	39.50%				39.5% of gig workers are having experience of less than 1 year, 23.3% are having experience of 1
	1 to 2 years	23.30%				
	2 to 3 years	9.30%				



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	more than 3 years	27.90%				to 2 years, 9.3% gig workers are associated with gig platform for 2 to 3 years whereas 27.9% gig workers are associated with gig work for more than 3 years.
other source of income	Yes	46.50%				When respondents were asked whether they have any other source of income, 46.5% were replied affirmatively while 53.5% replied in negative.
	No	53.50%				
satisfaction with income	very satisfied	16.30%				In the response to the question about satisfaction with the income earned as gig worker, 16.3% replied 'very satisfied', 41.9% replied 'satisfied', 25.6% were neutral for the satisfaction,
	satisfied	41.90%				
	neutral	25.60%				
	dissatisfied	14%				
	very dissatisfied	2.20%				



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						14% were dissatisfied and 2.2 respondent were very dissatisfied with the income they earn.
level of control over gig work	very satisfied	23.30%				23.3% respondents admitted that they were very satisfied, 39.5% were satisfied, 30.2% were neutral and rest were dissatisfied and very dissatisfied with level of control over gig work.
	satisfied	39.50%				
	neutral	30.20%				
	dissatisfied and very dissatisfied	7%				
cope with uncertain nature	budgeting	18.60%				18.6% respondents accepted that they use budgeting, 41.9% use savings, 25.6% respondents by building multiple
	savings	41.90%				
	building multiple income streams	25.60%				



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	not a concern for me	14%				income streams and 14% replied that coping with uncertain nature is not a concern for them.
challenging to balance gig work with other commitments	Yes	20.90%				20.9% respondents found its challenging to balance gig work with other commitments, 37.2% did not find it challenging whereas 41.9% admitted that its sometime challenging to balance gig work with other commitments.
	No	37.20%				
	sometimes	41.90%				
Plan to continue gig work in long term	yes	58.10%				58.1% respondents were ready to continue gig work in the long run, 14% were not ready while 27.9% respondents were not sure about the continuity of
	No	14%				
	not sure	27.90%				



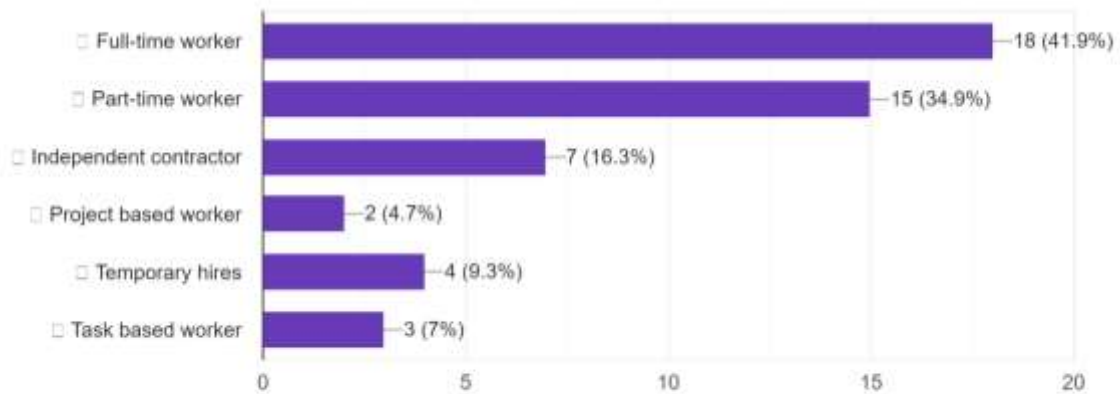
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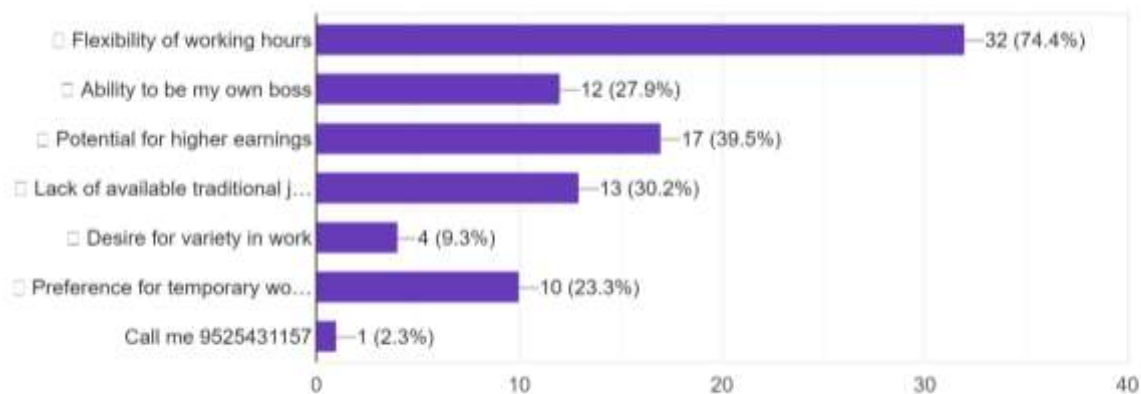
06 respondents (14%) were engaged with transportation and educational services and very few (2.3%) were engaged in search engine evaluation, AI data labelling, National Agriculture financing, loan services, marketing etc.

Type of work:



Focusing on the type of work provided by gig workers, out of total 43 respondents, 18 were full-time workers, 15 were part-time workers, 07 were working as independent contractor, 02 were working as project-based worker, 04 were temporary hired and 03 were working as task-based workers. Its shows that respondents were utilizing their free time to work as gig workers as and when convenient.

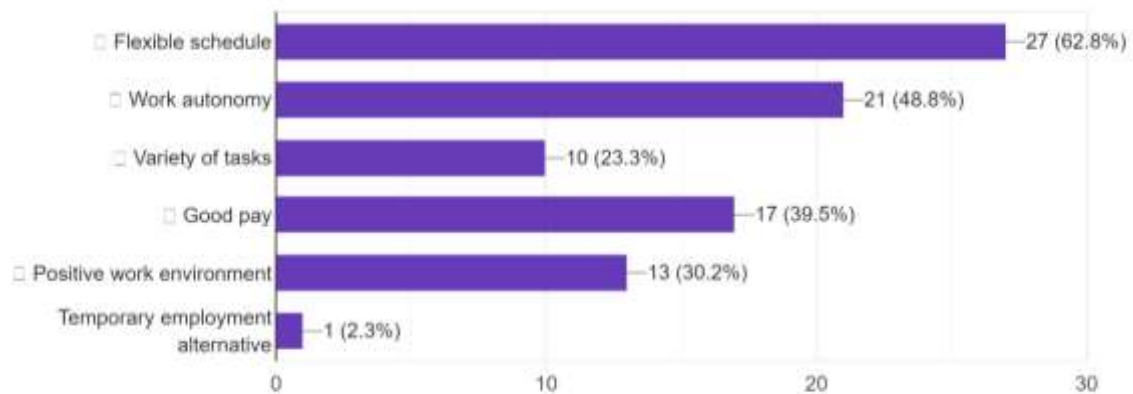
Factors that influenced to become a gig worker:



In response to the factors influencing decision to become gig workers, most of the respondents i.e. 32 (74.4%) respondents answered flexibility of working hours. 12 (27.9%) choose ability to be my own boss, where as potential for higher earnings, lack of available traditional job, desire for variety in work and preference for temporary work numbers 17 (39.5%), 13 (30.2%), 04 (9.3%) and 10 (23.3%) respectively.

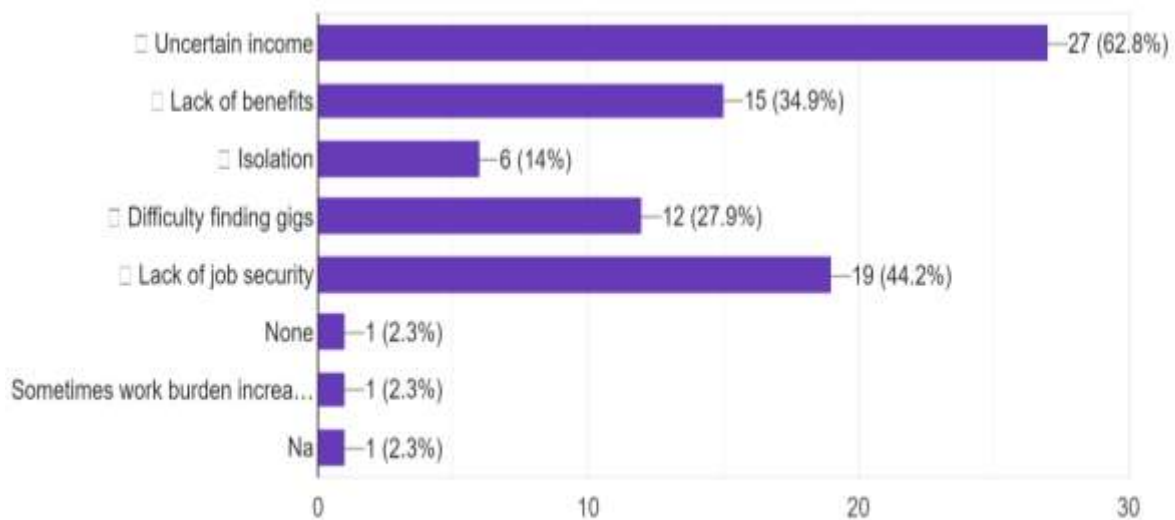


Factors contributing job satisfaction:



Above graph focuses on the factors contributing to job satisfaction. 27 (62.8%) respondents were satisfied due to flexible schedule, 21 (48.8%) satisfied due to work autonomy, 10 (23.3%) were due to variety of tasks, 17 (39.5%) respondents were satisfied due to good pay. 13 (30.2%) due to positive work environment and 01(2.3%) were due to temporary employment alternatives.

Challenges faced as gig workers:



In response to the question regarding the challenges to be faced as a gig workers, 27(62.8%) respondents were mentioned uncertain income, 15 (34.9%) respondents were mentioned lack of benefits. 6 (14%) were said isolation, 12 (27.9%) and 19 (44.2%) respondents mentioned difficulty in finding gigs and lack of job security respectively.

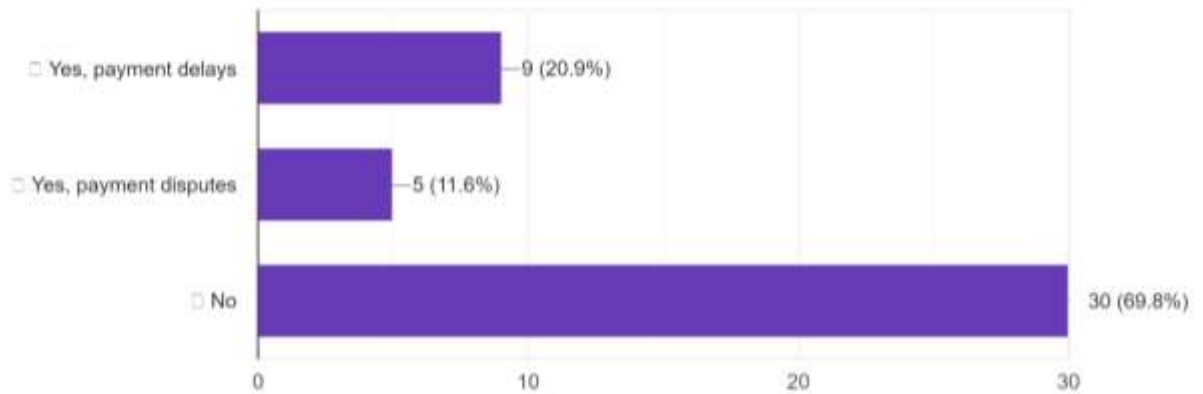


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Issues with payments:



09 (20.9%) respondents admitted with delay in payment, 05(11.6%) agreed with payment disputes and 30 (69.8%) denied any payment delays or payment disputes.

type of gig work*income Crosstabulation

			monthly income					Total
			below 10000	10000 to 15000	15001 to 25000	25001 to 35000	35001 to 50000	
type of gig work ^a	Transportation (ride service)	Count	0	3	1	2	0	6
		% within income	0.0%	33.3%	5.9%	18.2%	0.0%	
	food delivery	Count	1	3	3	4	0	11
		% within income	12.5%	33.3%	17.6%	36.4%	0.0%	
	courier service	Count	0	2	2	1	0	5
		% within income	0.0%	22.2%	11.8%	9.1%	0.0%	
	home service	Count	0	0	1	0	0	1
		% within income	0.0%	0.0%	5.9%	0.0%	0.0%	
	freelancing	Count	2	1	2	1	1	7
		% within income	25.0%	11.1%	11.8%	9.1%	33.3%	
	product selling	Count	2	0	1	0	1	4
		% within income	25.0%	0.0%	5.9%	0.0%	33.3%	
		Count	1	0	1	0	0	2



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	blog writer/content writer	% within income	12.5%	0.0%	5.9%	0.0%	0.0%	
	educational service	Count	1	0	4	1	0	6
		% within income	12.5%	0.0%	23.5%	9.1%	0.0%	
	Other	Count	1	0	2	2	1	6
		% within income	12.5%	0.0%	11.8%	18.2%	33.3%	
Total		Count	8	9	17	11	3	48

Percentages and totals are based on responses.

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Majority of respondents fall in the ₹15,001–₹25,000 income group (17 respondents), followed by ₹25,001–₹35,000 (11 respondents). Very few respondents (only 3) earn in the highest income category (₹35,001–₹50,000). This indicates that gig work is largely concentrated in low to middle income brackets. Food Delivery emerges as the most common gig work (11 respondents), especially, ₹25,001–₹35,000 (36.4%), ₹10,000–₹15,000 (33.3%), this suggests food delivery provides relatively stable mid-range earnings. Transportation (Ride Services) is concentrated in ₹10,000–₹15,000 (33.3%), ₹25,001–₹35,000 (18.2%) which indicates moderate earning potential but absence in higher income groups. Courier Services are mostly in lower to mid income ranges, ₹10,000–₹15,000 (22.2%), this suggests limited income growth in this category. Very few respondents fall in Higher Income Patterns (₹35,001–₹50,000) (only 3), and they are mainly engaged in Freelancing (33.3%), Product Selling (33.3%) and Other gigs (33.3%). This indicates that independent, skill-based or entrepreneurial gig work tends to yield higher income compared to platform-based jobs like delivery or transport.

The Kruskal–Wallis test was used to determine whether the level of satisfaction derived from gig work differs significantly across various monthly income groups and educational levels. This test was chosen due to the ordinal nature of the satisfaction variable and the presence of more than two independent groups.

Ranks			
	monthly income	N	Mean Rank
satisfaction derived with the gig work	below 10000	6	26.92
	10000 to 15000	9	18.72
	15001 to 25000	15	24.03
	25001 to 35000	11	18.77
	35001 to 50000	2	24.50
	Total		43



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Test Statistics ^{a,b}	
	satisfaction derived with the gig work
Kruskal-Wallis H	3.067
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.547
a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
b. Grouping Variable: monthly income	

H₀: There is no significant difference in the level of satisfaction derived from gig work across different monthly income groups.

H₁ : There is a significant difference in the level of satisfaction derived from gig work across different monthly income groups.

Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. Hence, There is no significant difference in the level of satisfaction derived from gig work across different monthly income groups. There is no evidence to suggest that satisfaction levels differ significantly based on a gig worker's monthly income. Therefore, how much a person earns per month does not appear to impact their satisfaction with gig work.

Ranks			
	level of education	N	Mean Rank
satisfaction derived with the gig work	no formal education	2	10.50
	secondary school	4	17.50
	higher secondary	14	19.64
	diploma/certificate	2	10.50
	Bachelor's degree	12	27.21
	Master's degree	8	25.00
	Ph.D. or equivalent	1	32.50
	Total	43	

Test Statistics ^{a,b}	
	satisfaction derived with the gig work
Kruskal-Wallis H	8.511
Df	6
Asymp. Sig.	.203
a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
b. Grouping Variable: level of education	

H₀: There is no significant difference in the level of satisfaction derived from gig work across different levels of education.

H₁ : There is a significant difference in the level of satisfaction derived from gig work across different levels of education.



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Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. Hence, There is no significant difference in the level of satisfaction derived from gig work across different levels of education. There is no evidence to suggest that satisfaction levels differ significantly based on a gig worker's education.

Conclusion:

The gig economy is a new type of fast-growing workforce that contributes more and more to the economy. The gig workers who want to live and work rather than work and live want to be their own boss and live a happy and healthy life than being caged into full-time employment. In some instances, individuals may struggle to find jobs due to a lack of education or skills, leading them to take on gig work. Many students also engage in gig work as part-time employees, viewing it as a valuable opportunity to earn while they learn. Additionally, factors such as urbanization, nuclear families, and dual-income households leave people with little time to shop for essential goods. With busy schedules and the absence of relatives to help with transportation, many may find it challenging to cook or attend to their daily needs. In these situations, gig platforms offer services tailored to their requirements. By providing these services, gig workers not only earn an income but also find fulfillment in contributing to society, which in turn respects their efforts.

From the study, it can be concluded that Gig work income is not uniform across types. Platform-based gigs (food delivery, transportation, courier) are associated with low to mid income levels. Skill-based and independent gigs (freelancing, product selling) show greater potential for higher income. The income distribution is positively skewed toward lower and middle ranges, with limited representation in higher income brackets. As per the study gig work is mainly male dominated with strong participation by females. Even though around 58% of respondents show positive satisfaction with the income, there is no significant difference in the level of satisfaction derived from gig work across different monthly income groups and different educational levels. As around 58% respondents show a tendency to continue gig work in the long run efforts should be made to solve the problems regarding uncertain income, lack of benefits, lack of job security and difficulty in finding gigs.

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