

Unravelling the Challenges Faced by Platform Gig Workers in Varanasi District, Uttar Pradesh

Shashi Shekhar Kumar

Assistant Professor

Department of Economics, Government College Bishrampur

Shailesh Singh

Assistant Professor

Department of Chemistry, Government College Bishrampur

ABSTRACT

This research paper made an attempt to investigate the multifaceted challenges confronted by platform workers particularly in accessing social security benefits. Utilizing a descriptive research design, a comprehensive understanding is sought through a qualitative approach involving interviews, surveys, and focus groups. A snowball sampling technique ensures the inclusion of diverse platforms and occupations, contributing to a nuanced exploration of the experiences of platform workers. Key findings reveal that 96% of respondents face obstacles due to their gig work status, with 86% noting limited availability of benefits for gig workers. Income instability in the gig economy poses a barrier for 90% of respondents in applying for SSB. While 74% find the application process understandable, 86% agree on the restricted availability of benefits. Notably, respondents report difficulties in accessing occupational benefits, followed by disability, retirement, health care, and injury benefits. These insights highlight critical issues and inform potential solutions for policymakers and stakeholders aiming to improve social security for gig workers.

KEY WORDS: GIG – Economy, Platform Workers, SSB, Disability, etc,

1. INTRODUCTION

The global digitalization process has surged quickly, leading to the reshaping of societies and introducing a new economic era that profoundly affects how we work and find employment. India's advantageous demographic structure and fast adoption of digital technologies do position it well to play a significant role in this economic transformation. The gig-platform economy is a central aspect of this shift, offering opportunities for flexible employment and entrepreneurship. This trend could potentially leverage India's strengths to drive economic growth and innovation (NITI Aayog, 2023). In India, which is still growing, the gig economy could be a huge opportunity if used well (Goenka, 2020). In January 2020, ASSOCHAM predicted that India's gig economy would experience a significant annual growth rate of 17%, reaching a total value of \$455 billion by 2023. The gig economy in India thrives largely without proper regulation, as platforms categorize these workers as 'contract workers,' depriving them of employee benefits such as minimum wages, overtime pay, annual leave, severance packages, pension contributions, employee provident fund (EPF) accounts, and anti-discrimination protections (Wage Indicator Foundation, 2020). NITI Aayog suggested expansion of social insurance programs, as well as leave, insurance and pension benefits, for contract workers and their families. The Code defines a self-employed worker under Article 2(35) of social insurance as "a person who performs work or enters a work arrangement and earns such activities outside the traditional employer-employee relationships." They can be divided into platform-based and non-platform employees. Platform workers are individuals whose income depends on online software or other digital platforms, such as Zomato, Swiggy, Amazon, Flipkart, Ola, Uber, etc. Non-platform gig workers usually manage personal accounts and earn money hourly wages when employed full-time or part-time in traditional industries, such as freelancers, seasonal workers, independent contractors, etc. In 2020, the Social Security Code was implemented to safeguard the rights of gig workers through the provision of social security safeguards. This code introduces nine fresh regulations that improve coverage and extend benefits to workers in both organized and unorganized sectors, applying uniformly across the four labor

codes (Kasturirangan, 2020). Although this legislation represents a positive move forward, it gives rise to several concerns. Notably, there exists no legal requirement or all-encompassing coverage for this Code. Furthermore, there is a lack of specified timelines or mechanisms to hold accountable those who need to adhere to its provisions. Sanjay Those, an advocate, characterizes the Code as "ambiguous, making grand assurances" (Shekhar, 2020). Around 77 Lakh workers are engaged in Gig economy in India. They are usually working without conventional employee-employer relationship, and having little access to social security benefits. They are denied social security benefits on the ground that they are not having formal contract of employment. It is in this background that the present paper examines the paramount duty of the incumbent government to protect its workers against certain risk who contribute to the growth of economy. The area for survey is selected purposively as the economy of Varanasi city is growing, that is, it is in developing phase so that there is a great chance of growth of Gig economy and that's why we could easily see the impact of social security on them. Varanasi has rural roots, people from rural areas comes to seek jobs. Due to the greater number of migrant workers, there is a great chance of growth of the Gig economy and so that the challenges faced by the workers in accessing social security benefit. Also, Varanasi is known for its rich food culture. so the growth of delivery agents will be significant here. That's why we can easily assess the challenges faced by these workers in context of social security benefit

2. OBJECTIVE

To identify the challenges faced by platform workers in access to social security in platform gig economy

3. METHODOLOGY

The study incorporates a descriptive research design to systematically investigate and describe the challenges faced by platform workers in Varanasi District. Utilize a qualitative approach to gather in-depth insights into their experiences. The respondents are selected randomly at their respective warehouses for Delivery worker and Courier agents and for ride hailing services respondents are selected randomly from airport, railway station, bus stops and famous tourist locations. A total of fifty samples were selected for the study. It uses a snowball sampling technique to select platform workers in Varanasi District who represent diverse platforms and occupations. Study Conducted semi-structured interviews with platform workers to delve into their personal experiences and challenges faced in accessing social security benefits and it also administer structured surveys to gather quantitative data on the prevalence and magnitude of identified challenges among a larger sample. The collected data were classified and tabulated in light of the objectives of the study. However, statistical methods like frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, correlation and regression were worked out for meaningful analysis and presentation of the data.

4. RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

SECTION A: Challenges encountered in accessing Social Security Benefits as a Platform worker in gig economy.

Every employee face problem at a certain level in their work and the intensity of problem varies with type of employer- employee relationships but in the case of gig economy it surmounts at high level. The workers of the gig economy encounter problems like income instability, job insecurity, lack of access to health services and others basic benefits that a worker of formal economy gets. It is very crucial to examine challenges faced by platform workers in accessing Social Security Benefits. For this several questions were asked to Platform worker using pre tested schedule with response categorized as agree or disagree, the research tries to accumulate them in appropriate manner.

Table 1. Challenges faced in accessing Social Security Benefits

Challenges you encountered in accessing Social Security Benefits as a Platform worker in gigeconomy?

Statements	Agree	Disagree
Lack of eligibility for assessing SSB due to gig worker status	48	2
Inconsistent or unpredictable income affecting benefit calculation	45	5
Difficulty in understanding the application process	12	38
Limited availability of benefits as a gig worker	43	7
Others	0	0

Source: Researchers own Calculation

Majority of respondents i.e., approx. 96 percent of total respondents agree with the statement “Lack of eligibility for assessing SSB due to gig worker status” while only 4 percent were disagreed. 90 percent of respondents were agreed with the statement “Inconsistent or unpredictable income affecting benefit calculation” while only 10 percent were disagreed from this. Majority of respondents disagreed with the statement “Difficulty in understanding the application process” and this denotes that most are educated and having good knowledge regard technology. Some of the respondents agreed with this statement they may be belongs to age group more than 45 years, therefore less updated regarding the technology caused problems to them in understanding application process. Eighty six percent of total respondents agreed with the statement “Limited availability of benefit as a gig worker” while only 14 percent denied the same.

SECTION B: Challenges encountered in accessing Social Security Benefits as a Platform worker in gig economy.

Have you faced challenges related to access of Social Security Benefits such as Health Care Benefit, Retirement Benefit, Occupational Benefit, Injury Benefit, Disability Benefit was categorized and the questions were asked to respondents regarding their access to those benefits. Respondent response are enumerated below:

Table 2. Challenges faced in accessing Social Security Benefits (SSB)

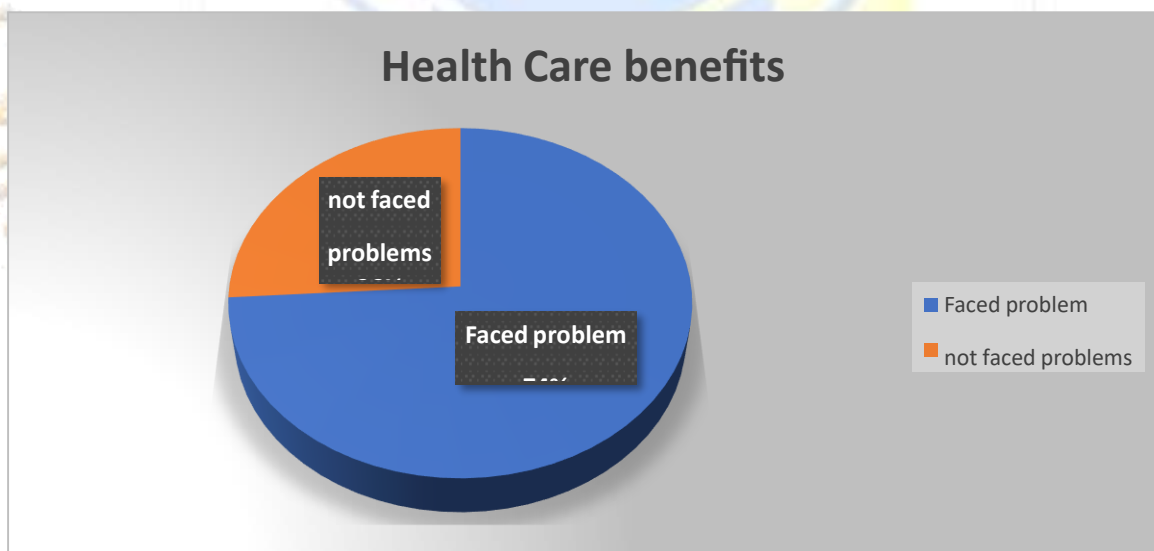
Have you faced challenges related to access of these?

SSB	Agree	Disagree
HealthCare Benefit	37	13
Retirement Benefit	38	12
Occupational Benefit	46	4
Injury Benefit	37	13
Disability Benefit	46	4

Source: Researchers own Calculation

Health Care Benefits

Majority of respondents faced challenges in accessing Health care Benefits. 74 percent of total respondent faced issues in accessing Health care benefits.

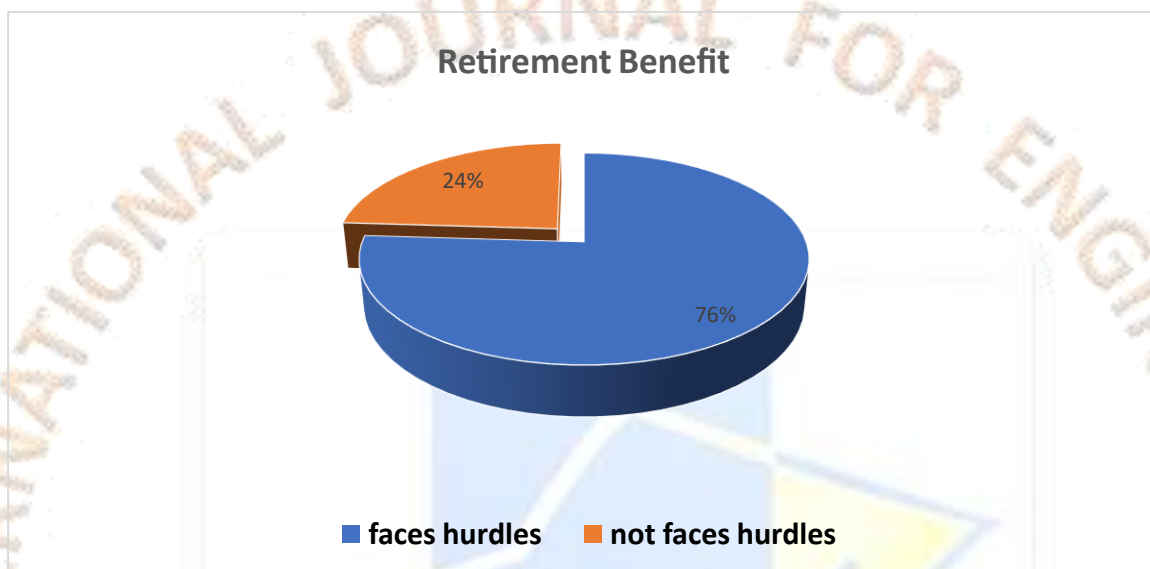


Source: Researchers own Calculation

Retirement Benefit

Retirement Benefit are a type of social insurance program provided by the government to support individuals after they retire from the workforce.

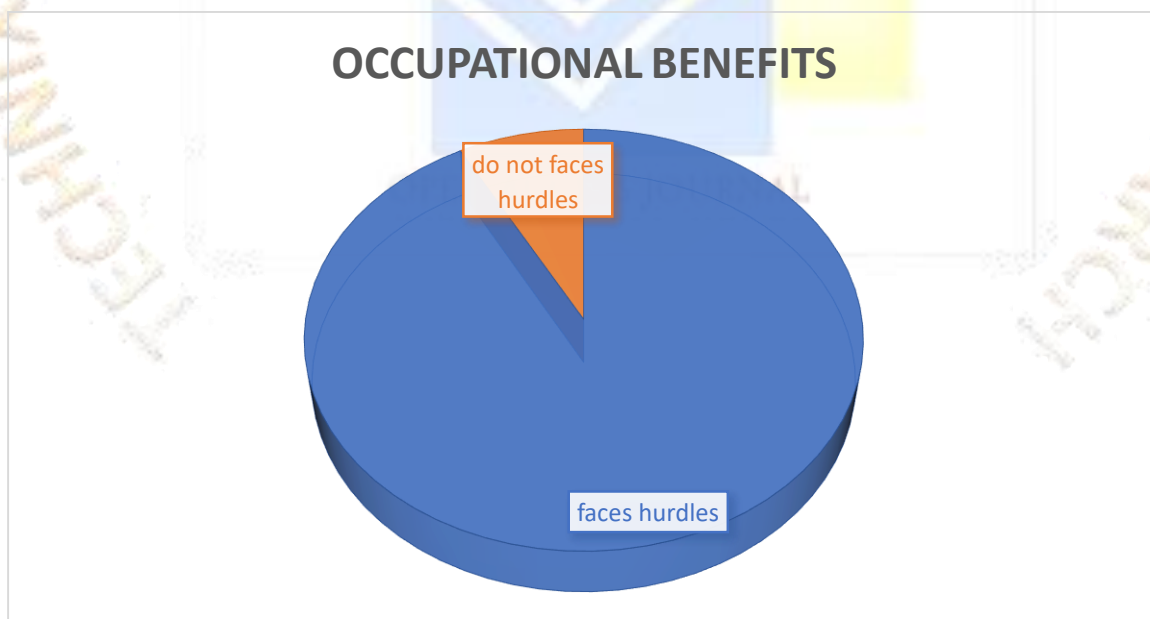
Majority of respondents faced challenges in accessing Retirement benefit. 76 percent of respondents faced problem in accessing retirement benefits while 24 percent do not face any issues.



Source: Researchers own Calculation

Occupational Benefit

Majority of respondents agreed that they faced challenges in accessing occupational benefits. Approx 92 percent of respondent faces it as a challenge while 8 percent doesn't. The respondents hurdles were displayed below:

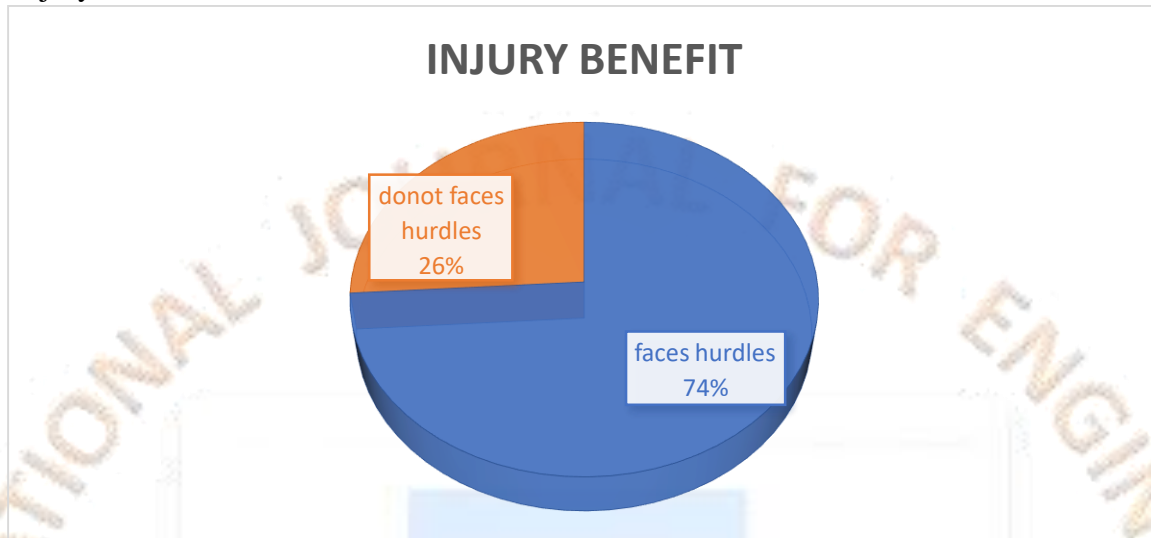


Source: Researchers own Calculation

Injury Benefits

Majority of respondents agreed that they face problem in accessing Social Security Benefits. 74 percent of total respondents agree that they face hurdles in accessing Social Security Benefit while 26 percent do not face the hurdles.

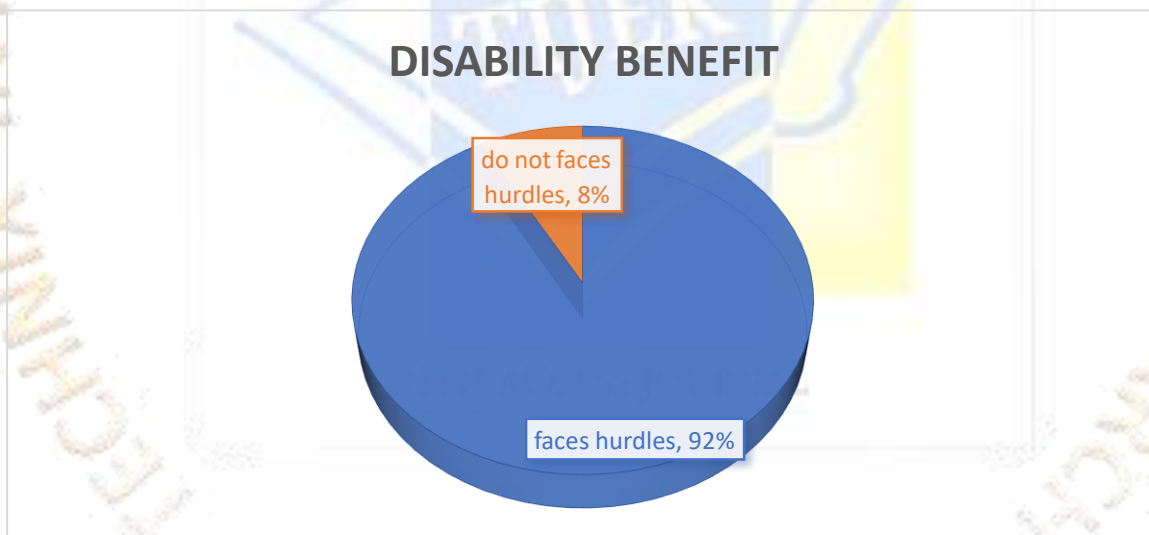
Figure 5.4 Injury Benefit Source: Researchers own Calculation



Source: Researchers own Calculation

Disability Benefit

Majority of respondents agreed that they faced challenges in accessing disability benefits. Approx 92 percent of respondent faces it as a challenge while 8 percent doesn't. The respondents' hurdles were displayed below:



Source: Researchers own Calculation

From the above it was found that majority of respondents faces hurdles in accessing social security benefits while some were not.

CONCLUSIONS

We examined the challenges faced by platform workers in accessing social security benefit. There are many challenges in it. 96 % of the respondent agreed that they faced problem in accessing SSB due to gig work status. 86% of the platform worker agreed that there is limited availability of benefits to gig worker. 90 percent of the respondent felt that the instability of income in gig economy create problem as it hampered them to apply for SSB due to income fluctuations. 74 percent of respondent has disagreed that they faced difficulty in understanding application process. 86 percent of the respondent has agreed that there is a limited availability of

benefits to the gig workers. Most of the respondent agreed that they faced problem in accessing occupational benefit followed by disability benefit, Retirement benefits health care benefit, injury benefit respectively.

REFERENCES

Goenka, V. (2020). Gig economy: The future of workforce. Retrieved November 2020, from <https://www.cnbctv18.com/economy/gig-economy-the-future-of-workforce-7360931.htm>

Aneja, U. & Zothan, M (2020). Worker Rights, Agency and Collective Bargaining: A look at digital platforms in India, South Africa, Myanmar and Online work. Tandem Research Blogs. Retrieved from: <https://tandemresearch.org/blog/gig-work-on-digital-platforms-in-the-global-south>

Kasturirangan, S. (2020). The Code on Social Security 2020: How will this new labour Code benefit employees-workers/2098269 <https://www.financialexpress.com/money/the-code-on-social-security-2020-how-will-this-new-labour-code-benefit-employees-workers/2098269>

Shekhar, D (2020). Why the Code on Social Security, 2020, misses the real issues gig workers face. Forbes India. Retrieved from: <https://www.forbesindia.com/article/take-one-big-story-of-the-day/why-the-code-on-social-security-2020-misses-the-real-issues-gig-workers-face/63457/1>

What is a gig worker?. (2020). Retrieved November 2020, from <https://www.gigeconomydata.org/basics/what-gig-worker>

Singh, M. (2020). India sets rules for commissions, surge pricing for Uber and Ola. Tech Crunch. Retrieved from: <https://techcrunch.com/2020/11/27/india-sets-rules-for-commissions-surge-pricing-for-uber-and-ola/>

Yogesh, M., & Lakshmi, T. K. (2022). A study on the challenges faced by Gig Economy workers in Indian Facility Management Industry with special reference to Chennai City. International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts, 10(5), 834-839.

Ruhela S., Prakash A. (2017). Factors that Contribute to Raising Awareness about Social Security Schemes among Self Help Group Members: An Empirical Study, Al-Barkaat Journal of Finance & Management 9(2), 124-133

ROBERT, G. A. (2021). Gig Economy: Prospects & Challenges under Social Security Code. International Journal of Law Management & Humanities, 4(3), 3863 - 3874. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1000/IJLMH.1190>

Stewart, A., & Standford, J. (2017). Regulating work in the gig economy: What are the options? The Economic and Labour Relations Review, 28(3), 420-437. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/103530461772246>