

An Economic Analysis of Gig Workers in the Healthcare Sector under Mukkom Health Block, Kozhikode District

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Abstract

The gig economy has an influence on transforming employment patterns across various industries, including healthcare. This paper conducts an economic analysis of gig workers in the healthcare sector, focusing on gig workers under the Mukkom health block. The study mainly focuses on the trends in employing gig workers and identifying challenges faced by workers.

Keywords: Gig workers, Health centers, Trends, Challenges

1. Introduction

The gig economy refers to work that is short-term, contract, or project-based, which is different from traditional full-time employment. This originated with the need for flexible job opportunities. Anything, including freelance jobs, is qualified as gig work, and it is defined based on the structure as temporary or part-time. Gig workers are usually building their careers around this structure with multiple projects or recurring gigs. Certain times, gig workers establish long-term relationships with the same companies by enjoying excellent financial stability.^[1]

Gig economy has grown exponentially over the past decades through the advancement in technology, flexibility, changes in workers preferences and economic conditions. The gig economy has also developed in the healthcare sector. The healthcare industry is undergoing a significant shift in its workforce dynamics with the emergence of gig workers playing a crucial role in combating staff retention and nurse turnover challenges.^[2] This paper tries to determine the trends in employing gig workers and the major challenges they face.

2. Review of literature

Various studies have been conducted on the emergence and existence of gig economy. (Lutkevich, B, 2022)^[3] in his paper states the gig economy as a free market system in which temporary positions are common and organizations hire independent workers for short-term commitments. It is a growing segment which brings economic benefits of productivity and employment (Charlton, E, 2021).^[4] The gig economy has also brought a significant change in the world of work and the investments and this will lead to a more robust and inclusive economic model. (Narayan, K, 2024).^[5]

Gig economy has also developed in the healthcare sectors. Healthcare industry is the most important and growing sector which needs qualified and skilled professionals and they have access to talented and

skilled locums to fulfill the workforce crisis. By utilising gig economy models in the healthcare sector organizations can hire professionals as per on-demand needs. It also reduces the hiring costs and saves more time (Jobizo.com, 2022).^[6](Newton, L, 2024) have also identifies the need and importance of adopting gig economic frameworks in the healthcare sector. It analyses the importance of gig workers in the healthcare sector as flexibility and scalability, enhanced patient care, bridge to permanent staffing, and cost-effectiveness.^[7]

3. Objectives

- To analyse the trends in employing gig workers in the healthcare sector under Mukkom health block, Kozhikode district.
- To identify challenges faced by gig workers in the healthcare sector under Mukkom health block, Kozhikode district.

4. Theoretical Framework

Insider-Outsider Theory: This theory examines the dynamics within labour markets where there are two main group of workers, insiders, and outsiders. Insiders are those who are currently employed and have job security. Outsiders are unemployed, underemployed, or marginally attached to labour markets and they do not have job security as insiders which relates to the gig workers. This theory examines how regular and gig workers interact with the labour market.

Labour Market Segmentation Theory: This theory explains that the labour market is divided into two segments primary and secondary, each with its own rules and characteristics. The labor market theory and the gig economic frame work are interconnected in labour economies and addresses how the labour market evolved and operates particularly with the rise of gig economy. The gig economy falls into the secondary segment where jobs have fewer benefits, less stability, and low pay scale compared to traditional employment.

Labour Process Theory: This theory is a framework for analysing how work is organized and controlled in capitalist economies originated from Marxist thought and focuses on dynamics between labour, management, and the capital. This theory highlights the inherent power imbalance between platform owners and gig workers. Here the platform becomes the workplace where social production processes occur and platforms manage these interactions by shaping how work is done. The theory argues that employers constantly seek ways to control the labor process where the gig economy utilizes technology for this purpose.

5. Methodology

Area of Study: The area chosen for the study is health centers under Mukkom health block in Kozhikode district. The study was conducted among gig workers in FHC Thiruvambady, CHC Mukkom, FHC Koodaranji, FHC Kodancheri, and FHC Kuruvattoor.

Source of Data: The study uses primary and secondary data. Personal interviews, telephonic interviews, and questionnaires were used to collect primary data. secondary data was collected from news articles, reports, books, and other publications available.

Sample Size: The total population under the study was 93 from the five health centers. With a confidence interval of 99% and a 3% margin of error, the sample needed was 89 or above. Thus, for this study, 90 samples were collected using a non-random sampling method, specifically convenience sampling, incorporating the participants who were readily available or willing to participate.

Method of Analysis: The analysis is done by using diagrammatic presentation, frequency and valid percent analysis. This study also uses correlation analysis and chi-square test like Pearson chi-square and likelihood ratio for a comprehensive study.

Period of Study: All the data were collected during the period 2024-2025.

6. Categories of Gig Workers in Health Centers

There are 16 categories of gig workers in health centers. They are:

RBSK Nurse, MLSP, Palliative Nurse, Pharmacist, Data Entry, Nursing Officer, Nursing Assistant, Physiotherapist, CDMC, Doctor, Lab Technician, PRO, Radiographer, Security, Driver, and Cleaning Staff.

These workers are appointed by the Hospital Management Committee (HMC), Local Self Government Department (LSGD), and National Health Mission (NHM) on contract basis. Their contract period varies from six months to one year after which they have to renew their contract to continue work. The working time of these workers also varies based on their contract.

7. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data for the study was collected using convenience sampling technique by collecting 90 samples. The respondents were classified into four age categories among which the highest number of respondents are from the 31 – 40 age group (47.8%). From the data, 88.9 % of respondents were females and 11.1% were males. It shows that health centers are dominated by female workers. The reason for female workers dominating is that most of the gig work opportunities in health centers are nursing related jobs including RBSK nurse and MLSP nurse where these jobs are done by female workers. This is because of cultural sensitivities or specific focus of these roles as families in rural areas feel more comfortable with female healthcare workers when dealing with sensitive health issues, maternal or child health related cases.

7.1 Monthly income of consumers

Table 7.1 Monthly incomes of consumers

Monthly Income	Frequency	Valid Percent
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Above Rs. 50,000	5	5.6
Below Rs. 10,000	8	8.9
Rs. 10,000 - Rs. 20,000	32	35.6
Rs. 20,000 - Rs. 30,000	42	46.7
Rs. 30,000 - Rs. 40,000	3	3.3
Total	90	100.0

Source: Primary data

Among the gig workers in health centers, doctors are paid the highest and cleaning staff, drivers, and security are paid less. Workers such as RBSK nurse, MLSP nurse, data entry, etc... are getting paid between 10,000 – 30,000 per month which is less compared to their work load. This creates difficulty for them to meet their expenses as most of the workers belong 31 to 40 age group and they have family responsibility and needs to cover. The gig workers are paid a low salary compared to the permanent staff. The main reason for this difference is that the gig workers are contract workers with no job security or power.

7.2 Working Hours Per Week

Table 7.2 Working Hours Per Week

Working Hours	Frequency	Valid Percent
11-20 hours	1	1.1
21-30 hours	6	6.7
31-40 hours	14	15.6
Less than 10 hours	12	13.3
More than 40 hours	57	63.3
Total	90	100.0

Source: Primary data

As the majority of workers are working more than 40 hours per week the salary they receive is really low compared to their work load. These workers would receive better pay rates in other permanent jobs. This low income compared to the work pressure is one of the important issues faced by the gig workers which adversely affects them.

7.3 Primary Reason for Engaging in Gig Work

Table 7.3 Primary Reason for Engaging in Gig Work

Reason	Frequency	Valid Percent
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Additional income	9	10.0
Flexibility and control over schedule	26	28.9
Lack of full-time employment opportunities	22	24.4
Pursuit of a passion or interest	33	36.7
Total	90	100.0

Source: Primary data

Table 7.3 shows that people join gig work because of different reasons among which pursuit of passion or interest is the main reason for workers engaging in gig work in the health centers. Gig works in health centers such as palliative nurses, MLSP and RBSK workers and other workers have also joined gig following their passion for such jobs. These workers may be or may not be satisfied with their salary but they might have satisfaction with their work. Only 9 respondents are working for additional income. Lack of full employment and flexible schedules also lead to joining gig jobs.

7.4 Workers' opinion on payment Structure

Table 7.4 Workers' opinion on payment Structure

Opinion	Frequency	Valid Percent
Does not have a strong opinion	9	10.0
Fair and adequate	11	12.2
Often inadequate	47	52.2
Sometimes fair, sometimes inadequate	23	25.6
Total	90	100.0

Source: Primary data

As most of the gig workers are working more than 40 hours per week, the 10000 to 20000 per month salary is really low compared to the work load and pressure. Thus, for majority of respondents it is often inadequate. The permanent workers are receiving better wages for these same works. The reason for low wages is that they are contract workers with limited bargaining power or support groups. There are also few workers receiving better wage rates comparing to their working hours and workloads. Some gig workers have only few working hours which is less than 10 hours per week. For such workers the salary they receive is fair considering the workload but it is not the same for others.

7.5 Worker Satisfaction on Earnings

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Satisfaction	Frequency	Valid Percent
Dissatisfied	33	36.7
Neutral	22	24.4
Satisfied	16	17.8
Very dissatisfied	15	16.7
Very satisfied	4	4.4
Total	90	100.0

Source: Primary data

The table 7.5 shows how well the workers are satisfied with their current earnings in the health sector. It is clear that 33 of the respondents are dissatisfied and 15 are fully dissatisfied. Only 4 workers are fully satisfied. Worker satisfaction is an important factor in any job. Here, most of the workers are not satisfied with their earnings. The main reason for the dissatisfaction is the low pay scale considering the work load and pressure. The gig workers are been working for hours with low wages. The low wages make it difficult for the workers to meet their needs and family expenses.

7.6 Experienced Financial Instability or Irregular Income

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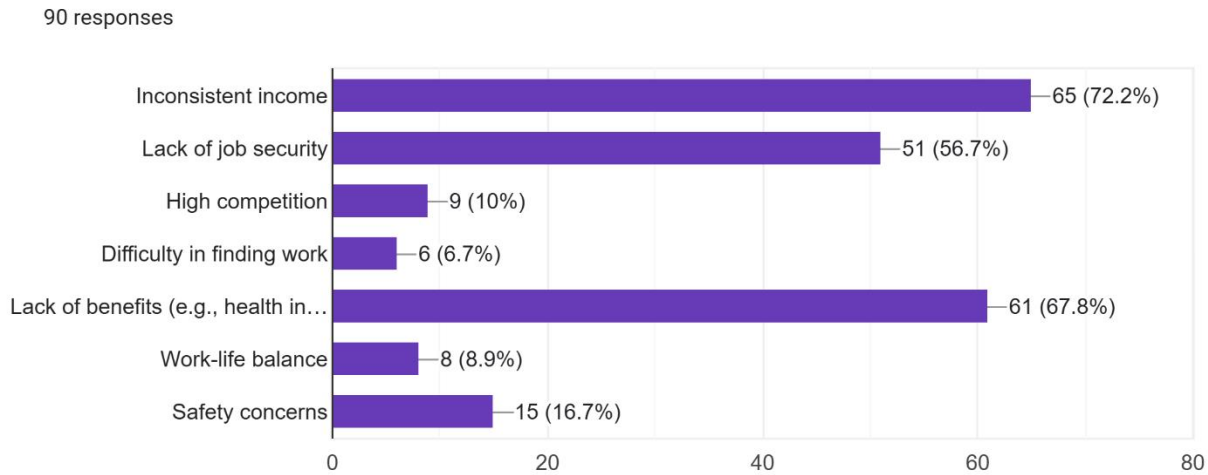
Responses	Frequency	Valid Percent
No	18	20.0
Yes	72	80.0
Total	90	100.0

Source: Primary data

The table 7.6 shows that 80 percent of workers experience financial instability or irregular income. This instability in income will adversely affect the gig workers and their dependents. Most of the gig jobs in health centers have low salaries and irregular payments. Only 20 percent of workers are getting regular income from gig work. For majority of respondents health center gig works are the major source of income and they are only receiving low income considering their work load which is not enough to meet their needs. Upon that the irregularity in receiving income increases their financial concerns and troubles. The workers who are not facing financial instability may be those receiving good salary packages or they may be having other source of income.

7.7 Main Challenges Faced in Health Sector Gig Work

Figure 7.1 Main Challenges Faced in Gig Work



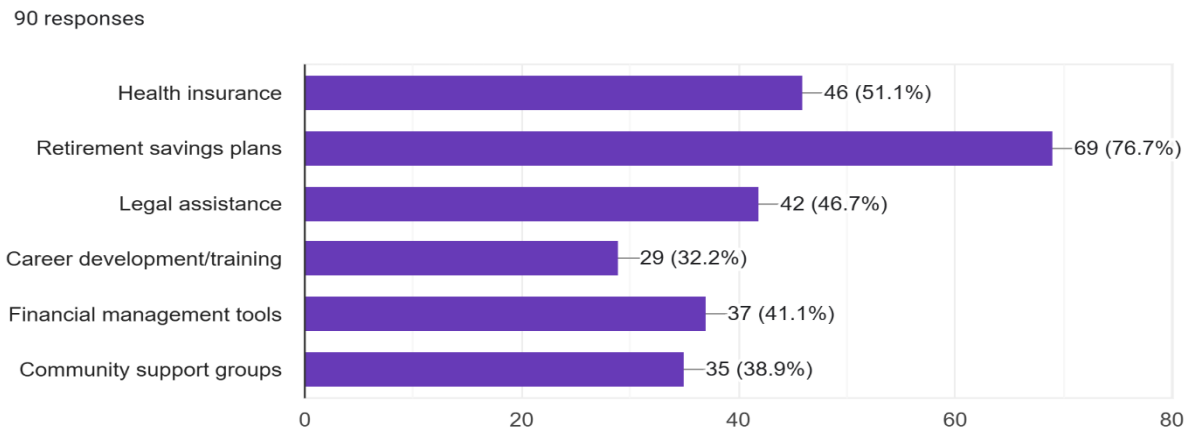
Source: Primary data

Figure 7.1 shows the various challenges faced by gig workers in the health sector. Workers are facing various types of challenges. The number of challenges also differs. Most of the workers choose for inconsistent income and lack of benefits like health insurance. The challenges of workers are different based on the work in health centers. When some respondents are only facing inconsistent income other workers are suffering from various challenges. These challenges call for a need to take action to help the workers and reduce their challenges.

Most important issue faced by the gig workers are inconsistent income and lack of allowances. The instability and irregularity in income affect the workers day to day life and it increase their stress levels. Lack of benefits or allowances also creates concerns in the workers. They are not receiving any health insurance, retirement saving plans or any other benefits like permanent workers. The reason for this is they are contract workers for a period of six months or till one year according to the contract. The gig workers also lack job security as their work is only for the contract period and they have to renew their contract every year to continue their work. But this does not provide a stable or secure job as any time they can be fired. All these major issues leads the gig workers to concerns.

7.8 Support or Resource Lacking in Health Centers

Figure 7.2 Support or Resource Lacking



Source: Primary data

Figure 7.2 shows the different resources or support systems the workers lack in health centers. Workers lack different resources based on their work. Most of the workers have chosen for a lack of retirement saving plans and health insurance. Workers also struggle with not having any legal assistance, financial management tools, community support groups, and other forms of support. It shows that the health sector gig jobs employ workers in contract or temporary positions but the workers do not enjoy benefits like permanent staff.

The gig workers have no job security and no retirement plans as they are contract based. When compared with the permanent staffs, some gig workers may be working more hours with less income. Other than that, they lack all kind of resources or support the permanent staffs are enjoying. When the gig workers can have a access to community support groups like workers union it helps them raise voice to their rights.

7.9 Faced Difficulty in Managing Work-Life Balance

Table 3.7 Faced Difficulty in Managing Work-Life Balance

Response	Frequency	Valid Percent
No	20	22.2
Sometimes	55	61.1
Yes	15	16.7
Total	90	100.0

Source: Primary data

Table 3.7 analyses whether the workers faced difficulty in managing their work-life balance while doing gig work. From the data, it is clear that the majority of workers are facing difficulty. It shows that work

in the health sector also affects gig worker's work-life balance. Overwork and low levels of income are the major factors leading to work-life balance issues.

Most of the gig workers are working more than 40 hours per week and are only paid very less compared to the work load. This makes difficult for the workers to maintain their work life balance.

7.10 Experiencing Burnout or Stressed from Gig Work

Table 3.8 Experience Burnout or Stressed

Response	Frequency	Valid Percent
Often	12	13.3
Rarely	11	12.2
Sometimes	47	52.2
Very Often	10	11.1
Very Rarely	10	11.1
Total	90	100.0

Source: Primary data

Table 3.8 shows that the majority of workers are facing burnout or stress from gig work in the health centers. It may be because of issues in maintaining work-life balance for the workers due to high workload. Workers also experience stress because of unstable or low income, lack of job security, and lack of any other resources or support systems.

Majority of the gig workers in the health center are working more than 40 hours per week which increase their stress level in the workspace. Other than that, the low pay rate makes it difficult for them to handle their needs. It leads them to financial instability and increases their stress level. The stress level of the gig workers can be reduced by increasing their pay rates which help them in maintaining their financial needs more efficiently.

7.11 Changes or Improvements Needed in Gig Work Opportunities

Table 7.9 Changes or Improvements Needed

Improvements Needed	Frequency	Valid Percent
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Better pay rates	59	65.6
Improved worker benefits	25	27.8
More consistent work opportunities	5	5.6
More flexible scheduling options	1	1.1
Total	90	100.0

Source: Primary data

Table 7.9 shows what changes or improvements the gig workers would like to see in the gig work opportunities in the health sector. Most of the workers opt for better pay rates. This makes it clear that the main problems faced by the workers are low pay rates and lack of benefits. Thus, improved pay rates and worker benefits will positively affect gig workers.

The majority of gig workers in health centers are working more than 40 hours per week with a salary below 20000 per month, which is low compared to their workload, and it creates difficulty for the workers to maintain their financial needs and increases their stress. Thus, the most important improvement needed in health centers is to provide a better salary for the workers. Workers also look forward to improved workers benefits like insurance and job security, which provide them with stable work opportunities. But as contract workers, the gig workers do not receive retirement pensions or job security as their work period is only for the contract period, and they have to renew their contract every year to continue their work in the health centers.

7.12 Increase or Decrease in Availability of Gig Works

Table 7.10 Increase or Decrease in Job Availability

Response	Frequency	Valid Percent
Decrease	25	27.8
Increase	65	72.2
Total	90	100.0

Source: Primary data

Table 7.10 shows whether the workers have observed an increase or decrease in the availability of gig jobs in the past years. From the data, it is clear that there is an increase in the availability of gig jobs in health centers. It shows the progress of the gig economy in the health sector. The health centers are becoming more aware of employing gig workers on a contract basis and thus the number of gig work positions is increasing. The improved knowledge of benefits of employing gig workers has increased the health center job opportunities, and the lack of full-time employment opportunities and passion for work has attracted more workers to gig jobs.

Employing gig workers on a contract basis benefits the employers as they need only to pay low salary compared to the permanent workers and they do not need to provide any workers' benefits. It also enables them to select efficient workers based on needs and do not need to employ a single worker for a long time. From the employee's side, even though it provides no worker benefits and have only a low salary compared to other it provides the workers to work on a contract basis, which allows them the opportunity to renew them and to move towards other works after the contract period if the work environment is not good. It is also a benefit for the workers who do not get full-time employment opportunities.

7.13 The correlation coefficient between "How many hours do you typically work per week" and "Do you find it difficult to manage your work-life balance while doing gig work"

Table 7.11 Correlation Between Working Hours and Work-life Balance

	<i>Column 1</i>	<i>Column 2</i>
Column 1	1	
Column 2	0.99601	1

- **Column 1 (Working hours per week):**This represents how many hours gig workers work per week (e.g. More than 40 hours, 31-40 hours, etc.).
- **Column 2 (Difficulty in managing work-life balance):** This represents whether the workers face difficulty in managing their work-life balance while doing gig work (e.g. Yes, No, Sometimes)

The correlation coefficient between these two columns is **0.99601** which indicates a **high positive correlation**.

This indicates that the number of hours worked per week and the difficulty in managing work-life balance are extremely closely related. When the working hours increase difficulty in work-life balance also increases and when working hours decrease, difficulty also decreases. Most of the gig workers are working more than 40 hours per week which makes it difficult for them to manage their work-life balance.

7.14 Payment Delays V/S Burnout/Stress Frequency in Gig Work

Hypothesis:

- Null Hypothesis (H₀): No association exists between payment delays and burnout/stress frequency in gig work.
- Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): An association exists between payment delays and burnout/stress frequency in gig work.

Table 7.12a Payment Delay and Stress Crosstabulation

How often do you experience a delay in payments for your work? * How often do you experience burnout or stress from gig work in the health sector? Crosstabulation

Count		How often do you experience burnout or stress from gig work in the health sector?					Total
		Oft en	Rar ely	So met ime s	Ver y Oft en	Ver y Rar ely	
How often do you experience a delay in payments for your work?	Oft en	6	3	10	0	1	20
	Rar ely	1	3	2	0	2	8
	Som etim es	2	2	29	1	4	38
	Ver y Oft en	3	2	5	9	1	20
	Ver y Rar ely	0	1	1	0	2	4
Total		12	11	47	10	10	90

Table 7.12b Payment Delay and Stress Result

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	56.692 ^a	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	49.082	16	.000
N of Valid Cases	90		

a. Pearson Chi-Square:

- χ^2 value: 56.692, with 16 degrees of freedom (df).
- p-value: .000.
- This indicates there is a significant association between variables.

b. Likelihood Ratio:

- χ^2 : 49.082
- p-value: .000.
- This also indicates there is a significant association between these variables.

The Pearson Chi-Square value is **56.692**, with **16 degrees of freedom** and a **p-value of 0.000**.

Since $p < 0.05$, H_0 is rejected and accepted H_1 . Thus, conclude that there is a **significant association** between the frequency of experiencing delays in payments and the frequency of experiencing burnout or stress.

4.1 Findings

Objective 1: To find the trends in employing gig workers in health centers under the Mukkom health block

- The gig economy in health centers includes 16 categories of gig jobs among them the highest openings is for MLSP workers based on the number of sub centers under each health block and most of the gig works in health centers are nursing related jobs.
- There is a huge salary difference between gig workers and permanent staff in the health centers. Gig workers do not receive any kind of allowances enjoyed by permanent workers.
- Age group 31-40 years dominates the workforce with 47.8% respondents and most of the workers belong to 18-40 age group because most of the health center gig jobs are nursing related and the age limit for such jobs belong to this group.
- Females (88.9%) significantly outnumber males in this sector because as most of the gig jobs are nursing related like MLSP, RBSK, and it hires female workers.
- The predominant educational qualification is graduation (46.7%), followed by diploma holders. It is because most of the gig jobs like nursing, doctors, lab technicians etc..., needs basic degree and knowledge.
- Most workers earn between ₹10,000 - ₹30,000 per month which is very low compared to their working hours. Only a few workers like doctors are receiving income more than ₹50,000.
- A significant portion (66.7%) of workers saves less than 10% of their income as their income is very low which even make it difficult for them to meet their needs.
- The majority of workers (88.9%) rely on gig work as their main source of income. Thus, the low-income receiving from gig works creates difficulty for the workers to meet their financial needs.
- A large percentage (63.3%) work more than 40 hours per week.
- Primary reason for joining gig work in health centers is pursuit of passion or interest for 36.7% workers.

Objective 2: To find the challenges faced by gig workers in health centers under Mukkom health block.

Gig workers in health centers faces various kinds of challenges. They face issues related to income, job satisfaction, work-life balance and other issues.

- Inconsistent income and lack of benefits are the most cited challenges for the gig workers in health centers. Income received by the workers are very less compared to their work load. Most workers work more than 40 hours per week but only receive income less than 20,000 per month.
- Financial instability affects 80% of the workers. This has a significant impact on the saving and investment habits of the workers. It also increases their stress level and leads to burnout.
- Many workers (61.1%) struggle with their work-life balance. With low level of income and large working hours.
- Majority of workers are experiencing burnout or stressed in their works with irregular or low income.
- Over 52% feel the payment structure is often inadequate. Only 17.8% express satisfaction with their earnings. Most of the workers are also experiencing payment delay which adversely affect them. These creates demand for better pay rates and improved worker benefits from the respondents.
- Only 46.7% agree that opportunities for professional development exist in health center gig jobs. 67.8% are looking for full-time employment, suggesting dissatisfaction or instability in gig work.
- Only 21.1% workers have access to any support systems. The rest 78.9% workers do not have. Access to support systems like workers union helps to workers to have a voice
- 72.2% of respondents report an increase in gig job availability for gig works in health centers. However, opinions on long-term career advancement are mixed, with 33.3% disagreeing and an equal percentage neutral.

4.2 Recommendations

- 65.6% of workers call for better pay rates as a primary improvement needed. Thus, the most important need for the gig workers in health centers are a better pay rates and improved workers benefits considering their workload.
- Ensure stability in income payment and reduce irregularity in payment system.
- Help in reducing work-life balance issues of the workers by ensuring more flexibility in works.
- Provide mental health support to the workers to reduce their stress or burnout in work.
- Start initiatives to provide trainings and skill development programmes for the gig workers to enhance their employability and thereby benefiting the health centers.
- Create support systems for the gig workers such as cooperatives or unions to support the workers during needs.
- Encourage the gig workers to expand their gig work services to new fields or multiple platforms to increase their income or earning capacity.
- Make the workers efficient to effectively manage their financial activities and future plans by providing financial literacy.

4.3 Conclusion

Gig economy in health centers denote the improved use of temporary/contract workers in health centers. Employing gig workers benefits both workers and employers. The health sector gig works performs differently than other gig work platforms. This study finds out the existence and development of gig economy in health centers by focusing on five health centers and find out various gig work posts in health centers. The most important challenges faced by the gig workers are inconsistent income or lack of workers benefits. The health workers are working more than 40 hours per week but receiving only income very less compared to the work load. Thus, the most needed improvement in health centers are better pay rates for the gig workers considering their workload. Even though there are challenges more people are getting attracted to gig works may be because of lack of full-time employment opportunities or due to other benefits of gig work.

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