

The Impact of Work–Life Balance on Job Satisfaction among GIG Workers: A Systematic Literature Review.

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ABSTRACT

Background: Gig economy has shifted working relationships - particularly via digital platforms such as Uber, Upwork, Deliveroo and Fiverr. While gig work is flexible and independent, there are concerns raised by researchers that the experience of gig work could involve income instability, algorithmic control, a distinction between work and leisure, and poor mental health, which may affect the health of workers and their satisfaction.

Research Question: What are the past, empirical and theoretical studies on the work–life balance and job satisfaction of platform-based gig workers, and what are the gaps, inconsistencies and determinants?

Methodology: The method followed in this systematic literature review was the Antecedents–Decisions–Outcomes (ADO) framework, which involved synthesizing and organizing the literature that was found regarding work–life balance and job satisfaction of gig workers. The review was performed with the methodology SPAR-4-SLR and the report followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. The supplementary search was conducted in the databases: Literature published between 2016 and 2026 from Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, Taylor & Francis, SpringerLink, Wiley Online Library, Sage Journals and Google Scholar.

Key Findings: Eight themes emerged: flexibility-driven WLB; autonomy and intrinsic motivation strengthening JS; income instability threatening psychological well-being; algorithmic governance leading to technostress and power inequality; burnout due to increased digital surveillance; gendered precarity; occupational insecurity decreasing satisfaction; and psychological well-being as a mediator. The theoretical framework that are most supported within this finding includes the Job Demands–Resources, Self-Determination Theory, Boundary Theory and Spillover Theory.

Implications for research: Future research should integrate JD-R with SDT and integrate longitudinal studies with cross-cultural and gender-balanced designs or samples, particularly on emerging platforms that are based on AI tools, especially in developing economies.

Practical implications: Platform managers to create algorithms, transparency of compensation, prediction tools, mental health programs, and sustainable HR practices that are humane.. Policymakers need to apply the same principles to labor protections in nontraditional jobs as in traditional jobs.

Originality/value: This review is a novel combination of WLB and JS in the gig economy, which spans the various theoretical lines and provides a clear research agenda for future work....

Keywords: gig workers, job satisfaction, work–life balance, JD-R model, algorithmic management, gig economy, platform work, psychological well-being...

INTRODUCTION

Gig economy is one of the most prominent shifts in work in the 21st century. Gig work refers to short-term contracts, project-based tasks, that are delivered via a digital platform and involve a variety of transport, food delivery, freelance knowledge work and creative services that link independent contractors with end users through algorithmically managed marketplaces (Hatos et al., 2025). Because of this development, it is worthy of

significant scholarly attention, as it is a departure from traditional notions of employer/employee relations, job security, and professional versus personal boundaries (Tan et al., 2021).

It's an astonishing development in the gig economy that is taking place in the world. The global gig economy market was estimated at USD 455 billion in 2023 and is projected to reach USD 2.1 trillion by 2030 (Hatos et al., 2025). The number of workers engaged in gig work is estimated to be 154–435 million or 4.4% – 12% of the total global labour

force (Hoinaru, 2025). The rate of gig activities has seen a significant increase in the United States, with about 36% of the workforce participating in gigs (Katz & Krueger, 2016). Platform workers were exposed to severe health threats due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and at the same time, the demand for delivery and online freelance services has been growing (Nuttah et al., 2023). Subsequent research by Rani and Dhir (2020) reveals that the transportation and delivery platforms were at the forefront of providing critical services to consumers during the lockdowns, even without access to personal protective equipment or paid sick leave.

Gig workers come in three analytically different types: app-work (such as Uber or Deliveroo drivers), crowdwork (such as Amazon Mechanical Turk or Upwork), and capital platform work (Duggan et al., 2019). Algorithmic management is a key feature in all of these categories as "the large-scale collection and use of data on the platform to develop and improve learning algorithms used to perform coordination and control functions that were previously performed by managers" (Benlian et al., 2022). This digital orchestration is both efficient and a new form of surveillance, opacity and asymmetric power relationships that make the lived work experience more complex.

The two constructs that have been prevalent in studies of employee well-being are work–life balance and job satisfaction. Greenhaus and Allen (2007) define WLB as "the degree to which an individual's effectiveness and satisfaction in work and family role are congruent with his/her life role priorities," highlighting both the time-equilibrium and psychological satisfaction aspects of balance (Marzec & Szczudlińska-Kanoś, 2023). Job satisfaction, on the other hand, has been classically defined by Locke as "a pleasant or positive emotional state that arises from the evaluation of one's job or job experiences" and has been said to have an affective and cognitive component (Saari & Judge, 2004). These constructs are especially relevant for gig workers, as they work outside of the traditional organisational structures which place HR protections on the worker, onto the gig worker.

Although, there is a growing interest in the field, the existing literature on WLB and JS for gig workers is scarce and fragmented. Empirical research is focused either on the positive aspect of flexibility (Berger et al., 2019) or on the negative aspect of precarity (Shettepanavar & Rudagi, 2025), seldom combining the two. Moreover, the spread of different platforms to different parts of the world makes generalisation an issue, as perceptions of work, regulation and institutions differ significantly across different cultures and geographical regions. Previous studies such as Mathew and Sajoy's TCCM analysis of gig-economy quality of work life (Mathew & P.B, 2026) and Jegadeeswari and Nair's study in the digital platforms (S & Nair, 2025) serve as good starting points, but they fail to provide an integrative WLB–JS framework supported by thematic synthesis.

The purpose of the present systematic literature review is to: (i) explore and examine the relationship between WLB and JS among gig workers; (ii) identify the key

determinants of WLB in the gig economy; (iii) analyse factors that influence JS among platform-based workers; (iv) synthesise empirical findings and theoretical perspectives; (v) identify inconsistencies and gaps; and (vi) chart a future research agenda.

The following are research questions that guide this review:

RQ1: How are WLB and JS related to gig workers?

RQ2: What are the key factors that affect WLB of platform-based workers?

RQ3: How are factors influencing JS different for gig workers from different platforms and geographies?

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides the theoretical and conceptual basis; The methodology used in conducting the reviews is detailed in Section 3. The findings are summarized in Section 4 within an Antecedents–Decisions–Outcomes (ADO) framework, which means that the antecedents that affect work–life balance and job satisfaction, the decision-making process (work–life balance), and the outcomes are condensed. Thematic findings are given in Section 4, the major patterns from the literature are discussed in Section 5, and gaps for further research are identified in Section 6, which is followed by future research directions in Section 7 and a conclusion of the review in Section 8.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION

THE GIG ECONOMY AS AN DISTINCT EMPLOYMENT FORMULA

The gig economy is a three-tiered labour market that includes workers, platforms (which are frequently algorithmically mediated intermediaries), and consumers (Hoinaru, 2025). It is unique from the traditional 9-to-5 arrangement in many ways, including a lack of formal employer-employee relationships, payment-per-task, and on-demand task allocation. Digitalisation has reduced barriers to entry, provided newfound scheduling freedom, but also created conditions of precarity such as income volatility, lack of social protection, and constant connectivity to digital (Tan et al., 2021). This phenomenon of gig economy is marked by "a dualisation of anti-power between workers and non-employers that can result in precarious work, fewer free workers and shadow corporations" (Hoinaru, 2025).

THEORITICAL LENSES

This review is based on four interwoven theoretical frameworks:

JOBS DEMAND - RESOURCE MODEL

According to the JD-R model, all occupations consist of job demands (physical, psychological, social, or organisational demands that need to be sustained to complete the work) and job resources (physical, psychological, social, or organisational resources that can aid in goal achievement, alleviate job demands, and foster growth) (Demerouti & Bakker, 2022). The model suggests a dual pathway – demands inducing strain and burnout in a health-impairment process, and resources inducing engagement and well-being through a

motivational process. The aspects of demands and resources that are relevant to gig work are the algorithmic surveillance, the dynamic prices, customer rating of performances, and isolation of gig workers, on the one hand, and autonomy in tasks, flexible scheduling, and information provided by the platform, on the other hand (Tara & Iqbal, 2023). In the gig context, Parman and colleagues (2025) empirically validated the JD-R heuristic in the context of low work intensity, stable gig roles, and strong technological support, which further amplify the effectiveness of WLB initiatives among gig workers in Indonesia.

BOUNDARY THEORY AND WORK/FAMILY BORDER THEORY

For Boundary Theory, the process by which people cognitively mark and navigate transitions between spheres of their lives (e.g., work and home) (Basile & Beauregard, 2014). The Work/Family Border Theory is closely related, and describes people as "border-crossers" who need to maintain a balance between domains, which in turn relies on the management of domain boundaries (Clark, 2000). The physical and temporal distinction between work and leisure is very fluid for gig workers who work from home via smartphone and laptop. According to Kreiner and Joshi (2019), "teleworkers are frequently cited as an example of people who frequently bring work to their home. As algorithms impose more integration on gig workers, though, it can also be oppressive (when the algorithm is the one pushing for integration, that is) or liberating (when the worker chooses to integrate, on his or her own terms). The authors of Allen et al. (2023) argue that boundary preferences are gender and culturally dependent and that this should result in culturally responsive design of WLB interventions.

SPILLOVER THEORY

Spillover Theory suggests that experiences, emotions, and behaviours within one role affect another role and have positive or negative cross-domain effects (Wayne et al., 2016). Positive spillover refers to the enhancement of personal life by work, negative spillover is the depletion of personal resources by work or the creation of conflict. Wayne et al. (2016) employed lagged multilevel modelling to show that "lower work scheduling autonomy was associated with a stronger negative indirect effect from cognitive work–family conflict to supervisor assessments of employee engagement via emotional exhaustion. When the intensification of the work dimension of algorithmic management outweighs the others, the lack of clear temporal limits can give rise to spillover effects that may be strong and asymmetrically negative for gig workers.

SELF- DETERMINATION THEORY

SDT proposes that there are three psychological needs that are intrinsic to human nature - autonomy, competence and relatedness which when fulfilled produce intrinsic motivation and wellbeing, and when frustrated, produce disengagement and ill-being. Zaman et al. (2020) demonstrated that self-determination mediates the relationship between gig worker's motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic) and gig worker's joy in gig work in the gig

context. Gig work is intrinsic provides opportunities for autonomy (decision-making, job selection), but it lacks opportunities for relatedness (being alone at work) and competence frustration (being continually at risk of being outcompeted by an algorithm).

CONCEPTUAL LINKAGE BETWEEN WORK LIFE BALANCE AND JOB SATISFACTION

Several interacting factors mediate conceptual linkages between WLB and JS in gig work: As argued by Berger et al. (2019), flexibility is considered the main advantage of GWS, as it enables workers to schedule their working time to fit around personal commitments. In some cases flexibility is only apparent when the platform sets availability guidelines or when workers engage in self-exploitation to make up for the lack of remuneration for individual tasks (Tan et al., 2021). The concept of intrinsic motivation and JS under SDT is rooted in the concept of autonomy, which relates to fulfilling basic psychological needs (Zaman et al., 2020). However, algorithmic management may deplete true autonomy by limiting choices to within the bounds of what platforms allow (Duggan et al., 2019). Income insecurity underlies chronic financial stress which limits workers' capacity to invest in non-work areas, with negative spillovers (Wayne et al., 2016). The algorithmic management has the potential to be a structural influence that affects WLB and JS outcomes. Some workers describe the algorithm as "lenient" and the payment system as "transparent" (Kervola et al., 2024), while others feel the algorithm is "very intense" and the payment system is "too volatile" and/or causes fear of deactivation (Oloyele et al., 2026). Algorithmic intensification causes work stress and burnout as boundaries are blurred and satisfaction is impacted (Lang et al., 2023). The paradox of "high job quality evaluations despite known drawbacks" (Švagan, 2023) indicates that WLB and JS are considered as interconnected but different constructs.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The Antecedents–Decisions–Outcomes (ADO) framework is used to structure and collate the literature on work–life balance and job satisfaction of gig workers. In this system, variables such as flexibility, autonomy, algorithmic management, income instability, work stress, burnout, gender and occupational security are considered antecedents. The decision aspect is represented by work–life balance, which indicates gig workers' ability to balance work and personal needs. Consequences include job satisfaction, psychological health, productivity, work engagement, intent to leave, and quality of life. The ADO framework offers a structure to synthesise and interpret the empirical evidence and to identify research directions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

REVIEW PROTOCOL

The literature review was conducted in a systematic manner and is synthesized based on the Antecedents–Decisions–Outcomes (ADO) framework suggested for literature reviews in the context of management and business. The ADO framework can be used to systematically organize the literature into categories of antecedents that relate to work–life balance, the decision-

making process that workers use to balance work and personal life, and the outcomes of that process, like job satisfaction and psychological well-being. The methodology adopted was the SPAR-4-SLR approach. Reporting was done utilizing the guidelines of PRISMA 2020 for transparency and methodological rigor.

To ensure transparent and standardized reporting, the review followed the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines (Page et al., 2021). The reporting guideline PRISMA was followed to report the identification, screening, eligibility assessment and inclusion of studies. To reduce bias, transparency and enhance reproducibility of the review, a review protocol was developed prior to searching the literature.

SEARCH STRATEGY

An iterative semi-structured Boolean search strategy was developed, using PICO scoping: Population (gig workers/platform workers/freelance workers), Exposure (gig work characteristics) and Outcome.. The general search term used was: (("gig worker" OR "platform worker" OR "freelancer" OR "on-demand worker") OR "independent contractor") OR "crowdworker") OR "ride-hail driver" OR "delivery rider") AND "work–life balance" OR "work–family balance" OR "life satisfaction" OR "occupational balance") AND "job satisfaction" OR "employee satisfaction" OR "job engagement" OR "work engagement" OR "well-being" OR "burnout" OR "occupational stress")) Database-specific syntax (e.g. title/abstract, MeSH terms) was adapted.

DATABASE USED

To get the latest scholarship, six core databases of subscriptions were searched from January to April 2026.

Scopus

Web of Science

Core Collection

ScienceDirect

Emerald Insight

Taylor & Francis Online

Springer Link For further retrieval and for citation tracking additional searches were done in Wiley Online Library,

Sage Journals and Google Scholar.

INCLUSION CRITERIA

Peer-reviewed articles published in English from 2016-2026. Empirical (quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods) studies or conceptual or theoretical reviews related to gig workers or platform-based work. Research that looks at at least one of the following: WLB, job satisfaction, work stress, burnout, psychological well-being, autonomy, flexibility, algorithmic management, or income instability in the gig context. Studies published in journals that are Scopus- or Web of Science-indexed, or other recognised journal index.

EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Conference proceedings, editorials, book chapters (without doi) and book reviews. Theses and dissertations (where no peer-reviewed alternative was available, except as supplementary). Predatory or non-indexed journals. Research not in English. Studies done before 2016 or after 2026. Research on labour beyond the gig/economy framework.

SCREENING PROCESS

All records found in the selected databases were downloaded into EndNote X9 for reference management and to remove any duplicate records. The screening process was conducted in four stages following the suggestions of the PRISMA 2020: identification of records, screening of title and abstract, full-text eligibility screening, and final screening for thematic synthesis. The two reviewers screened the studies independently according to the pre-planned inclusion/exclusion criteria. Differences on questions were worked out by discussion until agreement was reached. The entire process of study selection is clearly shown in the PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram (Figure 1).

PRISMA FLOW DESCRIPTION

A systematic search found 4,812 records in the chosen electronic databases. All duplicate studies were removed, and the remaining studies were screened using the predefined eligibility criteria based on their titles and abstracts. A total of 16 articles were retrieved for full-text assessment and articles that were not relevant to the inclusion criteria, but were excluded, were documented with their reasons. The eligible studies were then subjected to methodological quality assessment with the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT). The last group of excellent studies was incorporated into the thematic synthesis. The entire study selection process is shown in the PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram (Figure 1).

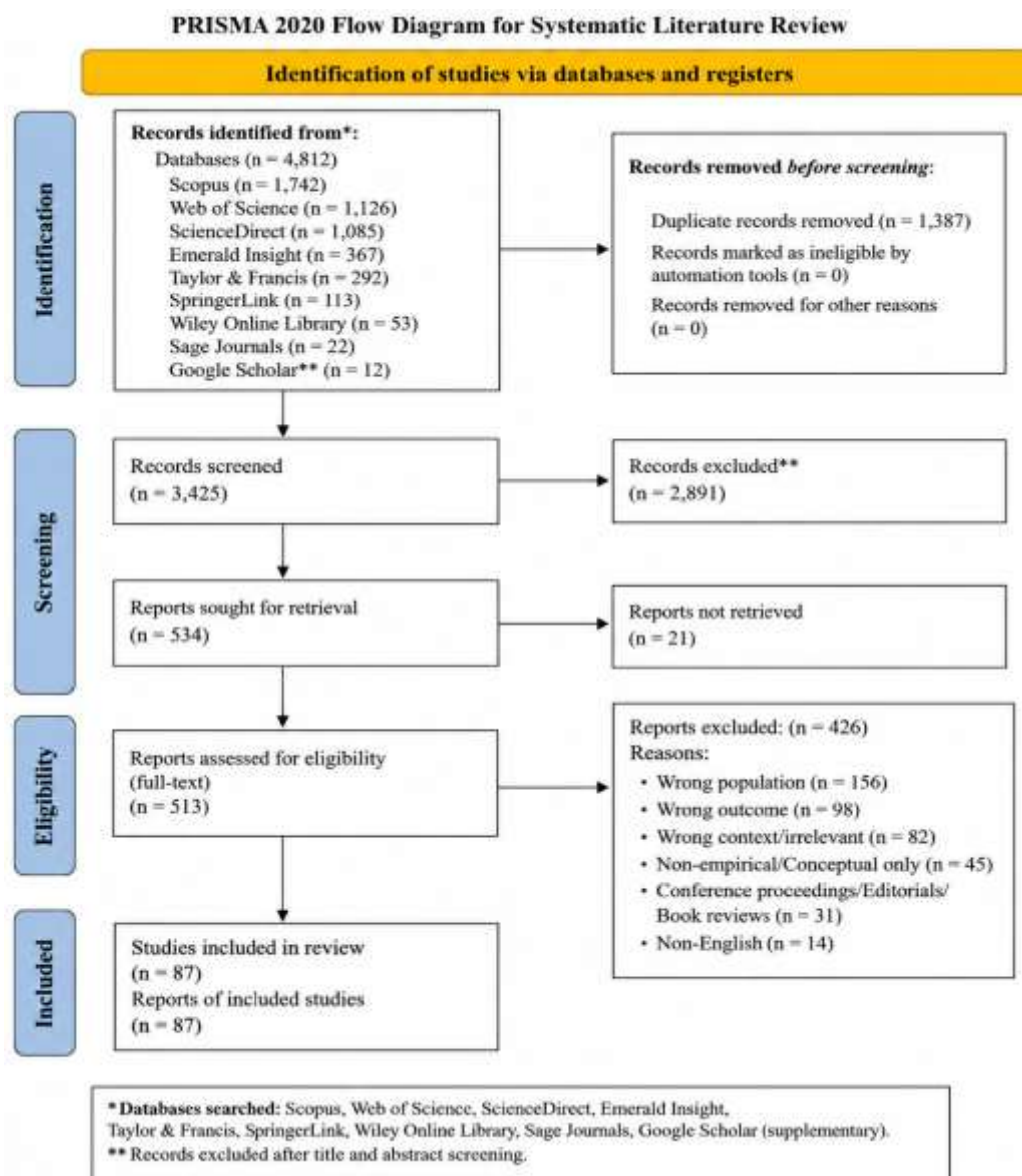


Figure 1: PRISMA 2020

QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (2018) was employed to assess methodological rigour in qualitative, quantitative and mixed designs. Studies with MMAT scores $\geq 75\%$ were kept, studies with scores $< 50\%$ were excluded and studies with scores between 50% and 74% were included with any caveats mentioned in the synthesis.

DATA EXTRACTION

The following data extraction sheet was used to gather the information: author(s), year, country, sample size, platform studied, methodology, theoretical lens, key variables, and major findings. A total of 87 studies were found for thematic synthesis.

Database	Search String (simplified)	Records Identified	After Deduplication
Scopus	("gig worker*" AND "work–life balance" AND "job satisfaction") TITLE-ABS	2,114	1,556
Web of Science	TS=(gig worker* AND "work–life balance" AND "job satisfaction")	1,287	938
ScienceDirect	("platform worker*" OR "gig worker*") AND ("work–life" OR "job satisfaction")	614	449

Emerald	("gig economy" AND "flexibility") OR ("gig" AND "burnout")	287	211
Taylor & Francis	AB=(gig worker* AND satisfaction)	218	162
Springer	("freelancer*") AND ("job satisfaction")	145	109
Wiley/Sage/GS	(gig work wellbeing) AND (work-life balance)	147	0

**Note: Following database retrieval, priority was given to studies published in journals listed in the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) Journal Quality List (A, A, B, and C) during the article selection process.*

Table 1: Search Strategy Matrix

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Period	2016 – 2026	Pre-2016 or post-2026
Language	English	Non-English
Source type	Peer-reviewed journals	Conference proceedings, editorials, blog posts, predatory journals
Methodology	Empirical or conceptual/theoretical reviews	Dissertations, theses*
Topic	WLB and/or JS among gig/freelance/platform workers	Non-gig employment contexts
Quality	MMAT $\geq$ 50%	MMAT < 50%

*Theses retained only as last resort for specific empirical data.

Table 2: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Author(s)	Year	Country	Sample	Methodology	Major Finding
Berger et al.	2019	UK	1,096 Uber drivers	Quantitative survey	Uber drivers report higher SWB but also higher anxiety (Berger et al., 2019)
Flatøy	2024	Norway	1,166 journalists (118 freelancers)	Survey regression +	Freelancers exhibit lower WLB than employees (Flatøy, 2024)
Cook et al.	2020	USA	>1,000,000 Uber drivers	Administrative data	7% gender earnings gap fully explained by preferences (Cook et al., 2020)
James	2022	UK	49 women crowdworkers	Qualitative interviews	Gendered constraints on algorithmic visibility (James, 2022)
Wan et al.	2024	China	Gig workers	Empirical	Job autonomy has dual effect on well-being (Wan et al., 2024)
Hajiheydari & Delgosha	2024	—	Gig workers	Empirical	Algorithmic injustice increases burnout (Hajiheydari & Delgosha, 2024)
Peng et al.	2024	China	Car drivers & delivery workers	Two-wave survey	Algorithmic evaluation increases burnout via basic psychological needs (Peng et al., 2024)

Brat et al.	2025	Indonesia	400 gig workers	PLS-SEM	WLB initiatives positively affect productivity via JS (Parman et al., 2025)
Kim et al.	2023	South Korea	447 gig workers	SEM	Economic and emotional factors more important than work category for QoL (Kim et al., 2023)
Raby et al.	2025	Chile	398 platform workers	Logistic regression	Autonomy and social support enhance JS (Raby et al., 2025)

Table 3: Summary of Selected Studies

RESULTS AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS USING ANTECEDENT -DECISION-OUTCOME (ADO) FRAMEWORK.

After performing screening with PRISMA, 87 studies were retained. These were themed and synthesized to identify the multidimensional and complex relationship between WLB and JS in the gig work context. A total of eight themes were identified which incorporated several empirical and theoretical findings.

The framework called Antecedents–Decisions–Outcomes (ADO) was used to synthesize the findings. Antecedents are factors impacting gig workers, including individual, organizational and platform characteristics. The decision stage is evidenced by the capacity of workers to have a work–life balance in different work conditions. Outcomes are the results of such decisions and range from job satisfaction, psychological well-being, burnout, productivity and retention.

4.1 Antecedents

Theme 1: FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility was the most commonly reported WLB benefit in both studies. When combined with technological assistance and a stable gig opportunity, flexibility-focused WLB initiatives "significantly positively impacted employee productivity" ([Parman et al., 2025](#)). In their study of London Uber drivers, [Berger and colleagues \(2019\)](#) found that a higher subjective well-being among the majority of Uber drivers can be attributed to their relatively high levels of desire for flexible working and to the fact that they have a high degree of control over their working hours.

Importantly, though, [Kervola and colleagues](#) suggested that the flexibility of platform-based work is the key positive feature of the gig economy but is also an imposed feature of the gig economy and could impact workers' wellbeing ([Kervola et al., 2024](#)). [Hatos and colleagues \(2025\)](#) found this paradox in their empirical work: flexibility is universally hailed as a benefit to WLB but it actually undermines income security and irregular work schedules. [Kusk and Bossen \(2019\)](#) have captured how the quality of flexibility can be considered autonomy: Danish Wolt couriers face flexibility as autonomy, as the algorithm is "lenient" and the payment system is "transparent" ([Kervola et al., 2024](#)). Therefore, the

correlation of flexibility and WLB depends on the transparency and predictability of the platform.

Theme 2: AUTONOMY

There have been several studies that have predicted JS, and the variable of autonomy has been consistently predicted in these studies. [Wan et al. \(2024\)](#) concluded that job autonomy fosters employees' control over work tasks and the availability of more resources to them to perform tasks under freer working conditions, resulting in "higher job satisfaction". This is also supported by the quantitative findings of [Raby and colleagues](#) that among Chilean platform workers, 'autonomy and social support significantly enhance job satisfaction' ([Raby et al., 2025](#)).

[Binder and Coad](#) hypothesized that gig workers and other self-employed people gain satisfaction from being their own boss and from leading an independent lifestyle (2015). This procedural utility view is similar to SDT: autonomy meets the basic psychological need of self-direction, resulting in intrinsic motivation ([Zaman et al., 2020](#)). But it also has a dark side: too much autonomy without boundaries can be detrimental for well-being, in the form of an inverted U-shape ([Wan et al., 2024](#)). In order to be sustainable, it must be bounded autonomy.

Theme 3: INCOME STABILITY

Income instability became identified as a structural determinant that led to both WLB and JS. Although the flexible nature of platform work allows drivers to work significantly more hours than a full-time job, have higher net earnings per month than low-skill or casual jobs, [Adhvaryu and colleagues'](#) cross-country study in India, Indonesia, and Kenya found that their hourly net earnings were similar or lower, resulting in chronic financial stress.

[Shetteppanavar and Rudagi \(2025\)](#) found that "precariousness was associated with increased stress as well as decreased job satisfaction, which in turn negatively affected well-being scores". The cost of living is the upstream cause of a downward cascade of strain, this serial mediation finding suggests. In keeping with this, [Roff et al's](#) ethnography of MTurk found that giggers are "making \$100 a month" (and less!) and that "the money is a necessity for working" and not the primary incentive of working for the company. Therefore, income insecurity is a psychosocial burden and has widespread WLB implications.

Theme 4. ALGORITHM CONTROL

Algorithmic management was the most newsworthy and/or controversial factor in modern gig work. Oloyele et al. (2026) conducted a PRISMA-guided systematic review of 48 studies to discover four main control mechanisms: (1) GPS tracking (panoptic surveillance), (2) rating systems (emotional labour demands), (3) dynamic pricing (income volatility), and (4) automated sanctions (deactivation fear). They calculated that "platform workers are exposed to 59.6% more digital speed determination and 36.3% more third party ratings than traditional workers" and that "rate platforms workers experience 41-67% higher prevalence of digital measures of burnout (Oloyele et al., 2026).

Theme 5: WORK STRESS AND BURNOUT

Hajiheydari and Delgosha found that "job insecurity, unsupportive algorithmic interaction and algorithmic injustice significantly contribute to gig workers' burnout" and "job resources – algorithmic compensation, work autonomy and information sharing – have significant positive effects on gig workers' engagement" (Hajiheydari & Delgosha, 2024). Peng and colleagues came to a similar finding: "algorithmic evaluation and discipline had a negative effect on the basic psychological needs of gig workers, and job burnout was increased as a result; however, algorithmic direction had a positive effect and reduced job burnout by increasing basic psychological needs" (Peng et al., 2024). The same technology, then, is an oppressive and supportive affordance. The use of algorithmic management poses "complex challenges for workers, through its ability to have a significant impact on the power of workers and organisations" (Duggan et al., 2019).

Work Stress, Burnout and Mental Health (Theme 5)

Burnout became an important mediator in the WLB—JS relationship. Lang et al. (2023) further noted that "platform work implies that it is even harder for gig workers to maintain a level of engagement for long periods, and the stress experienced leads to both a physical and mental exhaustion which triggers the slow and gradual onset of burnout. Dong et al. (2025) reported that "burnout is widespread among food delivery riders in China, and is shaped by various factors with a call for individualized support, humane organizational systems, satisfied work mechanisms, and supportive social environments.

During COVID-19, Li and colleagues found four dimensions of well-being that were "influenced in different ways including both positive and negative impacts" (Li et al., 2022): physical, subjective, psychological and social. Perhaps most importantly, Weidenstedt and colleagues' global N = 2,385 study suggests otherwise: "By default precarity does not cause dissatisfaction, because 'gig work can be stressful and satisfying, with high work pace and physical activity increasing satisfaction but not stress' (Weidenstedt et al., 2025). The paradox is that satisfaction and stress are not opposites, but rather are parallel results.

Theme 6: GENDER

An analytical axis that emerged was gender, which marked a division of the gig experience. James (2022) conducted an interview study of 49 crowdworkers from across the United Kingdom, who reported on "significant gendered constraints on women's algorithmic visibilities and abilities to compete for gig work online, alongside multiple health and safety issues among women gig workers". Women make up four out of every ten platform workers in Europe, but, according to Rodríguez-Modroño and colleagues, "female platform work is more prevalent in countries where traditional female participation rates are low," suggesting that platforms may be filling up disadvantaged segments of the labour market – not undermining inequality. (Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2022)

In its groundbreaking study of more than a million Uber drivers, Cook and colleagues showed that the gender earnings gap was of about 7%, and that this could be explained by experience, location preferences, and preferences for driving speed, but not by discrimination (Cook et al., 2020). Even with this, Gerber concluded that "platform work produces a work model that is a curse and a blessing for vulnerable parts of the labour market, for women in particular, as they face higher precarity risks because of care work" (Gerber, 2022). Churchill and Craig found that the gig economy is highly gender-segregated, where women work in caring roles and men work in transport (2019).

Theme 7: OCCUPATIONAL SECURITY

JS is intertwined with occupational security (linked to income, algorithmic control). In Xiaofang et al's (2026) SEM of 469 gig workers, it was found that job demands positively influenced the turnover intention whereas job resources negatively influenced the turnover intention, with job burnout and work motivation as the mediators. Yixin (2025) discovered that "work-related injury insurance significantly increased retention, and the effect was fully mediated by occupational safety, and the effect was stronger in high-risk industries.

Braganza et al. (2021) found that more than half of those who participated in the BEIS 2018 are highly or fairly satisfied with their gig work, and that the most influential characteristics are independence and flexibility, but that system automation is a negative moderator between the Gigification and job satisfaction. Therefore, the security of the job in gig work is multi-faceted, including financial, legal, algorithmic and physical security dimensions.

Theme 8: PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Psychological well-being is hypothesized to mediate the relationship between WLB and JS. According to the SEM analysis of 447 gig workers in South Korea, which was conducted by Kim et al., (2023), the factors of the 'economic and emotional factors that belong to the life domain' had a stronger effect on the 'overall quality of life' than 'work component.' Likewise, Khan and others found that "higher levels of perceived organizational support make this stronger" (Khan et al., 2025) between

the positive aspects of working a gig and positive impacts on Wellbeing.

Švagan's qualitative study of Slovenian delivery couriers revealed a paradox: couriers often "acknowledge the financial challenges and potential health and safety risks...but are willing to overlook some of these drawbacks due to how highly they value the autonomy, freedom and favourable work-life balance platforms offer" (Švagan, 2023). This finding shows that the psychological costs (autonomy and freedom) can be greater than the material costs and result in high levels of satisfaction even with structural precarity.

4.2 Decision: Work-Life balance

In the context of ADO, work–life balance is the main point of choice that gig workers use to balance between their work and personal lives. Literature reviewed all agree that work–life balance is a dynamic product of flexibility, autonomy, income stability, and algorithmic management. Flexibility provides employees with opportunities to tailor work schedules to their personal needs and can improve work–life balance, but can also be associated with increased work–family conflict if flexibility is not backed by predictable pay (Berger et al., 2019; Kervola et al., 2024). Likewise, autonomy can help to manage work and personal boundaries, whereas algorithmic control and constant digital surveillance can create an ambiguity of these boundaries and lead to stress and burnout (Duggan et al., 2020; Peng et al., 2024). Based on these findings, it can be inferred that the work–life balance mechanism is the core that connects work–life balance antecedents with employee outcomes in the gig economy.

4.3 Outcomes

The major outcomes identified across literature are:

Job Satisfaction

Psychological Well-being

Productivity

Work Engagement

Retention Intention

Quality of life

In the ADO concept, outcomes are the implications of work–life balance for gig workers' occupational and psychological experiences. All the literature reviewed has consistently shown that having a healthy work–life balance leads to a higher level of job satisfaction, a better psychological state, more work engagement and higher productivity. In contrast, negative work–life balance has been linked with burnout, emotional exhaustion, decreased organizational commitment, and greater intentions to leave the organization. Other research suggests that autonomy, a sense of work support and job security are key factors in reinforcing these positive outcomes, while algorithmic control, income insecurity and high workloads have negative impacts on workers' lives (Kim et al., 2023; Raby et al., 2025; Khan et al., 2025; Dong et al., 2025; Xiaofang et al., 2026). The findings indicate that work–life balance serves as the key link between workplace conditions and individual well-being and other organizational outcomes in the gig economy.

Theme	Key Findings	Theoretical Anchor	Sources
Flexibility & WLB	Flexibility is a benefit when transparent; an imposed burden when opaque	Boundary Theory	(Berger et al., 2019; Hatos et al., 2025; Kervola et al., 2024; Parman et al., 2025)
Autonomy & JS	Autonomy predicts JS via SDT; curvilinear effects with overwork	SDT	(Binder & Coad, 2015; Raby et al., 2025; Wan et al., 2024; Zaman et al., 2020)
Income Instability	Earnings volatility damages well-being and JS	Spillover Theory	(Adda et al., 2014; Adhvaryu et al., 2026; Dong et al., 2025; Shetteppanavar & Rudagi, 2025)
Algorithmic Control	Mechanisms: GPS tracking, ratings, dynamic pricing, sanctions	JD-R, Algorithmic Mgmt Theory	(Duggan et al., 2019; Hajiheydari & Delgosha, 2024; Lang et al., 2023; Oloyele et al., 2026; Peng et al., 2024)
Burnout & Mental Health	Burnout mediates demand-resource imbalance; satisfaction & stress can coexist	JD-R	(Dong et al., 2025; Lang et al., 2023; Li et al., 2022; Weidenstedt et al., 2025)
Gender Differences	Women face precarity, lower algorithmic visibility, care-work penalties	Feminist Labour Theory	(Churchill & Craig, 2019; Cook et al., 2020; Gerber, 2022; James, 2022; Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2022)

Occupational Security	Insurance moderates retention; demands drive turnover	Conservation of Resources	(Braganza et al., 2021; Xiaofang et al., 2026; Yixin, 2025)
Psychological Well-being	Acts as mediator; autonomy/relatedness support buffers stress	SDT, Conservation of Resources	(Khan et al., 2025; Kim et al., 2023; Švagan, 2023)

Table 4: Thematic Synthesis Matrix

DISCUSSION

There are a number of general patterns in the synthesis. First, in gig work the mediations between WLB and JS are primarily platform design. When algorithms are transparent in design, compensation is predictable, and ratings are fair, workers enjoy flexibility and autonomy as true WLB resources, and JS benefits are high. Algorithms that are unreadable and ratings that will crush, are the same flexibility that can become a stressor, and the same autonomy that can be a facade of control (Duggan et al., 2019; Kervola et al., 2024). This is in line with JD-R's longitudinal understanding of resources as resources require worker's perception of them as such (Demerouti & Bakker, 2022).

Second, the paradox of the high satisfaction of precarious workers is strong cross-culturally, as shown in the examples of delivery couriers in Slovenia (Švagan, 2023), international delivery workers (Weidenstedt et al., 2025), and Uber drivers in London (Berger et al., 2019). When basic psychological needs are met, SDT explains that intrinsic insecurity, which comes from feelings of lack of autonomy and competence, can be balanced by intrinsic motivations associated with autonomy and competence.

Third, algorithmic management is a new power dynamic that is at its very core. The Oloyele review's identification of 'psychological governance' eroding worker mental health' (Oloyele et al., 2026) is consistent with Noponen et al.'s synthesis, which identified 'income dependency' as also being a key determining factor in the experience of working under algorithmic management' (Noponen et al., 2023). The idea is that algorithmic control cannot be studied on its own but should be considered in relation to the regulatory, market and social environment.

Fourth, the platform work is a structurally precarious gendered work. Although the gig economy is represented as a democratisation of access to labour, there is consistent evidence across the UK (James, 2022), Europe (Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2022), and Germany (Gerber, 2022) that, for women, this economy imposes extra burdens of care, reduced visibility in algorithms, and increased risks of precarity. This is in contrast to narratives of gender neutral opportunities.

Fifth, it can be concluded that there is a need for theoretical pluralism. JD-R fairly captures the dynamics of demand and resources, but fails to consider gender or care responsibilities or algorithmic transparency. SDT only accounts for autonomy benefits and neglects structural determinants. This study turns to Boundary and Border Theories to gain insights on the permeability between work and home, but these theories need to be made explicit with the platform level variables. These

frameworks need to be incorporated into future models, not seen as competing models.

Findings for practitioners include three priorities for action. Platform design should include pays transparency, predictable design, humane deactivation policies, and meaningful worker voice, among other things. Second, HR managers must understand that even workers on platforms require possible career stories, support for their mental health, and avenues for their skills to be developed. Third, and not least, the recent EU Platform Work Directive (Directive 2024/2831) will generate a 'rebuttable presumption of employment where platform control is established', and 'will improve transparency of algorithmic management' (Hatos et al., 2025; Sfetcu, 2024). This is an emerging trend across the world of regulatory innovation, as reflected in Spain's 'Riders Law', which aims to shift the balance of protection for platform workers (Hatos et al., 2025).

RESEARCH GAPS

Although there is increasing scholarship, there remain a number of important lacunae.

First of all, there is a noticeable geographical imbalance. Most empirical studies are from the U.S., the U.K., China and other advanced economies. The recent comparison of India–Indonesia–Kenya by the team of Adhvaryu et al. (2026) is rare. Few details exist on the lived experiences of gig workers in Africa (excluding South Africa), in Latin America (excluding Chile), in South Asia and the Southeast Asia region. This reduces the external validity.

Second, there is a lack of development of gender scholarship. While there are many studies focusing on the role of women in the gig economy, gender has been used as a control variable in most studies, rather than as a lens for analysis. Longitudinal, intersectional studies are missing, except for two examples: qualitative work by James in the UK (James 2022) and a survey by Gerber in the US and Germany (Gerber 2022).

Third, methodologically, there is a predominance of cross sectional designs in the literature. There are no longitudinal studies that follow the gig experiences of workers and their well-being as they engage in their gig work careers. This prevents causal inference and makes it difficult to see how WLB–JS dynamics change with platform experience or with platform switching.

Fourthly, comparisons across cultures are restricted. National variations in labour law, social protection, gender norms, and platform regulation are important critical factors in outcomes, but are under-explored. An

informative natural experiment for future cross-national scholarship is provided in the EU Platform Work Directive of 2024 (Sfetcu, 2024; Zadorozhnyi, 2025).

Fifth, emerging technologies, such as AI-powered matchmaking and generative AI for content creation, and robotic process automation are changing gig work, but have received minimal research attention. AI-mediated platform work is under-researched, but Noponen and colleagues' systematic review found that “more elaborate forms of algorithmic management will be introduced progressively in more work contexts.”

Sixth, AI-powered gig platforms introduce new content-related challenges, such as artificial intelligence content,

which can be produced by large language models and compete with Upwork freelancers, synthetic training data workers, and AI-based wage discrimination. There is little empirical literature on any of these topics.

Finally, contexts of developing economies should be highlighted. Although there are several studies available on Indonesian (Parman et al., 2025), Indian (Bhattacharya et al., 2025), Chilean (Raby et al., 2025), South African (Wilmans & Rashied, 2021) and Southeast Asian gig contexts, studies that could address Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America beyond Brazil, Argentina and Mexico are underdeveloped.

Gap	Existing Evidence Base	Missing Knowledge	Priority
Geographical	Heavy US/UK/China focus	Africa, South Asia, Latin America outside Chile	High
Gender	Mostly treated as control	Intersectional, life-course, female-specific	High
Methodological	Cross-sectional dominant	Longitudinal, diary, panel data	High
Cross-cultural	Limited comparatives	EU vs Asia vs Americas comparisons	Medium
Emerging tech	Conceptual AI debates	Empirical AI-mediated gig outcomes	High
Developing economies	Indonesia, India, Kenya, Chile	Sub-Saharan, Andean, Mekong regions	High
Sustainability	Macroeconomic focus	Worker-level sustainability indicators	Medium
Platform regulation	EU Directive 2024 in progress	Comparative regulatory effects on WLB/JS	High
Health outcomes	Burnout focus	Long-term occupational health trajectories	Medium

Table 5: Research Gap Matrix

Further research using the ADO framework could examine other antecedents (such as platform governance with the use of AI), decision mechanisms (such as coping strategies and work–life integration), and long-term outcomes (such as career sustainability, mental health, and retention) of gig workers.

FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

Based on the gaps above, future priorities for scholarship are as follows:

This course introduces students to the basics of Artificial Intelligence and Gig Work. Scholars must explore how generative AI and LLM are changing the competitive landscape of crowdsourced platforms focused on creativity, design and writing, how compensation is changing for gig workers, and how skills are changing as a result. Research on the freelance, designer and translator market's competition with AI will be crucial.

Platform Governance. There are two quasi-experimental opportunities: the EU Platform Work Directive 2024 (Sfetcu, 2024; Zadorozhnyi, 2025) and the Spanish Riders

Law (Hatos et al., 2025). Comparative regulatory analyses of differential impacts of transparency rules for algorithms, minimum wage rules, and rebuttable employment presumptions on WLB and JS would help to build theory and guide policymaking globally.

Worker Protection Mechanisms. There is a need to explore the impact of portable benefits schemes, occupational health insurance, the role of trade union representation and algorithmic fairness audits. Theories of support for relations (Yixin, 2025), multi-homing (Maffie & Lakhani, 2025) and insurance (Ihl, 2024) suggest starting points for theory building.

Work–Life Integration. Scholars need to delve into the positive spillover, work–life enrichment, and conditions under which gig work can support—rather than detract from—the flourishing of life, not just conflict-based WLB. A recent paper by Dughi, et al. (2025) provides an attractive model of Work Meaning and Life Satisfaction.

Hybrid Employment Models. Additional research on workers doing gig and regular work, multiple platform gig

workers, and "side hustlers" with jobs should be conducted. Early understandings are provided by Kougiannou and Mendonça's research on "side hustlers" (2023) and Moorman and colleagues' research on extra-mile citizenship (2023), but there is a lack of systematic understanding.

Cross-Country Comparisons. Deconfounding of the culture, institutional and economic moderators of WLB–JS relationships would be achieved by coordinating comparative investigations with harmonised surveys across countries.

Methods for a Sustainable Gig Economy. Researchers need to build models that connect gig work with various aspects of sustainable careers, such as long-term well-being, financial resilience, identity coherence, and community embeddedness, based on the sustainable careers perspective (Retkowsky et al., 2022; Vos & Heijden, 2017). In the study by Müller et al. (2025), the career sustainability of gig workers via umbrella-company work is shown to be possible under specific institutional conditions.

Methodological Innovation. Longitudinal, diary and mixed methods designs to reveal the dynamic relationship between platform conditions, worker behaviours and well-being outcomes should be considered for future research (Bilal et al., 2025; Flatøy, 2024). This design would compensate for the lack of within-person variation measured by cross sectional measures.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this systematic literature review was to synthesize 87 peer-reviewed studies to shed light on the multifaceted relationship between work–life balance and job satisfaction among gig workers. The results show that the flexibility and autonomy touted by gig work are genuine, but not automatic and depend on platform design, institutional environment, and worker traits. However, these advantages can become liabilities, such as fluctuations in income, lack of transparency, unfairness and governance that is not people-centred, leading to a decline in well-being and satisfaction if platforms are not transparent, fair and people-centred. But when these benefits are not transparent, fair and when the platforms are not people-centred, then the advantages can become liabilities like income volatility, lack of transparency, unfairness and governance that erodes well-being and satisfaction.

This review has three main original contributions. First, it provides an integrative perspective to combine the JD-R, SDT, Boundary Theory and Spillover Theory into a cohesive and explanatory model. Secondly, it points to the paradox of high satisfaction under precarity, which is a phenomenon that needs to be theorized, not simply in terms of stress and satisfaction. Third, it draws attention to under-studied factors like gender, geography, AI and developing economies that warrant academic scrutiny to fully realize a more sustainable gig economy. Applications by the manager are important. Platform companies must be clear on how algorithms are used to make decisions, offer worker compensation systems, establish regular schedules, and incorporate workers'

voice mechanisms. HR managers should communicate with gig associates who offer portable advantages, skill development and mental health resources, besides the conventional wellness programs. But the gig economy shouldn't be exploited to exacerbate inequalities in the labour market, which could be tackled with regulatory innovation, like the EU Platform Work Directive, and Spain's Riders Law, as well as by new regulations being implemented in Latin America and in Southeast Asia. It is hard to see how platforms, regulators, scholars, and gig workers can possibly collaborate in developing a fair system of digital labour without the success of this. This review shows that, in order to achieve flexibility and fulfilment, and autonomy and actual self-determination, intentional institutional design, theoretically informed research and worker dignity must remain constant. The gig economy is not coming to an end but it's our future to shape....

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