
ENHANCING LABOUR RIGHTS PROTECTION AMONG GIG WORKERS IN KARNATAKA THROUGH LEGAL AWARENESS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

Dr. Sunil Sudhakar Varnekar, Research Scholar, Alliance, School of Law, Alliance
University, Bangalore, Karnataka, India

Dr. Upankar Chutia, Associate Professor, Department of Law, Dayananda Sagar
University, Bangalore, Karnataka, India

ABSTRACT

The gig economy has revolutionized India's labour market, offering flexible jobs and employment opportunities through digital platforms. The lack of conventional employment–employee dynamics, however, has brought about serious issues about workers' rights, social security, and legal protection for gig workers. The present study focuses on the intervention of legal awareness in improving the protection of labour rights of the gig workers in Karnataka with legal empowerment as a mediating variable. The methodology used in this research is mixed method which is a combination of doctrinal and empirical approaches in the study of the law. The doctrinal analysis consists of an in-depth study of the constitutional provisions, the Code on Social Security, 2020, and precedents and policies that have been established so far regarding the rights of gig workers. The empirical part is based on a structured questionnaire for collecting data from the gig workers, which were taken for simple random sampling among 150 gig workers across Karnataka. The data was analysed by SPSS and AMOS which included descriptive analysis, reliability test, validity test and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The results show that legal awareness is a significant contributor to the level of legal empowerment and this in turn helps to increase labour rights protection among gig workers. The mediation analysis also indicates that the mediation of legal empowerment partially alleviated the effect of legal awareness on the protection of labour rights. The triangulation of doctrinal and empirical findings suggest that although India has created a progressive legal framework for gig workers, there is still little legal awareness amongst gig workers, and inadequate enforcement of the law. The study suggests that the legal literacy programs ought to be reinforced, grievance redressal mechanisms should be strengthened and the enforcement of social security provisions should be enhanced to foster equitable and sustainable protection of labour in the gig economy.

Keywords: Gig workers, Legal awareness, Legal empowerment, Legal right protection, Labour Laws.

Introduction

Digital platforms have revolutionized employment by creating a new paradigm, known as the gig economy, where people seek employment through digital platforms. Digital platforms have made employment look different and in the process have created a new type of employment called the gig economy which is a major source of livelihood in India. Platform jobs, like ride-hailing, food delivery, logistics, and home services are flexible job options, but they pose problems for the use of traditional labour laws. Typically, gig workers have no statutory benefits, social security or strong legal protections and are not in typical employer-employee contracts. Hence, protection of labour rights, their legal recognition and accountability of the regulators have emerged as some of the key debates in modern labour law scholarship (Laisram & Shankar, 2021¹; Rane, 2023²).

These challenges led to the enactment of the Code on Social Security, 2020³, which is a step towards the formal recognition of gig and platform workers, and outlines the framework for social security schemes. However, there have been some scholars who have suggested that statutory recognition has not yielded successful protection because it is poorly implemented, weak in enforcement and there is a lack of awareness of the law among workers (Pawar & Srivastava, 2022)⁴. Comparative studies have also highlighted that, apart from strengthening the rights through laws, workers need to increase their awareness and awareness of laws, as well as institutional support to effectively exercise their rights.

Although there is a multitude of literature on the subject of gig economy regulation, there is not much empirical evidence that has been done to establish a connection between legal awareness, legal empowerment and labour rights protection in relation to Karnataka which is one of the biggest platform-based labour markets in India. To fill this gap, the present study takes a triangulated research approach, which is a combination of doctrinal analysis of the law and empirical investigation, to explore the role of legal awareness in facilitating the protection of labour rights via legal empowerment of gig workers in Karnataka. The results will be published and will help to advance research in labour law and offer policy guidance on building

¹ Laisram, I. & R. Shankar, *Navigating Labour Law in the Gig Economy*, 14 NUJS L. REV. 1 (2021)

² Rane, V., *Platform-Based Gig Workers: A Blind Spot in the Indian Labour Laws* (2023) (SSRN Working Paper No. 4821229)

³ Code on Social Security, No. 36 of 2020

⁴ Pawar, A. & A. Srivastava, *Gig Workers and Employment Laws: An Indian Perspective*, Shimla L. REV. 88 (2022).

legal awareness and enhancing the legal protection of gig workers.

The research objectives are –

- To assess the legal framework governing Gig workers in India
- To examine the legal awareness, empowerment and rights protection among gig workers in Karnataka

Review of Literature

Digital labour platforms have witnessed a dramatic growth, which has changed the nature of work and has entered the gig economy as one of the major livelihood sources in developing economies. This development has, however, left workers with a lack of employment security and social security coverage, and insufficient protections. There is a growing awareness of the need to reinforce and deepen labour rights, both through legal awareness and institutional protection, in the existing legal scholarship.

Platform-based work has been considered by other legal scholars as a new phenomenon, and early legal analysis focused on the fact that traditional labor laws did not aim to regulate this new type of work. Laisram and Shankar (2021)⁵ opined that gig work is a way of challenging the traditional employer–employee relationship where gig workers fall outside the protective ambit of many labour laws. Like this, Pawar and Srivastava (2022)⁶ noted that while gig work offers flexibility and job opportunities, Indian labour laws still remain clueless about the definition of gig workers, thereby restricting them from enjoying the statutory benefits and social security protections of employment. All of this research indicates a significant need for reform of current laws and regulations to deal with platform-mediated work.

Later studies for example have been oriented to the shortcomings of the current labor legislation within the growing "gig economy". Choudhary and Shireshi (2022)⁷ discussed about the different regulatory measures that have been applied across the world and suggested that India needs a holistic legislation that will be able to strike a balance between innovation by

⁵ Laisram, I. & R. Shankar, *Navigating Labour Law in the Gig Economy*, 14 NUJS L. REV. 1 (2021).

⁶ Pawar, A. & A. Srivastava, *Gig Workers and Employment Laws: An Indian Perspective*, Shimla L. REV. 88 (2022).

⁷ Choudhary, V. & S. S. Shireshi, *Analysing the Gig Economy in India and Exploring Various Effective Regulatory Methods to Improve the Plight of the Workers*, 57 J. ASIAN & AFR. STUD. 1343 (2022)

platforms and the rights of the workers. Similarly, Rane (2023)⁸ referred to the platform workers as a "blind spot" in Indian labour law, noting that it's not explicitly recognized in Indian law, which means there's considerable uncertainty about working conditions, wages, dispute resolution and employment security. These studies underscore the critical need for clarity in the regulations so as to ensure the fair treatment of gig workers.

Legal governance is also a subject of growing interest for scholars, as a result of the internationalization of digital labour markets. The internationalization of digital labour markets has further increased scholarly interest in legal governance. Singh and Bhushan (2023)⁹ argued that technological advancements and globalization have been creating digital labour platforms at a rapid pace and at the same time has raised concerns over working precarity and labour exploitation. Supporting this view, Gill and Gupta (2024)¹⁰ explored the impact of gig work on contract labour laws and concluded that platform contracts often result in an imbalance of bargaining power where the workers have little bargaining power to ensure good conditions of employment. The results indicate that at times contractual flexibility can carry with it a lot of legal pitfalls for gig workers.

In recent years, protection of social security and labour rights has gained greater focus of scholarship. Dwivedi and Deepak (2024)¹¹ pointed out that despite enactment of Code on Social Security, 2020, there is a significant lack in implementation of social security measures for gig workers. The authors observed that there are still restrictions on access to statutory benefits, due to the limited awareness, weak enforcement mechanisms and administrative challenges. In a like manner, Thomas (2024)¹² discussed the institutional development of India's gig economy overall and emphasized the rising opposition from workers for better legal acknowledgment, association and regulatory obligation. These studies show that both legislative changes and implementation are necessary, and that workers need to be involved, to achieve results.

Recently published comparative and policy-oriented studies are useful in deepening

⁸ Rane, V., *Platform-Based Gig Workers: A Blind Spot in the Indian Labour Laws* (2023) (SSRN Working Paper No. 4821229).

⁹ Singh, R. & V. Bhushan, *The Global Workforce Revolution: Exploring Digital Labour Platforms and the Gig Economy in the Era of Globalization*, 3 Int'l J. Civ. L. & Legal Rsch. 19 (2023).

¹⁰ Gill, J. & S. Gupta, *The Gig Economy and Its Implications on Contract Labor Laws*, 9 NUJS J. REGUL. STUD. (2024).

¹¹ Dwivedi, S. & D. Deepak, *Social Security for Gig Workers in India: Challenges, Gaps, and Policy Recommendations*, 11 NAT'L RSCH. J. BUS. ECON. 29 (2024).

¹² Thomas, P. N., *The Gig Economy in India: Start-Ups, Infrastructure and Resistance* (Routledge 2024).

understanding of bolstering labour protection. Shekhawat and Khare (2025)¹³ compared the law and policy frameworks of gig workers in India and Indonesia, and found that robust statutory recognition, adequate social protection, and robust enforcement of rights are crucial to ensuring the rights of platform workers. Similarly, Soni et al. (2025)¹⁴ proposed a new paradigm in the social contract between the workers, employers and the state in the age of gig economy and recommended that the current labour laws be expanded to cover non-standard employment. These contributions highlight the need to combine the legal awareness with institutional support in order to strengthen the protection of labour rights.

There has also been a lot of discussion on the link between legal recognition and protection of labour rights. In 2025, Gaikwad set out to investigate the shift from flexibility to exploitation in the gig economy and how a lack of enforcement is one of the key challenges to ensuring platform workers' rights are safeguarded. The study highlighted the importance of ensuring access to grievance redressal system and better institutional enforcement to ensure effective labour rights. In a similar vein, Vijayalakshmi and Prarthana (2025)¹⁵ argued that the rights of gig workers must be protected to realize the SDGs and that a holistic framework of legislation should be established so that platform workers can be better protected.

Overall, nothing in the existing literature conflicts with the recognition that gig workers are still at risk as a result of legal uncertainty, weak enforcement and lack of statutory protections and rights. While a lot of work has been done on labour law reforms, social security provisions and regulatory issues, very little empirical work has been devoted to understand the role of legal awareness in protecting women's rights in the context of labour, in the form of legal empowerment, in the case of gig workers in Karnataka. The majority of studies use a doctrinal, comparative or a policy approach and few empirical studies address workers' awareness, empowerment and perceived protection. This study is particularly significant in filling the identified gap, as it empirically explores the relationship between legal awareness, legal empowerment and protection of labour rights in the context of platform-based employment in India, adding to the existing socio-legal scholarship on platform-based employment in India.

¹³ Shekhawat, V. & P. Khare, *Legal Protections for Gig Workers: A Comparative Socio-Legal Study of Indonesia and India*, 5 *INDONESIAN J. SOCIO-LEGAL STUD.* 1 (2025).

¹⁴ Soni, M., S. B. Choudhary, R. Gade & H. Awasthi, *The Gig Economy and the Social Contract: Rethinking Labor Laws and Social Protection in the Digital Age*, 23 *Lex Localis* (2025).

¹⁵ Vijayalakshmi, S. & M. Prarthana, *Rights of Gig-Platform Workers and Sustainable Development Goals*, 3 *LawFoyer Int'l J. Doctrinal Legal Rsch.* 494 (2025).

Research methods

Research Methodology

The current study has been designed in a mixed method legal research approach consisting of both doctrinal and empirical approach, to enable an in-depth analysis of the protection of labour rights of gig workers in Karnataka. The doctrinal element enabled the critical examination of the legal framework applicable to gig workers and the empirical element enabled the evaluation of workers' perceptions on legal awareness, legal empowerment and protection of their rights in the labour market. These approaches were complemented by each other to triangulate legal principles with the practical experiences in order to gain a comprehensive perspective on the effectiveness of the current labour protection regime.

Doctrinal Research

The doctrinal research entailed the process of systematic analysis of the primary and secondary law sources covering gig workers rights in India. The primary sources used comprised the Constitution of India, the Code on Social Security, 2020 and legal pronouncements of the Supreme Court of India and foreign select jurisdictions regarding labour rights and platform work. There were a number of secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government reports, policy documents, law commission reports and international organisation reports. The doctrinal analysis critically assessed the developments in the field of labour rights, the recognition of gig workers in the statute book, constitutional protection, social security coverage and judicial decisions, highlighting the strengths and shortcomings of the current landscape of law.

Empirical Research

The empirical approach followed a quantitative type of research with the use of structured questionnaire responded by gig workers in Karnataka. The questionnaire was created to assess three constructs: Legal Awareness, Legal Empowerment and Labour Rights Protection, on a five point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Simple random sampling (SRS) method was used in the study to select the respondents from the different platform-based occupations such as food delivery, ride-hailing, logistics, services at home, and freelance digital work. The minimum sample size required was calculated by

Cochran's sample size formula with a 95% confidence level and an 8% margin of error which yielded the minimum sample size of about 150 respondents which formed the final sample size for the study.

This collected data analysis was done using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS). Finally, the results of the doctrinal and empirical analysis were triangulated to assess how much the current legal framework on the gig economy is present in workers' actual practice. This integrated approach helped to make the study more valid as it incorporated an empirical approach to complement the normative legal analysis, thus giving a holistic overview of the effectiveness of labour rights protection in Karnataka for gig workers.

Results and discussion

Doctrinal results

In the past few years, the gig economy phenomenon has changed the nature of employment, posing serious problems for the labour law. Online companies like Uber, Ola, Swiggy, Zomato, Urban Company and Amazon Flex have created flexible jobs and have made the workers vulnerable to questions of their employment status, social security, collective bargaining, and dispute resolution. Platform workers have been legally caught in a bind in India, where the existing labour laws have been framed with the traditional employer–employee paradigm in mind. While the recent legislation, including the Code on Social Security, 2020, has recognised gig and platform workers, there are significant doctrinal issues to be addressed on terms and enforceability of their labour rights.

The most notable statutory change is the introduction of “gig workers” and “platform workers” as defined in Section 2(35)¹⁶ and Section 2(61)¹⁷ of the Code on Social Security, 2020, for the first time, for which there is no clear definition. Chapter IX¹⁸ covers welfare measures on life and disability insurance, health benefits, accident insurance, maternity benefits, old age protection and skill development, which is in terms of the legislation, the powers of the Central and State Governments. In contrast to regular workers, however, gig workers do not have

¹⁶ Code on Social Security, No. 36 of 2020, §§ 2(35)

¹⁷ Code on Social Security, No. 36 of 2020, §§ 2(61)

¹⁸ Code on Social Security, No. 36 of 2020, ch. IX (India).

enforceable rights to minimum wages, being able to stop employment when they please, pay into the provident fund, or receive gratuity. The statutory recognition thus sets out a framework primarily in order to provide welfare benefits, and does not provide extensive labour rights.

Equally important groundwork for the protection of labour rights is the constitutional jurisprudence. Article 14¹⁹ provides equality before the law, Article 19(1)(g)²⁰ ensures the right to Freedom of profession or Occupation and Article 21²¹ has been judicially interpreted to encompass the right to live a life by profession or occupation and to a dignified life. It has been suggested that these guarantees in the constitution allow protection against arbitrary and exploitative labour practices to be extended to platform workers despite their atypical employment arrangements.

The judiciary has consistently had a broad approach to the interpretation of labour rights and has done so by 'purposive' approaches. *People's Union for Democratic Rights v Union of India*, (1982) 3 SCC 235²² was the case that established that the right against exploitation is not limited to just minimum standards for labour requirements but that this right must be respected even if the nature of the employment is limited in some way. In a similar way, in *Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India*, (1984) 3 SCC 161²³, the Court held that necessary parts of this right to live with dignity under Article 21 are humane working conditions and protection from exploitative labour practices. While made before the digital economy, these decisions help to highlight the constitutional principles directly applicable to gig workers in the quest for recognition of fundamental labour rights.

The concept of social security as an integral part of labour welfare was further fortified with the recognition granted by the judiciary. In the case of *Consumer Education & Research Centre v. Union of India*, (1995) 3 SCC 42²⁴, Supreme Court confirmed that health, safety and social security are three fundamental components of Article 21, Right to Life. Similarly, the Right to Livelihood was held to be a part of the Right to Life in *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation*, (1985) 3 SCC 545²⁵ and thus provided a vital constitutional basis for labour

¹⁹ INDIA CONST. ARTS. 14

²⁰ INDIA CONST. ARTS. 14, 19(1)(g), 21.

²¹ INDIA CONST. ARTS. 14, 19(1)(g), 21.

²² *People's Union for Democratic Rights v. Union of India*, (1982) 3 SCC 235.

²³ *Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India*, (1984) 3 SCC 161.

²⁴ *Consumer Education & Research Centre v. Union of India*, (1995) 3 SCC 42.

²⁵ *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Mun. Corp.*, (1985) 3 SCC 545.

protections to give economic dependent gig workers a constitutional protection.

In addition, comparative jurisprudence has been important to the discussions of platform work today. In *Uber BV v Aslam*²⁶, the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom (U.K.) determined that Uber's drivers were workers, and thus entitled to the statutory benefits and rights afforded to all workers, such as minimum wage and paid leave. The Court noted that the terms of a contract should not control this economic reality of the contract, especially when the platform has significant influence over the price, performance monitoring and access to work. While not a precedent in India, this judgement is a persuasive authority for discussions on the legal classification of platform workers.

In the same way, the California Supreme Court in *Dynamex Operations West, Inc. v. Superior Court*, 416 P.3d 1 (Cal.,) concluded that the three-part test in *Skouras* did not apply to the California Workers' Compensation system. In 2018, the ABC Test was adopted and employers will now have a responsibility to create genuinely independent contractor relationships. It had a strong impact on legislative reforms on a global level and reflects a trend in the judiciary to reinforce the rights of labour in non-standard employment situations.

Table 1 - Doctrinal Analysis Framework for Labour Rights Protection of Gig Workers

Legal Source	Provision / Case	Key Legal Principle	Relevance to the Present Study
Constitution of India	Article 14	Equality before law and equal protection of laws	Ensures that gig workers are entitled to equal legal protection without arbitrary discrimination.
Constitution of India	Article 19(1)(g)	Freedom to practice any profession or occupation	Protects the occupational freedom of gig workers while permitting reasonable regulatory safeguards.
Constitution of India	Article 21	Right to life and livelihood	Extends constitutional protection to dignified working conditions, health, safety, and social security.

²⁶ *Uber BV v. Aslam*, [2021] UKSC 5 (U.K.).

Code on Social Security, 2020	Sections 2(35) & 2(61)	Statutory recognition of gig workers and platform workers	Provides the legal basis for extending welfare and social security schemes to gig workers.
Code on Social Security, 2020	Chapter IX	Social security schemes for gig and platform workers	Enables governments to formulate welfare schemes including insurance, health, and disability benefits.
<i>People's Union for Democratic Rights v. Union of India</i> , (1982) 3 SCC 235	Supreme Court of India	Protection against labour exploitation	Reinforces constitutional protection of workers against exploitative employment practices.
<i>Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India</i> , (1984) 3 SCC 161	Supreme Court of India	Right to dignified working conditions	Establishes that humane working conditions form part of the right to life.
<i>Consumer Education & Research Centre v. Union of India</i> , (1995) 3 SCC 42	Supreme Court of India	Occupational health and social security	Recognizes health and social security as integral components of labour welfare.
<i>Uber BV v. Aslam</i> , [2021] UKSC 5	United Kingdom Supreme Court	Worker classification and employment rights	Demonstrates judicial recognition of platform workers as "workers" entitled to statutory protections.
<i>Dynamex Operations West, Inc. v. Superior Court</i> , 416 P.3d 1 (Cal. 2018)	California Supreme Court	Employment classification (ABC Test)	Illustrates international judicial approaches for determining employment status in platform work.
Ministry of Labour & Employment	Code on Social Security implementation	Policy implementation	Highlights government initiatives for operationalizing welfare measures for gig workers.
NITI Aayog (2022)	<i>India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy</i>	Policy recommendations	Emphasizes legal awareness, social security expansion, and institutional reforms for gig workers.

All the above favorable judicial developments have failed to translate into a better protection of the rights of workers in India due to implementation difficulties. The government's policy initiatives are increasingly recognising the need to bring the gig workers into the fold. The ongoing process of implementing welfare schemes under the Code on Social Security and setting up comprehensive database of gig and platform workers, has been brought to the fore by the Ministry of Labour and Employment²⁷. Similarly, NITI Aayog's report "India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy" (2022)²⁸ suggests increasing the social protection, legal awareness, and grievance redressal mechanisms, as well as skill development to enhance the outcomes of the labour market for gig workers. These policy recommendations recognise that the importance of recognizing labour rights is not sufficient without having a proper institutional implementation and awareness of workers.

Indo-Doctrinally, labour law is on a transition mode. Although statutory recognition under the Code on Social Security, 2020 is an important step in the legislative process, there are important gaps in the law in this area regarding the classification of employment, enforceable labour rights, collective bargaining and effective implementation of social security. The judicial precedents exemplify constitutional safeguards of workers' rights from exploitation and confirm that workers' rights include dignity, livelihood and social security. However, the implementation of the constitutional principles into a meaningful protection of the rights of gig workers can be achieved through more concrete statutory requirements, better enforcement of the law, and increased legal awareness of gig workers. The present study thus contends that along with the reform of the legislations, legal awareness and legal empowerment are essential complements to enhance the protection of labour rights in India's emerging gig economy.

Empirical results

Demographic Profile of the Gig workers

The majority of gig workers in Karnataka are men with 69.3% representing the male population and 28.0% representing the female population of the 150 surveyed gig workers. The age group of 26–35 years (40.7%) was the largest, followed by those aged 18–25 (25.3%) indicating that gig work is mainly done by young adults. Educationally, a relatively educated workforce was

²⁷ MINISTRY OF LABOUR & EMPLOYMENT, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, *Code on Social Security, 2020*, <https://labour.gov.in> (last visited June 30, 2026).

²⁸ NITI AAYOG, *India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy: Perspectives and Recommendations on the Future of Work* (2022), <https://www.niti.gov.in> (last visited June 30, 2026).

engaged in platform jobs with 42.0% having an undergraduate degree.

In terms of type of gig, food delivery (32.7%) was the highest number of gigs; other gigs included ride-hailing services (25.3%) and logistics/courier delivery (19.3%). A majority of respondents (39.3%) had 1 to 3 years of gig work experience, which suggests they have moderate experience with gig work. When asked about earnings, the highest share of respondents (36.0%) had monthly earnings ranging from ₹15,001 to ₹25,000, indicative of lower incomes of gig workers in Karnataka. This demographic profile gives an overview of the respondents and sets a proper platform to understand the relationship between the legal awareness and legal empowerment, labour rights protection and gig workers.

Work profile of Gig workers

The food delivery services and ride-hailing services were the top two categories of the work related profile, accounting for 32.0% and 24.7% of the sample, respectively, while logistics and courier services comprised 20.7% of the sample. The majority (64.0%) worked on gig platforms as full-time workers, indicating their main reliance on such gig work. In terms of experience 42.0% had 1-3 years of experience in gig work and 26.7% had participated in digital platforms for the last 4-6 years. Regarding working hours, 38.6% said they worked 9-12 hours a day, showing that they have longer hours of work common in the gig economy. The largest proportion of respondents (38.0%) earned between ₹15,001 and ₹25,000 per month, whereas 27.3% reported earnings between ₹25,001 and ₹35,000. Last, having flexible working hours (36.0%) was the main driver for their participation in gig work, while employers' failure to provide work (26.0%) and more income opportunities (23.3%) were also significant. The findings offer crucial contextual information on the employment features of gig workers, and also facilitate analysis of the legal awareness, legal empowerment and labour rights protections of gig workers in Karnataka.

Legal awareness among Gig workers

According to the legal awareness profile, 68.7% of the respondents were aware about their basic labour rights as gig workers while 31.3% were not. But, less knowledge of specific laws was observed. The number of respondents knowing about Code on Social Security, 2020 is 40.7% and 59.3% respondents do not know about the Code.

Likewise, the respondents showed lack of awareness about grievance redressal process for settling employment related issues (61.3%) while 38.7% said that they were aware of grievance redressal process. There was also limited participation in formal legal awareness and/or training programmes (28.0%). In addition, while 49.3% said they had some knowledge of the terms and conditions of the platform on which they work, just 26.0% said they were completely aware, which indicates that many gig workers sign up for platforms without reading the terms and conditions that are a critical part of the agreement.

Overall, the survey results show that most gig workers have a general awareness of their rights at work, but there is still a significant lack of knowledge about the statutory rights, processes for resolving concerns and platforms policies. These observations highlight the need for further efforts towards building legal awareness and strengthening legal empowerment among the gig workers in Karnataka, while ensuring protection of labour rights.

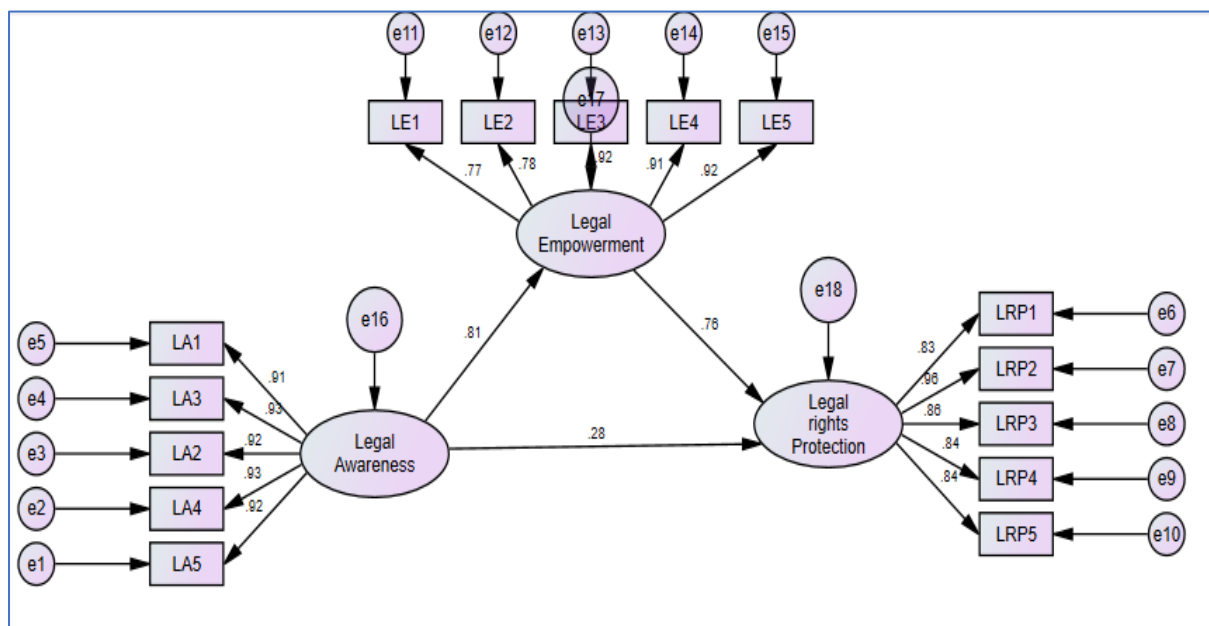
Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics show that the overall legal awareness, legal empowerment and perceived legal protection of labour rights of the respondents is low as reflected by the mean scores of most of the items ranging from 2.02 to 2.22 on a five-point Likert scale. In the Legal Awareness construct, the respondents showed limited knowledge in relation to their legal rights (LA1: Mean = 2.22, SD = 1.154); the provisions of the Code on Social Security, 2020 (LA2: Mean = 2.10, SD = 1.245); grievance redressal mechanisms (LA3: Mean = 2.09, SD = 1.240); platform terms and conditions (LA4: Mean = 2.07, SD = 1.192); and avenues for obtaining legal assistance (LA5: Mean = 2.16, SD = 1.202). Likewise, the Law Assertion construct had relatively low mean scores with high scores indicating low confidence in asserting their legal rights (Mean = 2.12), pursuing legal remedies (Mean = 2.06), challenging unfair decisions on platforms (Mean = 2.05) and using their knowledge of labour law to protect their interests (Mean = 2.10). Overall, people were more likely to feel confident about reporting unfair labour practices via appropriate channels though (LE2: Mean = 3.83, SD = 1.287). In terms of Labour Rights Protection, the respondents felt that the digital platforms did not provide enough protection of labour rights with low mean scores of labour rights protection (LRP1: Mean = 2.02), fair wages and payments (LRP2: Mean = 2.10), and access to grievance redressal (LRP3: Mean = 2.07). Despite this, relatively higher mean scores were found to be for occupational safety and welfare (LRP4: Mean = 3.93, SD = 1.206) and the adequacy of existing labour laws

and platform policies (LRP5: Mean = 3.93, SD = 1.142). Overall, respondents confirmed some elements of legal and institutional protection, but there is a lot of legal unawareness, lack of empowerment, and inadequate protection of labour rights of gig workers in Karnataka.

Testing of Hypothesis

Figure 1 – Mediation analysis results for role of Legal awareness, legal empowerment and legal rights protection



Hypothesis Testing

H1: Legal Awareness has a positive impact on Legal Empowerment of gig workers in Karnataka to a significant level.

Based on the structural model, the value of the standardized path coefficient of Legal Awareness on Legal Empowerment is 0.81 which indicates that the influence of Legal Awareness on Legal Empowerment is positive. The coefficient indicates that there is a strong positive relationship between legal empowerment of gig workers and their knowledge of labour laws, statutory rights, social security provisions and grievance redressal mechanisms, suggesting that gig workers with higher knowledge of these areas have higher levels of legal empowerment. The finding suggests that legal awareness helps the workers to be confident and to claim their rights and avail legal remedies if needed. Thus, the following hypothesis is accepted.

H2: Legal Awareness has a positive impact on Labour Rights Protection for Gig Workers in Karnataka.

The relationship between Legal Awareness and the Protection of Labour Rights was direct with the standardization path coefficient as $\beta = 0.28$, which indicates positive but comparatively less direct effect. This discovery indicates that awareness of labour rights help to increase the level of protection but legal awareness is not enough in order to ensure effective protection of workers' rights. There need to be other mechanisms, especially empowering the legal, to ensure awareness is realized in meaningful legal outcomes. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted.

H3: Labour Rights Protection among gig workers in Karnataka is significantly positively related to Legal Empowerment.

According to the structural model, the standardized coefficient (β) of the influence of Legal Empowerment on Labour Rights Protection is 0.76, which is a very strong positive influence. This strong connection suggests that empowered gig workers will be able to better claim their rights, seek grievance, call for fair treatment and avail statutory protection. Thus, the importance of legal empowerment comes to light as a factor in explaining the protection of labour rights in the gig economy context. However, legal empowerment proves to be a key factor in explaining labour rights protection in the gig economy context.

Mediation Analysis

A mediation analysis was also conducted to test if the mediation of Legal Empowerment was present between Legal Awareness and Labour Rights Protection.

The results show that the Legal Awareness has a significant effect on Legal Empowerment ($\beta = 0.81$) and Labour Rights Protection ($\beta = 0.76$) has a significant effect on Legal Empowerment ($\beta = 0.82$). The direct pathway from Legal Awareness to Labour Rights Protection is positive ($\beta = 0.28$), but is quite small in comparison to the indirect pathway through Legal Empowerment.

The indirect effect is approximately equal to:

$$\text{Indirect Effect} = 0.81 \times 0.76 = 0.616$$

The effect of Legal Awareness on Labour Rights Protection is partially mediated by Legal Empowerment as both direct effect ($\beta = 0.28$) and indirect effect ($\beta \approx 0.62$) are positive. This suggests that legal awareness has direct and indirect effects on the protection of labour rights, but that a significant part of legal awareness is in enhancing workers' legal empowerment.

Discussion

The results indicate that informing GWS of their legal rights is not sufficient to effectively protect them. Instead, the focus needs to be on empowering workers by strengthening their capabilities to claim their rights, their right to grievance and legal remedies. Enhancing legal empowerment can thus greatly boost the scope of protection of labour rights.

The present study is a triangulated research design that involved a combination of doctrinal legal analysis and empirical evidence to understand the linkage of legal awareness, legal empowerment and protection of labour rights among the gig workers of Karnataka. Through doctrinal analysis, the scholars established that India has taken great strides in making legal developments by including gig and platform workers as part of the Code on Social Security, 2020. The Constitution provides for the dignity, equality and social security of workers in the following ways: in Article 14, 19(1)(g), and 21 which is also reflected in the judicial pronouncements such as *People's Union for Democratic Rights v. Union of India*, *Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India* and *Consumer Education & Research Centre v. Union of India*, there is a strong commitment from law to ensure dignity, equality and social security of workers. The emergence of *Uber BV v. Aslam* in international jurisprudence also indicates the growing recognition of the rights of workers in the platform economy. The doctrinal analysis suggests that the legal landscape has come a long way in recognizing the need for protection of gig workers, albeit steps are not yet fully taken.

The empirical results show otherwise, however. The descriptive analysis showed that overall, legal awareness among the respondents is on a low level as reflected in the lack of awareness about the Code on Social Security, 2020, grievance redressal mechanisms and legal assistance facilities. Likewise, there was a low level of legal empowerment as respondents indicated they had limited confidence in asserting their legal rights and taking legal action. These results indicate that while there are statutory safeguards, there is a significant number that are not aware of these rights and protections. Thus far, the legal environment has not resulted in a broader understanding of its target groups.

This is supported by the structural model. The Legal Awareness variable had a positive and high impact on Legal Empowerment ($\beta = 0.81$); that is, the knowledge of the rights of the workers concerning the labour law has a significant effect on their empowerment. Legal Empowerment, on the other hand, produced a significant positive effect on Labour Rights Protection ($\beta = 0.76$) with the direct influence of Legal Awareness on Labour Rights Protection being relatively less ($\beta = 0.28$). The mediation analysis supported the findings of the partial mediation between Legal Awareness and Labour Rights Protection; that is, Legal Awareness has only part of the influence, because if there is only Legal Awareness, there is no influence on Labour Rights Protection.

The triangulation of doctrinal and empirical results, therefore, indicates a critical gap related to implementation. The doctrinal analysis illustrates that there is a developing legal structure in India that can guarantee protection of gig workers through constitutional principles and legal statutory recognition. However, the facts show that these legal safeguards have limited impact – due to a lack of awareness and power among many workers. So it is not just a lack of legal recognition of the gig economy as a phenomenon that is a problem, it's also that rights are not easily available and are a practical problem.

The study thus recommends for a multi-faceted approach to reinforce labour rights protection, which goes beyond legislative measures. Governments should conduct periodic legal awareness sessions, and make information available on labour rights and social security benefits accessible, and introduce easy to access grievance redressal systems especially for platform workers. There is a need to ensure transparency in communication of the legal rights of workers when they are hired and throughout their period of work and labour departments to work alongside the labour unions, civil society groups and legal aid institutions to promote legal literacy and access to justice. At the same time, developing comprehensive welfare schemes and accountability mechanisms for digital platforms as well as effective enforcement of the Code on Social Security, 2020, are key to ensure that statutory recognition becomes real labour rights protection.

The triangulated results show that the three elements discussed in the section above are interrelated and form a chain of activities towards positive labour governance, with legal awareness as the foundation, legal empowerment as the enabling mechanism, and labour rights protection as the end result. Therefore, the study suggests that welfare of gig workers in

Karnataka is to be protected through progressive legislation, but also by empowering the workers to enquire, assert and exercise their welfare rights. The integrated approach offers a feasible plan to build the robustness of labour justice in the platform economy that is rapidly growing in India.

Conclusion

The gig economy has become a key part of India's digital labour market, offering flexible working arrangements for those seeking jobs, but also leaving workers at a great risk of legal and social abuse. While the Code on Social Security 2020 is a progressive piece of legislation that has, for the first time, made gig workers and platform workers a part of the law, this study shows that statutory recognition is not enough to ensure full protection of labour rights for these workers. Knowledge and understanding of labour law rights is not enough for effective implementation: workers must also be confident and have the capacity to act on their rights.

The doctrinal analysis found that there was a strong normative bases of protection for gig workers from Constitutional guarantees, labour legislation and judicial precedents. The empirical results suggest, however, that many gig workers in Karnataka remain poorly informed and without legal empowerment and hence cannot exercise access to statutory benefits or grievance redressal procedures or other legal remedies. The structural model also showed that Legal awareness positively affect Legal empowerment, which in turn significantly affected labour rights protection, thus legal empowerment was considered as the path through which legal knowledge had a great effect on obtaining legal results.

The co-ordination of doctrinal and empirical results points to an obvious discrepancy between law as made and law as lived by gig workers. Though India has taken some serious steps towards the legal reforms some of the steps are yet to come through in the real sense because of the lack of awareness about the law, institutional support and its effective implementation. Thus, a multifaceted approach, which covers not only the implementation of the legislation, but also ongoing legal awareness programmes, easy access to legal assistance, clear platform policies and quick dispute resolution procedures is needed to enhance the protection of labour rights.

The study finds that a greater awareness of law and legal empowerment is needed to bring about meaningful labour rights for gig workers and to ensure that the legal clauses are realized.

Policymakers, labour departments, digital platform companies, and civil society organizations need to collaborate so as to raise legal awareness, extend social security coverage and set up effective enforcement mechanisms. All of this will not only improve the level of protection for labour rights but also help build a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable gig-economy in India.

References

Journal Articles

- Choudhary, V. & S. S. Shiresi, *Analysing the Gig Economy in India and Exploring Various Effective Regulatory Methods to Improve the Plight of the Workers*, 57 J. ASIAN & AFR. STUD. 1343 (2022).
- Dwivedi, S. & D. Deepak, *Social Security for Gig Workers in India: Challenges, Gaps, and Policy Recommendations*, 11 NAT'L RSCH. J. BUS. ECON. 29 (2024).
- Gaikwad, P., *From Flexibility to Exploitation: A Study of Legal Recognition, Protection, and Enforcement of Gig Workers Labour Rights* (2025).
- Gill, J. & S. Gupta, *The Gig Economy and Its Implications on Contract Labor Laws*, 9 NUJS J. REGUL. STUD. (2024).
- Laisram, I. & R. Shankar, *Navigating Labour Law in the Gig Economy*, 14 NUJS L. REV. 1 (2021).
- Pawar, A. & A. Srivastava, *Gig Workers and Employment Laws: An Indian Perspective*, Shimla L. REV. 88 (2022).
- Rane, V., *Platform-Based Gig Workers: A Blind Spot in the Indian Labour Laws* (2023) (SSRN Working Paper No. 4821229).
- Shekhawat, V. & P. Khare, *Legal Protections for Gig Workers: A Comparative Socio-Legal Study of Indonesia and India*, 5 INDONESIAN J. SOCIO-LEGAL STUD. 1 (2025).
- Singh, R. & V. Bhushan, *The Global Workforce Revolution: Exploring Digital Labour Platforms and the Gig Economy in the Era of Globalization*, 3 Int'l J. Civ. L. & Legal Rsch. 19 (2023).
- Soni, M., S. B. Choudhary, R. Gade & H. Awasthi, *The Gig Economy and the Social Contract: Rethinking Labor Laws and Social Protection in the Digital Age*, 23 Lex Localis (2025).

- Thomas, P. N., *The Gig Economy in India: Start-Ups, Infrastructure and Resistance* (Routledge 2024).
- Vijayalakshmi, S. & M. Prarthana, *Rights of Gig-Platform Workers and Sustainable Development Goals*, 3 LawFoyer Int'l J. Doctrinal Legal Rsch. 494 (2025).

Cases

- Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India, (1984) 3 SCC 161.
- Consumer Education & Research Centre v. Union of India, (1995) 3 SCC 42.
- Dynamex Operations W., Inc. v. Superior Court, 416 P.3d 1 (Cal. 2018).
- Olga Tellis v. Bombay Mun. Corp., (1985) 3 SCC 545.
- People's Union for Democratic Rights v. Union of India, (1982) 3 SCC 235.
- Uber BV v. Aslam, [2021] UKSC 5 (U.K.).

Statutes

- Code on Social Security, No. 36 of 2020, §§ 2(35), 2(61), ch. IX (India).
- India Const. arts. 14, 19(1)(g), 21.

Online Sources

- MINISTRY OF LABOUR & EMPLOYMENT, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, *Code on Social Security, 2020*, <https://labour.gov.in> (last visited June 30, 2026).
- NITI AAYOG, *India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy: Perspectives and Recommendations on the Future of Work* (2022), <https://www.niti.gov.in> (last visited June 30, 2026).