

Gendered Experience and Safety Challenges Among Women Gig Workers

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Abstract

The gig economy is becoming a major source of income for women, offering the flexibility of employment in various sectors like home services, deliveries, and ride-hailing. However, even though it is a flexible arrangement, gig work leads women into gendered experiences and safety issues that are hard to avoid, such as discrimination, emotional labour, and work-life conflict. The research aims to reveal the correlation between the gendered experiences and safety outcomes of women gig workers in India, using a sample size of 280 participants. To validate the constructs, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were conducted as preliminary methods, then Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the hypothesized relationships. The results indicate that the gendered experiences are the main reason for the significantly increased safety challenges, where emotional labour mediates and work-life conflict moderates. The necessity of platform interventions and policy reforms to ensure the safety of women participating in the gig economy is pointed out by the study.

Keywords: *Women gig workers, Gendered experience, Safety challenges, Emotional labor*

1. Introduction

The growth of the gig economy in India has made the labor market more attractive to women by providing them with the option to work in a flexible manner while taking care of house duties. By now, it is estimated that about a third to a half of the workers in the gig economy, such as those in home services, delivery, and ride-hailing sectors, are women [1]. The women's financial participation and independence are thus brought to the forefront by the expansion but at the same time, it positions them in a situation where they have to deal with the difficulties and risks that are gendered and which are not that common in the traditional forms of employment [2]. To start with the formal or regular job sector, the gig is usually unregulated, the workers do not have protection and the work is done online only. The online platforms, though granting flexibility to the workers, can also continue the biases that are in the society and thus create a work environment that is insecure for women [3]. The gendered work dynamics of women in the gig economy are characterized by discrimination, unequal treatment, emotional labor, and work-life conflict. One way to put it is that women may suffer from discrimination in the form of client bias, influence of rating systems of the platforms, and lack of access to well-paid tasks, all of which serve to limit women's earning potential and cement gender inequality in tele-working. Conferring to [4] emotional labor is about managing your emotions to fit into the organization or the clients' expectations. In the gig scenario, women normally end up exhibiting the opposing feeling, being friendly, or altering their conduct to the satisfaction of the clients which sometimes causes them to undergo psychological stress, burnout, and decreased well-being [5]. The issue of work-life conflict further adds to these difficulties, as women take care of the house while working in gigs. The unpredictable and often demanding nature of gig work can clash with domestic duties, thereby increasing stress and possibly affecting the performance and safety of the workers [6]. Safety issues in gig economy are not just single dimensional, they are multi-

faceted and cover physical, psychological, and social aspects. Women are mainly exposed to physical safety risks while delivering alone or servicing homes, especially in dark or unsafe areas. Apart from physical risks, there are also psychological ones that come from the constant fear of being harassed, verbally abused, or facing misconduct from clients. Social safety risks include being stigmatized, concerns about one's reputation, or fear of retaliation if the incidents are reported [7]. The intersection of gendered experiences with these safety challenges suggests a complex interplay, where discrimination, emotional labor, and work-life conflict may aggravate women's susceptibility to unsafe situations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Gendered Experience in Gig Work

The term gendered experience expresses the different perception and reactions of women to the workplace environment that are indirectly affected by gender norms and expectations. This is more pronounced in the gig economy where women have to deal with various issues like discrimination from clients, getting less opportunity for good paying tasks and being rated based on their gender. For instance, in some platforms, the client rating system used to determine worker compensation may accidentally strengthen the gender bias and hence, women will lose out [8]. Emotional labor is another aspect that women have to face because they will be making their feelings for the clients to be good and often, they will be taking in all the negative emotions like anger or discomfort which may lead to mental torture [9]. Work-life balance has always been a big issue in freelancing for women. In most cases, it is the women who are responsible for looking after the family as opposed to men who do the least. Moreover, even though job at home is quite flexible, there might be time and emotional conflicts between the professional and domestic duties which could lead to a negative influence on the employee's health and safety feeling [10]. All these factors together form the major gendered experience concept which affects the way women communicate with clients and the platform they are using.

2.2. Safety Challenges

Inherent in the dimensions, the safety challenges for women in gig work are made up of physical, psychological and social aspects. The biggest physical safety risks occur when women make deliveries, use ride-hailing services or go for home service appointments and they are all alone [11]. They might be going through unfamiliar neighbourhoods, poorly lit streets or deserted areas and this way, the risks of accidents, harassment or even assault are increased. These tangible barriers lead women to be inconsistent in their participation in gig work [12]. Psychological safety concerns are almost the same as physical ones, women's lives being full of hassle and anxiety due to the possibility of harassment, aggressive clients or unpredictable places to work [13]. This fear may not only be the cause of emotional decline, but also poor job performance and unwillingness to accept assignments that might look a bit dangerous. Adding to the problem are social safety risks that women have to deal with, such as loss of reputation, social stigma, or fear of being blamed when they want to report incidents and that limits their access to support and justice [14]. Empirical studies repeatedly indicate that women workers in gig positions are more likely to encounter unsafe situations than their male counterparts, thus revealing a gendered vulnerability in platform-mediated work. The evidence calls for immediate action in the form of safety interventions, which should comprise technological measures, strong reporting systems, customer screening, and gender-empathetic policies both at the organizational and regulatory levels [15]. In fact, these provisions are not only meant for the safety of women workers but also for the promotion of equal participation and sustainable engagement in the gig economy.

2.3. Gendered Discrimination

Gendered discrimination in the workplace has been a crucial factor in limiting women's economic participation and their general welfare. Classical researchers in organizational behavior stress that women's treatment in terms of pay, the distribution of responsibilities, chances for promotion, and acknowledgment is normally unequal [16]. Gender discrimination is said to be not only a structural problem but also a relationship issue, as it affects and distorts women's psychological safety, job satisfaction, and career advancement through their interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and clients [17]. Besides, gender discrimination in the gig economy is a situation often affecting the individual worker. Women daily deal with biases from clients, such as uneven assessment of skills, judgments based on looks, and doubtfulness about their ability to carry out a job in delivery, ride-hailing, or home servicing [18]. Research shows that not only human biases but also the machine algorithms and the rating system used in most platforms may unknowingly cause discrimination against women and thus, limit their work allocation and earning opportunities [19]. The emotional labor of women in these contexts is often increased as they constantly manage clients' expectations and biased interactions trying to get good ratings

and retain the clients [20]. Furthermore, discrimination combines with other structural and personal issues like work-life conflict, making the vulnerable even more so. Women doing platform work alongside taking care of the house are likely to be more exposed to dangerous situations, which brings to the fore the interlinkage of gender discrimination, emotional labor, and safety challenges [21]. All the studies together suggest that it is urgent to deal with gender discrimination in gig work as a matter of the whole society's concern, not just the particular women being affected.

2.4. Emotional labor

Emotional labor has turned out to be a significant and very affecting factor in the lives of women engaged in gig work. [22] put forward a theory that job sectors with a continuous regulation of emotions in particular, the showing of feelings contrary to one's true emotions could lead to psychological and physical strain and eventually to long-term exhaustion. In the case of gig work, women often have to be nice, friendly, and helpful no matter how they are treated; this is the case even when the treatment is that of being rude, discriminative, or making unreasonable demands [23]. In contrast to traditional workplaces, the non-centralized and customer-facing nature of platform work usually puts the whole emotional management responsibility on the worker, with compliance being further enforced by performance metrics and ratings. The constant effort to suppress feelings can lead to stress, emotional fatigue, and burnout [24]. In addition, it may directly and indirectly lower women's safety perception as they might not be willing to set limitations, turn down unsafe jobs, or report dangerous situations for fear of getting poor client ratings or decreasing their chances of getting work in the future [25]. The gradual build-up of the emotional labor effect not only influences the psychological well-being but also molds the decision-making, risk tolerance, and the extent of engagement in gig work, thus indicating the urgent need for dealing with emotional demands especially in situations where physical and structural safety measures have been put in place in the platform-based employment.

2.5. Work-Life Conflict

Work-life conflict happens when the requirements of professional life impede the meeting of personal, household, or family commitments, which results in creating tension and even strain for the person. Women who take part in gig work are especially prone to experiencing this conflict because of the non-uniform nature of the assignments which are platform-based, that is, the working hours can be unpredictable, there can be changes in location, and the workers may have to adjust their schedules to that of the clients at short notice [26]. Besides, gig work has become a common practice where the separation between work and personal life is blurred, and thus women find themselves all the time juggling between the two. This increased work-life conflict not only results in negative impacts on mental and physical health but also gets women into more dangerous situations as they might think that they have no option but to take up jobs during late hours, in unsafe places, or under conditions which jeopardize their security simply to earn a living or to meet household obligations [27]. Research provides evidence that work-life conflict can act both as a direct stressor and as a moderating factor, thus influencing the relationship between gendered experiences, emotional labor, and tangible safety outcomes [28]. Work-life conflict, on the one hand, magnifies the discrimination and emotional regulation pressures associated with women's participation in gig work, thus, the urgent need for interventions that are flexible, supportive, and protective to women in balancing work and personal or family responsibilities.

2.6. Conceptual Linkages

The reviewed studies reveal that the experiences of women and their safety issues in gig work have a complex relationship. Gendered experiences, including discrimination, emotional labor, and work-life conflict, have been pinpointed as the main factors influencing both perceived and actual safety risks [29]. Discrimination creates an atmosphere where employees feel either unwelcome or unsupported, emotional labor is the ongoing effort to control one's feelings in order to please the customers, and work-life conflict brings extra stress from trying to manage the household chores and unpredictable gig work at the same time [30]. All these factors make women more prone to unsafe situations. In this context, emotional labor is seen as the most important mediator. It shows how gendered experiences influence safety outcomes: women who are being discriminated against or who are experiencing bias from the client often put a lot of emotional effort into keeping a professional and cordial relationship with the customer, which can exhaust their mental resources and make them less able to identify, react, or reject unsafe assignments [31]. At the same time, work-life conflict might act as a moderator, and the effects of gendered experiences on safety might be multiplied. For example, when women are trying to manage household chores and at the same time working under the pressure of irregular or demanding schedules, the negative impact that

discrimination and emotional labor have on safety outcomes is more clearly observed, as they may think they have to take on high-risk tasks or not stick up for themselves in order to keep earning and meet the needs of their family [32]. In conclusion, this theoretical model brings together the direct, indirect, and conditional pathways through which gendered experiences affect the safety challenges women face, thereby offering a comprehensive and subtle understanding of the psychosocial factors involved.

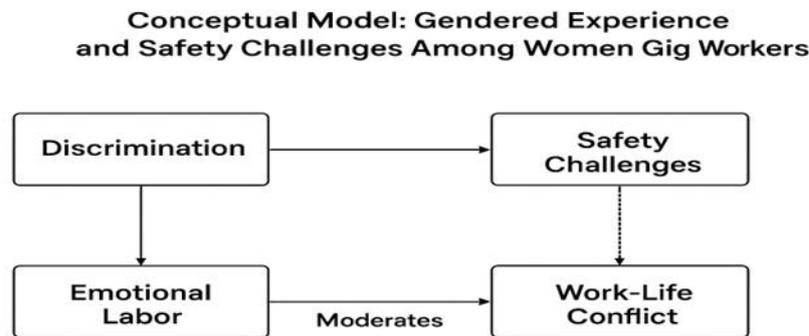


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Gendered Experience → Safety Challenges

3. Research Objectives

The research is guided by the literature and the theoretical framework, and thus has the following goals:

1. To investigate women's gig workers' gendered experiences in India involving discrimination, emotional labor, and work-life conflict; and to discover how these experiences affect work relationships and areas of interactions among the workers.
2. To identify the nature and the level of safety risks concerning women gig workers, including the risks of physical, psychological, and social safety.
3. To scrutinize the mediating effect of emotional labor in the connection between gendered experiences and safety challenges, exploring how emotional regulation leads to a state of being more vulnerable.
4. To assess the moderating role of work-life conflict in the relationship between gendered experiences and safety outcomes, and to clarify how the overlapping of home and work responsibilities determines the level of risk.

3.1. Hypotheses Development

Based on the literature, the following hypotheses are set forth:

H1: Women gig workers experience the perceived and real safety challenges positively because of the gendered experiences.

H2: The relationship between gendered experiences and safety challenges is mediated by emotional labor.

H3: Work-life conflict strengthens the relationship between gendered experiences and safety challenges, thus, raising their impact.

4. Research Methodology

The research is based on a cross-sectional quantitative research model and data were obtained through structured questionnaires that were given online and offline to women working in different kinds of gig platforms like delivery, home services, and ride-hailing. In total, 280 women workers of the gig economy took part, chosen through purposive sampling to guarantee different kinds of gig work representation. The participants were asked to have an experience of at least six months on the platform so that there would be enough exposure to the gig work conditions. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage
Age (years)	18–25	78

	26–35	102
	36–45	70
	46+	30
Type of Gig Work	Delivery	90
	Home Services	120
	Ride-Hailing	70
Education Level	Secondary	80
	Graduate	150
	Postgraduate	50

The demographic profile of the 280 women gig workers reveals that most of them (102; 36.4%) belong to the age group of 26–35 years, while the second largest group is 18–25 years (78; 27.9%), next comes 36–45 years (70; 25%), and finally 46 years and above (30; 10.7%). Such a distribution of ages shows a comparatively young workforce engaged in gig work activities. The type of gig work is concerned, home services take the lead (120; 42.9%), followed by delivery (90; 32.1%) and ride-hailing (70; 25%), hence, the prominence of domestic and service-oriented platforms among women can be seen. In terms of education, most of the participants are graduates (150; 53.6%), followed by those who have secondary education (80; 28.6%), and finally, postgraduate degrees (50; 17.8%), thus indicating that women from different education backgrounds are participating in the gig economy actively.

Table 2: Constructs and Cronbach's

Construct	Cronbach's α	Source
Gendered Discrimination	0.89	Vallas & Schor, 2020
Emotional Labor	0.87	Hochschild, 1983
Work-Life Conflict	0.82	Carlson et al., 2000
Safety Challenges	0.91	Bayton et al., 2019

5. Data Analysis

The data analysis utilized SPSS for Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and AMOS for Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The analysis was carried out in three stages: initially, EFA was executed to discover the underlying factor structure; next, CFA was performed to authenticate the construct validity and evaluate the measurement model fit; finally, SEM was used to examine the proposed relationships, incorporating mediation and moderation effects.

6. Results

6.1. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

By employing principal component analysis alongside varimax rotation, EFA was performed. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.87 demonstrated the appropriateness of the data for factor analysis. The results from Bartlett's test of sphericity were significant ($\chi^2 = 1240.45$, $p < 0.001$), thus, the presence of correlations among items was confirmed. A total of four factors were obtained and these accounted for 85% of the variance in total.

Table 3: EFA Results

Factor	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's α	Variance Explained
Gendered Discrimination	5	0.68–0.85	0.89	28%

Emotional Labor	4	0.65–0.81	0.87	20%
Work-Life Conflict	3	0.62–0.79	0.82	15%
Safety Challenges	6	0.70–0.88	0.91	22%

The outcomes of factor analysis suggest a solid measurement model for the constructs of the study. The Gendered Discrimination factor with five items showed strong factor loadings between the values of 0.68 and 0.85 and an excellent internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 which accounted for 28% of the total variance. Emotional Labor which was measured with four items also displayed good factor loadings (0.65–0.81) as well as high reliability ($\alpha = 0.87$) thus explained 20% of the variance. The Work-Life Conflict factor which is composed of three items shows acceptable loadings (0.62–0.79) and reliability ($\alpha = 0.82$) hence making a 15% contribution to the variance. Lastly, Safety Challenges which was assessed using six items exhibited strong loadings (0.70–0.88), excellent reliability ($\alpha = 0.91$), and explained 22% of the variance. To sum it up, these results indicate that the constructs are well-defined, internally consistent, and together capture a great part of the variability in the data.

6.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

CFA was performed to confirm the measurement model. All factor loadings were significant ($\lambda > 0.60$, $p < 0.001$). Fit indices indicated good model fit: $\chi^2/df = 1.95$, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.057.

Table 4: CFA Factor Loadings

Construct	Item	Factor Loading	S.E.	CR	p-value
Gendered Discrimination	GD	0.82	0.03	20.4	<0.001
Emotional Labor	EL	0.76	0.04	17.5	<0.001
Work-Life Conflict	WLC	0.71	0.05	15.6	<0.001
Safety Challenges	SC	0.81	0.03	19.8	<0.001

The results of confirmatory factor analysis validate the measurement model as the items, in all instances, load significantly on the constructs they are assigned to. Specifically, for Gendered Discrimination, the items GD exhibit loadings of 0.82, respectively, with standard errors of 0.04 and 0.03, critical ratios (CR) of 18.2 and 20.4, and p-values <0.001, thereby establishing relationships that are very significant. The Emotional Labor item EL1 has a loading of 0.76 (S.E. = 0.04, CR = 17.5, $p < 0.001$), and the Work-Life Conflict item WLC1 has a loading of 0.71 (S.E. = 0.05, CR = 15.6, $p < 0.001$), both indicating strong significance. On the other hand, the Safety Challenges item SC1 also has a very high loading of 0.81 (S.E. = 0.03, CR = 19.8, $p < 0.001$), thus supporting the reliability of the construct even more. To sum up, every factor loading is above the suggested level of 0.7, and the measurement model is proven to be both valid and reliable through the combination of high CR values and highly significant p-values.

6.3. Table 5: Structural Equation Modeling

Fit Index	Value	Threshold / Criteria
χ^2 / df	2.01	< 3
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.93	≥ 0.90
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.92	≥ 0.90
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.059	≤ 0.08

The SEM results indicate that the structural model fits the data well. The χ^2/df ratio is below 3, while the CFI and TLI exceed 0.90, reflecting good comparative and incremental fit. The RMSEA of 0.059 falls within the acceptable range, confirming that the hypothesized relationships among gendered experiences, emotional labor, work-life conflict, and safety challenges are adequately represented by the model.

Table 5: SEM Results

Hypothesis	Path	Standardized β	S.E.	t-value	Result
H1	Gendered Experience \rightarrow Safety Challenges	0.52	0.05	10.4	Supported
H2	Gendered Experience \rightarrow Emotional Labor \rightarrow Safety Challenges	0.21	0.03	6.1	Supported (Mediation)
H3	Work-Life Conflict moderates Gendered Experience \rightarrow Safety Challenges	0.15	0.07	2.1	Supported (Moderation)

The results from the structural model provide major backing for the hypotheses that were put forward. H1 indicates that there is a significant positive effect of Gendered Experience on Safety Challenges ($\beta = 0.52$, S.E. = 0.05, $t = 10.4$, supported), which means that female workers' gendered discrimination experiences are significantly correlated with safety risks in the gig economy to a great extent. H2 shows the significant mediating effect of Emotional Labor on the relationship between Gendered Experience and Safety Challenges ($\beta = 0.21$, S.E. = 0.03, $t = 6.1$, supported), which means that emotional labor management is one of the factors that partly explain the process of gendered experience becoming safety challenges. H3 states that Work-Life Conflict has a significant moderating effect on the relationship between Gendered Experience and Safety Challenges ($\beta = 0.15$, S.E. = 0.07, $t = 2.1$, supported), which implies that the relationship between gendered experience and safety risks is heightened under the condition of a high work-life conflict. In sum, the findings indicate that emotional labor and work-life conflict are the two factors which not only contribute but also determine the safety outcomes of women workers in the gig economy.

7. Discussion

Research on women's gig jobs has uncovered the impact of gendered experiences on safety issues of women gig workers. The factors of discrimination, emotional labor, and work-life conflict not only determine women's risk perceptions but also add up to their actual unsafe situation exposure. Emotional labor is revealed as a major point through which gendered experiences affect safety, which is consistent with earlier studies. The work-life conflict moderating effect suggests that the combined load of domestic and gig work makes one more likely to encounter safety incidents, thus exacerbating the problem. The implications of these findings are significant in practice. Technologies to reduce gender bias and those like client rating-based anonymity, safe task allocation, and quick incident reporting can be integrated. Furthermore, emotional resilience and situational awareness training can help women even more. Policymakers need to be aware of the peculiar risks women encounter in non-traditional work and set up laws that protect their safety and well-being.

8. Implications

This research broadens the gendered work theory application to gig economy settings and proves that gender-related experiences influence the safety outcomes both ways, directly and indirectly. The inclusion of emotional labor as a mediator sheds light on the psychological processes involved in a more detailed way. The platforms are to take active safety measures that involve technology-enabled monitoring, client screening, and emergency response plans, to mention a few. Adoption of gender-sensitive policies, implementation of flexible working hours, and provision of support mechanisms to employees will help reduce work-life conflict thereby minimizing the amount of exposure to safety risks.

9. Limitations and Future Research

The cross-sectional design restricts to a great extent the causal interpretation. The purposive sample might, to some extent, limit the ability to generalize the findings and self-reports can always lead to some bias being present. Longitudinal studies

could be a perfect option in future research, male counterparts for comparative analysis could be included and additional mediators such as social support or platform trust could also be investigated.

10. Conclusion

Gig working women in India find themselves in a complicated situation where problems related to gender along with the very significant issue of safety, all at once, exist. Such discrimination in the form of biased client interaction and unequal treatment on platforms, in addition to the emotional labor of creating and keeping up with customer expectations, result in both psychological and physical strain. Conflict between work and life situations makes these pressures even worse since women take care of household chores and at the same time, have to depend on irregular, often unpredictable, gig work hours which puts them at an even higher risk of facing safety issues. By providing empirical evidence of the direct and indirect pathways through which gendered experiences influence safety, and also the role played by emotional labor as a mediator and the impact of work-life conflict as a moderator, this research is able to give practical advice to platforms and lawmakers. Measures such as the use of technology for safety monitoring, employment of gender-sensitive policies, application of flexible scheduling, and provision of support can all help in reducing risks and improving well-being. It is of utmost importance to deal with these challenges not just for the sake of women workers' protection but also for the creation of inclusive, fair, and sustainable gig work environments which would mean the economic advantages of the gig economy would not come at the price of safety and mental health.

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