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Antecedents of Psychological Well-being in the Platform Economy: Evidence from Keralam.

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Abstract

The study analyses the relationship between job characteristics in the platform economy and the psychological well-being of platform-based workers, examining the mediating role of job insecurity. We administered a well-structured questionnaire to platform-based workers in Kerala (N=405). We recruited taxi drivers (N=203) and food delivery agents (N=202) through snowball sampling. Sociodemographic variables showed that 73.3 per cent of the sample relied solely on platform-based gig work, and 71.4 per cent worked more than eight hours a day; the sample also included highly educated workers, with almost 49 per cent holding a university degree. The analysis used structural equation modelling and controlled for sociodemographic variables. The results showed that job characteristics have a significant total effect on platform-based workers' psychological well-being (β=0.537, P<.001). Further path analysis showed that job characteristics significantly reduce job insecurity (β=-.507, P<.001) and increase platform workers' psychological well-being (β=.349, P<.001); job insecurity decreases psychological well-being (β=-0.371, P<.001); thus, job insecurity acts as a significant partial mediator (β=0.188, P<.001) in the conceptual model. The results have relevant implications for policymakers and aggregators to address platform-based workers' psychological well-being.

Keywords: Psychological well-being, Job characteristics, Job insecurity, Platform economy, Structural Equation Modelling (CB SEM).

Introduction

Digital interventions in the labour market have transformed traditional work tremendously. Gig work is an output of this emerging trend. The gig economy is a system in which companies connect with individuals to complete specific tasks executed through digital applications (Taylor et al., 2023). Gig workers are called by different names: temp-job workers, sharing-economy workers, collaborative economy workers, workers employed with aggregators, online workers, independent contractors, on-call workers, and so on (Remesh & Chaudhary, 2020). The gig economy gained overall attention with the arrival of digital labour-sharing platforms. The platform economy is a subset of the gig economy, comprising gig jobs through digital platforms (Abraham et al., 2021). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has classified digital labour platforms into 'Online web-based platforms' and

'Location-based platforms' (ILO,2021). According to De Stefano, digital platforms take two forms: 'crowdwork' and 'work on demand via apps' (De Stefano,2016). 'Location-based platforms' and 'work on demand via apps' are similar because they provide services through location-based apps, where apps act as matchmakers in the labour market within a geographical area (ILO,2018). Individuals are motivated to join gig jobs by factors such as autonomy over work, flexibility, and additional income. The workers do not have long-term relationships with a business; they are hired to complete a task or gig (Abraham et al., 2021). Platform jobs motivate many, even though stress is closely associated with these work arrangements. The precariousness of such platform-based jobs raises serious concerns. Platform gig workers face challenges, including competition among coworkers, inadequate compensation, problems in receiving incentives, and isolation (Behl et al., 2022). Much of the existing literature has focused on the problems of gig or platform workers; studies on antecedents of psychological well-being are fewer.

Review of Literature and Hypothesis Development

The article established a theoretical model by reviewing existing literature, then empirically tested it. The Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham,1976) inspired the theoretical foundation of this research. The theoretical model is used to evaluate the psychological well-being of platform workers. Job characteristics are the independent variable in the model, job insecurity is the mediating variable, and the dependent variable is psychological well-being. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model that guides the study, offering an empirical test of four hypotheses discussed in the following paragraphs. There are very few studies that have been carried out to measure the antecedents, such as job characteristics and job insecurity, of the psychological well-being of location-based platform gig workers. Hence, the present study investigates how well the model could predict the psychological well-being of platform workers. This study examines psychological well-being and its antecedents, job characteristics (autonomy and feedback) and job insecurity among platform workers in Kerala. The study aims to inform policies and practices for enhancing platform-based workers' psychological well-being. The objectives of the study, based on the information mentioned, are as follows:

- To study how platform job characteristics affect job insecurity.
- To analyse the impact of job characteristics and job insecurity on psychological well-being.
- To examine the mediating effect of job insecurity on the relationship between job characteristics and psychological well-being.

Psychological Well-being

Well-being has different dimensions, and the most commonly used dimension is psychological well-being. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2014), psychological well-being is the state in which an individual copes with day-to-day stresses, works productively and contributes to the community they live in. Psychological well-being is an individual's positive state of mind in which they experience a sense of purpose and meaning in life (Ryff, 1989). Platform-based workers operate in a complex daily environment; they work independently but under algorithmic control. Due to the precarious nature of work and income, compared to conventional workers, gig workers are experiencing a higher rate of depression (Berger et al., 2019). The gig workers' psychological well-being is affected not only by financial insecurity but also by loneliness (Wang et al., 2022).

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Job Characteristics

Job characteristics are perceived attributes of a job that influence an individual's performance at work (Mayyona et al., 2025). The study uses the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), which identifies five dimensions: Autonomy, Feedback, Task Identity, Task Significance, and Skill Variety. This research did not cover all dimensions of the model but focused on autonomy and feedback, which are closely associated with location-based platform gig jobs (Wood et al., 2019).

-Autonomy

In their Job Characteristics Model, Hackman and Oldham defined autonomy as the "degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and in determining the procedure to be used in carrying it out" (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). More autonomy in deciding when, where, and how to work makes individuals more prone to change (Nie et al., 2023). Platform gig workers' autonomy over the time and space of work, and how to execute the job, is an illusion of autonomy over minute decisions (Shapiro, 2017). Empirical studies show that perceived autonomy among digital workers is subject to algorithmic control, which simultaneously causes occupational burnout, sleep deficiency and fatigue (Wood et al., 2019).

-Feedback

Feedback is the "degree to which carrying out the work activities required by the job results in the individual obtaining direct and clear information about the effectiveness of his or her performance" (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). The feedback system can enhance job competence by facilitating continuous learning (Bakker & Demerouti,2007).

Job Insecurity

Job insecurity is defined as the persistent fear of losing a job (McGuiness et al.,2014). Job insecurity is the most distressing work situation (De Witte, 1999). Job insecurity harms job satisfaction and an individual's well-being (Sverke et al., 2002 & De Witte, 1999). When people feel job insecurity, they leave jobs for rational reasons, such as new career opportunities (Ashford et al., 1989). Flexibility is a major factor that draws young workers into platform jobs, but they face the repercussions of job insecurity (Rahman et al., 2025). Existing studies identify job insecurity as a stressor that adversely affects the well-being of platform-based workers (Shapiro, 2018).

Hypotheses

H1: Job characteristics have a significant negative effect on job insecurity.

H2: Job characteristics have a significant positive effect on psychological well-being.

H3: Job insecurity has a significant negative effect on psychological well-being.

H4: Job insecurity mediates the relationship between job characteristics and psychological well-being.

3. Research methodology

This study examines the relationship between relevant antecedents, such as job characteristics and job insecurity, and psychological well-being. This section focuses on the methodology used to achieve the research objectives. The study focuses on location-based digital platforms. The study used snowball sampling to collect responses from platform-based workers on location-based food delivery

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and transport platforms, accessible and willing to participate. The study collected responses from 405 location-based platform workers in urban agglomerations in Kerala (Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam and Kozhikode), confirming adequate representation and diversity in responses regarding the factors influencing psychological well-being. To safeguard content validity and reduce measurement error and ambiguity, the questionnaire development focused on established measures from existing studies. The study used well-established, validated scales from existing literature to measure all constructs. Job characteristics (autonomy and feedback) were assessed using items adapted from the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework (Demerouti et al., 2001).

Items of job characteristics were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'never' (1) to 'very often' (5). Job insecurity was measured using the Quantitative and Qualitative Job Insecurity Scale (QUAL-JIS), a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'completely disagree' (1) to 'completely agree' (5) developed by Fischmann et al. (2022). Psychological well-being was measured using items adapted from the Flourishing Scale (Diener et al.,2010). Psychological well-being items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (7). The dataset underwent tests of reliability, normality, and internal consistency with the use of statistical tools. To validate data adequacy, the study used Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modelling to estimate and validate the relationships among constructs. All data were analysed using SPSS version 25 and SPSS AMOS version 24. AMOS was used for model fit and theory testing and for bootstrapping mediation analysis. In addition, convergent and discriminant validity were assessed.

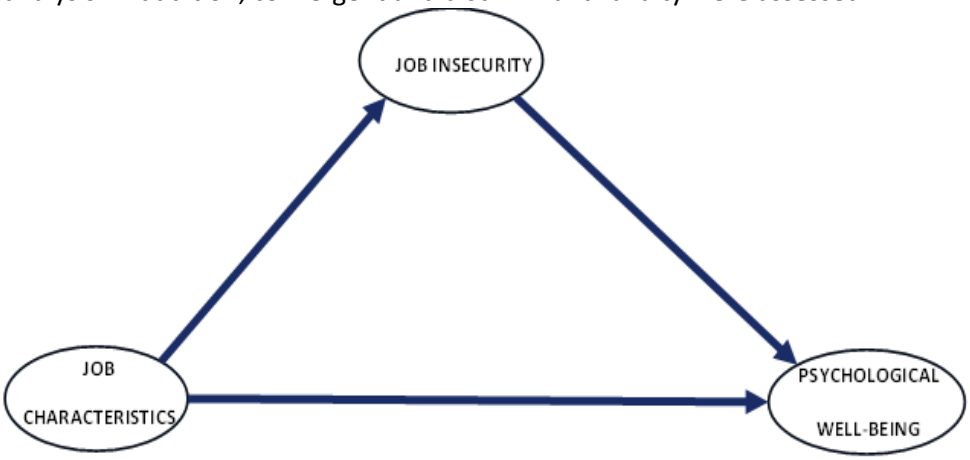

Figure 1 Hypothesised Research Model

4. Data Analysis and Interpretations

4.1 Analysis of Demographics

The demographic characteristics include age, education, primary employment status, years in gig work, platform working hours and income from platform work. Table 1 presents the empirical analysis of the demographic profile, using descriptive statistics. Respondents aged 30 to 39 accounted for 33.8 per cent of the sample, indicating involvement of middle-aged respondents. Further, 24.2 per cent attained senior secondary level, and 24.2 per cent attained a degree. Regarding primary employment

status, 73.3 per cent rely entirely on platform work. In terms of years in gig work, 52.8 per cent have up to one year of work experience on digital platforms. Most respondents (47.7 per cent) were of 9 hours to 13 hours of work, and 52.6 per cent of the sample came under the category of a monthly income, exclusively from gig work, of 28001-50000.

Table 1 Demographic details of the respondents

Demographic Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
Young adults (18-29)	121	29.9
Middle adults (30-39)	137	33.8
Mature adults (40-49)	99	24.4
Older adults (50 and above)	48	11.9
Education		
Below SSLC	44	10.9
SSLC	64	15.8
Plus-two	98	24.2
Degree	98	24.2
Post-graduation	15	3.7
Professional Degree	86	21.2
Current status		
Student	23	5.7
Private or public sector job	85	21
Only gig work	297	73.3
Months in gig		
Up to 1 year	214	52.8
1 to 3 years	124	30.6
3 years to 5 years	31	7.7
More than 5 years	36	8.9
Gig hours		

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Standard hours (3-8)	116	28.6
Extended hours (9-13)	193	47.7
Long hours (14-18)	84	20.7
Extreme hours (19-24)	12	3
Income from gig		
Low income (<28000)	153	37.8
Middle income (28001-50000)	213	52.6
High income (>50000)	39	9.6

Source: Primary source

4.2 Analysis and testing of Measurement Model

Model fit

The measurement model includes three interrelated latent variables: job characteristics, job insecurity and psychological well-being. The model indicates that the measurements fit the empirical data (Table 2). Likewise, the structural model showed good fit indices, and the single mediation model depicted that the indirect effect of job insecurity was statistically significant ($p<0.001$).

Table 2 Measurement Model Fit Indices

Indices	Threshold limits	CFA
CMIN	A lower value shows good model fit	191.051
CMIN/DF	Ratio of $\chi 2$ to df ≤ 2 or 3	1.470
TLI	>0.95	0.979
CFI	>0.95	0.982
GFI	Close to 1 shows better model fit	0.951
RMR	Smaller, the better; 0 indicates perfect fit	0.038
SRMR	≤ 0.08	0.0314

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RMSEA	< 0.06 to 0.08	0.034

Source: Primary source

Reliability and Validity of the Model

Table 3 Reliability and validity of measurement model

Construct		Measurement item	Std. factor loadings	Cronbach alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
Job characteristics	Autonomy	JC1	.787			
		JC2	.629			
		JC3	.668	.799	.885	.564
	Feedback	JC4	.753			
		JC5	.661			
		JC6	.715			
Job insecurity		JI1	.811			
		JI2	.834	.877	.879	.643
		JI3	.790			
		JI4	.771			
Psychological well-being		PW1	.730			
		PW2	.745			
		PW3	.734			
		PW4	.689	.890	.887	.520
		PW5	.740			
		PW6	.717			

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	PW7	.793	
	PW8	.528	

Table 3 presents the reliability and validity measures. The standardised factor loadings for most items are well above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, confirming strong indicator reliability. The highest factor loading was .834 for the item 'Do you have flexibility in the execution of your job?' and the lowest was 0.524 for 'People respect me'. Factor loadings above 0.50 are considered adequate for a sample size of more than 100 and for practical significance, and loadings above 0.50 were retained (Hair et al., 2010). Job characteristics showed strong factor loadings between 0.834 and 0.690, with a composite reliability (CR) of .885 and an average variance extracted (AVE) of 0.564. The results show the reliability and construct validity of the items used. Job characteristics demonstrated good reliability (α = 0.799), indicating that the measurement of the dimensions of autonomy and feedback is trustworthy. Likewise, job insecurity showed loadings between 0.815 and 0.780, a CR of 0.879 and an AVE of 0.643, demonstrating consistent and adequate reliability and validity, supported by a strong Cronbach's alpha (α) of 0.877. Psychological Wellbeing loadings ranged from 0.789 to 0.524, with an α of 0.890, a CR of 0.887 and an AVE of .520, confirming reasonable validity and reliability.

Source: Primary source

The results for hypothesis tests are presented in Table 4. This will help identify the major antecedents of psychological well-being among platform-based workers. The table confirms that all hypothesised relationships are statistically significant ($p<0.001$). Job characteristics significantly influence both job insecurity and psychological well-being. Furthermore, job characteristics and job insecurity influence psychological well-being, with job insecurity having a stronger negative impact. This indicates strong empirical support for the proposed structural model. These findings support the research framework and the effects of job characteristics and job insecurity on the psychological well-being of platform-based workers.

Table 4 Statistical significance of the structural model path with hypothesis

Hypothesis	**Beta values**	**P values**	**Decision**
Job characteristics -> Job insecurity	-.507	0.000	Supported
Job characteristics -> Psychological well-being	.349	0.000	Supported
Job insecurity -> Psychological well-being	-.371	0.000	Supported
Job characteristics -> Job insecurity -> Psychological well-being	.188	0.000	Supported

Source: Primary source

Results and Findings

The structural model presented in Figure 2 demonstrates the relationships among psychological well-being, job characteristics, and job insecurity. In the analysis, job characteristics serve as the primary independent variable; they directly and indirectly affect psychological well-being and job insecurity, respectively. Substantially, job characteristics influence job insecurity and psychological well-being, as well as all the other predictors. Psychological well-being is the last to be predicted. It has the highest R^2 value among all constructs in the model 0.510. This means psychological well-being is explained by (51 per cent) job characteristics and job insecurity. This value indicates a substantial and meaningful contribution of the two constructs to the platform workers' psychological well-being. Notably, the path coefficients indicate that job characteristics (β=0.48) are the contributors to psychological well-being than job insecurity (β=-0.30). Psychological well-being is enhanced mainly by job characteristics like autonomy and feedback rather than the precariousness of platform jobs.

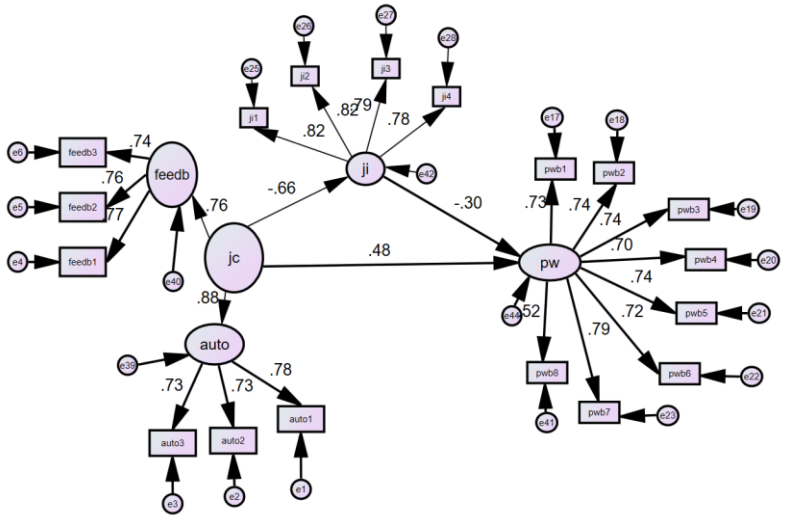

Figure 2 Structural model with path coefficients.

Table 5

Objectives	Hypothesis	Result	Key interpretation and findings
To study how platform job characteristics affect job insecurity.	H1: Job characteristics -> Job resources	β= -0.507 p=0.000 (Supported)	Job characteristics negatively influence job insecurity, indicating that higher autonomy and feedback can ease the precariousness of platform-based work.

To analyse the impact of job characteristics and job insecurity on psychological well-being.	H2: Job characteristics -> Psychological well-being.	β=0.349 p=0.000 (Supported)	Enhanced job characteristics significantly contribute to higher psychological well-being among workers, indicating that increased autonomy and feedback support mental wellness.
	H3: Job insecurity -> Psychological well-being.	β=-0.371 p=0.000 (Supported)	Higher job insecurity negatively influences psychological well-being, indicating that insecure employment adversely affects platform workers' mental wellness.
To examine the mediating effect of job insecurity on the relationship between job characteristics and psychological well-being.	H4: Job characteristics ->Job insecurity ->Psychological well-being.	β=0.188 p=0.000 (Supported)	Job insecurity significantly mediates the relationship between job characteristics and platform workers' well-being, indicating that autonomy and feedback mechanisms indirectly influence their mental wellness through reduced job insecurity.

Hypothesis 1 proposes that job characteristics have a significant negative effect on job insecurity. The standardised path coefficient is -0.507 (p<.001). This indicates a significant negative relationship between job characteristics and job insecurity, supporting Hypothesis 1. That is, job characteristics of the platform economy, autonomy, and feedback can reduce job insecurity (Wood et al.,2019). Hypothesis 2 predicts that job characteristics have a significant positive effect on psychological well-being. The standardised path coefficient between job characteristics and psychological well-being is 0.349 (p<.001), demonstrating statistical significance and supporting Hypothesis 2. Thus, the results indicate that job characteristics directly enhance platform workers' mental well-being (Wood et al.,2019). Hypothesis 3 suggests that job insecurity has a significant negative effect on psychological well-being. The standardised path coefficient is -0.371 (p<.001). This result indicates that job insecurity can reduce mental well-being among platform workers, confirming a statistically significant negative effect.

Hence, Hypothesis 3 is supported (Jalil et al., 2023)**.** Hypothesis 4 suggests that job insecurity mediates the relationship between job characteristics and psychological well-being. The standardised path coefficient is 0.188 (p<.001). Hence, job insecurity significantly mediates the effect of job

characteristics, autonomy and feedback on psychological well-being. The direct and indirect paths are statistically significant; job insecurity acts as a partial mediator, supporting Hypothesis 4 (Bakker & Demerouti,2017; Hayes, 2013). Table 5 shows the summarised results of the analysis. These findings indicate that both job characteristics and job insecurity affect the psychological well-being of platform-based workers, and they are strong antecedents. Thus, the present study made an effective attempt to fill the research gap, especially in the context of platform-based workers. The findings are consistent with prior studies (Wood et al., 2019).

Effects of control variables

The study used demographic variables as control variables to assess their effects on job insecurity and psychological well-being. Current employment status, specifically full-time gig work, significantly affects both job insecurity ($\beta = 0.635$, $p < 0.001$) and psychological well-being ($\beta = -0.264$, $p < 0.005$). The results show that full-time workers often experience higher job insecurity and lower psychological well-being compared to part-time workers. The daily working hours have a statistically significant effect on job insecurity ($\beta = 0.037$, $p < 0.005$), indicating that workers who work more hours per day have higher job insecurity. The remaining demographic variables show no significant relationship with job insecurity and psychological well-being.

5. Conclusion and Scope for Further Studies

Wellbeing is a multifaceted concept. Psychological wellbeing is an important dimension of wellbeing and relates to life. This study aims to investigate the relationship between psychological wellbeing and its antecedents, such as job insecurity and job characteristics. To understand the hypothesised relationships, the study focuses on gig workers in platform-based, specifically location-based, work. The present study found a significant positive relationship between job characteristics and workers' psychological well-being. The location-based platform environment is complex, with unseen employers and algorithmic management. Autonomy allows people to take platform jobs, and feedback helps workers evaluate and improve work performance. The findings indicate that when platform workers have autonomy and a good feedback system, their psychological well-being increases. Therefore, policymakers and aggregators who own digital platform companies should focus on improving the job characteristics. The study also provides evidence that job insecurity negatively affects platform workers' mental wellness. The precarious nature of platform jobs is affecting psychological well-being. The analysis also highlighted the effects of working hours and current employment status on job insecurity and psychological well-being; other demographic variables were statistically insignificant, and demographic variables play only a limited role in shaping job insecurity and psychological well-being.

The current study also reveals several limitations. The study sample was confined to the platform transport and delivery sector and was location-based; generalisations of findings should be made with great care. In addition, the study has not considered all factors that influence the psychological well-being of platform workers. The study sample does not fully represent female participation in platform-based work. Future studies might investigate other factors and develop a more comprehensive model that can be extended to other sectors of platform work, such as freelancing. Furthermore, given the overall findings, it's important to recognise that the study's sample is geographically confined to Kerala. Future research might elaborate on the present study's findings by incorporating a larger number of samples and geographic regions, which helps to depict a bigger picture of India's gig economy. Lastly, qualitative interviews with platform workers would allow for contextual data on the daily compromises and strategies workers use to maintain psychological well-being. In conclusion, the study establishes

that the interplay of job characteristics and job insecurity shapes psychological well-being among the platform-based workers in urban areas of Kerala. The findings confirm that favourable job characteristics can diminish job insecurity, which in turn increases psychological well-being. These insights stress the importance of reducing unnecessary tensions about losing platform jobs, providing adequate supportive systems and prioritising mental wellness in digital work environments.

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