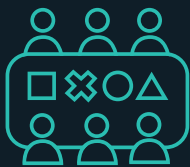


GIG WORKER LEARNING PROJECT

Phase One Progress Report: Analysis of Existing Research and Recommendations

Key Inputs:



Exploration Workshop
with Researcher and
Worker Leaders



Comprehensive Analysis
of Existing Publicly
Available Research



Initial Report and
Recommendations

THE
WORKERS
LAB

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
FUTURE OF
WORK
INITIATIVE



What is the Purpose of the Project?

Earlier this year, [The Workers Lab](#) and the [Aspen Institute Future of Work Initiative](#) launched the [Gig Worker Learning Project](#)*. The purpose of the project is to bring order and clarity to what we know about gig work and to center future understanding on workers themselves.

What are the Values of the Project?

The central value of the project as a whole is **worker voice**. The data available about gig work and workers is largely incomplete and in some ways misleading. This project seeks to center workers and their experiences in the national understanding of gig work and workers so that worker leaders and other decision-makers across the country can make more informed decisions about how to better serve workers.

What are the Reasons for the Project?

Official measures of work and workers have historically been designed around a full-time, long-term employment model, which never captured and still does not capture the full range of ways people work. This limited focus has created an incomplete understanding of how people are working and left significant gaps in the information that's informing solutions for workers.

Additionally, many sources use data collection methods that are more likely to reach standard employees and exclude those who may work inconsistently, have erratic hours or temporary positions, lack a stable workplace, or not have reliable phone or internet access—including many gig workers. When sources have focused on gig work, definitions have been a key challenge. Many studies use different definitions, focus on different populations, keep data private, or are oriented toward particular political or commercial goals. As a result, the findings are unlikely to fully center workers or reflect the full diversity of work. The lack of common language also makes it difficult to describe gig work and workers and to synthesize and build upon existing research.

*The term "gig" is used as a starting point to engage with existing research on work today. The project intends to revise language as workers are directly engaged.



Context and Clarification

Given the complex and dynamic nature of the gig economy, we want to be clear about how we come to this work.

1 Our Context

Over the past decade, non-standard work (any work outside of long-term, full-time, direct-hire employment) has garnered increasing attention from the media, policymakers, and consumers. Often called “gig work,” non-standard ways of working are nothing new. Farmworkers, domestic workers, construction workers, artists, and many others were gig workers long before the rise of app-based platforms popularized the use of the term “gig economy.” Even before the tech-enabled rideshare industry, gig workers were already left out of protections and benefits afforded to workers classified as employees who receive a W-2 from their employer. This is one of several exclusions that define U.S. labor law. Over the last four decades, the impact of these exclusions has become even clearer against a backdrop of rising wage suppression, income inequality, the **fissuring** of work, and blatant misclassification of workers across the U.S. economy. In addition, a long history of occupational segregation has fueled racial inequities; demographic information is crucial to understanding how gig work perpetuates this problem. Given this historical context, it is increasingly evident that the challenges of the “gig economy” are not new. But recent widespread interest and momentum provide an opportunity to address the long-standing need to listen to these workers, empower them, and work together to solve challenges.

2 What We Mean By “Gig Work and Workers”

There is a lot of recent qualitative and quantitative research on gig work (i.e., what gig workers are doing to make money) and gig workers (i.e., who they are and their demographics). There is not one consistent definition used across the research, leading to confusion and seemingly contradictory findings. The term “gig work” is used throughout the report. However, it is important to emphasize that **the purpose of the Gig Worker Learning Project is to understand, from the workers themselves, how they want to be categorized and referred to while more deeply understanding their needs and desires, which might require changes to our terminology.** For the purposes of this report, “gig work” refers to any income-earning activity done outside of a long-term, direct-hire employment relationship. Standard employers provide a W-2 annually and are legally responsible for providing certain protections and benefits to employees. Some employment is gig work, such as temporary, seasonal, or subcontracted work because it is not long-term and/or direct-hire. In addition, some workers do both gig and standard work at the same time.

3 References to Existing Research

There are many sources of data that shed light on how people are working today. While we can all learn from this work, we also note the inconsistent definitions, reference periods, and methods that make comparisons across data particularly challenging. Throughout this report, we present findings from a range of studies to illustrate both work that has been done, and the different definitions and categories that have been used. Given these differences, we caution against making comparisons between studies or extending findings beyond the specific population surveyed. We have noted definitions used for each study we share to remind readers of this challenge.

Fissuring of work: domestic outsourcing conducted by large firms to shed the responsibility for employees while retaining the control of work, primarily through shifting workers to W-2 contracts and invoking a ‘joint employer’ status.

Weil, David. *The Fissured Workplace*. Harvard University Press, 2014.

Stansbury, Anna M. and Lawrence H. Summers. 2020. “Declining Worker Power and American Economic Performance.” *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity: BPEA Conference Drafts*.

Stiglitz, Joseph E. 2021. “Fostering More-Competitive Labor Markets.” In *Inequality and the Labor Market: The Case for Greater Competition*, edited by Sharon Block and Benjamin Harris. Brookings Institution Press.

Mishel, L. and J. Bivens (2021a) “Identifying the Policy Levers Generating Wage Suppression and Wage Inequality, *Economic Policy Institute Report*, May 13. <https://www.epi.org/unequalpower/-publications/wage-suppression-inequality>.

Mishel, L. and J. Bivens (2021b) “The Productivity-Median Compensation Gap in the United States: The Contribution of Increased Wage Inequality and the Role of Policy Choice”. *International Productivity Monitor*, Fall 2021, Number 41 http://www.csls.ca/ipm/41/IPM_41_Mishel.pdf

Phase One Purpose and Activities

Before jumping into newly commissioned participatory research with gig workers, we thought it prudent to assemble and analyze existing research about gig work and workers so that we can fully understand where there are gaps, consensus, and disagreement. As mentioned earlier, the central value in the project as a whole is worker voice, which is why we not only engaged researchers in the work of phase one but also (and perhaps most importantly) worker leaders. **In this phase of the project, it's important for us to note that we are not yet concluding, but rather identifying areas where further research and clarity are needed and creating a baseline to compare to new participatory research.** We undertook three activities to achieve this:



Exploration Workshop with Researchers and Worker Leaders

In early 2022 The Workers Lab and the Aspen Institute Future of Work Initiative hosted an exploratory workshop for nearly 50 cross-sector researchers and worker leaders active in the gig economy space. The purpose of the workshop was to help us begin to assess the data that exists on the gig economy and help identify what additional research might be valuable.



Comprehensive Analysis of Existing Publicly Available Research

The Workers Lab and The Aspen Institute Future of Work Initiative analyzed more than 75 recent studies, which complements the more than 20 data sources included in the Aspen Institute's Gig Economy Data Hub. Citations for the research we reviewed are included in the addendum. Despite the value of this research, information about the range of challenges that gig workers are experiencing, what motivates them to do this kind of work, and what solutions would best serve them is inconsistent and incomplete.



Initial Report and Recommendations

The final activity in phase one of the project is the development of this report and recommendations. The report has been reviewed and edited by most of the researchers and worker leaders who attended the workshop mentioned above. This document seeks to lay the foundation for our future work and participatory research.

Why is Bringing Order and Clarity to this Data Important?

Any data informing decisions about gig work should be centered on and emerge from the workers themselves. People making decisions about gig work and workers need better, clearer, and worker-centered data to ensure that their decisions are properly informed and driven directly by what gig workers say they want and need. Right now, in politics, policy, government, private enterprise, and technology, important decisions are being made about the fate and future of gig workers. Wouldn't it be great if those decisions were being informed by the same data, from the same place, that comes directly from workers? Then, campaigns, public and private policies, programs and services, tech solutions, and more could match what workers need, serve them better, and make their lives easier.

What Does this Project Hope to Deliver?

A gig worker-centered and informed national data set to better understand who and where gig workers are, what they need and want, and what solutions will make the biggest difference in their lives. The hope and expectations are that this foundational understanding will inform the solutions the field of pro-worker people are pursuing, and the framing and messaging they use.

Preview of Phase Two

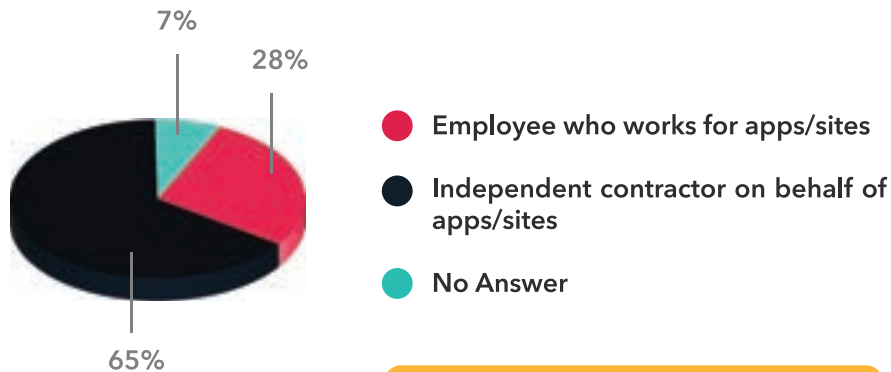
Having reviewed existing research, our next step will be putting these findings into action. We are now undertaking a series of participatory conversations directly with gig workers. In this qualitative research phase, we seek to dig deeper into several questions that we lack clear answers to. These include questions about terminology and categories, motivations for gig work, challenges faced by workers, how workers deal with those challenges, and what solutions could ease those challenges for workers and their families. From there, we plan to develop an extensive national survey of gig workers.

Phase One Biggest Takeaway

By far, the biggest takeaway from phase one of this project is that the terms used to describe gig work and workers are muddled, disorganized, and numerous. A range of terms mean different things to different workers, worker leaders, researchers, and others, based on position, circumstances, and/or goals. This inconsistency has led to confusion about what gig work is, who gig workers are, and what they need. For example, some research defines gig work based on how work is arranged and/or provided (if work is accessed via an app). Other times, people define gig work based on certain aspects of the contract between a company and its workers “whether they’re hired as employees or independent contractors, on long-term or temporary contracts, or directly or through a subcontractor”. And sometimes, gig work is defined by the experience of work “whether a worker works outside of the traditional 9-to-5 paradigm, works inconsistent hours, etc.” It is not surprising that many workers find their own work status confusing.

GIG WORKERS UNDERSTAND THEIR WORK STATUS DIFFERENTLY

“Which statement best describes how you view your relationship with these apps or websites on which you find jobs?”



PEW RESEARCH CENTER

August 2021 survey of over 10k U.S. adults. Respondents to this question identified as having earned money through an online gig platform.

Dozens of terms,
each with numerous definitions.



There is a significant lack of common language with this sector of the economy, leading to apples-to-oranges comparisons and misunderstanding.

Workers themselves often describe their work status using different terms.

“

Any discussion of the modern gig workforce is challenged by the lack of a common definition of the term. Some studies use narrow definitions and focus on internet-based or platform jobs. Other studies define the term more broadly to include any type of alternative work arrangement, short-term job or source of supplemental income.

”

- ADP Research, 2/20

Analysis of payroll and related data connected with 75k large companies and 18 million workers.

What we're learning

To bring some clarity to the landscape of research on gig work, we focus on how data on gig work and workers are collected and measured. Here's what we're learning:

- Different researchers use the same term with different meanings.
- Some researchers don't define the terms they use at all.
- Differences in definitions or phrasing of questions lead to seemingly contradictory findings.



"Nearly 8% of families earned income from the Online Platform Economy during the year before the pandemic, though growth in participation has slowed since March 2020."

- JP Morgan Chase, 10/21

Sample of 39 million Chase checking accounts.

"In the US, 16% of the workforce is comprised of gig workers. Of these, 8% are 1099-MISC contract workers and 8% are short-term W-2 workers."

- ADP Research, "Illuminating the Shadow Workforce: Insights in the Gig Workforce in Business, 2/20"

Analysis of payroll and related data connected with 75k large companies and 18 million workers.

"Twenty-seven percent of all employed respondents we surveyed reported being a contract, freelance, or temporary worker."

- McKinsey America Opportunity Survey, 4/21

Survey of 25k U.S. adults.

Terms researchers and workers use for these jobs:

- Consultant
- Independent contractor
- Platform worker or Online Platform Economy (OPE) worker
- Freelancer
- Self-employed worker
- Temporary worker
- Contract firm worker
- On-call worker
- Non-traditional worker

Terms researchers and workers use for this sector:

- Gig economy
- Online Platform Economy (OPE) or platform economy
- Sharing economy
- Shadow workforce
- On-demand economy
- Peer economy
- Non-standard work

What we're learning (cont.)

- Researchers often use different language, terms, and definitions than workers use, leading to confusion and creating inaccurate findings.
- There are a lot of duplicative questions being asked, leading to multiple entities spending money to understand similar items, rather than utilizing those resources to build from existing knowledge and deepen our understanding.
- Some methods for data collection are missing hard-to-reach workers or don't fully represent the realities of gig work. As a result, the findings are unlikely to accurately center workers, reflect the full diversity of workers, or reflect what is happening in their day-to-day lives.

A cautionary tale from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)

The Bureau of Labor Statistics collected data on platform gig work in its May 2017 Contingent Worker Supplement. Upon analyzing the responses, though, the BLS realized that the phrasing of their questions likely was interpreted inconsistently by respondents. They manually listened to interviews to estimate findings, concluding that their initial question was invalid.

Hard-to-reach workers include workers without reliable phone numbers or internet connection, workers with multiple jobs and little available time, and workers who speak a language other than English.

Bottom line:

A lack of clarity and common language to describe gig work and workers is making it incredibly challenging to compare findings and allows for findings to be misinterpreted and misused to advance specific interests. Perhaps most importantly, this allows for certain gig workers to be mistakenly grouped with other gig workers who may actually share very few experiences, making it very challenging to create and tailor solutions that make life better for these workers.



Our Framework For Better Understanding Gig Work and Workers

To better understand existing research - and to identify if new research is needed - we looked at the different ways gig work and workers are being described in relation to the broader labor force. In this report, existing research is cited throughout in order to illustrate the range of approaches, definitions, and data, and the challenges it creates. This baseline creates a foundation for us, and the broader community of pro-worker people, to build on with new qualitative and quantitative research approaches informed directly by gig workers so that their diversity, talent, and unique needs are properly reflected in the solutions meant to help make their lives easier.

We've identified several questions we feel are important to clarify and understand individually, before considering how they relate to one another and impact the shared and diverse needs of gig workers. They are listed in order, starting with the questions where the most research and findings already exist.

- **Question One:** *What is the "Gig Economy"?*
- **Question Two:** *What Are Gig Workers Doing to Make Money?*
- **Question Three:** *Who Are Gig Workers?*
- **Question Four:** *How Do Digital Platforms Affect The Experiences of Gig Workers?*
- **Question Five:** *How Are Gig Workers Using Their Income?*
- **Question Six:** *What Kinds of Benefits and Protections Exist for Gig Workers?*
- **Question Seven:** *What Does Flexibility Mean for Gig Workers?*

In the following sections, we consider each of these questions, articulate why it matters, look at existing research, and extract key considerations.

Question One: What is the "Gig Economy"?



QUESTION ONE

What is the "Gig Economy"?

Why Understanding This Matters

Our system of workplace benefits and protections was developed around a particular model of work: long-term, direct-hire employment. As companies increasingly hire workers outside of this standard arrangement, it is important to identify these workers and their common and distinct needs.

QUESTION ONE

What is the "Gig Economy"?

Comparisons Across Different Research

Depending on the definition being used, gig workers are estimated to make up somewhere between **1% and 36%** of the workforce.

The gig share of the workforce - between 1% and 36% - varies based on the definition being used.

"Nearly 8% of families earned income from the Online Platform Economy during the year before the pandemic, though growth in participation has slowed since March 2020."

- JP Morgan Chase, 10/21

Sample of 39 million Chase checking accounts.

"In the US, 16% of the workforce is comprised of gig workers. Of these, 8% are 1099-MISC contract workers and 8% are short-term W-2 workers."

- ADP Research, "Illuminating the Shadow Workforce: Insights in the Gig Workforce in Business, 2/20"

Analysis of payroll and related data connected with 75k large companies and 18 million workers.

"27% of all employed respondents we surveyed reported being a contract, freelance, or temporary worker."

- McKinsey America Opportunity Survey, 4/21

Survey of 25k U.S. adults.

"10.6 million individuals report working as independent contracts (6.9% of total employment), 2.6 million are on-call workers (1.7% of total employment) and 1.4 million find work through temporary help agencies (0.9% of total employment)."

- Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018

Survey of 60k households

QUESTION ONE

What is the "Gig Economy"?

Key Considerations

By defining gig work as income-earning activity outside of long-term, direct-hire employment, we can take the highest-level, most inclusive view of the gig economy.

Question Two: What Are Gig Workers Doing to Make Money?



QUESTION TWO

What are Gig Workers Doing to Make Money?

Why Understanding This Matters

Knowing what gig workers are doing to make money is necessary to understand and count workers, and identify their needs and challenges. For example, someone working primarily from a home computer will face different challenges than someone doing physically strenuous work outside of the home. The type of work also sheds light on workers' opportunities for advancement, including training, upskilling, etc.

QUESTION TWO

What are Gig Workers Doing to Make Money?

Comparison Across Different Research

Most studies define and categorize gig work differently. For instance, the Federal Reserve divided gig work into two primary categories (sales and service), whether it was performed online or offline. JPMorgan Chase Institute's analysis of the gig economy, though, looked exclusively at online platform work.

How The Types of Work Being Done are Labeled and Categorized Impacts Findings

Share of adults performing gig activities

SALES ACTIVITIES

- 9% Sold goods online
- 5% Sold goods at flea markets
- 3% Sold goods at consignment shops
- 1% Sold goods at events you plan
- 13% Any sales activities

SERVICE ACTIVITIES

- 6% House cleaning, yard work, property maintenance
- 3% Childcare or eldercare services
- 3% Renting our property (car, house, etc.)
- 2% Pet care
- 2% Driving or ride sharing
- 2% Paid tasks online
- 4% Other paid personal tasks
- 16% Any service activities
- 4% Any other paid activities

-"Economic Well-Being of US Households in 2020" Federal Reserve May 2021

Survey of 11k U.S. adults. Responses reflected here are based on individuals who identified as doing the listed activities.

Key Considerations

To build effective and targeted solutions for gig workers, it's important to understand the types of work they are doing and have a consistent framework for categorizing work.

Question Three: Who Are Gig Workers?



QUESTION **THREE**

Who are Gig Workers?

Why Understanding This Matters

Gig workers are bringing their full set of identities, backgrounds, and related needs to their work. The intersectionality of all these shapes the challenges workers face and the solutions that will impact them most. For example, many women (especially in immigrant communities and working in the informal economy) do not identify as “self-employed” or “gig workers” and so are too often excluded from research and solutions.

QUESTION **THREE**

Who are Gig Workers?

Comparison Across Different Research

Gig work and gig workers are incredibly diverse, and little research speaks across this diversity. Some groups of workers are harder to reach and aren't reflected in datasets, including gig workers who aren't using a platform, don't speak English, or don't have dependable access to a phone or the internet. Rich qualitative research engaging these workers exists, but tends to be limited in scope, using small samples and focusing on specific employers, sectors, or locations.



Definitions impact which workers are included in research.

For example, this study from ADP excludes workers in the informal economy, who are more likely to be immigrants, women, and people of color.

1099-MISC Workers

- More men than women
- Most highly-educated segment of the workforce
- Receive little advance notice.
- Tend to earn more than traditional W-2 workers
- Just slightly less likely than traditional W-2 workers to be unemployed for a month or more
- Average age is 46
- As likely to be married as traditional workers
- Most likely to be parents

ADP Research Partners

Analysis of payroll and related data connected with 75k large companies and 18 million workers.

QUESTION **THREE**

Who are Gig Workers?

Key Considerations

Research needs to capture and analyze the full set of demographics, backgrounds, and identities of gig workers, including but not limited to race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, education, income, and geography. In addition, future research questions and methods need to be designed with attention toward those most likely excluded from existing studies.

Question Four:

How Do Digital Platforms Affect The Experiences of Gig Workers?



QUESTION **FOUR**

How do Digital Platforms Affect the Experiences of Gig Workers?

Why Understanding This Matters

Workers who use online platforms are more easily reached and captured in research compared to non-platform workers. The rights of platform-based workers have become a highly politicized topic, especially around questions of classification. The overwhelming share of platform work is in transportation and delivery, which is largely dominated by a few large companies, who have been vocal in these debates. Classification is not the silver bullet across all sectors, but needs to be a part of any gig economy research agenda. Additionally, Black and Hispanic workers provide a disproportionate share of platform labor in the United States, and so understanding platform work is important to addressing the historic systemic racism of our labor market.

More needs to be done to fully reach and understand non-platform gig workers in research.

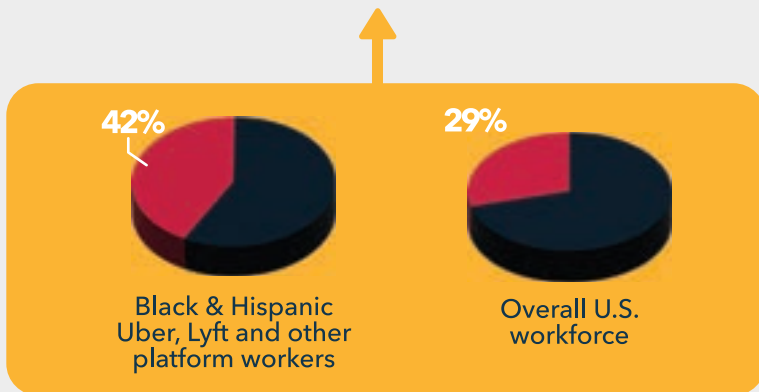
*Goldman, Tanya and David Weil. "Who's Responsible Here? Establishing Legal Responsibility in the Fissured Workplace". Institute for New Economic Thinking Working Paper No. 114 February 18, 2020
<https://www.ineteconomics.org/research/research-papers/whos-responsible-here-establishing-legal-responsibility-in-the-fissured-workplace>*

QUESTION FOUR

How do Digital Platforms Affect the Experiences of Gig Workers?

Comparison Across Different Research

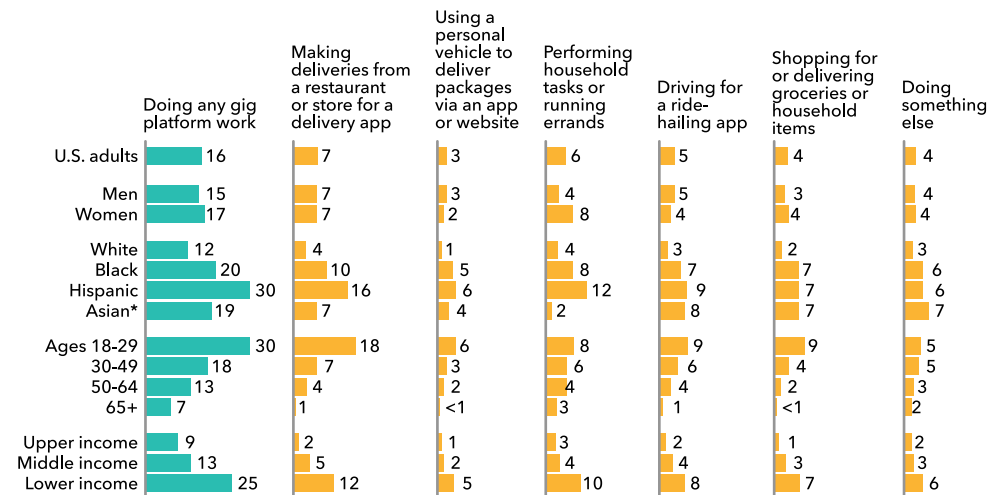
Existing findings show that online gig platforms tend to draw in lower-income, younger workers and include a disproportionately large share of Hispanic, Black, and Asian workers compared to White workers. Gig workers are also more likely to rely on Unemployment Insurance (UI) and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Bureau of Labor Statistics data show that Black and Hispanic workers make up almost 42 percent of workers for Uber, Lyft, and other companies, although they comprise less than 29 percent of the overall U.S. workforce.



IRS SOI Joint Statistical Research Program, 3/19, Analysis of tax returns for workers filing with a 1099

Demographic differences in gig work participation

% of U.S. adults who say they have ever earned money by...



* Asian adults were interviewed in English only.

Note: Gig platform work refers to earning money using a mobile app or website to find jobs that directly connect workers with people who want to hire them, or by using a personal vehicle to deliver packages to other. White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Family income tiers are based on adjusted 2020 earnings. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey U.S. adults conducted Aug. 23-29, 2021.

"The State of Gig Work in 2021"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

August 2021 survey of over 10k U.S. adults. Respondents to this question identified as having earned money through an online gig platform.

QUESTION **FOUR**

How do Digital Platforms Affect the Experiences of Gig Workers?

Key Considerations

“Platform” describes the use of digital platforms to connect workers with customers. A range of work can be arranged via platforms, though transportation and delivery are the predominant sectors. Workers who are not using a digital platform are considered “non-platform.” Platform workers are most commonly hired as independent contractors. Data on gig work tends to focus on platform workers, though more research is still needed to fully understand their diversity, challenges, needs, and preferred solutions.

Question Five:

How Are Gig Workers Using Their Income?

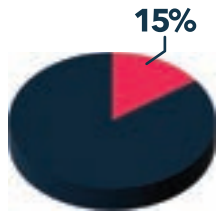


QUESTION FIVE

How Are Gig Workers Using Their Income?

Why Understanding This Matters

One of the core assumptions and misunderstandings about gig work is that it is purely a “side hustle” that helps workers bring in “extra” income.



While an estimated 15% of the U.S. workforce does leverage gig work for supplementary income, the definition of “supplementary” matters.

As we look deeper at existing research, we find that the vast majority of workers are using gig income to meet their basic needs. Additionally, for some standard workers, sluggish wage growth and reduced worker power mean gig work can help make up for inadequate pay in their other job.

Stansbury, Anna M. and Lawrence H. Summers. 2020. “Declining Worker Power and American Economic Performance.” Brooking Papers on Economic Activity: BPEA Conference Drafts.

QUESTION FIVE

How Are Gig Workers Using Their Income?

Comparison Across Different Research #1

Less than half of platform workers report understanding how their pay is determined.

How well, if at all, do you understand how the companies that run these apps or websites have determined how much you get paid?

52% "Not Well" | 45% "Well"



- Very Well
- Somewhat Well
- Not Too Well
- Not Well at All
- No Answer

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

August 2021 survey of over 10k U.S. adults. Respondents to this question identified as having earned money through an online gig platform.

QUESTION FIVE

How Are Gig Workers Using Their Income?

Comparison Across Different Research #2

Between one-third and one half of gig workers believe their platform has been unfair about their pay, assignments, and benefits

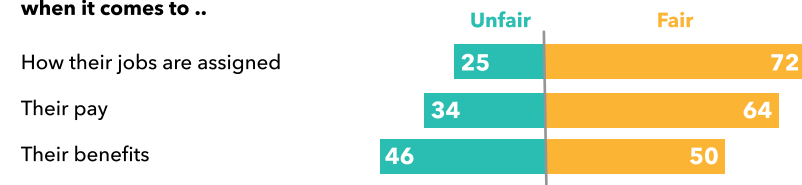
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

August 2021 survey of over 10k U.S. adults. Respondents to this question identified as having earned money through an online gig platform.

A majority of current or recent gig platform workers say companies have been fair with their pay, assignments, fewer say the same about their benefits

Among gig platform workers who have earned money in the past 12 months on these online platforms, % who say ...

The companies that run these apps or websites have been__ when it comes to ..



They have generally been__ with each of the following on these apps or websites over the past 12 months



Note: Gig platform workers refers to respondents who say they have earned money by using a mobile app or website to find jobs that directly connect them with people who want to hire them, or by using a personal vehicle to deliver packages to others. For a full list of these jobs, see topline of report. Very/somewhat fair or unfair, very/somewhat satisfied and not at all/not too satisfied are combined. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 23-29, 2021.
"The State of Gig Work in 2021"

QUESTION FIVE

How Are Gig Workers Using Their Income?

Comparison Across Different Research #3

Based on analysis on the Gig Economy Data Hub, which synthesizes more than 20 data sources, more than 1 in 4 of the total U.S. Workforce engaged in gig work in any capacity, while about 1 in 10 engaged in it as their main job.

When supplementary work is included, the number of gig workers jumps to roughly one quarter.

Total US Workforce

MORE THAN 1 IN 4

Engaged in any capacity

(primary and supplementary work)

ABOUT 1 IN 10

As main job

(independent work is primary)

LESS THAN 1%

Online Platforms

Gig Economy Data Hub

Key Considerations

To make sense of pay and the role of gig work in meeting workers' needs, we need to look at whether gig work is:

- **The primary income-earning activity**
- **Necessary secondary income-earning activity**
- **Supplementary income that's not required to meet basic needs**

It is also essential to learn how much is being earned per hour and per year, if workers have the freedom to set their pay rate, and if they have to spend time finding work or completing unpaid tasks.

Question Six:

**What Kinds of
Benefits and
Protections Exist
for Gig Workers?**



QUESTION SIX

What Kinds of Benefits and Protections Exist for Gig Workers?

Why Understanding This Matters

Benefits:

Many gig workers struggle with a lack of health insurance, retirement plans, and other benefits. Gig workers are uninsured at three times the rate of average workers. Additionally, most gig workers have no access to retirement plans.

Protections:

Protections ensure minimum standards for workers' safety, health, pay, and dignity. Many gig workers do not have basic protections against things like sexual harassment, discrimination, or unfair/abusive treatment. Safety concerns are especially pronounced for younger workers, women, and communities of color.

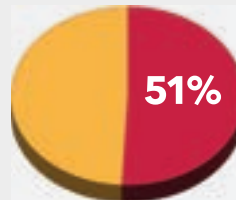
QUESTION SIX

What Kinds of Benefits and Protections Exist for Gig Workers?

Comparisons Across Different Research

Most existing research asks workers' concerns about benefits and protection. More needs to be learned about the type and level of benefits that gig workers need and how they want to access them.

According to the Pew Research Center, 51% of platform workers expressed concern over COVID-19 exposure while at work.



Many must find their own health care coverage - something they may need help with.

Lack of Health Insurance Impact a Good Number of Gig Workers

"Gig workers are uninsured at three times the rate of average workers: 35% of those surveyed were uninsured while only 10.5% of all workers remained uninsured.

Gig workers are leaving a lot on the table: when it comes to subsidy opportunity, most are going uninsured due to price (63%) even though there is government help available.

Gig workers need specific guidance when it comes to subsidies: due to irregular income, gig workers struggle with subsidy qualification, they also still need help claiming appropriate tax deductions to increase subsidy eligibility - 85% of workers didn't claim any tax deduction when applying for health plans.

22% of gig workers say they can't afford health insurance, compared to **13%** of all workers.

*"Health Coverage in the Gig Economy,"
Stride Study, 10/16*

Stride Health, survey of 1,700 respondents who identified as full or part-time self-employed or earning 1099 income.

QUESTION SIX

What Kinds of Benefits and Protections Exist for Gig Workers?

Comparisons Across Different Research Continued

Most Gig Workers Have No Access to Retirement Plans

ACCESS TO RETIREMENT PLANS:

- 7%** Temp agency workers
- 30%** On-call workers
- 38%** Contract-company workers
- 46%** Traditional employees

US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 5/18

Survey of 60k households

Gig Workers Are Pretty Much On Their Own When It Comes Retirement Savings and Tax Planning

Much of gig income is misreported for self-employment tax purposes, which matters because most Americans rely on Social Security for a significant portion of their retirement income.

Georgia State University Law Review, Winter 2022

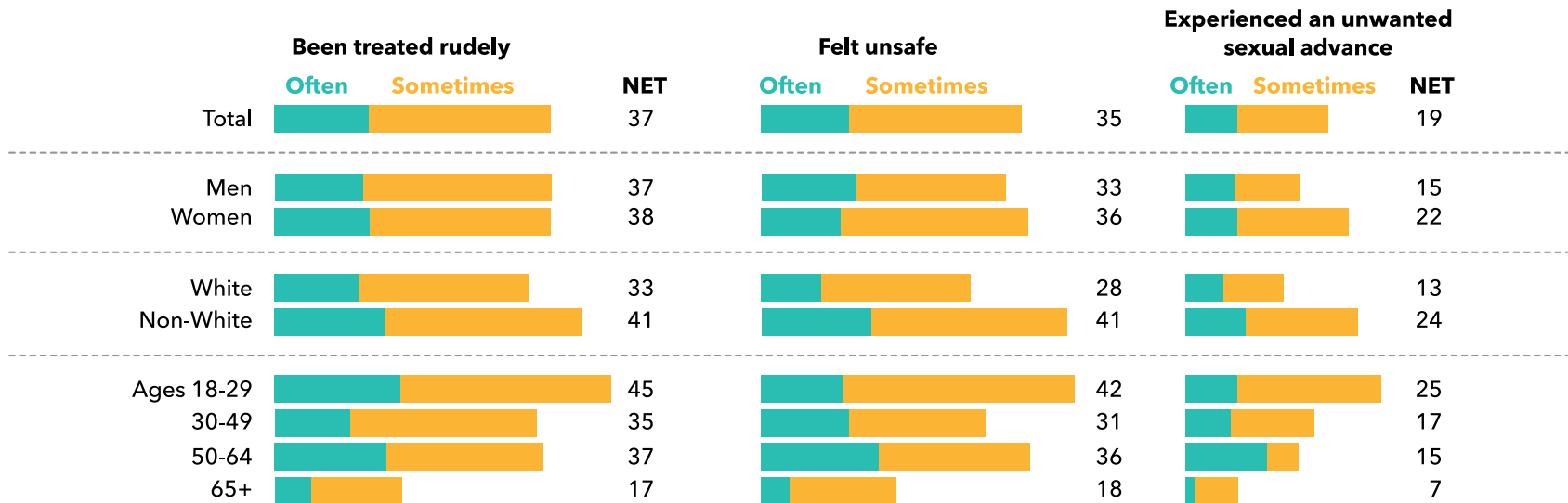
QUESTION SIX

What Kinds of Benefits and Protections Exist for Gig Workers?

Comparisons Across Different Research Continued

Safety concerns are mentioned by many platform workers, especially younger workers, women and communities of color

Among gig platform workers who have ever earned money on these online platforms, % who say they have experienced each of the following while completing jobs via these apps or websites since they first started taking on these kinds of jobs



QUESTION SIX

What Kinds of Benefits and Protections Exist for Gig Workers?

Comparisons Across Different Research Continued

A Majority of Platform Workers Expressed Concern Over COVID-19 Exposure While at Work

How concerned, if at all, have you been about getting the coronavirus while completing jobs via these apps or websites in the past 12 months?"

51% "Concerned" | 47% "Not Concerned"



- Very
- Somewhat
- Not Too Well
- Not Well at All
- No Answer

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Over 10k U.S. adults. Respondents to this question identified as having earned money through an online gig platform.

QUESTION SIX

What Kinds of Benefits and Protections Exist for Gig Workers?

Key Considerations

We need to learn more about whether gig workers received benefits through standard employment (separate from their gig work) or others in their household, if they can afford to purchase benefits on their own, or if they are left without critical benefits. We also need to learn more about the types and levels of benefits that are desired and how those benefits can be accessed easily. We are also eager to dive more deeply into gig workers' interactions with the tax system and what additional research or support they may need.

Question Seven: What Does Flexibility Mean for Gig Workers?



QUESTION SEVEN

What Does Flexibility Mean
for Gig Workers?

Why Understanding This Matters

When asked, one of the primary reasons workers give for engaging in platform work is the need for flexibility. The same is likely true for non-platform gig workers, who aren't included in the research. As the community of pro-worker organizations continue to look at solutions for workers, we need to consider the need for flexibility due to a variety of demands on workers' lives. Meeting this need shouldn't also mean sacrificing quality, agency, protections, and benefits.

QUESTION SEVEN

What Does Flexibility Mean for Gig Workers?

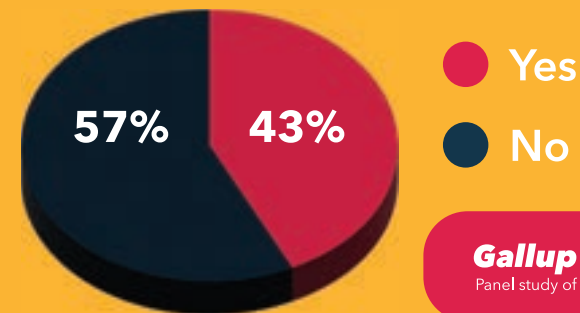
Comparisons Across Different Research

Gig workers report working fewer hours a week than traditional workers. A majority prefer it this way, though 43% are striving for more hours at work and want to train for better jobs.

50% of gig workers work at least 30 hours per week compared to 72% of traditional workers.

Especially in communities of color, gig workers would prefer permanent employment.

Do you want more hours than you are currently working?



“

Contract, freelance, and temporary workers would overwhelmingly prefer to have permanent employment (62%). This sentiment was most pronounced among first-generation immigrant (76%), Hispanic (72%), Asian American (71%), and Black (68%) respondents.

”

“Unequal America: Ten insights on the state of economic opportunity,” McKinsey/IPSOS, 5/19.

QUESTION SEVEN

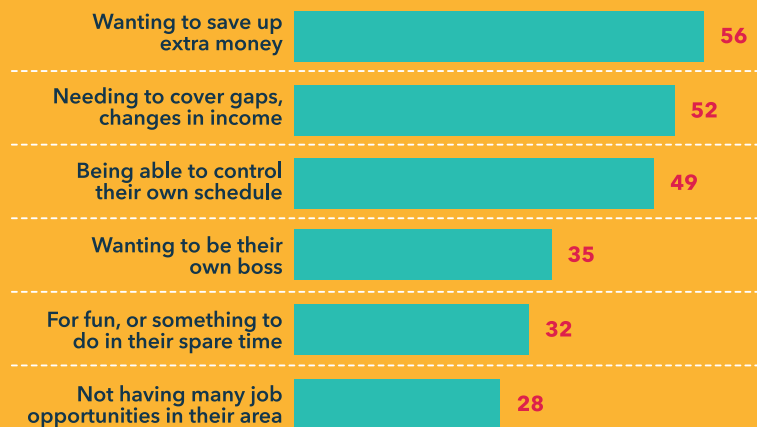
What Does Flexibility Mean for Gig Workers?

Comparisons Across Different Research Continued

Top Reasons to Engage in Platform Work: Needed Income, Needed Flexibility

Saving up, covering gaps in income, flexible schedules top reasons current or recent gig platform workers cite for taking on these jobs over the past year

Among gig platform workers who have earned money in the past 12 months on these online platforms, % who say each of the following is a major reason why they have taken on these jobs over the past 12 months



For 1099-MISC contractors, flexibility/life balance (44%) and enjoyment (38%) are the driving factors, whereas traditional employees look to benefits (51%) and financial security (40%) as the top reasons to work.



- ADP Research Partners

Analysis of payroll and related data connected with 75k large companies and 18 million workers

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

August 2021 survey of over 10k U.S. adults. Respondents to this question identified as having earned money through an online gig platform.

QUESTION SEVEN

What Does Flexibility Mean
for Gig Workers?

Key Considerations

We have identified several aspects of flexibility that should be explored further:

- Choosing which jobs to take on and which to reject.
- Choosing where the work is performed.
- Choosing specific days and times to take on jobs.
- Setting rates of pay.

Based on these factors, work may be flexible, inflexible, or flexible in some ways but not others.

Other Important Considerations For Future Research

Consideration #1: Dependability

There is a range of dependability and income security across the gig economy. **Does the worker know they can depend on having work and income?** A worker who finds work through an app may feel a different level of dependability compared to a worker who depends on finding work through word of mouth.

A lack of access to work when they need it can have a profound impact on workers financial stability, which in turn can also impact their mental health and stress levels. The insecurity a worker experiences from not having paid leave (e.g., knowing that an illness, accident, or other events could result in lost income) can also create high levels of stress.

Other Important Considerations For Future Research

Consideration #2: Equity, mobility, agency, respect, voice, satisfaction, and power

Workers, in any context, should be safe, healthy, secure, and empowered. Aside from having pay equity, and opportunities for advancement, workers deserve to be in an environment where they are free from harassment and discrimination. They should feel empowered to speak up and have the agency to participate, all while being treated with respect. If they choose to do so, workers should also have the right to organize and unionize.

Much more research and attention is needed on these topics. Having a coordinated approach to other questions will allow the entire field of researchers to dive more deeply into them.

Notably, nearly one-third of contract, freelance, or temporary workers said that they had enrolled in training or educational opportunities—more than twice the proportion of other respondents. And two-thirds of these workers said that they were interested in pursuing training in the future, more than double the share of other respondents who said this.

***“Unequal America: Ten insights on the state of economic opportunity,”
McKinsey/IPSOS, 5/19.***

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation #1: Common Language Framework

While we know a lot about gig work and gig workers, inconsistencies in terminology, descriptions, and definitions are preventing us from developing a complete picture of gig workers' experiences and needs. To do this effectively, the community of pro-worker people and researchers would benefit from a common language framework.

Recommendation #2: Research Consortium

Regular sharing of information and data between organizations and researchers is also valuable. We recommend that a research consortium be established to share information, reflect on shifts in the environment as they happen, and inform each other's work where possible.

Recommendation #3: Participatory Research Toolkit and Shared National Dataset

We also recognize that research and data on gig workers generally live with academics and researchers within elite institutions. Too much data is not directly informed by, readily available to, or digestible for the organizations that serve workers day in and day out. In addition, study instruments are designed by disciplinary or industry experts, rather than originating with workers and worker-led organizations. We would like to see the creation of a participatory research toolkit that equips organizations to gather data directly from workers in ways shaped by those workers, leading to a national dataset with analysis provided to the field regularly.

Coming Up Next

As an immediate next step, The Workers Lab and The Aspen Institute Future of Work Initiative will be putting these findings into action. We are now undertaking a series of participatory open-listening conversations directly with gig workers. In this qualitative research, we will seek to dig deeper into several questions that are not being asked widely of gig workers. These include questions about motivations for work, challenges faced, ways workers deal with those challenges, and what would make those challenges easier. That initial work will contribute to a worker-centered participatory project, consisting of a national survey and an ongoing toolkit for organizations to use.

Acknowledgements

Adrian Haro of The Workers Lab and Shelly Steward of The Aspen Institute Future of Work Initiative would like to thank our team members who helped analyze research and craft this report, especially Jeshua John and Lyle Del Mar Canceko from The Workers Lab, Amanda Fins and Yoorie Chang from The Aspen Institute and Joanne Schwartz of Momentum Advisors.

Our deepest gratitude is owed to the worker leaders, researchers, and others who reviewed this report, including, but not limited to:

Vikrum Aiyer, *former Obama White House Senior Policy Advisor & VP of Postmates*
Dannielle Alvarado, *Fair Work Center & Working Washington*
Catherine Bracy, *TechEquity Collaborative*
Xavier de Souza Briggs, *Brookings Institution*
Caroline Bruckner, *Kogod Tax Policy Center, Kogod School of Business, American University*
Chris Chafe, *GrowthSquared*
Neidi Dominguez, *Unemployed Workers United*
Althea Erickson, *Rustle Lab at the Center for Cultural Innovation*
Erik Forman, *The Drivers Cooperative*
Lexi Gervis, *Steady*
Samantha Gordon, *TechEquity Collaborative*
Lisa Grove, *Grove Insight*
Ligia Gualpa, *Los Deliveristas / Workers Justice Project*
Lesley Hirsch, *New Jersey Department of Labor & Workforce Development*
Louis Hyman, *Institute for Workplace Studies at Cornell University*
Elisabeth Jacobs, *Urban Institute*
Ken Jacobs, *UC Berkeley Labor Center*

Angie Kim, *Center for Cultural Innovation*
Steve King, *Emergent Research*
Will Pittz, *Teamsters Local Union No 117*
Barbara Robles, *Retired, Federal Reserve Board*
Wingham Rowan, *Beyond Jobs*
Juliet Schor, *Boston College*
Erica Smiley, *Jobs With Justice*
Jim Spletzer, *Formerly, U.S. Census Bureau*
Andrew Stettner, *Century Foundation*
Siddarth Suri, *Microsoft Research*
Beth C. Truesdale, PhD, *W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research*
Manisha Vaze, *Neighborhood Funders Group*
Saba Waheed, *UCLA Labor Center Institute for Research on Labor and Employment*
David Weil, *Heller School, Brandeis University / Ash Center for Democracy, Harvard Kennedy School*
Katie Wells, *Beeck Center for Social Impact and Innovation at Georgetown University*
Haeyoung Yoon, *National Domestic Workers Alliance*

ADDENDUM:

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