

‘Platform Precarity’: Exploring the Labor Conditions of Food Delivery Riders in Dhaka City

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Abstract: Widespread advancement in communication technologies along with changing consumption patterns have dramatically transformed the world of work by engaging people and businesses for contract labor. The advent of app-based food delivery platforms, a recent addition to metro cities like Dhaka, is catering the fast-growing demands of the consumers. The apparent work ‘flexibility’ in this platform-based work attracts vast number of unemployed youths including many students. These types of work, colloquially known as “rider” to deliver food or grocery items, is gaining popularity as part-time or full-time job. With the emergence of contractual labor regime, the insecure working conditions have also accelerated. The food delivery apps i.e., “Food Panda”, “HungryNaki” and “Pathao” work as primary interface between the riders, app companies, restaurants, and the consumers. The delivery riders working in this sector are mostly migrants and hold a vulnerable position in society. Moreover, the riders are self-employed, and they are constantly monitored through algorithmic management. This study explores the labor conditions of food delivery riders in Dhaka city from the notion of ‘precarity’ – mainly from three dimensions of platform precarity – neo-liberal capitalism, employment relationship and algorithmic control of labor processes. This study suggests that these dimensions must be understood to explain the labor conditions of food delivery riders.

Keywords: Platform economy, precarity, delivery riders, algorithmic control, employment relationship

1. Introduction

Over the last four decades, widespread changes in the global economy have had a substantial impact on the lives of the people. Globally, the advancement in information technologies has propelled the rise of ‘gig economy’ or ‘platform economy’ (De Stefano, 2016; Gandini, 2018; Srnicek, 2017; Wood et al., 2018). Advocates of platform economy often refers to the ‘new consumerism’ as a significant driver of platform economy. The gig economy, fueled by digital apps, promotes a hedonistic consumer paradigm (Migone, 2006), which is at the heart of contemporary lifestyles that generate immense

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waste. They spend inefficient resources, which implies social inequalities and environmental degradation patterns of consumption.

'Gig economy' or 'platform economy' refers to a type of contingent work where employers, workers and consumers use online platforms for transaction (Strowel et al., 2019). The potential of platform economy has received much attention globally but the impact of precarious nature of work on health of gig workers has been relatively under-explored. Three types of platforms can be distinguished: first, 'click-work' platforms, in which workers are hired online for short-term assignments (Gandini, 2018); second, platforms that facilitate meetings between workers and clients for manual labor (Parwez, 2015); and third, work-on-demand services, such as deliveries or driving assignments, that are arranged and controlled by platform aggregators (Heeks, 2017; Huws, 2014; Huws et al., 2018). 'On-demand' food delivery platforms falls under the third category that symbolizes the reclassification and technological repacking of traditional food delivery in context of platform economy (Veen et al., 2019).

Precarious labor on digitally mediated platforms is generally low paid, transitory, lacks training, health, and retirement benefits, and moves more of the risk of conducting business from the company to the worker. The precarious nature of contractual labor exposes employees to occupational and platform-based risks (Bajwa et al., 2018). The emergence of 'on-demand' platform economy has generated new forms of precarious labor that can be visualized as a trajectory of neo-liberalism and precarity of work (Zwick, 2018; Rubery et al., 2018). Though there is no established definition of work precarity in relation to platform work (ILO, 2016), yet it can be contrasted with the notion of *standard employment* which is defined as a secured, long-term, and full-time employment with wage to lead a decent life. 'Temporary work, part-time work, temporary agency work and other multi-party employment arrangements, disguised employment connections and dependent self-employment,' according to the International Labor Organization (2016), are examples of non-standard employment.

The characteristic of precarious employment is comprised of uncertainty and unpredictability that generates risky conditions for workers (Kalleberg, 2018). As the workers working in platform economy are regarded as independent contractors, the platform companies do not provide benefits to ensure social protection of workers (Kountouris, 2018; Codagnone et al., 2016; Johal & Thirgood, 2016). By analyzing the politics of platform economy in Europe and United states, Collier et al. (2017) argued that treating platform workers as 'independent contractors' rather than 'employees', profit-oriented platform companies avoid the responsibilities of providing employment benefits such as overtime pay, leave, and rest periods, social security protections, and the right to collective bargaining.

Hui Huang (2021) asserts that platform work's new dynamics of precarity are facilitated by digital organization and algorithmic control of work processes and performance evaluation. While advocates of platform work glorify its promised flexibility and entrepreneurial opportunities, which imply positive health outcomes for workers (Sundararajan, 2016), critics emphasize platform work's precarious nature and surveillance potential that are generally associated with poor health outcomes (Lewchuk, 2017; Griesbach et al., 2019; Ravenelle, 2019). Ethnographic thesis of Cant (2019) delves into the operation of Deliveroo in the south of the United Kingdom, revealing that a system of algorithmic control, conducted as a 'real-time dispatch algorithm,' partially automates labor process supervision and coordination, but remains a black box opaque to workers, results in indeterminate labor power through deskilling and labor intensification. In addition to this work, while analyzing the app's control of labor process in Australian food delivery platforms, Veen et al. (2019) argue that labor process controls go beyond algorithmic management, illustrating three distinct features: panoptic deployment of technological infrastructure, the use of information asymmetries to constrain worker choice, and the obfuscation of their performance management systems.

Griesbach (2019) found out that platforms exert a stringent type of algorithmic control of labor process to regulate the activities. The findings indicate that platforms adopt unique app-based control tactics to exert influence over passengers' selections and behavior. Platforms exercise control over workers through internal rivalry for shifts and bonuses based on statistics, informational asymmetries, and automated messaging systems. The way platform businesses are built and operated has an impact on the health and well-being of gig workers, including issues such as worker classification, price and workflow management, social isolation, menial microtasks, and work-related stress due to stringent monitoring system (Bajwa et al., 2018). The precarious nature of platform economy job entails socioeconomic insecurity that has grown endemic for many individuals dubbed the "precarariat" – 'a class in the making' by Guy Standing (2011). Hence, Vallas and Schor (2020) rightly claimed that platform work is the accelerant of precarity.

There is a nascent literature on exploring the labor conditions of gig workers. But so far, the work precarity of platform workers has been explored in western contexts. But understanding the implications of platform precarity in context of Global North is not sufficient to understand the labor conditions of platform workers in Global South. Given the fact that with the advent of the platform companies in Bangladesh, riding has emerged as an occupation of late. In Bangladesh, three leading food delivery platforms- Foodpanda, Pathao and HungryNaki engage millions of jobless individuals in income producing activities. A considerable proportion of persons work full-time as the sole

income of the family in informal sector. According to an unofficial source, 300,000 riders are working in Pathao (Khan, 2020). According to new research conducted by Fairwork Bangladesh, a collaboration between DataSense and the University of Oxford, found that the platform companies do not treat their workers fairly. Top 10 platform companies including Foodpanda, Pathao and HungryNaki have been rated out of ten in terms of fair treatment towards workers. Unfortunately, the study reported that Foodpanda and Pathao food scored one while Hungrynaki scored 0 out of ten (The Business Standard, 2021).

The delivery riders working in these platforms suffer from fair pay and fair working conditions. During pandemic, delivery charge per order has been decreased in Foodpanda as the number of riders increased owing to layoffs. As they are not identified as workers, they are not entitled to social protection and bargaining power (Hasan, 2020). Riding on bicycles or motorcycles with the parcels, cutting through traffic and overlooking the risks of road accidents, the delivery riders compete against time and travel throughout the city in heat, cold and rain to ensure that the customers receive their parcel on time (DhakaTribune, 2020). The gig workers operate in absence of any guidelines offering social protection. The academic interest has lagged in terms of exploring the precarious working conditions of food delivery riders in context of Bangladesh. This study adopted Huang's (2021) concept of 'Platform precarity' to explore how dynamics of platform precarity shape the labor conditions of food delivery riders.

2. 'Platform Precarity' as An Analytical Tool

The concept of precarity made its way into academic discourse partly in the twenty-first century as a response to political mobilizations against unemployment and social exclusion across Europe (Kasmir, 2018). This concept received little attention when Bourdieu (1998) invoked the term *precarite* while criticizing the rise of temporary and part-time employment in France in the late 1990s. As opposed to Bourdieu's line of thought, French sociologists associated the term 'precarity' with poverty (Barbier, 2002; De Preretti, 2005). However, the advent of neo-liberal capitalism, rising unemployment, and the introduction of 'flexible' employment relations in Europe reinforced Bourdieu's lens of linking precarity with job insecurity (Millar, 2017). Following the lens of Bourdieu, Castel (2003), Kalleberg (2009, 2011) and Vosko (2006, 2010) view precarity as a labor condition. Focusing on post-industrial societies of the global North, the sociologists define precarity as precarious work, which is characterized by job insecurity, part-time employment, lack of social benefits, and low wages. Sociologist Kalleberg (2009) contends that neoliberalism's strengthening of market-mediated interactions has ended in widespread precarity and insecurity across the labor force, reviving contingent forms of employment that existed before

the New Deal. This notion reflected the vision of a pendulum swinging from precarity to stability and then back to precarity.

In addition to this line of thought, Standing (2011) stresses on addressing migrants to youth working temporary jobs as 'precarariat'- 'a class in the making'. To be more specific, Standing (2011) characterized precariat as a 'dangerous class', a consequence of forced labor into the non-standard work arrangements in the age of great transformation. Precarity scholars of social sciences have had considerable debate over the drivers, pattern, and consequences of precarization. At the macro level, the neoliberal transformation of work, that pursues a flexible and autonomous labor market in the context of globalization, results in the de-standardization and causality of labor relations. Alberti et al. illustrate that management and the state act as the key drivers of precarization at micro level. Management glorifies precarity by enforcing insecure contractual arrangements such as temporary agency labor, zero-hours contracts, and subcontracting in multi-employer environments. Therefore, the state perpetuates precarity by denying some segments of the population access to social welfare and institutional safeguards. Precarity, in other words, is caused by an unequal distribution of protection within society. Despite academic disputes, there is widespread agreement that employees in the informal economy face ongoing employment insecurity, financial instability, and unclear identity.

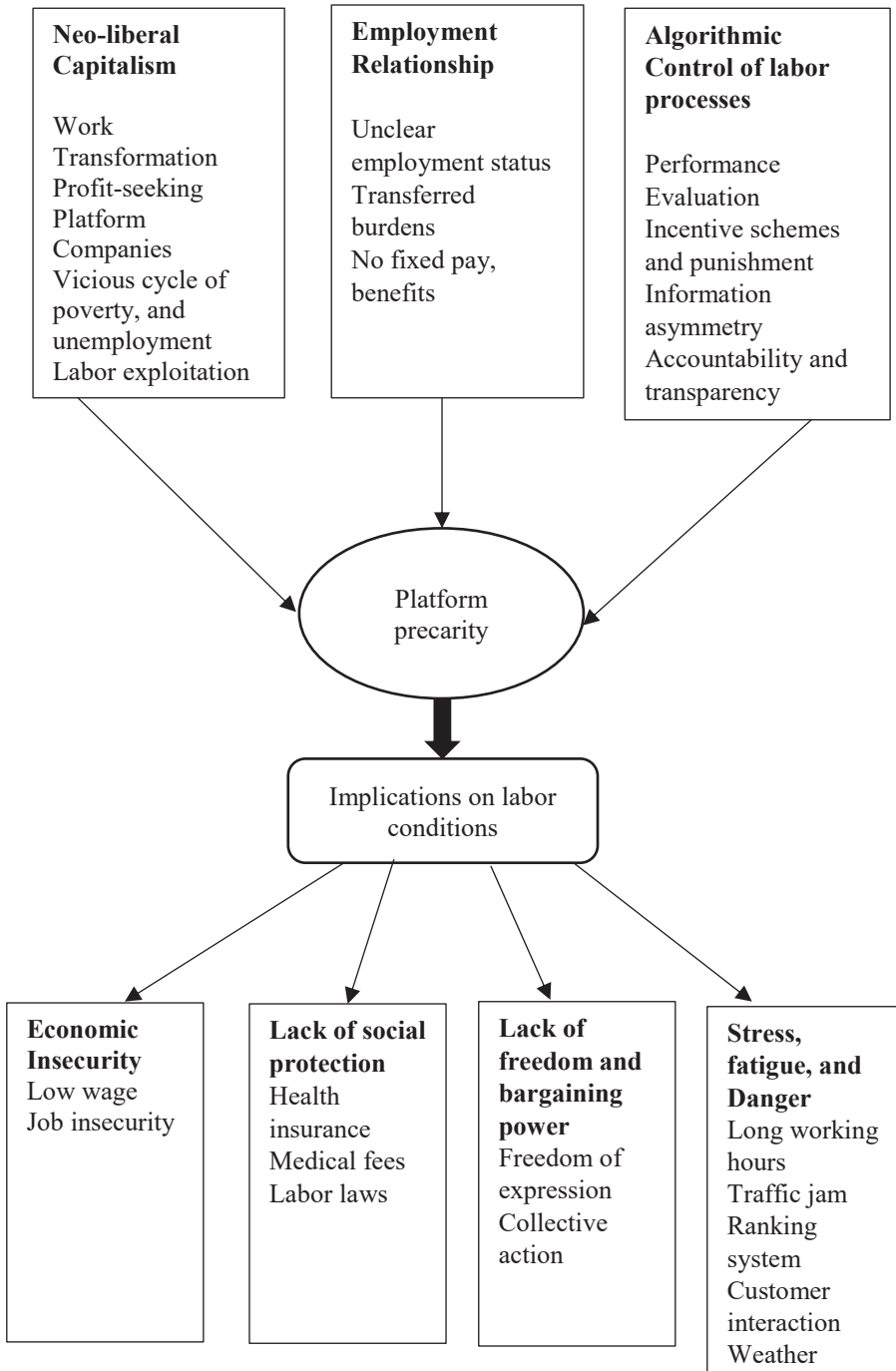


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Platform Precarity and Implications for Labor Conditions

3. Methodology

This exploratory study adopted mixed methodology approach. In this study, we have explored labor conditions of food delivery riders who worked in three major online food ordering platforms in Dhaka city over a period of four months from August 2021 to December 2021. The brand names of these food delivery services are Foodpanda, Pathao food and HungryNaki. These three food delivery platforms are the leading brands in Dhaka city and majority of the riders are found to be working in these platforms.

The data collection tools included in-depth interviews with semi-structured questionnaire, observation, and online survey. Long observations in front of food outlets in selected areas in Dhaka, where the riders wait for ordered food in the making while busy checking their smart phones that the order is still alive helped us to comprehend the everyday hectic schedule of delivery riders and their constant fight against time to deliver on time. For this research, we had chosen roadsides of Rokeya Avenue – one of Dhaka’s North-South main roads that runs through the area comprised of Mirpur Section 10, 11, and 12. I have chosen this area as the Rokeya Avenue has become of the busiest restaurant hubs in Mirpur of late, and with a higher concentration of riders working in this area.

In this research, we have followed purposive and snowball sampling techniques to engage with the riders to elicit information and their experiences. Reviewing of existing literature on gig job such as this food delivery as an emerging occupation in Bangladesh and elsewhere and the advent of online business platform in Bangladesh’s context which are scant but informed my research probes and questions. In this mixed-method approach, the quantitative online survey complemented the qualitative research materials such as collecting life history, family background, occupational history, and mobility, and on how mental and physical strain emanated from work conditions i.e., uncertainty, low wage and irregular pay, and occupational risks.

Table 1: Number of Respondents

Food Delivery Platforms	No. of respondents
Foodpanda	36
Pathao food	17
HungryNaki	20
Total	73

Source: Questionnaire survey 2021

Altogether, we had collected data from 73 respondents. We conducted 16 in-depth interviews with the riders following semi-structured questionnaire from three platforms i.e., Foodpanda (6 riders), Pathao Food (5 riders) and HungryNaki (5 riders). Moreover, an online self-administered anonymous questionnaire consisting of both close ended and open-ended questions was created using online technology of Google forms and was in Bengali language. The questionnaire was sent to the riders through social networking sites i.e., messenger, WhatsApp initially with the help of riders we interviewed earlier. In total 73 respondents filled the questionnaire survey and 16 riders with whom in-depth interviews have been conducted are also included in these 73 respondents. The questionnaire consisted of 22 questions regarding respondents' sociodemographic information, educational qualifications, earnings, motivations for riding occupation, attitude towards work and the risks associated with the work. These insights have enabled me to gain deeper understanding of the lives of the riders and to locate their social position in the wider context and to situate them and their work experiences in the shifting political economy of Bangladesh and beyond.

4. Study Findings

4.1. Rider's profile

The food delivery riders working across three platforms (Foodpanda, Pathao and HungryNaki) were found to be mainly young, male, migrant, and student. According 73 respondents, 49% riders were from Foodpanda, 23% from Pathao and 27% from HungryNaki. As this profession is male dominated, only 3% female riders from Foodpanda were found. There are no female riders in Pathao and HungryNaki. In 'on-demand' delivery platforms, mostly young people are the service providers. This study found 63% riders aged between 21-25 years, 21% aged between 15-20 years, 12% aged between 26-35 years and only 4% were found to be aged between 36-45 years. The riders were found to be mostly migrated from rural areas for education, seeking jobs to support themselves and their family financially. Among the respondents, 74% riders reported to be migrated from rural areas. Lastly, the riders reported to be studying at college, university and some are also graduates. 19% graduates were found to be working as rider which reflects the situation of unemployment in our country.

Table 2: Riders’ Profile

Profile	Frequency (Total 73)	Percentage (%)
Age (years)		
15-20	15	21
21-25	46	63
26-35	9	12
36-45	3	4
Sex		
Male	71	97
Female	2	3
Educational Qualification		
JSC	8	11
SSC	13	18
HSC	37	51
Graduate	14	19
Diploma	1	1
Company		
Foodpanda	36	49
Pathao	17	23
HungryNaki	20	27
Migration Status		
Migrant	54	74
Non-Migrant	19	26

Source: Questionnaire survey 2021

4.2. Neo-liberal transformation and vulnerable socio-economic condition

The vulnerable socio-economic condition of the young riders is one of the crucial factors behind their decision to work as a rider. The root of the vulnerable socio-economic condition is embedded in the historical analysis of neoliberal transformation throughout the years. Long history of dispossession, calamities, landlessness, and loss of agrarian livelihoods has exacerbated rural people's vulnerabilities, driving them to migrate to megacities like Dhaka. The glimmer of opportunities of the big cities attracts thousands of rural people to migrate. Owing to poverty, they migrate to cities in quest of job and a better life. However, due to a lack of skills and access, many eventually find themselves in informal activities in Dhaka.

The migration and family occupation histories of the delivery riders reflect how neo-liberal transformation of the country has trapped them into vicious

cycle of poverty resulting in engagement in precarious work. A Pathao rider expressed his grief saying:

Since childhood I had a dream to be a cricketer. When I first came to Dhaka, I thought of saving money for cricket training. But back in my village, financial condition of my family is so unstable that I had to come to Dhaka to earn money for myself and for my family. Here I am working as a Pathao rider for 5 years.

Another rider working in HungryNaki stated:

It's been 4 years my father died. My father used to do farming. As we do not have our own land, my father used to work on other people's land, and he was in debt too. After his demise, being the elder son of the family, I had to take charge. Hence, to bear my family expenses I have started working as a Foodpanda rider. But still, I am facing difficulties due to low wage.

Among the surveyed respondents, 60% workers reported that they migrated to Dhaka city for poor economic condition of family. Other 15.07% migrated for education purpose and 24.93% for seeking job. The migration histories of the delivery riders depict that these riders have been historically marginalized.

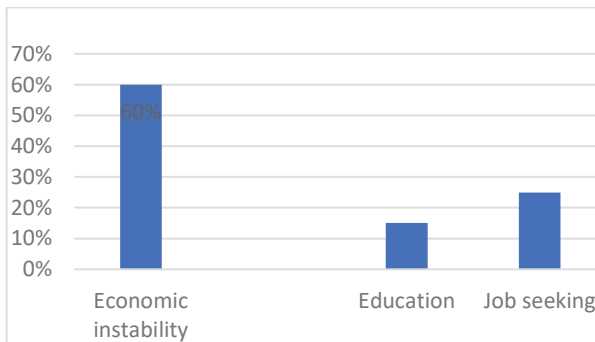


Figure 2: Reasons of migration

Source: Questionnaire survey 2021

4.3. Low wage and job insecurity

The food delivery riders are subject to low pay. As the riders are self-employed and do not consider as workers, they do not get any fixed monthly salary. They earn based on per piece delivery. The riders have no control over price fixing. The food delivery platforms fix the price of per piece delivery which is unpredictable and fluctuating. As these riders are historically marginalized and vulnerable, these people have become a cheap labor pool for the platform companies. Hence, the riders are easily exposed to low, unstable, and unpredictable income. The platform companies tend to get away by claiming that the riders work in this sector to earn an (additional) income. But that is not the truth always. Given the high rate of unemployment in our

country, mostly the riders take this profession as the primary source of income. Precariousness is exacerbated when a rider is fully dependent on this profession for survival. Among the surveyed respondent, 75% reported to be working full-time in this profession. Those working full time are dependent on the earnings they get from this riding profession.

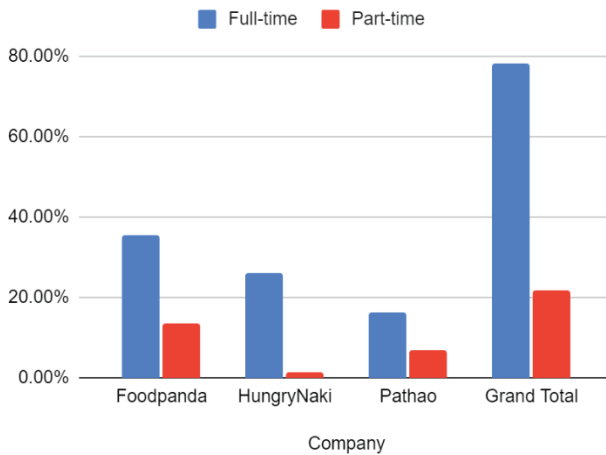


Figure 3: Time invested in platform work

Source: Questionnaire survey 2021

Though the delivery charge per piece is varied across platforms, still on average the range of the charge remains between 20-45 Tk for cycle delivery workers. The riders using bicycle can maximum earn up to 80 Tk per piece delivery. However, this charge is not sufficient for the people who are dependent on this source of income. An 18-year-old Foodpanda rider said:

The prices of the commodities are increasing. But our income is not increasing. Rather it keeps fluctuating. This earning is not sufficient to live in an expensive city like Dhaka.

The income they get by working here surpasses their monthly expenditure. 35.62% workers earn only 6,000-10,000 BDT per month and 39.73% earn 11,000-15,000 BDT. On the contrary, more than 40% of the workers reported that their monthly expenditure is 15,000-20,000.

Another rider of Foodpanda said:

It's really difficult for a married person like me to survive with the earnings I get by working here. My wife is pregnant, and I am worried how I will bear the expenses in near future.

Not only this, but the riders also must bear the costs related to mobile data, mobile balance, medical emergency, and other operational costs. Moreover,

the riders are subject to ‘unpaid time’ or ‘unpaid labor’. The time riders spent waiting for tasks at the outside of the food outlets and travelling to find the locations is not paid. One Pathao rider claimed:

The company does not provide us the operational cost. We must bear the cost from the income we get. Even if we face any accident while working, the company will not bear the medical cost. The income we get does not compensate the hard work we do all day.

A bike-user Pathao food rider said:

Monthly I have to spend a lot of money to bear cost of oil. The company should bear this expense. Otherwise, they should increase our salary.

During the pandemic, the Foodpanda company decreased the commission per delivery charge due to recruiting a large number of workers. Regarding this issue, one Foodpanda rider claimed:

During Covid-19, our commission per delivery decreased from 40 BDT to 22-36 BDT. The company changed the decision without letting us know. The company only cares about recruiting people to increase its brand value. The company even suspends without any reason. There is no guarantee when we will lose our job.

4.4. ‘Freedom’: A myth or reality?

The key feature of platform economy is ‘freedom’ of its workers. But this notion is overestimated in platform work. The delivery riders are constantly under the shadow of algorithmic management. The algorithmic management of the platform companies influences the flexibility and freedom of the riders. The activities of the delivery riders are constantly monitored through GPS and other digital tools and the pricing is also fixed by the platforms. To what extent the riders can exercise their freedom is a matter of question. Then there is system of performance evaluation that ranks the riders. In Foodpanda, the riders are divided into batch according to their performance. There are six batches in Foodpanda. The position of the riders keeps fluctuating based on their performance. Each day and week, their position in batch keep changing. The algorithmic management of apps is designed in such a way that controls every step of the delivery riders.

Delivery on time is the main challenge under the shadow of algorithmic control. The platform companies fix the time for delivery. Both the platform and the customers keep calculating their time. Getting stuck in road due to traffic, rain and accident is not a matter of consideration when it comes to deliver on time. Timely delivery is a mechanism for the platform companies to gain competitive edge over others and to satisfy the customers. Even the app design gives the customer the right to ‘cancel the order’ anytime. One Foodpanda rider said,

The platform companies do not care even if we die on the streets. They only just care about timely delivery.

On their way to deliver food, they constantly get notification about their time. Even if they are late by one minute, they start getting warnings and threats. Just right after receiving the parcel from the restaurant, apps start monitoring the time and the movement of the riders. A Foodpanda rider said:

One day after receiving the order, I had to stand for two minutes to cross the road. As the app found me standing and not moving, suddenly I got a message saying I am suspended for 2 days. I was shocked to see this.

The platforms provide both punishment and incentive to exercise control over workers. As the food delivery platforms are very much concerned about their customers, they take every feedback from the customers into account. Dividing workers in batches, ranking system are the incentive mechanism of the companies to generate competition among the rides and extract labor for them to ensure competitiveness and efficiency. If a customer gives negative feedback regarding a rider, that company restrict the riders from receiving order and in most cases suspend them as a form of punishment. The platform companies do not feel the need to verify the feedback and in this case the voice of the riders is not considered. The feedback from the customers has a direct impact on the salary and promotion of the riders. The algorithmic control of labor process remains a black box for the riders as they do not know what they are going to face in the next minute. They do not even know when they are going to be banned. This type of management generates information asymmetry, thereby hampering the accountability and transparency. Before changing any decision, the platform companies do not notify and discuss with the riders.

Among three platforms, the severe impact of performance evaluation is felt by the riders of Foodpanda. A Pathao rider stated in this regard:

One day when I went to deliver food in Mirpur, I was not able to find the location of the customer. It was not my fault. The customer did not input the exact location in app. I repeatedly said to the customer to update the location and give me the right address. To my utter surprise, the customer got irritated and made complain to the office saying that I misbehaved. Despite of not being guilty, I was threatened by the office. The company never verifies the feedback of the customers.

Sometimes the companies intentionally lower down the position of the rider to give them less money. When the number of the riders increases, the companies start to suspend the riders through a notification. The freedom of the delivery riders is only limited to the choice of accepting and rejecting orders. But the operations are designed in such a way that exercising freedom comes with a huge cost.

4.5. Social protection and bargaining power

As the delivery riders are considered as ‘independent contractors’, the risks and burdens are transferred to the riders. The delivery riders are not entitled to do social protection scheme. They do not receive any health coverage if faced with accident, disease. The companies do not provide any health insurance to the workers. Even during pandemic, the riders were excluded from the national security measures. Lack of social protection expose the workers to precarious working conditions. As they are not considered as workers, they are deprived of the implementation of labor laws. Most often, the riders face attack from the robber in the streets. The incidence of cycle robbery is faced by most of the delivery riders. One Pathao rider stated:

One day while going to deliver food, some robbers attacked me and stole my money. I informed my company about this incident. They acted like it’s not their responsibility. I did not receive any support from my company.

The confrontation and bargaining power are low among delivery riders. Recently, it has been observed in social networking sites that Foodpanda riders express their grief as the company suspends the rider in an unjustified manner and decreases the commission rate per delivery. But due to their employment status, they are not provided with the right to unionize. But almost every interviewed rider stated that they feel the need to unionize. Unionizing will help them to facilitate collective action. They want their voices to be heard. A HungryNaki rider said in this regard:

It is hard for us to unionize. No one gives us recognition as workers. If we protest in the streets, the police will beat us up and will not allow us to continue.

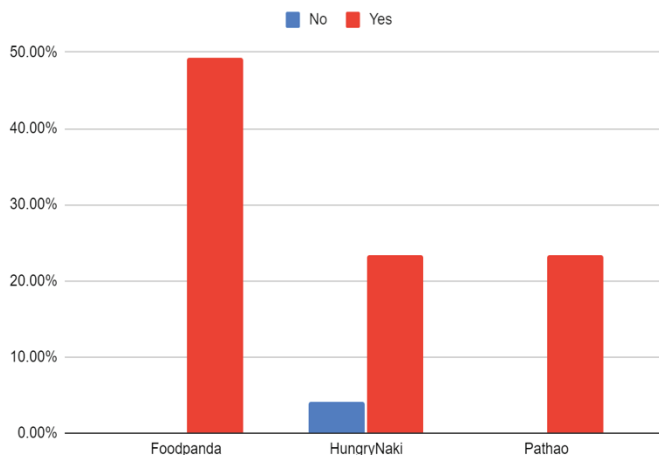


Figure 4: Respondents’ Willingness to unionize to express their rights

Source: Questionnaire survey 2021

Among the surveyed respondents, 95.89% riders reported to be willing to unionize to express their rights. This percentage of showing willingness to unionize depicts that their voice is suppressed in this occupation, and they are not given any freedom to confront and exercise collective bargaining power.

4.6. Work-related stress and health risks

The overstated flexible working conditions associated with gig work conceals the physical and psychological impact on workers. The operating system of the platforms exposes the riders to extreme level of stress and danger. Riding occupation is not as easy as riding a bicycle. The roads of the Dhaka city are not cycle user friendly. The constant pressure to deliver on time generates health risks and danger for the delivery riders. The traffic and weather condition of Dhaka city generates tension among riders. The incentive mechanism of delivery platforms is a way of persuading the riders to work for long hours. They are not allowed to take any break during their shifts. They have the freedom to do so but they will have to pay the cost for exercising their freedom. The cost is their ranking will be lowered down and their commission will decrease. As most of the riders work for 10 hours at a stretch, they feel fatigue after riding for long hours. A HungryNaki rider stated:

Working as a rider and cycling for 10 hours is extremely tiresome. Throughout my riding profession, I fell sick for so many times. On top of that, I am constantly worried about losing my job. I do not know when I will be suspended.

The delivery riders are exposed to insecure spaces and cycling in these streets with a bulk bag creates danger for the riders. On the days of extreme heat and rain, it becomes difficult for them to deliver the food. But these factors are not considered. One Foodpanda rider said:

The company does not provide us any extra charge for delivering on rainy days. On rainy days it becomes really challenging to deliver the food on time due to waterlogging.

The riders are asked to treat the customers very nicely to ensure good performance. The interviewed riders reported that they constantly make phone calls to confirm the location. The wrong address of the customers generates anxiety issues among the riders. Even if the mistake is from the end of the customers, the companies do not verify the comments. The riders do not even get time to have their lunch. During their shifts, they are not allowed to take a break. This leads to increase the malnutrition level among riders. Moreover, as they are constantly under threat of losing job and subject to low pay, they feel stressed thinking how they will survive.

5. Discussion

The reviewed literature depicts that mostly the riders working in platforms are young, male, migrant and students (Vandaele et al., 2019). The platform

workers face occupational and platform-based vulnerabilities (Bajwa et al., 2018). The delivery riders are subject to precarious working conditions. The platform workers of global south face the work precarity differently (Munck, 2013). The precarious working condition of the platform works must be understood in the context of neoliberalism which contributes to the increased globalization and precarization of work (Bajwa et al., 2018). In the context of Bangladesh, dispossession of vast number of peasants from the land, incapacity of small farmers to cope with modernized farm of farming contributed to the declining proportion of landlessness in rural areas. Hence, the loss of agrarian livelihoods compelled the rural people to migrant to urban peripheries leaving their roots behind (Nuruzzaman, 2014; Paprocki, 2018; Misra, 2016). The riders working in this sector did not choose to work in platform economy. Rather this choice is shaped by the histories of dispossession that made them dependent on the market for survival, which Denning (2020) referred to as 'wage less life'. In this study, 74% riders reported to be migrated from rural areas and 60% riders reported to migrate to Dhaka city due to poor economic condition of the family. Lack of skill, less alternative options and nepotism in job market compel these youths to enter into informal economy. Specifically, low level of entry barriers in food delivery platforms encourage these youths to take riding as a means of survival.

But riders working in this sector are exposed to low pay despite their long working hours. As tall claims are made that the riders who work here take riding as a part-time profession and hence, they should not be affected due to low wage. But this study revealed that almost 75% riders work full-time in this profession meaning they are fully dependent on this source of income. In context of Australian food delivery platforms, Goods et al. (2019) revealed that the food delivery riders are subject to economic insecurity. Moreover, oversupply of labor in these sectors aggravates the issue of job insecurity among delivery riders. Delivery riders working in three platforms (Foodpanda, Pathao food and HungryNaki) expressed that the commission they get per delivery is not sufficient to live in Dhaka city. But among these three platforms, only HungryNaki riders get a fixed monthly salary of 8,000 BDT along with the fixed commission per delivery.

Another dimension of platform economy which is related to increasing precariousness is the unclear employment status of delivery riders. This issue is coincided with the lack of social protection and bargaining power among delivery riders. Collier et al. (2017) argued that by classifying platform workers as 'independent contractors' rather than 'employees,' profit-driven platform companies can avoid providing employment benefits such as overtime pay, paid leave, and rest periods, social security protections, and the right to collective bargaining. Across countries, there are disparate practices addressing the work status of delivery riders. Since delivery riders are now

being noticed fighting for their rights and protection, courts are being asked to verify riders' legal standing. The vulnerable citizenship of workers, employment relationship and algorithmic management shape the dynamics of the precarity in platform economy (Huang, 2021).

The platform companies extract the labor from the marginalized people by not employing them as workers and exercising algorithmic control. The notion of freedom in platform is always overstated. Due to algorithmic control of labor, the workers cannot exercise their freedom. Performance evaluation system and the pressure to deliver on time restrict the freedom of the workers. Veen et al. (2019) argue that labor process controls extend beyond algorithmic management by demonstrating three distinct characteristics: panoptic deployment of technological infrastructure, the use of information asymmetries to constrain worker choice, and the obscuration of their performance management systems. Hence, Guy Standing (2011) referred this working class as 'precariat' - a class in the making. He referred to this group of workers as an emerging class who are constantly exposed to insecure labor.

The food delivery platforms offer low levels of economic security, diminished autonomy and precarious working conditions increasing stress, fatigue among the workers (Goods et al., 2019). Anwar and Graham (2020) found in a study that African gig workers end up working in harsh conditions and their bargaining power is constrained on the platform. In this study, the riders expressed that they feel the need to unionize to express their rights and voice but as they are not considered as workers, they are not allowed to unionize and protest. The adaptation of algorithmic management and technological control of labor processes traps the workers in vicious exploitation cycles that end in precariousness, stress, tiredness, and loneliness. According to Wood et al. the algorithmic control is a black box for the riders as they are not aware of what is going on inside. They are on the end of receiving exploitation. Moreover, the unclear employment status of the riders does not ensure social protection. If they face any danger while working, they are the ones to take responsibility. In this study, the riders expressed how they are exploited and controlled. Owing to lack of skills and job availability they are trapped in this precarious situation. They do not feel they have economic and life security.

6. Conclusion

Drawing on the working experiences of the food delivery riders, this study presents how the dimensions of platform precarity shape the labor conditions of food delivery riders. Interviewing riders from three different platforms (Foodpanda, Pathao food and HungryNaki), the study finds that the workers are subject to low pay and job insecurity. As they are not considered as workers, they are excluded from social protection schemes. The unclear employment status of the riders increases the risk of precariousness by transferring the burdens of risk. These young, male, and migrated riders are

historically marginalized and therefore, become the source of cheap labor pool for these platform companies. Though the young people feel motivated to join this occupation as they feel like there exists freedom. But the platform companies control the freedom of the riders through algorithmic management. These dimensions of the platform increase the feeling of insecurity among riders.

Moreover, the workers are exposed to physical and psychological risks. But the heterogeneity in experience of riders across platforms has been observed. Among three platforms, the riders of Pathao food and HungryNaki receive fixed commission rate per delivery. On the contrary, the Foodpanda riders receive commission rate per delivery based on the vehicle they use, distance they travel and customer ratings. On top of that, the HungryNaki riders are provided with a basic fixed salary. These differences shape the feeling of insecurity in different ways. Those who are fully dependent on this source of income feel more precariousness than the ones who work part-time. The riders are also even excluded from unionizing to facilitate collective action. The working conditions of the platform economy expose the workers to physical and psychological risks. Hence, these platform companies are exercising neo-colonial forms of labor exploitation. As this study only focused on exploring the labor conditions of food delivery riders, general conclusion cannot be made that workers in other platform share the same experience. Further research is suggested to conduct the labor conditions of gig workers of other platforms and make a comparative study.

7. References

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