



## Semarak International Journal of Entrepreneurship, Economics and Business Development

Journal homepage:  
<https://semarakilmu.my/index.php/sijeebd/index>  
ISSN: 3083-8053



# The Precarious Nature of Gig Work in Malaysia: An Analysis Using the Kreshpaj Model

Dzurizah Ibrahim<sup>1,\*</sup>, Aslinah Asnal<sup>1</sup>, Adam Rawlins<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup> School of Computer Science, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 2 March 2025

Received in revised form 14 May 2025

Accepted 5 June 2025

Available online 30 June 2025

#### Keywords:

Gig economy; gig workers; precarious; resilience; Kreshpaj model; working conditions; income; social protections; worker rights

### ABSTRACT

The gig economy has become a significant labour market phenomenon globally, including Malaysia. It has rapidly expanded in Malaysia, employing nearly three million workers, yet concerns over precarious employment persist. This article examines the extent to which gig work is precarious in these contexts, utilizing the Kreshpaj model of precarious employment. Drawing on an in-depth interview with 7 gig workers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, the study explores the dimensions of precariousness in gig work, including income instability, lack of social protections, and limited worker rights. The findings reveal that gig work in Malaysia, particularly Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, is precarious, with workers facing significant vulnerabilities and challenges. The article concludes with policy implications and recommendations for improving the working conditions of gig workers.

## 1. Introduction

The gig economy has grown rapidly in Southeast Asia, driven by digital platforms such as Grab, Gojek and Foodpanda. These platforms offer flexible work opportunities, particularly in transportation, delivery, and freelance services. However, the rise of gig work has also raised concerns about job security, social protections, and worker rights. In ASEAN, where informal employment is already prevalent, gig work often exacerbates existing labour market vulnerabilities. This article examines the precarious nature of gig work in Malaysia, particularly in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, using the Kreshpaj model as a framework for analysis.

Malaysia has a growing number of gig workers. According to a report by the Malaysian Social Security Organisation (SOCO) in 2021, there were 1.1 million gig workers in Malaysia. This number has likely increased since then, as the gig economy has expanded due to the rise of digital platforms like Grab, Foodpanda, and others. This employment trend is becoming increasingly popular and has transformed the labour market phenomenon, particularly in Malaysia. This is where the gig

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [idzuri@ums.edu.my](mailto:idzuri@ums.edu.my)

<https://doi.org/10.37934/sijeebd.4.1.112>

economy has created new opportunities, increased flexibility, and has the potential to address unemployment issues in Malaysia [17].

The gig economy in Malaysia includes ride-hailing drivers, food delivery riders, freelance professionals, and other independent contractors. The government has also taken steps to regulate and support gig workers, such as introducing the Employment Insurance System (EIS) and considering policies to provide better social protection for this group.

The gig economy is expected to continue growing in Malaysia, with more workers anticipated to enter the sector in the coming years up to the present day. However, a major weakness of this employment sector is that gig workers are not recognized as “employees” under labour laws. According to Radzi *et al.*, [17], there is no clear legal definition of gig workers in Malaysia. From a legal perspective, gig workers are not covered under the Employment Act 1955 (Act 265), the Labour Ordinance (Chapter 67, Sabah), or the Labour Ordinance (Chapter 76, Sarawak) [18]. Due to the lack of legal recognition in the country’s labour laws, gig economy workers are considered independent as they are not bound by a service contract with an employer. The ambiguity in labour laws regarding this form of employment has led to inequality in the gig labour market compared to other employment sectors, ultimately impacting workers in this industry. Consequently, this phenomenon has created an issue where the gig economy employment trend is becoming increasingly popular, attracting a growing number of workers to this sector.

However, a significant drawback of this type of employment is the lack of social protection, and studies have shown that gig economy platform workers do not receive adequate social security coverage. According to an International Labour Organization (ILO) survey, approximately 40 percent of online platform workers do not have health insurance, less than 15 percent are covered in the event of work-related accidents or unemployment, and only 20 percent have retirement protection. Meanwhile, for in-situ platform workers, only a small number have health insurance, less than one-third are covered in case of work-related injuries, and fewer than one-fifth have pension protection for old age [7].

In this regard, the ILO [8] stated that the vulnerability of platform workers during the COVID-19 crisis highlighted the urgent need to address significant gaps in social protection, including limited access to unemployment insurance, job retention schemes, sick leave benefits, and healthcare coverage. According to Heeks [6], the ILO classifies gig workers as a vulnerable group in the labour market due to precarious working conditions and structural employment inequalities caused by information asymmetry in this sector.

The rise of the gig economy has transformed the labour market worldwide, offering flexible employment opportunities while simultaneously posing challenges related to job security, income stability, and worker protection. In Malaysia, the rapid expansion of gig work, particularly within the food delivery sector, has attracted significant attention from scholars and policymakers due to concerns regarding workers' rights and social protection. Despite its growing prominence, the gig economy remains inadequately regulated, leaving workers vulnerable to economic uncertainties and occupational risks.

Several studies have examined the precarious nature of gig employment in Malaysia. Uchiyama *et al.*, [18] highlight that gig workers often lack access to formal labour protections, such as social security and stable income, exacerbating labour market inequalities. Similarly, Radzi *et al.*, [17] emphasize the financial vulnerability of gig workers, noting that the absence of employer-provided benefits forces them to rely on inconsistent earnings. Nawawi *et al.*, [16] further explore the emergence of the gig economy in Malaysia, discussing its implications for worker welfare and regulatory policies. These studies underscore the urgent need for comprehensive labour laws and social protection mechanisms to safeguard gig workers’ well-being.

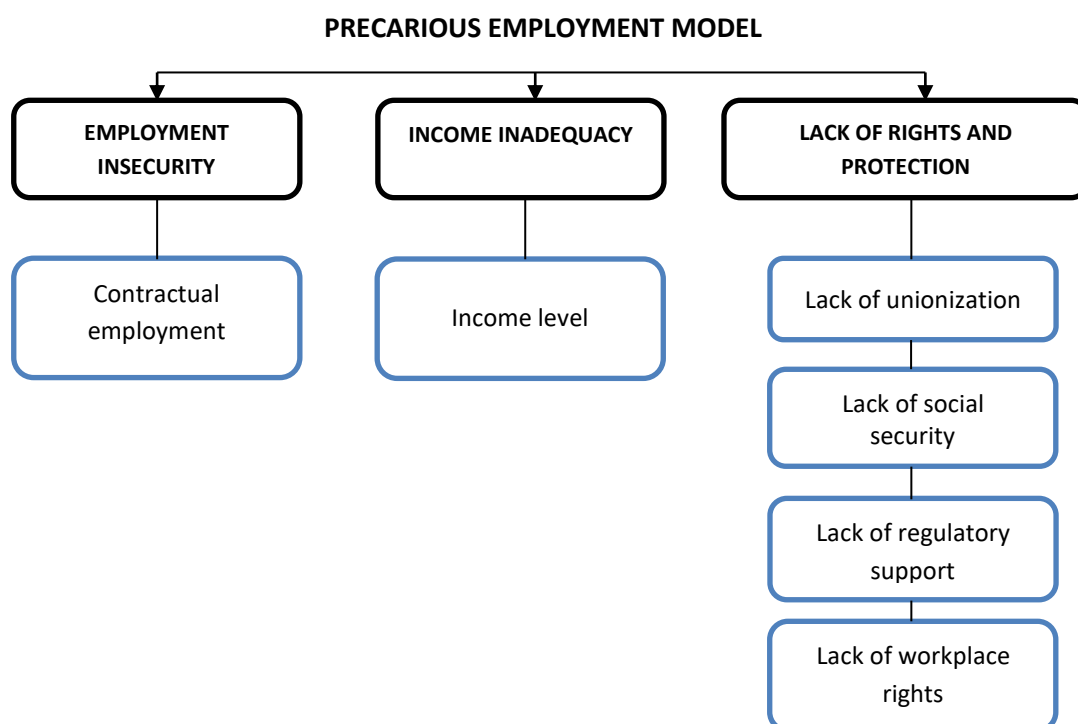
Given these emerging issues, however, there are gaps in studies that analyze the lived experiences of gig workers, especially in Sabah, where labour market conditions differ from Peninsular Malaysia. Sabah has a high prevalence of informal employment and limited labour protections, making gig workers even more vulnerable to job precarity. Additionally, previous research on gig employment in Malaysia has not extensively applied theoretical models to analyze worker vulnerabilities and precariousness, leaving a gap in understanding the structural inequalities affecting this labour segment.

This study fills this gap by employing the Kreshpaj model, which provides a comprehensive framework for assessing precarious employment. By applying this model, the study systematically examines the extent to which Foodpanda workers in Kota Kinabalu experience precarity in terms of income security, social protection, and workplace rights. Furthermore, this research contributes to the growing discourse on labour protections in the gig economy by offering empirical insights into the specific challenges faced by gig workers in a less industrialized region of Malaysia.

By addressing these gaps, this study provides valuable insights that can inform policymakers, labour organizations, and gig economy platforms on strategies to improve working conditions and social protections for gig workers in Malaysia. Additionally, by situating the findings within existing literature, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the precariousness faced by gig workers and the broader implications for labour policies in Malaysia.

## 2. Methodology

To categorize Foodpanda delivery workers as precarious employees, this study adapted the "Precarious Employment" framework introduced by Kreshpaj *et al.*, [9]. Their research synthesized findings from 63 studies across different continents on the definition of precarious work, including the foundational study by Rodgers and Rodgers [19].



**Fig. 1.** Precarious Employment Model by Kreshpaj *et al.*, [9]

This framework was designed to assess the extent to which workers experience precarious employment conditions. Therefore, it serves as a primary reference, and this study has adapted it to classify gig economy workers as precarious employees. The adoption of this model is justified as Kreshpaj *et al.*, [9] provides the most recent insights, and its dimensions have evolved in line with contemporary labour market trends. Accordingly, their study identifies three key employment dimensions, which are outlined as in Figure 1.

The theoretical and empirical studies synthesized by Kreshpaj *et al.*, [9] demonstrate that a common multidimensional definition can be developed and applied across different labour market contexts. They state that their framework can be used to assess precarious employment in various labour markets, even with differing methodological approaches.

Fundamentally, this model effectively explains precarious employment across various job types; however, it is not specifically designed for gig economy workers. Nevertheless, gig economy jobs are also classified as precarious work due to their similar characteristics. Therefore, this study utilizes the model to determine whether the dimensions proposed by Kreshpaj *et al.*, [9] can be applied to gig economy workers in assessing the precariousness of Foodpanda employees in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.

By focusing on Foodpanda workers as the case study, this research employs qualitative empirical inquiry to examine contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are unclear [20]. This design allows for a more in-depth exploration of worker precariousness using the selected precarious employment model. Implementing this approach requires a comprehensive understanding of various factors to analyze the precariousness of Foodpanda workers in the gig economy sector [2]. Overall, this case study helps explain the phenomenon through observation and interviews while providing a holistic understanding of social issues and individual behaviour.

Qualitative research is particularly suitable for exploring the lived experiences of gig workers, as it provides in-depth insights into their perceptions, challenges, and coping strategies that may not be captured through quantitative approaches. The study employs a phenomenological approach, which emphasizes understanding the subjective experiences of individuals within their specific socio-economic and occupational contexts.

A total of seven informants were randomly selected for in-depth interviews, with appointments arranged via WhatsApp. The interviews were conducted using semi-structured questions. The sampling method used was non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling, where individuals were selected based on predefined criteria set by the researchers. For instance, the study focused on individuals working on-demand within the gig economy, with the Foodpanda platform chosen as the focal point. Additionally, no restrictions were placed on age or gender, as long as the participants were actively working as Foodpanda riders in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.

These informants were selected because the researchers aimed to examine the precariousness of Foodpanda workers, particularly due to concerns that they lack social protection as they are not legally recognized under the Sabah Labour Ordinance (Chapter 67) [11]. Thus, the study seeks to assess their level of precariousness based on the adapted precarious employment model.

Although the sample size consists of only seven gig workers, qualitative research prioritizes depth over breadth, allowing for a nuanced exploration of issues such as job insecurity, lack of social protection, and regulatory gaps. As argued by Maxwell [14], Gobo [4] and Yin [20], qualitative studies do not aim for statistical generalizability but rather seek to achieve analytical generalization, where findings contribute to broader theoretical discussions on worker vulnerability and labour rights. Additionally, the purposive sampling strategy ensures that participants possess relevant experience and knowledge about the gig economy, enhancing the validity of the findings.

Future research may benefit from incorporating mixed-method approaches, combining qualitative depth with quantitative breadth to strengthen the representativeness of findings. However, within the scope of this study, qualitative interviews remain the most appropriate method for capturing the complexities and lived realities of Foodpanda workers in Kota Kinabalu.

The data obtained from the interviews was analyzed using the thematic analysis method as it aims to identify patterns or extract themes from the data collected [1]. Additionally, this method allows for a broader understanding of various issues [14].

Thus, this strategy is suitable for researchers to identify relevant themes aligned with the study objectives. Thematic analysis also enables researchers to code and categorize data into themes. The processed data can be displayed and categorized based on similarities and differences [5].

To achieve this, Braun and Clarke [1] explain that the process must involve distinct stages of theme development, including coding, categorization, and documentation. Therefore, the coding conducted by the researchers is an ongoing process, as emphasized by Miles and Huberman [15], who state that coding is not a static or pre-analyzed data outcome but rather a continuous process throughout data collection.

### 3. Results

The following is an analysis of to what extent is gig economy workers (Foodpanda riders) in the study context categorized as precarious employees.

#### 3.1 Job Insecurity

Interviews with Foodpanda workers reveal significant job insecurity, primarily stemming from the lack of formal employment contracts and the necessity of holding multiple jobs. Fundamentally, these workers do not have a conventional employer-employee relationship, as Foodpanda Headquarters (HQ) operates merely as an intermediary between workers and customers rather than as a direct employer. This structural arrangement exacerbates their precariousness, particularly regarding job stability and financial security.

##### 3.1.1 Employment contract insecurity

A predominant characteristic of employment precariousness among Foodpanda riders is the absence of formal contractual agreements. Informants consistently reported that they do not possess a written contract that explicitly defines an employer-employee relationship with Foodpanda. When asked about their employment status, they responded:

*"...We don't have a written contract like other jobs; we only register at the Foodpanda Head Quarters in Bundusan, Penampang..." (Faizal, 23 years old, two years of service)*

*"There is no contract because this job does not have an employer..." (Erwan, 44 years old, three years of service)*

*"...There is no formal contract given, but we must follow the rules set by Head Quarters, such as wearing the Foodpanda uniform and shoes while delivering food to customers..." (Wiwit, 23 years old, four years of service)*

These statements underscore the lack of legal protections typically afforded by formal employment agreements. Despite this absence of contractual security, Foodpanda HQ still enforces specific operational requirements, such as mandatory uniforms and adherence to platform guidelines. This paradox highlights the precarious nature of their employment, where they are subjected to rules without the protections and rights that formal employment typically provides.

### 3.2 Insufficient Income

The study highlights that inadequate earnings are a major challenge faced by Foodpanda workers, contributing to their overall job precariousness. Many informants reported financial strain, emphasizing that their income is insufficient to sustain their daily needs and long-term financial stability.

The issue of insufficient income is analyzed in relation to Malaysia's B40 income classification [3], which consists of four tiers and serves as a benchmark for assessing earnings among low-income groups.

Based on Malaysia's B40 income classification, there is a clear distinction in the estimated monthly income of Foodpanda workers, which varies depending on their working hours and batch level. During the interviews, the researcher asked informants to estimate their monthly earnings and whether their income was sufficient to cover household expenses. The majority expressed that their wages were inadequate, particularly for those with family responsibilities. One informant explained:

*"...Our income is definitely not enough for an entire month. Since we are paid weekly, most of our wages are immediately spent on essential expenses. Food is a daily necessity, and our earnings are barely sufficient to cover it..." (Suhaimi, 44 years old, one year of service)*

This concern was echoed by other informants, who emphasized that their earnings were insufficient, especially for those supporting large families. In addition to household expenses, they also face financial burdens related to vehicle maintenance, which is essential for their job. One informant, a student, highlighted the additional financial strain:

*"...Honestly, the income we receive is not enough—not just for workers with families but also for students like me. We also have to account for extra costs, such as motorcycle maintenance, to ensure we can continue delivering food efficiently" (Wiwit, 23 years old, four years of service)*

It is evident that Foodpanda workers struggle with income instability. Informants reported that their earnings fluctuate due to the nature of their work, which is influenced by their working hours and batch level. While working overtime can improve their income, it also enhances their job performance and increases their batch level, provided they maintain a consistent work schedule and avoids taking leave. Despite these potential benefits, their financial situation remains precarious, underscoring the inherent vulnerabilities within gig economy employment.

The interviews further revealed that Foodpanda workers experience significant fluctuations in their monthly earnings, primarily due to intense competition among food delivery riders. Additionally, some informants engaged in multiple jobs, further contributing to the inconsistency of their income. The unpredictable nature of their earnings was highlighted by one informant:

*"...My income is unpredictable, but I estimate earning around RM1,000+ per month, with weekly earnings ranging from RM80 to RM200..." (Faizal, 23 years old, two years of service)*

Another informant emphasized that earnings largely depend on individual effort and willingness to take on more deliveries:

*"...My monthly income is never fixed. Some months, I can earn between RM3,000 and RM4,000, but it all depends on how hardworking we (Foodpanda riders) are..." (Jamil, 26 years old, eight months of service)*

A notable disparity in earnings was observed between the Movement Control Order (MCO) period and the post-pandemic era. Informants reported that during the MCO, food delivery services were in high demand, significantly boosting their income. Some riders earned between RM7,000 and RM8,000 per month, allowing them to save money. This was reflected in the experience of another informant:

*"...My income fluctuates, but on average, I earn between RM2,000 and RM3,000 per month. However, during the MCO period, I was able to earn between RM6,000 and RM7,000 monthly..." (Erwan, 44 years old, three years of service)*

Given his tenure as a Foodpanda rider since the MCO period, Erwan personally experienced the stark contrast in earnings before and after the pandemic. His statement underscores the decline in financial opportunities for food delivery workers in the post-pandemic landscape.

Overall, the findings indicate that the majority of Foodpanda workers face income instability, influenced by several factors, including reduced customer demand, heightened competition among delivery workers, and individual work effort. While higher earnings were possible during the pandemic due to increased reliance on food delivery services, the current economic environment presents challenges in maintaining a stable income.

### **3.3 Lack of Rights and Protection**

Interviews revealed that Foodpanda workers face a lack of rights and protection, making them vulnerable and precarious workers. This deficiency has resulted in limited rights and protection for these workers.

#### **3.3.1 Absence of a union**

During interviews, it was found that Foodpanda workers have no union to voice their concerns if they are dissatisfied with Foodpanda HQ's management. They must advocate for their own rights individually. The following statements illustrate the situation when disputes arise between Foodpanda HQ and its workers.

According to informants, there is a designated leader at each work location. For example, in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, HQ appoints an individual whose role is merely to register new Foodpanda workers. This was supported by all informants when the researcher inquired about the existence of a workers' union within their job.

*“...we do not have any organization that represents all workers in case of disputes between HQ and Foodpanda workers...” (Raskin, 29 years old, three years of service)*

*“...there is no union in this job. If there is an issue with a customer, we have to handle it ourselves. The same applies to HQ—if we have a problem, we can go to their office or speak directly with Mr. Fareed. But now, we can manage everything via WhatsApp, which is more convenient for us...” (Azmin, 31 years old, two years of service)*

Overall, it can be concluded that Foodpanda workers do not have a trade union to advocate for their rights and concerns in disputes with HQ. Moreover, HQ does not act as their employer but instead functions as a service provider for both workers and customers. As a result, Foodpanda workers are categorized as precarious workers due to the absence of a union.

### 3.3.2 Lack of social protection

The findings from the interviews underscore a critical gap in social protection among Foodpanda workers, reflecting the broader challenges faced by gig economy workers. The majority of informants reported that they do not receive essential social security benefits such as the Employees Provident Fund (KWSP), Social Security Organization (PERKESO), health insurance, or medical coverage. The absence of these protections leaves them financially vulnerable, particularly in the event of workplace injuries, medical emergencies, or long-term financial insecurity.

One informant highlighted the instability of their earnings as a key barrier to contributing to social security schemes:

*“...We don’t have contributions like KWSP because our income is not stable. If we want to contribute, we have to opt for private social security schemes...” (Suhaimi, 44 years old, one year of service)*

Although Foodpanda HQ offers access to PERKESO, participation remains low, as many workers, particularly part-timers, choose not to enroll in the scheme:

*“...I haven't made any contributions, but HQ Foodpanda does provide PERKESO for workers. However, since the job is part-time, many workers choose not to participate in the scheme...” (Raskin, 29 years old, three years of service)*

Other informants echoed similar concerns, indicating that they had not made any contributions due to the nature of their employment:

*“...So far, I haven't made any contributions yet...” (Azmin, 31 years old, two years of service)*

*“...I only work part-time, so I haven't made any contributions. The risk of accidents can be reduced if I am more careful when delivering orders...” (Faizal, 23 years old, two years of service)*

Overall, these findings highlight the precarious nature of employment in the gig economy, where workers are often left without fundamental social protections. Many perceive food delivery as a temporary or supplementary source of income, and the irregularity of their earnings makes it challenging to commit to structured social security contributions. This lack of protection places



them at significant financial risk, particularly in cases of unforeseen circumstances such as accidents or health issues.

### 3.3.3 Lack of regulatory support

The absence of regulatory protections further exacerbates the precarious conditions faced by gig economy workers. In Sabah, gig workers are not covered under the Sabah Labour Ordinance (Chapter 67) [11], meaning they lack formal employee classification and are instead regarded as self-employed or independent contractors. This classification excludes them from the legal protections and benefits typically afforded to conventional employees, such as job security, paid leave, and social security contributions.

To examine their awareness of employment laws, the researcher inquired whether the informants were familiar with the legal framework governing their work. Some informants demonstrated awareness of their exclusion from labour protections:

*“...I know this job is not protected under labour laws like the Sabah Labour Ordinance (SLO) because I have studied it. However, I continue working in this job because there are no specific qualifications required to enter this field...” (Faizal, 23 years old, two years of service)*

*“...I know that we (Foodpanda workers) do not receive any benefits like sick leave or public holidays because we are not covered under any labor laws...” (Wiwit, 23 years old, four years of service)*

Interviews further revealed that while some informants were aware of the lack of regulatory support, they accepted these conditions due to the accessibility of gig work. Unlike traditional employment, Foodpanda does not impose educational or experience-based entry requirements, making it an attractive option for individuals seeking flexible work. However, the trade-off is the absence of structured employment benefits, such as health coverage, financial security, and workplace protections.

Despite these limitations, gig workers must adhere to platform-specific performance standards, such as maintaining punctuality, fulfilling assigned shifts, and avoiding behaviours that could negatively impact their reputation, such as rejecting customer requests or failing to log in on time. These constraints place significant responsibility on workers without granting them the legal protections available to employees in regulated industries.

### 3.3.4 Lack of workplace rights

This study found that workers face significant challenges concerning workplace rights, particularly in terms of health and safety. Many informants reported being exposed to hazardous working conditions, which pose serious risks to their well-being. The nature of their job requires them to spend prolonged hours on the road, making them vulnerable to accidents, extreme weather conditions, and other environmental dangers.

All informants acknowledged that their work environment frequently places them in precarious situations. As food delivery riders, they must navigate busy highways, collect orders from vendors, and ensure timely deliveries to customers—often under unsafe conditions. The job also becomes particularly demanding during extreme weather, as customer demand surges during heavy rain

when people prefer to order food rather than go out. Furthermore, road hazards, including poor infrastructure and reckless drivers, exacerbate the dangers they face.

*“...The work environment is hazardous—we endure extreme heat and heavy rain while delivering customer orders. Furthermore, poor road conditions, such as potholes, slow down the delivery process. Additionally, reckless drivers who exceed speed limits contribute to a dangerous work environment...” (Azmin, 31 years old, two years of service)*

*“...The environment is indeed dangerous because we are constantly on the road. I have had to deliver orders while being chased by a dog, and I have even passed through cemeteries to reach customer locations...” (Wiwit, 23 years old, four years of service)*

Overall, the insights provided by informants reveal that their occupation involves substantial occupational hazards, which could lead to accidents or injuries without proper risk mitigation strategies. These findings align with the Precarious Employment Model, reinforcing existing research that highlights the precarious nature of gig work and the vulnerabilities faced by workers in the sector.

#### 4. Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal the vulnerabilities and precariousness experienced by Foodpanda workers, particularly in terms of economic instability, lack of labour rights, and inadequate social protection. The results indicate that their financial situation is precarious due to insufficient and inconsistent income, which varies based on competition, demand fluctuations, and their individual working hours. Furthermore, the lack of a structured employment framework means that these workers are classified as independent contractors rather than employees, excluding them from essential protections such as social security, health insurance, and workplace benefits.

The experiences of Foodpanda workers align closely with the Kreshpaj Precarious Employment Model, which emphasizes three key dimensions of vulnerability in employment: economic insecurity, lack of labour protections, and poor working conditions. The study confirms that Foodpanda workers face inconsistent and insufficient earnings, making it difficult to sustain financial stability. Many workers rely on gig work as their primary income source, yet their earnings are highly unpredictable, reinforcing their financial vulnerability. Additionally, the absence of a workers' union, combined with their classification as self-employed contractors, denies them access to labour rights such as job security, paid leave, or health benefits. This aligns with Kreshpaj's model, which highlights how informal and gig economy workers are often excluded from traditional employment protections. Furthermore, the hazardous nature of food delivery work exposes riders to road accidents, extreme weather conditions, and safety risks such as reckless drivers or unsafe delivery routes. These risks further contribute to their precarious employment status, demonstrating the lack of workplace rights and occupational safety measures.

The findings of this study highlight several critical lessons regarding the vulnerabilities and precariousness of gig workers, particularly those in the food delivery sector. One of the most significant takeaways is that the gig economy, despite offering flexibility and accessibility, exacerbates worker precarity by failing to provide stable income and social protections. The fluctuating and often insufficient earnings of Foodpanda workers reinforce their economic insecurity, making it difficult for them to achieve financial stability. Without a structured

employment framework, these workers remain excluded from essential labour protections, leaving them with no guaranteed minimum wage, job security, or benefits such as paid leave and healthcare. The absence of union representation further weakens their bargaining power, forcing them to navigate disputes and workplace issues on an individual basis. This lack of collective representation places them in a vulnerable position where they must accept the terms dictated by platform management, often without avenues for negotiation or advocacy.

Another crucial lesson is that the labour laws in Sabah fail to accommodate the realities of gig work, leaving Foodpanda workers without legal recognition or protection. The existing labour regulations classify them as independent contractors rather than employees. This legal gap creates a precarious employment environment where workers are responsible for their own social security contributions, but many struggle to do so due to inconsistent earnings. The lack of regulatory support also means that these workers have no access to formal grievance mechanisms or labour rights, reinforcing their position as vulnerable workers within the economy.

To address these challenges, a series of policy and industry reforms must be introduced to create a fairer and more sustainable working environment for gig economy workers. A key recommendation is for policymakers to revise the Sabah Labour Ordinance (Chapter 67) and other relevant labour laws to include gig workers under formal employment protections. This reform would ensure that delivery riders receive minimum wage guarantees, social security benefits, and protection from unfair treatment by platform management. Additionally, the government should mandate contributions to KWSP and PERKESO for gig workers, either through shared contributions between workers and platform companies or through state-supported social security schemes tailored to the gig economy. By doing so, gig workers can access long-term financial security and accident coverage, mitigating the risks associated with their precarious employment.

Furthermore, the establishment of a gig workers' union or association is crucial in strengthening collective bargaining power and ensuring that delivery riders have a platform to voice their concerns. A well-organized trade union could negotiate for better wages, workplace protections, and improved working conditions while also providing a mechanism for resolving disputes between workers and platform management. Collaboration between gig platforms, labour organizations, and government agencies would be essential in institutionalizing fair labour practices that balance the interests of all stakeholders involved.

Another critical area that requires improvement is occupational safety and risk management for gig workers. Given the hazardous nature of their work, food delivery platforms should be required to provide comprehensive accident insurance for all riders. This coverage would help mitigate the financial burden of workplace injuries and ensure that gig workers receive adequate medical support in the event of an accident. Additionally, platforms should invest in rider safety training and awareness programs to equip workers with the necessary skills to navigate traffic hazards, extreme weather conditions, and other occupational risks.

Beyond regulatory reforms and workplace protections, there is also a need for financial and career development support for gig workers. Government initiatives should focus on enhancing financial literacy among gig workers, helping them manage their earnings more effectively and plan for future financial security. At the same time, programmes that provide opportunities for upskilling and transitioning into more stable careers should be introduced to reduce workers' long-term dependence on precarious gig employment. By offering vocational training, entrepreneurial support, and pathways to formal employment, policymakers can help gig workers move towards more sustainable career options that offer greater job security and benefits.

In conclusion, the gig economy presents both opportunities and challenges, but without proper regulatory interventions, it risks perpetuating economic insecurity and labour exploitation. The case

of Foodpanda workers in Sabah underscores the urgent need for stronger policy frameworks, collective worker representation, and corporate accountability to ensure that gig workers receive fair treatment, social protections, and safe working conditions. Moving forward, a collaborative approach between the government, labour organizations, and gig platforms is essential in addressing these issues and creating a more equitable future for workers in the gig economy.

## Acknowledgement

This research was not funded by any grant.

## References

- [1] Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "Using thematic analysis in psychology." *Qualitative research in psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- [2] Crowe, S., Cresswell, K., Robertson, A. *et al.* The case study approach. *BMC Med Res Methodol* 11, 100 (2011). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-11-100>
- [3] Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023. "Laporan Survei Pendapatan isi rumah 2022". [https://www.dosm.gov.my/uploads/release-content/file\\_20230806205831.pdf](https://www.dosm.gov.my/uploads/release-content/file_20230806205831.pdf)
- [4] Gobo, Giampietro. "Re-conceptualizing generalization: Old issues in a new frame." *The Sage handbook of social research methods* (2008): 193-213. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446212165.n12>
- [5] Heriyanto, Heriyanto. "Thematic analysis sebagai metode menganalisa data untuk penelitian kualitatif." *Anuva: Jurnal Kajian Budaya, Perpustakaan, dan Informasi* 2, no. 3 (2018): 317-324. <https://doi.org/10.14710/anuva.2.3.317-324>
- [6] Heeks, Richard. "Decent work and the digital gig economy: a developing country perspective on employment impacts and standards in online outsourcing, crowdwork, etc." *Development Informatics Working Paper* 71 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3431033>
- [7] International Labour Office. *World employment and social outlook 2021: The role of digital labour platforms in transforming the world of work*. International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2021.
- [8] International Labour Organization (ILO). 2023. Providing adequate and sustainable social protection for workers in the gig and platform economy.
- [9] Kreshpaj, Bertina, Cecilia Orellana, Bo Burström, Letitia Davis, Tomas Hemmingsson, Gun Johansson, Katarina Kjellberg, Johanna Jonsson, David H. Wegman, and Theo Bodin. "What is precarious employment? A systematic review of definitions and operationalizations from quantitative and qualitative studies." *Scandinavian journal of work, environment & health* 46, no. 3 (2020): 235-247. <https://doi.org/10.5271/sjweh.3875>
- [10] Malaysia. *Employment Act 1955 (Act 265)*. Kuala Lumpur: Percetakan Nasional Malaysia Berhad, 1955.
- [11] Malaysia. *Labour Ordinance (Sabah Cap. 67)*. Kota Kinabalu: State Attorney-General's Chambers, 1950.
- [12] Malaysia. *Labour Ordinance (Chapter 76)*. Kuching: Sarawak Government, 1952.
- [13] Yardley, Lucy, and David F. Marks. "Research methods for clinical and health psychology." (2003): 1-248.
- [14] Maxwell, Joseph A. "Why qualitative methods are necessary for generalization." *Qualitative Psychology* 8, no. 1 (2021): 111. <https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000173>
- [15] Miles, M. B. "Miles, MB, & Huberman, AM (1994)." *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (1994).
- [16] Nawawi, Nurul Hidayah Ahamad, Rosiati Ramli, Norlin Khalid, and Siti Fatimah Abdul Rashid. "Understanding the presence of the gig economy in Malaysia." *Malaysian Journal of Consumer and Family Economics* 31 (2023): 274-293. <https://doi.org/10.60016/majcafe.v31.11>
- [17] Radzi, Mohd Shahril Nizam Md, Asiah Bidin, Murshamshul Kamariah Musa, and Noor'Ashikin Hamid. "Protecting gig workers' interests in Malaysia through registered association under societies act 1966." *IJUMLI* 30 (2022): 157. <https://doi.org/10.31436/ijumli.v30iS1.702>
- [18] Uchiyama, Yosuke, Fumitaka Furuoka, Md Nasrudin Md Akhir, and M. MN. "Gig workers, social protection and labour market inequality: Lessons from Malaysia." *Jurnal Ekonomi Malaysia* 56, no. 3 (2022): 165-184. <https://doi.org/10.17576/JEM-2022-5603-09>
- [19] Rodgers, Gerry. "Precarious work in Europe: The state of the debate." *Precarious jobs in labour market regulation* (1989): 1-16.
- [20] Yin, Robert K. *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. Sage publications, 2017.