



ISSN: 2586-6036

JWMA P website: <http://accesson.kr/jwmap>doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13106/jwmap.2026.vol9.no3.111>

A Literature Review on the Psychological Well-Being of Gig Economy Workers and the Ethical Responsibilities of Platform Companies

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Received: April 08, 2026. Revised: June 10, 2026. Accepted: June 30, 2026.

Abstract

This literature review investigates the rapid expansion of the gig economy and its multifaceted impact on the psychological well-being of platform workers, juxtaposed with the ethical responsibilities of platform companies. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, and Carroll's Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the study systematically categorizes the determinants of worker well-being. The findings reveal a significant duality: while gig work offers flexibility and autonomy, it simultaneously introduces profound threats such as income instability, social isolation, algorithmic control, and identity crises. These structural challenges frequently frustrate essential psychological needs, leading to burnout and precariousness. The review further identifies a critical vacuum in platform ethics, where companies often prioritize economic survival and shareholder value over legal, ethical, and philanthropic duties. Consequently, this research proposes an integrated Platform Wellbeing Governance framework that emphasizes algorithmic transparency, fair distributive justice, and institutional support systems. By transitioning toward a governance model that internalizes worker welfare, platform companies can mitigate the psychological costs of precarious labor. This study provides a robust theoretical foundation for future empirical inquiry and offers actionable insights for policymakers, corporate managers, and platform designers aiming to ensure that the promise of labor flexibility translates into sustainable well-being and long-term dignity.

Keywords: Gig Economy, Psychological Well-being, Platform Companies, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Algorithmic Control, Self-Determination Theory

JEL Classification Code : J28, M14, M54, O33

1. Introduction

When you open a food delivery app, hundreds of riders are on the road at this very moment. On freelance platforms, developers and designers from around the world close deals with a single click. We call this massive transformation of the labor market the gig economy. Originally a slang term used by jazz musicians to describe one-time performances, gig has evolved into an economic concept encompassing all forms of short-term, demand-

based labor mediated through platforms (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017). The number of gig workers is increasing sharply worldwide, and in Korea, the platform labor population is expanding rapidly, centered on delivery, logistics, and IT freelancing.

In South Korea, the rapid growth of delivery, ride-hailing, and freelance platforms has triggered intense social debate regarding the legal status and social protection of gig workers. While recent legislative efforts, such as the expansion of employment and industrial accident

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insurance for platform laborers, represent significant progress, the discourse remains largely focused on legal classification rather than the ethical governance of algorithmic control and its psychological toll on workers. However, the changes brought by the gig economy go beyond restructuring the labor market; they are profoundly impacting the psychological well-being of individual workers. Ashford et al. (2018) noted that gig workers face psychological challenges qualitatively different from those of traditional organizational members. They must simultaneously manage five structural challenges (viability, identity, relational isolation, emotional exhaustion and navigating work-life boundaries) and are pressured to build their own holding environments in the absence of the institutional support systems provided by traditional organizations. Petriglieri et al. (2019) described this experience as agony and ecstasy, qualitatively revealing that independent workers endure both the fulfillment of freedom and existential anxiety.

Behind this psychological complexity lies the design choices of platform companies. The way algorithms control worker income, task assignment, and evaluation, the pricing policies that structure income volatility, and the legal choices to classify workers as independent contractors to avoid social insurance obligations are all products of conscious or unconscious ethical judgments by platform companies. From the perspective of Carroll's (1991) CSR pyramid, many platform companies focus on maximizing economic responsibility while systematically neglecting ethical, legal, and philanthropic responsibilities. In this context, this study reviews the literature centered on three research questions: First, what are the core factors threatening the psychological well-being of gig economy workers? Second, through what pathways do the operational methods of platform companies affect worker well-being? Third, what are the ethical responsibilities platform companies should fulfill to improve worker well-being? Through an integrated review, this study theorizes the link between well-being management and business ethics in the gig economy context and provides a foundation for future empirical research and platform policy design.

2. Research Method

2.1. Review Design and Rationale

This study adopts a structured narrative literature review (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Snyder, 2019) as its methodological approach. Narrative reviews are appropriate when the objective is to integrate diverse disciplinary literatures, construct theoretical frameworks,

and identify patterns across heterogeneous research designs—conditions that characterize the interdisciplinary field of gig economy research (Wu & Huang, 2024). While this study does not follow the PRISMA protocol for systematic meta-analysis, it adopts a structured narrative approach to integrate multi-disciplinary perspectives, specifically psychological mechanisms (SDT), occupational stressors (JD-R), and corporate ethics (CSR). This methodology was selected to facilitate the synthesis of heterogeneous data and the construction of the integrated PWG framework, which requires a more flexible theoretical development than a purely quantitative review allows.

To mitigate researcher subjectivity, pre-specified, transparent selection criteria were applied and screening decisions were documented at each stage.

2.2. Search Strategy

Searches were conducted in January 2025 across five databases: Google Scholar, Business Source Complete, PsycINFO, Scopus, and Web of Science. Search terms were organized into three Boolean clusters: (1) gig economy OR platform work OR crowdwork OR on-demand work OR precarious work; (2) psychological well-being OR mental health OR burnout OR autonomy OR identity; and (3) algorithmic management OR corporate social responsibility OR platform ethics OR worker classification. Boolean operators were applied consistently across all databases, and search strings were adapted to each database's controlled vocabulary where applicable. Backward citation tracking and forward snowballing supplemented database searches.

2.3. Selection Criteria and Screening

Papers were included if they: (1) directly examined the psychological or welfare experiences of gig workers, or analyzed the ethical or legal responsibilities of platform companies toward workers; (2) were published in peer-reviewed journals or recognized academic conference proceedings; (3) were published between January 2015 and December 2024; and (4) provided sufficient methodological detail for appraisal. Excluded were papers focused exclusively on consumer experiences, platform business models without attention to labor conditions, and conference abstracts or gray literature. Foundational theoretical papers (SDT, JD-R, CSR pyramid) were included regardless of date as a separate category.

To ensure the objectivity of the literature selection, the following quality appraisal criteria were applied: (1) priority was given to peer-reviewed articles indexed in SSCI or KCI to ensure academic impact; (2) studies were

required to explicitly link platform technological features with worker psychological outcomes; and (3) alignment with the core theoretical pillars (SDT, JD-R, CSR) was verified to ensure the literature could contribute meaningfully to the proposed framework. The selection process followed a transparent four-stage filtering protocol (Identification, Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion) to mitigate researcher bias.

Screening proceeded in three stages. The initial search returned 1,847 unique records after deduplication. Title and keyword screening reduced this to 312 records; abstract screening yielded 64 full-text candidates; The final sample consists of 34 references, comprising 20 core empirical studies for thematic synthesis and 14 foundational works for theoretical grounding. Table 1 summarizes sample characteristics.

Table 1. Study sample characteristics

Category	Subcategory	n	%
Study Design	Qualitative	7	35
	Quantitative	6	30
	Mixed-methods	2	10
	Conceptual/Review	5	25
Thematic Focus	Well-being/Mental Health	9	45
	Algorithmic Control	6	30
	CSR/Ethics/Regulation	5	25
Publication Year	2015–2018	5	25
	2019–2021	8	40
	2022–2024	7	35

Note. Total analyzed literature (n = 34). Core empirical papers (n = 20) are analyzed for thematic synthesis, while foundational theoretical and context-setting papers provide the conceptual framework.

2.4. Analytical Approach

Included papers were analyzed using thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008), with four deductive categories derived from the research questions: (a) psychological well-being determinants; (b) algorithmic management mechanisms; (c) financial and structural precarity; and (d) platform CSR and ethical obligations. The three theoretical frameworks served as interpretive lenses throughout synthesis. Each included paper was coded independently against the four categories, with coding decisions documented in a structured coding sheet. While this review was conducted by a single researcher, inter-rater reliability was partially addressed by applying pre-

specified inclusion/exclusion criteria consistently and by cross-checking thematic assignments against the operational definitions established prior to coding. The authors acknowledge this as a limitation and recommend future reviews employ dual-reviewer protocols for enhanced rigor.

3. Theoretical Background

3.1. Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Deci and Ryan (1985) proposed that optimal psychological functioning depends on satisfaction of three universal psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Gagné et al. (2022) extended SDT to show that algorithmic management—which monitors, restricts, and automates worker decisions—structurally undermines autonomy need satisfaction. In the gig economy, this tension is acute: platform rhetoric promises entrepreneurial freedom, yet algorithmic rating systems, task-assignment mechanisms, and opaque performance evaluations create "invisible" external regulation that systematically frustrates need satisfaction (Petriglieri et al., 2019; Wood et al., 2019).

3.2. Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model

Bakker and Demerouti (2007) explain burnout and engagement as outcomes of the balance between job demands (physical, cognitive, or emotional effort requirements) and job resources (goal-facilitating, demand-buffering features). Watson et al. (2021) systematically applied JD-R to gig work, identifying unique demands—role ambiguity, constant availability pressure, underemployment risk—while documenting a structural resource deficit: gig workers lack managerial support, job security, and peer community. Nilsen and Kongsvik (2023) corroborated through 35 interviews that platform-specific demands exceed the buffering capacity of the autonomy that gig work nominally provides.

3.3. Carroll's (1991) CSR Pyramid

Carroll (1991) conceptualized CSR as four simultaneously obligatory layers: economic (profit generation), legal (statutory compliance), ethical (socially expected conduct beyond law), and philanthropic (voluntary community contribution). Applied to platform companies, this pyramid reveals a structural distortion: platforms excel at economic responsibility while systematically exploiting absent legal infrastructure to evade ethical and

philanthropic duties. Etter et al. (2019) characterized this as a fundamental "CSR vacuum" generating unanswered questions about privacy, discrimination, and worker rights.

4. Psychological Well-Being of Gig Economy Workers

4.1. The Paradox of Flexible Autonomy

Gig work's primary psychological attraction is flexibility—the ability to determine one's own hours, location, and work intensity. Petriglieri et al.'s (2019) year-long inductive qualitative study of 65 independent workers found that those who cultivated personal "holding environments"—comprising stable routines, dedicated workspaces, supportive networks, and a sense of larger purpose—reported high job meaningfulness and psychological vitality. However, the same study revealed that independent workers experienced extreme emotional sensitivity to failure: a single negative rating could feel like a "referendum on their worth," reflecting an SDT paradox in which autonomy needs are nominally satisfied while competence and relatedness needs remain chronically frustrated. Caza et al. (2022), in a five-study scale validation effort, confirmed that identity, relational, and emotional challenges are the strongest predictors of poor thriving and resilience—precisely the dimensions most neglected by current platform designs. Wu and Huang (2024), synthesizing the broader literature through an input–process–output framework, further found that entry motivation moderates outcomes: workers entering gig work involuntarily (push motivations: unemployment, necessity) consistently report worse well-being than those who enter voluntarily (pull motivations: flexibility, supplementation).

4.2. Algorithmic Control and Autonomy Erosion

Despite formal flexibility, algorithmic management constitutes a powerful mechanism of practical control. Wood et al. (2019), combining 107 interviews with 679 survey responses across six countries, found that dynamic pricing pressure, algorithmic task assignment, and rating coercion created strong incentives to accept undesirable tasks and extend working hours—a "dual reality" of formal freedom and practical compulsion. Kellogg et al.'s (2020) comprehensive review identified six types of algorithmic control mechanisms as qualitatively novel in combining Taylorist surveillance intensity with AI data-processing, rendering invisible the mechanisms through which control operates. Rahman (2021) introduced the concept of the "invisible cage" through a three-year

qualitative study: success criteria remain permanently opaque, forcing workers into either "experimental reactivity" (continuously decoding algorithmic logic) or "constrained reactivity" (resigned acceptance)—both entailing significant psychological costs. Möhlmann et al. (2021) similarly found through grounded theory analysis of Uber drivers that algorithmic management generates chronic tensions around work execution, compensation, and belonging. Lee et al. (2015) and Lee (2018) demonstrated experimentally that workers report greater stress and lower fairness perceptions under algorithmic evaluation than under human management, particularly for tasks requiring contextual and relational judgment.

4.3. Social Isolation and Identity Fragmentation

Traditional employment provides not only income but social structure, professional community, and stable work identity. Ashford et al. (2018) identified "sustaining relationships" and "maintaining identity" as two of the five core challenges uniquely confronting gig workers. Empirically, Glavin et al. (2021) drew on two nationally representative Canadian surveys ($n \approx 2,460$ and $2,469$) to find that platform workers reported significantly greater powerlessness and loneliness than non-platform workers. Wang et al. (2022), using UK Household Longitudinal Study data in the first probability-sample study of gig worker mental health, found that loneliness and financial precarity jointly mediated the well-being deficit, with loneliness accounting for approximately 30% of the effect. Cropanzano et al. (2023) argued that gig workers inhabit triadic employment relationships generating systemic role ambiguity—the worker is simultaneously an entrepreneur, a contractor, and platform infrastructure—with documented costs for professional identity and self-concept (Caza et al., 2022). Khan et al. (2024), studying domestic care workers on gig platforms, found that dignity perceptions depended critically on relational quality, confirming that human connection serves as a vital protective resource even in algorithmically mediated work.

4.4. Financial Precarity and Mental Health

Income instability is the most extensively documented source of well-being harm. Glavin and Schieman (2022) showed using nationally representative Canadian data that platform workers dependent on gig income as their primary livelihood reported substantially higher psychological distress than non-platform workers or supplementary platform workers, with financial strain accounting for approximately 50% of the distress gap. This finding is theoretically important: it locates the primary harm mechanism in income dependency rather

than gig work per se, suggesting that income stabilization interventions could substantially mitigate well-being costs. Nilsen and Kongsvik (2023), applying the JD-R model through 35 interviews, found that the demand profile of platform work—physical risks, performance pressure, cognitive load, income uncertainty—consistently exceeded the buffering capacity of gig work's autonomy resources, particularly for workers without savings or social safety net access. Schor (2017) found that well-being risks are not uniformly distributed but concentrated among lower-income workers, who experience platform work as more precarious and less rewarding than higher-income counterparts who use it as supplementary income.

5. Ethical Responsibilities of Platform Companies: A CSR Analysis

5.1. Economic Responsibility: Structural Cost Externalization

Platform companies have fulfilled economic responsibility in its narrowest formulation—generating shareholder value and sustaining investor returns—but have done so partly by systematically externalizing labor costs. Kuhn and Maleki (2017) argued that independent contractor classification is fundamentally a cost-externalization strategy, transferring social insurance, workers' compensation, and minimum wage obligations to individual workers. Ahsan (2020) demonstrated using stakeholder theory that the "entrepreneurship" framing deployed to justify this classification is empirically untenable—gig workers lack the asset ownership, income diversification, and strategic autonomy that define entrepreneurship in the scholarly literature. Chai and Scully (2019) applied labor process theory to show how platforms obscure surplus value extraction behind peer-to-peer rhetoric, distributing risk downward to workers while concentrating profit upward to shareholders.

5.2. Ethical and Legal Responsibilities: Transparency, Fairness, and Classification

Carroll's ethical layer concerns behaviors expected as morally appropriate even without legal mandate. The empirical literature reveals a pervasive opacity in algorithmic management: workers cannot discern task assignment criteria, deactivation grounds, or evaluation methods. Kellogg et al. (2020) documented systematic denial of such information; Rahman (2021) showed the opacity is structural, concentrating informational power asymmetrically with platforms; Lee (2018) demonstrated that algorithmic opacity is perceived as a fairness violation

generating negative motivational and trust consequences. Cameron and Rahman (2022) found that workers responded with elaborate algorithmic resistance strategies—gaming rating systems, coordinating demand surges—precisely because formal contestation channels were absent.

Carroll's legal layer reveals a structural avoidance strategy. Existing labor law was designed for bilateral employer-employee relationships; platforms exploit triadic structures to claim technology intermediary status, avoiding employer obligations (De Stefano, 2016). De Stefano (2016) analyzed how "just-in-time" platform models strip economically dependent workers of intended legal protections. Prassl and Risak (2016) proposed a functional employer concept—defined by the exercise of control rather than formal contract type—demonstrating that major platforms satisfy functional employer criteria. Rogers (2016) grounded this in anti-domination principles, arguing that platform workers should receive employment rights regardless of contractual form. Cropanzano et al. (2023) noted that this legal uncertainty itself constitutes a distinct psychological burden, adding a layer of precarity to the financial and identity challenges documented in Section 4.

5.3. Philanthropic Responsibility: Workforce Investment Gap

Traditional employers provide training, occupational health support, and workplace social infrastructure as standard conditions. Gig workers receive none by default. Etter et al. (2019) argued that platform companies have an ethical obligation to actively address the externalities their models impose on workers and communities—not merely to refrain from harm but to invest proportionally in sustainable work conditions. Rosenblat and Stark (2016) documented how platforms rely on information asymmetry to maintain worker dependency, undermining conditions for genuine autonomous participation. Khan et al. (2024) found that decent work perceptions in gig care depended on relational quality—a dimension that platform governance choices can either support or suppress—suggesting that philanthropic neglect has concrete well-being consequences.

6. Enhanced Platform Wellbeing Governance (PWG) Framework

The preceding synthesis reveals that gig workers' well-being deficits are systematic products of platform design

choices and institutional governance failures rather than individual resilience shortcomings. Integrating SDT, JD-R, and Carroll's CSR pyramid with the reviewed empirical evidence, this study proposes an enhanced Platform Wellbeing Governance (PWG) framework organized across three levels and five components (Table 2).

The PWG framework is not merely a recombination of existing theories but an original synthesis that addresses three critical gaps. First, it bridges the micro-psychological needs of workers (SDT) with macro-institutional responsibilities (CSR). Second, unlike previous models that treat regulation as an external constraint, this framework internalizes the Regulatory Interface as a core endogenous component of platform governance. Finally, it elevates algorithmic transparency from a technical requirement to a fundamental ethical duty tied to worker dignity and autonomy.

The PWG framework offers several conceptually distinct contributions relative to prior governance proposals. Whereas earlier frameworks (e.g., Etter et al., 2019; Cropanzano et al., 2023) discuss platform ethics and worker outcomes as separate analytical domains, the PWG framework explicitly links platform design inputs (Level 1), institutional support architecture (Level 2), and regulatory interface mechanisms (Level 3) within a single integrated model. Critically, the regulatory interface layer treats regulation not as an external constraint but as an endogenous governance variable—a formulation absent from prior frameworks. Worker voice mechanisms are likewise elevated to a first-class structural component, reflecting the empirical evidence that the absence of formal contestation channels is itself a measurable source of worker harm (Cameron & Rahman, 2022; Glavin et al., 2021). These design choices collectively distinguish the PWG framework from prior conceptualizations in both scope and operationalization.

Table 2. The Enhanced Platform Wellbeing Governance (PWG) Framework

Level	Component	Core Mechanisms	Theoretical Basis
Level 1 Platform Design	Algorithmic Transparency	Explainable task assignment; disclosed evaluation criteria; deactivation due process	SDT (autonomy); Lee (2018); Rahman (2021)
	Income Stabilization	Minimum income guarantees; earnings smoothing tools; platform-funded portable	JD-R (resources); Glavin & Schieman (2022)

		benefits	
Level 2 Institutional Architecture	Worker Voice Mechanisms	Algorithmic appeals procedures; worker representation in governance; cross-platform collective organizations	Carroll (ethical/legal); Kellogg et al. (2020)
	Capability Investment	Platform-funded reskilling; professional community infrastructure; mental health resources	Carroll (philanthropic); Ashford et al. (2018)
Level 3 Regulatory Interface	Adaptive Regulatory Interface	Tripartite (platform–worker–regulator) data sharing; pre-legislative standard adoption; third worker status advocacy	Carroll (legal); De Stefano (2016); Prassl & Risak (2016)

Note. PWG = Platform Wellbeing Governance. Components derived from thematic synthesis of 20 core empirical studies and 14 foundational theoretical works.

Level 1 addresses platform design inputs. Algorithmic transparency responds to the convergent finding that opacity is among the most consistently documented drivers of perceived autonomy violation and procedural unfairness across the reviewed literature (Kellogg et al., 2020; Rahman, 2021; Lee, 2018). Meaningful transparency requires actionable explanations—why a specific task was withheld, how a rating was calculated, what procedural recourse is available—rather than mere technical documentation. Income stabilization addresses the finding that financial precarity is a key mechanism through which gig work is associated with diminished mental health outcomes (Glavin & Schieman, 2022; Wang et al., 2022), through minimum earnings guarantees, demand-smoothing earnings algorithms, and proportional portable benefit contributions.

Level 2 addresses institutional architecture. Worker voice mechanisms respond to the finding that gig workers' capacity to contest platform governance is near zero, generating the alienation documented by Glavin et al. (2021) and the resistance behaviors described by Cameron and Rahman (2022). Effective voice requires algorithmic appeals procedures and worker representation in policy development. Capability investment responds to the finding that gig workers bear the full cost of skill

development and social community construction without organizational support (Cropanzano et al., 2023; Ashford et al., 2018), fulfilling the philanthropic CSR layer that platforms currently neglect.

Level 3 introduces the regulatory interface—a component absent from prior governance frameworks—to address the institutional vacuum documented by De Stefano (2016), Prassl and Risak (2016), and Rogers (2016). Tripartite arrangements involving platforms, worker representatives, and regulators can jointly develop adaptive labor standards and share performance monitoring data that neither party can produce alone. This reflects Cropanzano et al.'s (2023) argument that gig work outcomes cannot be explained without the institutional environment in which platform-worker relationships are embedded. The PWG framework thus treats regulation as an endogenous governance variable rather than an external constraint.

7. Conclusion and Implications

7.1. Summary of Key Findings

This review synthesized 20 core empirical studies and 14 foundational theoretical works to generate an integrative account of gig workers' well-being and platform companies' ethical obligations. Four principal well-being harm categories were identified: the autonomy paradox (Petriglieri et al., 2019; Caza et al., 2022; Wu & Huang, 2024); algorithmic control and autonomy erosion (Wood et al., 2019; Kellogg et al., 2020; Rahman, 2021); social isolation and identity fragmentation (Glavin et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022; Cropanzano et al., 2023); and financial precarity and mental health deterioration (Glavin & Schieman, 2022; Nilsen & Kongsvik, 2023). These findings are systematic rather than incidental—products of platform design and institutional environment. Assessed against Carroll's CSR pyramid, platform companies display consistent prioritization of economic responsibility while evading legal obligations through contractor classification (De Stefano, 2016; Prassl & Risak, 2016), deploying ethically deficient opaque algorithmic systems (Rahman, 2021; Lee, 2018), and neglecting philanthropic investment in worker capabilities and communities (Etter et al., 2019).

7.2. Theoretical and Practical Implications

This review makes three theoretical contributions. First, it demonstrates that SDT, JD-R, and Carroll's CSR pyramid are complementary rather than parallel: SDT explains the psychological mechanism through which platform design

harms workers, JD-R explains the structural resource deficit that amplifies those harms, and Carroll's pyramid assigns institutional responsibility. Second, the review extends SDT into the algorithmic management context, corroborating Gagné et al.'s (2022) framework with gig-specific empirical evidence and establishing autonomy need satisfaction as a sensitive measure of algorithmic governance costs. Third, the enhanced PWG framework extends prior governance conceptualizations by incorporating worker voice and regulatory interface as first-class components grounded in the reviewed literature, addressing a gap noted by Cropanzano et al. (2023) and Wu and Huang (2024).

For the Korean context, the PWG framework suggests that policymakers should move beyond the binary debate of employee status and focus on establishing technical governance standards, such as algorithmic explainability for local platforms like Kakao T or Baedal Minjok. Furthermore, the development of a K-Platform CSR Model is necessary, where companies contribute proportionally to portable benefit systems to mitigate the structural precariousness inherent in the domestic gig economy.

For platform companies, three evidence-based imperatives follow. Algorithmic transparency must be operationalized as explainability—actionable worker understanding of how economic outcomes are generated—given that opacity drives psychological harm (Rahman, 2021) and perceived injustice (Lee, 2018). Income stabilization mechanisms should be adopted voluntarily, both because financial precarity harms mental health (Glavin & Schieman, 2022) and because worker well-being drives service quality and platform sustainability. Worker voice infrastructure—formal appeals processes and representative governance participation—reduces the alienation and resistance behaviors that currently represent the only available response to perceived injustice.

For policymakers, three legislative priorities emerge from the empirical record. The worker classification gap (De Stefano, 2016; Prassl & Risak, 2016) should be addressed through a third employment status category triggering proportional rights calibrated to platform dependency. Algorithmic transparency requirements should mandate disclosure of task assignment criteria, rating methods, and deactivation procedures. Portable benefit systems—in which contributions follow workers across platforms rather than attaching to specific employer relationships—should replace the structural absence of employment-linked social insurance.

7.3. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations of this review warrant explicit discussion. First, as a structured narrative review rather than a systematic review or meta-analysis, this study is unable to provide quantitative effect-size estimates, and thematic synthesis necessarily involves qualitative judgment that may introduce interpretive variability. The conclusions drawn should therefore be read as evidence-informed propositions rather than statistically established findings. A systematic review with PRISMA-compliant protocols or a meta-analysis would provide stronger causal inference and should be prioritized in future research. Second, the exclusive reliance on English-language literature represents a meaningful boundary condition. The reviewed studies are disproportionately situated in North American, European, and Australian contexts. Relevant scholarship in Korean, Chinese, Spanish, or other languages—particularly concerning East Asian, South Asian, and Latin American platform labor markets—may have been excluded, limiting generalizability. Future reviews should incorporate multilingual search strategies. Third, this review was conducted without systematic inter-rater reliability procedures. Although pre-specified criteria were applied throughout, the absence of dual-reviewer verification introduces the possibility of selection and coding bias. Future narrative reviews should employ dual-reviewer protocols to enhance rigor. Future research should prioritize: longitudinal empirical studies testing the causal pathways proposed in the PWG framework; comparative cross-national studies examining how regulatory environments moderate gig worker outcomes; research on the efficacy of different forms of worker voice and collective gig worker organization; and intersectional analyses examining how gender, race, immigration status, and disability distribute well-being harms unevenly across the gig workforce. The psychological well-being of gig economy workers is ultimately a governance problem—not a resilience problem—and realizing the promise of the gig economy requires that platform design, corporate ethics, and regulatory institutions treat worker welfare as a constitutive goal rather than an afterthought.

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