

Gig-Work in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract : In the spring of 2020, the country and the economy came to a halt due to an outbreak of the novel coronavirus, SARS-2, virus known as COVID-19. One of the hardest hit sectors of the economy was the gig-sector, which includes Lyft, Uber, Door-Dash, and other services. In this study, we examined the effects of the independent contractor status of laborers in this field to see how a near-complete economic shut-down affected the lives of laborers who are denied access to health-care and unemployment benefits due to their status as independent contractors. What the study found was there was no 'life-altering' change to the lives of the workers who used gig-work as supplementary income during the economic shut-down, but those who relied on Lyft and Uber, etc. as their sole source of income were more heavily impacted by the economic shut-down than part-time workers. The second significant finding of the study was that across all genders and races, the idea of having to seek unemployment or help was something that none of the workers wanted. They all felt as if unemployment and social-insurance were for those who could not work. While the findings are not generalizable due to this being a small qualitative study consisting of 27 participants, the findings suggest that the economic and social impact of COVID-19 on those that work in the gig-industry warrants further discussion and research.

Keywords : gig-work, Covid-19, independent contractor, Uber

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