DO GIG WORKERS ENJOY WORK-LIFE BALANCE? EXPLORING THE INFLUENCING FACTORS FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE AMONG THE GIG WORKERS.

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Abstract
The growing trend of the gig economy (GE) globally and nationally has contributed to the rise of gig workforce to reducing unemployment. Also, the increased demand for gig services in Malaysia has made GE as a recognised new economic driver. This is observed with the introduction of i-Saraan and e-rezeki. GE has opened up many employments opportunities with the option of maintaining work-life balance (WLB). This flexibility aligns with the desire of many Malaysians and millennials. With that said, what are the main influencing factors that contributed to the gig workers' WLB remain unexplored. This study aims to determine whether job autonomy (JA), work engagement (WE), and mental health (MH) are positively related to WLB via spillover theory. A total of 212 self-administered surveys were collected from the Malaysian low-skilled gig workers through judgmental and snowball sampling. Variance-Based structural equation modeling (VB-SEM) approach was to validate proposed hypotheses. The findings revealed that JA, WE, and MH had significant positive effects on WLB. Besides filling the research gap, this study provides some insights on the gig economy's sustainability, improves overall gig workers' well-being in attaining WLB.

Introduction
In this new era, people are using and benefiting from the convenience of food delivery services, dispatch services and transportation services in their daily life. All these services are referred to as part of the gig economy (GE). It is best defined as "independent workers freelancing or contracting for short-term engagements and temporary positions" (Nye, 2018). GE is also known as platform economy, on-demand economy, sharing economy, collaborative economy, digital economy, crowd economy and peer economy (Azahar, 2020).

According to the National Association of Counties (NACo), the formation of GE consists of gig workers, customers and platforms. Firstly, gig workers are independent workers who are paid by gigs like a task, unlike salaried or hourly workers (Istrate & Harris, 2017). High-skilled

freelancers create writing, graphic design, and professional support, while low-skilled gig workers drive, deliver food, and clean (Paul, 2022). Secondly, consumers are people who require services such as food delivery. Thirdly, platforms act as intermediaries to link the gig worker to the customer directly, like Grab and Foodpanda (Istrate & Harris, 2017). Nowadays, people can easily access online platforms from anywhere and at any time, boosting the number of GE workers (Paul Hype Page & Co (Malaysia), 2022). This is because smartphones have transformed people's lifestyles over the past decade. New opportunities are created through social networks. Thus, GE is reinventing work, and the government must be prepared with novel policies and programmes (Istrate & Harris, 2017).

Statista Research Development (2022) reported the growing trends of GE in the United States (US) with rising figures from 204 billion U.S. dollars in 2018 to 455.2 billion U.S. dollars in 2023. US topped the Global Gig-Economy Index's list of the ten fastest-growing freelancing markets with 78% revenue growth, followed by the United Kingdom (UK) (59%). The Philippines ranks sixth in Asia with 35% revenue growth and India seventh with 29%. This demonstrates that more people worldwide are realising GE is a viable means of earning a living (Azahar, 2020). GE's flexibility might spur the rise of entrepreneurial generation and improve service delivery (Paul, 2022).

Malaysia's GE workforce is also rising, from four million (26% of the labour workforce in 2020) to five million (approximately 30% of Malaysia's workforce in 2022) due to unemployment is rising (Azahar, 2020; Paul Hype Page & Co (Malaysia), 2022). The demand for gig services has increased by the popularity of remote work during the pandemic (Paul Hype Page & Co (Malaysia), 2022). During Movement Control Order (MCO), people were required to stay at home, hence many companies implement WFH practices. People who WFH worry about having insufficient time to handle work and house chores. Thus, people use Grab Food and Foodpanda to order meals with a click to maximise work time and do other tasks (Moy, 2020). Since MCO, remote work and food delivery platforms have become the "new normal" in the modern era (Nathan, 2020).

As GE is becoming prevalent and emerged as a new source of Malaysia's economic growth, it has been recognised and identified by the Malaysian Government with it being incorporated in the 12th Malaysia Plan 2021-2025 (Mohsin et al., 2022). The government of Malaysia places a high value on GE. In terms of gig workers' welfare, the government gives RM75 million in incentives as part of the National Economic Reform Plan (Penjana) package (Azahar, 2020). Additionally, the Malaysian Government also introduced i-Saraan through the Employees Provident Fund (EPF). Since gig workers are technically self-employed yet lack a proper savings mechanism for the future, i-Saraan is designed to encourage them to develop saving habits. Also, registered gig workers will receive the same benefits as full-time Employees Provident Fund (EPF) members (Abdul Rahim et al., 2021).

In terms of platform, Malaysia promotes GE with the establishment of *e-rezeki*, a digital platform which encourages anyone to participate in GE. In *e-rezeki*, digital employment will be distributed depending on an individual's skills. This has indirectly assisted unemployed individuals in earning a living, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Abdul Rahim et al., 2021).

GE's flexibility allows people to choose their work, working hours, location, and remuneration (Paul Hype Page & Co (Malaysia), 2022). Statistics indicate that on a global scale, GE tends to attract more young adults aged 25 to 34 (46.2%) and 35 to 44 (32%). This is

because the new generations like millennials desire better WLB and greater job flexibility than prior generations. According to Khateeb (2021), employees' WLB has been intensively studied in conventional settings but the research on Malaysia's GE context is scarce. Most of the GE-related studies are conducted in the US (Bunjak et al., 2021), the UK (Berger et al., 2019), Canada (Glavin & Schieman, 2022), India (Aruldoss et al., 2021; Venkatesan, 2021) and South Africa (Pogorevici & Serobe, 2020). Due to the current GE trend, WLB research on low-skilled gig workers remains rare. Hence, this research aims to investigate the factors such as job autonomy (JA), work engagement (WE) and mental health (MH) on the WLB of low-skilled gig workers.

Literature Review

WLB is one of the most studied topics from the past to the present, has no one-size-fits-all definition but multiple definitions in different aspects: behavioural or personal, organisational, temporal or role, and boundary or equilibrium (Khateeb, 2021). Studies have called WLB work-family balance and life role balance (Shahzadi et al., 2022). WLB has supplanted "work-family balance" because "life" refers to all non-work activities (Khateeb, 2021; Rashmi & Kataria, 2022). WLB's main goal is to balance one's life by successfully handling several responsibilities at home, work, and elsewhere (Khateeb, 2021; Shahzadi et al., 2022). This study will focus on gig workers' WLB in the GE context.

Prior findings imply that Job Autonomy (JA) influences workers' work and life conditions positively and negatively in a conventional setting (Zhou, 2020). The positive relationship between JA and WLB can be observed through higher JA and lower JA. Mohsin et al. (2022) define JA as how much control an individual has over work. JA consists of work scheduling autonomy, work methods autonomy, and decision-making autonomy (Dong et al., 2021). In prior studies, alternate terms for JA include flexible working arrangement, flexible working hours, flexible schedules and flextime (Khateeb, 2021). Combining these various facets of the JA definition, it was proposed that JA refers to employees' discretion to perform duties when, where, in what order, and in what manner (Zhou, 2020). GE offers greater JA for gig workers, allowing them to work according to their time, place, and task type. Thus, Mohsin et al. (2022) found that gig workers' flexibility facilitates the attainment of WLB. In light of the aforementioned arguments, this study aims to investigate whether JA has a positive impact on gig workers' WLB.

Apart from WLB, Work Engagement (WE) is another variable of interest in this study. WE is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind. It is characterized by vigour (a worker's mental condition that is described by a high degree of energy, resilience, readiness to devote time, and perseverance in the face of obstacles), dedication (workers' pride and enthusiasm for their work, coupled with inspiration derived from work), and absorption (a sense of being fully concentrated on work that creates a feeling of time passing quickly or finding it difficult to detach from work) (Mohsin et al., 2022; Wood et al., 2020). Work-engaged employees have high levels of these three components and are positive about their jobs physically, mentally, and cognitively (Mohsin et al., 2022). There is a mixed finding of WE and WLB in a conventional setting. This study strives to examine whether WE has a positive impact on gig workers' WLB.

Based on past studies, for the interst of WLB, Mental Health (MH) is one of the not to forget variable for investigation. According to World Health Organization (WHO) (2022), MH is defined as "a state of well-being in which an individual recognises his or her own abilities, can cope with normal life stresses, can work productively and is able to contribute to his or her community." MH includes emotional, psychological and social well-being (MentalHealth.gov., 2022). Glavin and Schieman (2022) found that dependent platform workers have higher MH issues such as psychological distress, 50% of which is caused by financial strain, exacerbating the MH penalties associated with dependent platform work. This is because platform workers' JA and earning opportunities are constrained, resembling insecure wage work. Pankow et al. (2022) revealed that higher psychological well-being was correlated with lower work-life conflict. Based on the above, this study predicts that MH has a positive impact on gig workers' WLB.

Spillover Theory

Spillover theory (Staines, 1980) can integrate the abovementioned variables of interest in this study. Spillover occurs when changes in one behaviour influence changes in subsequent behaviours (Taiwo et al, 2016). Spillover theory states that even though work and home have physical and temporal boundaries, fulfilment, accomplishment, problems and despondency in one area can induce the same sensations in another (Taiwo et al, 2016). Gig workers can work flexible hours with JA. However, flexible working hours blur work-life boundaries causing work-to-home (life) spillover. Since not having set hours, workers may confuse their work and family (life) roles. However, they can create a working timetable to prevent stressful hours and role ambiguity. By managing time efficiently, workers can preserve their WLB by focusing on work in the work role and enjoying life in the family role with less spillover (Yvonne, 2018).

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

The aforesaid discussion guided the development of the following conceptual framework and hypotheses formulation.
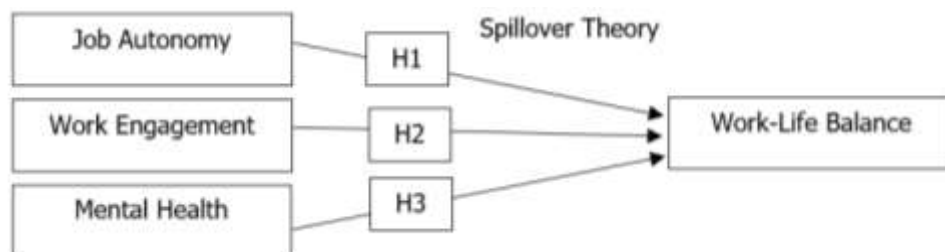

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Research Methods

This is a cross-sectional quantitative study. The targeted respondents are Malaysian low-skilled gig workers. Judgmental sampling (primary approach) and snowball sampling (secondary approach) were used to collect data. The features of low-skilled gig workers include wearing platform shirts and concentrating in commercial areas such as shopping malls. After judging and identifying the target respondents, survey questionnaires were distributed via WhatsApp or hard-copy surveys were filled out. The successfully surveyed gig worker then shared the online survey link with their friends or platform co-workers in the same industry and working style. 500 sets of self-administered questionnaires written in three languages which

are English, Chinese, and Malay were sent, with a response rate of 42.4% (212 sets) which were deemed usable for further data analysis. G*Power 3.1 sample size calculator was referred to identify the suffcent sample size. G*Power showed that 119 responses with effect size of 0.15 at 95% power level are required. Hence, 212 sample size was adequate.

Results

Table 1 summarises the 212 respondents' profiles. Most respondents were male (95.75%) and aged 21-25 (45.28%). Besides, 41.51% of respondents completed secondary school / PT3 / SPM / O-level / IGCSE, followed by 33.49% with Diploma. Most respondents were from urban areas (Selangor, 37.74% and Kuala Lumpur, 27.36%), 66.04% were single, 58.02% did not answer spouse's working status as they were unmarried, and 71.23% had no child. Moreover, 91.98% of the valid sample worked in food and beverage delivery (e.g., Foodpanda, Grab Food). 47.17% had 1-2 years of gig work experience, while 32.55% had less than one year. Furthermore, 64.15% of respondents set gig work as their primary source of income, 72.17% worked weekends frequently, and 48.58% were able to spend time with their families.

Table 1. Respondents' Demographic Profile

Participants' Demographic Characteristic		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	203	95.75
	Female	9	4.25
Age	Below 20 years old	26	12.26
	21 - 25 years old	96	45.28
	26 - 30 years old	37	17.45
	31 - 35 years old	26	12.26
	36 - 40 years old	10	4.72
	41 - 45 years old	8	3.77
	46 - 50 years old	3	1.42
	51 years old and above	6	2.83
Education Level	Primary school / UPSR	2	0.94
	Secondary school / PT3 / SPM / O-level /IGCSE	88	41.51
	Foundation / STPM / A-level / UEC	23	10.85
	Diploma	71	33.49
	Undergraduate (Bachelor Degree)	26	12.26
	Postgraduate (Master Degree)	2	0.94
Working State	Johor	11	5.19
	Kedah	1	0.47
	Kelantan	6	2.83
	Kuala Lumpur	58	27.36
	Melaka	26	12.26
	Negeri Sembilan	23	10.85
	Pahang	2	0.94
	Perak	2	0.94
	Pulau Pinang	1	0.47
	Sarawak	1	0.47
	Selangor	80	37.74
	Terengganu	1	0.47
Marital Status	Single	140	66.04
	Married	72	33.96
Gig Work Experience	below 1 year	69	32.55
	1 - 2 years	100	47.17

3 - 4 years		37	17.45
5 years and above		6	2.83

Source: Developed for the research.

Inferential Analysis

Following the approach of VB-SEM, there is two-stage approach to guide the analysis with Stage 1, the measurement model assessment and Stage 2, the structural model assessment.

Indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were assessed to evaluate the measurement model. Figure 2 depicts the graphical output of the measurement model.
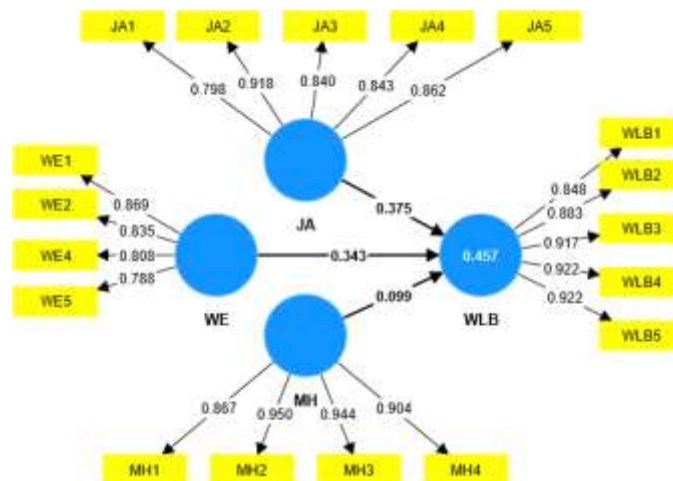

Figure 2 Measurement Model

Source: Developed for the research.

Indicator reliability (as evaluated by outer loadings), internal consistency reliability (as measured by CR), and convergent validity (measured by AVE) are detailed in Table 2. The outer loadings of WE3 and WE6 were removed since they did not reach the threshold of 0.708. After removal, indicator reliability was satisfactory as all indicators' outer loadings met the threshold. Moreover, internal consistency reliability was confirmed as the CR of all constructs was greater than the 0.7 threshold. In the meantime, convergence validity was ascertained as all AVE values were above the 0.5 threshold.

Table 2. Outer Loadings, CR & AVE

Construct Measurement	Items	Outer Loadings	CR	AVE
Job Autonomy (JA)	JA1	0.798	0.918	0.728
	JA2	0.918		
	JA3	0.840		
	JA4	0.843		
	JA5	0.862		
Work Engagement (WE)	WE1	0.869	0.853	0.681
	WE2	0.835		
	WE4	0.808		
	WE5	0.788		
Mental Health (MH)	MH1	0.867	0.998	0.841

	MH2	0.950		
	MH3	0.944		
	MH4	0.904		
	WLB1	0.848	0.942	0.808
	WLB2	0.883		
Work-Life Balance (WLB)	WLB3	0.917		
	WLB4	0.922		
	WLB5	0.922		

Source: Developed for the research.

The discriminant validity (as determined by the HTMT ratio) of the study is presented in Table 3. In this study, discriminant validity was confirmed as HTMT correlation ratios met the threshold of lower than 0.90.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity - HTMT Ratio

	JA	MH	WE	WLB
JA				
MH	0.169			
WE	0.719	0.186		
WLB	0.655	0.224	0.668	

Source: Developed for the research.

To evaluate the structural model, collinearity assessment, path coefficient, R^2 and f^2 were analysed. Figure 3 illustrates the structural model's graphical output. A bootstrapping method was utilised in this research with 5,000 bootstraps, as suggested by Hair et al. (2017), and 212 valid samples to determine path values and their significance level, as recommended by Henseler et al. (2009).
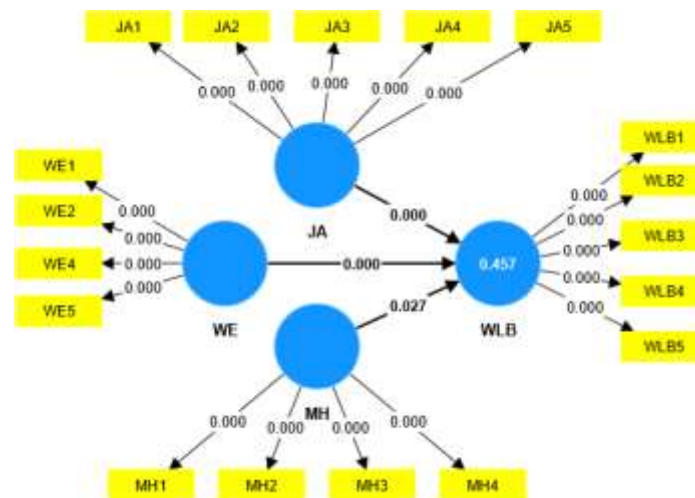

Figure 3. Structural Model

Source: Developed for the research.

Table 4 contains the outcomes of the structural assessment and the outcomes for H1 through H3. As each item's VIF value was less than 5, the findings of the assessment of collinearity indicated that no collinearity issue exist. In addition, R^2 reflects the percentage of the model's construct's variance. The R^2 value calculated for the proposed model was 0.457. The finding implied that the model's explanatory ability was moderate. This is due to the fact

that the R^2 only nearly met the threshold of 0.50 for substantial explanatory power. Regarding f^2, it describes how effectively the IV may explain the DV. The findings revealed that JA had a moderate effect size, whilst WE and MH had a small effect size.

The results of the structural model supported H1, H2 and H3, indicating that JA, WE, and MH have a significant impact on WLB. JA is the strongest predictor of WLB (β=0.375, $p<0.05$, Lower Bound (LB)=0.203, Upper Bound (UB)=0.51), followed by WE (β=0.343, $p<0.05$, LB=0.171, UB=0.488) and MH (β= 0.099, $p<0.05$, LB=0.022, UB=0.188).

Table 4. Result of PLS-SEM for H1 to H3

Relationship	β	P-value	Confidence Intervals Bias Corrected (CIBC)		VIF	f^2	Result
			LB (5%)	UB (95%)			
H1: JA → WLB	0.375	0	0.203	0.51	1.706	0.152	Significant
H2: WE → WLB	0.343	0	0.171	0.488	1.714	0.126	Significant
H3: MH → WLB	0.099	0.027	0.022	0.188	1.039	0.017	Significant

Source: Developed for the research.

Discussion

Since H1 has p-value<0.05, the research revealed that JA positively influences WLB among low-skilled gig workers as hypothesised. This result is consistent with the existing research, which focuses on high-skilled gig workers, i.e., freelancers (Shahzadi et al., 2022). According to Shahzadi et al. (2022), the flexibility provided by GE and remote work will make or break WLB. After doing research, it was determined that the freedom granted enables freelancers to attain WLB. In addition, the present study demonstrates that low-skilled gig workers can attain WLB through JA.

Since H2 has p-value<0.05, this study revealed WE positively influence WLB. This result is consistent with prior research (Wood et al., 2020). Wood et al. (2020) conducted a study on the relationship between WE and WLB in organisations in a conventional setting. Results indicated that a high WE would result in better-balanced management of work and life. In the current study, it is demonstrated that gig workers with low skill levels can acquire WLB through WE.

MH, which includes stress and burnout, has a positive effect on WLB. Such result is consistent with prior research (Kelly et al., 2020; Bell et al., 2012). According to Kelly et al. (2020), among residents and fellows, there was a substantial negative correlation between burnout and WLB. In other words, poor MH will result in a work-life imbalance (WLI), and vice versa. Moreover, Bell et al. (2012) performed a study among Australian academics on job stress, well-being, WLB, and work-life conflict. The results indicate that Australian academics who experience greater stress are more likely to experience a WLI. This concludes that poor MH will result in a WLI. In the present study, the results indicated that gig workers with fewer feelings of depression, sadness, and anxiety can have a good MH and achieve WLB.

Conclusions

This study shows that there is a significant positive relationship between IVs (JA, WE, MH) and DV (WLB). It fills a gap in WLB research in the Malaysian GE context. Through JA and

WLB, this research encourages GE participation, ensuring its sustainability. Also, the government may improve incentives for gig workers' WLB and promote GE growth. Moreover, this research improves society. GE reduces unemployment and encourages people to challenge new work options. Thus, everyone will have a job and be hopeful, reducing societal problems. This study also shows that almost 90% of low-skilled male gig workers attain WLB.

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