
The Phenomenon of Normalizing Self-Exploitation in Hustle Culture Among Gen-Z Gig Workers: A Socio-Legal Analysis and Policy Recommendations

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the phenomenon of hustle culture among gig workers and Gen-Z freelancers in Indonesia, highlighting the lack of legal protection for human rights and the resulting psychological impact. Using a socio-legal analysis, this study examines how social practices of hustle culture interact with gaps in national regulations, comparing them with more progressive international legal frameworks. The results and discussion indicate that hustle culture operates as a productivity regime that normalizes self-exploitation, blurs the boundaries between work and personal life, and deepens the vulnerability of gig workers who fall outside formal employment protections. Furthermore, claims of flexible work freedom perpetuate the logic of the global market, placing young workers in precarious conditions. Based on these findings, this study produces a framework of policy recommendations that focus on multidimensional protection for Gen-Z gig workers, encompassing legal, social, and psychological aspects. Recommendations emphasize the adoption of best practices from other countries, such as the Workers' Rights (Employment Rights) Bill in the UK, which expands the fundamental rights of gig workers; Assembly Bill 5 (AB5) in California, which reclassifies independent workers as contract workers; and social protection models in Germany and France, which include digital workers in health insurance and pension systems. Adaptation in the Indonesian context can be realized through the development of a social insurance scheme specifically for gig workers, the implementation of healthy working hours standards to maintain psychological balance, and transparent and fair employment contract arrangements. The conclusions of this study emphasize the importance of regulatory reform grounded in a multidisciplinary approach that integrates legal, economic, and psychological perspectives to protect Gen-Z gig workers from the negative impacts of hustle culture. The research's significance lies in its contribution to expanding interdisciplinary academic discourse and in offering a conceptual framework for policymakers to formulate adaptive regulations to the dynamics of flexible work in the digital era.

Keywords: hustle culture, self-exploitation, pekerja gig, Gen-Z, socio-legal analysis

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the growth of the gig economy has fundamentally transformed the global labor structure. This work model is characterized by a digital platform-based system that connects service providers with users through algorithmic mechanisms, as seen in online transportation services, goods delivery, and digital creative work. The presence of platforms such as Gojek, Grab, Shopee, and Upwork has created a new work ecosystem that offers flexible working hours and location freedom,

making it especially attractive to the younger generation seeking autonomy in their work (Woodcock & Graham, 2020). However, behind this narrative of flexible freedom lies a new dynamic of invisible forms of modern exploitation. This phenomenon is often rooted in an ideology of extreme work known as hustle culture, which normalizes overwork and blurs the boundaries between professional and personal life (Scholz, 2016).

In the Indonesian context, the gig economy is growing rapidly in line with the acceleration of digital transformation and increasing internet penetration. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) showed that more than 46 million independent or freelance workers were active in Indonesia in 2023, accounting for approximately one-third of the total workforce. This sector contributes to the national digital economy but faces significant legal challenges. Various studies show that platform workers are still classified as independent partners, falling outside the formal protections of the Manpower Law (Tambunan et al., 2024; Sroedji, 2025). The absence of regulations that clearly govern the employment relationship between platforms and workers creates a legal vacuum, leaving gig workers without access to social security, protection against excessive working hours, and clarity about fair employment contracts (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020).

Meanwhile, the ideology of hustle culture reinforces this paradox by promoting the idea that success requires endless hours of work. In the hyper-connected digital age, gig workers are encouraged to be constantly active to maintain ratings, secure projects, or increase professional visibility. This creates significant psychological stress and leads to the phenomenon of self-exploitation, where workers become both perpetrators and victims of the intensification of their work (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). This condition is exacerbated by algorithmic mechanisms that demand full availability (always-on mode), blurring the boundaries between work and personal life and disrupting psychological balance (Mazmanian, 2013).

Various studies have shown that the psychosocial consequences of this type of work system include increased stress levels, mental health disorders, and the risk of chronic fatigue among young workers (ILO, 2021). In the Indonesian context, excessive workloads in the online transportation and digital platform sectors are often not matched by adequate social protection. Sroedji (2025) emphasized that the absence of minimum wage regulations and social security for gig workers has the potential to deepen inequality and create new forms of economic vulnerability. Thus, there is an urgent need to examine the relationship between the culture of excessive digital work and the regulatory gap that allows self-exploitation practices to persist.

Based on this background, this research aims to address four key issues that reflect the complex relationship between digital work culture and structural inequality in the gig economy. First, it seeks to explain how hustle culture functions as a normalizing mechanism for self-exploitation among gig workers in Indonesia. This culture not only promotes a hard work ethic and relentless productivity, but also internalizes the idea that one's self-worth is measured by the capacity to continue working and "fighting" without limits. In the context of the flexible platform economy, this form of exploitation becomes invisible, disguised by a narrative of independence and freedom to work.

Second, this study explores the regulatory vacuum that leaves gig workers outside the scope of

formal labor law protections. Despite digital workers' significant contributions to the national economy, their legal status remains ambiguous, with neither formal workers nor independent entrepreneurs fully categorized. This situation results in the absence of social security, transparent employment contracts, and protection against excessive working hours. This gap highlights the need for regulatory reform to ensure digital workers' rights are recognized in the national legal system.

Third, this study examines the psychological and social implications of self-exploitation practices stemming from the internalization of hustle culture. The pressure to be consistently productive and "always available" in digital work creates a high mental burden, especially for the younger generation who dominate this sector. Frequent impacts include emotional exhaustion (burnout), anxiety, and a disrupted balance between personal and professional life. This phenomenon confirms that the issue of hustle culture is not just an economic issue but also a social and public health problem.

Fourth, this research aims to formulate a multidimensional protection policy model that can be adapted from global practices and implemented in Indonesia. This approach encompasses legal (reclassification of worker status), social (improving digital literacy and worker community welfare), and occupational health (implementing the Healthy Working Hours Standard). The proposed policy model is expected to strengthen the bargaining position of gig workers while ensuring the sustainability of a just digital economy ecosystem.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of sociological studies of work and the digital economy by integrating cultural studies and labor law approaches to understand the relationships among culture, power, and exploitation in the digital workplace. In practice, the results of this research are expected to serve as a basis for formulating labor policies that are more adaptive to the transformation of the digital economy, particularly in legal protection, social security, and occupational health.

Furthermore, this research has significant social significance because it highlights the voices and experiences of young workers, who are often marginalized in the discourse on digital economic development. Thus, this research not only enriches the academic literature but also encourages the development of a more humane, sustainable, and worker-friendly digital work system.

2. Research methods

This study uses a qualitative approach within a socio-legal framework to analyze the relationships among social phenomena. Hustle culture and the legal framework for employment in Indonesia. This approach was chosen because it explains how social norms and law interact to shape work patterns and power relations in the digital economy era. The data used is secondary data obtained through a literature review of legal documents, scientific journals, policy reports, and official publications from international institutions such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Economic Forum (WEF). The legal study focuses on Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower, Law Number 11 of 2020 concerning Job Creation, and various implementing regulations relevant to digital platform workers. Furthermore, empirical data and global policy reports are used to compare regulatory practices in countries such as the UK, Australia, and Germany, which have already

established standards to protect gig workers.

The analysis was conducted by combining a socio-legal approach and comparative analysis. Through socio-legal analysis, this study examines how hustle culture operates as a social mechanism that normalizes overwork and the extent to which Indonesian positive law can respond to this phenomenon. The analysis goes beyond the normative level but also highlights the realities of legal implementation on the ground, including gaps in protection for digital workers who face the risk of hidden exploitation. A comparative approach is used to review international policy frameworks, such as the Employment Status Framework in England, the Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Closing Loopholes) Act 2023 in Australia, and the Digital Platform Work Regulation in Germany, to identify relevant policy elements for adaptation in Indonesia. By combining these two approaches, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship among law, digital work, and self-exploitation, and to offer contextual, evidence-based policy recommendations to protect gig workers.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Hustle Culture as Normalization of Self-Exploitation

The main finding emerging from this study is that the hustle culture of Generation Z gig workers does more than simply promote an intense work ethic; it reshapes work time and space, blurring the boundaries between professional and private life. In platform practices, what was once called “flexibility” has transformed into a state of permanent digital preparedness: notifications, algorithmic penalties, and incentive mechanisms compel workers to respond to work opportunities whenever they arise, rendering formal working hours irrelevant and private downtime monetized as productive capital. This is not a sporadic phenomenon; it is consistently documented in the platform studies literature examining always-on schedules, the intensification of work through algorithms, and the invisibilization of unpaid work, all demonstrating that personal time is systematically absorbed into the platform production process (Fernández Massi & Longo, 2023; OECD/ILO, 2023).

Theoretically, this erasure of the time-space boundary can be understood through the interaction of three mutually reinforcing mechanisms. First, the transformation of managerial control into algorithmic management shifts the center of work rhythm regulation from human supervisors to software: algorithms create orders, measure responses, and award rewards/penalties, making digital presence, rather than formal hours, the unit of productivity measurement (Zhang et al., 2022). Second, the internalization of neoliberal norms about self-entrepreneurship encourages what can be called self-exploitation: young workers adopt the narrative that overwork is a personal investment and a sign of professional commitment, willingly exchanging private time for digital visibility and reputation. Third, platform practices “invisibilize” unpaid components of work waiting time, uncompensated travel, and technical readiness that, while not included in formal employment contracts, still contribute surplus value to the platform; as a result, private space is reduced to an extension of production unrecognized by conventional labor protection regimes (Mangan, Muszyński & Pulignano, 2023).

A comprehensive analysis of these dynamics suggests that the root of the problem is not simply

an individual choice to work harder or a pop culture predilection for “hustle,” but rather a structural-cultural synergy that facilitates and normalizes self-exploitation. Platform structures provide the technical architecture (algorithms, notifications, ratings) that demands alertness; millennial/Gen-Z work culture provides the moral and symbolic justification for the sacrifice of personal time; and the lack of labor regulations regarding non-standard forms of work make it difficult to recognize and compensate for extended working hours legally. Therefore, the normalization of exploitation occurs on two levels: material (time and space consumed without compensation) and symbolic (unlimited work viewed as a professional virtue). A comprehensive analysis of these dynamics suggests that the root of the problem is not simply an individual choice to work harder or a pop culture predilection for “hustle,” but rather a structural-cultural synergy that facilitates and normalizes self-exploitation. Platform structures provide the technical architecture (algorithms, notifications, ratings) that demands alertness; millennial/Gen-Z work culture provides the moral and symbolic justification for the sacrifice of personal time; and the lack of labor regulations regarding non-standard forms of work make it difficult to recognize and compensate for extended working hours legally. Therefore, the normalization of exploitation occurs on two levels: material (time and space are consumed without compensation) and symbolic (unlimited work is seen as a professional virtue). To visualize the structural, cultural, and regulatory synergy that perpetuates this condition, the Self-Exploitation Normalization Synergy Model (Figure X) is presented below:

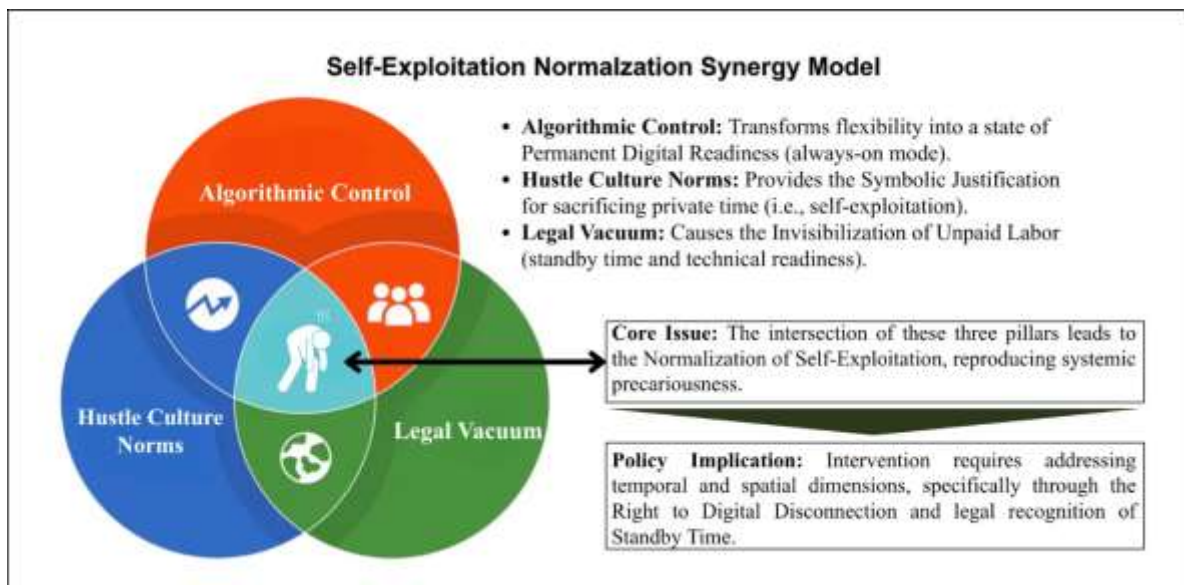


Figure 1. Self-Exploitation Normalization Synergy Model: Structural, Cultural, and Regulatory Synergy in Normalizing Self-Exploitation

The implications of this finding directly answer the research problem formulation: the mechanism of erasing time-space boundaries is the main channel through which hustle culture transforms Gen-Z workers' behavior into a practice of disguised self-exploitation, and without regulatory intervention or changes in cultural narratives, this pattern will reproduce systemic precarious conditions.

Taking this theoretical and empirical evidence into account, relevant policy recommendations must acknowledge the temporal and spatial dimensions of platform work: legal recognition of standby

time, regulation of digital disconnection rights, algorithmic transparency, and flexible social security mechanisms. Without explicit recognition of how private space is absorbed as a space of production, labor policy will continue to lag behind platform production practices, and this failure will deepen the normalization of self-exploitation among the most vulnerable generation of workers.

3.2. The claim of "Flexible Work Freedom" perpetuates precarious conditions

The claim that the platform economy provides work freedom through flexibility in time and place is often used as a dominant narrative to justify the gig business model; however, more critical conceptual and empirical studies show that in practice, this flexibility usually functions as a risk restructuring mechanism that shifts the burden of uncertainty from the platform to the worker. Recent literature confirms that so-called “flexibility” is often asymmetrical: workers are given formal freedom to choose when to work, but this freedom is limited or undermined by the algorithmic architecture that determines task allocation, price transparency, and reputation assessment mechanisms. In other words, flexibility turns into freedom, but it is precarious. Formal freedom accompanied by a lack of material protection (Gondim et al., 2024; Karlsson, 2021). In practical terms, workers can refuse orders, but doing so risks losing rank, incentives, or access to the job stream; such incentive structures create the impression of obligatory “choices.”

From the perspective of class and occupational theory, this phenomenon is most sharply explained by the concept of precariousness a condition characterized by little or no job security, variable incomes, and a lack of collective rights furthered by platform practices that blur the boundaries of formal employment status (Karlsson, 2021). Cross-national empirical research demonstrates a direct link between reliance on platform income and extended unstructured working hours: workers work longer hours at unconventional times to meet income targets, while platforms reject mandatory minimum wages, paid leave, and social security (Gondim et al., 2024; Lis et al., 2024). Therefore, flexibility is not simply an individual attribute that can enhance well-being; in the platform context, it should be understood as a capital strategy for organizations to reduce fixed labor costs while maintaining high productivity.

Further, algorithmic management. Algorithms play a dual role: they convey the impression of efficiency and choice, but they also create difficult-to-negotiate working conditions. Algorithms standardize performance metrics, regulate workflows, and effectively produce non-human forms of surveillance, a form of management that creates shoulder-to-shoulder control but is hidden (Karlsson, 2021). In this context, workers' bargaining power is weakened because information, data, and allocation decisions are in the hands of platforms; consequently, flexibility becomes mere rhetoric if it is not accompanied by legal rights to claim social security or access to adequate dispute-resolution mechanisms. This phenomenon has been documented in numerous studies: for example, app drivers trade schedule flexibility for unstable income and the risk of incurring operational costs themselves, a pattern repeated across many countries and platform sectors (Gondim et al., 2024; Lis et al., 2024).

This analysis confirms that the root of the problem lies in power relations, not simply work culture or individual choices. Flexibility, if not accompanied by clear recognition of work status and protection mechanisms, serves to deepen the situation of precariousness because: (1) it reduces workers' access to social security and wage protection; (2) it intensifies work through temporary incentives that force

continuous preparedness; and (3) it eliminates collective negotiation space by rejuvenating individualized work relations. Therefore, the normative and policy challenge is to redefine flexibility: from market claims that weaken rights to flexibility accompanied by protection clauses, to a minimum, for example, the recognition of the right to minimum earnings, proportional and accessible social security contribution mechanisms, and algorithmic transparency that allows for auditing and legal protection.

Finally, the implications for policy formulation are clear and straightforward: if the policy goal is to curb the reproduction of precariousness while preserving the potential for positive flexibility, policymakers must implement a multidimensional policy package that binds platforms (e.g., mandatory social security contributions, working time arrangements including standby time, the right to digital disconnection, and access to dispute resolution mechanisms). Without such structural measures, claims of flexible work freedom will continue to legitimize structured exploitation that perpetuates systemic precariat working conditions and places Generation Z at long-term social and economic risk.

3.3. Psychological and Social Implications of Self-Exploitation

The phenomenon of *hustle culture*, rooted in the internalization of the value of extreme productivity, directly leads to serious psychological consequences, including chronic fatigue, ongoing stress, and a decline in psychological balance between personal life and work. In the context of young Generation Z workers, cross-disciplinary research shows that the pressure to continuously “perform” both in terms of economic achievements and digital visibility triggers an increased risk of burnout, sleep disturbances, and depression associated with relentless work patterns (Lang et al., 2023; Lu et al., 2023). When the boundary between work time and personal time disappears, the space for psychological recovery also disappears, creating a cycle of unrealistic self-expectations. A longitudinal study in South Korea found that young workers in the labor market, at an always-on reporting level, experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion and work-life conflict than the conventional worker group.

Theoretically, this condition aligns with the concept of self-exploitation, as Han (2017) explained in the Burnout Society, in which the neoliberal subject positions itself as a never-ending project of productivity. Others no longer exploit workers, but by an internal drive that continually compels achievement. In this model, the individual becomes an “entrepreneur of himself” (entrepreneur of the self) and considers rest as a form of moral failure. The result is psychopolitical fatigue that is not only biological, but also existential because self-worth is entirely measured by work performativity. A recent neuropsychological study published in *Personality and Individual Differences* also confirmed that chronic exposure to digital work stress is positively correlated with decreased psychological detachment and worsening of symptoms of anxiety-depression (Liu, 2024).

Additionally, organizational psychology research has found that gig workers who experience role blurring the lack of clarity between professional and personal roles, report a significant decline in subjective well-being and increased feelings of social isolation (Lu et al., 2023). Thus, the previously identified loss of work time and space boundaries is a direct determinant of young workers' psychological distress. In this context, work-life balance is no longer simply a time management issue,

but rather a structural indicator of the imbalance between productivity expectations and individual recovery capacity.

Socially, continuous exposure to hustle culture can create a generation of workers with psychological and economic precarity. Dependence on platform systems that do not guarantee job security fosters long-term uncertainty in both financial and professional identity. Research found that young workers in the gig ecosystem experienced occupational identity diffusion, namely the inability to define a long-term career direction due to sporadic, unstructured work (Lu et al., 2023). As a result, existential precarity arises, where workers are not only worried about today's income but also lose the narrative of meaning in work itself.

Economically, this situation results in what Standing (2011) calls the precariat trap. The uncertainty trap forces workers to continue toiling for security that is never achieved. However, the most significant impact lies in the socio-psychological dimension. When economic uncertainty combines with the pressures of a productivity culture, the phenomenon emerges collective anxiety among the younger generation, where anxiety is becoming a new social norm (Lang et al., 2023).

This situation is slowly forming a “precarious cycle” for Generation Z: they seek stability through more complex work, but the harder they work, the more they depend on the system that undermines stability. As a result, the long-term risks that arise are not only burnout. This phenomenon not only affects individual rights but also social disorientation, weakening solidarity among workers, increasing competition between individuals, and decreasing collective capacity to negotiate employment rights. From a sociological perspective, this phenomenon demonstrates that self-exploitation does not stop at the psychological realm but also reshapes the social values of the younger working generation, placing personal success above collective well-being.

Thus, the psychological and social implications of self-sustained exploitation hustle culture are not just about fatigue or temporary emotional distress, but a fundamental shift in the mental ecology of a generation of young workers. They are forced to continuously adapt to uncertainty without adequate structural support, creating a paradox between the promised freedom and the instability they experience. Therefore, these findings underscore the urgency of developing intervention policies that integrate mental health dimensions into digital employment regulations, including recognition of the right to rest, disconnection time, and preventive psychosocial support.

3.4. Multidimensional Protection Policy Recommendations

Recommendations for multidimensional protection policies for gig workers should be based on lessons from global practices that have successfully clarified the legal status and social protections of digital platform workers. From a legal perspective, California's Assembly Bill No. 5 AB5 is an example of a progressive regulation relevant to adaptation. According to Section 2750.3 of AB5 (California Legislature, 2019), workers can only be categorized as independent contractors if they meet three main criteria: (a) the worker is free from the company's control and direction in carrying out their work, (b) the work is performed outside the scope of the company's primary business, and (c) the worker independently conducts a business that is in accordance with the nature of their work. An analysis of this section shows that AB5 firmly affirms the power relationship between platforms and

digital workers; if the platform controls work methods, working hours, and appraisal systems, then the worker should be recognized as a permanent employee, not a freelance contractor. This regulation closes a legal loophole that digital companies have exploited to avoid paying minimum wages, benefits, and social security.

A similar policy is also implemented in the UK through the Employment Rights Act 1996 and strengthened by the Workers' Rights Bill 2022, which introduced the category "dependent contractor." Under Section 230(3)(b) of the Employment Rights Act, "a worker is an individual who has entered into or works under... any other contract whereby the individual undertakes to do or perform personally any work or services for another party who is not a client or customer of any profession or business carried on by the individual." This article provides legal recognition for workers who fall somewhere between full-time and independent contractors. An analysis of the UK legal framework suggests that this approach is more realistic for the digital economy context, as it recognizes gig workers' economic dependence on platforms, even if they are not entirely under a traditional employment relationship. This model could inspire Indonesia to develop new legal categories that address the realities of digital work, such as "dependent workers," who have fundamental rights to a living wage, social security, and protection from unilateral termination.

From a social perspective, the protection systems implemented in Germany and France demonstrate how countries can integrate gig workers into national social security systems. In Germany, Social Code IV (Social Code Book IV) Article 2 paragraph (1) states that "persons engaged in employment or vocational training are compulsorily insured under social security, including those working on a self-employed basis if they are economically dependent and do not employ others regularly." This provision emphasizes that self-employed workers who are economically dependent on a single employer must still be included in the social security system. An analysis of this article demonstrates an inclusive approach: the status of "self-employed" does not absolve the state of its obligation to provide basic protection, especially when the worker lacks an equal bargaining position.

Meanwhile, France protects platform workers through the Labor Code (Article L7341-1), which requires digital companies to provide access to health insurance, work accident insurance, and pensions for freelancers working through platforms. An analysis of this provision shows that France views digital work as part of the formal employment ecosystem and requires compliance with the principle of social justice. The state acts not only as a regulator but also as a facilitator, ensuring social inclusion for all workers, without exception.

In light of these practices, Indonesia needs to reformulate its employment laws to accommodate the increasingly complex realities of digital work. Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower and Law Number 6 of 2023 concerning the Stipulation of the Job Creation Perppu. The Indonesian government has not explicitly regulated the status of gig workers, so many are still categorized as "partnership workers." This gap creates opportunities for exploitation because workers lack the right to social security and to reasonable working hours. Therefore, new regulations are needed that define platform workers as a category of semi-formal workers, with rights and obligations proportionate to their status. Furthermore, the government can develop flexible contribution mechanisms for BPJS Employment and BPJS Health that are tailored to irregular income patterns.

3.5. Implementation Policy Framework in Indonesia

Multidimensional protection for gig workers needs to be designed, taking into account the interrelationships between legal, social, and psychological aspects, to balance the flexibility of digital work with the principles of employment justice. Currently, the legal framework in Indonesia still relies on a traditional employment relationship model that requires elements of "command" and "subordination," as stipulated in Article 1 paragraph (15) and Article 50 of Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower. Article 50 states that "Employment relationships occur because of an employment agreement between the employer and the worker/laborer." This means that employee status is recognized only when there is a direct employment relationship between the employer and the employee.

In the context of gig workers, this relationship does not exist explicitly, as the digital platform acts as an intermediary rather than a formal employer. Consequently, gig workers fall outside the legal protections set out in Article 88 paragraph (1), which guarantees the right to an income that meets a decent living, as well as Article 99 paragraph (1), which states that "Every worker/laborer and his family have the right to obtain social security for the workforce." Thus, legally, gig workers do not yet have access to normative rights such as minimum wages, leave, social protection, and health insurance.

To bridge this gap, the government needs to develop a dedicated social and employment insurance scheme for gig workers. This approach aligns with the mandate of Article 28H, paragraph (3), of the 1945 Constitution, which states that "everyone has the right to social security that allows for the full development of oneself as a dignified human being." Besides that, Article 18 of Law Number 24 of 2011 concerning the Social Security Administration Agency (BPJS) opens the door to expanding social security coverage for workers outside the formal sector. Under this article, gig workers can be categorized as "self-employed workers" who have both obligations and rights to basic social protection, including work-related accident insurance, death insurance, and old-age security.

A similar model has been adopted in Germany and France, where platform workers are automatically enrolled in national insurance systems with contributions adjusted to actual earnings. This approach ensures universal social protection without eliminating work flexibility. If implemented in Indonesia, the government could use cross-subsidy mechanisms or shared contributions between workers and digital platforms as a form of corporate social responsibility (corporate social responsibility).

In addition to social protection, implementing Healthy Working Hours Standards is needed to protect psychological balance and prevent extreme fatigue driven by a culture of overwork. Under Article 77, paragraph (1), of Law No. 13 of 2003, employers are required to work a maximum of seven hours a day and forty hours a week for six workdays, or eight hours a day for five workdays. However, this article does not cover gig workers without formal employment relationships. In practice, platform algorithms that determine income and incentives often encourage workers to work indefinitely, which can lead to chronic fatigue, stress, and mental health disorders.

To address this, the government can adopt the Decent Work Agenda from the International Labour Organization (ILO), which emphasizes the importance of work-life balance as a basic worker right.

These guidelines can be translated into derivative regulations in the form of a Ministerial Regulation on Manpower that establishes healthy working-hour standards for digital workers, with indicators such as maximum work duration, mandatory rest periods, and protection against algorithm-based work targets. This approach is crucial for maintaining the psychological balance and long-term productivity of gig workers, especially the younger generation.

Furthermore, there is a need for transparent and legally binding employment contract regulations for platforms. Under Article 52 paragraph (1) of Law No. 13 of 2003, a valid employment contract must meet four elements: agreement, legal capacity, work, and wages. However, in gig economy practice, the contract typically takes the form of a "partnership agreement" or terms of service, unilateral agreements that fail to meet the elements of a balanced agreement. As a result, gig workers have no protection against unilateral changes to algorithms or bonus systems or against termination of partnerships.

To this end, the government needs to establish regulations requiring digital platforms to provide standard contracts that transparently outline the rights and obligations of both parties. These regulations could refer to Government Regulation Number 35 of 2021 concerning Fixed-Term Employment Agreements, Outsourcing, Working Hours, Rest Periods, and Termination of Employment, specifically Article 5 paragraph (1), which confirms that "A fixed-term employment agreement must be made in writing and contain the terms of employment, rights, and obligations of the parties." By adopting these provisions, digital platforms must include clauses that protect workers from unilateral policy changes and ensure transparency in compensation systems and dispute-resolution processes.

4. Conclusion

This study found that hustle culture, self-exploitation among under-30 Generation Z gig workers, has evolved into a new socio-economic regime that normalizes self-exploitation through the narrative of flexible work freedom. Behind the image of autonomy and flexible time, a market logic shifts the burden of uncertainty and economic risk from companies to individual workers. Flexibility, initially promoted as a form of freedom, has become a new algorithmic control mechanism, encouraging workers to be constantly "on call" and productive without clear time limits. These findings suggest that exploitation in the digital context is no longer external but internal, with workers becoming agents who contribute to normalizing systemic pressure through their own drive to keep working.

This situation is exacerbated by Indonesia's lack of employment regulations, which are unable to accommodate the realities of platform-based non-standard work. The "partner" status assigned to gig workers removes formal protections such as the right to a minimum wage, social security, and reasonable working hours. As a result, gig workers find themselves in a legal gray area that allows for new, subtle yet systematic forms of modern exploitation. Furthermore, this study confirms that extreme productivity pressures in hustle culture have a serious impact on the mental health and psychological balance of the younger generation. The phenomenon of emotional exhaustion (burnout), excessive anxiety, and the loss of boundaries between personal and professional life are clear indicators that self-exploitation has transformed into a social and public health problem. Thus, hustle culture is not just a

matter of work culture, but rather a labor structure that demands comprehensive legal and policy reform.

This research emphasizes the importance of updating employment regulations through a multidisciplinary approach that integrates legal, economic, and psychological perspectives to protect digital workers from negative impacts. Legally, Indonesia needs to create new categories of dependent workers to ensure gig workers receive formal recognition of their rights, including social security, a living wage, and protection against unilateral termination. This approach can be adapted from progressive legal frameworks such as California's Assembly Bill 5 and the UK's Workers' Rights Bill, which recognise the economic dependence between platforms and workers.

From a social perspective, countries need to build inclusive social protection systems with flexible contribution models, such as those in Germany and France, where independent workers remain enrolled in the national insurance system. At the same time, it is important to establish Healthy Working Hours Standards and digital rights disconnection to maintain the psychological balance of gig workers. Meanwhile, from a cultural and educational perspective, digital literacy needs to be developed that fosters awareness that limitless productivity is not a measure of success. Only with a combination of legal reform, adaptive social protection, and a paradigm shift in work culture can digital flexibility truly become a tool for empowerment, not an instrument of exploitation disguised as a false sense of freedom.

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