
Vulnerable Workers in Tailoring and Garment Business in Yogyakarta

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Abstract

The gig economy has grown in recent years, marked by an increasing number of workers involved in jobs based on the number of goods/services produced. Gig workers are not only those who use technology in their work processes, but also those who work without technology. This study aims to highlight the working conditions of gig workers in the tailoring and garment business sector in Yogyakarta, using the concepts of decent work and fair work. This study uses a qualitative approach through interviews with eight respondents and a literature review. The findings of this study indicate poor and unfair working conditions for gig workers in the tailoring and garment business sector. Most workers still face wages below the Regional Minimum Wage, excessive working hours, and a lack of social protection and health insurance. For formal workers, employment contract status is not fully accompanied by the fulfillment of workers' rights. On the other hand, employers' profit margins remain high, reflecting structural inequality between capital owners and workers.

Keywords: gig economy, gig workers, decent and fair work, tailoring and garment businesses

1. Research Background

The gig economy phenomenon marks a change in the structure of the labor market that has sparked debate regarding worker welfare. Several academic reports show how the gig economy model creates vulnerable workers without job protection and decent wages. According to Zhang and Liu, workers' access to social protection programs often depends on their employment status, which effectively excludes gig workers from such protection (Zhang & Liu, 2024). This is in line with findings that income instability and lack of access to social benefits can lead to significant economic insecurity in times of crisis (Ayu, 2024). Flexibility in the gig economy model can encourage freelance workers to exploit themselves in order to earn more income (Maqin, 2021; Hasibuan, 2021). These conditions make workers vulnerable to fatigue and stress (Lubis, 2022; Kirani & Santosa, 2023).

Previous studies have shown how gig workers experience vulnerability in various sectors. This study will highlight the conditions of gig workers in the sewing and garment industry in Yogyakarta. Gig workers are not only those who use digital technology inputs in their work processes, but also include workers without technology inputs (Airlangga, 2021). Such as workers in the sewing and garment industry who are paid based on the number of items they produce. Therefore, work processes

without digital technology inputs are included in the gig economy model, because workers are paid based on the number of goods/services produced, not based on working hours (Novianto et al., 2021). Furthermore, research from Airlangga (2021) shows the poor working conditions of sewing workers in rural areas. Unlike previous studies, this study will highlight sewing and garment workers in urban areas.

The development of sewing and garment businesses in Yogyakarta plays an important role in supporting small garment industries and the local fashion MSME sector. Based on data from umkm.jogjakota.go.id, there are 221 micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) engaged in the garment sector in the city of Yogyakarta. The MSME sector helps create jobs and drives the local economy. However, information on working conditions in the sewing and garment manufacturing sector remains limited. Using the concepts of decent work and fair work, this study will highlight the working conditions of gig workers in the sewing and garment manufacturing sector.

2. Theoretical Foundation

Decent Work is an ILO initiative (1999) that guarantees every individual productive employment in conditions of freedom, equality, security, and dignity. The ILO (2013) established ten indicators of decent work, which include employment opportunities, adequate wages, humane working hours, work-life balance, elimination of the worst forms of work, job stability and security, equality, safe working environment, social security, and social dialogue. This concept not only emphasizes economic aspects, but also the psychological and social well-being of workers (Duffy et al., 2019; Grandey et al., 2015), while encouraging an ideological shift from traditional work ethics towards a culture that affirms individual rights (Cooke, Xu & Bian, 2019).

In the Indonesian context, this theory forms the basis of labor policies to expand social protection and create fair working conditions (Rantanen et al., 2020; Perry, 2003). The Job Loss Insurance Program in the Job Creation Law is an effort to strengthen the protection network for workers (Mahendrasusila, 2021), although law enforcement of the principles of “fair and decent” is still weak (Ahmad & Omara, 2023). The ratification of ILO Convention No. 189 is important for the protection of domestic workers and the informal sector (Rayandi & Fauzi, 2025). The application of fair economic principles and transparent governance is an important part of achieving worker welfare and sustainable development goals (Bramsyah et al., 2022; Kesumadewi & Aprilyani, 2024).

Fair work describes conditions in which workers receive fair wages, contracts, working environments, management, and representation (Fair Work, 2022). Fairness in the workplace increases motivation, loyalty, and commitment to the organization (Binardi et al., 2024). Worker exploitation arises from incentive imbalances and low bargaining power, which force workers to accept unfavorable working conditions (MacKay, 2015; Persad, 2017). Power imbalances in the labor market make employers more dominant, placing workers in a situation where they are vulnerable to injustice (Liu & Wang, 2022).

3. Research Method

The research in this paper uses qualitative methods that study social phenomena as a whole, in the context in which they occur, and considers the meaning given to those being studied in relation to their actions and the actions of others (Rich, Brians, Manheim, et al., 2018). This research uses data collection techniques in the form of interviews and document studies.

4. Findings

Gig workers in the sewing and garment industry are divided into two types: workers with fixed-term employment agreements (PKWT) and informal workers. Although workers with PKWT have official contracts, the distribution of earnings uses a piece-rate system. Workers' wages are calculated based on the number of items completed.

Table 4.1 Categories of gig workers in the sewing and garment industry

Worker Categories	Description
Workers with PKWT	Workers who are employed for a fixed period of time and paid based on the number of items completed
Informal Workers	Workers who work without formal contracts, social security, and legal protection

Gig workers, both those with fixed-term contracts and informal workers in the tailoring and garment industry in Yogyakarta, earn income based on the number of items they complete. They spend an average of 65 hours per week working. This is far from the agreed standard working hours of 40 hours per week. These long working hours are not directly proportional to the income they receive. Gig workers earn less than the 2025 Yogyakarta City minimum wage of Rp2,655,041.

Table 4.2 Working hours and wages of tailoring and garment workers

Business	Worker Categories	Working Hours	Worker Salary
Timur Konveksi	Workers with PKWT	60 hour/week	Rp. 2.000.000
Barat Konveksi	Workers with PKWT	60 hour/week	Rp. 2.500.000
Utara Taylor	Informal Workers	60 hour/week	Rp. 1.600.000
Selatan Taylor	Informal Workers	72 hour/week	Rp. 1.800.000
Daya Taylor	Informal Workers	54 hour/week	Rp. 1.600.000

In addition to excessive working hours and wages below the minimum wage, researchers also found that gig workers do not have social security, a safe working environment, or decent working conditions. For example, there are no holidays, no social security, and the working environment is unsafe.

Table 4.3 Decent working conditions in tailoring and garment businesses

Decent Work	Decent Work Indicators	Workers with PKWT	Informal Workers
Job opportunities	Opportunities and certainty of employment	Fulfilled	Fulfilled
Sufficient income	Decent living components (minimum wage) + production facility costs and social security	Not Fulfilled	Not Fulfilled
Working hours	40 hours/week	Not Fulfilled	Not Fulfilled
Balancing work, family, and personal life	Right to holidays	Not Fulfilled	Not Fulfilled
Prohibited work	No forced labor or child labor (ages 5-17)	Fulfilled	Fulfilled
Job stability and security	Guarantee of not being fired or dismissed at any time.	Fulfilled	Not Fulfilled
Equal opportunities and treatment at work	No discrimination based on age, race, ethnicity, religion, political views, or gender.	Fulfilled	Fulfilled
A safe working environment	A safe and healthy work environment free from workplace accidents.	Not Fulfilled	Not Fulfilled
Social security	Guaranteed health and safety.	Not Fulfilled	Not Fulfilled
Social dialogue	Involvement in the decision-making process and the right to organize and express aspirations.	Not Fulfilled	Not Fulfilled

Meanwhile, fair labor indicators are not met in any tailoring and garment businesses. Both formal and informal workers are in unfair labor relations.

Table 4.3 Fair working conditions in tailoring and garment businesses

Fair working principles	Fair working indicators	Workers with PKWT	Informal Workers
Fair pay	Paid according to minimum wage or living wage + production costs incurred by workers.	Not Fulfilled	Not Fulfilled
Fair conditions	Working conditions that protect the health, safety, and comfort of workers.	Not Fulfilled	Not Fulfilled
Fair employment contracts	Contracts that truly reflect the employment relationship, are clear and transparent, and are enforced. If the relationship is a partnership, it is one of equals.	Not Fulfilled	Not Fulfilled
Fair management	There is equality in the management, negotiation, and complaint processes related to work processes.	Not Fulfilled	Not Fulfilled
Fair representation	There is freedom of association and recognized collective worker bodies that can represent workers and engage in collective bargaining.	Not Fulfilled	Not Fulfilled

Based on findings in the field, decent and fair working conditions are not met in the tailoring and garment sectors. This situation is in stark contrast to the profits earned by business owners.

Table 4.5. Financial conditions of tailoring and garment businesses

Business	Monthly Income	Monthly Expenses (estimated)	Monthly Profit (estimated)
Timur Konveksi	Rp. 50.870.000	Rp. 25.500.000	Rp. 25.370.000
Barat Konveksi	Rp. 78.000.000	Rp. 40.500.000	Rp. 37.500.000
Utara Taylor	Rp. 6.350.000	Rp. 1.850.000	Rp. 4.500.000
Selatan Taylor	Rp. 25.930.000	Rp. 7.930.000	Rp. 18.000.000
Daya Taylor	Rp. 62.270.000	Rp. 44.900.000	Rp. 17.370.000

The large profits earned by employers do not reflect decent and fair working conditions. Gig workers do not receive fair wages in accordance with the Yogyakarta City minimum wage and do not receive social security. In addition, gig workers also experience excessive working hours. This shows that there is an imbalance in the distribution of work results between employers and workers.

5. Discussion

Workers in the tailoring and garment industry can be categorized as gig workers, because they are paid according to the items they complete. As defined by Novianto et al. (2021), the gig economy model is characterized by workers being paid based on the number of items/services they produce, rather than the amount of time they work. The findings in this study show that gig workers in the tailoring and garment industry are vulnerable. Both workers who have fixed-term employment contracts (PKWT) and informal workers are in unfair and unreasonable conditions. This is similar to the findings of previous studies related to vulnerable workers in the technology-based gig economy, such as online drivers (Novianto, 2022; Nastiti, 2021; Islami 2021; Sunardi, 2021; Fathurrahman, 2021), and creative workers (Izzati & Apinino, 2021; Maqin, 2021; Hasibuan, 2021).

Gig workers with PKWT (fixed-term employment contracts) show that even though they have employment contracts, because the work process is carried out using a piece-rate system, the wages they receive are not adequate. This is because workers are paid according to the work they have done. Therefore, workers cannot guarantee a stable and adequate income. In addition, PKWT workers also do not have social security and a safe working environment. They work excessive hours in order to earn a large income by completing more items. Workers with PKWT do not reflect a fair employment contract.

Meanwhile, the conditions of informal workers in the sewing industry are not much different; they receive lower wages. Informal workers often do not have clear and transparent employment contracts. Informal workers in the gig economy model are more vulnerable than workers with fixed-term employment contracts. These findings reinforce the argument that gig workers without technological input in the work process also experience unfair and unreasonable working conditions (Airlangga, 2021). These vulnerable working conditions are caused by weak law enforcement by the government in labor supervision.

6. Conclusion

Gig workers in the tailoring and garment industry in urban areas experience unfair and unreasonable working conditions. Workers must work between 60 and 72 hours per week for wages below the regional minimum wage, without social security, holidays, or a safe working environment. Both fixed-term contract workers and informal workers in Yogyakarta are vulnerable. The gig economy model, which pays workers based on the number of items produced, leaves workers vulnerable. Additionally, weak government oversight of labor relations exacerbates this situation.

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