

# Understanding communication patterns in coping with stress in Indonesia's gig economy

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Despite the rise of the gig economy, the mental health of Indonesia's gig workers has received little attention. To cope with work-related stress and a limited interaction between drivers and app firms, many ride-hailing drivers have formed shared experience-based communities, such as Indriver Bandung Bersatu (IBB). **Purpose:** This study aimed to investigate the perspectives and motives of five drivers in a natural setting, with an emphasis on their lived experiences and interpretations of stress coping mechanisms. **Method:** To better understand how drivers deal with mental health difficulties at work, a qualitative phenomenological approach was applied. From November to December 2022, data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations. Triangulation and member checking confirmed data validity. **Result:** Although ride-hailing employment have several advantages, drivers are stressed because of monopolistic policies, fluctuating pay, negative customer behavior, and rapid system modifications. To cope, people rely on personal strength and mutual support from a community that shares experiences and alleviates emotional pressures. **Conclusion:** Capitalist structures, aided by uneven and unfriendly policies, disadvantaged drivers. Mutual-aid communities, on the other hand, enable them to support one another and work together to find common answers. **Implications:** Facing shared workplace issues together, sharing experiences, and developing peer-based support all promote motivation and self-determination, allowing drivers to become more resilient.

**Keywords:** Coping system; gig economy; job stress; mutual-aid community; ride-hailing

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## INTRODUCTION

The gig economy has continued to grow in recent years. Of the 5.89 million freelancers in Indonesia (Suhariyanto, 2019), around 4 million are digital gig workers (Nugraha, 2020), whose jobs are typically short-term and carried out independently (Hwang, 2019; SUSS, 2020). This type of work offers flexibility (Peetz, 2023), especially for those who face challenges in securing formal employment with decent standards and who prefer independent work (Herrmann et al., 2023). Several factors drive this trend, including technological advancement and rising demand for digital services (Dawid, 2024). Platforms such as food delivery, freelance marketplaces, and ride-hailing apps now offer people the opportunity to earn income on their own terms. This flexibility is particularly attractive to individuals managing other responsibilities, such as family duties or education (Jaiswal & Chaudhari, 2023; Pande, 2024).

However, the gig work model has also been criticized (Herrmann et al., 2023). Drivers recruited by ride-hailing companies such as Indriver and Grab Indonesia through partnership agreements, effectively as self-employed gig workers, are subject to the “priority account” system. This approach compensates drivers who work consistent hours and perform well by offering them additional ride requests. While not officially proclaimed, this strategy has made it difficult for many drivers to reach their destinations or even earn a basic income

(Novianto et al., 2021; Pratama & Nistanto, 2020). The system fosters a competitive climate in which only top performers receive adequate orders, resulting in salary inequities. Drivers who fail to achieve the strict conditions frequently face financial difficulties. Many people have expressed concerns about the system’s impartiality, claiming that it advantages those who can devote more time—often at the sacrifice of personal well-being. Furthermore, the algorithm-based method lacks transparency, leaving drivers unsure of how their performance is assessed or how to improve their standing. This ambiguity has led to frustration and a sense of helplessness among drivers who feel they are doing their best yet still fall short.

Safety and comfort in the workplace are not guaranteed for ride-hailing drivers (Komala & Simanjuntak, 2021). They often face difficult conditions, including having to wait for orders on the roadside and risking accidents while serving customers. Customer demands—such as urging drivers to speed due to urgency—further increase the risk of traffic violations and collisions (Allman, 2021; Pyta, 2021). The absence of adequate rest spots and access to basic services, such as bathrooms, exacerbates their pain. These circumstances contribute to high levels of psychological stress, which are allegedly higher than those experienced by formal sector workers.

Financial strain (Glavin & Schieman, 2022), severe competition (Apouey & Stabile, 2022), unpredictable working conditions, post-

COVID-19 economic volatility (Glavin & Schieman, 2022; Juddi et al., 2024), and a lack of social skills (IANS, 2017) are all additional stressors. Drivers frequently rely on unreliable and unpredictable income, which can exacerbate financial stress. To keep an adequate income, they must compete for orders by maintaining excellent performance and client ratings, which typically requires extended hours. Post-pandemic conditions have exacerbated gig workers' already precarious position. The absence of social safety nets—such as unemployment benefits, health insurance, or paid leave—has made them especially vulnerable during economic downturns. As a result, many face increased stress and mental health challenges while trying to sustain their livelihoods under uncertain job conditions (Louzado-Feliciano et al., 2022).

Research on gig workers has largely focused on gig work-specific features and conditions (Gandini, 2019). examined mental health and spousal well-being (Apouey et al., 2020; Apouey & Stabile, 2022; Cai et al., 2021; Glavin & Schieman, 2022; Montero-Moraga et al., 2020), especially in relation to work stress and coping (Sariraei et al., 2022). However, most of these studies are descriptive, literature-based, and centered on the global north. Critical, subjective approaches to stress and coping—particularly in the global south—remain limited. Therefore, this study aims to explore and critically analyze the subjective experiences of stress triggers and coping strategies among gig workers, focusing on ride-hailing drivers in Indonesia, to identify

research gaps and suggest culturally sensitive strategies for improving mental health support and interventions.

Effective communication between companies and workers, especially in traditional labor contexts, plays a key role. Clear communication between management—through supervisors or managers—and workers can enhance productivity and well-being while supporting mental health, although personal compatibility may still vary (Kuroda & Yamamoto, 2018). Open conversation, flexibility, and collaborative behaviors supported by company policies can promote psychological wellness at work (Gewurtz et al., 2022). Employees benefit from environments where they may express their problems, feedback, and suggestions without fear of repercussions. Such transparency fosters a peaceful workplace climate based on trust and mutual respect. When employees feel heard and respected, their job satisfaction and engagement rise, resulting to increased productivity and fewer turnover. Meeting the needs and interests of a diverse workforce requires flexible communication. This could include using several means, such as face-to-face meetings, emails, or instant messaging, to keep everyone informed and engaged. Flexibility also includes adapting varied work styles and schedules, which helps to decrease stress and promote work-life balance. Collaboration is another critical component. Promoting teamwork and collaboration fosters creativity and a deeper sense of workplace community (Rahmat et al., 2019). Employees that communicate effectively

can exchange expertise, offer support, and work together to overcome obstacles.

Companies, on the other hand, may employ open discussion to establish a false intersubjectivity that ultimately benefits corporate interests (Akella, 2016). This strategy creates the idea of mutual understanding and agreement between management and employees, while the dialog is closely managed to meet the company's aims. Workers may feel involved, believing that their thoughts are being heard, but their problems and proposals are not examined or addressed. Such bogus intersubjectivity can erode workplace trust and morale (Akella, 2016, 2020; Winkler & Rußmann, 2021). When employees notice that the discourse is deceptive, they may become disillusioned and disengaged, resulting in diminished motivation and productivity as they seek workplaces where their input is truly valued. This technique has the potential to exacerbate existing power disparities, as companies shape narratives and drive conversations toward their objectives. As a result, criticism is suppressed, and employees may be hesitant to offer fresh ideas or question existing methods, ultimately inhibiting creativity and innovation.

Ride-hailing drivers in the gig economy have different working conditions than in traditional sectors, where labor is protected by defined legal frameworks. Gig workers are self-employed persons who work on short-term contracts and do not have the same legal protections as traditional employees (Bestari,

2023). No institutional institution governs this type of activity. Companies are not required to give benefits like health insurance, pensions, taxes, lunch or transportation allowances, or a base pay. Instead, drivers must assume all of the hazards associated with their profession (Afrina et al., 2017; Rachmawati et al., 2022). Without legal protections, gig workers are subject to a variety of risks. For example, if a ride-hailing driver is involved in an accident, they are usually responsible for their own medical and repair costs because corporate insurance does not cover such accidents. This financial strain can be onerous, particularly for individuals who rely entirely on this profession. Furthermore, the lack of a guaranteed income causes financial instability. Unlike salaried employees, gig workers' salaries fluctuate according to market demand and work availability.

When it comes to work regulations and requirements, communication between companies and drivers is frequently one-way and unequal. Platform companies have more information about commissions, compensation structures, and locations than drivers do. This imbalance commonly causes disagreement and has a negative impact on workers' mental health (Bhatia & Kaur, 2023; Zhang et al., 2022). Individuals frequently fail to effectively convey their desires when under pressure. Two-way communication between management and employees can help to create a more supportive work environment by allowing workers' concerns to be heard and handled, while simultaneously helping management to have a

better understanding of situations at different organizational levels.

A lack of transparency and open communication can breed distrust and animosity among drivers. When employees believe they are excluded from decision-making or that their complaints are ignored, morale and job satisfaction suffer, harming performance and mental health. Drivers may feel alienated and unsupported, increasing tension and anxiety. Furthermore, information asymmetry might cause misunderstanding and unsatisfied expectations. For example, drivers may not fully comprehend how incentives are generated or why particular policies change. This lack of transparency can lead to unhappiness and perceptions of unfair treatment, especially if regulations appear to change without their knowledge.

Recognizing their limited relationship with the platform, many drivers accept full responsibility for the hazards associated with their business. In response, they frequently develop informal support networks, such as Indriver Bandung Bersatu (IBB), based on common experiences. These forums provide a forum for people to share ideas and encourage one another when faced with obstacles such as vehicle failures, demanding customers, or a lack of orders. They also provide emotional relief from the mental pressure associated with gig work. Gig employment can have a huge psychological toll. Drivers frequently experience income insecurity, which heightens

stress and anxiety. The lack of work security and benefits, such as health insurance or paid leave, exacerbates these problems. Long hours behind the wheel might also cause exhaustion and other health issues. As a result, it is critical to describe the psychological repercussions of gig work as well as the coping techniques used by drivers to deal with these issues, both individually and as a group.

Mental health is an essential component of occupational health, safety, and risk management (Denia et al., 2022). Psychological issues can have an impact on a person's confidence, professional identity, and connections with family, friends, and coworkers (Windham-Bradstock, 2022). Academic and policy discussions around gig work rules are necessary to help rethink societal norms, meanings, and identities. Such approaches could lessen platform companies' power in developing driver welfare rules and foster more balanced, mutually agreed-upon arrangements between employers and employees. Ideally, communication should be open and honest, allowing issues to be addressed as they emerge. When communication fails or is imprecise, minor difficulties can snowball into major problems, negatively impacting mental health. Shared knowledge, gained through rational discourse, is critical for social integration and democratic practice (Habermas, 2015; Monti et al., 2022). Consensus can be formed on knowledge, equality, and trust, both in direct interactions between users and service providers and in more abstract, impersonal circumstances



(Juddi et al., 2021; Voren & Cristo, 2022). As a result, communication becomes an essential instrument for developing shared understanding, achieving common goals, and fostering mutual trust.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study focuses on motorcycle ride-hailing drivers, primarily from Indriver and Grab, who are members of the Indriver Bandung Bersatu (IBB) community in Bandung Regency. The aim is to understand how these drivers utilize their mutual-aid-based community to develop coping strategies for increasing work-related stress, and how this relates to the exploitation of capital and the structuring of labor processes by the platform companies. The study takes a phenomenological qualitative approach (Creswell, 2016; Moustakas, 2010) to investigate the meaning and subjective experiences of ride-hailing drivers in connection to the intersubjective world of their work. This technique aims to expose key characteristics of the phenomena by providing: (1) a textual account of what the subjects encounter, and (2) a structural description of how they perceive and interpret these occurrences.

Primary data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with five informants who met the following criteria: (1) Drivers from Indriver or Grab who are part of the IBB community; (2) Have worked as motorcycle drivers for less than one year or

more than one year; (3) Are actively involved in the community, either as members or administrators; (4) Consider ride-hailing their main occupation, while holding other jobs as side work (Table 1). Five informants were chosen in accordance with phenomenological research standards for a minimum of three to ten participants (Creswell, 2016; Dukes, 1984). Data saturation was achieved since no new themes developed throughout the data gathering. These individuals were also the most active of the 25 community members, and they were deemed competent of portraying the group experience. Interviews lasted during November and December 2022, ranging from 30 minutes to two hours.

Ethical considerations in this study were addressed by obtaining informed consent from each participant, either via WhatsApp or in person, before the interview sessions. The researchers first provided information about the study's background, objectives, methods, and significance through WhatsApp and stated that the results would be published in a journal. Once the participants confirmed their understanding and agreement, their consent was reconfirmed in person before the interviews began.

Direct observation was also used to obtain supporting data, such as monitoring the activities and collaborative efforts of the Indriver Bandung Bersatu (IBB) community. Additional data were gathered from prior research, publications, assessments, articles, event reports, questionnaires, and other secondary

Table 1 Informant Criteria

Name	Status	Job Type	Origin	Gender	Experience
BH	Community member	Full time	Cimahi	Male	Under 1 year
RK	Community member	Part-time	Cimahi	Male	Over 1 year
MW	Community board	Full time	Cimahi	Male	Under 1 Year
YD	Community board	Full time	Cimahi	Male	Over 1 year
AW	Community board	Part-time	Cimahi	Male	Over 1 year

Source: Field data, 2022

sources. The study's goal was to create in-depth descriptions through rigorous investigation. After the interviews, the recordings were transcribed. The data was then cleaned up by categorizing, coding, and deleting extraneous information.

The analysis began with a thorough explanation of the phenomena and its context. Intrinsic case analysis was utilized to investigate what and how the informants experienced it. Thematic analysis was used to detect and describe patterns associated with the phenomenon. The data were then evaluated and presented in a narrative format before drawing conclusions. To assure data validity, triangulation was used, which involved cross-checking information against data conditions. Member checking was also done by confirming the findings with the informants.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Ride-hailing: policy, working conditions, and driver stress. The one-way relationship between platform companies (applicators) and ride-hailing drivers indicates

a lack of support for drivers in managing on-the-ground challenges. Drivers are made solely responsible for all work-related consequences, from technical issues to traffic accidents. Meanwhile, platform policies, monopolized by the applicators, continue to evolve in ways that primarily benefit the companies. For example, under Grab's diamond system—where one kilometer equals one diamond and one diamond is worth 100 Rupiah—drivers must work within strict area and time limits to meet targets (Anjungroso, 2018). As a result, many work an average of 49 hours per week, which exceeds the standard for decent employment.

Although the driver-applicator relationship is labeled as a partnership, policy decisions are made unilaterally by the applicators, leaving drivers without influence. At the same time, there are no clear government regulations regarding this employment model. This lack of regulation leads to a situation where drivers, despite being classified as part-time and flexible workers, are pressured to work full-time and complete a minimum of 20 orders per day to meet target points. Additionally, work-related attributes such as uniforms and accessories are

not provided by the applicators but must be purchased by the drivers themselves.

...Work attributes and all equipment are still bought, not provided by the applicator. Some vehicles are rented out. Drivers who do not own a motorbike must rent them. (MW, Personal interview, November 03, 2022)

Currently, no institution formally regulates this new form of work (Heeks et al., 2020; T. Putri, 2022; T. E. Putri et al., 2023), resulting in a lack of occupational safety protections for gig workers. The government's role—primarily through the Ministry of Transportation—is limited to setting service tariffs (Kementrian Perhubungan, 2022; Rosana, 2022). Broader issues such as the legal definition of gig work and the social and psychological well-being of workers remain neglected in current policy discussions.

Changes in the applicators' point and incentive systems have forced drivers to work longer hours to meet targets. This shift has gradually altered the nature of gig work from flexible to full-time, increasing the workload. As working hours become equivalent to full-time shifts, the original concept of part-time or gig work is undermined, resulting in work overload, elevated stress, and burnout (Liu & Lo, 2018; Locker et al., 1989; Page et al., 2013).

...If we are talking about the (job) risk, it is time. I mostly sleep two hours a day. Moreover, I must start working at the market at noon at 4 o'clock. (RK, Personal interview, December 02, 2022)

Gig workers are generally prospective entrepreneurs or full-time employees seeking additional income. The flexibility, freedom, and independence in managing workloads and schedules are appealing, especially to those with permanent jobs. However, drivers' perceptions of the platform system often differ. Many believe in a "priority account" system, where drivers with more consistent working hours receive more offers. This perception drives drivers to work full-time to gain those benefits, despite lacking access to basic protections or social welfare.

Part-time drivers often feel disadvantaged, observing that other drivers receive more ride orders. This creates pressure and leads to the potential waste of time, energy, and fuel. However, the "priority account" concept is based on drivers' interpretations, as the applicators do not disclose details of the algorithm or order distribution mechanisms. The opaque nature of these gamified systems confuses drivers—especially in performance assessments tied to customer ratings. With no government policies regulating these practices, applicators retain full control, allowing policy monopolies that may exploit drivers for company gain.

Part-time drivers typically begin "on-bid" (activating their accounts to receive orders) only after completing their primary jobs, such as selling spices at traditional markets. Although they are "on-bid" for about 7 to 8 hours—from 3 p.m. to 10 p.m.—they often complete orders for only 4 to 5 hours within that window. This



prevents them from meeting the minimum order targets set by the company. The ideal driver-applicator relationship is one of equality and fairness, with an emphasis on trust and mutual gain. In practice, however, the system tends to be exploitative, benefiting the firm. Overwork and a disregard for fair principles can have a severe impact on workers' emotional well-being, mental health, and job quality (Utamalie et al., 2022).

Understanding how the priority account system operates is critical, especially for people who rely on ride-hailing as their primary source of income. Even drivers who "on-bid" on a regular basis may encounter random changes in the number of orders received—for example, 13 orders one day and just 5 the next, with no clear trend. These unpredictable conditions, caused by technology, can result in tiredness (Tarafdar et al., 2020; Weinert, 2016) and behavioral tension (La Torre et al., 2019). Technology forces workers to work faster and longer hours, affecting personal life as it becomes integrated into daily habits. Drivers frequently feel always linked and struggle with ICT competence, compounded by the stress of frequent system changes (Brown, 2012; Ninaus et al., 2015; Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008; Suh & Lee, 2017; Tarafdar et al., 2007; Waizenegger et al., 2016). In severe circumstances, this can lead to mental health problems such as poor focus, impatience, and memory loss (O'Donnell & Hetrick, 2016).

Fluctuations in daily income can be detrimental to drivers, as they cannot adjust

daily expenses to match irregular earnings, disrupting their cash flow. This instability often forces drivers to spend more on necessities such as fuel and food during working hours.

...Working in this field means facing uncertainty. Sometimes (the income) is enough, sometimes even more than enough. (RK, Personal interview, December 02, 2022)

Ride-hailing work may be more suitable for those seeking additional income, as it offers flexibility without financial dependency. These individuals are less affected by daily income fluctuations because they rely on other sources of employment. In contrast, drivers who treat this job as their primary source of income face significant challenges. The system imposed by the platform generates inconsistent earnings, leading to uncertainty and financial stress. These drivers often encounter unpredictable conditions, including long working hours, job-related illnesses, accidents, and setbacks that contribute to psychological strain.

To cope, full-time drivers must continue to work under these conditions, as there is no legal structure to defend their interests. While the driver community provides a venue for exchanging experiences and mutual assistance, it lacks the capacity to issue legal safeguards. Driving remains a difficult job, with frequent road hazards and interactions with unpredictable clients.

Working as a ride-hailing driver requires daily interaction with customers. However,

work-related stress may lead drivers to treat customers with less patience or, in some cases, respond aggressively (Lo Presti et al., 2018; Zhan, 2015).

...The main problem is cancellations by passengers. Imagine, after receiving an order and telling my customer I'm on my way, arriving at the location, they cancel. It's frustrating, especially if it's a long distance. Then, there are instances of customers ordering food, and when I arrive, they ask why there is another order because they already got it from another driver.... If I cancel the order, the system will rate my account performance as poor. (RK, Personal interview, December 02, 2022)

While on duty, drivers often encounter irresponsible customer behavior. For example, some customers deactivate their accounts after the driver arrives at the pick-up location. This puts drivers in a difficult position—canceling the order results in lower system performance ratings, while customer-initiated cancellations still negatively affect the driver. Other frequent issues include cancellations made while the driver is en route, which can be both frustrating and demoralizing.

Such experiences cause many drivers to become more selective, limiting their service to specified locations or hours of operation. Another prevalent issue is fictitious orders, in which clients do not respond to phone calls or messages despite appearing online. Furthermore, “jammed” orders, in which numerous drivers get the same request, cause confusion and frequently result in double charges or unpaid

orders, affecting driver ratings and earnings.

Frequent direct interaction with consumers and recurrent exposure to bad encounters can cause significant stress and psychological distress in both regular and gig workers, such as ride-hailing drivers. This stress is not only immediate but also long-lasting, and it is frequently caused by unanticipated or unacceptable customer behavior (Mayer et al., 2022; National Research Council, 2008). Workers may experience emotional pressure, physical and mental tiredness, rage, as well as symptoms like cynicism, depression, and sleep difficulties (Fisk et al., 2010; Grandey et al., 2004; LeBlanc & Kelloway, 2002; Liu & Lo, 2018). Gig workers, particularly ride-hailing drivers, frequently encounter comparable issues. They frequently meet disrespectful customer behavior and are required to manage these issues independently and promptly (Xiongtao et al., 2021). Despite their vulnerability to harassment, they frequently receive less support from management than permanent employees.

Platform management rarely provides drivers with assistance in managing the difficulties they face during their work. Although performance evaluations emphasize ‘customer satisfaction,’ drivers are expected to handle challenges on their own. Management remains focused on ensuring service delivery to customers, while drivers’ occupational health and safety are largely overlooked (Billings et al., 2021; Mayer et al., 2022; O'Dell & Grayson, 1998). While the platforms have

created new employment opportunities, the work environment often fosters chronic stress and anxiety. The lack of communication and support from management contributes to a sense of neglect, leaving drivers to face the daily pressures of the job alone.

Based on the Figure 1, the stress symptoms experienced by ride-hailing drivers often stem from reduced income due to unmet target points. This situation is caused by multiple factors, including fake orders, driver ratings, unfulfilled targets, customer cancellations, and periods without orders—all of which contribute to driver stress. To manage this stress and maintain mental well-being, drivers rely on independent coping strategies and support from their communities. Individual efforts include taking short breaks, praying to regain composure, and adopting a healthy lifestyle, such as regular exercise.

...If I'm on the road, and something happens—like a flat tire or a broken motorcycle—I suddenly get a headache thinking that I won't be able to take more orders, and I won't meet my target points. The company doesn't care about the driver's problems on the road as long as the targets are achieved. (MW, Personal interview, November 03, 2022)

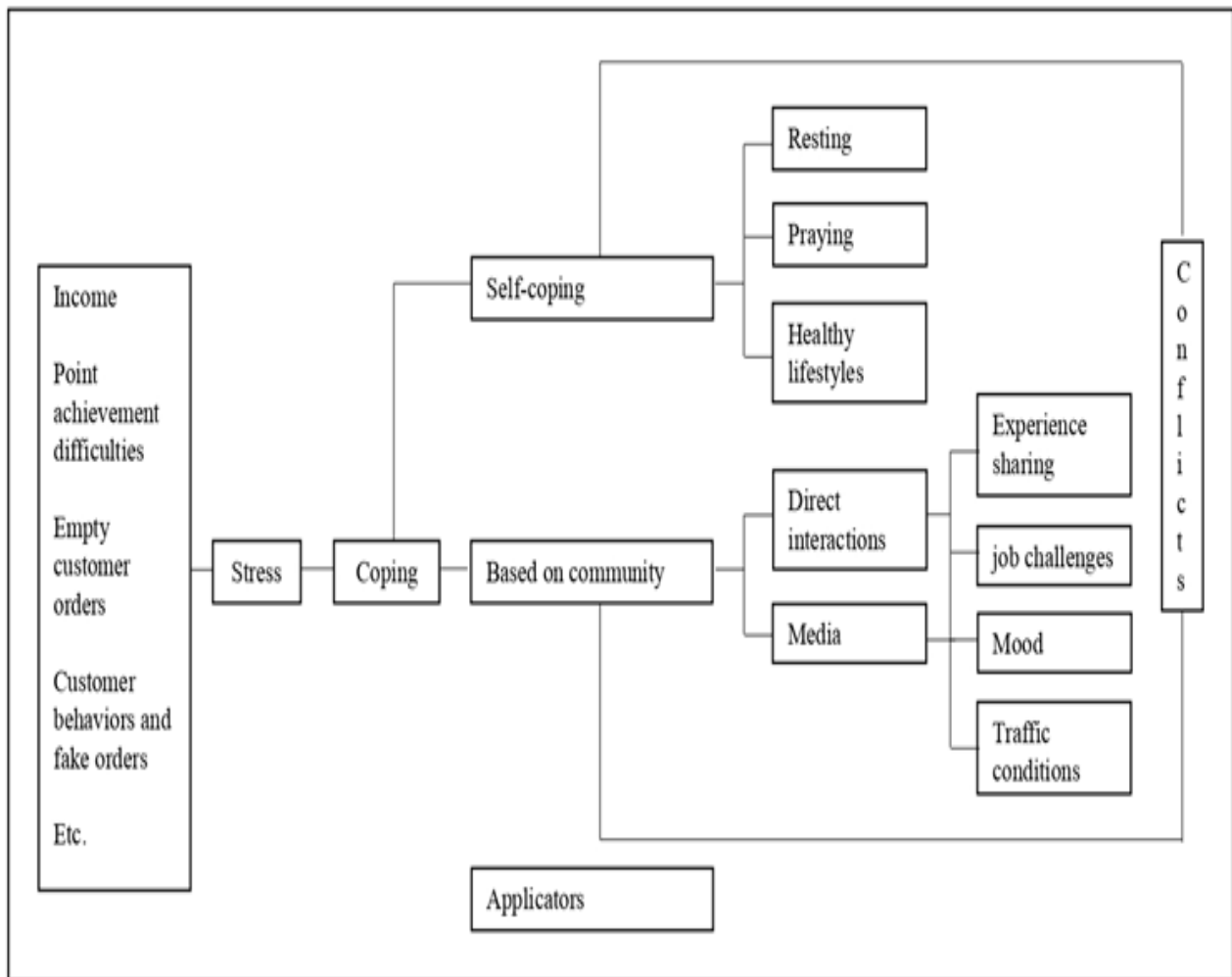
When facing obstacles on the road while fulfilling customer orders, drivers must resolve the issues on their own, as the working relationship is structured merely as a partnership. This often leads to stress, as failing to meet target points results in decreased income and fewer future

order opportunities.

Coping refers to the thoughts and behaviors activated to overcome, reduce, or tolerate stress from internal or external sources (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Lazarus & Launier, 1978). Individuals respond to stressors—events that cause imbalance and lead to stress—through both psychophysiological and behavioral aspects (Monroe, 2008; Wheaton et al., 2013). People generally exhibit stable coping styles (de Boer et al., 2017), which may be reactive—immediate responses to stress—or proactive, aimed at preventing or mitigating future stressors. In managing work-related stress, gig workers often do not expect support from management, instead relying on their own coping strategies, either individually or through community support. If I feel unwell, I will rest. (BH, Personal interview, November 03, 2022)

Drivers manage stress and maintain physical and mental well-being through self-directed efforts, such as getting adequate rest. Many drivers schedule regular breaks to relieve daily physical and mental strain caused by heavy workloads and inconsistent order volumes. During waiting times, they may stretch or have snacks instead of driving continuously. Staying hydrated and maintaining a healthy diet also supports stamina and general health during long shifts. In their spare time—especially evenings—drivers may engage in physical activity, exercise, or social interactions to maintain balance.

Coping strategies vary depending on



Source: Research Result, 2022

**Figure 1 Ride-Hailing Drivers' Stress Symptoms and Communication Patterns in Coping Style – Bandung**

individual characteristics (Bhagat et al., 1995; Field et al., 2013; Havlovic & Keenan, 1991). Some drivers find comfort in spiritual practices, such as giving alms or performing the five daily prayers. Expressing gratitude for their work and appreciating available support can help ease psychological strain. The persistent stress of gig work can be exhausting and may lead to depression, particularly for those who feel powerless within a system they cannot change. Recognizing the asymmetrical power embedded in platform algorithms, many drivers

instead focus on adapting—building positive interpersonal relationships and striving to satisfy customers (Gill, 2019; Pregoner et al., 2021).

Another way drivers manage stress is by joining communities, either through direct interaction or mediated communication. In face-to-face settings, drivers often share their experiences with one another to seek solutions to common challenges and offer work-related advice. In mediated contexts, community group chats serve as communication channels where

drivers report field conditions and receive motivation and peer support. Findings also reveal the absence of direct communication between platform companies and drivers. As a result, drivers do not receive institutional support when encountering obstacles on the job, highlighting both their low level of welfare and the lack of support from the applicators.

The motivation behind forming these communities is not primarily to improve customer relations. Instead, mutual-aid-based communities emerged in response to drivers' shared sense of abandonment and the absence of a support system. The formation of these communities is a proactive step—drivers creating their own social safety nets to address collective challenges and improve their well-being in precarious work conditions.

... We don't feel that there is any other force that can embrace us. That's why we formed this community—so we can support each other when we face difficulties. If we don't help each other, who else will care about the plight of ride-hailing drivers? (MW, Personal interview, November 03, 2022)

The mutual aid concept extends beyond work-related matters to other areas of life (Ford & Honan, 2019). In addition to collective efforts to meet financial needs, members also support one another during times of illness and engage in broader social activities, such as literacy programs or sharing job opportunities (Jarley, 2005). This form of mutual responsibility is egalitarian and grounded in active social participation, rather than driven solely by economic motives (Lynd, 2015).

The presence of community support in gig work allows drivers to slow down and work more effectively. To cope with work-related stress, drivers turn to their community to express their anxieties and explore possible solutions.

...When I experience problems at work, I contact the community because of closeness. (BH, Personal interview, November 03, 2022)

When drivers endure order cancellations, they frequently share their experiences in digital chat forums, where other members give words of encouragement and practical assistance. If drivers have problems at pick-up or drop-off sites, they often seek assistance via WhatsApp or Facebook groups, asking for instructions or guidance. In such instances, engaging community members is deemed more beneficial than contacting the applicator's customer service. This peer-to-peer support system is thought to be more effective at resolving work-related concerns and improving drivers' emotional well-being.

Ride-hailing drivers are especially vulnerable to emotional exhaustion—an continuing feeling of fatigue and emotional depletion caused by prolonged stress, which is frequently exacerbated by customer interactions (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2016; Shahid & Kundi, 2021). Drivers face a variety of customer-related issues on a regular basis, each with its own emotional cost. To compensate, many drivers spend time waiting for orders at coffee shops or base camps. These gatherings



reduce stress through casual discussion, shared experiences, and mutual support. Even when concrete solutions are not found, simply engaging in dialogue helps drivers feel heard and supported. Storytelling and informal exchanges with peers play an important role in reducing stress and strengthening their sense of solidarity.

This is reflected in the horizontal peer support among coworkers, which enhances self-confidence and psychological well-being (McClure & Moore, 2021; Schwartz & Sendor, 1999). High-quality relationships with peers are an effective means of reducing work-related stress. Workers feel more comfortable sharing personal concerns without fear or suspicion. Among drivers, this shared experience of facing similar problems eliminates social distance and fosters open interaction.

Mutual support provides strength and motivation, as drivers realize they are not alone. Community membership becomes part of their coping strategy, reinforcing the principle of equality through horizontal interaction. This form of interaction effectively relieves stress due to its egalitarian and symmetrical communication style, which enables open exchange of information and feedback (Beltrán, 1979). The informal language used in these interactions—whether online (James, 2014) or in person (McClure & Moore, 2021)—encourages a genuine exchange of thoughts and emotions. These interactions often occur spontaneously and are grounded in empathy

(Cronin, 2014; Elliott, 2009; Habermas, 1987; Petrič, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, the one-way communication between applicators and drivers forces individuals to handle workplace issues and crises independently, revealing a significant gap in accountability and support. Conflicts with customers—often unpredictable—can occur during service and negatively impact driver performance. Low customer ratings have an impact on system evaluations, which in turn impair a driver's capacity to accept future orders and earn money. One of the most urgent stressors for drivers is financial instability, which is frequently caused by restricted order availability and an opaque, ever-changing gamification system. App problems, dual or false orders, troublesome customer behavior, and falling performance ratings are all additional stressors. The connection between applicators and drivers is exploitative, as companies tend to prioritize point accumulation based on completed orders and client satisfaction. Customer ratings play a critical role in determining a driver's point achievement and their ability to secure future work.

Furthermore, applicators provide little to no support for drivers in the workplace, particularly when they face difficulties in handling customers. Capitalist labor relations—

manifested through asymmetrical and driver-unfavorable policies—further disadvantage drivers. This increases work-related stress, particularly when performance expectations are high yet welfare and workplace safety are not assured. Part-time drivers are frequently forced to deal with these challenges on their own, with little help from the platforms. Drivers use a variety of coping mechanisms to preserve emotional and psychological stability, including praying, exercising, and eating a healthy diet. Community membership provides an additional support system that enables drivers to help one another and find solutions together. In this context, drivers in the Indriver Bandung Bersatu (IBB) community engage in both online and offline interactions, build relationships, and collaboratively address shared issues. These interactions promote intersubjectivity—a shared understanding among members—allowing for an equitable exchange of experiences and mutual support. Facing common issues and collaborating to discover answers boosts drivers' enthusiasm and self-determination, allowing them to become more resilient in dealing with professional barriers. The mix of community support, spiritual activities, and healthy lifestyles improves drivers' ability to deal with work stress. Community membership improves their ability to manage work-related challenges, lowering stress levels.

The government should develop formal regulations controlling digital labor platforms to ensure legal protection for both applicators and gig workers. Furthermore, the establishment of

a direct communication channel between drivers and applicators, whether online or offline, would allow for two-way contact, allowing drivers to express concerns and share their experiences. Such forums could assist curb monopolistic tactics by applicators while also providing more legal and occupational protections for drivers. Future research on this topic could take a case study approach, involving several cases to gain a better knowledge of digital economic policies affecting ride-hailing drivers. This will allow for the incorporation of varied perspectives from not only drivers, but also applicators and government players, resulting in a more thorough understanding of policy creation and regulatory frameworks in the gig economy.

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