



Publicness Between State and Market : The Struggle of Female Ojol Drivers Amid Intersectional and Sustainable Vulnerability

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Abstract

The digitalization of the public transportation sector has opened opportunities for many citizens, including women, to become ride-hailing motorcycle taxi (ojol) drivers, working flexibly as partners of a company without fixed contracts. This participation allows women to enter the public sphere through employment. However, women's presence in the public sphere reveals multiple layers of precarity. Stemming from inadequate welfare and safety guarantees, exposure to harassment, and economic pressure under the partnership scheme for freelancers in the gig economy. This study focuses on the experiences and struggles of female ride-hailing motorcycle taxi drivers in the city of Yogyakarta as they face risks in the public sphere. It also seeks to understand the relationship between the state and corporations that shape their working conditions. This research also aims to answer two main questions. (1) How do female drivers confront multiple layers of precarity in both digital and physical publicness? (2) How are basic worker rights advocated by female ride-hailing drivers, and to what extent does this advocacy mitigate the vulnerabilities they face? These questions will be answered using qualitative methods, particularly through participatory observation and in-depth interviews. This study will contribute to the literature on women's precarity in the freelance gig economy by highlighting the inequities in protective guarantees and public rights that should be ensured by the state. Its findings are expected to yield policy recommendations to improve protection and justice for female ride-hailing drivers as vulnerable workers in the public sphere.

Keywords : public sphere; women; ride-hailing drivers; precarity; GIG economy

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed contemporary labor relations, particularly through the emergence of platform-based gig work. Internet-mediated employment has enabled flexible and decentralized labor arrangements, reshaping traditional employment structures worldwide (Koutsimpogiorgos et al. 2020; Alauddin et al. 2025; Dedema and Rosenbaum 2024; Kadolkar et al. 2025; Rofi'ah and Farez 2025). While the gig economy promises flexibility and new economic opportunities, it also produces new forms of labor precarity characterized by unstable income, lack of social protection, and weak bargaining power, particularly among workers in the Global South.

In Indonesia, digital ride-hailing platforms such as Gojek represent one of the most significant manifestations of platform-based labor expansion. Since its establishment in 2010, Gojek has developed into a multi-service platform offering transportation, logistics, financial services, and various on-demand services (Gojek 2025). This platform expansion has created new employment opportunities, including increased participation of women in transportation and digital informal labor sectors. Female ride-hailing drivers, previously marginalized in male-dominated transportation industries, have become increasingly visible actors within the gig economy. However, their participation is accompanied by multiple vulnerabilities, including unstable income, occupational risks, gender discrimination, and the persistent double burden of domestic and productive labor (Alauddin et al. 2025; Baca Calderón et al. 2025; Dedema and Rosenbaum 2024; Ridwan 2025).

These vulnerabilities are intensified by the structural nature of platform-based labor. Female ride-hailing drivers operate as independent partners rather than formal employees, excluding them from labor protections and social security systems. As a result, they face layered vulnerabilities that combine economic precarity, gender inequality, and digital labor exploitation (Izzati & Sesunan 2022). This condition reflects broader transformations in labor relations where flexibility becomes a mechanism for precarization, particularly for women workers in the informal sector.

The situation of female ride-hailing drivers also reflects a crisis of publicness in platform-based labor systems. Women drivers operate within public spaces that are simultaneously physical and digital, yet these spaces do not guarantee recognition, protection, or rights. Their experiences illustrate how labor in the gig economy is situated between market dominance and limited state intervention, placing women workers in structurally vulnerable

positions. This condition is particularly significant in Global South contexts, where informalization, gender inequality, and weak labor regulation intersect more intensely.

Existing studies have examined various dimensions of female ride-hailing drivers. Arofah and Alam (2019) explored symbolic resistance among female drivers in masculine work environments. Alifina (2021) highlighted discrimination and double burden experienced by female drivers in Surabaya. Larasati et al. (2021) examined gender inequality and violence within driver communities, while Sundari and Harianto (2023) emphasized economic motivations behind women's participation in platform labor. More recent research by Hisyam et al. (2025) analyzed misogynistic practices and resistance strategies among female drivers. While these studies provide important insights into gendered experiences, they largely focus on individual and socio-cultural aspects, with limited attention to structural relations between the state, market, and digital platforms.

This study addresses these gaps by examining female ride-hailing drivers through the combined lens of public sphere transformation and precariat theory. The public sphere, as conceptualized by Herry-Priyono (2010) and Marquand (2001), extends beyond physical space to include legal, symbolic, and structural dimensions shaped by power relations. Meanwhile, precariat theory highlights how platform-based workers experience insecurity, exploitation, and lack of social protection under flexible labor regimes (Bourdieu 1998; Standing 2011; Dyer-Witheford 2015; Zuboff 2019). By integrating these perspectives, this research conceptualizes female ride-hailing drivers as actors navigating intersectional vulnerability within both digital and physical public spheres.

Accordingly, this research addresses the following questions: 1) What forms of struggle do female ride-hailing drivers undertake in confronting intersectional vulnerabilities in digital and physical public spheres?; 2) How do female drivers negotiate their fundamental rights within platform-based labor systems?

This study contributes to the sociology of work, gender studies, and digital labor by providing a Global South perspective on platform-based labor precarity. It also contributes to emerging Southern sociological scholarship by highlighting how gendered labor vulnerability emerges from the intersection of state absence, market dominance, and platform capitalism. These insights are particularly relevant for developing more inclusive labor policies and gender-responsive protections in rapidly expanding gig economy contexts.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a qualitative method, utilizing participatory observation and in-depth interviews as the primary techniques of data collection. Methodologically, this research draws on the guidelines set forth by Joseph A. Maxwell (2013) in his work entitled *Qualitative Research Design : An Interactive Approach*. That volume emphasizes that methods in qualitative research are interrelated and share a common thread with the sections on purpose, research questions, conceptual framework, and validity. Maxwell explains in his book that within the qualitative approach, the researcher functions not merely as a data collector, but as the primary instrument of the research, one who is actively engaged in excavating social meaning and constructing understanding through direct relationships with participants in their natural environment. The use of participatory observation and in-depth interviews is therefore highly appropriate, as it enables the researcher to capture the subjective experiences of informants in a rich and contextual manner, and allows the researcher to attain a comprehensive understanding of the reality directly experienced by female Gojek drivers, particularly in confronting Intersectional Vulnerability within a Public Sphere that is frequently hostile toward women.

The researcher employed purposive sampling, whereby specific criteria were established in the selection of informants. The informants selected were female Gojek drivers who treat this profession as their primary occupation and operate within the Yogyakarta region. More specifically, the informant criteria consisted of senior female Gojek drivers who are married, and senior female Gojek drivers who are single parents. Data collection was conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was carried out directly in the field, with the researcher present and observing the daily activities of female Gojek drivers while they worked. This observation aimed to directly witness the struggles of female Gojek drivers that are not always verbally articulated, particularly in confronting risks and challenges within the Public Sphere. The data collection process was conducted in Yogyakarta over three days, commencing on Wednesday, 9 July 2025.

On the first day, the researcher searched for informants by traveling by motorcycle to several Gojek base points (*pangkalan*) around the city. However, as no female drivers matching the criteria could be found, the researcher attempted an alternative strategy by ordering a GoFood service and inquiring about acquaintances who were female Gojek drivers, or at least

obtaining relevant information. Although this attempt was also unsuccessful, the GoFood driver offered the suggestion to trace female driver communities through social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. On the second day, Thursday, 10 July 2025, the researcher continued the search for informants via social media. The researcher explored Gojek Yogyakarta community groups on Instagram and contacted several accounts identified as belonging to female drivers. Of the accounts contacted, three female Gojek drivers responded, and two of them agreed to be interviewed.

The subsequent data collection technique is the interview. In-depth interviewing serves as the follow-up technique employed to explore further the personal experiences of the informants. Through in-depth interviews, informants are enabled to convey their life stories in a more relaxed, reflective, and substantive manner. The purpose of these interviews is to develop a deeper understanding of the forms of vulnerability, the informants' survival strategies, and the processes of adaptation within a profession that is frequently regarded as a male domain. The first informant, anonymized under the initials IG, was contacted via Instagram direct message and subsequently directed to a WhatsApp conversation to agree upon an interview schedule. The interview was conducted at the location where the informant regularly waits for orders (*mangkal*), in the Sagan area, Caturtunggal, Depok, Sleman. The informant shared many stories about the struggle to survive under conditions of economic constraint, as well as her motivations for working as a driver.

After the interview concluded, IG provided information about a colleague who is also a female driver and meets the research criteria. The researcher subsequently contacted the second informant via the WhatsApp number provided by the first informant. The technique used to obtain the second informant is known as snowball sampling, whereby the first informant recommends the next informant whose profile matches the research criteria. The second informant, given the pseudonym DG, is a single parent who also cares for her ailing father. Consequently, when contacting this informant, communication had to be adjusted to fit the informant's working hours. The interview was conducted at a different location, though still within the same area. The second informant shared a life story that was deeply motivating and moving: from her reasons for becoming a Gojek driver to the challenges she faces every day as the sole provider for her family and caregiver to a sick parent.

Data collection continued through to the third day. On the third day, the researcher did not find any female Gojek drivers meeting the research criteria for interview. The researcher

therefore decided to conduct further observation on that day. The researcher also engaged in casual conversation (small talk) with male Gojek drivers who were waiting for orders along Jalan Sagan.

The final data collection technique is documentation. The forms of documentation produced include written field notes, audio recordings of informants' voices during interviews, and visual materials in the form of photographs and video to capture moments shared with informants and to record the aspirations that informants conveyed. Once data collection was deemed sufficient, the data gathered were subsequently processed for analysis. Data analysis in this research was carried out in a gradual and straightforward manner, yet the analysis was never separated from the data collection process; rather, the two proceeded in tandem. This is consistent with the approach described by Maxwell (2013). Data analysis drew upon audio recordings, field notes, photographs, and documented video materials. This documentation aimed to capture the details of informants' stories as well as the atmosphere of the interactions, which may not always be fully rendered in written field notes.

The documentation was processed in stages, beginning with the verbatim transcription of interview recordings. Once transcription was complete, the next step involved categorization, whereby sections of the interviews were grouped according to specific themes. Each segment of conversation falling within a particular category was then assigned a specific code (coding). This coding process assists the researcher in organizing data systematically, thereby facilitating the writing process in the results and discussion section. Through this approach, the researcher is able to directly connect narrative quotations with the overarching themes raised in the research, without losing the contextual thread of the informants' stories. As recommended by Maxwell, qualitative analysis must maintain validity by re-examining the researcher's assumptions and remaining faithful to the realities encountered in the field

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Female Drivers in the Public Sphere

Today, the presence of remarkable women as ride-hailing motorcycle taxi (ojol) drivers has created highly significant change within the arena of the Public Sphere in Indonesia. The change that has taken place is a transformation in gender representation within the Public Sphere of labor, a domain such as ride-hailing motorcycle taxi work that had previously been

dominated exclusively by men. The presence of women in the Public Sphere of labor has, however, brought several important shifts: the opening of access for women to spaces that were previously gender-biased, the transformation of the Public Sphere into an arena for the negotiation of identity, gender, and power relations, and the introduction of new dimensions into social dynamics, including the protection of female workers, the recognition of women's labor, and solidarity among women themselves.

The growing number of women who choose to work as ojol drivers does not signal an improvement in social welfare in Indonesia; rather, it opens new avenues of vulnerability, even as no reliable source to date has presented figures on the number of female Gojek drivers in Yogyakarta. The vulnerability confronted by female Gojek drivers constitutes a profoundly difficult condition, in which they work as informal workers without social security guarantees, and simultaneously as women in the Public Sphere that remains, to this day, permeated by stigma, discrimination, violence, gender bias, and harassment. Their work, moreover, is not solely a matter of economic mobility; it is also bound up with social stigma and a domestic burden that never disappears.

This research focuses on the Yogyakarta region, known as a city of students, culture, and tourism, which generates high levels of mobility including demand for digital transportation such as ride-hailing motorcycle taxi services (ojol). This very condition reveals its own distinct Public Sphere challenges. The research informant DG illustrates that she works not only to meet financial needs, but also serves as the primary caregiver for her elderly father. This demonstrates that female Gojek drivers frequently work in situations that demand they balance productive labor with reproductive labor.

“For instance, I am still taking care of my father. My father is 83 years old. My child is already married, has their own family, and we do not live together. So automatically, in that house it is just me and my father. Whether I like it or not, I am the one who has to keep meeting my father's needs.” (DG, personal communication, 10 July 2025)

This condition signifies the reality of female Gojek drivers living beneath a state of Intersectional and sustained vulnerability. This complex condition is not merely a matter of work and economics; it encompasses domestic concerns, the structure of digital labor, and the minimal protection afforded by both the state and the Gojek platform itself. It is therefore of critical importance to examine further the forms of Intersectional and sustained vulnerability that female Gojek drivers have endured throughout their working lives.

Intersectional Vulnerability Experienced by Female Gojek Drivers

Before delving into the forms of vulnerability experienced by female Gojek drivers, it is important to first understand who the remarkable women serving as subjects in this research are. The characteristics of the informants in this research provide an important social context for reading the dynamics of vulnerability and struggle they experience as drivers on the Gojek platform, and reflect diverse social backgrounds and work experiences.

The first informant, given the pseudonym DG, is a remarkable woman aged 49 years who resides in the City of Yogyakarta, Special Region of Yogyakarta. DG has been struggling as a Gojek driver since 2016. In her daily life, DG also bears full responsibility for caring for her ailing parent, who is 83 years of age.

The second informant, given the pseudonym IG, is a remarkable woman aged 49 years who is domiciled in Sleman Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, and has been working as a ride-hailing motorcycle taxi driver since late 2017, specifically in the month of November. IG's work as a Gojek driver constitutes a concrete economic contribution to her household, as she simultaneously struggles to meet daily needs alongside her husband, who also works in the same sector. The researcher conducted interviews with both informants, who provided a vivid and highly lucid account of how social conditions, age, experience, and even domestic burdens have together shaped the Intersectional and sustained vulnerability they have endured throughout their working lives in the Public Sphere of labor.

Several field findings indicate that the vulnerability experienced by female Gojek drivers is not singular in nature, but rather Intersectional and sustained. This clearly reveals a combination of economic pressure, domestic burdens, road safety risks, gender bias, and minimal protection from both the state and the Gojek platform itself. One of the most conspicuous forms of vulnerability is economic vulnerability. Informant IG feels compelled to struggle by working as a female Gojek driver, as she perceives that the income from her husband, who also works as a driver, is insufficient to meet their household needs.

"I also want to have additional income, you know, so that I can earn for myself and help my husband. Forgive me for saying this, but if it only comes from one source, from my husband alone, forgive me, I think it is not enough for my children. They are already grown, already in school, it is not enough. That is my view, though I cannot speak for others. There may be those who are fine with just staying home, relying on their

husbands. But for me, I will always contribute." (IG, personal communication, 10 July 2025)

Even under normal conditions, IG states that her income is often only sufficient for day-to-day survival, leaving her no room to save.

"If it is enough, well, it is enough in a sense. Meaning, enough but we cannot save anything. It is just enough and then it is gone, you know. We earn fifty thousand, we spend fifty thousand for tomorrow's cooking. Then we look for more again, that is how it is for me. Just to get by. For the children's schooling, it is all used up." (IG, personal communication, 10 July 2025)

Beyond the vulnerability arising from economic pressure, the next dimension of vulnerability is the domestic burden, which constitutes an equally powerful force in shaping the work reality of female Gojek drivers. The domestic burden experienced by DG, for instance, extends beyond earning a livelihood for her family; she also bears the responsibility of caring for her elderly and ailing father. DG explains that these domestic responsibilities significantly affect the flexibility of her working hours.

"Now my father is already, a bit sickly. His leg, he once fell. So his spine, it broke. The spinal fracture spread to his left leg. So when he walks now, he drags it a little. Perhaps it is also an age factor, because at 83, everything has declined. All his activities have declined. So now I cannot. In the past I was active, active in all the communities, whether it was Srikandi, we still have the independent group, the open group, the Jensut group. All those activities, I would always join. I happened to still be an committee member. So I could still run around freely. But now there is Father. I have to watch my working hours. When it is time for me to come home, it cannot be disturbed at all." (DG, personal communication, 10 July 2025)

This condition causes DG to feel exhausted as a single parent who must manage domestic affairs while simultaneously bearing the burden of being the family's primary breadwinner.

"So in truth, we are already exhausted from managing household affairs. But we still have to think about working as well." (DG, personal communication, 10 July 2025)

Further still, physical vulnerability arising from occupational safety on the road also emerges from a Public Sphere of labor that is insufficiently safe and laden with risk, particularly for female Gojek drivers. IG conveyed that she deliberately restricts her working hours so as not to operate at night, out of concern for the risks present on the road, especially as a woman.

"I have already set limits on my working hours, you know, for instance at night, I avoid it, night is dangerous for crime, sexual crime, any kind of crime, it is dangerous." (IG, personal communication, 10 July 2025).

This is further reinforced by narrative accounts from both informants describing experiences of symbolic violence in the form of verbal harassment and false accusations by customers, which compound the psychological burden of both informants as informal workers who possess no bargaining power before the system. DG recounts that she was once falsely accused by a customer to the point of nearly being blacklisted by the system.

"You have committed an act of violence against a customer... when in fact that was a Google photo of a diabetic person's leg." (DG, personal communication, 10 July 2025)

The algorithmic system of Gojek, which determines performance, order distribution, and incentives, and whose logic female Gojek drivers themselves do not understand, constitutes a further dimension of vulnerability, as it does not take into account the social realities confronted by female drivers (Benlian et al., 2022; Dedema & Rosenbaum, 2024; Kadolkar et al., 2025). This vulnerability arises from the dominance of technology corporations through what Zuboff (2019) terms "*accumulation by digital dispossession*." This system also places women at a disadvantage, as they are more easily marginalized within the labor process and face limited access to technology and information, thereby producing a digital divide that is further compounded by inequalities in technological access and digital literacy. This is consistent with IG's experience of technological and digital literacy limitations, which compelled her to spend an entire year learning to become accustomed to the work processes of ride-hailing motorcycle taxi services that rely on Google Maps.

All of these forms of Intersectional and sustained vulnerability demonstrate that working as a female Gojek driver means operating beneath a gig economy structure that is unjust and gender-biased. These women constitute a concrete representation of the Precariat class described by Guy Standing (2011) as a group of workers living in conditions of *insecurity, lack of social protection, no health insurance, dangerous and hazardous working*

environments, and psycho-social deprivation. They also confront what Bourdieu (1998) terms “*flexploitation*”: work flexibility that in practice opens the door to unrestrained exploitation.

Solidarity, Survival Strategies, and the Struggle for Rights

Female Gojek drivers confront Intersectional and sustained vulnerability, ranging from unstable income and a burdensome 20% platform commission, to risks of harassment on the road and minimal access to social security guarantees. This vulnerability is not merely an individual matter; it is structural. With the state absent in its role as protector and the platform dominant through a partnership scheme that is flexible yet fragile, their position represents the Precariat class. This section of the research addresses the second research question concerning the efforts of female Gojek drivers in fighting for their fundamental rights, as well as the impact of those efforts on the vulnerabilities they face.

The interview findings indicate that, amid conditions of vulnerability, female drivers construct solidarity and alternative protection mechanisms through groups such as KGMP and the Srikandi Community. This finding is consistent with the research of Larasati et al. (2021) on the Grab Queen community in Malang, which functions as a space for sharing information and mutual support. DG affirms the importance of core networks as a form of field-level protection:

"It is good to have solidarity, like having certain groups. For us, there is perhaps a core group. So if there is a problem in the field, or if there is an accident in the field, that is important, right? Important information can be shared in the core group." (DG, personal communication, 10 July 2025)

Through such networks, community members can immediately learn if a fellow driver has encountered misfortune, such as a road accident, or receive information about zones prone to crime and harassment (Sun et al. 2023; Yao et al. 2021). IG affirms that routine monitoring and care among drivers, however simple it may appear, is of critical importance as a form of informal social protection. Within the context of a partnership work arrangement that provides minimal safety guarantees, the first support received when an accident occurs almost invariably comes from fellow drivers, not from the company or formal authorities. This is affirmed by DG, who states:

"When there is an accident, number one is always friends. The solidarity of friends comes first... That is why there is no harm in joining a group... at least one group. There are those who do

not want to join... when an accident happens, those who are not in the group, we would not know. They also do not call. 'I just had an accident, Sis.' Well, why did you not call? 'I was afraid of being a burden.' She thought that herself. It is not a burden, because she is not in the group either, right. At the very least we take turns, because that is life, we need each other. Today we help someone, who knows tomorrow someone will help us." (DG, personal communication, 10 July 2025)

This statement affirms three forms of rights struggle. First, community solidarity functions as emergency protection on the road. Second, the right to assistance frequently depends on membership in a social group; drivers who are not affiliated risk falling silently without support, rendering their vulnerability invisible rather than structural. Third, the norm of reciprocity enables women to assert the right to receive help without being regarded as a burden. From the perspective of the Public Sphere (Herry-Priyono; Lefebvre), these communities create a new social space as a site for obtaining protection, risk information, and emotional support. This solidarity forms an "alternative Public Sphere" in which female drivers can share their grievances, devise collective strategies, and protect one another. This demonstrates that their struggle is active, not passive, in reclaiming the Public Sphere.

Occupational safety is a fundamental right that should be guaranteed by both the state and corporations. Yet for female Gojek drivers, this guarantee is absent in any systemic form, compelling them to construct independent strategies to minimize the risks of gender-based violence.

"I have already set limits on my working hours... for instance at night, I avoid it. Night is dangerous for crime, sexual crime, any kind of crime, it is dangerous." (IG, personal communication, 10 July 2025).

This self-imposed restriction on working hours constitutes a form of risk negotiation, albeit one that carries a direct cost to potential income from nighttime orders. A similar practice is carried out by DG. Beyond occupational safety, the fundamental rights of workers also encompass access to social protection and emergency assistance. However, field findings indicate that the platform's formal procedures frequently constitute a barrier, as experienced by DG when she assisted a fellow driver who had been involved in an accident.

"It so happened that yesterday there was also a Srikandi member who had an accident, and the one who backed her up was also someone else entirely. The funny thing is, it

should have been like Gojek stepping in, like what happened before. But the difficulty is, say for instance from Gojek's side, say I am helping someone and I need an ambulance from Gojek, they require a photo of the ID card. Well if the person is unconscious, how are we supposed to ask them to photograph their ID? That takes too long, you know. But if it is just us fellow drivers, well, we just get on with it." (DG, personal communication, 10 July 2025)

This account reveals that access to platform assistance is frequently obstructed by digital bureaucracy that prioritizes data validation over rapid response. As a consequence, the right to safety is left in a precarious position, rendering the community the primary pillar of support. Solidarity through WhatsApp groups and the Srikandi community serves as an "alternative Public Sphere" for mutual support and the preservation of mental wellbeing among fellow drivers. Yet this solidarity only alleviates daily vulnerability without resolving its root causes, such as high platform commissions, uncertain income, and the absence of social security guarantees. Herry-Priyono's theory of the Public Sphere affirms that the Public Sphere is an arena of conflict; female Gojek drivers struggle to reclaim this space from the dominance of both the state and the market. The following section will therefore reflect on the role of these two principal actors in creating dignified work.

A Space for Reflection: The State, the Market, and the Future of Dignified Work

The preceding section has elaborated on the forms of struggle undertaken by female Gojek drivers and the solidarity constructed by Gojek drivers within the Public Sphere. In this section, the researcher endeavors to further advance a space for reflection on the structural system that produces this vulnerability, namely the state and the market. The state, which ought to serve as the protector of citizens' rights, as stated in the Preamble to the Constitution, should be the party responsible for public affairs and for the fulfillment of citizens' rights, chief among them welfare. The subsequent reflection is directed at the market as the primary economic actor that governs all labor relations through the form of digital platforms, yet which frequently absents itself or remains negligent in guaranteeing the fundamental rights of its partners, particularly female Gojek drivers (Izzati & Sesunan 2022; Sun et al. 2023).

These two reflections do not arise arbitrarily, nor do they constitute empty assertions; they emerge from realities encountered in the field that have produced adverse consequences for the conditions of citizens and partners or workers, particularly female Gojek drivers. These adverse conditions have led the informants in this research to articulate reflections on the crisis

of publicness that is currently unfolding, reflections that are important to voice and to hear. These reflections are also accompanied by aspirations from both informants, expressed with the hope that they may be heard and realized.

Informant DG affirms the necessity of special attention from both Gojek and the government for partners who are single parents, as they carry a greater domestic burden and face more constrained work flexibility. She expresses hope for an affirmative scheme such as order priority or cash assistance to ease economic pressure.

"In truth, we are already exhausted from managing household affairs. But we still have to think about working as well... what if, for instance, Gojek were to provide some assistance or pay more attention to single parents. Yes, and the same goes for the government too." (DG, personal communication, 10 July 2025).

Meanwhile, IG proposes that Gojek adopt a system similar to Grab, which she considers safer for female drivers in terms of order distribution. IG also emphasizes the importance of mental health services for drivers, particularly women who are vulnerable to harassment on the road.

"It would be nice, you know, if there were something like that. So what would it be? Like a place to pour out your feelings... Because usually, you know. In the past the only thing discussed was how we experience sexual harassment." (IG, personal communication, 10 July 2025)

Sharp criticism is then directed at the state, particularly concerning labor regulation and social security guarantees for female Gojek drivers. Both informants state that they possess BPJS-TK, yet when cash assistance became available, they and other workers holding BPJS-TK were unable to access the disbursement because their status is not that of a fixed-wage recipient. Their status as partners renders them excluded from formal social protection schemes, in contrast to courier workers at logistics companies such as Lazada or J&T, who receive fixed allowances.

"Even though I have BPJS-TK, I did not receive the assistance... They are like Lazada, they have a company backing them. But we do not." (DG, personal communication, 10 July 2025).

The only assistance ever received came from a THR program disbursed by the government, and even then, only once in their entire working lives as partners.

"For all this time, never, not once. That was the only time I ever received THR. I received 450,000 rupiah." (DG, personal communication, 10 July 2025)

This Intersectional and sustained vulnerability is further aggravated by the minimal governmental control exercised over Gojek as a platform operator (aplikator). The absence of robust government control within the current system allows Gojek to freely set commission rates, determine fares, and operate its algorithms without intervention. This situation causes considerable unease among the informants, who also lament that the demonstrations staged by ride-hailing motorcycle taxi drivers have received neither serious attention nor meaningful response from the government.

"So the hope is precisely that the government should also step in and help. But for me, well, that is just a hope. But it feels like, that is not going to happen. Sometimes, well, if we get called in, good, if not, then so be it, that is how it is now. Not very helpful. So the platform operators are still free to do as they please. They set the price rates. Yes, whatever they like, that is how it is. So the government is not able to put pressure on PT Gojek." (IG, personal communication, 10 July 2025)

This condition proves that the state has yet to be capable of serving as a protector of the rights of platform-based informal workers such as Gojek drivers, particularly women. The government is regarded as no more than an extremely passive observer in digital labor conflicts, without genuine alignment with vulnerable groups such as female Gojek drivers. The government's lack of solidarity with vulnerable groups generates both unease and aspiration among the informants, who call for the government to intervene and to act more firmly in regulating and pressuring platform operators so they cannot act with impunity. What the informants convey constitutes a voice of critical importance.

"Do not be like that. Your partners here, pay attention to them, do not take too much of a cut. That is what I mean. Do not take too much profit. Those are your partners, take care of them! But from PT Gojek there should also be advocacy." (DG, personal communication, 10 July 2025).

IG conveys a profound hope that her child will have a better future and will not follow in her footsteps to become a ride-hailing motorcycle taxi driver. This reflects an awareness that work as an ojol driver holds no promise without clear structural protection.

"So, imagine if my whole family were all ojek drivers. I wanted my child to join the military, please, do not let everyone become online ojek drivers. 'I do not want to.' Well then, they became an online ojek driver, you know. Can you imagine, the whole family being ojek drivers, like that. Yeah." (IG, personal communication, 10 July 2025).

The reflections and aspirations of both informants demonstrate that being a female Gojek driver is not merely an act of survival, but part of a long struggle to obtain recognition as citizens, social justice, and dignified work amid a labor system that is biased and discriminatory. The experiences of DG and IG prove that, even within structural constraints, women are capable of constructing spaces of collective struggle through solidarity and negotiation. Yet without fundamental change from both the state and the platform as structural actors, this struggle will only continue to revolve within the same circle of inequality. The following section will draw together the threads of all these findings as a closing to the discussion

Contribution to Southern Sociological Perspectives

This study contributes to Southern sociological perspectives by demonstrating how platform-based labor precarity is experienced within Global South contexts. While gig economy literature is largely dominated by Global North perspectives, this research shows that digital labor in Indonesia is embedded within informal economies characterized by unstable income, weak labor regulation, and limited social protection.

The findings also reveal that gendered vulnerability in the Global South is shaped by intersectional pressures, including economic precarity, domestic responsibilities, and public safety risks. Unlike Global North contexts where gig work often functions as supplemental income, female Gojek drivers rely on platform labor as a primary survival strategy, reflecting the structural realities of informal labor in the Global South. Furthermore, this research highlights the emergence of informal solidarity networks, such as Srikandi and driver communities, as alternative social protection systems. These grassroots networks function as

social infrastructure that provides emergency support, emotional solidarity, and risk-sharing mechanisms when both state and market institutions fail to offer adequate protection.

Finally, this study demonstrates that platform labor in the Global South produces hybrid public spheres that combine digital governance, urban mobility, and community-based resilience. Female Gojek drivers therefore represent a new form of digital precariat navigating intersecting inequalities within platform capitalism. These findings contribute to Southern sociological scholarship by emphasizing how workers in the Global South actively construct survival strategies and collective resistance within precarious digital labor systems.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that the presence of female Gojek drivers in Yogyakarta represents a significant transformation within the Public Sphere, while simultaneously revealing forms of intersectional and sustained vulnerability. Women enter the gig economy not as a matter of preference, but due to limited employment alternatives, economic pressure, and restricted access to formal labor markets. Their participation in platform-based labor is further shaped by gendered social expectations that position women as primary caregivers responsible for domestic labor. As illustrated by the informants in this study, female drivers must simultaneously manage productive labor, domestic responsibilities, and caregiving obligations, which intensifies their vulnerability within the gig economy structure.

Despite their growing presence in platform-based labor, female drivers operate without adequate recognition or protection. They face unstable income, platform commissions reaching up to 20 percent, risks of harassment, and limited access to social protection. These conditions reflect processes of precarization, where workers live under permanent uncertainty without structural guarantees. The absence of state protection, combined with market dominance through platform governance, places female drivers in a structurally vulnerable position between the state and the market. In response, female drivers construct alternative strategies through solidarity networks such as Srikandi and KGMP, which function as alternative public spheres providing mutual protection, emotional support, and risk-sharing mechanisms.

This study contributes to sociological scholarship by demonstrating that platform-based gig work in the Global South generates distinct forms of gendered precarity. Unlike narratives of flexibility often associated with gig work in the Global North, platform labor in Indonesia emerges as a survival strategy shaped by informal labor structures, weak social protection, and

persistent gender inequality. Female drivers therefore represent a new form of digital precariat, navigating hybrid public spaces that combine physical mobility, digital governance, and community-based solidarity.

Furthermore, this research contributes to Southern sociological perspectives by highlighting how women workers in Global South contexts actively construct alternative protection systems when both state and market institutions fail to provide adequate support. The emergence of grassroots solidarity networks demonstrates that community-based resilience plays a crucial role in sustaining vulnerable workers. This finding reinforces the importance of Southern sociological approaches that foreground lived experiences, informal institutions, and community-driven responses to structural inequality.

The findings of this study also carry important policy implications. First, the government needs to develop regulatory frameworks that recognize platform-based workers and guarantee their fundamental rights, including social protection and occupational safety. Second, platform operators such as Gojek should implement gender-responsive policies, including female-priority safety features, improved emergency response systems, and accessible mental health support services. These interventions are necessary to ensure that flexibility in gig work does not translate into structural vulnerability.

This study is not without limitations. The research focuses on female Gojek drivers in Yogyakarta, which may not fully capture the diversity of experiences across different regions and platforms. Future research may expand the geographic scope, include multiple platform companies, and employ mixed-method approaches to strengthen empirical findings. Further studies may also explore comparative analyses between Global South contexts to deepen understanding of platform-based labor and gendered vulnerability.

Ultimately, this research demonstrates that the struggle of female ride-hailing drivers extends beyond economic survival. Their experiences reflect broader issues of citizenship, recognition, and social justice within emerging digital labor systems. Female Gojek drivers represent a new working class navigating the intersection of gender inequality, informal labor, and platform capitalism. Their presence in the Public Sphere therefore constitutes not only a transformation of labor relations, but also an ongoing struggle to reclaim dignity, recognition, and rights within the evolving landscape of digital work.

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