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Resilience of Online Motorcycle Taxi Drivers in Bekasi City: Workload, Compensation, and Adaptation Strategies during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Hasanuddin^{1*}, Djuni Thamrin², Rosalina³

¹Universitas Bhayangkara Jakarta Raya, Jakarta, Indonesia, hasanuddin@dsn.ubharajaya.ac.id

²Universitas Bhayangkara Jakarta Raya, Jakarta, Indonesia, djuni.thamrin@dsn.ubharajaya.ac.id

³Universitas Bhayangkara Jakarta Raya, Jakarta, Indonesia, rosalina.siagian@dsn.ubharajaya.ac.id

*Corresponding Author: hasanuddin@dsn.ubharajaya.ac.id

Abstract :

This study aims to analyze the resilience of online motorcycle taxi drivers in Bekasi City during the COVID-19 pandemic by highlighting workload, compensation systems, and adaptation strategies. The research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data was obtained thru in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation, and then analyzed using the Miles & Huberman model. The findings indicate that the pandemic intensified work; many drivers had to stay online for 18–24 hours per day to maintain their income. Algorithm-based compensation and incentives create uncertainty, with earnings often falling below the regional minimum wage. Adaptation strategies such as extending working hours, multi-homing, diversifying income, and community solidarity are short-term and do not address structural issues. The limitations of the study lie in its single-location focus and qualitative approach, which limit generalizability. Practically, these results confirm the importance of more protective labor regulations, algorithmic transparency, and social support for platform workers. The original value of this research lies in providing an empirical overview of the resilience dynamics of online motorcycle taxi drivers in

metropolitan buffer zones, while also opening up space for discussion on labor policy reform in the gig economy.

Keywords: *Resilience, Online Motorcycle Taxi, Gig Economy, Compensation, Adaptation Strategies, Bekasi*

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has drastically altered the global economic landscape and the structure of the labor market. One of the most visible impacts is on the development of the platform-based economy (gig economy), which in Indonesia is reflected primarily in the online transportation sector. This application-based business model employs hundreds of thousands to millions of people, particularly online motorcycle taxi drivers who work thru platforms like Gojek and Grab. While the rapid expansion of this business model does open up new income opportunities for the public, it also puts workers in a vulnerable position due to weak labor protections. International reports and research confirm that despite the rapid increase in the number of jobs, social protection remains minimal, leaving workers facing risks ranging from income decline and exposure to infection to loss of incentives during the pandemic waves (Hussein, 2023).

In the Indonesian context, this vulnerability is a significant issue considering that many urban workers are heavily reliant on ride-hailing and delivery platforms as their primary source of income. Research on driver experiences indicates that the relationship structure between platform companies and driver partners is intentionally ambiguous, using the term "partner" instead of "employee." This status ambiguity has serious implications: basic rights such as sick leave, compensation when unable to work, and access to social security become unclear. As a result, during the pandemic, drivers were often forced to continue working despite high health risks in order to maintain their daily income (Fauziyah, 2024).

This condition is exacerbated by highly fluctuating income dynamics. Several studies in Indonesia show that during the implementation of the Community Activity Restrictions (PPKM), the daily income of drivers decreased drastically as demand for services declined. Heavy reliance on platform incentive schemes exacerbates the situation because incentives that typically support earnings are often reduced or altered following the company's business strategy. Although some platforms briefly offered assistance or insurance products, these were limited and unable to offset the economic losses caused by the decline in order volume (Kurniawan & Marhaeni, 2023).

Specific research in Bekasi even found that many full-time drivers earned below the Regional Minimum Wage (UMR), particularly during the initial and peak phases of large-scale social restrictions. A comparative study of income between Gojek and Grab drivers and the Bekasi UMR confirmed the structural vulnerability faced by platform workers: the results-based system makes income highly dependent on fluctuations in demand and incentive policies, making it easy to fall below the living wage standard (Bukhari & Ramadhan, 2020). This finding indicates that despite the platform's claim of offering flexibility, the reality is significant economic uncertainty.

Seeing this, there are two analytical approaches to understanding the driver's situation. First, from a non-standard employment perspective, platform-based work tends to be temporary and contractual, with incentives and algorithms dictating the workflow. As a result, drivers have very limited control over their working conditions and income levels. Second, from a socio-economic adaptation strategy perspective, drivers respond to pressure by extending their working hours, joining more than one platform, or seeking additional sources of income. Research (Rachmawati et al., 2021) shows that this adaptive strategy reflects the flexibility and local wisdom of gig workers, but it is reactive and only solves short-term problems, without addressing the more fundamental structural vulnerabilities.

Beside the economic aspect, the impact on health cannot be ignored either. For many drivers, the pandemic created a dilemma: continue working for daily income or stop to reduce health risks. Because there is no guaranty of income if they are absent from work, many reports indicate that drivers continue to accept orders despite the high risk of infection. The platform's efforts to provide protective equipment, vaccination access, or healthcare assistance only reach a small fraction of drivers and are unable to replace lost incentives or reduced order volume (Putri et al., 2023). Thus, economic pressure intertwines with health risks, deepening the double vulnerability for drivers.

Furthermore, this vulnerability is also influenced by the platform's business model, which focuses on cost efficiency and workforce flexibility. By classifying drivers as independent contractors, the platform can implement algorithms that regulate work patterns thru bonus and penalty schemes. During the pandemic, policy changes such as stricter bonus requirements, changes in order distribution, and reduced incentives forced drivers to increase their working hours to maintain their income. As a result, there was an intensification of work, increasing both the physical and psychological burden on drivers. This phenomenon has been documented in empirical research across various major cities in Indonesia and is often linked to issues of distributive justice within platform compensation mechanisms (Fauziyah, 2024).

This condition raises important debates in the realm of public policy. The main question is whether conventional labor regulations are sufficient to protect app-based workers, or whether a new policy framework is needed that is more suitable for the characteristics of the gig economy. A number of proposals have been put forward, ranging from recognizing the basic rights of platform workers such as social security, minimum hourly wage standards, and occupational accident protection, to public-private collaboration models that provide affordable protection. Recent studies emphasize that policy interventions need to be directed toward three main areas: (1) clarifying and balancing compensation and incentive schemes, (2) expanding access to inclusive social protection programs, and (3) enhancing drivers' capacity thru digital literacy and skills diversification. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic not only exposed structural vulnerabilities in platform-based work but also opened up space to discuss labor policy reforms in Indonesia. The experience of online motorcycle taxi drivers in Bekasi as a local case study provides a real picture of the challenges to welfare and occupational health in the gig economy. At the same time, this case highlights the urgency of evidence-based policies to create fairer, more protective, and

sustainable platform governance for workers in the digital age (Rivandra Royono, Valentina Brailovskaya, Terry Muthahhari, Jack Thunde, 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The phenomenon of online motorcycle driver resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be separated from the rapidly developing gig economy dynamics in Indonesia. The platform-based economy presents both opportunities and vulnerabilities. On the one hand, digital business models open up new and flexible job opportunities; however, on the other hand, the ambiguous employment status as a "partner" raises issues of social protection and income uncertainty (De Stefano, 2019; Fauziyah, 2024). This ambiguity in the employment relationship weakens the drivers' bargaining position, especially in obtaining basic rights such as social security and compensation when they are not working.

In the context of the pandemic, this pressure is becoming increasingly real. International reports indicate that platform workers in many countries are losing incentives, facing income fluctuations, and experiencing excessive workloads due to declining demand (Hussein, 2023; ILO, 2021). This condition aligns with findings in Indonesia, where incentives that typically support income are being cut or changed to align with platform business strategies (Kurniawan & Marhaeni, 2023). Local research also confirms that the earnings of many online motorcycle taxi drivers in Bekasi fall below the Regional Minimum Wage (UMR), highlighting structural vulnerabilities in the algorithm-based compensation system (Bukhari & Ramadhan, 2020).

Beside the financial aspect, the drivers' workload has increased sharply. Many were forced to extend their working hours to 18–24 hours a day to cover the decline in orders, which had implications for physical fatigue, psychological stress, and an increased risk of accidents (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2023). This aligns with global findings that order distribution algorithms create invisible work pressure because drivers feel constantly monitored by customer rating and review systems (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020; Wood et al., 2019). Thus, the pandemic intensified the phenomenon of work intensification while also highlighting the dual health risks for drivers.

In response to these conditions, drivers developed various adaptation strategies. Research shows that they extend working hours, engage in multi-homing (joining more than one platform), seek alternative sources of income, and leverage community solidarity (Putri et al., 2023; Rachmawati et al., 2021). Community-based strategies are an important social capital that allows drivers to survive amidst uncertainty (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020). However, this strategy is generally short-term and does not address the root of the structural problems, namely inequality in labor relations and the lack of social protection (Apouey et al., 2020).

Overall, the existing literature suggests that the resilience of online motorcycle taxi drivers reflects a survival response rather than a long-term solution. This condition underscores the urgency of new labor policies capable of addressing the challenges of the gig economy. Interventions are needed to clarify compensation schemes, expand access to social protection, and create transparency in work distribution algorithms (ILO, 2021; Rivandra Royono, Valentina Brailovskaya, Terry Muthahhari, Jack Thunde, 2025). Thus, the resilience demonstrated by

drivers is not only interpreted as individual fighting spirit, but also as an indicator of the need for structural reform in platform-based work governance.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, as the research focus is directed toward a deep understanding of the experiences of online motorcycle taxi drivers in Bekasi City in dealing with workload, compensation, and adaptation strategies. The qualitative approach allows researchers to explore the subjective meanings and strategies used by drivers within a dynamic socio-economic context (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The research location is in Bekasi City, one of Jakarta's satellite cities with a high level of online transportation activity. The study participants were selected using purposive sampling, which involves choosing respondents who meet specific criteria, such as active drivers who have worked for at least one year and have been affected by the pandemic. Purposive sampling is often used in qualitative research to obtain relevant and experienced informants (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Data collection was conducted thru in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation. In-depth interviews were used to explore the experiences, perceptions, and adaptation strategies of drivers (Kallio et al., 2016). Data analysis was conducted using the model (Miles & Huberman, 1992) which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. This technique is considered suitable in qualitative research for organizing complex data into meaningful findings. Data validity is strengthened thru source triangulation by comparing information from various informant categories (Carter, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study confirm that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought significant changes to the work patterns, compensation systems, and adaptation strategies employed by online motorcycle taxi drivers in Bekasi City. The findings not only reflect local phenomena but also align with global trends experienced by gig economy workers. In the context of modern employment, drivers are placed in an ambiguous position: they are not full employees, but they are also not fully independent, which limits their access to social security, legal protection, and standard labor compensation (De Stefano, 2019).

The context of Bekasi City reinforces this condition. As a satellite city of metropolitan Jakarta, it represents the complexity of the urban labor market, which is highly dependent on the digital economy and platforms. The high mobility needs of the public, coupled with the growth in online service consumption, make online motorcycle taxis a vital component of urban transportation and logistics distribution. However, the pandemic reduced passenger transportation demand due to large-scale social restrictions (PSBB/PPKM), leading to a drastic decline in driver income.

In a crisis situation, the workload doesn't decrease; it tends to increase because drivers have to extend their working hours to meet minimum targets in order to earn a decent income. Meanwhile, the compensation that should be a form of recognition for hard work is fluctuating and decreasing, especially in the incentive scheme. This condition forces drivers to develop

survival strategies, both individually, such as long working hours and job diversification, and collectively, by leveraging community support.

Overall, the results of this study found that platform-based work relationships are highly vulnerable to external shocks. Thus, this discussion will highlight three main aspects: workload, compensation, and drivers' adaptation strategies, linking them to theory, previous studies, and policy implications.

Based on interviews and observations, online motorcycle taxi drivers in Bekasi City on average faced a heavier workload during the pandemic. The decrease in orders forced them to stay online longer, with some even keeping the app active for 18-24 hours a day. This indicates the practice of work intensification, where workers increase their working hours to compensate for declining productivity or income. This workload is not only physical (driving duration, accident risk, fatigue), but also psychological. Drivers are facing pressure because incentive targets are not adjusted to pandemic conditions, leading to anxiety, income uncertainty, and stress due to high competition with fellow drivers.

The phenomenon in Bekasi aligns with global research on platform workers. In the Philippines and Vietnam, ride-hailing drivers also reported longer working hours with drastically reduced earnings during the pandemic (ILO, 2021). Furthermore, research by (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020) in Europe states that order distribution algorithms create "invisible work pressure" because drivers feel constantly monitored by customer rating systems and app ratings. This is identical to the experience of drivers in Bekasi, who stated that the app's performance determines their chances of getting orders, thus increasing psychosocial pressure.

The physical and mental health of online motorcycle taxi drivers is affected by excessive workload. There is a significant relationship between the symptoms of long-term fatigue experienced by online drivers and long working hours. Additionally, fatigue reduces concentration, which increases the risk of traffic accidents. From a psychological perspective, this condition can lead to work stress and work fatigue, which ultimately results in poorer service quality (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2023). Not only that, the COVID-19 pandemic has implications for increased working hours and significant psychosocial pressure among online motorcycle taxi drivers in Bekasi City. This condition poses risks to occupational health, necessitating policy-based intervention steps and platform management strengthening to protect worker well-being.

Additionally, the research findings indicate that the compensation system for online motorcycle taxi drivers in Bekasi City depends on the number of orders. Earnings are calculated per trip, or per journey, in a system known as a piece-rate model. If drivers meet certain targets, there are weekly and daily incentive programs. However, many drivers experienced a drastic decrease in the amount of incentives they received during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Drivers with low account levels, such as basic, often did not receive additional incentives because they relied solely on per-trip wages. Conversely, drivers with platinum or gold account levels had a higher chance of earning incentives, although the amount was still smaller compared to before the pandemic. This situation creates a gap between drivers and also shows that the account-level compensation system is not entirely fair.

This injustice becomes even clearer when considering the non-financial forms of compensation provided by platform companies, such as jackets, helmets, or participation in BPJS Ketenagakerjaan (Indonesia's social security program). Although it appears to be a form of support, this compensation is considered disproportionate to the workload and health risks drivers have to bear. Most respondents even rated this type of compensation as minimal and unable to provide long-term financial security.

In line with this, the financial compensation received by drivers also faces similar issues. Income from per-trip wages and incentive bonuses is considered insufficient, while indirect compensation is limited to BPJS access and simple work equipment. This condition was felt even more acutely during the pandemic, when working hours increased significantly but income actually decreased relatively. This shows an imbalance between the workload drivers experience and the compensation they receive.

Additionally, algorithm-based compensation models place drivers in an asymmetrical power relationship with platform companies. While drivers have no opportunity to negotiate, the company has complete control over the incentive scheme. This leads to compensation and work distribution systems controlled by algorithms without transparency (Wood et al., 2019).

The phenomenon of declining compensation during the pandemic is not only happening in Bekasi or Indonesia, but also in many other countries. A study (ILO, 2021) found that in Southeast Asia, most platform drivers reported a drastic decline in earnings, while incentives were cut by companies citing efficiency reasons. Research (Apouey et al., 2020) in France shows that gig economy workers face income uncertainty, and the pandemic has worsened the situation. Thus, the findings in Bekasi strengthen the evidence that the compensation system in the gig economy tends to be vulnerable to external crises and creates economic uncertainty for its workers.

This vulnerability is not only felt by drivers personally but also by their families. Drivers face difficulties in meeting basic household needs such as food, vehicle installments, and children's school fees. This indicates that compensation uncertainty has a significant socioeconomic impact, not only reducing drivers' well-being but also increasing family economic vulnerability.

Additionally, this compensation issue is closely linked to how the platform's work system is designed, which still has many weaknesses. First, there is instability because drivers' income is highly dependent on the number of orders, which fluctuates with market changes. Second, the account level system differentiates incentive opportunities without setting fully transparent standards. Third, drivers' protection from work risks is insufficient due to non-financial compensation and limited access to social security. These three issues indicate that the compensation mechanisms of ride-hailing platforms have not yet met the decent work standards set by the ILO, (ILO, 2021)

The phenomenon of declining compensation experienced by online motorcycle taxi drivers during the pandemic not only impacted their financial situation but also pushed them to find ways to survive amidst the uncertainty. Income instability, the unfairness of the account level system, and the lack of non-financial compensation make it impossible for drivers to fully rely on company policies or market mechanisms.

The research findings indicate that online motorcycle taxi drivers in Bekasi City are affected by company policies and market changes, and are actively seeking strategies for survival. According to field interviews, they employ at least four main approaches: extending working hours (work intensification) to 18 to 24 hours per day despite the health risks, leveraging experience to choose locations with high demand, increasing job diversification thru cross-platform multi-homing practices, and enhancing community solidarity as a source of material and moral support.

Although the main focus of the strategy is to solve short-term problems, the adaptation patterns of online motorcycle taxi drivers in Bekasi also show more sustainable aspects. They do various types of work to survive. This also demonstrates efforts to build strong livelihoods to cope with difficulties. For example, although the primary revenue source for ride-hailing apps, side hustles can help protect the platform from financial uncertainty.

The results of the study on online motorcycle taxi drivers' adaptation strategies in Bekasi City are similar to the patterns found in other countries, showing how ride-hailing drivers maintain their jobs by expanding informal networks, such as sharing accounts and orders as a collective strategy. On the other hand, research in Europe by (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020) emphasizes that community solidarity is an important social capital in facing income uncertainty caused by changes in platform algorithms. Therefore, drivers using adaptive strategies in Bekasi are part of a global pattern showing the dynamics of workers in the gig economy. However, local factors such as strong community ties in Indonesia give it a unique flavor, where solidarity is not only a way to survive but also a means to resist corporate policies.

Online motorcycle taxi drivers are developing adaptation strategies with complex and multifaceted consequences. Extended working hours increase the risk of long-term fatigue, mental health disorders, and traffic accidents from an occupational health and safety perspective (ILO, 2021). This pattern at the level of industrial relations shows that the lack of regulation encourages drivers to rely on individual and collective survival strategies rather than obtaining the structural protection that should be provided by companies and the state. Therefore, the adaptation strategies show that workers want to survive and that the platform economy has systemic limitations in labor governance.

Although the adaptation strategies employed by drivers reflect high levels of resilience and determination, these strategies have fundamental limitations. First, this strategy tends to be short-term, where extending working hours can only meet daily needs but potentially has negative long-term impacts on both physical and mental health. Second, adaptation strategies are prone to failure because multi-homing practices do not always guaranty income stability; the entire platform essentially faces similar demand fluctuation patterns, making it unable to fully reduce financial vulnerability. Third, this strategy does not address the root of the structural problem, as community solidarity is only effective in providing temporary support but cannot replace the need for institutional protection thru fair and comprehensive labor regulations.

Thus, these adaptive strategies reflect more of a short-term survival response than a sustainable solution to the uncertainty in the platform economy. Although the adaptation approaches of online motorcycle taxi drivers in Bekasi demonstrate socio-economic resilience, they also reveal structural inequalities within the platform's working system. The research findings

indicate that the adaptation strategies of online motorcycle taxi drivers in Bekasi City reflect the dynamics of economic work worldwide, with employees striving to remain flexible but trapped in systemic vulnerability. This indicates that the government must be involved in creating specific regulations that allow for algorithmic transparency, minimum compensation standards, and social protection.

CONCLUSION

The research on the resilience of online motorcycle taxi drivers in Bekasi City during the COVID-19 pandemic shows that this group of workers faces complex challenges, both in terms of workload, compensation system, and the adaptation strategies they employ. The workload of drivers actually increased amidst declining service demand, forcing many of them to extend their working hours to dozens or even more than twenty hours per day. This condition has serious consequences for physical and psychological health, including fatigue, stress, and an increased risk of traffic accidents.

From a compensation perspective, this study found that the algorithm-based and incentive system puts drivers in a vulnerable position due to fluctuating earnings, often below the regional minimum wage, as well as limited non-financial compensation. This shows a structural imbalance between platform companies and driver partners who have no room for negotiation over work policies.

Meanwhile, the adaptation strategies employed by drivers reflect their resilience and flexibility in the face of economic pressure. They extended working hours, engaged in multi-homing by joining multiple platforms simultaneously, diversified their income sources, and relied on community solidarity. However, this strategy is short-term and unable to address the root of the structural problems. Extending working hours is actually risky for long-term health, while diversification and multi-homing do not guaranty income stability because all platforms experience similar patterns of fluctuating demand.

Thus, it can be concluded that although online motorcycle taxi drivers in Bekasi City demonstrate a high level of resilience, their position remains highly vulnerable due to income uncertainty, weak social protection, and dependence on the algorithmic policies of platform companies. This research underscores the need for more protective and inclusive policy interventions to ensure the sustainable well-being of workers in the platform-based economy.

Suggestions

1. For the government, strategic steps are needed to provide more comprehensive protection to gig economy workers. The government needs to formulate specific regulations that can guaranty minimum compensation standards, expand access to social security, and ensure occupational health protection for online motorcycle taxi drivers. Additionally, algorithmic transparency is also important to ensure that order distribution and incentive schemes operate more fairly. These efforts should be strengthened with collaborative policies involving the government, platform companies, and labor unions, creating more just and sustainable labor governance.

2. For the Company, it is important to review the incentive and compensation schemes to make them more stable and in line with the principles of decent work. Companies also need to provide more comprehensive health support, for example, thru insurance, regular health checkups, and workplace safety facilities. Furthermore, the platform should develop capacity-building programs for drivers, including digital literacy, financial management, and alternative skills, so they have long-term resilience amidst the uncertainties of the digital economy.
3. For online motorcycle taxi drivers, strengthening community solidarity needs to be a priority, not just as a means of temporary material support, but also as a platform for collective advocacy to fight for workers' rights. Additionally, drivers need to manage their working hours more healthily to reduce the long-term health risks associated with work intensification. Developing income diversification outside the digital platform is also an important strategy to ensure drivers are not entirely dependent on the platform's fluctuating algorithms, which do not always provide certainty.
4. For academics and researchers, research on gig economy workers still needs to be expanded, especially with a quantitative approach to more comprehensively measure the economic impact. Comparative studies between cities or platforms are also important to understand the differences in driver adaptation patterns across various contexts. The results of this kind of research can make an important contribution to formulating public policies and corporate strategies that are more favorable to the welfare of online motorcycle taxi drivers.

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