Flexible But Disconnected: Airbnb Hosts' Social Isolation, Work-Family Experience, and

Mental Wellbeing

Abstract

Purpose: The understudied psychosocial factors affecting Airbnb hosts are examined in this study by focusing on social isolation and willingness to remain as an Airbnb host. The espoused benefits of host flexibility and autonomy have not been fully contextualized in relation to the real demands and costs of hosting.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This study uses Social Support Theory to examine hosts' perceptions of their positions. Data from 136 Airbnb hosts were analyzed using a structural model to explore relationships between social isolation, work-family conflict, mental wellbeing, and life satisfaction.

Findings: The results indicate that higher levels of social isolation were linked to greater work-family conflict, lower mental wellbeing, and reduced life satisfaction. Furthermore, social support was negatively correlated with social isolation.

Practical Implications: As a result of social isolation, Airbnb hosts will need to find outside support (e.g., online gig worker communities, mental wellbeing apps) to meet work/life challenges. Gig work platforms should provide tools for gig workers to cultivate social support.

Originality/Value: This research presents a needed focus on the paradox of gig work. Airbnb hosting can provide flexible employment and extra income, but it may also lead to social isolation, work-family conflict, and reduced wellbeing. These findings have significant implications for gig workers and contracting organizations, underlining the need to prioritize workers' social connections and overall wellbeing in the increasingly pervasive gig economy.

Keywords: gig workers, Airbnb hosts, work-family, social isolation, social support, mental wellbeing

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Introduction

The global gig economy currently generates USD 204 billion and accounts for a third of the world's working population (Gitnux, 2023). It is projected to reach USD 500 billion in gross volume in the next five years and projected to reach 60 million workers by 2027 (Gitnux, 2023). For some, gig economy participation is a choice—attracted by the belief of greater autonomy and facilitated by the proliferation of smart-phone accessible platforms such as Uber, Lyft, and Airbnb (Manyika et al., 2016). For others, participating in gig work has become a necessity, in part because of the pandemic and its economic fallout, resulting in shifts in how and where work is done.

Airbnb is a leading lodging gig company, a peer-to-peer accommodation sharing service recognized as one of the most successful platforms worldwide (Volgger et al., 2019) that has disrupted the hospitality industry (O'Neill & Yeon, 2023). In 2021, Airbnb counted 5.6 million active listings spread across 100,000 cities in over 220 countries and regions worldwide (Airbnb, 2023). Despite the pandemic-related downturn, Airbnb's recent earnings report (Novet, 2021) demonstrates that their post-pandemic pivot helped produce massive success since early 2021. Airbnb had a record-breaking IPO at the end of 2020 (Griffith, 2021), after which CEO Brian Chesky reported the need for "millions more hosts" to meet current and future Airbnb demand (Bursztynsky, 2021).

Peer-to-peer hospitality (Guttentag, 2015) represents a paradigm shift in the hospitality industry compared with traditional hotel experience (Mody et al., 2017). Airbnb hosts, in contrast to hotel employees, enjoy a high degree of control over their service offerings and

pricing, which allows for a personalized touch and flexible earnings (Farmaki & Kaniadakis, 2020). However, hosts also face the challenges of adhering to platform policies, difficult guests (bad reviews), and risks (personal safety, damage to home), that can affect hosts' wellbeing (Zhang et al., 2019).

The nature of Airbnb hosting blurs the lines between work and home; nearly half of the listings are private rooms within hosts' residences, and hosts are expected to respond within an hour, despite time zone differences. This overlap can create spillover between professional and personal domains, leading to both spatial and psychological boundary issues (de Janasz et al., 2023). Despite growing research on Airbnb (e.g., guest motivation and behavior, comparisons of traditional and P2P hospitality), there is relatively little research on the motivations and experiences of hosts, with a few recent exceptions (e.g., Bremser & Wust, 2021; de Janasz et al., 2022; Ozanne & Prayag, 2022).

Therefore, we address this gap by examining Airbnb hosts and their experience of social isolation, social support, work-family conflict, and outcomes such as wellbeing, life satisfaction, and the intent to continue as an Airbnb host. Our research utilizes social support theory to analyze the complex dynamics of gig work's influence on the experience and outcomes of hosts. By delving into these areas, we hope to enrich the understanding of the gig economy's psychological effects on gig workers and identify support mechanisms for these workers.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Social Support Theory (SST) posits that social relationships play an important role in mitigating stress and bolstering mental wellbeing (Farmaki & Kaniadakis, 2020). According to SST, social support can be understood as a social network's provision of psychological and material resources intended to benefit an individual's ability to cope with stress (Cohen & Wills,

1985). These resources can be actual (provided) or perceived (believed to be available) and may take the form of emotional, informational, or instrumental (tangible) assistance (Langford et al. , 1997). Because of the solitary nature of Airbnb, hosting deviates from traditional work environments where employees typically benefit from the presence of colleagues and supervisors for both professional and social interaction. Employees in traditional jobs who work from home still have coworkers and a manager, even if all the interactions are virtual. The Airbnb host has no Airbnb coworkers nor a manager and thus has no one in a formal role to connect with regarding work issues. This potential lack of social support structures in Airbnb hosting can result in social isolation, a form of social stress. According to SST, without adequate social support, hosts might find it more difficult to manage the stresses related to hosting, leading to decreased mental wellbeing (Thoits, 2011) and decreased intention to continue on the platform.

Further, SST allows us to examine work-family conflict among Airbnb hosts. The blur between personal and professional life in hosting activities could lead to an intrusion of work-related stress into family life or vice versa, causing conflict. Factor in competing demands (e.g., current and future bookings), lack of back-up colleagues to fill in if needed, and performance stress (insufficient star ratings can reduce a host's status), and it's clear that without adequate social support, hosts may have a hard time managing their work and family roles (Voydanoff, 2004).

By integrating SST into our study, we provide a theoretical basis for understanding how social isolation among Airbnb hosts might affect their mental wellbeing, life satisfaction, work-family conflict, and intention to continue as Airbnb hosts. However, SST also suggests potential strategies for reducing these negative effects through the presence of alternate social support for hosts.

Social Isolation

Social isolation is defined as ''a state in which the individual lacks a sense of belonging socially, lacks engagement with others, has a minimal number of social contacts and they are deficient in fulfilling and quality relationships'' (Nicholson, 2009, p. 1346). Such isolation significantly affects health, with increased risks for morbidity and mortality (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). Research shows that gig workers experience high levels of social isolation (Keith et al. 2020). Isolation not only diminishes work-based support but also hinders social connectedness, increasing the potential for burnout and frustration (Zhang et al., 2022). While interactions with clients may offer some sense of connection, they are often fleeting and transactional, lacking the permanence and depth of relationships found in conventional work environments.

Social support typically fosters positive experiences and a sense of belonging that can enhance wellbeing (Lakey & Cohen, 2000). However, Airbnb hosts experiencing social isolation might not enjoy these benefits. They are prone to loneliness, which not only diminishes quality of life (e.g., Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008) but can also negatively influence physical health, as observed in middle-aged populations (Steptoe et al., 2004). Research by Wang et al. (2022) highlights that gig workers report lower mental health and life satisfaction than their traditionally employed counterparts due to higher loneliness levels. Hosts may lead lonely work lives, despite the presence of guests in their homes, and may experience stress from the blurring of boundaries between their and their guests' living space (e.g., de Janasz et al., 2023). Socially isolated Airbnb hosts, lack the buffering support of co-workers and supervisors, making them more vulnerable to stress and its negative impacts on mental wellbeing and life satisfaction. The feelings of isolation may result in a reduced intention of continuing as an Airbnb host. For these reasons, we expect:

Hypothesis 1: Social isolation will be negatively related to mental wellbeing
Hypothesis 2: Social isolation will be negatively related to life satisfaction

Hypothesis 3: Social Isolation will be negatively related to intention to continue as an
          Airbnb host

Work-Family Conflict

Work-family research indicates that the intensifying complexity of work and the

convergence of work and personal life can have detrimental effects on employees, including

increased stress and reduced satisfaction in both life and job activities, as well as diminished

organizational commitment (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Piszczek et al., 2021). Such negative

outcomes persist across sectors, including hospitality, and are only partially mitigated by family-

friendly workplace practices (Behson, 2005). The effects of work-family conflict (WFC) can be

ameliorated by work autonomy, supportive supervisors, or work climate (e.g., Ferri et al., 2018).

However, in the case of gig work, the equation is different. Flexible scheduling and the absence

of a supervisor, while appealing, might not equate to gig work reducing WFC or enhancing

wellbeing.

Remote work (e.g., telecommuting) has been proposed as a way to balance work and

personal life due to its inherent autonomy and flexibility (Golden et al., 2008), however, it can

paradoxically lead to longer working hours and encroachment on personal time (Mulki et al.,

2009). While telecommuting (e.g., work from home; hereinafter WFH) and gig work share

similarities, they are not the same. Gig work differs significantly from a traditional job in

compensation structure (project-based vs. salary), the temporariness of engagements (gig

workers complete a job and move to another), and flexibility in when/how/where the work is

performed (Watson et al., 2021). Further delineating gig work suggests additional challenges for

Airbnb hosts. Compared to gig goods providers/sellers (e.g., Etsy) who have minimal contact

with the customers beyond economic transactions, gig service providers (e.g., Airbnb, Uber) face

the demands of emotional labor: they need to be nice to get high ratings. Again, beneath the

attractive veneer of Airbnb hosting lies the potential for social isolation, increased WFC, and the expectation of emotional labor—negative experiences that are exacerbated by a lack of social support found in traditional work arrangements.

Social isolation in gig work might exacerbate WFC. If gig workers are deficient in social relations at work, they might not have people in their lives to help them when work interferes with family (WIF), or family interferes with work (FIW). Traditional employees have a supervisor who can counteract an unsupportive work environment or colleagues who can step in should a worker need to take time to deal with work/family challenges (Warren & Johnson, 1995; Kim et al., 2023). However, Airbnb hosts do not have these supports and the social isolation and loneliness common among gig workers (Farmaki & Stergiou, 2019) might intensify the tension between work and family obligations. In their solitary Airbnb hosting work, lacking co-workers or family members to provide emotional support or work-related assistance, we anticipate that hosts will experience increasing WFC (WIF and FIW) with increasing levels of social isolation.

Hypothesis 4a: Social isolation will be positively related to WIF
Hypothesis 4b: Social isolation will be positively related to FIW

Social Support

SST highlights the importance of social connections and the support that people receive from their social networks. Previous research suggests that gig workers' experience of social isolation can be ameliorated by social support. This support can come from friends and family, other Airbnb hosts (through social media forums like Facebook and meet-up groups facilitated by apps), and guests. Keith et al. (2020) suggest that those gig workers who have social relationships that can provide support and resources will be less likely to feel the negative effects of isolation. For this reason, we offer:

Hypothesis 5: Perceived social support will be negatively related to social isolation.

Mental Wellbeing, Life Satisfaction, and Intention to Continue as Airbnb Host

The experience of mental wellbeing and life satisfaction will influence gig workers' motivation to continue their gig work participation (Jabagi et al., 2019). Airbnb hosts who experience diminished wellbeing in gig work will not want to stay with Airbnb (Ozanne & Prayag, 2022). Similarly, life satisfaction is critical to continue as an Airbnb host. If the work dampens life satisfaction, hosts may consider leaving the platform. When gig workers feel satisfied with their work, they are more likely to see it as fulfilling, meaningful, and enjoyable, thereby increasing their motivation to continue working in the gig economy.

The idea that mental wellbeing and life satisfaction will be positively related to the intention to continue as an Airbnb host is supported by several concepts in psychology and sociology. Job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and mental wellbeing are often linked (e.g., Piotr & Weziak-Bialowolska, 2021); hence, if Airbnb hosts enjoy their job, they may experience improved mental wellbeing and be more inclined to continue. The role of an Airbnb host can be stressful and, if managed effectively, maintaining mental wellbeing might suggest an ability to handle such stress, leading to the intention to continue hosting. Hosting also provides a sense of self-efficacy and autonomy (Muskat et al., 2019), which can contribute to mental wellbeing and motivate individuals to continue as hosts. Thus,

Hypothesis 6: Mental wellbeing will be positively related to intention to continue as Airbnb host.

Hypothesis 7: Life satisfaction will be positively related to intention to continue as Airbnb host.

Methodology

Sample

Prior to developing a survey, we created an interview protocol and interviewed a dozen "superhosts" about their Airbnb experiences. Given the unique experience of sharing one's home with strangers as a means for generating income, we felt the interviews necessary to first understand—without presupposing a typical work-family conflict model—the context in which these gig workers operate. Our interview comprised open-ended questions that would help us understand: the motivation for or evolution of becoming a host, the likes and dislikes of being a host, the challenges hosts experience in managing the Airbnb work/family interface, and their plans vis-à-vis Airbnb. We also gathered demographic information about their hosting experience (e.g., years hosting, hours per week spent managing their Airbnb business, percent of total income derived from Airbnb) to ensure the data collected were representative. Our analysis of common themes in the interview data guided our survey development, which included well-established measures in work-family research (adapting some items for the Airbnb context), and other reliable measures used in organizational and psychological research.

One hundred eighty-one respondents were recruited through six different Airbnb-related Facebook groups to participate in the online survey via Qualtrics (with a chance to win one of five $50 Amazon gift cards). Removing incomplete surveys, the final sample consisted of 136 Airbnb hosts. Respondents were 81.2% female, 13% were married or living with a partner, 60% had children, 76.9% had a least a bachelor's degree, and 34.1% shared their living space with Airbnb guests. All respondents actively managed their own Airbnb business, as opposed to hiring someone else to manage their Airbnb listing/s.[1]

Measures

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[1] The question as to whether a host contracted someone else to manage their property was a screener; respondents who didn't manage their own property were automatically excluded from completing the survey.

Measures for the study were selected from existing scales in the work/family and organizational behavior literature. Most of the scales used have been subjected to extensive development and have exhibited acceptable psychometric properties. We did, however, adapt some of the items to reflect the uniqueness of the Airbnb context, in which respondents' non-traditional gig work as a host is predicated on 24/7 monitoring of and responses to guests' needs. Table 1 lists the mean, standard deviation and intercorrelations of the key study variables.

Social Isolation. Social isolation in Airbnb work was measured using six items from the 20-item UCLA Loneliness Scale, first developed by Russell et al. (1978) to capture individuals' subjective feelings of loneliness and social isolation. Measured on a four-point Likert-type scale (e.g., "I am unhappy doing so many things alone," "I am isolated from others"), where higher scores represented higher frequency with which the respondent feels this way. The host respondents were told to focus on their Airbnb work when responding to these questions. The six items demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = .89$) and were averaged to form a composite score.

Work-Family Conflict. Work-family conflict was measured separately to capture both directions of the conflict. We used the Netemeyer et al. (1996) five-item WIF and five-item FIW scales, which use a 5-point Likert-type scale to measure work demands interfering with family and family demands interfering with work. The work interfering with family (WIF) variable ($\alpha = .90$) included items such as "Things I want to do at home do not get done because of the demands my Airbnb work puts on me." The family interfering with work (FIW) variable ($\alpha = 0.88$) included items such as, "I have to put off doing Airbnb-related tasks because of the demands on my time at home."

Perceived Social Support. To assess the degree to which hosts felt support from three sources; friends, family, and significant other, we used nine items from the 12-item Multidimensional

Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988), e.g., "I get the emotional help and support I need from my family." Participants indicated the strength of their agreement (or disagreement) using a 5-point scale, with higher scores indicating stronger agreement. The reliability was strong ($\alpha = 0.88$), so we averaged the scores for this construct.

Life Satisfaction. We used the Satisfaction with Life scale (SWLS)—a five-item construct—to assess an individual's cognitive judgment of their satisfaction with their life (Diener et al., 1985). Individuals completing the questionnaire responded to statements such as "In most ways, my life is close to my ideal," using a five-point Likert-type scale. The Cronbach alpha for this measure was 0.87.

Mental Wellbeing. Mental wellbeing was measured by six items compiled from the 14-item Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) (Tennant et al., 2007). Sample items include "I've been feeling optimistic about the future" and "I've had energy to spare." Scores from the six items, which were measured on a five-point scale of how often the statements were experienced over the prior two months (from none of the time to all the time), were averaged to form a composite score. The Cronbach alpha for this measure was 0.88.

Intention to Continue as Airbnb Host. Intention to continue as Airbnb host was measured using six items (e.g., Even if Airbnb were not doing well financially, I would be reluctant to leave). The coefficient alpha for this measure was .73.

Data Analysis

All analyses were conducted using SPSS AMOS 28 to perform structural equation modeling (SEM).

Results

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables. Note that nearly all correlations are statistically significant and in the expected direction. Figure 1 shows the model we have proposed for Airbnb hosts. The results showed that the model was a good fit to the data, as indicated by following goodness-of-fit statistics: χ^2/df = 1.25, which is within the range of acceptable ($\chi^2/df < 3$) given our sample size (Hair et al., 1998). Other important fit indices (e.g., Kline, 2015) include CFI (Comparative Fit Index) = .996 (above .90 indicates acceptable fit); NFI (Normed Fit Index—a preferred index for small samples) = .980 (above .90 indicates a good fit); IFI (Incremental Fit Index) = .996 (above .90 is acceptable); and RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) = .037 (below 0.08 is good). The overall fit of our model (Figure 1) was good. All our hypotheses were then tested using the standardized regression coefficients obtained from our SEM model (see Table 2).

Figure 1 shows the path analysis results. Hypothesis 1 examined the link between social isolation and mental wellbeing. Our results supported this hypothesis, suggesting that higher levels of social isolation were associated with lower levels of mental wellbeing (β = -0.352, $p <$ .001). Hypothesis 2 examined the relationship between social isolation and life satisfaction. We found that feelings of isolation and loneliness were associated with lower levels of overall life satisfaction (β = -0.437, $p <$ .001). Hypothesis 3 examined the relationship between social isolation and intention to continue as Airbnb host. Hypothesis 3's prediction that social isolation is negatively related to the intention to continue as an Airbnb host was not supported.

For hypothesis 4a and 4b, we expected both WIF and FIW to be positively associated with social isolation. Indeed, when Airbnb hosts experience higher levels of social isolation, they faced increased WIF (β = 0.334, $p <$ .001) and FIW (β = 0.25, $p <$ .01). Our data supported hypotheses 4a and 4b.

We expected perceived social support to be negatively related to social isolation, as our findings show. Higher levels of perceived social support (Hypothesis 5) were associated with hosts reporting lower levels of social isolation (β = -0.572, p < .001). Our findings also supported Hypothesis 6, that mental wellbeing will be positively associated with intentions to continue as Airbnb host (β = 0.199, p < .05). Finally, Hypothesis 7, predicting a positive relationship between life satisfaction and intention to continue as Airbnb host was not supported.

Our results further suggest that mental wellbeing mediates the effects of feelings of social isolation on intention to continue as Airbnb host (indirect effect = -0.12, p < 0.01, 95% CI = [-0.21, -0.04]). In addition, FIW mediates the effects of feelings of isolation on intention to continue with Airbnb (indirect effect = -0.10, p < 0.01, 95% CI = [-0.20, -0.03]).

Discussion and Conclusions

Conclusions

Our study expands our understanding of gig workers' experience by showing that social isolation is associated with negative outcomes. Hosts with higher levels of social isolation experience greater levels of WFC (both WIF and FIW), and reduced levels of mental wellbeing and life satisfaction. On a broader level, the study shows that social support theory provides a viable lens to shed further light on Airbnb hosts' experiences. This is important because it explains the counterintuitive link between gig work and social isolation. As we predicted, while hosts may have found the sought-after autonomy and freedom, there are tradeoffs such as isolation and work-family conflict. Lacking coworkers and informal social gatherings at work, Airbnb hosts (and some other gig workers) may experience isolation, which increases their experience of work-family conflict and decreases their mental wellbeing and life satisfaction.

This is one of the first to empirically examine the costs of gig work, showing its negative consequences. In the Airbnb environment, a host's workspace may be their home space and vice versa, enabling "working from home" to take on a new, and more conflictual meaning. The work and home domains are blurred and conflicting, especially for hosts who must always be "on" and respond within one hour, or risk damaging their reputation and attractiveness to potential guests. Airbnb hosts have 24/7 response expectations but little to no formal or informal support to help them cope with these challenges. These findings support our contention that participation in the gig economy might not wipe away work-family conflict—in fact, it may increase it; it may also create new problems, namely social isolation.

The relationship between social isolation and the intention to continue as an Airbnb host was not significant. Although we hypothesized direct effects of social isolation on intention to continue as Airbnb host, our model produced significant mediating pathways. Social isolation's impact on intent to continue is mediated by mental wellbeing and FIW. One explanation is that social isolation is counteracted (reduced) by mental wellbeing which is positively associated with intention to continue as Airbnb host. The relationship between social isolation and intention to continue with Airbnb can also be partially explained by the mediating effect of family interfering with work. Social isolation relates to greater feelings of family demands interfering with work obligations and FIW is negatively related to the intention to continue as a host.

Increasing levels of social support were associated with decreasing levels of social isolation. This is in line with recent research by Keith et al. (2020) that suggests the importance of gig workers' social relationships outside of their Airbnb work, in providing support and resources and mitigating the negative effects of isolation. Airbnb hosts may receive this support

from loved ones, friends, and other jobs[2]. Support could even come from guests and though hosts

differ in the level of interaction they desire with guests (Phua, 2019), some specifically turn to

guests as "surrogate companions" (Di Domenico & Lynch, 2007).

Finally, we expected and found that hosts who had higher levels of mental wellbeing had

stronger intentions to continue as an Airbnb host. Mental wellbeing—consisting of optimism,

feeling useful, having energy to spare, interest in others, ability to overcome problems—provides

hosts with tools and resources to surmount the psychological challenges of hosting, thereby

facilitating their willingness to continue doing so.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical contributions of our proposed model, set within the context of Airbnb

hosts, are underscored by SST. Airbnb hosts often experience social isolation, owing to the

nature of their work and the lack of coworkers, and this isolation can have detrimental effects on

their mental wellbeing and life satisfaction. This study significantly advances SST by empirically

examining and contextualizing the experiences of Airbnb hosts, a previously underexplored

group within the gig economy. We investigated the complex interplay between social isolation,

social support, work-family conflict, mental wellbeing, and life satisfaction.

Our findings underscore the critical role of social support in mitigating the adverse

effects of social isolation, expanding SST to incorporate the unique dynamics of gig work. This

aligns with previous research findings that emphasize the importance of social support in the gig

economy (e.g., Wang et al, 2022). Unlike traditional employment, gig work often lacks inherent

social structures, such as coworker relationships and formal organizational support, that buffer

against isolation stressors. Our study reveals how the perceived social support from external

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[2] Hosts may also receive this support if they have other employment that includes co-worker interaction.

sources, including friends, family, and even guests, can significantly reduce feelings of isolation among Airbnb hosts. This insight enriches SST by highlighting the importance of non-traditional forms of social support in contemporary work arrangements (Ozanne & Prayag, 2022).

The research also highlights the pivotal role of social support in mitigating work-family conflict among gig workers, particularly those engaged in home-sharing activities. This is crucial in the gig economy, where traditional work-life boundaries are often blurred, leading to unique challenges in work-life integration. Social support, whether from family, friends, or online communities, is a buffer against the stressors associated with gig work, enhancing mental wellbeing and life satisfaction. This is particularly significant given the isolated nature of gig work, where workers may lack more formal support systems available in traditional employment settings.

Moreover, the study underscores the importance of understanding the multifaceted nature of social support in the gig economy. Different types of emotional, informational, and instrumental support play distinct roles in addressing the challenges gig workers face. For instance, emotional support can alleviate feelings of isolation. In contrast, informational support can help navigate the complexities of gig work, and instrumental support can provide practical assistance in managing work and family responsibilities.

Additionally, our research offers a deeper understanding of the double-edged nature of gig work's flexibility, providing theoretical insights into the conditions under which the benefits of gig work (e.g., autonomy, flexible scheduling) may be offset by the challenges of social isolation and work-family conflict. It advances SST by illustrating social support's complex, context-dependent effects on gig workers' wellbeing and work-life experiences.

Practical Implications

Making up over a third of the global workforce, the gig economy is expected to continue expanding in response to the opportunities and challenges for the future of work (e.g., Gitnux, 2023; Manyika et al., 2016). Due to the pandemic which stimulated a massive increase in delivery services and virtual services (Henderson, 2020), along with advances in technology (e.g., artificial intelligence) diminishing the need for in-person jobs (e.g., Watkins, 2023), we expect a decline in "traditional" work and an increase in gig as well as part-time and remote work.

However, our findings suggest a possible double bind of gig work. While the gig economy has created new jobs, additional income, and flexibility to choose where, when, and how to work (e.g., Schor & Attwood-Charles, 2017), our results indicate that the flexibility afforded by hosting may come with costs in the form of social isolation, work-family conflict, and reduced life satisfaction, particularly for those who lack social support or mental wellbeing. These findings add to the increasing negative outcomes (such as lack of employment benefits, job security, and promotion opportunities) associated with the growing gig economy (e.g., Calo & Rosenblat, 2017).

Despite Airbnb's lure of autonomy and "easy" income for hosts, our study offers some insights about why hosts might intend to leave Airbnb. Anecdotal evidence suggests that hosts exit their Airbnb businesses due to intrusive guests, stress related to the rating system, along with the lack of control and uncertainty over how algorithmic evaluations work (Jhaver et al., 2018). However, our findings suggest that hosts' feelings of isolation, difficulty in managing conflicting work-family demands, and lack of social support may also have a great impact on intentions to leave Airbnb.

Our study suggests that despite the lure of the highly autonomous, revenue-generating work as an Airbnb host—as "sold" by Airbnb (whether full-time or as a "side hustle"), this work is not suited for everyone. While hosts may be able to be their own boss and control their own schedule, the nature of hosting can be problematic. People who enter hosting expecting to experience less work-family conflict than a more traditional work arrangement (whether in an office or hospitality setting) may be surprised to find that work-family conflict is not reduced. However, and consistent with decades of research on work-family conflict (e.g., Ferri et al., 2018; O'Neill & Follmer, 2020), those with greater social support and mental wellbeing may survive or even thrive in gig work, perhaps finding a more positive cost-benefit analysis of hosting than engaging in traditional work.

There are several suggestions for those who are more prone to feelings of social isolation or have a reduced scope for social support from friends and loved ones. One suggestion is for gig workers to join virtual platforms to connect with other gig workers. These online communities provide a unique opportunity for gig workers to learn from the experiences of others and receive social support from within the gig economy. Social support and relationships are crucial for the overall wellbeing of gig workers. Another possible path forward relates to the relationship found between mental wellbeing and intention to continue hosting. As smart-phones enabled the growth of gig work, they also enabled the development of mental health and wellbeing apps for stress reduction (e.g. Headspace). These apps offer assessments, therapeutic exercises, mindfulness techniques and other strategies for low or no cost (see Local Consumer Insider, 2024). Compared with traditional employees who have access to company marketed and sponsored wellness and wellbeing programs, Airbnb hosts have no such benefits. By partnering with online apps that focus on friendship (e.g., Bumble), mental wellbeing (e.g., Headspace), and

happiness/positive thinking (e.g., Live Happy), Airbnb can highlight the importance of and

increase access to these opportunities which can counteract the negative effects of social

isolation on wellness (Scott, 2020). By shifting from "find help yourself" to "here's what we

offer hosts"—mirroring traditional employee experiences—Airbnb may encourage more hosts to

take up the offer.

Recognizing that most gig workers participate part-time or as a supplement to their full-

time employment, we also suggest that gig workers engage in "crafting" their employment

situation (Wong et al., 2020) to build resilience and long-term prospects in the gig economy.

Originally coined by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), job crafting comprises changes

employees can make in the tasks, relationships, and meaning of the job to better align with their

values, needs, and abilities. Such changes in the job can result in higher performance, greater

positivity, and increased work-related wellbeing. In a more recent piece, Dutton and

Wrzesniewski (2020) share specific examples of employees whose crafting efforts expanded

their responsibilities and increased their alignment and satisfaction.

Job crafting can occur in gig work, as noted by Wong et al. (2020), and may consist of

sharing common events and work processes, engaging in regular communication, and pursuing

collaborative activities. Such job crafting activities would involve connecting with on- and off-

platform communities to help counteract the social isolation and demotivation that many gig

workers experience (Wong et al., 2020). Our own data gathering on various Airbnb-related

Facebook groups suggests that some Airbnb hosts have been doing job crafting such as offering

airport pick-ups, guided tours, and other creative experiences (e.g., local cuisine cooking lessons

or yoga on the beach). These re-designed jobs facilitate crafted or changed tasks, relationships,

and the meaning of being a host. Considering that some employees are attracted to the hospitality

industry because of the expectation and desire to interact with guests (i.e., show them hospitality), the "surprise" of social isolation that may come from leaving traditional hospitality jobs to host their Airbnb could be jarring. Recognizing the "craftability" of the hosting job and shaping the job by implementing some of these ideas—or discovering others by interacting with others hosts in Facebook, Instagram, or similar platforms—can help increase the alignment and meaning of the job, minimize the effects of social isolation, and increase satisfaction.

Our study has implications for the broader gig economy, including workers and the organizations who contract with them. The absence of social connection with coworkers and the competitive nature of the gig economy may result in feelings of alienation unless measures are taken to prioritize the humanity of gig workers. By promoting resources that may help provide social support and reduce isolation (e.g., smart-phone wellness apps, availability of online groups that facilitate "conversation" and sharing of best practices) and encouraging gig workers to engage in job crafting, some of the disadvantages inherent in gig work may be mitigated.

Limitations and Future Research

Although our research provides insights into the experiences of Airbnb hosts, several limitations should be noted. The sample size, although adequate, could be larger. Also, despite its relevance in work-family research, gender was not directly examined. Women comprised a disproportionate share of the sample which is typical for Airbnb (56% of hosts are female; Airbnb, 2023). However, the fact that we used Facebook (which is also skewed female) to recruit most of the respondents may have impacted the sample. In addition, missing data limited the sample size for some statistical analyses. While many of our respondents earned income from other work beyond their hosting, we did not have adequate information as to the nature of the other jobs to factor that into our study.

This research lays the groundwork for a deeper understanding of gig work's psychological costs and the essential nature of social support, providing a foundation for future studies and the development of interventions to support gig workers' quality of life. Future research should utilize larger samples to enable the examination of various demographic variables to understand the interplay of gig work and personal life. Similarly, it would be useful to assess how different degrees of reliance on Airbnb income—whether as a primary job or a side hustle—affect work-life interactions, that could lead to more tailored support for hosts navigating the demands of the gig economy. Research should also explore the role of online communities, such as those on social media platforms, as support systems to manage social isolation and work-family conflicts experienced by gig workers. Finally, it would be worthwhile exploring how technological advances, such as virtual reality or AI-powered chatbots, and the growing availability of online and virtual tools to improve mental health and wellbeing, could be utilized to alleviate feelings of isolation among hosts.

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Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for major study variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Social Isolation	--						
2. WIF	.33**						
3. FIW	.25**	.74**					
4. SocSupp	-.57**	-.19*	-.15				
5. LifeSat	-.58**	-.35**	-.32**	.46**			
6. MentalWB	-.42**	-.32**	-.32**	.28**	.47**		
7. ContAir	-.05	-.37**	-.37**	.10	.11	.25**	
Mean	1.79	2.29	1.83	4.22	3.99	3.74	3.53
SD	.68	1.06	.85	.79	.80	.75	.72

$^{*}p < .05.$ $^{**}p < .01$ (2-tailed). *Note.* WIF=Work interfering with family; FIW=family interfering with work; SocSupp=Perceived social support; MentalWB=Mental wellbeing; ContAir=Intention to remain as an Airbnb host

Table 2. Standardized regression coefficients for SEM model

| Path			Estimate
Isolate	<---	SocSupp	-.572***
WIF	<---	Isolate	.334***
FIW	<---	Isolate	.250**
MentalWB	<---	Isolate	-.352***
MentalWB	<---	FIW	-.205
MentalWB	<---	WIF	-.044
LifeSat	<---	Isolate	-.437***
LifeSat	<---	WIF	-.061
LifeSat	<---	MentalWB	.233**
LifeSat	<---	FIW	-.096
ContAir	<---	MentalWB	.199*
ContAir	<---	FIW	-.223*
ContAir	<---	Isolate	.123
ContAir	<---	LifeSat	-.044
ContAir	<---	WIF	-.175

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001*

SocSupp=Social Support, Isolate=Social Isolation, WIF= Work Interfering with Family, FIW=Family Interfering with Work, MentalWB=Mental Wellbeing, LifeSat=Life Satisfaction, and ContAir=Intention to Continue as an Airbnb host.

Figure 1. Structural Model for Airbnb Hosts
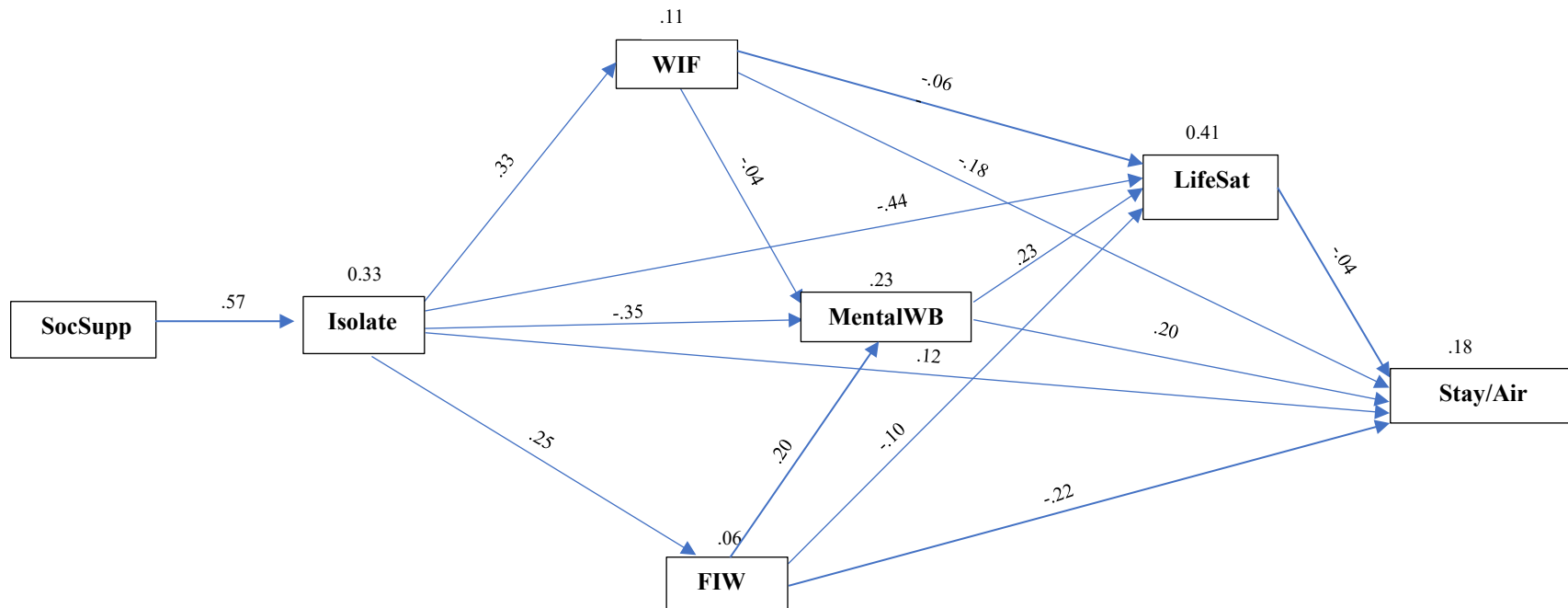
Note. SocSupp=Social Support, Isolate=Social Isolation, WIF= Work Interfering with Family, FIW=Family Interfering with Work, MentalWB=Mental Wellbeing, LifeSat=Life Satisfaction, and StatAir=Intention to Continue as an AirBnB host.

Figure created by Dr. Jeffrey Alstete. Used with Dr. Alstete's permission.