Young Platform Workers’ Attitudes towards Basic Income and Its Influence Factor

Joohee Lee
Professor of Sociology, Ewha Womans University
Platform Work and Labor Process

- Cutthroat competition: extremely low barriers to entry
- Controlled by algorithms, but platform workers feel they are in charge (algorithms lack transparency)
- Precarious work and unpredictable income
- Boundaries of working and non-working hours are blurred
- “Be your own boss!” mentality
Platform Work and Social Protection

• Currently, platform is not legally presumed to be an employer

• Not entitled to national minimum wage, etc.

• Limited access to social insurance
  - Industrial accident insurance (only 19 occupations)
  - Unemployment insurance (selected occupations with upper income limits)
  - National pension
  - Health insurance (regarded as self-employed)
Platform Work and Basic Income

• The employment-centered arrangements of social security and welfare only help those enjoying stable employments and their families (Offe, Claus. 1992)

• There seem to be selective affinity between platform work and basic income (Standing, Guy. 2011, The Precariat)
Research Methods

In-depth interviews with twelve young platform workers who are between 19 and 34 years of age.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sex/ Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Platform Work</th>
<th>Work experience</th>
<th>Monthly income (KRW)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>M/22</td>
<td>Not married</td>
<td>High school degree</td>
<td>Parcel service</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>5~6 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M/33</td>
<td>Not married</td>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>Videographer</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>2~2.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>F/31</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>University degree and more</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>M/25</td>
<td>Not married</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Voice actor</td>
<td>1 years+</td>
<td>0.6~1.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>F/20</td>
<td>Not married</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Private lesson etc.</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>0.6 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>F/21</td>
<td>Not married</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Private lesson</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>0.6 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>F/33</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>Webtoon writer</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>2.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>F/33</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>Personal trainer</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>1.5~2 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>F/22</td>
<td>Not married</td>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>Baby sitter</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>M/25</td>
<td>Not married</td>
<td>High school degree</td>
<td>Food delivery</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>4~6 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>M/23</td>
<td>Not married</td>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>Food delivery</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>6~7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>M/29</td>
<td>Not married</td>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>Food delivery</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>3~4 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Youth Platform Workers’ Labor Process
• Possibly due to cutthroat competition among platform workers, participants demonstrated liberal principles such as meritocracy and individualism.

• The non-transparency of the algorithmic management system severely restricted autonomy of young platform workers. Algorithms control platform workers to work long hours (ex. Cases 1, 10, 11, 12 all work more than 10 hours per day), but most of them feel that they can choose when and how to work.

• In order to resolve the tension between the promised autonomy and tight technical control, respondents seemed to develop entrepreneurial selves.
What young platform workers really think about basic income
Respondents who support basic income

#3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12

#8

#1, 2, 6, 10, 11

Respondents who are opposed to basic income
Respondents who are opposed to basic income

• Embrace meritocracy and individualism as ideal principles
• Tend to think that the Korean society is unfair or lacks opportunities
• Believe that people are poor mostly because of their personal inability
• Distrust the state and state provision of welfare, so they are against paying taxes
• Do not know well or trust social insurance
Respondents who support basic income

- Embrace meritocracy, but they are concerned about large income gap
- Tend to think that the Korean society is rather fair (however, non-unanimous)
- Believe that people are poor mostly because of structural factors
- Trust the state and state provision of welfare, so they are favorable to increasing taxes
- Demonstrate the need for social insurance
- Worry that the Fourth Industrial Revolution will cause the loss of jobs
Conclusions

• Concrete plans for regulating platform work (especially regarding misclassification)
• Transparency in the use of algorithms
• Social insurance and basic income are not mutually exclusive (can be complementary)
• Despite the labor process that diminished the importance of labor and social rights, respondents demonstrated support for basic income.
Thank You

j.lee@ewha.ac.kr