

The “Gig” Picture: One-in-three Canadians have done some kind of informal work in the past five years

Canadians unsure whether increase of gig work is a good thing or a bad thing for workers

November 26, 2019 – As governments and policy makers measure Canadian growth by, among other things, employment rates, new data shows millions of adults in this country are earning their livings by doing “gig” – or informal – work.

While companies such as Airbnb and Uber are putting discussion of the gig economy on the front burner, it's a concept with which Canadians are already well acquainted.

A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds that one-in-five Canadian workers (17%) are currently engaged in the gig economy, while the same number (17%) have worked this type of work at some point in the past five years – but aren't now.

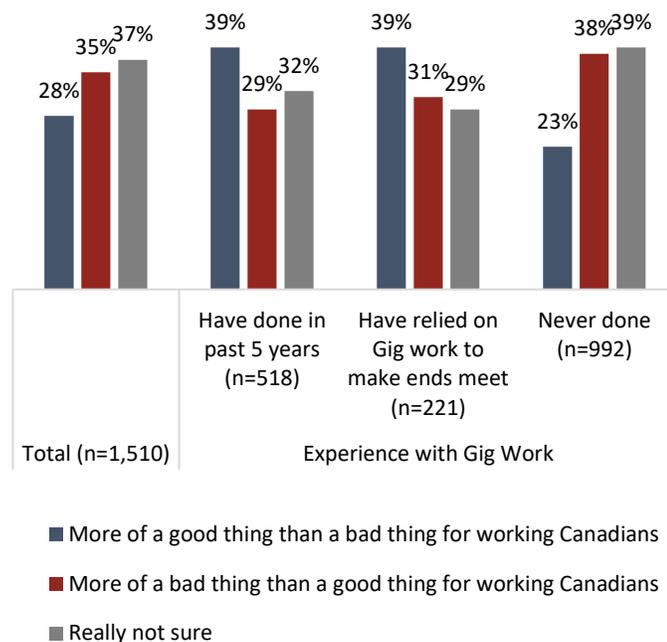
The most common types of work for people in this freelance field include office-based projects such as graphic design or computer programming, as well as for-hire handywork, babysitting and childcare.

Ultimately, the country is divided about whether this is good or bad for workers in this country overall.

Considering the benefits and risks, Canadians are more likely to say that the gig economy is more of a bad trend than a good one for workers. That said, those who rely on the gig economy for their financial wellbeing, due to being unable to find steady work elsewhere, are more positive than negative.

Despite their more positive opinion of informal work, these gig workers face more financial uncertainty than others. Canadians who have relied on the gig economy to make ends meet are much more likely to have annual household incomes below \$50,000, are far more likely than other segments of the population

Would you say that overall, based on what you know, that increased work in the gig economy is...



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from November 8 – 12, 2019 among a representative randomized sample of 1,510 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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to be worried about household job security and are less likely to feel that they are on track to have a comfortable retirement.

More Key Findings:

- Overall, Canadians see both the pros and cons of informal work. While some celebrate the increased income available to willing workers (74%) and the potential to better control one's work-life balance (39%), many have concerns about the lack of benefits (66%) and poor regulations around some companies in this industry (55%).
- Men and young women ages 18-34 are most likely to have participated in the gig economy in the past five years, in each case at least four-in-ten have. That said, one-quarter of those over 55 years of age have done so as well.
- While gig economy workers are more likely to come from lower-income households, a significant number of Canadians across the income spectrum have taken part in this type of work within the past five years, including 31 per cent of those with household incomes over \$150,000.

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

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Part One: Size and scope of the gig economy

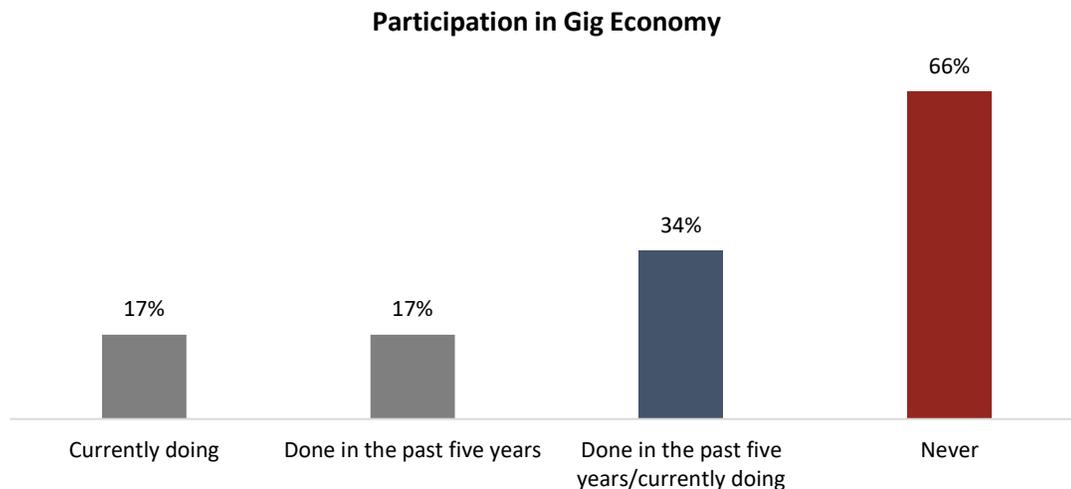
Work in the gig economy, also sometimes referred to as the informal economy, has made more headlines in recent years as companies such as Airbnb and Uber have gone from tech startups to [billion-dollar entities](#). That said, participating in the gig economy predates the age of ride-and home-sharing.

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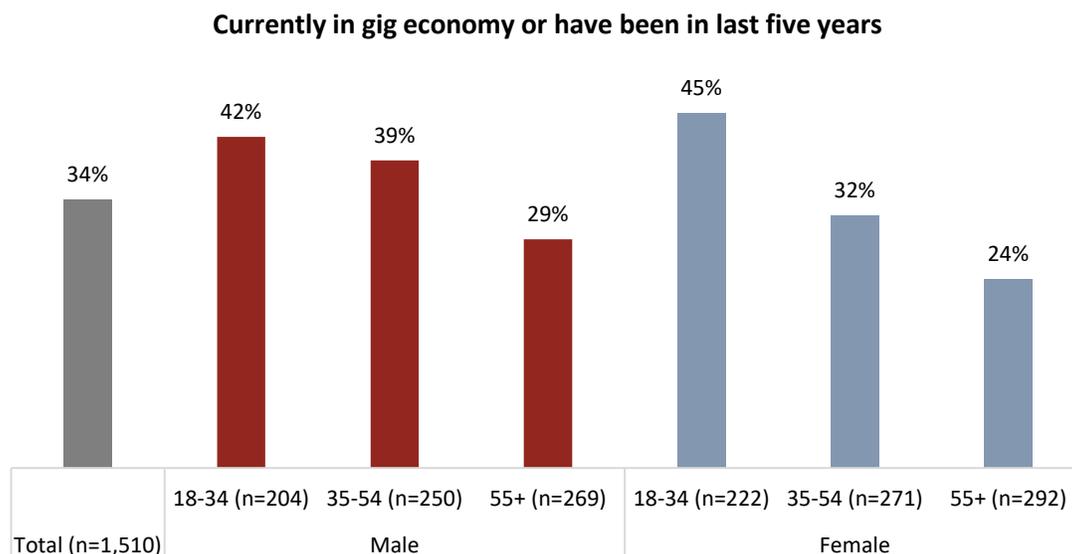
Note that this study defines gig work apart from traditional employment insofar as it is considered more temporary, and companies in this industry often employ workers as independent contractors or freelancers. The term “informal economy” in this context does not specifically refer to the “underground” economy, where income earned or paid may not be declared by workers or employers.

Just under one-in-five Canadian workers say they are currently engaged in the gig economy, while another 17 per cent say they have at some point in the past five years. In total, one-in-three Canadian workers say they have done gig work in the last five years:



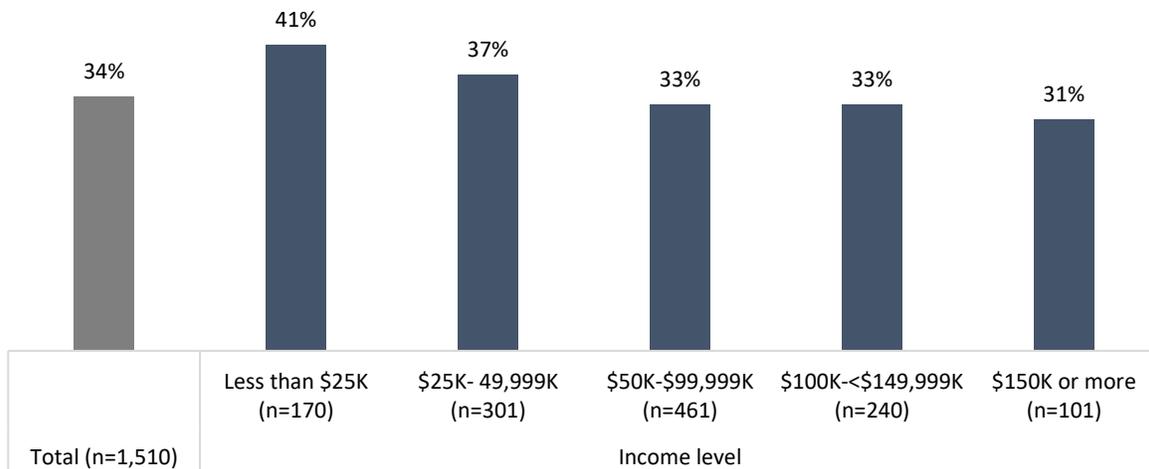
Who are the workers?

While Canadian workers of all ages are doing gig work, it is most common among those ages 18 to 34. That said, men within the 35 to 54 age group have also engaged in the gig economy at significant levels as seen in the graph below:



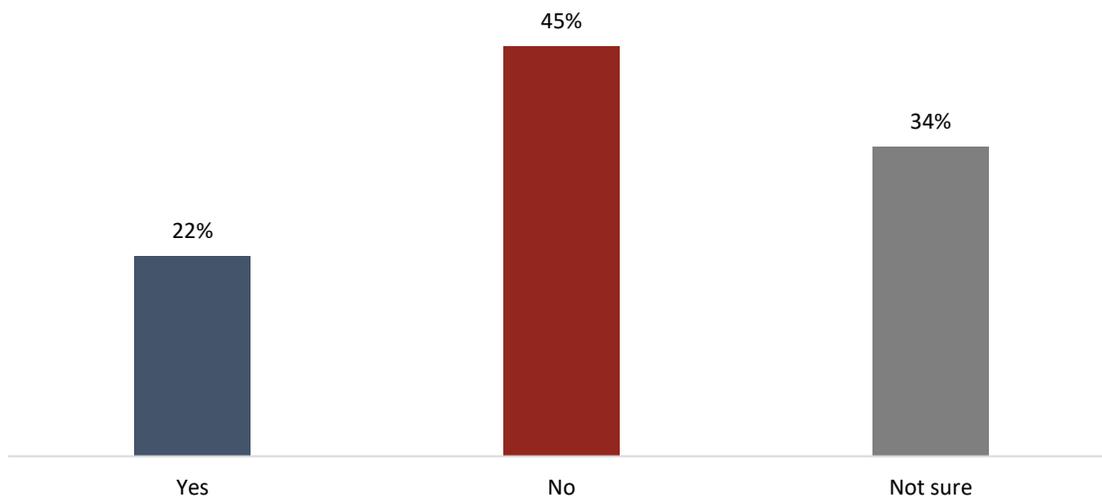
Perhaps surprising to some, at least three-in-ten Canadians across all household income levels, including those who earn more than \$150,000 per year, have engaged in gig work in the past five years. Participation rates are, nonetheless, highest among those with the lowest household income levels:

Currently in gig economy or have been in last five years



Among those who have never taken part in the gig economy, one-in-five (22%) say that this is something they can see themselves doing in the future. One-in-three (34%) say that they aren't sure but would not rule it out:

Might you see yourself doing some kind of "gig work" in the future? Among those who have not yet participated in gig economy (n=992)



What type of work do they do?

The most common type of gig work includes that of the “white collar” variety – that is, freelance office work. Among gig workers, more than one-in-three say they have done tasks completed online such as computer programming, editing documents, reviewing résumés, graphic design, etc.

Maintenance and handywork, as well as babysitting, are the next most common types of gig economy work, though the former is primarily done by men and the latter by women. Fewer workers in Canada say they are doing gig work associated with its more modern forms, such as renting property through Airbnb (6%) or driving for Uber or Lyft (4%).

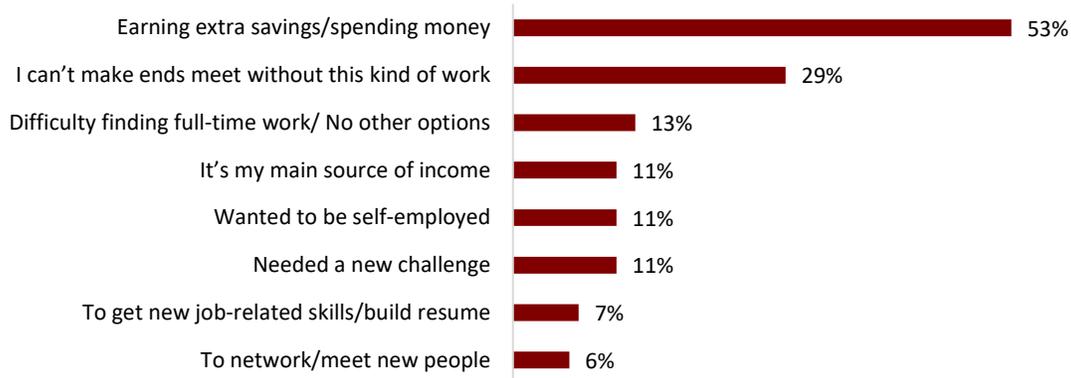
| What type of work have you done in the informal or gig economy? Among those who have done this work in past five year, 34% of population, n=518 | | | | | | |
|--|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|
| | Total (n=518) | Gender | | Age | | |
| | | Male (n=260) | Female (n=257) | 18-34 (n=186) | 35-54 (n=184) | 55+ (n=147) |
| Freelance “office work” | 36% | 38% | 34% | 37% | 43% | 26% |
| Maintenance/handywork around people’s houses | 30% | 44% | 15% | 32% | 28% | 29% |
| Babysitting | 29% | 13% | 44% | 46% | 20% | 17% |
| House sitting | 23% | 17% | 28% | 35% | 15% | 17% |
| Personal assistance services | 20% | 20% | 19% | 20% | 16% | 24% |
| Housecleaning | 18% | 12% | 23% | 23% | 14% | 17% |
| Dog walking | 15% | 9% | 21% | 25% | 7% | 12% |
| Posting videos, blog posts or other content online | 11% | 11% | 12% | 14% | 13% | 6% |
| Renting out property through a service such as Airbnb | 6% | 4% | 7% | 4% | 7% | 6% |
| Food delivery driving services, Skip the Dishes etc. | 6% | 7% | 4% | 8% | 4% | 4% |
| Driving for a ride-sharing service such as Uber or Lyft | 4% | 6% | 3% | 6% | 3% | 3% |

Motivations for participation in gig economy

Half of those who have participated in the gig economy say that their primary motivation has been earning extra income either for spending or saving. Another three-in-ten, however, say they would not be able to get by without adding in this type of work.

About one-in-ten have different reasons, including difficulty finding full-time work, or personal autonomy, as seen in the graph below:

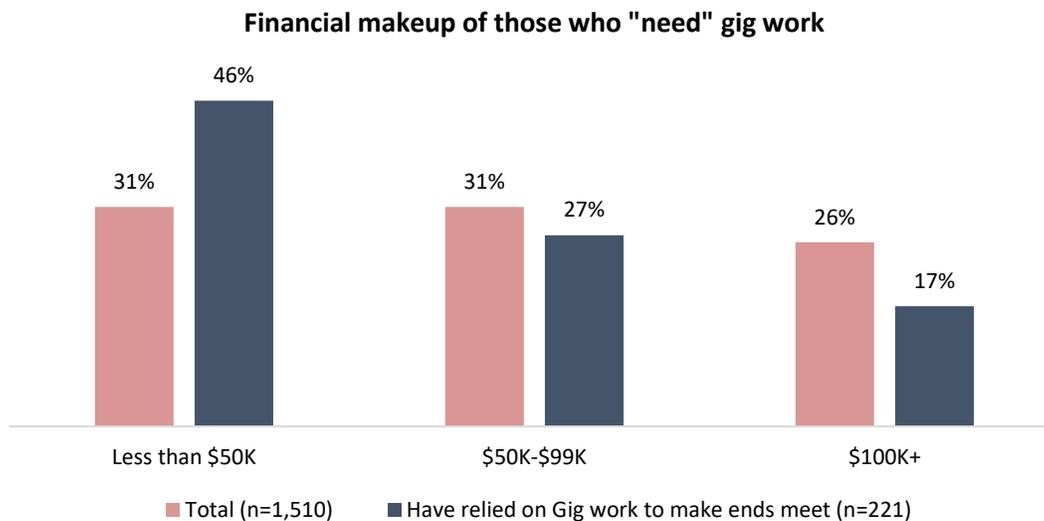
**What are the primary reasons you're currently doing "gig work" or have done in in the past five years? Choose all that apply.
(Done gig work/currently doing, n=518)**



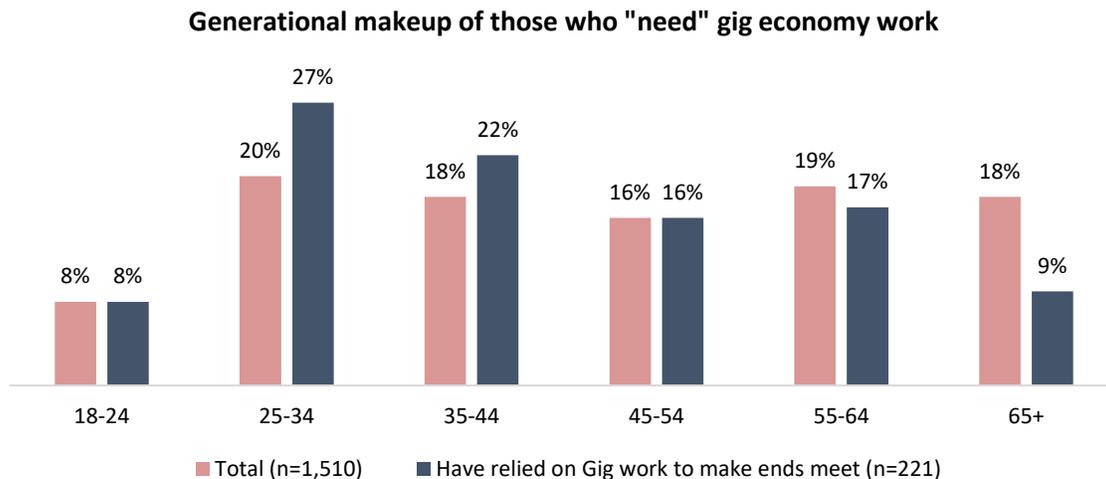
Demographics of those reliant on gig work

Looking at one group in aggregate is illuminating. By combining those who say they “can’t make ends meet without this kind of work”, “have difficulty finding full-time work”, and use gig work as their “main source of income”, researchers were able to understand the demographics of those who “need” gig work, as opposed to those who are doing it for a challenge, to network or for extra income.

Notably, half (46%) of those who have relied on gig work for their financial well-being are from the lowest income level, compared to 31 per cent in the general population. There are, however, a significant number of these workers, just under one-in-five (17%), from higher income classes:



The distribution of age across this group is also interesting. Half of workers who have needed gig work to get by are concentrated in the 25 to 44 age range, but one-quarter of those relying on this work are 55 years of age or older:

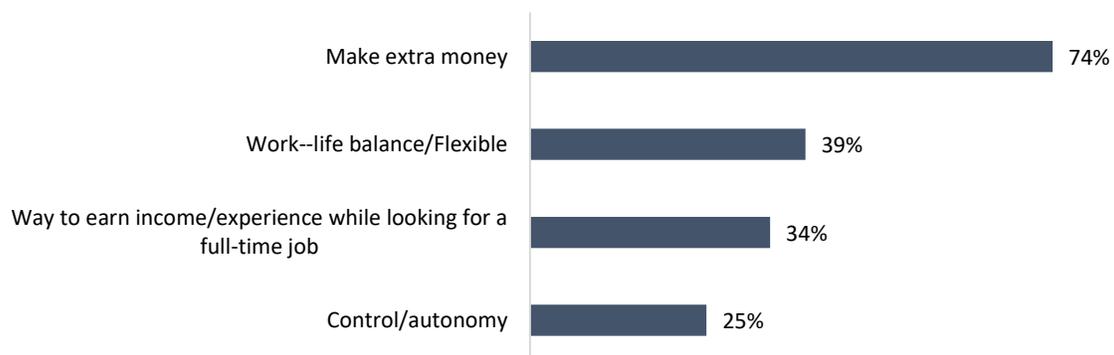


Part 2 – Broader attitudes about informal work

Pros and Cons

As was the case with those who personally participate or have participated in gig work, the top perceived benefit among the rest of the population is also income related. Three-quarters of respondents (74%) say that making extra money is the key benefit for informal work, while nearly half as many choose the next highest reason – work-life balance (39%). One-in-three (34%) say the preponderance of temporary jobs is useful to fill the gap or gain experience for future full-time work:

**What would you say are the benefits of the kind of gig work we have been discussing?
(All respondents, n=1,510)**

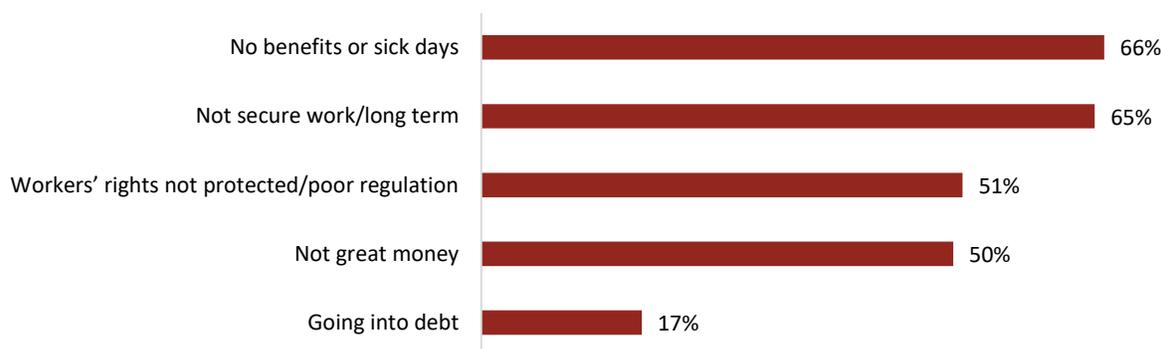


In terms of negatives, issues of job security and benefits are top of mind. Two-thirds of Canadians perceive these as problematic in relation to gig work, while half also have concerns about a lack of regulation in certain jobs to protect workers, and the level of pay:

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**And on the other side of things, what would you say are the negative aspects of gig work?
(All respondents, n=1,510)**



Concerns about a lack of benefits and job security rise among those with experience in the gig economy and rise further still among those who rely on this type of work. Among those who *need* gig work to get by, six-in-ten say the money is not great:

| What would you say are the negative aspects of gig work? | | | | |
|--|--------------------|---|---|--------------------|
| | Total (n=1,510) | Experience with Gig Work | | |
| | | Done in past 5 years/ currently doing (n=518) | Have relied on Gig Work to make ends meet (n=221) | Never done (n=992) |
| No benefits or sick days | 66% | 69% | 74% | 65% |
| Not secure work/long term | 65% | 67% | 72% | 63% |
| Workers' rights not protected/poor regulation | 51% | 48% | 52% | 52% |
| Not great money | 50% | 56% | 61% | 47% |
| Going into debt | 17% | 16% | 20% | 18% |

Overall good or bad?

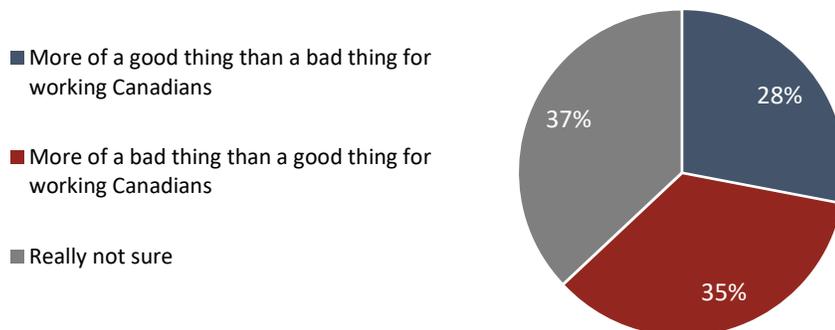
When Canadians assess the overall impact of the trend toward increasing informal work in the economy, they are a group divided. The largest number, in fact, say they are unsure whether the effect is good or

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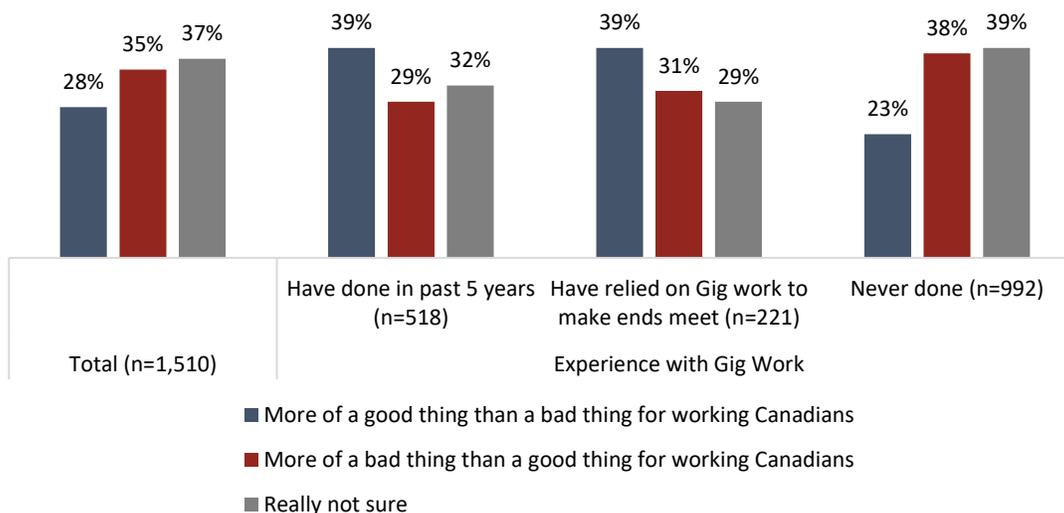
bad. One-in-three (35%) say that the trend is a negative one, while slightly fewer (28%) believe it is more good than bad.

**Would you say that overall, based on what you know, that increased work in the gig economy is?
(All respondents, n=1,510)**



As one might expect, experience with this type of work plays a role in views of it. Those who have never participated in the gig economy are more likely to withhold judgement, or to have a net negative view of the trend. Those who have experience are more positive, but are anything but uniform in their opinions:

Would you say that overall, based on what you know, that increased work in the gig economy is?

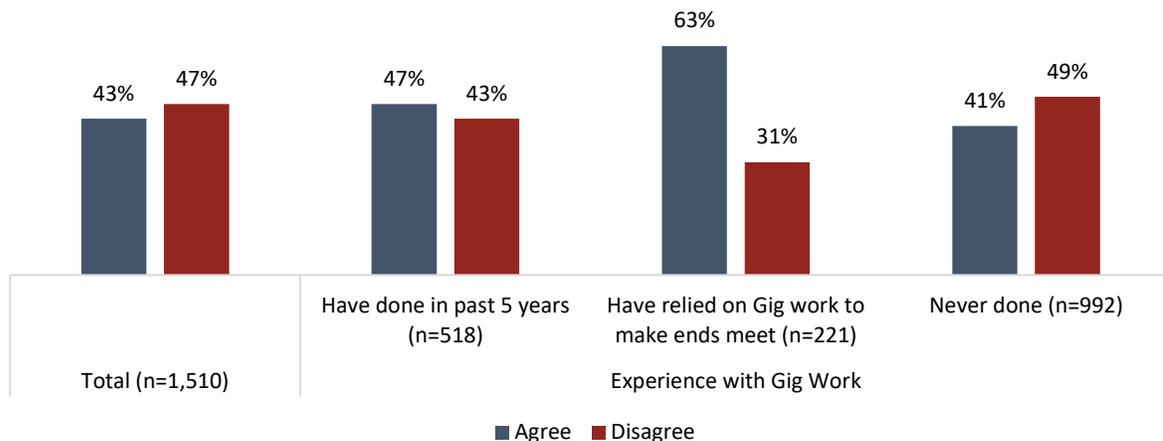


Financial worries higher among gig workers

While there may be benefits for people who choose to work in the gig economy, the financial circumstances of this group are generally more challenging than those with steadier work. In addition to

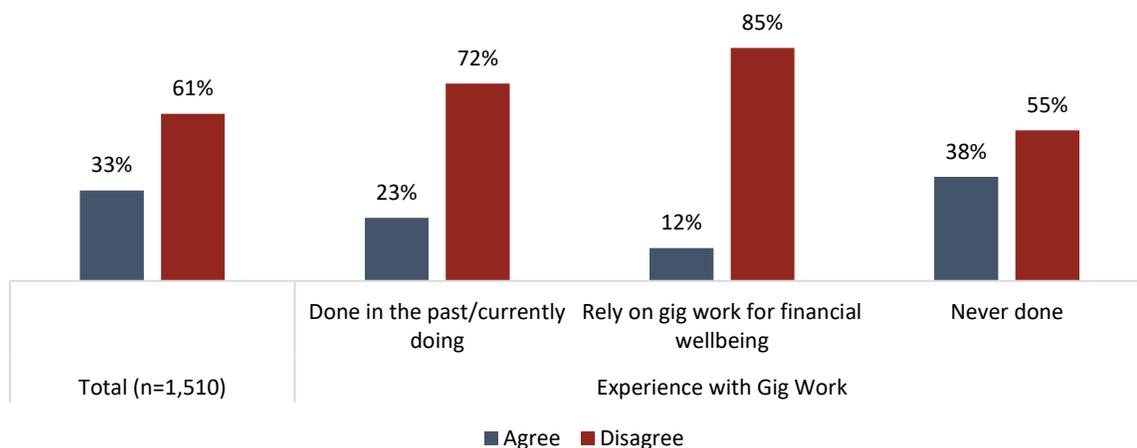
working in gig work that may be temporary or unstable, people who have relied on this work to get by are far more likely than other segments of the population to be worried about household job security:

Agree vs Disagree: "I'm concerned that I or someone in my household could lose a job because of the economy"



Another ongoing concern raised by policymakers is the ability of gig economy workers to save for retirement. For this reason, some retirees are indeed, turning to gig work after they retire to keep some income flowing. The data in this study appears to confirm some of these worries, as Canadians who have participated in the gig economy recently, or who rely on it, are far more likely to have concerns about how they will ultimately be able to afford to retire:

Agree vs Disagree: "Based on my current financial position I feel I can have a comfortable retirement"



For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here.](#)