

Occupational Injustice: Mental Stress and Chronic Pain in Gig Laborers

Md Saif Mahabub, MPH

Health Promotion and Education, CECH School of Human Services

Email: mahabumf@mail.uc.edu



THE DHAKA STUDY: GLOBAL EVIDENCE

Introduction & Methods

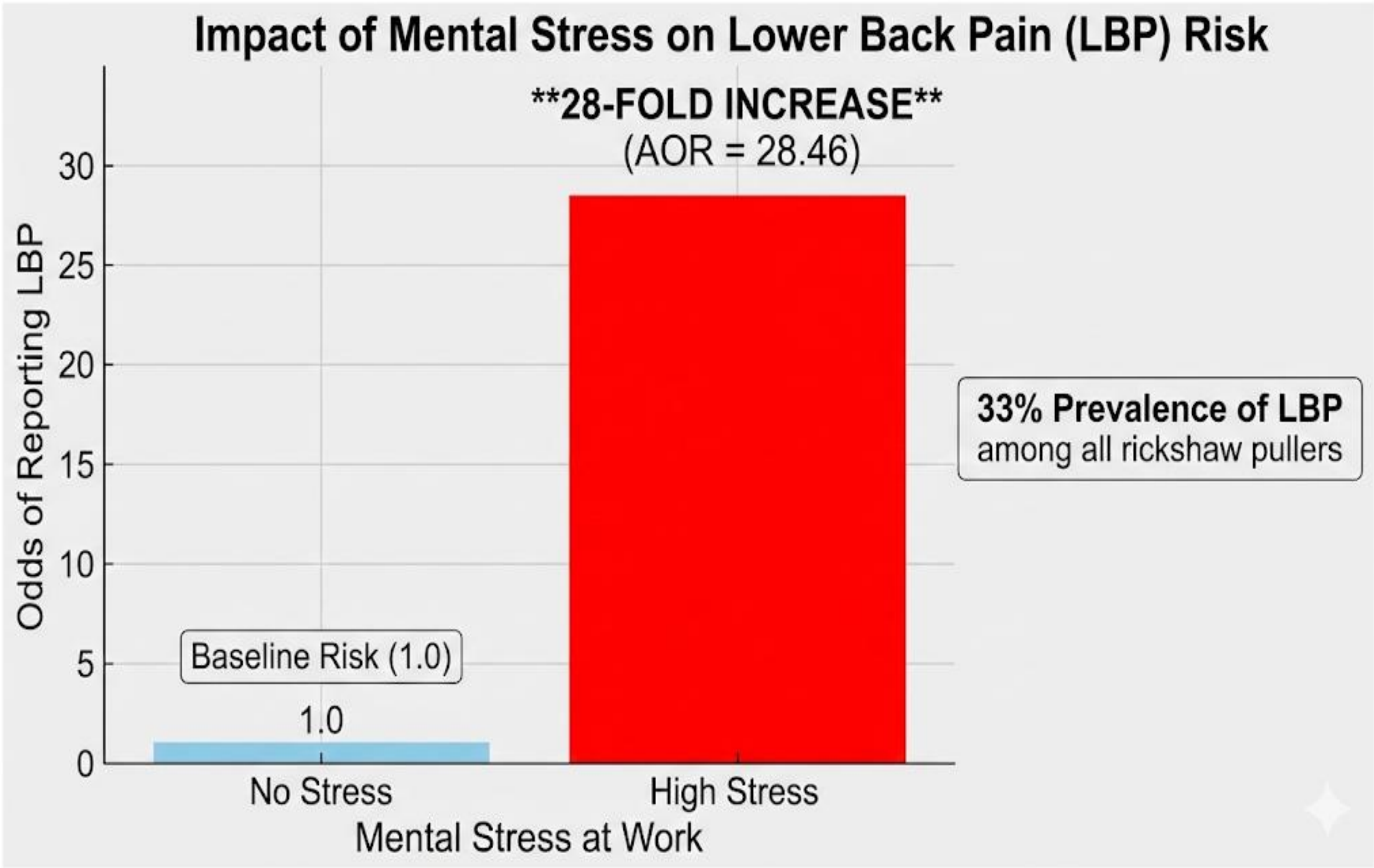
- Context:** Rickshaw pulling in Dhaka is an unregulated, physically demanding occupation involving heavy loads and extreme weather conditions. It serves as a critical case study for precarious labor.
- Study Design:** A cross-sectional survey of 299 male bicycle rickshaw pullers was conducted in Dhaka to assess self-reported physical pain and psychosocial risk factors.

Key Data Highlights

- Prevalence:** 33% of participants reported suffering from Lower Back Pain (LBP).
- Working Conditions:** 88% of pullers worked 9–13 hours daily, and 90.6% routinely lifted heavy objects.

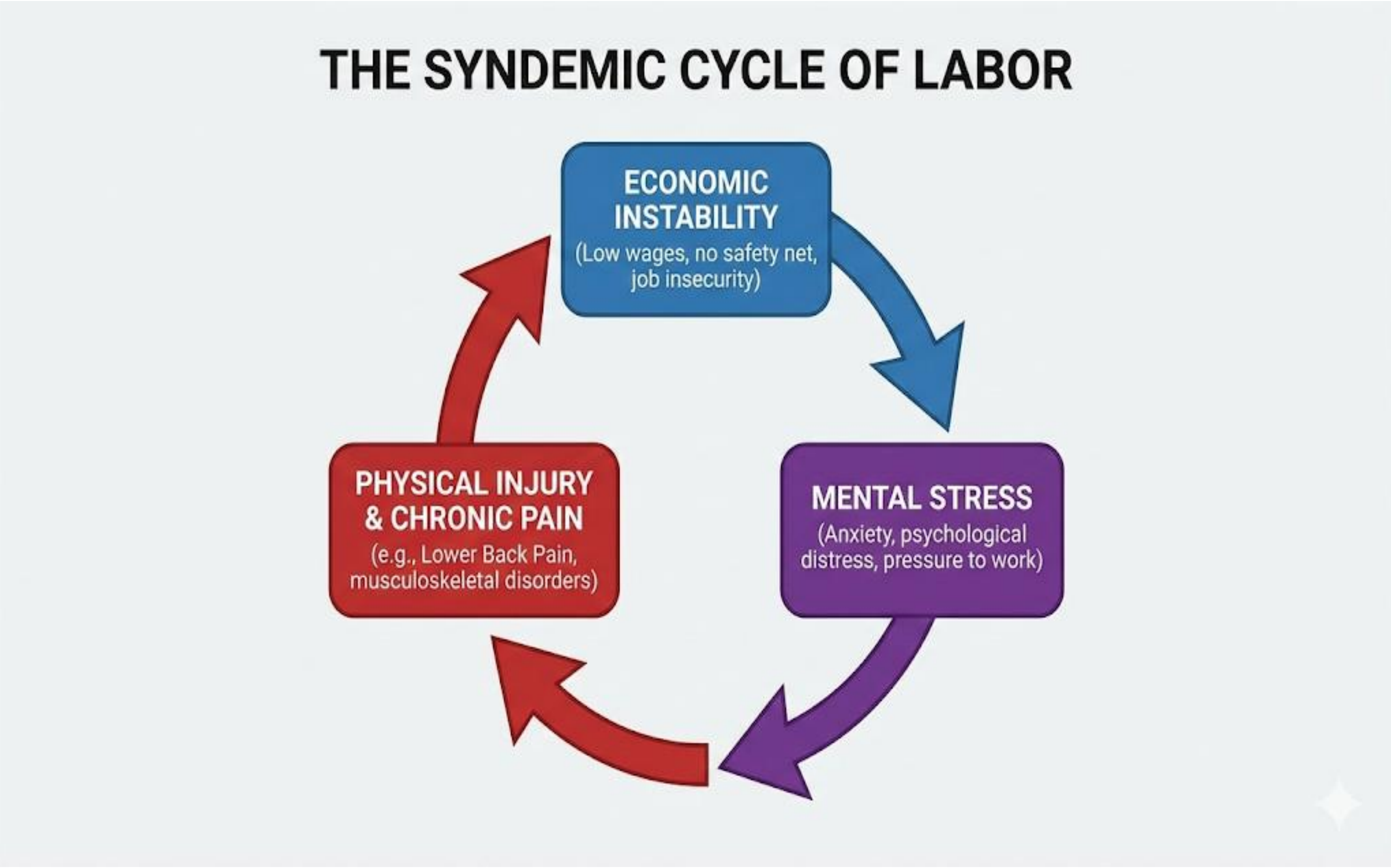
THE STRESS FACTOR (MAIN FINDING)

- While physical demands are high, psychological distress was the strongest predictor of pain.
- Participants experiencing mental stress at work were nearly **28 times more likely** to report LBP compared to those who did not.



THE SYNDEMIC OF LABOR & U.S. PARALLELS

The Syndemic Model



- Explanation:** Physical health cannot be separated from psychological instability. Economic precarity drives mental stress, which biologically amplifies susceptibility to chronic pain and injury, trapping laborers in a cycle of poverty and poor health.

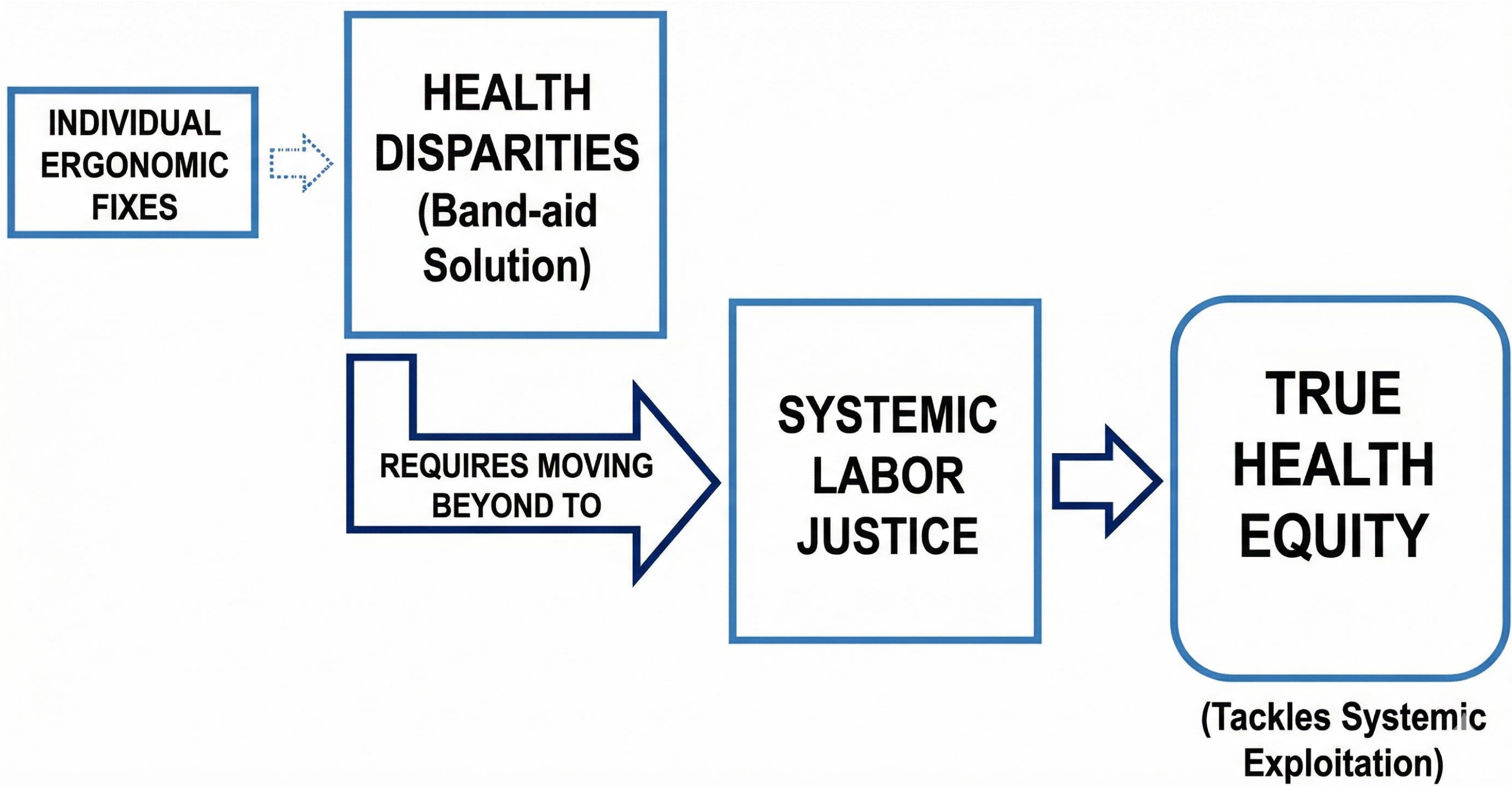
Comparative Analysis (Global vs. Local)

Feature	Dhaka Rickshaw Pullers	U.S. Gig Economy Workers
Labor Type	Informal, physically demanding transport.	Delivery drivers, warehouse laborers, rideshare.
Lack of Protections	No health insurance, job security, or sick leave.	Independent contractor status (1099), limited access to benefits or workers' comp.
Health Risks	Chronic LBP, exposure to extreme heat and pollution.	Ergonomic strain, repetitive motion injuries, pressure of high-quota algorithms.

ADVOCACY & CALL TO ACTION

A Social Justice Framework

- Addressing these health disparities requires moving beyond individual ergonomic fixes to tackle systemic exploitation. True health equity demands labor justice.



Global & Local Action Steps

- GLOBAL:** Support NGOs like **BRAC** (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) that provide essential healthcare safety nets for informal laborers.
- LOCAL (Cincinnati):** Advocate for ethical supply chains and demand protective labor standards for gig and warehouse workers in Ohio.

