

# A STUDY ON CAREER PROGRESSION FOR WOMEN IN HOTEL INDUSTRY: CURRENT SCENARIO

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** *The hospitality industry has no dearth of women joining the industry. In fact if we have a look at the data available with various hotel management institutes, the success ratio of girls to boys is very high. Still when it comes to the senior management positions in the hotels like General Manager and other Head of Departments, it's the men who rule the roost. Now with the society being more accepting towards working women, the newer generation may see different result. But with the current scenario still in existence, we should be expecting the same results, hence giving us the need to explore the unbalanced dynamics of this mismatched career progression between male and female employees.* **Objective:** *The purpose of the study was to discover how successful women achieve their senior-level positions, how they balance their work and family life, and what career advice they can offer to future hospitality leaders.* **Methodology:** *It involved interviews from female hotel employees through semi-structured questionnaire. The interview was conducted on 35 female employees working at various positions in 8 different star category hotels in the city Jaipur with an idea to explore the challenges faced by them in the career ladder in hotel management.* **Results:** *A very fair distribution of job positions ranging from associate to managers with 30 percent at associate level and 25percent at Managers level was seen. On an average, women did not feel that gender based discrimination is hindering their chance to progress. Respondents felt lack of family support, nature of work career growth and pay package as career barriers.* **Conclusion:** *The study may help students learn from successful female hoteliers and perhaps increase their commitment to longevity in hotel careers. Also to sensitize the male counterparts in the industry to the specific needs of the female employees in phases of their professional life.*

**Key Words:** *Career of women, Hospitality Industry, Career Progression, Unbalanced dynamics.*

## INTRODUCTION

It is a known fact that women have excelled in Hospitality sector not just in India but worldwide. Hospitality sector is one of the largest employers of women in current scenario. Women with their

characteristic, charm and enigma are a strong asset to the hospitality industry. The grace and elegance can only be brought forward by the feminine touch. In spite of being an intricate part of the core operations in the hospitality sector, a steady career for them is not guaranteed. Though the women join in good numbers at the initial career stages the representation of women on the senior management level is a dismal, no show.

Way back in 80's, 90's women were discouraged to join hotels and even if allowed their domain was limited to Rooms division and sales. In the last decade or so, there has been a substantial increase in women joining the industry and department which earlier had the monopoly of male employee's like in Food and Beverage Service and Food Production.

This shift in interest and number increase is usually due to education and change of mindset issues. Despite the changing scenario, this numeric size is not converted to the roles that women get to play at higher levels. If we look at statistics women workforce is a mere 22.5% in India (Sucheta Ray, 2016). According to International Labour Organization (ILO) out of 131 countries from which the data is available, India ranks a low of 11<sup>th</sup> from bottom in FLFP (Female Labour Force Participation).

Considering the changing and demanding current scenario, changes in the workforce and employability are tangible and most required. The increasing numbers of women in employment sector have now changed the face of business world, hospitality industry being a part of such organizations. The tourism industry is a major employer of women. It has been observed that the labor force of the tourism industries includes more female workers (58%) than male workers. The highest proportions are seen in accommodation (60 %), and in travel agencies and tour operators (64 %). Nearly one in every three women working in the tourism industries works part-time however the ratio of men is one in every seven working men. women working full-time still represent the biggest share of employment 40%. Within the three selected tourism industries, the proportion of part-time employment is highest in the accommodation sector (25 %), closely followed by travel agencies and tour operators (23 %) (Eurostat, 2015).

Within the industry, women make up nearly 70% of the workforce, however there is shown a marked difference in senior positions, with women holding less than 40% of all managerial positions, less than 20% of general management roles and between 5-8% of board positions. (Baum, 2015) Women talent is recognized as a critical business asset and thereby stands for at least half of the talent available to organizations and economies in most countries. They are also considered as the fundamental driver of corporate performance. (Scott, 1995; Mihail, 2006) claimed that "women who aspire to managerial careers in corporate Greece are likely to face intense attitudinal barriers" Hospitality and tourism industry is a dynamic industry which is influenced by gender stereotyping and therefore, there are certain types of work that women can do more effectively as women have the opportunity to express themselves and operate according to their traditional roles. (Brownell, 1994a; Brownell J, 1994b) They

continued that women are mainly found in part-time or seasonal/break jobs in tourism. There are certain positions that are dominated by women and others by men. However, women in this case hold positions that create hurdles for them to progress in the hierarchy and become hotel general managers (Woods, 2000; Biswas, 1996) or hold those that are poorly paid (Kinnaird, 1994) Nevertheless, women have started rising the career ladder and nowadays are found in higher managerial positions in the industry. It also presents the critical business case for having more gender balanced senior management teams - a case which is growing in strength. However, a clear disparity is figured out between the number of women working in the industry and those in management and senior positions.

Data on age and dependents have suggested that those women who have caring responsibilities take longer, or struggle, to progress to senior positions. There are also large differences in the concentration of female workers in certain types of occupations and areas of industry, which is reflected in the salaries they earn. Also, it was displayed that Retention strategies has not focused sufficiently on the reasons why the rate of women leaving jobs is more in comparison to men, but it was estimated that the 310,000 female workers our industry loses annually cost in replacement recruitment and initial training (Maxwell, 1997) suggested that female hotel managers communicate better than male hotel managers, as they have the especial essence to understand the deeper insight of both the organization and the staff. It was suggested that an organization having at least one female representative on the board appears to cut a company's chances of going bust by about 20 percent. Having two or three female directors lowers the risk even more. These skills include communication, flexibility, the ability to adapt, and teamwork. They have become better at listening, as part of their communication processes, as well as an information gathering technique, in their effort to effectively and efficiently analyze employees' concerns and the organization's climate. Where female and male members are equally represented in a team it works better, showing enhanced productivity and quality of work.

The glass ceiling exists implies a single, invisible, structural barrier is also questioned in terms of career progression of women in the hospitality industry. There is a great need to acknowledge the dynamic complexity of the glass ceiling metaphor The term intersectionality is used to describe the theory of overlap of various social identities, as race, gender, sexuality, and class, contributes to the specific type of systemic oppression and discrimination experienced by an individual and in this case, the glass ceiling, at different times in the workplace of hospitality and tourism industry. In contrast to the traditional power-based structural view of the glass ceiling, (Altman, 2005) suggest an eccentric life-career approach as an alternative exposition. This approach aims to identify the diversity of experience between groups of women. Three groups are identified in this regard: **Group 1** of younger women employed in the junior ranks of management in their early to late 20's, **Group 2** comprises of women established in their career who occupy roles at department head level in their late 20's to early 30's, **Group 3** involves some women established in their career at a more senior level, older and sometimes with independent children. Thus, it is argued giving an eye to the glass ceiling phenomenon, it is

very critical that attention be paid to intersections between gender, other diversity characteristics and to the concept of glass ceiling. In the research, the intersection of gender, age and time in life with career progression and their combined impact on the glass ceiling phenomenon was scrutinized with following objectives:

- 1) To understand the varied demographics of women working in hospitality industry.
- 2) To examine whether gender discrimination is a deterrent in career progression.
- 3) To evaluate which factors are important for career progression.
- 4) To measure which factors make up as roadblocks in the path of career growth.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted using qualitative research design. This was used to help the researcher seek the views from female hospitality employees at all levels to provide key information about their viewpoint as to what they consider as being important to have a steady growth in their profession. As qualitative research, respondents were offered the opportunity to respond to questions more elaborately.

The primary data was collected through semi-structured questionnaire, personal in depth interviews conducted with females in the hospitality industry. Consequently, women working in five star category hotels in Jaipur were identified. Later the questionnaire was extended to PAN India respondents. The reason for the choice was, they may have actually experienced on the job obstacles faced for career progression and to get a better insight on the problems faced.

The interview was conducted at the respondent's work place or researcher's office and it took approximately 30 minutes for each respondent

The population of the study included 35 female members from the hospitality industry working in varied operational and support departments.

Questionnaire was broadly divided in to 5 sections:

- A. Section 1 gathered background information of the participants i.e (name of the respondent, age, occupation, experience details, place of work)
- B. Section 2 dabbled with the gender based issues which female employees may or may not have faced at workplace.
- C. Section 3 and 4 focused on the factors contributing career advancement and barriers to the same. Respondents were asked to mark various factors as per their understanding as important and not important.
- D. Section 5 dealt with two short answer questions to include anything which might have been skipped by the researcher in the questionnaire above and also to get a personalised view of the respondent in relation to their working environment.

Secondary data was used to compare previous year research regarding employer's perspective of hospitality education and associated skills needed by industry. The data selected by secondary data collected in a longitudinal manner. The studies were similar but maintained little difference in supporting questions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Demographics: Age, Educational Qualifications, Job title, Department of Work

There was a strong presence of the women workforce in the two age segments 18-25 years and 25-30 years. Unfortunately there was not even a single response from the age group of 30-35 years. This gap may be interpreted as break taken for marriage or maternity prospects. Thereafter a steep fall is also seen in the age group above 35 years with only 3 respondents (Table 1).

As far as education is concerned being a practical based industry, the majority did not opt for post graduation considering work experience makes a better choice than higher studies. Given a chance if they stick to the industry more women will definitely make to the top levels. Departments as expected were allied, with no representation in food production department. Though there has been an increase in the number of girls joining the kitchen, but was still substantially very low. An interesting factor here was that a very fair distribution of job positions ranging from associate to managers with 30 percent at associate level and 25% at Managers level was observed.

*Table 1: Demographic profile of the subjects*

S.No	Particulars	Percentage
1.	<b>Age Group</b> 18-25 25-30 30-35 Above 35	 69 28 0 3
2.	<b>Educational Qualifications</b> Diploma Graduate Post Graduate Others	 5 80 10 5
3.	<b>Job title</b> Associate Supervisor Executive Assistant Manager Manager	 30 18 13 14 25

4.	<b>Department</b>	
	Housekeeping	29
	Food Production	0
	Sales and Marketing	13
	Front Office	31
	Food and Beverage	14
	Others	13
5.	<b>Job position</b>	
	Associate	30
	Supervisor	18
	Executive	11
	Assistant Manager	16
	Manager	25

### Gender Based Concerns

The analysis showed a progressive scenario wherein majority of the respondents have actually nullified gender based issues if any. Direct gender discrimination has been given thumbs down indicating that at least prima facie things have drastically improved in the industry where women feel safe.

The research focused towards the equality of men and women in workplace; however we do have a split opinion in certain cases where women still feel that the perception still exists that a man will advance faster than a woman in career. This may or may not reflect the actual scenario but surely enough unseen and unsaid gender bias must be there as many responded yes for this viewpoint.

One factor where women have answered yes in high numbers, 63.9% to the obstacles faced by them at work may be due to the fact that general perception that a women is less than a man is slowly changing but when it comes to ground reality the still face the rigmarole of fitting in the man's world. Of course we still have a long, long way to go to achieve absolutely no discrimination but as we can see with the responses, we are on the right path.

On an average, women do not feel that gender based discrimination is hindering their chance to progress; it may be a secondary reason but surely breaks the glass ceiling.

### Career Advancement Reasons

Taking into account the various factors which would be contributing towards better and faster career gets a complete nod for Leadership. No doubt having a women sitting in a role of authority needs exceptional leadership skills. As expected, all the reasons/factors are highly important on the radar of nearly all the respondents, only a few stating that willingness to relocate is not important for career advancement. This might be debatable as we have generally seen that relocation actually becomes a major issue especially post marriage.

**Table 2: Gender Based Concerns**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Yes (%)</b>	<b>No %</b>
Gender Discrimination	32.8	67.2
Career progress perception M/F	47.5	52.5
Skill set M/F	21.3	78.7
Personal Qualities M/F	41	59.0
Obstacles faced in career progression	63.9	36.0
Treatment : Associate level	62.3	37.7
Treatment : Manager Level	70.5	29.5
Turnover Ratio F/M	45.9	54.1

**Table 3: Career Advancement Reasons**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Important (%)</b>	<b>Not important (%)</b>
Leadership	100	0
Communication	98.4	1.6
Personality Traits	98.4	1.6
Work atmosphere	98.4	1.6
Family support	98.3	1.7
In house support	93.3	6.7
Job Expertise	90	10
Willingness to relocate	81.7	18.3
Organisational Skills	96.7	3.3
Attitude	91.7	8.3

**Table 4: Career Advancement Barriers**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Important (%)</b>	<b>Not important (%)</b>
Long working hours	26.7	73.3
Nature of Work	86.7	13.3
Sexual abuse	56.7	43.3
Indifference At work	53.3	46.7
Quality of personal Life	78.3	21.7
Family support	93.3	6.7
Career goals	93.3	6.7
Pay package	91.7	8.3
Glass ceilings	43.3	56.7
Old boy club	31.7	68.3

## Career Advancement Barriers

It was seen that respondents have given very high preference to family support, nature of work career growth and pay package. Needless to say that four factors indeed are the most important factor combined when a woman is looking to rise at her workplace. A usual myth that we tend to associate with women not willing to work long hours is challenged here with 73.3% respondents said that it is not a deterrent for them, in fact glass ceilings and Old boy school club also find a low rating on being important.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the

- a) Majority of the respondents are working at associate level in the age bracket of 18 – 30 yrs. A significant dip is seen in the age group of above 35 years indicating lesser women working in higher positions or leaving job for various allied reasons after a certain time.
- b) With a strong presence in the Manager job position with nearly 25 percent in that bracket, it may be said that only if women do not leave the industry, this percentage may be easily converted into senior level positions as in General Managers and corporate level designations.
- c) Front office department leads with highest number of women working in the department followed by housekeeping and food and beverage service.
- d) Majority of the respondents stated that they have not faced gender discrimination in the industry, however they do face obstacles in their work area but they necessarily may or may not be gender biased.
- e) Leadership trait is considered the major factor for career advancement by the respondents. Followed by family support and in house support in the organisation.
- f) Women (Respondents) believe family support, pay package, career goals are the factors which motivate them for continuing in the job. In contrast to the popular perception women feel that long working hours are not barrier for their Career advancement and progression.
- g) The major reason we see as to why the hospitality industry is male dominated is partly because of the culture and nature of the industry, where job opportunities are highly versatile even requires the flexibility to quick relocation.

Women seem to have no issues entering the industry at the beginning of a career. However, they may be more likely than men to leave the industry as they age, especially if they are not happy with the pay package, career goals or family pressures. The reasons for this may not relate to the classic 'glass ceiling' or Old boy club.



With minimalistic representation in the age brackets of 30 years plus, it may be inferred that due to the personal choices taken by women, that from a wide number of managers working in the industry, a smaller pool of female candidates seek promotion, and in turn fewer women in senior management positions, even though opportunities treatment have become more equalized.

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