

Women in Tourism Industry – Sri Lanka

D.A.C. Suranga Silva
Senior Lecturer, University of Colombo

B.A.K.M. Mendis
Visiting Lecturer, Department of Economics, University of Colombo

ABSTRACT

Tourism industry is one of the areas that has the potential to develop and grow in the next few years in Sri Lanka. According to the Tourism Development Strategy of Sri Lanka, tourism industry is expected to be the third largest foreign exchange earner by 2016. The country needs further 500,000 well trained employees by 2016 to meet the expected target. However there are doubts this potential for growth may retard by a deficit of qualified, experienced efficient employees. It is observed that female participation in the industry is very low. Furthermore, at the middle and senior management level the representation is negligible.

A survey was conducted to find the reasons for the low participation of females in the sector. The survey participants consisted of both sector representatives and other professionals.

The fact findings reveal that the main barrier for females entering and excelling in the tourism sector is the view of the general public. The perception of the general public is that unwanted attention or pressure of sexual nature is common in the tourism industry. Therefore it is not safe for females to be employed in the tourism sector.

Key Words: Tourism Industry, Female Participation, Career Advancement, Cultural and Non – Cultural Factors

1. Introduction

The tourism industry has become an economic and social wonder (UNWTO, 2016), demonstrating an above average growth rate for six successive years since the 2009 economic crisis. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council the industry contribution to the global economy rose to 10% of global GDP in 2015 and recorded a total value of over USD 7.6 trillion. Moreover the industry accounted for 277 million jobs globally in the year 2014. The industry is a key driver of global economic growth and responsible for creating jobs and economic development. Furthermore the World Travel and Tourism Council predicts the industry to grow further by an average of 4% annually.

The tourism industry is featured prominently in the post war era of Sri Lanka. Unlike any other industry tourism indicated a double digit growth. Total contribution to GDP in 2014 was LKR 1,067 billion which is 11.1% of GDP (Central Bank of Sri Lanka,2014) .The industry was placed the fourth highest contributor to the GDP, after foreign remittance, apparel and agriculture (Central Bank of Sri Lanka,2014). According to the World Travel & Tourism Council the industry is expected to grow further and become the highest earner by the year 2024. In 2014, the total workforce of tourism industry, including jobs indirectly supported by the industry, was 10% of total employment that was 819,500 jobs. This was expected to fall by 2.4% in 2015 to 800,000 jobs and rise by 1.7% per annum to 804,000 jobs in 2024 that will be 9.5% of total jobs (World Travel & Tourism Council 2014).

Tourism is expected to be the third largest foreign exchange earner by end 2016 with over USD 3 billion in annual earnings and 2.5 million arrivals (World Travel & Tourism Council 2014). Around 45,000 extra hotel

rooms will be needed to cater the demand. It is also estimated that Sri Lanka needs further 500,000 employees by the end of 2016 to meet the predicted target (World Travel & Tourism Council 2014).

Attracting and keeping qualified human resources is one of the major challenges faced by the industry. The industry is short of entry-level as well as qualified and experienced employees. There is also a considerable rate of dropouts at entry-level. Moreover a significant number of qualified and experienced employees leaving the country seeking overseas employment have worsened the situation.

According to the World Travel & Tourism Council 2014, worldwide, women make up nearly 70% of the workforce of tourism industry. However female representation in the senior management level is very low. According to the available data from World Travel & Tourism Council 2014, women hold less than 40% of all managerial positions, less than 20% of general management roles and between 5-8% of board positions. Participation of Sri Lankan women in the industry is significantly low, as a percentage only 10% of the formal sector. Furthermore women who have reached the top management positions in the tourism sector are negligible.

Women's under-representation in the labour market is a phenomenon in Sri Lanka. The island nation's population comprises of 52.8% females but when it comes to labour force participation their representation is only 35.6%, which is the lowest in South Asia (Department of Census and Statistics – Sri Lanka, 2014).

However Sri Lankan females are among the most literate in South Asia, and the country tops the sub-continental rankings for female literacy. According to University Grant Commission of Sri Lanka is the only country in the region to produce more female graduates from its local universities.

Nevertheless the situation is much different in the tourism industry. As per gathered data from the government and private registered hotel schools around the island a clear gender disparity is visible in the hotel school enrollment. Ceylon Hotel - Colombo School represent only 21% of female population, 12 % in Kandy Hotel School and only 6% in the Anuradhapura Hotel School. Similarly the three privately managed hotel schools namely Mt. Lavinia Hotel School, The Winstone Hotel School and William Anglaise Hotel schools representation is 11%, 10% and 24% respectively.

The low enrolment rate to the hotel schools around the island highlight the lack of interest in the Sri Lankan women in learning and functioning in the tourism industry.

This research study intends to find empirical evidence on the factors hindering women entering and excelling in the tourism industry of Sri Lanka.

2. Literature Review

Although modern tourism industry is equipped with technology, luxury and comfort it is still principally dependent on the quality of human capital to ensure a successful and profitable industry. (Korczyński 2002).

In the 21st century in many parts of the world most of the organizations comprised of 50% of women. Nevertheless, the representation was solid only in the lower and middle layers. The percentage gets lower at higher levels of the corporate hierarchy. Turner in 2012 defined this as a “pyramid problem”. However Burke and Vinnicombe (2005) challenge that aging workforce and fewer new entrants have resulted in shortage of qualified professionals, forcing organizations to use and develop talents of all its employees. Under the circumstances they cannot afford to limit the career possibilities of women.

This statement puts forward a logical argument that although women are capable, they are traditionally denied the opportunities. As quoted by Masadeh in 2013, equal opportunities for men and women in the fields of education and career are there in many developed countries around the world. However, even in the developed world still gender barriers are obvious in the tourism industry. Women in the hotel industry make up an underutilized and undervalued resource (Maxwell, 1997). They are still overshadowed by men and do not actively take part in the tourism industry for social, cultural and traditional reasons (Baum, Amoah & Spivack, 1997; Li & Leung, 2001; Wong & Chung, 2003).

According to ILO the term “gender” refers to socially made roles, rights and responsibilities that communities and societies consider fitting for men and women. As explained by Kinnaird in 2000 Tourism industry consists of processes that are made out of gender societies. As a result, tourism-related development symbolizes gender relations. Researchers have long contended that power sharing is directly related to politics, to which they inform by gender and other socially structured relationships (Kempadoo, 1999; Momsen & Kinnaird, 1995). Therefore women are situated differently in their respective socio-cultural and socioeconomic environments than men and are “likely to experience tourism differently due to their position” (Apostolopoulos & Sonmez, 2001).

This is more obvious in cultures that have residual effects of machismo and stronger patriarchal societal norms (Duffy, Cardenas, Chancellor & Byrid 2011). Scholars recognized machismo to be a cultural ideology which refers to the phenomenon of male pride and exertion of masculinity and serves to explain gender interactions and acts performed by males (Duffy, Cardenas, Chancellor & Byrid 2011). Consequently this has been a negative power structure for women and it has the potential to inform all aspects of their lives. Moreover this situation impacts how the women of the community are able to participate in the tourism workforce.

The world tourism industry was dominated by males for a long period of time. Hence, the career development theories in the industry were developed centering men and those are masculine by nature. In this male dominated environment women are expected to copy male traits to develop their careers (Schrieber 1998).

Thus women who have succeeded in the industry had to adapt to male model and male cultural standards (Bierema & Cseh 2000). As stated by Bierema & Opengart 2002, being non emotional is one of the traits women managers had to gain to climb the career ladder in the tourism industry.

Gilliigan (1982) defied women’s career development as a change in moral understanding which occurs during five years after graduating from college. According to Gilligan women’s career development should be considered interdependent rather than independent. Bierema & Opengart (2002) identified following six reasons as obstacles for women’s career development. (1) Gender roles and social expectations (2) Primary care giving and homemaking responsibilities (3) Increasing availability of alternative work arrangements (4) Current models that lack diversity (5) Career patterns that differ from men (6) Importance of hidden curriculum to succeed in the male dominated environment.

Some researchers noted that women change their life choices after reaching middle management level (Cornelius & Skinner, 2006). These observations differ from men hence most of the employers discourage women from aspiring for senior level management positions. As a result typical ‘gender pyramid’ is prevalent. Hence one can argue that women are mostly employed in lower levels of occupations and occupations with few career development opportunities. Further a report in HR MID (2006) argued that women are victims of discrimination. They proved their argument based on the high profile suits women around the world have filed successfully against their employers for discrimination based on their gender.

Sexual harassment, including unwanted attention or intimidation of a sexual character is extensive in the tourism industry (Hoel & Einarsen, 2003). A study revealed that females attached to tourism industry in the developing world were the sector most affected (Hoel & Einarsen, 2003). Further the study revealed that Front office staff,

Waiters/stewards, and housekeeping staff were the most prone to sexual harassment. According to the study most common acts of harassment were obscene language and jokes, and sexually suggestive comments.

Additionally the study exposed that mainly women in junior positions experience sexual harassment which displays that it has to do with both gender and power issues. With low levels of education, they are less confident than other employees when dealing with difficult people in positions of power.

Other than this, irregular working hours, night shifts, dress code and a suggestive physical environment also make them prone to sexual harassment. Exposure to unwanted sexually related attention is considered to be part of the job (Hoel & Einarsen, 2003).

A study conducted recently by British Hotel Employees concluded that the hotel is not a rational environment where there is agreement over social norms or acceptable behavior between customers and staff.

3. Methodology

The independent focused group survey was carried out through emails with the sector specialists, and professionals from other sectors. A set questionnaire was used to gather information from the respondents. After extensive literature review a questionnaire was drafted to explore the reasons obstructing women entering and excelling in the tourism industry. The questionnaire contained 30 statements, each similar to one of the six main reasons identified as factors which hinder women's career advancement in hospitality industry.

Namely (a) Cultural factors and social norms of the society discourage females to enter the industry (b) Sexual harassment of female employees in the sector (c) Discrimination in recruiting and promoting females (b) Lack of opportunities for females to continue higher studies in tourism industry (d) The industry is predominately dominated by male (f) Irregular working hours and night shifts. The "Five point Likert Scale" was used by the participants to mark the most suitable answer. The scale ranging from 0 – 4 as follows:

- 0 – Not at all
- 1 – Once in a while
- 2 – Sometimes
- 3- Fairly often
- 4- Frequently if not always

4. Data Analysis

Response Rate

From the selected sample of 250 survey participants 180 successfully filled in and returned the questionnaires, resulting in a response rate of 72%.

Demographic Data

Demographic data collected on various aspects, and a summary of the results presented in Tables 01, 02 and 03. The statistics revealed that 53% of the participants were females. And 62% of the participants have postsecondary qualifications. The statistics reveal that only 10% of the participants are aged 50 or above.

Table 5.1 Demographic data: Gender

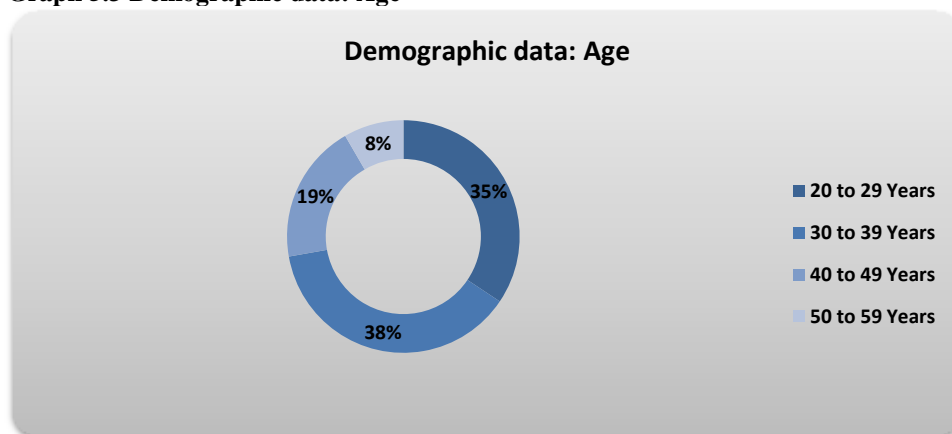
	Frequency	Percentage
Male	85	47%
Female	95	53%

Table 5.2 Demographic data: Education Level

Education	F	%
Masters	12	7%
Bachelors	22	12%
Professional Qualification	30	17%
Diplomas	57	32%
A/L	59	33%

All the respondents were Advanced Level qualified, while 121 respondents had post A-Level qualifications, and 22 participants had a bachelor’s degree. 12 respondents were qualified at Master’s level.

Graph 5.3 Demographic data: Age



35% of the survey participants were below 30 years of age, while the highest percentage of 38% represented the age group (30 -39). 19% of the participants were in the 40 -49 category. The least number of respondents (8%) belonged to the 50 – 59 age categories.

Data collected through the Questionnaire was analyzed through Microsoft Excel 2007.

Table 5.4 Descriptive Statistics - Mean & Standard Deviation Scores

Factors	Number of respondents	Mean	Standard Deviation
Cultural reasons and social norms of the society discourage female to enter the industry	180	3.98	0.89
Lack of opportunities for females to continue higher studies in tourism industry	180	3.75	0.92
Discrimination in recruiting and promoting females	180	3.96	0.93
The industry is predominately male dominant	180	3.63	0.85
Sexual harassment	180	3.97	0.91
Irregular working hours, night shifts	180	3.94	0.89

5. Survey Findings & Discussion

Table 5.4 explains Mean & Standard Deviation Scores of respondents for reasons hindering women career advancement in tourism industry.

Cultural reasons and social norms identified by the respondents as the biggest barrier for women in the tourism industry with a mean score of 3.98 and a standard deviation of 0.89. Similarly previous researchers highlighted that all over the world cultural and social norms obstruct women entering the tourism industry. This is worse in societies that have residual effects of machismo and stronger patriarchal societal norms (Duffy, Cardenas, Chancellor & Byrid 2011). A similar situation can be viewed in Sri Lanka, where there is a male dominant society.

Sexual harassment, identified as the second highest barrier for females to excel in the tourism industry. As discussed in the literature review sexual harassment including unwanted attention or pressure of a sexual nature is common in the tourism industry. Therefore it is the opinion of the survey respondents that tourism industry by its nature is prone to sexual harassment

Discrimination in recruiting and promoting females is identified by the respondents as the fourth barrier with a mean score of 3.93. Discrimination in recruiting and promoting females in the tourism sectors in the country. One of the main reasons for this is lack of successful females in the sector. Absence of female senior managers in the industry limit human resources managers/ recruiters' expectations of what women could aspire to in the industry. Hence they prefer male employees.

Irregular working hours, night shifts – the survey respondents have identified irregular working hours & night shifts as fourth main reason for the females to stay away from the industry. The labour law has allowed females stewards, telephone operators and housekeeping staff to work late night shift. Survey respondents have seen this as a barrier for females to excel in the tourism sector. But it can be noted that nurses and medical doctors who are also needed to report to duty for the late night shift dominated by females.

Lack of interest in females to continue higher education in tourism is identified by the respondents as the fifth highest barrier with a mean value of 3.75. From the gathered data the researchers noted that few females intend to perceive higher education in the tourism industry, therefore less than 20% females represent hotel schools around the country.

Sixth significant barrier identified in this research was **male dominant culture** with a mean value of 3.63, where the working culture, industry policies, procedures and practices long set up favoring men. The respondents felt that working on shifts basis pattern not favoring women as it may conflict with family responsibilities.

6. Conclusion

The research findings suggest the cultural belief of the country plays an important role in discouraging female participation in the industry.

Further it can be noticed that the opinion of general public of the female employees attached to the tourism sector is still negative. The public opinion is sexual harassment including unwanted attention or pressure of a sexual nature is common in the tourism industry. Therefore the industry is not suitable for reputable females.

But the actual picture may be totally different to the perception. When compared to actual number of complaints on sexual harassment from the employees of the tourism sector to other main sectors, one can see complaints received from tourism sector is much lower than some other sectors where the females dominates. For that reason it is important to educate the general public about the situation. Proper awareness programs may change the view of public on females working in the tourism industry.

The study also revealed that due to negative view of the society females are reluctant to enter the tourism industry. Therefore female students are very low in the hotel management sector. Consequently the industry lacks female leaders and role models. Rare success stories have discouraged human resources managers and recruiters, who seek to recruit, develop and retain promising individuals to recruit women. As they see less potential for females in the industry.

Thus recruiters may favor male candidates and disfavor females. This further hinders female participation and career advancement in the tourism industry. Therefore present industry culture could also exert a negative effect on career progression of women in the industry.

Therefore it is the responsibility of senior managers and human resources managers of the industry to identify the barriers limiting women's career progression. This need reviewing some of the organizational cultures such as working hours/ shifts and selection and promotion that may disadvantage women in gaining senior management positions.

It can note reasons identified in the research interdependent and interrelated. Therefore reasons obstructing women's' career advancement in tourism industry linked as a circle.

List of References

Annual Statistical Report – 2011, Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority

Apostolopoulos, Y. & Sonmez, S. (2001). Working producers, leisured consumers: women's experiences in developing regions. In Y. Apostolopoulos, S. Sonmez & D. Timothy (Eds.), *Women as Producers and Consumers of Tourism in Developing Region*, p. 3-17. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Baum, T., Amoah, V., & Spivack, S. (1997) "Policy dimensions of human resource management in the tourism and hospitality industries." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 9, (5) 221-229. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09596119710172615>

Bierema, L., & Opengart, R. (2002). *Emotions in Women's Career Development: A merging of literatures*. Paper presented at 2002 AHRD Conference: the Women and Career Development. Honolulu.

Bierema, L.L. & Cseh, M. (2000). *Evaluating HRD research using a feminist research framework*. Paper presented at the Academy of Human Resource Development Conference, Raleigh Durham.

Central Bank of Sri Lanka Annual Reports 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014.

Cornelius, N., & Skinner, D., (2006), *An alternative view through the glass ceiling, Women in Management Review* Vol. 20 No. 8, 2005 pp. 595-609

Duffy, L., Cardenas, D. A. , Chancellor, H. C. , & Byrd, E. T. (2011, June). *Examining barriers, motivations, and perceptions of women working in the tourism industry: Case study of Ayampe, Ecuador*. Travel and Tourism Research Association, London. Canada.

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hoel, H., & Einarsen, S., (2003), *Violence at work in hotels, catering and tourism*, http://www.oit.org/wcmstp5/groups/public/@ed_dialogue/@sector/documents/publication/wcms_161998.pdf

HRMID (2006), The glass ceiling: smashed or still holding strong? Human Resource Management International Digest, VOL. 14 NO. 3 2006, pp. 19-21 <http://www.wttc.org/>

Kempadoo, K. (Ed.). (1999). Sun, sex, and gold: Tourism and sex work in the Caribbean. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Kinnaird, Kothari, and Hall (1994). Tourism: Gender Perspectives. In V. Kinnaird & D. Hall (Eds.), Tourism: A Gender Analysis. New York: Wiley & Sons

Korczynski, M. (2002). Human Resource Management in Service Work. London: Palgrave

Li, L., & Leung, R. W. (2001) "Female managers in Asian hotels: profile and career challenges." International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management 13, (4) 189-196. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09596110110389511>

Maxwell, G. A. (1997) "Hotel general management: views from above the glass ceiling." International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management 9, (5/6) 230-235.

Ronald Burke, Susan Vinnicombe, Advancing Women's Careers, Emerald Group Publishing, 2005

Momsen, J. & Kinniar, V. (eds.) (1995). Different Places, Different Voices: Gender and Development in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. London: Routledge.

Mousai Masadeh Out-Of-Country Training For Hotel Middle Managers In Jordan: European Journal Of Tourism, Hospitality & Recreation ,Vol. 4, Issue 1, Pp.105-122, 2013

Ronald Burke, Susan Vinnicombe, (2005) "Advancing women's careers", Career Development International, Vol. 10 Iss: 3, pp.165 - 167

Schrieber, P.J. (1998). Women's career development patterns. In L.L.Bierema (Ed.). Women's career development across the lifespan: insights, and strategies for women, organizations and adult educators. New directions for adult and continuing education, No.80 San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Tourism Development Strategy 2011 – 2016 , Ministry of Economic Development - Sri Lanka

Turner, K. L. and Makhija, M. V. (2012), The role of individuals in the information processing perspective. Strat. Mgmt. J., 33: 661–680. doi:10.1002/smj.1970

Wong, C. S., & Chung, K. M. (2003) "Work values of Chinese food service managers." International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management 15, (2) 66-75. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09596110310462913>

World Travel & Tourism Council - Tourism Highlights 2016