

Gender Representation in Kenya's Hospitality Industry: A Connection to Tourism Entrepreneurial Aptitude

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Abstract

Tourism other than being an important foreign exchange earner in Kenya is a means of employment for its citizens. It is therefore vital to evaluate gender participation especially with the growing global advocacy of women to participate in formal employment among other economic activities. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The goal of the study was to examine the level of male and female employment in the hospitality industry in particular 5-star hotels. Specifically, the purpose was to assess whether there is any significant difference between the number of male and female employees working in the hospitality industry. Questionnaires were used to collect data from 200 employees and 32 Heads of Department (HODs). Stratified random sampling was used to identify employees in each department. Sixty four percent of the employees working in the hotels were males compared to 36% of the employees who were female. Repair and maintenance department had the highest number of male employees (97%) compared to female employees. In contrast, the front office department had the highest number of female employees (58%) compared to male employees. The management team comprised of 70% male employees and 30% female employees. Apparently, employment in the hospitality industry is unbalanced with regard to gender. Gender was also found to have a significant relationship to the potential of initiating entrepreneurial activities especially in the tourism sector ($\chi^2 = 32.690$; $df = 4$; $p < 0.001$). In spite of the strides made for the push for women at the workplace and entrepreneurial activities, there are still disparities in their representation giving room for better policies and funding for women's groups.

Keywords: Employment; Gender disparity; Hospitality industry; Entrepreneurship.

1. Introduction

Tourism in Kenya is the third largest foreign exchange earner after tea and horticulture. However, due to the current upward trend of international tourism, this position (3rd) is likely to change in the not too distant future. Tourism is seen as a major source of employment for the destination countries. However, the perception of tourism employment is rather split with people viewing the industry to possess a certain image of glamour, while on the other hand deemed to be of low skill and low status (Mathieson & Wall, 1982).

Tourism involves processes which are constructed out of complex and varied social realities and relations that are often hierarchical and unequal. All parts of the process embody different social relations of which gender relations is one element. The Longman dictionary of Contemporary English (1992) describes gender as the fact of being either male or female, whereas the term imbalance refers to not being equal. However, Hesse-Biber & Carger (2000) views gender as being determined socially; it is the societal meaning assigned to male and female. Each society emphasizes particular roles that each sex should play, although there is wide latitude in acceptable behaviours for each gender.

Shaw (1995) notes that women and especially the African women have been known to play a negligible role as far as economic development is concerned and that it is not only until very recent that some acknowledgement has been given on the contribution of women to economic growth. Such improvements have been highlighted by the CERT Employment Survey (2001) in Ireland showed the male/female ratio in employment to be 48 percent/52 percent. At managerial level, the survey showed that women account for over 40 percent of the total employed. They hold 42 percent of management positions (52 percent in hotels and 33 percent in restaurants).

However, this situation has not been completely addressed especially in the hospitality industry where the trend appears to be the same. This is in spite of the view that women appear to be suitable for this industry due to their hospitable nature and most of the work of the work tends to be similar to household chores. Male employees have dominated the hospitality industry although there have been some considerable gains in the levels of female participation. It is mainly through properly laid down policies and rules that women participation can be increased. Some countries have taken proactive measures to increase the number of females in the workplace. In Japan, for instance, the constitution provides for legal equality between men and women in terms of equal opportunity in job recruitment, firing, placement and promotion (Nozawa, 1994). Some of the restrictions lifted included those that prohibited overtime and night work.

Cunningham & Siga (2006) notes that in Brazil, a country with a moderate minimum wage, an increase in the minimum wage leads to greater job loss for women, young, and low-skilled workers whose wages are clustered

around the minimum as opposed to male, prime aged and skilled workers. As a result of job losses, they engage in entrepreneurial activities so as to sustain their economic wellbeing. This follows Lazaer's (2005) opinion that in economics, prior labour market experience is argued to be an important motivator of new entrepreneurs.

Greater participation of women in entrepreneurial activities inclusive of tourism related activities like curio shops, restaurants or cafés serve to improve the standards of living in many homes especially where mothers are single parents. However, the level of women involvement in various facets of the economy has generally been seen to be relatively small. With women forming the majority of Kenya's population, it is greatly expected they would form the bulk of employees in various sectors of the economy including tourism. This is because of the stereotype that women are recruited into work deemed to represent an extension of their traditional domestic responsibilities for which they are inherently skilled (Kinniard, 1996). However, this may not be the case especially with regard to the hospitality industry. A variety of issues have been raised as impediments to equal representation of employees with respect to gender. Education level and presence of organizational rules and regulations either formally laid out or impliedly that restricted participation of particular gender in employment are some of the areas pointed out. Limited employment opportunities and the lack of job security especially for the low skilled manual jobs with respect to a developing economy like Kenya leads to engagement in entrepreneurial activities which can be linked to past job experiences (Lazaer, 2005).

To check whether this still holds for tourism related enterprises necessitated this study. The study was primarily focused in the hospitality industry because the dominance of the hospitality sector and difficulty in drawing the boundaries of tourism encourage the view that the magnitude of tourism can be estimated from data on the hospitality sector (Riley & Ladkin, 2002).

Therefore, the goal of this study was to evaluate the influence of gender on the choice of tourism related entrepreneurial activities. It aims to determine the proportion of employees in the organization(s) by gender; determine the number of male and female employees with regards to hotel departments; and evaluate the influence of gender on the choice tourism related entrepreneurial activity. As such, the study sought to answer questions relating to representation of employees by gender, and whether or not gender influences choice of tourism related entrepreneurial activities.

2. Literature review

Ester (1970) argues that gender proportions within towns in developing countries continue to reflect the principles of selection which the Europeans used in their recruitment of indigenous labour. In regions where only men were recruited, the towns had large surplus of men, for instance, there were 5 men to each woman in Nairobi before independence. Women were confined to homes therefore streets, factories, offices, hotels and cinemas became a male world with enormous supply of men over women. Hence tourism involvement was mainly male dominated. The tourism industry ranks high on the list of the most stressful environments (Law, 1987). This was a major reason for women's indecision to work in the industry. The work conditions are mostly unfavorable to female workers and it produces job dissatisfaction and personal exhaustion. Other reasons relate to low pay, anti-social working hours and the requirement to deal with the public on a day to day basis.

Walby (1988) argued that an understanding of the origins of gender segregation and its maintenance at work is the key to explaining women's subordinate position in the workforce. Even when there is evidence of women and men starting with equal skills, qualifications or experience, the distribution of higher status and higher paid grades remains uneven. Cultural theories suggest that women make a rational choice about the type of work they pursue and that their choice derives from an adherence to the values associated with femininity and domesticity.

The governments which participated in the Beijing Conference on women in 1995 recognized that the status of women had improved in some respects, but that progress has been uneven, inequalities between men and women have persisted and major obstacles remain with serious consequences for the well being of all people (UN, 1995). Women are recruited into work which is deemed to represent an extension of their traditional domestic responsibilities for which they will be inherently skilled (Kinnard, 1996). Women take up mainly manual jobs related to their domestic chores. Great strides have been made with regards to championing of female rights including demands for top jobs. However this has not been devoid of controversies. Shere (2000) argues that sexual politics are the hidden reasons for the few number of female executives at the top of corporations. A male executive does not want to be pointed out as one who hired or promoted a female executive since he may be accused of having a sexual affair with her. This has an effect of stifling female representation in management positions.

Many countries in the modern society have embraced gender representation in their workplaces. However, the Director of the Fawcett Society commented that one of the main barriers to gender balance is the assumption that equality has already been achieved (EOC, 2001). This assumption is belied by continuing horizontal and vertical gender segregation between and within many professions. Despite the potential improvements in the economic status that women may attain as a consequence of involvement in tourism-related employment, strong cultural barriers, poor availability of government initiatives and the lack of cooperation among the women workers constrain them from aspiring to political and communal leadership roles (Kinniard, 1996). It is mainly through

taking up leadership roles that reforms can take place, hence if there is minimal representation of women in such positions the pace of reforms may be curtailed. One way of increasing female representation in income generating activities is to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

2.1 Entrepreneurial activities

Entrepreneurship is the process of creating something new with value by devoting the necessary time and effort, assuming the accompanying financial, psychic, and social risks, and receiving the resulting rewards of monetary and personal satisfaction and independence (Hisrich *et al.*, 2005). Entrepreneurship plays an important role in the economic growth and development of nations. It is a purposeful activity that includes initiation, promotion and distribution of wealth and service.

An entrepreneur can be assigned different meanings to different people. An entrepreneur is one who brings resources, labour, materials, and other assets into combinations that make their value greater than before (Hisrich *et al.*, 2005). In addition, an entrepreneur is one who introduces changes, innovations, and a new order. To a psychologist, such a person is typically driven by certain forces including the need to obtain or attain something, to experiment, to accomplish, or perhaps to escape the authority of others. To one businessman, an entrepreneur appears as a threat, an aggressive competitor, whereas to another businessman the same entrepreneur may be an ally, a source of supply, a customer, or someone who creates wealth for others, as well as finds better ways to utilize resources, reduce waste, and produce jobs others are glad to get.

It has always been likened that employees in smaller firms often work closely with the firms managers and/or founders and could therefore be exposed to entrepreneurial learning (Gompers *et al.*, 2005). A contrasting view would be that employees of large bureaucratic firms are pushed into entrepreneurship because their employers have little patience for their entrepreneurial ideas. Managerial ability has also been a recurring theme in the entrepreneurship literature. Lucas (1978) develops a model in which individual's managerial ability is positively related to the individual's propensity for entrepreneurship. In light of this, one may choose to enter into a particular line of business that has grounding on their previous employment. For instance, an employee in the hospitality industry may choose to participate in tourism related business ventures that may include setting up curio shops, restaurants, fast food cafes, motels, lodgings, travel and tour agencies, guides (hiking), entertainers (dancing groups) among other ventures that have direct impact on promotion or facilitation of the tourism industry (either domestic or international).

Recent estimates of the number of self-employed men and women in Kenya shows an upward trend, especially in the 1990s. Between 1991 and 1999, for instance, self-employment males had increased by 30 per cent. The number of self-employed women, however, increased by a higher rate of 70 per cent (CBS, 1998, 1999). Women now account for nearly half of the self-employed in Kenya. This provides an indication that more women are engaging in entrepreneurial activities.

3. Research methodology

This study targeted Nairobi hotels, and aimed at establishing gender representation in the hospitality industry. Employing descriptive survey design, the data was collected between December 2010 and January 2011. Nairobi being the capital city was chosen as the study area due to its expansive infrastructure and facilities. It boasts of numerous hotels and restaurants and is the business hub of Kenya. Nairobi has the highest urban population in East Africa, with a population of 3,138,369 (KNBS, 2010). Therefore it is an ideal location to support entrepreneurial activities. It also has a number of attractions including Nairobi national park, the only national park located in a city, as its jewel.

This study was conducted through descriptive survey. Cooper & Schindler (2008) identifies a survey as a measurement process used to collect information either by personal or impersonal means. This research design seeks to collect data from members of a population in order to determine the current status of the population with respect to one or more variables in a relatively short period of time. The target population consists of fourteen 5-star hotels in Nairobi. These hotels have a substantial number of personnel working in either permanent or casual basis and this was considered appropriate for providing a focal point for the study of gender in conjunction with employment. Consequently, four 5-star hotels deemed to be representative of the target population were identified for the study through simple random sampling. These hotels are Nairobi Serena hotel, Safari Park hotel, Laico Regency hotel and The Stanley hotel.

Data was then collected using questionnaires administered to employees. The departments were classified according to their size and staff numbers. Large departments included Kitchen, Housekeeping, Front office, and Food & Beverage (F&B) and Accounting & Finance departments. Small departments included Transport, Repair and Maintenance (R&M) and Security departments. In each of the large departments, ten questionnaires were administered in the four hotels, whereas 3 questionnaires were administered for each of the small departments in the four hotels. Questionnaires were also administered to the Heads of department (HOD) in each of the four hotels. The total sample size was 32 HODs and 236 employees.

Finally, both descriptive and inferential analyses were performed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics included frequencies and means, presented using bar graphs and pie charts. Inferential statistics including Chi square test

of independence was used to test the relationship between gender, present employment and the choice of entrepreneurial activities. Cramer V was used to check the strength of the association.

4. Result

The main objective of this study was to determine the proportion of employees in the four selected hotels by gender and evaluate the influence of gender on the choice of tourism related entrepreneurial activity. Out of a total number of 268 questionnaires administered to employees and Heads of Departments (HODs), 232 were returned and used for analysis, which accounted for about 87% response rate.

4.1 Gender representation among the employees

Of the 200 employees interviewed, 64% were males compared to 36% females. This depicted a wide disparity in the employment status with regards to gender. A further analysis of how employees were spread at the departmental level was performed. These departments varied in their sample size, and they include front office, housekeeping and laundry, accounts, F&B, security, transport, repair and maintenance, kitchen, management and other.

The front office had the highest percentage of female employees (58%). This is mainly because of the perception that women are deemed to be warm and welcoming thus making guests feel at ease. The Repair and maintenance department had the least population of female employees (3%) as opposed to male employees (97%). This is primarily due to the technical nature of the job. Majority of the female workforce lack technical skills, a feature highlighted by Vegso (2006) that indicated in recent years, women earned fewer than 20 percent of computing and engineering degrees in the US.

The Kitchen and the Housekeeping and Laundry department had 65% and 60% of its employees, respectively being male which gives the impression that what traditionally was seen as household chores are actually being performed by men as opposed to traditional belief that they are more suited for women. In the Accounts and finance department 32% of the employees were female. This can be attributed to level of acquired skill that is still fairly low with respect to women as opposed to men. In the F&B department 64% of the employees were male. This is because the HODs viewed male employees to be more agile and resilient enough to stand and wait on tables for more hours as opposed to their female counterparts. The security department comprised of 88% male employees and 12% female employees. This is primarily due to risk factor associated with the job. This deters women from applying for jobs in this sector. However, hotels tend to have a few slots for ladies in this department so as to cater for their female clientele in cases like body searches.

The transport department comprised of 89% male employees and 11% female employees. This because driving normally brings about movement of a person from his usual surrounding and in the case of long haul drivers for long periods of time. This has an effect of separating someone from his family hence frowned upon by a majority of the women. The management (HODs, hotel managers and assistant manager) was comprised of 70% male employees and 30% female employees. Finally, males accounted for 65% of the 'other' category.

4.2 Relationship between gender and choice of tourism related entrepreneurial activities

Employee respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they could engage in tourism entrepreneurial activities, and their responses analyzed in relation to their gender to establish whether or not the latter influences the former. The results revealed a significant association or relationship between gender and choice of tourism related entrepreneurial activities, $\chi^2=32.690$; $df=4$; $p < 0.001$. Additionally, the strength of association was 0.404 which is moderate. Andy (2006) indicated that the Cramer V statistics is most useful with strength being measured between 0 and 1, with 0.1 having small effect, 0.3 having medium effect, 0.5 having a large effect, and > 0.5 as having a very strong effect.

However, study findings showed that there was no relationship ($r = 0.037$, $p = 0.601$) between the current department and choice of tourism related entrepreneurial activities. In contrast, there was a significant negative relationship between age and choice of tourism related entrepreneurial activities ($r = -.292$, $p < 0.001$). This meant that younger respondents were more likely to venture into tourism related entrepreneurial activities.

4.4 Presence of organizational rules limiting gender participation

Majority of the heads of departments (66%) indicated that their departments did not have any rules implied or otherwise that limited participation of either gender, which matches with their supplementary response (66%) that they did not believe that rules limiting gender participation exists in the industry.

5. Discussion

The hospitality industry is mainly a service industry, therefore Housekeeping & laundry department, Food and beverage and kitchen department form the largest departments. This is because business focus is on the sale of beds, food and catering services. However, the distribution of employees by gender is not even, with male employees forming the huge portion of the workforce. This, in spite of the societal norm that the duties undertaken in these departments reflect household chores and so should be frowned upon by men and taken up by women.

The study also showed that younger employees are more inclined to take up tourism related entrepreneurial

activities ($r = -0.292$, $p < .001$). This can be attributed to efforts made by the government to have the youth start up businesses with the aid of initiatives such as the Youth enterprise funds.

Security departments had the least number of employees because hotels mainly outsourced these services from various private security companies including Group4 Security (G4S). The hotels had also invested in the use of surveillance cameras around its perimeter, thus reducing the number of people required to physically guard the whole building. The female employees formed 12% of the workforce in this department. This is primarily due to risk factors associated with the job, which deters women from applying for it. However, hotels tend to have a few slots for ladies in this department so as to cater for their female clientele in cases like body searches. In contrast, the front office had 58% of its employees as female. This is because the department represents the client's first contact with the organization. Therefore receiving guests and making them comfortable is paramount. This holds in the societal perception of the woman's role in receiving and welcoming guests in the homestead.

In spite of the societal gains in educating the girl in Africa and specifically in Kenya, there are still disparities in the departments that require highly skilled or technical staff such as Repair and maintenance department comprising of electricians, engineers, carpenters and mechanics, whose majority (97%) of the workforce were male.

In retrospect, there were indications that participation of a particular gender is being hampered by the existence of some organizational rules, implied or otherwise. This is illuminated by the fact that 34% of the Head of department actually identified with this. An example of such an implied rule involves filling of positions of casual labourers upon commencement of their maternity leave, meaning there would be no chance for them to return to work. Similarly, the management comprising of HODs, hotel managers and assistant managers consists of 70% male employees.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

Employment in the hospitality industry is overtly gender imbalanced. The industry is male dominated, forming the major portion of the management. In spite of the important strides in the education sector, this has not been reflected in the working environment, especially in the hospitality industry. The presence of implied organizational rules have been seen to hinder female participation, for instance, the issue of non-existent maternity leave for casual workers has greatly exploited by the management to employ men. This is because they view maternity leave as a waste of company's time and resources since they have to employ and train casual employees to fill these positions. However, it has been noted that more and more women are venturing into entrepreneurial activities with the number of self-employed women, increasing by a higher rate – 70% (CBS, 1998, 1999). Therefore for women having prior work experience in the hospitality sector should result in them venturing into tourism related entrepreneurial activities.

It is therefore recommended that educative forums to ease the societal pressures on the role of women especially in the working environment, for example professional driving. This would increase their participation in the hotels transport department whereby tour guides double up as drivers. In addition, employees should also establish trade unions especially for casual labourers whose rights are virtually trampled upon by employers. These trade unions will fight against injustices committed to employees and advocate for better working conditions. Existing laws of the land governing equal opportunities to employment should also be implemented effectively. In that effect, the judiciary should play its role by providing quick rulings that are just and fair pertaining to the discrimination and harassment at the workplace, which would advance women participation.

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