

Introduction

Men have always been the financial providers while women have been home keepers and care-givers. Changes have taken place due to globalization and more women are entering the work field. Nevertheless, it is seen that women have always faced gender discrimination in any career that they have tried to pursue. Be it as a teacher or a nurse, as corporate managers or scientists, or the hospitality sector, the reasons remain the same for all women. Women definitely have a dual role to play (taking care of the family and the work place) and to avoid the role conflict and reduce the anxiety and stress, women prefer business or flexible schedules and refrain from accepting higher responsibilities at work. The hospitality sector is particularly demanding because of irregular hours of work. The Equal Opportunities Commission warns that gender equality is still generations away and may take 20 to 25 years to close the gap (Adfero, 2007).

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Rationale for research

The hospitality sector is one of the fastest growing sectors in the UK. Studies assess under-representation of women managers and gender discrimination issues at workplace. A survey on the UK hospitality industry saw a total of 2,042 respondents out of which 570 were women (FHRAI, 2002). The survey revealed that more women were working in part-time positions than men were. While the catering and hotel industry in the UK are focusing on attracting women in the industry, and while the catering industry makes up for 68% women, women are found in the back of the house management – administration and housekeeping. Some associate this with lack of education while others

link it to the gender issue or even lack of interest by the women themselves. Women are seldom found in managerial positions and based on this the research question would be:

What are the factors affecting women's career advancement in the hospitality industry?

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Literature Review

Worldwide tourism is an important sector for women who make up to 46% of the tourism labor force (Vargas & Aguilar, 2002). There is a significant vertical and horizontal gender segregation of the labor market. Women all over the world have always faced discrimination in terms of management positions and levels of pay. Cobb & Dunlop (1999) agree that the gender gap still exists in the area of promotions and the women are at a disadvantage (cited by Zhong, 2006). While the scene is gradually changing, the pace of change is 'painfully slow' (BBC, 2007) as Zhong (2006) also observes that women represented 20% to 40% of management positions in about 60 countries (ILO) but they continue to be underrepresented in management positions compared to their overall employment. Burke and Vinnicombe (2006) contend that aging workforce and fewer new entrants has resulted in shortage of qualified leaders, forcing organizations to utilize and develop talents all of its employees. Under the circumstances they cannot afford to *artificially limit* the career possibilities of women. This itself implies that women are capable but are being denied the opportunities.

There are three types of transitions impacting working women at their work places – career-focused transitions, life-cycle induced transitions and workplace or market-induced transitions (Womenomics, 2006). Women change jobs twice as often as

men, which is a reason for concern and warrant research. They even switch jobs between sectors and prefer a job where they can make a difference. They prefer jobs which offer facility for skill development to increase their employability. Studies suggest that when women do get access to functional roles in their current employment, they either stall in their career advancement or move to other employers.

A survey conducted by The Caterer revealed that women are not entering the managerial posts but are opting for traditionally female roles (FHRAI, 2002). The Restaurant Association claims that they do not employ based on gender but on merit and they feel there is significant advancement for women to rise up the ladder in managerial positions. The issue of diversity can lend sustainability and the organizations have to go beyond discrimination. Organizations benefit in different ways like culture, change and learning based engagement with managing inequality and difference as there is enough evidence to prove that organizational culture is a major impediment to women's progress into senior management (Mann, 1995).

Ninety percent of the people employed as chambermaids, flight attendants, sales personnel and cleaners are women (Vargas & Aguilar, 2002). The abundance of full-time, part-time, seasonal, temporary and casual work available in the tourism sector is a key attraction by women, and is preferred mostly by mothers of young children carers, semi-retired women and students (LDA, 2003). They preferred the workplace flexibility and the positive impact it has on family life. Women tend to value the joy, contentment and happiness derived from being with the family, which gives them sense of fulfillment and positively affects their professional lives as well. Fulfillment relates to learning and growing which provides sense of confidence. The fact that women prefer part-time work

is corroborated by the statistics of the first three months of 2002 which shows that men in full time employment were double the number of women, while women as part-time workers were four times that of men engaged in part-time employment (Grundy & Jamieson, 2002). Zong however finds that women lack the education, skills and work experience necessary to be an executive or a manager.

Management diversity is defined as the proportion of women among the highest-ranking CEOs in firms and on boards of directors (Smith, Smith & Verner, 2006).

Female managers are supposed to be best qualified in terms of education for top management posts and to be on the board of directors. Women have a better understanding of certain segments and this could lend creativity and innovation to the work place. Women on board of directors have positive impact on firm performance. There are other suggestions that women differ from men in their aspirations and expectations in career; they also differ in the definition of success. Women have also been blamed for being emotional as there are differences in the expectations and acceptance of emotional expression (Zhong, 2007). Some researchers observe that women change their life choices after reaching middle management level (Cornelius & Skinner, 2006). These observations basically stem from men and employers as a means to discourage women from aspiring for the senior level management positions.

The typical 'gender pyramid' is prevalent – lower levels and occupations with few career development opportunities available to women (Vargas & Aguilar, 2002) while a report in HRMID (2006) confirms that women are victims of discrimination is evident from the fact women have filed high profile suits successfully against their employer for discrimination based on their gender. Women definitely have a dual role to play but this

can be overcome by creating more quality part-time roles to increase the number of women in senior roles. This is essential in view of the fact that businesses are disadvantaged by not selecting the best executives from the largest talent pool, reports Treanor (2007) of *The Guardian*. Companies continue to spend heavy amounts in repeated recruitments and training and they could save on this through reduced attrition. Feyerherm and Vick (2006) suggest that re-examining the corporate culture could enhance values like openness, mutual respect and continuous learning. The culture change should also include work-life effectiveness programs or flexible work options work (Womenomics, 2006). A study by Cornell University revealed that stock of companies that went public with more women in top management teams performed better in both short and long run than those with no or few women at the helm of affairs (Corporate Board, 1999). The survey further revealed that having more women on top executive teams had positive and significant effect on both stock-price growth and earnings-per-share growth.

Research also suggests that London relies a great deal on migrant labor and more so in the hospitality sector where the women experience downward social mobility (Evans et al., 2005). Women have been found to be better employees because they make a better team or more suited to 'people-oriented work' but the women find that 'tourism does not offer a livable wage' in London (LDA, 2003). It may be 'good for a second income' and hence more women are found in the sector than men as Evans et al., also confirm that the lowest rates of pay were found in the London's catering industry.

Sexual harassment, including unwanted attention or intimidation of a sexual character is widespread in the hotel, tourism and the catering industry. A study of 502

working women in Luxemburg aged between 16 and 50 years in the hospitality industry were reported to be the sector most affected (Hoel & Einarsen, 2003). In the UK bullying and harassment were reported by 24.2% of the respondents. Waiters were most prone to sexual harassment and the most common acts of harassment were obscene language and jokes, and sexually suggestive comments. Mainly women in junior positions experience sexual harassment which demonstrates 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. Apart from this, irregular working hours, night shifts, dress code and a suggestive physical environment also make them prone to sexual harassment. *Being exposed to unwanted sexually related attention is considered to be part of the job* (Hoel & Einarsen, 2003). A study of 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.

Review of the literature suggests that there could be several factors affecting the career advancement of women in the hospitality industry. These include differences in traits, for example, being emotional, gender bias, woman's home-making responsibility, sexual harassment, lack of educational opportunities, lack of skills, availability of part-time work, availability of diverse career opportunities. Based on these, the research would be conducted.

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Data collection

. The purpose of the research is to determine the factors that affect the career advancement of women in the hospitality sector. As such the research will be based on two types of data.

In quantitative analysis data is collected through mail questionnaires, interviews and published statistics (Gable, 1994). Self-completion questionnaires would help to determine the individual's view of the career. This method of data collection allows the ability for unambiguous quantitative data to be collected (Redmond & Griffith, 2003). The format will be kept relatively simple and straightforward as there is little control over the respondents' interpretation of questions. Online surveys will be conducted as internet has become a very popular means of gathering data. It permits quicker answers because respondents can fill and send the questionnaire easily. The response rate is quite high. It also allows an easy territorial and geographical coverage. Random sampling technique would be applied here once the databases of employees at different travel agencies and hotels have been collected. About 200 emails would be sent out as it is expected that 25% may not respond or there may be delayed response.

Quantitative data would further be collected through focus group interviews. Focus-groups are effective in providing information on why people think the way they do. This has certain advantages even over the personal interviews as participants tend to be more comfortable and natural. Besides, they influence and are influenced by others just as they are in real life (Redmond & Griffith, 2003). Focus groups are open yet guided and hence it would help to collect data on how women feel and think of their careers and the workplace. Four different focus group interviews would be conducted at four different

hotels using the cluster sampling technique and this would be at the respective hotel premises.

Difficulties may arise in scheduling the focus-groups interviews but these would be overcome by contacting the front office manager or some other senior woman in the respective hotel. Collection of database for emails may also be a problem which would be obtained through the labour office. The ethical norms would be adhered to through out the research process.

Word count: 358 words

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