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Barriers for Women in Career Advancement in the Hospitality Industry:

A Review of Literature

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### Abstract

The increasing importance of the contribution brought by the hospitality industries particularly tourism in the local as well as world economy is highly remarkable. Today, the hospitality industry is among the fastest growing economic sectors worldwide. In fact, the hospitality industry is recognized to be a multi-billion dollar industry and is still progressing.

Over the last decade hospitality industry has experienced tremendous growth. It's one of the areas where women are employed in substantial numbers. It has no shortage of women entering the business, but underscores a high inequality in women's empowerment and career advancement. In recent years, the increased number of women in hospitality industry and their underrepresentation in the top management position has been of great concern. What is limiting women to really "come out" for the more prestigious role? Why do they face different set of barriers between entry into management and upward mobility into management? Why females are unable or unwilling to "puncture" the glass ceiling? To answer this question, this paper focuses on exploring barriers to career advancement in hospitality industry. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the body of knowledge by continuing to shed lights on the barrier women face in their work place that hinders their career advancement.

## Barriers for Women in Career Advancement in the Hospitality Industry:

### A Review of Literature

*“Motherhood is bliss.” “Your first priority is to care for your husband and children”*

Historically, society believed a women’s place was in her home, caring her husband and children. They encouraged young women to find happiness and fulfillment through marriage and home making by completely devoting herself to the preservation of the female oriented position of home maker. Working women were viewed as morally wrong. But, the role of women in the current society has drastically changed. Women today are coming forth in this modern society. They are now regularly performing duties that were traditionally assigned to males. They no longer lag behind the man in most of the occupations. There are people who believe that women have managed to get an equal position in the society as men do (Meharroof, 2009). In contrast, also there are other people with a totally different view on the position of women in the modern society (Meharroof, 2009). According to them, the glass ceiling still remains an unsurpassable barrier women regularly face in their life (Meharroof, 2009).

The term “glass ceiling” refers to invisible, generally artificial barriers that prevent qualified individuals- women, from advancing within their organization and reaching their full potential (Knutson & S. Schmidgall, 1999).

The literature review presumes the factors that affect the women in career advancement in hospitality industry by responding the following question:

1. What are the factors affecting the women’s career advancement?
2. Why women’s are blocked?
3. What career aspiration do female workers have?

Although, the last several decades have been a period of remarkable change and growth for women in this field and have proven themselves that they are every bit as capable and qualified as men and strides have been made by women in achieving management positions, unfortunately, the increasing number of women in the hospitality industry has not produced a proportional increase in the number of women in higher management positions. Research suggests that overall a woman's place in hotels is generally not an enviable one (Shelagh & Irene, 2009). Women frequently carry out the most undesirable and lowest status work in hospitality (Adib & Guerrier, 2003). They are horizontally segregated into particular jobs and areas of operation (Ng & Pine, 2003). For instance, women occupy the jobs regarded as low in skills and status such as chambermaids, waitress, and male occupy the more prestigious role such as managers and chefs. A 1986 Wall street journal survey found "The highest ranking women in most industries are in non-operating areas such as personnel, public relation, or occasionally finance specialist that seldom lead to the most powerful top management posts. Hospitality companies do employ more women today, but they are typically categorized into certain departments, i.e.: human resources, marketing, sales, advertising etc. Moreover, many women who are working in other areas, such as operations, finance and reservations have hard times breaking through the manager or director level or any higher positions. In reality, the hospitality industries have no shortages of women employees but senior management positions seem to be mostly taken by men.

### **What are the factors affecting the women's career advancement?**

Researchers have identified a number of factors that function as barriers to women's career advancement. These include the glass ceiling, i.e., artificial barriers that prevent qualified individuals from advancing within their organizations (Galinsky et al., 2003; Knutson & Schmidgall, 1999; Myerson & Fletcher, 2000); gender discrimination, a male dominated organizational culture (Brownell, 1994; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly & Wood, 1991; Vianen & Fischer, 2002); and work and family conflict (Brownell, 1998; Mallon & Cassell, 1999). The existing literature on women's career development has generally examined the impact of a combination of individual, organizational and societal factors on women's career choices. There are perceived obstacles that women encounter during the course of career that must be acknowledged in order to be successful.

The four identified key obstacles that had a restrictive impact on women working in, or intending to pursue a career in hospitality are as follows:

#### **1. Work/Family Conflict:**

One of the most common causes of the glass ceiling for women is the conflict between work and family. It has been suggested that the profound challenge is the effort to balance work and family (Knutson & Schmidgall, 1999). Certainly, a percentage of women reach a certain point in their career and do not want to progress further within the industry. This is because they perceive that there is no other way to reconcile the dual realities of a career and a family. For women with family responsibilities, their upward movement may be hampered as they juggle time to devote to both career families. Hospitality industry demands long hours and requires a great deal of crisis management and problem solving. These factors combine to create a dynamic but often stressful and exhausting work experience for managers. Balancing work and

family becomes major challenge for women in particular, because of the perpetuation of traditional gender roles. Women still often serves as the primary caregivers for families, despite their expanded activities outside the home. When females return home to their children and spouse who are anticipating their full support and attention, the balance of work and life may then become difficult to achieve (Brownell, 1998).

## 2. Equality of Opportunities

Many organizations today state in their job advertisements that “we are an equal opportunities employer”. Yet in reality the practice behind such claims can be experienced by women employees as radically different. Recently the “business case” for promoting women and other diverse groups has become more popular. Essentially the business case utilizes a Gendered division of labor in hotel industry human resource management perspective. For an organization to be productive during times of recession and uncertainty, it is particularly important to manage and utilize effectively the diverse talents and skills of the whole workforce, including those who were traditionally “excluded” on the basis of their “difference”, be it sex, ethnicity, disability or whatever. The effective management of diversity, a notion in which all nations has had a long history creates a number of strong arguments for the utilization of women workers for the corporate good.

## 3. Lack of Family Support and Environment

Many studies have reported that the biggest barriers to career advancement among women are beyond their personal control. Lack of proper family support is another issue that women suffer from. At times women need different source of inspiration, motivation and support from family only then they may be able to juggle their career, family and personal obligations successfully. Absence of proper support, cooperation, and back up for women by their own family member

and outside world will discourage them to drop the idea of excelling in their career advancement. But the greater obstacle is the one that the individual controls i.e. by far, the largest obstacles resides within us. Thus, it requires hard work (harder work more than any of us may be willing to do), sacrifices, determination and confidence to manage their profession.

#### 4. Gender discrimination

One of the biggest challenges women face is how to be tough (in male- dominated industry) without being difficult". Sex and gender discrimination is clearly seen in the hotel sector. Traditional gender-based labor divisions are the obstacles that can be found in the career development of women. Although women have made clear that they have the ability to perform with the same skill and success in every endeavor engaged in by men, the issue of sex discrimination still exists. Traditionally, the hotel industry belongs to that group of industries classically segregated by gender. Typically large number of women are employed, particularly on the non-managerial side of the organization where work is semi- or unskilled, low paid and classically segregated by gender. As, the women who are working in hospitality industry get paid marginally lower compare to the men. This works as a demoralizing factor for women to succeed and to put consistency and effort to their work. Also, different kinds of cultural norms, values, stereotypes deeply rooted in patriarchal traditions that promote male privilege constitute the most fundamental barrier to women's career advancement (Tlaiss, 2014, p. 527). But, unless the patriarchal natures of institutions are broken down, women will find it difficult to advance their career in what is considered male territory. An additional negative aspect to women's work in hotels is that they are subject to high levels of sexual harassment from both guests and peers due to their low status and low-educational levels (Poulston, 2008).



### **Why women's are blocked?**

An interesting finding is that the barriers to advancement for female employees are due to neither corporate practices nor policies but rather seems to be a function of cultural and societal sanctions (Li & Leung, 2001). The fact remains that it is the nature of women career paths that blocks their progress to top position. At lower management levels, women are typically placed in non-strategic sectors, and in personnel and administrative positions, rather than in professional and line management jobs leading to the top. Often these initial disadvantages are compounded by women being cut off from networks, formal and informal, so essential for advancement within enterprises. It is notable that in large companies and organizations where women have achieved high-level managerial positions, these are usually restricted to those areas considered less vital and strategic to the organization such as human resource and administration.

If something that blocks their career path is, the internal factors such as their own motivation or skill, and external factors such as problem related to their husband their children and lack of school and employment. For women with family responsibilities, their upward movement may be hampered as they juggle time to devote to both career families. Thus, many working women choose jobs that will allow them the flexibility to manage their household duties and do not require them to put their career above family (Iverson, 2000). Family reasons as well as organizational demands become detrimental to both working women and their organizations that fail to tap the full potential of these experienced women, thereby becoming less productive themselves (Sekarn, 2000).

Nevertheless, in many instances, the development of detailed career plans within enterprises has been shown to be instrumental in promoting equal opportunities in career progression. Special support through networks, coaching, mentoring and training has also been found to be effective in encouraging women and making them more visible. Yet, due to lack of time and work schedules female hospitality managers do not focus on networking, training and other related activities which are valued if they wish to progress in their careers (Li & Leung, 2001). Thus, not only is specific action required to ensure that women careers are not stymied, but increasingly their opportunities will be enhanced by the creation of workforce which are more dynamic, flexible, value- diverse, are more people-oriented and family-friendly.

Therefore, for years, hospitality industry experts and analysts have talked about the "glass ceiling" that has prevented women in the field from ascending to the upper ranks of supervisory and managerial positions. To an extent, the same conditions prevail in virtually every industry -- although women have come a long way in the workplace, men continue to hold most leadership roles. However, the unique culture and history that define the hospitality industry have made the prospect of change particularly challenging.

### **What career aspiration do women have?**

Career aspirations are the goals that one set out to achieve in their desired profession. More simply, career aspirations “provide information about an individual’s interest and hopes unfettered by reality” (Hellenga, Aber & Rhodes, 2002). Career aspiration are influenced by factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, race, parents’ occupation and education level and parental expectations (Khallad, 2000; Watson et al., 2002). Researchers examine such factors to determine their role in career behavior and how they affect individuals’ career decisions (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996; Rojewski & Yang, 1997). The types of career women choose and factors influencing their choices are relevant issues to examine, especially since most research reveals women continue to work in lower- paying, traditionally female oriented jobs ( Rainey & Borders,1997; Watson et al.,2002).

Today women’s career aspiration has evolved unwaveringly. They can be seen in all facet of employment. They want to make money, they desire of doing something independently, to achieve, to use their skills and talents and to enhance their job satisfaction. Women today are more progressive and play a vital role in fulfilling their economic needs and attaining social status; their career decision focus on the work that provides personal satisfaction, intellectual growth and independence. The women of today are much different than those of years ago. They do not focus on their limitations. They are committed to making their goals reality. The last several decades have been a period of remarkable change and growth for women in the field. In restaurants, hotels, catering firms, resorts, and many other venues, women are becoming much more visible in management roles and other key positions than ever before, and experts predict that the opportunities for women in the industry will only increase as businesses struggle to keep pace with growth and demand in the field.

### Conclusion

It is very interesting to understand what is limiting women to really “come out” for the more prestigious role? Why do they face different set of barriers between entry into management and upward mobility into management? Why females are unable or unwilling to “puncture” the glass ceiling? Despite women now being more exposed to widely distributed opportunities such as in the field of hospitality; there are still various barriers in their career advancements. Some of the noticeable barriers are:

- Work/ Family conflicts
- Equality of the opportunities
- Lack of support
- Gender Discrimination

Due to the aforementioned barriers women are still struggling to fully support themselves, and the barriers women face at their work place hinder their career advancement.

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