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Gender Differences in Perceptions of Work Experiences and Service Quality Provided By Front-Line Service Workers in Four- And Five-Star Hotels in Turkey: A Research Note

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Abstract

Two studies considered possible gender differences in work experiences and service quality behaviors of front-line service employees working in hotels in Turkey.. The first study examined perceptions of servant leadership provided by their supervisors/managers and worker's reports of service quality provided to clients by their hotels of male and female front line workers employed in four- and five –star hotels. Data were collected from 221 front-line employees, 122 males and 82 females, a 37% response rate, using anonymously completed questionnaires. Previously developed and validated measures of servant leadership (Liden, Wayne, Zhao & Henderson, 2008) and service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1998) were used and both were found to be highly reliable in this study. Males and females were similar on five personal demographic items. Males tended to report higher levels ($p < .10$) on two dimensions of servant leadership (Emotional support, Conceptual skills) than did females. In addition, males rated the quality of service provided higher on three dimensions (Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, and tended top rate the quality of service higher on the composite score ($p < .10$) than did females. The differences on perceptions of service quality might be attributed to the departments in which males and females were more likely to work, males tended to work in departments having greater direct client contact. The second investigation examined gender differences in levels of service rewards provided by their hotels and employees engaging in in three prosocial service behaviors: extra0role, role prescribed, and cooperation (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997). Data were collected from 241` employees, 151 males and 88 females working in 18 different hotels in the Cappadocia region, using anonymously completed questionnaires, a 60% response rate. _There were no differences in perceptions of service rewards or in prosocial behaviors. In essence, male and female front-line service workers generally indicated more similar than different appraisals of their work experiences in both investigations. .

Keywords: Gender, Work experiences, Front-line worker

The tourism and hospitality sector in Turkey

Tourism and hospitality are major contributors to the Turkish economy and are growing in importance (Duman & Tosun, 2010; Gokovali, 2010). Inelma, Zeytinoglu and Ungor (2012) note that Turkey had about 27 billion tourist visitors in 2010, ranking seventh in the world, and accounted for about \$US 23 billion in revenue, ranking tenth in the world. Figures for 2012 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2012), reported about 32 million tourist visitors and accounting for over \$US23 billion in revenue. To meet the human resource and management needs of an important and growing sector, a number of school and university programs were created (Kuslivan & Kuslivan, 2000 Okumus & Yagci, 2006).

The tourism sector in most countries is facing several challenges including a low educated workforce, high turnover among front-line employees, low job satisfaction and low pay, poor working conditions such as very long hours, and autocratic and untrained supervision (Kuslivan & Kuslivan, 2000; Yesiltas, Ozturk & Hemmington, 2010).

Gender differences

There are several reasons why studying gender differences in the hospitality sector is important. Women are increasingly being employed in this growing and important sector. There is a shortage of skilled staff given this growth. Front-line service jobs require working long hours, different shift patterns, seasonal work, few rewards, limited opportunities for promotion, autocratic supervisors and poor working conditions. Women may find these challenges more difficult to master than do men. Women also face unique demands such as sexual harassment and discrimination. Women generally bear more home and family responsibilities than do men, making it difficult for them to keep a demanding work schedule. Finally, turnover rates in this sector are high, yet it is not clear if men and women have different turnover rates, and whether the same or different factors influence these rates. .

There are findings indicating that women and men are treated differently in this sector (Brownell, 1998, 1993; Woods & Cavanaugh, 1999). More men are in supervisor and management positions than women, and women tend to congregate in particular functions (e.g., front office, front desk, human resources, housekeeping) reflecting both vertical and horizontal segregation (Jordan, 1997; Sinclair, 1997). And as women become a larger part of the tourism and hospitality workforce, it is becoming more important to better understand whether female and male front-line service employees share the same work experiences and outcomes. Women now represent a larger percentage of employees in this sector than in the Turkish workforce as a whole.

Inelma, Zeytinoglu and Uygur (2012) found no difference in intention to quit in a study of 94 men and 65 women working in front-line service jobs in ten Istanbul hotels. Yavas, Babakus and Karatepe (2008), in a study of 723 front-line employees, found that females indicated higher levels of both work-family and family-work conflict than males, but females and males were similar on exhaustion, turnover intentions, and self-rated job performance.

Burke, Koyuncu and Fiksenbaum (2013), in a study of 371 men and 174 women employees of 15 high quality hotels in Turkey, reported relatively few gender differences. Females were more highly educated, worked fewer hours per week, and were less likely to supervise others. Females also indicated a higher level of absorption, one indicator of work engagement, less family-work conflict, and lower intentions to quit. Men and women were similar on job satisfaction, vigor, dedication, engaging in voice behaviors at work, and on work-family conflict.

Gender, however, has been considered in other aspects of customer service. Mathies and Burford (2010), in a sample of 876 front-line employees from a wide range of industries in Australia found, that females had

a significantly higher service orientation than did males. Using automated text analysis for responses to an open-ended question ("What do you think is good customer service?"), the average response being 10.2 words, they found small differences in the responses males and females. Females placed more emphasis in the actual service interaction and emotional outcomes while males emphasized a more functional outcome oriented view of customer service. The f=male and female rankings of the frequency of concepts was also basically the same. They suggest, as one managerial implication, that females be assigned to particular service situations and males to others. Babin and Boles (1998) report that female service providers were more job satisfied than were males.

Gender research in service delivery has tended to focus more on the customer perspective. Women customers place more value than men on the relationship with service providers (Iacobucci & Ostrom, 1993), with men rating service quality higher than women (Charalambos, Eugenia & Niki, 2004). The gender of the server influences customer satisfaction ratings when it confirms a gender stereotype (Mohr & Henson, 1996). Finally, customer satisfaction with service failures has also been found to be influenced by the gender of the service provider ((McColl-Kennedy, Daus & Sparks, 2003).

The two studies presented here focus on the ways in which gender of the service provider may influence their work experiences and their views on levels of service provided to guests. Based on research reviewed above, we hypothesized few differences on these work and service outcomes.

Study 1. Gender and perceptions of servant leadership and service quality

Quality of service

Providing a high quality of service is important in contributing to the success of organizations in the hospitality and tourism sector. But assessing service quality can be complicated since service quality, an intangible, is primarily subjective involving an interpersonal

experience of an individual providing a service and an individual receiving service. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1998) describe in great detail the development of a multidimensional scale for measuring perceptions of service quality. They define perceived service quality as a global judgment about the superiority of the service provided. Satisfaction, on the other hand, relates to a particular transaction. Service quality then includes several dimensions. Their measure was used in this investigation.

Leadership

Servant leadership emerged as a potentially important leadership concept in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Greenleaf, 1977; George, 2003). Servant leadership focusses on serving the needs of employees and larger communities inside and outside an organization. Servant leaders help employees reach their full potential. Servant leadership builds trust by helping others first (Greenleaf, 1977). Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson (2008) developed and validated a multidimensional measure of servant leadership and found that it predicted community citizenship behaviors, organizational commitment and in-role performance in a sample of 164 employees and 28 supervisors from a single production and distribution company. We use the Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson measures in this investigation.

The general hypothesis underlying this research is that male and female front-line service workers would be similar on personal demographic and work situation characteristics assessments of the level of servant leadership provided by their supervisors/managers, and indicated similar levels of quality service being provided by them to clients.

Method

Procedure

Data were collected from men and women working in four- and five-star hotels in Nevsehir Turkey using anonymously

completed questionnaires between April and July 2012. Hotel managers were contacted and asked for help in the distribution and administration of the questionnaires. A total of 600 questionnaires were delivered to fourteen hotel managers who agreed to take part. A total of 221 questionnaires were received, 122 males and 82 females, a response rate of thirty-seven percent. All held front-line service jobs in these properties.

Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the sample. Slightly over half

were male (60%), most were 27 years of age or younger (56%), most had 5 years of less of organizational tenure (74%), most had a high school education (53%), most worked in the food and beverage department (36%), and respondents were equally divided into four- and five-star hotels (53% and 47%, respectively). There was a slightly higher percentage of males in Front Office and food and beverage departments and a slightly lower percentage of males in Accounting and Housekeeping, and a slightly lower percentage of males working in five star hotels than in the sample as a whole.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Sample

<u>Gender</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Males	122	59.8	18 – 22	41	21.8
Females	82	40.2	23 – 27	64	34.0
			28 – 32	49	26.1
			33 – 37	23	12.2
			38 or above	17	8.8
<u>Education</u>					
Elementary	36	18.3			
High School	104	52.8			
University	57	29.0			
<u>Department</u>			<u>Organizational tenure</u>		
Front office	40	20.3	1 – 5 years	130	73.9
Food & beverage	71	36.0	6 – 10	33	18.8
Accounting	21	10.8	11 or more	13	7.4
Housekeeping	38	19.3			
Other	27	13.7	<u>Hotel rating</u>		
			4 star	104	52.8
			5 star	93	47.2

Measures

Personal and work situation characteristics

Six personal and work situation characteristics were assessed by single items. These were: gender, age, level of education, organizational tenure, department, and whether respondent worked in a four- or five-star hotel.

Servant leadership

Servant leadership was measured by a 28 item scale developed by Liden, Wayne, Zhao

and Henderson (2008). Respondents indicated the degree to which each item described their supervisor/manager on a five point scale of agreement (1=strongly disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 5=strongly agree). This scale had seven dimensions each measured by four items, in addition, a four item measures of Role model was created specifically for this study. Internal consistency reliabilities were: Emotional healing ($\alpha = .82$), Creating value for the community ($\alpha = .79$), Conceptual skills ($\alpha = .80$), Empowering ($\alpha = .78$), Helping employees grow and succeed ($\alpha = .85$), Putting employees

first ($\alpha = .85$), Behaving ethically ($\alpha = .86$), and Role model ($\alpha = .81$);. A composite measure based on the eight dimensions had a reliability of .91. Scores on the eight dimensions were all positively and significantly inter-correlated with an average inter-correlation of .54.

Service quality

Perceptions of the quality of service provided by the hotel to clients was measured by a 22 item instrument, SERVQUAL, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988). Respondents indicated their perceptions of the quality of service provided to clients on a five point scale (1=strongly disagree, 3-neither agree nor disagree, 5-strongly agree). This measure had five dimensions: Tangibles (4 items, $\alpha = .86$), physical facilities, equipment, appearance of staff; Reliability (5 items, $\alpha = .87$), provide promised service, dependable, and accountable; Responsiveness, 4 items, $\alpha = .82$), willingness to help clients and providing prompt service; Assurance 4 items, $\alpha = .79$), knowledgeable and courteous staff able to inspire trust and confidence, and Empathy, (5 items, $\alpha = .86$), individual and caring attention to clients. The total SERVQUAL scale, 22 items, had an internal consistency reliability of .94), Scores on the five dimensions were all positively and significantly correlated, with an average inter-correlation of .70.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Respondents assessed the levels of servant leadership provided to them by their supervisors/managers as fairly high. The modal response on a five point scale was 4 (Agree) with the mean response being 3.5. s.d. =.70. These ranged from a high of 3.9, s.d. =.92 on Behaving ethically to a low of 3.1, s.d. =1.02 on Putting employees first. Respondents also rated the quality of service provided to clients in their hotels as also fairly high, mean ratings being 3.9, s.d.=.62 (4=Agree). Scores on the five dimensions ranged from a high of 4.0 on both Responsiveness and Assurance, s.d. =.71 and .71, respectively, to a low of 3.9, s.d. =.72 on Empathy.

Gender differences

Table 2 shows the gender differences on personal demographics, perceptions of servant leadership provided by supervisors/managers, and perceptions of quality of service provided to clients. The following comments are offered in summary. First, considering personal demographics (top third of Table 2), no significant gender differences were present. Second, moving to perceptions of levels of servant leadership provided to respondents (middle third of Table 2), two differences on the eight dimensions approached significance ($p < .10$) with males tending to report receiving higher levels of both Emotional support and Conceptual skills. Finally, considering perceptions of service quality, males reported their hotels delivering higher levels of service on three of the five dimensions (Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness) and tended to report higher levels of service quality on the composite measure ($p < .10$).

Study 2: Gender and perceptions of service rewards and prosocial service behaviors

Service rewards and service quality culture

Lytle, Hom and Mokwa (1998) developed a managerial measure of organizational service orientation. Consistent with our view, they write that an organization's service orientation is best understood as a culture or climate of an organization as perceived by employees. They defined culture as "employees' perceptions of the events, practices and procedures, as well as their perceptions of the behaviors that are rewarded, supported, and expected, constitute the climate of the work setting in an organization" (pp. 457-458). They identified ten factors as representing an organization's service orientation. We used one of their factors, an organization's use of Service Rewards, in this study. They found that Service Rewards were perceived to be significantly higher among better performing stores than among poorer performing stores in a large retail home improvement chain in the US, store performance ratings based on senior executives assessments.

Prosocial service behaviors

Bettencourt and Brown (1997), on the conviction that employees who “go the extra mile” in the delivery of customer service, prosocial service behavior, would contribute to perceptions of higher quality service and to higher levels of customer satisfaction, loyalty and favorable “word of mouth”. They focused on three types of prosocial service behaviors: extra-role, role prescribed, and cooperatin. Based on data from tellers and customer service employees from 50 branches of a prominent US bank, they found that higher

levels of prosocial service behaviors on the part of bank front-line employees were generally associated with higher levels of customer satisfaction. They also considered workplace fairness perceptions and job satisfaction as predictors of self-reported prosocial service behaviors. Fairness perceptions predicted both levels of prosocial service behaviors and job satisfaction, but on prosocial service behaviors were associated with bank customer satisfactions. We used their measures in this investigation.

Table 2
Gender differences

	<u>Males</u>			<u>Females</u>			<u>P</u>
	<u>X</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>N</u>	
<u>Personal demographics</u>							
Age	27.7	6.61	112	27.2	5.64	76	NS
Tenure	4.2	3.56	107	3.5	3.11	69	NS
Education	2.1	.68	117	2.1	.76	80	NS
Star rating	1.5	.50	116	1.5	.50	81	NS
<u>Servant Leadership</u>							
Emotional support	3.8	.76	122	3.6	.94	82	.10
Creating value	3.6	.78	122	3.5	.80	82	NS
Conceptual skills	3.8	.86	122	3.6	.92	81	.10
Empowering	3.5	.91	122	3.3	.97	82	NS
Helping others	3.4	.86	122	3.3	1.11	82	NS
Employees first	3.1	.96	122	3.1	1.13	82	NS
Behaving ethically	4.0	.85	119	3.8	1.04	81	NS
Role model	3.6	.77	119	3.5	1.04	81	NS
Total servant leadership	3.6	.62	119	3.5	.83	81	NS
<u>Service quality</u>							
Tangibles	4.0	.59	122	3.8	.83	82	.05
Reliability	4.1	.60	122	3.9	.82	82	.05
Responsiveness	4.1	.53	122	3.9	.83	82	.05
Assurance	4.1	.63	122	4.0	.80	82	NS
Empathy	4.0	.68	122	3.8	.77	82	NS
Total Service Quality	4.0	.54	122	3.9	.71	82	.10

Method**Procedure**

Data were collected from hotel employees using an anonymously completed questionnaires in Nevsehir and the Cappadocia region between September and December 2012. Hotel managers were contacted and asked for help in the distribution and administration of questionnaires. A total of 400 questionnaires were delivered to 18 hotel managers in Nevsehir and the Cappadocia region. Completed questionnaires were received from 241 respondents in Nevsehir and the Cappadocia region, a 60% response rate.

Respondents

Table 3 shows the personal demographic and work situation characteristics of respondents. The sample contained more males (68%), were more likely to be single (55%), most were between 20 to 30 years of age (63%), had high school educations (48%), worked 3 years or less at their current hotel (59%), and tended to work in four star properties (61%).

Table 3

Demographic Characteristics of Sample

<u>Sex</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Male	151	68.2	20 or under	13	5.5
Female	88	36.8	21-25	78	33.1
<u>Marital status</u>			26-30	70	29.6
Single	132	55.2	31-35	34	14.4
Married	107	44.8	36-40	26	11.0
<u>Level of education</u>			41 or over	15	6.4
Elementary	54	22.6	<u>Organization tenure</u>		
High school	118	49.4	1 year or less	73	30.5
Bachelor's degree	67	28.0	2-3 years	67	28.1
<u>Star level</u>			4-5 years	44	18.4
4 star	148	61.4	6-10 years	38	15.9
5 star	93	38.6	11 years or more	17	7.1

Measures**Personal demographic and work situation characteristics**

Personal demographic and work situation characteristics were measured by single items. These included: gender, age, level of education,

marital status, organizational tenure, whether hotel was 4 or 5 star, and department

Service rewards used in their hotels

Two service reward items ($\alpha = .94$) developed by Lytle, Hom and Mokwa (1988)

were used. One item was “This organization noticeably celebrates excellent service.”

Prosocial service behaviors

Three aspects of prosocial service behavior were examined using scales developed and validated by Bettencourt and Brown (1998)-

Extra-role customer service was assessed by 5 items ($\alpha=.86$). One item was “I help customers with problems beyond what is expected or required.”

Role-prescribed customer service behavior was also measured by five items ($\alpha=.81$). An item was I perform all those tasks for customers that are required of me.”

Cooperation was assessed by 5 items ($\alpha=.88$). One item was I help other employees who have heavy workloads.”

In all cases, responses were made on a five-point Likert scale: 1= Strongly disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 5=strongly agree.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Prosocial service behaviors

Respondents indicated relatively high levels of prosocial service behaviors. The mean values for each were: Extra-role, $X=4.2$, $s.d.=.69$, $n=241$; Role prescribed, $X=4.2$, $s.d.=.67$, $n=241$, Cooperation $X=4.2$, $s.d.=1.0$, $n=241$, (4=Agree). The three measures of prosocial service behaviors were also significantly and positively inter-correlated ($p<.001$, $n=241$); Extra-role and role prescribed, $r=.66$, extra-role and Cooperation, $r=.66$, and Role prescribed and Cooperation, $r=.66$.

Service rewards

Respondents also indicated relatively high levels of service rewards as well ($X=3.6$, $s.d.=1.2$, $n=241$ (4=Agree, 3- Neither agree nor disagree).

Gender effects

Males and female respondents were compared on five personal demographic items (age, marital status, level of education,

organizational tenure, star level of property), the three measures of prosocial service behaviors (Extra-role, Prescribed, and Cooperation), and service rewards. (see Table 4) Males tended to be older ($p.10$) and has significantly longer organizational tenure ($p<.001$).

Discussion

There has been only a small amount of research devoted to understanding gender differences in the characteristics, work experiences and work and personal well-being outcomes of front line employees in the hospitality industry. The results of these exploratory studies were general consistent with previous research findings and our hypotheses. First, the samples as a whole were reflective of men and working in front-line positions in the hospitality and tourism sector being young, low educated, and having a short organizational tenure (see Tables 1 and 3). Second, women and men were generally similar of all personal demographic and work situation items (see Tables 2 and 4). Third, women and men generally had similar appraisals of the levels of servant leadership provided to them by their own supervisors/managers (see Table 2). Fourth, and contrary to expectations, men rated the quality of service they, and their hotels, provided to clients significantly higher than women did (again see Table 2). It is only possible to speculate on the latter results. Women may also have higher expectations for service quality. In addition, there was a small indication that women and men worked in different departments or units in which it may have been harder to deliver high quality service or know when high quality service was being provided. (e.g., more women than men in housekeeping. Finally, women and men perceived similar levels of service rewards in their hotel cultures and engaged in similar levels of prosocial service behaviors (see Table 4).

Table 4

Gender Differences

	<u>Males</u>			<u>Females</u>			<u>P</u>
	<u>X</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>N</u>	
<u>Personal demographics</u>							
<u>Age</u>	29.4	6.74	149	27.8	6.23	87	.10
<u>Marital status</u>	1.4	.50	151	1.4	.50	88	NS
<u>Education level</u>	2.0	.66	151	2.1	.79	88	NS
<u>Organizational tenure</u>	4.8	4.36	151	3.1	2.62	88	.001
<u>Star rating</u>	1.4	.49	151	1.4	.48	88	NS
<u>Prosocial service behaviors</u>							
<u>Extra-role</u>	4.2	.77	151	4.2	.54	88	NS
<u>Role prescribed</u>	4.1	.73	151	4.2	.56	88	NS
<u>Cooperation</u>	4.1	.75	151	4.2	.60	88	NS
<u>Service rewards</u>	3.5	1.30	151	3.6	1.17	88	NS

Practical implications

Several practical implications follow from our findings. First, women and men generally indicated similar work experiences. Thus hotels should have no qualms about recruiting and attracting both women and men to these positions. Second, women in the hospitality and tourism sector are less represented in higher level supervisory and managerial positions. Thus hotels could ensure that qualified women, similar to men, are considered for training and development efforts, and work experiences, that would put them on the path to these positions. This is particularly relevant given the shortage of qualified individuals in a growing industrial sector.

Future research directions

These preliminary results suggest that undertaking further research on potential gender differences is work experience and

work outcomes of hospitality workers has merit. First, additional important work and well-being outcomes need to be included. The former would include levels of work engagement, intent to quit, engaging in employee voice and organizational citizenship behaviors; the latter would include work and family conflict, burnout, and psychosomatic symptoms. Second, conducting this research in other regions in Turkey would add to our understanding of potential boundary conditions of our results. Third, using a longitudinal design would allow researchers indicators of absenteeism and turnover data as well as performance evaluation ratings of supervisors/managers. Fourth, it would be possible to include client perceptions of service quality and their satisfaction with service provided as well as other more "objective" measures of hotel effectiveness. Fifth, undertaking studies of women and men holding supervisor and management jobs

would also add to our understanding of the role of gender in this sector.

Limitations

Some limitations should be noted to put the results into a larger context. First, all data were collected using respondent self-reports raising the limited possibility of response set tendencies. Second, the samples of males and females, while reasonably large, may not be representative of all hotel employees in Turkey. Third, all properties were located in one region of Turkey and again may not be representative of hotel employees working in other regions of the country. Fourth, there were small differences in the departments in which males and females worked which may have contributed to the pattern of findings.

Footnotes

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