

# Women and Tourism: Hindering Factors of Women Employment in the Hotel Sector in Sri Lanka

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**Abstract--***Empowerment opportunities for women have been proven to be more rampant in the travel and tourism industry. In certain countries, women make up 60% to 70% of the workforce in the hotel sector. Unfortunately, Sri Lanka is still experiencing a very low rate of female employment in its hotel industry. Further empirical studies could provide support to these statistics and determine the factors that hinder women from joining the workforce. This study therefore aims to investigate the factors that prevent women from working in the hotel sector in Sri Lanka, with specific focus on socio-cultural and institutional elements. The study sample includes prospective female employees in various sectors in Sri Lanka, those with college degrees and between 20 and 40 years old. The sample selection was carried out using the non-probability convenience sampling method; 400 respondents were selected but only 334 responses were received and usable. The findings revealed that all the socio-cultural factors had a high influence on women employment in the hotel sector in Sri Lanka whilst the institutional factors had moderate influence.*

**Keywords--***Women and Tourism, Socio-cultural factors, Institutional Factors, Women employment.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The participation of women in the global workforce is very low with only half of working age women actually being in the labor force. The prevalence varies from 30% in South Asia to about 60% in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Compared to other industries, travel and tourism have been indicated to provide more empowerment opportunities for women such as workforce participation, entrepreneurship and leadership roles as supported by the UN Global Report on Women and Tourism 2010 by World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and UN Women. It has been revealed that women benefit tremendously from their interactions with people from other cultures, as prevalent in tourism. A study concentrated in Costa Rica, Belize and Honduras revealed that women view employment in the tourism sector as more advantageous than in other industries. Women in younger age groups also indicate the tourism sector as a better way of earning a living with vast opportunities of meeting new people and building their confidence.

Based on the 2010 analysis by ILO, women make up 60% to 70% of the hotel sector workforce. Meanwhile, about 58% of the workforce in the accommodation and food industries in the Philippines is made up of women. Women working in the tourism sector also have more opportunities for advancement. In Bulgaria, 71% of the managers and administrators in tourism are made up of women as opposed to only 29% in the entire nation.

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The tourism sector in several countries has almost twice as many women employers as other sectors, providing ample opportunities for the women to venture as entrepreneurs. More than half of tourism-related businesses in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand are operated by women. About 51% of tourism businesses in Latin America are run by women i.e. more than twice than that of other sectors. More than 70% of businesses in Nicaragua and Panama are operated by women, as opposed to only 20% in other sectors.

Women are also more prone to running private sector associations and tourism-related NGOs than other sectors. Such trend is supported by several private sector travel organizations such as Hilton Worldwide which established its Women in Leadership policy. The U.S. women workforce for Hilton has reached 51% whilst Marriott International's comprise 55%; the Alzalai Grand Hotel in Mali has 55% female interns. Likewise, the number of female workers at Maldives' Shangri-La hotel is twice the average for the hotel industry. In Maldives, about 10% of the key administrative positions (i.e. managers, supervisors, accountants, administrators, and sales and marketing staff) are held by women, with 8% in the management and supervisory positions, which is double the national average.

However in Sri Lanka, the participation of women as hotel employees is still very low i.e. less than 8% (Nanayakara, 2016). They are often paid less and are not employed in managerial positions. In fact, past studies have revealed that women are severely underrepresented in tourism. There is an average 53% point gap in the workforce participation rates between men and women globally. Hence, further empirical studies could provide support to these statistics and determine the factors that hinder women from becoming a part of the general workforce. This study therefore aims to investigate such hindering factors in the context of the hotel sector in Sri Lanka.

## **II. LITERATURE SURVEY**

Women tend to be involved more in tourism than in other sectors due to the following possible reasons: low requirement for formal education and training, high prerequisite on personal and hospitality skills, better prospects for part-time work and work-from-home options, better prospects for entrepreneurship without high start-up financing, and wider economy-sharing opportunities via online platforms including Airbnb, Uber, and Vacation Rentals by Owner (VRBO).

However, there are also several challenges prevalent in the tourism industry: rampant instances of temporary workers, long and stressful working hours such as for tour guides and front desk officers, and being in contact with tourists who are unfamiliar with the local cultural norms. Apart from the strenuous working conditions and long-hours, female workers are also exposed to a high prevalence of gender stereotyping. Female workers in the industry are often relegated to low paying jobs such as being spa workers, clerks and cleaners while being greatly underrepresented in the more well-paying professions such as tour guides, chefs, and technical and managerial positions. Not many women are given decision-making roles and many experience glaring disparities between their qualifications and work responsibilities whereby most are only given part-time, informal, seasonal, agency, and casual work (World Bank Group, 2017).

**Table 1:**Labour Force participation rate by gender in Sri Lanka (2018)

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Economically active</b>	<b>Labour Force</b>
<b>population (No.)</b>	<b>Participation rate</b>	
Total	8,387,759	51.8
Male	5,464,236	73.0
Female	2,923,523	33.6
Annual Bulletin (2018)		

### **Women Employment in Tourism**

In the context of Sri Lanka, the tourism industry has shown great potentials for development and growth in the next several years. Approximately 500,000 well-trained employees are needed by 2020 to fulfill the targeted projections. Nevertheless, this targeted growth may be hindered by the lack of qualified, experienced and efficient workers. The participation of women in this industry is noticeably low. Additionally, their representation at the middle and senior management level is almost non-existent (Suranga Silva&Mendis, 2017).

Tourism is incorporated in the 2030 Sustainable Development agenda. Its significance as a catalyst for creating job opportunities and promoting local economic development, culture and products clearly stated in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 8, 12 and 14, which incorporate explicit tourism aims. The tourism industry’s role as “a vehicle for job creation, economic growth and development” is also acknowledged by the G20. Jobopportunities in tourism have always been attractive covering a wide range of sectors such as transport and travel, retail, hospitality, lodging, visitor attractions, and the performing arts. It has a significant role in creating job openings particularly in the employment of female workers on a seasonal basis. Since the creation of jobs is a popular benefit of tourism, employment in the industry has garnered great attention(Alka Obadić et al.,2009).

Tourism has been proven to be a viable sector for creating job opportunities and income-generating activities that would benefit the surrounding local communities in the tourism area. Nevertheless, one often overlooked aspect is the imbalanced ways in which those benefits are distributed between the men and women especially in developing nations. Although women make up the majority of the population in Sri Lanka, approximately 11 million of this segment is not actively contributing to the economy. Consequently, this had contributed to the country’s low GDP growth in the past few years. The women in Sri Lanka make up 60% to 70% of the global tourism workforce, over-representing in lower skilled and lower paid works especially in housekeeping and customer service.

The tourism sector opens up opportunities for women to create self-employment in the form of small- and medium-sized enterprises, hence paving the way for eliminating poverty among the local communities in general and the female segment in particular in developing countries. Empirical findings stated that there are several determinants to the supply of female workers. Ortiz-Ospina and Tzvetkova (2017)emphasized on the following: Maternal Health, Fertility, Child Care and Other Family-Oriented Policies, Labor-Saving Consumer Durables,

Social Norms and Culture, Structural Changes in the Economy, Social Changes and Society Awareness of Women's Issues, Support of the Omani Government and Organizations, and Family and Paid-Labour Supports.

### **III. MEASURING THE VARIABLES**

#### **Women Employment in Hotels**

The involvement of women in tourism-related occupations is known as women employment in tourism, which can be categorized into three i.e. direct employment, indirect employment and induced employment (Alka Obadić& Ivana Marić,2009).This study focuses specifically on the lodging sector of tourism i.e. hotels and restaurants. Hence, this study deals with the direct employment of women in the hotel and restaurant sector. Educators and researchers in this industry mostly focus on their students' career intention i.e. their aim of developing a career in the hospitality industry (Kate et al., 2015). Marco et al. (2014) also emphasized that employees in this industry should have high competence in providing quality hotel services with adequate knowledge and skills. Therefore, the dimension of women employment in the hotel industry is measured using the constructs of intention, knowledge, and influence.

#### **Socio-cultural Factor on Women Employment**

The low participation of women as workers in the Sri Lankan hotel industry is significantly influenced by the socio-cultural structure of the society as argued in this study. The specific factors include the unsupportive social and cultural environments that hinder the ability of the women to acquire the needed skills to be involved in the tourism industry (Suranga Silva&Mendis,2017).Culturally, women are prohibited from taking on jobs that are low in status, necessitate constant travelling, involve interactions with strangers, and have long hours. Women are also hindered from working due to the society's religious beliefs. Traditionally, women are expected to devote their lives to taking care of the home front (Salime Mehtap et al.,2016). Local traditions and customs as well as social misperceptions hinder women from becoming a part of the hotel industry workforce (Ibrahim Bazazo et al.,2017). Hence, the social-cultural variable in this study is measured using the constructs of Gender Stereotypes, Social Attitudes, Gender Inequality, Cultural Values, as well as Traditions and Religion. The hypothesis below is therefore proposed:

**H1:** Socio-Cultural factors affect the employment of women in the hotel industry.

#### **Institutional Factors influencing Women Employment**

Institutional factors play an important role in encouraging the participation of women in the hotel industry. Women often deem that internal organizational cultures are largely unsupportive of female development such as fewer promotion and mentoring opportunities for them. Hence, it is suggested that the lack of development opportunities for women at work is caused by the perceived discrimination of male-dominated organizational policies instead of the women's lack of determination or self-confidence (Ibrahim Bazazo et al., 2017).Other factors that hinder women from working in the hotel industry are unfair salary, lack of positive workplace and family support systems, and stressful workplace commute (Jyoti Peshave& Kirti Gupta,2017). On top of that, there are also the factors of gender discrimination at the workplace and non-flexi working hours. Hence, the variable of institutional factors in this study is measured using the constructs of: fairness of established policies, fairness of

promotion practices, workplace support systems, and internal organizational culture. The hypothesis below is therefore proposed:

**H2:** Institutional factors affect the employment of women in the hotel industry.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

The study samples entail prospective female employees in Sri Lanka in various sectors, female undergraduates and those between the ages of 20 and 40. Due to the unavailability of the list of female employees in various sectors as well as the sample frame, the non-probability convenience sampling method was employed in selecting the respondents. Despite having an initial sample size of 400, only 334 responses were returned and usable for analysis. The questionnaire items were taken from past studies and modified to suit the current research objectives and serve as the data collection tool. The survey method of drop-off and pick-up is deemed to be more effective as it produces a higher response rate. A pilot test was conducted to test the instrument in terms of ease of response and clarity.

#### V. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

##### Demographic statistics

Age-wise, 58.98% out of all the respondents are between 31 and 40. Education-wise, 48.50% are graduates whilst 43.41% are secondary level (O/L & A/L) leavers. In terms of marital status, 52.39% are single whilst 38.62% are married (refer to Table 4.2).

**Table 2:** Descriptive Statistics

Age Category	Frequency	Percentage
20-30	78	23.35%
31-40	197	58.98%
Above 40	59	17.66%
<b>Total</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Educational Level</b>		
Primary	17	5.08%
O/L	81	24.25%
A/L	64	19.16%
Diploma	06	1.79%
Graduate	162	48.50%
Post Graduate	04	1.19%
<b>Total</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Unmarried	175	52.39%

Married	129	38.62%
Widow	30	8.98%
<b>Total</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Factor analysis - Socio-Cultural factors**

This construct has seven items of which each is measured on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, whereby 1 denotes strong disagreement to the statements and 5 denotes strong agreement to the same.

**Table 3:** Factor Analysis on Items in Socio-Cultural Factors

		Mean	Std deviation	SF1	SF2	SF3	SF4	SF5	SF6	SF7
Correlation	SF1	3.72	.862	1.000	.719	.602	.632	.582	.614	.564
	SF2	3.67	.790	.719	1.000	.626	.658	.569	.642	.619
	SF3	3.61	.766	.602	.626	1.000	.637	.659	.564	.549
	SF4	3.58	.797	.632	.658	.637	1.000	.671	.561	.564
	SF5	3.52	.730	.582	.569	.659	.671	1.000	.642	.549
	CF6	3.60	.816	.614	.642	.564	.561	.642	1.000	.619
	CF7	3.65	.778	.564	.619	.549	.564	.549	.619	1.000

All the items' mean values approximate 4 indicating that the respondents in general are contented with the socio-cultural factors. The correlation between each item with at least one other item in the construct is found to be highest at 0.3 and 0.9. Hence, there are adequate correlations between all the items in the construct. In the exploratory factor analysis (EFA), the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistics was recorded as 0.868 i.e. excellent (Hair et al., 2012). A single factor was extracted that explained 71% of the variation in the seven items.

**Institutional factors**

This construct has four items. In the EFA, the KMO statistics was recorded as 0.744 i.e. good. A single factor was extracted that explained 58% of the variation in the 4 items. The mean of the 4 items was calculated and saved as institutional factors to be used in the next analysis.

**Table 4:** Factor Analysis on Items in Institutional Factors

		Mean	Std Deviation	IF1	IF2	IF4	IF5
Correlation	IF1	4.04	.821	1.000	.328	.331	.350
	IF2	4.18	.816	.328	1.000	.449	.567
	IF3	4.01	.838	.331	.449	1.000	.590
	IF4	4.12	.817	.350	.567	.590	1.000

Initial analysis of the data reliability was carried out using Cronbach's alpha in which all the values were found to be more than 0.7, indicating high data reliability. Nevertheless, actual data reliability and validity must be determined to ensure that the analysis is accurate. The reliability analysis results are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Reliability using Cronbach's Alpha

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
SF	.896
IF	.762
WEH	.880

Therefore, the constructs' discriminant and convergent validity were determined using the factor analysis. The correlations between all the constructs were shown to be between 0.3 and 0.9, indicating adequate correlations between all the items within the specific constructs. In the EFA, the KMO statistics for all the constructs are presented in Table 6. Data reliability and validity are confirmed more comprehensively through this than via the Cronbach's Alpha.

**Table 6:** Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Statistics

Variable	KMO	Factors	Variance	Items
Socio-cultural	.868	Single	70.86	7
Institutional	.744	Single	58.21	4

### Correlation Analysis among the Independent and Dependent Variables

The correlation between each item and another item in the construct was found to be the highest at 0.3 and 0.9. Hence, an adequate correlation between the independent and dependent variables are confirmed. No cases of multicollinearity exist between the variables as the highest correlation between each factor did not exceed 0.85.

### Regression of Women Employment in Tourism upon the Factors Influencing Women Employment in Tourism

Based on the analysis, institutional factors were shown to be insignificant in predicting the employment of women in the tourism sector as the factor's p-value is indicated to be more than 0.05. Meanwhile, socio-cultural factors were found to be significant predictors of women employment in the tourism industry as the p-value is indicated to be less than 0.05. No issues of multicollinearity were found as the values for the variance inflation factor (VIF) are indicated to be less than 5. The regression equation can be stated as Women Employment in Tourism (WE) = 0.12+ 0.388 (Socio-cultural factors) + (0.007) (Institutional Factors).Based on the model summary, the R-square value is 0.524 indicating that 52.4% of the variation in the construct of women employment in tourism is explained by the socio-cultural and institutional factors which act as the independent variables. The Durbin-Watson statistic of 2.015 approximates the value of 2.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study showed that female employment in the hotel industry is greatly hindered by socio-cultural factors with a probability value of 0.000 and a positive individual Beta ( $\beta$ ) value of (0.388). Hence, Hypothesis H1 of this study is confirmed. The findings of this study are consistent with that of past studies.

Meanwhile, institutional factors were revealed to be non-factors on an individual basis. However, on a joint basis, these factors do influence the employment of women in the hotel industry as shown by the probability value of 0.863 and the positive individual Beta ( $\beta$ ) value of (0.007).

Sri Lanka's tourism industry has strategically contributed to the country's economic development as well as its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in major ways for the past several years. The findings reveal that although the tourism sector opens up plenty of job opportunities, the participation of women in the sector remains low. Socio-cultural factors are highlighted as the primary reasons for this including the prevalence of discriminative practices such as gender stereotypes and inequality due to social norms, cultural values, traditions and religious ideals. Meanwhile, institutional factors were found to have a moderate influence on the participation of women in the hotel industry specifically in relation to the workplace system, equity in terms of promotion, and the internal working environment.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has generally uncovered the various constraints that hinder women from being employed in the hotel industry. Based on the investigation, this study hence puts forward several recommendations of actions to be taken by the relevant authorities in addressing the issue.

Firstly, the relevant bodies should increase public awareness about women employment in various sectors using the mass media to show how women in other parts of the world participate as members of the workforce. Additionally, there is a need to further build the knowledge among women to reinforce their skills. This study also suggests for hoteliers and lodging providers in general to restructure their facilities to properly accommodate the needs of both genders. Introducing flexible working hours may also benefit female employees considering that long working hours and irregular shifts have been indicated as among the main factors hindering women from joining the work force. With flexible working hours, female workers would have more work autonomy, are able to balance between home and work life, and can work in a safe environment. Meanwhile, the government and the industry in general can allocate a higher percentage for women in their recruitment plans.

Further studies can focus on other lodging segments such as home stays and small-scale eateries of which operations are distinct from those of large-scale hotels, which could indirectly encourage the participation of female workers in the tourism industry.

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