HRMARS
Exploring Intellectual Capital

Women in the hotel industry: what's missing from this picture?

Dr. Mousa Masadeh

Petra College for Tourism and Archaeology , Al-Hussein Bin Talal University
Petra, Jordan
Email: jordantourism@hotmail.com

Abstract:

The hotel and tourism industry remains male-dominated, particularly in the upper echelons of management. While this situation is changing worldwide, it remains more entrenched in Middle Eastern countries like Jordan. This article reviews the literature on women in the hotel and tourism industries in order to contextualize the situation in Jordan, where a significant and growing government-supported tourism sector makes issues of gender and industry practice especially timely. While not explicitly reinforced by organizational policy, gender inequity remains embedded in cultural traditions, with women typically relegated to service roles. Meanwhile, female managers are often valued for their "soft" skills and democratic management styles. Gender composition of the hotel workforce is analyzed, and the directions for future investigation in the area are suggested.

Kewords: women, hotel industry, gender equality, literature review, Jordan.

Introduction

Because of the long domination of Confucianism, rule by man has prevailed. Man plays a dominant role in both society and family, while woman should follow the instruction given by man. (Wong & Chung, 2003: 72)

This quotation describes women's situation in China. Interestingly, however, if we substituted the term 'Confucianism' with 'Traditional values', it would undoubtedly give a similar picture of women's situation in Jordan or in any Arab country. In truth, looking at the role of women in the Arab world through the years, they have been pictured as frail, and dominated by their husbands, a phenomenon which stems from the traditional and religious 'laws' which greatly inform social life (Würth, 2004). This also concurs with the views of Baum, Amoah and Spivack (1997), who stated that religious barriers still bar women from getting involved in the tourism and hospitality industry.

Reviewing

Beliefs and culture vary from one society to the other. Within the tourism industry, it is often deemed to be not easy to discuss the role of women, who are relatively insignificant in the industry and still remain a tiny minority in hotel work (Magablih, 2000). This is what is really going on in Jordan: women are axiomatically not involved in the hotel industry, and a visitor to Jordan will rarely see females working in a predominantly male environment, despite the fact that women are equally as experienced, talented and skilled as men; therefore, women should be emancipated from social restrictions and given new opportunities (Magablih, 2006).

Although researchers have called for equal opportunities (EO) between men and women, in developed countries women in the hotel industry 'constitute an underutilized and under-valued…resource' (Maxwell, 1997: 234); they still tend to take a back seat to men in jobs and do not actively participate in the hospitality industry for social, cultural and traditional reasons (Baum, Amoah & Spivack, 1997; Li & Leung, 2001; Wong & Chung, 2003). Additionally, the 'old boy' network still dominates in the vast majority of organisations in Europe (Linehan & Scullion, 2001: 222), and there is a clear distinction between women and men in terms of occupation in high masculinity cultures such as Japan, Germany and the USA (Treven, 2003). In contrast, it has been argued that a high percentage of female staff are employed in the hotel industry in the world (Baines, 1998), as well as an increased proportion of women in the hospitality industry (Lee & Chon, 2000).

In the literature, it is generally agreed that in hotels, women are recruited to do somewhat semi- or unskilled, low-paid, gendered, operative and non-managerial jobs (Biswas & Cassell, 1996; Davies, Taylor & Savery, 2001). And women are not recruited for other hotel jobs since it is considered inappropriate, such as being bell-boys, night watch or night porters (Biswas & Cassell, 1996). Furthermore, Linehan & Scullion (2001) stated that women held low-skilled jobs and low-paid positions due to selection and recruitment processes as well as informal and formal policies and processes, and that the main barrier preventing them from reaching senior managerial positions was the instilled negative perception in the organisation environment towards them (their gender), as is demonstrated by Biswas and Cassell (1996: 23):

> The taken-for-granted assumptions about gender that are embedded deeply within established organizational discourses serve to create organizational environments where it is difficult for women to succeed.

However, Li and Leung (2001) in their research have identified the main obstacles restricting female managers from moving up the hierarchical structure as cultural and social barriers, and argue that this has nothing to do with specific company policy or practices. Nevertheless, these wider cultural considerations no doubt have consequences for the prospects for female employees within a given company.

Female employees cannot be excluded from the hotel industry because of gender roles in the organisation. However, there are past studies that showed some hotel companies as somewhat gendered and discriminatory. For instance, Biswas and Cassell (1996) pointed out, in a case study, of an international hotel chain in England, that organisations prefer some jobs in hotels to be occupied by women, such as reception and the sales and marketing department, because of their appearance and their display of sexuality. Moreover, to provide the impression of being at home, for example, an older waitress for breakfast is highly recommended. In line with their conclusion, Kattara, (2005) stated that females tend to be more attractive to customers, i.e. male customers, better at handling customers and more accepted than their male counterparts in people-oriented positions such as room division and marketing departments. Additionally, she argues that owing to females' natural abilities and qualities, women are ideally and

naturally suited to roles in human resource positions. The latter point has been underlined by Liu and Wilson (2001), who have argued that females are far more determined than their male counterparts and tend to be more democratic in management, which encourages staff commitment. They also added that women are:

> Quite adept at juggling work and family life, and have gained various job-transferable skills such as interpersonal, communication, organisation and 'fire-fighting' ability. It is these and other skills that have proved to be quite valuable in the workplace. (Liu & Wilson, 2001:172)

Moreover, research has confirmed the importance of the female contribution to hotel management, since it is presumed that the female role in management in future is considerable (Maxwell, 1997; Li & Leung, 2001). Other 'good' aspects accompany the employment of women: according to female managers' point of view, the success of hotels relies on customer satisfaction, while in contrast, male managers are more focused on achieving financial goals for the hotels (Peacock, 1995). Moreover, according to the view of Diane Miller, a general manager interviewed in research conducted by Maxwell (1997), senior managers have started to recognise and acknowledge that women, when fully committed, achieve better results than men do.

Furthermore, Maxwell (1997: 233) has found that, compared to that of their male counterparts, the approach used by female senior managers in their staff management styles such as 'good communication, flexibility and adaptability, and teamwork' have aided them in attaining this rank and provided good outcomes for the organisation. In more detail, these approaches and skills, which have previously been identified as connected with female management (e.g. Smith & Smits, 1994; Shirley, 1995, both cited in Maxwell, 1997), are:

- 'Their being better communicators than their male counterparts in terms of having a deeper insight into, and being more interested in, their staff.

- Their having a consistent expectation of high standards of performance from staff together with a capacity for attention to detail.

- Their focus on being a visible, open-management presence with regular and frequent contact with staff.

- Their relative sensitivity to what their staff thinks of them and flexibility in adjusting their management styles in response.

- Their inclination towards teamwork' (Maxwell, 1997: 233).

According to Magablih (2000), one of the leading experts on tourism and hospitality in Jordan, there should be a quota system and equal opportunity required by new legislation on recruitment and selection in the tourism industry to enable women to share work fairly with their male counterparts in tourism and hospitality activities. Interestingly, the Jordanian government introduced a quota system in tourist guide training programmes by allocating places for women and charging them only token admission fees, to encourage women to train and operate with their male counterparts as tourist guides. Putting such initiatives into practice succeeded, to some extent, in bringing women into the tourism arena and increasing the proportion of female employees in other tourism activities (Magablih, 2000). As the author notes, this policy led to several female tourist guides working in Jordan. However, it has empirically been identified that nepotism practices preclude Jordanian organisations from applying the basic principle of equal opportunity, namely, 'the right person for the right job' (Hayajenh, Maghrabi & Al-Dabbagh, 1994: 66).

In terms of women and type of hotels, according to Timo and Davidson (2005), the jobs in 4- and 5-star international hotel chains are shared almost equally between female and male counterparts. However, things differ when it comes to managerial positions, which are still dominated by men (Wong & Chung, 2003; Timo & Davidson, 2005). Moreover, Ramos, Rey-Maquieira & Tugores (2004) found that there was not much gender difference in terms of receiving training conducted by large hotels, whereas the difference in small-and medium-sized hotels was significant.

This negative attitude to women working in the hotel industry has recently started to diminish. Although it will take time to fully surmount it, it will change, largely thanks to globalisation,

public awareness of tourism and international hotel chains, which are renowned for their leading policies and practices in the field of equal opportunities (GröschI & Doherty, 1999).

Considering women in Arab countries, in Egypt (a typical Arab country) only 153 (13.2 per cent) of hotel managers were female out of a total of 1,161, and only three females in 71 hotels were able to break the 'glass ceiling' and climb the hierarchical structure up to management administrative positions: general manager, executive assistant general manager and resident manager (Kattara, 2005). Also a research approached all middle managers (head department) in all international hotel chains in Jordan, the researcher found that The profile of respondents reveals that the hotel industry is male dominated at the middle management level, with 33 females (16 per cent) and 174 males (84 per cent) (Masadeh, (2010). This finding supports the study of Magablih (2000), which reported that women play an insignificant role in the tourism and hotel industry. Similarly, Timo and Davidson's (2005) study on Australian MNCs reported that only 34.5 per cent of hotel industry managers were female, compared to 65.5 per cent male. In the U.S.A., on the other hand, Woods and Viehland (2000) found that 46 per cent of managers in the country's 11 hotel chains were female. Nevertheless, these findings were consistent with those of the present study in that female management tended to be limited to specific areas. This appears to be a common issue in Asian and Middle Eastern countries. Li and Leung's (2001) study reported that only two females had broken through the invisible barrier and achieved general manager position in the 77 hotels in Singapore. Pine's study indicated that only three females reached general management positions out of 72 Hong Kong hotels.

These figures are even lower than those suggested by the worldwide picture of gender segregation in the hospitality industry, in which it has been reported (Jones, 1992) that women make up only 4 per cent of middle and senior managers and 1 per cent of upper management. This is despite the importance of the tourism sector for women, who make up some 46 per cent tourism workers according to a 1999 report based on data from 76 counties, and whose employment in the tourism sector is higher in most places than in the general workforce. The same report noted that the percentage of women working in tourism (including catering, restaurant and hotel industries) varied greatly from region to region, ranging from 2 per cent to

over 80 per cent; however, in countries with established tourism industries, women tended to make up roughly half of the tourism sector workforce. Nevertheless, the report confirms the widespread phenomenon of horizontal and vertical gender segregation in the tourism workforce worldwide, with women generally occupying lower-paid seasonal and part time positions (see also Jordan, 1997).

Conclusion

Although there are a number of studies investigating women in various industries, there is presently little research devoted specifically to the woman hospitality sector. Data on female workers in the hotel industry in the Middle East is difficult to come by and in Jordan, was and is still almost entirely non-existent (Masadeh, 2010).

Very few women are employed in the hotel industry in Jordan, despite male and female employees' equal levels of competence, something attributable to entrenched local tradition and religious laws relegating women to weak, submissive social roles (Würth, 2004). The restriction of women's opportunities working in the hotel and tourism industry is also prevalent in other countries, and not limited to Arab countries alone. Although women's employment in the industry has increased in recent years, it is stated in the literature that for the most part they are hired to do semi-skilled or low-skilled work, and hold low-paying jobs (Biswas & Cassell, 1996; Davies, Taylor & Savery, 2001). Furthermore, gender inequality has prevented women from reaching managerial positions in their organisations (Biswas & Cassell, 1996: 23). In Egypt, it was found that female employees did not get promoted to senior levels due to four factors: 1) the belief that women once married would not function as well as their male counterparts; 2) in hotels, promotions could be associated with transfer of assignment to another hotel chain, and there is a belief that married females are not as mobile as males; 3) usually female employees have to work much more than males to be as effective; and lastly, 4) the presence of cultural barriers that prevent women from advancing their careers (Kattara, 2005).

Regarding the Middle East, Kattara's study is the first of its kind in the region, as female career development is a neglected area of research in the Middle East (Kattara, 2005). Apparently female career advancement in the hotel industry in the Middle East region can be illustrated by the following quotable statement:

> A female holding a 'general manager' position is still too complicated a situation to be accepted in the Middle East culture. Business there is generally a men's world, not to mention that precedence in management must be prevailed by males. Therefore, it is an extremely rigid road for females to find an easy chance to reach such managerial positions. (Kattara, 2005: 246)

Finally, Mahatma K. Gandhi extolled women:

> To call women the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman…There is no occasion for women to consider themselves subordinate or inferior to men…A woman's intuition has often proved truer than man's arrogant assumption of superior knowledge…Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities…If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with woman. (Quotations compiled by Tikekar, 2007).

Corresponding Author

Mousa A. Masadeh
Department of Hotel and Tourism Services Management
Petra College For Tourism and Archaeology
Al-Hussein Bin Talal University
P.O. Box: 20
Petra 71810 Jordan
Email: jordantourism@hotmail.com

References

Baines, A. (1998) "Technology and tourism." *Work Study* 47, (5) 160-163. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/00438029810370492

Baum, T., Amoah, V., & Spivack, S. (1997) "Policy dimensions of human resource management in the tourism and hospitality industries." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 9, (5) 221-229. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09596119710172615

Biswas, R., & Cassell, C. (1996) "Strategic HRM and the gendered division of labour in the hotel industry: A case study." *Personnel Review* 25, (2) 19-34. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/00483489610147870

Brewster, C., & Scullion, H. (1997) "*A review and an agenda for expatriate HRM*." *Human Resource Management Journal* 7, (3) 32-41. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-8583.1997.tb00424.x

Davies, D., Taylor, R., & Savery, L. (2001) "The role of appraisal, remuneration and training in improving staff relations in the Western Australian accommodation industry: a comparative study." *Journal of European Industrial Training* 25, (7) 366-373. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/EUM0000000005837

Gröschl, S., & Doherty, L. (1999) "Diversity management in practice." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 11, (6) 262-268. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09596119910281757

Hayajenh, A. F., Maghrabi, A. S., & Al-Dabbagh, T. H. (1994) "Research Note: Assessing the Effect of Nepotism on Human Resource Managers." *International Journal of Manpower* 15, (1) 60-67. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/EUM0000000003933

Jones, M. (1992) "Failure to promote women: a serious loss." *Caterer and Hotelkeeper*, 9 January, p.12.

Jordan, F. (1997) "An occupational hazard? Sex segregation in tourism employment." *Tourism Management* 18, (8) 525-534. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(97)00074-5

Kattara, H. (2005) "Career challenges for female managers in Egyptian hotels." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 17, (3) 238-251. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09596110510591927

Lee, C., & Chon, K.S. (2000) "An investigation of multicultural training practices in the restaurant industry: the training cycle approach." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 12, (2). http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09596110010309934

Li, L., & Leung, R. W. (2001) "Female managers in Asian hotels: profile and career challenges." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 13, (4) 189-196. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09596110110389511

Linehan, M., & Scullion, H. (2001) "Challenges for female international managers: evidence from Europe." *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 16, (3) 215-228. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/02683940110385767

Liu, J., & Wilson, D. (2001) "The unchanging perception of women as managers." *Women in Management Review* 16, (4) 163-173. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09649420110392145

Magablih, K. (2000) "Role of Female Employees in the Hotel Industry of Jordan." *Al Edari* 83, 181- 210.

Magablih, K. (2006) "Dimensions of Women Participation in the Jordanian Tourism Industry." *Abhath Al Yarmouk* 22, (1) 95-122.

Masadeh, M. (2010) *Human Resources in international hotel chains in Jordan: "Out-of-country" training determinants.* Unpublished PhD thesis. Coventry University.

Maxwell, G. A. (1997) "Hotel general management: views from above the glass ceiling." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 9, (5/6) 230-235. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09596119710172624

Peacock, M. (1995) "A job well done": hospitality managers and success." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 7, (2) 48-51. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09596119510079990

Pine, R. (1997) "*Hong Kong's changing hotel industry and the current and potential utilization of women in management and leadership roles*" *working papers,* Hong Kong.

Ramos, V., Rey-Maquieira, J., & Tugores, M. (2004) "The role of training in changing an economy specialising in tourism." *International Journal of Manpower* 25, (1) 55-72. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/01437720410524992

Shirley, S. (1995) "*Getting the gender issue on the agenda*." *Professional Manager*, January, 12-14.

Smith, P.L., & Smits, S.J. (1994) "The feminisation of leadership?" *Training and Development*, February, 43-6

Tikekar, S.R. (2007) *Epigrams from Gandhiji.* Retrieved from http://www.mkgandhi.org/epigrams/w.htm

Timo, N., & Davidson, M. (2005) "A survey of employee relations practices and demographics of MNC chain and domestic luxury hotels in Australia." *Employee Relations* 27, (2) 175-192. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/01425450510572694

Treven, S. (2003) "International training: the training of managers for assignment abroad." *Education + Training* 45, (8/9) 550-557.

Woods, R.H., & Viehland, D. (2000) "Women in hotel management." *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly* 41, (5) 51-54.

Wong, C. S., & Chung, K. M. (2003) "Work values of Chinese food service managers." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 15, (2) 66-75. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09596110310462913

Würth, A. (2004) *Women's Rights in the Arab world: Overview of the status of women in family law with special reference to the influence of Islamic factors*. Retrieved from http://www.gtz.de/de/dokumente/en-frauenrechte-arab-welt.pdf