

# Identify the Opportunities and Constraints in Career Progression for Women in the Hotel Industry with Special Reference to Southern Province

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**Abstract-** Tourism industry is often considered as a labor intensive sector and mostly the women can be a frill for the industry since they actively participate with the operation. A study by Zhong, (2006) indicates that, women are struggling to reach the top in the hospitality industry, and that women are subordinate to men. Therefore, the objectives of this study are to identify the opportunities for women for the career advancement in hotel industry, to identify the constraints that are preventing them from fulfilling their career ambitions and to determine the special positions of women holding in tourism and hospitality workforce as a diverse culture in an organization in four departments separately. Primary data collected by the author from 14 human resource managers and 67 female employees interviewed using purposive sampling method and stratified sampling method in southern province are the main source of data. Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods were deployed. The findings reflect that, Socio-cultural and organizational factors, work and family conflicts and gender discrimination as the factors that affect women's career progression in the hospitality industry and organizational background for women to pursue top ranks in hotel industry in southern province. In conclusion, women participation and women in top positions in hotel industry in southern province in Sri Lanka is considerably low due to lack of formal and informal networking and lack of visible women in senior positions whereas work and family life balancing, gender bias and dominant masculine culture were not affected for career advancement with reference to the findings. Management decisions and policies are seeking to provide separate strategies for women employees to increase the productivity and quality of the service.

**Index Terms-** HRM, Gender discrimination, Strategies, Career progression and constraints, Southern province

## INTRODUCTION

Women participation into the professional world changed the dynamics of the workplace and being a member of workforce has, without a doubt, chanced over the past few decades. Tourism industry is often considered as a labor intensive sector and mostly the women can be a frill for the industry since they actively participate with the operation. Tourism presents a wide range of income generation opportunities for women in both formal and informal employment and tourism provides better opportunities for women's participation in the workforce, women's entrepreneurship, and women's leadership than other sectors of the economy (Global Report on Women in Tourism 2010). Knowles (1998) has stated that tourism and hotel industry consists of a complex blend of tangible and intangible elements of products food, drinks, accommodation and the service, atmosphere and image that surrounds them (this sentence is bit unclear to me). Although women have become a considerable percentage and good number of women has been promoted to greater positions in organizations Li, Tse, & Xie, (2007) noted that women represented few top management positions compared to the overall employment.

For many years, women in hospitality industry has been a less number which is due to "Glass Ceiling Effect" which prevents women in the field from ascending to the upper ranks of supervisory and managerial positions, become a minor effect while another factors are taking place as barriers. Women employees as managers often concentrated in supervisory and line management positions whilst male dominates the upper management position.

Women are often concentrated as low paid, low states in every field and they have lack of educational opportunities, slow salary increases and low recognitions as a sub part of career advancement opportunities. Career Progression is not the same as Career Development which is the term most people are accustomed to use. People are often attracted to a particular job, industry or a position for career development through training, educating and knowing about the job to fulfill and match life desires and goals. Moreover women face several barriers which can be recognized as career advancement constraints. Constraints can be defined as characteristics or circumstances that limit women's ability to progress in their career within the hospitality industry (Zhong, 2006).

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO's annual report), there are known to be challenges facing women in tourism. Women are often concentrated in low status, low paid and precarious jobs in the tourism industry where gender stereotyping and discrimination exist. Women mainly tend to perform jobs such as cooking, cleaning and hospitality but it provides better opportunities

for women’s participation in the workforce, women’s entrepreneurship, and women’s leadership than other sectors of the economy as identified by few researches. A study by Zhong, (2006) indicates that women are struggling to reach the top in the hospitality industry, and that women are subordinate to men.

Since Sri Lanka is becoming most currency generating industry recently has changed the structure of labor pool and status quo. Researchers have found that Sri Lanka has achieved most of the human development goals but the active female participation in the economy is relatively low. Females account for as much as 70% of the population that is classified as ‘economically inactive’. Even of those who are ‘economically active,’ the number of women in the workforce (33%) remains far below that of men (67%).women are earning simultaneously to their male counterparts and equal safe work place environment are contradictory arguments when the point of view of industry professionals indicate positive foundation for women and negative environment issues in tourism industry. 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 proving that women participation in tourism industry is to be still covered for future research to investigate carrier advancement and potential risks involving in the industry.

### METHODOLOGY

Based on the research objectives, this research is documented through a survey conducted with 14 human resource managers and 67 female employees in southern province. The study employed purposive sampling method to select number of HR managers and stratified sampling method to select number of women employees. The criterion for the stratification was to cover all levels in hotel. The sample consists of representation of each level employees and employees in main four departments (Housekeeping, Front office, Kitchen and Food and Beverage) and other sub departments (Accounts, Spa, Gym, Gardening, Engineering and Maintenance).

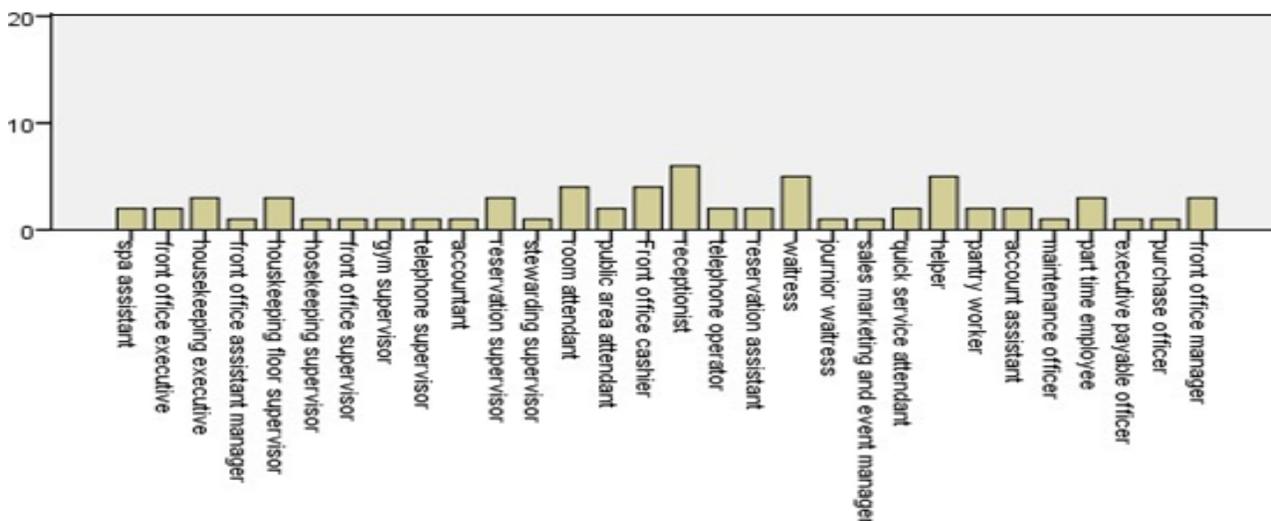
In order to achieve objectives of the research, the analysis used both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data were obtained by means of semi structured questionnaire. The quantitative data were analyzed by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Minitab. Descriptive analysis, including means was calculated along with frequencies, graphs, charts and tables. Content analysis was used to analyze open ended questions and personal interview data. Qualitative data were collected by means of a structured interview.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.1 Descriptive analysis

Study has revealed that the women participation for the senior management positions are considerably low than the male counterparts. The following graph describes the female participation from the top level to bottom level.

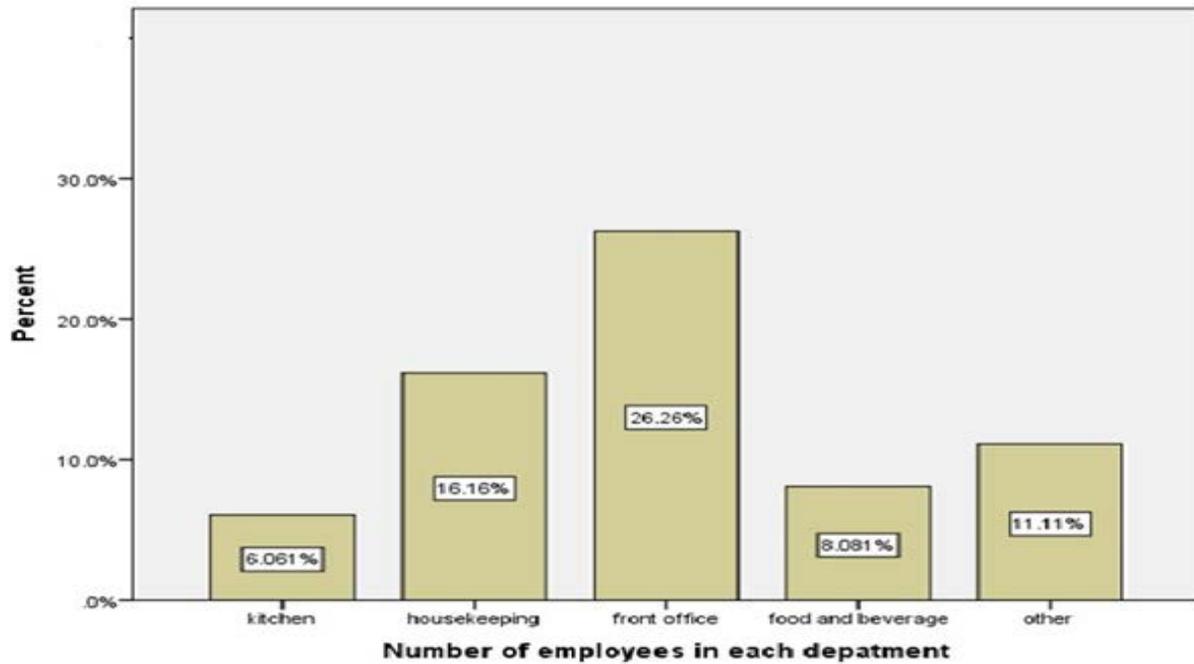
Figure 4.1 Women employee distribution N= 67



Source: SPSS outputs of the research

The figure 4.1 shows the distribution and composition of women employees in star classified hotels in southern province. The results have proven that the literature related to career advancement is similar to the hotel industry in any country showing that the women in senior position is obviously low compared to men in industry. The opinion of HR managers is these job structure has created within the industry since most job categories are not suitable for women employees.

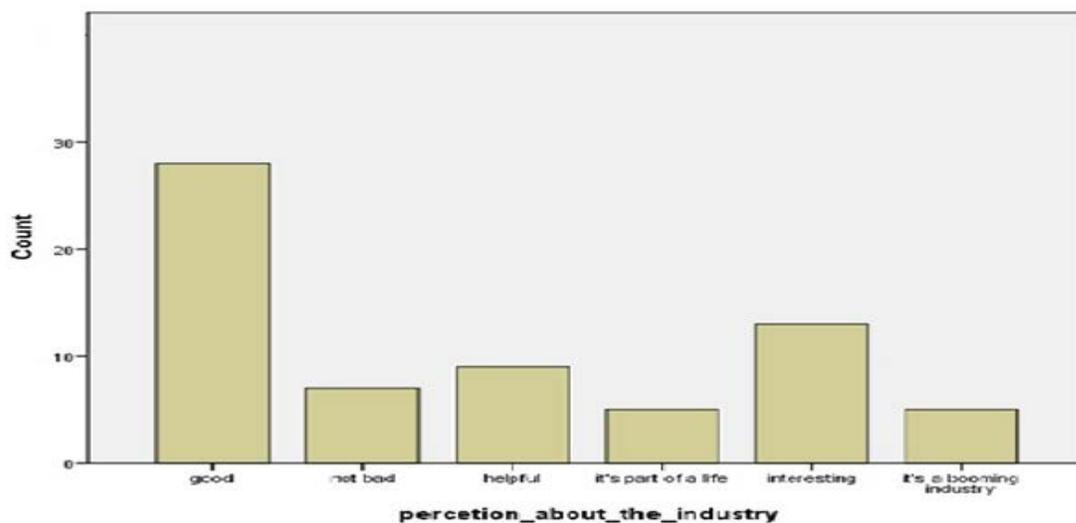
Figure 4.2 The departmental distribution of women employees



Source: SPSS outputs of the research

Study results revealed that there are restricted jobs for women in departments which are noted as kitchen and the food and beverage department confirming that women employees are underrepresented with the reason of night shift jobs are usually pertain with kitchen department where services are operated 24 hours probably and food operations in hotels are known to be comprise of male employees.

Figure 4.3 Perception about the hotel industry



Source: SPSS outputs of the research

The figure 4.3 indicates that every employee in hotel industry has given positive answers about the industry. Everyone has accepted the industry as a good industry whilst some others rated it as a part of a life and the industry helps them increasing their life standards.

#### 4.2 Opportunity identification of women employees for career advancement

Opportunity identification of women employees for career advancement were measured under the four factors namely, Special job position for women, Career advancement for other departments, Effect from gender bias to the formal network among employees and Assistance of hotel management for career advancement.

Majority of them stated that the hotel requires more waitresses, receptionists and especially for accounts and marketing departments. Studies by Mainiero (1994) and Chew & Zhu (2002) and Kandola, (2004) have identified a number of key success factors for women who have broken the glass ceiling. The factors predominantly relate to individual performance, soft skills, attitude towards work and skill development. Few numbers have found to reject the conception of special job positions for women, according to the responses some of them have stated that women are able to do whatever job role that they are assigned to perform. The results counted from HR managers stated that they usually do not recruit women for special positions but the number of job application receiving from women applicants are normally applying for jobs which are said to be suitable and allocated for women employees by the applicants. Out of 67 women employees, only two have commented that they wish to have career advancement for another department from the current position under a reason from which they could gain more knowledge and experience within the hotel while relocating and moving around the hotel in different departments. The data analyzed indicates that gender bias is not an effect for the formal network that encourages women to have career advancement through better communication and the job accountability. The survey was successfully gathered most important facts that would build a clear conclusion for real career advancement opportunities. Though women employees are ready to take the challenge of being an active employee in the hotel industry in spite of avoiding situations for degradation of job, hotels can be out of favors of career advancement for women employees.

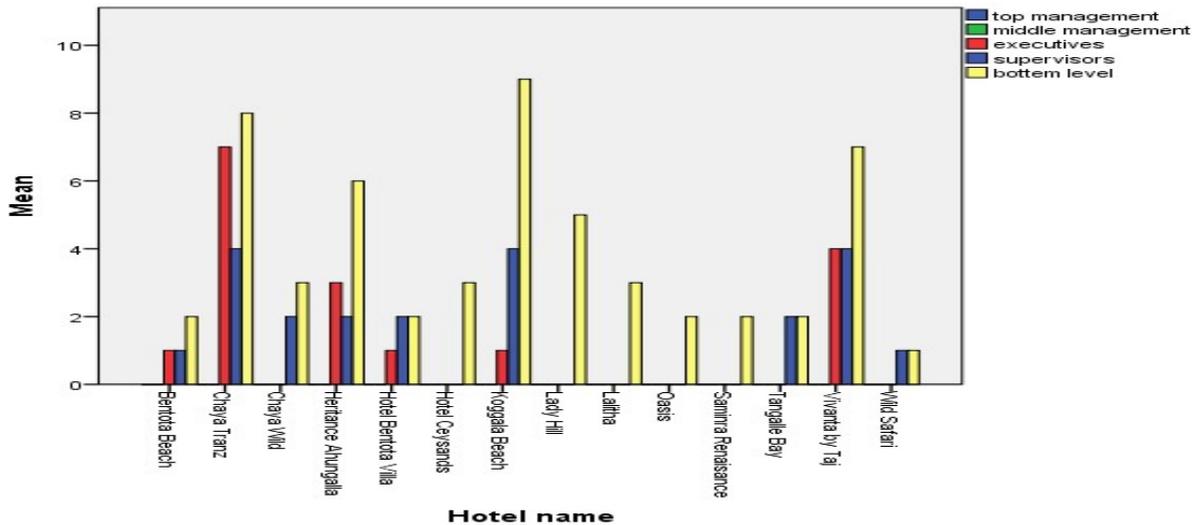
#### 4.3 Factors that should improve for career development opportunity

Career development is not only promotion or salary increment but the satisfaction of current status that they are having. Organizational expectations relate to the skills, competencies and attitudes required for job performance. In the hotel context organizational expectations predominantly relate to individual performance, skill development and acquisition of political nous and interpersonal skills such as positive mindset, understanding business culture, positive thinking and proactive nature for career development. The respondents identified the different organizational and personal development factors as important in affecting women progression in the hospitality industry such as, Personality, attitude towards work, support and guidance from a mentor, educational qualifications and luck. Every response of women employees stated that they are capable of working in any environment and are able to face for changes in the work place.

#### 4.4 Factors that affect Women's career progression in the hospitality industry

This study identified and classified the factors that affect women's career progression in the hospitality industry into five categories, namely; the difficulty of combining work at senior level with caring responsibilities, a dominant masculine organizational culture, Preconceptions and gender bias, a lack of networking and exclusion from informal networks of communication and lack of visible women in senior positions.

Figure 4.4 Employee distributions among different levels in hotels



Source: SPSS outputs of the research

Figure 4.8 above shows that any of the hotels do not consists of top and middle management level female employees. The results describes women are still underrepresented in hotel sector compared to other industries. Many of the female employees have mentioned that they do not have personality and confidence to mix up with foreign guests and visitors as they see it in other senior male employees they work under. The hotel managers addressed and discussed the issue of inadequate female role models in the hospitality industry and lack of visibility. The inadequacy of female role models was thought to have been occasioned by the limited number of female managers in the industry. Previous studies by Ng, & Pine, (2003) found that the limited number of female role models in the hospitality industry may be a contributing factor to the slow movement of women to top positions.

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings reflect that, job related characteristics such as long hours, flexible hours, strategies for women gender discrimination. Moreover Socio-cultural and organizational factors, work and family conflicts and gender discrimination as the factors that affect women’s career progression in the hospitality industry and organizational background for women to pursue top ranks in hotel industry in southern province. In conclusion, women participation and women in top positions in hotel industry in southern province in Sri Lanka is considerably low due to lack of formal and informal networking and lack of visible women in senior positions whereas work and family life balancing, gender bias and dominant masculine culture were not affected for career advancement with reference to the findings. Moreover capabilities of women employees are in expected level for the career progression and many job categories should be opened for women despite of the gender. Management decisions and policies are seeking to provide separate strategies for women employees to increase the productivity and quality of the service.

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