

Exploring Reasons for Low Women's Employment in the Hotel Industry: A Case Study of Southern Province of Sri Lanka

P.K.U. Perera*, J.K.V.M. Jayasinghe, N.A.P.S.R. Nanayakkara

Gampaha Wickramarachchi University of Indigenous Medicine, Yakkala, 11870, Sri Lanka

**kasunu@gwu.ac.lk*

Despite the considerable growth of Sri Lanka's tourism industry over the years, the engagement of women in the hotel sector workforce remains notably low. This study delves into the complexities of this persistent issue, focusing on the Southern Province as a microcosm of the broader situation. By employing qualitative research methods, the research seeks to unveil the intricate web of underlying causes and barriers that contribute to this gender disparity. In order to comprehensively investigate this phenomenon, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 female employees actively working within the hospitality industry and 5 women who are not part of the sector. The research site comprises three graded hotels in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka, providing a localized yet representative perspective. It becomes evident that long-standing misperceptions, deeply rooted patriarchal attitudes, and socio-cultural influences intertwine to create an environment where women's participation in the hotel sector remains limited. Importantly, the voices of female employees highlight a paradoxical situation: while they express job satisfaction and a desire to continue in the industry, they also share experiences of societal resistance and negative perceptions associated with their hotel employment. Moreover, certain segments within the industry exhibit hesitancy towards the integration of women, acting as internal barriers to their entry and advancement. Furthermore, this research underscores how societal norms tied to marriage place additional challenges on women in the hotel industry, further perpetuating gender stereotypes and constraining their involvement. The scarcity of female enrollment in hotel schools compounds these challenges, resulting in a dearth of qualified female professionals and ultimately contributing to the perpetuation of low employment levels. By advocating for industry-driven measures to challenge misperceptions, promote inclusivity, and tap into the full potential of women in the sector, this research aligns with broader international findings.

Keywords: Gender Disparity, Hotel Industry, Sri Lanka, Social Barriers, Women's Employment