



# Factors influencing Career Advancement among Women in the Hotel Industry

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## Abstract

This study explores the intricate web of factors influencing women's career advancement in the hotel industry, shedding light on the multifaceted challenges and potential catalysts that shape their professional trajectories. Despite the industry's dynamic nature, a gender gap persists at leadership levels, prompting a critical examination of the underlying determinants. The study synthesizes existing research, drawing on studies that investigate the impact of workplace culture, gender bias, mentorship programs, work-life balance, and educational opportunities on the career progression of women within hotel management. By synthesizing current research on these critical factors, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by women in the hotel industry. It identifies potential avenues for fostering career advancement. The insights derived from this review not only contribute to the academic discourse on gender diversity but also offer practical implications for organizational policies and industry-wide initiatives geared towards creating more equitable and inclusive pathways for women in hotel management roles.

**Keywords:** Women, Gender, Career, Career Advancement, Hotel Industry.

## Introduction

In the contemporary global workforce landscape, the hotel sector is a dynamic and multifaceted sector that plays a pivotal role in hospitality and tourism. Despite its prominence, the hotel industry, like many other industries, grapples with issues of gender disparity, particularly in the context of career advancement. While strides have been made toward gender equality in various professional spheres, women in the hotel industry continue to encounter barriers hindering their career progression.

The global hotel industry is renowned for its fast-paced and demanding nature, requiring diverse skills and competencies for success. Despite the industry's reliance on a talented and skilled workforce, there remains a palpable gender gap in leadership roles (Acker, 2009).

Although constituting a significant portion of the workforce, women are disproportionately underrepresented in managerial and executive positions within the hotel hierarchy. This underrepresentation raises critical questions about the factors that impede or facilitate women's career progression in this field.

This paper delves into the intricate tapestry of factors influencing career advancement among women in the hotel industry. The study seeks to unravel the nuanced dynamics and explore the challenges and opportunities that shape the professional trajectories of women in this sector. By shedding light on these factors, we aim to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers women face and, consequently, provide insights that may inform strategies to foster a more inclusive and equitable work environment within the hotel industry.

Historically, the hotel industry has been perceived as a male-dominated domain, perpetuating stereotypes and biases that hinder women's upward mobility. Cultural norms and societal expectations often dictate traditional gender roles, influencing perceptions about the suitability of women in leadership positions within the industry. This study endeavors to scrutinize the impact of these cultural norms on career advancement, seeking to unravel how deeply ingrained beliefs might shape organizational structures and impede the progression of women professionals.

Discriminatory practices, whether overt or subtle, continue to pose significant challenges for women striving for career advancement in the hotel industry. From biased recruitment processes to unequal pay structures, these practices can create formidable obstacles. Our research aims to uncover the prevalence and impact of such practices, providing empirical evidence to inform policies and interventions that foster a more equitable work environment.

Beyond external factors, the internal dynamics of women's career advancement in the hotel industry warrant thorough exploration. The aspirations, motivations, and strategic decisions women professionals make are pivotal in shaping their trajectories. This research aims to delve into the individual experiences and stories of women who have successfully navigated their way to leadership positions. It offers valuable insights into the personal attributes and strategies contributing to career advancement.

As we embark on this exploration, it is imperative to recognize that the hotel industry is not monolithic, and factors influencing career advancement may vary across different contexts, regions, and organizational structures. This research paper, therefore, adopts a multi-dimensional approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies to capture the complexity of the issue at hand. Through surveys, interviews, and case studies, we aim to compile a comprehensive dataset that reflects the diverse experiences of women working in various capacities within the hotel industry.

## **Career Progression**

Career progression is a dynamic and multifaceted journey that individuals navigate throughout their professional lives. It encompasses stages of growth, learning, and

advancement within one's chosen field. As a crucial aspect of personal and professional development, career progression involves acquiring skills, experiences, and responsibilities that propel an individual forward on their professional trajectory. Career advancement typically refers to promotions to higher hierarchical levels or roles with increased responsibilities (Hall, 2002). Career advancement is a goal for many individuals as it can lead to increased job satisfaction, higher income, and more significant personal and professional development opportunities. Individuals have the autonomy to make decisions about their career paths, whether within their current organization, outside of it, or by venturing into entrepreneurship, depending on their specific career objectives (Baruch, 2004).

The foundation of career progression is often laid through education and skill acquisition. Individuals embark on their careers equipped with the knowledge and competencies gained through formal education, training programs, or practical experiences. This foundational phase sets the tone for the subsequent stages of career progression, providing the essential building blocks upon which further advancement is built. One of the key determinants of career progression is performance in the workplace. High-quality work, dedication and the ability to meet or exceed expectations contribute significantly to an individual's advancement within an organization. Employers recognize and reward excellence, often promoting individuals who consistently demonstrate exceptional skills and a commitment to their roles. This recognition becomes a catalyst for further career growth, fostering a sense of achievement and motivating individuals to strive for higher levels of excellence.

## Literature Review

Women employed in the hotel industry often confront a diverse range of challenges in their pursuit of professional advancement. According to a 2019 report by Grant Thornton, 26 percent of female respondents identified networking as a hindrance to their career progression. The limited representation of women in managerial roles is frequently attributed to the existence of a "glass ceiling," impeding their career growth and ascent to leadership positions (Sanchez, 2016; Huang et al., 2019).

The Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) defined the term "glass ceiling" as an intangible obstacle that hinders the career advancement of women. Within organizations, this metaphorical glass ceiling represents an unseen upper limit, making it challenging for women to attain higher leadership positions (Kurupparachchi & Surangi, 2020). The term "glass ceiling" is aptly coined as it signifies an invisible barrier, reflecting job inequality or discrimination that is challenging to elucidate (Cotter et al., 2001). An examination of the impact of the glass-ceiling effect on women's career advancement revealed that individual, organizational, and cultural factors significantly influenced their professional growth (Bombuwela & De Alwis, 2013; Lathabhavan & Balasubramanian, 2017). Lathabhavan and Balasubramanian's (2017) research highlighted the presence of the glass ceiling, emphasizing social, cultural, and religious obstacles that impede women's career progress, showing variations across countries. For example, in South East Asia and Central Asia, the study concluded that the glass ceiling was primarily attributed to organizational and cultural barriers (Lathabhavan & Balasubramanian, 2017).

Stereotyping and biases pose significant barriers for women within organizational settings (Hill et al., 2016). Gender norms and stereotypes contribute to the metaphorical glass ceiling for women. Organizational culture can also act as an obstacle, fostering a perception of unequal opportunities for advancement (Huang et al., 2019). Gender stereotypes often have a detrimental impact on women, perpetuating these stereotypes and eroding their self-confidence and self-perception (Crites et al., 2015; Schuh et al., 2014). Some organizations display bias against appointing women to managerial and leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002), leading to diminished self-confidence due to the infrequent sight of women in high-ranking positions (Beaman et al., 2012).

Additionally, a preference for family and the pursuit of a work-life balance can sometimes hinder women's career growth. Schueller-Weidekamm and Kautzky-Willer (2012) highlighted that the primary obstacle to attaining leadership roles is the conflict between work and personal life. This conflict arises due to the time-consuming nature of women's family responsibilities, demanding significant time and energy. Tajlili (2014) similarly emphasized that balancing work and personal life is a major challenge for women, as the demands of their professional roles often clash with their family obligations. Some women may choose to resign from high-level positions to prioritize their families and children (Bertrand et al., 2010). A study conducted by Mani (2013) also recognizes that women prioritize their family commitments as their primary preference, resulting in a conflict of roles between their work and family responsibilities. Research by Crompton and Lyonette (2011) suggests that while gender discrimination remains an ongoing issue, the primary barrier to career advancement lies in women's continued preference for domestic responsibilities and childcare. Studies have highlighted the challenges women face in balancing career growth with family responsibilities (Sandberg, 2013).

## **Factors Affecting Career Advancement**

A variety of factors can influence women's career progression, and these factors can vary depending on the individual and the context. These include external factors such as networking and mentorship, character traits, equity, family issues, lack of support, and treatment (Zhong et al., 2011). Specific enabling factors identified in the British hospitality industry include family-friendly practices, gender equality measures, support networks, and personal development plans (Calinaud et al., 2021). Both male and female hospitality students perceive communication skills and hard work as important facilitators, but women see equity-related factors as more constraining (Zhong & Couch, 2007). Shared challenges across different geographical locations include networking, gender discrimination, segregation, long and irregular working hours, and work-family balance (Kumara, 2018). Here are some common factors that may affect women's career progression:

## **Gender Bias and Discrimination**

Stereotypes and biases about gender roles can affect how women are perceived in the workplace. Discrimination, whether subtle or overt, may limit opportunities for women to advance in their careers. Numerous studies consistently highlight the prevalence of gender

stereotypes (Sparrowe & Iverson, 1999) and instances of gender discrimination (Knox, 2008; Zo, 2015; Sparrowe & Iverson, 1999). These stereotypes often result in assumptions that women are more suitable for specific roles, such as front desk or housekeeping, rather than positions in leadership.

The housekeeping department is a clear example of gender-based segregation, as indicated by a managerial staff discrimination study conducted in Australia (Knox, 2008). In this scenario, female employees predominantly occupied roles as room attendants and laundry staff, while their male counterparts were primarily engaged as housemen, responsible for more physically demanding cleaning tasks. Additionally, the study revealed a concentration of female employees in the back-of-the-house areas, particularly in the kitchen, where they often undertook unskilled labor roles. The disparities in role allocation based on gender contribute to a segregated workplace, reinforcing traditional gender roles and limiting women's access to diverse and higher-ranking positions within the hotel industry.

## **Workplace Culture**

The organizational culture can impact women's career advancement. Driskill (2018) mentioned that organizational culture pertains to the various methods and behaviors exhibited within an organization. These behaviors reflect cultural elements encompassing the historical background, norms, and values shared by a group of individuals. According to Hofstede (2000), organizational culture distinguishes members of one organization from others. Nonetheless, as Hofstede (2000) notes, an organization might not have an entirely distinct culture of its own since the organizational culture can be influenced or overshadowed by national or professional cultural influences. If a workplace is not inclusive, supportive, and equitable, it can hinder women's progress. An organizational culture that lacks inclusivity, support, and equity can pose significant barriers to women's progress within the workforce. A non-inclusive environment may foster biases, limit opportunities for women, and impede their access to key decision-making roles. Supportive workplace cultures, on the other hand, provide avenues for mentorship, networking, and skill development, essential components for women's professional growth. Achieving gender equity requires organizations to cultivate cultures that actively embrace diversity, dismantle biases, and ensure that women have an equal opportunity to thrive and advance in their careers.

## **Family Responsibilities**

Family responsibilities constitute a significant factor influencing career advancement among women in the hotel industry. The demanding nature of hospitality careers, with irregular working hours and high-pressure environments, often intersects with traditional gender roles and expectations. Women, more frequently than men, find themselves navigating the delicate balance between professional aspirations and familial obligations.

The challenge arises as family responsibilities, including childcare and household management, can constrain the time and energy women can allocate to their careers. This may result in women having to make trade-offs between career advancement and fulfilling

family duties. In a sector where long shifts, weekend work, and holiday commitments are common, the ability to meet these professional demands can be influenced by the availability of support systems and flexible work arrangements.

Moreover, societal expectations regarding women's roles as primary caregivers can create a subtle but pervasive bias, affecting how women are perceived in the workplace. Striking a balance between career ambitions and family responsibilities necessitates individual resilience and organizational policies that recognize and accommodate the unique challenges women face in pursuing career advancement within the dynamic and demanding landscape of the hotel industry.

### **Lack of Mentoring and Networking Opportunities**

Women may face challenges in accessing mentorship and networking opportunities, which are crucial for career development. Mentorship, a vital component of professional growth, is instrumental in providing guidance, support, and insights that can significantly impact an individual's career trajectory. Unfortunately, women in this industry may encounter challenges in finding mentors who can offer valuable advice and help navigate the complexities of their chosen field. Effective networking is essential for career advancement as it opens avenues for job referrals, promotions, and connections with influential individuals. Women in managerial positions face obstacles in networking, predominantly stemming from stereotypes associated with the hotel industry. The industry, often linked with aspects like alcohol, bedrooms, and late-night entertainment, creates a perception that hampers the ability of female managers to engage in socializing activities crucial for professional networking. Boon et al. (2013) observed that these challenges have detrimental effects on the career progression of female managers, highlighting the impact of industry stereotypes on women's opportunities to build influential professional relationships. Addressing these perceptions and fostering a more inclusive networking environment within the hotel industry is imperative to ensure that female managers can fully leverage networking opportunities for their career advancement.

### **Unequal Pay**

Unequal pay, manifested through the gender pay gap, imposes significant constraints on the financial incentives and recognition available to women in the workforce, adversely affecting their motivation and career advancement. When women receive lower compensation than their male counterparts for comparable roles, it not only undermines their economic well-being but also sends a demoralizing message about their value within the organization. This disparity in remuneration not only hampers women's financial independence but also perpetuates systemic barriers, hindering their progress in climbing the professional ladder. Addressing and rectifying the gender pay gap is paramount to fostering an environment where women are duly recognized, motivated, and empowered to advance in their careers.

## **Access to Training and Development**

The restricted access that women may face to training, skill development, and leadership programs poses a significant impediment to their career advancement. When women encounter barriers to participation in these critical professional development opportunities, it hampers their acquisition of essential skills and knowledge necessary for progression. This limitation not only perpetuates existing gender disparities but also diminishes the pool of qualified women ready to ascend into leadership roles. To foster gender equality and create a conducive environment for women's career growth, it is imperative to dismantle these barriers and ensure equal access to training and development initiatives within the professional landscape.

## **Maternity and Parental Leave Policies**

Maternity and parental leave policies play a pivotal role in shaping women's career trajectories. While designed to support work-life balance, the extended absence from the workplace during maternity leave can inadvertently impact advancement opportunities. The perception of reduced commitment or availability during this period may contribute to biases, hindering career progression. Women may face challenges in regaining momentum upon returning to work, and the perceived trade-off between family responsibilities and career commitment may influence advancement decisions. Addressing these dynamics and implementing supportive policies that facilitate a seamless return to work is crucial for mitigating the impact of maternity and parental leave on women's career development within the professional landscape.

## **Implicit Bias**

Implicit biases, though often unconscious, wield significant influence over decision-making processes, detrimentally impacting women's prospects for promotions and career advancement. These biases, rooted in societal stereotypes and ingrained cultural norms, may lead to subjective judgments that disadvantage women in professional settings. Subtle prejudices can manifest in performance evaluations, promotion considerations, and leadership selections, creating barriers that hinder women's progression. Recognizing and actively addressing these implicit biases within organizational structures is imperative to fostering a fair and unbiased workplace, ensuring that women are afforded equal opportunities for promotions and sustained career growth.

## **Lack of Representation in Leadership Roles**

The scarcity of women in leadership roles poses a significant challenge, as it not only deprives organizations of diverse perspectives but also impedes the development of a robust pipeline of female leaders. The absence of women in influential positions creates a dearth of role models for aspiring professionals, making it harder for women to envision and pursue leadership roles. This lack of representation perpetuates gender disparities, as the absence of diverse leadership undermines the cultivation of a supportive and inclusive workplace.

Addressing this issue requires deliberate efforts to promote gender diversity at the highest echelons of organizations, providing not only equal opportunities but also fostering an environment where women can thrive in leadership roles.

## **Societal Expectations and Norms**

Societal expectations and norms play a pivotal role in shaping women's career choices and progression. Deep-seated cultural beliefs about traditional gender roles often impose implicit guidelines on women's professional pursuits. Societal norms may dictate expectations around caregiving responsibilities, career paths deemed suitable for women, or the balance between work and family life. These expectations can significantly influence the decisions women make about their careers, steering them toward or away from specific industries or leadership roles. Navigating these societal expectations requires a nuanced approach to redefining cultural norms and promoting an inclusive environment that allows women the freedom to pursue diverse career paths and achieve their professional aspirations.

## **Organizational Policies and Practices**

Organizational policies and practices play a pivotal role in shaping the career experiences of women. The absence of family-friendly policies, such as flexible work arrangements and comprehensive maternity leave, can profoundly impact women's ability to balance work and personal responsibilities. Inflexible workplace structures may create challenges for women, particularly those with family commitments, hindering their career progression. Organizations that prioritize and implement supportive measures, such as remote work options or childcare assistance, not only contribute to a more inclusive work environment but also enhance women's capacity to navigate their professional roles while fulfilling personal obligations. Such policies are integral for fostering gender equality and promoting the advancement of women in the workforce.

## **Educational and Skill Attainment**

Educational and skill attainment plays a critical role in shaping career progression, and unequal access to these opportunities can significantly impact women's advancement. Limited access to quality education may constrain women's ability to acquire the necessary qualifications for certain roles, narrowing the pool of qualified candidates. Disparities in skill development opportunities further contribute to the gender gap in certain professions. Bridging these educational gaps is vital for unlocking the full potential of women in the workforce, expanding their skill sets, and ensuring equal opportunities for career growth. Organizations and societies must actively work towards creating inclusive educational environments to empower women in their pursuit of professional success.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, the multifaceted factors influencing women's career advancement in the hotel industry reflect a complex interplay of societal norms, organizational dynamics, and individual aspirations. Gender bias and discrimination, workplace culture, family



responsibilities, and limited access to mentorship and networking opportunities are persistent challenges that hinder women's progress. The gender pay gap, implicit biases, and the lack of representation in leadership roles further exacerbate these challenges. Moreover, societal expectations and norms, coupled with organizational policies, significantly shape women's career choices and experiences.

Addressing these barriers requires a holistic approach, encompassing societal, organizational, and individual changes. Promoting inclusivity in organizational cultures, dismantling implicit biases, implementing family-friendly policies, and fostering mentorship programs are crucial steps toward creating an equitable and supportive environment. Encouraging equal access to education and skill development opportunities is essential for empowering women in their professional journeys.

The journey towards gender equity in the hotel industry demands a collective commitment to challenging stereotypes, redefining cultural norms, and actively promoting diversity at all organizational levels. As organizations and societies work collaboratively to eliminate systemic barriers, the prospects for women in the hotel industry to thrive, ascend to leadership roles, and contribute meaningfully to the industry's dynamism become more promising. This paper underscores the importance of concerted efforts to create an inclusive and gender-equitable landscape within the hotel industry, ultimately fostering a brighter and more diverse future for women in hotel management roles.

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