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Female managers in the food and beverage department in luxury hotels: gender issues and success factors

## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to offer a unique perspective into the experiences of female hotel employees and especially into career development, in the male-dominated context of Food and Beverage management. Gender discrimination and the glass ceiling have restricted women's career progression in this sector. According to ILO (2018b), gender gaps in labour force participation remain wide. Gender diversity has been a major issue over the years. On the one hand, there is progress when it comes to closing the gender gap in managerial roles in the hospitality industry as studies show that the hospitality industry consists of nearly 50% of female managers and the percentage of women being trained to become managers is over 75% nowadays. On the other hand, women are more likely to suffer financially because women's professions pay less than men's professions. Indeed, gender differences in professional choice contribute to low wages for women, even if we account for differences in skills and credentials related to the work of men and women (Powell, 2010). The so-called "patterns of employment ghettos" do exist, and certain departments of the hotels are filled by men, while in other departments mostly women are employed and this implies that gender diversity and occupational segregation is prevalent in the hospitality industry with less opportunities available for female managers (Pinar et al., 2011; García-Pozo et al., 2012; Lacher & Oh, 2012). Academic literature has shifted the focus of the researches into women in general management, keeping in mind their opinions and views on and aspirations to develop their personal careers in the food and beverage department. The experience of individual employees in the hotel industry remains very much to be understood and this study seeks to fill a knowledge gap in the perception of female food and beverage managers in luxury hotels.

A qualitative approach was taken in order to meet the purpose of this research and semi-structured interviews were selected as the best way of achieving detailed and rich profiles for the women in the food and beverage department. There have been 8 in-depth interviews of women who have worked in the food and beverage departments in Greece. 8 female managers of various ages and experience were participants in the study to maximize the data gathered.

The key findings suggest that female food and beverage managers in this study appear to be hopeful for the future confirming Torns and Recio (2012) who support that there have been

attempts to decrease the gender inequality. Hard work appeared to be the main reason for the low participation, followed by the discrimination and work-life balance. The participants' opinions on the glass ceiling differ from each other and none of the women seemed to agree fully with Santero-Sanchez et al. (2015) about the glass ceiling being thoroughly evident in the workplace. There were those women that have not encountered obstacles, whilst others faced age discrimination. Female leadership was found to be effective, as they were found to be multitaskers and more capable of handling situations. All of the participants supported that the stereotypes in Greece still persist, agreeing completely with the existing literature (Petraki-Kottis & Ventoura-Neokosmidi, 2011). According to the participants the pay gap is also in place in Greece and they all agree that hospitality is a very low paid sector considering the long working hours, work without coverage in some establishments and the unpaid labour. This study proposes that in Greece, the HR department is either non effective, non-existent or conducting basic HR operations, without giving much detail to what the employees really need, and even though there is legislation that supports women, there is no implementation at all, which confirms the study by Paraskevas (2000) and sadly this situation proves that hospitality establishments have not still realised the importance of the human capital now that the competition in Greece has increased that much (Belias et al., 2017).

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