

The Persistent Gender Gap in Canadian Hotel Operations

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Abstract

All over the world, women constitute over half of middle management and front-line positions in hotel businesses, yet they are marginalized at top management positions. To examine possible factors that drive this gender imbalance at the top-most administrative structure of hotels in Canada, surveys were administered to management teams of nine hotels in Calgary, Canada. The surveys asked questions pertaining to gender gaps in career advancement in the Canadian hospitality field as well as insights as to what could be done to reduce gender discrimination in the Canadian hotel field. Results show that organizational barriers are the most frequently indicated element restricting job promotion of all hotel workers, regardless of gender.

Key words: Hotel Operations, Career Advancement, Gender Discrimination, Canada

Introduction

The hotel industry in Canada is an important part of the economy which consists of over 8,253 properties and 455,959 rooms, generating revenues of over \$16.7 billion in 2013, and employing 306,600 people directly (Hotel Association of Canada, 2019). According to Tourism HR Canada (2019), the number of employees in the accommodation industry amounts to 162,770 with the greatest share being women (60.3%). While women account for more than half of the workforce in the accommodation industry, they are still lacking representation in executive positions (Masadeh, 2013). In Canada specifically, the female representation in executive positions is only 14% on average (Blayney and Blotnicky, 2013).

Although recent studies point to the increasing recruitment of women to senior management positions within the hotel industry (Masadeh, 2013; Brownell and Walsh, 2008), gender differences in career advancement has been a concern in hotel management operations for more than the past 20 years (Iverson, 2000; Aykac, 2006; Cave & Kilic, 2010; Pinar et al., 2011; Campos-Sori et al., 2011; Garcia-Pozo et al., 2012). Along with this lack of promotion, women face discrimination in pay. In full-time jobs, women earn 81% of men's salaries (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In Canada specifically, women working in the accommodation sector made an average of 83 cents to every dollar a man made in 2012 (Statistics Canada, 2015).

Many studies have pointed to the benefits of hiring a more diverse workforce. Hobbler et al. (2018), found greater female representation in top leadership to be associated with greater financial performance, and female leadership in general being associated with greater sales performance. According to Jackson (2001), women are more likely to manage others by offering rewards and incentives while their male counterparts are more likely to manage others through punitive measures. Women also demonstrate characteristics of ‘super leadership’, a style in which the leader creates self-direction and self-leadership in followers (Sims & Lorenzi, 1992). Compared to that of their male counterparts, the methods used by female senior managers in regard to staff management, such as ‘good communication, flexibility and adaptability, and teamwork’, have helped them in progressing in rank and providing good results for the organization (Maxwell, 1997). With the tremendous growth of the accommodation industry in Canada (Hotel Association of Canada, 2018), it is important for hotel operations to critically review their operational structures and recruit women into executive positions.

Women may not be given the chance to progress and the organization’s executives may fear that they may leave to start a family resulting in their reluctance to invest in their development (Brownell & Walsh, 2008; Lyness & Thompson, 2000). While women bring benefits to an organization, there is also ample research coming out of Australia and the USA, finding that women face many barriers to their career progression in the male-dominated hotel industry such as stereotyping, exclusions from important networks, lack of mentoring, wage disparity, and the “glass ceiling” (Burgess, 2000; Knox, 2008; Lyness & Thompson, 2000; Maxwell & Ogden, 2006). Whatever metaphor is used, the path is not easy, nor are the rewards great.

Although there has been a gradual shift towards resolving gender differences in senior management positions, the hotel business in Canada continues to experience a gender gap in hotel operations especially at the apex of management. It is the purpose of this research to examine factors that contribute to the gender gap in management positions within the Canadian hotel industry.

Literature Review

The Canadian accommodation industry makes use of a labor force comprised of 60.5% females. Surprisingly, the percentage of females in middle-level management positions in Canada’s accommodation sector is projected at only 52%, 8.5% lower than the average female representation

in the industry (Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council [CTHRC], 2004). Interestingly, Blayney and Blotnicky (2013) found, that female representation in executive positions in some hotel associations of different provinces in Canada was only 14.18%, slightly below female representation in some international hotel associations, which sit at 16.52% (Blayney and Blotnicky, 2013). This modest representation exists in the face of women making up the largest share (60.3%) of the accommodation labor force. Recent studies suggest that there has been some positive growth in female representation on hotel executive boards since 2012 (Blayney & Blotnicky, 2017), but that senior hotel management teams in Canadian and International hotel groups are still male-controlled and dominated (Iverson, 2000; Aykac, 2006; Cave & Kilic, 2010; Pinar et al., 2011; Campos-Sori et al., 2011; Garcia-Pozo et al., 2012; Blayney & Blotnicky, 2017).

Although significant research exists examining the dynamics of gender disparity in hotel management, the need to conceptualize gender balance of Canadian hotel operations cannot be overemphasized. Several researchers have identified a multitude of factors that work as barriers to women's career advancement. These include, but are not limited to, glass ceiling (Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018; Boone et al, 2013; Vigil, 2002; Vianen & Fischer, 2002); gender discrimination in a male-dominated organizational culture (Santero-Sanchez et al., 2015; Blayney & Blotnicky, 2010); and work and family struggle (Zhong et al, 2013; Zhong & Couch, 2007).

Gender Discrimination

Women are entering the hospitality industry at an increasing rate (Zhong et al., 2013). While the number of women who are both academically prepared and interested in hospitality management has increased significantly over the past decade (Allen et al., 2016), women continue to encounter gender-related obstacles as part of their career development (Blayney & Blotnicky, 2010; Brownell, 1993). Traditionally, the hotel industry has been part of those industries separated by gender. While the accommodation industry in Canada has been one of the fastest areas of employment growth, with women representing 60.3% of the workforce (Tourism HR Canada, 2019), persistent discrimination patterns still exist. Demonstration of such discrimination takes the form of low representation of women in executive positions, a gender pay gap, gendered stereotyping, and employee layoffs (Blayney & Blotnicky, 2013; Brownell & Walsh, 2008).

Work and family struggle

In Canada, women typically perform fewer paid hours than men (Figure 1), as they tend to spend more time on household chores and childcare (Moyser, 2017). Indeed, when females return home to their children and spouse who are anticipating their full-support and attention, the balance of work and life may then become difficult to achieve (Shrestha, 2016). Furthermore, some women at some points in their career, do not want to progress in the industry because they assume that there is no other way to conquer these dual realities of work and family (Blayney & Blotnicky, 2010). Work and family conflict are unhealthy for both individuals and for their organization (Brownell, 1998). In addition, Brownell (1998) and Blayney & Blotnicky (2010) suggest that employee stress from balancing personal and work responsibilities is likely to result in considerably abridged performance, as employees tend to suffer the penalties of anxiety and depression. In fact, balancing work and family become a threat to females because of the perpetuation of traditional gender roles (Zhao, 2016; Brownell, 1998).

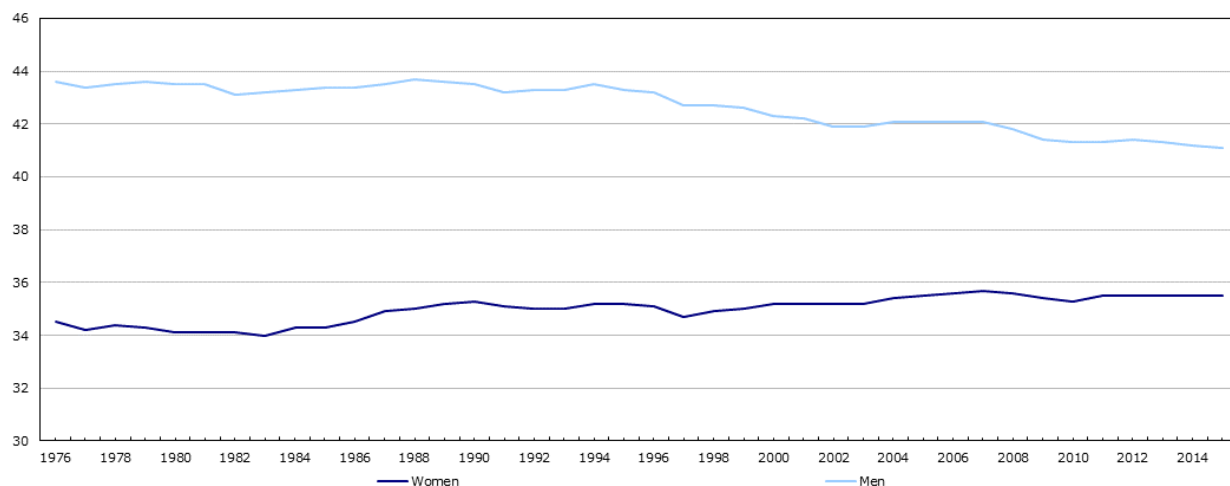


Figure 1 Weekly mean hours of persons of 25 to 54 years in Canada from 1976 to 2015 (Source: Statistics Canada, labor force survey, CANSIM table 282-0016, 2015)

While the concept of the dual-earner or two career family model is increasing, with the number of dual family households having doubled over the past 40 years (Statistics Canada, 2016), women are still typically saddled with more domestic duties despite their marital status and workplace position's seniority (Halford & Leonard, 2001; Allen et al., 2016). As a result, the career chances and growth of females with family are greatly affected by family norms, religious values, and cultural tradition (Baum, 2013).

The Glass Ceiling

Globally, there has been a gradual change occurring in the composition and participation of the workforce in the service economy (Moyser, 2017), with a significant increase in the number of women working in the hospitality sector than ever before (see Table 1). This increase in participation by females in the hospitality labor force has also, to some extent, resulted in a rapid increase in the number of women in management positions (Blayney & Blotnicky, 2013). However, the increasing involvement of women in the workforce is not synonymous with their representation in senior management roles (Viane & Fischer, 2002). For instance, the female representation in executive positions of many hotel and tourism organizations in some provinces in Canada was found to be an average of 14.18% (see Table 2).

Table 1 Statistics of Canadian labor force employed by the accommodation industry

Province / Area	Total number of Executives	Total number of Females	% Female Representation
Newfoundland and Labrador	8	3	37.50%
Manitoba	11	3	27.27%
Tourism Industry Association of New Brunswick	4	1	25.00%
Hotel Association of Nova Scotia	5	1	20.00%
Alberta	16	3	18.75%
Saskatchewan	14	2	14.29%

Source: Tourism HR Canada, 2019

Table 2 Women representation in executive positions in hotel associations in Canada

Province / Area	Total number of Executives	Total number of Females	% Female Representation
Newfoundland and Labrador	8	3	37.50%
Manitoba	11	3	27.27%
Tourism Industry Association of New Brunswick	4	1	25.00%
Hotel Association of Nova Scotia	5	1	20.00%
Alberta	16	3	18.75%
Saskatchewan	14	2	14.29%
Greater Toronto Area	26	3	11.54%
Hotel Association of Canada	18	2	11.11%
British Columbia	39	2	5.13%

Total / Average	141	20	14.18%
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Source: Blayney and Blotnicky, 2013

When women sense obstacles to their career development, they tend to either depart, voice concern, or adjust to that environment (Hamel, 2009). Boone et al. (2013), identified various external barriers, like lack of mentoring, social exclusions, and stereotyping, that also hinder career growth for females in the hospitality industry. Their research also showed that gender stereotypes appear to be well established in the minds of female managers and employees who are about to enter the workforce. Also, Lyness and Thompson (2000), found that women could be uncomfortable with male senior managers due to men appearing to be hostile to them. In addition, women rely more heavily on the firm’s formal promotion processes as opposed to men who manage to use the informal network to career progression (Blayney & Blotnicky, 2010; Shrestha, 2016). Employment models may disadvantage females in the workplace. According to Mooney’s research (2009) in the hotel industry, the “long hours” work expectation, mentoring, and the old boy’s network of hiring practices are top barriers for women to move up the next level.

While much research has found that a wage gap exists in the Canadian hotel industry, and some has looked at the barriers that women face to management, the research into barriers is dated (<2010). This paper looks to understand the factors that contribute to the gender gap in management positions within the Canadian hotel industry.

Methodology

To better understand the factors that contribute to the gender gap in management positions within the Canadian hotel industry, this study explored the extent to which career advancement differs by gender in the Canadian hotel field, factors that contribute to the persistent gender gap in hotel operations, and to garner industry insights into what could be done to reduce gender discrimination in the Canadian hotel field. To facilitate this research, targeted sampling of a single hotel chain (Marriott) in a defined geographic area (Calgary) was undertaken. In April of 2019, data was collected from 9 hotels in Calgary who are all part of the Marriott hotel brand, each of which had 7 people in leadership positions. These 9 hotels were contacted, as they were part of a network of hotels available to the research team, and who had agreed to participate. Prior to data collection, the researcher visited these hotels and explained to them why this research was being undertaken.

Marriott hotels were chosen for this research because the chain has 30 brands and more than 7,000 properties across 130 countries and territories with strong organizational values which focuses on diversity and inclusion (www.marriott.com), allowing this study to focus on a hotel company that is working to increase gender equality, instead of just the status quo.

After being approved by the University of Guelph's Research Ethics Board, a link to an online survey questionnaire was sent to each hotel's general manager directly, asking them to participate and invite their various department heads to participate in the study. Out of the 63 participants, a total of 24 usable surveys were obtained from the participants resulting in a response rate of 38%, comprised of 13 male and 11 female respondents. Although the number of respondents was few, all participants answered all questions in the survey, and many also provided answers to the open-ended questions.

Respondents were asked to answer 38 questions, both open and close-ended, which were derived from literature. The work of Purcell (1996), Vigil (2002), Chiang & Birch (2011), and Allen et al. (2016) were used to develop the ranking questions pertaining to job satisfaction, compensation, benefits, and rewards. In addition, the work of Brownell (1998), Hoque (2000) and Blayney & Blotnicky (2010) were used to inform questions around demographics such as age, gender, educational level, and marital status of participants.

The Data was downloaded from Qualtrics and input into excel. With the use of excel, data was analyzed on all the 37 survey questions.

Results

To better understand the factors that contribute to the gender gap in management positions within the Canadian hotel industry,

Although contemporary literature proposes improvements in the progression of women into senior leadership roles of hotel enterprises (Brownell, 2008; Masadeh, 2013), professional Canadian women hoteliers likely continue to be confronted with work-place gender discrimination in addition to gender inequity with respect to career progression. This research, therefore, sought to better understand the factors that contribute to the gender gap in management positions within the Canadian hotel industry, and gain industry insights into what could be done to reduce or eliminate barriers to advancement.

Work and family life

Table 3 shows response to questions designed to composition of respondents in terms of work and family life. It appears that all participants worked full-time with 67% of them having children and 33% without children. Close to half (41%) of the respondents have worked with their organization for between 3-5 years, with only one respondent having worked with their firm between 6-10 years. There was a fairly equal representation of respondents by gender, with 52% of the respondents being men and 48% of them being women, with the average age of respondents being 30-50 years.

Table 3 Features used to determine work and family life

	Variable	%
Years worked	Less than 6 months	7
	6 months-1 year	11
	1-3 years	22
	3-5 years	41
	6-10 years	4
	More than 10 years	15
Work status	Full time	100
	Part time	0
Children	Yes	67
	No	33

To further explore work and family life as being a challenge to carrier advancement, the questions “Please explain how having children influence your career?” was asked. Some indicated that they had to forego certain jobs due to family obligations, with one respondent stating that ‘With young children, it is necessary to ensure their schedule can be accommodated for school and other organized activities,’(Man) and another stating that ‘it postponed my career a bit, I was able to stay home for 8 years with them once they were born. When I went back to work I had some catching up to do.’(Woman) One respondent also believe that the obligations of family life influenced their getting a job, stating that ‘I believe I was not hired for a few jobs because of somewhat limited availability.’(Woman)

Glass Ceiling

Considering that women are underrepresented at top-level decision making in the accommodation industry (Brownell and Walsh, 2008; Masadeh, 2013), the levels of women at senior and middle-level management i.e. percentage of women managers that were general managers, chief executive officers, the board of directors, etc., were assessed. As can be seen in Figure 2 below, only 19% of the respondent’s operations have more than 50% of their senior management roles filled by women. This is in comparison to 32% of the respondents who believe more than 50% of their middle management to be comprised of women. This may suggest that the glass ceiling problem, such that the higher you look up the corporate hierarchy, the less female representation you will see.

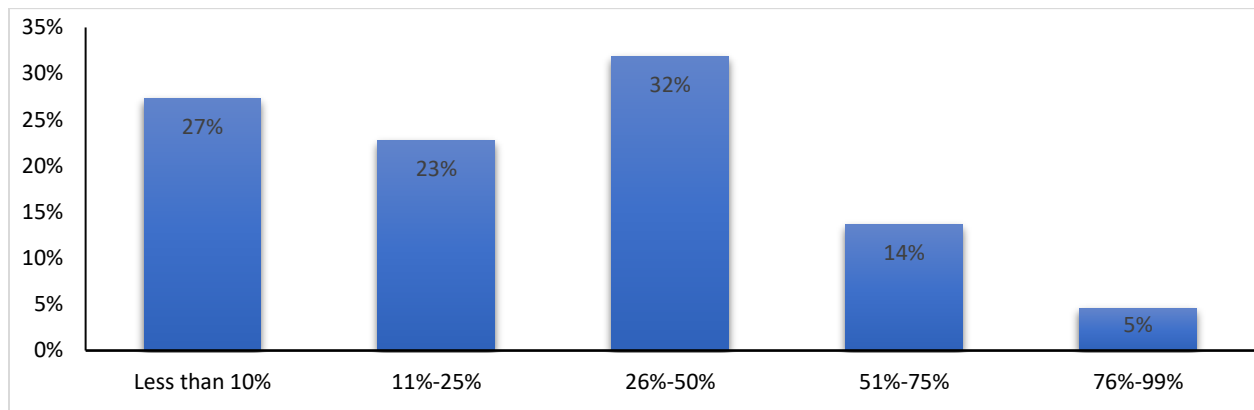


Figure 2 percentage of your senior management (GM, CEO, Board of Directors, etc.) that are women.

Gender Discrimination

It was recorded that 27% of the respondents have observed racial and gender discrimination at work but only 8% have personally experienced discrimination at work (see Table 4). When asked if they believe discrimination exists in the industry, 45% agreed.

Table 4 The degree of gender discrimination in the work environment

	Variable	%
What forms of discrimination have you observed at work?	Racial	27
	Gender	27
	Sexual harassment	18

	Sexual orientation	8
	Other	18
Have you experienced discrimination at work?	Yes	8
	No	92

Recommendations for Eliminating Gender Discrimination

Beyond the barriers that exist in their organizations, respondents were asked to comment on ‘what the hotel industry [could] do to eliminate gender discrimination?’. While there were some responses, they were “I don’t know”, “unsure”, and “I don’t think anything can be done”, there were also specific recommendations.

Conclusion and Discussion

The key research questions focused on the barriers women face to career advancement in the hospitality industry, and what strategies companies should consider to narrow the gender gap. While this study did find that gender discrimination does exist in the 9 hotels examined, with men holding more senior management positions than females. Barriers to advancement in these organizations included such issues as relocation, limited managerial positions, and required educational achievement. The study also found family life to have an impact on career progression. To promote equal opportunity in hotel workplaces, educational and learning programs like mentorship programs, professional development opportunities, succession planning programs, and job rotation programs should be introduced and/or strengthened.

The hotel industry continues to attract diversity and researchers have identified inclusion and equality as the key elements to curtail gender differences in the industry (Brownell, 2008; Blayney an & Blotnicky, 2010; Masadeh, 2013). To promote equal opportunity for career advancement, equitable and fair hiring practices and succession planning programs should also be developed to build the pipeline for women into senior management positions.

Limitations

While this study does shed light on the gender gap as it exists in a few hotels, the results are limited. This study drew on management teams who were part of the research teams’ network, and who’s hotel General managers had agreed to have their management teams and themselves answer

questions. Future studies should look to broaden the research to include management teams from a variety of hotel brands in different locations. Furthermore, given that the management teams were sent the invitation to participate in the study by their general managers, results of this study may have been impacted. Future studies should look to survey a larger sample from not only a greater number of brands, but also from a larger sample of the population.

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