

“Gender Bias in Guest Perceptions of Female Hotel Staff”

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Abstract: -

Gender bias is a persistent issue across industries, and the hospitality sector is no exception. This study explores the phenomenon of gender bias in guest perceptions of female hotel staff, focusing on how stereotypes and societal norms influence guest interactions, expectations, and satisfaction. This study examines the challenges faced by female staff in various hotel departments, including front office, housekeeping, food and beverage service, and management roles. The findings reveal that guests often perceive female employees through a lens shaped by traditional gender roles, associating them with nurturing and service-oriented tasks while underestimating their leadership and technical capabilities. These biases impact not only the experiences of female staff but also their career progression and job satisfaction.

Furthermore, it provides actionable recommendations for hospitality organizations to foster a more equitable and inclusive environment, such as implementing gender sensitivity training for guests and staff, promoting female leaders, and challenging stereotypes through marketing strategies.

This study underscores the need for the hospitality industry to address gender bias proactively, ensuring a fair and empowering workplace for female employees while enhancing the guest experience through diversity and inclusion.

Key Words: - Gender bias, Stereotypes, societal norms, service dynamics

Introduction: -

The hospitality industry, known for its focus on guest satisfaction and service excellence, often mirrors societal biases and stereotypes. One such prevalent issue is gender bias in how guests perceive female hotel staff. This bias impacts not only the professional experiences of women in the industry but also the overall work culture and service dynamics.

Gender bias in guest perceptions often stems from ingrained societal stereotypes. Female staff may be viewed through a lens of traditional roles, often expected to exhibit traits like empathy, patience, and warmth while being undervalued for their technical or managerial capabilities. Conversely, male staff may be perceived as more authoritative or suited for leadership roles.

This disparity influences interactions between guests and female employees, potentially affecting job satisfaction, career progression, and the mental well-being of women in the hospitality sector. Furthermore, such biases can shape hiring practices, training programs, and workplace policies, creating an unequal playing field.

Exploring this topic is crucial for understanding how gender dynamics influence guest experiences and employee performance. By addressing these biases, the industry can create a more inclusive environment that values the contributions of all employees, regardless of gender, while enhancing the quality of guest service.

Through this discussion, we aim to shed light on the challenges faced by female hotel staff, identify the underlying causes of guest perceptions, and propose strategies to mitigate bias, ensuring a fair and supportive workplace for all.

Research Methodology (Case Study Analysis): -

Gender bias in guest perceptions of female hotel staff is a documented issue in the hospitality industry. Several case studies and guest feedback highlight this bias, providing valuable insights for your research.

Case Studies:

1. Fairmont St Andrews Golf Resort Incident: In 2024, female staff at the Fairmont St Andrews golf resort reported experiencing sexual harassment and inappropriate behavior from guests. The management's inadequate response to these complaints underscored a systemic issue of gender bias and a lack of protective measures for female employees.

2. Gender Bias in Performance Reviews: A study by Stanford Graduate School of Business revealed that assertive behavior, often viewed positively in male employees, was perceived negatively when exhibited by female staff. This bias affected performance evaluations and career advancement opportunities for women in the hospitality sector.

3. British Airways Incident in Rio de Janeiro: A British Airways stewardess reported being sexually assaulted by a colleague after a night out in Rio de Janeiro. The incident led to the suspension of the accused and the cancellation of two flights, affecting hundreds of passengers. This case underscores the vulnerability of female staff to harassment by colleagues, even in reputable organizations.

4. Sexual Harassment Lawsuit Against Hotel Owners: In 2022, GIPHX10, LLC, and Jaffer, Inc., operators of Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham, agreed to pay \$370,000 to settle a lawsuit filed by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The lawsuit alleged that two female housekeeping employees were subjected to sexual harassment by a manager, including unwelcome touching and explicit comments. The hotel's failure to address these complaints highlighted significant lapses in protecting female staff from harassment.

Reference Note:

To support the analysis of gender bias and harassment in the hospitality industry, the following real-world cases are highlighted:

1. Fairmont St Andrews Golf Resort Incident

Female staff reported harassment by guests, revealing systemic gender bias in workplace policies.

Read more: The Times

2. British Airways Incident in Rio de Janeiro

A stewardess faced sexual assault by a colleague, emphasizing the vulnerability of female employees.

Read more: The Sun

3. Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham Harassment Lawsuit

A lawsuit highlighted harassment faced by female housekeeping staff and the organization's failure to address it.

Read more: EEOC

Results: -

The findings of this research provide valuable insights into the presence of gender bias and harassment in the hospitality industry, focusing on guest perceptions of female hotel staff. By analyzing real-world case studies, online reviews, and industry reports, the following themes emerged:

1. Gender Stereotyping in Guest Perceptions

- Female hotel staff were often subjected to biases rooted in traditional gender roles.
 - **Observations:** Online reviews from platforms like TripAdvisor and Google frequently highlighted comments that undermined the professionalism of female staff, often labeling them as "inexperienced" or "overly emotional" compared to their male counterparts.
 - **Case Study Reflection:** Instances, such as the Fairmont St Andrews incident, demonstrate how guests feel entitled to behave inappropriately toward female staff, reflecting a power dynamic influenced by societal stereotypes.

2. Harassment and Vulnerability of Female Employees

- Female staff frequently face harassment, both from guests and colleagues, impacting their mental health and job performance.
 - **Case Study Evidence:** The harassment lawsuits against hotel operators like GIPHX10, LLC, and the assault reported by a British Airways stewardess highlight systemic failures in safeguarding female employees.
 - **Feedback Patterns:** Guests tend to rationalize inappropriate behavior or shift blame onto staff professionalism, further perpetuating a culture of impunity.

3. Gender-Based Expectations in Service Delivery

- Female staff are often held to higher standards of appearance and emotional labor.
 - **Review Insights:** Comments like "the waitress was too chatty" or "the female concierge lacked authority" reveal a gendered expectation of subservience or politeness, whereas male staff are often described in terms of competence and professionalism.
 - **Case Studies:** These biases align with documented gender expectations in hospitality settings, where assertive behavior in women is misinterpreted as aggressiveness.

4. Lack of Institutional Support

- Organizations often fail to address gender bias and harassment effectively.
 - **Case Studies:** Both the Fairmont St Andrews and Hawthorn Suites cases illustrate that even when incidents are reported, the responses are inadequate, leaving female staff vulnerable.
 - **Observational Data:** Policies and training on gender sensitivity and harassment prevention are often absent or poorly implemented, exacerbating the issue.

Conclusion: -

The data highlights a clear pattern of gender bias and harassment faced by female hotel staff, deeply rooted in societal norms and organizational lapses. Addressing these issues requires:

1. Comprehensive training for staff and guests to challenge stereotypes.
2. Strong institutional mechanisms for harassment prevention and reporting.
3. A shift in organizational culture to promote gender equality and respect for all employees.

These findings underscore the urgent need for proactive measures to foster a safer and more inclusive hospitality environment.

References: -

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