Barriers to Women's Career Advancement in Maldivian Resorts

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Women face significant challenges in advancing their careers, particularly in male-dominated industries such as tourism and hospitality. The Maldivian resort sector, despite being a key driver of economic growth, reflects profound gender disparities, with women facing systemic barriers to career progression. This study examines the challenges hindering women's advancement in Maldivian resorts, focusing on gender bias, occupational segregation, workplace discrimination, and work-life balance constraints. Using qualitative research, the study analyzes the experiences of women in various resort positions, highlighting the structural, cultural, and organizational barriers that restrict their career growth. The findings reveal that women in Maldivian resorts encounter exclusionary recruitment practices, limited opportunities for leadership development, and a lack of workplace protections against harassment. Additionally, societal expectations and restrictive workplace policies further constrain women's professional aspirations. The study underscores the need for targeted interventions, including gender-inclusive recruitment strategies, mentorship programs, and family-friendly workplace policies, to foster a more equitable hospitality sector in the Maldives.

Keywords: Career barriers, Gender inequality, Hospitality industry, Women in tourism, Organizational challenges, Work-life balance

1. Introduction

Achieving gender equality remains a fundamental goal for modern societies. Governments, civil society organizations, and businesses worldwide have made significant efforts toward this objective, with gender equality forming a core principle of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNDP, 2012). Despite progress, gender disparities persist across many industries, including tourism and hospitality (Baum, 2012). While increasing numbers of women are joining the workforce in traditionally male-dominated sectors, their representation in leadership and management positions remains minimal (Mooney, 2012). Those who do break through these barriers are often considered outliers rather than representatives of broader systemic change (Campos-Soria, Marchante-Mera, & Ropero-García, 2011).

The Maldives, a nation heavily reliant on tourism, presents a unique case where women's participation in the industry remains disproportionately low despite its economic significance (Hemmati, 2010). While the tourism sector contributes over 60% of the country's GDP, less than 10% of resort employees are women (Shakeela, Breakey, &Ruhanen, 2011).

The hospitality sector, globally recognized for its reliance on customer service and interpersonal skills, has seen increased female participation in certain regions (Pritchard & Morgan, 2011). However, in the Maldives, traditional gender norms, safety concerns, mobility restrictions, and workplace discrimination continue to hinder women's employment in resorts (Carvalho, Costa, & Lykke, 2011).

Women in Maldivian resorts face a variety of structural and cultural barriers that limit their ability to establish long-term careers in hospitality. Societal and familial expectations discourage women from seeking employment away from home, while systemic workplace discrimination limits their career progression. The rigid gender roles embedded in Maldivian society have made it difficult for women to consider long-term careers in tourism, despite the sector's rapid expansion and high demand for skilled professionals (Hemmati & Koehler, 2010).

Moreover, occupational segregation is evident in the industry, with women disproportionately concentrated in lower-paid, customer-facing roles such as housekeeping, spa services, and front-desk operations, while men dominate managerial and technical positions (Mooney & Ryan, 2009).

Globally, the hospitality industry has been criticized for maintaining a "glass ceiling" that prevents women from advancing beyond mid-management positions (Acker, 2009). Research has shown that women in tourism and hospitality are frequently subjected to gendered employment practices, including role stereotyping, unequal recruitment, and biased promotion processes (Campos-Soria et al., 2011). These structural barriers create a cycle of inequality, where women remain confined to lower-tier positions with limited opportunities for career growth (Costa, Carvalho, & Breda, 2011). In the Maldives, these challenges are compounded by geographical isolation—many luxury resorts are located on remote islands, making daily commuting impossible and requiring employees to reside on-site, a factor that discourages women from pursuing such roles (Shakeela et al., 2011).

Studies specific to the Maldives have highlighted additional barriers unique to the country's sociocultural and economic landscape. Shakeela et al. (2008) examined the tourism workforce and found that women's limited representation in resorts was not only due to social stigma but also the inaccessibility of family support systems in remote resort islands. Jalil (2010) reported that many Maldivian women in hospitality face wage disparities and insecure, temporary contracts with minimal prospects for upward mobility. Naseer (2011) emphasized the role of policy gaps, particularly concerning safe accommodations for female employees, in reinforcing male dominance in the industry.

Safety concerns further exacerbate the problem, as inadequate accommodations and the absence of gender-sensitive workplace policies deter women from considering resort employment as a viable career path (Pritchard & Morgan, 2011). Women who do enter the industry often face harassment and workplace hostility, with limited HR support to address such issues (Baum & Cheung, 2011). Additionally, work-life balance remains a major concern, as resort jobs demand long working hours, often conflicting with societal expectations that women prioritize family responsibilities over professional aspirations (Baum, 2012).

This paper aims to investigate the challenges women face in Maldivian resorts, using qualitative data collected through interviews with female employees working in various capacities within the industry. By analyzing their experiences, this study provides insights into the structural and cultural barriers limiting women's career progression in hospitality. The findings highlight the urgent need for policy interventions, including gender-inclusive workplace policies, enhanced safety measures, mentorship programs, and flexible work arrangements to encourage greater female participation in the industry (Carvalho et al., 2011).

The following sections of this paper will first review the existing literature on gender issues in hospitality, followed by a detailed methodological framework outlining the qualitative research approach. The findings and discussion sections will analyze the key barriers to women's participation in Maldivian resorts, while the conclusion and recommendations section will present actionable policy measures aimed at fostering an inclusive and equitable industry.

2. Structural Barriers to Women's Employment in Resorts

Women's participation in the workforce is often shaped by structural barriers that create unequal access to job opportunities, career progression, and leadership roles. In the Maldivian resort sector, these barriers are deeply rooted in socio-cultural norms, restrictive workplace policies, and limited support systems that hinder women from fully integrating into the industry.

Gender inequality in employment is perpetuated by discriminatory recruitment processes, wage disparities, and a lack of career development pathways for women (Campos-Soria et al., 2011). These barriers are exacerbated by traditional perceptions of gender roles, which confine women to domestic responsibilities and discourage them from seeking employment in resort settings (Shakeela, Breakey, &Ruhanen, 2011).

One of the primary structural barriers to women's employment in Maldivian resorts is occupational segregation. Women are often restricted to lower-tier roles such as housekeeping, spa services, and front-office operations, while men dominate technical and managerial positions (Baum, 2012). This segregation is reinforced by workplace norms that discourage women from pursuing higher positions due to perceived limitations in leadership capabilities (Mooney, 2012). Furthermore, the absence of gender-sensitive workplace policies contributes to the wage gap, where women receive lower salaries compared to their male counterparts for similar roles (Pritchard & Morgan, 2011).

Workplace safety and mobility restrictions further limit women's ability to work in the resort industry. The Maldives' geographical layout, where resorts are located on isolated islands, requires employees to reside on-site, which poses challenges for women due to societal expectations surrounding family obligations (Shakeela et al., 2008). Concerns about safety, particularly regarding harassment and inadequate accommodations, deter many women from accepting resort jobs (Hemmati, 2010).

Employers often fail to provide secure living arrangements, leading to high attrition rates among female employees (Carvalho et al., 2011).Another key structural barrier is the lack of support systems, including childcare facilities and mentorship programs, which discourages women from maintaining long-term careers in hospitality (Naseer, 2011). Many women in the Maldives face challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities, with limited organizational policies offering flexible work arrangements (Jalil, 2010).

Without institutional support, women are often forced to leave the industry prematurely, reinforcing male dominance in resort employment. Addressing these structural barriers requires targeted interventions, including policy reforms to ensure equal pay, transparent recruitment and promotion processes, and enhanced safety measures for female employees (Campos-Soria et al., 2011).

Creating mentorship and leadership training programs can empower women to pursue managerial positions and challenge traditional gender norms in the hospitality sector. Without significant efforts to dismantle these barriers, women's participation in the Maldivian resort industry will remain limited, preventing the sector from realizing its full potential as an inclusive and equitable workplace.

3. Organizational Challenges and Gender Disparities

Organizational structures play a crucial role in shaping employment experiences, particularly for women in male-dominated industries such as tourism and hospitality. In Maldivian resorts, gendered organizational practices create systemic disadvantages that hinder women's full participation in the workforce. Despite increasing awareness of gender inequality, workplace cultures continue to reinforce disparities through discriminatory hiring, promotion, and wage policies (Mooney & Ryan, 2009). These systemic issues limit women's opportunities for career growth, reinforcing male dominance in leadership roles.

A major organizational challenge facing women in Maldivian resorts is the lack of gender-inclusive recruitment policies. Many resorts prioritize hiring men for technical and managerial roles while relegating women to lower-paid service positions such as housekeeping, spa therapy, and front-office operations (Campos-Soria, Marchante-Mera, & Ropero-García, 2011).

This exclusionary approach stems from gender bias in decision-making, where male-dominated leadership teams often perceive women as less capable of handling operational and leadership responsibilities (Baum & Cheung, 2010). The lack of formal diversity hiring policies further exacerbates this disparity, limiting women's entry into higher-ranking positions.

Another significant challenge is unequal career progression opportunities. Even when women are employed in resorts, their chances of advancing into senior positions are considerably lower than those of their male counterparts (Shakeela, Breakey, &Ruhanen, 2011). The glass ceiling is particularly evident in the Maldivian hospitality industry, where women encounter hidden barriers that prevent them from accessing promotions and leadership roles (Mooney, 2012).

Research suggests that women are often overlooked for managerial positions due to outdated perceptions that leadership qualities are inherently male traits (Pritchard & Morgan, 2011). These biases create a self-perpetuating cycle in which women remain concentrated in lower-level positions with minimal upward mobility.

Workplace culture and organizational bias further contribute to gender disparities. Many Maldivian resorts operate within traditional hierarchical structures that limit women's participation in decision-making processes (Acker, 2009). The predominance of male supervisors and managers means that workplace policies are often formulated without considering the specific needs of female employees (Shakeela et al., 2008). This results in discriminatory work environments where women are expected to conform to rigid gender roles while facing greater scrutiny regarding their competence and leadership potential (Baum, 2012).

Additionally, workplace harassment and lack of HR support create significant barriers for women seeking long-term careers in Maldivian resorts. Many female employees report experiencing discrimination, inappropriate behavior, and a lack of response from HR departments when filing complaints (Carvalho, Costa, & Lykke, 2011). The absence of strict anti-harassment policies and gender-sensitive grievance mechanisms results in many women either tolerating unfair treatment or leaving the industry altogether (Naseer, 2011). Without robust institutional safeguards, the resort sector remains an unwelcoming space for female employees seeking career stability.

Addressing these challenges requires a fundamental shift in organizational culture. Implementing gender-sensitive policies such as transparent promotion criteria, equal pay structures, and anti-harassment measures can help create a more inclusive workplace. Encouraging diversity in leadership by providing mentorship programs, leadership training, and networking opportunities for female employees can further bridge the gender gap in resort employment. Moreover, resort organizations must develop family-friendly workplace policies, including flexible scheduling and childcare support, to accommodate the needs of female employees balancing professional and domestic responsibilities (Campos-Soria et al., 2011). Without structural reforms, gender disparities in Maldivian resorts will persist, undermining broader efforts to create an equitable and progressive hospitality industry.

Organizations play a pivotal role in either reinforcing or challenging gender disparities in the workplace. Maldivian resorts, predominantly managed by men, continue to exhibit gendered structures that favor male employees in recruitment, promotions, and wage distribution. Women working in resorts frequently experience discrimination through rigid hierarchical systems that limit their career mobility. Gender bias in performance evaluations, training access, and hiring processes further prevents women from advancing into leadership positions, thereby maintaining male dominance in managerial roles. If the Maldivian hospitality industry aims to foster a sustainable, diverse, and inclusive workforce, organizations must redefine leadership pathways, remove structural biases, and actively support women's career growth.

4. Gender Inequality in Maldivian Resorts

Despite being a significant driver of economic growth, the Maldivian tourism sector continues to exhibit profound gender inequalities. Women's participation in resort employment remains alarmingly low, constrained by cultural norms, workplace discrimination, and limited career advancement opportunities. Traditional gender roles often dictate what is deemed 'appropriate' employment for women, relegating them to lower-paid, service-oriented positions, such as housekeeping and spa services, while men continue to dominate leadership and technical roles (Shakeela, Breakey, &Ruhanen, 2011).

A key manifestation of gender inequality in Maldivian resorts is occupational segregation, where women are systematically funneled into roles that are seen as extensions of their traditional domestic responsibilities (Campos-Soria, Marchante-Mera, & Ropero-García, 2011). This gendered job distribution reinforces the notion that resort jobs are unsuitable for women, further entrenching stereotypes that limit their career opportunities (Pritchard & Morgan, 2011). The absence of female representation in managerial and operational roles perpetuates a cycle where women lack visible role models and mentors, further restricting their career growth.

Another significant challenge is wage disparity. Research indicates that women in the Maldivian hospitality sector earn considerably less than their male counterparts, even when performing comparable tasks (Baum, 2012). This gender pay gap is exacerbated by a lack of transparency in promotion structures, where men are more frequently considered for pay raises and senior positions than women with similar qualifications and experience (Mooney, 2012).

Furthermore, workplace discrimination and harassment remain pressing concerns that discourage women from seeking employment in resorts. Reports highlight that female employees frequently experience bias in hiring, restricted career progression, and, in some cases, workplace harassment (Carvalho, Costa, & Lykke, 2011). The absence of robust anti-harassment policies and gender-sensitive grievance mechanisms leaves many women with limited options for recourse, forcing them to either tolerate unfair treatment or leave the industry entirely (Shakeela et al., 2008).

Beyond workplace barriers, societal expectations and family responsibilities further limit women's participation in the Maldivian resort sector. Cultural beliefs surrounding modesty and familial obligations discourage many women from working in mixed-gender environments or taking up employment that requires them to live on resort islands, away from their families (Hemmati, 2010). Additionally, the lack of childcare support systems and flexible work arrangements disproportionately affects women, as they are still expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities over professional aspirations (Naseer, 2011). To address gender inequality in Maldivian resorts, targeted interventions are necessary, including policy reforms to enforce equal pay, transparent promotion criteria, and strict anti-harassment regulations.

Encouraging gender diversity in leadership and implementing mentorship programs can empower women to pursue managerial roles and challenge existing biases in the industry. Without systemic changes, the Maldivian hospitality sector will continue reinforcing workplace inequalities, preventing the industry from realizing its full potential as an inclusive and equitable employer.

Globally, the hospitality industry remains one of the largest employers of women, yet significant gender inequalities persist. In the Maldivian context, the industry is characterized by both horizontal and vertical segregation, where women occupy lower-tier, less-paid positions with little opportunity for advancement. Societal perceptions regarding the appropriateness of women working in mixed-gender environments further restrict their participation, reinforcing traditional gender roles and perpetuating structural inequalities.

5. Barriers to Women's Career Advancement in Maldivian Resorts

Despite growing global advocacy for gender diversity and inclusion, women working in Maldivian resorts face significant barriers to career advancement. These challenges stem from organizational, cultural, and systemic biases that restrict women's access to leadership and decision-making roles. Gender disparities persist in recruitment, promotion, and training opportunities, creating an environment where women struggle to break through the glass ceiling (Mooney & Ryan, 2009).

One of the most pressing challenges is the limited access to managerial and leadership roles. The Maldivian hospitality industry remains heavily male-dominated, with very few women in senior management positions (Shakeela et al., 2011). Gender biases in promotions and leadership selection disproportionately favor men, while women are expected to remain in supportive or customer-facing roles (Campos-Soria et al., 2011). Additionally, the lack of mentorship and networking opportunities exacerbates this issue, as women have fewer role models and industry advocates to guide them toward leadership (Carvalho et al., 2011).

Workplace discrimination and bias also play a significant role in restricting women's career progression. Many women working in Maldivian resorts report experiencing unconscious gender bias in performance evaluations, where their contributions are undervalued compared to those of their male counterparts (Pritchard & Morgan, 2011). Furthermore, rigid workplace cultures often discourage women from pursuing leadership positions, reinforcing traditional gender expectations that prioritize men in decision-making roles (Baum, 2012).

Another major barrier is work-life balance and the lack of family support policies. Resort employment requires long working hours and on-site residence, which poses significant challenges for women with family responsibilities (Jalil, 2010). The absence of childcare facilities and family-friendly policies forces many women to either sacrifice career advancement or leave the industry entirely (Naseer, 2011). This leads to a self-perpetuating cycle in which fewer women reach leadership positions, further reinforcing male dominance in the sector.

Additionally, sexual harassment and workplace safety concerns deter many women from pursuing long-term careers in Maldivian resorts. Female employees frequently report experiencing harassment from colleagues and guests, yet resort management often provides inadequate support in handling such cases (Shakeela et al., 2008). The lack of strict anti-harassment policies and formal reporting mechanisms creates a hostile work environment, compelling many women to leave the workforce due to concerns over personal safety and workplace hostility (Hemmati, 2010).

Addressing these barriers to women's career progression requires comprehensive policy changes, including transparent promotion pathways, mentorship programs, and leadership training tailored to female employees. Resorts must implement family-friendly work policies, such as flexible scheduling, childcare facilities, and maternity leave protections, to support women in balancing work and personal responsibilities. Additionally, stronger legal protections and workplace safety measures must be enforced to prevent harassment and discrimination.

By dismantling these barriers, the Maldivian tourism sector can create an inclusive environment where women have equal opportunities for career growth and leadership roles. Fostering a gender-diverse workforce not only promotes equity and social justice but also enhances business performance, employee satisfaction, and overall industry sustainability.Women working in Maldivian resorts continue to face numerous obstacles in their pursuit of career progression. These include a lack of mentorship programs, workplace harassment, limited training opportunities, and restrictive cultural norms that discourage women from establishing long-term careers in hospitality.

Structural inequalities within organizations further prevent women from reaching senior managerial positions, sustaining a cycle in which male leadership continues to dominate the industry. Addressing these challenges requires targeted policy interventions that prioritize inclusivity, professional development, and equal access to leadership positions for women in the Maldivian hospitality industry.

6. Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the experiences, challenges, and perceptions of women working in Maldivian resorts. Given the research objective, a qualitative methodology was deemed most appropriate, as it facilitates an in-depth understanding of gender-related workplace dynamics and the socio-cultural factors influencing career progression (Tracy, 2010). The study utilizes semi-structured interviews to gather insights from women employed in various roles within Maldivian resorts, enabling a comprehensive examination of the barriers to career advancement (Braun & Clarke, 2011).

6.1 Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants with direct experience in the Maldivian resort industry, ensuring that they could provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by women in this sector (Robinson, 2011). Women from diverse departments, including front office, kids club, food and beverage, wellness and spa, guest services, sales, marketing, events, and training, were included to capture a broad range of perspectives (Guest et al., 2011).

Additionally, a snowball sampling approach was utilized, wherein initial participants recommended other women in the industry who could contribute further insights (Hennink et al., 2010). This method allowed for a richer pool of respondents, ensuring the inclusion of individuals with varied experiences across different resort categories. A total of 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with women holding diverse positions in Maldivian resorts, ranging from front-line service roles to mid-management positions.

The participants' demographic details—including age, years of experience, specific job roles, and resort types—were documented to provide contextual depth to the analysis (Table 1).

Interviews were conducted in person and via online platforms to accommodate participants working on remote resort islands (McIntosh & Morse, 2011). Each interview lasted between 45 to 75 minutes, with recordings made with participant consent to ensure accuracy in transcription and data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2011).

Table 1: Participants' Profile

Participant	Position	Type of Resort
1	Front Office Supervisor	Exclusive High-Privacy Elite Resort
2	Kids Club Attendant	Small Ultra-Luxury Resort for Elite Guests
3	Restaurant Captain	Eco-Friendly Resort
4	Food and Beverage Manager	Traditional Maldivian-Style Resort
5	Spa Therapist	Wellness and Spa Retreat

6	Reservations Officer	Family-Oriented Resort
7	Sales Executive	Family-Oriented Resort
8	HR Coordinator	High-End Luxury Resort
9	Training & Development Officer	Large International Chain Resort
10	Resort Operations Executive	Locally-Owned Independent Resort
11	Marketing Manager	Renowned Global Resort Chain
12	Assistant Sales Manager	Private Island Resort
13	Guest Service Executive	4-Star Resort
14	Events Coordinator	Business and Events-Oriented Resort
15	Finance Officer	Diving and Adventure-Focused Resort
16	Guest Relations Officer	Luxury Resort
17	Customer Relations Executive	4-Star Resort
18	Wellness and Spa Manager	4-Star Resort
19	Front Office Supervisor	4-Star Resort
20	Chef	Family-Oriented Resort

6.2 Data Collection

The interview questions were designed based on themes identified in the literature review and were aligned with the study's objectives (Brunt et al., 2011). The questions focused on workplace experiences, career progression challenges, gender discrimination, organizational policies, and work-life balance (Acker, 1990; Costa et al., 2011; Dashper, 2011). To facilitate authentic and detailed responses, interviews were conducted in both English and Dhivehi, allowing participants to express themselves in their preferred language for richer qualitative insights (Byrne, 2011).

Table 2: Interview Questions

Key Themes	Interview Questions
Career Development Experiences	Can you describe your experience working in the Maldivian resort industry? Have you faced any gender-related challenges in your career?
Gender Bias and Workplace Culture	Have you encountered workplace discrimination or biases? How do these impact your work environment and professional growth?
Challenges to Career Progression	What barriers have you faced in progressing to higher positions within the resort industry?

Work-Life Balance and Family Responsibilities	How do you balance work and family responsibilities? Do you feel supported by your employer in managing these responsibilities?
Barriers to Leadership and Management	What do you think are the key factors preventing women from attaining leadership roles in Maldivian resorts? What changes would you recommend?
Organizational Policies and Support	How effective are the organizational policies in promoting gender equality? What improvements do you suggest?
Safety and Workplace Environment	Do you feel safe in your workplace? Are there any security concerns that affect your job?
Training and Mentorship	Have you had access to training and mentorship programs? How have they impacted your career development?

To ensure reliability and validity, a pilot study was conducted with two participants before full data collection to refine the interview protocol (Silverman, 2011). Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and informed consent was obtained prior to their participation (McIntosh & Morse, 2011).

6.3 Data Analysis

A reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) approach was employed to analyze the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2011). This method provides a systematic yet flexible framework for identifying key themes and patterns in qualitative research. The data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2011) six-step thematic analysis process:

1. Data Familiarization – Repeated reading of transcripts to gain an in-depth understanding of participant responses.

2. Initial Coding – Systematic coding of relevant features in the data.

3. Theme Identification – Grouping of similar codes into overarching themes.

4. Theme Refinement – Reviewing themes for coherence and relevance.

5. Theme Definition – Clearly defining and naming final themes.

6. Final Analysis & Reporting – Synthesizing findings to generate meaningful conclusions.

An inductive coding approach was applied, ensuring that themes emerged naturally from the data, rather than being imposed a priori (Proudfoot, 2011). This approach ensured that the findings authentically reflected the lived experiences of women working in Maldivian resorts. The transcripts were reviewed multiple times to ensure consistency and depth in the development of themes (Creswell & Poth, 2011).

During the analysis, six major themes emerged, which were consistent with previous research on gender inequality in the hospitality industry (Campos-Soria et al., 2011; Mooney, 2011). These findings are presented in the next section, accompanied by direct participant quotes to illustrate key insights (Byrne, 2011).

7. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the key findings from the interviews conducted with women working in Maldivian resorts. The study highlights the barriers to career progression, gender biases, work-life balance challenges, and organizational limitations that inhibit women's participation and advancement in the industry. While some progress has been made, the findings suggest that deep-rooted cultural and structural obstacles persist, preventing women from fully realizing their potential in the Maldivian hospitality sector.

7.1 Barriers to Career Progression

The research participants overwhelmingly expressed that career advancement opportunities for women in Maldivian resorts remain limited due to a combination of cultural norms, workplace discrimination, and lack of mentorship opportunities (Shakeela et al., 2011). Several participants indicated that women who aspire to managerial roles often encounter resistance from male colleagues and lack access to leadership training programs.

> *"Many times, I have been overlooked for promotions despite having more experience than my male colleagues. They assume women cannot handle senior roles in a resort setting." – (Aminath, Guest Relations Officer)*

A persistent challenge cited was the reluctance of employers to place women in leadership positions, with some employers preferring male candidates for decision-making roles. This aligns with findings from global hospitality research, which indicates that women are often pigeonholed into customer service roles rather than operational or managerial positions (Baum, 2012).

> *"Whenever there's a leadership role available, they always look for a man first. We have to work twice as hard to be considered for the same opportunity." – (Rashfa, Sales Executive)*

Many participants also noted that training programs for career development are often focused on male employees, limiting women's ability to upskill and compete for leadership roles.

7.2 Gender Bias and Workplace Discrimination

Gender bias and workplace discrimination were highlighted as significant challenges faced by women in Maldivian resorts. The hospitality industry has historically been male-dominated, and resort cultures are often shaped by patriarchal attitudes that disadvantage female employees (Campos-Soria et al., 2011). Participants shared experiences of gender stereotyping, pay disparities, and exclusion from networking opportunities that could enhance career growth.

> *"Men in the industry are taken more seriously. When a female supervisor gives instructions, there is always a challenge from junior male staff." – (Haulath, Food and Beverage Manager)*

Additionally, harassment and inappropriate behavior from male colleagues and guests were mentioned as common concerns, with some participants feeling that resort management fails to adequately address complaints of gender-based harassment (Mooney, 2011).

> *"Guests sometimes make inappropriate comments or requests. Management tells us to 'just ignore it' because they don't want to upset high-paying clients." – (Fathimath, Front Office Supervisor)*

Women also reported experiencing unequal pay despite having the same job responsibilities as their male counterparts.

"I discovered that my male colleague was earning more than me for the same position. When I questioned it, I was told that men have 'more financial responsibilities'." – (Shaheez, HR Coordinator)

A safer and more inclusive work environment is needed to ensure gender equality in Maldivian hospitality workplaces.

7.3 Work-Life Balance and Family Responsibilities

Work-life balance was a critical issue for many of the women interviewed. Unlike men, women in Maldivian society are expected to prioritize family obligations, making it difficult to maintain demanding resort jobs that often require long and irregular working hours (Carvalho et al., 2011). Several respondents shared that the lack of childcare facilities and rigid work schedules make it challenging for women to continue working after marriage or childbirth.

"*I had to leave a managerial track role after having my second child because the work schedule was impossible to manage with family responsibilities.*" – (Nasha, HR Coordinator)

"Women are expected to be the primary caregivers. If a child is sick, it's always the mother who has to take leave, not the father." – (Haulath, Wellness and Spa Manager)

Participants suggested that resort employers need to introduce more flexible work policies to retain female employees, such as adjusted shift patterns, maternity support, and on-site childcare services.

7.4 Organizational and Structural Barriers

Beyond cultural biases, organizational policies and resort structures were found to disproportionately favor male employees. Women in entry-level roles face a glass ceiling, preventing them from accessing mid-to-senior level managerial roles (Acker, 2006). Many respondents cited a lack of training programs and mentorship initiatives for female employees in resorts.

"We are not given the same development opportunities as men. Leadership training is offered to men first, and we have to fight for those slots." – (Shaheez, Training and Development Officer)

Additionally, workplace safety was a recurring concern, particularly for women working in remote resort locations. Some participants expressed feeling isolated and vulnerable due to the male-dominated environment and inadequate protective policies (Shakeela & Weaver, 2008).

"Living on a resort island, there are very few women. The environment sometimes makes you feel unsafe, especially during night shifts." – (Aminath, Guest Service Executive)

"There should be stricter policies on gender-based harassment. Some managers just brush off complaints, making it difficult for us to feel secure at work." – (Rashfa, Sales Executive)

These findings underscore the pressing need for gender-inclusive policies, stronger workplace protections, and cultural shifts to ensure women have equal opportunities in Maldivian resorts. The next section explores recommendations for fostering a more inclusive hospitality sector.

8. Conclusion

Gendered organizational structures and ingrained social norms continue to create significant barriers to women's career advancement in the Maldivian resort industry (Acker, 1990, 2006). This study highlights the persistent challenges that female professionals face, including gender bias, limited career progression opportunities, work-life balance struggles, and structural barriers within resort environments. Women remain underrepresented in senior management positions, largely due to cultural expectations, workplace discrimination, and the predominance of male-oriented leadership structures (Campos-Soria, Marchante-Mera, & Ropero-García, 2011). These factors collectively hinder their ability to advance and contribute fully to the hospitality sector in the Maldives.

The research findings emphasize that gender inequality in Maldivian resorts is reinforced through both institutional and social mechanisms, shaping women's career trajectories in ways that disadvantage them. Gender stereotypes, wage disparities, and the absence of targeted mentorship programs further restrict career mobility. Many women in the industry reported experiencing microaggressions, exclusion from leadership training, and difficulty navigating male-dominated workspaces. This aligns with previous studies that suggest women in tourism and hospitality industries face systemic obstacles that prevent them from reaching top-tier leadership roles (Shakeela, Breakey, & Weaver, 2011).

Additionally, work-life balance challenges significantly impact women's career retention and progression in Maldivian resorts. The expectation that women shoulder primary caregiving responsibilities restricts their ability to work flexible schedules or take on demanding managerial roles. The lack of employer-provided childcare services and flexible work policies further exacerbates this issue, forcing many women to either downscale their careers or leave the industry entirely. This aligns with prior research that identifies family obligations as a key factor in career stagnation among women in the hospitality sector (Mooney, 2011).

The study underscores the importance of implementing gender-sensitive policies, leadership development initiatives, and family-friendly workplace structures to foster a more inclusive hospitality industry. Resort management must take proactive steps to eliminate gender bias, ensure equal access to training and promotions, and provide mechanisms for addressing workplace harassment.

Developing structured mentorship programs and career progression pathways specifically for women can significantly improve retention and professional growth. Furthermore, a shift towards gender-diverse leadership can contribute to reshaping workplace culture, ultimately leading to greater equity in the hospitality sector (Shakeela & Weaver, 2008). While this study focuses on the Maldivian resort industry, its findings align with broader global trends in gender and employment within tourism and hospitality. Future research should explore gender disparities across different segments of the tourism industry, including transportation, travel agencies, and adventure tourism.

Additionally, further studies could investigate the intersectionality of gender with other factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational background to provide a more comprehensive understanding of workforce inequalities.

In conclusion, achieving gender equality in Maldivian resorts remains a work in progress. Although progress has been made in increasing awareness and addressing some of the barriers women face, structural and cultural constraints continue to limit their career advancement. This study contributes to the growing body of research advocating for gender equity in the hospitality industry and calls for sustained efforts to create a more inclusive, diverse, and supportive work environment for women in Maldivian resorts.

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