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GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY: PAY GAP, EVERYDAY SEXISM, AND THE EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE TOUR GUIDES

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Abstract

Tourism offers jobs for both genders within the fields of transport, hotel services, air transport, among others. Despite accounting for a significant portion of the workforce in the tourism industry, issues of gender inequality still exist. The paper seeks to evaluate current literature about discrimination based on gender within the tourism industry with particular emphasis on gender wage differences, management and career progression, and societal stereotyping. Based on the evaluation of current literature, the paper seeks to analyze important aspects leading to gender inequality within the tourism sector.

Gender Inequality in Tourism Industry: Discrimination against Women's Employment

Introduction

The tourism industry has many opportunities for employment in this field, including becoming a tour guide. Unfortunately, there are issues related to gender inequality in the tourism industry and among tour guides. Some of them are poor pay, stereotypes about the ability of women to work in the sector, sexual harassment, and limited career opportunities. Female tour guides often have to face discrimination from both tourists and managers due to gender inequality. Some women may not feel safe reporting the incidents since they can lose their jobs. These issues can impact their confidence, safety, and future career prospects. According to the previous research conducted in some countries like Egypt, China, and India, gender inequality in the tourism sector persists in spite of the positive influence of this sector on females' financial stability. The purpose of this research is to determine the kinds of gender inequality experienced by female tour guides and its consequences, as well as ways to address gender discrimination. The current paper will analyze previous researches and reports in order to get an understanding of the issue.

Literature Review

Female tourist guides may encounter gender discrimination in the tourism industry. These female tourists guides might be subjected to stereotypes, poor wages, sexual harassment, and limited job opportunities.

According to Nguyen H. and Nguyen V., stereotypes complicate the roles of women as tour guides. In some cases, men are believed to be better leaders and more knowledgeable than women, even though both sexes possess similar qualities. Bearing this in mind, travelers, colleagues, or superiors may fail to accord due respect to female guides.

In the case of Mousa et al., the researchers studied the experiences of female tour guides in Egypt. They discovered that the tour guides have been harassed by tourists and occasionally even by their employers. They would not dare report the latter due to being fired. While some female guides would remain silent, others would report the harassment and take other measures. The authors also stated that female tour guides are rare in travel agencies due to religion and family pressures, sexual harassment, discrimination in recruitment, and stereotyping in media.

According to Díaz-Meneses, Vilkaitė-Vaitonė and Estupiñan-Ojeda, sexist stereotypes can result in sexual harassment among the tourism sector employees. Women employed in the tourism industry can be viewed as less professional and only valued for the way they look.

Wang and Xu investigated Chinese informal female tour guides. Such guides had to struggle hard to retain their employment simply because they were females. Some of them used femininity while others formed business relationships with the owners of nearby businesses. It means that even under tough circumstances, women guides can survive.

Another issue to consider is that of low pay. A study on women working as tour guides in India mentions that tourism enables freedom for women, and tourism is the only means through which they can do what they like doing best. Women continue to face gender discrimination, stereotyping, and low pay.

Based on this research, we could say that, “female tour guides experience many interconnected issues.” For example, stereotypes may cause females to resign from their work, harassment may force them to resign from their employment, low salaries may restrict their voice, and not having an opportunity to express themselves. Females cope with the stress differently, however, tourism businesses should take additional measures to protect women.

Methodology

This research paper has been prepared using already published articles. It contains no new data obtained by means of surveys or interviews. Research articles concerning the topic of sexism in the tourism sector are analyzed.

The key point here is to give proofs about the abuse of female guides. These sources were chosen due to their reference to gender discrimination, stereotypes, sexual abuse, poor salary, and female experience in the tourism industry. These sources have examples from various countries, such as Egypt, China, and India.

Sources have been collected with the use of AI, various websites, and Google Scholar.

Table 1. Highlights major types of sexism

Forms of inequality	How it appears	Source
Sexual harassment	Female tour guides may experience harassment from tourists and even from managers. Women may avoid reporting managers to keep their jobs.	Mousa et al. (2023), Egypt. International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management.
Gender Stereotypes	Women face the disrespect of being viewed as less professional compared to men.	Nguyen, H. T. V., and Nguyen, V. T. P. The gendered landscape of tourism.
Low pay and judgement	Women in tourism earn less and have to overcome the judgment of society daily.	H.Singleton. India (2026)

Results

The results of the studies reveal the issues faced by female tour guides such as gender stereotyping, sexual harassment, low wages, and career restrictions. Firstly, gender stereotypes negatively impact how women are perceived in the workplace. As noted by Nguyen and Nguyen, some individuals perceive men to be more professional and leadership-oriented than women. Therefore, female tour guides may lack respect from tourists, co-workers, and supervisors. Secondly, one more problem faced by women in this sphere is sexual harassment. For example, Mousa et al. (2023) highlight the issue of harassment of women working as tour guides in Egypt. Some of the victims may prefer not to report on this situation as losing the job seems to be unacceptable. Thirdly, low wages and limited opportunities are the factors that may prevent women from developing their careers. The report about female tour guides in India reveals the issue of sexism and poor working conditions in the sphere of tourism despite the ability to earn independently. Lastly, the findings reveal that female tour guides adopt various strategies to handle the mentioned challenges. Some of them report on cases of harassment; however, others choose silence or networking. Overall, the research demonstrates the impact of gender inequality on the safety, wages, and professional development of women.

Discussion

From what has been learned from the research in this paper, gender disparity in the field of tourism is no longer one problem alone. Working women in the tourism industry have to deal with stereotyping, poor salaries, sexual harassment, and career prospects all at once.

Stereotyping affects the treatment of female tour guides in all circumstances. There are people who believe that men appear more professional and have greater strength or leadership qualities compared to women. Such beliefs can result in the feeling among women that they have to work harder than men. Such social beliefs, as Nguyen, H. and Nguyen, V. state, might hinder women's progress in their careers.

Sexual harassment is the second challenge that female tour guides must face. Mousa et al. discovered that females could be victims not only of tourists but also of managers. This becomes very problematic

since managers hold an authority in relation to the employment and remuneration of women. Being scared of being fired, women cannot make any complaints.

Third, the low salary increases gender disparity in the field. There is no doubt that the field of tourism can empower Indian women, but at the same time, this area may also become unjust and even dangerous. According to a research paper about female tour guides, the field of tourism can both bring empowerment and be a challenge for women who work in this sector. According to one of the tour leaders of India, Anjali Singh, the job of the tour guide has brought significant changes in her life. “I find it extremely empowering when I know that I am able to earn a living doing what I love. I wish more women followed in my footsteps.”

In addition, females are not helpless. They use different strategies to ensure survival. Some of them remain silent about the harassment, while others complain. There are also some females who form a network of women or local businessmen and other colleagues. It is demonstrated by Wang and Xu that the female informal tour guides in China have employed gendered strategies for survival in hard conditions. However, women should not depend on strategies alone.

Recommendations

According to literature, there are many ways for tourism firms to address gender disparity, such as:

- There should be clear rules about sexual harassment.
- Protect workers who report harassment.
- Compensate men and women equally who have the same tour guide positions.
- Ensure that both men and women have similar chances of career advancement.
- Have anonymous reporting systems.
- Charge people who make sexist remarks, jokes, etc.

Although these recommendations may not solve everything instantly, it will help to make tourism industry workplaces safe and more equal places for women.

Conclusion

There are still large gaps when it comes to gender equality in the tourism industry. Women tour guides suffer from stereotyping, harassment and are paid low salaries and have poor prospects for career advancement. These are some of the key obstacles which affect them.

According to literature, all these problems are interrelated. Stereotypes may cause harassment; harassment may result in women quitting their jobs; and low wages, along with the absence of female role models, may inhibit women from raising issues. While female guides currently have various techniques to address discrimination, they do not need to tackle all these problems on their own. Or better still, there should be no problem at all.

Tourism organizations, management, and government need to ensure a safe workplace environment and also ensure fair treatment for their employees. For women to participate more actively in tourism, anti-harassment policies must be developed, and equal pay needs to be guaranteed at a minimum level.

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