

EMPOWERING WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN CITY OF IMUS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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Abstract. Women remain underrepresented in the high-status and managerial levels of the tourism industry. Despite the large number of women employed in tourism, they generally hold low-skilled positions related to traditional work such as assistance, services, and accommodation. Related studies and prior research revealed that women's employment opportunities were influenced by gender discrimination, stereotyping, women qualities, and experiences. This qualitative research study used purposive sampling in determining the size and selecting participants. Narrative analysis was used to interpret the data to codes and themes. Construct validity was reflected through truthful interviews and interrelated questions. This study revealed the continued underrepresentation of women in high-status and managerial levels of the selected tourism industry limited to restaurants, hotels, travel agencies, and the local tourism and development office of Imus and recognized the participation of some women who hold high-status and managerial roles in the selected tourism industry. Gender discrimination and stereotyping were still evident in employment opportunities and task dissemination. Further studies on expanding the size and participants across all tourism industries were suggested. Implementation of rules and policies on gender discrimination and discussion within management on gender stereotyping were advised to create equal employment opportunities for both genders and assess the validity of employability based on their qualifications, job experience, and educational background.

Keywords: *gender discrimination, stereotype, high-status, employability, tourism industry*

Introduction

The Philippine tourism industry plays a vital role in developing, promoting, strengthening, and enhancing tourism as a major socio-economic activity to generate income and employment. As a matter of fact, according to the Philippines Statistics Authority (PSA) in their report dated June 2022, the share of employment in tourism industries was at 11.1% present, labeling it as the biggest employer in the country. The regional and local tourism offices of the country devoted their expertise and effort to performing this role. In fact, Cavite, the "Historical Capital of the Philippines", is a leading and sustainable tourism and cultural destination. Imus, the de jure capital of the province of Cavite, is the location of the study as it is considered the tourism powerhouse of Cavite. Even if Imus is known for many historical sites and tourist spots, this study focused on the restaurants, travel agencies, museums, and the local tourism office covering the wide range of activities of the tourism industry. More importantly, the researchers looked into empowering women in their participation and employment in the tourism industry of Imus. The city of Imus is home to over 20 distinguished and recognized restaurants that sell and serve local products, more than 10 permitted and top-performing travel agencies, a distinct historical museum, and a tourism and development local office that oversees and supervises these industries. Among the mentioned tourism industries, the researchers found a strange gap in the employment

opportunities, in terms of gender particularly those at high-status and managerial levels. The researchers observed that the owners and/or managers of these establishments are mostly men. Women hold low-skilled positions which the researchers relate to traditional work such as assistance, document processing, cooking, cleaning services, and accommodation to name some.

Despite dramatic movements to end gender inequality and discrimination, there is still a huge gap between men's and women's representation in employment that requires decision-making and leadership. The researchers categorized these jobs as high status (high paying or high quality). A study conducted by Lippa et al. (2014) provided empirical evidence on the factors that affect women's participation including the influence of gender roles, and gender stereotypes; social policies that make it difficult for women to easily combine work and family roles; differences in the educational backgrounds and human capital of men and women; gender differences in interests, values, motivation, and abilities. While men are traditionally breadwinners and are the ones doing the tough jobs, women do all the chores or are typically tasked to do housework. Looking at the historical lens, the Philippines had long been patriarchal since Spanish colonization and it can be said that during that time, men do the hard work or the best jobs go to men. Moreover, the historical context also showed that men are more privileged in important areas of politics and education. The researchers strongly see this as to why women weren't trusted with high-status and management positions. Men hold a disproportionate number of top jobs, whereas women hold more lower-paid positions than men (Mooney, 2020). Most women in the tourism industry work in low-level jobs, such as part-time work, seasonal opportunities, and low-skill activities- less secured employment. In 2020, there were approximately 4.68 million people working in the tourism industry in the Philippines (SRD, 2021). Employment opportunities in the tourism industry must be offered to both genders fairly with proper compensation regardless of gender and must focus on the capabilities of women that fit the employment requirements.

The United Nations Organization has long recognized this problem. UNWTO specializes in the impacts of tourism on women's lives as a contribution to achieving SDG 5 which is centered on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. While SDG 5 tackles women and girls, this research focuses solely on women as adults and is permitted by law to be employed. According to their study, discriminatory laws and social norms remain to be pervasive. In 2019, they launched a study that states that around 54% of women are tourism employees and they are earning 14.7% less than men. They still remain under-represented in the tourism industry high-status and managerial positions. The generalization of women being subordinate to men added to this idea. Although, there have been significant advances in terms of gender equality in the economy, education, and employment, and numerous laws and regulations that seek to promote equal opportunities for men and women, gender inequality in adults still exists in crucial areas such as wages and position of power (Solbes-Canales et al., 2020). Women that are not in the rank are subjected to sexual harassment, which adds to increasing inequality, and discrimination, and exacerbates female workers (Eger, 2021). The goal of achieving equality and empowerment of women free from discrimination and providing equal opportunities, rights, and responsibilities to men and women remains unfulfilled. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated equality in both genders and empowerment of women, since women employed in the tourism industry in the Philippines are hit the hardest with a severe decline in 2020 (Simeon,

2021). The researchers believe that women do need the right opportunity as a pathway to high-status or managerial level employment opportunities without trying to be like men as they have their own qualities. Sally Krawcheck argued in her book titled *Own It: The Power of Women at Work* (Krawcheck, 2017) that the attributes women tend to bring to the job - relationship skills, an awareness of risk, a more collaborative, deliberative approach to decision-making are increasingly valued, and women should showcase them, not try to be more like men. The study of Brindha and Gokila (2022) added to this as it reflected the increasing number of women owning businesses in almost all countries. They recognized the qualities of women-skills, knowledge, and adaptability of women to handle entrepreneurial activities have been growing.

This research highlighted the empowerment of women's participation in the tourism industry and the position they hold equivalent to their qualities. The term “empower,” means “enabling” one to do something. Furthermore, empowerment of women describes the capability of women to take control in order to live a life they deserve (Galiè and Farnworth, 2019). Empowering women participation is necessary for achieving the sustainable development goal, where no one is discriminated against and if one has met the requirements of employment, specifically in the tourism industry. The researchers attempted to show the participation of women in the tourism industry of Imus and recognized the gap between the employment of men and women. This recognized the capabilities of women to perform high-status and managerial positions in the tourism industry employment. The research is designed to address three objectives: (1) to determine the gap between men and women participation in the tourism industry of Imus; (2) to determine discrimination relating to gender exist in the employment of women; and (3) to identify women experiences or qualities directly affect their participation.

Furthermore, the researchers interviewed owners and managers of the tourism industry limited to restaurants, travel agencies, hotels, and the local tourism and development office. The result of the study will be of great benefit to the Sustainable Development Goal 5 to provide information that women are outnumbered and they deserve equal employment opportunities without discrimination. This study will zoom into the characteristics of women in their employment: high-status, managerial, or low-skilled jobs. Gathered data will support the fact that women can achieve equally as men. It chains the significance of feminization, its involvement of women in activities where men are dominant, and to future investigation and aims for additional evidence on studies involving women empowerment in the tourism industry.

Literature review and conceptual/theoretical framework

An article published by Hamlin (2019) featured a forum to discuss the different challenges and concerns of women in tourism, the current situation of gender equality, and women empowerment. Aside from job opportunities in different areas of tourism travels and tours, the Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions or Events (MICE) help to support women empowerment in the tourism industry in the Philippines. Moreover, it directly affects the employability of women in the Philippine tourism industry. When women are given equal job opportunities in society, they tend to advance. The majority of the workforce in one of the speaker's companies is composed of women as they show standards required for specific work disregarding their gender. In contrast, a study conducted by Albayrak in 2021 says that even though the number of women is twice higher than men in tourism employment, due to their gender, women

working in the sector are subjected to rules and discrimination. It is seen here that even with the skills gained by the women from traditionally staying at home, discrimination in tourism employment still exists. This highlights that even if there is a large number of participation of women in employment, they still encounter discrimination and exploitation. An international study in APEC regions conducted by Hutchings et al. (2020) presented the continued underrepresentation of women in tourism employment. Employment in tourism is specifically biased toward a single gender (Pritchard and Morgan, 2016) and tourism gender segregation is still rampant (Hutchings et al., 2020). This study interviewed participants from different regions and the result revealed continuous segregation in women's employment that was caused by management, policy, and cultural differences which can be avoided if there is an equal opportunity for both genders, and policies aren't just focused on how women should act. While this is also true, policy intervention might not be done in a short time thus making gender equality in tourism employment goals difficult to achieve. A survey conducted by Horowitz and Fetterolf (2020) revealed that even though gender inequality is a major problem to address in Asian countries, many people still think that men have more opportunities than women and men will have better lives in the future. Therefore, there is still a high chance that even if equal opportunities are provided to end gender inequality, men will still be of greater benefit.

Emotions shed light on a response of the women in their current status in the tourism industry. Because women are in relatively weaker positions in society, they continually experience tension in the family or even in the community. In the study of Díaz-Carrión and Vizcaino (2022), they rely on Ahmed's framework focused on emotions, practices, and gender in job-related work to measure women lived experiences in gendered tourism work. As a result, women used this emotion to defy gender stereotypes in the tourism industry. On the other hand, women, who are expected to maintain the household, are equipped with economic, social, and individual skills (Çiçek et al., 2017), and may also utilize these important skills in handling bigger tasks in employment in the cultural tourism industry. In creating a just and humane society, the feminization of labor empowers women to contribute and express themselves, their qualities, and their creativity. According to Rocamora (2018), the Department of Tourism continuously provides numerous opportunities for women to make the tourism business gender and community empowered by building training courses and programs. Thus, with the Philippine tourism industry's unprecedented growth, about 5.3 million jobs have opened for Filipinos, creating opportunities for women to be part of the tourism industry's workforce (Rocamora, 2019), which focuses on the feminization of labor. This revealed that by creating job opportunities, women will feel empowered because of their abilities and contribution to society. However, in 2019, the women's rate of employment in the tourism industry is low in the Philippines. In a study by Cabegin and Gaddi (2019), they found that women's labor market participation in the Philippines has the lowest rate in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region due to inadequate employment and decent work opportunities, gender segregation, and social norms. Moreover, women are also more likely to work in low-quality or vulnerable jobs which often provide fewer opportunities for decent work and social security. This study is helpful because it will address the problem of whether gender stereotypes affect women's employment, but it focuses on the overall labor force participation of women in all sectors.

For Qazi and Khushk (2019), the study used a phenomenological research approach to interpret women's experiences when it comes to income generation opportunities such as business and bank savings and investments. This highlighted that when financial income is stable, women feel more empowered. Although, financial stability is not only the basis for women to feel empowered. Having equal rights as men and acknowledging their skills and abilities would be a great step in achieving this goal. A study conducted in Fiji, Japan by Movono and Dahles (2017) focused on how women were empowered in tourism by means of launching businesses that were highly successful. Gender empowerment advocates also deem that the patriarchal environment is the root cause of gender discrimination in education and more importantly in employment opportunities. Despite the huge population of women, male dominance prevails because of cultural and historical taboos. The huge gap between the participation of Filipino men and women in the labor force is brought by gender role stereotyping that women are placed in doing reproductive or domestic work, religious factors that hinder women to do certain types of jobs, lack of access to skills training, gender segregation, discriminatory ideas; and few women economic activities (Cabegin and Gaddi, 2019). Employment opportunities in the cultural tourism industry constitute more financial stability for people, thus, when given to women, would achieve the same level of financial stability as men. Good governance is also seen as one of the factors that affect gender equality and women empowerment. A study conducted by Awi (2018) identified the concerns of gender inequality which primarily points to policy and programs in the government. This study uses Daniel Stufflebeam's Content, Input, Process, and Product (CIPP) model to examine the results and implementation of the GAD program for gender equality. On the other hand, Noche (2019) featured in her article the steps of the Department of Tourism in emphasizing women's contribution and skills in tourism as part of the modification of policies and programs related to gender equality in tourism. The forum they headed gave an extra push for Filipino women to create a bigger impact in the tourism industry and end the debates about man and woman division. It centered on showing the talents of women to rise above the traditional gender stereotyping and start expanding their perspective in submerging themselves in possibilities and opportunities to work in tourism.

As mentioned by Figueroa-Domecq and Segovia-Perez (2020) tourism research supports the identification, comprehension, and sharing of information that is necessary to minimize gender disparity. It demonstrates how women have a huge impact on the tourism sector and its various segments, including cultural tourism. This also identifies the need for a feminist perspective in tackling issues in gender employability in tourism. They showed the gap of lack of education in different age brackets that hinders the employment of women. However, the study by Adnyani et al. (2021) believes that the factor of education equal to men is not always the cause of discrimination in the treatment of women but tourism policies and the dominant culture can also affect gender inequality. Lack of education and discriminating tourism policies all add to the cause of less women participation in the cultural tourism industry. The conceptual framework of this research is based on literature studies related to the topic (*Figure 1*). The elements in the conceptual framework reveal the contributing factors to the research problem. Both the conceptual framework and the objectives are a result of collecting controlled related variables from other studies. The framework used in this study reflects the factors and the relation of it to the research problem. In contrast to the study of Figueroa-Domecq and Segovia-Perez (2020), this used a theoretical framework on a

previous study provided by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Research in 2011. The theoretical framework is based on previous scientific knowledge and from a feminist perspective review on distinguishing issues related to gender inequality in tourism while the conceptual framework the researchers developed is a result of the current research problem and deals with specific objectives, factors, and existing knowledge on the topic of women empowerment in the tourism industry.



Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study.

In today's generation, several movements surface to end discrimination in employment thus contributing to less participation of women in the tourism industry. The related studies that tackle this problem are limited. Most studies reflect the international status quo and little to few are set in the local setting. To add, studies that focus on women's employment in the tourism industry are narrow. Araújo-Vila et al. (2021) revealed that only a few authors focus their publications associated with gender equality in the tourism industry. Thus, putting attention and adding to sources and references in research that touches on this topic is beneficial. This study is unique in the way that the researchers wanted to show that there is a lack of equality in opportunities for both genders to be employed in high-status and managerial positions in the tourism industry.

Materials and Methods

This paper is a qualitative study as it is based on the experiences of the participants regarding women's participation in the tourism industry and the position they hold equivalent to their qualities in the City of Imus. The researchers used a phenomenological approach as this study focuses on women's experiences through interviews. Cresswell and Poth (2018) stated that phenomenology is applied to research aimed at determining the essence of a set of people's lived experiences who participated in the phenomenon. The participants of the research came from the tourism industry limited to owners and managers of restaurants, travel agencies, hotels, and the local tourism and development office exclusively in service from November 2021 to the present. The researchers used purposive sampling in determining the sample size of the study which results in the selected participants. According to Etikan and Bala (2017), the researchers must focus on people who share the same viewpoint in order to obtain the necessary information and be willing to share it. The participants are people who are directly involved and have direct control with employment in the tourism industry and reach them through email and personal appearances. The study's semi-structured interview started in June 2023 and is guided by seven open-ended questions. The interview questions inquired about the status per se of men and women in the selected tourism industry. The recorded interview of the participants is transcribed into themes such as women participation and employment, discrimination based on gender, women

experiences, and women qualities to highlight the important factors related to the study. After that, the transcript is compared to the audio recordings to confirm the accurate accounts are collected (Nasheeda et al., 2019).

In treating the data, the researchers used narrative analysis to interpret the answers during the interview. The recorded interview is transcribed demonstrating the voice of the participants to be followed by inductive coding. As most qualitative research does, analyzing the narratives presented in interview transcripts goes beyond providing descriptions and topic developments (Nasheeda et al., 2019). Codes aren't determined yet at the beginning of the research but slowly unfold as the participants share their personal narratives. Construct validity is reflected in the research by setting the concepts to measure through the use of truthful interviews and interrelated questions. Validity of the interview aims to ensure that the questions tapped concepts included in the study such as the equal representation of both genders in employment opportunities in the tourism industry, thus, showing if empowerment of women is reflected. Moreover, the interview questions started with the basic questions up to the questions that will measure the validity of the research. It is also vital to follow the order of questions logically to establish the connection. Valid qualitative research focuses on the representation of different social worlds that will provide different interpretations to the readers (Kuzmanić, 2009). This is demonstrated through participants coming from the selected tourism industry. The participants were carefully chosen to elicit valuable information that will help to establish the validity and reliability of this research. The personal information shared during the recorded interview is protected by the Data Privacy Act of 2012. All information gathered and shared during the conduct of the research is confidential and used solely for the progress of the paper and will be destroyed after the study. The researchers will apply the principles of ethical consideration for the entirety of the data collection. The participants will not be subjected to any harm and they are free to withdraw from the study if they wish to do so. Moreover, the researchers assure the truthfulness and transparency in the methods, results, and records of activities during the process. To achieve sincerity and honesty in answers from the participants, the researchers centered the questions on the participants' opinions, observations, and experiences about topics revolving around the research problem. To ensure the truthfulness and appropriateness of the participant's responses, it is important to build rapport at the beginning of the interview (Dikko, 2016). For the sake of transparency and fairness, the participants signed a letter of permission allowing the researchers to conduct a recorded audio-video interview on the agreed platform, schedule, and scope. The researchers will also minimize biases in the analysis and interpretation of participants' interviews and will set aside personal interests, feelings, and/or emotions that may affect the result of the research. Integrity and carefulness will be observed by adhering to the agreement set in the ethical form.

Results and Discussion

In this section will be presents the result and discussion of the study on the empowerment of women's participation in the tourism industry and the position they hold equivalent to their qualities. The researchers organized transcribed texts into narrative blocks and applied coding across all texts. Inductive method of narrative analysis was used in analyzing the data gathered. Results were presented through themes that were finalized later in the study.

Women participation and employment

Respondents were asked about their opinion on related studies that mentioned valued roles and high salary positions in tourism employment as male-dominated and their answers varied depending on the tourism industry they represent. Respondent 1 (manager, local tourism and development office) saw that there is no issue between the participation of men and women in tourism as most of her staff are women and there were several high offices that were led by women. In contrast, Respondent 2 (manager, restaurant) agreed and noted that there was an observable gap between the employment of men and women. There are roles in this sector that need firmness and masculinity such as managers and kitchen staff and those that need enthusiasm like front desk officers and customer service staff. Although all respondents acknowledged that gender was not one of the qualifications to hire, their answers leaned toward gender stereotyping which proves the study of Hutchings et al. (2020) that mentioned tourism gender segregation is still rampant. Two apparent answers from the respondents in terms of hiring an applicant mentioned qualities, educational background, and job experiences. In support, Adnyani et al. (2021) believed that the factor of education is not always the cause of discrimination in tourism but the policies and the dominant culture can also affect gender inequality and employment. While it is true that respondents do not look at the gender in an applicant's employability, it is the qualifications or job requirements that set the limitation on both genders.

Discriminant based on gender

Most of the respondents commented on the fact that they see genders equally. Respondent 1 was assertive when she mentioned that there is no need to fight or empower women in their office because she feels empowered herself. This was also supported by Respondent 3 (owner, travel agency) as most of the employees in their field were women. We have come far from the traditional gender stereotyping but gender taboos are still present nowadays. We could still see women as subordinate even if they can voice out their opinion in meetings and gatherings, their capabilities and physical strength cannot align with men in the field. Contrary to the narrative stated by Respondent 2 and Respondent 4 (manager, hotel) when they both agreed that there were tasks that they can't assign to women. These tasks include those that need physical strength. Tasks that include lifting heavy loads were given to men as there are stronger physically. Meanwhile, tasks that relate to concerns dealing with clients were assigned to women because they are more pleasing and welcoming. Albayrak (2022) mentioned in his study that even though the number of women is twice higher than men in tourism employment, due to their gender, women are subjected to rules and discrimination. The tasks that include handling clients and demonstrating patience were given to women. Opposing the study of Çiçek et al. (2017) when they mentioned that women are expected to maintain the household and utilize these important skills in handling tasks in employment in the cultural tourism industry. In restaurants and hotels, they need physical manpower and authority thus, jobs that require strength like transfer of weights and leadership were given to men as women are seen as soft, lenient, and emotional (Díaz-Carrión and Vizcaino, 2022) and jobs that require dealing with clients were given to women in general. The respondent's answers mainly suggested that although high-status positions acknowledged the qualities of women and women are well represented,

men still dominated it and have more opportunities as they are critical thinkers and physically stronger.

Women experiences and qualities

The responses around women's experiences included problems, challenges, and issues concerning men and women. In general, women were mentioned mostly in the respondent's answers which narrowed down to women's emotions, maternity, and confidence. Respondent 2 mentioned the challenge in dealing with women employees comes when they are imposed to follow rules. Women tend to act based on their emotions resulting in rage and unprofessionalism. Respondent 3 commented on the lack of workforce when a woman takes her maternity leave. Respondent 4 shared that women applicants tend to lose confidence when put side by side with a qualified man applicant. All these answers can be put together as the biological nature of women. Díaz-Carrión and Vizcaino (2022) revealed in their study that women used emotions to defy gender stereotypes in the tourism industry. As a result of women's experiences, they are more visible and well-represented in high-status positions in some areas of the selected tourism industry.

Conclusion

We have come far from the traditional discrimination between men and women. Women have proven their participation in the tourism industry, yet the related studies and literature revealed that women still experience challenges in employment in tourism, especially in high-status and managerial jobs. Although the number of women employed in the selected tourism industry is relatively high compared to men, they usually hold average or low-skilled jobs. This study recognized the gap between men and women in the tourism industry of Imus. Certain qualifications were followed in employing men and women applicants such as qualities, educational background, and experience. On the other hand, these qualifications also limit each gender to getting equal opportunities to be hired. There are roles and tasks in restaurants and hotels that needed physical strength and client services. This paved room for gender stereotyping as biologically, men excel in physical strength and women are better at handling client services. This was also the case in the local tourism office and travel agencies as their service is aligned with dealing with clients so their employees are mostly women. Even if the selected tourism industry acknowledged the need to give equal treatment to both genders, discrimination is still present when the subject of work performance was discussed. The weaknesses of women when it comes to strength were magnified in giving roles and designating tasks. Women experiences and qualities were also seen as an issue as they can be seen as lenient in attitude and weak in nature which directly affects their participation.

Women continue to face challenges in employment in tourism. The researchers see this as a progressive issue. As women continue to prove their participation in many areas, people in the ranks continually demonstrate gender taboos. This study supports the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5 to give equal opportunities to men and women without discrimination. However, limitations on gender may be surpassed by some women but not all. The contributing factors that affect this goes down to their biological nature. The need for a feminist perspective in tackling the empowerment of women participation is a huge impact on women in the tourism industry. The

researchers also see this as an opportunity to promote women empowerment. The participation of women in most tourism industries was observed. Narratives from the respondents themselves served as evidence to this as they represent women and hold high-status roles in some tourism industries. It clearly suggested that women can achieve equally as men. Although this research presents the visible participation of women in the tourism industry, the study is still limited to selected sectors such as restaurants, travel agencies, hotels, and the local tourism and development office. There were other sectors that further researchers may focus on such as travel, airlines, museums, etc. The sample size of the respondents may not be enough to generalize the tourism industry in Imus as a whole. Thus, it provides future studies to expand and explore other sectors and respondents in the tourism industry. The researchers also see the need to amplify rules and policies and conduct discussions to end gender stereotyping and boost the confidence of women who are still in average roles. Owners and managers of many tourism industries should change from segregating tasks to specific genders to giving them equal roles to excel and perform their job regardless of their gender. Thus, future in-depth interview-based qualitative studies could examine more across other tourism industries and businesses to ascertain how women are represented and may also look at the validity of the assessment of employability of both genders.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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