

## **Cultural Beliefs on Women Career Advancement in Selected Kenyan Hotels**

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### **Abstract**

The hotel employment sector is characterized by a high proportion of women, yet they are underrepresented at the senior management level. Females are disadvantaged in the hotel industry because of the traditional male perceptions of workplace gender roles, stereotypes and discrimination. The objective of the study was to determine how cultural beliefs affect women's career advancement in 3-5-star hotels in the Nairobi County City Kenya. A descriptive research design was used. This study focused on a qualitative thematic analysis of in-depth, semi-structured interviews administered to 76 hotel managers. The interviews were used to gain more in-depth knowledge on issues concerning gender bias, leadership styles and gender stereotypes. The data was analysed using content analysis, in order to present data in words and themes, and allow for interpretations to be drawn. The results showed women were fewer at the management level and there were no women who were being paid the top most salaries. The study recommended adopting positive human resource practices that promote a gender-neutral culture in the hotels by providing unconscious bias training for all levels of employees to participate in.

**Keywords:** stereotyping, bias, gender, management, leadership

### **1. Introduction**

The World Travel & Tourism Council WTTC (2020) report revealed that the tourism sector had 10% of the total world employment in 2018 with 10.4 % of the global gross domestic product (GDP) and 319 million jobs. Women accounted for 54% of the total workforce while earning 14.7 % less than men and holding less than one fifth of the leadership roles in the tourism industry (United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), (2019). Africa has the highest proportion of women in senior management, with almost two fifths (38%) of executive roles in the region being held by females (Grant Thornton 2020). In addition, research from McKinsey, (2019) found that Rwanda and South Africa have increased women's representation in middle-management roles by 27% and 15% respectively.

The current global average of women board directors stands at 23.3%, up from 20.4% in 2018. Kenya has done better than this with 36% in 2021 up from 21% in 2017. However, most women in the hotel industry are employed in unskilled and low-paid jobs. The representation of women dwindles to around 21% at the executive level probably because of the cultural beliefs of the employees. These culture beliefs include gender bias, leadership styles and gender stereotypes. Such cultural beliefs in Kenyan hotels could be a gender barrier against women career advancement. Once addressed at the hotel workplace there would be a better working environment for women which, in-turn would unlock the full potential of women working in the hotels and thereby foster improved economic growth in (Mwakio, 2021).

According to the Women Matter Africa(2016), women in the hospitality sector are yet to receive the same privileges, opportunities and rights as their male counterparts. In the Kenyan hospitality industry, gender occupational segregation is notable, both horizontally where women and men take up different types of jobs and vertically where women remain at the lower-level positions (Mwakio, 2021). Women in hospitality and tourism are more likely to be undertaking part-time, informal, seasonal, agency, and casual work (ILO, 2017). Women should be represented in the hospitality sector as envisioned in the new Constitution (2010) article 27(3) (Domingo et al., 2016). This article stipulates that women should constitute 30% of all leadership positions in the country. It also emphasizes that gender equality should be demonstrated by not less than one-third representation of either gender in public appointments.

The culture beliefs that hindering women career advancement are double blind gender biases and prevailing leadership styles which come from gender stereotypes, social norms and societal expectations. A set of widely shared conscious and unconscious mental associations supported by society's attachment to these cultural myths of masculine authority, dominance and ambition, still shape people's ideas on leadership (Carli & Eagly, 2016). Prevailing leadership styles in the hotels have associated masculinity with authority. Managerial skills and leadership skills are also linked with men rather than women.

### *1.1 Objective*

The Objective of the study was to determine how cultural beliefs affect women's career advancement in 3-to-5-star hotels in the Nairobi City County Kenya.

The study results will help women working in the hotel industry overcome the glass ceiling effects and advance in their careers. The outcomes will also provide critical implications to hotels on how to retain and maintain talented female employees for purposes of the sustainability of hotels.

### *1.2 Conceptual Framework*

The conceptual framework assumes that the organizational culture in hotels within the Nairobi City County hotels influences women's career advancement. The conceptual framework was adapted from the theoretical model of a hotel organization by Allaire and Firsirotu (1984) and Dauber et al., (2012). The hotel's socio-structural systems include structures, strategies, policies and processes that align with the cultural system. They are also based on the conceptual

framework by Ibarra et al., (2013), that has cultural dimensions or beliefs about women, with three indicators (i) double bind of gender bias, (ii) prevailing leadership style and (iii) leadership stereotypes.

In consequence, the model used in this study assumed that the moderating variable (hotel environment) affected the direction and strength of the relations between the independent variable (organizational culture) and the dependent variable (women's career advancement). A moderating variable explains how, what, and why there is a relation between two variables (Tsang, 2015). The study therefore examined the relationships between the individual, organizational factors (independent variable) and women's career advancement (dependent variable).

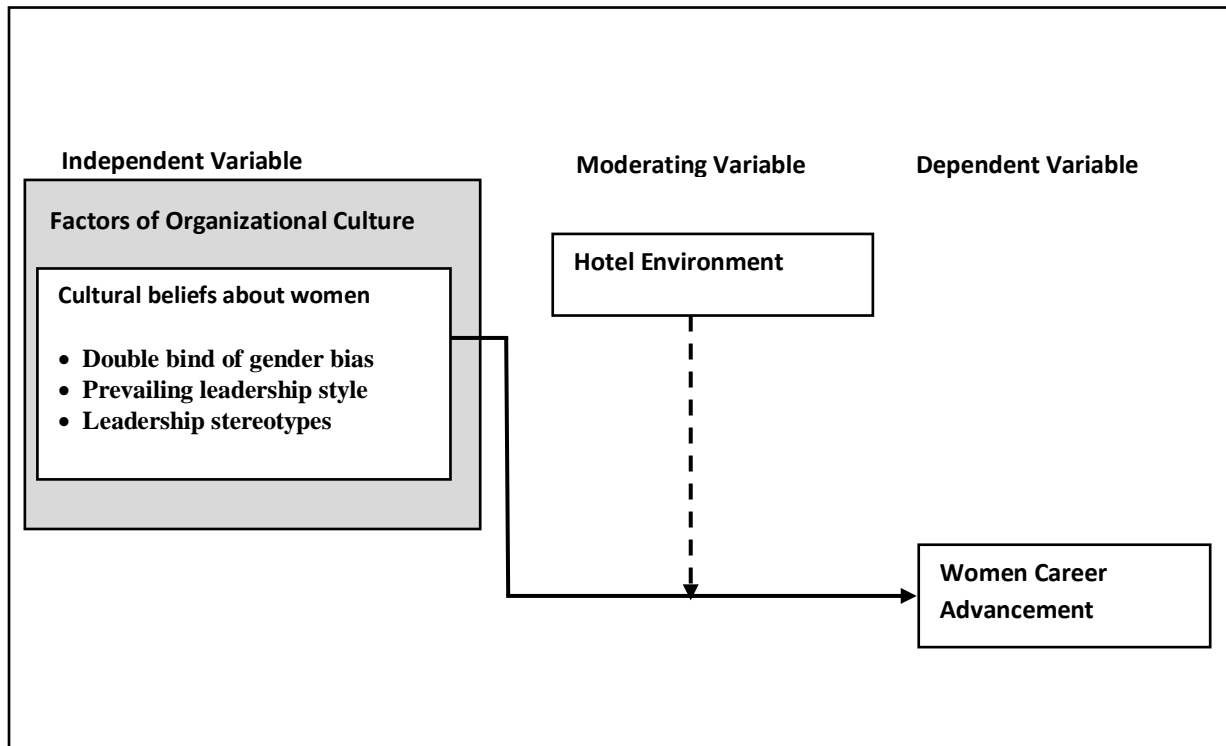


Figure 1: A model on cultural beliefs about women and women's advancement model in a hotel context

Source: Adapted and modified from Allaire and Firsirotu (1984) and Ibarra et al., (2013)

**2. Literature Review**

*2.1 Organizational culture model*

The Organizational culture model emphasizes the interaction between the culture in the hotel workplace and the behaviour of employees in the context of women’s career development. Organizational culture is influenced directly by staff members who pass on their respective characters and their opinions of social ideals, procedures, norms and behaviours to the workplace

in this case the hotel (Schein, 2004; Hatch 2013). The nature of the hotel industry is a fast-paced environment and with a need for rapid and clear communication with each other and between employee-employer and employee-customer in order to adapt and understand the workflow in the workplace. The hotel industry is required to generate healthy working environments and conditions for its employees so that they can commit and be well motivated. One of the attributes of organizational culture is cultural belief.

### *2.2 Cultural belief about Women and Career Advancement*

Cultural beliefs about women have long been recognized as a potential problem in the hotel workplace that deserve serious attention. According to Mwashita et al., (2020), there are cultural views that prevail on the roles and responsibilities of women in society. Further, that society does not view women as suitable to fill top positions, as they are thought not to be the primary breadwinners in the household (Khuzwayo, 2016). However, arguably, things have changed now that women are more educated and have more formal jobs outside the home. Cultural beliefs are passed on directly through social ideals, norms, values and behaviours from employer to employee and from employee to employee. The aspects of cultural beliefs in this study were double-bind gender bias, prevailing leadership styles and gender stereotypes.

### *2.3 Double-Bind Gender Bias*

The double bind of gender bias occurs when a woman working in the hotel does not behave as expected of her gender, and she is then labelled “bossy,” “intimidating,” or worse. According to (Gallant, 2014a), females who display ‘male’ leadership characteristics such as assertive behaviour, are double bound. When women are outspoken, are often labelled as feminists who are aggressive, and their career paths ends in a negative way. Their freedom to speak is suppressed (Khuzwayo, 2016a). Such women are seen as capable. They are however disliked and tagged as ‘never just right’ (Carli & Eagly, 2016). Such attitudes reinforce the unfair expectation that women leaders must make demands without being demanding and without speaking out. The societal expectations of women are often explained by the role congruity theory. This role congruity theory underlines the societal expectations about what is desirable for men and women. In such instances individuals’ characteristics and behaviours are evaluated and confirmed by the perceived requirements of their gender roles (Diekmann & Goodfriend, 2006). Even as social norms around gender shift, there is still a tight prejudice against female leaders based on the incongruity between stereotypes of women and the prevalent image of a leader. Somehow, this has resulted in women having to face a cultural backlash in the workplace. The backlash can be witnessed when women try to express equal related grievances at the workplace. Furthermore, if the women do not behave in a manner that is consistent with common stereotypes, they risk being dismissed or sidestepped (Casaca & Lortie, 2017; Karunarathne, 2015).

Women are constrained to speak candidly yet apologetically, and hold the line without sacrificing “niceness,” all the while sporting the perfect hairstyle and outfit. If women demonstrate stereotypical “masculine” leadership qualities—a dominant or assertive style—the societal expectations of the roles of women (e.g., compassion or nurturance) is violated and

could negatively impact work relationships (Meister et al., 2014). Furthermore, even though her gender brings with it numerous disadvantages, she must never appear to leverage it for her benefit (Baker & Cangemi, 2016). The second-generation gender bias is also apparent in men's performance which tends to be overstated compared to women's, especially in male-dominated hotel environments (Hunt et al., 2018). Ibarra et al.,(2013) express how women can face penalties in the workplace like missing out on hiring or advancement opportunities and salary increases due to double-standards. This mismatch between conventionally feminine qualities and features thought necessary for leadership in the hotel puts females in a double bind.

#### *2.4 Prevailing Leadership Styles*

Literature review shows that prevailing leadership styles prevent women from finding their way to the top. Women and men are often seen as having different leadership styles, with certain traits labeled as feminine and others masculine. According to Ryan et al., (2016a), being male is associated with leadership while the converse is the case for the attributes of a female. Subsequently, having been created by and for men, hotel organisational systems, structures, processes, and practices are imbued with norms that reflect masculine values, experiences, and life situations O'Neil et al., (2018). It is evident that a set of widely shared conscious and unconscious mental associations supported by society's attachment to these cultural myths of masculine authority, dominance and ambition still shape people's ideas on leadership (Carli & Eagly, 2016).

It is not surprising then that according to Khan, (2017) in a Women Matter's survey revealed that, close to 40% of women believed that the prevailing leadership styles in their organizations are incompatible with women's communication and leadership styles.

#### *2.5 Gender Stereotypes*

Gender stereotypes largely explain the inequalities within leadership. Gender is a social construct loaded with norms, expectations and prescribed traits (Casaca & Lortie, 2017). Society is more resistant to applying influence when managers are female than it is for males. Furthermore managerial skills are usually predominantly associated with men rather than women (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Women are required to tactfully blend toughness with warmth to be regarded as credible leaders, whereas this is not necessarily so for men (Acar & Acar, 2014). Women are typically viewed as more emotional and sensitive. Showing emotions can be negatively perceived in the workplace as having less leadership effectiveness (Brescoll, 2016). In the research of Thornton (2016), women are calling for change from the old leadership of the "alpha male" approach to embracing new ways of leadership that value inclusion, listening to views of others, allowing questions to be asked and collaborating to find the best solutions to problems.

While men may receive hotel job offers within more comfortable circumstances—beneficiaries of the glass cushion—women with fewer paths to the top may be more motivated to seize problematic opportunities. Furthermore, for most women, it seems that gender stereotypes are stubborn; change is slow, subtle and constantly negotiated (Cole, 2018). Constraints to women does not end at these hotel cultural beliefs but rather go beyond to the other areas of the work

environment. For this reason, hotel employees should for instance also be ready to look into the hotel practice challenges that do not allow successful women to advance in their careers.

The literature review discloses several aspects that influence women's career advancement in an organization. It however neither define which ones will promote or inhibit increased women's career advancement nor does it reveal the degree to which these factors could be considered promoters or inhibitors. A necessary further step of a well-designed quantitative research that is founded on actual empirical inquiry, with the field data collected and analysed appropriately is needed in these regards. This study aims to identify critical organizational cultural factors that either promote or retard women's career advancement and the commonness of these factors in hotels.

### **3. Method**

#### *3.1 Research Design*

This study used a descriptive design using a cross-sectional survey. Gall et al. (1996) observed that descriptive survey research involves collecting information from the respondents at a single point. Nairobi is Kenya's capital city and has the country's highest number of hotels (Tourism Regulatory Authority, 2019). The Nairobi City County has a relatively young population comprising of 1.605 million males and 1.533 million females (GOK, 2020).

#### *3.2 Sampling Technique and sample size*

The Tourism Regulatory Authority classification of 2019 was used to get the list of classified hotels in Nairobi. The study employed the stratified random sampling (SRS) technique to attain the desired representation from the population's subgroup (star-rated hotels). The strata used here consisted of the five, four, and three star rated hotels. The hotels were distributed into their respective star ratings in accordance with the star rating criteria of the Tourism Revenue Authority (TRA) of Kenya. From the TRA's 2019 list of classified hotels 18 hotels were selected using the systematic random sampling. This method was best suited to help answer the research objective with depth and focus (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). In line with the target population, the sample size was computed using the Yamane's (1967) formula.

To compute the sample size for the department heads, the following formula was used.

$$n = \frac{N1}{1 + Ne^2}$$

$$n = \frac{126(1)}{1 + 126(.05)^2} = 96$$

Therefore, a total of 96 departmental heads were purposively sampled as key informants for this study. The sample size comprised of women and men heads of departments. Table 1 displays the computations used to determine the study sample size of departmental heads and distributed across the star rating of hotels.

Table 1: Sample Size of Respondents

Description	5-star hotels	4-star hotels	3-star hotels	Sample Size	Sampling procedure
Number of hotels	5	4	9	18	Stratified
Departmental/Section Head	30	31	35	96	Purposive

### 3.3 Interview Schedule

The departmental heads from the sample of five, four and three star hotels in Nairobi City County were interviewed in order to understand women's career progression challenges. A list of semi-structured questions guided the interviews. The face-to-face interviews were used with non-verbal clues, encouraging a good understanding of the questions (Galletta, 2012). The interview schedules gathered data about the interviewee and the organizations background. Some questions examined cultural beliefs found in the hotel environment, while others were used to investigate the participant's views on gender stereotypes and leadership. The interview schedules formed the frame for the interviews. The interviews consisted of a combination of open, semi and closed questions. Facilitating a flexible two-way communication, semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to elicit more detailed information through probing and prompting, while providing participants with more time and opportunity to share deeper thoughts on the subject matter (Galletta & Cross, 2013).

### 3.4 Data Collection

Prior to collecting data, the researcher first booked appointments on phone, then visited the sampled hotels to seek permission from the managers and explained the purpose of the research. All interviewees were from the various departments in the hotels, which included housekeeping, front office, food production, food service, human resource and security department respectively. Each took between 30 to 40 minutes. However, where hotels did not allow interactions because of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, interviews, were conducted on the telephone and audio recordings kept. Interviews were carried out in accordance with the relevant conventions guiding social science research, which ensure participants' privacy, confidentiality and anonymity as well as informed consent of all participants (Veal, 2011).

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and content analysis done to generate the study dataset. To ensure confidentiality participant names we're not used. The transcripts coded, and emergent themes were sought for in relation to the research objective. All the completed interviews were coded using the following criteria: Hotel star rating—designation—interviewee number. For example, 5\*-FB-12 meant an interviewee from a 5-star rated hotel who was a food and beverage manager whose interview was completed as number 12, and 3\*-HR-06 meant an interviewee from a 3-star rated hotel who was a human resource manager whose interview was completed as number 6. Where necessary, respondent responses were represented using direct

quotes or voice recordings. Qualitative analysis was resorted using the software program SPSS and NVivo 12.

#### **4. Results**

The study targeted 96 hotel departmental heads for interview. Of these 76 were interviewed satisfactorily, accounting for 79.2% of the targeted 96 interviewees.

##### *4.1 Socio-demographic Profile of participants*

Most (60.5%) participants were females. These indicated that female workers dominate three to five-star hotels in Nairobi City County, a reflection of the status of the number of women and men employed by the hospitality sector in Kenya. This could be attributed to the fact that more females nowadays are as well educated as males, holding jobs and earning more money than they were years ago.

Concerning the age of the respondents, the majority, 38 (50.0%), were between 30 and 39 years. This demonstrated that three to five-star rated hotels in Nairobi City County are dominated by millennials, who appreciate flexibility in working hours, a work-life balance and a sense of balance and are a digital generation. Furthermore, 27 (35.5%) respondents earned between 51,000 and 100,000 shillings. This revealed that department heads do not earn high salaries in hotels. The earnings of employees in three to five-star rated hotels were average compared to their counterparts in other service sectors such as health and education. Concerning the level of education, the majority, 31 (40.8%), had an undergraduate degree qualification. This shows that most managers are well educated. Further, the study found that 50 (65.8%) were married or living with a partner. Being married could affect the women's career progression because of family responsibilities. Lastly, the majority 50 (68.4%) had worked in the hotel sector for over five years. This demonstrated that the heads of departments of three to five-star hotels in the Nairobi City County had adequate work experience to provide their opinions about the effect of organizational culture on women's career advancement for women.



Table 2: Characteristics of the Participants

Category	Frequency	Proportion%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	30	39.5
Female	46	60.5
<b>Age (years)</b>		
18-20 years	2	2.6
21-29 years	12	15.8
30-39 years	38	50.0
40-49 years	22	28.9
50-59 years	1	1.3
60 years and higher	1	1.3
<b>Household Income (KShs):</b>		
0-50,000	10	13.2
51,000-100,000	27	35.5
101,000-150,000	9	11.8
151,000-200,000	12	15.8
201,000-250,000	6	7.9
251,000-300,000	2	2.6
301,000-350,000	2	2.6
350,000 and above	8	10.5
<b>Level of Education</b>		
High school	2	2.6
High school or equivalent	9	11.8
College diploma	27	35.5
Bachelor's degree	31	40.8
Master's degree	5	6.6
Doctoral Degree	2	2.6
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	50	65.8
Previously married	4	5.3
Single	22	28.9
<b>Work experience in the hotel sector (years):</b>		
Less than a year	2	2.6
1-3	11	14.5
4-5	11	14.5
Over 5 years	52	68.4

*Note.* n= 76

*4.2 Influence of organizational cultural beliefs about gender prevalence on Women's Career Advancement*

This section presents the descriptive and inferential results of the influence of an organization's cultural beliefs about gender prevalence and women's career advancement.

Table 3: Descriptive Results of Organizational Cultural Beliefs about Gender Prevalence

Statements	M	SD
Women managers who display “masculine” leadership traits are labelled as “too aggressive.”	3.73	0.94
There are lesser female leaders than male managers in my company	3.66	0.99
Women who display “feminine” leadership traits are labelled “too soft.”	3.53	1.00
The dominant leadership styles display stereotypical traits of masculinity (e.g., authority, ambition, and toughness)	3.47	.960
There is an underlying belief that men make better leaders than women	3.35	1.05
Gender stereotyping (e.g., “those gender bind men” or “those feminists”) is addressed and countered by individual staff members in the hotel	3.23	1.01

*Note.*  $N = 147$ . Scale and Mean Range: 1 = *strongly disagree* (1.00 – 1.75), 2 = *disagree* (1.75 – 2.50), 3 = *agree* (2.50 – 3.25), 4 = *strongly agree* (3.25 – 4.00)

As shown in Table 3, the mean range for all the measures of cultural beliefs about gender prevalence in hotels is 3.23 to 3.73, indicating that the respondents generally agreed with all the items. Specifically, the respondents reported that women managers who demonstrated ‘masculine’ leadership attributes were classified as ‘too aggressive’ by employees ( $M = 3.73, SD = 0.94$ ). Female leaders in the hotels were less than their male counterparts ( $M = 3.66, SD = 0.99$ ). Furthermore, the respondents indicated that women who exhibited ‘feminine’ leadership attributes were labelled as ‘too soft’ ( $M = 2.53, SD = 1.00$ ), while the dominant leadership styles in the hotels exhibited stereotyped masculine traits such as authority, ambition, and toughness, to mention a few ( $M = 3.47, SD = .960$ ). The respondents also believed male employees are superior leaders ( $M = 3.35, SD = 1.05$ ) and that gender stereotyping was addressed and countered by individual staff members in the hotels ( $M = 3.23, SD = 1.01$ ).

*4.3 Perceptions about Gender beliefs aspects*

Qualitative results of the information gathered during in-depth interviews with the departmental heads revealed that cultural beliefs negatively influenced women’s career advancement to senior positions in the workplace. Cultural beliefs are beliefs that are learned and shared across groups of individuals. Although female employees dominate the hospitality industry in Kenya, the managerial positions are monopolized by men, as women occupy operational and supervisory positions. Therefore, cultural beliefs at the workplace play a significant role in women's progress to senior positions in star-rated hotels. The analysis revealed three themes about cultural beliefs about gender prevalence and their role in women's career advancement, namely; (1) gender stereotyping, (2) masculinity, and (3) male leadership preference.

#### *4.4 Gender Stereotyping*

Gender stereotyping as a theme emerged from the qualitative findings as a major barrier to women's career advancement as it dictated selections and recruitments by hotels for senior positions. Stereotypes came in form of perceived gender roles as well as the perception of skills and abilities associated with specific genders. One section head of a five-star-rated hotel indicated that the generalized preconception about men being better suited to occupy senior management positions was a big constrain to women's capability to occupy the senior positions as reported by a food and beverage manager:

“In the hotel, the senior positions are occupied by male employees, and even when a strong female employee with better qualifications is available for selection, a man will be preferred not because he is better but because men are seen as better leaders than women (5\*-FB-12).”

The same theme was revealed in the voice of a head housekeeper of a four-star hotel:

“Regarding senior positions, men are seen as a better bargain regarding senior positions. They are considered as having better and strong traits that position them better to occupy leadership positions than women. Women are seen as being benign and soft. If a woman is in the top-most positions, you will find one in the positions such as the housekeeping and food and beverage departments (4\*-HH-20).”

#### *4.5 Masculinity*

Stereotypes regarding the inclinations, skills and abilities of both men and women can be limiting to both genders. The respondents shared that women tend to give more thought to their actions, while men tend to act fast, sometimes rashly. Results that displayed bias for men were found in the sentiments given by the sectional heads who strongly indicated that men are better leaders because of their masculine characteristics that portray them as being superior to women. In addition, the study showed that women are stereotyped as being soft and gentle—not preferred qualities because of the kind of leadership that many hotels have employed. This is reflected in the experience of one head of section (a man front office manager in a 4-star rated hotel) who retorted that:

“[...] culturally, men are believed to be superior to women and have superior traits that are regarded as making one suitable for topmost leadership positions in the hotel industry. Men are seen as powerful, strong, and tough and are preferred over women because most hotels use transactional and authoritative leadership styles, which deny women opportunity to progress to higher positions (4\*-FO-03).”

#### *4.6 Preference for male leadership*

The sectional heads reported that the belief that women with characteristics that resembled those of men are overly aggressive and not fit for higher positions was a cultural belief bias among the factors generating the wider gender gap in the hospitality sector, as explained by one of the departmental heads—a front office manager of a three-star rated hotel:

“[...] the notion that women have feminine qualities that are too benign to survive the pressure of being, for example, a general manager has hampered their progress. As a result, few women in top positions still do not hire women when opportunities arise. Another crucial thing is that women who possess men’s traits are branded and labelled as ‘tomboys’ and overly aggressive—characteristics that do not work well with senior positions (3\*-FO-52).”

#### **4. Discussions**

This research aimed to determine how cultural beliefs affect women's career advancement in 3-to-5-star hotels in the Nairobi City County, Kenya. The results from the perception of hotel managers showed that gender stereotypes create an invisible barrier to women advancement making them often difficult to combat or even detect. Similarly, Eagly and Karau (2002), in their study, believed that men and women behave in ways that are gender consistent and that gender stereotypes make it difficult for men and women to go against the norms which enable them to fit in, for fear of social rejection and of all the other negative consequences that will follow. Women who lead are normally left with limited or unfavourable options no matter how far in their career they go or how they may choose to behave as leaders. Even if individuals are against stereotypes, these culturally formed inclinations still affect the employee’s perception and judgment.

The study revealed that role stereotyping characterised the cultural beliefs in three to five star-rated hotels in the Nairobi City County. Stereotypes are the baggage people carry upon entering the hotel which baggage is reinforced that of others who happen to entertain some portfolio of stereotypes. Self-fulfilling effects make individuals believe that as men and women, they embody the traits that come along with these stereotypes and this, in turn, could influence how they perceive themselves and their corresponding actions. This study also found out that leadership styles in three to five-star rated hotels in the Nairobi City County were characterised by male traits. These results are consistent with Gallant (2014) that females who display ‘male’ leadership characteristics like assertive behaviour are double bound. Khuzwayo (2016) also found similar results and argued that when women are aggressive, they are often labelled as hostile feminists, which often resulted in their career progression being negatively impacted by the decision to speak about their issues. This same sentence is a direct repetition of a similar one three paragraphs above.

In addition, the study results resonated well with Schmiede and Yousaf (2017), who argued that the prevailing leadership styles in the hotel sector favour men’s progression and prevent women from finding their way to the top. The study also suggests that a preference for stereotypical masculine behaviour associated with authoritative styles often puts women in a double bind of stereotypical perceptions. Many women in the hospitality industry occupy junior positions while the few who have made it to the top face hostile working conditions as compared to their male counterparts. Ryan et al. (2016) and Baum (2015) came up with similar findings and argued that role stereotyping limits the talents of women who are then blocked from promotion to senior management positions from the onset of their careers, creating segregated role models for future career-minded women in the hotel sector.

Interesting though, some of the women that the researcher interviewed were relatively high up in their hotels and had considerable authority, but none were vice presidents or general managers nor could interviewees identify even one woman who was.

### **5. Limitations**

The study was conducted in the Nairobi City County. Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalizing the results to the population of star rated hotels in Kenya and beyond. Another limitation is the cross-sectional design of the study, where all data were gathered at a single point in time does not allow us to make more definitive causal inferences as the researcher did not have the research opportunity to gather longitudinal data.

### **6. Conclusions and recommendations**

This research aimed at determining how cultural beliefs about gender prevalence influenced women's career advancement in three to five star-rated hotels in the Nairobi City County. Results of this study disclosed that cultural beliefs about gender prevalence had a negative and significant effect on women's career advancement. From the study findings, it can be concluded that cultural beliefs about gender prevalence such as gender stereotyping and the belief that men make better leaders than women are obstacles to women's career progression. Less traditional, more inclusive leadership styles on the other hand, might foster gender diversity and decrease the risk of stereotypical bias. The more the prevalent negative cultural beliefs are, the more the career advancement of women in three to five star-rated hotels will be hampered.

In practice, the results provided important implications for the management of hotels, which could as a result design better proactive and gender equality as well as inclusion practices also better development strategies, and similarly offer corresponding program/ activities for women employees. For example, the management of the hotels are encouraged to have gender neutral recruitment and clear performance evaluation criteria when appraising employees and also having a third party in the room when a candidate is being evaluated to remove any unconscious bias that may occur. This can help address the barriers women face in fully participating in the workplace and achieving their full potential.

Another recommendation would be to provide the necessary emotional support offered through mentoring by leaders in the industry, which is extremely valuable. Additionally, recognition and encouragement from the right sponsor can have a dramatic impact on an individual's career advancement. Not only will a sponsor champion the prospects and skills of women in the workplace, but they can also enable the women to take risks and make mistakes without these hampering an individual's career (Grant Thornton 2017).

Furthermore, practitioners could focus on the factors that enable women to advance in their careers such as renewed sense of urgency for women employees to experience the need to be ready for management roles, which could be from leadership training and high-profile assignments.

From the hotels perspective the executives could check on their current policies and regulations to see if they address the expectations of the women employees or craft and create more effective women career advancement policies. Having women leaders in strategic positions would help not only in developing women friendly policies but also providing role models. Opening channels of communication to address women's challenges and immediate feedback would improve work performance and enhance a positive working environment for women.

From an academic viewpoint, this study contributes to the body of knowledge on gender issues in hospitality. It also reveals dimensions of gender equality. This study builds the growing body of literature on gender and the workplace. Whereas the study concentrated on three to five star rated hotels, these findings may lead to compelling further research opportunities that can focus on one and two star rated hotels. Other fields that can be investigated besides hotels are those that encompass restaurants, casinos, lodges, and tourism businesses such as travel agents and tour operators.

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