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CONTENTS

Sr. No.	TITLE & NAME OF THE AUTHOR (S)	Page No.
1.	SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SMEs) AND COMMERCIAL LOAN ACCESSIBILITY DEBATE: KIGALI CITY VOICES <i>EGWAKHE, A. JOHNSON & KABASHA, ALPHONSE</i>	1
2.	AN OVERVIEW OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND PROBLEMS OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS AT DAVANAGERE CITY <i>SUNANDA V.M. & DR. HIREMANI NAIK</i>	10
3.	HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AWARENESS IN SELECT SMEs (SMALL MEDIUM ENTREPRENEUR) <i>VANAMALA MOHANREDDY & DR. R. MAREGOUD</i>	14
4.	ASSESSING THE EXISTENCE OF THE GLASS CEILING THAT AFFECTS WOMEN'S CAREER GROWTH IN THE INDIAN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY <i>USHA DINAKARAN</i>	18
5.	BUYER-SELLER RELATIONSHIP CONSTRUCTIONS IN THE BUSINESS BUYER BEHAVIOR: WHOLESALE AND DISTRIBUTOR FAST MOVING CONSUMER GOODS (FMCG) INDUSTRY IN INDONESIAN MARKET PLACE <i>AGUS TRIHATMOKO, R., MUGI HARSONO, SALAMAH WAHYUNI & TULUS HARYONO</i>	24
6.	VALUE OF INFORMATION IN MANAGEMENT OF AGRI-RISK: A CASE STUDY OF MOBILE BASED AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION SYSTEMS IN INDIA <i>DR. G. KOTRESHWAR & V. GURUSIDDARAJU</i>	34
7.	EXPLORE E-COMMERCE STRATEGY IN CHINA <i>CHAO CHAO CHUANG & DR. FU-LING HU</i>	37
8.	LITERATURE REVIEW OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND THE ROLE OF INDEPENDENT DIRECTORS <i>DR. MITA MEHTA & SAYANI COOMAR</i>	40
9.	AFFECT AND ORGANISATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOUR (OCB): A CONCEPTUAL EXPLORATION <i>P. VIJAYALAKSHMI & DR. M. V. SUPRIYA</i>	42
10.	NON-MONETARY BENEFITS & ITS EFFECTIVENESS IN MOTIVATING EMPLOYEES <i>JYOTHI.J</i>	45
11.	A STUDY OF POST RECESSION INDIVIDUAL INVESTMENT BEHAVIOR <i>SONIYA SINGH</i>	49
12.	BASEL III IMPLEMENTATION IN THE INDIAN BANKING SYSTEM <i>GEETIKA</i>	56
13.	A STUDY ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY IN INDIAN BANKING SECTOR <i>DR. A. R. SUDHAMANI</i>	60
14.	COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF NUMBER OF LOANS DISBURSED TO AMOUNT OF LOANS DISBURSED (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SHGS-INDIA) <i>DURGAPRASAD NAVULLA & DR. G. SUNITHA</i>	64
15.	DETERMINANTS OF EMPLOYEE SPIRITUALITY AND THEIR OUTCOMES: A STUDY OF BANKING SECTOR AT AGRA REGION <i>SHWETA KHEMANI & DR. SUMITA SRIVASTAVA</i>	68
16.	CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AS A BRANDING TOOL WITH REFERENCE TO CARBORUNDUM UNIVERSAL LIMITED (CUMI), KOCHI <i>P. BALASUBRAMANIAN, SREEJA P.S, SURYA P.T & SHEETHAL M.S</i>	74
17.	IMPACT OF GREEN MARKETING ON CONSUMER BUYING DECISION (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BANGALORE CITY) <i>NAGALAKSHMI G S</i>	79
18.	A STUDY OF RURAL CONSUMERS' SATISFACTION AND THEIR PERCEPTION TOWARDS TELECOM (WIRELESS) SERVICE <i>SUSHILKUMAR M. PARMAR & MILAN S. SHAH</i>	82
19.	EMPLOYEE PERCEPTION ON HR PRACTICES: A STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE INSURANCE ORGANISATIONS <i>B. RAGHAVENDRA & DR. D. APPALA RAJU</i>	87
20.	ORGANISATIONAL CONFLICT AND MOST PREFERRED CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES (A RESEARCH STUDY CONDUCTED AT NTPC, PATNA) <i>KIRTI</i>	92
	REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK & DISCLAIMER	101

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ASSESSING THE EXISTENCE OF THE GLASS CEILING THAT AFFECTS WOMEN'S CAREER GROWTH IN THE INDIAN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The glass ceiling as a barrier in career progress of marginalized groups, particularly women, is a subject matter of interest and discussion for decades. Some of the barriers that are felt can also be self-imposed by the woman. While many organizations believe that they do not discriminate against women, the lack of a strong leadership guidance for women by other women, and other implicit and informal forms of prejudice are often unknown (or unacknowledged) by several organizations. While there has been increased visibility of women employed in various industries including the hospitality industry in recent times, the absence of women in supervisory and leadership roles is still felt. This paper aims to assess the existence of a glass ceiling that affects women's career growth in the hospitality industry with respect to the Indian environment. It aims to explore the factors and perceptions of women in the hospitality industry that may interfere in a smooth career progression for them.

KEYWORDS

women, glass ceiling, discrimination, hospitality industry, hotels.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS THE 'GLASS CEILING'?

The expression 'glass ceiling' was coined in an article published in the Wall Street Journal in 1986 by Carol Hyowitz and Timothy D. Schellhardt ("The glass ceiling", 2009). The terms sustained itself for decades now and has been in frequent usage to discuss the existent of an invisible barrier that prevents someone from achieving further success. Glass ceilings are most often observed in the workplace and are usually a barrier to achieving power and success equal to that of a more dominant population. A common manifestation of this is seen where a woman who has better skills, talent, and education than her male peers but is obviously being passed over for promotions. Or for a woman to get paid lesser for the same job that her male peers are doing despite holding similar qualifications.

The existence of the glass ceiling as an invisible barrier is "so subtle that it is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents women from moving up the corporate hierarchy." With an outlook from their position on the corporate ladder, women can view the senior-level management positions but are often turned from "reaching the top" (Morrison, *Breaking the Glass Ceiling*, 1987). According to Morrison, the glass ceiling "is not simply a barrier for an individual, based on the person's inability to handle a higher-level job. Rather, the glass ceiling applies to women as a group who are kept from advancing higher because they are women." In the hospitality industry, we see the very prevalence of the glass ceiling by the limited number of women in leadership, supervisory, and managerial roles. Although there have been steady improvements with time, two academic studies (Woods, 2000) pertaining to the hospitality industry revealed that lesser than 10% of hotel general managers were women. This discrepancy is also visible in university hospitality classrooms, where a major chunk of the class students are still female, but majority of the senior industry executives who are panelists and speakers are predominantly male.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

ROLES OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

Various studies and research often reveal consistent findings of women forming the minority in top leadership positions and supervisory roles both in government service and private sector (Barr 1996; Daily, Certo, and Dalton 1999; Morrison, White, and Velsor 1992).

A 2013 study (Catalyst, 2013) revealed that only a marginal 20 of the Fortune 500 CEOs were women, and in 2011, women held close to 14% of senior level positions at these companies. At lower levels, women comprised just over 50% of the employees occupying "managerial and professional specialty occupations" (Bureau of Labour Statistics 2003). While only thirteen companies belonging to the hospitality related field on the Fortune 500 list, every single one of them had a male CEO.

A better insight of both the social perspective and the industry on the roles of women in families shows women's professional outcomes and performances being impacted with outlooks of both peers and colleagues within their work environments on the professional front and from their families on the personal front.

The most frequently held self-imposed barriers tend to involve family and household responsibilities and attaining work-life balance. The most common workplace barriers were the dearth of strong mentorship programmes, unplanned career choices and moves, and perceptions and stereotypes related to women.

FAMILY STRUCTURE AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

The biggest factor that affects women's career growth to the upper echelons at the workplace is family responsibility. In many cultures, communities, and countries world over, the woman is still considered to the lynchpin in running the household. These home responsibilities are often perceived to be divergent with the responsibilities of upper management (Stockdale and Crosby, 2004).

Conservative predispositions and stereotypes about women in the professional environment have led many to believe that men are more motivated and determined go-getters than women; women tend to have soft skills and do not possess leadership skills. (Brief, 2008). Several connections may be formed between gender stereotypes and women capabilities in terms of managing companies. Powell (2010:130) suggested that "...it is difficult for women to be as effective in leader role ..." Over the last thirty years, corporate males in the US, UK and Germany continue to see women as less qualified than men for managerial positions. (Schein, 2007).

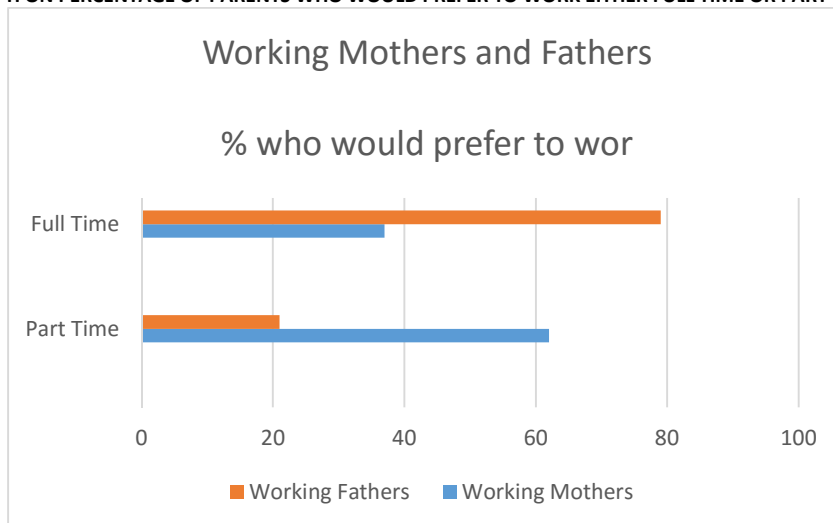
Different approaches have been employed to tackle the issue of promoting women to senior level jobs in the hospitality industry – some of them include networking, career tracking, mentoring, succession planning and adoption of a comprehensive approach. (Wirth, 2001). The research indicated that networks play a massive role in furthering career progression and that these informal social systems use friendships and alliances to organize, influence and rewards within hospitality organisation. Mentoring and training are very important in terms of women's career development.

WORK - FAMILY BALANCE

It is widely accepted that the lack of women in senior, corporate positions is due to conflict between family and career; and that women feel the need to choose between their career and family (Cutler & Jackson, 2002). Nieva (1985) in her study found that in some cases, women themselves were hesitant in furthering their careers and passed on their promotions so as to not burden themselves with the additional stress of balancing work and family. Stautberg (1987) stated that with some companies, employers themselves were hesitant to promoting women, with the assumption that women would prioritize their family's needs over professional demands and could possibly be underperforming as a result. This is an outdated research result but its outcome can still be visible today, especially in the hospitality industry.

In a qualitative study of interviews with female respondents (Winkler, 2011), one respondent proceeded to describe biases by many organizations after she gave birth to her child. The participant seemed to express interest in other jobs but felt being discriminated against because she had a child. On a personal front, she also felt confronted by her friends and acquaintances as they were often judgmental about the limited time she spent with her child. Her husband also participated in a very limited manner when it came to sharing responsibilities of the child. She felt that taking care of the child was primarily her responsibility and this affected both her personal and professional situations.

FIG. 1: BAR GRAPH ON PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS WHO WOULD PREFER TO WORK EITHER FULL TIME OR PART TIME (Parker,2009)



(Note: Based on parents working full-time or part-time who have children ages 16 or younger; mothers n=135, fathers n = 165. Source: Pew Research Centre Social and Demographic Trends survey report conducted July 20 - August 2, 2009)

GENDER-RELATED STEREOTYPING AND THE BACKLASH EFFECT

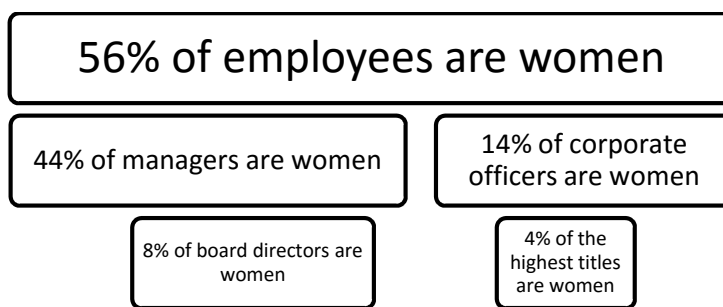
Another difficult factor in breaking the glass ceiling is gender stereotyping of women – following it and going against it are both viewed negatively; referred to as the backlash effect (Rudman, L.A., 1998).

A study of prescriptive gender stereotypes and backlash towards agentic women (Rudman and Glick, 2001) discussed the types of discrimination due to perceived incompetence occur due to descriptive gender stereotypes (i.e., what women and their traits are assumed to be). Extensive research has dissected how perceived sex differences (e.g., in intelligence, confidence, ambition) prevent women from being perceived as competent leaders (e.g., Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Glick, Wilk, & Perreault, 1995; Heilman, 1983). The suggested solution to this problem is for women to act the way men do so as to disconfirm gender stereotypes, (Wiley & Eskilson, 1985). As a catch-22 created by the backlash effect, women who do so are not liked, because they violate the prescriptive aspect of female gender stereotypes (i.e., what women should be); in particular, when compared to the school of thought that dictates and expects women to be more nurturing, compassionate, considerate, and sensitive to others’ feelings. Due to women being held to a higher standard of niceness than men, agentic women may be perceived as competent but insufficiently feminine (Glick & Fiske, 1999; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999), thus resulting in a possibly hostile attitude towards them by men.

LACK OF WOMEN IN SENIOR POSITIONS

A Stanford research study (Wynn, Seeing through the glass ceiling, 2012) revealed that women constitute 47% of the labour force, 1/3 of all MBA degrees, and only 2% of Fortune 500 CEOs. In 48% of Fortune 1000 companies, there are no women executives at all.

FIG. 2: WOMEN STILL FORM A KEY CHUNK OF THE HOTEL WORKFORCE BUT EXECUTIVE PROSPECTS ARE STILL LIMITED. Adapted from Primavera B. (2001).



In the hospitality industry, particularly where the gender stereotypes are taken more seriously, two of the biggest factors that affect women are long, odd working hours and the type of service level jobs that are found in many hotels (S Mooney, 2009). Long working hours are seen as a fundamental basic in the hotel industry as the nature of the job demands it highly. (Brownell, 1993; Hicks, 1990; Knutson Schmidgall, 1999).

It was also found in a study that both men and women emphasized self-imposed barriers over workplace barriers. A lot of these barriers for women could stem from the personal front like managing the home and desire to spend more time and be involved in the lives of their children. While these issues have been existing for decades within the industry, and organizations and hotels are encouraging more women to join them, they’re not realizing in the process that they’re simply ignoring and not addressing and helping women to successfully manage these barriers. A new approach with a strong focus on an active leadership development is the need of the hour (Boone, Houran, Veller, 2013).

EXCLUSION FROM MALE DOMINATED PEER GROUPS

Women often face exclusion from their male dominated peer groups - also known as the “Old Boys’ Club”. This is an informal network and gathering of male managers, particularly at senior levels of management that women feel and admit they are intentionally being kept out of (S Mooney, 2009). These informal male networks are often built around sports – either playing a game of golf or giving tickets to watch football matches, both of which women rarely get to be a part of. Extending it to a more formal platform, many women report there are "certain kinds of meetings" they don't get asked to as they are not viewed as decisions makers. Women in the corporate world tend to not travel on business as frequently as men do, according to surveys by Korn/Ferry International (1982) and Wall Street Journal/Gallup (1984). Studies confirm these differences in status and the different treatment of women. Another study showed that among employees at similar levels of qualifications and experience, men "managed greater numbers of people, had more freedom to hire and fire, and had more direct control of the company's assets" than women (Harlan and Weiss).

This informal boys' club affects women in following areas – networking, interview and selection process, double standards of behaviour for men and women and potential discrimination against women with young families.

NEED OF THE STUDY AND IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Despite the presence of many women professionals in the hospitality industry, the absence of women in supervisory and leadership roles is really prominent. There also seems to be a higher number of younger female professionals than older women in the industry, which doesn't seem to be so in the case of men. The study aims to understand the existence of any discriminatory platform or a glass ceiling that affects the career progression of women in this industry.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Assessing the existence of the glass ceiling that affects women's career growth in the Indian hospitality industry.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To identify the reasons behind the limited presence of women in leadership and supervisory roles in the hospitality industry and to understand the existence of a glass ceiling where women get discriminated against.

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLING

A total sample size of 80 was taken for the study. The sample unit consisted of women in the age groups of 22 – 50 who are currently employed in the hotel industry. The respondents were from the cities of Bangalore, Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, and Chennai.

STATISTICAL TECHNIQUE

The sampling technique used in the research was non-probabilistic sampling where convenient sampling was done.

QUESTIONNAIRE

The primary data was collected by using a qualitative questionnaire prepared earlier. The questionnaire had a total of 9 questions, with 1 question employing the scaling technique of Likert scale of agreement.

PROCEDURE

The primary data was collected by questionnaires filled in an online format. Scoring was done by taking the average of the respondent selections for option-based and scaling questions.

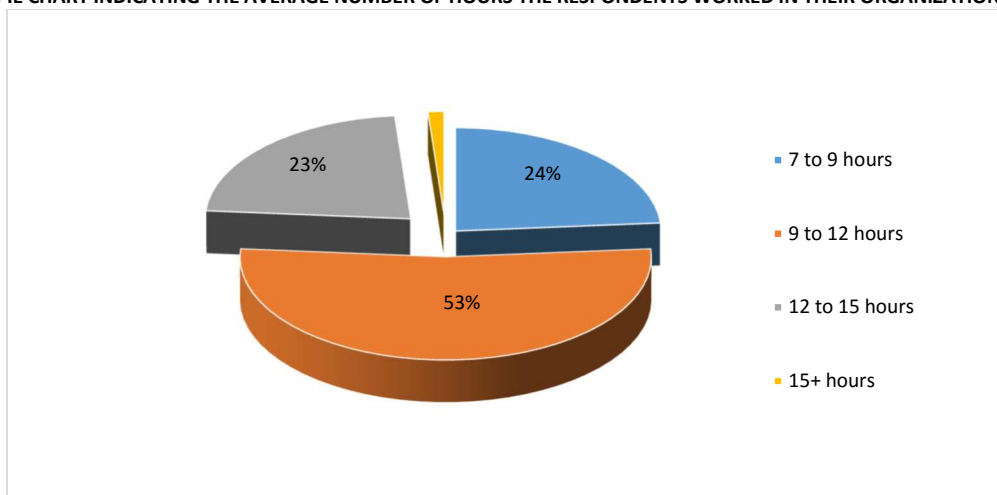
KEY FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Over 80% of the respondents were younger and from the age group of 21 – 35 years. The highest participation was from the age group of 21 – 28 years, with the numbers continuing to dip lower after that. It is also possible that the younger respondents were also easily available to access and participate in the questionnaire online.

45% of the respondents had worked in the industry for 5 – 10 years and gained reasonable experience to understand its intricacies and that of the glass ceiling. This was followed by nearly 28% of the respondents having less than 5 years of experience, and just stepping into the industry.

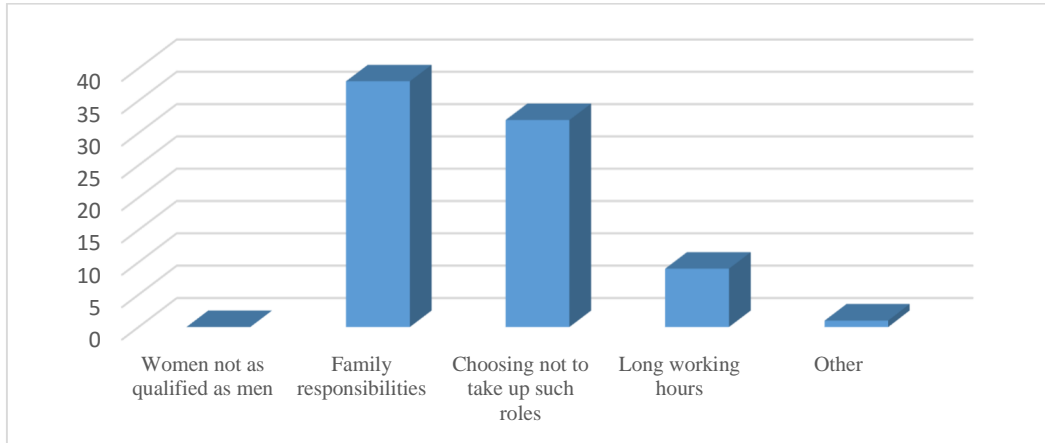
53% of the respondents worked 9 to 12 hours a day and 24% of the respondents worked 7 to 9 hours every day. 23% of the respondents worked 12 to 15 hours a day. With 8 hours being the standard work shifts in most industries, and given the odd and long hours of the hospitality industry, more than half the respondents putting in 9 to 12 hours of work a day seems like a common norm.

FIG. 3.1: PIE CHART INDICATING THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF HOURS THE RESPONDENTS WORKED IN THEIR ORGANIZATION EVERY DAY



An overwhelming 80% of the respondents claimed that they had seen and/or experienced discrimination against women at some point in their career. The lack of a positive work environment, an encouraging boss, prejudiced male peers, could affect women's career decisions in quitting their jobs after a few years of service. A whopping 75% of the respondents felt that starting a family has/would affect the way their supervisors and peers assessed their performance. 20% disagreed. As discussed earlier, family responsibilities still tend to fall squarely on the shoulders of the women in the household, and as a result, the gender stereotyping and social expectations may affect the judgment of supervisors and peers during appraisals of maybe not prioritizing work responsibilities sufficiently.

FIG 3.2: GRAPH SHOWING THE RESPONDENTS' PERCEIVED REASONS FOR THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AND SUPERVISORY ROLES



48% of the respondents felt that the lack of women in leadership and supervisory roles was due to having familial responsibilities. 40% felt that the women themselves didn't want to take up such roles. 11% believed that the long working hours played a crucial factor in this. No one thought that the women weren't as qualified as men for the same job. Family responsibilities still tend to fall mostly on women, even in the modern day as they are stereotyped and considered to be more nurturing and compassionate and are expected to fulfil family responsibilities. The belief that would stem behind not wanting to assume such roles could also be driven largely by family responsibilities.

A majority of the respondents - nearly 73%, believed that women must perform better than men to be recognized/promoted for the same job. With respect to the review of literature discussed in this paper and the presence of a backlash effect, the gender stereotyping of women to be assumed as kind and considerate and as a result, not being strong leaders' pushes women to work harder and better to be recognized/promoted. In addition, when being assertive and confident and other "manly" traits, women can also be negatively assessed as aggressive and bossy.

100% of all the respondents felt that they were being excluded from certain events and informal meetings which were strictly organized by and invited only male supervisors and peers from their workplace. While the establishment of an old boys' network is clear, in the Indian context, there also seems to be a clear gender stereotyping where women might be assumed to not want to participate in such events or assumed to take care of family issues after work hours. The exclusion is still this prominent in the Indian hospitality industry as the influx of women employees in this industry is still relatively new, and only initiated in the last three decades or so.

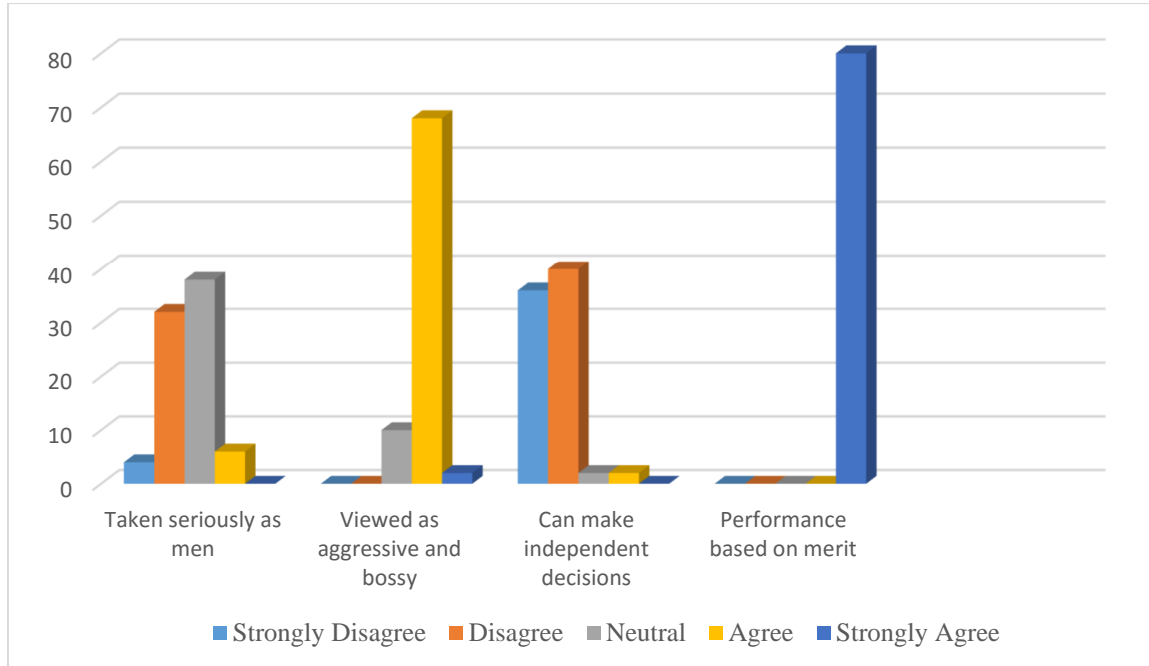
Nearly 48% of the respondents had neutral views on being taken just as much as seriously as their male counterparts were at work. 40% of the respondents disagreed on the statement of being taken seriously as their male colleagues. There still seems to be a shaky ground on how women are perceived in the industry and the gender stereotyping as discussed earlier may have a big role to play here.

A majority 85% respondents felt that whenever they were firm and confident with their colleagues at work, they were perceived as being aggressive and bossy. This is an area of major concern and a clear manifestation of the backlash effect. Women try to break out of the mould by being more assertive and confident, but they can often be perceived to be "bitchy" and "bossy" while it's possible men behaving the same way would be perceived as strong leaders.

An incredible 95% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that they could make decisions at work without their supervisor consulting their male colleagues/subordinates. This is one of the biggest hiccups in increasing the number of women leaders and supervisors as they are still possibly seen as weak and not as influential decision makers. This makes their supervisors consult with their colleagues and subordinates to revalidate their decisions. This practice can also have a serious negative effect on the employee morale as it indicates trust issues.

100% of all respondents believed that people should be rewarded based on their performance, regardless of their sex. Everyone demands a fair assessment and any gender bias present should be done away with.

FIG. 3.3: GRAPH SHOWING THE LEVELS OF AGREEMENT OF THE RESPONDENTS TO THE SITUATIONAL STATEMENTS IN THE WORKPLACE



RECOMMENDATIONS**FOR ORGANIZATIONS****ADOPT A STRONG LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME AND GET WOMEN MENTORS ON BOARD**

While many organizations may truly believe that they are providing all they can in order for women to grow in their careers, it's possible that many women feel the lack of a strong support system that enables them to do so. Organizations need to adopt a strong leadership programme for women and other discriminated groups and help them shatter their possible mould of self-doubt and discomfort and push them to achieve more. In addition, having a scaffolding platform by having women mentors on board – from different organizations as well – would help entrench that support system in place.

ENCOURAGE FLEXIBLE TIMINGS

A highlighting concern for women is still managing and balancing work and family life. Organizations must try to encourage flexible timings when possible and encourage both men and women to do so. Family responsibilities are still just as important, and by letting both men and women participate to work from home and utilizing flexible timings, organizations are reassuring their employees that they do take and understand their needs seriously. In addition, it also promotes gender equality when allowing both men and women to utilize it, thus also pushing men to participate and take on more household responsibilities.

DISMANTLE THE OLD BOYS' NETWORK

100% of all women respondents in this study felt being excluded from informal meetings and gatherings that often comprised male supervisors and peers. This network, while helps other men to get further by social interaction and other related activities, voluntarily keeps out women from these circles. Women also need a platform to participate in while off work hours and interact and network with other members from the industry. All male gatherings that intentionally keep out women need to be dismantled and a more supportive networking gathering that includes people of all the sexes, communities, and is bias free needs to be initiated.

FOR WOMEN**TAKE THE INITIATIVE AND BE A RISK-TAKER**

It's easy to get lost in the sea of employees and being noticed, but it's even harder to make an impression when you tend to be a minority. It is thus fundamental to be the initiator and risk taker and be as visible as you can at work. Women need to interact cross functionally at work, participate in discussions and events, maybe even learn and/or enhance their entrepreneurial skills. They also need to find the perfect balance of being polite yet firm and push themselves to not be taken lightly. It is essential for women to have that presence as the study does indicate that majority of the respondents didn't think their supervisors gave them sufficient freedom to make decisions by themselves.

GET YOUR PARTNER EQUALLY INVOLVED IN HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES

It's important for women to remember and remind themselves that the entire load of household responsibility doesn't need to necessarily fall on their shoulders - women must get their partners involved as much as possible. Men being an equal part of household activities – including chores and taking care of the family, would help inculcate an added responsibility along with being more understanding towards female colleagues and superiors. It will also encourage them to set and utilize flexible timings at work and help shatter societal expectations of gender.

BUILD A SUPPORT NETWORK

One of the key things women are currently missing on is a support network and a platform that helps them hone their executive skills. Women need to get out and network more – be it at business summits, industry conferences, even company events – to be more visible and be taken more seriously. These networks don't necessarily have to be women oriented but can also include men who are just as supportive. Networks help build references, are integral to one's career, and help in finding mentors and a strong social network group that helps one another to succeed and grow. Other women are also looking to build on and expand their networks, so one must tap into these and grow as much as they can.

CONCLUSION

The glass ceiling seems to manifest itself across many industries, but given the erratic nature of the hospitality industry and in lieu of the Indian context, its presence is felt a little more than usual. To completely remove any form of discrimination and the existence of such a barrier, both organizations and individuals need to play a crucial role. There is a necessity to let go of decade old practices and assessment measures – no evaluating bias must come into play. While abolishing sexist discrimination, men should also be entitled to paternity leave and flexible work timings. Tangible effort is required from both male and female employees as well as initiatives from organizations to fight the glass ceiling successfully.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER STUDY

The study of the glass ceiling and affecting career progress can be studied in a micro environment. While this study pertained to the hotel industry in general, scope for further study can analyse the same variable but compartmentalize it to housekeeping, kitchen, service, executives, and managers. The research would reveal the possible ramifications of such a barrier.

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ANNEXURE

The expression 'glass ceiling' is used to describe artificial barriers that prevent qualified women from advancing within their organization.

Examples are:

- (1) Barriers that prevent women from being promoted into upper management positions
- (2) Pay inequities for equal work,
- (3) Stereotyping

This questionnaire aims to assess the existence of a glass ceiling in your work environment and study the possible outcomes of it as a result. Your responses would be kept strictly confidential.

1. Please specify your age.

- a) 21 – 28
- b) 28 – 35
- c) 36 – 44
- d) > 44

2. How many years of experience have you had?

- a) Less than 5 years
- b) 5 – 10 years
- c) 10 – 20 years
- d) 20 – 30 years
- e) More than 30 years

3. On an average, how many hours do you work every day?

- a) 7 – 9 hours
- b) 9 – 12 hours
- c) 12 – 15 hours
- d) More than 15 hours

4. At any point in your career, have you seen/experienced any discrimination towards women?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Can't say

5. Has/will starting a family affect the way your peers and supervisors assess your performance?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Can't say

6. Do you feel that women must perform better than men to be recognized/promoted for the same job?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Can't say

7. Have you felt excluded from certain events and informal meetings which were strictly organized by and invited only men from your workplace (comprising superiors and peers)?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Don't know

8. Women are underrepresented in supervisory and leadership roles in the hotel industry. Why do you think this could be the case?

- a) They're not as qualified as men.
- b) They have familial responsibilities.
- c) They choose to not take up such roles.
- d) They can't commit to the long working hours.
- e) Other

9. Please use the following scale to answer the question below:

- a) Strongly Disagree
- b) Disagree
- c) Neutral
- d) Agree
- e) Strongly Agree

10. I'm taken seriously just as my male counterpart in the workplace.

- a) Strongly Disagree
- b) Disagree
- c) Neutral
- d) Agree
- e) Strongly Agree

11. Whenever I'm firm and confident, I'm viewed as aggressive and bossy.

- a) Strongly Disagree
- b) Disagree
- c) Neutral
- d) Agree
- e) Strongly Agree

12. I can make decisions at work without my supervisor consulting with my male colleagues/subordinates.

- a) Strongly Disagree
- b) Disagree
- c) Neutral
- d) Agree
- e) Strongly Agree

13. People should be rewarded based on their performance, regardless of whether they are men or women.

- a) Strongly Disagree
- b) Disagree
- c) Neutral
- d) Agree
- e) Strongly Agree

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