

Women Occupational Empowerment in the Omani Tourism Sector

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ABSTRACT

Investigating issues on women empowerment and employment are relatively well established in research. However, few works have been conducted in regard with tourism and even less in the Arabic region. Although tourism is a relatively new industry in Oman, women's contributions to the tourism profession in this evolving country have evidentially increased in the recent years. Accordingly, this research aims to examine the attitude of the Omani women working in tourism toward this profession and to explore the extent to which gender horizontal or vertical segregation exists in the tourism employment, before illustrating the various driving and restraining factors influencing the Omani women career in tourism. A combination of semi-structures interviews and a unified survey was utilized in this research, which helped identify both qualitative and quantitative feedbacks. The research resulted in several major findings regarding the current situation of female workers in the Omani tourism sector, which could be significant for enhancing the ongoing efforts for empowering women in Oman.

Key words: Oman, women employment, women empowerment, tourism, gender

INTRODUCTION

In their inclusive report entitled "*Women's Empowerment Principles: Equality Means Business*", the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the UN Global Compact (2010) claim that empowering women to participate in the economic development at all levels and in all sectors is essential for building strong economies and stable, just societies. Other reports (e.g. UN 2000, UNICEF 2007) deem that empowering women is not a matter of luxury or just for strengthening women's rights, but an issue of necessity if a country is to rise above the difficulties associated with poverty, assuming that if women are empowered to do more, economic growth will be more approachable. Conversely, eliminating a significant part of a nation's workforce can have detrimental effects on the economy of that nation. Accordingly, "women empowerment" has recently become a noteworthy topic of research. In this context, numerous researchers (e.g. Ciulla 1998; Page and Czuba 1999; Blanchard *et al* 2001) argue that "empowerment" does not mean giving people power, as they have power in their wealth of knowledge and motivation to excel, but letting this power out by encouraging people to express their skills and knowledge to overcome obstacles in life and ultimately develop within their societies.

Although women are currently working in almost all the different aspects of life, segregation between genders in terms of employment, earnings, positions and promotions is still broadly evidential. For instance, Mitra (2003) states that even though educational equality has opened up more possibilities for female employees, there are still less opportunities for women than men, and fewer women are generally moving to senior management positions. Jurajda (2003) believes that, in many EU countries, the introduction of anti-discriminatory legislation did not led to equality in opportunities, as studies assess that men could be paid up to 30% more than their female counterparts in the same occupations.

Even in self-employment, men find it easier to raise capitals for self-employment schemes (Leung 2006).

In this regard, researchers generally believe that there are still many barriers hindering women empowerment and equity. First and most importantly, ideas inherently lie into the cultures of certain nations and societies (Nussbaum 1995). Even if the state and its legislators are aware of the benefits of women's equal participation, many societies could still be scared of changing the status quo. Accordingly, societal norms may continue impeding women empowerment, regardless of the supportive legislations (WSRWD 2009; Wilson, 2001). Second, Cave and Kilic (2010) reckon that - even in more liberal communities - occupational stereotyping may emerge to hinder women empowerment, where women could be stereotyped as well-qualified to work in specific areas (e.g. secretarial, teaching, and nursing) rather than others (e.g. army, transportation, heavy industries). However, "women stereotyping" is definitely not a new concern, as it seems embedded in the history of humankind. Describing the historical relationship between men and women in work, Crompton (1997: 6) states, "*Women and men have always worked together... The way in which this work is divided between them, however, has changed and developed over time and still varies considerably between different societies. However for a number of reasons, most societies have allocated particular tasks to men and others to women - that is men and women have not usually performed the same work*".

Researchers such as Mitchell (2000) and Cave and Kilic (2010) extend the list of obstacles to include also what they entitled "*community assumptions*", which comprise: (1) women need to work close to home to escort children to and from schools and to act rapidly in case of emergencies. (2) Women have limited work experience and higher records of absence due to family responsibilities and maternity leaves. (3) Women can hardly move at night due to the escalating social problems and criminal ratio. Finally, differences in educational attainment especially in developing countries may also cause gender occupational inequality. Accordingly, numerous researchers (e.g. Witz and Savage 1992; Anderson and Dimon 1995; Jordan 1997; Ng and Pine 2003; Skalpe 2007; and Thrane 2008) claim that women employment is usually associated with both horizontal and vertical segregations, where the earlier refers to differences in the type of work assigned for men and women, while the later indicates to discrimination in occupational promotions.

In tourism, the industry has undergone a period of rapid growth and consequently a mounting rate of job opportunities during the last few decades. In 2010, the UNWTO estimated that tourism jobs (direct and indirect) have boosted to more than 235 million representing about 7% of the overall number of worldwide jobs (UNWTO 2010), and are expected to rise to almost 300 million jobs by 2019 (Merco Press 2010). In parallel, estimations of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) show a similar increase of women's share in tourism jobs, from one third in 1983 to 46% in 2000 (ILO 2001).

In more details, a European Union study (1997) found out that 63% of the European tourism workers were women. In Scotland, for instance, female workers exceed the number of male workers (Boyne 1999). In Bulgaria, several sources suggest that women represent around two-thirds of those employed in tourism (Ghodsee 2003). In hospitality, women typically represent the majority of the workforce. This is evidential in USA, where 52% of the restaurant employees were women (Soeder 1998); Austria where women accounted for 60% - 70% of the hospitality employment (Weiermair 1996) as well as in Denmark (62%), Australia (58%), the Netherlands (52%) and Italy (50%) (Juyaux n.d.). Giving a comprehensive view, the United Nations Environment and Development Forum (Hemmati 1999) claim that in countries where tourism is a more mature industry, women share in tourism employment tends to be larger than men mainly due to working in the hospitality sector.

Accordingly, UNWTO and UN Women (2011) as well as several other researchers (e.g. Cave and Kilic 2010; Wilson 2003) argue that tourism is an exceptionally suitable profession for women as it provides significant opportunities for women's advancement through formal, informal, and supply-chain employment. In this context, they assume that tourism offer four advantages for women. First, it provides home-grown entrepreneurship opportunities especially in handcrafting, traditional food production and local guidance, which are mostly managed by local families with limited budgets. This makes tourism more likely to employ women, poor segments, and minority groups than other industries. Second, tourism part-time and shift work as well as seasonality and therefore seasonal unemployment can be attractive for women with household responsibilities (Ghodsee 2003). Third, tourism provides various entry points for women's employment, which enables women with different skills to find suitable work (Hemmati 1999). Finally, tourism projects are mostly working on a small profit margin, which makes them prefer to hire cheap labour (Skalpe 2007). According to Jordan (1997), female workers, particularly married women seeking part-time work, have habitually been available for lower payments. Therefore, women are more likely to accept less salaries, which makes them more welcomed to work in the tourism business.

On the other hand and focusing on women's positions in tourism, Hemmati (1999) record that resembling the situation in the labour market in general, women working in tourism suffer from both horizontal and vertical occupational segregation with less career development opportunities (Hemmati 1999). Some researchers assume that it is even more difficult for women to get senior managerial positions in tourism than in other professions for several reasons. In hotels, for instance, managers may work up to 12 hours a day and may frequently stay overnight; as well in some tourism and airline senior positions, travelling for days or even weeks could be the norm. Accordingly, women struggling with family responsibilities may find it difficult to compete with men when it comes to devoting time to work, which may diminish their opportunities to stand out for senior positions (McGehee et al 2007). However, several examples support this assumption.

For instance, Cave and Kilic (2010) found out that most of the general managers in the hospitality sector in Europe are male and that men dominate senior management posts in areas such as marketing, food and beverage, and finance, while women tend to be employed as waitresses, housekeepers and receptionists. Even where women reach senior management positions, it is limited to certain posts such as human resources. At British Airways for example, women have never occupied top executive positions and few women have been board members. Mills (2002) justifies that by the hypothesis that airlines managerial positions have always been seen as male occupations. However, this pattern of occupational segregation is evidential in developing as well as developed countries including Norway, Hong Kong, the United States and Mexico (Cave and Kilic 2010). Finally, in Egypt – as an Arabic model – Al-Sharief (2005) notifies that out of 337 thousand persons working directly in tourism, only 13.9% are female, and that 6.4% of the members of managerial boards, 7.8% of the general managers, while 15.8% of the deputy general managers are female.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN THE OMANI TOURISM INDUSTRY

Since HM Sultan Qaboos Bin Said accession in 1970, Omani citizens have firmly been the focus of all the Omani government plans, and women development has always been a priority. Before the reforms made in the last four decades, there were only three primary schools serving 900 boys. In 1970, a new education policy for both men and women was assigned (Al-Riyami and Afifi 2003), which boosted the female existence in schools from 0% in 1970 to 49% in 2007 (Neelufer and Goveas 2011). As well, Omani women who were educated overseas were invited to return back and help rebuild the nation. Currently, women represent about 49.2% of 2.1 million Omani citizens (NCSI 2013). In labour, women are

encouraged to stand out and participate in the country development; accordingly women are currently employed in almost every profession. A UNICEF census notified in 2000 that 17% of the Omani workers were women (Dawn 2000). More recent studies (e.g. Salha 2010; Katzman 2011) illustrate that this share has enlarged to 30% and that 40% of them are in professional jobs. Aiming to enhance this percentage, HM Sultan Qaboos has lately signed the Decent Work Country Programme (2010 – 2013), which is dedicated to increase job opportunities for women (Neelufar and Goveas 2011).

On the other hand, revising national and international tourism reports discloses that Oman has been successfully developing its tourism business for some years now. With the worldwide volatility in the petroleum trade, and the expected reduction in the petroleum production, Oman has recently started encouraging tourism as a major future source of earnings. Statistics of international organizations such as the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC 2011) show that the number of tourists visiting Oman has increased from less than 0.5 million in 2004 to more than 1.1 million in 2010. According to the Euro-Monitor International (2011), this number is expected to exceed the barrier of three millions before 2020 relying on the ambitious tourism plans unveiled by the Omani government since drafting its “Vision 2020”. Translating this potential demand into revenues, WTTC (2011: 5) assumes that “the total contribution of travel and tourism to GDP (including wider effects from investment, the supply chain and induced income impacts) is expected to be OMR 1,698.6mn in 2011 (6.8% of GDP). It is forecast to rise by 5.5% pa from OMR 2,906.1mn by 2021 (7.7% of GDP)”. These promising expectations led Oman to continue supporting several mega tourism projects (e.g. Blue City, The Wave, Jabal Seifah, Muscat Dunes and Salalah Beach), despite the effects of the recent global economic downturn. It also stimulates the Omani Ministry of Tourism (OMT) to launch its first global promotional campaign in several countries including UK, Germany, France, Netherlands, Belgium, UAE, India, and Australia using the tag line ‘Beauty has an address ~ Oman’ (Business Monitor International 2011).

Similar to several other countries, creating new job opportunities for the incremental number of population is a foremost motive for tourism in Oman. Thus, human resources development has always been a focal point in tourism strategies and projects conducted under the auspices of the OMT. Revising the OMT official reports reveals that in 2009 about 16,507 persons were working in a wide range of tourism direct-related jobs, representing 1.5 - 2% of the total employees in Oman (Al-Balushi 2010). The accommodation sector acquires the highest number of jobs with 48.3%, followed by airline companies with 28.4%. Far below, travel agencies, restaurant and car rental agencies come with 9.7%, 9.6% and 4% respectively. However, Omanis represented 47.7% only of the tourism employees in Oman (Table 1).

Table 1: No. of employees in the Omani tourism Sector 2009 (Al-Balushi 2010)

Tourism Establishments	Omani	Non Omani	Total	% to total Jobs
Accommodation	3,557	4,416	7,973	48.3%
Airline companies	2,775	1,915	4,690	28.4%
Travel agencies	746	850	1,596	9.7%
Restaurants	632	953	1,585	9.6%
Car rental agencies	309	354	663	4%
Total	7,849	8,231	16,507	100%

Aiming to get a more thorough understanding of the tourism workforce in Oman, OMT commissioned in 2010 a UNWTO extensive project to unearth related problems and suggest policies and strategies to improve the quality of tourism workforce. The project concluded that the size of tourism workforce in Oman is expected to double over the following five years, and that Oman is currently facing an obvious qualitative and

quantitative imbalance in the tourism employment (i.e. shortage in labours' number and insufficiency in their quality). Accordingly, an action plan was suggested including a series of procedures to improve the quality and provision of education and training programmes and to strengthen the industry/education coordination (UNWTO 2012). However, extremely few reports had discussed the role of women in the Omani tourism industry. This is not surprising as information about women tourism employment in the Arabic region is commonly scarce.

RESEARCH AIM

Despite the fact that there is a plethora of studies, which have discussed women empowerment worldwide, there is less work on this issue in the Arabic region. These worldwide studies, which have been mainly focusing on Europe, America and some Asian countries, generally claim that tourism profession can hardly be described as sector where gender equality is actually applied. On the other hand, Oman is a country, which could be described as "innovative" regarding women rights and empowerment. Accordingly, this research aims to examine the attitude of female working in tourism toward this profession as well as to explore the extent to which gender horizontal and vertical segregations exist in tourism employment, before illustrating the various driving and restraining factors influencing the Omani women's career in tourism, which should result in suggesting recommendations for facilitating women empowerment in Oman.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Different methodologies have been applied in studying women employment in the tourism labour market. On one hand, Creswell (2007) argues that qualitative research is more appropriate for examining how individuals or groups view a problem as well as for suggesting solutions. In this context, Cave and Kilic (2010), for instance, used unstructured interviews to examine the role of Turkish women in tourism employment; Marshall (2001) applied extensive semi-structured interviews to study the relationship between women and tourism seasonality. However, qualitative approach is highly acknowledged as more conducive for measuring the richness of women's contributions, fears, challenges and aspirations; but it is also criticized for offering limited statistical analysis possibilities. On the other hand, structured quantitative methods have as well been utilized in a considerable volume of women/tourism related studies by researchers such as (Ghodsee 2003), who used surveys to study the state (Bulgaria) role in supporting women working in tourism. Aiming to benefit from using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, in one of the foremost studies about women's empowerment, Gentry (2007) developed a comprehensive concept merging the two approaches, by using a combination of observation, semi-structured interviews and survey. As well, Saunders et al. (2003) claim that women studies are driven by many issues such as culture, values, norms, socio-economical and socio-political factors, which makes a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods more appropriate for attaining the required understanding. This later belief is adopted by this research as well.

Accordingly and in regard with this research, semi structured interviews associated with self-administrated survey were utilized as research methods. This technique was effective in several aspects: first, using the self-administrated survey facilitated asking analogous questions, which help collecting quantitative data. Second, "semi structured interviews" was appropriate for altering the discussion sequence, as well as, expanding its scope to probe for more information when useful. In this context, a pilot study was conducted to filter the research population as well as test both the survey and the interview checklist. Consequently, initial interviews were conducted with six female members working in different tourism entities (i.e. the Omani Ministry of Tourism, a travel agency, a five-star

hotel, and Oman Air). During the pilot study, the interviewees were directed to revise an initial version of the survey to check two issues: first, wording, sequence and other potential errors and second, the questions suitability for achieving the research aims. Based on the responses, the survey questions were confirmed as relevant and suitable for fulfilling the research potential aims. As well, few terminological and wording modifications were suggested. The pilot study helped as well modifying the interviews checklist to shed more lights on the different factors affecting female tourism employees. As a result of the pilot study, a modified checklist and a refined survey were designed.

Besides recording the interviewee's demographic and occupational data, the survey comprises 15 questions measured on a 10-point Likert scale, where 1 = very negative and 10 = very positive. The questions were set to examine four main areas: the interviewees' attitude toward working in tourism, the interviewees' satisfaction, the level of social pressure due to working in tourism, and the existence of either a horizontal or vertical segregation. On the other hand, the semi-structured interview checklist covered three main topics: reasons of gender horizontal or vertical segregation in tourism employment (if any), driving and restraining factors influencing the Omani women career in tourism, in addition to suggestions of required procedures for facilitating women empowerment in Oman. During the interviews, the interviewees were allowed to develop their own ideas and to pursue any new thoughts they believe to be associated with the researched issues. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face in the interviewees' offices between the 26th of January and the 7th of August 2013, where each interview extended between 15 to 25 minutes.

The survey was meant to be distributed to 150 female staff members from 25 tourism-related entities; while the checklist was used to navigate 25 semi-structured interviews. The interviewees' selection process was based on a criterion of two factors. First, "diversity"; where the list of interviewees' entities extended to include entities such as the Omani Ministry of Tourism, Public Authority for Craft Industries, Omran (a governmental tourism development entity), Oman Sail, as well as travel agencies, hotels, airline companies, and museums. On the other hand, it was exceptionally difficult to find Omani women working for tourist restaurants or as tourist guides. Second, "the interviewee's position", where it was meant to represent women working in as-wide-as-possible positions (e.g. starting from head of departments to newly hired staff members). Finally, SPSS 15 software was utilized to analyse the data and find correlations. The ANOVA test was applied to measure the result significance and therefor credibility.

RESULTS

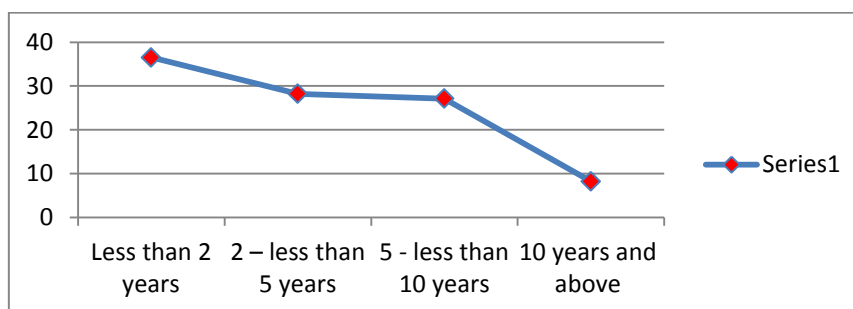
150 questionnaires were collected; 14 of them were considered invalid mostly for ignoring answering some questions. In the same context, 25 interviews were conducted during the survey completion process. Two interviews were disregarded due to giving insufficient short answers and showing no sincere interest in discussions (interviews duration extended for approximately 5 minutes only). Analysing the 23 interviews raised several questions which necessitated re-conducting 5 interviews to either complete discussing or clarifying specific issues more deeply. In this context, table no. 2 illustrates the participants' profile including their tourism employers, years of experience in the tourism profession, level of education and marital status.

Analysing the respondents' profile (table no. 2) reveals clearly that the longer the experience, the harder to find women working in tourism, where 36.5% of the respondents have less than two years experience, while only 8.2% of the respondents have more than 10 years work experience in tourism (figure 1). This result could be interpreted in two extremely different ways. First, it could be understood as an expressive distribution which reflects truthfully the Omani women's escalating trend to work in the tourism profession in the last few years. Nevertheless, it could also be analysed as a reflection of an attitude to quit working in tourism which leaves few women with long experience. Asking interviewees for an explanation reveals that the majority tends to the first justification. "Over 12 years in tourism, I saw lot of women leaving for other jobs for different reasons, but I believe more that this [situation] is due to the increasing number of freshly graduated girls who have been joining tourism [work] recently; 10 years ago, few women would accept working in tourism" (interview no. 27).

Table 2: Respondents' Profile

Profile	Frequency (%)
Tourism Sector	
Travel agencies	36.8
Gov. entities	25.0
Hotels	27.9
Airlines/Airports	10.3
Years of Experience	
Less than 2 years	36.5
2 – less than 5 years	28.2
5 - less than 10 years	27.1
10 years and above	8.2
Level of Education	
Pre-secondary school	5.9
Secondary school	41.2
Higher education	44.7
Postgraduate Education	8.2
Marital status (%)	
Married with children	38.8
Married	14.1
Single	45.9
Others	1.2

Figure 1: Experience of women working in tourism



52.9% of the respondents hold a higher education or a postgraduate degree, which ensures the quality of women working in tourism. If this could be linked to the confirmed relationship between level of women's education and their social background, then it could probably be assumed that women working in the Omani tourism industry are majorly coming from relatively higher social backgrounds. Single females, represented the majority of the respondents (45.9%). This is expected, knowing that the Omani population is generally young where 67.2% of the females are under 30 years old (NCSI 2013).

Aiming to achieve better understanding of the respondents' attitude towards working in tourism, data is analysed relying on the respondents' four previously-mentioned classifications (see: table no. 2): tourism sector, years of experience, level of education and marital status. Table no. 3 shows the participants' responses according to the tourism sector in which they are working.

Table 3: Participants' responses according to their tourism employment sector

Q	Participants' attitude toward working in tourism	AL*	HO**	GV+	TA ±	Mean (\bar{x})	(P-value)
1.	I willingly work in tourism	9.6	7.9	7.1	9.2	8.4	0.029687 a
2.	Tourism is the best profession for my capabilities	8.6	7.9	6.0	8.2	7.6	0.004274 a
3.	I believe I have a promising future in tourism	9.3	8.4	7.9	8.2	8.3	0.525872
4.	If I can, I will switch from tourism to another profession (-)	(3.6)	(6.9)	(5.1)	(7.2)	(6.3)	0.009695 a
	Mean (\bar{x})	8.5	6.8	6.5	7.1		
Participants' satisfaction							
5.	I am happy for working in tourism	8.4	8.4	8.2	9.4	8.7	0.182975
6.	I am in a job suitable for my capabilities	8.9	8.3	7.0	8.2	8.0	0.201017
7.	Salary in tourism is better than other professions	4.0	5.6	1.9	4.4	4.1	5.26E-05
8.	I consider myself successful	8.9	9.0	8.8	9.1	9.0	0.927147
	Mean (\bar{x})	7.6	7.8	6.5	7.8		
Extent of social pressure due to working in tourism							
9.	Working in tourism causes social pressure on women (-)	(4.4)	(5.7)	(3.9)	(4.9)	(4.9)	0.212235
The existence of either a horizontal or vertical segregation							
10.	I believe my job is more suitable for men (-)	(2.3)	(5.3)	(4.0)	(5.0)	(4.6)	0.180694
11.	Men have better opportunities for promotion in tourism (-)	(7.0)	(5.5)	(4.2)	(7.0)	(5.9)	0.005584 a
12.	There are some tourism jobs which should be for men only (-)	(4.9)	(6.2)	(6.1)	(6.2)	(6.1)	0.852774
13.	There are currently some men-only-jobs, which women can do	4.6	7.1	3.9	6.0	5.7	0.013471 a
	Mean (\bar{x})	(4.7)	(6.0)	(4.6)	(5.6)		
	Level of occupational empowerment	6.8	5.7	6.1	6.1		

* AL = Airline companies and airports

+ TA / Travel agencies and tourism operators

a Significance at higher than 0.05 probability level

** HO / Hospitality (hotels and restaurants)

± GV / Governmental tourism entities

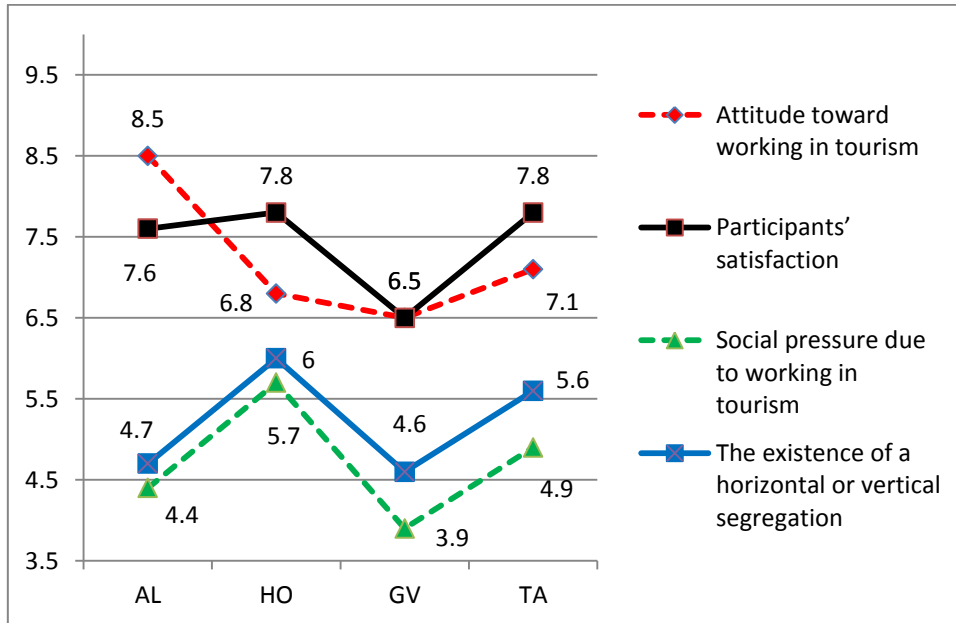
(-) Negative question

In this regard, it is significantly obvious that women working in airline companies and airports (AL) have a definite positive attitude toward working in tourism as they achieved the highest records in willingness to work (Q.1. \bar{x} = 9.6), accepting tourism as the best profession for their capabilities (Q.2. \bar{x} = 8.6), and being optimistic regarding their professional future (Q.3. \bar{x} = 9.3). They will also hardly switch from working in tourism to any other profession (Q.4. \bar{x} = 3.6). On contrary, women working in governmental tourism entities (GV) believe barely that they are in the best jobs for their capabilities (Q.2. \bar{x} = 6.0), but they are as well scarcely ready to leave (Q.4. \bar{x} = 5.1). This is mostly due to the numerous advantages associated with working in Omani governmental entities (e.g. stability, society recognition). On the other hand, despite that women working in both hospitality and tourism intermediaries (HO and TA) have joined these sectors willingly (Q.1. \bar{x} = 7.9 and 9.2), they record the highest level of desire to quit working in tourism (Q.4. \bar{x} = 6.9 and 7.2). Analysing questions no. 7, 8, 9, and 10 could help highlight why women working in HO and TA tend to quit more than those working in AL and GV.

Despite women working in tourism generally disagree that their salaries are higher than other professions (Q.7. \bar{x} = 4.0), surprisingly, women working in HO and TA are relatively more satisfied with their salaries (Q.7. \bar{x} = 5.6 and 4.4) and have higher sense of success (Q.8. \bar{x} = 9.0 and 9.1) comparing to their counterparts in AL and GV (Q.7. \bar{x} = 4.0 and 1.9) (Q.8. \bar{x} = 8.9 and 8.8). Thus, it could be concluded that salaries and future uncertainty are definitely not the main reasons why women working in HO and TA tends more to change their tourism profession. On the contrary, women working in HO and TA feel social pressure (Q.9. \bar{x} = 5.7 and 4.9) higher than the other two tourism sectors (\bar{x} = 4.4 and 3.9 for AL and

GV). It may worth mentioning here that – despite the absence of verified studies – a common contentedness exists that there is a social negative attitude toward working in hospitality in particular. However, it should also be stated that this trend has been declining rapidly during the last few years. The effect of social pressure could also be noticed in question no. 10, where a significant percentage of the female workers in HO and TA believe deeply that their jobs are more suitable for men than for female ($\bar{x} = 5.3$ and 5.0 comparing to only 2.3 and 4.0 for AL and GV). Women working in HO and TA are surely having higher indications of occupational segregation ($\bar{x} = 6.0$ and 5.6), while GV jobs logically show the lowest level of notifying such attitude ($\bar{x} = 4.6$) (see: figure no. 2).

Figure 2: Participants' responses (Means) according to their tourism employment sector



Finally, with a total average of only 5.7 (see figure 3), it could be claimed that women working in the hospitality sector seem to be the segment with the severest need for support. However, women in GV and TA are not too far less in need for support. Oppositely, women working in AL surely have higher feeling of empowerment.

Figure 3: Participants' responses (Overall) according to their tourism employment sector

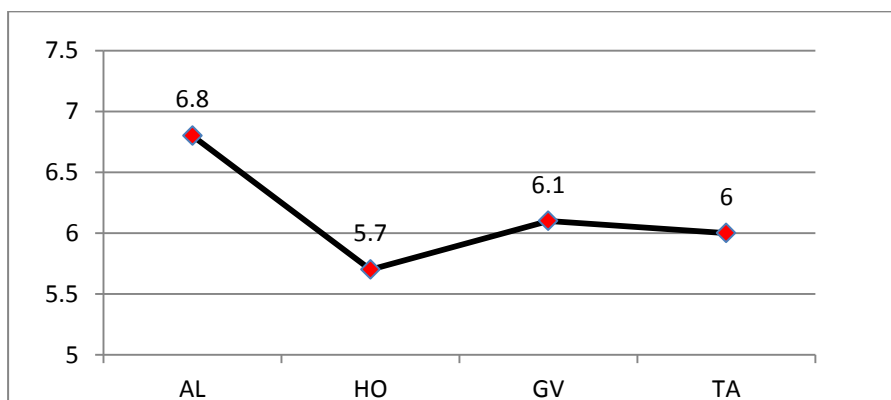


Table 4: Participants' view according to their length of experience

Q	Participants' attitude toward working in tourism	-2	2-5	6-10	10+	Mean (x̄)	(P-value)
1.	I willingly work in tourism	7.8	8.6	8.9	7.9	8.4	0.246418
2.	Tourism is the best profession for my capabilities	7.5	7.8	7.6	8.2	7.6	0.777165
3.	I believe I have a promising future in tourism	8.0	9.0	8.5	7.9	8.3	0.14245
4.	If I can, I will switch from tourism to another profession (-)	(5.6)	(6.8)	(5.9)	(6.9)	(6.3)	0.294855
Mean (x̄)		7.2	8.1	7.7	7.7		
Participants' satisfaction							
5.	I am happy for working in tourism	8.8	8.7	8.9	8.2	8.7	0.749909
6.	I am in a job suitable for my capabilities	7.0	8.6	8.4	8.9	8.0	0.012691 a
7.	Salary in tourism is better than other professions	3.8	3.8	5.1	3.1	4.1	0.094593
8.	I consider myself successful	8.8	9.3	9.1	8.2	9.0	0.192472
Mean (x̄)		7.1	7.6	7.9	7.1		
Extent of social pressure due to working in tourism							
9.	Working in tourism causes social pressure on women (-)	(5.1)	(4.7)	(4.9)	(4.1)	(4.9)	0.77516
The existence of either a horizontal or vertical segregation							
10.	I believe my job is more suitable for men (-)	(4.8)	(4.6)	(3.9)	(6.3)	(4.6)	0.194552
11.	Men have better opportunities for promotion in tourism (-)	(6.0)	(6.6)	(5.1)	(4.5)	(5.9)	0.077194
12.	There are some tourism jobs which should be for men only (-)	(5.3)	(5.7)	(7.2)	(6.2)	(6.1)	0.138597
13.	There are currently some men-only-jobs, which women can do	5.8	4.8	5.5	7.7	5.7	0.08508
Mean (x̄)		(5.5)	(5.4)	(5.4)	(6.2)		
Level of occupational empowerment		5.9	6.4	6.3	6.1		

a Significance at higher than 0.05 probability level

Analysing the respondents' opinions according to their length of experience reveals several major results. First, women with longer experience (i.e. ten years and above) record the highest average regarding believing that they are in the best profession (Q. 2 \bar{x} = 8.2) and job (Q. 6 \bar{x} = 8.9) for their capabilities, and feeling the minimum social pressure (Q. 9 \bar{x} = 4.1). In this regard, several interviewees state that there has usually been a considerable social misunderstanding of the nature of tourism work at the beginning of their career. The longer they work, the more awareness is to be transferred to their local surroundings concerning tourism and tourism profession and therefore the more their community accepts their jobs. This is critically important as it straightforwardly indicates that the Omani community cannot be described as an opponent of women's work in tourism, but it is actually a matter of deficiency of tourism awareness, and that more efforts in this regard will definitely secure more social acceptance for tourism as a suitable profession for Omani women.

On contrary and surprisingly, despite feeling less social pressure and believing that they are in the best profession and job for their capabilities, female workers with the longer experience have the highest desire to switch from tourism to other professions (Q. 4 \bar{x} = 6.9). Questions 3, 5, 7, 8 and 10 may justify this odd situation. In this regard, women with more than ten years experience record the lowest level of satisfaction with their salaries (Q.7. \bar{x} = 3.1), being optimistic regarding their professional future (Q.3. \bar{x} = 7.9), feeling happy in work (Q.5. \bar{x} = 8.2) and considering themselves successful (Q.8. \bar{x} = 8.2). Finally, they assume that

their jobs might be more suitable for men rather than for women (Q.10 \bar{x} = 6.3). Discussing this trend for quitting work in tourism despite the absence of social pressure (which was commonly believed to be the main reason) revealed that in addition to the early mentioned unsatisfactory salary, the high stress associated with most of the tourism professions was indicated as one of the fundamental reasons why women may quit working in tourism. *“It is unbelievable pressure I repeatedly have nightmares about passengers losing their flight connections and yelling at me”* (interview no. 7). *“It is part of the tourism work. For me the problem is not the pressure itself, but having to smile, whatever the pressure is, once I face a guest”* (interview no. 12). Other reasons include looking for more long-term, secured jobs (e.g. governmental jobs), and less working hours. Some interviewees with longer experiences interpreted this as a reflection of feeling underestimated comparing to their long experience.

The previous two paragraphs could lead to two major conclusions. First, with averages such as 7.9 (Q3), 8.2 (Q. 5 and 8), it is invalid to claim that women with long experience are unhappy or unsatisfied; nevertheless they are the less satisfied and happy segment. Second, social pressure is surely not the main reason for quitting work in tourism and that other factors including unsatisfactory salaries, work pressure and looking for stability could be the actual reasons.

Figure 4: Participants’ responses according to their work experience

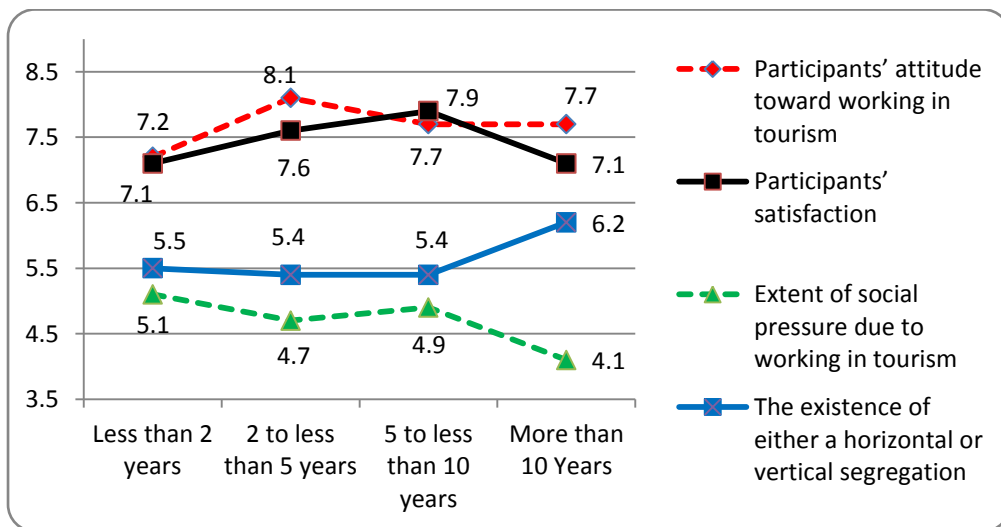


Figure 5: Participants’ responses (overall average) according to their work experience

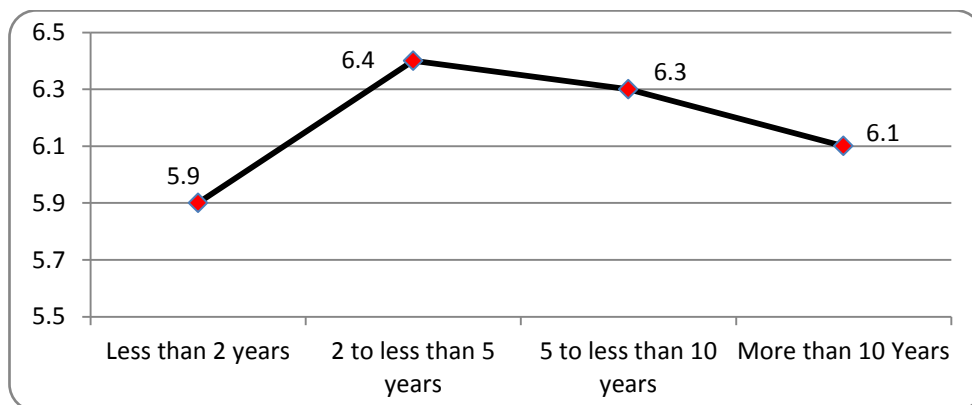


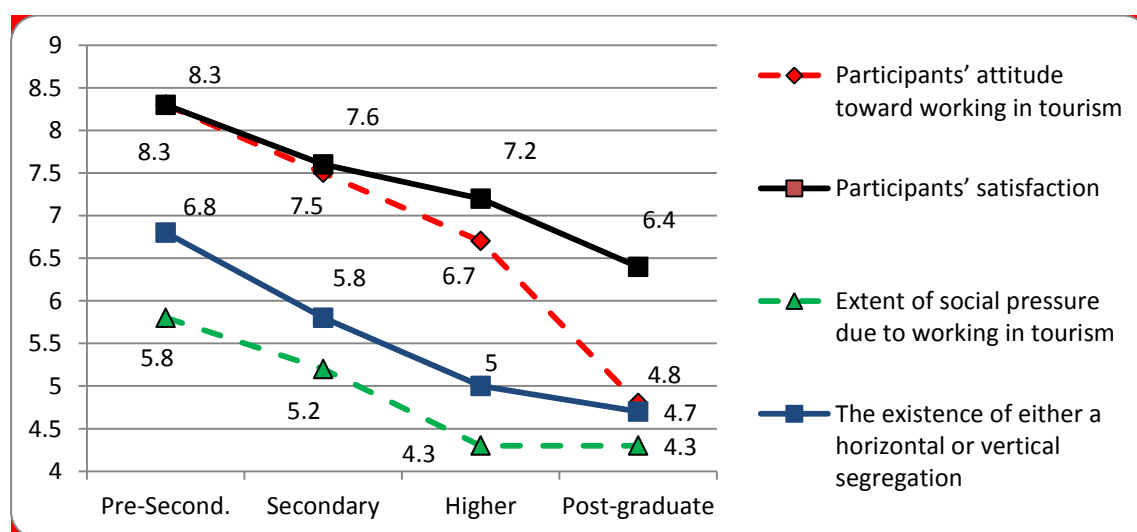
Table5: Participants' view according to their level of education

Q	Participants' attitude toward working in tourism	Pre-Second.	Secondary	Higher	Post-graduate	Mean (\bar{x})	(P-value)
1.	I willingly work in tourism	8.8	8.5	8.4	6.3	8.4	0.225174
2.	Tourism is the best profession for my capabilities	9.4	7.7	7.4	5.8	7.6	0.025253 a
3.	I believe I have a promising future in tourism	8.8	8.2	8.4	7.4	8.3	0.703955
4.	If I can, I will switch from tourism to another profession (-)	(3.9)	(4.4)	(7.4)	(9.2)	6.3	1.07E-08
Mean (\bar{x})		8.3	7.5	6.7	4.8		
Participants' satisfaction							
5.	I am happy for working in tourism	9.4	8.7	8.7	7.6	8.7	0.344759
6.	I am in a job suitable for my capabilities	9.4	7.9	8.0	7.4	8.0	0.358525
7.	Salary in tourism is better than other professions	4.8	4.7	3.3	2.0	4.1	0.015799 a
8.	I consider myself successful	9.4	9.0	8.9	8.4	9.0	0.683539
Mean (\bar{x})		8.3	7.6	7.2	6.4		
Extent of social pressure due to working in tourism							
9.	Working in tourism causes social pressure on women (-)	(5.8)	(5.2)	(4.3)	(4.3)	(4.9)	0.267434
The existence of either a horizontal or vertical segregation							
10.	I believe my job is more suitable for men (-)	(7.6)	(4.6)	(3.9)	(4.7)	4.6	0.02189
11.	Men have better opportunities for promotion in tourism (-)	(6.4)	(6.6)	(5.1)	(3.6)	5.9	0.016653 a
12.	There are some tourism jobs, should be for men only (-)	(6.0)	(6.2)	(5.8)	(6.6)	6.1	0.932074
13.	There are currently some men-only-jobs, women can do	7.0	5.8	5.3	3.7	5.7	0.292719
Mean (\bar{x})		(6.8)	(5.8)	(5.0)	(4.7)		
Level of occupational empowerment		6.0	6.0	6.2	5.6		

a Significance at higher than 0.05 probability level

Figure 6 summarizes precisely the responses of women working in tourism according to their level of education, where significant differences exist between the four different segments (i.e. pre-secondary, secondary, higher education and post-graduation segments).

Figure 6: Participants' responses (Overall) according to their education



In other words, analysing table 5 shows the existence of a converse relationship between women’s attitude toward working in tourism and their level of education where the higher the level of women’s education the less their desire to continue working in tourism (see Q. 1, 2, 3 and 4), and the less their satisfaction with their work (see Q. 5, 6, 7 and 8). Commenting on this relationship, interviewee no. 26 stated that “*This is strange; I did not notice that; but maybe they believe they deserve more than what they get, due to their [educational] degrees*”. Interviewee no. 28 claims that “*Salary and position are the reasons. Of course, if I have a higher certificate....I would be unhappy with the salary I am receiving now....no, it is rare to have an increase [in salary] due to getting a higher certificate [a postgraduate degree] especially in the private sector. We usually receive more money for having more experience*”. On the other hand, women with higher educational level feel less social pressure (see Q. 9), which is generally expected assuming that women’s higher educational level is frequently associated with more social recognition. Finally, the same segment complains less about occupational segregation.

Understanding women’s attitude toward work in regard with their marital status is a common approach where several researchers (e.g. Al-Sharief 2005) assume that marital status and family responsibilities are amongst the most crucial factors affecting women work.

Table6: Participants’ view according to their marital status

Q	Participants’ attitude toward working in tourism	Married with children	Married	Single	Mean (\bar{x})	(P-value)
1.	I willingly work in tourism	8.5	8.2	8.4	8.4	0.949514
2.	Tourism is the best profession for my capabilities	7.4	8.3	7.6	7.6	0.424475
3.	I believe I have a promising future in tourism	8.3	8.0	8.4	8.3	0.870545
4.	If I can, I will switch from tourism to another profession (-)	(5.8)	(5.7)	(6.7)	6.3	0.304198
	Mean (\bar{x})	7.5	7.6	7.8		
	Participants’ satisfaction					
5.	I am happy for working in tourism	8.7	8.1	8.9	8.7	0.296363
6.	I am in a job suitable for my capabilities	8.4	8.8	7.6	8.0	0.104515
7.	Salary in tourism is better than other professions	4.0	3.1	4.5	4.1	0.20258
8.	I consider myself successful	9.1	8.2	9.1	9.0	0.090173
	Mean (\bar{x})	7.6	7.1	7.5		
	Extent of social pressure due to working in tourism					
9.	Working in tourism causes social pressure on women (-)	(4.9)	(3.2)	(5.4)	(4.9)	0.017342 a
	The existence of either a horizontal or vertical segregation					
10	I believe my job is more suitable for men (-)	(3.6)	(4.3)	(5.3)	(4.6)	0.027413 a
11	Men have better opportunities for promotion in tourism (-)	(4.8)	(6.5)	(6.5)	(5.9)	0.011203 a
12	There are some tourism jobs which should be for men only (-)	(5.8)	(5.4)	(6.4)	(6.1)	0.476799
13	There are currently some men-only-jobs, which women can do	4.7	7.3	5.8	5.7	0.021747 a
	Mean (\bar{x})	(4.7)	(5.9)	(6.0)		
	Level of Occupational empowerment	6.4	6.4	6.0		

a Significance at higher than 0.05 probability level

In addition to the early mentioned results which have been concluded from the analysis of the previous tables, analysing the respondents' replies in table 6 reveals three more results. First, with minimal differences in responses, marital status seems to be not affecting the female workers' attitude towards working in tourism ($\bar{x} = 7.5, 7.6$ and 7.8) as well as their work satisfaction ($\bar{x} = 7.6, 7.1$ and 7.5). On contrary, social pressure understandably seems higher on single females than on married women as single females are commonly more exposure to social pressure than the other two categories (see Q. 9). Finally, it may worth mentioning that besides unsatisfactory salary, "looking for a job near their houses" has been numerously mentioned as a reason for changing jobs in association with women married with children particularly. "[They are leaving] *for different reasons mostly salary, to work nearer to their houses ... not because they are against tourism*" (interview no. 16).

FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS

Besides relying on interviews for clarifying the respondents' choices in the survey, interviews were valuable as well for shedding lights on the major forces acting for and against women's empowerment in the tourism industry in Oman. In this context, interviewees were asked to explain, the main driving elements (the pros) which are helping Omani women to flourish in the tourism profession as well as to identify the major restraining forces (the cons), which may hinder them from achieving more success. Data analysis shows the existence of three deriving and two restraining forces.

DRIVING FORCES

Omani women working in tourism believe that three factors are pushing forward the Omani women's empowerment in the tourism profession. These factors comprise a compensation of social, economic, legal as well as cultural forces.

1. Social changes and society awareness of women's issues

A major deriving force for the Omani women's empowerment is the combination of social changes and awareness of women's issues which have recently been taking place especially during the last decade. The majority of the interviewees assume that this progress has occurred due to the continuous development of education and media services in particular, which are helping amend the society trends toward women's economic, political and social participation in the on-going development. The society is moving gradually towards more recognition of women's work in both governmental and private establishments, where traditional negative ideas and concepts about women's work are gradually diminishing. In this context, some women's activities which were totally rejected forty years ago (e.g. women education, political participation) are gaining more acknowledge today. This overall escalating awareness and social changes have been reflected in tourism as well. "*The Omani community is going day after day, more and more in supporting working women ... the society was firmly against women working in tourism ... this has been changing over the last years*".

2. Support of the Omani government and organizations

Oman has formed several regulations to enhance women's rights including education, work, as well as social, political and economic participation. *"HM Sultan Qaboos has put lot of efforts to guarantee women rights ...this is clear in the decrees, laws and plans for reinforcing women's situation in Oman"*. Almost all the interviewees notified that they are feeling secured and satisfied with the current work regulations. According to these regulations, women are supported against both horizontal and vertical segregation. Women are as well guaranteed to have maternity leave, breast-feeding hours, as well as relatively long childcare leaves, and mourning periods (i.e. 40 days in case of husband's death). On a parallel path, several governmental and non-governmental organizations and entities have been established over the last years to provide different sorts of support for Omani women especially in areas such as education, training, health awareness and SMEs funding. A key player in this field is the Omani's Women Association, a governmental organization which has 38 branches all over the country (MoSD 2013).

3. Family and paid-labour supports

Dependence on family and/or paid-labour assistance is a common behaviour amongst Omani working women, where many of them depend on their non-working family members (e.g. mothers, sisters, and in-laws) to babysit their children and assist in households while they are at work. On the other hand, those who cannot get family support may depend on paid-labour support (e.g. nurseries, babysitters, and housekeepers). *"I have four kids; two of them are still under the school age ... my family support is an important factor for me to continue working"* (interview no. 17). The majority of the survey participants are married (54.1%), 71.7% of them have children. Accordingly, relying on family and paid labour support, many Omani working women are managing between work obligations and familial responsibilities. *"I understand the risks [of relying on paid-labour]; but most of those who can, will hire a housemaid even if they are not working"* (interview no. 3). On the other hand, A shyly drift in the Omani society is the tendency of some husbands to assist their wives in childcare and household activities to enable them balancing between work obligations and familial responsibilities and, then, to maintain their career. *"Yes, of course, more men are ready now to help"* (interview no. 14). However, establishing childcare facilities at some workplaces (e.g. hotels) could be a further support for women's career.

RESTRAINING FORCES

On the other hand, interviewees identified two major forces which may restrain women's empowerment in the Omani tourism sector.

1. Anti-traditions work conditions

Tourism is definitely having its own work conditions, which could be described as "anti-social work conditions" (Al-Sherif 2005). Several researchers assume that those conditions are definitely putting an exceptional pressure on tourism workers regardless of their gender. These conditions include obligating workers to delay at work after regular working hours, work overnight, and travel frequently and maybe for long time. These work obligations conflict with the Omani – as well as most of the Arabic countries – traditions,

which may confine lot of women from working in some areas of tourism; and if working, from accomplishing some of their duties. However, women are majorly not seeing that as a sign of segregation, alternatively they assure that some jobs (e.g. guides, transfer staff) should be for men only mostly due to its conditions (e.g. travelling for long time, night shifts) which they believe are not suitable for them (see Q. 12. $\bar{x} = 6.1$).

2. Work/family conflict

One of the severest problems of female workers is the work/family conflict, where female workers are usually stressed between family, work and social responsibilities. To some researchers (Al-Sharief 2005), women who can successfully manage those burdens are “*superwomen*”. In this context, some women prefer to quit work after marriage or after having their first baby. Another portion gives up after short time and end up leaving their jobs for the sake of the family. Interviewees assume that women tend to quit work mainly to take care of their children. Accordingly, the availability of child-care facilities at a reasonable cost might be a valid solution. However, work/family conflict could be associated as well with different forms of career interruption as women are physiologically compelled to several career interruptions like maternity leave and breast-feeding hours; and they may also need relatively long childcare leaves. These interruptions either delay or even terminate women’s career (Al-Sherif 2005).

CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that there is a plethora of studies, which have investigated most of the women’s related issues such as women empowerment, women in the workplace, role of women in development, research regarding female workforce in tourism is still far behind the other areas. Those relatively few tourism-related studies which have been mainly focusing on women in Europe, America and some Asian countries, claim that despite all the work equality regulations, tourism can hardly be described as a sector where gender equality is actually applied; alternatively both horizontal and vertical segregation could easily be observed in the tourism profession. In this context, researchers generally assume that women’s participation in the tourism profession is relatively bizarre. While tourism appears as a suitable career for women looking for a seasonal or a part-time work and for those working in traditional food production and handcrafting, tourism emerges, on contrary, as a harsh profession putting severe pressure on women mainly due to the special conditions and work requirements of the tourism business. Additionally, women seem to be typically constrained to work in specific jobs and areas of tourism and not proportionately represented in senior management positions.

On the other hand, Oman is a country, which could be described as “innovative” regarding women rights and empowerment. Over the last four decades, Omani women have been progressively obtaining equal opportunities for education, training and work, which helped them to firmly move from their previous household confinement to the public sphere. These determining actions put Oman as one of the leading Gulf countries in terms of gender equality and women participation.

In regard with this research, 11 major assumptions could be concluded. First Omani women are getting more enthusiastic to work in tourism, which is currently witnessing the involvement of younger generations. Second, finding women with a long experience is relatively hard, as tourism was not considered amongst the most suitable professions for women during the last decades. However, this is rapidly changing now. Third, tourism is particularly attractive for Omani women with higher degrees (i.e. college and post-graduate degrees), which comparatively does not match the global model, where tourism usually attracts more women with lower educational degrees (i.e. secondary school degrees). This could be justified by the escalating percentage of women receiving higher education in Oman. Fourth, Omani women working in tourism can hardly be described as unsatisfied with the tourism profession, nevertheless some segments could be described as less satisfied than the others. Fifth, female workers in airlines seem to be highly satisfied with their tourism career and less ready to quit their jobs comparing to their counterparts in hospitality and travel agencies, who are clearly feeling higher social pressure due to working in tourism. Sixth, shortage in tourism awareness exists as a major reason for misunderstanding the contexts of women's work in tourism, where women with longer involvement in tourism are believing that their communities are getting more understanding, appreciating and supporting their work. However, women with longer experience may quit their jobs for reasons related to work pressure and insufficient salaries. Seventh, nevertheless, tourism is more appealing for Omani women with higher degrees, the higher the female workers' level of education, the more they are unsatisfied with working in tourism. Eighth, marital status has a minimal effect on the female workers' attitude towards working in tourism. Ninth, and most importantly, social pressure is no longer the main reasons for quitting tourism work in Oman. Reasons such as looking for better salaries, long-term secured jobs, and avoiding work pressure are amongst the major reasons for such decision.

In this context and aiming to enhance women empowerment in the tourism profession, more stimulation should be given to women working in hospitality as their relatively higher salaries are definitely not sufficient for enhancing their willingness to work in tourism. In this regard, more social awareness should be considered as social pressure (unlike the case with all the other segments) seems to be the major negative factor influencing their career. On the other hand, unsatisfactory salaries are surely the major problem facing women working in tourism governmental entities. Besides salaries, women with higher education as well as women with longer experience have more concerns regarding their future development and have a greater need for occupational recognition.

Finally, revising the women level of occupational empowerment (at the bottom of tables 3, 4, 5 and 6) reveals that a married (or married with children) female working in the airlines sector, with a higher education level, and two to five years of experiences will feel the highest possible level of occupational empowerment in tourism. On contrary, a single female working in the hospitality sector, with a post-graduate education level, and less than two years of experiences will feel the lowest possible level of occupational empowerment in tourism.

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