

Research Paper

Women's Career Advancement in the Hospitality Industry in the Central Region, Vietnam

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Abstract: The underrepresentation of women at the top management level has been a persistent challenge to the hospitality and tourism industry worldwide. While a number of barriers to women's career advancement in tourism are well-documented, the impact of these barriers is sensitive to different institutional, economic and socio-cultural contexts. Using quantitative research methods, this study aims to investigate barriers to women's career advancement in the context of the Vietnam hospitality industry, where the collective mechanism is known as a key successful factor for addressing gender issues at workplace. Findings reveal that hotel managers perceive no problem of gender issues at work. However, *work-life balance* was reported as the only barrier to women's career advancement, and is suggested as a focal point for gender-related policies and programs. The study also proposes some directions for future researches in order to enrich the methodological aspects and empirical evidences of this research domain.

Keywords: Gender issues, barriers, career advancement, female manager, hospitality industry, Vietnam

Suggested citation: Bui T. T., Mai L. Q., & Nguyen H. T. Q. (2022). Women's career advancement in the hospitality industry in the Central Region, Vietnam. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Innovation in Hospitality and Tourism*, 11(1), 101–120.

Introduction

Known as a strong engine for job creation, employment and entrepreneurship for women, tourism helps promote gender equality and women empowerment worldwide, especially for the poor and marginalised women groups around the world (World Bank Group [WBG], 2017; United Nations World Tourism Organisation [UNWTO], 2019). In addition to the large share of women in the tourism labour pool, women in tourism industries have made significant contributions to their

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organisations' performance. Several studies have found that companies with a high percentage of women representation in management positions are manifested in improvements in many aspects of operations such as innovation, work environment, organisational culture, financial performance, etc. (Walsh, Fleming, & Enz, 2016; Baum & Cheung, 2015). This empirical evidence lends strong support to the proposition that women's career advancement and empowerment in tourism is becoming mainstream towards achieving the sustainable development goal for gender equality.

In a recent report by United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2019), while significant progress was disclosed with women making up about one-quarter of decision-makers in the tourism sector, it was also highlighted that there were fewer women moving up into top management positions. With much effort being made by different parties to promote women's career advancement in tourism, the progress appear to be far-reaching across countries and territories and Vietnam is no exception. Interestingly, the latest job and employment survey in Vietnam reported that there is a higher proportion of semi-skilled and skilled women as compared to men in the hospitality industry. However, the lower monthly salary and lower representation of women in leadership positions continue to prevail across sectors and regions (GSO, 2017). This raises the concern whether gender stereotypes and "glass ceiling" are indeed invisible barriers for women to advance in their careers in the context of Vietnam, where institutional dynamics for gender equality are in place. Unfortunately, to the researcher's knowledge, there has been hardly any study in Vietnam on career advancements in hospitality for women.

Looking at the hotel sector in the Central Coast region of Vietnam, we argue that while women in the hospitality sector have strong motivation for their career advancement, the barriers to their career path can be linked back to their responsibilities and choice of work-life balance. The "glass-ceiling" and gender stereotypes may not necessarily impede women's career advancement. Hence, factors related to work-life balance should become the focal point for managerial solutions and policy implications in achieving gender equality.

Literature Review

Gender and Gender Inequality – A Cultural Organisational Perspective

The term "gender" has been widely discussed in many related fields of study. In the simplest sense, gender refers to the difference in biological sex. Watson and Newby (2005, p. 129) noted that "historically, gender has been considered a uni-dimensional construct measured on the basis of an individual's biological sex". This preconception commonly sets a common ground for examining gender inequality in relation to gender identity. In a broader sense, gender is defined as "a system

of beliefs and practices that refer to or deal with creating a sense of the difference between females and males” (Connell, 1987; Westand Zimmerman, 1987, as cited in Thompson & Armato, 2012, p. 10). As such, any analysis of gender issues should be made within a social-cultural structure. For instance, Adler (1993, p. 289) explained that women's underrepresentation in management positions is “neither coincidental nor random, but rather a function of systemic cultural sanctions, educational barriers, legal restrictions, and corporate practices”. Lorber (2010, p.10) argued that “the sources of gender inequality are structural and not the outcome of personal attributes, individual choices, or unequal interpersonal relationships”. Many recent research works further clarified the different elements of cultural organisational structures, that shape gendered processes as well as gendered power relations and practices (Hearn, 2000; Duffy, Kline, Mowatt, & Chancellor, 2015; Shrestha, 2016; Carvalho, Costa, Lykke, & Torres, 2018a, 2018b; Segovia-Pérez, Figueroa-Domecq, Fuentes-Moraleda, & Muñoz-Mazón, 2019). Notwithstanding organisational and institutional frameworks in countries, women's career progress still faces many key barriers of gender stereotypes and discrimination against women, rooted in a male-dominated societal and organisational structure (Gregg & Johnson, 1990; Brownell, 1994; Baum & Cheung, 2015; Konar, Ali, & Hussain, 2018; Carvalho et al., 2018a; Kumara, 2018).

Cultural–Structural Factors Influencing Women's Career Advancement in Tourism

In the hospitality and tourism industry, women's career advancement has evolved into a long-standing debate over the last several decades. An extensive body of literature has explored the issues of gender inequality and the barriers that prevent women from moving up the career ladder. Many researchers suggest a number of barriers that appear to be universal such as gender stereotypes, “glass ceiling”, work-life balance, industry-specific obstacles, etc (Brownell, 1994; Ng & Pine, 2003; Clevenger & Singh, 2013; Shrestha, 2016; Kumara, 2018; Carvalho et al., 2018a; Chen, Severt, Shin, & DiPietro, 2021). Based on the push-pull theory of entrepreneurship by Kirkwood (2009), the impacts of these factors not only involve social aspects, organisational structure, job characteristics and working environment (external/push factors) but also extend to women's ambition and efforts for career advancement in tourism (internal/pull factors).

It is undeniable that women are entrusted with maternal and family responsibilities, irrespective of their cultures. In many Eastern cultures, women are perceived as family caregivers and housewives, irrespective of being employed or not. In a nuclear family with dual income earners, where the household work division has changed into one that involves more sharing and less of a burden for women, women remain the primary charge for taking care of their children and housework.

This may imply that the impact of the patriarchal structure on gendered roles and family support is well established as one of the important factors that affect the career advancement of women (e.g., Li & Leung, 2001; Walsh et al., 2016; Carvalho et al., 2018a; Kumara, 2018; Fan, Im, Miao, Tomas, & Liu, 2021).

From a business perspective, women account for “at least half of the talent available to organisations and economies in most countries” (Baum & Cheng, 2015, p. 7), and more than half of the global tourism labour force are women (UNWTO, 2019). Women in tourism have proven themselves just as qualified as their male counterparts; in fact, they excel in some domains like front office, human resources, retail and marketing, etc. (ESRT, 2015; Shrestha, 2016; Dasgupta & Sharma, 2017). Further, empirical evidence asserts the positive relationship between women leadership and company performance in many aspects such as organisational culture, business and financial performance (Dezsö & Ross, 2012; Walsh et al., 2016; Hunt, Prince, Dixon-Fyle, & Yee, 2018).

The organisational factors also involve formal policies, management attitudes and organisational culture that promote women’s career advancement. In pursuing the gender equality goal, tourism companies have endeavoured to maintain a transparent and supportive organisation culture, that is expected to create synergy for the company’s prosperity. These structural factors establish an important foundation for progress in gender equality at the workplace; however, the success of the gender mainstreaming programs requires more consistent actions to remove invisible barriers such as “glass ceiling”, “old boy network”, and a male-dominated culture (Brownell, 1993; Knutson & Schmidgall, 1999; Bendl & Schmidt, 2010; Baum, 2013; Walsh et al., 2016; Carvalho et al., 2018a; Kumara, 2018). Unfortunately, the research evidence thus far has not helped to reify what works for resolving these challenges, but instead deals with them “in a superficial way” (Ferguson & Alarcón, 2015).

Industry-specific Factors

Several other obstacles were highlighted in the literature related to the workplace environment and nature of tourism jobs, such as sexual harassment (Brownell, 1993; Baum, 2013; Boone et al., 2013), irregular and long working hours, night shifts as well as job mobility (Li & Leung, 2001; Mooney & Ryan, 2009; Costa, Bakas, Breda, & Durao, 2017; Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019; Kumara, 2018). In the context of the hospitality sector, sexual harassment takes many forms that may cause negative consequences for employees’ physical and psychological health, labour productivity, or even the organisation’s image and reputation (Poulston, 2008; Ineson, Yap, & Whiting, 2013).

As the tourism workforce becomes more gender-diverse, the need for companies to address industry-related barriers to women’s career advancement has only become more pronounced. It is not uncommon to find positive responses from tourism

companies where organisational support to career development is well-designed, that is, recruitment and promotion are based on individual career development, irrespective of gender (McLean & McLean, 2001; Baum, 2013; Ho, 2013). However, many challenges persist, such as lack of mentoring programs and female role models as well as exclusion from informal networking (Boone et al., 2013; Nawarathna, 2017; Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018; Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019).

Internal Factors that Affect Women's Career Advancement

The internal barriers to women's career progression relate back to gender identity (Duffy et al., 2015) as well as women's self-perception of capability, selfness and personal priority to work-life balance, family responsibility, career goal and motivation (Boone et al., 2013; Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019). In seeking work-life balance, women have to either struggle to accomplish their gender roles and household responsibilities or feel demoralised for taking the effort to advance in their career. For many women, family duties and work-life balance are set as a high priority at the expense of their career goal, and having a job may just simply be for earning. In other words, they are less career-minded as compared to men. This provides the justification for the common notion that women's career advancement in tourism is blocked by self-imposed factors, and/or they do not want to proceed further on the career ladder in the tourism industry (Knutson & Schmidgall, 1999; Li & Leung, 2001; Boone et al., 2013; Zhong, Couch, & Blum, 2011; Blayney & Blotnick, 2010).

However, there is a counter-argument to this related to women's personality traits and career goals. From the individual perspective, women's career advancement emanates from their needs that are commonly explained by Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). Simply put, in the modern society, women's career advancement is motivated by and paid by psychological and self-fulfilment needs, whereas the lower levels of needs may be intertwined depending on their circumstances. As such, the self-imposed barriers may have minimal impact on women's career advancement. Literature on women's career advancement in tourism suggests that women's intrinsic characteristics such as personality, internal drive, career ambition work as enablers for their career success (Brownell, 1994; Li & Leung, 2001; Shrestha, 2016; Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018; Fan et al., 2021). Furthermore, it is reasonable to claim that the more educated a woman is, the more positive the awareness and the higher the ambition for career success. In line with the rhetoric of gender equality, the improvement of women's career advancement is the moral imperative (Baum & Cheung, 2015). Removing these imposed barriers will add more chances for further progress in gender equality.

The literature on women's career advancement puts forward the common argument that external and structural barriers still strongly influence a woman's decisions on career development. However, in-depth analyses with concrete empirical

evidence in different social-cultural and organisational contexts that can support any generalisation is still lacking.

Likewise, the interaction between the internal and external barriers is rarely discussed in order to provide an insight into what actually works for women empowerment and career advancement in tourism. Carvalho et al. (2018a) claimed that the studies on women managers seem to either overlook the internal barriers or presume these barriers as a result of external and structural factors. This will unintentionally bury the truth or lead to misleading insights about women’s underrepresentation in the tourism industry. The analytical framework proposed for examining the barriers to women’s career advancement in the hospitality industry is shown in Figure 1.

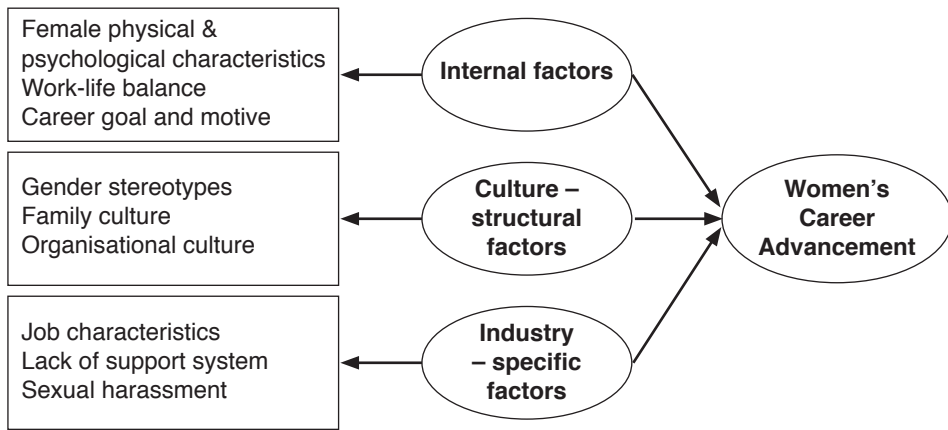


Figure 1. Analytical framework of barriers to women’s career advancement in the hospitality industry

Methodology

Sample Selection and Respondents’ Profile

The Central Coastal region of Vietnam (CCR) includes 14 provinces spread along about 1,900 km of the coastal zone and is home to more than 20 million people. Four provinces of the CCR were selected for this study, including Thanh Hoa, Thua Thien Hue, Da Nang and Phu Yen. The study was carried out in two phases. The first phase was mainly qualitative-based research for exploring the social organisational issues of women’s career advancement, as well as designing and testing the study’s questionnaire. The second phase was quantitative research. Using the convenience sampling technique, 42 hotels ranked 3-5 stars were selected, from which a total of 200 management staff were selected (by quota sampling) for a structured

questionnaire survey. Only 3–4 star hotels were included in this study because they provide broader settings for examining the issues of women's career advancement. Due to incomplete or invalid answers, a final sample of 152 valid responses (76% response rate) was used for this study.

Descriptive analysis showed that more than two-thirds of the sample (71.7% of respondents) were 31 – 40 years old and 80.9% were married. The sample comprised 99 females (65.1% of the sample), 53 males and most of the respondents held a university degree or higher. The inclusion of male respondents was on purpose to examine the perception differences between male and female managers. More than one-third had 5 – 10 years of work experience and a higher proportion (36%) had 11 – 15 years of experience in the hospitality industry.

Measures

As indicated in Figure 1, three constructs were proposed to investigate factors hindering women's career advancement in Vietnam's hospitality industry, for which 29 statements of barriers were designed based on the 5-point Likert scale (scores ranged from 1 – Totally disagree to 5 – Totally agree). The first construct, comprising of eight items, looked at the internal factors relating to females' perception of their gender roles, work-life balance, physical and psychological identities (Brownell, 1994; Blayney & Blotnick, 2010; Kumara, 2018). The second construct was on socio-cultural and structural barriers referring to external factors (Ng & Pine, 2003; Nawarathna 2017; Boone et al., 2013; Carvalho et al., 2018a) and was measured using 11 items. The third was industry-specific barriers including job characteristics and environment (Mooney & Ryan, 2009; Clevenger & Singh, 2013; Kumara, 2018), that were measured using 10 items.

In addition, a part of the questionnaire evaluated respondents on their awareness and perception of the existing Vietnamese laws and regulations of gender equality, gender issues at the workplace as well as their preference over gendered-leadership. This information is useful in providing an overview of the outcomes of collective actions for gender equality in the hospitality industry of Vietnam.

Data Analysis

Using SPSS AMOS statistical software (Ver. 22), exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed to construct the measurement model of barriers to women's career advancement in the CCR of Vietnam, followed by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the validity of the constructs used in the study. Furthermore, descriptive statistics and analysis of variance (ANOVA) with the relevant statistical procedures were used to test the mean differences among groups regarding their perception of barriers of women's career advancement in Vietnam's hospitality industry.

Results

The Progression in Career Path — Female vs. Male

Since there is no formal statistics to date, of gender profiles and their career path in tourism in general and in the hospitality industry, in particular in Vietnam, the analysis of the sample profile would be helpful in providing an overview of this concern. The results showed that more than a quarter of the male staff reached the mid-level management position under 30 years old but none of the female staff did. This observation was the same in the older age groups. For instance, in the 31 – 40 age group, there was a higher proportion of male staff reaching top and mid-level management positions as compared to their female counterparts (Table 1). None of the women in this study obtained any top management position after 50 years old. Overall, females tend to be promoted to middle management positions and supervision more than males, as consistently reported in literature (Li & Leung 2001; Kattara, 2005; Tam & Vy, 2019).

Table 1. The progression of women in hospitality in the CCR of Vietnam

Items	Top management (% of respondents)		Mid-level management (% of respondents)		Section head, supervisor (% of respondents)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Age group						
21 – 30	0	0	26.7	0	73.3	100
31 – 40	22.7	9.1	54.5	31.9	22.7	59.1
41 – 50	50.0	30.8	37.5	53.8	12.5	15.4
> 50	37.5	0	62.5	100	0	0
% within gender group	22.6	19.1	45.3	30.3	32.1	59.6
Years spent to reach the current management position						
< 3 years	0	4.5	14.8	11.1	3.9	7.9
3 – 5 years	36.4	27.3	22.2	35.2	17.1	47.4
6 – 10 years	18.2	13.6	7.4	9.3	1.3	22.4
% within gender group	54.6	45.4	44.4	55.6	22.3	77.7

Note - Top management includes General manager, Deputy General manager, Chief executive officers.

- Mid-level management includes Functional division managers/Deputy division managers

Concerning the years of experience before being promoted to the current position, the results revealed that about a quarter of the mid-level managers was promoted within less than 3 years, of which males account for a higher share. Likewise, more male staff reached a top position within 3–5 years of experience, while more female staff reached mid-level positions within these years of experience. Only 4.5% of top managers got their position within less than 3 years, but interestingly all of these were

women. This finding lends support to the argument that recruitment and promotion in the industry can be based on personal quality (McLean & McLean, 2001; Ho, 2013). Women are believed to embody some personality traits and emotional quotient for career success (Ng & Pine 2003; Costa et al., 2017; Carvalho et al., 2018b; Fan et al., 2021), especially young and well-educated women. It also further depicts a bright side of the progress in gender equality policies in the hospitality industry in Vietnam.

Overall, the analysis of positions by gender showed only 10.1% of female staff at the top level of management, 30.3% at the mid-level management while 59.6% were supervisors and section heads. These figures for men were 22.6%, 45.3% and 32.1%, respectively. As clearly depicted, the further up the career ladder, the fewer women found. This finding is consistent with a recent research by Tam & Vy (2019), indicating roughly that 12% of top management positions in the hotel sector are held by women, which is even lower than many other places across the world (Baum & Cheung, 2015; Catalyst, 2016; UNWTO, 2019). This finding suggests that women's underrepresentation is still a lingering challenge in the hospitality industry in Vietnam, despite many efforts being made for their career advancement.

Gender Issues at Workplace

Thanks to the supportive institutional dynamics and consistent policy commitments, Vietnam has gained significant achievements in addressing gender inequality. In this study, the results also provide some interesting empirical evidence. When asked about the awareness and perception of existing laws and regulations of gender equality, all respondents expressed their strong belief in the effectiveness of the hierarchical institutional mechanism of the Vietnam Women Union (VWU), which helps to promote gender equality as well as women's career advancement in tourism. Many of them added comments or evidence to affirm that Vietnamese laws have been thus far successful in promoting gender equality.

Some previous studies have argued that the hierarchical institutional structure and VWU, in particular, has yet to fully implement its functions in promoting gender equality and the advancement of women (Goodkind, 1995; Schuler et al., 2006; Hoang, 2020). However, this research findings provide concrete evidence of the progress that VWU has made for gender equality. In contrast, the study found a different outcome in low-ranking hotels, where the VWU was found not working well. This should be taken into account in gender equality programs as the number of 1-star and 2-star hotels accounts for roughly two-thirds of the total ranked hotels in the CCR of Vietnam, according to 2020 statistics (VNAT, 2020).

Regarding disparity at work, all respondents confirmed that there was no discrimination between women and men in terms of wage pay, bonus and other incentives, as well as the opportunities for training and promotion. Many of them passionately clarified and supported this using responses such as "*as long as one has*

talent and better work performance, she/he will have the chance for promotion, irrespective their gender”, “*unequal wage payment is against Vietnamese labour law*”, “*all companies I have worked have a very transparent and fair policy on wage, bonus and incentives*”, etc. While the disparity in pay prevails in the global hospitality industry (Guimarães & Silva, 2016; Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019; UNWTO, 2019), this finding may present a successful case where a top-down mechanism works for enhancing gender equality. Generally speaking, the finding is valid since the payroll policy in Vietnam is strictly regulated and specified for different types of labours, nature of work and also types of businesses by ownerships in order to ensure transparency and fairness. However, there still exists some exceptional cases where violations were uncovered, mostly in micro and small scale businesses. This also explains why the study’s finding appears to be inconsistent with formal statistics data that reported women’s monthly salary, on average, was roughly 11% lower than men (GSO, 2017). Unfortunately, there is no such data available for the hospitality sector in Vietnam.

It is interesting to note that, when asked about their preference for gendered leadership, a majority of the respondents (63.8%) expressed having no preference, whereas 21.1% of them preferred female leaders and only 15.1% of them favoured male leaders. The respondents also strongly disagreed with the statements related to their preferences in supervising or guiding female and male employees, work-related interactions with other peers and superiors. In other words, as a manager, they had no gendered preferences when working with subordinates, peers or superiors.

Finally, the respondents were asked three pseudo-situation questions related to the trade-off between a happy family and a successful career. Interestingly, 57.9% of the respondents (88 managers) chose career advancement, while the remaining 42.1% (64 managers) prioritised a happy family. About 47.9% of the respondents stated that they were willing to sacrifice for their spouse’s career advancement. Even more interesting, nearly 95% of the respondents chose to have a child rather than make this trade-off for career advancement, if required. The findings help explain why 22.4% of the respondents contended that women faced obstacles to opportunities of career advancement in the hospitality industry, and 27.6% of them were not so sure about this, although the remaining 50% of them denied. In “connecting the dots”, one may suggest that the myth of women’s career advancement in the hospitality industry could be related to invisible socio-cultural barriers.

Barriers to Women’s Career Advancement in the Hospitality Industry

Before running the EFA, the reliability of the overall sample was tested. The test yielded a Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of high scale reliability (0.866). The KMO value of 0.851 (> 0.7) and significant level of Bartlett’s test at 0.000 indicates the sampling adequacy and the relevance of the factor analysis. From 29 measurement variables, using principal components extraction with varimax rotation method

(for uncorrelated factors), the Kaiser's criterion with Eigenvalue greater than 1, and factor loading greater than 0.50 for factor selection (Hair et al., 2014), the results of EFA highlighted 6 factors extracted from 20 variables and 67.10% of the total variances explained. However, the tests of Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for each extracted factor allowed to keep four factors while two factors were dropped because of low scale reliability (Cronbach's Alpha coefficients < 0.5). The results of EFA are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. The extracted factors/barriers to women's career advancement in the hospitality industry

Extracted factors	Number of load variables	Cronbach's alpha
1. Work-life balance	3	0.710
2. Female psychology	2	0.528
3. Social – structural factors	8	0.892
4. Job characteristics	3	0.640
5. Male-dominated family culture	2	0.498
6. Impacts of maternal leave	2	0.458

The two dropped factors include male-dominated family culture and the impacts of maternal leave. The low reliability of the male's role could be due to the fact that in most nuclear families nowadays with double income earners, the male's role as the primary breadwinner is diminished. Moreover, the impact of this factor could be embedded in the broader term of social structural barriers. Adding more measurement variables designed for this factor could be an option for enhancing the reliability of this factor. Likewise, the low reliability of the maternal leave factor was also acceptable because the impacts of maternal leave could be collapsed into *Work-life balance* factors.

The next step was to perform the CFA to validate the measurement model of barriers to women's career advancement in the hospitality industry. Five common goodness-of-fit indices were used to assess the model fit, including the Chi-squared/degree of freedom (CMIN/df), the goodness of fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardised root mean residual (SRMR) (Kline, 2011). The results showed that the four-factor measurement model fits the data well (CMIN/df = 1.657; CFI = 0.938; GFI = 0.884; SRMR = 0.07 and RMSEA = 0.066). The CFA results also confirmed the convergent and discriminant validity of all constructs used in the study, where the values of composite reliability (CR) were above the minimum requirement (>0.6), and the average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded 0.50 for all constructs.

In summary, the research results suggest a revised model of the four constructs measuring barriers to women's career advancement in the hospitality industry,

including *Cultural – structural factors*, *Job characteristics*, *Work-life balance* and *Female psychology*. The *Cultural–structural* construct was explained by 8 variables (out of 11 hypothesised items) measuring the managers' perception of impacts of gendered issues at the workplace, old boy network, societal preconception of gender stereotypes, patriarchal traditions and supporting activities. The results also revealed that three measurement items related to job characteristics were loaded in the hypothesised construct named *Industry-specific factors*, including night-shift, geographical mobility and pay gap between male and female workers. Hence, this construct was renamed as *Job characteristics*. Several other measurement items of supporting activities and working environment (such as training opportunities, role model, mentoring) were not loaded in this factor, but rather, these items had high loadings in the *Cultural – structural construct*. This could be explained by the fact that in the business context, most gender-supporting activities and gender policies aim to support a gender-unbiased organisational culture. Moreover, in a broader term, the working environment is commonly related to working conditions, work assignment and organisational culture, which can be taken as a whole by the managers as organisational culture. This would further add the need for revisiting the related concepts of industry-specific barriers in women's career advancement.

It is also interesting that the measurement variables of the internal factors were grouped into two constructs, namely *Work-life balance* (3 items) and *Female psychology* (2 items). For the items explaining the construct of *Work-life balance*, the “difficulty of keeping work-life balance” and “women having to give birth” were highly effective measurements with factor loadings above 0.88. Likewise, the statement of the women's emotion-based leadership style (factor loading of 0.83) helped explain well the construct of *Female psychology*. Although more empirical evidence is needed to test the model, the specification of these two factors in the measurement model would be helpful for an in-depth analysis of the barriers to women's career advancement in the tourism industry.

The Managers' Perceptions on Barriers to Women's Career Advancement

From the results of CFA, four factors were used to assess the managers' perceptions of barriers to women's career advancement in the hospitality industry. The derived means of factors suggest that *Work-life balance* appears to be the only factor hindering women's career advancement in this case and there were no statistically significant differences ($p \leq 0.05$) in perception among the different groups of the respondents by gender, age, marital status, education, current position and years of experience (Table 3). This convergence in the managers' perception further corroborates with literature that *Work-life balance* is a key barrier to women's career advancement in the hospitality industry. On the same note, the three other factors, namely *Cultural – structural barriers*, *Job characteristics* and *Female psychology* were not perceived by

the managers as barriers. On the one hand, this positive view could be seen as an outcome of the collective efforts made by the completed hierarchical mechanism as aforementioned. In reality, VWU has continued to play a central role in raising public awareness of gender equality and solving gender issues both at the workplace and families. Irrespective of having membership or not, any woman could report any gendered issues at any time and ask for help from VWU. On the other hand, along with the increasing strategic importance of the hospitality and tourism industry in Vietnam, the image of a tourism career has improved significantly, which helps to strengthen the “pull and push factors” to advance women’s careers in this industry. As such, the top-down organisation with collective actions for gender equality in Vietnam deserves special credit as a good example as highlighted by Waibel and Glück (2013).

Table 3. Perception differences of barriers to women’s career advancement by demographic groups

Factors	Mean ¹	Top management		Mid-level management		Section head, supervisor	
		Gender	Age	Marital status	Education	Current position	Years of experience
1. Work-life balance	3.76	0.345	0.690	0.368	0.307	0.075	0.300
2. Female psychology	2.86	0.074	0.001	0.008	0.000	0.088	0.001
3. Social – structural factors	2.41	0.040	0.000*	0.202	0.000	0.117	0.000*
4. Job characteristics	2.87	0.018	0.153	0.835	0.050	0.851	0.088*

Note: The Likert’s scale value (1 =Totally disagree to 5 = Totally agree)

* Welch statistics with the ANOVA Games – Howell Post – hoc test

The results in Table 3 show that the perception among different age groups on the factors of *Female psychology* and *Cultural – structural barriers* are statistically and significantly different ($p \leq 0.05$). The older the respondents were, the more they disagreed with Cultural – structural barriers but were less disagreeable with the *Female psychology* barriers. With regard to education level, college and university degree holders tended to be neutral on three factors, while the other groups showed disagreement. Similarly, although both male and female managers expressed disagreement on the three factors (*Cultural – structural barriers*, *Job characteristics* and *Female psychology*), the female respondents expressed less disagreement with these factors as a barrier to women’s career advancement. This implies that women seem to be more optimistic

about the opportunities for career advancement in the hospitality industry in the CCR of Vietnam. These different perceptions of barriers to women's career advancement should be taken into account for more effective gender policies and programs.

Discussion and Conclusion

While barriers to women's career advancement in tourism have been extensively discussed, very few studies have examined the interrelationship among these barriers in order to provide an insight into women's career progression in tourism. Given that the impacts of the barriers to women's career advancement are sensitive to different institutional, economic and socio-cultural contexts, more empirical evidence is needed to enrich a global view on women's career advancement in tourism. Using quantitative research methods on a sample of 152 management staff from 42 3-5 star hotels in Vietnam, this study made an extended effort to fill in these gaps by investigating the interrelationship between the barriers to women's career advancement in the context of the Vietnam hospitality industry.

The findings suggest a four-factor model measuring the barriers to women's career advancement in the hospitality industry, including *Cultural – structural factors*, *Job characteristics*, *Work-life balance* and *Female psychology*. The verification of this factor structure corroborates with the findings of many previous studies on women's career advancement in tourism (Brownell, 1994; Boone et al., 2013; Nawarathna, 2017; Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018; Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2021), and further, acknowledges the claim that impacts of the barriers to women's career advancement should be examined in the context of interdependent relationships which should be made the focal points of gender mainstreaming programs rather than translated into monitoring indicators (WBG, 2017).

Hospitality managers in this study expressed their strong belief in their gender-friendly working environment and agreed that the opportunities for career advancement were equal for both males and females. Further, work-life balance was perceived as a key barrier to women career advancement in hospitality. The impacts of cultural – structural factors and women's emotion-based leadership appeared so minimal that the managers did not recognise them as barriers to women's career advancement. In this respect, gender equality policies and gender mainstreaming programs should aim to improve childcare and health services as well as facilitate changes in familial gender roles, which can be expected to address women's burden of work-life balance for their career advancement.

The research findings also point out that VWU's operations could be tailored depending on the type of hospitality establishments. Family-run and/or low-ranked hotels commonly have weak women associations. This may prove to be the missing link that has weakened VWU's reach and influence in promoting women's career advancement in the hospitality sector in Vietnam.

Theoretical Implications

This study attempts to provide several important theoretical implications. Since the few studies in the past were based on interdependent analysis, the confirmation of the four-factor model of barriers to women's career advancement verified in this study is considered a methodological significance that helps enrich the literature of women's career advancement in hospitality. It is interesting to note as a departure from past cases, the managers in this study did not see *Cultural – structural factors*, *Job characteristics* and *Female psychology* as barriers to women's career advancement in the hospitality industry. Instead, *Work-life balance* was found as the only element hindering their career advancement in the hospitality industry.

The fact is that for most of the managers in the hospitality sector, who are well-educated and supposedly to be more career-minded, their strong personality traits and qualifications as facilitators may moderate the impacts of *Cultural – structural barriers*, *Job characteristics* and *Female psychology*. Irrespective of different socio-cultural settings, work-life balance has been established as a key barrier to women's career advancement in hospitality and tourism (Chandra, 2012; Indra, Tanusia, & Abu Baker, 2013; Lim, Peng, & Yin-Fah, 2013; Deiana & Fabbri, 2020; Fan et al., 2021). Women managers in the hospitality industry tend to pursue their career advancement while fulfilling their family responsibilities. In other words, searching for the balance between workload and family obligations will continue to be a struggle in the choice for work-life balance.

Practical Implications

As among the first attempts to explore the barriers to women's career advancement in the hospitality industry in Vietnam, the results of this research provide several important practical implications. From the institutional perspective, Vietnam is well-known as one of few countries with the most progressive top-down mechanism for gender equality, in which VWU is a key influential organisation. VWU started out as a pioneer in the development and implementation of gendered policies and programs in the country, by which the collective actions had been mobilised through its hierarchical structure. Given the important role of VWU in enhancing gender equality at the workplace, hotel businesses should have a clear policy for the enforcement of women associations as a proactive part of its gendered practices.

The study also reveals that fewer women get promoted at young ages as compared to their male peers. Apart from the impacts of cultural–structural factors, women personality, which is commonly characterised as being more tender-minded, and altruistic (Weisberg, De Young, & Hirsh, 2011), may motivate them towards maintaining social bonds rather than aiming for management positions. Interviews with young managers show that women usually take a longer time as compared to men

to adapt themselves during the early years of their career. Hence, the establishment of mentorship and career development programmes in organisations will be helpful to help women overcome this hurdle.

For hotel businesses, enhancing opportunities for women to advance in their careers should be prioritised in talent management. Hotel businesses should be ready for organisational changes that accommodate more flexible practices in human resource management, lessen career-related strain, and motivate women's capability and motivation for career progression. At the family and individual level, both women and family members play equally important roles in eliminating gender stereotypes. Family support (changes in awareness and attitude toward women careers, sharing of the housework burden, providing resources etc) will be important for women to overcome challenges from job characteristics, work-life balance, and move ahead in their career goals.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

As in any research, several limitations are inevitable in this study. Due to the limited sample size, only CFA was applied in this case to validate the measurement model. Therefore, for future research, the replication and extension of this study can be made with a larger sample size and/or across the tourism sectors for a more complete model development. For further discussion, some managers may consider the term "work-life balance" as a misnomer. One may argue that work-life balance can be seen as one of the career goals or an outcome of a career path, whereas many others may take it as a burden of work that they have to tackle in their daily life. Hence, the impacts of work-life balance could be an aggregation of all other constructs, that challenges the operational definition of the construct. Thus, further studies on the operationalisation of this concept could help enrich the literature of this research domain.

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