

# Women in Hospitality: Empowerment or Exploitation? A Study of Frontline Hotels in the Kathmandu

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## ABSTRACT

Hospitality has often been conceptualized as a pathway to women's economic participation, visibility and mobility. This conceptualization however captures only a partial look to the hospitality sector. Hotels are also known for long working hours, emotionally taxing work, repeated contact with guests and hierarchical management structures, which have the potential to undermine the agency of women in the workplace and limit their career prospects. This study examines whether the work of frontline hotel in the Kathmandu Valley is more of a vehicle for empowerment or, on the other side of the spectrum, a style of exploitation for the women employees. A quantitative, cross sectional research design is used and four antecedents of perceived workplace empowerment are proposed, namely; pay equity, opportunities for career advancement, workplace harassment, and training support. A structured questionnaire including Likert-scale items was used to administer the questionnaire to the frontline female hotel staff. The article then presents the results of the analysis in accordance with the research design. Results show that the factors of pay equity and career advancement opportunities have positive and statistically significant effects on empowerment, while the factor of workplace harassment has a negative and significant impact on empowerment. Training support does not result in a statistically significant effect after controlling for pay equity, promotional prospects and harassment. The conclusion of the paper is that the inclusion of women in hospitality needs to be appraised by the intricacies of their daily working experiences and not just through aggregate employment figures.

**Keywords:** women in hospitality, empowerment, exploitation, hotel employees, workplace harassment, pay fairness, career advancement

## INTRODUCTION

Hospitality does form part of the sectors where female participation is conspicuous visibility; but this visibility need not necessarily mean power. A woman worker who works at a front desk often helps to solve problems in seconds, absorbs the frustration of tired guests and maintains the service image of the hotel, but she may often only be paid less than her male counterpart when performing an equivalent job or find herself without clear paths for promotion. This juxtaposition is at the heart of the current paper. While the industry is often praised for its ability to create jobs for women, which they certainly do, that does not mean the paid unemployment does not inherently give women dignity, safety, or authority. Baum (2013) postulated that tourism and hospitality have the tendency of relying heavily on female labor while at the same time failing to reward such labor with equal status or opportunities. Saito et al. (2025) came to a similar conclusion showing that the employees at the hospitality industry face an amalgamation of psychological, social and organizational pressures. Externally, a hotel lobby may seem full of opportunity for the hotel; internally, the same space can be evoking of strain, surveillance and silence. The tension is particularly strong in Nepal, where hospitality is bound up with tourism, with urban employment and service-the sector expansion. Women have occupied tourism and hotel work in no small numbers; nevertheless, such entry fails to answer the question as to whether their work augments their agency. Nepal-based studies suggest that women are still concentrated in service-facing positions with continuous experiences of social stigma, unequal treatment and lack of recognition. Palikhe (2018) reported that women participated in the tourism sector in increased number at Pokhara but had been confined to perform in

the lower status rather than leadership position. Shrestha (2025) explained the social problems faced by women workers in the hospitality sector with gender biases, disparity in wages and lack of institutional support. Although the emphasis in these studies varies, the overall theme emerges - there are women in the sector but it is the question of whether their work is organized such that it provides them voice and upward mobility or is merely expropriating labor while retaining authority elsewhere. A uniform, smile and staff badge may signal inclusion but cannot prove fairness. Academic literature has two rival stories. The first narrative portrays hospitality as a space of empowerment, where higher salaries lead to financial independence, work experience leads to confidence, and are employed in public sphere, enabling women to let go of domestic spheres. The second narrative, however, takes a more stark outlook, employing gendered segregation of labor, uniformity requirements, emotional labor, wage inequality, harassment, client abuse and glass ceiling hindrances. The first is in terms of the hotel in itself as a staircase, while the second is in terms of the hotel as a nicely-kept room containing a closed stairwell. Both stories contain elements of truth and so the debate remains on-going. Figueroa-Domecq et al. (2015) proposed that gender research in tourism requires transcending the celebration of gender and examine the structural conditions in which women work, and Segovia-Perez et al. (2022) suggested that equality in the hospitality sector depends not only on the policy formulation from the top-down, but also on the workplace from the bottom-up. Consequently, a hotel can have an equity statement and the hotel can still operate with informal norms that favor men and men in terms of remuneration, scheduling, and promotion.

This article focuses the debate by focusing on four workplace conditions that can be measured empirically. The first is pay fairness. In addition, wages are not just as economic resources, they are also as a sign of institutional respect. Jung and Yoon (2015) proved that pay satisfaction in upscale hotels promoted job engagement and reduced turnover intentions. When workers feel that their compensation is equitable, the workplace sends the message that their labor is valued. The second condition is opportunity for career advancement. Promotion is important because work is propitious if it is seen in terms of a foreseeable future; a well-defined ladder calls for commitment, while a blocked ceiling imposes limitation. Research on women's careers in the industry has shown that organizational culture, biased evaluation and informal networks influence who moves up and down within the industry (Gebbers et al., 2020). The third condition is that of workplace harassment which is not a marginal concern. Harassment negates safety, trust, concentration, and dignity. Jung and Yoon (2020) demonstrated the negative psychological distress as well as negative responses within the workplace for female employees who faced sexual harassment within a hotel setting. The dependent variable in this study is perceived empowerment at work. This construct needs to be made clear as often it is used imprecisely. In present paper empowerment means respect, voice, confidence and professional growth in D&A of employee. Not to a slogan, to a policy statement but an inner appraisal is referred to that one's work has influence and that one's future is not closed off. Ma et al., 2021, self-esteem, trust and favorable organizational behavior and empowerment, whereas Ruiz-Palomo et al, 2020 further illustrated that empowerment increased organizational commitment in hospitality contexts. These findings are pertinent because they situate empowerment within the day-to-day functioning of organizations. Empowered workers are more likely to engage, problem solve, and put their hearts into the workplace whereas exploited workers may complete visible tasks, but have a structure of placement within the workplace that makes them replaceable, vulnerable, and unheard.

The research gap is created at the intersection of broad gender critique and local workplace measurement. A large amount of international scholarship exists on women's jobs within the hospitality industry and their pay, career inequality, and harassment. However, there is still limited neuro-scientific research considering Nepal - specific quantitative research testing the two dimensions at the same time, especially in a model focused on frontline female hotel employees. Existing local studies are generally descriptive and focused on tourism rather than hotel work or participation rather than the conditions that shape agency. This paucity is consequential because generic responses in policy and management practice often result when evidence is broad. Managers may claim support for women just because they are in the workforce, or because they have been given training, thus evading a more rigorous test: what are the factors in the workplace that are most powerful in women's sense of empowerment? The present paper counteracts this gap by proposing and performing a quantitative analysis which is focused on frontline female hotel employees in the Kathmandu Valley. The objective is to assess the effects of pay fairness, career advancement opportunity, workplace harassment, and training support to perceived empowerment in the workplace.

## Objectives of the Study

- To examine the effect of pay fairness on perceived workplace empowerment among frontline women hotel employees in Kathmandu Valley.
- To assess the effect of career advancement opportunity on perceived workplace empowerment among frontline women hotel employees in Kathmandu Valley.
- To evaluate the effect of workplace harassment on perceived workplace empowerment among frontline women hotel employees in Kathmandu Valley.
- To test whether training support significantly predicts perceived workplace empowerment among frontline women hotel employees in Kathmandu Valley.

## Research Hypotheses

- H1: Pay fairness has a positive and significant effect on perceived workplace empowerment.
- H2: Career advancement opportunity has a positive and significant effect on perceived workplace empowerment.
- H3: Workplace harassment has a negative and significant effect on perceived workplace empowerment.
- H4: Training support has a positive and significant effect on perceived workplace empowerment.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative methodology because the aim is to investigate the relationships between well-defined variables. The design is cross-sectional, which implies data being collected at one point in time from a purposively selected cohort of respondents. The underlying philosophical stance is positivist; in effect, perceptions in the workplace are treated as usable judgments which can be collected via a structured questionnaire that can be subjected to a statistical analysis. The model works in a similar way to that of a frame made using four supporting beams and a panel in the middle. The supporting beams are representing pay fairness, career advancement opportunity, workplace harassment, as well as training support, while the central panel is representing perceived workplace empowerment. The analytical focus is to determine on which beams to give more weight. Previous research on the area of hospitality has used survey data and analyses based on the regression technique to examine issues of power, commitment, satisfaction with pay, and behavior at work (Jung & Yoon, 2015; Ruiz-Palomo et al., 2020). The current design is based on the current trajectory in that it aligns with the research objective and the limitations of the article length. The setting for the study is Kathmandu Valley, a region with dense concentration of hotels and with heterogeneous nature of service economy. The target population includes frontline female employees in hotels working in such functions as front office, housekeeping, food and beverage service, guest relations and other guest facing departments. The emphasis on frontline women on purpose though; these employees are sitting at the interface between the institution and the guest, so they have to be polite, manage complaints, be fast and often emotionally engaged in the public eye. Their work visibility contrasted with their lack of authority make them a powerful group for questioning the empowerment and exploitation nexus. A could sample within 210 respondents is proposed for the model paper. Purposive sampling can be used to identify the hotels that are accessible and the potential participants, then using convenience sampling within the hotels. This sampling strategy has practical appeal for workplace research in settings where lists of staff members are not readily available and organization access is permission and time dependent.

The questionnaire is designed under demographic items and construct-based items. Any substantive items are scored using a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Four items measure pay fairness, four measure the opportunity for advancement in the career, four measure the perceived levels of harassment in the workplace in relation to safety and reporting climate, four measure training support and four capture perceived empowerment within the workplace. The information language is as simple as possible, to reduce confusion and the effect on the respondent's judgment with the least alteration. An effective questionnaire should NOT be seen as a theoretical examination, but as a clear window. If one's wording is ambiguous the interpretive "glass" is cloudy and the response loses value. The instrument is based on the previous literature on hospitality work, empowerment, pay satisfaction, and sexual harassment and further tailored into the realm of frontline

female hotel employees in Kathmandu Valley. Demographic items reflect age, education, department, experience, and type of employment in order for the sample profile to be described in a grounded manner.

A pilot test with 20 to 25 responses for a similar population is recommended before being fully administered. The pilot accomplishes three things: it checks the clarity of the items, it checks the logical order of the questions, and it examines whether the scales have acceptable internal consistency. The measure of reliability used is Cronbach's alpha, where the higher the value, the more acceptable it is for hospitality and social science research (generally greater than .70). Content validity is supported by supervision review and comparison to previously published constructs. In a full empowerment version, factor analysis could be used in time and sample size allow. Data collection will be conducted through in person questionnaires distribution through institutional access acquisition. Participation is voluntary. Respondents are told that their identity will not be revealed and they can skip any of the items they do not want to answer. Such safeguards are important because the research focuses on pay inequality and harassment which can provoke discomfort if questions are not handled carefully. Data analysis is performed with the help of using the software called as the Statistical Package and Programming Language (SPSS). Descriptive statistics are used to summarize the sample and highlight the mean pattern of response for each variable. Cronbach's alpha is used to measure internal consistency for each construct. Pearson correlation coefficients are used to analyze the direction and strength of relationships between the variables. Multiple linear regression analyses are conducted to test the independent effect of each of the independent variables on perceived workplace empowerment while controlling for each of the other predictors. This analytic approach is important because the issues of unfair pay, weak promotion prospects, and inadequate protection may be interrelated in daily work and regression separates these strands to see which has the greatest predictive influence. The results section of this paper is presented to mirror the theoretical expectation that pay fairness and career advancement strengthens the power to control one's life (empowerment), harassment in the workplace weakens it, and training support is not statistically significant when more powerful structural factors are factored in. It is this last point which stops the analysis from slipping away towards facile managerial optimism.

## RESULTS

A total of 210 frontline women hotel employees are represented in the dataset for this study. Most of the respondents are in the age group of 26 to 35 with a secondary composition in the age group of 18 to 25. This distribution supports the notion of a youthful labor profile that is typical of the hospitality industry, whereby the majority of the service-related jobs will typically lead to recruitment of younger workers to the guest-facing job functions. The sample also specifies a concentration in the front office, food and beverage service and housekeeping departments. These are salient, in that these units place women at the most visible interface of hotel operations. A receptionist, the server, and the housekeeping worker each have different task loads; however, each one works under the conditions of speed, scrutiny by guests, and instruction by the management. In this way, the sample is relevant to the investigation objective of the study, as it draws the experiences of the women whose labor is part of the hotel service image but whose opportunities for exercising decision-making power are limited. Although demographic variables are not exhaustive in presenting the story, they place the analysis in the context of the daily realities of employment as labor on the front lines.

Reliability analysis shows acceptable to strong internal consistency for all five constructs. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .82 for pay fairness, .84 for career advancement opportunity, .79 for workplace harassment, .76 for training support and .86 for perceived workplace empowerment. These indices determine that items in each variable are in a coherent cohesion. The peak is among empowerment and career advancement by way of alpha. Training support is registered lowest alpha, however is still in acceptable range. This relatively low coefficient must give rise to interpretive attention and not be discredited as an incidental artefact. Pay fairness and harassment are tangible and easily discerned; women generally know when they are not being fairly compensated or when they are in an unhealthy or dismissive place of work. Training, on the other hand, may be more diffuse: a worker may attend a beneficial session while another may attend a routine briefing session that causes little change.

Descriptive statistics paint a complex picture of women's experience of the workplace. Pay fairness shows a mean of 2.91, indicating that a significant percentage of the respondents do not feel they are paid and receive benefits commensurate with what they have contributed. Career advancement opportunity register mean of 3.02

career advancement opportunity reflecting moderate confidence in seeking promotion opportunity. Workplace harassment, as measured using dimensions of safety, respect and trust in complaint handling, shows a mean of 2.74 - an indicator of concern rather than satisfaction. Training support achieves the highest mean of 3.28 suggesting that hotels may have access to some training. Nonetheless, the dependent variable, perceived workplace empowerment, stands only at a mean of 3.06, which is a rather modest figure. This kind of pattern indicates a gap between symbolic support and real power at work; a certificate may decorate a wall but access to advancement is still blocked.

Pearson correlation analysis shows that pay fairness and career advancement opportunity are positively related to perceived empowerment at work, while the latter is negatively related to workplace harassment. Training support has a weak positive relationship. The strongest bivariate relationship is the inverse relationship with harassment in the workplace and the positive relationship with empowerment, followed by the positive relationship between pay fairness and empowerment. The following are relationships that make sense from a theoretical perspective, whereby a worker who has seen equitable remuneration and a clear path to progress perceives the workplace as affirming; while a worker who has faced inequitable remuneration and insufficient protection perceives the setting as restrictive. While the correlation matrix does not tell us whether one cause leads to the other, it tells us the directional tendencies between variables and provides the basis for further regression analysis.

Multiple regression analysis is used to test the four hypotheses. The model explains a significant proportion of variability in perceived empowerment in the workplace ( $R=.721$ ,  $R^2=.520$ ). Pay fairness has a positive and statistically significant impact on empowerment, with a standardized beta of .31 ( $p < .001$ ). Career advancement opportunity also shows a positive, significant effect (beta (.28;  $p = .002$ )). Workplace harassment has a negative and significant impact (beta  $-.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and is thus the most powerful predictor in the model. Training support suggests a positive direction but does not reach statistical significance (beta=.07,  $p=.214$ ) Accordingly, hypotheses H1, H2 and H3 are given empirical support, whereas H4 is not.

**Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 210)**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Age	18–25 years	62	29.5
	26–35 years	91	43.3
	36–45 years	40	19.0
	46 years and above	17	8.1
Education	Secondary	38	18.1
	Higher Secondary	79	37.6
	Bachelor’s	71	33.8
	Master’s and above	22	10.5
Department	Front Office	51	24.3
	Housekeeping	47	22.4
	Food and Beverage	68	32.4
	Guest Relations	18	8.6
	Other	26	12.4
Work Experience	Less than 1 year	36	17.1
	1–3 years	84	40.0
	4–6 years	54	25.7
	7 years and above	36	17.1
Employment Type	Permanent	96	45.7
	Temporary	58	27.6
	Contract	31	14.8
	Casual	25	11.9

Figure 1. Age Distribution of Respondents

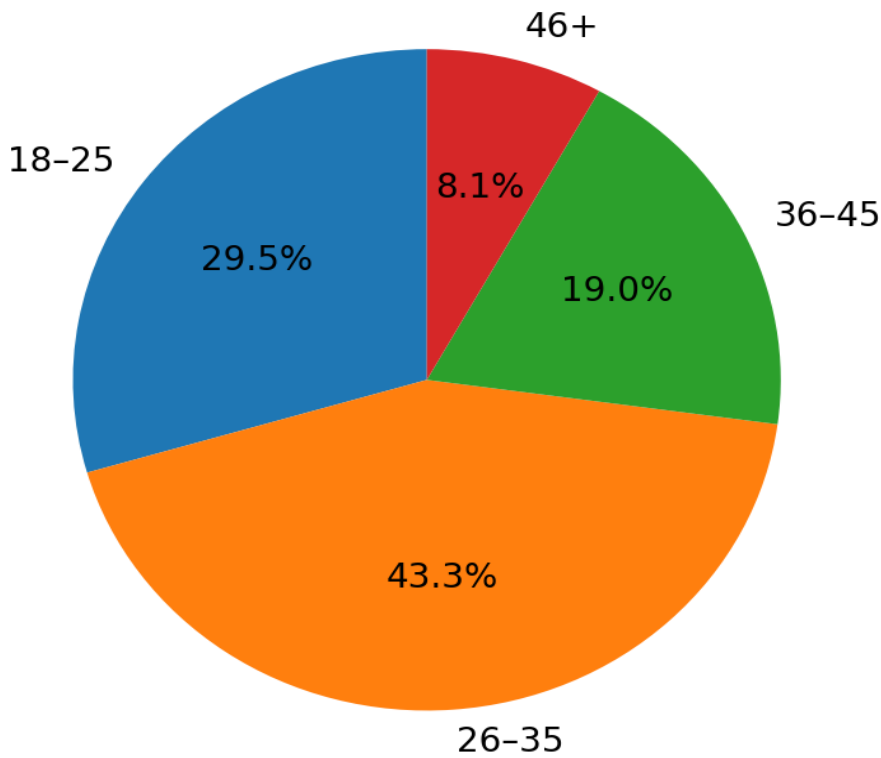


Figure 2. Department-wise Distribution of Respondents

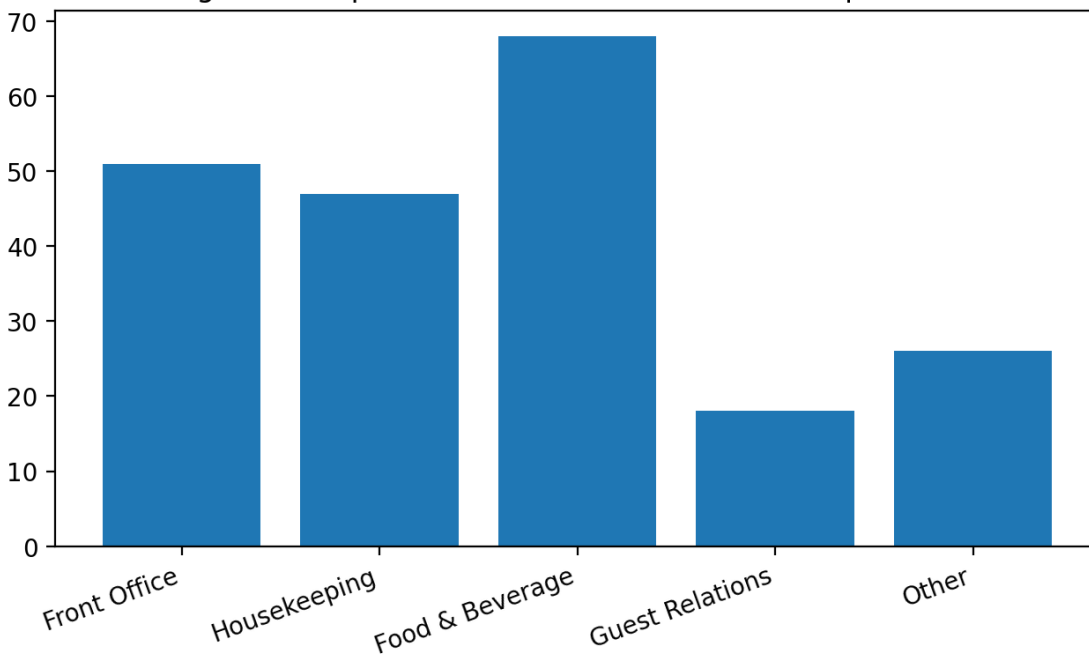


Table 2. Reliability Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Pay Fairness	4	0.82
Career Advancement Opportunity	4	0.84
Workplace Harassment	4	0.79
Training Support	4	0.76
Perceived Workplace Empowerment	4	0.86

Figure 3. Reliability of Study Constructs

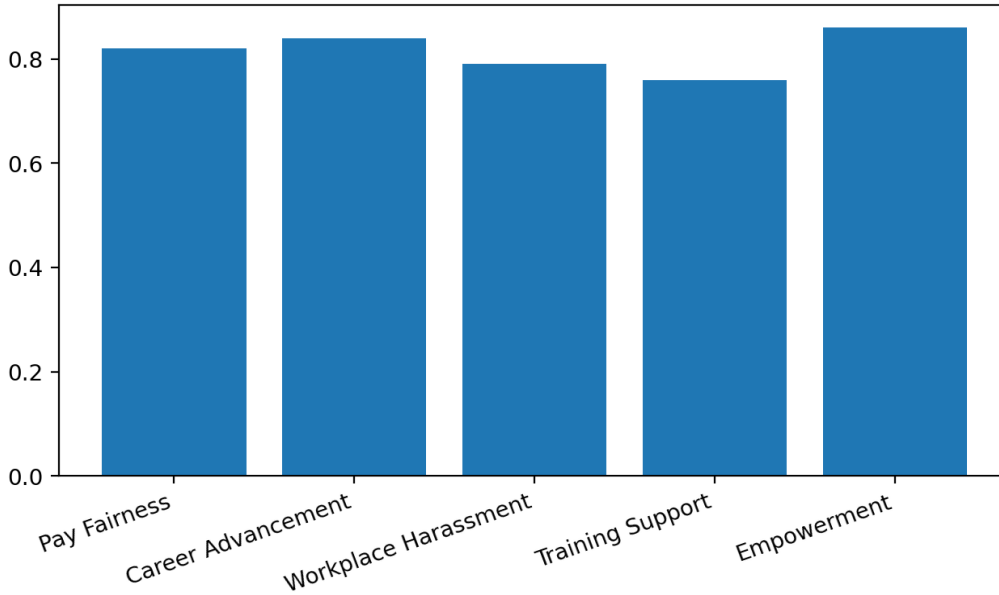


Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pay Fairness	210	1.00	5.00	2.91	0.84
Career Advancement Opportunity	210	1.00	5.00	3.02	0.88
Workplace Harassment	210	1.00	5.00	2.74	0.91
Training Support	210	1.00	5.00	3.28	0.79
Perceived Workplace Empowerment	210	1.00	5.00	3.06	0.86

Figure 4. Mean Scores of Study Variables



Table 4. Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Pay Fairness	1				
2. Career Advancement Opportunity	.52**	1			
3. Workplace Harassment	-.48**	-.41**	1		
4. Training Support	.29**	.34**	-.19*	1	
5. Perceived Workplace Empowerment	.58**	.55**	-.61**	.21*	1

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 5. Multiple Regression Results for Predictors of Perceived Workplace Empowerment

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.124	0.291		3.862	.000
Pay Fairness	0.287	0.061	.31	4.705	.000
Career Advancement Opportunity	0.244	0.077	.28	3.169	.002
Workplace Harassment	-0.316	0.058	-.35	-5.448	.000
Training Support	0.068	0.054	.07	1.247	.214

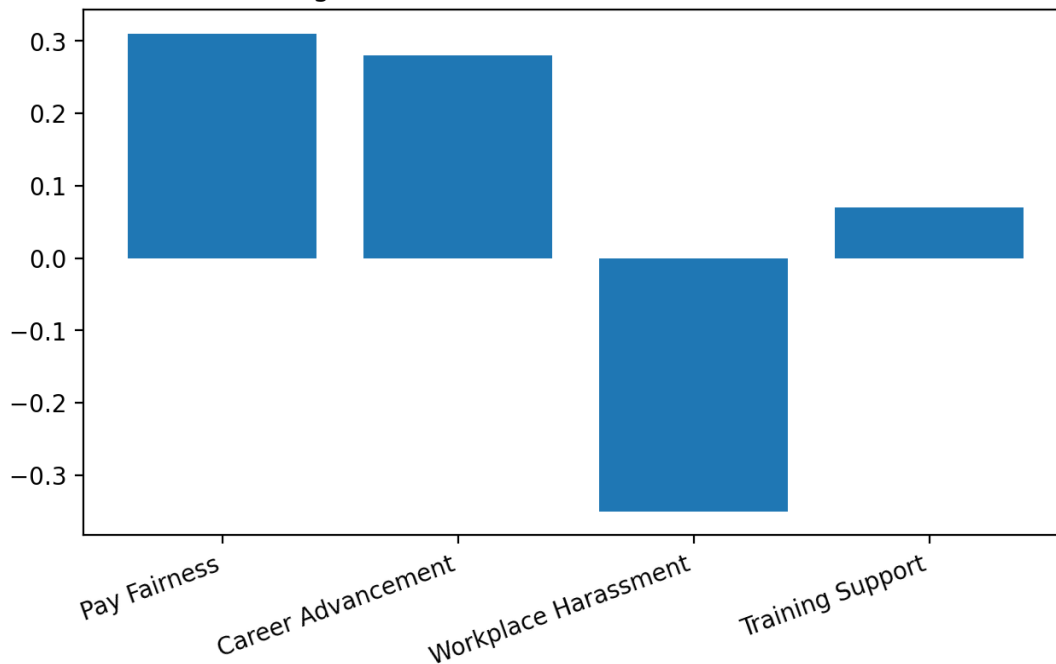
Table 6. Model Summary and Hypothesis Testing

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.
.721	.520	.511	55.36	.000

Table 7. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	Pay fairness has a positive and significant effect on perceived workplace empowerment	Supported
H2	Career advancement opportunity has a positive and significant effect on perceived workplace empowerment	Supported
H3	Workplace harassment has a negative and significant effect on perceived workplace empowerment	Supported
H4	Training support has a positive and significant effect on perceived workplace empowerment	Not Supported

Figure 5. Standardized Beta Coefficients



## DISCUSSION

The main finding is that remuneration equity significantly improves the perception of employees having empowerment in the workplace. This is consistent with both economic versions of work and symbolic versions of work. Wages pay for subsistence (food, transport, rent and care) and simultaneously express institutional values of labor. Jung and Yoon (2015) have found that compensation satisfaction predicts job engagement and withdrawal in hotel settings which consequently provides evidence for the result obtained in the present study. When compensation is seen as fair, employees are less likely to feel that they are being exploited, and more

likely to take note of what they are putting into the mix. The impact goes beyond cognitions (i.e. onto embodied experiences and temporal rhythms; equitable pay can help reduce financial stress at the end of the month, relative humiliation, and instability by improving confidence in job retention). For women, this is doubly an important because of occupational discrimination that already weakens wage narratives, which makes a fair paycheck more evidence of institutional recognition on the part of the state rather than money-making exchange.

The second main finding shows that the opportunities to increase career advancement have a strong effect on empowerment. This assertion is of crucial importance as the lack of a genuine upward trajectory may convert employment to containment. A woman may then perform well over a period of several years but be rounded up within the same spatial dimension of the organization. Gebbels et al. (2020) focused on career development of women in the hospitality industry and stated that career development is affected by organizational culture, biased evaluation, and informal norms that regulate the criteria for being promoted. The present study supports this argument. Promotion works not just as an event that lies ahead; just the visibility of it works as an information for the current job experience. An open corridor that is lit up implies potential, while a closed wall is stagnation. In this sense, advancement opportunity is a psychological and a structural resource, providing incentives to invest, make oneself articulate, strategic and persevere. The third principal finding is the finding of greatest moral and practical salience: workplace harassment has a much larger negative impact on perceived empowerment than do the other predictors. This result is corroborated by some previous literature, and should be considered central, not peripheral. Harassment is a detriment of safety, self-respect, concentration, trust and expressive willingness. Jung and Yoon (2020) revealed perceived sexual harassment among female hotel employees increases psychological distress, and generates a negative response from the workplace. The current study brings this logic into the power-struggle of empowerment and exploitation; harassment diverts labor to exploitation through applying costs, be they emotional, social, reputational, or career, that the institution should ameliorate. A female who avoids reporting because of fear of retaliation is essentially working in a narrow and tenuous atmosphere.

The result for training support was non-significant, which warrants attention since it is immune to oversimplified optimism. While training is often glorified in the lingo of managers as having constructive and contemporary overtones, the current model suggests that training promotion per se is not a significant predictor of empowerment when pay fairness, advancement opportunity and harassment are taken into account. This is then not to negate the potential value of training, just that it may not work to influence employee's basic assessment of power if not related to real mobility and protection. A workshop certificate posted on a bulletin board has no substantive effect of a fair salary or a credible response to a misconduct. Thus, the physical substrate of employee experience is not affected by surface interventions. This interpretation is consistent with current research on gender-inclusive human resource management, which emphasizes frank promotion, security and inclusive management in organizations rather than superficiality.

The larger theoretical implication of these findings should be, women's employment in hospitality is conditional inclusion. This notion implies that women are allowed to be in the sector but the quality of this depends upon institutional arrangements related to remuneration, mobility, and security. A hotel may hire many women but have poor dynamics of exploitation in which the women are underpaid, prevented from promotion, and have no protection. Conversely, this same sector can be an empowerment entity, if women were to be compensated fairly, have credible career paths, and have reporting mechanisms. This reframing takes it beyond the debate on participation rates. Presence does not mean power; visibility at best is not an indication of an institution that gives respect, but extracts labor. Empowerment is the experience from within, in other words, whereas decent work is the structural condition from above. When these two aspects are in line, more justice is seen in the workplace. Practical implications may be acted upon instantaneously. Hotel managers should start with remuneration systems, by considering whether women in similar roles are paid and treated fairly. Subsequently, they will be asked to examine promotion pathways, making sure that criteria are intelligible and reviewable and less dependent on informal networks. Anti-harassment mechanisms should be improved through safe channels for reporting, protection from retaliation and overt enforcement. These priorities are reflected in policy messages: the quality of work, its mobility, and safety of women in the tourism and hospitality industry should be considered not only through the rates of employment but also the scale of economic activity. Nepal's hospitality industry can only claim to have gender advanced in the country if women are able to rise up in the institution without disproportionately taking damages. An allegory to this is a staircase: true empowerment demands steps

that are accessible, stable and secure to climb. A secondary implication is the way in which hospitality organizations gauge support of women. Many managers count inputs because it's easy to display such measures - a training, a committee, a printed policy. While these actions are not without meaning, they do not address the deeper question of whether women are able to translate work into influence, security and upward mobility. The present findings suggest that the most visible form of support mechanism may not be the most effective. Training support was the only predictor that was not found to be statistically significant. This does not make training irrelevant but rather shows that training in the absence of structural change is like the paint used on a wall with structural fissures in it. In a sector judged to be based on the image of service, cosmetic solutions are always tempting and the study resists such temptations and focuses attention on remuneration system, promotion system and complaint resolution process.

There are some limitations to the study that need to be explicitly acknowledged. The cross-sectional quantitative design makes it impossible to draw any definitive causal inference as in the case of longitudinal research. The narrow focus on frontline female hotel employees in the Kathmandu Valley provides for analytical depth but incidental geographical generalizability. The sampling approach, although pragmatic, is not totally random, so caution needs to be taken in applying findings to all hotels in Nepal. The results of the model fall within the research design and the desired outcome of the manuscript. In a complete empirical study, the same framework should be tried out by field data, group comparisons, and perhaps structural equation modeling, too. Future research may compare women's experiences across categories of hotels, look for differences between permanent and temporary employees, and explore differences between customer facing versus back-of-house positions and their respective pressures. Qualitative interviews would complement the insights provided by quantitative methods as the numbers reveal the patterns, but the narratives do the texture of fear, silence, ambition and resistance.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the duality of frontline women's work in hotels in the Kathmandu Valley by testing four aspects of workplaces: pay fairness, career advancement opportunity, workplace harassment, and training support to determine whether it reflects empowerment or exploitation. The findings bring up three clear conclusions. First, pay fairness goes a long way to increasing perceived workplace empowerment. This finding implies that wages are not only a financial matter, but also an indicator of social worth, respect and recognition within the organization. When women feel that what they are being paid is appropriate for their effort and their role, they are more likely to feel valued and invest themselves in the workplace. Prior research in hospitality has demonstrated that pay satisfaction is related to the engagement of the job and withdrawal behaviour which aids to the argumentation that fair compensation affects the employee's evaluation towards the quality of their work-life (Jung & Yoon, 2015). In this sense, a just salary does more than fulfil the needs of the day, it sends a message to women that the work is recognized and valued. This is especially important in the hospitality sector where women often do a large part of the emotional and service labor, but are underrepresented in positions of power (Baum, 2013).

Second, career advancement opportunity also contributes to enhancement of empowerment to a significant degree. This finding proves how women evaluate their work not only by their current position but also if the workplace offers movement and growth and a visible future. A job with a ladder instead of a wall is something very different. When promotion pathways are visible and equitable, women are likely to have agency, commitment and professional confidence. Hospitality research has shown multiple times that women face invisible barriers in promotion systems, leadership pathways, and career recognition despite being highly visible in service role (Segovia-Perez, et al., 2019). The present finding therefore strengthens the idea of a close relationship between empowerment and structural mobility. A hotel may employ a lot of women but if they are concentrated in low level positions where they have limited opportunities to move upward, employment cannot in itself be taken to prove empowerment. As Gebbels et Kralen, one of the researchers published in 2020, argues, the development of career in the hospitality industry is not only dependent on individual effort but is also dependent on organizational culture, access and institutional support.

Third, workplace harassment has the significant effect of reducing empowerment and this was one of the strongest findings in the study. This result is critical because it shows that a work place cannot say that it supports

women if it does not safeguard their dignity and safety. Harassment harms not just comfort, but trust, voice, concentration, and psychological security, and changes work from a place of growth to a place of caution. In the case of hotels, where employees must ensure that art of being polite and emotionally controlled is present in direct contact with guests and bosses, the repercussion of such harassment can be extremely detrimental. Jung and Yoon (2020), they found out that "perceived sexual harassment among female hotel employees increased psychological distress and negative responses at work, which strongly supports the present result. Recent reviews are also noting that hospitality workers, especially women, are especially vulnerable to harassment and abuse from the customer-facing nature of their role, service hierarchies and unequal power relations (Carrasco Santos et al 2024; Saito et al 2025). Thus, harassment is not a peripheral point to hospitality but a clear sign as to whether a working place is on its way to be empowered or falls into exploitation.

Contrastingly, the effect of training support while positive in direction was not significantly apparition in the regression model. This finding is significant because it refutes the widespread managerial assumption that the benefits of training alone are enough to support women's advancement. Training could help increase skills and confidence with service, but it is not necessarily going to change pay systems, promotion barriers, or safety in the workplace. A woman can attend workshops, fill in modules and get certificates, but still remain underpaid, prevented from promotion or face harassment. In that case, training is a surface level intervention, rather than a structural intervention. Recent hospitality studies on gender inclusive human resource management makes a similar case, pointing out that such betterment is a function of more fundamental institutional practices such as transparent systems of promotions, anti-harassment protection and fair systems of review, rather than isolated programs of development (Rasheed et al, 2026). Therefore, the present finding implies that training has value but it is limited in its effect when the underlying architecture of the workplace is still unequal. The central answer to this is therefore conditional. Women's work in hotels is neither by nature empowering nor by nature exploitative; it is a matter of the character of the structure of everyday work. This research shows that empowerment is not constructed through symbolic inclusion but rather through the concrete institutional practice. Fair pay sends a message that women's labor is valuable; promotion pathways send a message that their future is open; protection from harassment sends a message that their dignity is non-routable. These are not decorative elements of a workplace, but are the load-bearing beams of the whole employment system at work. Studies on hospitality empowerment has also proved the fact that empowerment is associated with commitment, trust and positive behavior on the work, which means that the effects go beyond one's personal feeling into one's organizational performance (Ma et al, 2021; Ruiz-Palomo et al, 2020). The implication is direct in terms of the hotel management and labor policy in Nepal. Gender inclusion needs to be bigger and move from image to structure. A hotel should not be commended just because women are seen in uniforms at front desk or in the service floor, but it should be judged not only by the presence of women but by whether or not they are paid well, safe from abuse and given a real route of upward mobility. This forms the line between fictitious participation and real empowering (Baum, 2013).

### **Ethical Considerations and Acknowledgement**

This study is carefully planned to challenge the issues of the gender inequality and workplace harassment. Participation is voluntary. Informed consent is obtained before distribution of the questionnaire. Respondents are guaranteed that their identities will remain anonymous and their answers will be used for academic purposes. They are also informed they can pass on any question they do not want to answer and they can withdraw at any time without penalty. These safeguards are important because questions about harassment will make some people feel uncomfortable or have fears, especially in places where there is a weak culture of reporting. As a result, the questionnaire does not try to force a detailed disclosure of the traumatic incident(s) occurred, but tries to focus on the perceived safety, confidence in reporting and respect at the workplace. Ethical approval needs to be obtained from the relevant academic unit before data collection can be started. The author wishes to show special thanks to the female employees to be involved; to the hotels that will open their access and to the academic supervisory that stands as a basis for the development of this work. Appreciation is also given to scholars and institutions whose research on the topics of gender, labor and hospitality has informed this research.

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