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Ocak/January 2013, Cilt/Vol: 15, Sayı/Num: 1, Page: 7-16
ISSN: 1303-2860, DOI: 10.4026/1303-2860.2013.0216.x

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“İş,Güç” Endüstri İlişkileri ve İnsan Kaynakları Dergisi
“İş,Güç” The Journal of Industrial Relations and Human Resources

Ocak/January 2013, Cilt/Vol: 15, Sayı/Num: 1, Page: 7-16

ISSN: 1303-2860, DOI: 10.4026/1303-2860.2013.0216.x

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Gender differences in work experiences and satisfactions among front-line employees in Turkish hotels: Less there than meets the eye?*

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Abstract

Front-line service workers in the hospitality and tourism sector play a central role in the delivery of high quality service to clients and customers. Yet front line service jobs are typically low paying, require working long hours, involve autocratic supervision, poor working conditions, little reward and recognition for good work, and are seen by outside observers as low status and requiring little skill. The attraction, recruitment, selection and retention of front-line staff is a challenge as these jobs have historically had very high levels of turnover, termed a "turnover culture". This study compares male and female front-line service workers on personal demographic factors, work situation characteristics, and a number of important job outcomes to identify potential gender differences associated with job dissatisfaction and intention to quit. Data were collected from 371 men and 174 women working in 15 high quality hotels in Turkey using anonymously completed questionnaires, a 59% response rate. There were relatively few significant gender differences. Considering personal demographics and work situation characteristics, females had higher levels of education, worked fewer hours per week, and were less likely to supervise others. Considering work outcomes, females indicated higher levels of absorption, an indicator of work engagement, lower levels of family-work conflict, and less intent to quit their employing organizations.

Keywords: Satisfaction, Frontline-worker, Family-work Conflict, Turkish Hotels, Work Experiences

* This research was supported in part by York University, Nevsehir University and Akdeniz University. We thank the General Managers and our respondents for their participation in the study.

The tourism and hospitality sector in Turkey

The tourism and hospitality sectors represent a large contributor to the economy of Turkey and is growing in importance. Inelmen, Zeytinoglu and Uygur (2012) write that Turkey attracted 27 million tourists in 2010, ranking seventh worldwide, accounting for \$23 billion in revenues, ranking tenth worldwide. This growth in tourist might create a shortage of skilled motivated and committed employees as a result (Akktas, et al, 2001;Brotherton, et al, 1994). To address these needs, A number of school and university programs have been created in Turkey to address these needs, with an increasing number of front-line employees now coming to Turkey from other countries (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000: Okumus &Yagci, 2006).

There are high rates of turnover among front line workers reflecting in part the nature of these jobs and the negative perception held by people about front-line service jobs. Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000), based on their review of the literature drew the following conclusions about front-line service workers: hospitality and tourism workers were less educated than workers in other sectors; turnover among front-line workers is high because of low job satisfaction, few sources of motivation and poor working conditions exist(e.g., long hours, low pay); work schedules often change; there are few opportunities for promotion; supervision is autocratic; and there is little understanding of why men and women want to work in this sector. In addition, there is evidence that women are treated differently than men in the sector (Brownell, 1998, 1993; Woods & Cavanaugh, 1999). More men occupy supervisor and managerial jobs than women and women tend to be congregated in particular functions (front office, front desk, human resources) reflecting both vertical and horizontal sex segregation (Jordan, 1997 ; Sinclair, 1997). Finally, the sector has outdated human resource management

policies and practices with few signs that change is being undertaken here (Baum, 2007).

The irony is that front-line service workers are critical to organizational success in hospitality and tourism organizations (Kuslavan, 2003).. Service is an interpersonal transaction between a provider and a consumer. Both parties create the service experience. The attitudes, behaviors and demeanor of the front line worker influences the quality of service perceived by the consumer and creates an image of the organization in the minds of customers and clients. When a front line worker delivers exceptional service, the client is likely to spend more, return, and tell others about their excellent experience.

Senior managers in the hospitality sector face a large challenge in creating a highly motivated and skilled workforce given the obstacles noted above. While much has been written about needed improvements in the training and development of managers and supervisors, elements of workplace culture associated with higher levels of staff motivation and engagement, and in the selection of front-line service workers, the gap between best practice and reality remains wide (Kusluvan, Kusluvan, Ilhan and Buyruk, 2010). Finally, as women become an increasing part of the hospitality and tourism workforce, it is unclear whether female and male front-line service employees share the same work experiences and outcomes.

Gender differences among front-line workers in the hospitality sector

Very few studies have examined potential gender differences in personal demographics, work experiences and work outcomes of front-line service workers in the hospitality and tourism sector. This is somewhat surprising since women comprise a higher percentage of employees in the

hospitality sector in Turkey than the percentage of women in the Turkish workforce. Inelmen, Zeytinoglu and Uygur (2012), in a study of 94 men and 65 women working in front-line service jobs in ten hotels in Istanbul found no difference in intention to stay with their employers. Yavas, Babakus and Karatepe (2008), in a study involving 723 front-line hotel employees reported that females indicated higher levels of both work-family conflict and family-work conflict but that females and males were similar on exhaustion, turnover intentions and self-rated job performance. They undertook separate tests of the effects of gender on the relationships among study variables and the results showed relatively few significant gender effects. Several other studies conducted in Turkey among front-line service workers included both females and males but did not undertake any gender comparisons, although gender was used in correlational analyses (e.g., Karatepe & Uludag, 2007; Karatepe, Sokmen, Yavas & Babakus, 2010).

Why study possible gender differences? First an increasing number of women are now working in this sector, a percentage that exceeds the percentage of women now employed in the Turkish workforce. Second, frontline service jobs require long work hours, different shift arrangements, low pay and few rewards, considerable job demands, autocratic supervision, and poor working conditions. Front line service jobs are seen as low skill jobs offering little chance for advancement. Women may find these demands more difficult to manage than do men. Women also face some unique demands such as discrimination and sexual harassment. Third, turnover rates are very high in front line service jobs in the hospitality and tourism sector. The majority of these workers are young, single, and without children. It is not clear whether men or women have different turnover rates and whether different factors might account for turnover in men and in women. Fourth, women generally shoulder more of the home and family responsibilities than do men. These responsibilities may make it more difficult for women to maintain a demanding work schedule.

This research examines possible gender differences in personal demographics, work situation characteristics, and work outcomes among front-line employees in the tourism and hospitality sector. Front line workers are an important element in the delivery of high quality customer service and therefore represent critical resources. Thus, as an exploratory study, only general hypotheses were considered. It was expected, building on other gender difference findings in organizations, that men would work more hours per week, be in higher level organizational position, more likely be supervising others, and indicate higher levels of voice and empowerment in their workplaces. and experience lower levels of work-family and family work conflict.

Method

Procedure

The General Managers of fifteen highly rated four and five star hotels in Alanya were approached in early May 2012, the research discussed, and all agreed to participate. Surveys were given to the General Managers. The Human Resource managers at each property then distributed surveys to employees. A total of 93 surveys were distributed and 549 completed surveys were returned to the research team, a 59% response rate. Some surveys contained missing data. Potential respondents included all employees except the General Managers.

Respondents completed the survey in Turkish. The survey was translated from English to Turkish and back again using the back-translation method.

Respondents

Table 1 shows the personal demographic characteristics of the sample. Most were male (68%), worked full-time (93%), were single (58%), were between 21-30 years of age (47%),

Table 1
 Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

<u>Sex</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Male	371	68.2	20 or younger	67	13.2
Female	174	31.8	21 – 30	246	46.8
			31 – 40	149	28.8
			41 or more	72	13.2
<u>Work Status</u>					
Full-time	490	93.4			
Part-time	36	6.6			
			<u>Marital Status</u>		
			Single	314	58.2
			Married	225	41.8
<u>Parental Status</u>					
Children	212	39.6			
Childless	314	60.4			
			<u>Education</u>		
			Elementary school	202	36.8
			High school	237	43.2
			Bachelor's degree	110	20.0
<u>Department</u>					
Housekeeping	105	19.2			
Food and beverage	246	45.0			
Front office	61	11.1			
Accounting	31	5.8			
Human resources	9	1.6			
Technical	18	3.3			
Security	16	2.9			
Other	60	11.0			
			<u>Organizational level</u>		
			Non-management	415	76.8
			Management	125	23.2
			<u>Supervise Others</u>		
			Yes	219	41.0
			No	313	59.0
<u>Hours worked</u>					
40 or less	38	7.0			
41 – 50	186	34.6			
51 – 60	134	28.1			
61 – 70	87	16.1			
71 – 80	48	8.8			
81 or more	31	5.4			
			<u>Organization size</u>		
			100 or less	120	31.0
			101 – 200	262	47.7
			200 or more	117	21.3
			<u>Worked other properties</u>		
			Yes	454	83.0
			No	93	17.0
<u>Job tenure</u>					
1 year or less	164	35.3			
2 – 5 years	245	52.8			
6 – 10 years	31	6.7			
11 or more	24	5.2			
			<u>Organizational tenure</u>		
			1 year or less	120	24.1
			2 – 5	215	43.3
			6 – 10	99	20.0
			11 or more	63	12.6

had no children (59%), had high school education (43%), worked in food and beverage (45%), had worked in other properties (83%), held non-management jobs (83%), had no supervisory responsibilities (72%), worked between 41 and 60 hours a week (61%), worked in properties having 101-200 employees (48%), had five years or less of job tenure (88%), and years or less of organizational tenure (67 %). A higher percentage of males than females worked in food and beverage, Technical services, Security and Other while a lower percentage of males worked in Housekeeping, Accounting and Human Resources.

Measures

Personal demographic and work situation characteristics

These were measured by single items (e.g., age, marital status, organizational size (see Table 1')

Work outcomes

Job satisfaction was assessed by a seven item scale ($\alpha=.80$) developed by Kofodimos (1993). An item was "I feel challenged by my work." Respondents indicated their agreement with each item on a seven-point Likert scale (1=Very dissatisfied, 4=Neutral, 7=Very satisfied

Work engagement

Three dimensions of work engagement were assessed using scales developed by Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker (2002). Vigor was measured by six items ($\alpha=.86$). One item was "At my work I feel bursting with energy." Dedication was measured by five items ($\alpha=.75$). An item was "I am proud of the work that I do." Absorption was assessed by six items ($\alpha=.83$). One item was "I am immersed in my work". Respondents indicated their agreement with each item on a five-point Likert scale

(1=Strongly disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 5=Strongly agree

Employee voice

Front-line workers indicated how often they engaged in "voice" behaviors at work using a six item scale ($\alpha=.85$) adapted from Van Dyne and LePine (1998). One item was "I speak up in my workplace with ideas for new projects or changes in the way we do things". Responses were made on a five point Likert scale (1=Never, 3-sometimes, 5-Very frequently)

Supervisor behavior

Respondents assessed the behaviors of their supervisors on eight item scale ($\alpha=.93$). Respondents indicated the degree to which each item described their supervisors on a five point Likert scale (1=Does not describe my supervisor at all, 3=Describes my supervisor to some extent, 5=Describes my supervisor to a great extent). One item was "My supervisor spends time teaching and coaching his/her staff."

Organizational support

Organizational support for work-family life was assessed by a five item scale ($\alpha=.92$) developed by Thompson, Beauvais and Lyness (1999). One item was "In general, managers in this organization are quite accommodating for family-related needs." Responses were made on a seven point Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree, 4=Neither agree nor disagree, 7=Strongly agree)

Work-family/Family work conflict

Three aspects of work-family and family-work conflict were measured by scales created by Carlson, Kacmar and Williams (2000): conflict-based, strain-based, and behavior-based conflict. Each of the six types

of conflict was measured by three items. Respondents indicated their agreement with each item on a five-point Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree, 3=Neutral, 5=Strongly agree). A composite 9 item work-family conflict score combined the three sub-scales ($\alpha=.83$); and a composite 9 item family-work conflict score combined the three subscales ($\alpha=.89$). Sample items included: "My work keeps me from my family activities more than I would like" and "Tensions and anxiety from my family life often weakens my ability to do my job."

Intent to quit was measured by a two item scale ($\alpha=.72$) used by Burke (1991). One item was "Are you currently looking for a different job in a different organization (1=yes, 2=no).

Results

Gender differences in personal demographics and work situation characteristics

Table 2 presents the comparison of males and females on personal demographic factors and work situation characteristics using one-way Analysis of Variance. The following comments are offered in summary. First, considering personal demographics, women were more likely to be parents (have children) and had more education than men: men and women were similar on age, work status and marital status. Second, considering work situation characteristics, men worked significantly more hours than did women and were more likely than women to supervise others. Males and females were similar in job and organizational tenure, organizational sizes, were at similar organizational levels, having worked in previous properties, and had spent similar amounts of time working at previous properties.

Gender differences in work outcomes

Table 3 shows the comparisons of males and females on a number of work outcomes. Three statistically significant gender differences were present. Men indicated higher levels of family-work conflict and a greater intention to quit as well as lower levels of absorption, one of the work engagement measures, than did women. Men and women in front line service jobs were similar on levels of job satisfaction, vigor and dedication-two other work engagement measures –voice behaviors, levels of perceived organizational support, perceptions of positive supervisor behaviors and levels of family-work conflict.

Several observations are worth noting. First, there were relatively more areas of similarity than differences in the responses of the men and women in our sample of front-line service workers. Consistent with expectations, men worked more hours and were more likely to supervise others than were women. In addition, women were more highly educated than were men. Interestingly, though working long hours, but not as many hours as men worked, more women than men had children. Second, although there were considerable gender similarities on work outcomes, when differences were observed they tended to favor women as employees. Thus women were more absorbed in their jobs and were less likely to quit their current employer. Contrary to expectations, however, men reported higher levels of family-work conflict than did women. One can only speculate as to the reasons for this. It may be that men's significantly longer work hours affected levels of family-work conflict.

Table 2
Gender Differences on personal demographics and work situation characteristics

<u>Personal Demographics</u>	<u>Males</u>			<u>Females</u>			<u>P</u>
	<u>X</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>N</u>	
Age	29.8	8.80	358	30.6	8.44	170	NS
Work status	1.1	.25	348	1.0	.20	169	NS
Marital status	1.4	.49	364	1.5	.50	172	NS
Parental status	1.6	.48	350	1.5	.50	162	.05
Education	1.8	.70	369	2.0	.79	174	.05
<u>Work situation characteristics</u>							
Worked at other hotels	1.2	.25	365	1.2	.41	174	NS
Tenure other hotels	9.1	10.27	314	7.5	9.47	128	NS
Organizational level	1.3	.43	365	1.2	.40	171	NS
Supervise others	1.5	.50	364	1.7	.45	165	.001
Job tenure	3.3	.77	348	3.4	.79	149	NS
Organizational tenure	3.4	.83	346	3.5	.86	148	NS
Organizational size	164.3	103.42	371	173.6	115.20	179	NS
Hours worked	57.8	16.37	364	52.3	12.87	157	.001

Table 3
Gender differences in work outcomes

<u>Work outcomes</u>	<u>Males</u>			<u>Females</u>			<u>P</u>
	<u>X</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>N</u>	
Job satisfaction	26.7	6.19	366	26.7	6.85	172	NS
Vigor	22.6	6.22	365	22.9	6.01	170	NS
Dedication	17.8	4.90	363	18.0	4.71	170	NS
Absorption	19.9	6.29	361	21.2	6.17	172	.05
Voice behaviors	22.7	6.19	332	22.1	5.93	161	NS
Organizational support	22.9	9.50	336	24.6	9.58	169	NS
Supervisor behaviors	30.4	9.21	329	29.6	9.76	158	NS
Work-family conflict	26.2	8.93	357	26.0	8.60	171	NS
Family-work conflict	22.2	9.81	357	19.6	8.93	171	.01
Intent to quit	3.5	.78	371	3.8	.60	166	.001

From the perspective of the employing organizations taking part in this research, the positive news was that women and men, as employees, were more similar than different in terms of what they brought with them to their employers and what their responses, in terms of work outcomes, were. It should be noted that there were some gender differences in the units in which women and men worked however.

Discussion

Relatively little research as examined gender differences in the characteristics, work experiences and work outcomes of front line employees in the hospitality sector. Our findings (see Tables 2 and 3) indicated considerably more similarities than differences. Some of the differences were expected; males working more hours, males more likely to be supervising others, males having a higher intent to quit, and males less educated. Other differences were not; males indicated higher levels of WFC.

The favorable news in our results is the general similarity of the work outcomes reported by both males and females. This suggests to employing organizations that their female and male employees perceive their work experiences and outcomes similarly. The problematic news is that the sample as a whole generally had moderate perceptions of their outcomes suggesting considerable need and opportunity for organizations to increase employee outcomes responses.

Practical implications

The presence of significant gender differences might support the position that males and females need to be considered separately as they have different work experiences. Given the few significant gender differences, the sample is best treated as one. The sample as a whole indicated only moderately favorable perceptions on many of the work outcomes considered. One

consequence of this is that employing organizations likely need to address issues of human resource management and workplace culture in order to improve workforce standing on these important outcomes. One area that seems to need attention is the long work hours required by both women and men.

Limitations of the research

The present research has limitations which should be noted to put the findings into a larger context. First, all data were collected using self-report surveys raising the possibility of response set tendencies. Second, although the sample was large, all respondents came from high quality hotels in one region of Turkey. It is not clear the extent to which these findings would generalize to hotels of other quality levels and hotels in other regions of Turkey. Third, there were some differences in the percentages of males and females working in particular units or functions.

Future research directions

Our findings indicated relatively few significant gender differences on a number of valued work outcomes. It is possible however to further our understanding of potential gender differences among front-line hotel workers in a number of ways. First, more attention needs to be paid to the work experiences of front-line service providers to better understand other antecedents of their work attitudes and job behaviors. Second, work outcomes having a more objective basis, such as attendance, absenteeism, and performance assessments by supervisors, would offer a more complete assessment of potential gender differences. Third, comparing the work experiences and work outcomes of women and men working in similar units would strengthen whatever conclusions emerge.

* This research was supported in part by York University, Nevsehir University and Akdeniz University. We thank the General Managers and our respondents for their participation in the study.

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