

Why are women underrepresented in senior management? A study in the Turkish hospitality industry

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Abstract

This study aims to establish the causes for underrepresentation of women in senior management positions in the hospitality industry in Turkey using role congruity theory. The study used the qualitative research method and included semi-structured interviews conducted with 20 women who are managers in the hospitality industry. The study identifies organizational, social, and individual factors that prevent women from rising to senior management positions. This study is crucial to demonstrate how the perceived incongruity between female gender roles and leadership roles hinders the representation of women in senior management. Further, the present study contributes to the literature and benefits hospitality professionals by revealing the challenges that women encounter in their journey to reach senior manager positions.

Keywords: gender, hospitality industry, role congruity theory, Turkey, women managers.

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1. Introduction

In the tourism and hospitality sector, where women represent 54% of those employed globally (UNWTO, 2019), the issue of women employees and women in management has been addressed by researchers since the 1990s. Although the issue has been discussed for more than forty years, statistical data and research results establish that women employees in the hospitality sector are represented at a limited level, especially in senior management positions. It is stated that the rate of women holding managerial positions in the hospitality sector is 40%, and this rate falls to 20% in senior management positions (Baum & Cheung, 2015). Another report shows that the rate of women employees in senior management positions (e.g., board of directors, chief officer positions) is approximately 27–28% (Diversity in Hospitality Travel & Leisure, 2020). In the hospitality sector, although women employees constituted half of the labor force, they only held 12% of leadership positions in 2019, including general manager, president, partner, manager, and CEO positions (Castell Project, 2020). Women hold one leadership position (CEO, president, and founder) for every 10.3 men, an increase from one position for every 11.2 men in 2019 (Castell Project, 2022).

Since a significant part of the work performed is considered feminine and women are employed in large numbers, the hospitality industry exhibits the characteristics of a “women intensive” business field (Akoğlan-Kozak, 1996). The aim of this study is to understand why women are underrepresented in senior positions in this sector. Studies investigating the barriers to female management in the hospitality industry have revealed various findings such as stereotypes of women (Clevenger & Singh, 2013), lack of mentors or role models (Kattara, 2005), the problem of the “old boy’s network” (Jackson, 2001) and work-family conflict (Mooney & Ryan, 2009; Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018).

Although women’s employment and the number of women managers in different sectors in Turkey, including the hospitality sector, have shown an increase compared with the past, their representation rate, particularly in senior management positions, is still inadequate. According to International Labor Organization (ILO) data, women constitute 54.2% of the hospitality and food and beverage services sector employees, while this rate is 25.2% in Turkey (ILO, 2020). Women who are less employed in the Turkish hospitality sector than the world average experience discrimination in hiring and promotion (Zengin *et al.*, 2021) and the glass ceiling effect (Anafarta *et al.*, 2008). Studies conducted in Turkey primarily focus on the problems that women encounter in their work life in hotel businesses and the barriers for women to lower and middle management positions (Anafarta *et al.*, 2008; Balcı & Aslan, 2022; Güçer *et al.*, 2018; Pelit *et al.*, 2016; Zengin *et al.*, 2021; Zengin, 2023). There is a limited number of studies that have been carried out with high-level women managers. For this reason, more work is needed to develop a comprehensive approach regarding the representation of women in managerial positions in the hospitality sector in Turkey.

It is important to identify the barriers that women perceive and to better understand the women’s perspectives in senior management positions of the hospitality industry. This study used qualitative research and the sample included members of senior management team. Thus, the study aimed to acquire in-depth findings from the perspectives of women managers to enrich the results presented in the literature on women management in the hospitality industry.

Previous research has shown that cultural and social structures are also influential in the underrepresentation of women in senior management positions and the problems that women employees encounter. For example, a study by Koburtay and Syed (2019) conducted in Jordan indicated that Bedouin tribal culture has significant influences on the managerial processes of women. Likewise, Fan *et al.* (2021) and Liu *et al.* (2022) stated that the managerial processes of Chinese women are significantly affected by Confucianism. Turkey, where the present study was conducted, is defined as an authoritarian and patriarchal society exhibiting a tendency to preserve its traditional structure

(Navaro, 1996). However, Turkey provides an interesting ground to explore women in management since it is a cultural and geographical bridge between East and West and is the only secular state and democratic republic in the Middle East (Aycan *et al.*, 2012).

The present study has two objectives. The first objective is to understand the reasons why women are underrepresented in senior management positions in hospitality businesses in Turkey. The second objective is to present the recommendations and suggestions of women managers who have reached senior positions to women employees targeting these positions. We used role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) as a theoretical framework to understand the causes of underrepresentation of women managers in hotels.

This study contributes to the literature on women management with regard to identifying the barriers women managers perceive in the hospitality industry in Turkey and revealing recommendations of current managers to overcome these challenges. The results of the study can be a guide for increasing the number of women in senior level positions in developing societies or those that have cultural characteristics similar to those in Turkey in the hospitality sector.

2. Literature review

2.1. Role congruity theory of prejudice

Grounded in social role theory, role congruity theory examines “the congruity between gender roles and other roles, especially leadership roles” (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 575). According to role congruity theory, prejudice against any group can emerge in a context in which group stereotypes conflict with the requirements of the role (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Thus, beyond leadership and gender roles, the theory has also been used to understand stereotypes about age (Diekmann & Hirnisey, 2007), race (Barden *et al.*, 2004), and sexual orientation (Clarke & Arnold, 2018); however, management studies have mostly focused on gender roles (Anglin *et al.*, 2022). This study used role congruity theory as a framework to understand to what extent gender role expectations in the Turkish hospitality industry influence women’s career and management processes.

Social role theory, which is the foundation for role congruity theory, suggests that there are expectations about the roles of men and women and qualities and behavioral tendencies that are believed to be desirable for each gender (Eagly, 2002). According to the theory, the reason for gender differences in behavior is not due to innate gender roles but to the societal division of labor between genders and different socialization processes (Eagly *et al.*, 2000). The theory argues that men and women socialize in ways consistent with gender roles and are expected to have traits and behaviors consistent with gender roles. In this context, communal traits such as “affection,” “kindness,” “sensitivity,” and “nurture” are considered appropriate for women, while agentic traits such as “aggressiveness,” “dominance,” “self-sufficiency,” and “proneness to act as a leader” are attributed to men. Such a division of labor and role distribution has resulted in women having less power and status and controlling fewer resources than men (Keskin & Ulasan, 2016).

Role congruity theory extends social role theory by examining the congruity between gender and leadership roles, the factors affecting the perception of congruity, and the consequences of this congruity for biased behavior. According to this theory, successful managers are expected to be perceived as those who possess the qualities attributed to men rather than to women (Eagly & Karau, 2002). When a woman is considered to be a leader or a potential leader, there is a perception of incongruity between agentic traits attributed to men and communal traits attributed to women (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Role congruity theory suggests that the incongruity perceived between women’s roles and leadership roles leads to two types of prejudice (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 576): (1) “less favorable evaluation of women’s (than men’s) potential for leadership because leadership ability is more

stereotypical of men than women; (2) less favorable evaluation of the actual leadership behavior of women than men because such behavior is perceived as less desirable in women than men.”

These prejudices may lead to less positive approaches for women leaders than for men leaders, greater hardship for women in reaching leadership positions, and difficulties in accepting that women can succeed in leadership roles (Eagy & Karau, 2002). Heilman (2001) highlighted that the reason for the perceived incompatibilities between “woman” and “leader” is ingrained gender stereotypes and that women are subjected to many biased assessments in their careers.

Many study results support the role congruity theory. Mulvaney *et al.* (2007) noted that perceived contradictions between the typical female role and the typical employee role negatively affect women’s career development. A study conducted in Iran reported that women are excluded from managerial positions on the grounds that they are emotional (Ghorbani & Tung, 2007). Napasri and Yukongdi (2015) found that stereotypical beliefs suggesting that women lack effective leadership qualities hinder women’s career advancement in Thailand. Similarly, stereotypical images of traditional gender roles persist in China (Yang, 2011). In summary, social role expectations, gender stereotypes, and prejudices limit the selection and evaluation of women as managers in organizations.

2.2. Barriers to women’s career advancement in the hospitality industry

The hotel industry is primarily male dominated and traditional (Kensbock *et al.*, 2015). The sector is characterized by gender-based horizontal and vertical segregation (Costa *et al.*, 2017). Horizontal segregation means that women are concentrated in certain jobs (Guy & Newman, 2004). Expectations of what constitutes men’s and women’s work in the industry reflect ingrained gender stereotypes (Carvalho *et al.*, 2018). The reflection of communal traits attributed to women in social role theory can be seen in the division of labor in the hospitality industry. Women working in the hotel industry are usually employed in lower-skilled and lower-paid jobs such as receptionist and housekeeper, as an extension of their traditional roles (Campos-Soria *et al.*, 2009; Campos-Soria *et al.*, 2011). Brownell and Walsh (2008) noted that women are more likely to hold job positions characterized as “feminine” such as front-line work and customer service.

Vertical segregation refers to managerial positions being dominated by men (Charles, 2003). In fact, expectations of what a leader should be like in hotel organizations are shaped around masculine norms (Costa *et al.*, 2017). A study by Koburtay and Syed (2019) conducted in hotels in Jordan revealed that successful leaders are mostly perceived to have male stereotypes. However, this fact brings out prejudices against women leaders even if they have appropriate qualities for leadership roles (Koburtay & Syed, 2020). Mooney *et al.* (2017) noted that gender stereotypes in the hospitality industry negatively impact women’s career advancement, leaving them stuck in lower-level positions. Women comprise almost half of those employed in the industry (UNWTO, 2019); however, very few women attain senior management positions (Carvalho *et al.*, 2014; Ho, 2013; Kattara, 2005; Li & Leung, 2001). Studies reveal that women often remain at lower-level positions (Campos-Soria *et al.*, 2011; Carvalho *et al.*, 2014; Cave & Kilic, 2010; Santero-Sanchez *et al.*, 2015). Despite observing that the visibility of women in management positions has increased recently, women in management mostly hold positions in small-scale, independent businesses (González-Serrano *et al.*, 2018) or concentrate in the middle management levels. Vertical separation demonstrated in the sector is also called the “glass ceiling,” a metaphor used to explain the concentration of women in lower positions that refers to an invisible barrier making it difficult for women to reach management positions (González-Serrano *et al.*, 2018). Many researchers have demonstrated the existence of the glass ceiling in the hospitality sector (Chen *et al.*, 2021; Clevenger & Singh, 2013; Deiana & Fabbri, 2020; Gonzalez- Serrano, 2018; Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018). The incompatibility between the concepts of women and leaders proposed in role congruity theory can also exist in the hospitality industry.

The following study discusses the factors that may contribute to the underrepresentation of women in management positions in the hospitality industry under the headings of social, organizational and individual barriers.

2.2.1. *Social barriers*

Social barriers describe those barriers that women perceive based on the structure of society. Eagly's (1987) social role theory suggests that social and cultural norms and social roles influence the shaping of individuals' behaviors and thoughts. According to the theory, different gender roles are attributed to women and men, and thus, the desired qualities, behaviors, and expectations of women and men are different. It is expected that men are the breadwinners of the family, whereas women primarily undertake domestic tasks such as childcare and housework (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Thereby, boys and girls are raised differently from each other (Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2014). Hofmann (1972) states that boys in childhood have freedom to take risks and act independently more than girls, and this improves men's self-confidence in taking risks in later ages. That women are mostly raised with communal values in the context of social norms may also reflect negatively on their career life. Some studies demonstrate that women in business life lag behind men in terms of the desire to reach managerial positions (O'Conner, 2001), self-confidence (Deiana & Fabbri, 2020), and career aspiration (Napasri & Yukongdi, 2015). In short, upbringing styles, social norms, religious beliefs, and traditions are influential factors in women's career advancement (Syed *et al.*, 2018).

Studies conducted in the hospitality industry have revealed that gender stereotypes attributed to women, such as less resilience to stress, lack of authority, and emotional sensitivity, create prejudices about women in management and constitute a significant barrier to their career advancement (Boone *et al.*, 2013; Deiana & Fabbri 2020; Naranayan, 2017; Segovia-Pérez *et al.*, 2021).

In a country like Turkey, where gender expectations are strong, it is not surprising to see reflections of gender roles in the hospitality industry. Kemer and Aslan (2022) have found that gender roles are adopted and implicitly maintained in hospitality organizations. In another study investigating occupational gender perceptions in the tourism sector, the position of general manager was perceived as masculine, as suggested by role congruity theory (Çilingir-Ük, 2019). In the hospitality industry, gender role expectations reinforce the perceived incompatibility between leadership and women's roles and create an appropriate ground for stereotypes and prejudices to emerge. The effects of societal barriers can extend to organizational and individual spheres, affecting women's career development.

2.2.2. *Organizational barriers*

The structure, policy, and practices of an organization influence women employees in the hotel industry seeking to reach managerial positions. Clever and Singh (2013) indicated that women in the hotel industry perceive more organizational barriers in career promotion processes when compared with men.

One of the most significant organizational barriers is prejudice toward women employees. According to role congruity theory, prejudices regarding women managers can emerge in two forms. In organizations in which leadership roles are coded with masculine traits, the leadership potential of women can be overlooked. Such stereotypical approaches toward women have been explained with the "think manager-think male" phenomenon (Schein, 2001). This phenomenon can create a psychological barrier that leads to prejudices against women in decisions on selection, promotion, and training for managerial positions through the preference of only men for important organizational positions (Schein, 2001).

In the second form of prejudice, women managers are exposed to being evaluated on how they behave. When women managers, who are expected to display feminine traits, fulfill requirements of leadership behavior by acting masculine, they encounter a dilemma, which is referred to as “double bind” in the literature. A common perception is that women managers violate their feminine traits when they exhibit an agentic attitude, whereas they do not meet expected leadership traits when they exhibit communal attitudes. Women who demonstrate masculine traits expected in the leadership role can be stigmatized with labels such as “dragon lady,” “battle axe,” “honorary men,” or “flawed women” in the workplace (Etzkowitz *et al.*, 2000; Tannen, 1994). Previous study has shown that female leaders in hospitality sector experience inequalities when negotiating their identities as successful leaders and women (Pizam, 2017). In summary, difficulties arising from the double-bind effect may impact women’s leadership processes and styles within the organization.

On the other side, domestic character traits attributed to women conflict with the ideal tourism worker lifestyle. Costa *et al.* (2017, p. 73) asserted that an ideal tourism worker should have “the ability to become available in short notice for overtime and non-shift work and to spend a couple of days away from home for work.” Reproductive gender roles limit career development of women by restricting their ability to be an ideal tourism worker (Carvalho *et al.*, 2018). Marco (2012) stated that women are underrepresented in management in hotel businesses because they cannot meet demands such as long working days, split shifts, and weekend and evening hours due to women’s child rearing responsibilities that are attributed to them.

Previous research has also expressed that not being able to be included in the informal communication networks that men form among themselves, known as the old boy’s network, can push women away from senior management positions (Jackson, 2001). Women employees outside of this network may not be aware of some in-organization policies and opportunities, and members of this network consisting of men fill positions open within the organization (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). Studies have revealed that the old boy’s network also poses a problem for women working in the hospitality industry (Carvalho *et al.*, 2019; Clevenger & Singh, 2013; Kattara, 2005; Reinhold, 2005). Varma *et al.* (2001) stated that managers perceive themselves as more similar to subordinates whose demographic profiles are similar to their own and tend to work with similar subordinates. Considering that the majority of senior managers in the hospitality industry are men, it is clear that this is a disadvantage for women. In addition, Linehan and Scullion (2008) have found that women have less time for networking due to domestic commitments. The fact that women’s participation in activities outside working hours is limited (Ragins, 1996) may prevent them from being part of informal networks and having access to male mentors.

Another hindering aspect for women employees is that role model (mentor) practices, which are important career development strategies, are missing in hospitality businesses. Previous research has revealed that Turkish female hotel employees who do not have a mentor in their careers feel the glass ceiling effect more intensely (Anafarta *et al.*, 2008). Boone *et al.* (2013) similarly emphasized that the lack of mentoring practices in hospitality is strongly associated with inadequate career planning and lack of good offers from the management. Mentoring in the hospitality industry is an important tool for women’s career advancement (Calinaud *et al.*, 2020; Dashper, 2020); however, women employees experience a lack of role models and mentors in the hospitality industry (Dimovski *et al.*, 2010; Kattara, 2005; Mooney & Ryan, 2009; Reinhold, 2005; Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018; Zhong *et al.*, 2011). Studies have shown that women develop fewer cross-gender mentoring relationships because men are more comfortable developing relationships with someone of the same sex (Ragins, 1989), there is potential discomfort in cross-gender relationships (Ragins *et al.*, 2000), and there is a risk that the mentoring relationship may be perceived as a sexual approach (Clawson & Kram, 1984). The fact that senior positions in the hospitality industry are usually held by men means that the majority of mentors

who will transfer knowledge and experience are also men and that women are deprived of a role model. The gendered structure of the hospitality industry seems to exclude women from informal and formal networks and prevent them from access to mentors.

Women employees in organizations can sometimes be exposed to discrimination by other women. The career barriers that women put in front of other women are explained by the concept of the queen bee syndrome. The concept of the queen bee is a metaphor defining women managers, especially in male-dominated sectors, who adopt a male perspective by leaving their women identities behind and putting a distance between themselves and other women by aiming to be the sole woman in their position (Staines *et al.*, 1974). Derks *et al.* (2011) interprets the queen bee phenomenon as a reaction developed by women who identify less with the female gender identity due to the gender discrimination they face at work. The fact that women managers try to adapt to the dominant gender stereotype in the organization may cause them to display hostile attitudes toward their female subordinates. A study examining the attitudes toward female managers in the Macau hospitality industry found a clear queen bee effect, particularly in male-dominated workplaces (Boyol Ngan & Litwin, 2019).

2.2.3. Individual barriers

Individual barriers are addressed as self-imposed barriers. The endeavours of women to balance their responsibilities in their work and home life may result in situations such as role conflict and work-family conflict (Chen *et al.*, 2021; Li & Leung, 2001; Mooney & Ryan, 2009). Hence, some women employees may feel that they have to choose between their careers and their families. Women's internalization of the "family first" approach, which we can see reflected in Turkish culture, may often result in women being limited to lower-level jobs that allow them to fulfill their domestic responsibilities along with work (Segovia-Pérez *et al.*, 2019). Women employees who want to overcome these problems are seen to adopt strategies in their career life such as making personal sacrifices or creating support systems within the family (Knutson & Schmidgall, 1999).

The preference theory propounded by Hakim (2006) may be useful in explaining women's business life and career choices. According to the theory, women and men have different life goals, and the majority of women employees seek work-life balance more than men. For this reason, they usually select certain jobs that provide more work-life balance. In the case when they are not able to find those jobs that give them more flexibility, they can even prefer to stay out of paid employment temporarily (Hakim, 2006). The preference theory asserts that the number of men will continue to be high in important jobs and professions, because a small proportion of women prefer to prioritize work in their life.

Boone *et al.* (2013) propound that the most striking barrier that affects women's advancement in the hospitality industry is self-imposed. Inadequacy of practices for women such as mentorship and career planning strengthen self-imposed barriers of women (Boone *et al.*, 2013). Boone *et al.* (2013) even indicated that there is no longer a glass ceiling in the hospitality sector; instead, there exist businesses that fail to help women regarding self-imposed barriers.

2.3. Sociocultural context of Turkey

Cultural norms and gender role expectations are closely related to the working life and management processes of women in the hospitality industry. For example, culture, religion, customs, and traditions are some of the most common barriers to Jordanian and Egyptian women's employment and access to managerial positions in the hospitality industry (Kattara, 2005; Koburtay & Syed, 2019; Masadeh, 2013). On the other hand, in China, where Confucian traditions are predominant, women managers working in the tourism and hospitality sector challenge gender roles by redefining them (Liu *et al.*, 2022). It is useful to take a closer look at the sociocultural context of Turkey to understand the position of women in society in Turkey, where the study was conducted.

Turkey, geographically and culturally located on the border of East and West, is a country where many cultures, traditions, and working styles are blended (Napier & Taylor, 2002). Despite the reforms introduced in various areas after the announcement of the republic, Turkey has not lost its traditional side and preserves its patriarchal structure with distinct gender role differences (Sakallı-Ugurlu & Beydoğan, 2002; Yüksel, 1999). Arat (1994, p. 47) touches on women's position in Turkish society: Turkey is a developing young country in which traditional infrastructure changes very slowly; the vast majority of women are conditioned to male-dominated institutions in the family, society, and economy and face many traditional and legal difficulties and discrimination.

Turkey has a social structure in which patriarchal characteristics and the distinction between gender roles can be clearly observed. Although legally there is no obstacle for women and men to be able to work with the same rights in every sector, the sociocultural structure in Turkey plays a significant role in shaping the role of women primarily as “wife” and “mother” (Cave & Kilic, 2010). Savaş (2018) revealed that in Turkey, individuals' stereotypes regarding gender roles are at a significant level and the primary roles and responsibility areas of women are still perceived as housework, childcare, and marriage.

Reflections of gender differences are also seen in the labor market in Turkey. Women in Turkey have been working outside the home in paid jobs since the 1950s; however, in the area of gender roles, they have usually shown presence in fields such as education, health, and secretarial (Sakallı-Ugurlu & Beydoğan, 2002).

In 2021, the rate of employment was 28% for women and 62.8% for men, which demonstrates that the employment rate of women was less than half of that of men (TUIK, 2022). According to a review of the management rates of women, the proportion of women in senior and middle level managerial positions accounted for 20.7% in 2021 (TUIK, 2022). The Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2022) reveals that the proportion of women members on the board of directors of businesses in Turkey is 18%, whereas the percentage of businesses with women senior level managers is only 3.9%.

Within the framework of the sociocultural structure of Turkey, the inadequacy of the number of women managers in senior management positions also manifests itself in the hospitality sector. Although Aksatan *et al.* (2020) stated that the proportion of women students studying tourism and hospitality is over 50%, the skills of educated women employees in the hospitality sector are minimally utilized, especially at senior management levels.

According to the Hotel Association of Turkey, the percentage of women employees employed in the hospitality sector is around 35% (TUROB, 2021). Women in the hospitality sector hold less than 40% of management positions, less than 20% of general management roles, and less than 8% of the board of director positions. The fields of employment of women employees are also mostly at lower levels (TUROB, 2021).

Studies carried out in Turkey's hospitality sector have shown the existence of the glass ceiling effect (Anafarta *et al.*, 2008) and that there is insufficient gender diversity in the sector (Pinar *et al.*, 2011). Women, as both employees and medium-level managers, primarily work in housekeeping, front office, and human resources departments (Cave & Kılıç, 2010). A study by Zengin *et al.* (2021) indicated that women are exposed to discrimination, especially in recruitment processes.

Previous studies discussing Turkey's hospitality industry have focused on the problems that women employees face in their business life (Güçer *et al.*, 2018; Pelit *et al.*, 2016; Zengin *et al.*, 2021) and revealed that women employees are underrepresented in senior management (Akoğlan-Kozak, 1996; Anafarta *et al.*, 2008; Cave & Kilic, 2010). However, the factors that lead to women's limited participation in senior

management have not been sufficiently investigated from a holistic point of view. Addressing the factors that prevent women from becoming managers, especially from the perspective of women managers, and understanding their experiences may provide a deeper understanding for the development of women's leadership. Therefore, in this study, the researchers used role congruity theory as a theoretical framework and aimed to expand the existing literature by investigating the factors that prevent women from being represented in senior management from the perspective of women managers. In addition, the researchers aimed to provide career development strategies to prospective female managers by investigating the recommendations of current female managers.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design and sampling

The complex nature of the glass ceiling phenomenon in organizations demands a methodology that can access its subtle manifestations (Veale & Gold, 1998). This study concentrates on an in-depth understanding of the perceptions and thoughts of women managers about the inadequate representation of women managers at senior management levels in hospitality businesses. Qualitative research can have a more significant effect than quantitative research in studies that aim at a deep understanding of meanings and experiences (Sedgley *et al.*, 2011). Thus, the present study followed a qualitative research process. From the perspectives of women managers, the authors tried to reach the personal experiences they had in their management processes and the career barriers they perceived.

The study adopted snowball technique, a purposive sampling method. In order to identify the study sample, the authors scanned online news (e.g. assignments and success stories) that appeared in tourism journals and newspapers and explored websites of tourism and hospitality associations. In addition, they prepared a preliminary list identifying women executives serving in the role of manager. Subsequently, the authors contacted identified executives via email and telephone and requested their voluntary participation after giving information about the aim and importance of the study and the estimated interview duration. After commencing the interviews, the women managers who participated in the study contributed to the increase in the number of interviews by directing other women managers they know to the researchers. The data collection process was terminated when themes and subthemes reached saturation, that is, when a new point of view did not emerge (Charmaz, 2006).

Within the scope of this study, interviews (16 face-to-face, 4 phone calls) with varying duration of 30–68 minutes were conducted between November 2016 and June 2018 with 20 women managers working as business managers in various hospitality businesses in five different cities of Turkey. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. Codes were assigned to the participants to protect their anonymity; demographic and other information about the participants are presented in Table 1.

The corresponding author performed the interviews. The authors of this study, both women, conducted research in the field of tourism and hospitality in Turkey. Having character traits and experiences that are similar to those of the participants is closely associated with research reflexivity (Berger, 2015). Relevant researcher positioning such as gender, race, individual experiences, and linguistic traditions becomes significant especially in qualitative research. Participants may be more willing to share their experiences with a researcher who they think feels sympathy with their status due to similarities in question; the researcher may also be more knowledgeable about potential information sources (Berger, 2015). The interviews were performed in Turkish, the native language of the participants, and they were allowed to express themselves in the way they felt most comfortable. In the final stage, a professional translator translated the study into English.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants

Participant (P)	Age	Education	Marital Status	Child	Family Business	City	Hospitality Facility
P1	44	Bachelor D.	Married	-	yes	Ankara	4 stars
P2	43	Associate D.	Married	1	-	Ankara	4 stars
P3	36	High School	Married	2	-	Belek/Antalya	5 stars
P4	44	Associate D.	Married	2	-	Alanya/Antalya	5 stars
P5	38	Masters D.	Married	1	-	Antalya	5 stars
P6	37	Bachelor D.	Married	1	-	Istanbul	5 stars
P7	34	Bachelor D.	Single	-	-	Alanya/Antalya	4 stars
P8	35	Associate D.	Married	1	-	Alanya/Antalya	4 stars
P9	38	Bachelor D.	Married	-	yes	Selimiye/Mugla	Apartment hotel
P10	40	Associate D.	Married	1	-	Alanya/Antalya	4 stars
P11	49	Bachelor D.	Married	2	-	Alanya/Antalya	4 stars
P12	40	Bachelor D.	Married	1	-	Bodrum/Mugla	4 stars
P13	38	Bachelor D.	Married	2	-	Alanya/Antalya	3 stars
P14	44	Bachelor D.	Married	2	-	Alanya/Antalya	5 stars
P15	32	Bachelor D.	Single	-	-	Urgup/Nevsehir	Boutique hotel
P16	43	Bachelor D.	Married	2	-	Alanya/Antalya	3 stars
P17	42	Bachelor D.	Married	2	-	Alanya/Antalya	3 stars
P18	45	Bachelor D.	Married	1	-	Manavgat/Antalya	3 stars
P19	42	Bachelor D.	Married	2	-	Alanya/Antalya	5 stars
P20	34	Bachelor D.	Married	2	-	Alanya/Antalya	4 stars

Data were collected using the semi-structured interview method. Belina (2023, p. 1) states that the semi-structured interview is an effective tool “for gaining insight into hidden aspects of social life, problems that are not immediately perceptible.” In addition, the semi-structured interview helps the researcher to obtain in-depth data on the participants’ perspectives and make sense of their lived stories (Al Balushi, 2016). In this type of interview, the interview questions are prepared in advance; however, the researcher can change the questions according to the situation and is free to create a conversation flow without deviating from the focal topic (Patton, 2018). Using such an interview method allowed the researchers to ask for more details and examples.

As a data collection tool, the researchers adopted an interview protocol based on the results of previously conducted studies on the subject of women in management in the hospitality sector. The interview protocol consisted of two parts. In the first part, there were questions about the personal information of the participants (age, marital status, education, number of children (if any), years of work in the profession, years of experience in management). In the second part of the interview protocol, in line with the research objectives, the following questions were posed to the participants:

1. *What do you think about the reasons why women employees are underrepresented in senior management positions in the hospitality sector?*
2. *Have you ever experienced a conflict while trying to manage your career and family life? If you have, what kind of conflict was it?*
3. *Have there been any women in your career that you see as role models or mentors? If so, how did this person(s) contribute to you?*
4. *What advice would you like to give to women employees who are aiming for a high-level career in the hospitality sector?*

3.2. Data analysis

In the data analysis, the researchers adopted the procedure recommended by Creswell (2016). First, the researchers deciphered the interviews into audio file format and transferred them to word files. All data were read after making them ready for analysis and notes were taken to ascertain what the participants said. In the second stage in which the coding process started, the data were coded primarily with the “open coding” method by reading them line by line. With open coding, the data were fragmented into small parts for conceptualization and categorization (Merriam, 2015). The code set obtained in the following stage was grouped, and temporary themes and subthemes were attained at the end of this process. An inductive point of view was applied to check whether the available codes fit into these themes. After reaching an opinion that additional themes and subthemes could not be generated, it was deductively checked whether the themes fit into the codes. At this stage, “axial coding” was employed to define properties and dimensions of the themes and to explore how the themes and subthemes interrelate with each other (Saldana, 2019, p. 236). In the final stage of the analysis, the meaning of the final themes and subthemes was interpreted using descriptive analysis.

The author who performed the interviews conducted the coding process. In the data analysis process, the researchers came together regularly, discussed the subthemes and themes and reached a consensus. Table 2 and Table 3 present a perspective regarding the themes and subthemes obtained.

3.3. Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the study results was discussed in terms of credibility, transferability, and dependability (Merriam, 2015). The interview questions relying on the literature review were prepared to ensure the credibility of this study. The consent forms were prepared, confirming that the participants voluntarily participated and the information they provided, such as their names and institutions, would remain confidential. In addition, the data collected at the end of each interview were summarized to the participant, and the interviewer asked whether the data accurately reflected her own perspective (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p. 303). In qualitative research, biases, assumptions, and tendencies may emerge as part of the researchers’ reflexivity (Merriam, 2015). To increase the credibility of the research, the researchers rigorously focused on this issue during the data collection and interpretation process.

The details of the research process, the study context, and the data collection and sample characteristics to assess the transferability of results to a similar context were explained (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Yıldırım and Şimşek (2013) stated that the transferability of the research is in regard to the generalizability of the research results. The researchers used analytical generalization in this study since ensuring the statistical generalizability in qualitative research is out of the question. They interpreted the findings obtained by comparing them with results previously presented in the literature.

Regarding the dependability of the study, two different academics made coding separately on the data obtained from the interviews and the consistency ratio was calculated by comparing those. The Cohen’s Kappa coefficient was 0.708. This result can be interpreted as there being an agreement at a significant level between the evaluators, according to Landis and Koch (1977).

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Women’s barriers to senior management positions

Three themes—organizational, social, and individual barriers—were determined regarding the reasons why women are underrepresented in senior management position (Table 2). These themes were interconnected and had an impact on each other. Reflections of social barriers could be seen in both the organizational and individual barriers theme. Similarly, perceived organizational barriers could

Table 2. *Women's barriers to senior management positions*

Theme	Subtheme	Statements
Organizational Barriers	Long and flexible working hours	“So, a manager should be able to stay here until late if need be. She has to be constantly active in external life conditions... She should be able to stay here when necessary. For example, there are such handicaps as a woman...” (P16) “Even if you are a manager, you constantly have to prove that you do your job well.”
	Effort to prove oneself	This becomes manifest in the same way among both your subordinates and superiors.” (P6) “First of all, you need to start your career journey from the negatives because of being a woman, and even if you have increased your competencies more than your competitors, this situation may not be considered. Men, consciously or unconsciously, enjoy priority in appointments and promotions.” (P19)
	Inequality in promotion opportunities	“I’ve never had a mentor. I have never met such a woman. I’ve never had such a person around.” (P17)
	Lack of role model or mentor	“You will be a little bossy, when appropriate, you will not show those weak spots you have.... When you exaggerate this too much, you are being criticized as “this is like a man, what kind of woman is she.” In another situation, you are getting criticized for being emotional.” (P3)
	Double bind	“I don’t know why, it’s probably psychological. Women just don’t want women to be good.” (P1) “That is to say, how many women hotel owners are there in a male-dominated society, in an environment where there are male-dominated bosses? In how many of them do you see a woman taking an active part one-on-one as a boss?” (P20)
	Queen bee syndrome	“Especially in the Alanya region, this is also a very big factor.... There are family hotels here, not many institutional structures.... People who sold their land back in time, built a hotel there; people who do not understand tourism very well, people who do not understand the logic of tourism.” (P8)
	Male-dominated business owners	“They think that you understand less about technical things as a woman, for example. Or they may behave differently when giving a price quotation...For example, an engine will be purchased, or an engine has gone out of order down in the boiler room, they think that a man would be more knowledgeable about it...(P16)
	Non-institutionalized business	“But they always direct women to little more reliable and state-related occupations, such as teachers, civil servants, nurses... you will be a civil servant; you will be able to go home early; your shift will be over at 5:00 p.m. You will go home, cook food, take care of the children...” (P12)
Social Barriers	Stereotypes	“... For example, we had personnel here who could have been a very good manager ... but after she got married, her spouse did not prefer that she worked in the tourism sector, so she quit. Her spouse was a lawyer, and he did not want his wife to work in the tourism sector as a manager. [...] but it does not pose a problem when a women’s spouse is a tourism professional. We have a bank employee friend, and her husband is a tourism professional; we have a teacher friend, and her husband is a tourism professional...” (P16)
	Discrimination in career choice	“Another reason, unfortunately, is that there is an image against women that still exists even in 2018 – which we claim and prove to the contrary – there is a senior management composed of bosses who think that women cannot take an active role as men [...] and in their mentality, the alternative is primarily given to men.” (P20)
	Husbands’ negative attitude to women’s work in the hospitality sector	“There are too many responsibilities on the woman for once, such as issues regarding household chores, work, children’s dress, homework, course. That is to say, women have more than one load and wear out a lot...” (P3)
Individual Barriers	Biases	“... you think on the one hand that whether the child is ok, does she have a fever or did she get better, so and so. On the other hand, there are works that you need to finish at the office, and you do them too. You are obligated to manage both...” (P17)
	Having multiple roles	“... but there are also many female staff who can't stand the difficulties until they make themselves accepted and give up and quit the job from the very beginning.” (P6)
	Dilemma of being a mother	
	Personal preferences	

influence the theme of individual barriers. The themes and subthemes complemented each other to explain the underrepresentation of women in top management.

4.1.1. Organizational barriers

The researchers developed eight subthemes under the theme of organizational barriers. These subthemes were long and flexible working hours, effort to prove oneself, inequality of promotion opportunities, lack of role model or mentor, double bind, queen bee syndrome, male-dominated hotel owners, and lack of institutionalization of the business.

As pointed out in previous studies (Costa *et al.*, 2017; Mooney & Ryan, 2009; Segovia-Pérez *et al.*, 2019), **long working hours** due to the nature of the hospitality business put a considerable strain on married women with children. Women cannot have flexible working hours and mobility required by the job because of gender roles such as housework and childcare. These factors move women away from the discourse of “ideal tourism worker” and manager. Interestingly, the women managers stated that they themselves prefer men employees in certain positions and departments. The reason for this may be that women strongly internalize social attitudes toward gender roles.

“I prefer some of the people I employ in departments to be men [...]. You know, we work in shifts and provide 24-hour service. For example, you cannot employ women at evening shifts, women always prefer daytime hours.” (P16)

Another finding was that women managers put in extra **effort to prove themselves** to both their subordinates and superiors. This finding agrees with Carvalho *et al.* (2018). Segovia-Pérez *et al.* (2021) highlighted that a company with a male-dominant organizational culture and more stereotyped roles for women has a structural environment that prevents women from advancing to managerial positions. The participants stated that they have to endeavor to demonstrate that they themselves also possess leadership skills that are mostly attributed to men. As asserted by role congruity theory, this reveals that women experience difficulties in proving that they can be successful in leadership roles. In this sense, it can be seen that the “think manager-think male” (Schein, 2001) phenomenon prevails in the hospitality sector in Turkey, especially at senior management levels, and it poses a significant barrier for women.

Inequality of promotion opportunities was another subtheme. The participants’ statements revealed that promotion processes are not always carried out according to fair criteria, and women are not provided with enough opportunities regarding management. One participant expressed that women’s marital status and pregnancy plans affect evaluation processes particularly in recruitment and promotion procedures, and this leads to inequality in opportunity:

“A sales and marketing position was open in the place where I have been working for five years. And there were two possibilities for this position; I was one and a male friend was the other (friend of interviewee). And the male friend was selected. Afterwards, the boss told me clearly that ‘in fact I would prefer to work with you, but I was told that you got engaged.’ Thus, it was something like she got engaged, she will get married, we will train her, and she will leave. In a word, it means one of the opportunities that I in fact lost in my past due to marriage, due to children, or at least due to being a woman.” (P20)

When asked whether the participants had **role models or mentors** in their career life, the majority ($f = 12$) stated they did not have any role models or mentors, neither male nor female. This finding is consistent with the results of Dimovski *et al.*, 2010; Jackson, 2001; Kattara, 2005; Mooney & Ryan, 2009;

and Reinhold, 2005. The participants did not participate in any mentoring practice before they were employed, and such a practice was not held in the businesses where they work.

One of the reasons for the lack of role models and mentors for women is that there are not many senior female managers in the sector. Another important reason is that formal mentoring practices are not institutionalized in hotels in Turkey (Balçı, 2012). In addition, in the Turkish hospitality industry, where gender roles are deeply ingrained, male mentors may not regard women as mentees because, as Hanson (2008, as cited in Elmuti *et al.*, 2009) suggests, they perceive women to be more emotional, less skilled in problem solving, and at risk of sexual harassment in the workplace. In addition, organizations may informally invest in men—who are perceived to have more stable careers, rather than women whose careers are interrupted by motherhood-related processes—to transfer knowledge and experience.

One of the barriers women perceive is the **double-bind** effect. Women managers have to balance feminine and masculine aspects of their dress, speech, and behaviour (Carvalho *et al.*, 2019; Chen *et al.*, 2021; Costa *et al.*, 2017). The participants mentioned the difficulty of balancing leadership and women role expectations within the organization. They suppressed their feminine aspects, especially at the workplace, and sometimes even exhibited masculine attitudes to strengthen their authority. Cuadrado *et al.* (2015) also revealed that masculine character traits are considered more important for management positions. However, when women managers exhibiting leadership behaviors are perceived to violate female stereotypes, they are found strange and criticized. While men leaders are evaluated positively even if they use soft power, there is an attitude of discontent toward women leaders violating role expectations, especially by their men subordinates (Dirik, 2020). Thereby, gender role expectations can create dilemmas particularly for women in their work life.

Another noteworthy finding was the hindering approaches of women among themselves. In the hospitality sector, where management is male dominated, women in upper-level positions are sometimes observed to exhibit the behaviour of hindering their fellow women. The women managers conveyed that they themselves had similar experiences in their career journeys. The findings showed that the **queen bee syndrome** exists in the hospitality sector. To adapt to the prevailing gender stereotype in the organization, women develop masculine thought and behaviour patterns and display unsupportive attitudes toward their fellow subordinates. The findings of a study conducted in Turkey by Çelen and Tuna (2021) showed that women managers were negatively evaluated by women hotel employees. Also, Çelen and Tuna (2021) found that working with men managers was easier for women and they did not support the idea of having more than one woman manager.

The participants drew attention to the fact that most **business owners were men**. Therefore, they stated that discrimination started from the top in the system and that it required effort to exist as a woman and make herself to be accepted. One of the participants mentioned that as a consequence of the patriarchal system, uncultivable lands by the seashore have been left as an inheritance to women. However, the development of tourism in these regions in the 1970s and 1980s did not provide the expected benefit for women, because the management of the hotels built on these lands has been transferred to their spouses. One participant explained the situation as follows:

“[...] unproductive and uncultivable lands by the sea shore were given daughters while prosperous and beautiful lands were given sons. And eventually, these lands belonging to daughters were suddenly valued because of tourism. But girls themselves did not benefit from this. [...] In fact, women own all hotels by the seashore in the land registry system. [...]. But, nonetheless, who does the management? Men do. While the system already starts from here, downward, you would not expect it to be much different for the general manager.” (P20)

The participants contemplated that the increase in the presence of women in senior management would reflect positively on all levels of the business, especially the management team. Indeed, the study conducted by Costa *et al.* (2017) highlighted that companies managed by women were more likely to hire women as managers.

Another factor hindering the increase in women in senior management is that work facilities are not always **institutionalized**. It becomes challenging for women employees to progress in their careers, especially in small-scale businesses managed in the family hotel system. Small and independent hotels tend to have fewer objective procedures and ambiguous promotion standards (Segovia-Pérez *et al.*, 2019). Ersoy and Ehtiyar (2020) reported that women hotel employees prefer institutionalized businesses to cope with the challenges in the sector.

4.1.2. Social barriers

The theme of social barriers encompassed the subthemes of stereotypes, biases, discrimination in career choice, and a husband's negative attitude toward women working in the hospitality sector. Cultural norms and values of the society determine the barriers in this theme. The fact that leadership roles in society are coded with male stereotypes creates an incongruity between leadership and the female gender role. Such a male culture and the gendered image of women consolidates the gender discrimination in reaching management positions (Segovia-Pérez *et al.*, 2021).

The participants were also aware of these **stereotypes** attributed to women and they tried to create their own self-defence mechanism by “not exhibiting feminine traits.”

“One of the reasons why there are not many women managers is this: women approach the work very emotionally. I am a woman, but I have never approached work emotionally. I’m sort of ruthless about it...” (P8)

Stereotypes may also lead to a horizontal separation within the hospitality sector. The participants indicated that some departments “possess” a gender. Consistent with the findings obtained in the studies of Kattara (2005) and González-Serrano *et al.* (2018), women entering the sector were mostly preferred in departments such as the front office and housekeeping as personnel and manager; thus, departments also take on a gender. The work done in these departments is an extension of gender roles:

“[...] Women can be favoured in terms of visibility and kindness and diligence they show in their work. [...] If you are a woman, the approach is different. For example, you are more favoured in the front office.” (P16)

The stereotypes and expectations attributed to women may also lead to **prejudices** regarding women. The fact that leadership roles are perceived with male stereotypes may lead to the leadership potential of women to be less positively evaluated. Clevenger and Singh (2013) highlighted that the perception of women as less competent than men is a significant career barrier. Segovia-Pérez *et al.* (2021) showed that the more organizational stereotypes or prejudices about women's attitudes, capabilities, and leadership qualities, the lower the likelihood of achieving management positions.

The other significant finding was that society directed women to relatively more “**appropriate**” work areas, such as civil service, that would be compatible with gender roles and would not disrupt their responsibilities at home. Gender roles are instilled in individuals from childhood, and women are taught that they need to make job choices “appropriate for themselves.” Therefore, gender roles are reinforced in this cycle. Women remain within certain frameworks and those who go outside of these frameworks have to contend with prejudices and stereotypes.

Another social barrier was the **negative attitude of the spouse** toward working in the hospitality sector. Scott (1995) mentioned in her study published almost 30 years ago that spouses of married women opposed their working as a tour guide or receptionist. This understanding, which is more common in the development years of tourism in Turkey, is changing today (Çiçek *et al.*, 2017). The reasons for this change may be the acknowledgment of the economic contribution of women to the family by the spouse and the increase in the education level of women (Çiçek *et al.*, 2017). However, despite the time passed since Scott's study (1995) and the progress made, the participants in this study expressed that there are women in the hospitality industry who may quit their work at the request of their spouse. According to the participants' statements, it is considered reasonable for a woman's spouse to work in the hospitality business. On the other hand, it is less desirable for women to work in the hospitality sector since long working hours and shift work may cause the disruption of women's responsibilities at home. Therefore, this result revealed that men were not always willing for their wives to work in a dynamic sector, such as hospitality, within the framework of the social structure.

4.1.3. Individual barriers

In the theme of individual barriers, there were three subthemes: having multiple roles, the motherhood dilemma, and personal preferences. **Having multiple roles** was perceived to be the greatest barrier that kept women from management positions. Trying to fulfill the social expectations attributed to "motherhood" and "womanhood" causes the start of a second shift at home for women. In conformity with the structure of Turkish society, domestic responsibilities are considered among the fundamental duties of women, and only a few household chores can be shared with spouses. As stated in previous studies (Li & Leung 2001; Mann & Seacord 2003; Mooney & Ryan, 2009; Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018), trying to fulfil the demands of both family life and work brings about work-life conflict. These roles that women undertake in their business and family lives and the responsibilities of the different areas that they need to fulfil may create a role conflict for women.

"Your husband expects womanhood from you.... You will be a housewife and you will work; you will do household chores, make your husband happy, you know, it is very difficult to be a working mother and a working wife." (P8)

Another subtheme was the **motherhood dilemma**. The participants mentioned that the minds of mothers, especially those with small children, were largely on their children and they could not fully focus on the work in their business. The lack of women-friendly practices in businesses, such as kindergarten and flexible working hours, are among the most important causes of this situation. The hardworking pace of the hospitality sector (weekends, holidays) aggravates the burden of women who have difficulties in the subject of work-life balance and leads them to experience "mom-guilt." For this reason, some participants stated that they decided to postpone the plan of having children and to have children after very long years.

"[...] As I said, I become unhappy ... [...] once the children have grown up, if they say that mom was always going to work, she was not spending any time with me, or if they say that mom was not playing games with me, I will have regrets in the future as well." (P17)

"I have been married for 18 years. But I always postponed having a child. My child was born after 10 years. In the first five years, I was leaving work around 11:00 p.m. all the time, I was responsible for everything. I thought if I have a child... How is it going to be? I postponed." (P18)

The women managers, at this stage, also mentioned the importance of having various support systems as indicated by previous studies (Ayca, 2004; Carvalho *et al.*, 2018; Chen *et al.*, 2021; Jadnanansing *et al.*, 2021; Segovia-Pérez *et al.*, 2019). It was observed that the women received different supports such as

support of family elders, spousal support, and helper support for housework. However, only a few stated that they could receive organizational support.

Women who have difficulty in adapting to the conditions in the hospitality sector and in establishing work-life balance, and who experience role conflict, have to make some personal choices. Hence, another subtheme was **personal choices**, in line with Hakim's (2006) preference theory. The fact that the area that women prioritize in their lives is family rather than career makes them directed to jobs that allow them to fulfill these responsibilities. Women may quit their job, gravitate to different sectors, or take a break from their careers until their children grow up. Such interruptions of women's careers not only have a negative effect on their career development but also cause the loss of skilled and experienced human resources of the business (Sharma, 2016).

The women adopted a "limited liability" strategy to balance multiple roles and responsibilities and fulfill their maternal and spousal duties that are expected of them. One participant stated that she preferred to remain as a department manager during her child's growing up period:

"[...] for example, I worked as a sales and marketing manager where I could leave work at 6 o'clock for some time. I did not work as a hotel manager. Why? Because my child was young." (P18)

4.2. Recommendations offered to women manager candidates

Within the scope of the second research objective of the study, the participants were asked to present recommendations for women candidates targeting senior positions. While providing these recommendations, the participants also gave insights about individual strategies and methods that they implemented in their own career.

The recommendations of women managers to women employees aiming at management in the hospitality sector were evaluated in two themes as personal development and career development recommendations (Table 3). The participants mostly presented recommendations related to intrinsic character traits in the first theme, whereas the second theme comprised mostly recommendations specific to career development in the hospitality business.

Individual characteristics and personality are important variables in the career development of women in the hospitality sector (Naranayan, 2017). In the theme of personal development recommendations, there were subthemes of resilience, self-development, setting goals, being investigative, self-confidence, perseverance, honesty, and autonomy.

The results obtained were similar to those reported in the literature. For example, **self-confidence** and achievement orientation (Aycan, 2004), **perseverance**, (Jadnanansing *et al.*, 2021), strength of determination (Li & Leung, 2001), **goal focus**, and ambition goals (Maxwell, 1997) were previously revealed as women's success factors. Carvalho *et al.* (2018), on the other hand, reported that effort, dedication, competence, and hard work emerge as individual enablers.

However, intrinsic factors are not sufficient for management. Women are expected to develop themselves in terms of work-related skills. Thus, the second theme was career development recommendations. The subthemes of the recommendations regarding career development of candidates were love for the job, experience in institutionalized hotels, acquiring overseas experience, communication skills and developing oneself regarding foreign language(s), having work discipline, and not hesitating to take responsibility.

Table 3. Recommendations offered to women manager candidates

Theme	Subtheme	Statements
Personal development recommendations	Resilience	“If they have career goals, they need to mentally prepare themselves beforehand for the stress they will experience. They need to be undeterred...” (P10)
	Self-development	“... if you do not develop yourself, if you stick in the mindset of 20 years ago, you cannot advance anywhere and you lose your position as well. Of course, age is progressing, you have to catch up with age. It is necessary to be open to development...” (P17)
	Setting goals	“They should definitely set a goal for themselves for the first five years. Even if it is not hotel management, of course, a friend of ours who started at the reception this year should definitely get a promotion within a maximum of three years. Thus, they can progress by setting such goals...” (P13)
	Being investigative	“They say, workaholic women, unhappy women; the candidates should pay no attention; and I recommend them to have the nature of being innovative, curious, and investigative no matter whatever work they do.” (P3)
	Self-confidence	“I think having self-confidence is enough. For example, our society shapes (people) a lot. You cannot do this, you cannot do that, or they mean something else. By knowing yourself, whatever you want to be, you will go for it...” (P7)
	Perseverance	“... maybe it requires a little patience. But sooner or later, you rise as you deserve [...] it will take more time than what they planned. Three years, the target they set, will perhaps increase to five years. But if they want it, it will happen. ...” (P8)
	Honesty	“As long as they do their job properly, there's no such thing as the possibility of not being promoted. When you are honest, you do your job right. If not in the first year, you are promoted in the second year...” (P8)
	Autonomy	“... I have only one thing to say for any sector, not only for the tourism sector; if a person wants to be successful, make money, and build a career, the person will make her own choice.” (P1)
Career development recommendations	Love for the job	“... most importantly, they should like the job they do. That is the key point... You cannot do well when you do not like your job. Moreover, let me say this; they will certainly be noticed when they put in the effort.” (P3)
	Experience in institutionalized hotels	“In the good facilities, they go to work in the worst positions, but they can observe the system. They should prefer institutionalized establishments.” (P20)
	Overseas experience	“... they need to develop their foreign country experience as well. We here live within our own borders, but it should not be in the way of the blind leading the blind...” (P20)
	Communication skills and foreign language	“They can learn the language, which is very, very important. You need to be more than one person, not two, not three, the more, the merrier...” (P12)
	Work discipline	“We welcome different guests every day and try to provide the same service and comfort to all of them. It is very difficult to set up a system that works like a clock and keep it running all the time. Therefore, discipline is indispensable for tourism and hotel management. (P6)
	Taking responsibility	“If they take responsibility, they rise quicker. This is true no matter what profession it is... You cannot rise without taking responsibility.” (P18)

Women managers primarily recommended to women who want to rise in their career to **love and respect the work they do**, as reported by the studies of Maxwell (1997) and Carvalho *et al.* (2018). The hospitality industry is known for long working hours (Mooney & Ryan, 2008), low pay, high turnover (Deery & Shaw, 2009), poor work-life balance (Mohanty & Mohanty, 2014), and being highly gendered (Dashper, 2020). Koç and Uşaklı (2022) determined that failure to meet professional expectations, long working hours, and sexist attitudes were among the reasons why women working in the Turkish tourism industry leave the sector. Thus, the industry presents a challenging career path for women. Nevertheless, the participants emphasized that their commitment to and love for their profession were the driving forces for them to endure difficulties and continue their careers. Participants perceived loving their profession as an important part of career advancement:

“[...] it is not a job that can be done without love. You are dealing with people. There cannot be many people in tourism who do not love their job. You have to love it....” (P18)

“[...] the most important thing... As long as they love their job, you can be sure that the career success steps come automatically....” (P13)

Some studies in the literature have emphasized education and experience as significant success factors (Costa *et al.*, 2013; Li & Leung, 2001). All but one of the participants interviewed in the present study had either an associate's degree or a bachelor's degree, and nine of them received education in the field of tourism and hospitality. The majority of the participants attached importance to experience (**experience in institutionalized hotels and experience abroad**) rather than receiving education in the field of hospitality. The fact that most of the participants did not receive tourism education may lead them to not consider this as a factor that makes a difference in their career.

“[...] they should spend some time in corporate hotels not to make money but to gain experience.” (P15)

“They should push the limits and try to get the lowest positions in a Sheraton group or a Conrad group abroad.” (P20)

Another reason for attaching importance to experience may be that the women feel the need to prove themselves regarding management. Sector experience may make women “acceptable” and “reliable” candidates by improving their management skills. One participant explained this:

“If you are experienced, you can be a manager in a place. [...] A male can be considered as manager even if he does not have management experience. But they question it for a woman, you know.” (P16)

Other success factors expressed were having **work discipline and taking initiative and responsibility**. Remington and Kitterlin-Lynch (2018) also defined “taking the initiative in getting promotions” as a success factor. One of the participants recommended the development of communication and language skills. In the study of Patwardhan *et al.* (2016), communication skills are defined as among the significant career success indicators. In the present study, the participants emphasized the importance of having effective communication skills both in guest relationships and within the organization. **The ability to speak a foreign language** was also identified as an essential career strategy:

“[...] the most important issue is foreign language. If they want to take part in tourism, they should improve their foreign language skills.” (P20)

Costa *et al.* (2017) indicated that values such as compassion, communality, and empathy, which are perceived as feminine management traits, have become more desired in the tourism and hospitality industry. It has been reported that women managers create a “hybrid managerial style” by blending feminine traits such as relational and facilitative and masculine traits such as assertive and commanding (Costa *et al.*, 2017, p. 154). In the present study, on the other hand, the participants also recommended women to have some masculine stereotype traits including resilience, self-confidence, perseverance, and autonomy. A similar result was reported by Segovia-Pérez *et al.*'s (2019) study in which they concluded that positive social qualities associated with women do not comply with the leadership style expected in hospitality businesses. As asserted by role congruity theory, leadership traits were attributed to male stereotypes. The participants believed that they have to carry these traits to make themselves

accepted as the manager. However, considering the double-bind effect, which was identified to be one of the organizational barriers in the study, the women managers were careful not to be stigmatized as “extremely male” or “extremely female.”

The findings overall demonstrated that prerequisites and requirements differ in the career advancement of women and men. It can be stated that women, unlike men, endeavour to prove themselves and their skills so that they keep their present position or ensure their efforts will be accepted.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the reasons for underrepresentation of women on senior management teams of the hospitality industry in Turkey and the recommendations of women managers to women candidates from the perspectives of women hospitality business managers. The researchers used role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) as a guiding framework to meet the research objectives. The present study provided crucial perspectives to hospitality industry professionals and policymakers to increase the representation of women in senior management.

Turkey is viewed as a combination of Ottoman heritage and Western civilization (Kongar, 2004). Based on the existence of traditional and modern values in Turkish society, both individualist and collectivist attitudes can be exhibited (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005). Thus, this intersectionality creates an in-between effect on women’s social lives (Bingöl, 2014). Furthermore, the patriarchal cultural structure in which family is at the core (Cave & Kilic, 2010) still determines “what” and “how” women should be. The present study showed that cultural norms and traditional gender roles have a significant effect on women’s career and individual lives.

Within the framework of the first research objective, the researchers determined that there are organizational, individual, and social barriers in the hospitality industry that hinder women from advancing to senior management positions. Social barriers shaped around culture and gender roles attributed to women reflect on women’s business and personal lives. As a matter of cultural norms, the glorification of family and motherhood as women’s primary areas of responsibility causes women who want to pursue a career experience a dilemma between home and career. Unequal sharing of domestic roles by women and men brings about work-life conflict in women, hence, they have to make various choices such as quitting their job, taking a break from their career until their children grow up, or not assuming much responsibility. When the male-dominated structure in the hospitality sector, the fact that leadership roles are defined with masculine stereotypes, and difficult working conditions of the sector combine, women’s representation in senior management decreases considerably.

The second research objective aimed to present the recommendations provided to women manager candidates. The participants presented recommendations regarding both intrinsic and work-related skills that should be possessed. The fact that candidates were recommended to have character traits attributed to male stereotypes indicates that leadership is still perceived with masculine values. In addition, unlike their male counterparts, women need to be better prepared professionally to be able to get promoted. As their management competence is questioned, contrary to men, women have to prove themselves. There is a lack of organizational vision and policies that will ensure gender equality. Women mostly struggle with career barriers by taking individual initiatives by themselves. As stated by Carvalho *et al.* (2018), recommending that women be “superwomen” should not be the solution to structural problems in organizations. Such an approach would make it possible to strengthen and maintain male gender roles as desirable traits for management.

Gebbels *et al.* (2020) described the hospitality sector as a “battlefield” where women struggle with factors hindering their career development. This struggle also applies to women working in the

hospitality sector in Turkey, and the participants define themselves as “unfamiliar managers,” in the words of one of the participants. They believed that they could successfully fulfil senior management positions when given the opportunity. They progressed in their careers by struggling against gender stereotypes.

Finally, previous research has shown that having women in senior positions is associated with long-term organizational success and positive contributions to financial performance (Gupta, 2019; Noland *et al.*, 2016). In addition, Marinakou (2014) highlighted that hotels may benefit from women’s distinctive capabilities and skills in dealing with uncertainty and competition. Therefore, it is important for organizations to be aware of the potential benefits of having a diverse workforce. Creating an inclusive culture that allows all employees to develop their leadership skills will contribute to the future success of organizations (Offerman & Foley, 2020).

5.1. Theoretical implications

Studies have identified the existence of a glass ceiling effect in the Turkish hospitality industry (Akoğlan-Kozak, 1996; Anafarta *et al.*, 2008; Cave & Kilic, 2010). However, more research is needed to determine the reasons for the limited representation of women managers in senior management. This is the first study in the Turkish hospitality literature that goes further than the research on the problems women face in business life and investigates the underlying reasons for women’s inability to become senior managers from the perspective of senior women managers and a qualitative perspective. There is also a general lack of research discussing how women managers perceive the obstacles and challenges they face and how they rise to position of leadership. This study is based on the personal expressions of women leaders in the Turkish hospitality industry and reveals their experiences in their career advancement processes. The study makes contribution to the literature by providing a holistic picture of the obstacles that women managers face in their personal and professional lives and by providing an understanding of the methods and approaches they follow in the face of these obstacles.

This study investigated the reasons for underrepresentation of women in the senior management teams of hospitality industry in Turkey through the lens of role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Thus, the study contributed to the theory with the findings from the hospitality industry in Turkey by demonstrating how the incongruity perceived between the female gender role and leadership roles hinders the representation of women in senior management.

Although this study has found results that support the relevant literature in general, it includes new findings specific to the Turkish hospitality industry. For example, the lack of mentor practices and the double-bind effect, barriers previously identified in the literature, are also valid in the Turkish hospitality industry. In addition, male-dominated business owners and non-institutionalized businesses also emerged as organizational barriers specific to the Turkish context. Similarly, discrimination in career choice and spousal approach extended the existing social barriers in the Turkish hospitality industry.

Finally, according to Morgan and Pritchard (2019), gender studies are not at the core of hospitality research. In their bibliometric study, Figueroa-Domecq *et al.* (2015) found that gender research is limited within tourism research and that gender-aware studies, which are relatively less studied, are mostly centered on Anglo-centric countries. In this respect, the current study contributes to gender and leadership in hospitality literature with findings specific to Turkey and expands the existing body of knowledge.

5.2. Practical implications

This study offers some practical implications for Turkish hospitality industry and organizations. The findings of the present study can help organizations better understand the challenges and barriers experienced by female employees and take steps to improve the career advancement of female employees.

First, in the context of the second objective of the study, the advice of female managers was investigated for the first time in the Turkish hospitality context and the study revealed valuable insights for prospective female managers.

Second, women employees in the hospitality sector mostly need support regarding work-life balance during the managerial process, and organizations remain ineffective in this regard. It is crucial to implement practices suitable for the needs of all employees at different career levels, such as work-life balance programs, nursery facilities, telecommuting, and flexible working hours. Also, especially for mothers who gave birth, applications such as return-to-work programs, business coaching for mothers, and counselling services are important. Such support programs might provide benefits, such as a reduction in turnover rate, increased performance at work, and a decrease in work-life conflict (Lazār *et al.*, 2010).

Third, a large majority of the participants did not have role models and there were no mentoring practices in businesses. Given that mentoring practices are an essential strategy for the career development of women employees in the hospitality sector (Dashper, 2020), it is suggested to institutionalize the mentoring practice so that women employees perceive fewer obstacles to becoming managers and increase their self-confidence. To achieve this, it is important to create an organizational culture where mentoring is encouraged and rewarded and where being a mentor is desirable. In particular, women-to-women mentoring should be encouraged with additional incentives and female employees should be provided with role models. Considering the low number of female managers who mentor and the reservations about cross-gender mentoring, group mentoring, e-mentoring, and peer-mentoring methods can be recommended. The group mentoring method, in which a mentor works with a group of mentees, can allow more female employees to benefit from the mentoring practice. E-mentoring can facilitate mentors and mentees' access to the program and reduce the need for mobility. It can also reduce reservations about cross-gender mentoring such as sexual approach. Thanks to the peer-mentoring method, high-potential female employees at similar career levels working in different departments can be brought together and have the opportunity to share their experiences and best practices. This will also mean a networking opportunity for mentees. By combining these practices, mentoring programs tailored to the needs of the organization and staff can be prepared.

Fourth, there is a need for leadership training programs. Koburtay *et al.* (2019) suggest that gender equality practices and leadership programs can alleviate prejudicial evaluations of women. Hence, potential women manager candidates at all levels should be strengthened with training programs specific to women employees to unveil their talents and boost their self-confidence. Thus, it would be possible to compensate for the experiences missed during career breaks due to reasons such as giving birth and raising children. In addition, there is a need for training programs, workshops, and seminars for all employees on issues such as gender roles, diversity, and inclusion. Online and face-to-face application options should be evaluated in organizing these training programs and these programs should be mandatory for employees at all levels of the business. Participation of senior managers in these programs, as an indication that they care about diversity and inclusion, will set an example for all employees.

Fifth, it will be a significant step in reducing inequality of opportunity for businesses to design egalitarian methods that focus on qualifications and skills, independent of a candidate's gender in the promotion process. A balanced talent management policy regarding gender should be followed so that women can benefit from the same opportunities that men have and thus develop equally. Strengthening women employees who are considered to have management potential, through programs such as cross-training and manager-in-training (Russen *et al.*, 2021) that allow them to become acquainted with other departments, may also contribute to diminishing the horizontal discrimination.

This study also has implications for tourism and hotel management departments of universities. The study results showed that less than half of the participants were women who had received hotel management education. Therefore, female students should be encouraged to stay in the sector and be better prepared for senior management positions. Educators can make updates to their curriculum using study results. Students' awareness about gender can be increased through gender equality and leadership skills courses, case studies, and events to which woman managers who will serve as role models are invited. In the study, woman managers gave great importance to experience. Accordingly, internship, training, and mobility programs can be organized within the framework of collaborations among hotel businesses and universities at home and abroad.

In conclusion, in Turkey, which ranks 124th among 146 countries according to the Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2022) and is one of the countries where the gender gap is deep, policymakers, organizations, and relevant stakeholders need to work in coordination to increase the number of women in business life as qualified managers.

5.3. *Limitations and future research*

This study has some limitations. It is based solely on the opinions of women hospitality managers, and the results obtained are in the context of Turkey. In further studies, research in which men managers and all employees in the upper, middle, and lower levels are addressed holistically can be designed and comparative results can be analysed. Planning of studies that also include women managers working in other areas of the tourism industry, such as travel agencies and food and beverage businesses, may reveal additional findings.

As the research findings indicate, business owners display a male-dominated structure. Thus, the reasons why women are underrepresented in senior management positions should also be evaluated from the business owners' point of view. The low number of women working as managers in hospitality businesses made it challenging to identify the sample. Most of the participants work in medium- and small-scale facilities or family businesses located in certain regions of Turkey (Western Mediterranean, Aegean, and Marmara), which constitutes another research limitation. It is crucial to investigate the regions and businesses with no women managers and establish the reasons for this situation.

One of the study results was the lack of mentoring practices. Considering the limited mentoring studies in the hospitality literature (Kim *et al.*, 2015), future studies should focus on the use of mentoring, especially for women's career development. Almost half of the managers who participated in the study were not graduates of tourism and hospitality studies. It can be suggested to elucidate the factors that cause underrepresentation of women in management. Future studies should focus on leadership styles of women and men managers and investigate which gender roles they include in their management styles and to what extent. Moreover, it may be enlightening to investigate whether perceived barriers differ according to age and management level. Finally, conducting longitudinal studies on women's management will contribute to the comparison of the past and current situation and to planning for the future.

The data of this study were collected before the COVID-19 pandemic started. The pandemic has been reported to exacerbate gender inequality in the labour market and at home that previously existed (Yavorsky *et al.*, 2021). Women who traditionally cannot share domestic responsibilities equally, especially mothers, have assumed the family responsibility more than men during the pandemic period (Craig & Churchill, 2021). Increasing domestic responsibilities during the pandemic has made women more vulnerable to job losses associated with the pandemic (Yavorsky *et al.*, 2021). For this reason, strengthening women in hospitality businesses and urgently implementing work-family support policies has become more important than before for women employees.

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