



# Gender differences in the hospitality industry: A Job quality index



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Women's rate of participation on the labour market is growing, but their working conditions, and consequently their quality, are less favourable than men's.
- A study of job quality from the gender perspective is a pressing need.
- Creation of a Composite Index of Job Quality (CIJQ) for the Tourism Industry.
- Important number of published studies that compare men's and women's job quality, which focus primarily on salary.
- The CIJQ includes more variables apart from salary and reveals the importance of bearing work week duration in mind.
- CIJQ results confirmed that on average women held lower quality jobs than men and an analysis by age group revealed gender gap widens with age.
- Women have lower job quality in management positions they have not traditionally held.
- The gender gap in quality is widest in clearly feminised, lower skilled jobs.

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## ABSTRACT

Employment in the hospitality industry is generally associated with lower quality of employment opportunities than other industries. While women's participation has improved both quantitatively and qualitatively, they continue to encounter a host of barriers attributable to labour market discrimination. A gender-oriented study of job quality is consequently in order.

The present paper aims to define and construct a composite index of job quality, compiling objective job security conditions in a single variable that allows the detection of possible gender differences in job quality. Unlike other comparisons of job quality that focus primarily on salary, the composite indicator developed stresses work week duration in an industry in which part-timing impacts women particularly heavily. Findings reveal that women hold lower quality jobs than men and that the gender gap widens with age. Results also show a double adversity for women: a lower job quality in management positions they have not traditionally held, and a wider quality gap in clearly feminized, lower skilled positions.

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## 1. Introduction

Employment in the hospitality and tourism area is generally associated with lower quality of employment opportunities than other industries (García-Pozo, Campos-Soria, Sánchez-Ollero, & Marchante-Lara, 2012; Lacher & Oh, 2012). Lower salaries, more part-time and temporary contracts (Blake, Arbache, Sinclair, &

Teles, 2008; Lacher & Oh, 2012) and the need to cover 24/7 working hours (Lu & Adler, 2009), might be the reasons why many workers decide to leave the industry after their initial work experiences (Doherty, Guerrier, Jamieson, Lashley, & Lockwood, 2001; Jenkins, 2001).

Moreover, in tourism and consequently in the hospitality industry low job quality is associated, among others, with gender differences. While women's participation in the tourist industry has improved both quantitatively and qualitatively, women continue to encounter a host of barriers attributable to labour market discrimination (Ramos, Rey-Maqueira, & Tugores, 2002).

The interest in job quality has increased world-wide, for part of the jobs created in the last 10 years are characterised by declining

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work flexibility, instability, part-time hours, low salaries and lack of social protection (Leschke & Watt, 2008). Moreover, while women's rate of participation on the labour market is growing, their working conditions are less favourable than men's (Segovia-Pérez & Figueroa-Domecq, 2014) and consequently they are majority in those low quality jobs. In 2005 the European Council's Lisbon Strategy reinforced this interest in job quality. From that moment on, job quality has come to be regarded as one of the key tools for fostering productivity and economic growth, objectives that afford a counterbalance to social cohesion (Kovacs & Casaca, 2007).

A job quality index is a must for policy purposes, particularly in the present context of economic and social change (Osterman, 2010). Interest in developing such an index has been growing in recent years in response to that need, as attested to by the vast literature on the subject (Loughlin & Murray, 2013) and the efforts of many countries to create internationally comparable job quality indices (Dueñas, Iglesias, & Llorente, 2010; Vinopal, 2012). These composite indices ensure a holistic perspective of the concept of job quality.

The importance of job quality lies not only in a socially responsible management but also in the fact that higher quality raises productivity and with it company competitiveness (Royuela & Surinach, 2013). In particular for the tourism and hospitality industry two factors join hands here: the precarious and at least unstable labour market situation and the dependence of tourist company success on employee skills, motivation and satisfaction (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). Job quality impacts service quality and consequently customer satisfaction. Therefore, one of tourist organisations' primary objectives is to attract and retain talent with a view to improving the service rendered (Mulvaney, O'Neill, Cleveland, & Crouter, 2007).

In the tourism domain and especially in hospitality, very little research has been conducted on job quality (Lacher & Oh, 2012), despite its direct impact on service quality, productivity and hence profits. Studies that compare and assess job quality from a gender perspective are therefore needed.

The present paper aims primarily to contribute to meeting a corollary need, namely to define and construct a composite index of job quality (CJQI) able to reflect the current situation of the hospitality industry in a single measure. This measure allows us to detect possible gender differences in job quality in the hospitality industry. In particular, we will focus on an objective perspective of job quality determined by the intrinsic characteristics of each position and its relation to the characteristics of the employee. The use of Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to construct the CIQJ will make possible to measure a concept (job quality) using multiple partial indicators of it, to satisfy issues of content validity and the relevance of the different dimension included.

The study focuses on the Spanish tourist industry and particularly on hospitality for two reasons. Hospitality was chosen because it accounts for the greatest share of the industry product (Talón, González & Segovia, 2012); and with industry commoditisation, human resources now largely determine hotel and travel industry companies' competitive advantages (Pulido, Sáez, & Figueroa, 2011; Talón et al., 2012).

The rest of the paper is organised as follows. The above introduction of the paper is followed by an overview of the labour market and basic working conditions in Spain's hospitality industry, chosen as the object of a case study. The third section develops the theoretical framework used in the construction of the composite index for job quality, including a revision of the literature, stressing the lack of research in this topic in the tourist industry. Besides, in this part of the study, we present our working hypothesis. The next section contains an explanation of the methodology used to select the database and the variables that

build the proposed composite index of job quality. The job quality assessment findings using this index in the industry are then presented. Lastly, the paper discusses the conclusions and major implications for the travel and hospitality industry in connection with job quality.

## 2. Overview of the labour market and working conditions in the Spanish hospitality industry

Tourism, as well as the hospitality industry, makes a substantial contribution to Spanish national employment. According to the Labour Force Survey, in 2012 the tourist industry had a labour force of 248,531,0 people (0.9% less than in 2011), accounting for 10.8% of the economy's total and 17% of the service sector's labour force. According to those figures, 11.8% of the total persons employed in Spain and 15.7% of the 13 million employed in the service sector worked in the tourist industry. With a total of 315,558 employees (12.3% less than in the preceding year), the hospitality industry studied here, accounts for 15% of the total employment in the tourist industry. Forty-four percent of its employees are male and 56% female. While the total number of men was down by 7.5% on 2011, the number of women declined by 15.6%. In other words, the industry is slightly feminised and the crisis has affected women more deeply than men.

As the statistics discussed below show, hospitality industry jobs are characterised by a very high rate of temporality and employment gender differences, two important variables when analysing job quality.

An assessment by type of **employment contract** shows that the vast majority (93%) of hospitality industry workers are wage-earners. Of these, 67.5% of employees (199 301) have permanent contracts, a figure very close to the 67.8% for the tourist industry as a whole, but lower than the service sector (77.3%) and the nationwide total (76.4%). Furthermore, while more women were employed in this industry, just 59% of the total female workers had permanent contracts, compared to 67% of the men. The inference is that men had greater job security than women.

Another parameter of concern is the duration of the **work week**. In 2012, 86% of the 294 880 wage-earners employed by the hospitality industry worked full time, more than the 74.2% recorded for the tourist industry and the 81.3% for the service sector, and similar to the nationwide figure (84.4%). In 2012, 93% of the male wage-earners employed in the hospitality industry worked full time, compared to 80% of the women. The complementary figures are even more eloquent: 20% of the women compared to 7% of the men worked part time.

Briefly, the hospitality industry is taking a growing share of national employment, while women seem to have the worst working conditions with more unemployment, poorer employment contracts and a larger proportion of part-time work.

## 3. Theoretical framework: job quality and discrimination on the grounds of gender

### 3.1. Job quality definition

Over the past two decades the factors affecting job quality have been the object of growing attention in both public policy and in academic studies (Brown, Charlwood, & Spencer, 2012; Burchell, Sehnbruch, Piasna, & Agloni, 2014; Eurofound, 2012).

According to Burchell et al. (2014), the origin of this important area of research can be traced back to the notion labelled "quality of working life", introduced in the nineteen sixties and seventies as a parameter for assessing workers' satisfaction with their jobs. The criticism levelled against this subjective approach led to the

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