



The Reality and Challenges of Gender Issues in the Tourism Industry

Imanuella R. Andilolo^{1*}, Ikma Citra Ranteallo², Harmi Widiana³

¹ Department of Management, University of Mataram, Mataram, Indonesia.

² Department of Sociology, Udayana University, Denpasar, Indonesia.

³ Department of Management, University of Mataram, Mataram, Indonesia.

Article Info

Received: July 25, 2025

Revised: August 30, 2025

Accepted: September 19, 2025

Published: September 30, 2025

Corresponding Author:

Imanuella R. Andilolo

irandilolo@gmail.com

DOI: [10.29303/alexandria.v6i2.1270](https://doi.org/10.29303/alexandria.v6i2.1270)

© 2025 The Authors. This open access article is distributed under a (CC-BY License)



Abstract: Tourism industry is still marred with “glass ceiling” phenomenon even though women contribute a significant portion of the overall industry. Women remain underrepresented in top culinary roles and continue to encounter challenges including wage inequality, restricted career advancement, workplace harassment, and deeply rooted patriarchal practices within the professional kitchen. Historically a woman’s place was considered to be in the kitchen. The feminist movement in 1970s opened up opportunities for women to join the work force. However, after decades, women still have difficulty entering the professional kitchen where men continue to dominate. This paper conducts an empirical research on the gender of Head Chefs or Executive Chefs of several five and four-star hotels in Lombok, Indonesia, and discusses challenges on gender issues within the professional kitchen. This paper examines the managerial and social barriers based on gender bias/inequality in professional kitchens; it looks at how female chefs socially manoeuvre within the kitchen culture; and attempts to compile solutions.

Keywords: Chef, Gender Issues, Glass Ceiling, Professional Kitchen.

Introduction

Historically a woman’s place was considered to be in the kitchen. In some cultures, in fact only women are allowed in the kitchen. For example, in Uganda, men and boys aged 12 and above are not allowed to sit in the kitchen (Countries and Their Cultures, n.d.). To date there has been significant improvement in women being emancipated from their kitchen duty. The feminist movement of the 1970s helped to inspire a generation of women to pursue professional aspiration outside the household despite societal believe at the time that a woman’s place was in the kitchen (Smith, 2009).

Times are changing. Males are entering and preparing food in the domestic kitchen as well. This new setting creates a change in gender relation and to certain extent put notable influence on masculinities on men who have significant cooking responsibilities in their homes (Szabo, 2013). Studies also show that men may compensate for their involvement in the traditionally

feminine domestic kitchen by doing “masculine” things in the kitchen such as swearing (Deutsch, 2005) thereby distancing it from “feminine” cooking, i.e. mundane care work done for loved ones (Szabo, 2014).

“If you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen”; is a saying that best describe a professional kitchen. This saying was corroborated by a Michelin-starred chef Tom Kerridge that said to be in a professional kitchen one must have testosterone that contribute to the dynamic of getting things done, the ability to dig deep and be put under pressure; which is why there is a lack of female chefs in the culinary industry according to Warhurst (2014). “As is visible within the culinary world, even when a traditionally understood “women’s activity” is professionalized, it is difficult for women to reach top positions that their male colleagues tend to hold more often” (Roscoe, 2012).

Deborah Harris, the author of *Taking The Heat*, in Garsd (2015) says, male chefs made a big deal about “differentiating between the cultural, high-status, intellectual cooking of men, and the low-status, every

How to Cite:

Andilolo, I. R., Ranteallo, I. C., & Widiana, H. (2025). The Reality and Challenges of Gender Issues in the Tourism Industry. *ALEXANDRIA (Journal of Economics, Business, & Entrepreneurship)*, 6(2), 346–350. <https://doi.org/10.29303/alexandria.v6i2.1270>

day work of women." This seemingly strong need for a clear distinction between how men and women cook is indicative of gender bias in the professional kitchen. Again, this only serves as a reminder of an old adage: "Women cook with the heart, men cook with the head – because women have hearts and men have brains". This is a stereotype that in most industries would not be tolerated anymore, however it is still very pronounced in the culinary industry.

Invisible barriers to access high status positions in management are known as glass ceiling. This terminology was first coined by Hymowitz and Schellhardt in a Wall Street Journal report in 1986 and has been use extensively for research on gender inequality in the corporate world (Lockwood, 2004). There is however, very limited research exploring glass ceiling in the culinary industry. This is by no means an indication that a glass ceiling is not present in the culinary industry. This paper examines the issues on managerial and social barriers based on gender bias/inequality in professional kitchens; it also looks at how female chefs socially manoeuvre within the kitchen culture; and attempts to compile solutions.

Method

Lombok is one of the famous tourist destination in Indonesia, well known for its natural landscape, unique cultural experiences, and tranquil holiday getaway compare to its neighbour, Bali. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics of West Nusa Tenggara Province (BPS, 2025), there is an increase of almost 12 percent of international tourists from June 2024 to June

2025. Furthermore, with the establishment of Mandalika Circuit and MotoGP event every year, increase of tourists both domestic and international are expected to rise.

An empirical research was conducted in Lombok on the gender of Head Chefs or Executive Chefs of four to five star hotels. It aims to see how many of Head Chefs or Executive Chefs that run hotel restaurants are male or female. The hotels selected were hotels with high star ratings because there are more than one restaurants or restaurant services conducted in the hotel simultaneously and it is expected to provide fine dining experience or high quality service. Furthermore, most upscale restaurants are located in these hotels. There are 11 five-star hotels and nine four-star hotels throughout Lombok Island that are investigated. Majority of the five-star hotels are located along the coastal area, and only four-star hotels are available in the City of Mataram. The data are collected from hotel websites, news articles, online sources, and direct phone call to the hotel management.

Result and Discussion

A. Gender of Head Chefs

As can be seen in Table I below, the Head Chefs or Executive Chefs of the 20 hotels in Lombok are all male. Three Head Chefs are foreigners (one from Italy, and two from India), and 17 are Indonesians. While conducting data collection for this research, the Author observed that previous Head Chefs were also male.

Table 1. Gender of Head Chefs in four to five star hotels in Lombok, Indonesia

	Location: Senggigi	Hotel Description	Stars	Gender	Origin
1	Qunci Villas Resort	A luxury resort with lush grounds, beautiful ocean views, and excellent spa treatments.	5	Male	Italy
2	Royal Avila Boutique Resort	Perched on a cliff with panoramic ocean views, this hotel offers serenity and a fine-dining experience.	5	Male	Indonesia
3	Katamaran Hotel & Resort Lombok	Features large outdoor pools, a private beach, and stunning sunset views over the ocean.	5	Male	Indonesia
4	Sudamala Resort	Praised for its excellent service and beautiful premises, with unbeatable sunset views from the restaurant.	5	Male	Indonesia
5	Merumatta Senggigi	The property offers spa facilities and outdoor activities such as cycling and snorkeling, duplex Villas with relaxing and spacious Suites on the beachfront.	5	Male	Indonesia
6	Sheraton Senggigi Beach Resort	This beachfront resort offers old-school luxury, a kids' club, a large pool, and beautifully maintained grounds.	4	Male	Indonesia
7	Jeeva Klui Resort	A boutique hotel with traditional Sasak design, a beachfront infinity pool, and a spa.	4	Male	Indonesia
8	Holiday Resort Lombok	A popular hotel in Senggigi offering excellent value and located on the beach.	4	Male	Indonesia

Location: Kuta

1	Pullman Lombok Merujani Mandalika Beach Resort	A large resort near Mandalika Beach with spacious rooms and villas.	5	Male	Indonesia
2	Innit Lombok	A beachfront hotel in Ekas that offers an exclusive and serene feel, making it an excellent choice for a secluded getaway.	5	Male	Indonesia
3	Novotel Lombok Resort and Villas	A family-friendly, 4-star beachfront property in the tranquil Kuta area of southern Lombok.	4	Male	Indonesia

Location: Gili Islands and Medana

1	The Oberoi Beach Resort	A posh resort situated on Medana Beach, offering traditional-style villas with an infinity pool and a private beach.	5	Male	India
2	The Sira	This hotel is located on Sire Beach near the Gili Islands and features modern and luxurious rooms.	5	Male	India
3	The Lombok Lodge	A boutique hotel in Tanjung known for its high level of service and elegant design.	5	Male	Indonesia
4	Cocana Resort	A beautiful resort with a private beach and pool on Gili Trawangan, noted for its peaceful environment.	5	Male	Indonesia
5	Hotel Vila Ombak	Situated on Gili Trawangan, this hotel offers panoramic views of the Lombok highlands and features a beachfront restaurant and two outdoor pools.	4	Male	Indonesia

Location: City of Mataram

1	Lombok Astoria Hotel	Located in central Mataram, this hotel features an outdoor pool, a spa, and a rooftop garden.	4	Male	Indonesia
2	Golden Palace Hotel Lombok	This hotel is in the city's business, shopping, and entertainment areas and offers a rooftop swimming pool with city and sunset views.	4	Male	Indonesia
3	Prime Park Hotel & Convention Lombok	Situated in the heart of Mataram, near the Islamic Center and Epicentrum Mall, this hotel is a modern option for both business and leisure.	4	Male	Indonesia
4	Aston Inn Mataram	A clean and centrally located hotel featuring a rooftop terrace, an outdoor pool, and a well-equipped fitness center.	4	Male	Indonesia

Source: Primary Data Collection; October 2025

B. Gender Issues and Management Implication

Who is cooking? A research experiment was conducted in New York to ask the question: *Do women working in restaurant kitchens have discernibly different cooking styles than their male counterparts?* (Levine, 2009). A panel of judges were to distinguish meals prepared by a female chef and which by a male chef solely based on how they looked and tasted. The experiment proved that it was impossible to tell based on how the meal was presented. No surprise. What was more interesting, however, was why did the panellists assume that certain flourishes or flavours were feminine? The main conclusion derived from this research experiment was men and women don't cook differently, but people judge their food differently. When the gender of the chef is known, the adjectives used in expressing the same dish prepared by a male and a female chef are

clearly different. A male chef's dish would be described as "in-your-face, rich, intense, bold flavours – a declaration of ego"; while a woman's dish would be identified as "homey, comforting fare, prepared with love – a testament to home cooking" (Druckman, 2010).

Druckman points out that we indeed have come a long way from the notion that a woman's place is in the domestic kitchen, and that the only kitchen appropriate for a man is the professional one. But in practice, things can be pared down to the following equation: *woman: man as cook: chef* (Druckman, 2010). Druckman asks whether we have contributed in perpetuating this semantic nuance. Editors in-chief of *Food and Wine* and *Gourmet* magazines, both females, shared the opinion that to give women special attention is to corroborate that an actual difference exists between a man and a woman [in the professional kitchen]. This

notion confirmed a collective sentiment from seven female head chefs of New York City. For these chefs, acknowledging the existence of sexism would in part portray them as victims or be labelled whiny. Even worst, believing that sexism exists might just stop them in their tracks (New York Magazine, 2007). The question remains: Is denying the elephant in the room the best policy? More importantly, what are the implications for management of the professional kitchen?

Abuse, bullying, harassment, aggression, violence are words used by an anonymous chef to describe his experience in a professional kitchen. The article by Burrow et al., (2015) gives a portrait into what goes on in most professional kitchen. The abusive language lashed out by Gordon Ramsay in his US television series *Hell's Kitchen* is bad enough for most, but the anonymous chef's recount in "Yes Chef": Life at the vanguard of culinary excellence", is a must read and mind blowing article. Management of a professional kitchen should and must implement a code of behaviour in the work place. This set of code of behaviour must create a safe and effective work environment for both men and women.

The glass ceiling terminology may now seem out of place when talking about the culinary industry. It seems out of place for reasons that glass ceiling refers to barriers that are invisible or unseen, however, emotional and physical abuse are very clearly present. "In-your-face" in fact. A young girl just starting her career in a professional kitchen recounts her first day when the chef took her into the kitchen and another young cook, male, said to the chef: "Chef, you know it's my birthday and you brought me a present". A former Pastry Chef, Kate Burnham, filed a human rights complaint against three senior chefs where she previously worked in Toronto, Canada, citing that she was verbally harassed and routinely had her breasts and crotch touched at work, among other indignities (Bielski, 2015). An account by a female chef, O'Leary, that "the macho rock star chef serving a steaming heap of bravado seems to be finally becoming a relic of the past: It just doesn't make for good cooking. It's so outdated, it literally doesn't work. We've learnt you simply can't keep cooks that way" (Garsd, 2015). Management must take heed of what goes on in the kitchen as any court case will tarnish the image of the whole restaurant or establishment.

Working for very long hours 16-20 hours a day is difficult enough for both men and women. Add the cherry on the top, working long hours in a degrading and dehumanising environment with a low pay. This is clearly not to most people's taste and preference. Long working hours that are expected from working in a professional kitchen create conflict between work and

family responsibilities and women are more affected than men. This is the caused for many females to leave the professional kitchen. Female chefs or females that have worked as a chef were respondents in a study conducted by Harris (2010) on how they negotiate work-family conflict. There were three strategies in-play: (1) delaying/forgoing childbearing to succeed as a chef; (2) leaving kitchen work for another job in the culinary field; and (3) adapting either work or family to make the two roles more compatible. Managing work-family responsibilities must be taken into consideration in working out the appropriate working hours. O'Leary in Garsd (2015) claims that "cheffing is hard physical work, and many women move into managerial roles. We women excel at organising kitchens, but the only way you can do that is by moving up through the ranks of hard knocks. To be able to keep the whole brigade under you together, you have to have done it all. That's the only way to earn the respect of the guys."

Chef as an occupation is very fitting to the study of gender and work as it highlights the problem of gender inequality in the workplace while simultaneously breaking down the argument that somehow "women's work" is natural to a female. "The question of what prevents or blockades women from entering and maintaining positions as chefs remains at the structural, organizational, and cultural levels" (Roscoe, 2012). A management system with gender perspective should be implemented to change the current structural and organizational that prevents women to advance in a professional kitchen. At a cultural level in Mexico there is a clear boundary that men, even male chefs, do not make tortillas as they claim "...that's a woman's labour" (Christie, 2008). And as what Chef Iliana De La Vega's mother's commented on her daughter's decision to become a chef: "No, we always [cook] anyways. So why don't you go and do something else?".

Conclusion

Women had been goddesses of the kitchen, who manage all foods to eat. However, the professional kitchen culture has adapted a patriarchal system, where men became new gods within the kitchen and hardly the place for women. Furthermore, television cooking shows have reinvented female and male chefs to become the new idols and celebrity figures: good looking; got more reviews, good rating, and followers by social media users; and promoted and endorsed more hotels or restaurants. These challenges need more attentions by cooking schools to create healthier and safer culture in the professional kitchen that advances both men and women. Management of professional kitchens must also

acknowledge and strive to create a better working environment for women, such as better working hours; maternity leave; standard of behaviour or code of conduct in the work environment.

References

- Bielski, Z. 2015, "Female chefs take a stand against sexist kitchen culture", *The Globe and Mail* 1 September. Available from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com>. [1 October 2015].
- Burrow, R., Smith, J., & Yakinthou, C. (2015). 'Yes Chef': life at the vanguard of culinary excellence. *Work, employment and society*, 29(4), 673-681.
- Christie, M. E. 2008, "Kitchenspace: Women, Fiestas, and Everyday Life in Central Mexico". Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Countries and Their Culture, n.d., *Uganda*. Available from: <http://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/Uganda.html>. [2 October 2015].
- Deutsch, J. 2005, "Please pass the chicken tits: Rethinking men and cooking at an urban firehouse", *Journal of Food and Foodways*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 91-114.
- Druckman, C. 2010, "Why Are There No Great Women Chefs?", *Gastronomica*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 24-31.
- Garsd, J. 2015, *Taking The Heat: Is Foodie Culture Making Room For Female Chefs?*. Available from: <http://www.npr.org/>. [2 October 2015].
- Harris, D. A., Giuffre, P. 2010, "The Price You Pay: How Female Professional Chefs Negotiate Work and Family", *Gender Issues*, vol. 27, pp. 27-52.
- Levine, E. 2009. Available from: <http://www.seriousseats.com/2009/06/do-men-cook-differently-than-women-gender-in-the-kitchen-grant-achatz-dana-cowin.html>. [1 October 2015].
- New York Restaurants 2007, *A Woman's Place?*. Available from: <http://nymag.com/restaurants/features/39595/>. [1 October 2015]
- Roscoe, E. 2012, *Stirring the Pot: Women in a Male Dominated Kitchen*. Available from: <http://mcgillverstehen2012.weebly.com/stirring-the-pot-women-in-a-male-dominated-kitchen.html>. [1 October 2015].
- Smith, C. N. 2009, "Les Dames d'Escoffier International- A History", *Les Dames d'Escoffier International (LDEI)*.
- Szabo, M. K. 2013, "Men Nurturing Through Food: challenging gender dichotomies around domestic cooking", *Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 23, no. 1.
- Szabo, M. K. 2014, "I'm a real catch": The blurring of alternative and hegemonic masculinities in men's talk about home cooking", *Women's Studies International Forum* 44, pp 228 – 235.
- Warhurst, M. 2014, "Women Chefs Can Handle the Heat in the Kitchen But Have No Appetite for Sexism", *The Guardian* 15 October. Available from: <http://www.theguardian.com>. [29 September 2015].