

Women in tourism: experiences and challenges faced by owners of small accommodation establishments

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Abstract

African women, including those in the global context, have increasingly become engaged in the business of tourism. Such women have become important actors in the tourism entrepreneurial arena, despite facing inequality in a perceived male-dominated environment. Although making significant contributions to the growth of any given economy through their business initiatives, women still face a number of challenges that limit their effectiveness in the small business context. This study analyses the role that is played by women in the tourism business sector. Specifically, it focuses on the experiences and challenges of women who operate accommodation-related businesses. Using a qualitative research approach, interviews were conducted with guesthouse and bed and breakfast owners in the Johannesburg region. The key findings reveal that women face various challenges, mainly in terms of a lack of appropriate training and education within the tourism industry pertaining to the accommodation sector that might adequately support their business ventures, as well as in relation to lacking sufficient access to finance for their business(es). Furthermore, women tend to enter into business ventures for diverse and varying reasons such as the need for growth and better quality of life, rather than simply to make a profit. Additionally, their experiences vary, with the most prominent experience being found to be meeting and interacting with people.

Key words: women, guesthouses, expectations, experiences, challenges, recommendations

Introduction

Women are, by default, at a disadvantage when accepting the risk of entrepreneurship, simply because they might lack the necessary resources in terms of financial resources, networks and the management expertise to start up their own business (Chinomona and Maziriri, 2015). Beyond this, in a developing country context, women tend to encounter challenges relating to employment, including pressures in the workplace, struggles to balance all the aspects of the life of a homemaker who works, and in relation to the general status of unemployment as experienced in the country in which they reside (Nxopo and Iwu, 2015). To combat such challenges, women may resort to owning their own business, despite the lack of effort that is exerted, by the broader society, to facilitate women-run ventures and to promote women entrepreneurship. According to Nxopo and Iwu (2015), African women are hugely affected by unemployment, having often to be extremely self-motivated to find ways of improving their opportunities of self-employment, which are imperative in the South African context. The 2007 South African Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) indicates that women, despite the aforementioned setbacks, have come to play an important role in stimulating economic growth in South Africa (Maas and Herrington, 2007).

While several studies have been conducted in relation to the above-mentioned area of entrepreneurship (Chinomona and Maziriri, 2015; Koutsou, Notta, Samathrakakis, and

Partalidou, 2009; Nxopo and Iwu; 2015) they have mainly focused on the challenges that women face when they are small business owners, which, in its own right, is important. This paper aims to identify the associated challenges and to explore the experiences of women who own small businesses within the accommodation sector. Through such identification, valuable insight should be gained into the perspective of guesthouse owners who are located both in the urban and the township areas of the Johannesburg region.

The objective of the current study is to deepen the understanding of the perspectives of women entrepreneurs who own guesthouses in their respective areas in the Johannesburg region. The paper is also aimed at furthering insight into the reasons for the aforementioned women having become entrepreneurs within the tourism sector. The study therefore involves a discussion of the literature that explores the role played by women in tourism entrepreneurship, followed by a consideration of the general challenges that women entrepreneurs tend to face, as explored in the existing research, as well as of the benefits of women entrepreneurship. The methodology employed in the current research and a detailed analysis of the empirical work pertaining to the objective of the study will be presented thematically.

Women in tourism entrepreneurship

Tourism is recognised as being the fastest growing industry in the world, with it, in South Africa in particular, being noted to generate approximately 11% of the gross domestic product (GDP) (Nieman, Visser & van Wyk, 2008). The South African government has recognised tourism as being a key driver of economic development and job creation. Rogerson (2001) establishes that within a developing country context “the activities of small, medium and micro-enterprise (SMME) are crucial for promoting economic growth and alleviating poverty”. According to the National Department of Tourism (South Africa. NDT, 2016), within the tourism industry, women make up nearly 70% of the workforce. However, there is a marked underrepresentation of women in senior positions, with women holding less than 40% of all managerial positions, as well as under 20% of general management roles, and between 5 and 8% of board positions. In addition, Gretzel and Bowser (2013) attribute the importance of the tourism industry to it providing a wide range of income-generating opportunities for women. Despite the challenging nature of the hospitality and tourism industry, the public relations and communication manager at the Johannesburg Tourism Company has indicated (Advertorial, 2014) that tourism is seeing an increasing number of women entrepreneurs entering the field due to its lucrativeness. Internationally, although self-employment in the rural areas can be seen as being disadvantageous, some women find such employ to be liberating (Koutsou *et al.* 2009). Furthermore, Arzjani and Rahiminezhad (2011) assert that the advancement of women, and the achievement of equality between women and men, is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice.

Elijah-Mensah (2009) justifies that, from a South African perspective, the motivation for entrepreneurial behaviour includes material motives, as well as the need for independence, to contribute to family security and to make a difference in terms of business and achievement. Tourism is seen as a sector that offers relatively bright prospects for women in particular, as reflected in 2007's World Tourism Day (Elijah-Mensah, 2009). In contrast, Nemasetoni and Rogerson (2005) explain that, despite the fact that tourism has been identified by South Africa's Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) as being one of the strategic priority sectors for promotion, little attention has so far been devoted to issues surrounding the development of tourism SMMEs. Unlike Ghanaian women, who are known to contribute 56% of their national GDP, South African women in general contribute only approximately 30% of the latter country's GDP (South Africa. National Department of Tourism, 2016). Clearly, little attention

has, so far, been paid to the issue of female small business ownership, or the promotion thereof.

Challenges facing women entrepreneurs

Chinomona and Maziriri (2015) point out that, although women entrepreneurs make a significant contribution to the success of national economies throughout the world, various challenges hinder their entrepreneurial progress. Mooney (2014) highlights the fact that women are often good at explaining their reasons for not trying something, in terms of the 'imposter syndrome'. The challenges that women entrepreneurs have to face while either deciding to enter, or owning, a small business have been subject to some scrutiny in the past, especially within an environmental context (Naser, Mohammed and Nuseibeh, 2009; Nieman, Visser & van Wyk, 2008; Nxopo and Iwu, 2015). Gretzel and Bowser (2013) stipulate that, although certain programmes, including ones in tourism, have clearly served to attract female students, often such students have lacked role models in leadership positions in the industry, academia or their communities. As a result, women might, from the outset, lack the appropriate mindset and guidance to venture into the small business arena. Brynin and Schupp (2000) assert that the presence of a powerful role model can influence women positively in terms of the decisions that they make and the careers that they choose.

McElwee and Al-Riyami (2003), in an international study, came to specify the primary role of an Islamic woman as being that of a wife and mother. However, such role assignment can, at least to a certain extent, be generalised in terms of nearly all cultures worldwide. Roomi and Parrott (2008) acknowledge that a woman's situation, in comparison to that of a man, is one of systemic subordination that is largely determined by patriarchal forces. In addition, Roomi and Parrott (2008) further found, in their Pakistan-based study, that the men researched tended to prescribe to sociocultural values that prevented them from readily accepting instructions from a female manager.

Gender inequality was found by Jamali (2009) to contribute to women-owned businesses being smaller and less profitable than were those of the men surveyed. Along with the issue of gender inequality, Chinomona and Maziriri (2015) insist that women's limited access to finance is a major hindrance to them starting their own business. Although the lack of education and training can be problematic across the board for especially those entrepreneurs coming from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds, Phillips, Moos and Niemand (2014) indicate the additional challenges women have to face when operating in a traditionally male-dominated environment. A Canadian study conducted by Lee-Gosselin and Grise (1990) highlights that women entrepreneurs have self-doubts regarding their environment, as opposed to those that they have in considering their own self-image. Such a finding supports the claim made by Gretzel and Bowser (2013) in terms of the lack of role models for purposes of guidance.

The (mis)perception that women are less capable and less interested in running businesses than are men is highlighted by Morris *et al.* (2006). The researchers in question explain that such perceptions are possibly due to women still occupying the majority of support and administration positions, including those of secretaries, nurses, and domestic service and clerical service suppliers.

The above issues represent a concern for women who wish to own their small business and for those who currently own a small business, particularly in the context of South Africa's failing economy. Chinomona and Maziriri (2015) reason that the country's predominant constraints

to economic growth are poverty, inequality and unemployment. Therefore, it is important to note that Halkias, Nwajiuba, Harkiolkis and Caracatsanis (2011) advise that gender-related barriers seriously impede the economic potential of the nation as a whole. Further, they stipulate that the participation of both sexes in an economy provides opportunities for the growth of a country's productive potential, and that South Africa's development in this regard should serve to strengthen Africa's economic growth as a continent. In this regard, Chinomona and Maziriri (2015) stress that it is important to understand the constraints facing female entrepreneurs in developing countries, and in developing regions, such as Gauteng, in particular.

Benefits associated with women owning small business accommodation establishments

Vera and Dean (2005) point out that women are starting successful businesses and that daughters are increasingly becoming regarded as possible successors in family firms. Basargekar (2007) confirms that entrepreneurship is a driving force for economic development in any country, thus making women entrepreneurship and their overall participation vital to the development of the nation as a whole. Furthermore, Nxopo (2014) stresses that the existence of women entrepreneurs can assist in eradicating poverty and unemployment in South Africa. Poverty alleviation and unemployment are crucial factors that the South African government contends with to date, hence within this context it is important to promote women engaging in entrepreneurial activities to assist in the creation of employment.

In an international study conducted by McElwee and Al-Riyami (2003) the majority of women found to own businesses were concentrated within the service industry. Clearly, women prefer this particular field, which renders them capable of providing a sound basis within the context of the tourism and accommodation sector, leading to the need to support women who wish to become, or who already are, business owners. However, Morris *et al.* (2006) indicate that previous studies have attempted to ascertain how men and women conform to male institutional standards, while failing to investigate the situation from a uniquely female perspective and within female-dominated contexts. This gap in the existing literature validates the objective of the current study, which aims to reveal the perspectives of women who, at present, are entrepreneurs in the tourism field.

Methodology

In the current study, qualitative research methods were employed to gain an understanding of the rationale behind behaviour and attitudes, through the use of theory (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, semi-structured telephonic and face-to-face interviews, consisting of a set of open-ended questions, were used in the present cross-sectional study, so as to gather information regarding the demographic profile of respondents, as well as so as to be able to conduct a descriptive study of women entrepreneurs in the tourism and hospitality industry, focusing on their experiences and challenges as female owners of a guesthouse. Non-probability sampling techniques were employed in the selection of the sample for the current study. Desktop research was conducted to create a database of 25 guesthouses and bed and breakfasts. From this database convenience sampling was employed in the selection of the respondents who participated in the study. Although the full database was targeted to participate in this study, only 10 valid responses were collected at the end of the data collection period. Reasons for this included respondents were too busy or declined to participate, or the guesthouses were not female owned, or were not contactable. Therefore, the sample was selected on the basis of purposive (female owners), convenience (those willing to participate). The case study approach adopted, entailed selecting guesthouses and bed and breakfasts that were owned

by women, motivated by the assertion that the majority of female-owned businesses are concentrated within the service industry (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003).

An interview schedule comprising a series of semi-structured, open-ended questions was developed for use in the current study. Questions relating to the demographic profile and expectations of the respondents, as well as to their experiences and challenges were posed to the respondents based on a comprehensive literature search and the objective of the study. A content analysis was conducted on the data collected from the series of interviews undertaken. The analysis entailed using specific themes, with the results obtained being presented in terms of the themes to emerge through the study. By means of analysing the data gleaned from the interviews, answers were obtained to the critical questions asked in the interview. Therefore, the results that are discussed include a summary of the demographic profiles of the female guesthouse owners, as well as various themes identified and discussed in line with the objectives of the study.

Results and discussion

Summary of the demographic profile of the respondents

In terms of the demographic composition of the population surveyed, questions relating to the race and age of the respondents were asked to find out at what stage of the respondents' life they chose to become an entrepreneur. Furthermore, the issue of race is crucial in the context of South Africa, considering that it is a relatively young democratic country. Of the sample that was obtained from both the urban and township areas, only three of the guesthouse owners were white, with the rest being black. The literature suggests that there has been a burgeoning of emerging black-owned enterprises since the end of the apartheid era (Rogerson, 2005), which has been still further encouraged by South Africa's hosting of such mega-events as the Soccer World Cup in 2010 (Tichaawa and Mhlanga, 2015). The ages of the guesthouse owners was diverse, with the youngest being 25 years old and the oldest being 70 years old. To a large extent, the post-apartheid environment and the 'Mandela boom' served to stimulate a wave of international tourism arrivals (Nemasetoni and Rogerson, 2005), which might have contributed to the respondents making the bold decision to start up a business of their own.

Almost all of the guesthouse and bed and breakfast owners interviewed had limited to no experience in the tourism industry, with none of them possessing either a qualification linked to tourism or a hospitality-related degree. However, the older the guesthouse owner, the more experience they had in either catering or in being self-employed. For example, responses such as the following were received: *"Ever since I was married in 1963, I have been running a catering service"* or *"I was self-employed, owning a restaurant in town."* Such responses suggest that, regardless of qualification or experience, the tourism sector provides opportunities to those who are willing to take a risk in becoming a business owner. The literature explored in the context of this study supported the belief that the tourism industry provides a range of income-generating opportunities for women (Gretzel and Bowser, 2013).

Motives and expectations in relation to owning a guesthouse

In terms of motive and expectations for owning a guesthouse, four major themes emerged from the data (the need to make a profit, the need for growth and a better quality of life, the quest for independence, creating employment and boosting community upliftment).

The need to make a profit

Both international and local studies verify that the majority of women entrepreneurs engage in small business for various reasons, among which are the desire for: self-actualisation; the opportunity to use inborn talent; the chance to achieve independence; and the ability to satisfy economic needs. Furthermore, economic objectives have been reported, in the past, as being the primary motive for women to engage in such ventures (Lee-Gosselin and Grise, 1990; Rogerson, 2005). The following views corroborate the economic objectives found in the literature. For example, one of the respondents spoke excitedly when articulating her motive for starting her business. She quipped:

“I had always had a dream of becoming a guesthouse owner, and we had extra space on the property. A friend of mine suggested the expansion into a guest lodge, as this was a possibility of increasing income.”

Other respondents were rather direct in their response;

“I was looking to make a good profit each month.”

The above-mentioned findings support the fact that, regardless of women often not having the relevant qualifications relating to tourism or hospitality, they still find a means of generating an income within the sector. The two responses clearly indicate the will to generate income, as income generation is an important aspect of the study in relation to the motives of women opening their own business.

The need for growth and a better quality of life

The study revealed a need for growth on the path of the respondents and to improve upon the quality of their life.

For example one respondent stated:

“I wanted to grow as [a] person, to enrich my life. Meeting large amounts of people has a positive effect.”

To further explain this, one respondent revealed:

“I didn’t expect much success at the beginning, but moved towards bigger goals as the guesthouse grew”

The research findings clearly indicate that the guesthouse owners surveyed expected to succeed and to improve their quality of life while providing accommodation. Such growth not only relates to financial gain, but also to personal development. Women are seen as being motivated to start their own businesses, because they need to be independent, as well as to be economically self-sufficient (Nxopo and Iwu, 2015).

The need for women entrepreneurs to make a profit goes deeper than just starting up and maintaining a profitable business, From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that there are many

motivating factors that contribute to the need for a profitable business, such as the need to create a stable lifestyle and the need to create employment (given the low rate of unemployment within the South African context). In support of such a finding, Nxopo and Iwu (2015) state that African women are primarily affected by unemployment, in response to which they are finding ways in which to improve the levels of female self-employment, which is imperative in the South African context. As was previously mentioned, the respondents surveyed represented diverse age groups, therefore representing the various needs and motivations of women entrepreneurs at different stages of life. This therefore, leads to the following themes which emanates from the data (The quest for independence, creating employment and boosting community upliftment).

The quest for independence

The study reveals that women increasingly are taking steps towards gaining independence through their efforts in becoming business owners despite the risk that are associated with being self-employed

This is exemplified by the response:

“So I said to myself: why not do my own thing, and open up a guesthouse combined with a spa?”

Yet another respondent declared:

‘Ag! Let me just open a guesthouse’, and my children encouraged me to do something that would enable me to be independent.”

From a developing country context Jamali (2009) echoes that family supports has a direct impact on the way that women are motivated towards being self-employed and consequently towards women achieving independence in their own right. Furthermore literature outlines that entrepreneurial activities and risk are mutually inclusive and these risks may increase due to societal gender bias (Brindley, 2005). This notion is supported by Jamali (2009) who stipulates “women owned businesses tend to be smaller, slower growing and less profitable than those owned by men”.

Creating employment and boosting community upliftment

The need to create employment emerged as a theme especially within the tourism sector. This is supported by Nieman *et al.* (2008) who cites the South African tourism industry has having ample opportunities as a tourist destination. Guesthouses form an integral aspect in promoting the provision of quality accommodation with reference to a personalised South African experience.

One respondent admitted that *“I really wanted to work for someone in my industry, but my industry did not have much”*. This points to the lack of employment opportunities in South Africa which drives women to create their own (Chinomona and Maziriri, 2015).

Another respondent expresses her concern:

"I like entertaining, and, another thing, I was worried for the children in the community, when they see my car, they always ask for work. It made me want to help the children by giving them something to do."

This finding reveals a deeper desire to not only create jobs but also to contribute to community upliftment by promoting community ethics, ensuring that the youth in the community are involved in positive pursuits. Furthermore as a result of gaining independence through self-employment women are now empowered to express their patriotism through the promotion of South African culture and heritage. One guesthouse owner voices her thoughts:

"We wanted to share our experiences with the guests that visit our tourist destinations by exposing them to our culture and day-to day lives."

This proves that the tourism industry provides jobs to both the highly skilled and for the unskilled, which allows for a substantial injection of income to take place even at community level (Nieman *et al.*, 2008). However, such views are contrary to that of Zapalska and Brozik (2014), who suggest that, although men and women may demonstrate similar entrepreneurial motivation, women are characterised as generally being more motivated by non-economic goals than are men. In addition, women in general have been found to strive to uphold a balance between such economic goals as profit and growth and such non-economic goals as personal fulfilment and independence (Nxopo and Iwu, 2015; Zapalska and Brozik, 2014). Additionally some women entrepreneurs establish a guesthouse as an avenue for the creation of jobs, and to support their community (Lee-Gosselin and Grise, 1990; Morris *et al.*, 2006).

Challenges faced by female guesthouse owners

Numerous themes emerged from the question relating to the challenges of being a female guesthouse owner. The key themes that have emerged concern guest complaints; government and association processes; pricing; the inability to manage overheads; lack of training; human resources; financing; and the female condition. Mwobobia (2012) also found similar challenges faced by small scale women entrepreneurs in Kenya. These sentiments were also echoed in international studies by Zapalska and Brozik (2014).

Pricing and payment for services by guests

A major factor to influence consumer's spending behaviour in relation to a product was the price. The issue of price and payment emerged as a major challenge among the respondents. George (2015) emphasises that many tourism organisations have a range of offerings on offer at various price levels that are designed to meet the needs of diverse target segments that have different levels of spending power available. The challenge in question is either linked to when a guest complains about the prices charged for the accommodation, or when a guest refuses to pay for services.

One respondent indicated that *"one of my challenges are when guests complain about the price."*

Still in line with pricing, another respondent mentioned that one of her challenges was:

“You get a lot of people who will see how hard they can push you in terms of discounts or guests leave the guesthouse without paying.”

This finding implies that guests can be problematic when paying for their accommodation at a guesthouse, which includes them complaining about the rates set per night stay.

Financial constraints

The aforementioned challenges regarding the pricing and payment at guesthouses and bed and breakfasts may be linked to a further challenge that the respondents highlighted with regard to their limited finances, which is linked to the cost of running and operating such an establishment as well the affiliation to relevant associations. The respondents provided the following views that are linked to the cost of belonging to an association:

One respondent indicated that *“it is quite expensive for small guesthouses to join associations.”*

Another respondent exclaimed “

“Oh my god, things are too expensive. The little you get goes for water, rent, utilities, and helpers.”

The above responses acknowledges the benefits that can be gained from belonging to industry associations. However, findings reveal that the requirements and processes involved, and the high costs that are associated with belonging to associations in the industry had been found to be beyond the reach of many of the respondents. Chinomona and Maziriri (2015) discuss that “women suffer from inadequate financial and working capital”.

Another respondent emphasized that:

“Financing is a challenge, especially when it comes to the expansion [-related] needs – wear and tear on the facilities and linen, maintenance of the property, and renovating of facilities.”

Previous studies have shown that women tend to suffer from low credibility when dealing with the various stakeholders, such as suppliers, customers and bankers, who are associated with their firm (Nxopo and Iwu, 2015). The above results may suggest that such challenges are an indicator that women entrepreneurs are somewhat lacking in sound small business management skills. However, guesthouses are classified as one of the fields within the hospitality industry that make up the South African tourism Industry. Therefore, it can be argued that the challenges that are encountered can be generalised in regard to all guesthouse owners, regardless of gender.

In the light of such an approach, the challenges noted by Chinomona and Maziriri (2015) can be seen as stemming from the absence of tangible security and credit from the market. The findings discussed here may also be linked to the challenges emerging from a lack of knowledge in the industry, particularly taking into consideration that none of the respondents had a tourism or hospitality-related qualification.

Lack of education and training

In line with the finding that none of the respondents possessed a professional qualification in the fields of tourism and hospitality, research indicates that starting and running a business is very risky for the entrepreneur. Such risk is even more extreme for women entrepreneurs who not only have to survive in a male-dominated environment, but who also tend to lack education and training in the field, which might pose difficulties for the successful operation of a business in both the formal and the informal sector (Chinomona and Maziriri, 2015). The following are some of the responses received that support the above assertion:

“I do not have much training of in financial issues.”

“It is a major challenge, because I do not know if half the things I am doing is are right.”

The above views clearly indicate that women guesthouse owners in Johannesburg lack appropriate education and training, which poses a problem for women establishing and running guesthouses. The indication is clearly aligned with the views of Chinomona and Maziriri (2015) that many women entrepreneurs, especially in Gauteng, lack a proper education and training. Other challenges encountered by the respondents included human resource issues pertaining to “getting the right employees”, with “the right skills”, who were “willing to work”.

Further challenges that were highlighted by the respondents included having to deal with seasonality, marketing strategy, and the expansion of client-based, limited infrastructural space, such as parking. Such challenges may be linked to the broad themes that have been identified, namely to ‘the need to make a profit’ and ‘training and education’, as previously discussed. In order to address the issues of the lack of infrastructure available within a business, the latter must be profitable. The profitability of an enterprise has a knock-on effect on expanding its client base, as, without increasing the infrastructure of a business, it is impossible to expand the existing client base. The issue of having to deal with seasonality might be directly linked to the marketing strategy, which requires the possession of specific knowledge. As is discussed further below, many of the respondents in the current study were found to lack a formal education or training related to the tourism and hospitality sector, thereby hindering their ability to deal with such challenges as seasonality and marketing strategies.

Experiences of women guesthouse owners

When the respondents were asked to describe their positive and negative experiences of being a female guesthouse owner, the majority of negative experiences were found to be linked to the challenges encountered, which have already been mentioned above.

The respondents indicated the following experiences as being positively related to them being a guesthouse owner:

- *the meeting of new people;*
- *receiving compliments from guests in terms of the services with which they were provided at the guesthouse;*
- *attaining a star grading from the Gauteng Tourism Grading Council;*

- *the exhibiting of loyalty by their guests; and*
- *the ability to work flexible working hours that enabled them to balance work and family life.*

Some of the positive experiences mentioned by the respondents address the expectations of a guesthouse owner, of which many had apparently been met. However, it was surprising to note that the expectation of income generation did not emerge as a theme in relation to their positive experiences. Such an absence leads one to wonder whether the businesses concerned are profitable enough to last into the sustainable future, as a predominant challenge mentioned entailed the meeting of the demand of operating costs. In the South African context, the majority of entrepreneurship tend to fail within their first few years of existence. Fatoki (2014) concludes that the lack of finances involved might be a direct cause of such business failure.

Recommendations to aspiring female guesthouse owners

The findings of the study have led to three broad of recommendations which include:

- the need for the encouragement of entrepreneurial development among female guesthouse owners;
- the desire for passion and dedication; and
- suitable training and education.

Encouragement of entrepreneurial development among female guesthouse owners

With regard to the thoughts and sentiments expressed by the female guesthouse owners surveyed, with an eye to aiding future women entrepreneurs in the industry, many respondents expressed a desire to encourage women to join and become a part of the industry as an entrepreneur. Some of the responses received in this respect were given as follows:

“As a female, take the challenge: face it head on, and go for it! There are no lions out there.”

“I will always encourage people to run guesthouses.”

The literature recommends that, as entrepreneurship is a driving force for economic development in any country, female entrepreneurship and the overall participation of women in industry are vital for the burgeoning of a nation (Basargekar, 2007).

Passion and dedication

Certain of the respondents urged future women entrepreneurs to acquire particular skills that they needed to develop in order to facilitate their successful management of a guesthouse or bed and breakfast. These skills relate to the ability to interact with their clientele (guest relation skills) as well as to develop a strong sense of the responsibilities towards the business. The following responses that express these concerns were:

“You can let someone else run it, but for you to ensure the quality of the product, you need to be there 100%.”

“The potential owner needs to be people-minded and focused.”

Education and training

The need for an appropriate qualification was also flagged by the respondents as being critical to the success of establishing and maintaining a profitable guesthouse:

“Younger people should go to school first, and then gain experience in our establishments [i.e. engage in work-integrated learning], then they can find their niche [within the industry].”

“Gaining an educational qualification first is very important before starting up a guesthouse.”

Women without a proper education and training in the field of tourism and hospitality are likely to find it challenging to manage a profitable business, as has heretofore been discussed. Therefore, the views of the respondents on the importance of education and training before, or while, running a guesthouse were found to be of paramount importance. Based on the authors' understanding of the case of female guesthouse owners in Johannesburg, lack of education and training in the field can be seen as hindering the effective running of guesthouses in the study area.

Conclusion

A qualitative research design was used in the current study to explore the expectations and experiences of, as well as the challenges faced by, women guesthouse owners in Johannesburg. The research involved also identified the recommendations made by the respondents in regard to future women guesthouse owners, based on the former's own experiences and challenges. The demographic analysis of the women guesthouse owners surveyed indicated a wide age range among the respondents, who were between 25 and 70 years of age. They generally lacked professional education and training within the tourism and hospitality sector. The main reason for the women becoming guesthouse owners was to obtain economic benefits therefrom. Other reasons included job creation, and the need for growth and a better quality of life. The respondents state that the challenges that they faced related to financial constraints such as the high cost of operations and problems associated with the pricing of, and the payment for, services, with the need to secure access to finance being an integral aspect of ensuring that the business was a viable entity. It is, therefore, important to note that the respondents, who were already in business for themselves, recommended that future women guesthouse owners should investigate and identify the available sources of funding to which they might make use in future, and also the organisations that subsidise and aid women entrepreneurs. The government and other funding organisations might need to reconsider different ways of offering assistance and of granting support, in the light of the respondents noting the excessive amount of red tape that was, at the time of the present study, attached to the process of acquiring assistance from them.

Generally, South Africans within the tourism and hospitality landscape are characterised by managers and owners who possess few, if any, qualifications in the industry. The current

researchers found that the respondents identified the lack of an appropriate education and training as a challenge, which is supported, by and large, by both the local and the global literature that is available on women entrepreneurship (Chinomona and Maziriri, 2015; Zapalska and Brozik, 2014). The possession of a relevant qualification (appropriate education and training) is considered as the cornerstone in being able to maintain a successful business. Women entrepreneurs, regardless of their age, should participate in training programmes, it was thought, so as to increase their knowledge of the industry, which would be likely to facilitate their efforts to maintain a profitable business. Many universities and institutions offer short learning programmes that could enable women entrepreneurs to engage in an intensive short-term learning programme. Such training institutions should effectively align their programmes / short courses with the needs of this industry, so as to adequately equip the guesthouse owners with the required skills.

With the negative experiences of the respondents being closely linked to the challenges already highlighted, they indicated that their positive experiences revolved around issues related to personal growth, such as achieving the loyal support of their guests, and obtaining a star grading. Despite the challenges that women entrepreneurs face, they are making meaningful contributions to the communities in which they operate, through the creation of employment, encouragement of community based employment and consequently, community upliftment. If government and other financial institutions could improve their strategies to aid women entrepreneurs, with specific reference to accommodation enterprises, they could make a greater impact in the tourism industry, and the economy as a whole.

Limitations and areas for further research

The sample size of the study was reduced to ten respondents due to the limited timeframe, as well as the unwillingness of women guesthouse owners to participate in this study. Furthermore, the risk of bias is also acknowledged, based on the limited sample size. While the study focusses holistically on the experiences and challenges of female guesthouse and bed and breakfast owners, the study excluded the analysis of profiling the guests which frequent the respective establishments. Therefore, future research should include a deeper analysis which includes guest profiles and occupancy rates of the businesses concerned. Furthermore, the women owners of various other establishments (such as restaurants and spas) that are associated with the tourism and hospitality industry within the Johannesburg region will form part of future research.

Although the objective of this paper is not to gauge or analyse transformation, in terms of race, gender and age, this research may be regarded as preliminary. Future research should explore the intersection of race and class against the backdrop of post-apartheid South Africa, through an analysis of the experiences and challenges of 'black' versus 'white' small business women owners to ascertain the level of transformation implemented within the tourism sector.

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