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Role of Affirmative Action on Career Advancement in 3 - 5 Star Classified Hotel Employees in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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Abstract

One of the 17 goals of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is gender equality and empowerment (affirmative action) of all women and girls, underscoring the importance of women in socioeconomic transformation. As such, affirmative action has gained prominence in hospitality and tourism with aim of promoting sustainable growth. In Kenya, in spite of the existence of the affirmative actions and policy initiatives including the 2/3 gender rule in the constitution, affirmative action initiatives like Women Enterprise Funds, constitutional provisions including targeted recruitment both in public and private sector, gender disparity in career advancement still confront hospitality sector in Kenya. This research examines the impact of affirmative action on career advancement in star-rated hotels with focus to 3-4-5-star hotels in Nairobi City. The study employs a cross-sectional descriptive study design targeting 41 star rated hotels with 6,001 employees. A structured questionnaire and interview guide were used to collect data. 54.79 percent of the employees were not satisfied with level of career advancement in terms of growth, promotion and pay. While only 40.03% established that affirmative action had been properly implemented within their hotel, affirmative action depicted a positive and significant effect on career advancement among employees. The study concluded that affirmative action has been partially implemented in the hotel sector with career advancement of women workers in the sector being relatively low. The study recommends provision of equal training opportunities at all levels in hotels, strengthening of affirmative action policies, monitoring and implementation of the affirmative initiatives within the hotel industry.

Keywords: Affirmative action; career advancement; 3 - 5 star rated hotel employees; Kenya

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Introduction

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims for gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls, encompassing 169 targets for people, planet, and economic prosperity. Affirmative action has gained prominence in the hotel industry that contributes to the socioeconomic growth. Despite the significance of hospitality and tourism to the socioeconomic growth of the society, gender disparities in career advancement within this sector remains a major issue. The United States, is the third leading hospitality industry with the most jobs (Clevenger & Singh, 2013). While women in the United States constitute a significant percentage of the employees in the hotel sector, they face gender disparities in career advancement, with men disproportionately holding managerial and leadership positions, despite the existence of affirmative action policies aimed at promoting diversity (Adeniyi et al., 2024). Studies show that women hold a smaller percentage of senior management and board positions compared to men in the hospitality sector. For example, a study Ozdemir & Harrah (2021) focusing on hospitality found that women constituted only 23% of board positions in the hospitality sector and 22% of executive positions, with only one 3% women holding CEO positions in the US hospitality industry. Corresponding sentiments have been reported in Norway (Dagsland et al., 2015) where hotel industry are significant source of employment. While hotel industry in Norway are source of employment and economy, gender disparities still characterize the sector. This is evident despite the existence of gender quota for boards of directors directing at least 40% to women in all organizations (Furtado et al., 2021). According to Skalpe (2017), while Norway has been regarded as a leader in gender equality, gender disparities and problems in career advancement persist within the Norwegian hotel industry, including gender pay inequality and underrepresentation of women in senior management and leadership positions. Among the Arab and Islamic countries, women representation in the hotel industry like other economic sectors remains very low. As noted by Baum (2013), women representation in the hotel sector in Saudi Arabia is 1.5%, Egypt (2.4%), Iraq (2.6%), Iran (8.1%), UAE (11.9%) and Turkey (14.8%). This is similar to sentiment by Al-Ismail et al. (2019) who pointed out that men dominate workforce in the hotel, where women employees for example in Saudi Arabia being 22.3% and moderately 40.9% in United Arab Emirates. In Iran, Carrasco-Santos et al. (2024) establishes that gender stereotypes and theocratic structures highly characterize the hotel sector.

In India, despite the existence of affirmative actions and policy initiatives, most hotels are not yet implementing proactive policies to promote more women's representation or empowerment especially in the senior leadership positions (Gupta, 2015). A report by Stipes (2021), established that 80% of management positions in the hotel sector are held by men workers and are more likely to be promoted by 30% compared to 8% chances for women in India. More worrying is that men dominate the hotel senior leadership positions exacerbating career progression and representation inequality between men and women employees in the hotel industry. Regionally in Africa, while women are significant in the hotel industry they hold lower positions. For instance, Mhlongo (2018) established that while affirmative action aims to tackle gender disparities and promote career advancement, challenges remain in achieving true gender equality, particularly in senior leadership positions and pay. For instance, women have historically and continuously lagged behind men in remuneration (Campos-Soria et al., 2009;

Sinden, 2017), and have been acutely underrepresented in senior executive posts (Mooney, 2018). In Tanzania's hotel industry, whereas women are prevalent in lower-level positions, they face significant challenges in career advancement and often encounter gender-based discrimination, leading to a "glass ceiling" effect (United Nations, 2023). This trend is supported by Fischer (2013) who established a huge pay inequality in Tanzania with women paid significantly less than men for a similar work, further exacerbating the issue. In Kenya the Ministry of State Planning, Development, and Vision 2030, as cited by Kyule (2013) reports that revenue generation has continuously grown in the hospitality industry to become a major player contributing to the country's economy and significantly contributing to employment, supporting over 1.5 million jobs, about 8.5% of total employment (Ondieki & Kung'u, 2015). Despite the significance of hotel industry to the economy and employment, gender disparities exist. This is despite the existence of the affirmative actions and policy initiatives in Kenya including the 2/3 gender rule in the constitution, affirmative action funds like Women Enterprise Funds, constitutional provisions including targeted recruitment both in public and private sector, gender disparity and career advancement changes still confront hotel industry in Kenya. Whereas women make a significant chunk of the Kenyan hospitality workforce, they face challenges in career advancement, including unequal gender pay disparities, limited access to training, and workplace discrimination, despite holding a majority of entry-level positions (Koome et al., 2015; Maringa et al., 2022). In Kenya's hotel industry, significant gender disparities exist in employment and representation, with men dominating management positions and women often concentrated in lower-paid roles. According to Koome et al. (2015), 64% percent of the workforce in the hotel industry are men while 36% are female, though the trend has been changing with growing number of women working in the sector. KIPPRA (2024) report that indicated that more men compared to women constitute majority of workforce in the hotel industry aside from being paid 32% less than male counterparts.

Hotels in Kenya are classified and graded by the Tourism Regulatory Authority (TRA) based on factors like size, services, facilities, and target market, using a star rating system (1 to 5 stars) (Tourism Regulatory Authority, 2014). According to section 7(a) of the Tourism Act and the Tourism Regulatory Authority, Regulations, 2014, the Authority is mandated to categorise and rate all hotels and hospitality related enterprises. 3-Star provides a comfortable and convenient stay with a wider range of amenities while 4-Star offers a higher level of comfort, luxury, and amenities, with more personalized services. 5-Star on the other hand are luxury hotels that provide the highest level of comfort, elegance, and personalized hotel services (Tourism Authority, 2014). Based on this, there is practical and theoretical urgency to address the research gap on gender disparities, affirmative actions, and career advancement in the hospitality industry. This study investigated the effect of affirmative action on career advancement of employees in 3-, 4- and 5-star hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The study tested the following hypothesis:

> *H_{o1}: Affirmative action has no significant influence on career advancement among employees in three- to five-star hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya.*

Literature review

This research was based on Bandura's 'Self-efficacy theory. Bandura postulated that an individual's self-efficacy (which is their perceived competence in accomplishing a task) and outcome expectancy are the determinants of behavior (Bandura et al., 1999). Contextualizing it to career progression, a person's self-efficacy towards achieving the highest cadre in their career, and the associated benefits of that position determine whether they will pursue that course of action. It challenges one to explore careers and focus on achieving the best in their roles. The theory is important as it views career development holistically (Super, 2020). However, the theory has been criticized for assuming long-term career stability which may not be practical. The theory, however, was applicable in understanding affirmative action and career development. The emergence of affirmative action occurred during Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s that emerged because of systematic discrimination of ethnic minorities, as well as women in accessing educational and employment opportunities in US (Del Pilar, 2023). Affirmative action are the proactive measures to ensure equality to groups of people who were previously marginalized or discriminated against on unfair basis like gender, race, disability, religion or sexual orientation (Mujtaba, 2023). Affirmative action policies endeavor towards increasing the numbers of employees, students, or representatives from disadvantaged groups in areas that they are underrepresented (Nzavi et al., 2018). By so doing, these institutional policies reduce the unfair treatment. Proponents of affirmative action argue that this initiative is required to address the challenges faced by women and minority groups in seeking opportunities. They also argue that affirmative action help pool and diversify talents in organizations. If affirmative action policies fail, society may experience a resurgence of discrimination and inequality, while the economy could face challenges like reduced diversity and innovation stemming from underrepresentation in key sectors. However, critics argue that affirmative action exacerbates discriminations where women are preferred against men who could be more qualified, thus perpetuating unfairness and even inefficiency (Holzer & Neumark, 2008). Effective affirmative action policies have the potential to attenuate the gender disparities highlighted in the preceding sections. For instance, affirmative action programs US enhanced the employment of minority groups even after the firms were no longer federal contractors (Kurtulus, 2015). However, it is not evident whether the desirable effects of affirmative initiatives extend beyond the entry-point and influence career progression and whether awareness and application of affirmative action play center role. Kurtulus (2015) reported enhancement of the population of minority employees but did not show an association between affirmative action programs and women's career advancement. Perhaps the only effect could be that by increasing the recruitment of women affirmative action programs help "release unrealized female talent" (Mooney, 2018).

In Kenya, the history of affirmative action is synonymous with the fight towards gender balance. The affirmative action, particularly the "two-thirds gender requirement of the Constitution," aims to address historical gender imbalances in leadership and public bodies, ensuring no more than two-thirds of job selections are of the same gender, as outlined in Articles 27(8) and 81(b) of the Kenyan Constitution (Kaimenyi et al., 2013). The push for formal policies against gender discrimination began in 1997 when Hon. Phoebe Asiyo proposed a motion to enhance female participation in leadership in the parliament and local governments but failed to garner support (Kaimenyi et al., 2013). The same motion was again unsuccessfully presented in parliament, however, the second attempt sensitized policymakers on the issue of gender balance as it was a reference point in 2010 Constitution's provisions on equal employment. While affirmative action in Kenya has made notable progress in areas such as increasing political representation for women and marginalized groups, bridging employment gap between men and women, notable challenges persist, including underrepresentation of women in leadership helm, persistent cultural barriers, and issues with the effective implementation of policies (Ndaire, 2009; Wambui, 2009).

Methodology

This was a cross-sectional descriptive study. Adoption of cross-sectional descriptive study important to identify trends and patterns and make inferences from the study findings about the population (Cvetkovic-Vega et al., 2021). According to Mugenda & Mugenda (2013), a cross-sectional study is an observational study in which data is gathered from the same subjects at one point of time. The data for the study variables that include demographic characteristics (gender), awareness affirmative action, and career advancement were gathered at one point of time hence this design is suitable. This study focused on the hospitality sector in Nairobi City. While the sector has thrived in several parts of the country including the Coast, South Rift, Western, and Central (Mount Kenya), Nairobi City County is the hub of hospitality with about (41) 3-5 star-rated establishments (Tourism Regulatory Authority, 2023). As per the classification of hotels by the TRA (2023) out of the 41 hospitality establishments, 10 are five-star, 17 are four-star and 14 are three-star. The study's target population was 6001 employees in all the 41 classified hotels comprising of 3-5 star rated hotels operating in Nairobi City. The population was chosen based on the classification of Hotels and Restaurants Regulatory Authority through the TRA 2023 classification. The Yamane (1967)/Slovin's formula was used to calculate the number of 375 hotel employees to participate in the study. Data was gathered using structured questionnaires self-administered to hotel employees, the managers, and the general managers. The responses in the questionnaire were standardized using a 5-point Likert scale. The participants were asked to indicate level of agreement abut statements that measured affirmative action and career progression. The Likert scale responses were 1(strongly disagree), 2(disagree), 3(neutral), and 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree). This technique was the most suitable for measuring opinion and attitude about affirmative action and career advancement of employees in the hotel industry. An interview schedule was also employed to collect qualitative data since it provides a higher comprehensive information and clarification that may not be possible while using questionnaires. The management and operation managers were interviewed in this case. Data was coded and entered into SPSS Version 22.0 and analyzed by employing both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics comprised frequencies, percentages and means. Inferential statistics used simple linear regressions to test the statistically significant effect affirmative action on career advancement of employees in the hotel industry. The presentation of quantitative data was done using tables and figures. Qualitative data was analyzed using content analyzed and triangulated with quantitative results to draw inference and conclusion.

Results

A total of 259 out of the 375 questionnaires which represents 69.07 % were properly filled. A 69.07% response rate is enough to conclude the study. According to Fincham (2008), a response rate of 60% and above is acceptable to make a good conclusion about the study. 69.07% response rate, therefore, is thus good to conclude the study. This response rate is in tandem with Ali et al. (2021) who argued that in hospitality and tourism research, an acceptable response rate for surveys generally falls within the range of 30%-50%, though some studies suggest that 50% and above are deemed good and thus acceptable rate within the hospitality and tourism industry. Ali et al. (2021) established a 54.44% response rates in hospitality research. Sataloff & Vontela (2021) indicated that acceptable response rates across different fields of 40% to 75%. Thus, the response rate of 69.07% falls within the industry standards.

Demographic information of the hotel employees

Study findings showed that 65.25% of the hotel employees were female while 34.75% were male. The results shows that female is more in the hotel industry and this has been a norm for a long time. However, a study by Koome et al. (2015) established that 64 percent of workers in hotel are males while 36% are female. More male were in repair and maintenance section compared to women to a tune of 97%. The results, therefore, shows that gender representation is not fair. This is not good particularly in the current world where diversity is highly regarded (Russen et al., 2021). Examining Figure 1, men hold key positions in the hotel industry. Hotel general managers comprise of 10.97% of men compared to 2.86% of female. Similarly, in the departmental heads and supervisory positions there are more males compared to female. Only in the front line that comprise more of serving customers (waiters) where there were more female employees compared to males.

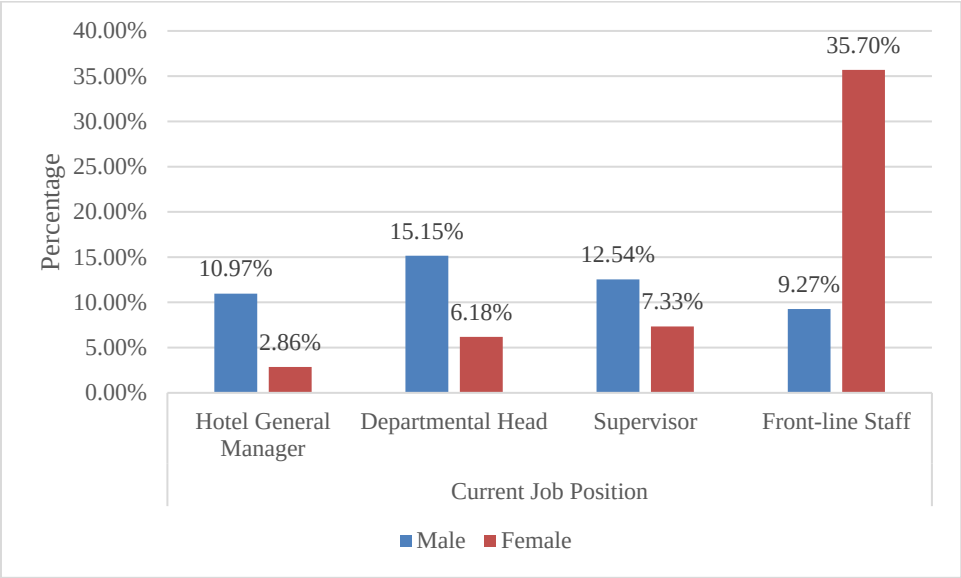

Figure 1: Cross tabulation of gender and current job position

In the hotel front office (food serving and drink serving area, reservations and receptions), females make the majority among the waiters. However, in the senior management, security, kitchen, operations, finance and supply, transport, male employees are the majority. Additionally, males often outnumbering females in certain roles, particularly in areas like repair and maintenance, while women are underrepresented in leadership positions. The results imply that there are hotel sections where female employees are majority hotel front office (food serving and drink serving area, reservations and receptions). However, in the senior management, security, kitchen, operations, finance and supply, transport, male employees are the majority. Male employees are often outnumbering females in certain roles, particularly in areas like repair and maintenance, while women are significantly underrepresented in senior leadership positions. The results are in congruence with Koome et al. (2015) who established that in the Kenyan hospitality sector, male dominance persists in many key positions, although there is been some progress in female participation. Masadeh & Alhammad (2020) also noted that women are not equally represented in senior hotel leadership positions, encountering hurdles to progressing to senior positions. Nonetheless, Yang (2011) pointed out that although women move to high positions and begin their management careers earlier than males; it is more challenging for them to become general managers. A cross tabulation of age and current job position of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Cross tabulation of age and current job position

		Current job position				
		Hotel General Manager	Departmental Head	Supervisor	Front-line Staff	Total
Age	18-30 yrs.	0.00%	1.09%	2.86%	32.17%	34.12%
	31 – 40 yrs.	1.54%	2.02%	3.70%	20.00%	26.26%
	41 – 50 yrs.	5.02%	7.31%	5.82%	5.39%	26.54%
	> 50 yrs.	4.32%	1.93%	3.86%	2.97%	13.08%
Total		10.88%	12.35%	16.24%	60.53%	100.00%

Most of those who hold the position of general managers (5.02%) and departmental head (4.32%) are aged 41 years and above. Most of those who take supervisory positions are the youngest, are aged 31 and 40 years. In the frontline hotel are younger workers aged 18 to 40 years. Majority of these young workers are in the operations, front hotel, kitchen, food serving and drink serving area, reservations and receptions. However, older employees were in the senior management operations, supervisory, operations and leadership. The results imply that senior positions in the hotel industry are held by older employees in the hotel. This could be linked to the belief that older employees possess more years of experience and skills working in the hotel sector. The age distribution of the participants, therefore, enabled the study to get different perspectives on the variables under study as age comes with experience of life and work issues (Rozelle et al., 2023). Further, Table 2 provides results showing a cross tabulation of gender with level of education of hotel employees.

Table 2: Cross tabulation of gender with level of education of hotel employees

		Highest level of education					Total
		High School or below	Diploma	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Ph.D. or other advanced degree	
	Male	1.54	15.83	20.92	10.51	0.000	49.81
Gender	Female	3.47	30.12	12.27	5.34	0.000	50.19
Total		5.02	45.95	33.19	20.85	0.00	100.00

The study results demonstrate that most of the hotel employees had diploma level of education, (45.95), bachelor's degree (28.19) and Masters (20.85%). Most males had bachelor's degree and master's degree compared to females while most females were diploma holders. This demonstrates that the vast majority of respondents were educated and, as a result, were knowledgeable about hotel undertakings. Level of education may imply the nature of skills required in various section of the hotel. For instance, senior management positions in the hotel may require workers with advanced management skills and higher

education levels like undergraduate degree and post graduate. On the other hand, front hotel may require basic hotel skills, customer relation skills which are taught in technical and vocational colleges. Furthermore, food preparation and serving require skills and experience from culinary colleges. The cross tabulation of gender with level of education of hotel employees and the results are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Cross tabulation of gender with number of years working in the hotel establishment

As indicated by results above, 10.42% of the employees have worked for the establishment for less than one year, 33.59% of the respondents have worked for the hotel for 1-5 years, 27.41% have worked for establishment for 6-10 years while 28.57% have worked for establishment for more than 10 years. From the study, most of the respondents have worked for the establishment for more than one year. Working experience is important in comprehending the experience of workers in terms of skills competences and how this has translated to career progression. Hotel employees who have worked for establishment for a longer period of time may have better understanding of the functioning of the establishment and the opportunities and problems the establishment encounters (Pearce et al., 2020). Years of experience in workers can lead to improved service quality, increased customer satisfaction, enhanced efficiency, and a better understanding of the industry's nuances. In addition, more years of work experience imply better understanding of hotel related activities, customer serving and quality and delicacy of cuisine served.

Descriptive findings for career advancement

Data analysis involved descriptive results using percentages, means and standard deviation was employed to investigate career advancement among workers in hotel. The interpretation of the results was that a mean of .00-1.49= Strongly Disagree, 1.50-2.49=, disagree 2.50-3.49= neutral, 3.50-4.49= agree 4.50-5.00=strongly agree. Table 3 highlights descriptive findings for career advancement.

Table 3: Descriptive findings for career advancement

	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	Std Dev
Job promotions are fairly done irrespective of the gender of the worker	39.8%	16.6%	5.8%	27.4%	10.4%	2.41	1.07
There is equal access to in service trainings programs for all workers	20.1%	38.2%	4.2%	14.7%	22.8%	2.35	1.31
There is equal pay scale for workers in the same job category	17.8%	40.2%	5.8%	15.8%	20.5%	1.66	1.34
Equal access to mentorship services from seniors in this hotel	22.8%	31.7%	6.2%	19.7%	19.7%	2.49	1.29
Aggregate	24.9%	31.8%	5.6%	19.6%	18.3%	2.20	1.25

Key: SD=strongly disagree, D=disagree, N=Neutral, A=agree, SA=strongly agree

On aggregate 54.79 percent of the employees argue that they are not satisfied with level of career advancement in the hotel industry whereas 40.41%. The results signify low career advancement which could be linked to disparities at the work place. Job promotions are not fairly done irrespective of the gender of the worker in this hospitality firm supported by a mean of 2.41 and standard deviation is 1.07. The result implication is that job promotions are not conducted in a fair manner. The results are in tandem with Brites da Silva et al. (2021) who noted that while women constitute a significant portion of the workforce, they are often underrepresented in management and leadership positions, suggesting potential gender disparities in promotion opportunities. Most of the respondents denied the existence of equal access to in service trainings programs for all workers irrespective of the gender differences with a mean of 2.65. Access to in-service training programs for hotel workers is crucial for improving service quality, boosting employee skills, and fostering a positive work environment, with training programs ranging from on-site to external courses and workshops. According to Waqanimaravu & Arasanmi (2020), training, access to support training among hotel workers vary with male counterparts accessing more in service trainings compared to female workers. There was disagreement that there is equal pay scale of workers in the same job category. The results signify existence of pay disparity among hotel workers based on gender. Gender pays disparity exists, with women often earning less than men, even when holding similar roles and having comparable qualifications, and this disparity is exacerbated by gender segregation in both horizontal and vertical employment. The results agree with Cotilla & Campos-Soria (2021) who identified huge wage

gap between male and female workers in hotel industry. A significant majority disagreed that they access mentorship services from their seniors in this hotel irrespective of my gender with a mean of 2.49. The standard deviation is 1.29 showing that the responses are consistent. This is an implication about accesses to mentorship programs for workers in the hotel industry. Mentorship services in the hotel industry, offered by both women and men, can be instrumental in supporting career development and addressing gender inequality, providing guidance, networking opportunities, and fostering a more inclusive environment. According to key informant 6; *"Culturally kitchen duties have been preserved for women which explains why women may have accessed good opportunities in the hotel. Much needs to be done, however, to ensure that women are given equal opportunities in senior positions in hotels."* There is need to ensure that women are encouraged to take leadership roles in the hotel industry. According to Dashper (2020), women have not been confident to take up leadership roles. They should be empowered and mentored to prepare them and challenge them for leadership roles and this is important to promote gender equality in the hospitality industry. However, Matsoso & Harris (2025) noted women often do not receive equitable compensation or recognition, nor are they afforded adequate protection; instead, they are frequently subjected to exploitation.

Hypothesis testing

The study null hypothesis was that there is no significant relationship between affirmative action and career advancement among employees in 3-5star hotels in Nairobi City County. From Table 4, the R Square is 0.371 implying that affirmative action explains 37.1% of the career advancement. The overall model was statistically significant (F statistic=151.764; p-value =0.000<0.05). The null hypothesis was thus rejected concluding that there exists a significant influence of affirmative action on career advancement in the hotel industry.

Table 4: Regression analysis of the affirmative action and career advancement

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.609[a]	.371	.369	.36502

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	20.221	1	20.221	151.764	.000[b]
	Residual	34.242	257	.133		
	Total	54.463	258			

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.031	.131		15.554	.000
	Affirmative action and career advancement	.489	.040	.609	12.319	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Affirmative Action and Career Advancement
b. Dependent Variable: Career development

Affirmative action depicted a positive and significantly effect on career advancement. Affirmative action plays a crucial role in career advancement for women in the hotel sector by ensuring that women have equal access to opportunities for growth, promotions, and leadership roles. It actively addresses gender disparities by implementing policies that promote diversity, challenge biases, and remove barriers that traditionally hinder women's career progression. Through targeted initiatives such as mentorship programs, leadership training, and fair hiring practices, affirmative action empowers women to excel in the workplace, paving the way for a more inclusive and balanced leadership structure. Ultimately, it not only benefits individual employees but also enhances the overall success and reputation of the hotel by fostering a diverse and talented workforce. Akala (2019) supports the finding that there is significant association between affirmative action and career advancement. Affirmative action gives priority to the equitable hiring, promotion and training practices that are important to achieve equality in place of work. It creates pathways for persons who may face discrimination in career development to access equal career growth. Outreach and mentorship affirmative programs help a lot to enlighten people which is important to enable them to embrace equality (Akala, 2019). It provides opportunity for employees from diverse backgrounds to thrive and this increases their likelihood to scale up the career ladder. Affirmative action can enable organizations to enrich their talent pool and attract innovative individuals that bring on board innovative perspectives and solutions. Finally, as noted by Castro (2024), fostering a more inclusive workforce, countries can harness tourism's potential to drive sustainable economic development and reduce inequality.

Conclusions and implication to policy and practice

Study results found that career advancement in the Kenyan hospitality industry is fairly distributed among male and female employees, with females dominating lower positions. However, females are less represented in top positions and receive lower pay. The study also highlighted the importance of affirmative action in ensuring equal opportunities for career advancement, highlighting the need for awareness and mentorship programs. The study suggests that while the hospitality industry in Kenya is making progress in career advancement, more needs to be done. Equal training opportunities, gender-responsive policies, and alignment of affirmative action with organizational goals are crucial for promoting career advancement and long-term performance improvement. The study findings further highlight the need for hotel management and policymakers to strengthen and institutionalize affirmative action policies to promote equitable career growth, especially for marginalized groups such as women. The findings suggest that while affirmative action initiatives exist, their implementation is often inconsistent or poorly monitored, limiting their effectiveness. As a result, there is a need for clearer guidelines, regular audits, and capacity-building programs to ensure these policies translate into tangible opportunities for advancement of women to senior leadership positions

in the hotel industry. Additionally, human resource practices in the hotel industry should be aligned with national affirmative action frameworks to foster inclusive workplaces that value diversity and merit-based progression.

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