

## The Impact of Demographic Influences on Work Engagement for Front of House Female Hotel Employees

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### Abstract

The demographic influences affecting the wellbeing of front of house (FoH) female employees who are employed in hotels. The work engagement subscales, vigour, dedication and absorption were measured against the participants' age, level of education and marital status. A cross-sectional survey was done from a sample ( $n = 100$ ) of female participants. A biographical questionnaire and The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) were administered. Significant relationships were found on the vigour, dedication and absorption subscales. FoH female employees younger than 35, those with tertiary education and those without life partners displayed higher levels of wellbeing. Therefore work engagement levels vary with regards to age, marital and educational status. Human resource specialists for hotels could measure work engagement and apply it through in-house policies and supportive practices as well as defend these practices regarding their FOH female employees as female employees are the majority of employees within the hospitality industry. The workforce in South Africa is characterized by demographic diversity. The variances of work engagement are imperative as it enhances the guest experience and improves productivity and ultimately increases financial turnover for the hotels who operate in a very competitive market.

**Keywords:** Work engagement, front of house female employees, demographic influences, human resources, hotels

### Introduction

Well-being is defined as a response to occasions in life that informs satisfaction, happiness and fulfilment in the personal and work life of an individual (Diener, Oishi & Lucas, 2003). Well-being in the work environment encompasses an individual's work engagement (WE)(Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010) as well as his/her meaningfulness at work (Van Zyl, Deacon & Rothmann, 2012). Work engagement is also defined as the involvement and contributions that employees put into their work (Kuok & Taormina, 2017). Due to organisations and societies' structural design, career advancement for males and females are not the same (Brownell, 1993; Sinclair, 1997; Woods & Cavanaugh, 1999; Fagenson-Eland & Baugh, 2000; O'Neil, Hopkins & Balimoria, 2008). When compared to their male counterparts, females frequently fulfil more work roles, which results in females spending their time

performing formal and informal labor. Females are furthermore employed by organizations full-time for paid labor, yet they also do unpaid labor more than men do (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2013).

Geldenhuis and Henn (2017) indicate that demographic variables such as race, marital status, level of education and number of children influence the capability of females to handle the demands of their jobs across many economic industries. They furthermore indicate that the above-mentioned demographic variables have a major influence on the well-being of females within the work environment. Ngoo, Tey and Tan (2015) similarly explain that demographic variables are determining factors of well-being. Furthermore, the influence of demographic variables on employee well-being have an effect on work organisations in multiple ways. A study by Mandu, Buitendach, Kanengoni and Bodat (2014) also indicate that demographic variables such as age, race and educational status influence the well-being of female employees. Dwivedi, Kaushik and Luxmi (2015) furthermore indicate that age, educational status and marital status influences organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB). OCB is described as the positive and constructive work environment in which employees function with regards to the effort that the employees put in into performing their tasks and responsibilities in the workplace. (Velickovska, 2017; Zhang, 2011). The demographic variables of employees therefore play a role in increasing productivity and output within a work organization.

The tourism and hospitality industry increases the quality of life of many South-Africans with its enormous social and economic value. Amoako, Kutu-Adu, Caesar and Neequaye (2019) suggest that the hospitality industry is one of the most competitive business areas globally. Clevenger and Singh (2013), indicate that within the hospitality industry female employees are the majority of employees and that there is an acceptance that many female employees have difficulty finding an equilibrium between their personal lives and the demands of the job.

Vallen and Vallen (2004) define front office in terms of its standing as the central contact point for guests within the hotel, irrespective of the hotel type. FOH employees bring a wealth of resources with them to the FOH service counter. For example, their approaches, experience, knowledge, capabilities and internal and external relationships play a crucial role in the overall guest experience. Their aptitudes and abilities are predisposed to the policies and practices of their respective workplace cultures. These skills are supported by empowering FoH employees to voice their know-hows, recommendations and anxieties. The outlooks, actions and expertise of the FoH service supplier are crucial to the success of the relations with and the contentment of the hotel guest (Burke, Koyuncu, Fiksenbaum & Tekin, 2013).

There is emerging data (Kusluvan, 2003; Kusluvan, Kusluvan, Ilhan, & Buyruk, 2010) that the supervision of FoH employees are crucial to ensure organizational success within the hospitality industry. Effective human resource management (HRM) may elevate the quality of service delivered to guests, increase guest satisfaction as well as guest retention, provide an economical advantage and increase the hotel's organizational performance (Burke et al. 2013). Hotel groups, managers, supervisors and hotel employees should use this information to recognize that FOH female employees function, manage and experience the workplace in a different manner and accept that female employees would be better able to devote themselves in the hotel environment when they receive the appropriate support from colleagues, supervisors and management.

This study aims to provide information regarding the correlation between age, marital status as well as the level of education on work engagement and the effect that these variables have on the three aspects that comprises the WE construct namely vigour, dedication and absorption. This study furthermore aims to provide an understanding of how FoH female employees evaluate their life situations and their individual well-being. These evaluations will

inform hotel/ hotel group work policies and decision-making principles in such a way that female employees will benefit from these policies and principles. This study furthermore offers critical evidence regarding the effect of demographic variables on FoH female employees' well-being in their respective hotels. The wellbeing of female employees in the hospitality industry is not restricted to demographic variables but is a significant factor to consider as it could inform policies and decision-making principles such as the development of induction programs suited to FOH female employees, policies concerning maternity leave and other female-related issues, for example, flexi time for mothers. It is, however, impossible for hotels/ hotel groups to take into consideration all the aspects that influence well-being on an individual employee level and reward the individual preferences accordingly. The subdivision of female employees into sets with comparable features and requirements may be an effective solution (Nienaber, Bussin & Henn, 2011). By evaluating the demographic variables of female employees, employers are able to subdivide and improve female employee wellbeing and consequently the overall organisational success of the hotel/hotel group. Diener and Tay (2015) indicate that the importance of wellbeing in the workplace continues to develop as management realizes the impact of a healthy workforce and community. A vigorous work environment is crucial within the hospitality industry because it is an industry with employees who deliver an intangible service such as guest satisfaction regarding service, product as well as the overall guest experience (Yam, Raybould & Gordon, 2018).

### ***Work engagement***

Luthans (2002) defines positive psychology as the scientific study of human strength and optimal functioning and positive organizational behaviour as '...the study of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's workplace.' Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá and Bakker (2001) describes work engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related awareness that is categorized by vigour, dedication and absorption. Engagement is not a fleeting and exact state, it speaks to a more determined and persistent affective-cognitive state that is not dedicated to any specific object, event, individual, or behaviour. Vigour is described by these authors as having great levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to devote effort to one's work and perseverance even when difficulties arise. Dedication is furthermore described to being intensely involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of significance, zest, motivation, pride and challenge. Lastly, absorption is described as being completely focused and happily immersed in one's work, whereby time passes swiftly and one has difficulties with separating oneself from one's work. Kahn (1990, p. 694) defines engagement as the "... harnessing of organization member's selves to their work roles: in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during role performances.'

A positive relationship between the constructs of work engagement and work commitment exists as employees who are highly engaged in their work are also likely to be committed to their respective organisations (Jackson, Rothmann & Van de Vijver, 2006; Rothmann & Jordaan, 2006; Saks, 2006). Bakker and Demerouti, (2008) agree that engaged employees frequently experience positive emotions which leads to better job performance. Rigg, Sydnor, Nicely and Day's (2014) study indicate that employees in Jamaican hotels who were responsible for customer relations were more engaged than employees within the other departments of the hotels. Blau's (1960) social exchange theory supports this by suggesting that employees who are engaged in the reciprocal guest interaction experiences become more engaged within their respective organisations and will seek out to reciprocate these positive

interactions elsewhere. Reciprocation may enhance positive work attitudes and intentions which leads to improved job satisfaction and reduced staff turnover.

As a result, hotels should manage guest engagement through a comprehensive and integrative method by encouraging FoH employee engagement as a significant aspect of the hotel's competitive edge in the market. The high levels of work engagement required from FoH employees would reflect in the service quality that these employees provide to the hotel guests which, in turn, should benefit the hotel with returning guests, and increased hotel revenue as well as profit (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002; Gelade & Young, 2005; Lockwood 2007; Rigg, Day & Adler 2013; Saks 2006; Van Rooy, Whitman, Hart & Caleo, 2011;). In Mauno, Kinnunen, and Ruokolainen's (2007) study, females were found to be more immersed and energetic in the workplace than their male counterparts. Similarly, Pitt-Catsoupes and Matz-Costa (2008) found a relationship between gender and employee engagement, indicating that female employees were frequently more engaged in the workplace than their male colleagues.

The relationship between the demographic variables is of interest as work engagement has been studied internationally (Durksen & Klassen, 2012; Fong & Ng, 2012) and in developed countries (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006; Saks, 2006). Very little research has been done in the hospitality industry in the South African context regarding the demographic variables and work engagement (Field & Buitendach, 2011) of female employees.

### ***Demographic characteristics and employee engagement***

#### *Age*

Previous research studies (Simpson, 2009; Pitt-Catsoupes & Matz-Costa, 2008) revealed that employees of different age groups displayed different levels of work engagement. In these studies the older employees (42 years and above) were more engaged at work followed by younger employees (18–25 years). Similarly, a South African study indicated that older employees scored higher on the dedication variable of work engagement (Haley, Mostert, & Els, 2013). Hotel employee engagement in China revealed that older hotel employees were more engaged than their younger counterparts (Zeng, Zhou & Han, 2009). However, in a study on hotel managers in China, no correlation was found between age and work engagement (Burke, Koyuncu, Jing, & Fiksenbaum, 2013). One reason that older employees were more engaged at work could be that they were more likely to have full-grown adult children, which allowed these employees to direct all their attention to their jobs (Geldenhuys & Henn, 2017).

#### *Educational levels*

There are conflicting results in the literature between employees' educational levels and their work engagement levels. Some indicate that educational levels does have an effect on employee engagement levels, while others indicate that no relationship was found between educational levels and employee engagement (Mahboubi, Ghahramani, Mohammadi, Amanis, Mousavi, Moradi, et al 2014). Rigg et al. (2014) reported that hotel employees' engagement levels increased as educational levels increased. Zeng et al. (2009) indicated the opposite that employees displayed less engaged behaviour when they achieved graduate levels. Hotel studies (Burke et al., 2014; Karatepe & Olugbade 2009) indicated no relationship regarding the correlation between education levels and engagement. In a South African study, participants with a matric reported considerably higher absorption than participants with doctoral degrees (Bell & Barkhuizen, 2011). In stark contrast, a study on a group of South African scholars revealed that those with doctoral degrees displayed considerably higher levels of absorption than those scholars with Honours or equivalent 4-year degrees (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2006).

### *Marital status*

There were mixed results regarding marital status and work engagement. Some research findings (Keller, 1983; Wild, 1970) suggest that employees with partners were more content in their professions when compared to single employees. Geldenhuys and Henn's (2017) results regarding work engagement and marital status were undetermined. Other studies that measured married and unmarried hotel employees (Burke et al., 2013; Kim, Shin & Swanger, 2009; Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008; Zeng et al., 2009) also indicated no significant correlation between marital status and work engagement. However, Maslach and Jackson (1981) suggested that single employees were predisposed to low levels of engagement when compared to employees with life partners. Kong (2009), however, disagreed and reported considerably higher levels of work engagement among single employees when compared to employees with partners.

It is apparent from the research that the outcomes regarding the demographic differences of FoH female hotel employees are not conclusive, yet there is ample proof that demographic variables influence wellbeing. The South African workplace is diverse in nature and therefore it is estimated that the relationships between demographic variables and well-being will differ significantly among the FoH female employees. More precisely, this study hypothesizes that FoH female employees will experience work related well-being in a different way based on their age, marital status as well as their level of education.

## **Research methodology**

### ***Research approach***

To meet the objectives of this study a quantitative research approach was used and a cross-sectional design was employed. Olsen and St. George (2004) suggest that a cross-sectional research design is when both an all-inclusive population and a subgroup of the targeted population is chosen and from these individuals, data are obtained to answer the research problem. Sakaran and Bougie (2016) furthermore define a research design as the layout or plan for the gathering, measuring and analyses of data, formulated to be a solution to a research question. A cross-sectional design was employed to gather information in numeric form (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). FoH female hotel employees within various hotels in Gauteng, South Africa were approached as participants for this study. Hardcopies of the questionnaire were handed out to FoH female employees at their respective hotels. The questionnaires were complemented with a letter clarifying the purpose of this study as well as confirming the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants.

### ***Research participants***

The targeted participants consisted of 131 FoH female hotel employees who were employed at 3 to 4 star hotels that belong to various hotel chains in South Africa. The sample consisted of  $n = 131$  women who were employed as FoH reception staff in these hotels and who had at least one year working experience, a matric which means that the participants had at least completed a secondary education and who were fluent in English. This criteria resulted in a 76 % response rate or  $n=100$  participants. The hotels in Gauteng who were targeted for this study had to be part of a hotel chain and have a three or four star hotel rating. This was to ensure consistency when comparing the results of the WE questionnaire of the FoH female employees. The sample was further well represented in terms of age, marital status and level of education. The participants' age groups reflected that 60% were between the ages of 18 and 34 years, while 40% were between the ages of 35 and 65 years. Concerning their levels of education, the FoH female hotel employees were split into two groups: those with a secondary education (39%) and those with a tertiary qualification (61%). The marital status of the FoH female hotel



employees were as categorized as those with a life partner (41%) and those without a life partner (59%).

### Research procedure

The researcher handed out hardcopies of the questionnaire to the female FoH employees at their respective hotels. Thereafter, the researcher explained the purpose and objective of the study and obtained consent from the participants before they completed the questionnaire. A cover letter accompanied the questionnaire which explained the purpose as well as the significance of the study. The FoH female hotel employees was informed that the study was on a voluntary basis and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was ensured by following the protocols of the tertiary institution where the researchers are affiliated.

### Measuring instruments

The measuring instruments for this study was made up of a biographical questionnaire and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). The biographical questionnaire consisted of questions regarding age, level of education and marital status. There is previous research which also used the UWES (Barkhuizen, & Rothmann, 2006; Geldenhuys & Henn, 2017) as the questionnaire is in the open domain. The UWES (UWES-9 item) was developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), and is aimed at measuring the participants' overall well-being. The items are scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (never) to 5 (always). The scale measures 3 factors of work engagement namely vigour, dedication and absorption. A sample item for vigour is: In my job I feel strong and vigorous. A sample item for dedication is: I am proud of the work I do. A sample item of absorption is: I feel happy when I am working intensely. In a South African study, Geldenhuys and Henn reported an alpha coefficient of 0.93. The reliability for the UWES in this study was also  $\alpha = 0.93$ .

## Results

### Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics for the work engagement construct is reported in Table 1. The descriptive statistics include mean scores and standard deviations. Table 1 displays the mean scores and standard deviations for each of the groups of participants.

**Table 1: Overall descriptive scores for the UWES subscales**

Subscales	Work engagement								
	Vigour			Dedication			Absorption		
Variables	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Age</b>									
Under 35	60	4.178	.932	60	4.739	1.020	60	4.517	1.074
Over 35	40	3.108	.480	40	3.500	.675	40	3.392	.769
<b>Education</b>									
Up to grade 12	39	3.419	.833	39	3.744	.860	39	3.615	.935
Tertiary education	61	3.962	.951	61	4.563	1.095	61	4.355	1.120
<b>Relationship status</b>									
Partner	41	3.407	.705	41	3.821	1.028	41	3.610	.931
No partner	59	3.989	1.013	59	4.537	1.028	59	4.384	1.117

The descriptive statistics for the well-being constructs are reported in Table 1. The descriptive statistics include mean scores and standard deviations. Table 1 shows the mean values and standard deviations for the UWES subscales and the demographic variables of the participants. The mean values of the subscales were recorded as follows: for participants under the age of 35 the mean score for the Vigour subscale was 4.18 (SD .932) and for participants over the age of 35 the mean score for the Vigour subscale was 3.11 (SD .480). The mean score for Vigour on Education was 3.42 (SD .833) for participants who were educated up to Grade 12 and for those participants who had a tertiary education the mean score was 3.96 (SD .951) on Vigour. For the relationship status on Vigour the participants with a partner reported a mean score of 3.41 (SD .705) and for the participants with no partner a mean score of 3.99 (SD 1.013) was reported.

The following mean scores and standard deviations were reported for Dedication: for participants under the age of 35 the mean score for the Dedication subscale was 4.18 (SD 1.020) and for participants over the age of 35 the mean score for the Dedication subscale was 3.50 (SD .675). The mean score for Dedication on Education was 3.74 (SD .860) for participants who were educated up to Grade 12 and for those participants who had a tertiary education the mean score was 4.56 (SD 1.095). For the he relationship status on Dedication the participants with a partner reported a mean score of 3.82 (SD 1.028) and for the participants with no partner a mean score of 4.54 (SD 1.028) was reported.

The following mean scores and standard deviations were reported for Absorption for participants under the age of 35 the mean score for the Absorption subscale was 4.52 (SD 1.074) and for participants over the age of 35 the mean score for the Absorption subscale was 3.39 (SD .769). The mean score for Absorption on Education was 3.62 (SD .935) for participants who were educated up to Grade 12 and for those participants who had a tertiary education the mean score was 4.36 (SD 1.120). For the he relationship status on Absorption the participants with a partner reported a mean score of 3.61 (SD .931) and for the participants with no partner a mean score of 4.38 (SD 1.117) was reported.

### Independent sample t-tests

The normality results, for most of the variables, except for Absorption for participants with partners/no partners were not normally distributed. Even though the variables (almost all variables) were not normally distributed, a t-test was done to test for the differences between the groups. A t-test is quite robust if the group sizes are large enough, even when normality is not assumed. A test for normality was administered. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was done to test for normality where there were 50 participants or more per group and the Shapiro-Wilk test was done to test for normality where the number of participants were less than 50 per group. The variances of each demographic group was tested in terms of equality of variances.

**Table 2 T-test of significance based according to age**

Variable	Age						t	df	p-values	d
	35 years or younger			Older than 35 years						
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD				
Vigour	60	4,18	.932	40	3,11	.480	7.521	93	.000	0.14
Dedication	60	4,74	1.020	40	3,50	.675	7.309	98	0.000	0.17
Absorption	60	4,52	1.074	40	3,39	.769	6.098	97	.004	0.15

df – degrees of freedom, SD - standard deviation



Higher mean scores were reported for Vigour (4.18), Dedication (4.74) and Absorption (4.52) for the participants who were younger than 35 years of age than for Vigour (3.11), Dedication (3.50) and Absorption (3.39) for the participants who were older than 35 years of age.

Table 2 shows the results of the independent samples t-tests examining the significant differences between the different age groups on the work engagement variables of the FoH female hotel employees. The p-values for the t-tests in table 2 were all less than 0.05, therefore there are significant differences between the group who is younger than 35 years of age and the group who is older than 35 years of age. For Cohen’s D there is a small effect size (0, 2 standard deviation) between Vigour, Dedication and Absorption with regards to the participants’ age and there is no difference in the effect size between Vigour and Absorption.

**Table 3 T-test of significance based according to level of education**

Variable	Level of education						t	df	p	d
	Up to Grade 12			Tertiary qualification						
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD				
Vigour	39	3.42	.833	61	3.96	.951	-3.006	98	.0004	0.60
Dedication	39	3.74	.860	61	4.56	1.095	-4.170	94	0.000	0.83
Absorption	39	3.62	.935	61	4.36	1.120	-3.568	91	0.001	0.72

df – degrees of freedom, SD - standard deviation

Higher mean scores were reported for Vigour (3.96), Dedication (4.56) and Absorption (4.36) for the participants who had obtained tertiary qualifications and lower mean scores were reported for Vigour (3.42), Dedication (3.74) and Absorption (3.62) for the participants’ who were educated up to grade 12.

Table 3 shows the results of the independent samples t-tests examining the significant differences between the two levels of education on the work engagement variables of the FOH female hotel employees. The p-values for the t-tests in table 3 were all less than 0.05, therefore there are significant differences between the group who has been educated up to grade 12 and the group who has a tertiary education. For Cohen’s D there is a large difference in the effect size (0.2 standard deviation difference) between Vigour and Dedication with regard to level of education and there is no difference in the effect size between Vigour, Dedication and Absorption as it is not above 0.2 for level of education.

**Table 4 T-test of significance based according to relationship status**

Variable	Relationship status						t	df	p	d
	No partner			Partner						
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD				
Vigour	59	3,99	1,013	41	3,41	0,705	3.388	98	.001+	0.06
Dedication	59	4,54	1,028	41	3,82	1,028	3.424	98	.001*	0.07
Absorption	59	4,38	1,117	41	3,61	0,931	3.424	98	.000*	0.11

df – degrees of freedom, SD - standard deviation

+Equal variances not assumed (Levene’s test for equality of variances)

\*Equal variances assumed (Levene’s test for equality of variances)

Higher mean scores were reported for Vigour (3.99), Dedication (4.54) and Absorption (4.38) for the participants without partners than for Vigour (3.41), Dedication (3.82) and Absorption (3.61) for the participants who had partners.



Table 4 reports the results examining the relationship between participants with partners and the participants with no partners. All results were significant (for Vigour, Dedication and Absorption), with p-values less than 0.05. For Cohen's D there is a small difference in the effect size between Vigour and Dedication with Absorption and there is no difference in the effect size between Vigour and Dedication with regard to the relationship status of the participants.

## Discussion

The FoH female hotel employees younger than 35 years of age experienced higher levels of work engagement in comparison to their older colleagues. The younger FoH female employees scored the highest on the dedication subscale which indicates that the younger female employees are more committed to giving a superior guest service at the FoH desk. Dedication is a significant indicator of job satisfaction, organizational commitment and reduced staff turnover in a hotel. The higher levels of dedication indicates that the younger FoH female employees are experiencing job satisfaction and are committed employees who are not planning to leave their hotel groups in search of other employment. These staff members will grow the organization as well as grow with the organization. It is therefore important that the management and HR departments are aware of staff dedication towards creating a superior guest experience as returning guests improve the profitability of the hotel.

The 35 year and older FoH female hotel employees also scored the highest on the dedication subscale even though they did not score as high as their younger colleagues. It seems that the older female FoH employees are experiencing the stressors and demands of the hospitality industry and have greater responsibilities at the FoH desks of the hotels as they often occupy supervisory and managerial positions due to their years of FoH experience. The emotional labour of the FoH female employees should be taken into consideration besides the physical and cognitive aspects that the FoH desk job entails. These female employees provide a round the clock service to the hotel guests as well as supervising the younger staff members. The intense work pace combined with the emotional facades worn to exhibit helpful and friendly behaviors to hotel guests even when undesirable situations occur may cause reduced levels of work engagement and subsequent job satisfaction.

These findings are in contrast to previous local and international studies (Haley, Mostert, & Els, 2013; Pitt-Catsoupes & Matz-Costa, 2008; Simpson, 2009; Zeng, Zhou & Han, 2009) which suggest that older employees displayed higher levels of work engagement. Geldenhuys and Henn (2017) furthermore suggest that female employees experience substantial differences with regards to their levels of work engagement based on their age.

The FoH female hotel employees in this study with tertiary education qualifications experienced significantly higher levels of vigour, dedication, absorption in comparison to those FoH female employees who has secondary education qualifications. Tertiary education provides an entry to higher paying employment and these employees have higher living standards as they might be able to afford a better lifestyle when compared to their less qualified colleagues. The remuneration of these female employees may be relatively high and contributing to higher work engagement even though remuneration is considered an extrinsic motivating factor. It is also possible that the female FoH employees with tertiary qualifications are given more interesting, challenging and managerial tasks in the FoH office even though the demands placed on them by high-ranking levels of work may cause increased pressure and work stress. This study reports similar findings to Rigg, Sydnor, Nicely and Day (2014) study where the hotel employees' work engagement levels increased as educational levels increased. In this study the FoH female hotel employees without life partners experienced significantly higher levels of dedication, vigour and absorption compared to their female colleagues with

life partners. For the FoH female hotel employees without life partners the work experience and subsequent work engagement is enhanced at the FoH desk. Similar to this study, Kong (2009) reported considerably higher levels of work engagement among single employees when compared to employees with life partners. The FoH desk is service orientated and labor-intensive and the female FoH employees do not work independently. The quality of the FoH service which is delivered to the hotel guests is a collective effort of the FoH work team. Therefore, the emotional support such as respect, collaborative sharing and camaraderie from colleagues could reduce the work stress and pressure related to the demands of the job. The result of peer support could be supported in a positive work environment as greater levels work engagement is experienced. Work and family are entangled and work environments influence personal relationships. There may be a reciprocal relationship between being involved with a life partner or being involved with work colleagues and peers and work experiences such as work engagement.

### **Conclusion**

This study validates that demographic influences have an impact on the work engagement among FoH female hotel employees. The ages of the FoH female employees revealed that the younger female employees displayed higher levels of dedication and subsequent work engagement and job satisfaction. This is a significant finding as engaged employees are less likely to seek employment elsewhere and employee retention contributes to the overall service excellence of the hotel. Higher levels of education correlated positively with higher levels of work engagement and improved standards of living as the more complex work assignments and responsibilities were given to those FoH female employees with higher qualifications. These female employees were financially better rewarded than their colleagues with lesser qualifications even though they experienced more pressure and work stress. The findings from the FoH female employees who do not have life partners suggested that peer support at work from colleagues led to higher levels of work engagement as the FoH desk is labour intensive and a collaborative effort in ensuring superior guest service which would lead to higher levels of occupancy.

Individuals spend large parts of their lives in their working environments and the majority of employees within the hotel industry are female employees. Therefore managers cannot disregard the human factor in their pursuit for long term survival and excellence in the very competitive hospitality industry. The impact of these demographic influences may assist HR practitioners in the hotel industry in successfully supporting and supervising their female FoH employees by designing policies and interventions, for example, talent management policies and strategies providing opportunities for FoH female employees to improve their qualifications through in-house training programs which is tailored for specific departments within the hotel. These findings may also contribute with staff retention strategies as interventions could be targeted to accommodate specific categories of employees such as female FoH staff.

This research study contributes to the study of positive psychology in the hotel industry. It is more specifically, a contribution to the work engagement of female FoH hotel employees within the South African hospitality context. The study adds to the existing literature on organisational outcomes regarding work engagement. More specifically, this study highlights the importance of demographic influences and the effect of work engagement variables amongst female FoH hotel employees. There are some limitations as this study focused on FoH female employees in hotels in a province within South Africa. This study could be expanded to include more demographic groups, for example include male employees who are employed in the other departments in hotels across the country in an expanded study to increase the

generalizability of the study. This study was furthermore conducted with an existing work engagement questionnaire, therefore other well-being constructs could also be included and compared to other demographic data of hotel employees. Future studies could include constructs such as resilience, emotional labour and burnout. This study was furthermore cross-sectional and no conclusions regarding cause and effect of work engagement variables could be drawn. The sample sizes were unequal regarding the demographic variables, therefore the demographic variables were divided into two groupings.

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