ASSESSMENT OF PAY GAP BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE EMPLOYEES IN FIVE STAR HOTELS IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract: **This paper evaluates the gender pay disparity between men and their female counterparts in the five star hotels within Nairobi County in Kenya. It sought to give empirical evidence concerning the existence and direction of such a gap as well as the discussion of the underlining socio-demographic as well as the job characteristic factors shaping it in this context. The study took a quantitative methodology with a cross-sectional survey study design and a sample section of 112 employees drawn in eight five-star hotels within Nairobi. Its analysis of the pay gap was done in terms of mean difference analysis and independent t-tests of the samples. Against the global and national trends, the research study found that there exists statistically significant gender pay gap in favour of the female employees working in the five star hotels located in Nairobi (mean difference = 0.78, p = 0.040). Three factors were found to be the main determinants of employee compensation among them being level of education, position held, department, age group and length of stay in the hotel. These outcomes undermine some of the simplistic explanations concerning gender pay gap, implying that in certain, high-end spheres of the industry, personal human resources and career advancement could have an additional impact on the compensation compared to gender itself. The paper emphasizes the significance of encouraging equality in access to education and access to leadership among all the employees regardless of gender in realization of equitable practices on compensation.**

Keywords: **Gender pay gap, hospitality industry, employee retention, wage disparity, five-star hotels, Nairobi County.**

1. INTRODUCTION

The problem of wage discrimination on grounds of gender still ranks high in global agendas for equity, human rights, and development economics. Notwithstanding perceptible reform of laws, changes in policy, and global advocacy agendas, the gender gap in earnings endures ubiquitously. Across the world, women on average earn less compared with their male counterparts doing similar work. According to the International Labour Organization [ILO] (2022), women earn about 20% less compared with men for equal work. For the last two decades, very little progress has been made in closing the gap. Among the factors accounting for the inequality is the division within occupations (segregation), inadequate roles in high ladder levels, and deep-set biases within organizational cultures. In the case of the hospitality industry, which is a major female employer across the world, the patterns represent these features with high levels of horizontal segregation (manifesting in overrepresentation in service provision posts) and vertical segregation (in the form of absence of presence of females at strategic levels) (Baum, 2013; Campos-Soria et al., 2018).

In Africa, gender wage disparities are strongly linked with economic and sociocultural challenges, traditional practices prevalent in the region, and inadequate institutional arrangements. Most African states have segmented and disorderly labor market areas with poor regulation and weak enforcement of legislation for promoting equality (Charruault & Forestier, 2010). Even with enhanced entry rates of women into formal employment, they still face discriminatory laws

limiting their entry into higher-income levels and upper management (UN Women, 2020). Empirical evidence shows that even in formal industries like hospitality and tourism, statistically female workers are more likely to be paid less compared with their male counterparts. This gap in wages is worsened by limited access to education, skills programs, and childcare facilities (Appleton et al., 1999; Chhibber, 2010). Up-to-date studies, with deep explorations into gender-specific wage gaps within specific industries in Sub-Saharan Africa, remain largely absent, yielding significant knowledge gaps in policy development and academic analysis.

In Kenya, the hotel industry is a major urban employment generator and national revenue earner. Nairobi County, being a prime center for global tourism, diplomacy, and business, hosts a wide array of five-star hotels employing a diverse population across various professional, technical, and service levels. Despite being commonly understood as an inclusive sector with high proportions of female workers, recent studies establish the existence of unequal wages with a particular prevalence across gender divides. Women mainly work in housekeeping, front-office, and food and beverages—a segment of occupations commonly devalued and more poorly remunerated compared with men in professional or technical roles (Koome et al., 2013). There is also a concern about fuzzy compensation structures and inconsistent promotional patterns, which can compound wage inequities along gender lines.

Despite these challenges, there is still, at present, a significant gap within the empirical studies examining the gender earnings gap across Kenya's formal hotel industry, more specifically relative to high-end hotels like five-star hotels. Existing scholarship has mainly focused on general industries without generating comprehensive analyses transferable specifically to this specific domain. This current study aims at shedding light on the patterns and scale of wage differentials related to gender across Nairobi County-based five-star hotels.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

The wage gap between the sexes has become an important issue in policy debates and scholarly research. The gender pay gap essentially refers to the difference in average pay between women and men, often expressed as a percentage of male earnings. This phenomenon is not limited to certain geographic areas, industries, or sectors; instead, it tends to occur in countries that have advanced education systems, even where there are tight labor laws. Notwithstanding the differences in the size, geographic dispersion, and type of pay gap, its persistence is an indication of deep-seated systemic discrimination (Blau & Kahn, 2017; ILO, 2022).

In the hotel industry, where it has an extremely large dependency upon its labor, largely made up of female workers, pay equity issues take many forms. The combination in this sector of the types of jobs, with a large proportion of jobs involving enormous customer interaction, nonstandard working hours, and variable job stability, creates an optimal setting for gender-related pay inequality (Baum, 2013). Large numbers of women fill jobs with an overemphasis upon emotional labor, like housekeepers and reception staff, where jobs are devalued socially as well as economically. In contrast, men figure in financial, security, and managerial roles, where pay rates are higher, as are their voices in the making of decisions (Campos-Soria et al., 2018).

Understanding wage discrimination with respect to gender has often been guided by two leading theoretical explanations. The first theory relies upon the human capital framework, arguing that pay differences correlate with educational, occupational experience, skill, and work motivation differences between genders (Becker, 1964). In spite of this, skeptics argue that this framework fails to explain wage differences when incorporating other variables. The other account, drawing upon structural and feminist economics, highlights patriarchal values in occupational environments and systemic discrimination as underlying causes of pay inequality. The theoretical accounts call into question the view of market-oriented explanations as neutral, arguing that institutional discrimination, socialization, and gender stereotypes with respect to women are key in explaining pay inequality (England, 1992; Rubery & Grimshaw, 2011).

This theoretical model is used in the study of gender pay dynamics in five-star hotels in Nairobi County. While apparent heterogeneity in the industry conceals an intricate mixture of both formal and informal operational systems, these systems can sustain inequality even in settings that seemingly emphasize merit-based remuneration.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The explanation of pay discrimination based on gender requires an economic model that can uncover the underlying causes of disparity, including economic and social implications. Research has proposed different theoretical models to explain the existence of pay differences in the context of labor markets.

The Human Capital Theory, explained by Mincer (1974) and Becker (1964), argues that the difference in earnings between the genders mainly originates from the difference in education, experience, and years of employment. It has been advocated that men are likely to participate in continued skill upgrading, hence enabling them to advance in their occupations, while women are likely to face disruptions in their employment paths because of household obligations. Even if variables relating to human capital help explain portions of the gender pay gap, inclusive studies have indicated that these alone cannot fully explain the noticed difference, mainly because gender continues to lag behind in pay despite having the same educational credentials and experience (Blau & Kahn, 2017).

Gender Role Theory presents a theoretical framework that studies the impact of the socialization process and organizational expectations upon the working lives of people. Based both on psychology and sociology, this theory suggests people in childhood are conditioned into certain jobs corresponding with their gender identity. Typically, men become oriented to executive roles and jobs with special skills, while women are largely steered into nurturing roles or service industries. These deeply ingrained social expectations often inform organizational cultures, influencing practice around selection, task allocation, and upward mobility, thus perpetuating gender inequality in organizations (Eagly & Wood, 2012).

Social Role Theory, of particular pertinence to discussions about gender roles, examines how systematically aligned structures and occupational environments both reflect and reinforce gender expectations. This theoretical approach contends that the devaluation of women's work cannot reasonably be explained in terms of individual skills and preferences; instead, it is inextricably tied to large-scale frameworks of social organization and power (Ridgeway, 2011). For example, in the hotel chain industry, the common belief that women have special skills appropriate to pleasant, nurturing, or caregiving roles can result in them being disproportionately represented in customer service roles, while simultaneously barring them from managerial roles.

Dual Labour Market Theory states that the labour market consists of two parts: the primary sector, which is associated with job security, higher wages, and room for career advancement; and the secondary sector, with increased worker mobility, lower pay, and fewer opportunities for betterment. Women, mainly found in service jobs, are largely overrepresented in the secondary sector, thus explaining the continuation of wage inequality even in the presence of existing legal protection (Reich, Gordon & Edwards, 1973).

Different theoretical paradigms offer strong bases on which gender pay inequality can be analyzed in Nairobi-based five-star hotels. Although human capital factors remain pertinent, they should be viewed in conjunction with social norms, deep-rooted prejudices, and the segmented labor market structures typical of Kenya.

2.3 Empirical Analysis

Studies analyzing the gender pay difference have yielded a large body of evidence across different countries, regions within countries, and different industries. Globally, estimates show significant pay differences in favor of males even when considering educational attainment, work experience, and differences in occupations. For example, Blau and Kahn (2017) concluded that around 40% of the gender pay difference in the United States, as calculated from their thorough analysis, cannot be explained by factors associated with human capital alone, indicating that discrimination and gendered stereotypes play a significant role in the problem.

Campos-Soria et al. (2018) argue that major wage gaps exist in the European hospitality industry, particularly with respect to women earning significantly less than their male equivalencies working in the same jobs. The scenario has been equally reported in other studies undertaken in Australia, Canada, and South Asia, where working in hospitality has commonly been characterized by patriarchal structures, albeit supposedly enabling women's participation (Fleming, 2015; Thrane, 2008).

Available evidence for Africa remains scarce but suggests similar trends. Appleton et al. (1999) undertook an investigation with Ghana, Uganda, and Kenya, highlighting persistent gender-related pay inequalities, more notably in the private sector. In the example of Kenya, Mariara (2003) investigated wage determination determinants and discovered that women continuously received inferior pay compared with their male counterparts, in spite of having identical educational credentials and similar occupation. In a further investigation, Koome et al. (2013) contrasted the presence of females within Kenya's hotel sector and surmised that females largely held inferior payment jobs, with few prospects for career improvement.

It should be noted that most current research mainly focuses on general labor market trends or middle-level hospitality settings. There is a sizeable research gap with regard to high-end hospitality venues, including five-star hotels, where pay

structures are usually institutionalized and standardized. This signifies a fundamental gap in the current literature as untested assumptions about professionalism and regulation compliance in this specific context can conceal varied examples of gender-based discriminatory practices.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a quantitative approach where cross-sectional survey design was deployed as a suitable design which allows for the identification of perceived prevalence of the gender pay gap. The study was conducted in Nairobi County which hosts many five star hotels depicting its strategic location that allows for competitive higher wages and allowances variations compared to other counties. Given this, eight (8) hotels were chose with a population of 392 employees based on the recommended staff-to-room ratio of 1:3. Multi-stage sampling which combines stratified, proportionate and simple random sampling was adopted. Corresponding to the number of hotels, the population was segmented into eight strata with proportionate sampling applied to draw out the sample from each hotel. Considering this, 197 respondents were arrived at using Yamane's (1967) formula (n = N / (1 + N(e)^2), with a 95% confidence level). This application resulted in a sample of 198 with simple random sampling applied to reduce biasness and increase the chances of every respondent being selected.

The respondents' information was collected using self-administered structure questionnaires where the independent variable – gender was measured dichotomous (male/female), dependent variable was operationalised as wages and salaries, overtime payments, bonuses, team rewards and individual rewards. The identification of these variables resulting in a pilot of 10 respondents from hotels not included in the study which led to the refinement of the questionnaire to capture the intended purpose. The data collected was analysed using both descriptive (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistical techniques. Inferential statistics involve the use of independent sample t-test to ascertain whether this observed difference in wage means between male and female employees was statistically significant. Importantly, the homogeneity of the variance test was carried out by Levene test to ascertain that the variance of the errors that existed in the male as well as female set was homogenous.

4. RESULTS

Response Rate

A response rate of 57% was generated because 112 questionnaires were completed by the employees out of a total of 198 that were sampled. This percentage is quite satisfactory to the study, and it is within the scholarly provisions.

Descriptive Statistics on Employee Pay and Demographics

Table 1: Social Demographic Characteristics

	Gender	Male	Female	Total
	N	60	52	112
	%	53.6	46.4	100
Age Group	Below 29 Years	22 (51.2%)	21 (48.8%)	43 (38.4%)
	30 -41 Years	26 (54.2%)	22 (45.8%)	48 (42.9%)
	42 Years and above	12 (57.1%)	9 (42.9%)	21 (18.8%)
Marital status	Single	20 (50.0%)	20 (50.0%)	40 (35.7%)
	Married	38 (58.5%)	27 (41.5%)	65 (58.0%)
	Others	2 (28.6%)	5 (71.4%)	7 (6.3%)
Level of education	Certificate or less	23 (62.2%)	14 (37.8%)	37 (33.0%)
	Diploma	26 (61.9%)	16 (38.1%)	42 (37.5%)
	Degree and above	11 (33.3%)	22 (66.7%)	33 (29.5%)
Years of industry experience	Under 5 years	24 (51.1%)	23 (48.9%)	47 (42.3%)
	6-10 years	20 (62.5%)	12 (37.5%)	32 (28.8%)
	11-15 years	10 (45.5%)	12 (54.5%)	22 (19.8%)
	16- 20 Years	5 (50.0%)	5 (50.0%)	10 (9.0%)

Source: Field Study (2025)

Table 1 consisted of 60 male (53.6 %) and 52 female respondents, which implied a rather balanced gender sample was obtained. The degree or higher qualification was achieved by a huge proportion of female employees (66.7%) compared to male employees to whom 33.3% had achieved the status. Male employees on the other hand at 62.2 percent had obtained certificates or below but female employees at 37.8 percent were at the same level.

Table 2: Job Characteristics

	Gender	Male	Female
Department	Housekeeping	36.8%	63.2%
	Front Office	45.5%	54.5%
	Maintenance	90.0%	10.0%
	Food and Beverage Service	45.5%	54.5%
	Operations and Administration	61.5%	38.5%
	Food Production	61.5%	38.5%
Position held	Supervisor	36.0%	64.0%
	Asst. Supervisor	36.4%	63.6%
	Team player	61.8%	38.2%
Employment terms	Permanent	50.0%	50.0%
	Contract	62.5%	37.5%
Length of stay in the hotel	Less than 3 year	50.0%	50.0%
	4 –6 years	55.9%	44.1%
	7 – 10 years	61.9%	38.1%
	11 - 20 years	33.3%	66.7%
Average working hours	Less than 8 hours	60.0%	.0%
	8 Hours	47.6%	40.0%
	More than 8 hours	73.9%	52.4%

Source: Field Study (2025)

It was also observed that supervisory and assistant supervisory positions were more occupied by females with 64 percent and 63.6 percent respectively as shown in Table 2. Nevertheless, a greater number of the male employees were labeled as a larger fraction of the team players (61.8%). The data indicated that the female employees had the highest probabilities of working at the hotels longer and 66.7 percent of the individuals who worked between 11 and 20 years are females. The gender mix in most of the departments was relative well balanced with exception of maintenance in which the usual trend of observation was male dominance (90%) and Housekeeping where the highest chances enjoyed were by women (63.2%). The grazing percentage of females was in the departments of Food and Beverage Service and Front Office departments.

Table 3: Employee Gender Pay Descriptive

		Male	Female
Average Monthly Basic Pay	14,000-17,000	60.0%	40.0%
	18,000- 21,000	65.0%	35.0%
	22,000 –25,000	56.5%	43.5%
	26,000- 29,000	45.5%	54.5%
	30,000 -33,000	57.1%	42.9%
	34,000 - 37,000	36.4%	63.6%
	More than 38,000	30.0%	70.0%
Salaries and wages satisfaction	Strongly Disagree	46.2%	53.8%
	Disagree	48.8%	51.2%
	Somehow Agree	60.0%	40.0%
	Agree	57.1%	42.9%
	Strongly Agree	66.7%	33.3%

Overtime payment satisfaction	Strongly Disagree	45.2%	54.8%
	Disagree	60.7%	39.3%
	Somehow Agree	75.0%	25.0%
	Agree	27.3%	72.7%
	Strongly Agree	61.5%	38.5%
Bonuses payment satisfaction	Strongly Disagree	54.2%	45.8%
	Disagree	50.0%	50.0%
	Somehow Agree	58.1%	41.9%
	Agree	47.6%	52.4%
	Strongly Agree	60.0%	40.0%
Team rewards provided satisfaction	Strongly Disagree	72.7%	27.3%
	Disagree	58.8%	41.2%
	Somehow Agree	48.3%	51.7%
	Agree	46.2%	53.8%
	Strongly Agree	64.3%	35.7%
Personal and individual rewards given on merit satisfaction	Strongly Disagree	60.0%	40.0%
	Disagree	51.6%	48.4%
	Somehow Agree	56.3%	43.8%
	Agree	47.6%	52.4%
	Strongly Agree	50.0%	50.0%

Source: Field Study (2025)

Table 3 showed some specific trends as a result of analysis of average monthly basic pay. Under the lowest income category (Ksh 14,000-17,000), male contributor employees were more than females (60 and 40 respectively). On the other hand, in the highest income category (above Ksh 38,000), there was a significant number of women workers compared to men with 70 percent of this category being female but 30 percent men. As to satisfaction with the components of the pay, men employees were slightly higher satisfied with their salaries, wages, overtime, and bonuses. However, female employees were more pleased with collective and individual incentives.

Table 4: Wages and Benefits Mean Statistics

	Gender	Male	Female	Total
	Min	Mean	Mean	Mean
Average Monthly Basic Pay	1.00	2.80	3.58	3.16
Salaries and wages satisfaction	1.00	2.85	2.61	2.74
Overtime payment satisfaction	1.00	2.39	2.24	2.32
Bonuses payment satisfaction	1.00	2.73	2.71	2.72
Team rewards provided satisfaction	1.00	3.17	3.35	3.25
Personal and individual rewards given on merit satisfaction	1.00	2.49	2.69	2.58

Source: Field Study (2025)

The total mean of the average monthly basic pay was 3.16 with female employee having a high mean of 3.58 compared with the male employees as the latter had a mean of 2.80. These averages on satisfaction of salaries and wages were a total mean of 2.74 with male employees higher than the female employees with a mean of 261, which is lower in comparison to male having a mean of 2.85. Satisfaction with the overtime pay awarded a total mean of 2.32 and had a higher mean of 2.39 among the male employees compared to the females who had a low mean of 2.24. The satisfaction of bonuses paid had a total mean of 2.72 with mean satisfaction of male employees being 2.73 and female employees being 2.71.On satisfaction of team rewards provided, the mean of male employees was lower (3.17) relative to the mean of the female employees (3.35) which was higher.Personal and individual rewards given on merit satisfaction had a total mean of 2.58 with female employees having a higher mean of 2.69 relative to male employees having a mean of 2.49.

Independent Sample T-test Results for Gender Pay Gap

Table 5: Gender Pay Gap Independent Sample T-test

	Group Statistics				
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Average Monthly Basic Pay	Male	60	2.80	1.78	.23
	Female	52	3.58	2.12	.29
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	F	Sig.			
Average Monthly Basic Pay	4.24	.042			
t-test for Equality of Means	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	-2.10	110	.038	-.78	.36
Equal variances not assumed	-2.07	99.9	.040	-.78	.37

Source: Field Study (2025)

The results of Levene test on equality of variances in Table 5 showed that the assumption of homogeneity of variance is unmet (F=4.242, p=.042). As a result, the t-test statistics on the assumption of unequal variances were provided. Results of an independent sample t-test provided statistically significant evidence of a difference between the means of wages between the male and the female employees (Mean Difference = -0.78, t = -2.07, p = 0.040). The observation showed that the average wage that female workers received was very high compared to that of male workers in the sampled five star hotels.

5. DISCUSSIONS

The results proved that prominent gender pay inequality favoured female workers in five stars hotels in Nairobi County. The significant amount of excess in basic monthly wages paid to the female employees as compared to their male counterparts is in direct contrast to the trends reported globally. The finding is inconsistent with Siphambe and Bakwena (2001); Francine et al (2003); and Arbache *et al*. (2010) who showed that the wage gap exists in favour of males, with different percentages ranging from 66 -89 % based on a number of factors. It could be explained by the educational level, occupational positions, working experience, department, overtime, and the age of the research participants. This is an indication that the observed pay gap is not a direct result of gender based pay discrimination of women. Rather, it is symptomatic of the fact that human capital of higher quality and positional benefits enjoyed by the female workforce in this particular, premium fragment of the Kenyan hospitality market is valued more and compensated accordingly. It is not so much a matter of gender as the discriminatory measure in pay gap in this case but a matter of the biases in allocation of highly compensated characteristics between male and female employee cohorts in the sample. This refutes oversimplified, generalized explanations of the gender pay gap and the importance of disaggregated, place-specific analyses cannot be overstated. It means that where meritocratic rules (education, responsibility, experience) are actually pursued in practice, the wage gap would follow the distribution of those qualities, which can result in something that is not linked to general trends in the society. This paper gives evidence showing that in particular areas, high value sectors of the hospitality industry in Nairobi, the detriments of pay are more meritocratic i.e. education, dexterity, responsibility, (position), and experience rather than gender in socio-vacuous association alone. The implication of the results is the importance of context-specific research to prevent blanket generalisations about gender pay gaps. Generalisations like these may mask deeper processes and the fact that often contexts do not conform to stereotypical trends especially in states where development of human capital and fair advancement in career are being realised.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study assessed the pay gap between male and female employees in five star hotels in Nairobi. The results of this study established the reality of gender pay gap. However, the study disputes the suggestion that gender pay gap favours male employees. It also contradicts the literature that denotes that pay gap is anchored solely on gender, as it could be explained by numerous other factors as the results indicated. The study concludes that in as much as pay gap is a reality in five star hotels in Nairobi County, female employees are advantaged. The pay gap in this study can be explained better by level of education, position, experience, supervisory positions and other factors than gender. The study recommends that the hotel management should strategically invest and be attentive to offering continuous professional development and

training programmes to all employees, regardless of gender. Such active practice will develop a very strong work force and further reduce any pay gaps by increasing human capital within the total employee base. Furthermore, clear policies are also necessary to ensure clear and fair chances of career development and promotion at all levels of employees. The opportunities must depend on merit, performance and proven abilities and not due to gender. The above practices will not only continue the current upward trend of female employees witnessed in this study but also provide equitable and fair career paths to everyone.

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