

The Challenges of Tourism Sector Employees in Türkiye: Aegean Region Example

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to reveal the challenges experienced by employees in the tourism sector in Türkiye and to provide suggestions for the remediation of issues. The method of the research is a qualitative research method. Research sample includes 21 tourism employees in the Aegean Region, which is one of the important regions of the tourism sector for Türkiye. A semi-structured interview form has been used for the research. The form contains 6 open-ended questions and 5 demographic variables. Content analysis has been used in the research. According to the results, the most important challenges of employees have become evident as low wage level, long working hours, lack of social-cultural activities, lack of motivation, and insufficient accommodation opportunities in Türkiye. An important point that draws attention here is that the challenges expressed by employees indicate the dimensions of job satisfaction. At this point, it can be said that tourism sector employees have no/insufficient job satisfaction. In this respect, it may be recommended to measure the job satisfaction of tourism sector employees in future research. In order to eliminate or alleviate these challenges, wage policies can be reconsidered and wage increases can be achieved, wage policies specific to the tourism sector can be developed. Regarding the regulation of long working hours, the 4-day working week model is currently implemented in various countries of the world (such as England and Germany). Pilot applications can be made for tourism workers. In addition, social-cultural activities can be organized for employees at regular intervals. Lodgings and houses close to workplaces can be provided by employers to improve accommodation opportunities for their employees. Thus, improving the problems of employees in the tourism sector, which is an important source of income for Türkiye, will increase both the quality of life and job satisfaction of employees.

Keywords: Tourism, Tourism Sector Employees Challenges, Working Life, Occupational Psychology, Türkiye

1. Theoretical Background

According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), the tourism sector is developing increasingly every year. It plays a major role in bringing people and countries together, providing cultural interaction, and being a significant source of income and employment (<https://www.unwto.org/tourism-data/unwto-tourism-dashboard>, 24.01.2024). Particularly, tourism countries can make serious contributions to the country's economy and human resources if they evaluate and develop their tourism sector well (Ntibanyurwa, 2006). Türkiye is also an important tourism country and is among the leading countries such as Spain, Italy, Greece, Caribbean, Hawaii, Maldives, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia, especially in terms of sea tourism. Tourism is an important source of income and employment for Türkiye (TURSAB and <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Turizm-Istatistikleri-III.-Ceyrek:-Temmuz---Eylul,-2023-49604>, 24.01.2024). For these reasons, it is envisaged that it is important to conduct a research in the tourism sector in Türkiye. One of the starting points of this study is that Türkiye is an important tourism country in the world.

Tourism was one of the fastest growing sectors in the world economy in the 1950s (Yanardağ and Avci, 2012), especially after 1980 (Bilgiçli and Altınkaynak, 2016). It is possible to say that the employees of this sector, which has been a significant place in the world economy for approximately 75 years and have a large share among the employees in the world. So, the importance of tourism employees in the development and quality of the tourism sector is also great (Costa, 2004). The need for manpower is relatively higher than other sectors, because tourism is a labour-intensive sector. In countries where the tourism sector stands out, an important factor why these countries are preferred is their human resources and organizational structure (Çeken, 2003). For this reason, employees employed in tourism have an important dynamic for the sector.

When the relevant literature was examined, it was noted that the studies carried out addressed the general problems of the tourism sector (Priestley, 1995; Thomson et al, 1995; Weaver and Elliott, 1996; Ondicho, 2000; Koch and Massyn, 2013; Cholik and Se, 2017, Tagi et al, 2021). On the other hand, it has been noted that some studies focused on employer problems or factors affecting tourism (Aymanıy, 2001; Dilber, 2007; Tutar et al, 2023, Öztürk, 2021). Another issue that is mainly focused on in studies on the tourism sector is how tourism can be developed (Sathiendrakumar and Tisdell, 1989; Carlsen and Hughes, 2008, Tsartas, 2014; Lolos et al., 2021; Leka et al, 2022). These are some of the results revealed by theoretical and applied studies. And that the studies specifically addressing the problems of tourism sector employees and proposing solutions were limited. However, it was stated that the tourism sector is a labor-intensive sector and provides employment to

many people. For this reason, it is thought that it is a deficiency for this field that among the studies conducted, those focusing on the problems of tourism sector employees are in the minority compared to others (development of tourism, problems of tourism, problems of tourism employers). Thus, it is anticipated that this study will be important in filling this gap. When the studies conducted for Türkiye are examined, it is seen that the research conducted in the tourism sector is aimed at general problems or the development of tourism, as in other studies conducted in the world (Gunduz and Hatemi, 2005; Tosun et al, 2009; Bulgan et al, 2019; Saint Akadiri et al, 2020; Ulucak et al, 2020). In this respect, it can be argued that this study will fill a significant gap in the relevant field, as the problems of tourism sector employees in Türkiye are not focused enough on. On the other hand, another deficiency in this research field is that the problems of tourism sector employees are addressed within employment problems (Ball, 1988; Yanardağ and Avcı, 2012; Koçak, 2019; (Özdemir and Erol, 2019; Kaya, 2012; Ekiz Gökçen, 2018). In summary, this research will make important contributions to both the Turkish and the world tourism sector, in the context of tourism sector employees.

2. Methodology/Design

The method of the research is a qualitative research method. Data was obtained through the interview form. A semi-structured interview form was prepared for this research. The interview form consists of 2 parts. There are 6 interview questions in the first part, and 5 questions about demographic characteristics in the second part. Thus, a total of 11 statements are included in the interview form. One of the questions "If you need to evaluate the positive and negative aspects of working in the tourism sector, what would you like to say?". The questions are open-ended. The main question of the research is "What are the problems of hotel employees in the Aegean Region of Türkiye?"

Interviews were conducted face to face, by telephone and online with 21 hotel employees. Sample selection was made according to maximum diversity sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods within the scope of the qualitative research method (Patton, 1990 and Yıldırım, 1999). First, the data was coded, then the themes of the coded data were determined. In the third stage, codes and themes were organized. In the fourth stage, the findings were defined and interpreted (Guba and Lincoln, 1982). In this process, Miles and Huberman's (1994) compliance percentage method was adopted and The compliance percentage of the analysis is 79%.

3. Results

3.1 Demographic Variables

11 of the sample are male and 10 are female employees. 9 people are between the ages of 23-32, 10 employees are between the ages of 33-45. Only two employees are under 22 years old. 9 Employees are high school graduates, the others are primary school, associate and bachelor's degree graduates. 6 Employees have been working for more than 10 years, 11 employees have been working for 10 years or less, and 4 employees have been working for less than 1 year. Daily working hours are on average 10.5 hours.

3.2 Qualitative Analysis Results

According to the data obtained from the interviews, five themes emerged. These are "Wage Level (Low wage level), Working Hours (Long working hours), Workplace Relations (Negative Relations with manager, colleagues and customers sometimes), Workplace Opportunities (Lack of social-cultural activities, insufficient accommodation opportunities), Other (mobbing, lack of motivation)". In order to hide the identities of the participants and represent their ideas in the research, they were given codes as P1, P2, P3, ... P21, respectively.

Theme 1: Wage Level (Low wage level)

The problem most frequently expressed by employees is low wages. 18 out of 21 participants complain about the low wage level. As a result of the interviews, some participants' opinions on this issue are as follows:

- P2: "An employee's biggest wish is salary. If the salary is good, a person's desire to work increases. But if I works for minimum wage, I want to work for the salary I receive. I work reluctantly and without morale..."
- P7: "Wages are low and I think our rights are decreasing day by day. This puts me under stress and I have a hard time making ends meet..."
- P8: "Even when I work overtime, they pay me less than the hours I work. There is a great injustice. If you seek your rights, you may be unemployed, mobbing may be applied. That's why everyone is silent. We are afraid of losing our jobs..."
- P13: "I can't say that I get a very good salary. My salary is not enough and the hotel where I work pays a low wage. I even work overtime, but I am not paid for this overtime..."
- P17: "My social insurance is incomplete, it is incomplete and the money I earn in half the year is not enough for the other half..."
- P21: "When I work overtime, I am paid less than the hours I work, so I do not want to work overtime..."

Theme 2: Working Hours (Long working hours)

One of the results obtained as a result of the research is that employees complain about long working hours. They state that long working hours and uncertainty about starting and finishing work are serious problems for them. Some participants' opinions on this issue are as follows:

- P2: "There is generally no concept of a specific hour at my workplace. It is known that I work 8 hours a day, but I work beyond this hour; because tourism businesses work at an intense pace..."
- P6: "During the season we work 7 days a week, essentially 11 hours a day. This makes 77 hours a week, I don't think it's fair or humane at all..."
- P8: "For example, I normally work from 8 in the morning to 4 in the evening. During this period, the intensity continues without any interruption. It wouldn't be possible to say that I leave at 4 o'clock. Sometimes I work until 5 and I don't get paid. I cannot get paid in monetary terms; I'm just known to be a hard-working staff member, that's all..."
- P11: "You work long hours, it is an extremely negative situation for me..."
- P12: "We work 8 hours a day; However, due to the lack of personnel in our department, we work with 2 personnel and sometimes 3 personnel. The workload is very high during working hours. Working hours are very long and tiring to me, I feel exhausted..."
- P16: "Long, tiring! Depending on the location, permits are canceled due to workload..."

Theme 3: Sometimes negative Relations with manager, colleagues and customers

Another negativity for employees is the communication problems that occur from time to time in the workplace. They claim that they sometimes have communication problems with managers. Some statements on this subject are as follows:

- P4: "Some of our manager friends were very successful in creating difficulties...It is terrible for me!..."
- P7: "However, the words and actions of managers are cursed due to their own ego and narcissism..."
- P8: "My manager practices mobbing, causing poor performance..."
- P10: "Managers are sometimes aggressive. It's demoralizing. My colleagues are good, we have to be polite with customers and be friendly. When I have good customers, I feel happy, and when nervous customers bother me..."
- P12: "How does mobbing cause poor performance in working life..."
- P13: "If you are a manager, you do it all the time, you sacrifice yourself, you run around, get sick one day, have you received a report, in his eyes, you are the one who doesn't work and avoids work..."

Theme 4: Workplace Opportunities (Lack of social-cultural activities, and insufficient accommodation opportunities)

Another result of the research is that the workplace lacks accommodation or social cultural activity support. They expressed these situations as lack of workplace opportunities. Some participants' opinions on this issue are as follows:

P6: "There is no activity or socialization during the season. There is an intense work tempo and long hours of work..."
 P7: "Our workplace definitely does not encourage social or cultural activities..."
 P13: "Unfortunately, they do not spare time for social activities because we are so busy..."
 P20: "The facilities of the lodging I stay in are very inadequate, it needs improvement; I would like to stay in a more humane place. After all, it is a living space..."

Theme 5: Other (mobbing, lack of motivation)

Mobbing etc. for employees. practices and other factors that reduce motivation were also considered as problems. Some participants' opinions on this issue are as follows:

P9: "I always have to be actively working and that's why my family is a little secondary. This is a situation which makes me sad and stressed..."
 P14: "Institutions are reluctant to unionize, this situation affects the staff negatively, and the reason for this is that the staff cannot receive all their rights..."
 P16: "I cannot pay much attention to my private life because of being busy and working too much. I cannot maintain a work-life balance..."

The themes obtained were summarized in a table and this table is as follows.

Table 1: Expression Frequencies by Themes

The Challenges	Expression Frequency
Wage Level (Low wage level)	18
Working Hours (Long working hours)	16
Workplace Relations (Relations with manager, colleagues and customers)	7
Sometimes negative relations with manager, colleagues and customers	11
Other (Mobbing, lack of motivation)	8

As seen in Table 1, the two most important problems of the tourism sector for the participants of this research are low wages and long working hours. The third important theme is sometimes negative relations with managers, colleagues and customers.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

As a result of this research, it was revealed that the wage level was perceived as an important problem by the employees. Low wages are a major problem for tourism industry workers (Marcouiller & Xia, 2008; Lacher & Oh 2012). Previous studies have also concluded that low wages are negative for employees. Wage is one of the most basic elements that ensure employee motivation (Kolaylı & Lorcu, 2017). It is an important reason for job satisfaction (Luthans, 1995). Wage is an extrinsic motivation (Tesone, 2008), and low wages cause employees in the tourism sector to move away from the sector (Yanardağ and Avci, 2012), and because of low wages, people want to quit their jobs and find new jobs (Nasöz and Demirkol, 2014). By making a sectoral regulation regarding the low wage level, unions can develop suggestions for wage improvement demands.

One of the research findings is dissatisfaction with long working hours. It was revealed that the people interviewed worked an average of 10.5 hours per day. This corresponds to a working time of 63 hours per week. This period is higher than the world average (<https://data.oecd.org/emp/hours-worked.htm>, E.T. 11.09.2023). Previous studies have revealed that long working hours have negative effects on employees. Working time is an important factor affecting an employee's productivity and motivation. Not having long working hours increases job satisfaction and motivation and reduces stress (Solanki, 2013). Excessive working hours and lack of flexibility are negatively evaluated by employees (Aydın and Sevim Korkut, 2019). Additionally, a study confirmed that working hours are a strong predictor of job stress, well-being, and depression. Long working hours have a

significant indirect effect on depression through work stress (Hong et al, 2022). These days, some countries are working on reducing working days and hours. Efforts to reduce working hours are also on the agenda in Türkiye.

(<https://www.haberturk.com/mesai-saatleri-dusurulecek-mi-bakan-bilgin-den-son-dakika-calisma-suresi-aciklamasi-3588129>, 08.09.2023).

Another consequence is negative working relationships. Similar results have emerged in previous studies. Negative relationships at various levels in the work environment negatively affect employees' work experiences (Morrison and Nolan, 2007). Negative workplace relationships can cause employees to negatively affect each other and prevent them from doing business (Baron, 1989). It is also a situation that reduces employee motivation (Huberman and Miles, 1994). However, good working relations at the workplace increases the workplace happiness of employees (Turan, 2022). Training and development programs can be planned for tourism sector employees on issues such as good relations and communication in the workplace.

Another result is the lack of social and cultural activity. When organizations offer accommodation or accommodation to their employees, it increases the quality of life of employees and increases business performance (Kensbock et al, 2017). A study revealed that insufficient support by companies for workplace accommodation was perceived negatively by employees and even prevented new job applications (Shahin et al, 2020). Providing accommodation to employees is an important indicator of a fair and favorable working environment(<https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=4slQ6QSmIBEDzFEovLCuW1a0Szab0oXTdlmnsJZZVQfoUYY19kME5pOqRbao%2BukB1Kzn1MMnQL24FFvtIldk%2F%2FR%2FF0GthE%2BTiGSATb%2BUa3WMs0%2F%2BfvfQFg02%2BY%2FTVuqU>, E.T. 11.09.2023). Organizing social activities for sector employees will increase their motivation. Access to accommodation opportunities will improve their quality of life. In conclusion, improving the problems of employees in the tourism sector, which is an important source of income for Türkiye, will increase both the quality of life of employees and customer satisfaction.

As a general result, it is noteworthy that the problems stated by the participants are expressions/dimensions of job satisfaction (Cooper et al, 1989; Lee et al, 2007). Therefore, future research can be designed to include quantitative studies such as measuring the job satisfaction of tourism sector employees and addressing the problems in this context.

4.1 The Theoretical and Practical Implication

This study revealed the challenges experienced by tourism sector employees with the example of Türkiye, a tourism country. It will be an important resource for both theory and practice in developing solutions to these challenges. This research will improve tourism research theoretically and shed light on other studies to be conducted in the future. Examining the problems of employees, especially in the tourism sector, with scientific data will be an important theoretical resource. For practice, this research will be a good resource for tourism sector managers in tourism countries to raise awareness about the problems of their employees and to take action.

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