

Social Negotiation and Agency among Women Tourism Workers in Lombok

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Abstract

Tourism has expanded paid work opportunities for women in Lombok, Indonesia, but the conditions under which they are able to retain such work are poorly understood. This qualitative study examines how women tourism workers negotiate the restrictions they meet in their families, workplaces, and communities, and what these negotiations enable and cost them. Data came from semi-structured interviews, conducted between August and October 2025, with twelve women working in guiding, travel coordination, homestays, hotels, and food service, interviews with four key informants, and field observation. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The women described four kinds of practice: presenting themselves modestly, involving male relatives or avoiding night work, describing their work in religious or family terms, and contributing to village activities. These practices helped them keep their jobs and, in some accounts, gain recognition from neighbours and village leaders. They also carried costs, including lost income and dependence on relatives, and acceptance by others did not always mean greater control over earnings, mobility, or decisions. The study therefore distinguishes agency, social acceptance, and empowerment. It suggests that employers, tourism associations, and village institutions share responsibility for widening women's options, so that securing acceptance does not rest on women alone.

Keywords: women's agency; social negotiation; empowerment; women tourism workers; gender and tourism; Lombok

INTRODUCTION

Background

Tourism is one of the few sectors in which women form the majority of the

workforce. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2019) reports that women make up 54% of people employed in tourism, compared with 39% in the wider economy, yet they earn 14.7% less than men in



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the sector. A study of 21 APEC economies likewise found that the segregation of women in tourism employment persists (Hutchings et al., 2020). For this reason, gender equality is now discussed as a condition of sustainable tourism and not simply as a by-product of growth (Alarcón & Cole, 2019). The same literature cautions that paid work in tourism does not by itself amount to empowerment, because income may rise while women's control over time, mobility, and decisions remains limited (Cole, 2018; Ferguson, 2011; Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020).

Indonesia shows a similar pattern. The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy stated in February 2024 that 54.22% of the country's tourism workers are women (Antara News, 2024), and Law No. 18 of 2025, which amends the 2009 Tourism Law, lists women's empowerment among the aims of tourism village development (Undang-Undang Nomor 18 Tahun 2025). Empirical studies nevertheless show that participation takes different forms and yields uneven results. Balinese women employed on cruise ships work mostly in support positions, although the work raises their income and their standing in the family (Darma Oka et al., 2015). In Penglipuran, women's empowerment in tourism depends on customary rules, education, and social capital (Dianita & Saskara, 2024), and the business decisions of female tourism entrepreneurs in Bali are shaped by culture and family heritage (Tajeddini et al., 2017). The number of women employed therefore says little about the terms on which they work.

Lombok is a useful setting for examining these terms. Tourism on the island has expanded through the Mandalika Special Economic Zone, designated a national super-priority destination, alongside the older resort area of Senggigi and trekking around Mount Rinjani, and the province has promoted halal tourism through Regional Regulation No. 2 of 2016 (Peraturan Daerah Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat Nomor 2 Tahun 2016). This growth has

created jobs for women in places where their work was previously concentrated in the household and in agriculture (Syafuddin et al., 2020, 2023). Sasak custom (*adat*), Islam, and "the community" should not, however, be read as a single fixed system that restricts women in the same way everywhere. Local Islamic practice, customary rules, and state law operate side by side on the island, and women negotiate among them (Platt, 2017). Conditions also differ from one place to another. In the customary hamlet of Sade, village rules (*awig-awig*) regulate women's dress and movement, and guiding is done mainly by men while women weave (Oktaviani, 2026). In Tetebatu, by contrast, women work as tour and trekking guides and a woman chairs the village tourism management body (Fatriani et al., 2024). In Mandalika, women's access to jobs depends on employers' preferences, working hours, and parental permission (Syafuddin et al., 2020), and family support is a key factor in whether women take part (Pattaray et al., 2025). The restrictions women face thus vary between families, workplaces, and villages, and they change over time.

The problem addressed in this study arises where the demands of tourism employment intersect with these expectations. Guiding, hotel marketing, and restaurant work require public visibility, travel, contact with unrelated men, and evening hours. In the accounts analysed here, restrictions were not experienced as a general cultural rule. They were tied to particular relationships and settings: neighbours' remarks after a day trip with male tourists, gossip about late-night assignments, and village disapproval of a woman in a managerial role. The same relationships could also provide support, as when a brother accompanied a guide on tours or village leaders later invited a woman manager to speak at a community meeting. Men continue to dominate tourism employment in the area (Syafuddin et al., 2020). Fieldwork for this study found few women working as guides, although several workers and key

informants reported that visitors, particularly women, sometimes ask for female staff. Women respond with practices such as dressing modestly, working alongside a male relative, or declining night work. These practices protect their reputation, but they may also limit income or create dependence on others, and it is not yet clear when they widen women's options and when they only allow women to keep the job.

Previous research has established several points on which this study builds. Mahmood (2005) showed that agency can be exercised through inhabiting religious and moral norms and not only through resisting them. Tucker (2007) described how women in a Turkish tourism village re-worked notions of shame in order to take up paid work. Later studies in Fiji (Movono & Dahles, 2017), Nepal (Hillman & Radel, 2022), and Jordan (Alrwajfah et al., 2020) likewise show that women's involvement in tourism is worked out in relation to local gender expectations. Three questions remain open. First, most of this evidence concerns entrepreneurs, a single site, or a single occupation, and far less is known about employees across different tourism jobs. Second, culture and religion are commonly treated as one barrier, with little attention to how constraints differ between the household, the workplace, and the wider community. Third, negotiation is often read as empowerment without asking what it costs. Kabeer's (1999) distinction between resources, agency, and achievements suggests that the ability to act strategically does not guarantee a change in outcomes. Research on Lombok has so far concentrated on job types, barriers, and motivation in Mandalika (Pattaray et al., 2025; Syafruddin et al., 2020, 2023) or on single villages (Fatriani et al., 2024; Oktaviani, 2026), and it has not compared how women in different occupations and locations handle these constraints.

Addressing this gap matters for practical as well as analytical reasons. Tourism employment in Lombok is

expanding under national priority programmes and a legal framework that now names women's empowerment as an aim. Yet the recommendations in existing Lombok studies centre largely on improving women's skills, motivation, and competence (Pattaray et al., 2025; Syafruddin et al., 2020, 2023), an approach that has been criticised for framing women as the ones who are lacking (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020). If the relationships and workplaces in which restrictions arise are left out, policy may add to the burden on women while employers, families, and village institutions stay as they are. There is an analytical risk as well: without attention to costs, accounts of negotiated agency can overstate how much has changed.

This study therefore asks: How do female tourism workers in Lombok negotiate the restrictions they encounter in their families, workplaces, and communities while building professional identities and maintaining social legitimacy, and what do these negotiations enable and cost them? It draws on interviews with twelve women working in guiding, travel coordination, homestays, hotels, and food service, interviews with four key informants, and field observation. The analysis distinguishes between agency, social acceptance, and empowerment. Its contribution is to specify the conditions under which working within moral expectations widens women's options and those under which it mainly preserves their employment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender and Tourism Work

Tourism employment is organised by gender (Kinnaird & Hall, 1994; Sinclair, 1997; Swain, 1995). Women are often concentrated in lower-paid service roles and earn less than men (Hutchings et al., 2020; Muñoz-Bullón, 2009), although tourism can also give women new visibility and income (Ferguson, 2011). In Indonesia, women's involvement varies across cultural settings, and two studies in this

journal show how work opportunities and social institutions shape what women gain. Darma Oka et al. (2015) found that Balinese women employed on cruise ships work mostly in support positions, although the work raises their income and their standing in the family. Dianita and Saskara (2024) showed that women's empowerment in the tourism village of Penglipuran depends on customary rules, education, and social capital. These settings differ from the Lombok cases. Cruise-ship work takes women away from the village for the length of a contract, and empowerment in Penglipuran is shaped by a strong customary village institution, whereas the women in this study work in hotels, restaurants, and guiding while living among the people who judge their conduct. Neither study examines how women handle social expectations in day-to-day work or what doing so costs them.

Women's Agency in Patriarchal Societies

Agency refers to a person's capacity to act within structural limits (Giddens, 1984). In patriarchal settings, women's agency often takes the form of negotiation and accommodation rather than open confrontation (Mahmood, 2005). Feminist scholars have argued that agency should not be equated only with rebellion and that it can involve strategic engagement with dominant norms (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Cornwall & Edwards, 2010). Research on gender and tourism has examined how women's work and self-representation are shaped by wider discourses of gender and culture (Aitchison, 2001; Tucker, 2007). Seen in this way, social negotiation is a continuing effort to balance gender expectations against the demands of paid work.

The Lombok Context: Religion, Culture, and Gender Norms

Most of Lombok's population is Sasak and Muslim, and both *adat* (custom) and Islam inform ideas about female modesty and domestic responsibility. These

ideas are not applied uniformly. Local Islamic practice, customary rules, and state law operate side by side, and women negotiate among them (Platt, 2017). Expectations also differ between villages: in the customary hamlet of Sade, village rules regulate women's dress and movement (Oktaviani, 2026), while in Tetebatu women work as tour and trekking guides (Fatriani et al., 2024). Workplaces differ as well. In the Mandalika area, women's access to jobs depends on employers' preferences, working hours, and parental permission (Syafruddin et al., 2020), and family support affects whether women take up tourism work (Pattaray et al., 2025). Women who work in tourism may therefore attract scrutiny from some neighbours, relatives, or employers and not from others. This study treats these relationships, and not a single cultural system, as the setting in which restrictions arise.

Conceptual Framework: Social Negotiation and Agency

This study draws on Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus and Mahmood's (2005) account of moral agency to read the practices of women tourism workers as negotiated adaptation. The women work within gender and religious norms more often than against them, and they reinterpret values such as modesty, respectability, and service so that these fit their jobs. Following Kabeer (1999), the framework keeps three concepts apart. Agency is a woman's capacity to define her goals and act on them, including through bargaining and negotiation. Social acceptance is other people's approval of her work. Empowerment is an expansion of her ability to make strategic life choices, which depends on resources and is reflected in outcomes as well as in action.

The three do not necessarily move together. A woman may act strategically and still lose income or remain restricted, and approval from neighbours or village leaders does not by itself show that she has more control over her life. In the analysis,

agency was identified where a participant described a deliberate choice among alternatives. Acceptance was identified where a participant reported a change in how others treated her. Empowerment was claimed only where there was evidence of wider options, such as control over earnings, freedom to travel and take assignments, or a say in household and community decisions. The costs of each accommodation were recorded alongside its benefits.

METHOD

This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews and field observation as its data sources, with documents consulted as background only, and the material was examined with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A qualitative design suited the research question because the study concerns how women understand and handle the restrictions they meet in everyday work (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The analysis looked for patterns of meaning across participants and did not follow the case-by-case procedure of interpretative phenomenological analysis. The study population was women employed in tourism and hospitality in Lombok, not tour guides alone. Twelve women took part. Their occupations included tour guiding, homestay management, travel coordination, hotel marketing, cooking, and restaurant management, and they worked in the Senggigi coastal area of West Lombok, in Central Lombok, and in the area around Mount Rinjani. All were aged between 20 and 45 and had at least one year of experience in tourism work. To reduce the risk of identification in small workplaces, participant characteristics are reported at the group level, and individual participants are referred to by codes (P1–P12) with only their occupation and broad area. Four key informants were interviewed separately: a tourism academic from the University of Mataram, a local religious leader, a senior representative of a travel agency, and a tourism community leader. Their

interviews provided context and are not counted among the twelve participants.

Participants were selected purposively and recruited through professional networks, local tourism associations, and referrals. Initial contact was made through regional tour guide associations and managers of local tourism businesses, who distributed information about the study. Early participants then put the researchers in touch with other women who met the criteria (snowball sampling), which gave access to a range of roles and experiences across the sector. The age range confined the study to women in the early and middle stages of their working lives. Twelve interviews were judged sufficient because data saturation was reached: later interviews repeated the practices, coping strategies, and narratives identified in earlier ones and produced no new substantive categories or themes. The variation in occupations and sites, more than the number of participants, contributed to the depth and variation of the material. Because only women currently working in tourism were recruited, women who could not enter the sector or who had left it are not represented, and accounts in which negotiation failed are likely to be under-represented. These limits are discussed in the conclusion.

The study was approved by LPPM-STP (ethical approval number 014/REA/LPPM-STP/VIII/2025). Because participants described experiences that bear on their reputation in small communities, this article does not use their names. They are referred to by codes (P1–P12) with only their occupation and broad area, and the names of workplaces and villages are not reported.

The three study areas differ as workplaces. Senggigi is an established resort area with hotels, restaurants, and tour operators, where women work in formal businesses alongside colleagues and guests from outside their village. Tourism around Mount Rinjani centres on trekking and village-based services, so work there takes place closer to the community in which

women live. Central Lombok includes the Mandalika Special Economic Zone, where large-scale development has created new hotel and service jobs (Syafuruddin et al., 2020). The findings note where these differences in workplace and community setting matter.

Figures 1–3 illustrate the kinds of tourism work in which women in Lombok are engaged: hotel sales and marketing, tourism event organisation, and tour guiding. The photographs are included for illustration only and are not linked to the coded participants (P1–P12).



Figure 1. A woman sales manager at work in a hotel in Lombok, illustrating women's employment in hotel sales and marketing. (Source: Authors' documentation; published with the permission of the person(s) shown)



Figure 2. Women tourism business actors, including an event organiser, at the Tourism and Creative Economy Marketing Sales Mission II, Mataram, Lombok (2024). (Source: Authors' documentation; published with the permission of the person(s) shown)



Figure 3. A woman tour guide accompanying a group of domestic tourists on a bus tour in Lombok. (Source: Authors' documentation; published with the permission of the person(s) shown)

Fieldwork took place in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, from 10 August to 10 October 2025. The interviews were conducted by the researchers, lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, and were held in Indonesian and Sasak. They covered motivation for entering tourism work, views on gender and work roles, experiences of stigma, and the ways participants responded. The interviews were transcribed and then translated into English by a sworn translator. Expressions with a specific local meaning, such as *perempuan bebas* and *dakwah kecil*, are given in the original language with an English gloss. Observation took place during guiding sessions, community meetings, and local festivals, and field notes recorded what was said together with gestures, tone, and setting (Emerson et al., 2011). Local tourism policy documents, media coverage, and community tourism guidelines were consulted as background on how

women's roles in tourism are publicly described. They are not treated as a separate data source in the findings.

Analysis followed the phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing and defining themes, and writing up. NVivo 12 was used to organise transcripts and field notes, and interpretation was carried out by the researchers. Initial codes were generated from the data and then organised under two analytical lenses taken from the conceptual framework: agency and empowerment, and social negotiation and cultural adaptation. For example, P4's statement that guiding is a way of "showing the beauty of Islam through behaviour" was coded as describing work in religious terms. With related codes, such as dressing modestly at work, it contributed to the theme of religion and respectability reported in

previous section. Each theme was then checked against the distinction between agency, acceptance, and empowerment set out in previous section.

The researchers' own assumptions about religion, gender, and tourism work may have shaped what participants chose to say and how their accounts were read. Reflexivity does not remove this influence (Finlay, 2002). In this article it is addressed by separating what participants reported from the authors' interpretation, by stating where an interpretation rests on a single account, and by reporting the costs of each practice as well as its benefits.

The twelve women's interviews are the main data. Key informant interviews and field notes were used to place these accounts in context, and the findings indicate where an interpretation draws on them. Where no other source was available to check a participant's account of change, this is stated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tourism as a Gendered Field and the Paradox of Empowerment

The accounts collected for this study suggest that tourism work in Lombok, although promoted as inclusive, remains shaped by gendered expectations. For the participants, taking a tourism job meant more than entering a growing labour market, because it involved negotiating ideas that place women's work mainly in the home. Sinclair (1997) and Ferguson (2011) observed that tourism growth in developing regions opens employment to women without necessarily altering gender hierarchies, which are often reconfigured rather than eliminated.

Participants described a setting in which the visibility their jobs require can conflict with what neighbours and relatives expect of women. Contact with male and foreign tourists is part of the work, and participants reported that it could lead others to question their respectability. Their earnings supported their households, yet they

described their standing as dependent on continued approval. P1, a guide in Senggigi, said that neighbours called her *perempuan bebas* ("a loose woman") after she accompanied male tourists on a day-long trip. She responded by asking her younger brother to assist during tours, which allowed her to present the work as a family activity. This was a deliberate choice among the options she saw, and in that sense an exercise of agency.

Her account does not show whether bookings, income, or neighbours' attitudes changed after the arrangement began, so it should not be read as a resolved case. The arrangement also has costs. It makes her ability to work depend on a male relative's time and willingness, and it leaves in place the expectation that a woman should not travel with male guests alone. In Mahmood's (2005) terms, P1 acts through the moral code and not against it. That shows agency. It does not by itself show empowerment, because the evidence concerns keeping her job and not a widening of her options.

Cases like this caution against equating empowerment with open resistance, and equally against treating every accommodation as empowerment. In these accounts, the women weigh respectability, livelihood, and moral standing against one another, and the balance they reach can be revised. This is consistent with feminist tourism scholarship that stresses the role of context in gendered empowerment (Ferguson, 2011; Tucker, 2007) and with work that treats empowerment as something negotiated in everyday relationships (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010).

Negotiated Agency: Between Resistance and Accommodation

Participants rarely described open resistance. They described small, repeated adjustments. P2, a hotel marketing employee in the Senggigi area, wears a hijab and a traditional *songket* scarf when greeting and accompanying guests. Her dress meets local expectations of modesty and

also presents Lombok's culture to guests. Three readings need to be kept apart: dress as religious commitment, dress as a professional expectation, and dress as strategic self-presentation. Clothing alone cannot establish which motive dominates, nor whether it increases the trust of guests or neighbours, who were not interviewed on this point. Read with Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus, the practice can be understood as a disposition that she also puts to professional use. P3, a chef in Central Lombok, avoids late-night assignments in order to prevent gossip and social suspicion. This reduces her income. Her case shows a negotiation that preserves employment and reputation at a personal cost: she chooses, but among options that the threat of gossip has already narrowed.

These examples show that the participants' experiences do not reflect a steady movement toward greater freedom. Their position is adjusted repeatedly as circumstances change, through everyday relationships of power, culture, and personal aspiration (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010). The practices described here neither fully conform to prevailing gender norms nor reject them. They use those norms to secure legitimacy, and in several cases they do so at the price of income or independence. P3's reduced income is the clearest case in the data of a negotiation that preserves reputation at a direct economic cost.

Religion, Morality, and the Politics of Respectability

Participants spoke of modesty (*kesopanan*) and family honour (*harga diri keluarga*) as values by which their conduct is judged. Several did not see tourism work as incompatible with these values and described it in ethical or religious terms. P4, a guide, said that she begins her tours with the greeting "Assalamu'alaikum" and introduces visitors to local customs and Islamic hospitality. She called this *dakwah kecil* ("small-scale religious outreach") and described it as "showing the beauty of Islam through behaviour." This is P4's

description of her own practice and of what it means to her. Her account does not show how relatives, neighbours, or guests responded, so the practice is evidence of how she justifies and presents her work, not evidence that the community accepts it.

This practice resembles what Mahmood (2005) calls pious agency, in which women act by inhabiting religious discourses creatively and not by rejecting them. Tucker (2007) describes a related process in Göreme, Turkey, where women's entry into tourism work involved renegotiating notions of shame. In both settings, women seek to be seen as respectable (Skeggs, 1997) while taking up paid work in public.

By describing their work in the language of respectability, these participants present themselves as pious, knowledgeable, and culturally grounded, in contrast to the stereotype of the female tourism worker as morally suspect. For them, religion and morality serve as resources as well as constraints. The evidence concerns how the women understand and present their work. How far others accept this presentation is examined in the next section.

Community Perception, Social Acceptance, and Cultural Change

Some participants reported that the way others treated them changed over time. P5, a restaurant manager in the Mount Rinjani area, recalled that people in her village at first opposed her work and accused her of "acting like a man." She said that after she used part of her income to support youth activities and the renovation of the mosque, village leaders began to acknowledge her, and she was later invited to speak at a village meeting on tourism development. Her account shows how she understands her own experience: recognition followed visible contribution. It is one person's recollection, and this article does not present independent evidence, such as other accounts or dated observations, of a wider change in village attitudes. The

claim is therefore limited to her experience. It also raises a question the data cannot answer, namely whether men in comparable jobs are expected to earn recognition in the same way.

Several participants said that girls in their villages now show interest in studying foreign languages or tourism. These are the participants' impressions, and no girls or young women outside tourism were interviewed. They are best read as perceived aspirations, which may reflect the standing that participants feel they have gained (Bourdieu, 1990), and not as evidence of generational change.

Tourism, Modernity, and Cultural Hybridity

The accounts also touch on a division of tasks. Research on tourism employment shows that women are concentrated in particular occupations (Hutchings et al., 2020), often in roles involving care, aesthetic presentation, and emotional labour. Participants described a similar tendency in Lombok: women are more often assigned to cultural storytelling, handicraft tours, and culinary activities, and men to trekking and diving. This pattern comes from interview accounts, not from employment records, and it is not a fixed rule. In Tetebatu, for example, women work as trekking guides (Fatriani et al., 2024). The guides in this study presented their knowledge of local folklore, textiles, and religious history as a source of standing with guests and with their communities. For them, a role often regarded as secondary has become a source of authority, although the division itself may still restrict the range of work open to them.

In this sense, the women act as intermediaries who explain local culture to visitors while presenting themselves to their own communities as its custodians.

Reframing Empowerment through Local Values

The cases suggest that empowerment should not be equated only with

autonomy or open defiance. We use the terms modesty (*kesopanan*) and service to the community (*pengabdian*) to summarise values that appear in the accounts discussed above: modesty in P2's dress and P3's avoidance of night work, religious purpose in P4's guiding, and service in P5's contributions to village activities. These values do not appear in every account, and a shared moral framework cannot be inferred from these cases. Where participants did draw on them, they were not seeking to overturn gender norms. They were seeking a workable position within those norms. Abu-Lughod (1990) cautions against romanticising such acts as resistance and proposes reading them as a diagnostic of the power relations in which women act. Read in this way, the practices reported here show where pressure comes from (neighbours, relatives, employers, and village leaders) as much as they show the women's resourcefulness.

Comparison with the two studies discussed in previous section, helps to place these findings. Among Balinese women working on cruise ships, employment raised income and standing in the family even though most held support positions (Darma Oka et al., 2015). In Penglipuran, customary rules, education, and social capital were found to determine women's empowerment in tourism (Dianita & Saskara, 2024). The Lombok accounts agree with both studies that social expectations and customary institutions shape what women gain from tourism work. They differ in two respects. First, the women in this study live and work among the people who judge their conduct, so reputation is negotiated daily and close to home, whereas work at sea takes place away from the village. Second, the two earlier studies report the positions women hold and the determinants of empowerment, while the interviews here show the practices through which women respond to expectations and the costs attached to them, such as P3's lost income and P1's reliance on her brother. Higher income or

family standing should therefore not be assumed to bring wider choices unless the terms of the accommodation are also examined.

Implications

This section sets out implications that follow from the findings. It separates what the study observed from what it proposes, and it names who could act on each proposal.

1. Policy Implications

The findings show that restrictions arose in specific relationships and settings: neighbours' judgements of a woman who travels with male guests (P1), gossip about evening work (P3), and village opposition to a woman manager (P5). Policy can respond to these settings directly. Provincial and district tourism offices could include women's safety and working conditions in guide licensing and in the standards, they set for tourism businesses and could record women's share of guiding and supervisory positions so that change can be measured. Village governments and tourism awareness groups (*Pokdarwis*) could give women workers a regular place in tourism deliberations, which in P5's case happened only informally. These are proposals; the study did not observe their effects.

2. Economic Implications

Women are under-represented in parts of Lombok's tourism workforce, particularly in guiding. Several participants and key informants said that some visitors, especially women, ask for female staff, and they attributed this to comfort and ease of communication. Tourists were not interviewed, so this is the perception of workers and industry informants and not a measurement of market demand. If the perception is accurate, the small number of women in guiding would represent unused capacity.

The interviews do not measure economic outcomes, and the following points are potential implications that remain to be tested. For individual women, tourism employment provides income and skills,

which may support household welfare where they control their earnings. A larger number of women workers might broaden the services on offer and, if visitors do prefer female staff in some settings, might improve satisfaction and repeat visits. Any such effects on Lombok's competitiveness, and any multiplier effects through household and community spending, would need to be established with visitor surveys and economic data.

3. Social and Cultural Implications

Social legitimacy affects whether women can remain in tourism work. Their visibility, mobility, and contact with tourists are judged by neighbours, relatives, employers, and village leaders, and these judgements can facilitate or constrain their work. In the cases reported here, the effort of securing legitimacy fell on the women themselves, through modest dress, accompaniment by relatives, refusal of night work, and personal donations. These practices should not be turned into recommendations, since that would make acceptance something women must earn through modesty or unpaid service.

The practical implication is to shift part of that effort to institutions. Employers can provide safe transport and fair scheduling for evening work, so that refusing night shifts does not mean losing income. Guide associations and tour operators can set rules for mixed-gender assignments and procedures for handling harassment and complaints, which would reduce the need for a male relative's presence. Village governments and tourism awareness groups can include women workers in tourism deliberations as a matter of course. Some participants believed that their example encourages girls to consider tourism careers. This remains an impression that later research could examine.

4. Theoretical Implications

The findings have implications for how agency and empowerment are related in tourism research. Kabeer (1999) defines

empowerment as the expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices where that ability was previously denied, and analyses it through three connected dimensions: resources, agency, and achievements. Her account of agency already includes bargaining and negotiation as well as resistance, so the Lombok cases do not contradict it. They extend it in one respect. Negotiation aimed at social acceptance can preserve a resource (the job and its income) while leaving achievements, in the sense of wider choices, unchanged or even reduced. In these cases acceptance by others works as a condition of access to resources, and it should not be read as an outcome of empowerment.

The more specific contribution concerns the conditions under which working within moral expectations widens women's options. Negotiated and context-dependent agency is already established in the literature (Mahmood, 2005; Tucker, 2007), and the study does not claim it as new. Across the cases, three conditions appear to matter. The first is who controls the accommodation: P1's arrangement depends on her brother, whereas P2's dress appears to be under her own control. The second is whether the accommodation reduces earnings, as P3's refusal of night work does. The third is whether recognition comes from people with authority to change a woman's position, as when village leaders invited P5 to speak. Where the woman controls the practice, loses no income, and gains recognition from those with authority, negotiation is more likely to widen her options. Where these conditions are absent, it mainly preserves employment. These propositions come from a small number of cases and need testing. The study does not offer an intersectional analysis. The cases differ in occupation, age, and family position, and these differences probably affect which accommodations are available, but the sample is too small to analyse them systematically.

CONCLUSION

This study asked how women tourism workers in Lombok negotiate the restrictions they encounter in their families, workplaces, and communities, and what these negotiations enable and cost them. The twelve women interviewed described restrictions that arose in particular relationships, with neighbours, relatives, employers, and village leaders, and not from a single cultural rule. They responded by dressing modestly, working alongside male relatives, declining night work, describing their work in religious or family terms, and contributing to village activities. These practices enabled them to keep their jobs and, in some accounts, to gain recognition. In several cases they also cost income and independence. The practices are evidence of agency. They are evidence of empowerment only where a woman's control over earnings, mobility, or decisions has grown, and the data show this for some participants and not for others.

The study has limitations that restrict what can be claimed. Only women currently working in tourism were recruited, so those who could not enter the sector or who left it are absent, and failed negotiations are probably under-represented. The participants work in different occupations, and twelve interviews do not allow systematic comparison between them. Fieldwork was limited to selected areas, and conditions elsewhere on the island may differ. Accounts of change, such as P5's, are retrospective and were not observed as they happened. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian and Sasak and translated into English, and some meaning may have been lost. The study has no longitudinal evidence. For these reasons the findings do not support claims about attitudes across Lombok or about lasting empowerment. They describe how this group of women manages restrictions at present.

The recommendations follow from where the restrictions arose and are addressed to institutions. (1) Hotels, restaurants, and tour operators should provide safe transport and fair scheduling for evening work, so that women are not forced to choose between reputation and income. (2) Guide associations and operators should adopt procedures for mixed-gender assignments, harassment, and complaints, so that a woman's ability to work does not depend on a male relative's presence. (3) Local government and tourism authorities should widen women's access to guide certification and licensing and monitor women's share of guiding and supervisory positions. (4) Village governments and tourism awareness groups should include women workers in tourism decision-making, without making recognition conditional on donations or unpaid service. (5) Awareness activities should be directed at employers, families, and community leaders and not at women's conduct. (6) Further research should include women who left or could not enter tourism, follow workers over time, and compare occupations. Each measure is intended to widen the choices available to women, and none asks them to earn acceptance through modesty or community service.

AI USE STATEMENT

During revision, the authors used Claude (Anthropic), a generative AI assistant, for language editing, for restructuring and redrafting sections in response to the reviewers' comments, and for checking in-text citations against the reference list. The tool was not used to collect, generate, or alter research data. The authors reviewed all AI-assisted text against the interview material and the cited sources and take full responsibility for the content of this article.

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