

Gendered food bias in central rural North Indian homes: Implications for hospitality in Aotearoa

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In most societies and organisations, gender plays an important role, strongly influencing how individuals are treated. It is common for women to experience bias in all spheres of life, and have limited access to opportunities and resources. While this does not suggest that men do not face prejudices, in most cases, male values are normally those privileged. In contrast, women must often conform to cultural ideologies of submission, appearance, approachability, and cooperation [1]. One thinks of hospitality, particularly in the home, as extending to all family members. However, a recent AUT study showed that in some cultures, there is a stark contrast between the hospitality extended to women, compared to that extended to men in domestic social settings. This is particularly evident around food.

The AUT study explored gendered food bias in central rural North Indian homes. The primary researcher took a feminist perspective, which intrinsically views women's disadvantage as a consequence of their subordinate societal position as women [2]. Data were collected from a series of YouTube food preparation videos that demonstrated the routines of the family lives of rural women in their domestic settings. These videos were purposively selected to provide detailed insights of everyday domestic activities around food preparation and consumption in the home, as carried out by women and girls. Although the data were from a contrasting culture and background, the findings mirror important equity issues faced by women in the Aotearoa hospitality industry.

The study highlighted three important themes: 1) male domination; 2) the roles of service for women; and 3) traditional behavioural norms for women. The data revealed a male-dominated hierarchy, in which men exerted authority over the women in their family, regardless of their ages or the relationships between them. In the food cycle of production, service, and consumption of food, there was evidence of a gender bias that disadvantaged women and privileged men. Women's subordinate roles in the family hierarchy involved hard labour over many hours, with little or no

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acknowledgement or appreciation from those at the apex, who consumed the products of the women's and girls' labour.

These themes are replicated in the gendered norms that limit women's careers in the hospitality industry. Women are horizontally and vertically segregated into jobs at the lowest levels of hospitality hierarchical structures [3]. Organisational practices reinforce the stereotypical roles for which woman are deemed more suitable. At the highest levels of management, exclusionary processes limit women's career progressions compared to those of their male peers [1]. In North Indian society, traditional norms of behaviour were shown to dictate women's social roles as caretakers of the household, and pressurised them into ignoring their nutritional needs in favour of those of their fathers, husbands, and sons. In many hospitality organisations, women are still defined by their traditional biological role, and considered less flexible, and more emotional than are men [4], and therefore, less suitable for leadership positions.

The findings of the study suggest the norms that govern gender relations in the regional Indian rural society studied, and those of the hospitality industry, duplicate each other in fundamental ways. Women were concentrated at the lowest level of the hierarchy, accruing the social and economic penalties associated with low status roles. This study, although set in a different environment, has implications for hospitality practitioners and researchers in Aotearoa. A hospitable organisation offers equal opportunities to all employees, regardless of their gender, and a hospitable society extends hospitality to all its residents, regardless of their identity or social status. When the warmth and hospitality of hospitality establishments is offered to guests, it is important to be sensitive to the interests and needs of all individuals, regardless of their position in the social hierarchy. In the true spirit of hospitableness, the guest is queen, if only for a short while.

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The full research project can be accessed at <http://hdl.handle.net/10292/13268>

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