



## The stress from my tour leading job: Differences between genders

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### ABSTRACT

This study compared job stressors between female and male Tour Leaders (TLs) operating in South America, mainly Peru and Bolivia. In 2017, 82 TLs were surveyed about their level of stress on 30 items representing four sources of job stress: job roles, nature of the job, tourists' attitudes and behaviors, and external factors. Statistical tests determined that female TLs perceive higher levels of stress from sexual harassment, natural disasters, facilitating the tourists-locals interaction, having limited free time during trips and constant packing/unpacking. Male TLs reported higher levels of stress when tourists supersede their authority. These results indicate the need to amend policy and managerial guidelines to increase gender equity in the tour leading profession.

### 1. Introduction

Tour Leaders (TLs) are the operators' representatives who travel with groups to ensure that itineraries run smoothly and tourists are safe and satisfied with the trip (Luoh & Tsauro, 2014). As such, TLs undertake many responsibilities beyond escorting tour members or on-site interpretation. They also manage tour logistics, entertain passengers, and serve as liaison for all actors involved in the creation of the tourism experience, including local tour guides, suppliers and host communities, even turning into tourists' psychologists and surrogate parents in situations of crisis (Bowie & Chang, 2005; Curtin, 2010; Tsauro & Teng, 2017; Wang, Hsieh, & Chen, 2002). The pressure to fulfil these responsibilities and ensure tourists' satisfaction is exacerbated with unexpected trip difficulties and risks, which requires TLs to maintain a professional demeanour while working under high levels of stress (Chang, Shen, & Li, 2018; Wang, Jao, Chan, & Chung, 2010; Wong & Wang, 2009).

The extant literature indicates that TLs' job stressors emerge from the different roles they perform (e.g., problem-solving while touring), the nature of the job (e.g., long rides), the tourists (e.g., unpunctuality), and exogenous factors (e.g., theft) that fall beyond their control (Carrillo, Barbieri, Knollenberg, & Edwards, 2019; Tsauro & Lin, 2014; Wang et al., 2010). Yet, we posit that female and male TLs may experience different levels of stress for several reasons. First, the growth of women in tour-leading (Teng & Chen, 2019; Tsauro, Cheng, & Hong, 2019), a traditionally male dominated profession (Lin et al., 2008), may exert more pressure on female TLs to establish their presence and

exceed expectations. Secondly, social norms which dictate that men are the household breadwinner and women the family caregiver (Antoniou & Cooper, 2011) may add stress to female TLs who are expected to fulfil both breadwinner and caregiving roles (Clark, Beiler, & Zimmerman, 2015). Third, working women experience amplified stress because of gender inequality in the work environment, which limits their career progression and economic parity compared to male colleagues (Gray, 2016; Martin, 2011). In the case of tour-leading, women may also be subject to sexual harassment (Tsauro et al., 2019; Tsauro & Lin, 2014).

Evidence indicates that male and female TLs are equally capable of displaying the necessary emotions to deal with job stress (Yim, Cheung, & Baum, 2018). Yet, social gender differentiation results in the development of different coping mechanisms. Women's caregiving responsibilities favor the development of interpersonal skills and nonverbal communication (Eagly & Steffen, 1984) that align with frontline positions demands in the service sector (Antoniou & Cooper, 2011). Yet, those coping mechanisms can exert additional stress. For example, by empathizing with clients, women may take on added emotional burden, which generates additional stress (Boone et al., 2013; González-Morales, Peiró, Rodríguez, & Greenglass, 2006).

Understanding the impact of stressors on TLs is important because they negatively influence job performance, which for TLs is critical in shaping tourists' satisfaction with their trip (Wong & Wang, 2009; Yen, Tsauro, & Tsai, 2018). More specifically, scant information on how job stressors affect TLs across genders calls for further scrutiny given the increasing growth of women entering the tourism workforce while still under disadvantaged conditions (WBG, 2017). For instance, women

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have lower salaries than men for performing the same jobs (Guimarães & Silva, 2016) and are overrepresented in low-skilled positions associated with domestic duties while underrepresented in leadership positions (Baum, 2013; Mooney, 2018, p. 184). Thus, this study investigated whether the stressors that TLs experience differ between genders. The study was conducted in South America because group tours, a frequent mode of travel for international visitors in this region, have steadily grown over recent years, especially in Peru, where most of the TLs in this study operate (PROMPERU, 2015). Thus, identifying the stressors affecting male and female TLs working in South America can reduce gender inequality and provide information to ensure TLs are equipped to handle job stressors while delivering quality experiences. Specifically, this study pursued two objectives: (1) Measure TLs' perceived levels of job stressors, and (2) test whether perceived job stressors vary between male and female TLs.

### 2. Study purpose and methods

This note reports the comparison of job stressors between female and male TLs in South America. A non-random sampling was used to identify study participants since a frame list of TLs in that region was not available. Fifty-six TLs, personal acquaintances of one of the authors, were initially invited to complete an online survey and were asked to refer the survey to TLs in their networks (snowball sampling). To reduce the social response bias non-random samples can generate, participants were told (before starting the survey) their responses would be anonymous and presented in aggregate. Informed by the literature, stressors were operationalized through 30 items representing four sources of job stress: job roles, nature of the job, tourists' attitudes and behaviors, and external factors (Beehr & Newman, 1978; Tsaur & Lin, 2014; Wang et al., 2010; Wong & Wang, 2009). These items were measured on 5-point unidirectional scales ranging from "not stressful" (1) to "extremely stressful" (5).

The survey instrument was written in English, translated into Spanish and entered into an online survey platform; it was pre-tested among a sample of Spanish-speakers to diagnose any wording or operational issues before deployment. In October 2017, the initial sample was sent an e-mail invitation to participate in the survey. A generic survey link was used to facilitate the survey referral, although it prevented calculation of the response rate. A total of 82 valid responses were obtained, from which 77 that provided their gender are included in the statistical analyses. The sample size satisfies the condition of having more cases in each group (45 males, 32 females) than the number of dependent variables analyzed in each multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) test (9, 5, 6 and 10 stressors respectively). MANOVA was used because its suitability to compare job stress levels across multiple factors (external factors, tourists' attitudes and behaviors, nature of the job, job roles) between female and male TLs; Hotelling's trace statistic was reported given its high accuracy for small samples (Smith, Gnanadesikan, & Hughes, 1962). Discriminant function analysis was conducted to interpret differences found without increasing Type I error. The critical value set for all statistical analyses was five percent, meaning results with *p*-values lower than 0.05 are statistically significant different.

### 3. Results

The survey yield slightly more male respondents (*n* = 45; 58.4%) than female (*n* = 32; 41.6%); most were between 31 and 40 years old (69.3%). A large proportion were married or living with a partner (42.8%) and held a 5-year bachelor's degree (48.0%). In terms of economic situation, 43.4% reported living with some comfort but did not have saving capacity while 34.2% reported that they lived with some comfort and had saving capacity. Most (70.7%) have at least one person who economically depends on them. The vast majority (86.4%) were independent TLs working under freelance conditions, meaning they can

**Table 1**  
A comparison of stress levels perceived from tour leading between genders.

Job Stressors	Mean <sup>a</sup>			Statistical Values	
	All	Female	Male	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> -value
<b>External Factors (<math>\alpha = 0.796</math>)<sup>b</sup></b>					
Issues at border crossings	3.73	3.56	3.88	1.623	.207
Theft incidents	3.70	3.81	3.61	0.837	.363
Strikes	3.64	3.66	3.66	0.000	.993
Transportation accidents	3.53	3.75	3.37	2.633	.109
Delays in transportation	3.19	3.22	3.17	0.051	.821
Natural disasters	3.19	3.66	2.90	9.690	.003
Sexual harassment	3.04	3.59	2.63	16.496	< .001
Constant changes in altitude	2.22	2.44	2.10	1.903	.172
Constant changes in weather	2.08	2.03	2.15	0.248	.620
<b>Composite Scores</b>	<b>(3.15)</b>	<b>(3.30)</b>	<b>(3.03)</b>		
<b>Tourists' Attitudes &amp; Behaviors (<math>\alpha = 0.805</math>)<sup>c</sup></b>					
Superseding TLs' authority	3.24	2.78	2.84	6.675	.012
Unreasonable demands	3.10	3.13	2.61	1.541	.218
Misunderstanding instructions	3.06	3.28	2.91	3.057	.085
Not being on time	2.84	3.31	3.00	0.080	.779
Ailments	2.84	3.66	2.95	3.900	.052
<b>Composite Scores</b>	<b>(3.01)</b>	<b>(3.23)</b>	<b>(2.85)</b>		
<b>Nature of the Job (<math>\alpha = 0.813</math>)<sup>d</sup></b>					
Long rides	2.92	3.00	2.86	0.417	.521
Variable monthly income	2.90	3.09	2.75	2.657	.107
Long work hours per day	2.89	3.09	2.77	2.262	.137
Multitasking	2.50	2.63	2.43	0.796	.375
Limited free time during trips	2.49	2.81	2.30	6.541	.013
Constant packing/unpacking	2.36	2.66	2.14	4.980	.029
<b>Composite Scores</b>	<b>(2.68)</b>	<b>(2.88)</b>	<b>(2.53)</b>		
<b>Job Roles (<math>\alpha = 0.846</math>)<sup>e</sup></b>					
Collecting tips for others	3.22	3.30	3.16	0.271	.604
Being responsible for tourists' safety	3.10	3.33	3.02	1.638	.205
Solving problems while touring	2.89	3.23	2.73	4.562	.036
Keeping the group entertained at all times	2.70	3.00	2.50	3.452	.067
Managing the tour budget	2.60	2.90	2.48	3.494	.066
Handling the trip logistics	2.55	2.83	2.39	4.099	.047
Leading large groups	2.52	2.80	2.39	2.409	.125
Leading long trips	2.38	2.70	2.23	3.586	.062
Facilitate the tourists-locals interaction	1.70	1.97	1.55	6.351	.014
Give information about the destination	1.52	1.70	1.43	2.632	.109
<b>Composite Scores</b>	<b>(2.52)</b>	<b>(2.76)</b>	<b>(2.38)</b>		

<sup>a</sup> Five-point Likert scales were used to measure job stressors (1 = Not stressful; 2 = Slightly stressful; 3 = Moderately stressful; 4 = Very stressful; 5 = Extremely stressful).

<sup>b</sup> MANOVA statistics: Hotelling's trace = 0.575; *F* = 4.023; *p* < 0.001.

<sup>c</sup> MANOVA statistics: Hotelling's trace = 0.202; *F* = 2.828; *p* = 0.022.

<sup>d</sup> MANOVA statistics: Hotelling's trace = 0.125; *F* = 1.432; *p* = 0.215.

<sup>e</sup> MANOVA statistics: Hotelling's trace = 0.157; *F* = 0.990; *p* = 0.461.

work for different companies but are not assured job stability. Although respondents' years of experience as a TL varied widely (Range = 0.5–16.0), the largest proportion had at least six years of experience (45.1%). The majority worked mainly in Peru (81.8%) and Bolivia (72.7%). Most respondents reported leading tours between 15 and 21 days (55.6%) and for medium size groups (11–15 passengers; 56.1%).

Participants reported moderate to low levels of job stressors from all four sources (Table 1). Yet, MANOVA showed significant differences in perceptions of job stressors between genders related to external factors (*p* < 0.001) and tourists' attitudes and behaviors (*p* = 0.022). Within those dimensions, women perceived significantly higher levels of stress related to natural disasters ( $M_{female} = 3.66$ ;  $M_{male} = 2.90$ ; *p* = 0.003) and sexual harassment ( $M_{female} = 3.59$ ;  $M_{male} = 2.63$ ; *p* < 0.001) than men reported. Conversely, men perceived significantly higher levels of stress than women when tourists superseded their authority ( $M_{female} = 2.78$ ;  $M_{male} = 2.84$ ; *p* = 0.012). Analysis did not reveal

**Table 2**  
Discriminant analysis identifying predictors of respondents' gender.

Predictors	Canonical Discriminant Function	Wilks' Lambda	Significance
Sexual harassment	.396	.827	< .001
Natural disasters	.307	.888	.005
Superseding TLs' authority	.254	.920	.019
Facilitate the tourists-locals interaction	.229	.935	.034
Limited free time during trips	.214	.942	.047
Constant packing/unpacking	.213	.943	.048
Solving problems while touring	.193	.953	.073
Handling the trip logistics	.186	.956	.083
Variable monthly income	.181	.958	.092
Leading long trips	.171	.963	.111
Ailments	.170	.963	.113
Keeping the group entertained at all times	.166	.965	.121
Managing the tour budget	.154	.969	.149
Leading large groups	.150	.971	.162
Issues at border crossings	-.140	.974	.189
Transportation accidents	.138	.975	.195
Give information about the destination	.130	.978	.223
Long work hours per day	.128	.979	.230
Misunderstanding instructions	.125	.980	.242
Unreasonable demands	.125	.980	.243
Constant changes in altitude	.124	.980	.244
Being responsible for tourists' safety	.098	.987	.357
Theft incidents	.081	.991	.447
Multitasking	.077	.992	.467
Constant changes in weather	-.068	.994	.523
Long rides	.040	.998	.706
Strikes	-.035	.998	.743
Not being on time	-.034	.998	.750
Collecting tips for others	.027	.999	.801
Delays in transportation	-.015	1.000	.888

significant differences in stress levels between genders related to their job roles and the nature of the job.

Subsequent analysis revealed one discriminant function, explaining 87.0% of variance between genders (Canonical  $R^2 = 0.572$ ) and significantly differentiating male and female TLs ( $\Lambda = 0.429$ ;  $\chi^2[30] = 44.067$ ;  $p = 0.047$ ; Table 2). Analysis of function scores indicate that male and female TLs differentiated in stressors caused by two external factors (sexual harassment [ $p < 0.001$ ]; natural disasters [ $p = 0.005$ ]); one tourist attitude and behavior (superseding TLs' authority [ $p = 0.019$ ]); one job role (facilitating the tourists-locals interaction [ $p = 0.034$ ]); and two from the nature of the job (limited free time during trips [ $p = 0.047$ ], constant packing/unpacking [ $p = 0.048$ ]). Female TLs perceived higher levels of stress from all those causes, except from tourists superseding TLs' authority.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study evaluated whether TLs' perception of their job stressors differ between genders in response to women's increasing presence in the tourism workforce and existing evidence indicating that women working on the frontline experience more stressors than men (Baum, 2013; Segovia-Perez, Figueroa-Domecq, Fuentes-Moraleda, & Munoz-Mazon, 2019). Results indicated statistical differences on the extent to which external factors and tourists' attitudes and behaviors exert stress on female and male TLs. Specifically, study results provided evidence that sexual harassment was associated with more stress on female TLs, which although expected, was not previously tested (Tsaour et al., 2019; Tsaour & Lin, 2014). Women reported less stress than men based on tourists superseding TLs' authority. These results may reflect social gender inequality as women are more exposed to authoritarian discourses and mistreatments (Moreno & Cañada, 2018) and men are less tolerant of losing control and independence in their workplaces (Padkapayeva et al., 2018). These differences indicated that, although all TLs (regardless their gender) are exposed to similar job stressors such as tourists' misbehaviour (Tsaour et al., 2019) that they are equally

capable of dealing with (Wong & Wang, 2009; Yim et al., 2018), it is inappropriate to assume they are equally affected by them.

Although ample evidence demonstrates gender inequalities exist in societies, in the overall work environment, and particularly in the tourism workforce, it is critical that more investigations are conducted to identify both differences between genders and suitable mechanisms to enhance gender equity (e.g., coping mechanisms) to foster a more sustainable tourism industry. It is critical to further this investigation in South America where this topic has not received enough attention in the academic literature (Duffy, Mowatt, Cnacellor, & Cárdenas, 2012; Figueroa-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Pérez, Morgan, & Villacé-Molinero, 2015). In advancing this research line, it is advisable to further investigate gender differences at a larger scale and whether socio-political context (e.g., national policies promoting gender equity) moderate these effects (Martin, 2011, pp. 213–230). Future research should replicate this study in other regions reliant on group tours to identify gender equity solutions at the macro-level given that job stressors are delimited to geopolitical considerations, such as policy frameworks and cultural values (Beehr & Newman, 1978).

In addition to the aforementioned contributions to scholarship, study results provide valuable practical implications for the tourism industry. It is of utmost importance to create an environment in which women can realize their full potential as TLs (Lin, Wang, & Chen, 2008; Wong & Wang, 2009). Additionally, it is vital to reduce job stressors for female TLs to potentially limit detrimental health behaviors (e.g., tobacco use, alcohol abuse) that women in frontline service positions tend to adopt to cope with stress (Wireko-Gyebi, Adu-Frimpong, & Ametepheh, 2017). Addressing sexual harassment, which especially affects women, is a priority given the severity of its associated negative health (e.g., depression) and job outcomes (e.g., absenteeism; Mordukhovich, Gale, Newlan, & McNeely, 2019). Considering women perceive greater stress from sexual harassment, companies should evaluate and re-structure their organizational environment to encourage, rather than discourage, reporting sexual harassment incidents (Siuta & Bergman, 2019), such as confidential agreements for reporters,

independent investigation protocols, and strict follow-up actions. Tour operators should also consider establishing senior-to-junior mentoring programs to share accumulated knowledge and skills to cope with other stressors that resulted more prominent for female (e.g., limited free time) and male (tourists' superseding authority), especially those that are beyond human control (e.g., natural disasters) or inherent to the job (e.g., constant packing/unpacking). As we move forward into a desirable equitable future, academia and industry should join efforts to identify and solve issues to enhance the working conditions of the tourism workforce with more equal opportunities for women to succeed in their careers.

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## Declaration of competing interest

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