



Research Article

Gender and the glass ceiling in tourist guiding: An examination of women tourist guides' professional experiences*

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Abstract

Purpose: Tourism is one of the most important sectors for countries due to its positive economic impacts. Employment holds a special place within these economic impacts. The fact that the tourism product is service-oriented and therefore labor-intensive makes tourism employment even more significant. The existence of many different job sectors in tourism leads to the employment of people with very different characteristics and skills in the tourism sector. Furthermore, tourism has significant power in combating gender inequality, a major social problem, particularly in the area of female employment. In this context, this study aims to examine the gender-based problems experienced by female tourist guides within the framework of the glass ceiling syndrome, based on their professional roles.

Design/methodology/approach: Using qualitative research methods, interviews were employed as the data collection tool. Data was obtained from a total of 21 female tourist guides to answer the research problem. Content analysis was used in the study, and evaluations were made based on a total of six research themes. Data analysis was performed using the MAXQDA program.

Results: According to the results of the study, gender bias, customer bias, and career barriers were identified as problems faced by female tourist guides, showing interrelationships.

Discussion: The research supports existing studies in the literature that conclude that female tour guides have higher levels of professional acceptance and commitment compared to other areas of the tourism sector, but also reveals gender-based inequalities in terms of occupational biases and career barriers.

Keywords: Tourism, Women's Employment, Tourist Guide, Glass Ceiling Syndrome, Gender Inequality

Introduction

Globally, women's employment has shown a significant increase in recent years, and this increase continues year after year (Derin, 2020). In earlier periods, a relationship was discussed between women's employment and the level of development of countries (Şahin, 2016; Mabbett, 2025). However, it is possible to say that this is slowly beginning to change. In traditional societies, it can be said that there is a more rigid attitude towards women's employment. It is possible to say that this situation has begun to change due to very different reasons. First of all, significant socio-economic transformations have changed the perspective on the issue (Elacqua et al., 2009). While the level of education is increasing in some countries and the increasing rates of women's education directly lead to an increase in women's employment, the rise in the general level of education in society has brought about a softening of attitudes towards this situation. Berber and Eser (2008) emphasize the transformative role of education in this context. However, economic conditions, particularly in less developed and developing countries, show that household livelihood largely depends on supporting women's employment. Aksoy et al. (2019) state that in Turkey, women's employment has begun to increase due to economic conditions forcing women to participate. The traditional social profile, which is unable to make ends meet, has begun to look favorably upon women's participation in the workforce. Supporting this understanding, there are studies showing that women's desire to pursue university-level education is more pronounced than men's when it comes to career expectations (Mohammadi Roozbahani and Taromi, 2006).

While significant positive developments have occurred regarding women's participation in the workforce, certain preferences regarding the sectors or occupations in which women can work emerge, particularly depending on the level of development of societies (Albanesi, 2025). While some countries view women's

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employment in public spaces or light jobs favorably, there is a negative attitude towards their employment in service-oriented sectors, especially tourism. Ngai and Petrongolo (2017) attribute this phenomenon to the rise of the service sector and argue that this rise has also increased the demand for female labor. This situation is even reflected in education processes, and in some countries, a generally negative social attitude can develop towards receiving education in service-oriented fields such as tourism. However, service-oriented industries or sectors have great potential in terms of job creation. Therefore, tourism stands out as a significant force, especially in societies where female employment is a necessity. The study by Yetiş and Çalışkan (2020) also addresses a similar role of tourism.

One of the areas where women's employment stands out in tourism is tourist guiding and travel services. Tourist guiding is a prominent profession, especially in countries that are notable for their cultural heritage and historical identity. The intellectual nature and human capital-focused nature of the profession lead to those who practice it having a good social status. It can be said that women in different societies have a significant motivation to practice this profession (Öztor and Şengel, 2026).

While there is a positive trend regarding women's employment both generally and in the context of tourism, it is also true that women face some difficulties in their professional lives. It is known that female tourist guides face certain problems while pursuing their careers. Çelik Uğuz and Topbaş (2016) state that this is also an important reality of general women's employment. It is known that these problems are shaped by many different reasons, including personal, family, social, and sectoral factors. Albanesi and Şahin (2018) highlight working hours as a significant factor in the emergence of these problems, emphasizing that shorter working hours are more preferable. The negative influences on female tourist guides in their professional lives create significant obstacles for them. Women's participation in social life is a critical issue in building healthy societies. Numerous scientific studies have focused on the challenges women face in the workplace, and a theoretical framework has been established in this context. This theoretical framework makes significant contributions to solving problems and securing the future of women's employment. In this context, this study aims to evaluate the professional obstacles faced by women in tourist guiding in Turkey, within the framework of gender and the glass ceiling syndrome. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in tourism guiding education and, consequently, in the tourist guiding profession in Turkey. This new process, which brings with it problems in various contexts, leads to the prediction that the increasing employment of women in the profession will face some problems stemming from personal, family, social, and sectoral sources, both currently and in the future. Arslan and Şimşek (2018) present a broad framework, stating that these problems may arise from different sources such as social, family, colleagues, tourists, sectoral and professional, agency, education, and supervision. In this context, it is believed that the study will contribute to the literature by highlighting the professional challenges of female tourist guides and offering a future perspective.

Conceptual Framework

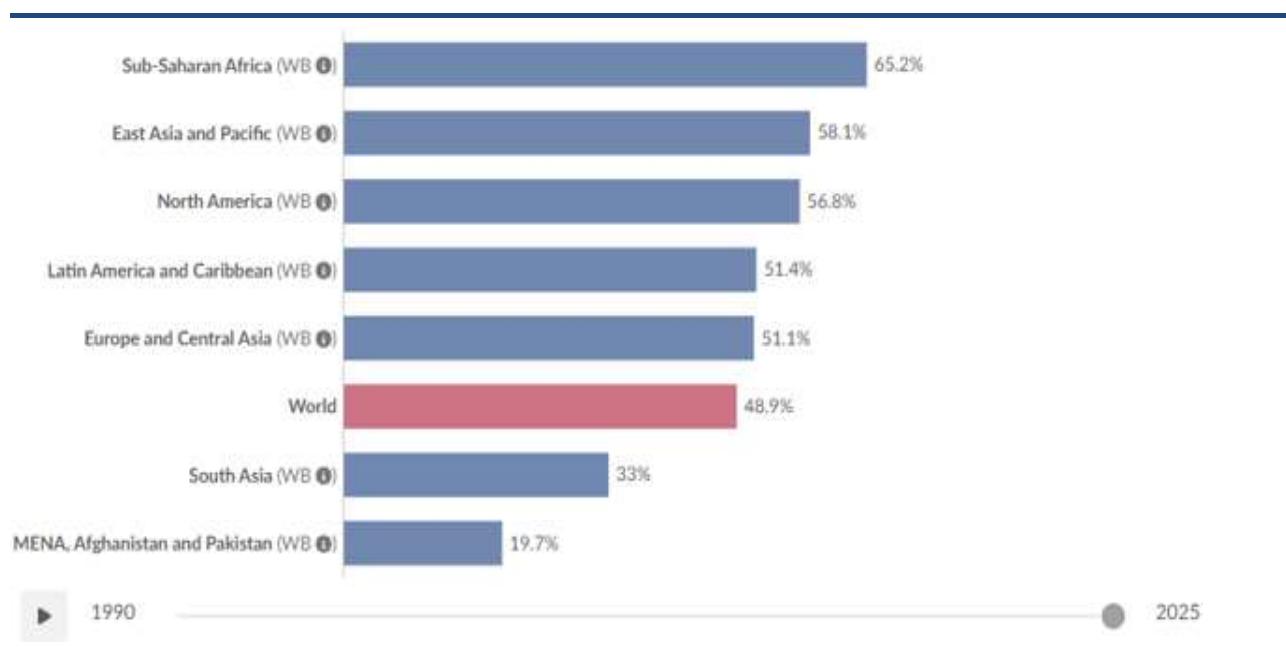
Women's Employment and the Glass Ceiling Syndrome

It can be said that significant developments regarding women's employment are increasingly becoming a part of people's lives worldwide. This situation, often linked to development, is a significant reflection of women's presence in economic, social, and political spheres. Pishgahifard and Poulab (2010) support this view by considering developments and the conceptual background of women's employment as a component of economic development, emphasizing that it should be supported as an important future vision for societies. Yousefy and Baratali (2011) state that this vision regarding women's participation in employment is supported by education. Education is one of the most critical issues closely related to all matters concerning employment, rather than just women's employment itself. In this context, education stands out as a crucial parameter in addressing all existential problems, whether it be finding employment, social empowerment, or cultural challenges. In light of this information, the background of employment, centered on knowledge and skills, necessitates that individuals acquire these skills through supplementary training. However, even if good education and all other complementary thresholds are met, it is possible to speak of other parameters that determine employment. Influenced by these parameters, the historical chronology of women's employment worldwide can vary by region, as explained in Figure 1.

Figure 1 reveals some striking results. First, it shows that women's employment is close to 50% globally. Figure 1 shows that women are either participating in employment or at least actively seeking work. However, the nearly 50% global employment figures present significant differences between regions. While some regions in the world show an average close to the global average, regions such as the Middle East and North Africa and South Asia show a trend below the average. Nevertheless, when the results of the graph and the

report are considered together, it is evident that women's employment can be high in developed countries as well as in less developed societies. This perspective is also consistent with the conceptual framework of the study, which is based on two fundamental dynamics of employment. The only critical point here is related to the nature of the work women do. In developed societies, women perform more qualified and successful jobs due to their socio-economic achievements, while in less developed countries, due to necessary economic conditions, they are forced to work in more arduous jobs and unskilled positions.

Figure 1. Female Labor Force Participation Rate, 2025



Source: (Ortiz-Ospina et al., 2026)

One of the biggest reasons for the developments in women's employment is the gradual change in some traditional views/patterns. Massive social changes, in particular, are among the biggest shifts in women's employment. There is a significant change in the traditional roles attributed to men in traditional societies: working as an individual, meeting the family's needs, and solving economic problems. Thus, even in traditional societies, a situation has begun to emerge where women, through participation in employment, contribute to the family's economic needs and share the roles/burden of men (Van der Lippe and Van Dijk, 2002). In less developed or developing countries, this participation of women in employment may occur out of necessity, depending on certain conditions.

Social changes, especially the changing roles of women in society, have affected their participation in public demands for higher education. The traditional model that "men should work alone and solve the family's economic problems" is changing, and women's direct share in the family economy is increasing compared to the past. While the number of women in the higher education system is increasing, the economic and professional system cannot keep up with this number of women, and in the future, we will face a critical situation such as unemployment for young women with higher education (Elmi, 2005).

When the realities of women's participation in employment and the increase in the number of female employees are considered, a different situation arises, especially within an organizational structure. It is possible that women sometimes encounter obstacles, or at least that various problems arise in the processes within the organization. Thus, it becomes possible for some negative organizational problems such as organizational silence (Avcı, 2023), organizational dissonance (Şen et al., 2017), and organizational cynicism (Alhas, 2022) to come to the fore. While these are general organizational problems, they turn into symptoms that develop in women as a result of negative attitudes towards them within the system. In this context, it can be said that women go through difficult times in organizational structures.

Organizational processes in large businesses, and the aging gender-based problems they address, are discussed by Acker (1990) using the concept of gendered organizations. These are also systems where the benefits and drawbacks of the job or organization, the manager and the managed within the organization, the advantages and disadvantages gained, the actions and emotions involved in performing the job, and parameters such as

meaning and identity are all evaluated within a context of masculinity-femininity functions, varying according to gender. Here, masculinity is generally seen as a dominant identity. Morrison et al. (1987) address the peak of this view with a striking assessment. All of this points to the existence of hierarchical, invisible, and clustered barriers that prevent women from reaching important positions in the organization. Considering these obstacles to women's professional lives as a significant social problem, Nkomo and Rodriguez (2019) emphasize that the issue should be examined within the context of corporate social responsibility.

Significant theoretical and conceptual studies are being conducted on the oppressed organizational roles of women. The Glass Ceiling Syndrome holds a prominent place among these. The glass ceiling is one of the concepts that reacts against gender discrimination because it reveals the invisible barriers that cause difficulties for women who know about elite roles within the organization but struggle to reach them (Bendl and Schmidt, 2010). Even discussing these issues at a high level is of critical importance. As can be understood from this information, the glass ceiling expresses a reality. It is a reality that reveals that the demand for advancement in the organizational hierarchy by qualified profiles, based on the principle of merit, is stopped to a certain extent by meaningless reasons such as sexism (Babic and Hansez, 2021). Over time, the concept has moved beyond this meaning and focused on nationalism as an obstacle besides sexism. It has also brought to the agenda the disproportionately unfair attitudes that occur not only in promotions in rank and title, but also in wage levels (Christofides et al., 2013; Wiswall and Zafar, 2018). Regardless of the conditions and results, the glass ceiling's struggle against inequalities in working life is quite useful in the context of the principle of equality.

Table 1. Issues Related to the Glass Ceiling

The glass ceiling;	
<i>Factors supporting its impact</i>	• Personal • Interpersonal • Situational • Social • Organizational
<i>Demographic barriers it addresses</i>	• Gender • Racism • Age • Education • Status • Parental Status
<i>Causes originating from women</i>	• Lifestyle choices • Indirect discrimination • Second-generation prejudice
<i>Social and psychological determinants</i>	• Denial • Socialization • Historical precedents • Women's attitudes toward other women • Negotiated resignation • Traditional culture
<i>Determinant macro factors</i>	• Recruitment strategies • Internationalization • Foreign ownership
<i>Best breakthrough strategies by women</i>	• Consistently exceeding performance expectations • Seeking out challenging or high-visibility tasks • Developing a style that makes men feel comfortable • Networking with effective colleagues • Having a respected mentor

Source: Created by the author based on literature review

Table 1 reveals that the glass ceiling can be explained by many different factors, or that the causes contributing to the glass ceiling process exist across a wide spectrum. Here, factors other than individual or women-related psychological factors are generally highlighted as societal factors. In fact, Table 1 provides very useful information in demonstrating how a concept constructed around gender can be affected by many different components. According to Huaman-Morillo et al. (2024), the glass ceiling syndrome, which focuses on organizational pressures experienced by women, can be overcome through strategies such as integrating

practices like strong mentoring, successful communication, performance and expectation management, managing men, and undertaking and successfully completing challenging and impactful tasks.

Women's Employment in Tourism and Female Tourist Guides

Service-related fields of work are gaining more and more importance and are becoming one of the critical areas for many countries. As such an industry, tourism stands out as a service-oriented and labor-intensive field of activity. This industry, which has a versatile and rapid development course, has started to attract attention as a rapidly growing social and economic activity in many countries in recent years. This increasing importance of tourism brings with it many socio-economic gains, the most notable of which is the employment creation function. As a major industry, tourism is an area of great importance with its effects on both direct and indirect employment. From this perspective, tourism offers remarkable employment opportunities for large masses. Tourism also plays important roles in the context of regulating the demographic structure and makes serious contributions to country policies by creating job opportunities for both men and women (Obadić and Marić, 2009). This identity area of tourism especially regulates the demographic structure and displays a useful image in terms of women's participation in business life in terms of gender.

Tourism is one of the most decisive industries in terms of ensuring gender equality in many aspects, especially employment. Women's employment is especially decisive in tourism, which causes multi-dimensional effects such as women's empowerment, participation in employment, and economic gains. Although women's employment in tourism is at a very advanced level in developed countries, improvements in this sense are also beneficial for meeting some of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in terms of women's access to economic resources and equal opportunities in decision-making (Abou-Shouk et al., 2021). It should also be stated that women's employment in the field of tourism is an important criterion in developed countries, that is, the high level of women's employment in tourism shows that the countries have made some important progress on the path of development. However, despite this optimistic picture, it should be said that women's employment does not occur in a format suitable for gender equality in all sectors of tourism.

Tourism is one of the fields with the highest concentration of female employment. However, it should be noted that female employment in the industry also faces certain risks. It's important to say that not only female employment, but all positive aspects related to tourism face such risks. The most important reason for this is that tourism is a dynamic sector. Khalid et al. (2024) state that sanctions in tourism could cause a contraction in demand, negatively impacting investment and payment systems. Seyfi et al. (2023), making similar assessments, state that these developments could disrupt the foreign exchange system and negatively affect the accommodation, food and beverage, and travel sectors. Consequently, it is stated that formal employment opportunities in tourism will decrease, and businesses will employ limited personnel. Thus, employment contractions may occur in areas where women are heavily employed, such as the accommodation and food and beverage sectors, as well as handicrafts and tour guiding. Oghazi et al. (2024) state that as a result of these developments, informal enterprises may increase, and problems related to access in areas such as employment may arise, exacerbating gender inequality.

Employment-related problems are felt more acutely in patriarchal societies where inequality exists. Women in traditional societies and states with traditional governance philosophies are also likely to face these restrictions in working life. In such social or organizational environments, institutional or legal restrictions are prominent, leading to the problem of women facing greater obstacles in employment compared to men. In this context, it can be said that restrictions specific to women manifest themselves not only in specific meanings such as mobility, behavior, clothing, presence in the institutional sphere, or free will, but also in areas such as employment and economic freedom (Carrasco-Santos et al., 2024; Seyfi et al., 2026). Recent research in tourism and hospitality further demonstrates that women's career progression can be constrained by multiple and interconnected barriers. Kokkranikal et al. (2024), for instance, identified gender bias, microaggressions, work-life balance issues, lack of gender diversity, inflexible working conditions, and lack of mentoring support as barriers to women's career progression in the hospitality industry. Such findings reinforce the view that career barriers should be understood as multidimensional rather than as a single organizational obstacle. The fact that tourism is an important sector for women's employment shows that it is worthwhile to overcome the problems experienced. Therefore, there is a need for developments that will encourage women's employment in different fields. The field of tourist guiding is also quite critical for women's employment in tourism. Women develop significant career motivations in this field (Öztor and Şengel, 2026). Therefore, both women and all other stakeholders must fight for the continued professional existence of female tourist guides. In this context, it is crucial to contribute academic studies to the literature that will help female tourist guides maintain their profession. Recent studies have continued to draw attention to gender-related challenges experienced by

women in tourist guiding. Karacaoğlu (2024), based on interviews with 16 female tourist guides in Türkiye, identified various gender-related difficulties and reported that the profession was perceived as male-dominated by most participants. Similarly, Nguyen and Nguyen (2025) examined female tour guides' professional experiences and highlighted the relevance of social stereotypes and workplace challenges to their career progression. These studies indicate that gender-related challenges remain an important issue in tourist guiding; however, further research is needed to examine how such experiences may interact with career barriers and contribute to the persistence of a glass ceiling within the profession.

Methodology

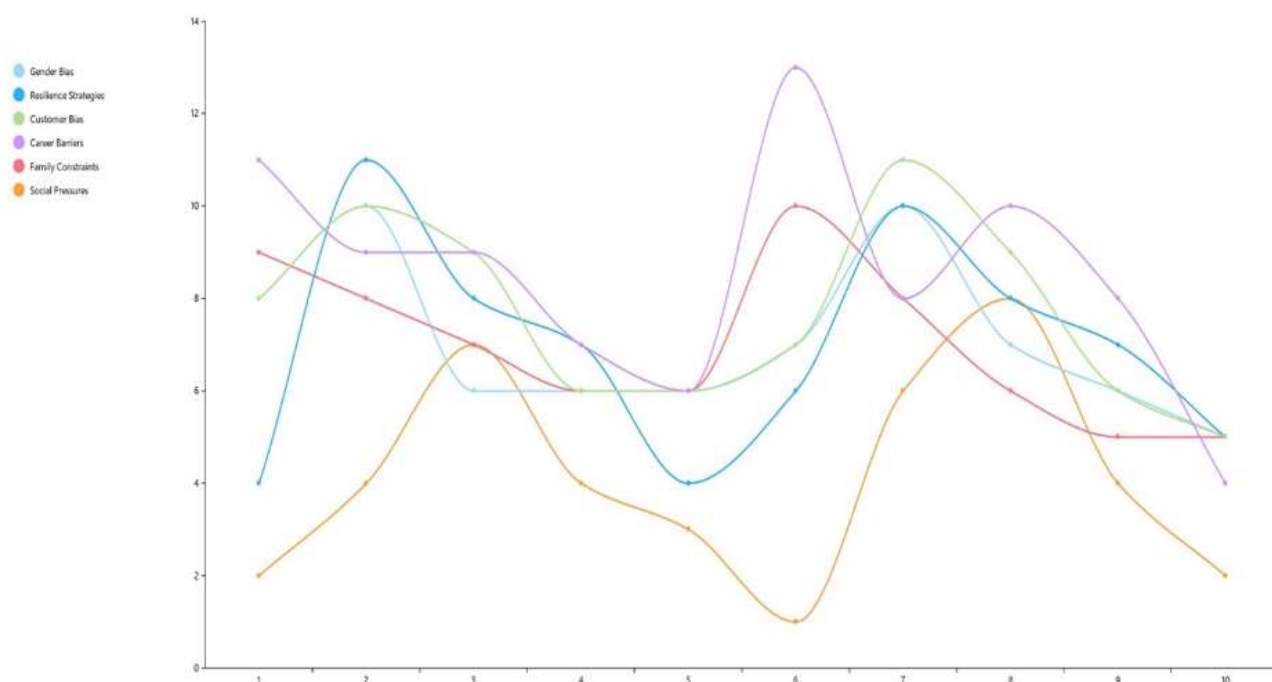
This study focuses on a critical issue related to the tourism guiding profession. The existence of gender-based discrimination in the tourism guiding profession is examined within the context of the glass ceiling syndrome. In this context, obtaining in-depth data is one of the most critical aspects of the field research process. Therefore, field research was conducted using qualitative research methods. Interviews were chosen as the data collection tool. A questionnaire was created to conduct the interviews. The questionnaire was designed with a total of 10 questions, including one demographic question. Following a literature review, the questions were narrowed down to 8 questions (including one demographic question) after consulting with six experts in research methods and faculty members working in the tourism guiding department. This ensured the validity of the measurement tool.

Data collection was carried out in February 2026. This season was suitable for both the design timing of the research and the data collection process, as it was a period when guides were not frequently working. Data were collected using the snowball sampling method, and the interviews were concluded after 21 participants based on the recurrence of information in the interview data. This approach is consistent with methodological research indicating that sample size in qualitative research varies according to the research question, participant characteristics, and type of qualitative analysis, rather than being determined by a single universal threshold (Hennink and Kaiser, 2022; Wutich et al., 2024). Interviews were conducted within a time frame of 13-37 minutes. All data were collected face-to-face. A semi-structured interview method was preferred, particularly for data quality, therefore face-to-face data collection constituted one of the most critical processes of the field research. The interviews were transcribed into a Word document, and this document was used in the analysis. Content analysis was used in the analysis of the data. This technique is a renewable and inference-making method. It categorizes and systematizes large datasets. It is suitable for presenting inferences and contributes to the predictive power of research (Aldemir et al., 2020).

The most critical aspect of content analysis is identifying themes appropriate to the research problem. Therefore, by reviewing the glass ceiling syndrome literature and obtaining expert opinions based on the researcher's experience, a total of six themes were determined. Indeed, Stemler (2000) states that determining categories or themes is one of the most critical elements in content analysis and emphasizes that factors such as literature review and expert opinions are very important in determining them. In this context, content analyses were conducted on six themes: gender bias, resilience strategies, customer bias, career barriers, family constraints, and social pressures. In content analysis, which stands out with its experimental nature, large datasets are transformed into a simpler and more interpretable form (Krippendorff, 2018). The MAXQDA program was used in the analysis of the study data.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the first 10 interview data according to themes, as shown in the code trend distribution obtained from MAXQDA. One of the most important reasons for using MAXQDA in the analysis processes is the program's popularity in qualitative research in recent years. However, beyond this, the program allows for systematic evaluations due to its ability to simplify data and present results using maps or visuals (Kuckartz and Radiker, 2019).

Before the analysis process, the data was loaded into the program, then the codes were transferred to the program, and as a third step, the data was coded into themes using the auto-coding method. This method, normally used for very large datasets, was preferred for this study even though the dataset was not very large, for the sake of the reliability of the results (Çolak et al., 2026). After all the coding processes were completed, the analyses were performed using the visual tools analysis section of MAXQDA, and the results were reported in the findings section.

Figure 2. Code Trends for The First 10 Participants in Each Theme

Source: Obtained from MAXQDA

Findings

Data was collected from tourist guides as this was relevant to the research problem. Therefore, all participants were female. The participant profile was distributed across associate's, bachelor's, and master's (with and without thesis) education levels. 11 participants were 30 years old and under, while 10 participant were over 30. 9 participants were national guides, while 12 were regional guides. Finally, approximately two-thirds of the participants were qualified to provide guiding services in a foreign language, while the remainder were authorized to provide guiding services in Turkish.

Figure 3. Word Cloud of the Data

Source: Obtained from MAXQDA

The word cloud analysis, which provides an overview of the data, is shown in Figure 3. Word size indicates frequency of repetition, with the largest word in the center having the highest frequency. Conjunctions, verbs, and words not considered directly related to the research problem were excluded from the analysis. Words with the same meaning and their suffixes were combined with the main word. In this context, a word cloud with a maximum frequency of 114 was obtained. A minimum frequency of 5 was set, and words with a frequency below 5 were not included in the cloud. Examining Figure 3, the word "profession" stands out as the most frequently repeated word. Other words such as "problem," "women," "tour," "guide," "guiding," "manager," "guests," "illegal," "experience," and "preference" are also frequently repeated words relevant to the context of the topic.

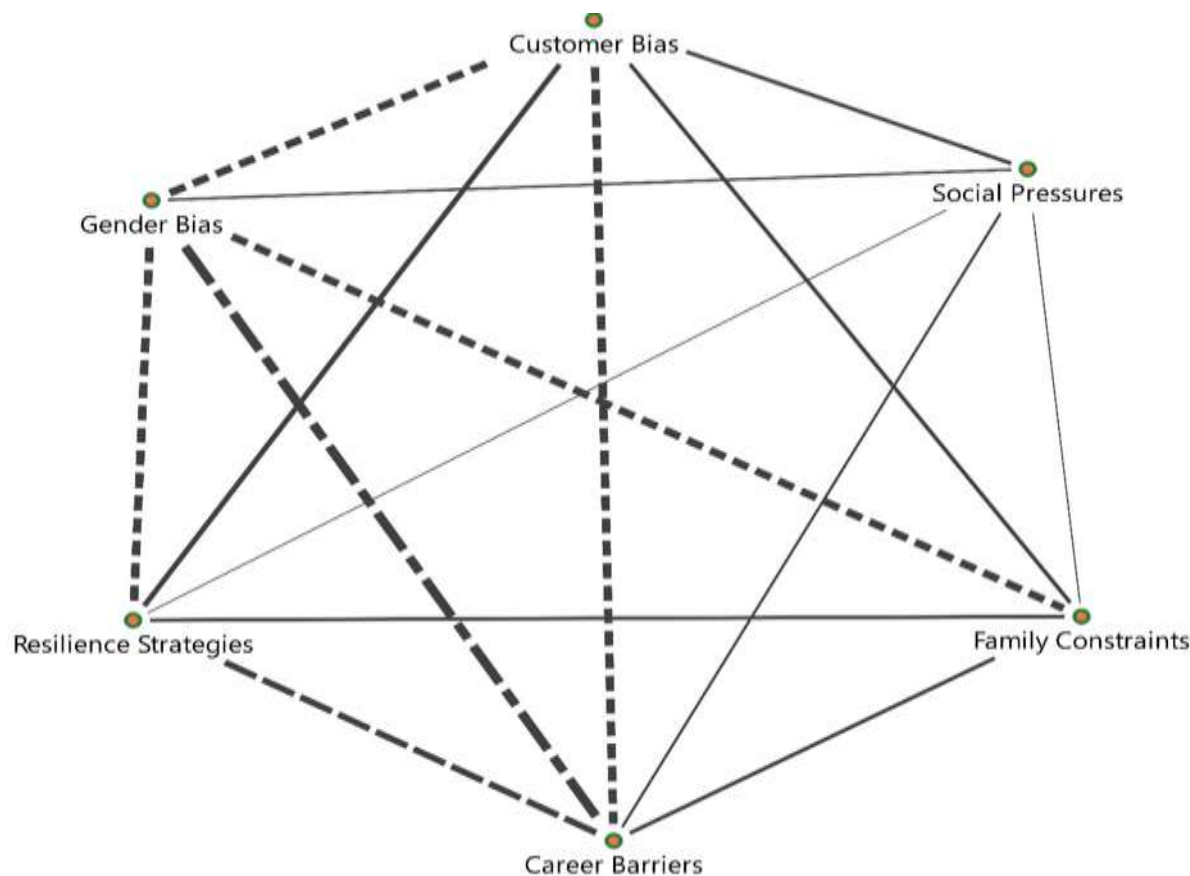
Table 2. Theme code relationship browsers

Coding System (Research Themes)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Gender Bias (1)	-					
Resilience Strategies (2)	118	-				
Customer Bias (3)	132	111	-			
Career Barriers (4)	126	112	132	-		
Family Constraints (5)	121	111	116	118	-	
Social Pressures (6)	74	68	90	90	68	-

Source: Obtained from MAXQDA

Table 2 shows the extent to which the themes identified in the study were repeated together by the participants as a result of the coding. The most frequently repeated themes in the study were customer bias, gender bias, and career barriers. According to the coding from the data of 21 participants, customer bias was repeated 132 times with the other two themes. This was followed by resilience strategies with gender bias and family constraints with career barriers, with a frequency of 118 repetitions. Another noteworthy finding in the study is that the Social Pressures theme had a generally low frequency of repetition with all other themes.

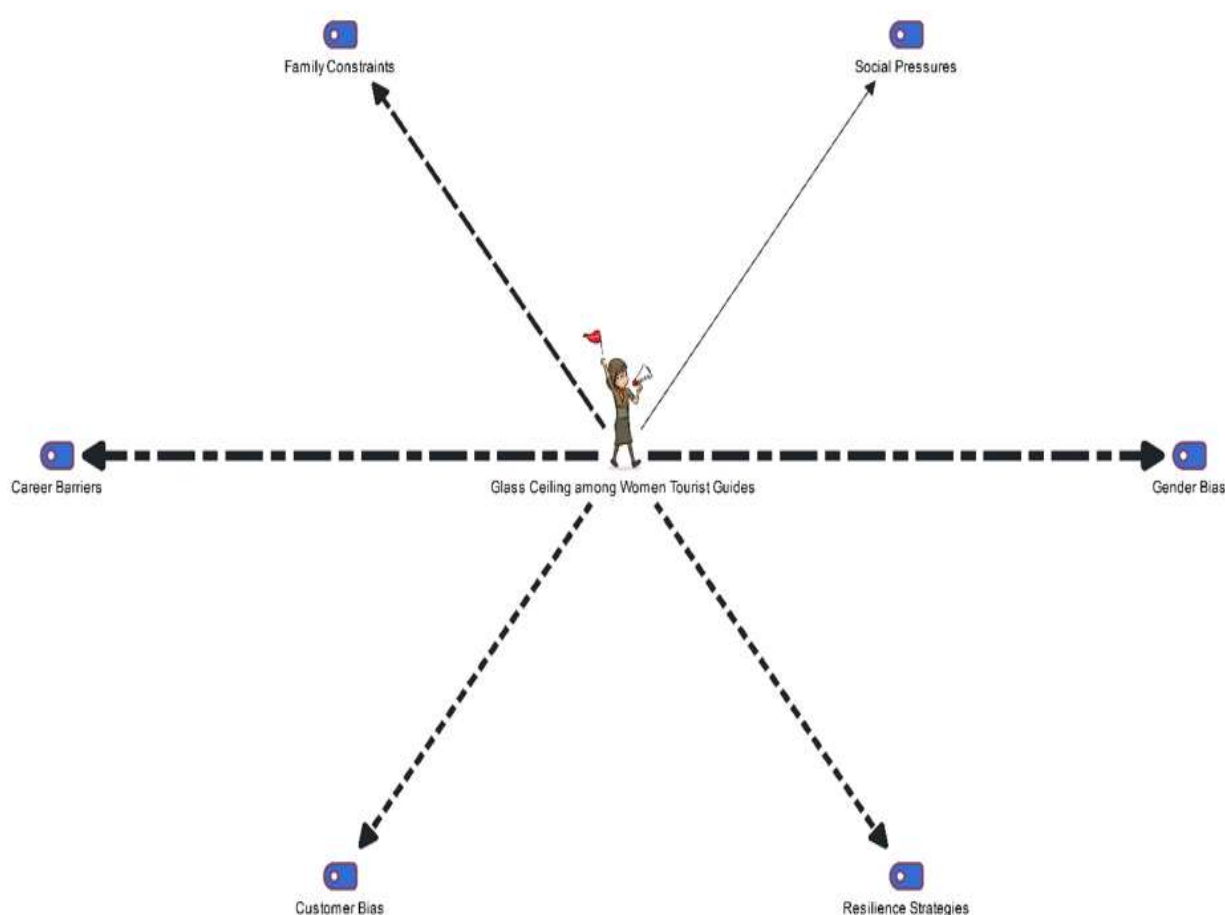
Figure 4. Relationship Map of Themes



Source: Obtained from MAXQDA

One of the most critical analyses performed with MAXQDA is to reveal the relationship levels of research themes based on data. In this study, the relationship levels of the themes are given with the help of Figure 4. Line thicknesses and differences are determined according to the strength of the relationships. In the study, the strongest relationship occurred between gender bias and career barriers (7 pax). The closest relationships occurred between different themes, and these relationships, which occurred with a strength of (6 pax), were between gender bias and customer bias, career barriers and customer bias, gender bias and family constraints, and gender bias and resilience strategies. The third strongest relationship, with a strength of five, was between career barriers and resilience strategies. The straight lines in Figure 4 indicate different relationship levels in the (1-4 pax) range. Social pressure stands out as the theme that produced the lowest relationships with other themes. Apart from that, family constraints developed a low-level relationship with other themes, except for one relationship.

Figure 5. Relationships of Themes to the Research Topic



Source: Obtained from MAXQDA

Figure 5 shows the extent to which the themes relate to the professional challenges of female tourist guides. Every woman faces certain challenges in her professional life. Six prominent problems in the context of the glass ceiling syndrome were identified as research themes, and the data were coded according to these themes. The study shows that female tourist guides face career barriers and gender bias with a correlation level of 7. Secondly, customer bias and resilience strategies, with a correlation level of 4, were identified as prominent issues according to the opinions of female guides. Family constraints stood out with a correlation level of 3, while social pressure did not have a significant interaction for female tourist guides within the context of the glass ceiling.

Conclusion and Discussion

The world experiences significant differences stemming from gender inequality in many different ways. Employment is one specific issue to address in the context of inequality. Many sectors have a male-dominated employee profile. However, women trying to establish themselves in the workforce face significant obstacles

in certain aspects (Yousefy and Baratali, 2011). Consequently, the topic is addressed in academic literature from time to time in different contexts. The glass ceiling syndrome, examined in this study, is one of these topics (Babic and Hansez, 2021). Such studies have crucial functions in achieving equality, especially gender equality, and in profoundly shaking or even eliminating certain social norms.

Tourism is one of the most important areas for women's employment, contributing to the elimination of employment-based inequalities. The need for employees with diverse skills and profiles is one of the sector's most important characteristics (Seyfi et al., 2023). In this context, tourist guiding stands out as an alternative and important tourism profession, especially in countries rich in historical, cultural, and natural resources. Studies are being conducted on the acceptance of the profession by female tourist guides (Oghazi et al., 2024). Generally, it can be said that their professional commitment is higher compared to other female employees in tourism (Öztor and Şengel, 2026). However, it should be noted that gender-based inequalities can exist in the profession of tourist guiding, as in every profession.

The glass ceiling syndrome, based on the experiences of women who encounter negative situations while practicing the profession of tourist guiding, has been found to be based on certain specific foundations. In this context, female tourist guides often face professional prejudices and career obstacles while practicing their profession. Furthermore, there are relationships between these two negative situations. This relationship is also supported by recent research on female tourist guides. Karacaoğlu (2024), based on interviews with 16 female tourist guides in Türkiye, found that participants encountered various gender-related challenges, which were associated with the structure of the tourism sector, social and family conditions, and characteristics attributed to women. Similarly, Nguyen and Nguyen (2025) showed that social stereotypes and workplace challenges can shape female tour guides' professional experiences and career progression. In the present study, however, the strong relationship identified between gender bias and career barriers provides further insight into how gender-related experiences may be connected to career-related difficulties within tourist guiding. Rather than treating gender bias and career barriers as separate problems, the findings suggest that gendered perceptions may contribute to the emergence or persistence of barriers to women's professional advancement. This may be partly explained by the traditional gender roles assigned to women, which can create expectations regarding women's responsibilities and appropriate behavior. Another important finding of the study is that social pressure did not emerge as a prominent negative factor in the professional experiences of the female guides. This may be related to the relatively positive social perception of tourist guiding compared with some other occupations in the tourism sector.

The career barriers identified in the present study also reflect the multidimensional nature of women's career challenges reported in the tourism and hospitality literature. Kokkranikal et al. (2024), for example, identified gender bias, microaggressions, work-life balance difficulties, limited gender diversity, inflexible working conditions, and insufficient mentoring as factors that can hinder women's career progression in the hospitality industry. Similarly, Sobaih and Abu Elnasr (2024) identified cultural and social, regulatory, organizational, and personal barriers affecting women's access to senior positions in the tourism industry. These findings suggest that career barriers should not be understood as a single or isolated obstacle, but rather as the outcome of interacting factors operating at different levels. This multidimensional perspective is also reflected in the present findings. Career barriers were closely associated with gender bias, customer bias, family constraints, and resilience strategies, indicating that participants' career experiences were shaped by interconnected professional, social, and personal factors. In particular, the strongest relationship between gender bias and career barriers suggests that perceptions and experiences related to gender may be particularly relevant to women's experiences of career-related difficulties in tourist guiding. From the perspective of the glass ceiling, these findings indicate that career barriers may operate through multiple interconnected mechanisms rather than through a single formal restriction on promotion. This interpretation is consistent with recent research conceptualizing women's advancement barriers in tourism as involving social, organizational, familial, and personal dimensions (Sobaih and Abu Elnasr, 2024). Thus, the glass ceiling in tourist guiding may be manifested not only in the limited attainment of higher professional positions but also through the accumulation of gender-related experiences that can constrain women's career development over time.

In this respect, the findings may be viewed as reflecting some of the mechanisms through which a glass ceiling can persist in tourism-related professions.

Implications of Study

While the study shows a positive perception of female tourism guides compared to other female tourism workers, it also reveals that female tour guides face certain challenges. The root of these problems lies in issues

such as gender bias, career barriers, family constraints, and customer bias. Stakeholders in the profession have important roles to play in minimizing these problems. It is particularly recommended that professional organizations, at both macro and micro levels, take all necessary measures to ensure women can practice their profession comfortably. A mechanism to impose sanctions on individuals, organizations, or institutions that act contrary to this is crucial.

It is also very important for travel agencies, as employers of tour guides, to employ guides based on quality rather than gender or other demographic considerations. Tour guides themselves should evaluate each colleague without prejudice, seeing them as a profile that will contribute to the profession. This will foster a unifying and collectively strong professional organization instead of a divisive one. Tourists participating in tours also need to regulate their relationships with guides. It is crucial that they maintain a production-consumption perspective in their interactions throughout the trip. Close relationships or minimizing gender-based approaches are highly valuable.

This study focuses on the glass ceiling syndrome, a critical issue in women's employment. Its focus on a specific field and profession, such as tourism guiding, makes the study significant. The study's findings contribute theoretically to the literature on glass ceilings in other fields, both in terms of its focus on this specific profession and its examination of women employees in diverse areas (Akpınar-Sposito, 2013; Ambri et al., 2019; Taparia and Lenka, 2022; Kandemir, 2026).

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research: However, the study has some limitations due to its focus on a specific methodology and a limited sample in a broad area. Although the participants were female tourist guides working in different regions of Türkiye, the study was not designed to make systematic comparisons across geographical regions. Therefore, studies with larger samples, geographies and different methodological assumptions could be conducted.

Ethics Statement: For the interview method used in this study, permission was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Sakarya University of Applied Sciences at its meeting dated 18/06/2026 and numbered 69/54, with decision number E-26428519-050.99-228461. If a contrary situation is identified, Journal of Gastronomy Hospitality and Travel (JOGHAT) shall bear no responsibility whatsoever, and all responsibility shall rest with the author(s) of the study.

Author Contribution Statement: The contribution rate of the 1st author is 100%.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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