

Vulnerable work in Gauteng:

hospitality sector survey

The hospitality industry is one of the sectors where precarious work is common. While it is easy to get a job, it is also easy to get dismissed. Some workers have contracts whilst others have none. Wages are also so low that in some instances workers make more money from tips. **Edward Webster, Attiyah Loonat, Debbie Budlender, Leilanie Williams and Mark Orkin** investigate decent work in the hospitality sector in Gauteng Province in a recent research report whose snapshots are in this article.

FINDINGS

In order to understand working conditions in the hospitality industry we combined a survey of 947 hospitality workers in Gauteng with in-depth interviews. The questionnaire used for the hospitality sector survey was, wherever possible, the same as that used for the earlier studies on farm workers and security guards. This approach was taken so as to facilitate comparisons across the sectors.

In addition to the survey, we conducted in-depth interviews with workers (majority being waitrons) in the hospitality industry. Hospitality work is often marked by emotional labour as it is primarily face-to-face interactive service work. As one respondent remarked, 'We have to make sure everything is in order as the customers have to get what they want.'

Workers who participate in emotional labour do more than their jobs, they play 'games'. In the words of waitress Bongivi at

Carnival City, these games include, 'Being friendly and talkative. I would say an important skill is to be attentive to the customer.' Eating out is a bit like the theatre where hospitality workers have to put on a show for customers. This is best illustrated by Itumaleng, a waitress at Carnival City, who tries to impress her customers by using flaring.

Appearance is a crucial part of work in the hospitality industry. Mary captures the importance of appearance when she says: 'We are working with the customers, we are in the front, when they come they see us first so we have to look beautiful.'

Another waitress, Susan, mentions that, 'We must dress nice, we must look attractive'. Indeed in one of our interviews the waitron said that in his establishment at 35 you are too old. This raises questions about age discrimination in the industry. The concern about appearance is however not only an important aspect for women. Says Thando: 'You

have to look like someone who you wouldn't mind touching your food'. Thando adds: 'It is work and you have to look professional and different from the customers'.

A central feature of hospitality work which emerged from our interviews is surveillance. Patience, claimed that, 'Here they don't have cameras but they are always around so definitely they watch what we are doing'.

Mduduzi, a waitress, mentioned that 'Managers just stand around and tell us what to do'. Bongivi adds that 'Management is always around making sure we do our jobs but even if they are not around we know we have to do our jobs because we could make more tips'.

PROFILE OF EMPLOYEES

We used the online yellow pages to draw a sample of enterprises within the hospitality industry. To ensure a range of establishments we focused on three types; hotels, restaurants and coffee shops. A total of 947 workers were interviewed. Just over

half of the interviews were conducted with employees at hotels and approximately four in every ten (42%) with individuals in restaurants. Only 56 interviews were conducted with employees at coffee shops. This distribution of interviews in large part reflects the sampling strategy, in that four different types of workers were targeted for each hotel, three types of workers for each restaurant, and two types for each coffee shop. Thus the sample came from a total of 162 hotels, 140 restaurants and 35 coffee shops.

Table 1. Number of interviews per establishment

| | Freq. | % |
|-------------|-------|-----|
| Hotel | 498 | 53 |
| Restaurants | 393 | 42 |
| Coffee shop | 56 | 6 |
| Total | 947 | 100 |

More than half (54%) of the workers interviewed in the hospitality sector were female. Female workers constituted the majority in hotels (62%) as well as coffee shops (68%), while males dominated in the restaurant business (59%) as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Types of businesses in hospitality sector

| | Male | Female | Total | N |
|-------------|------|--------|-------|-----|
| Hotels | 38% | 62% | 100% | 498 |
| Restaurants | 59% | 41% | 100% | 393 |
| Coffee shop | 32% | 68% | 100% | 56 |
| Total | 46% | 54% | 100% | 947 |

Employees in the hospitality sector were fairly young with approximately three in every four (76%) younger than 40 years. Half of employees at restaurants (50%) and close on half (46%) of those at coffee shops were aged between 20 and 29 years. Hotel employees tended to be older than workers in the remaining categories in that approximately one in every four (23%) were aged between 40 and 49 years.

As seen in Table 3, approximately seven in every ten (73%) employees classified themselves as African, and approximately one in every four (25%) classified themselves as non-South African. More than eight in every ten (82%) non-South Africans were Zimbabweans, whereas one in every 12 (8%) were Malawian. African employees constituted a larger proportion of the employees in hotels (84%) than restaurants (60%) or coffee shops (61%). In contrast, non-South Africans were more likely to be employed in restaurants (38%) or coffee shops (32%) than in hotels (14%). White employees were more likely

to work in coffee shops (7%) than hotels (1%) or restaurants (2%). The number of coloured and Indian/Asian employees was very small.

With regard to the high percentage of foreigners within the hospitality industry, Patience, said: 'This job is kind of hard but I am used to it. Locals, they have opportunities so they don't want to be working here'. Thando, added: 'I am a foreigner, I have no choice but to go out there and work. I can't even save money by staying with my parents'.

Table 3. Population group

| | Hotel | Res- taur- ant | Coffee shop | Total |
|----------------------|-------|----------------------|----------------|-------|
| African | 84% | 60% | 61% | 73% |
| Coloured | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Indian or Asian | 0% | 1% | 0% | 0% |
| White | 1% | 2% | 7% | 2% |
| Non-South African | 14% | 38% | 32% | 25% |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| N | 498 | 393 | 56 | 947 |

Employees in coffee shops (48%) were more likely than those in restaurants (34%) and hotels (34%) to classify themselves as never married as shown in Table 4. Employees in coffee shops (29%) and hotels (31%) were less likely than those in restaurants (35%) to be in long-term relationships. There were gender differences in terms of relationship status, in that a larger proportion of males (36%) than females (21%) classified themselves as married. Females were more likely than males to be divorced or separated or widowed.

We asked all interviewees to indicate the number of people with whom they were sharing a dwelling, excluding themselves. They were asked to specify the number of male adults, female adults and children. Close on three in every ten respondents (29%) lived with four or more persons. About one-sixth of interviewees (16%) lived alone. In addition, we asked all interviewees how many of their own children (under 18 years of age) were living with them at the time of the study. Just over half of interviewees (52%) did not live with any of their own children. Close on one in every four (25%) interviewees lived with one child.

Table 4 shows that individuals who worked at coffee shops tended to have higher levels of education than those employed in hotels and restaurants. Approximately two in every three (66%) coffee shop employees had completed secondary education as opposed to just over half of hotel (54%) and close on half of restaurant workers (47%). In addition,

approximately one in every five (21%) coffee shop employees had a tertiary qualification compared to approximately one in every eight (12%) restaurant workers. The small proportion (1%) of employees with no formal education was mainly in the hotel and restaurant sectors.

Table 4. Education levels in hospitality sector

| | Hotel | Res- taur- ant | Coffee shop | Total |
|-------------------------------|-------|----------------------|----------------|-------|
| No formal education | 1% | 1% | 0% | 1% |
| Less than primary completed | 3% | 2% | 2% | 2% |
| Primary completed | 2% | 3% | 2% | 2% |
| Less than secondary completed | 40% | 45% | 30% | 41% |
| Secondary completed | 38% | 36% | 45% | 38% |
| Tertiary | 16% | 12% | 21% | 14% |
| Other | 1% | 3% | 0% | 2% |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| N | 498 | 393 | 56 | 947 |

Interviewees were asked if they were doing any other paid work or studies in addition to their employment at the hotel/restaurant/coffee shop. More than nine in every ten employees (93%) were not doing other work or studying. Employees at coffee shops were more likely than those in hotels or restaurants to be involved in other work or studies.

Approximately three in every ten (29%) employees interviewed were waitrons. This reflects the sampling approach in which waitrons were explicitly targeted for all three types of workplace. Slightly more than one in every four (26%) of the employees were employed as kitchen staff (other than chef/cook) or chefs/cooks (27%) respectively.

Males were more likely than females to be employed as chef/cook or waiter; whereas females were more likely than males to be employed to clean, i.e. they performed housekeeping or kitchen duties. Employees who performed duties other than those provided in the pre-specified categories, did mainly work across two or more of the specified categories (20) or bar tending (10).

More than half of employees in the hospitality sector (56%) were employed elsewhere prior to employment in the hotel/restaurant/coffee shop, but decided to leave that job. However, approximately one in every

five employees (19%) was unemployed and looking for work. This was the case for close to one in every four employees (23%) who worked in coffee shops. Employees in the hotel sector were less likely than those in restaurants or coffee shops to say they were forced to leave previous employment. Responses contained in 'other' included several employees who noted that they were transferred from another branch of the hotel/restaurant/coffee shop that employed them at the time of the study.

Approximately one in every five (21%) employees had worked in the hospitality sector for less than 12 months. Overall, on average, employees had worked in the hospitality sector for 4.3 years, with the median being three years. Employees who worked in hotels had a longer working tenure than those employed in restaurants or coffee shops.

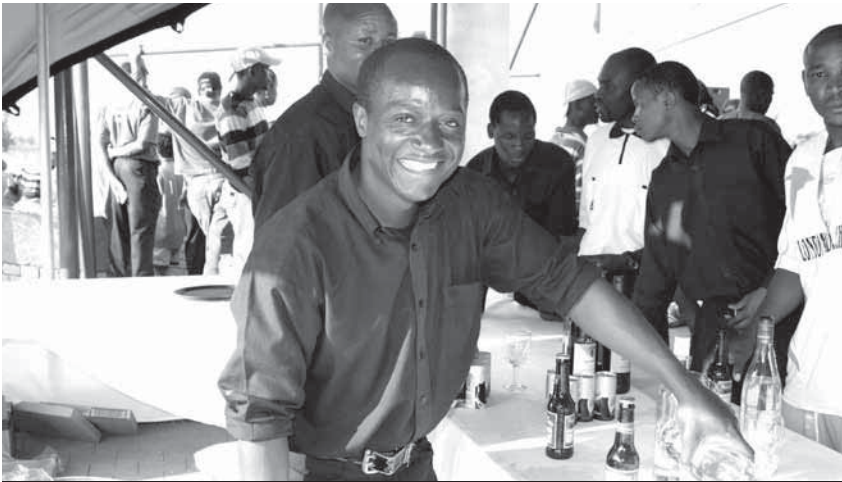
Hotel employees (15%) were more likely than employees at restaurants (2%) to live where they worked. However, employees at hotels spent more time travelling to and from work each day than those at restaurants and coffee shops. The former spent on average two hours (median, 1 hour) travelling, while the latter spent on average one hour respectively. As expected, none of the employees at coffee shops indicated residence at the coffee shops. Employees at restaurants tended to live closer to work than employees at hotels and coffee shops. Thus a larger proportion (34%) of these workers than for other employees indicated a distance of less than five kilometers between work and home.

Employees at hotels tended, on average, to spend more money on transport to and from work on a monthly basis than employees at restaurants and coffee shops.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Half of the employees agreed that it was difficult to get a job at hotels, restaurants and coffee shops in Gauteng. Employees at coffee shops were undecided as equal proportions agreed and disagreed with the statement.

These comments illustrate the difficulties of getting a job in the hospitality industry. For Patience, as a foreigner, jobs in the hospitality industry were the easiest to get: 'I am a foreign person so normally they are the jobs that we can get and since I'm using a passport they are good with that. They say as long as I have a passport I do not need a South African Identity Document'. The hospitality industry is often seen as a job of last resort as Mbali comments: 'There was no job at the time. Even now there is no job. I am looking for a job. You don't find any so I'm stuck here'. This is reiterated through the comment made by Bongwiwe, who claims: 'Well I wouldn't say I chose this job because I was desperate for work and this was the only job I could find'.



Zimbabwean waiter serves customers in Soweto.

Half of employees surveyed agreed that it was easier to get a job at hotels, restaurants and coffee shops than in construction. Hotel workers (35%) were more likely than restaurant (26%) and coffee shop (25%) workers to disagree with the statement.

There were higher levels of agreement compared to previous statements, especially amongst coffee shop and restaurant workers, with the statement that it was easier to get a job as a hotel/restaurant or coffee shop worker than to start one's own business.

SECURITY AND STABILITY AT WORK

Interviewees were asked what, if any, procedure was followed if employers wanted to dismiss workers. For the most part employees, especially those in the hotel sector, noted a verbal or written warning as the procedure for dismissal. Employees at coffee shops were more likely than others to say that their employers did not follow a set procedure for dismissal.

The majority of those interviewed in the survey said that companies have a set procedure for dismissal but because of the liberal use of warnings, dismissal is relatively easy. This is illustrated in the interview with Lorraine: 'They have to first give us three warnings before they can fire us. But they give us warnings for everything. Everything wrong we do we must sign for it'.

One in every eight (14%) employees in the hospitality sector worked without a contract of employment. However, this was the case for approximately one in every four (23%) restaurant employees. Employees who worked in hotels (83%) were more likely than those employed in restaurants (48%) and coffee shops (59%) to have a written contract as the basis of their employment. Conversely, employees in restaurants (28%) and coffee shops (25%) to a larger extent than those in hotels (10%) had verbal agreements. There were no noteworthy gender differences in terms of possession of contracts.

Employees who were conducting housekeeping duties (81%) were more likely than kitchen staff (other than chef/cook) (58%), waitrons (65%), and chefs (71%) to have written contracts.

The incidence of contracts within the hospitality sector is mixed, as some workers have contracts while others do not. Patience is one such worker with no contract: 'No, I do not have a contract of employment, only the kitchen staff has contracts. We on the floor don't'.

Mduduzi, on the other hand has a contract: 'Yes, every year we sign a contract, basically 12 months. I can say I'm not a permanent employee; I'm a permanent casual because I sign a contract every year. It's just this year we haven't signed yet which means up until now I don't have a contract'.

From these comments, it becomes evident that employment

within the hospitality industry is insecure as even the incidence of a contract of employment does little in reducing the vulnerable nature of the job.

Employees at coffee shops (15%) were more likely than those employed in hotels (9%) and restaurants (9%) to work on a casual basis. Hotel employees (87%) were more likely than those employed in coffee shops (62%) and restaurants (75%) to hold permanent contracts. Seven out of 12 employees, who selected the category 'other', did not know the nature of their contracts.

Restaurant workers (50%) more so than hotel (44%) and coffee shop (45%) workers feared losing their jobs in the near future. Coffee shop employees (52%) felt more secure about their jobs than restaurant (39%) and hotel workers (45%).

Employees were undecided about the prospects of their being promoted in the near future since similar proportions agreed (41%) and disagreed (43%) with the statement. Coffee shop employees were less optimistic than hotel and restaurant employees about the possibility of being promoted as evident from higher levels of disagreement with the statement.

Although many workers employed in the sector see prospects of being promoted, the promotion itself may be difficult to come by. As Mbali mentions: 'We do apply for promotion, [but] they don't use us in here. They take people from outside to come and be our supervisors and our managers. If you go and ask why, they say we shortlist our managers'. Another participant, Benjamin, remarked: 'There is nowhere to go from here; this job cannot be our future'. ¹⁸

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