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Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism

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Tourism and Gender: Safety for Women Travelers, Enhancing Gender Equality and Combating Violence Against Women

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to analyze the safety of women tourists, which includes strategies for promoting gender equality and combating violence against women in the tourism industry with specific reference to the context of Kazakhstan. The article outlines the essential strategies for breaking barriers and fostering a gender-equal environment in the tourism industry. It stresses the importance of comprehensive training programs, supportive work environments, policies and programs that support women's leadership and representation in decision-making processes in tourism, addressing the wage gap, creating a safe environment, establishing policies and procedures for handling complaints and offering assistance to victims. Documentary analysis methodology involved the systematic examination and interpretation of relevant documents, reports, publications, international conventions, and declarations related to gender equality and violence against women in the tourism sector. The findings of this study underline the significance of collaboration with various stakeholders including governments, tourism organizations, businesses, and civil society, and advocacy for legal reforms in creating

systemic change. The documentary analysis revealed key strategies for ensuring the safety of women travelers. This includes implementing technological and security innovations, such as mobile applications for security and video monitoring. Additionally, it is crucial to offer women-only transportation and accommodation options. Gender-sensitive training was also identified as an essential component for tourism professionals.

Keywords: gender equality; violence against women; sustainable development; Kazakhstan.

JEL Classification: I23; I28; K15; L30; L33; Z32.

Introduction

The safety of tourists, including women travelers, is essential for the successful development of tourism. The safety of women tourists involves addressing gender equality and violence against women. Despite some improvements, gender inequality still exists in the travel and tourism industry (Alarcón and Cole, 2019; Casado-Díaz *et al.*, 2022; Duffy *et al.*, 2015). Women frequently have limited opportunities for career growth and leadership roles in the tourism sector and commonly experience unequal pay and discriminatory practices (Carvalho *et al.*, 2018; Casado-Díaz *et al.*, 2022; Chen *et al.*, 2021; Muñoz-Bullón, 2009). Moreover, the problem of violence against women, such as harassment and assault, can put their safety and well-being in danger (Aragón Falomir, 2022; Eger, 2021; Mpu and Adu, 2021; Sanggyeong Je, 2023). Addressing these challenges requires proactive measures. This article aims to shed light on strategies that advance gender equality and combat violence against women in the tourism industry. It will explore strategies such as training programs, fostering a supportive work environment, collaboration with stakeholders, advocacy for legal reforms, addressing the wage gap, and creating accessible support systems that empower women and address violence against women. It stresses that collaboration with various stakeholders in the tourism industry including governments, tourism organizations, and civil society can facilitate the development of initiatives that promote gender equality and economic opportunities for women within the tourism industry. The tourism industry can contribute to sustainable development and social progress by breaking barriers and creating a safe and inclusive tourist environment.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Gender Inequality in the Tourism Industry

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in September 2015, established Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5), which aims to global commitment to achieving gender equality and empowering women (UN, 2015). It focuses on eliminating all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination, ensuring access to proper healthcare and education, and promoting equal opportunities for women in political, economic, and public life. Achieving gender equality by 2030 is impossible without taking a decisive effort to address the underlying causes of discrimination against women in the public and private spheres. Despite notable progress in some areas, gender inequality continues to persist in the tourism sector of many nations across the world (Alarcón and Cole, 2019; Casado-Díaz *et al.*, 2022; Duffy *et al.*, 2015; Navarro Cejas *et al.*, 2021; Segovia-Pérez *et al.*, 2019). According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2023, that reflects indicators of economic integration, such as salaries, access to high-skilled employment and access to education, the economic gap between men and women is significant even in developed countries (World Economic Forum, 2023).

Global Report on Women in Tourism (2019) stresses that 'tourism has a pivotal role to play in achieving the commitments at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – including commitments to gender equality, women's empowerment and leaving no one behind'. It highlights that women in tourism often face various challenges and disparities, including underrepresentation in leadership roles, wage gap, unpaid care work, access to education and training, safety concerns, and stereotyping and bias. Although women count for 54% of workforce worldwide in the tourism sector, they are underrepresented in managerial positions (less than 40%), management roles (less than 20%), and board positions (less than 8%) (Global Report on Women in Tourism, 2019). Unless gender equality is effectively and significantly addressed, tourism's ability to make a meaningful contribution to the SDGs will be limited (Alarcón and Cole, 2019; Zelinska *et al.*, 2021).

Meanwhile, according to the Global Report on Women in Tourism (2019), a gender pay gap continues to persist in the tourism sector, as women earn less than men for equivalent work. Research also indicates that there is a sizable wage gap for women across all locations within the tourism industry, with their mean hourly rate being significantly lower than that of men, revealing serious gender-related challenges (Casado-Díaz *et al.*, 2022; Muñoz-Bullón, 2009). For example, the study by Fleming (2015) that based on a sample of 112,990 people employed in the hospitality industry of the USA in 2010 found that there is solid evidence of a persistent income

gap between females and males, even after taking into account factors such as educational attainment, and hours worked. Casaldo-Díaz *et al.* (2022) argue that women employed in the tourism industry tend to hold lower-ranking positions compared to men and, also they are more commonly found in low-skilled roles, contributing to their overall wage gap. Thus, wage gap is one of the factors that contribute to the gender inequality within tourism sector.

Furthermore, social and cultural factors such as traditional gender roles and stereotypes further hinder women's involvement in the tourism industry (Carvalho *et al.*, 2018; Chen *et al.*, 2021; Duffy *et al.*, 2015). These deep-rooted beliefs often aggravate inequality and limit opportunities for women, both as employees and entrepreneurs within the tourism sector. For instance, social norms may dictate certain roles as more suitable for women, leading to the concentration of women in traditionally female-dominated, unskilled and marginalized jobs such as front desk staff and housekeeping (Ghaderi *et al.*, 2023). Women may therefore find it difficult to get higher-paying jobs and leadership roles in the tourism sector. Similarly, women entrepreneurs in the tourism industry may face difficulties accessing financial resources and support due to gender prejudices in the financial sector (Handaragama and Kusakabe, 2021). These prejudices result from societal conventions and beliefs that view women as less competent in the workplace. Therefore, it is important to address traditional gender roles and stereotypes in the tourism industry in order to create a more inclusive and equitable sector that benefits from the full participation and contributions of women.

Additionally, there is still an uneven representation of women in senior roles within the tourism industry (Carvalho *et al.*, 2018; Chen *et al.*, 2021; Rinaldi and Salerno, 2020; Segovia-Pérez *et al.*, 2019). The concept of the 'glass ceiling' is commonly employed in gender and management literature to analyze the underrepresentation of women in top-level roles (Carvalho *et al.*, 2018; Chen *et al.*, 2021; Remington and Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018). It symbolizes the invisible barriers that competent individuals, such as women and ethnic minorities, encounter, impeding their advancement to senior and executive management positions (Carvalho *et al.*, 2018; Remington and Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018). Despite their skills and qualifications, these obstacles prevent women from advancing in their careers. Chen *et al.* (2021) conducted in-depths interviews with 14 females in hospitality leadership positions in the USA and found that women might face obstacles in their careers due to the lack of self-confidence, lack of careful career planning and workplace stereotypes. Moreover, Carvalho *et al.* (2018) found that even women who have surpassed the metaphorical 'glass ceiling' in hotels and travel agencies in Portugal, acknowledge that gender power dynamics and ongoing gendered processes still have an impact on them and that attaining a high position does not eliminate the influence of gender norms and biases in their professional settings. Therefore, addressing gender inequality requires systematic approaches that can include promoting equal employment opportunities, combating stereotypes and biases, empowering women in local communities, and implementing gender-sensitive policies and regulations.

1.2. Safety for Women and Violence Against Women in Tourism

Safety for women travelers and violence against women in the tourism sector are critical issues that require urgent attention and action (Aragón Falomir, 2022; Eger, 2021; Mpu and Adu, 2021; Sanggyeong Je, 2023; World Health Organization, 2013). Women in the tourism sector, such as hotel staff, tour guides, hospitality professionals as well as female tourists may be particularly at risk of experiencing various types of violence, such as sexual harassment and assault. In 2022, the highest rate of violent crimes against women was observed in Senegal (78%), Guinea (80%), and Pakistan (85%) (OECD, 2023).

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women adopted December 20, 1993 defines violence as 'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life'. Meanwhile, according to Article 3 of the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) adopted on May 11, 2011, 'gender-based violence against women shall mean violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately'. These international conventions stress the importance of thoroughly addressing violence against women in both the public and private domains.

The various forms of violence against women in the tourism industry range from verbal harassment to physical and sexual assault, trafficking and exploitation, and forced labor (Alrawadieh and Alrawadieh, 2020; Brooks and Heaslip, 2019; Cheung *et al.*, 2018; Díaz-Meneses *et al.*, 2020). The study by Cheung *et al.* (2018) has documented the prevalence of incidents of sexual harassment and seductive harassment behavior in Taiwan's tourism sector. Some key factors contributing to violence against women in the tourism sector include gender inequality, cultural factors such as gender-based stereotypes, lack of awareness and education, alcohol

and drug use, economic factors, lack of legal protection, permissive culture (Aragón Falomir, 2022; Díaz-Meneses *et al.*, 2020; Mpu and Adu, 2021). Eger (2021) emphasizes the significance of gendered constructions of vulnerability in understanding the nature of violence. According to the Council of Europe, four types of factors can be identified as causes of gender-based violence: cultural factors (patriarchal and sexist views, gender stereotypes and prejudice, general acceptance of violence, socialization of gender, etc.), legal factors (low levels of reporting and investigation, legal flaws or loopholes), economic factors (lack of economic resources, poverty) and political factors (Council of Europe, 2019). Comprehending the diversity of the forms of violence and factors contributing to violence is crucial in developing targeted interventions and enhancing efforts to prevent gender discrimination.

Research has indicated that violence against women is prevalent in the tourism sector. Díaz-Meneses *et al.* (2020) analyzed violence from gender stereotypes and sexist attitudes in the context of tourism and argue that within the tourism sector, there are underlying gender stereotypes that contribute to the marginalization of women as both travelers and professionals. Similarly, Aragón Falomir (2022) examined and identified the factors that contribute to the vulnerability and violence faced by women in Cancun, Mexico's international tourism city and found that women's vulnerability is influenced by factors such as poverty, lack of education, inequality, and social norms. Furthermore, Cheung *et al.* (2018) found that Asian tour leaders frequently are very passive in dealing with instances of sexual harassment. These findings indicate the urgent need for effective measures to address violence against women.

2. Research Methodology

The aim of this study is to examine the promotion of gender equality and combating violence against women in the tourism and hospitality sector. To achieve this aim, a documentary analysis approach was employed. This methodology involved the systematic examination and interpretation of relevant documents, reports, and publications related to gender equality and violence against women in tourism and hospitality. In particular, international conventions and declarations such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women adopted December 18, 1979, Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) adopted May 11, 2011, as well as policy documents of Kazakhstan were analyzed. Data were analyzed in order to identify prevalent themes, patterns, and trends arising from the documentary sources, related to gender equality and violence against women in the tourism sector.

3. Research Results and Discussion

3.1. Addressing Violence Against Women in the Tourism Sector

A comprehensive and coordinated worldwide framework is needed to address violence against women in the tourism industry to ensure the safety and well-being of female tourists, employees, and local communities. The international framework of violence against women includes a set of agreements, conventions, and guidelines developed by international organizations and ratified by member countries to address and combat violence against women at a global level. One of the important steps in combating violence against women is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) that was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 18 December 1979. It is frequently referred to as an international bill of rights for women and is regarded as one of the most significant international human rights instruments that focuses on gender equality (Mullins, 2018). According to article 3 of the CEDAW, 'States Parties shall take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men'. Key features and provisions of the CEDAW include a comprehensive definition of discrimination, obligations of state parties, a focus on substantive equality, and the development of effective reporting and monitoring mechanisms.

In the meantime, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women that was adopted by United Nations on 20 December 1993 was the first international law that specifically addressed violence against women, offering a framework for regional and global action. It is an essential international instrument for the global effort to abolish discrimination and gender-based violence against women. The Declaration provided the definition of violence against women, recognized gender-based violence as human rights violation, highlighted the importance of eliminating all forms of violence against women, and stressed obligations of states and international cooperation in eliminating violence against women. It has played a crucial role in shaping policies, legal frameworks, and initiatives that aim to eliminate violence and promote gender equality worldwide (King, 2019).

Another major international convention in combating violence against women is The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) and it is considered as first legally binding convention for Europe and first to establish a gender-neutral definition of sexual violence (Grans, 2018; Jurasz, 2015; Lozinska, 2021). According to the Istanbul Convention, types of gender-based violence include psychological violence, stalking, physical violence, sexual violence, including rape, forced marriages, female genital mutilation, forced abortion and forced sterilization, sexual harassment, aiding or abetting and attempt, unacceptable justifications for crimes, including crimes committed in the name of so-called 'honor'. Based on this classification Council of Europe (2019) identified five common types of gender-based violence: physical, verbal (including hate speech), sexual, psychological, and socio-economic. Key features of the Istanbul Convention include comprehensive scope, emphasizing preventive and protective measures, the importance of prosecution and sanction as well as non-discrimination and equality.

As the literature review indicated, women travelers and tourism workers face serious safety risks from sexual harassment and assault (Alrawadieh and Alrawadieh, 2020; Brooks and Heaslip, 2019; Cheung *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, it is crucial to create a safe environment where women feel protected and where offenders are held responsible for their behavior. In order to address this problem, training programs can be put in place to inform tourism staff on proper conduct, bystander intervention, gender sensitivity, and reporting procedures. In addition, creating accessible support systems, helplines, and safe spaces for victims can encourage reporting cases of violence. Some key benefits of support systems include providing immediate assistance, ensuring confidentiality, tailored support, raising awareness, prevention, early intervention, and collaborative efforts with the government and other stakeholders. These measures have the potential to play a significant role in encouraging reporting and supporting victims during their recovery process.

Another important way of tackling this issue is establishing policies and procedures for handling complaints and offering assistance to victims. These policies and procedures can offer a structured framework for handling complaints and helping individuals who are impacted. Developing such policies can include clear reporting mechanisms, confidentiality and anonymity, thorough investigation process, legal protections, timely responses, supportive measures, and regular training and awareness programs.

Additionally, legal reforms are an important step in tackling violence against women effectively. For example, the findings of the Review of the effectiveness of legislation protecting women from violence across the Commonwealth outlined 9 main areas for action that are intended to assist parliamentarians in their initiatives to improve local laws that protect women from violence: review existing legislation addressing violence against women, advocate for the introduction or amendment of legislation, build women's cross-party parliamentary networks, build parliamentary cross-party networks with men, build external alliances, conduct pre-legislative scrutiny, advocate for a specific amendment of a bill, conduct post-legislative scrutiny, and conduct a gender analysis of the budget (The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, 2021). Strong and comprehensive laws are crucial for protecting women, holding perpetrators accountable, and promoting a society free from gender-based violence. Some key areas in legal reforms related to violence against women can include removing legal loopholes, support for victims, and international cooperation. It is crucial to ensure the protection of female tourists and tourism employees as well as the creation of a secure atmosphere in order to achieve gender equality and responsible tourism practices. The creation of a safer and more respectful tourism environment for women and all individuals is possible through comprehensive and collaborative actions.

3.2. Safety for Women Travelers in Tourism

Safety for women travelers is a crucial aspect of creating a welcoming and sustainable travel environment. Prioritizing women's safety not only contributes to the growth and reputation of tourist destinations but also promotes the principles of human rights and equality. To address the safety of female travelers, it is necessary to take a multifaceted approach that incorporates infrastructural upgrades, increased security protocols, and public awareness initiatives. The rapid development of international tourism, as well as the growth of global security threats, demands new approaches for governing international collaboration and partnerships in the tourism industry. The dangers posed by the security concerns rise as nations' connections through travel and tourism deepen. Several crucial strategies to improve tourism security cooperation and partnership might be proposed to address these issues. One of the important ways of such partnerships is information sharing and intelligence collaboration. Countries must establish efficient systems for exchanging information and intelligence about potential security threats. To enable nations to react proactively and cooperatively, this entails building systems for exchanging real-time data on security concerns, trends, and incidents. Moreover, a coordinated response to

cross-border security challenges can be facilitated by the formation of regional and international agreements on tourism security. These agreements could address areas such as extradition procedures and joint operations.

The documentary analysis revealed important strategies in ensuring the safety of women travelers such as technology and safety innovations (mobile apps for safety and video surveillance, women-only transportation and accommodation, gender-sensitive training, emergency hotlines and support centers, the collaboration of various stakeholders (Ghai and Chowdhri, 2022; Khoo-Lattimore and Gibson, 2018). In fact, technology may significantly assist safe tourism practices. Women travelers can feel more secure and have better overall safety with the use of mobile apps that offer real-time safety alerts and location tracking. Hotels and transport companies can also install contemporary security measures like CCTV cameras and panic buttons to ensure quick response in case of emergencies and for the purpose of identifying potential security threats.

Offering women-only services such as women-only accommodation options and transportation services aims at creating a secure and comfortable environment for female travelers. Women-only services contribute to enhanced safety and comfort, and a positive reputation of tourist destinations (Ghai and Chowdhri, 2022). They might have extra security precautions, female staff members, and safety procedures that provide them with a sense of protection and lessen the possibility of harassment or potential risks. Moreover, there may be specific norms and sensitivities surrounding relationships between men and women in some cultures. Women-only services can assist in addressing these cultural considerations and ensure that female travelers feel respected and safe.

Meanwhile, gender-sensitive training implies providing education and guidance for tourism professionals, including hotel staff, tour guides, and transportation operators, on gender sensitivity, recognizing harassment, and reacting appropriately to security concerns. Gender-sensitive training can cover a range of topics, including recognizing gender bias, understanding safety concerns, empathy and communication, and creating safe spaces. For example, The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) proposed four steps for gender mainstreaming in tourism companies as a part of guidelines on gender-inclusive strategy for tourism business: securing high-level support for gender equality and committing to the Women's Empowerment Principles; assessing current progress on gender equality; reviewing current progress on thematic areas for women in tourism; and developing and implementing an action plan for gender equality in tourism (UNWTO, 2022). Gender-sensitive training helps tourism professionals become more attentive and responsive to the diverse needs of female travelers.

Emergency hotlines and support centers are essential in ensuring the safety of women travelers. Travelling can be risky, especially in unfamiliar surroundings, and women may have difficulties with regard to their safety and security. Having access to dedicated emergency hotlines and support centers can provide them with protection and assistance. Emergency hotlines and support centers can provide immediate assistance in emergencies, psychological support, necessary information and resources for women travelers.

The collaboration of the government, travel agencies, and local communities is one of the key ways to create a safe and welcoming travel environment for women. This may involve implementing policies and guidelines to prevent harassment, training staff in the tourism industry on gender sensitivity, disseminating information and resources on safety, and promoting an inclusive and respectful culture.

3.3. Collaborative Strategies and Initiatives to Advance Gender Equality in Kazakhstan's Tourism Industry

Over the years of independence, Kazakhstan has made some progress in protecting the legal rights and interests of women and eliminating gender inequality (Bayanbayeva and Altynbassov, 2020; Khairullayeva *et al.*, 2022; Kuzhabekova and Almukhambetova, 2021; OECD, 2017). In 1998, Kazakhstan joined the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Kazakhstan has also signed other important international pacts on civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights of women (OECD, 2017). Currently, compared to other countries in Central Asia, Kazakhstan is a pioneer in advancing gender equality (World Economic Forum, 2023). According to article 14 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 'no one shall be subject to any discrimination for reasons of origin, social, property status, occupation, sex, race, nationality, language, attitude towards religion, convictions, place of residence or any other circumstances'. The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated December 8, 2009, On state guarantees of equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women ensures equal access of men and women to the state service and stresses the importance of ensuring gender equality in the field of protection of health, education, culture.

In the Global Gender Gap Index 2023, a study report that compares gender equality across 146 nations, Kazakhstan improved its overall standing and climbed to position 62 (World Economic Forum, 2023). Specifically, according to the report, Kazakhstan ranked 28th in Economic participation and Opportunity, 27th in Educational

Attainment, 47th in Health and Survival, and 100th in Political Empowerment. Thus, although the nation showed some progress in eliminating gender gaps in education attainment levels, economic opportunities and health and survival, the number of women in parliament and ministerial positions is still low. It indicates the gendered nature of management roles, highlighting that despite their apparent gender neutrality, these roles frequently reflect characteristics and expectations that conform to traditional male norms. This demonstrates how gender power dynamics still have an impact on organizations, proving that gendered hierarchies and norms play a significant role in determining organizational structures and dynamics.

In the Travel and Tourism Development Index of the World Economic Forum 2021, Kazakhstan ranks 66th out of 117 countries, up 14 positions compared to the previous index in 2019 (80th) (World Economic Forum, 2022). Kazakhstan has significantly improved its position in such areas as Tourism Prioritization, International Openness, Natural Resources, Tourism Services Infrastructure. At the same time, there is a deterioration in such indicators as the Business environment, Health and hygiene, and Safety. It shows the necessity of proactive measures in some areas in order to develop sustainable tourism in Kazakhstan.

Unfortunately, national policy documents on tourism in Kazakhstan such as the Concept of development of the tourism industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023 – 2029 ignore the gender issues in tourism. In addition, there are no statistics on the gender equality in tourism and violence against women in the tourism sector of Kazakhstan. Although at the international level there are various ratings regarding the danger or safety of countries and cities for women to visit, in Kazakhstan there is no unified information regarding these data. Furthermore, available literature from Kazakhstan's context also overlooks gender issues in tourism. For example, Altynbassov *et al.* (2021) found that the establishment of international university campuses can facilitate the attraction of international academics and students which can lead to the development of the tourism sector. Another study has revealed that academic mobility can increase the rate of MICE tourism and academic tourism as a whole (Altynbassov *et al.*, 2022). However, these studies did not cover gender equality issues in the tourism sector.

In fact, gender inequality hinders the tourism industry's capability to fulfill the United Nations SDG 5, which aims to advance gender equality and empower women. To address gender inequality in tourism in a comprehensive way, governments, tourism organizations, businesses, and civil society must collaborate. University-business partnerships are a crucial component of this collaboration (Issabekov *et al.*, 2022; Pugh *et al.*, 2022). These partnerships can address gender disparities and develop a more inclusive and equitable tourism industry by collaborating on research, teaching, and practical initiatives. Other important ways for promoting gender equality can include policies and initiatives that promote women's leadership and representation in the decision-making process, implementing measures to address the wage gap, providing training programs to enhance women's skills and opportunities for career advancement, raising awareness about gender-based discrimination and harassment and creating safe and inclusive work environments. Tourism organizations and employers should implement policies that promote equal opportunity, offer training on gender equality and diversity, and ensure transparent and fair recruitment and promotion processes. Additionally, establishing support systems and mentorship programs can assist women in navigating career challenges and empowering them to overcome barriers.

Conclusion

This article aims to shed light on strategies for ensuring the safety of women tourists, which includes strategies for promoting gender equality and combating violence against women in the tourism sector. Addressing gender-specific safety issues is one of the most important components of safe travel for women. Women travelers face unique challenges, ranging from cultural norms to potential risks of harassment or violence. Destination countries and stakeholders in the tourism sector must actively collaborate to put gender-sensitive policies and initiatives into place in order to mitigate these concerns. Furthermore, in order to develop a more inclusive and equal tourism industry, the root causes of discrimination against women must be addressed. This involves dismantling conventional gender roles and prejudices, encouraging women to pursue leadership positions, reducing the wage gap, and supporting and supplying resources for female entrepreneurs. These initiatives align with SDG 5's broader objectives of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Throughout the years Kazakhstan has been actively addressing the issue of gender equality by taking steps to protect women's rights and interests and eliminate gender inequality. The country has made strides in this regard through its participation in international conventions and the implementation of policies aimed at fostering gender equality across various sectors, including state service, healthcare, education and cultural

domains. However, despite these achievements, there are still challenges that need to be overcome to achieve gender equality.

This study emphasizes that gender inequality in the tourist industry can be addressed by the adoption of gender-sensitive policies, the provision of training programs, and the promotion of women's leadership and representation. University-business partnerships can also play a significant role in developing a more inclusive tourism sector. Moreover, a worldwide framework is necessary to effectively address violence against women in the tourism industry. International conventions and agreements, such as the CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention offer essential guidelines and provisions for global action against gender-based violence.

The creation of a safe and respectful tourism environment for women requires comprehensive and collaborative actions that involve training programs, support systems, and policies for handling complaints and assisting victims. This study revealed key strategies for ensuring the safety of women travelers including implementation of technological and security innovations, such as mobile applications for security and video monitoring, offering women-only transportation and accommodation options and gender-sensitive training.

Credit Authorship Contribution Statement

Aigerim Bayanbayeva: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Validation, Writing – review and editing.

Akmara Turarbekova: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing.

Daniyar Nurmukhanbet: Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing.

Venera Balmagambetova: Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing.

Nagima Kala: Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing.

Serik Sabitov: Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing.

Aiman Mytalyapova: Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

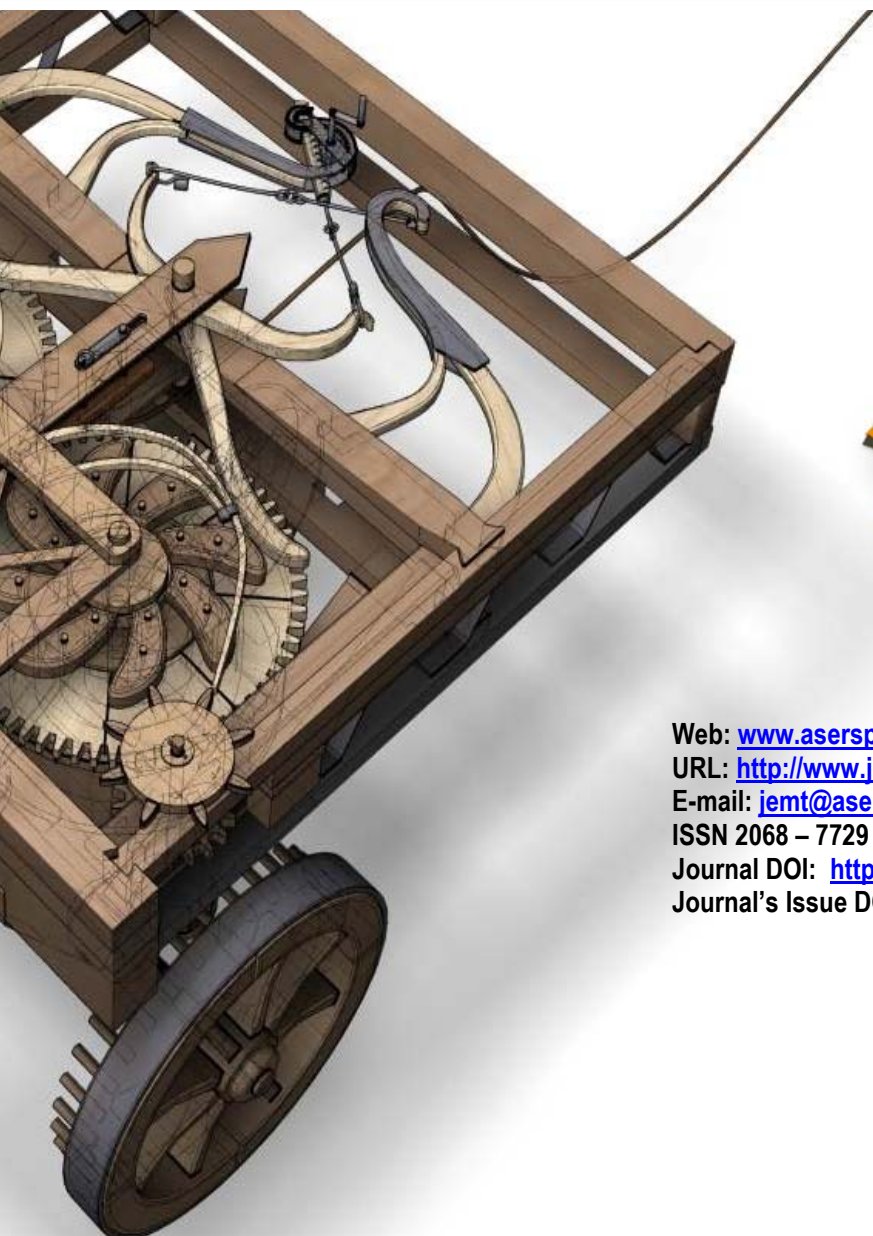
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