

Review

Gendered Employment and Organizational Power in Travel Agencies and Tour Operators: A Scoping Review

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Abstract

Travel agencies and tour operators employ large numbers of women, yet the evidence remains fragmented on whether employment provides comparable rewards, working conditions, career opportunities, and organizational authority. This scoping review mapped indexed empirical research on gendered employment and organizational power in tourism intermediaries. Scopus and the Web of Science Core Collection were searched through 20 July 2026. After deduplication, 390 unique records were independently screened by two reviewers, 30 reports underwent full-text assessment, and 17 reports representing 16 studies were included. Data were extracted using a structured matrix and synthesized through evidence-role classification, design-sensitive interpretation, methodological robustness appraisal, and sensitivity analysis. The evidence base was small and heterogeneous. Thirteen studies provided direct and separable evidence, whereas three were contextual. The clearest findings concerned unequal wage returns, work-design conditions associated with retention and safety, and selective routes into leadership or ownership. Evidence from three settings did not support a simple capability-deficit explanation, while strategic decision rights, collective voice, board processes, and platform governance were rarely examined directly. The review organizes these findings around reward allocation, work organization, and access allocation. Future research should broaden database coverage and use longitudinal, comparative, and decision-level designs to examine these allocation processes directly.

Keywords: gendered organizations; sociology of work; organizational inequality; travel agencies; tour operators; pay inequality; work design; career mobility



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1. Introduction

1.1. From Workforce Presence to Organizational Returns

Women's numerical presence in an occupation does not, by itself, indicate whether they receive equivalent pay, career opportunities, authority, or protection at work. Research on gendered organizations shows that apparently neutral rules for evaluation, promotion, and reward can reproduce inequality after women enter employment (Acker 1990, 2006; Castilla 2008; Castilla and Benard 2010). The relevant social-science question is therefore not only who is employed, but how organizations value qualifications, performance, responsibility, and participation.

Recent organizational research likewise shows that gender inequality can be reproduced through workplace structures, leadership relations, and organizational policies

even when women are formally present in employment ([Galdiero et al. 2024](#); [Tinkler and Clay-Warner 2026](#)).

This distinction matters in tourism. Women comprise a large share of the workforce, yet tourism employment remains marked by occupational segmentation, unstable conditions, care-related constraints, harassment, and under-representation in senior positions ([Baum 2015](#); [World Tourism Organization 2019](#)). Critical reviews have also noted that tourism research often reports the number of women without examining the organizational processes that distribute work, rewards, and authority ([Figuerola-Domecq et al. 2015](#); [Mooney 2020](#)). A focus on employment relations and organizational inequality provides a clearer bridge between tourism research and the sociology of work, gender studies, and social stratification.

This review concentrates on tourism intermediaries, principally travel agencies and tour operators. They link travelers to transport, accommodation, attractions, and other services, but they do not perform exactly the same role. Agencies mainly advise customers and sell products supplied by other firms; tour operators assemble services into packages and coordinate their contracting and delivery. Travel-management companies, reservation firms, and tour leaders attached to agencies may perform comparable intermediary functions. Because these organizations sit between suppliers and customers, they also make choices about staffing, customer-facing work, product portfolios, supplier access, and sometimes business ownership ([United Nations Statistics Division 2008](#); [Pencarelli and Dini 2016](#)).

The organizational boundary matters because hotels, airlines, destination organizations, travel agencies, and tour operators do not allocate work, assets, or decision rights in the same way. Pooling these settings can blur where inequality is actually produced and make it impossible to determine whether a finding belongs to a tourism intermediary, another tourism industry, or a wider labor market. Mixed-sector studies were therefore eligible only when findings for travel agencies, tour operators, or other eligible intermediary participants could be isolated from the broader sample. For example, [Carvalho et al. \(2018\)](#) was retained because evidence from the three travel-agency executives could be identified within a broader sample of senior women in tourism.

1.2. An Organizational Lens

Acker's account of gendered organizations provides the main theoretical lens, supplemented by relational inequality theory. Jobs, hierarchies, workplace interactions, and images of the "ideal worker" are produced through organizational practices that distribute tasks, visibility, rewards, and authority ([Acker 1990, 2006](#)). Relational inequality theory directs attention to claims over valued resources and to the relationships through which categorical distinctions become consequential ([Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019](#)). Together, these theories provide a strong account of gender inequality in organizations. The more limited task here is to identify where indexed studies locate those processes within tourism intermediaries.

Gendered-organization analysis also requires a distinction between visible outcomes and the processes that produce them. [Britton \(2000\)](#) cautions that workforce composition or formal structure alone cannot establish that an organizational practice is gendered. [Ely and Meyerson \(2000\)](#) and [Gherardi \(1994\)](#) similarly locate gender in formal procedures, informal interaction, and everyday cultural practices. Organizational power may therefore appear in discrete decisions, but it may also be embedded in routines, norms, and taken-for-granted expectations ([Fleming and Spicer 2014](#)). This distinction is important because pay, turnover, or formal leadership may be recorded even when the allocation decisions behind them are not.

The glass-ceiling metaphor captures part of the problem, but it can hide several distinct transitions. Women may enter the sector yet remain in less-valued roles, receive lower returns for comparable responsibility, or face working arrangements that make retention and promotion difficult. A managerial title may not bring control of budgets or strategy, while ownership may depend on unusual access to finance, family assets, religious legitimacy, or elite networks. These situations are connected, but they are not equivalent and cannot be inferred from workforce counts alone.

To keep these transitions separate, the review uses an allocation-point heuristic rather than proposing a general theory. It distinguishes three organizational decision points: reward allocation, work organization, and access allocation. The included studies treat education, experience, occupational skill, performance, responsibility, and participation as resources, while the observed outcomes include pay, employment quality, retention, career mobility, authority, ownership, and decision rights. The heuristic asks where organizational rules connect resources to outcomes and whether the resulting allocation is unequal, conditional, or simply unobserved. It draws on the resources–agency–achievements distinction and research on gendered organizations, without treating qualifications as neutral measures of merit or assuming a single career path (Kabeer 1999; Acker 2006).

The three allocation points were selected because they capture distinct organizational questions already emphasized in the theoretical traditions used here. Reward allocation draws on gendered-organization and relational inequality approaches by asking how organizational rules and claims distribute valued resources (Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019; Zimmermann 2024). Work organization focuses on how tasks, schedules, workloads, support, and control are structured in everyday employment, a concern shared by gendered-organization research and labor process analysis (Acker 2006; Thompson and Smith 2010). Access allocation addresses entry to positions and resources through which authority is exercised, including leadership, ownership, and substantive decision rights (Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019; Fleming and Spicer 2014). These categories are therefore used as a parsimonious heuristic for organizing a heterogeneous corpus, not as a universal taxonomy of organizational inequality or as a replacement for alternative frameworks in organizational sociology or labor process research.

The device serves two limited purposes. First, it prevents common substitutions: presence is not power, a title is not a decision right, and an individual complaint is not collective voice. Second, it converts broad claims into testable questions: which resource is being allocated, who controls the rule, which outcome follows, and what alternative explanation remains plausible? It does not establish a causal sequence or assume that every tourism intermediary follows the same pattern.

For clarity, several recurring terms are used in a specific sense throughout the review. Organizational power refers broadly to the capacity to shape consequential organizational outcomes through formal decisions, control over resources, or rules and routines that structure others' options. Authority refers more narrowly to a recognized capacity to direct work or make decisions within an organizational role. Decision rights denote substantive discretion over matters such as policy, staffing, budgets, investment, products, or other consequential allocations; a formal title alone is not treated as evidence of such rights. Resource control refers to control over valued organizational assets or inputs, including capital, budgets, staffing, supplier access, and other resources relevant to organizational action. Collective voice refers to representative or organized forms of employee influence, such as bargaining or worker representation, rather than individual complaint, disclosure, or coping.

1.3. Review Aim and Research Questions

Research on gender in tourism has examined segregation, work–family relations, harassment, entrepreneurship, leadership, career progression, and pay, while recent reviews have continued to document these issues across hospitality and tourism at a broad sectoral level (Figueroa-Domecq et al. 2015; Carvalho et al. 2019; Mooney 2020; Russen et al. 2021; Yudhistira and Robaka 2025). Evidence specific to tourism intermediaries, however, remains dispersed across countries, methods, and organizational levels. Tourism-wide research cannot establish whether findings from hotels, airlines, destination organizations, or mixed tourism samples apply to travel agencies and tour operators, and the prior-review searches undertaken for this study identified no synthesis focused on this organizational boundary. A further analytical problem is that the available studies more often record employment outcomes or formal positions than the decisions through which organizations allocate rewards, structure work, and regulate access to authority. It therefore remains unclear whether women’s numerical presence in tourism-intermediary employment is accompanied by comparable returns, working conditions, career access, or substantive decision rights.

Within the indexed record retrieved here, this lacuna has persisted over time. The earliest included study, Hull and Milne (1998), examined women-led tourism enterprises in a broader regional setting rather than gendered employment or organizational power in tourism intermediaries as a distinct field. More sector-specific evidence appeared from the mid-2010s onward, including employment structure and pay (Carvalho et al. 2014), leadership decisions in travel agencies (Alonso-Almeida and Bremser 2015), retention and work–family conflict (Khorakian et al. 2018), and later ownership, employee voice, and wage inequality (Gomez-Perez and Jourde 2021; Abou-Shouk et al. 2021; Marfil-Cotilla et al. 2024). The expansion has therefore been gradual but fragmented, with studies accumulating around particular outcomes and national settings rather than developing a sustained body of research on how tourism intermediaries allocate rewards, organize work, and distribute substantive authority.

The aim is to map and critically appraise the indexed empirical evidence, not to estimate sector-wide prevalence or to validate a universal explanatory model. The contribution is diagnostic and analytical rather than causal: it defines a transparent organizational boundary, maps study-level evidence, and identifies an observational asymmetry between outcomes that are measured and decision processes that are largely unobserved. Direct findings, qualified interpretations, and untested propositions are kept separate; the allocation-point device is used only to structure those distinctions.

Given the expected size and heterogeneity of the corpus, processes not directly observed—such as board deliberation, collective bargaining, platform governance, and corporate social responsibility systems—are treated as evidence gaps. Context-specific accounts involving race, religion, class, migration, or care responsibilities are likewise not presented as proof of a general intersectional effect.

The review addresses 3 questions:

- Research question 1. What are the main characteristics and methodological robustness of the indexed evidence?
- Research question 2. What evidence exists on gendered rewards, work organization, career access, leadership, ownership, decision rights, and collective voice?
- Research question 3. Which findings remain stable after evidence role and methodological robustness are considered, and which domains remain under-researched?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Review Design and Reporting

The study used a scoping-review design with systematic searching, independent screening, full-text assessment, and design-sensitive synthesis. This design was appropriate because the literature varied in setting, population, method, and outcome, while the purpose was to map the extent and limits of evidence rather than pool effect sizes. More recent methodological guidance similarly defines scoping reviews as evidence syntheses designed to systematically identify and map heterogeneous evidence and emphasizes transparent alignment among data extraction, analysis, and presentation (Munn et al. 2022; Pollock et al. 2023). Reporting followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) and the PRISMA extension for Searches (PRISMA-S) (Peters et al. 2020; Tricco et al. 2018; Rethlefsen et al. 2021). PRISMA-ScR was used to structure transparent reporting of the scoping-review process, whereas PRISMA-S guided complete and reproducible reporting of the database searches. A completed PRISMA-ScR checklist accompanies the submission.

The protocol was not prospectively registered. Before cross-study interpretation began, the population–concept–context boundary, screening and full-text exclusion codes, study-family rule, extraction fields, coding framework, power dimensions, and robustness criteria were frozen in a dated methodological workbook. All later decisions were logged. This procedure improves traceability but does not replace prospective registration.

2.2. Information Sources and Search Strategy

Scopus and the Web of Science Core Collection were selected to map multidisciplinary scholarship indexed across tourism, management, sociology, labor studies, and related social sciences. They were not treated as a complete representation of the field. The review was defined as a synthesis of internationally indexed research, and every descriptive claim is restricted to the retrieved corpus. The databases were searched through 20 July 2026 without restrictions on publication year, language, document type, subject category, or country.

Three search families were executed in each database. S1 combined tourism-intermediary terms with gender and inequality terms; S2 added employment, career, leadership, ownership, pay, authority, power, and governance terms; and S3 sought prior systematic, scoping, integrative, bibliometric, or evidence reviews. Exact strings, fields, dates, yields, and export files are provided in Supplementary File S1 and the search log.

Regional databases, thesis repositories, and gray literature were not searched. This creates a clear coverage risk: studies published in local outlets or outside the major indexes may be missing, particularly from Latin America, Southern Europe, Africa, and Asia. No language filter was applied in either database, but the Boolean strings were built in English. Relevant records indexed in Scopus or Web of Science without English-language titles, abstracts, or keywords may therefore have been missed. The review was consequently defined as a synthesis of internationally indexed scholarship rather than as an exhaustive inventory of all available evidence.

2.3. Eligibility and Organizational Boundary

Eligible populations were employees, managers, executives, owners, entrepreneurs, and tour leaders or guides linked to travel agencies or tour operators. Eligible organizations also included travel-management companies, destination-management companies with a substantive intermediary function, reservation services, online travel agencies, and closely related intermediary arrangements. The concept was gendered employment or organizational power, including work allocation, pay, job quality, retention, career progression, leadership, ownership, authority, decision rights, harassment, or voice.

Primary empirical studies were eligible. Mixed-sector studies were retained only when results for tourism intermediaries were reported separately or when eligible participants and findings could be directly attributed. Studies of tourists, consumers, destination choice, marketing responses, or gender used only as a demographic control were excluded. Tourism-wide studies were also excluded when agency or tour-operator results could not be separated. Companion reports were linked and retained only when they contributed unique methods, findings, or interpretation.

Six full-text exclusion codes were used: intermediation not substantive (FT1); gendered work or power not substantive (FT2); wrong organizational population (FT3); intermediary results not separable (FT4); ineligible evidence form (FT5); and companion report without unique evidence (FT6). The first failing criterion was recorded as the primary reason. Full operational definitions are provided in Supplementary File S1.

2.4. Deduplication, Screening, and Full-Text Assessment

The primary S1 searches yielded 516 records: 345 from Scopus and 171 from Web of Science. Matching by Digital Object Identifier and normalized bibliographic fields removed 126 duplicates, leaving 390 unique records. Both reviewers independently screened all titles and abstracts without access to the other reviewer's decisions, using Include, Exclude, or Uncertain. Exact agreement across the three categories was 96.4% (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.748$); after Include and Uncertain were grouped as Retain, agreement was 99.7% ($\kappa = 0.982$). Any record retained by either reviewer advanced to full-text assessment, prioritizing sensitivity over premature exclusion. This rule produced 30 full-text candidates.

Both reviewers independently assessed all 30 retrieved reports. Before consensus, 24 include/exclude decisions were identical (80.0%; Cohen's $\kappa = 0.559$). The six decision discrepancies and two coding differences were resolved against the frozen criteria and page-level evidence. Thirteen reports were excluded: nine because intermediary results were not separable, and one each for non-substantive gendered work or power, wrong organizational population, ineligible evidence form, and a companion report without unique evidence. The final corpus comprised 17 reports representing 16 studies.

2.5. Data Extraction, Evidence Roles, and Coding

A structured matrix recorded bibliographic details, country, intermediary type, organizational level, aim, theoretical framing, design, sampling, data source, participants, outcomes, mechanisms, limitations, page-level evidence, and evidence role. Evidence role was separate from methodological robustness: 13 studies were classified as core because they provided direct and separable evidence about tourism intermediaries, whereas three were contextual because the attributable evidence was narrower, embedded in a multi-actor design, or based on a small eligible subgroup. Contextual studies could qualify an interpretation or identify a possible process, but they could not establish a cross-study conclusion on their own.

Outcome coding covered workforce representation; occupational placement; wages and employment quality; work–family conflict, stress, safety, and retention; career progression and employability; leadership; ownership and entrepreneurship; strategic or resource decision rights; employee voice and industrial relations; emotional labor; and digital or platform power. Mechanism coding covered human capital, work design, care responsibilities, occupational norms, organizational culture and policy, harassment and safety systems, networks and social capital, migration, race and class, religion and cultural norms, state and labor institutions, value-chain structure, crisis conditions, individual agency or resistance, and digital governance.

Each code used a four-point centrality scale: 0 absent, 1 mentioned or peripheral, 2 substantive, and 3 central. Cross-study figures count studies scored 2 or 3; they do not estimate prevalence, effect size, or causal importance. Synthesis statements were classified as direct findings, qualified interpretations, or research propositions. Direct findings required separable empirical support and an appropriate design; qualified interpretations rested on heterogeneous, selected, or contextual evidence; research propositions concerned indirect or unobserved domains and were not reported as results.

Table 1 summarizes the progression from database retrieval to the final study corpus and distinguishes the distribution of records, reports, unique studies, and evidence roles.

Table 1. Data sources and study-selection distribution.

Review Stage	Source or Unit	Records/Reports/Studies
Database search	Scopus	345 records
Database search	Web of Science Core Collection	171 records
Before deduplication	Combined database records	516 records
After deduplication	Unique records	390 records
Full-text assessment	Reports assessed	30 reports
Full-text exclusions	Reports excluded	13 reports
Final corpus	Included reports	17 reports
Final corpus	Unique studies	16 studies
Evidence role	Core studies	13 studies
Evidence role	Contextual studies	3 studies

2.6. Organizational Power Dimensions

Evidence was arranged across nine dimensions to avoid treating different forms of organizational position as interchangeable: workforce presence, occupational placement, employment quality, career mobility, managerial authority, executive authority, ownership or control of capital, strategic or resource decision rights, and collective voice or union power. The ordering is analytical rather than a career ladder. Ownership may be reached outside corporate promotion, and responsibility for daily work does not necessarily bring control over strategy or capital.

Three distinctions were enforced. A formal title did not establish strategic power unless the study identified authority over policy, allocation, investment, products, staffing, or another consequential resource. Individual disclosure, complaint, coping, or silence did not count as collective voice without representative institutions, bargaining, or organized worker power. Customer-facing digital activity or media visibility did not count as platform governance. These rules kept representation, managerial status, ownership, strategic rights, and collective power separate.

2.7. Design-Sensitive Robustness Appraisal

Robustness appraisal informed interpretation rather than determining eligibility. Eight common criteria assessed clarity of aim, appropriateness of design, identifiable intermediary context, substantive gender analysis, sampling adequacy, data-collection quality, analytic transparency, and support for findings. Quantitative studies were additionally assessed for measurement quality, model specification, uncertainty, and consistency between tables and conclusions. Qualitative studies were assessed for sampling rationale, depth of collection, analytic transparency, reflexivity, credibility procedures, and linkage between interpretation and data.

Items were scored 0 when a criterion was not met, 1 when it was partly met or unclear, and 2 when it was fully met; non-applicable items were removed from the denominator. Normalized scores were grouped as strong (80–100%), moderate (60–79%), limited (40–59%), or very limited (<40%). Appraisal memos noted contradictions and the precise claims that each study could support. Limited and very limited studies remained visible as descriptive or contradictory evidence, but they did not drive the synthesis. Study-level appraisal details are reported in Supplementary File S1 (sheet 10_REPORT_APPRAISAL), including each report's evidence role, robustness rating, contribution to the synthesis, and main inferential limitation.

2.8. Cross-Study Synthesis and Sensitivity Analysis

Synthesis was design-sensitive: studies were not statistically pooled or treated as if they provided equivalent forms of evidence. Administrative and firm-panel studies were used for distributions and associations at the level measured; employee surveys for modeled associations within sampled settings; and qualitative studies for meanings, processes, and organizational conditions. Comparability was judged by what each design could legitimately support, not by forcing all studies into the same evidential category. Study memos identified the strongest defensible claim, plausible alternative explanations, and counterevidence before cross-study patterns were considered.

Two sensitivity comparisons were conducted. The first separated the three contextual studies, whose intermediary evidence was narrower or embedded in a broader design, from the 13 core studies with direct and separable intermediary evidence. The second restricted interpretation to the 12 studies rated strong or moderate in the robustness appraisal. A pattern was considered stable only when its interpretation remained unchanged under both restrictions. Stability did not convert an association into a causal effect or compensate for scarcely studied domains.

Reviewer involvement extended beyond study selection. The first author prepared the structured extraction and coding matrix, and the second author independently checked the included-study records against the full texts, including factual extraction, outcome and mechanism coding, organizational-power classification, robustness appraisal, and page-level evidence. Discrepancies were resolved by returning to the predefined coding rules and the relevant passages in the original reports. The reconciled matrix, rather than either author's initial classifications, formed the basis for the cross-study synthesis and sensitivity analyses. Because extraction, coding, and appraisal involve interpretive judgment, predefined rules, independent checking, page-level evidence, and reconciliation were used to reduce reviewer-specific interpretation. The authors brought complementary backgrounds to these decisions: the first author combines tourism research with professional experience in tourism intermediation, while the second author is a sociologist whose research and teaching include tourism, territory, and local development.

Figure 1 summarizes the analytical workflow used in the review. The sequence separates study identification and selection from evidence extraction, classification, robustness appraisal, and cross-study synthesis. This distinction is important because screening decisions, evidence-role classification, robustness appraisal, and interpretive synthesis served different functions and were not treated as interchangeable stages of analysis.

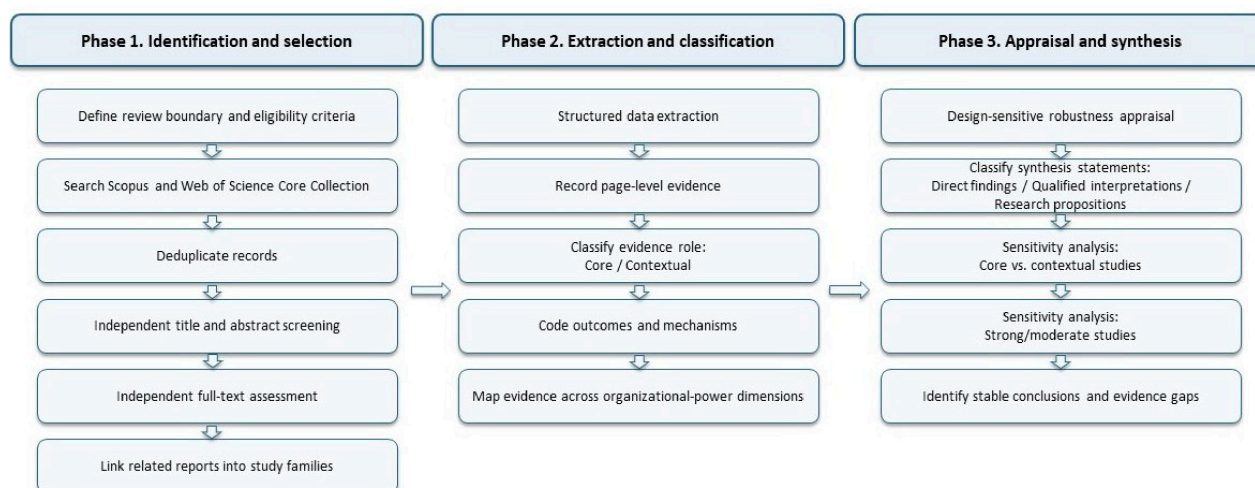


Figure 1. Analytical workflow of the scoping review. The workflow distinguishes study identification and selection, evidence extraction and classification, and appraisal and synthesis. The sequence represents the review procedure and does not imply causal relationships among the analytical categories.

3. Results

The results are presented in a sequence that follows the analytical logic of the review. Section 3.1 first describes the composition and methodological robustness of the evidence base. Sections 3.2–3.4 then synthesize findings across the three allocation points: reward allocation, work organization, and access allocation. Section 3.5 considers contextual and intersectional configurations, while Section 3.6 reports the sensitivity analyses and identifies domains in which evidence remains sparse or absent. Section 3.7 brings these strands together in the allocation-point map and translates the evidence into testable research questions. No statistical pooling or sequential hypothesis testing was undertaken; the analysis instead combined design-sensitive interpretation, evidence-role classification, robustness appraisal, and sensitivity analysis.

3.1. Search Flow, Data Sources, and Characteristics of the Evidence Base

Figure 2 reports the selection process. Screening 390 unique records yielded 30 reports for full-text assessment. Seventeen reports met the eligibility criteria and represented 16 studies, as the articles by Mousa et al. (2023, 2024) reported distinct findings from the same interview study and were therefore treated as two reports from one study family. The included reports were published from 1998 to 2024; because no date limit was applied, this interval reflects the retrieved evidence rather than a predefined historical period.

The evidence base was geographically dispersed and methodologically heterogeneous: 11 studies were quantitative, four were qualitative, and one used mixed methods. Across these designs, the evidence drew on administrative, wage, and regional labor-market data; firm-level panels; employee and tour-leader surveys; qualitative interviews; and mixed-source case studies. Thirteen were core and three contextual; two were rated strong, 10 moderate, two limited, and two very limited. The two strong studies examined turnover processes among 618 women employed in Iranian travel agencies and wage differences in Spanish travel agencies (Khorakian et al. 2018; Marfil-Cotilla et al. 2024). The Slovak stressor study and Nigerian pandemic-turnover study contained substantial design or reporting weaknesses and were retained for transparency, not as foundations for the main conclusions (Sambronská 2015; Uludag et al. 2023). Table 2 summarizes the study settings, designs, evidence used, and inferential limits before the results are interpreted.

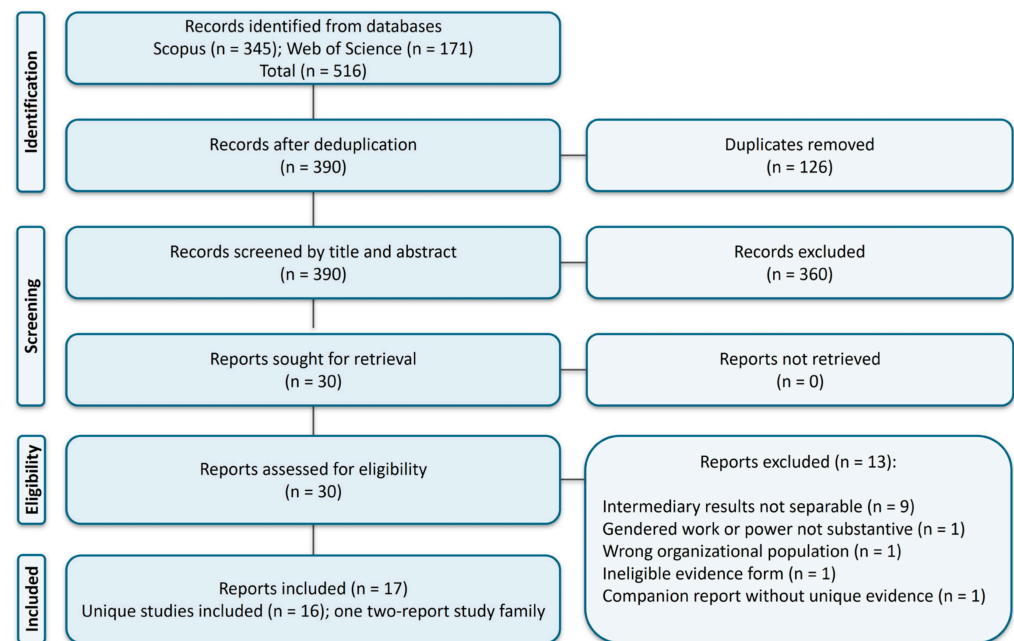


Figure 2. PRISMA-ScR flow diagram of the study-selection process. Searches covered database records available through 20 July 2026; exports and the formal audit log were finalized on 21 July 2026. Adapted from the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (Page et al. 2021), licensed under CC BY 4.0.

Table 2. Characteristics, evidence used, and inferential limits of the 16 included studies.

Study	Setting, Sample, and Design	Evidence Used in This Review	Robustness and Main Inferential Limit
Carvalho et al. (2014)	Portugal; tourism intermediaries; linked administrative data	High female participation and education coexisted with lower executive representation and a 13.2% mean pay gap in the analyzed employment structure.	Moderate; sector profiles are separable, but the design does not identify firm-level mechanisms.
Alonso-Almeida and Bremser (2015)	Spain; 132 decision-makers in small independent travel agencies; cross-sectional survey	Women-led firms did not show inferior performance; women reported more employment-preserving crisis choices.	Moderate; self-reported decisions in a selected national setting do not establish causal leadership effects.
Sambronská (2015)	Slovakia; 55 women in 28 tourism intermediaries; survey	Role ambiguity, work organization, insecurity, responsibility, and limited development were reported as stressors.	Very limited; small sample, weak analytic reporting, and no comparative or longitudinal design.
Christian (2016)	Kenya; tourism production-network case study	Gender and race were embedded in access to property, finance, networks, and higher-value positions.	Moderate; rich process evidence, but tourism intermediaries are embedded in a wider value chain and no prevalence can be inferred.

Table 2. Cont.

Study	Setting, Sample, and Design	Evidence Used in This Review	Robustness and Main Inferential Limit
Khorakian et al. (2018)	Iran; 618 women employed in travel agencies; cross-sectional structural equation model	Job embeddedness mediated associations between workload or work conflict and intention to quit.	Strong; large and clearly bounded sample, but single-city cross-sectional data do not establish temporal causality.
Yim et al. (2018)	Hong Kong; 309 tour leaders; cross-sectional survey	Emotional-labor performance was broadly similar by gender, with some differences in perceived support.	Moderate; self-reported performance does not measure promotion or strategic authority.
Cheung et al. (2018)	Taiwan; licensed tour leaders; survey	Harassment exposure coexisted with limited policy awareness and training.	Limited; self-report and sampling constraints prevent causal conclusions about organizational protection.
Lincaru et al. (2020)	Romania; regional labor-market data for travel-agency, tour-operator, and reservation activities; geographic information system clustering	Mapped employee characteristics and territorial concentration in the intermediary field.	Moderate contextual evidence; ecological data do not observe firm-level authority or career processes.
Abou-Shouk et al. (2021)	Egypt; 551 travel-agency employees; cross-sectional partial least squares structural equation model	Employee voice, satisfaction, and intention to leave were associated.	Limited; gender-moderation results were internally inconsistent and the design was cross-sectional.
Hedija and Němec (2021)	Czech Republic; firm panel, 2008–2015	Female executive participation was not associated with inferior financial performance.	Moderate; firm-level gender composition does not reveal individual authority or board decision processes.
Gomez-Perez and Jourde (2021)	Senegal; 31 women owners or managers organizing Hajj travel; interviews	Experience, networks, religious legitimacy, political access, and capital supported selected routes to ownership.	Moderate; selected successful owners create survival and selection bias.
Mousa et al. (2023, 2024)	Egypt; 32 female tour guides linked to agencies; 2 reports from the same interview study	Care norms, representation, clientelism, low pay, harassment, managerial impunity, and silence shaped work experience.	Moderate; retrospective qualitative evidence from 1 participant group cannot estimate frequency or intervention effects.
Uludag et al. (2023)	Nigeria; 148 tourism-intermediary employees; structural equation model	Pandemic stress and work–family conflict were related to turnover constructs.	Very limited; contradictions concerning the sample and model reporting sharply restrict interpretation.

Table 2. *Cont.*

Study	Setting, Sample, and Design	Evidence Used in This Review	Robustness and Main Inferential Limit
Marfil-Cotilla et al. (2024)	Spain; national wage microdata for travel-agency activities	The gender wage gap widened across the distribution and approached 40% at the upper tail; returns to responsibility differed.	Strong; direct distributional evidence, but cross-sectional wage data cannot identify firm-level decision processes.
Hull and Milne (1998)	Quebec; regional mixed-source case study	Women-led enterprises converted local resources into ownership while family labor reproduced gendered support roles.	Moderate contextual evidence; an older, multisector regional case with limited generalizability.
Carvalho et al. (2018)	Portugal; 6 senior women, including 3 in travel agencies; interviews	Selected owners and executives described authority, credibility tests, networks, and availability norms.	Moderate contextual evidence; very small successful-leader sample and only 3 agency participants.

3.2. Reward Allocation: Pay and Employment Quality

Reward allocation was the domain in which the evidence was most direct, although it remained concentrated in a small number of national settings.

The most consistent direct evidence related to pay. Spanish wage microdata showed that the gender wage gap in travel agencies varied across the distribution and approached 40% at the upper tail. Women also received smaller wage returns from responsibility and other characteristics associated with higher-paid positions ([Marfil-Cotilla et al. 2024](#)). Portuguese administrative evidence described a feminized and comparatively educated workforce alongside lower female executive representation and a 13.2% mean pay gap in the analyzed employment structure, with travel agencies and tour operators reported as a separable field ([Carvalho et al. 2014](#)).

The qualitative studies did not estimate the same relationship and should not be treated as replications. The Kenyan production-network case described gendered and racialized access to land, finance, networks, and higher-value positions ([Christian 2016](#)). The Egyptian tour-guide study family described low pay, clientelism, care expectations, and judgments about women's suitability for agency representation ([Mousa et al. 2023, 2024](#)). These accounts identify organizational and institutional conditions that may shape valuation, but they do not establish a common cross-national mechanism.

Taken together, these studies support a narrow but important inference: the strongest evidence concerns unequal returns to work-related characteristics rather than a general difference in capability. In the Spanish study, responsibility and other wage-related characteristics generated different returns by gender, while the Portuguese evidence points in the same direction descriptively. The qualitative studies help identify possible organizational and institutional channels, but they do not establish a common mechanism across settings. The evidence therefore supports a finding of unequal reward allocation in specific contexts, not a sector-wide wage estimate or a universal allocation rule.

3.3. Work Organization: Retention and Safety

Evidence on work organization concerned how workload, scheduling, support, safety, and reporting arrangements were associated with retention and workplace experience.

The most direct pathway evidence came from a study of 618 women employed in Iranian travel agencies. Workload and work–family or work–leisure conflict were associated with intention to quit through job embeddedness (Khorakian et al. 2018). Its cross-sectional design cannot establish temporal causality, but it specifies an organizational pathway rather than merely listing barriers. The Slovak study reported role ambiguity, poor organization, insecurity, high responsibility, and limited development as stressors; its small sample and weak reporting limit it to corroborative description (Sambronská 2015).

Harassment studies also examined workplace safety in relation to organizational arrangements. Taiwanese tour leaders reported workplace sexual harassment alongside limited knowledge of policy and training (Cheung et al. 2018). In Egypt, female guides described harassment by tourists and managers, managerial impunity, and coping through avoidance or silence (Mousa et al. 2024). These studies do not estimate the effectiveness of a particular policy, but they show that exposure, reporting credibility, and managerial accountability belong to the organization of work rather than to individual resilience alone.

Evidence on employee voice and turnover was less reliable. In the Egyptian employee survey, voice was associated with satisfaction and intention to leave, but the reported gender-moderation results were internally inconsistent (Abou-Shouk et al. 2021). The Nigerian study connected pandemic fear, work–family conflict, and turnover-related constructs, yet contradictions concerning the participants and model reporting required a very limited rating (Uludag et al. 2023). Both studies remain in the evidence map for transparency, but neither drives the synthesis.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that work organization matters through several distinct channels rather than through a single employment practice. Workload and work–family conflict were associated with retention-related outcomes, while safety and reporting studies pointed to the importance of policy awareness, managerial accountability, and credible reporting arrangements. These findings are context-specific and do not establish a common effect size or universal intervention, but they consistently place retention and workplace safety within the organization of work rather than solely in individual resilience or preference.

3.4. Access Allocation: Career Mobility, Leadership, Ownership, and Authority

Evidence on access allocation was more selective than evidence on rewards or work organization and was concentrated on leadership performance and routes into senior positions or ownership.

Three studies weaken simple capability-deficit explanations. In Spanish agencies during the financial crisis, firms led by women did not show inferior performance, and women decision-makers reported greater reluctance to dismiss workers or reduce socially oriented expenditure (Alonso-Almeida and Bremser 2015). A Czech firm panel found no evidence that female executive participation reduced financial performance (Hedija and Němec 2021). Male and female tour leaders in Hong Kong reported broadly similar emotional-labor performance, although some differences in perceived support remained (Yim et al. 2018).

Evidence on access to authority and ownership came mainly from selected cases. Women organizing Hajj travel in Senegal reached ownership and strategic control through accumulated sector experience, commercial and political networks, capital, and religious legitimacy (Gomez-Perez and Jourde 2021). Women-led enterprises in Quebec converted local knowledge and relationships into ownership, while family and community labor also reproduced gendered support roles (Hull and Milne 1998). Portuguese women at the top described the capacity to redesign some employment practices, but only three participants were agency executives and all represented successful careers (Carvalho et al. 2018).

Taken together, the evidence separates performance from access. Women who reached leadership or decision-making roles did not show inferior performance on the outcomes measured, but this does not indicate that access to those roles was equivalent. The qualitative studies instead point to selective routes shaped by networks, capital, legitimacy, property, and demanding availability norms. Across the corpus, formal leadership or ownership positions were not consistently accompanied by direct evidence on strategic decision rights. The findings therefore challenge simple capability-deficit explanations while leaving the processes that govern access to authority only partially observed.

3.5. Contextual Configurations and the Limits of Intersectional Inference

Contextual evidence showed that gendered employment and access to authority were often embedded in wider institutional and social configurations, although these configurations were not directly comparable across studies.

Four qualitative settings show why gender cannot always be interpreted in isolation. In Kenya, gender was embedded in racialized production relations, property access, and value-chain position (Christian 2016). In Senegal, ownership depended on religious legitimacy, state relationships, networks, and capital (Gomez-Perez and Jourde 2021). In Quebec, family and community labor shaped ownership and control (Hull and Milne 1998). In Egypt, care norms, religious and media representations, clientelism, and managerial impunity shaped agency representation and workplace safety (Mousa et al. 2023, 2024).

These studies were not designed as comparable tests of intersectionality, and most quantitative studies did not model interactions among gender, race or ethnicity, class, religion, migration, care responsibility, or contract status. They are therefore treated as context-specific evidence and as grounds for future intersectional research, not as a synthesized intersectional effect.

3.6. Evidence Density, Sensitivity, and Unobserved Domains

This section assesses where the evidence was concentrated, which domains remained weakly observed, and whether the main interpretations changed under the predefined sensitivity restrictions.

Coverage became thinner as the review moved from employment conditions to more consequential forms of organizational power. Employment quality received substantive or central attention in 11 studies and career mobility in 10. By contrast, studies of managerial or executive positions rarely established who actually controlled budgets, staffing, products, or investment. None provided substantive evidence on collective voice or union power, and direct observation of board deliberation, appointments, platform governance, or corporate social responsibility systems was almost absent. The review can therefore say more about employment and selected leadership outcomes than about organizational power in its stronger forms. Figure 3 shows the distribution of attention across the nine dimensions; it is a map of measurement, not a ranking of importance.

Mechanism coverage was also uneven. Organizational culture and policy appeared substantively in 11 studies; work design or workload in nine; individual agency or strategic choice in eight; human capital, networks, and occupational norms in seven each; and state or labor institutions in six. These counts show where the indexed literature directs attention; they do not rank causes or estimate prevalence. Digital or platform governance was absent.

Table 3 separates direct findings, qualified interpretations, and research propositions so that the synthesis does not give the same weight to evidence and agenda-setting claims.

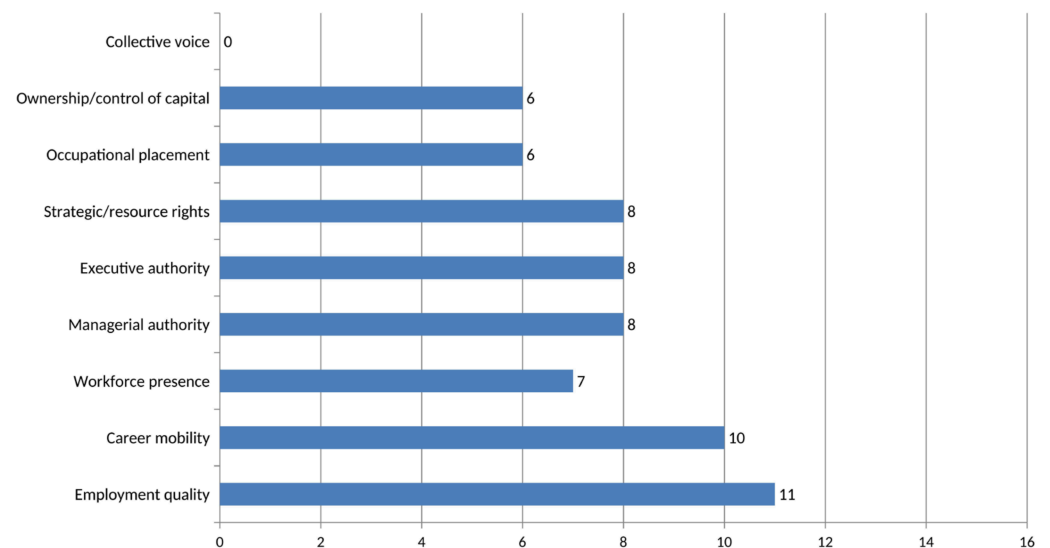


Figure 3. Evidence coverage across organizational power dimensions. Counts represent studies coded 2 (substantive) or 3 (central). They do not estimate sector prevalence, causal importance, or the amount of power held by women.

Table 3. Evidence claims, their status, and limits of inference.

Evidence Statement	Evidential Status	Main Empirical Support	Inferential Boundary
Unequal returns to responsibility and some qualifications	Direct but narrow	Strong Spanish wage evidence; moderate Portuguese administrative evidence	No pooled gap and no basis for assuming the same pattern across countries or firms.
Work design is related to retention and safety in specific settings	Direct and qualified	Strong Iranian embeddedness study; harassment studies in Taiwan and Egypt	No common effect size, longitudinal sequence, or tested universal intervention.
Women in authority did not show inferior performance on measured outcomes	Direct counterevidence in 3 settings	Spanish agency survey, Czech firm panel, Hong Kong tour-leader survey	Does not establish equal access to leadership or transformative effects of women leaders.
Routes into leadership and ownership appear selective	Qualified interpretation	Senegal, Quebec, and Portugal qualitative studies	Successful owners and executives are selected cases and cannot represent all workers or firms.
Gender was embedded in wider institutional configurations	Illustrative, not an intersectional synthesis	Qualitative cases involving race, religion, property, care, and networks	No general intersectional effect or comparable cross-context interaction was tested.
Boards, collective voice, platform governance, and corporate social responsibility systems	Evidence gap and research proposition	No direct substantive evidence in the included studies	Nothing can be inferred about their presence, absence, or effects in practice.

The sensitivity analyses were then used to assess whether the main interpretations depended on contextual or methodologically weaker studies.

When the synthesis was limited to the 12 strong or moderate studies, the main interpretations concerning wages, employment quality, career mobility, comparable leadership performance, and selected routes to ownership remained. Employee voice, however, was represented by only one study under this restriction and was not treated as stable. Removing the three contextual studies also reduced the basis for discussing ownership and institutional conditions. The two very limited studies were not needed for the core conclusions, while the evidence on stronger forms of organizational power remained too sparse to combine.

3.7. From Evidence Mapping to Testable Allocation Questions

Figure 4 brings the evidence together around the three allocation points. Reward allocation covers pay, recognition, and employment quality. The second point, work organization, covers workload, scheduling, support, safety, and conditions affecting retention. Access allocation covers leadership, ownership, and substantive decision rights. Direct or recurring evidence is kept apart from qualified evidence and from domains that were not observed. The figure is descriptive and does not imply a causal sequence.

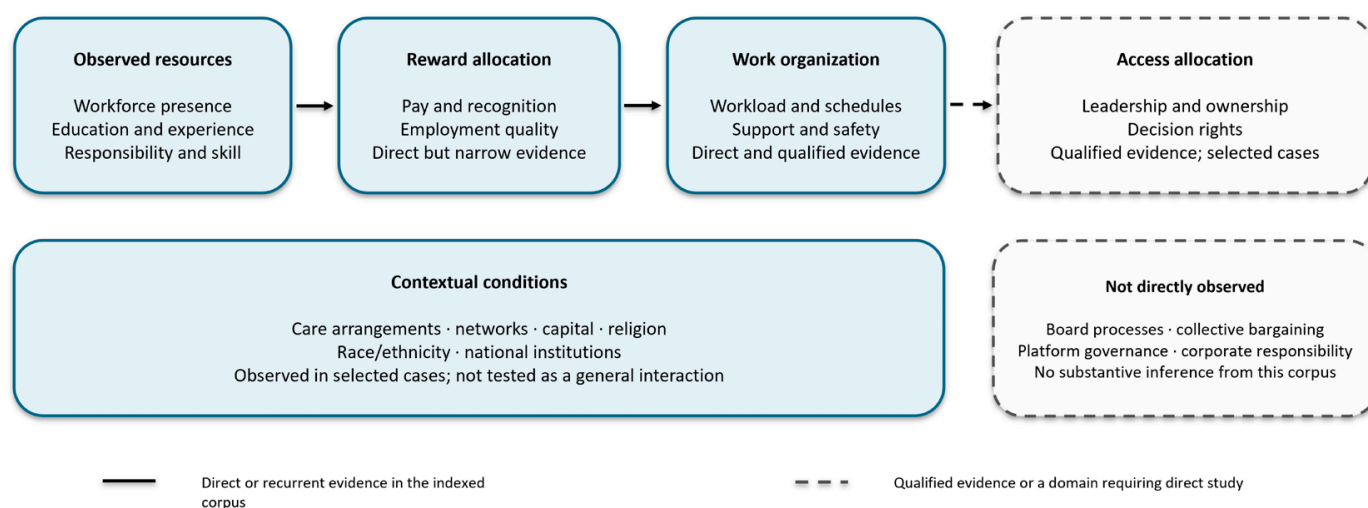


Figure 4. Allocation-point map of the indexed evidence. Solid outlines indicate direct or recurring evidence; dashed outlines indicate qualified evidence or questions requiring direct study. Arrows structure the research questions and should not be read as a validated causal path.

The analytical use of the heuristic lies in specifying the unit of comparison, the allocation rule, the organizational actor controlling that rule, the measurable outcome, and the evidence that would challenge the proposed relationship. An allocation claim should be weakened when disparities disappear after credible adjustment for occupational composition, national institutions, firm selection, or other measured alternatives; it should be rejected as a general explanation if comparable workers and organizations receive comparable outcomes across settings. The current corpus is too small and heterogeneous to conduct those tests, so the propositions in Table 4 remain a research agenda rather than findings.

Table 4. Research propositions, required designs, and conditions that would weaken proposed allocation relationships.

Allocation Point	Research Proposition	Minimum Design or Measure	Evidence That Would Weaken or Revise the Proposition
Reward allocation	Among employees in comparable roles, gender differences may arise where pay, recognition, or responsibility rules are discretionary or opaque.	Linked personnel and payroll data; job and firm controls; audits or policy-change designs.	Differences disappear after credible adjustment for role, tenure, firm, contract, and national wage-setting institutions.
Work organization	Unpredictable schedules, workload, weak support, and unreliable reporting systems may contribute to gendered retention or safety outcomes, especially where care demands are unequal.	Longitudinal rosters and exit data; incident and reporting records; schedule or reporting-system interventions.	Comparable exposure and outcomes by gender, or differences fully explained by non-gendered job conditions.
Access allocation	Numerical representation or managerial title may not translate into equivalent authority over staffing, budgets, suppliers, products, or investment.	Authorization matrices, decision logs, board or management records, and matched measures of title and actual decision rights.	Titles consistently predict equivalent resource control and decision authority across comparable organizations.
Contextual patterning	Allocation outcomes may vary with migration, race or ethnicity, class, religion, contract status, age, and care responsibility.	Interaction-capable quantitative samples or comparative qualitative designs constructed around specific relational configurations.	The specified configurations do not alter allocation processes or outcomes once measured alternatives are considered.
Unobserved domains	Collective voice, board processes, platform governance, and corporate social responsibility require direct observation before any substantive claim is made.	Union and bargaining records; board appointment and voting data; platform algorithms and ratings; corporate responsibility implementation studies.	No confirmatory or disconfirmatory inference is possible until these processes are measured directly.

4. Discussion

4.1. Main Findings and Diagnostic Contribution

Four findings organize the synthesis. The clearest direct evidence concerned unequal wage returns, particularly in Spanish travel-agency employment. Work organization was associated with retention and workplace safety in several specific settings, although the designs did not support a common effect size or universal intervention. Evidence from three settings did not support a simple capability-deficit explanation among women who reached leadership or decision-making roles, while access to leadership and ownership remained selective and context dependent. Finally, the corpus measured employment outcomes and

formal positions more often than strategic decision rights, collective voice, board processes, or platform governance.

Existing theories already explain why formally neutral arrangements may distribute rewards and authority unequally (Acker 1990, 2006; Britton 2000; Ely and Meyerson 2000; Gherardi 1994; Castilla 2008; Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019). Work on organizational power likewise distinguishes visible decisions from power embedded in rules, norms, and routine practice (Fleming and Spicer 2014).

The specific contribution of this review lies in how these findings are bounded and organized. By restricting the synthesis to travel agencies, tour operators, and closely related intermediary arrangements, the review avoids automatically transferring evidence from hotels, airlines, or tourism-wide samples. It also brings dispersed evidence on rewards, work organization, leadership, ownership, and authority into a sector-specific synthesis while keeping formal position, ownership, strategic decision rights, and collective voice analytically distinct. The allocation-point map uses these distinctions to identify where the evidence is comparatively direct and where organizational power remains largely unobserved. It is therefore a diagnostic framework for structuring future empirical tests, not a new general theory of gendered organizations.

That distinction is useful because tourism studies can move too quickly from a feminized workforce to claims about empowerment or power. In this synthesis, employment quality is not treated as career mobility, managerial titles are not treated as strategic decision rights, ownership is not treated as promotion, and individual coping is not treated as collective voice. The Spanish wage study and the Iranian retention study offer specific associations; qualitative studies illuminate processes in particular settings. Keeping these forms of evidence apart avoids folding them into a single explanation.

The corpus records outcomes more readily than the decisions that generate them. Wage studies show distributive differences, but seldom reveal how starting pay, assignments, evaluations, or promotion rules were set. Retention studies identify burdens and intentions to leave, yet rarely show who designed schedules or whose preferences shaped flexibility. Leadership research records titles, firm composition, and selected careers, but usually not authority over staffing, suppliers, products, budgets, or investment. This imbalance is the central analytical lesson of the review: the consequences are more visible than the rules through which power is exercised.

Other explanations remain possible. Pay differences may also reflect occupational location, firm size, contract type, or national wage-setting institutions. Leadership findings may be affected by selection and survivorship because the observed women are those who reached senior or ownership positions. Qualitative cases may capture local political economies rather than a pattern shared across intermediary organizations. Since few studies examine these alternatives together, the review cannot determine whether organizational allocation, sector composition, or institutional context carries greater causal weight.

Even so, the comparable-performance findings provide useful counterevidence. They do not establish superior female leadership or equal access to senior roles. They show only that the reported outcomes do not support the simple proposition that women advance less because they are less capable (Alonso-Almeida and Bremser 2015; Yim et al. 2018; Hedija and Němec 2021). The remaining questions concern selection, evaluation, opportunity, and context, but the present evidence cannot rank those processes.

4.2. Interpreting a Small and Heterogeneous Evidence Base

Methodological heterogeneity is not a minor technical issue. National wage microdata can identify distributional differences but do not capture informal promotion or decision processes. Cross-sectional surveys estimate associations within sampled settings, but

they remain vulnerable to common-method bias and cannot establish temporal ordering. Qualitative interviews can reveal meanings, gatekeeping, and organizational practices, but selected cases do not estimate frequency. The synthesis therefore treats these designs as complementary and judges comparability by the claims each can support.

Two findings have comparatively direct support: unequal wage returns in Spanish travel agencies and the association between work conflict, embeddedness, and intention to quit among women in Iranian agencies. Harassment studies add recurrent evidence that safety and reporting are shaped by organizational arrangements. Evidence on leadership and ownership is less direct. Firm-level and survey studies found no measured performance disadvantage for women, while interviews identified resources associated with selected routes into authority. Together, these studies provide counterevidence to simple capability-deficit explanations and identify possible access mechanisms, but they do not establish how widely those routes are available across organizations or countries.

Limited and very limited studies were retained to document contradictions, reporting weaknesses, and neglected topics. They were not combined with stronger evidence to increase apparent convergence. Their inclusion therefore preserves transparency without allowing weaker studies to drive the synthesis.

4.3. Claim Boundaries and the Observational Limits of Power

Within the indexed corpus, three claims can be stated cautiously. Some studies identify unequal returns in pay or employment outcomes; work design and safety arrangements are associated with retention and workplace experience in particular settings; and women who reached leadership did not show inferior performance on the outcomes measured. Selected qualitative cases further indicate that networks, capital, legitimacy, property, and family arrangements can condition access to ownership or authority.

These findings have clear observational limits. The corpus does not support a sector-wide mechanism linking employment to power or a pooled gender gap, and it rarely observes board influence, collective bargaining, platform governance, or corporate social responsibility systems. Strategic and collective power require evidence on agenda setting, authorization, bargaining, and the capacity to make or block consequential decisions. Job titles, workforce composition, individual perceptions, or coping behaviors are insufficient proxies. Future studies therefore need decision records, organizational documents, longitudinal observation, and accounts from both those who make rules and those affected by them (Fleming and Spicer 2014).

Intersectionality remains a research requirement rather than a synthesized finding. Qualitative studies show that gender operated alongside race, religion, property, care, and institutional position, but the settings were not comparable and most quantitative studies did not test interactions. Consistent with Crenshaw's (1989) critique of single-axis analysis, these accounts are therefore used to frame future research questions rather than to infer a general intersectional pattern.

4.4. Limited Implications for Tourism-Intermediary Organizations

The evidence points to an audit question rather than a tested intervention: do employees performing comparable work receive comparable pay progression, responsibility, high-value assignments, promotion consideration, retention support, and exit conditions? Tourism intermediaries can also examine who absorbs schedule volatility, travel demands, customer disruption, and care-incompatible availability. These indicators follow from the review and broader organizational research, but the included studies did not test a common management program.

Safety and leadership require the same precision. Harassment reporting and response systems should be assessed in terms of reporting access, investigation, sanctions, and protection from retaliation, not only the existence of training. Leadership reporting should distinguish title from authority over staffing, products, suppliers, budgets, and investment. These measures would improve organizational diagnosis; the review does not show that adopting them will necessarily change outcomes.

4.5. Research Agenda and Empirical Tests

Table 4 translates the three allocation points into research propositions rather than findings. Longitudinal personnel records can test reward and retention processes within the same organizations; matched employer–employee data can compare formal rules with employee experience; and comparative qualitative or mixed-method designs can observe how authority over budgets, staffing, supplier choice, and product decisions is exercised. Each proposition also specifies evidence that would weaken or require revision of the proposed relationship.

Domains currently unobserved require direct study. Board research should examine appointment, agenda setting, deliberation, voting, and resource decisions. Studies of collective voice should analyze unions, professional associations, bargaining claims, and outcomes. Platform research should observe how algorithms, ratings, visibility, and surveillance allocate work. Intersectional research requires samples and designs capable of examining combinations of gender with race or ethnicity, migration, class, care responsibility, age, religion, and contract status rather than adding these variables only as controls.

Practical access to these data will require designs adapted to a fragmented intermediary field. Multi-site partnerships with agency networks, franchise groups, professional associations, unions, and platform firms could support anonymized payroll, promotion, scheduling, and exit records. Matched employee–manager interviews could compare formal rules with their implementation, while diary studies during peak seasons could capture schedule volatility and customer disruption. Decision-process studies could compare formal authorization matrices with actual participation in staffing, supplier, product, and budget decisions.

A prospectively registered update should extend the search to regional databases, thesis repositories, backward and forward citation searching, and carefully appraised gray literature while retaining the same organizational boundary. Such an update would help distinguish a genuinely under-researched field from an indexing effect and provide a stronger basis for retaining, revising, or abandoning the proposed allocation distinctions.

4.6. Limitations

This review has three main methodological limitations. It covers Scopus and Web of Science, but not regional databases, theses, or gray literature, and may therefore miss work published in local outlets. The databases were not filtered by language, although the search strings were written in English; records indexed only with non-English titles, abstracts, or keywords may have been overlooked. The protocol was also not registered prospectively. Fixing the criteria before synthesis and retaining the audit files strengthens traceability but does not provide the same protection as prospective registration against decisions made after results are known. Finally, the field is small and heterogeneous, so broad generalization would be difficult to justify.

Limits also arise from the available evidence. The corpus contains 16 unique studies: two strong, 10 moderate, and four limited or very limited. Countries, organizational settings, designs, and outcomes differed too much for meta-analysis. Cross-sectional work predominated, and several studies of leadership or ownership examined women who had

already reached those positions. Small samples, publication and indexing bias, inconsistent measures, and largely untested alternative explanations restrict both causal and population inference. Funding and conflict-of-interest statements were not extracted systematically from the 16 primary studies, leaving open the possibility that sponsorship, conditions of organizational access, or author relationships influenced some original surveys or qualitative accounts.

These constraints define the boundary of the review. It identifies where the indexed literature provides direct evidence, where interpretation must remain qualified, and where evidence is missing. It does not estimate inequality across the whole intermediary sector, validate a universal causal model, or infer organizational effects in domains that were not measured.

5. Conclusions

This scoping review mapped 17 reports representing 16 studies on gendered employment and organizational power in travel agencies, tour operators, and related tourism intermediaries. In response to RQ1, the indexed evidence was geographically dispersed, methodologically heterogeneous, and uneven in robustness. Only two studies were rated strong, while most relied on cross-sectional, selected, or context-specific designs. The evidence therefore supports a bounded synthesis rather than a sector-wide estimate.

In response to RQ2, the clearest evidence concerned unequal rewards and work organization. Wage studies identified unequal returns to responsibility and other work-related characteristics, while studies of workload, work–family conflict, safety, harassment, and reporting arrangements linked organizational conditions to retention and workplace experience in specific settings. Evidence on leadership and ownership was more selective. Women who reached leadership or decision-making roles did not show inferior performance on the outcomes measured, but this did not establish equivalent access to authority. Strategic decision rights and collective voice remained rarely examined directly.

In response to RQ3, interpretations concerning unequal rewards, work organization, retention, and selected leadership outcomes remained after contextual and methodologically weaker studies were restricted. By contrast, claims concerning collective voice, intersectional effects, board processes, platform governance, and broader organizational transformation were not supported by comparable direct evidence.

The contribution of the review is diagnostic rather than theoretical. It shows that tourism-intermediary research measures employment outcomes and formal positions more often than the organizational decisions through which rewards, work, and access to authority are allocated. The allocation-point map organizes this imbalance around reward allocation, work organization, and access allocation, providing a structured basis for future longitudinal, comparative, intersectional, and decision-level research.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/socsci15090609/s1>, Supplementary File S1: Search strategies, search log, eligibility and coding rules, organizational power dimensions, critical appraisal methods and report-level results, sensitivity analyses, mechanism coverage, title-and-abstract screening decisions, full-text eligibility assessment, included reports, exclusion reasons, and related-report handling. PRISMA ScR Checklist.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

PRISMA-ScR	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews
PRISMA-S	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses literature search extension
FT	Full text
GIS	Geographic information system
ISIC	International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities

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