

# Pregnancy and Workplace Inequality in the Hospitality Industry: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Discrimination and Job Insecurity

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## HOW TO CITE:

Simbarashe Magaisa, Zanele Thandeka Mabaso, (2026), Pregnancy and Workplace Inequality in the Hospitality Industry: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Discrimination and Job Insecurity  
International Journal of Special Education, 41(21s), 449 - 462

## ABSTRACT

The hospitality industry is characterised by labour-intensive tasks, irregular working hours, and high levels of customer interaction, conditions that often present significant challenges for pregnant employees. Despite the existence of labour protections and equality legislation in many jurisdictions, pregnancy-related workplace inequality remains pervasive, particularly in service-oriented sectors where flexibility and productivity demands are high. This conceptual paper examines how pregnancy intersects with workplace inequality in the hospitality industry, drawing on Gender Role Theory and Labour Process Theory to explain patterns of discrimination, marginalisation, and job insecurity.

Existing literature indicates that pregnant workers frequently experience reduced work allocations, exclusion from career advancement opportunities, negative managerial attitudes, and subtle forms of organisational discrimination. The paper develops a conceptual framework linking organisational culture, managerial perceptions, and job design characteristics to key outcomes, including employee well-being, turnover intentions, and career stagnation. It further highlights how the informal, precarious, and customer-driven nature of hospitality employment exacerbates vulnerability among pregnant workers.

The framework emphasises the mediating role of workplace support systems, policy enforcement, and inclusive human resource practices in mitigating adverse outcomes. By situating pregnancy-related inequality within the structural and operational dynamics of hospitality work, this study contributes to both labour and gender studies literature and offers practical insights for creating equitable and inclusive workplaces.

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**Keywords** Pregnancy discrimination, Workplace inequality, Hospitality industry, Job insecurity, Gender role theory, Labour process theory

## 1. Introduction

Workplace inequality remains a persistent and multifaceted challenge across global labour markets, disproportionately affecting women, particularly during periods of pregnancy and motherhood (Zonno, 2026). Despite significant advances in gender equality policies and labour protections, pregnancy continues to be associated with subtle and overt forms of discrimination, marginalisation, and career disruption across sectors (Heilman et al., 2024). Contemporary research shows that pregnant employees are often perceived as less competent, less committed, and less reliable, leading to reduced career opportunities, biased performance evaluations, and exclusion from advancement pathways (Hing et al., 2023, Gatrell et al., 2024). More recent studies further highlight that pregnancy discrimination remains embedded in organisational cultures, often manifesting through informal practices rather than explicit policies (Gatrell et al., 2024, Zhu et al., 2022, Arena Jr et al., 2023).

These challenges are particularly acute in labour-intensive and service-oriented industries such as hospitality, where organisational structures and job demands often conflict with the physical, emotional, and temporal realities of pregnancy (Giousmpasoglou, 2024, Diaz-Carrion et al., 2020). The global hospitality industry, including hotels, restaurants, catering services, and tourism operations, is characterised by irregular working hours, shift-based schedules, high levels of customer interaction, and physically demanding tasks such as prolonged standing, lifting, and mobility (MacDonald et al., 2024). According to (MacDonald et al., 2024), such working conditions create significant structural constraints for pregnant employees, who may require flexible scheduling, reduced physical strain, and access to supportive workplace accommodations. However, empirical evidence suggests that these accommodations are frequently limited or inconsistently implemented, particularly in low- and middle-income contexts and precarious employment settings (Piper, 2023, Tannis et al., 2023).

While many countries have enacted legal protections, such as maternity leave provisions, anti-discrimination legislation, and workplace accommodation policies, there remains a persistent gap between policy frameworks and lived workplace realities (Gatrell et al., 2024, Orifici and Allen, 2022). According to Gatrell et al. (2024), in practice, pregnant workers often face subtle forms of exclusion, including reduced working hours, reassignment to less favourable roles, denial of promotion opportunities, and, in extreme cases, termination of employment (Gatrell et al., 2024, Khatter, 2025). These experiences reflect broader structural inequalities rooted in gendered labour norms, organisational inflexibility, and managerial biases (Khatter, 2025). Research grounded in Gender Studies and labour process theory suggests that pregnancy is frequently constructed as incompatible with ideal worker norms that prioritise uninterrupted productivity, availability, and physical endurance (Abderhalden-Zellweger et al., 2021, Rao and Goel, 2017).

Furthermore, the intersection of precarious employment conditions within the hospitality sector exacerbates job insecurity among pregnant employees (Wallace and Coughlan, 2023, Farrugia et al., 2023). According to Wallace and Coughlan (2023), many workers in this industry are employed on temporary, part-time, or informal contracts, limiting their access to social protections and increasing vulnerability to unfair labour practices. Pregnancy may be perceived as a liability by employers, leading to heightened risks of contract non-renewal, workplace hostility, or forced exit from employment (Gallego-Ortiz, 2025, Kumarasamy et al., 2025). This dynamic is particularly pronounced in developing economies, where enforcement of labour regulations may be weak and gender norms more rigidly entrenched.

This paper aims to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework that explains how workplace conditions, organisational cultures, and employment arrangements interact to produce discrimination and job insecurity among pregnant employees in the hospitality sector.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Pregnancy and Workplace Discrimination

Pregnancy discrimination refers to any form of adverse or unequal treatment of employees due to pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions (Schneider et al., 2025). Despite legal protections in many jurisdictions, evidence consistently shows that pregnant workers continue to face both overt and subtle forms of discrimination across organisational contexts (van Daalen et al., 2022). According to Gatrell et al. (2024) pregnant women are often perceived as less competent, less committed, and less suitable for leadership roles compared to non-pregnant women and men. These stereotypical perceptions are rooted in broader gender norms that associate motherhood with reduced productivity and prioritisation of family over work responsibilities (Germishuys-Burchell, 2022).

Studies within Organizational Behavior indicate that discrimination often manifests through informal practices rather than explicit exclusion (Harris, 2025). Studies by Harris (2025) and Gatrell et al. (2024) argue that pregnant bodies are frequently constructed as “problematic” within workplace settings, leading to marginalisation through task reassignment, reduced responsibilities, and exclusion from high-visibility roles. Similarly, Sloth-Nielsen (2021) introduced the concept of the “flexibility stigma,” whereby employees who require adjustments, such as pregnant women, are perceived as less dedicated, even when such accommodations are legally protected. Research by Torres et al. (2024) and Schneider et al. (2025) shows that ideal worker norms, characterised by uninterrupted availability, long working hours, and physical endurance, systematically disadvantage pregnant employees. Within Gender Studies, scholars argue that pregnancy discrimination is not merely an interpersonal issue but a structural phenomenon embedded in gendered organisational systems (Matotoka and Odeku, 2020). These systems reproduce inequality by privileging masculine-coded work patterns while

penalising reproductive roles, thereby reinforcing long-term career disadvantages for women.

### 2.2 Working Conditions in the Hospitality Industry

The hospitality industry presents a particularly challenging environment for pregnant employees due to its labour-intensive and highly flexible nature (Giousmpasoglou, 2024). Globally, the sector is characterised by precarious employment arrangements, including temporary contracts, part-time work, low wages, and high labour turnover (Giousmpasoglou, 2024, Wallace and Coughlan, 2023). Employees are expected to deliver high-quality customer service while simultaneously managing physically demanding tasks such as prolonged standing, repetitive movements, lifting heavy items, and working irregular or night shifts (Wallace and Coughlan, 2023).

From a labour process perspective, these working conditions reflect a broader emphasis on operational efficiency, cost minimisation, and workforce flexibility (Adane et al., 2023). However, such conditions often conflict with the physiological and health needs associated with pregnancy (Adane et al., 2023, Vrijkotte et al., 2021). Medical research indicates that prolonged standing, physical strain, and irregular working hours can increase risks of adverse maternal and fetal outcomes, including preterm birth, fatigue, and musculoskeletal complications (Van Beukering et al., 2023).

Workplace accommodations, such as modified duties, reduced hours, and ergonomic adjustments, are critical for protecting maternal health (Krief et al., 2022). However, evidence suggests that these accommodations are inconsistently implemented in the hospitality sector, particularly in low-resource and informal employment contexts (Krief et al., 2022, Andersen et al., 2022). According to (Andersen et al., 2022), employers often prioritise operational continuity over employee well-being, leading to limited flexibility for pregnant workers. The emotional labour required in hospitality, such as maintaining a positive demeanour and managing

customer interactions, adds a layer of strain (Farrugia et al., 2023). This combination of physical, emotional, and temporal demands creates a work environment that is inherently misaligned with the needs of pregnant employees, thereby reinforcing exclusionary practices.

### 2.3 Job Insecurity and Career Penalties

Job insecurity represents a critical dimension of workplace inequality for pregnant employees, particularly within the hospitality sector (Karatepe et al., 2024). The prevalence of non-standard employment arrangements, such as casual, seasonal, and zero-hour contracts, limits workers' access to job protection, social security, and maternity benefits (Karatepe et al., 2024, Wallace and Coughlan, 2023). According to Wallace and Coughlan (2023), pregnancy is often perceived as a financial and operational risk by employers, leading to discriminatory employment practices. Pregnant workers are more likely to experience reduced working hours, contract termination, or non-renewal of employment agreements (Gatrell et al., 2013; Hebl et al., 2020). These practices are often justified under the guise of operational requirements but reflect underlying biases regarding productivity and reliability (Wallace and Coughlan, 2023). As a result, pregnant employees face heightened vulnerability to income loss and employment instability.

Motherhood is associated with wage penalties, reduced career advancement, and diminished job security (Kalabikhina et al., 2024). More recent studies confirm that these penalties persist across both developed and developing economies, although they are often more severe in sectors characterised by informality and weak labour protections (Kalabikhina et al., 2024, Casarico and Lattanzio, 2023).

In the hospitality industry, these penalties are further amplified due to limited career progression pathways and high competition for stable employment (Casarico and Lattanzio, 2023, Jones et al., 2023). The intersection of gender, employment precarity, and organisational bias creates a cumulative disadvantage for

pregnant workers, reinforcing cycles of inequality (Harris, 2025). From a theoretical standpoint, this aligns with labour market segmentation theory, which posits that workers in secondary labour markets, characterised by instability and low wages, are more vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination.

## 3 Methodology

### Research Design

This study adopts a conceptual paper design based on an integrative review of existing literature. Conceptual research is appropriate when the objective is to develop theoretical insights, synthesise existing knowledge, and propose relationships among concepts rather than generate primary empirical evidence. The study seeks to examine pregnancy-related workplace inequality in the hospitality industry and to develop a conceptual framework that explains how organisational and structural factors contribute to discrimination and job insecurity among pregnant employees.

### Literature Search Strategy

The conceptual framework was developed through a structured review of scholarly literature relating to pregnancy discrimination, workplace inequality, job insecurity, gender and employment, and hospitality industry labour practices. Relevant literature was identified through searches conducted in Scopus and Web of Science.

Searches were conducted using combinations of the following keywords:

( TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "Pregnancy discrimination" ) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ( pregnant AND workers ) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "pregnant employees" ) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ( maternity ) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ( pregnancy ) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ( hospitality AND industry ) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ( hotel AND employees ) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ( tourism ) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ( hotels ) OR TITLE-ABS-

KEY ( hospitality ) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "workplace inequality" ) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ( discrimination ) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ( bias ) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ( marginalisation ) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "job insecurity" ) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "employment insecurity" ) )

### Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The review included peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and policy reports that addressed pregnancy-related employment experiences, workplace discrimination, gender inequality, labour market precarity, and human resource management practices within service-sector environments. Particular attention was given to studies focusing on hospitality, tourism, retail, and other customer-facing industries where employment conditions share similarities with hospitality work.

Studies were excluded if they:

- Focused exclusively on medical or clinical aspects of pregnancy.
- Did not address workplace experiences or employment outcomes.
- Were not available in English.
- Were duplicate publications.

### Literature Analysis and Synthesis

The selected literature was analysed using thematic synthesis. Recurring themes were identified and categorised according to organisational, managerial, and structural dimensions influencing pregnancy-related workplace experiences. The analysis focused on five major themes:

1. Organisational culture and workplace norms.
2. Managerial perceptions of pregnancy and productivity.
3. Job design and work demands in hospitality settings.
4. Workplace discrimination and job insecurity.

5. Organisational support mechanisms and human resource practices.

Insights derived from these themes were integrated with Gender Role Theory and Labour Process Theory to explain how organisational structures and social expectations shape the experiences of pregnant employees within the hospitality sector.

### 4. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on multiple complementary theoretical perspectives to explain how pregnancy-related workplace inequality is produced and sustained within the hospitality industry. Specifically, the framework integrates Gender Role Theory and Labour Process Theory to capture both the socio-cultural and structural dimensions of discrimination and job insecurity. Together, these theories provide a multidimensional lens for understanding how gender norms and organisational practices interact to shape the experiences of pregnant employees.

#### 4.1 Gender Role Theory

Gender Role Theory, as articulated by (Eagly, 1997), posits that socially constructed expectations assign distinct roles and behavioural norms to men and women. Women are traditionally associated with caregiving, nurturing, and domestic responsibilities, while men are linked to breadwinning, leadership, and economic productivity (Eagly and Mitchell, 2004, Zenani et al., 2025). These socially embedded norms influence perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours within workplace settings, often shaping organisational decision-making processes (Zenani et al., 2025).

Pregnancy serves as a highly visible marker of femininity and caregiving, thereby reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes (Schneider et al., 2025). Within organisational contexts, pregnant employees are frequently perceived as less committed, less competent, and less capable of fulfilling demanding work roles (Debie et al., 2025). According to Debie et al. (2025), these perceptions are not necessarily based on actual

performance but rather on implicit biases and cultural assumptions about motherhood and work. As a result, employers may anticipate reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, or diminished long-term commitment from pregnant workers.

These gendered assumptions often translate into discriminatory organisational practices. Empirical research shows that pregnant employees are more likely to experience task downgrading, exclusion from leadership opportunities, and biased performance evaluations (Gatrell et al., 2024, Heilman et al., 2024). Such discrimination is subtle and normalised within organisational cultures, making it difficult to identify and challenge (Heilman et al., 2024). These practices reflect deeply entrenched gender hierarchies that prioritise “ideal worker” norms, characterised by uninterrupted availability and full-time commitment, over reproductive and caregiving roles (Debie et al., 2025).

Gender Role Theory helps explain the persistence of the “motherhood penalty,” whereby women experience long-term disadvantages in wages, career progression, and job security following pregnancy (Hameed et al., 2022). In the hospitality sector, where flexibility and availability are highly valued, these penalties are often intensified. Thus, Gender Role Theory provides a critical lens for understanding how societal expectations are reproduced within organisational settings, contributing to systemic inequality for pregnant employees.

#### 4.2 Labour Process Theory

Labour Process Theory, originally developed by Harry Braverman (1974), offers a structural perspective on workplace inequality by examining how work is organised, controlled, and monitored within capitalist systems (Thompson and Smith, 2024, Braverman, 1998). According to (Thompson and Smith, 2024), the theory emphasises the role of managerial control in maximising productivity, efficiency, and profitability, often at the expense of worker autonomy and well-being.

In the hospitality industry, labour processes are highly structured and tightly controlled to ensure consistent service delivery and customer satisfaction (Çıvık and Besler, 2022). This includes standardised procedures, performance monitoring, time discipline, and the regulation of employee behaviour, particularly in customer-facing roles (Omidi et al., 2023). Workers are expected to demonstrate flexibility, adaptability, and physical endurance, often under conditions of high work intensity and emotional labour (Chehab et al., 2021).

Pregnant employees may be perceived as misaligned with organisational demands due to physical limitations, health considerations, and the need for workplace accommodations (Baglioni, 2023). From a Labour Process Theory perspective, this misalignment is not simply an individual issue but reflects a structural tension between labour commodification and human reproduction (Baglioni, 2023, Ross and Savage, 2021). Employers may respond by increasing surveillance, reallocating tasks, or excluding pregnant workers from key roles to maintain operational efficiency (Bar-On Shmilovitch et al., 2022). According to Bar-On Shmilovitch et al. (2022), these practices reinforce existing power imbalances between management and employees. Pregnant workers, particularly those in precarious or informal employment arrangements, often have limited bargaining power and may be reluctant to request accommodations for fear of job loss or reduced income (López et al., 2022). This dynamic aligns with broader critiques within Sociology of Work, which highlight how vulnerable workers are disproportionately affected by intensified managerial control and labour market segmentation (Ioannou and Dukes, 2021). Moreover, Labour Process Theory helps explain how organisational priorities, such as cost minimisation and productivity maximisation, can override employee welfare considerations. In the hospitality sector, where profit margins are often tight and competition is high, employers may prioritise operational continuity over inclusive labour practices (Ioannou and Dukes, 2021, Saito et al., 2025).

This creates an environment in which pregnancy is constructed as a disruption to the labour process, rather than a normal aspect of the workforce lifecycle.

#### 4.3 Integrating the Theoretical Perspectives

While Gender Role Theory focuses on socio-cultural norms and perceptions, Labour Process Theory emphasises structural and organisational dynamics. When combined, these frameworks provide a comprehensive understanding of pregnancy-related workplace inequality. Gendered expectations shape how pregnant employees are perceived, while labour process dynamics determine how these perceptions are operationalised within organisational practices.

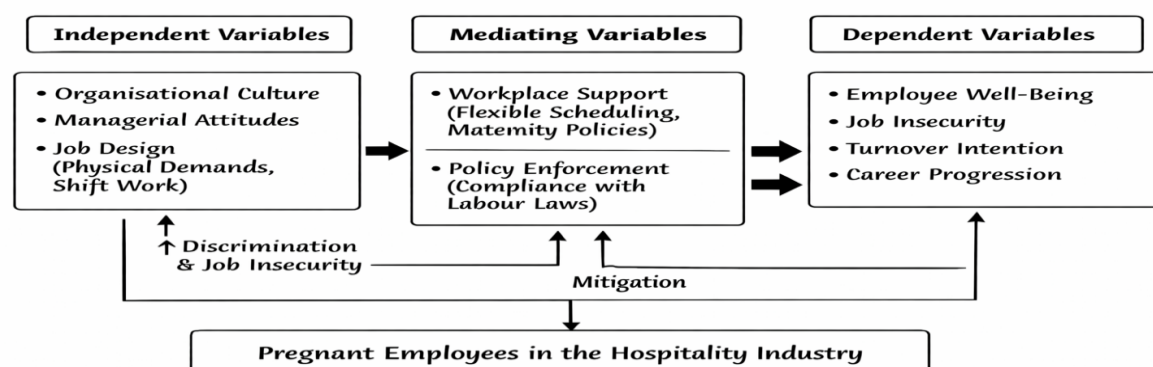
Together, these theories illustrate that discrimination and job insecurity are not isolated phenomena but are embedded within broader systems of gender inequality and capitalist labour organisation. This integrated theoretical approach underpins the conceptual framework developed in this study, which seeks to explain how organisational culture, working conditions, and employment structures interact to produce unequal outcomes for pregnant workers in the hospitality industry.

#### 4.4. Conceptual Framework Development

The conceptual framework developed in this study explains how workplace dynamics within the hospitality industry shape the experiences and outcomes of pregnant employees by linking organisational factors, mediating mechanisms,

and employee outcomes. At its core, the framework posits that organisational culture, managerial attitudes, and job design function as key independent variables that drive inequality. Organisational culture influences workplace norms, values, and expectations regarding productivity, flexibility, and inclusion, and in many hospitality settings, such cultures prioritise operational efficiency over employee well-being (Kalargyrou et al., 2023). Within Organizational Behavior, it is widely recognised that organisational norms shape decision-making processes and can either reinforce or challenge discriminatory practices. Managerial attitudes further play a critical role, as supervisors' perceptions of pregnant employees, often influenced by gender stereotypes, can result in biased evaluations, reduced responsibilities, or exclusion from career opportunities (Correll et al., 2007; Hebl et al., 2020). In addition, job design in the hospitality sector, characterised by physically demanding tasks, long working hours, and shift-based schedules, creates structural barriers for pregnant employees whose health and safety needs may require workplace adjustments (Andersen et al., 2022, Arena Jr et al., 2023). Collectively, these independent variables contribute to increased discrimination and job insecurity, as reflected in the framework.

**Figure 1: Workplace dynamics within the hospitality industry shape the experiences and outcomes of pregnant employees**



The model further introduces workplace support and policy enforcement as mediating variables that influence the strength and direction of these relationships. Workplace support, including flexible scheduling, maternity leave provisions, and task adjustments, serves as a critical mechanism for reducing the negative impact of demanding work environments on pregnant employees. Evidence from Occupational Health suggests that supportive workplace practices are essential for maintaining maternal health, reducing stress, and improving overall job satisfaction (Diaz, 2022). However, the mere existence of policies is insufficient; effective policy enforcement is equally important. Compliance with labour laws and maternity protection regulations ensures that employees are protected from unfair treatment and discriminatory practices. Reports by the International Labour Organization (2023) highlight that weak enforcement mechanisms often undermine the effectiveness of otherwise robust legal frameworks, particularly in sectors characterised by precarious employment. In this regard, workplace support and policy enforcement act as buffering mechanisms that can mitigate the adverse effects of negative organisational conditions.

The dependent variables in the framework, employee well-being, job insecurity, turnover intention, and career progression, represent the key outcomes experienced by pregnant employees. When organisational culture is unsupportive and managerial attitudes are biased, employee well-being is negatively affected, often resulting in increased stress, fatigue, and health risks. At the same time, precarious employment conditions heighten job insecurity, as pregnant workers may fear contract termination, reduced working hours, or limited future opportunities (Monteiro and Joseph, 2023). This insecurity, in turn, contributes to higher turnover intention, as employees may either voluntarily exit with the organisation or be indirectly pushed out through unfavourable working conditions. Over the long term, these dynamics hinder career progression, reinforcing what is commonly referred to as the

motherhood penalty, where women experience reduced wages, slower promotion rates, and diminished career trajectories following pregnancy (Torres et al., 2024, Pandey et al., 2025).

The relationships illustrated in the framework reflect both a direct risk pathway and a mediated protective pathway. The direct pathway shows how negative organisational culture, unsupportive managerial attitudes, and demanding job design lead to discrimination and job insecurity, ultimately resulting in adverse employee outcomes. In contrast, the mediated pathway demonstrates how effective workplace support systems and strong policy enforcement can interrupt or reduce these negative effects. This dual-pathway approach highlights that pregnancy-related workplace inequality is not inevitable but is shaped by organisational practices and institutional responses.

From a theoretical perspective, the framework integrates insights from Gender Role Theory and Labour Process Theory to provide a comprehensive explanation of these dynamics. Gender Role Theory explains how societal expectations regarding women's caregiving roles influence organisational perceptions of pregnant employees, often leading to biased treatment and reduced opportunities (Eagly, 1997, Eagly and Mitchell, 2004). At the same time, Labour Process Theory highlights how the organisation of work within capitalist systems prioritises efficiency and control, often at the expense of worker well-being (Braverman, 1974). In the hospitality industry, these structural pressures manifest through tightly controlled labour processes, high work intensity, and limited flexibility, which collectively disadvantage pregnant workers. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the framework demonstrates that workplace inequality arises from both socio-cultural biases and structural labour conditions.

Overall, the conceptual framework underscores that the experiences of pregnant employees in the hospitality industry are shaped by the interaction between organisational environments, managerial

practices, and institutional protections. It provides a holistic understanding of how discrimination and job insecurity emerge and how they can be mitigated through supportive workplace policies and effective enforcement mechanisms. This integrated perspective not only advances theoretical understanding but also offers a practical foundation for empirical testing, policy development, and organisational reform aimed at promoting equity and inclusion in the workplace.

## 5. Discussion

The conceptual framework underscores the fundamentally structural nature of pregnancy-related workplace inequality in the hospitality industry, demonstrating that discriminatory outcomes are not merely the result of individual prejudices but are deeply embedded within organisational systems, labour processes, and institutional arrangements. In line with insights from Organizational Behavior, the findings suggest that organisational culture, managerial practices, and job design collectively shape how pregnancy is perceived and managed within the workplace (Fox and Quinn, 2015). Rather than being treated as a normal and protected life event, pregnancy is often constructed as a disruption to productivity and operational efficiency, particularly in labour-intensive service environments (Fox and Quinn, 2015, Kumarasamy et al., 2025). This structural framing reinforces exclusionary practices, including task reassignment, reduced working hours, and limited access to career advancement opportunities.

Consistent with Gender Role Theory, the framework highlights how deeply entrenched societal norms continue to influence organisational behaviour. Pregnant employees are frequently evaluated against gendered expectations that prioritise caregiving roles over professional commitment, leading to assumptions that they are less reliable, less ambitious, or less capable of meeting workplace demands (Delgado-Herrera et al., 2024, Gauci et al., 2023). These perceptions often operate at a

subconscious level, manifesting in subtle forms of bias such as exclusion from decision-making processes, reduced visibility in the workplace, and biased performance evaluations. As noted in the broader Gender Studies literature, such biases are reinforced by the “ideal worker” norm, which assumes uninterrupted availability and full-time commitment, conditions that are often incompatible with pregnancy and caregiving responsibilities (Lantano et al., 2025, Heilman et al., 2024). Consequently, pregnant employees are systematically disadvantaged, not because of actual performance deficits, but due to socially constructed expectations that shape organisational decision-making.

At the same time, Labour Process Theory provides a critical lens for understanding how these gendered perceptions are operationalised within workplace structures. In the hospitality industry, labour is highly standardised, closely monitored, and organised around efficiency, customer satisfaction, and cost minimisation (Omidi et al., 2023). These productivity-driven environments prioritise flexibility, speed, and physical endurance, leaving little room for accommodation of workers with specific needs, such as pregnant employees. As a result, pregnant workers may be subjected to increased surveillance, reduced autonomy, or exclusion from key tasks to maintain operational consistency. Within the field of Sociology of Work, this reflects a broader pattern in which managerial control mechanisms disproportionately affect workers perceived as less “productive” or “flexible,” thereby reinforcing workplace inequalities.

The discussion further aligns with the growing body of literature on precarious employment, which emphasises the vulnerability of workers in informal, temporary, or service-oriented sectors. Studies show that precarious employment conditions, characterised by job insecurity, limited social protection, and weak regulatory enforcement, create an environment in which discrimination can thrive (Zhou et al., 2022, Zhang et al., 2022). In the hospitality industry, these vulnerabilities are particularly pronounced

due to high labour turnover, seasonal employment patterns, and the widespread use of casual or part-time contracts. Such conditions reduce workers' bargaining power and increase their susceptibility to unfair treatment, including dismissal or contract non-renewal during pregnancy.

Moreover, the interaction between precarious employment and gendered expectations amplifies the risks faced by pregnant employees. The fear of job loss or reduced income often discourages workers from disclosing pregnancy early or requesting necessary accommodations, thereby exacerbating health risks and workplace stress. This dynamic contributes to a cycle of inequality in which structural constraints, organisational practices, and individual vulnerabilities reinforce one another. From a policy perspective, this highlights the critical importance of not only establishing maternity protection laws but also ensuring their effective implementation and enforcement. Evidence from the International Labour Organization indicates that gaps between policy and practice remain a major challenge, particularly in sectors characterised by informality and weak oversight (Goodman et al., 2023, Schneider et al., 2025).

Importantly, the framework also points to the potential for organisational and institutional interventions to mitigate these inequalities. The inclusion of mediating variables, such as workplace support and policy enforcement, demonstrates that negative outcomes are not inevitable. Supportive organisational practices, including flexible scheduling, reasonable workload adjustments, and inclusive management approaches, can significantly improve employee well-being and reduce job insecurity. Similarly, strong enforcement of labour regulations can protect workers from discriminatory practices and promote more equitable workplace environments.

Overall, the discussion reinforces the view that pregnancy-related workplace inequality in the hospitality industry is a multidimensional issue that requires integrated solutions. Addressing this

challenge necessitates a shift from viewing pregnancy as an individual limitation to recognising it as a structural and organisational concern. Combining theoretical insights from Gender Role Theory and Labour Process Theory with empirical evidence on precarious employment, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how inequality is produced and sustained, while also identifying pathways for meaningful intervention and reform.

## 6. Policy and Practical Implications

Addressing pregnancy-related workplace inequality in the hospitality industry requires integrated organisational and regulatory interventions that move beyond formal compliance to promote genuine inclusion. Flexible work arrangements and reasonable accommodations, such as adjusted shifts, reduced physical demands, and rest breaks, are essential for protecting maternal health while maintaining productivity (Schneider et al., 2025). At the same time, stronger enforcement of maternity protection laws remains critical, as gaps between policy and practice persist, particularly in service sectors with precarious employment (International Labour Organization, 2023).

Managerial training is also necessary to address implicit bias and discriminatory attitudes, which often influence workplace decisions in subtle ways. Insights from Gender Studies show that challenging gender stereotypes can improve fairness in task allocation, evaluations, and career opportunities (Brooks, 2021). In addition, fostering inclusive organisational cultures that normalise pregnancy as part of the workforce lifecycle can enhance employee engagement and reduce discrimination (Hyland and Shen, 2022).

Clear and consistently implemented human resource policies are equally important, particularly in a sector characterised by high turnover and informal employment. Such policies guide maternity rights, workplace accommodations, and return-to-work support, reducing ambiguity and unfair practices. Overall, these measures can improve employee well-being, reduce job insecurity and turnover, and

enhance organisational performance. Beyond individual organisations, broader policy efforts, such as strengthening labour protections and extending social benefits, are necessary to address structural inequalities and promote more equitable workplaces.

## 7. Conclusion

Pregnancy-related workplace inequality remains a persistent and complex challenge within the hospitality industry, shaped by the interaction of structural, cultural, and managerial factors. This paper has demonstrated that discrimination against pregnant employees is not merely an outcome of individual bias but is embedded within organisational systems, labour processes, and broader socio-economic conditions. In labour-intensive environments characterised by high flexibility demands, physical work requirements, and precarious employment arrangements, pregnancy is often perceived as incompatible with dominant productivity norms. As a result, pregnant employees frequently experience reduced job security, limited career progression, and compromised well-being.

The conceptual framework developed in this study provides a structured understanding of how organisational culture, managerial attitudes, and job design function as key drivers of inequality, while workplace support and policy enforcement serve as critical mitigating mechanisms. By situating these relationships within Organizational Behavior, the study highlights how internal workplace dynamics influence employee outcomes, and how organisational practices can either reinforce or reduce inequality. The integration of Gender Studies through Gender Role Theory further explains how deeply embedded societal norms continue to shape perceptions of pregnant workers, often leading to biased evaluations and exclusionary practices. At the same time, Labour Process Theory provides insight into how productivity-driven organisational systems marginalise workers who

require flexibility, reinforcing power imbalances and limiting opportunities for accommodation.

Importantly, the findings emphasise that pregnancy-related inequality is not inevitable. The inclusion of mediating variables such as workplace support and effective policy enforcement demonstrates that organisations have the capacity to create more inclusive and equitable environments. Interventions such as flexible work arrangements, fair management practices, and strong compliance with labour regulations can significantly improve employee well-being and reduce job insecurity. This aligns with global policy priorities highlighted by the International Labour Organization, which advocate for stronger maternity protection and inclusive labour market practices.

There is a need to test the proposed framework using quantitative and mixed-methods approaches, such as regression analysis or structural equation modelling, to examine the strength and significance of the identified relationships. Additionally, future studies should explore context-specific dynamics, particularly in developing countries where informal employment and weak regulatory enforcement may intensify workplace inequalities. Comparative studies across sectors and regions would also provide valuable insights into how institutional and cultural differences shape the experiences of pregnant employees.

Addressing pregnancy-related workplace inequality in the hospitality sector requires a shift from viewing pregnancy as an individual limitation to recognising it as a structural and organisational issue. By advancing a theoretically grounded and practically relevant framework, this study contributes to the broader discourse on gender equality and labour inclusion, offering pathways for both scholarly inquiry and policy reform aimed at creating more equitable workplaces.

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