Degree Thesis

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How COVID-19 affected immigrant housekeeper work in Sweden

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Abstract: The hotel industry employees have been one of the most affected people in the industry by the Covid-19 pandemic. Immigrant workers and women are not an exception. Considering the literature gap on investigating immigrants in hospitality in Sweden, this thesis aims to understand the immigrant housekeeper worklife post Covid-19. Using a qualitative approach, this study participants were interviewed to share and voice their concerns. Findings indicated that room attendants have faced poor job conditions, additional issues on seeking a job as immigrants, and Covid-19 only hardened existing working conditions.

Keywords: COVID-19, housekeeping, tourism industry, pandemic, emotions and feelings, immigrant workers
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1 Introduction

Hospitality is one of the largest global industries and generates millions of job opportunities. Despite the low status of hospitality, it is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. Pizam and Shani (2009) state that even though there is an ongoing debate over the nature of hospitality and its significance, no clear consensus has been made on its qualities. The absence of such agreements may, however, have disadvantageous consequences for both the hospitality business and its education. Therefore, considering the size of the hospitality industry, it is important to research different areas and aspects of it. Hospitality is a set of skill and culture diversity, hence, it will differ depending on where in the world it is.

Christensen-Hughes (1992) states that for many years, the hospitality industry has relied on diversified staff. However, just like every other industry, it has its own challenges and downsides. These challenges such as “unfair treatment among men and women employees; untrained workforce, poor working condition, seasonality of the sectors, sexual harassment and stress; high working hours without overtime payment, and other socio-cultural related factors” are addressed by Aynalem et.al. (2016, p. 4). According to the UN (n.d.), 8th (Decent work and economic growth) National Sustainable Development Goal is to “protect labour rights and promote a safe and secure working environment for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular the women migrants, and those in precarious employment”. In which, at the first look, the hospitality sector is visibly behind. People's dignity at work is recognized through decent work (Lucas, 2017, as cited in Miller et.al., 2019) which is mentioned in 8th SDG. Further ILO (1999) states that it is not only about job creation but also the quality of it. Most hotel workers report a lack of respect, little to no communication with managers and colleagues, physically and mentally tough tasks, poor recognition, inadequate shift hours (Unite, 2016, Miller et.al., 2019, Sobaih, 2015).

“A dirty job”, this is how Powel and Wattson (2006) describe hotel employee jobs on cleaning. Moreover, they state that workers earning wages by being housekeepers have “low self-respect” and “a lack of dignity” (p. 372). International workers have traditionally formed a significant part of the hospitality workforce. There are lots of research that explains the status of immigrants in the Swedish labor market, particularly after the 1990s owing to lower employment rates in comparison to native Swedish individuals. A growing business that depends on their human capital that mostly consists of women with foreign background. However, the number of female migrant workers is unknown (Refslund & Thörnquist, 2016).
Considering that hospitality and, moreover, the tourism industry are one of the most important industries, the status of decent work in tourism should be looked at. Miller et.al. (2019) states “the relevance for decent work in tourism lies in the labour intensity of the industry, as well as the opportunities for women, migrants, and young people which are higher than in most other industry sectors”. There are challenges achieving 8th SDG in the tourism industry, let alone hotel employees recovering from the pandemic.

Covid-19 pandemic is responsible for many changes not only in the hospitality industry but also in day to day lives of workers. According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020), employees with informal employment arrangements, insufficient social protection, and limited healthcare prior to the Covid-19 are particularly and considerably have a higher risk of poor job security and of facing unfair working conditions during and after Covid-19. This includes women, immigrant workers, disabled people, and young employees. This group of employees is susceptible of sliding into poverty. Therefore, this study through interviews will investigate how in general an immigrant housekeeper’s work life is affected post Covid-19. The thesis will bring forward certain issues which should be highlighted and talked about more for the sustainable growth of the hospitality sector.

1.1 Problem statement

Hospitality workers are seen at the bottom of the ladder in the industry and their voices and opinions are often unheard in conversations. Hotel room attendants contribute to being the biggest teams in the hotel industry, yet they are considered to be invisible. Invisibility comes due to them being the actors who are working alone “behind the scenes”, and not being addressed enough (Mykletun & Onsoyen, 2009). Nonetheless, they are a vulnerable group in the labour market. Vulnerable groups risk facing unfairness such as fewer rights at work, nominal or negligible social protection, low earnings and other similar issues. Moreover, considering the topic of Covid-19 and its impact in the hotel industry is very new, the existing literature fails to address many questions. Therefore, this paper will contribute to the literature on the situation with immigrant workers in the hospitality sector and voice their concern to some extent.
1.2 Aim and Research questions

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate immigrant housekeeper’s worklife post Covid-19. This is motivated since there are only a few existing studies examining it so far. The group of immigrant housekeepers is also a particularly vulnerable group in the labour market and as such, it is important to explore the impact of the pandemic on their situation at work. The thesis aims to understand and present the immigrant housekeeper’s worklife post Covid-19, as well as give minorities in the hotel industry a fair chance to express themselves. The paper will answer the following research questions:

- How do immigrant housekeepers describe their work life post Covid-19 in terms of well-being?
- How have they been treated at work?
- Have immigrant housekeepers been exposed to unfair job conditions, in that case how?

The theoretical approach used in this paper is focused on the effects of Covid-19 on immigrant room attendant’s work in Sweden. This paper addresses concerns of immigrant housekeepers by interviewing them. Through a series of interviews, the main issues were firstly summarized and concluded, and later categorised into themes to be looked at and considered for the well-being of the housekeepers and to carry out fair employment practices in the hospitality industry. The main concepts that are worked on in this thesis are the work environment in the housekeeping department, job loss and informal employment, immigrant worker integration in Sweden, and job conditions in hospitality.

The work consists of 5 main sections with subsections:

1. The introduction section, where the hospitality industry and decent work are talked about,
2. Related literature focuses on Covid-19 affecting the world of work, work environment, and immigrant workers in the hospitality and housekeeping sector in Sweden,
3. The methodology section covers the introduction and background of the methods used to achieve the goal, the data method collection and analysis, and sampling strategy,
4. The findings and discussion section reveal the outcome of the interviews and discuss the importance of it, and explores further the underlying meaning of the research,

5. The Conclusion section restates the existing issue, sums up the thesis highlighting the issues that need to be addressed, and discusses their implications while recommending further research that can be done in the future.
2 Theoretical background

2.1 Covid-19 and the world of work

This chapter talks and collects the existing literature about Covid-19 consequences specifically on the labour market and the world of work to understand the impact and the extent to which the industry was affected. The hospitality industry was one of the first industries to succumb to the adversity of the pandemic, affecting millions of workers globally. Since the aim of this study is to look at the worker’s life post Covid-19, it is important to understand how it has changed the industry and what is known to this day.

2.1.1 Economic consequences of Covid-19

The economic and labour market shock which was brought by the Covid-19 pandemic, has been affecting both demand and supply industries. Production disruptions, which began in Asia, have now expanded to global supply networks. According to Salem et.al. (2021), all organizations, irrespective of their size, are experiencing substantial problems, particularly those within the aviation, tourism, and hospitality industries, which face the actual possibility of large revenue drops, business failures, and even job losses in certain cases. Small and medium-sized companies will especially have a tough time staying in the business industry (Guillet & Chu, 2021). According to Chan and McGinley (2021), many workers are unable to relocate to their places of employment or perform their duties as a result of travel restrictions, border closures, and quarantine procedures, which has a knock-on effect on wages, particularly among the temporary and informally employed workers. In many economies, consumers are unable or unwilling to acquire products and services. Given the climate of uncertainty and anxiety, businesses are likely to postpone investments, purchasing of goods, and employment of personnel (ILO, 2020).

During the increasing pandemic, the economy’s prospects were steadily worsening. Besides, the quantity of jobs as well was declining substantially. While current projections differ significantly, they all indicate a major negative effect on the global market. According to International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020), the pandemic has an influence on the world of work in three important dimensions: “1) the number of jobs (both unemployment and underemployment); 2) the quality of work (e.g., pay and access to social safety); and 3) the effects on specific groups who are more vulnerable to adverse labor market outcomes)”
ILO (2020) states that the level of unemployment due to the pandemic has been higher than due to the 2008 crisis. RISCI (2020) also agrees that on a macroeconomic level, such decline has been seen since the Great Depression in 1929. High scenario of global unemployment is around 24.7 million. Despite the numbers being still somewhat uncertain, it is for a fact that unemployment has been drastically increasing due to Covid-19. That being said, underemployment is also anticipated to rise dramatically. ILO (2020) describes that the shock to the labour demand resulted in negative revisions in wages and working hours. As a result, during a crisis, informal employment tends to rise. The existing restrictions on the movement of people and products, however, may hinder this sort of coping technique (ILO, 2020). Moreover, both manufacturing and services are affected by the fall in economic activity and restrictions on people's migration. Supply networks on a global and regional scale have been affected. The most vulnerable sectors have been service, tourism, and retail. According to the World Trade and Tourism Council, foreign visitors dropped by up to 25% in 2020, hence, millions of jobs were under threat and were eventually compromised.

Individuals were forced to “hide” at homes and adapt to the “new normal” which consisted of closed workplaces, offices, new working hours, and on top of this change, many people faced a new challenge - working from home if they weren't laid off (RISCI, 2020). Remote working was formerly reserved for a select few, but the new normal brought about by Covid-19 compelled enterprises to exhibit a new workplace culture with flexibility in work location and hours, rather than the usual nine-to-five. Agba (2020) has found that Covid-19 is also responsible for the severe losses of working hours worldwide - 6.2 percent of working hours were eliminated in the second quarter of 2020, which is around 195 million full-time employment. The Arab states have been struck with an estimated 8.1% reduction in working hours, equivalent to 5 million full-time employment. This is followed by Europe, which has a 7.8% reduction rate, which is 12 million full-time jobs. Similarly, significant reductions in working hours are expected in Asia/Pacific, with an anticipated 7.2% drop corresponding to 125 million full-time employment. Upper-middle income nations are also predicted to lose 7.0% of their working hours, or over 100 million full-time jobs (Agba, 2020, p.121).

2.1.2 Covid-19 and inequality

As it can be seen, there has been relatively much more research done on how the pandemic is affecting the work industry. On the other side, there is also some research on how the pandemic has affected inequality. According to WEF (2020), women have been disproportionately affected by unemployment brought by Covid-19. As an example, in the period between December and April 2020, women's unemployment increased by 11% in the
United States, while men's unemployment increased by 9%. Meanwhile, these percentages were 1.6 percent and 0.8 percent in Germany, respectively (WEF, 2020). ILO (2020) also states that women are more affected in the work industry than men, which triggers worsening inequality. This idea is also supported by Rutgers (2020) stating that besides nine-to-five, office or other kinds of jobs, women perform bulk work at home, and had no other help from outside during the crisis and lockdown.

2.1.3 Covid-19 and mental health
The deadly virus known as Covid-19 is known as a physical health crisis with the effect of a serious mental health catastrophe (United Nations, 2020). Covid-19 has the potential to have a significant influence on the mental health of workers. It also demonstrates that milder mood disorders are widespread among healthcare professionals, and that female nurses and healthcare workers had a greater rate of anxiety and depression (Pappa et al., 2020). Cooch and Spoorthy (2020) further note that the Covid-19 pandemic threatens and exacerbates work-related stress and psychological suffering among frontline and hospitality workers throughout the world. Covid-19 has a significant influence on people's mental health worldwide, according to the International Organization for Migration – IOM (2020). This shows that migrant employees are more likely to be among Covid-19's most mentally ill personnel. The study (Gavida, 2020) also found a significant rise in new prescriptions for anti-insomnia, antidepressant, and antianxiety drugs. This implies that companies' strategic and human resource management during and after Covid-19 should include mental health assistance as an integral component in the company’s policy framework, or they will risk jeopardizing employees' health and productivity. According to Selko (2020), one critical cause of employee stress is how enterprises or employers are responding to the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of safety procedures and job security.

2.1.4 Migrant workers in hospitality
Hospitality is a bigger mass of the service sector activities and skills which directly reflects and correlates to the well-being of guests. Christensen-Hughes (1992) states that the hospitality industry has depended on ethnically diverse manpower for many years prior. He specifically looks at hospitality organizations employing foreign born workers and specifies that, it is due to the hesitation of businesses to employ “other types of employment” (Christensen-Hughes, 1992. p.80). Hospitality nowadays, in fact, requires being flexible when facing other workers from outside of the country (Baum et.al., 2007). Similar research was done by Zopatiis, Constanti and Theocharous (2014) where they also point out the
necessity of immigrant workers in the industry. Hudson (2007) argues that the nature of foreign workers is rather unusual and they are crucial to studies of employee behaviour. Nonetheless, one can address these concerns as much as he is knowledgeable and aware of the situation.

Loi et.al. (2014, as cited in Choi et.al., 2017) argument suggests that migrant workers are rather disadvantaged in the labour market. Choi et.al. (2017,p. 55) states “as an example, a person who is only interested in work as a means of survival will not quit that work due to low job satisfaction or a lack of fit with an organization because that person sees work as a way to survive”. This case is very often seen to be associated with immigrant workers. Therefore, they are most likely to dismiss unfair job conditions and other related issues, and make a compromise just to keep the job. Moreover, existing studies prove that immigrant workers face more unfairness than native workers (Ayuk, 2020; Bell et.al. 2014; Devine et.al., 2007). Migrant workers receive little attention and are often dismissed, despite the significant number of foreigners in the hospitality industry. Their voices and opinions are supressed, and their inputs are discredited.

2.1.5 Work environment
Workplace environment is a crucial component of individuals' work, and it affects them in some manner. It is found that employees who are content with their work environment (both physical and organizational) are more likely to achieve favourable job results (Hafez, 2019). Hafez (2019) argues that physical environment aspects such as noise, colour, temperature, workplace architecture, and other factors have an impact on the employee’s performance and well-being. Kamarlunzman (2011) proposes that there is a link between the working environment and employee productivity. An appealing workplace or supporting environment is one that concentrates individuals and inspires them to join its workforce, giving them the opportunity to perform efficiently, state Awan and Tahir (2015). Attractive work environments and supporting environments enhance the circumstances in which people combine their talents, competencies, and knowledge to work efficiently (Mbembati et.al., 2008). “A decent working environment is a condition where individuals can do their jobs in an ideal, secure, healthy, and comfortable way” (Al-Omari & Okasheh, 2017, p. 15545). Cottini and Ghinetti (2012) argue that if the organizational environment does not attract employees and they have a negative perception of it, then various behaviours such as low performance, stress-related illnesses, and productivity, might show up later. Such a case might be damaging to the organization in the long term. In turn, if the work environment is friendly, trustable, and safe, then workers are to stay in the organization longer (Hafez, 2019). Bushiri
(2014) stresses the impact of the work environment not only on the employee’s behaviour and job results but also the mental state of personnel. There is research stating that physical and material things such as acoustics, lighting, furniture and tools, indoor air quality have an impact on employees (Makhbul, 2013).

2.1.6 Housekeeping in Sweden

Occupation such as housekeeping includes activities like hotel room and common area maintenance, achieving hotel standards and providing quality service (Schneider & Tucker, 1989). According to SCB (Statistics Sweden, 2020), in 2018, there were 74,800 workers in the cleaning industry of hotels, offices and other facilities, where 60% are foreign born workers. Distinctively, SCB (2020) reports that “the second most common occupation among foreign born women was “cleaners” " . However, there are no other statistics done by SCB after 2018, looking at the foreign born worker’s percentages in the cleaning industry. Considering that migration has calmed down after the pandemic, there are still pre-existing workers in the country and a small fraction of new individuals that are incoming each year who need to be catered to as well.

In the Swedish context, Thörnquist (2015) has studied informal organizations with temporary immigrant workers mainly from Poland and the Baltic states. The workers occupation was cleaning in which they were not under the Swedish collective agreements, meaning formal contract. Such cases have consequences - lower wages and poor working conditions which also affects other regulated competitors. The findings of these studies highlight the difficulty that the immigrants have in obtaining work due to a lack of skills or talents that are not transferable between nations (Bevelander, P., 2001). Lack of knowledge in the Swedish language and how labour market works, low or non-existent social contacts, are the triggers for immigrants to take jobs classified as low skilled, and have difficulties to mobilize to better skilled and paid jobs (Bevelander, P., 1999). The last condition of low or non-existent social contacts has been seen among scholars as a type of discrimination for certain ethnical groups (Höglund, 1998 on Bevelander, P., 2001) (Medina, 2017). Nevertheless, foreign born persons were employed in occupations with lower requirements for qualifications compared to Swedish born persons (scb, 2016). In the literature, there is limited research that focuses on a more comprehensive approach that studies the experiences of migrants in Sweden.
2.1.7 Covid-19 and housekeeping

Already difficult circumstances of immigrant service sector workers have been stressed out by a drastic coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. Hospitality firms are required to make significant adjustments to their activities in the Covid-19 business climate in order to safeguard the health and safety of their staff and customers, as well as increase customer willingness to consume their business (Gössling, 2020, as cited in Gursoy & Chi, 2020). Housekeeping needs quick support in handling the shortage of skilled personnel, adopting new technology, and training teams (Jain, 2020) on new systems during this troubling time. Hotel room cleaning and tidying now are barely different to hospital room cleaning. There was relatively much and new research done on how housekeeping measures have changed after the reopening of hospitality industry.

According to Jain (2021), housekeepers are now required to disinfect rooms, commonly used areas such as door handles etc. Moreover, the author claims that it is necessary for business owners to replace some things such as carpets which hold the most bacteria, in order to be claimed as a Virus Free hotel. Similar research has been done in Delhi by Sharma and Kaushik (2021), where they have found that The Leela Group and other hotels have been coming up with new protocols and rules regarding sanitization. This includes the use of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) by all associates, a temperature check of guests, associates, and partners upon entering the hotel, hand sanitisation alarms, thorough deep cleaning of all areas, the use of hotel cars for guests, and the deployment of a task force to ensure all protocols are followed. They have also taken efforts to preserve the greatest levels of food hygiene by using social distance, e-menus, sanitization sites in restaurants, the introduction of immunity-boosting drinks, and the washing of dishes at 80 degrees Celsius. They have also implemented pay by phone at check-out, high bar pressure dry steam cleaners, electrostatic sprayers, and guest access to e-papers. The well-known Indian hotel chain, ITC, has also collaborated with the National Accreditation Board for hospital and health services to raise cleanliness standards to hospital levels (Sadahale, 2021). They worked on specially created online training for colleagues, reengineered zero-contact guest experiences, sanitized cutlery, crockery, tableware, digital ordering, and e-payments. Furthermore, cleaning methods for guest spaces have been improved, common rooms have been remodeled to encourage social distancing, and UV (ultraviolet) sanitization, and sophisticated disinfectants have been introduced for extra safety.

While most hotel housekeeping staff are concerned about personal hygiene, it is critical that masks and gloves be worn at all times while cleaning rooms to ensure not only that they do not contaminate the rooms, but also that they do not come into direct contact with
contaminants (Dogan & Christina, 2020). Staff health checks will be required on a frequent basis in the post Covid-19 hospitality situation until a suitable vaccination is discovered. Any employees who exhibit indications of sickness should be reported to medical experts right away (Dogan & Christina, 2020). Hotels will have to rely on room-based marketing strategies in the future. Emphasizing sanitization measures and staff cleanliness will be crucial in enticing potential clients to their location. The emphasis must shift from ultra-luxury to ultra-hygienic housing, with a strict emphasis on a bacterium and virus-free atmosphere (Dogan & Christina, 2020). Gursoy and Chi (2020) state that customer demand in hospitality after reopening is not the same as it was before, hence, guests are not returning to hotels and restaurants straight away. Due to smaller demand, employee shortage is most likely to be increased, which worsens the quality of the service.

Summarising the existing literature above, there is relatively much new research on how Covid-19 affected the tourism industry, hotel work, and what new measures housekeeping had to face. However, there is little to no research on how the housekeeper’s work life is post Covid-19 and how they feel about it. Especially, immigrant housekeepers have not been exposed or been a part of any research as such. This paper’s analysis will focus on concepts such as work environment, job conditions of immigrant workers in hospitality and housekeeping post Covid-19 scenario.
3. Methodology

3.1 Research design
In this chapter, the choice of methodology will be explained further. This paper aims to analyse new data and information to expand existing literature and look deeper into the topic of Covid-19’s effect on hotel housekeeper’s overall work well being, and work after the pandemic. The method chosen to collect the following data is qualitative. In-depth, semi-structured interviews are proposed to gather the data, and the interviews are conducted in Russian. Interviews allow diverse and profound answers, and, moreover, there is a chance to find different perspective answers for future discussions. Charmaz (2008) states: “qualitative interviewing provides an open-ended, in-depth exploration of an aspect of life about which the interviewee has substantial experience, often combined with considerable insight” (p. 29).

As the topic is new, little to no data is available as of now. While the topic of Covid-19 and hotel industry’s relation is being discussed, there is no pre-existing literature which examines the pandemic’s effects directly on housekeeping teams and their work well being. To investigate this potential connection further, the author must take an exploratory approach, hence, qualitative research was chosen. Because there is no proof of past academics investigating the issue, the author had to build it with limited resources, since there are only a few literatures on housekeeping but not from Covid-19’s perspective. As a result, interviews seemed to be more helpful and fitting for data collection than questionnaires. The qualitative research had more sense when it came to measuring responses and building a case.

3.2 Data collection method
For decades, qualitative interviews have been applied to extract data in research. Interviews were employed by Piaget (1930, as cited in Roberts, 2020) in formulating his theory of child development. Roethlisberger and Dickson, who were so influenced by the success of Piaget, performed the Hawthorne research, which comprised of over 21,000 interviews (Roberts, 2020). Qualitative interviews were also done inside focus groups to better understand the customer motives (Dichter, 1960). According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984), to successfully study humans and their behavior, social researchers (as well as other researchers) had come up with qualitative design. Seaman (2008) describes qualitative method purpose by stating “qualitative methods, then, were required to capture and describe these socially
constructed realities” (p. 36). The primary benefit of employing qualitative approaches is that they require the researcher to dive into the complexities and details of the subject rather than making it abstract.

### 3.3 Data analysis

To analyze the collected data, a thematic analysis is used. “Theme” is the main product of data analysis that yields practical results in the field of study” (Vaismoradi, 2016, p. 101). Individual interviews were conducted with participants to collect data for this research. The interviews are semi-structured, encouraging participants to speak freely while assisting with extra questions from the interviewer if they changed the subject. This kind of interview allows participants to create a flow of dialogue and support their storytelling (Roberts, 2020).

An interview guide, which can be found in Appendix A, was designed to make sure participants stick to the goal. It is crucial to keep in mind that a dynamic approach was taken and the interview guide has been changed and modified during interviews, according to the participant’s storytelling and new patterns in the story. To find out additional patterns, extra questions were asked to specific interviewees which cannot be found in other interviews.

Using data analysis some themes were discovered during the interviews with the participants. Some themes were assumptions of the author, hence, some specific questions were included. To find out other themes, in depth follow up questions were initiated. The interview was not transcribed due to personal information that was not relevant to the study. It is important to note that the goal of the thesis is not to generalize the findings. Themes were found out to support research questions and build arguments answering the question.

### 3.4 Sampling strategy

According to Marshall (1996), selecting a study sample is a key stage in any research effort because studying an entire population is rarely practicable, effective, or ethical. Participants were chosen by a convenient sampling in the beginning, chosen from the author’s network. The rest of interviewees were found by a snowball sampling. Meaning, participants were from other interviewee circles/networks. When choosing a sample, no nationalities, gender and ages were specified or given a hand to. Furthermore, no specific location of Swedish hotels was chosen. This study emphasizes hotels in Sweden, therefore, for better
understanding of the issue, hotel employees are chosen for interviews. More precisely, the housekeeping team of hotels are interviewed. However, it is kept in mind that the study site is not hotels itself, the consensual interviews were taken online via Zoom.

Interviewees were collected from different hotels in different cities in Sweden. Selection of interviewees was only guided by following standards:

- The participant worked in Sweden as a housekeeper until 2020
- The participant is able to communicate in the Russian language.

The reason for choosing to conduct interviews in the Russian language is that there exists a decent fraction of Russian speaking workers are in the hotel industry, however, there is not much research done, especially in Sweden (Thornquist, 2015, Ollus et.al, 2013, Almega Serviceentreprenörerna, 2014). They are also immigrants in the Swedish labour market. Moreover, for the realistic understanding of the interviewee's thoughts and emotions, the language was chosen according to the participant's mother tongue, with which the author comprehends as well. All consensual interviews were recorded for research purposes and are fully anonymous.

The chosen sample is as following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 1</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 2</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 3</td>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 4</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 5</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1: List of participants*

The figure 1 is showing the summary of the chosen sample for this study, including their participant number (which is used in findings and discussion chapter) age, gender, country of origin and year of experience (Elza Jakovele, 2022).
3.5 Ethics and limitations of the research

According to Orb et.al. (2000, p.93), “any research that includes people requires an awareness of the ethical issues”. This thesis author works with participants via interviews, hence, the question of ethics is raised. While recruiting interviewees, participants had been informed that they are free to choose whether or not they are ready and willing to do interviews. Some interviewees had had privacy concerns, therefore, they all had been informed on the interviews being anonymous. All interviewees had given their consent to use their interview answers as quotes in this thesis. Moreover, the participants had been informed on the purpose and benefits of this research. Some interviewees are known by the author, therefore, all information is kept confidential and hidden. Furthermore, their data is anonymised and cannot be linked to other data by anyone else.

In addition, despite the appropriate research method, there might be potential bias in answers as interviewees were asked about sensitive and vulnerable topics. Socially desirability bias (SDB) can be “caused by social standards that indicate that positive or negative responses to questions are socially desirable” (Larsson, 2019, p. 534). Using anonymity surveys and altering questions to reduce replies that look socially acceptable may assist in reducing SDB. Furthermore, the author reassured the interviewees that it is fine to share the information without any guilt even if it is not “socially acceptable”.

4 Findings and discussion

The following section will analyze and discuss findings of the collected data from the series of interviews. As mentioned earlier, a thematic analysis is initiated, therefore, the themes were found for each case and discussed in depth in this chapter.

4.1 Housekeeping as a work environment

Work environment is where people work and spend most of their time. It has a direct effect not only on employees' well being but also job satisfaction (Davis & Wright, 2002). In this study participants were asked about their role in their work environment – “the housekeeping department”. All interviewees admitted facing some level of stress and pressure from both employers and customers. The reasons for such would differ at both professional and personal level. It was proved that interpersonal relations and conflicts directly affected job satisfaction, job commitment and employee behaviour (Wong, 2021). Interviewee 1 stated that she feels “awful”, “humiliated” and “offended” about how the situation was handled by
management when pandemic arised. She believes that the reason for such behaviour was already occurring during work before the pandemic. Moreover, participants shared that conflicts mostly were arising when work was not being done on time. Faulkner and Patiar (1997) state that failing at meeting employment demands brings employee conflict between other colleagues or management. Meeting the demand - cleaning rooms on time - is difficult in housekeeping because of the time limit the room attendants have been assigned with. Lundberg and Karlsson (2011) argue that an eight hour shift is an unfair time, especially during peak season. Most housekeepers end up working overtime to meet the requirements, and therefore are overworked, and the stress level increases with it significantly. Interviewees believe that housekeeping work in general is stressful regardless of the pandemic situation.

“Well, our [housekeeping] job is always hard, physically and mentally” participant 1 shares.

“It is not only about it being physical. It is mentally hard. First of all, there is so little time given to clean the rooms, also the list of rooms is always long so it makes you tense and anxious” interviewee 3 states.

Besides professional conflicts between housekeeping and management, there is also the additional invisible pressure incurred due to the ongoing pandemic. During Covid-19 participants described feeling “stressed” and “not safe” because guests did not follow governmental health care guidelines, that is, putting others at higher risk. When the second wave “hit”, some participants were still working which they described as “strange” and “quiet”. Already tough conditions were hardened by Covid-19 which took a toll on the mental health of employees as well. Exposure to such conditions such as Covid-19 directly affects mental health and already existing mental illnesses (Sonmez et.al., 2020). After Covid-19 and the reopening of hospitality industry, many employees are missing, hence, the upper management or higher position managers tend to contact former employees asking or requesting them to come back to the hotel. All participants share that Covid-19 only hardened the work, because of new measures and being understaffed all the time. Hotels were challenged by service innovations, extra sanitizing, using UV lights, restoring and rebuilding some hotel rooms in order to keep guests safe and to maintain the good service (Chan., & Gao, 2021, Sharma, 2021). Travelers seem to be precautious and ask for extra cleaning as well.

“We were all alone doing all responsibilities which usually takes 3 people to do these things” interviewee 2 shares.

Such phenomena brings the quality of service into question, especially during the deadly virus pandemic. Good quality service is the goal of the hotel, however, it seems that some
hotels were lacking not only employees, but also standards. Participants explained that due to hotels not being able to afford housekeeping staff, frontline workers such as receptionists were forced to work in another department. The question that arises then, “is it easy to replace room attendants?” There are multiple training programs such as Room Attendant Training Program by Hospitality Training Center which prepare people for being a housekeeper. Such programs make sense because housekeepers are the ones providing promised quality and requirements. Despite such a big role in hotels, housekeepers are facing social stigma of being unimportant and invisible. Feeling unappreciated may lead to decreased performance (Wong, 2021) which in the long run may affect the organization in more than one way.

4.2 The role of job loss as an immigrant

Job loss was not something uncommon during the pandemic which has affected many people within and outside the industry. All participants in this study state that they have lost their position regardless of what level they held. Moreover, interviewees admit not returning to the hotel work. A job loss brings not only unstable social security but also fear for the future employment which further can affect an individual’s mental health. Getting a new position as an immigrant is not as easy, despite having skills and a stable work background (Ayuk, 2020) for multiple reasons. According to Rydgren (2004), there are two approaches to making recruiting decisions that are based on stereotyped and biased assumptions about group specific qualities rather than individual merits. Recruiters also discriminate by hiring people they recognize or have been suggested to for open positions. Interviewee 1 shares her experience of being unable to secure a position despite 13 years of experience in the industry and relevant skills:

“Immigrants will be treated like immigrants in every country…first things first you always think about your own people”.

By “own people” the interviewee means native Swedes, stating that they always have an upper hand in terms of chances to get a desired position with little to no skills to back them up. It can be seen as an unfair attitude or rather discrimination while considering recruiting. This unfair division in the labor market makes the immigrants work hard, or sometimes fight, for desired positions compromising their own well being.

This brings forward the lack of social networking as another reason for difficulties in finding a job. The use of personal ties and connections is one of the most popular and fastest strategies to acquire a job. According to Swedish legislation, open positions must be notified to the employment offices, however, many jobs are filled using informal recruiting methods,
giving a hand to social networks being the most popular job matching route. Nonetheless, even having connections did not help during nor after Covid-19 to find a new job position:

“Even if you had contacts it was impossible to find a job ”, interviewee 3 shares.

“I called managers who I know back in 2020 but they were in the same position as me”, interviewee 4 states.

Jobs can be discovered not just through formal channels such as employment offices, but also through networks or contacts of friends and family. These connections are way wider and more open for a native citizen than an immigrant worker. Diaz (1995, as cited in Ayuk, 2020) states that establishing new linkages to community life, social networks, and social interactions is a long-term process that is challenging for most immigrants since it takes time to establish relationships. This is a direct disadvantage to the immigrants, particularly in the employment market. Social integration enables immigrants to broaden their social networks and get access to the labor market in the so-called host country. Therefore, most immigrants rely on public services as their primary job searching source. Although there are positions posted, the amount of vacancies are fewer, and having a larger competition narrows the chances for immigrants to secure a position for themselves.

For most interviewees language barrier was a reason for facing difficulties finding a job. The ability to communicate in the host country's language is a critical characteristic that opens numerous doors to social and economic integration. Lack of skill in the Swedish language is viewed as a key barrier that stops immigrants from acquiring a work, particularly a qualified position that fits their academic qualifications. Therefore, it makes them settle for “less” due to some reasons such as language barrier which instantly decreases chances of job seeking.

“There for sure was misunderstanding because I did not know Swedish that well but with time it got better. I think people were annoyed because of that”, interviewee 5 shares.

Due to poor proficiency in Swedish, there is little access not only to the labour market but more importantly to information and rights in general. An immigrant worker is more likely to dismiss poor job conditions if there is no knowledge of common language between the employer. Furthermore, this might make immigrant workers to seek informal social networks for employment, which Sweden is trying to limit (Gavanas, 2012; Ollus & Joutsen, 2013).

Lack of formal things such as recognition of foreign educational degrees has contributed to talented immigrants’ difficulties in getting qualified positions. According to the findings of Ayuk (2020), educated and skilled immigrants have been unable to get their educational certificates accepted as comparable to the Swedish educational qualification by the
evaluation board. It was discovered by Dingu-Kryklund (2005) and Lemaitre (2007) that immigrants’ foreign credentials played little or no effect in helping them get positions that matched their educational abilities. Furthermore, due to a lack of academic experience in Sweden, Swedish employers do not appear to place much trust in foreign educational qualifications and work experience. The interviewee 1 also describes the fair share of the same issue:

“I have a diploma from Prague but nobody needs it here [in Sweden], nobody looks at it”.

Meanwhile, some participants of this study have a degree in hospitality and/or tourism which eventually brought many questions in front of them about their future employment opportunities in their field of degree.

“I am not sure if I should go study further in tourism if there is no work”, participant 2 shares.

Despite having educational service offered at Swedish institutions, it takes for one or two years in order to have their educational degrees acknowledged in Sweden. Concluding what was said before, a native Swede entering the labour market has already a larger social connection which most of the time might be tied to an informal, but highly known, recruitment procedure. This is a feature that most immigrants lack or have an insignificant amount of. To put it simply, immigrants are not in the same situation as native Swedes who are entering the labour market for the first time.

4.3 Job conditions as an immigrant

At first glance, the Swedish approach to multiculturalism and diversity, which differs substantially from that of other European countries, appears to have been effective in encouraging immigrant integration. However, something that is ongoing regardless if Covid-19 is around or not, is being treated differently as an immigrant in Sweden. All participants have similar experiences in unfair conditions and receive an unfavourable attitude from employers, coworkers, and even guests. Furthermore, for unknown reasons, some have been exposed to bullying and even racism. While being feared for their employment, suffering from unfair conditions, harassment, bullying, room attendants continue their lives without seeking help and/or using their voice. Devine et.al. (2007) in his research states “there is a perception among international employees that employers tend to assume that they are only capable of low-skilled work. As a result, the skills of many migrant workers may be under-used in the labour market” (p. 126). Meanwhile Jarman et.al. (2004) agrees that while valuing migrant employees’ qualities, employers may be underutilizing their
expertise. All participants of the interview are coming from post Soviet countries where to this day there are tough living conditions. Ollus and Joutsen (2013, p. 19-20) supports it by stating “migrants are particularly vulnerable to exploitation because they come from a very poor economic background, they have a low level of education or they are members of a minority group that is discriminated against in the home country”. Nonetheless, it does not excuse the fact that room attendants face not only rude comments but also harassment and bullying. Such poor conditions might directly affect self-esteem and mental health in general. This study's participants have mentioned encountering bullying at the workplace, however, they are unaware of reasons for such behaviour. Some mention them being immigrant workers for being “an issue” at the workplace. In particular, one of interviewees (Interviewee 4) describes her story of being bullied with unknown reason by a manager's assistant during her shift. It is clear that conflicts during the shifts slows down an employee, therefore, making the work even more stressful. She also mentions, while she was keeping her boundaries, the assistant kept going further, that is, violating her personal space and boundaries. It seems that conflict management is lacking in most hotels when it comes to respecting team members, and handling the conflict (if there is such) professionally. Such issues might affect an employee’s behaviour in the long run, by not feeling respected, and eventually losing the highly skilled personnel. The bullying mostly seems to appear in bigger hotel chains rather than smaller and/or privately owned hotels due to smaller hierarchy and less employees. Regardless, it is important to keep in mind that harassment and bullying at the workplace could be present in any size hotel.

Another condition that participants have faced is low salaries. Despite Sweden not having a minimum wage system, most interviewees argue that the salary was below average. Other Swedish researchers (Thornquist, 2015) have found that many migrant workers were paid less but worked longer hours than they should have. Similarly, the interviewee 5 describes her salary:

“Well, it was not much at all but it was still something”.

“Still something” is a questionable amount of money which could pay for the needs of a housekeeper, especially, if she/he has a family. It looks like the cleaning industry does not bring much income. Moreover, being an immigrant worker restricts thriving in the hospitality industry as a worker. In addition to the Covid-19 situation, the industry is still recovering, meaning that it is not as easy to negotiate higher salaries. Hotels are challenged to afford the personnel, as well as, look into existing issues such as unfair job conditions.
5 Conclusions
This study discovered different patterns of immigrant workers in housekeeping. The paper aimed to understand the immigrant housekeeper worklife post Covid-19. Conducting interviews using qualitative methods, it is clear that Covid-19 pandemic has negatively affected migrant housekeeper work, moreover, not fully recovered post covid-19.

Instead, interviews have shown and exposed rather negative and pessimistic emotions and feelings towards housekeeping as a job in general and moreover Covid-19 affecting it. Poor job conditions appeared to be existent regardless of the pandemic situation. Moreover, immigrant workers are more likely to suffer from a job loss than native workers. Even most qualified immigrant workers suffer from a Swedish recruitment system which seems to employ people relying on inner networks. In addition, the housekeeping department makes most of the hotel in total, however, it is also stressful which only increased after the pandemic. Hotels seem to dismiss strategies which do not work in the long term, such as, not enough time for cleaning.

Facing rough conditions of the pandemic, all participants have moved on and are trying to adapt to new positions, and some, even to new countries. Covid-19 was rather a chance to re-think and reflect on hotel work and their former position. If the hotel industry can manage and better job conditions is yet to be seen in the future. Though existing literature shows how the housekeeping department is underestimated, this research adds new findings on missing literature about immigrant workers in hospitality in Sweden. This study leads to the conclusion that hotel owners should reconsider their work environment and culture, and take appropriate measures in such an international industry. Considering the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, the hotel industry is given another chance to rethink employee work well-being.

5.1 Limitations
Due to interviewing in the participant’s mother tongue, translation was initiated. Despite the author being fluent in Russian and English, some translations might slightly differ from the original. However, it does not change any thoughts or emotions of the participants.
The interviews were not transcribed but they were recorded which has allowed the author to go back to the data and listen if needed. For the reader to have raw data and better engagement with it, the interviews could be transcribed in the future.

In addition, this research area could be explored in a bigger parameter, meaning, the amount of participants could be increased. Such measures reduce the risk of biased groups of interviewees, and give more reliable results.

5.2 Future research
In the future this study could be expanded towards higher hotel management, addressing existing issues on their level. Since this study showed that Swedish hotels do not educate employees on cultural diversity enough, hotels could address their strategies in the future studies. Do Swedish hotels have strategies on educating workers about cultural diversity? How do Swedish hotels handle issues such as harassment and bullying at the workplace? Questions as such could be expanded and answered in the future.
6 References


Jain, S. 2020. Would the hotel Industry have to redo the rooms / housekeeping standards post COVID? Instilling greater confidence to bring back the customers.


Appendix A

Interview guide

1. Укажите, пожалуйста, когда вы работали в отеле?
   a. (Please, state when did you work in the hotel?)

2. Как вы думаете, повлиял ли Covid-19 на отрасль? Если да, то можете ли вы описать его мне?
   a. (Do you think covid-19 affected the industry? If so, can you describe it to me?)

3. Возвращаясь к 2020 году, что произошло за эти годы?
   a. (Going back to 2020, what happened during these years up until now?)

4. Как вы себя чувствуете после потери работы?
   a. (How do you feel after losing a job?)

5. Каков был ответ во время выхода на рынок труда и поиска работы в Швеции?
   a. (How do you experience the labor market, finding a job in Sweden? What was the response?)

   a. (How do you remember the work being physically/mentally?)

7. К вам когда-нибудь относились иначе, чем к шведам?
   a. (Have you ever been treated differently from native Swedes, Swedish born people?)

8. Какие у вас были эмоции во время и после того, как на вас повлиял covid-19?
   a. (What were your emotions during and after covid-19 has affected you?)

9. Удалось ли вам вернуться в отель после COVID-19?
   a. (Were you able to come back to the hotel after COVID-19?)

10. Считаете ли вы работу физически/эмоционально другой до COVID-19 и так как она сейчас?
    a. (Did you find work physically/emotionally different from times before COVID-19?)

11. Считаете ли вы, что языковой барьер стал проблемой при поиске работы после пандемии?
    a. (Do you think language barrier was an issue finding a job after the pandemic?)

12. Как вы оцениваете то, что произошло на сегодняшний день, вернетесь ли вы в отель?
    a. (How do you judge what happened today?)
Note: Due to the nature of interviews, some questions were skipped, depending on interviewees story telling. Moreover, some questions might be paraphrased differently in order to expand the current dialogue. Some questions were added on the move.

Additional questions were asked if the interviewees answered in one sentence. Some answers were challenged to find out if they feel somewhat different.

Anything beyond this, the teacher’s directives apply.