

CAREER RESILIENCE OF THE TOUR LEADER: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

Chih-Hung Wang

National Taichung University of Education, Taiwan

INTRODUCTION

Group package tour is one of the popular outbound travel patterns among Asian tourists (Wong & Wang, 2009). The tour leader is the most prominent feature of group package tours. It is an important interface between destinations and tourists, which significantly affects tourists' overall impression and satisfaction with travel services, and is also an important target for tourists to evaluate travel experience and service quality. Tour leaders must arrange transportation and accommodation, deal with emergencies and provide related services. In addition, they must also deal with difficult participants (Luoh & Tsaor, 2014). Furthermore, the service interaction between the tour leader and the participants is close, and the working hours are long, so the physical and mental burden of the tour leader is often caused.

In view of the difficult work of tour leaders, many previous studies have explored issues related to the physical and mental burden of tour leaders, such as emotional labor (e.g., Wong & Wang, 2009), hassles (e.g., Tsaor & Lin, 2014), work-family conflict (e.g., Lin, Chen, & Sun, 2015; Lin, Chen, & Wang, 2022), tour member misbehavior (e.g., Tsaor, Cheng, & Hong, 2019), emotional blackmail and job frustration (e.g., Lin, Chen, & Luo, 2021). For the tour leaders, the aforementioned burdens seem to be an adversity that needs to be overcome urgently. If they cannot be overcome, it may cause subsequent adverse effects and eventually force the tour leaders to leave the workplace.

London (1983) pointed out that career resilience is one of the important factors affecting career motivation, and advocated that career resilience refers to the resistance of an individual to career interruption in a less ideal working environment. Resilience refers to the positive adaptation pattern that is still displayed in the

context of significant adversity or risk environment (Masten, 2001). Therefore, if the tour leader has strong resilience, she/he should be able to overcome or adapt to adversity smoothly and move forward in her/his career.

The tourism industry is easily affected by the external environment, which threatens the development prospects of the industry. For example, the pandemic of COVID-19 was raging, which led to an instant freeze in the development of the tourism industry, and at the same time aroused the academia to pay more attention to the issues related to industrial resilience (e.g., Mladenović, Rrustemi, & Mogaji, 2022; Prayag, 2020; Sharma, Thomas, & Paul, 2021; Wieczorek-Kosmala, 2022). Resilience is not a new issue in the field of tourism. With the increasing challenges of business environment, climate change, social structure and economic turmoil, previous research proposals should focus on issues related to resilience assessment (e.g., Luthe & Wyss, 2014).

Looking back at the research on resilience in the field of tourism, there are relatively few studies on the resilience of the front-line employee, and even less research on career resilience for specific jobs. So far, there is only a few researches on the career resilience of tour leaders with extremely difficult job characteristics. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to use in-depth interviews to explore the career resilience of tour leaders.

METHOD

Research on career resilience of the tour leader is still in its infancy, so this study used in-depth interviews to explore the progression of career resilience of the tour leaders in Taiwan. One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted in this study. The six stages of the resilience progression (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005)

were used to act as the questions for in-depth interview. Each interview lasted approximately one to two hours. The interview process was not terminated until information saturation was reached. A total of 14 tour leaders were interviewed. The entire interview was recorded and translated into text. This study also used aliases to maintain anonymity and keep the details of the interviewees confidential. Content analysis was used in this study to test the reliability and summarize the results.

FINDINGS

Patterson and Kelleher (2005) indicates that when individuals are facing adversity, they may produce three resilience formation mechanisms: interpretation, capacity, and action. Through the interaction of the three aforementioned mechanism, an individual can break through the difficulty when facing adversity. The progression of resilience proposed by Patterson and Kelleher (2005) includes adversity strikes, interpretation of adversity, resilience capacity, actions to achieve resilience, successful outcomes, and increased resilience capacity for future adversity. The in-depth interviews of this study show that COVID-19 pandemic has led to a significant reduction in job opportunities, and it was difficult for the tour leaders to switch jobs because they don't have other occupational skills. Most of the tour leaders then have begun to consider the cause of the difficulties and their professional advantages, and build some slash work skills with the occupational training provided by governments. The passion for the work of the tour leader is the main source of resilience energy for the tour leader. Most tour leaders were difficult to give up on the work of the tour leader. The tour leaders also believed that the pandemic will end one day. Therefore, the switch of work is mostly related to the core skills of the tour leader, such as staffs in the tourist information center or airport. Some tour leaders choose to work part-time or return to the family as housewives. Most of the tour leaders were still expecting to return to act as a tour leader in the future. As the pandemic gradually relieved, most tour leaders began to back to the workplace and lead the tours. The knowledge and capabilities built during the previous pandemic can also be used as a way to adapt to the next adversity, although they do

not expect such a day.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study reveal the progression of resilience of tour leaders in coping with the adversity, especially for the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this study may provide the reference for travel industry and tourism authority. As the issue of resilience has attracted enormous attention, it is suggested that future research may establish a career resilience scale for tour leaders to act as a tool to establish and verify the theoretical frameworks in the future.

REFERENCES

- Lin, W.-R., Chen, H.-M., & Sun, C.-K. (2015). A study on the relationship between work-family conflicts and the job satisfaction of tour leaders. *Journal of Tourism and Recreation*, 2(1), 41-52.
- Lin, W.-R., Chen, H.-M., & Wang, Y.-C. (2022). Work-family conflict and psychological well-being of tour leaders: The moderating effect of leisure coping styles. *Leisure Sciences*, 44(7), 786-807.
- Lin, W.-R., Chen, H.-T., & Luo, S.-T. (2021). Relationships among emotional blackmail, job frustration, turnover intention for tour leaders. *Anatolia*, 32(2), 262-273.
- London, M. (1983). Toward a theory of career motivation. *Academy of Management Review*, 8(4), 620-630.
- Luoh, H.-F., & Tsaur, S.-H. (2014). The effects of age stereotypes on tour leader roles. *Journal of Travel Research*, 53(1), 111-123.
- Luthe, T., & Wyss, R. (2014). Assessing and planning resilience in tourism. *Tourism Management*, 44, 161-163.
- Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic: Resilience process in development. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 227-238.
- Mladenović, D., Rrustemi, V., & Mogaji, E. (2022). Using COVID-19 vaccination as a resilience strategy for the tourism sector- evidence from Serbia. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 25(7), 1021-1025.
- Patterson, J. L., & Kelleher, P. (2005). *Resilient school leaders: Strategies for turning adversity into achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Prayag, G. (2020). Time for reset? Covid-19 and tourism resilience. *Tourism Review International*, 24,

179-184.

- Sharma, G. D., Thomas, A., & Paul, J. (2021). Reviving tourism industry post-COVID-19: A resilience-based framework. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 37, 100786.
- Tsaur, S.-H., Cheng, T.-M., & Hong, C.-Y. (2019). Exploring tour member misbehavior in group package tours. *Tourism Management*, 71, 34-43.
- Tsaur, S.-H., & Lin, W.-R. (2014). Hassles of tour leaders. *Tourism Management*, 45, 28-38.
- Wieczorek-Kosmala, M. (2022). A study of the tourism industry's cash-driven resilience capabilities for responding to the COVID-19 shock. *Tourism Management*, 88, 104396.
- Wong, J.-Y., & Wang, C.-H. (2009). Emotional labor of the tour leaders: An exploratory study. *Tourism Management*, 30(2), 249-259.