

TO ENHANCE THE SLEEP EXPERIENCE OF THE GUESTS IN THE HOTELS

(A Study on the Five Star Hotels in Pune)

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ABSTRACT

The Five Star Hotels in India, since a decade has started paying special attention towards a better sleep experience for their guests. The Hotel bedding revolution is a global phenomenon today and the hotels in India are no exception to it. Most of the guests are unable to sleep in the guest rooms either because the beds are uncomfortable, they do not get the desired pillow type, or the rooms are not dark enough or quiet for a sound sleep. The hotels provide different types of mattresses ,pillows, a good night kit with eye mask, ear plugs, special aroma therapy oil, sleep inducing music ,sleep inducing snacks for their guests as a part of the turn down service. The findings of this research suggests that the Five Star Hotels in Pune are making conscious effort to provide comfortable bed along with sound sleep experience to their guests to sustain in today's competitive market. The concept is at an early stage, where the resources are available but not fully utilised. The hotel needs to train their staff to create the "wow" effect for their guests to return to their hotels.

KEY WORDS- Turn down service, Pillow menu, Eye pillow, Percalé

Turn Down service-Making the bed ready for sleeping by removing bedspread and other tasks done to make the environment conducive for a good night's sleep

Pillow Menu- It includes different types of pillows such as either down, polyfill, cotton etc.

Eye pillows or dream pillows, are mask shaped or rectangular pouches made from a fabric such as cotton or silk and filled with scented or non-scented herbs

Percalé- a weave which has a thread count of about 200 or higher, and is noticeably tighter than the standard type of weave used for bed-sheets

White noise - white noise can be described as noise whose amplitude is constant throughout the audible frequency range and helps in inducing sleep through a machine

I. INTRODUCTION

“Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care ,balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course, chief nourisher in life's feast”- William Shakespeare

The hotels in India have woken up to the fact that sound sleep for the guest is an important aspect during his stay in the hotel. In addition to providing high-speed internet access, branded toiletries and

linen or free airport shuttle service, hotels at all levels are attracting customers by offering a great sleep experience. The guests in the business hotel spend maximum time in the bed after a tiring and a stressful day at work. It is the guest's basic need to have a sound sleep to start the day afresh. Hotels are investing in creating a bed that the guests desire and has value for money. Offering high quality bedding in the rooms give hotels a unique tool to stand out in the competitive market. Most hotels have replaced the mattresses and all of the bedding to survive in the competitive environment. The detailing about the bed linen is done to the extent that "warmth" defines a larger dose of fabric softeners for the linen, while "efficiency" defines linen with a thread count of 330 for just the right amount of crispness of the sheets. The customers perceive the overall quality of the room to be higher with a more luxurious bed in the hotels.

The customers are more alert about a sound sleep every night as its deprivation is directly linked to higher stress level, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, stroke and certain types of cancers. The concept of "Heavenly Bed" was introduced realising that nothing could beat the virtues of a good bed. According to the study conducted by Westin Hotels and Resorts, nearly half of the travellers globally reported to have difficulty in sleeping in the hotel rooms. The bed ranked high on the list of priorities for the guest in most of the surveys conducted by the hotels in India. Bed denotes one of the important products which is seen as a luxury by the guests.

There are many reasons for the guest to have a disturbed sleep, the main reasons being absence of homely feeling, uncomfortable bed, noisy surroundings, jetlag, stress and certain phobias. The guests are accustomed to their own beds. No other bed, no matter how well made, is apt to feel quite as naturally good and comfortable as their own. Many factors are responsible to have trouble in getting a good night's sleep when they are in a hotel. Many of the guests travel alone and sleep alone when travelling for business. The combination of ingredients is frequently not conducive to getting a good night's sleep. The problem of conditioned or learned insomnia can be resolved by using the bed only for sleeping. The brain will then begin to reassociate the bed with sleeping, and the act of just going into bed will make the person feel sleepy.

When going to bed, it is crucial that the person's mind is calm and stress free to help his body slow down and prepare for the sleep. Hotels can be very accommodating and the guests need to be as explicit as possible about what they require for a sound sleep in the guest rooms.

The Five Star Hotels in India offer the following facilities and amenities for a better sleep experience to its customers-

a) The sumptuous and stylish Bed with a comfortable Mattress-The customers perceive to get improved sleep in the hotel rooms than they normally get in their own bed at home. Luxury and high end quality bedding ensures that they get a sleeping experience that is the best that can be offered. The luxury hotel beds are large sized, custom designed by well-known bed manufacturers exclusively for the hotels.

Mattresses preferred by hotels range from those with a high number of coils around 900 to 3,000 individually pocketed to coil-less ones made of latex or polyurethane. Factors such as type of foam, number of layers, and whether a mattress has air chambers are the differentiators for the mattresses. The best ones are titanium coil-springs which are light and durable. Some international hotels hire a director of bed bouncing, whose job is to go around the company's hotels and bounce on the bed to test its coils. Ideal mattress designs could be from 12.5- 13.5 inch-thick, non-flip and with washable tops. The tight foundation of the mattress grips linens for minimum disruption which makes it convenient for the housekeepers during bed making. The mattress is topped with three sheets, including one over the blanket, a decorative bed scarf across the foot of the bed, a white duvet, down blanket, five feather and down pillows. About 90% of the world's market is dominated by spring mattresses, but in India the spring mattresses are at a very nascent stage. A good mattress can enhance healthy sleep by maintaining spinal alignment, reducing surface pressure, regulating the body temperature and resisting allergens. The guest's with a back problem may request for a hard board to be placed below the mattress on the bed.

The bed designs have also changed with the oversized headboards built onto the walls, which are gaining popularity in the hotels. The headboards feature double-layered upholstered ones in different

colours to match the decor of the room. Pendant lights or small chandeliers at the sides of the beds are new design tricks being used to highlight the bed which is the star of the guestroom.

b) The perfect blend of fabrics for the bed linen- While pillow menus and mattresses get a lot of attention but the bed sheets remain the first point of contact for the guest. The important factors for the sheets are the thread count, the quality of yarn, the finish of the fabric and the colour. Every hotel has different specifications and is decided based on the category of the hotel. Most upscale hotels have sheets with polyester and cotton blends, but percale is the easiest to maintain and looks good even after hundred washes. The thread count varies between 230-330, cotton or polycot fabric depending on the type of hotel. Very few hotels have sheets with a 300-thread count and are made of Egyptian cotton or American organic yarns. White is the preferred colour for the bed sheets as it looks clean and can take up many laundry washes. Certain boutique hotels experiment with different colours for the sheets. Today's guests are more concerned with the cleanliness and not just comfort. Decorative items for the bed are often not selected these days unless they can be washed and hotels are opting those items which can be washed after every use.

c) The Pillow Menu- A typical hotel's pillow menu allows guests to choose from the different types of pillows. It ranges from anti-snoring, peace, tranquillity, energy, meditation to down-alternative microfiber pillows. The range is huge and also includes soft polyfill, non-allergic and even the scented ones. If the pillows do not suit the type of posture or support the weight of the body for a guest, it can lead to neck or back pain, insomnia or a headache upon waking. The hotels may provide guests with a variety of pillows to suit the personal preferences. The hotels may provide gel pillows which can be warmed or cooled to relieve the muscle tension. Some hotels offer the jet-lagged guests special services that include afternoon turn-down, wake-up call and a napping kit similar to the sleep kit. Many of the guests are very specific about the type of pillow they use and hence carry one while travelling.

d) Quiet Zones- The new trend in the hotel rooms is to have black-out curtains which are closed during the turndown service. Blackout fabric is primarily used to block light. It also provides insulation against outdoor temperature, reducing heating and cooling costs. The rooms also have door drop seal or curtain clips which blocks light and noise from the corridors, noiseless door hinges, and master switches to put off all the lights in the room. The hotels use white noise machines which mask the background sounds. It is used to promotes healthy sleep, helps to drown out sounds which otherwise prevent us from falling asleep or waking up while asleep. The transit hotels are susceptible to disruptions that typically cannot be avoided or prevented by hotel. The supervisory associates should be trained in dealing with problems and make good decisions, both on ways to minimize noise disruption as well as dealing with guests who bring complaints to the hotel's attention.

e) Turndown service with special additional services- The turn down service in the hotels is given from around 5:30 pm to 9 pm for the guests. The turn down service includes removing the bedcover, turning down the bed sheets, placing the cotton pillow on top of the foam pillow, placing the breakfast knob card on the pillow along with flower bud, chocolates or a good night message. The guestroom attendants replenish the supplies, generally tidy the room, adjust the air-conditioning, pull the drapes, and switch off all the lights except the bedside lamp to create a welcoming glow around the bed. The other tasks carried out to make the environment conducive to and comfortable for a good night's sleep include delivering a lavender filled eye pillow, lavender oil which induces sleep, ear plugs, eye masks, putting sleep inducing music each evening around nine o'clock in the guest rooms. Hotels provide bedside white noise machines upon request that electronically drown out any stray background or other noise. The hotels may get requests from the guests to provide rooms away from the elevators to avoid the noise of the traffic. The hotels may provide "Sleep Menu" in every room so that the guests can customize their guest room with a variety of additional amenities and services, such as aromatherapy linen sprays and sleep-inducing bedtime snack options.

f) Sleep initiatives taken by hotels-Hotel companies are now sponsoring sleep studies, commissioning their own branded mattresses, putting up tent cards to explain the special services provided by the hotel for a sound sleep, publishing sleep newsletters. There is a competition to win customers' loyalty by promising them a better night's rest and it demands something more than just good mattress and sheets. To stay ahead, hotels are rolling out full-scale sleep initiatives. The hotels

have Sleep Concierge who takes care of every sleep requirement of the guest and ensures that the guest's time in bed is well-spent. Some hotels have specially designed, user-friendly alarm clocks in every room which ensures waking the guest at the right time leading to sound sleep.

g) Training of the staff for special guest experiences- The housekeeping employees are imparted training to gain the knowledge of the special services offered to the guest and the expected standards of performance are taught to them. The importance of personalised service and special requests by the guests is emphasised. The staff takes initiatives to welcome their guests by presenting towel art in various forms.

h) Providing the best temperature for the sound sleep-Temperature could be one of the factors which are overlooked by the hotel. It could be responsible for a sound sleep and a fitful night which may leave the guest tired the next day. The survey suggests that guests prefer to sleep in a cold atmosphere and may get annoyed if the temperatures are regulated by green thermostats that maintain a particular temperature. Most of the hotels prefer to maintain their temperatures between 18 to 22 degree Celsius in summer and 22 to 24 degree Celsius in the winter season.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mr.Sudarshan Rai, Food and Hospitality World Magazine, 2013

In this article Mr.Rai talks about the need of educating the guests and the employees about the importance of bed and bedding in the hotel. The globally travelled guests find a huge difference in the comfort of the bed in Indian hotels and International hotels. The guest experience in Indian hotels related to bed and bedding is dissatisfactory. Hotel industry in India is taking strong steps towards developing the quality of bed and bedding of the guest rooms and also spreading the awareness about the same.

Express Hospitality Magazine's Design Corner, July 2013

The study suggests that many hotels in India and abroad take conscious decisions about choosing the correct bed and bedding for the hotels, mostly during the time of renovations. Along with the interior of the room, the main focus is on the bed and bedding and its comfort to the guest. Each and every bed is designed keeping in mind the comfort of the guest. The bed and bedding contributes on a higher scale to the comfort of the guest compared to the interior or other facilities of the room.

Shalini Seth, Deconstructing the Bed, Hotelier India, January 2012

The article emphasizes that various hotels have different strategies to enhance the sleep experience of the guests. The bed is always among the top scorer in the guest satisfaction surveys in the hotels. A lot of attention is given on the pillow menu, mattress, thread count, the quality of yarn, the finish and the color of the sheets to give a unique experience to the guests.

Peter Yesawich, Hotel and Resort Selection: The criteria are changing, Hotel Mngement.net, September 2012

The study states that the criteria for the selection of a hotel by the guests have changed. It states that the relative influence of many selection criteria the industry promoted aggressively in the recent years has plateaued. This includes the appeal of soundproofed guest rooms, premium quality bedding and linen, hotel frequent-stay points, suggesting that they no longer provide the degree of service or product differentiation and are expected by the guests.

Steve Timmermand, Guests are willing to pay extra for sought after features, Hotel Management net magazine, in September 2012

In this article Mr. Steve says that the hoteliers should grab the business not only through the services which the consumer wants but also for which the guests are willing to pay extra to the hotel. It was observed that in- room comfort facilities are the most sought after features for the guest. The guest is least interested paying for Style and decor, Flexible cancellation policies and reward points. Whereas when it comes to the comfort of the room and the amenities involved, the guest is willing to pay extra. There is a 20% rise seen in the business of the hotels which are giving top priorities to the bed, its comfort and other room amenities. The guests prefer those hotels who handle their issues on the priority basis and also their preferences are taken care in all the visits.

Brendan Coffey, A Good Night's Sleep Is Critical To The Success Of A Business Trip, So Hotels Are Putting New Emphasis On The Bed, Executive Travel Magazine , Oct 2011

The study conducted suggests the importance of sleep and states that sleep improves memory and performance while lack of it erodes productivity, coordination, judgment and attention to detail. It was observed that the travellers are paying extra attention to the comfort of the room and are consciously selecting their bed & bedding and are ready to pay extra for it. The findings suggest that good night sleep adds value experience for the guest and helps in repeat business. The hotels nowadays try to grab business by not only providing the additional services but providing the facilities for which the guest is willing to pay extra to the hotel. The guest is willing to pay extra for the comfort and amenities. The preferences from the guests during the reservation help them to fulfil their needs and wants during the stay. The maximum preferences received during reservations are for comfortable beds in the guest rooms.

Anya Orlanska, How to get a good night`s sleep, National Sleep foundation, June 2010

Anya Orlanska suggests that the travellers no more consider hotels as just lodging and boarding facility and expect unique experiences to be cherished by them. The experience of a sound sleep is also an important one for the guest. Along with the appropriate bed, the other facilities like sound proof walls for the rooms, correct lighting, and a good turn down service creates a favourable environment for a sound sleep for the guest.

Sonal Kashyap, Innovations in Fabrics, Hotel and Food Service, July-August 2010

The study suggests that the furniture, architecture and lighting comprise the body but the fabrics that are used in the property are definitely the clothes. Often called as the “Amenity War”, hotels are constantly trying to be one up on each other about their amenities and chief amongst them is their bedding. For many consumers hotel bedding is seen as luxury, comfort and style.

David A. Reinstein, LCSW, How to Get a Good Night's Sleep in a Hotel Room, Know What You Require, Prepare What You Can and Insist on the Rest, August 30, 2007

The study focuses on the various reasons for not getting a sound sleep in the hotels. It suggest that for a sound sleep in the new place you should request the accommodations department in the hotel the things that suit you to get good sleep, feel rested and at your best the next morning.

Andrea Bennett, Upgrading Hotel Beds, Travel and Leisure Magazine, June 2005

The study suggests that nowadays the concept of good night sleep is no more restricted to comfortable bed and bedding, but hotels are taking a number of other initiatives for their guests. All the hotels are facing competition in bed improvement and it has become the new face of the hotel brand. This is the reason why there is double raise in sale of the mattresses in last 5 yrs. Hotels are emphasising on the bed and bedding and it has become their unique selling point. The guests perceive the overall quality of the room to be higher with a more luxurious bed. The research suggests that superior beds are enough to keep the guests loyal towards a hotel.

Sleep in 5-Diamond and 5-Star Comfort

The article states that one of the greatest pleasures of spending time in a five star hotel is to experience sleeping in a really good bed. The hotels at all levels are attracting customers by offering a really great sleep and beds are made by well-known bed manufacturers exclusively for the hotels. Today`s guests are more demanding and conscious about the health factors. The hotels have strong belief that if you want to convert your guest in to a repeat guest, then providing basic facilities like best bed and bedding is a must. Hotels are giving strong emphasis on the training of the staff for making a guest room ready during the turn down service along with the best quality of linen to the guest.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the new trends in the hotel beds and beddings.
2. To study the additional services provided by the new age hotels related to the sleep experience of the guest.
3. To study the awareness of the sound sleep concept amongst the hotel staff and the guests.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Collection of Data:-

The data required for the research was collected using the following techniques:-

The scientifically prepared and pre-tested questionnaires were used for the collection of primary data. The researcher collected the data from the Managerial and Supervisory levels in the hotels. The data was also collected from the guests to understand the awareness about the concept of sound sleep experience. The secondary data was collected by means of articles published in the hospitality journals, books and internet.

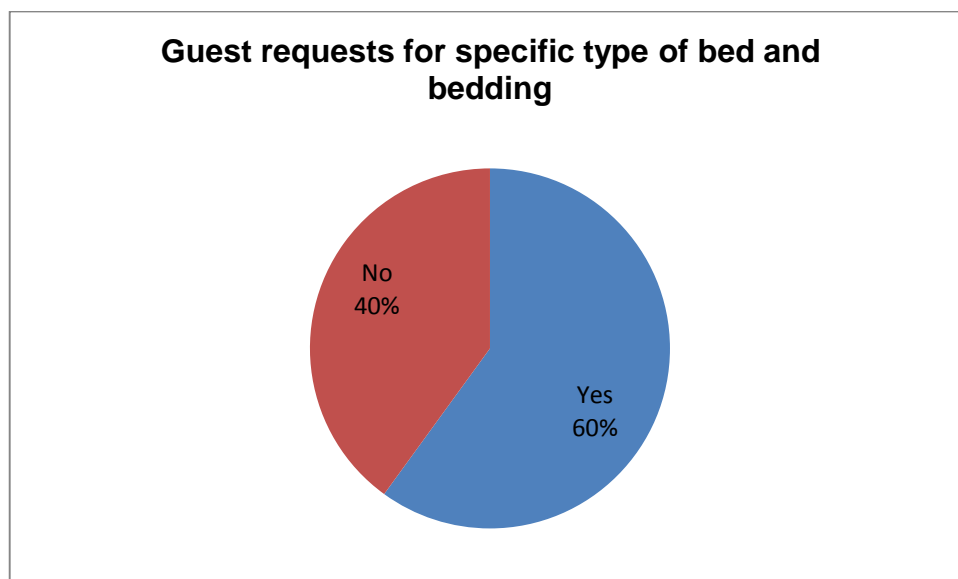
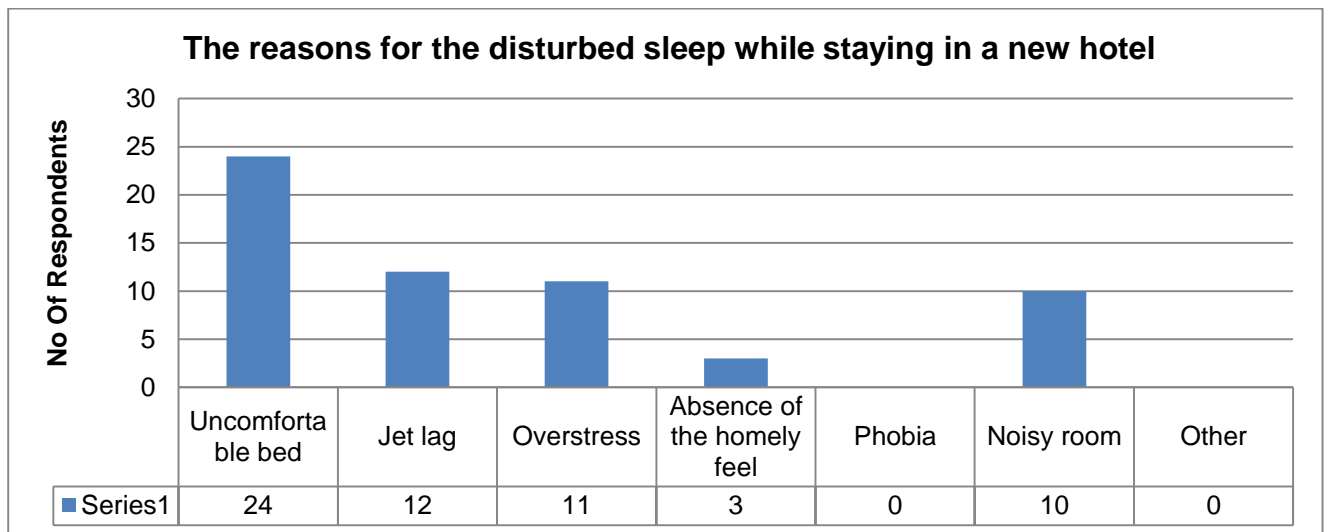
Sampling Techniques:-

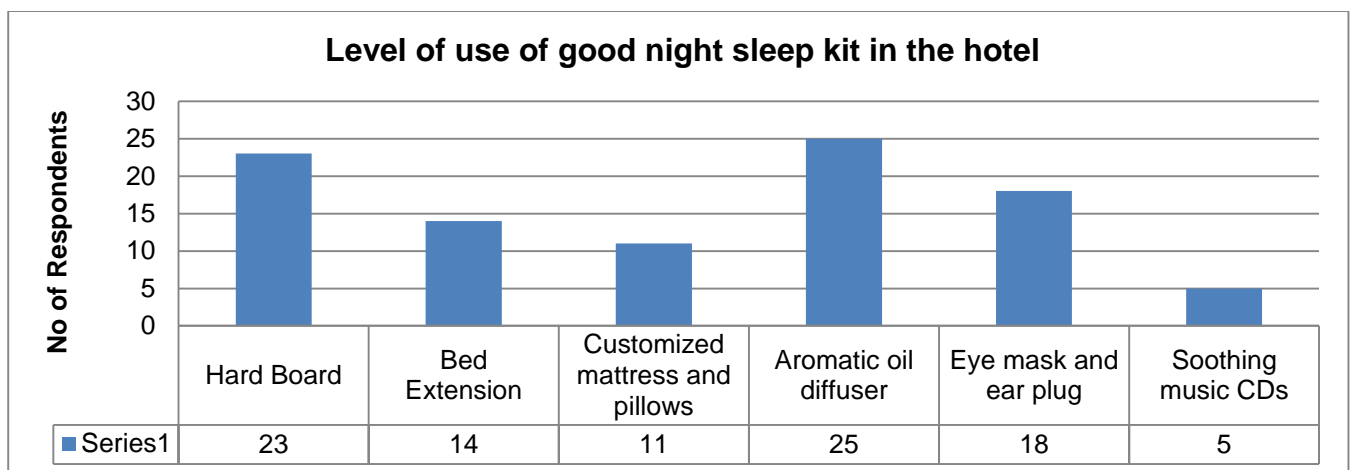
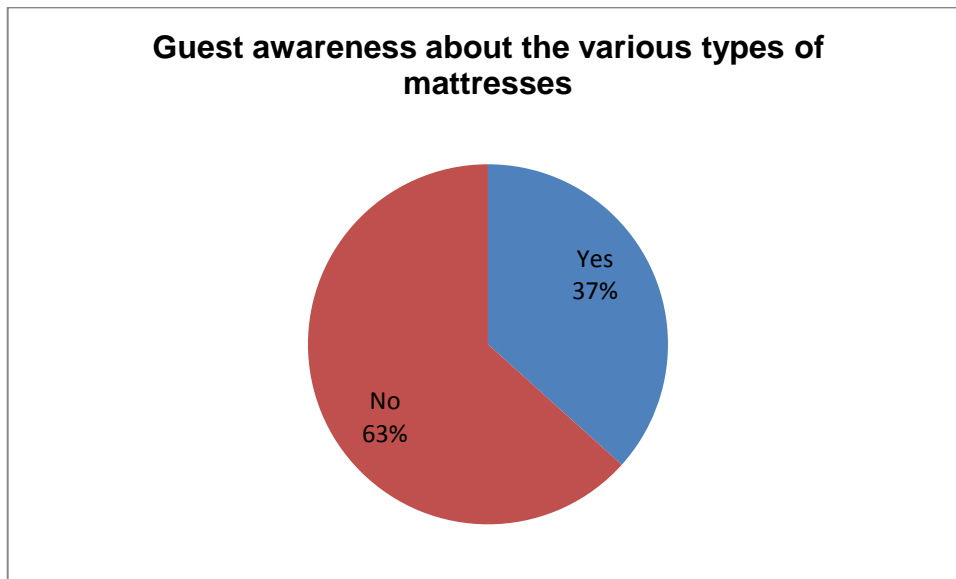
The study was done for 15 Five Star Hotels in the city of Pune by random sampling method. The sample size was 100 which included 40 Managerial and supervisory level employees and 60 hotel guests.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

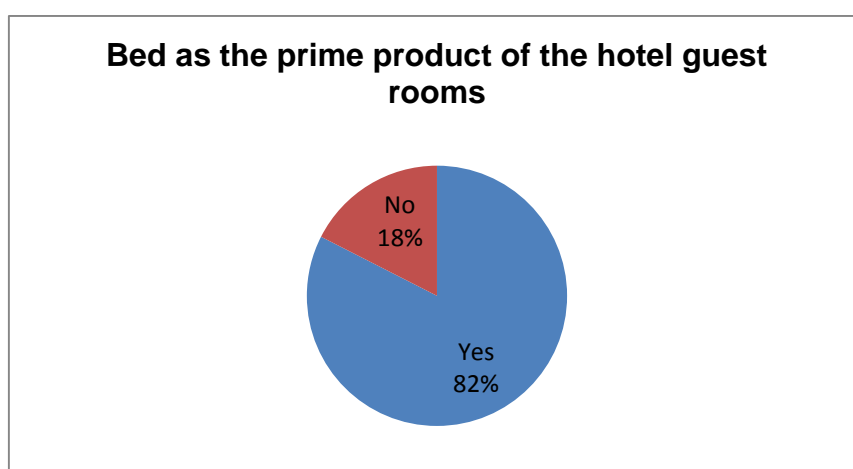
The primary data collected through the questionnaire was analyzed by percentage method and the representation was done in graphical form. The data was analyzed as per the responses obtained from the respondents and interpreted to draw the following conclusions.

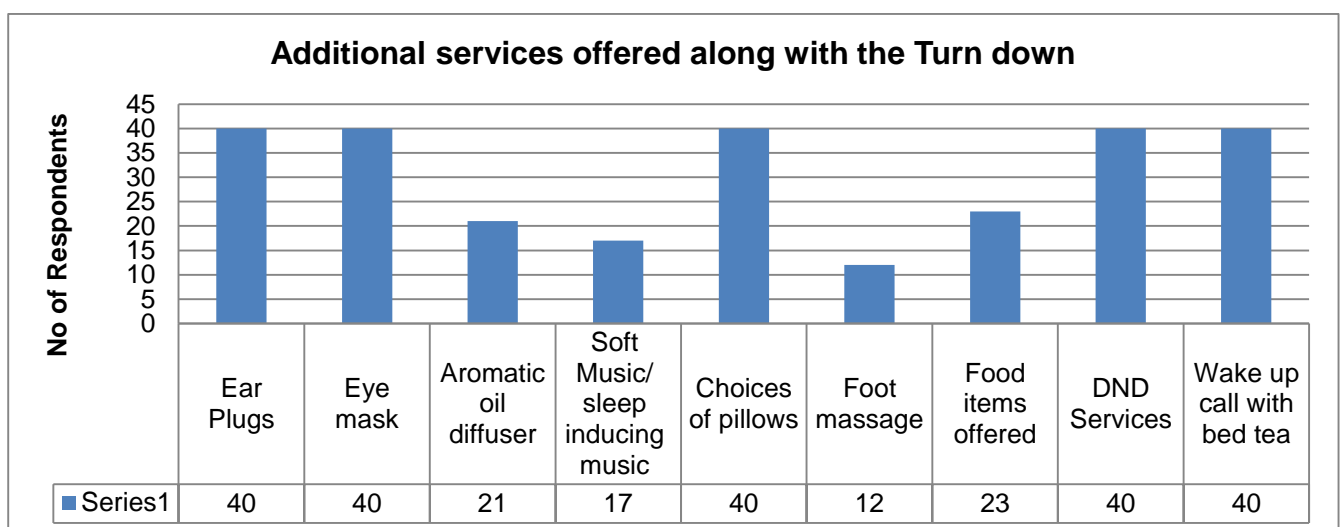
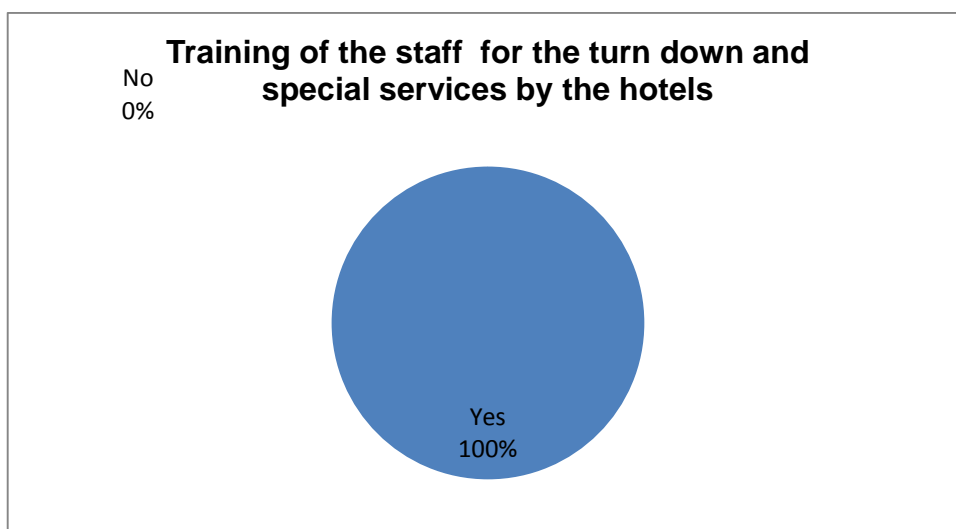
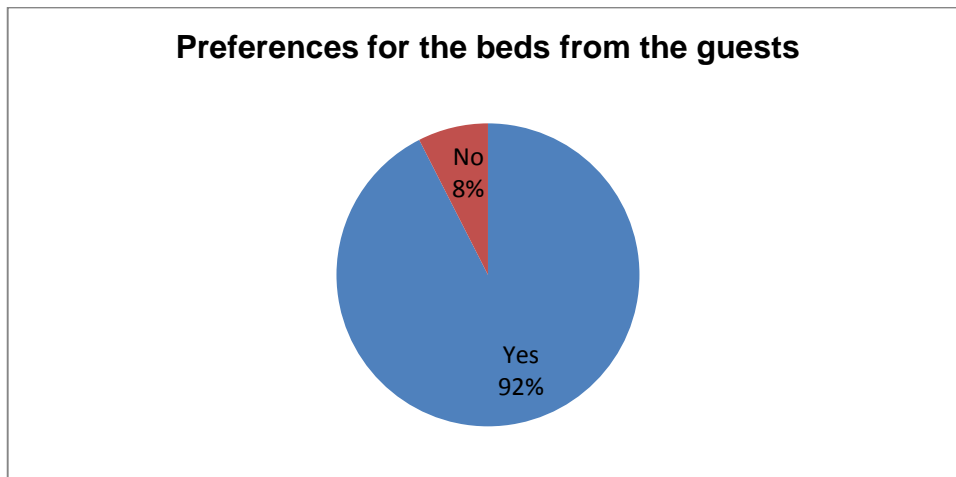
The results obtained from the data collected through the hotel guests are as follows-





The results obtained from the data collected through the hotel employees are as follows





VI. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the research can be concluded as follows-

1. The five star hotels in Pune are making conscious efforts to provide comfortable bed to their guests to sustain in the competitive market.
2. From the above data it is understood that most of the respondents' sleep gets affected because of the uncomfortable bed, jet lag, overstress and noisy rooms.
3. The guests are aware about the concept of comfortable bed and bedding and it is one of the deciding factors while choosing the hotel.
4. Special services related to the sound sleep experience such as eye mask, aromatic oil, ear plugs, soothing music, choice of pillows, sleep inducing food, foot massages are availed by the guest during their stay in the hotels.
5. From the managerial survey it was concluded that the bed is the prime product for the hotel and requests for various types of beds and mattresses are received by the hotel.
6. The study states that the hotel trains their employees to deliver the turn down service effectively and thus enhance the sleep experience of the guest.

VII. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The staff needs to be monitored for delivering of the services post training and any suggestions from the guest should be incorporated in the training.
2. Surprise checks should be made by the managers for the consistency and effectiveness in delivering the sleep experience services to the guests.
3. Regular feedbacks related to the sound sleep services offered to the guest should be taken by the Management to understand the effectiveness of the services.
4. The Management should keep an update of the upcoming trends in the hospitality sector and implement those accordingly.

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