Peeters, Jan; Rohrmann, Tim & Emilsen, Kari (2015).  
**Gender balance in ECE: Why is there so little progress?**  
Presentation on the 25th EECERA annual conference, 9.9.2015, Barcelona/Spain

**Abstract**

This paper questions the persisting gender imbalance in ECEC and analyses ambivalences regarding more men in the field. Research from many countries worldwide shows that in early childhood care and education (ECEC), male workers are welcomed by female colleagues and parents. In the last two decades there have been initiatives for more men in ECEC in several European countries, nevertheless the proportion of male workers ECEC remains low worldwide. This presentation is based on recent gender theory. The presenters will give an overview of research and actions that have been set up in Belgium, Norway and Germany and will analyse the efforts and limits of strategies for more male students and workers in ECEC. Individual interviews were conducted following ethical approval and further to gaining each participants informed consent. It is concluded that deeply held gendered attitudes and practices in the field of care and educational work with young children have to be put into question. More space in ECEC for embodied subjectivities is needed to overcome essentialist conceptions of differences between body and mind, women and men. The gender imbalance will not be improved without a radical shift in the policy towards ECEC. More space in ECEC for embodied subjectivities is needed to overcome essentialist conceptions of differences between body and mind, women and men.

**Keywords**
gender, professionalism, embodied subjectivities, men in ECE, gender theory

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Gender balance in ECE: Why is there so little progress?

25 years of actions to increase male participation
- Sweden
- Denmark, Norway
- Belgium, Scotland
- Germany

Political consensus
- European childcare network goal (1995): 20% in 2005
- OECD 2006, 2012
- National Governments
- European Commission 2011

Scientific consensus
- Role of fathers and male educators: important

Disappointing results
- Most of countries: 1 to 4%
- Norway: 8.7%
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### Men in ECEC statistics (1)

![Graph showing gender balance in ECE over time for different countries](image)

**Source:** Peeters, Rohrmann & Emilsen 2015

### Men in ECEC statistics (2):
**huge disparities between regions**

![Map showing gender balance across regions](image)

**Source:**
[http://mika.koordination-maennerinkitas.de/forschung/maenneranteil.landkreise/](http://mika.koordination-maennerinkitas.de/forschung/maenneranteil.landkreise/)
Coordination office „Men in Kitas“, 2015
Peeters, Jan; Rohrmann, Tim & Emilsen, Kari (2015).

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**Men in ECEC statistics (3): different developments in regions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Saxony</th>
<th>Norway</th>
<th>Bremen</th>
<th>Bavaria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt (Germany), Statistisk sentralbyrå (Norway)

- Different measures in several areas and in different stages of vocational biographies are needed
- The number of men will not increase without specific actions
- For parity between women and men, we need a positive policy for at least 10 years (Moss 2003)

**How to attract more male workers?**
Norway: Long-term measures for more men

- Consensus in society about the importance of men taking part in children’s lives
- Goal of gender equality enshrined in laws, regulations and curricula
- Since 2001 four national action plans for gender equality
- **BUT**: Proportion of trained male workers is still below 10%.
Germany: A decade towards more men

(Do male ECEC workers need a beard?!)
2010-2014: Program „More men in Kitas“

State-funded program:

• 2010 Coordination office „Men in ECEC“
• 2011-2013 ESF model program „MORE men in Kitas“
• 2011-2014 Research: „Tandem study“ Dresden
• Promotion of job shifting into the field
• 2015 new ESF model program for job shifters

* Public and scientific discourse promotes more initiatives and projects – regional and beyond

ESF model program „MORE men in Kitas“

• 16 model projects in 13 federal states
• 13 million € financial support
• Development of innovative strategies and best practice
• Wide spectrum of measures and issues
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ESF model program „MORE men in Kitas“

Issues and fields of activities of model projects:
• Vocational orientation
• Vocational training and job shifters
• On-the-job-training on e.g. gender issues
• Teamcoaching and mentoring
• Working groups for male ECEC workers
• Concepts regarding „general distrust“ against male workers - prevention of abuse and violence
• Public relations: campaigns, media, websites, social media

How to attract more male workers?
• Gender sensitive pedagogy in ECEC (Gender Loops 2008; Rohrmann & Wanzeck Sielert 2014; Emilsen 2015)
• Vocational orientation for boys, e.g. “Boys’ day” in kindergarten for male teenagers
• Support for male workers and gender-mixed teams (Rohrmann & Emilsen 2013)
• Raise the status and prestige of the profession through training and qualification (Cameron 2003; Rolfe 2005)
• Choose a name for the profession that is gender neutral (Wohlgemuth 2003; Peeters 2008)
• Public relations, media, political support
Why are the results so disappointing?

1 to 4%

Contradictious expectations: Why do we want more men?
Example 1: Norway

- Traditional gender roles are to be replaced by new patterns where men and women do the same and where women and men are not complementary categories. Gender categories are not to determine what men and women can, would and should do.
- A higher proportion of men increases the probability of a positive assessment of efforts put into gender equality work (assessment of the influence of the framework plan for the content and tasks of kindergartens, gender awareness when buying teaching aids, seminars about equality, actions to increase the number of men etc).

Evaluation of the 3rd Norwegian Action Plan, Hoel 2010

Example 2: Malaysia

“...men are more stable emotionally, not as sensitive as women.
1. If any problem occurs, especially grievances or any matters concerning the centre or the children, they will try to solve them rationally.
2. Men always are very strong to do all the necessary mobilizing corners. Arranging furniture and fittings. Carrying heavy stuff and other odd jobs that sometimes woman can’t do.
3. Technical matters concerning water, electricity, any bulb which are not functioning and other repairing elements. Men are smart and handy thus minimising the operation cost of the centre. Just imagine to call a plumber for a few minutes will cost us about 300 Malaysian Ringgit which is considered exorbitant.
4. Men can perform interesting outdoor activities such as football, gardening (...) or any kind of sports.”

Hajjah Mahanom Basri, President
Association of Childcare Centres Selangor, Kuala Lumpur
Contradictious expectations: a theoretical model (Wernersson 2015)

Horizontal differentiation: feminity and masculinity as „specialisations“

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions</th>
<th>Men and women have similar qualities/abilities</th>
<th>Men and women have different qualities/abilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men and women have the same power/status/value</td>
<td>Men and women doing the same tasks are a model of gender equality for children</td>
<td>More men would add male complementary competencies and role models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men and women have more power/status/value</td>
<td>More men will make occupational conditions better (but may reduce career options for women)</td>
<td>Men are superior and bring important qualities to the profession, occupational conditions and the workplace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In search of an explanation: a look back at the history of women as mothers and educators

- The origins : the “ideal mother”
- Care has always been considered “women’s work”
- Employment in ECEC is an acceptable work for women
- After WW II : educators were modeled after the symbolic personification of a “loving mother” (attachment theory)
- Men have to take responsibility as father not as educators
Second wave of feminism: the seventies

Women’s right on labour

We require affordable day care!
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**Scolarisation: turn of the century**

- Investment in the early years: better preparation for successful school career and the labor market
- Care separate from learning and executed by unskilled staff: invisible work
- Working with young children: higher social esteem, wages rise

In many countries – Denmark, Sweden, Slovenia, New Zealand, France, Belgium – wages and social esteem of ECEC professionals are higher, but...  

*Higher social esteem* does not attract more men  

High level of professionalism with almost exclusive female workforce
Second wave of feminism

Typical explanations in public debates (status, power and wages) do not fully explain why men are not attracted to working in ECEC

“The personal is politic”: the characteristics and common political struggles of all women, which unite them as a group.

Essentialist statements

Third wave of feminism:

• New view on care from a social and political perspective

Criticism of the separation between body and mind: skilled and better-paid women are responsible for “the spirit”, the least qualified and ‘invisible’ assistants are responsible for the “body”
Views on “body” in different cultures
(Childcare in Europe 2007, Cameron and Moss 2007, 75)

- The Danish concept of “kropslighed” – how one senses the body – includes a strong element of experiencing the world through the body in ECEC practices (Jensen 2011).
- The view of Danish pedagogues on English ECEC: institutional logic, a school rationality controlling the practice with ‘body discipline’; a great deal of attention is paid to the ‘head’ and little to the ‘body’ as “one way or another, the body has been reduced to a head in the English centres”.
- Hungarian ECEC was perceived as warm and accepting, but also as quiet, calm and predictable – and thus as a ‘boring workplace’

corporeality

- The denial of the body creates a “mute” body which is always female. This makes it difficult for men to find their place in ECEC.
- The concept of corporeality – „kropslighet“ – opens up new perspectives on gender in ECEC without going back to simplifying biologic interpretations
corporeality

- This is especially relevant in the context of dealing with the « fear of pedophilia »
- Close body contact and caressing is necessarily part of ECEC work, but it has to be in regard of the emotional expressions and needs of the child, not of the educator (Peeters 2012).

Conclusions

Academisation alone will neither attract more men, nor lead to a gender-neutral profession. We need
- to create open spaces where ECEC workers can position and develop themselves as men and women
- to develop a gender conscious understanding of professionalism that goes beyond traditional gendered notions.

New perspectives on the concept of “care” have to be developed
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Bibliography


How to attract more male workers?

- Focus actions on male job switchers (25-35 years)
- Rethink concepts of ECEC, content of profession and training to avoid exclusion of men:
  - e.g. focus on social subjects and outdoor activities
  - towards a gender conscious interpretation of training and profession