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## **Gender equality in Norwegian ECECs**

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### ***Abstract***

The author presents research conducted within the framework of the Norwegian Action plan on Gender Equality (2008-2010). The goal of gender equality is enforced through laws, regulations and curricula, including the administrative platforms for learning and teaching in Early and Primary education. Equality in ECE centers involves rights, power, and liberating relationships. Therefore, questions of equality are a question of democracy (Rossholt 2003). Gender equality is equally important for boys and girls, and actions need to include both sexes (Emilsen 2011). But, as studies show, ECE centers (ECECs) give only limited attention to gender equality (KD 2010, Østrem et al. 2009).

Several projects in nine ECECs have focused on gender equality. The aim of the projects was to increase awareness of the significance of gender in ECECs and provide gender equal options, attention and care in ECECs. Another goal was the recruitment of more men to ECECs. A variety of methods, approaches and measures were used during the project period to achieve and evaluate the aims of the Action plan.

In the mentioned ECECs, a survey was conducted to measure employee's perceptions of gender equality and diversity. The questionnaire was mainly quantitative, but included several open questions.

Equality between men and women, boys and girls is a basic value in Norwegian society. But results show that the employee's hold divergent perceptions of what equality implies, and that it is difficult to define what gender equality and diversity mean in everyday practice. Implications for the further development of strategies for gender equality in ECECs are discussed.

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### ***Keywords***

Gender equality, Gender balance, male workers




**Gender Equality in Norwegian Early Childhood Education and Care institutions (ECEC)**

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**The main issues**

- Background
- About the project "*Gender Equality in Trondheim ECECs*"
- Results for a survey
  - attitudes towards male workers
  - men's contribution in ECECs




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**Background information**

- Almost every child in Norway attend ECEC
  - 89% of the children between 1 and 5 years of age attend a ECEC
  - 97% of the children aged 5 attend (SSB 2010).
- Since 2006 ECEC are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research and are considered as a part of children's education and not just a place for care, as a substitute for home.
- The Norwegian welfare state provides opportunity for men to be included in care for young children both private and professional
- ECEC have both professional and non-professional employees. The professional staff has a 3 year Bachelor's Degree specialized in early childhood.
- The share of men in ECEC are 9 % (SSB 2010).
- The share of men in ECEC teacher education are 14 %.




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**Background**

- ECEC is an important contributor to the goal of an egalitarian society. Hence the need to work with what equality in ECECs means in practice, and what it means for children's socialization, learning and development.
- The goal of gender equality is enshrined in laws, regulations and curricula. The government has decided that gender equality should be one of the platforms for learning and teaching in ECECs and primary education.
- We have an Actionplan "Equality 2014"




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**Background**

- Equality in ECECs involves rights, power, liberating relationships, and questions of equality is therefore a question of democracy (Rossholt 2003).
- Gender equality is equally important for boys and girls, and measures need to include both genders (Emilsen 2011).
- Studies show that gender equality has limited attention in ECECs (Likestillingssenteret 2010, Østrem 2009).
- Instead of working to counter traditional gender patterns, ECECs often reinforce this pattern (ånggård 2011; Likestillingssenteret 2010)
- Some argue that men's presence in the ECECs reinforces gender stereotypical pattern (Friis 2006, Østrem 2009)




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**" Gender Equality in Trondheim ECECs" is a project in Trondheim municipality's quality program.**

- All ECECs in Trondheim municipality (300) were invited to participate in the development project under the umbrella of "*Quality program for ECECs in Trondheim 2008-2011*".
- The program claims: *The program will provide ECECs a better foundation to develop into learning organizations in continuous development.*
- Nine ECECs have focused on gender equality, organized as a project from 2008 – 2011 and are now a network.
- It is organized as a project, with a manager and a supervisor. Each ECEC has a coordinating project group.



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**The aim of the project:**


To follow up goals and actions described in the previous "*Plan of Action for Gender Equality in ECECs and primary education 2008-2010*". And the current action plan "*Gender equality 2014*"

**More specific:**

- The main goal of the project is to increase knowledge about what equality is, and means in ECECs.
- Increase awareness about gender equality and the significance of gender in ECECs, and provide just options, attention and care in ECECs.
- To recruit and retain more men in the ECECs.



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**Metods**


Many methods, approaches and measures have been tested during the project period.

**A quantitative survey was conducted in 2008 and 2009.**

- The goal was to start the reflection of the individual worker and have the ability to measure changes in practice and attitudes after a time of project work.
- The questioners were mainly quantitative but had some open questions.
- The computer program SPSS was used to register the numbers and analysis.
- Respondents who answered :  
2008 N (110) (6 ECECs) 20% men and 80% women  
2009 N (156) (9 ECECs) 12% men and 88% women




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## Results

**My focus:  
Attitudes to the importance of  
more men ECECs**


Results from the survey in 2009. Women and men.


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***I think it is important to have more  
men in ECECs generally***


	Frequency	Valid Percent
Disagree very	4	<b>2.6</b>
Disagree	4	<b>2.6</b>
Slightly disagree	8	<b>5.2</b>
Agree a little	22	<b>14.3</b>
Agree	26	<b>16.9</b>
Agree very	90	<b>58.4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>100</b>
System missing	2	
Total	156	


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***I think it is important to have more male staff in our ECEC***


	Frequency	Valid Percent
Disagree very	5	<b>3.2</b>
Disagree	6	<b>3.9</b>
Slightly disagree	11	<b>7.1</b>
Agree a little	35	<b>22.6</b>
Agree	39	<b>25.2</b>
Agree very	59	<b>38.1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>100</b>
System missing	1	
Total	156	


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***I do not want men in the department for "any price"***


	Frequency	Valid Percent
Disagree very	23	<b>15.2</b>
Disagree	10	<b>6.6</b>
Slightly disagree	8	<b>5.3</b>
Agree a little	18	<b>11.9</b>
Agree	35	<b>23.2</b>
Agree very	57	<b>37.7</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>100</b>
System missing	5	
Total	156	

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***I have different expectations for male colleagues than to female***

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Disagree very	63	<b>42.3</b>
Disagree	26	<b>17.4</b>
Slightly disagree	17	<b>11.4</b>
Agree a little	28	<b>18.8</b>
Agree	11	<b>7.4</b>
Agree very	4	<b>2.7</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>100</b>
System missing	7	
Total	156	




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**What expectations do you have for male colleagues**


*" The same as my female colleagues. Do the same tasks"*

*" I have the same expectations for women and men. That they are cooperative, clever, kind, think of the children's best, good at listening and resolve things in a team and individually!"*




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**“Is there a difference in how men and females relate with children in ECECs?”**

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Yes	109	<b>74.1</b>
No	16	<b>10.9</b>
Do not know	22	<b>15</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>100</b>
System missing	9	
Total	156	



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**“Yes there is a difference in how men and females relate with children in ECECs”**


*“Men are generally more physically active in games and activities than women. Women are more concerned about feelings, etc. Women have better overview, and better to see the children's special needs.”*

*“Men have better ability to stay focused on the “task”, do not care so much about everything around, other tasks, time, etc.”*

*“Men are more physically active with the kids. Women and men are facing children emotional expressions in different ways”.*




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**No there is not any difference in how men and females relate with children in ECECs"**

"It is not gender, but personality and values that are essential"

"The variations within the sexes are large, I therefore see no particular differences in my ECEC"




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**I think it's different to work in an ECEC where there is a male head**

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Disagree very	9	6.0
Disagree	15	10.1
Slightly disagree	36	24.2
Agree a little	39	26.2
Agree	35	23.5
Agree very	15	10.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>100</b>
System missing	7	
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	



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## Conclusions

- The Norwegian government and local authorities have a goal to increase the amount of men in ECEC
- We have made a survey among employees in ECECs in Trondheim
- Overall, the response is as expected
  - It is important to have more men in ECECs
  - Men behave differently and relate to the children differently in their work. This is valuable.
- Nevertheless, a non-negligible number of respondents still disagree to these statements.
- It is important to continue to increase the awareness of the importance of men in ECECs

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## Thank you for your attention!



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