

Opheim, Vibeke & Waagene, Erica (2015).

**Gender equality in Norwegian kindergartens: Current status and recent trends**

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**Abstract**

The aim of the presented study is to analyse, evaluate and discuss gender equality in Norwegian kindergartens. A previous evaluation of gender equality in Norwegian kindergartens was conducted in 2010. Our study draws on previous research on gender equality in the labour market (tokenism, attribution theory), childrens' gender identity development and studies on gender equality discourses in different times and settings. Quantitative and qualitative data sources are used: 1) Registry data (BASIL), 2) National survey of kindergarten managers (response rate 60%), 3) Face-to-face interviews with managers and employees in kindergartens, and academic staff and students at university colleges offering early childhood education programs. Official guidelines for conducting surveys and interviews are followed. We report the results in an anonymous form, no individual, kindergarten or university college can be identified. Registry data shows an increase in the share of male employees in Kindergartens during 2009-2013. Both managers and staff show a strong support for increasing the proportion of men in kindergartens. Does a higher proportion of male staff lead to a greater focus on gender equality in the kindergartens? The results indicate no automated link between the two factors. To what extent the topic of gender equality is 'lifted' from the unconscious and unspoken and into the conscious part of everyday life differs considerably between kindergartens. Individual, structural, social and political barriers to increasing the share of male staff in kindergartens are discussed. Our study suggest a need for increased awareness of gender equality in kindergartens and in education programmes.

**Keywords**

gender equality, staff gender balance, kindergarten activities, gender identity development, early childhood education

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Opheim, Vibeke & Waagene, Erica (2015).

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# Gender equality in Norwegian kindergartens

## Status and recent trends

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Barcelona September 9 2015

## About the project

- Commissioned and financed by The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (*Utdanningsdirektoratet*)
- Aim: to collect new data, analyze, evaluate and discuss gender equality in Norwegian kindergartens (integrated system, age 1-5)
- Follow up on status situation regarding national goals
- Focus on the kindergarten's daily activities and the respondents' attitudes to gender issues
- Data collected between June and November 2014

**Gender equality in Norwegian kindergartens:  
Current status and recent trends.**

## Background

- Kindergartens regulations contains rules and guidelines concerning gender equality both among children and staff:
  - work towards equality
  - counteract all forms of discrimination
- The governance have expressed two main goals:
  - To increase the proportion of men working in kindergartens to 20 percent
  - To increase the total number of kindergartens with at least one male employee
- Motivation for gender equality goals:
  - The representation of both men and women has a positive effect on the work environment
  - Male role models – men can also be good caregivers and work with children

## Knowledge status

- Development of gender identity
  - Gender differences in choice of toys and activities from an early age (1 year) (Servin et al 1999)
- Kindergartens' practices
  - Same opportunities, but different expectations from parents and ECEC teachers/staff towards boys and girls (Rossholt 2012)
  - Tendency to emphasize the masculine over the feminine – even if the intention is to emphasize the gender neutral (Lenz Taguchi et al 2011)
  - Kindergarten practices reflecting power structures in society – disparagement of «feminine» colours, toys, activities; e.g. the colour pink (Ambjörnsson 2011)

**Gender equality in Norwegian kindergartens:  
Current status and recent trends.**

## Knowledge status: Workplace research

- Gender balanced workplaces
  - Preferred by both men and women (Holter et al 2009)
  - Gender imbalanced workplaces are associated with more conflicts, gossip and displeasure by both men and women
  - Especially workplaces dominated by women are referred to as negative
- Consequences of being a minority
  - Preference for discrimination: employers hire people that remind them about themselves to reduce uncertainty and risk (e.g. Becker 1971)
  - Women in male dominated workplaces, «glass ceiling» (e.g. Kanter 1977)
  - The benefits of being a minority – Men experiencing the «glass elevator» in female dominated workplaces with male dominated management (Holter et al 2009)

## Knowledge status: definitions of 'gender equality'

- Historical development of the concept of 'gender equality' during last decades (Nordberg 2005, Askland & Rossholt 2009 in Likestillingscenteret 2010:20-22):
  - similarity
  - the erasure of power differences – emphasis on gender differences
  - distinctiveness discourse
- Different levels of 'gender equality'?
  - Level 1: equal rights and opportunities
  - Level 2: emphasis on what is different between the feminine and the masculine
  - Level 3: Individual distinctiveness - differences are praised regardless of sex
- Or complementary aspects of same concept?

Opheim, Vibeke & Waagene, Erica (2015).  
**Gender equality in Norwegian kindergartens:  
 Current status and recent trends.**

## Data sources

- Registry data from the national kindergarten portal BASIL
- Web survey to managers at a representative sample of public and private kindergartens (N=926)
- Semi-structured interviews with managers and employees in 8 kindergartens
- Semi-structured interviews with academic staff and students at 2 university colleges

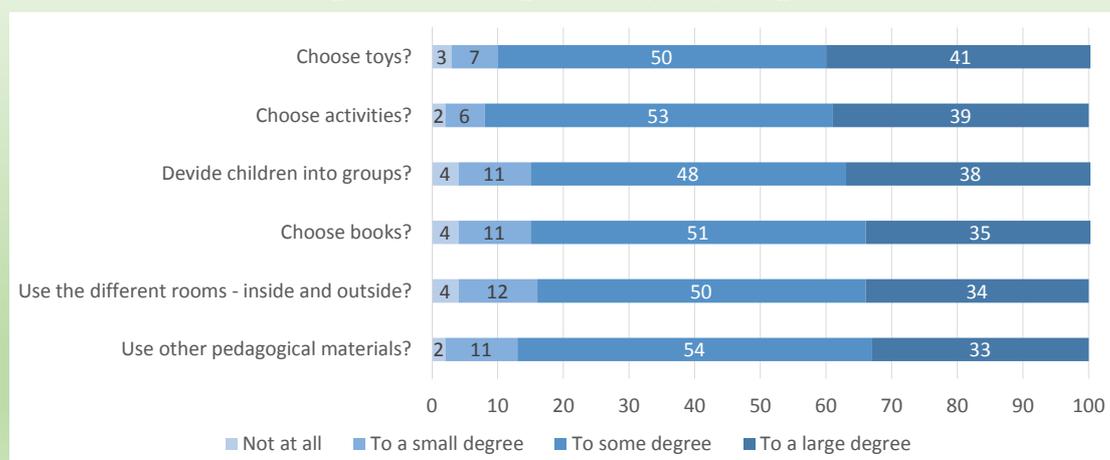
## Results from the national kindergarten portal *BASIL*

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>The whole country:</b>					
% male staff	7.9	8.3	8.3	8.5	8.6
% kindergartens with at least 1 male employee	40.8	43.6	45.1	46.9	49.7
<b>Oslo (Capital):</b>					
% male staff	13.4	14.6	15.1	15.0	16.0
% kindergartens with at least 1 male employee	56.9	60.2	63.5	66.1	68.8
<b>East:</b>					
% male staff	7.6	7.8	7.7	8.0	8.2
% kindergartens with at least 1 male employee	40.9	42.9	44.7	46.7	49.2
<b>South and west:</b>					
% male staff	6.4	6.6	6.5	7.0	6.5
% kindergartens with at least 1 male employee	37.2	40.0	39.5	42.0	45.0
<b>Middel and north:</b>					
% male staff	7.5	8.1	8.3	9.0	8.6
% kindergartens with at least 1 male employee	36.6	40.4	43.1	43.6	46.1

## Web survey to managers in Norwegian kindergartens

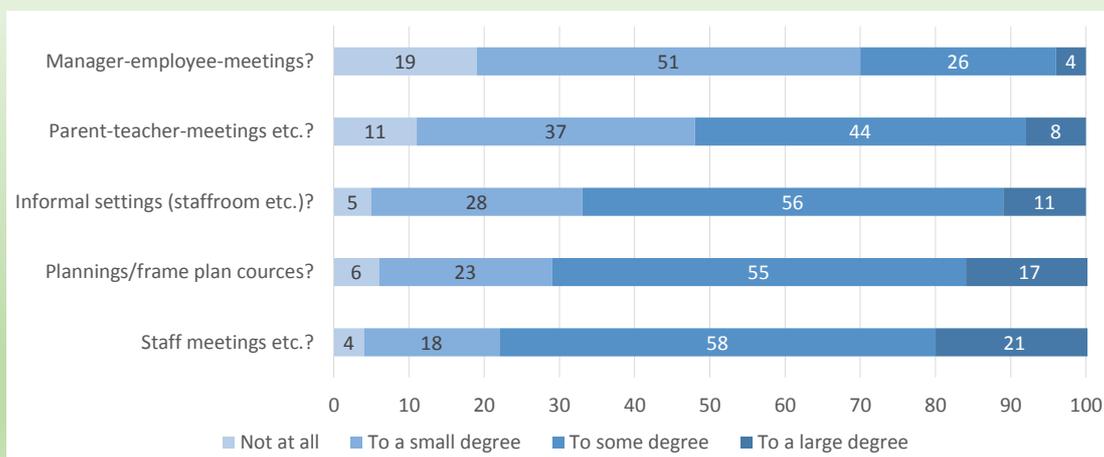
- 2013: 6300 kindergartens in Norway; 47 % public and 53 % private (SSB 2014)
- Stratified sample: 1542 kindergartens selected on the basis of the following characteristics :
  - Size (number of employees, less than 5: excluded)
  - Geography (all counties represented)
  - Ownership (public/private)
- Response rate: 60 %, Number included in analyses: 926

## Managers' responses: «To what degree do you focus on gender equality in the following learning and playing activities?»

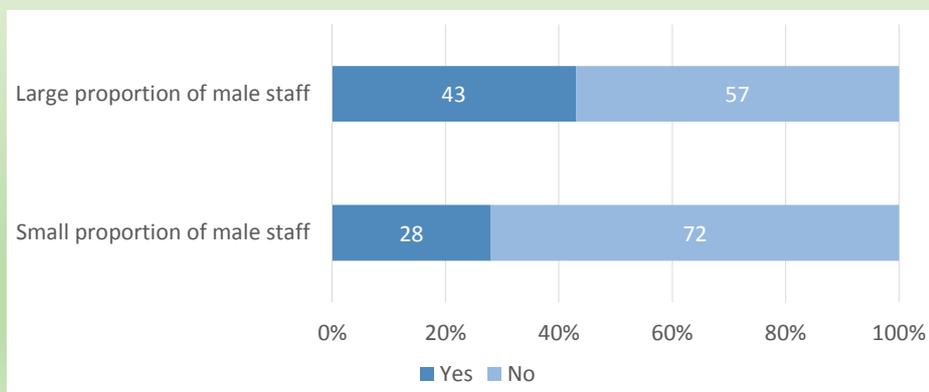


Opheim, Vibeke & Waagene, Erica (2015).  
**Gender equality in Norwegian kindergartens:  
 Current status and recent trends.**

«To what degree has the staff’s behavior towards boys and girls been discussed in...»

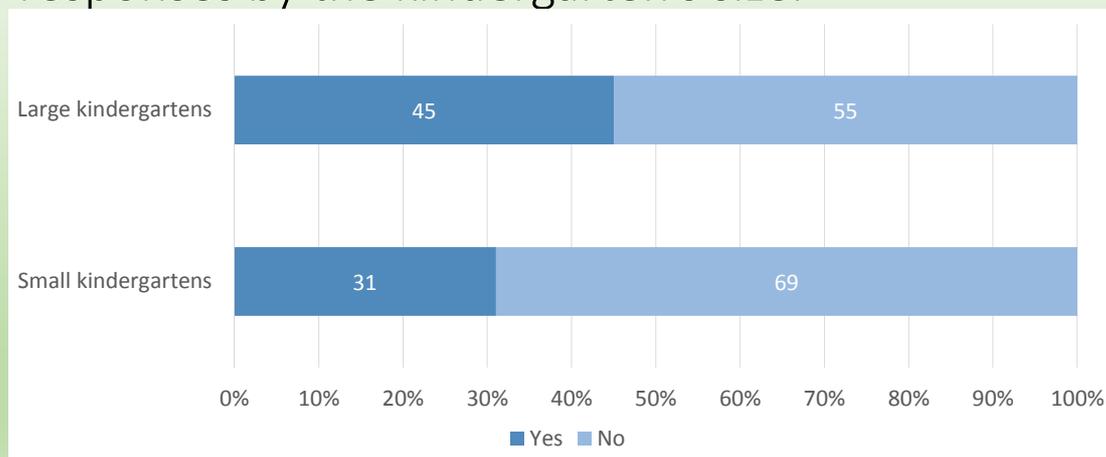


«Has the kindergarten implemented measures to increase the proportion of male staff?»  
 Managers’ responses by the kindergarten’s proportion of male staff.



Opheim, Vibeke & Waagene, Erica (2015).  
**Gender equality in Norwegian kindergartens:  
 Current status and recent trends.**

«Has the kindergarten implemented measures to increase the proportion of male staff?» Managers' responses by the kindergarten's size.



Results: The managers' views on the kindergartens' emphasis on gender equality

	Proportion of men	Size	Private	Male manager	The manager's age	Oslo	N	R2
<b>Plans:</b>								
The government's action plan for equality affects the kindergarten's daily work	0	0	-	-	+	0	727	0.031
The review of the framework plan for equality affected the daily work	+++	0	--	---	+++	0	732	0.060
'Gender equality' is documented in local plans	0	0	--	0	0	0	735	0.009
<b>Daily practice:</b>								
Gender equality is important when choosing teaching materials (toys, books etc.)	0	0	0	---	0	0	727	0.033
'Gender equality' is important when choosing activities	0	0	0	---	0	++	722	0.047
The staff's behaviour towards girls/boys is discussed in formal settings/meetings	0	0	0	---	0	0	684	0.017
The staff's behavior is discussed in informal settings/meetings	0	0	--	--	++	0	715	0.039
The staff have attended courses regarding gender equality during the last 3 years	++	0	---	0	0	-	731	0.039
<b>Employment processes:</b>								
The kindergarten has implemented specific measures to increase the proportion of male staff	+	+++	0	0	0	++	733	0.038
<b>Comprehensive assessment:</b>								
The kindergarten works systematically with measures regarding gender equality	0	0	0	0	+++	0	694	0.025

## Qualitative interviews: Results

### Interviews

- 8 kindergartens, 4 private and 4 public
  - **8 managers**, 6 female and 2 male
  - **14 employees**, 10 female and 4 male
  - 4 kindergartens with a large proportion of male staff (+ 20%), 4 with a small proportion of male staff
  - 4 kindergartens in Oslo, 3 located in the eastern parts and 1 in the western parts of the city
  - 4 kindergartens outside Oslo (rural areas)
  - All kindergartens have at least 5 employees (6-40)
- 2 university colleges
  - 4 members of the academic staff
  - 4 students

**Gender equality in Norwegian kindergartens:  
Current status and recent trends.**

Results: Gender equality is an unconscious/unspoken part of the daily practice

- Everybody observes gender difference in the children's behavior and play
- However, they are also aware of individual differences: quiet boys and active girls etc.
- Gender equality: rarely mentioned in the kindergartens' plans
- Gender equality: rarely a topic in meetings and other formal forums
- Gender equality: Pronounced focus in certain situations:
  - When our understanding of gender equality is challenged; e.g. High proportion of children with minority background
  - When reminded; e.g. Theme of an interview

Results: Everybody wants more male staff

- Men perceived to possess positive personal characteristics
  - Gender differences in activities towards children – men engage more in physical activities
  - Men are role models (showing that both gender can work in kindergartens)
  - Have good interaction with the parents – better relationship with the dads
- Female dominated working environments are considered negative
  - A gender balanced working environment is considered positive – more structure, less gossip and small talk during the meetings, etc.
- Children's rights
  - Children's rights to interact with both men and women in their everyday life

**Gender equality in Norwegian kindergartens:  
Current status and recent trends.**

## Results: How to increase the proportion of male kindergarten teachers?

- More information about the profession and the education
- Moderate quota
- Higher salaries and status
  - Greater differences in the work tasks between positions as assistant and the pedagogical leaders/kindergarten teachers
  - More flexible rotations and working hours
  - Increased staff-to-child ratios
  - More power and influence in decision making processes
- More room for diversity – the “male” way of doing things

## Summary: What do the kindergartens do to create a gender equal environment for the children?

- Varying degree of awareness about gender equality is overserved
- The staff's interference when the children are playing is generally very limited
- Many emphasize equal *opportunities* for the children to choose activities and toys of their choice
- However, they seldom encourage the boys and girls to choose the *same* activities and toys;

*We try to buy toys that everyone likes to play with. We also buy specific toys that we know girls like to play with and cars and stuff that we know boys like to play with. It's important to make sure that girls not only play with dolls and boys not only play with cars. They should get introduced for several things, but we don't force anyone to play with something. We don't tell a child: "Now you've been playing with cars for five days, so now you're not allowed anymore." That we won't do! (Female manager in a kindergarten with a high proportion of male staff)*

- Gender neutral behavior towards the children
- Gender neutral language to the children

**Gender equality in Norwegian kindergartens:  
Current status and recent trends.**

Summary: What do the kindergartens do to create a gender equal environment for the staff?

- Measures to increase the proportion of male staff
  - 37 % of the kindergartens report having implemented measures to increase the proportion of male staff
  - Encouraging men to apply in vacancy advertisements
  - Using their own/the kindergarten's social network to locate potential male candidates
- Room for diversity;  
*You can't hire a man and expect him to be one of the women. (...) Everyone has to do the tasks that need to be done, but men and women do things differently. There must be room for such diversity.*  
(Female manager in a kindergarten with a high proportion of male staff)

Summary: What are the barriers towards increasing the share of male staff?

- Small turn-over
- Few male applicants for vacant positions
- Managers emphasize applicants' personal characteristics, and not gender when hiring
- «Female» characteristics often emphasized (?)
  - Tidy and structured
  - More dedicated for a permanent (long term) employment
- Men choose to work in kindergartens that already have male staff

Opheim, Vibeke & Waagene, Erica (2015).

**Gender equality in Norwegian kindergartens:  
Current status and recent trends.**

Summary: Does a higher proportion of male staff lead to a greater focus on gender equality?

- No automated link between the two factors
- Both kindergartens with a high and a low proportion of men may have low awareness of gender equality
- Gender stereotypical distribution of work tasks is common
- The study suggest a general need for increased awareness towards gender equality in Norwegian kindergartens

Thank you for your attention!

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