

McHale, Joanne (2018). **Male early childhood educators in Ireland: An exploration of the views of female colleagues and parents**

Paper presented on the 28th EECERA Annual Conference, 30.8.2018, Budapest, Hungary.

Abstract

Despite changing social structures in Ireland (Connelly, 2011), the male participation rates in the early childhood workforce remain low at 2% (Pobal, 2017). Building on an earlier phase focusing on men's trajectories and experiences in early childhood in Ireland, this research aims to consider the experiences and perceptions of female workers and parents of young children in relation to the value of men in the early childhood workforce. This research will be discussed in the context of previous literature on the gendered nature of the early childhood workforce (Cameron et al., 1999; Brind et al., 2011; Conroy, 2012; Brody, 2014; Peeters et al., 2015). The changing Irish social and political landscape and the impact on the role of the family and caring for children form the basis of this research which takes a mixed methods cross sectional approach. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were carried out with women working alongside men in early childhood settings. Surveys were carried out with parents of children attending early years services in Ireland. Ethical clearance was granted through UCL Institute of Education. The perceptions of female early childhood workers and parents will be discussed in the context of the previous research on men's trajectories, roles and practices in the early childhood workforce. Despite significant changes in the Irish society, wider structures such as the value on care, the "breadwinner" role and the presentation of early childhood as a career option to young boys need to be addressed.

Keywords

gender balance, trajectories, early childhood workforce, men in early childhood, Irish context

Author

Joanne McHale, Institute of Technology Blanchardstown, Ireland



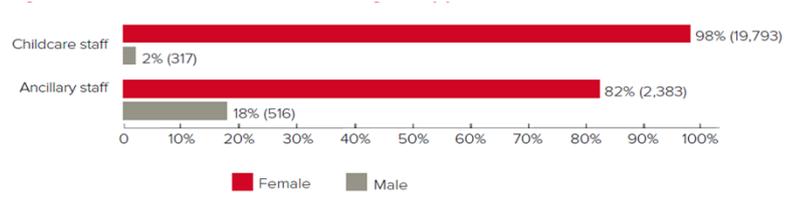
MALE EARLY EDUCATORS IN IRELAND

Female colleagues and parents
Joanne McHale
Institute of Technology
Blanchardstown

EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES AND STAFFING

186,190 children in 4,448 early childhood services in Ireland (Pobal, 2017)

20,110 staff



Ref: Pobal, 2017 p.74

GENDER IN THE ECEC WORKFORCE –KEY THEMES

Role modelling (Brown, 2004; Brownhill, 2014, 2015)

Pedagogy and practice (Besnard and Dirren, 2010, Gulbrandsen, 2012; Perkins, 2013; Brandes et al, 2015; Warin, 2017)

Equality (Cameron, 2001)

Gendered roles and expectations (Cameron et al, 1999; Cremers et al, 2010; Peeters, Rohrmann and Emilsen, 2015)

Pay and conditions (Walshe, 2012)

Advanced Progression 'glass elevator' (Williams, 1992, Cameron, 2001)

Risk (Besnard and Dirren, 2010; Woltring, 2012)

Retention (Pirard et al, 2015)

DOCTORAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS & OBJECTIVES

Research Questions:

Entry: What leads men to enter the early childhood sector?

- What are the factors that influence them (experiences, advice etc.)?
- What are the hindrances/barriers (demand, perceptions)?

Trajectories: What path do their careers take?

- Where do they go when they enter (experiences)?
- Do their trajectories differ from women's?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK(S)

Gender as socially constructed

- (Connell, 2005)
- Messages picked up inform children's views of what men and women do

Social change in Ireland

- Vast amount of social change in Ireland over the past 30 years (Connelly, 2014)
- Evidenced by results in recent referenda and legislative changes
- Focus on gender-based rights
- Increasing separation of church and state.

Early childhood frameworks

- Early Childhood in Ireland and the CoRe Report (Urban et al, 2011)
 - Competences as connecting the "dimensions of knowledge, practice and values through critical reflection"
- Aistear (2009); Siolta (2006); Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter (2016)

METHODOLOGY

Mixed methods cross sectional design

Phase one

- Qualitative: semi-structured interviews
- Sample: sixteen participants
 - 10 men
 - 6 women
- Early childhood educators
- Analysis
 - Narrative analysis
 - Thematic analysis

Phase two

- Parent Survey
- Summer/Autumn 2018

Phase three

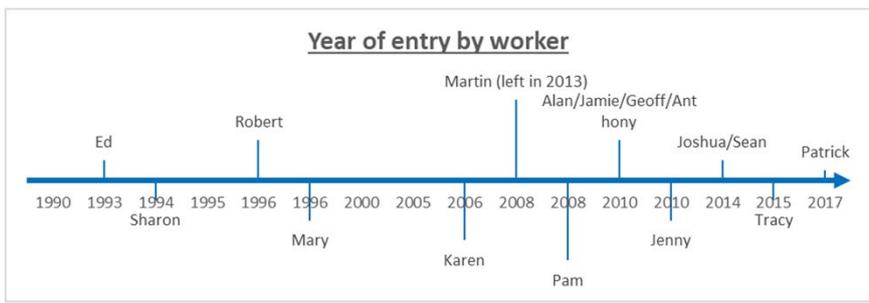
- Careers teacher focus group
- October 2018



PROFILE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKERS

Entry

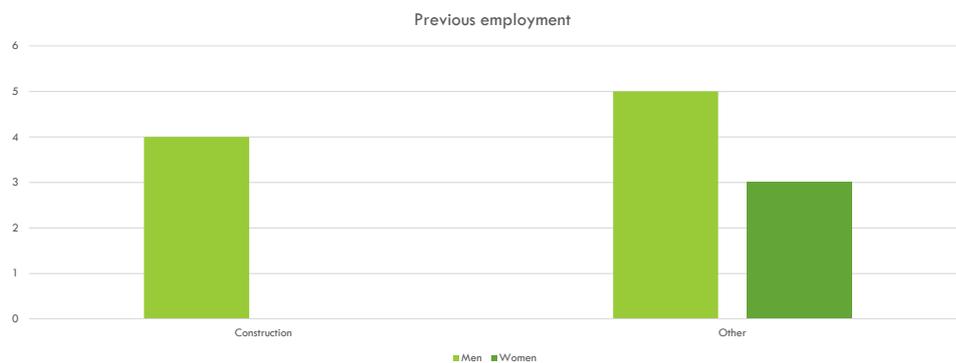
LENGTH OF SERVICE/ENTRY POINTS



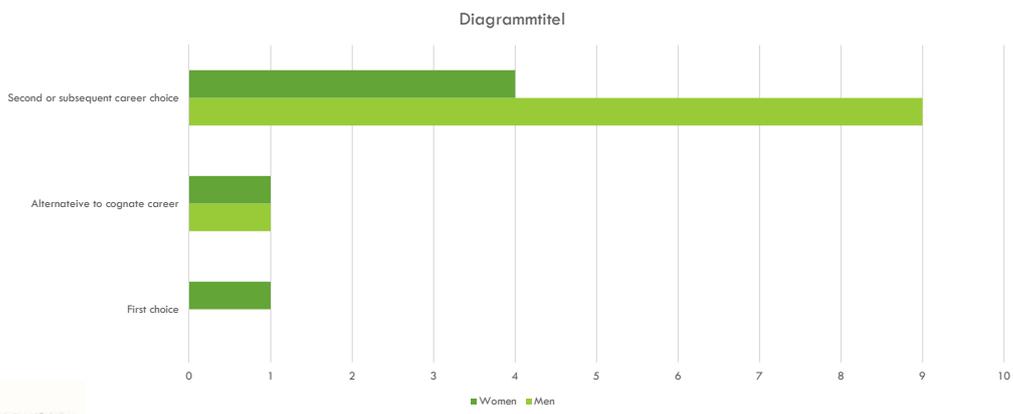
LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION



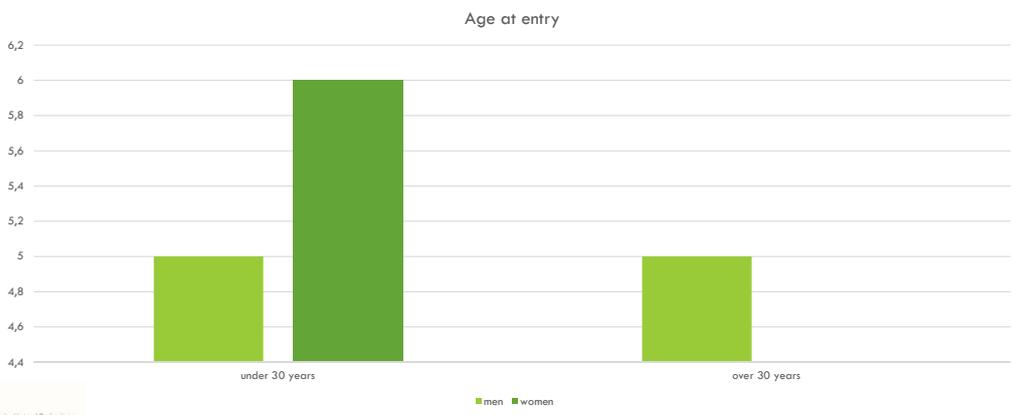
PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENTS



PRIMACY OF CHOICE



AGE AT ENTRY



WORKPLACE POSITION



RECURRING THEMES FOR MALE PARTICIPANTS

Redundancy as “opportunity”

- Social and economic climate
- Accidental

Gendered expectations – micro and macro

- Fixing a shelf
- Paying a mortgage

Simultaneously challenging gender and reinforcing it

- “Playing dolls with the girls” (Joshua)

Parents’ reactions

- Perceived/expected
- Reality

Articulation of difference

- “Hard to put it into words”

Value of the profession

- Salary & Status

Support

- Impact on experiences

Recruitment

- Preferential treatment

PARENT REACTIONS

Negative experiences

- Half of the men interviewed had negative experiences with parents
- Four related to intimate care; one related to story telling with children on knees

“she said that she only wanted the girls in the room changing her nappies... this was kind of was addressed out there in front of people and was a bit messy and the word “paedophile” started getting thrown around and, yeah, it was it got a bit messy and I don’t think she kind of grasped the you know how damaging that would be” (Alan)

- Response of the management was important

“Martin is an employee of this creche as is anyone else. He’s qualified as is anyone else...”
(Martin)

“It has to be in a policy, it has to be in a policy” (Anthony)

PARENT REACTIONS

Perceived concerns

- *“sometimes people worry about what parents will think, without consulting the parents”*
(Robert)
- *“fear of d’you know of the media with the historic issues of abuse” (Robert)*

Initial wariness/hesitation replaced by acceptance

- Importance of relationship building

“there’s that moment of awkwardness slash uneasiness, not that the parents had anything against me... but it’s that saying that, you know you kind of fear what you don’t know”
(Martin)

“kids can be the best advocates for men, because they go home, they sort of say what they did during the day and thinks like that d’you know and I think that eases parents’ minds” (Robert)

PARENTS REACTIONS

Status

- Three male participants talked about the parents seeing them as more of an authority than the female participants

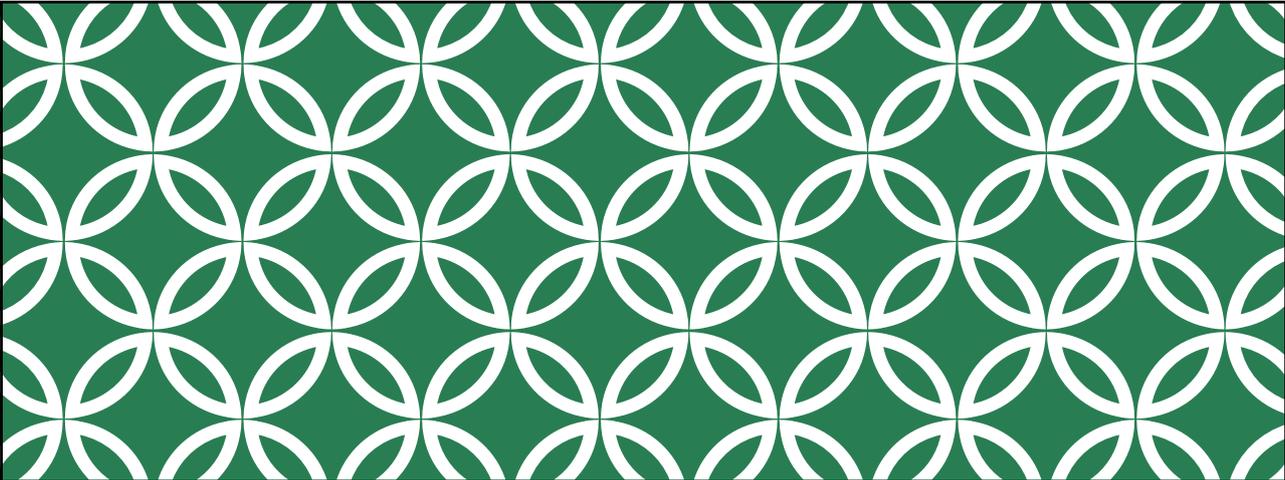
"The parent, talks to me in a different way than she talks to the other two women and it's more favourable to me" (Ed)

Role and practice

- Sense that men provided a role model and particular practice suited to boys

"the parents picked us because I was working here" (Patrick)

"I think they expect me to be very sporty I've noticed and I'm not. I'm not at all" (Sean)



FEMALE COLLEAGUES

FEMALE VIEWS

Recruitment:

- None of the women had a sense that their gender was a factor in their own recruitment
- However, two of the women suggested that it might be a negative factor in men's recruitment

"probably the female candidate is just, always has that little bit more of an edge to the male, just because people assume I suppose that females are more maternal and just that the people just assume that they might be better" (Jenny)

Responses of children:

- All participants reported positive responses from and interactions with children
- Two women reported that children would be more drawn to the female workers for comfort

"I find that the children are naturally more comfortable around a female...because of the way the industry is, it's they're more comfortable around females I'd have to say, the majority of them are" (Tracy)

Practice

- Expectations versus reality
- Two men and two women suggested that there is a perception that there should be a difference but it's individual rather than gendered.

"people will just assume that, you know the guys would be more sporty but that's not just an assumption, so I don't really think there would be a huge difference" (Jenny)



- Caring and comforting

- One woman and one man suggested that caring practices had differences with women being more emotional but this does not appear to be a shared perception with many saying that while there were other differences in practice, care and comfort were largely the same.
- However, there was an awareness among some that supervision during those times may differ

“[male worker] was extremely caring but there there were times when maybe other people's kind of ehm interpretation of, may have effected d'you know in terms of confidence and stuff, of that person” (Sharon)



- Physicality of men's presence

- Five of the women suggested men being more willing to encourage risky play, engage in physical and outdoor play (three of the male participants rejected this notion, but three of them also suggested that men are more physical in their practice)

“when I watch our male staff with the children, it's a lot more physical and it's up and it's playing and it's, it doesn't have to be this big revelation of life like and the children they really love it, they respond more to that” (Jenny)

▪ Gendered expectations

“Ah 100%, sure if a spider walks into the room the poor person getting called in Jamie ... real damsel in distress kind of thing... but I know here the men would take care of the facility itself, a lot more than the women, like we'll do the cleaning” (Tracy)

SUMMARY

Reliance on economic circumstance can facilitate men's entry and their exit

- Influence of the recession
- Influence of the need to earn sufficient salary (breadwinner) – despite significant social change in relation to domestic roles and focus on gender-based rights in other areas

In relation to parents, male participants could talk of experiences not experienced by their female colleagues of

- Outright objection
- Initial reticence replaced with acceptance
- Expectations of role modelling and meeting the needs of boys



Perceived parent responses don't appear to influence recruitment of willing men, but may influence roles assigned.

Some parents appeared to still hold concerns in relation to men's roles in the intimate care of children and in some cases the child's gender can affect those concerns

Leaving could be influenced by financial considerations, but these were present for the female workers.



Expectations and experience of men's practice varied from individual differences to gendered differences – particularly in relation to physical play (though this varied by male workers also)

-Caring behaviours largely the same with individual variations

- Exception that men may have been observed or scrutinised more in these behaviours
- Though the perception that caring behaviours are more natural or female still exists

Men's presence was largely seen as positive though in some cases binary masculine-feminine role expectations and behaviours still existed

REFERENCES

Besnard, T. & Dirren, A (2010). 'Perseverance of male students in early childhood educator training' *Procedia Social and Behavioural Sciences* 2 3206-3218.

Browne, N. (2004). *Gender Equity in the Early Years* Berkshire: OU Press.

Cameron, C., Moss, P. and Owen, C. (1999). *Men in the Nursery: Gender and caring work*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Cameron, C. (2001). 'A Promise or a Problem? A review of the literature of men working in early childhood services *Gender Work and Organisation*' Vol 8 No. 4 pp 430-451.

Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (2004). *Siolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* [online] Dublin: CECDE Available at <http://siolta.ie/> Accessed 3rd May 2016.

REFERENCES

Connell, R.W. (2005). *Masculinities* (2nd Ed) Cambridge: Polity Press.

Connolly, L. (2014) *The Irish Family* Manchester University Press

Cremers, M. Krabel, J. Calmbach, M. (2010). *Male Educators in Kitas: A Study on the situation of men in early childhood education* [online] Berlin: Federal Ministry For Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth Available at <http://www.koordination-maennerinkitas.de/en/research/our-study/> (summary report).

Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2016) *Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education* Dublin: DCYA [online] Available at <http://aim.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Diversity-Equality-and-Inclusion-Charter-and-Guidelines-for-Early-Childhood-Care-Education.pdf> {accessed 19th July 2018}

Department of Education and Skills (2014) *Minister O'Sullivan Announces First Major Review of Education and Training Programmes for the Early Years Sector* Press Release, 4th September 2014 [on-line] Available at <http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2014-Press-Releases/PR14-09-04.html> [accessed 5th May 2015]

McHale, Joanne (2018). **Male early childhood educators in Ireland:**

An exploration of the views of female colleagues and parents

Paper presented on the 28th EECERA Annual Conference, 30.8.2018, Budapest, Hungary.

Lancaster University (2018) 'ESRC Project Investigates Why Only 2% of Preschool Staff are Male' Press Release 23 May 2018 [online] Available at https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2018-05/lu-epi052318.php [accessed 19th July 2018]

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2009). Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework [online] Dublin: NCCA Available at http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Early_Childhood_Education/Framework_for_early_learning/

National Economic and Social Forum (2005). Early Childhood Care and Education NESF Report 31 July 2005 [online] Available at http://files.nesc.ie/nesc_archive/nesc_reports/NESF_31.pdf Accessed 28 September 2016.

Njordfell, O. (2015). 'From a Handful to 11,000 Men. What's Next?' Conference Presentation Boys and Girls in No Man's Land Asker, Norway 22nd October 2015



Institute of Technology
Blanchardstown
City Campus
1500 Dublin 15

Peeters, J. (2005). 'Promoting Diversity and Equality in Early Childhood Care and Education and Training – Men in Childcare' in Schonfeld, O'Brien and Walsh (2005). (eds) 'Questions of Quality' *Proceedings of a Conference in Early Childhood Care and Education* Dublin: CECDE

Peeters, J., Rohrmann, T. & Emilsen, K. (2015) Gender balance in ECEC: why is there so little progress?, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 23:3, 302-314, DOI: 10.1080/1350293X.2015.1043805

Pirard, F., Schoenmaeckers, P & Camus, P. (2015) Men in childcare services: From enrolment in training programs to job retention, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 23:3, 362-369



Institute of Technology
Blanchardstown
City Campus
1500 Dublin 15

McHale, Joanne (2018). **Male early childhood educators in Ireland:**

An exploration of the views of female colleagues and parents

Paper presented on the 28th EECERA Annual Conference, 30.8.2018, Budapest, Hungary.

Wright, D. (2016) 'Time for Action on Men in Childcare' Nursery World 28th January 2016 [online] available at <https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/nursery-world/opinion/1155693/time-for-action-on-men-in-childcare> [accessed 18th July 2018]

Wright, D. (2018) 'Closing Comments' Men In the Early Years National Conference, Bristol 10th July 2018

Walshe, D. (2012). 'Men in Childcare in Ireland' *Barnardos Childlinks* Issue 1.

• Warin, J & Adriany, V. (2017) Gender flexible pedagogy in early childhood education, *Journal of Gender Studies*, 26:4, 375-386

Woltring, L. (2012). 'Men in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE): "Get the Good Guys in and the Wrong Guys Out" Prevention of Abuse Embedded in Good Quality Management' *Barnardos Childlinks* Issue 1.