



Innovative Approaches to Research on Gender and ECEC

9th SIG gender balance research meeting – online!

Friday, 3rd September 2021, 12.00-14.00 UTC / GMT

Meeting notes

Founded 2010, the SIG gender balance is still up and alive! However, the global pandemic has slowed down many research projects, initiatives and cooperations. Against this backdrop, the SIG gender balance team decided for a less formal SIG meeting without a scientific program. However, several papers on recent research of SIG members were presented online in two SIG symposia and a poster in the EECERA conference.

27 researchers from 14 countries worldwide met for this meeting, including attendees of the EECERA online festival who joined the SIG meeting for the first time. SIG group co-convenors Kari Emilsen and Tim Rohrmann welcomed the participants and gave a short introduction to the SIG and the purpose of the meeting. Participants marked themselves on the padlet <https://padlet.com/timrohrmann/1mg6p8n924buohzo>.

What is going on in the world with Men in ECEC?

Germany shows a continuous increase of male workers in ECEC –now 7,5% of the work force. However, public and political interest has decreased during the last years. There are no nationwide projects for more men/diversity in ECEC teams any longer; only one town (Hannover) has established sustainable activities in the field. There is only little research on men in ECEC besides occasional Master and PhD thesis.

Norway has around 10% male workers, but there are no governmental activities for more men anymore. There is a drop in interest in gender issues in the work force, with more focus on overall quality and competence in ECEC. Recently, gender equality is mentioned more often in the context of UN sustainability goals. Goal 5 is “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”, but as the second part of the goal indicates, often focuses on women and girls only.

Sweden reports no current efforts by the government, with no significant increase in the percentage of male participation in the workforce (around 3-4%) for decades. Often, a debate on men in ECEC is still interpreted as “separatistic” and opposed to gender equality. The city of Malmö has a higher share of men in the ECEC workforce. Several strategies for more men were developed, including internships for young men at universities and networks

for male workers. Gender research is mostly connected to post-feminist concepts, and there is little connection between research and policy measures.

In the *United Kingdom*, the GenderEYE project (2018-2020) has combined activities for a more diverse and gender-sensitive ECEC work force with a research program <https://gendereye.org>. The MITEY campaign has published a Guide to recruiting more men into Early Years Education <https://miteyuk.org/the-mitey-guide-to-recruiting-men/>. However, council funding for male educators was cut in the last years, and the new Early Years framework does not consider the topic.

In *Scotland*, the Men in Childcare project has not received funding for the first time in 20 years.

In the *United States*, the proportion of male workers was 6,5% in 2018 – the highest proportion since 1964. Recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has slowed down funding for projects on men in ECEC.

In *Belgium*, a project on fathers in “play circles” for young children focuses on the role of male and female leaders of these programs, and continues research on the topic.

No relevant developments were reported from other countries. However, many participants and other colleagues are active in research on various aspects of the topic on individual level.

The group discussed the ups and downs in public interest in the topic of men in ECEC. The idea of “cyclical focus” was introduced, with public interest in men in ECEC going through a cycle of interest and disinterest every 8-10 years. It was also mentioned that the impact of the Covid19 pandemic on societies, including the ECEC system, has risen social issues that need immediate focus.

Exchange of information, publications, and projects

Information on publications and ongoing projects is assembled on the padlet <https://padlet.com/timrohrmann/yc0ds7acavb71gb7>

Research Speed Dating

The session continued with three rounds of breakouts into rooms of three participants, to discuss new research ideas, upcoming projects, and ideas for future cooperation. The participants highlighted that collegial relationships grow out of these informal chats, and expressed thanks to the convenors facilitating this exchange.

Final round and reflections

In the final round, the participants brought up a wide range of topics and suggestions for further research and cooperation.

During the Covid 19 pandemic, and the resulting stress and ECEC workers, labour supply issues and shortage of ECEC workers become even more dominant in debates on the ECEC workforce. Labour activation mechanisms and community employment schemes are important issues.

Against this backdrop, the focus of research on men in ECEC could shift from *attracting* to *retaining* and *developing* men in the field. One approach could be male worker's own interest of gaining more male colleagues ("work from within, not from outside").

As mentioned on previous conferences, it was pointed out that reflecting on gender stereotypes is crucial. Considering the persistent lack of recognition for caring work in society, measures for gender equality need to empower women.

Intersectional approaches can enhance the research debates. For example, underrepresentations of black and minorities men should be focused. How can intersectionality shape professionalism in ECEC?

Regarding parents, it was suggested not only to include the perspectives of parents in projects and in research, but also to work on changing negative attitudes of parents towards men in ECEC. However, this is a quite big task, at least in some countries. A comparison of different national cultures of the involvement of fathers and caring men could be helpful.

Finally children's perspectives have to be taken into account.

A new Special Issue?

2015, SIG members edited a special issue of the EECER journal on the topic of *Gender Balance in the ECEC work force*. This issue gained widespread attention and received high views and citation metrics. With all the mentioned topics above in mind, the idea of a second Special Issue for the SIG was highly supported by participants.

Victoria Sullivan & Tim Rohrmann