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## **Similarities and differences in interactions of male and female ECE workers with children**

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### **Abstract**

The research project W-INN (Wirkungsstudie Innsbruck), a study on the effect of male workers on development and behavior of children in ECE centers, continues research on men and gender relations in ECEC in Austria which started with the elementar project 2008-2010 (Aigner & Rohrmann 2012, Rohrmann 2009). Theoretically based on fathers', early pedagogical and psychoanalytic research findings (Aigner 2001, Huber 2010), several research questions are focused: What similarities and/or differences can be found in interactions with children depending on childcare staff composition (mixed gender vs. female)? What are childrens' (re-)actions in these groups/towards staff? Are there possible "compensatory effects" of male childcarers for children who don't have much contact with fathers and/or men in general?

The main sample consists of 30 children (15 boys, 15 girls), aged 4 to 6 years, from 10 different Austrian kindergarten groups. A multi-method research design was developed, including videographic observations of daily interactions in kindergarten groups, questionnaire survey of childcare staff (about professional background and behavior assessment of children) and parents (about familiar background and behavior assessment of children), as well as projective tests (Mac Arthur Story Stem Battery) to gain access into childrens' inner worlds. Additionally more than 170 parents from the mentioned kindergarten groups took part in a survey using the same questionnaire on behavior assessment of their children.

The project aims at confirming research questions as well as finding possible new hypotheses about men's influence on children. Preliminary results will be presented, and implications for practice and policy will be discussed.

### **Bibliography**

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Rohrmann, Tim (2009). Possible solutions for a more gender balanced workforce in ECEC. Presentation on the 19th EECERA Conference (European Early Childhood Education Research Association), Strasbourg, France. [Online] <http://www.lefuret.org/19th%20EECERA/EECERA2009Abstracts.pdf>

### **Keywords**

Gender, Male workers, Attachment




**W-INN 2010/2012**  
Wirkungsstudie Innsbruck


**Similarities and differences in  
interactions of male and female ECE  
workers with children**

W-INN - EECERA 2012 - Porto 1

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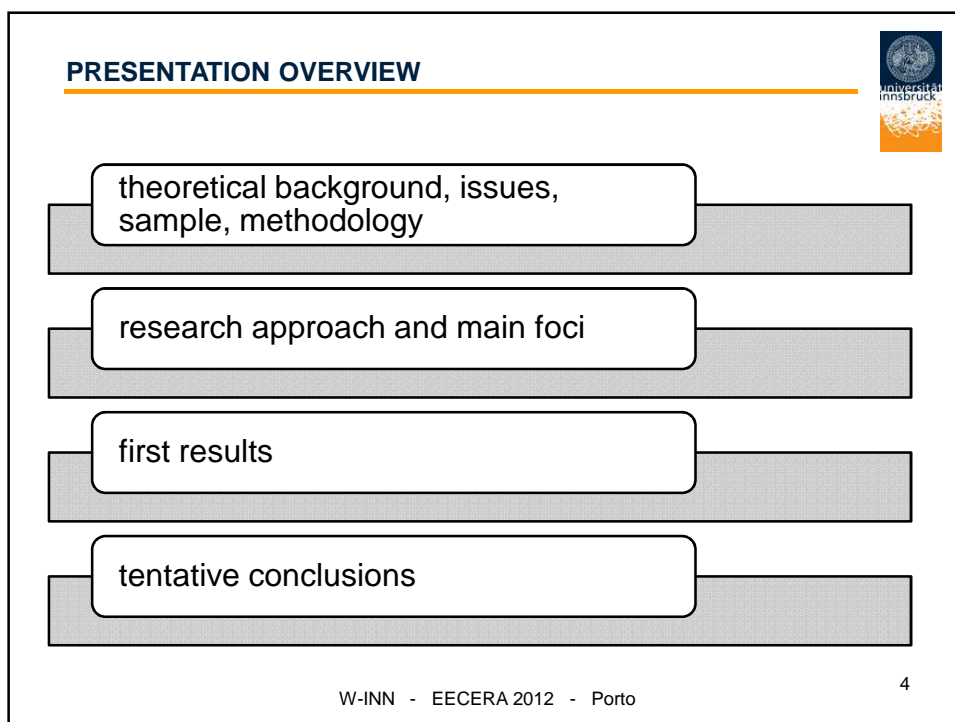
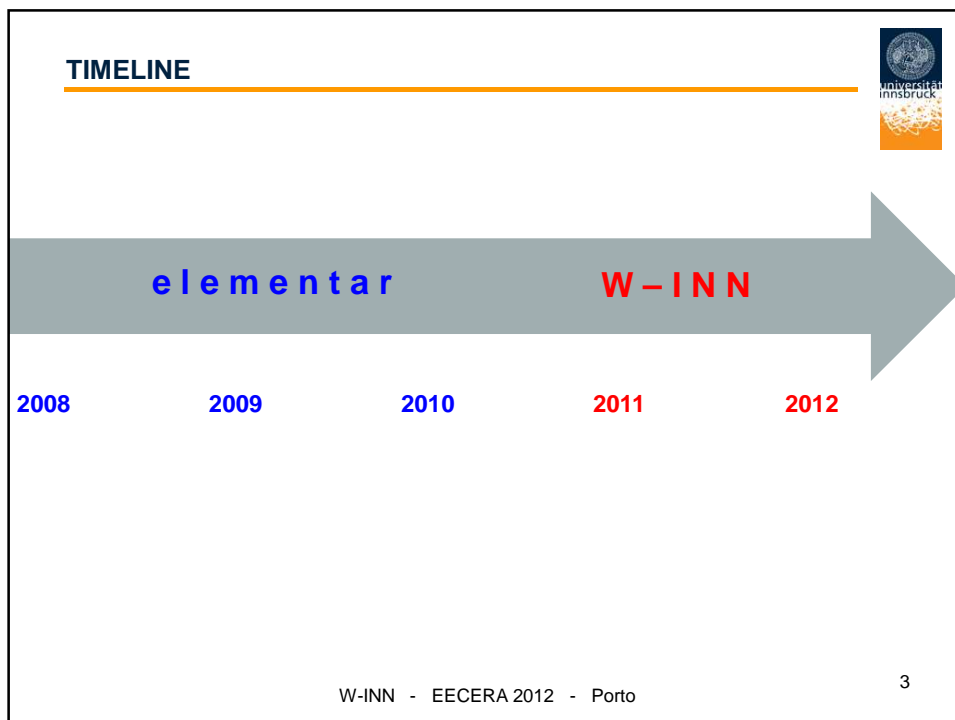


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W-INN - EECERA 2012 - Porto 2



## BASIC CHARACTERISTICS

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- **pilotstudy**
- **cross-sectional approach**
- **multimethodal design**
- **multi-informants/perspectives**

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5

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

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- **psychoanalytic** – object - relation theories & academic **developmental-psychology**
  1. **fathers** (different internal expectations of the children-> fathers respond with special masculine mode -> support developmental tasks)
  2. **public fathers** (transference concept -> lack of father experiences -> public fathers respond and support developmental tasks)
- **preschool pedagogic context**

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6

## CURRENT ISSUES



- What similarities and/or differences can be found in the **interactions and behavior** of children in different childcare staff compositions (mixed gender vs. female)?
- What similarities and/or differences can be found in the **educational style** of male and female ECE workers?
- What similarities and/or differences can be found in the **group dynamics** of different childcare staff compositions (mixed gender vs. female)?

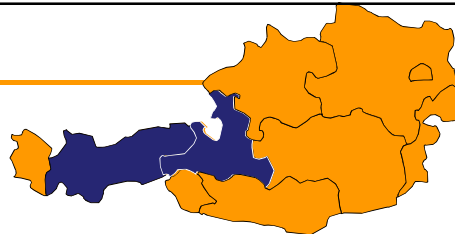
### further issue:

availability of **male ECE workers** <-> certain **familiar constellations**

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7

## MAIN SAMPLE




- **163** children - in **10** ECE centers (**5** female staff and **5** mixed gender staff)
- **206** parents and **22** ECE workers
- **15** boys and **15** girls for investigations in greater depth (inclusion criteria: age: 4 to 6 years, compliance, speaking & understanding german, no developmental delays)

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8

## MAIN SUBJECTS


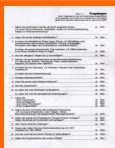
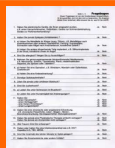

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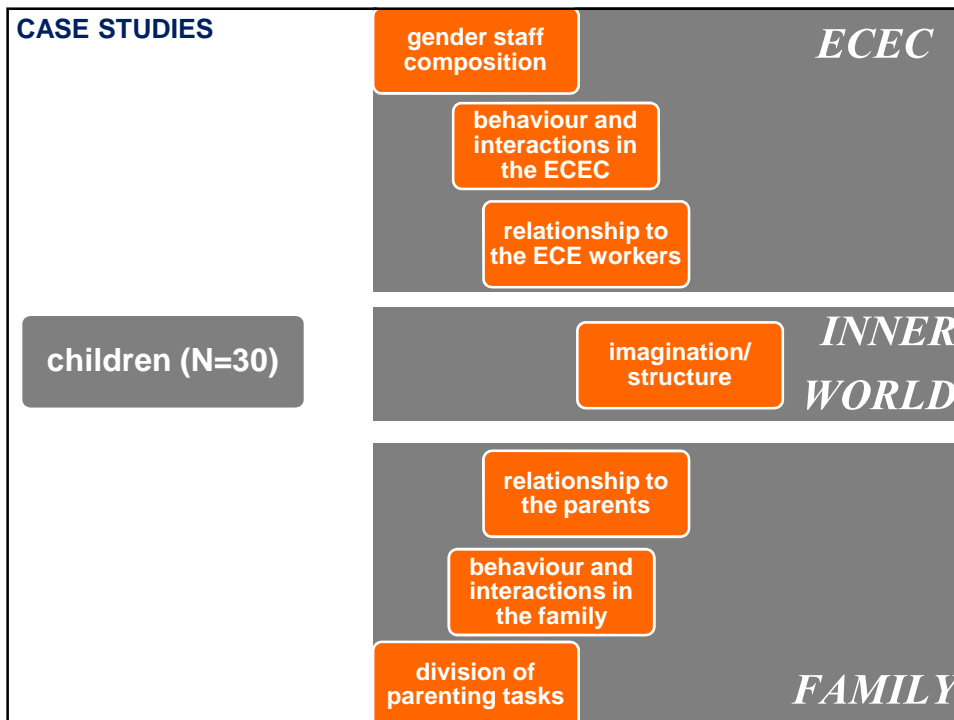
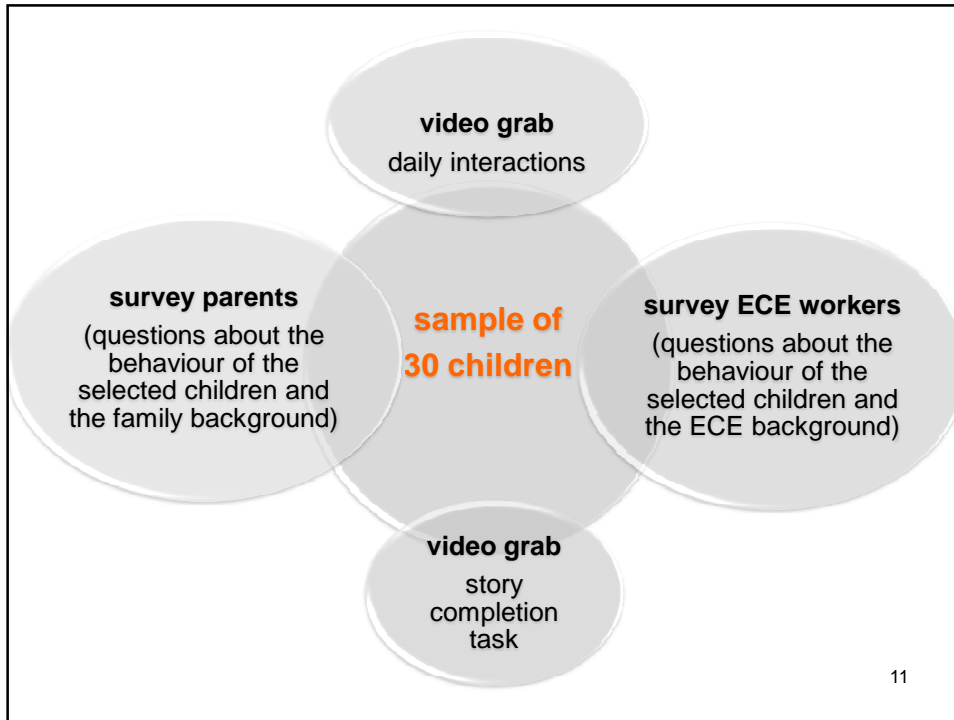


- **observable daily life** in ECE centers
- **family situation** of the children
- **children's „inner world“**

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9

1. video grab: daily interactions	2. survey: ECE workers	3. survey: parents	4. video grab: story stem
			
<p>database: 10 ECE workers 163 (30) children 900 min videotape</p> <p>1. focus (worker): educat. style &amp; interactions</p> <p>2. focus (kids): behaviour &amp; interactions</p> <p>3. focus (group): group dynamics</p>	<p>database: 22 ECE workers 155 items</p> <p>1. focus (worker): experiences &amp; teamwork</p> <p>2. focus (kids): behaviour interactions, &amp; relationships in the ECEC</p>	<p>database: 206 parents 183 items</p> <p>1. focus (family): division of parenting</p> <p>2. focus (kids): behaviour interactions, &amp; relationships in the family</p>	<p>database: 30 children 210 stories 900 min videotape</p> <p>focus: conflicts empathic react. moral themes avoidance aggression use of the figures coherence of the story</p>



## IN PROGRESS

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### ➤ case studies

- diploma project: **quantitative measure** of interactions between the ECE workers (male and female) and the children (male and female)
- diploma project: **qualitative measure** of interactions between the ECE workers (male and female) and the children (male and female)

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**...first findings and tentative conclusions...**





## FIRST RESULTS

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Two foci on our current issues:

- **childcare workers' behavior** (observable and self-reports)
- **childrens' contact behavior towards childcare workers'** (observable and assessment by childcare workers)

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15

## FIRST RESULTS

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### Educational style:

Caregiver Interaction Scale (Arnett 1989); **N=10** (5m/5f)  
Videorating-data

- Low and high scores in all (sub)scales for men and women as well
- *In mean* male childcare workers interact more positive, less punitive and equally detached
- Highest difference of male childcare workers regarding permissiveness (accordance with self- and external reports)

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16

## FIRST RESULTS

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### Group dynamics:

self-constructed rating scale; **N=10** (5m/5f) Videorating-data

- Male childcare workers provoke more mobility
- Tendency of male staff to create more ‚transitional space‘
- No differences concerning structuring group activities (discrepancy to self-reports)

## FIRST RESULTS

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### Child contact behavior:

Attachment related behavior tendencies (AQS; Waters1995)  
**N=30** (15m/15f) Videorating-data

- No differences between boys and girls concerning frequency of contact behavior
- Boys show more often contact behavior towards male childcare workers (in comparison to female staff); esp. „enjoying physical contact“, „affective sharing“
- No similar effect for girls!

**FIRST RESULTS****Childcare worker-child relationship:**

- 45% of female childcare workers report that boys “escape” out of their operating range, whereas no male childcare worker report the same
- Girls have overall better relationships to childcare workers of both sexes (*Instrument: STRS; Pianta 2001*)
- Boys show more closeness behavior to male childcare worker in comparison to female staff (*Instrument: STRS; Pianta 2001*)

**FIRST RESULTS****Childrens' social and emotional behavior:**

- Boys in groups with mixed gender staff are more extraverted and tend to be more dynamic (e.g. room-taking behavior or general mobility) *Videorating-data*
- Girls tend to be more social-emotionally competent in mixed-gender-staff groups (*Instrument: VBV-ER; Döpfner et al. 1993*)
- Boys tend to be more oppositional-aggressive (‘externalizing behavior’) in groups with (!) mixed gender staff (*Instrument: VBV-ER; Döpfner et al. 1993*)

## SUMMARY

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- Men in ECE seem to have some different educational styles (e.g. more permissiveness)
- Men in ECE expand the group dynamic (e.g. by relaxing the structure or provoking more mobility)
- Men in ECE develop a close relationship especially to boys (e.g. physical contact, affective sharing)

## TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

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- Existence or absence of gender similarities and/or differences also depend upon the perspective (political gender equation vs. child developmental view)
- For children a „gender-neutral“ relationship world does not exist
- Research about influences of male childcare workers on children need to be extended by the „impact“ of their female colleague, especially in long-term-studies !



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## W-INN research project

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