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**Male and female co-workers in Austrian childcare institutions:
Results of a nationwide research project**

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Abstract

Caring for children in Austria is still experienced as women's work, something that women "by nature" do better. The proportion of male ECE workers is very small: with less than one percent Austria is well below the European average.

Recently, the field of EC institutions and vocational training is undergoing rapid change towards professionalisation. Within this context, a research group at the University of Innsbruck has now finished a nationwide research project on men in ECE. With a range of qualitative and quantitative methods the project investigated the views of active ECE workers, adolescents and adults in vocational training, and pupils prior to career decision.

Quantitative methods included a full survey of male ECE students and workers, and samples of female colleagues. Furthermore, 80 in-depth interviews explored biography, attitudes and experiences of men and women in ECE institutions as well as adolescents in vocational training.

In many aspects the results show only few differences between male and female workers and students, but the study highlights how the "hidden curriculum" of ECE works against a more gender-balanced workforce. Despite of this, male colleagues show a wide diversity in opinions and interactions with children, and they are mostly seen as a benefit for ECE institutions. Subsequently factors are identified that could encourage an increase of the proportion of male workers in the profession. As a result of the study it is stated that recruitment and training of men can play an important role for the professionalisation of the whole ECE sector.

elementar research project

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Male (and Female) Co-workers in Austrian Childcare Institutions

Results of a nationwide
research project



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World Congress 2010, Göteborg

ECEC in Austria: Tradition



The profession is seen as substituting
motherhood and the workplace is seen
as a substitute „home“

Men enter the workforce...

Two voices regarding the theme „men in childcare“

„Children would never ask a female pedagogue for permission to sitting on her shoulders...“

male student, 17 years

„...Child care needs diversity, and ECEC institutions need more the image of activity...“

female manager

The two statements refer to:

- different sexes/bodies
- different activities



(Norwegian preschool teacher)



ECEC in Austria: Background (1)

- Early childhood centres: a traditional female field
- the public image of the profession is associated to care & play, not to education
- low salaries and poor working conditions
- vocational training: secondary school level
- male students permitted only since 1980
- only 1 % male workers, 3 % male students



ECEC in Austria: Background (2)

- Educational work in the early years is not seen as important and challenging by society in general.
- Institutions and workers make too few efforts to inform about the character of their work.
- Part time work is common, the labour union is weak. This is not uncommon for occupations in which almost all co-workers are female.



ECEC in Austria: recent developments

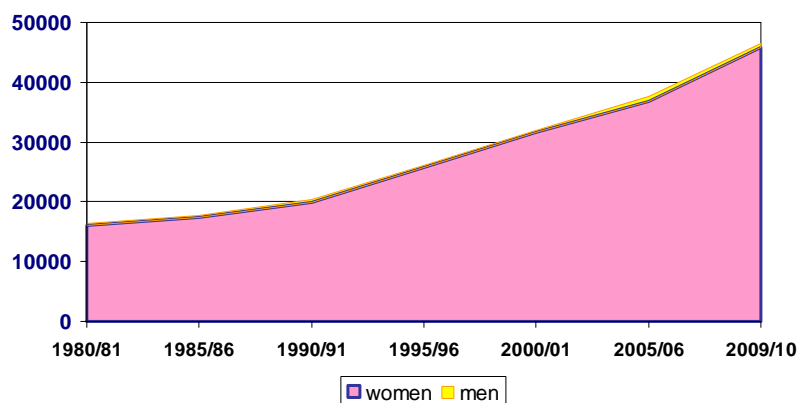
New understanding of elementary education:

- Debates on raising the level of vocational training on third level
- „Education“ in ECEC gets more important
- ECEC institutions should be open full-time, all the year, for children 0-5 years

→ Increase of workforce (6000 in the last 2 years)



Increase in number of (female) co-workers





Research project „public fathers“ – Men in Early childhood education and Care (director: Prof. J.C. Aigner)

- What makes men become ECE workers?
- What do men experience in vocational training and when working in kindergarten?
- Is there a specific ‚male‘ way of working with children?



The research project: target groups

1. Pupils prior to career decisions
2. Students (adolescents and adults) in vocational training
3. Men and women working in ECEC institutions
4. Parents



The research project: methods

- Analysis of statistical data
- Group discussions (9)
- Paper & pencil surveys (1209)
„full survey“ of men in ECEC
- In-depth interviews (79)
content analysis
psychoanalytic approach



Results 1: Male pupils prior to career decision: Attitudes towards „men in kindergarten“ (n=234)

„These men do not fit
to my image of a „man“
(male adolescent, 15 years)

„...I could imagine this job for myself“
(male adolescent, 15 years)



Results 1: Male pupils prior to career decision: Attitudes towards „men in kindergarten“ (n=234)

One out of four male adolescents states that male kindergarten workers are no „real men“!

One out of four male adolescents states to be interested in work with children!

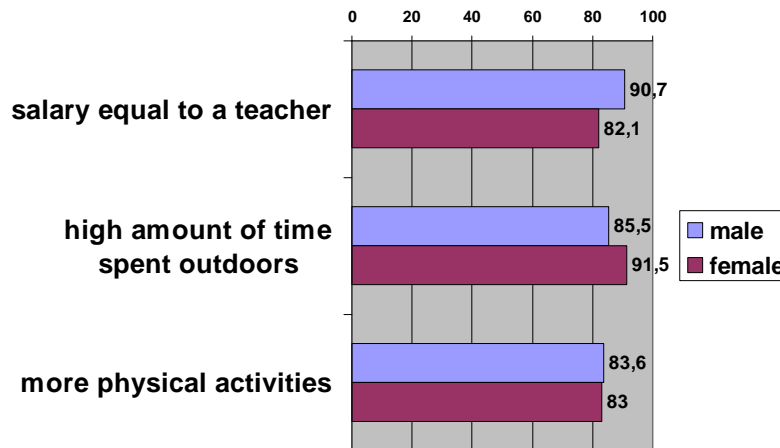


Why do male and female adolescents interested in work with children do not aim for a career in ECEC?





What would attract youth interested in work with children to train / work in ECEC?



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Results 2: Male adolescents (age 15-19 years) in vocational training (school) for ECEC

- Many men/boys report negative reactions of peers (boys) on their vocational decision
- 45% of the male students state that the regular vocational training is more designed for women
- „Masculine“ themes and interests of boys/men fall short at school

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Results 2: Male adolescents (age 15-19 years) in vocational training (school) for ECEC

- Male students report subtle discrimination (35 %) and accusations as „abusers“ (12 %) in kindergarten practice
- Boys/men interests include: more nature & outdoor experience, sports & physical activities and interactions with children



Results 2: Male adolescents (age 15-19 years) in vocational training (school) for ECEC

“I think women are more likely to adopt the kind of caring like it is, and men are more innovative and find their own methods.” (male student)

Female students like to work with children while sitting around a table; I prefer playing in the garden.

(male student)

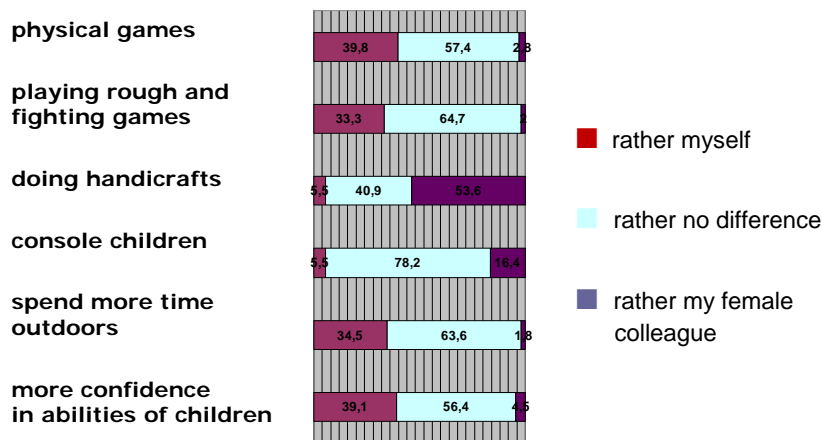


Results 3: Men at work (age 20-50 years)

- Men prefer working in private institutions (certification is not always necessary, low hierarchies, more freedom „to work in my own way“.
- Female co-workers, children and parents appreciate the presence of men in ECEC – men are welcome.

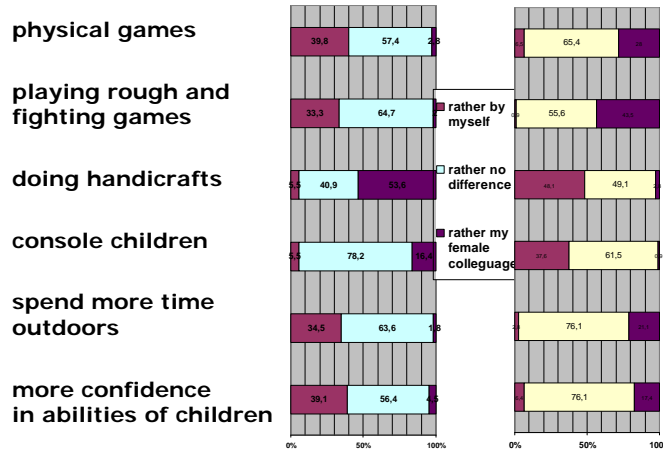


Similarities and differences in activities/attitudes between male and female coworkers in the view of men





Similarities and differences in the view of men and women



Same tendencies in attitudes of men and women, but...



Male and female ECEC workers (1)

- About 80% of males and females state that men have a different access to children.
- Men bring in more diversity and interests and activities stereotyped as „masculine“ like being outdoors, carving, playing rough games.
- It seems, some women do this too, but eventually with less emotional involvement.
- Women can get new ideas for their work with children through the presence of male coworkers.



Male and female ECE workers (2)

- Communication in teams changes:
Communication style of male colleagues is seen as more „straight forward“
- 90 % of males and females state that boys and girls need male role models / male adults to relate to.



Male and female ECE workers: (3)

- Most men like their job and are satisfied with their work.
- Men need possibilities to work „in their own way“ – women too, but for them it is easier as they work in a traditional female field.
- In contrast to many female coworkers many men have no wife/partner with high salary – and therefore depend more on adequate salary.
- Better general conditions are basic for motivating men – and women!



Results 4: Parents

- About 80% of the parents are happy to have a male preschool teacher.
- The vast majority of parents does not suspect men to be potential child abusers



Conclusions

„Yes, more money would be good, but...
... it's not the only problem.“

- Better working conditions in general
- More male colleagues
- Better career options
- Enrichment of concepts and practice (including sports, outdoor, more physical activities...)
- More appreciation of ECEC work from parents, politicians and society



Conclusion

- More men in the field would lead to a change of concepts and practice of ECEC *and*
- ECEC-institutions have to change concepts and practice to be an attractive workplace for women and for men.



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