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## **Male caretakers working with children under three –research results and open questions**

Presentation on the 22<sup>nd</sup> EECERA annual conference, 31.8.2012, Porto/Portugal

### ***Abstract***

Recent years have seen a significant increase of institutional care for children up to three years old in many countries. In this process, gender issues have been neglected (Rohrmann 2010). But, research on fathers' roles, and attachment theory have pointed out the importance of fathers for the development of infants (Kindler & Grossmann 2008; Grossmann et al.2008). It could be assumed that male caretakers in ECEC can also play an important role for children's development, distinct from the relationships female caretakers and children develop. Excluding men from ECEC settings can be interpreted as a form of subtle discrimination and sexism.

There is indeed some empirical evidence that female ECE workers tend to develop better relationships with young girls than with boys (Ahnert, Pinquart & Lamb, 2006). But until now, there has been a marked absence of research on the role of men working with infants in organized care.

The author presents an overview of empirical evidence on men working with infants, and results of a re-analysis of data from the research project "elementar" on men in ECE in Austria (Aigner & Rohrmann 2012, Rohrmann 2009), a multi-method study including quantitative and qualitative methods.

The results show differences between men working with infants and other male ECE workers, and shed light on the role of a general distrust against male ECE workers especially in the work with infants.

The study concludes that there is a need for more research as well as for affirmative action regarding the importance of men not only in ECE in general, but specifically in work with infants.

### ***Bibliography***

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Rohrmann, T. (2009). Possible solutions for a more gender balanced workforce in ECEC. Presentation on the 19th EECERA Conference, Strasbourg, France.

### ***Keywords***

Gender, Male workers, Attachment

**Tim Rohrmann**

## MEN IN THE WORK WITH CHILDREN UNDER THREE



Presentation on 22st  
EECERA Annual Conference  
Oporto, Portugal, 31.8.2012

### To begin with...

- *The important dimensions of parental influence are those that have to do with parental characteristics rather than gender-related characteristics.*

**Michael Lamb (2004)**

The Role of the Father in Child development (4th edition), p. 10.  
Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley & Sons.

- *Men who change nappies change the world!*  
Slogan of an international campaign for more male caretakers

## Institutional care for infants

- Recent increase in several countries ...
- ... connected to changes of gender relations in family and society
- Professionalization of ECEC for U 3-children
- Lack of qualified workers
- e.g. Germany: at least 39% of parents want institutional care for their infants; 55.000 more (!) ECEC workers are needed to meet the demands of parents (2011).

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## Fathers' engagement in early childhood

- Fathers' engagement in families is increasing worldwide
- Father Research points out the importance of fathers for childrens' development
- Fathers are more present in ECE institutions
- e.g. Nordic countries and Germany: parental leave partly only for father → in Germany participation of fathers went up from 2% to 26 % within a few years

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## Male workers in ECEC

- More male workers in ECEC – percentage slowly increasing
- International organisations support more male workers, e.g. recent EC Action plan (2011)
- Few countries with political strategies for better gender balance in ECEC

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## Consequence

***We need more men in the work with infants...***  
***... but work with infants is the most “female domain” in ECEC***

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## Research question

***What do we know about men working with infants?***

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## Die Krippe – la crèche



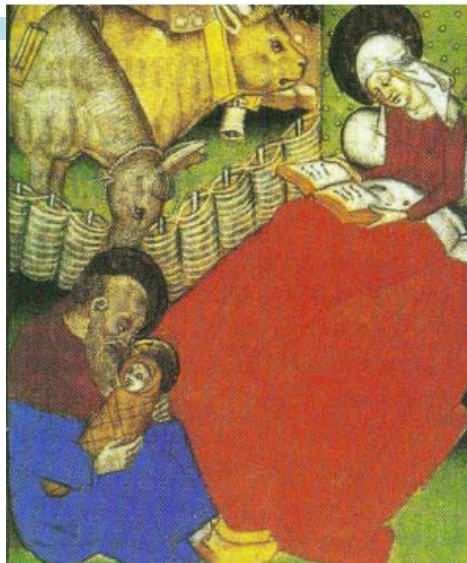
Gerrit van Honthorst (1590-1656):  
Anbetung der Hirten I (1620)  
*Adoration of Herdsmen*  
Source: Wikimedia

## Die Krippe – la crèche



Gerrit van Honthorst (1590-1656):  
Anbetung der Hirten II (1622)  
*Adoration of Herdsmen*  
Source: Wikimedia

## Joseph & Jesus



### **Virgin reading while Joseph rocks the Babe**

Book illustration,  
15th century,  
Northern France

Source: Günther, Andrea (Hg.)  
(2004). *Maria liest*. Rüsselsheim:  
Christel-Göttert-Verlag.

## Research question

### *What do we know about men and women working with infants?*

- Father research shows few gender differences, but points out the importance of the „early triad“
- Frequent face-to-face interactions and close and physical contact are specific challenges of work with infants – especially for men
- Secure attachment relations seem to be more likely between female childcare workers and girls (metaanalysis Ahnert, Pinquart & Lamb 2006)

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## Research background

- Research project  
„elementar – men in ECEC in Austria“  
Innsbruck university (Aigner & Rohrmann 2011)
- Men and women working in ECE  
questionnaire: males N=112, females, N=154  
in-depth interviews: males N=29, females N=20
- Subset working in institutions for 0-3 years:  
questionnaire: males N=9, females, N=18  
in-depth interviews: males N=6, females N=5

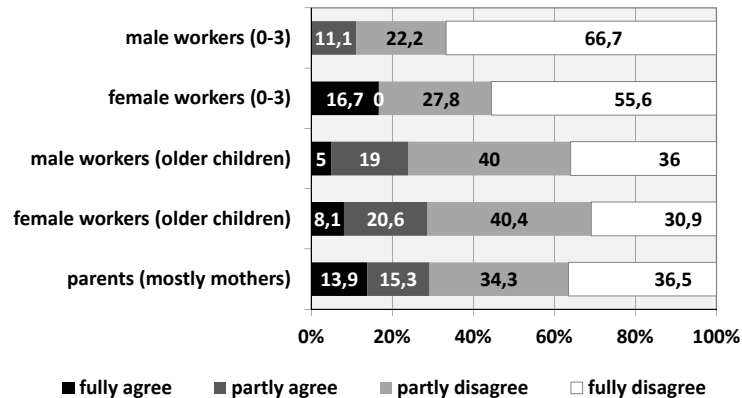
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## Who should care for infants?

„Children up to three years should be cared for by women“



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## Who should care for infants?

*I just liked the work with infants (...) the children are very natural, it's good to work with them (...)*

*I had to fight a long time for this (...) the impression you have to double or triple your efforts to get what you want.*

*[It was argued] with care tasks, that parents might not accept it if a man changes nappies, although I was changing my own childrens nappies. (...)*

*[Now:] It is... also my colleague [female] says – it has'nt been better! Like in family – a man, a woman, many children, there is nothing what could be better.*

**experienced male worker, father,  
 special qualification for work with infants**

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## Job satisfaction

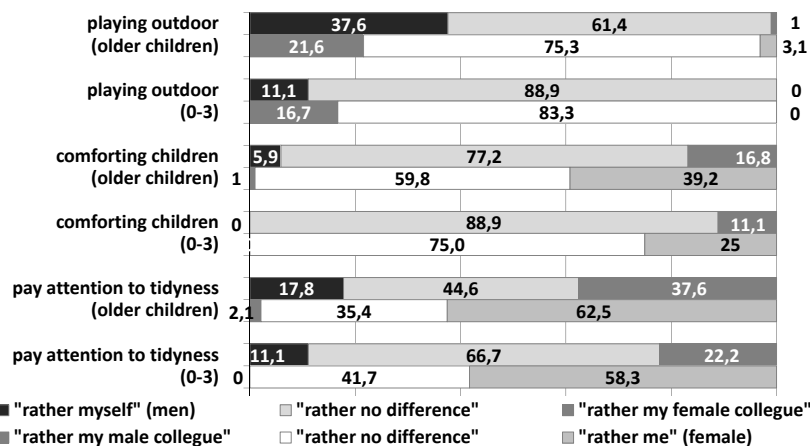
- Job satisfaction of male ECEC workers is high
- ... especially with position at the workplace, work climate, varied activities on the job, and working in a gender-mixed team
- Job satisfaction of males working with infants is higher compared to other male ECEC workers
- Males working with infants are especially confident with their female colleagues (2/3 „very confident“)

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## Gender differences in activities



Similarities and differences in activities between male (above) and female (below) coworkers

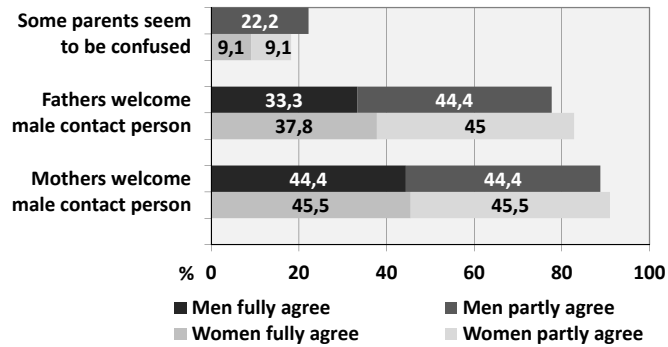
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## What do parents think?

„How do parents react on male workers?“



Reaction of parents (only 0-3, male workers N=9,  
 female workers with male colleague N=11)

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## A general distrust against men

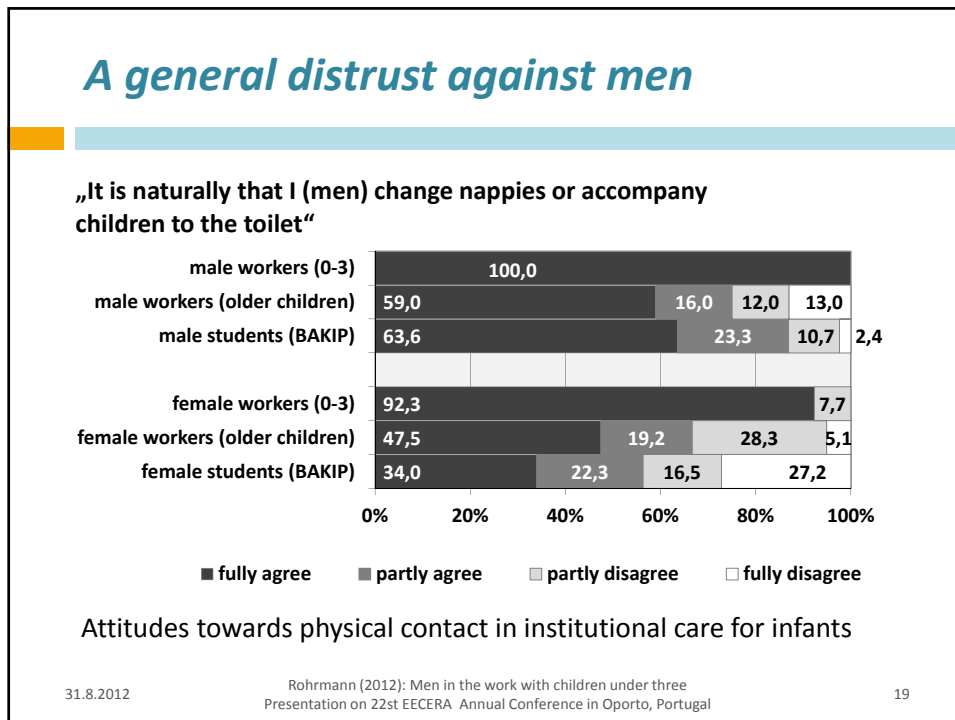
Male workers working with infants report more distrust:

- Every third worker „partly agrees“ that males experience a general distrust against male workers in ECEC institutions, compared to „only“ every fourth male working with older children.

16.9.2011

Rohrmann (2011): Does the fear of pedophilia prevent men to become childcare workers?  
 Presentation on 21st EECERA Annual Conference in Geneva

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- ### Consequences
- We need **research** on the specific situation of male ECEC workers working with infants, e.g. their role in attachment processes, play activities, collaboration with parents/fathers...
  - Male ECEC workers need **support** when they enter the field of work with infants, especially to counter the general distrust against men in this area.
- 31.8.2012 Rohrman (2012): Men in the work with children under three  
Presentation on 22st EECERA Annual Conference in Oporto, Portugal 20

Rohrman, Tim (2012). Men in the Work with Children under Three.  
Presentation on the 22<sup>nd</sup> EECERA annual conference, 31.8.2012, Porto/Portugal.

## Links

### Coordination office Men in Kitas

Catholic High School of Applied Sciences, Berlin, Germany

web <http://www.koordination-maennerinkitas.de>

### elementar research project

Innsbruck University, Faculty of Education, Austria

web <http://www.uibk.ac.at/ezwi/elementar>

Publication:

Aigner, Josef C. & Rohrman, Tim (eds.)(2012). Elementar – Männer in der pädagogischen Arbeit mit Kindern. Opladen: Barbara Budrich.

### EECERA SIG gender balance

email [rohrman@koordination-maennerinkitas.de](mailto:rohrman@koordination-maennerinkitas.de)

31.8.2011

Rohrman (2012): Men in the work with children under three  
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gefördert vom:



Träger:



Thank you for your attention.