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Koch, Bernhard (2013).

## **Professionalization in ECEC and the persistence of gender segregation**

Presentation on the 23<sup>rd</sup> EECERA annual conference, 29.8.2013, Tallinn/Estonia

### ***Abstract***

The research is based on a project funded by the Austrian Science Foundation (2012 – 2015) about strategies to increase the number of men in ECEC. It focuses on the links of gender and professionalism and analyzes attitudes and professional images connected to the aim of increasing the number of men working in ECE. The study builds up on recent research projects on men in Austrian kindergartens as well as on projects on "more men in ECE" in several European countries. The conceptual framework is based on a concept of two sexes and a large variety of masculinity and femininity (gender roles).

The methodical approach is both quantitative and qualitative. 50 teachers and 50 students responded to a questionnaire about men and women in childcare. Moreover, interviews and focus group discussions were conducted. Attitudes and behaviour of teachers in vocational training institutions regarding professionalism will be measured at the beginning and at the end of the project. The ethical principles include (according to the British educational research association) the categories harm, autonomy, privacy, reciprocity, equity.

First analyses show that the vocational training institutions reflect their "gendered identity" and plan measures to increase the proportion of men. There is a welcoming atmosphere for men and many men are in general interested in child care work. Nevertheless female norms of caring and education ("air of care") still dominate the field. The preliminary findings will help to put the issue of "gender balance and professionalism" on the political agenda in Austrians ECEC system.

### ***Keywords***

men, women, gender, professionalism, childcare workers

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**Professionalisation in  
ECEC and the  
persistence of sex  
segregation**

Nurturing (photo: private)



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**ECEC in Austria: Background**

- profession associated with „caring & playing“ rather than „education“
- vocational training: secondary school level
- expansion (child care centres for children under 3, number of coworkers ...)
- Staff: 60% full qualified

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## Professionalisation (some interpretations)

- Unique body of knowledge
- Selected entry into the field
- Higher level of quality in the work with children
- University level of training (academic)
- Higher recognition (salary....)

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## Sex segregation




- Gender and sex?
- Proportion of men: 1%,
- Proportion of men in training institutions: 3%
- Work is seen as „women's work“

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## Conditions/Frame of the research


**Research on gender (& sex):**  
more research on „mothers“ than on „fathers“,  
proportion of male researchers in gender studies < 5%

**gender policy on career choice in Austria:**  
several programmes for girls (Girls Day, FIT, MUT) less for boys (Boys Day) e.f. legal frame für equality: „women will be preferred employed“ -  
in child care centres too?

**Education Policy**  
worse educational achievement for young men (less men reach  
generell qualification for university entrance: minus 7000/year);  
discussions about the „acceptance test“ for medicine („is not gender  
neutral“), no discussion about acceptance test for educational training  
for child care work



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## Tradition: Screening test in vocational training:

Singing high                      not                      throwing high



**Is the screening test actually gender-neutral? (or sex-neutral)?**  
„We try for it“ (director of a training institution)

Bildquelle: BAKIP Judenburg bzw. Innsbruck university press

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**Action research: „Strategies to increase the proportion of male child care workers“ (2012- 2015)\***

**Project objectives:**

1. Developing an intervention programme to increase male representation in pre-school education together with the stakeholders of a region (Tyrol)
2. Accompanying analysis of political, administrative and 'interpersonal' negotiations; analysis of resistance and factors of success
3. Evaluating empirically how the intervention programme affects attitudes, career choice and proportion of men in training and practical work



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**Overview of qualitative and quantitative interviews:**


	Target Groups	Number		
		Questionnaire (persons involved)	Group discussion	Interview (case study)
1	young men and women prior to their career choice	70	0	0
2	Male job seekers	1	0	4 (1)
3	Coworker in training institutions	28	3	4
4	Managers of child care centers	16	1	2
5	Female child care workers	0	0	2
6	Policy maker team	18	2	15
		Research diary		



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## Some findings



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### Gender Policy:



Eine Initiative von Frauenministerin  
Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek

*„There are not yet so many men in parental leave as I desire.“*




Eine Initiative von  
Männerminister  
Rudolf Hundstorfer

*„there are not yet so many women in fulltime work as I desire“*

Assumption:  
We get accustomed to that gender politics are made by women. Most (and the most powerful) men are not interested

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**Example** (huge announcement in the local newspaper, April 2013)

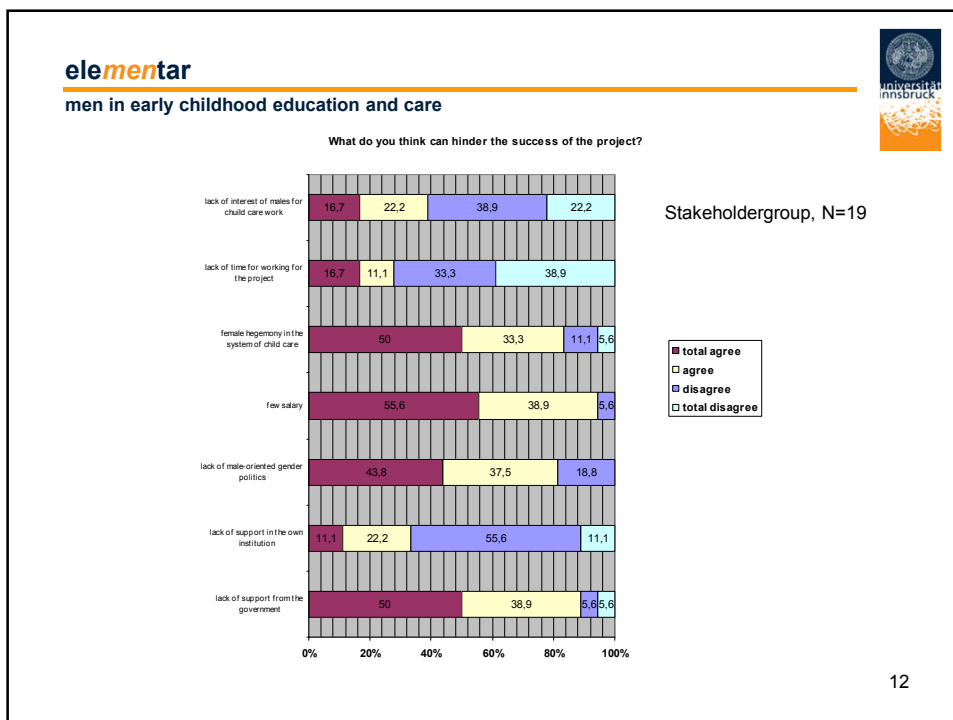
„Labour agency sponsors women in technical professions“

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Labour agency sponsors men in educational professions

„We are not yet at the point to do such a support for males...“(expert in a interview)

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**The project shows some evidence for female hegemony in ECEC**

- „A problem could be that the child care centres and the female workforce are mentally not able to accept male child care workers at eye level; the strong player in the field are women ...“ (gender expert)
- „(in our institution) there is not really a discussion about the necessity of such activities.....“ (gender-expert of the school authority)

We asked 600 managers of childcare centres to work with us (to promote men in the sector), only 7% responded (previous, comparable research: 40% responded)

Some male job seekers report that they have problems to find a job (despite the fact that there is a need for co-workers and despite the political correct “men welcomed”)

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**Questionnaire: directors of child care centres (N=16)  
(agree, total agree);**

Should there be more male child care workers?	100%
Have you thought about measure to get more men into the team?	66%
<u>Have some coworkers mental reservations against male coworkers?</u>	<u>25%</u>
Should there be more further trainings with the issue „mixed teams“?	80%
(Further training is planned for December, one was canceled because of less interest)	

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**Questionnaire: male students in ECEC (N=35)**

- 33% say, for increasing the proportion of men, there must be measures directed to men,
- 75% say, that there must be measures directed to the vocational training institutions and to the work place.  
„work with children is wonderful, but many institutions destroy this pleasure“ (male student, 18 years)
- Their desired child care centre is described with terms such as „open“, „free“, „garden/nature/forest“, movement, „toleranz“
- Only half of the male students promote the occupation in his circle of acquaintances

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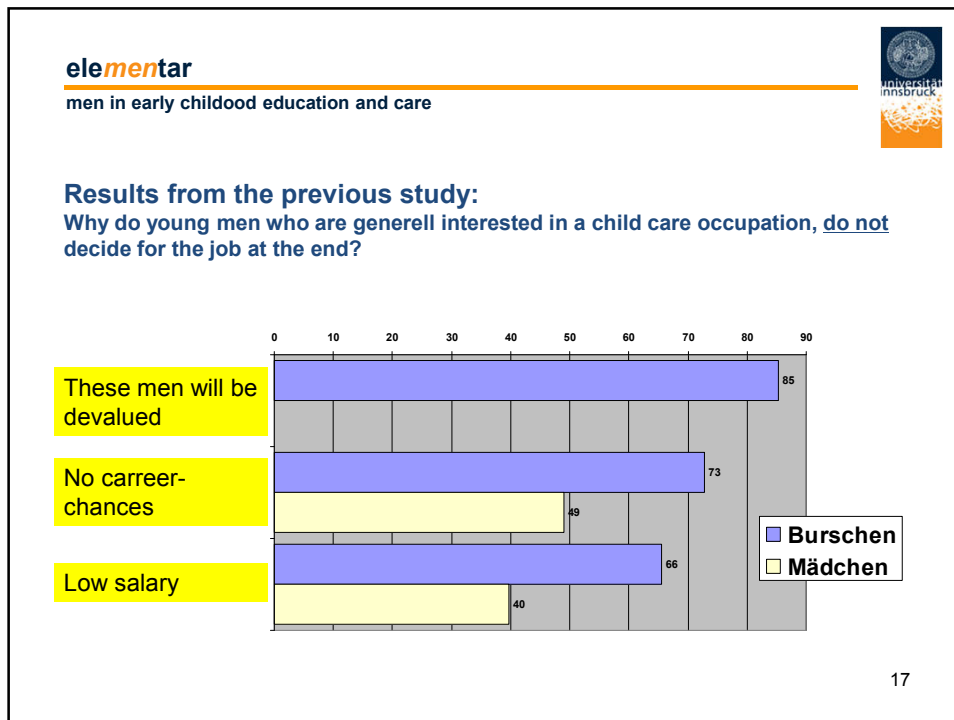
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**Questionnaire: teachers in vocational training institutions  
(N=28)**

- **78% say**, for increasing the proportion of men, there must be **measure directed to men**, and 75% say, that there must be measures directed to the vocational training institutions and to the work place
- 70% say that in the vocational training and the work place is dominated by female educational norms, which can be difficult for male students.

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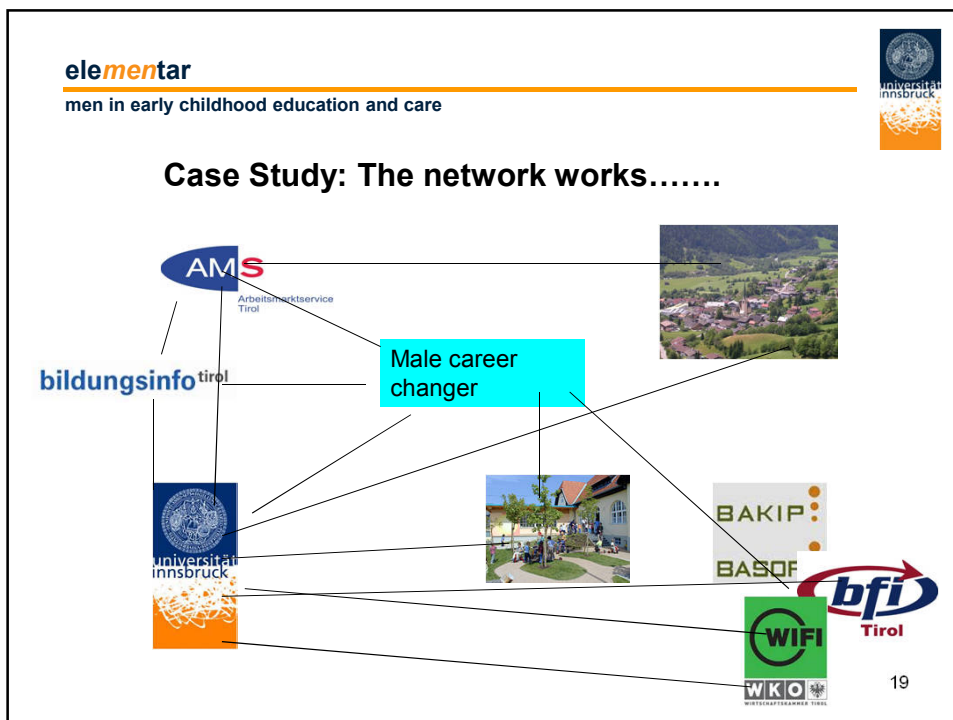
**Questionnaire: boys prior to their career decision (N=70)**

**Attitudes before and after a male child care worker present his job (group of male pupils, lasting one hour)**

„This is only a job for women“  
Before the intervention: 50%  
After the intervention: less than 10%


Scepticism against male child care workers („homosexuell“, „no real men“...)  
Before the intervention: 25%  
After the intervention: 10% („Who's interested shall do it“: 90%)

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- Some activities (planned and/or realised)**
- Hotline und first information
  - Network of partner – childcare centres (35 out of 597; 7%)
  - Network of male professionals
  - Further training for „mixed teams“
  - Financial support of announcements in newspapers,
  - Media presentations at meetings of employers (mayors), change of buildings/gardens,
  - Change of job advertisements (men are especially invited....)
  - Higher salary
  - Presentations and discussions with teachers of vocational training institutions
  - Media campaigns
  - Job orientation
  - Courses only for men
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**Challenges in the communication with men:**

- ECEC profession do not attract job seekers with high salary and high image (as many - not all - male dominated jobs)
- Activities have to be directed against the powerful trend of „feminisation of (paid) educational work“
- Lack of „brain power“ and institutional resources (compared with female-specific activities in the last century)
- On the other hand: strong support from parents and the public

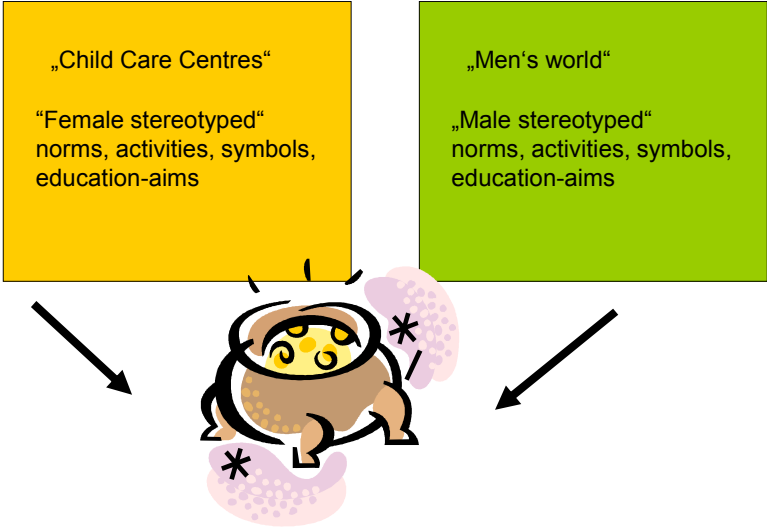
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**Challenges for the ECEC System**



„Child Care Centres“  
“Female stereotyped“  
norms, activities, symbols,  
education-aims

„Men's world“  
„Male stereotyped“  
norms, activities, symbols,  
education-aims

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## Breaking up the persistence of sex segregation

1. Establishing of a network („Children need men too“)
2. Male connoted images
3. Exposition of the benefits for the female workforce and the companies/employers (gatekeeper)
4. Winning the (female) managers
5. Reacting „revolving doors“: Increase of the number of men, who remain in employment (Child care centres with men are attractiv for men - example: „Seifenblase“: 6 out of 14 are males.....)

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## Change of images



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## Measures in generell

- Increase of salary and status
- Positioning ECEC as a professional institution
- Campaign about the significance of men for children
- Further increase of governmental investment into the ECEC-system
- Different entrances into the profession
- Measures and special trainings for male job seeker
- More male orientated programmms in schools („disarming the opponents“)
- More „modern“ child care centres (reggio-orientated, outdoor-preschools, „open“ concepts)

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## First conclusions

1. Expanding the ECEC sector is mainly discussed without sex/gender issue
2. High proportion of young men who are generally interested
3. Some hints for female hegemony in ECEC.
4. Lack of a „pressure group“ („their is no decion maker, for whom it is important“ (political expert).
5. For decades many female decision maker in the region were accompanied by the women's movement, there seems to be some scepticism against the aim of the project

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## Some questions

What does professionalisation mean, if the sector continue the concept of „maternal care“ and selected entry into the field is strongly based on sex?

What effect has the entrance of men (differences between men and women in biography, body, educational norms...) for the „unique body of knowledge“?

**Assertion:** Professionalisation in ECEC can be put forward through increasing the proportion of men, because of

- men's focus on job-identity (status, salary)
- relativising „mothering work“ via adding „fathering work“
- a mayor variety of bodies, experiences, biographies, interests, communication styles .....(quality of work)

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.....thank you for your attention



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**Strategies  
to Increase the Proportion of Male Child Care Workers (2012 – 2015)**

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