

Peeters, Jan; Rohrmann, Tim & Emilsen, Kari (2015).

**Gender balance in ECE: Why is there so little progress?**

Presentation on the 25<sup>th</sup> EECERA annual conference, 9.9.2015, Barcelona/Spain

***Abstract***

This paper questions the persisting gender imbalance in ECEC and analyses ambivalences regarding more men in the field. Research from many countries worldwide shows that in early childhood care and education (ECEC), male workers are welcomed by female colleagues and parents. In the last two decades there have been initiatives for more men in ECEC in several European countries, nevertheless the proportion of male workers ECEC remains low worldwide. This presentation is based on recent gender theory. The presenters will give an overview of research and actions that have been set up in Belgium, Norway and Germany and will analyse the efforts and limits of strategies for more male students and workers in ECEC. Individual interviews were conducted following ethical approval and further to gaining each participants informed consent. It is concluded that deeply held gendered attitudes and practices in the field of care and educational work with young children have to be put into question. More space in ECEC for embodied subjectivities is needed to overcome essentialist conceptions of differences between body and mind, women and men. The gender imbalance will not be improved without a radical shift in the policy towards ECEC. More space in ECEC for embodied subjectivities is needed to overcome essentialist conceptions of differences between body and mind, women and men.

***Keywords***

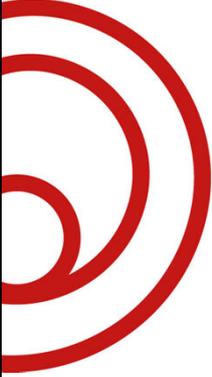
gender, professionalism, embodied subjectivities, men in ECE, gender theory

***Authors***

Jan Peeters | Ghent University, Belgium

Tim Rohrmann | University of Applied Sciences, Dresden, Germany

Kari Emilsen | Queen Maud University College, Norway

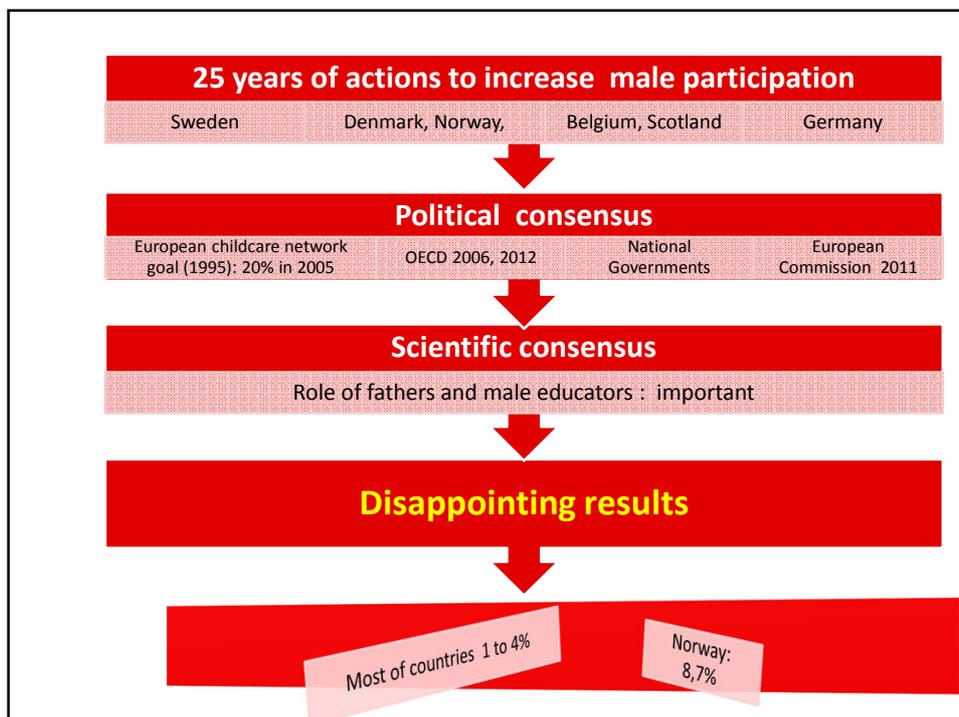


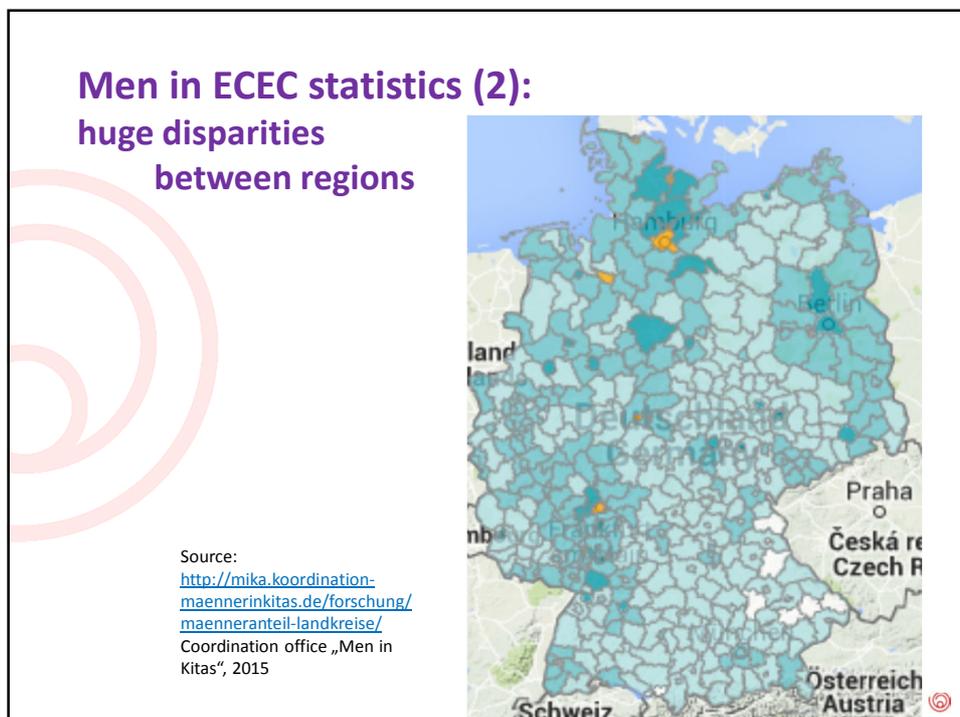
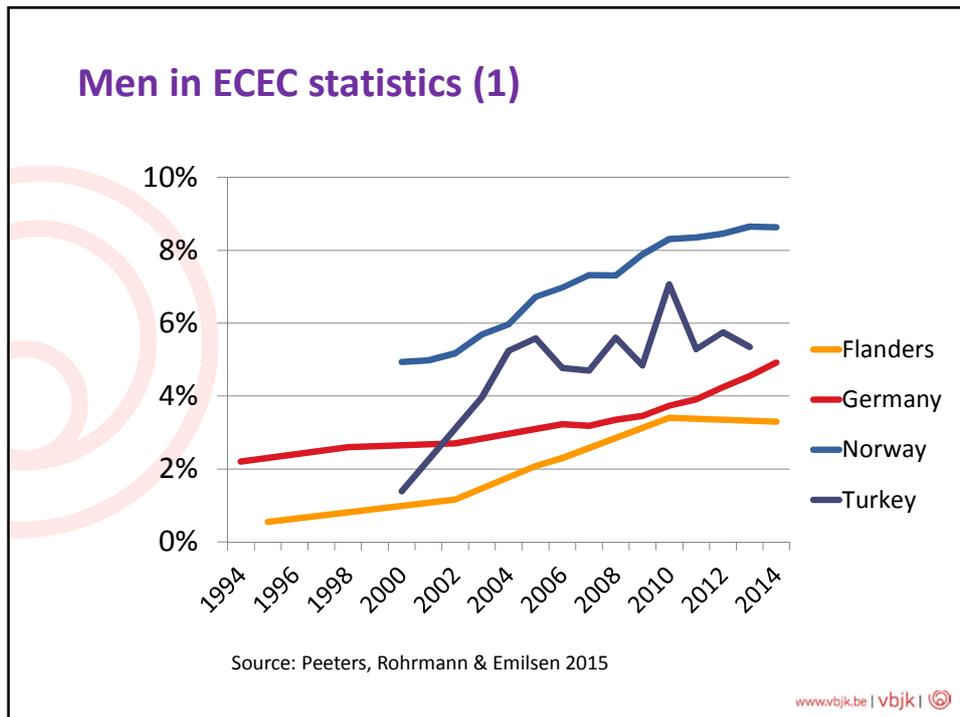
EECERA 2015  
Self Organised Symposium  
Special Interest Group – EECERJ Special issue  
Gender balance in the ECEC workforce

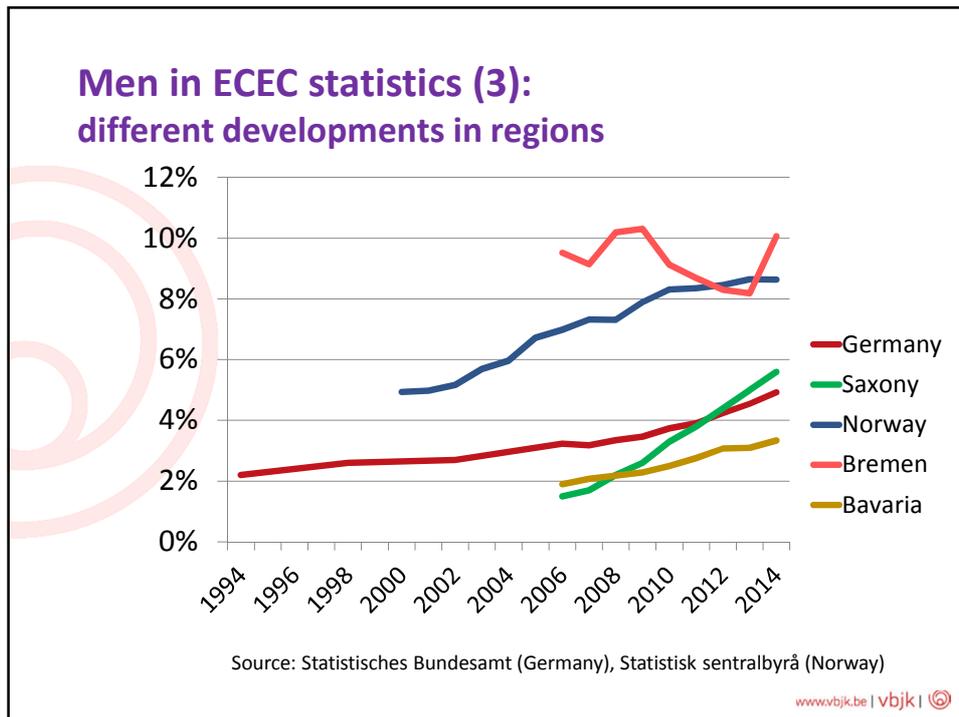
**Gender balance in ECEC :  
why is there so little progress?**

*Dr. Jan Peeters - Ghent University*  
*Dr. Tim Rohrmann - University of Applied Sciences Dresden*  
*Kari Emilsen – Queen Maud’s University College Trondheim*

Centre for Innovation in the Early Years | Centre d’Innovation de la Petite Enfance | [www.vbjk.be](http://www.vbjk.be) | vbjk | ©







### How to attract more male workers?

- Different measures in several areas and in different stages of vocational biographies are needed
- The number of men will not increase without specific actions
- For parity between women and men, we need a positive policy for at least 10 years (Moss 2003)

www.vbjk.be | vbjk | ©

## Norway: Long-term measures for more men



## Norway: Long-term measures for more men



- Consensus in society about the importance of men taking part in children's lives
- Goal of gender equality enshrined in laws, regulations and curricula
- Since 2001 four national **action plans** for gender equality
- **BUT:** Proportion of trained male workers is still below 10%.



## Germany: A decade towards more men



(Do male ECEC workers need a beard?!)

[www.vbjk.be](http://www.vbjk.be) | vbjk | ©

## 2005-2010: Men in ECEC become an issue

- 2005 First regional studies on men in ECEC
- 2005 Model project on new vocational orientations for boys – „Neue Wege für Jungs“
- 2007 1. nationwide conference „Men in Kitas“
- 2008 Ministry of Family affairs initiates study „Male workers in ECE...“
- 2010 Study published, more projects start

[www.vbjk.be](http://www.vbjk.be) | vbjk | ©

## 2010-2014: Program „More men in Kitas“

State-funded program:

- 2010 Coordination office „Men in ECEC“
  - 2011-2013 ESF model program „MORE men in Kitas“
  - 2011-2014 Research: „Tandem study“ Dresden
  - Promotion of job shifting into the field →
  - 2015 new ESF model program for job shifters
- \*
- Public and scientific discourse promotes more initiatives and projects – regional and beyond

[www.vbjk.be](http://www.vbjk.be) | vbjk | ©

## ESF model program „MORE men in Kitas“

- 16 model projects in 13 federal states
- 13 million € financial support
- Development of innovative strategies and best practice
- Wide spectrum of measures and issues



[www.vbjk.be](http://www.vbjk.be) | vbjk | ©

## ESF model program „MORE men in Kitas“

Issues and fields of activities of model projects:

- Vocational orientation
- Vocational training and job shifters
- On-the-job-training on e.g. gender issues
- Teamcoaching and mentoring
- Working groups for male ECEC workers
- Concepts regarding „general distrust“ against male workers - prevention of abuse and violence
- Public relations:  
campaigns, media, websites, social media

www.vbjk.be | vbjk | ©

## How to attract more male workers?

- Gender sensitive pedagogy in ECEC (Gender Loops 2008; Rohrmann & Wanzeck Sielert 2014; Emilsen 2015)
- Vocational orientation for boys, e.g. “Boys’day” in kindergarten for male teenagers
- Support for male workers and gender-mixed teams (Rohrmann & Emilsen 2013)
- Raise the status and prestige of the profession through training and qualification (Cameron 2003; Rolfe 2005)
- Choose a name for the profession that is gender neutral (Wohlgemuth 2003; Peeters 2008)
- Public relations, media, political support



www.vbjk.be | vbjk | ©



### Example 1: Norway

- Traditional gender roles are to be replaced by new patterns where men and women do the same and where women and men are not complementary categories. Gender categories are not to determine what men and women can, would and should do.
- A higher proportion of men increases the probability of a positive assessment of efforts put into gender equality work (assessment of the influence of the framework plan for the content and tasks of kindergartens, gender awareness when buying teaching aids, seminars about equality, actions to increase the number of men etc).

*Evaluation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Norwegian Action Plan, Hoel 2010*

www.vbjk.be | vbjk | ©

### Example 2: Malaysia

- „ ...men are more stable emotionally, not as sensitive as women.
1. If any problem occurs, especially grievances or any matters concerning the centre or the children, they will try to solve them rationally.
  2. Men always are very strong to do all the necessary mobilizing corners. Arranging furniture and fittings. Carrying heavy stuff and other odd jobs that sometimes woman can't do.
  3. Technical matters concerning water, electricity, any bulb which are not functioning and other repairing elements. Men are smart and handy thus minimising the operation cost of the centre. Just imagine to call a plumber for a few minutes will cost us about 300 Malaysian Ringgit which is considered exorbitant.
  4. Men can perform interesting outdoor activities such as football, gardening (...) or any kind of sports.”

*Hajjah Mahanom Basri, President  
Association of Childcare Centres Selangor, Kuala Lumpur*

[http://www.menteach.org/news/men\\_we\\_need\\_you\\_most\\_in\\_early\\_childhood\\_as\\_a\\_father\\_figure\\_in\\_malaysia](http://www.menteach.org/news/men_we_need_you_most_in_early_childhood_as_a_father_figure_in_malaysia)

©

## Contradictory expectations: a theoretical model (Wernersson 2015)

Horizontal differentiation: femininity and masculinity as „specialisations“

Vertical differentiation: gender/power/status hierarchy	Assumptions	Men and women have similar qualities/abilities	Men and women have different qualities/abilities
	Men and women have the same power/status/value	Men and women doing the same tasks are a model of gender equality for children	More men would add male complementary competencies and role models
	Men and women have more power/status/value	More men will make occupational conditions better (but may reduce career options for women)	Men are superior and bring important qualities to the profession, occupational conditions and the workplace

www.vbjk.be | vbjk | ©

## In search of an explanation: a look back at the history of women as mothers and educators

- The origins : the “ideal mother”
- Care has always been considered “women's work”
- Employment in ECEC is an acceptable work for women
- After WW II : educators were modeled after the symbolic personification of a “loving mother” (→ attachment theory)
- Men have to take responsibility as father not as educators

19 century until the sixties

www.vbjk.be | vbjk | ©

## Second wave of feminism: the seventies



Women's  
right on  
labour

[www.vbjk.be](http://www.vbjk.be) | vbjk | ©

## Second wave of feminism: the seventies



We require  
affordable  
day care!

[www.vbjk.be](http://www.vbjk.be) | vbjk | ©

### Scolarisation: turn of the century

- Investment in the early years : better preparation for successful school career and the labor market
- Care separate from learning and executed by unskilled staff: invisible work
- Working with young children: higher social esteem, wages rise

www.vbjk.be | vbjk | ©

In many countries –  
Denmark, Sweden, Slovenia,  
New Zealand, France, Belgium –  
wages and social esteem of ECEC  
professionals are higher, but...

Higher social  
esteem

does not attract  
more men

High level of professionalism with almost  
exclusive female workforce

www.vbjk.be | vbjk | ©

## Second wave of feminism

Typical explanations in public debates (status, power and wages) do not fully explain why men are not attracted to working in ECEC

“The personal is politic”: the characteristics and common political struggles of all women, which unite them as a group .



**Essentialist statements**

www.vbjk.be | vbjk | ©

## Third wave of feminism:

- New view on care from a social and political perspective

Criticism of the separation between body and mind: skilled and better-paid women are responsible for “the spirit” , the least qualified and ‘invisible’ assistants are responsible for the “body”

www.vbjk.be | vbjk | ©

## Views on “body” in different cultures

(Childcare in Europe 2007, Cameron and Moss 2007, 75)

- The Danish concept of “kropslighed” – how one senses the body – includes a strong element of experiencing the world through the body in ECEC practices (Jensen 2011).
- The view of Danish pedagogues on English ECEC: institutional logic, a school rationality controlling the practice with ‘body discipline’; a great deal of attention is paid to the ‘head’ and little to the ‘body’ as “one way or another, the body has been reduced to a head in the English centres”.
- Hungarian ECEC was perceived as warm and accepting, but also as quiet, calm and predictable – and thus as a ‘boring workplace’

www.vbjk.be | vbjk | ©

## corporeality

- The denial of the body creates a “mute” body which is always female. This makes it difficult for men to find their place in ECEC.
- The concept of corporeality – „kropslighet“ – opens up new perspectives on gender in ECEC without going back to simplifying biologicistic interpretations

www.vbjk.be | vbjk | ©

## corporeality

- This is especially relevant in the context of dealing with the « fear of pedophilia »
- Close body contact and caressing is necessarily part of ECEC work, but it has to be in regard of the emotional expressions and needs of the child, not of the educator (Peeters 2012).

www.vbjk.be | vbjk | ©

## Conclusions

Academisation alone will neither attract more men, nor lead to a gender-neutral profession.  
We need

- to create open spaces where ECEC workers can position and develop themselves as men and women
- to develop a gender conscious understanding of professionalism that goes beyond traditional gendered notions.



**New perspectives on the concept of “care” have to be developed**

www.vbjk.be | vbjk | ©

## Bibliography

Peeters, J. (2013) Towards a gender neutral interpretation of professionalism in ECEC. *Revista Espanola de Educacion Comparada. La Educacion Infantil en Perspectiva Europea* ano 2013. 21, pp. 119-143.

Peeters, Jan; Rohrmann, Tim & Emilsen, Kari (2015). Gender balance in ECEC: Why is there so little progress? *European Early Childhood Research Journal*, 23(3), 302-314. DOI: 10.1080/1350293X.2015.1043805  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1350293X.2015.1043805>

Rohrmann, Tim & Emilsen, Kari (eds.)(2015). Special Issue: Gender Balance in the ECEC work force. Editorial. *European Early Childhood Research Journal*, 23 (3), 295-301.  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1350293X.2015.1043804#abstract> DOI: 10.1080/1350293X.2015.1043804

Van Laere, Katrien; Vandebroek, Michel, Roets, Griet & Peeters, Jan (2014). Challenging the feminisation of the workforce: rethinking the mind–body dualism in Early Childhood Education and Care. *Gender & Education*, 26(3), 232-245. Available at:  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2014.901721>

Wernersson, Inga (2015). More men? Swedish arguments over four decades about ‘missing men’ in ECE and care. In Brownhill, Simon; Warin, Jo & Wernersson, Inga (eds.). *Men, Masculinities and Teaching in Early Childhood Education. International perspectives on gender and care* (pp. 13-25). London: Routledge.

www.vbjk.be | vbjk | ©



## How to attract more male workers?



- Focus actions on male job switchers (25-35 years)
- Rethink concepts of ECEC, content of profession and training to avoid exclusion of men:
  - e.g. focus on social subjects and outdoor activities
  - towards a gender conscious interpretation of training and profession