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Attitudes towards men in ECEC. A comparison of parents' views in Austria and Turkey.

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Abstract

What do parents expect from male ECEC professionals – do attitudes of parents differ in relation to cultural backgrounds? This study analyses parent's views from Austria and Turkey, two countries with relevant differences in gender equality status and male participation in ECEC. Possible reasons for the higher proportion of male teachers in Turkey are discussed. The paper builds up on research on men/gender balance in ECEC in Austria (Aigner/Rohrmann, 2012), Turkey (Sak/Sak/Yerlikaya, 2015), and international comparison (Peeters/Emilsen/Rohrmann, 2015), with focus on parent's attitudes towards male ECEC workers. Within the context of research on gender balance in ECEC, the paper analyses attitudes of parents regarding the participation of male workers in everyday routines and in relations to children and families. A quantitative questionnaire was used for cross-country comparison. The original questionnaire was developed in the context of a multi-method research project in Austria, where it was combined with interviews of practitioners. The questionnaire was translated and revised in regard of the situation of ECEC in Turkey. The research follows EECERA ethical guidelines. Participants gave informed consent on the use of their data for research. The results mirror differences and inconsistencies in gender equality status and ECEC qualifications in Austria and Turkey. Despite persisting stereotypes, Austrian parents are generally more positive towards male workers. However, the higher status of ECEC teachers' qualification in Turkey might explain a higher share of male professionals. For a better gender balance in ECEC it is necessary to regard and sometimes confront parents' gendered expectations and attitudes.

Keywords

men, ECEC, parents, gender balance, cross-country comparison

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ATTITUDES TOWARDS MEN IN ECEC

A comparison of parents' views in Austria and Turkey

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Gender equality in ECEC


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Cross-cultural research shows


- a high degree of cross-cultural similarity in gender stereotypes and division of labor,
- but also relevant effects of cultural influences (Best & Williams 2001; Saewyc 2017).

Gender equality has become

- a global issue in the field of education,
- often focusing on discrimination of girls,
- but not on the dominance of women in the elementary & primary sector.



Male workers in ECEC




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Participation of men in the ECEC work force is


- important for children's development
- an element of diversity in the context of quality development in ECEC
- relevant for gender equality in society (Rohrman & Emilsen 2015).

Many stakeholders in the field agree that there should be more men in ECEC.

But **what do parents think about male teachers?**



Research on parents' views





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Research from several countries shows:

- A majority of parents is positive towards male workers;
- only a minority of parents are suspicious about men taking care for their children.

However, reasons for the overall positive attitudes are inconsistent and sometimes contradictory.





The research project

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There has been substantial research on parents' views on men in ECEC, but no cross-cultural research focusing on cultural factors underlying parents' attitudes.


We build up on research on men in ECEC in Austria (Aigner & Rohrmann 2012; Schauer 2017) and Turkey (Sak 2005; Sak et al. 2015), and compare parents' views in both countries.




Main research questions

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- Are parents willing to accept men as teachers and carers for their children?
- Do parents perceive gender differences among male and female professionals?
- What do parents expect from male ECEC professionals?
- Do attitudes of parents differ in relation to cultural backgrounds and traditions?



Cultural background

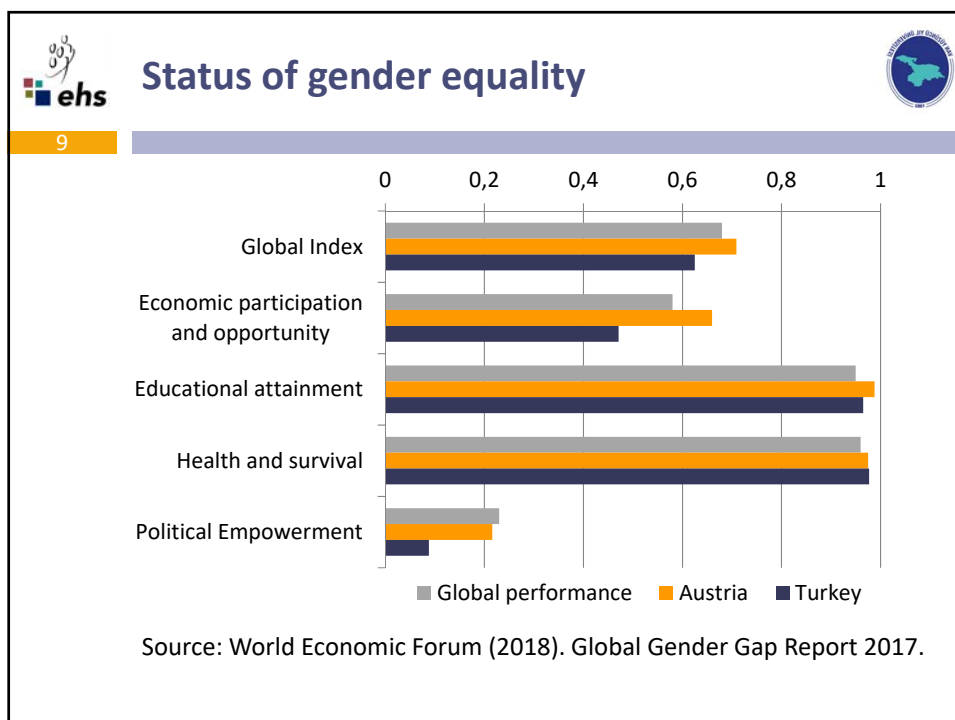




Turkey

- Islamic traditions affecting gender roles in family
- Secular tradition of 1st republic, incl. education system
- Relatively high proportion of female academics

Austria

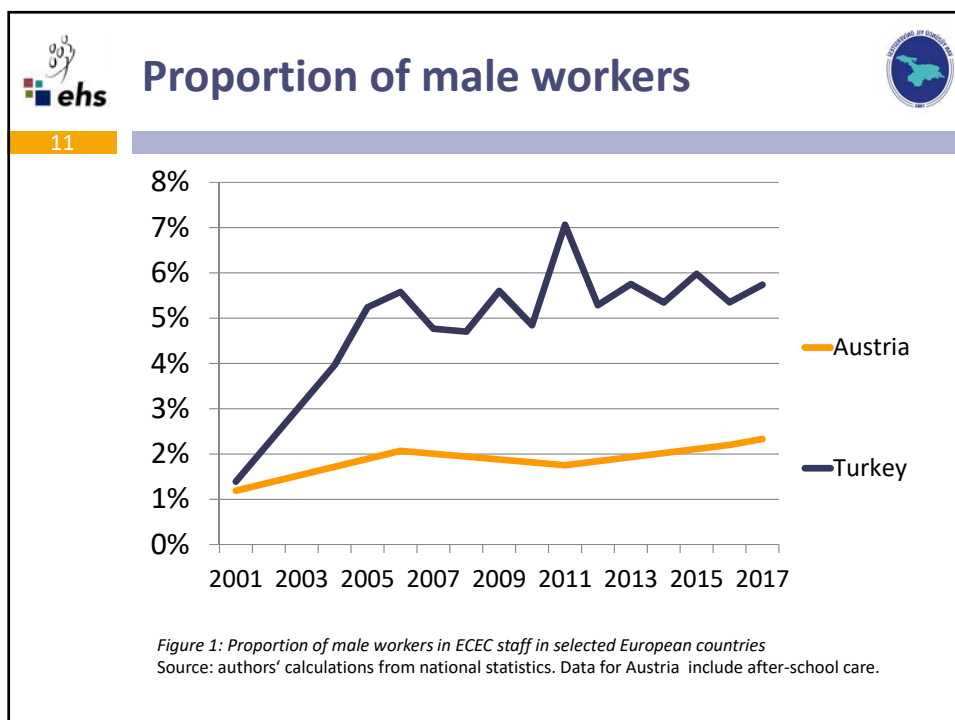
- Catholic traditions affecting gender roles in family
- Education system partly connected to religious providers
- Feminist approaches established in political system




 **ECEC systems in Turkey and Austria** 


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- strong increase of ECEC provision in both countries during the last two decades;
- children in Turkish preschools are mostly 4-6 years old – Austrian kindergartens provide ECEC for children aged 1-6;
- Turkish pre-school teachers have an academic degree – Austrian pedagogues are trained at vocational secondary schools;
- in Turkey, usually one teacher is alone in class, whereas in Austria a pedagogue is supported by an assistant, at least part of the time.






Method




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A **quantitative questionnaire** was used for cross-country comparison.

- The original questionnaire was developed in the Austrian research project (Aigner & Rohrmann 2012).
- The questionnaire was translated to English and then to Turkish.
- 12 main questions, and some demographic features.
- Most questions consisted of a list of sub-questions or items, rated on 3- and 4-point rating scales.
- One question block derived from a German survey on general attitudes on gender roles in family.



Sample



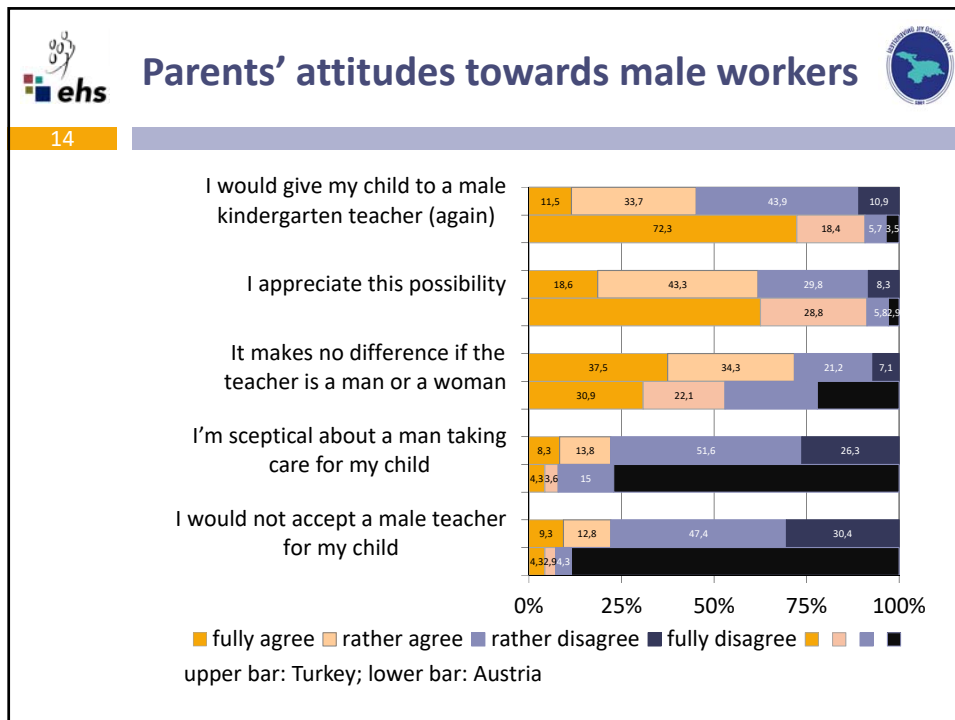
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455 parents participated in the study.

Austrian sample:
143 parents from 9 kindergartens in Tyrolia and Salzburg (83.7% mothers and 14.7% fathers)

Turkish sample:
312 parents from 8 pre-schools in Eastern Anatolia (55.8% mothers and 44.2% fathers)

Turkish parents were younger than Austrian parents.
Austrian children were younger than Turkish children.




Gender differences in behaviors


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Research results on gender differences among ECEC practitioners are inconsistent. What do parents say?

- Turkish parents perceived more differences between male and female teachers, compared to the majority of Austrian parents who didn't see any differences.
- Female workers were said to be more "anxious", more "controlling", but also "patient" with children, and "talk more to children".
- Men were said to "turn a blind eye" more often.
- In Austria, men were experienced as "playing outdoors" with children more often, and to show more acceptance of "children's autonomy".



Do parents want more men?




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More Austrian than Turkish parents definitely want more educated male workers („yes, sure“) (62,9% vs. 17,3%).

Parents who already had experienced male workers were more positive:

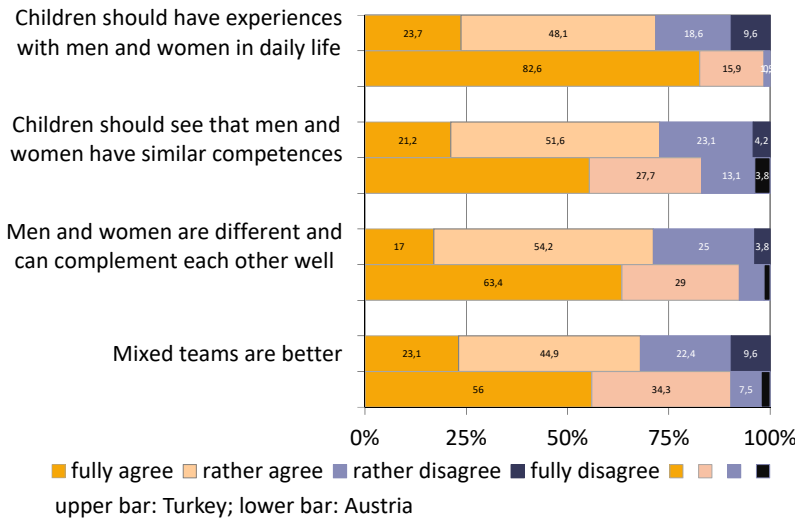
- Nearly all Austrian parents with such experiences appreciated male workers;
- Turkish parents who had experienced a male teacher were significantly more positive towards men in general.
- However, 20% of these parents remained sceptical.



Why should there be more men in ECEC?



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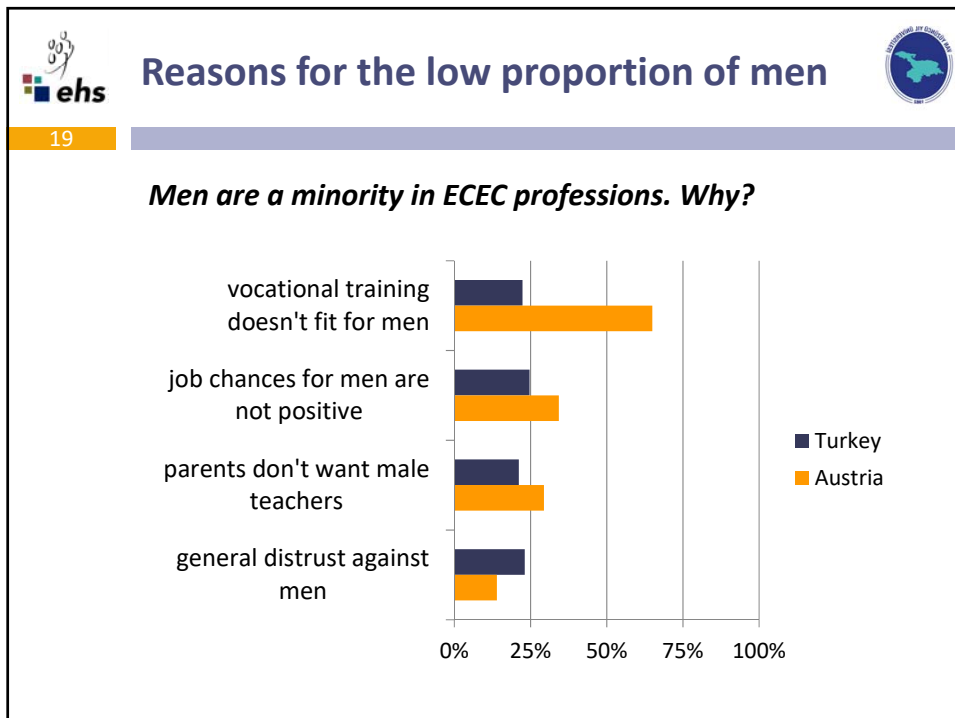
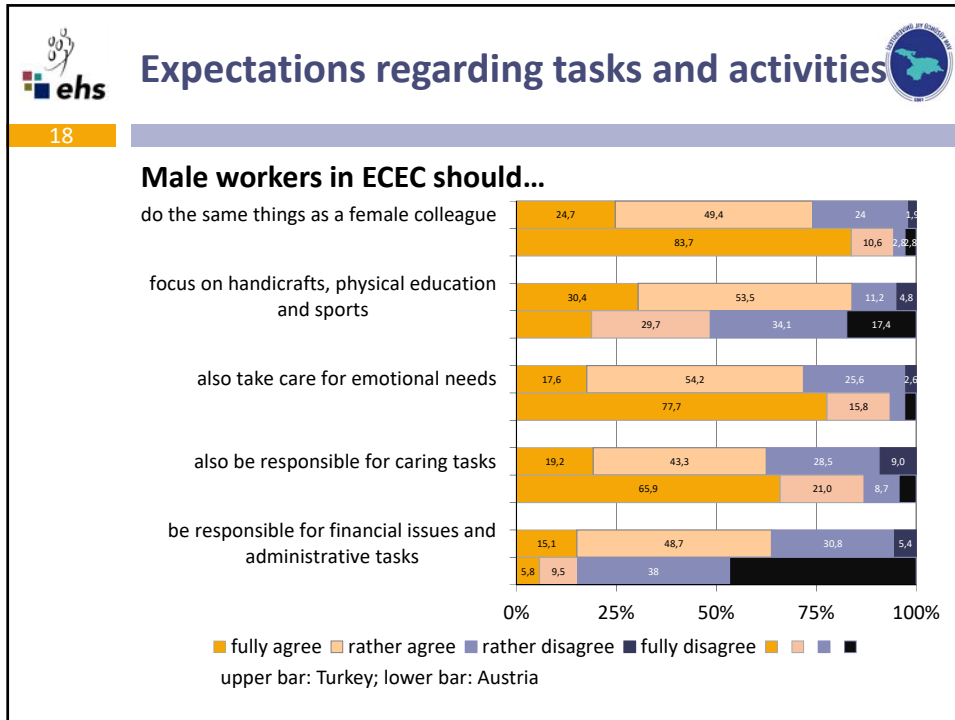


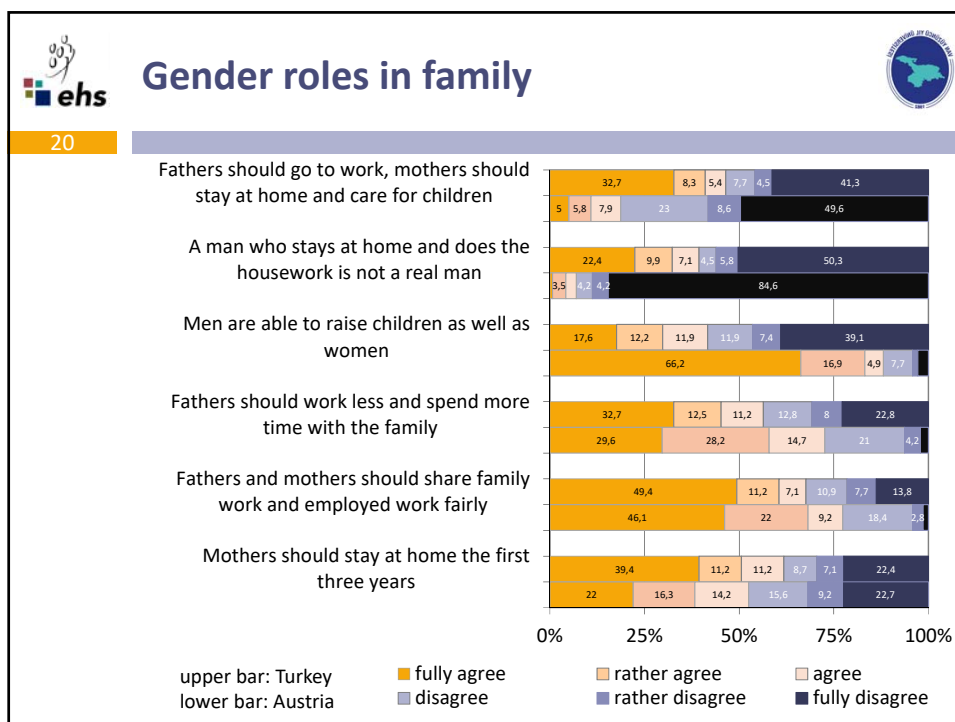
Reason	Turkey (Upper Bar)	Austria (Lower Bar)
Children should have experiences with men and women in daily life	23,7 (fully agree), 48,1 (rather agree), 18,6 (rather disagree), 9,6 (fully disagree)	82,6 (fully agree), 15,9 (rather agree), 1,2 (rather disagree), 1,2 (fully disagree)
Children should see that men and women have similar competences	21,2 (fully agree), 51,6 (rather agree), 23,1 (rather disagree), 4,2 (fully disagree)	56,7 (fully agree), 27,7 (rather agree), 13,1 (rather disagree), 3,8 (fully disagree)
Men and women are different and can complement each other well	17 (fully agree), 54,2 (rather agree), 25 (rather disagree), 3,8 (fully disagree)	63,4 (fully agree), 29 (rather agree), 3,8 (rather disagree), 3,8 (fully disagree)
Mixed teams are better	23,1 (fully agree), 44,9 (rather agree), 22,4 (rather disagree), 9,6 (fully disagree)	56 (fully agree), 34,3 (rather agree), 7,5 (rather disagree), 7,5 (fully disagree)

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

■ fully agree ■ rather agree ■ rather disagree ■ fully disagree

upper bar: Turkey; lower bar: Austria





Summary


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In general,


- male ECEC workers are accepted by a majority of parents,
- but Turkish parents are more often sceptical, compared to Austrian parents.

The results

- mirror differences and inconsistencies in gender equality status of Austria and Turkey,
- but show developments towards gender equality.



Summary




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A reluctance of accepting male teachers is rooted in traditional notions of childcare as “women’s work”.
In Austria, public opinion has shifted towards an appreciation of the role of men in education.

However, the proportion of male ECEC workers remains low in Austria, and is higher in Turkey.

Why???




Conclusion 1: Professionalisation




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Qualification levels of ECEC professionals are well recognized by parents!

- Austrian parents agree that the traditional vocational training doesn’t fit for men.
- In Turkey, the profession might be more acceptable because of the university-based Bachelor degree and the better salaries.



Conclusion 2: Men as “change agents”




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Our results support the idea of **men and women in gender-mixed teams as “change agents”**:

- Gender balance in ECEC can provide examples for changing gender roles in family and society;
- Overcoming gender stereotypes in collaboration with parents can contribute to an increase of male workers in ECEC.

To achieve this aim, a **cultural-sensitive approach** is necessary, taking into account parents’ call for more men as well as parents’ reservations and doubts.



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