

Brody, David; Emilsen, Kari; Rohrmann, Tim & Warin, Jo (2021). **Exploring Career Trajectories of Men in the Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce: Why they leave and why they stay.** Paper presented on the 30th EECERA Annual Conference, Online, 10.9.2021.

**Abstract**

We aim to understand why men leave and stay in ECEC and what gender has to do with these career decisions. This international study compared 37 dropouts and persisters in 12 countries on five continents, involving seventeen researchers. Previous research about work longevity, particularly in American child care settings identified internal and external factors (Totenhagen et al., 2016) while this study examines multiple factors, using an international context and focusing on men. Micro, meso, and macro lenses frame the various factors effecting career decisions. The micro level relies on self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and agency (Bandura, 2006) theories. The meso level uses theories of organizational cultures (McDonald, Thorpe, & Irvine, 2018). A qualitative methodology involved narrative and semi-structured interviews and storyline drawings. Grounded theory framed the analysis in which themes were drawn from data. Anonymity was preserved and participants signed an informed consent. Ethical approval was obtained from three universities. Findings showed how factors at the micro, meso, and macro levels affected men's career decisions, including professionalization, leadership, and everyday interactions between staff. Internal factors were found to mediate between the individual, societal and cultural forces, as well as national policies that either pulled or pushed men from ECEC. Gender was found to be overriding factor, either in the foreground or background, but always present. This study shows how international collaborative research sheds new light on a complex issue. The results call for gender-sensitive policies at the institutional as well as the national level.

**Keywords**

gender, men in ECEC, career decisions, internal factors, societal factors

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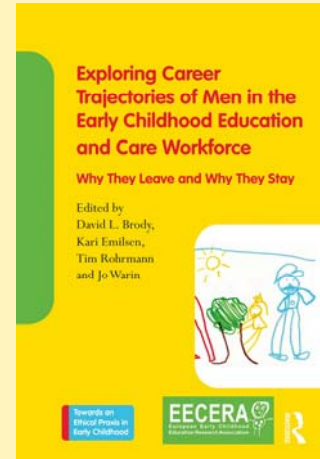
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**Symposium: Men's Career Trajectories in ECEC**

**Chair: David Brody**

- Exploring Career Trajectories of Men in the Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce: Why they leave and why they stay  
**David Brody, Tim Rohrmann, Kari Emilsen**
- A cultural lens on job turnover and dropout of male students and workers in the field of ECEC  
**Tim Rohrmann, David Brody, Jean-Yves Plaisir**
- Four Men at the ECEC Cross-road: A Comparative Analysis of their Intrinsic Motivations, Work Experiences and Career Trajectories  
**Jean-Yves Plaisir**

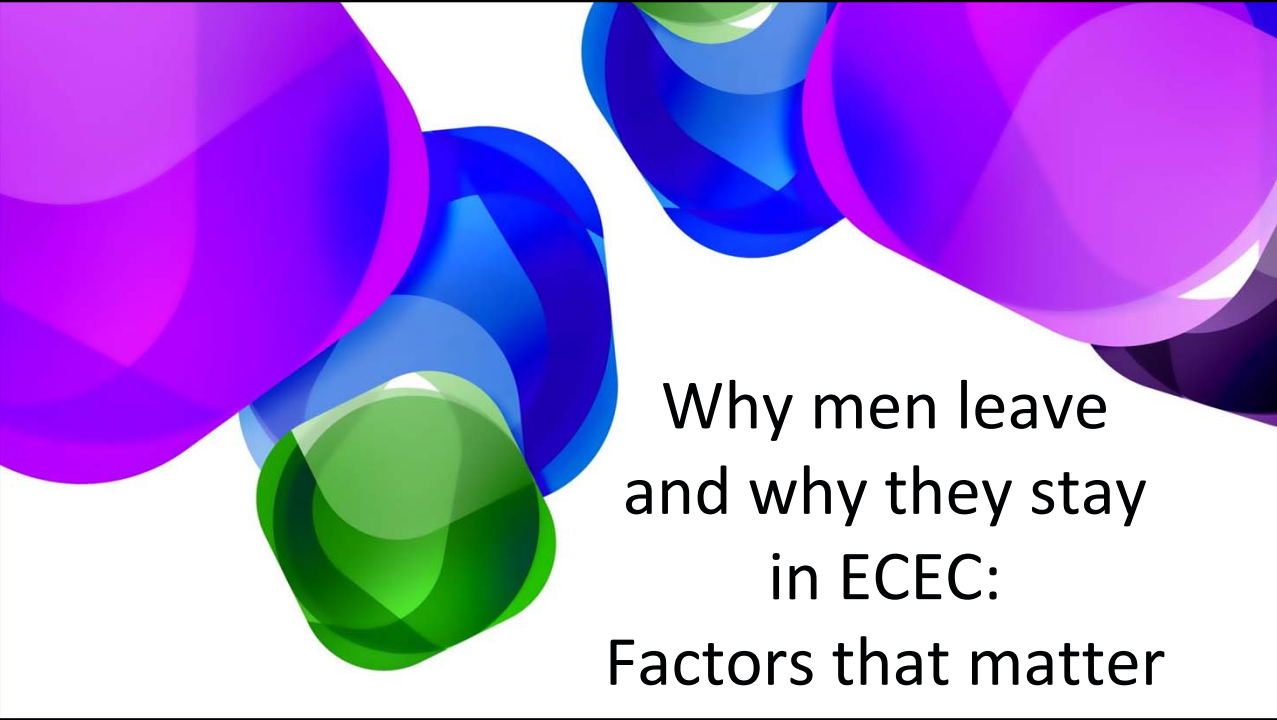


**A 12-country project on gender in ECEC**

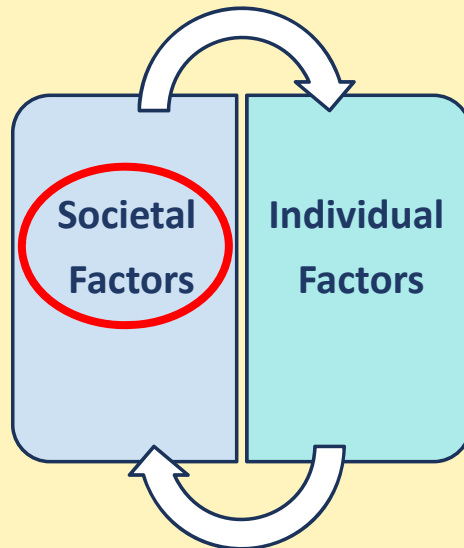


## Our study addresses three questions

- Why do some men drop out from working in ECEC in the 12 researched countries?
- Why do other men in the countries persist in their ECEC careers?
- How does gender inform and shape men's career decisions in ECEC?



Why men leave  
and why they stay  
in ECEC:  
Factors that matter



## Professionalization

### Staff support

*"Let's say, you [are] teaching something, and you make a mistake. . . , no one will call you to crucify you, it's all about learning."*

(Riaan, persister, S. Africa)

### Disconnect between theory and practice

*"Teacher training misses its target and it is general. It doesn't touch practical issues we encounter in our daily teaching."*

(Jun, dropout, China)

## Leadership and governance

### Push

*"Actually, my major concern was principals. We could not get on with them. I still think that they thought of ECEC classrooms as financial sources, and they were not aware of the pedagogical importance of this period."*

(Orhan, dropout, Turkey)

### Pull

*"I'm closely followed up by my leader, at the same time, my leader gives me a lot of freedom to do whatever I want, really."*

(Norbert, persister, Norway)



## Workplace relationships

### Distrust

*"I was standing at the side and then some kids climbed up [the fence], and I stood by and made sure that it went well, and then she came... and was kind of saying: 'Yes, it's dangerous, can't climb there' "*

(Nicola, dropout, Norway)

### Inclusion

*"I guess, for me, in a female dominated workforce, the connection that men have between each other is just important in life, really. But when you haven't got that in a workforce, it's actually kind of hard in many ways."*

(Herbert, persister, Australia)



## Societal factors

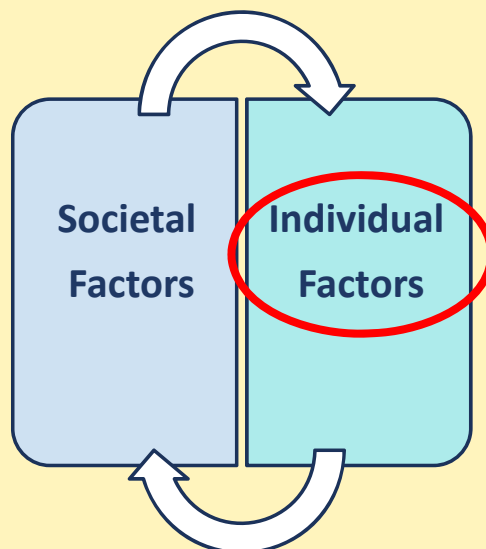


### Feminization of ECEC

*"I already felt a bit inferior by being in a women-driven field in which I know that some parents will be a little extra vigilant over me just because I am a man."*  
(Sven, dropout, Sweden)

### Reactions of family and friends

*"When she [a girlfriend] learned that I was working at a preschool she looked me in the eye and just asked me straight out, "Are you gay"? There is nothing wrong with being gay in general. But the comment was different . . . you know, "what's wrong with you"?"*  
(Kevin, dropout, Iceland)



## Intrinsic motivations



### Self-fulfillment and relatedness

*"When kids are around me it's where I belong. It's my place to relax . . .  
I don't feel [as if] I'm working for one second."  
(Amos, persister, Israel)*

### Competence and effectiveness

*"I find it very gratifying to mould a child.... You know, that you are shaping them  
towards their future."  
(Riaan, persister, S. Africa)*

## Agency



### Self reflection

*"When I bent down, my students were hugging and kissing me, and we were  
chatting about everything. Therefore, I knew I was on the right path."  
(Mehmet, persister, Turkey)*

### Resistance

*"I was one of the most defiant sons of bitches around. They brought in workbooks,  
and I said: 'You are not putting a workbook in my kindergarten'".  
(Tzvika, dropout, Israel)*

## Masculinity, sexuality, and resistance

### Why are you here?

*"Yeah, so it was weird being a guy. It was different, and you were out of place. I didn't let it really bother me.... I was different and maybe I needed to take some extra steps just in case parents thought it was weird."*

(Andrew, dropout, Australia)

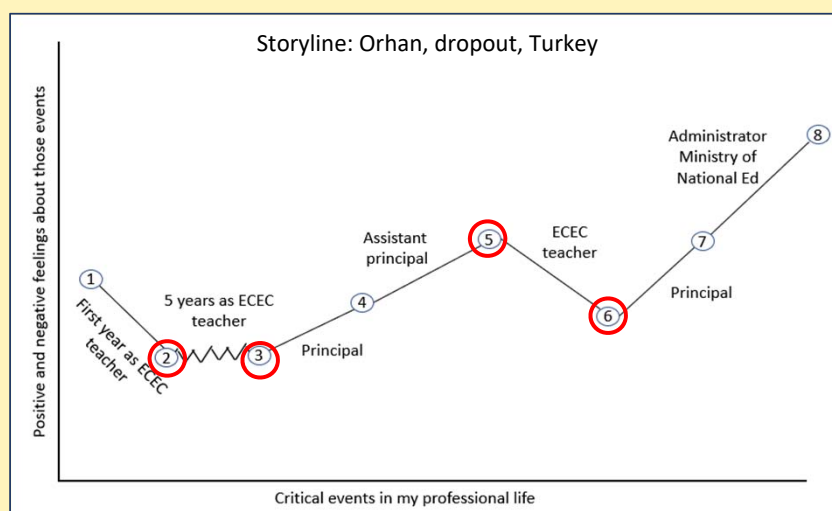
### Negotiating masculinity

*"It would be important for men to understand how they can be perceived, but yet still do these things that children need".*

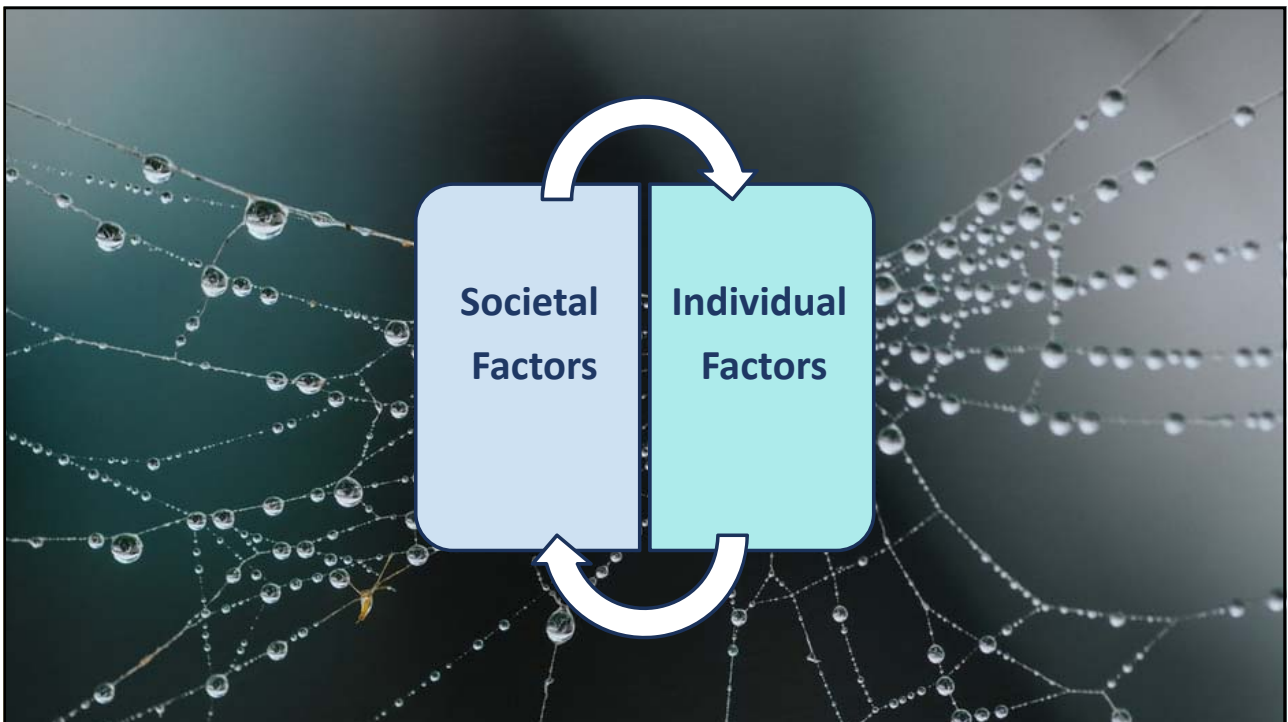
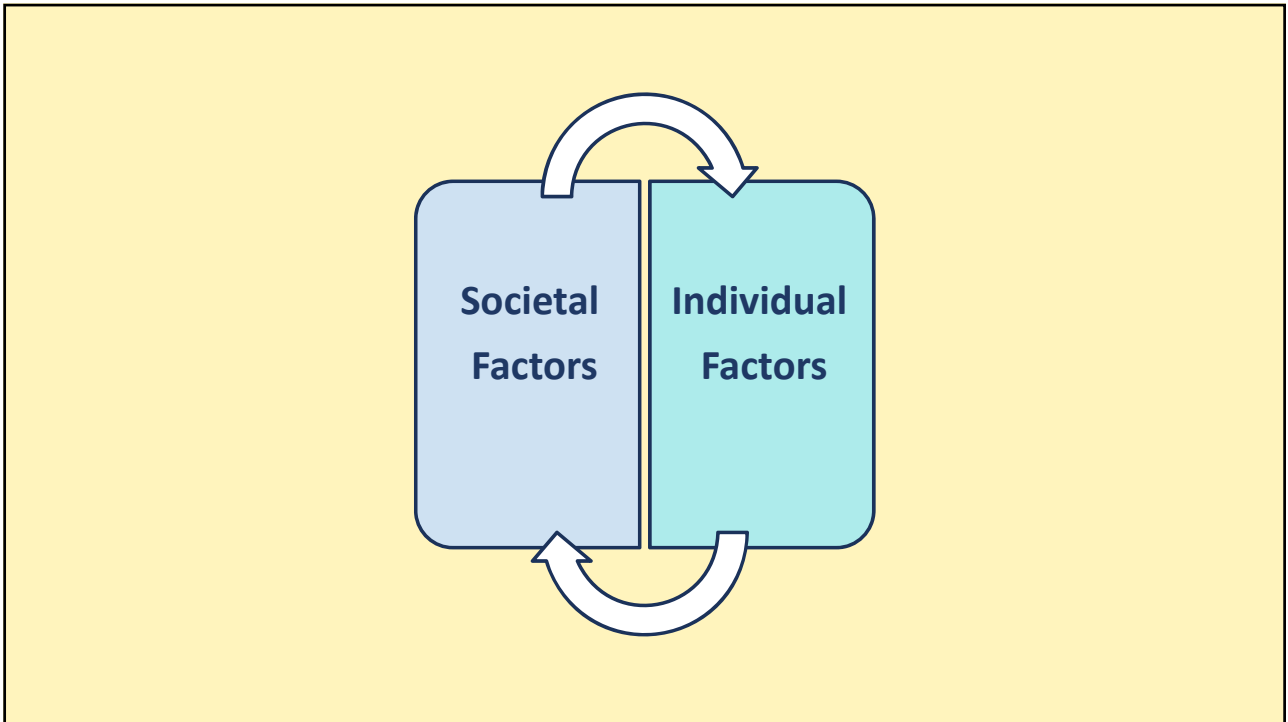
(Marcos, persister, USA)



## Critical moments







# MORE MEN IN ECEC

## Recommendations

### Towards a gender-sensitive workforce

#### *Taking gender into account*

- **Men's personal agency** affects their career decisions once they enter the profession.
- **The role of the leader** is of importance.
- **Peer support** is needed.
- **Everyday action:** *"One aspect of this innovation would be training for both leaders and staff to understand the importance of everyday actions on the well-being of men (and women) in the workplace" p. 191.*
- **Breaking down gender barriers:** *"Problematizing gender norms involves challenging the power of hegemonic masculinity at the macro, meso, and micro levels".*

## ***Towards a gender-reflective, gender-mixed ECEC workforce***

- **Recognize the importance of cultural differences** regarding gender and gender equality, as well as different institutional contexts and structures in educational systems.
- Keep in mind that **translating research into policy entails a practical awareness** of how policy decisions are made and implemented at the meso and macro levels of governance.

## ***Towards a gender-reflective, gender- mixed ECEC workforce***

### **Macro level:**

***Joined-up gender policies can bring about gender change over time.***

Make an effort to work across different government departments and administrations and bring together various stakeholders.

### **Meso level:**

Transformative leadership, support structures for gender-mixed teams and for male workers, and gender-sensitive approaches to practice have to be **enshrined in ECEC policies, frameworks, and curricula.**

## ***Towards a gender-reflective, gender-mixed ECEC workforce***

### **Address fear of paedophilia:**

Teach children about their own body and support their developing integrity and resilience against abuse.

Develop clear child-safeguarding policies in ECEC, while at the same time broach the issue of a problematic general distrust against men

Develop a professional approach to close body contact.

*Overcome the idea that physical closeness is 'natural' between women and children, whereas it is potentially 'dangerous' when a man is involved.*

## **What to bring home?**

*"It is the joy of working and being with children that makes men stay, and they deserve qualification paths and working conditions that keep this spirit alive".*

*"It is our task to create open spaces where ECEC workers can position themselves as men and women and can develop a gender-conscious understanding of professionalism that goes beyond traditional notions of gender"*

(Brody et al. 2021, p.194)