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The key aim in undertaking this research was to identify the supports and barriers to male educators' participation in ECE. OECD (2019) reported one of the nine recommendations to address the current crisis was encouraging the participation of men. While pay presents a major challenge, research identified relationships within the workplace as critical (Bullough, 2015; Gallant & Riley, 2017). Being a gender minority can be isolating; inclusive practices are pivotal in retention (Acker, 2012; Clow, Ricciardelli, & Bartfay, 2015; Sobiraj, et.al., 2011). This small percentage of men in early education (2.5%) is situated in occupational sex-segregation. The theoretical framework was guided by previous research findings and the emerging themes based on the empirical data collected (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017). These investigations utilised design contrasts and qualitative methods were used to obtain educator perspectives with application of abductive analytical techniques. The major ethical concerns for this thesis include confidentiality, interviewee emotional wellbeing and informed consent. These were thoroughly considered in the ethics application approved by UQHREC. The findings identify while men may be presented as a source of pride for a centre, they also challenge social norms and disrupt established social order. Prejudices from female educators are pervasive if hidden or presented as the views of parents or broader society. The support and authentic inclusion of female and male colleagues is critical. This demonstrates the need for informed action to remove the structural and attitudinal barriers to men's participation. Inclusion of men requires change to value work in ECE as professional.

Keywords

occupational sex segregation, male teachers, early childhood education, wellbeing, gender and education

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