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McHale, Joanne (2023). **Men's professional agency in the Irish ECEC workforce**. Paper presented on the 31th EECERA Annual Conference, Estoril/Portugal, 31.8.2023.

Men are under-represented in the early childhood workforce worldwide and Ireland is no exception with a figure of less than 2% (Pobal, 2022). This research sets out to understand agentic factors in men's professional practice in a women majority profession (Schaub, 2015) and the structures that influence it. This research builds on previous literature on agency in the male ECEC workforce (Brody and Gor Ziv, 2020; Brody, Andra & Kedar, 2021), analysing the data from the experiences of men in the Irish context. The data will draw on understandings of gender and professional agency in care and education (Murray, 2013; Schoon & Eccles, 2014; Smith, 2011). Taking a social constructivist perspective, this research analyses qualitative interviews with men working in ECEC in Ireland to understand their motivations and experiences as a minority in a field traditionally associated with maternal understandings of care. Data for this research was collected as part of a doctoral thesis on men's trajectories in the ECEC sector in Ireland. Ethical approval was granted by UCL Institute of Education and standard ethical considerations of confidentiality, anonymity, data storage and right of withdrawal were observed (Bera, 2011). Findings suggest that some men developed a strong sense of their professional agency while others experienced instances of their professional agency being undermined and the influence on these experiences will be discussed. Implications for a diversified workforce and understanding of gender challenges within professional practice will be explored.

Keywords

agency, professional practice, men in ECEC, gender diversity, pedagogy

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