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Elkarif, Halah (2024). **How do men with different cultural backgrounds survive in the ‘feminine’ ECE profession?** Paper presented on the 32nd Annual EECERA Conference, Brighton/United Kingdom, 4.9.2024.

This study explores how male educators with different cultural backgrounds navigate challenges within the ECE field, traditionally perceived as a 'feminine' profession. While prior research has identified various challenges faced by male ECE educators (Yan, 2018), and explored 'why' they choose to pursue working in this non-traditional career choice (Brody et al., 2021), this study uniquely investigates 'how' they manage to survive within the ECE field; mostly dominated by female staff. The study draws upon identity control theory (Burke, 1991) and stress and coping theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), both emphasizing individual agency, navigation of challenges, and adaptation. Within a generic qualitative approach, 18 face-to-face interviews were conducted with current male ECE educators in Germany, including participants with different cultural backgrounds. Adhering to EECERA ethical code for early childhood researchers, participants provided written and verbal taped consents for recording the interviews, signifying their voluntary participation in the research. The thematic analysis identified a number of actions, choices, strategies, and belief systems developed by the participants, serving as their 'survival mechanisms' within the ECE field. These mechanisms were employed, either consciously or unconsciously, on three different levels: personal, interpersonal, and professional. The adopted mechanisms, initially perceived as individual, were found to be shared among many participants, often unknowingly. Moreover, evidence demonstrates that cultural factors influenced the development of distinct mechanisms among participants with migrant backgrounds. The uncovering of these shared and culturally influenced mechanisms holds practical implications for supporting male ECE educators to 'thrive' rather than merely 'survive' in the ECE profession.

Keywords

Male educators, feminine profession, survival mechanisms, cultural background, thematic analysis

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How do men with different cultural backgrounds survive in the ‘feminine’ ECE profession?

Keywords: Male educators, feminine profession, survival mechanisms, cultural background, thematic analysis

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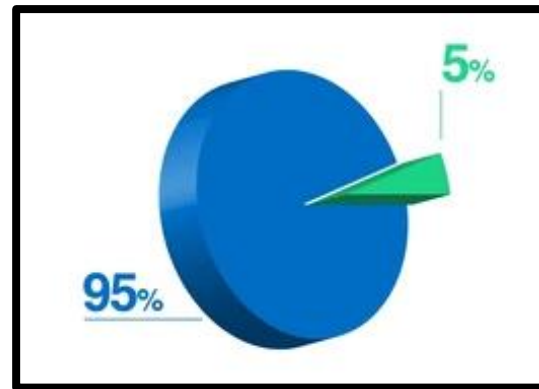
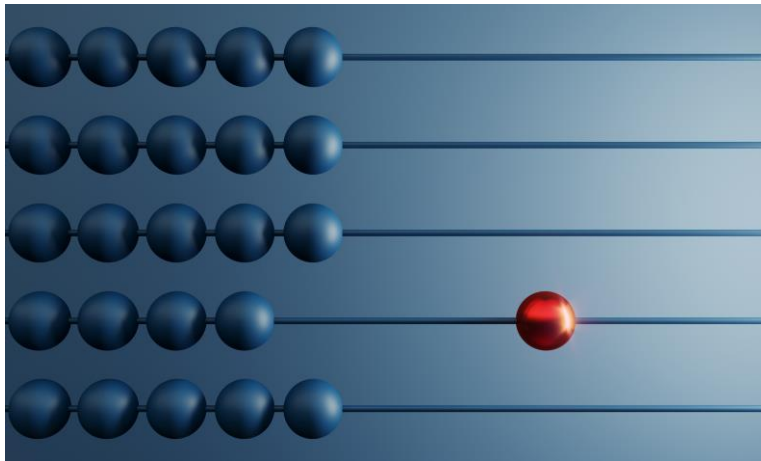
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GERMANY

Outline

- 1** Introduction & Overview
- 2** The findings
- 3** Discussion & Recommendations

Introduction

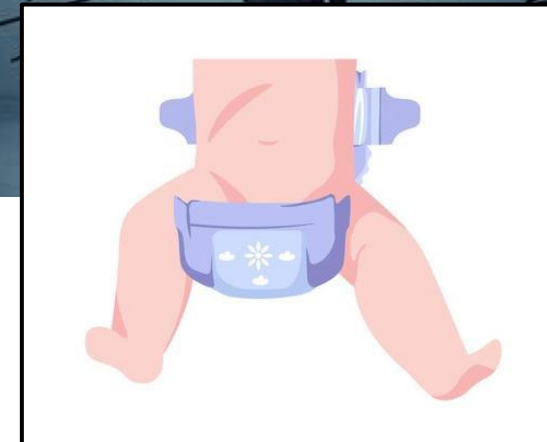
- Male ECE educators represent a minority in the ECE field.
- International phenomenon - Majority are women !
- **ECE field is commonly traditionally perceived as a ‘feminine job’**



Highlights

Male ECE educators face many challenges in this 'feminine' field.

- **Mistrust and Suspicion** because of the '**fear of pedophilia**' issue (Cruickshank et al., 2021; Eidevald et al., 2018; Hedlin et al., 2018; Mistry & Sood, 2022; Saigol & Danish, 2016; Xu, 2019).
- Concerns about 'child safety' have led to a '**social stigma**' against men who wish to work with 'young children' (Mathwasa & Sibanda, 2021).
- The challenge becomes more **complex** given the intimate nature of caregiving tasks, such as '**diaper-changing**'.



Highlights

Male ECE educators face many challenges in this 'feminine' field.

- The **social construction of ECE field as a 'feminine profession'** has led to some contradiction on the male ECE educators as **'men'** in this 'feminine field. According to Brody et al. (2021), Moosa & Bhana (2023) and Plaisir et al. (2021), men in ECE are often perceived as "**not real men**" or as having **'less masculinity'**, and even sometimes their ***sexuality*** was questioned.



Highlights

Male ECE educators face many challenges in this 'feminine' field.

- The experience of being a **minority** within a predominantly female environment (Ayub & Yasin, 2022), which can lead to feelings of **isolation** (Cruickshank et al., 2021) and affect integration and visibility (Santos et al., 2022).
- **The low pay and low social status** (Pasiningsih & Pancaningrum, 2023)
- The lack of support from **family and friends**, along with potentially negative comments.



The list goes on. . .

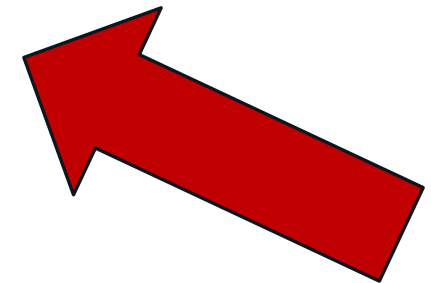
Previous research & Current research

Previous research has extensively highlighted various **difficulties, barriers, obstacles, and challenges** faced by male ECE educators, influencing their engagement, as noted by Cruickshank (2014); and Mathwasa & Sibanda (2021).



Many previous researchers explored **'why'** male ECE educators choose to pursue working in this non-traditional career choice (Brody et al.,2021)

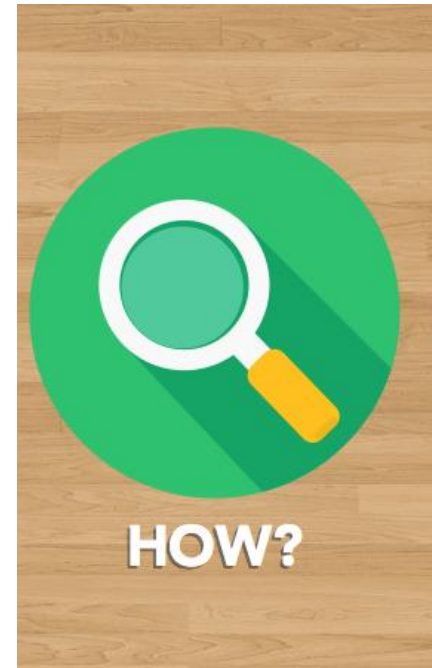
How do men survive in the 'feminine' ECE profession?



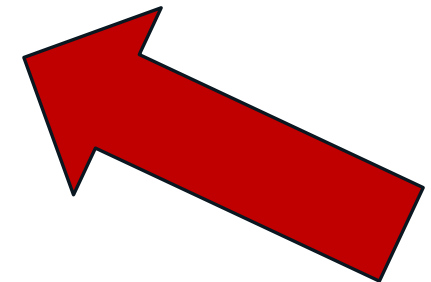
Previous research & Current research

- The experiences and *strategies* of male early childhood educators (Santos et al., 2022) - **Portugal**
- How male ECE educators *position* themselves in ECE (Hedlin et al., 2018) - **Sweden**
- Maneuvering suspicions of being a potential pedophile (Eidevald et al., 2018) - **Sweden**

Cultural background



How do men survive in the 'feminine' ECE profession?



How do men with different cultural backgrounds survive in the 'feminine' ECE profession?

Data, methods, & participants



Men represent 8% of the ECEC workforce in Germany (Autorengruppe Fachkräftebarometer, 2023).



Data, methods, & participants

18 participants



9
German participants

Male ECE educators in Germany
and

9
migrant Participants (MENA)

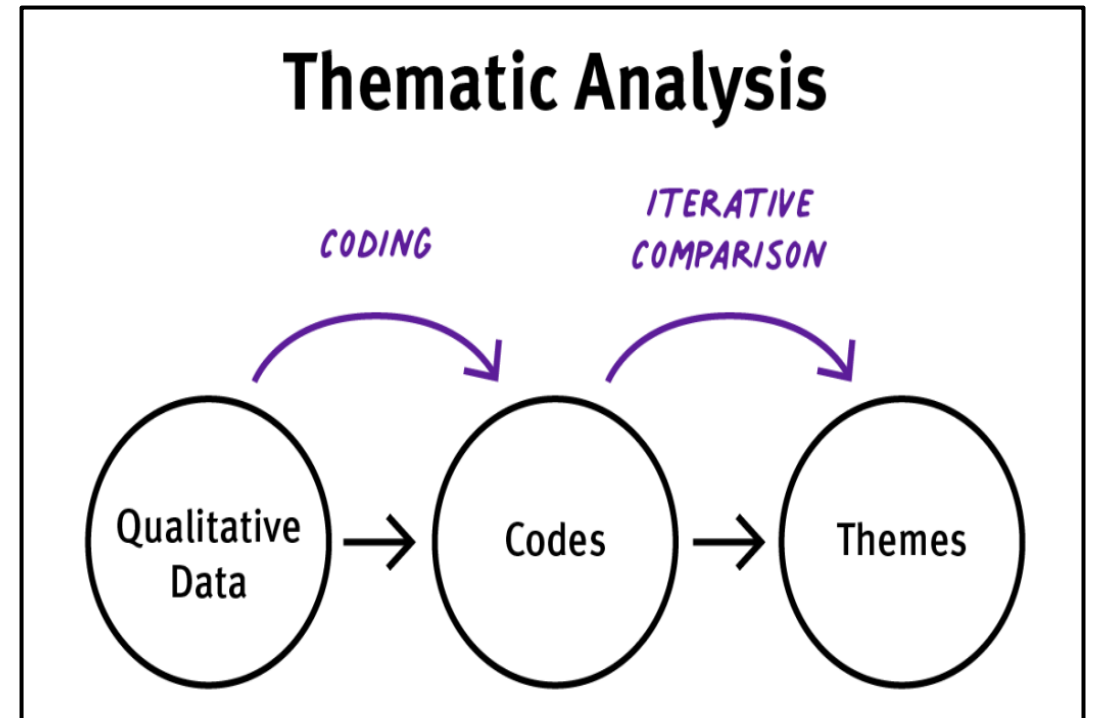
Data, methods, & participants



Broader topic



How do men with different cultural backgrounds survive in the 'feminine' ECE profession?



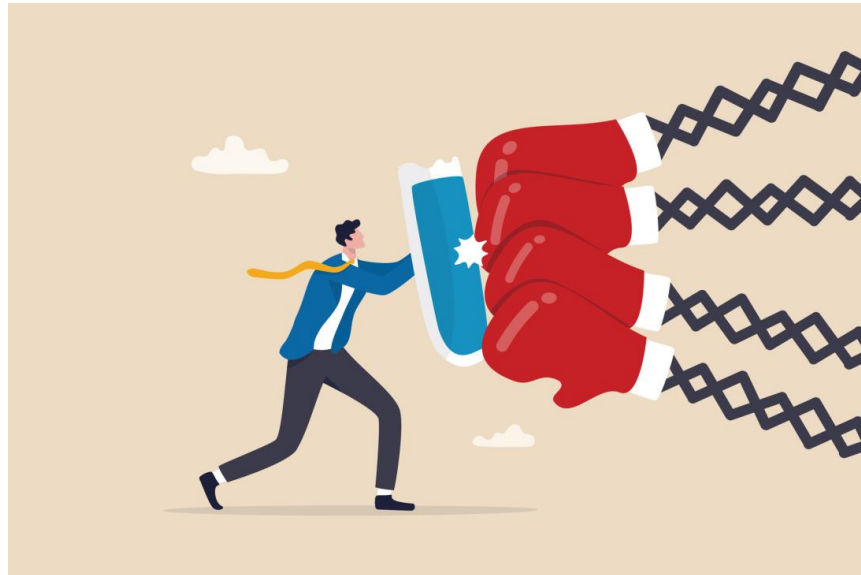
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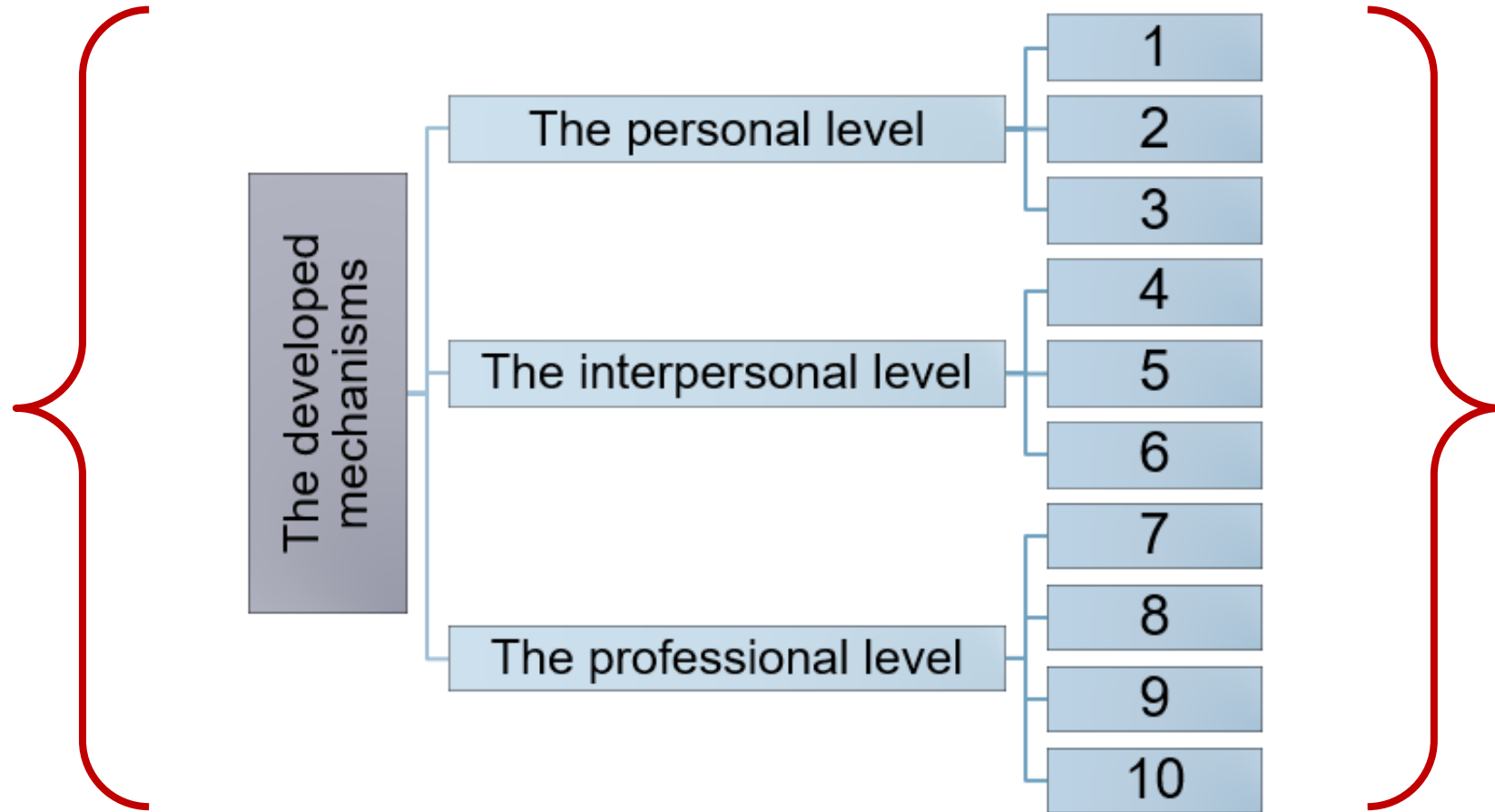
How do men with different cultural backgrounds survive in the 'feminine' ECE profession?

The thematic analysis identified a number of **actions, choices, strategies, and belief systems** developed by the participants, serving as their **'survival mechanisms'** within the ECE field.

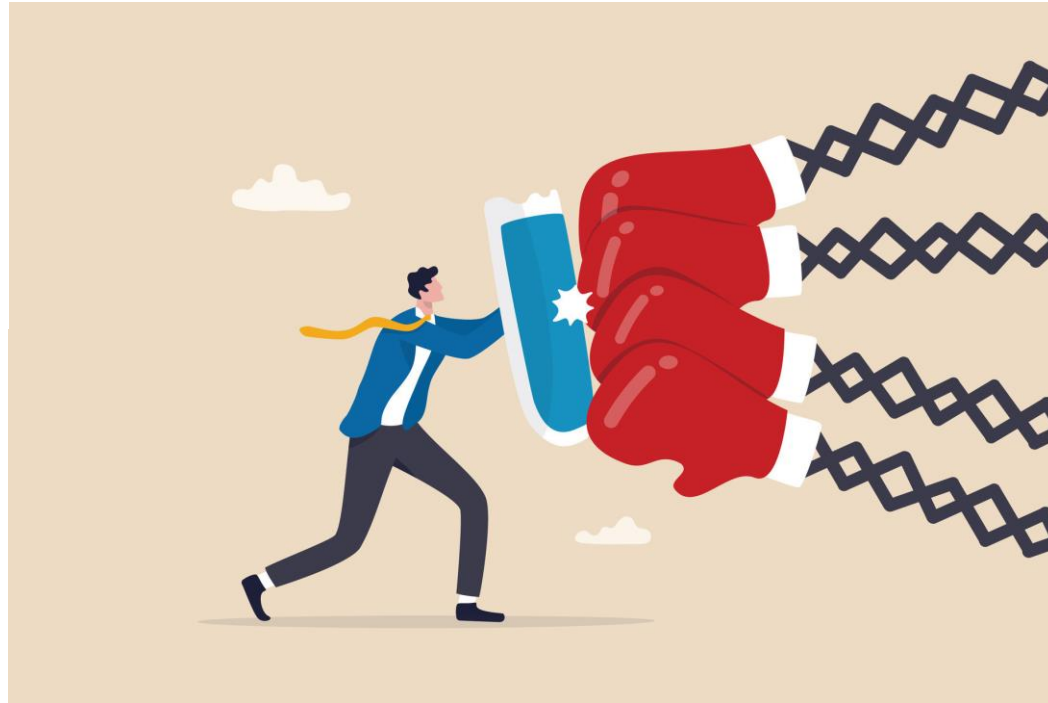


- Mistrust and Suspicion**
- Questioning their motivations**
- Questioning their Abilities**
- Questioning their masculinities and even their sexuality**
- Gendered Expectations**
- Reactions from family, and friends**
- Isolation**

How do men with different cultural backgrounds survive in the 'feminine' ECE profession?



1- The 'safety blanket'



**Mistrust
and
Suspicion**

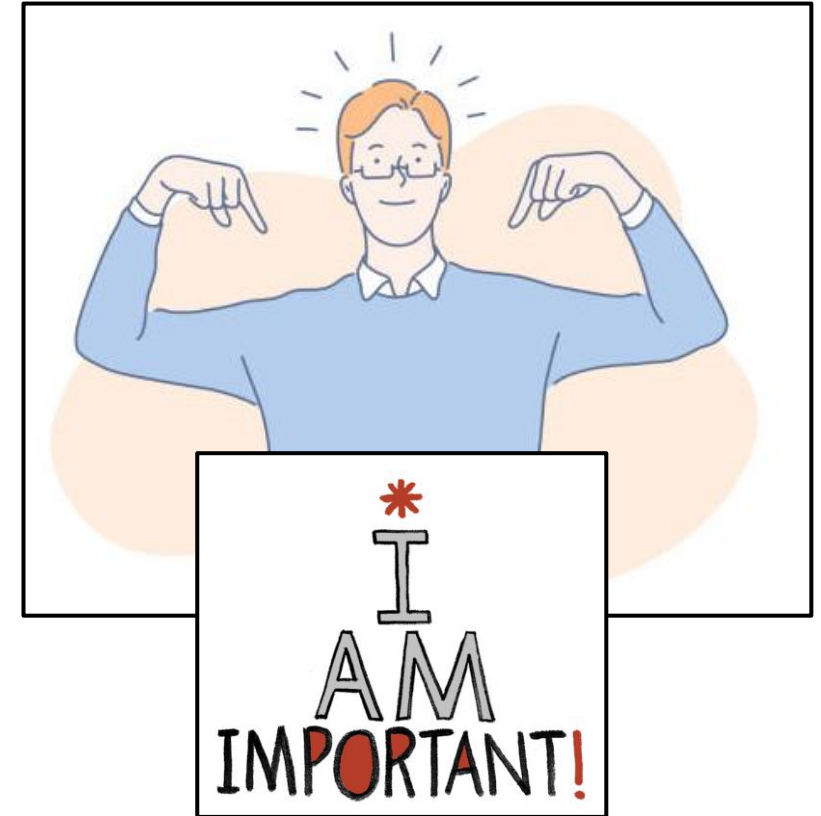
2- Emphasizing Unique Roles and Specialized Competencies

I am important as a man!

I am important as a person!

I am important as a professional!

I am important as a person with a
migration background!



3- Adopting non-traditional masculinities

Many participants detached themselves from ‘traditional masculinities’ while positioning themselves away from the ‘other traditional men’.



4- The filtering

When discussing their friends' unsupportive or negative reactions, participants often referred to these *in the past tense*, indicating that such responses were part of their history.

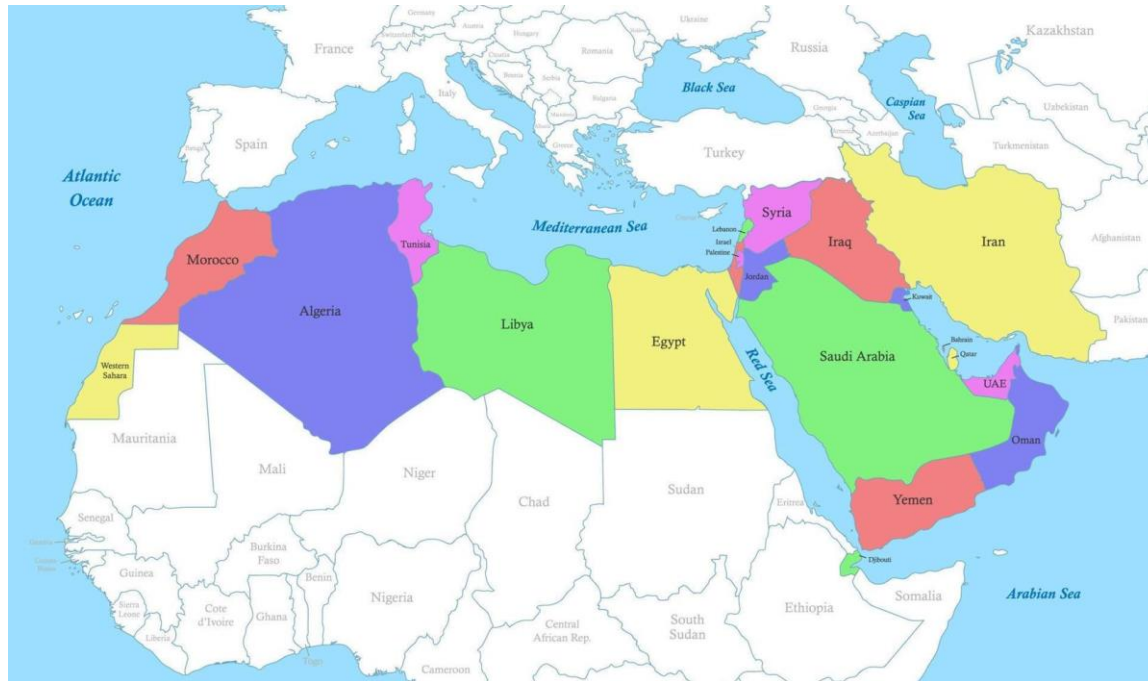


5- Selective disclosure

Some migrant participants chose not to fully inform their families about their decision to become ECE educators in Germany.



5- Selective disclosure



less pressure and fewer judgments

6- Building Resilience through Time and Experience



7- Self-protection strategies in practice

As a man in this field, you have to be CAREFUL ALL THE TIME!



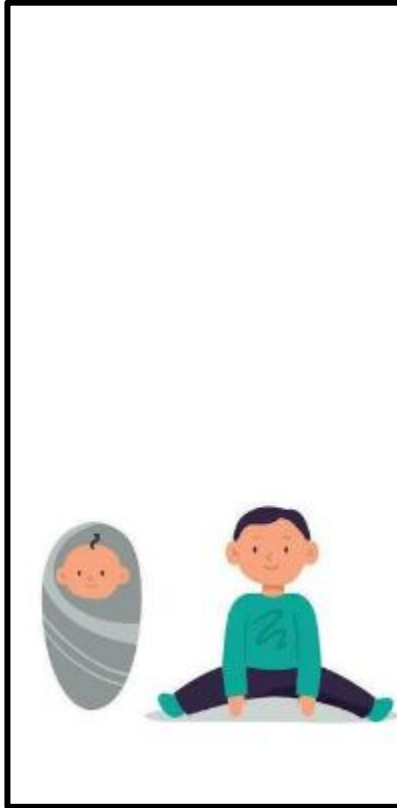
8- Responding to gendered tasks

Many participants did not mind doing such tasks, often characterizing such tasks as '**masculine**'. Some migrant participants even initiated '**gendered initiatives**' to assist their female colleagues.

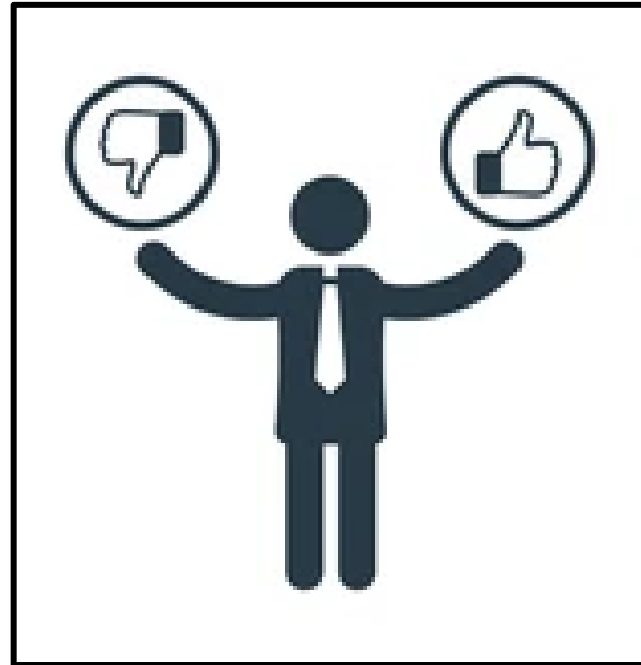
- Carrying heavy things
- Repairing things (e.g., lamps)
- Christmas tree's decoration



9- Age preferences



Younger than 3 years old



Older than 3 years old



10- Opting for ECE institutions with ‘other male colleagues’





Merging these results with...

When examining **the professional trajectories** of male ECE educators in relation to employment stability within specific institutions or movement between different ones, **a notable pattern emerges.**

At the time of the interviews, **more than half of the participants were still employed at their first Kita, often the same institution where they completed their initial training.**



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Developed Survival Mechanisms

The findings demonstrate that it took male ECE educators a significant amount of time—often many years—to cultivate and develop these defensive strategies, build trust within their ECE institutions, and enhance their resilience, which affected their career trajectories as well.





Targeted support

Therefore, we assert the need for increased **support** targeting specifically male ECE educators, enabling them to more rapidly achieve stability and self-trust in their professional roles. **Targeted interventions can help accelerate this process.**





Reflexivity

We argue that **reflexivity** is crucial in the professional development of male ECE educators.



The male ECE educators should be encouraged to **reflect on their own developed defense mechanisms** and critically evaluate both the **conscious and unconscious** use of these strategies in their professional practice. Moreover, they need to recognize that mechanisms they perceive as individual are often shared collectively among many of their peers.

Reflexivity

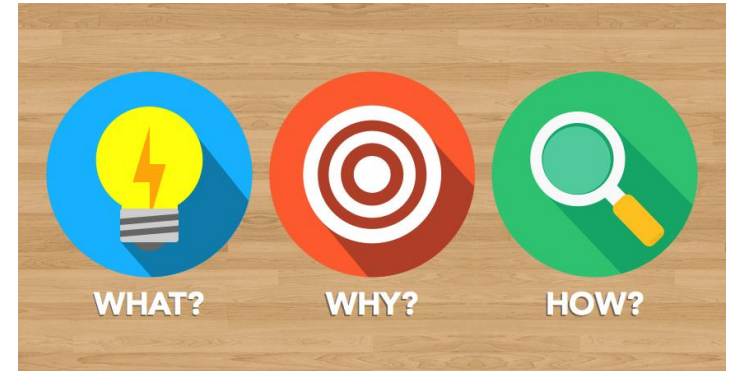




Developed Survival Mechanisms

By exploring the "**How**" (How male educators survive in the 'feminine' ECE profession?), this study has significantly contributed to **academic knowledge** about the issue of men in ECE.

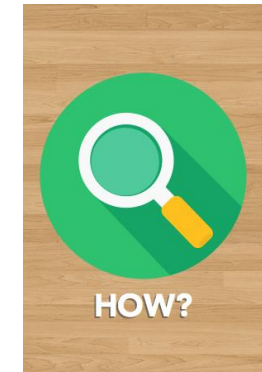
It also demonstrated that **cultural factors influenced the development of distinct mechanisms among participants with migrant backgrounds**. For instance, the mechanism of 'selective disclosure' was only observed among male ECE educators with migration backgrounds.





Thriving, not just Surviving

We assert the need for **more qualitative research** that directly addresses this question and engages with men, particularly within diverse cultural and social contexts, **in order to support male ECE educators to 'thrive' rather than merely 'survive' in the ECE profession.**

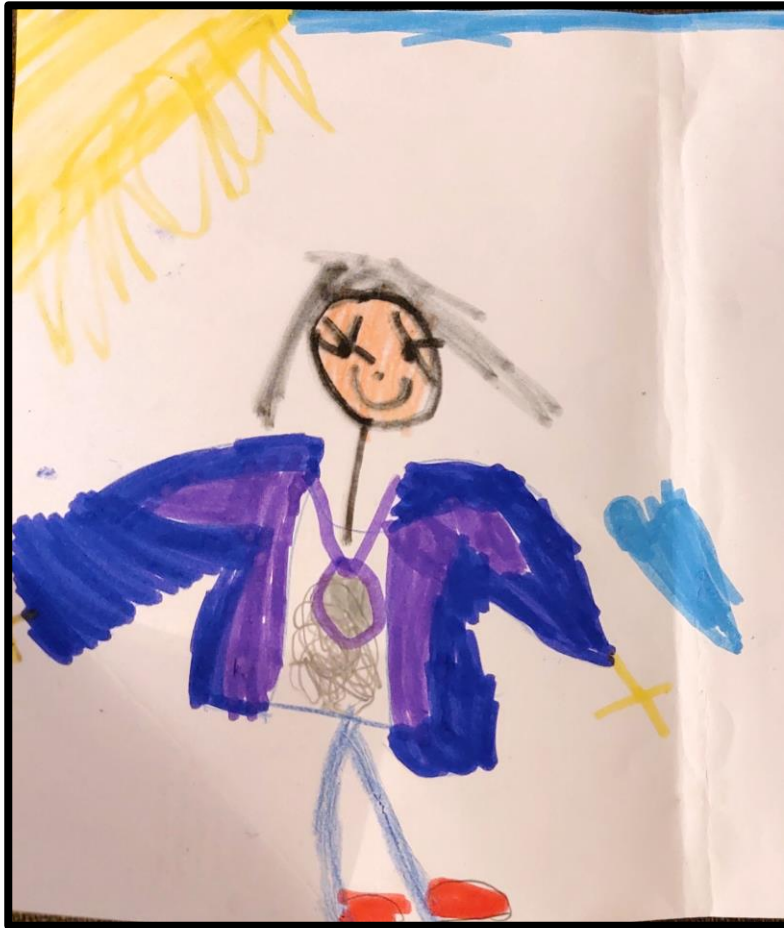


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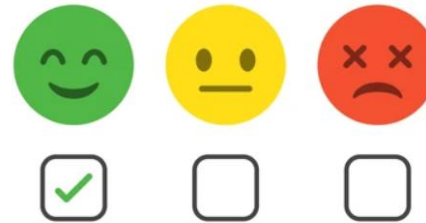
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