

McHale, Joanne (2026). **MoMEC: Mentoring Men in Early Childhood Education and Care**. Paper presented on the 34th Annual EECERA Conference, Funchal/Madeira, Portugal, 26.8.2026.

Abstract

This international collaboration aimed to create the necessary conditions for developing a gender-mixed work force in ECEC. Research was conducted with men working in ECEC across multiple contexts (Türkiye, Germany, Norway, USA and Ireland) to evaluate and develop mentoring strategies with the aim of increasing participation and retention of men as educators in ECEC. Internationally, men's participation and retention in the ECEC workforce remains low. Previous studies have indicated that men's career satisfaction can be impacted by their minority status and reactions to their presence. However, this can be ameliorated by good leadership and supportive mentoring (Brody et al., 2021). This research is framed by understandings of gender as embedded in social structures (Connell, 2009) and influencing men's career decisions and experiences in women-majority occupations (Schaub, 2015). Mentoring frameworks and their application to men in ECEC are considered. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed. Anonymous questionnaires were distributed in the respective represented countries to establish men's mentoring needs. Ethical Clearance was granted from the respective university ethics committees of each of the researchers on this project. Considerations such as anonymity (by design), voluntary informed participation, risk mitigation and data storage and retention were of primary concern. The research findings demonstrate the nuanced nature of men's experiences and the need for targeted mentoring approaches to increase and retain men's participation in ECEC. Based on this research, recommendations for practice and policy will be made, particularly in light of recruitment and retention in ECEC generally internationally.

Keywords

men in ECEC, gender, mentoring, recruitment, retention

Presenter:

Joanne McHale, Technological University Dublin, Ireland

Non-presenting authors:

Jean Plaisir, City University of New York, United States

Ramazan Sak, Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Türkiye

İkbal Tuba Şahin-Sak, Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Türkiye

Tim Rohrmann, Hildesheim University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany

Kari Emilsen, Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education, Norway

M₀MEEC

Mentoring Men in Early Childhood Education and Care

Presented by: Dr Joanne McHale, TU Dublin

Project Partners

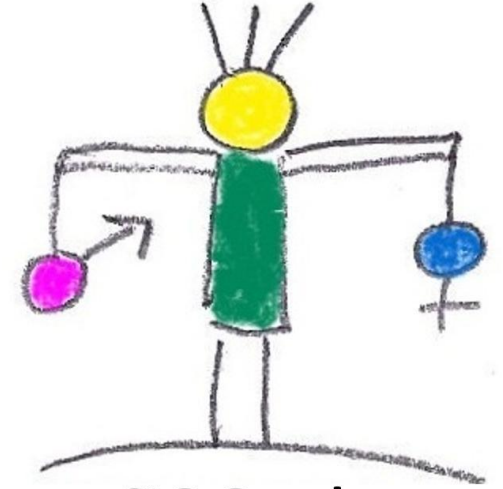
Tim Rohrmann, HAWK University of Applied Sciences, Germany

İkbal Tuba Şahin-Sak & Ramazan Sak, Van University, Turkey

Joanne McHale, TU Dublin, Ireland

Jean Plaisir, BMCC Borough of Manhattan Community College, New York, USA

Kari Emilsen, Queen Maud's University College, Trondheim, Norway



SIG Gender

EECERA Special Interest Group

<https://eecera.org/sig/gender/>



Background

- Much research on the dearth of Men in ECEC internationally.
- Studies have pointed to the need for ongoing institutional support and effective mentoring strategies for men in ECEC
- Mentoring seen as a positive mechanism for retention in the ECEC workforce generally (ET2020 Working Group, 2020).
- Small scale or short-term projects on mentoring men in ECEC internationally (Plaisir & Quansah, 2024).
- Paucity of large-scale implementation projects at national and international levels and long-term collaborative research initiatives and evaluation strategies (despite recommendations for same).



Literature

- Low participation of men in ECEC internationally (Rohrmann, 2020; Brody et al. 2021)
- Much focus on the factors impacting recruitment:
 - Visibility & opportunity (Warin et al., 2020)
 - Gender norms & stereotyping (Coles et al., 2026; Warin et al., 2020; Wright & Brownhill, 2019)
 - Perception of risk (Wright & Brownhill, 2019; Eidevald et al., 2018)
- Research on experiences suggest:
 - Gendered expectations & biases (Brody et al. 2021; Warin et al. 2020)
 - **Need for gender-sensitive professional development, institutional support, and mentoring (Brody et al. 2021; Warin et al. 2020)**



Research Aims

Enhance the Professional Experiences of Men in the ECEC Sector

Improve Retention of Men in ECEC Settings

Strengthen Gender Inclusivity and Professional Development in the ECEC Workforce

Through implementation and evaluation of existing mentoring measures in participating countries.

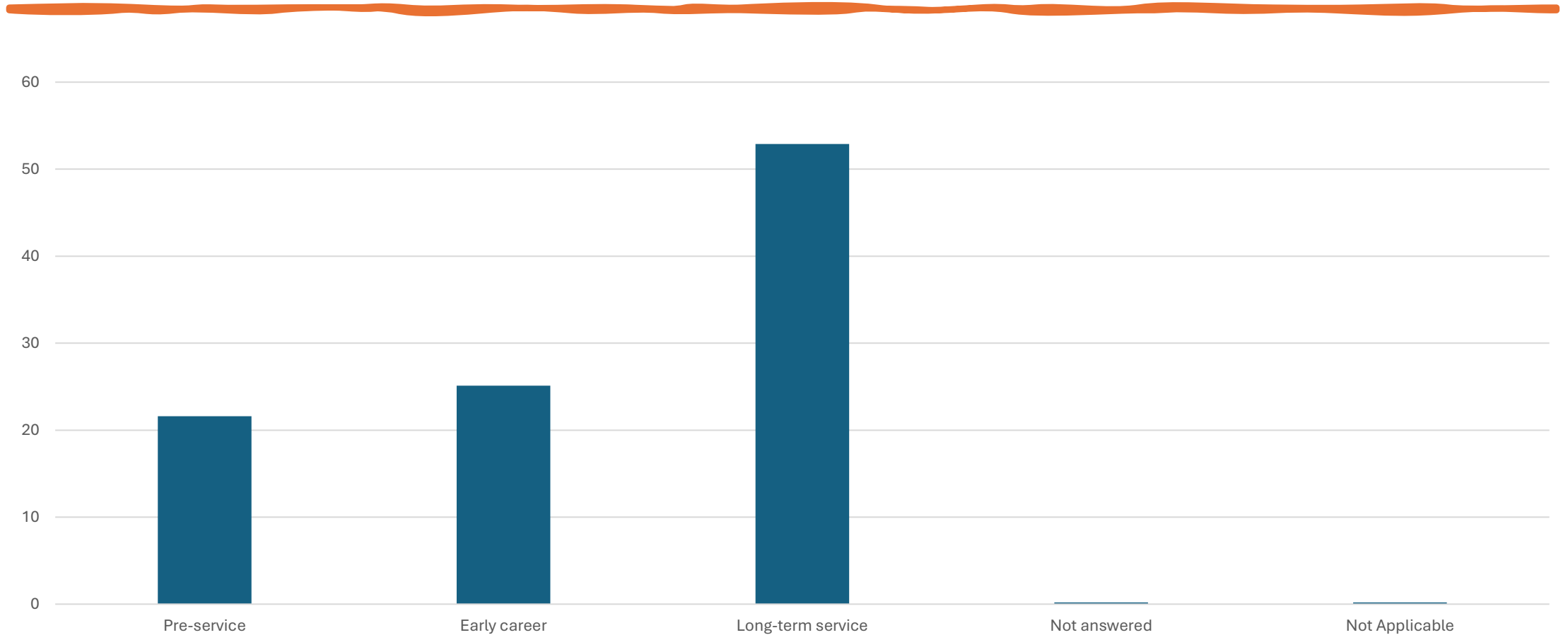
Research methodology

- Multi-method
 1. **Short Quantitative Questionnaire on experiences and mentoring needs**
 - **Drawing on previous research and knowledge on men's experiences**
 2. Document analysis
 - Review previous and existing mentoring programme literature to identify common effective approaches.
 3. Implementation of existing measures in participating countries
 4. Qualitative follow-up interviews

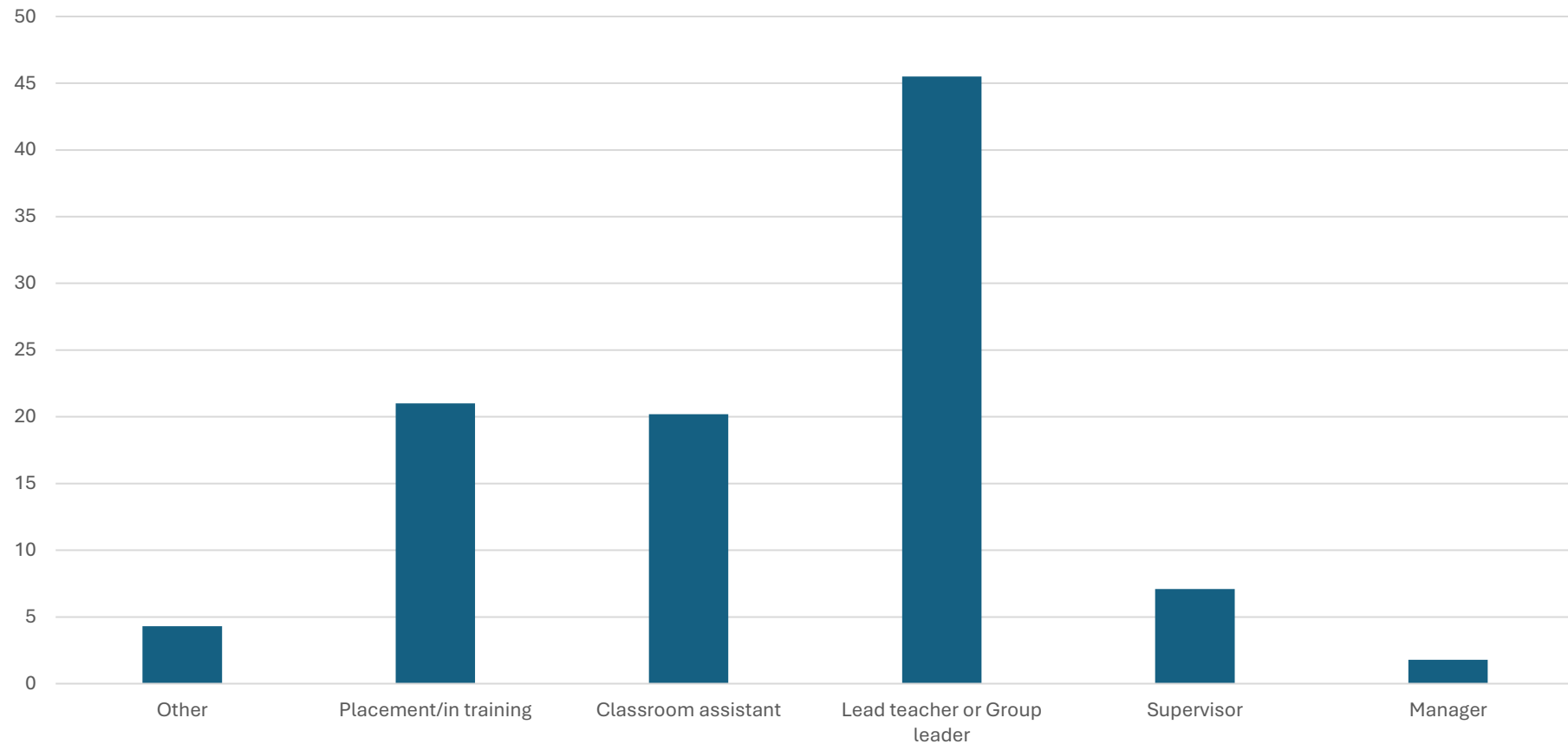
Preliminary selected results (first phase)



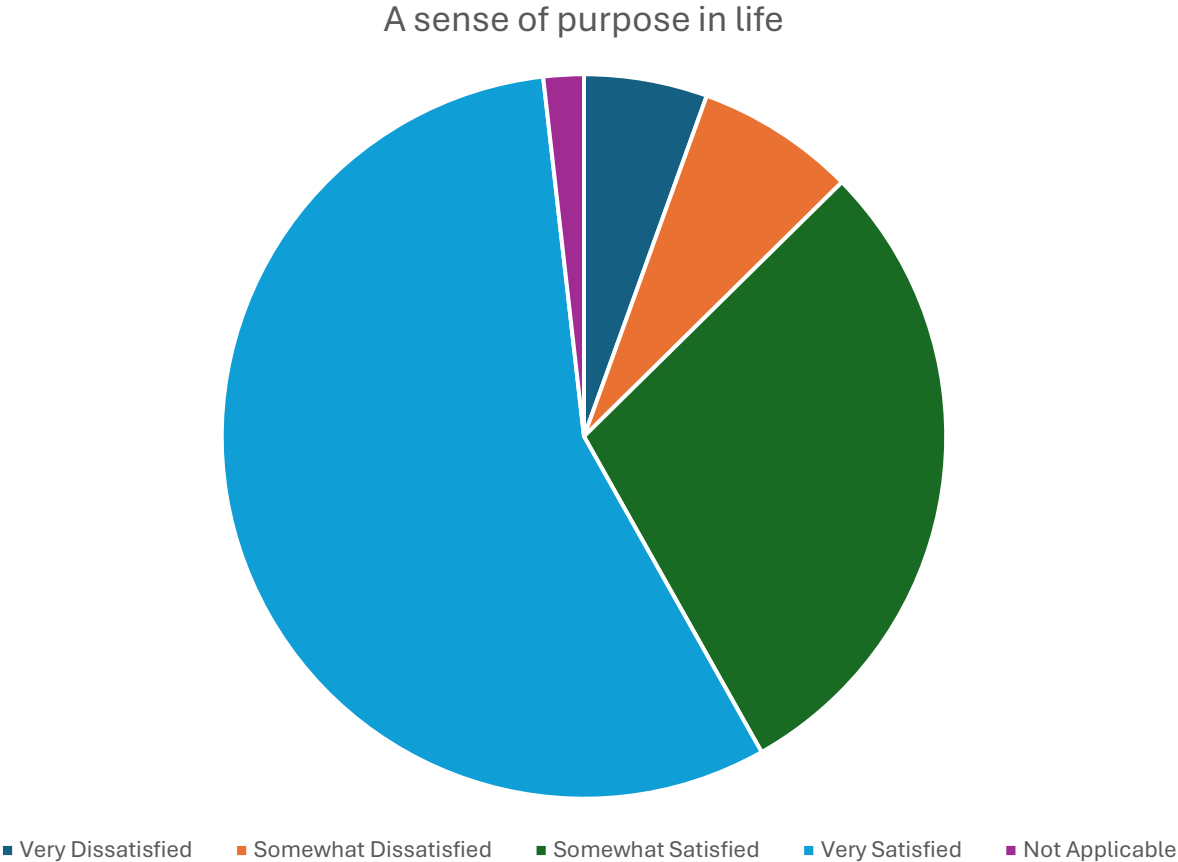
Career Stage of participants



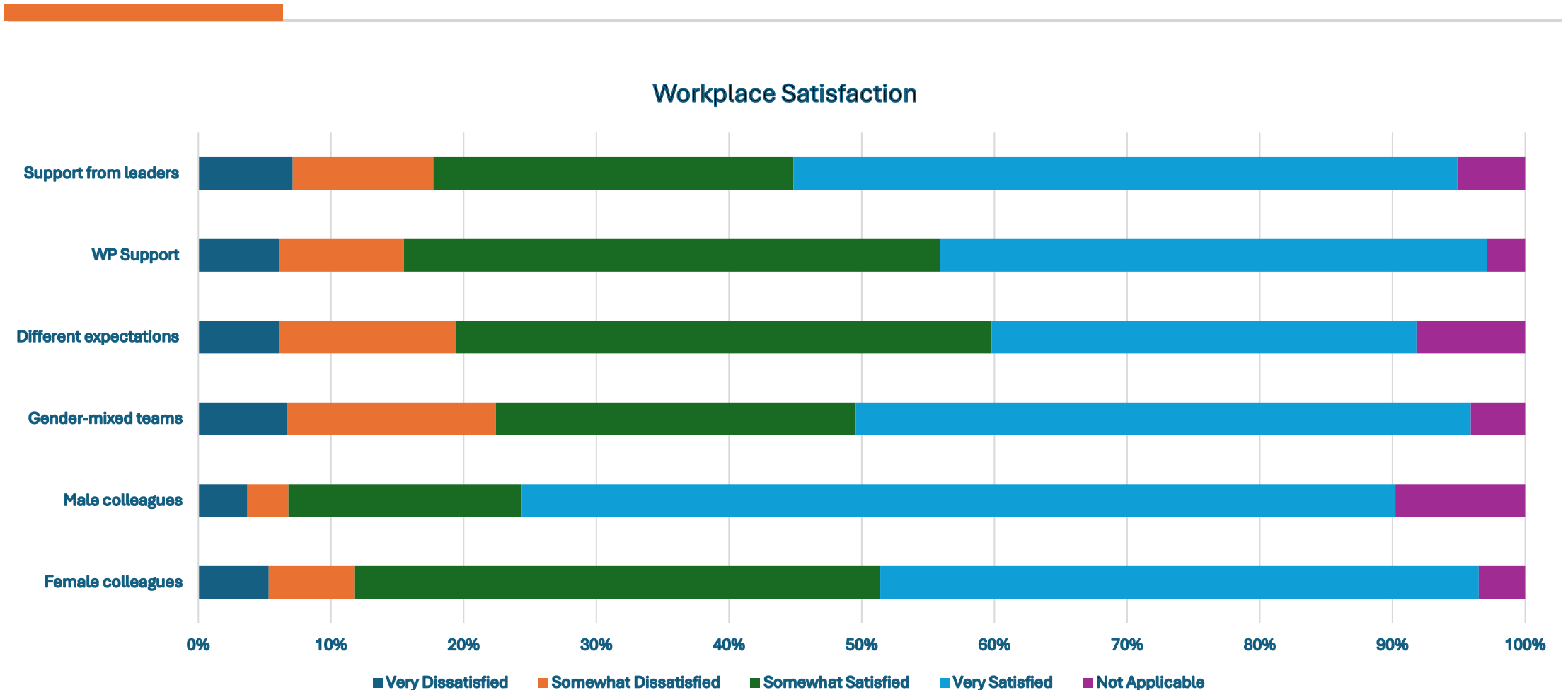
Occupational Roles



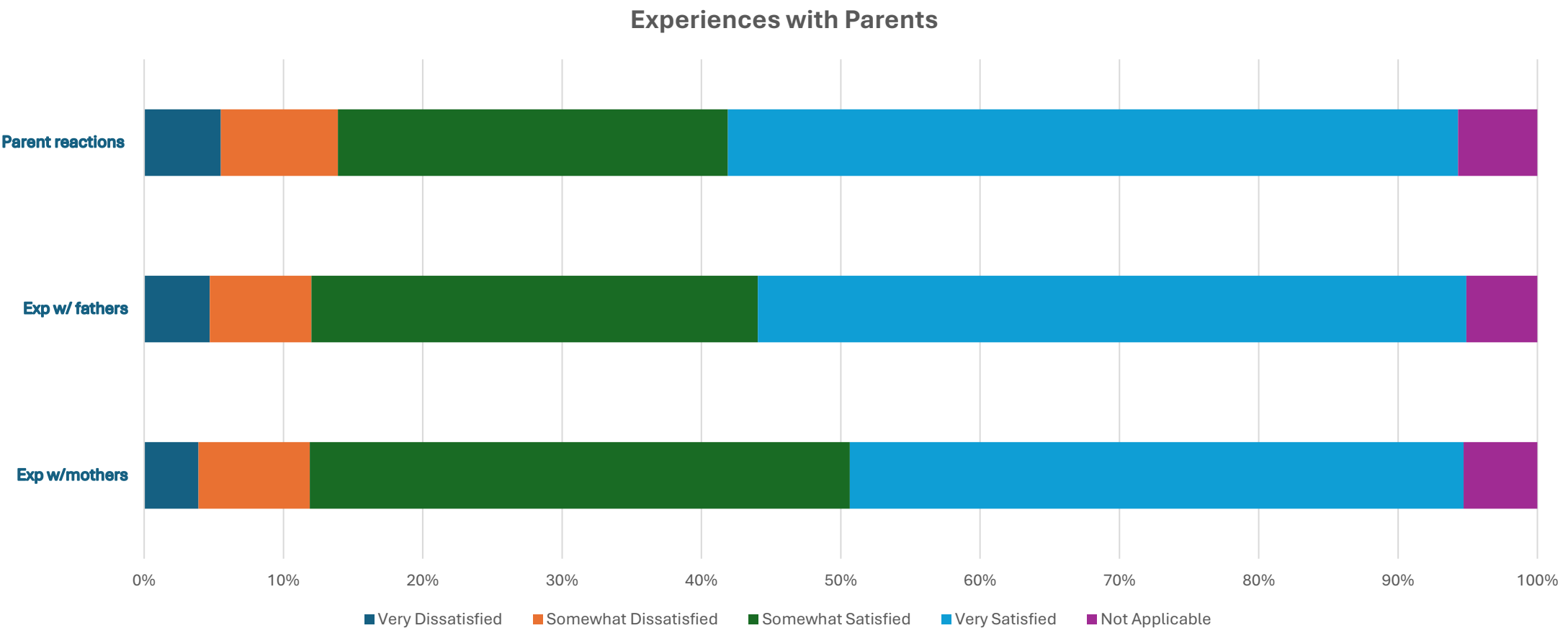
Satisfaction with ECEC



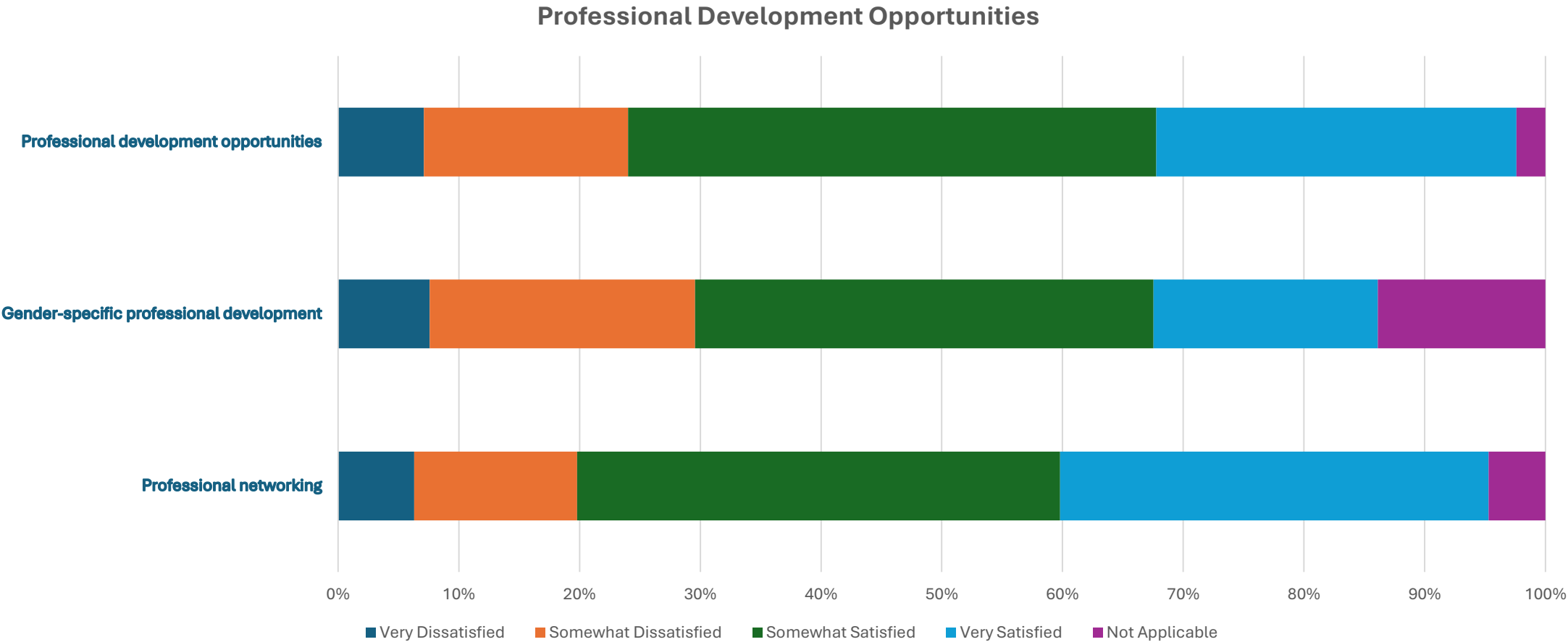
Satisfaction with ECEC - Workplace



Satisfaction with ECEC - Parents



Satisfaction with ECEC - Professional development



Satisfaction with ECEC work features

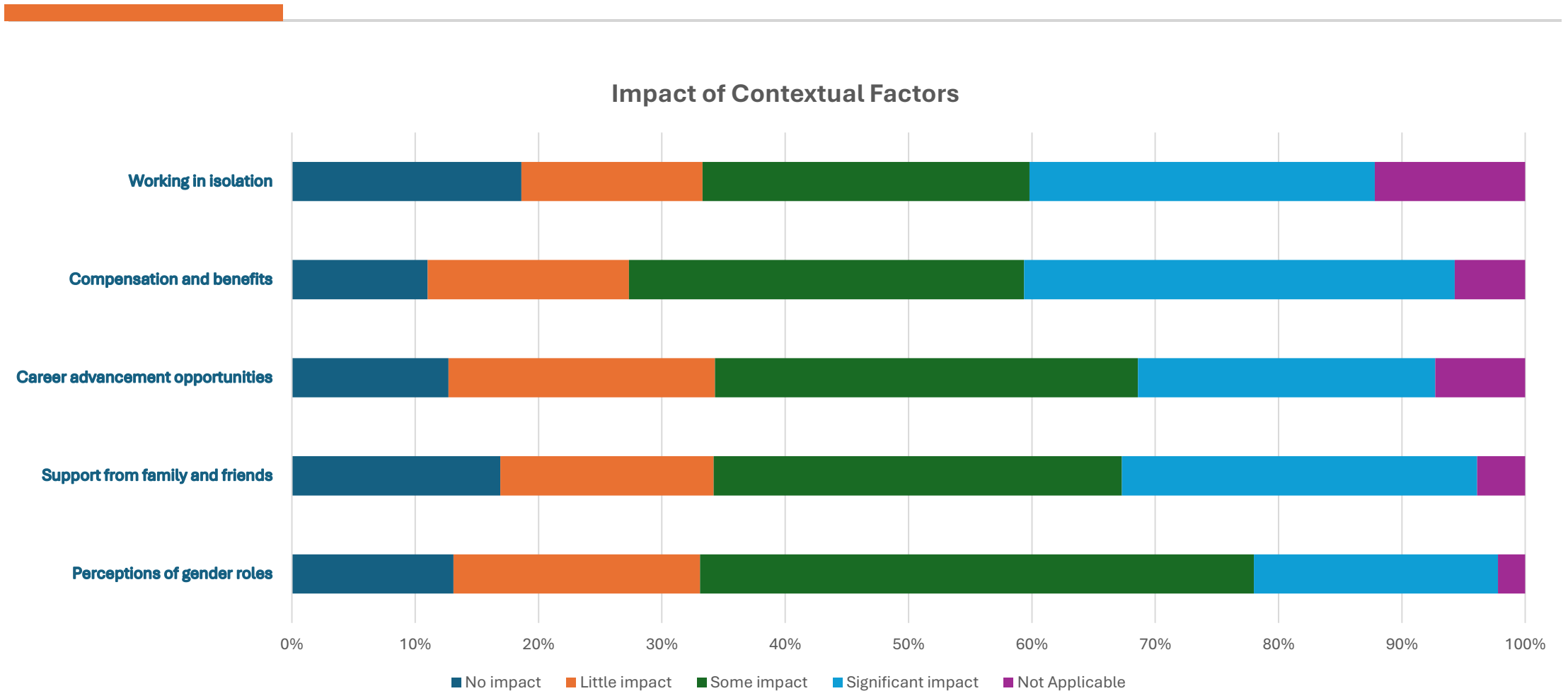
"Being a preschool teacher is a life adventure that colors life and keeps one alive, without experiencing a lack of love and joy." (Turkish participant)

"Great work. I'm very glad that a friend suggested I try out this field. I completed the training at age 30 and have been happily working in it for the last 15 years. Fantastic!" (German participant)

"A varied, meaningful, and active working day." (Norwegian participant)

"For the most part life here [or in the ECEC sector] has been smooth. I will say that it's not only the parents that men considering this line of work have to worry about, sometimes the children that you hold closest to your heart are the ones that make you want to quit." (USA participant)

Impact of contextual factors



Impact of contextual factors

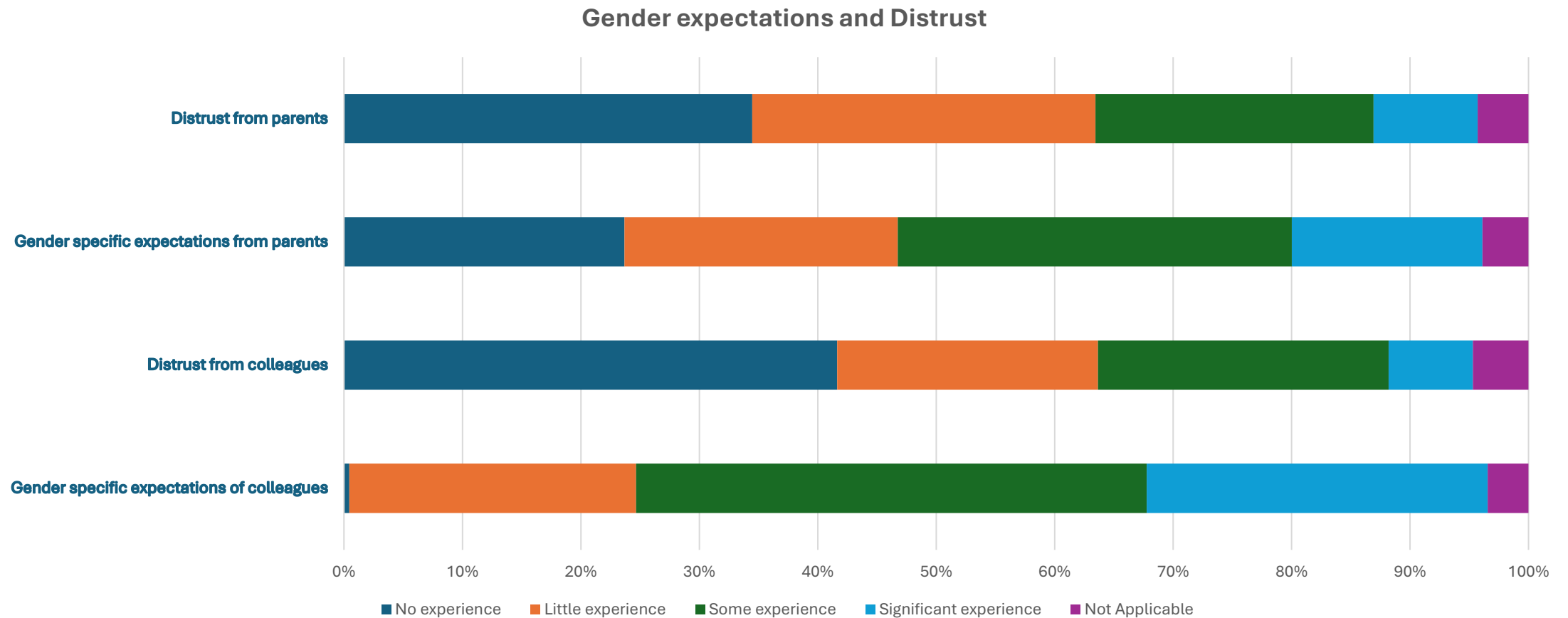
"Children are more interested in how their teachers approach them and whether they make them happy than their gender... the teacher's qualifications, merit, and self-efficacy are more important than their gender."
(Turkish participant)

"Spending years in the classroom, it is noticeable that there are stereotypical differences in play between male and female children. It is not always the case, but when it happens, I always try to have the children explore areas they do not always gravitate towards to explore new areas and strengthen new skills, such as blocks for females and dramatic play dress up for males". (USA participant)

"I have had good experiences working in ECEC. I feel that gender is not important in this profession, but the working conditions are far too poor." (Norwegian participant)

"Stereotypes also affect men in everyday work life. For example: "Who can carry this? Men." "Who grills? Men." and so on. Apart from the fact that I'm happy to help, this is a very one-sided and stereotypical division of tasks. In my experience, the problem becomes even worse in teams where I might be the only man".
(German participant)

Gender Specific Expectations and Distrust



Gender specific expectations and distrust

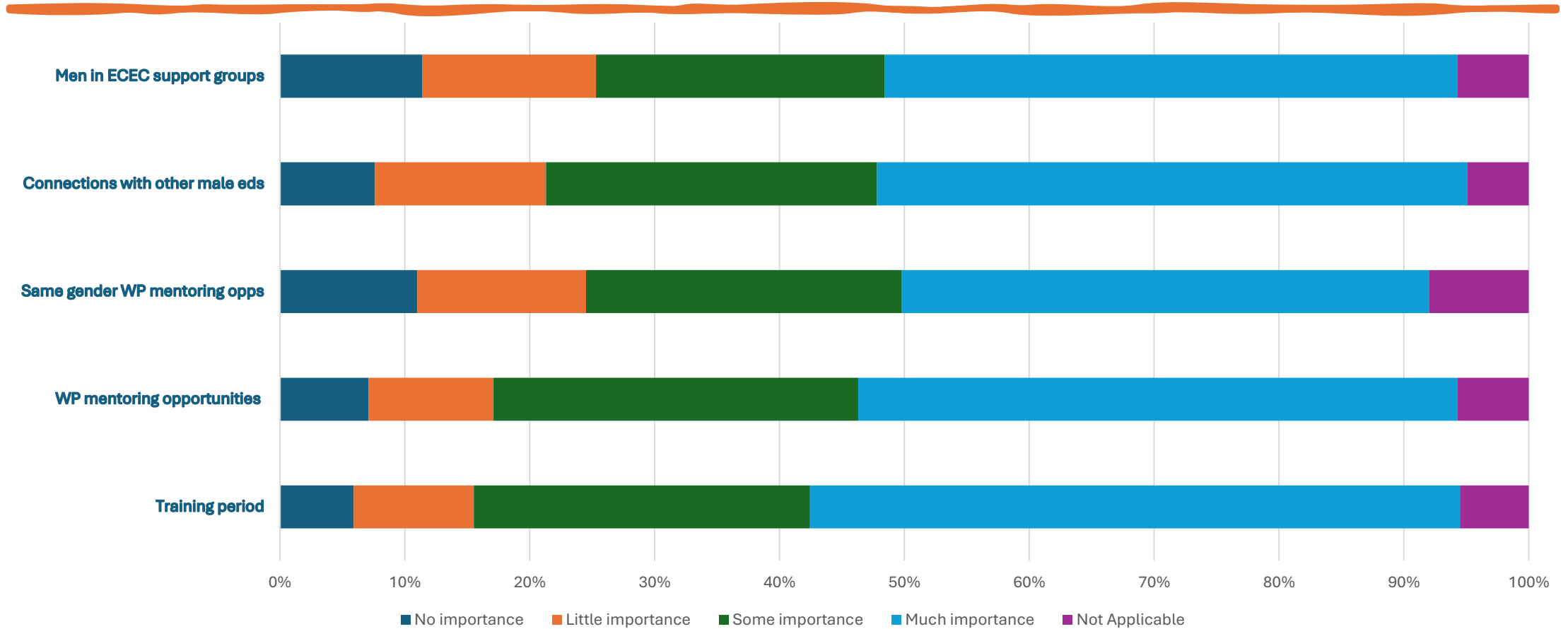
"First and foremost, parents need to stop being prejudiced against male preschool teachers. Professions have no gender." (Turkish participant)

"But the times parents have asked me to not work with their child based on me being male took a large mental toll on me leading to a 2-year break from the sector." (Irish participant)

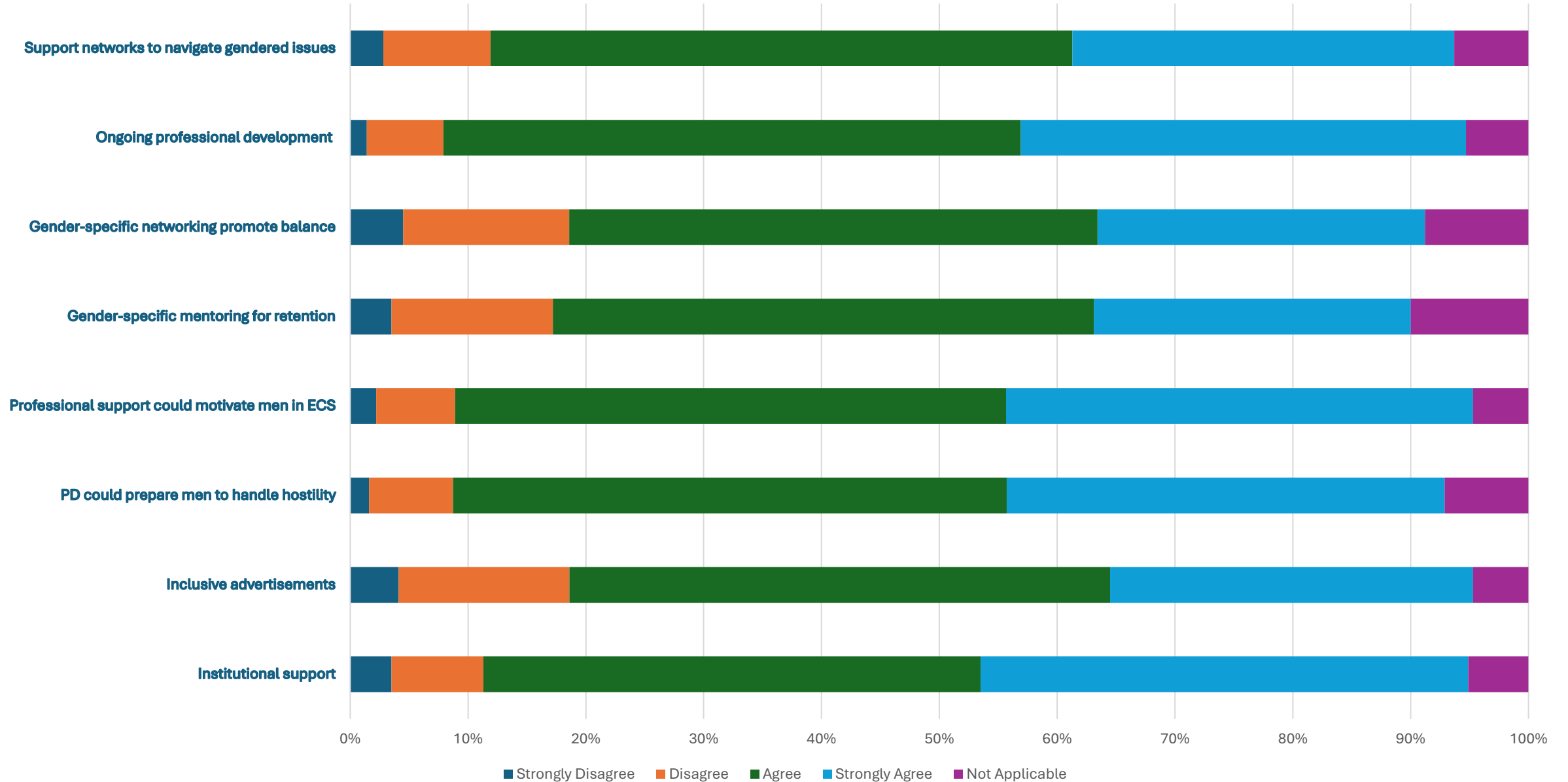
"I have had some issues with parents in the past especially moms. But I've always tried to resolve it peacefully and also the team that I work with is also very supportive. If anything happens, we always go down as a group so that way there are multiple witnesses to parents interacting with the teachers." (USA participant)

"Unfortunately, as a man working in a daycare center, I am almost always treated as a general suspect, which makes the job more difficult. My colleagues and the parents do not want me to change diapers or assist with hygiene education; these tasks are apparently reserved solely for female professionals". (German participant)

Importance of support type



Importance of Support type



“If teams have not yet had experience working with male colleagues, they should receive **training**. The “integration” of male staff is not a one-way street or solely the responsibility of the individual employee, especially since that employee is already operating within an existing power imbalance”. (German participant)

"A meeting **place** for Men in ECEC. The opportunity to receive direct guidance from other men working in ECEC who are not affiliated with my own workplace.“ (Norwegian participant)

“Having experienced male teachers in the field provide **insight and mentoring** for males who are beginning their studies. As well as having the opportunities for male teachers to speak with younger males who may be interested in the field or speak at schools to discredit rumors and stereotypes in the field”. (USA participant)

"They should be introduced to and encouraged to share their experiences with teachers who are more experienced than them in their professional lives. **Real experiences will definitely be motivating**.“ (Turkish participant)

Qualitative Questions – Recurring themes

- Representation and Visibility
- Leadership
- Informed parents and families/awareness building
- Peer support
- Emotional support
- Institutional supports (multi-level)
- Opportunities for professional development
- Recognising that not all experiences are gender-related
- **Communication**
 - "I sometimes find it difficult to understand my female colleagues. Support in communication skills can be provided not only to men but also to women."
 - "Sometimes when you try to assert yourself as a man in a building full of women it can come across more aggressive than intended when really you just wanted to make your thoughts known."
- Overall, evidence of impact of positive support **AND** negative reactions

Summary conclusions

- Overall, the findings suggest that the ECEC professionals derive strong intrinsic meaning from their work and generally maintain positive relationships with colleagues regardless of gender.
- Male participants generally enjoy good working relationships with colleagues and parents.
- Pay, benefits, and structural gaps in professional development remain an issue (though this may not be gender-specific).
- Issues persist with gendered expectations and stereotyping.
- Men would welcome increased support and mentoring, particularly in early career.



Supports recommended by participants

- Male representation at all levels of education, training and workplace will make it easier for new entrants to feel a sense of belonging.
- Male-male peer mentoring.
- Mixed gender discussions and training on gender issues.
- Leadership gender sensitivity training.
- Safe places and spaces to meet (online and in person).
- Conferences and seminars.
- Awareness building (across all levels including parents).

Next Steps

Phase 2 of data collection

- Re distribute survey in participating countries
- Distribute survey in additional countries
- Analysis by country

Document analysis

- Review previous and existing mentoring programme literature to identify common effective approaches.
- Compare against data to highlight pertinent approaches

References

- Brody, D.L., Emilsen, K., Rohrmann, T. and Warin, J. (Eds.) (2021). *Exploring Career Trajectories of Men in the Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce: Why They Leave and Why They Stay*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge. Available at: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781000284300>.
- Coles, L., Xu, Y., Sullivan, V. & Thorpe, K. (2026) 'At the margin and in the centre: how men working in early childhood education and care frame their role', *Community, Work & Family*, DOI: [10.1080/13668803.2026.2621909](https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2026.2621909)
- Eidevald, C., Bergström, H. and Broström, A.W. (2018). 'Maneuvering suspicions of being a potential pedophile: experiences of male ECEC-workers in Sweden'. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 26 (3), 407–417. DOI: [10.1080/1350293X.2018.1463907](https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2018.1463907)
- ET2020 Working Group (2020) *Early Childhood Education and Care How to recruit, train and motivate well-qualified staff*. Brussels: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. Available at: https://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/EInfancia/documentos/early_childhood_and_care_-_how_to_recruit_train_and_motivate_well-qualified_staff.pdf
- Rohrmann, T. (2020). 'Men as promoters of change in ECEC? An international overview'. *Early Years*, 40 (1), 5–19. DOI: [10.1080/09575146.2019.1626807](https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2019.1626807)
- Warin, J., Wilkinson, J., Davies, J., Greaves, H. and Hibbin, R. (2020). *Gender Diversification of the Early Years Workforce: Recruiting and Supporting Male Practitioners*. End of Project. Lancaster: Lancaster University, ESRC, Fatherhood Institute. Available at: <https://gendereye.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/gendereye-final-end-of-project-report-28-oct.pdf>
- Wright, D. and Brownhill, S. (2018). *Men in Early Years Settings: Building a Mixed Gender Workforce*. London, United Kingdom: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. Available at: <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucl/detail.action?docID=5573908>