

# Factors of Entry and Retention of Men into the Early Childhood Education Profession: A Systematic Review

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## Abstract

*This study aimed to identify research that provides information on the factors that influence the entry and retention of male educators in early childhood education. To this end, a systematic review was conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach. The design for systematic reviews and meta-analysis (PRISMA) was used. Twenty studies were analyzed from the following databases, Scopus, Web of Science, Scientific Electronic Library Online, and Education Resources Information Center, published between 2019 and 2024. The subject matter was classified as ideological, political, and socio-cultural factors. The results show that the low presence of men in early childhood education is complex and multifactorial. It is necessary to generate governmental and educational policies to help men enter and remain in early childhood education. Research on the subject provides a basis for the discussion of such policies.*

**Keywords:** *Early Childhood Education, Men's Work in Early Childhood Education, Gender, Masculinities.*

## INTRODUCTION

Historically, early childhood education has been exercised by women associated with motherhood (Martínez Palma, 2022). Care work is socially and culturally constructed as a task carried out only by women and, therefore, far removed from the natural abilities of men (Sullivan et al., 2023). Patriarchal ideology has traditionally positioned the predominance of men over women, arbitrarily separating their occupations. Men are to be involved in technical occupations based on knowledge and the exercise of authority and women are to be engaged in teaching and childcare (Yang & McNair, 2020). This binary division, where women are framed under the responsibility of childcare and men as the providers of the family continues to exist even today (Hedlin et al., 2019).

In this socio-cultural context, in which female and male roles transcend the sphere of professional development, the entry of men into professional studies, understood as a job performed primarily by women, is socially questioned. The incorporation of men into early childhood education work is conditioned by gender, economic, and professional development factors, among others (Bhana et al., 2022; Moosa & Bhana, 2020; Sullivan et al., 2023; Vidaña, 2023). Other factors that drive men away from the profession include female hegemony, stigmatization, association with paedophilia, prejudice, and judgement in terms of sexual orientation, mistrust, fear of accusations of child abuse, and isolation from a gender perspective (Cruz et al., 2021; Hedlin et al., 2019; Mota et al., 2023; Palacios et al., 2022; Vásquez, 2022).

Promoting and maintaining male participation in early childhood education contributes to reducing occupational sex segregation (Sullivan et al., 2020). Men's presence contributes to gender equality and diversity in the early childhood education workforce (Xua et al., 2022). The presence of male teachers is seen as a positive factor in the gender development of boys and girls in early childhood education (Sales dos Santos, 2021).

Moving from the feminization of early childhood education to the incorporation of men in early childhood education can help redefine socially stereotyped roles and traditional models (Martínez Palma, 2022). Understanding the ideological, political and socio-cultural barriers by which male educators are characterised is a first step towards labour inclusion (Sullivan et al., 2023).

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Globally, it is estimated that 3% of early childhood education and care teachers are men (OECD, 2021). Norway, Turkey, and Denmark lead the world in male participation, but their participation in early childhood education does not exceed 10% (Shapiro et al., 2021). In the last 10 years, European countries such as Belgium, Sweden, Norway, and the United Kingdom have formulated education policies intending to encourage men to work in early childhood education (Gonçalves R., 2021).

With this systematic review, we aim to contribute to this problem by identifying possible factors in international empirical studies that influence the entry and retention of men in the early childhood education profession.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Early childhood education from its beginnings has been marked by a high feminization. The trend in early childhood education as a female job found its rise and predominance in the 19th century (Mota et al., 2023). Reforms to education and transformations in labor market forces due to the growth of cities and industrialization changed in social perceptions of women's role in education and childcare (Shapiro et al., 2021). The feminization of education in this area was due to a preferential demand for women's exercise, which was associated with childcare that did not require special qualifications (Gonçalves et al., 2023).

These divisions of labor that were generated in their origins created gender segregation in the sense that men and women are confined to differentiated occupations and job responsibilities (Yang & McNair, 2020). Early Childhood Education work is almost entirely seen as a feminized activity (Brito & Ferreira, 2023), yet there is still a high rate of feminized and masculinized careers that influence vocational decision-making (Martínez Palma, 2022). This sexual segmentation of work, which establishes which jobs and professional occupations are ideal for each gender, affects gender equity in early childhood education (Ovando & Falabella, 2021).

Internationally, male participation in early childhood education remains low, with an average rate of 3% in OECD countries (Sullivan et al., 2023). Currently, research into the processes men face when entering a traditionally female field is a developing topic (Gonçalves R., 2021). Existing gender ideologies often position early childhood education as a "soft" and "feminized" career choice for men, associating this softness with a weakness not that of a male condition (Moosa & Bhana, 2023). This unorthodox conception stigmatizes males as lacking the skills to perform in this profession (Bhana et al., 2022).

Reasons for a male to choose a profession related to early childhood education range from early positive influence inspired by close relatives, former teachers, classmates, and other males involved in early childhood education (Sales dos Santos, 2021). Men's entry into a female-dominated field has an intrinsic quest for professional fulfillment. By occupying a place that is not his own, he breaks fixed patterns with static identities, thus bringing in new identities (Rodríguez et al., 2020). Unfortunately, this free choice for men is limited by the gender roles that society imposes on individuals (Martínez Palma, 2022).

There is a need to pave the way for the development of new forms of masculinity by validating teaching and caring for young children as a natural career choice for men (Bhana et al., 2022). It is relevant to investigate in which professional situations and at which intersections men experience inclusion or exclusion in early childhood education and how these experiences affect career choice (Ljunggren & Eidevald, 2023).

When a man chooses a career in early childhood education, his choice clashes with cultural associations, which can generate confusion and even hostility from others. It can also be interpreted as an unmasculine choice and generate doubts about his sexuality, leading to ideas about possible perversions and child abuse (Hedlin et al., 2019). Countering hegemonic ideals of masculinity through male entry into early childhood education raises questions that need to be addressed by the socio-cultural environment and the educational community where the formative experience takes place (Sullivan et al., 2023).

The entry of a male into the profession will provoke uncertainty in parents, as the female figure is identified as suitable for working with young children, while the male figure is not as trusted in the cultural imaginary, as he may be associated as a possible aggressor (Gonçalves et al., 2023). This process for men who choose early childhood education as a means of professional development can be fraught with tensions such as mistrust from parents, colleagues, and managers (Wilkinson & Warin, 2021). In this regard, the formative work of

educational institutions in designing programs that develop strategies to encourage the recruitment and retention of men for early childhood education is critical (Bonnett & Wade, 2022). These actions in addition to recruitment and retention must be prepared to address negative associations with males such as paedophilia, orientations towards deviant sexual behavior, discrimination, suspicions, and unfounded accusations of sexual abuse (Mota et al., 2023).

Men face not only the above-mentioned situations but also a complicated hierarchical process of masculinities in their entry into early childhood education, as they jeopardize the surplus value of their hegemonic masculinity by entering what is seen as women's work (Moosa & Bhana, 2023). Men who enter early childhood education are ridiculed for pursuing what is distinguished as an intellectually inappropriate and undemanding profession for a man (Bhana et al., 2022). Tenacity and persistence, from the moment of career choice, are internal factors within the individual that enable them to cope with social stigmas and prejudices regarding a male's career choice of early childhood education (Martínez Palma, 2022). Studies speak of a discourse of covert disapproval through non-verbal cues that males experience; there may indeed be positive discourse regarding their entry into the profession, but at the same time, non-visible disapproval (Bonnett & Wade, 2022). Parents and colleagues do not directly express judgment, reticence, and disapproval of the presence of male educators in the care of their children, this covert disapproval is attributed in society to the voices of others.

The professional practice of young men in early childhood education is viewed positively by researchers in terms of the connections they can make with infant and toddler-aged children (Thorpe et al., 2018). The presence of male teachers in early childhood education is seen as a factor in shaping the gender structure of children (Sales dos Santos, 2021).

Previous studies have highlighted the essential role of men in early childhood education and the relevance of their potential in this field (Jones & Aubrey, 2019). However, the low participation of men in early childhood education remains a constraint. It seems necessary to study the factors that influence the entry and retention of male teachers in the profession. To this end, the following research questions are intended to be answered:

What are the possible factors influencing the entry of men into pre-primary education?

What are the possible factors influencing the permanence of men in early childhood education?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Materials and Methods**

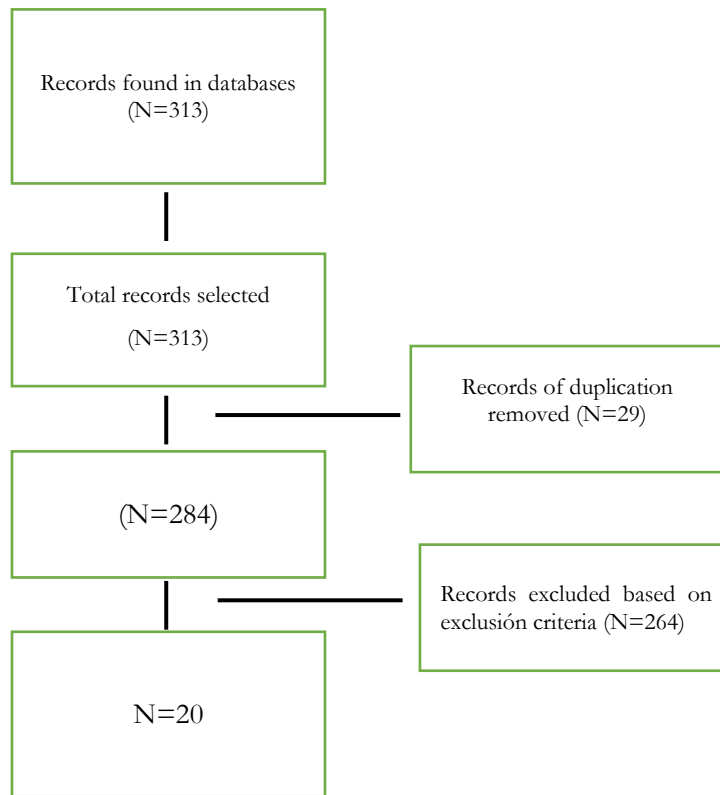
The working method is an in-depth systematic review of the scientific literature on the factors that influence the entry and retention of male educators in the early childhood education profession. To this end, twenty studies were analyzed from the following databases, Scopus, Web of Science, Scientific Electronic Library Online, and Education Resources Information Center, published between 2019 and 2024. The present study followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-analysis (PRISMA) approach (Urrutia & Bonfil, 2010). In conjunction with the search in the databases, the selection of articles was carried out using Intelligent Systematic Review (Rayyan), which was subjected to assessment by two researchers; an action that allowed the construction of the theoretical framework in the study (Izquierdo, 2015).

### **Search Criteria**

The search terms used for the topic of the study were: "male teachers in early childhood education". These words in English and Spanish were combined, using the Boolean operator AND.

### **Eligibility criteria**

We selected studies written in English and Spanish that investigated factors influencing men's entry into and retention in early childhood education. Exclusion criteria were: systematic reviews, books, theses, articles with no male authors, articles from other educational contexts, and articles with no educational context. Finally, a total of 313 titles were found (SCOPUS= 35, Web of Science= 233, Scientific Electronic Library Online= 14, Education Resources Information Center= 31). Of this total, 29 were eliminated as duplicates, and 263 were rejected for not meeting the eligibility criteria, as shown in figure 1.



**Figura 1:** Prisma Flow chart

### **Analysis Phase**

The analysis was carried out in consideration of the research questions raised in this study. Table 1 presents the selected articles from different language contexts, authors, methods, description of the study, and main findings. Selected articles were examined to identify themes of male entry and retention in early childhood education. Thematic analysis was selected to categorize facts to uncover meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This provided information on the factors of entry into and retention in early childhood education among male teachers.

N°	Author	Article	Methods	Description	Key Findings
1	(Brito & Ferreira, 2023)	Representations of male teachers in pre-primary education	Film analysis	This article addresses the presence of men as teachers. The aim is to analyze what representations are constructed about male teachers.	The representations constructed in the fiction are close to the problems experienced by Brazilian teachers on a daily basis.
2	(Gonçalves et al., 2023)	Male teaching in early childhood education: is this a women-only space?	Case study	In this study, the aim was to understand how male teaching can cause strangeness in the school community.	The reason for the absence of men in the early childhood education space is that actions about childcare are linked to the female figure. The male figure in early childhood education has an impact on the school community.
3	(Bhana et al., 2022)	Men in early childhood education and care: on navigating a gendered terrain	International ethnographic study	This article finds out how a group of men navigate a highly sexist EAPI terrain in 12 countries.	Provide a nuanced understanding of how men provide strategies to increase and support men's participation in ECEC in more progressive and gender-sensitive ways.
4	(Bonnett & Wade, 2022)	Procuring Gender-Situated Voices of Male Early Childhood Professionals in Canada.	Intrinsic qualitative case study	At the heart of this is gendered scrutiny, binary role models and adverse occupational outcomes.	Factors such as heterogeneous reactions from family and friends, disharmony in male role models, strategies adopted by participants to protect themselves and avoid speculation, forgotten children's voices and the nuances related to working in a caring profession
5	(Hedlin et al., 2019)	Fun guy and possible perpetrator: an-interview study of how men are positioned within early childhood education and care	Ethnographic study	By focusing on the interaction between educators and children, the purpose of this study is to investigate gender-specific beliefs about male preschool teachers.	The results show that "the fun guy" and "the potential perpetrator" are two gender-specific positions to which male informants are subjected. The article discusses how men adopt and resist both positions and argues for the need to further challenge gender stereotypes in preschools.
6	(Ljunggren & Eidevald, 2022)	Men's career choices in early childhood education and care – an embodied intersectionality perspective	Corporeal phenomenology	This article analyses narrative data from Nordic men with different experiences of formal education and work in ECEC.	The findings have discussed the professionalization of the ECEC, professional mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion, and debates on the professionalization of the ECEC.
7	(Martínez, 2022)	Teacher professionalization in Kindergarten Education: Analysis of discursive mechanisms that construct representations of femininity vs. masculinity in the profile of kindergarten educators.	Multiple case studies	This article identifies the discursive mechanisms that construct professional identity perceptions in early childhood educators based on their representations of gender.	The results highlight that this identity is based on the extension of moral motherhood as the axis of the understanding of the professional role. Similarly, the predominance of female leadership in the field of early childhood education is observed, even though the incorporation of men in the educational act is considered necessary, but in secondary roles.
8	(Moosa & Bhana 2020)	'Troubling men who teach young children': masculinity and the paedophilic threat	Ethnographic study	The article demonstrates how a combination of homosexuality and paedophilia positions homosexual men as actual and potential paedophilia perpetrators.	Heterosexual men's power and violence were used to distance heterosexual men from ECE.
9	(Moosa & Bhana 2023)	Men who teach Early Childhood Education: Mediating Masculinity, Authority and Sexuality	Ethnographic study	This article highlights the reasons why a group of South African prospective teachers chose to specialize in Early Childhood Education.	Avoidance of sexual misconduct allows male teachers to strategically mediate power and claim status as future ECE teachers.

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10	(Ovando & Falabella, 2021)	Men in green coats: Training and career trajectories of early childhood educators	Exploratory descriptive	This article explored the formative and professional trajectories of five male early childhood educators.	The results of the study show the various barriers that educators face during their career paths, especially the most critical point when they enter the classroom.
11	(Rodríguez et al., 2020).	In search of identity: is early childhood education a man's place?	Ethnographic study	This article aims to discuss the male presence in the teaching profession, specifically in the field of Early Childhood Education.	The data, treated from the perspective of Bahktinian discourse analysis, lead us to the assertion that "male toughness" is an element of culture and not of the human nature of the male gender.
12	(Sales dos Santos, 2021).	Men in early childhood education teaching: an analysis from the children's perspective	Ethnographic study	This article analyses how children attribute meanings to the presence of a male teacher in pre-school education.	It was identified that the relationships experienced by the teachers were based on gender stereotypes. The teacher often attributed part of her responsibilities to the teacher, thus calculating on representations of hegemonic masculinity, causing the children to appropriate these meanings.
13	(Shapiro et al., 2020).	"I Am the Teacher": how male educators conceptualize their impact on the early childhood classroom.	Ethnographic study	The aim of this article is to demonstrate how self-identified male educators construct non-normative masculinities as they fulfil their roles with young children in early childhood education settings (ECE).	In general, the men in our study see their involvement in ECE as an opportunity to support children's social and emotional development, as they also reject stereotypes about men in this sector.
14	(Sullivan, et al., 2020)	Beliefs and attributions: Insider accounts of men's place in early childhood education and care	Ethnographic study	In this study, we analyzed interview data from the majority of women to distinguish personal voices and ascribed beliefs regarding the inclusion of men in the ECCE workplace.	Analysis suggests that the view of male educators as active was vindicated, while concerns about risk or competence were usually attributed to others.
15	(Sullivan, et al., 2023)	Men Times Ten: Does the presence of more men support inclusion of male educators in early childhood education and care?	Semi-structured biographical	In this article, we take the unique circumstance that many men work together in ECEC to ask whether having more men on staff improves experiences of inclusion.	Data identifies a developmental process in which mentoring by male and female peers is critical to early career retention.
16	(Thorpe et al., 2020)	A man in the center: Inclusion and contribution of male educators in early childhood education and care teaching teams	Methodological approach was abductive.	The low participation of men in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and the public debate on the "suitability" and "value" of male educators were studied.	Men's pedagogical contribution was described as related to work roles, not gender identity.
17	(Wilkinson & Warin, 2021)	Men-only support spaces in early years education: a step towards a gender diverse or a gender divided workforce?	Case study	This article explores the role of sex-differentiated support in the gender diversification of the early years workforce and asks when and for whom such spaces may be effective or valuable.	Gender-differentiated support is important and should be valued as a strategy (one of many) to move the Gender EYE project beyond the gender binary. It is a means to an end.
18	(Xu, 2020)	Does the gender of a practitioner matter in early childhood education and care? Perspectives from Scottish and Chinese young children	International ethnographic	This article responds to concerns about the supposed "feminisation" of ECEC and adds the perspectives of boys to debates about whether more men should work in ECEC.	Findings show that children relate practitioners to their experiences of gender. This article argues that practitioners should openly discuss gender with children.
19	(Xua et al., 2022)	Men's participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC): comparative perspectives from	Ethnographic participant observation	This article presents the results of a study conducted in Edinburgh, Scotland, and Tianjin, China. The study explored how male and female professionals and children talk about gender and how gender relations and	This research points to the need for comparative research to include observational data and the views of professionals and children to improve understanding of how global discourses of ECEC work.

		Edinburgh, Scotland and Tianjin, China		roles are 'performed' in practice settings.	
20	(Yang & McNair, 2020).	Chinese male early childhood education teachers' perceptions of their roles and professional development	Phenomenological approach.	This study explored male teachers' perceptions of their roles in early childhood education and their beliefs about their own professional development in shaping their careers.	The findings imply rethinking professional development for both women and men with an emphasis on improved teaching and career advancement.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The twenty articles considered for this systematic review are classified into three main themes: ideological factors, political factors, and socio-cultural factors related to the entry and retention of boys in early childhood education.

### Ideological Factors in Entry and Retention in The Early Childhood Education Profession

Ideological factors are present in education, which can communicate violence and introduce inequalities precisely because they present the interests of a particular group as universal (Habermas, 1990). Female dominance in early childhood education may affect the contribution of men entering early childhood education and their subsequent professional development. Segregation and symbolic representations of gender deliver culturally organized forms that provide subjects with the ability to indicate, classify, show, or name themselves, people, and things, based on the historically constructed differences between masculinity and femininity (Santos, 2017). In this sense, ideologically, there is a pigeonholing of the male who enters the field of early childhood education, as he is progressively named by his environment from a heterosexual conception to a homosexual identity. Thus, they become concerned about "others" supposed sexual motivations in their professional choice, generating suspicions about their intentions to become an early childhood educator (Thorpe et al., 2020).

From the moment a man starts studying early childhood education, an ideological chain is created. At first, it is seen as inconceivable that he would want to study a profession to work directly with children. Then ideas emerge that he has chosen a career that is not sufficiently masculine, accompanied by a perception linked to sexuality. Finally, this professional choice is associated with images linked to possible perversion and child abuse (Brito & Ferreira, 2023). These views can be seen expressed spontaneously through questioning and negative discrimination or internally in how people idealize the male educator (Hedlin et al., 2019). There is "covert disapproval", a condition that men are subject to when working with children, which focuses on non-verbal cues from parents and colleagues (Bonnett & Wade, 2022). There will also be a phenomenon called "gender vertigo" which can be summarised as bewilderment and disorientation that occurs in society when someone acts in confrontation with prevailing gender ideas (Hedlin et al., 2019). All of this makes the mere fact of thinking about studying a career a complex aspect, from the decision to enter and the permanence in academic development, as there is a powerful ideological barrier (Mota et al., 2023).

The retention of males in early childhood education careers is complicated by the fact that females have been idealized as desexualized and objects of men's irrepressible sexual desire; males, in contrast, are exalted as hypersexualized and potential sexual aggressors (Moosa & Bhana, 2020). It is not uncommon, for example, for physical contact between educators and children to be perceived as a sensitive issue in educational practices (Hedlin et al., 2019). These men are seen as sexual dangers and paedophilic threats, putting pressure on them to leave professional practice. Selected research indicates that male teachers avoid teaching in early childhood education after graduation, given the constant actions that question their status as men and their sexuality (Bhana et al., 2022). In addition, the presence of a male professional in educational centers may generate reluctance and discontent from families about their participation in the classroom (Ovando & Falabella, 2021).

## **Political Factors in The Entry and Permanence in The Early Childhood Education Profession.**

Overcoming institutional practices and discourses that negatively interfere with men's entry into a field hegemonically dominated by women (Rodríguez et al., 2020) requires policies that generate strategies to address the entry and retention of men in early childhood education (Bonnett & Wade, 2022). Studies mention the need to adopt institutional university policies that reduce gender disparities, broadening the entry profile through the dissemination of the profession that includes the image of men as professionals (Shapiro et al., 2020). This dissemination can be implemented through informative talks given by universities, colleges, and vocational guidance teams, among others. Other actions at the institutional policy level that contribute to the entry of boys into the field are vocational support and summer youth employment programs that guide men's choice to study and work in early childhood education (Bhana et al., 2022; Shapiro et al., 2021).

While these policy actions are intended to remedy the low presence of males in early childhood education, we know that there is minimal likelihood that males will enter, complete, and remain in the career pipeline in any educational institution (Bhana et al., 2006; Ljunggren & Eidevald, 2022). There must be gender-sensitive policy frameworks around socially feminized professions such as early childhood education (Sullivan et al., 2023). We know that even micro-policies standardize what a boy and girl should be, a heteronormativity that emphasizes that there is only one type of masculinity and femininity, directing people to certain types of professions that match their gender (Rodríguez, et al., 2020).

Another aspect that may limit the entry and retention of boys is gender policies, which may target only one gender sector. These policies need to challenge gender stereotypes around professional work, including in early childhood education curricula (Xu, 2020). It is not enough to insert men into the early childhood education sector to produce a policy around gender equality, rather policies must recognize male entry and retention as an agent of change for the level of education (Sales dos Santos, 2021).

The lack of academic and policy research focusing on reducing male entry and retention in early childhood education is a powerful factor in why this situation has remained unchanged since the origin of early childhood education. This policy focus, lacking action on the diverse workforce in early childhood education, perpetuates the lack of males in the field (Wilkinson & Warin, 2021).

Significant structural barriers remain at the policy level, in early childhood education training institutions, and the workplace regarding the vision of the person who should be an early childhood educator. The development of institutional partnerships would be a positive factor that would help the recruitment, participation, and subsequent retention of men in early childhood education careers (Thorpe et al., 2020).

The internal policies of training institutions must accompany the student toward the future labor field, helping immersion and permanence in early childhood education (Rodríguez et al., 2020). Proactive decisions are required to change the educational community's perception of boys in early childhood education and generate a change in the institutional climate. This will require coordinated work between government policies, training institutions, and administrators of early childhood programs, among others. The final task falls especially on training institutions and their design of internal plans and policies framed around the inclusion, recruitment, and support of men for entry and retention, as they are the gateway for future male professionals to enter and remain in the profession (Shapiro et al., 2021; Wilkinson & Warin, 2021; Xua et al., 2022).

## **Socio-Cultural Factors in Entering and Remaining in The Early Childhood Education Profession.**

Each society constructs a sexual division of labor according to its cultural and temporal parameters that establish what type of work and professional occupations are appropriate for each gender (Ovando & Falabella, 2021). The feminization of the children's education sector is mainly influenced by a socio-cultural aspect. Considered as an extension of motherhood and of low social status, they produce the natural move away from the male towards entry into early childhood education and professional development (Gonçalves et al., 2023).



Gender is a key individual characteristic guiding occupational choice, where men and women, being in the majority in some types of work, generate occupational gender segregation (Moosa et al., 2023). Women in male-dominated work environments are subjected to attitudinal barriers by men that make it difficult for them to enter and remain in masculinized sectors. In the opposite case, where work environments are dominated by women, similar behavior is shown (Sullivan et al., 2020).

Gender, sexuality, and social processes influence the construction of masculinities that wish to enter and remain in early childhood education (Bhana et al., 2022). Male career choice conflicts with social representations of the femininity of the profession, which may even be present in higher education settings (Hedlin et al., 2019). The entry and permanence of men may represent a transgression of this culturally feminine space (Mota et al., 2023). Among the experiences of men in their entry and permanence in the profession, we can identify fears about their professional future, stereotyping, social questioning about their sexual orientation, and attributions of inappropriate behavior with boys and girls (Ovando & Falabella, 2021).

Culturally, the social roles of women and men are closely related to their bodily characteristics, and this is quickly understood by boys and girls who see in women an image linked to care (Xu, 2020). In contrast, men are perceived in a strong, nurturing image, distanced from the education and care of children. In this sense, men may be culturally ridiculed for working in this profession, as it is socially and economically inappropriate (Bhana et al., 2022).

In terms of career development, men's work in early childhood education is associated with low salaries (Ljunggren & Eidevald, 2022). Working conditions in feminized environments are another factor that makes it difficult for boys to stay in the profession, giving an uncertain career horizon (Thorpe et al., 2020; Sullivan et al., 2020). The low wages set by societies, according to the importance of the work, confront men with a difficult decision to enter and remain in the child sector; these men do not see it as economically viable for them to enter and remain in the profession (Bhana et al., 2022).

Prejudice and discrimination (Ovando & Falabella, 2021), reflected in workplaces by professional peers and families, are activated when men enter the classroom and become factors that affect their professional permanence (Martínez Palma, 2022; Sullivan et al., 2020; Wilkinson & Warin, 2021). The prejudices and discrimination that are activated at the time of the entry of men into professional practice (Ovando & Falabella, 2021), patriarchal social attitudes reflected in workplaces, by family and friends, in addition to institutional barriers, become factors that affect entry and permanence (Martínez Palma, 2022; Sullivan et al., 2020; Wilkinson & Warin, 2021).

There is a need to overcome cultural stereotypes that define roles around feminine and masculine, especially in the field of early childhood education, as it is important to attract men to this sector devoid of the necessary masculinity (Mota et al., 2023).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Men can experience ideological exclusion from the moment of entry to study early childhood education and later in the exercise of their profession questioned by their masculinity as the very exercise of the profession is historically associated with the feminine.

The implementation of laws can help the entry and retention of minority males in early childhood education by positioning them as priorities in preschool teacher recruitment. Government policies and internal institutional policies should inform men and the educational community of the possibilities for professional practice in early childhood education.

In the sociocultural ideology, early childhood education is associated with an extension of motherhood and childcare. When a man chooses the profession of early childhood education, he comes into conflict with ideas about the femininity of the profession, and these associations may also be present in the same training centers and future working environments.

Finally, the low presence of men in early childhood education is an irrefutable international issue. Ideological, political, and socio-cultural factors play a role in the low presence of men in early childhood education. It is

necessary to generate educational policies that help the entry and permanence of men in the field of early childhood education for a better integral development of boys and girls.

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