

Research Notes

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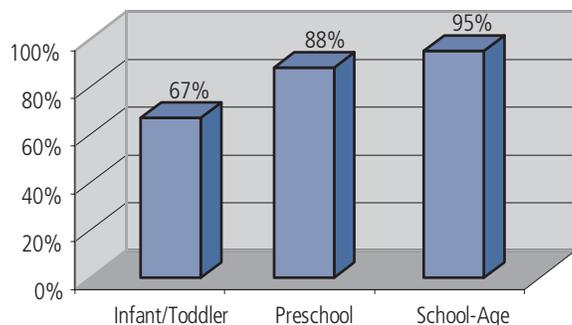
Directors' Perceptions About Male Involvement in Early Childhood Programs

A fundamental principle of child development underpinning early childhood practice is that children need stable, nurturing relationships with both men and women to develop strong gender identities. With more than 60% of young children in non-parental care during part of their day, it is of serious concern that less than 5% of the early childhood workforce is comprised of males. The low wages typically paid to early childhood teachers is often cited as the reason for this under-representation. However, this explanation only partly explains the phenomena as there are numerous low paying occupations in which both men and women are employed.

Seeking the perspective of those who recruit, orient, and supervise early childhood teaching staff, the Center for Early Childhood Leadership recently conducted a study of 336 directors of early care and education programs in 17 states. The following summarizes the key findings of this study regarding directors' perceptions about male involvement in early childhood programs.

The Sample

As would be expected, the overwhelming majority of the 336 directors who participated in this study were female (92%). Respondents had worked in the early childhood field for an average of 17 years and in an administrative position for an average of 11 years. More than 90% reported that they had experience working with male teachers. Respondents represented the racial and ethnic diversity of the early childhood workforce and more than three-fourths of the sample held at least a baccalaureate degree. A third of the sample had gone on to achieve an advanced degree.



Percentage of Directors Who Believe Male Involvement is Important for Children Attending Different Types of Programs (N = 336)

Directors' Beliefs about Male Involvement

On a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), directors were asked to respond to 16 statements regarding the role of men in early care and education. The survey also included several open-ended questions soliciting their feedback about their experiences recruiting and hiring male teachers.

The results of the survey revealed that a majority of directors believe it is important for children to have male teachers. However, the strength of their conviction regarding this belief is directly related to the age level of the child; 95% felt it was important for children in school-age programs to have male teachers whereas only 67% felt it was important for children in infant/toddler programs to have male teachers. Nearly all the respondents (90%) believe that male and female teachers are equally capable of nurturing young children in educational settings.

Why Are There So Few Men?

Almost three-quarters of the directors in the sample (71%) believe that low wages are the primary reason there are so few men working as teachers in early care and education programs. But directors also felt strongly that individual and societal biases also accounted for the under-representation of males in the early childhood workforce. The following responses suggest that gender stereotyping negatively impacts the professional involvement of men in the care and education of young children. Some respondents admitted to holding these personal biases; others expressed biases they have heard among parents and colleagues:

- *I don't think males have the nurturing qualities that females do. Men tend to be the hunters... Women naturally nurture.*
- *Many men just don't enjoy spending time with children or have the patience needed to teach young children.*
- *Society considers working with young children to be women's work so men who choose this work are looked down upon.*
- *Parents don't want male teachers; we will lose children from our program.*
- *There are still strong cultural expectations that a man needs to be the primary wage earner and a woman should be the primary caregiver.*

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- *Men are concerned about perceptions of why they would want to work with young children.*
 - *Men have told me that when people hear they work with young children, they assume they are gay.*
 - *I believe that many men worry about being subjected to unfounded allegations of child abuse.*
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Additional reasons that surfaced for the lack of male involvement in early care and education were gender-biased practices in the workplace, the isolation that males feel on the job, and the absence of focused recruitment efforts to attract males into the profession.

Recruitment of Male Teachers

While the majority of directors believe it is important for young children to have both female and male teachers, only 39% indicate that they have actively tried to recruit male teachers. Over one-half of the respondents (60%) believe that there should be special incentives like scholarships to attract males into careers in early childhood. Of those respondents who have actively tried to recruit male teachers, the following strategies were reported as being most successful:

- encourage male volunteers and work/study students to consider early childhood as a career
 - ask male staff members to recruit other men
 - attend high school and college job fairs to recruit men
 - involve parents in the recruitment process
 - offer incentives such as paying for early childhood coursework
 - use photographs of males in recruitment literature and add male and female descriptors to all program brochures
 - offer referral bonuses to staff who recruit males
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Gender-Stereotyped Practices

The results of the survey revealed the existence of both gender-biased and gender-balanced practices in early childhood organizations. Only 13% of the directors believe that programs should have policies restricting male teachers from certain activities such as nap room supervision or assisting children with toileting. However, 61% of respondents believe that male teachers experience gender discrimination on the job. From changing light bulbs to moving furniture and fixing computers, respondents agree that male teachers are more often expected to do gender-stereotyped tasks. One-half of respondents also believe that children with challenging behaviors are more frequently assigned to the classrooms of male teachers.

Implications for the Field of Early Care and Education

This study found several contradictions between what directors believe about the importance of male involvement in early care and education, the reasons attributed to lack of male participation in the early childhood workforce, and the actual experience of male teachers working in early childhood centers. While directors overwhelmingly believe in the importance of male teachers, they also report significant biases against male teachers of young children existing within themselves, parents, or society as a whole. Directors believe that low wages largely account for the lack of participation of men in the early childhood workforce, but they also acknowledge that most male teachers experience gender discrimination in the workplace.

The results of this study suggest that in order to increase male involvement in the early childhood profession it will be necessary for directors to work with parents and staff to overcome gender-based stereotypes, eliminate discriminatory practices, and implement targeted recruitment strategies to increase male representation in the workforce.

For further information about research conducted by the Center for Early Childhood Leadership, call 800-443-5522, ext. 5056. Funding for the Center's Research Notes is provided by the McCormick Tribune Foundation, the Illinois Department of Human Services, and the Joyce Foundation. Individuals may photocopy and disseminate freely.

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