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TIME FOR MEN TO BE INVITED INTO EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHING

**The Findings of a National Survey of
Early Childhood Education Services and
Teacher Educators**

Time for Men to Be Invited into Early Childhood Teaching: The Findings of a National Survey of Early Childhood Education Services and Teacher Educators

Executive Summary

Women dominate the childcare and teaching sector in New Zealand. More than 98 percent of the early childhood education (ECE) workforce is female. It would seem that the gender imbalance is accepted because the work involves being with young children.

The size of the early childhood sector and its workforce has grown exponentially over the past decade and early childhood teaching has become professionalised with more qualified early childhood staff than ever before, but no significant increase in male representation has occurred. Despite being a country that internationally is recognised as being at the forefront of gender equality, there have been no sustained initiatives to address the gender imbalance in the ECE sector.

To gauge the feeling of those involved in the running of the early childhood services and providing teacher education and training, the ChildForum Early Childhood Network conducted a sector-wide national survey over one week in August. The survey received 834 responses from early childhood services and teacher educators (an ECE service may have one to 100s of licensed centres).

The aim of the survey was to determine whether those in the sector wanted to see more men in the workplace and what benefits or disadvantages it could bring. The results show that the majority would like to see more men in ECE. Not only was it believed that more men in the sector would bring a range of benefits for children, but it could also lift the overall quality of teaching by introducing gender diversity, improve staff dynamics and encourage fathers to become more involved with their child's education.

A more diverse workforce, with men represented as well as women, is seen as being necessary to expand the quality of early childhood education for children and bring different viewpoints and ways of working to the ECE profession and the sector. However, the results also reveal some worries expressed by a minority of respondents about how increasing the number of male teachers may impact on job security and the sector as a whole. Some expressed concern that there may be fewer employment opportunities for women, that men might get special treatment or be given better jobs, and that men, who had not proven themselves to be capable of basic care-giving, might be employed as teachers.

The majority of respondents would like to see government play an active role, in some way. The survey results present a clear message to the government that it needs to assist to help create change. Many respondents felt the lack of men in ECE was a social issue that needed to be recognised as some other gender inequalities have such as the need for more women in Parliament or in professions such as law and medicine.

The results show that people in the ECE sector and teacher education welcome men and see there is a need for men to be involved in working alongside female teachers. A commitment to gender equality in early childhood education public policy, teacher recruitment and workplace practices would bring a new dimension to quality in early childhood education.

The Respondents

The online survey was carried out during one week in August. Invitations were sent to subscribers to the ChildForum Early Childhood Network mailing list and Facebook page and an additional 200 invitations were sent to randomly selected ECE services across the country.

The table below shows the number (total = 834) and percentage of respondents in each service type and group. The high percentage of respondents from teacher-led centres, namely kindergartens and childcare or early learning centres, reflects the much higher number of these service types in operation compared to other types.

Respondents	Number	Percentage
Teacher-Led Centre/or Centre Group	647	77.6%
Home-Based Service	48	5.8%
Hospital Based Service	3	0.4%
Parent-Led Centre/or Centre Group (e.g. Playcentre)	18	2.2%
Licensed Playgroup or Casual ECE Service	15	1.8%
Teacher educator or provider involved in the training and/or professional development of ECE educators	103	12.4%

It was not asked how many centres or home-based schemes were operated by individual services but comments indicated that some services operated more than one and some up to hundreds of ECE centre or home-based licences.

Additional responses were received from 13 student teachers and 21 individuals (e.g. relief teachers, special educationalists, researchers, government officials, a high school teacher of ECE, and retired ECE professionals). Their responses are reported separately in the Appendix.

Survey Questions

The survey asked two questions. Firstly, participants were asked whether they felt the government should take any action or not to increase the number of men in ECE. Secondly, they were asked whether higher numbers of male ECE teachers would have a positive, negative, or no effect on the following areas:

- Children's learning
- Children's behaviour and social skills
- Children's physical skills and development
- Children's access to male role models
- The status of early childhood work
- Wages and salaries in the sector
- Staff team dynamics
- Parents' views of a safe environment for their child
- The value parents place on early childhood education
- Dads and male caregivers participating in their child's ECE service

Participants were also asked to leave additional comments for both questions if they wished.

Results

Should Government Act on this Issue?

Most respondents (64%) wanted the government to take some kind of action to increase the number of men in early childhood teaching. A further 21% would like to see government doing something but were less certain and expressed conditions and reservations about what form any action might take and what the consequences might be for the sector (e.g. would it take money away from spending on other things in the ECE budget).

Table 1 shows the responses of early childhood services and teacher educators to this question were remarkably similar.

Table 1. ECE Service and Teacher Educator Views on Whether Any Government Action is Needed

	ECE Services	Teacher Education	Total
No Government Action	12%	14%	12%
Yes Government Action	64%	64%	64%
Maybe	21%	20%	21%
No opinion on this issue	3%	3%	3%
<i>Number who answered question</i>	<i>731</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>834</i>

The comments revealed diverse opinions on the need for government intervention in this issue.

Of those who did not want to see government take any action, or stated 'maybe' some felt that it was the responsibility of men themselves to sign up as early childhood teachers

- It is a choice thing - if they want to come into ECE they will (Playgroups & Casual ECE)
- Men can enrol in ECE just like anyone else, government shouldn't have to do anything (Teacher-Led Centre)
- It's optional for men to decide whatever career to take (Teacher Educator)
- I think there would be an opportunity to educate young men about employment opportunities in the sector. On the other hand, so much depends on the individual's personality and it might not be a good idea to simply encourage someone into early childhood simply on the basis of gender (Teacher Educator)
- Don't need a policy in my opinion. We need male teachers who are motivated to be great teachers not because they get rebated fees or scholarships for having a y chromosome (Teacher-Led Centre)

Others thought ECE services and training organisations should take the initiative

- It is up to kindergartens and their associations if they want to employ more male teachers. Why does the government have to have something on this? (Teacher-Led Centre)
- I don't see that this is a Government issue. It is up to training institutes and early childhood services to promote the profession (Teacher-Led Centre)
- Why should this be a government problem surely it belongs to the ECE stakeholders. I run a fully licenced private all day centre (Teacher-Led Centre)

There were other reasons too for being against government intervention related to fears of reverse discrimination and women's achievement in the sector

- I do not feel that positive forms of discrimination are beneficial via policy. I think it is more about consideration of why men do not choose to enter the field and why (Teacher Educator)
- We are built on a history of high quality childcare being provided for women by women. It would be damaging to bring in greater numbers of men than already (Teacher Educator)
- As long as they are on fair pay/expectations/training as woman, not given unearned/unfair opportunities to advance in their careers, just because they are minority (Teacher-Led Centre)
- I think it would be sexist if only males were given incentives (Hospital based ECE).
- How can the government change public perception? We don't want reverse discrimination (Teacher-Led Centre)

Some respondents expressed fears about what could happen if men were encouraged to enter the ECE sector, such as job availability for women, costs to the sector and teacher standards

- They will bring in a wealth of knowledge for the children at a very early age but on the other hand female teachers would have to find jobs elsewhere if the industry is taken up by men (Teacher-Led Centre)
- We cannot lower any teacher standards to let more males in (Teacher Educator)
- Any male still needs to be the right kind of person to work with young children, I think if there was a policy we would end up with some unsuitable males (Teacher-Led Centre)
- I have been a teacher for 30yrs and in that time I have worked with 7 male teachers. Only one of whom was what I would classify as an egalitarian teacher, the others I have found primarily too egocentric to get on with the job (Teacher-Led Centre)
- Men have every right to teach early childhood - some women shouldn't be let near children (Teacher-Led Centre)
- Not at the expense of existing funding (Teacher-Led Centre)
- As long as targeting funding to recruit males doesn't adversely affect funding for other ECE groups (Teacher-Led Centre)
- ECE is so short of money, I am not sure that this would be the best way to spend money (Teacher-Led Centre)
- I am not sure about assisting men in training as student fees are difficult for everyone (Teacher-Led Centre)
- These things always cost money for committees/consultation/administration which is better spent elsewhere (Teacher Educator)

Most welcomed the idea of specific government policy to encourage men into the sector

- With such an imbalance, policy and government intervention is needed. All relationships - child learning is affected by the absence of men (Teacher Educator)
- The negative attitude (of some) that males are potential child abusers requires decisive action from the government. This attitude is harmful to all families, communities, and New Zealand (Teacher Educator)
- Other countries internationally have set targets and our country has a lack of gender equality policies so this would be a great opportunity to make a difference (Teacher-Led Centre)

- As long as the policy doesn't hold centres responsible for having a certain number of males as this is not sustainable until there are more males. But policies to encourage male teachers would be fantastic (Teacher-Led Centre)

A range of suggestions to support an increase of men in the sector were put forward including scholarships, media campaigns, incentive grants to ECE services, setting performance indicators, and helping to make ECE teaching an attractive career option

- The government should encourage men into this field with incentive grants for ECE services to set up programmes like the Wainuiomata (Wellington Kindergarten Assn) one. Then if the men like what they have been able to do and it looks like a career they wish to pursue then another incentive to study (Teacher Educator)
- Scholarships such as the ones offered to Maori and pacific ECE teachers should be made available to men as an identified minority group (Teacher-Led Centre)
- Yes, it is well overdue. Some kind of incentives need to be thought of to entice men into the industry for example: free fees for their degree (Teacher-Led Centre)
- We need incentives to encourage male teachers to study towards a qualification. There's no point in having a governmental policy if there is nobody to fill the gap (Teacher-Led Centre)
- Maybe incentivise a centre if they recruit an ECE registered male teacher (Teacher-Led Centre)
- ERO should have a performance indicator around this for all centres when they evaluate them that honestly appraises their attempts at having a varied workforce i.e. that gender diversity is valued just as much as cultural diversity in the service (Teacher-Led Centre)
- Steps need to be taken to ensure the profession is seen as one with equal opportunity and male teachers are seen as an asset (Teacher-Led Centre)
- Work needs to be done to combat stereotypes in ECE (Parent-led ECE Centre)
- There are unfortunately still negative perceptions out there of men in ECE, and this will need serious addressing in order to move forward. Why should a female ECE teacher be more trusted than a male? (Teacher-Led Centre)
- Rather than a policy, perhaps work towards promoting how amazing men are in early childhood to replace the negative stereotype they currently have (Teacher-Led Centre)
- The government needs to adjust the funding back to the higher levels for centres 90%+ to make ECE an attractive career option for men (Teacher-Led Centre)

Would Having More Men Make a Difference and How?

The results show that increasing the number of men in ECE could have wide-ranging benefits for children and a positive effect on the sector according to the respondents (see Table 2).

A small minority of respondents feared a change for one or more reasons, mostly it would seem, because they are comfortable with the current gender bias and worry that the involvement of men could be negative for women. For example:

- Could make it worse for female teachers. Male teachers might demand higher wages which would be unfair on the female teachers even though they might be on the same level of qualifications and experience (Teacher-Led Centre Service)

- It could create potential difficulties in leadership as males tend to dominate leadership in all other education sectors (Teacher Educator)
- Exposure to a broader range of thinking / ways of being is always good for learning. We don't want the field to be overtaken by male dominated thinking, however, as women have worked long and hard to be heard and have influence in our society (Teacher Educator)

Table 2: Responses to the Question of What Difference Would Having More Male Teachers Bring to Children, the Sector, and Parents' Views of the Sector and Child Safety

Answer Options	Better	Make no difference	Worse	No opinion
Children's learning	67%	30%	0.1%	3%
Children's behaviour and social skills	78%	19%	0.4%	3%
Children's physical skills and development	78%	20%	0.2%	2%
Children's access to male role models	96%	3%	0.1%	1%
The status of early childhood work	64%	32%	1%	3%
Wages and salaries in the sector	39%	54%	0.5%	7%
Staff team dynamics	70%	20%	3%	7%
Parents' views of a safe environment for their child	28%	48%	11%	13%
The value parents place on early childhood education	47%	45%	1%	7%
Dads and male caregivers participating in their child's ECE service	85%	11%	1%	4%

According to the majority of respondents, the involvement of more men in early childhood teaching would be beneficial for:

- children's access to male role models (96% respondents)
- dad and male caregiver participation in their child's ECE programme (85% respondents)
- children's behaviour and social skills (78% respondents)
- children's physical skills and development (78% respondents)
- staff relationships/team dynamics (70% respondents)
- children's learning experiences/outcomes (67% respondents)
- the social status of early childhood work (64% respondents)

Around half of the respondents (47%) felt that parents would place a higher value on early childhood education if more men were involved while a further 45% said it would be unlikely to make a difference to parents' regard of the value of ECE.

Eleven percent of respondents felt that having more male teachers would make parents see their service as a less safe place for children, for example respondents said:

- We polled parents in the past and some were nervous about nappy changing etc. Unfortunately some stereotypes still occur (Teacher-Led Centre)

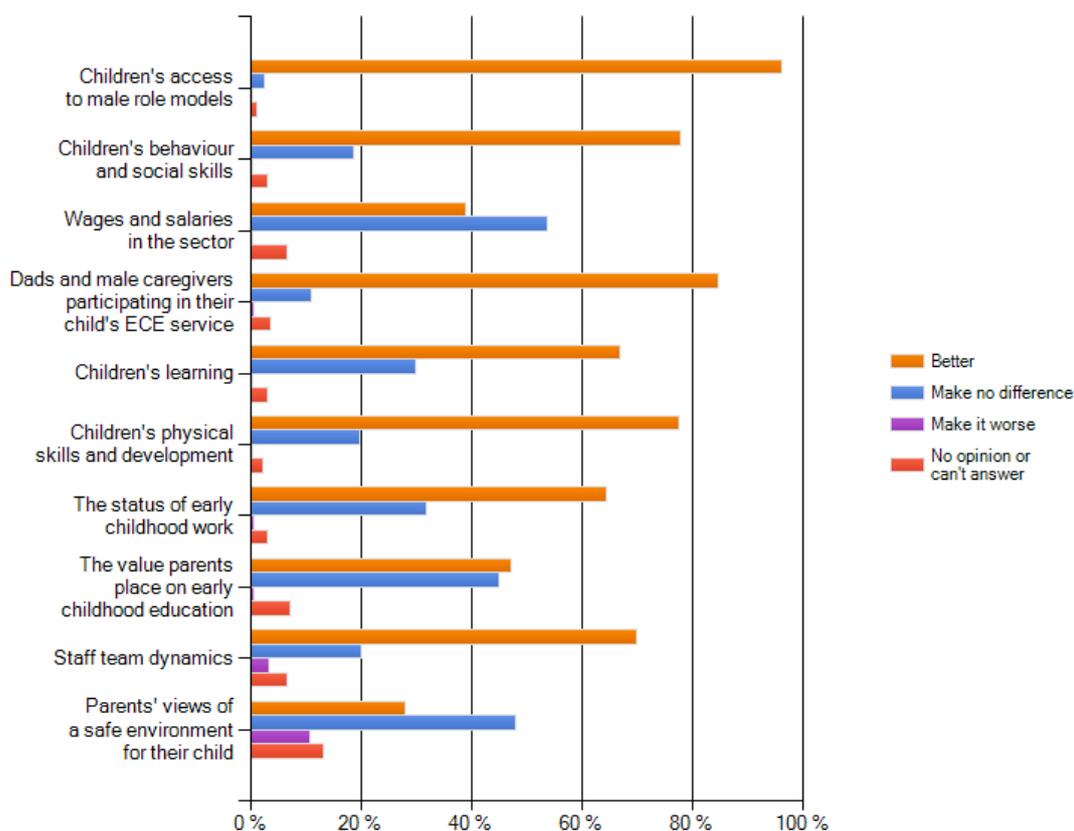
- As a centre owner, I WOULD NOT put a male in a toileting position simply because parents don't want a male tending to their child's bathroom needs. This in turn would cause strife amongst other staff as this is not a position anyone likes (Teacher-Led Centre)

However, nearly half (48%) indicated that it would make no difference to perceptions of children's safety and a further 28% felt parents would more likely view the environment as being safer because services would become more conscious about child safety. These results go against suggestions that many in the sector believe having male teachers reduces child safety and parents would not therefore support the employment of male teachers.

Having more men in ECE teaching would help to lift up salaries and wages in the sector according to 39% respondents or make no difference according to 54% of respondents. Less than .05% percent of respondents rated that it would be worse for wage and salary levels to have more men in ECE.

The responses of ECE services and teacher educators were separately analysed and little difference was found. The only significant difference between the groups was on the question of how more male teachers might affect wage and salary levels in the sector. Amongst the ECE services 56% indicated that it would make no difference to wage and salary levels compared to 36% of teacher educators, and 36% ECE services thought it would lead to an improvement compared to 57% of teacher educators.

Respondents who stated they had no opinion or could not answer any of the statements listed, were uncertain, did not want to give an opinion without experience of employing or working alongside men, or they wanted to know what other people thought first.



The chart above presents the results in a different way - graphically. The lengths of the orange and blue bars in the graph show that the overwhelmingly majority of respondents thought that on nearly all of the areas/statements listed it would better to have men as teachers. On the areas of parents' perceptions of a safe environment for their child and staff wages and salaries only a small minority of respondents believed the presence of more men in the ECE workforce would make these things worse.

The comments revealed a number of perceived benefits men can bring to ECE both in general and specifically for each of the statements in the survey.

Children's Access to Male Role Models

- A lot of children are brought up in a female dominated family. For this reason alone we need more Males in ECE (Teacher-Led Centre)
- Children, from birth, require both female and male perspectives. Men and women (generally speaking) react to life differently and children require both perspectives with the multitude of intricacies that this embodies. Many children in New Zealand grow up with minimal modelling from a male, which may have negative short term and long term consequences (Teacher Educator)
- Children's understanding of male/female relationships and provide the children who have sole mothers with a male role model so that girls learn how to relate to men, and boys learn what it is to be a man (Teacher Educator)
- Our children need to see that our men can be nurturers too (Teacher-Led Centre)

Children's Behaviour and Social Skills

- For all children, seeing men as engaged, respectful, caring and enjoying being with young children has got to be good for creating an environment where the culture is that all relationships are respectful and, therefore, in influencing children's perceptions of what the world is like (Hospital-based ECE)
- Boys particularly need men to show them how to behave (Teacher-Led Centre)
- Guys bring a different atmosphere with more energy and physical interaction generally with interests like sport and within our centre's the children are drawn to the men as solid caregivers - they seem to be someone the children miss when they are away more than anyone else (Teacher-Led Centre)

Children's Learning

- Boys are unintentionally discriminated against across the sector. Their interests are only partly catered to as much as it fits within a female world view. They are in many ways assimilated into the female world of ECE and their learning suffers as a result (Teacher-Led Centre)
- Learning to appreciate different styles by having men as teachers in the team will prompt more dialogue about teaching, other points of view, and be better for children's learning (Teacher-Led Centre)
- Men change dynamics in teaching. They give balance and interact with children in ways women don't. A no brainer really (Teacher-Led Centre)

Children's Physical Skills and Development

- Males are more carefree than women and allow children to take those risks and use their problem solving skills. Women tend to wrap the children up if they get hurt physically or

emotionally which doesn't really help the child in understanding the disposition of taking a risk and persevering and learning from mistakes (Teacher-Led Centre)

- We have 2 male teachers and it has challenged our female staff to allow more risk taking in children's play, which I see as a positive thing (Teacher-Led Centre)

Status, Wages and Salaries of Early Childhood Teachers

- Would be good because then we would have more full-time employees and lower staff turnovers (i.e. perceived as more of a profession and less of a vocation with more men in the workforce) (Teacher-Led Centre)

Staff Team Dynamics

- The men we have employed have brought a unique energy and perspective to our work and have contributed much to our team spirit and sense of 'fun' (Teacher-Led Centre)
- I have one Centre with two male teachers and it is a wonderful dynamic. We feel that the workplace has become more professional and there is less gossiping or petty sniping - men don't buy into this and the women have come on board (Teacher-Led Centre)
- We have a male teacher and he gives that balanced view at meetings where women get a bit stuck at times (Teacher-Led Centre)

Parents' Views of a Safe Environment for their Child

- With good information sharing right from the start on policies already in place for safe practice from all teachers, and an open door policy for parents, etc, I think it makes it better to have male teachers as it forces us all to look at our practice and articulate it (Teacher-Led Centre)
- We find a male presence to be a positive in attracting some families and no real difference for others (Teacher-Led Centre)
- I think the parents will be fine. We employ a number of men in our service and it causes no issues (Teacher-Led Centre)

Dads and Male Caregivers Participating in their Child's ECE service

- I have worked with Dad's at Playcentre. At our Playcentre we also hold termly un-licensed Dad's sessions for the dads who cannot do regular duties. I know how much they bring to the sessions (Parent-Led Centre)
- When the Dads seem him, they go straight to him. They stay longer and chat and they watch him with the kids and just get involved a whole lot more. Before we had a male teacher they used to drop their kids off and run (Teacher-Led Centre)

Respondents offered two main additional reasons for increasing the number of men in ECE

1. To give children greater choice in adults to relate to

- Each child is unique relating to a range of people in different ways and therefore we need a range of diversity in our teaching teams; male teachers would contribute to this range (Teacher Educator)
- Enabling children and their families to experience both genders in a teaching team encourages healthy 'normal' societal experiences and contexts, and is far more preferential than having one gender only (Teacher-Led Centre)

2. So ECE services reflect the gender composition of their community

- It would normalise early childhood education in that the teachers would reflect the communities of the children (Teacher-Led Centre)

- Any sort of diversity in relation to the ECE educators/teachers children engage with has got to be beneficial to everybody involved. It is important that the communities we have in ECE settings reflect the communities outside of these (Teacher Educator)
- We have a male teacher in our Centre. Overall we love having him, and most of the children love him, particularly the boys. However, he is there more because he is a male than for the other skills he brings. Having more male teachers would then 'normalise' their employment in ECE and they could then be employed for the skills they bring as individuals, not just for being a male. It will take a while to get to this stage! (Teacher-Led Centre)

General comments from Services Who Have, or Have Had, Male Teachers

- I have two male teachers currently employed in my centre and I feel it has been great for the families and educator who use the service (Teacher-Led Centre)
- We have 2 at present - have had 3 in the past - and find they bring a different dimension to the play and the staff dynamics (Teacher-Led Centre)
- We employ 3 male teachers in our organisation. Great quality to our team (Teacher-Led Centre)
- Men add a different layer to early childhood. We have had a number of male teachers at our centre and tried really hard to persuade one of them to do his training. He was amazing, very much a rough and tumble man and alongside that caring, gentle and he would just need to say to one of the four year olds, "That's not cool" and they would stop it straight away. Massive loss to early Childhood (Teacher-Led Centre)
- We currently have 2 male teachers in our centre and this is beneficial not only to our children and their whanau but also to the female teachers. I notice that they don't tend to over analyse everything like we seem to do as females. I have also noticed that they tend to spend a lot more time with children and don't get so tied up with routines (Teacher-Led Centre).

Conclusion

The results of this survey show that while there is a definite desire to see more men in early childhood education, more discussion needs to take place on how this should be achieved and what checks and balances need to be put in place to make sure any impact on the sector is positive rather than negative. While most felt that government should act on this issue there was some comment also about possible impacts on women in the sector and whether it could take spending away from other areas in ECE.

The feedback given by respondents presents a call to the government (or its Education Ministry) to take a lead role in addressing the issue. While individual services and training organisations can, if they wish, go some way to making the sector more attractive to men, to achieve any significant increases a prominent and positive campaign to invite and support men into teaching is needed among other possible strategies.

Work especially needs to be done on improving the image of male early childhood teachers in the eyes of the public and increasing the appeal for men of working in the ECE sector.

Further surveys on this issue could gauge whether parents, MPs and government officials support gender diversity in the early childhood teaching workforce.

APPENDIX

Additional responses were received from 13 student teachers and 21 individuals (e.g. relief teachers, special educationalists, researchers, government officials, a high school teacher of ECE, and retired ECE professionals).

All 13 student teachers wanted the government to do something to change the gender imbalance in the early childhood teaching workforce. For example:

- We need to ensure there is more support out there and more information for male teachers.
- I am an ECE teacher in training and I love to rough and tumble and play rugby with our young boys but it is not the same as having a male around doing it with them. Some children have no male role models. We need to give these children males to look up to.
- Financial assistance is needed to encourage men in
- Men provide a balance in the way children perceive their world and are needed in the ECE sector.

Student responses to the statements on what differences it would make to have more male teachers echoed those of the ECE services and teacher educators. Table 3 below shows that student teachers believed having male teachers would bring positive benefits in key areas for children and staff relation, while some rated it would make no differences to parents' perceptions of child safety and staff wage/salary levels.

Table 3. Student Teacher Responses to the Question of What Difference Would Having More Male Teachers Bring to Children, the Sector, and Parents' Views of the Sector and Child Safety

Answer Options	Better	Make no difference	Make it worse	No opinion or can't answer	Total Number
Children's learning	11	2	0	0	13
Children's behaviour & social skills	12	1	0	0	13
Children's physical skills and development	12	1	0	0	13
Children's access to male role models	13	0	0	0	13
The status of early childhood work	12	1	0	0	13
Wages and salaries in the sector	6	7	0	0	13
Staff team dynamics	12	1	0	0	13
Parents' views of a safe environment for their child	4	6	1	2	13
The value parents place on ECE	9	2	0	2	13

The 21 other individuals who completed the survey gave similar responses to the respondents this study specifically targeted (i.e. ECE services and teacher educators).

Here are some examples:

- A child development researcher said 'yes' to government doing something to bring about a change in the gender imbalance, and indicated that it would be 'better' to have more men in ECE for children's learning, children's behaviour and social skills, children's physical skills and development, children's access to male role models, staff team dynamics, parents' views of

a safe environment, the value parents place on ECE, and father involvement in the ECE service. The researcher gave no opinion on the difference it would make to the status of early childhood work and staff wages/salaries.

- A practice advisor to early childhood teachers in Special Education said ‘yes’ to government doing something to bring about a change in the gender imbalance because “We need more good male role models in all children’s lives and there is significant evidence that this has long term effect”. The practice advisor indicated that it would be ‘better’ to have more men in ECE for children’s learning, children’s behaviour and social skills, children’s access to male role models, staff team dynamics, parents’ views of a safe environment, the value parents place on ECE, father involvement in the ECE service, and the status of early childhood work and staff wages/salaries. The respondent thought it would make no difference to children’s physical skills and development and expressed no opinion on the likely impact on staff wages/salaries.
- A relieving teacher indicated ‘yes’ to government intervention and indicated that it would be better to have more male teachers on all statements listed.
- A teacher in rural education indicated ‘yes’ to government involvement and wrote “males should be encouraged to look at this profession but must meet the same criteria as other applicants to be able to undertake the study required”. The teacher indicated it would be ‘better’ to have more men in ECE for children’s learning, children’s access to male role models, children’s physical skills and development, staff team dynamics, father involvement in the ECE service, and the status of early childhood work. The respondent thought it would make no difference to children’s behaviour and social skills, parents’ views of a safe environment, the value parents place on ECE, and staff wages/salaries.

Further Information

News items, reports, and other research studies on Men in ECE are available on the ChildForum website.