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Male educators in early childhood care and education in Johannesburg : lived experiences and policy issues.

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ABSTRACT

The promotion of male educators in the early childhood care and education (ECCE) workforce has been pursued as a social policy in various countries around the world, yet this issue is virtually absent in ECCE literature and policy in South Africa. From certain child development, education and gender perspectives, more men in ECCE is seen as good for children, good for men, challenges gender stereotypes and enhances gender equity as well as the quality of ECCE. We know very little about male ECCE educators in South Africa. This study aims to shed light on their experiences and explore whether there is a need to promote gender inclusivity in ECCE in South Africa. Due to the virtual absence of this minority, a small sample of six male ECCE educators were purposively sampled in an in-depth, qualitative case study, using semi-structured interview schedule and face-to-face interviews. The study also explored the views of two key informants - academics working in early childhood and gender studies. Thematic content analysis of the data revealed some commonalities with previous studies. While some generalisations can be drawn the aim of the study was to gather contextualised accounts of these experiences and views on the broader social issues pertaining to the lack of men in the sector. The overall findings suggest that there is a need for existing and potential male educators to be encouraged, supported and made more visible. This requires network building by male educators themselves and support from the ECCE sector, Government and other stakeholders for programmes that promote attitude and institutional change.

KEYWORDS: Early childhood care and education workforce, gender inclusivity, male educators, occupational segregation.