

# Gender matters: Male and female ECEC practitioners' perceptions and practices regarding children's rough-and-tumble play (R&T)

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# What is rough-and-tumble play (R&T)?

- R&T refers to vigorous behaviours, such as wrestling, grappling, kicking, and tumbling, that appear to be aggressive except for the playful context (Humphreys and Smith 1984, Pellegrini and Smith 2005)
- Commonly observed in children's free-play time from preschool to adolescence (Humphreys and Smith 1984)



# R&T and aggression

- Playful symbolic aggression differs from serious aggression in that the motivation is not to cause harm or injury to the participants and occurs in several play types
  - E.g. superhero play, pretend fighting, chase games, protect/rescue play and wild animal/monster play (Logue and Harvey 2009)



## Background of study:

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- There is now a growing body of evidence pointing to the benefits of playful aggression in young children
- Still, it remains one of the most challenging kinds of play to support in early childhood education and care (ECEC) institutions

(Hewes 2014, Flanders et al. 2009, Pellis, Pellis, and Reinhart 2010 )

# Aim of study

- The aim was to explore Norwegian ECEC practitioners' perceptions and practices regarding children's indoor and outdoor R&T.
- Using a gender approach, we also explored the factors influencing the (male and female) practitioners' perception and practices.

# Method

- In this study both a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were used together in a mixed method design

## Questionnaire

- A total of 423 participants were recruited through internet
  - 381 women (90.1%)
  - 42 men (9.9%)

## Interviews

- A total of 6 interviewees (3 men and 3 women)
  - Two employees, one male and one female, from three strategically selected ECEC institutions

# Results

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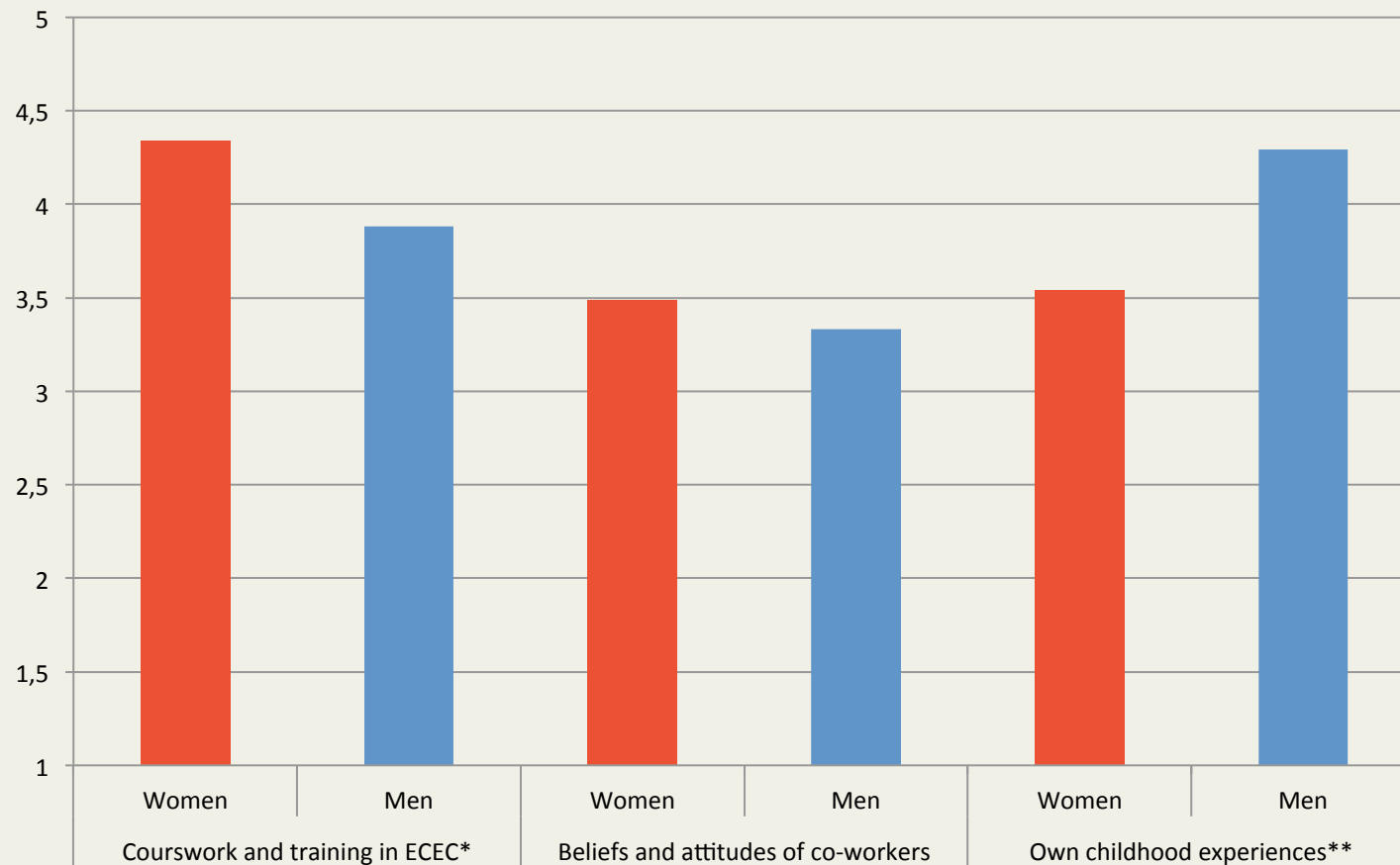
**Table 1. How strongly do you agree or disagree with allowing each type of dramatic play either in indoor and outdoor play environments?**

		Indoor play					Outdoor play			
R&T Play Themes:		M	SD	t	p		M	SD	t	p
Superhero Play	Women (n= 381)	1.93	.97	1.190	.235		1.44	.83	-.640	.523
	Men (n = 42)	2.12	.80				1.52	.67		
Pretend Fighting	Women (n= 381)	2.68	1.15	.200	.842		1.88	1.02	-.318	.751
	Men (n = 42)	2.71	1.04				1.93	.80		
Chase Games	Women (n= 381)	2.72	1.18	-.942	.347		1.58	.90	-.747	.455
	Men (n = 42)	2.90	1.12				1.69	.95		
Protect/ Rescue	Women (n= 381)	1.82	.98	-.816	.415		1.40	.90	-.773	.440
	Men (n = 42)	1.95	.82				1.50	.95		
Wild animal/ Monster	Women (n= 381)	2.18	1.007	-.478	.633		1.49	.87	-.747	.455
	Men (n = 42)	2.26	.989				1.62	.82		

1= Always allow, 2= 2, 3= 3, 4= 4, 5= Always prohibit



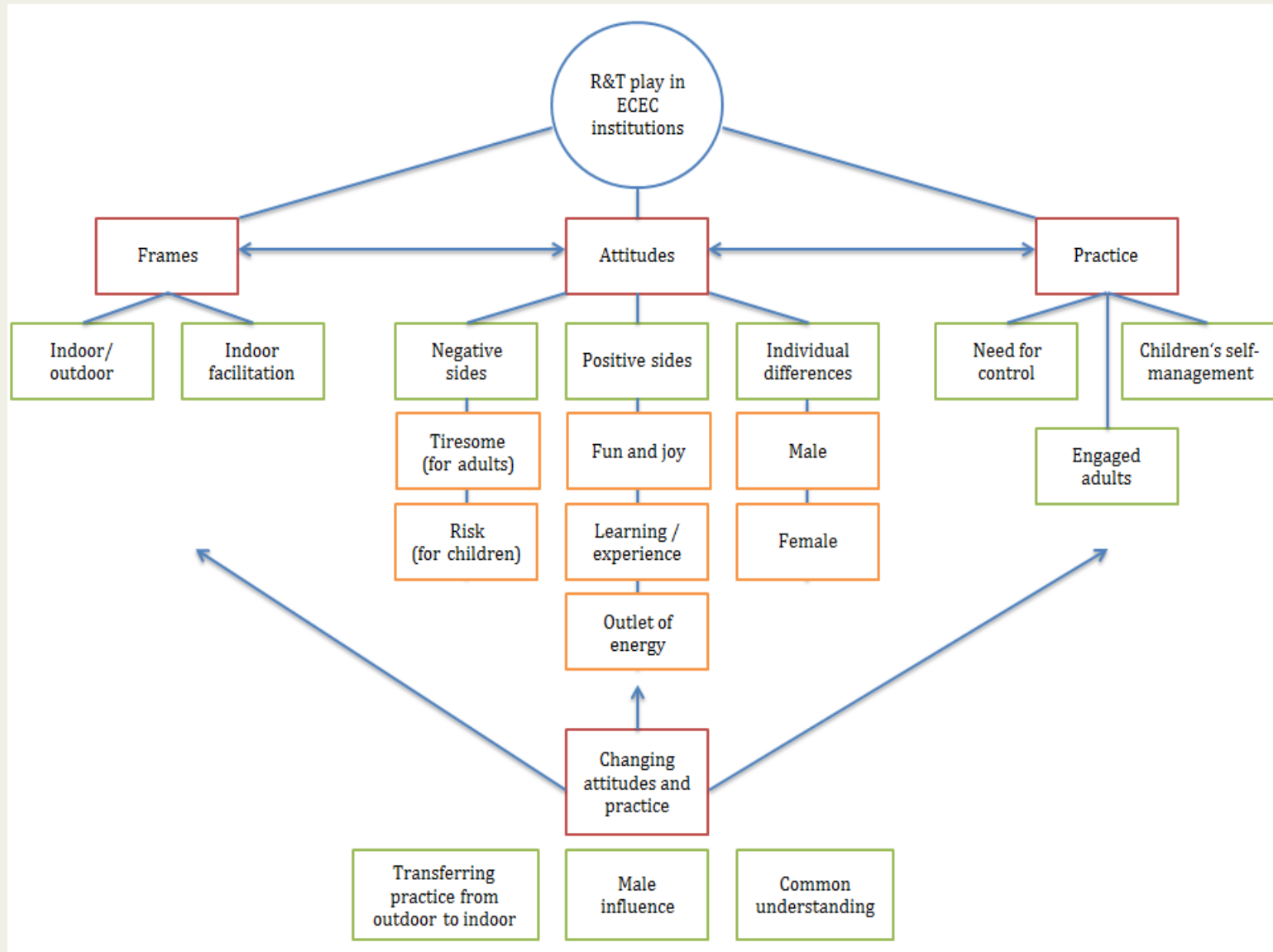
Figure 1. Distribution of the three most influential factors on practitioner's attitudes towards play.



\* = significant difference between gender at the .05 level

\*\* = significant difference between gender at the .01 level

**Figure 2. Conceptual map of categories and subcategories influencing ECEC practitioners' perceptions and practices regarding children's R&T**



- The most surprising result from the questionnaire was the lack of gender differences in allowing children's R&T in ECEC.
- However, the interviews revealed that although a basic difference in attitudes between male and female practitioners originally existed, female practitioners changed their attitudes and practices towards R&T as a result of gaining more knowledge and experience of this play through their male colleagues.
- In addition, a high consciousness of trying to adopt common understandings, rules and practices regarding R&T also contributed to a change of attitudes.

# CONCLUSION

- The results in this study indicate the importance of gender diversity in developing a supportive environment for children's R&T opportunities in ECEC institutions.
- Male and female practitioners' attitudes and practices seem to be influenced by their own gender-based dispositions and experiences, as well as the beliefs and attitudes of co-workers.
- In that sense, male practitioners may function as catalysts of R&T in a dynamic, female-dominated working environment.