

**EXPLORING MALE PRACTITIONERS' PERCEPTIONS,
EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
DEVELOPMENT**

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ABSTRACT

Gender balance is a major area of interest within the field of social work studies. Many males who are interested in venturing into careers that are associated with early childhood development have been not offered enough support by society. This study aimed at exploring male practitioners' perceptions, experiences and challenges in early childhood development (ECD). A qualitative approach with an exploratory – descriptive research design was utilised. Three themes were identified and the findings show that the male practitioners are self-motivated to take jobs in ECDs. It was also discovered that there is a perception about male practitioner's roles and also debunked stereotypes. Furthermore, the study showed that some parents spoke highly of male practitioners as they were displayed beneficial as they serve as role models to male children in the centres and also help in instilling discipline in the children. Moreover, some parents gave a lack of support and stereotypes as challenges they perceived to be facing the male practitioners. Evident from this study, was that the male practitioners' roles in the ECDC cannot be divorced from the perceived gender role and social expectations; therefore, there should be ways to attract men to this sector to regulate such perceptions. A recommendation is that government should put programmes in place and formulate policies that would help eradicate the gender bias and stereotypes in the ECD sector. Another recommendation is that pre-schools should include males in management of the centres as to make the sector more accessible/attracted to males. Future studies might also look at evaluating intervention and measures put in place by the government in addressing the challenges facing male practitioners working in the ECD sector in South Africa, Other studies might also need to compare the experiences of male practitioners from different regions in South Africa as this current study was based in Khayelitsha only.

KEYWORDS

Early Childhood Development

Male practitioners

Social constructionism theory

Early Childhood Care and Education

Perceptions

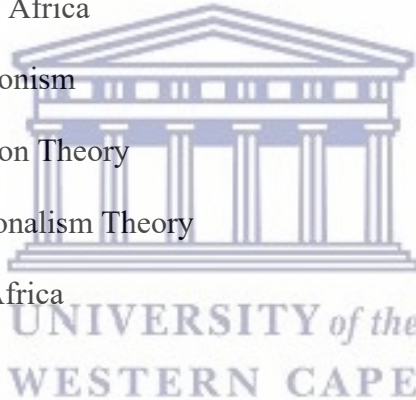
Parents



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ABBREVIATIONS

ECD:	Early Childhood Development
ECC:	Early Childhood Care
ECDC:	Early Childhood Development Centre
ECDE:	Early Childhood Development Education
ECCE:	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECDS:	Early Childhood Development Services
ECES:	Early Childhood Education Sector
ECDP:	Early Childhood Development Programme
ELC:	Early Learning and Childcare
RSA:	Republic of South Africa
SC:	Social Constructionism
SCT:	Social Construction Theory
SFT:	Structural Functionalism Theory
Stats SA:	Statistics South Africa
UK:	United Kingdom
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund
USBLS:	United States Bureau of Labor Statistics
UNESCO:	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UWC:	University of the Western Cape



DECLARATION STATEMENT

I declare that the study titled, “*Exploring the perceptions, experiences and challenges of male practitioners in the early childhood development sector,*” is a product of my research. All the sources that were used in carrying the research have been included and acknowledged, by means of inclusive references.

Name: Ntsukumbini Vuyiseka

Date: August 2022

Signed:



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DEDICATIONS

This study is dedicated to all the children in the world, especially the “fatherless” ones.



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I am very grateful to Dr C. J. Erasmus and Ms N. Lekelelo for their direction during the process of research.

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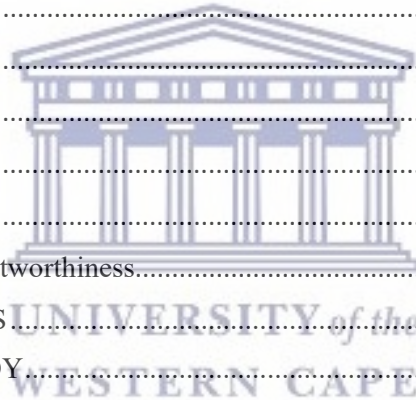
To the Almighty God, I say thank You Lord for blessing me and giving way to me the grace to these great opportunities.



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

1.1 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

This study concerning exploring the perceptions, experiences and challenges of male practitioners in the early childhood development sector is important to address gender perceptions linked with the early childhood sector (ECS). Some noted that females are always associated with the early childhood care ECC, while any men found in this sector face a legion of challenges and negative perceptions from the people of the society due to the nature of the field (Brown, 2018). In the study carried out by Holmes and Brownhill (2011), they asserted that gender imbalance in the early childhood setting is stark, with the workforce within the sector being populated heavily by females. Brown (2018) claimed that females are more caring, sensitive and creative than males but in the real sense, society still views male practitioners in the ECS as suspicious and this social stereotypical view of males is a big jab deterring some males from entering the profession.

The childcare sector is said to employ about 375,000 paid workers across an extensive range of sectors, which include day nurseries and after-school care institutions (Sargent, 2017). It is a large employer that allows and enables women with children to contribute to the labour market, therefore, important to the achievement of gender equality. The childcare workforce has been a key area for the South African employment policy in recent years, with emphasis particularly given to the recruitment of new workers into the sector (Sargent, 2017). Yet, all sources of data on the childcare workforce show men as at less than 3 percent (Sargent, 2017). This figure has remained steady in the last decade despite national and local recruitment campaigns aimed at men (Vandenbroeck & Peeters, 2018). However, how to rally more male practitioners to equalise the

largely feminised workforce remains a challenge for the early childhood development sector (Miller & Cable, 2012). Most early childhood development centres (ECDC) seem to have become organisation that have established a gender regime, which maintains constant gender norms. In most of those schools, it is most likely that every day-to-day practices operate to reinforce the dominant construction of early childhood teaching as being more naturally suitable to females than males (Sumison, 2015). Male practitioners in the ECDC are perceived as conspicuous and may be subjected to some kind of suspicion (Smedley, 2007).

A lot of studies specify that fewer men are working in premature years' settings (Mills et al., 2014; Moss, 2017). A survey of 20 countries specified that men represented less than one percent of the early year's workforce (Moss, 2017). Across many western industrialised countries, research on the distribution of gender in the early years' workforce shows that generally, men hold accountability for less than 5 percent of the workforce (Farquhar, 2017). Sumison's study (2015) concluded that in Scandinavian countries, eight percent of the workforce in the early years is males whereas the proportion of men in the early years' workforce is 1-4 percent globally. In reviewing earlier reports, which paid attention to gender distribution in childcare centres, Doris and Frank (2000) established that the early years' workforce is becoming less associated with women as men are now more welcome to the sector because people's perceptions are gradually changing. This result appears to be armoured in studies with primary schoolteachers (Doris & Frank, 2000). Furthermore, Doris and Frank (2000) indicated that there are many factors that hinder the integration of males into the ECS, which are the point of view of colleagues in the sector, low rate of wages, the high proportion of women in the work environment and the fact that the job brings them in closer contact with the children.

Research has specified that many efforts have been made to address the disproportion amongst men and women in the early years such as the recruitment campaigns that were used to increase the number of men in the early year's workforce (Carrington & Skelton, 2016; Hutchings, 2002). Farquhar (2017) observed that there is a common perception about most males who offer their services to work within the ECS as being mostly assumed to be either homosexuals or paedophiles. Cushman (2010) reported that the participation of male practitioners helps in the development of children's socio-emotional status, which further emphasises the need for men and their involvement in the lives of children. Woodson and Pabon (2016) highlighted that although it is understood and some awareness on the requirement of men to be engaged in the ECES, relevant data and research around this underlying issue is inadequate and limited. The perceptions around male involvement and a lack of research regarding male involvement needs to be a challenge through research evidence, henceforth, this research seeks to assess the perception, experiences and challenges male practitioners face in the ECS.

1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two theories shape this study. One of them is the social constructionism theory, which denotes that, generally, people develop knowledge about the world in a context that is social and that much of what we distinguish as reality depends on shared assumptions (Galbin, 2014). From a social constructionist perspective, there are many things that we take for granted and many that we believe are objective reality; those are socially constructed and thus, can change as society changes (Owen, 2015). The theory is relevant in exploring the perceptions, experiences and challenges of male practitioners in the ECDS as these perceptions are developed from social constructions. In this study, the social constructionist theory through patriarchal gendered discourse was used to examine male practitioners' perceptions, experiences and challenges in this sector. Weerhannadige

(2012) indicated that “Social constructionism is a relativist epistemological position, which is premised on the supposition that the social world is being constructed by individuals themselves through their social practice” (p. 467). A critical analysis of the central assumption of the social constructionism theory is that with proper contextualisation of the assumption within the gender stereotype context, it would then become crystal clear how the gender composition of the ECS is a product of social collectivity or put differently, social construct, which is wrapped within the purview of the social perspective that women are viewed as being mediocre when compared to men concerning status and power (Holmes & Brownhill, 2011). From the foregoing, it can be said that patriarchal gender discourse is connected to power among women and men where the men are given absolute priority while the females occupy an inferior position (Weerhannadige, 2012). This study assumed that social influences lead to gender imbalances in ECD centres.

A further theory to this study is structural functionalism, which, upheld the belief that society is made up of an integrated whole, with interrelated and interconnected parts (Lucas, 2009). These interdependent parts work together to ensure the functioning of the whole social system (Ritzer, 2011). The structural functional theory espoused that the understanding of the society can be better placed if it could be seen in the light of a complex system that is composed of different interacting and independent working parts that are interdependently working towards the functionality of the whole social system (Lucas, 2009). This tradition believed that society is like a biological organism that has different parts and these parts are working towards the functionality of the whole social system (Ritzer, 2011).

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Few men are attracted to the field of ECS as research shows that women working in childcare, rule the 0-5 years of the age labour force with 98 percent being female (Cameron et al., 2009;

Nutbrown, 2014). The male workforce has witnessed a struggle in the construction of their professional distinctiveness, in part, because of the gendered nature of childcare vocation, the control of other groups such as government and the market financial system of childcare and other professionals who inflict upon it their definitions of what a childcare worker should be and how they should perform. (Nutbrown, 2014). Multiple perceptions regarding male practitioners within ECS exist, which create challenges and various difficult experiences for the male workers. Despite the local government's persuasion to ensure a balanced early childhood workforce, the male practitioners' workforce remains low (Nutbrown, 2014). From what has been garnered from the existing body of knowledge, it could be deduced that limited research has been done on male practitioners' perceptions, experiences and challenges in the early development centres; therefore, this study hoped to close that gap.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

This study answers the following research question:

What are male practitioners' perceptions, experiences and challenges of working in the early childhood development sector?



1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

1.5.1 Aim

The study aimed to investigate male practitioners' perceptions, experiences and challenges in the early childhood development sector.

1.5.2 Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- Explore and describe the held perceptions of male practitioners in early childhood development.
- Explore and describe the experiences and challenges of male practitioners in early childhood development.
- Explore and describe the perceptions of pre-school parents with respect to male practitioners in early childhood development centres.

1.6 METHODOLOGY

This study engaged a qualitative approach, which explores observable facts as they occur in the real world and therefore, desires to study them in their natural settings (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Qualitative research is a kind of research strategy that usually emphasises quality rather than quantity in the collection and analysis of data (Bryman, 2016). This study used an explorative and descriptive research design as exploratory studies make groundwork investigations into comparatively indefinite areas of research. They employ an open, flexible and inductive approach to research as they attempt to look for new insights into the phenomena (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The overall purpose of descriptive research is to offer a picture of an occurrence as it naturally happens and focuses on “how” and “why” questions (Bickman & Rog, 2008:14). The researcher begins with a distinct area under discussion and conducts research to explain it accurately and as it exists at present (Kothari, 2017) whereas in investigative studies, the researcher aims to become acquainted with fundamental particulars and to generate a universal depiction of the state of affairs (Bryman, 2016).

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study has contributed to the body of knowledge by exploring the perception, experiences and challenges faced by male practitioners working at the ECDS in Western Cape Province in Khayelitsha Township. The findings of this study would also be useful to the government or the managerial board of the ECD in different centres to help develop programmes that would help address the challenges faced by male practitioners working within the ECDS. Furthermore, the findings could assist society understand the real intention of the male practitioners in ECD and help orient them on the need to give them moral support rather than holding a stereotypical view about them.

1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Early Childhood Development: the era of individual progress from birth until the year before a child enters formal school (National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy, 2015).

Early childhood development Centre: a fractional care facility that provides an early childhood programme with an early knowledge and progressive focus for children from birth until the year prior to entering Grade R/formal school (National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy, 2015).

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE): refers to a variety of processes and instruments that maintain, support and assist in the holistic improvement of children, from birth to age 8 years (UNESCO & UNICEF, 2012).

Practitioner: an individual who provides early childhood development services in formal early childhood development programmes, family services and playgroups and training as well as those

providing supervision support services to these employees (National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy, 2015).

Parent: a biological, foster or adoptive mother and/or father accountable for the care and security of a young child who is established in the child's life and who loves the child and needs to look after the child (National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy, 2015).

Social Constructionism Theory: a hypothesis of information of sociology and communication that examines the progress with a mutually constructed perception of the world (Galbin, 2014).

Structural Functionalism Theory: it is a set of assumptions in sociology that sees or conceives the society as an entity made up of interrelated parts (Ritzer, 2011).

1.9 OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter One provides an indication of the study, a prologue to the problem and rationale for the study. The chapter also gives concise negotiations of the hypothetical structure and methodology. It outlines the problem proclamation and the connotation of the study. Additionally, it states the research question, aim, objectives and lastly, the definitions of terms.

Chapter Two provided a detailed understanding of the theories of social constructionism and structural functionalism and their applicability to the relevance of this study.

Chapter Three gave a detailed review of extant studies relating to the issues of early childhood development, male practitioners' perceptions in ECD, the societal perception of the male practitioner in the ECD sector, gender imbalance in ECDS, challenges facing male practitioners working in this sector as early childhood educators and the advantages of having men in this sector.

Chapter Four provides an in-depth look at the research methodology, which includes the research question, aim and objectives, an outline of the research approach and design, an explanation of the units of analysis and their sampling procedures, an outline of the research instrument and the pilot study, method of data collection and analysis, research limitations and ethical considerations.

Chapter Five focuses on the discussions, results and findings of the study as per the main themes and subthemes whilst substantiating and/or negating the findings with the theoretical framework as outlined in chapter two and with previous research as presented in chapter three.

Chapter Six presents the conclusion and recommendations based on the findings of the study as well as suggestions for future studies.



CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The theories of social constructionism and structural functionalism that underpin this study are explored in this chapter. The rationale of this chapter is to provide a theoretical understanding of the perceptions, experiences and challenges of male practitioners in the early childhood development sector. A comprehensive description of these two theories as well as their applicability to this study is provided.

2.2 ORIGIN OF THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM THEORY

Murphy et al. (1998) stated that social constructionism (SC) originated as an effort to come to terms with the temperament of authenticity and it emerged some thirty years ago. This hypothesis has its genesis in sociology and has been connected with the post-modern era in qualitative research, which is associated with the idea of how remarks indicate the world that is being pragmatic. Constructivism and constructionism are terms often used interchangeably, the first term being ideal in psychology and educational studies, the second in sociology. Over the past 40 years, constructionism has also been of long-lasting curiosity in qualitative social research, alongside augmented acknowledgement of the skewed, social and discursive consistency of human experience, practice and artifacts (Marechal, 2010). Constructivism proposes that each individual psychologically constructs the world of knowledge in cognitive processes while SC has a social rather than an individual focal point (Young & Colin, 2004). The social constructionism theory (SCT) is said to be introduced in a book published in the year 1966 titled, 'The Social Construction

of Reality’, by sociologists, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, whose thoughts were stimulated by numeral thinkers including Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and George Herbert Mead (Young & Colin, 2004). In particular, Hebert Mead's theory of figurative interactionism, which assumes that the structure of individuality in any social space is a product of social communication, was exceedingly influential to the expansion of the SCT of Berger and Luckman in 1966 (Vinney, 2019).

Social constructionism is a broad term functional to theories that highlight the communally shaped nature of social life (Young & Colin, 2004). The importance of SC is typically traced back at least to the effort of William Isaac Thomas and the Chicago sociologists as well as the phenomenological sociologists and philosophers such as Alfred Schultz (Vinney, 2019). Such approaches emphasise the idea that society is aggressively and imaginatively produced by human beings (Young & Colin, 2004). They depict the world as made or invented rather than simply given or taken for granted. Social worlds are interpretive nets woven by individuals and groups (Vinney, 2019).

The term officially entered the sociological terminology through Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman’s Social Construction of Reality” which was published in the year (1966), which attempts a pioneering amalgamation of the ideas of Émile Durkheim and George Herbert Mead. For Berger and Luckman, the fundamental features of social order are captured in the belief that ‘Society is a human product’ (Vinney, 2019). Furthermore, it was added that this can then be summed up by saying, society is an objective reality and also man is a social product (Vinney, 2019). Their foremost case study of SC was faith (Berger, 1969) but at the same time, the labelling theory of deviance was being urbanised and popularised, signifying in an equivalent fashion that deviance is socially constructed (Young & Colin, 2004). Similarly, within the sociology of

education, researchers were deploying opinions resulting from the work of Mary Douglas and Basil Bernstein to the effect that instructive awareness was also socially constructed (Young & Colin, 2004). From several diverse sources, therefore, the more wide-ranging phraseology of constructionism emerged—and the expression lost much of its original characteristic meaning (Vinney, 2019).

Social constructionism is often contrasted with so-called essentialism for the reason that it moves away from the thoughts of the naturally given or taken for granted and questions the communal and chronological pedigree of phenomena (Vinney, 2019). Burr (1995) acknowledged the chief power of Berger and Luckmann (1991) in its development. In turn, they acknowledge the influence of Mead, Marx, Schutz and Durkheim on their thinking. Their inscription, therefore, constitutes an amalgamation of these influences (Marechal, 2010). The beginning of SC can be traced in part to an interpretivist approach to thinking (Marechal, 2010). Mead, one of the originators of emblematic interactionism, is the familiar link (Vinney, 2019).

In the late 1960s, three separate rational arrangements came jointly to shape the groundwork of SC. The first was an ideological movement that questioned social realities and put focus on the opinionated programme behind such realities. The second was a bookish/symbolic drive to deconstruct verbal communication and the way it influences our familiarity with reality. The third movement was an evaluation of scientific practice, led by Thomas Kuhn, who argued that methodical findings are prejudiced by, thus, envoy of the specific communities where they are fashioned rather than objective reality (Vinney, 2019).

The central criticism levied against social constructionism could be summed up in its conception of realism and relativity (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Andrews, 2012). The theory has been criticised for being antithetical to realism in its denial of knowledge as a progenitor of perception

of reality. (Craib, 1997). It was also criticized for denying the self-evident and stable findings of the evidence-based sciences like biomedicine and offering little evidence to back up its claims (Schwandt 2003).

The studies that employ this theory have been criticised for their inability to cater for objective reality and rendering of multiple accounts (Schwandt 2003). It was said that the theory adoption of relativism negates the realist stand and creates room for multiple realities that are essentially incongruence with objectivity (Stem, 2001). In this regard, it was said that the finding of research that stem from this study could be said to be useless as its usefulness to the body of knowledge is questionable (Andrews, 2012). Underlining this argument is the criticism that a study conducted using this theory cannot claim precedence over other studies as each research has its relative report, which made it impossible to reach an objective reality (Andrews, 2012).

2.3 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM THEORY

Social constructionism is a sociological theory that explores how people develop knowledge of the world in a given social context. This theory highlights that much of what people within a given social context perceive as reality depends on the shared assumptions (Galbin, 2014). To Gergen (1985), social constructionism is a perspective that is of the opinion that human existence is a product of social influence. From a social constructionist perspective, many things we take for granted and believe are objective reality, which is actually socially constructed, thus, can change as society changes (McIlveen & Schultheiss, 2012). From the social constructionist lens, the social construct would then mean as a notion or idea which appears to have an objective existence to man but which from the point of reality may or may not be true but in the real sense, it is the product of the intersubjective submission of the individuals in the society (Galbin, 2014). From the foregoing, it must be noted that what is held as reality in any context is a product of the society,

that is to say, what is known or the definition of anything in the society is created by those found in that society and this constructed knowledge is driven by politics (Rogers, 2010). Galbin (2014) further buttressed this by asserting that, from the constructionist lens, central to the creation of social realities are symbols, language and communication with the given social milieu.

Constructionists espoused that knowledge and what is projected to be the truth within any given social context are not borne out of the mental processing but a construction that emanates from the interaction of the individuals in the society (Schwandt 2003). In that regard, the position of Schwandt (2003) can then be found a parallel with the assumption that to be a realist is in congruence to being a constructionist. One can believe that concepts are constructed rather than discovered yet maintain that they correspond to something real in the world. Moreover, Galbin (2014), in his social constructionist analysis, posited that social constructionists as against the beliefs of many regarding the tradition, give credence to the fact that humans are being influenced by both biological and social factors but explicated and concentrate on the influence of the social factors emanating from social interplay on the behaviour of a human in the society. This can then be deduced from Galbin (2014) analysis that, although there exists biological cleavage of human behaviour, this is not the ultimate and sole determinant of human behaviour and construction of meanings but what is being projected as social facts within a given social context are derivative of the human social expedition (Galbin, 2014). This is consistent with the idea of Berger and Luckmann (1991) and the subtle realism of Hammersley (1992) in that, reality is socially defined but this reality refers to the subjective experience of everyday life, how the world is understood rather than to the objective reality of the natural world. As Steedman (2000) noted, most of what is known and much of the knowledge is concerned with trying to make sense of what it is to be human as opposed to scientific knowledge. Individuals or groups of individuals define this reality

(Galbin, 2014). This branch of constructionism is unconcerned with ontological questions or questions of causation (Steedman, 2000). Social constructionists believe that things that are generally viewed as natural or normal in society such as understandings of gender, race, class and disability, are socially constructed and consequently are not an accurate reflection of reality (Galbin, 2014).

In this research study, the social constructionist theory was used to expose male practitioners' perceptions, experiences and challenges in the ECD sector, normally a female dominated area. With a social constructionist perspective, when keenly analysed, it could be deduced that the assumption that men are not expected to be found in the ECD sector for whatever reasons, is a social construct that is born out of the interaction of the individuals in the society and not that men are incapable of working in this sector by nature or naturally (Holmes & Brownhill, 2011). This socially constructed reality, in turn, affected the reaction of the majority of the male towards choosing by choosing a career in the ECD sector. This socially constructed reality that males who chose a career in the sector are paedophiles and homosexuals who are capable of harassing the children in the educational care centres is basically stereotypic, which might not be true of everyone for all of them. Some of them could have actually chosen the career out of their passion or one's experience and this would in no doubt counteract the argument against them as being sexual harassers.

Scrivens (2002) examined the female leadership constructions and suggested that the ECD leaders usually utilise female-oriented leadership ideas rather than using custom developed styles from reflections on their practice and leadership theory. Frequently, the female practitioners are fond of reporting that male practitioners in early childhood are never well prepared to assume leadership responsibilities (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; 2016; Rodd, 2020). Gender differences has been

a persistent area of study in the ECD sector to date. The gender issue, similarly related to equity and diversity in education, triggers in people traits such as fear, silence and blindness (Rusch, 2014, p. 19). These might be genuine reactions because of various personal reasons. Gender sensitivities or stereotypes regarding child abuse may make men encounter prejudice sometimes (Coleman, 2007, p. 45); thus, very few men become early childhood practitioners (Cushman, 2010). A larger part of the literature is attached to the assumption that leaders will always be men while women only pursue leadership paths as careers, hence the women are left out in the leadership field (Coleman, 2007).

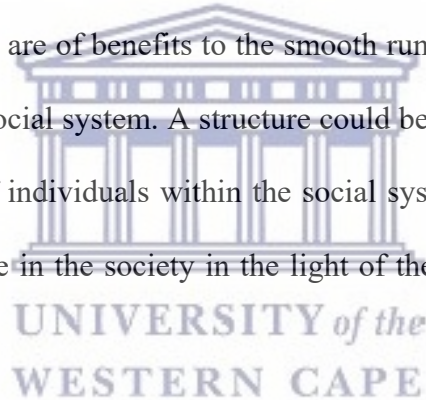
Lumby (2007) suggested that whether at a group or individual level, giving a response to “strangers” involves both emotional conscious/unconscious and cognitive strategies. Such outcomes can cause anxiety, anger or confusion (Di Tomaso & Hooijberg, 2006; Prasad & Mills, 2007; Rusch, 2014). Milliken and Martins (2006) elaborated that strangeness can lead to an increase in anxiety in a relationship indicating the negative reaction to ethnicity or gender that exists, instead of age; thus, it is difficult to understand the notion of strangeness.

Male practitioners’ self-perceptions would be shaped by what society thinks they are. This is also supported by Holmes (2011) where he mentioned that our consciousness level and relations with one another are shaped by our society and culture; all the metaphysical qualities we overlook are obtained from others and the environment around children. Constructionism entails relations and allows an individual to take charge of the social construction of realities (Cojocaru, 2010; Cojocaru, 2013). This means that the male practitioners’ construction of their role is based on relations within their circles, be it the parents, the colleagues and even the children themselves and at the end in this constructionism, the role of an individual is sustained according to their realities.

Crawford (2006) combined the idea of social and constructivism; he discovered that the child can develop in various ways which are positive if he/she interacts with both gender of practitioners.

2.4 STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM THEORY

A further theory that underpins this research study is the Structural Functionalism Theory (SFT), which is a social theory that conceived the society as a product of interdependent subsystems (Lucas, 2009). This theory posited that society works as a system called a social system (Ritzer, 2011). This theory further posited that these subsystems are functional to the existence of the whole social system and that a fault in one of the interacting subsystems would lead to tension for the whole social system (Ritzer, 2011). The focus of the theory on the structure is centred around the functions these structures perform (Lucas, 2009). In the exposition of function according to this tradition, it means consequences are of benefits to the smooth running of the society towards the achievement of stability of the social system. A structure could be understood to be anything that exists outside or independent of individuals within the social system (Lucas, 2009). In essence, this theory analyses the structure in the society in the light of the functions they perform in the society (Ritzer, 2011).



The structural functionalists also upheld the belief that society is made up of an integrated whole with interrelated and interconnected parts. These interdependent parts work together to ensure the functioning of the whole social system. The SFT espoused that the understanding of the society can be better placed if it could be seen in the light of a complex system that is composed of different interacting and independent working parts that are interdependently working towards the functionality of the whole social system (Lucas, 2009). This tradition believed that society is like a biological organism that has different parts and these parts are working towards the functionality of the whole social system (Ritzer, 2011). This theory also holds that the social system is composed

of different parts that are interconnected; the understanding of the interconnected parts can be derived from the functions they performed in meeting the needs of the social system at large; the components are all working towards equilibrium, a defect in a subsystem or part would lead to change in the other parts within the social system (Lucas, 2009).

From the assumptions of this theory, taking the ECD sector as a social system of its own is made of different interrelated parts just like we have in the biological organisms. These structures include the administrators of the sector, the male practitioners, the female practitioners, the children enrolled at the centre and the support staff like cleaners and clerical staff, structural components of the ECD sector. Furthermore, the theory espoused that their structural parts are there to meet specific needs of the society, so, it is for the different components of the ECD sector. Moreover, the male practitioners are there for a specific purpose, the same way we have the female practitioners to perform some functions that ordinarily a man cannot perform. Within the sector, the male practitioners are needed to serve as a father model for the children, especially those children that do not have access to both parents or whose parents are separated or divorced, and their mother is their custodian. The presence of male practitioners in this sector would also help in meeting the needs of the children in engaging in some physical activities that a woman cannot ordinarily handle. The presence of male practitioners in this sector would in no doubt help in creating learning enhancing the environment for the children in this sector.

2.5 SUMMARY

This chapter described the social constructionism theory, its origin and critiques and how they relate to the current study. The theory has explored how people develop knowledge of the world in a social context and that much of what we perceive as reality depends on shared assumptions. From a social constructionist perspective, many things we take for granted and believe are

objective realities that are socially constructed and thus, can change as society changes. The theory has helped explain how perceptions towards male practitioners are shaped by what society thinks of them. For instance, this means that the male practitioners' construction of their role is based on relations within their circles, be it the parents, the colleagues and even the children themselves and at the end, in this constructionism, the role of an individual is sustained according to their realities such as the belief that women are supposed to be the caregivers. . The fundamental assumption of structural functionalism is that the society is made up functional substructures that are all working for the functionality and stability of the social system. From the analysis of this theory, the early childhood development sector is like a system that comprises different parts, that is, the administrators of the sector, male and female practitioners, the children enrolled at the centres and the support staff, which are viewed as the structural components of the ECD sector.

The next chapter, the literature review, will provide critical insight into other researches conducted on the topic.



CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided the theoretical framework for understanding male practitioners' perceptions, experiences and challenges in the ECD sector. This chapter provides critical insight into researches conducted on the topic. Content discussed includes early childhood development, male practitioners' perceptions, experiences and challenges in ECD and the societal perceptions of the male practitioner in the ECD sector.

3.2 EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Peacock-Chambers, Ivy and Bair-Merritt (2017) believed that the first three years of life are a vital period for the growth and development of a child as this has the potential to influence the social, economic and health-related quality of life. Fernald et al. (2017) described child development as the behavioural, biological, physiological and psychological changes that happen as an infant move from being dependent to fairly independent or independent. Fernald et al. (2017) further explained that the development of language, cognitive skills, motor skills and social-emotional skills are all part of these changes. Similarly, Black et al (2016) believed that child development is a maturational and an interactive process that results in an ordered progression of perceptual, motor, cognitive, language, social-emotional and self-regulation skills. This means that children reach developmental potential when they acquire developmental competencies for academic, behavioral, social-emotional and economic achievements. A child's development is a vital determinant of health over the life course and when children are provided with early developmental opportunities, there is a high chance of them excelling academically as well as health-wise (Black

et al, 2016). However, just like fingers are not equal, children are not the same as they have unique characteristics, hence, the speed of a child's development can vary over time and a child's success in a particular area may be unstable instead of advanced over time (UNICEF, 2018).

The first sustainable development goal is to ensure that all human beings can fulfill their potential in dignity and equality. According to (Richter et al., 2017), this is only achievable if early child development is protected, promoted and supported. Britto et al (2017) had a similar view and believed that the sustainable development goals provide a historic opportunity to implement interventions that can help promote ECD. ECD programmes influence a child's readiness to learn in class because these programmes improve the cognitive and social-emotional functioning of children (Britto et al, 2017). Britto et al (2017) claimed that children who are exposed to ECD programmes enjoy lifelong benefits, which include improved health and well-being and an increased ability to learn and earn. Despite many important roles ECD programmes play, they might not be easily accessible because of the determinants of early child development. Black et al (2016) espoused that ECD is determined by factors such as poverty, socio-cultural factors, psychological and biological risk factors. A child's development depends on the function of the central nervous system and on positive and negative environmental factors (Fernald et al., 2017). These positive environmental factors include many elements of health (such as diseases, prevention, immunisation), nutrition (such as dietary, diversity, macronutrients and micronutrients, breastfeeding), security and safety (such as early interventions for vulnerable children, birth registration), responsive caregiving (such as home visits, support for emotional development, caregiving) and early learning (such as access to quality child care and preschool, learning materials. These factors are supported by an enabling environment for the caregiver, family and community (Fernald et al., 2017). Black et al (2016) opined that early childhood

development is influenced by characteristics of the child, the family and the social environment. Extreme poverty increases children's likelihood of exposure to multiple adversities including family stress, child abuse, insecurity and violence, which in turn, affects child development negatively (Black et al, 2016).

3.3 GENDER IMBALANCE IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

Globally it is estimated that between two and three percent of teachers in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) are men (OECD 2018; Brody et al., 2021). A recent OECD report (2019) claims that across OECD countries just 3.2% of pre-primary teachers are male. This is to show that the lack of male practitioners in ECD is a global crisis (Mukuna and Mutsotso, 2011; Brody et al., 2021; Oberhuemer et al., 2010; Warin, 2018; Wright & Brownhill, 2018) that indicates that the issue of gender imbalance in the ECD is not just a regional matter; it is an issue that has permeated every ECD sector in different countries across the globe.

Rohrman (2016) found that a great deal of discrimination exists within this sector. Many of the female practitioners in this sector do seem at the first contact to have positive reactions to having more male colleagues but with veritable pieces of evidence, it has been recorded that during recruitment, they prefer female applicants to male applicants (Rohrman, 2016). This was the typical instance Murray called “Subtle Discrimination” (Rohrman, 2016). While they feign to be positive at the first sight of the male colleague, a critical analysis from different studies has shown that underlying in them is a stereotypical view about the male practitioners being a role model to the kids in the ECD sector (Rohrman, 2016, Cruickshank et al., 2020). Yang and McNair (2019) in their study also indicated that males are expected from the stereotypical view of the female practitioners to engage in some activities such as tumble play, being the janitor, fixing electricity and doing some outside playing with the kids in the ECD sector.

As indicated in the studies of Xu (2020a) and Tembo (2021) it is evident that male practitioners are expected to provide alternative (and positive) male role models who are safe, respectful, and caring to children. This stereotypical view was also reported by Yang and McNair (2019) where they revealed that many of the male practitioners in this sector are expected by the public to act as male role models, to provide an exemplar of socially accepted ‘ways of doing’ masculinity for boys to emulate from an early age (Wood & Brownhill, 2018). Globally measures have been taken to attract men to work in early learning and childcare (ELC) so as to challenge gender stereotypes of men being less caring and to provide children with gender- early life (Xu 2020a). Norway and Germany have invested in extensive projects and programmes to increase the number of male students and workers in ECEC. Some Chinese provinces have put in place policies that endorse men’s enrolment on ECEC courses by offering them free tuition (not equally free to women) (Xu & Waniganayake 2018). Despite these efforts, the proportion of male ECEC workers remains low compared to the goal of 20 percent that was put forward by the European Commission Network on Childcare nearly 20 years ago (Peeters et al., 2015, p. 303).

A publication by Thorpe and Sullivan (2017) published by The University of Queensland, Australia, shows that the male practitioners found in Australian ECDCs represents just three percent of the workforce in the sector. Similarly, recent data from the United States Bureau of Labour Statistics USBLS (2019) showed that less than three percent of male practitioners are found in preschool and kindergarten. In the United Kingdom (UK), the male practitioners in ECDC are just two percent of the practitioners in the sector (Graham, 2018) while in Norway the recent data shows a bit improvement in male participation in ECDC, which has nine percent of the workforce in the sector to be male practitioners (Graham, 2018).

In conclusion, the statistical data presented above shows that in European countries, the female practitioners still dominate the ECD Sector, which has shown the low participation of males in this sector compared to their female counterparts (Cameron, 2013). This is also the case in other continents like Australia and North America (Graham, 2018).

3.4 SOCIETAL PERCEPTIONS OF MALE PRACTITIONERS IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

When it comes to child care, there is a higher chance of the child caregiver being a female than a male. Female child care practitioners continue to dominate the ECD sectors with 98% of them being representative of females, a situation that has not changed for many years (Graham, 2018). This may be because women are perceived to be better at nurturing children than men (Joseph & Wright, 2016). Brownhill and Oates (2017) believed that the major reason females continue to dominate the ECD sector is because of the gendered nature of child care work, the power of other groups such as governments and the market economy of childcare and other professionals who impose their definitions of what a childcare worker should be. Furthermore, this is supported by Mathwasa and Sibanda (2021) by stating that in many households childcare is perceived as the responsibility of women and that perception has contributed towards dominance of female workforce in the early childhood education.

Mistry and Sood (2013) indicated that one of the challenges facing the ECD sector is how to encourage more male practitioners to work in a highly feminised workplace. In such sectors, parents, children and staff perceive male styles of leadership differently from those of females' styles of leadership, which is very challenging (Mistry & Sood, 2013). Warin (2017), believed that men and women are positioned as different in the contributions they bring to the ECD sector and their interactions with the children. Male practitioners are perceived as commanding and are

subjected to considerable suspicion unlike their female counterparts (Rohrmann, 2016). There is also a perception of males who choose to work with children as paedophiles or homosexuals (Mistry & Sood, 2013). Male practitioners have also been perceived as not-so-good teachers. Some people believe that male practitioners in ECD can only function when they teach courses bordering on sports and nature (Laere et al., 2014). Male practitioners are also perceived to lack the ability to care and nurture, which are very vital skills in early childhood development sectors (Mistry & Sood, 2013). There is also the belief that males find teaching unattractive or being too female, hence, the reason why male practitioners are frowned upon (Brownhill & Oates, 2017).

On the other hand, it was reported that males make as good role models as females, claiming that they can meet the needs of boys who come from disadvantaged backgrounds better than females (Mistry & Good, 2013; Graham, 2018). Besides, Page (2019) revealed that there are learning styles only the male practitioner possesses, which can, in turn, be an advantage to a male child. According to Page (2019), since early childhood sectors are dominated by females, it is more favourable to girls than boys. Nevertheless, when male practitioners are introduced, boys begin to enjoy activities suited to them (Page, 2019). There is also great concern over boys' abilities to learn how to grow into men as a result of the amount of contact young children have with female practitioners in their early education (Laere et al., 2014). Van den Berg and Ndoda (2019) suggested that it is not enough for males to be trained as child care practitioners but they should also be accepted into the workforce without bias.

However, Mistry and Sood (2013) submitted that male practitioners deserve to be treated like the practitioners they are as their gender should not be a disadvantage to them as long as they are good at what they do. They need to start being perceived as people who can gain respect and form good

relations with peers and children as they are capable of being good role models and aware of family issues that children may have (Graham, 2018).

3.5 MALE PRACTITIONERS' PERCEPTIONS IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

There is nothing that could be compared to the children having good and quality education as this is found helpful in the development of the children's potential and ultimately helps in improving their life chances (Josephidou, 2017). Children at their early stage in many countries are being enrolled in ECD centres where they are trained by adult practitioners (Josephidou, 2017). However, the composition of the gender within this sector is imbalanced (Josephidou, 2017; Rohrmann, 2016). Most of these adults working in this sector are female (Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011). In this light, the male practitioners have a way they see and perceive themselves because of societal beliefs (Page, 2019).

Male practitioners in the ECD sector's perceptions about themselves are wedged between a struggle between the social perception of the male practitioners, which is highly rooted in the social norms and the perception and reactions of their female co-workers within the sector (Rohrmann, 2016). Rohrmann (2016) revealed that their perceptions are also shaped by the gender-neutral and gendered definitions of professionalism. Their perceptions are also being influenced by the general distrust for an idea of male practitioners working in the ECD sector (Rohrmann, 2016).

In the study of Page (2019), an early childhood practitioner revealed that he feels being closely monitored by the people because of the reservations of people to him being male rather than focusing on his ability to be a good child caretaker. This practitioner explained that these perceived social reservations have had a significant influence on him as he disclosed it had been hurtful and also made him feel unnecessarily sensitive. Van den Berg & Ndoda (2019) disclosed that male

practitioners try their best to ensure the parents and others see that they can also care for babies like their female colleagues. However, it is added that they still perceive that some parents do not feel comfortable leaving their children with them due to gender but some parents do not bother about such; they rather drop their children and settle their bills with the mindset that they have their children handed over to a father for the rest of the day. This is inconsistent with the earlier position of Page (2019) who revealed that they felt being at the edge and being closely monitored, which affected their ability to freely relate to the kids.

Some of the male practitioners in the ECD centres do feel highly distinguished because they participate in nontraditional male jobs, which give them a sense that they are taking an active part in the sector that is most important in society (Van den Berg & Ndoda, 2019). Some of them also revealed that they feel happy as they are pursuing what they feel interests them and this, according to Rohrmann (2020), helps in increasing the job satisfaction of the male practitioners working in this sector. In the study conducted by Mukuna and Mutsotso (2011), they reported that the majority of the male practitioners revealed their satisfaction with their jobs and preferred to teach at pre-schools. They also reported that the male practitioners revealed that they did not in any way feel inferior to their female counterparts as they were also capable of giving the same professional care to the children like the female practitioners would do (Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011).

From the foregoing, it can be noted that there has been little focus on researching the perceptions of the male practitioners in this sector in the existing body of knowledge (Mackay, 2015). Mackay (2015) focused on examining male educators' life experiences within ECD. Jordan (2011) explored the perceptions of male early childhood teachers about career choices. Mukuna and Mutsotso (2016) investigated the aspects that lead to the gender imbalance in the preschool teaching staff. The literature review also showed that there is limited research done concerning

men as early childhood instructors while the few that were done involving the male subjects focused mainly on the negative factors related to their career choices as asserted by Mackay (2015).

3.6 EXPERIENCES OF MALE PRACTITIONERS IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

There is a great deal of things male practitioners in ECD centres experience, which has inevitably affected their interests in the profession significantly. This assertion can be substantiated and established in the study carried out by Stevens et al (2012) where they posited that the number of male practitioners who work in early years has declined continuously over the past ten years. However, the opposite was the case in Norway as there was an increase in male practitioners in the ECDC in 2003 when it was 5.7 percent to 9 percent in 2018 (Graham, 2018). The widely diffused general belief is rooted in the social convention and norms that women give more care and attention than men also have central to the experiences of men who consider a career in early childhood education (Joseph & Wright, 2016). One of the most gender-biased professions in many Western countries is early childhood education (Stevens et al., 2012). Overrepresentation of women is unlimited to the early childhood workforce alone- in primary schools in the Netherlands, 85% of the teachers are women; in the UK, it is 86 % and in Denmark, 76% (UNICEF, 2018).

In a study conducted by Joseph and Wright (2016), it was revealed that despite the drive to enter the early childhood profession, a male early childhood provider is majorly faced with the socially held belief and perception that men have more tendencies and are more likely than others to abuse children. Rohrmann (2016) espoused that it has been a historically held belief that early childcare and education is ‘women’s work’, hence the major reason for females dominating this sector. Rohrmann (2016:9) categorised the most associated ideas on early childhood education, which bring about these gender divisions as “mother-teacher”, “homosexual and paedophile” and the

third one, “male role model”. The first division, “mother-teacher”, agrees with the idea that people mostly view childcare as an enlargement in the scope of the home and motherhood (Rohrmann, 2016:9).

The second division is a negative construct, which is “homosexual” and “paedophile”. These are used to construct the gendered nature of teaching. They can also be used as a kind of social control mechanism in others to control or regulate the number of male teachers at a minimum (Rohrmann, 2016). Sometimes there are even rules, which prohibit that men change nappies because of suspicions that men who work with children could be paedophiles. Such fears are often not outspoken but influence pedagogical behaviour and relationships of men and women working together (Rohrmann, 2016). He concluded it has been hypothesized that men who wish to work in this context are often effeminate, homosexual and/or pedophiles and women are perceived as nurturers.

The third division is the expectation that they will act as male role models. There is also a belief that men will serve as a living model of manliness to boys who lack a male in their lives (Van den Berg & Ndoda, 2019; Warin et al., 2020). Female co-workers see male colleagues as role models for boys and want them to play football or get involved in rough and tumble play with the boys (Rohrmann, 2016; Warin et al., 2020). Another challenge faced by men is that female workers often have stereotypical views about male and female roles in their daily practice (Rohrmann, 2016; Zhang, 2017).

Another belief associated with the male role model responsibility is the notion that when a man is present in the classroom, he contributes to an increased level of discipline, which consequently reduces the rate of behavioural problems (especially on the part of boys) (Page 2019). There is also information about men that they are most times expected to play the role of a janitor when

they are absorbed into a centre (Rohrmann, 2016). On the other hand, it is not expected that men would be involved in intimate care for infants or sit around with children on their laps (Rohrmann, 2016). The greatest challenge of men in childcare is about how they are thought of within society (Stevens et al., 2012). Rohrmann (2016) stated that research conducted from various countries shows incongruous stance and responses of female workers towards male colleagues. In the first instance, many female co-workers seem to be appreciative of more than male workers.

Men do not like to work in an environment that is predominantly female because they feel socially isolated. Many of them are worried about what other people are likely to think. This includes the fear of being accused of inappropriate behaviour and even peer pressure (Stevens et al., 2012). Men end up having the feeling of isolation as a result of not having male colleagues, being under constant pressure to prove they are just as good as women at caring-type jobs and being singled out for attention or being made to feel uncomfortable or different in an all-female environment (Stevens et al., 2012). Zhang (2017) posited that men are worried about the eventual accusation of sexual harassment or child abuse when they decide to teach in ECEC. A general doubt against male works as sexual abusers and possible paedophiles is a worldwide reported problem, but the extent and also the aftermath or effect varies depending on the public belief of early childhood education and care work as well as on the task assigned to both men and women in society in general (Rohrmann, 2016). Male practitioners also get concerned about the negative attitude parents display to them when carrying out intimate care of young children; as such, men feel they have to work much harder than women co-workers in order to gain parental trust (Stevens *et al.*, 2012). Parents are always worried about their children when they know that their children were assigned to a male teacher's class. Parents are concerned about male teachers mostly because of the issues of physical contact (Yang, 2018).

3.7 CHALLENGES OF MALE PRACTITIONERS AS EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

The ECD sector has been socially conceived to be a sector for the women in the society as it involves taking care of the younger kids especially between the age of 0-5 years (Rohrmann, 2016). However, as against the socially constructed reality, the deviation of some men from the social norms to work in this sector has since been noteworthy, especially in recent times, where men are now found working in this traditionally constructed women profession (Peeters et al., 2015). Male practitioners reported that they face many challenges that emanate from social stereotyping (Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011; Brody et al., 2021). In China, there is a stigma that men who work with children that are 'abnormal' have added to the problem of making this career unattractive option for men. Han (2016) concurred that the ECEC profession is largely feminised. Chen (2010), on the other hand, stated that "Chinese society still sees men as the main breadwinners of families," so it is a challenge facing male practitioners in the ECD sector. Mathwasa and Sibanda (2021) is of the view that the social perception

Mukuna and Mutsotso (2011) found that men that work in this sector suffer stereotyping as they are viewed to be women culturally speaking because women are expected to take care of the children and men are unsupported to take such a low cadre job. It was also reported that even in some climes, men in such as sector are not counted to have any job. This is linked to the fact that this is not seen as a job for men and those who are found doing it are just playing (Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011). This was substantiated by the study carried out in Botswana by Jorosi-tshiamo et al. (2013) that showed that the main reason men are scarce in this sector is because of the social belief that has been instilled in the male child from infancy that caregiving of children is mainly for women and any men found in this would be socially conceived as women.

This stereotyping was also revealed in Cameron's (2013) study where many of the male practitioners reported that they are always expected to do some jobs within the environment, which include fixing electricity, engaging in practical jobs around the centre, light bulb fixing and many more (Cameron, 2013). Cameron (2013) posited that this is mostly from the social expectation that men are naturally good in some aspects than the female, hence, even in the ECD centres, this gender expectation is still prevalent in the male practitioner practice of their work (Cameron, 2013). This is in line with what Koch and Farquhar (2015) suggest that there is no obstacle for males when coming from the theoretical vantage point but in the practical sense, there have been some barriers that have been created, which are both unseen and unacknowledged, yet discriminatory. This is called “glass-door” barrier, which is not seen unless one gets closer (Koch & Farquhar, 2015).

Another challenge that was reported in the reviewed literature is male sexuality. It was noted that the men are seen as physical and sexual abusers who can sexually abuse the child (Bektas & Kilinc, 2018). Zhang (2017) posited that men are worried about the eventual accusation of sexual harassment or child abuse when they decide to teach in ECEC. A general doubt against male works as sexual abusers and possible paedophiles is a worldwide reported problem but the extent and also the aftermath or effect varies depending on the public belief of early childhood education and care work as well as on the task assigned to both men and women in society in general (Rohrman, 2016).

Moreover, low payment has also been reported as one of the challenges faced by male practitioners in the ECD sector. In the study conducted by Bektas and Kilinc (2018), low payment was revealed as one great problem for male practitioners who are working and a big discourager from the others who might want to consider an interest in choosing a career in this sector. Many of the male

practitioners in ECD are poor and this impoverished state is traceable to their low payment, which is not in any way close to the sufficient wages and benefits (Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011). Mukuna and Mutsotso (2011) reported that research revealed that 10% of the male practitioners working left due to low pay and that they would have stayed if the pay could be higher (Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011). Even from the social expectation of any male child, they are expected to get themselves engaged in activities that would help in catering for their financial responsibilities in the family; hence, they are not expected in such low paying jobs (Bektas & Kilinc, 2018).

Another challenge the male practitioners battle within the course of their work in the ECD sector is their low status (Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011). In Bektas and Kilinc's (2018) study, it was revealed that male practitioners working in this sector suffer a low professional status in society because women are the socially accepted gender who are to engage in this profession. It was also noted that people have a belief that the males are not professional enough due to their impatience while compared to their female counterparts (Bektas & Kilinc, 2018). Another reason for the low professional status for the male practitioners in the ECD sector is with the title they are been addressed with 'nursey nurse', which signals little respect for males who might be addressed with such a title (Bektas & Kilinc, 2018). Koch and Farquhar (2015) revealed that the male practitioner does feel uncomfortable with the working environment as well. They expounded the fact that the environment is made of females with the highest percentage who will bring their usual home attitudes and norms to the workplace, thus, make it uncondusive for male practitioners and makes them not see the environment as a workplace (Koch & Farquhar, 2015). Male practitioners in the study of Cameron (2013) reported that they find it difficult to grasp most of the conversations of the female practitioners especially when they are in the staff room and this makes them feel uncomfortable and practically alienated from the work environment. It was also noted that a female

practitioner revealed that men are marginalised in the work environment especially while in the staffroom because it is not expedient to get so personal with male practitioners (Cameron, 2013).

3.8 NEED FOR MALE PRACTITIONERS IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SECTOR

For a very long time and even up to date, the ECD sector has been perceived to be a sector that should house the feminine gender and not the male gender. Many studies revealed that involvement of males in the lives of young children is vital for their social, emotional, and cognitive development (Khewu & Adu, 2015, Mashiya, et al., 2015).

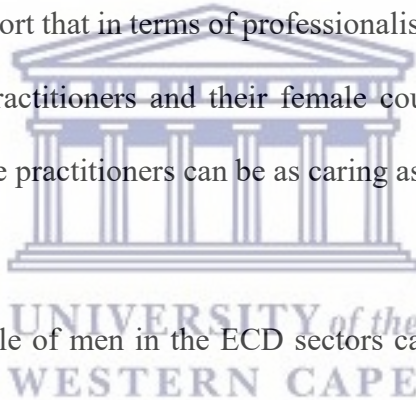
Cameron (2013, p. 33) revealed the “male worker employment in early childhood services such as nurseries, family daycare and kindergarten with young children, is still rare in England and has become, in some other European countries, accepted as a means of demonstrating gender equality and resolving labour shortages. However, in recent times, there has been global agitation for the need for having a gender balanced working environment in the ECD sectors and ultimately the attitude towards male participation in this sector has begun to change (Peeters et al., 2015). In the study of Mukuna and Mutsotso (2011), the absence of male practitioners in the ECD sector is creating a big gap for the male child in this sector as they are missing out on the experiences of learning from a male role model. They further supported the fact that some children who are from single parent families whose fathers are no longer present or are divorced or separated from the mother would not have any experiences of being brought up by male adults (Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011). One of the main reasons why males should be given more chances in the ECD sector is also traced to the different ways of learning that are peculiar to male and female kids (Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011). It was related by the Head teacher of an ECD centre a the study of Mukuna and Mutsotso (2011) who opined that a male teacher may be more suitable in taking care of the boisterous nature of the male child who might be too extreme for a female practitioner and this

would be something that would meet the nature of the male practitioner, making it essential for the male practitioner to get involved in the ECD childcare (Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011).

Warin (2018) revealed that a cursory insight into the rationale behind the encouragement of the men into working in the ECD sector would make it seem it is never gendered but a natural plan. However, he further expounded that a critical analysis would then help reveal the gender inequality cleavage of the sector (Warin, 2018). He submitted that the need for encouraging male practitioners into this sector is traceable to the potency that the presence of male practitioners has in ensuring the transformation of gender relations the society (Warin, 2018). This would then help in showing that, gender balanced society is achievable at the level of the ECD sector, which is believed to be the basics, the more male practitioners and caregivers can be encouraged (Rohrmann, 2016).

Furthermore, the need for more males in the ECD can also be traced to the role they can play as role models to male children and to be emulated by the male children at their early stage of life (Warin, 2018). Bektas and Kilinc (2018) reported that even the female practitioners also attested to the fact that participation of more male practitioners in caregiving at ECD centres is highly essential. While expounding on this report, they exposed that the females acknowledged the fact that the able representation of both genders in the caregiving profession in the sector would help in projecting the real picture of the society and ultimately help in ensuring that the children experience male influence in their life (Bektas & Kilinc, 2018). This argument is in line with the position of Mukuna and Mutsotso (2011) who suggested that the whole essence of male involvement is principally knitted with the high need for both the male and the female child to interact with the male practitioners and to be able to build positive views about masculinity and maleness.

The incorporation of more men into the ECD sector might help restructure the sector (Cameron, 2013). Cameron (2013) explicated that a different way of viewing the gendered relation can be seen by creating a seeing it from a different perspective. He noted that “different pictures’ can then be shared knowledge and opened to discussion among the staff group. Male workers can offer an added dimension to staff dynamics; their differences can prompt new ways of working with children or new perspectives for staff discussions about children’s experiences within the setting (Cameron, 2013, p. 37). Moreover, the study conducted by Cameron (2013) showed that there is no significant difference between the male practitioners and their female counterparts. Cameron (2013) revealed that the discussion around differences in the sector should not be linked to gender differences but rather the individual difference. This is also corroborated by the findings of Bektas and Kilinc (2018) where they report that in terms of professionalism, there has been no significant differences between the male practitioners and their female counterparts working in the ECD sector. This shows that even male practitioners can be as caring as female practitioners (Bektas & Kilinc, 2018).



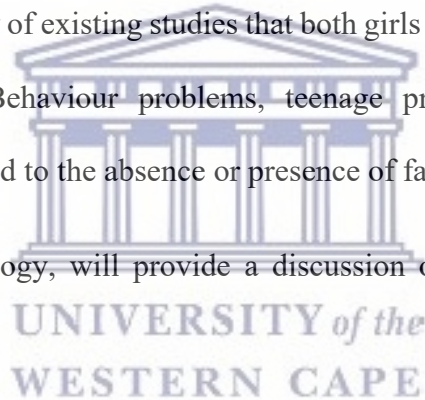
It must also be noted that the role of men in the ECD sectors can help improve the learning of children in the ECD sector (Bektas & Kilinc, 2018). Children when viewed from the assumptions of the socio-cultural learning theories can learn better when it is done amidst their peers and adults (Bektas & Kilinc, 2018). To crown this, Anderson et al (2003) the learning must be in a gathering where there is freedom of gender imbalance.

3.9 SUMMARY

From the reviewed literature in this study, it could be gathered that early child development is a vital period for the growth and development of a child as this has the potential to influence the social, economic and health-related quality of life. Previous studies have concentrated on the

projection of the gender imbalance in the ECDC and the perceptions of the public about the male practitioners. However, it must be noted that there has been a paucity of studies conducted to explore the perceptions of the male practitioners working in the ECD centre. It also became evident in the review that many of the males do not choose this career as they are always being discouraged by the societal held stereotype and also for the fact that females have been deemed appropriate to be the best suited for the job. It was also uncovered that society holds the belief that men are not as affectionate and caring as the female folks and need not be found in this ECD sector, hence, it should be left for the females. Many of the male practitioners experience a lot in the workplace such as social stigma, ridicule and isolation. Many of them are even perceived as those who sexually harass kids or paedophile and are not supposed to be working in such sectors. It was, however, argued from the review of existing studies that both girls and boys benefit mutually from positive father role models. Behaviour problems, teenage pregnancy rates and education management are all closely linked to the absence or presence of fathers.

The next chapter, the methodology, will provide a discussion of the methodology applied to execute this study



CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the research methodology that was employed to implement the study to answer the research question and achieve the objectives of this study. The research approach and design employed for this study are presented and a detailed account of the population and sample selection is provided. The pilot study that was conducted, the data collection method and instruments used in the collection of the data and the rationale behind their adoption, the data analytics method and ethical guidelines that guide this study, are presented in this chapter.

4.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

The following research question was the focus of this study:

What are male practitioners' perceptions, experiences and challenges of working in the early childhood development sector?



4.3 RESEARCH AIM

This research aimed to explore the male practitioners' perceptions, experiences and challenges in the early childhood development sector.

4.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The current study had the following objectives, which were to:

- Explore and describe the held perceptions of male practitioners in early childhood development.

- Explore and describe the experiences and challenges of male practitioners in early childhood development.
- Explore and describe the perceptions of pre-school parents regarding male practitioners in early childhood development centres

4.5 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

This study employed a qualitative approach, which explored phenomenon as they occurred in the real world, therefore, wanted to study them in their natural settings (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The choice of following a qualitative as opposed to a quantitative design was based on the topic being investigated (Chopra et al., 2007) and the desire to add to the limited knowledge available about the male practitioner's perceptions and experiences and challenges in ECDC in South Africa. Qualitative research is used to explore and understand the meaning that people give to their experiences, social contexts, values, opinions and behaviors and these perspectives are explored in depth (Creswell, 2013; Green & Thorogood, 2009).

This research study was exploratory since little is known about the male practitioners' perceptions, experiences and challenges in the ECDS (Mack et al., 2005). Mack et al. (2005) further suggested that the advantage of exploratory research is that it allows participants to respond to research questions in their words and provides an understanding of a situation, phenomenon and persons. An exploratory design was chosen to gain detailed information on male practitioners' perceptions, experiences and challenges in ECD as well as the perceptions of pre-school parents regarding male practitioners in these centres. Descriptive research designs focus on gathering more information about characteristics within a particular field of study (Burns & Grove, 2005).

4.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.6.1 Research Setting

The research was conducted in ECD centres in Khayelitsha, an isiXhosa name translated “new home,” is a township situated approximately 30km south of Cape Town Central in the Republic of South Africa (RSA). It is an economically marginalised peri-urban township that had a population of approximately 391,749 residents by 2011 (Stats SA, 2011). The ethnic make-up of Khayelitsha is approximately 90.5% Black African, 8.5% Colored and 0.5% White, with isiXhosa being the predominant language of the residents. Khayelitsha has a very young population with fewer than 7% of its residents being over 50 years old and over 40% of its residents being under 19 years of age. In 2011, around 62% of residents in Khayelitsha were rural to urban migrants, most coming from the Eastern Cape. In the informal settlements, over 85% of the residents were born in the Eastern Cape. Looking at the people percentage in Khayelitsha according to gender, females dominate the population with 51.1% with the male being 48.9%. Only 21% of the families living in Khayelitsha are married. The majority, which makes 69% never married, with 42% of households being female headed while 52% of the population has no income (Stats SA, 2011). Khayelitsha as a township forms part of the bigger City of Cape Town and as a resident from Khayelitsha, the researcher understands the dynamics of the male versus female (patriarchal) notion in black communities.

Khayelitsha is mostly dominated by the people from the Eastern Cape. The Eastern Cape is dominated by Xhosa speaking South Africans, with Afrikaans and English-speaking citizens constituting 11% and 6% of the population respectively. With 6.6 million population, 13% of South African, the Eastern Cape is the 3rd most populous province in the country (Stats SA, 2011). Most people from the Eastern Cape are Xhosa people with tradition as an extremely powerful

social force binding them together (South African Tourism, 2020). Looking closely at the demographics of Khayelitsha, there are approximately 40 000 children under the age of five. With that in mind, there are 153 registered pre-schools or ECD sites as they are also known and nine unregistered ECD sites. Collectively, these facilities are reaching over 11 000 children (Sikhula Sonke, 2019) as 65.4% of children who are enrolled in ECD centres also live in the area. These ECD centres are mostly managed by female practitioners.

4.6.2 Population and Sampling

Bless, Higson-Smith and Kagee (2006) asserted that these terms synonymously refer to the entire set of objects and events or group of people, which is the object of research and about which the researcher wants to determine some characteristics. Similarly, Polit and Beck (2004) expressed population as the entire aggregation of cases in which a researcher is interested. The population for this study comprised male practitioners at the ECD centres and parents of children in these centres within Khayelitsha. Practitioners (both male and female) are the persons who provided ECDS through formal ECD practitioners, family services and playgroups and training (Guest et al., 2006). The target population for this study comprising male practitioners and parents of the children who attend an early development centre (EDC) were male practitioners practicing professionals and who were employed at Khayelitsha ECD centres.

Evans (2007) defined sampling as the use of a small portion of the population that will represent the population. Purposive sampling was used where the researcher samples with certain research goals in mind (Bryman, 2016). The sample comprised fifteen participants (five male practitioners, ten parents) who are purposefully selected from the population of male ECD practitioners at five Khayelitsha ECD centres. Parents or guardians were selected of those whose children go to these ECD centres where the male practitioners are employed. Participants were excluded if they were

female practitioners working in the ECD centres and parents whose children were not attending any of the centres where male practitioners were working. One male practitioner from each of the five selected ECD centres was recruited as well as ten parents whose children are enrolled at the ECD centre where male practitioners are employed. Interviews were conducted until no new information was forthcoming, thus, data saturation was reached. Data saturation is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study (O'reilly & Parker, 2013; Walker, 2012) or when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained (Guest et al., 2006).

4.6.3 Pilot Study

Pilot testing provides a basic indication of how participants respond to the question frame and facilitates the collection of background information (Polit et al., 2001; Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). It was conducted with two participants, one parent and one practitioner, who did not form part of the main study to test the data collection tool. The piloting stage was significant as it allowed for the improvement of the research instrument (De Vos et al., 2014). This allowed the researcher to adjust the questions and adjusted the data collection process (Glesnie 2006; Mason, 2007). During the pilot stage, it became apparent that no changes to the instrument were necessary. The pilot testing was good practice for the researcher in terms of articulating questions to the participants and how to conduct the interviews.

4.6.4 Data Collection

The primary method of data collection took place through a semi-structured interview with two different interview schedules: male practitioners (Appendix C) and parents (Appendix D) were used. Dawson (2002) stated that a semi-structured interview allows the researcher to focus on specific areas of importance. As De Vos et al. (2014) explained, an interview is a useful way of getting large amounts of data quickly and are an especially effective way of obtaining data in

depth. An interview schedule is constructed to guide the interview and to provide the researcher with predetermined questions that are used to engage participants and designate the narrative terrain (Glesnie 2006; Mason, 2007). The interview schedules consisted of a range of open-ended, unbiased questions, which assisted in gaining rich information (Babbie & Mouton, 2010; Creswell, 2012). Further tools assisting the data collection through the interviews were the taking of field notes, recording of the proceedings and capturing non-verbal cues during the interviews (Maree, 2007). Field notes ensure rich context persists beyond the original research team.

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Human and Social Sciences Research and Ethics committee from the University of the Western Cape (UWC). Permission was also sought from the various ECD centres for data collection. To gain access to the sample, the researcher worked closely with an organisation that works with ECD practitioners in Khayelitsha, Ikamva Labantu, which provides a list of registered centres with male practitioners in Khayelitsha, containing their contact details. From this list, prospective participants were contacted by telephone and asked to participate in the study. The purpose of telephonic contact was to recruit participants and using a telephone provided a low-cost and effective way of reaching a larger number population, making a quick determination of eligibility and willingness to participate in the study (Cachia and Millward, 2011; Shuy, 2003; Musselwhite et al., 2007; Stephens, 2007). After meeting the ECD practitioners, contact was made with parents of children attending these centres where the male practitioners' practice.

Interviews were conducted at a convenient time communicated by the participants of this study until no new information was forthcoming, that is, until data saturation was reached. This is consistent with the exposition of O'Reilly and Park (2012) when they posited that data saturation is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study or when the ability to obtain

additional new information has been attained. Furthermore, in the process of collecting the data, research assistants were employed.

4.6.4.1 Preparation of Participants

Prior to the conduction of the interview, there is the need to sell the idea to the participants to participate in the study (Trochim, 2020). Before the interviews took place, the researcher explained the purpose of the interview. Each participant was given an information sheet (Appendix A) and a consent form (Appendix B) that needed to be signed before the interview could commence. In compliance with the prescription of Arinfin 2018, where he posited that in a qualitative study, especially when an interview is being used in gathering data from the vulnerable or minority social class, the place of ethical considerations is very relevant. Therefore, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the interview at will as participation is voluntary. They were also assured of their confidentiality of all the information garnered from them, their identities will remain anonymous and no information will be revealed to a third party as the information is just required for research and advancement in the horizon of knowledge in this study. After the assurance of things aforementioned, the participants also agreed to the use of an audio recorder during the interview to capture their responses. The reason for using an audio recorder in an interview was to capture key information as it occurred and also audio recording allowed the interviewer to concentrate on the interview rather than writing responses of the participants. The researcher can capture responses directly, hence there will not be any information uncaptured (Center for Strategy Research Boston, 2006). Likewise, an audio provides an unbiased and true presentation of the interview, which offers greater context and a holistic picture of the situation (Sullivan, 2010).

4.6.4.2 Individual Interview Sessions

The semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face and the advantage of such interviews was that they allowed the researcher to observe the participants' body language and facial expressions in response to the questions posed (De Vos et al., 2011). Permission was obtained from the principals of the ECD centres to use their classrooms as a research site. Initial contact was established using a telephonic invitation to the parents. Arrangements were made beforehand with participants as to a suitable date and time and these were confirmed telephonically. A room in each classroom was identified by the principal where the interview was conducted. The rooms were comfortable, with two chairs and a table on which the tape recorder was placed. The chairs were positioned in a manner that conveyed a relaxed atmosphere in which a personal conversation could take place. The setting and environment were non-threatening since the participants were familiar with their department (De Vos et al., 2014). Interviews varied in length and lasted no longer than thirty minutes. The researcher engaged with participants by neutrally posing questions, listening attentively to participants' responses and asking follow-up questions using probes based on their responses (Mack et al., 2005). Probing involved the use of words that encourage participants to explain more about the topic under discussion (Hennink et al., 2011). Communication skills such as eye contact, nodding and verbal clarification were applied to encourage the participants to share their experiences. The interviews were conducted in English or isiXhosa, giving preference to the participant's language of choice (Babbie & Mutton, 2010). Where the participant preferred to be interviewed in isiXhosa, the researcher provided a translated version of the information sheet and consent form. Field notes were captured alongside the interviews.

4.6.4.3 Fieldnotes

Kawulich (2012) explained that field notes serve as a record of activities or ceremonies observed and informal discussions from the field. Field notes are intended to be read by the researcher as evidence to produce meaning and an understanding of the culture, social situation or phenomenon being studied (Schwandt, 2007). It was important for the researcher to take field notes to remember and capture behaviours, activities and events as they occur in the field that would help when analysing data and demonstrating of the feelings experienced throughout the interview. Flick (2019) explained that field notes taken during interviews should “contain the essentials of the interviewee’s answers and information about the proceeding of the interview” (p. 340).

4.6.5 Data Analysis

In analysing the data collected, the phenomenological interpretative analytical method was implemented by first searching for themes and concepts. This is consistent with the generic process of qualitative data analysis as described by Creswell (2013, pp. 191-195) which comprises the following steps:

- Organising and preparing data for analysis, which involved transcription of interviews from the audiotapes and merging them with field notes into a word processing document.
- Reading through the transcript to get the general sense of the information by going over the transcripts to get one acquainted with the responses obtained from the participants of the study. Reading the transcripts made it easier to understand the pattern of response and how to code the information for analysis and presentation.
- Coding, that is, breaking down the narrative data into more general and transferable parts or insights. Similar data segments were categorised and labelled. The coding was done

along with creation of themes and subthemes and the codes were attached to them for easy analysis and presentation.

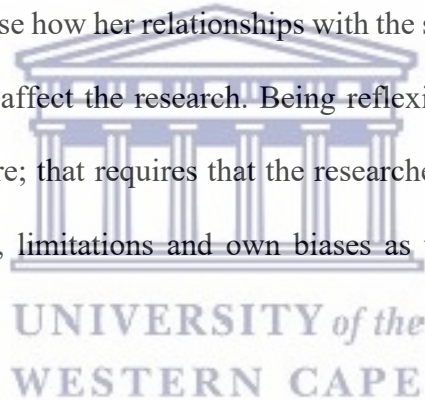
- Identifying main themes for analysis for each participant and across different participants. These are descriptions generated from the coding process about the phenomena in question and/or its setting. In this study, the main themes were derived from the objectives of the study and the subthemes from the questions and responses from the interviews.
- A description of how the themes were presented in the research report. This step explicates the way the analysis is being presented. While presenting the data after analysis, a thematic-narrative presentation style was employed where the themes and subthemes were used as the umbrella for the presentation of the data. Under each theme and subtheme, the narrations were presented according to the data transcription as analysed from the interviews conducted.
- Making an interpretation or meaning of the data. This involved formulation of an exhaustive description of the motive behind the decisions to be circumcised based on the gained insights. In recourse to this, the data analysed and presented were interpreted regarding the responses and contexts of the participants. The meanings were deduced from the line of argument of the participants and free from the bias of the researcher who analysed, presented and interpreted the data.

The results with subsequent discussion will be presented in Chapter Five.

4.6.6 Self-reflexivity

Lambert et al. (2010) asserted that reflexivity entails self-awareness, that means, being actively involved in the research process. On the other hand, Ackerly and True (2010) indicated that reflexivity is about the recognition that researchers are part of the social world that we study and

reflexivity as a process is introspection on the role of subjectivity in the research process. It was important for the researcher in this study to follow the process of reflecting on self to provide a more effective and impartial analysis. In achieving self-reflexivity in this study, the researcher examined and consciously acknowledged the assumptions and preconceptions brought into the research and that shaped the outcome. Self-assessment of subjectivity can reduce bias (when appropriate done) and increase dependability by increasing transparency of the research process (Guba, 1981). The researcher did not come with biases as she was never involved in the ECD sector. Documenting reflexivity of the researcher is useful to analyse how the researcher can affect the research participants, how research participants can affect the researcher and how the experiences, feelings and background of the latter can affect her observations (Patton, 2003). It will also help the researcher realise how her relationships with the settings and people change over time and how it can potentially affect the research. Being reflexive in doing research is part of being honest and ethically mature; that requires that the researcher is in constant reflection over research methods, methodology, limitations and own biases as the study goes on (Johnson & Saltanat, 2017).



4.6.7 Data verification and trustworthiness

This refers to the degree of confidence qualitative researchers have in their data, assessed using the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Polit & Beck, 2004, p. 734). The following measures were taken to enhance these criteria:

- **Credibility** - the confidence in the truth of the data (Polit & Beck, 2004, p. 715) was enhanced by allowing ample time for collecting data from each participant to get sufficient information. Data were collected up to the point of saturation where no new information was forthcoming. Audiotapes were used to collect data; they allowed repeated review of

the original raw data. This helps in keeping track of the transcripts of the data, which was done verbatim. Various researchers also had a moment to independently review the same data for verification. In a bid to achieve this, the researcher employed some research assistants who have been properly trained and schooled on the focus of this study in conducting the interview sessions. The research assistants helped in ensuring that the transcribed data were not in conflict with what was recorded during the interview sessions and that no information was manipulated or removed from the transcriptions. Furthermore, one of the greatest challenges qualitative analysts face is the interpretation of data; the researcher must analyse and interpret the data in such a way that would be free from his bias (Babbie, 2020). About that, this study enforced quality control by ensuring that the data presented in the study were true reflections of the interviewees' responses and were not in any way manipulated to fit into the expectations of the researcher. The data were interpreted according to the responses given by the participants in this study, free from the bias of the researcher.

- **Dependability** - the stability of data over time and over conditions, that is, the degree of consistency of the results if the same study is replicated with the same participants in the same context (Kumar, 2018). To enhance this, the researcher's focus was kept in mind throughout the research process to ensure that the research problem was addressed (Kumar, 2018). The researcher ensured that all the proposed methods for data collection were followed to the letter. The researcher kept to the questions that were presented in the interview schedules and employed these uniformly according to the different groups that are of interest in this study. In essence, all the participants were asked similar questions based on the group within which they fall. The researcher also ensured the data analytical

processes as highlighted in the data analytical method in this chapter, were not compromised. The use of an audio recorder was employed as it allowed and helped the researcher to focus on the interview and at the same time, promoted capturing of participant responses (De Vos et al., 2011). Taking field notes was done and was important as it allowed the researcher to include what the researcher observed during the interview which an audio recorder could not capture (De Vos et al., 2011). The above also assisted the researcher with dependability.

- **Transferability** - refers to the generalisability of the data, that is, the extent to which findings can be applied to other settings or groups (Imel et al., 2002; Polit & Beck, 2004). To ensure transferability, the researcher provided a thick description of the data including precise and detailed information in this regard. The researcher identified a theoretical framework and clearly stated the data collection methods and analysis that underlined the research project (De Vos et al., 2011). Transferability was increased through purposeful sampling; the participants are selected because they most represent the research design, limitations and delimitations of the study (Given, 2008).

Confirmability - refers to the neutrality or objectivity of the data, that is, their accuracy, relevance or meaning. By credibility, as described above, the confirmability of this study was also enhanced. In addition, bracketing was also exercised, that is, putting aside any preconceived ideas about ECD and being open to the participant's perceptions. In the course of analysing and interpreting the data from the interview sessions, the personal bias of the researcher who analysed and interpreted the data was excluded. This is in line with what was found in the existing body of knowledge that it is highly important that the researcher analysed and also interpret the data in such a way that would

be free from his bias (Babbie, 2020). Hence, the interpretation of this study was drawn from the responses of the participants and not the preconceived ideas of the researcher.

4.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There is a great need for the protection of the human participants or subjects in any study, which is premised on employing the appropriate ethical guidelines (Arifin, 2018). In the following expositions, these are ethical considerations explicitly explicated as they are applied in this study.

- **Ethical Approval, Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation**

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of the Western Cape Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee as well as from the principals of the ECD centres. Any research undertaken that involves human subjects must first have sought the consent of the research subject before the study is being carried out (Arifin, 2018). This process entails informing the research subject about the purpose of the research and giving them the room to make voluntary decisions on whether to agree to participate or not (Arifin, 2018). Before the collection of the data, the aim and objectives and the data collection procedures were explained with the potential participants in this study and were given an information sheet (Appendix A) which clearly explained the research process. Before the participant could take part in the research, they had to sign a consent form. Informed consent (Appendix B) was obtained after an explanation of the purpose of the study. Participants had the autonomous right to voluntarily choose to participate or not or terminate their participation at any time without risking any penalty or differential treatment. Babbie (2020) asserted that no one should be forced to participate in any research project therefore, participants were also informed that their participation was voluntary and could withdraw their interest at any point in the course of the interview

session. It was also revealed to them that, since they are participating in this study voluntarily, their decision to withdraw from the study would not in any way affect them or make them lose their job regardless of the centre where they work, nor would it affect the care given to their children's potential volunteers who are parents.

- **Anonymity and Confidentiality**

The identity of and information got from a research respondent must not be revealed neither should it be revealed to a third party (Dawson, 2002). Throughout this study, the identity of the participants was not revealed. Dawson (2002) exposed that one must ensure as a researcher, the information given by the respondents cannot be traced back to them on whatever occasion. Similarly, while conducting the interview, the name of the participants was not asked and in data analysis and presentation, codes were used rather than their real names. Furthermore, Dawson (2002) recommended that in no case should the information gathered in the course of the interview be revealed to a third party. All the recorded voices were not released to any third party; all the information obtained from the research participants were kept secret in line with the ethical guideline in this study as presented in this study proposal. This was also in line with the recommendation of Sangasubana (2011) on the conduction of an ethnographic research.

- **Beneficence**

This principle seeks to prevent harm and exploitation of and maximise benefits for, study participants (Polit & Beck, 2004, p. 712; Burns & Grove, 2005). Good communication and interpersonal skills were called for by the researcher. This ensured the establishment of good rapport to avoid psychological stress and fear in the participants. It was also ensured that the choice of venue and time were comfortable and convenient to each participant. The

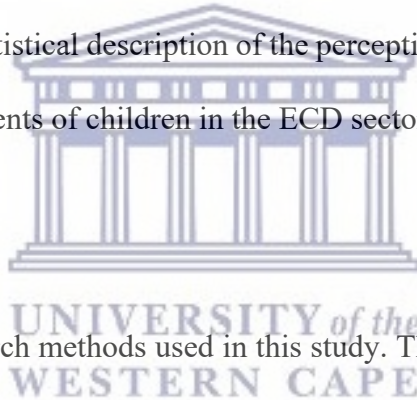
researcher also emphasised to participants that they had to say only the information which they were comfortable to share with no coercion. No costs were incurred by the participants in the entire process.

4.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In the work of Babbie (2013), he posited that there is a great deal of fundamental inconsistencies with qualitative research. He further revealed that some of these limitations include the inability to generalise to the general population and the inability to give a statistical description of the total population (Babbie, 2013). In that regard, one limitation to this study is that the finding of this study cannot be generalised to the whole population of male practitioners working in the ECD sector in South Africa because a fraction of them was just purposefully selected. Furthermore, this study's results do not give the statistical description of the perceptions, experiences and challenges of male practitioners and the parents of children in the ECD sector.

4.9 SUMMARY

This chapter described the research methods used in this study. The methodology highlighted the use of a qualitative approach and a descriptive and exploratory research design. The population and sampling were discussed and data collection was described along with data analysis, validity/trustworthiness and research ethics.



CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions, experiences and challenges of male practitioners in the early childhood development sector. A qualitative methodological approach was employed and data were collected through interviews, which focused on the individuals' feelings and perceptions as they reflected on their experiences. The collected data was analysed through thematic analysis.

The following objectives guided the achievement of the aim which were to:

- Explore and describe the held perceptions of male practitioners in early childhood development.
- Explore and describe the experiences and challenges of male practitioners in early childhood development.
- Explore and describe the perceptions of pre-school parents regarding male practitioners in early childhood development centres.

The demographic information of participants is presented in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 respectively. Three major themes, with subsequent sub-themes, emerged during data analysis.

5.2 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Fifteen participants took part in the study of which five were male practitioners working at ECD centres and a further ten participants were represented by parents whose children attended these centres.

5.2.1 Demographic information of the male practitioners

As reflected in Table 5.1, the age of the male practitioners ranged from 23 to 52 years of age. Most of them revealed that they are teachers at the ECD centres and the rest were administrators. From this, one could deduce that those who are teachers are people who are still either new to the profession or their age indicated that they are younger in comparison to those at the administrative helm of the ECD centres. The qualifications also revealed that many of them have a technical or college qualification, a few of them possess a diploma. Further education indicated that two of the practitioners had an undergraduate degree, with the rest having a grade 11 or grade 12 school qualification. It was further noted that those that possess a degree are those found at the administrative helm of their profession. The working experiences by the practitioners reflected 6 months to a year.

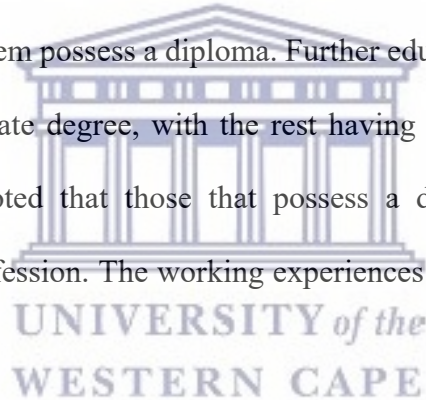


Table 5. 1: Demographic Information of the Male Practitioners

	Age	Position	Qualifications	Training	Time	Location
P001	23	Teacher	Diploma	ECD NQF Level 5	6 months	Khayelitsha
P002	44	Administrator	Degree	Advanced ECD Educator Training	1 year	Phillipi
P003	36	Teacher	Diploma	Further Education and Training Certificate	9 months	Cross Roads
P004	34	Teacher	Diploma	ECD NQF Level 5	8 months	Khayelitsha
P005	52	Administrator	Degree	Foundations of Teaching Grade R	6months	Mfuleni

Table 5.2: Demographic Information of Parents

	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Education Level	Occupation	Children at center
P006	F	27	Single	Grade 11	General worker	1
P007	F	32	Single	Grade 5	Unemployed	1
P008	F	50	Married	No education	Housewife	1
P009	M	45	Married	Grade 3	Self Employed	1
P010	F	33	Single	Grade 12	Unemployed	1
P011	F	30	Single	Grade 11	Student	1
P012	F	39	Widowed	Grade 10	Cashier	2
P013	F	30	Single	Grade 12	Intern	1
P014	F	38	Married	Grade 8	Self Employed	2
P015	F	32	Single	Grade 5	Unemployed	1

The gender composition of the parents was one male and nine females. Six of the respondents were single three were married and one was a widow. The age distribution of the respondents ranges from 27 to 50 years of age. Regarding the educational background of the respondents, two respondents completed grade 12, four of them had some secondary schooling whereas three had only primary schooling and one had no schooling at all. Some parents are unemployed, with one being a stay-at-home parent, two being self-employed and one being an intern and one a student. Most of the respondents indicated they had at least one child attending at the centre during the time of survey, with only two having two children at the centre.

5.3 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This section presents the detailed analysis of the responses of the participants and concurrently integrated it with the existing body of knowledge and theory adopted in this study. This section was presented using narratives around different emerging themes and subthemes from the research objectives and data from the participants to address the research question. The data were analysed and discussed simultaneously and supported by narratives and voices of the participants from the transcribed data.

The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysed, transcribed and collected data are tabulated in Table 5.3 followed by the discussion of the themes.

Table 5.3: Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme	Sub-Theme
<p>Theme 1: Male practitioners in ECDS</p>	<p>Sub-Theme 1: Choosing a career in early childhood development Sub-Theme 2: Male practitioners' perception of their job role Sub-theme 3: Male practitioners and social stereotyping</p>
<p>Theme 2: Experiences and challenges of male practitioners</p>	<p>Sub-Theme 1: Experiences of male practitioners Sub-Theme 2: Challenges of the male practitioners</p>
<p>Theme 3: Parents' perceptions of male practitioners</p>	<p>Sub-theme 1: Benefits of male practitioners in ECDS Sub-theme 2: Challenges faced by male practitioners working in ECDS</p>

5.3.1 THEME 1: MALE PRACTITIONERS IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

Children at their early stage in many countries are being enrolled in ECD centre where they are trained by adult practitioners (Josephidou, 201; Xu & Waniganayake, 2018; Page, 2019). However, the composition of the gender within this sector is imbalanced (Josephidou, 2017; Rohrmann, 2016). Most of the adults working in this sector are female (Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011; Jones 2016; Perez-Escamilla et al. (2019) , Cavallera & Tomlison, 2019) and the effeminising of this sector led to different conceptions about and reactions to males who chose a career in this field (Xu & Waniganayake, 2018; Page, 2019). Wohlgemuth (2015) opined that the male practitioner perceived their roles, their work environment and co-workers differ a lot from the way society perceive them. Jones (2016) and Xu and Waniganayake (2018) revealed that the inception of the perception of the male practitioners about themselves in the job is affected by the motivation for joining the ECD sector.

5.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Choosing a career in early childhood development

A study by Cameron (2013, p. 33) revealed the “male worker employment in early childhood services such as nurseries, family daycare and kindergarten with young children, is still rare but is becoming, in England and has become, in some other European countries, accepted to demonstrate gender equality and resolving labor shortages.” The factors that shaped the choice of the male practitioner in the ECD sector as practitioners, according to the report of Jones (2016) and Xu and Waniganayake (2018) informed the perceptions of the male practitioners. The findings of this study show that the practitioners perceived themselves as being in the ECS as highly instrumental to them rather than just being a job, as their interest in the job stemmed from their desire to be with children.

“...being here is a blessing in disguise as it helps me in building my capacity to also be a nurturer, as against what others say about, we are not capable of doing such and it is what they always wanted – to be with children. Again, it is great to be here because we get to see the development in children and we play a part in ensuring that their growth is exciting for all the young ones. The idea of having the experience to work with younger souls is very interesting because you get different personalities and as a male practitioner in their early childhood development, you have to adjust well to ensure that they are well developed for their growth.” (POO3)

This was also reported by Perez-Escamilla et al. (2019) when he found in his study that a good number of the participants is related to their interest to be educators in ECDC. Participants Furthermore, the participants felt the profession gives them the ability to express their potential as nurturers, just like the female practitioners, as it gives them the sense of being capable of also caring for children. This is also consistent with the findings from the study conducted by Jones (2016) where some of the respondents reported their interest to work in the ECDC stemmed from their natural inclination to nurture children. Extracts from some of their responses revealed, thus:

“I perceived myself as helping the future of those kids at the same time, building myself to be a good childcare giver every day. This, in many ways, has assisted me as a male caregiver. I also believe that being in this early childhood centre is a good standing for the young ones. The role of male figures in the early childhood centres is very important in my experience because it enables them to protect the children. It is also helping because it enables the children to get adequate support and get the provision of a male figure love.” (POO1)

This suggests that natural inclination is one of the factors that fuel the appetite of some male practitioners to engage in teaching activities in the ECDC. This, however, was against what Xu and Waniganayake (2017) found in their study where their respondents reported that they are being influenced by the societal belief regarding the idea of the need to create more job opportunities for

males in ECDC to promote masculinity in China. Even studies from Europe as conducted by Perez-Escamilla et al. (2019) and Rohrmann (2016) revealed how society shapes the influences of some of the male ECDC educators in choosing a career in the sector. This incongruence in the result of this study and the findings from China and Europe are taken care of by what the social constructionist postulates. From the foregoing, according to social constructionism, it must be noted that what is held as reality in any given context is a product of the society, that is to say, what is known or the definition of any given thing in the society is created by those found in that society and this constructed knowledge is driven by politics (Rogers, 2010).

The next subtheme will focus on the perception of the male practitioners about their roles in ECDC in South Africa.

5.3.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Male practitioners' perception of their job role

A discussion of the male practitioners in the ECD sector perceptions about themselves cannot be divorced from the social perception of the male practitioners which is highly rooted in the social norms and values (Rohrmann, 2016). The result from this study shows that some of the male practitioners reported that they perceived their current job role as rewarding. The reason for these perceptions is because some male practitioners understand how to take care of children although society sometimes can be judgmental when it comes to leaving young children alone with a male figure. Below are the views of male practitioners that fully understand their work and are comfortable with their work description although most people do not view it right for males to be ECD practitioners:

“As much as it is nice being in this job generally as practitioners but as a male practitioner in this job, it is generally believed that this is a female world. I am more than happy with my job. I am confident to say I know the role I have to play to ensure that my young students develop to be better youngsters that will pursue

better lives post being in the ECD centre. There is also this joy that fills my heart while I teach my students and I can see them improve and get better. I cannot fully explain how I feel but what I know is that when I am with my students, I change my mood to accommodate all of them so that they can feel safe while in the classroom. I know that I have to practise inclusivity in everything that I am doing. This means that I have to ensure that all the learners in my class feel the part of being in class, that is always my goal as I continue to help build these young souls.” (POO3)

“Yeah, looking at the role, it gives more satisfaction to me as a teacher because it gives me an atmosphere to be part of kids’ growth process and also do what I enjoy doing but it is often awkward with the kind of roles we are being ascribed to perform at times, which spices up the gender discrimination in this job. I believe that my role in these young souls is to be a role model because sometimes children need father figures and this job has allowed me to play that role and ...” (POO4)

This shows that the male practitioners are not necessarily on the job as a result of the need to get a job due to the low population of males in the sector. This, in turn, engendered the government encouraging more men into these sectors and the need to give more opportunity to more men as was reported by Xu and Waniganayake (2017) and Perez-Escamilla et al. (2019). (. The viewpoints from the participants also revealed that they see the job as highly rewarding. The male practitioners see the job as a medium to express their natural inclination (Jones, 2019). This was against the socially held belief that male practitioners are there to molest the children or they are homosexuals or paedophile as was stated in the findings of Zhang (2017). This further revealed that their job in teaching is highly functional as they learn and even become happier in the job as being a practitioner in the society.

“As an administrator, I would say looking at other male practitioners in the job I can say the job is rewarding for them in the sense that, it is both developing the male teachers as individuals and the young minds they get to interact with daily. There are challenges they face in the sense that they are regarded as people who

molest children and are paedophiles. Even though that is the case, I still feel comfortable and confident with the male practitioners in their job and the role they play in the growth of the young children they interact with. At the end of the day, there are no jobs without challenges...” (POO5)

Some of the male practitioners in the ECDC feel highly distinguished because they participate in a nontraditional male job, which gives them the sense that they are taking an active part in the sector that is most important in society (Van den Berg & Ndoda, 2019). This is in line with the argument of the structural functionalists when they argued that the parts of the social structure are developed to meet specific needs (Lucas, 2009; Ritzer, 2011).

“I would say as a male practitioner, we get labelled by different names. I would like to think this is because the work we are in is considered being for females since they are considered being individuals who can naturally nurture young children. I also understand that some people would ask questions why are we doing this job and some would label us by names that we are chance takers. Besides the negativity the job comes with, I can say I am still confident to say, I love the job and not at any day do I feel like I regret taking this path...” (POO1)

It was opined that the role of being a male practitioner at the earliest years can be very daunting and challenging but with time rewarding, as it helps in building creativity and help in improving communication with children Zhang (2017).

“...the task when I started wasn't easy for me; the difficulty of interacting with kids who are normally not taken by male practitioner and the difficulties that come with trying to understand the culture of the society but this role has given me a sense of fulfillment, a platform to be more creative because one just needs to create more engaging activities for kids and it has helped me learn more on how to better communicate with kids.” (POO3)

“I was of the view that being a male practitioner was not that difficult but at the early stages when you have just started, it becomes tricky in the sense that you have

to give all children attention and this varies because some would cry and others would be silent for some time. I learnt as time goes that I needed to be calm about the situation I was in. There were some other factors I had to look at such as different upbringing of the children, that some have single parents and some do not have parents at all; it is a case where they are living with their guardians...”
(POO1)

The responses from the participants of this study suggest that, as much as the male practitioners are there to teach and care for the students, they also learn in the process and better improve themselves in communication skills which they may not have acquired if they are to be employed in other jobs. This goes in line with the postulation of the structural functionalists when they argued that the subsystems within the society are interacting and interdependent (Ritzer, 2011). From this, we would then see that the male practitioners teach not only the children but also learn from them and in turn, be taught.

The participants also revealed that serving as male practitioners in the system has been found helpful as they are functional to the society in the aspect of serving as a role model for the male child in the workplace, creating a balanced learning environment for the kids especially the male children who like engaging in a wild play like tumbling and serve as an icon of a father to those who are from single mother families. This is in tandem with the findings of Mukuna and Mutsotso (2011) where they espoused that some children who are from single parent families whose fathers are no longer present and/or divorced or separate from the mother would not have any experience of being brought up by a male adult, hence the role of the male educators. Some of the male practitioners in the ECDC felt highly distinguished because they participated in a nontraditional male job, which gives them the sense that they are taking an active part in the sector that is most important in society (Van den Berg & Ndoda, 2019).

“We are also servings as a model for the children here. One thing that is needed in the society today, especially for kids that are coming from the family where the father is no more or separated, being with such kids is highly rewarding” (POO2)

“...kids here are made up of different nature; some of them here love mild play and some of them prefer rough play; it is just more than necessary for us to be here because none of the ladies here can give such to the children here.” (POO4)

Then, this shows that the presence of the male practitioners in the ECDC gives them a kind of sense of balancing the gender imbalance in some homes and even in the school and also providing complementary service within the centres that helps in building proper learning and development environment for the children in the ECDC. This is symmetrical to the argument of the structural functional theory that all the subsystems are there to perform different functions for the development of the society (Lucas, 2009). The argument of the structural functionalist theory about the context of this study’s findings shows that the male practitioners perform vital roles both in the life of the children, help bring gender balance in the ECDC and help promote proper learning and create a more conducive environment for children in the ECDC and ultimately, help to block the gap that is opened in the larger society in terms of building masculine male child, which might not be if the female is left alone to ECDC jobs (Ritzer, 2011).

The fact that some children who are from single parent family whose fathers are no longer around or divorced or separated from the mother would not have any experience of being brought up by a male adult, hence the role of the male educators in ECD (Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011). Cao and Wu (2016) reiterated this by indicating that male educators help in creating an environment that helps guide against effeminising the male children in ECDC. The effect of having male educators in ECDC, the gender gap both in the family and the ECDC would be addressed (Jones, 2016).

Male practitioners served as role models to the male children in ECDC (Zhang, 2017; Van den Berg & Ndoda, 2019).

In the next section, the discussion focuses on male practitioners and social stereotyping in ECDC in South Africa.

5.3.1.3 Sub-theme 1.3: Male practitioners and social stereotyping

Characterising the perceptions of the male practitioners in the ECDS about themselves is a struggle between the social perception of male practitioners that is highly rooted in the social norms and the perception and reactions of their female co-workers within the sector (Rohrmann, 2016). A recent study by Okeke and Nyanhoto (2021) noted that because of the challenge of low status and low salaries in other instances, the perception of early childhood development is viewed as women's work. This perception is caused because males are viewed as children abusers and people who are associated with sexual harassment. These factors are the major contributors as to why there are fewer numbers of males in early childhood development. Rohrmann (2016) also revealed that their perceptions are also shaped by the gender-neutral and gendered definitions of professionalism. Their perceptions are also being influenced by the general distrust for an idea of male practitioners working in the ECDS (Rohrmann, 2016; Stevens et al., 2012). This breeds the stereotypical view of the male practitioner, that is to say, society holds some overgeneralised ideas or perception about the male practitioners, which are not necessarily true for all of them (Han, 2016). Some stereotypes include lack of care for children, inability to measure up with their female colleagues in caring for children, male practitioners as being paedophile or sexual abusers and a lot more (Rohrmann, 2016; Perez-Escamilla et al. (2019) , Laere et al, 2014; Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011). Mathwasa and Sibanda (2021) agreed that society, for a very long time, has had a belief that early childhood development centres are specifically jobs for women and not men. This

perception has been due to the perception the public holds that women have a more nurturing nature than men, which has created a hindrance to some men participating or pursuing careers in early childhood development.

“...to be honest, if I can comment as a male practitioner, I can say there is a lot of distrusts from society regarding the work we do. We are perceived as individuals who lack care-giving as our fellow female co-workers. I have experienced a generalised approach in the sense that some parents would not feel comfortable leaving their children with a male practitioner. I can confidently say as an individual who was involved in Early Childhood Development; I feel like the generalised perception or stereotype we face makes us be determined about the work that is expected of us and I believe it pushes us to excel in what we want to achieve in the sector” (POO3)

From previous studies, male practitioners in the ECDC have been viewed by the people in the society in diverse ways, which may even be said to have equally influenced their attitude and perception of the work they do (Rohrmann, 2016; Perez-Escamilla et al. (2019) , 2019).

“I can say that as male practitioners, we are treated differently in the line of work we are doing; we are treated differently in the sense that when it is the first time as a male practitioner in the Early Childhood Development sector, there are certain tasks you are not entrusted with such as being left with the children alone since we are viewed as individuals who cannot be at the same level as our female co-workers. This has been a major issue for most of the newcomers in the sector but if you are determined about being in the sector, then, there is no amount of pressure you can feel like an individual; instead you take each day as a learning curve which allows you to gain experience...” (POO1)

It was reported in previous studies that the male practitioners are not as professional as their female counterparts as they lack patience, are physically rough, tend to be less caring, less meticulous and too playful. They should be found in the teaching profession and not caring profession like ECD

(Liu, 2013; Vang, 2014; Shen 2016). However, while the result of this study was in tandem with the result garnered from previous studies, as shown in the above paragraph, it rendered the social perceptions about the male practitioners untrue. The result shows that all the male practitioners that participated in this study thought that on the issue of professionalism, they are equally capable of caring for kids just like the female practitioners would do as there is no difference between them when it comes to professionalism. Mathwasa and Sibinda (2021) added that society has this social stigma against men who venture into early childhood development, having them labelled ‘abnormal’. Males who decide to choose a career in the early childhood development sector often face scrutiny and suspicion when they attempt to express affection for young children, thereby putting their lives in jeopardy.

“We can do the same thing they can do, so, the society is wrong to believe that we cannot offer quality like the female folks in this setting” (POO3)

“Society believes that we cannot take care of the young children like our female co-workers and this has been a general view that male practitioners are not good at developing the young children. Again, it is believed that taking care of young children is a female’s job and not a male’s job of which that is not true at all” (POO4)

The participants posited that being male does not make them less professional. This shows that the social stereotype does not affect their perceptions of what they are capable of doing in their area of interest as early childcare practitioners.

“They are just stereotypes and they can never see the threshold of reality. We are never less professional; there are things we can even do better than they can” (POO5)

This, however, debunked the assumption of the social constructionist theory as heralded by Galbin (2014) that human reality within a social context is informed by the shared assumption in the society. This finding shows how the individual construction of reality is in variant with the socially held conceptions of reality. It can then be said from the foregoing argument that reality may not necessarily be constructed from a shared assumption in the society as the social constructionists believed as individuals are rational.

“...society believes that male practitioners cannot really execute the work of taking care of children as our female co-workers do. This is incorrect because male practitioners can do what our female co-workers can do” (POO3)

Okeke and Nyanhoto (2021) reported that society perceives males who want to be practitioners in ECDS as people who are child abusers, sexual harassment predators and paedophiles. The findings of this study show that some of the male practitioners reported that they are always uncomfortable with the stereotype and social-held belief that men are abusers. This made them feel threatened and insecure as they feel that people are watching them closely unlike the female practitioners. It is highly difficult when a practitioner is felt too monitored (Page, 2019).

“Being a male practitioner can be demanding and challenging as it is practically seeming as if every one of us is perceived. erm... as a paedophile as it has been socially believed that most of the men caring for female children are likely to abuse them and it really affects the way we relate to these children” (POO1)

“...as a man working here, looking at the socially held belief that we are sexual harassers for choosing to work in this sector, it is not too easy for us as we need to tread with care for not to be accused of what we have been labelled to be. You can't change diapers for a baby; you can't show too much affection for a girl child. There is a limitation to all, not because this is natural, but because we are trying not to act true to type.” (POO5)

This is clear of the socially belief held by society as reported in a study conducted by Joseph and Wright (2016) that the drive to enter the early childhood profession, a male early childhood provider is majorly faced with challenges that emanated from the socially held belief and perception that men have more tendency and are more likely than others to abuse children highly influenced the male practitioners. In this light, it could be deduced that they see themselves as being unnecessarily monitored, which also in the long run affects their reactions to the child they care for. This is in tandem with the findings of the study of Page (2019) where he reported that a male early childhood practitioner revealed that he used to feel being closely monitored by the people due to the reservations of people to him being male rather than focusing on his ability to function at the duty. The respondent further disclosed that these perceived social reservations have had a great impact on him. They disclosed that it has been hurtful and also makes him feel unnecessarily sensitive while caring for children. There are some occasions where men are not allowed by some parents to place a female child on their lap, change nappies or take them to the toilet to ease themselves due to the stereotype that they are prone to sexually harass the child. This affects how they relate to their female students as they cannot show them care as expected due to this (Xu & Waniganayake, 2017; Basri, 2015).

5.3.2 THEME 2: EXPERIENCES OF AND CHALLENGES FACING MALE PRACTITIONERS IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

The ECDC has been identified as a gendered workspace, which is highly odd for men to work and any of them found in such effeminate gatherings are known to be subject to public suspicion (Yang, 2018). This form of suspicion entails one from friends, family, parents and guardians and other members of the society (Friedman, 2010). There is a great deal of things male practitioners in ECD centers experience, and which has inevitably affected their interests in the profession

significantly (Perez-Escamilla et al. (2019)). It is often the norm in the society, to stigmatise those that are found deviating from the community expectations and such perception of these male practitioners in the society is in no doubt centrally influential to their experiences and ultimately challenges that face them in the workplace (Yang, 2018). The widely diffused general belief rooted in the social convention and norms that women give more care and attention than men also have been central to the experiences of men who consider a career in early childhood education (Joseph & Wright, 2016). One of the most gender-biased professions in many Western countries is early childhood education (Stevens et al., 2012). These aforementioned often characterise the experiences of male practitioners in ECDC. In that regard, this section would reveal the result from this study relating to the experiences and challenges of male practitioners in ECDC.

5.3.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1: Experiences of male practitioners

Working in a socially dominated female gender profession as a male can be said not to be without its own experiences (Basri, 2015). Male educators in the ECDC experience a lot in their course of service as caregiver in the ECDC (Han, 2016). Their experiences, however, cannot be divorced from the social stereotype of the male within the society and the expected gender role that a typical man is expected to display (Jing et al, 2018). This is to say that the experiences of male practitioners in ECDC are grouped around the expected gender role (Yang, 2018). This section would, hence, project the experiences of the male practitioners that participated in this study. It was reported by two of the respondents that the male is always assigned some socially perceived male jobs in the society even while assigning responsibilities to ECDC. The respondents have the following to say:

“I was always assigned duties like fixing bulbs, cutting the grasses and even being the janitor of this centre” (POO4).

“We are seen as men and are expected to carry out tasks like fixing electricity and engaging in activities which the women don’t have the natural ability to do” (POO3).

This shows that there is much correlation between gender role and designation of responsibilities as professionals in the ECDC. This is similar to the experience of a respondent of Yang (2018) study on the experience of male practitioners in ECDC in America where he revealed that the wildest students are always assigned to his class being the only male in that center. This respondent further related that he was assigned to be the centre disciplinarian, which shows that men and women in ECDC are expected to perform distinct roles (Cao & Wu, 2016). This however, negates the primary duty of the practitioners in the centre as they are employed to perform the same tasks in the profession without any gender appearance (Rohrmann, 2016).

“...as a male practitioner in the ECD centre, I have past experiences of given children that are unruly and I was expected to discipline the child when they start to be naughty. This showed that male practitioners are not treated the same as our female co-workers.” (POO1)

“I had complaints in the sense that I was given a lot of work in the centre simply because they wanted me to feel the pressure. What helped me was that I voiced out my grievances against my co-workers. I wanted to be heard that I could be able to do the work as my fellow female co-workers do...” (POO4)

This could be explained in line with the argument of the social constructionists where they opined that what is done in the society is the product of interaction with the social world (Scrivens, 2002; Galbin, 2014). This signposts that the ascription of some responsibilities to men in the ECDC is an importation from the shared assumptions in the society.

In addition, some of the participants also revealed that they are also expected to serve as male role models for the male child and engage in some outdoor activities that would help stimulate masculinity in the male children. Rohrmann (2016) highlighted that having a male in the development of children is an important principle as it allows for the children to be groomed by a male figure, more especially if there is no father at home for that particular child. Another study by Schwalb and Schwalb (2013) summarised that the idea of having active males in early childhood development influences the attitudes of young children.

“We are expected to be one of the fields to carry out activities that are not female kind of activities per se such as playing football, tumbling play and the like,” (P002)

“In this centre, we have taken it to be our duty to ensure that the male children here are not effeminate. We are expected to inculcate the manliness into them,” (P005)

These findings suggest that in some climates, male practitioners, even though they might not be recruited to manifestly perform the function of the male role models, they latently perform the task. This also affirms that male children are expected to perform different tasks from that of their female colleagues to bring equality to the system and also serve as cover for the gaps in many families (Zhao, 2016). This also corroborates what Xu and Waniganayake (2017), in China, revealed that the government of some states gave scholarships for the education of males to pick jobs in the ECDC to correct effeminated male children in the country. This shows that China are very strategic in employing male practitioners for them to serve as models to the male child (Xu & Waniganayake, 2017). Perez-Escamilla et al. (2019) and Bektas and Kilinc (2018) also reported that even the female practitioners also attested to the fact that participation of more male practitioners in caregiving at the ECD centres is highly essential.

From this foregoing, according to Emile Durkheim, one of the proponents of structural functional theory, an individual in the society is shaped by the social institutions or what he called *social facts* (Lucas, 2009; Ritzer, 2011). This social fact in these findings would be the societal role expectations in the society and how it shapes role assignment in the ECDC.

5.3.2.2 Sub-Theme 2.2: Challenges male practitioners experience

Working in a traditionally feminised profession can be something challenging for male practitioners as they are often found to be kicking against societal traditions (Yang, 2018; Friedman, 2010). This also informed the gendered imbalance within the profession, which informs the outweighing of females by males in the profession (Han, 2016; Rohrmann, 2016). Some challenges faced by the male practitioners in the ECDC include but not limited to isolation by female colleagues, stigmatisation by friends and family, inability to communicate well with the students, and low salary, all of which affects their productivity as practitioners in ECDC (Connell & Pearse, 2015; Yang, 2018; Roberts-Homes & Brownhill, 2012).

The profession from the information garnered from the participants of this study, it was reported that the people in the society stigmatise men taking a job in ECDC as it is considered a low status job with low salary, which extends women's job in the society (Page, 2019). One of the participants admitted that even though he sometimes gets self-conscious regarding his career choice while amidst the friends, he revealed that he always tries to manipulate things while his friends are discussing job choice, which he reported makes him uncomfortable. He then linked this to the inadequate education of the people of what the job entails. He believed that if proper education could be done for the people in the society, the stigma that the job is a low profile one, which is disdainful for men to delve into, would change.

“When my friends and I are discussing job choices, most of them would talk about engineering...and I do not want to say that I want to be an early childhood educator...I want to say something that is in my friend’s category. I believe that is the dilemma... but if we educate men about what the job entails, how males are important in children’s lives, their perception might change entirely.” (POO4)

The result of this study regarding that the early childhood development profession is a low paying job has been backed by the findings of the existing body of knowledge. In the study conducted by Bektas and Kilinc (2018), low payment was revealed as one great problem for male practitioners who are working and a big discourager from the others who might want to consider showing interest in choosing a career in this sector. Mukuna and Mutsotso (2011) also justified this in their study when they revealed that many of the male practitioners in ECD are poor and this impoverished state is traceable to their low pay, which is not in any way close to the sufficient wages and benefits.

The respondents also reported that they also are faced with the problem of isolation from their colleagues. Some of them reported that they are just the minority in their centre and most of the time, their female colleagues do not really regard them as they regard their fellow females and they hardly speak to them except in compelling situations.

“In fact, I am always worried, all alone here and my female colleagues here would rather neglect me than to keep my company. Most of the time in the staff room, I am outrightly alienated...” (POO3).

“We the few males here are just on our own; you will see females hanging out amidst themselves and would not even consider that with the males for ones...what we have been facing for long and it is when they needed your attention or advice or idea on something that they would show up.” (POO1)

This suggests that the gender sensitivity within this profession is still manifested in the interaction between male and female practitioners. Male educators in ECDC do suffer from being isolated by their female colleagues (Yang, 2018). It was also reported that the female practitioners revealed that the male practitioners are not expected to be in the caregiving job. A female has to be a caregiver; males can function in primary schools but not in a place like ECDC (Rohrmann, 2016). Some of the females often ignore them and even their contributions during meetings (Jones, 2016). This can be clearly understood with the assumption of the social constructionism theorists when they argue that social reality in a given social context emanated from the shared general assumptions of the people in such communities (Schwandt 2003). Galbin (2014) further argued that the social interaction in the society affects the understanding of the individual in the society and also their construction of what is real in the society. From this, we would see how the social construction of male practitioners in the general society, affects the conception of male practitioners by their female colleagues in ECDC and also their reactions towards the male counterparts.

Some of the participants reported that they also have an issue communicating with the children and relating with them freely. One of the participants revealed thus:

“One of the challenges here is the issue of effectively communicating with the children in such a mild and soft voice and tone to the kid. In fact, when I started teaching here, some of the kids won’t want to come to class because I am a male teacher. Communicating to them in the language they would understand is a bit very difficult” (POO4)

This shows that the belief that males’ voices and tone of communication might not be friendly to children as that of the female educators who are believed to be the perfect suit, shapes the difficulty some of the male practitioners are facing in ECDC while interacting with their students. This is

reflected in their struggle to be as soft as possible just like the female practitioners would do (Perez-Escamilla et al. (2019). This shows how the socially held belief has affected indirect the tone of the male in their engagement with children. It was reported in the study conducted by Joseph and Wright (2016) that some of the practitioners find it very difficult in communicating with their students as they believe that since male voices are not natural as that of females, with the complexity in the style of communication by men, which is not as soft and soothing to children like that of female. This communication challenge was similar to what Perez-Escamilla et al. (2019) and Yang (2018) reported in their studies that there are challenges in the proper dispensation of the curriculum. This is still leading down to the argument of social constructionism as related to reality and the perception of the individuals in society. This, in turn, informs their actions and inactions in society as a product of shared assumption and product of interaction in society (Galbin, 2014).

Another participant also indicated that communication with the parents and guardians has been a great challenge. It was revealed that some of the parents and guardians are always uncomfortable having male teachers in their children's class as they believe that some of the male educators are not good enough to take care of their children. It was also reported that some of the parents are also suspicious of the male practitioners of being liable for sexually assaulting their female children and as such, they are always monitoring them when with the kids.

“Some of the parents don't agree we take the class their children are because some feel we aren't capable of caring for the children...” (POO1)

“Relating with the kid is another problem. We are strictly monitored and you want to deal with the children with care so as not to be mistaken to be a paedophile. Many times, when some of the children are coming to hug me, I would rather shake them

instead or make it a side hug, so it will not appear like I am in any way harassing the kids. We are not happy with such ugly happenings here.” (POO4).

What is deductible from these is that society has contributed to the challenges facing the male practitioners in ECDC. The view of the practitioner as incompetent can be said to emanate from the socially held belief that men are not meant to be child caregivers but women. This has been similar to what Yang (2018) reported in his study when the participant revealed that he was always faced with the issue of relating with the parents or guardians of students, as he indicated that some of the parents are not happy with seeing him teaching their kids. The parents become suspicious of male educators in ECDC, which is not the same for their male counterparts that teach in primary schools (Joseph & Wright, 2016). The male practitioners are not often comfortable in carrying out their jobs as they cannot freely relate to the students (Page, 2019). A great deal of discomfort for a couple of male practitioners causes them to either develop a coping mechanism or quit the job (Perez-Escamilla et al. (2019). The account of social constructions is socially constructed with an interaction of the male practitioners and parents over time (McIlveen & Schultheiss, 2012). The next section provides a discussion of the ways the parents of children in the ECDC perceived the male practitioners working in the ECDC.

5.3.3 THEME 3: PARENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE MALE PRACTITIONERS IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

Male practitioners in ECDC are perceived by parents in both a negative and positive way. From the negative perspective, it has been reported that some of the parents are not pleased with male teachers in their children’s class as they believed that the teachers are incapable of giving care to their children the same as their female co-workers, issues with communicating with their students and some are sexually abusive (Anderson et al., 2014; Ho & Lam, 2014; Petersen, 2014; Gulciek,

2017). It is also noted by the parents from previous studies that male practitioners are advantageous in ECDC in terms of filling the space of fathers, serving as role models to the kids and also instilling discipline in the children (Rohrmann 2016; Gulciek, 2017). It is often believed that males are needed to complement the females in ECDC for some tasks that the women cannot fit into naturally (Perez-Escamilla et al. (2019) , 2019).

5.3.3.1 Subtheme 3.1: Benefits of male practitioners in the early childhood development sector

In previous studies of Rohrmann (2016) and Gulciek (2017), the perceptions of the male practitioner by the parents have been voiced that in the early childhood setting there is availability of distress that men have capacity to abuse children and this is a universal concern (Mathwasa & Sibanda 2021). Additionally, Mathwasa and Sibanda (2021) state that protective measures are taken into consideration when it comes to employability of males in the ECD sector due to the prevalence of child abuse and paedophilic conduct. The report of Jorosi-tshiamo et al. (2013) showed that the main reason men are scarce in this sector is because of the social belief that has been instilled in the male child from infancy that caregiving to kids is mainly for women and any men found in this sphere would be socially conceived as women.

The result from this study on the perceived benefit of the male practitioners to the children from the perspectives of the parents yielded different responses and insights. From the data gathered, all the participants established that it was essential that the children be surrounded by positive role models specifically those from single parent homes. The male presence was also beneficial to children who came from families with no male figures.

“Some children do not have fathers at home and it is good for them to interact with men and develop fully”. (PO15)

“It is helpful to have men in early years for all children to model, particularly children without fathers or men at home to care for them”. (PO11)

From this, the belief that men are role models can be true as argued by Rohrmann (2016) while he was reporting the perception of the female practitioners about their male colleagues where he posited that even while they feign to be positive at the first sight of the male colleague, a critical analysis has shown that, underlying in them is a stereotypical view about the male practitioners being a role model to the children in the ECD sector. This was also in tandem with the findings of Peeters et al. (2015) where they posited the global quest for males in the ECS as fathers are indispensable both in the family and also in the upbringing of children.

In the study of Mukuna and Mutsotso's (2011), the findings verify that the absence of male practitioners in the ECDS is creating a big gap for the male children in this sector, as children in centres where male practitioners are absent, without a father in their families are missing out on the experiences of learning from a male role model. In this regard, the assumption of the structural functional theorists that society comprises interrelated parts, that have to work together towards stability and functionality of the whole social system, is actually helping to build a solidified society (Lucas, 2009). A recent study of Zhang (2017) also verified that men who enter the field seem to be less likely to stay due to the low salaries in the field, social views of masculinity and femininity, low profile of the teaching occupation, the long history of the profession being dominated by females and the negative stigma sometimes associated with a man working with young children than their female colleagues and they move into other employment that pays better than child care or teaching. Ritzer (2011) further argued that these structural parts are created in the society to meet the specific needs of the society. In that light, we would see that the male

practitioners are functional in the aspect of meeting the needs of the male role model within the ECDC space.

Rohrmann (2016) stated that it is worthwhile to have men in the area as a method for testing generalisations. Parents considered ECE as a substitute or another type of child rearing. This is something which they considered being a collective responsibility of both fathers and mothers. The presence of men in early years' child care centres challenges the stereotype impressions that men lack the nurturing and social skills for caring. One practitioner remarked:

“If fathers hug, cuddle, play with children during care at home, then, these same men can teach in early years because that stage is not all about teaching; it is about showing love, nurturing where it is not about a woman or man; it is about the qualities to care for kids.” (P006)

The parents are also of the opinion that male kids are probably going to ignore female experts and, in that capacity, there is the requirement for men in early years' settings as disciplinarians. Some parents were of the view that people had diverse styles of minding, which impact how kids react to them. The parents have this to say:

“Respondents showed that men connected with kids in increasingly dynamic movement amid play though ladies encouraged quietness and calmness amid play. Extra reactions given by participants demonstrated that kids were probably going to connect more with men as they adore more movements amid the early years.” (P007)

“The fact that many of these kids have different ways of reacting when they play made it important to ensure we have both the male and female practitioners with these kids.” (P015)

“Children during their early years do like play with little or no constraints and we can see that female practitioner do not have the much strength like the male to manage the kids in such form of situation. The females want the kids to play calmly but the men can still manage the excesses of these kids efficiently.” (P008)

This finding is in line with the findings of the study of Mistry and Sood's (2013) where it was reported that practitioners deserve to be treated like the practitioners they are as their gender should not be a disadvantage to them as long as they are good at what they do. Perez-Escamilla et al. (2019) revealed that there are learning styles only the male practitioner possesses, which can, in turn, be an advantage to a male child. Since early childhood sectors are dominated by females, it is more favourable to girls than boys. Nevertheless, when male practitioners are introduced, boys begin to enjoy activities suited to them (Page, 2019; Joseph & Wright, 2016). Furthermore, there is also great concern over boys' abilities to learn how to grow into men as a result of the amount of contact young children have with female practitioners in their early education (Xu & Waniganayake, 2017).

It was related by the Headteacher of an ECDC in the study of Mathwasa and Sibanda (2021) that a male teacher may be more suitable in taking care of the boisterous nature of the male child, which might be too extreme for a female practitioner and this would be something that would meet the nature of the male practitioner, thus, making it essential for the male practitioner to get involved in the early childhood development childcare (Mathwasa & Sibanda, 2021). This also agrees with the findings that rubberstamp the assumption of structural functionalism that all the subsystems that make up the social system are functional for the functionality of the whole structure (Okeke & Nyanhoto, 2021).

From the foregoing, it could be concluded that most of the parents, while sharing their personal views, favoured the notion of men working in ECD. They were also of the view that this would challenge the traditional norms that still take root in South African society of child care being a woman's responsibility. They also noted that the male presence would also assist in dissuading the negative perceptions in society concerning men who take part in child care as a profession being

potential child abusers. Rohrmann (2016) added that in as much males can be regarded as individuals who are child abusers, some males have full capabilities to take care of children the same way their female counterparts do. Participants had the following to say:

“Their choice is changing perspectives of many of us in this community. The idea that what a woman can do, a man can do also is real and the male teachers are getting this to people’s heads already” (PO14)

“There is nothing left to argue about; these ones are really breaking grounds and challenge the ignorance of our people...” (PO11)

“This would help change the status quo; there would be a shift in the way the profession is being seen as for the females only as the male began to practise in this profession.” (PO07).

“Another paradigm is developed in viewing the early childhood care job as we now have not just female practitioners but also the male practitioners.” (PO09)

This suggests that some parents felt the need for the re-orientation of people and society to new social realities. Some parents related that male practitioners in the ECDC are distinguished because they participate in a nontraditional male job, which according to the society is wrong and this is instrumental to usurping the stereotype that care of the child is only meant for women (Van den Van den Berg & Ndoda, 2019). It was also reported that some parents in their study revealed that they feel happy as they are pursuing what they feel interests them and this helps in increasing the job satisfaction of the male practitioners working in this sector.

This is, however, incongruent with the findings of Gulciek (2017) where some parents opined that the male practitioners are undesirable as they do not possess self-care skills which the female practitioner is the best suited for. From a social constructionist perspective, many things we take for granted and believe have objective reality in the society are actually socially constructed by the

interacting individuals in the society, thus, can change as society changes (Vinney, 2019). This shows that the social belief that men are not for ECDC is a social construct that can be changed by the interacting individuals like the male practitioners in the sector.

Some participants also highlighted that if more men were present in the sector, it would make children know just like women than men can be nurturers, thereby bringing clarity in the culture concerning actions such as touching, hugging and providing warmth, to be done by all gender.

The inclusion of the male practitioner in this centre would not only change history but also help open the understanding of the children that males can also be good nurturers like the females too.” (PO14)

“umm...this will help enlighten the kids on the fact that actions such as touching, hugging and providing warmth aren't gender based.” (PO12)

This result is corroborated by the findings of Bektas and Kilinc (2018) where they reported that in terms of professionalism, there has been no significant difference between the male practitioners and their female counterparts working in the ECD sector. This shows that even male practitioners can be as caring as female practitioners (Bektas & Kilinc, 2018). This disagrees with the findings of Bari (2015) who argued that the male practitioners have different roles to play in the ECDC as they are better in some activities than their female counterparts and are less professional to the females in some aspects. This was similar to the result found in the existing study that is against the socially constructed reality, the deviation of some men from the social norms to work in this sector has since been noteworthy, especially in recent times, where men are now found working in this traditionally constructed women profession (Peeters et al., 2015). A recent study by Okeke and Nyanhoto (2021) agreed that male practitioners in preschools or ECDS are increasingly becoming a necessity in centres across South Africa. Due to the dramatic departure from the traditional nuclear family structure, there is a corresponding need for male role models. The role

male practitioners play not only in preschool but also in other phases of teaching and learning. It is a vital role for the young children as they get exposure to a father figure at school and it closes the gap of the absent father at home. This role cannot be filled by the female counterpart of the male practitioners in ECDS, hence, it is important to have male practitioners in ECDC.

Males are less patient and meticulous when it comes to caring for young children (Liu, 2013). These findings, however, contrast with the proposition of the social constructionist theory where they posit that the reality in society is what and when people come together, negotiate and agree upon (McIlveen & Schultheiss, 2012). Moreover, Okeke and Nyanhoto (2021) agreed that the role male practitioners play in the early childhood development of young children is impeccable in a way that cannot be compared to the female counterpart in the sector. What was found in this study negated the social construction of what men can do. Some parts of society believe they cannot be good nurturers, and the parents opined they can be just good as their female counterparts.

The next section reveals the result gathered from the interview sessions on the challenges facing the male practitioners working in the ECDC perceived by the parents.

5.3.3.2 Subtheme 3.2: Challenges faced by male practitioners working in the early childhood development sector

Working in a traditionally feminised profession can be something challenging for male practitioners as they are often found to be kicking against the societal tradition (Yang, 2018; Friedman, 2010). Some challenges faced by the male practitioners in the ECDC include but are not limited to isolation by female colleagues, stigmatisation by friends and family, inability to communicate well with the students and low salary, all of which affect their productivity as practitioners in ECDC (Connell & Pearse, 2015; Yang, 2018; Roberts-Homes & Brownhill, 2012).

“Society believes that we cannot take care of the young children like our female co-workers and this has been a general view that male practitioners are not good at developing the young children. Again, it is believed that taking care of young children is a female’s job and not a male’s job, of which that is totally not true at all.” (POO4)

“I had to complain because I was given a lot of work in the centre simply because they wanted me to feel the pressure. What helped me was that I voiced my grievances and I was heard. I wanted to be heard that I can be able to do the work as my female co-workers do...” (POO3)

It has often been reported that male practitioners are perceived by the parents and guardians as paedophiles or homosexuals (Zhang, 2017; Yang, 2018). It is often the norm in society to stigmatise those that are found deviating from the community expectations and such perceptions of these male practitioners in the society are in no doubt influential in their experiences and ultimately challenges that face them in the workplace (Yang, 2018). The widely diffused general belief rooted in the social convention and norms that women give more care and attention than men also have been central to the experiences of men who consider a career in early childhood education (Joseph & Wright, 2016). The parents’ perception of the male practitioners has, however, focused on the positive and negative assessment of male practitioners; there are perceptions of the parents regarding the challenges faced by the male practitioners in ECDC.

“This would help change the status quo; there would be a shift in the way the profession is being seen as for the females only as the male began to practise in this profession.” (POO7)

“The inclusion of the male practitioner in this centre would not only change history but also help open the understanding of the children to the fact that males can also be good nurturers like the females too.” (PO14)

In this study, the only perceived challenge the parents reported is the lack of support for the male practitioners. This study's findings show that some parents had their displeasure with the way male practitioners receive less or no support from the people. They reported that regardless of gender, parents were worried about the absence of support for men in the division, which is linked to the social stereotype about the male practitioners of being sexual abusers and paedophiles. They claimed this as one of the difficulties encountered by men in the early childhood education sector.

A female parent reported that:

“Most parents don't agree to send their children to classes where men were solely responsible and complained about the safety of their children when they saw men at the settings.” (P007)

At the same time, some parents were worried that the male practitioners in ECD centres do not receive the needed support they deserve to ensure that the children are taken care of since these male figures are ready to take care of the young children and ensure that they are properly developed. Below is what some participants had to say about this:

“It is helpful to have men in early years for all children to model, particularly children without fathers or men at home to care for them”. (P011)

“If fathers hug, cuddle or play with children during care at home, then, these same men can teach in early years because that stage is not all about teaching. It is about showing love, nurturing where it is not about a woman or man. It is about the qualities to care for kids.” (P006)

This result is in tandem with what Bektas and Kilinc (2018) found when they disclosed that some of the men are seen as physical and sexual abusers who can sexually abuse the child. Zhang (2017) backed up this when he reported that male practitioners are worried about the eventual accusation of sexual harassment or child abuse when they decide to teach in ECEC. Gulciek (2017) reported

that the parents perceived the male practitioners to be sexually abusive and they fear having their children in their classes. This falls in line with the argument of the social constructionism theorists. Rogers (2010) posited that interactions, beliefs and norms affect the decisions of the individuals in the society.

This explains the relationship between the social stereotype and the challenge of isolation that the parents pointed out that the male practitioners are facing. The societal belief that the male practitioners are paedophiles can affect the support that could have been given to them and their reaction to the children, parents and even their female colleagues.

5.4 SUMMARY

From what has been reported in this chapter, it could be noted that the male practitioner has positive perceptions about their work and some of them are highly pleased with their work. It was also reported that the male practitioners in the course of their sojourn as educators in ECDC have been experienced a lot from their students, female colleagues and also their parents. They also reported that they are also faced with different challenges such as stigmatisation, being given excess work, having to work under pressure and receiving little or less support from their female counterparts. It was also garnered that the parents perceived the need for male practitioners in ECDC for the development of the children and also felt they are much more needed in ECDC.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This section relates the conclusion of the results from the male practitioners and the parents of the children in the early childhood development centres in Khayelitsha. This study aimed to explore the perceptions, experiences and challenges of male practitioners in the early childhood development centres in Khayelitsha. This aim was achieved through a qualitative methodological approach, which sought to provide answers to experiences, meaning and perspective, usually directly from the participant's standpoint, as against the use of predetermined methods (Babbie, 2013). The research question was answered in Chapter Five where the research findings were presented and discussed. The analysed data was presented in three main themes with seven sub-themes identified. A review of appropriate literature and a theoretical framework was used to substantiate, explain, compare and contrast the findings of this study as comprehensively presented and discussed in Chapter 5.

A summary of the preceding chapters followed by several recommendations for future research as well as for professionals practising in the field and a conclusion to close the study, are provided in the final chapter of this study.

6.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

6.2.1 Chapter 1: Introduction of the study

This section of the study gives the background to the perceptions, experiences and challenges of male practitioners in the early childhood development sector. The study was carried out to help cover the gaps in the literature regarding the male practitioners' perceptions, experiences and challenges in the early development sector in South Africa. To address the research problem and adequately work towards achieving the research aim and objectives, a qualitative research approach was executed.

6.2.2 Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

This chapter described the social constructionism theory, its origin and critiques and how they relate to the current study. The theory explored how people develop knowledge of the world in a social context and that much of what we perceive as reality depends on shared assumptions. From a social constructionist perspective, many things we take for granted and believe in are an objective reality which is actually socially constructed, thus, can change as society changes. The theory assisted in the explanation of how the perceptions towards male practitioners are shaped by what society thinks of them. For instance, this means that the male practitioners' construction of their role is based on relations within their circles, be it the parents, the colleagues and even the children themselves and at the end in this constructionism, the role of an individual is sustained according to their realities such as the belief that women are supposed to be the caregivers.

Also, the second theory of structural functionalism underpinned this study. The main assumption of this theory is that society is made up of functional substructures that are all working for the functionality and stability of the social system. From the analysis of this theory, the early childhood development sector is a system comprising different parts. These structures include the

administrators of the sector, the male practitioners, the female practitioners, the children enrolled at the centre and the support staff like cleaners and clerical staff. These sets of people, according to this theory, are those structural components that make up the early childhood development sector.

6.2.3 Chapter 3: Literature review

This chapter provides critical insight into research conducted on the topic. The content discussed includes early childhood development, male practitioners' perceptions, experiences and challenges in ECD and the societal perceptions of the male practitioner in the ECD sector. Existing literature was reviewed around themes like early childhood education, gender imbalance in the early childhood development sector, societal perceptions of male practitioners in the early childhood development, male practitioners' perceptions in the early childhood development sector, experiences of male practitioners in the early childhood development sector, challenges of male practitioners as early childhood educators and the challenges of male practitioners as early childhood educators. From the reviewed literature in this study, it could be gathered that early childhood development is a vital period for the growth and development of a child, as this has the potential to influence the social, economic and health-related quality of life. It can also be deduced that it is a very sensitive period in the life of the infants, which made it more essential for it not to be taken with levity.

6.2.4 Chapter 4: Research methodology

This study engaged a qualitative approach, which explores observable facts as they occur in the real world and therefore, desires to study them in their natural settings. This study used an explorative and descriptive research design where two sets of participants (male practitioners and

parents) were purposively selected and were interviewed through semi-structured interviews guided by a semi-structured interview guide.

6.2.5 Chapter 5: Presentation and discussion of the findings

This section focuses on the findings the researcher has discussed based on the objectives of the study. The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions, experiences and challenges of male practitioners in the early childhood development sector. Themes and sub-themes were created and written around the perceptions held of male practitioners in early childhood development, the experiences and challenges of male practitioners in early childhood development and the perceptions of pre-school parents regarding male practitioners in early childhood development.

6.2.5.1 Theme 1: Male practitioners in ECDS

This section focuses on the choosing of a career in ECD by male practitioners. The section also focuses on male practitioners' perception of their roles, the factor that motivated them and their reactions to the social stereotypes as a practitioner in the ECD sector. This theme was described by three sub-themes namely: *Choosing a career in early childhood development, male practitioners' perception of their job role and male practitioners and social stereotyping*. The finding shows that the male practitioners in this study are self-motivated to take the job. They also reported positive perceptions about their roles and also debunked the stereotype that they are sexual abusers and incompetent for the job. This section was fully discussed with the extensive engagement of literature and theories.

6.2.5.2 Theme 2: Experiences and challenges of male practitioners in ECDS

This section presented the findings regarding what the male practitioners have been through and facing in the course of their jobs in the ECD sector. From what was garnered from this study, the male practitioners' roles in the ECDC cannot be divorced from the

perceived gender role and social expectations. This theme was described by two sub-themes namely: *Experience of male practitioners and challenges of the male practitioners*. The information gathered showed that some men are been assigned jobs like fixing electricity, taking the children in playing some outdoor games that were assigned based on their perceived gender expectations. They also reported that they are faced with communication challenges with the children, the parents and their colleagues. They also reported isolation, inability to deliver the curriculum, communication and stigmatisation as the challenges they face in the sector as male practitioners.

6.2.5.3 Theme 3: Parents' perceptions of the male practitioners in ECDS

This section reported the perception of the parents about the benefits of the male practitioners in ECDC and the challenges they perceived the male practitioners are experiencing in ECDC. This theme was described by two sub-themes namely: *Benefits of male practitioners in ECDS and challenges faced by male practitioners working in ECDS*. In the findings, the parents reported that the male practitioners are highly beneficial as they serve as role models to male children in the centres and also help in instilling discipline in the children. Moreover, the parents gave a lack of support and stereotypes as challenges they perceived to be facing the male practitioners.

6.2.6 Chapter 6 Summary of Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion

The final chapter provides the conclusion and recommendations, with an overall presentation of a summary of the chapters covered in the study. The limitations observed and experienced in the execution of this study are also captured in Chapter six.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding the results, this study recommends the following:

- Government should put programmes in place and formulate policies that would help eradicate the gender bias and stereotypes in the ECD sector.
- The parents should help in giving support to male practitioners giving care to learners.
- Government should provide scholarship opportunities for males that are ready to choose a career in the ECD sector.
- Pre-Schools should involve men in management of centres to attract male educators to work in the sector.

6.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study based on the time constraint and the limitation of its coverage could not cover some other important areas that need to be researched. Other studies might also need to look at:

- Research evaluating intervention plans and measures put in place by the government in addressing the challenges facing male practitioners working in the ECD sector in South Africa should be considered.
- Further research should focus on whether the assistance of female practitioners in this sector will improve the experiences of the male practitioners in ECDC.
- Future research should address how the career choices of male practitioners affect their family roles and family relations.

This study was confined to Khayelitsha. Other studies might also need to compare the experiences of male practitioners from different regions in South Africa.

6.5 SUMMARY

From the findings of this study, it can be seen that the male practitioners should be given a chance to fully participate in the early childhood development centres in Khayelitsha and in South Africa as a whole as they are essential in the sector. From the findings, it could be concluded that society has in a great deal influenced the perceptions of the male practitioners about their profession and their persons as male early childcare educators. The scarcity of male practitioners in ECDC would decrease if society takes the responsibility of educating the people to better see the profession as one that needs the input of both the male and female practitioners collectively to deliver quality care to the children. Furthermore, the findings have also shown that the male practitioners should be given all the support they need so that society can be able to see that the sector is not only suitable for females only but also males can do the work that is done by their female counterparts in the ECDC. They serve not only as role models for the children but also help in creating an ECDC where children would learn that a gender balanced society is the most balanced society and what everyone should dream of. They should be accorded due respect they deserve and the stereotype that society has constructed regarding the profession should be discarded. This shows that majority of the males working in this sector are satisfied with their jobs despite all the inconveniences that are characterised by working in ECDC. This also shows that although working in the ECDC can be very challenging, it can also be interesting at the same time. Finally, it was also recorded that the male practitioners are faced with many ugly experiences in society, which dissuades many men from considering a career in the ECD sector.

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APPENDIXES



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APPENDIX A INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title:

Exploring male practitioners' perceptions, experiences and challenges in early childhood development.

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by Vuyiseka Ntsukumbini at the University of the Western Cape. I am inviting you to participate in this study because you are working with young children in ECD centers. The purpose of this study is to explore male practitioners' perceptions, experiences and challenges in early childhood development. The interviews with participants will be conducted at their places where they are employed and will be conducted in English or Xhosa giving preference to the participants' language of choice. The translation of the interview transcript will be done when the participant prefers the Xhosa language.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?

You will be asked to fill in the agreement form for the interview guide and use of audiotape prior to conducting the interview. You will be asked to respond to the interview questions in a way you understand them. The interview will only take about 30 to 60 minutes. The ECD Centre will be used as a study site. The questions for the interview will explore male practitioners' perceptions, experiences and challenges in early childhood development.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

The researcher undertakes to protect your identity and the nature of your contribution. To ensure your anonymity, thus your name will not be included for any purpose in this research project. A code will be used to differentiate different transcriptions of participants. Only the researcher will be able to link your identity and will have access to the identification key especially for the information verification. To ensure your confidentiality, the interviews will be copied to a computer immediately afterwards and deleted from the audiotape. The interviews will be kept in the password-protected folder, which will be known, to the researcher only. The transcriptions will be identified with codes and stored in filing cabinets, which will be locked, personal to the researcher. If we write a report or article about this research project, be sure your identity will be highly protected.

What are the risks of this research?

There may be some risks from participating in this research study. The risks may range from psychological, social and emotional risks. There might also be other risks that are currently unforeseeable as: all human interactions and talking about self or others carry some amount of risks. We will nevertheless minimize such risks and act promptly to assist you if you experience any discomfort, psychological or otherwise during the process of your participation in this study. Where necessary, an appropriate referral will be made to a suitable professional for further assistance or intervention.

What are the benefits of this research?

This research is not designed to help you, but personally, the results may help the researcher learn more about male practitioners' perceptions, experiences and challenges in early childhood development where the lack of male practitioners is common. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through an improved understanding of roles, experiences and challenges of male practitioners in early childhood development.

Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

Is any assistance available if I am negatively affected by participating in this study?

All possible precautions will be taken to protect you from experiencing any harm from the research process. However, if you are or feel that you are being negatively affected by this research, suitable assistance will be sought for you at the University of the Western Cape.

What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by Vuyiseka Ntsukumbini in the Centre for Interdisciplinary studies in Children, Families and Society, at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study, please contact 083791083. Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems, you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Head of Department:

Prof S Savahl

Centre for Interdisciplinary studies in Children, Families and Society, ssavahl@uwc.ac.za

021 9593674

Dean of the Faculty of Community and Health Sciences:

Prof. Anthea Rhoda

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17

Bellville 7535

chs-deansoffice@uwc.ac.za



This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape's Senate Research Committee and Ethics Committee.

APPENDIX B INFORMED CONSENT FORM

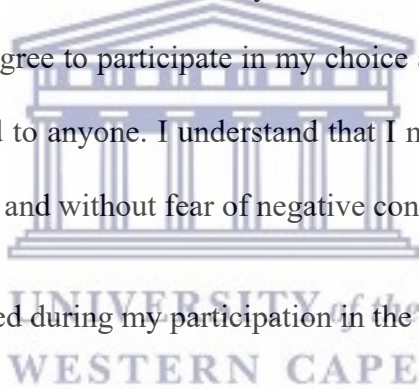


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INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: **Exploring male practitioners’ perceptions, experiences and challenges in the early childhood development sector**

The study has been described to me in English or Xhosa giving preference to the language of choice that I understand. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand what my participation will involve and I agree to participate in my choice and free will. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed to anyone. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences or loss of benefits.



_____ I agree to be audio-taped during my participation in the study.

_____ I agree not to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.

Participant’s name.....

Participant’s signature.....

Date.....

APPENDIX C INTERVIEW GUIDE – MALE PRACTITIONERS

NB: ensure written consent form is signed and collected before the interview commences.

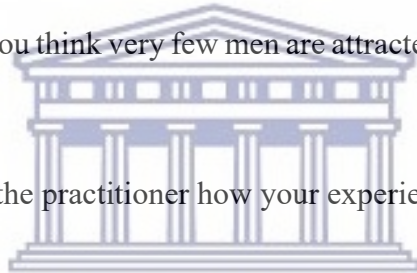
Research introduction: This study is conducted in fulfilment for the requirements to obtain a Master’s degree in Child and Family Studies at the University of the Western Cape. The study seeks to find out the male practitioners’ perceptions, experiences and challenges in early childhood development.

Interviewer:	
Respondent Code:	
Age:	
Position:	
Qualifications:	
Training:	
Time:	

The logo of the University of the Western Cape is centered in the background of the form. It features a classical building with a pediment and columns, with the text 'UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE' below it.

- Please tell me more about yourself?
- How did you start working in the ECD centre?
- What motivated you to work in the ECD centre?
- What are your direct responsibilities?
- What do you enjoy the most about being an ECD practitioner?
- What do you dislike about being an ECD practitioner, if any?
- How is your relationship with your colleagues?

- What training do you have? (probe) Level of training in ECD
- Can you talk about the most significant challenges (if any) that you face at the centre?
- What is the source of these challenges?
- How do you deal with these challenges??
- What do you think are the biggest issues ECD male practitioners face?
- What improvements or changes would you want to see in the ECD sector (at national, provincial, community and ECD centre levels)?
- What else (if anything) would you like to share?
- From the perspective of a practitioner, what do you think could be the challenges/difficulties of having men working in the early childhood development centres?
- In your opinion, why do you think very few men are attracted to work in the early childhood development centres?
- During the time, you are the practitioner how your experience has been?



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APPENDIX D INTERVIEW GUIDE – PARENTS

NB: ensure written consent form is signed and collected before the interview commences.

Research introduction: This study is conducted in fulfilment for the requirements to obtain a Master's degree in Child and Family Studies at the University of the Western Cape. The study seeks to find out the male practitioners' perceptions, experiences and challenges in early childhood development.

Interviewer:	
Respondent Code:	
Age:	
Gender:	
Place:	
Time:	



- What do you think of a male practitioner teaching and caring at the centre ?
- How would you describe your relationship with your child's male educator practitioner?
- How do you feel about having a male practitioner in your children's centre?
- In your view, do you think is there a difference between male and female practitioners' teachings? In addition, what do you think is the difference?
- Do you think the presence of men helps/supports the children's development?

APPENDIX E EDITOR'S CERTIFICATE

Registered with the South African Translators' Institutes
(SATI) Reference number 1000363

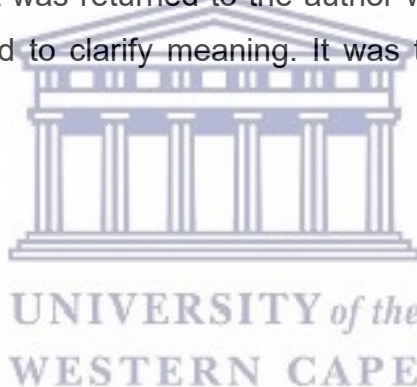
SACE REGISTERED

20 January 2022

**TITLE: EXPLORING MALE PRACTITIONERS' PERCEPTIONS, EXPERIENCES AND
CHALLENGES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT**

This serves to confirm that I edited substantively the above document including a Reference list. The document was returned to the author with various tracked changes intended to correct errors and to clarify meaning. It was the author's responsibility to attend to these changes.

Yours faithfully



Dr. K. Zano

Ph.D. in English

kufazano@gmail.com/kufazano@yahoo.com

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09 November 2017

Ms V Ntsukumbini
Social Work
Faculty of Community and Health Science

Ethics Reference Number: HS17/9/8

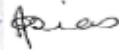
Project Title: Exploring male practitioners' perceptions, experiences and challenges of working in the early childhood development sector.

Approval Period: 08 November 2017 – 08 November 2018

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the above mentioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval. Please remember to submit a progress report in good time for annual renewal.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of the study.



*Ms Patricia Josias
Research Ethics Committee Officer
University of the Western Cape*



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PROVISIONAL REC NUMBER - 130416-049