

Katie Rebecca Nyman is a BSc graduate from Middlesex University, with a year-long placement experience at the Hospital School. At the School of Health and Social Sciences, Middlesex University Department of Psychology; Dr Bahman Baluch is a Reader in Experimental Psychology, Dr Linda Duffy is a Principal Lecturer and Director of Psychology Programmes and Pnina Shinebourne is a Senior Lecturer. For communication please email: bahman1@mdx.ac.uk

# Katie Rebecca Nyman, Bahman Baluch, Linda Duffy and Pnina Shinebourne

---

## Drawings of self and best friend by children undergoing dialysis

Drawing is the most natural mode by which children could express their feelings and emotions to others, particularly those with serious medical conditions (Malchiodi, 1999). In this respect children undergoing dialysis have been reported to show extensive distress about their condition and treatment, which necessitates special nursing (Neff, 1987).

### Research

There has been very little research where the drawings of children undergoing dialysis have been the subject of systematic research; in particular, how the child sees him or herself in relation to the stressful conditions he/she is experiencing. The drawings of self and best friend may best reflect the degree of stress and separation that a child may be experiencing while being hospitalised.

In an earlier study Nyman, Baluch and Duffy (in press) examined hospital school children's drawings of self and their best friend using Koppitz's (1968) criteria for assessing emotions expressed in the drawings. Nyman et al found that long stay (i.e. staying for more than two weeks) hospital school children placed more emotional indicators on drawing their best friend than short stay or mainstream school children, suggesting the degree of separation from friends as a result of being hospitalised. However, one important conclusion drawn from the previous research was that in addition to using emotional indicators as a criteria for degree

of emotion expressed, there are other features of the drawings that may be equally important in assessing the children's feelings. For example, mainstream school children's self and their best friends drawing are similar in many respects with regard to the eyes, nose and body posture. However, hospital school children have portrayed a different drawing of themselves compared to that of their best friend. Children undergoing treatment for cancer often draw no hair or have their head covered. This is in contrast to the drawings of their best friend who is not suffering from cancer in which he/she appears to be with full hair and often looking happy and smiling (Nyman et al).

In the present investigation the drawings from four dialysis patients were subjected to a more qualitative analysis. Permission for the study was granted by the Hospital School and Psychology ethics committee. The drawings were from one child aged 8 and three aged 11 (three male and one female), all undergoing dialysis for renal failure. All children were long stay (due to the nature of their kidney condition) and were having intravenous dialysis via their arm.

### Self-portrait

The children were asked to draw a self-portrait and one of their best friend outside the hospital. All drawings were done in the presence of the first author (on a year-long placement at the Hospital School) on a one to one basis with a black pencil and under

no time restriction. The children had the choice of either first drawing themselves or their best friend. The results are shown in figures 1a and 1b next page. The 8 year old did not wish to draw a best friend and just completed a self-portrait drawing, the other children did both drawings.

The most striking finding in this series of drawings is how all four children have drawn their arms. In relation to self-portrait drawings, two have them hidden behind their backs and two have drawn them either shorter than their best friends drawing of the arms or have cut them short from the elbow. This is, however, not the case with the drawing of the best friend and the position of the arms and length (see figure 1b). Furthermore, when asking children what is the feeling expressed by the drawings, the main expressions for self-portrait drawings were sad and bored by two male patients. Only the 11 year old female used happy as an expression for both self and best friends drawings. The feelings expressed for the best friend by the patients were angry, bored and happy. None, however, wrote that the best friend was sad.

Overall such consistency observed in the present findings in relation to self and best friends drawings is an indication of the extent of the child's feelings about the isolation and medical conditions they are undergoing, and the extent to which the dialysis is affecting their normal life.

It would be an interesting follow up question to examine the extent to which children's drawing may differ depending upon whether they are short or long stay. The present findings suggest that long stay children are indeed expressing their feelings about themselves and their best friend via their drawings. Similar findings regarding the use of drawings by children as a means of expression of pain and feelings have been the subject of recent investigations (Kortesuoma, Punamäki, & Nikkonen, 2008; Skybo, Ryan-Wenger & Su, 2007). Skybo et al (2007) for example, asked children to draw an ideal hospital. They

argued that "the children's drawings of an ideal hospital would probably include the basic elements that they regard as most crucial to the quality of their care" p333. Analysis of the drawing showed that children drew an ideal hospital looking like a warm homelike house with entertainments such as TV and toys. Children included most members of their family in their drawing although mothers appeared more than fathers, nurses appeared more than doctors and in most drawings all people featured in the drawings were smiling, dressed in colourful outfits. There are other forms of activities that have been organised by the hospital school as aids for children's expression of emotions. In this respect play is seen as an effective means of communication (GOSH). This is often assisted with the aid of Hospital Play Specialists and Play Workers who provide a range of therapeutic tasks for children and a choice of a wide range of toys, games and creative activities.

In conclusion, it is the intention of the current study to highlight the significance of drawings as an additional aid in helping children express their feelings, particularly as they could be used irrespective of ethnicity and other cultural and linguistic constraints (Driessnack, 2005; Rollins, 2005).

#### References

- Driessnack, M. (2005). Children's drawings as facilitators of communication: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Pediatric Nursing*, 20, 415-423.
- Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH). <http://www.gosh.nhs.uk/gosh/clinicalservices/Play/Homepage>
- Koppitz, E. (1968). *Psychological evaluation of children's human figure drawings*, Grune and Stratton, New York.
- Kortesuoma, R., Punamäki, R. & Nikkonen, M. (2008). Hospitalized children drawing their pain: the contents and cognitive and emotional characteristics of pain drawings. *Journal of Child Health Care*, 2008, 12, 284-300.
- Malchiodi, C. A. (1999). *Medical art therapy with children*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers; 1999.
- Neff, J. A. (1987). Nursing the child undergoing dialysis. *Issues in Comprehensive Paediatric Nursing*, 10, 3, 173-185

Nyman, K. R., Baluch, B. & Duffy, L. J. (in press). Human figure drawings by children in hospital and mainstream schools. *International Journal of Health Promotion and Education*.

*Pediatric Oncology Nursing*, 22, 4 203-221

Skybo, T., Ryan-Wenger, N. & Su, Y. (2007). Human figure drawings as a measure of children's emotional status: Critical review for practice. *Journal of Pediatric Nursing*, 22, 15-28.

Rollins, J. A. (2005). Tell me about It: Drawing as a communication tool for children with cancer. *Journal of*

Figure 1a - Drawings of self (in a reduced size) by children undergoing dialysis. The actual size of the drawings (centimetres) is shown at the bottom of each figure.

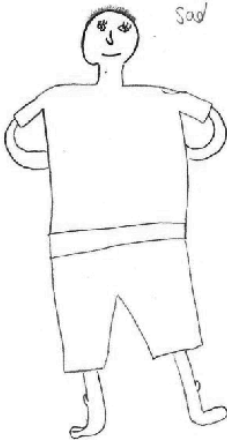
**Self drawing**

8 year old male

11 year old male

11 year old male

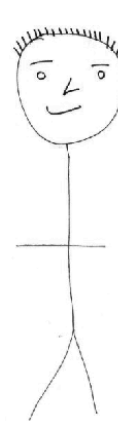
11 year old female



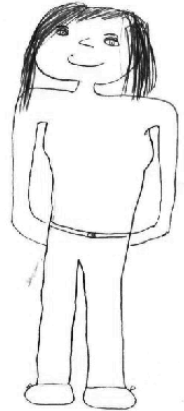
18 centimetres



23 centimetres



22 centimetres



17 centimetres

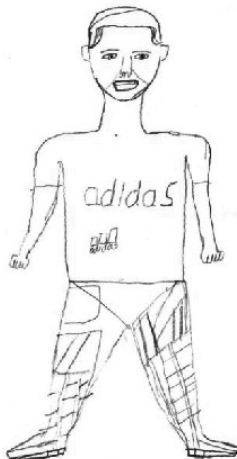
Figure 1b- Drawings of best friend (in a reduced size) by children undergoing dialysis. The actual size of the drawings (centimetres) is shown at the bottom of each figure.

**Drawing of best friend**

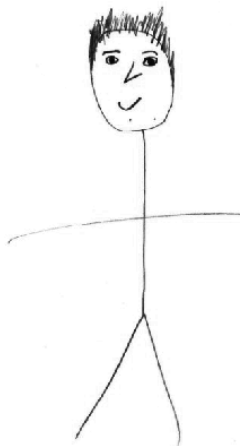
11 year old male

11 year old male

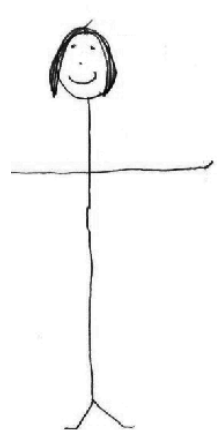
11 year old female



21 centimetres



21 centimetres



11 centimetres