

THE PROJECT: Aim and Context

This research was initially conducted for the CHAMPSEA (Child Health and Migrant Parents in South East Asia) project, which examines the wellbeing effects on children left behind when their parents work abroad.

The project surveyed around 4,000 families across four countries, conducting interviews with parents, caregivers and children aged 9-11. The younger children (aged 3-5) were considered too young to answer detailed questions and so instead they were asked to **draw a picture of their family and describe it**.

My research has focused on understanding how other social science disciplines use children's drawings as a research tool when other methods may not be appropriate and how Geography can do the same.

WHY DRAWINGS?: What can we learn from them?

When conducting research with children, particularly those who are very young, research methods have to be **adapted** to suit them. One avenue that children already use to communicate thoughts and emotions through is drawings. It makes sense to harness these and analyse them in order to make **inferences about the child's experiences based on what they draw and how they explain it**.

Information about relationships and wellbeing can be inferred from:

- The relative size of objects
- The placement of objects on page
- What is drawn and what is left out

1) Left hand side of page is usually associated with female, right with male. (Di Leo, 2016)



Figure 1: A drawing by a girl aged 5, from the Philippines who lives with both parents. The mother is shown on the left and the father on the right, reinforcing the female/male sides of the drawing.

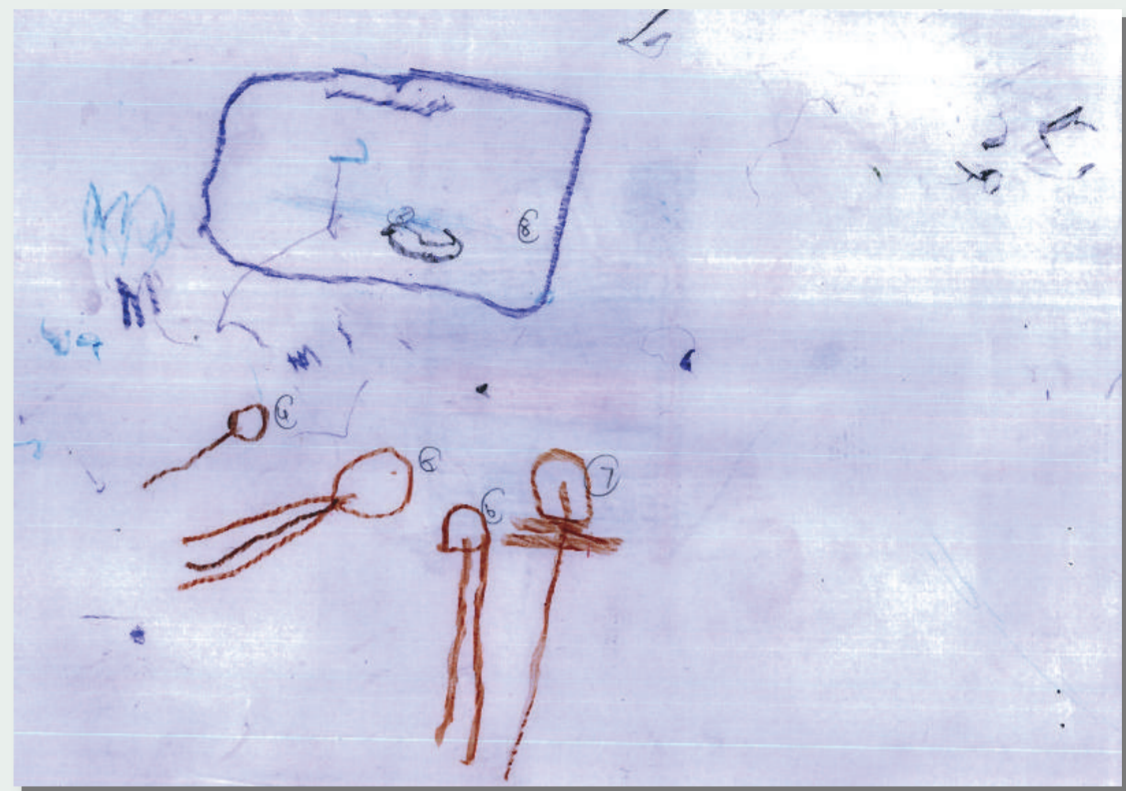


Figure 2: A drawing by a boy aged 4, from Thailand who has a migrant father. It is interesting that the right hand side of the page (the male side) is completely empty, in stark contrast to Figure 1. This makes sense as his father is absent.

2) Object size indicates importance. (Di Leo, 2016)



Figure 3: A drawing by a boy aged 4, from Vietnam whose father is migrant. His mother is not only on the left (female) side, but she is also the largest figure in the image, indicating importance. His father is not drawn.

3) Houses indicate need for stable home environment (Di Leo, 2016)



Figure 4: A drawing by a girl aged 4, from Thailand who has a migrant father. The house is the largest object in the picture indicating its importance and perhaps the girl's desire for a stable home. The right (male) side is also less cluttered than the left.

CONCLUSIONS: Geography and Children's Drawings

Children's drawings have a lot to offer the social sciences both as a form of data and as a research tool within a wider study. Like other disciplines, Geography can benefit from using child drawings as a **qualitative research method**. Geography already uses a large number of **visual methodologies** (maps, GIS and photo-elicitation) but it has not made use of child drawings as yet. In all my research I could find **only one paper** (Mares and Zwi, 2015) that used children's drawings to help answer geographical questions. The CHAMPSEA project has made use of them to understand more about children's experiences, and geographers should further explore their potential use in the discipline, especially in Child Geographies.

References

- CHAMPSEA, <http://www.populationasia.org/CHAMPSEA.htm>
 Di Leo, J., 2016. *Children's Drawings as Diagnostic Aids*. New York: Routledge.
 Mares, S & Zwi, K., 2015. Sadness and fear: the experiences of children and families in remote Australian immigration detention. *Journal of Pediatrics and Child Health*, 51(7), 663-669.