CHAPTER 3

DESIGN, INSTRUMENTATION AND PROCEDURES

3.0 Introduction

This is a case study which has been designed to investigate the nature of problems faced by two adolescents from father-absent homes. It also attempts to ascertain to what extent their behaviour, self-concept, emotional state and academic performance are affected by their father absence.

3.1 The subjects

The subjects in this study comprised of two adolescent boys brought up in single-mother families. The criteria used for the selection of the subjects were based on the type of father absence, the subjects' ethnicity and gender, their religious background and their personal characteristics. Both the subjects lost their fathers through death due to illness. Both are adolescent boys of Indian origin brought up in Christian families and both have been identified as 'problematic' by their respective schools.

The first subject (subject A) is a 17-year-old boy from Taman Klang Jaya, a middle class residential area in Klang. He completed his primary education in SRK
Taman Klang Jaya and at the time of this study, he is a Form Five student in Sekolah Menengah Raja Mahadi, about 500 meters away from his home.

The subject is the only child in the family. His father passed away in 1986 after a long battle with cancer. The subject was five years old when his father passed away. His grandparents shifted in to look after him while his mother continued to work as a clerk. However, when the subject’s school grades began to deteriorate after his grandparents passed away, his mother decided to quit her job and become a full-time housewife, with the hope of providing closer supervision on the subject.

The second subject (subject B) is a 19-year-old adolescent boy from Taman Tepi Sungai in Klang. The subject’s father passed away when he was 12 years old. Since then, the subject has been staying with his two sisters and mother in the present home. They stay in a double storey semi-detached house about one km away from his former school: Sekolah Menengah Methodist (Laki-Laki) Klang.

The subject’s mother was a secondary school teacher until 1995 when she took her optional retirement. After her retirement, she conducted motivation courses for children and did some direct selling businesses to supplement her family income.

Subject B appears to be a well-mannered boy to strangers but his behaviour is beyond his mother’s control. He was least interested in his studies, always up to some mischief in school, and had even stayed away from home throughout the night,
just to be discovered the following morning, drunk and fast asleep with his peers in some deserted playground.

Both the subjects were selected based on the fact that in spite of their ‘notoriety’, they are pleasant boys, easy going, frank and unreserved. Besides, their mothers are both educated and keen to find out what exactly caused their sons to go astray in spite of their strict and religious upbringing.

3.2 Instrumentation

Several instruments were used to collect the data and information needed to answer the research questions in this project paper. Among the instruments used were the modified Mooney Problem Checklist, the 24-item Malaise Inventory, the modified Child Behaviour Checklist, and the Personality Test Inventory. Besides, separate interviews were conducted with the subjects, their mothers and school teachers to obtain more in-depth information about the subjects.

3.2.1 The modified Mooney Problem Checklist

The Mooney Problem Checklist (MPCL) used in this study was modified by the Department of Psychology in University Kebangsaan Malaysia. Subject A chose to respond to the Bahasa Malaysia version of the checklist (see Appendix A) while subject B responded to the English version. (see Appendix B) The checklist consists
of 220 short phrases which represent common problems faced by adolescents. These problems are categorized into eleven general areas as shown below:

1. Health and physical development
2. Finance and living conditions
3. Social and recreational activities
4. Courtship, sex and marriage
5. Social-psychological relations
6. Personal psychological relations
7. Moral and religion
8. Home and family
9. The future: vocational and educational
10. Adjustment to school work
11. Curriculum and teaching procedures

The subjects were first requested to underline the general problems which appear to disturb them and then circle those problems which disturb them particularly. Their answers were entered into the score sheet before analysis of data are being carried out.

3.2.2 The Personality Test Inventory

The Personality Test Inventory (PTI) was designed by Sidek Mohd. Noah from University Putra Malaysia. (see Appendix C) It consists of 150 statements.
The subjects were required to ascertain whether each statement describes them correctly and shade 'true' or 'false' in the answer sheet provided.

The subjects' test scores can be categorized into the following 15 types of personality traits: aggressive, analytical, autonomy, dependent, extrovert, intellectual, introvert, adventurous, perseverance, self-critical, domineering, helpfulness, supportive, structured, and achievement oriented.

3.2.3 The Malaise Inventory

This inventory was designed by Rutter et al. in 1970. (see Appendix D) It consists of 24 short questions which requires the respondents to answer either 'yes' or 'no'. The inventory is commonly used as a screening instrument to sample a wide range of emotional disorders like depression, anxiety, phobias and obsessions.

A 'yes' score of seven and above indicates a high likelihood of the presence of emotional problems which require psychological help and counseling.

3.2.4 The modified Child Behaviour Checklist

The modified Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL) which was to be filled by the subjects' mother, consists of two parts. (see Appendix E) The first part seeks to
gather information regarding the subjects' interest and hobby, as well as their social and school competency.

The second part consists of 113 items covering various aspects of behavioural problems measured by a three-point Likert Scale. The behavioural problems are classified into the following nine categories:

- Withdrawn
- Somatic Complaints
- Anxious/ depressed
- Social problems
- Thought problems
- Attention problems
- Delinquent behaviour
- Aggressive behaviour
- Other problems

The first six categories listed above measured the subjects' internalized problems whereas categories seven and eight measured their externalized problems. The scores were to be marked on the accompanying chart to identify the subjects' problems as perceived by their mothers.
3.2.5 Interviews

Informal, unstructured, open-ended interviews were held with the subjects, their mothers and teachers. (see Appendix F) These interviews were conducted on a one to one basis to ensure confidentiality. Interviews with the subjects and their mothers were held in their respective homes while interviews with their teachers were held in the school counselling room.

3.3 Data collection procedure

Once the topic of the research project has been agreed upon, efforts were made to identify adolescents from father-absent homes. Since most research literatures suggested that the impact of father absence is more negative on boys as compared to girls, it was decided that this study will focus on adolescent boys.

The two subjects were randomly selected based on some knowledge of their school records and family background. The subjects and their mother were contacted by phone to find out if they are willing to participate in this research project. The aim of the study was made known to them and they were briefed about the time, commitment and help which is expected of them.

After the subjects were decided upon, informal visits were made to the subjects' homes to observe the living conditions of the subjects, their relationship with their
mothers and siblings, as well as to develop better rapport with the subjects and their mothers. During the follow-up visits, the subjects were each given a set of the Mooney Problem Checklist, the Malaise Inventory and the Personality Test Inventory. They were briefed on how to answer the checklist/inventory and were ensured that their answers will be treated with strict confidentiality. At the same time, the subjects' mothers were requested to fill the Child Behaviour Checklist. The subjects and their mothers were given two weeks to fill up the checklists and inventories.

Meanwhile, separate trips were made to the subjects' schools to collect relevant information about their academic performance, involvement in co-curricular activities, as well as discipline records.

After two weeks, another visit was made to the subjects' homes to collect the answers to the checklist and inventories. The data was then carefully analyzed and based on the information collected, separate sets of interview questions were prepared for the respective subjects and their mothers.

To avoid the subjects or their mothers from withholding some sensitive information, the subjects were interviewed when their mothers were not around. Likewise, interviews with the subjects' mothers were conducted without the subjects being present.
3.4 Data analysis

Analysis of data was on-going. To ensure consistency and reliability, information obtained from the checklists was cross-checked with information obtained from interviews. Likewise, information obtained from the subjects' mothers and teachers was cross-checked with those obtained from the subjects themselves.