CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

4.0 Introduction

The interpretation of data is organized into the following areas:

i. Problems faced by the subjects

ii. Subjects' personality traits and self-concept

iii. Subjects' psychological and emotional adjustment

iv. Subjects' academic performance

v. Subjects' perception regarding their future

4.1 Problems faced by the subjects

Analysis of the answers to the Mooney Problem Checklist revealed that subject A appeared to be very troubled by problems in the following three categories:

a. Adjustment to school work

b. Personal-psychological relations

c. Social and recreation activities.

The most prominent problem area identified by subject A was adjustment to his school work. He underlined 13 out of 20 items in this area and circled 8 out of the 13 items underlined. He indicated that he was particularly disturbed by his frequent
absence from school, inability to understand certain subjects, not spending enough time in his studies, not interested in books and studies, not able to speak out in class and not knowing how to study effectively.

Subject A’s school records showed that he had been remanded several times for skipping classes and wondering around the school compound. During the interview, he indicated that he was totally lost in subjects like History, Mathematics and Principles of Account and did not know what the teachers were talking about. That was the main reason why he stayed away from school or class. In spite of that, he is very worried over his coming SPM examination. He feels that time is running out on him and the chances of him getting through the examination is very slim.

The second area which troubled subject A was regarding his personal-psychological relations. He underlined nine out of 20 items and circled five of the underlined items. He was disturbed by the fact that he was unable to control his temper and his tendency to stammer and day dream. Besides, he felt he was easily excited and depressed.

Subject A’s psychological problems were further confirmed from his response to the Malaise Inventory, in which he indicated that he had the tendency to feel depressed, worry about things, get into violent rage and was easily annoyed and irritated by people. The fact that subject A responded positively to eight out of the 24
questions in the inventory indicated that he is likely to suffer from emotional problems which requires psychological help and counselling.

Subject A also appeared to be disturbed by problems regarding his social and recreational activities. Among the problems that disturbed him particularly were having nothing to do during his leisure time, having no hobby, and careless with his personal belongings.

Other than the above three areas, subject A was also troubled by the fact that he was too fat, physically unattractive, not being liked by others, impulsive and easily involved himself in fights and conflicts.

With regard to home and family, subject A felt that his mother had sacrificed too much for him and made too many decision for him. He was also troubled by the occasional misunderstanding between him and his mother.

The above findings indicated that subject A is a ‘lost’ adolescent facing a host of problems. He underlined 77 out of 220 problems in the checklist, covering all the 11 categories. However, his major problems appeared to focus around his studies and his poor psychological adjustment. Subject A gave his school teachers the impression of a lazy, irresponsible, big bully who was all out to intimidate others. However, the data revealed that he actually suffered from poor self-concept and his ‘acting-out’ behaviours could be a form of defence mechanism against his negative self-concept.
In fact, in the privacy of his home during the interview, he appeared to be polite, shy, and pleasant. The fact that he was troubled by so many problems revealed that many of his behaviours might be beyond his control and were indirectly caused by his insecurity due to his father-absent background.

Compared to subject A, the second subject appeared to be more stable and encountered fewer problems. He only identified 35 problems from the checklist. His major problems were related to finance, family and his physical appearance.

According to subject B’s mother, she practically spent her last cent seeking treatment for her husband’s cancer and after the death of her husband, the family of 4 survived on his pension and her meagre salary. After she opted out from the teaching service three years ago, she received a combined pension of approximately RM 1 600 per month and spent her entire gratuity on her eldest daughters’ college education. Fortunately, her house was bought with a government loan and she need not have to pay for it after her husband’s death. To supplement her family income, she rented out two rooms and catered food for her tenants. In spite of that, she still finds it hard to make ends meet and subject B appeared to be able to feel the financial strain on his family.

Subject B sat for his SPM examination in 1996 but failed all the science subjects. To cut him off from his ‘lepak’ peers, his mother sent him to Australia to stay with his aunt. His aunt enrolled him in high school to prepare him for the Victoria Certificate
of Education examination (equivalent to STPM). He worked part-time in a restaurant while studying there and did get through the examination at the end of the academic year. However, he was forced to return to Malaysia earlier this year when his aunt was unable to continue financing him.

Back in Malaysia and with a 'passport' to enter university, subject B was faced with a dilemma: to work or to study. His qualification was not accepted by local universities and he could not afford the high tuition fees charged by private colleges or foreign universities. His mother pestered him a get a job for the time being until his eldest sister completes her course but with the present economic situation in the country he found it hard to get a job. It is therefore not surprising that his major problems are related to finance and money.

Subject B's second area of problems concerned his home and family. Like subject A, he felt that his mother had sacrificed too much and made too many decisions for him. He was particularly upset over the death of his father and disliked asking for money from his mother. He was also troubled by the fact that his mother did not trust him and treated him like a child.

Besides finance and family, subject B was also worried over his future vocational and educational choice. He was particularly worried that he won't be able to enter college at all and felt strongly that he needed more information regarding his future career choice.
Therefore, it appeared that other than problems related to home and family, both the subjects were preoccupied by different sets of problems. Subject A was more preoccupied by problems related to school work and personal-psychological adjustment whereas being older and out of school now, subject B’s problems appeared to focus more around finance and future vocational and educational choice. During the interview, both the subjects indicated that their lives would definitely be different if their fathers were still around. Both the subjects’ mother also revealed that as much as they wanted to help their sons, many a time they felt frustrated and helpless because their sons preferred to be with their friends and simply refused to talk to them.

4.2 Subjects’ personality traits and self-concept

The scores on the personality test revealed that subject A was an introvert who was shy and easily embarrassed. Besides, his scores also indicated that he was quite aggressive and dependent. In spite of these negative traits, his personality test scores revealed that he was helpful and highly critical of himself. These traits appeared to be congruent with his mothers’ response to the CBCL in which he was described as being dependent, easily embarrassed and timid, but kind and helpful.

On the other hand, subject B’s scores on the personality test revealed that he was more of an extrovert who loved parties and crowds and who could mingle with
strangers easily. Besides, he scored very high on analytical, intellectual, perseverance and achievement oriented traits. Like subject A, he also appeared to be helpful and highly critical of himself, and to a certain extent aggressive as well as dependent.

Many research literatures revealed that children from father-absent homes were more aggressive and dependent. Therefore, the two subjects' aggression and dependency traits appeared to be associated with their father-absent home environment. However, their religious upbringing appeared to have instilled the moral values onto them. As a result, they were highly critical of themselves.

In terms of self-concept, subject A appeared to have very poor self-esteem. In the MPCL, he revealed that he felt inferior and wished to have a more attractive personality so as to become more popular among his friends. During the interview, he indicated that he was neither intelligent nor handsome and he was good for nothing. Subject A appeared to perceive himself from the way others reacted towards him. At home, his mother treated him like a child and did everything for him. In school, he was frowned upon by his teachers and friends due to his poor academic performance and deviant behaviour.

Compared to subject A, subject B appeared to have a more positive self-concept regarding himself. He thought of himself as intelligent, hardworking and was quite sure that he will be successful in life. Although he was perceived by his mother as
lazy, forgetful, slow moving and irresponsible, he did not seem to be affected by such negative perception. When asked to describe himself, he wrote:

"I am capable of achieving anything I put my mind to. I'm trustworthy. I like challenges. Problems can't keep me down for long because I will try to solve them instantaneously. I believe I can go far in life."

Therefore, it appeared that the self-concept formation of the two subjects were affected by their age and the onset of their father absence. Subject A, being younger and loss his father when he was only five years old, appeared to have a more fragile self-concept when compared to subject B, who is older and loss his father when he was 12 years old.

4.3 Subjects' psychological and emotional adjustments

Response from the subjects' mothers and teachers revealed that both the subjects suffered from some form of psychological and emotional maladjustment as a result of their father absence. During the interview, subject A indicated that he could still remember how his father played with him when he was young and that he could not help feeling jealous and upset whenever his friends mentioned about their fathers. However, judging from the fact that his father passed away when he was at a tender age of five, it was rather doubtful that he could remember incidences that happened so long ago. Therefore, it appeared that whatever recollection he had regarding his father could be from what he heard from his grandparents. In the CBCL, subject A's mother reported that her son used to fuss over not having a father at home and
complained of loneliness, until she had to shut him up about two years ago. He did not show so much emotional instability of late but was still highly impulsive and easily distracted. His teachers reported that he liked to 'act out' in school in order to get the attention of other students.

The scores on the Mooney Problem Checklist and the Malaise Inventory indicated that subject A portrayed many psychological and emotional problems generally associated with adolescents brought up by single mothers. In the MPCL, he indicated that he was impulsive and unable to control his temper. In the Malaise Inventory, he revealed that he was easily depressed, easily annoyed by people and had the tendency to throw into a violent rage. His mother complained that he demanded a lot of attention and had the habit of showing off and clowning himself. Such behaviours indicated that subject A could be suffering from insecurity syndrome. After his father passed away, he was pampered by his grandparents. According to his mother, his grandparents always gave in to his whims and fancies. It was after his grandfather's death that he started to show anti-social behaviours like smoking, skipping school and intimidating the younger students in his school. Therefore, his showing off and clowning acts could be his way of disguising his insecurity.

Compared to subject A, subject B appeared to be more stable psychologically because he responded positively to fewer psychological and emotional problems in the Malaise Inventory. He revealed that he was always worrying about things, had
difficulty falling asleep and had frequent nightmare. However, when analyzed with his family history, it appeared that subject B might have gone through more traumatic experiences in life compared to subject A. But being older and more mature, he was able to handle the situation better than subject A, thus appeared to have lesser psychological problems than subject A.

Subject B’s problem could perhaps be traced back to the circumstances that led to his father’s death. According to his mother, her relationship with her husband had never been good. She stopped sharing her bedroom with her husband after he forced her to go for an abortion, which was against her Catholic faith. After that he started to abuse her physically. She could never forgive her husband for what he did but stayed on for the sake of the children. For six years before her husband succumbed to cancer, he slept with the subject and they shared many fond moments together. Therefore, subject B was heartbroken when his father passed away but, knowing how his mother felt about his father and not wanting to hurt his mother, he tried to suppress his pain by not mentioning about his father at all after his death. Deep in her heart, his mother knew that he missed his father terribly. Therefore, such suppression of feelings could have contributed to his psychological and emotional problems, which are translated into what his mother described in the CBCL as ‘forgetful’, ‘day dreaming’ and ‘refuses to talk’.

His response to the MPCL also indicated that he had not got over his pre-adolescence pain and was still a very ‘dejected’ adolescent. Unlike subject A who was
'God-fearing' and who attended church services regularly, subject B indicated that he had stopped going to church these days because he was puzzled about the meaning of God and he doubted some of the religious teachings preached in his church.

Therefore, it appeared that other than the onset of father absence, the circumstances that led to father absence and the parental relationship may also affect the psychological and emotional adjustment of adolescents.

4.4 Subjects' academic performance

Subject A's school records showed that he had never excel in his studies even though his parents were both quite highly educated. His father was a civil engineer and his mother worked as a clerk with Socso. Unlike subject B's family who faced financial difficulties, subject A lives quite comfortably with his mother. The house they stayed in was a wedding gift from his grandparents and his father left behind RM 80,000 in the form of gratuity. Therefore, the hypotheses that economic hardship was the major cause of poor academic performance of adolescents from father-absent homes does not seem to hold true for subject A because he could get whatever he asked for, even a new motorcycle for him to go to school!

An analysis of subject A's school results revealed that his grades started to show drastic deterioration when he was in standard three, the year when his grandmother passed away. He managed to get a 'B' and 3 'C's for his UPSR examination.
However, after his grandfather passed away when he was in Form 2, he completely lost interest in his studies. Except for English, which he scored a ‘B’, he got ‘C’ s and ‘D’ s for all the other subjects in his PMR examination. In spite of that he was promoted to Form 4. It was in Form 4 that he started to give his teachers a hard time. He walked in and out of the classroom whenever he likes, did not bother to do his school work, and behaved like a gang leader for Indian students in his school. As a result, he did not pass a single subject in his Form 4 school-based examination and obtained an aggregate of 52 out of a total of 54.

Fortunately, a counseling session with his priest earlier this year brought him to his senses and he promised during the interview that he would turn over a new leaf. Feedback from his teachers revealed that he did show some improvement in his behaviour and was not so much of a nuisance of late. According to his mother, he even enrolled himself for tuition classes and is indeed trying very hard in his studies. The sad point is, after lagging behind in his studies all these years, he is now facing the uphill task of understanding his teachers as well as his text books.

Subject B’s parents were both secondary school teachers. Although he was not an excellent student, he did reasonably well in his primary school. He scored 2 ‘A’ s and 2 ‘B’ s for his UPSR examination. However, his studies began to deteriorate after his father was diagnosed of cancer. According to his mother, when his father was under treatment for cancer, she was so preoccupied with his illness that she completely neglected her children’s studies. Due to her strained relationship with her husband,
she was forbidden from going near his sick bed by her in-laws. As a result, subject B was the one who nursed and looked after his father while he was in the hospital. During the interview, subject B was seen withholding his tears when he narrated in detail how he looked after his father and saw his father drawing his last breath. He said he was so sad that he couldn’t cry. Under such circumstances, it was not surprising that he did badly for his PMR examination. He scored an ‘A’ for his English, and scraped through with ‘C’s and ‘D’s for the other subjects. However, due to the fact that his father was an ex-teacher in his school, he was promoted to the science stream in Form Four. Unfortunately, science subjects were beyond his ability to cope. As a result, he lost interest in his studies completely and began to get involved in deviant behaviours like ‘lepaking’, drinking and smoking. For his SPM examination, he managed to score a distinction for his English but did badly for all the other subjects.

Out of desperation, his mother sent him to Australia to cut him out from his ‘lepak’ gangs. It appeared that he had matured after staying away from home for a year. During the interview, he indicated that he would try to work and save up for his college education. He admitted that he still smokes, but only drinks occasionally. Whatever it is, he has finally realized the importance of education and has set his mind to study hard if he ever gets to college.

The above findings revealed that both the subjects performed badly in school. Their poor academic performance could be the outcome of their father absence.
Subject A who lost his father since pre-school years had never excelled in his studies although both his parents were quite highly educated. It appeared that his poor academic performance was associated to lack of paternal challenges and motivation in the home rather than to economic hardship. However, subject B performed quite well in school until his father succumbed to terminal illness. Therefore, his poor academic performance could be attributed to the financial strain and emotional stress that he encountered after the death of his father.

4.5 Subjects' perception regarding their future

When asked about their perception and plans for their future, the two subjects responded very differently. At age 17, subject A appeared to be still in the stage of 'identity foreclosure'. He seemed to be dependent on his mother to make decisions for him. According to him, if he gets through his SPM, he will take up a course in hotel management in Switzerland, where his mother's cousin is working. If he fails, probably he will go and work in one of the hotels in the Klang Valley.

He also indicated that he was infatuated with a Malay girl when he was in Form 2 but the girl left him after a few days because he was 'stupid' and 'not handsome'. Therefore, he has decided that he will let his mother choose his future wife. He emphasized that his mother always makes the best choice.
It appeared that having lost his father at a tender age of five and being pampered by his grandparents, subject A has hardly grown up although he is already 17 years old. He is dependent on others to make decisions for him and is contented with his life.

Unlike subject A, subject B seemed to have made up his mind to become an entrepreneur. He indicated that he intends to take up a course in information technology and work for a few years. After which, he intends to start his own business dealing with computer software. According to him, he is the only man in his family and it is his responsibility to see that his mother and sisters live comfortably.

Subject B’s strong desire to strive for a better lifestyle was probably fueled by the economic hardship faced by the family since he was a boy and the frustration of not having enough money to go to college now.

The strained relationship between his parents appeared to have affected his perception regarding his own marriage in future. He disclosed that he does not intend to get involved with girls until he is successful and financially stable and if he ever gets married, he will make sure he will become the best husband to his wife and the best father to his children.
Therefore, the subjects' perception regarding their future was affected more by the financial state of the family than by father absence. Adolescents from economically deprived homes appeared to mature faster and tended to have a vision to strive harder to attain financial independence as compared to adolescents from well-to-do families.