

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### 5.1 Summary

The objective of this study is to investigate the impact of father absence on adolescent development and their academic performance as well as to compare the effects of father absence on Malaysian adolescents with those in the west. Seven research questions were formulated to serve as guidelines in this investigation and the findings are summarized as below:

- a. Problems encountered by adolescents from father-absent homes varied according to their age and their family socio-economic status. The younger subject was preoccupied with problems related to adjustment to school work and personal-psychological adjustment whereas the older subject was more concerned over problems related to finance and future career. The fact that both the subjects felt that their mothers had sacrificed too much for them and treated them like kids at home indicated that single-mothers tended to over-protect their children to compensate for their paternal deprivation, not knowing that they were suffocating their adolescents who were desperately crying for space and independence.

- b. Analysis of the personality traits of both the subjects revealed that although both of them portrayed aggressive traits, both also experienced a certain degree of anxiety and inferiority complex. Subject A was actually an introvert but resorted to acting out and being aggressive to disguise his insecurity and inadequacy. Subject B was anxious about his family and his future but chose to shut himself out from his mother and to hang out with his friends as a form of escapism. Therefore, the presence of a father in their homes could have made a difference to their personality traits.
- c. The subjects' poor academic performance was associated to father absence. Both the subjects' fathers died of terminal illness which put the family under tremendous stress before they died. Both the subjects' mothers admitted that before and after the death of their husbands, they were so preoccupied with their own personal problems that they completely neglected their children's studies. By the time the subjects reached Form 2, their grades had deteriorated so much that nothing much could be done to motivate them to do well. Had their fathers been around and more guidance been given to their school work, they would probably perform better in school and emerge as average or even above average students.
- d. The self-concepts of the subjects appeared to have been seriously tarnished by their poor academic performance. It is undeniable that the Malaysian education

system placed too much emphasis on academic excellence. Academic excellence has been perceived to be equivalent to intelligence. It is not surprising that subject A had such low self-esteem about himself and felt that he was stupid and useless. On the other hand, subject B was fortunate to be given the opportunity to go abroad and he seemed to have regained his confidence and self-esteem after he got through his Victoria Certificate of Education in Australia. Therefore, it appeared that for the subjects in this study, the impact of father absence on their self-concept was fueled by their poor academic performance instead of by the physical absence of their fathers.

- e. It was obvious that father absence had its impact on the psychological adjustment of the subjects. Both the subjects were found to be impulsive, worrisome, forgetful, having a weak sense of conscience and having problem concentrating in school. Due to their poor psychological adjustment, they were more vulnerable and succumbed easily to peer pressure to engage in deviant behaviours like smoking, drinking and skipping school. Their social adjustment also suffered a setback as a result of their father absence. Both the subjects got infatuated with girls at a young tender age of 14. Having no male role models at home, they were rather confused about their gender roles and did not know how to deal with their new found sexuality. As a result, both their relationships backfired, which added further insult to their fragile self-esteem.

f. It appeared that the impact of father absence on Malaysian adolescents is quite similar to that in the west. Like adolescents from father-absent homes in the West, the subjects in this study performed badly in school, started smoking and drinking at a young age, felt insecure and depressed and have the tendency to be violent. The psychological adjustment of the two subjects also appeared to be affected by the onset of their father absence and the socio-economic status of the mother. Subject A appeared to be more problematic compared to subject B because he lost his father at a younger age. On the other hand, the economic hardship faced by subject B's family gave him the desire to strive for a better future.

However, contrary to the studies done in the west, the two subjects in this study were not suicidal. They were mischievous and rebellious but they had not gone to the extent of committing crimes. Although they do smoke and drink, they are still free from drug abuse. Therefore, it appears that the negative impact of father absence on Malaysian adolescents is not as serious as that encountered in the west.

## 5.2 Limitation of the study

The major limitation of this study is the sample size. This study only investigated the impact of father absence on two adolescent boys in Malaysia. As such, the data collected could probably be biased and the findings cannot be generalized to other

adolescents in the country. For instance, both the subjects in this study were Indian boys aged 17 and 19 respectively but research literatures revealed that there was a differential effect of age, race and gender on the severity of impact of father absence. Younger adolescents may react differently towards father absence compared to older adolescents. Adolescents from different ethnic groups may be affected differently by father absence and adolescent girls may adjust differently to father absence compared to adolescent boys. Besides, both the subjects in this study were from middle-class families and both their mothers were educated and full time homemakers. However, father absence could have differential effects on latch-key adolescents whose mothers are fully employed or on adolescents from lower socio-economic background.

Therefore, more comprehensive studies involving larger sample sizes with more controls on the variables need to be carried out in order to gauge the impact of father absence on adolescents in Malaysia.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The findings of this study showed that father absence is associated with adolescent deviant behaviour and poor academic performance in schools. Adolescents from father-absent homes have to struggle with more adjustment problems compared to their peers from intact families due to a lack of male role models in the home. Therefore, they tend to be more impulsive and are more vulnerable to peer pressure

to engage in deviant behaviours like skipping school, smoking and drinking. Besides, they were found to be more forgetful and lack concentration power, which resulted in their generally poor academic performance. Their poor academic performance in turn resulted in their poor self-concept, which stripped them of their self-confidence and made them more prone to day dreaming. To the other extreme, they may resort to acting out or clowning in order to get recognition from their teachers and peers. Therefore, understanding the predicament faced by these adolescents will enable mothers, teachers, and counsellors to show more empathy towards them and to help them overcome their anxiety and role confusion in order to emerge as psychologically healthy adults.