

EFFECTS OF PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT ON YOUNG ADULTS'  
PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT

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If we educate children with canes, there is no difference with apes.

(Anton Semenovych Makarenko, 1888-1939)

I dedicate this thesis to my family for nursing me with love and  
to the memory of my father

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## ABSTRACT

Physical punishment brings palpable negative impacts on one's psychological development over the life span. A wide pool of research has been conducted in the western cultures and not in the local contexts, thus this study is conducted to investigate whether or not the physical punishment causes the same pattern of negative impacts on young adults' psychological adjustment. This study illustrates the residue effects of physical punishment on psychological adjustment among young adults. The current study involved 467 young adults in a public higher learning institution in Malaysia. Data were collected by the mean of questionnaires. This study elucidates that the prevalence of physical punishment is at a high level among the young adults of the target area. The findings show that both the paternal and maternal physical punishment have consistent effects upon young adults' psychological adjustment. Hence, it provides evidence that parental rejection behaviours have profound effects on children's psychological development. Besides, the perceived paternal and maternal harshness were found to be the strongest predictor in predicating young adults' psychological adjustment. The study suggests that parents should practise positive reinforcements as behaviour management methods instead of relying on such violent behaviour.

## ABSTRAK

Hukuman fizikal membawa impak negatif terhadap perkembangan psikologi insan sepanjang umur. Kajian yang menggunakan telah dilaksanakan di negara-negara barat, tetapi kajian yang dilaksanakan dalam konteks Malaysia masih terhad bilangannya. Oleh itu, kajian ini dijalankan adalah untuk mengkaji sama ada hukuman fizikal mendatangkan impak negatif yang diuar-uarkan terhadap perkembangan psikologi golongan belia. Secara amnya, kajian ini bertujuan mendedahkan kesan negatif hukuman fizikal terhadap perkembangan psikologi golongan belia. Kajian ini melibatkan 467 belia yang sedang menuntut pelajaran di sebuah institusi pengajian tinggi di Malaysia. Borang soal selidik digunakan untuk mengumpul data. Dapatan kajian menyatakan bahawa penggunaan hukuman fizikal sudah menjadi fenomena yang lazim di kawasan kajian. Dapatan kajian turut mendedahkan bahawa hukuman fizikal daripada kedua-dua pihak ibu bapa membawa impak negatif yang berkekalan terdapat penyesuaian psikologi para belia. Dengan ini, dibuktikan bahawa perlakuan yang bersifat penolakan daripada ibu bapa mendatangkan kesan yang amat ketara dalam penyesuaian psikologi para belia. Di samping itu, didapati bahawa kekerasan hukuman fizikal yang digunakan oleh kedua-dua pihak ibu bapa merupakan peramal yang paling jitu untuk meramal tahap penyesuaian psikologi para belia. Kajian ini mengesyorkan bahawa ibu bapa harus mengamalkan strategi yang berlandaskan prinsip-prinsip peneguhan positif untuk mengendalikan tingkah laku anak-anak.

## TABLE OF CONTENT

CHAPTER	CONTENT	PAGE
	TITLE	i
	DECLARATION	ii
	DEDICATIONS	iii
	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
	ABSTRACT	v
	ABSTRAK	vi
	TABLE OF CONTENT	vii
	LIST OF TABLES	xiv
	LIST OF FIGURES	xviii
	LIST OF SYMBOLS	xix
	LIST OF APPENDICES	xx
<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
	1.0 Preamble	1
	1.1 Background of Study	2
	1.2 Problem Statement	4
	1.3 Research Objectives	5
	1.4 Research Questions	6
	1.5 Hypotheses	7
	1.6 Scope of the Study	9
	1.7 Theoretical Perspectives	10

1.7.1	Parental Acceptance-rejection Theory	10
1.7.2	Behavioral Theory	13
1.7.3	Social Learning Theory	15
1.7.4	Theoretical Framework of the Study	16
1.8	Conceptual Framework of the Study	18
1.9	The Significant of Study	19
1.9.1	Parents	19
1.9.2	Children	19
1.9.3	Educators	20
1.9.4	The Ministry of Education	20
1.9.5	Psychologists and Counselors	21
1.9.6	Future Researchers	21
1.10	Limitations	22
1.11	Definition of Terms	24
1.11.1	Physical Punishment	24
1.11.2	Young Adults	25
1.11.3	Psychological Adjustment	26
1.11.3.1	Aggression	26
1.11.3.2	Dependence	27
1.11.3.3	Self-esteem	27
1.11.3.4	Self-adequacy	28
1.11.3.5	Emotional Responsiveness	28
1.11.3.6	Emotional Stability	29
1.11.3.7	Worldview	30
1.12	Summary	31
<b>2</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>32</b>
2.0	Preamble	32

2.1 Parental Acceptance-rejection Theory, Behavioral and Social Learning Perspectives on the Use of Physical Punishment	33
2.1.1 Parental Acceptance-rejection Theory	33
2.1.2 Behavioral Theory: Classical and Operant Conditioning	35
2.1.3 Social Learning Theory	36
2.2 The History and Prevalence of Physical Punishment	38
2.2.1 History of Physical Punishment	38
2.2.2 The Prevalence of Physical Punishment	39
2.2.3 The Form of Physical Punishment	41
2.2.4 The Physical Punishment, Children Rights and Legislation	42
2.3 Factors which Promote Physical Punishment	43
2.3.1 Cultural Factors	43
2.3.2 Income and Social Status	44
2.3.3 Religious Beliefs	45
2.3.4 Childhood Experiences	46
2.3.5 Demography	47
2.4 The Effectiveness of Physical Punishment	48
2.5 The Adverse Impacts of Physical Punishment	50
2.5.1 Psychological Adjustment Problem	50
2.5.2 Antisocial Behavior	52
2.5.3 Weaken Interpersonal Skill	53
2.5.4 Suppressed Cognitive Development	54
2.5.5 Physical Abuse	55
2.6 Past Researches	56
2.6.1 The Difference between Paternal and Maternal Parenting	56



2.6.2	The Relationship between Physical Punishment and Psychopathology	57
2.7	Summary	61
<b>3</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>62</b>
3.0	Preamble	62
3.1	Research Design	63
3.2	Population	64
3.3	Sample	65
3.4	Response Rate	68
3.5	Data Collection	69
3.6	Instruments	69
3.6.1	ADULT PPQ: Father and Mother	69
3.6.2	ADULT PAQ: Personality Assessment Questionnaire	73
3.7	Pilot Testing	76
3.7.1	Test-Retest Reliability for ADULT PPQ: Father and Mother	77
3.7.2	Internal Consistency Reliability for ADULT PAQ	79
3.8	Data Analysis	80
3.8.1	Descriptive Statistics	82
3.8.2	T-test	82
3.8.3	Pearson Correlation	83
3.8.4	Regression Analysis	84
	3.8.4.1 Correlation Analysis	85
	3.8.4.2 Multiple Regression Analysis	85
	3.8.4.3 Mediator Analysis	86
3.9	Study Procedure	87
3.10	Summary	88

<b>4</b>	<b>RESULTS AND ANALYSIS</b>	<b>89</b>
	4.0 Preamble	89
	4.1 Setting and Participants	90
	4.1.1 Setting	90
	4.1.2 Participants	90
	4.2 Research Question 1: What is the Prevalence of the Physical Punishment in Malaysia?	91
	4.3 Research Question 2: What are the Differences between Maternal and Paternal Parenting in Differential Events which are Consistency, Predictability, Incidents, Timing, Use of Explanation, Frequency and Severity, Fairness and Deservedness, and the Forms of Physical Punishment?	92
	4.3.1 The Consistency of Physical Punishment	92
	4.3.2 The Predictability of Physical Punishment	93
	4.3.3 The Incidents of Physical Punishment per Week	95
	4.3.4 The Timing of Physical Punishment	96
	4.3.5 The Use of Explanation before Punishing	96
	4.3.6 The Frequency and Severity of Physical Punishment	97
	4.3.7 The Fairness and Deservedness of Physical Punishment	98
	4.3.8 The Forms of Reported Physical Punishment	99
	4.4 Research Question 3: What are the Differences between Perceived Paternal and Maternal Harshness, Justness, and the Sum of Punishment among Young Adults?	101
	4.4.1 Perceived Harshness of Punishment	101
	4.4.2 Perceived Justness of Punishment	102
	4.4.3 Sum of Punishment	102

4.5	Research Question 4: What are the Mental Health Status over Seven Personality Dispositions (Hostility and Aggression, Dependency, Negative Self-esteem, Negative Self-adequacy, Emotional Unresponsiveness, Emotional Instability, and Negative Worldview) and Psychological Adjustment among the Young Adults?	103
4.5.1	Mental Health Status over Seven Personality Dispositions	103
4.5.2	Psychological Adjustment Index	104
4.6	Research Question 5: What is the Difference in Psychological Adjustment Index among Young Adults across Their Experience in Physical Punishment?	107
4.7	Research Question 6: What is the Difference in Psychological Adjustment Index among Young Adults between Both Genders?	107
4.8	Research Question 7: What is the Significant Level of Differential Effects of Maternal versus Paternal Physical Punishment on Offspring's Personality Dispositions and Psychological Adjustment?	108
4.9	Research Question 8: What is the Strongest Predictor for the Psychological Adjustment among Young Adults?	109
4.9.1	Standard Multiple Regression for Paternal Physical Punishment	109
4.9.2	Standard Multiple Regression for Maternal Physical Punishment	111
4.10	Research Question 9: How does the Second Strongest Predictor Mediate the Association Emerged between the Strongest Predictor and Psychological Adjustment among the Young Adults?	113

4.11 Results of Hypothesis Testing	115
4.12 Summary	116
<b>5 DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION</b>	<b>117</b>
5.0 Preamble	117
5.1 Research Participants	118
5.2 Discussion	118
5.2.1 The Scenario of Physical Punishment in the Higher Learning Institution	118
5.2.2 The Personality Disposition States among the Young Adults	121
5.2.3 The Effects of Physical Punishment on Young Adults' Psychological Adjustment	122
5.3 Implications	125
5.3.1 Theoretical Implications	125
5.3.2 Practical Implications	130
5.4 Recommendations	133
5.5 Conclusion	135
5.6 Summary	135
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>APPENDICES A-I</b>	<b>159-182</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>TABLE NO.</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
3.1	Academic disciplines structure of the target government university in Johor, Malaysia	64
3.2	The Sample Size Table of Krejcie and Morgan	66
3.3	Ideal sample size and collected samples according academic disciplines	67
3.4	Response options for ADULT PPQ: Father and Mother	70
3.5	Score range and score indication for ADULT PPQ: Father and Mother	71
3.6	Score range and score identification for harshness of punishment and justness of punishment	72
3.7	Questionnaire items across seven personality dispositions	74
3.8	Numerical scoring for the response options	74
3.9	Score range and midpoint for each dimension and total ADULT PAQ score	75
3.10	Values of weak, moderate and strong test-retest coefficients	77
3.11	Test-retest reliability for original version and translated version of ADULT PPQ: Father and Mother	78
3.12	Internal consistency reliability for original version and translated version of ADULT PAQ	79
3.13	Statistic methods to answer research questions	81
3.14	Indication of the magnitude of correlation coefficients	84

4.1	Population and percentage (in parentheses) of punishment for total samples, males, and females according to gender of parents	91
4.2	Percentage of the reported consistency of punishment according gender of parents	92
4.3	Details of independent samples t-test of consistency of physical punishment	93
4.4	Percentage of the reported predictability of punishment according gender of parents	93
4.5	Details of independent samples t-test of predictability of physical punishment	94
4.6	Average of incidents of physical punishment according to gender of parents	95
4.7	Percentage of reported timing of punishment according gender of parents	96
4.8	Percentage of reported the use of explanation before punishing according gender of parents	96
4.9	Percentage of reported frequency and severity of punishment for total samples, males, and females according to gender of parents	97
4.10	Percentage of reported fairness and deservedness of punishment for total samples, males, and females according to gender of parents	98
4.11	Percentage of reported forms of physical punishment conducted by father	99
4.12	Percentage of reported forms of physical punishment conducted by mother	100
4.13	Details of independent samples t-test of perceived harshness of physical punishment	101

4.14	Details of independent samples t-test of perceived justness of physical punishment	102
4.15	Details of independent samples t-test of sum of physical punishment	102
4.16	Mean and standard deviations (in parentheses) for seven subscales of personality dispositions for total sample, females, and males	103
4.17	Qualitative interpretations for Adult PAQ subscale scores	104
4.18	Mean values and standard deviations (in parentheses) of psychological adjustment index	105
4.19	Qualitative interpretations for psychological adjustment composite index	105
4.20	Percentage of psychological adjustment composite index for males and females	106
4.21	Details of independent samples t-test of psychological adjustment across participants' experience in physical punishment	107
4.22	Details of independent samples t-test of psychological adjustment across gender of participants	107
4.23	Intercorrelations among physical punishment events and psychological adjustment	108
4.24	Model summary of paternal punishment events in predicting psychological adjustment	109
4.25	Casewise diagnostics summary of paternal punishment events in predicting psychological adjustment	109
4.26	Correlations of paternal punishment events in predicting psychological adjustment	110
4.27	Model summary of maternal punishment events in predicting psychological adjustment	111

4.28	Casewise diagnostics summary of paternal punishment events in predicting psychological adjustment	112
4.29	Correlations of maternal punishment events in predicting psychological adjustment	112
4.30	Mediation regression analysis summary for investigating paternal justness as a mediator on psychological adjustment	114
4.31	Mediation regression analysis summary for investigating paternal justness as a mediator on psychological adjustment	114
4.32	Results of Hypothesis Testing	115



**LIST OF FIGURES**

<b>FIGURE NO.</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
1.1	The warmth dimension of parenting	11
1.2	Theoretical framework of the study	17
1.3	Conceptual framework of the study	18
3.1	Unmediated model	86
3.2	Mediated model	86
3.3	Methodology flow chart	87
4.1	Percentage of age distribution across participants' gender	90
4.2	Reported incidents of physical punishment according to gender of parents	95
4.3	Illustration of a direct effect between predictor and outcome	113
4.4	Illustration of a direct effect between predictor and outcome indirectly through mediator	113

## LIST OF SYMBOLS

PARTheory	-	Parental acceptance-rejection theory
M	-	Mean value
SD	-	Standard deviation
N	-	Number of data points
p	-	Significant level
df	-	Degrees of freedom
R	-	Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient
R <sup>2</sup>	-	Square of the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient

## LIST OF APPENDICES

<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
A	Letter of permission to access allocation of students according academic disciplines	159
B	Participant assent to participate in the current research	160
C	Permission to employ self-reports from Ronald and Nancy Rohner Center	161
D	ADULT PPQ: Father and Mother Physical Punishment Questionnaire	162
E	ADULT PAQ: Personality Assessment Questionnaire	165
F	Certification of comparison between original and translated instruments	169
G	Translated version of ADULT PPQ: Father and Mother Soal Selidik tentang Hukuman Fizikal (Edisi Kaum Dewasa: Bapa dan Ibu)	170
H	Translated version of ADULT PAQ: Personality Assessment Questionnaire Soal Selidik untuk Mentaksirkan Personaliti (Edisi Kaum Dewasa)	173
I	Details of mediator regression analysis	180

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Preamble**

Nowadays, we are often exposed to the news that parents were murdered by their children (Whjennings, 2013), old folks were tortured in nursing home (AsiaOne, 2012), infants was abused by maids (The Star, 2013), and the likes. Perhaps, we can relate these incidents from the view of physical punishment as there are emerging researches have provided supportive evidence that physical punishment will cause adverse impacts on psychological adjustment (Gamez-Guadix et al., 2010; Melissa, 1999; Smith et al., 2006).

Since quite a long time ago, people have kept arguing whether caregivers should endorse physical punishment or not. This argument occurs might be due to cultural factors (Alison, 2010; Douglas; 2006); social economic factors (Fontes, 2002; Songül 2009), religious beliefs (Ripoll-Nunez and Rohner, 2006), demography (Tang, 2006) and so on. On no account, physical punishment is prevalent worldwide (Durrant and Ensom, 2012; Karen and Rohner, 2006). Besides, the adverse impacts of physical punishment, noted by researches, are many.

On top of that, according to PARTheory, physical punishment links with the withdrawal of warmth feelings from caretakers (Rohner and Khaleque, 2008). A child will perceive oneself as being rejected and eventually lead to personality impairments, such as aggressive behaviors, low self-esteem, being dependent, lack of self-adequacy, emotional unresponsiveness, emotional instability, and negative worldview.

Given the prevalence and adverse impacts of physical punishment, our major concern is how does the physical punishment experience affect the children when they become young adults? This research aims to investigate the effects of physical punishment on young adults' psychological adjustment.

## **1.1 Background of Study**

Physical punishment is defined as “causing pain by imposing physical force, but not designed to cause injury” (UNICEF, 1999). As claimed in the definition of physical punishment, the intention of physical punishment is not to cause any injuries on the misbehave child, but the caregivers tend to increase the harshness of physical punishment as the effect of physical punishment keeps decreasing as time goes by (Save the Children Fund, 2001). Plus, intensive punishment ordinary has an immediate effect to suppress the undesired behaviors because it coerces the subject to stop his or her inappropriate behaviors (Kauffman and Landrum, 2009).

Voices of abolishing physical punishment are clamoring arising from the awakening of a positive parental consciousness. Nonetheless, physical punishment is still prevalent around the country (Quazi, 2010; Suzieana, 2004; UNICEF, 2008b). For another scenario, according to the Third National Health and Morbidity Survey in 2006, there were approximately 11.2% of Malaysian adults were suffering from

psychological distress to a certain extent in their everyday life (Lee, 2010). Furthermore, it is predicted that the mental health problems will increase by 15% in 2020 from 10% in 1990 of the total accounted for global diseases (Lee, 2010). Does the severe physical punishment contribute to this phenomenon? This question triggers the motivation of the researcher to seek the answers for it.

Parenting styles play an important role in children's psychological development (Yoo and Miller, 2011). In line with this, there are a growing body of studies have investigated the influences of parenting on psychological adjustment across cultures (Cournoyer et al., 2005; Melissa, 1999; Yoo and Miller, 2011). Based on this assumption, parental acceptance-rejection theory (PARTheory) which extolled by Rohner, postulates that children's perception of parental warmth is positively associated with their psychological adjustment (Rohner and Khaleque, 2008). As children received physical punishment from parents, they would feel that they have been rejected by their parents and turn into psychological maladjustment. However, PARTheory does not state specifically the relationship perception parental warmth and psychological adjustment (Yoo and Miller, 2011). Moreover, results from related studies remain inconsistent (Cournoyer et al., 2005; Yoo and Miller, 2011). It is hoped that the current study will illustrate the emerged relationships between variables of the study in order to make a genuinely significant contribution to the literature.

Nothing out of expectation, as the result of severely physical punishment, the child may develop into psychological maladjustment (Katherine et. al., 2006). Ironically, the initial intention to physically punish a child is for the reason to reduce one's antisocial behaviors, but the child tends to be developing more in antisocial behaviors later on (Strauss et al., 1997). This statement is supported by Kauffman and Landrum (2009) who advised that physical punishment should be carefully implemented. This is because physical punishment does not teach children appropriate behavior and engages the children with further misbehavior. Or to put it

differently, physical punishment puts the child at risk of psychological maladjustment. Nay there is accumulating evidence that the detrimental psychological effects of physical punishment will continue into adulthood (Melissa, 1999). Thus, this research serves as an attempt to seek the answer whether physical punishment will cause consistent negative effects on children's psychological adjustment when they reach young adulthood.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

From the background of the study, it is clear that severe physical punishment causes destructive effects on children's psychological development. Nowadays, emerging researches have shown that the risks related to physical punishment are robust. Most of the relevant researches were done in Western countries. As far as the researcher retrieves the study materials from the internet database, the relevant researches in the local context is limited. At the same time, physical punishment is prevalent in our country (Quazi, 2010; Suzieana, 2004).

Children are being regarded as pillars of our nation. If the children are at risk of the adverse effects of physical punishment, it causes destructive impact on the national development and reducing the possibility to achieve their desired milestones. It is hopes that, the findings of the current study can be used to illustrate the physical punishment scenario and to what extent the physical punishment is associated with the personality maladjustment, especially in Malaysia cultural context.

Besides, findings from this research study can educate the caregivers on the negative outcomes of physical punishment and to think twice before endorsing physical punishment because punishment without positive reinforcement can lead to a mistake (Kauffman and Landrum, 2009).

### 1.3 Research Objectives

The research attempts to identify the issues of the negative outcomes of exposure to physical punishments on young adults' psychological adjustment. Below list the objectives of the current study:

- i. To investigate the prevalence of the physical punishment in Malaysia.
- ii. To examine the differences between maternal and paternal parenting in differential events which are consistency, predictability, incidents, timing, use of explanation, frequency and severity, fairness and deservedness, and the forms of physical punishment.
- iii. To examine the differences between perceived paternal and maternal harshness, justness, and the sum of physical punishment.
- iv. To evaluate the mental health status over seven personality dispositions (hostility and aggression, dependency, negative self-esteem, negative self-adequacy, emotional unresponsiveness, emotional instability, and negative worldview) and psychological adjustment among the young adults.
- v. To examine the difference in psychological adjustment index among young adults across their experience in physical punishment.
- vi. To instigate the difference in psychological adjustment index among young adults between both genders.
- vii. To illustrate the significant level of differential effects of maternal versus paternal physical punishment on offspring's personality dispositions and psychological adjustment.
- viii. To find out the strongest predictor for the psychological adjustment among young adults.
- ix. To examine the mediate effect of second strongest predictor on the association emerged between the strongest predictor and psychological adjustment among the young adults.



## 1.4 Research Questions

Based on the research objectives, the research questions are developed accordingly. The research questions are:

- i. What is the prevalence of the physical punishment in Malaysia?
- ii. What are the differences between maternal and paternal parenting in differential events which are consistency, predictability, incidents, timing, use of explanation, frequency and severity, fairness and deservedness, and the forms of physical punishment?
- iii. What are the differences between perceived paternal and maternal harshness, justness, and the sum of punishment among young adults?
- iv. What are the mental health status over seven personality dispositions (hostility and aggression, dependency, negative self-esteem, negative self-adequacy, emotional unresponsiveness, emotional instability, and negative worldview) and psychological adjustment among the young adults?
- v. What is the difference in psychological adjustment index among young adults across their experience in physical punishment?
- vi. What is the difference in psychological adjustment index among young adults between both genders?
- vii. What is the significant level of differential effects of maternal versus paternal physical punishment on offspring's personality dispositions and psychological adjustment?
- viii. What is the strongest predictor for the psychological adjustment among young adults?
- ix. How does the second strongest predictor mediate the association emerged between the strongest predictor and psychological adjustment among the young adults?

## 1.5 Hypotheses

A testable hypothesis is a statement about a theoretical relation between two or more variables (Kerlinger and Lee, 2000). In the meantime, Creswell (2012) adds that, in quantitative research, a hypothesis is a statement in which the researcher makes a prediction or a conjecture about the outcome of a relationship among study variables. Creswell (2012) further adds that a hypothesis is not purely an “educated guess”, but it is formulated based on past research and literature review. A well-formulated hypothesis will help researchers to narrow down the research purpose to specific prediction (Creswell, 2012). Besides, Elmes et al. (2012) point out that a testable hypothesis specifies how variables of the study will be measured and related. The hypotheses for this study are formulated based on research questions and are listed below:

The hypotheses for Research Question 2:

- H1: The consistency of physical punishment is significant difference across both parents.
- H2: The predictability of physical punishment is significant difference across both parents.

The hypotheses for Research Question 3:

- H3: The perceived harshness of physical punishment is significant difference across both parents.
- H4: The perceived justness of physical punishment is significant difference across both parents.
- H5: The sum of physical punishment is significant difference across both parents.

The hypotheses for Research Question 5:

H6: There is a significant difference in psychological adjustment among young adults who experienced physical punishment and those who did not.

The hypotheses for Research Question 6:

H7: There is a significant gender difference in psychological adjustment index among the young adults.

The hypotheses for Research Question 7:

H8: The perceived paternal or maternal harshness of physical punishment is related significantly with young adults' psychological adjustment and its subscales.

H9: The perceived paternal or maternal justness of physical punishment is related significantly with young adults' psychological adjustment and its subscales.

H10: The sum of punishment is related significantly with young adults' psychological adjustment and its subscales across between both parents.

## 1.6 Scope of the Study

Seven specific research purposes are presented as below:

- i. The current study will focus on the prevalent issues of physical punishment among the young adults in the higher learning institution.
- ii. The current study will try to reveal the scenarios of physical punishment across both parents.
- iii. This study is conducted to examine to what extent are the harshness, justness, and the sum of punishment different between parents.
- iv. The present study is designed to find out the mental health status over seven personality dispositions and psychological adjustment among the young adults in the higher learning institution.
- v. This study will focus on the differences in psychological adjustment index among young adults with respect to the experience in physical punishment.
- vi. The current research study will also focus on the gender differences in psychological adjustment index among the young adults.
- vii. The present research is constructed to identify the relationship between physical punishment events and young adults' psychological adjustment across both parents.
- viii. The extent to which the effects of perceived harshness, justness and total forms of physical punishment on young adult's psychological adjustment across both parents.
- ix. The current study will try to find out the mediating effect between study variables.

Thus, the current research is designed to examine these seven purposes and to examine the association issues.

## **1.7 Theoretical Perspectives**

There are three main psychological theories underpin the current: (1) parental acceptance-rejection theory (PARTheory); (2) behavioral theory; and (3) social learning theory.

### **1.7.1 Parental Acceptance-rejection Theory**

The parental acceptance-rejection theory or “PARTheory” could be used to portrait the influence of physical punishment on psychological adjustment for either children or young adult. PARTheory can track its' history as early as 1890s and extolled by Ronald P. Rohner. Now, there are more than 2000 researches have been conducted based on this theory (Rohner and Khaleque, 2008).

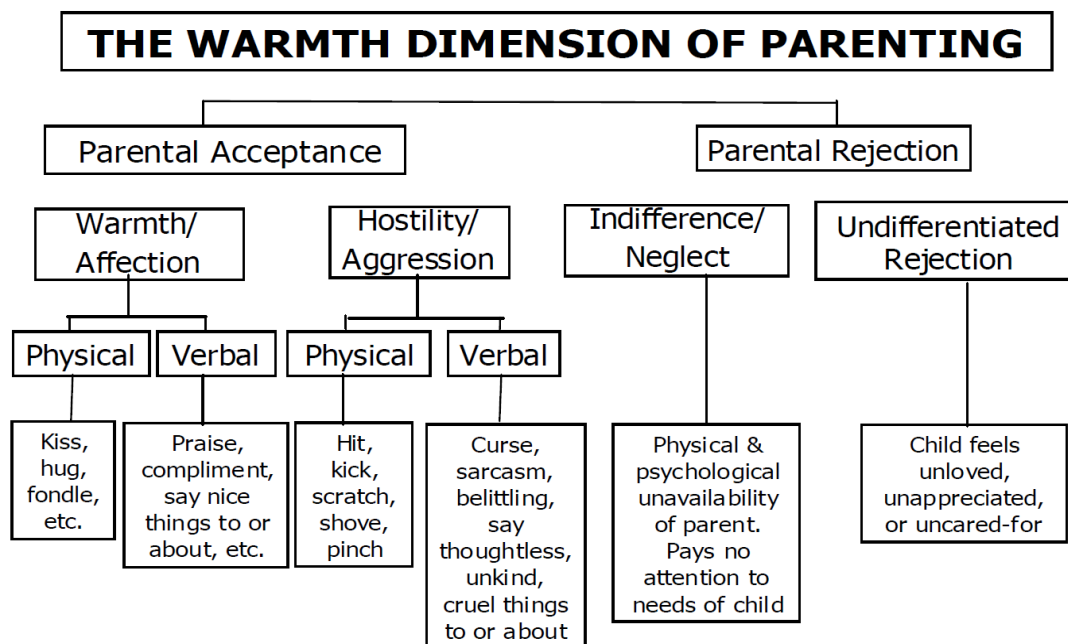
According to this theory, parental love and care are essential elements to foster the healthy social and psychological development of children as well (Rohner and Khaleque, 2008). In other words, children all around the world, regardless their social culture they within, gender or ethnicity, need positive responses from their parents or their caregivers to let them feel that they have been accepted by their close very significant others. In contrary, when the children fail to meet satisfactorily, they will feel that they have been rejected and might lead to unhealthy psychological development, for example, they tend to be impaired in self-esteem and self-adequacy, being dependent, behave aggressively, emotionally unresponsive and unstable, and view the world negatively (Rohner and Khaleque, 2008). The rejected children will also usually be predicted to end up with behavior disorders and conduct problems, substances abuse, and other similar problems (Rohner and Khaleque, 2008).

Although the unhealthy psychological development can be contributed by environmental factors and biological factors, 26% of the children with psychological maladjustment can be related with the degree how they viewed themselves have been accepted or rejected by their significant others (Rohner et al., 2007). Thus, PARTheory is a powerful predictor of psychological development worldwide and supported by a growing body of evidence across cultures (Kausar and Tabassum, 1990; Mathurin et al., 2006; Riaz, 2012).

The main conceptual characteristic of the PARTheory is its emphasis on one's subjective perceptions of their parents' parenting styles (Rohner and Khaleque, 2008). This means that the children will interpret the meaning of their parents' behavior or any words their parents said based on their own lenses to determine whether they are beloved (accepted) or neglected (rejected) by their significant others (Rohner, 1986).

According to Rohner and Khaleque (2008), the PARTheory can be explained through the warmth dimension of parenting. Parenting in warmth dimension means the degree of the affection bond between parents and their children, and the extent of the physical and verbal expression by their parents towards their children. This means, if children perceive themselves get enough love, care, concern, affection, and supports from their significant others; they will feel that they have been accepted.

To the other side of spectrum, the children will feel that they have been rejected when they were the withdrawal of these feelings from their significant others (Rohner et al., 2007). The details of warmth dimension of parenting are shown in Figure 1.1.



**Figure 1.1:** The warmth dimension of parenting

Moreover, children will feel them being rejected if they perceive themselves experienced physically or emotionally hurtful behaviors (Rohner and Khaleque, 2008). According to Rohner and Khaleque (2008), the parental rejection behavior can be experienced any combination of four principal expressions: (i) cold and unaffectionate (the opposite of being warmth); (ii) aggressive; (iii) neglecting; (iv) undifferentiated rejection. Undifferentiated rejection means one's beliefs that their significant others do not love him, although their parents do not show any behavioral indicators, for examples, behave aggressively or neglecting them (Rohner and Khaleque, 2008).

In a nutshell, each pattern of parental behavior will impact children's psychological adjustment (Hussain and Munaf, 2012). A child who perceived has been accepted by parents will adjust healthier in their psychological adjustment. Meanwhile, a child who perceived has been rejected by parents will have difficulties in psychological adjustment.

## 1.7.2 Behavioral Theory

Behavioral theory emphasizes classical conditioning and operant conditioning. Classical conditioning claims that the child learns by association, namely pairing of automatic responses (unconditional response) to new stimuli (unconditional stimulus) (Santrock, 2011).

The well-known classical conditioning paradigm pertains to Pavlov's classical conditioning paradigm, where Pavlov's dog will keep slobbering when hearing a bell rang even though the food is absent. To explain this phenomenon, several technical terms need to be understood. In the Pavlov's classical conditioning paradigm, food refers as unconditioned stimulus, the bell rang refers as neutral stimulus, and the dog's salivation is the unconditioned response (Santrock, 2011). When the dog was exposed to the concurrent of bell rang and food several times, Pavlov's dog has associated with the unconditioned stimulus and the neutral stimulus (Santrock, 2011). After repeated pairings between the bell and food, the association will eventually become so strong and produces the conditioned response of salivation (Santrock, 2011).

In classical conditioning context, Staats (1996) viewed that punishment is a tricky business to treat children's unwanted behaviors. If parents punish their children, the children will classically condition the negative emotional responses to their parents. Staats (1996) claimed that the more frequent and the stronger the punishment, the more the parents will become a negative emotional stimulus.

Besides, from the viewpoint of operant conditioning, human being can learn from the consequences of their behavior (Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo, 2011). This theory of learning was developed by an American psychologist, E. L. Thorndike (1874-1949). Thorndike put a hungry cat in a puzzle box. If the cat activates the



trigger in the box, the cat can escape from the box to get the food. The cat will be to put back into the puzzle box later on. Over and over again, Thorndike found that the time which had been taken by the cat to escape from the puzzle box decreased. From this experiment, Thorndike claimed that learning has happened where the cat has associated its behavior with the consequences (Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo, 2011).

From his puzzle box experiment, Thorndike developed a learning principle, law of effect. Law of effect proposed that once a connection is made, the strength of that connection is depended on what follows, namely a reward will strengthen that behavior and punishment will weaken the behavior (Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo, 2011). This means people are practicing certain behavior after punished and rewarded. Later, Thorndike emphasized that rewards are more important than punishment in shaping children's behavior (Morea, 1972).

Other than Thorndike, B. F. Skinner (1904–1990) is another famous psychologist who proposes for operant conditioning. Skinner emphasized the difference between classical conditioning and operant conditioning; where an individual or animal does not have option to respond on the environment to create consequences, but in operant conditioning, the subject has choice to operate to the environment (Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo, 2011).

As discussed before, behavior can be enhanced or eliminated through reinforcement (reward) and punishment in operant conditioning. According to Sanderson (2009), children always act like their parents do because parents initially have the power to shape their behavior through operant conditioning. In simple terms, reinforcement means applying consequences to increase certain desired behavior (Moreno, 2010), while on the other hand, punishment means applying consequences to decrease certain undesired behavior (Santrock, 2011). Both reinforcement and punishment comes in two varieties, namely (1) Positive reinforcement, meaning provides rewards to enhance a desired behavior; (2)

Negative reinforcement, meaning enhances a desired behavior by removing an unpleasant stimulus; (3) Positive punishment, meaning apply unpleasant to stop an undesired behavior; and (4) Negative punishment, meaning remove pleasant stimulus to eliminate an undesired behavior (Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo, 2011).

Physical punishment is pertaining to a kind of positive punishment (Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo, 2011). From the discussion above, we know that punishment will only weaken the undesired behavior rather than correct the misbehavior. Hence, we should stop punishment for several reasons. First, the behavior changes that result from punishment are often temporary (Hyman, 1996), for example, children often stop undesired behavior when their parents present and the undesired behavior return when their parents are not around (Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo, 2011). Second, punishment does not actually offer any information about desired behaviors (Talwar and Carlson, 2011). Third, punishment causes adverse effects, for examples, low self-esteem and aggressive (Moreno, 2010; Mathurin, 2006).

### **1.7.3 Social Learning Theory**

Social learning theory contends that models are a crucial source for learning new behaviors and lead to behavioral change. Social learning occurs when the people observing others' behavior (Moreno, 2012). Basically, social learning theory is derived from the work of Albert Bandura. Bandura has conducted a Bobo doll experience, in which there were three groups of children, namely (i) Group 1- exposed to an aggressive adult model; (ii) Group 2- watching violence was punished; and (iii) Group 3- didn't exposed to an aggressive adult model or known as control group. This experiment pointed out that those children who have exposed to an aggressive adult model will have a higher likelihood to replicate the aggressive

behavior towards the Bobo doll (Moreno, 2012). The results indicate that if the children have been exposed to the aggressive model, they were more likely to act like the way like the aggressive model did.

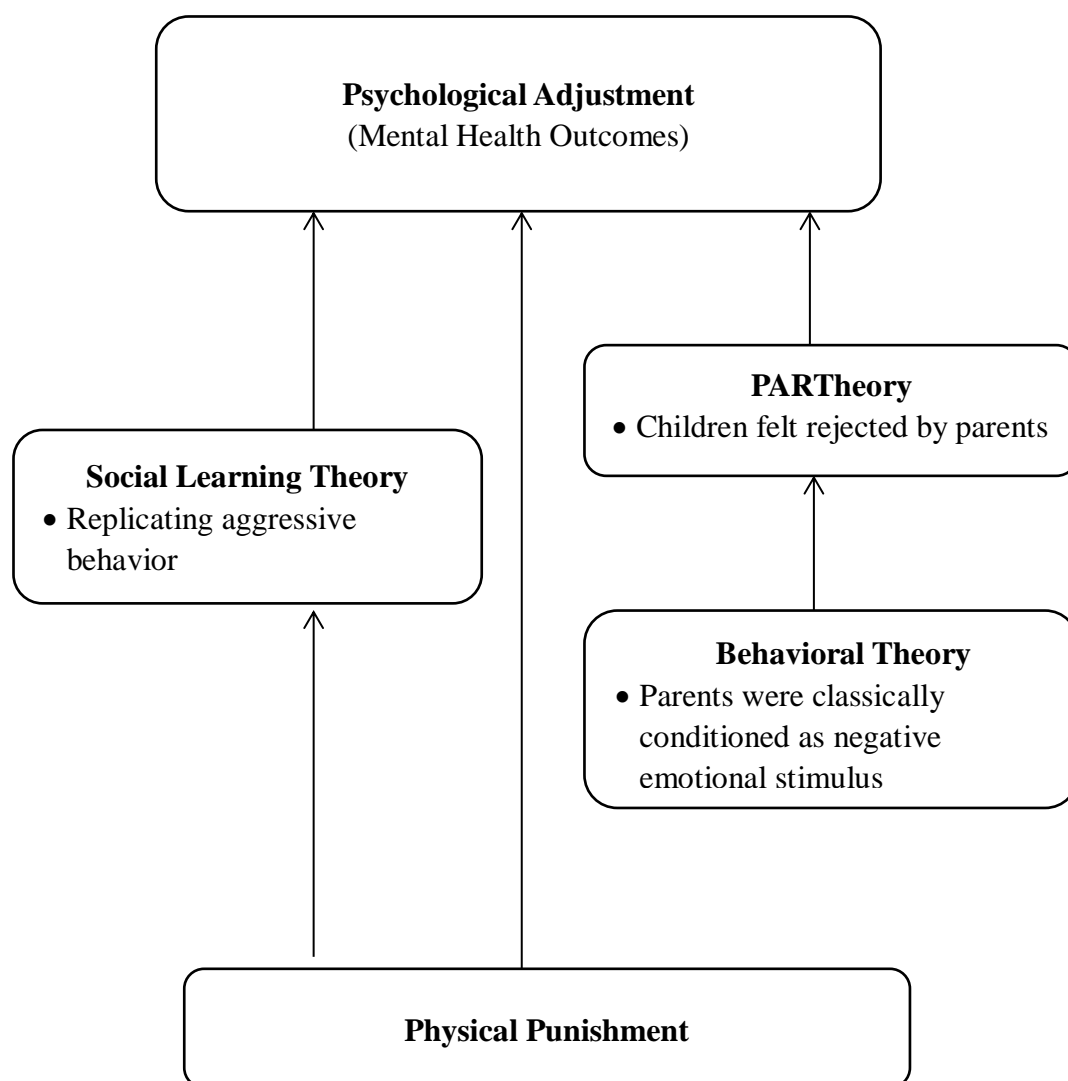
As physical punishment is socially approved behavior, children will encode and intimate the violent behaviors in the form of physical punishment when parents impose it to correct and teach them (Straus and Yodanis, 1996). Though the physical punishment, the parents teach their children two things, (i) misbehavior will lead to aversive consequences; and (ii) being aggressive is a powerful ways of controlling others' behavior (Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo, 2011). Thus, physical punishment may eliminate undesired behavior, but it may also foster aggressive children (Arab et al., 2011; Straus et al., 1997). This phenomenon occurs because aggressive behaviors have been learned by the children through the exposure to the physical punishment and remains a moderate predictor of aggression during adulthood (Loeber et al., 2005).

#### **1.7.4 Theoretical Framework of the Study**

After reviewing the theoretical perspectives, physical punishment can be referred as rejection behavior from caretakers. Caretakers usually endorse physical punishment which refers as the endorsement of unpleasant consequence to eliminate a child's misbehavior (Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo, 2011). However, as time goes by, the effectiveness of physical punishment tends to be reduced; as an alternative, the parents tend to increase the harshness of physical punishment systematically (Save the Children Fund, 2001). Eventually, children will pair their parents with negative stimulus and perceived themselves have been rejected by their parents. Furthermore, the children will take their parents as aggressive model unconsciously and end up with aggressive behavior (Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo, 2011).

According to PARTheory, the children who have received more severe physical punishment will feel themselves have been rejected by their very significant others and develop psychological maladjustment (Rohner and Khaleque, 2008).

The theoretical framework which involved PARTheory, behavioral theory and social learning theory is shown in Figure 1.2.

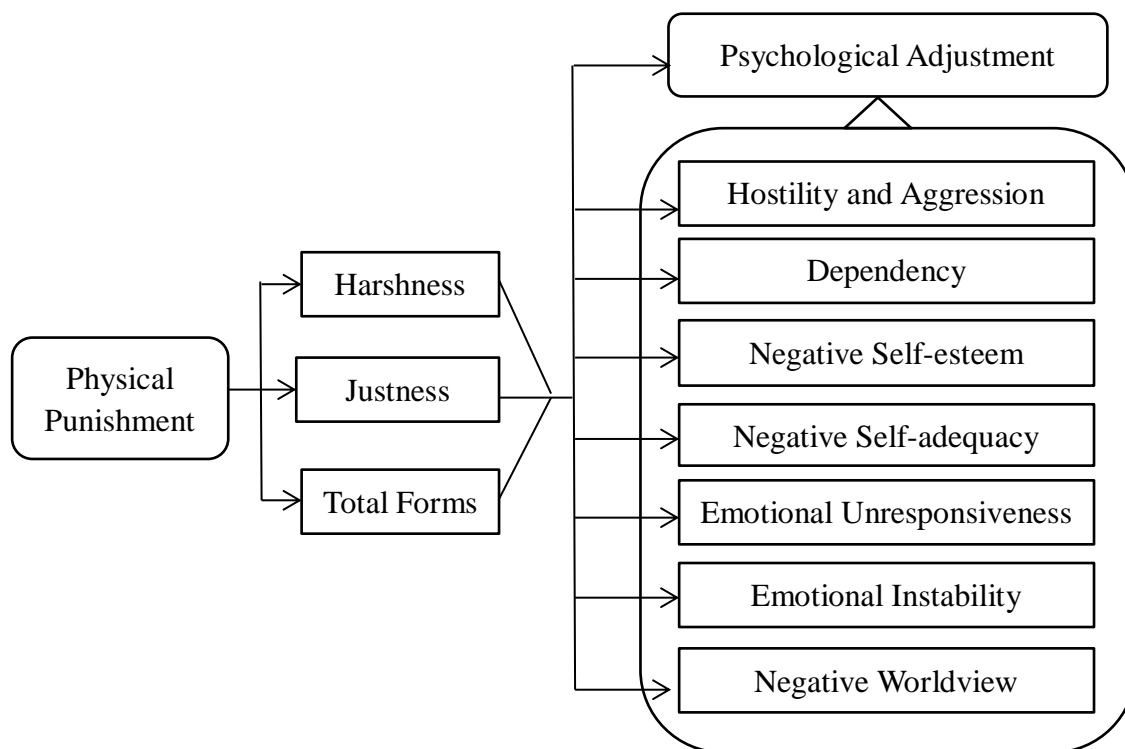


**Figure 1.2:** Theoretical framework of the study

In short, a strong parents-child relationship is indeed to nurture a healthy psychology development among the young generation (Durrant and Ensom, 2012).

## 1.8 Conceptual Framework of the Study

Based on the theoretical perspectives of physical punishment, the conceptual framework of the current study has designed as below:



**Figure 1.3:** Conceptual framework of the study

As shown in Figure 1.3, the perceived paternal or maternal harshness, justness and total forms of physical punishment were served as independent variables. In the meanwhile, psychological adjustment and all its subscales (hostility and aggression, dependency, negative self-esteem, negative self-adequacy, emotional unresponsiveness, emotional instability, and negative worldview) served as dependent variables. The contemporary researcher would try to illustrate the effect of physical punishment events on the psychological adjustment by interpreting the emerged relationships between the study variables. In addition, the researcher also interested in studying to what extend each of the physical punishment events plays its role as a predictor to predict participants' psychological adjustment.

## **1.9 The Significant of Study**

The current study would be valuable contributions to different parties, for examples, parents, educators, the Ministry Education of Malaysia, psychologists and counselors, and future researchers as well.

### **1.9.1 Parents**

Parents are the principal caregivers to their children. The findings of the current research will expose parents to the long term negative outcomes of physical punishment. Parents who practice physical punishment should be alerted and shift their parenting style to other more appropriate methods, for example having a clear communication with their children and tell them the contingent consequences when their children explicit undesired behavior. Other than physical punishment, the parents can provide regularly positive attention to the desirable behavior and encourage them to strengthen the behavior (Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 1998).

### **1.9.2 Children**

Emerging researches revealed that physical punishment is quite prevalent in Malaysia (Narasappa and Azizah, 2010; Quazi, 2010; UNICEF, 2008b). It is hoped that the contemporary research can be a voice for children who have been victims of physical punishment. These children may suffer from the negative outcomes of physical punishment, such as psychological maladjustment (Katherine et al., 2006) and end up with antisocial behavior (Ohene et al., 2006).

### **1.9.3 Educators**

The current research provides empirical evidences on the aversive effects of physical punishment. School educators should be aware of when using physical punishment. Every day, children will immerse in the school environment at least five hours except school holidays. Therefore, teachers be regarded as godparents in school, and school to be counted as students' second home. Based on this basic, schools should provide a comfortable environment for children to foster a healthy growth. If school teachers perceive physical punishment is the only solution for incomplete homework, disobedience, and other conduct problems, schools will be cited as a battlefield to against violence.

After exploring in the current research, it is expected that school teachers will think twice before physically punishing children with misbehaving. Being in diametrical opposition, teachers should put efforts to construct a nurturing environment for their students and try to engage with other non-violent forms of disciplinary manner to foster a new generation who excellent in both educational attainment and psychological development.

### **1.9.4 The Ministry of Education**

The Ministry of Education Malaysia is the main government agency in developing educational policies in the country. The current research provides the long term negative outcomes of physical punishment to The Ministry of Education Malaysia and developing a deeper understanding on this issue. The ministry should refine the teacher guidelines to shift the teachers with other positive forms of disciplinary method. For example, teachers would practice rewarding program to

reinforce desired behavior or having a deep conversation with the student who misbehave to let them know the consequences from that unwanted behavior.

In order to realize the goal, The Ministry of Education Malaysia could organize workshops to equip teachers with relevant knowledge and skills to correct the misbehave students without using violence approaches.

### **1.9.5 Psychologists and Counselors**

The findings of the current research will provide clinical implications to psychologists or counselors who are dealing with patients who are having personality maladjustment problems. The concerned parties might relate the patients' personality maladjustment problems with the experience in physical punishment and provide positive interventions accordingly.

### **1.9.6 Future Researchers**

As far as the current researcher is being able to search from the internet resources, the research study to reveal the impacts of physical punishment on psychological adjustment is limited within Malaysia as compared with other Western countries. Thus, it is hoped that the current research study will motivate and provide inspiration to researchers all over Malaysia to further study the negative outcomes of physical punishment on psychological development along the human life span. This attempt will make constructive contributions to generate a better understanding of the physical punishment issues in a local context.



## 1.10 Limitations

Although the current research was carefully conducted, there were some unavoidable limitations.

- i. The samples in the current study were only consisted of students from one of the higher education institutions in Johor, Malaysia. Thus, the participants in the current study possess higher education attainments and many other society segmentations have been ignored.

Besides, the selected participants were not necessarily to represent the nation, or even the university itself. Therefore, the findings drawn from the current research are not suitable to make generalization to any other sites. However, the generalization can be made about the theory underpins the current study, namely the physical punishment will make children felt rejected by their parents and will pose a long-lasting effect in their psychological development later on.

- ii. Second, since this study was conducted by the current researcher himself, as a matter of fact, certain levels of subjectivity might be unavoidable. The current study could be a sort of objective if it had been conducted by several researchers so that different points of view could be taken into consideration.
- iii. Third, since there are 63 items in the instrument: ADULT PAQ, it is somewhat time-consuming to complete all the items. As a result, the participants may answer superficially, misinterpret and do not respond to the particular items.

- iv. Forth, although all participants were given the items with the same construction of words in the questionnaire, it is possible that the same item does not measure the same thing for different participants.

To paraphrase this, United Stage of Americans addresses the “spanking” as spanking on the buttocks, but in other sites of world, “spanking” may involve other kinds of physical punishment (Douglas, 2006).

- v. The main objective for current study is to seek the relationship between independent variables (events of physical punishment) and dependent variables (young adults’ psychological adjustment), thus the current study was restricted to find out the causes of psychological maladjustment which may also be cause by many other factors (Rohner and Khaleque, 2008).
- vi. Lastly, for the instrument ADULT PPQ: Father and Mother, the participants need to recall their childhood experiences regarding the physical punishment that had been given by their parents when they were about seven to twelve years old. Thus, it could be trouble for certain participant to recall the detail accurately.

Sometimes, participants might fail to recall the reality owing to false memory, meaning all the retrieved memories are not necessary true, for example, the false memory occurs when the participants combining real memories with the other sources or suggestions from others (Loftus, 1997).

## **1.11 Definition of Terms**

The important key terms that form the main variables in the current study are defined in this section as below:

### **1.11.1 Physical Punishment**

According to Gershoff (2008), the term “physical punishment” is always interchangeably with “corporal punishment” or “physical discipline.” According to American Human-rights Law, corporal punishment means “any physical form of punishment which intended to deliver pain or discomfort to the receiver” (Stephey, 2009). The forms of corporal punishment include hitting, pinching, caning, slapping, and the likes. The similar definition is given by UNICEF as “causing pain by imposing of physical force, but not to cause injury, in the role of disciplining the receiver” (UNICEF, 1999). According to the given definition, other than typical forms of physical punishment, such as spanking, beating, hitting and slapping; physical punishment thus also includes washing a one's mouth with soap, kneeling, standing for a long time or sit in a painful position for a long time, and forcing a child to have excessive exercise (Gershoff, 2008).

However, physical punishment is different with physical abuse across two domains, namely intensive and intentional (UNICEF, 1999). For the intensity, corporal punishment does not cause a wound which resulted from the imposing of violence act. For another, namely intention, the intention of corporal punishment is to discipline the receiver over his or her misbehavior (UNICEF, 1999).

In this research, physical punishment refers as any physical form of punishment that is adopted to deliver pain to a misbehaved child.

### 1.11.2 Young Adults

As planned by Erikson (1968) in his “Eight Stages of Psychosocial Development”, young adulthood refers to those who are ages 19 to 40 years old (Erikson, 1968). In this stage, the young adults will need to engage themselves into intimate relationships; if they fail to do so, they will become isolated or self-absorbed (Papalia and Feldman, 2012).

For another definition, Hewstone et al. (2005) refer the term “young adulthood” as those who are from approximately 18 to 40 years of age. According to Hewstone et al. (2005), by the time one reaches early adulthood, the individual has experienced physically and mentally transformed. There are also some difficulties to decide when adolescence ends and starts young adulthood. As alternative, Hewstone et al. suggest some formal markers, for examples, reaching a specific birthday, obtained the right to vote, gaining financial autonomy, eligible to join the national services, getting married and so on. However, not any single life event can assert an adolescent has transitioned into young adulthood (Hewstone et al., 2005). However, on the other side, Papalia and Feldman (2012) defined young adulthood as those who are ages 20 to 40 years old.

To suit with the population of the setting for the current study, the definition given by Erikson (1968) is taken on the basis of that the first year undergraduate students usually start to pursue their study in the target university around the age of 19. Thus, in this research, young adults refer to those who are age 19 to 40. According to Papalia and Feldman (2012), during this stage, young adults tend to have stable personality traits, moral judgment become complex, follow the normative life (e.g., leave home, marry, or become parents) and their health condition are in prime.

### **1.11.3 Psychological Adjustment**

The term “psychological adjustment” defined as the process which an individual look for self-satisfactory over what his or her desires, goals, and needs (Nathan, 1952). The one’s psychological adjustment will be changed with age since the desires, goals, and needs are different at different human development stage (Nathan, 1952). Rohner and Khaleque (2008) measures an individual’s psychological adjustment upon seven personality dispositions, videlicet aggression, dependency, self-esteem, self-adequacy, emotional responsiveness, emotional stability, and world view.

For the current study, psychological adjustment is calculated by summing up the scores gather from the seven subscales of personality dispositions and used to reflect the mental health of the participants.

#### **1.11.3.1 Aggression**

Based on perspectives of psychology, aggression refers to any intentional behavior aimed at doing harm to others (Rohner and Khaleque, 2008). Rohner and Khaleque (2008) claim that aggressive behaviors might be delivered through physically (e.g., hitting and biting), verbally (e.g., sarcasm and cursing), or symbolically (e.g., rude hand gestures or facial expression). Nonetheless, unintentional harm is excluded in this definition, such as road accidents, drowning, and fall (Myers, 2012).

In this study, the term definition defined by Rohner and Khaleque (2008) is taken; that is, aggression means any intentional action that can hurt or harm oneself and other people.

### **1.11.3.2 Dependence**

According to Rohner and Khaleque (2008), dependence means internal felt wish for getting emotional care, support, attention and so on from any person who has a comparatively long-lasting emotional relationship with the subject. This definition is taken for the current study. In children in context, the dependency can be exhibited through actual behavior, such as clinging to their parents and crying when their parents leave them away.

### **1.11.3.3 Self-esteem**

Self-esteem means the judgment of an individual makes about his or her self-worth (Papalia and Feldman, 2012). The analogous definition for self-esteem also gave by Block and Robbins (1993) as the extent to which an individual perceives himself / herself as comparatively close to what the one wants to be. In more simple terms, Larsen (2010) has defined self-esteem as how an individual feels who he / she is. Rohner and Khaleque (2008) claim that positive self-esteem means that the individual like himself / herself; the individual is more acceptable and comfortable with himself / herself; and the individual will perceive himself / herself worthy for respect. On the other side of the shield, negative self-esteem means an individual dislikes himself or herself; the individual devalues him / herself and inferior to others; the individual perceives him / herself a worthless person (Rohner and Khaleque, 2008). Besides, females tend to decrease in self-esteem due to the gap between ideal self and real self as compared with males (Larsen, 2010).

In a nutshell, in this research, self-esteem refers to how an individual perceives himself / herself.

#### **1.11.3.4 Self-adequacy**

Self-adequacy refers as the judgments of an individual on how his / her ability or competence to fulfill their daily tasks (Rohner and Khaleque, 2008). For those with positive self-adequacy, they will feel themselves are capable to meet their day-to-day task demands and solving the daily problems with satisfactory; however for those with negative self-adequacy, they will feel themselves are incompetence and inability to solve their daily tasks in living successfully (Rohner and Khaleque, 2008).

For the current study, self-adequacy means the ability of an individual to fulfill his / her daily tasks.

#### **1.11.3.5 Emotional Responsiveness**

The term “emotional responsiveness” means the ability of an individual to express their feeling and emotion to another person easily and freely (Rohner and Khaleque, 2008). According to Rohner and Khaleque (2008) Emotional responsive individuals will tend to have a close relationship with others since they have only a little problem in responding to their attachment relationship with others. On the other hand, individuals with emotional unresponsive will tend to have emotionally isolated by others because they tend to restrict their emotional when develop an attachment relationship with others (Rohner and Khaleque, 2008).

In short, for the current study, an emotional responsiveness individual means that the individual can express his / her feeling spontaneity and ease.

### **1.11.3.6 Emotional Stability**

In Big Five Model of Personality, Costa and McCrae (1992) defines the term “emotional stability” as one’s tendency to negative emotions, meaning an individual who high on emotional stability are less likely to engage in negative emotions; meanwhile an individual who low on emotional stability is more likely to be engage in negative emotions.

From other points of view, Rohner and Khaleque (2008) define the term emotional stability as “individuals’ steadiness of mood, their ability to withstand minor setbacks, failures, difficulties, and other stresses without becoming upset emotionally”.

Rohner and Khaleque (2008) further explain that an individual with high emotional stability is capable to tolerate minor stresses in daily tasks without ending up with angry, stressful, distress and worried. They are able to cope with minor emotional stress and stay composure. Besides, they are also constant in their emotions, and they will revert quickly from frustrations or have been provoked by others. In other words, an individual with emotional stability is calm and free from anxiety (Hay and Ashman, 2003). Be opposite to emotional stability, individuals with emotional instability have inconstant and unpredictable mood changes (Rohner and Khaleque, 2008). Thus, emotional stability plays a significant part of one’s social network (Celli and Rossi, 2012).

After reviewing the definition given by various researchers, the contemporary researcher defines emotional stability as the ability to stay resilience with environmental changes or influences.



### 1.11.3.7 Worldview

Rohner and Khaleque (2008) define worldview as “overall evaluation of life, the universe, or the very essence of existence as being more or less positive or negative”.

Rohner and Khaleque (2008) further explain that an individual with positive worldview means he or she views his / her life is good, happy and riskless; while an individual with negative worldview will tend to view his / her life is full of frustrations, unhappy, insecure, bad, and dangerous. Vidal (2008) continues adding that people with negative worldview are more likely to engage with feelings of insecurity and being distrusted. Thus, a positive worldview will help us to achieve life satisfaction (Vidal, 2008).

For another, Gamble (2013) views world view as term meaning how an individual interprets reality based on what he or she believes to be true. Gamble (2013) also views that an individual’s worldview is influenced by the thoughts of those an individual has read and watched, his / her religious belief as well, thus each individual has his / her own perceptions on worldview. Worldview is dynamic because it can and do change (Gamble, 2013).

Besides, according to Hodson (2011), worldview will determine our interpretation on the real world, decision making, how we perceive our relationship with others, and how we make sense of our past experiences (Hodson, 2011). One’s worldview will determine his / her responsibility, values and ambitions (Hodson, 2011).

For the current study, worldview is defined as perception of an individual regarding his / her daily life.

## **1.12 Summary**

Since the global world has ushered in a new millennium, it is visible a trend that international have started in concerning the physical punishment among the children. Nevertheless, physical punishment is still prevalent in Malaysia. As the populations of people who suffer from psychological maladjustment keep increasing, the current research study is designed to investigate the relationship between physical punishment and psychological adjustment.

The main purposes of the current research are ninefold. Thus, there are night research objectives and research questions have been formulated accordingly. Besides, there are ten hypotheses have been formulated based on previous research evidence.

Besides, to prostrate the relationship between the study variables, a conceptual framework is developed after an intensive study on the theoretical perspectives underlying the current research study. The main limitation of the current study pertains to the ability of generalization. This is because the sample of the current study consisted of university students, where other social classes have been ignored. At last, there are ten conceptual and operational definitions been defined clearly.

The following chapter will present the intensive literature review regarding the past and contemporary issues of the physical punishments, and the negative outcomes of the physical punishment on psychological adjustment as well.

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