



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PERCEIVED STRESS, PARENTAL ATTACHMENT, PEER ATTACHMENT, RELIGIOSITY-SPIRITUALITY, AND LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG MALAYSIAN UNDERGRADUATES IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES***

**HAWA BINTI RAHMAT**

**FEM 2018 7**



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**By**

**HAWA BINTI RAHMAT**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, University Putra Malaysia,  
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**January 2018**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PERCEIVED STRESS, PARENTAL ATTACHMENT, PEER ATTACHMENT, RELIGIOSITY-SPIRITUALITY, AND LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG MALAYSIAN UNDERGRADUATES IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES**

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**January 2018**

**Chairman : Rumaya Juhari, PhD**  
**Faculty : Human Ecology**

A growing body of literature has shown significant impacts of life satisfaction on health and longevity, psychological, social and educational functioning at all level of developmental stages. Research on life satisfaction is particularly important among undergraduates because they are continuously faced with stress in campus such as academic challenges, personal issues, relationship concerns, and at the same time have to fit in with social activities in campus, which in turn affect their life satisfaction. It is specifically critical to study life satisfaction of undergraduates in the private universities because private and public universities are different in mission and vision, and the ways in running the business. Not only they imposed higher fees, private universities are also considered as “second chances” places for those who failed to study in public universities, having inadequate facilities, offered limited courses and English as the medium of instruction could influence students’ moral and social life, in turn affect their life satisfaction.

However, with scarce studies on life satisfaction among Malaysian sample, it is deemed essential to study on factors directly and indirectly associated with life satisfaction among Malaysian undergraduates. The present study examines the relationships between perceived stress, paternal attachment, maternal attachment, peer attachment, religiosity-spirituality, and life satisfaction among undergraduates in Malaysian private universities. Gender is manipulated in order to examine the differences in life satisfaction between male and female undergraduates. The study also seeks to determine the unique predictors of life satisfaction among the undergraduates. Peer attachment is examined as a mediator between perceived stress, paternal attachment, maternal attachment and life satisfaction. Religiosity-spirituality

is also examined as a moderator on the relationships between perceived stress and life satisfaction among the respondents.

In total, 400 students from four selected private universities in Malaysia participated in the study. The instruments used were Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et. al, 1985), Inventory of College Students' Recent Life Experiences (ICSRLE) (Kohn et. al, 1991), Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) (Greenberg and Armsden, 1987), and Brief Multidimensional Measurement of Religiousness-Spirituality (BMMRS) (Fetzer Institute, 2003). Random sampling was used to gather data from the respondents in the class.

The SEM-AMOS was generated to examine the model based on the integrations of Top-down Theory and Attachment Theory as the theoretical framework of the study. The model has met all the three required fitness indexes; the RMSEA (0.069), Chisq/df (2.920), and CFI (0.938). Perceived stress, maternal attachment, paternal attachment, and peer attachment significantly correlated with life satisfaction. The study does not significantly show any difference between male and female in the young adult's life satisfaction. The standardized beta coefficients for perceived stress do not equal zero when regressed against undergraduates' life satisfaction. It indicates that perceived stress is stronger predictor of life satisfaction relative to other independent variables. Parental attachment appears to be second main predictor of life satisfaction after perceived stress. However, peer attachments do not significantly mediate the relationships between perceived stress, parental attachment, and life satisfaction. Meanwhile, religiosity-spirituality was significantly moderate the relationships between perceived stress and life satisfaction among the undergraduates.

In conclusion, the study highlights significant association of perceived stress, maternal attachment, paternal attachment, peer attachment, and life satisfaction. The study also revealed positive roles of religiosity-spirituality in moderating the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction among young adults studying in the universities. The findings add valuable input on the existing body of knowledge in the field of developmental psychology specifically on the study between perceived stress, parental attachment, peers attachment, religiosity-spirituality, and life satisfaction among undergraduates.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PERKAITAN ANTARA PENERIMAAN STRES, PERAPATAN IBU BAPA,  
PERAPATAN RAKAN, KEAGAMAAN-KEROHANIAN DAN KEPUASAN  
HIDUP DI KALANGAN PELAJAR-PELAJAR UNIVERSITI SWASTA DI  
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Banyak kajian literatur menunjukkan kesan yang signifikan kepuasan hidup terhadap kesihatan, jangka hayat, psikologi, sosial dan pendidikan di semua tahap peringkat pembangunan manusia. Penyelidikan kepuasan hidup adalah penting di kalangan pelajar kerana mereka sentiasa menghadapi tekanan di kampus seperti cabaran akademik, isu peribadi, kebimbangan hubungan, dan pada masa yang sama perlu menyesuaikan diri dengan aktiviti sosial di kampus, yang seterusnya memberi kesan kepada kepuasan hidup mereka. Kajian sangat penting dijalankan terhadap mahasiswa di universiti swasta kerana perbezaan yang ketara dalam misi, visi dan cara kendalian kedua-dua institusi itu. Bukan sahaja yuran yang mahal, stigma “second chances”, kurang kemudahan, kursus yang terhad dan Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa pengantar mempengaruhi moral dan kehidupan sosial para pelajar. Ini akan mempengaruhi kepuasan hidup para pelajar.

Situasi ini mendorong keperluan untuk mengkaji kepuasan hidup di kalangan pelajar di universiti swasta, terutama mengenai faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi kepuasan hidup mereka kerana kajian yang terhad mengenai kepuasan hidup di kalangan sampel Malaysia. Oleh itu, adalah penting untuk mengkaji faktor-faktor secara langsung dan tidak langsung berkaitan dengan kepuasan hidup di kalangan mahasiswa Malaysia. Kajian tesis ini mengkaji perkaitan antara penerimaan stres, perapatan bapa, perapatan ibu, perapatan rakan, dan kepuasan hidup di kalangan mahasiswa dalam universiti swasta Malaysia. Jantina dimanipulasi untuk mengkaji perbezaan dalam kepuasan hidup antara pelajar lelaki dan wanita. Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk menentukan peramal unik kepuasan hidup di kalangan pelajar. Perapatan rakan diperiksa sebagai mediator antara penerimaan stres, perapatan bapa, perapatan ibu dan kepuasan hidup.

Keagamaan-kerohanian juga diperiksa sebagai moderator di antara perkaitan penerimaan stres dan kepuasan hidup di kalangan mahasiswa.

Secara keseluruhannya, 400 pelajar dari empat universiti swasta terpilih di Malaysia telah mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. Instrumen yang digunakan ialah Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et. al, 1985), Inventory of College Students' Recent Life Experiences (ICSRLE) (Kohn et. al, 1991), Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) (Greenberg and Armsden, 1987), dan Brief Multidimensional Measurement of Religiousness/Spirituality (BMMRS) (Fetzer Insitute, 2003). Persampelan secara rawak digunakan untuk mengumpul data daripada responden.

SEM-AMOS digunakan untuk mengkaji model berdasarkan integrasi Teori Kognitif Sosial dan Teori Perapatan sebagai rangka kerja teori. Model ini telah memenuhi semua tiga indeks kecergasan yang diperlukan; RMSEA (0.069), Chisq / df (2.920), dan CFI (0.938). Penerimaan stress, perapatan ibu, bapa, dan rakan berkait secara signifikan dengan kepuasan hidup. Jantina tidak menunjukkan kesan yang signifikan terhadap kepuasan hidup mahasiswa. Koefisien beta standard untuk penerimaan stres tidak sama dengan sifar apabila di regresi dengan kepuasan hidup mahasiswa. Ia menunjukkan bahawa penerimaan stres menjadi peramal kepuasan hidup yang paling utama berbanding pemboleh ubah bebas yang lain. Perapatan bapa menjadi peramal kedua yang mempengaruhi kepuasan hidup pelajar-pelajar. Walau bagaimanapun, perapatan rakan tidak menjadi mediator antara penerimaan stres, perapatan ibu bapa dan kepuasan hidup. Manakala faktor keagamaan-kerohanian menjadi moderator antara hubungan antara penerimaan stres dan kepuasan hidup di kalangan mahasiswa.

Kesimpulannya, kajian ini menyoroti hasil yang ketara terhadap penerimaan stress perapatan ibu, perapatan bapa, perapatan rakan dan kepuasan hidup. Kajian itu juga mendedahkan kesan positif keagamaan-kerohanian sebagai pengantara antara hubungan penerimaan stres dan kepuasan hidup di kalangan orang dewasa muda yang belajar di universiti. Penemuan ini menambah maklumat yang berharga kepada pengetahuan yang sedia ada dalam bidang psikologi perkembangan khususnya dalam kajian antara penerimaan stres, perapatan ibu bapa, perapatan rakan, keagamaan-kerohanian, dan kepuasan hidup di kalangan mahasiswa.

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Finally, thank you guys for the superb and incredible support. This is not the end of our success, but this is a beginning of our new discoveries and more success stories. May Allah bless us all. Amin.



I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 10 January 2018 to conduct the final examination of Hawa binti Rahmat on her thesis entitled "Relationships between Perceived Stress, Parental Attachment, Peer Attachment, Religiosity-Spirituality and Life Satisfaction among Malaysian Undergraduates in Private Universities" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SWLS	Satisfaction With Life Scale
ICSRLE	The Inventory of College Students' Recent Life Experiences
IPPA	The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment
BMMRS	Brief Multidimensional Measurement of Religiousness/Spirituality
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
IWM	Internal Working Model
HPEI	Higher Private Education Institution
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers the background of the study. The discussions continue with the statements of the problem, research questions, objectives, hypotheses, significance of the study, theoretical frameworks, conceptual frameworks, and definitions of terminologies. A summary of the chapter is presented at the end of this chapter.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Developmental psychologists defined young adults as individuals aged in between 20-40 years old, characterized by a common set of personal, social, and identity-related changes (Freiberg, 2011). The changes start from the identity exploration which goes off across important domains into a more advanced relationship than that formed in adolescence stage, such as looking for a special friend or life partner and create a long-term and intimate bonds. Nevertheless, the present study focusing on young adults pursuing their education in universities or synonymously termed as undergraduates. They are usually aged between 18-25 years old (Arnett, 2000). The study on the undergraduates is particularly worthy of attention because during the transition to adulthood, they face many developmental and adjustment challenges such as academic concerns, financial matters, personal and social issues, and relationship problems in campus (Ajmal, 2014; Dolan, 2010). The failure to balance the challenges may make them susceptible to stress (Ajmal, 2014). It will, in turn, lead to depression and the worst part may lead to suicide (Sharif Mustaffa, Rashid Aziz, Mohd Nasir Mahmood, and Shukri Shuib, 2014). In return, the cycle goes where their study will be affected (Klainin-Yobas, Ramirez, Fernandez, Sarmiento, Thanoi, Ignacio, and Lau, 2016).

Synchronise to the above, data from Malaysia Mental Health Association (MMHA) (2013) reported a startling update whereby anxiety, stress, and depression are the most common form of mental and neuropsychiatric disorders among young adult. In the previous report of National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) held in 1996 described a higher prevalence of psychiatric morbidity among adults of 16 years old and above (13%) as compared to the statistics among children and adolescents below 15 years old (10.6%). Additionally, in the Second NHMS report in 2006 testified about 6.4% of acute suicidal ideation. The statistics still showed the highest rate among adolescence and young adults between 16-24 years old (11%) (MMHA, 2013). In 2011 NHMS reported about 1.7% (0.3 million) adults aged 16 years and above suffered Generalized Anxiety Disorders (GAD), 1.8% (0.3 million) experience current depression, 1.7% (0.3 million) has suicidal ideation, and 1.1% (0.2 million) were reported to have attempted to commit suicide. Similarly, in 2015 NHMS reported that the prevalence of mental health problem among Malaysian adults in Malaysia was 29.2% aged 16 years old and above as compared to 12.1% among children. These

reports showed the importance and need of exploring more about contributing factors on young adult psychological or subjective well-being.

However, those reports did not specify who are the young adults; are they among the general or students' population? Apparently, these reports have generated an urge to investigate further on young adult's well-being studying in Malaysian universities. It is specifically critical to study the life satisfaction of undergraduates in the private universities because private and public universities are different in mission and vision, and the ways in running the business (Shah and Nair, 2016). Private universities are considered as "second chances" places for those who failed to study in public universities (Ali Reza Jalali, Md. Aminul Islam, Ku Halim Ku Ariffin (2011). Many students want to study in public university due to lower fees as compared to private universities. Other than higher fees and the "second chances" stigma, most private universities also have inadequate facilities, offered limited courses and English as the medium of instruction that could influence students' moral and social life (Ancheh, Krishnan, Nurtjahja, 2007), which in turn affect their life satisfaction.

Henceforth, those issues concerning undergraduate in private universities require further attention on their well-being. Hamimah (2006) studied among Muslim students at University Tun Abdul Razak (formally known as ITTAR), one of private universities in Malaysia, revealed shocking news whereby some of the students' moral and attitude are at stake, ranging from absenteeism, vandalism, dishonest, sex activity, drug abused issues. Her studies complement the report of NHMS and MMHS that revealed anxiety, stress, and depression are among the most common problem suffered by the students because expectation from society's standard of morality challenges their behaviour in which may cause peer pressure and affect their well-being. In similar veins, pertaining to Hamimah's, few suicidal cases were reported among private universities students in Malaysia. The star online reported in August and November 2015, female and male students jump to death in two different private universities, respectively. Befrienders Malaysia also reported that on average, 20 of the 68 people who call Befrienders Kuala Lumpur daily for help have suicidal thoughts mostly between the ages of 15 and 29 years old.

This breaking news dragged the present study to investigate the life satisfaction among students in private universities, especially on factors that influence their life satisfaction. Most of the studies in Malaysia on well-being are objective in nature (objective well-being) (Siti Aisyah Ramli et al. 2017) such as living condition or economic development (Ivkovic, Ham and Mijoc, 2014) and the data mostly come from secondary data such as measurement Malaysian Well-being Index (formerly known as Malaysian Quality of Life Index) (Economic Planning Unit, 2013). Thus, more studies have to be carried out on young adult subjective well-being, i.e., life satisfaction.

Life satisfaction is a fundamental indicator of subjective well-being. It is defined as the cognitive judgemental process that involves affective experiences of life (Diener, Emmons, and Griffith, 1985). Life satisfaction is also best described as the subjective enjoyment in one's life, which is specified as "the degree to which a person evaluates the overall quality of his or her present life-as-a-whole positively" (Veenhoven, 2015: 6). It could be surmised that life satisfaction is a subjective life enjoyment based on individual's experiences, perception, expectation, and beliefs. It is in the same line as what the previous researchers have been doing then and now, which is studying the general life satisfaction. Thus, it is not a matter of being materially rich or poor, but how an individual perceived the live satisfaction despite being rich and poor. Briefly, life satisfaction is a mental state that met one's expectations, needs, and desires of the surrounding world.

A higher level of life satisfaction showed a positive impact on many aspects of life among those groups. This information was evident in the systematic literature reviews on life satisfaction among youth by Proctor, Linley, and Maltby (2009), in which life satisfaction has important implications on their psychological, social and educational functioning. In another review by Grant, Wardle, and Steptoe (2009), on the relationship between life satisfaction and health behaviour among university students, results showed that young adults who were satisfied with their life are healthier and live in a healthy lifestyle such as exercises, healthy diet, and not smoking. You, Song, Wu, Qin, and Zhou (2014) also disclosed that life satisfaction is associated with lower suicidal risk behaviours among undergraduates.

In Hamimah's (2006), family background and peer influence were among the factors contribute moral and social issues to the young adult. Studies between parents-child attachment and life satisfaction were predominantly enormous among adolescent (Clair, 2012; Pan, Zhang, Liu, Ran, dan Teng, 2016), but sparse on young adult (Wanfen Chen, Dajun Zhang, Yangu Pan, Tianqiang Hu, Guangzeng Liu, Shilan Luo, 2017). Besides, there are limited studies that examined the different effects of maternal attachment and paternal attachment on life satisfaction (Yangu Pan, Dajun Zhan, Yanling Liu, Guangming Ran, and Zhaojun Teng, 2016). Thus, separate variables of parental attachment i.e., maternal attachment and paternal attachment are vital to examine the differences in affecting the young adult life satisfaction because studies showed that there is significant difference between paternal attachment and maternal attachment on adolescent well-being (Yangu Pan et al. 2016).

Furthermore, in Attachment theory, as the child mature, he or she increasingly seeks the company of friends. The theory enlightened that a better parent-child relationship could positively influence the development of peer attachment (Bowlby, 1980) and affect a positive outcome. Besides, Ma and Huebner (2008) support the theory with their research findings that revealed peer attachment mediates the relationship between parental attachment and life satisfaction. Earlier, a similar study has established that peer attachment mediate the relationship between parent-child attachment which found that having a secure relationship with parents allowed adolescents to nurture secure representations and expectations of their peers, which in

turn influence the quality of peer experiences (Cassidy, Kirsch, Scolton, & Parke, 1996). Hence, the study proposed that peer would mediate the relationship between paternal attachment, maternal attachment and life satisfaction among the undergraduates.

On the other hand, in the religious and spiritual struggle on well-being, Wilt et al. (2016) established that religiosity-spirituality adjustment has possibly offered psychological function that exceptionally pertinent to mental health. Studies on student's religiosity and spirituality have been enormously evolving (Kreitlow, 2015). A number of studies highlighted religiosity-spirituality moderate the relationship between stress and life satisfaction (Ai, Park, Huang, Rodgers, and Tice, 2007; Dolan, 2010). However, little research was available on undergraduates' religiosity-spirituality as compared to those among people who suffered from chronic illness, mental illness, working adult, and retiree population (Fetzer, 2003). Accordingly, in this study, religiosity-spirituality was proposed to moderate the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction.

In terms of gender, Imam, Nurullah, Makol-Abdul, Rahman, and Noon (2009) have discovered that females are more satisfied with their life than males. However, it is not supported by the study of Upadaya and Salmela-Aro (2017) which showed that males were more satisfied than females. Thus, the inconsistencies of previous findings create a need to investigate gender difference in the undergraduates' life satisfaction.

In summary, the present study aims to examine the relationships between students' perceived stress, maternal attachment, paternal attachment, peer attachment, and religiosity-spirituality with life satisfaction among Malaysian undergraduate students in private universities.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

Research on subjective well-being is growing prolifically. Predominantly, studies on life satisfaction disclosed significant impacts on social and educational functioning among young adult. It is particularly important among undergraduates because they are continuously faced with stress in campus such as academic challenges, personal issues, relationship concerns, and at the same time have to fit in with social activities in campus, that in turn affect their life satisfaction. Despite these growing literature, studies on subjective well-being in Malaysian samples are at scares. It is due to most studies of well-being focus on objective well-being (Siti Aisyah Ramli, Bahaman Abu Samah, Asnarulkhadi Abu Samah, Khairuddin Idris, Hayrol Azril Mohammed Shaffril, 2017). Hence, it is deemed essential to study factors directly and indirectly associated with life satisfaction among Malaysian undergraduates.



Reports by Malaysia Mental Health Association (MMHA) on the high prevalence rate of mental illness among young adult should also be taken into consideration seriously. With the limited study available and unspecified data (from MMHA) for the Malaysian undergraduates, further investigation on how they perceived stress and its association with life satisfaction is crucial. Report by Befrienders Malaysia that described the average age for suicidal thoughts mostly between 15 and 29 years old is a startling sign to investigate further about young adult life satisfaction. Subsequently, two cases of students committing suicide in two different private universities (star online, 2015) were reported. Thus, limitation of the accessibility of data despite the seriousness of the issue, has urge the researcher to investigate more about the subjective well-being of the student in private universities, especially on factors that influence their life satisfaction.

In Hamimah's (2006), family background and peer influence were among the contributing factors to moral and social issues among the young adult. Attachment to parent and peer is also important to be studied as in collectivist Asian country such as Malaysia, family kinship and friends are valued figures. However, previous researches on life satisfaction have been focusing on parent-child attachment at adolescence period (Clair, 2012; Pan, Zhang, Liu, Ran, dan Teng, 2016), but sparse on young adult (Wanfen Chen, Dajun Zhang, Yangu Pan, Tianqiang Hu, Guangzeng Liu, Shilan Luo, 2017). Young adult is considered unique than adolescence and adult (Arnett, 2000). Thus, more studies have to be carried out between parental attachment, peer attachment, and life satisfaction among young adults' population. Not only that, a study by Yangu Pan, Dajun Zhan, Yanling Liu, Guangming Ran, and Zhaojun Teng (2016) on adolescent showed that there is significant difference between paternal attachment and maternal attachment. Nevertheless, there are also limited studies on the different effects of maternal attachment and paternal attachment towards life satisfaction (Yangu Pan et al. 2016). Hence, it is imperative to examine maternal attachment and paternal attachment separately to examine the differences in their relationship with life satisfaction.

Besides, Attachment theory suggests that a better parent-child relationship could positively influence the development of peer attachment (Bowlby, 1980) and affect positive outcome. In support of the theory, Ma and Huebner (2008) revealed in their findings that peer attachment mediates the relationship between parental attachment and life satisfaction among the adolescents. Similarly, Cassidy et.al (1996) also support Bowlby's and Ma and Huebner's. Hence, the study proposed that peer attachment would mediate the relationship between paternal attachment, maternal attachment and life satisfaction among Malaysian undergraduates.

Additionally, little research was available on undergraduates' religiosity-spirituality as compared to those among people who suffered from chronic illness, mental illness, working adult, and retiree population (Fetzer, 2003). Studies showed that high religiosity-spirituality act as a moderator between negative life experiences and subjective well-being (Israel-Cohen, Kaplan, and Noy, 2016; Abu Talib and Abdollahi, 2015), which means despite the problem in life, one may experiences quite

higher level of subjective well-being indirectly because of his or her higher level of religiosity-spirituality. Conceptually, a higher religiosity-spirituality would moderate between perceived stress and life satisfaction. Hence, by examining religiosity-spirituality as a moderator between the perceived stress and life satisfaction may provide fruitful information on the study of life satisfaction.

Finally, the study also examines gender's roles on life satisfaction. Several studies showed that gender plays important role in association with life satisfaction (Machinov and Fernandez, 2012; Khanna Shipra, 2015). Even though a study by Upadyaya and Salmela-Aro (2017) in a longitudinal study with a total of 821 participants (aged from 17-25 years old) in Finland, showed that males are less stress than females, other studies showed the opposite direction whereby Imam, Nurullah, Makol-Abdul, Rahman, and Noon (2009) have discovered that females are more satisfied with their life than males. Males reported slightly more stress, strain, and religious coping mechanism than female do (Baqutayan, 2011). Prasoon and Chaturvedi (2016) also found that women have an average level of life satisfaction at all age levels. These findings indicate that gender play significant roles in the study of life satisfaction. Thus, in this study, gender is proposed to have a significant difference in its relationship with satisfaction among the undergraduates.

In brief, literature reviews have highlighted that the survey on life-satisfaction is worth pursuing especially among undergraduates in the campus. Not only young adult is unique at its own period but also they are the leader for tomorrow. Hence, it is deemed essential to study on factors directly and indirectly associated with life satisfaction of the young adult studying in the university. The outcome of the research may offer a significant contribution to the field of study in life satisfaction. Based on the literature reviews and the theoretical framework, the variables such as perceived stress, maternal attachment, paternal attachment, peer attachment, and religiosity-spirituality are the factors that deemed necessary to be studied among the undergraduates with regards to their life satisfaction. It is also essential to study the mediating role of peer attachment and the moderating role of religiosity-spirituality among young adults. Learning more about the direct and indirect influences on life satisfaction among the undergraduates would contribute and enrich the existing body of knowledge on the study of life satisfaction.

### **1.3 Research questions**

The following research questions (RQ) were framed to address the issue of the study.

**RQ 1:** To what extent are the relationship between perceived stress, parental attachment, and peers attachment with life satisfaction among Malaysian private university undergraduates?

**RQ 2:** Does gender differences influence life satisfaction among Malaysian private university undergraduates?

**RQ 3:** What are the unique predictors of life satisfaction among Malaysian private university undergraduates?

**RQ 4:** Does peer attachment mediate the relationships between the perceived stress, paternal attachment, maternal attachment and life satisfaction among Malaysian private university undergraduates?

**RQ5:** Does religiosity-spirituality moderate the relationships between the perceived stress and life satisfaction among Malaysian private university undergraduates?

#### **1.4 Objectives**

The study aims to examine the relationships between perceived stress, maternal attachment, paternal attachment, peers attachment, and religiosity-spirituality with life satisfaction among the Malaysian private universities undergraduates.

Specifically, the objectives of the research are:

**Objective 1:** To examine the relationships between perceived stress, parental attachment, peer attachment, and life satisfaction among Malaysian private universities undergraduates.

**Objective 2:** To examine the difference in life satisfaction between male and female of Malaysian private university undergraduates.

**Objective 3:** To determine the unique predictors of life satisfaction among Malaysian private universities undergraduates

**Objective 4:** To examine the roles of peer attachment as a mediator on the relationships between perceived stress, paternal attachment, maternal attachment and life satisfaction among Malaysian private universities undergraduates.

**Objective 5:** To examine the roles of religiosity-spirituality as a moderator on the relationships between perceived stress and life satisfaction among Malaysian private universities undergraduates.

## 1.5 Hypotheses

The specific hypotheses are formulated as follows;

**Objective 1: To examine the relationships between perceived stress, parental attachment, peer attachment, and life satisfaction among Malaysian private universities undergraduates.**

**Ha1:** There is a significant relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction

**Ha2:** There is a significant relationship between maternal attachment and life satisfaction

**Ha3:** There is a significant relationship between paternal attachment and life satisfaction

**Ha4:** There is a significant relationship between peer attachment and life satisfaction

**Objective 2: To examine the difference in life satisfaction between male and female of Malaysian private university undergraduates.**

**Ha5:** There is a significant difference in life satisfaction between male and female of Malaysian private university undergraduates.

**Objective 3: To determine the unique predictors of life satisfaction among Malaysian private universities undergraduates.**

**Ha6:** The standardized beta coefficients for selected variables do not equal zero when regressed against undergraduates' life satisfaction.

**Objective 4: To examine the roles of peer attachment as a mediator on the relationships between perceived stress, paternal attachment, maternal attachment and life satisfaction among Malaysian private universities undergraduates.**

**Ha7:** Peer attachment would significantly mediate the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction.

**Ha8:** Peer attachment would significantly mediate the relationship between maternal attachment and life satisfaction.

**Ha9:** Peer attachment would significantly mediate the relationship between paternal attachment and life satisfaction.

**Objective 5: To examine the roles of religiosity-spirituality as a moderator on the relationships between perceived and life satisfaction among Malaysian private universities undergraduates, respectively.**

**Ha10:** Religiosity-spirituality would significantly moderate the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction.

## 1.6 Theoretical Framework

To date, the integration of several different theories in bridging the gaps and highlighting the complementary depiction of the theoretical framework is in trend (Celik and Ergun, 2016). In the present study, two theories were identified as the foundation for the variables understudied. The Top-down Theory and Attachment Theory are integrated to explain the framework of the study.

Life satisfaction is best described using Top-down theory. Top-down theory is one of main theory in the study of life satisfaction (Diener, Oishi, and Tay, 2018). The theory explains a cognitive approach to well-being, i.e., life satisfaction. It focuses on how people attend to and construes information in their lives and how these processes affect their well-being (Margolis and Lyubomirsky, 2018). In this approach, it focuses on how the cognitive interpretations of the daily hassles to an individual (perceived stress) affect life satisfaction. From a top-down perspective of life satisfaction, the effect of the environment on well-being is heavily facilitated by subjective construal or individual's cognitive judgemental process towards the pleasant and unpleasant experiences in life.

This perspective also explains religiosity-spirituality as part of personal experiences that could influence young adults' life satisfaction. According to Kioulos et al (2015), the success of finding meaning in one's life is very much related to one's perceptions and belief. A believer (belief in God) always has strong positive interpretation over something either towards himself or herself or others. Religiosity-spirituality is expected to be a hard shield that protects the believer between feelings of depressed or useless and life satisfaction. In this study, religiosity-spirituality is viewed as a function, which moderates the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction.

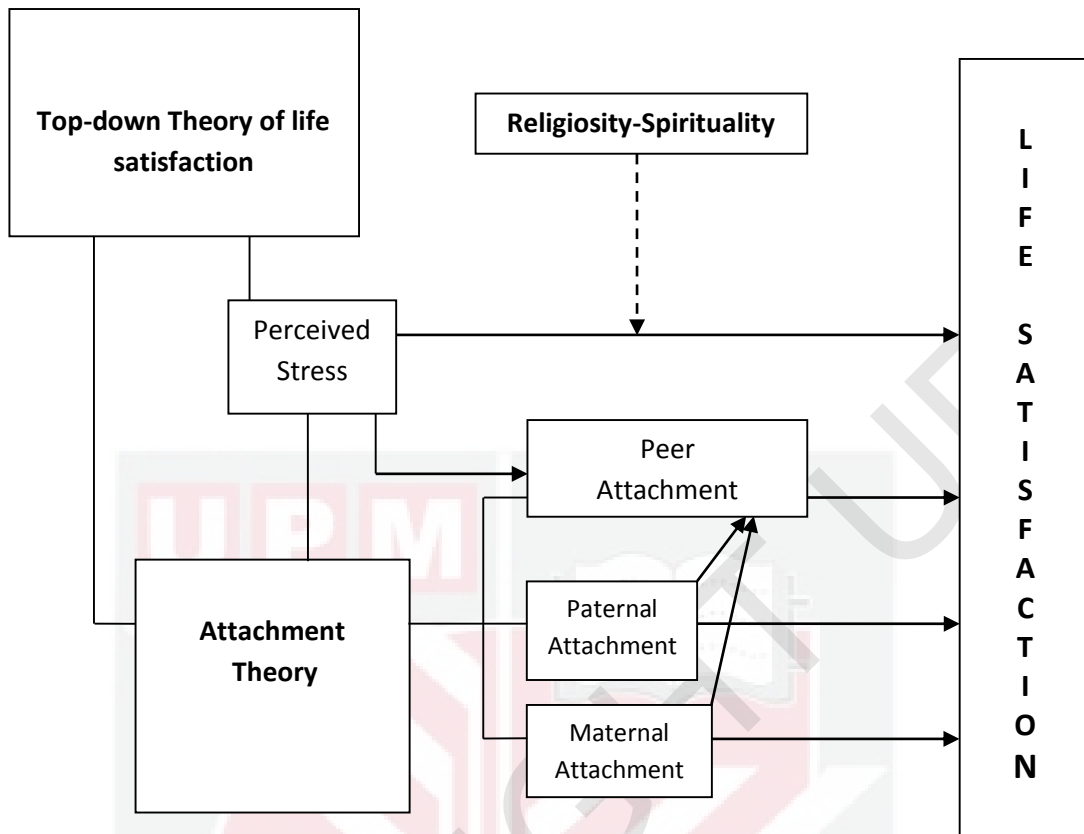
Moreover, Attachment theory is inserted into the framework to explain more and complete the framework of life satisfaction among the young adult. Attachment is viewed as a "disposition of the child to seek proximity to and contact with a specific

figure and to do so in certain situations, notably when he is frightened, tired or ill” (Bowlby, 1982: 371). The theory explains how infant-caregiver emotional bond could be internalized. The internalized emotional bond, namely attachment, could bear a profound impact on individual’s affective, behavioural and cognitive responses in social contexts across the person’s lifetime (Fraley, Vicary, Brumbaugh, and Roisman, 2011)

The internalized bond is called the internal working model (IWM). IWM is a hypothetical model proposed by Bowlby (1969, 1982). It refers to a schema about an individual and others that would guide the individual’s daily functioning, particularly in the interpersonal context. Through IWM, the young adult foresees the importance of others and the beliefs about the personal worthiness of love and support. In other words, attachments formed during childhood may persist throughout individual’s whole life and generalize to relationships with others and may influence individual’s affect, cognition, and behaviours in subsequent attachment quality including peer attachment (Bowlby, 1980; Ma and Huebner, 2008).

The IWM also explains that the attachment in childhood will reflect their later life attachment (Bowlby and Ainsworth, 1985). This condition indicates that the young adult’s life satisfaction in the campus is very much related to how compassionate is the attachment with the parents and peers. The application of attachment theory to various psychological outcomes seems to be important in understanding the impact that parenting has on young adults. Subsequently, a healthier parental attachment is associated with the development of peer attachment (Bowlby, 1980). The theory is supported by research findings that compassionate relationship with parents associated with greater life satisfaction (Leung and Leung, 1992; Romano, 2009).

Briefly, the integrations of the theories provide the support and provision to explain life satisfaction and the related variables. Top-down theory appears at best in explaining and highlighting the importance of cognitive outlook as a pattern of thinking that comprises one’s evaluation of the self and events in the world. Attachment theory views the importance of strong bonding with parents and peers in which it is manifested through IWM, in order to achieve life satisfaction in later life. Obviously, the two theories have a significant complementary description in describing the theoretical framework. Therefore, by incorporating the Top-down theory and Attachment theory, the study deliberately examines the relationship between perceived stress, maternal attachment, paternal attachment, peer attachment, religiosity-spirituality, and life satisfaction among Malaysian private universities’ undergraduates. Figure 1.6.1. shows the theoretical framework of the study.



**Figure 1.6.1 : The Top-down Theory and Attachment Theory are integrated to explain the relationships between Perceived Stress, Paternal Attachment, Maternal Attachment, Peer Attachment, Religiosity-spirituality, and Life Satisfaction among Malaysian private universities students**

## 1.7 Conceptual framework

Figure 1.6.2 shows the conceptual framework of the study. A conceptual framework was derived from the aforementioned theoretical framework. In particular, there are six main variables involved, namely, perceived stress, maternal attachment, paternal attachment, peers attachment, religiosity-spirituality, and life satisfaction.

The antecedent variables (AV) constitutes the background of the students and the parents (socio-demographic variables). The independent variables (IVs) are perceived stress, maternal attachment, paternal attachment, peers attachment. The dependent variable (DV) is life satisfaction. There is one mediating variable (peers attachment) and one moderating variable (religiosity-spirituality). Peer attachment becomes an IV when examining the direct relationship with life satisfaction, but becomes a DV and a mediating variable when examining the indirect (mediating role) between perceived stress, maternal attachment, paternal attachment, and life satisfaction. The research aims to examine the relationship between students' perceived stress, maternal

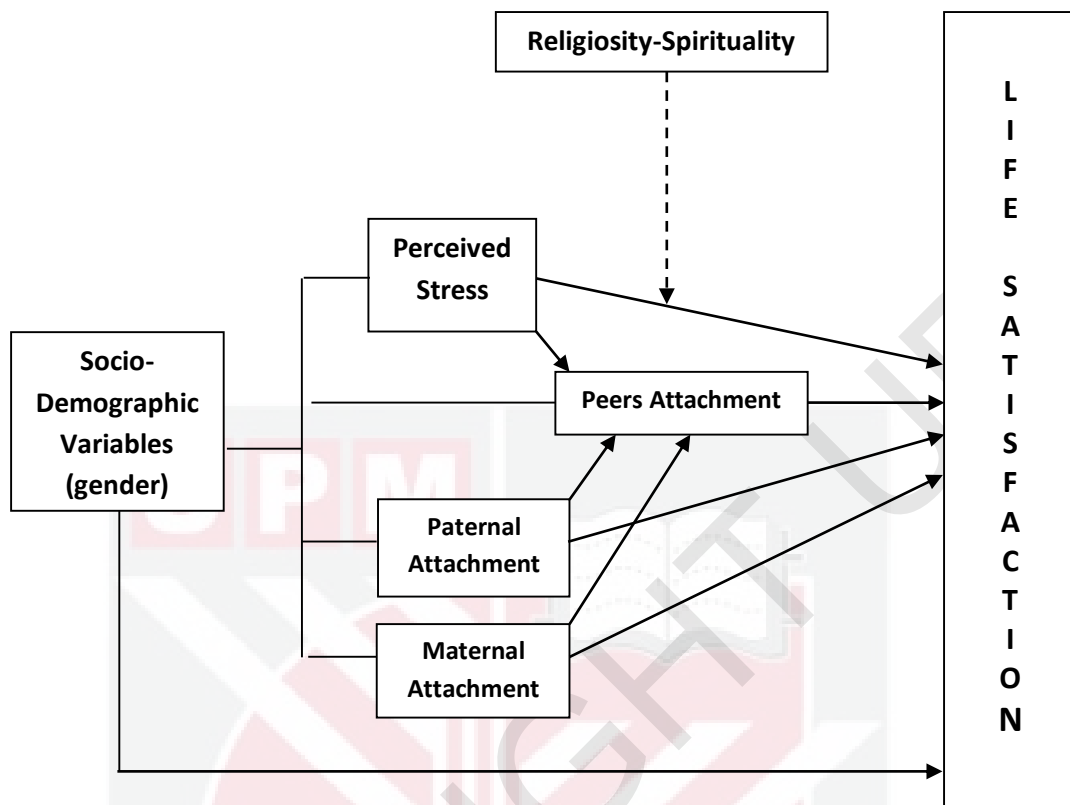
attachment, paternal attachment, peers attachment, and religiosity-spirituality with life satisfaction among Malaysian private universities' undergraduates.

The mediation variable in this study is peer attachment. The study investigates the indirect impact of peer attachment in the relationships between perceived stress, maternal attachment, paternal attachment, and life satisfaction. Attachment theory proposed that a better parent-child relationship could positively influence the development of peer attachment (Bowlby, 1980) and affect positive outcome. Ma and Huebner (2008) support the theory with their research findings that peer attachment mediates the relationship between parental attachment and life satisfaction. In other words, peer attachment is expected to explain further about the influences of perceived stress, maternal attachment, and paternal attachment to life satisfaction. It provides more essence on the relationships between perceived stress, maternal attachment, paternal attachment, and life satisfaction.

The moderating variable is tagged in dotted line to discriminate with the mediating line because moderation is not part of the Sequential Equation Model (SEM) (Zainudin, 2014). Ai, Park, Huang, Rodgers, and Tice (2007) highlighted religiosity-spirituality moderate the relationship between stress and life satisfaction. Religiosity-spirituality helps to buffer between stress and life satisfaction among the students. Other studies also showed that high religiosity-spirituality moderate the relationship between negative life experiences and subjective well-being (Israel-Cohen, Kaplan, and Noy, 2016; Abu Talib and Abdollahi, 2015). Therefore, it is important to examine the moderating effect of religiosity-spirituality on life satisfaction among students. Hence, religiosity-spirituality (MV2) was hypothesised to moderate the relationships between perceived stress and life satisfaction. While peer attachment construct chosen as the mediator is theoretically based, the religiosity-spirituality construct is statistically and conceptually based tested to see its function between perceived stress and life satisfaction among the undergraduates based on past studies (Baron and Kenny, 1986). In other words, though one is experiencing unpleasant experience, he or she still attain a certain level of satisfaction in life because religiosity-spirituality functionally buffer that negative experiences.

Finally, based on past literature reviews that showed females are more satisfied with their life than males (Imam, Nurullah, Makol-Abdul, Rahman, and Noon, 2009) while males reported slightly more stress, strain, and religious coping mechanism than female do (Baqtayan, 2011). The study proposed that there is a significant difference in life satisfaction between male and female of Malaysian private university undergraduates





**Figure 1.6.2 : Conceptual Framework for the Relationships between Perceived Stress, Maternal Attachment, Paternal Attachment, Peer Attachment, and Religiosity-spirituality with Life Satisfaction among Malaysian Private Universities Undergraduates**

### 1.8 The Significance of the study

The transition to adulthood involves a unique episode for the young adult. Even though most of their times were spent on the campus, they still depend on their parents, especially for financial and socio-emotional support. In other words, despite being encircled with peers in the campus, the family is still an important figure for the young adult. The information gained in the current study on the contribution of parental and peer attachment towards young adult may provide supportive evidence for the validation of young adult as a distinctive developmental stage. Hence, the study of life satisfaction among the undergraduates may enrich the existing body of knowledge in the field of developmental psychology. The issue is specifically added to the existing body of knowledge of young adult's life satisfaction because previous researchers were focusing mostly either on older adult, or people suffer from chronic disease or mental health.

It is projected that the results of the study will offer possible inputs to professionals, such as counsellors, academicians, trainers, parents, and policy maker in planning and developing relevant intervention programme or support group for vocational or motivational training. The aimed is to motivate the students in obtaining successful resolution during stressful life event to achieve satisfaction in their life especially the young adults are the millennial generation. They are technology savvy and very quick in responding to critics and flaws in their eyes (Hinote and Sundvall, 2015). Therefore, knowing more details on the influences of the undergraduates' life satisfaction could make such plan for intervention programmes more robust and focused.

Eventually, a variety of approaches could be implemented in the aforesaid programs because the outcomes provide a real potential for any programme or intervention to be implemented in the future. It is truly so for the young generation's physical and psychological development, specifically on their mental health, and lifestyles. Such programmes or interventions are also expected to benefit in promoting positive parent-child relationship.

## **1.9 Definitions of terminologies**

### **1.9.1 Life satisfaction**

**Conceptual definition:** A cognitive judgemental process of an individual towards the pleasant and unpleasant experience (Diener, Emmon, Larsen, and Griffin, 1985) that symbolises the enjoyment of life.

**Operational definition:** Life satisfaction is measured using The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et. al, 1985). Higher score indicates higher level of life satisfaction of the respondent.

### **1.9.2 Perceived Stress**

**Conceptual definition:** Perceived stress is the feelings or thoughts that one has about how much stress they are experiencing at a given time period (Phillips, 2013)

**Operational definition:** Perceived stress is measured using the Inventory of College Students' Recent Life Experiences (ICSRLE) (Kohn et. al, 1991). The total score was used in the analysis where a higher score indicates a higher level of stress (Donohue, 2016).

### 1.9.3 Attachment

**Conceptual definition:** An enduring, emotional ties, and close relationship between parents (mother/father/caregiver) and child formed in early stages (infancy) throughout the life span (Armsdeen and Greenberg, 1987) and close friends (peer) (Greenberg and Armsden, 2009).

**Operational definition:** Attachment is measured using The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) (Greenberg and Armsden, 1987). Attachment to mother is measured using IPPA (mother) while attachment to father is measured using IPPA (father). Attachment to peer is measured using IPPA (peer). Higher score indicates secure parental and peers attachment, and a lower score indicates insecure attachment (Lehmann, 2008).

### 1.9.4 Religiosity-Spirituality

**Conceptual Definition:** Religiosity-spirituality is defined concurrently as “the quest for existential meaning constitutes a universal phenomenon traditionally manifested in official religions (religiosity) or personal modes of transcendence (spirituality)” (Kioulos et al. 2015: 38).

**Operational definition of religiosity-spirituality:** Religiosity-spirituality is measured using The Brief Multidimensional Measurement of Religiousness/Spirituality (BMMRS) (Fetzer, 2003). Higher score indicates a higher level of religiosity-spirituality (Rounding, Jacobson, and Hart, 2016; Kim, Kim, 2016).

### 1.10 Scope of the Study

The scope of the present study focuses on Malaysian undergraduates in private universities only. Private universities are different in the mission and vision, which in turn may also have different means and ways in running the business that influences the students’ performance and well-being (Shah and Nair, 2016). Therefore, the outcome could only be generalised to students’ population among private universities students and cannot be generalised to other students studying in public universities in Malaysia.

### 1.11 Organisation of the Thesis

The thesis covers five chapters. Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter. It covers the review of the background of the study, which includes the problem statement, research

questions, objectives of the study, hypotheses, the significance of the study, theoretical and conceptual framework, and the definitions of terminologies.

Chapter 2 is the literature review. It reviews each variable of the study and provides a lengthy discussion of the variables in the study for better understanding.

Chapter 3 is the methodological chapter. It provides the research design, location, population, sample, research instruments, the procedure of data collection, and data analysis.

Chapter 4 represents the results and the discussion of the studied variables. The results are furnished with tables and figures. It follows with a discussion, which is the explanation of the results and supported by theories and previous studies.

Chapter 5 includes the summary, conclusion, and recommendations for future research. It provides readers with an overall conclusion of the thesis. It also offers some limitations of the current investigations and recommendations that could be the topic of interest for future studies.

## **1.12 Summary**

Chapter 1 begins with a review of the background of the study where life satisfaction is the main discussion in the study. Several factors associated with life satisfaction were identified and elaborated. The factors that were identified are perceived stress, maternal attachment, paternal attachment, peers attachment, and religiosity-spirituality. Subsequently, to further understand the study on life satisfaction, the descriptions on the statement of the problem were explained. Then, the discussion was followed by the research questions, research objectives, hypotheses, and significance of the study. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks were also discussed that involved 3 theories. The Top-down Theory and Attachment Theory were integrated to explain the theoretical foundation of the study in life satisfaction. The definitions of terminologies used in the current study were explained. Finally, the scope of the study was explained on the limitation of the study. Next, Chapter 2 is a fundamental review of the previous studies on factors associated with life satisfaction among young adults studying in universities.

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