

# A Conceptual Framework for Investigating Malaysian Parents' Awareness Factors on Paedophilic Behaviour

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## ABSTRACT

Paedophilic behaviour poses significant risks to child safety, yet parental awareness in Malaysia remains underexplored. Despite legislative measures such as the Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017, cases of child sexual abuse continue to rise, highlighting systemic gaps and cultural barriers. This paper proposes a conceptual framework grounded in Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT) to examine three critical awareness factors: education on “stranger danger,” awareness of online platform risks, and perceived effectiveness of child protection laws. These factors are hypothesized to influence parental perceptions of paedophilic behaviour, which in turn shape preventive actions. The framework addresses research gaps by integrating cultural norms, digital threats, and legal confidence into a unified model tailored to Malaysia’s sociocultural context. Methodological considerations suggest a quantitative approach using stratified sampling and Structural Equation Modeling for future validation. The study’s significance lies in its theoretical extension of CBT, practical guidance for policy and awareness campaigns, and social contribution toward empowering parents as proactive defenders against child exploitation. This conceptual model offers a foundation for evidence-based interventions that strengthen child protection strategies both online and offline.

**Keywords:** Parental Awareness, Paedophilic Behaviour, Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT), Child Protection Laws, Online Safety

## INTRODUCTION

Paedophilia, clinically defined as a psychiatric disorder involving persistent sexual attraction to prepubescent children, poses severe risks to child safety and well-being [26, 58]. Globally, child sexual abuse remains a critical concern, with over 103,000 cases reported in England and Wales between 2021 and 2022 [31]. In Malaysia, 6,540 cases were recorded under the Sexual Offences Against Children Act between 2018 and November 2023 with 91 percent involving physical sexual harassment [6]. High profile incidents, such as the GISB holding scandal [49, 10, 16] and the “Abang Bas” TikTok grooming case [36, 55], highlight systemic enforcement gaps and cultural complacency. Public fundraising to support offenders further reflects inadequate parental vigilance.

Despite legislative measures and awareness campaigns, empirical research on Malaysian parents’ understanding of paedophilic behaviour remains scarce. Cultural taboos surrounding sexual topics and limited digital literacy hinder proactive engagement, leaving children vulnerable to exploitation. This paper addresses these gaps by proposing a conceptual framework grounded in Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT) to examine three awareness factors, mainly education on “stranger danger”, awareness of online platforms risks, and perceived effectiveness of child protection laws, and their influence on parental perceptions of paedophilic behaviour. By integrating cultural, digital, and legal dimensions, the framework provides a foundation for evidence-based interventions that strengthen child protection strategies in Malaysia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Global Perspectives

Globally, strategies to address paedophilic behaviour emphasize prevention and rehabilitation. Initiatives such as Germany’s Dunkelfeld Project and Switzerland’s Zurich Treatment Program apply Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to manage deviant impulses and reduce recidivism [13, 21]. These programs adopt holistic

approaches, combining psychological support with community accountability. However, challenges such as stigma, fear of exposure, and limited access to specialized services persist, discouraging voluntary participation [59, 15]. These global experiences highlight the need for culturally sensitive strategies that integrate education, prevention, and therapeutic interventions.

## **B. Malaysian Context**

In Malaysia, public discourse often relies on sensationalized narratives, such as describing paedophilia as a destroying business [47, 59, 17, 14]. While these metaphors raise awareness, they oversimplify structural issues such as weak enforcement and cultural taboos surrounding sexual education. Recent scandals including abuses in care institutions and online grooming incidents, underscore systemic gaps in child protection [49, 10]. Scholars [72] advocate reforms such as stricter monitoring of childcare facilities, legislative enhancement aligned with international standards, and the establishment of an independent Children's Commission [62, 63, 68]. Despite these efforts, societal reluctance to discuss sexual safety perpetuates parental knowledge gaps.

## **C. Theoretical Foundation**

This study applies Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT), which posits that maladaptive cognitions and behaviours can be modified through structured interventions [57, 53, 43]. In parental contexts, CBT suggests that informed parents are more likely to adopt preventive strategies, such as teaching boundaries, monitoring online activities, and advocating for stronger legal protections [54, 51,2].

## **D. Parental Perceptions of Paedophilic Behaviour**

parental perceptions of paedophilic behaviour refer to how parents interpret and respond to risks within their cultural and social environment [1, 37]. These perceptions influence whether parents act as proactive protectors or remain passive observers [58, 34]. In Malaysia, cultural taboos encompassing sexual topics often discourage open discussions about child safety, leaving children vulnerable to grooming. Parents who acknowledge these risks typically engage in preventive behaviours such as teaching boundaries, monitoring online activities, and advocating for stronger enforcement of child protection laws [7, 39, 64, 65]. Conversely, those who avoid such conversations due to discomfort or fear of breaching norms may underestimate threats [34, 22], resulting in complacency [40, 71]. Understanding these perceptions is critical because these perceptions shape parental readiness to adopt safety measures [44, 67] and influence the effectiveness of awareness campaigns [25, 48].

## **E. Prior Studies and Hypotheses Development**

Research consistently shows that parental education on “stranger danger” significantly reduces risks of child exploitation by promoting vigilance and proactive safety measures. Parents who actively teach children to recognize and avoid risky interactions are more likely to perceive paedophilic behaviour as a serious threat, translating into preventive actions such as setting boundaries and supervising outdoor activities [60, 58]. This is particularly critical in Malaysia, where cultural restrictions often limit open discussions about sexual safety.

Similarly, awareness of online grooming risks correlates with stricter monitoring and digital literacy practices. Studies indicate that parents who understand online threats implement protective measures such as privacy controls and parental monitoring tools [27, 5, 28]. In Malaysia, rising cases of social media grooming highlight the urgency of digital awareness among parents.

Confidence in child protection laws also influences parental engagement. Parents who perceive these laws as robust and enforceable demonstrate greater trust in institutional safeguards and complement them with personal vigilance. Conversely, scepticism about enforcement often leads to passive attitudes, weakening preventive efforts [4, 41].

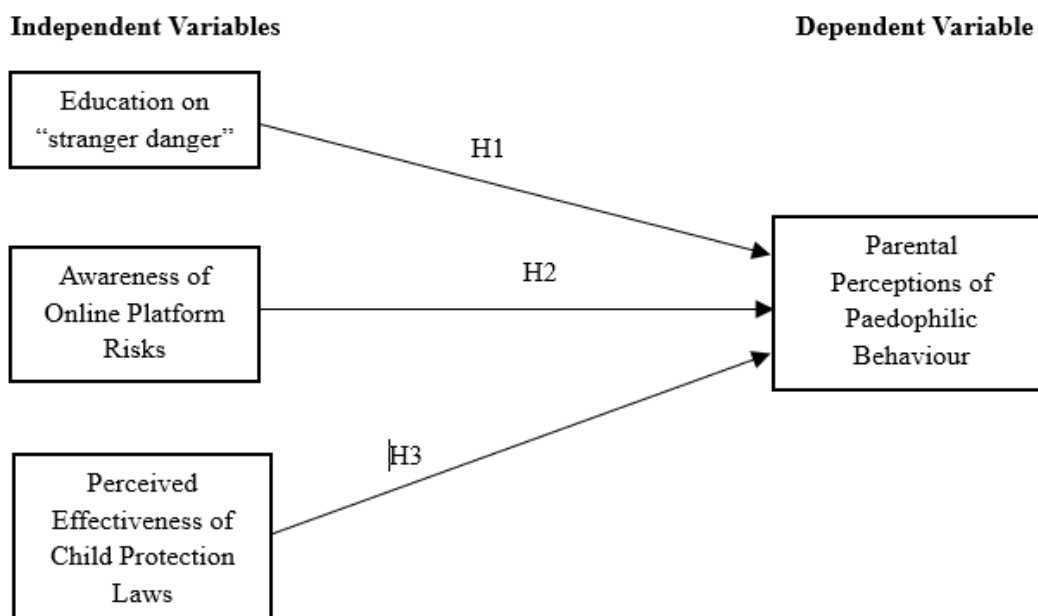
Based on these findings, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

1. H1: Education on “stranger danger” is positively associated with parental perception of paedophilic behaviour.

2. H2: Awareness of online platform risks is positively associated with parental perception of paedophilic behaviour.
3. H3: Perceived effectiveness of child protection laws is positively associated with parental perception of paedophilic behaviour.

## F. Identified Gaps

Malaysian research on paedophilic behaviour remains fragmented, often examining cultural norms, digital threats, and legal perceptions in isolation. While laws such as the Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017 exist, enforcement inconsistencies and societal reluctance to discuss sexual safety limit their effectiveness [56, 38]. Studies reveal that parents recognize paedophilia as a serious crime but lack practical strategies for prevention, including body safety education and digital risk awareness [12]. Digital literacy is often superficial, with reliance on fragmented online resources rather than structured learning [32, 35, 45]. Legal confidence is also uneven, resulting in many parents trust existing laws but doubt enforcement, reducing proactive engagement [1, 3, 11, 30, 42]. These gaps underscore the need for an integrated conceptual framework that combines education, digital awareness, and legal confidence to strengthen parental capacity for child protection.



**Fig. 1 Proposed Conceptual Framework**

## III. Proposed Methodology

Although this paper is conceptual, it proposes a practical and rigorous approach for future empirical validation. A quantitative survey design is recommended, using structured questionnaires with five-point Likert scale items to measure parental awareness and perceptions of paedophilic behaviour. This design ensures standardized responses and facilitates statistical analysis of relationships between variables. The questionnaire will include items aligned with the conceptual framework, covering education on “stranger danger”, awareness of online platform risks, and confidence in child protection laws.

Examples of items include statements such as “I teach my child to avoid strangers”, “I monitor my child’s social media use”, and “I believe Malaysian child protection laws are effective”. These constructs will be operationalized as follows:

1. Education on stranger danger will be measured by the frequency and depth of safety discussions with children.
2. Online awareness will be assessed through the use of digital safety measures and parental monitoring practices.
3. Legal confidence will reflect parents’ perceived robustness and enforcement of child protection laws.

The sampling strategy will employ stratified random sampling, focusing specifically on parents who send their children to public schools. This criterion ensures accessibility and feasibility for participants recruitment, as public schools maintain structured parent records that facilitate tracking and follow-up. Stratification will capture diverse demographic characteristics such as age, education level, and socioeconomic status, which influence awareness and perceptions [43, 47, 52, 6]. The sample size will be calculated using Cochran's formula to achieve a 95 percent confidence level and acceptable margin of error. Urban areas, particularly Petaling Jaya, will be prioritized due to demographic diversity and relevance to child safety concerns [62, 8].

For data analysis, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), that is SmartPLS, is proposed to test hypothesized relationships between independent and dependent variables. SEM-PLS is particularly appropriate because it allows simultaneous testing of multiple relationships and accounts for measurement errors, making it ideal for validating a conceptual framework [73, 18]. Ethical approval will be obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the researchers' institutions. Participants will provide informed consent, and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study.

Data will be anonymised and securely stored. This methodological approach aligns with the study's objectives of examining awareness factors that influence parental perceptions. It addresses cultural sensitivity by ensuring representation of diverse parental groups and demonstrating analytical rigor through the use of advanced statistical techniques. By combining these elements, the proposed methodology provides a strong foundation for future research aimed at informing policy and educational interventions.

### **Expected Contributions**

The study expects a meaningful theoretical contribution by extending Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT) into the domain of parental awareness and preventive behaviour. Traditionally, CBT has been applied to offender rehabilitation and therapeutic interventions, but its integration into parental education and awareness frameworks is relatively unexplored. By conceptualizing how cognitive processes such as knowledge of risks and confidence in protective measures shape parental perceptions, this paper introduces a novel perspective that bridges psychological theory with preventive family practices. This approach enriches current literature by positioning parents as active agents in mitigating paedophilic threats, rather than passive recipients of policy measures [1, 42, 57, 74].

From a practical standpoint, the proposed framework offers actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and child protection organizations. By identifying key awareness factors, the study provides a roadmap for designing targeted awareness campaigns, school-based safety programs, and community workshops. These efforts can empower parents with the knowledge and skills needed to safeguard children in both physical and digital environments. Furthermore, the framework supports the development of evidence-based interventions, ensuring that resources are allocated to strategies proven to influence parental perceptions and behaviours [43, 72, 75, 9].

Socially, this study addresses a critical gap in Malaysia's child protection landscape by promoting parental engagement as a cornerstone of prevention. In a context where cultural restrictions often hinder open discussions about sexual safety, the framework encourages dialogue and proactive parenting. By enhancing parental awareness and confidence, the model contributes to creating safer communities and reducing the incidence of child sexual exploitation both online and offline. This aligns with national priorities for child welfare and support broader societal goals of protecting vulnerable populations [61, 47, 74].

### **CONCLUSION**

This conceptual paper presents a framework for understanding Malaysian parents' awareness factors related to paedophilic behaviour. By integrating education on "stranger danger", awareness of online platform risks, and confidence in child protection laws, the framework highlights the multidimensional nature of parental perceptions and preventive behaviour. It emphasizes that parental awareness is shaped not only by cognitive understanding but also by cultural, social, and legal context, which influence how parents recognize and respond to potential threats.

The framework established a foundation for future empirical research to validate and refine these constructs. Strengthening parental awareness through targeted interventions is essential for reducing children's vulnerability to exploitation and fostering safer communities. By addressing these gaps, this study shifts the focus from reactive measures to proactive strategies rooted in parental empowerment, supporting national main concern for child protection.

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