



Impact Of Empty Nest Syndrome On Well-Being: A Comparative Study Between Working Women And Homemakers

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Abstract

Empty nest syndrome (ENS) is a psychological condition experienced by some parents after their children leave home. Parents often experience sadness, loneliness, and anxiety during this transitional phase. Mothers are often prone to experiencing empty nest syndrome because of their primary role involved in children's lives. The study aims to understand the impact of well-being on working mothers and homemakers. The sample consists of 106 participants (working women =56; homemakers = 50). Ryff's Psychological wellbeing scale and Lyfas Empty nest syndrome scale were used to assess the well-being and determine the type of empty nest syndrome present among participants respectively. The study's results revealed that 1.9 % of women experienced Symptomatic ENS, 62.3% experienced Asymptomatic ENS and 35.8% experienced No ENS. The findings also suggested working women to experience a higher psychological well-being in comparison to homemakers.

Keywords: Emptynest syndrome, well-being, working mother, home-makers

I.Introduction

When children move out of their parent's house, an emotional void is created in the hearts of parents. Lamoreux (2021) pointed out that some mothers experience "feelings of sadness, anxiety and loss of purpose in life". Dorothy Canfield described these feelings as mother's experiencing "Empty-nest Syndrome or ENS" It is more dominant in women due to their role as a primary caregiver. Budhia et al. (2022) assessed the prevalence of empty nest syndrome in middle-aged adults in Eastern India. Their findings indicated prevalence of empty nest syndrome to be higher among females than males. Furthermore, persistently feeling these emotions can cause severe psychiatric issues like depression or anxiety. Nonetheless, it is vital to understand that Empty-nest syndrome is more of a temporary psychological condition than a permanent psychiatric disorder.

The absence of children from the home, can have a negative impact on the emotional well-being of some parents. This can subsequently affect the relationship dynamics between spouses. As disruptions in one aspect of well-being and can have a ripple effect on other domains, Bongyoga and Risnawaty (2021) in their study demonstrated that a decrease in emotional well-being due to the absence of a child can lead to alterations in physical well-being of parents, family interactions, and parenting behaviours.

On the other hand, some parents view an empty nest as a chance to prioritize their own needs and interests without the demands of parenting. This may involve reigniting their relationship with their partner, dedicating more time to personal hobbies and goals, or fulfilling other commitments that were previously difficult to pursue. This newfound freedom may also allow them to reconnect with their social support network or attend to familial responsibilities that were previously neglected.

Research suggests that parents with lower levels of education reported a significantly higher incidence of empty nest syndrome compared to their more educated counterparts. Additionally, the departure of children due to marriage or pursuing education did not significantly impact the level of empty nest syndrome experienced by parents. (Mansoor and Hasan, 2019)

Wang et al., (2017) suggested that empty-nest adults had a higher prevalence of loneliness and major depressive episodes compared to non-empty-nest adults. Additionally, research also suggests a significant correlation between loneliness severity with depression severity and perceived social support. However, emergence of digital technology has helped in strengthening the social support system which thereby reduced depression and loneliness experiences among people who were in empty nest stage of their lives (Murugan et al., 2022)

Voydanoff and Donnelly (1989) suggest that mental health of women can be positively influenced by employment. As it opens the doors for working women towards exercising financial autonomy, gaining status, power, and position. Working women generally have a positive viewpoint regarding their occupations. Despite, the impact that stress and family issues play, being employed can have a significant impact on an individual's sense of self-worth as it boosts up confidence and enhances psychological well-being. On the contrary lives of home-makers women revolve around raising children, taking care of home and husband, and fulfilling familial engagements. Mothers gain satisfaction seeing their children and husband flourish. They take pride in the success of their loved ones. Having a supportive and loving family enhances the psychological well-being of mothers.

Empty nest syndrome has been previously studied in relation to its impact on parents. However, limited research is done specifically on women and moreover pertaining to the comparison between working-mothers and stay-at-home moms. Previous studies focused on examining empty-nest syndrome among parents and its effects on different dimension physical/psychological distress, marital issues. However, the present study aims at understanding the impact of ENS on employment status of mothers. Thereby, seeking to close the gap. The study can be beneficial in gauging insights and identifying different intervention or coping strategies adopted by mothers. Additionally, the study can add to the body of knowledge on family dynamics and mental health, offering important new information to academics and professionals working in these disciplines.

The research findings can influence workplace policies that assist working parents with flexibility or community initiatives that offer empty-nesters social and emotional support to smoothen their transition. The findings will thus have a big impact on the relevant fields. The study's findings can help in identifying the different strategies or engagements involved by mothers' which results in the presence or absence of empty-nest syndrome. This can further have implications for preventing/ reducing mothers from experiencing empty-nest syndrome and the associated psychological and physical distress because of it. Thereby helping in improving their quality of lives.

II.Method

Aim: To study the impact of empty nest syndrome on the well-being of working mothers and home makers.

Objective

- To Identify presence of empty nest syndrome between working mothers and home makers
- To examine the impact of empty nest syndrome on wellbeing of working mothers and home makers.
- To explore how ENS affects the social and emotional dynamics of working mothers and home makers among their social and familial bonds.

Hypothesis

H1: There will be a significant difference in the relationship of empty-nest syndrome between working women and home-makers.

H2: There will be a significant difference between overall well-being of working mothers and home makers.

Research Design

The study follows a comparative research design. Aiming towards comparing the impact of empty-nest syndrome on well-being of working mothers and home-makers.

Variables:

Independent variable: Empty nest syndrome

Dependent Variable: Well-being

Sampling design

The study involves purposive sampling having a sample size of 106. It consists of 56 Working women and 50 Home-makers. The age group of the participants ranged from 45 years and above. Budhia et al. (2022) in his study examined the population age group between 45-55 years. The present study therefore wants to examine a wider age range of mothers. The upper limit was 67 years.

Inclusion criteria: The study involves mother's of those children who left their home to pursue studies/ career or are married.

Exclusion Criteria: The study does not involve mother's who have lost their child to accidents/childbirth etc. the study also doesn't involve mother's whose children have come back from college/ studies and are presently residing with them.

Tool description:

Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales (PWB)

The 42-item Psychological Wellbeing (PWB) was developed by Carol D. Ryff . there are 6 dimensions of happiness and wellbeing are measured by the PWB scale to determine the psychological well-being of a person. The dimensions are as follows (Ryff et al., 2007; adapted from Ryff, 1989).

- "Self-Acceptance: The extent to which individuals have a positive attitude towards themselves and accept both their good and bad qualities.
- Positive Relations with Others: The quality of an individual's relationships with others, including family, friends, and colleagues.
- Autonomy: The degree to which an individual is self-directed and able to regulate their own behavior and decisions.
- Environmental Mastery: The extent to which an individual feels competent in managing their surroundings and achieving their goals.
- Personal Growth: The extent to which an individual feels that they are growing and developing as a person.
- Purpose in Life: The extent to which an individual feels that their life has meaning and purpose."

On a 6-point Likert scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree, respondents to the PWB-42 are asked to rate how much they agree or disagree with each of the 42 statements. Higher scores on the scale indicate better levels of well-being. The scale is scored by adding the replies for each dimension. The PWB-42 is a commonly used instrument in psychological research and is useful for determining a person's level of well-being in a variety of situations, including clinical settings, scientific investigations, and community-based initiatives.

The Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.75 to 0.88 for the 6 dimensions indicating good internal consistency. The PWB-42 has shown good stability over time, with test-retest correlations ranging from 0.72 to 0.82 over a 2 to 6-week interval.

Lyfas Empty-nest Syndrome Scale

Das (2022) “Lyfas ENS is an in-house AI tool which was developed to measure Empty-Nest-Syndrome amongst parents whose child/children are no longer staying them. This scale was created using a questionnaire created during several Lyfas consultations and patient testimonies.

Lyfas ENS has a CrunchBase alpha of 0.9, test-retest reliability of 0.88 thereby indicating a strong internal consistency. The average cross-correlation with other scales DASS depression, DASS Anxiety, Ruminicence Scale, and Quality of life scale of .82. hence it’s a reliable clinical instrument.”

Procedure

For the study the participants were reached out physically. At first rapport was built with the subject. They were briefed about the research, its objectives and the tools administered. Upon interest an informed consent was taken from the participant for their voluntary participation and were acquainted that the data collected will be kept confidential and be solely used for research purposes only. Additionally, subjects were also informed regarding the withdrawal from the study too even after signing the consent form, if at any moment they felt discomfort. Participants were asked to answer honestly to avoid hampering of results.

Statistical Analysis

After collection of data, they were transferred to excel sheet for data sorting and scoring. Later on input the data into SPSS for statistical analysis. Correlation and independent sample t test were employed. Spearman correlation was used to find out if there will be a significant difference in the relationship of empty-nest syndrome between working women and homemakers. While independent sample t- test done to find out if there will be a significant difference between overall well-being of working mothers and home makers.

III. Result

Table 4.1

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	106	51.26	5.205
Working women/Home-makers	106	1.53	.502
Symptomatic ENS/Asymptomatic ENS/No ENS	106	1.34	.514
Purpose in Life	106	29.06	4.562
Self Acceptance	106	29.49	6.452
Autonomy	106	28.15	5.688
Environmental Mastery	106	28.36	4.852
Personal Growth	106	30.49	5.073
Positive Relationships	106	30.60	6.167

Table 4.1 represents descriptive statistics of working women and home makers on psychological well-being and empty-nest syndrome. The average age of participants = 51.26 years. The mean score of participants ranged from 29.06 – 30.60 for the dimension of PWB well being scale and Std. Deviations from 4.562 – 6.452.

Table 4.2: Frequency table on employment status of mother and type of ENS.

	N	%
Home-makers	50	47.2
Working Women	56	52.8
Symptomatic ENS	2	1.9
Asymptomatic ENS	66	62.3
No ENS	38	35.8

Table 4.3*Correlations*

			Working mom/ Homemakers	Symptomatic ENS/ Asymptomatic ENS/ No ENS
Spearman's rho	Working Home-maker	Correlation coefficient	1.000	.050
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.613
		N	106	106
	Symptomatic ENS/ Asymptomatic ENS/ No ENS	Correlation coefficient	.050	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.613	.
		N	106	106

Table 4.4 represents Spearman correlation between employment status of mother (Working women/ Home-maker) and type of empty-nest syndrome (Symptomatic ENS/ Asymptomatic ENS/ No ENS) where, $r = 0.050$, and $p = 0.613$ thus, indicating a very weak positive correlation but is not statistically significant.

Table 4.5

Independent sample t-test between employment status of mother (working women/ home-maker) and psychological well-being.

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t- test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Purpose in Life	.019	.890	-6.201	104	<.001	-4.726	.762
Self acceptance	9.632	.002	-4.957	104	<.001	-5.623	1.134
Autonomy	14.361	<.001	-5.567	104	<.001	-5.434	.976
Environmental Mastery	.423	.517	-4.040	104	<.001	-3.556	.882
Personal growth	3.401	.068	-6.559	104	<.001	-5.471	.834
Positive relationships	1.073	.303	-5.782	104	<.001	-6.064	1.049

Table 4.5 represents independent sample t-test between employment status of mother (working women/ home-maker) and psychological well-being. $P < 0.001$ in all the dimensions of well being. Thereby suggesting a significant difference between the psychological well being of working women and home-makers.

IV. Discussion

Empty nest syndrome is a psychological condition that parents experience when their children leave home and start living independently. The empty nest syndrome can have a significant impact on the well-being of parents, especially mothers, who may have spent a significant part of their lives caring for their children. This impact can differ depending on whether the parents are working women or homemakers.

The Study's primary objective was to identify the presence of empty nest syndrome between working mothers and home makers. To fulfil this Lyfas emptynest tool was utilised. It is an inhouse scale developed by Lyfas. Table 4.2 which illustrates a frequency table of employment status of mothers and type of ENS helps us determine the emptynest syndromes present in the sample population. The results suggest that 1.9 % of women experienced Symptomatic ENS meaning an active presence of empty nest syndrome, 62.3% experienced 'Asymptomatic ENS' meaning mothers are actively using different coping strategies to deal with ENS. Failure to continue these strategies may redirect them towards 'symptomatic ENS' and lastly 35.8% experienced 'No ENS' meaning no empty-nest syndrome.

Spearman correlation was employed to determine the relationship between employment status of mothers and type of ENS present. The result indicated a positive correlation between the type of empty-nest syndrome present among home-makers and working women. However, $p > 0.05$ which indicated the results to be not statistically significant.

Research findings conform with Su et al. (2012) the findings suggested that occupational status significantly affects anxiety brought on by an empty nest syndrome. Employed women are happier, spend more time outside, and experience fewer difficulties from the syndrome because they have broader social interactions with friends and coworkers at work. Women who concurrently balance the responsibilities of being a home and a worker may be less prone to the condition and its repercussions.

Hypothesis 1: Stated that there was a significant difference in the relationship of empty-nest syndrome between working women and home-makers.

Henceforth, the hypothesis has been accepted.

The secondary and tertiary objectives were to examine the impact of empty nest syndrome on well-being of working mothers and home makers and to explore how ENS affects the social and emotional dynamics of working mothers and home makers among their social and familial bonds respectively. Independent sample t- test was employed to identify the variation in different dimensions of well-being among working mothers and homemakers. The study's findings revealed a significant difference between the psychological well-being of mothers and homemakers.

Meaning that working women scored higher in all 6 dimensions of Ryff's psychological wellbeing scale which were self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, purpose in life, personal growth, environmental mastery in comparison to home-makers. High score in Self-acceptance indicated working women to have a positive attitude towards one self and acknowledge various aspects of self in comparison to homemakers. Working women scored higher in positive relationships thereby suggesting they build warmer, satisfying and trusting relationships than homemakers. High scores in autonomy suggests working women to be self determining and independent, are able to resist social pressure better than homemakers. High score in purpose in life suggests working women to be more directional and focused attitude towards life than home-makers. Working women scored higher in personal growth thereby suggesting they perceive themselves as open to new experiences, growing, expanding and changing their behaviors by reflecting more on self-knowledge and effectiveness than home-makers. Higher score in environmental mastery indicates working women to have mastery and competence in managing environment than home-makers. The former is able to make effective use of surrounding opportunities better than the later.

The results contradict the previous literature which suggested otherwise. Pandey et al (2014) explored the mental health of working women and housewives. The study's findings suggested mental wellbeing of housewives were better than working women. However, Kholasezadeh et al. (2012) in his study revealed working women to experience better mental health in comparison to housewives. The findings also revealed a positive correlation between women's mental health and husband's job satisfaction.

H2: Stated that there will be a significant difference between overall well-being of working mothers and home makers.

Henceforth, hypothesis is accepted.

V. Conclusion

The present comparative study examined the impact of empty nest syndrome on well-being of mothers based on their employment status.

The following can be concluded:

- Presence of empty-nest syndrome (asymptomatic/symptomatic) does not significantly depend on working status of mothers (home-maker/ working women).
- The overall well-being of working women is comparatively better than home-makers.

From the literature review and the results, it can be concluded that presence of empty-nest syndrome depends upon various factors. However, if women are preoccupied with other activities after the departure of their child the anxiety and loneliness experienced are comparatively lesser. Mothers can try maintaining regular communication with their offspring to avoid worrying about their child's well-being. Strengthening social bonds and reigniting the marital relationship can provide them with stronger emotional support which can be very helpful for them during this transitional phase. Homemakers are used to following a routine life, it can be difficult to find a new balance after the departure of their children. However, if homemakers start putting themselves first and look at it from an alternate perspective, the spare time can be utilized to focus on themselves, which was earlier not possible.

Moreover, mental health professionals and policy makers could ideate different programs and devise intervention plans catering to the needs of women going through this transitional phase. Support groups, community activities for parents, promotion of self-care etc. can be beneficial for society. The literature review has pointed out the importance of emotional support during this transitional phase. Having honest and open conversations with spouses/ family, preparing yourself mentally beforehand and providing constant emotional understanding will lead to a smoother transition for mothers during this rough phase.

Limitations

Due to the smaller sample size, it limits the generalizability of the study's findings. Another limitation could be investigating the long-term effects of empty nest syndrome on the wellbeing of working women and stay-at-home moms may be helpful with longitudinal research. The experiences of the participants in this study may just represent a snapshot of their lives at a particular point in time, and as such, they may not truly reflect the long-term effects of empty nest syndrome on wellbeing.

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