



Psychological Issues Related To Empty Nesting Among Parents Of Migrated Children: Impact And Coping Strategies

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Abstract

Empty nest syndrome among parents whose children have migrated presents a multifaceted challenge marked by feelings of loneliness, isolation, and financial strain. This quantitative study aims to explore the psychosocial impact of children's migration on their parents, referencing issues related to the empty nest experience. Data were collected using a survey questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics. The Findings reveal a pervasive sense of isolation among respondents, compounded by the absence of familial support and the challenges of adapting to new cultural contexts. The study underscores the need for tailored interventions to address the psychological and social needs of aged parents grappling with psychological issues related to empty nesting in the context of migration. By shedding light on the intricate interplay of factors shaping this phenomenon, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding aging, migration, and familial relationships in contemporary society.

Key Words: psychological issues related to empty nesting, Psychological and Social Needs, Isolation, Migration, Aging

Introduction

Empty nest syndrome is a circumstance that many parents experience when their children leave home for the first time, usually to attend college, get a job, or start a family of their own. psychological issues related to empty nesting (psychological issues related to empty nesting) is a psychological condition characterized by feelings of grief, loneliness, and loss of purpose that parents, typically between the ages of 40 and 65, may experience when their children leave home for higher education, employment, or marriage, Hidyati D. S. Suparno (2024). So this study is focused on the diverse impact of child's migration on their parent's life.

Parents may experience a range of physical symptoms, such as difficulty sleeping, loss of appetite, and increased stress and anxiety. The severity and duration of these symptoms can vary depending on the individual, their support system, and their coping strategies. One of the best ways to cope with psychological issues related to empty nesting is to stay connected with the children and to focus on their own (parents) interests and goals. This may include hobbies, travel, volunteer work, or other activities that bring joy and fulfillment. Additionally, seeking support from friends, family members, or a therapist can be beneficial in processing and managing the emotions associated with this life transition.

Background of the study

Migration is an ever-expanding global phenomenon, particularly impacting the youth population. Recent data highlights a significant rise in youth migration, driven by employment opportunities, education, and the pursuit of higher living standards. Youths aged 15 to 24 now make up approximately 11.3% of the international migrant population, equating to around 31.7 million young migrants worldwide (Migration Data Portal, n.d.) This migration is largely from developing countries to developed nations, reflecting shifts in global economic dynamics. The leading destination countries for young migrants include the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. In particular, Asian countries, notably India, see substantial youth migration due to the appeal of better education and job prospects. India holds the distinction of having the largest diaspora in the world. As of 2020, around 18 million Indians were living abroad (Economic Times, 2023) A considerable portion of these migrants are youths, with many seeking advanced educational qualifications and enhanced employment opportunities, predominantly in countries such as the US, Canada, and the Middle East. Kerala is a significant contributor to India's migration pool. The Kerala Migration Survey (KMS) 2023 estimated that approximately 2.2 million Keralites are currently living abroad (The Hindu, 2023) The state has seen a sharp increase in student migration, with numbers nearly doubling from 1.29 lakh in 2018 to 2.5 lakh in 2023 (The New Indian Express, 2024)

A growing conflict exists between migration trends and family relationships, particularly when children migrate and settle abroad. Paradoxically, many parents in Kerala actively encourage their children to seize opportunities to migrate, driven by societal expectations, prospects for higher income, improved living standards, and enhanced social status. As a result, young adults choose to migrate, whether as students or employees, often leading to Permanent Residency (PR) or citizenship in their host countries. While migration is viewed as a pathway to success for the children, it creates a significant void for the parents left behind. Parents, who were once deeply attached to their children, find themselves facing an abrupt vacuum in their households. This vacuum not only leads to loneliness but also gives rise to various psychological challenges. The absence of their children, who once played a central role in their daily lives, can trigger conditions like depression, anxiety, and feelings of abandonment. The parents, left to navigate life without their children, often build their own isolated world, which can have both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, some parents may adjust by strengthening their relationship with each other and finding new ways to occupy their time. However, for many, the experience is overwhelmingly negative. Financial burdens can exacerbate their situation, as parents may have taken on debt or bank loans to fund their children's

education and migration. Social isolation and the erosion of social status often tied to traditional family structures where children care for aging parents create further distress. For Parents this is the phase that begins along with the contraction stage of the family life cycle in which children move out of their parental home to relocate either to a different city or country for educational and professional purposes, this will cause the condition called Empty Nest coined (Dorothy Canfield 1914).

Methodology

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. A survey form was distributed to 67 respondents who are parents both included father and mother, experiencing psycho-social effect due to their children's migration in Kottayam district, Kerala. The survey collected data on the emotional, psychological, and social impacts of this life transition. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with a subset of respondents to gain deeper insights into their personal experiences and coping mechanisms. Data from the surveys were statistically analyzed, while interview transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis to identify common patterns and themes.

Objectives of the study

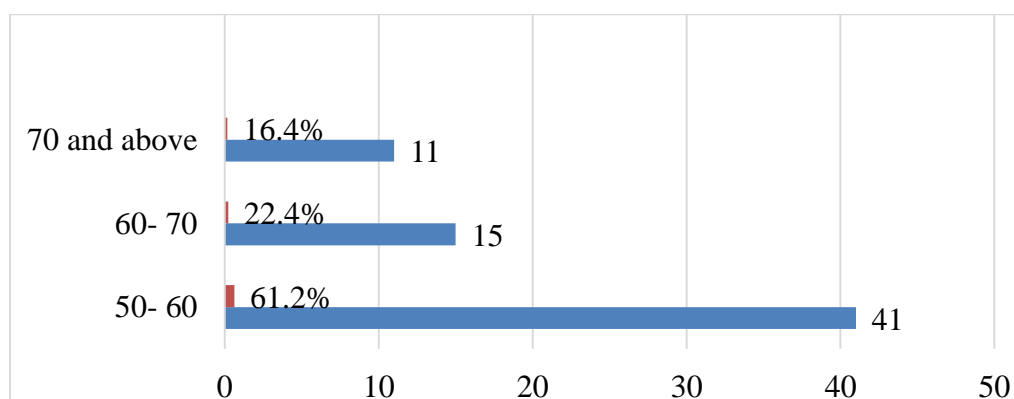
The main objectives of the study are:

1. To study the social and emotional impact of migration of their Children
2. To understand the interplay of distance and communication
3. To identify the coping mechanism and relation to emotional impacts associated with children's migration on Parents

Results and Discussions

The analysis has done by descriptive statistics. It also included the qualitative data that collected from the respondents through detailed interview.

- **Demographic information:**



Graph 1: Age of respondents (in years)

The findings reveal that 61% of the respondents are aged between 50 and 60 years, 22% fall into the 60–70 years’ age bracket, and 16% are aged 70 and above. According to Hidyati (2024), psychological issues related to empty nesting (psychological issues related to empty nesting) is defined as a psychological condition that parents often experience after their children leave home, leading to feelings of loneliness, sadness, and loss of purpose. Given that a substantial proportion (61%) of this study’s respondents belong to the 50–60-year age group, it indicates that the selected sample is highly appropriate and well-aligned with the study's focus on parents at risk of psychological issues related to empty nesting.

Key Challenges Faced by Parents of Migrant Children

Variable	Frequency (%)	Description
Feelings of Loneliness	78%	Parents reporting frequent feelings of loneliness
Financial Strain	65%	Parents experiencing financial difficulties
Communication Barriers	72%	Parents facing challenges in maintaining contact
Support System Availability	45%	Parents with limited social support

Table 1: Key Variables and Responses from Survey

The study revealed that a significant proportion of parents reported feelings of loneliness and social isolation following their children's departure. Many respondents highlighted the challenges of maintaining a connection with their children who now live abroad, citing time zone differences and infrequent communication as major barriers. Financial strain was another common issue, particularly among parents who had financially supported their children's education or migration. The qualitative data further illustrated the emotional toll of adapting to a quieter household and a reduced social support network.

The migration of children for extended periods leaves parents grappling with a profound sense of emptiness, often referred to as "psychological issues related to empty nesting," which disrupts their sense of purpose and identity. A significant 78% of parent’s report experiencing loneliness, highlighting the emotional void and lack of meaningful engagement in their lives. This condition reflects their current reality, where they often feel as though they have "nothing to do," a sentiment exacerbated by reduced familial interactions and support, as noted by Badiani and Desousa (2016). Additionally, 65% of parents face financial strain due to the migration of their children, as they lose economic support and struggle with reduced income, a situation described by Ali, Rahman, and Rani (2022). Communication barriers, affecting 72% of parents, further deepen this sense of detachment, as limited or strained interactions with their children make it harder to maintain emotional connections, as emphasized by Ahmad (2022). Furthermore, the limited availability of social support (45%) leaves parents isolated and excluded, with many lacking the networks needed to cope

with these challenges, as discussed by Feng and Phillips (2024). These findings underscore the profound social and emotional impact of migration on parents, emphasizing the interplay of distance, communication gaps, and a lack of support systems in shaping their present struggles.

Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Parents of Migrated Children

Coping Mechanism	Frequency (%)	Description
Engaging in Hobbies	55%	Parents taking up new or revisiting old hobbies
Seeking Social Support	48%	Parents joining support groups or seeking therapy
Increased Communication Efforts	60%	Parents making additional efforts to stay in touch

Table 3: Coping Mechanisms Reported by Parents

To cope with the challenges of psychological issues related to empty nesting, parents adopt various mechanisms to navigate the emotional and social void caused by their children's migration, although these mechanisms are not widely visible in many communities. Engaging in hobbies is a key strategy, with 55% of parents finding relief in revisiting old interests or pursuing new activities. As Ahmad (2022) and Badiani and Desousa (2016) suggest, these hobbies help alleviate loneliness by providing a renewed sense of purpose and fulfillment, enabling parents to adjust to the loss of daily parental responsibilities. Seeking social support is another critical coping mechanism, with 48% of parents turning to peers, social groups, or therapy for emotional and practical support. Arifin et al. (2023) emphasize that community networks and support groups foster resilience, while Bryant and Veroff (2019) highlight the role of such connections in reducing social exclusion and improving mental health. Increased communication efforts also play a vital role, as 60% of parents actively maintain frequent contact with their children and other family members through technologies like video calls and social media. Ahmad (2022) and Guo et al. (2018) underline the importance of sustained intergenerational communication in bridging emotional gaps and reducing distress. However, in many communities, these coping strategies are overshadowed by the societal belief that life is truly "settled" only when individuals or their children migrate abroad. This mindset creates significant pressure on both children and parents, with parents often experiencing trauma and an emotional void after their children leave. The focus on achieving success through migration leads to the neglect of parental well-being, which becomes an unimportant factor for many and its leads to Empty Nest. As a result, parents are left to navigate feelings of loneliness, purposelessness, and neglect with limited or no support, underscoring the urgent need to promote awareness and healthier coping strategies for these families.

The findings emphasize the profound emotional and social challenges faced by parents following their children's migration, particularly those in their 50s and 60s, as they navigate life without the constant

presence of their children. The departure of children, primarily for jobs or education, has triggered significant emotional and social challenges for many parents. Feelings of loneliness, isolation, and a loss of purpose are common, with many parents experiencing emotional strain as they adapt to an empty household. This emotional toll is further exacerbated by the lack of physical proximity to their children, making it difficult to provide timely support or maintain regular, meaningful communication. Psychological issues related to empty nesting also impacts parents' daily routines and social lives. While some parents manage to maintain consistency in their activities, others face disruptions, finding it difficult to adapt to their new circumstances. Financial difficulties and the absence of external support further complicate their adjustment. The generational gap in values, aspirations, and communication styles also adds to the emotional burden, as parents struggle to reconcile their expectations with the evolving perspectives of their children. Despite these challenges, many parents demonstrate resilience by engaging in new hobbies and utilizing technological advancements to maintain contact with their children. However, time zone differences and cultural shifts often make communication and emotional connection a persistent challenge. While some parents find a sense of fulfillment in their parenting efforts, the emotional weight of psychological issues related to empty nesting remains a central struggle for many, reflecting the complex interplay of social, emotional, and generational factors in this phase of life.

Social Work Implications

- To mitigate the effects of psychological issues related to empty nesting, maintaining regular communication between parents and children is crucial to reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation. Parents are encouraged to focus on physical and mental well-being by engaging in hobbies, recreational activities, or mindfulness programs. Strengthening relationships with spouses through open communication and shared activities is also vital. For more serious mental health challenges, professional help, such as individual or group therapy, can provide support. Family therapy is particularly helpful for addressing familial conflicts and fostering stronger connections.
- Awareness programs and geriatric counselling should be integrated into community services and educational institutions. NGOs and government agencies can develop specialized projects and evaluate policies to ensure elderly well-being. Social work professionals play a significant role in this process by offering supportive services such as one-on-one counselling, organizing support groups, and facilitating community engagement.
- Social workers can identify the specific needs of elderly parents, including emotional, financial, and social support, while promoting their health and well-being through education on stress management and healthy lifestyles. They also assist in mediating family communication and addressing cultural sensitivities related to family dynamics and migration. Finally, they provide financial and legal guidance, enabling parents to access relevant services and resources to foster resilience and empowerment in their lives.

Conclusion

psychological issues related to empty nesting among parents of migrated children is a major issue requiring a holistic approach. Maintaining communication, engaging in hobbies, and strengthening partner relationships can help to tackle the loneliness. Social workers play a crucial role by offering counselling, support groups, and community programs while addressing emotional, financial, and cultural concerns. To Integrating awareness programs, geriatric counselling, and policy initiatives can empower elderly well-being. By fostering resilience through tailored interventions and community support, parents can navigate this life stage with optimism and improved quality of life.

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