

## EMPTY-NEST SYNDROME

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### ABSTRACT:

This study explores parental health and well-being in relation to “empty nest” transitions. Focus is placed on the purported empty nest syndrome (i.e., self-reported experiences of depression and emotional distress when children leave home) and variations by parental gender and cultural background. This study is primarily based on in-depth telephone interviews conducted in 2006 and 2007 with a subsample ( $n = 316$ ) of parents from four cultural groups (British, Chinese, Southern European, and Indo/East Indian) living in Metro Vancouver, British Columbia. A mixed-methodological approach is used whereby both quantitative and qualitative strategies are combined. Findings reveal that overall only a minority of parents report having experienced the empty nest syndrome.

### INTRODUCTION

The term “Empty nest syndrome” was first introduced in 1914 by the writer Dorothy Canfield. Empty-nest syndrome is the name given to a psychological condition that can affect parents (most commonly women) around the time that their children leave.

### DEFINITION

- **Empty Nest Syndrome** is a feeling of grief and loneliness parents or guardians may feel when their children leave home for the first time, such as to live on their own or to attend a college or university.
- "The **Empty Nest Syndrome** is a depressive reaction in middle-aged mothers attributed to role loss when all her children have grown up and ‘left the nest’." (Radloff).

### CAUSES

- Women going through other major changes, like dealing with menopause or coping with increasingly dependent elderly parents.
- Feelings of sadness and grief that parents may feel when they no longer have children living with them.

### BEHAVIORAL SYMPTOMS

- Sadness
- Worry
- Stress

- Loneliness
- Emptiness
- Uselessness
- Feelings of rejection
- Feeling no longer having a purpose in life
- Anxiety over the child's welfare
- Guilt—if the relationship with the child was strained

### PARENTS MAY EXPERIENCE SYMPTOMS ASSOCIATED WITH CLINICAL DEPRESSION

- Difficulty concentrating
- Inability to seek or derive pleasure
- Excessive worry or anxiety
- Indecision
- Parents who experience empty nest syndrome often questioned themselves.

### PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

- Hot flashes (a sudden uncomfortable sensation of heart)
- Night sweats
- Fatigue or lack of drive
- Irritability
- Changes in eating patterns
- Some may be seen spending time in the child's room

**MIDDLE AGE PHASE TASK**

There are some tasks to be planned during middle age.

**POSITIVE ASPECT OF EMPTY NEST SYNDROME**

- They are free to do more tasks and also they have more time to socialize
- They don't see their kids moving out as a loss but a new adventure.
- To find a common mission.
- Self-acceptance
- Positive relations with others
- Personal freedom
- Environmental mastery
- A new purpose in life
- Continued personal growth
- An empty nest can promote freedom, improved relationships

**NEGATIVE ASPECT OF EMPTY NEST SYNDROME**

Parents dealing with empty nest syndrome experienced

- ❖ Profound sense of loss
- ❖ Depression
- ❖ Alcoholism
- ❖ Identity crisis
- ❖ Marital conflicts.

**8 STEPS USED TO RECOVER FROM EMPTY NEST SYNDROME**

1. Prepare for the departure.
2. Shift aside the terrifying thoughts.
3. Explore the ways that you intend to keep in touch with your Children.
4. Understand what empty nest syndrome is, so that you can recognize the symptoms in your own situation.
5. Accept supports.
6. Start looking to your own needs.
7. Rediscover the love of your life.
8. Focus on some of the positive points of your kids moving out.

**NURSING MEASURES TO EDUCATE THE CLIENT TO EASE THE IMPACT OF EMPTY NEST SYNDROME**

- 1) Remind yourself that it's very normal to feel sad during this transition. Your deep attachment to your child only indicates the positive quality of your love for him/her. It's healthy to miss them.
- 2) Re define your children's departure as a new beginning instead of a loss or sad ending. Reframe the change as an opportunity for you to start a new life and do many of the things you were unable to do while you were raising your children.
- 3) Stay connected to your kids via email, texting and social networks such as Facebook. Remember that you can also video chat via Skype, etc.
- 4) Don't be hesitant to lean on friends and colleagues for support, especially the ones that have also been through empty nest syndrome themselves. You'll be pleasantly surprised to see how compassionate your friends can be.
- 5) Initiate self-care and do nice things for yourself on a routine basis. Get a massage, take a yoga class or an art class at a local college. Take a small vacation, tend to your garden, go to the gym, etc.
- 6) Don't try to accelerate your recovery period. Allow the grieving process to occur and run its course. Don't make any major changes in your life during this time, like selling the house or moving to another city or state. You may also consider going to a family counselor for guidance and support.
- 7) Do volunteer work with a local organization of your choosing. Get involved in helping others and focus your attention on trying to make their lives better. It will make you feel purposeful again.

## WAYS TO COPE WITH EMPTY NEST SYNDROME:

- **Accept the timing.** Avoid comparing your child's timetable to your own personal experience. Instead, focus on what you can do to help your child succeed when he or she does leave home.
- **Keep in touch.** You can continue to be close to your children even when you live apart. Make an effort to maintain regular contact through visits, phone calls, emails, texts or video chats.
- **Seek support.** If you're having a difficult time dealing with an empty nest, lean on loved ones and other close contacts for support. Share your feelings. If you feel depressed, consult your doctor or a mental health provider.
- **Stay positive.** Thinking about the extra time and energy you might have to devote to your marriage or personal interests after your last child leaves home might help you adapt to this major life change.

## NEW CHALLENGES

- Establishing a new kind of relationship with their adult children.
- Becoming a couple again, after years of sharing the home with children.
- Filling the void in the daily routine created by absent children.
- Lack of sympathy or understanding from others, who consider children moving out to be a normal, healthy event.

## SUMMARY

Empty nest syndrome refers to the grief that many parents feel when their children move out of home. This condition is typically more common in women, who are more likely to have had the role of primary carer. The feelings of grief can coincide with other major life events such as menopause or retirement. It can be difficult to find sympathy, but help and support is available.

## CONCLUSION:

Especially in transition period of development of a society, many mothers may not be prepared for separation from their children. These mothers will be vulnerable to complicated empty nest syndrome. In absence of adequate family support, the suffering parents will not get proper attention, care and treatment.

## REFERENCES

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## RECENT TRENDS

**In the last decade, the "Boomerang Generation"—young adults who return to live with their parents—have changed the traditional empty nest dynamics. Census data from 2008 showed that as many as 20 million 18- to 34-year-olds (34% of that age group) were living at home with their parents. A decade earlier, only fifteen percent of men and eight percent of women in that age range did so.**