

**EMPTY NEST SYNDROME: IMPACT ON POST MENOPAUSAL WOMEN  
A STUDY ON MOTHERS IN KERALA****ABIYA SUSAN TOJO**1<sup>ST</sup> YEAR MSW, KRISTUJAYANTI COLLEGE BANGALORE**ABSTRACT**

The study examines the effects of empty nest syndrome on post-menopausal mothers in Kerala, a place where family acts as the primary indicator of social agency and kinship. The psychological, emotional and social effects of empty nest on post Meno-pausal women are analysed through the study. Findings suggest that empty nest syndrome causes loneliness, depression, loss of purpose and identity crisis most commonly in mothers. Mothers being the primary caregivers are more directly impacted by the absence of their children in daily life. In this paper, the author explores various factors that make mothers more dependent on the family and their children. The author also identifies that middle class non-working women are more negatively affected by empty nest as they lack a social structure to occupy themselves.

**INTRODUCTION**

The empty nest syndrome is a condition where parents feel isolated, depressed or face any other psychological dilemma when their children leave the home for education, job or marriage. According to Barbara A. Mitchell and Loren D. Lovegreen, "The empty nest transition, or the period when children permanently leave the parental home, is a normative event—a developmental phase faced in midlife whereby parents expect their children to leave, become independent, and to successfully negotiate the demands associated with this life stage (Havighurst, 1953). When a child leaves, it is a significant event for both parents and child. And although many parents view it as a highly positive event, for others it is a conflicted time: a period of loving and letting go and a time when the day-to-day parental role is surrendered. For the child, it is a step toward independence; a symbolic marker of adulthood."

Menopause is one point in a continuum of life stages for women and marks the end of their reproductive years. The hormonal changes associated with menopause can affect physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being. [WHO]

Women's identity is viewed solely as a function of their reproductive roles in certain cultural contexts, so the occurrence of menopause makes an identity crisis in women. At the same time during this post Meno-pausal times itself women undergo the phase of empty nest, which diminishes their major role of motherhood. Both the situations impact the psychological transition of women.

In the cultural context of Kerala, women are more connected to the family and after marriage the only social interaction agency was family, especially for middle class women. The factors such as employability and financial independence also contribute to the depressive elements of empty nest in middle class women in Kerala. The aim of the researcher was to understand various factors that causes the depressive elements in empty nest stage and to explore the effects of empty nest syndrome on the mental health and wellbeing of post Meno pausal mothers in Kerala.

**HYPOTHESIS**

H1: Post-menopausal women in Kerala who have stronger attachment bonds with their children are more likely to experience higher levels of distress when their children leave home, contributing to the severity of empty nest syndrome.

H2: Social support networks, including extended family members and community groups, serve as protective factors against the negative effects of empty nest syndrome among post-menopausal women in Kerala, preventing feelings of purposelessness and loneliness.

H3: Post-menopausal women in Kerala who experience empty nest syndrome are greatly influenced by cultural views about ageing and motherhood, with societal expectations escalating feelings of anguish and loss.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Empty Nest Syndrome has drawn attention from psychologists around the world because it can cause parents to feel empty, depressed, and doubt their own existence. Research conducted in a variety of cultural contexts has demonstrated the significant influence that ENS has on mothers' well-being and has been linked to feelings of despair, anxiety, and low self-esteem. But the relationship between ENS and menopause is still largely unknown, especially in Kerala's cultural setting. Many articles attempt to connect the relation of this biological and emotional transition state. Many studies and literatures say that both have a similar effect on mothers. The close-knit kinship ties and deep caregiving tradition of Kerala's familial system provide a unique setting for comprehending the interaction of post-menopausal experiences and ENS. Mothers confronting ENS may find resilience in their familial support networks, but social standards and cultural expectations may also make them feel more alone and bereaved.

Previous research on empty nest syndrome has identified several factors that may contribute to its onset and severity, including attachment to children, marital satisfaction, and coping strategies. Studies specific to post-menopausal women have highlighted the role of hormonal changes and life stage transitions in exacerbating feelings of loneliness and depression. Cultural factors, such as collectivist values and intergenerational living arrangements, may also shape the experience of empty nest syndrome in Kerala.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Through a detailed study and analysis researcher finds the feelings, difficulties, and coping strategies that define Kerala's post-menopausal mother's experiences with empty nesting.

Emotional unrest and identity reconstruction were the major problem, as they don't have any other particular roles beyond being a mother, that motherhood defines their identity, also most of the mothers devote their life for their children after the marriage and rearing and bearing of children become their major responsibility. The rest period became a boring experience for them as they are used to the busy schedule of rearing and bearing. In some cases, ENS positively impact mothers was they start to involve themselves more in community activities and social interactions and they spend more time in pursuing their interests.

**Cultural Expectations and Social Pressures:** Various cultural groups adopt different norms, values, roles, and expectations regarding family types, relationships and ways of coping. Indo-Eastern origin parents have strict principles regarding the appropriate withdrawal time (i.e. for studies, or marriage) and some families maintain the tradition of older male descendants remaining with their wives within the family in order to care for elderly parents. In Africa, India, Middle East, and East Asia, older parents are held in very high esteem and it is virtually considered a child's duty to care for and respect them. When these principles are not respected, it causes stress, sadness, or shame to the parents. By negotiating the conflict between independence and filial responsibility in the Keralan social environment, mothers' experiences with ENS may be better understood in light of cultural norms and society expectations.

**Resilience and Coping Mechanisms:** Participants may discuss a variety of coping strategies used to get through the empty nest phase, such as turning to social support, pursuing worthwhile activities, and adopting spiritual practices to find comfort in the midst of chaos. The coping mechanisms are different based on the economic class they belong to. In upper class community women became part of elite groups and clubs and spend their time in such social structures. In lower class community women became more engaged in different SHGs and groups like kudumbasree. The case of middle class is different, as some of them may become more spiritual and involves themselves in religious endeavours and some will spend more time alone.

**Intergenerational dynamics and support networks:** Researching family dynamics and intergenerational support networks may help identify how extended kinship networks might help lessen the effects of ENS by promoting a sense of connection and belonging.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this article examines the complex interplay between ENS, menopause, and cultural context in shaping the experiences of post-menopausal mothers in Kerala. By analysing the situation of mothers traversing the empty nest phase, this research seeks to inform targeted interventions and support initiatives tailored to the unique needs of this demographic.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Psychoeducation and Counselling:** Promoting awareness and understanding of ENS among healthcare professionals, alongside offering counselling services which focus to the emotional needs of post-menopausal mothers.

**Community-Based Support Initiatives:** Fostering community-led support groups and initiatives that provide a safe space for mothers to share experiences, seek guidance, and cultivate social connections amidst the empty nest transition.

**Policy Advocacy:** Advocating for policies that recognize the psychosocial needs of post-menopausal women, integrating ENS awareness and fostering community-led support and support frameworks within broader healthcare and social welfare initiatives.

**Interdisciplinary Research and Collaboration:** Encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration between researchers, healthcare practitioners, and community stakeholders to foster a holistic understanding of ENS and develop multifaceted interventions.

In a nutshell, this article serves as exploration of the emotional landscape inhabited by post-menopausal mothers navigating the tumultuous terrain of Empty Nest Syndrome in Kerala, advocating for greater empathy, support, and solidarity within familial and societal realms.

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