FACULTY ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME

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Date of Event: 29 January, 2026

Faculty-in-Charge: Ms. Gigy Johnson

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REPORT

As part of the Faculty Enhancement Programme, a presentation was held on 29 January 2026 at the Seminar Hall, Main Block, from 03:15 p.m. to 04:00 p.m., by Ms. Anitta Jaison, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work. The topic of the session was "Parental Perceptions of Cultural and Livelihood Changes Driven by Youth Migration: An Exploratory Study". The presentation examined parental perceptions of cultural and livelihood changes influenced by youth migration, highlighting its social and economic implications. The session was attended by 51 faculty members from various departments. Participants actively contributed to the session through questions and discussions.

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Prepared by:	Verified by:	Approved by:
Ms. Gigy Johnson	Dr. Sabu Varghese	Rev. Fr. Dr. Paulachan K.J.
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BROCHURE

FACULTY ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME

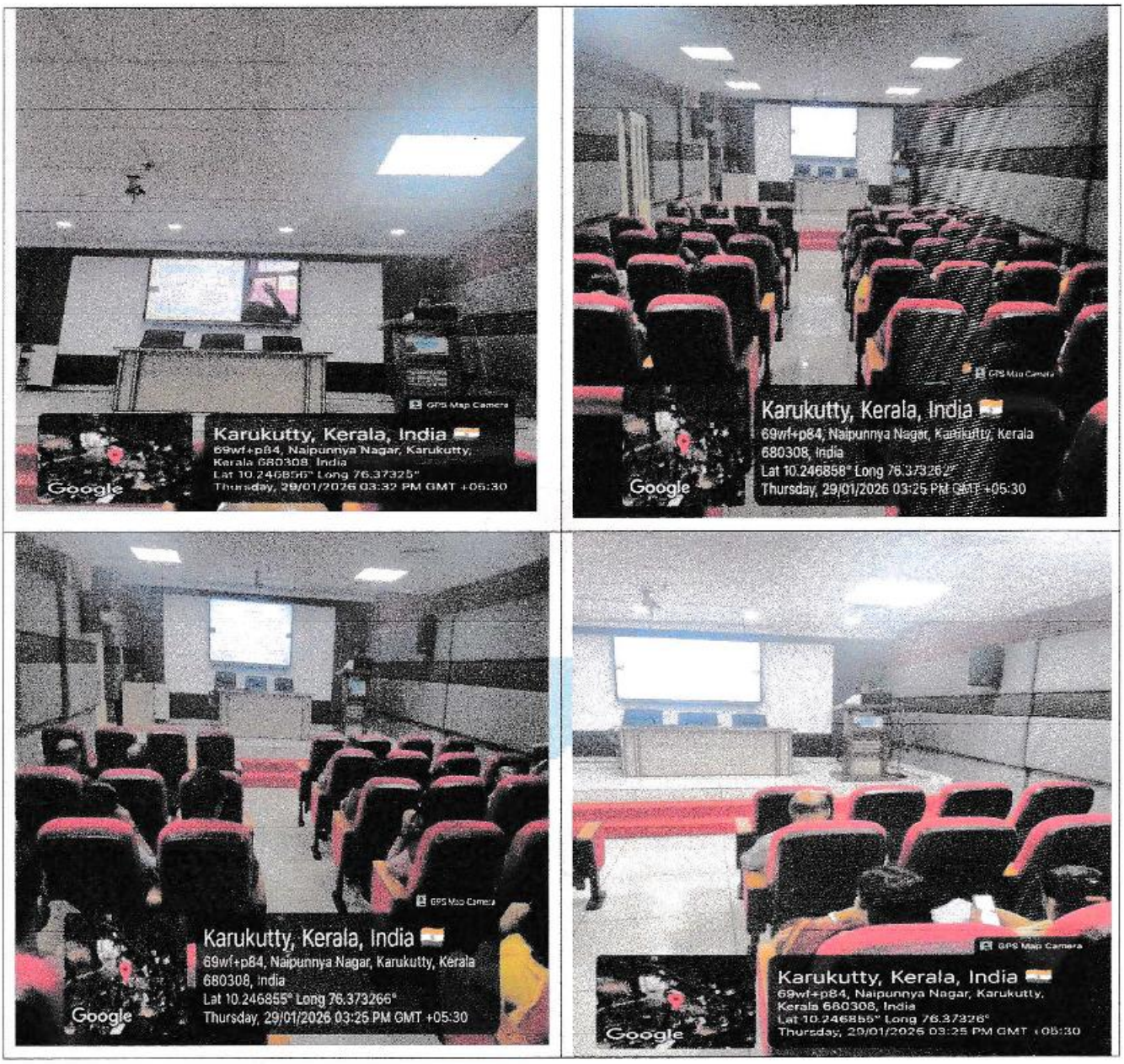


Ms. Anitta Jaison
Asst. Professor
Department of Social Work

Topic : Parental Perceptions of Cultural and Livelihood Changes Driven by Youth Migration: An Exploratory Study

DATE : 29 JANUARY, 2026
TIME : 03.15-04.00 PM
VENUE : MAIN BLOCK, SEMINAR HALL

PHOTOGRAPHS



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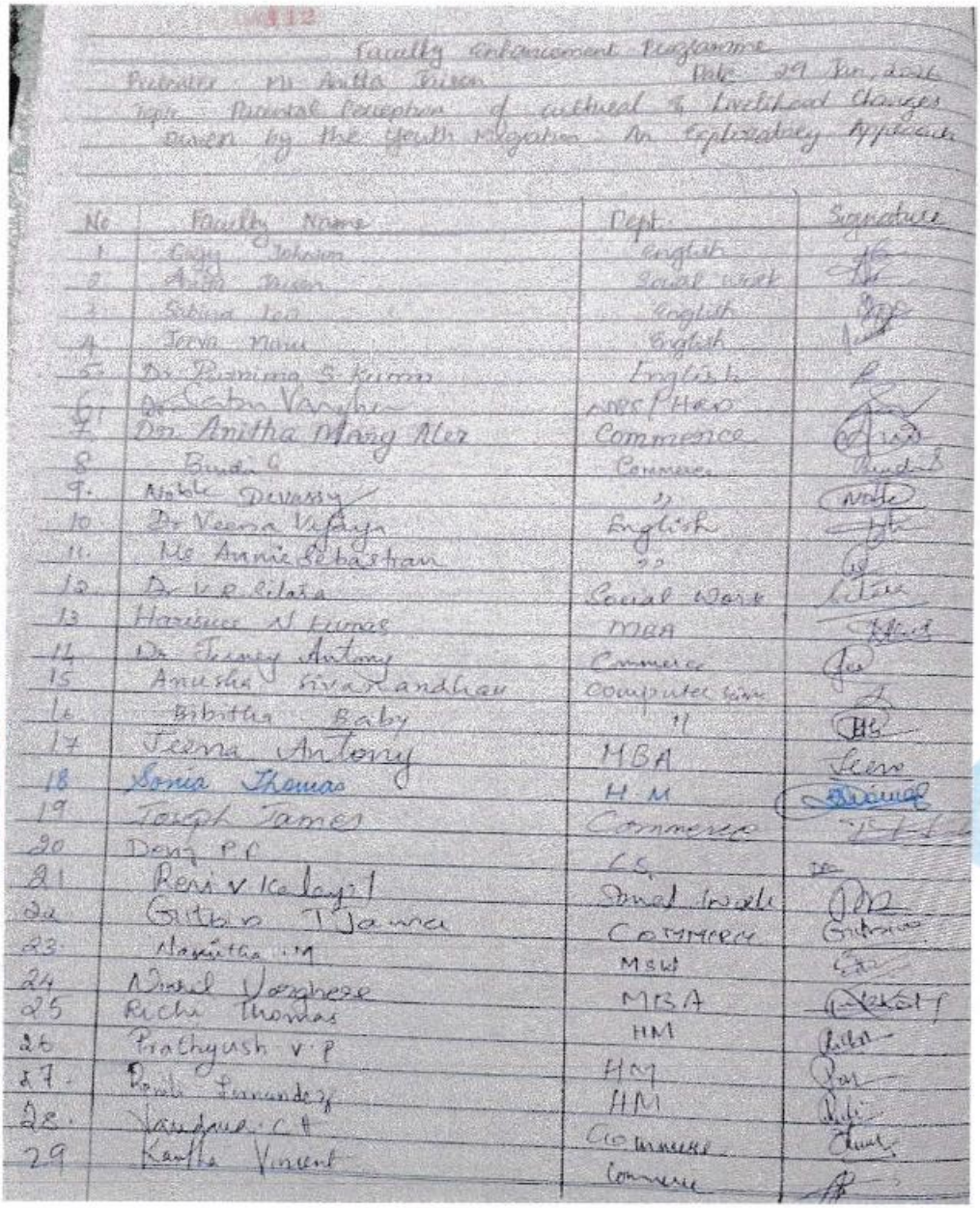
PARTICIPANTS' LIST



Faculty Enhancement Programme

Presenter: Mr Anitha Jaison Date: 29 Jan, 2026

Topic: Parental Perception of cultural & Livelihood Changes Driven by the Youth Migration: An Exploratory Approach

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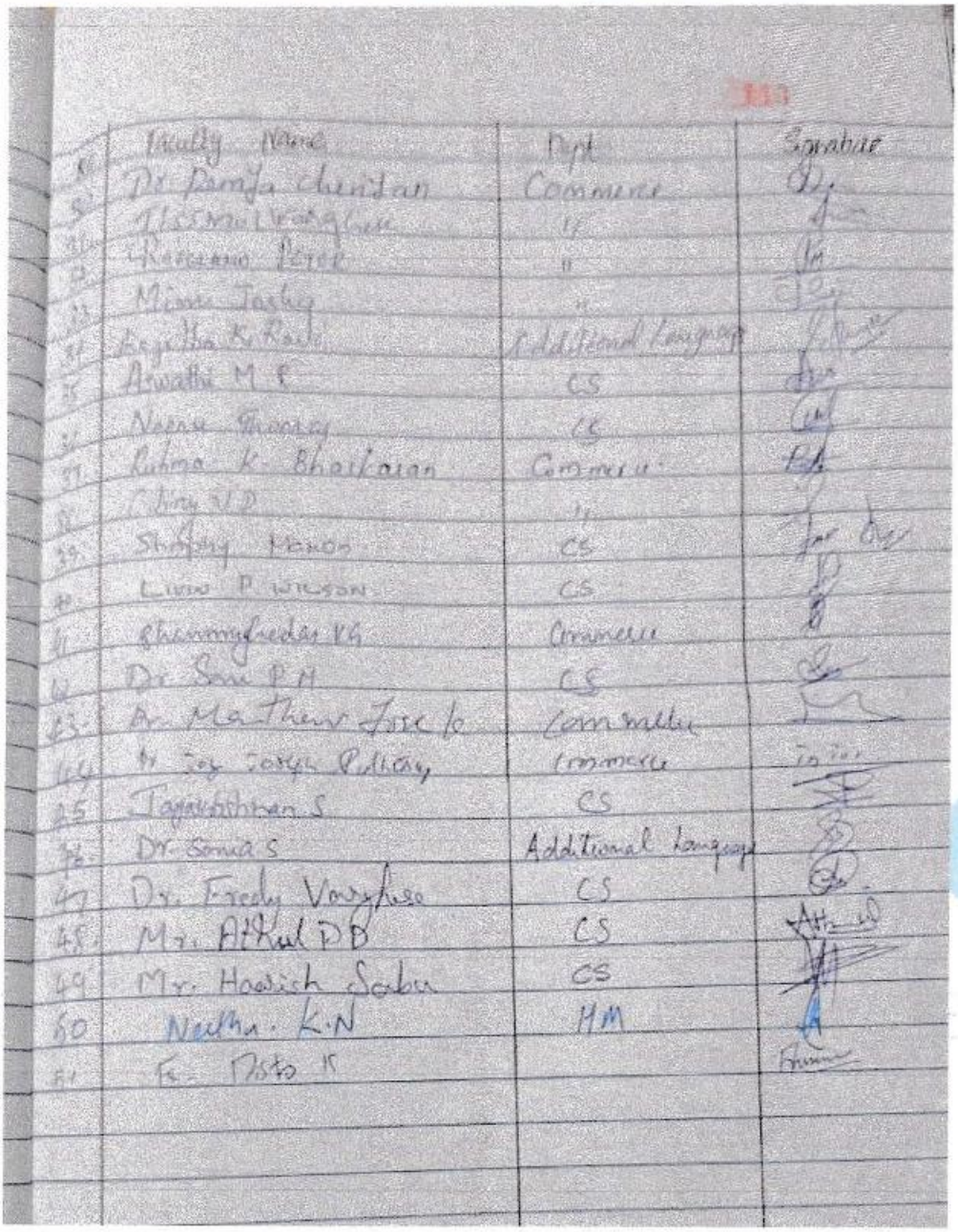

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32	Rosemary Peter	"	
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Parental Perceptions of Cultural and Livelihood Changes Driven by Youth Migration: An Exploratory Study

Anitta Jaison, Asst.Professor, Department of Social Work, NIMIT

Abstract

The transition to an empty nest, where children leave home for education or employment, poses significant challenges to parental well-being, particularly in emotional and psychological domains. In Kerala, a state known for its high rates of migration to foreign countries, the impact of empty nest syndrome (ENS) is often amplified due to the long-term separation of families. This concept paper explores the multifaceted effects of ENS on parental well-being, with a special focus on the cultural, social, and psychological dimensions prevalent in Kerala. The widespread migration of children to European and Gulf countries creates a prolonged sense of separation, heightening the sense of loss, loneliness, and anxiety among parents. Empty Nest Syndrome (ENS) is not classified as a clinical condition under the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-V), but it is recognized in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) under "Other Associated Problems with Social or Cultural Environment" (Code: QE0Y). Despite its absence from the DSM-V, ENS has been widely observed as a psychological phenomenon among parents for over five decades, particularly in developing countries, when their children leave home for employment, higher education, or marriage. In recent years, as more job opportunities and institutions emerge both in India and abroad, children increasingly leave home to pursue their dreams.

Being abroad is a social status in Kerala. Those who departed without ensuring their security or job profile went to work at any kind of unknown job. However, the empty-nest syndrome has a significant impact on Kerala's distinct cultural fabric. Kerala parents are greatly impacted by cultural relativism and social disengagement. They may be adjusting to this circumstance in response to social exclusion and unhappiness. Due to their children's shifting, the conventional family structure, community network, and social support system have all been lost (Mathew, S., & Joseph, A. 2021).

In Indian society, where joint family living is preferred, middle-aged parents often cohabit with their adult children. These parents, who belong to the "sandwich generation," are already navigating the challenges of intergenerational gaps. When their children leave, the emotional impact can be even greater. While existing literature suggests that this grief typically lasts two weeks, the duration of symptoms can extend well beyond this timeframe, sometimes persisting for months. Without timely intervention, prolonged ENS may pose a subtle risk of developing into depression.

Key Words: Empty Nest Syndrome (ENS), Parental Well-Being, Migration, Cultural Relativism, Sandwich Generation, Social Disengagement, Social Support Systems

INTRODUCTION

Empty Nest Syndrome (ENS) refers to the emotional challenges parents face when their children leave home, often for education, employment, or marriage. While this life transition is a natural phase, it can lead to feelings of loneliness, loss of purpose, and depression, particularly among parents who derive a sense of identity from their role in child-rearing. However, each person's culture, socioeconomic background, coping strategy, and social support network are unique, therefore this affects them differently. Other factors that contribute to parents having an empty nest include gender differences, the role and influence of the parent, attachment to the children, parental issues including divorce, and single parenting. Dorothy Canfield coined 'Empty Nest' terminology in her 1914 book, *Mothers and Children*, describing it as 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. Western migration is currently growing quickly in India, particularly in Kerala. Kerala would thus become a geriatric civilization; there won't be any children or young people living there in the future. Hence, the psychological wellness of parents turns into a mental illness empty of treatment.

Migration within states and between Gulf countries is common in India. Research on the relationship between migration within states and the service industry has demonstrated how the service sector helps create job possibilities for the migrant population (Mitra, 2020). India along with caregiving share a profound cultural relationship. Numerous factors contribute to migration, both within and across states (Neeraj Kumar). The Ministry of Statistics and Programmes of India's Periodic Labour Force Survey provides a thorough picture of migration in 2021–2022. Thus, with COVID-19, there has been a shift in the pattern of individuals leaving India and migrating to the west. However, because of migration, the younger generation is less concerned about caregiving and parental supervision, which has a significant emotional impact on ENS. The aging population is growing, and having adult children who live far away has psychological effects on them.

Similar to western nations, being abroad is a social status in Kerala. Those who departed without ensuring their security or job profile went to work at any kind of unknown job. However, the empty-nest syndrome has a significant impact on Kerala's distinct cultural fabric. Keralan parents are greatly impacted by cultural relativism and social disengagement. They may be adjusting to this circumstance in response to

social exclusion and unhappiness. Due to their children's shifting, the conventional family structure, community network, and social support system have all been lost (Mathew, S., & Joseph, A. 2021). This research highlights the cultural variations in managing empty nest syndrome while concentrating on the mental health of parents. This will provide a comprehensive understanding of how various cultural contexts affect the coping mechanisms used by parents with ENS.

This concept paper explores the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of ENS in Kerala, where migration is often viewed as a status symbol, but the departure of children can result in loneliness, loss of social support, and emotional strain on parents. Particularly affected are middle-aged parents, often referred to as the "sandwich generation," who struggle with intergenerational gaps and are at risk of developing depressive symptoms if ENS persists without proper intervention.

OBJECTIVES

1. To Know the psychological impacts of Empty Nest Syndrome on parents, particularly those whose children have migrated for education or employment.

2. To explore the social and cultural dimensions of ENS in the context of Kerala's migration patterns and traditional family structures.

3. To identify gender differences in the experience and coping mechanisms of ENS among Kerala's parents.

4. To highlights new concepts on ENS and parental Wellbeing in the context of migration

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to Empty Nest Syndrome (ENS)

Empty Nest Syndrome (ENS) is a term used to describe the feelings of sadness, loneliness, and grief that parents often experience when their children leave home (Bouchard, 2014). Though ENS is not formally recognized as a clinical diagnosis in DSM-V, it is considered a legitimate emotional state that affects mental health. In Kerala, where family ties are culturally significant, and joint families are often the norm, the departure of children due to migration can lead to an intensified sense of loss (Mathew & Joseph, 2021). The high rate of youth migration from Kerala to European and Gulf countries creates a unique

socio-cultural context for ENS, as prolonged separation from children exacerbates feelings of isolation and emotional distress (Joseph, 2019)

Gender Differences in ENS and Coping Mechanisms

Kristensen et al. (2021) report that there is no longer a relationship between depressive symptoms and loneliness affecting parents after their children leave home. The study highlights decreased loneliness in men and increased depressive symptoms in women. However, it does not specify the impact of children moving out and how parents cope with these situations. Nevertheless, this study will help in understanding the life cycle changes among older parents.

Parental Involvement and Cultural Contexts

Studies suggest that ENS is more pronounced in parents who are deeply involved in their children's lives, particularly in traditional societies where parental identity is closely tied to their children's presence (Stewart, 2006). The migration of children also disrupts the support systems traditionally provided by intergenerational living arrangements, which in Kerala are increasingly eroded due to changing economic and social dynamics (Krishnan, 2018). Moreover, cultural expectations around caregiving and gender roles often mean that mothers experience more intense psychological distress than fathers when children leave home (Bouchard, 2014).

Theoretical Frameworks of ENS

Theoretical frameworks such as Attachment Theory and Role Theory have been applied to understanding ENS. Attachment Theory posits that the emotional bonds between parents and children are fundamental to parental identity, and their disruption can trigger feelings of abandonment and loneliness (Bowlby, 1988). Role Theory, on the other hand, examines how the transition to an empty nest challenges the parental role, often leaving parents struggling to redefine their identity and purpose in life (Stewart, 2006).

Socio-Demographic Factors

Mansoor & Hasan (2019) explored how ENS affects middle-aged adults based on gender, educational qualification, and the departure of children. Their study indicates that parents generally face less severe ENS when children leave for education compared to marriage, as parents are more prepared for the latter. The research also found that less educated parents experience more ENS when their children leave home. Although the study does not specify cultural and societal environments, it contributes to the understanding of ENS in different contexts.

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Community Engagement and Coping Strategies

Lee & Park (2021) investigated how social networks, spiritual practices, and community engagement significantly improve the well-being of elderly parents experiencing ENS, especially those whose children have migrated abroad. Their findings suggest that parents who engage in volunteer work report higher life satisfaction. This study contributes to the understanding of interventional strategies that can support parents dealing with ENS.

Gender Differences in Parenting Dynamics

Ivanova (2020) assessed the happiness of biological parents and empty nest stepparents. Compared to biological mothers, stepmothers reported greater life satisfaction. Additionally, fathers with biological children from previous relationships expressed more contentment. This highlights the role of gender differences and parental responsibilities, which could be an important analytical component in the current study

Cultural Influences on Parental Well-Being

Agarwal (2023) discusses the emotional experiences associated with ENS, describing it as a mix of pride, longing, and loneliness when parents face empty homes. The study found that strong family ties and caregiving expectations exacerbate the psychological impact of ENS among Indian parents. Insights from psychiatric professionals confirm that ENS can negatively affect physical, mental, and social well-being. However, it also presents an opportunity for couples to focus on shared goals.

Life Satisfaction Among Indian Parents

Arora & Khanam (2023) examined life satisfaction in Indian parents during the empty nest stage, noting that collectivist societies prioritize interconnectedness over independence. Their findings reveal both positive and negative aspects of ENS, highlighting that individual factors and environmental contexts significantly influence parental life satisfaction. However, the study's limited respondent pool necessitates further research in the Indian context.

Marital Adjustment and Coping Strategies

Choudhary & Sain (2020) found a negative correlation between ENS and marital adjustment among midlife Indian couples. They noted that empty nest couples tend to focus more on their marital relationships and enjoy activities together, leading to increased financial freedom. However, the study primarily addressed marital roles and did not fully explore parental roles or identity.

Migration and its Impact on Parental Well-Being in Kerala

Rajan & Zachariah (2023) provide insights into the implications of migration on Kerala's population, highlighting not just statistical data but also qualitative aspects like migration's effects on elderly parents. With approximately 2.7 million Keralites living abroad, particularly in the Gulf and Western countries, understanding these dynamics is critical for analyzing the well-being of parents experiencing ENS.

Social Support and Quality of Life for Empty Nesters

Abraham & Joseph (2023) focus on social support and quality of life for elderly individuals in the empty nest phase, particularly within the Elikkulam Grama Panchayat in Kottayam District. Although this study mainly assesses the adaptation of elderly individuals to the empty nest period without offering intervention strategies, it provides valuable insights into the quality of life factors that could contribute to understanding parental experiences.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

1. **Literature Review**

   A comprehensive review of academic literature on Empty Nest Syndrome, migration trends in Kerala, and parental well-being was conducted. Scholarly articles, books, reports, and case studies were sourced from peer-reviewed journals and academic databases such as JSTOR, PubMed, and Google Scholar.

2. Theoretical Framework

   This study was framed using Attachment Theory and Role Theory to understand the emotional bonds between parents and children and the shifts in parental identity during the transition to an empty nest (Bowlby, 1988; Stewart, 2006).

3. **Comparative Analysis**

   A comparative approach was employed to analyze how the experience of ENS in Kerala differs from other cultural contexts. This included examining the effects of migration, socio-economic status, and family structures on parental well-being.

4. **Cultural Contextualization**

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Kerala's unique socio-cultural landscape, characterized by joint family systems and high migration rates, used as a case study to explore the broader implications of ENS in a globalizing world. The paper also examined how modern communication technologies such as video calls and social media impact the experience of ENS by maintaining virtual family connections (Mathew & Joseph, 2021).

KEY DIMENSIONS

Psychological Impacts

The psychological toll of ENS on parents includes feelings of loneliness, depression, and loss of identity, especially when children leave for extended periods (Bouchard, 2014). Kerala's high rates of youth migration further intensify these psychological challenges due to the prolonged physical distance between parents and children.

Social and Cultural Dimensions

Kerala's cultural emphasis on family unity and traditional joint family systems means that the departure of children disrupts social cohesion. Parents may experience social isolation and a loss of community ties as the support networks that typically come with intergenerational living are diminished (Krishnan, 2018).

Gender Differences

Research indicates that mothers tend to experience more severe emotional distress than fathers when children leave the home, as their identities are often more closely tied to caregiving roles (Bouchard, 2014). In Kerala, where cultural norms emphasize maternal caregiving, this distinction is particularly pronounced.

Role of Migration

Migration trends in Kerala have significantly altered family dynamics. The physical absence of children due to migration to foreign countries for work or education leads to prolonged ENS, which can last much longer than the conventional period of adjustment (Joseph, 2019).

Coping Mechanisms and Interventions

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Effective coping mechanisms, such as maintaining regular communication with children through digital platforms, participating in community support groups, and engaging in hobbies, can help parents navigate the emotional challenges of ENS. Professional counseling and intervention programs may also be beneficial in preventing the long-term psychological impact of ENS (Bouchard, 2014).

DISCUSSIONS

The psychological implications of ENS are profound, often leading to increased feelings of loneliness and a potential decline in mental health. Studies indicate that parents, especially those closely involved in their children's lives, experience more pronounced symptoms of ENS (Stewart, 2006). In Kerala, cultural expectations surrounding caregiving and the importance of familial roles further exacerbate these feelings, particularly among mothers, who may experience heightened psychological distress when their children leave home (Bouchard, 2014). In Kerala, the traditional joint family system has been a cornerstone of social structure, providing essential support systems for parents. The migration of children disrupts these intergenerational living arrangements, leading to a breakdown in community networks and social support (Krishnan, 2018). The loss of these connections can leave parents feeling isolated and disconnected, intensifying the emotional impact of an empty nest. Additionally, the cultural context in Kerala, which emphasizes strong family ties and caregiving expectations, shapes the way ENS is experienced and understood among parents. Research has shown that the impact of ENS varies significantly based on gender. Studies reveal that while men may experience decreased loneliness, women often report increased depressive symptoms following the departure of their children (Kristensen et al., 2021). This gender disparity in coping mechanisms and emotional responses underscores the need for tailored interventions that address the specific challenges faced by mothers and fathers during this transition.

Youth migration from Kerala, particularly to European and Gulf countries, adds a complex layer to the understanding of ENS. The prolonged separation associated with migration not only intensifies feelings of loss but also disrupts traditional family dynamics (Joseph, 2019). The societal perception of migration as a means to achieve economic stability further complicates parental responses, as parents grapple with conflicting feelings of pride and longing for their children. Given the multifaceted nature of ENS, developing effective interventional strategies is crucial for supporting parents during this transition.

Research suggests that community engagement, social networks, and spiritual practices significantly enhance the well-being of elderly parents experiencing ENS (Lee & Park, 2021). Implementing support programs that encourage social interaction and provide resources for coping with the emotional challenges of an empty nest could mitigate the negative impacts of this transition.

NUANCED CONCEPT INTRODUCED

This concept paper introduces a new framework for understanding parental well-being during the transition to an empty nest, considering the unique socio-cultural dynamics at play in Kerala. It seeks to explore the interplay of psychological, social, and cultural factors that shape parental experiences during this transition, particularly in the context of increasing youth migration. By examining these dimensions, the paper aims to contribute to the development of targeted interventions that can support parents as they navigate the complexities of an empty nest.

1. **Redefining Parental Identity and Transition to Empty Nest**

   The departure of children marks a significant shift in parental identity, necessitating a reevaluation of roles and responsibilities. This transition can be particularly challenging in Kerala, where traditional norms emphasize close familial ties. The emotional void created by a child's absence can lead to feelings of purposelessness, prompting parents to seek new identities outside of their parental roles. Understanding how this identity redefinition occurs within the cultural context of Kerala can provide insights into the emotional struggles faced by parents. When considering gender differences in the empty nest experience, it is essential to address the impact of menopause on mothers during this transitional phase. The onset of menopause can bring about significant physical and emotional changes, including mood swings, anxiety, and a sense of loss regarding fertility and youth. These changes can compound the feelings of sadness and loneliness that mothers often experience when their children leave home. Additionally, societal expectations around caregiving can place added pressure on mothers, as they may feel a heightened sense of duty to support their adult children while simultaneously managing their own emotional well-being. In contrast, fathers may experience this transition differently, as societal norms often dictate that they maintain a more stoic demeanour. This disparity in emotional experiences and societal

expectations can lead to a significant gender divide in how parents cope with the challenges associated with an empty nest.

2. **Cultural Context and Emotional Responses**

In Kerala, cultural expectations surrounding family and caregiving play a crucial role in shaping emotional responses to ENS. Parents may experience feelings of guilt or inadequacy if they perceive themselves as unable to support their children, especially in a migration context where family separations are common. This cultural lens is vital for understanding the psychological impacts of ENS, as it highlights the societal pressures that influence parental emotions.

3. **The Impact of Migration on Family Dynamics**

Youth migration has significant implications for family dynamics, often exacerbating the emotional challenges associated with ENS. As children migrate for better opportunities, parents may experience a dual sense of pride and loss, creating a complex emotional landscape. The long-term nature of these separations can lead to feelings of abandonment and emotional distress, particularly in parents who have heavily invested in their children's futures.

4. **The Sandwich Generation and ENS**

The rise of individualism is not the sole factor contributing to the growing trend of nuclear families in India. Middle-aged couples caught in what is known as the intergenerational squeeze are referred to as the "sandwich generation." These individuals often find themselves living with adult children who postpone their independence and elderly parents who are living longer. In India, the sandwich generation is a common phenomenon, as the tradition of cohabiting in non-nuclear families is widely accepted. Members of this generation aspire to achieve both financial and relational growth, which may prompt them to leave their current households and form their own nuclear families. This indicates that the transition to an empty nest does not always carry negative connotations; rather, it highlights how culturally acceptable timelines for separation can vary. Parents often have specific expectations regarding how their children should transition into adulthood, shaped by social norms about when children should leave home and the reasons for their departure. These expectations are deeply rooted in their social, cultural, and personal beliefs. Research indicates that children from certain ethnic backgrounds, such as those in South Asia, are more likely to delay leaving their parental homes due to these collectivist cultural factors.

5. **The Role of Social Support Networks and Intervention**

Support systems play a crucial role in mitigating the effects of ENS. In Kerala, the erosion of traditional family structures due to migration can lead to feelings of isolation among parents. The introduction of community support initiatives, such as peer support groups and counseling services, can help address these challenges. Understanding how social networks and community engagement can bolster parental well-being is essential for developing effective interventions. By introducing a comprehensive framework for understanding parental well-being during the transition to an empty nest, this concept paper highlights the intricate interplay of psychological, social, and cultural factors in Kerala's unique context. It sets the stage for further research and discussion on effective support mechanisms for parents navigating this significant life transition, ultimately aiming to enhance their emotional and psychological well-being.

6. **Role of Social Work Discipline**

Social work employs various methods as interventional strategies to enhance parental well-being, particularly during transitions like Empty Nest Syndrome (ENS). Individual counseling is a key approach, providing a safe space for parents to express their feelings of grief, loneliness, and anxiety associated with their children leaving home. Social workers utilize techniques such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) to help parents reframe negative thoughts and develop coping strategies, thus promoting emotional resilience. Additionally, family therapy can address dynamics that contribute to parental distress, facilitating open communication among family members. Support groups offer a community for parents experiencing similar challenges, fostering a sense of belonging and shared understanding, while educational workshops empower parents with practical skills for managing their emotional well-being.

Community engagement is another important method, as social workers encourage parents to participate in local activities, which can enhance social connections and reduce feelings of isolation. Crisis intervention strategies are also vital in addressing immediate emotional distress, ensuring parents receive timely support and resources. Importantly, social workers adopt a culturally sensitive approach, considering the unique cultural context of families in Kerala. By assessing various factors affecting parental well-being through a holistic lens, social work methods provide comprehensive support that

fosters resilience, strengthens family relationships, and ultimately improves the quality of life for parents navigating the challenges of an empty nest.

CONCLUSION

By introducing a comprehensive framework for understanding parental well-being during the transition to an empty nest, this concept paper highlights the intricate interplay of psychological, social, and cultural factors in Kerala's unique context. It sets the stage for further research and discussion on effective support mechanisms for parents navigating this significant life transition, ultimately aiming to enhance their emotional and psychological well-being.

ocial work methods provide comprehensive interventional strategies aimed at enhancing parental well-being during transitions such as Empty Nest Syndrome. By employing these diverse strategies, social workers can help parents cope with their emotions, strengthen family relationships, and foster resilience, ultimately leading to improved mental health and quality of life.

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