

Research Paper

Emotional Adjustment and Identity Crisis among Indian Mothers Experiencing Empty Nest Syndrome

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined the relationship between Emotional Regulation and Empty Nest Syndrome among Indian mothers. The study was conducted on a sample of 76 Indian mothers experiencing the empty-nest transition. Emotional Regulation and Empty Nest Syndrome were assessed using standardized measures. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the mean and standard deviation of the variables, while Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between Emotional Regulation and Empty Nest Syndrome. The findings indicated a mean score of 44.05 (SD = 7.52) for Emotional Regulation and 139.20 (SD = 28.40) for Empty Nest Syndrome. The correlation analysis revealed a positive relationship ($r = 0.333$) between Emotional Regulation and Empty Nest Syndrome, indicating a weak-to-moderate association between the two variables. The findings suggest that emotional processes are associated with mothers' experiences during the empty-nest transition. The study highlights the importance of understanding the psychological experiences of mothers during this significant family-life transition and may provide useful insights for counseling, emotional support, and future research.

Keywords: *Emotional Regulation, Empty Nest Syndrome, Indian Mothers, Emotional Adjustment, Psychological Well-being, Motherhood, Empty Nest Transition*

An important developmental milestone in the family life cycle is the shift from active parenting to an "empty nest" period. When children leave home for reasons such as further education, job, marriage, or migration, their parents may suffer from Empty Nest Syndrome (ENS), which is characterised by emotional anguish, loneliness, melancholy, and psychological discomfort (Badiani & Sousa, 2016). Despite ENS's lack of official diagnosis as a clinical disease, the effects it has on middle-aged parents' mental health, sense of self, and relationships with others are attracting more and more attention in the field of psychology. Motherhood in India is strongly linked to caring and family duties, thus when children leave home, it may cause significant emotional and psychological distress for their families. Mothers in India often spend a great deal of time caring for their children and juggling all of the household chores. For women in traditional Indian culture, being a mother and taking care of the home are central to who they are as individuals. Therefore, moms may feel lost, lonely, emotionally empty, and confused about who they are as their children grow

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Emotional Adjustment and Identity Crisis among Indian Mothers Experiencing Empty Nest Syndrome

up and go their own ways. Due to their higher level of emotional investment in childrearing and everyday caregiving, moms are more likely to have harsher emotional responses to empty nest transitions compared to dads, according to research (Mitchell & Lovegreen, 2009). Mothers undergo a psychological and emotional process of adjustment known as "emotional adjustment" during the empty nest era as they adjust to life without children. For emotional recovery to take place, it may be necessary to establish new habits, strengthen marital bonds, reawaken lost passions, and participate in extracurricular or professional pursuits. Anxiety, despair, stress, social disengagement, and worse mental health may result from inadequate adjustment, however. According to recent research conducted in India, middle-aged people who have experienced more empty nests tend to be less happy and emotionally fulfilled (Pandey & Chaurasiya, 2026). Identity crisis is another significant psychological issue linked to ENS. An individual is experiencing an identity crisis if they are unsure of who they are, what they are here to do, or why they are here. After their children leave home, mothers who have always seen themselves mostly via their roles as parents may find it difficult to reimagine who they are. When caring responsibilities are abruptly reduced, it may lead to feelings of emotional instability and a lack of purpose. This is made much more difficult by cultural expectations inside Indian households, where women are highly esteemed for their caring and maternal responsibilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dwivedi (2026) reviewed the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of Empty Nest Syndrome (ENS). The review identified loneliness, anxiety, sadness, and changes in self-identity as common experiences among parents. It also highlighted intensive parenting, marital dissatisfaction, and limited social support as important risk factors.

Mehta (2025) explored the lived experiences of Indian homemaker mothers during the transition to an empty nest. The findings showed that mothers experienced mixed emotions, including pride, happiness, grief, loneliness, and a sense of loss. Cultural expectations surrounding maternal sacrifice intensified these emotional difficulties.

Gupta (n.d.) examined ENS in the context of changing family structures, globalization, migration, and urbanization. The study highlighted that the decline of joint-family systems may increase social isolation among older parents. It particularly emphasized the disruption of women's caregiving identities after children leave home, which may contribute to identity crisis, anxiety, and depression. Counseling, community involvement, and social support were suggested as important approaches to healthy adjustment.

Royena (2024) investigated social support and loneliness among middle-aged parents experiencing ENS using a mixed-methods approach. The study found a significant negative relationship between social support and loneliness, indicating that greater social support was associated with lower loneliness. Participants reported using spirituality, online communities, family support, and continued communication with children as coping strategies.

Hartanto et al. (2024) examined the empty-nest experience from a cross-cultural perspective, particularly comparing Western and Asian contexts. The study suggested that the transition can result either in role loss and reduced well-being or in relief from parenting-related role strain. Cultural expectations, gender roles, family structures, and social involvement influence these outcomes.

Emotional Adjustment and Identity Crisis among Indian Mothers Experiencing Empty Nest Syndrome

Sample

The study comprised 76 Indian mothers who were experiencing the empty-nest transition after their child/children had left home for reasons such as education, employment, or marriage. The participants' demographic characteristics included age, gender, and educational qualification, were assessed using standardized questionnaire items.

Locale of the study

The study was conducted among Indian mothers from different geographical and residential backgrounds in India, with participants recruited through online data collection. The locale was not restricted to a specific city or state, allowing the study to capture diverse experiences of mothers experiencing Empty Nest Syndrome.

Variables of the Study

1. **Emotional Adjustment (Independent Variable):** Emotional adjustment refers to the ability of mothers to manage and adapt to the emotional changes associated with their children leaving home.
2. **Identity Crisis (Dependent Variable):** Identity crisis refers to confusion or uncertainty regarding one's self-concept, purpose, and personal role after the children leave home.

Tool Description

- **Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ):** The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ), developed by Gross and John (2003), is a 10-item self-report scale that measures two emotion regulation strategies: Cognitive Reappraisal (6 items) and Expressive Suppression (4 items).
- **Empty Nest Syndrome Scale–Indian Form (ENS-IF):** The scale was developed by Tanvi Jhangiani, Madhumita Dutta, Arundhati, Trina Banerjee, and Grace Maria Jochan, is a 50-item self-report instrument.

Statistical Analysis

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of all the variables

	Emotional Regulation	Empty Nest Syndrome
Mean	44.05263	139.1974
Standard Deviation	7.523997	28.40376
N	76	76

The table shows that the mean score for Emotional Regulation was 44.05 (SD = 7.52), while the mean score for Empty Nest Syndrome was 139.20 (SD = 28.40) among 76 participants. The results indicate greater variability in Empty Nest Syndrome scores compared to Emotional Regulation scores.

Table 2 Correlation between Emotional Regulation and Empty Nest Syndrome

	Emotional Regulation	Empty Nest Syndrome
Emotional Regulation	1	
Empty Nest Syndrome	0.33305	1

Emotional Adjustment and Identity Crisis among Indian Mothers Experiencing Empty Nest Syndrome

Table 2 shows a positive correlation ($r = 0.333$) between Emotional Regulation and Empty Nest Syndrome. This indicates a weak-to-moderate positive relationship, suggesting that higher emotional regulation scores are associated with higher Empty Nest Syndrome scores among the participants.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

The study found a positive correlation ($r = 0.333$) between Emotional Regulation and Empty Nest Syndrome among the 76 participants. This indicates a weak-to-moderate positive relationship between the two variables.

The finding suggests that participants with higher Emotional Regulation scores also reported higher levels of Empty Nest Syndrome. This may indicate that emotional regulation is related to how mothers experience and respond to the emotional challenges associated with the empty-nest transition. However, the correlation does not establish a causal relationship between the variables.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined Emotional Regulation and Empty Nest Syndrome among 76 Indian mothers. The findings showed a mean score of 44.05 ($SD = 7.52$) for Emotional Regulation and 139.20 ($SD = 28.40$) for Empty Nest Syndrome, indicating individual differences in both variables. The correlation analysis revealed a positive relationship ($r = 0.333$) between Emotional Regulation and Empty Nest Syndrome. This suggests that mothers reporting higher emotional regulation scores also tended to report higher levels of Empty Nest Syndrome. The finding indicates that emotional regulation is associated with mothers' experiences during the empty-nest transition, although the relationship should not be interpreted as causal.

Overall, the study highlights that the empty-nest phase is an important psychological transition for mothers and that emotional processes may be closely connected with their experiences during this period. The findings can contribute to a better understanding of the psychological adjustment of mothers whose children have left home and may provide a basis for future research and supportive interventions.

Implications of the Study

- 1. Psychological Counseling:** The findings highlight the need for counseling services to help Indian mothers manage the emotional challenges associated with the empty-nest transition.
- 2. Identity Development:** Mental health professionals can help mothers redefine their identity beyond their traditional caregiving and parenting roles and encourage them to develop new interests and personal goals.
- 3. Emotional Regulation:** Interventions focusing on healthy emotional regulation and coping strategies may help mothers manage the emotional difficulties associated with Empty Nest Syndrome.
- 4. Family Support:** The study emphasizes the importance of maintaining healthy communication and emotional connections between mothers and their adult children, even when they live separately.

Emotional Adjustment and Identity Crisis among Indian Mothers Experiencing Empty Nest Syndrome

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Emotional Adjustment and Identity Crisis among Indian Mothers Experiencing Empty Nest Syndrome

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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