

## **INFLUENCE OF EMPTY-NEST SYNDROME IN THE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE ON EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT OF TEACHERS IN LAGOS STATE**

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### ***Abstract***

*As people pass through different stages in life, they are faced with the challenges that come with their new responsibilities, stage or age. Empty-nest syndrome is one of such challenges which is mostly thought as being characteristic of people in the empty-nest stage of the family life cycle. This study examined the influence of empty-nest syndrome and family life cycle on social and emotional adjustment of teachers in Lagos State. This was a descriptive study which adopted a survey research design. The researcher adopted multi-stage sampling technique to select three hundred teachers from fifteen randomly selected schools in three randomly selected education districts in Lagos comprising a target population of all the married teachers in Lagos State. The researcher used four validated research instruments namely; Social Adjustment Questionnaire (SAQ), Emotional Adjustment Questionnaire (EAQ), Marital Adjustment Questionnaire (MAQ) and Empty Nest Syndrome Questionnaire (ENSQ) to gather relevant data on the study variables. The researcher tested nine hypotheses by using 3-way ANOVA and Pearson Product Moment Correlation. There was significant difference in empty-nest syndrome of teachers with respect to the interaction between gender and marital adjustment. Gender and family life cycle have significant interaction influence on empty-nest syndrome of teachers. There was need for women to continue to receive more attention in receiving help on empty-nest syndrome. Marriage counsellors should include teachings on empty-nest syndrome in their services to ensure that couples eventually utilise marital coping in curbing the experience of empty-nest syndrome. The gray area of this present research where maritally adjusted contracting families experienced empty-nest syndrome more than maritally maladjusted contracting families can better be illuminated by further studies.*

**Key words:** *Empty-nest syndrome, Family Life cycle, Social Adjustment and Emotional Adjustment*

### **Introduction**

The importance of children in every home cannot be over-emphasized. The arrival and departure of children in every home may therefore, portend distortions to the functioning of a family and its members. While the arrival of children in many families are almost always expected, their eventual departure from families is least thought of and talked about. Thus, normalcy may be distorted, dislocated or dislodged at a stage in the family life cycle when children begin to leave the family to live independent lives, leaving behind their parents or guardians sometimes, traumatized (Bouchard, 2014; Hardy, 2013). Specifically, empty-nest, which refers to the phase of the family life cycle following the departure of children, has been associated with both positive and negative consequences for parents (Bouchard, 2014).

Empty nest syndrome is the psychological condition that can affect parents (especially women) following the departure of their children from home (Delvin, 2016). In more specific terms, empty nest syndrome is a term used to describe the feelings of sadness and grief that parents may feel when they no longer have children living with them (Ponnuz, 2013). Empty-nest syndrome can have debilitating effects on parents especially women (Whitbourne, 2013) or people with marital maladjustment (Stoessel & Karam, 2013; Tucker, 2016) in the areas of their emotional and social adjustment (Maktar, 2015).

According to Poinier, Romito and Husney (2017), family life cycle is the emotional and intellectual stages individuals pass through from childhood to their retirement years as members of a family. In the analysis of Joronen and Rantanen (2014), the stages in the family life cycle have great support in the theory of family development.

Sherin (2017) asserts that all the stages in the family life cycle can be operationally condensed into three main stages namely; beginning family, the expanding family and the contracting family. The beginning family starts at marriage until the birth of the first child. The birth of the first child marks the beginning of expanding family and ends at the departure of the last child from home while the contracting family begins when the first child leaves home as a young adult and ends at the departure of the last child from home for an independent life (Sherin, 2017). Allowing children to live with other members of the family outside the home without the parents (sometimes practiced in some African countries) may also impose some feelings of sadness on parents at any stage in the family life cycle. Researches have shown that empty-nest syndrome can have consequences on marriage (Tucker, 2016; Beaty, 2016; Stritof, 2017), finances (Zhou, Ji, Chu, Medina, Li, Jiang, Zheng, Liu & Rozelle, 2015), social and emotional adjustment (Mazzuco, 2006; Maktar, 2015; Abate, 2017).

Sharma (2016) explained that “emotional adjustment is an important task because, adjustment during emotions lead to a normal behaviour, whereas maladjustment leads to abnormal behaviour”. “Some people may breakdown completely, cannot take proper decisions, and many people even collapse in severe emotional arousal, because of serious changes in vital systems such as heart, lungs, brain, etc” (Sharma, 2016). As much as emotional adjustment is important, it is necessary that individuals get along with other members of the society.

Jain (2012) defined social adjustment as “an effort made by an individual to cope with standards, values and needs of a society in order to be accepted. It can be defined as a psychological process that involves coping with new standard and value”. In a similar vein with emotional adjustment, social adjustment also affects an individual in virtually all aspects of life (Yengimolki, Kalantarkousheh & Malekitabar, 2015).

Another variable that studies have shown to moderate the effect of empty-nest syndrome is marital adjustment. A home that constantly radiates love is likely to be less affected by empty-nest syndrome while homes devoid of love may activate or aggravate the effect of empty-nest syndrome (Parker-Pope, 2009)

### **Statement of the Problem**

The extended family system is practiced in Nigeria. This allows grown children and other family members live together in the same house and do things together. Many adults cherish the presence of young ones around them to assist in house chores and running errands, but due to westernization and urbanization this culture is fast wearing away. Children are sent to live in boarding schools while the adult children prefer to be independent and live separately from their parents. This creates emotional and social vacuums in the life of parents which they suffer silently. This hampers healthy living of the ageing parents. This effect appears more pronounced among the ageing members of the family considering the fact that by tradition many ageing parents look up to their children for financial, emotional and social support. This study sought to examine the influence of empty nest syndrome in the family life cycle on emotional and social adjustment of teachers in Lagos State, Nigeria.

**Research Hypotheses**

1. There will be no significant difference due to gender in the experience of empty nest syndrome among teachers in Lagos State.
2. There will be no significant difference due to marital adjustment in the experience of empty nest syndrome among teachers in Lagos State.
3. There will be no significant difference due to family life cycle in the experience of empty nest syndrome among teachers in Lagos State.
4. There will be no significant difference due to the interaction between gender, family life cycle and marital adjustment in the experience of empty nest syndrome among teachers in Lagos State.
5. There will be no significant influence of empty nest syndrome on emotional adjustment of teachers in Lagos State.
6. There will be no significant influence of empty nest syndrome on social adjustment of teachers in Lagos State.

**Methodology**

This was a descriptive study which adopted a survey research design. The study adopted a non-randomised 4x2x2 factorial design as shown in the layout below:

Family Life Cycle	Gender	Marital Adjustment	
		Not Well Adjusted	Well Adjusted
Beginning	Male	<i>Empty Nest Syndrome</i>	<i>Empty Nest Syndrome</i>
	Female	<i>Empty Nest Syndrome</i>	<i>Empty Nest Syndrome</i>
Expanding	Male	<i>Empty Nest Syndrome</i>	<i>Empty Nest Syndrome</i>
	Female	<i>Empty Nest Syndrome</i>	<i>Empty Nest Syndrome</i>
Contracting	Male	<i>Empty Nest Syndrome</i>	<i>Empty Nest Syndrome</i>
	Female	<i>Empty Nest Syndrome</i>	<i>Empty Nest Syndrome</i>
Empty Nest	Male	<i>Empty Nest Syndrome</i>	<i>Empty Nest Syndrome</i>
	Female	<i>Empty Nest Syndrome</i>	<i>Empty Nest Syndrome</i>

Non-randomised 4x2x2 factorial design

**Sampling Procedure and Sample**

The researcher adopted multi-stage sampling technique for this study from a target population of all the married teachers in Lagos State. Simple random sampling using the lucky dip method was used to select three educational districts in Lagos state. Systematic random sampling using odd and even number was used to select first five secondary schools from each district after arranging in alphabetical order. Lastly, simple random sampling of lucky dip was used to select twenty married teachers from each of the fifteen schools. Therefore, the sample comprised three hundred teachers (300).

**Instrumentation**

The researcher used Social Adjustment Questionnaire (SAQ), Emotional Adjustment Questionnaire (EAQ), Marital Adjustment Questionnaire (MAQ) and Empty Nest Syndrome Questionnaire (ENSQ). All the instruments were questionnaires with Likert-type items. EAQ was adopted from Aguado, Rubio, Hontangas and Hernandez (2005). It is a 28 item Likert-type instrument used to measure emotional adjustment. MAQ

was a 10-item Likert-type instrument adapted from Wilhelmand Parker(1988).ENSQ was a 4-point Likert-type scale containing 10 items adapted from Kearney (2000) to capture the experience of empty nest syndrome by parents

### Validity of the Instruments

To ensure the validity of the instruments, the researcher submitted copies of same to some experts in the Department of Educational Foundations, University of Lagos for face and content validity. Their comments were used to refine the instrument.

### Reliability of the Instruments

The test re-test reliability method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. The reliability coefficients were 0.81, 0.80, 0.82 and 0.83 for SAQ, EAQ, MAQ and ENSQ respectively.

### Data Analysis

The data obtained from this study was analysed using inferential statistics. The researcher tested hypothesis 1 to 4 by using 3-way ANOVA while hypotheses 5 and 6 were tested with the use of Pearson Product Moment Correlation. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

### Results

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Empty Nest Syndrome among Teachers in Lagos State according to Gender, Marital Adjustment and Family Life Cycle**

		Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Gender	Male	8.6753	6.24854	154
	Female	13.9726	6.97379	146
				300
Marital Adjustment	Not well adjusted	13.2061	6.62828	131
	Well-adjusted	9.7396	7.12580	169
				300
Family Life Cycle	Beginning	7.1800	4.21488	100
	Expanding	9.4337	3.83880	83
	Contracting	15.7000	7.88971	60
	Empty nest	16.3684	8.32087	57
<b>Total</b>		<b>11.2533</b>	<b>7.11321</b>	<b>300</b>

**Table 2. 3-Way ANOVA the Difference in Empty Nest Syndrome of Teachers according to Gender, Family Life Cycle and Marital Adjustment**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power <sup>b</sup>
Corrected Model	9750.055 <sup>a</sup>	15	650.004	34.321	.000	.644	514.812	1.000
Intercept	31249.757	1	31249.757	1650.017	.000	.853	1650.017	1.000
GENDER	2186.634	1	2186.634	115.456	.000	.289	115.456	1.000
MARITAL ADJUSTMENT	678.765	1	678.765	35.839	.000	.112	35.839	1.000
FAMILY LIFE CYCLE	2956.504	3	985.501	52.035	.000	.355	156.106	1.000
GENDER* <b>MARITAL ADJUSTMENT</b>	79.186	1	79.186	4.181	.042	.015	4.181	.531
GENDER * <b>FAMILY LIFE CYCLE</b>	203.751	3	67.917	3.586	.014	.036	10.758	.788
MARITAL ADJUSTMENT* <b>FAMILY LIFE CYCLE</b>	1843.615	3	614.538	32.448	.000	.255	97.345	1.000
GENDER* <b>MARITAL ADJUSTMENT*FAMILY LIFE CYCLE</b>	38.091	3	12.697	.670	.571	.007	2.011	.191
Error	5378.692	284	18.939					
Total	53120.000	300						
Corrected Total	15128.747	299						

a. R Squared = .644 (Adjusted R Squared = .626)

**Table 3. Post Hoc Scheffe Test for the Difference in the Empty Nest Syndrome for Teachers in the Beginning, Expanding, Contracting and Empty Nest Stages of the Family Life Cycle**

FAMILY LIFE CYCLE	N	Subset		
		1	2	3
BEGINNING	100	7.1800		
EXPANDING	83		9.4337	
CONTRACTING	60			15.7000
EMPTY NEST	57			16.3684
Sig.		1.000	1.000	.840

**Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Empty Nest Syndrome, Social Adjustment and Emotional Adjustment**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
EMPTY NEST SYNDROME	11.2533	7.11321	300
SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT	28.0100	9.60821	300
EMOTIONAL ADJUSTMENT	89.0067	23.91302	300

**Table 5. Relationship of Empty Nest Syndrome with Social Adjustment and Emotional Adjustment**

		EMPTY NEST SYNDROME	SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT	EMOTIONAL ADJUSTMENT
EMPTYNESTSYPNDROME	Pearson Correlation	1	-.564**	-.693**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	300	300	300

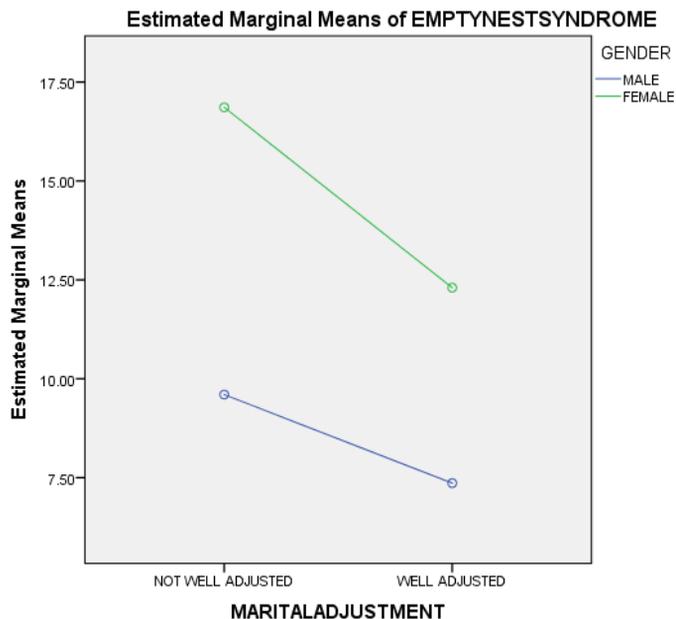


Figure 1. Difference between mean scores of male and female teachers on empty nest syndrome as they apply to the maritally and not maritally adjusted

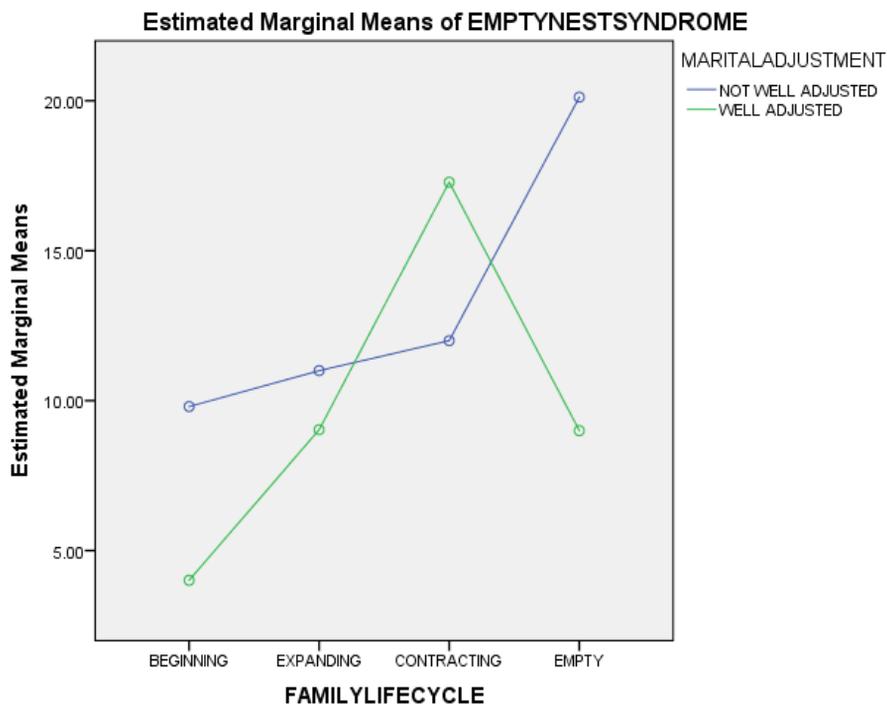
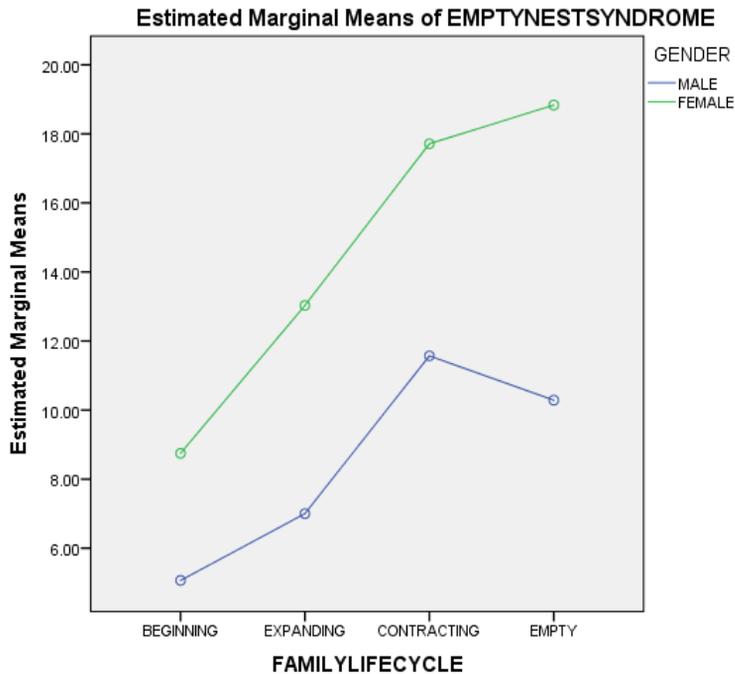


Figure 2. Difference between mean scores of martially adjusted and not martially adjusted teachers on empty nest syndrome categorised by family life cycle



**Figure 3. Difference between mean scores of male and female teachers on empty nest syndrome categorised by family life cycle.**

**Hypotheses Testing and Discussion**

Table 2 showed that the calculated F-value for the difference in empty- nest syndrome mainly attributable to gender was 115.456 at 0.05 level of significance and 1 and 284 degree of freedom. This is to say that there is significant difference mainly due to gender in the experience of empty nest syndrome among teachers. Combining the evidences in Tables 1 and 2, it can be seen that female teachers have significantly higher empty-nest syndrome (13.9726) than their male counterparts (8.6753).

Similarly, Table 2 showed that the calculated F-value for the difference in empty-nest syndrome mainly attributable to marital adjustment was 35.839 at 0.05 level of significance and 1 and 284 degree of freedom. This is to say that, there is significant difference due to marital adjustment in the experience of empty-nest syndrome.

Table 2 showed that the calculated F-value for the difference in empty-nest syndrome mainly attributable to family life cycle was 52.035 at 0.05 level of significance and 3 and 284 degree of freedom. This implies that family life cycle has a main significant influence on empty nest syndrome of teachers.

The post hoc Scheffe test in Table 3 showed that teachers in the beginning and those in the expanding stages of the family life were significantly different from each other and from the teachers in the contracting and empty-nest family life stages. The calculated F-value for the difference in empty-nest syndrome jointly attributable to gender and marital adjustment was 4.181 at 0.05 level of significance and 1 and 284 degree of freedom. This means that gender and marital adjustment have significant interaction influence on empty nest syndrome of teachers.

Figure 1 showed that the interaction between gender and marital adjustment is ordinal for the two lines do not actually cross each other. It shows that for both men and women, empty-nest syndrome will significantly reduce for the maritally well-adjusted while empty nest syndrome is high for both male and female maritally unadjusted teachers. Table 2 showed that the calculated F-value for the difference in empty-nest syndrome jointly traceable to gender and family life cycle was 3.586 at 0.05 level of significance and 3 and 284 degree of freedom. This means that gender and family life cycle have significant interaction influence on empty-nest syndrome of teachers. Figure 2 showed that the interaction between gender and family life cycle is ordinal because the lines actually did not cross each other. It can be seen that for all stages in the family life cycle, empty level syndrome is lower for male teachers than for female teachers.

The calculated F-value for the difference in empty-nest syndrome jointly owed to marital adjustment and family life cycle was 32.448 at 0.05 level of significance and 3 and 284 degree of freedom. Therefore, there is significant difference due to the interaction between marital adjustment and family life cycle in the experience of empty nest syndrome among teachers in Lagos State. The graph in figure 3 shows that with the exception of contracting family, for all stages in the family life cycle, the maritally well-adjusted teachers have significantly lower empty nest syndrome than the teachers who are not well-adjusted maritally. Table 2 showed that the calculated F-value for the difference in empty nest syndrome jointly attributable to gender, marital adjustment and family life cycle was 0.670 at 0.05 level of significance and 3 and 284 degree of freedom. This means that gender, marital adjustment and family life cycle have no significant interaction influence on empty-nest syndrome of teachers.

Table 5 shows that the calculated  $r$  for the relationship between empty-nest syndrome and emotional adjustment is -0.693 at 298 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. This implies that there is significant inverse linear relationship between empty-nest syndrome and emotional adjustment. Lastly, Table 5 shows that the calculated  $r$  for the relationship between empty-nest syndrome and social adjustment is -0.564 at 298 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. Thus, there is significant influence of empty-nest syndrome on social adjustment of teachers in Lagos State.

Accordingly, the finding of this study which showed that gender predictor of empty nest syndrome is unsurprising as previous studies like Whitbourne (2013) who indicated that empty-nest syndrome can have debilitating effects on parents especially women. Another finding of this study which reported that there is difference in the level of empty nest syndrome experienced based on marital maladjustment agrees with the earlier observations of researchers like Stoessel & Karam (2013); Tucker (2016) who showed that empty-nest syndrome is not unrelated to marital adjustment.

The outcome of this study which reported that experience of empty-nest syndrome varies with stages in the family life cycle is also not without support from literature as the submission of Idumonyi (2017) that parents whose children leave home do not necessarily experience the grief of empty-nest syndrome presupposes that empty-nest syndrome is not necessarily experienced by all the people in the empty-nest stage.

Each of the findings of these study which showed interactions of gender, family life adjustment and marital adjustment harmonising to predict empty-nest syndrome is a clear indication that empty-nest is not a criterion of any single prediction variable. Idumonyi (2017) idea that parents whose children leave home do not necessarily experience the grief of empty-nest syndrome is though an eye opener to the fact that empty-nest syndrome is not peculiar to the empty-nest stage in the family life cycle. Finally, the findings of this study showing empty-nest syndrome as a significant negative predictor of social and emotional adjustment provide

further supports to several positions in the literature like Maktar (2015); Winch (2013) & Abate (2017) linking empty-nest syndrome to social and emotional adjustment.

### **Conclusion**

The effects of empty-nest syndrome on individuals at different stages of life and in different areas are well documented in the literature. However, there is paucity of empirical research in this area, making the age-long concept of empty-nest syndrome and its multiple effects somewhat, a silent variable with latent but potent damaging rather than positive effects. The present study which examined how empty-nest syndrome interacts with a whole lot of other factors like family life cycle, gender and marital adjustment individually and jointly influence social and emotional adjustments as important areas of life, has advanced some empirical support for the knowledge in this area of study while it has also opened way for future research to enhance human understanding of empty-nest syndrome as well as solve the problems which the condition may breed.

### **Recommendations**

1. There should be awareness programme through the mass media, religious organisations and institutions of learning to prepare the adults for the empty-nest stage of life.
2. Government at all levels should create recreational centers and activities where adults can come together to interact, this will help to reduce loneliness and boredom. Such parents can equally take up personal activities like going back to school, taking up voluntary work in the society, e.t.c, just to occupy their minds.

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