DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EMPTY NEST AND NON-EMPTY NEST RURAL ELDERLY IN BANGLADESH

Ety Rani[1]

[1] *Sociology Discipline, Khulna University, Khulna, Bangladesh*

ABSTRACT

This study has three objectives- to identify the socio-economic difference between the empty nest and non-empty nest rural elderly, to find out the difference between them based on their relationship with their children, and to differentiate the pattern of mental anxieties between them. The social survey method has been applied for data collection. For the empty-nest elderly, the researcher has selected three villages under the district of Jhenaidah. The non-empty-nest elderly researcher has established Shatoil village under the district of Naogaon. Data were collected from a total of 132 (100 non-empty-nest and 32 empty-nest) respondents using purposive sampling with informed consent. A semi-structured interview schedule was applied to collect the data. In this study, most empty-nest respondents' socio-economic conditions were satisfactory, but non-empty-nest respondents' socio-economic conditions were not. In both cases, the highest of the (empty-nest and non-empty-nest) respondents' relationship with children was good and had no difference. The main difference between them is in the case of service providers. The greatest of the non-empty-nest elderly did not feel loneliness and mental anxieties. On the other hand, all the empty-nest respondents felt lonely and most suffered from mental anxiety. GOs and NGOs should build up adult recreation centers and old homes and train elders on using modern technology (such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Messenger, Skype, etc.) to communicate with children. It will mitigate their loneliness and mental anxiety.

1. INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is now a global phenomenon and will unavoidably affect the living patterns of the rural elderly. Based on the National New-Type Urbanization Planning (2014–2020) report, approximately 100 million rural people will move into cities from the country's farming regions in China (CPC Central Committee, 2014). As of 2019, over 13 million people living in Bangladesh are aged over 60, which is 8 percent of the country's total population. In 2050, the ratio of older people is anticipated to double to 21.9 percent, with 36 million people over 60. This means that for every five Bangladeshis, one will be a senior citizen (Help Age International, 2020). Decker (1980) said, "There is a natural movement of individuals from the family of orientation to the family of procreation and this movement represents the beginning of a new generation (p.209)." The aged population is defined in this paper as defined by the Bangladesh Association of Gerontology (2003) -- "the group of the population who belong to the age group of 60 years or more." McNicoll (2002) studied that since 1950 the old age (60+) population has trebled in 50 years, and it is anticipated to treble again by 2050. In 2017, the population of Bangladesh was 165 million, but in 2050 it will be 202 million (World Population Prospects, 2017). United Nations projected that older persons will double to 1.5 billion in 2050. Globally, 65+ more aged people have increased from 6 percent in 1990 to 9 percent in 2019 (United Nations, 2019). Johnson & Bursk (1977) found a significant *association between* a positive *elderly* parent-adult-child *relationship* and health and attitude toward *aging.*

With the increase of urbanization and rapid change in the economy and society, the number of empty-nest elderly is increasing yearly. A previous study indicated that the proportion of empty-nest elderly households will reach 90 percent by 2030 (Su et al., 2012). Empty nest syndrome mainly results from children's departure from home (Su et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2011; Zhai et al., 2015; Xie et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2010). Actually, with the rapid change of urbanization and the imbalance of economic development, the number of empty-nest elderly is increasing rapidly in rural areas (Liu & Guo, 2007). The empty nest elderly is vulnerable to different disadvantageous situations and experience problems associated with old age, such as health problems and an immutable decrease in functional capacity (Lv et al., 2013). Chen et al. (2012) indicated that the appearance of depression in empty-nest elderly is upper than that in non-empty-nest elderly. Xie et al. (2010) found that the determined appearance of depression was up at 74.46 percent, much upper than that of non-empty-nest elderly. The empty-nest elderly or rural elderly had stronger feelings of loneliness (Liu & Guo, 2007; Wang et al., 2011).

The previous research in this field mainly focused on African, global, or Asian contexts. There is no study on the difference between the empty and non-empty nest rural elderly in the North Bengal or South-West region. That is why the author has chosen this topic. The main goal of this research was to differentiate the empty-nest and non-empty-nest rural elderly based on socio-economic conditions, their relationship with their children, and the pattern of mental anxieties.

2. METHODS

2.1. Design of the Study

This study was carried out using a quantitative research design. Therefore, this study used numerical data to obtain information about the difference between the empty nest and non-empty nest rural elderly in Bangladesh and try to identify the socio-economic difference between the empty nest and non-empty nest rural elderly; to find out the difference between

them in the basis of their relationship with their children, and to differentiate the pattern of mental anxieties between them. In this study, empty-nest elderly means older adults who have no children or whose children have already left home and thus live alone or with their spouses. On the other hand, non-empty-nest elderly means older adults who have children or whose children stay with them.

2.2. Method of the Study

A method is a specific technique to accumulate evidence about a phenomenon. In this research work, the survey method was used to collect data.

2.3. Study Area

In this study, the empty-nest elderly researcher has selected three villages in Shailkupa Upazila under the district of Jhenaidah in the division of Khulna, Bangladesh. Three villages were Ananto Badalsho, Badalsho, and Aushia.

Figure 1 Shailkupa Upazila
Source: banglapedia.org

The non-empty-nest elderly researcher has selected Shatoil village under the district of Naogaon in Bangladesh.
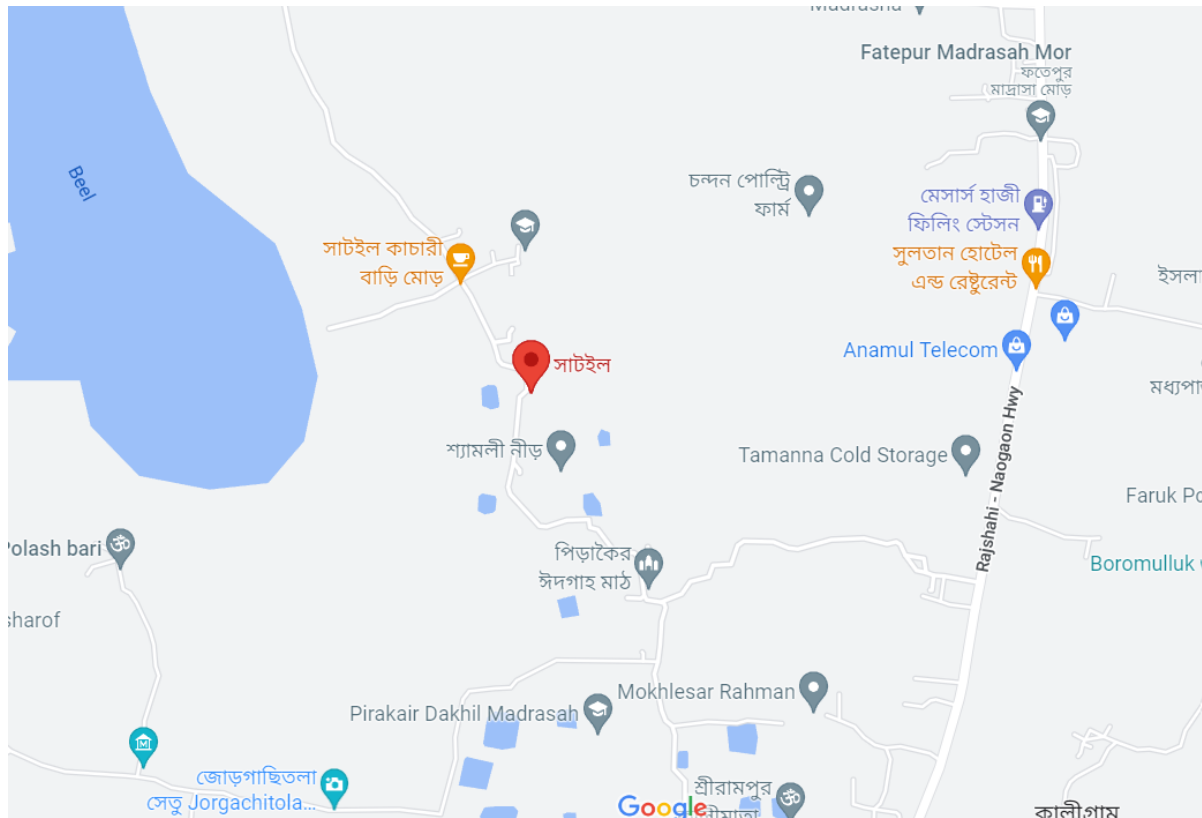
Figure 2 Shatoil village
Source: Google map

Shatoil village was the researcher's village, and Shailkupa upazila was familiar to the researcher. It was easy to collect data for the researcher. That is why the researcher has selected those villages as the study area.

2.4. Unit of Analysis

In this research, the researcher has identified some inclusion criteria to identify the respondents. For empty-nest elderly, the respondents must be 60 or above; the respondents must be empty-nest and live at Ananto Badalsho, Badalsho, or Aushia village in Jhenaidah district. Moreover, for non-empty-nest elderly, the respondents must be aged 60 or above; the respondents must be non-empty-nest and live in Shatoil village in Naogaon district.

2.5. Sources of Data

2.5.1. *Primary Sources*

Primary data is data that has not been previously published, i.e., the data is derived from a new or original research study and collected from first-hand sources of data by surveys, observation, or experimentation (Kabir, 2016). In this research, primary data were collected using the interview technique. A semi-structured interview schedule containing open- and closed-ended questions has been used to record the data.

2.5.2. *Secondary Sources*
Secondary data has already been published, interpreted, and recorded (Walliman, 2011). The secondary data for this study were collected from the local administration office, study

reports, evaluation of government projects, programs, census reports, newspapers, books, and articles.

2.6. Techniques and Duration of Data Collection

Data have been collected from both males and females aged 60 and above. Data have been collected by using purposive sampling. Data have been collected from a total of 132 respondents with informed consent. The number of empty-nest elderly was 32, and the non-empty-nest elderly was 100. A semi-structured interview schedule containing open- and closed-ended questions was used to collect the data from June 2017 to August 2017. Firstly, the questionnaire has been prepared in English. However, the questions were translated into Bengali at the time of data collection. Each interview lasted 20-25 minutes face-to-face, initiated with rapport build-up.

2.7. Tabulation and Analysis of Data

Data analysis is a process that involves editing, coding, classifying, and tabulating the collected data (Kothari, 2004). The collected primary data has been checked and edited by the author before final processing. Then all the data were tabulated and analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Statistical procedures have been used, such as tabulation, frequency distribution, percentage, mean, ratio, and graphs.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

Table 1 shows different variables in the socio-economic difference between the empty nest and non-empty nest elderly. In the first variable, we see that among the non-empty-nest elderly, almost 90 percent of respondents were Muslims and the rest were Hindus. On the other hand, among the empty-nest elderly, most respondents (62.50%) were Hindus, and the rest were Muslims. In the second variable, a majority of the non-empty-nest elders were illiterate. The highest of the empty-nest elderly were primary or secondary educated. The third variable indicates almost the same result among empty-nest and non-empty-nest elderly homemakers or farmers. The result of the fifth variable was almost the same.

The highest of the empty-nest and non-empty-nest elderly used sanitary toilets. But they had a vast difference in the type of house. Most (51%) of the non-empty-nest elderly lived in clay-made houses. On the other hand, the most significant number (56.25%) of the empty-nest elderly lived in terraced houses. In the case of the amount of cultivable land, we find a considerable difference between empty-nest and non-empty-nest elderly. The most empty-nest elderly had 6-10 Bighas of cultivable land, and the highest of the non-empty-nest elderly had 0-5 Bighas of cultivable land. Most of the empty-nest elderly informed that their children did jobs outside and sent money for their expenses. So, the most empty-nest elderly did not face the economic problem. Even all of the empty-nest elderly had mobile phones.

Nevertheless, most of them had no economic savings because they were not aware of their future life. The tendency of economic savings among empty-nest rural elderly was very few. On the other hand, among the non-empty-nest elderly, most of the children were day laborers or only cultivated their land. So, they faced economic problems. All of them had no mobile phone. A majority of them would not be able to have economic savings.

Table 1 Difference between the empty nest and non-empty nest elderly on socio-economic characteristics

Variables	Non-empty-nest elderly	percentage	Empty-nest elderly	Percentage
Religion				
Muslims	90	90	12	37.50
Hindus	10	10	20	62.50
Total	N=100	100	N==32	100
Education				
Illiterate	71	71	7	21.88
Primary educated	16	16	12	37.50
Secondary educated	12	12	10	31.25
Higher secondary educated	1	1	1	3.12
Tertiary educated	0	0	2	6.25
Total	N=100	100	N=32	100
Occupation				
Farmer	53	53	11	34.38
Housewife	43	43	15	46.88
Service	3	3	3	9.37
Doctor	0	0	2	6.25
Others	1	1	1	3.12
Total	N=100	100	N=32	100
Type of house				
Made of clay	51	51	4	12.50
Made of CI sheets	2	2	2	6.25
Terraced house	5	5	18	56.25
Brick built	40	40	8	25.00
Others	2	2	0	0
Total	N=100	100	N=32	100
Type of toilet				
Sanitary	97	97	26	81.25
Non-sanitary	3	3	6	18.75
Total	N=100	100	N=32	100
Amount of cultivable land				
0-5 Bighas	52	52	11	34.37
6-10 Bighas	26	26	15	46.88
11-15 Bighas	12	24	6	18.75
15-above Bighas	10		0	0
Total	N=100	100	N=32	100
Economic savings				
Yes	25	25	4	12.50
No	75	75	28	87.50
Total	N=100	100	N=32	100

Source: The author

Table 2 has three variables. All these variables indicate the same results on the child's relationship with their parents. The first variable in table 2 portrays that a majority of 64 percent of non-empty-nest respondents' child's behavior was good or very good. At the same time, the highest of the 62.50 percent empty-nest respondents' child's behavior was also reasonable or very good. From this point of view, there is more similarity between non-empty-nest elderly and empty-nest elderly. As the same as both sides, the highest number of the children were interested in spending money for respondents' treatment and familial expenses and accepted parents' suggestions in decision making.

Table 2 Difference between the empty nest and non-empty nest elderly on their relationships with their children

Variables	Non-empty-nest elderly	Percentage	Empty-nest elderly	Percentage
The pattern of the behavior of family members toward the elderly				
Very good	18	18	4	12.50
Good	46	46	16	50.00
So-so	17	17	6	18.75
Bad	9	9	6	18.75
Very bad	10	10	0	0
Total	N=100	100	N==32	100
Children's interest in spending money for respondents' treatment and familial expenses				
Yes	72	72	20	62.50
No	28	28	12	37.50
Total	N=100	100	N=32	100
Interest pattern in appreciating suggestions of parents in decision making				
Interested	55	55	24	75.00
Not interested	13	13	6	18.75
Not interested at all	32	32	2	6.25
Total	N=100	100	N=32	100

Source: The author

Table 3 indicates that the highest number of the empty-nest respondents' children took regular inquiries to their parents, visited their parents regularly, and took their parents to their homes for a walk. It indicates positive relationships between empty-nest elderly and their children.

Table 3 Other variables that show the children's relationship with empty-nest elderly parents

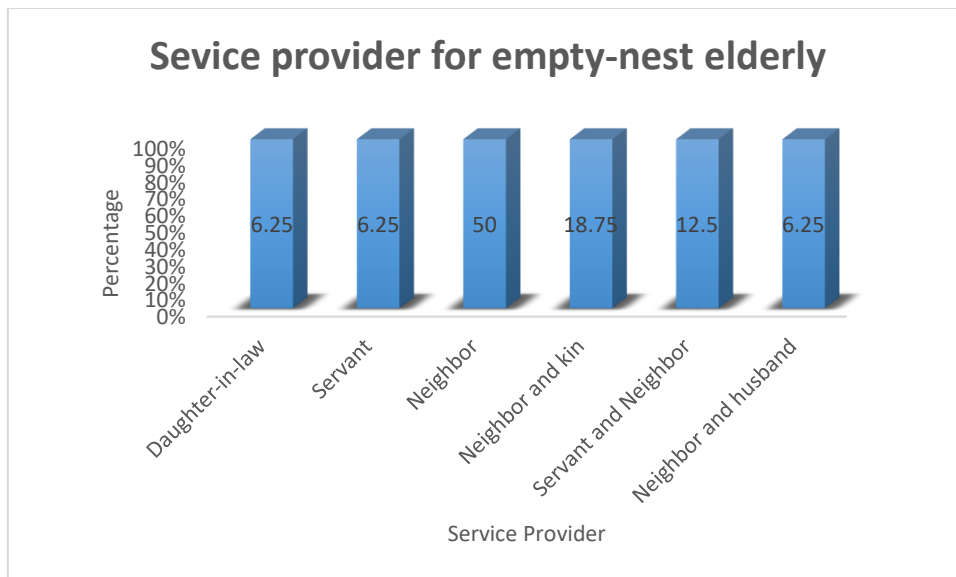| Variables	Empty-nest elderly	Percentage
Whether children take regular inquiries		
Yes	24	75.00
No	8	25.00
Total	N=32	100
Whether to visit regularly		
Yes	24	75.00
NO	8	25.00
Total	N=32	100
Whether to take the child home for a walk		
Yes	22	68.75
No	10	31.25
Total	N=32	100

Source: The author

Figure 3. During the illness of the empty-nest respondents, the person providing the service
Source: The author

Figure 3 indicates that during their illness, the highest number of (50%) respondents got service from their neighbors, and 12.50 percent got service from their daughters-in-law and servants, respectively. About nineteen percent got service from neighbors and kins, 12.50 percent got service from servants and neighbors, and another 6.25 percent got service from neighbors and husbands. By analyzing this table, neighbors have played an essential role as service providers during their illnesses.
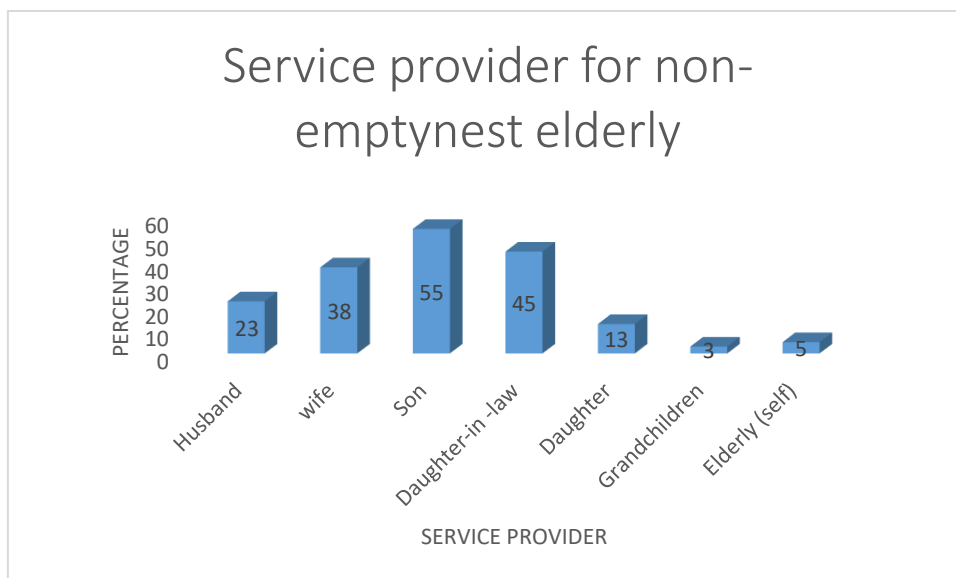

Figure 4 During the illness of the non-empty-nest respondents, the person providing the service
Source: The author
*Respondents were asked to mention, during their illness, the person providing the service
(Multiple responses accepted).

Figure 4 portrays that during their illness, the highest number of (55%) respondents got service from their sons; 45 percent got service from their daughters-in-law. About 38 percent got service from wives, 23 percent from husbands, 13 percent from daughters, and another 8 percent from grandchildren and the elderly (self), respectively. By analyzing this table, the sons and daughters-in-law played an essential role as service providers during their illness. So, by analyzing these two figures, we can say that the main difference between empty-nest and non-empty-nest elderly consists in the case of service providers. Empty-nest elderly faced huge problems when they felt sick. However, the non-empty-nest elderly did not face this problem.

Table 4 shows that most non-empty-nest elderly did not feel lonely because they could spend time with their children or grandchildren. So, most of them also did not feel mental anxieties. Only 39 percent and 33 percent of non-empty-nest rural elderly felt loneliness and mental anxieties because they had lost their better half. On the contrary, all of the empty-nest rural elderly felt loneliness, and almost 75 percent felt mental anxiety.

Table 4 Difference in mental anxieties among empty-nest and non-empty-nest rural elderly

Variables	Non-empty-nest elderly	Percentage	Empty-nest elderly	Percentage
Loneliness				
Yes	39	39	32	100
No	61	61	0	0
Total	N=100	100	N=32	100
Mental anxieties				
Yes	33	33	24	75
No	67	67	6	25
Total	N=100	100	N=32	100

Source: The author

Table 5 Cause for mental anxieties among empty-nest rural elderly

Cause for Mental anxieties	Number of respondents	Percentage
Children live outside	4	16.67
Children live outside and economic misery	2	8.33
Children live outside and have serious health problems	10	41.67
All of the above	8	33.33
Total	N=24	100

Source: The author

Table 5 points out that among 24, 16.67 percent of respondents' cause of mental anxieties was their children living outside of the home, and 8.33 percent of respondents' causes were their children living outside of the home. They had economic misery, 41.67 percent were their children lived outside of them, and they had severe health problems, and 33.33 percent opined that the cause of their mental anxieties was all of the above causes. This data indicates that they had no peace of their mind.

Table 6 Ways to alleviate respondents' mental anxieties

Ways to alleviate respondents' mental anxieties	Number of respondents	Percentage
Talking with children on the phone	18	56.25
Performing religious activities	24	75.00
By watching TV	12	37.50
By reading books or newspaper	8	25.00
By gossiping with neighbors	30	93.75

Source: The author

*Respondents were asked to mention the ways to alleviate their mental anxieties (multiple responses accepted).

Table 6 shows that the highest of the 30 (93.75%) respondents mitigated their mental anxieties by gossiping with neighbors, and 24 (75%) mitigated by performing religious activities. About 12 (37.50%) were mitigated by watching TV, 8 (25%) mitigated by reading books or newspapers, and 18 (56.25%) respondents mitigated their mental anxieties by talking with children on the phone.

3.2. Discussion

UNFPA Representative Eoken (2008) mentioned that the elderly population of Bangladesh suffers from manifold problems concerning health and socio-economic issues. The present study supports health-related problems. Because in the present study, the highest of the empty-nest and non-empty-nest elderly were very unhealthy and suffered from different health-related issues. However, it is not supported by economic problems in the empty-nest elderly because most of the empty-nest elders' socio-economic condition was satisfactory. Most of the non-empty nest elders were primary or secondary educated and lived-in terraced houses. Most of them had 6-10 Bighas of cultivable land. All of them had mobile-phone.

On the other hand, it supports the case of the non-empty-nest elderly. A majority of the non-empty-nest elders' socio-economic condition was not satisfactory. Because the highest number of non-empty-nest elders were illiterate, their occupation was farmer or housewife, the house was made of clay, and most had 0-5 bighas of cultivable land. All of them had no mobile phone. So, we can say that the present study has a difference in the case of socio-economic conditions between empty-nest and non-empty-nest rural elderly.

Over the last few decades, the traditional joint family structure in rural Bangladesh has been breaking down because of poverty, attitudes of self-interest, quarrels, and maladjustment (UNESCO, 1992). Since in the present study, all of the empty-nest respondents lived in nuclear families, the present study resembles the study of UNESCO (1992). However, it rejects in the case of the non-empty-nest elderly. In the patrilineal joint family, sons are regarded as the preserver of parents in old age (Ghuman & Ofstedal, 2004). Family provides care to elderly persons by helping them with different physical works such as bathing, dressing, giving medication, and feeding (Morgan & Kunkel, 2007). During the disaster, sickness, and old age, adult children (especially sons) are considered their parents' primary source of security and financial support (Cain, 1986). However, the present study rejects the study of Ghuman & Ofstedal (2004), Morgan & Kunkel (2006), and Cain (1986) in the case of empty-nest elderly. Because in empty-nest families, children lived so far from their parents. They would not be able to take care of their parents. The present study shows that during respondents' illness, the highest number of (50%) respondents got service from their neighbors.

On the other hand, in the case of non-empty-nest elderly during their illness, the highest number of respondents got service from their sons and daughters-in-law. So, it accepts in the

case of non-empty-nest elderly. The present study's findings fully support the findings of the study carried out by Saha (2005); Mason (1992). Saha (2005) found that the trend of taking care of the elderly at the family level was declining. Mason (1992) showed that the traditional family-based care systems for older people seem likely to erode in Asian countries. However, it rejects in the case of the non-empty-nest elderly. Rahman (2000) found that 44.3 percent of older adults get involved in beggary to maintain their living expenses and family needs. The present study differs from the study of Rahman (2000). Because in the present study, both empty-nest and non-empty-nest elderly were not involved in beggary.

However, other studies have supported the hypothesis of a robust negative relationship between the empty nest and elders' health (Rahman et al., 2004; Kharicha et al., 2007). Chen et al. (2012) indicated that the appearance of depression in empty-nest elderly is upper than that in non-empty-nest elderly. Loneliness was prevalent among the empty-nest elderly in rural Anhui Province (Wu et al., 2010). A study from China showed that empty nest elders had worse self-care ability and lower mental health scores (Wu et al., 2010). The results showed that empty nests significantly adversely influenced elders' physical, cognitive ability, and psychological health (Gao et al., 2017). The empty nest elderly is vulnerable to different disadvantageous situations and experience problems associated with old age, such as health problems and an irreversible decrease in functional capacity (Lv et al., 2013). Moreover, including loneliness, anxiety disorders, and depression, the empty nest elderly must fight to cope with psychosocial problems. We can call it empty nest syndrome (Su et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2013; Liu & Guo, 2007; Fahrenberg, 1986; Wang et al., 2011; Zhai et al., 2015; Xie et al., 2010). One of the most common factors among the elderly is loneliness (Tomstad et al., 2012). The empty-nest elderly or rural elderly had stronger feelings of loneliness (Liu & Guo, 2007; Wang et al., 2011). *Johnson & Bursk (1977)* found a significant *association between* a positive *elderly* parent-adult-child *relationship* and health and attitude toward *aging*. Xie et al. (2010) found that the determined appearance of depression was up at 74.46 percent, much upper than that of non-empty-nest elderly.

The present study resembles their study. Because in the present study, all of the empty-nest respondents suffered from loneliness. Moreover, the highest 24 (75) percent of empty-nest respondents felt mental anxieties. Among 24, 16.67 percent of respondents' cause of mental anxieties was their children living outside of them, and 8.33 percent of respondents' cause was their children living outside of them. They had economic misery, 41.67 percent of respondents' cause was their children living outside of them, and they had a severe health problem, and 33.33 percent opined that the cause of their mental anxieties was all of the above causes. This data indicates that they had no peace of their mind. They want to get mental peace by performing prayer. To mitigate their anxieties, they select different ways. The highest of the 30 (93.75%) respondents mitigated their mental anxieties by gossiping with neighbors, and 24 (75%) mitigated by performing religious activities. About 12 (38%) were mitigated by watching TV, 8 (25%) mitigated by reading books or newspapers, and 18 (56.25%) respondents mitigated their mental anxieties by talking with children on the phone.

On the other hand, most non-empty-nest elders did not feel lonely and had no mental anxieties. However, most empty-nest and non-empty-nest elderly had good relationships with their children. The most significant number of empty-nest and non-empty-nest respondents' child behavior was good; children were interested in spending money for respondents' treatment and familial expenses and accepted parents' suggestions in decision making.

The highest number of the empty-nest respondents' children took regular inquiries to their parents, visited their parents regularly, and took their parents to their homes for a walk. It indicates positive relationships between empty-nest elderly and their children. From this point of view, there is more similarity between non-empty-nest elderly and empty-nest elderly. But the main difference between empty-nest and non-empty-nest elderly consists in the case of service providers. Empty-nest elderly faced huge problems when they felt sick. However,

the non-empty-nest elderly did not face this problem. The novelty of this research was that with the rapid change of urbanization and modernization, the number of empty-nest elderly is increasing, and they feel loneliness and severe mental anxieties. We should take proper steps to prevent their loneliness and mental anxieties.

4. CONCLUSION

This study's main findings were that most of the empty-nest respondents' socio-economic conditions were satisfactory. However, the most significant number of non-empty-nest respondents' socio-economic conditions were unsatisfactory. The highest of the (empty-nest and non-empty-nest) respondents' relationship with children was good in both cases. But the main difference between empty-nest and non-empty-nest elderly consists in the case of service providers. Empty-nest elderly faced huge problems when they felt sick. However, the non-empty-nest elderly did not face this problem. The greatest of the non-empty-nest elderly did not feel loneliness and mental anxieties. On the other side, all empty-nest respondents felt lonely and had mental anxieties. The leading causes of their mental anxieties were that their children lived far from them, and they had severe health problems. Since their children lived so far from them, their children could not look after them during their illness. This time they depended on either neighbors, kins, servants, or others. Most of the time, neighbors played an essential role as service providers. The policy recommendation is an important issue in any study. In this study, some policy recommendations have been derived from the researcher's analysis for the welfare of the empty-nest and non-empty-nest elderly. GOs should provide economic support for the poor elderly and build up adult recreation centers so that they can mitigate their loneliness, Especially for taking care of the empty-nest elderly GOs and NGOs should build up old homes in every district and should train them on the use of modern technology (such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Messenger, Skype), so that they can communicate with their children with video and audio calls. The elderly are an asset to our country. So, we should take care of them and conduct more and more studies on them.

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