

Diversity of Empty Nest Response Among Spouses

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Abstract: The objective of this study is to validate the third proposition of the Empty Nest Perspective Theory, which is, “Responses to empty nest stage differ among spouses.” This study utilized a qualitative multiple case study approach. A multiple case study enables the researcher to analyze within each and across sets. Several cases are examined to understand the similarities and differences between cases in a multiple case study. After the analysis of data utilizing qualitative content analysis method, four themes emerged: 1.) Adjustment; 2.) Coping; 3.) Not so empty nest: Keeping in touch with children, 4.) Conquering Loneliness: Strengthening relationships and exploring new roles. Response to empty nest among elderly couples is a combination of negative and positive responses. There is excitement seeing their children moving forward in life and negative emotions like grief, and loneliness. Responses may be diverse yet complement each other.

Keywords: Adjustment, challenges, coping, loneliness, responses

I. INTRODUCTION

Elders, preferably the women undergoing the empty nest experience encounter complicated emotions such as feeling sad, feeling relieved, wondering about oneself, loving children, dealing with missing someone, dealing with transition, coping with anxieties, and denial, seeking supports, and feeling positive. Women are more likely than men to be affected. While mothers in Back’s study (1971) expressed greater agreement between their real self and their appearance to others than did fathers. For women, being free of family obligations may allow them greater ease in accepting themselves for what they are; whereas men, children leaving home makes them more dependent on their work role, in which they have difficulty presenting their real image. Men can also experience similar feelings of loss regarding the departure of their children. In the study of Barber (1980), men were more likely than women to express ambivalent or neutral feelings concerning the empty nest transition.

Lowenthal and Chiriboga (1972) suggested that this gender difference may be an artifact of the predisposition of women in our society to more skillfully and freely express complex feelings and attitudes. During the transition to the empty nest, they found, men experienced self-evaluation and disequilibrium but might be unwilling and/or unable to clearly express their emotional responses to the transition in other than neutral or ambivalent terms.

The subjective well-being of mothers versus fathers in the empty nest is inconsistent, reflecting the complexity of the empty-nest transition. Nevertheless, there is little support for the notion that the empty nest is widespread or pertains solely to women. Riley (1978) claimed that the ways in how

individuals experience and cope with life transitions vary from generation to generation; that there is no set pattern of negotiating role transitions.

Two main theoretical perspectives offer hypothesis regarding the effects of the departure of children on parents: the role loss perspective and the role strain (relief) perspective. Both perspectives are supported by empirical data. The role loss hypothesis predicts that when the role from which parents, particularly mothers, have derived their sense of accomplishment is over, a decrease in their well-being should be observed (White and Edwards, 1990; Sheriff and Weatherall, 2009).

In contrast to the hypothesis of a loss, the role strain relief perspective suggests that the empty nest stage should lead to improvement in parental well-being, because the presence of children at home increases exposure to stressors, such as daily demands, time constraints, and work-family conflicts (Erickson et al. 2010; Umberson et al. 2010). The role strain relief hypothesis was supported by a fairly consistent finding throughout the literature that children have an unfavorable influence on marital quality (Ahlborg et al. 2009; Umberson et al. 2005; Bradbury et al. 2000;).

As partners modify roles through retirement, post-parenthood or empty nest stage, illness, or disability, they face the strain of relinquishing previous roles and adapting to new ones. Older partners’ ability to negotiate such role transitions depends, in large part, on their prior flexibility and satisfaction in their marital relationship. Marital satisfaction may increase in middle age to early old age, with couples becoming more similar in their attitudes, beliefs, roles, and behaviors ((Davey & Szinovacz, 2004). Sex role expectations and behaviors are often relaxed in old age, with the marital relationship becoming central to men’s lives as they age. In fact, marital quality maybe more important for older men than age, health, life expectancy, education or retirement in predicting life satisfaction and well-being (Davidson, 2006; George, 2006).

Happy marriages in old age are characterized by adequate communication, gender equality, and joint decision making through a gradual relaxation of boundaries and a decreasing division of labor based on traditional male/female roles. Nevertheless, women still carry primary responsibility for domestic tasks and elder care (Calasanti & Kiecolt, 2007; Kaufman & Taniguchi, 2006). Failure to negotiate role expectations, such as the division of household tasks can result in disagreements and divergent paths. In a study of gender ideology among individuals 51 to 92, men who held egalitarian attitudes reported significantly higher levels of

marital happiness than did those with traditional attitudes. Overall feeling equitably treated in a marriage tends to reduce marital stress (Hagedoorn, Van Yperen, Coyne et al., 2006; Kaufman & Taniguchi, 2006). Accordingly, with more opportunities for companionship, older partners may discover common interests and a greater sense of interdependence. As a consequence, expressive aspects of the marriage such as affection and companionship may emerge more fully across time.

Marital strain tend to affect older adults' health status and self-ratings of health negatively (Umberson et al., 2005; Wallace & Luszcz, 2009). One reason that marital conflict may precipitate physiological changes, which can impair immune response and increase cardiovascular reactivity (Robles & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2003; Umberson & Williams, 2005). One study found that over 20% of couples experience moderate or strong emotional and social loneliness in their marriage. Such marriages were characterized by a spouse with health problems, limited emotional support from the spouse, infrequent conversations or being in disagreement, or evaluating their current sex life as relatively unpleasant or nonexistent (Gierveld, van Grownou, Hoogendoorn, & Smith, 2009).

In the findings of Kitson (1982), she found that there were few differences in the way mothers and fathers felt and that many of the changes were positive despite the perception that mothers in particular fell apart and experience empty nest. Furthermore, in the study of two women experiencing empty nest found that these women encountered complicated emotions in which the following themes were elicited: Feeling sad, feeling relieved, wondering about oneself, having children, dealing with missing someone, dealing with transition, coping with anxiety and demand, seeking supports and feeling positive. In general, empty nest gave the subjects mixed feelings.

According to Go (2018c), an empty nest affects the well-being of both mothers and fathers. It reflects the complexity of this transition. A new chapter associated with many issues and challenges affecting one's individuality, relationships, and experience of multiple losses: loss of daily life with children, loss of the sense of family that parents have built, and loss of active job parenting. This study aims to validate the assumption of the Empty Nest Perspective Theory that responses to empty nest are diversified among spouses. Being an older adult going through the empty nest stage is a concern on how each of them respond to this new chapter.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a case study approach. Polit and Beck (2004), defined case studies as in-depth investigations of a single or a small number of entities. An individual, family, group, institution, community or other social unit may be the entity being studied on. In a case study, researchers attain a wealth of descriptive information and may examine relationships among different phenomena, or may examine

trends over time. Case study researchers attempt to analyze and understand issues of the entity under that are important to the history, development, or its circumstances. A multiple case study allows the researcher to explore within and between cases differences. The goal is to reproduce findings across cases. Because comparisons will be drawn, it is imperative that the cases are carefully selected so that the researcher can predict similar results across cases, or predict contrasting results based on a theory (Yin, 2003).

Purposive selection was utilized in this study, specifically selection of similar cases which deliberately reduces differences and allow a more focused inquiry. The participants of this study were five couples (ten older adults) who belonged to the following inclusion criteria: 1.) age (60 years old and above); 2.) either male or female; 3.) length of time from the last child left home within the past three (3) months to more than a year; 4.) ability to articulate personal experiences and feelings, which have the experience of interest, were willing to share their experiences and can communicate. A purposive sample is a sample selected in a purposeful and non-random fashion to realize a certain goal.

In the first step, the researcher read a description of each person participating in the study to gain a sense of the participants. Next, the researcher extracted statements with significance to the research question. (See Appendix A).

To analyze the data gathered, qualitative content analysis is utilized. A research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns is defined as qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

To reflect the research data accurately, the significant statements were taken from direct quotations from the participants. Inductive reasoning was used in this process, by which themes and categories emerge from the data through the researcher's careful analysis and constant comparison. To analyze the significant statements, the researcher begun to articulate what the statements mean and created themes from the meanings. The researcher grouped similar themes together and organized them into categories. Finally, the researcher integrated the results into a comprehensive description of the topic and returns to each participant to verify the results (Sanders, 2003). Deductive reasoning does not need to be excluded in qualitative content analysis (Patton, 2002). It is very useful for qualitative research, especially at the inception of data analysis to generate concepts or variables from theory or previous studies (Berg, 2001).

The researcher made use of a qualitative open-ended questions or loosely structured interviews were utilized to uncover how people think and feel in certain situations. (See Appendix A) It consists of warm up questions, four main questions and prompts that encourage the participants to share their insights.

As this study involved participation of human respondents, to address ethical issues, since participants of the study are those senior citizens with a minimum age of 60 years old and above, an informed consent (both verbal and written) was asked from the participants. After full disclosure and explanation of the study, the participants were notified on the nature, purposes, methodology, risks and benefits of the study. They were made to volunteer and were not coerced to participate.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Discussed below is the case profile of the five couple participants that were being involved in this study.

Case A. The Gentle Couple

Case A (Leo) is a male participant aged 67 years old and married to (Neneng) who is 69 years old. They've been married for 28 years and are gifted with three children.

Leo is a government retired employee and enjoys his monthly pension. For him, empty nest is a normal phenomenon because children will thrive to become independent when the proper time comes. Which he experienced among his children. He felt lonely at first but at the same time happy for his children because they strive to become independent adults and are now successful with their respective families living in other countries (based in Australia and Canada).

Neneng, the wife who is 69 years old is also a retired government employee.

As a mother of three whose children left their abode one at a time to find their own niche is not exempted during the empty nest transition. She was happy when all her children graduated in college and became professionals but it was a painful moment for her because of the physical separation which she did not expect it was that difficult. She would simply cry quietly whenever she remembers them especially during special occasions like their wedding anniversaries, their birthdays and holiday seasons.

Case B. The Loving Couple

Case B (Loloy) is 84 years old and the oldest male participant. He is happily married to (Wena), who is 83 years old. They were married for 62 years. They were blessed with five children and all have left their abode one after the other. Raised a family of their own, live and work in other places. Gifted with seven grandchildren. They are recipient of City Government's (Cagayan de Oro) monthly allowance for indigent seniors. Both have no pension.

Loloy is a person with lots of frustrations in life. He only finished elementary education and since then he struggled through life by helping his father in the ricefield. His parents could not afford him to send to further education. Until he got married. He was busy working that oftentimes he could not spend time with his growing children. His meager

income was not enough to meet the needs of his family. Until one by one his children left their house. He felt so lonely when his children separated from them. He felt rejected and isolated.

Wena is 83 years old and the oldest among female participants. She is an epitome of a strong woman who went through a lot of sacrifices and difficulties. She too did not reach high school but nonetheless she is a hardworking woman who helped her husband raised their children in the best way they could. She recalls that to help augment her husband's income, she would sell suman (sticky rice) and firewood in neighboring sitios and barangays in their place. Her children became independent at an early age because she would always leave them early in the morning so that she can sell her goods. The children were left in the house tending for themselves. For her, the separation from her children etched a painful mark in her heart. She admitted that there are times she remember them, longing and misses them so much. For her there was a big change in their lives especially now that they are very old and frail.

Case C. The Socially Active Couple

Jo is 76 years old who is a retired police officer. He is happily married to Warly for 54 years. They are living together in their new residence (Upper Carmen, Cagayan de Oro City). They were blessed with five children who are professionals and have a family of their own. Three are living outside the country and two are in the country. They have eight grandchildren.

Warly recalls that her husband was a strict father. He sees to it that his children are well disciplined and very particular about the importance of finishing a degree. True enough, his children granted his aspirations for them. He felt the emptiness for the first time when his eldest daughter left the country to work in the United States. He felt the house became empty especially when all his children left one by one. It was a painful experience but he was thankful at the same time because all of them are now professionals and are successful in each of their endeavors.

Warly is a female participant aged 72 years old. She was a businesswoman who sold varied merchandise to help her husband augment their income. She was a full time mother at the same time did her buy and sell job. Empty nest period befell her too just like her husband. She admits that during the first 1-2 years when her three children left their abode one by one, it was the most difficult stage. She felt lonely and missed them. The house was quiet. To ease their loneliness, she and her husband would go out often. They see to it that they dine outside and watch movies regularly. Good thing her other two children who have settled down too are in the same city where they live. Sometimes her children find time to visit them and bond with them through dining and going out on special occasions.

Case D. The Blessed Couple

Marlo is a male participant aged 69 years old and happily married. He lives together with his wife in an uptown residence in Upper Balulang, Cagayan de Oro City. Seven of their children are professionals, three are living and working outside the country, the other three are in Luzon and the remaining two (second from the eldest and the youngest) within the city. He is a retired soldier and enjoying his retirement at present. Being a father was difficult for him to handle when he was still active in the military service. He was assigned in different places that's why he did not enjoy much watching his children grow. But he saw to it that he gave them quality time when he was around. Every moment was very precious for him and his family. Now, he felt the loneliness and emptiness in their residence with his wife when all his children left. He admitted when they left, there was a big change. He missed them but because they wanted to look for a brighter future, that they wanted to succeed.

Lolita is 67 years of age, a female participant. She is a woman who stood the test of time. A loving and hardworking mother who did everything to help her husband raised their children in the best way she can. She recalled because she was jobless and opted to become a full time mother to their children of eight, she went into different buy and sell business. Sometimes had to lend money and even availed the five-six just to support the children's tuition. Some of the younger children had to stop school to give way to the elder siblings. Since she and her husband could not afford to send them to school all together. But with perseverance and the family's resilience, the children are now very successful and she and her husband are enjoying their fruits of hard-earned labor.

At the start when some of the elder children went to work after college one by one, she did not feel the empty nest period that much. Until she realized that all of them have gone away. Now, she and her husband are living a good life. Their children bought them a new house and a new car. Although sometimes inflicted with illness, often they go with close friends to spend quality time like dining out and celebrate birthdays. They are engaged in their parish choir group too.

Case E. The Gifted Couple

Ferio is 72 years old and been married for 46 years. He got three children and all are professionals. His childhood was a tragic one because his mother died when he was eight years old and his only sister died when he was 12. His father who was a soldier got married for the second time and he had six step sisters and brothers. As the eldest, he was given responsibilities to look after his step siblings until he got married and settled down. He became a soldier too and now he enjoyed his retirement. At his early marriage, he never got to be with his children because he was assigned in far places. He went home every three to six months. He was a responsible father and husband. He thought his children good values and faith in God. He is not expressive and demonstrative when it

comes to showing his children how much he loved them. He was more of doing the right thing through actions. Until his youngest went to college where she studied in a different place and the second son started to work away from them too and later got married where he started to feel the emptiness although he did not show it.

Linda is 63 years old, a full time mother to her three children. She became the mother and father of her children when her husband was away from work. She recalled that whenever one of her children got sick especially the youngest whose almost every month she would bring her to the hospital, it was difficult yet she was able to survive because of her love for them. Until all the children have grown and the eldest and the second entered high school that her husband's salary was not enough because they were enrolled in a private school. With this, she helped her husband augment their income by selling banana cue right in front of their house every afternoon. This she did until they finished college and all her children finished successfully. Until one after the other, all their children left to realize their dreams.

It was painful at first that there were times she cried quietly in her room. But she can't do anything about it because it's just the way it was. There was a part of her that she wanted to keep them with her and a part of her to give them the liberty in order for them to be happy and find their own place.

IV. THEMES GENERATED FROM THE CASES

All of the participants in this study during the period of data collection have shared their personal responses on empty nest stage. From the data gathered, each of the emergent themes were defined and discussed with excerpts from the transcripts of responses to support and highlight each theme.

Theme 1. Adjustment

Changes are sometimes affected by choice, but as people age, their role changes and transitions may increasingly occur outside their control. These changes may be abrupt or taking a slow pace but certainly there will be an opportunity for adjustment to the change. Experiences in the past and a series of adaptations may help prepare for some transitions like the primary shift from parenting to empty nest period making them smoother and less stressful. The following responses are from the participants telling us how they responded to the departure of their children.

According to participants A:

"Dili nami busy sa pag atiman sa mga bata kay aduna naman silay taga- taga ka pamilya. Tuana pod sila sa laing nasud. Kami na lang duha sako wife." [We're no longer busy taking care of our children because they have their own families. They too are living outside the country. Only just the two of us now.] (Leo)

“Daku na ang kalainan kay kami na lang dari sa balay. Wala nay magsaba-saba. Amo na lang kaugalingun among giatiman. Isig tabangay mi sa tarbahuon dari balay.” [There’s a big difference because only the two of us left here in the house. No more children making noise. We take care of ourselves and help each other in doing household chores.] (Neneng)

Leo accepted his fate as a father with open heart. Being realistic about the situation. Facing the truth that his children are establishing separate lives of their own. While Neneng, his wife positively responded to the change in their lives.

Losing the children leaves the empty nest participants to worry. The weight of grief experienced can take one by surprise, and acknowledging the depth of sadness one is going through is the key to accepting it. According to one couple participants:

“Daghan ang kausaban nga nahuman na sa pag atiman sa mga bata. Padayun sa pagkinabuhì kaming mag asawa. Kami na ga-inunungay sa paglahutay.” [There are a lot of changes now that we’re done with our parental roles. We continue to live as partners through thick and thin.] (Marlo)

“Wala nawala among pagka ginikanan kay galantaw gyapon mi nila pero dili na direkta. Hatag na lang ug mga advise kung kinahanglan. Sya na lang akong bana hatagan sa atensyun aside sa mga trabahuon sa panimalay ug apil usab sa mga kalihukan sa simbahan sama sa kwaresma ug pasko. Tapos naman sila sa pagtuon, nakaginhawa nami *sa mga bayrunon*. (*laughs*).” [Our roles as parents never ceased, it is just indirect now cause we still look after our children’s well being. We simply give advises if needed. I gave now my full attention to my husband, attend to daily house chores and actively join church activities during holy week and christmas season. Our children have graduated. We no longer pay their school fees (laughs), and other expenses.] (Lolita)

The response of Marlo as an empty nest elderly took him to an inner realization of offering sacrifice for the love of his children and their happiness. While Lolita, his wife is open too in accepting the realities of post parenting.

Often, the physical separation itself is not the hardest part. Rather, it is the daily reality of living wherein the children are no longer present at home. Inevitably, a parent know less about their children’s well-being; where they are and what they’re doing at any given moment of the day. And worrying about their welfare can exacerbate the feelings of loneliness and loss.

One couple participant added:

“Tigulang naman mi. Usahay mabalaka sa mga anak sa ilang safety kay layo naman sila namo. Maghuna-huna nila ug sa akong sakit nga Diabetes. Adunay mga maintenance na immun.” [We are old already. Sometimes I get worried for my children regarding their safety because they are far. I think of

them and about my sickness. I have diabetes. There are maintenance medications that I take.] (Julio)

“Usahay maghuna-huna sa mga bata. Naa pod daghan utang. (Laughs) Magkatawaha lang mi. Maglaag usahay uban samo silingan.” [Sometimes I think of our children. There are debts too. (Laughs). We just laugh it out. Go somewhere together with our neighbor friends.] (Josephine)

The response of Julio, showed his vulnerability as a father. Typically, feels worried for the uncertainty about the safety and welfare of his children who are far from them. While his wife, Josephine expressed a mother’s continuous concern for her children too. To divert herself, she goes out with neighbor friends on some occasions.

Theme 2. Coping

Majority of the participants are stay-at-home mothers who were once thought to be most prone to empty nest. They have shaped their lives around nurturing their children. In reality, it can affect any kind of parent, whether one have a separate career or not. They strive to hurdle this transition together with their partners. As one participant shared one of her style of coping:

“Wala nay atimanon na mga bata. Kalingaw lang ko dari sa balay trabahuon ug atiman sakong bana. Labi na nga naa nay pangbati na mga sakit.” [No more children to look after, i just spent my time doing household chores and some hobbies. Take care of my husband especially now that we have some ailments.] (Wena)

Recognizing the empty nest phenomenon is a very real thing which make it easier to cope and accept that this is just another chapter in ones life as one participant shared:

“Mag ampo na lang. Magkalingaw mig storya-storya kami ra duha. Busy mga tarbahuon sa balay pag-digamo sa pagkaon. Usahay muadto sa silingan mangayo ug utanon nila nga tanum para sud an.” [I just pray. We talk just the two of us and we kept ourselves busy doing household chores. Sometimes I go to our neighbor and ask for vegetables they planted for our food.] (Warily)

Keeping busy really does help. After giving oneself time to grieve, one find it essential to fill up that free space with other activities or interests that would mean something. As one participant shared:

“Ginikanan pa gihapon kami pero dili na direkta nga nag-atiman nila kay naa naman silay pamilya. Mag storyahanay lang mi sa cellphone. Mangumusta nila sa ilang trabaho. [We are still their parents but no longer directly taking care of their welfare. We keep an open communication with them through cellphone.] (Marlo)

“Karun retired nami. Dari lang sa balay pirme. Maglakaw lang ug magsimba, mag grocery or manan-aw pod sine panagsa.” [Now we have retired. We simply stay at home. We only go

for a walk outside when going to church, buy groceries or watch movies together] (Lolita)

Another participant added:

“Wala man, kana lang kay kami nalang duha. Kung mularga sya kay paadtuan sa among anak sa Canada, ako ra isa mabilin.” [Nothing, it’s just that we are the only two left. Whenever she travels every time our son ask her to go to Canada, I am the only one left.] (Leo)

“Kana kung magbakasyon ko sya ra usa sa balay. Paubanan lang sa among silingan. Dili ra pod ko magdugay kay sige man ko maghuna huna niya.” [Evrytime I go on vacation my husband is left in the house alone. I request one of our close friend neighbor to stay with him while I’m away.] (Neneng)

The response of Marlo in terms of acceptance proved his enduring love for his children despite the distance. While his wife, Lolita showed strength in going on by keeping herself busy as a housekeeper and loving wife.

Theme 3. Not so empty nester: Keeping in touch with children

There are various technologies, which have been used by the elderly to overcome their loneliness like television, mobile and the likes from which they stay connected with their friends, relatives. Tehcnological competence brought about by individual experience with and positive appraisal of technology, can contribute to maintaining a sense of belonging and self determination in old age (Kasper, 2004).

Technology has made it much easier with the transition of a child leaving the home. It enabled parents to live a much more enriched and maintained an open communication with their children. Parenting role have diminished but a stronger bond and new found relationship between a parent and children emerged. The following responses are from the participants telling us how they continued being in touch and continue to build a stronger bond with their children despite the distance.

“Dari rami sa balay. Kalingaw ug basa, tan aw tv, storya mi sa Skype sa among mga anak ug mga apo, ug kalingaw pod sa among Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) activities.” [We just stay here at home. Do reading, watch tv, converse with our children and grandchildren online through Skype. We also attend to our Basic Ecclesiastical Community (BEC) activities.] (Leo)

One of the participant shared that they and their children make an effort to stay in touch through phone calls and even video calls so it feels like they are still at home.

“Ginikanan pa gihapon kami pero dili na direkta nga nag-atiman nila kay naa naman silay pamilya. Mag-storyahanay lang mi sa cellphone. Mangumusta nila sa ilang trabaho.” [We are still their parents but no longer directly taking care of their welfare. We keep an open communication with them through cellphone.] (Lolita)

Furthermore, she added:

“Pabilin akong pagka inahan. Mangumusta sila namo pinaagi sa pagtawag halos kada semana gyud. Puli-puli silag tawag namo. Mangumusta. Malipay pod mi nga kanunay nila ming gihandum. Ako pirme naga-ampo nga giyahan sila kanunay ug tagaan ug kabaskog sa panglawas pirme.” [My being a mother remains. They call us every week one after the other to check us. We are too happy because they think of us. I often pray that the Lord will guide and give them good health always.] (Lolita)

Theme 4. Conquering Loneliness: Strengthening relationships and exploring new roles

Empty nest can be a challenging time for both couples. As the demands of parenting become less, couples start to focus their time on giving importance of rebuilding and strengthening their marriage, settle some critical relationship issues and giving time to other important activities like community relations and engaging in meaningful endeavors (Parker, 2017). According to the following participants.

“Our paternal role wala maundang o matapos kay gahatag man mi nila ug advise kung mangayo sila sa among advise o ideas. Wala lang sila sa among kiliran. Karun mabuhat na namo ang mga gusto namo sauna mag asawa. Sama sa sige ug uban kung manglaag nga kami ra. Mag travel together sa ting bakasyon summer ug Christmas nga kami rang duha.” [Our paternal role has not stopped or ended because we still give them advises if they ask. They are just no longer with us. Now, we can do all things that we as a couple would love to do before as husband and wife. Like going outside together just the two of us. Travel together during summer vacation and Christmas time.] (Ferio)

Another participant added:

“Ga-alagad ko sa simbahan isip usa ka lay minister, vice President pod ko sa among parish council ug President sa among homeowners association dari sa subdivision. Daghan mga problema nga angay sulbaron.” [I serve our Parish Church as a Lay Minister, I’m the Vice President of our Church Council and the current President of our homeowner’s association. There are lots of concerns that need to be addressed.] (Neneng)

“Magbisitaan na lang mi nila. Among isa ka anak nga minyo na tua sa Manila ug among Doktor. Ug dunay special occasions sila pod mag bakasyon dari sa among balay.” [We visit them like one of our children whose married and is based in Manila and our son, Doctor. If there are especial occasions, they too visit us here in our house.] (Linda)

Responses on empty nest stage about their struggles, challenges and life-changing events of these senior couples, proved to be worthy of appreciation of the beauty of parenthood and life itself. Like the case of Ferio, he learned to accept his new status. He still continue to give advises to his

children when they asked for it. While Linda, his wife is happy whenever they make visits to their grandchildren and married son. Keeping in touch with them on some occasions.

That parents are gifts from God who deserved to be happy and be rewarded with goodness as they embrace a new chapter of their lives after launching their children.

V. CONCLUSION

Response to empty nest among elderly couples is a combination of negative and positive responses. In terms of self expression, most of the wives conveyed more verbalizations about their responses compared to the husbands. On the positive aspects, both couples agreed on the following: there is feeling of overwhelming gratitude, a sense of fulfilled accomplishments, and excitement seeing their children moving forward in life, being successful in their own journey. In terms of the negative responses, wives were more expressive toward feelings of sadness and loneliness compared to their spouses. This is a tough time of transition for couples, and even more so for those who have always been very close to their children throughout their lives. This phenomenon enabled the participants to explore new opportunities for personal growth, achieved a new level of self-awareness, discovered new dimensions of parent-child relationships and gained new learnings. Their responses may be diversified yet complement each other.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings present synthesized description which captured the essence of the lived experiences of spouses' responses during the empty nest stage. Based on the outcomes of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Organize self-help support groups in Senior Centers or Adult Day Care centers for empty nesters. Hold fitness programs, and provide extension of health services to older persons. Help them engage in social services to other support services and encourage active participation in social activities of Senior's organizations. Participation in this organization can be meaningful to older persons, not only possible source of social services, but also an opportunity to reach out to other senior citizens.
2. Determine whether older persons have access to basic needs such as safe water, housing, nutritious foods, health care, physical security, and protection against abuse and crime.
3. Assist in enabling older persons to assume the responsibility in managing their lives in a community setting in accordance with their preferences, and pursuing opportunities for personal upliftment.
4. The children should continue to enhance open communication with parents. Find ways to connect not only through social media and other means of communication (phone calls, and text messaging) but

plan to conduct regular meaningful events or occasions in order to spend quality time with parents.

5. For future research endeavors, it is highly recommended to include the following areas of interests: effect of empty nest on emotional capability, influence of educational attainment, and the degree of social support among empty nesters.

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Appendix A
Interview Guide

1. What were the changes in terms of your role as a parent after your last child left home?
(Unsa ang mga kabag-uhan sa diha nga sa termino sa imong papel isip usa ka ginikanan human sa imong katapusang anak mibiya na sa inyong panimalay?)

2. How is your relationship as a couple now after your last child left home?
(Sa unsang paagi o kumusta naman ang imong/inyong relasyon isip usa ka magtiayon karon human sa ang imong/inyong katapusang anak mibiya na sa inyong panimalay?)

3. What were the changes or responses you experienced as a couple or as a parent? Are there differences? Kindly expound.
(Unsa ang mga kabag-uhan o mga tubag nga imong nasinati isip magtiayon o isip usa ka ginikanan? Aduna bay kalainan? Palihug pagpatin-aw.)

4. What were the uncertainties or difficulties if any, in your relationship as a couple during the empty nest stage?
(Unsa ang mga uncertainties o mga kalisdanan kon sa bisan unsa nga, sa inyong relasyon isip usa ka magtiayon sa panahon sa walay sulod nga salag stage o kahaw ang sa panimalay dihang mibiya na ang inyong mga anak?)